WINTER MOUNTAIN LEADER AWARD

PROSPECTUS, SYLLABUS & GUIDANCE NOTES
This Handbook contains the information needed to progress through the Winter Mountain Leader Award Scheme. Its purpose is to support the knowledge and experience of candidates while at the same time avoiding prescribed techniques. Mountain Training UK produce a range of publications for walkers and mountaineers that illustrate the range of evolving techniques used by leaders; these notes complement such literature (see Appendix 6).

The booklet is divided into four parts:

- **The Scheme:** explains the way you progress through the Winter Mountain Leader scheme from registration to assessment.
- **Syllabus:** lists the skills of a Winter Mountain Leader.
- **Guidance notes:** helps candidates interpret the syllabus and develop appropriate protocols and procedures.
- **Appendices:** provides background information.

### PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Mountain Training recognises that climbing, hillwalking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and associated literature to help leaders manage these risks and to allow new participants to have positive experiences while gaining knowledge of their responsibilities.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the preparation of this Handbook by attending Mountain Training Scotland seminars and by making detailed and constructive comments on the draft. Grateful thanks are due to board members and staff of the National Mountain Training Boards and Mountain Training Scotland Course Providers and Course Directors.

Prepared by the Executive Officer and Board of Mountain Training Scotland with contributions from Mountain Training England, Mountain Training Northern Ireland, Mountain Training Cymru and Mountain Training United Kingdom.

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Design by Rock Solid – www.rocksoliddesigns.co.uk
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THE SCHEME

1 INTRODUCTION

The Winter Mountain Leader scheme provides training and assessment of the skills and techniques necessary to lead walking parties on the hills and mountains of the UK and Ireland under winter conditions, excluding roped climbing on technical terrain. The demands made on the Mountain Leader under winter conditions are much greater than in summer. The intensive nature of the experience, the demands it makes on fitness and the need to navigate accurately and safely over the chosen route in adverse weather conditions present a challenge that requires the leader to have knowledge and experience well above that normally required in summer conditions.

Therefore completion of the Mountain Leader scheme is a prerequisite for all candidates and the Winter Mountain Leader scheme is a natural progression, building on many of the skills already acquired.

The Winter Mountain Leader scheme integrates personal experience, training and assessment. Since its introduction in 1965 the scheme has achieved widespread recognition by education authorities, youth organisations and individuals for ensuring technical competence. The scheme is operated on behalf of Mountain Training by Mountain Training Scotland and the qualification is valid throughout the UK even though all training and assessment courses are run in Scotland. Mountain Training recognises this qualification as the lowest level of qualification suitable for those who operate independently while leading walking groups in mountainous country in the UK in winter conditions.

2 SCOPE OF THE SCHEME

The Winter Mountain Leader scheme offers the opportunity to gain technical competence to lead and provide basic skills instruction to parties on hill and mountain walks within the UK under winter conditions. The qualification excludes the use of ropes and technical climbing equipment (other than required for potential emergency situations), the area and terrain chosen for the activity should be such that use of the rope is not contemplated. It also excludes leading expeditions using snowholes as the base or main form of accommodation.

The qualification does not provide a climbing or instructional qualification. Those who wish to instruct others in winter climbing skills and techniques should hold the Mountaineering Instructor Certificate.

Qualified Winter Mountain Leaders who wish to lead expeditions using snowholes as their base or main accommodation; or provide further winter skills instruction beyond that needed by novices on a winter walk are directed to refer to Section 12 Further Experience.

It’s the duty of the employer or operating authority to decide whether a leader possesses the personal attributes needed to take responsibility for a particular group of people. The combination of technical skills, wide experience and personal qualities form the basis for effective group management. The scheme assesses only the technical skills and experience – the employer or operating authority must gauge personal qualities and any other professional qualification requirements.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has allocated the Winter Mountain Leader Award within the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) at SCQF Level 9 and with a Credit Rating of 31 Points.
3 STAGES IN THE SCHEME

The scheme consists of six stages:

• Gaining personal winter hillwalking and mountaineering experience
• Registration
• Training course (6 days minimum)
• A consolidation period after the training course when further personal experience is gained; this period allows time to practise the techniques you have learnt
• Assessment course (five days minimum)
• Continuing to maintain a log of experience gained.

4 REGISTRATION

Winter Mountain Leader registration is conditional on your submitted experience application, showing a minimum of 20 Winter Quality Mountain Days (QMDs), being vetted and approved by Mountain Training Scotland. Unless a candidate has registered on the Winter Mountain Leader scheme, and had their registration approved by Mountain Training Scotland, they cannot attend a Winter Mountain Leader training course.

Personal proficiency training is not provided by Mountain Training Scotland. Hopeful Winter Mountain Leaders seeking personal proficiency training so that they can gain the required experience for registration for the scheme are advised to seek instruction from a qualified Mountaineering Instructor or British Mountain Guide.

Before registration for the Winter Mountain Leader Scheme candidates must:

• already hold the Mountain Leader award;
• have current experience of hillwalking and mountaineering in winter conditions in at least three different UK mountain areas;
• have experience of an absolute minimum of 20 Winter Quality Mountain Days (applications with less than 20 days will not be considered; there are no exceptions to this);
• be well practised in the personal use of ice axe and crampons.

There are two stages to registering for the Winter Mountain Leader.

1. Prospective candidates should first register and pay their fee on-line at www.mountain-training.org.
2. On registering candidates receive an email from Mountain Training with instructions on how to submit their Mountain Training digital logbook (DLOG), which must contain an absolute minimum of 20 Winter Quality Mountain Days, to Mountain Training Scotland for screening and, if appropriate, approval.

Registration is conditional on your submitted experience application being successful; if unsuccessful the registration fee is non-refundable. On receipt of the appropriate fee and approval of the application your registration will be approved via the Candidate Management System and a confirmation email sent.
If your application is not successful you will be given feedback on how best to fulfil the experience requirements and your registration application will be held open, at no additional cost, for 12 months until your successful application. Candidates should apply to register for the Winter Mountain Leader Scheme not less than three weeks before booking to attend a training course.

NOTE: Failure to have your registration approved prior to attending a training course will render attendance invalid.

EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

The result of decades of experience of assessment courses has shown that the key element in the making of good candidates is the quality and quantity of their personal winter hillwalking and mountaineering experience. The unit of measurement of mountaineering experience is a Winter Quality Mountain Day (QMD), albeit that the definition of this unit is imperfect.

There are a number of common characteristics that can be said to contribute substantially to a Winter QMD, although it is impossible to provide an exact definition as every day out will vary. The adversity of weather conditions, the changeable nature of the underfoot conditions, the requirement to navigate accurately and carry greater amounts of equipment, etc., all affect speed of movement and distance travelled. However, Winter QMDs are likely to be strenuous and reasonably demanding and will involve over five hours walking and/or climbing.

Winter QMDs should require elements of planning, exploration of an unfamiliar locality, map reading/navigation, more than likely require the use of ice axe and crampons for security and involve the ascent of a significant peak. Navigation is likely to require skills and techniques applicable to winter and be more difficult and demanding than those needed in summer conditions. Above all the experience should lead to feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction, even if enjoyment may occasionally be questionable!

The following are examples of days that do not constitute Winter QMDs.

Days acting as an assistant leader, while valuable experience, do not count as QMDs. Why? Well the qualified leader/instructor is the one ultimately making the judgements and decisions and having overall responsibility.

