

winter safety



GEORGEFISHER.CO.UK



A GUIDE TO WINTER WALKING GEAR AND USAGE

WINTER SAFETY GUIDE



For many of us, the Lakeland winter brings out the best in our mountains. What would be a fun summer's walk in shorts and T-shirt, transforms itself into a serious-feeling expedition that starts and finishes in the dark. The hordes have gone; you'll find few people on Hall's Fell Ridge. Those that you do meet are revelling in the experience, crampons on feet, axe in hand.

It's now that you appreciate the design features built into your gear. Lightweight waterproofs are ideal in the summer months but won't cope with blizzard conditions - a fully specified winter jacket allows you not only to survive, but actually to enjoy the situation. You'll need effective insulation; not just fleece, but maybe down or synthetic too.

Map and compass skills, easier in good weather, become essential for winter walking. Footwear becomes a serious factor, both for cold-weather comfort and underfoot security. Plus crampons and axes may be needed - do you know how to use them properly?

With the right knowledge and equipment, being out in the mountains in winter weather actually has its own appeal - the satisfaction of being in control in poor conditions. Arguably winter walking has more potential for risk given that a simple accident can more rapidly turn into a serious situation in blizzard conditions. So if you're heading out on the fells, whatever the season, are you fully prepared?



This booklet isn't a definitive list of kit you will need for your mountain adventures. It highlights some gear you definitely need such as map, compass, footwear, clothing etc but the selection of what you take with you will come down to your personal experience, the activity you are planning and of course the weather. Hopefully the information and ideas here will encourage you to think about what you currently take out with you and identify items you may be missing.

At George Fisher you can talk with enthusiasts who not only know the fells, but are itching to get out there themselves. We stock the best products for all conditions based on performance and our experience, pure and simple.



Images © Stuart Holmes

“IT’LL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME”



Advice for winter walkers from Keswick Mountain Rescue Team

In recent years a series of similar incidents ended in the worst possible way for several casualties and their families. While the details of the events often remained unclear, a common factor was the length of time taken and the difficulty in locating these walkers by Mountain Rescue teams.

All the casualties were walking alone (and happened to be male, in the 50-70 age range), and did not leave clear details of their intended route with a responsible person. The outcome of the incident may have been more positive in some cases if the walker had taken the following sensible precautions:

Planning

Plan a route well within your capabilities, taking into account the weather forecast and sunset time. This itinerary should include early escape routes allowing you to easily descend to your start point, should conditions deteriorate. Leave a written record (for example, a text, email, route card, or even a photocopy of your map with lines drawn on) with someone expecting your return and the time you expect to be back by. If you're staying in Keswick your hotel staff will be happy to do this (George Fisher distributes copies of its Walk Plan to Keswick accommodation providers) plus the Walk Plan is reproduced on the back page of this leaflet for you to take copies of.

Equipment

Carry a waterproof jacket (with hood) and trousers, additional warm layers as well as hat and gloves allowing for the fact it is often 10C cooler on the fells than in the valley. Take plenty of food, sugary snacks and water, a map and compass (and know how to use them!) plus a head torch (and spare batteries), survival bag, mobile phone, whistle and first aid kit.

During your walk

If possible, 'check in' with someone from points along your route - summits and ridges give the best chance of a mobile signal.



Image courtesy KMRT

Judge the risk! If you find yourself on steep ground, assess what could happen if you slipped, and if you feel uncomfortable about this risk choose an alternative route. A further common element of our incidents this year was a fall or tumble down steep ground, which had been inadvertently strayed onto, perhaps due to darkness or a navigation error. Mountain rescue teams would rather be called out to a 'stuck' walker than a 'fallen' walker!

Keep an eye on the time, the weather conditions and your progress; don't leave it too late to descend safely.

If you do need the assistance of Mountain Rescue, call 999 and ask for the Police who will then call out the appropriate team. If you have no signal, and no-one to shout to, then blow your whistle loudly six times and repeat at minute intervals. If it is dark also flash your torch six times repeatedly.

For further information and advice go to the George Fisher website and click on Visit > Our Services > Stay Safe.

Happy walking!

WINTER NAVIGATION

Part 1: Maps

Winter brings the joy of cold, crisp, sunny days with clear, blue skies and a cool freshness on your face. Days that are ideal for getting wrapped up and setting out on an exhilarating and invigorating stomp through snowy hills, stopping on the way back for hot chocolate and marshmallows to heat you through - an indulgence you'll have thoroughly earned!

Winter can potentially be a dangerous time to venture out into the mountains, so do make sure you go properly equipped and know how to navigate your way back. An Ordnance Survey or Harvey map and basic navigation skills are essential, even if you are sticking to well-worn paths and walks.

