

# Young People

Climbing, Hill Walking, Mountaineering  
A Parent's Guide



Price £1.00



**BMC**  
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**British  
Mountaineering  
Council**

Working for Climbers,  
Hill Walkers and  
Mountaineers



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Cover Photo: *Sorting out those tricky ropes!*  
Photo: John Beatty – www.wild-vision.com

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*Climbing takes me to new places... It gives me freedom and space*

**George**, age 8

## // PURPOSE OF THIS LEAFLET

This leaflet sets out what climbing, hill walking and mountaineering involve, in order to help parents gain a better understanding of these activities.

## // BENEFITS

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities that are physically and mentally demanding as well as incredibly fulfilling. They can also lead to lifelong participation. This helps individuals keep fit throughout their lives and provides opportunities for long-term friendships to develop. People of all ages and abilities, from all backgrounds, cultures, races, orientations and religions can enjoy these activities. Disabilities should not be seen as barriers to participation. Additionally, those keen to learn often acquire a host of new life skills and quickly develop a sense of personal responsibility that can stand them in good stead throughout their lives. These benefits need to be balanced against the risks involved. There is no getting away from the fact that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering involve a level of risk. Many people welcome this, feeling it adds a vital element to their lives.

## // RISKS

The *BMC Youth Participation Statement* is very clear and needs to be read carefully. It states:

**Parents and young participants should be aware that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Parents and participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.**

Injuries are possible in climbing, hill walking and mountaineering, as in all sporting activities, as a result of over-training, inappropriate training regimes, or poor technique as well as those that might be sustained during a slip or fall, or if something or someone falls on a person.



Climbing outside Photo: Plas y Brenin – [www.pyb.co.uk](http://www.pyb.co.uk)

Risks need to be put in context. There are currently about 5 million climbing wall user visits annually and it has been estimated that between the 1960s and 2005 there were approximately 50 million climbing wall user visits in the UK alone. During that period there was one fatality at a wall in England and Wales and that involved an adult. There are 13 million young people in this country. Approximately 700 have fatal accidents every year. Of these, 457 are land transport accidents (National Statistics). This compares with approximately one child death per year in organised adventurous activities.

On the other hand, activities in which risk management is an integral part can play a vital role in helping young people to acquire these extremely important life skills.

## // CHILD PROTECTION

The *BMC Child Protection Policy* is available on the BMC website. Before giving consent for your child to go climbing, hill walking or mountaineering, if you are not going to be present, you should ascertain whether there are child protection procedures in place. This can best be achieved by enquiring whether a Child Protection Policy is in place (which you are advised to read) and whether those supervising children have been properly vetted. Parents or children with concerns about inappropriate or abusive behaviour should contact the *BMC Youth Officer* by telephoning the BMC office as set out in the BMC Child Protection Policy. Contact details for the BMC, NSPCC and Childline are given at the back of this leaflet.

Climbing is a good activity  
we can do as a family

Natalie, age 9

## // MAIN ACTIVITIES

There are many different activities described as climbing, hill walking or mountaineering. Many are outdoor activities whilst others take place on indoor climbing walls. Some activities are usually carried out with ropes to help manage the risks; while others, such as bouldering and hill walking, are invariably undertaken without ropes. The main activities are:

- // **Bouldering** is a form of climbing usually practiced on small rocks and boulders (hence the name), or at indoor walls. As the climber doesn't go very high it is often possible to jump back down. Some people carry padded mats to jump down onto in order to help reduce impact on landing. Specialist rock shoes are an advantage.
- // **Rock climbing** with ropes can be done indoors or outdoors and usually involves two people (but it can be a group). The person climbing is tied to a rope that is controlled by another person. The aim of controlling the rope is to prevent injury should the climber fall. Controlling the rope is called belaying and the person doing this is called the belayer.

