

Lowland Leader Award – Candidate handbook

This booklet contains information needed to progress through the Mountain Training Lowland Leader Award Scheme. It is designed to support the knowledge and experience of candidates while at the same time avoiding prescribed techniques.

Mountain Training UK produces a range of publications for walkers and mountaineers that illustrate a wide range of techniques and skills used by leaders; these notes are designed to complement such literature (see Appendix 4).

The handbook is divided into four parts:

- A Prospectus that explains the way you progress through the Lowland Leader Award scheme from registration to assessment.
- A Syllabus that lists the skills and competencies of a Lowland Leader and which incorporates guidance notes that are designed to help candidates of understand the requirements of the syllabus and the skills to be developed.
- Guidance on the logging of experience and the nature of the assessment process.
- Appendices that provide background information.

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Mountain Training 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.

Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and associated literature to help leaders develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROSPECTUS

1 INTRODUCTION

The Lowland Leader Award is a nationally accredited scheme developed and administered by the five Mountain Training boards across the UK and Ireland. The award is designed to train and assess those who wish to lead groups on day walks in lowland countryside and woodland in summer conditions¹.

This award complements and supports the other walking awards administered by Mountain Training – the Hill and Moorland Leader Award (formerly the Walking Group Leader Award) and the Mountain Leader Award. For further information on these awards and the Mountain Training climbing awards please see www.mountain-training.org

A further two day Expedition Skills Module is available for those who wish to lead and supervise overnight expeditions. The module also covers remote supervision and teaching navigation. For more information please go to www.mountain-training.org/walking/awards/expedition-skills-module

2 SCOPE OF THE SCHEME

2.1 The Lowland Leader Award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to lead others on walks in lowland countryside and woodland that fit ALL of the following criteria:

- Walks must not cross any hazardous terrain (e.g. cliffs, very steep slopes, water hazards etc.).
- Throughout the walk the group should never generally be more than 3km away from a key access point such as a car park, lay-by or populated area. Any potential escape routes should also lie within the scope of the defined terrain for the Lowland Leader award.
- Walks will require the ability to plan routes, use simple navigation skills using a map and compass and be self-sufficient.

¹ This scheme does not provide training or assessment of the skills required to cope with the hazards of winter conditions, particularly lying snow and ice. 'Summer conditions' are defined by the conditions prevailing and not by the calendar. See 2.1.

- Walks must follow paths or tracks that are both marked on a map and clearly visible on the ground and that do not require navigation across untracked areas.
- Walks must use bridges or other recognised water crossing points.
- Walks must only take place in summer conditions (ie when there is no unavoidable snow or ice on any part of the route).

2.2 A combination of technical competence, leadership skills and a wide range of experience form the basis of effective group management. The scheme addresses all these elements. However, the employer or operating authority must ultimately decide whether a leader possesses the personal attributes needed to take responsibility for any particular group of people.

3 STAGES IN THE SCHEME

3.1 Register for the award with Mountain Training.

Registration and training may be completed at age 17, but assessment may not be completed until after the candidate's 18th birthday.

3.2 Gain relevant experience prior to attending a training course

a. Have personally undertaken and logged an absolute minimum of ten varied walks in Lowland terrain where the use of a map is required.

Or,

b. Have attended a walking and navigation personal skills training course recognised by Mountain Training.

3.3 Attend a Lowland Leader Award training course.

Training courses are delivered by Mountain Training approved providers and will include a minimum of 16 hours contact time. The training course will focus on the skills and knowledge required by those leading groups and will assume basic competencies in personal skills such as map reading and walking on paths and tracks in Lowland terrain.

Note: Candidates registering for the Lowland Leader Award who have already undertaken training in the Hill and Moorland Leader Award (formerly the Walking Group Leader Award) or Mountain Leader Award can progress direct to assessment in the Lowland Leader Award if they can demonstrate that their walking experience includes walks relevant to the scope of this scheme.

3.4 Undertake a consolidation period

Candidates are advised to continue to develop skills learned during their training course on suitable Lowland terrain walks until they feel confident of their ability to lead groups before they present themselves for assessment. Prior to assessment all candidates must have completed an absolute minimum of 20 logged walks in lowland countryside. Duplicated walks must not be counted in this total and walks should encompass a breadth of different lowland terrains i.e. coast, forest, farmland.

Experience gained in other mountain activities is useful, but not a pre-requisite. Some non-UK/Ireland experience may be included, but should be in terrain and conditions that are similar to those in the UK/Ireland and must be unguided. Normally any overseas days would be considered as additional experience and should not form a substantial part of the required total.

3.5 Complete an appropriate first aid course.

Prior to the assessment course the candidate must attend and complete a first aid course of a minimum duration of sixteen hours. First aid courses designed to cater for those working outdoors away from immediate assistance are highly recommended.

