



Mountain Skills

Winter is coming

A concise guide to your first winter in the mountains

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THE winter months see the mountains at their most dramatic. Nothing beats those calm winter days with the snow-covered mountains etched against a cobalt blue sky and just shouting out to be climbed. But should you go? The answer is a big fat 'YES', followed by an equally big fat 'YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED'.

The rewards in winter are great, but the mountains pose their own challenges, and the key is for us to be well prepared for them.

Planning is key

Do your homework before you head out by checking a mountain-specific weather forecast and the excellent resources on the Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) website. Take the time to fully absorb the information on the SAIS pages and learn how to avoid potentially dangerous areas. Taking note of the wind speed and direction from the weather forecasts is vital for a successful day. Make sure your journey on the high ground is planned with the wind behind you



Useful Links

Mountain Weather: www.mwis.org.uk;
www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/specialist-forecasts/mountain

Scottish Avalanche Information Service: www.sais.gov.uk

Advice on getting started in winter including a winter kit list: www.mountaineering.scot/activities/mountaineering/winter-mountaineering/getting-started

Winter skills courses: www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/courses-and-events/our-courses/winter-skills

Winter navigation courses: www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/courses-and-events/our-courses/navigation-courses

and remember that wind speeds of 35-40 mph will start to affect your balance and stability. Winds more than 60mph are not unusual and will likely mean choosing a lower route.

Winter kit

Additional kit is vital for your winter adventures. Put those bendy summer boots away and invest in a rigid-soled boot which will give support and a good 'edge' for travelling on snow-covered terrain. Adding an ice axe and crampons is essential – as, of course, is gaining the knowledge of how to use them. Treat yourself to a winter skills course to learn the basics.

Navigation

If visibility is poor and the ground snow-covered, navigation is challenging and potentially life-threatening if you are near a corniced edge. Map and compass are essential, as is the skill to use them efficiently in poor conditions such as limited visibility. Practice your skills at low level before you need them 'in anger' on the mountain. Again, a short course can be very beneficial and definitely money well spent.

And finally

Be conservative. A round of four Munros in summer conditions may be very achievable, but in winter, with high winds and deep snow

cover, your normal 4km-an-hour pace could be reduced to less than 1km.

Take a progressive approach. Choose to develop your winter experience on lower, less steep and craggy terrain before you venture onto more serious, consequential ground. You can find out a lot more and get detailed advice on winter mountaineering in the #ThinkWINTER section of our website at www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/thinkwinter