The time of year alone, such as a January day when no snow or ice is present, or the presence of snow patches (such as on the Cairngorm plateau) on a sunny day in May, do not qualify as Winter QMDs, even though the day may satisfy the elements of length, navigation and exploration.

Skills training or climbing should be part of a longer mountain day and not the sole reason for the day.

While foreign experience can be useful these days should be in similar conditions to those found in the UK in winter to be truly relevant. The use of an axe and crampons on snow or ice does not necessarily constitute a Winter QMD.
IN SUMMARY

Experience gained in other areas can also be recorded if similar conditions to those found in the UK in true winter conditions were encountered.

**However the majority of this experience, at least 75% of the minimum requirements, should be in the UK.**

At assessment at least 50% of the days must be in Scotland.

A QMD will involve most, if not all, of the factors below:

- it is most likely that the ascent of a significant mountain is included in the day;
- the individual takes part in the planning and leadership;
- navigation skills are required;
- knowledge is increased and skills practised;
- attention is paid to safety;
- adverse weather and underfoot conditions may be encountered;
- five hours or more journey time;
- conditions encountered should be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in the UK in true winter conditions;
- an ice axe and crampons are likely to be required.

These criteria mean that days as a course member under instruction, assisting a qualified leader, practising winter skills, or summer days in Alpine areas are very unlikely to meet the requirements of a Winter QMD. However these can be recorded in the appropriate place in your logbook even though they are not suitable for registration purposes.
5 TRAINING

The training courses are run by Course Directors working for Course Providers (Course Providers are approved by Mountain Training Scotland) and offer candidates the choice of a 6-day mid-week course or a series of weekends. A full list of approved courses and dates is available from www.mountain-training.org/find-a-course

Training courses are for potential leaders and assume basic competence as a winter hillwalker. They emphasise those skills which a candidate might have difficulty in learning without expert guidance, for example evaluating snow conditions, arresting a slide with an ice axe, belaying securely on snow and ice, safe rope work, construction of emergency snow shelters and snowholes, and navigation in extreme winter conditions. For this reason some aspects of the syllabus, which the candidate may easily learn elsewhere, may not be covered during the training course. Candidates are expected to gain knowledge and understanding of these subjects themselves.

Completion of a Winter Mountain Leader training course alone, without taking an assessment course, is not a qualification in itself, although it is likely to be of considerable benefit to the trainee.

Course participants must provide access to their updated logbook and MTID number to the course provider

At the completion of the training candidates will have an opportunity to assess their own performance (using the Winter Mountain Leader Skills Checklist) and (in discussion with the Course Director) to develop a personal action plan to undertake prior to assessment.

6 CONSOLIDATION PERIOD

During the period between training and assessment, candidates are expected to gain extensive personal winter hillwalking and mountaineering experience including the acquisition of snow and mixed climbing experience at Grade 1 or above and record this in their logbook (see Appendix 1).

WINTER-GRADED GROUND

In climbing terminology Grade I ground is taken to mean “uncomplicated average angled snow climbs normally having no pitches but which may present cornice difficulties or have significant or potentially hazardous run-outs”, normally considered to be gully climbs, for example No 4 Gully, Aladdin’s Couloir or Parsley Fern Gully. However, for the Winter Mountain Leader Award it is best to think of Grade I ground in a more typical hillwalking setting, where it is taken to mean “snow-covered ground, often with easy angled steps of ice, neve or rock on which a fall or slip could have potentially serious consequences”.

![Image of mountains and snow]
In other words, Grade I ground need not only be encountered in long gullies, but could be sections of open slope which require techniques in addition to those normally associated with walking. It is not necessarily the angle of the ground or the length of the slope that is important, but the type of ground, the quality of the snow covering it, and the consequences of a slip. The requirement of ten Grade I or above named UK winter climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes for assessment is to ensure candidates are comfortable and experienced on this type of terrain. As this experience is on named winter routes, there is a degree of uniformity in the terrain so there is a greater definition to what is required than in the term ‘steep ground’ which can vary with personal interpretation. Climbs more difficult than Grade I are more than likely to include this standard of terrain on the approach, at the top or at other places on the route.

The inclusion of the requirement to have experience of moving/climbing on Grade 1 ground is to ensure that candidates have experience of moving on a variety of terrain at this standard. If possible, working under the guidance of a suitably qualified leader is also recommended. Every opportunity should be taken to practise the skills learned during training.

The scheme is specifically designed for the UK, therefore candidates should have substantial winter experience in the hills and mountains of the UK, particularly in Scotland. However equivalent winter hillwalking, mountaineering and snow and ice climbing experience gained in other countries may be relevant and should be recorded on the appropriate logbook pages.

7 FIRST AID REQUIREMENTS

For the Mountain Leader, first aid is an essential skill and the Winter Mountain Leader assessment requires a current first aid qualification. The minimum requirement is that such a course must involve at least two days or sixteen hours of training and include an element of assessment. Candidates are further expected to undertake such additional elements of first aid training as are consistent with their role in wild and remote country in the winter environment, including emergency assistance and evacuation techniques. It is the responsibility of the award holder and/or their employers to evaluate their likely role and the type of situations that they can reasonably expect to encounter and to maintain current appropriate first aid training and qualifications.

8 ASSESSMENT

Assessment is mandatory and is carried out by Course Directors approved by the Board. Prior to assessment candidates must:

• have attended or have gained exemption from a training course;
• have completed an absolute minimum of 40 QMDs under winter conditions, with at least 20 gained in Scotland, distributed over a period of at least three winter seasons (75% of the minimum requirements must be UK based and at least 50% gained in Scotland);
• have completed at least 10 x Grade 1 or above named UK winter climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes;
• hold a first aid certificate recognised as appropriate for the scheme.

When applying for assessment candidates should ensure that they meet the prerequisites and should identify their best 40 Winter QMDs in their logbooks. An * before the date or highlighting the days is recommended. Course Directors may request evidence that candidates meet the prerequisites prior to acceptance for an assessment. On arrival for assessment candidates must present their logbook (or provide access to their electronic equivalent) and first aid certificate to the Course Director.

Failure to meet the course prerequisites or, where appropriate, to provide exemption evidence, will result in a deferral or attendance being declared void.

Candidates should be familiar with all aspects of the syllabus before assessment, even if some parts of the syllabus were not covered in training. During the assessment course, which lasts a minimum of five days, candidates will be tested in
accordance with the syllabus requirements (Appendices 2 and 3). This assessment normally involves a three day/two night expedition. The assessment Course Director then provides an assessment report, submitted via the Mountain Training on-line Candidate Management System (CMS) completed with the appropriate recommendations.

The assessment reports will take one of three forms:

- **PASS**: awarded where the candidate has demonstrated a proper knowledge and performance of the scheme syllabus and has demonstrated the necessary experience for mountain leadership.
- **DEFER**: where the candidate has generally performed well and has demonstrated the necessary experience and skills, but where complete proficiency has not been attained.
- **FAIL**: where the candidate’s performance has been generally weak, or the necessary experience and skills have not been shown.

Candidates who are deferred or failed on practical aspects of the syllabus should not attend reassessment within three months. Course Directors will provide advice in the form of an Action Plan to all such candidates on the way forward. A failure will necessitate attendance at a complete assessment course. A deferment, which normally involves a one-day reassessment of the weak areas, has a shelf life of five years after which the complete assessment course must be retaken. Following deferment only two x one-day reassessments are permitted, after which a full course assessment will be required. Wherever possible reassessments should be retaken with the original Course Provider.