There are two main forms of roped climbing:

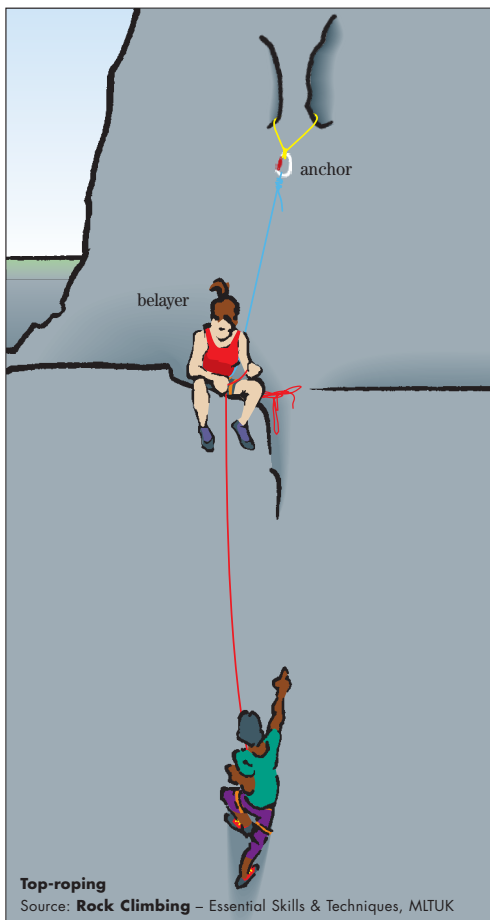
**Top-roping** – this is where the climber is secured with a rope from above, so that if he or she falls it won't be far. This can also be called seconding or bottom-roping depending on the position of the belayer.

**Leading** – this is where the rope is not secured above the climber, but instead is trailed by the climber and controlled entirely from below. Various sophisticated systems, depending on the type of climb, are used to protect the climber should they fall. This requires higher levels of skill and judgement and so is not usually attempted until a person has gained experience and feels ready to do this. Again, specialist rock shoes are an advantage. Climbing harnesses and ropes are needed as well as other equipment.

// **Ice climbing** involves climbing snow or ice. It is most often done outdoors using ropes and protection systems similar to rock climbing. However, there are now some specialist indoor venues for this form of climbing. Specialist equipment required includes boots, warm clothing, ice axes, crampons, harness and rope.

// **Competition** climbing is a competitive form of climbing done on artificial structures and climbing walls.

Most competitions in this country are indoor forms of bouldering or rock climbing. However, ice climbing competitions are starting to become popular abroad. Every year the BMC runs the very popular British Regional Youth Climbing Series (BRYCS) that is open to all young people, in the relevant age categories, regardless of experience or ability. The BMC also runs the British Bouldering Championships (BBCs), and the British Indoor Climbing Championships (BICCs). Selection for the British Climbing Team is based on BICC results – although climbers are also assessed on an individual basis. As in all types of competition, young people can be particularly susceptible to peer pressure. This can lead them to over-train or under-eat (in order to lose weight) in the mistaken belief that these will improve their performance, whereas they may actually be damaging both their health and their performance. Parents need to be alert to these possibilities and be aware of what their children are doing and why. See the BMC website for further details about these competitions.