Using a map and a few basic navigation skills, you can work out routes that take you off the beaten track, where you really can be the first to leave a footprint in the fresh, crisp snow!

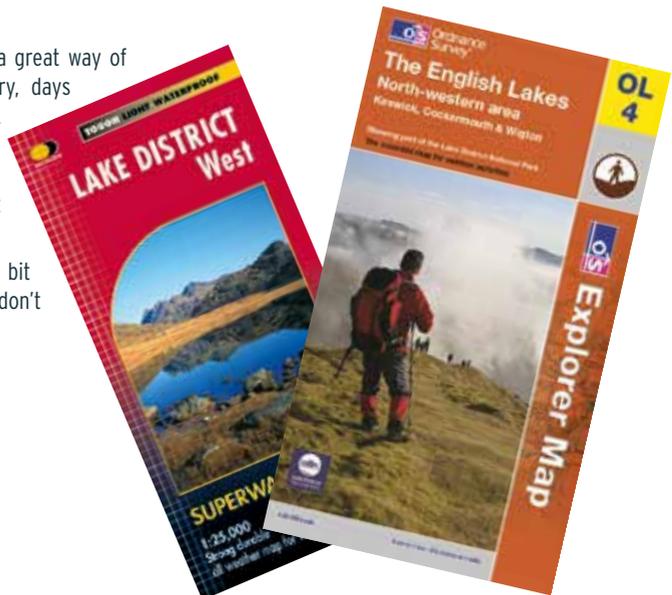
OS Active or Harvey maps come into their own if you are out in the mountains and the weather takes a turn for the worse and you find yourself in drizzle or even full-blown storms. The weatherproof coating protects the map so it doesn't get soaked and become hard to read.

Planning your next adventure can be a great way of getting you through the damp, dreary, days when you really can't get outside. There's nothing better than poring over a map and working out where you are going to go, ready for the next adventure.

So, on those crisp winter days when a bit of adventure and challenge are calling, don't forget your map.



Image courtesy Dave Willis/Cumbria Tourism



WINTER NAVIGATION



Part 2: Compass

Whether it's summer or winter, your map and compass are essential pieces of hill gear. Ordnance Survey or Harvey maps are a treasure trove of information. Even quite subtle features can be used to navigate, and time spent learning to read a map properly is time well spent.

The compass is a simple piece of technology and will become your unfailing friend when conditions get serious. A compass can mean the difference between reaching safety with ease, or a terrifying experience stumbling around lost.

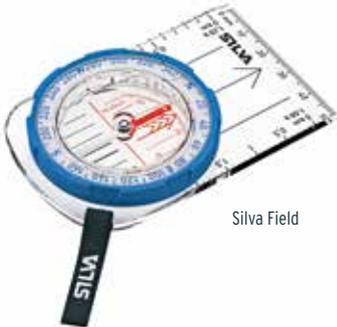


Image © Stuart Holmes

Silva Expedition 4

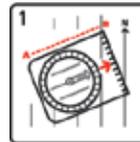


Silva Ranger

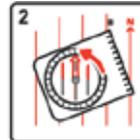


Silva Field

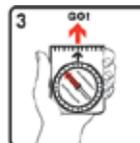
FOUR SIMPLE STEPS TO TAKING A BEARING:



1. Place the edge of the compass between the two points, with the direction of travel arrow pointing towards your destination.



2. Ignoring the needle, turn the compass housing round so the housing arrow points to the top of the map and the orienting lines are parallel to the vertical grid lines of the map.



3. Read the bearing off on the housing against the direction of travel arrow.

4. Adjust for magnetic variation.
(This changes year by year - to find out the current magnetic variation, look on an up-to-date map or check on nearby.org.uk)



Image courtesy Dave Willis/Cumbria Tourism

Using your compass is straightforward once you have mastered the four short steps to taking a bearing. To take a bearing you need to know where you are (which is why map skills are so important), and where you wish to go.

Once you have the figure, you need to alter your bearing accordingly. Add (If magnetic north is west of grid north - otherwise subtract) the magnetic variation onto your grid bearing by physically moving the housing round by the variation.

Once you've mastered taking bearings, this process won't take you long at all. You then need to follow your bearing on the ground. Holding your compass level, look along your direction of travel arrow. You might see your destination, in which case walk to it. However you'll probably have to break your navigation down into shorter sections. Find an object to walk to that lies exactly on your bearing (as indicated by the direction of travel arrow). Put your compass away and walk to it, take your compass out again and repeat the process until you reach your destination.