### 9 EXEMPTION FROM TRAINING

Attendance on a winter training course is normally mandatory. Exemptions will only be given to exceptional candidates with considerable experience in Scottish winter conditions. Exemption application forms can be obtained directly from Mountain Training Scotland.

Candidates who already have substantial personal experience in winter conditions in mountainous areas, as well as experience in the leadership of groups, may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements of attendance at an assessment course. They should also have at least two years’ experience of leading groups.

To apply for exemption candidates must:

- be registered on the Winter Mountain Leader scheme;
- obtain and complete an exemption application form from Mountain Training Scotland;
- forward the appropriate fee and logbook extracts as detailed in the exemption application form; and
- candidates should allow at least three weeks for completion of this process.

There is no exemption from assessment.

### 10 EQUALITY

Mountain Training believes that equality is concerned with fairness, justice, inclusion and respect for diversity, rather than just about equal numbers. Equality is about making sure that everyone has an equal chance to participate in and contribute to sport or their chosen recreation if they choose to do so, and that no-one is discriminated against unfairly for any reason, including – but not limited to – gender, race, disability, age, religious or political belief, sexual orientation, social background, ethnic origin, language, marital or civil partnership status or pregnancy. Candidates, trainers and assessors should express a positive attitude towards equality and act as positive role models.
11 COMPLAINTS & APPEALS PROCEDURE

The Winter Mountain Leader Scheme is subject to continuous monitoring with a periodic formal review. Candidates who have any feedback to give on their courses, both conduct and content, are encouraged to submit written comments to the Provider and/or to Mountain Training as a part of that review process.

If for any reason you find it necessary to raise concerns about an aspect of the delivery of your training or assessment then you should contact the Course Director. If the dialogue with the Course Director fails to resolve these concerns then candidates should contact the Executive Officer at Mountain Training Scotland.

Candidates are encouraged to decide whether their concerns take the form of:

- a complaint (where some aspect of the course was unsatisfactory but the outcome is uncontested); or
- an appeal (where a candidate believes the result is incorrect and wishes the board to arbitrate).

Full details of the complaints and appeals policy are available from Mountain Training Scotland.

12 FURTHER EXPERIENCE

All Mountain Training award schemes are designed to train and assess the application of technical skills and the judgement of the candidate against agreed standards of performance. That set of skills and knowledge are used to determine the ‘scope’ of the award scheme. The personal attributes needed for the appropriate care of specific participants should be determined and evaluated by the employer or organising authority.

If award holders are to be deployed to operate beyond the strict scope of this Award then the employer or organising authority should develop a strategy for managing such deployment. This management should include the involvement of a suitably experienced and qualified technical advisor who can assess the suitability of the award holder to operate on specific venues, routes or activities and testify to their competence to do so. If such a process is put in place holders of this award may, through additional training or breadth of experience, be able to demonstrate that they have competencies over and above those assessed as a part of this award (see Appendix 4).
SYLLABUS & GUIDANCE

There is a wide range of skills and knowledge that a Winter Mountain Leader needs in order to operate effectively. Not only is it necessary to perform each element in isolation, it is also vital that leaders are able to combine several skills at any one time. For example, they need to be able to look after their group and navigate simultaneously.

The Winter Mountain Leader courses take place in a variety of Scottish mountain environments with their associated hazards. These courses are for participants with considerable independent personal experience. While staff will endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

These guidance notes are designed to assist candidates in training and assessing by expanding on all aspects of the syllabus and offering suggestions on how best to tackle a particular subject leading to a fuller, overall appreciation of the Winter Mountain Leader Scheme.

It is essential that candidates have a good level of winter experience, and an associated high level of fitness, before they attend their course. Candidates must be experienced winter hillwalkers and mountaineers so that they can grasp all aspects of the training and contribute fully to the course. The success of a course, be it training or assessment, depends on the contributions made by all those involved. Candidates should feel free to ask even the simplest questions since they are often the most pertinent. There are often several solutions to a task and the experience brought to a course by each person will contribute to the range of learning opportunities. It can be helpful to keep notes during the course so that at a later date candidates can build on skills learnt during the course.
As for the summer scheme, candidates should be able to identify the equipment required for individuals and a group during winter mountain and hillwalking journeys and expeditions, how to plan such excursions and be aware of the common causes of mountain accidents in winter. Candidates should be able to:

1.1 display positive leadership and decision making by:
   1.1.1 setting, monitoring and reviewing appropriate group aims
   1.1.2 demonstrating good communication skills
   1.1.3 maintaining discipline and control
   1.1.4 meeting the changing needs of the group and individual members
   1.1.5 fostering environmental awareness
   1.1.6 maintaining involvement, interest and enjoyment
   1.1.7 imparting fundamental technical skills where appropriate
   1.1.8 adopting appropriate leadership styles for the situation and group;

1.2 calculate the time required for winter journeys and expeditions and select suitable routes appropriate to the activity, group and individuals;

1.3 select clothing, food and equipment suitable for personal and group use for day walks and overnight expeditions;

1.4 demonstrate the personal skills and organisation to remain comfortable in the mountains in winter;

1.5 organise group and personal hygiene arrangements in a way that minimises the impact on the environment;

1.6 organise search and rescue for a lost member of the group;

1.7 identify and minimise the risks created by the following hazards:
   1.7.1 loose and verglassed rock
   1.7.2 snow bridges above streams and boulder fields
   1.7.3 cornices
   1.7.4 avalanche prone slopes
   1.7.5 strong winds;

1.8 observe changes in the weather while walking and make informed decisions relating to choice of route and safety.
GUIDANCE

It isn’t possible to separate the skills of party management and leadership from the technical skills and experience that are required by a Winter Mountain Leader. Candidates should be aware of various styles of leadership applicable to particular situations. Not only is it necessary to perform each element in isolation, it is also vital that leaders are able to combine several skills at any one time. For example, they need to be able to look after their group and navigate simultaneously in poor weather.

**During assessment candidates will be expected to demonstrate the ability to lead safely and effectively in a manner that enables the group to be involved, informed and, where appropriate, protected.**

It is important for candidates to assess the strengths, weaknesses and requirements of the group and individuals and to carry out detailed planning before undertaking a journey in the winter hills and mountains. The scheme requires you to have experience of this topic and to be able to organise and execute mountain and hillwalking journeys and expeditions.

Experience should be gained in a variety of terrain and weather conditions. However, you must be aware of the dangers associated with short daylight hours, severe weather conditions and quickly changing underfoot conditions that occur in winter, and also with the additional fatigue and stress associated with winter mountaineering.

Expeditions incorporate so many aspects of mountain walking that their importance should not be underrated. However in winter, due to the unexpected vagaries of the weather and the sudden shift to extremes (for example storm force winds) candidates should be aware of the limitations of camping and be familiar with the use and limitations of bothies and huts as accommodation alternatives.

*It is important that candidates appreciate that using snowholes as the base or main form of accommodation is an activity that is outwith the scope of the Winter Mountain Leader Award. Those who wish to do so are advised to consult Appendix 4 for information on using snowholes.*

Great importance is now attached to environmental matters and you should take a positive interest in this aspect of the syllabus, particularly the problems associated with the removal of waste in winter.

Candidates are expected to be able to cope with unplanned events or emergencies. To that end you should be appropriately equipped, fit and resilient to cope with such situations and still continue to function as an effective Winter Mountain Leader the next day. Your best method of preparation for assessment is to have undertaken overnight expeditions with peers in relatively non-serious locations during the consolidation period.

