

Outdoor Education Standard Operating Procedures



Winter Mountaineering

April 2026

Standard Operating Procedures: Winter Mountaineering

Winter Mountaineering and Winter Climbing

Definition and Scope of Activities

Locations are hill or mountain venues

The major activities covered within this section are as follows:

- Guided mountain / hill walking
- Skill teaching (e.g. navigation / avalanche awareness, snow craft skills)
- Snow / ice and mixed climbing

Precautions to Minimise Hazards

It is essential that the Standard Operating Procedures are followed and that personnel leading the Group fully brief the group to pay attention to hazard warning information, remain in control of the activity and follow accredited tuition and activity progression.

The specific hazards identified are not exhaustive and additional hazards or combinations may arise during the course of an activity necessitating ongoing attention to minimise or control the risk(s) to a manageable level.

Seasonal Constraints

These activities can take place all year.

Location Constraints

Use of remote high mountain plateau in winter conditions should be avoided with participants under 16 years of age.

Tuition Ratios

The tuition ratios are:

Winter walking / winter skills teaching

1 Leader to 6 participants

Winter mountaineering - (up to grade 1 ground)

1 Leader to 4 Participants

Winter Climbing - (above grade 1 ground)

1 Leader to 3 participants

This can be reduced at the instructors discretion

Tuition Leader Qualifications

Winter Mountain Leader – walking and teaching winter walking skills

Winter mountaineering and climbing instructor – all forms of winter mountaineering and climbing

All leaders must hold valid first aid certificate – WMCI holders must hold an advance first aid certificate

The National Governing Bodies contact data relevant to this section are as follows:

- Mountain Leader Training – www.mltuk.org

Equipment - Participants

All participants must have access to windproof/waterproof/protective clothing and equipment appropriate to conditions, venue and activity.

Dependent on location / conditions, ice axe / crampons, food and personal avalanche transceiver, avalanche probes and shovel, goggles / glasses

Equipment – Group Safety

Additional equipment to be considered depending on location / conditions:

- Safety rope
- First aid supplies
- OS map (1:50000 scale)/compass
- Hot drink or means of making one
- Emergency rations
- Group emergency shelter or tent
- Crampon repair kit
- Torch

Access / Environment

Mountains and coastal cliffs often provide an important habitat for nesting birds and species of moss / alpine not normally found at lower levels. Groups should exercise care to reduce unnecessary disturbance and damage from overuse of specific sites.

 CHANGING FOR THE FUTURE				RISK ASSESSMENT				ASSESSMENT REF NO:				
Activity: Winter Mountaineering				Location: Various				Assessor: DS, LJ				
Hazard	Who might be harmed?			Existing controls What makes the hazard less risky? What makes these controls effective?	Risk			Further actions Avoid Control at source Take advantage of technology Protect all Make what you have more effective	Target date dd-mm-yy	Responsibility	Completion Date	New Residual Risk Score
	Public	Client	Leader		Probability	Severity	Rating					
Person being adversely affected by extremes of weather		x	x	Check of forecast and monitoring of weather during the day. Equipment / Location and route suited to the client and conditions.	4	3	12	None				
Avalanche	x	x	x	Check forecasts / good route choice and experience of leader. View SAIS use the BAA proces	1	5	5	Continue leader CPD consideration of T.S.P				
Injury from equipment	x	x	x	Instruction in use, equipment in good state of repair	2	3	6	None				
Injury during snow craft session	x	x	x	Use of helmets while learning ice axe skills, venue free from objects and obstacles, equipment well fitting, surface free from protruding rocks,	2	3	6	None				
Disorientation in extreme weather		x	x	Leader to work within own skill level	2	3	6	Continue leader CPD				
Loss of group members		x	x	Good group control and clients given brief on group management	1	3	3	None				
Snow hole collapse		x	x	Shovel and probe outside shelter, conditions of snow and weather checked before and during activity.	1	4	4	None				
Fall from Height	x	x	x	Care around edges, robust safety brief	2	5	10	None				

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Cornice	x	x	x	SAIS and local observations. Good route choice	1	5	5	None				
Rock fall / ice fall	x	x	x	Helmets, position of belays, SAIS, weather forecasts, local observations and currency of staff	2	4	8	On going CPD				
Anchor failure	x	x	x	Staff judgement and robust observations / testing	1	5	10	On going CPD				
Further actions approved by:					Signature:					Date:		

Urgency of Action = (20> *Very High*) (16-20 *High*) (9-15 *Moderate*) (4-8 *Low*) (1-3 *Very Low*)

Severity = 1. Damage 2. Minor Injury 3. +3 Days/Hospitalised 4. Major Injury/Permanent Disability 5. Fatality

Probability = 1. Very Unlikely 2. Unlikely 3. Fairly Likely 4. Likely 5. Very Likely

Review Date: April 2027

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