How to prepare for and pass your ML

At Glenmore Lodge we are concerned at the number of candidates across the UK who are being deferred for basic reasons. We have produced these notes to help you prepare for the process and hopefully have a successful outcome. We are not expecting experts, we are expecting a level of competence that tends to matches 40 Quality days of experience and attendance at a training course. Assessors know that they probably learnt as much about summer hill walking after completing their ML as when they attended their own assessment.

Assessors want to support candidates, they enjoy offering little tips and bits of additional training throughout the assessment and helping candidates gain more knowledge along the way. This is made much easier when candidates have prepared properly and are therefore more relaxed and that in turn enables a supportive and enjoyable process.

**So please:**

DON’T LEAVE PREPARATION TO THE LAST MINUTE.

ARRIVE WITH A PROPER CLEARLY COMPLETED DLOG WITH A **MINIMUM** OF 40 QUALITY MOUNTAIN DAYS. THIS IS A **MINIMUM** AND IT DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY DAYS ON YOUR TRAINING COURSE. THEY SHOULD BE DAYS YOU HAVE PLANNED AND EXECUTED YOURSELF IN A DECISION MAKING ROLE, THE VAST MAJORITY OF DAYS SHOULD BE IN THE UK AND UNDER SUMMER CONDITIONS.

Advice on QMDs is now clearly written in the MT literature, on the MTUK website and will have been spelt out to you at training.

FAILURE TO DO THIS WILL RESULT IN A DEFER AND YOU WILL BE CHARGED A DLOG RE-ASSESSMENT ADMINISTRATION FEE OF £50. SIMILARLY FOR FAILURE TO PRODUCE A VALID FIRST AID CERTIFICATE.

THERE IS A STRONG CORRELATION BETWEEN A NAVIGATION DEFERRAL AND A LACK OF QMDS.

THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR DEFERRAL ACROSS THE UK IS NAVIGATION, SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREPARE?

THERE ARE 4 KEY AREAS:

1. **A lack of the MINIMUM of 40 QMD's.**

Make sure you have this with some days to spare so you don't find that the assessor considers 4 ascents of Snowden by the same route only counts as one or two QMD's!

1. **Contour interpretation.**

Contours are the only thing on the map that we can feel through ourfeet, ankles, knees and hips as we walk, even with our eyes shut. Think about the 2 "A"s, slope Aspect and Angle what should it feel and look like as you cross contours on your route? The journey might start crossing them at right angles, before crossing them diagonally to the left and steepening for instance. Learn to recognise what is going to happen and how that should feel and look. Even following a path, what is it's relation to the contours?

Look for linear features created by contours. Ridges, change in slope steepness and slope aspect. Avoid using the middle of flat areas as a target, it is changes in the contour spacing and steepness that are most useful. Failure to get to grips with contours often means decisions are made with only 50% of the available information from the map and ground.

**3. Use of appropriate strategies for navigational legs.**

Candidates all too often focus on the objective and try to use a bearing and pacing all the way. They don't search the map around the objective for an easy to find (and often visible) attack point, and identify a catching feature. Look for and use attack points, catching features, aiming off etc. Understand the difference between mental (e.g. pacing and timing) and physical catching features (e.g. change in slope angle or aspect or arriving at a stream) and look for the best option to help you guarantee finding the objective. The choice of attack point can change the catching feature from being a mental one to a physical one. Plan the leg, check it along the way and make decisions at critical points. Good navigators will often start planning a leg by working back from the objective looking for an attack point and catching feature then seeking linear features to guide them to the attack point from the start.

**4. Use of appropriate and logical relocation strategies. An inability to effectively relocate tends to be the ultimate defer reason**

There seems to be a lack of a relocation system or process to work through. First set the map and think of when and where you last knew your location, can you deduce your current location from that information? Spend 2/3rds of your time looking 360 degrees around you and 1/3rd looking at the map which is easy to memorise.

Understand that it is usually necessary to "Move to prove" or "Travel to unravel". When really lost it is rare to be able to determine your location by standing still in the mist!

