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Mountain Skills

Course Syllabus and
Written Test

Guidelines for
Candidates, Trainers
and Assessors

www.mountaineering.ie

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Introduction

The Mountain Skills (MS) scheme plays a number of roles within the structure of MCI/BOS mountain training. One of its primary functions is to provide a general introduction to hill walking in Ireland and to impart the necessary skills in navigation and knowledge of hazards, equipment etc., so that a person finishing the course may be in a position to safely pursue hill walking as a hobby.

The MS scheme also provides foundation training for those who wish to progress on to the national and internationally recognised leadership qualifications. This is reflected in the third block of the scheme, the MS Assessment, successful completion of which is a pre-requisite for registration on the BOS ML training scheme.

Trainers should keep in mind two points. Firstly, not all students on a Mountain Skills course will be interested in the Mountain Leadership scheme. Secondly, the course is intensive and the capability of the person upon completion of the course will largely depend on their individual experience prior to entering the course, and their efforts during it. Whilst an official programme is laid out below, and should be followed if at all possible, the trainer may have to be flexible in the best interest of the majority of students and their ambitions.

The MCI acknowledges that the use of the MS scheme syllabus may be used under two providership categories.

1. **Non-approved providers.** The MS syllabus may be used by any individual or organisation wishing to promote best practice guidelines within a well-structured training course. Non-approved providers, however, must not advertise, promote, or present their training courses in any way that may be construed as official affiliation to the MCI/BOS MS scheme. Non-approved providers must also ensure that all participating candidates on their course clearly understand that their training course is a non-official MCI MS course. Candidates participating in training with a non-approved provider and wishing to progress on to the MS Assessment will need to apply for exception from the assessment provider.
2. **Approved providers.** These individuals are recognised as official providers of the MCI/BOS training scheme, having undergone full approval in line with the BOS provider guidelines and criteria. These providers are registered MCI/BOS approved trainers and fulfil the required reporting structure in place for candidates to become officially registered on the MCI database as having completed MS training. These providers must apply for revalidation of their approval every two years and demonstrate compliance with the current criteria.

Requirements to Run MCI/BOS MS Courses

The provider must be an approved individual, achieved by fulfilling the following criteria:

1. The director of the course should have previously attended and observed two full Mountain Skills courses and one Assessment course with an approved BOS provider.
2. The director of the course must have completed a Mountain Skills Club Trainers course as organised by BOS.
3. Agree to use suitably qualified and experienced instructors. Recognised qualifications include ML, MIA, EML or higher award.
4. Use the syllabus as drawn up by BOS and describe the course as an MCI/BOS Mountain Skills course.
5. All staff must hold a valid and approved first aid certificate.
6. Apply to BOS on the official application form including the appropriate non-refundable administration fee.
7. Agree as course director to be actively involved and present for all aspects of the course delivery.
8. A completed course report must be sent to the MCI training officer within 30 days of course completion.

Attendance at the basic Mountain Skills course is not a qualification to lead others in the Irish hills. It provides a solid introduction to hillwalking and a very useful and logical first step to a Mountain Leadership qualification.

On the following pages you will find details of the syllabus and a suggested sample course programme. The latter gives details of each talk/lecture session on the course. A primary objective is given for each talk or practical exercise as well as essential elements of content. It is up to each trainer to compile their own lecture notes, practical exercises etc. to reflect the syllabus and course notes. It is in the best interest of everybody if a degree of uniformity is established by all trainers so that students are not at a disadvantage if they change trainers, or when they attend assessments. This also helps students and trainers if the student progresses to Mountain Leadership training.

The development of the course programme is ongoing and revisions will be made if necessary, in line with trainers' and students' suggestions. Comments should be addressed to Mountain Skills Course, c/o MCI training officer.

Note On Duration Of Training Courses

The complete MS training course is to be run over a minimum of four days with at least two evening/night sessions to allow for talks and night navigation exercises. A longer period may be desirable and necessary depending on students' individual skill levels. For those students attending the Mountain Skills assessment, an overall period of eight weeks (minimum) must elapse between commencement of training and the Mountain Skills Test.



Administrative Pre-Course Work

- The course must be described as a MCI/BOS Mountain Skills training course.
- The course director must be actively involved in all aspects of the course delivery.
- Assistant instructors on the MS course must be experienced ML award holders (or higher), have a full understanding of, and experience of teaching, the MS syllabus, and must hold a valid first aid qualification. There is a maximum ratio of six pupils per instructor as per BOS requirements.