3.6 Attend an assessment course

Assessment courses will contain a minimum of 16 hours contact time and will be delivered by Mountain Training approved Providers. Candidates will be tested in accordance with the syllabus and should ensure they are familiar with it before attending the course.

Attendance will be recorded by the Provider or Director and entered on to the Mountain Training Candidate Management System.

The assessment result will take one of three forms:

- **Pass:** awarded where the candidate has demonstrated appropriate knowledge and application of the course syllabus and has shown the necessary experience and leadership attributes.
- **Defer:** awarded where the candidate has generally performed well and has shown the necessary experience and attributes, but where complete proficiency has not been attained in certain aspects of the syllabus or where a lack of experience has been identified.
- **Fail:** awarded where the candidate's performance has been generally weak, or the necessary experience and attributes have not been shown.

In the case of a deferral, candidates are encouraged to return to the original assessment Provider, but can be re-assessed by any assessment Provider. Practical re-assessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practice and preparation. All deferral re-assessments must be completed within five years.

Candidates may undertake two re-assessments after a defer result. Subsequently a full assessment must be undertaken.

3.7 Optional: Attend an Expedition Skills Module

After successful completion of assessment for the Lowland Leader Award a candidate can choose to attend a two day Expedition Skills Module which is delivered as a combined training and assessment course. The module covers leading overnight expeditions, remote supervision and teaching navigation. For more information please go to www.mountain-training.org/walking/awards/expedition-skills-module

4 EXEMPTION FROM TRAINING OR CONSOLIDATION PERIOD

As noted above, candidates who have attended a training course in the Hill and Moorland Leader Award (formerly the Walking Group Leader Award) or the Mountain Leader Award may progress straight to an assessment course after registering for the Lowland Leader Award. Other suitably experienced candidates may apply for exemption from the Lowland Leader Award training scheme and, if granted exemption, progress straight to assessment. Further details of the exemption process are here <http://www.mountain-training.org/faqs/exemptions>

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Mountain Training is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all participants in walking, climbing and mountaineering. Candidates, trainers and assessors will express a positive attitude towards equal opportunities and act as positive role models.

6 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

All of the Mountain Training award schemes are subject to continuous monitoring and review. Candidates who have any feedback to give on their courses, both conduct and content, are encouraged to submit written comments to the Provider and/or to Mountain Training as a part of that review process.

If for any reason candidates find it necessary to raise concerns about an aspect of the delivery of their training or assessment then they should contact the Course Director.

If the dialogue with the Course Director fails to resolve these concerns then candidates should contact an officer within the relevant Mountain Training Board.

Candidates are encouraged to decide whether their concerns take the form of a complaint, where some aspect of the course was unsatisfactory but the outcome is uncontested or an appeal where a candidate believes the assessment result is incorrect and wishes the board to arbitrate.

Full details of the complaints and appeals policy are available from Mountain Training

SYLLABUS & GUIDANCE NOTES

The leader of walking groups needs a wide range of skills and knowledge in order to operate effectively. Not only is it necessary to be able to perform each element in isolation but it is also vital that leaders can combine several skills at any one time. For example, they may need to manage the group and navigate at the same time.

1. Leadership Skills and Group Management

The leader should be aware of:

- a. their responsibilities to the group and individuals within it, parents/guardians, employing authorities, other outdoor users and the general public, including the choosing of venues and planning and recording of routes.
- b. current legislation that relates to the care of groups under their charge, including legislation relating to the care of young people and vulnerable adults.
- c. specific responsibilities to choose appropriate objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.
- d. the health and fitness benefits of walking, and be able to explain them to a group.
- e. communication strategies whilst leading groups.
- f. group management strategies and the need to adapt to differing groups and situations.
- g. the variety of barriers to participation, including mental and physical disability, ethnicity, fitness/health and be aware of the impact of various medical conditions.
- h. the progress of those under their charge and motivate them towards further participation where appropriate.
- i. national walking initiatives.

GUIDANCE

The Lowland Leader Award assumes the possession of basic personal skills and competencies and seeks to prepare candidates for leading others. It is vital that all leaders are able to perform the basics of navigation, for example, whilst still keeping a focus on the group that they are with.

During assessment candidates will be expected to demonstrate the ability to lead safely and effectively in a manner that enables the group to be involved, informed and, where appropriate, protected.

Much of this leadership is based in thorough preparation and planning. Whilst it is not possible to deal with specific requirements candidates should be aware that many employing organisations (schools, scout county authorities) will have procedures in place to ensure that appropriate preparation has been undertaken. Candidates should be able to adapt to these systems but also

recognise underlying principles so that they can independently prepare walking trips. It is important for candidates to assess the strengths, weaknesses and requirements of the group and individuals before undertaking any journey.