**Top-roping**

Source: **Rock Climbing** – Essential Skills & Techniques, MLTUK

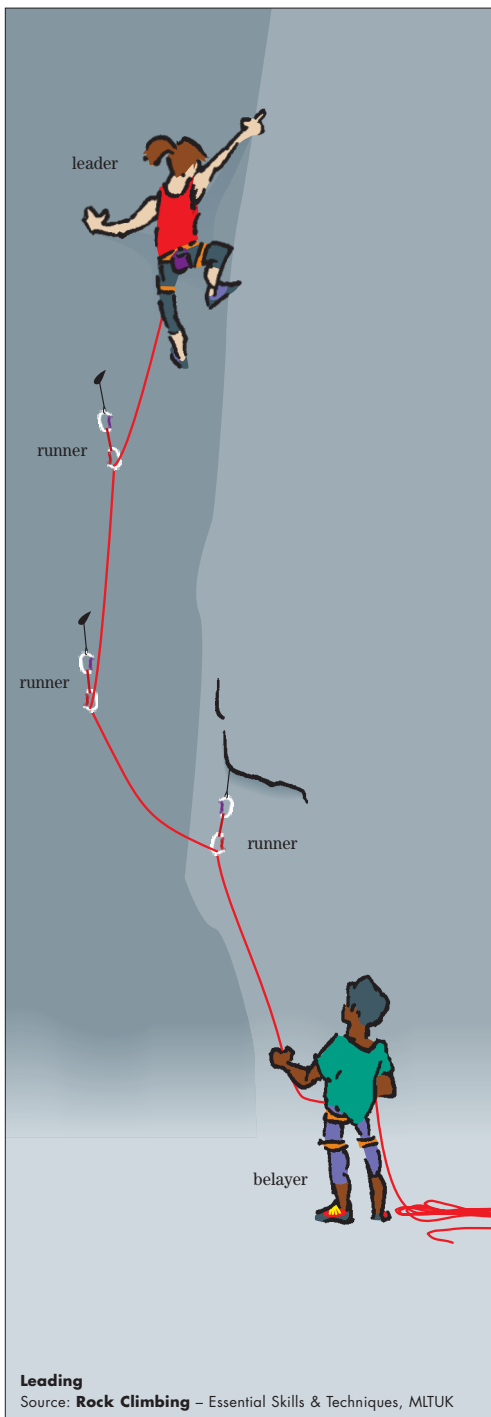
// **Hill walking** involves walking over mountainous terrain and venturing through exhilarating landscape with fabulous views. Aerobic fitness is improved, so it is very good for keeping fit. Specialist skills needed include map reading, terrain judgement and navigation. Boots, warm and waterproof clothing are required as the weather in hills and mountains can be inclement and sometimes difficult to predict accurately.

// **Scrambling** involves elements of both hill walking and rock climbing. Some scrambles up steep ridges can be very exposed. The steeper the rock, the harder the scramble and obviously the more skills and equipment required.

// **Mountaineering** involves walking, scrambling as well as rock and ice climbing up big mountains. The BMC *Winter Essentials* DVD gives useful insights into aspects of hill walking and mountaineering.

Climbing keeps me fit!

**Mark**, age 11



An indoor climbing competition Photo: Alex Messenger

## // INDOOR CLIMBING

Many people's first experience of climbing is at an indoor climbing wall. This is because:

- // There are more than 500 in the UK and the number is growing
- // They are usually easily accessible
- // Instruction is often available
- // Shoes and other essential equipment can often be hired
- // Some have children's and young people's clubs
- // It's a great way to meet people
- // Many hold fun competitions
- // It's warm and dry indoors when it might be wet and windy outside
- // Some schools take pupils as part of their P.E. curriculum or after-school activities

It is worth stressing that even though some risks are more easily managed at an indoor climbing wall, they are still present, and serious accidents do

### Leading

Source: **Rock Climbing** – Essential Skills & Techniques, MLTUK



Top-roping at indoor wall Photo: Alex Messenger

## // THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Many young people also want to take on the greater challenges that are available outdoors. Outdoor activities range from bouldering on small rocks and boulders, to rock climbing on cliffs and crags, to hill walking, scrambling, ice climbing, and mountaineering. As there is a greater variety of hazards outdoors, and conditions can quickly change, there are more risks associated with such activities. These obviously vary depending on the particular activity being undertaken, the weather, time of year and so on. There is much published material that can inform a parent's decision about whether to consent to their child participating in an outdoor activity and the reading list at the back of this document should be studied carefully, especially the BMC's free publications *Climbing Outside* and *New Hill Walkers*.

Some climbing walls and many professional instructors offer instruction for those who want to make the transition from indoors to outdoors. Also some clubs are well equipped to support people in this direction. It is worth checking all these avenues. There are sections on *Clubs* and on *Instruction* later in this document.

## // EQUIPMENT

As equipment can be expensive to buy, it is perhaps worth considering hiring any specialist equipment when children start on any of the activities described in this leaflet. Most climbing walls and course providers usually have facilities for doing this. However, when the time comes to have one's own equipment, it is important to look after it correctly, especially ropes and harnesses. The BMC had published a useful booklet entitled *Care and Maintenance* that gives excellent guidance on these issues.

