

The Professional **Mountaineer**

ISSUE 28 >> WINTER 2019 >> £4.75

The Association
of Mountaineering
Instructors

British Mountain
Guides

British Association
of International
Mountain Leaders

Mountain Training
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Advertising artwork **must** be supplied ready prepared as high resolution (300dpi), font embedded pdf/jpeg. Please refer to our T&Cs for details and cancellation terms.

Print and distribution Printworks
www.printworkspublishing.co.uk

NEXT ISSUE

Spring 2020 Environmental knowledge, assessing gear placements, sustainable employment. Copy deadline: Friday 17 January 2020.

The Professional Mountaineer is registered with the British Library.

ISSN 2052-3351

Our front cover

Pete on the tenuous traverse of *Babylon* (VII 8), Ben Nevis. This was the first route of the season, and was suitably exciting! © Luca Celano.

Woodland Carbon scheme
CO₂ emissions from the production of the paper used in this magazine has been offset by planting native woodland in the UK, through the Woodland Trust and the Woodland Carbon scheme.



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ABOVE Our contributions to carbon capture.

LEFT Editor with students in Kenya in joint UK-New Zealand training project. © Steve Long/UIAA Training.

After another cold and wet autumn, with early snow on the hills, our volunteer writers have been preparing for winter by producing some excellent guidance and technical advice for the snowy conditions that mountaineers around the world are hoping for.

We also have some excellent business advice for readers in this issue, along with some important considerations for sport climbers. The quality of materials that our members continue to contribute to this magazine is truly astounding, and fully justifies our original belief that the associations deserved their own publication. I strongly believe that it has been a major contribution to the professionalism of leaders, instructors, coaches and guides, both in the paid and voluntary sectors.

With climate change and habitat loss increasingly occupying the public consciousness, we need to strike a balance between our lifestyles and our carbon footprint. There is no denying that mountaineering involves significant amounts of travel, so we need to make every journey count. Glacial recession is a huge issue worldwide; ironically some alpine areas are now only accessible by helicopter due to the unstable moraines

now exposed. Individual action is important, but global leadership is also required. We should not forget, on the other hand that our activities help make the protection of wild places more economically viable.

Here at *The Professional Mountaineer* we have long sought a solution for reducing the impact of distributing the magazine. The associations now store digital copies in the members' sections of their websites, and we have been researching various solutions for packaging. We currently use a recyclable plastic wrap that can be disposed of at sites with suitable recycling facilities (not yet via council collection). We continually monitor the evolving technology, but the cost of compostable wraps is currently prohibitive for the relatively small volume of our output. Our research continues, but in the meantime we are working closely with our publisher (Vertebrate) to reduce our carbon footprint. Vertebrate is now part of a partnership with Woodland Trust to mitigate CO₂ emissions generated by the publishing industry. We acknowledge that this is a compromise, but to date, the trees planted through this scheme have captured nearly 57,000 tonnes of carbon.

Steve Long
Technical editor

OUR COVER



Luca Celano

Luca is a Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor, Winter Mountain Leader and soon to be trainee WMCI, spending winters in Scotland and summers in North Wales. He is a keen photographer and even keener winter climber.

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www.lucacelano.com

OUR WINTER ISSUE CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE



© Henry Prudden.

Cath Bateman

Cath became an International Mountain Leader after a year living in Canada inspired her to lead walks and expeditions internationally. She is also a teacher of Biology, with a particular interest in plants and lichens.



Lucy Dunn

Lucy grew up in the Lake District and has always been interested in nature and the natural world. She runs the environmental education programme at the Lake District Wildlife Park and is a Mountain Leader.



Lesley McKenna

Lesley grew up in Aviemore and cut her feet in the outdoors from a very young age. She competed in Alpine skiing as part of the Scottish Ski Team and British Alpine Ski Team before changing to compete in freestyle snowboarding.



Sandy Paterson

Sandy is a Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor and International Mountain Leader. He runs his own company Scotch on the Rocks guiding which is a provider of both the Summer and Winter Mountain Leader schemes.

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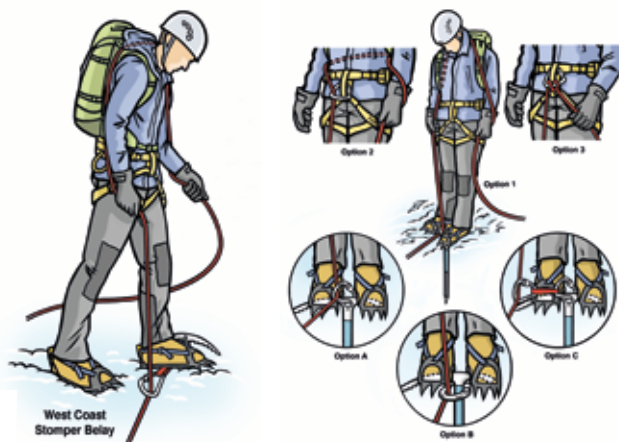
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Feeling inspired?

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Fancy advertising?

If you would like to advertise in the next issue, please contact **Caroline Davenport** at caroline@media-solution.co.uk

NEWS



THE ASSOCIATION OF MOUNTAINEERING INSTRUCTORS (AMI)

I hope that everyone has had a successful summer and autumn season on the rock. All eyes are now on winter...

It's been a busy autumn for the committee. The BMC asked if AMI would host a Technical Advisors register (in the same way they host an Expert Witness register) so a process has been put in place for this, to go live in the spring. The first AMI tender for charitable work was successful and the Alpkit Foundation have agreed to match funding for this initiative (www.alpkit.com/foundation)

The outcomes from the AMI website Working Group should be implemented by the time you read this and our thanks go to them for their excellent work.

Finally the AMI AGM will be taking place on 27th-29th March 2020 at The Hollowford Centre in the Peak District. This has been moved to this date to lure Winter Mountaineering & Climbing Instructor's down from up north at the end of the season, and take advantage of the ideal conditions for grit! There is an exciting mix of new and proven workshops (20 each day), each with CPD points attached. Book accommodation early to get a bonus surprise. Details are, of course, on CMS. Look forward to seeing you there...

Phil Baker (Chairman)



AMI is the representative body for professionally qualified Mountaineering and Climbing Instructors in the UK and Ireland and is committed to promoting good practice in all mountaineering instruction. Full members hold the Mountaineering and climbing instructors qualification or higher qualification the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor.

T **01690 720123**
www.ami.org.uk



BRITISH MOUNTAIN GUIDES (BMG)

As the long hot summer of the Alps has come to a very abrupt end with a relatively short wet period, the early snows have arrived allowing ski gear and axes to be dusted off.

The BMG AGM took place in Chamonix, Mont Blanc France on 9th and 10th November. On the Sunday Louis Piguat, who is at the cutting edge of avalanche search and rescue, delivered a presentation and practical session as part of the Roger Payne risk assessment seminar.

There have been quite a few changes of face for the committee, with Martin Doyle being placed as President elect and Tim Blakemore taking the position of Technical Director elect. Both will work alongside the current role holders before taking over the following year. A number of others have also taken on other positions - thanks to all who put themselves forward for these roles and thanks to those leaving the positions for their diligence and hard work.

By the time you read this a new IFMGA president will have been elected at the IFMGA AGM. Diego Wellig from the Swiss association and our very own Peter Cliff were in the running.

A fledgling environmental group has been drawn up in conjunction with the International Olympic Committee, along with mountain sports federations, environmental groups and practitioners which includes the IFMGA with BMG representation.

Mark Charlton (President)



The BMG is a member of the International Federation of Mountain Guides (IFMGA), currently comprising 24 nations worldwide, with growing membership, it is the professional organisation that trains and assesses Mountain Guides in all disciplines. A British Mountain Guide operates to the highest recognised level throughout the world, in all terrain and in diverse roles.

T **01690 720386**
www.bmg.org.uk



THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN LEADERS (BAIML)

I'm writing this in transit back from the Annual Assembly of UIMLA in Brasov, Romania. This year there were many interesting side meetings and collaborations and we'll be telling you all about some joint projects in 2020 and asking for volunteers to get involved. We also unanimously accepted our newest Aspirant country into the union, the Nepal Mountain Leader Association, exciting times ahead.

By the time you read this we'll have had our own Conference and AGM based at the Royal Victoria Hotel in Llanberis over the 29th November to 1st December. With more than 30 different workshops on offer with some of the best providers available and nearly 150 members signed up I know it will have been a great event. We also introduced our two new Directors and the new members of our Reps Team. Michelle has been working hard to launch a new strategy for supporting regional CPD for our members.

Finally we'd like to pause and remember the members we lost this year and welcome the new IMLs who joined us.

We wish you all a festive Christmas and great 2020, and hope to see you on the hill.

Kelvyn James [Chair]



BAIML is the professional association for International Mountain Leaders (IMLs) in the UK. It represents the UK at UIMLA, the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations, which is the international governing body for IMLs. Full members hold the IML award and are committed to a dedicated CPD programme.

T 01690 720272
www.baiml.org



THE MOUNTAIN TRAINING ASSOCIATION (MTA)

Firstly, a big thanks to everyone who came along and supported our autumn conference, we enjoyed meeting you.

As winter gets underway regional coordinators and support volunteers have been busy organising peer led night navigation sessions amongst other things, so keep an eye on our workshop programme and get involved with your regional group.

Our Winter CPD weekend will take place at Glenmore Lodge on the 25th and 26th January, there really is something for everyone, whether you are starting out in winter, preparing for assessment or already working as a Winter Mountain Leader. Bookings are available through the Glenmore Lodge website.

The collaboration work we have been doing with the Met Office providing specialist weather workshops across the UK during 2019 has been a resounding success. Another programme of workshops will take place throughout 2020.

In September we ran a further two mentor training days in Harrogate and Milton Keynes to give more members the opportunity to have mentor support. We will continue to expand and develop the programme during next year.

Finally, thank you for your continued support, have a very Merry Christmas and wishing you every success in whatever you're planning for 2020.

Belinda Buckingham [Development Officer]



The MTA is a membership organisation providing support and development opportunities for all candidates of Mountain Training. Promoting good practice and providing continued personal development opportunities as part of a UK-wide community of outdoor leaders. Full members hold one or more of the Mountain Training Awards.

T 01690 720272
www.mountain-training.org/mta



MAIN PHOTO Taking a breather to admire the view north.

IN PURSUIT OF SNOW IN AUSTRIA

WORDS AND PHOTOS (UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED)
BY CATH BATEMAN

Having spent the last eight years in Scotland for my Christmas and New Year holidays, experiencing hugely variable levels of snow cover, I was keen to find some deep, powdery stuff to enjoy.



© Henry Prudden.

Cath Bateman became an International Mountain Leader after a year living in Canada inspired her to lead walks and expeditions internationally. She is also a teacher of Biology, with a particular interest in plants and lichens. Currently she is having a year off work and completing the Munros whilst living in a van. She has enjoyed taking people on expeditions to different countries and she leads walking holidays in the UK and abroad.

As luck would have it a friend of mine has access to a chalet in Austria and this presented an opportunity to seek out the snow I hankered after. This also gave me the chance to explore an area that not only yielded the fantastic substance in huge quantities (winter 2018/19) but also has easy access to snow sports and all the essentials needed for shopping, dining out and hiring kit.

Styria (Stiermark in German) is a state in the southeast of Austria. Easily accessible by car or train from Vienna in under a couple of hours it offers excellent snowshoeing and a host of other snow-related activities. The Northern Limestone Alps (German: Nördliche Kalkalpen, also called the Northern Calcareous Alps) cut through this state on a west-east axis. These have been worn down into canyons and cliffs such as the Enns

Gorge in the Gesäuse National Park. The park itself is located in the mountainous Upper Styrian region covering large parts of the Gesäuse range within the Ennstal Alps and the steep water gap of the Enns river between Admont and Hieflau.

Our snowshoeing centred on the quiet area of the commune and city Mariazell, 143 kilometres north of Graz at an altitude of 868m, and a small hamlet called Lahnsattel, 1 km east of the Lahn Saddle (German: Lahnsattel). The Saddle, at an altitude of 1,006m, is a high mountain pass between the Bundesländer of Lower Austria and Styria. It is traversed by Federal Highway B23 and connects the Salza river valley from Mariazell with the Mürz river valley. The local peaks here are between 1,200-1,799 metres. Grosser Goller, 1,766m and 3 km away from the



1. Headed up a typical track through the woods, using the snow baskets in fine powder snow made progress more efficient. © Emily Coates. 2. The steepest part of the route up to Wildalpe, the use of heel-raisers was helpful in this section. 3. Consulting the map en route to Wilde Alp. © Chris Bradshaw. 4. Using the repair kit in anger, the snowshoe was repaired swiftly, and we carried on our journey.

