

WinterCLIMBING+

The positive approach to improving your climbing

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Cover: Sue Knott climbing a W16 pillar in the Route 41 Area of Pont Rouge, Quebec, Canada.

This page: Climbers high on the classic Tower Ridge IV Ben Nevis, Scotland.



Gareth Lewis on the *North East Face of Pen y Fan* in the Brecon Beacons of South Wales. The mountain on the right is Cribin on which there are also some easier grade routes (around II to III).
Photo by Mark Salter.

Introduction (4)

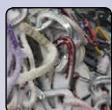
About this book, about winter climbing and about the authors.

Starting Out (6)



The basic movement and gear skills that every climber needs to know before venturing onto winter climbs.

Equipment and Clothing (38)



A comprehensive guide to the clothing and equipment needed for winter climbing, plus how to care for it and modify it so it performs to the optimum level.

Mountain Safety (88)



Winter climbing has a number of serious objective dangers. This section looks at how to identify those dangers, how to avoid them and how to deal with them.

Ice: Styles and Ethics (108)



The different types of ice, the different styles of approach, the ethics attached to ice climbing and how winter ice grades work.

Ice: Tactics and Technique (130)



Ice climbing has its own techniques. This section looks at the optimum way to get secure placements with ice axes and crampons, while using as little effort as possible.

Mixed: Styles and Ethics (170)



The different worlds of sport and trad mixed climbing, covering the different styles of ascent and how routes are graded.

Mixed: Tactics and Technique (182)



Examining the varied and creative techniques for climbing both trad and sport mixed routes plus tips on ropework and tactical ideas for redpointing sport mixed.

The Mind (224)



Explores the all-important psychological approach to climbing in winter and looks at how various tools can be used to succeed on more climbs, more often.

Training (240)



A simple approach to building the strength and fitness required to be a capable winter climber including numerous proven exercises and ideas as to how to structure your training.

Destinations (256)



There are ice climbing destinations all over the World. This section lists a number of the most well-know ones to help you choose where to go.

Acknowledgements (276)

Index (277)



Jon Winter on the Scottish mixed classic *Savage Slit*, V6 Cairngorms, Scotland.

Mixed: Styles and Ethics

Mixed climbing is surely one of the great tests of all-round climbing skill. The idea of hauling your way up a rock face with axes balanced precariously on tiny edges and crampons skating around on verglas is one thing. Add to the equation the need to clear thick hoar frost from the holds and place protection as you go, or transfer your weight onto a fragile hanging icicle and you have a major challenge on your hands.

Today mixed climbing has evolved into a diverse activity, with styles ranging from roadside crags with short bolted 'power' routes, to multi-pitch, traditionally protected, endurathons in the mountains.

Trad mixed

Traditional mixed routes are protected with natural gear, which is most commonly placed without using aid or resting on ice axes. Trad mixed routes may be on dry rock that is thinly iced or coated in verglas, or they may be on rock that is coated in thick rime or hoar frost. Frozen turf may be common to both styles.

Climate conditions will dictate the style of mixed climbing that is found in a given area. In Scotland, for example, there is a tendency to encounter icier mixed routes in the Western Highlands and snowier routes in the Eastern Highlands. Note that in some areas, the same route may come into condition either as an icy mixed or a snowy mixed route.



Alan Mullin on the snowy trad mixed line of *Stirling Bomber*, V,7 Cairngorms, Scotland.

Icy trad mixed routes

Icy trad mixed climbs are rarely climbed as rock routes in summer, as they would be wet, loose and vegetated. These routes are often bold owing to the difficulty of placing gear in iced-up cracks. The main gear options are either to chip the ice away and attempt to place nuts or pegs, or to bang in a hand-hook or warthog into clumps of frozen turf. Cams are rarely safe in cracks that are heavily iced.

Snowy trad mixed routes

In general the snowy, 'hoared-up' mixed routes are less commonly found owing to the very specific type of climatic conditions that create them. In the Eastern Highlands of Scotland, cold, moist Easterlies blow in from the North Sea and plaster thick layers of hoar frost to the buttresses of high mountain crags. Many of the classic mixed routes of this area are also popular summer climbs.

Snowy trad mixed ethics

Climbers sometimes raise the issue of whether it is legitimate to climb a summer rock route with axes and crampons in winter. Most consider it to be fair game as long as it is on designated crags and the route is in 'acceptable winter condition'. This latter point often attracts furious debate. Having made the drive and the long walk-in, it can be all too tempting to bag a snowy mixed route when it has minimal cover and is barely different to a summer rock route.

Those who are used to dry-tooling at sport mixed venues may find the idea of deliberately waiting for a route to be covered in snow to be extraordinary. But without snow cover, these are not mixed routes and the technical difficulty will be substantially less. This type of discussion often sounds ridiculous to outsiders, but the more you climb in snowy mixed areas, the more you start to realise that a very special set of ethics have been preserved in order to enhance the challenge of the activity.



Rich Cross earning full ethical brownie points but also tired arms from cleaning *The Deviant*, V₆ in deeply hoared condition. Cairngorms, Scotland.

Everyone has their own ethical boundaries but it also pays to respect the traditions. Only you will know whether a climb felt wintery on the day.