An issue for parents to consider is the wearing of climbing helmets. For many people this is an issue about freedom, choice and personal responsibility. Some people choose to wear them, others choose

occasionally occur. Additionally, children are particularly vulnerable to overuse injuries during growth spurts. During periods of rapid growth, high intensity activities should be avoided. Over-enthusiastic children who have unsupervised access to training facilities (including training boards in garages, cellars and bedrooms) can develop overuse injuries. Parents need to be aware if their children are using such facilities and act accordingly to prevent injuries.

There is a climbing wall finder on the BMC website and the BMC also publish a climbing wall directory that is free to members; either will help you locate climbing walls in your area. Notification of forthcoming competitions and other events are also posted on the BMC website.

Outdoor climbing is fun  
in the summer!

**Connor**, age 9



Hill walking has fabulous views Photo: Plas y Brenin – www.pyb.co.uk

not to. That is their choice. As a parent, you will need to decide whether you want your child to wear one or not.

## // PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Parents of Under 18s (including those with parental responsibility) need to give their consent for their child(ren) to go climbing with someone else. Often this is achieved by completing a **Parental Consent Form**. Any parent giving their consent should take this responsibility very seriously and find out precisely what their child will be doing. This publication is a first step in that process. Additionally, you should talk to the people taking your child(ren) climbing, hill walking or mountaineering, and satisfy yourself that you are happy with the situation. Ask as many questions as come to mind. There is a list of useful questions at the end of this leaflet. It would also be useful to attend a similar event prior to the one your child(ren) will be attending. In this way you can see what sort of activities are undertaken and decide whether you are

happy with your child(ren) participating. A trip to a local climbing wall is possibly the most convenient way to gain an understanding of the activities that take place there. Talking to other parents, as well as reading magazines and books about these activities is also useful in this process. Another way for you to gain knowledge and understanding of what is involved is by doing some climbing, hill walking or mountaineering yourself. Not only will this give you greater insight, it will also open up the possibility of you being able to support your own child(ren)'s participation in a practical way once you feel able and confident to do so. This will also give you greater control and responsibility over the activities your children do. Generally, the better informed a parent is the more likely they will be able to make decisions in the best interest of their child(ren).

Anyone taking another person's child climbing, hill walking or mountaineering with the parent's consent will be '*in loco parentis*'. This is a Latin term meaning that they will be acting '*in place of a parent*'. This requires them to exercise a duty of care that would be provided by a reasonably prudent parent.

## // THE NATURE OF CLUBS

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering clubs have evolved from groups of people with common interests in these activities getting together and simply going out and doing them. Therefore, when club members go out together there is very often no defined leader or person in charge. As a general rule, there is no formal instruction but there will probably be some very experienced and knowledgeable climbers or mountaineers present, with a wide range of skills. Accordingly, it is often said that club members share their knowledge with each other – and that is the way many people learn and gain experience. As such, each individual has to be responsible for themselves. This is not as difficult as it sounds, but it does require that one is constantly aware of the need to think for oneself and consider things very carefully, especially one's own safety needs.



Mehreen, the first blind person to reach a BRYCS National Final Photo: Phil Weedon

Climbing has made me feel that I can do anything when I try

**Mehreen**, age 10

As noted previously, anyone taking a child climbing, hill walking or mountaineering in a club situation with parental consent will be acting *in loco parentis*. This requires him or her to act as a reasonably prudent parent. Just as it is reasonable for a parent to treat their children differently as they get older or gain experience, so it will be for a child in a club situation. As they get older and gain more experience, they will be expected to take on more responsibility for their own activities and safety.

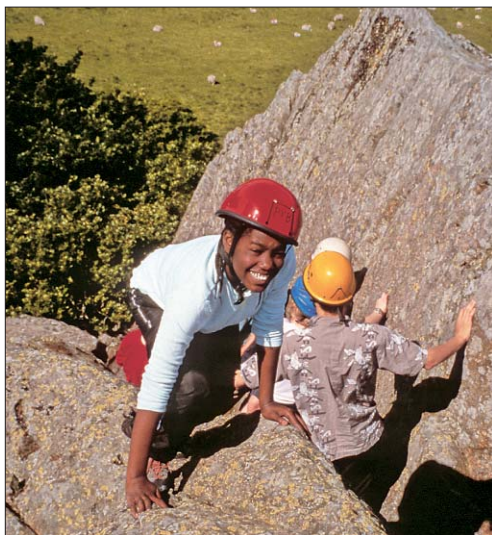
Managing risks effectively involves having the right level of knowledge, skills and experience for the situations encountered. Additionally, knowing that one is fully responsible for one's own actions and any consequences that might follow from them makes most people realistic in their decision making where hazards and risks are concerned.