Saddle, is a popular back-country ski-tour and hiking/snowshoeing route. The summits are mostly just above the treeline so the routes are a combination of pastures and forestry tracks. Summer and winter routes are detailed on various maps that we bought online before our trip. The Freytag & Berndt maps that came with a German booklet describe some routes in the area. The start of routes are well-signposted and along tracks there are red-white-red markings. Be careful though, depending on the level of snow-plastering, these signs and marks can be covered! Stiermark produce avalanche forecasts with easy-to-understand graphics and translate them into English, making it an invaluable tool for planning your days out; <http://www.lawine-steiermark.at/lagebericht/avalanche-bulletin>.

Over the New Year and beyond, and much to our joy, huge amounts of snow fell for almost a week. The soft powder snow made our snowshoeing adventures so much fun, particularly for those in our group who had not tried it before. Hans, who looked after the snow clearance for the hamlet, referred to it as “schneee-schwimming” and the day we left we were certainly wallowing in it. Lahnsattel is known locally as ‘avalanche saddle’, the truth of which became clearer following some serious avalanches in early January cutting off the local ski-hills and causing damage to infrastructure.

Our days out snowshoeing were all within 30 minutes’ drive from Lahnsattel and were planned using the maps, guidebooks and careful attention to the avalanche forecast. One of our routes took in Wildalpe (1,523m) from the north, zigzagging up through the forest on a mixture of wide forest tracks and small paths. We gained the summit from the relatively steep east shoulder, which made the heel-raisers, a feature on the MSR and TSL snowshoes, handy to take the strain off our calf muscles. Close to the summit some ski-tourers appeared, having ascended by another route. This was the only day we encountered anyone else at all outside of a ski resort. Heading back the way we came the going was much more like “snow-swimming” and we cut through the trees glades to return to our chalet, the log fire and the schnapps!

The repair kit, which usually sits at the bottom of my bag, came in useful when a clevis pin sheared off of a snowshoe. We fixed this with a nut and bolt and continued to enjoy the rest of the day out. In addition to the nuts and bolts (Nylock type nuts provide a more durable mend) it’s useful to have a small spanner, some zip-ties, duck-tape and a multi-tool or Swiss army knife. Usually a few pieces are sufficient to make it off the hill but there was one occasion on another trip where a snowshoe with a tubular frame broke and was splinted using the metal handle from a saucepan!

Reasons to go and top tips

The area around Lahnsattel and Mariazell is not only a fantastic place to enjoy snowshoeing and practice navigation but also to try out your language skills – German or Austro-Bavarian – do not presume English is spoken here! (We had many laughs hiring langlauf equipment with only the very basics of verbal communication). There is enough information with good avalanche and weather forecasts readily available to help inform you before setting out. There are many hills under 2,000 metres that are accessible from a range of aspects to take account of snow-loading on the slopes. Take care to check the map scales and contour spacings as the micro navigation can be challenging, especially for example when using a 1:50,000 scale Kompass map with 100 metre contours.

There are set tracks for langlauf (Nordic skiing) in virtually every hamlet and for a few euros, you can hire skis, boots and poles and ski the routes varying in distance and gradient.

Or, if you prefer, you can go for an afternoon of down-hill skiing in the small resorts at Mariazell and Annaberg where you can hire all ski equipment including snowshoes and poles.

Note that this area is a “traditional” place, where restaurants and shops usually shut on Sundays and Bank Holidays, so make sure you plan for the kit hire and buy enough food as only petrol stations tend to be open. These, however, do sell the essentials (crisps, beer and wine) in addition to fuel!

This is a great place for guiding clients on snowshoeing adventures with plenty of routes. There are also lots of culturally interesting places to visit such as the Mariazell Basilica, also known as Basilica Mariä Geburt (Basilica of the Birth of the Virgin Mary). It is the most important pilgrimage destination in Austria and one of the most visited shrines in Europe. Gastronomes should try the Styrian pumpkin seed oil; a dark green intensely-flavoured oil made in this area. It has an intense nutty taste and is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids. Pumpkin seed oil serves as a salad dressing. The typical Styrian dressing consists of pumpkin seed oil and cider vinegar. The oil is also used for desserts, giving ordinary vanilla ice cream a nutty taste. It is considered a real delicacy in Austria and Slovenia, and a few drops are added to pumpkin soup and other local dishes.

Finally, and as always, International Mountain Leaders should check the requirements and legal obligations before operating in Austria. ■

CROSSING THE HARDANGERVIDDA HUT-TO-HUT SKI TOURING IN NORWAY

Day one was an early start; I'd got up before breakfast to have a look at the beginning of the route – which climbed up onto the start of the Hardangervidda – imagining how we might ascend the terrain on Nordic touring skis, carrying packs.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JASON FRANKS

We had arrived at the hut the night before by taxi from a remote bus stop on the main road where we had been dropped by the bus after a five-hour journey from Oslo Airport. It was early April and the temperature was warm down at this height so the snow would be wet and heavy – which would mean a soft wax for the skis or even climbing skins. It was misty with low visibility, and was gently snowing. The first hut was around 26km away up on the plateau, with around 500m of ascent. If this route worked out today, we had a relatively short steep climb ahead followed by undulating terrain; over hills, across and around frozen lakes, threading through dramatic peaks with occasionally steep descents. Navigation was going to be challenging but then this is just another day on the Hardangervidda and we were setting out to cross it in the following six days.

The Hardangervidda is a Norwegian mountain plateau with a cold year-round alpine climate. It is the largest in Europe and covers 6,500 km² and has an average elevation of 1,100 m. It is also home to Norway's largest glacier Hardangerjøkulen. The majority of the vidda is protected as part of Hardangervidda National Park, which is also Norway's largest national park at 3,422 km². The Hardangervidda is above the tree-line, so in winter it is barren arctic tundra that experiences some extreme weather conditions.

Crossing the Hardangervidda – south to north/east to west (or vice versa) has always been seen as a ski-touring challenge and was made famous during World War Two by the Heroes of Telemark; the Norwegian resistance saboteurs who parachuted onto the vidda and skied incredible distances, survived terrible weather and harsh conditions to carry out a highly successful commando raid. Crossing

the vidda can be done either unsupported by pulling sleds (pulks) and camping, or by making use of the DNT (Norwegian Trekking Association) huts and cabins (that exist all across Norway). These range from the primitive (no electricity) unstaffed huts to the almost luxurious staffed lodges. There are established winter and summer hut-to-hut routes which are marked on most Norwegian maps but in the winter on the Hardangervidda there are no cut ski tracks so crossing the Hardangervidda involves off-track Nordic backcountry skiing. There might be some route markers (wands or birch branches) depending on the time of year and recent weather but these can't be relied on, so map and compass are essential.

The DNT hut system is a well perfected and preserved system that really works and – much like mountain huts worldwide – relies on good faith. Whilst 'learning' the system I've certainly been schooled a number of times by wisened Norwegian skiers on the finer details of hut etiquette, mainly involving the detailed in-hut paperwork. Norway is an expensive country, so staying at DNT huts is not necessarily cheap, although the basic unstaffed remote huts are certainly reasonable and by far the most fun – even if you do arrive in the dark after a long ski day and need to use your shovel to dig out the entrance and take over a freezing hut before starting the fire and making it very cosy. Using DNT unstaffed huts requires DNT membership and a key (all the huts are well provisioned) and staffed huts might require booking (it is advisable to book as this has the added advantage of providing route-following from the staffed huts). Although the DNT system says that no one is ever turned away, there have certainly been a few occasions in the busy part of the season and on the busy routes, when I've been genuinely amazed at



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MAIN PHOTO Ski tracks and zig zag climb. 1. A blue sky day. 2. Lunch stop. 3. Navigation check in low visibility. 4. Unstaffed DNT hut. 5. Skis and pack.

how many people have been squeezed into those little huts, but on other times and in remoter places we've often been the only group.

Skiing between the huts on the undulating and varied terrain can be an absolute joy in good weather but a serious challenge in marginal conditions. Weather planning is vital and it's very useful to build in a day or so of slack in case the weather closes in and you need to sit it out in the hut. Internet access is at best patchy, so taking a snapshot of the route weather forecast is useful but no guarantee, as the weather is prone to sudden and unexpected change. Skiing across the terrain is a mix of classic Nordic cross-country kick and glide technique on the flat; zig-zagging or skinning up the hills; and telemark/alpine techniques for the way down. Good skis for the terrain are metal-edged Telemark/Nordic touring skis with 75mm Telemark or NNN/SNS bindings and leather or plastic Telemark boots. I use a waxing ski – fish scales are also fine – as whilst getting the wax right each day can be a fun challenge, when you get it right it's sublime. I also find the fish scale skis lose glide speed especially on very long gentle descents. The skis are wider than Nordic track skis but they are still light and have enough of a camber for kick and glide. The extra width provides a stable platform for Telemark turns on the way down and enough surface area to attach climbing or kick skins for going up. Skiing with weight is also a big consideration and affects downhill techniques and travelling speed on the flat. A 30-45lt pack with enough to get through a very bad day or even a night in an emergency snow shelter is usually sufficient.

Although it is treeless arctic tundra there is wildlife to be seen on the vidda. Wild herds of reindeer roam freely and tracks of arctic hares, foxes and lemming are often seen madly criss-crossing over

the snow. Ptarmigan can also be heard and occasionally seen, and last year I was lucky enough to see a wolverine out on a meandering hunting trip. I'm always hoping to see a wolf.

After six days the final day was a long 28km ski with 400m of aggregate ascent but which had a lovely 8km descent to our finish point. It was a warm glorious blue ski day with new soft snow. The route meandered over hills, alongside frozen lakes and through cols and emerged alongside the beautiful Hardanger Ice cap – which we had seen days before looming in the distance. Up close it was even more beautiful, with tumbling outlet glaciers and crevasses of blue ice.

Crossing the Hardangervidda is a tremendously rewarding experience and even in a group, in many ways these experiences are very individual. The Hardangervidda can be a place to be alone and experience wild remoteness whilst experimenting with your own mental and physical limits. A place to travel though, where you can contemplate freedom and space and have existential thoughts about the insignificance of human existence as you are dwarfed by the vast, eternal and incredible stark beauty of the arctic wilderness, or you might just enjoy a locally brewed cold beer with your skis, boots and pack off and feet up by the fire, after a challenging 130km six day ski crossing the Hardangervidda. ■



Jason Franks is a Winter Mountain Leader, member of MTA and a BASI Telemark and Nordic Ski Instructor. He works freelance and leads off-track hut tours in Norway for The Off-Piste & Telemark Ski Company and the UK Military. www.jasonfranks.co.uk



A CLOSER LOOK AT ROPE AWARENESS

MAIN PHOTO Climber climbing with rope behind the leg, Arginonta Valley, Kalymnos.

Is it possible to always avoid getting the rope behind your leg? Maybe not 100% of the time but it is important to give a clear procedure to help people avoid it.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY TREVOR MASSIAH

Teaching people how to avoid getting the rope behind their legs at first seems a fairly straightforward thing to teach. However, there is a little more to it than advising climbers to keep the rope between their legs and the rock (rock-rope-leg).

When teaching lead climbing we will often choose routes that are well protected and therefore present less opportunity for the climber to make the mistake of getting the rope behind the leg. As there is quite a bit of new information for new leaders to think about, placing lots of gear when trad leading, or placing trad gear in between bolts when sport climbing, can provide a useful way of deferring teaching rope awareness until later in a course when the information might be more easily retained. It is still possible to fall with the rope behind the leg when clipped into gear above the waist,

but this is more likely to result in a rope burn rather than falling upside down. (*See Photo 1*)

As the consequences of falling upside down can be serious it is something that deserves a reasonable amount of attention.

Most people find the concept of rock-rope-leg fairly straightforward. The difficulty comes when the choice of foothold necessitates making a decision to go around the outside of the rope keeping it between the cliff and your leg, or to control the rope with the foot or the leg. I'm going to look in more detail at why we sometimes feel we have made the correct decision but still find the rope travelling behind our leg.

So, is there a rule or procedure that we can apply or teach to help students with these decisions? Yes there is. And most of us have

one, and that is: when moving around the rope, always go around the outside of the rope. This makes perfect sense as logically if you step inside the rope it would usually end up behind the leg. This is however only part of the process. There does need to be a second part to this rule which is: only step over the rope if you are also going past the gear or the bolt below you. (See Photo 2)

If the chosen foothold is directly above or not beyond the gear or bolt below, then the correct decision would be to control the rope with the side of your foot or leg. Failure to do this will almost always result in the rope travelling behind the leg once you have moved your body to stand on that foothold. It is moving your body that takes the rope behind your leg. And that is part of the problem. It seems ok to go around the outside of the rope when you place your foot on the hold, but as soon as you move your body, the rope travels with it and ends up behind your leg.

Not taking into account the angle of the rope travelling up from the last piece of gear, and/or the foothold in relation to the protection will lead to the rope travelling behind the leg often. A good percentage of clients attending coaching courses have

encountered psychological issues linked to climbing that stem from having fallen upside down, which may have been avoided had they received a more detailed explanation of how to avoid getting the rope behind their leg.

