

# Mountain Leader

## Guidance notes for trainers and assessors

### **Definition: Quality mountain day**

In terms of experience, the quality of a mountain day lies in such things as the conditions experienced both overhead and underfoot, the exploration of new areas, the terrain covered and the physical and mental challenge. Such days make a positive contribution towards a person's development and maturity as an all-round mountaineer.

- Usually some or all of the following criteria would be fulfilled :
- the individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- navigation skills are required away from marked paths.
- experience must be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in UK and Irish hills.
- knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- attention is paid to safety .
- the journey is five hours or more.
- adverse conditions may be encountered.
- ascent of a substantial peak would normally be included in the day.

These criteria mean that days as a course member under instruction, a member of a group practising skills, or days spent repeating familiar routes are very unlikely to meet the requirements of a Quality Day. However, these can be recorded in the appropriate place in your logbook even though they are not suitable for use in meeting the minimum requirements for attending assessment.

**Note:** the term 'mountainous country' will be used throughout this document to refer to suitable terrain for the Mountain Leader that meet the quality mountain day criteria.

## Introduction

- These guidance notes should be used together with the Mountain Leader candidate handbook and the relevant national Mountain Training organisation quality manual.
- It is important that candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy the prerequisites for training and assessment courses and this must be evidenced in writing, ideally in DLOG, before attending their course.
- Overseas quality mountain days can be counted up to 50% of the minimum number required for training or assessment if they are in equivalent terrain and conditions to the UK and Irish mountains.
- Course staff should support and facilitate candidates to engage in reflective practice.
- Mountain Leader courses are for participants with considerable personal experience. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

## General principles

### Trainers

- Courses should concentrate on the skills that candidates may have difficulty in learning without expert guidance, whilst not forgetting that in reality the skills of effective leaders are integrated into a holistic performance. It is valuable to review the course programme and the candidates' progress at the end of each day.
- Trainers should be mindful of experience levels of candidates when introducing content especially if techniques shown are on the fringe of the qualification scope. Training and assessment courses should facilitate open discussion.
- At the end of the course trainers should assist candidates to develop their action plans, while referencing the Mountain Leader skills checklist.
- Candidates should be given individual debriefings and should leave the training course with a good idea of what is required of them during the consolidation period.

### Assessors

- Assessors evaluate the performance of a candidate against the syllabus requirements. Assessments should enable everyone to perform to the best of their ability under suitably testing mountainous country conditions.
- Assessors should ensure that candidates understand the tasks required of them and are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their competence. If assessment candidates are unable to demonstrate competence initially, other opportunities should be given where possible or appropriate.
- An assessor should make a realistic and objective assessment against the nationally recognised standard and not decide results by comparing candidates' abilities. They should set tasks or scenarios rather than request that specific techniques be demonstrated. Tasks set should not demand solutions that use techniques beyond the scope of the qualification.

## 1. Leader responsibilities

### Trainers

Trainers should ensure that candidates are made aware of the importance of assessing the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the group and planning the journey accordingly. Trainers should discuss with candidates how best to carry out initial preparation and budgeting exercises and how to complete detailed planning before leading day and overnight expeditions into the mountains. Candidates should be made aware of some of the formal requirements of the planning process such as gaining parental consent, organising insurance and obtaining organisational permissions. Risk assessments for both accompanied and unaccompanied journeys should be undertaken.

In the case of unaccompanied journeys trainers should make the candidates aware of the different methods of supervising groups at a distance and their pros and cons e.g. 'shadowing', digital tracking, designated meetings with a supervisor or written messages left at specific points. Procedures for when and how the group leader or the group might call for assistance should also be discussed. Candidates must be aware that unaccompanied journeys should only be undertaken by suitably experienced groups. Trainers should provide opportunities to analyse situations as they occur during practical sessions and review exercises, which involve an element of leadership.

### Assessors

Assessors should examine the candidate's ability to undertake risk assessments for planned journeys and expeditions and their strategies for dealing with emergency situations. Planning skills can initially be assessed with a presentation or written task but they should not be looked at in isolation from a candidate's practical ability to lead a group effectively in mountainous country. Questioning and tasks can be set to examine candidates' knowledge on safeguarding, duty of care, obtaining informed consent and information on participants, contingency and emergency planning, supporting special needs and planning appropriate objectives.