In the case of children, through increasing participation, they begin to understand their own skill levels and their limitations. With guidance they become more able to manage some of the associated risks. Many respond well to this sort of structure. However, there are obviously individual differences between children and some may not be mature enough, or have sufficient understanding or powers of thought, to appreciate fully the hazards to which they are exposed. Parents are best placed to know whether their own children are ready and mature enough to take on more responsibilities or not. Consequently, you will have to decide whether you are going to consent to your child participating. Clubs taking Under 18s, on the other hand, will be able to inform parents about the nature of the activities they intend to do.

CLIMBING ALLOWS ME TO SHARE A COMMON INTEREST WITH MY SONS, THAT WILL GIVE US YEARS OF TRIPS AND EXPERIENCES TOGETHER LONG AFTER MANY OTHER INTERESTS FADE AWAY

**David**, a parent





Bouldering outside Photo: Plas y Brenin – www.pyb.co.uk

Some clubs accept Under 18s, some don't and others will only accept them if accompanied by their parent(s) or legal guardian. There are 350 clubs in England and Wales listed by geographical area on the club finder on the BMC website. Again, it is worth attending a club meet to decide whether you would be happy to allow your child to participate in the club's activities.

Clubs that admit Under 18s unaccompanied by their parents are required to have a designated **Club Youth Co-ordinator** who is responsible for making club members aware of the BMC Child Protection Policy, its requirements, and ensuring that the policy and its procedures are implemented within the club, as well as liaising with the BMC on youth related matters.

## // FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Ever since the beginning of climbing and mountaineering, people have started in many different ways. Some have simply gone out on their own, or with other novices, perhaps after reading books or seeing others do the activities, and by a long process of trial and error have gained experience. Others have gone with more experienced friends or relatives

who have generously taken them in an informal way and passed on their knowledge. This has been a useful way for beginners to gain an introduction to the activities and build up valuable experience. If you wish to explore this avenue for your child, you will need to satisfy yourself that you trust the person to look after your child in the way you would want them to. The information contained in this leaflet will go some way to helping you to do that, but ultimately the decision will be your own.

Climbing enables me to meet new people and make new friends

Tim, age 13

## // INSTRUCTION

Many parents use the services of professional instructors to help them and/or their children learn and gain experience. Lists of qualified freelance instructors are available on the **Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI)** website and the **British Mountain Guides (BMG)** website.

There are several organisations and institutions that offer climbing, hill walking and mountaineering courses. For instance, **Plas y Brenin**, the National Mountain Centre, runs a range of courses specifically designed for Under 18s. The **Adventure For All** website has links to centres that provide outdoor opportunities for people with disabilities. **Scouts**, **Girl Guiding**, **The Duke of Edinburgh's Award** and **Outward Bound** offer elements of climbing or mountaineering within their activities.

There are also numerous commercial organisations that offer climbing and outdoor pursuits courses for both adults and children. Some have websites that can be found by doing an internet search in the usual way. Many also advertise in the specialist climbing and



Learning skills Photo: Ian Hey

hill walking magazines. These can be purchased at most major outdoor shops, newsagents, or at greatly reduced rates when taking out a subscription with BMC membership.

Those who provide instruction for payment to under 18s without their own parent or legally appointed guardian present are required to be licensed. This does not apply to indoor climbing walls as they fall outside the scope of the licensing scheme. A database of those holding a license can be found on the **Adventure Activities Licensing Authority** website (AALA).

Instructors working professionally should have **Professional Indemnity Insurance**.

Climbing is challenging and fun!