On receipt of an application or an enquiry of interest the trainer should check:

- a. The applicant's general level of experience.
- b. The applicant's previous general mountain experience.

As the trainer will have to accommodate applicants of many different standards of experience gained over varied periods of time, it is recommended that providers state that some recent experience of mountain walking in Ireland is imperative.

Participation on the full Mountain Skills course is to be encouraged but students may, due to their own situation, choose to do only part of the course. It is up to the individual provider to decide whether it is possible for a candidate to move directly on to MS2 without completing MS1

Syllabus

Mountain Hazards

Climatic hazards

- Temperature, precipitation, wind, lightning, humidity and snow.
- Reference to causes of mountain hypothermia.

Topographic hazards

- Steepness, ruggedness, special emphasis on remoteness.
- Reference to falls and drownings in hillwalking situations.
- Ability with reference to terrain and conditions.

Human hazards

- Health and fitness.
- Poor/lack of equipment.
- Poor route choice.

Maps

- Map scales/symbols/conventional signs.
- Ordnance Survey maps/history, reliability, suitability, comparison of different scales.
- Terminology/features (e.g. corries, spurs, ridges, aretes etc.)
- Relief depiction including contours, crags.
- Orienteering maps.
- Grid references.

Navigation

- Methods of calculating distance travelled and height climbed (Naismith's Rule).
- Methods of measuring distances on ground (timing, pacing).
- Simple navigational techniques (aiming off, handrails, attack points etc.).
- Methods of location, cardinal points (solar, astral).
- Feature recognition (distant and near), self-location.
- Navigating across country using map alone.
- Theory of navigational tools including Silva-type compass, altimeters, and GPS.
- Map setting by compass: following bearing, back bearing and simple resection.
- Navigating across country using both map and compass.



Route Planning

- Route planning (choice of route, route card, bad weather alternatives, escape routes).
- Guidebooks and sources of information.
- Slope aspect.
- Re-location techniques.

Personal Equipment

- Equipment for hillwalking with reference to weight, bulk, and cost.
- Comparison and contrast of: footwear, outer clothing, headgear, gloves, middle layer garments, base layers.
- Bivouac bags and Bivouac tents.
- Rucksacks, torches, care of maps, whistle and other emergency signalling devices.
- First aid kits.
- Additional equipment for winter.

Emergency Procedures

- Procedure in event of an accident.
- Prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mountain hypothermia, sprains, blisters, fatigue, and other typical ailments.
- Mountain rescue organisation in Ireland, including location of posts and teams.
- Call-out procedures

Recommended Programme

Mountain Skills 1

Day 1

MS Scheme Introduction (Talk – 30 mins)

Objective: To introduce MS scheme and role of various organisations.

- The roles of the following organisations: MCI, BOS, trainer.
- Scope of the Mountain Skills course and how it relates to Mountain Leader course.
- Introduce (weekends) programme, instructors etc.

Maps: Suitability of OS Maps (Talk – 1 hour)

Objective: To explore some concepts of maps and the history and current suitability of OS maps for hillwalking.

- Properties of maps: aerial view, scale, symbols.
- Scales and their effect on map detail.
- Conventional symbols including contours on walking maps – what they represent on the ground.
- Suitability/reliability of OS and other production walking maps.
- Refer to scale, age, content: contour interval, crags, forests and tracks, building in isolated areas, rivers/streams.
- A brief history of OS mapping in Ireland: early 1800s, six-inch survey, for taxation purposes, mostly accurate on land below 1000 ft.
- Early 1:50000 – based on 1970s photography
- Rest of series – based on 1995 photography.
- Other production maps now available.
- Digital maps.

A variety of maps should be utilised to illustrate general points (eg. OS large scale maps, orienteering maps, walking maps, regional/atlas maps etc.)

A selection of walking maps of different scales, style and production available in Ireland should also be shown.

Hill Walk (5 hours)

Objective: To develop map reading skills, understanding of symbols and basic contour patterns. Navigation should be done using map only techniques when suitable.

- Conventional symbols and what they represent.
- Mapsetting.
- Contour features: flat/steep ground, spur, valley, top, col/saddle, ridge, plateaus, re-entrants.
- Distance estimation – on map and ground. (Do not introduce measuring scales or Naismith calculations at this stage, but encourage estimation by eye, feel, and experience).
- Simple navigation technique – following handrail features, easy line features to start then graduating to easy contour features – spurs/ridges etc.
- Direction estimation/map setting.
- Terrain/maps – this exercise should be conducted on easy, moderate terrain. Use 1:50000 or 1:25000 maps most applicable to the area. Clearly identifiable points, both on the map and ground should be chosen for navigation legs.