Assessing remote supervision should focus on the decision-making process of whether this is appropriate as well as the techniques to employ. In particular candidates should be able to describe the evidence they would need to make and justify these decisions.

### Top tips

- Setting scenario-based open questions or tasks, whether verbally or in writing, will best determine the candidates' knowledge and thought processes with regard to planning.
- Candidates' route planning should show considerable adaptability to anticipate changes in conditions, the group or the environment. This can be tested in mountainous country either for real or by setting different scenarios.

## 2. Leadership and decision making

### Trainers

Trainers should emphasise to candidates that underpinning our role as a leader are the values, beliefs, ethos and philosophy that shape our view of what leadership should be.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model used by Mountain Training provides a framework that candidates can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, followers who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations.

Transformational leadership is a model of positive (INSPIRE) behaviours that leaders can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups. Mountain Training's ethos of developing competence and independence should be contrasted with other approaches.

Training in leadership needs to be a balance between a theoretical and practical approach to group management and the leader's responsibilities. Trainers should highlight that leadership attributes can be learned, trained, and developed.

Trainers should highlight that whilst leadership attributes allow us to make good decisions and lead well, our decision making is influenced by the 'situation and environment', the leader, and the group. All leaders tend to have preferred behaviours that are heavily influenced by their personality, experience, ethos and beliefs, as do their groups. Trainers should stress that leaders will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate behaviour required by balancing the needs of both the situation and the group.

Teaching of leadership works best if it is integral to every task and situation during training. Trainers should include the more commonplace leadership tasks that occur, for example managing a group across a busy road as part of a planned journey. Training staff should recognise that they are acting as role models for candidates through their own practice during a course.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' (VSC) model can help trainers 'frame' discussions, sessions, and feedback regarding leadership and decision making. They should discuss the seven leadership attributes:

- Leadership Style: controlling versus non-controlling
- Decision-Making: what informs this & how to make them
- Leader Observations: what they should be & how to make them
- Leader Communication Skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening
- Experience & Ability: how this influences decision-making
- Emotional Intelligence: to support individualised leadership
- Group Management: techniques, styles and influences

Trainers should ensure candidates know what they are trying to achieve with regard to the 'Individual and group satisfaction and performance'. Importantly how do they – the leader – know what this is? How do they monitor it? And how do they achieve it?

Whilst there are challenges with setting scenarios involving peers during training, trainers may find that modelling leadership behaviours, then using the VSC model to review the task, can support candidates' understanding of the practical application of the Mountain Training leadership model. The following are examples of other options for structuring leadership tasks:

- Use of 'scenario' cards to promote discussion and reflection amongst the group.

- Having the group involved in decision making and route choice.
- Having the group plan breaks/food stops for the day.

Trainers should be well versed in the literature on leadership and the responsibilities of a leader, as specified for candidates, in addition to developing their own resources. Trainers should draw on their own and the candidates' experiences to discuss and expand this topic in the classroom and on the walk.

### **Assessors**

It can be challenging to provide genuine leadership situations on assessment. For example, groups of assessment candidates are not likely to react like a novice party. Much assessment however can be achieved by careful questioning throughout the course as situations arise. Assessors should consider introducing the VSC model at the beginning of the assessment and use this to help frame the assessment process and manage candidates' expectations.

Assessors should be clear in their own minds as to which aspects of leadership they can assess within the structure of the course. They should carefully consider how they use simulated situations for assessment and should make clear to candidates what is being assessed at any given time. Self-evaluation (using VSC as a framework) should be encouraged because being an effective leader depends upon leaders being aware of their behaviours, strengths and limitations.

Assessors may consider using questions based around the factors underpinning leadership and decision-making competencies e.g. can you briefly explain your personal leadership style and beliefs? How does this align with the Mountain Training ethos?

Candidates' understanding of different styles and modes of leadership should be assessed. Candidates should be able to identify their preferred behaviour(s) and therefore the style with which they are most comfortable and be able to make judgements about when changes of behaviour might be appropriate when leading a group. Assessors should give candidates opportunities to show understanding of the issues surrounding effective management in a variety of lowland situations. During the practical assessment candidates should also be presented with some common emergency situations.