Sport mixed

Sport mixed routes are bolt protected throughout the rock sections, although some will require screws for ice sections. A small selection of trad gear may also be required if the bolts are well spaced. The most common style is for the rock to be 'dry' or dotted with the odd patch of ice

or verglas. The intention of a true sport mixed climb is to head for a suspended ice feature or to connect a series of discontinuous hanging features. Many climbers feel that a degree of ice is necessary on a climb in order to justify the term 'mixed', and to make the use of axes and crampons feel appropriate.

Dry tooling routes

Today many bolted dry-tooling climbs exist which involve no ice at all. These are either found in between other routes that do have ice features, or at dedicated 'all-dry crags' where none of the routes have ice. Whilst representing fun gymnastic challenges, and great training options for warmer days, many winter climbers feel that the 'all-dry' mixed climbs lack a certain aesthetic quality in comparison to their icier neighbours. Theoretically, these routes could be attempted with ice tools on summer days as winter conditions are not required in order to make an ascent. At all-dry crags the 'D' grade (for dry) or even French grades are sometimes used instead of the 'M' grade in order to make a distinction from mixed routes.



Ian Parnell on *Puma*, M9+ at the Haston Cave, Cogne, Italy.
Photo by Neil Gresham.



Ian Parnell on *Easter Rising*, M8, Ouray, USA. Photo by Neil Gresham.

Starting Out

Equipment

Mountain Safety

Ice : Style-Ethics

Ice : Techniques

Mixed : Style-Ethics

Mixed : Techniques

The Mind

Training

Destinations

Evolution of sport mixed

Sport mixed is a relatively young branch of climbing that evolved in answer to the long-standing dilemma of how to reach suspended ice features that never touch down. The early pioneers used aid on the rock to gain the ice and from then on, normal ice techniques would be employed.

It was climbers like Stevie Haston in Europe and Jeff Lowe and Will Gadd in the USA, who first experimented by using dry-tooling techniques as an alternative to aid in the 1980s. This was done at first with a combination of pegs, slings and a variety of different forms of fixed rock pro. But as momentum gathered, soon the drills came out and a whole new way of climbing emerged. The first routes of their generation were Jeff Lowe's *Octopussy*, M7 in Vail and Stevie Haston's 009, M9 in Cogne. The first sport mixed climbers used standard ice tools with leashes, as no alternatives existed, but lighter boots and clothes were de rigeur. Standards rose and Gadd added *Amphibian*, M8 to Vail, and Pete Takeda and Jeff Lowe established *Fatman and Robin*, M9. Haston responded back in Europe with the incredible *X Files*, the World's first M10.

The touch paper was lit at the turn of the century when the potential for creating ice and mixed climbing competitions was realised in Europe, and suddenly an arms race to develop superior tools and techniques was on. The leash-less tool was born and a new repertoire of moves became the norm. The result was that mixed climbing grades went, literally, through the roof.

A few of the top French rock climbers like Francois Lombard and Daniel Dulac took to the mixed and their superior fitness

levels showed. But Stevie Haston stayed in the frame with his multi-pitch M11, the *Empire Strikes Back*, which finished up a very serious hanging icicle. Meantime, Italian mixed master Mauro 'Bubu' Bole added *Mission Impossible*, M11 to Cogne and Robert Jasper also added a string of impressive M routes with double figures, including *Vertical Limits*, M12 in Kandersteg, Switzerland.

At the same time things were hotting up at the Cineplex in Canada with Will Gadd's *Mushashi*, M12 and Ben Firth's the *Game*, M13. On the whole, these routes were steep with good hook placements, but Gadd's 2007 Cineplex route, the *Steel Koan*, M13+ was notable for being marginal and precarious as well as preposterously strenuous.

Use of spurs

The technological advances in equipment for sport mixed climbing seemed to race ahead of themselves around the year 2003. Suddenly climbers were hanging upside down from heel spurs in the middle of roofs and taking hands-off rests in the middle of cruxes. 'Good luck to them!' was what most people thought, but then ethical awareness started to close in around the mixed cowboys. The new notion was that if you can rest anywhere then the challenge is greatly reduced. It seemed that heel-hooks with spurs were now the utility move and that figure-of-fours were needed less and less. Ultimately, the choice rests with the individual, many routes are now given a grade for spurs and a grade without. Now that many of the top sport mixed climbers have hung up their spurs, it will be interesting to see if others follow suit.



Stevie Haston in action making the second ascent of *Mission Impossible*, M11, Valsavarenche, Italy. This was the first ascent without the use of spurs. Photo by Laurence Gouault Haston.

Starting Out

Equipment

Mountain Safety

Ice : Style-Ethics

Ice : Techniques

Mixed : Style-Ethics

Mixed : Techniques

The Mind

Training

Destinations

Some terminology**Onsighting**

An onsight ascent of a mixed route is where the climb is led successfully on the first attempt, without falls or resting on the rope or ice axes, and without prior knowledge (or beta) of the moves or protection. You can still claim an onsight of a sport mixed route if the quickdraws are in place although it is undoubtedly slightly harder to place them yourself. On trad mixed routes you will need to place all the

runners yourself and if you encounter any in-situ gear then treat it as a lucky bonus!