Are you on an 'area' (hillside), a 'line feature' or an obvious 'point feature'? One of the first two will be the starting point and both require a bearing along a line created by contours, to gain a slope aspect for instance or the direction a physical feature runs. That bearing is then applied to the map and starts a detective process to eliminate possibilities and ends with following the line feature to an identifiable point feature. Invariably once a methodical process is started, it has a calming effect and we may realise our position before completing the whole process.

So think, map set, last known point, look around 360 degrees, 'Travel to unravel' - area, line, point. It is a process, a sequence of elimination, not standing still or a headless running around without a plan.

**How can you measure or bench mark your navigation ability between training and assessment?** Whilst the syllabus suggests you should know where you are to within 100m at all times, this really does not explain how and the strategies above should help achieve this.

The orienteering map is to navigation what the climbing wall was to rock climbing 30 years ago. These maps have become much more available - probably more so in cities with parks and school grounds becoming widely mapped. If your access to the mountains is limited it is essential that you practice your navigation between times. Local orienteering clubs are putting maps on line and many clubs are running several little events or training each month. You do not have to be a club member, run or wear Lycra. You just have to pay a few pounds for the map which you keep and then walk around planning and practicing skills. You will find clubs through the British Orienteering website. The key is on the map and it is quite intuitive but remember "white" is open woodland.

Orienteering courses are graded by colours like ski and bike runs. For an ML, "Green" is the colour to go for, or "Blue" if you have a lot of time. Over an hour or two this will give you 15 to 20 legs offering route choice for practicing strategies, pacing, compass work, and hopefully some relocation skills. Clearly this is not hill walking but say 3 courses in the couple of months leading up to assessment will boost your navigation confidence and ability considerably. It is a great way of packing in lots of legs with a clear answer that you have found the objective (or not). Bagging a Munro rarely provides anything like that navigational opportunity to practice and repeat to engrain the skills and strategies. **You cannot be confident of something you have not practiced.**

**Security on steep ground and party management**

Ropework is often the focus for the candidate but just as important for the assessor is decision making and judgement. However the basic rope skills and belaying are simple enough to practice. Selecting anchors is probably more critical and where errors are made. Ensure the Anchor cannot be moved, test it thoroughly and make sure you remember ABC Anchor, Belayer and Client are all in line and under tension. Understand the pros and cons around stance management and being able to see the client. You really don’t need much more than an overhand knot. But being able to tie a bowline and stopper knot can provide more flexible options with thread belays and tying the rope around a waist for confidence roping.

**Water hazards**

It is more about risk management, risk assessment and decision making but after that it is being able to organise a group, rehearse and cross in some sort of well managed order or formation.

**Environment**

You need to arrive with two prepared 5 minute talks on an environmental subject to be shared with other members of the assessment, it is designed to add to everyone’s knowledge. Do some research and preparation, check around websites such as Scottish Natural Heritage, MoorLife / Moors for the future, RSPB, Forestry etc. It is a good idea to have some knowledge around landscape and think laterally. E.g. forestry can be seen from the top of every hill, how did it get there - what is it for, how is it managed, what lives in it, what is the food chain etc? It is more general and more interesting than being able to name a flower which you may not see anyway!

**Equipment**

This about looking the part, being professional, organised and appropriately equipped. It is appreciated that not everyone will have a rope and a complete set of mountain camping equipment but you should have good knowledge of it and we have a good store you can borrow from.

**Weather**

Be able to interpret a forecast and plan accordingly for different groups.

**Fitness**

Whilst it is not meant to be a test of fitness it certainly helps to be hill fit and able to carry an expedition rucsac perhaps between 12 and 15kg up a hill whilst navigating and managing a group. Turning up with an injury or explaining that you have not been able to get out on the hill for the past couple of months will not earn any leeway in the syllabus and standards of the award. You booked the assessment and you want to demonstrate your skills and knowledge to the best of your ability so please prepare properly and we will be as supportive as we can be to help you through the process. The more candidates we can pass the more people will be introduced to the hills safely to enjoy and value our hills and mountains for life.

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