Mountain Hazards (Talk – 1 hour)

Objective: To explore and illustrate some objective and subjective hazards of walking in the Irish mountains. It can be beneficial to allow candidates time to produce their own list of suggested hazards under the following headings.

- Weather: rain, cloud, cold, etc.
- Topographic: cliffs, vegetation, loose rock, etc.
- Human: health, fitness, attitude, etc.

A group discussion may then take place about formulating the chances and consequences of individual hazards or when combined with others.

Personal Equipment (Talk – 1 hour)

Objective: To discuss and show possibilities for hillwalking gear.

- Demonstrate examples of essential gear. Show possibilities for various options. Supplement with hand-out. Discuss the extra equipment needed for hillwalking in winter.

Depiction of Relief (Talk – 30 mins)

Objective: To illustrate different methods of showing relief in the mountains, with emphasis on contour features. Include how corries, spurs, ridges, valleys, peaks etc. are depicted.

- Discuss and show examples (if possible) of hill shading and contours and their relative merits.
- Concentrate on contour information – variation in basic patterns of shape, slope, and size of various features. The role of spot heights and crag symbols. A 3-D model or 3-D digital mapping example could be useful.

Day 2

Pacing and Timing (Talk/Practical – 1 hour)

Objective: To elaborate on rough distance estimation of previous day and introduce more accurate methods.

- Pacing exercise – determine number of double paces per 100 metres.
- Pacing – discuss variance in stride and how ground type and inclination alter number of paces taken, both up and down.
- Measuring distances on maps.
- Basic Naismith's rule: Allow 1 hour for every 3 miles (5 km) forward, plus ½ hour for every 1000 feet (300 metres) of ascent.
- Breaking basic Naismith's Rule down into smaller units e.g. 100 metres, etc.
- Some timing calculations.
- Limitations over short distance, broken and steep ground.

Hill walk (5.5 hours)

Objective: To develop map reading and more accurate means of measuring distance from the map and on the ground.

- Pacing: more direct and easier to understand than timing. Include a practical session and discuss how students can further refine their own double pace.
- Timing (Naismith's Rule)
- Feature recognition.
- Terrain/maps – same as Day 1.
- Advice on individual student training needs.

Route Card (Talk – 30 mins)

Objective: To demonstrate the importance of route planning and preparation.

- Simple photocopy of map with marked route.
- Detailed route card showing times etc.
- Use of route card in emergencies for assistance information.

Debrief (Talk – 30 mins)

Objective: To offer general advice on course, answer queries etc., get feedback.

- Course comments – student and instructor.
- Need for practice in navigation.
- Details of next course etc.

Mountain Skills 2

Day 1

Briefing (Talk – 20 mins)

Objective: To outline course and assess student progress.

- Analysis of students' hillwalking activity since MS 1.
- Introduce programme, instructors etc.

Emergency Procedures – Part 1.

Mountain Hypothermia (Talk – 30 minutes)

Objective: To create an awareness of the concept of mountain hypothermia.

A brief outline of the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of same.

- Physiology.
- Causes – environmental, individual.
- Signs and symptoms.
- Treatment – early, ongoing.
- Prevention.
- Also discuss other common ailments: sprains, blisters, fatigue, etc.

Introduction to Compass, Grid References (Talk/Practical 1 hour)

Objective: To introduce the use of the compass in hillwalking navigation and grid references.

Compass (40 mins)

- Compass points – cardinal points, 360 degree system.
- North – true, grid, magnetic.
- The concept of a bearing.
- Measuring bearings from a map by estimation, protractor.
- Theory of a Silva-type compass; taking bearings from a map.
- Grid and magnetic bearings.
- Walking on a bearing – short exercises.

Grid references (20 min)

- National Grid.
- Four-figure grid references.
- Six-figure grid references.

Hill Walk (5 hours)

Objective: To develop map reading skills, the concept of timing, and to practice the compass theory introduced earlier. Map and compass to be used in conjunction as much as possible.

- General map reading, setting map by features.
- Setting map by compass.
- Timing calculations.
- Taking bearings from map.

