Mountain Training

Winter Mountain Leader

Candidate handbook



Contents

1. Qualification pathway 5
2. Course structure 9
3. Course delivery 10
4 Awarding organisation 10

Syllabus and guidance notes 11
1. Leader responsibilities 11
2. Leadership and decision-making 13
3. Planning, weather, snow and avalanches 17
4. Hazards and emergency procedures 21
5. Equipment 24
6. Snowcraft and walking skills 26
7. Navigation 29
8. Security on steep ground 32
9. Teaching and learning skills 34
10. Access, conservation and the environment. 36
11. Background knowledge 39

Appendix 1 - Definitions 41
Appendix 2 - Additional information 45
Appendix 3 – The assessment process 50

Preface

This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training Scotland's Winter Mountain Leader qualification. It contains useful information about the various stages in the qualification as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities that have associated risks. Mountain Training Scotland provides training and assessment courses and guidance to help Winter Mountain Leaders develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the winter environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

All Winter Mountain Leaders owe a heightened duty of care to the people they lead, their colleagues, and the wider public who may be impacted by the leader's actions.

Mountain Training Scotland qualified Winter Mountain Leaders will act in the best interests of their group, individual group members and others, and they will always act within their competence to prevent harm to them.

Acknowledgements

Mountain Training Scotland would like to thank all the national Mountain Training organisation staff members, volunteers and MTS Winter Mountain Leader course providers, course directors and staff involved in the Mountain Training Walking Qualifications Review.

Thanks also to the following individuals whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Dave Evans, George McEwan, Giles Trussell, Karl Midlane, Lou Beetlestone and Sam Leary.

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

scqf
scottish credit and qualifications framework

supported by

sportscotland
the national agency for sport



Winter Skills

Throughout this handbook there are references to Winter Skills by Andy Cunningham and Allen Fyffe which we publish as the official handbook of Mountain Training's winter qualifications. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant chapter(s) for each syllabus area.



1. Qualification pathway

1.1 Introduction

The Winter Mountain Leader qualification enables experienced mountain walkers to lead groups in mountainous country of the United Kingdom and Ireland in winter conditions.

Since its introduction in 1965 the qualification has achieved widespread recognition by education authorities, youth organisations and individuals for ensuring technical competence. Operated on behalf of Mountain Training by Mountain Training Scotland and the qualification is valid throughout the UK and Ireland, although all training and assessment courses are conducted in Scotland by approved providers.

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

1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified Winter Mountain Leader can lead others and provide basic skills instruction to parties on mountainous country within the UK and Ireland under winter conditions (see Appendix 1 for definition). Qualification holders are able to manage groups safely during this activity.

1.2.1 Terrain

Mountainous country in the UK and Ireland in winter conditions. For the purpose of the Winter Mountain Leader qualification, ‘mountainous country’ may be defined as wild country which may contain unavoidable snow and/or ice covered steep and rocky ground where walkers are dependent upon themselves for immediate help.

The Winter Mountain Leader qualification integrates experience, training and assessment in what could be challenging and testing conditions in mountainous country in winter conditions.

1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- Winter climbing, nor does it cover the skills required for the planned use of the rope - the area and terrain chosen for the activity should be such that use of the rope is not contemplated.
- Leading expeditions using snowholes as the base or main form of accommodation. Qualified Winter Mountain Leaders who wish to lead expeditions using snowholes as their base or main accommodation; or provide further winter skills instruction beyond that needed by novices on a winter walk, are directed to refer to Appendix 2 - Additional Information.

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

1.3 Stages in the qualification

1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

Registration for the Winter Mountain Leader qualification is an application process and you need to meet the following prerequisites:

- You must already hold the Mountain Leader qualification.
- You must have current experience of hill walking and mountaineering in winter conditions in at least three different UK and Ireland mountain areas.
- You must have experience of an absolute minimum of 20 Winter Quality Mountain Days. The majority of this experience, at least 75% of the minimum requirements, should be in the UK and Ireland. (Applications with less than 20 days will not be considered; there are no exceptions to this.)
- You must be well practised in the personal use of ice axe and crampons.

Once your experience is recorded in DLOG you are required to;

- Register for the Winter Mountain Leader qualification and pay the non-refundable registration fee.
- Notify Mountain Training (via the 'Send To Mountain Training' button on the 'Share' tab in DLOG) that your DLOG is ready to be reviewed.

- A Mountain Training Scotland technical officer will then review your experience in DLOG and if it meets the minimum requirements, you will be notified by email that your registration on the qualification has been approved.

Applications with less than the minimum experience cannot be approved. If your application is not successful, you will receive feedback on how best to fulfil the experience requirements and your registration application will be held open until your successful registration.

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

1.3.2 Training prerequisites

You must have an approved registration for the Winter Mountain Leader qualification on CMS.

1.3.3 Consolidation period

During the period between training and assessment, candidates are expected to gain extensive personal winter walking and mountaineering experience including the acquisition of snow and mixed climbing experience at Grade I or above (see Appendix 1 – Winter Graded Ground).

Walking experience should include some practice in leading parties in easy winter upland terrain. Working under the guidance of a suitably experienced leader in more difficult terrain is also recommended. Every opportunity should be taken to practise the skills learned during training.

All but the most experienced candidates should wait until at least the following winter season before returning for assessment. There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the qualification.

The Mountain Training Association provides workshops to support the candidate journey for trainees and qualified instructors. Mountain Training Scotland has provided a self-assessment skills checklist for this qualification to assist you in completing any action plan discussed with the training course director.

Mountain Training Association

Our association can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications. We are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

1.3.4 Assessment prerequisites

See below for the minimum requirements for assessment. It is expected that for most candidates the consolidation period will take more than one to two winter seasons.

- You must have attended a Winter Mountain Leader training course (or have been granted exemption by Mountain Training Scotland)
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must have an up to date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of:
    - an absolute minimum of 40 Quality Mountain Days under winter conditions, with at least 20 gained in Scotland, distributed over a period of at least three winter seasons (75% of the minimum requirements must be UK and Ireland based and at least 50% gained in Scotland)
    - at least 10 Grade I or above, named UK and Ireland winter climbs and/or equivalent mountaineering routes.
- You must have a current first aid certificate, gained by completing an in-person (not online) course which involved at least two full days of instruction, or equivalent, and included an element of assessment.

2. Course structure

2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 60 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of 6 days.

Results: Completed, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show, Exemption.

2.2 Assessment

Assessment will involve a minimum of 60 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of 5 days.

Results: Pass, Defer, Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show.

There is no exemption from any element of the assessment. Course directors will provide advice in the form of an action plan to all candidates who have been deferred or failed on the way forward. All deferral reassessments must be completed within five years of the original assessment.

A deferral, which normally involves a one-day reassessment of the noted weak areas (normally no more than one major syllabus item) cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practice and preparation. Following deferment candidate may undertake only two one-day reassessments, after which a full course assessment will be required.

A failure will necessitate attendance at a complete assessment course.

3. Course delivery

3.1 Training

Course director must be an approved Mountain Leader assessment course director, hold the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor, BMG Carnet or BMG Aspirant Carnet plus Mountain Training Scotland requirements.

