

Walk the line

PROFESSIONAL SLACKLINE PERFORMER AND INSTRUCTOR **HARRY CLOUDFOOT** SHOWS WHAT SLACKLINING CAN OFFER SCOUTS

Suitable for Scouts+



Taking slacklining to the extreme – but don't try this at home

Balance, one of our most basic skills, is perhaps the one we take most for granted – until, that is, you step onto a slackline.

Best described as a long, narrow trampoline, a slackline is fixed at both ends, but wobbles like mad as soon as you set foot on it. With a base that is hilariously unstable, and the whole thing liable to shake uncontrollably before you've even had a chance to get your bearings, you have a real challenge and a fool-proof recipe for immediate fun and entertainment.

Play and learn

Recently I was invited to perform and teach at 8th Holborn's community fun day in central London, where a playful atmosphere was immediately achieved by initiating an imagination-led game. We placed crash mats under the slacklines and challenged participants to try to 'cross the narrow bridge over crocodile-infested waters'. This approach meant the young people focused on the task of trying to balance and overcome the risk-factor, but framing the process as a

fun, imaginative game also meant that the instinctive neurological fear-circuit was bypassed. Far more of the younger Scouts pushed themselves to try it than would have done had they seen it as merely a line over some mats.

Fun for all

For a slightly older crowd at this year's Gilwell 24 event for Explorer Scouts, we had fun within the context of a friendly competition. A clothes peg on the slackline was an easy marker for the distance each person achieved; simple



Be safe

- Running slacklining as a Scouting activity comes under POR 9.77 (Other Activities). This means that leaders will need to ensure it is appropriate for the young people involved, carry out a risk assessment prior to the activity and put suitable measures in place for any issues that the risk assessment identifies.

- Leaders are responsible for learning proper set-up, operational guidelines, and safety techniques. Equipment used for slacklining must be suitable for the activity and the participants, but there are many instructors and companies in the UK that will help with this.

- You must obtain the approval of your District/County Commissioner before running slacklining.

- Harry recommends that the slackline should not be more than 3ft high. This will help participants step off the line safely if they feel they are about to fall.

- Also put suitable precautions in place for falls, by placing spotters or setting up crash pads.

- Do not allow more than one participant on the line at a time.
- Site the slackline in a suitable location. Trees used for anchor points should be strong (with trunks at least eight inches in diameter). Check for weak or rotten overhanging branches.

- Protect tree trunks from damage when anchoring slacklines.

TRIED & TESTED

'It was good for balancing skills and if you fell then there was a crash mat. I think it helped me with my roller skating.' Violet, Cub, 8



visual feedback that sparked an immediate competitive spirit. Some Scouts competed against each other, while others simply challenged themselves, trying to beat their own personal best. These examples show that playing games on and around a slackline is only limited by your imagination. With tighter lines giving you the ability to bounce, and new rigging techniques allowing three- and five-way slackline set-ups, slacklining's potential for a physically positive impact on its participants is only just beginning to surface.

Slacklining is an ideal activity to include as part of your next woodland hike or bushcraft weekend. It can even be used to help educate your Group about different tree species. Get hold of a slackline or two and some crash mats for your Group, and get creative with the ways you can learn and play simultaneously. Why not encourage your Scouts to use social media to post details of the slacklining games they invent, with videos to demonstrate how they can be played – an 'open-source' approach to having lots of fun? 📸