



St John
Scotland

Press Release

10 March 2016

For immediate release

Skilling students for winter mountains

Partnership between MCoS and St John Scotland targets 'high risk' group

While wintertime accidents in Scotland's mountains have once more led to ill-thought-out calls to restrict access to the mountains in winter, a partnership project between the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and charity St John Scotland has been taking a more positive and practical approach.

Through the partnership a highly qualified Mountain Safety Instructor has teamed up with Scottish university mountaineering clubs to give 'on the mountain' training to small groups of students and also give safety lectures to larger groups.

Up until the end of February, 60 students had benefited from the training on the hill and 130 from the evening lectures.

The Mountain Safety Instructor scheme was devised by St John Scotland and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in 2015, targeting a group that is traditionally regarded as 'high risk' in what is already a sport with an element of risk.

Nick Carter holds the Mountaineering Instructor Certificate, the highest qualification in the British Mountaineering Instructor scheme. Through the winter he has been working with university mountaineering clubs, particularly 'freshers', who join clubs in the first weeks of arriving at university and who may go into the hills to face challenging weather conditions without appropriate training.

Students learn a range of essential winter mountaineering skills, including navigation, use of ice axe and crampons, moving on steep ground, avalanche danger and choosing a route depending on conditions, and use of emergency shelters.

The value of Nick's work has been underlined by comments from some of those who have been on club meets where he has been on hand for training and advice.

One student from Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club said afterwards: "I took winter more seriously and saw it in a different perspective, realising my previous over-confidence."

A participant from St Andrews University, said: "Nick did a great job of explaining, demonstrating, and teaching numerous safety and climbing skills to us. He gave us a solid understanding of checking

forecasts so that good decisions can be made before going out for a climb and identifying hazards while out. He taught us to determine the safest route choice in a variety of situations, as well as useful navigation skills. I definitely feel that all club members will be safer in the mountains now. We are certainly better prepared to avoid and respond to dangerous situations in the mountains because of Nick's instruction."

Another St Andrews student said: "The weather on the day of our excursion was absolutely horrible – which allowed us to learn and practice firsthand the skills needed to cope with such conditions, such as navigating in white-out conditions."

St John Scotland, which funds the scheme, is a leading care charity and the biggest single supporter of the voluntary mountain rescue movement in Scotland.

Nick Carter said: "This is a great idea from St John Scotland and something which is very much needed. In many university clubs even the senior members may not have the experience or perhaps the confidence to instruct beginners. I firmly believe that it's important to catch people young and prepare them for a lifetime of safely enjoying the mountains."

Heather Morning the Mountain Safety Advisor with the MCofS, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for university club members to obtain qualified instruction during their winter meets, at no cost to the club or students, with the aim of enhancing their awareness of the skills and knowledge which will help them become more self-reliant".

Major General Mark Strudwick, Prior of St John Scotland, praised the scheme, saying: "St John Scotland's purpose is to both save and enhance life; this initiative achieves both – it allows students to more safely venture into the hills, thereby improving their fitness, leadership and, importantly, their self-confidence, while it equips them to deal with emergencies if such circumstances arise. We are proud to be collaborating with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in this way. Nick Carter has proved to be not only an outstanding instructor, but also a fantastic role model for the student community."

Ends

Notes for editors

Images for this press release are downloadable here:

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/St_John_course_1.jpg

Leading her first winter climb

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/St_John_course_4.jpg

Using a buried ice-axe as a snow anchor

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/St_John_course_6.jpg

Students enjoying their day despite the weather

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/St_John_course_7.jpg

Adjusting crampons, used to keep a grip on the ice

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/St_John_course_9.JPG

Using an ice-axe to halt a slide on a snowy slope

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/Nick_Carter.jpg

St John Scotland MIC Nick Carter

Further information

Contact Neil Reid, Communications Officer, on 01738 493941 or 07788871803 or neil@mcofs.org.uk

About the MCofS

- The MCofS acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering.
- The MCofS is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains.
- The MCofS provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.
- The MCofS is a membership organisation with over 12,000 members representing hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers, funded through a combination of membership subscriptions, non-governmental grants and investment from **sportscotland**, which supports public initiatives and services in mountain safety, mountain weather forecasting, mountain training and the development and promotion of mountaineering activities.
- The MCofS is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland. Company number SC322717.
- The Mountaineering Council of Scotland, The Old Granary, West Mill Street, Perth PH1 5QP