**Joshua**, age 8

## // AWARDS & QUALIFICATIONS

The BMC and *Central Council for Physical Recreation* (CCPR) established the *Mountain Leader Training Board* in 1964 to deliver and administer training and qualifications for hill walking, rock climbing and mountaineering. Over the years Mountain Leader Training has changed in structure. There are now individual mountain leader training organisations covering England (MLTE), Wales (MLTW), Scotland (MLTS) and Northern Ireland (MLTNI) with a co-ordinating body (MLTUK). Between them, the training boards administer a range of nationally recognised awards and qualifications. Full details of all the training schemes can be found on their websites.

## // ROLE OF THE BMC

The BMC is the representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales. For Scotland the representative body is the *Mountaineering Council of Scotland* and in Ireland it is the *Mountaineering Council of Ireland*.

Amongst other things the BMC:

- // Promotes the interests, and protects the freedom of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers to enjoy their activities;
- // Lobbies and advises government on a range of important issues, such as access and changes in legislation;
- // Relies on a network of dedicated volunteers and employs 24 full-time staff to implement the BMC's work programmes including: Access and Conservation, Training and Youth, Good Practice, Climbing Walls and Climbing Competitions, and Guidebook publication. (Access and Conservation staff and volunteers, for instance, negotiate and secure access to our mountains, moorland and crags);
- // Provides information through seminars and national lecture series, as well as producing a range of posters, booklets, DVDs and other publications aimed at increasing people's awareness of all climbing related activities and issues, including good practice, training, access and conservation;
- // Advises on all aspects of climbing wall activities;
- // Runs regional and national climbing competitions;

- // Examines equipment failures and reports on these;
- // Maintains a Register of Expert Witnesses;
- // Has an important role within the international mountaineering and climbing federation, the UIAA, in setting international standards for climbing and mountaineering equipment and having BMC representation on all UIAA Commissions.

The BMC is a democratic organisation that encourages members to contribute to its ongoing work. Many contribute easily and simply by joining the BMC. This can be done quickly on the BMC website. Some people contribute by attending meetings or volunteering to help at various events. All BMC members are encouraged to attend **Area Meetings**. These are local forums and the democratic grassroots of the BMC. Full details can be found on the BMC website. There are also substantial personal benefits to joining. For instance:

- // All *Individual, Club, and Family Members* receive £5m Civil Liability Insurance. The policy provides cover for any civil liability claim arising in connection with hill walking, climbing and mountaineering. It is recommended that all participants join the BMC, or a *BMC Affiliated Club*, to be covered by this important insurance.
- // *Individual Members* also receive 4 copies of *Summit* magazine per year.
- // Discounts in over 200 retail outlets.
- // Additionally, the BMC sells the highly regarded *BMC Travel and Activity Insurance*. This specialist insurance is only available to BMC (and other Mountaineering Council) members and is specifically designed for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers. Any surplus is reinvested to support the BMC's vital work.

A full list of membership benefits appears on the BMC website.

BMC INSURANCE IS THE BEST YOU CAN GET... IT GIVES YOU COMPLETE PEACE OF MIND. IT GOT ME HOME NO FUSS WHEN I BROKE MY LEG ON CERRO TORRE

**Leo Houlding**, former British Junior Climbing Champion

## // USEFUL QUESTIONS

This is a list of questions you might wish to ask anyone you are considering approaching about taking your child climbing, hill walking or mountaineering. Having carefully read this publication you should now be in a better position to judge whether you find the answers given satisfactory or not.

- // Can you explain the sorts of activities you are able to offer?
- // Are they suitable for my child(ren)?
- // Do you have any information I can read (leaflet, website, etc)?
- // Is it a requirement that I accompany my child?
- // May I accompany my child if I wish?
- // Are the people taking my child on activities competent to do so?
- // What child protection procedures are in place?
- // What sorts of insurance do you have?
- // Do you need to be licensed? Are you licensed?
- // Do you have any alternative activities (a plan B) if you need to change your original plans?
- // What if I am late? Or what if you are late back?
- // How do I maintain contact with you? (mobile phone, email, etc)
- // Do you have emergency procedures? – What are they?