Candidates are expected to be able to impart fundamental technical skills, such as basic navigation, avalanche awareness, etc. where appropriate. This would be expected to be done ‘in passing’, such as journeying about the hill with a group rather than in a formal and structured manner.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Start developing good planning habits by planning your own winter journeys

Be familiar with the demands winter walking makes on the individual, their equipment and their skills

Develop your resilience by getting out there into the Scottish winter mountains having personal adventures
Navigation in winter can be very difficult and requires considerable practice. In addition to being able to navigate effectively in good visibility, in poor conditions, including darkness and whiteout, candidates should be able to safely and efficiently:

2.1 relate map to ground using either 1:25,000, 1:50,000 or other relevant scale maps;
2.2 choose appropriate safe and efficient routes between geographical features in poor conditions;
2.3 measure distance accurately using pacing, timing and detailed information from the map;
2.4 take and follow accurate compass bearings while walking in poor conditions;
2.5 demonstrate navigational techniques appropriate to poor conditions;
2.6 demonstrate using a rope to safeguard progress in poor conditions;
2.7 relocate position effectively;
2.8 demonstrate a practical awareness of the use, and limitations, of electronic navigation devices such as GPS, Smartphones etc.;
2.9 demonstrate a practical awareness of how electronic navigation devices can be integrated with a map and compass.
For the Winter Mountain Leader Scheme, navigation is probably the most important aspect of the syllabus, and poor navigation skills continue to be the most common weakness for candidates during assessment. The major difference between summer and winter is that in winter far greater use is made of dead reckoning and distance estimation.

In zero visibility, the skills of walking accurately on a compass bearing for a set distance are crucial.

It requires a sound grasp of contour interpretation and the use of appropriate navigational planning strategies such as the use of aiming off, attack points and catching features. All these need to be backed up with well practised relocation strategies.

It is essential for you to be able to navigate accurately and be able to identify the 100 metre square within which you are located at any time during a walk. If you are unable to locate your party’s position accurately you may unknowingly lead your group into danger or, should an incident occur, you will fail the group and waste time for the rescue services. On many occasions dependent on terrain candidates will need to be considerably more accurate than this to move safely through the mountains.

The element that candidates have most difficulty in coping with is the feeling of uncertainty produced by navigating for prolonged periods in poor visibility. There is no short cut to overcoming this. Confidence in such conditions comes from good navigation skills being regularly practised in poor visibility and in a variety of terrain.

Access to and the use of electronic navigation aids such as GPS, Smartphones and GPS watches has significantly increased in past years. In addition technology has improved vastly in terms of battery life/types in such units. They are more reliable now and used correctly can be a powerful navigation tool. Candidates should be able to demonstrate a practical awareness of how electronic navigation devices can be integrated with a map and compass. However while the use of navigational aids, such as altimeters and GPS, is becoming more common they are still not fully reliable in all circumstances. For this reason your navigation skills will be primarily tested using the basic navigational tools of the map, compass and watch.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Ensure that you are comfortable with using 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 scale maps in all conditions

Develop your map memory skill when navigating

When verifying or locating your position use at least four bits of terrain information and ensure they ‘fit’ your current location
Candidates should be able to continually evaluate the terrain, snowpack, weather conditions and human factors, at the three important phases within their day, namely planning; during the journey; at key places and situations to draw sensible educated conclusions regarding avalanche hazard and risk by:

3.1 identifying sources of avalanche information;
3.2 identifying the types of avalanche common in the UK;
3.3 identifying common snowpack and grain types such as neve, graupel etc.;
3.4 identifying how a change in weather conditions affects the snowpack;
3.5 understanding the significance of the published avalanche hazard forecasts on mountain travel and applying them;
3.6 understanding how avalanche hazard is influenced by weather conditions, and terrain and its importance when planning your journey;
3.7 understanding how avalanche risk is influenced by people (human factors) and its importance when planning your journey;
3.8 differentiating between situations of significant avalanche danger and those of limited avalanche danger;
3.9 demonstrating the ability to plan a safe/appropriate route according to the conditions;
3.10 demonstrating an ability to continually appraise snowpack stability, weather and human factors while journeying;
3.11 identifying possible wind slab and cornice formation on a particular slope as a result of snowfall intensity and wind direction;
3.12 interpreting snowpack structure and stability using a variety of field observations;
3.13 demonstrating safe and effective precautions when negotiating a slope that may be avalanche prone;
3.14 stating the actions to be taken if involved in an avalanche incident and organising a rescue & recovery for those buried in an avalanche using commonly carried equipment.
The objective hazards to which walking groups are exposed during winter conditions are very real. Every year it is apparent that avalanches pose a serious hazard and therefore this study is a vital section of the syllabus.

Avalanche awareness is not just about facts and knowledge and field observation. Rather it is how we use this information and these techniques to inform the decision-making process. Avoiding situations of avalanche hazard is based on good reliable information and using this knowledge, and related information-gathering techniques, to continually test our supposition regarding snow and avalanche hazard helps to inform our decisions as we travel around the mountains.

You should be aware that while snow and avalanche is a vast subject area and that there is always uncertainty when predicting the likelihood or risk of avalanches, there are certain areas of knowledge with which any winter leader must be familiar. You will be expected to recognise the indicators and signs of avalanche hazard, which areas may be more prone to avalanche than others, and carry out relevant assessments to assess snowpack stability.

There are a number of ways to increase knowledge and skills of this subject.

- Attend an avalanche course. Such courses undoubtedly provide candidates with a level of expertise sufficient to meet the standards required at assessment. However, there are the drawbacks of additional time and costs to be considered.
- Study the subject through reading the books recommended in the bibliography and articles on avalanches in the climbing press.
- Be familiar with the Sportscotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) and understand the avalanche hazard levels used in the forecasts.
- Understand how avalanche hazard is influenced by weather conditions, terrain and people (human factors).
- Understand winter weather and the effects it has on the snowpack.
- Continually observe signs of change affecting the snowpack throughout winter; use field observations and practise the interpretation skills learnt on the training course. This simple option is often neglected by candidates and this shows at the time of assessment.

During the assessment course you will be asked to make assessments of the avalanche hazard, primarily based on weather conditions, terrain and human factors, before your journey. In addition, during your journey you are expected to make observations and gather ‘on the ground’ information from a variety of sources, make analysis of the snow cover and then draw conclusions on the relative safety of the snowpack. This process should then translate into safe route selection. Provided you read and maintain interest in the subject and, most importantly, make observations and draw conclusions from the signs of avalanche danger encountered on the hill as well as interpreting the information gained from other sources, you should have little difficulty during assessment.

**KEY PRACTICE POINTS**

When using the SAIS avalanche reports take time to read and comprehend the detail in the report

Monitor weather and avalanche forecasts well before heading out on your journey

Compare information gleaned from the above sources with personal ‘on the hill’ observations about what is actually happening on the ground
The term snowcraft is used to describe basic ice axe and crampons skills. Candidates are expected to be very competent in the use of ice axe and crampons on a variety of terrain, including Grade 1 ground, and in a variety of snow and ice conditions.

On snow slopes, using only the axe, candidates should demonstrate safe and efficient:

4.1 selection of an ice axe of suitable length and design, and its care and maintenance;
4.2 carriage and use of the axe for balance and support in a fashion appropriate to the slope and snow conditions;
4.3 carriage and use of the axe when kicking steps up, down and across slopes of hard snow;
4.4 cutting the appropriate type of step up, down and across steep slopes of hard snow for personal use.