The ability to prepare and motivate any group prior to the trip is important and candidates should be able to assess the participants in terms of their physical abilities as well as in terms of any equipment needs. It may be that there are many other factors to take into account in the preparation and conduct of any walk. If needed a progression of walks may be used to develop participants' fitness and personal capabilities.

Leadership strategies can be varied depending on the group, the purpose of the walk and the conditions/terrain that you are in. The style of leadership adopted whilst preparing a group to cross a busy road will normally be very different to that used whilst training a group in navigation in open woodland. Leaders should also be able to communicate clearly to the group with them and be able to adapt their communication to the situation.

On the walk itself the leader must monitor the participants to check how they are coping with the walk and put in place strategies to deal with different fitness levels, minor injuries such as blisters and make sure no-one goes missing!

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Develop good planning habits by thoroughly planning a few of your own journeys.

When you go walking yourself try to imagine the walk 'through the eyes' of a variety of groups. Where are the challenges? Where can you take breaks? Where can you introduce extra interest?

Try and get out as much as you can with experienced leaders and note any techniques and strategies they use with their group.

2. Walking Skills

- a Demonstrate an appropriate level of personal fitness
- b Set a sensible pace for the group, understand how to conserve energy and demonstrate balance and co-ordination
- c Identify potential hazards and manage risk

GUIDANCE

Whilst the Lowland Leader Award is not a fitness test candidates should evaluate their own capability to lead day-long walks and still have something in reserve to deal with delays and problems. They also need to be able to carry sufficient equipment both to ensure their own comfort and also to care for the group in their charge. **It should be born in mind that whilst the Lowland**

Leader will not be operating on open hill or mountain terrain they may still have some steep hills to ascend; many coastal paths abound in examples of steep descents and equally steep re-ascents.

As part of the planning of a walk sufficient time for rests and breaks should be built in and opportunities taken for the group to have some recovery time. The ability to talk about the environment or the locality can be invaluable as a means of creating some time for the group to catch its breath. A suitable pace, based upon an appropriate timing formula for the group, should be maintained in order to assist novice walkers not to travel too quickly; especially if travelling uphill. It is important that an accurate view of the capabilities of the group is factored into this. Try to maintain a pace that allows you to talk to others whilst you are moving; and allows them to talk to you as well.

Whilst the Lowland Leader will not normally be encountering particularly hazardous terrain it is still necessary that the ability to spot and manage hazards and their associated risks is developed.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Between training and assessment try to get plenty of full day walks under your belt; ideally carrying the kit that you might need as the leader of a group.

Try and get on to some steeper paths and analyse how you move up, and down, them. How do you place your feet? Are your steps longer or shorter? The more that you can work out how *you* move the more able you will be to coach others in moving over steep or rocky paths.

Do a few walks with a notebook and jot down all of the things you see that could be a hazard to a variety of groups. Then try to evaluate how you might deal with the associated risks with each group.

3. Planning a Walk

Adequate planning of a walk is crucial to the enjoyment and safety of the participants and the confidence of the leader. It can vary from a few minutes thought to a pen and paper exercise. When planning a walk, a leader should consider the group's abilities, the terrain to be covered, the weather forecast and the plan for any potential emergencies.

- a. Understand the scope of the Lowland Leader Award scheme and plan walks that lie within this terrain.
- b. Know where to find information to assist with the planning of walks
- c. Understand what is required to plan and successfully lead a walk
- d. Understand common health problems and disabilities and the impact they may have on the walk
- e. Understand why and when group and personal insurance is necessary

- f. Weather forecasts – sources, interpretation and assessing impact on planned walks and equipment requirements
- g. Be able to identify significant risks and appropriate methods to manage risk, both in the planning stage and during the journey
- h. Demonstrate awareness of any policies and guidance for the planning and recording of walks that differing organisations might require.

GUIDANCE

It is important that the scope of the award is understood and leaders are able to plan accordingly. Caution should be exercised about the possibility of straying into terrain for which the leader, and the group, is unprepared.

When planning a walk for a group there are basic considerations to be thought through: the distance; the sort of terrain covered; the time it will take; what the conditions will be like; the navigational demands. It may be that these can be evaluated simply by the leader and a 'plan' carried in the head. However, many organisations will require a more formal record of the planned trip. Therefore different ways of recording and communicating the plan (e.g. route card, annotated map) should be practiced. This planning can be very useful for identifying the crucial 'decision points' where navigational decisions will need to be made.

It is often the case that guidebooks or local pamphlets give information about recommended walking routes. Whilst these sources can provide useful background information and knowledge the possession of a guidebook should not negate sufficient planning by the leader. Sources of information about the history, flora, old buildings, etc. that will be encountered on any walk are also valuable resources.

Thorough planning, especially with regard to distance, time and gradient, will be useful when thinking about the route for specific groups who may have some limitations in terms of fitness or health. If working with people with specific disabilities it is always essential to consult with them about their abilities and limitations.

