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Skills for the Hills: inspiration and safety in Scotland's mountains

An ever-growing number of Scots are escaping to the hills to enjoy a variety of mountain adventures each year. With spring just around the corner, over thirty of Scotland's leading outdoor organisations will be joining forces this March for the biggest event of its kind, aiming to equip all those who love the Scottish outdoors with the skills they need to venture out safely.

Held at the Royal Concert Halls, Glasgow, on Saturday 25 March, *Skills for the Hills* is organised by the Scottish charity, Mountain Aid, in conjunction with Mountaineering Scotland. It is set to inspire, educate and entertain the many who head onto our hills, be they summer hill walkers, all-weather climbers or mountain bikers. It also seeks to encourage the many more who don't know what they are missing, and signpost some of the ways they can get started.

The event will be officially opened by outdoor broadcaster and journalist Cameron McNeish, who has been a patron of Mountain Aid since 2010, and will deliver a keynote lecture on the day. He is passionate about encouraging people of all ages to enjoy the unique mountain landscapes on their doorstep, but to do so with a healthy respect for the risks and skills involved; "for me, climbing hills and mountains is the most wonderful activity imaginable, but it's not without risks. Like everything else in life, you learn to recognise the risks and you equip yourself with the skills to try and manage them. That is what *Skills for the Hills* is all about."

A varied programme of talks will also give practical advice from expert speakers including Heather Morning, Mountain Safety Advisor with Mountaineering Scotland, a representative from SARDA, the Search and Rescue Dogs Association, and survival skills personality from Backwoods Survival School, Patrick McGlinchey.

There will be interactive skills work stations covering mountain weather services, navigation, first aid for the hills, avalanche awareness, and forecasting.

Highlighting those who give up their time voluntarily to rescue hill goers when things go wrong, several local mountain rescue teams will attend, as will the Search and Rescue Dog Association (SARDA), with both two and four-legged members.

Leading outdoor retailers Cotswold Outdoor, Craigdon Mountain Sports, Nevisport and Tiso will be on hand to offer their expertise, advising about walking boots and other essential kit, the benefits of walking poles in summer and the necessity of ice axes and crampons in winter. They'll also have a comprehensive range of equipment on display, including clothing, rucksacks, sleeping bags, stoves, tents and survival gear.

With Scotland's growing reputation for world-class mountain biking, *Skills for the Hills* will be welcoming members of the Developing Biking in Scotland team from the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome. There will also be a wide range of mountain bikes on display, along with experts to answer your questions.

Other organisations represented in the exhibition hall will include Glenmore Lodge – the National Centre for the Outdoors, the John Muir Trust, the Mountain Bothies Association, the Scottish Youth Hostel Association, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, and Ramblers Scotland. Mountaineering Scotland, the organisation which already represents over 13000 Scottish hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers will be there, alongside local mountain activity clubs. There will also be a taste of mountaineering history from the Scottish Mountain Heritage Collection, collated by mountain guide and mountain rescue veteran, Mick Tighe. For a full list, see the Mountain Aid website: www.mountainaid.org.uk.

News in brief:

Skills for the Hills – Scotland's biggest gathering of outdoor organisations and mountain enthusiasts – will take place on Saturday 25 March, 10am to 4.30pm. An entrance fee of £2 per adult and £1 per child will allow access to all the stands, workstations, talks and lectures, plus the chance to win a variety of exclusive prizes.

Full details of the event programme can be found on the Mountain Aid website at www.mountainaid.org.uk.

Ends

- For media enquiries, interviews and photo requests, contact Neil Reid, Mountaineering Scotland Communications Officer on 01738 493942.

Photos to accompany this press release are downloadable here:

http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/Cameron_McNeish.jpg

Cameron McNeish

[http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/glen_feshie_oct_15_\(13\).JPG](http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/glen_feshie_oct_15_(13).JPG)

Generic image of walkers practising navigation in the hills above Glen Feshie

http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/Heather_Morning_feb_2015.JPG

Heather Morning