To summarise, in teaching rope awareness we should not just explain the rock-rope-legs principle and teach clients to always go around the outside of the rope.

What we need to create in lead climbers is an awareness of the gear or bolt below.

If the chosen foothold is past the gear or bolt below: go around the outside of the rope. If the chosen foothold is close to, just above, or not past the gear or bolt below: it is best to push the rope aside with the side of the foot.

For a visual and more detailed description, we refer to this video: "How to avoid falling upside down – Rope Awareness – Rock and Sun" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74WMHHgCIe4> ■



PHOTO 1. Climber has made the wrong decision to step over the rope while rope running diagonally. Climber may catch their heel or foot on the rope if falling, resulting in rope burn or falling upside down. The photo on the right shows the climber making the correct decision to put their foot under the rope.



PHOTO 2. Climber makes the correct decision to go around the outside of the rope.



PHOTO 3. The first photo shows the climber making the correct decision to control the rope with the side of her foot. Second and third photo show how the climber has chosen a foothold that is clearly beyond (to the right of) the bolt below, but made the wrong decision to step inside the rope, resulting in having the rope behind the leg while clipping the next bolt.



Trevor Massiah has been a Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor for nearly 20 years, and is a Director of Rock & Sun. Rock & Sun offers climbing courses and holidays in the UK, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Morocco and Thailand, and bouldering trips to Fontainebleau and Albarracin. Rock & Sun provide high quality coaching courses for all levels, and are constantly updating and improving climbing and safety skills.

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There is of course nothing wrong in using it south of the border, however it does require a certain depth of snow which is often lacking south of the Highlands.

It first appeared on the Scottish Winter scene in the late seventies and early eighties and from memory initially distrusted by some of the Guides and Instructors operating at the time, although I understand some trials were done on the Guides' winter tests during that period. However, it was not entirely new even then as there is reference to something very similar in books dating back to the 1963 version of Wastle Mariners book on *Mountain Rescue Techniques*. In fact, I believe this was the English translation of a book first published in Germany during the 1940's, so I think it is fair to say that the origins are lost in the mists of time.

However, since then the Stomper has gone through a number of minor and major modifications, and can be an extremely quick and effective method of belaying (either lowering or belaying someone up) providing it is done correctly and in an appropriate situation. It must not be used for lead climbing. I am not going to stipulate an exact method as the Stomper has been, and will continue to be, discussed and argued over: I know for a fact that at least one of my contemporaries strongly disagrees on my preferred method.

There are so many variables, not least of which is the essential commodity (snow), which can be hard, soft, icy, compacted, powdery, slushy or any of the variables in between. The second major variable in my book is the human element, light, wiry and not particularly strong physically or built like a brick outhouse? That is not to say that lighter, less physically strong folk shouldn't use this method of belaying – but may have to pay a little more attention to details.

The weather and underfoot conditions are also infinitely variable, from a spring-like day with little wind in the late season to a howling hooley in the depths of January. Finally, the axe may or may not make a difference; this should be a standard straight-shafted mountaineering axe, although some bent shafted axes should be effective albeit generally more difficult to place.

Basic Principle (Figure 1)

If the belay point is on a slope, cut a ledge so you can comfortably maintain a horizontal stance with the feet. Now drive the axe in vertically at right angles to the slope/direction of pull and weight the axe with your insteps over the adze/pick. If the snow is icy cut a small slot for the feet and a groove for the rope to run through if necessary so as to avoid any upward tension on the axe. Softer snow can be 'stomped' down to improve the placement and in icy conditions crampons should be worn throughout, taking care not to step on the rope etc. Any loose surface crud should be dispatched to where it belongs.

There are now three main options

A A locking karabiner is clipped through the eye of the axe. This is quick and simple; however the karabiner is held in position which

may create more friction at that point and potentially put a cross load against the gate. Check which way the rope is running and consider changing this if deemed necessary.

B A locking karabiner is placed around the shaft. This will probably have to be a larger HMS karabiner and shouldn't create any additional friction as the rope should run in a relatively straight line without any additional friction being created as above. However, the point of attachment is quite low so may require cutting a groove in the snow surface for the rope to run more easily.

C A short sling is placed around the shaft and the rope runs through a karabiner attached to this. This should slightly decrease the amount of friction. At that point the rope is running at a slightly lesser angle than either of the above, with less contact with the snow surface which may be a good or bad thing.

THE STOMPER

WORDS BY MAL CREASEY, ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE MANLEY

Not, as some of you may imagine, a move taken from line dancing where the dancers all 'stomp' their feet in unison – but a snow belay often used (and abused) in Scottish winter conditions.

There are also a number of options for the actual belaying, or management of the rope. It is worth bearing in mind the efficiency of taking the rope in is paramount with the Stomper, as any slack that is allowed to accumulate could lead to a shock load on the system – which it is not designed for!

1 Many will opt for a standard shoulder belay, that is with the rope running up from the axe, under the armpit, across the back and over

the shoulder and into the dead hand – that is the one furthest away from the 'live' person on the other end. Finally a twist on the arm of the braking hand may or may not be preferred. This is quick and simple and is easy to give a tight rope by using the back/leg muscles. Without the twist on the braking arm is probably the most efficient for bringing a rope in quickly on easy ground or allowing a nice smooth descent whilst lowering. The potential disadvantage of this method is perhaps limited stability in blustery conditions. However, if the belayer is wearing a sac a slightly more stooped stance can be adopted since the sac should help keep the rope in place.

2 If the belayer is wearing a harness a locking karabiner can be clipped to the belay loop and the rope taken through this and around the back into the braking hand, with a twist around the wrist as in a standard waist belay (sometimes erroneously called a body belay). The main danger of this is the potential for the rope slipping over the backside and down behind the knees – which would be disastrous! However, it does allow for a lower, more dynamic stance, taking in can be very efficient and you can still apply a tight rope. This, I have to say is my preferred method (ok, I've got a big ass!) as I have never had any concern about the rope slipping over my backside. But, you can't just stand there – stick your bum out!

3 Finally, and perhaps more controversially, taking the rope from the karabiner on the axe directly into an Italian hitch on the belay loop of your harness can be very effective. Probably best considered when the climber is making slow and painful progress but it is perhaps best for you folk to work out the issues with that one – perhaps a little too radical for some...

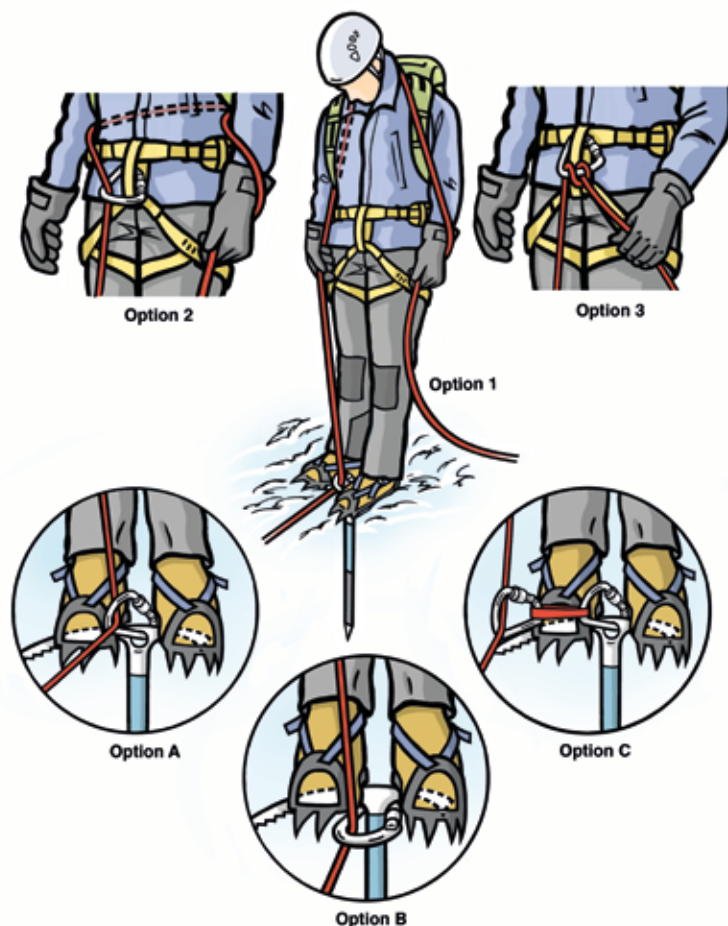


FIGURE 1 (LEFT) Stomper Belay. FIGURE 2 (RIGHT) West Coast Stomper Belay.

West Coast Belay (Figure 2)

A further variation of the above is well worth considering as it is popular in some quarters. The **West Coast** belay utilises the same vertical axe driven in to the snow and horizontal ledge for the feet where necessary. However, one foot is weighted over the axe whilst the other leg/foot is placed downhill, creating a tripod effect which should offer more stability than the conventional Stomper. A further variation (and preferred by some), is to place a short sling or HMS plus another karabiner around the shaft of the axe, place the axe behind the uphill foot, with the foot further supported by a 'slot' in the snow and the foot placed over the sling/karabiners. With either of the above methods be aware that weight distribution to support the axe is crucial. A standard shoulder belay is best utilised with either option and due to its improved stability in windier conditions is a valuable addition for the winter mountaineers' toolbox.

At this point it must be emphasised that if you cannot get the shaft in full depth, another method such as the boot/axe or New Zealand Foot Brake must be used!

There are more variations out there, maybe a horizontally buried axe in front on the Stomper – however, time and space is limited. Maybe this needs a workshop and some real investigation...

The crucial thing for you, dear reader, is to weigh up the situation, the pros and cons and see what works for you. What I have outlined above is a few ideas and my personal thoughts; it is up to you to consider basic principles, try things in a safe situation and consider the consequences. Just don't take my word for it, nor anybody else's, see what works for you and adapt. The final thing I will say is the first time you do a Stomper should not be at the top of a steep gully exit with little communication and gathering darkness! It cannot be emphasised enough – practice – find out what works for you in the given conditions, be comfortable with your choices and pay heed to the consequences. Finally, remember it is inescapable – unless of course it's gone pear-shaped – in which case you are in the deep doo doo!

My thanks to Simon Powell and Alan Kimber for their input, and to George Manley for the excellent artwork. ■



Mal Creasey is a former Technical Officer for Mountain Training, until recently working as a freelance Guide and Mountaineering & Climbing Instructor based in North Wales. He has over 30 Alpine and Scottish Winter seasons to his credit. He is still keen to get out and about before the body seizes up completely. Although now a 'retired' Guide he is still a member of AMI and can be persuaded to do the occasional day on the hill or advisory work. He can be contacted at malcolmcreasey@btinternet.com



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WINTER WILDLIFE

Winter is a time when some of us are more active and some of us less so. In the animal world it is similar, with some animals migrating, some hibernating and the others toughing it out.

The animals that remain in our mountains in winter adopt different strategies to survive; one of which is becoming a master of disguise through camouflage.

WORDS AND PHOTOS (UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED) BY LUCY DUNN



Lucy Dunn grew up in the Lake District and has always been interested in nature and the natural world. She runs the environmental education programme at the Lake District Wildlife Park and is a Mountain Leader. She holds a degree in Natural Sciences and University Certificate in Species Identification and Recording.

Winter can be one of the most rewarding times for spotting wildlife. An encounter I had back in February 2013 remains a personal one that is hard to beat. I was ski touring in the Cairngorms during a week of settled high pressure. The plateau was covered in snow, the sky was blue, and the sun was shining. On the return journey from a day exploring around Ben McDui and Carn Etchachan, I was heading towards Feith Buide when I spotted movement ahead of me. My first thought was “That’s too big for a Ptarmigan”. The bird took off but then landed just a few metres away from me. I had enough time to get my camera out and snap off a couple of pictures. The bird I had disturbed was a male Snowy Owl, *Bubo Scandiacus*. I was stunned by both its size and its beauty. It was only after heading home and doing some research that I fully realised how lucky I had been.

Snowy Owls are more commonly found further north in the Arctic regions of America and Eurasia. The plumage of the male is pure white and the female and young birds are more speckled with grey. They are ground nesters and this plumage helps

them to blend into the Arctic tundra. They have however been known to migrate further south, as with the one that I spotted in the Cairngorms.

The last sighting of a Snowy Owl in Scotland was in 2011 of a male bird in the Western Isles where it had been seen for the previous eight years. It was joined by a female but there was no evidence of breeding. The last time Snowy Owls produced and raised chicks was in Shetland in 1975. (1)

A more common sighting in the Cairngorms is the Ptarmigan, which is extremely well camouflaged in both summer and winter. The species of bird that we see in Scotland is the Rock Ptarmigan, *Lagopus muta*. It historically also inhabited the Southern Uplands and the Lake District. These birds have such a different plumage in summer and winter it would be easy to think that they are two different species. A sighting of these remarkable birds in their white winter plumage is well worth the effort. A member of the grouse family, Ptarmigans are quite comical birds to watch. I have stopped in my tracks many times just to watch them wandering about the rocks.