On a hard snow slope of a steepness such that a slip could lead to an accelerating slide if not arrested, demonstrate safe and efficient:

4.5 carriage of the ice axe in a fashion that allows rapid deployment for self belay and for self arrest;
4.6 self-arrest from any sliding position;
4.7 self-arrest of a tumbling fall quickly and effectively.

Using crampons in a range of winter mountain walking terrain of varying difficulty, demonstrate safe and efficient:

4.8 selection of crampons of a suitable design and their care and maintenance;
4.9 attachment to and removal from boots;
4.10 movement up, down and across hard snow using French technique, front pointing, and a mixture of both;
4.11 adoption of techniques to suit a variety of underfoot conditions, for example, water ice, hard snow, new snow and soft wet snow.

Winter Mountain Leaders will frequently need to give basic tuition to novice walkers in some or all of the above techniques. Candidates should demonstrate:

4.12 practised demonstrations in all the above ice axe and crampon techniques that ensure the leader is seen as an expert model for the technique;
4.13 good choice of appropriate safe terrain to teach techniques;
4.14 demonstrate use of an appropriate teaching model or approach when teaching others;
4.15 ensure a simple structure and appropriate programme of training to the individuals' and/or groups’ abilities and experience.
On Grade 1 ground, using ice axe and crampons as appropriate, demonstrate safe, efficient and confident movement so that the following technical obstacles may be overcome:

4.16 cornices;
4.17 water ice;
4.18 hard snow;
4.19 rock steps;
4.20 mixed ground.

**KEY PRACTICE POINTS**

Practise your personal movement using axe and crampons skills on a variety of underfoot conditions and situations for example hard snow, soft snow, icy snow, snow-covered rock, mixed (ice, turf, snow and rock)

Ensure you can provide good solid demonstrations of basic axe and crampon skills

**GUIDANCE**

The term snowcraft is used to describe basic ice axe and crampons skills. Much emphasis is placed on this aspect of the syllabus and efficient and effective use of axe and crampons are fundamental skills of the Winter Mountain Leader. Winter Mountain Leaders will frequently need to give basic tuition to novice walkers in some or all of the above techniques. This role is undertaken within a wider context, such as part of a led group undertaking a winter mountain walk to ‘winter proof’ their charges before taking a group to any location where their use becomes necessary, either for mobility or safety.

While preparing for assessment, you should ensure that you can provide good, solid demonstrations of correct and appropriate basic axe and crampon skills to novices.

Choose suitable safe locations to teach novices ice axe braking and other basic skills, and ensure you can create a simple structure and clear progression while teaching and coaching novices. The main difficulty candidates often have is an inability to demonstrate good ice axe techniques such as self arrest and step cutting. Therefore you should be prepared to demonstrate correct personal use of both ice axe and crampons (be an ‘expert model’) and be able provide basic instruction to novices on your assessment.
Winter Mountain Leaders should be familiar with techniques to ensure safe travel through steep ground. This should be through a combination of planning, route choice and group management – these considerations are detailed under ‘Leadership and Journey Skills’ and ‘Navigation’. Winter Mountain Leaders should be able to provide security for individual members of a hillwalking party during ascent and descent of short sections of ground up to and including Grade 1 ground and cornices, using techniques appropriate to equipment carried by a hillwalking party, for example, ice axe, rope, sling, and karabiner. Candidates should be able to efficiently and safely:

5.1 kick steps suitable for novices to safely follow in both ascent/descent/traverse;
5.2 cut steps for novices to safely follow in ascent/descent/traverse;
5.3 select and maintain suitable ropes, slings, karabiners and any other relevant equipment;
5.4 construct suitable stances appropriate to the anchor;
5.5 construct appropriate anchors in snow and mixed terrain;
5.6 demonstrate rope management including knots, tying on and fluent handling while belaying;
5.7 identify the appropriate situations determining use of waist belays and direct belays including belaying on flat ground;
5.8 use the rope to protect short climbing descents/ascents for the whole party;
5.9 safeguard themselves in descent on steep ground;
5.10 hold slips and arrest short slides using dynamic delay techniques;
5.11 provide security for one person with a short length of rope while moving together on steep exposed non-serious walking terrain;
5.12 communicate instructions.
GUIDANCE

Winter Mountain Leaders should be familiar with techniques to ensure safe travel through steep ground. This should be through a combination of planning, route choice and group management and appropriate use of winter techniques, such as kicking or cutting steps by the leader, to help reduce the risk of a group member slipping.

There is an established need for Winter Mountain Leaders to be able to operate safely on steep ground (equivalent to Grade I), not necessarily through choice but because circumstances have forced the group onto such terrain. In these circumstances you must be able to safeguard your group and be able to assess your own limitations and those of the group. This is an important element of the syllabus – techniques requiring the use of the rope are only likely to be required when an emergency arises. In such a situation it is vital that you can perform the techniques competently, confidently and safely.

Candidates often fail to appreciate the difference between the personal experience requirements of 10 recognised Grade I or above winter climbs (or equivalent mountaineering routes), and the techniques of security on snow and ice necessary for a Winter Mountain Leader to be demonstrated at assessment. The inclusion of the requirement to have completed these climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes (see Appendix 1) is to ensure that candidates have experience of moving and ropework on a variety of terrain at this standard. It is not necessary for you to be an accomplished snow and ice climber but it is important that you are at ease on steep and hazardous mountaineering type terrain. It ensures that you have practised many of the security on steep ground techniques taught during the training course. Your steep ground experience will also help develop your decision making in terms of route choice and the suitability or otherwise for your groups.

The need for experience of a range of mountain terrain in winter cannot be over-emphasised. It is one thing to know from past experience the quirks of a particular mountain – a very different thing to encounter them for the first time on route and have to make decisions about how best to proceed. The scheme requires you to be technically competent and safe using only the equipment that a leader and group would carry for a winter walking expedition, for instance rope, sling, karabiner, ice axe and lightweight shovel (and possibly a Deadman snow anchor). Assessment does not require the use of technical winter climbing gear such as nuts, camming devices, ice screws or rock pegs. During the training course you will be taught security on snow and ice techniques using the walking equipment outlined above.

It is possible that trainers may include the ascent of graded ground in the training course but ideally most of the training should take place in descent, the most likely situation when emergency ropework would be used. Even if you do not have a climbing background you are likely to progress sufficiently well to complete graded climbs.

Candidates often fail to impress assessors, and in turn would not impress their group, regarding simple tasks with the rope such as uncoiling, preparing the rope and knot-tying. These are elementary skills which can be practised anywhere and you should aim for a high standard in these aspects. A more difficult skill is the ability to choose a safe and suitable anchor since this reflects considerable experience – there is no room for serious error here. Assessors will accept any safe method of constructing anchors. The ability to set up a certain type of belay system is less important than your ability to assess whether such a technique would be appropriate.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Practise step cutting buckets and kicking steps and view them as security on steep ground tools

Develop a breadth of experience by varying your practice for steep ground scenarios and gaining experience of a variety of snow-packs and conditions
Candidates should demonstrate the ability to construct and use snowholes and emergency shelters to provide effective shelter in the winter mountain environment in the event of an emergency or unplanned night out:

6.1 select suitable sites for bivouacs, emergency shelters and snowholes;
6.2 construct emergency shelters quickly using only hillwalking equipment;
6.3 construct and use snowholes suitable for occupation as an emergency overnight refuge;
6.4 identify the dangers of snow shelters, and take steps to minimise these.
GUIDANCE

Even as committed winter mountaineers few candidates will have experienced a night in a snow shelter, either voluntarily or otherwise, before the training course. There are several aims of staying overnight in a snow shelter during the training course. To demonstrate how to survive if forced into a night out in winter conditions, and that such a night out can be completed in relative comfort (remember that coming off the hill late, if it can be achieved safely, is invariably preferable to spending an unscheduled night in a snow shelter). The use of a snowhole allows other areas to be visited during training, may permit night navigation to take place and it allows many aspects of the syllabus to be drawn together.