The weather encountered can have a significant impact on the walk and the enjoyment and safety of the participants. It is important that candidates can access good weather forecasts, understand the information being given and evaluate the impact of the expected weather on their plans. An understanding of the major weather systems that affect the UK is useful as a way of aiding the interpretation of the likely consequences of differing wind directions. A basic awareness of the features that can be observed on the day to determine the speed and severity of possible weather changes, is a useful additional skill.

Any walk will encounter hazards; uneven ground, stiles, road crossings, barbed wire fences are all common and can cause injury or damage. It is impossible to make any walk free from hazard or risk. It is the way in which those risks are managed that is the hallmark of a competent leader.

Some things may be evident at the planning stage, for example road crossings, and strategies can be devised at that stage for dealing with them. Many organisations will have standard procedures for leaders to follow to aid that process. It is vital, however that risk assessment is not simply a file

'back at base' but that there is ongoing, 'dynamic' risk assessment being undertaken throughout the walk. Are those stepping stones still safe to cross after that downpour an hour or two ago? What livestock is in the next field you are planning to cross?

KEY PRACTICE POINTS.

When planning walks try to decide where any hazards are likely to be encountered. When undertaking the walk make notes about where the hazards actually are and how severe the risk might be.

Make a note of the forecast for the day and then compare that forecast with what actually happens. Try this with a variety of forecasts to evaluate the relative accuracy of various sources of weather information.

Try and get hold of a variety of 'planning' documents and look at the information that is common to them.

4. Basic Mapwork and Route Finding Skills

The ability to efficiently navigate along a planned walk is a fundamental skill for any walk leader; indeed without that skill very little can be accomplished. Candidates should be able to:

- a. Use a variety of commonly used maps and understand the use of scales and symbols.
- b. Understand and use the information given on maps with regard to rights of way and access to land
- c. Understand how to find uphill and downhill sections using contours and printed heights and identify major land features
- d. Understand and provide six figure grid references
- e. Find which direction to walk in by orientating the map either in relation to surrounding features or with a compass.
- f. Use the compass to determine the direction of a path or feature
- g. Find out how far apart two points are on the map and calculate how long it will take to walk between them
- h. Understand 'tick off' and 'catching' features and how to use them to aid route finding.
- i. Recognise linear features such as walls and streams on a map.
- j. Identify position on the map.
- k. Navigate competently (using the above skills) in poor visibility due to weather conditions or darkness.
- l. Understand the benefits and limitations of using handheld GPS devices.

GUIDANCE

The primary tool for the Lowland Leader is the map. It is essential that candidates are familiar with not only the commonly used Ordnance Survey mapping but can also manage with other forms of mapping and appreciate the common symbols used to indicate basic features. Gaining some practical experience of navigation with Harvey maps at 1:40,000 scale, for example, as well as orienteering style maps at a variety of scales is valuable practice. It can initially be quite confusing to shift scale so practical experience is to be encouraged. It is important to choose the 'right' map for the walk to be undertaken, as is the ability to select a sturdy and reliable compass which will do all you expect from it.

In the sort of terrain where the Lowland Leader will operate close attention will often have to be paid to rights of way and identifying access land so that there are no issues with landowners. An understanding of the way in which rights of way are marked on maps as well as an appreciation of the fact that the indicated right of way may not exactly match the line of the path on the ground is important.

Whilst the Lowland Leader will not normally need to use detailed contour interpretation it is necessary that they can identify major landforms such as hills, valleys and ridges etc. and can anticipate uphill and downhill sections of the route as well as getting some information about the type of countryside to be crossed from symbol information. Information on linear features such as paths, streams, forest boundaries, walls or fences should also be clearly understood.

The ability to use six figure grid references as part of the planning process and to locate positions on the map from them is important; especially when trying to locate the start of the walk! **Throughout any journey the ability to accurately 're-locate' or find the position of the group on the map is vital; without a secure start point for any section of the route navigation can easily go awry. Keeping a constant check on position is a valuable technique.**

The next ability in the sequence is being able to follow the route in the right direction. Again, the primary tool here is the map when accurately 'set' to the surrounding landscape, using visible features or the compass, it can give fairly accurate indication of the direction of travel. Where this is not clear the compass can be used to give a more accurate direction of travel.

When direction of travel is established the leader must be able to calculate when the next point will be arrived at and use strategies whilst walking to confirm position. The ability to measure distance both on the map and on the ground and relate the two things is essential; the use of techniques such as 'tick-off' and 'catching' features, to evaluate distance travelled and when to stop are valuable as supporting evidence.

It is easy for a party to be delayed either through a minor injury or through adverse weather especially in the short daylight hours of the winter period. Mist and low cloud can also be a hindrance. It is important, therefore, that the leader develops the confidence that they can use their skills in limited visibility.