There are three energy-demanding activities for birds: breeding, migrating and moulting. Most birds replace all of their feathers at least once a year due to wear and tear. Some birds replace feathers to improve their plumage before breeding, others replace them before or after migration. Some birds replace all of their feathers at once including flight feathers, tail feathers, head and body feathers; a full moult. Some replace just their flight and tail feathers; a partial moult. The timing



MAIN PHOTO Mountain Hare on full alert. 1. Mountain hare. © Steve Gardner, courtesy of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. 2. Rare sighting of a Snowy Owl in the Cairngorms. 3. Male ptarmigan. © Steve Gardner, courtesy of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. 4. Young Reindeer in the Cairngorms.

and types of feathers that a bird replaces is known as the moult strategy. The Rock Ptarmigan has at least two moults a year and research now shows that they actually undergo three moults (2). In summer the Ptarmigan is mottled grey, and quite hard to spot in rocky barren upland areas. The males have a distinctive red stripe above their eyes. It is this striking red mark that sometimes enables you to spot them amongst the rocks.

As the daylight hours decrease and the temperature drops, the Ptarmigan undergoes a pretty remarkable change where it replaces all of its flight feathers, tail feathers and body feathers. It is the only bird in Britain that adopts white plumage in winter. Both males and females turn completely white except for black outer tail feathers. The males retain their red eye stripe with a black stripe in front of the eye. One of the most remarkable characteristics are the “fluffy” feathers on its feet which will help the birds to “tough it out” during cold conditions. The genus name, *Lagopus* is derived from the Ancient Greek “lagos” which means hare and “pous” which means foot. This literal translation of “hare foot” is referring to the Ptarmigan’s fluffy feet. The English translation Rock Ptarmigan also refers to the habitat that the bird prefers: mountainous and barren areas. (3)

The other amazing animal that is a great to spot in winter is the Mountain Hare, *Lepus timidus*. With a similar moult strategy to the Ptarmigan, the Mountain Hare

replaces its fur as we head into winter. The Mountain Hare is native to the highlands of Scotland and the Peak District. In summer the Mountain Hare could be confused with the introduced Brown Hare, *Lepus europaeus*. However, the Mountain Hare is smaller in size with grey flanks. It also has smaller ears without black tips and a white tail. In winter they replace their fur, some turning pure white and some remaining more speckled. They all have black ear tips in winter, which can help to spot them against the snow. The amount of white is governed by the temperature (4). Interestingly there is also a subspecies, *Lepus timidus hibernicus*, the Irish Mountain Hare. They are red-brown in summer and in winter the coat of the Irish Mountain Hare turns grey with white patches but not completely white.

I have had some great sightings of Mountain Hares again in the Cairngorms. I was able to get very close to one on a sunny, snowy day, by approaching slowly and quietly. They can be quite hard to spot in winter and are usually seen darting for cover after they have been disturbed. I have however also seen them on days where there is only a small smattering of snow. Following a snow melt and on some grey days they really stand out and so are at risk of predation.

There has been some research on population sizes of Mountain Hares, and fluctuations have been identified. However, they are subject to a variety of pressures

such as habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, persecution and climate change. Shooting of Mountain Hares has become increasingly popular when other game is scarce (4). With rising temperatures and warmer winters, it will be interesting to see what happens to our white winter animals. Studies have been carried out on Snowshoe Hares in the Rocky Mountains and whilst they can adjust their moult, it is difficult for them to keep up with rapid temperature changes (5). Animals are remarkable at adapting to their surroundings but as evolution has shown it takes many years to adapt and evolve.

Finally if you are out in the mountains this winter, especially in Scotland, do keep an eye out for winter wildlife as you never know what you might see.

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All accessed October 2019. ■

#2 “DUTY OF CARE”

WORDS BY MATTHEW DAVIES

You need to be aware of the direction of travel in terms of the increasing expectation and speed of this change.

A few examples, both real and theoretical:

- A business professional travelling overseas on assignment, contracts a serious illness and sues. Inadequate (or perhaps even, no) health briefings given. What would a reasonably prudent/competent employer have done? You may have your own views...
- A ship's crew member. The departure and destination points are malaria-free. The stop-over/refuel point is not considered as part of the planning. The individual contracts the illness and dies. No malaria risk assessment covered the stop-over island.
- An adventure travel company uses the services of a ground handler. Serious incidents occur including injury. Claims follow. How well did they check out the service provider in-country that was delivering the activities?
- A member of staff is attacked in their hotel room on assignment overseas. It transpires that the hotel is known to be targeted and has a very long history of break-ins and attacks. No one from the company checked before booking the accommodation.
- A member of staff is assaulted overseas due to their sexuality. No risk assessment was carried out. Simple advice and support could have made a big difference as to whether the incident occurred in the first place.
- An obese and seriously unfit staff member has a heart attack overseas. What screening was undertaken regarding basic suitability for the task?
- A young man dies of heatstroke on an expedition overseas. The coroner criticises the expedition arrangements and briefing to the participant and parents regarding fitness levels needed to safely undertake the expedition.

These are a few, real world, Duty of Care scenarios. A number of fairly recent cases have sent shockwaves through some related sectors. They shouldn't have been shockwaves; the issues should have been foreseen and adequate safeguards put in place. The concepts are nothing new:

- On 25 November 2015, Judgement was handed down in the case of *Steven Dennis v The Norwegian Refugee Council*. The case related to a Canadian national, employed by the NRC who was kidnapped alongside several others in Kenya, in 2012. He was shot. The court held, finding NRC grossly negligent, that the incident was foreseeable, mitigation measures could have been put in place.
- Two light aircraft crash cases – the Stormharbour and Sundance cases. In *Dusek v Stormharbour*, there was an inherently dangerous and high-risk flight which should have been the subject of a careful risk assessment and was not. Sundance on the other hand was a low risk flight which did not give rise to any reasonable concerns, and the carrier had been the subject of reasonable scrutiny. Interesting reads to compare and contrast.
- The Cheeki Raffi Ki case (<http://www.itv.com/news/2017-07-14/trial-of-yacht-boss-over-cheeki-rafiki-deaths-fails-to-reach-verdict-on-manslaughter-charges/>) is a very recent case to digest. Google

In the previous issue we examined the meaning of “Duty of Care” from a legal perspective and started to explore this in the context of our profession. The last ten or twenty years or so, in particular, have seen a vastly increased awareness of the issue of “Duty of Care” in the mobile worker, travel and business travel contexts.

over a coffee then call everyone in to reiterate the importance of health and safety (and promptness of dealing with incidents/ risks when you become aware of them). Gross Negligence Manslaughter Prosecutions will seriously disrupt your wellbeing! Hopefully now you are sitting up and paying attention.

An action plan

If you are a University, Adventure Travel company, extractives sector (oil, gas, minerals) company and you are unclear on your Duty of Care obligations, a good start would be:

- Get training and advice. You don't know what you don't know. Find out what you don't know, then fill the gaps.
- Instigate an in-house Duty of Care program. Get training from those with qualifications and experience in Travel Risk Management as to what systems and procedures you should have in place to support travelling coworkers. This will normally focus on Travel Risk Assessments, threat assessments, country risk reports, education, delivering pre-departure briefings, ongoing support, sources of information and more.
- There are assistance providers out there if you decide to go down that route – they do have very useful services – at a cost. You may decide you can run much of this in-house – with bolt-on services and support from external providers as needed.
- Keep up to date. There are some good conferences out there. Concentrate on getting the basics right and not just expensive technology.
- Watch the horizon – standards change. What society sees as the ‘norm’ changes over time. Equipment capability (and importantly, cost) change over time. What was unaffordable last year may be much cheaper and widely becoming mainstream this year. What are your competitors doing? Maybe the reasonably prudent or competent “XXX” has raised its game... ■



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and is a Travel Risk Management and Remote Area Risk specialist, certified Duty of Care Practitioner – as well as a specialist lawyer within this area. He has over 25 years experience in the field, is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and has led expeditions in and trained teams for various environments including desert and Arctic Circle expeditions. He is on a drafting committee for BS:8848. Matthew is a consultant for Remote Area Risk International, a company providing Wilderness Medical and Risk Training and Consultancy. He operates as a specialist adviser, Travel Risk Management, Duty of Care and Off Site Safety Management instructor, has experience of working with exploration companies, higher education establishments, expedition providers and expeditioners, adventure travel, search and rescue and NGO's in the context of field safety. He can be contacted on E davies@R2Rinternational.com



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THE TECHNICAL ADVISER

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE REMIT AND GIVING ADVICE

Earlier this year, both the national and legal press widely reported on the collapse of a multi-million pound fraud trial due to the prosecution's expert witness.

WORDS BY PETE STACEY

This news report sums up the proceedings – <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/carbon-credits-fraud-trial-collapses-andrew-ager-expert-witness-a8935921.html>

The judge Nicholas Loraine-Smith said of the expert: “Andrew Ager is not an expert of suitable calibre. He had little or no understanding of the duties of an expert. He had received no training and attended no courses. He has no academic qualifications. His work has never been peer-reviewed.”

One of the barristers involved in the case was interviewed afterwards who was instrumental in identifying the shortcomings of the expert which led to the collapse of the trial. This video is a lengthy but very worthwhile watch. <https://www.bondsolon.com/trial-collapses-as-expert-witness-was-no-expert/> – source Bond Solon.

The equivalent of this case in an adventure activity context would be someone who put themselves as Technical Adviser for climbing who had never been climbing.

After watching this, it struck me that much of what was discussed regarding the Court Expert Witness role and giving expert opinion in court proceedings had clear direct relevance to the role of the Technical Adviser. We act for our clients and give them advice on how best to safely manage their business, activities and staff in our specialist field of climbing and mountaineering and other activities such as coasteering, scrambling, combined water-rock sessions, as well as any other activities we might be suitably qualified and experienced to comment upon.

This is why both Expert Witnesses in adventure activity cases, as well as Technical Advisers, need to be very experienced and well qualified in the activity in question and not just a generalist

outdoor instructor or a specialist in another activity. In both cases it would be ill-advised to offer advice or opinion which went beyond the remit of their qualifications or their recent personal experience. They should keep to common practices and avoid the obscure or the unusual.

As a simple clear example – I do not provide advice or make comment on any water/rock sessions such as coasteering or sea level traversing, because I do not partake in those activities, nor do I provide instruction or work with providers delivering these activities. I consider it beyond my remit, my skills and my experience. On the other hand, having worked over 15 different gorges/ghylls in the Lake District, in Wales and on The Isle of Man, I have acted as a Technical Adviser for activity providers delivering this activity. Knowing when to say no is critical to your reputation and professionalism.

In the case of Technical Advisers, AALS always point out the responsibility for the providers' safety management arrangements should always lie with the provider and not the Technical Advisers. The TA role is definitely not an additional tier of regulation, but it is up to the Technical Adviser to ensure that they provide the business with the services needed to demonstrate, for example, staff competence to rescue customers on a ropes course. The clue is in the name. We are Advisers who offer advice. We are not regulators who manage what the provider is allowed to do. That is AALS's job.

It is up to the provider to decide whether to follow the advice or not. A provider might choose to have more than one Technical Adviser; that is their prerogative, and as stated above they have the final say as they will take responsibility if there is an incident.

The Technical Adviser should be competent in the field they are operating in, be experienced and qualified at a higher level than those delivering the activity, in order that they can assess the instructor's competencies and also analyse the safety management system and so provide good quality information to the provider with recommendations.



Pete Stacey works as a freelance Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor and International Mountain Leader. He is a past Chair of the AMI and has also been Chair of Mountain Training UK and is an inspector for various accreditation schemes including AALS, Adventuremark and LOTC. He is a course provider for various Mountain Training walking and climbing schemes and is a Technical Expert for NICAS and a number of other activity providers, climbing walls and ropes courses. He is a member of the BMC Legal Expert Witness Register.
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We can advise, we can recommend, we can offer possible solutions (including at times the only safe solution if necessary), we can verify someone's competence to lead groups/customers on activities. But the role is not about telling the provider what they can and cannot do, what staff they should deploy or what method of delivery the business must use.

External and Internal Technical Advisers

There are some advantages for a provider bringing in a new set of eyes to look over their safety management systems. An external TA should be conversant with the latest equipment, and current methods of activity delivery and have that wider experience from working across multiple sites to help the provider develop the right systems.

Equally having your own Internal Technical Adviser who has intimate knowledge of the structures within the business may have some advantages and outweigh any disadvantages. In some centres this would often be the Centre Manager, Chief Instructor or Head of Department. The important thing for an internal Technical Adviser is to have the independence and authority to decide when someone is not yet competent to instruct alone.