The skills of navigation in summer or winter are the same; it's just that in winter you need to be extra careful. Underfoot conditions may be more treacherous, it'll certainly be colder and it gets dark quicker so accurate and effective navigation is vital; there is less scope for error in the winter. Whatever you do, when you get lost it's essential you don't panic. Take stock of your situation, work out where you are, and then plan a safe descent. Look carefully for hazards on the route down - sometimes it's better to take a longer, safer route than a short and dangerous one.

Most importantly it's vital you give yourself the best chance on the hills in winter by learning to use your map and compass properly. There are courses up and down the country (check out our providers on pages 14 & 15) and a host of good books are available instore. At the end of the day, it's practice that makes perfect and the more time you spend ensuring you can take a bearing and follow it, the better you will be when you need it most.

WINTER NAVIGATION



Part 3: GPS



Over the past few years GPS units have advanced to include some innovative and useful features to help you on the hill during the winter months. In particular, Garmin have worked tirelessly to ensure their devices survive the toughest of conditions, so their GPS units are fully waterproof and have been designed and tested for the worst outdoor conditions.

For winter navigation, a rugged GPS with front-facing buttons will be easier to use with mitts or gloves on, but touch-screen models can also be used with special touch-sensitive gloves.

Some GPS units include a barometric altimeter which, combined with the GPS signal, gives you accurate elevation information. The barometric sensor will also give you a weather trend over time so you can see if a storm front is approaching. Various units also include a 3-axis compass, which allows you to select a bearing and walk on this without the risk of drifting - really useful when in a white-out on the tops!



Satmap GPS Active 12



Garmin GPS Oregon 700

By far the largest advancement is the inclusion of Ordnance Survey mapping. This allows for live positioning ensuring that, irrespective of the conditions, you always know where you are and can see your current position clearly on a familiar OS map.

PACKING FOR WINTER

By Jon Wickham, Equipment and Accessories buyer



Image © Stuart Holmes

Walking in winter presents a few extra challenges compared with the more benign summertime. Shorter daylight hours, cold conditions, as well as snow or ice on the ground, focuses us to reassess our plans for going on the fell. Here's how to upgrade your summer kit to help make the experience a little safer and more pleasant.

It's sensible to carry some extra insulation year round. Borrowing an idea from climbers, a 'belay jacket' is a synthetic or down jacket that can be thrown over all your other layers (including a waterproof) for instant warmth when you're stopped. In summer something light will do a great job, or even an insulated gilet. However, in winter you are likely to need more warmth so a dedicated garment with a hood will be a better idea. Down is always going to give the best warmth for weight, but many now prefer synthetic insulation due to its greater water resistance.

A sit pad is also a great idea for breaks to keep your bum off the frozen ground!

Hats and gloves are also a definite requirement for winter. Extremities get cold very quickly and trying to open a rucksack with icy fingers is not something you want to have to deal with. Several pairs of gloves in case you lose one, or a pair get wet is a good precaution. A light pair of close fitting fleece gloves is great for keeping your hands warm whilst retaining some dexterity, while a warmer glove or mitt with a waterproof membrane will be ideal for worse conditions.

There are a whole variety of hats available; those with a windproof lining are great for cutting out an icy draught, and in really bad conditions a balaclava will give the most protection. Whether summer or winter a Buff is light enough to be carried without thinking about it and can be fashioned into a whole range of headwear.

Continued overleaf.



Image © Stuart Holmes

You should be carrying a map and compass year round but there are a few ways you can 'winterise' these vital bits of kit. Having spares of each in your pack is a great backup just in case you lose either, particularly if you are on a multi day trip. Putting paper maps in a map case protects them from the rain, but a laminated OS Active Map or Harvey map printed on waterproof paper is ideal for use in really bad weather. You may be more reliant on your compass, so a model with a longer baseplate allows you to take more accurate bearings and often includes a roamer scale for taking more accurate grid references.

If you want additional reassurance while navigating, then a GPS device or watch is ideal. We stock models from Garmin, Satmap and Suunto; please just ask us for advice on which is best for you.



WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

There is always the chance that you may need rescuing, so it is sensible to plan for this eventuality. There could easily be a wait of several hours before the Mountain Rescue Team reaches you, so you need to be able to stay warm for at least that long. Some sort of shelter from wind and rain is therefore important. At the very least a survival blanket will cut out some of the wind and provide a little insulation. A survival bag is better as it can cover your entire body, giving greater protection. The gold standard (short of an entire tent) is probably the survival shelter. Otherwise known as a KISU or Bothy Bag, these are lightweight boxes of water resistant material, big enough for two or more people to get inside. To keep the weight down, there are no supporting poles, so the fabric just sits on the heads of the occupants. These cut out the wind and trap shared heat, creating a warm micro-climate inside, and is the most effective way of keeping warm and relatively dry.