Onsighting can be especially difficult and frustrating on mixed routes. Sometimes it only takes a little pocket or 'nick' that is half the size of a fingernail to support a pick and full body weight. Add to this, the presence of snow cover on the route, and suddenly route reading becomes the key skill. Many traditional mixed climbing areas such as Scotland have a strong onsight ethic where working routes is still frowned upon.

Flashing

A flashed ascent is where a route is completed on the first attempt but with the aid of prior knowledge (or beta) of the moves and protection. On trad mixed routes, note that you will still have to place the protection yourself in order to qualify for a flash.

On mixed routes, beta can make an enormous difference to the feel of the climb. At sport crags you can watch someone to see where all the pick placements are or have the moves shouted to you as you climb. If you are just told one small snippet of beta before a climb then it will be up to you to decide whether it made a crucial difference to the ascent. Most will probably still claim the onsight!

Beta can be obtained verbally or by sight, whether live or on film, but if you actually abseil down the climb, and especially if you clear snow away or test hook or gear placements then it definitely does not count as a true 'flash' because you have actually been on the climb. Looking at a climb from an adjacent route is perhaps as far as you can bend the ethic!



Andy Nisbet heading into the unknown on the first ascent of *White Horses*, V6 Aonach Mor, Scotland.



Mark Garthwaite following a well rehearsed sequence on an M9 at Pont Rouge, Quebec.

Redpointing

A redpoint ascent is the term given to a successful ascent of any climb that has been attempted previously. Even if you have only tried a climb once before and you are then successful on your second try, that is still a redpoint.

On a true redpoint ascent you must clip all protection as you go, though on sport routes, it is perfectly acceptable to have the quickdraws in place. Redpointing is less commonly applied to trad mixed climbing, although most would consider that you should try to place the majority of the protection on lead if you do go for a trad redpoint. Note that in-situ wires or pegs are sometimes used on routes that have heavily iced cracks.

A popular strategy on redpoints is to climb up to the first or second bolt, or protection point, and then reverse back down to the floor - this way you can leave that piece of protection pre-clipped for the full redpoint ascent. On trad routes, every attempt should be made to place protection on the redpoint. If some protection is in place an ascent is sometimes referred to as a 'pinkpoint'.

Working a route

You don't need to work a route in order to redpoint it but it helps! Having fallen off a flash or an onsight, you may just wish to lower straight to the floor and try for a redpoint. Alternatively, you can hang on the rope to practice and perfect moves. The more you work a route, the more you will increase your chances of redpointing it quickly and for this reason, many purists are still uncomfortable about the idea of working mixed routes, especially the trad ones. With mixed climbing it makes a huge difference to work a route just once before doing it, seeing as so much of the skill is about finding and trusting placements.

Mixed grades

The 'M' system is widely used throughout the world for grading both trad and sport mixed routes. Note that 'M' grades take into account a combination of the technical difficulty and strenuousness of a climb but they do not take into account danger.

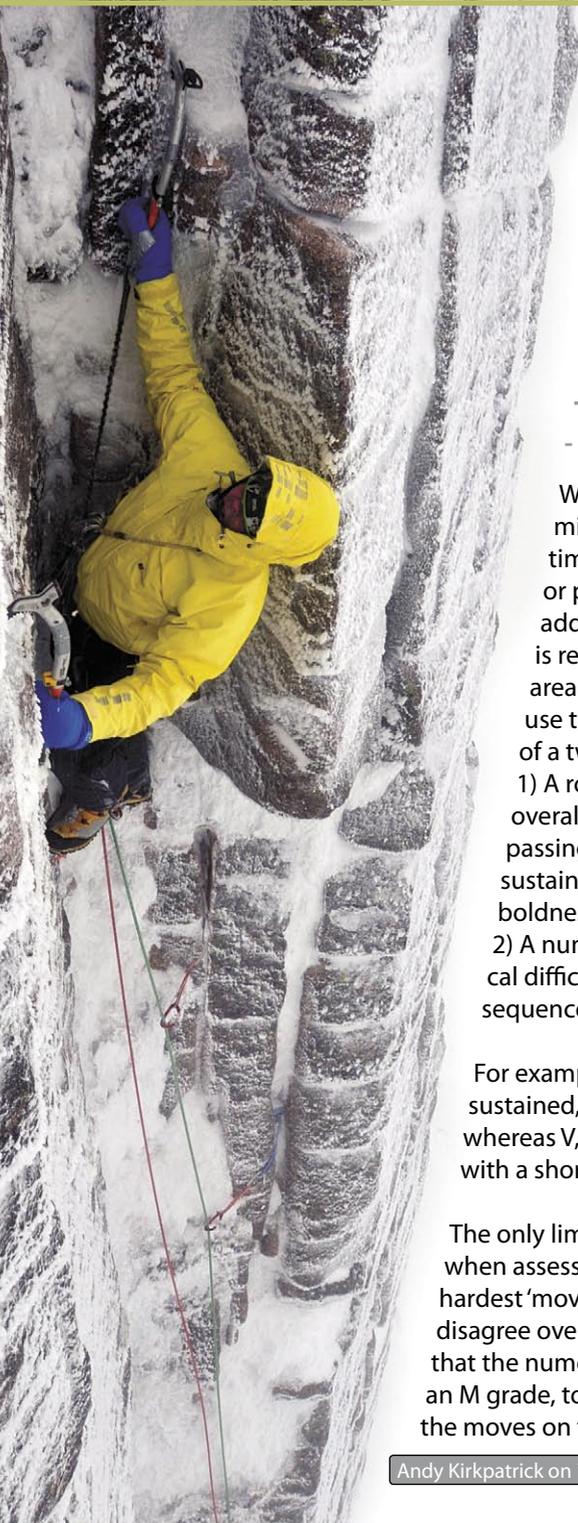
Trad mixed grades - the Scottish system

When 'M' grades are used for trad mixed routes then an 'R' is sometimes added to reflect big run-outs or poor protection; but whether the added difficulty of placing trad gear is reflected in the 'M' grade is a grey area. For this reason, many prefer to use the Scottish system, which consists of a two-part grade