Access to and the use of electronic navigation aids such as GPS, Smartphones and GPS watches has significantly increased in past years. In addition technology has improved vastly in terms of battery life/types in such units. They are more reliable now and used correctly can be a powerful navigation tool. Candidates should be able to demonstrate a practical awareness of how electronic navigation

devices can be integrated with a map and compass. However while the use of navigational aids such as GPS is becoming more common they are still not fully reliable in all circumstances. For this reason your navigation skills will be primarily tested using the basic navigational tools of the map, compass and watch.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

Try to think ahead so that you do not actually need to stop at decision points; you will know what to do even before you get there.

Practice 're-location' techniques even when you know where you are. Identify features around you and find them on the map; turning the map so that it is oriented. When you are happy that you have the map set correctly check it with a compass.

Undertake some walks in the dusk or dark; initially short, familiar walks in a limited area with clear boundaries.

5. Equipment

Leaders should be familiar with, and able to advise participants on:

- a. Suitable personal clothing and equipment
- b. Additional equipment carried by the leader
- c. Appropriate food and liquids to carry
- d. Use of walking poles
- e. Appropriate maps and compasses

GUIDANCE

The candidate should know how to equip themselves so that they are able to remain comfortable and function efficiently in a variety of conditions. They should be able to select suitable clothing and footwear appropriate for the forecast and the terrain to be covered as well as knowing what extras to carry to allow for the forecast being wrong.

The leader may well be in the position of advising relative novices on how to equip themselves. It is therefore important that sensible advice can be given; often there will need to be an element of prioritisation and a recognition that less expensive alternatives can often perform nearly as well as more expensive, branded, outdoor clothing and will be perfectly adequate for those starting out in relatively benign conditions.

As well as personal clothing and accessories there also needs to be an appreciation of what extra needs to be carried when leading a party. First Aid kit, some spare clothing, possibly some form of group shelter, extra food/drink, sunblock; all or some may be part of the kit list for any particular group or walk. Whilst the leader should not be overburdened it is important that some extra kit is

carried in case of unforeseen circumstances. It may be that some form of assistance might be given to others as well as having to deal with needs amongst their own group. Obviously this kit can be shared amongst the group if appropriate.

Walking poles were once seen as a fairly idiosyncratic luxury; increasingly they are being appreciated as just another walking aid. It might be the case that with some groups, the elderly or those suffering from specific disabilities for example, poles may enable them to undertake walks that would otherwise be over-taxing. For the leader the walking pole can often be seen as an adjunct to the first aid kit enabling those with minor sprains etc. to remain mobile more easily.

Food and drink for the walk should meet the two main requirements of being easy to carry and providing a good return of energy. It may well be the case that for shorter walks, snacks alone can be carried so long as a decent breakfast is assured. An understanding of the basics of nutrition will assist the leader to appreciate the benefits of various foods.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS.

Go out for walks in foul weather! Evaluate your kit during and after the walk for its effectiveness at keeping you relatively comfortable.

Compile a variety of kit lists for 'imaginary walks' at different times of the year, with different forecasts, with a variety of groups and a variety of locations.

Keep a look out for budget priced clothing and equipment and try to evaluate its effectiveness. A recommended kit list for a novice walker could be priced with a variety of budgets in mind.

6. Hazards and Emergency Procedures

Leaders should be familiar with strategies for managing groups when encountering the following hazards:

- Badly eroded trails, uneven and wet sections
- A variety of man-made features e.g. stiles, stepped decking, steps etc
- Animals; both livestock and wild
- Roads and traffic
- Other users and their needs e.g. runners, bikers and horses
- Working environments e.g. farmyards, quarries, forestry operations
- Water features such as rivers or lakes
- Poor visibility
- What to do if the path becomes indistinct and /or signs are missing
- Weather conditions

The leader should be able to:

- a. Select an appropriate first aid kit and additional group equipment
- b. Deal with common injuries and medical problems
- c. Manage self and group in a variety of different weather conditions including heat, cold, rain and high wind.
- d. Take appropriate action in the event of an incident or accident including knowing how to get appropriate assistance
- e. Plan and follow 'escape routes', using appropriate navigational techniques, to nearby assistance.
- f. Manage a group to perform a small scale search for a missing person

GUIDANCE

Much has been made in other syllabus areas of the need to identify and manage hazards; much can be done in the planning stage. It is no accident that this aspect of skill is spread throughout the award as there is a need throughout to engage in 'holistic performance' in order to keep the led party as safe as possible. The skilled leader will automatically be evaluating progress, keeping check of position on the map, chatting to the group and looking out for hazards as one continuous process.

It needs to be acknowledged that the environment in which the Lowland Leader may operate should not be particularly hazardous; indeed the most dangerous part of any walk may well be driving to the start point. It is worth considering the above list of potential hazards that could be encountered and considering how they might be managed or avoided.