As mentioned above, the provider always has responsibility for the safety management system in place.

Keep up to date

Obvious isn't it, but attending AGM's, going to CPD events, talking to colleagues and keeping yourself up to date with events and knowledge is essential to making sure you remain competent and current.

Keeping records

This is an area often overlooked! Whilst it is important to be trained and competent in the Technical Adviser role and keep up to date, it is also important to remember to deal with the paperwork! This includes all the emails and information given to the provider, and evidence of any statements of competence you have issued plus minutes of meetings to discuss relative issues. Store documents securely and keep copies of all notes even those not submitted, including if felt necessary a short note of phone conversations, so that you have an audit trail to refer to if ever necessary.

And unlike Andrew Agar (as discussed in the independent newspaper article at the start above), keeping files in a box on the landing or on a shelf simply isn't going to cut it anymore. Lock files away in a cabinet, back up emails and electronic files onto an encrypted hard drive and keep a copy in a separate place on an encrypted memory stick – these are quite cheap – £15 will buy you a 64GB memory stick that is both password protected and has hardware encryption.

Being able to produce information to providers can occasionally be useful, when they may question your advice; quite often it's because they have forgotten what was agreed, usually because they have 10,000 other things spinning round and we are just one aspect of helping them keep their business running.

There is more to the TA role than just assessing staff and writing statements of competence for them; helping review operational procedures or risk assessments, developing new systems in the light of new equipment developments or helping identify ways to make the activity accessible for a person with mobility issues, all these make the job really interesting, and help the provider run a successful business! ■

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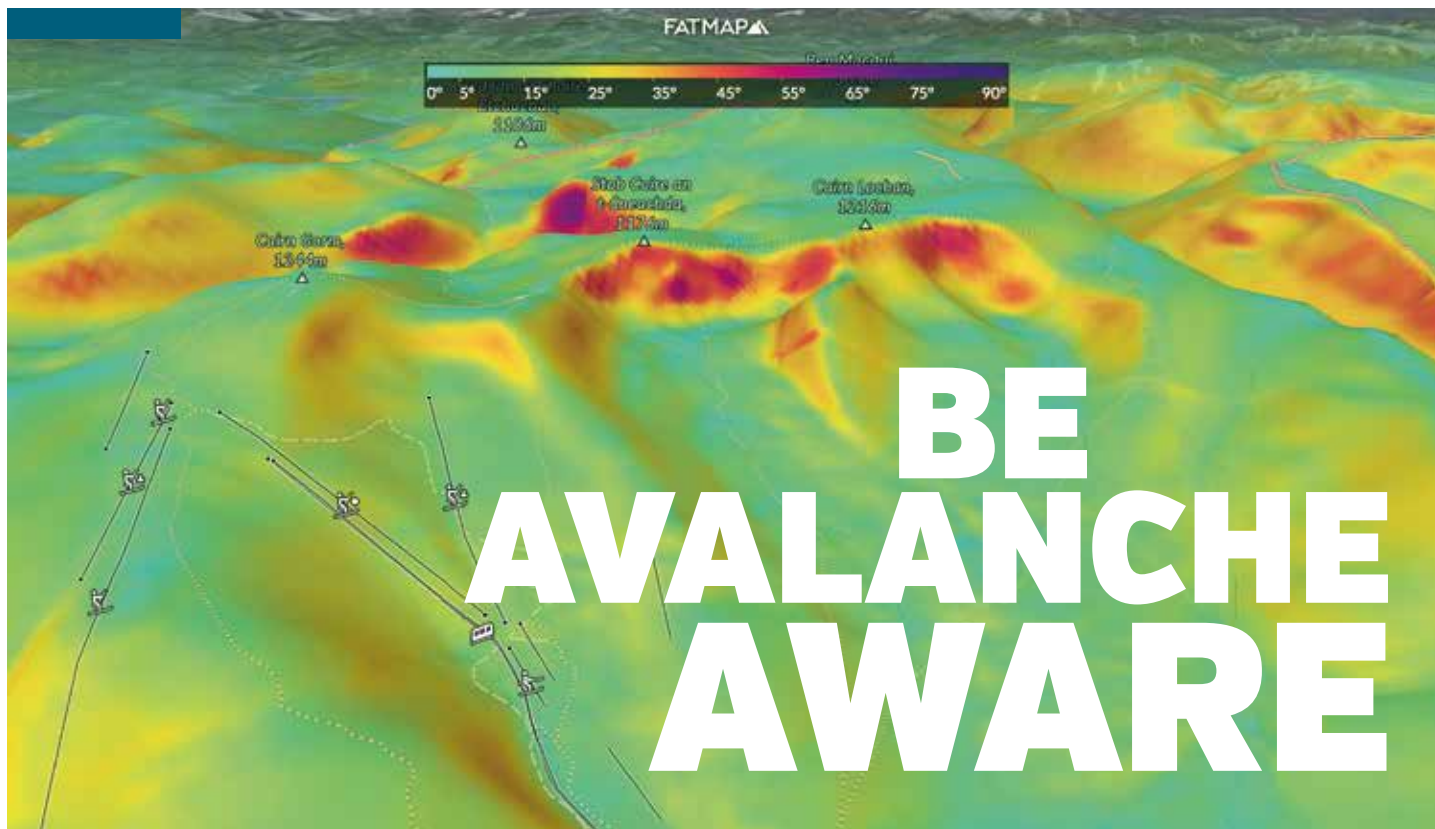
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It is getting to that time of year again when we start to think winter, and for many it will be getting out and logging those quality mountain days (QMD's) for the Winter Mountain Leader (WML) qualification or winter climbs for those working towards the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor (WMCi) scheme.



WORDS BY SANDY PATERSON

Sandy Paterson is a Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor and International Mountain Leader. He runs his own company Scotch on the Rocks Guiding which is a provider of both the Summer and Winter Mountain Leader schemes.

As well as being an experienced mountaineer and climber he also has a background in teaching and coaching having been a secondary school Geography teacher for 8 years and coached Rugby to a reasonable level! More recently he has spent time developing this background and mixing it with some of the latest thinking and research into coaching in adventure Sports.

When not delivering Mountain Training qualification courses or working as a Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor he delivers coaching workshops for a variety of organisations.

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The pressure of having a looming assessment or wanting to register so you can attend a training course can add a certain challenge to getting out in winter. Sometimes the drive of getting in a route or logging a day out can make us forget or miss the warning signs when it comes to avalanche danger. This is where the excellent 'Scottish Avalanche Information Service' (SAIS) 'Be Avalanche Aware' (BAA) planning tool comes into use. For a current or prospective Winter Mountain Leader and Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor it would be expected that you had a very good working knowledge of the process.

The thoughts below are by no means exhaustive, but are more designed as a reminder to get the brain working ready for winter. The process is split into three stages (planning; journey; key places) and at each stage we think about three areas (mountain conditions; you and your party; mountain landscape).

As a rough rule of thumb I think the breakdown on time and effort on thinking about each section is something like planning – 75%, journey – 20% and key place – 5%. Most of our information is sourced before we leave home, and we then confirm and check it during our journey before making any final decisions at key places.




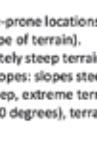
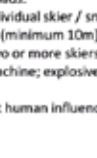
A Planning

When you have a vague idea of where you want to go and what you would like to achieve during the day, start the planning process. This will start to shape what you can and can't think about doing in terms of safety. I must stress though that you should not finish this process with a fixed agenda for the day but with an outline plan.

Mountain Conditions

Weather: You are interested in the previous four or five days as this will allow you to build some knowledge of where the snow will be and what it will be like (more of this below) in addition, of course to what the weather is going to be like for the journey and following day. Temperature is important – have the last few days been below Zero, or has it been fluctuating above and below freezing? Where has the wind been coming from and how strong has it been; where is the snow being moved to and what is happening to it? Finally, is there more snow or rain forecast?

Snow pack: The weather will influence the snow pack. Are there instabilities within the snow pack and if so what are they like? Are there surface instabilities (wind slab) or is there instability within the snowpack (persistent weak layer)?

European Avalanche Danger Scale (2018/19)				
Danger level	Icon	Snowpack stability	Likelihood of triggering	
5 very high		The snowpack is poorly bonded and largely unstable in general.	Numerous very large and often extremely large natural avalanches can be expected, even in moderately steep terrain*.	
4 high		The snowpack is poorly bonded on most steep slopes*.	Triggering is likely, even from low additional loads**, on many steep slopes*. In some cases, numerous large and often very large natural avalanches can be expected.	
3 considerable		The snowpack is moderately to poorly bonded on many steep slopes*.	Triggering is possible, even from low additional loads**, particularly on the indicated steep slopes*. In certain situations some large, and in isolated cases very large natural avalanches are possible.	
2 moderate		The snowpack is only moderately well bonded on some steep slopes*; otherwise well bonded in general.	Triggering is possible, primarily from high additional loads**, particularly on the indicated steep slopes*. Very large natural avalanches are unlikely.	
1 low		The snowpack is well bonded and stable in general.	Triggering is generally possible only from high additional loads** in isolated areas of very steep, extreme terrain*. Only small and medium natural avalanches are possible.	

* The avalanche-prone locations are described in greater detail in the avalanche bulletin (altitude, slope aspect, type of terrain).

- moderately steep terrain: slopes shallower than about 30 degrees
- steep slopes: slopes steeper than about 30 degrees
- very steep, extreme terrain: particularly adverse terrain related to slope angle (more than about 40 degrees), terrain profile, proximity to ridge, smoothness of underlying ground surface

** Additional loads:

- low: individual skier / snowboarder, riding softly, not falling; snowshoer; group with good spacing (minimum 10m) keeping distances
- high: two or more skiers / snowboarders etc. without good spacing (or without intervals); snowmachine; explosives

natural: without human influence

This knowledge is important as it means you know what to look for when in the next stage (journey). Are the instabilities likely to change with the weather during the day?

You and your party

The group is only as competent as its least experienced/fit/willing member, so to this end it is really important to make sure that everyone in the team is well equipped and skilled, but almost more importantly they have the same aspirations for the day.

Equipment: Having the correct technical equipment is vital for your day out, and having enough warm clothing, goggles etc. is also important. You may decide that due to an avalanche hazard you stay on a wind exposed ridge – good for snow stability but no good if you get too cold in the wind and can't see due to the blown snow. Ensure also that you have a Plan B escape route for such an itinerary!

Skills: If you are travelling through steep terrain do you have the movement skills to be able to do this with ease, allowing you to continue to make decisions? Or are you pushed away from the hard stable snow into the soft potentially unstable snow because of your movement skills? Can you navigate well in white out conditions to avoid certain aspects and angles of slope? If you don't have these skills, then it does not mean you can't venture out – but you have to be a little more careful with the route choice and location.

Plans and aspirations: Making good decisions in the mountains is important, and when you are part of a group this requires everyone to be on the "same page"! Make sure that everyone has the same goals and aspirations; the last thing you want to be doing is having an in-depth discussion/argument about whether you bag that extra munro or do a particular climb. Be open and honest in the planning stage.

Mountain landscape

Steep: Is the terrain you are heading into going to be steep? For avalanche awareness this means anything around 30 degrees and upwards. Why this angle? Well, it is from here that avalanches become more common, **but they can and do occur in lower angles.**



ABOVE Good movement skills in steep ground allowing head space for decisions about snowpack stability.



You can measure slope angle on maps, or another option is to use the excellent Fat Map software. Remember that during the next stage you still have to judge the terrain but this will help your planning.

Aspect: What aspects are you heading to? If there is unstable snow it is unlikely that it will be on all aspects. If you have steeper terrain to cross can you do this on the wind-scoured safer side? Remember that this could change during the day and that mountains do strange things to wind so you might get pockets of unstable snow on various aspects: therefore you have to watch out for this on your journey.

Complex or simple: Does the terrain you are heading into have lots of changes in aspect and angle on a micro level that would be hard to navigate around without good visibility, or is it relatively simple terrain where you can stick to uniform slopes and ridges? This, along with the visibility will have an impact on your planning and route choice.

B Journey

Once your planning is done and an objective has been decided on you must still remain flexible dependant on what you see on your journey.

Mountain Conditions

Weather: Is the weather as forecast? What is the wind and temperature doing, does this fit with the forecast? If so great but if not, then what is it doing to the snow? Are you going to have to change plans majorly or does it just highlight areas you need to be more aware of?

Snow pack: Does the snow pack look, feel and sound like you were expecting? Do you need to do some further investigation? Are you seeing or hearing any warning signs: shooting cracks, the squeaking on wind slab, pillows of fresh windblown snow, cornices etc?

You and your party

Equipment: Has everyone in the team got what they need? It is possible to forget things during the fug of an early morning winter start!

GUIDANCE

Skills: If the group is new to you, do the skills discussed match reality? Do you need to change plans to allow the group to be more comfortable?