It is, of course, vital to contact help as well as keep yourself protected from the elements. Mobile phone coverage in the mountains is quite patchy and so shouldn't be relied upon. Maximise your chances of using any signal by keeping your mobile phone turned off to extend its battery, and carry a backup charger. Also remember that a text message is far more likely to get through than a voice call; register for the Emergency Text Service at emergencysms.org.uk so you can use this facility.

The most common injuries in the mountains are to people's lower legs. A fracture is likely to be impossible to walk on, but with a simple sprain you may have other options. Carrying a First Aid Kit with some painkillers and bandages to strap up an ankle may get you as far as a point where you can get a phone signal or at least to some shelter. First Aid Kits are of no great help without the knowledge to use them. There are a variety of Outdoor First Aid courses available, some of which will also double as First Aid at Work courses. See if your employer will pay for one, and kill two birds with one stone.

A whistle is great for attracting attention in an emergency. The International Distress Signal is six blasts, with a minute wait, then another six continued for as long as effective. Don't forget that many rucksacks have a whistle built into the buckle of the chest strap.

Shorter days make it more likely that you will be descending in the dark, so a head torch becomes even more important. In summer a small, less bright torch

may be adequate for using in the dusk or around a campsite, but if you want to be able to navigate then plenty of light is preferable. We carry a wide range of head torch options.

Whether you want it or not, this winter will see some snow somewhere. If you expect to be out in snowy conditions, adequate grip is vital. The most comprehensive option is to be fitted for a pair of winter-specific boots that have stiffer soles than summer boots. These provide a more substantial platform to stand on, as snow tends to be less stable than summer ground, particularly if it is steep. Stiffer boots also allow the use of crampons, which will not stay attached to flexible summer boots.

For winter walking on frozen, icy but generally straightforward paths, technical crampons can be overkill. They're easy to trip up in, and feel like you're walking on stilts. So if you know you're only walking on non-technical ground, consider trail crampons ideal for snowed up paths - they fit onto almost any shoe or boot in seconds to give extra traction on ice and hard-packed snow.

Steeper routes like Swirral Edge on Helvellyn, where a slip could prove dangerous, require more substantial boots and crampons. This sort of terrain would also require an ice axe, both to steady you on steep ground and to provide a way to control a slip by 'self-arresting'.

If you're not on a steep enough route to require an ice axe, walking poles really come in to their own, providing you with extra grip on tricky surfaces, as well as taking the strain off your knees.



Boots



Image courtesy Mark Wright

With summer a memory and the trees devoid of leaves, walking in the Lake District fells becomes a more serious challenge. Days are shorter and the weather colder and sooner than we think the first winter snows cover the tops.

Amongst the most important aspects of your gear is footwear. As the ground conditions change to icy paths and snow and ice, then so should your footwear. A number of years ago a boot grading system was devised to help choose the correct boot for the conditions.

- B0** Lightweight boots and shoes suitable for easy walking conditions.
- B1** Hill walking boots designed for tougher year round walking conditions.
- B2** Mountain walking boots with stiffer midsoles which give greater support when walking on difficult terrain.
- B3** Mountaineering boots are typically used to climb in the high mountains of the world but are also used to climb in winter in Scotland, the Lakes and Snowdonia.

Most winter walkers in the Lakes would choose a B1 or a B2 boot. A few years back you would have been compelled to wear heavy, stiff and uncomfortable boots. But with recent advances in designs (better ankle flex) and materials (lighter midsoles and PU/EVA cushioned soles) these boots are lighter, more agile and comfortable.

The boot you choose will ultimately depend on how it fits your foot. For the UK walker who wants to get out on the hills all year round, on or off the footpaths then a B1 boot is a great choice. The performance will give enough support to use with crampons when you need them; for the final push to the summit of Helvellyn, or for emergency use. But if you plan to walk all day in crampons we would recommend the greater support you get from a B2 boot.

Always think what you might need these boots for in the future, as they will last a long time. Perhaps you will go on to a winter skills course at one of our recommended providers overleaf or plan glacier walking on the Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt? If this is the case although the B1 boot may have been fine for your winter Lakeland forays the B2 boot maybe your better choice.

Pop instore for a full boot fit.



Image courtesy Cumbria Tourism/Dave Willis

Walking in the Lakeland hills in winter can be serious. Using and carrying the correct equipment, clothing and emergency equipment helps minimise the risks, but is no substitute for experience, skill and fitness. If snow is on the ground, or forecast, then an essential piece of kit is an ice axe. An axe improves on the support and balance of a trekking pole, and also can be used for self-arrest, in case of a slip, or for chopping steps on an icy path. They become essential as soon as you go onto steeper slopes where their shaft or pick is used for support and progress.

