

scramble

Expert advice on the skills you'll need in the hills – courtesy of the instructors at Glenmore Lodge, Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre

IT'S reached that time of year when we're putting our axes and crampons to bed, ready to be re-awakened from their summer hibernation at the first signs of snow next winter. If you're like me, your mind will now be wandering, looking for new adventures to be had in the hills. You might want more excitement than walking alone provides but, on the other hand, the idea of clinging to steep rocky faces by your fingertips with too much rope and gear weighing you down is not so appealing!

The answer lies somewhere in the middle. Scrambling combines the freedom and enjoyment that we all seek from being in the mountains but spices it up with the challenges and excitement of easy rock climbing. It takes us to a new level of exposure and experience.

The very nature of scrambling enters the mountainous realms of steep, broken and at times loose ground. But with good route choice and safe travel techniques you can manage yourself safely and efficiently over this terrain. As with rock climbing there are a range of guidebooks available to help point you in the right direction. These



Natural protection

books will recommend routes to do in different areas, tell you the grade of the routes, and provide descriptions of the lines taken. It takes a bit of practice to get the most out of these guidebooks but when used well, they will be your shining light through the mountainous maze of scrambles on offer. Curved Ridge, for example, is one of Scotland's most popular scrambles, but involves reasonably complex route-finding to the start of the scramble and has seen many parties temporarily geographically misplaced. Follow the guidebook to the word and you shouldn't go far wrong.

With scrambling ground being so variable, even with the use of a guidebook you need to be able to make on-the-move judgments as to the safest lines on offer through broken ground. You will be dynamically risk-assessing your journey all the time. Taking into consideration rock quality (is it loose, steep, slippery, sharp or all of the above?) and any objective dangers above and below your chosen route, do you need a rope and some rock gear to manage any rocky steps or steepening?

Do you have sufficient time to complete your chosen scramble? On Sron Na Lairig in Glen Coe I watched in horror as a rock dislodged by a second on my rope bounced and fell towards a solo scrambler below us. Just after the rock disappeared from sight we heard the muffled groans of rock on human contact. Luckily the person who caught the rock was shaken but otherwise undamaged. It helped to highlight our objective dangers but also to question how much of a risk assessment the other scrambler had made.

When scrambling, you need to build on your hill skills so you can manage yourself safely by means of good movement and some basic skills and techniques. Efficiency and control are key. One of the biggest joys of scrambling is the freedom of moving through thrilling terrain. But the thrilling terrain comes at a cost: a much higher risk of an accident if a slip or trip occurs. To avoid this you need to be operating on ground that is within your comfort zone while being challenging. If you are looking to push yourself on harder scrambles a basic knowledge of

rock climbing rope and gear techniques will help keep you safe.

Especially if you're on harder, more challenging scrambles, having a rope and a small amount of rock gear with you is highly recommended. A rope can provide life-saving protection over rocky steps and ridges, and can give you the confidence to challenge yourself. However, it is no use having a rope if you don't know how to use it!

Techniques like pitching, body belaying, direct anchors, friction belays, moving together and taking coils all require time to learn and practice, as well as the experience to know when and where to use them. The best way to learn all these techniques is by going out with people more experienced than you or by going on a scrambling course. As with so much in the outdoors, the best means of building experience is by getting out there and doing it. You may get technically very knowledgeable by reading books but you'll never be a very experienced armchair scrambler!

The grade of your scramble and its description will help you to gauge whether or not a rope is needed and how much, if any, gear will be required. A 50-metre full rope is the norm for most scrambles; sometimes a shorter rope will save weight and rope coiling but make sure you've got enough for your chosen objective. The gear you carry may only be a selection of slings for spiky blocky routes, or you may need a small selection of wires and a hex or two for cracks. Be sure not to weigh yourself down with too much gear: light is right.

As an example of something to aim for, consider Cneifion Arête, a classic Grade 3 scramble in North Wales. It starts with a bang – the first 30 metres consist of very steep scrambling which borders on easy rock climbing, then it leans back into a soaring knife-edge ridge all the way to the top. A scramble like this requires a mixture of rope and gear techniques to allow you to fully enjoy the quality of the route in relative safety without taking an excessive amount of time. Acquire the right skills and it will be worth the effort for a superb day out.

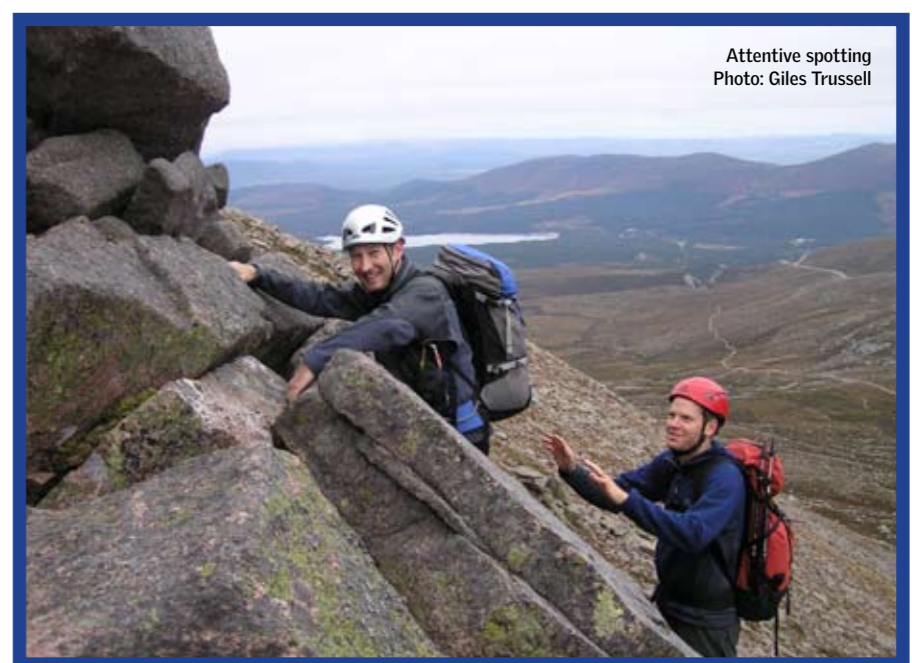
Whether you're looking for your first taste of scrambling on a steady Grade 1 route that takes an involving



Good use of Italian Hitch



Big boots and small rack



Attentive spotting
Photo: Giles Trussell

but steady line to the top, or you're setting your sites on Skye's Alpine-like ridges, scrambling takes you on great adventures. You can visit stunning locations that will leave you with wonderful memories never forgotten.
Mark Chadwick
Instructor, Glenmore Lodge

Glenmore Lodge is Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre, based in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park.
If you would like to join their instructors on a scrambling course visit www.glenmorelodge.org.uk or call 01479 861256.



Simple rope anchor and belaying
Photo: Giles Trussell