Additional staff must hold the Winter Mountain Leader (or higher) plus Mountain Training Scotland requirements.

Min. course size:2, Max. course size: 12, Max. ratio: 1:6. All candidates will work with more than one trainer during the course.

3.2 Assessment

Course director must be an approved Winter Mountain Leader training course director plus Mountain Training Scotland requirements.

Additional staff working must hold the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor,

BMG Carnet or BMG Aspirant Carnet plus Mountain Training Scotland requirements.

Min. course size: 2, Max. course size: 12, Max. ratio: 1:4. All candidates will work with more than one assessor during the course.

4 Awarding organisation

- Mountain Training Scotland



Management and decision-making



1. Leader responsibilities

Winter Mountain Leaders have responsibilities as a group leader with regards to the care and safety of the group. This includes safety management, their own leadership behaviours and ethos as well as dealing with hazards and emergencies. They will be able to:

1.1 Explain their general responsibilities to the group and, where appropriate, to parents/guardians, the organising authority, committee or manager of the activity, the outdoor user and the general public.

1.2 Explain their specific responsibilities to choose appropriate objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.

Guidance

As a winter leader you have a clear duty of care to your groups, the level of which will vary according to the group members' age and experience. You owe a greater duty of care when you are acting in loco parentis with people under 18. The winter mountain environment presents additional hazards that may not be apparent to novice walkers, so participants and parents of children participating in this activity should be made aware of and accept these risks.

Many of your responsibilities as a leader will be identified through preparation and planning and will likely include: parental consent (if participants are under 18), authority clearance (if required), personal and medical information, finances, insurance and transport. Employing/deploying organisations will have their own procedures in place to ensure that appropriate preparation has been undertaken.

Your understanding of and ability to adapt to these procedures and underlying principles will enable you to independently prepare appropriate winter walking trips.

The ability to prepare and motivate any group prior to a winter walking trip is important and you should seek opportunities to assess the participants in terms of their physical abilities as well as in terms of any equipment needs. It may be that there are many other factors to consider in the preparation and conduct of any winter walk. The harsher conditions of winter can present additional challenges which can tax clothing, equipment and an individual's physical and mental resilience. Leaders may choose to consider a progression of walks in non-serious terrain to develop participants' fitness and personal capabilities and develop familiarity with their equipment and clothing systems.

Your position of responsibility extends beyond the journey itself and participants may look to you for guidance on how to continue winter walking independently or to develop their winter skills further. A rounded knowledge of suitable opportunities is therefore very useful.

Many walks in appropriate Winter Mountain Leader terrain will fall within the scope of the Adventurous Activity Licensing Regulations. Candidates should be aware of the implications of this for any work they may undertake with those under 18.



See all Learning to lead boxes

Key practice points

- Develop good planning habits by planning your own winter journeys.
- Be familiar with the demands winter walking makes on the individual, their equipment and their skills.
- Develop your own physical and mental resilience by getting out into the Scottish winter mountains and having personal adventures.
- Research opportunities for developing skills or finding winter walking companions that might be suitable for a range of groups and individuals.



2. Leadership and decision-making

2.1 The leader demonstrates adaptable leadership behaviours and decision-making.

2.1.1 Monitor the group, environmental conditions and activity, and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements.

2.1.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the group.

2.2 Vision: The leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others.

2.2.1 Articulate clear and agreed values for their group; lead by example; and behave how they want the group to behave.

2.3 Support: The leader creates a positive and supportive environment for the group.

2.3.1 Recognise, respect and adapt to individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities.

2.3.2 Encourage independent learning; establish an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and provide clear and positive feedback to support this.

2.4 Challenge: The leader provides relevant and appropriately challenging experiences.

2.4.1 Agree group goals and calibrate the level of challenge to individual abilities and motivations.

2.4.2 Encourage and support the group and individuals to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to solve their own problems.

The leader understands the Mountain Training ethos of leadership and has a developed their own. They should be able to:

2.5 Articulate their own leadership ethos and beliefs along with those of Mountain Training.

2.6 Acknowledge and describe a range of leadership approaches, models and associated ethos.

The leader understands the value of processing and learning from experience. They should be able to:

2.7 Facilitate a personal post-activity review to make sense of, and develop, themes/events occurring during the activity and identify the lessons learned and how to incorporate them into their own practice.

Guidance

A Winter Mountain Leader needs to demonstrate the basic skills and decision making of adaptive leadership. Leaders should be demonstrating each element in isolation, and be

able to combine several skills at any one time. For example, they need to be able to look after their group and navigate simultaneously in poor weather.

Leaders should have a well-researched group plan which incorporates situational and environmental factors such as: short daylight hours, severe weather conditions and quickly changing underfoot conditions; type of task and group goals; social/cultural context, the groups' individual personalities, their ability/skill and arousal/anxiety (noting the additional fatigue and stress associated with winter activities) relative to the task; their leadership behaviour preference; and the leader's expertise and experience. Most importantly candidates should match their leadership choices with the needs and the agreed outcomes for the group.

In spite of the best made plans, things can and do change – be it the weather, the group, the equipment, or whatever. A good leader will actively notice these changes before a problem arises, adapting their approach and leadership behaviours accordingly.

Underpinning the role of a leader are the values, beliefs, and ethos that shape every individual's view of what leadership is and in turn shape their leadership behaviours. All leaders have preferred behaviours and personality traits which impact their leadership styles. Likewise, individuals within a group may have their own leadership behaviour preferences. Leaders will need to be adaptable in behaviour and leadership to balance the needs of both the situation and the group – this is called the required behaviour.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model of transformational leadership provides a framework that leaders can use to plan, execute, monitor and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, groups who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations.

Leaders need to develop trust amongst their group. This requires an appropriate balance of consultation, empathy and instruction to engineer success. Effective leaders will, for example, adapt the way they communicate to best suit their group and will give different degrees of responsibility to groups of varying ability and experience.

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

Praise in public, give constructive criticism in private. Call people aside if you need to challenge their behaviour, unless it was directed at someone else.

Explain your thinking. Followers have a right to know why you are telling them to do something; but retain your authority.



See all Learning to lead boxes

Key practice points

- Make sure your group is ready to receive instruction when you need to give it – gather them up with their backs to the wind and weather and make sure they are all looking at you before you speak.
- Challenge by choice. Calibrating and establishing agreed goals is the art of good leadership. Too low and they will become disengaged, too high and you will lose their trust.
- Apply the vision/support/challenge model in your leadership practice both for planning and reviewing your activity with groups – actively seek feedback from your group.



3. Planning, weather, snow and avalanches

Candidates should be able to incorporate the Be Avalanche Aware (BAA) process and guidelines into their activity. To do this a wide range of knowledge and skills will be required as follows:

3.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the scope of the Winter Mountain Leader qualification and plan itineraries that lie within this scope.

Be Avalanche Aware process (BAA)

3.2 Candidates should be able to demonstrate an understanding of when and how to apply the Be Avalanche Aware process at the various stages - Planning', 'On The Journey' and 'Key Places' to avoid the avalanche hazard.

