

Here are the personal things to bring along for winter climbing, mountaineering and walking courses in Scotland. All technical winter equipment is provided. Feel free to get in touch if you'd like more detailed advice on gear or clothing.

waterproof jacket

Breathable but not too lightweight, and with a hood big enough to fit over a helmet. If you're purchasing a new jacket, go for a bright or bold colour, and avoid black or very dark colours... it's good to be visible!

waterproof trousers

Breathable and again not too lightweight, and with side-zips long enough so they can be pulled on over boots. Sallopettes and bibs are okay, but they can be quite restrictive when it comes to regulating temperature on the move.

clothing/insulating layers

Base layer - a wicking long-sleeve top and leggings - merino wool, Capilene, Polartec, or similar.

Mid layers - a long-sleeved fleece, plus an additional top that can be layered on top, such as a gillet or a larger fleece.

Spare layer - it's very important that you carry 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 fleece jacket, a lined soft shell top (a very versatile option), or even an old-style Buffalo shirt. Natural down/feather filled jackets are totally shite for Scottish winter conditions - no matter what the manufacturer claims, they 'wet out' quickly and lose all their insulating ability. I have a few 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 has some windproof ability and is quick drying will be fine.

Softshell top - life will undoubtedly be more comfortable with a softshell, but it isn't an essential piece of clothing - it simply makes temp regulation much easier and can often be worn for the majority, if not all of the day. A lightweight windproof can also work to some degree. Neither is a substitute for also carrying a waterproof jacket.

gloves	Two pairs of warm waterproof gloves. Plus one or two pairs of thinner liner-type gloves. An additional midweight, dextrous softshell/windproof pair are handy but not essential. Mitts are good in an emergency but impractical for anything else - it would be better to carry an additional pair of gloves.
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 or Scottish mush. Plain and simple alpine/mountaineering style are best.
hat	Fleece or woollen, and able to fit under a helmet (which means no bobbles). Don't bring a balaclava.
rucksack	A classically shaped, narrow climbing/alpine sac is best, ideally with side compression straps - if only for stowing your axe upright, rather than on the various attachment systems now found on the rear of most sacs. Minimum 45 litres for climbing or 35+ litres for walking or mountaineering. Avoid overly engineered or strap-happy style sacs such as some by Osprey. I have a couple of spare 45 litre sacs to loan.
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 a nightmare to use in Scottish winter conditions. Leave them at home.
goggles	Ski goggles, preferably with a double lens to prevent them misting up. Can't stress how important goggles are.
headtorch	A rechargeable LED type is the way forward, made by a reputable manufacturer. Also having a small/cheap spare LED headtorch is a sensible safety measure.
water bottle	0.5-1 litre plastic bottle. Not a Camelback or similar hydration system - the tubes freeze and clog, even if insulated.
personal emergency stuff	A <u>small</u> personal first aid kit, which includes <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 - emergency food (energy bars, dried fruit, ...)
mobile phone	Pre-install one of the free apps that give your current grid reference, such as 'OS locate'. Better still, install the 'Viewranger' app and purchase the minimal amount of tile credits allowable. The recently revamped 'OS Maps' app is a bit rubbish - it presently won't work without a 4G signal.

compass

A decent hill walking compass - one that you're accustomed to using and confident will point you in your desired direction. If you'd like to improve your winter navigation, bring a 'type 4' Silva compass (in degrees not mils).

The following stuff is the personal technical gear 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, go for white or a bright colour. Avoid the black/orange combo or dull grey models.

harness

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

mountain axe

For winter skills training, winter walking and traditional winter mountaineering, the most versatile mountain axe will have a straight or slightly curved shaft. The best length is 50-55cm, depending on your height and preference. A wide adze is handy. The DMM Raptor and Petzl Summit Evo are probably the most popular. The DMM Cirque is a good value all-rounder. The Petzl Cosmique and the Grivel Air Tech Evo are also good. Be wary of purchasing anything sub 400g - it's going to be too lightweight for when conditions are harsh.

climbing axes

Simple climbing axes such as any generation of Petzl Quarks or Black Diamond Vipers (the most versatile axes for both mixed and ice climbing). They are also good to use as a mountaineering axe on terrain where only one tool is needed. Axes with handles, such as the DMM Switch or Petzl Nomic are good on ice and steep mixed routes but not so good to use on sub grade III or on mountaineering ground - if you purchase a pair, make sure you fit one tool with an adze.

crampons

Any 12 point mountaineering crampons (C2) with anti-balling plates are fine (e.g. Grivel G12, Charlet/Petzl Vasak, Black Diamond Sabretooth). Models with front plastic bails are by far the most versatile and easier to put on in foul conditions. If you can't bring your own crampons, you're welcome to borrow a pair of Grivel Air Techs (C2) with a new matic fit. These are the best crampons for all-round Scottish use (maximum boot size 12/EU47, otherwise you'll need to purchase an extension bar). If Air Techs aren't compatible with your boots (unlikely), old style 'strap-on' crampons (C1) can be hired in Aviemore.

10 point crampons are fine for winter walking and grade I snow slopes (which covers the majority of winter Munros).

small transparent dry bag

Extremely useful for keeping mobile, map and all your other valuable stuff dry and useable - Ortlieb clear document cases and Seal Line E-cases are good examples.

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

Very useful, especially if there's deep snow. They should be telescopic/collapsible so they can be stowed, preferably inside your rucksack or in the side compression straps. They'll need to be fitted with snow baskets.

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.