The inclusion of snowholing in the Winter Mountain Leader scheme is to ensure candidates are fit and resilient enough to cope with the demands of the winter environment. Its purpose is not to teach the Winter Mountain Leader how to conduct expeditions using snowholes as the base or main form of accommodation.

The aim remains the same during assessment. Almost anyone with the right equipment and some basic skills training will be able to survive in a snow shelter. However, a Winter Mountain Leader is expected to be at a higher standard than merely being able to survive one night and should be fit and sufficiently organised to be able to cope with the demands of a three-day expedition based in snowholes. At assessment candidates should be able to demonstrate judgement around site selection (taking into consideration avalanche hazard, weather conditions, and other users), while managing the hazards of using a snow shelter, such as managing the internal temperature of a snow shelter, and minimising the effects of drifting snow blocking snowhole entrances. Candidates should be able to demonstrate effective use of a shovel and snow saw in the efficient construction of their snowhole.

In preparing for assessment candidates should practise the construction of a variety of snow shelters and, in non-serious situations, spend nights out with peers.

Candidates should be aware that when conditions are overly hazardous, for example in conditions of a rapid thaw or high avalanche risk it may not always be possible, nor safe, to spend an overnight in a snowhole during their course.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Practise the construction of a variety of snow shelters

Gain experience of spending multiple nights out using bases such as bothies and snowholes in non-serious situations
Candidates should understand the causes and be able to avoid the physiological injuries that can occur in cold, wet and freezing conditions. They should take precautions to avoid injuries but, failing that, be able to identify the signs and symptoms and then apply first aid to treat the following:

7.1 mountain hypothermia;
7.2 frostnip and frostbite;
7.3 heat disorders;
7.4 snow blindness;
7.5 sunburn.
This is not a difficult subject to learn in theory but, because everyone’s natural inclination is to avoid cold weather injuries, few candidates have experience of actually dealing with them. You should not be overly concerned about this as real cold weather injuries are generally easily recognisable, even in the early stages, and treatment can be made before conditions worsen.

It is to be hoped that during assessment no-one suffers any injuries of any kind. This obviously restricts the options for assessing you with verbal and written questions. The latter provides a more thorough and impartial method. You should therefore expect emphasis on the identification and treatment of cold weather injuries in the form of written questions.

This is a subject that can be adequately revised in the comfort of your own home.

**You are advised to read about cold weather injuries, how to avoid them and how to deal with them.**

Information on this subject can be found in the books shown in the bibliography. Do not forget that during practical assessment sessions you will be expected to take all methods available to avoid cold weather injuries.

**KEY PRACTICE POINTS**

- Understand the importance of appropriate equipment and adequate nutrition in the avoidance of cold weather injuries
- Read about the subject using the books shown in the bibliography
Candidates should understand the development of weather systems in winter time and the sequence of events that cause particular local weather and snow conditions. Candidates should demonstrate an understanding and use of weather information for planning and during hillwalking expeditions in winter conditions:

8.1 identify appropriate sources of meteorological information;
8.2 interpret meteorological forecasts and synoptic charts;
8.3 convert sea level forecasts for altitudes up to 1200 metres;
8.4 take account of the special features of weather in the mountains:
   8.4.1 wind speeds
   8.4.2 temperature changes
   8.4.3 wind chill factors;
8.5 recognise cloud formations and alterations of wind direction and temperature that are indicative of weather changes.
GUIDANCE

You will already have an elementary understanding of weather. The winter scheme builds on your existing knowledge to enable you to translate the effects to the winter mountain environment.

The weather component, although of a theoretical nature, is predominantly practical in its application. Weather always has an effect on the snowpack and therefore forms an inherent part of the avalanche hazard assessment. Furthermore numerous emergencies, occasionally leading to disastrous consequences, have occurred as a result of either ignorance of impending weather conditions or inappropriate responses to prevailing conditions. Conversely, an enjoyable day can sometimes be achieved after a poor start because the leader has envisaged an improvement.

Developing an interest in basic meteorology and following daily forecasts, and then relating these to observed weather conditions and changes when winter mountaineering will increase awareness and experience. This should eventually translate into a better understanding of weather conditions in mountain areas.

You are expected to be able to interpret internet, television, radio and newspaper weather maps and forecasts so that your own forecast is close to the conditions actually experienced when winter mountaineering. You should also have an understanding of the effects of weather on the snowpack.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Read about the subject using the books shown in the bibliography

Understand the relationship between mountain weather and the implications on journeying on the hill
Mountain Training highly recommends that all candidates use the on-line digital logbook facility in the Candidate Management System (known as DLOG) to record their winter mountaineering experience.

The logbook should provide a total record of the candidate’s winter mountaineering experience and demonstrate, at assessment, that the Board’s requirements have been fulfilled. It is an essential tool to help trainers advise candidates on specific further experience needed before assessment, and after assessment it can be used by employers to demonstrate continuing experience.

A key feature of all the Mountain Training qualifications is that competence is based on extensive quality personal experience of the activity. Having relevant and wide-ranging personal experience is key to success at assessment.

Therefore at assessment, Winter Mountain Leader candidates need to have completed and logged an absolute minimum of forty quality winter mountain days, gained in three different mountain areas in the UK over a minimum period of two winter seasons, with the majority UK based (75%), with at least 50% gained in Scotland.

What is a Quality Mountain Day? Put simply Quality Mountain Days (QMDs) are the cream of a candidate’s mountaineering and hillwalking experience. They consist of winter hillwalking in a variety of areas, weather conditions and snow types. The gains candidates make in developing this experience, for example fitness, technical competence, decision-making skills, etc. carry straight into how they operate as a Winter Mountain Leader. There is nothing like the Scottish Highlands in winter time to present a wide variety of tough, challenging winter adventures. Other areas such as North Wales and the Lakes have winter conditions, but you are never that far from a road or habitation offering a fast and comparatively easy escape from the mountains. That’s not always the case in the Scottish Highlands.

Likewise with overseas experience – if the overseas experience is very close to the winter environment encountered in the UK then that experience may well be valid. However the Winter Mountain Leader is a UK-based award so the bulk of a candidate’s winter experience should be UK based. At assessment a candidate’s logged days should have the majority UK based (75%), with at least 50% gained in Scotland and done with the candidates either in sole charge of the party, on their own, or with peers.

When with peers it is suggested that the candidate plays a full part in the decision making and planning rather than following a more experienced friend who makes all the decisions, does the navigation, etc.