- 1) A roman numeral indicating the overall difficulty of the route encompassing technical difficulty, length, sustainedness, strenuousness and boldness.
- 2) A number which describes the technical difficulty of the hardest move or crux sequence on the route (not pitch).

For example, VII,5 may be very bold or sustained, but with low technical difficulty, whereas V,7 is likely to be well protected and with a short hard crux section.

The only limitation with this system comes when assessing what constitutes the hardest 'move' on the pitch. Many climbers will disagree over this and what usually happens is that the numerical grade often gets used like an M grade, to reflect the 'overall' difficulty of the moves on the pitch.



Sport mixed grades - the M system

'M' grades lend themselves perfectly to sport mixed routes by working in exactly the same way as French sport grades. For example, a long route with relatively easy moves may be given the same 'M' grade as a shorter route with harder moves.

A plus or minus is sometimes used to split 'M' grades, although some consider this to be a little pedantic. The issue of whether or not heel spurs are used is sometimes dealt with by offering 2 separate grades, although this will only effect the very steepest routes. 'M' grades usually start at about M4 or M5 because they were originally based on the 'WI' scale and sport mixed climbing is rarely any easier than this! M13+ has been established and the system is open ended.

'M' grades and Scottish grades compared

Note that when comparing 'M' grades to Scottish grades, if the physical and technical difficulty were isolated then there would be an approximately two grade difference between the routes. In



Moving from bare rock to thin ice - a typical situation on a sport mixed route. Tim Emmett on an un-named M8 at Gol, Norway.

other words, a Scottish VIII,8 would be like doing an M6 without the bolts, but placing your own protection. The result of this means the 'overall' effort of onsighting a Scottish VIII 8, (hanging on to place fiddly traditional gear) is probably equivalent to onsighting a bolt protected M8 and hence the grades do actually compare.

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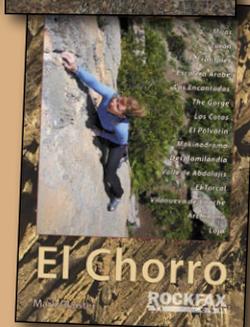
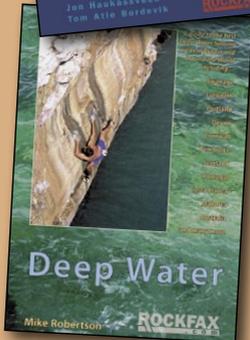
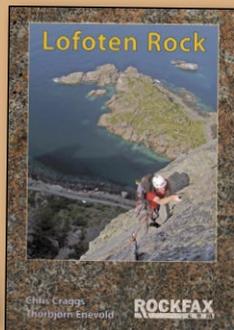
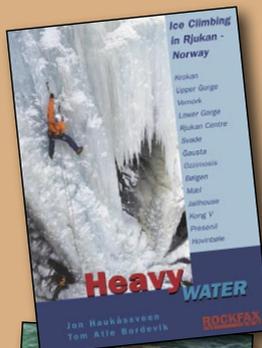
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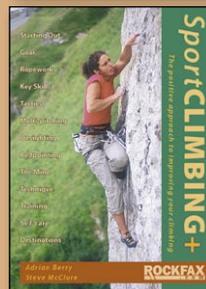
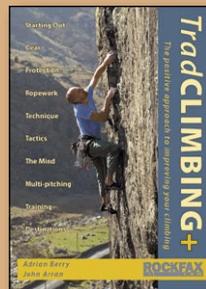
TradCLIMBING+

The trad climbing volume of the 'plus' series covers all aspects of traditional climbing. Many of the techniques described in **WinterCLIMBING+** link well with those used for trad climbing.

SportCLIMBING+

The first book in the 'plus' series covers all aspects of sport climbing. The approach focuses on the positive things people can do to improve their own performance.