Aspirations: Do peoples' aspirations match their skills? Have aspirations changed when faced with the reality of the winter conditions? Is anyone carrying an injury, or coming down with a cold? These things can not only affect movement skills but also the ability to make good decisions.

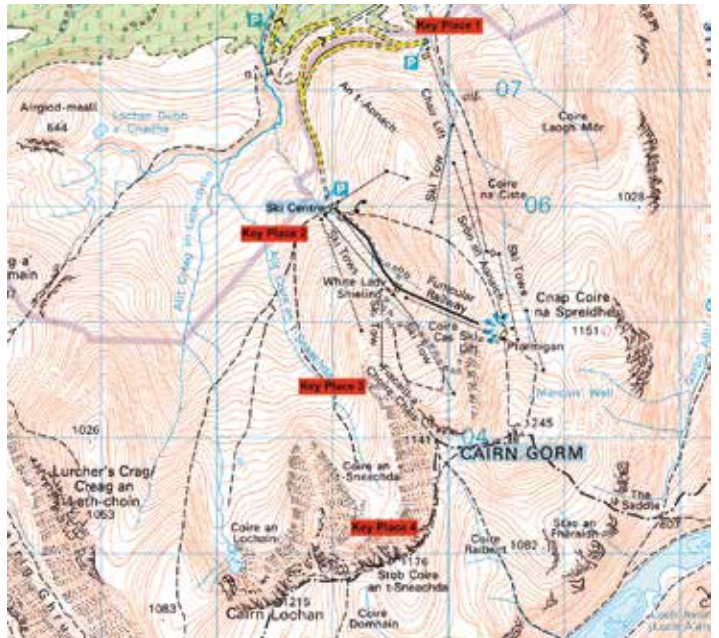
Mountain landscape

If you have not been to the venue before does it look like you were expecting? Maps are brilliant but they cannot show all the micro terrain that can be important when it comes to snow stability and instability. If the terrain is not what you were expecting and you need to change plans how will that affect the group and the snow stability on your new route?

C Key places

A key place is a decision-making point from where a number of options are ruled out. For example, if in the Northern Cairngorms for a climbing day the first key place decision might be the car park (Key Place 1)! Sounds funny but once parked in the Cas car park for Sneachda you are unlikely to walk to Cha-No. Then once heading towards Sneachda a key place decision is at the path junction between Sneachda and Lochain (Key Place 2), then halfway into Sneachda (Key Place 3) do you go into the base of the corrie or along the Fiacail, then in the base of the corrie (Key Place 4) which area do you go to?

You should arrive at each key place having considered the above process, and basically knowing the answer to the decision it is just a final time to confirm and if needed discuss with your group.



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Conclusion

There is a lot going on to make good decisions on avalanche terrain and the above is just a flavour. An important aspect of making good decisions in winter is having 'head space'. If operating at your limits your head space will already be crowded – however, if you have plenty in reserve then there will be room for decisions! Go out and have big challenging days, visit new areas, push your grade when the decisions are easy to make. When it gets a bit more confusing, or the weather is dodgy, or you are feeling below par then play it safe. ■



COLD AND SWEATY? YOU NEED TO FOCUS ON THE SKIN



© Euan Whittaker, ClimbNow

Many people venture into the outdoors to undertake more technical challenges during the winter months often under extreme cold with reduced light. The selection of appropriate winter clothing is vital to increase your enjoyment and comfort levels especially when you know your body will get hot even though its cold out. In cold weather your choice of clothing is as important as to how you wear it.

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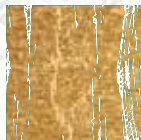


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MOUNTAIN MANNERS VS MOUNTAIN MADNESS

There seems to be a problem in the backcountry, on the crags, in the chutes and gullies, couloirs and faces that constitute the out-there playground of the adventure sport world. In a bid to emulate the hero and heroine figures of mountain sport shown in iconic photo moments on social media, young - and more often than not, male - usually inexperienced, mountain sports enthusiasts are getting it wrong.

Anyone who has spent any considerable time in the backcountry, on the mountains learning whatever mountain craft becomes their passion, knows that getting it wrong is a bad day and often results in injuries or worse.

In an article in *The Times* recently, this problem was framed as people being 'lead into danger after mis-construing glamorised images of key influencers due to those images only showing a snapshot of the whole picture'. These 'Rookie' climbers are 'risking their lives by copying glammed up adventures they see on social media.'

I think this is a very important topic in the adventure sports world right now and a topic that places adventure sports culture and values at the centre of a very modern problem in western culture as a whole. Somewhat ironically, in my experience, adventure sports culture and the values that participants often learn to embody, not only show often dangerous side effects of this problem but can also contain the antidote to that problem.

The problem is winning, the need to be the best, better than the rest, win the accolade, the fame, the prestige, the money, medals, celebrity or whatever external prize is connected with the notion of success. The problem, specifically is 'winning (i.e. success) at all costs' as opposed to success being defined by a sense of achievement, prowess, mastery, skilfulness, learning, endeavour, collaboration and a little bit of fun and serendipity.

There are no winners in the backcountry. For experienced backcountry enthusiasts and professionals, getting it right means something far more valuable than the notion of winning an external prize of some sort. 'Getting it right' in this context, where things come together, skill matches challenging environments and optimum decision-making, where movement is like a divine grace, and a timeless sensation of being connected to something far more powerful than our individual

WORDS BY LESLEY MCKENNA,
PHOTOS BY EUAN BAXTER



Lesley McKenna grew up in Aviemore and cut her feet in the outdoors from a very young age. She competed in Alpine skiing as part of the Scottish Ski Team and British Alpine Ski Team before changing to compete in freestyle snowboarding where she went on to be the first GB snowboarder to win a FIS World Cup event in halfpipe and also the first snowboarder from the UK to compete in a Winter Olympics. Lesley won six World Cup podiums in her career and competed in three Olympics.



self, create a moment in time that will be forever etched on the deepest parts of our beings. Indeed, in the words of the great WH Murray, getting it right is 'a time to remember' and usually not a time where accidents have happened.

These life-defining moments have been portrayed in iconic images of adventure sports ever since people first took cameras to mountain sports environments. Long before smart phones and the internet, adventure sports enthusiasts looked up to, and aspired towards iconic images of moments where 'things went right'. So if the documenting of, and aspirational nature of these iconic images is nothing new, what is going on now that might cause these images to have such a negative impact on the behaviour of inexperienced mountain sports participants?

Natalie Berry, a top GB climber, is quoted in the same article in *The Times*, saying that people are copying to gain "likes" on social media. If this is indeed the case, and social media likes are a form of external reward or accolade, then this would amount to a form of winning as defined by modern western culture. Winning is defined in the dictionary as defeating others or as being better than others. Either way it is defined as something externally referenced to oneself, thus putting the action related to winning outside our individual control or influence as we have no real power over what others are doing. The notion of not being in control of your own actions in the backcountry, for anyone with any experience of the backcountry environment, is immediately uncomfortable. This would suggest that you are likely to be in that worrying zone where ego is in control and bad decisions are going to be more likely. That place where more likely than not, bad days happen. Most people with a bit of time in the backcountry have experienced some form of this kind of thing.

For this reason, adventure sports people often talk about the importance of things like 'the stoke', (the buzz you get when things go right), being 'in the zone', (transcending mindfulness!) the importance of fun with friends and of learning new skills and taking on new challenges for their own sake. The spirit of creativity and adventure as well as the perfection of difficult and physically challenging technical moves are often described as the cultural



Cairngorm 'backcountry'.

capital of adventure sports. Ideas taken from Flow Theory – that present adventure sport as the perfect vehicle for developing connection to self, others and the environment, and where grace, ease of movement, decision-making and performance at the top end of skill ability – are commonly talked about internally within the action sports community and are a part of the notion that makes an 'iconic shot' a form of communal good. This idea of a picture representing a cultural value, or virtue even, is an important part of the adventure or action sports experience. However, as a community we are not often very good at making this idea accessible to newcomers or those who have yet to fully get to grips with the ego dance that can often lead to bad days as opposed to the free flowing, fully connected days when things go right. And the mainstream sports media and media in general are not initiated in this way of being.

We don't often enough tell the stories of when things went wrong, or indeed the stories of when they went right.

It is only by bringing the higher values sitting behind the iconic images to life through filling in the back story that newcomers with less experience will be able to understand the motivations and learning behind the 'glammed-up' images. By talking about the motivations, process and thinking behind the actions that eventually led to the 'moment in time' captured in the picture, the community can get a stronger sense of the underlying values and behaviour fit for the backcountry. By countering the narrative that 'winning' is success with a narrative about a deeper sense of connection, autonomy and personal achievement a sense of collective responsibility might start to flourish and alongside that, the notion that a 'good day' for one person in the backcountry is a good day for all, can be made more easily accessible to the newcomer and stalwart alike. Hopefully, taking this values-based approach to the narrative set alongside social media images, no matter how glamorised, can help foster safety as a virtue and help make the backcountry a safer place for all. The common good, mountain style. ■

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UIAA TRAINING

While we all wait nervously to see how our government will re-shape our relationships with Europe and the rest of the world it is worth knowing what international climbing, walking and mountaineering bodies are out there.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY STEVE LONG



Steve Long [supported by Mountain Training] chairs the UIAA's Training Panel, collaborating with many federations and helping newcomers develop their own qualifications. He is an active member of all four of the associations that produce this magazine. Existing MTUKI providers who are interested in training within developing countries are welcome to get in touch for further information.
E steve.long@theuiaa.org

The International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) was founded in 1932 and has a global presence on six continents representing over 90 member associations and federations in 68 countries. It promotes the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide including work on safe and ethical mountain practices, responsible access, culture and environmental protection, youth participation, the Olympic movement and in preserving their spirit and traditions of these activities. Training is one of the core services offered by the UIAA and in particular, the Mountain Qualification Label (MQL), managed by the UIAA Training Panel, is an internationally recognised accreditation and certification scheme which examines and evaluates the training and assessment programmes of UIAA member federations.

The other two international mountaineering bodies that readers may be familiar with are the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations (IFMGA) and the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations (UIMLA).

These two bodies are both UIAA observer members and are each responsible for a single specialist qualification and in ensuring that Guides and International Mountain Leaders can operate as widely as possible.

The UIAA's training panel and its MQL takes a very different approach, by accrediting bona fide leader and instructor qualifications delivered by member federations in their country i.e. national, rather than international qualifications. As the president of the Training Panel, supported by Mountain Training UK and Ireland (MTUKI), I work with a team of experts from across the globe to support both established in-country qualification schemes and new and developing ones. The standards are specific to the unique culture and environment of each country but adhering to guidelines for good practice has been beneficial in building mutual understanding of these qualifications. For example MTUKI offers a direct entry to the International Mountain Leader scheme for holders of a UIAA accredited Mountain Leader qualification, and New Zealand offers a fast-track pathway for ex-pats; other countries have been slower to follow suit with concessions.

The aspiration of gaining UIAA accreditation brought on board a significant sponsor, the Petzl Foundation. This charity sources EU funding (thankfully Brexit-proof!) for projects that protect and support mountain environments and communities. Thanks largely to this support we have been able to experiment with sending international teams of trainers to countries experiencing rural depopulation and/or quality control issues over training within adventure tourism in the mountains.

Many Asian countries in particular are experiencing not only significant influxes of foreign tourists but unprecedented growth in



internal tourism, due to rising living standards in the cities. The goal is to help develop a sustainable qualification structure by working closely with the in-country representative body (usually a federation). The showcase for this work has been the development of a modular Mountain Leader qualification in Nepal that culminated in the formation of a Leaders' association that is currently an aspirant UIMLA member.

Other projects have had mixed success, leading to a growing realisation that the UIAA could

and should introduce an endorsed skills training system that could be delivered by accredited qualified trainers, for individuals to benefit from a structured progression and gain recognition for their efforts. As with skills training in the UK, it is hoped that this will also increase the kudos and visibility of leaders and instructors and help qualifying become a goal for the more experienced students.

The Training Panel has become a permanent sub-commission, with its own budget and has really

MAIN PHOTO The ambitious 2019 leader and rescue training in Ladakh. © Keith Ball. 1. Tim Jepson with canyon leader candidates in Jordan. 2. Skills and leader training candidates in Ladakh. 3. Canyon leader training in Wadi Mujib, Jordan. 4. The first training course in Ladakh, 2010 in partnership with Indian Mountaineering Foundation. 5. Navigation training in Petra, Jordan.



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6. Train the trainer course in Langtang, Nepal. 7. Rock skills training in Wadi Rum with Petzl and AMI and other nationality instructors.

begun to blossom. The commission has re-examined the definition of candidate revalidation. For many countries, nothing less than re-testing every few years is regarded as revalidation but it was eventually agreed that compulsory CPD – as practiced by the Associations in UK and Ireland – is acceptable. The MTUKI Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor scheme, linked to association membership is one such approved solution. Attention will next move to the MTUKI's Mountain Leader scheme and I suspect that a similar outcome may be in store when it comes up for revalidation.