3.3 Candidates should be able to create a route plan for a winter mountain/hill walking journey that incorporates the Be Avalanche Aware process and specifically identifies 'Key Places'.

Within the BAA process they should:

3.4 Weather, avalanche hazard and mountain conditions.

3.4.1 Know where to source, explain how to interpret and use reliable sources of weather information.

3.4.2 Know where to source and demonstrate an understanding of avalanche forecasts, the nature of the forecasted avalanche hazard and the weather influence on them.

3.4.3 Demonstrate an elementary understanding of weather maps and resulting weather conditions on the hill.

3.4.4 Recognise and continuously evaluate the effects of weather, particularly wind speed, temperature changes and wind chill, on cornice formation, avalanche hazard and activity.

3.4.5 Recognise cloud formations and alterations of wind direction and temperature that are indicative of weather changes.

3.4.6 Explain an understanding of snowpack spatial variation and how snowpack structure, snow grain and weak layer combinations can contribute to instability.

3.4.7 Be able to identify and demonstrate methods for monitoring key snow stability indicators (also known as 'Avalanche Problems') and recognise increasing or decreasing trends in snowpack stability.

3.5 You and your party;

3.5.1 Describe an understanding of human factors and how they can influence decision making.

3.5.2 Identify objectives and create a plan appropriate to the experience, skills and motivation level of the group, the prevailing conditions and the leader's own experience.

3.5.3 Complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed.

3.5.4 Understand and employ appropriate tools to manage human factors and support decision making.

3.5.5 Monitor your and your party's performance relative to your initial appraisal and plan.

3.5.6 Integrate 'You & Your Party' observations with weather, avalanche hazard, conditions and mountain landscape observations to inform route choice.

3.6 Mountain landscape

3.6.1 Demonstrate an understanding of how mountain landscape influences snow pack stability.

3.6.2 Be able to use the avalanche forecast to identify on the map terrain that is likely to present an avalanche hazard and use this to create a route plan that avoids hazard.

3.6.3 Identify whether the journey and terrain options will result in occasional, frequent or constant exposure to avalanche terrain.

3.6.4 Be able to identify Key Places from the planning phase and make appropriate terrain choices based on observations throughout the journey.

3.6.5 On the journey identify terrain that may pose an avalanche hazard.

3.6.6 Recognise situations where key information is missing or uncertain and make decisions accordingly.

Guidance

The ability to plan and lead a mountain journey is an essential skill for a Winter Mountain Leader and should incorporate the Be Avalanche Aware (BAA) process and guidelines into every aspect.

Historically, emergencies, with occasionally disastrous consequences, have occurred as a result of either ignorance of impending weather conditions or inappropriate responses to prevailing conditions. Applying the Be Avalanche Aware process, combined with effective leadership and decision-making skills, seeks to mitigate the negative impact of heuristic traps on you and your group.

Expeditions incorporate so many aspects of mountain walking that their importance should not be underrated. However, in winter, due to the unexpected shifts of the weather extremes, for example storm force winds, the choice of accommodation is important. Camping in the winter can be challenging and you should be familiar with the use and limitations of bothies and huts as accommodation alternatives.

A suitable plan for your group will accommodate the needs, skill set, experience and available equipment which may influence the itinerary. Measurable factors such as distance, time and gradient will be considered as well as hazards or features such as weather, icy conditions, avalanche hazard, steep ground and streams.

The weather component is predominantly practical in its application. Weather always influences the snowpack and therefore forms an inherent part of the avalanche hazard assessment.

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

You are expected to be able to interpret internet, television, radio and newspaper weather maps and forecasts so that your own forecast is close to the conditions actually experienced when winter mountaineering.

The objective hazards to which walking groups are exposed during winter conditions are very real. Avalanche awareness is not just about facts, knowledge and field observation. Rather, it is about how we use this information and these techniques to inform the decision-making process, by continually testing our supposition regarding snow and avalanche hazard.



Chapter 3 Winter Weather

Chapter 9 Snow Structure

Chapter 10 Avalanches

Key practice points

- Research different sources of weather forecast, particularly those specific to mountain areas, and identify how similar they are for any particular day. What do any differences indicate?
- Be familiar with the SportScotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS), understand the avalanche hazard levels used in the forecasts. Take time to read and comprehend the detail in the forecasts.
- Research human factors in decision-making and apply strategies in your own practice to mitigate the negative impact of these factors on your and your group's decision making.
- After every journey ensure you review the effectiveness of your application of the Be Avalanche Aware process and associated decision making.



4. Hazards and emergency procedures

Hazards

4.1 Identify and appropriately manage the risk created by the following environmental mountain hazards:

- 4.1.1 Loose and verglassed rock
- 4.1.2 Snow bridges above streams and boulder fields
- 4.1.3 Cornices
- 4.1.4 Avalanche prone slopes
- 4.1.5 Strong winds
- 4.1.6 Flooding
- 4.1.7 Lightning

They should be able to deal with an unplanned or emergency situation where these hazards are encountered.

Emergency procedures

4.2 Be able to select an appropriate first aid kit and additional group equipment suited to the environment and prevailing conditions.

4.3 Manage self and group in a variety of different weather conditions including cold, heat, snow, sleet, rain and high wind.

4.4 Describe how to deal with common injuries and medical problems in the winter mountains.

4.5 Explain the causes, symptoms, prevention, and treatment of mountain hypothermia, cold injuries (frost nip and frostbite), snow blindness, heat disorders, sunburn and dehydration.

4.6 Describe and demonstrate the actions to be taken if involved in organising a rescue and recovery for those buried in an avalanche using commonly carried equipment.

4.7 Take appropriate action to ensure the group and the casualty's well-being in the event of an incident or accident including knowing how to get appropriate assistance.

4.8 Have a basic understanding of Mountain Rescue and how it is organised.

4.9 Ensure the casualty's safety until help arrives.

4.10 Plan and follow 'escape routes', using appropriate navigational techniques, to nearby assistance.

4.11 Manage a group to perform a small-scale search and rescue for a missing person.

4.12 Demonstrate improvised rescue techniques and their limitations.

Emergency snow shelters and holes

4.13 In the event of an emergency or unplanned night out, candidates should be able to demonstrate the ability to construct and use snowholes and emergency shelters in the winter mountain environment. They should be able to:

4.13.1 select suitable sites for bivouacs, emergency shelters and snow holes;

4.13.2 construct emergency shelters quickly using only hill walking equipment;

4.13.3 construct and use snow holes suitable for occupation as an emergency overnight refuge;

4.13.4 identify the dangers of snow shelters and take steps to minimise these.

Guidance

A Winter Mountain Leader will be able to identify and manage, through a combination of planning, route choice, leadership and group management, common environmental and terrain hazards encountered on a winter mountain journey.

Emergency situations may develop from accidents, illnesses or from errors of judgement. Leaders will experience extra pressures when something goes wrong and should be clear about suitable responses for any given emergency on a journey.

To cope with unplanned events or emergencies, Winter Mountain Leaders should be appropriately equipped, fit and resilient so the y can continue to function as an effective Winter Mountain Leader whilst managing themselves, the group and potentially a casualty.