With a sensible amount of equipment the leader can deal with most minor injuries; blisters and sprains are perhaps the most common. With good preparation of the group and an intelligent evaluation of the weather forecast the worst effects of the weather can be mitigated.

If the situation evolves to one where further progress on the planned route is not possible the leader has two main choices to make. It may be possible to curtail the route; 'escape route' may be an overly dramatic term to use. 'Early exit' might be more appropriate. The main skill here is to be able to improvise a route to a possible pick-up point or assistance and then efficiently navigate that route. In a worst case situation the leader must manage the group, deal with any injuries and then send for assistance if no phone communication is possible, giving an accurate position and indication of the problem. Who will be involved in any rescue will depend largely upon the area where the walk is taking place but the leader should know what information to give and who to ask for. It is also worth preparing simple instructions that could be given to the group to enable them to reach a road or shelter if they get separated from the group or if it is the leader who is incapacitated.

Finally it is worth knowing some strategies that can be used if a party member goes astray.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS

It is to be hoped that most emergency procedure practice is simulated rather than real.

When planning routes it is always worthwhile preparing some ways of shortening them if necessary; these may be needed if the group is slower than anticipated.

One of the most hazardous parts of any walk is when roads have to be followed or crossed. Roads for the Lowland Leader are what mountain streams are for the mountain leader. Try to develop some strategies for group management in those situations.

7. Environmental Awareness, Conservation, Access and Land Ownership

Access considerations

Leaders should understand and be familiar with the following:

- a. their responsibility to minimise impact on the environment and applicable national codes (such as the Country Code).
- b. current applicable legislation concerning access to the countryside including the law relating to rights of way and access to land and, the nature of specially designated areas and limitations on their use
- c. how and where to get information about access to the countryside e.g. from appropriate guidebooks and maps, Mountaineering Council sources, local and National Access Forums and from the various countryside agencies and local authorities.

Environmental Awareness

Leaders should seek to develop and extend their:

- Knowledge of countryside flora and fauna
- Knowledge of local history, place names, etc.
- Understanding of how walking can impact on the environment and other people
- Awareness of conservation programmes such as 'Leave No Trace' and apply those principles in order to minimize the impact of their activities

GUIDANCE

For the leader there are two main aspects to environmental awareness; how to ensure that a minimum impact approach is taken by any group, and also inculcated in the members of the group, along with an ability to inform and entertain the group with information about the environment within which they are walking.

As an absolute minimum any led group should conform to codes of good practice and comply with relevant access legislation; the leader should therefore have a sound understanding of those things and any regional variations that may be relevant. It is equally important that the group knows why they are being asked to behave in certain ways. It may well be the case that temporary restrictions

might be in place or changes to access conditions have occurred. The leader should know the possible sources of information with regard to access and any areas of sensitivity.

General knowledge about the environment within which the group is being led is always valuable. The history of the area combined with some basic knowledge of the land use, plants and animal life can illuminate a walk for the participants and start a real interest on their part. Short, impromptu talks can sometimes be a useful group management tool allowing the slow to catch up and get their breath back.

KEY PRACTICE POINTS.

As an additional feature of any planned walk find out where you might be able to get up-to-date information about the locality you will be visiting.

Make it a habit to seek out guidebooks or other sources of information; it is often possible to bolster your general knowledge immediately before any particular walk.

Do some research on programmes like 'Leave No Trace' or the work of the John Muir Trust.

LOGGING EXPERIENCE & ASSESSMENT

The basic requirements of the syllabus in terms of personal experience are usually summarised in terms of 'quality days' in appropriate terrain. There are a number of common characteristics that contribute to a 'quality day' although it is impossible to provide an exact definition as every day out will vary.

'Quality days' for the Lowland Leader should require elements of planning, exploration of an unfamiliar locality, and a substantial part in the map reading/ navigation and decision making. They will normally require 5 to 6 hours travel time to accomplish. The primary function of the quality day is to enable the prospective leader to learn something new about the environment, to explore new areas or to practice and hone skills.

The experience of a quality day should lead to feelings of accomplishment, improvement and satisfaction.

Days spent leading groups or acting as an assistant leader, while valuable experience, do not count as quality days (and should be logged separately). Whilst you are assisting a qualified leader/instructor they are the one ultimately making the judgements and decisions and having overall responsibility; you may be picking up tips about how to manage groups but your personal abilities will not be being stretched. It will similarly be the case that whilst working as a group leader you will normally be operating well within your own 'comfort zone' and not extending your personal abilities.

Whilst foreign experience can be useful as an indication of breadth of experience these days if used as part of your logged 'quality days' they should be in similar terrain and conditions to those found in the UK to be truly relevant as preparation for assessment.

IN SUMMARY

Experience gained in areas other than the UK and Ireland can be recorded if in similar conditions to those found in the UK were encountered.

The majority of your experience however, at least 50% of the days recorded, should be in the UK.

