

Safety on Winter Trips

"The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement."

Winter trips are potentially dangerous. 'Epics' can be created by lack of effective planning and communication. Red Rope encourages individual self-reliance: members look after themselves and each other. There should be a balance of experience in a group to avoid overwhelming anyone with responsibility for novices. Routes planned should be within the capabilities of everyone in the group.

Planning/Route Cards

- Meals should be eaten early to give time for rest and planning
- The recommended group size is 3 to 4
- The group should discuss each other's experience, skills and confidence
- Expected pace and frequency of rest stops should be discussed and noted on the route card
- Early starts are essential when daylight hours are short
- Overlong routes should be avoided and 'summit fever' put aside in favour of developing winter skills and safe practice
- Escape routes should be realistic
- Plan to carry spare batteries for phones and/or keep phones close to your body for warmth

Practise winter skills when conditions allow at the start of the trip and include

- Putting on crampons
- Ascending and descending on different angles, walking in a zig-zag, 6m apart
- Ice axe arrest practice
- Using the axe as a pick
- Assessing avalanche risk

On the route

- Before leaving base get together to check group and individual gear
- Before leaving base do a route check together
- Front walkers should keep an eye on others and adapt their pace so they stay in touch with the rest of the group.
- Back markers should not be the slowest walkers

In harsh conditions

- Use of the group shelter will facilitate group communication and considered decision making
- Listen to people unsure about continuing
- Consider turning back or adopting the planned escape route
- If needed call Mountain Rescue