- Walking on bearings.
- Back-bearings.
- Simple resection (i.e. party located somewhere on a definite linear feature. Bearing taken to a clearly identifiable point roughly at right angles. Intersection of plotted bearing and linear feature gives rough position).
- Feature recognition – close, distant.
- Navigational technique – attack points, aiming off.

Route Planning (Talk – 1 hour)

Objective: To explore and illustrate the principles of route planning from maps.

- The selection of walking routes from the map – in good/poor weather.
- Difficulties associated with steep ground, forestry, rivers, etc.
- Bad weather alternatives, escape routes.
- Use of route card.
- Various designs of route card.
- Preparation of route card – run through example.
- Use of guidebooks in route planning.

Night Navigation/Poor Weather Exercise (2/3 hours)

Objective: To practice navigation technique (particularly compass skills) in conditions of poor visibility.

- Discuss the reasons for, and actions taken, when caught out after dark.
- Short, simple navigation problems should be set, requiring a combination of tactics and compass work to solve. Clearly identifiable points, both on the map and ground should be chosen for navigation legs.
- Safety must be paramount and a strict time limit adhered to, to avoid disenchantment.

DAY 2

Emergency Procedures – Part 2. Mountain Rescue (Talk – 30 mins)

Objective: To outline procedures in the case of a mountain accident.

- Brief history of mountain rescue in Ireland, IMRA.
- Location of mountain rescue teams in Ireland.
- Accident procedure.
- Plan of action – risk to others, nature of injuries, weather, time available, party, equipment, terrain, location, and distance. Options – evacuation, sending for help.
- Call-out procedure.
- Role of the Air Rescue Helicopter, SARDA.

Steep/Broken Ground: Practical

Objective: To explore more rugged terrain, perhaps not normally encountered by hillwalkers, and develop an awareness in the student of his/her own abilities and limitations so that they remain at all times within full control of the situation on steep or broken ground.

- Safe movement in ascent and descent.
- Movement skills and technique.
- Route finding, maps etc.
- Movement of group.
- Hazards, problems of loose rock and other objective dangers.

Note on MS Steep/Broken Ground

While it may be difficult to definitively classify suitable steep ground for the MS course, it should only include ground where the use of the rope would not be contemplated. Many aspects of this part of the syllabus can be taught through outdoor discussions presented around a number of styles and degrees of steep/broken ground. Although it can be beneficially important to progress clients on to a range of more serious terrain in order to demonstrate judgement, this should be always kept within the perceived ability of the group.

Debrief, Assessment Briefing (Talk - 45 mins)

Objective: To answer queries, get feedback and outline procedure for Mountain Skills Test if applicable.

- Course comments – students, instructor.
- Assessment procedure for those intending to do Mountain Skills Assessment.
- Issue logbook.
- Sample paper.
- Advice on further training needs.

Exemptions from formal training

Candidates who feel they have achieved the necessary experience may exempt themselves from formal training and take the Mountain Skills Test directly without having attended a formal training course. A candidate may also opt to undertake only part of a training course. People who take this route typically have spent a considerable amount of time learning the necessary skills through a club, scouts, or other organisation. Candidates who gain exemption must present the official MS logbook (available from the MCI office) on assessment, showing evidence of at least twice the normal required experience. Such candidates are advised to become familiar with the MS syllabus before taking the MS test. Although training at Mountain Skills level is designed to be very flexible, candidates must still gain the necessary experience and comply with logbook requirements.

The course director will be happy to discuss your individual case, give advice, and accommodate your individual circumstances.

Mountain Skills Assessment Introduction

The purpose of the test is to ensure that the candidate has a good working knowledge of the theoretical aspects of navigation and other mountain skills (as outlined in the syllabus).

Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe (BOS) approves suitably qualified and experienced providers to deliver and run the official MCI/BOS Mountain Skills Assessment. The assessment has both practical and written elements. The written element is set, administered, and corrected by the course director responsible for the overall test.

Applications to take the test should be made directly to an approved course provider. Not all approved training providers are approved to direct MS assessment. A full list of current approved providers is available from the MCI office.

Candidates, instructors and assessors should be thoroughly familiar with the Mountain Skills Test, written exam notes and the MS syllabus.