Certain aspects of group management, such as pace setting, briefings and communication are relatively easy to evaluate, as are the choice and preparation of personal equipment, selection of routes over varying terrain and reaction to set emergency situations. However, the best course of action for an unanticipated situation has to be weighed carefully against possible alternatives. It is common for these situations to be used as further training for the benefit of all concerned.

Assessors should give daily debriefs, with special regard to leadership aspects. Such sessions will provide a vital platform for discussion and opportunities to compare the perceptions of all parties involved.

### **Top tips**

- Encourage candidates to think of observable behaviours that demonstrate the leadership competencies. The VSC and situational leadership models can help with this.
- Ask candidates to describe or enact leadership behaviours on the course as relevant situations arise e.g. 'What would you say/do to a mixed ability group before setting off on today's walk to

create an inclusive and positive team spirit for the day?

- Set tasks that require technical focus (e.g. micro-navigation, negotiating a diverted path through farmland) and also demand positive group management. Can they manage both?
- Home research tasks and brief interviews can examine candidates' knowledge of leadership models and their own ethos of leadership.

### 3. Planning and Weather

#### **Definition: 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 scheme provides specific training and assessment for winter conditions in the hills and mountains of the UK and Ireland.

Neither term can be defined by 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, and hence 'winter conditions', to prevail well into summer.

#### **Trainers**

Trainers should highlight the importance of planning each day, taking into account such factors as the expected weather and conditions on the hill, the level of experience, fitness and skill of the group, as well as of themselves.

The trainer should identify the basic level of weather knowledge required to enable the candidates to make appropriate judgements based on commonly available information. This can be achieved through presentations and by directing candidates to suitable material such as the Met Office e-learning module.

Additionally, it is recommended that this topic be integrated within the course on a daily basis using practical observation. Forecasts and synoptic charts should be used and compared with the local weather conditions. Interpretation and forecasting based on weather signs and patterns illustrate the practical application of this aspect of the syllabus.

#### **Assessors**

Weather knowledge might be assessed through written and oral examination including the use of home papers. Asking candidates to make daily interpretations of the weather at the start of the day and then reinforcing this on the hill emphasises and places in context the relevance of weather prediction. The assessor should be confident that candidates are able to understand how to access all the commonly available types of weather forecast and be able to evaluate their relative accuracy and reliability. They should also understand those weather forecasts and understand how mountains may affect the prevailing weather systems. Finally they should be able to integrate their understanding of the likely weather conditions into their planning as Mountain Leaders.

#### **Top tips**

- Asking candidates to research the weather forecast through various means and to present this with its implications for planning to the group is both a useful training and assessment task.
- Different weather and/or group scenarios can be given to demonstrate or assess how routes and objectives can be changed to suit the conditions and needs of the group.
- Formal route plans and their uses should be addressed, but candidates should also be encouraged to be adaptable to the demands of the day.

#### 4. Hazards and emergency procedures

**Definition: Steep ground**

‘Steep ground’ as described by Mountain Training is complex terrain where a walker’s experience in weaving a safe route is demanded, and decisions about managing safety on exposed steps or sections will require judgement and foresight. Steep ground may include broken, often vegetated ground with a fair proportion of visible, potentially loose, rock, where the consequences of a slip or fall might be serious.

*Hazards of steep ground*

**Trainers**

The importance and relevance of leaders being able to make judgements and skills required to manage a group and individuals and ensure safe travel on steep ground without the use of a rope should be covered and emphasised. The technical demands of managing a group/individual on steep ground will overlap with the ‘Leadership and Decision Making’ competencies in syllabus section 2.

The use of a rope, and its limitations, for managing unplanned circumstances e.g. route finding challenges on steep ground or tired/scared group members should be emphasised. It should be continually emphasised that this is not rock climbing. Even candidates who are rock climbers may have problems adapting to the use of a rope on its own. Trainers must examine each candidate’s logbook to ascertain their background experience. With safety and educational principles in mind, the terrain chosen should not be intimidating or dangerous.

Trainers should draw upon their own experiences to convince candidates, many of whom believe they will never take groups on to steep ground, that there are group management and rope skills which they can acquire and which may be invaluable one day.

