

SKILLS & ADVICE



With Ben Nevis on our cover this month, it's fitting that we should announce our first Scottish Winter Weekender, taking place on March 1st-3rd 2014 at the home of British winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe. winter mountaineering – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe.

OUR EXPERTS The Mountain Skills team

Expert profiles with placeholder names (XXXXXXXXXX) and photos (one of which is redacted with a yellow circle).

THE KNOWLEDGE

Moving a casualty

Alun Richardson discusses when, and how, to move an injured team member in the mountains

WORDS ALUN RICHARDSON PICTURES SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Should mountaineers walk in the hills with the expectation that they will be rescued even when led in the hills by a more competent person? Should we really call a mountain rescue team for a non-life threatening injured ankle when we have strong team members capable of carrying someone from the hill? It is a question that is not easily answered – in reality, every situation has a different answer and the decision to move an injured person is a difficult one for mountaineers and leaders.

The decision is made easier when leaving the casualty where they are is worse than the risk of moving them to a safer place. You may also have no alternative when you are in a remote place with no external assistance, or when it is winter and the weather is worsening. The option of calling for the assistance of a mountain rescue team can make the decision more difficult; we should always remember that mountain rescue teams can take many hours to get to you especially if the conditions are bad.

If it is an injured adult then their opinion will help, but if they cannot communicate with you the decision is more difficult. Take a common-sense approach; if the casualty is conscious, they want to move and their evacuation will not put others in danger – then give it a go – but be realistic about your abilities and the terrain. If the decision is made to move a casualty then the methods described in the rest of this article will be of use.

RUCKSACK CARRY

If the injured person is conscious and can sit up, then you could consider using a 'rucksack carry'. Exactly how you do this will depend on the size of the casualty and the carrier. Using walking poles threaded through the shoulder straps, a minimum of four poles is required (more for a very big person), tape them and add padding. Swap

frequently and have people to help you get up. For more detailed explanation on this, see below.

MOVING A SERIOUSLY INJURED CASUALTY

Before moving a seriously-injured casualty, you must ask yourself the following questions:

Do I really need to move the casualty? Only move them if it will save their life. It is impossible, even with a dedicated stretcher, to move a casualty without causing movement that may cause pain and/or further damage. Moving the casualty may be justified in order to move the casualty from an awkward, unstable or exposed location, to somewhere sheltered, protected or more stable.

Are there enough people? Moving casualties, even with a dedicated stretcher is difficult and tiring. Tired rescuers are susceptible to injury and more susceptible to heat stroke or hypothermia.

What is the terrain like? Is it worth the risk? Moving a casualty requires the co-ordinated effort of many people even over a short distance.

Do you have enough equipment? A stretcher made out of an orange bivi bag is virtually useless apart from very short carries when a back injury is not suspected.

RUCKSACK STRETCHER

To make a rucksack stretcher, you need a minimum of three expedition (60L+) rucksacks. Four 40-50L rucksacks can be used, but this increases the number of articulations thereby reducing the rigidity of the stretcher. The advantages of the rucksack stretcher is that it is quick to set up, and it limits movement to two articulations between the three rucksacks, and this can be minimised by passing skis, tent poles or walking poles through the side compression straps. Tarps and sheets are useful for lifting or positioning casualties, but

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unlike a rucksack stretcher, do not provide any spinal immobilisation. With a rucksack stretcher the waist straps secure the casualty to the stretcher, and the shoulder straps provide ready-made carrying handles. When the casualty is lowered during rests or into the final position, the rucksacks provide protection and insulation from the ground. With the casualty positioned, the stretcher is 'top heavy', so be aware of leaving the casualty as they may roll.

MAKING THE STRETCHER

- 1. Gather all of the equipment so that it is close to hand.
2. Lay the rucksacks end-to-end
3. Unbuckle completely the shoulder straps of the middle rucksack
4. 'Daisy chain' all three pairs of shoulder straps using the unbuckled straps
5. Reinforce the stability by passing walking poles, skis, tent poles etc through the side compression straps.

- 6. Undo the waist straps to their full extent in readiness for the casualty.
7. Cover the casualty and do up the straps. Lifting a casualty onto the stretcher is beyond this article. If you are not familiar with the procedures needed to protect someone's back then go on an first aid course. ■ T&M

I am indebted to Adam Gent from www.realfirstaid.co.uk for his comments.