

Listed below are the personal things to bring along for winter climbing, mountaineering and walking courses in Scotland. All technical winter equipment is provided (including axes, crampons, harness and a helmet if you don't have your own). Feel free to get in touch if you'd like more detailed advice on gear or clothing.

waterproof jacket

Breathable but not too lightweight (e.g. not Gortex Active or Pertex Shield fabrics) and with a hood big enough to fit over a helmet. If you're purchasing a new jacket, get a bright, bold colour and avoid black or very dark colours.

waterproof trousers

Breathable but not lightweight, with side-zips long enough so they can be pulled on easily over boots. Sallopettes and bibs can be restrictive, making it difficult to regulate temperature when on the move.

clothing/insulating layers

Base layer - a wicking long-sleeve top and leggings (merino wool, Capilene, Polartec, MeCo, etc).

Mid layers - a long-sleeved fleece plus one other top that can be layered over, such as a gillet or a larger fleece.

Spare layer - everyone in winter needs to be carrying a large, warm, spare clothing layer of some description. Big enough so that it can be pulled on over your other insulating layers if you stop walking for a while, or if you're belaying on a cold stance, or more importantly if there's an emergency. The ideal solution is a jacket or pullover with synthetic insulation. Other good options include a large fleece, a lined soft shell top (a very versatile option), or even an 'old school' Buffalo shirt. Natural down (feather) filled jackets are totally unsuitable for Scottish winter conditions, no matter what the manufacturer claims. They 'wet out' too easily, rapidly losing their insulating ability. I have a few spare large, synthetically insulated jackets available to borrow.

Hill/Mountain trousers - made from any trusted outdoor fabric. Schoeller, Windstopper and Polartec are the most well known but are certainly not the only good materials available. Anything that is quick drying and has some windproof ability will be fine. Even fleece leggings are okay... so long as you agree to keep your waterproof trousers on.

Softshell top - life is undoubtedly more comfortable with a softshell but it is by no means an essential piece of clothing. It can often be worn for the majority, if not all of the day but isn't a substitute for also having a waterproof jacket.

gloves	A pair of warm waterproof gloves (ski gloves are fine) plus 1 or 2 pairs of thin liner gloves. Ideally you should also have a spare pair of waterproof gloves. I have a few 'used' pairs that can be borrowed during your course. An additional midweight, dextrous softshell/windproof pair are very handy but not essential. Mitts are impractical.
boots	Stiff soled winter or insulated summer alpine boots capable of taking a Grivel G12 crampon (C2) with a new matic fit. If you're purchasing boots, feel free to call or email for advice.
gaiters	Indispensable in deep snow. Plain and simple alpine/walking style are best.
hat	Fleece or woollen and able to fit under a helmet. Don't bring a balaclava.
rucksack	A classically shaped, narrow climbing/alpine sac is best. It must have side compression straps (used for stowing your axe upright, rather than on the axe attachment systems on the rear of some sacs). Minimum 45 litres for climbing or 35+ litres for walking. Avoid overly engineered and strap happy style sacs such as Osprey. I have a couple of spare, medium back length, 45 litre sacs which can be borrowed.
rucksack liner	A waterproof liner to keep your gear dry. Or at least a few smaller 'roll top' waterproof bags to keep your spare clothing and gloves dry. External rucksack covers are generally a nightmare to use in Scotland. Leave them at home.
goggles	Ski goggles, preferably with a double lens to prevent them misting up. Can't stress how important these are.
headtorch	Multi LED or LED/halogen combo made by a reputable manufacturer... with fresh batteries. Carrying a cheap spare LED torch is more sensible than carrying spare batteries.
headtorch	A 0.5-1 litre water plastic bottle. Not a Camelback or similar hydration system, the tubes freeze and clog, even if insulated.
personal emergency stuff	<p>A <u>small</u> personal first aid kit, which includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - any medication you are taking - sun cream / block - a blister kit (e.g. compede or plasters / tape) - a plastic whistle - an energy bar or gel, or dried fruit <p>Also bring a fully charged mobile phone. If it's a smart phone, install one of the free GPS apps such as 'OS locate'. Better still purchase either 'Viewranger' or 'OS Maps' and pre-load the relevant 1:50,000 maps.</p>

compass

If you'd like to learn or improve your winter navigation, don't forget to bring a 'type 4' Silva compass (or comparable model). Also, if you own a smart phone see the above notes on mobile mapping apps.

The following items are the personal technical equipment you'll need to bring along. If you'd like to borrow any of these items free of charge, please get in touch in advance.

helmet

A climbing helmet big enough to go over your hat. If you're purchasing a new helmet, get a white one or a bright colour. Avoid black or grey.

harness

Any modern climbing harness with adjustable leg loops will be okay. The ideal lightweight, minimalist models are the Black Diamond Bod or Alpine Bod and the DMM Super Couloir. A harness isn't required for winter walking.

mountain axe

For winter skills training, winter walking and traditional winter mountaineering, your mountain axe needs to have a straight or slightly curved shaft and be approx 55cm in length (maybe 60cm if you're over 6ft). It should have a forged head and a wide adze. The most versatile axes for Scottish winter are the DMM Raptor and Petzl Summit Evo. The DMM Cirque is a good value all-rounder. The Petzl Cosmique and the Grivel Air Tech are also good but very close to being too light for the job. You're welcome to borrow an axe for your course.

climbing axes

Simple climbing axes such as any generation of Petzl Quarks or Black Diamond Vipers are the most versatile for both mixed and ice climbing. They also act as good mountain axes on ground when only one tool is needed. Climbing axes with 'handled' shafts, such as DMM Switch or Petzl Nomics are good on steep routes but are somewhat limited on mountaineering ground, or for digging out belays (unless they're fitted with an adze). If you'd like to borrow axes, you're welcome to try a pair of Quarks, Vipers or Nomics.

crampons

Any 12 point mountaineering crampons (C2) with anti-balling plates are suitable (e.g. Grivel G12, Charlet/Petzl Vasak, Black Diamond Sabretooth). Models with front plastic bails are by far the most versatile and easy to put on in foul conditions. If you'd like to borrow a pair of crampons, you're welcome to use a pair of Grivel Air Techs (C2) with a new matic fit (maximum boot size 12, otherwise you'll need to purchase an extension bar). If Air Techs aren't compatible with your boots, old style 'strap-on' crampons (C1) can be hired cheaply in Aviemore on a daily basis.

10 point crampons are fine for winter walking and grade I snow slopes (which covers just about every winter Munro).

The following gear is optional.

thermos flask

A luxury on the hill. A cylindrical shaped 0.75 or 1 litre stainless steel variety works best.

trekking poles

Only bring if you're familiar with using them. They should be telescopic/collapsible so they can be stowed, preferably in your rucksack or in the side compression straps. They'll need to be fitted with snow baskets.

small transparent dry bag

Extremely useful for keeping mobile, map and all your other valuable stuff dry and together in one place (an Ortlieb clear A5 or A4 document case is a good example).

sunglasses

Surprisingly useful judging from recent winters. Get hold of a rigid case to keep them in one piece. These aren't a substitute for goggles.

There are a few good, well-stocked outdoor shops in Aviemore. The staff are knowledgeable and on the whole, gear is competitively priced.