Following an introduction to rope choice, management, knots and their relevant application, a day is generally devoted to putting these skills into practice. It is recommended that emphasis be placed on using these techniques in descent, the most likely situation to occur. Candidates should be able to use a rope to safeguard group members and themselves, where required, using appropriate techniques, to scramble over or down a short, steep or rocky section of ground. The use of lowers where the group member’s full body weight is on the rope, using complicated rope harnesses such as the Thompson knot or triple bowline, is outside the scope of the qualification.

With using a rope, a key focus of the day should be the selection and use of anchors, as this requires considerable practice. Much valuable training can be experienced whilst working in pairs but it should not be forgotten that in reality the leader would often be in charge of a larger group. Relevant

situations where the problems of group management can be discussed and demonstrated should be included at some point.

The techniques and skills of dealing with a single group member experiencing difficulties should also be covered. Various methods of giving security, both with and without a rope, should be explored. The scheme expects proficiency with the rope alone. The use of a sling and screw-gate karabiner is outside the scope of the award.

It is important that candidates are introduced to the idea that there is a continuum of types of terrain which will tend to dictate the appropriate technique. Verbal reassurance, simple physical support, the use of a rope to instil confidence, the rapid use of a direct belay and 'full on' anchoring and belaying may all have their place: the vital skill to be developed is an awareness of where those techniques are appropriate.

### **Assessors**

When assessing this aspect of the syllabus the assessor should examine the skills of group management on steep terrain both with and without the use of a rope. While there should be no undue emphasis on this part of the syllabus there should be a number of occasions during the assessment when it can be examined. This must not be in an unduly intimidating situation. Candidates should be able to tackle the problems in a relaxed frame of mind with reasonable amounts of time to complete tasks. The methods demonstrated should be safe, secure, efficient and practical with assessors recognising that there are usually several acceptable solutions.

Management skills such as the positioning of the group in relation to the leader and the various forms of un-rope assistance are valuable to a potential leader and should be examined.

### *Water hazards*

#### **Trainers**

Water hazards encompass a number of aspects such as dealing with bogs, marshes, streams and rivers. River crossings in particular can be hazardous and the training must reflect this and not be trivialised, as many candidates will not have experienced the power of even small streams. The value of sound preparation should be stressed. Training should be a combination of theoretical and practical work with the emphasis firmly on avoiding water hazards, especially river crossings. Allowing candidates to experience the power of a current to reinforce the serious nature of river crossings should be an important part of this session. However, candidates should not be exposed to situations where they could be swept away or where specialist PPE for swift water is required. Trainers must bear in mind the difficulties of safeguarding candidates in moving water. The use of a rope for river crossings is outside the scope of the scheme.

#### **Assessors**

This aspect of the syllabus can be assessed through questions and by practical demonstrations, for which group activity is acceptable. Attention should be given to hazard avoidance, sound preparation and a thorough understanding of the techniques and dangers of river crossing. It may be appropriate to deliver further training in river crossing once it has been established that candidates understand the potential dangers.

### *Emergency procedures*

Many mountaineers will encounter an emergency in the hills, and leaders should be thoroughly prepared for these situations. It should be understood that emergencies may not be a result of an



error on the part of the leader but can be the result of an unforeseen accident happening to a party member or other group/individual(s) encountered on the hill.

### **Trainers**

Accident and emergency procedures should be covered in detail. The candidates should be taught methods of search and evacuation. They should also be taught improvised rescue techniques so they could deal with a minor evacuation if necessary. This would typically be no more than about 50 metres for a prone casualty to be moved to a safer/more sheltered location.

### **Assessors**

Emergency procedures can be assessed by a combination of scenario-based questioning and practical work. Assessors should accept that there might be different solutions to examination situations. This area lends itself to discussion, particularly in groups, when differences of opinion may arise and can be used for the benefit of all candidates.

Assessors should be confident about the candidates' knowledge and ability regarding accident procedure and their responses to emergency situations. Candidates should exercise reasonable judgement and an awareness of the consequences of any particular course of action. When it comes to considering what is appropriate equipment, any decision has to balance objectives, economics and equipment availability.