In addition to Quality Mountain Days candidates need to have logged at least 10 x Grade 1 or above named UK winter climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes. This requirement to have completed climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes, in what is essentially a hillwalking leadership award, always provokes the question – why? In winter time the boundary between hillwalking and mountaineering is very blurred. For example very icy underfoot conditions coupled
with snow build-up can turn what was an innocuous slope into something far more technical and challenging. In such a situation the Winter Mountain Leader has to be able to move about the ground in a skilful, relaxed and efficient manner so that they can devote their full attention to managing their team. Hence the requirement for a Winter Mountain Leader to be able to move about on this type of mountaineering terrain. It can be difficult to quantify whether candidates have this experience, hence having completed 10 Grade I climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes is a shorthand way of ensuring that a Winter Mountain Leader candidate has definitely had experience of moving on steep, icy terrain.

Candidates will be required, on their assessment, to move about on Grade I mountaineering type ground, which could be steep open snow slopes, snow covered rock and turf, hard neve, etc. So experience of a variety of underfoot conditions on Grade I type ground is essential. A Winter Mountain Leader will not be much use to their group if they are a shaky, quivering wreck cautiously teetering across a snow slope trying to look after them. Confidence breeds confidence – so if the Leader is confident in all likelihood their group will take heart from that.

It is in the interests of candidates to evaluate their record of experience before applying to attend an assessment course. The assessment Course Director will be looking for experience that has been acquired over at least three winter seasons and in several mountain areas. Candidates should remember that experience concentrated in one area or undertaken as a student under instruction has a lower value and may be discounted or treated as of a relatively low value when considering depth and breadth of experience.

If using an alternative electronic or paper logbook candidates are requested to identify their best 40 winter QMDs when submitting log books to assessors. An * by the side of the entry, and/or highlighted, is recommended (the Mountain Training DLOG does this for you).
Many course providers use written ‘tests’, often referred to as ‘The Home Paper’, which candidates are given to complete prior to attending their assessment. Candidates can therefore ‘tune in’ to the syllabus information and skills sets they should be familiar with for their assessment. These ‘tests’ will not determine the final result but they may aid assessors when considering the choice of tasks to be set in the latter part of the course.

Examples of the written questions are shown below and candidates are advised to examine these. It is most likely that the home paper will be related to subjects such as:

- Winter mountain safety
- Winter mountain weather
- Cold weather injuries

If you have a particular difficulty in responding to the written home paper then please contact your course provider and explain the issue. They can arrange for alternative arrangements to be made.

**EXAMPLE WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

These are given as examples of different styles of question and the list is not intended to be definitive. Providers will usually employ a range of different styles and may not necessarily use any of the styles shown here:

**Snow and Avalanches**

1. Between what two angles of slope are avalanches generally most prevalent?
2. Which of the following slope profiles causes the greatest tension within the snow?
   a. Uniform slope.
   b. Convex slope.
   c. Concave slope.
   d. Indented slope.
3. Which of the following is the most common form of avalanche found in Scotland?
   a. Slab.
   b. Loose snow.
   c. Wet snow.
   d. Powder.
4. Briefly outline how you would continually appraise snowpack stability, weather and human factors whilst journeying?
5. In relation to avalanche hazard explain what is meant by ‘heuristic traps’?
6. With a south-westerly wind, which slopes will be most avalanche prone?
7. Ring (T)rue or (F)alse after the following statements:
   a. After one person has crossed a slope, then it is safe and will not avalanche. (T) (F)
   b. The first thing to do in an avalanche accident is to send for help. (T) (F)
8. In the European Avalanche Hazard Scale what hazard level has no avalanche triggering probability?
9. A steep temperature gradient will give rise to what type of crystals?
10. Under what conditions does surface hoar form and how can it constitute a danger?
Security on Steep Ground

11. Describe your options and the process you would use to get a group down a section of moderately angled (25-30°) icy snow?

Cold Weather Injuries

12. Which of the following statements is true? Windchill is:
   a. The combined effect of wind and rain.
   b. The combined effect of rain and temperature.
   c. The combined effect of wind and temperature.
   b. A mathematical calculation of cold temperatures.

13. What is the primary concern when handling a deeply unconscious casualty?

14. Briefly describe frostbite and the treatment for it.

15. What are the symptoms of snow blindness and how is the condition treated?

Winter Weather

16. Which air mass is likely to bring the most snow to Scotland?

17. With a wind speed of 20 mph at sea level, what wind speed would you expect at 900m?

18. Given a temperature of O°C at sea level and average humidity, what temperature would you expect at 1,000m?

19. What do lenticular clouds usually signify?

20. What is the name of the weather front ‘A’ on the attached synoptic chart?

21. On this chart, what is the wind direction over the Highlands of Scotland?

Emergency Snow Shelters and Holes

22. Why is it preferable to have the entrance to an emergency shelter at foot level?

23. List the points of safety required for an unplanned emergency night in a snowhole?

General

24. What do the following Gaelic words mean?
   - Ruadh - Garbh
   - Stob - Bealach

25. Why is Five Finger Gully well known?

26. What is a coarse probe and what is it used for?

27. What do the following abbreviations stand for?
   a. SARDA  b. SAIS  c. MIC

28. What are the advantages of rigid/stiff soled mountaineering boots over mountaineering boots with less rigid/stiff soles?
APPENDIX 3 - THE WINTER MOUNTAIN LEADER SCHEME ASSESSMENT

This handbook has been prepared for candidates at all stages of the winter scheme. This handbook has been prepared to allow a flexibility of interpretation within the framework of the syllabus. Indeed, the strength of the scheme, as with mountaineering in general, lies in its freedom from rigid constraints. It is not intended that the handbook should be definitive.

There is an accompanying booklet for Trainers and Assessors known as the Winter Mountain Leader Guidance for Trainers and Assessors. This offers guidance for training and assessment staff by expanding on all aspects of the syllabus and offering suggestions on how best to tackle a particular subject. Candidates are free to download this if they wish.

As the Prospectus explains, to gain the Winter Mountain Leader award involves registering and having this approved by Mountain Training Scotland, attending a training course, and gaining further experience before finally being assessed. You're advised not to proceed too quickly from training to assessment. Allow yourself sufficient opportunity to overcome any weaknesses identified during training and to gain the technical skills and judgement that stem from experience.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment course gives candidates the opportunity to prove to themselves that they can operate as Winter Mountain Leaders at a nationally recognised standard. These notes discuss assessment standard, as well as outlining the minimum standard required of a practising Winter Mountain Leader.

The following notes give details of assessment courses. The essence of any advice is simply “to do what you know” and leave the job of interpreting your actions to the assessor.

The assessment course is normally a five-day examination conducted by Mountaineering Instructor Certificate (MIC) holders. Each course will have a Course Director who takes part in the direct assessment of individuals. One of the main tasks of the Course Director is to offer guidance to both candidate and assessor and also to mediate in circumstances which warrant intervention. Assessors will be allocated to small groups of candidates; no more than four at any one time. You should be examined by at least two assessors, although generally one will be the main examiner.

It is a holistic process so the candidate’s performance is viewed as a total within the context of the week rather than a day by day or syllabus area by syllabus area ‘tick box’. In this context many assessors often prefer to give interim feedback to candidates, but this is not compulsory. It should be clear that each day is not taken in isolation, so scraping through each day may not add up to a pass at the end of the week. On the other hand, one poor day can often be redeemed.
by the others.

During assessment you will be expected to demonstrate the practical skills in a range of circumstances that are likely to occur during winter hillwalking expeditions. You will be expected to show that:

- you are completely “at home” in the winter mountain environment;
- you can demonstrate practical skills with the ease and fluency that results from long practice;
- you are able to move easily and with confidence over snow, ice, rocks and scree in steep and exposed situations.