The panel have been developing an international database for skills training and qualifications in order to administer the system and create transparency. Due to budget constraints this has been a slow affair but in the meantime the UIAA published a textbook called the Alpine Handbook, and invited other countries to translate it virtually royalty free. The amount of interest worldwide has dramatically exceeded our expectations, and the book is now published or almost complete in a wide range of languages and available direct from various federations or club.

The UIAA has recruited a marketing company to promote the skills scheme once the database work is complete. Provision of a skills training course is of course much simpler than developing qualifications. Many guides, instructors and leaders with teaching qualifications can potentially deliver UIAA skills training in developing countries that do not yet have their own qualifications programmes. UIAA skills training also provides a potential screening opportunity for favouring competent clients, for association members who offer guiding services. Currently UIAA Training is piloting skills (and leadership) courses in various countries, delivered by providers with substantial prior experience of skills and leadership training – these are often partially funded by tourism bodies – and it may not be long now before they start to invite trainers to enrol for induction to become providers.

For the first time the UIAA will provide a unique service that will bring federations new members and income, while also providing the UIAA with the finances to develop and enhance this programme. ■

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YOGA FOR CLIMBERS

Many climbers will have tried yoga at some point in the hope that it will improve their flexibility, and, consequently, their climbing performance.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SARAH KEKUS

But maintaining a regular yoga practice alongside climbing and other climbing-specific strength training can be difficult and, if the benefits aren't immediately obvious, motivation can dwindle. So here's some guidance to help you figure out if yoga really is worth your time.

Mental and physical benefits

A regular yoga practice really can offer both physical and mental benefits to climbers. An obvious one is that yoga helps to increase range of movement, especially in the hips and shoulders; not only can this help you with many climbing moves but it will also reduce your risk of injury. Yoga also helps to develop all the muscles of the torso including the deep transverse and, more superficial, oblique abdominal muscles, which are the muscles we use for stability and to help "pull us in" on steeper routes.

Plus, yoga uses many of the same back muscles as climbing so it really can help to maintain strength and suppleness in the back.

In addition, styles such as Vinyasa Flow use the arms a lot so this kind of practice will increase strength in the arms and shoulders too.

A key principle of yoga is that steady breathing unites mind and body; when climbers learn pranayama or controlled breathing, it truly can be the most powerful "weapon" in their arsenal; powerful enough to steady "disco legs", increase mental stamina and promote calmness. This is not just "fluffy" yoga-speak; deep, steady breathing stimulates the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PSNS), which sends signals of reassurance to the brain and counters the "fight or flight" response from our adrenals. Mastering breath control so that you can stay calm in scary situations will massively increase your confidence, plus, the increased self awareness that yoga develops, will help you to recognise when you are becoming anxious.

Finding the right class

There are lots of different yoga styles out there so finding the right class can be tricky. A good starting point is to find a class that you enjoy and which works with the rest of your training programme. Many climbing walls now offer climbing-specific classes but if you can't find a class dedicated to climbers, here are some good options:

Vinyasa Flow Offering a dynamic, continuous flow these classes will help to build strength and improve flexibility. The constant movement means you won't get bored and you will quickly see improvements to your range of movement, balance and core strength.

Ashtanga Many Ashtanga practitioners have a similar physique to climbers as this practice offers some tough physical challenges that rely on strength as much as flexibility – a bit like climbing! But it can be a bit too punishing for those looking to balance out the physical demands of climbing.

Yin Yoga Yin yoga involves mainly passive stretches and poses, which are held for between 5-20 minutes to provide a much deeper release of fascia and/or connective tissue. Yin yoga will work well within a training programme that is primarily focussed on strength work as Yin will provide something more gentle and restorative.

Iyengar This is a very meticulous style of yoga, which places emphasis on precise alignment and detailed breath control. Postures are worked on in more depth and practitioners use props such as blocks and straps to help with refinements. This style will suit those who love to get absorbed in the detail and the process is not dissimilar to refining subtle or more delicate moves on small holds.

What to look for in a teacher

Many climbers are detail "geeks" so it's definitely worth looking for a teacher with some understanding of the demands of climbing, who demonstrates a good knowledge of functional anatomy and who offers a range of stretching methods including ballistic, facilitated and passive stretching. Finding a teacher who offers precise alignment cues will also help you to develop more quickly and safely. The main regulatory bodies for yoga in the UK are Yoga Alliance, the Independent Yoga Network and the British Wheel of Yoga, so you should check that your teacher is registered with one and also find out what trainings they've undergone, how many years they've been teaching and any areas of specialism they may have.

My favourite multi-tasking yoga poses for climbers

If you can't get along to a regular class then here are some poses to help open shoulders, hips, quads and hamstrings. These poses will also improve spinal mobility and core strength. ■



1. **Kneeling Bow** – Shoulders, back muscles & quadriceps.
2. **3-Legged Down Dog** – Calves, hamstrings, and shoulders.
3. **Wide-leg Forward Fold (Variation C)** – Hamstrings and shoulders.
4. **Warrior 3** – Balance, shoulders, core and hamstrings.
5. **Side-lunge with bind** – Adductors, hamstrings and shoulders.
6. **Easy Twist with half-bind** – Back muscles, core, hamstrings and calves.
7. **Puppy Dog** – Shoulders and back release.
8. **Bound Angle Pose** – Relaxing hip-opener.



MTA member **Sarah Kekus**, is an experienced yoga teacher (registered with Yoga Alliance UK) and holds a specific Yoga for Sport qualification. She also has an MSc in Nutritional Therapy and holds the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor qualification (WMCI). She lives in the Lake District where she runs her business The Health Architect, offering nutritional therapy, lifestyle coaching, yoga classes, retreats and functional movement classes specifically for triathletes, runners, cyclists and climbers. www.thehealtharchitect.co.uk



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Off-Piste leadership qualifications



Skiing and boarding days in the Scottish winter mountains are soulful experiences. Sliding effortlessly through the snow and enjoying the thrills of a descent are certainly memorable. Interest in Snowsports touring has risen dramatically.

PHOTO Wild ski. © Ed Smith.

WORDS BY GLENMORE LODGE

As the number of participants increase, so do the opportunities for UK-based snowsport instructors, leaders and coaches to find rewarding work, saving knees and increasing fun.

On a warm sunny day at Glenmore Lodge in September 2019 a new range of off-piste leadership qualifications for skiers and boarders were launched by UK Snowsport (UKSS).

This launch represents several years of hard work and an unprecedented level of collaboration between Snowsport Scotland, England, Wales and BASI. The UK Snowsports qualifications framework is clear and unified, and inclusive of both recreational and performance. Part of this new framework is a new pathway for instructors, coaches and leaders to qualify and be able to lead groups off-piste and on ski tours in the UK mountains. These new qualifications now replace the existing Mountain Snowsports Leader (MSL), which has been delivered by Glenmore Lodge on behalf of Snowsport Scotland for almost 40 years.

So why the new structure?

In short, the MSL wasn't broken but the pathway leading to qualification did not reflect the current snowsports landscape or culture. The high level of prerequisites prevented participation, rather than encouraging it. Glenmore Lodge and Snowsport Scotland began a review process that looked in detail at the existing output skills as well as the needs of ski schools, snowsport clubs and independent leaders.

The review also highlighted that the existing prerequisite of holding a Winter Mountain Leader (WML) qualification, favoured mountaineers with an interest in skiing or boarding but discriminated against experienced skiers and boarders, many of whom had considerable experience of the UK mountains in winter conditions but who had developed these skills on skis/boards rather than on foot. It became clear that keeping the WML qualification as a requirement for attending the MSL was reducing the numbers of

participants and ultimately the numbers of leaders available to lead groups. As a result of this on-foot, high-level prerequisite, individuals wanting to lead groups on skis or boards have sought alternatives, from ski instructor qualifications to working without any relevant training or assessment, any of which may be counter-productive.

How will it work?

Our aim was to create a progressive pathway that would meet the needs of the snowsports sector, encourage participation and develop leaders who will inspire, mentor and nurture the next generation of skiers and boarders.

We have created a three-tiered pathway. Training and assessment will be delivered on skis or boards within the UK mountains. The entry requirements to these new awards will still require a snow-based ski instructor or leadership qualification, essential for candidates to have the fundamental knowledge to help them develop students from the very basics to becoming competent self-motivated skiers or boarders.

The new pathway consists of three awards:

- Sidecountry Snowsports Leader
- Backcountry Snowsports Leader
- Mountain Snowsport Leader

The terms 'Sidecountry' and 'Backcountry' are commonly used terms within the snowsport community and industry and refer to off-piste environments whether next to or adjacent to the piste or the more remote areas beyond the ski areas.

All three awards in the new pathway will contain three modules; performance training, leadership training and assessment, as well as consolidation periods and pre-assessment logbook days.



ABOVE PHOTOS Wild ski. © Ed Smith.

The performance training modules will be focused on personal skills and knowledge. Avalanche awareness, navigation and mountain/journey skills as well as ski/board technique are continually developed and reinforced as a candidate progresses.

Leadership will be developed separately, allowing candidates time to consolidate and reflect on their personal skills. The leadership content has been developed, incorporating techniques and strategies from mountain biking, paddle-sport and mountain leadership. How a leader adapts their internal and external focus is an essential part of the leadership modules, leading to a better understanding of how to lead effectively in a dynamic environment.

The consolidation period and assessment module for each level will also give trainers and candidates time to explore leadership and personal skills fully so that qualifying candidates have been tested, encouraged and nurtured through the assessment.

Pilot courses

Many of the competencies required of a Winter Mountain Leader need to be held, but used in a different context. The demands placed on an MSL whilst leading groups place high and sometimes differing demands upon the leader. The new suite of awards provides an exciting opportunity to deliver all this training within the context of days spent on skis/boards, offering training in a much more relevant context.

Despite a poor winter we were able to run a 'pilot' of the Sidecountry and Backcountry Snowsports Leader performance and leadership modules. Working with Snowsport Scotland we identified suitable candidates who brought a diverse range of experience and knowledge which would test the syllabus fully. Each course was also appraised against the required outputs, and following a final team review we were ready to launch.



Accredited Prior Learning (APL) process

It was clear from the beginning of the development process that access to these snowsports awards for mountaineers and walkers needed to be straightforward. Skiing and mountaineering have many contributory skills, with experience and knowledge supporting both. The revised pathway had to create snowsports leaders with a rounded set of skills rather than develop or encourage too much specialisation. To ensure this, we have been able to facilitate a very comprehensive Accredited Prior Learning pathway that allows individuals to find their own route through the qualifications.

Holders of the Winter Mountain Leader qualification and BASI Ski Instructors will also be able to use their existing qualifications and leadership experience to enter the scheme and gain exemption from some of the modules and course. The entry requirement of an 'on snow' instructor or leadership award will remain, but the APL process will make these new qualifications very appealing to winter aficionados looking to expand their work opportunities.

So, dust off your skis or boards, sharpen the edges and get them waxed-up – and discover a whole new way to work as a mountain professional in winter.

For further information check out:

- <https://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk/backcountry-skiing/qualifications/>
- <https://snowsportscotland.org/courses-qualifications/>

Contributions

With special thanks to the contributions made by Roy Henderson from BASI and the Snowsports Touring Advisory Group. ■



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MENTORING

TOP TIPS FOR HONING YOUR PRACTICE

WORDS BY DR SAMANTHA MCELLIGOTT

With the growing popularity of mentoring across the professional organisations, it can be overwhelming trying to work out what you need to do to create the perfect relationship. So what are the top tips for getting the best out of mentoring?

Last winter's edition covered the basics of what mentoring actually is, and how it may differ to coaching. Below is a summary table to remind us what the differences are, so we can be clear about what we are expecting from our mentoring relationship.

MENTORING	COACHING
Mentoring is about 'Putting In' learning to the student.	Coaching is about 'drawing out' learning from the student.
Mentoring is, more typically, an informal voluntary relationship.	Coaching is more likely to be a service.
Mentors help their student to develop, they offer expertise and pass on skills and knowledge.	Coaches primarily draw out learning from the student, asking questions and encouraging the student to learn experientially.
The Mentor is usually more skilled/experienced in the same line of work as the student.	The coach doesn't necessarily need to have any experience of the student's practice.
Mentors are usually impartial and neutral to the student's work, i.e., they are not the student's boss.	Coaches cannot guarantee to be neutral or impartial, as they may work within the same organisation, and/or manage the student, or be aiming for specific goals.
Mentors use thoughtful questioning to elicit responses from the student, however they might offer insights from their own experiences to illustrate key points, for example experiences of a qualification pathway.	Coaches, generally, do not elaborate on personal experiences, or rather they focus on the individual's experience.

The next step is to consider how we go about creating and developing the relationship.