Snow shelters are a potentially useful way of avoiding the worst of the weather in an emergency, but the majority require a deep enough bank of snow to be effective. This may not be nearby in the event of a serious incident, so every step should be taken to

avoid an emergency situation from developing in the first place.

Hill walking equipment that could be used to construct an emergency shelter may include an ice axe and/or a shovel. Whilst a shovel has multiple uses, not everyone considers them hill walking equipment and candidates should be able to construct an emergency shelter using only an ice axe. As a rule of thumb candidates would generally be expected to create a suitable emergency shelter to get themselves out of the elements within fifteen to thirty minutes, though snow conditions would have a significant impact on ease of digging and associated time required.

The inclusion of snow holing in Winter Mountain Leader courses when conditions allow, is a convention to ensure candidates are fit and resilient enough to cope with the demands of the winter environment. Its purpose is not to teach the Winter Mountain Leader how to conduct expeditions using snow holes as the base or main form of accommodation.

At assessment, if conditions allow, candidates should be able to demonstrate judgement around site selection. This will involve considering avalanche hazard, weather conditions and other users, while managing the hazards of using a snow shelter, such as managing the internal temperature and minimising the effects of drifting snow blocking the entrances. A Winter Mountain Leader is expected to be fit and sufficiently organised to be able to cope with the demands of a three-day expedition based in snow holes.

Candidates should be aware that when conditions are overly hazardous, for example in conditions of limited or icy snow cover, a rapid thaw or high avalanche risk it may not always be possible, nor safe, to spend a night in a snow hole during their course. As a result of climate change the likelihood of snow holing being inappropriate due to adverse weather and conditions has increased. When this is the case, trainers and assessors will use other methods of covering/assessing the syllabus.



Part 6 Winter incidents

Key practice points

- Develop your resilience by getting out into the Scottish winter mountains and having personal adventures.
- Practise the construction of a variety of snow shelters using an ice axe alone.



5. Equipment

Winter Mountain Leaders will be personally competent winter hill walkers who are able to provide safe walking experiences for no vice groups and individuals. To fulfil this role effectively they will be able to:

5.1 Demonstrate knowledge of personal and group equipment required for winter day walks considering the environment and prevailing weather conditions.

5.2 Choose appropriate food and drink for winter day walks.

5.3 Demonstrate an understanding of additional equipment required by a Winter Mountain Leader.

5.4 Be able to pack equipment effectively for personal and group use.

5.5 Demonstrate an understanding of the design and construction of equipment, including its material characteristics, care and maintenance.

5.6 Demonstrate the personal skills and organisation required to remain comfortable in the mountains in winter.

Guidance

As a Winter Mountain Leader your ability to equip yourself appropriately for a variety of conditions and journey lengths will enable you to carry out your role effectively.

The main factors that can lead to hypothermia are low temperatures, wind chill, wet conditions, inadequate diet, morale and exhaustion. Exposure to any or all of these factors can lead to the onset of hypothermia and predispose the winter walker to making potentially fatal mistakes. Preventing heat loss can be dealt with by being adequately prepared mentally, physically, and technically; ensuring your personal clothing and equipment is up to the task is extremely important.

Careful refinement of equipment commonly means Winter Mountain Leaders can continue to operate efficiently with minimum gear 'faff '. Experienced Winter Mountain Leaders make no assumptions nor leave things to chance regarding the choice or packing of equipment.

You are also likely to offer advice to novices on choice and suitability of winter clothing and equipment and this advice will need to consider the intended use and available budget; less expensive alternatives can often perform nearly as well as more expensive, branded, outdoor clothing and will be perfectly adequate for those starting out in relatively benign conditions. In more challenging conditions higher quality equipment will pay dividends but it still need not be expensive. Appropriate knowledge and understanding of what is available on the market is therefore useful.

Food and drink for any winter mountain walk should meet the two main requirements of being easy to access and consume, whilst providing a good return of energy. An understanding of the basics of nutrition will enable you to offer advice on the benefits of different foods.

Whilst the leader should not be overburdened it is important that some extra kit is carried in case of unforeseen circumstances. It may be that some form of assistance might be given to others as well as having to deal with needs amongst their own group. This kit can be shared amongst the group if appropriate and might include spare clothing, spare food, a shovel(s), a group shelter and Blizzard bag (or similar), long sling, karabiner, emergency rope and walking poles.



Chapter 1 Mountaineering equipment

Key practice points

- Go out for walks in foul weather! Evaluate your kit during and after the walk for its effectiveness at keeping you relatively comfortable.
- Compile a variety of kit lists for different walks and expeditions at different times of the year, with different forecasts, with a variety of groups and a variety of locations.
- Keep a look out for budget priced clothing and equipment and try to evaluate its effectiveness.
- A recommended kit list for a novice winter walker could be priced with a variety of budgets in mind.



6. Snowcraft and walking skills

6.1 Demonstrate good practice with regard to individual walking skills: pace, rhythm, foot placement, conservation of energy, balance, and coordination.

6.2 Demonstrate an ability to kick personal steps using a variety of techniques in ascent/descent/traverse.

Snowcraft

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

6.3 Selection of an ice axe of suitable length and design, and its care and maintenance.

6.4 Carriage and use of the axe for balance and support in a fashion appropriate to the slope and snow conditions.

6.5 Carriage and use of the axe when kicking steps up, down and across slopes of hard snow.

6.6 Cutting the appropriate type of step up, down and across steep slopes of hard snow for personal use.

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

6.7 Carriage of the ice axe in a fashion that allows rapid deployment for self-belay and for self-arrest.

6.8 Self-arrest from any sliding position.

6.9 Self-arrest of a tumbling fall quickly and effectively.

Using microspikes (also known as micro-crampons) demonstrate safe and appropriate movement as follows:

6.10 Explain the use and limitations of microspikes with regard to terrain, underfoot conditions and safety considerations.

6.11 Select microspikes of a suitable design, and explain their care and maintenance.

6.12 Identify appropriate terrain and conditions for the safe and efficient use of micro-spikes.

6.13 Attach and remove microspikes from boots.

6.14 Demonstrate movement up, down and across **the above terrain**.

6.15 Adapt technique to suit a variety of underfoot conditions, for example, exposed water ice and hard névé (or icy compacted snow).

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

6.16 Selection of crampons of a suitable design, and their care and maintenance.

6.17 Attachment to and removal from boots.

6.18 Movement up, down and across hard snow using the appropriate technique; flat footing, front pointing, or a mixture of both.

6.19 Adoption of techniques to suit a variety of underfoot conditions, for example, water ice, hard snow, new snow and soft wet snow.

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

6.20 Deliver practised demonstrations in all the above walking, ice axe, crampon and microspike/micro-crampon techniques that ensure the leader is seen as an expert model for the technique.

6.21 Demonstrate good choice of appropriate safe terrain to teach techniques.

Guidance

Being able to use their boots to make/kick personal and group steps in a variety of snow types and the safe and effective use of axe and crampons are fundamental skills of the Winter Mountain Leader. Candidates are expected to be very competent in using an ice axe and crampons on a variety of terrain, including Grade I ground, and in a variety of snow and ice conditions.