### **Top tips**

- The management of hazards and emergency procedures often concerns candidates as they rarely get to practise these. Time demonstrating techniques, discussing decision making and practising scenarios is well spent in order to build their confidence.
- Candidates should be encouraged to think around problems for the best solutions rather than necessarily imitating a technique they have seen.

## **5. Equipment**

### **Trainers**

It is important to spend some time examining and discussing equipment needs with candidates. Candidates should be aware that their equipment has implications for the safety and comfort of themselves and their group. If a candidate does not have suitable equipment, trainers should be able to offer constructive advice and discuss available options. It may be appropriate for trainers to demonstrate their own personal and group equipment, discussing items that they or other trainers may elect to carry.

Candidates should be encouraged to travel light yet must also be able to deal with foreseeable emergency situations. Informal discussions offer excellent opportunities to show candidates the wide variety of equipment that is available. Trainers should ensure that all candidates understand and can use the equipment they will need as leaders and the depth of knowledge required to advise others.

### **Assessors**

An assessment course provides many opportunities to examine the suitability of each candidate's personal equipment. Equipment should be examined with regard to safety, comfort and efficiency, allowing for personal opinion that will have been developed over previous months or years.

Candidates need to be able to operate as party leaders in poor conditions and choice of personal equipment will have a bearing on their ability to do this.

Candidates' knowledge of various types of equipment requires examination, especially with regard to their recommendations to others.

**Top tips**

- Setting short (5 minute) presentation tasks assesses both a candidate's research and knowledge as well as their communication skills.

## 6. Walking Skills

**Trainers**

Candidates should be observed and taught, if necessary, to move over uneven ground with confidence and efficiency. Stance, balance, foot placement and cadence, with appropriate pace and stamina levels to lead a quality mountain day, should be addressed. They should be taught to look ahead and pick the most appropriate route on open ground for themselves and their group. Different scenarios will highlight the judgements to be made.

**Assessors**

Assessors need to determine if a candidate can fulfil their duty of care to others over a quality mountain day, including dealing with any incidents that could typically occur. Candidates do not need to demonstrate high levels of fitness and agility, but they need to be able to confidently look after themselves in mountainous terrain whilst setting an appropriate pace to keep their group safe and comfortable.

**Top tips**

- An upright walking stance on steep or uneven ground indicates good balance and efficiency of movement. This can be coached.

## 7. Navigation

**Definition: Poor visibility/darkness**

The term 'poor visibility and/or darkness' are used to describe situations where an individuals' line of sight i.e. how far they can see, may be limited by weather (e.g. mist/low cloud, heavy driving rain), 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. At high 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.

### **Trainers**

Whilst candidates will be expected to be reasonably proficient navigators this may not always be the case. Many experienced walkers have done little navigating in poor weather conditions or have employed only a limited range of techniques. Others may have mainly followed paths and used walking guides.

Teaching all the basic navigation skills will be beneficial. This will be revision for some but could be used as a model for those candidates who are in a position to teach basic navigation to their own groups. Trainers should teach navigation in relation to group leadership, including route selection and party supervision, remembering that candidates must cope with both navigation and leadership issues simultaneously.

Maps of different types and scale should be available during the course. The use of navigation aids such as global positioning systems, mobile phone apps and altimeters should be discussed. It may be useful to give practical demonstrations of these devices. Candidates should be encouraged to use the appropriate technique at any particular time and also to pay attention to the terrain around them.

Part of the training should be allocated to choosing routes over mixed and difficult terrain without the use of a map. Night navigation is often used when no poor visibility navigation has been possible during daylight hours. Trainers may also wish to include night navigation even if poor visibility has been encountered, as it is not uncommon to be walking off the hill in poor light. It should be remembered that on a clear night, navigation may be no more difficult than in daylight.

Navigation should be presented in a progressive structure so that the candidates can build and consolidate skills throughout the course. The candidates should finish the course being aware of the level of navigation ability required and what they need to do to achieve this.

### **Assessors**

The assessor should structure the tasks to ensure that all relevant navigation techniques are seen. Navigation will be assessed throughout the course so assessors can usually afford to settle candidates by initially setting simple navigation tasks. Assessors need to be certain that any errors are through lack of ability rather than as a result of 'assessment nerves' or their own failure to communicate clearly. Very careful and precise briefing of the candidate concerning what is being asked of them is essential. The other candidates must also be briefed about their role while someone else is leading the group.

