

FOUNDATIONS OF FLIGHT | BACKTRACKING



Brought to you by Instructor Brianne Thompson of AXIS Flight School at Skydive Arizona in Eloy. Photos by Niklas Daniel.

AXIS
Flight School



Purpose

- ▶ Leading a tracking dive
- ▶ Tracking away from a freefly jump

Execution

Before attempting back tracking, you should first become proficient at the basic back-fly position (see “Foundations of Flight—Basic Back-Fly Position,” July 2012 *Parachutist*). With both basic back flying and when learning to back track, remember to check your altimeter frequently. It is easy to lose altitude awareness while working on a new skill, particularly one in which you are facing the sky and don't have a ground reference. Use a wrist-mounted altimeter (since a chest-mounted altimeter is unlikely to read correctly while you are on your back), and wear an audible altimeter as an additional reminder.

To practice back tracking, exit in a basic back-fly position and immediately orient yourself perpendicular to the aircraft's line of flight. You can accomplish this by looking back up at the airplane immediately after exit to use it as a reference. Since you will not be able to use any landmarks on the ground to maintain your heading, align yourself with the airplane so that your body is parallel to its wings.

Once you have established your direction of flight, to move in the direction of your head, add power with your legs by straightening them. During your early attempts at back tracking, maintain a wide



body position (similar to a delta track if you were on your belly) for stability. Produce a proud chest, maintain a straight spine and keep your knees locked, emphasizing putting pressure on your calves (keep your heels down and toes pointed).

Once you become more proficient at producing movement, you can add more power by bringing your legs and arms closer together (“penciling up”). As you do this, you will notice that your body is more susceptible to roll, just as it would be if you were tracking on your belly. Focus on penciling up as smoothly as possible.

When back tracking on breakoff, focus on tracking as flatly as possible to produce the most horizontal separation from others. If you tilt your ribcage back slightly, your body position will produce more lift overall. Plan your breakoff so that you'll have enough altitude for all jumpers to attain clear airspace for deployment. If you are working on mastering this new skill while back tracking with others, it may be safer to flip onto your belly at breakoff and track in a belly-to-earth

position. Once you are proficient and can cover as much distance as you would on your belly, you can remain on your back a little longer before rolling onto your belly to continue tracking before deployment.

Helpful Hints

When leading a tracking dive on your back, you'll need to maintain a consistent angle and fall rate so that the group can stay together. To prevent your angle from becoming too steep, avoid moving your head toward your chest in an attempt to look around. Maintain a proud chest, keep your chin up and look toward the other jumpers with your eyes only to avoid tucking in your head.



To view the instructional video, use the QR code to the left or visit the Foundations of Flight page at parachutistonline.com.