

because there is little friction and it can be difficult to hold such a thin rope.

If you are using a karabiner brake or a belay device the situation is different because the knot will not pass through the device. If there is a convenient ledge that coincides with the knot, abseil to the ledge, put in some protection for yourself while you take the rope out of the device and reconnect it below the knot.

Abseiling past a knot while you are hanging free or when there is no convenient ledge to stand on presents different problems. These are by no means complicated or insurmountable but will require practice in a safe and controlled situation. If you know that you have to abseil past a knot before you set off, rig a safety back-up French prusik above the device. It is important to connect the French prusik to the harness with its own screwgate karabiner and to do so in such a way that the abseil device can easily be removed while you are hanging from the French prusik.

Abseil down until the joining knot is 15 cm (6 in) away from the device (Photo 125a). This must coincide with your full weight coming on to the French prusik. Take the abseil rope out of the device and put it back on below the knot (Photos 125b and 125c), then make sure that the joining knot sits up against the device. Lock off the device securely by wrapping the rope several times around your upper thigh, then reach up and put one hand on the rope above the French prusik. Pulling down smoothly but firmly on top of the prusik will release the knot and your weight will come back on to the abseil device. Once your weight is back on the device, disconnect and release the French prusik. Unless you have a second knot to pass, it is probably not worth putting it back on, although you may want it for a safety back-up. This system makes it possible to abseil past a knot in less than 30 seconds, not the 30 minutes it usually takes!



125a-c. Abseiling past a knot. (a) Abseil down until the joining knot is about two hands' width away from the device. This should coincide with your full weight coming on to the French prusik. (b) Take the rope out of the device and put it back below the knot. Make sure that the knot sits tight up against the abseil device. (c) Release the French prusik until your weight returns to the abseil device.