Winter Mountain Leaders should also understand the appropriate use of microspikes/micro-crampons and be practised in their use on suitable terrain.

The pace of a journey is also your responsibility and different strategies can be employed depending on the size and makeup of the group and their relative fitness levels. Try to maintain a pace that allows you to talk to others whilst you are moving, and allows them to talk to you as well. This will help novice walkers not to travel too quickly. Such a strategy will also reduce excessive energy expenditure and avoid ‘wetting out’ clothing through sweating, reducing its insulation properties. Strategies for trail breaking in deep snow whilst conserving the energy of all group members should also be considered.

Walking across uneven, snow-covered ground is commonplace in the winter mountains and can be a new skill for some participants. Travelling over snow- and ice-covered terrain may also require the use of an ice axe and crampons. The term ‘snowcraft’ is used to describe core ice axe and crampon skills used for facilitating safe and efficient travel over steep and/or icy terrain.

Winter Mountain Leaders will frequently need to give basic tuition to novice walkers in winter walking and snowcraft techniques. This role is undertaken within a wider context of supporting your group to safely complete a winter journey. During the journey choose suitable locations to teach appropriate techniques to ensure you can create a simple structure and clear progression in context.



Chapter 6 Moving on snow

Key practice points

- Practise your personal movement using axe and crampon skills on a variety of terrain, for example hard snow, soft snow, icy snow, snow-covered rock, mixed ground (ice, turf, snow and rock).
- Consider what advice you might give to someone crossing an icy snow slope for the first time. What information might help them cross the slope securely and confidently?
- Practise providing clear and correct demonstrations of using an ice axe and walking in crampons as an ‘expert model’.
- Get plenty of full day walks under your belt; ideally carrying the kit that you might need as the leader of a group.



7. Navigation

Winter Mountain Leaders should have the ability to choose from a range of techniques and select those that are appropriate to the terrain and conditions. Using both analogue and digital tools they should be able to:

7.1 Navigate using a variety of commonly used maps and understand the use of scales and symbols.

7.2 Demonstrate an understanding of how contours and other cartographic methods are used to represent relief and use them to effectively navigate in the terrain. Be able to recognise topographical features in the landscape.

7.3 Relate the map to the ground and vice versa. Recognise key features in the landscape and identify them on a map.

7.4 Choose appropriate safe and efficient routes between geographical features in poor conditions.

7.5 Be able to relocate efficiently in a range of situations. Provide a six-figure grid reference on doing so.

7.6 Measure distance accurately on a variety of maps and calculate how long it will take to get from one location to another.

7.7 Effectively measure distance travelled on the ground using appropriate techniques, in complex terrain and/or poor visibility.

7.8 Use a compass effectively to navigate in complex terrain and/or poor visibility.

7.9 Navigate competently in poor visibility due to weather conditions or darkness.

7.10 Explain and use the information given on maps with regard to rights of way and access to land.

7.11 Demonstrate an understanding of GPS and smartphone navigation apps' strengths and weaknesses in winter environments (e.g., battery life, accuracy, user interface challenges).

7.12 Demonstrate using a rope to safeguard progress in poor conditions.

Guidance

For the Winter Mountain Leader qualification, navigation is probably the most important aspect of the syllabus, and poor navigation skills continue to be the most common weakness for candidates during assessment. The major difference between summer and winter is that in winter, far greater use is made of dead reckoning and distance estimation. In zero visibility, the skills of walking accurately on a compass bearing for a set distance are crucial. It requires a sound grasp of contour interpretation and the use of appropriate navigational planning strategies such as aiming off, attack points and catching features. All these need to be backed up with well-practised relocation strategies.

It is important that you can navigate efficiently, accurately and confidently whilst still being able to look after a group, avoid hazards and make the journey interesting. Winter Mountain Leaders have such a mastery of navigation they should be able to locate any feature on a map or in the terrain and relocate in any hill or mountain location.

Your experience will also help you to become a more skilful navigator as you confidently choose the right technique to suit the terrain and visibility.

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

Access to and the use of electronic navigation aids such as GPS, smartphones and GPS watches has significantly increased in recent years. In addition, technology has improved vastly in terms of battery life/types in such units. They are more reliable now and used correctly can be a powerful navigation tool. Candidates should be able to demonstrate navigation competence using map and compass as well as competence with both electronic navigation devices and digital mapping.



Chapter 4 Winter navigation

Key practice points

- Navigate across unfamiliar ground wherever possible; it will develop your mountaineering judgement.
- When verifying or locating your position, use your observation skills to identify at least four pieces of terrain information and ensure they ‘fit’ your current location.

- Ensure that you are comfortable with using a variety of map scales e.g. 1:25,000, 1:40,000 and 1:50,000 scale maps in all conditions.
- Develop your map memory.



8. Security on steep ground

On Grade I ground, using an ice axe and crampons as appropriate, demonstrate safe, efficient and confident personal movement so that the following technical obstacles may be overcome:

8.1 Cornices.

8.2 Water ice.

8.3 Hard snow.

8.4 Rock steps.

8.5 Mixed ground.

Candidates should be able to efficiently and safely:

8.6 Demonstrate the ability to manage a group and individuals and ensure safe travel on steep ground by:

8.6.1 Kicking steps suitable for novices to safely follow in both ascent/descent/traverse.

8.6.2 Cutting steps for novices to safely follow in ascent/descent/traverse.

8.6.3 Creating a suitable stance/platform on which an individual/group may take temporary refuge.

8.7 In an emergency or unplanned event, provide confidence or assistance using a rope. This includes the ability to:

8.7.1 Explain the suitability of different types, sizes and lengths of rope, slings and karabiners.

8.7.2 Demonstrate safe and efficient rope management.

8.7.3 Demonstrate safe and appropriate knots.

8.7.4 Demonstrate safe and appropriate methods of belaying, including choice and construction of anchors in snow and mixed terrain.

8.7.5 Hold slips and arrest short slides using dynamic belay techniques.

8.7.6 Demonstrate the use, and explain the limitations, of using the rope alone:

i to protect the whole party in descent or ascent on a short section of steep ground.

ii to safeguard a single party member on exposed non-serious walking terrain.

iii to safeguard themselves in descent on steep ground.

Guidance

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

Due to the nature of mountainous areas, Winter Mountain Leaders need to be able to operate safely on steep snow-covered ground, either through choice or because circumstances have forced them onto such terrain. Effective Winter Mountain Leaders have spent time developing good judgement and decision-making skills that enable them to

choose routes through or around steep ground that do not require the planned use of the rope, which is beyond the scope of this qualification. Rope - work is included in the syllabus because unpredictable situations may arise where the rope is necessary to safeguard members of the group.

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

Simple tasks with the rope such as uncoiling, preparing the rope and knot-tying can and should be practised anywhere and you should aim for a high standard in these aspects. A more difficult skill is the ability to choose a safe and suitable anchor since this reflects consider able experience – there is no room for serious error here. Assessors will accept any safe method of constructing anchors. The ability to set up a certain type of belay system is less important than your ability to assess whether such a technique would be appropriate.