Candidates should be given time to demonstrate their level of navigation ability to the assessor. They should be allowed to complete the task to the best of their ability and not be pressured into making quick decisions and mistakes. Candidates should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to adopt the appropriate technique for the situation. The assessor should look at the task set from the viewpoint of someone navigating over unfamiliar ground in a stressful situation.

A balance must be struck between micro-navigation and the broader style of navigation used when following a path or defined feature. Micro-navigation can allow a large number of comparable legs to be set in a relatively short space of time. However, a walk in mountainous country can also provide opportunities to assess navigation while reminding everyone of the nature of the activity. In all cases the elements of group management and leadership and environmental issues should not be neglected.

Assessors must satisfy themselves that candidates can navigate in the full range of weather conditions.

When the weather is good then more accurate navigation can be asked for to compensate for the lack of poor visibility. At these times night navigation may well be required although this is no guarantee of poor visibility. In these situations the skill of the assessor in selecting the appropriate terrain and setting suitable tasks is vital to the success of the assessment. Every navigation task set should help the assessor to draw relevant conclusions about the candidate.

Candidates who make a simple mistake should be given time to resolve the situation. The ability to identify and correct an error is both an essential skill for a Mountain Leader and an informative process for an assessor. The choice of appropriate techniques and the efficiency of their application may be as important as the arrival at a designated point for the assessment process.

Navigation ability must be tested with map and compass alone without the use of GPS, altimeter or other similar equipment. If candidates carry navigation aids their ability to use them may be discussed as an additional training element.

### **Top tips**

- Orienteering maps and exercises can be used to build up navigational skills very efficiently.
- Candidates need to understand the hierarchy of navigational evidence and be encouraged to develop their ground to map sense with contour interpretation above all else.
- The concept of traffic light modes of navigation and their application may be useful to introduce. Green = map away, macro navigation; Amber = map reading, ticking off features, timing etc; Red = full concentration with compass and micro-nav techniques.

## **8. Expedition skills**

### **Definition: Wild camping**

Wild camping takes place in moorland or mountain terrain remote from roads and habitation. Wild camping has the potential to adversely affect the locality by vegetation trampling and pollution through food and human waste. It therefore needs to be undertaken with sensitivity combining care for the environment with personal enjoyment.

### **Trainers**

Training courses must contain at least a one-night/two-day mountain journey of an absolute minimum of 24 hours duration. Programme exceptions from this format should be discussed and agreed in advance with the relevant national Mountain Training organisation technical officer. The candidates should be self-sufficient, carrying all personal and group requirements. The expedition provides the opportunity for the trainer to share an intensive period of time with the candidates in the mountain environment. This should present numerous opportunities to train all aspects of the syllabus in context, building on the learning that has taken place during other elements of the course.

A Mountain Leader should be able to advise a novice about equipment for undertaking journeys in mountainous country in the UK or Ireland. Trainers should therefore make every effort to provide a wide range of equipment for candidates to use during the course. Although candidates will frequently wish to provide their own equipment, it is important that they also have the opportunity to evaluate other equipment.

Even where candidates have some experience of going on expedition, the basic skills of packing and carrying should be addressed. Many candidates assume that a well prepared leader carries equipment to cater for every eventuality, whereas in reality this can result in being overburdened and therefore less effective as a leader. Modern lightweight equipment has its advantages, but if unavailable it should not result in a candidate carrying an excessively heavy load. Candidates should be encouraged to work as a team and carry essential group equipment between them.

During a short expedition food should provide energy, be light to carry, require minimal fuel to cook and be enjoyable to eat. Trainers should ensure that candidates have some basic nutritional knowledge, including an understanding of the significant difference between simple sugars and complex carbohydrates. Candidates' preferences can provide the basis for a discussion on suitable food.

Candidates must develop an awareness of the difference between food that is appropriate for personal use and that which is suitable for novices, who may be cooking on stoves for the first time. Food preparation and hygiene should be considered.

A training course should provide the opportunity for candidates to use a range of stoves. The safety aspects relating to the use of different stoves and fuels must be considered, as must the serious issues associated with stove use near tents.

