Client safety

WORDS BY STEVE OWERS

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Picture the scenario: a young couple on holiday in the Lake District. Although fit, they have little mountain walking experience. Not feeling confident enough to do it themselves they hire the services of a mountain leader to take them to the summit of Scafell Pike.

After leaving the summit the cloud descends and it starts to rain. The leader slips, bangs his head on a rock and is knocked unconscious.

Whether we are guides, instructors or leaders we should all feel confident that we can look after our clients when we take them into the hills and mountains. But have you ever thought about how they would cope if for some reason you were not able to care for them? Would they have the necessary skills, information and kit to be able to fend for themselves, get to a place of safety or call for help?

We would be naive to think that nothing can go wrong when we take clients to the hills and mountains but by thinking about what could go wrong and putting simple practical measures in place to reduce the risk for ourselves and our clients. These measures need to be appropriate to the activity level and location.

Suggested safety equipment carried by a leader on a mountain walk which the client may be able to access in the event of the leader being incapacitated:

• Mobile phone
  • Is it switched on? Is there a pin code? Does the client know how to contact the Emergency Services?
• Group shelter
  • Do all the clients know what one is and how to use it?
• First aid kit
• Map and compass
  • Is the route marked? Are possible escape routes marked?
• Headtorch
• GPS
  • Could your client use it to obtain an exact location to pass on to Emergency Services or to navigate to safety with map?

Suggested equipment carried by clients on a mountain walk in the event of the leader and client becoming separated:

• Client’s own mobile phone
  • Do they have the leader’s mobile number? Does the client know how to contact the Emergency Services?
  • Is the phone protected from the weather?
• Whistle
  • Does the client know the international distress signal?
• Bivi bag
  • Do all the clients know what one is and how to use it?
• Map with route and escape route marked
• Grid Location App downloaded onto smartphone e.g. Gridpoint, OS Locate.
  • Could your client use it to obtain an exact location to pass on to Emergency Services or to navigate to safety with map?

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