Part 4 Security on steep ground

Key practice points

- Develop your personal experience of a range of mountain terrain in winter.
- Practise cutting bucket steps and kicking steps and view them as security on steep ground tools.
- Develop the breadth of your experience by practising steep ground scenarios in a variety of contexts. This should also allow you to gain experience of different snow-packs and conditions.



9. Teaching and learning skills

Winter Mountain Leaders should be able to teach others and promote learning to ensure the safe enjoyment of winter mountain walking. They should be able to;

9.1 Identify appropriate skills and deliver basic structured tuition appropriate to individual and group experience and goals.

9.2 Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet group needs.

9.3 Identify and use appropriate tasks to develop safe group activity.

9.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for evaluating a journey and success of the outcome.

Guidance

Candidates are expected to be able to impart fundamental technical skills, such as basic navigation, avalanche awareness and winter walking skills to support the group in completing a successful winter walk. Winter Mountain Leaders are expected to incorporate skills training into a journey, rather than running an entire day of skills training. This approach relies on the Winter Mountain Leader being opportunistic in selecting suitable terrain to cover appropriate techniques. Careful consideration of terrain during the planning phase can reduce the level of 'opportunism' whilst journeying, ensuring

effective use of terrain, and efficient use of time, for teaching appropriate techniques.

Winter Mountain Leaders need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel relaxed and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. The mountain environment can feel inhospitable at times and the activity and terrain can feel overwhelming to the uninitiated.

Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will require different approaches to achieve success. Good communication skills are key. The ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals are the foundations of effective teaching.

In addition to these communication skills, effective teaching requires Winter Mountain Leaders to be able to observe and assess participants' abilities, confidence levels and group dynamics, adapting their approach accordingly.

The 'must know' basic teaching strategies include:

- Emphasis on good solid demonstrations that ensure that the leader is seen as an expert model for the technique;
- Choosing suitable safe terrain to demonstrate and allow group members to practise appropriate techniques;
- Using an appropriate teaching model to deliver a structured progressive session to a group, for example a simple 'show and tell' approach, or an 'appropriate teaching model' could be something like IDEAS* or EDICTS** or any variation

*IDEAS = Introduction; Demonstration; Explanation; Activity; Summary.

**EDICTS = Explanation; Demonstration; Imitation; Correction; Training; Summarise.



See all Learning to lead boxes

Key practice points

- Develop a set of 'lesson plans' for teaching common tasks such as packing a winter rucksack, or kicking steps.

- Consider how you might teach a particular skill in a very direct, instructional style and how you would teach the same skill in a student-centred way. What might be the pros and cons of each?
- Consider how you might change your approach in challenging weather.



10. Access, conservation and the environment.

Winter Mountain Leaders introduce and support people to participate in winter mountain walking, encouraging sustainable and sympathetic use of the outdoor winter environment by all user. They will be able to:

10.1 Organise group and personal hygiene arrangements in a way that minimises the impact on the environment.

10.2 Inspire and enthuse their groups in winter mountainous terrain in the United Kingdom and Ireland and expand their personal knowledge*, appreciation, and understanding of winter mountain environments.

10.3 Demonstrate knowledge of permissive access agreements, rights of way and access legislation such as CRoW Act 2000 and Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the importance of being aware of, and adhering to, access restrictions where relevant.

10.4 Explain how to obtain information about access to mountainous terrain and know how, and to whom, access issues are reported.

10.5 Explain relevant campaigns and codes of good practice such as Countryside Code, Scottish Outdoor Access Code and Leave No Trace, and acknowledge one's responsibility to minimise impact and promote sustainable use of the outdoors.

10.6 Demonstrate knowledge of land management in mountainous terrain and the long-term effects of the human pressures created by its multiple uses.

10.7 Demonstrate knowledge of relevant conservation legislation as well as the nature of specially designated areas and limitations on their use. Leaders should also show an appreciation for the challenge and complexity of conservation in mountainous terrain.

*Examples of relevant personal knowledge include flora, fauna, geology, landform processes (geomorphology), local history, heritage and language, place names, folklore, the evolution of our landscape and future challenges.

Guidance

It is important for qualified Winter Mountain Leaders to have sound general knowledge of mountainous terrain which enhances the journey if they can talk knowledgeably about a range of subjects and make the most of learning opportunities when they arise. The benefits of this to group members are myriad and may include:

- fostering a deeper appreciation of the natural world and our winter uplands
- the importance of conservation and sustainable recreation, a greater understanding of pressures and constraints caused by varied land use and ownership.
- an understanding of access legislation and local arrangements.
- a greater appreciation of local culture, heritage and language.

Having the ability to educate groups on a range of subjects may also be used as a subtle and effective leadership strategy as it will enable a leader to pause the walk to give group members a rest or to keep the group together without bringing attention to individuals or situations developing within the group.

Winter Mountain Leaders should be conscious of the impacts of increased winter recreation activity, including path erosion, conflict between different recreation activities and the effect on host communities. As an absolute minimum, any led group should conform to codes of good practice, comply with relevant access legislation and any prevailing local arrangements. Winter Mountain Leaders should, therefore, always be mindful of setting a good example, demonstrating good practice and explaining the purpose of the codes which are designed to minimise the impact of recreational use on

the environment and rural communities by encouraging certain behaviours.

Occasionally, a led group may encounter a temporary restriction or change to access arrangements on a chosen route. Under such circumstances, Winter Mountain Leaders should be familiar with sourcing relevant information as required and capable of adopting a flexible and diplomatic approach to minimise conflict. In addition, Winter Mountain Leaders should recognise that all walkers have a role in maintaining access, especially in situations where access is not formally defined.

As all candidates will be members of a mountaineering council it is expected that they should be familiar with the work undertaken by the councils with regard to access, conservation and the environment.

Particular areas of concern that are subject to change include:

- Parking
- Ski areas
- Sanitation
- Winter flora and fauna



Chapter 2 Environmental issues

11. Background knowledge

11.1 Explain the role and ethos of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils and walking clubs. Demonstrate an awareness of the history, traditions and ethics of recreational winter mountain walking in the UK and Ireland.

Mountain Training

The network of awarding organisations who administer skills courses and leadership qualifications. Approved providers deliver the courses.

Mountaineering councils

The councils protect the interests of walkers, climbers and mountaineers and the cliffs, hills and mountains they enjoy.



Mountain Training Association

Mountain Training's membership association providing support and development opportunities for trainee and qualified candidates.

Guidance

The nature of winter walking as a recreational activity doesn't require a formal system of governance, however there is a web of support, comprising the national Mountain Training organisations, the Mountain Training Association and the mountaineering councils, among other organisations. These organisations directly and indirectly support and enable activity across the spectrum, from youth groups and challenge events to independent adults and professional instructors.

Mountain Training provides skills training and nationally recognised leadership qualifications and information on good practice through a range of publications. Gaining a Mountain Training qualification is the formalisation of your experience and competence to be responsible for others. Through a network of approved course providers across the UK and Ireland, over 10,000 candidates attend a Mountain Training course each year and go on to lead and inspire millions of people. Mountain Training's vision, mission and ethos underpins all decision making and activity.