The top recommendation is to set out an **agreement** for how you will conduct the relationship – for both parties. As a mentor, you may like to consider what you are willing to do and what you retain as paid private work, for example. Are you happy to conduct mentoring out on the hill or on the crag with your mentee? Are you intending to introduce your mentee to employers or other types of networking? As a mentee, what do you think your role is in the relationship? What are your expectations?

If an agreement between both parties can be forged early on, then expectations are set and can be managed, which will lead to better outcomes for both mentor and mentee.

The next recommendation is to set out **how and when you will interact**: Face to face? Video calls? Emails? Face to face is always the most effective for developing rapport, but may not always be the most practical or efficient. Time is the biggest factor in any relationship, so it is worth discussing how flexible you are prepared to be with each other, and what obstacles are likely to get in the way.

The next thing to consider is how you go about **goal setting** together. The mentee should be driving the relationship – it is their goal after all! Useful tools to help guide goal setting are easily found online (such as SMART, GROW, SWOT analysis, performance profiles, and so on, which will all help reflection and exploration of what the mentee wants to achieve). Goal setting should focus on specific goals, with appropriate timelines, and should be something that the mentee actually wants to achieve. Motivation is the key to successful goal achievement. The mentor can ask open questions to allow the mentee to explore their ideas, options and the resources they may need to achieve their goals.

Questioning remains a big part of getting the most from the relationship. Typically, we view the mentor as the key questioner, but the mentee should also question themselves and what they really want to get from the relationship. The best questions for a mentor to ask are those that allow the mentee to speak freely and should be followed up by more questioning, not opinions or advice. The ideal situation is simply to allow the mentee to keep exploring a theme until they come to their own answer. The mentor can, however, offer their own experiences wherever it is relevant and helpful. This is the main difference with coaching – the mentor has typically experience of the pathway that the mentee wishes to undertake, so their views and experience will often be very useful to the mentee.

The above tips may sound simple, but that is always the key to establishing positive relationships. Keep things simple, clear and collaborative from the beginning. Think about where you may need extra support or resources to help you understand your role in a mentoring relationship. Consider practicing some of the tools and techniques that help you be a supportive mentor, or an effective mentee, perhaps with friends or colleagues, or indeed just as introspection and reflection. ■



Dr Samantha McElligott is a Mountain Leader and leadership consultant and has been an active outdoor practitioner and expedition leader for over 15 years. She specialises in research-led leadership development, particularly in the outdoor context. Her research interests include quantitative examination of the impact of leadership; transformational leadership development; and the effects of outdoor learning on outcomes such as self-esteem and teamwork. Samantha lives in Snowdonia, loves adventures at home or overseas, and enjoying days out on the hills with tea and cake to follow.

BOOK REVIEW

FANTASTIC FEMALE ADVENTURES

TRULY AMAZING TALES OF WOMEN EXPLORING THE WORLD

by Lily Dyu

Reviewed by Lily Cousins

Lily Dyu's incredible descriptions and inspiring message in *Fantastic Female Adventurers* is something rarely found for young women looking to explore the outdoors – and is much needed. Dyu's words transport the reader to each gripping and thrilling key event in the 13 heroines' adventurous lives. The notion of such marvellous women, with their masterfully told stories, is enough to make anyone fall in love with the very idea of the outdoors regardless of gender, religion or age.

As a 15 year old girl with a love for everything adventurous, these tales are exactly what I feel I have been missing. We receive a detailed account of each woman's personal journey, from their discovery of their selected activity to the exploration that activity has brought them. There is no end to the range of the activities: I personally had no idea biking could come in the forms of hand-biking or stand-up biking. No two journeys are the same and every location is an enlightening new adventure.

One tale that filled me with warmth and almost pride for this woman who I have never met was Karen Darke's. An incredible disabled woman who hand-biked along the Great Silk Road. This feat is nothing short of extraordinary to me, especially considering the obstacles she overcame and the happiness her exploration brought her.

Then there's Beth French, who attempted to swim the 'Oceans' Seven', despite suffering from chronic fatigue and ME, to show her autistic son Dylan that he too could go on such adventures. She encounters sharks and jellyfish and yet perseveres. Unfortunately, Beth did not complete her adventure but her reason for stopping is



also the reason she began: her son, the most valid reason in the world.

The tale of Mira Ray is honestly astonishing. This hero goes from carrying grass for the animals on her family farm on her back for a daily two-mile trek as a child, to joining the Nepalese army as a teen and then competing in her first mountain race with no preparation or warning and yet being the only woman to finish. This story is incredible and yet entirely true.

Each unique tale feels like something out of a storybook. Thanks to Lily Dyu, princesses are no longer the only women young girls can look up to. We now have warriors who battle the cold in frozen kingdoms like Ann Daniels or heroes like Sarah Outen who travelled the world on foot, by bike and kayak to raise money for arthritis charities. Each woman is a knight in shining armour but they don't slay dragons: they conquer natural challenges and their own personal limits.

But while the book may appear to be aimed at a younger audience, the stories are eternal, heartening and should be enjoyed by young and old. Reading it, I was left feeling proud, merry and influenced. This book truly inspires one to aim for the stars, just as Helen Sharman, the first British astronaut, once did. ■

SCOTTISH ISLAND BAGGING

THE WALKHIGHLANDS GUIDE TO THE ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND

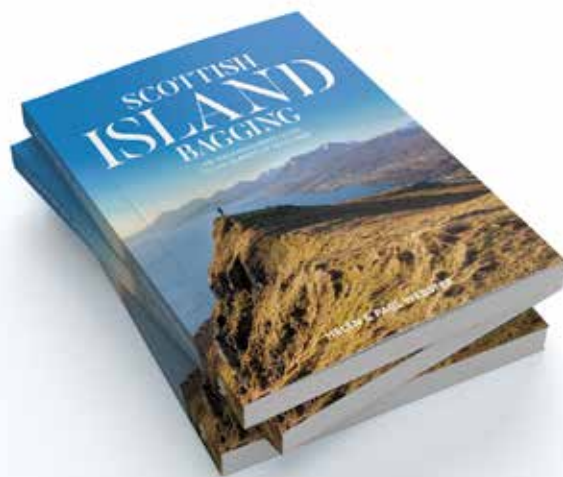
by Helen and Paul Webster

Reviewed by Lucy Wallace

There's something magical about islands. Watching the ferry slip away, knowing that for a few hours we are cut off from the cares of the world, is a special feeling. Scotland has an abundance of islands of all sizes, inhabited and deserted, steeped in history and teeming with wildlife. Each one is unique in character; from the mysterious reaches of Skye, to the abrupt full stop of Ailsa Craig, Scottish islands always deliver something special.

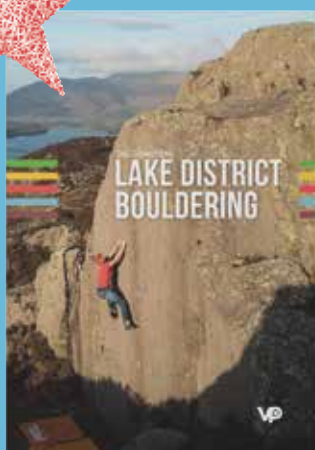
The authors of this book are the team behind the popular Walkhighlands website. They shy away from a dry definition of what constitutes an island, and offer a flexible but comprehensive guide to the most accessible and interesting ones to visit. The book begins in the Firth of Forth, alights on the isles of the Clyde, and then travels through the maze of the Inner and Outer Hebrides, and further still to St Kilda and Rockall, before turning its gaze to the Northern Isles and the far reaches of Shetland. Highlights are served up with access information, top tips, history and geology, with suggestions for things to do and interesting walks. Being an islander myself, I'm fortunate that I know a few of them very well, and can vouch for the quality of the entries.

Before I read this book, I did not consider myself a "bagger", although I'd be the first to admit a thrill of happiness every time I land on an island that is new to me. However, like islands themselves,

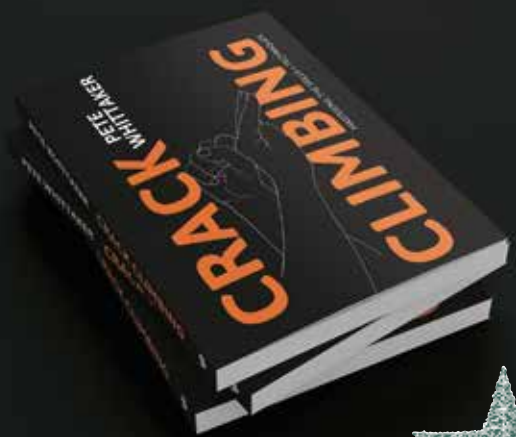


this book is strangely enticing, the glossy front cover and wonderful photographs within are beaming images that evoke memories of past adventures, and conjure up new ideas. I'll admit it wasn't long before my pencil was out, and I was popping ticks in the list at the back. It's a great companion for dreams and for planning, and has charmed me in to wanting to visit more islands, preferably soon. The book would also make a lovely gift, and will appeal not only to island enthusiasts like me, but also curious tourists, active travellers, and family holidaymakers. It will be very at home on a coffee table, but even more so in your hand; as you embark on your next ferry journey, anticipating adventures to come. ■

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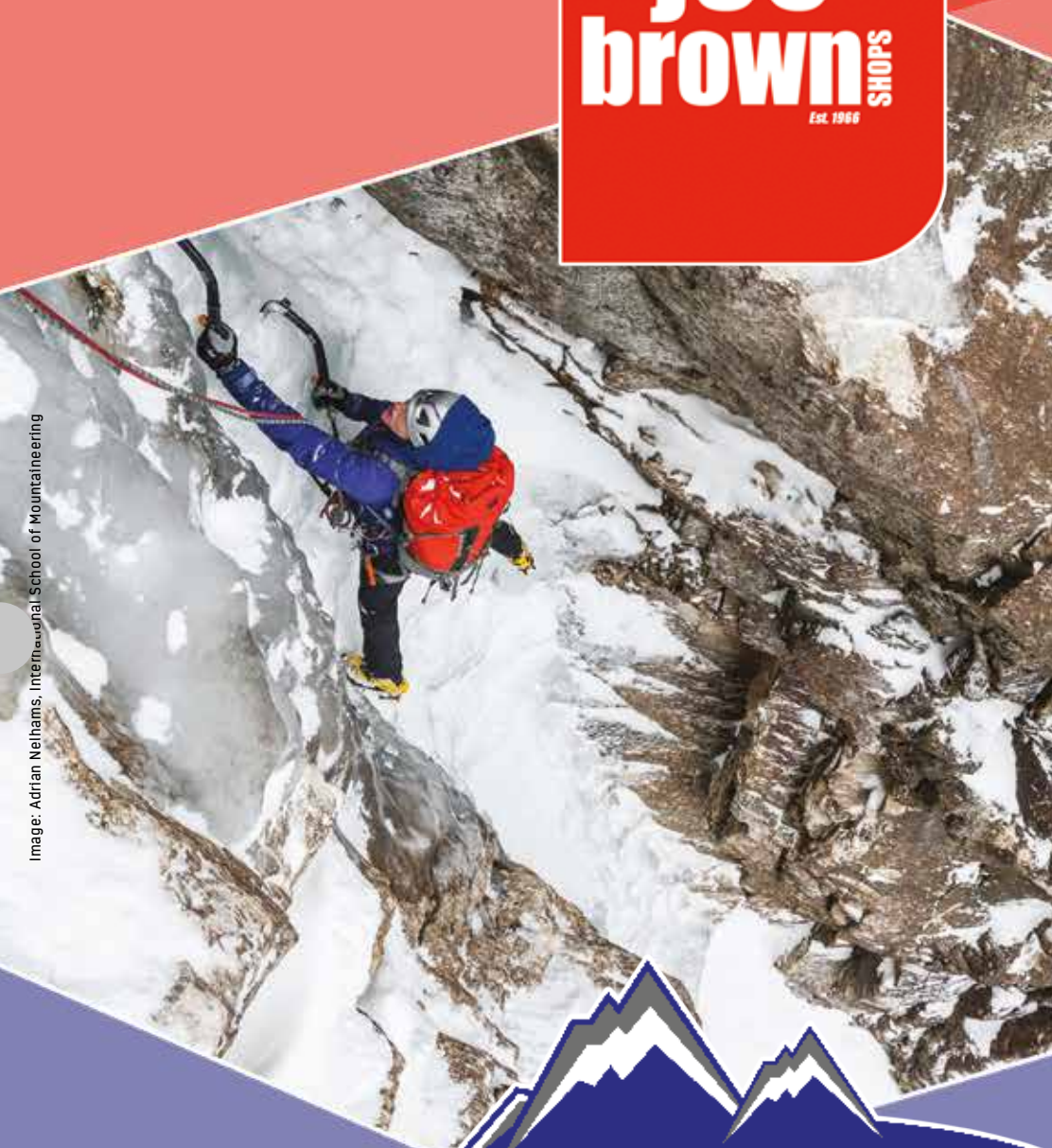


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