The combined experience of candidates may be used as the basis for a discussion on campsites. Until extremes have been experienced, the vagaries of mountain weather may well be underestimated, leading to a false sense of security in fine conditions. Issues of hygiene, toilet practices and water availability, as well as the discreet location of tents, should also be discussed.

Other forms of mountain shelter should be discussed. A bothy, bivi or mountain hut could be included, in addition to a one-night camp, to extend the mountain experience of candidates. A bivouac is not an essential element of a Mountain Leader training course, but the ability and confidence to bivi (either planned or unplanned) is a useful mountain skill and many candidates would benefit from the experience.

### **Assessors**

Assessment courses should contain at least a two-night, three-day journey in mountainous country of an absolute minimum of 48 hours duration. Programme exceptions from this format should be discussed and agreed in advance with the relevant national Mountain Training organisation technical officer. As well as demonstrating an ability to be self-reliant for consecutive days, the expedition places candidates in continuous contact with the mountain environment, creating numerous opportunities to explore all elements of the syllabus.

Candidates would usually be expected to arrive with all the necessary equipment for the expedition. Although each individual should be self-sufficient, it is likely that candidates will be able to rationalise group equipment. Many leaders are tempted to carry equipment for every eventuality. However, it is important to encourage a common sense approach in order to minimise the load carried, thus helping to make the expedition a constructive experience.

Candidates should be aware of the existence of alternatives to camping in mountainous country. It is possible that the assessment expedition might utilise one of these alternatives for one of the nights in

circumstances where this is beneficial e.g. in extreme weather or an improvised bivi when walking at night away from previously pitched tents.

**Top tips**

- Ask candidates to choose a suitable wild campsite and make a risk/impact assessment – considering themselves, a group scenario and the environment. This can be done theoretically by map or practically in mountainous country.

## 9. Teaching and learning skills

**Trainers**

Candidates need to pass on their knowledge and enthusiasm effectively to their students. However, inspiring is not the same as impressing and a fruitful discussion can be had on the role of the leader and the values that Mountain Training espouses. It is often worth spending some time looking at group communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal.

Candidates will need to be able to teach basic skills such as walking on steep ground, packing a rucksack, using a stove and pitching a tent but not necessarily more advanced skills such as teaching complex navigation.

Time should be spent looking at how instructors can alter their activities and delivery style to teach the same topic to different groups. Being able to alter their language, calibrating the level of challenge, giving clear demonstrations, and setting appropriate goals are all essential teaching tools.

Reflective practice is the key to improving teaching skills and candidates should be encouraged to approach more experienced leaders for feedback and to experiment by modelling different behaviours with groups.

**Assessors**

Candidates need to be able to command the attention of their groups and deliver knowledge and instructions to their participants with clarity. There should be a good structure to what they say and they should have developed a habit of checking for understanding from their group using a range of methods.

Candidates need to be able to teach the basic skills that groups need in order to be led onto the mountains, as described above in the trainers' section, but not more advanced skills such as teaching complex navigation.

They should be able to plan and adapt activities that are appropriate for the group and that achieve defined outcomes. They should keep the group engaged and enthused by facilitating the appropriate level of challenge. Candidates should also be able to evaluate students' progress and signpost them to appropriate avenues for further development.

Course staff should remain mindful they are assessing the competence of candidates against the 'Teaching and learning skills' criteria here. A candidate performing poorly may be deferred but only against the 'Teaching and learning skills' competencies concerned rather than their own ability to pack a rucksack, for example. If the latter was also of consequence another syllabus area might need to be

referenced in the assessment report.

Written and verbal self-evaluation will give the assessor good insight into the candidate's ability to reflect on and adjust their approach. All these skills can be modelled with peers or by presenting them with alternative scenarios.

### **Top tips**

- Setting scenario-based lesson plans is a good way to assess a candidate's choice of route and goals.
- Look for behaviours that can be described, recorded and fed back to the candidate, e.g. voice characteristics, eye contact, use of names, body position and language, quantity of talk and activity, pace, attention to individuals, giving feedback and encouragement etc.
- Setting different teaching scenarios for the same skill development will test candidates' abilities to adapt their plan and style of delivery.

## **10. Access, conservation and the environment**

### **Trainers**

Recreational use of mountainous country represents only one of the many demands placed upon these environments. These demands may at times conflict and trainers have a responsibility to ensure that candidates have sufficient knowledge to operate without inadvertently creating tension with other land users.