Candidates can join Mountain Training's Association (MTA) as a Trainee or Full member. In joining the association, you will have access to training opportunities, support, and become part of a community of trainee and qualified leaders. The Association provides the highest quality personal development opportunities including workshops, webinars a yearly conference, and a quarterly magazine.

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC), Mountaineering Scotland and Mountaineering Ireland work to protect the interests of walkers, climbers and mountaineers and the cliffs, hills and mountains they enjoy. Without their work, access to these spaces would be curtailed for all, including for leaders, coaches and instructors. By joining a mountaineering council, you are helping to ensure this access today and for the future.

Hill walking clubs and organisations can be useful in guiding participants into long-term independent participation; they include well-established local or national clubs and less formal online groups. As a leader novices may look to you for advice on how to find other people to walk with and how to develop confidence and competence. Your ability to direct them to appropriate courses such as Mountain Training's Hill & Mountain Skills qualification or guidance on finding a club can lead to a lifetime of enjoyment.

Appendix 1 - Definitions

Mountainous country:

For the Winter Mountain Leader qualification, 'mountainous country' may be defined as wild country which may contain unavoidable snow and/or ice covered steep and rocky ground where walkers are dependent upon themselves for immediate help. In the United Kingdom and Ireland mountainous country includes:

- Lake District
- Northwest Highlands
- Central Highlands
- Grampian Mountains (East and Central Highlands)
- Southern Highlands
- Western Highlands & Islands
- North and Far North (Scotland)
- Mountains of Mourne
- Galloway Hills
- Cork & Kerry Mountains
- Galway & Mayo Mountains
- Donegal Mountains
- Dublin & Wicklow Mountains
- Eryri / Snowdonia
- Bannau Brycheiniog / Brecon Beacons

Winter Quality Mountain Day (QMD)

Winter QMDs make a positive contribution towards a person's development and maturity as an all-round mountaineer.

As with 'summer' quality mountain days, the quality of a winter QMD lies in such things as the conditions experienced both overhead and underfoot, the exploration of new areas, the terrain covered, the skills deployed and the physical and mental challenge. They are more demanding than a 'summer' QMD as candidates continue to develop their experience, fitness, technical competence and decision making skills while simultaneously dealing with winter weather and conditions.

The Scottish Highlands in winter conditions present a wide variety of hazards that need to be managed and the physical effort required to complete a winter quality mountain day is substantial.

Other areas such as North Wales, the Lakes and Ireland have winter conditions, but you are often never that far from a road or habitation offering a fast and comparatively easy escape from the mountains. That is not always the case in the Scottish Highlands which is why at assessment 50% of the minimum required number of winter QMDs must be in Scotland.

All the following criteria should be fulfilled:

- The individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- Navigation skills are required away from marked/well used paths.
- Experience must be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in UK and Irish mountainous terrain.
- Knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- Attention is paid to safety.
- The journey is five hours or more.
- Conditions encountered should be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in the UK and Ireland in true winter conditions.
- Ascent of a substantial peak would normally be included in the day.
- An ice axe and crampons are likely to be required.

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

Winter Quality Mountain Days for registration:

The intent of the registration application process is to ensure candidates have sufficient and appropriate personal experience and competence as a winter walker/mountaineer to safely attend training, and ensure they attain maximum benefit from their training experience.

For registration purposes, experience gained in other areas can also be recorded if similar conditions to those found in the UK and Ireland in true winter conditions were encountered. However, at least 75% of the minimum requirements should be in the UK and Ireland.

A simple approach when logging winter QMDs for registration is to use the description section for the day to evidence each of the criteria.

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

However, these days can and should be recorded in the appropriate place in your DLOG even though they are not suitable for Winter Mountain Leader personal winter experience registration purposes.

Winter graded ground

In climbing terminology, Grade I ground is taken to mean “uncomplicated average angled snow climbs normally having no pitches but which ma y present cornice difficulties or have significant or potentially hazardous run-outs”, normally considered to be gully climbs. No 4 Gully, Aladdin’s Couloir or Parsley Fern Gully are prime examples. However, for the Winter Mountain Leader qualification it is best to think of Grade I ground in a more typical hill walking setting, where it is taken to mean “snow-covered ground, often with easy angled steps of ice, neve or rock on which a fall or slip could have potentially serious consequences”. Climbs more difficult than Grade I are more than likely to include this standard of terrain on the approach, at the top or at other places on the route.

In other words, Grade I ground need not only be encountered in long gullies but could be sections of open slope which require techniques in addition to those normally associated with walking. It is not necessarily the angle of the ground or the length of the slope that is important, but the type of ground, the quality of the snow covering it, and the consequences of a slip.

The requirement of ten Grade I or above-named UK and Irish winter climbs or equivalent mountaineering routes for assessment is to ensure candidates are comfortable and experienced on this type of terrain. It ensures that you have practised many of the security on steep ground techniques taught during the training course. Your steep ground experience will also help develop your decision making in terms of route choice and the suitability or otherwise for your groups.

The need for experience of a range of mountain terrain in winter cannot be over-emphasised. It is one thing to know the quirks of a particular mountain from past experience, but a very different thing to encounter them for the first time enroute and have to make decisions about how best to proceed. The qualification requires you to be technically competent and safe using only the equipment that a leader and group would carry for a winter walking expedition - for instance, rope, sling, karabiner, ice axe and

lightweight shovel. Assessment does not require the use of technical winter climbing gear such as nuts, camming devices, ice screws or rock pegs. During the training course you will be taught security on snow and ice techniques using the walking equipment outlined above.

Summer and Winter conditions

The term 'summer conditions' is used to describe any conditions not covered by the term 'winter conditions'. 'Winter conditions' can be defined as the time when snow and ice prevail, and travel requires the skills and equipment required to cope with the special hazards of winter conditions. Mountain Training Scotland's Winter Mountain Leader qualification provides specific training and assessment for winter conditions in the hills and mountains of the UK and Ireland.

Neither term can be defined b y a portion of the year, i.e. 'summer conditions' can prevail during the winter months. Likewise it is possible, especially in high mountain areas of Scotland, for extensive snow and ice to prevail well into summer.

Poor visibility/darkness

The terms 'poor visibility' and/ or 'darkness' are used to describe situations where an individual's line of sight, i.e. how far they can see, may be limited by weather (e.g. 'white-out', blizzards) environment (e.g. plantation woodland, complex rolling terrain) and/or time of day (e.g. night time). Any combination of any or all of these can severely restrict a person 's line of sight requiring specialist navigation skills to navigate their journey safely and efficiently. Night-time alone does not in and of itself equate to darkness. During the summer months in Scotland, assuming clear skies, it never really gets dark.

Likewise in clear weather with a full moon it is unlikely to be dark enough to warrant reliance on specialist navigational techniques and skills.

Winter steep ground

'Winter steep ground' as described by Mountain Training is snow-covered ground, often with easy angled steps of ice, neve, or rock on which a fall or slip could have potentially serious consequences. It may include complex terrain where a leader's experience in identifying a safe route is demanded, and decisions about managing safety on exposed slopes, steps or sections will require judgement and foresight.