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112 and 999 emergency numbers	107	<i>body belay</i>	30	clearing verses trundling	148
A Abalakov hooks	34	<i>boot-axe</i>	32	climbing pace	143
Abalakovs	29, 167	<i>bucket seat</i>	30	climbing pillars	161
ABC	106	<i>buried axe</i>	32	clipper leashes	57, 64
abdominal exercises	245	<i>choosing a site</i>	28	clipper leash method	151
adzes	61	<i>Deadman</i>	32	clipping	212
Alpinists axes	58	<i>devices</i>	81	Cloggy	264
alternating sequence	142	<i>equalising</i>	28	Clogwyn y Garnedd	264
anatomist training	246	<i>ice screw</i>	28	Clothing	<i>see Equipment and Clothing</i>
anti-balling plates	18, 66	<i>snow</i>	30	Cobbler	260
Aonach Dubh	261	<i>snow bollard</i>	32	Cody	270
Aonach Mor	262	<i>staying warm</i>	29	Coire an Lochain	262
Argentière le Besse	275	<i>stomper</i>	32	Coire an t-Sneachda	262
arm exercises	244	<i>T-anchor</i>	33	Coire Mhíic Fhearchair	263
arresting slips	26	bench press	246	Cold showers	166
Arrochar	260	Ben Firth	176	competition ice	115
artificial grade	127	Ben Nevis	261	conditions	14, 116, 160, 166
artificial ice	115	beta	178	conditions resources	92
ATC belay device	81	bicep curl	247	cone	158
avalanches	94, 101	Bidean Nam Bian	261	confidence	143
<i>assessment</i>	96	black box technique	237	connective breathing	233
<i>cornices</i>	96	Black Diamond Express Ice Screws	72	conscious walking	233
<i>forecasting</i>	94	Black Ladders	264	cord connectors	122
<i>slope angle</i>	96	Blencathra	265	cornices	96
<i>snow pack</i>	98	Blue Bombshell	156	Craig y Rheadr	264
<i>underlying terrain</i>	98	body bars	198	crampon bags	83
<i>weather</i>	98	body belay	31	crampon maintenance	86
<i>what to do in the event</i>	99	body positions	140	crampons	18, 66
Aviemore	262	boldness	232	<i>advanced footwork</i>	133
axe placement	134, 188	bolts	214	<i>anti-balling plates</i>	66
axes	54	bolt-to-bolt	218	<i>balling</i>	18
<i>bouldering</i>	243	boot-axe belay	33	<i>basics</i>	18
<i>can-opener</i>	190	boot care	46	<i>boot compatibility</i>	66, 69
<i>dagging</i>	16	boot-crampon compatibility	66, 69	<i>enlarging footholds</i>	132
<i>driving</i>	188	boots	46	<i>fit</i>	69
<i>holsters</i>	197	<i>boot care</i>	46	<i>French Technique</i>	18
<i>hooking</i>	138, 188	<i>boot fit</i>	47	<i>lightweight</i>	68
<i>linking</i>	204	<i>foot warmth</i>	46	<i>maintenance</i>	86
<i>matching</i>	190	<i>fruit boot</i>	48	<i>modular points</i>	66
<i>number of swings</i>	138	bouldering	252	<i>mono or dual</i>	68
<i>pick retrieval</i>	138	Bozeman	270, 275	<i>monopoint technique</i>	133
<i>placement</i>	134	Braemar	262	<i>placement</i>	132
<i>placement depth</i>	136	brain	236	<i>placement on hard snow/ice</i>	20
<i>placement rating system</i>	192	breathability	42	<i>placement on soft snow</i>	18
<i>plunging</i>	16	breathing	209, 233	<i>placements when mixed climbing</i>	187
<i>shape for ice</i>	56	bridging	144, 199	<i>sharpening</i>	70
<i>sport mixed</i>	56	Britain	258	<i>step-in</i>	66, 69
<i>stashing</i>	196	brittle days	166	<i>using footholds</i>	132
<i>straight shaft</i>	57	B-spec picks	60	Creag Meagaidh	262
<i>swinging when fatigued</i>	139	Buachaille Etive Mor	260	Crémerie	266
<i>technical tool placements</i>	17	bucket seat	30	cross-overs	164
<i>the swing</i>	134	buried axe belay	33	cups of tea model	192
<i>torquing</i>	190	butter-knifing	158	Cwm Idwal	264
<i>trad mixed</i>	56	C Cadair Idris	264	Cyfrwy	264
<i>weight and balance</i>	56	<i>caffeine</i>	254	D Dachsteins	51
<i>Z-bend</i>	56	<i>Cairngorms</i>	262	<i>dagging</i>	16
B backed up descent	102	<i>caif raises</i>	247	<i>Daniel Dulac</i>	176
backing off	227	<i>calling for a rescue</i>	107	<i>darkness</i>	105
balaclava	53	<i>calm moment</i>	238	<i>Deadman</i>	32, 75
balanced diet	253	<i>cams</i>	78	<i>Deadman angle</i>	75
balling	18	Canada	272	<i>Deadman placing</i>	75
bandolier	220	<i>Canmore</i>	272, 275	<i>dealing with different ice features</i>	158
Banff	272	<i>Cannon Cliff</i>	270	<i>dealing with difficult conditions</i>	166
bar exercises	244	<i>can-opener</i>	190, 194, 204	<i>dealing with hotaches</i>	149
Beinn an Dtohaidh	260	<i>carb-loading</i>	255	dehydration	255
Beinn Dorain	260	<i>cardiovascular training</i>	248	<i>descents</i>	104
Beinn Eighe	263	<i>Carn Etchachan</i>	262	Destinations	256-275
belay devices	81	<i>Cathedral Ledge</i>	270	<i>Britain</i>	258
belayer position	208	<i>cauliflowers</i>	159	<i>Canada</i>	272
belay gloves	51	<i>centre of gravity</i>	140	<i>Festivals</i>	275
belay jackets	45	<i>check list</i>	85	<i>France</i>	266
belays	28	<i>chimneying</i>	198	<i>Italy</i>	267
<i>Abalakov</i>	28	<i>circuit training</i>	248	<i>Norway</i>	269
<i>adding yourself to</i>	28	<i>clean housing</i>	236	<i>Switzerland</i>	268
<i>backing up</i>	28	<i>cleaning down jackets</i>	45	<i>USA</i>	270

