



Press Release

21 March 2016

For immediate release

Stay safe in the mountains this Easter

Walkers and climbers urged to leave word where they are heading

As Easter approaches, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Police Scotland have joined forces to urge outdoor enthusiasts to stay safe as they make the most of Scotland's superb mountains.

With Easter coming early this year, and snow still in the mountains, the safety message is especially important – as is advice for walkers and climbers always to leave word of where they are going. And that's underlined by hard-hitting comments from the sister of one man who has been missing in the mountains for almost a year, telling of the heartache and financial and administrative nightmares that followed his disappearance.

There are currently six people missing in Scotland's mountains. Young climbers Tim Newton and Rachel Slater went missing on Ben Nevis in February, and earlier this month Jim Robertson from Glasgow went missing in the Cairngorms.

Still missing from the summer of 2015 are three hill walkers lost in separate incidents in the Lochaber/Glencoe area: Tom Brown, Eric Cyl and Robin Garton.

Voluntary mountain rescue team members, Police Scotland, RAF mountain rescue and Search and Rescue helicopters have committed considerable time and effort in unsuccessful searches for all the missing people, even after the chances of recovering them alive have gone.

The sister of Tom Brown, Marjorie Ballantine, has spoken out about the grief and uncertainty – and the financial difficulty – that followed in the wake of his disappearance.

She said: "My experience - following the disappearance of my brother - demonstrates how irresponsible it is to set off alone without indicating to anyone where you are going – and the terrible implications for your family if you do unfortunately sustain a fatal accident and your body is never recovered.

"People like to be free to roam, but they generally have a good idea of one's objective for a day. When a person goes missing the relatives are faced with awful uncertainty and grief. There's also a legislative process of immense complexity to deal with. While the aftermath is bad enough, the next of kin are unable to administer the financial situation of their missing relative, due to legal issues, and

they suffer financial hardship while lacking information about the actions they are able to take in relation to the missing person's property.”

Police Scotland Area Commander for the South Highland area, Chief Inspector Brian Mackay, said: “At this time of year, people rightly come to the Scottish Mountains in search of the excellent winter sports and mountaineering challenges available. As spring is now upon us the conditions are ever changing, people continue to undertake the technical winter climbs, ascending Munros which may still be subjected to winter conditions.

“We do not want to discourage anyone from participating in the great outdoor experience but do advocate the benefits of taking the time to share your intentions with another in case things go wrong. We work closely with the volunteer mountain rescue teams in Scotland to provide a world class service any time and in any weather. We have experienced a number of challenging searches for missing climbers in recent months, including for people who have left minimal or no information regarding their intentions.

“When walkers are reported overdue or missing, having left no information about their intended walking route, police and mountain rescue face the potential of having to widen the search to the entire mountain range, which poses a significant challenge. We know that not everyone will want to leave a written route card, but we are asking the hill-going public, and even those on lower level rambles, to make sure that somebody knows where they are going, so that we have a better idea where to look for them if they are overdue.”

Heather Morning, Mountain Safety Advisor with The Mountaineering Council of Scotland, endorsed Marjorie Ballantine’s comments about leaving word, and added: “No one wants to feel as though they are controlled or restrained when they head into the hills; likewise none of us would imagine that it might be ourselves that gets into difficulty.

“However, whenever I go out alone – or with a group – I always let someone know which mountain/route I am heading for. It might be as simple as texting or emailing a friend with my intended plans, or giving someone a call. Losing a family member in the mountains is bad enough, but to not have any 'closure' with no body being found must be the worst possible scenario.”

In addition, Heather advises anyone heading out into the mountains this Easter to check out the current mountain weather, and the avalanche and snow conditions (www.mwis.org.uk & www.sais.gov.uk) to help them plan a great day out.

“Scotland’s mountains are a beautiful, awe-inspiring and challenging environment, and a day out in the mountains, whether on foot or ski, can be a truly magical experience”.

“But Easter is early this year and many of the higher Scottish mountains will still be holding snow. Don’t let that magical experience turn into a nightmare for you and your family this Easter.

“Planning ahead and researching your route and conditions will help you decide what kit to take with you. For example, will your intended route cross snow patches? Are these likely to be hard snow? Perhaps your route takes you up a north facing corrie which will hold snow and likely remain firm while in the shade. If that is the case, then ice axe and crampons will definitely be required.”

More information to keep you safe in the mountains and have a great day out can be viewed at www.mcofs.org.uk/mountain-safety.asp

Ends

Notes for editors

Images for this press release are downloadable here:

http://www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/Heather_Morning&Milly.JPG

www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/media/heather_morning_2012.jpg

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

Heather Morning, Mountain Safety Adviser with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland
(Final image shows Heather in Glenelg, with snow on the background hills)

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