A Quality Day will involve most, if not all, of the factors below:

- The individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- Navigation skills are required.
- Knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- Attention is paid to safety.
- Adverse weather and poor underfoot conditions may be encountered.
- Four hours or more journey time.

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.

USING THE DIGITAL LOGBOOK

Mountain Training highly recommends that all candidates use the on-line digital logbook facility (DLOG) in the Candidate Management System to record their developing experience. If the candidate chooses to use an alternative method, for example spread-sheet or 'paper' logbook, then the entries should follow a similar format (headings, etc.) as those contained in the DLOG. Entries should be concise and easily read.

The logbook should provide a total record of the candidate's experiences and demonstrate, at assessment, that the Board's requirements have been fulfilled. It is an essential tool that can help trainers advise candidates on specific further experience needed before assessment and can also be used by employers after assessment to demonstrate continuing experience.

A key facet of all the Mountain Training awards is that competence is fundamentally based on extensive quality personal experience of the activity. Having relevant and extensive personal experience is key to success at assessment.

In the case of the Lowland Leader Award the minimum requirement for candidates presenting themselves for assessment is twenty quality days experience.

THE LOWLAND LEADER AWARD ASSESSMENT

This handbook has been prepared for candidates at all stages of the award scheme.

It is not intended that the handbook should be definitive; it has been prepared to allow a flexibility of interpretation within the framework of the syllabus. Indeed, the strength of the scheme, as with all Mountain Training Awards schemes, lies in its freedom from rigid constraints and the recognition that flexibility is the key to operating appropriate to varied circumstances.

There is an accompanying booklet for Trainers and Assessors which offers guidance for training and assessment staff by expanding on all aspects of the syllabus and offering suggestions on how best to tackle a particular subject. Candidates are free to download this if they wish.

You are advised not to proceed too quickly from training to assessment but to allow yourself sufficient opportunity to overcome any weaknesses identified during training and to acquire the technical skills and judgement that stem from experience.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS.

The assessment course is designed to give candidates the opportunity to prove that they can operate as Lowland Leaders at a nationally recognised standard. While these notes may talk of the 'assessment standard', they are also outlining the minimum standard required of a practising Lowland Leader.

The following notes give some insight into the assessment process.

The essence of any advice is simply "do what you would normally do and what you know you can do". Try not to guess what you think the assessor 'wants' and leave the interpretation of your actions to the assessor.

The assessment course is normally a two-day examination. Course Directors will hold as a minimum qualification the Mountain Leader Award. Each course will be organised by an approved Provider of Lowland Leader Award courses and will have a nominated Course Director, approved by one of the Home Nation Training Boards, who will participate in the direct assessment of all candidates. One of the main tasks of the Course Director is to offer guidance to both candidate and any other assessors and also to act as the final arbiter of assessment decisions. Assessors will work with small groups of candidates; no more than four at any one time. You may be examined by more than one assessor although generally one will be the main.

The assessment will always be an holistic process: the candidate's performance is viewed as a total within the context of the whole course rather than a day by day or syllabus area by syllabus area 'box ticking' exercise. In this context many assessors often prefer to give interim feedback to candidates, but this is not compulsory. If the candidate asks for such feedback it should be given. It should be clear that each part of the course is not taken in isolation, so scraping through each day may not add up to a pass at the end of the course. Conversely, one poor performance can often be redeemed by other stronger performances.

During assessment you will be expected to demonstrate the practical skills of the syllabus in a range of situations. You will be expected to show that you are completely “at home” in the outdoor environment; to demonstrate practical skills with the ease and fluency that results from long practice, and be able to move easily and with confidence over routes in appropriate terrain.

All aspects of the syllabus may be covered but usually lack of time prohibits total examination of every topic. You should therefore expect to be examined more thoroughly in subjects which commonly pose problems.

Since everyone can make mistakes, isolated errors are not normally grounds for failure, but persistent mistakes, however minor, may well lead to a deferral or recommendation for re-assessment. Assessors are often more interested in your ability to cope with mistakes and recover from them rather than the fact that you made a minor mistake in the first instance. You should be aware that a consistent lack of proficiency in two or more major areas is likely to result in a fail rather than a deferment.

At the end of the assessment course you will normally be interviewed by the Course Director who will inform you of the result.

This is recorded in the Candidate Management System (CMS). There are three possible results – Pass, Defer, Fail. In the event of a result other than a Pass the Course Director will verbally outline the background to the result (including examples), advice about further experience and, if re-assessment is proposed, give details of any prerequisites. A detailed and specific action plan can be extremely useful and this is done via the Candidate Management System (candidates can access their own reports on-line, although you may also be given a paper copy). It is hoped that deferred candidates will return to the same Provider/Course Director. They are at liberty to go elsewhere, in which case, the notes of the original assessment may need to be passed on to the new assessment Course Director.