Starting Out

Equipment

Mountain Safety

Ice - Style-Ethics

Ice - Techniques

Ice - Style-Ethics

Mixed - Techniques

Mixed - Style-Ethics

The Mind

Training

Destinations

- developing boldness 232
 D grade 174
 dieting 254
 difficult conditions 166
 digging a snow hole 107
 distractions 237
 D.I.Y. fruit boots 48
 dorsal raises 247
 double ropes 82
 doubts 237
 down-climb 102
 down-climbing 146
 down jacket cleaning 45
 down jackets 45
 driving 188
 drop-knee 165
 dry tooling 174
 dynos 204
- E**
 early days 8
 early season ice 116
 eating 254
 Écrins 266
 egyptian 165
 emergency 106
 emergency services 107
 energy systems 242
 environment 236
 equalising a belay 28
- Equipment and Clothing 38-87**
Alpinists 58
axes 54
boot-crampon compatibility 69
boots 46
care and maintenance 44
clipper leashes 64
crampons 66
deadmen 75
gloves 50
hand-hooks 74
hardshell clothing 40
headtorches 83
headwear 44
ice screws 72
inspection and care 83
jackets 44
layering system 44
maintenance 86
navigation 87
other gear 80
packing for the hill 85
picks 60
protection 72
rock 78
ropes 82
rucksack 84
softshell clothing 42
tools 54
Tools 54
walk-in 52
 equipment maintenance 86
 ergonomics 132
 ethics 118, 173, 176, 214
 etiquette 128
 eVent 40
 evolution of sport mixed 176
 eyewear 53
 fall arrest 26
 falling ice 100
 fall resulting in injury 106
 falls 210
 fear of falling 229, 231
 figure-of-four 163, 202, 245
 figure-of-nine 203, 245
 fixed gear descents 104
 flag 165
- flashing 178
 flash pump 210
 fleeces 44
 focus 233, 236
 food 253, 255
 foot warmth 46
 Fournel 266
 France 266
 Francois Lombard 176
 freeze-thaw 14
 freezing level 14
 Freissinières 266
 French rock grade 127, 181
 French Technique 18
 front levers 245
 fruit boot 48
- G**
 Gable Crag 265
 gaiters 52
 Gastons 195
 Gavarrie 266
 Gear. See Equipment and Clothing
 gearing up 13, 85
 gear inspection and care 83
 gear maintenance 86
 gear placing 220
 getting out of trouble 12, 167
 Ghost Valley 272
 giant scales 159
 glacier ice 115
 Glen Coe 260
 Glenmore Lodge 11
 gloves 50
belay 50
Dachsteins 50
hardshell 50
liner 50
neoprene 50
softshell 50
sport mixed 50
 Gol 269
 goose down 45
 Gore-tex Proshell 40, 52
 Goulotte picks 60
 grades 126, 180, 181
 grades and conditions 127
 Great End 265
 Grigri 81, 210
 Grivel Candela 34
 gullies 24
belays 24
movement 24
protection 24
 Haffner Creek 272
 hammers 61
 hand-hook 167
 hand-hooks 74
 hand warming technique 216
 hanging curtains 163
 hardshell clothing 40
 hardshell verses softshell 43
 hardware maintenance 86
 harnesses 80
 harness maintenance 86
 Haston Cave 267
 hazards 100
 headtorches 83
 head torquing 190
 headwear 44, 53
 heel-hooks 133, 165
 Hells Lum 262
 helmets 53
 Helvellyn 265
 hexes 78
 high-tooling 191
 hill food 255
- HMS screwgates 81
 holding falls 210
 holsters 197
 hooking 138, 188
 hooks 192, 193
 hotaches 13, 51, 149, 157
 Hyalite Canyon 270
 hydration 254, 255
 Ian Parnell 5, 76
 ice and mixed combined 115
 ice axe bouldering 243
 ice axe circuits 243
 ice basics 12
 ice bouldering 157
 ice climbing
advanced moves 164
advanced tips 143
alternating sequence 142
axe placement 134
body positions 140
bridging 144
clearing 148
climbing pace 143
conditions 160
confidence 143
cross-overs 164
dealing with different ice features 158
difficult conditions 166
down-climbing 146
drop knee 165
egyptian 165
fear of falling 231
flag 165
hanging curtains 163
heel-hooks 165
hooking 138
hotaches 149
keeping a rhythm 143
maintaining balance 143
moving from steep to slabby ice 147
moving on complex ice 143
pillars 161
placing ice screws 150
reading the line 154
resting 145
side-pulls 164
steep ice 164
thin ice and verglas 162
traversing 146
trundling 148
twist-locks 164
undercuts 164
upward movement 142
warm-up 157
where to belay 154
 ice climbing style 10
 ice conditions 116
macrocycle variations 116
microcycle variations 116
 icefall etiquette 128
 icefalls 112
 ice features 158
 Icefields Parkway 272
 ice hooks 207
 ice screws 29, 72, 150, 152
belays 29
maintenance 86
racking 73
sharpening 73
 Ice screws do work 76
 ice skins 162
- Ice: Styles and Ethics 108-129**
artificial or competition ice 115
conditions 116
ethics 118