All aspects of the syllabus may be covered but usually lack of time prohibits total examination of every topic. You should therefore expect to be examined more thoroughly in subjects which commonly pose problems.

Unsuccessful candidates often show weaknesses in the following areas of the syllabus:

- navigation, which can be very testing in poor visibility. Specific areas are contour interpretation, appropriate strategies for successfully achieving the leg and ultimately, relocation strategies;
- security on steep ground;
- party supervision, particularly in bad weather or on difficult terrain;
- assessment of avalanche risk;
- Quality Mountain Days; a lack of a fully completed log book or DLOG evidencing a minimum of 40 QMDs, the vast majority of which are advised to be spread across the high mountains of Scotland under winter conditions.

Since everyone can make mistakes, isolated errors are not normally grounds for failure, but persistent mistakes, however minor, may well lead to a deferral or recommendation for reassessment. Assessors are often more interested in your ability to cope with mistakes and recover from them rather than the fact that you made a minor mistake in the first instance. You should be aware that lack of proficiency in two major areas is likely to result in a fail rather than a deferment.

At the end of the assessment course you will normally be interviewed by the Course Director who will inform you of the result. This is recorded in the Candidate Management System (CMS). There are three possible results – Pass, Defer, Fail. In the event of a result other than a Pass the Course Director will verbally outline the background to the result (including examples), advise about further experience and, if reassessment is proposed, give details of any pre-requisites. A detailed and specific action plan can be extremely useful and this is done via the Candidate Management System (candidates can access their own reports on-line, although you may be given a paper copy). It is hoped that deferred candidates will return to the same Course Director. They are at liberty to go elsewhere, in which case, the notes of the original assessment may need to be passed on to the new assessment Course Director.

Finally, the winter mountain environment is genuinely hazardous and assessment courses will normally proceed irrespective of weather and snow conditions. Assessment Course Directors make every effort to ensure that candidates are not exposed to unnecessary risk but it is essential to the process of the assessment of Winter Mountain Leaders that candidates are exposed to situations where real judgements about safety have to be made. Candidates are urged to ensure that they have recent winter mountaineering experience in Scotland before attending assessment and that they are fully aware of the weather and snow hazards to which they will be exposed.

However in extreme conditions the assessment Course Director may have to abandon the process of assessment.
APPENDIX 4 - FURTHER EXPERIENCE

Award holders should follow the National Guidelines issued by Mountain Training UK. In particular they should note that the award is only valid where the holder is operating within the scope of the award and the holder has recent logged experience appropriate to the award. Where there is any doubt advisors should contact the relevant national Mountain Training board.

According to the Health and Safety Executive there are four ways to demonstrate the competence of leaders. These are:

- to hold the relevant qualification
- to hold an equivalent qualification
- to have received appropriate in-house training
- to be competent through experience

Mountain Training endorses this view, while emphasising that national awards are the key components in such an approach. Further training events and opportunities to review new initiatives are valuable components in the continuing development of any leader.

To assist in providing further training opportunities the Mountain Training Association will make available information on matters of interest to all award holders including Continuing Personal Development (CPD) events. The responsibility for ensuring that leaders receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders.

Award holders who wish to operate beyond the scope of their award(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Winter Mountain Leader holder leading snowhole-based mountain expeditions, may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a local scheme.

Local schemes are for the provision of skills needed to deal with specific restricted tasks, and the accreditation tends to be site or area specific, restricted and non-transferable. Therefore it should be appreciated that local schemes are only suitable for use by organisations and not by individuals.

Individuals (self-employed leaders) seeking additional training and assessment from a suitably qualified and experienced technical advisor, thus enabling them to develop further relevant experience, may find this allows them to demonstrate competence beyond the scope of their award. Award holders using this route to extend their personal remit, beyond the scope of the award they hold, should clarify the operational responsibility of the technical advisor and the implications for their insurance cover for operating beyond the scope of the award held.
APPENDIX 5 - MOUNTAIN TRAINING AND THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCILS

The prime aim of the four home nation boards of Mountain Training is to promote awareness of climbing and mountain safety through formal leader training schemes. These include the Lowland Leader Award, the Hill and Moorland Leader Award, Mountain Leader Award, the Winter Mountain Leader Award, the Single Pitch Award, the Climbing Wall Award and the Climbing Wall Leading Award.

Mountain Training promotes and co-ordinates the four home nation Boards in the provision of this training and is responsible for the Mountaineering Instructor Scheme and the International Mountain Leader Award. Mountain Training also maintains a centralised national mountain training database (known as the Candidate Management System or CMS), which provides a record of qualifications for mountain leaders, instructors and guides throughout the UK.

The mountaineering councils are the representative bodies for climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers and work to promote their interests and protect their freedoms. They provide a wide range of services for members and hold regular area meetings.

Mountain Training UK (MTUK)
Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Conwy LL24 0ES
Tel: 01690 720272  Fax: 01690 720248
info@mountain-training.org
www.mountain-training.org

Mountain Training Northern Ireland (MTNI)
Tollymore Mountain Centre, Bryansford, Newcastle, Co Down BT33 0PT
Tel: 028 4372 2158  Fax: 028 4372 6155
livetheadventure@tollymore.com
www.tollymore.com

Mountain Training Cymru (MTC)
Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Conwy LL24 0ET
Tel: 01690 720361  Fax: 01690 720248
admin@mountain-training.org
www.mountain-training.org/home-nations/cymru

Mountaineering Ireland
Sport HQ, 13 Joyce Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin 12, Ireland
Tel: 00 3531 625 1115  Fax: 00 3531 625 1116
mci@eircom.net
www.mountaineering.ie

Mountain Training England (MTE)
Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Conwy LL24 0ET
Tel: 01690 720314  Fax: 01690 720248
info@mountain-training.org
www.mountain-training.org/home-nations/england

Mountain Training Scotland (MTS)
Glenmore, Aviemore, Inverness-shire PH22 1QZ
Tel: 01479 861248
scotland@mountain-training.org
www.mountain-training.org/home-nations/scotland

British Mountaineering Council
177-179 Burton Road, Manchester M20 2BB
Tel: 08700 104 878  Fax: 0161 445 4500
office@thebmc.co.uk
www.thebmc.co.uk

Mountaineering Scotland
The Old Granary, West Mill Street, Perth PH1 5QP
Tel: 01738 638227  Fax: 01738 442095
info@mcofs.org.uk
www.mcofs.org.uk
The following publications, while not an exhaustive list, are all relevant to the syllabus of the Winter Mountain Leader Award. For wider and background reading the bibliographies in the Mountain Leader Award Handbook and the Single Pitch Award Handbook are strongly recommended.

*Winter Skills: Essential Walking & Climbing Techniques*  
Cunningham and Fyffe

*Mountaineering and Leadership*  
Langmuir

*Navigation in the Mountains*  
Carlo Forte

*SAIS Reports*  
SAIS

*Be Avalanche Aware*  
SAIS

*A Chance in a Million (2nd Ed.)*  
Barton and Wright

*Avalanche!*  
Robert Bolognesi

*Avalanche Safety for Skiers and Climbers*  
Daffern

*Mountain Skills Training Handbook*  
Hill and Johnston

*Mountaineering. The Freedom of the Hills*  
The Mountaineers

*Rock and Ice Guides*  
SMC

*Scotland’s Winter Mountains*  
Moran

*Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain*  
Bruce Tremper

*The Avalanche Handbook*  
McClung and Schaerer
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