Mountain Skills Logbook

Candidates are required to maintain a logbook of their mountaineering activities. Before applying to take the MS test, they should ensure they have completed at least 14 walks in a number of different upland areas of Ireland. At least four of these walks should be within two months of the Mountain Skills test. To count as one of the required logged walks there are a number of prerequisites that should be part of the logged mountain day:

- To take place in a recognised hill/mountain environment of Ireland.
- Not to be a repeat of an already logged walk.
- The candidate should have personally played an active part in organising and implementing the day.
- The route should not solely follow a waymarked way or path.
- The candidate should have presented themselves with an opportunity to use relevant skills learnt through MS training.

Candidates who have exempted themselves from formal training should note that at least 30 days hillwalking should be logged before applying to do the test.

Mountain Skills Practical Assessment

The format of the MS Assessment will be decided by the individual provider and will take into account weather, location, and time of year. Below is a guide to example tasks that may be requested by the assessor for candidates to complete. However, candidates can expect to be assessed on any part of the MS syllabus through a number of different formats over the two days.

1. Demonstrate an awareness of the seven principles of Leave no Trace.
2. Choose and follow a route, not less than 1.5km in length to a given destination using the map only.
3. Complete a leg using compass and distance calculation. Leg length to be from 1km to 1.5km and to be executed with a lateral margin of error not exceeding 100m in 1km.
4. Correctly self locate on six occasions, only three of these to be on large obvious features.
5. Correctly identify six features, three of these to be further than 3km.
6. Possess the necessary equipment for a safe day in the hills.
7. Have the necessary experience to deal with simple ailments and a hypothetical first aid accident.
8. Demonstrate the ability to navigate adequately in conditions of reduced visibility, for example at night-time.
9. Demonstrate an ability to move on and choose a safe route over rough or steep ground.

Mountain Skills Written Test

The written test is based on the MS syllabus. There is no pass/fail mark as the MS assessment is essentially a practical exercise with a written component that may be used as a diagnostic tool to aid both candidates and assessors.

Content and Layout of the Written Test

Assessors may choose different formats and layout for the written test, including asking candidates to produce route cards, answer multiple choice type questions, or produce answers in more detailed format. The general level of knowledge required should be suitable measured against the experience requirements through attending MS training and completing required logbook. In the past some candidates have exhibited problems with written exams. In such cases the course director, may allow a candidate who performs poorly in the written exam to pass the overall test, if they demonstrate a solid level of ability in the practical test, particularly in those aspects of navigation and safety where the written test suggested weakness.



Warning to candidates

The above mentioned provision is not a license to avoid studying for the written exam. Those who fail the exam because they do not know the subject well enough, rather than because they have problems with written exams in general, are also likely to fail the practical test. If a candidate fails the written test and is borderline on the practical test, he/she will fail the overall test.

Conduct of the Written Test

Candidates are allowed to use a compass and writing materials. The time allowed is generally 90 minutes. The exam takes place at the start of, or shortly before, the practical assessment.

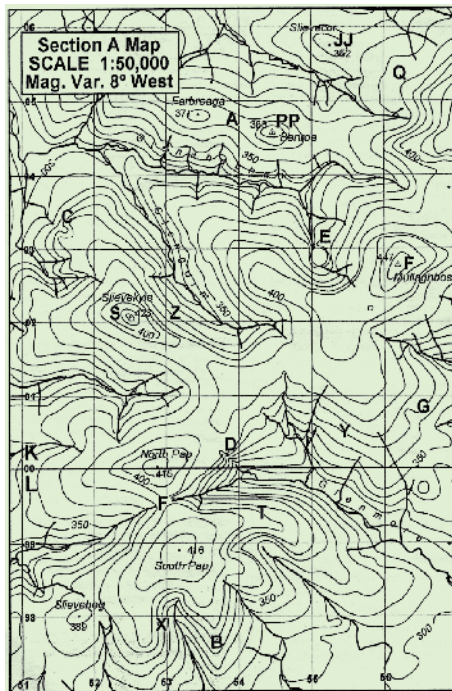
The following examples demonstrate three formats that may be presented to candidates on assessment. Assessors may decide to use one particular format or a combination of all three.

1. Map and navigation calculations.
2. True or False general mountaineering questions.
3. Day walk plan and route card.

It is important that the exam can be corrected before the practical assessment takes place in order that any weakness shown may be assessed while out on the hill.

Example Written Paper Formats

Map and Navigation Calculations.