- glacier ice* 115
grades 126
ice and mixed combined 115
icefall etiquette 128
leashed or leash-less? 120
snow ice 114
types of ice 110
water ice 110
- Ice: Tactics and Technique** 130-169
advanced moves for steep ice 164
avoiding hotaches 149
axe placement 134
body positions 140
clearing verses trundling 148
dealing with different ice features 158
dealing with difficult conditions 166
getting out of trouble 167
ice climbing ergonomics 132
ice skins 162
ice trip tactics 168
pillars 160
placing ice screws 150
reading the line 154
upward movement 142
warm-up and preparation tactics 157
- ice tool maintenance 86
 ice trip tactics 168
 ice types 110
 if you get lost 106
 indoor ice climbing 36
 indoor ice walls 115
 indoor rock climbing 243
 injury 106
 in-situ quickdraws 214
 insurance 107
 intermediate level training 250
 inverted can-opener 190
 Isenfluh 268
 Isle of Skye 263
 Italy 267
- J** jackets 45
 Jasper 272
 Jeff Lowe 176
 jelly-arm 139
 Joe Josephson 166
- K** Kandersteg 268
 karabiners 80
 knee raises 245, 247
 knifeblades 78
 knotted rope lock-offs 244
 Krokan 269
- L** La Grave 266
 Lake District 265
 Lake Willoughby 270
 laneyards 121
 La Pomme d'Or 274
 late season ice 117
 laybacking 198
 layering 44
 leashed 120, 122
 leashes 64, 121, 122, 135
 leash-less 64, 121, 122, 135
 leash-less adjustments 135
 leash-less clipping 196
 leash-less conversion kits 58
 leg conditioning 248
 leg wear 53
 Ljathach 263
 lightweight crampons 68
 liner gloves 51
 linking axes 204
 links 218
 Lliwedd 264
 Loch Avon 262
 Lochnagar 262
- lock-offs 244
 loose rock 101, 222
 lost 106
 lower body stretches 252
 lowering from gear 102
 lowering off 213
 low fat 253
- M** macrocycle 251
 macrocycle variations 116
 maintaining balance 143
 Malbaie Valley 274
 matched picks 190
 membrane leg wear 53
 membrane softshell 42
 mental preparation routine 236
 M grades 180
 microcycle 251
 microcycle variations 116
 microfleece 42
 micro gear 78
 mid season ice 117
 military press 247
 minerals 253
 mitts 51
 mixed basics 12
 mixed climbing
 axe placement 188
 body position 185
 body tension 187
 footwork 187
 loose 222
 mental training and preparation 234
 trad moves 198
 mixed climbing style 10
 mixed grades 127, 180
Mixed: Styles and Ethics 170-181
 evolution of sport mixed 176
 grades 180
 sport mixed 174
 terminology 178
 trad mixed 172
Mixed: Tactics and Technique 182-223
 attachment points 187
 axe placements 188
 axe stashing 196
 bolts and bolting 214
 breathing 209
 developing a feel 192
 ergonomics 184
 gear placing on trad mixed 220
 leash-less clipping 196
 loose mixed routes 222
 movement 198
 moving onto the ice 206
 pick orientations 194
 preparation tactics 216
 redpointing 218
 resting 218
 ropework for sport mixed 208
 sport mixed moves 200
 trad mixed moves 198
 Mixed Warrior 238
 mobility 252
 modular points 66
 monkey hang 141
 monopoint technique 133
 Montmorency Falls 274
 motivation 226
 Mountain Instructor Certificate 90
Mountain Safety 88-107
 assumptions 90
 avalanche assessment 96
 avalanches 94
 descents 104
 emergencies 106
- preparation* 92
 retreating 102
 weather 98
 while climbing 100
 moving from steep to slabby ice 147
 multigym 246
 mushrooms 159
- N** Neil Gresham 5, 15, 125, 129, 153, 156
 neoprene gloves 51
 non-membrane softshells 42
 Northern Corries 262
 North-west Scotland 263
 Norway 269
 number of swings 138
 nutrition 253
 nutrition on the hill 255
- O** onsighting 178, 217
 Ouray 270, 275
 outdoor rock climbing 243
 overhangs 186
- P** pace training 243
 packing for the hill 85
 Parkas 45
 pegs 28, 78
 periodised training 251
 Pete Takeda 176
 pick filing 62
 pick retrieval 138
 picks 60
 pick torquing 189
 pillars 160
 pinkpoint 179
 pinky stop 58
 placing ice screws 150, 152
 Placing screws the hard way 153
 Plas y Brenin 21
 plunging 16, 159
 Pont Rouge 274
 poor ice 167
 portable snow protection 32
 power 242
 power endurance 242, 251
 power-pulls 244
 preparation 216, 236
 pressure 234
 Primaloft 45
 prioritised macrocycle 251
 prioritised microcycle 251
 process focus 233
 protection 23, 24
 pull-test 135
 pulse raiser 252
 Quebec 274, 275
- Q** quick-draws 80
R rackers 73
 rational boldness 232
 rational verses irrational 228
 reading the line 154, 217
 redpointing 179, 218
 rep and set guidelines 244
 Repentant 129
 rescue 107
 resting 218
 retreating 102, 167, 227
 retreating from poor ice 167
 retreating from steep ice 167
 reverse-side-pulls 195
 R garde 127
 rhythm 143
 ridges 22
 moving together 23
 protection 23
 tactics 22
 technique 23
 Rjukan 269