Appendix 2 - Additional information

Developing winter experience

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

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

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

Candidates will be required, on their assessment, to move about on Grade I mountaineering type ground, which could be steep open snow slopes, snow covered rock and turf, hard neve, etc.

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

If using an alternative electronic or paper logbook candidates are requested to identify their best 40 winter QMDs when submitting logbooks to assessors. A * by the side of the entry, and/or highlighted, is recommended (the Mountain Training DLOG has a ‘flagging’ feature which can be used for this purpose).

Leadership experience

Candidates are advised to gain some practice in leading parties in easy winter upland terrain. Working under the guidance of a suitably experienced leader in more difficult terrain is also recommended. Every opportunity should be taken to practice the skills learned during training.

Days assisting a more experienced leader are also very valuable but do not count as quality days (and should be logged separately). Whilst you are assisting a leader, they are the one ultimately making the judgements and decisions and having overall responsibility; you may be picking up tips about how to manage groups, but your personal abilities will not be being stretched.

Days spent leading groups, including peer groups, are valuable experience and can be counted as quality mountains days (QMD) if they meet the QMD criteria. This experience often pays dividends at assessment. However, candidates are advised to ensure they have sufficient independent personal experience of operating in winter which supports them to develop the required fitness, technical competence, decision-making skills, etc. They should also be mindful of the consequences of any decisions or actions that may arise due to lack of experience/practice.

Overseas experience

Whilst overseas experience can be useful as an indication of breadth of experience, if these days are used as part of your logged 'quality days' they should be in similar terrain and conditions to those found in the UK and Ireland to be truly relevant as preparation for assessment.

Experience gained in areas other than the UK and Ireland can be recorded if undertaken in similar conditions to those found in the UK and Ireland.

At registration at least 75% of the minimum requirements, should be in the UK and Ireland. At assessment,75% of the minimum requirements must be UK and Ireland based and at least 50% gained in Scotland.

Course delivery

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Winter Mountain Leader courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the Candidate Management System (CMS) https://mt.tahdah.me or on our website http://www.mountain-training.org/find/find-a-course.

Your training and assessment result will be recorded on the Candidate Management System (CMS).

Exemption from training

Attendance on a winter training course is normally mandatory. The exemption route is open to:

- Candidates who already have substantial personal experience in winter conditions in mountainous areas, as well as experience in the leadership of groups, may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements of attendance at an assessment course. They should also have at least two years' experience of leading groups.
- Those candidates who have completed their military Winter Mountain Leader training and wish to complete their assessment in the Mountain Training Winter Mountain leader qualification.
- Candidates who have not completed their training course, for whatever reason (Their course director will have provided additional individualised guidance in this regard).

To apply for exemption, candidates must:

- Be registered, and have had their registration approved, on the Winter Mountain Leader qualification.
- Obtain and complete and exemption application form from Mountain Training Scotland.
- Ensure their DLOG is up to date with the required assessment prerequisites experience.
- Email their completed application form and fee for exemption.
- Candidate should allow at least three weeks for completion of this process.

Without a training exemption being granted candidates cannot attend an assessment course. Due to the above process, we will not consider applications from individuals who are already booked onto an assessment course. There is no exemption from assessment.

Complaints and appeals procedure

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond qualification

Once you have passed the Winter Mountain Leader assessment you are responsible for remaining current and up to date with good practice for as long as you are using y our qualification. Mountain Training would like to encourage you to regularly dedicate some time to your development both as a hill walker and as a Winter Mountain Leader.

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

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

The national Mountain Training organisations endorse this view, while emphasising that nationally recognised qualifications are the key components in such an approach.

Remaining current and competent can be achieved in various ways, one of which is to join an association. The Mountain Training Association is a membership association designed to support both trainee and qualified candidates by providing access to developmental workshops, conferences, and peer learning events among other member benefits.

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



Appendix 3 – The assessment process

The Winter Mountain Leader qualification assessment

This handbook has been prepared for candidates at all stages of the winter qualification.

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

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

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

About the assessment process

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

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

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

assessors, although generally one will be the main examiner.

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

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

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

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

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

- Navigation, which can be very testing in poor visibility . Specific areas are contour interpretation, appropriate strategies for successfully achieving the leg and relocation strategies.
- Quality Mountain Days. A lack of a fully completed logbook or DLOG evidencing a minimum of 40 QMDs, 50% of which are advised to be spread across the high mountains of Scotland under winter conditions.
- The personal skills and organisation to remain comfortable in the mountains in winter.
- Security on steep ground, particularly being able to construct anchors in snow and mixed terrain.
- Party supervision, particularly in bad weather or on difficult terrain.
- Assessment of avalanche risk.

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

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

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

However, in extreme conditions the assessment Course Director may have to abandon the process of assessment.

Appendix 4 – Candidate management system and DLOG

Mountain Training uses software powered by tahdah to record y our journey through our qualifications.

You can use the system to:

- register for a qualification
- search for a training or assessment course
- join an association or mountaineering council
- buy recommended books from the Mountain Training shop
- record your experience in DLOG (the digital logbook)
- access e-learning modules - https://mt.tahdah.me

Logging your experience

The foundation of your success as a Winter Mountain Leader is your experience. It is this experience that enables you to learn from the training course, consolidate your learning, pass an assessment and then continue to develop as an instructor and climber.

There are fourteen activities you can log, including walking, lowland walking and winter walking and all of them start by searching the database. There are some information boxes on the screen - please read these to help with the logging process.

Top tips:

- 'Winter Walking' should be used to log walks in winter conditions in the UK and Ireland. 'International Trekking' should be used to record winter walking outside the UK and Ireland.
- Use the description box to describe your route and key learnings from the day, particularly if you're logging it as a Winter Quality Mountain Day.
- Non-QMD winter walks are still useful supporting evidence so feel free to log time spent practising particular skills or walks in non-mountainous parts of the country.

Uploading your previous experience

If you have recorded your experience in another format already and want to start using DLOG, you can upload your existing logbook as a file to the Files tab. (The Files tab accepts various file formats including word, excel, pdf, jpg and png.)

Many candidates who do this also choose to create DLOG records for their most recent or most significant walks.

Sharing your DLOG

When you book on to a training or assessment course, your logbook will become visible to the course director.

If you would like some feedback prior to this, you can share your logbook with a mentor/ friend/future course director by clicking on the Share tab, entering their email address and selecting the length of time they can access it.

Mountain Training Association

Our association is a membership organisation that can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications.

As a membership association we are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

We can help you with:

- Big savings on clothing and equipment
- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities for continuing personal/professional development
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance from experts and peers within the profession
- Specially negotiated rates for liability insurance for qualified members

Anyone can join from the moment they register for a Mountain Training qualification, and can join anytime when working towards a qualification or when qualified.

Join via your account on the Mountain Training Candidate Management System (Tahdah – CMS).

"The workshops I've done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader" Alex, Association member.

"The Association offers an excellent range of CPD, which has given me a broader understanding of the role, skills and expertise required to be a great leader. Definitely recommend." Charlie, Association member.