Answer the following questions in conjunction with the supplied map

2. Give the following bearings:

- Grid bearing from North Pap to South Pap 166 degrees
- Grid bearing from JJ to PP 214 degrees
- Magnetic bearing from Mullaghbos Mt. to Pond (K558022). 222 degrees

1. State the time taken to travel in a straight line between these points at:
5 kph and 300m ascent per 1/2 hour:

- From F (pt 447) to North Pap (415m) 54 mins
- From PP to JJ. 20 mins

3. What feature may best be described at the following letters:

- Col/Saddle
- Spur
- Re-entrant
- Gully

4. In good visibility, state whether each of these pairs of points are intervisible (i.e. whether you can see one from the other).

- D and C No
- PP and JJ Yes
- F and S Yes

5. a. Give a 6 figure grid reference of point PP

K545046

b. Give a 4 figure grid reference of point A

K5504

True or False Questions

- Very dry, cool, calm air greatly increases the risk of hypothermia. TRUE
- Hypothermia is the drop of the body's core temperature due to cold and exhaustion. TRUE
- Hypothermia victims should be rewarmed rapidly in a hot bath. FALSE
- Providing rest, extra clothes, shelter, and food are good ways to treat hypothermic victims. TRUE
- Rainfall levels can be three times higher in the mountains than in the lowlands. TRUE
- Wind speed increases very little as you go up, once you're above 1,000 feet. FALSE
- Flooded rivers can be a major problem while hillwalking in Ireland. TRUE
- If an accident happens to a person in a walking group one should ensure the casualty is warm and sheltered. TRUE
- If an accident happens to a person in a walking group, the casualty can be easily carried off the hills with an improvised stretcher. FALSE
- Only in hot countries do we need to worry about drinking liquid while we are hillwalking. FALSE

11. The International Mountain Distress Signal is six distinct blasts of a whistle or flashes of a torch followed by one minute's silence. **TRUE**
12. Mobile phones are always a very reliable source of communication in the mountains. **FALSE**
13. When descending a convex slope, one often cannot see how steep the lower part of the slope is until one gets there. **TRUE**
14. The upper part of a concave slope is steeper than the lower part. **TRUE**
15. There are no 1:25 000 scale maps of the Irish mountains. **FALSE**
16. Handrail features are always along ridges. **FALSE**
17. Aiming off involves navigating using the sun and the compass to get bearings. **FALSE**
18. Pacing is a mountaineering technique for walking very quickly. **FALSE**
19. Mountaineering Qualification are essential for all users of the Irish hills. **FALSE**
20. Ordnance Survey maps are always waterproof. **FALSE**

Route Planning Question

- You are planning to take a one day solo walk in Co. Kerry during the middle of March.
- You have a car and are using Killarney for accommodation.
- Your aim is to try and reach the summit of Carrauntoohill .1039 (GR:V8084)
- The weather forecast you got last night for Co. Kerry is as follows:
 - A low pressure is situated to the NW of Ireland
 - A cold front will pass over Ireland in the next 12 hours
 - Winds will be Westerly 20kph gusting 30kph
 - Winds will increase to 30kph gusting 40kph by afternoon and veer South Westerly

Write out a brief route card for the above day. Be sure to include:

- expected route
- emergency escape routes
- all other relevant information

The Successful Candidate

The successful candidate should feel confident and be able to navigate from one major feature to another, e.g. col/summit/ large re-entrant/large spur/ major slope changes. They should be able to do this competently in clear weather and with a reasonable proficiency in mist or at night. They should be able to plan their day from the inception, look after themselves, deal with minor emergencies, know what to do and who to contact in case of emergencies of a more serious nature, and to know their limits in terms of type of ground encountered. As a candidate you will not be expected to take any form of leadership role bar looking after yourself.

Further Guidance

The Mountain Skills scheme provides candidates with the foundation upon which to build their future mountaineering endeavours. It presents a firm grounding for the basic skills required to become a self-sufficient hillwalker within the normal conditions found in the upland regions of the UK and Ireland. Further training towards specialised skills needed for other aspects of mountaineering including, climbing, scrambling and winter mountaineering are also available through the MCI/BOS approved providers. Upon successful completion of the Mountain Skills Test you will be eligible to enter the Mountain Leadership Scheme. This scheme trains the individual to lead groups in both the Irish and British hills by building on the skills learnt in the Mountain Skills Scheme and combining it with modules on leadership while developing more advanced skills.

You can gain further information on the BOS Mountain Leadership scheme by visiting www.mountaineering.ie.

Further information, updates on the BOS Mountain Skills Scheme, and all other training matters are available on the MCI web site

www.mountaineering.ie

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