- Robert Jasper 176
 rock climbing 243
 rock protection 78
 Roman numeral grade 126
 rope diameter 82
 rope flick method 151
 ropes 82
 ropework 208
 rotten ice 166
 route choice 93
 route plan 93
 RPs 78
 rucksack 84
 rucksack capacity 84
 safety while climbing 100
 Scotland 258
 Scottish avalanche service website 94
 Scottish grades 181
 screamers 80
 self arrest 26
 shaft torquing 190
 sharpening crampons 70
 shell jacket 41
 shell pants 40
 Shelter Stone 262
 Shiva Lingam 266
 shock-tapes 80
 side-pulls 164, 194
 simultaneous focus 233
 single ropes 82
 sit-ups 247
 Sixt Fer a Cheval 266
 sixth sens 227
 Skye 263
 slingdraw 80
 sling maintenance 86
 slings 80
 slope angle 20, 96
 smart belaying 210
 snow belays 30
 snow bollards 32
 snow clearing 199
 snow hole 107
 snow ice 114
 snowpack 98
 softshell clothing 42
 soloing 118
 sport climber hits the ice 15
 sport mixed 174
 bolt-to-bolt 218
 dry tooling 174
 ethics 176
 evolution 176
 fear of falling 229
 flashing 178
 grades 180
 moves 200
 onsighting 178
 redpointing 179, 218
 ropework 208
 terminology 178
 warming up 216
 working a route 179
 sport mixed boot *see fruit boot*
 sport mixed style 10
 spotting 208
 spurs 133, 165, 176, 204
 stamina 242
 stance 150
 Stanley Headwall 272
Starting Out 6-37
Abalakov hooks and cord 34
Arresting slips 26
Axe basics 16
Belays 28
Crampon basics 18
Crampon placement on hard ice 20
Early days 8
Getting into winter climbing
from rock climbing 9
Indoor ice climbing 36
Introductory climbs - gullies 24
Introductory climbs - ridges 22
Learning the basics 12
Portable snow protection 32
reading the conditions 14
Snow belays 30
Winter climbing styles 10
 stashing 196
 state of mind 226
 steep ice 164
 steep snow 158
 Steinpuller 190
 step-in bindings 66
 step-in crampon 69
 Stevie Haston 176
 stick-clip 208, 211
 Stob Coire nan Lochan 261
 stomper 33
 strength 242
 strength building exercises 244
 stretching 157
 stripping routes 213
 sunny conditions 166
 super-sets 245
 supplements 254
 survival bag 85
 sweating 13, 53
 swinging when fatigued 139
 Switzerland 268
 system training 243
T
 tactics 168
 taking falls 211
 T-anchor belay 33
 technical tool placements 17
 Telluride 270
 terminology 178
 terrain 98
The Mind 224-239
boldness 232
clean housing the brain 236
hard mixed climbing 234
mental preparation routine 236
mental training and preparation
preparation 234
risk assessment 228
state of mind 226
 thin ice 162
 third tool 58
 threads 167
 toe-hooking 204
 tools 54
 axes 54
 axes for Alpinists 58
 leashed 120
 leash-less 120, 135
 picks 60
 tool storage bags 83
 torquing 189, 190
 Tough Brown Face 262
 Trad Climbing+ 28, 90, 210
 trad mixed 172
 ethics 173
 fear of falling 229
 gear placing 220
 icy routes 172
 mixed grades 180
 moves 198
 snowy routes 172
 warming up 216
 trad mixed style 10
Training 240-255
abdominal exercises 245
anatomist training 246
arm exercises 244
bar exercises 244
energy systems breakdown 242
general circuit training 248
methods 243
nutrition 253
nutrition on the hill 255
requirements 242
training program 250
warming up 252
 training and diet 254
 training guidelines 250
 training indoor 36
 training program 250
 transition 238
 traversing 146
 triceps extensions 247
 trigger finger 58
 trundling 148
 T-spec picks 60
 twin ropes 82
 twist-locks 200
 typewriters 244
U
 Ueschenen 268
 UIAGM Guide 90
 Uncompahgne Gorge 270
 undercuts 164, 194
 Un-leashing the Rock God 125
 unstable snow 101
 upper body stretches 252
 upward movement 142
 USA 270
V
 Vail 270
 Valeille 267
 Valnontey 267
 venue choice 92
 verglas 162
 visualisation 237
 vitamins 253
W
 Wales 264
 walking poles 27
 walk-ins 13
 warming up 157, 216, 252
 water ice 110
 water ice formation 110
 water ice grade 126
 weather 92
 weather and descents 104
 web sites 92
 Weeping Wall 272
 weights 246
 what to do in an emergency 106
 WI grade 126
 Will Gadd 176
 Windstopper 53
 working a route 179
X
 X grade 127
Y
 Ysgolion Duon 264
Z
 Z-bend 56