Mountainous country, where the climate is typically severe, is often particularly sensitive to change and opportunities should be built into a course to illustrate the impact of recreational and other upland use on the balance of habitats. Measures to minimise or control these effects should be illustrated during a course.

Trainers must be aware of current legislation as it affects mountainous areas of the UK and Ireland, and trainers should ensure that candidates leave the course with an understanding of the current legal situation.

Mountain Leaders may operate in unfamiliar areas. It is therefore essential that they know how to obtain current information about access. Trainers should ensure that candidates are fully aware of the significance of Rights of Way and access arrangements as shown on maps. They should also appreciate the different legal rights and approaches to access in different areas of the UK and Ireland:

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/>

<https://www.mountaineering.ie/accessandenvironment/AccessPolicy/default.aspx>

<https://www.gov.uk/right-of-way-open-access-land>

<https://gov.wales/get-access-countryside>

The principles in the accepted codes of practice should be embedded throughout the course. The concept of Leave no Trace, and its implications should be discussed.

It is important that on a training course, staff try to impart knowledge about differing aspects of the mountain environment. Candidates should be encouraged to discuss areas of personal expertise with

the rest of the group and to impart what knowledge they may have. Candidates can be helped to develop the confidence to talk about their knowledge through a positive demonstration by training staff. Guidance may be given on resources available for further development.

### **Assessors**

An assessor can gain an understanding of candidates' experience and attitudes towards this crucial aspect of the syllabus by reviewing their DLOG and asking follow-up questions. Although a written paper may be of value and provide a stimulus for worthwhile discussion, this aspect lends itself to be evaluated throughout a course either as opportunities arise or as they are engineered by the choice of venue. It is common for a candidate to be asked to prepare a discussion topic and then lead a group session on relevant local or national access and environmental issues.

The criteria applied to the assessment of this area of the syllabus, with its wide range of topics and possible levels of expertise, will need to be flexible. However, assessors should not hesitate to defer a candidate if they feel that the range of experience demonstrated contributes to a serious lack of awareness of the importance of access and the environment, or that the practice of the candidate has, or may have, a negative impact. Assessors may look for knowledge and enthusiasm over a wide range of mountain related subjects but should not expect equal levels of expertise across them all.

The assessment of candidates in this area of the syllabus needs to be flexible and allow for variations in personal interests and depths of knowledge. A positive attitude to learning and imparting knowledge on the part of the candidate may well be the overriding concern. Candidates should be familiar with current legislation that may differ between the different parts of the UK and Ireland.

Assessors should be confident that candidates are aware of the interests of others, both commercial and recreational, in mountainous country areas. They should be particularly aware of and sensitive to the potential conflict between their own imported values and those of local communities. Assessors must be confident that a candidate in no way jeopardises existing arrangements through insensitive actions.

Knowledge of sources of current information is vital to planning any route. It is possible to incorporate this in a planning exercise during an assessment course. This would provide opportunities to discuss real situations as they arise and to offer further training.

The implications of the various protection designations should be understood, as should the value of the relevant code.

### **Top tips**

- Setting research and presentation tasks on access rights in different settings of the UK can be used to assess the candidates' abilities to find the relevant detailed information.
- Presentation tasks on the mountain environment should encourage the explanation of systems, processes and concepts (e.g. glaciation, ecology, mountain building, food chains, environmental impact etc) rather than just describing and naming observations.



## 11. Background knowledge

### **Trainers**

Trainers should introduce candidates to a variety of resources to enable them to expand their understanding of the development of walking in mountainous country. They should also introduce candidates to the role of Mountain Training and the national Mountain Training organisations, the mountaineering councils and the Mountain Training Association and of how they work with other agencies that have interests in the mountains. This can be achieved through lectures and an integrated approach throughout the course.

### **Assessors**

Assessors must be confident that candidates operate in a suitably sensitive way in order to avoid conflict between their activities and those of other hill users.

Candidates' overall knowledge of the development of the activity and roles of national bodies should be investigated. They should be able to signpost participants to suitable pathways for their activity development. This can be achieved through a variety of ways, e.g. research tasks, discussion or presentations.