**British  
Mountaineering  
Council**

[thebmc.co.uk](http://thebmc.co.uk)

- // Working for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers
- // Keeping crags open
- // Travel and liability insurance
- // Competitions, safety and training
- // Discounts on gear, magazines and travel
- // Worldwide 'Information Service'

## // USEFUL CONTACTS

### British Mountaineering Council

T: 0870 010 4878 // [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk)

### Mountain Leader Training UK

T: 01690 720272 // [www.mltuk.org](http://www.mltuk.org)

### Mountain Leader Training England

T: 01690 720314 // [www.mtle.org](http://www.mtle.org)

### Mountain Leader Training Wales

T: 01690 720361 // [www.mltw.org](http://www.mltw.org)

### The National Mountain Centre – Plas y Brenin

T: 01690 720214 // [www.pyb.co.uk](http://www.pyb.co.uk)

### Scotland's National Mountain Centre – Glenmore Lodge

T: 01479 861 256 // [www.glenmorelodge.org.uk](http://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk)

### Ireland's National Mountain Centre – Tiglin

T: 00 353 (0) 404 40169 // [www.tiglin.com](http://www.tiglin.com)

### Northern Ireland's National Mountain Centre –

Tollymore Mountain Centre

T: 028 4372 2158 // [www.tollymore.com](http://www.tollymore.com)

### The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

T: 01738 638227 // [www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk](http://www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk)

### The Mountaineering Council of Ireland

T: 00 353 (0) 1625 1115 // [www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie)

### UIAA

T: 0041 (0) 31 370 1828 // [www.uiaa.ch](http://www.uiaa.ch)

### Adventure Activities Licensing Authority

T: 029 2075 5715 // [www.aala.org](http://www.aala.org)

### The Association of Mountaineering Instructors

T: 01690 720314 // [www.ami.org.uk](http://www.ami.org.uk)

### British Mountain Guides

T: 01690 720386 // [www.bmg.org.uk](http://www.bmg.org.uk)

**Adventure For All** – The association of residential outdoor activity centres working with people with disabilities.  
[www.adventureforall.org.uk](http://www.adventureforall.org.uk)

### Outward Bound

T: 0870 513 4227 // [www.outwardbound-uk.org](http://www.outwardbound-uk.org)

### NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Free 24hr Phone: 0808 800 5000

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Free Textphone: 0800 056 0566

### Childline – Free Confidential helpline

T: 0800 1111

## // USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

### Climbing Outside BMC (2005)

Also available as a free PDF on the BMC website

### Climbing Wall Directory BMC (2005)

### Club Guidance Notes BMC (2005)

Available as a free PDF on the BMC website

### Winter Essentials: Skills & Techniques for the Winter Mountains

BMC (2005) a DVD film

### Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults Policy BMC (2004)

Available as a free PDF on the BMC website

**New Hill Walkers:** route planning – map reading – weather – clothing & equipment BMC (2003)

**Care and Maintenance:** equipment standards – equipment wear and failure – routine checks and care BMC (2001)

**Tread Lightly:** a best practice guide for walkers and climbers in the uplands BMC (2000)

**Safety on Mountains:** clothing, equipment, navigation, hazards, camping, environment, first aid BMC (2000)

**Ropes** BMC (1998)

**Knots** BMC (1997)

**Hill walking** – The Official Handbook of The Mountain Leader and Walking Group Leader Schemes Long, S (2004) Mountain Leader Training UK

**Rock Climbing – Essential Skills & Techniques**, The Official Handbook of the Mountaineering Instructor and Single Pitch Award Schemes Peter L (2004) Mountain Leader Training UK

**Guidelines for Resistance Exercise in Young People** Stratton, G., Jones, M. and Fox, K.R. (2004) Coachwise Business Solutions

**One Move Too Many:** How to understand the injuries and overuse syndromes of rock climbing Hochholzer T. and Schoeffl V. (2003) LOCHNER-VERLAG, D-82067, Ebenhausen, Germany, ISBN 3-928026020-8

BMC and MLTUK publications are available via the shop on the BMC website:  
[www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk)

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Diagrams have been taken from **MLTUK's book Rock Climbing – Essential Skills & Techniques** by British Mountain Guide Libby Peter. To purchase a copy, please contact the BMC on **0870 010 4878**.