APPENDIX 1 TERRAIN DEFINITION FOR THE LOWLAND LEADER AWARD

The Lowland Leader Award is designed to train and assess the skills and knowledge required to operate as a leader of walking parties in rural countryside and forest following paths and tracks. Walks must follow paths or tracks that are clearly marked on a map and normally visible on the ground. There will always be situations where crop growth, ploughing or simply heavy leaf fall might obscure a path temporarily, however entry and exit points to such areas will normally be easy to locate. Routes should not require navigation across untracked areas. The navigational demands of routes should be such that the use of the map alone would normally suffice with the compass simply being needed to orientate the map or indicate path direction.

There should be no requirement to cross any hazardous terrain such as very steep slopes or cliffs although it must be recognised that some paths in appropriate lowland terrain may be steep and broken.

The terrain should be fairly close to access points so that the leader can easily cut short a walk or gain help. As a general rule no point on planned walks should be more than around 3km from an access point such as a car park, lay-by or populated area where assistance or evacuation would be available.

Any 'escape routes' from the planned walk should also be through terrain that lies within the scope of the Lowland Leader Award. A long route that ran 3 km away from, and parallel to, a road but which had a high moorland ridge between it and that road could therefore fall outside the scope.

Walks should at all times use bridges or other recognised water crossing points such as stepping stones or fords when needing to cross any stream that could constitute a hazard to the party.

Walks must only take place in summer conditions (ie when there is no unavoidable snow or ice on any part of the route). It should be noted that such conditions may well be found at any time of the year; the Lowland Leader should operate according to the conditions underfoot rather than the season.

APPENDIX 2 GAINING FURTHER EXPERIENCE

Award holders should follow the National Guidelines issued by Mountain Training UK. In particular they should note that their award is only valid where the holder is operating within the scope of the award and the holder has recent logged experience appropriate to the award.

Where there is any doubt advisers should contact the relevant national Mountain Training board.

According to the Health and Safety Executive there are four ways to demonstrate the competence of leaders. These are:

- to hold the relevant qualification
- to hold an equivalent qualification
- to have received appropriate in-house training
- to be competent through experience

Mountain Training endorses this view, while emphasising that national awards are the key components in such an approach. Further training events and opportunities to review new initiatives are valuable components in the continuing development of any leader.

To assist in providing further training opportunities the Mountain Training Association will make available information on matters of interest to all award holders including Continuing Personal Development (CPD) events.

The responsibility for ensuring that leaders receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Award holders who wish to operate beyond the scope of their award(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Lowland Leader award holder leading a party in local moorland terrain which they are familiar with, may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a local scheme.

Local schemes are for the provision of skills needed to deal with specific restricted tasks, and the accreditation tends to be site or area specific, restricted and non-transferable. Therefore it should be

appreciated that local schemes are only suitable for use by organisations and not by individuals. Individuals (self-employed leaders) seeking additional training and assessment from a suitably qualified and experienced technical advisor, thus enabling them to develop further relevant experience, may find this allows them to demonstrate competence beyond the scope of the award. Award holders using this route to extend their personal remit should clarify the operational responsibility of the technical advisor and the implications for their insurance cover for operating beyond the scope of the award held.

APPENDIX 3 - MOUNTAIN TRAINING AND THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCILS

The prime aim of the four home nation boards of Mountain Training is to promote awareness of climbing and mountain safety through formal leader training schemes. These include the Lowland Leader Award, the Hill and Moorland Leader Award, the Mountain Leader Award, the Winter Mountain Leader Award, the Single Pitch Award, the Climbing Wall Award and the Climbing Wall Leading Award.

Mountain Training promotes and co-ordinates the four home nation Boards in the provision of this training and is responsible for the Mountaineering Instructor Scheme and the International Mountain Leader Award. Mountain Training also maintains a centralised national mountain training database (known as the Candidate Management System or CMS), which provides a record of qualifications for mountain leaders, instructors and guides throughout the UK.

The mountaineering councils are the representative bodies for climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers and work to promote their interests and protect their freedoms. They provide a wide range of services for members and hold regular area meetings.

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Mountain Training Northern Ireland (MTNI)

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Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MC of S)

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APPENDIX 4 – BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following publications, while not an exhaustive list, are all relevant to the syllabus of the Lowland Leader Award.

Call Out Mountain Rescue? A Pocket Guide to Safety on the Hill

Judy Whiteside

Hillwalking

Steve Long

History of the Countryside

Dr Oliver Wrackham

John Craven's Countryfile Handbook

BBC

Leading and Managing Groups in the Outdoors

Ken Ogilvie and Lyn Noble

Managing Risks in Outdoor Activities

Cathye Haddock

Mountaincraft and Leadership.

Langmuir

Navigation in the Mountains.

Carlo Forte

Safety, Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Activities

Bob Barton

Walking

Henry Thoreau

Walking for All

MTE booklet