Ice axes can be divided into two types: B and T rated. Walking axes that you would generally not use for climbing or rope work are B rated, while Alpine and ice climbing axes are T rated and have greater strength. The Lakeland walker would normally choose a B rated axe. However if you are planning more mountaineering or snow climbing, the best choice would be a T rated axe.

Crampons are another part of essential winter kit. They are perhaps the most difficult to use as they require the most skill and training. Remember the old adage, 'Crampons take a novice into danger rather than safety!' Learn how to use them by enrolling on a course, or from your more experienced friends.

Again, crampons are graded: C1 for walking, C2 for mountaineering and C3 for climbing. It is best to be advised by experienced shop staff as to which is suitable for you, and if buying crampons it's best to take your boots with you to the shop.

Let's hope that this winter gives us snow and crisp cold clear weather. It is in these conditions that the Lake District is one of the most beautiful places in the world to walk and explore.



WINTER SKILLS COURSES Recommended by George Fisher

Live4Adventure



If you're looking to develop your walking and climbing skills when the snow is on the ground then Live4Adventure offer you the perfect solution.

Lead instructor, Chris Higgins MIC, has been instructing in the outdoors for over 20 years and offers instructional days to individuals and groups in essential Winter Walking Skills and Winter Climbing. As a member of Keswick Mountain Rescue Team, Chris is only too aware that people need the right skills and equipment to venture safely into the mountains in winter and is eager to share his knowledge and passion for the mountains.

The Winter Walking Skills day provides the summer walker with the skills required to make a safe transition to winter hill walking - covering navigation, boot and crampon techniques, use of the ice axe, avalanche awareness, winter weather, clothing and equipment as well as what to do if something unplanned happens.



If you want to go a step further, then guided Winter Climbing will take you onto some classic routes where you'll look at rope techniques, snow and ice anchors, route finding and the other essentials to have a great day in more technical ground.

Live4Adventure offers a full range of outdoor courses throughout the year - our aim is to give our clients a personal, high quality, safe and enjoyable experience.

Find out more at www.live4adventure.co.uk

Call Chris on 07751 627551 or email chris@live4adventure.co.uk

More than Mountains



Do you want to be able to enjoy the mountains safely all year round? If so you need to learn how to walk or climb when everything is covered with ice and snow.

On a 'More than Mountains' winter mountaineering course you can learn basic winter walking skills, go on a winter mountaineering journey or climb some classic winter routes.

There is so much to learn and our highly qualified, experienced and friendly instructors will teach you everything you need to know. We can show you the right equipment to take with you and how to use it effectively. You will learn how to interpret weather and avalanche forecasts to make sure your route choice for the day is appropriate and can be completed safely. We will also give you tips on how to navigate in winter and how to check for avalanche risk when you are out and about.

We run our winter mountaineering courses both in the Lake District and Scotland. All of our winter courses are designed specifically for you and your group and can be run on any date of your choice. So whether you are just starting out on your first winter walking experience or you would like to lead your first winter climb we can create a course just for you.

Set courses include the basic Winter Skills Course (for winter beginners), our Winter Mountaineering Course, and then the Winter Climbing Course.

See our website for more details:

morethanmountains.co.uk

Or contact us on:

info@morethanmountains.co.uk

Or call 07984 410230





WALK PLAN

DATE: _____ STAYING AT: _____

WALKER INFO

NAME

MOBILE NO.

NO. IN PARTY

CAR REG. NO.

or bus route/number or launch

ROUTE & ANY ALTERNATIVES

Give details of where car will be parked / start point / start time etc.

ESTIMATED RETURN TIME:



WALKERS' CHECKLIST:

- GPS Map Compass Food & Drink First Aid Hat & Gloves
Torch & Spare Batteries Whistle Medication Blister Kit
Sun Hat & Sun Cream Survival Bag Thermal Clothing
Mobile Phone In winter conditions: Ice Axe Microspikes/Crampons

Check the weather forecast and sunset time:

T: 0844 846 2444 or www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/weatherline

For free mountain safety advice check:

www.georgefisher.co.uk or www.keswickmrt.org.uk

George Fisher

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Before you head for the hills it's good practice to leave details of where you're going - and what time you expect to be back - with a responsible person.

George Fisher produces this Walk Plan, which is used by many Keswick accommodation providers. Feel free to copy and use this Walk Plan; you can also find copies in store, and as a free download at georgefisher.co.uk