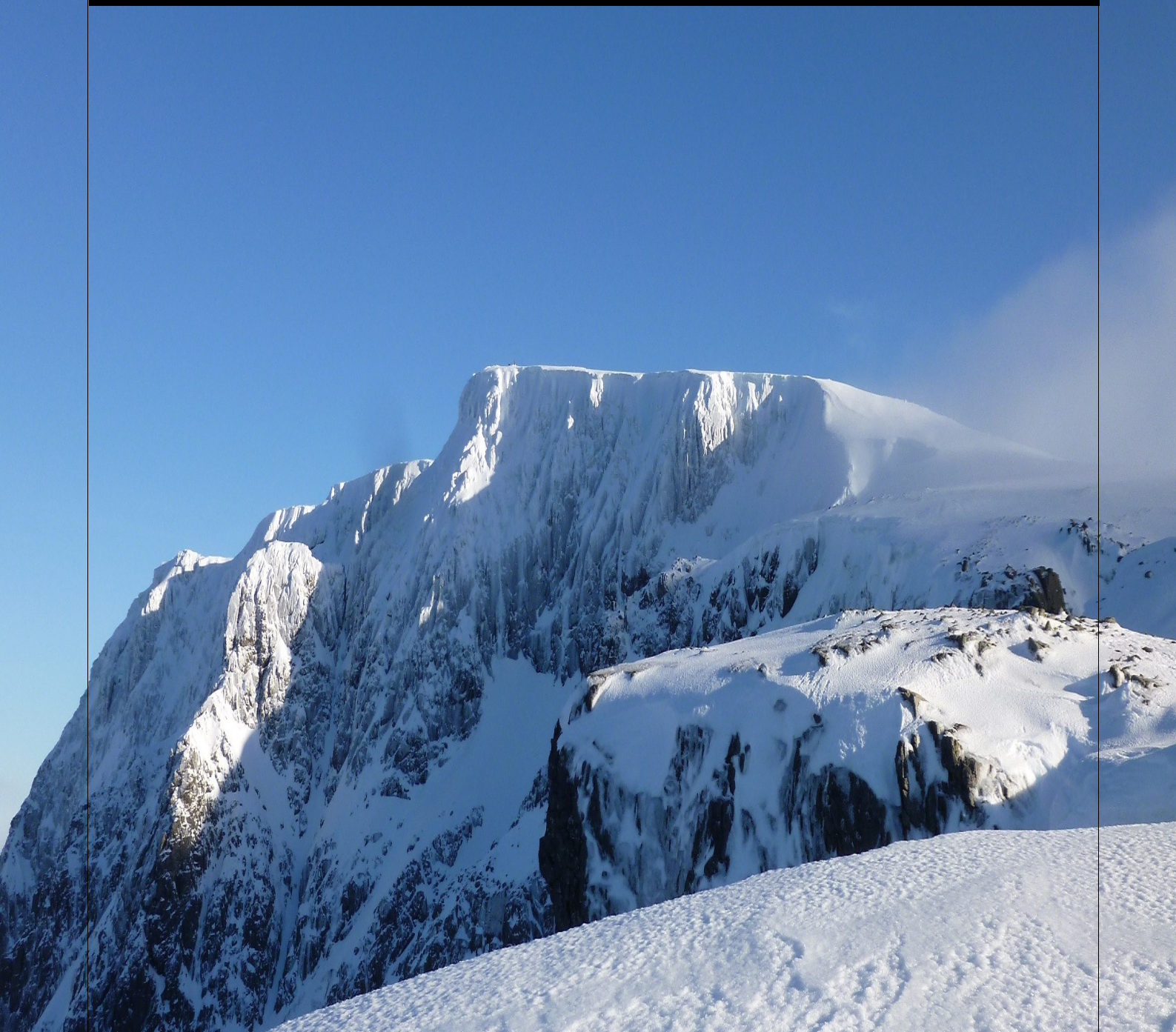


# Lochaber Guides

Fort William



## Ben Nevis Winter Weekend Trip Information







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## Fort William

### **Ben Nevis Winter Weekend**

Introduction	Page 3
Itinerary Day 1	Page 4
Itinerary Day 2	Page 5
Your Guides	Page 6
The Mountain Environment	Page 7
Fitness and Training	Page 8
Equipment List part 1	Page 9
Equipment List part 2	Page 10



# **Introduction**

Thank you for enquiring about this trip with Lochaber Guides. We hope this information pack will give you some idea as to what is involved in this particular trip and help to answer some questions you might have. Rather than try to push the 'hard sell' we've tried to be as honest as possible with what to expect and what to prepare for. You may find the tick list style of the equipment list useful when packing!

If you would like any further information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us and we will be happy to discuss things with you.

We look forward to meeting you in the Highlands!

Best Wishes

*Dave Anderson*

Dave Anderson  
Lochaber Guides

**Lochaber Guides  
60 Castle Drive  
Lochyside  
Fort William  
PH33 7NS**

**Tel: 07903459266  
Tel: 01397 700359**

## Day 1- Winter Skills

We usually meet you at your accommodation about 0845hrs if you are staying locally and accompany you to sort out the hire of technical equipment if needed.

Once all technical and other kit has been checked, we will head to our venue for the Winter Skills part of the trip.

There are several locations available to us and your guide will choose the best venue depending on various factors. We try to have as little time as possible walking into the area and as much time as possible covering the skills.

As conditions can change on a daily basis though, when the snow conditions dictate, we may have a little further to go.

We often use the Gondola on Aonach Mor at Nevis range which takes us up to 650m.

We will try and adopt a holistic approach to the skills day. Rather than just teaching you set pieces, we will try and put it all in context of a journey in the mountains and cover decision making in the process.

- Using your winter boots as a tool is one of the first aspects we usually cover and good footwork is the foundation to many of the skills we build upon.
- We will show you how to use an ice axe including cutting steps on hard snow and how to arrest a slide if you were to lose your footing.
- Using crampons well is by far one of the most important skills to cover and we will show you the basic techniques required to travel over various types and angles of ice and snow. We feel getting some mileage whilst wearing crampons is essential, especially if we are going to be using them for real the following day, so we aim to go for a journey and look at various natural obstacles and how to overcome them.

We aim to finish the day by about 1600hrs, grabbing a hot drink somewhere to warm up, have a debrief and a chat about the next day. This gives you plenty time to get fed and rested before our big day on the Ben!







# Itinerary

## Day 2- Ben Nevis Ascent

We aim to start between 0700 and 0730hrs on the Ben Nevis Mountain Track, by headtorch until sunrise. The lower half of the track usually stays snow free though some water ice can build up in cold conditions.

We arrive at the half way point, the Red Burn in about 1hr 30 minutes for some refuelling before heading up to the exciting second half!

The path soon disappears, and can often be covered by up to 2m of hard icy snow. We will get our crampons fitted, have our ice axes out and slowly and steadily make our way onto the summit plateau of the Ben.

A line of cairns can sometimes be seen as waypoints but more often than not, are shrouded in mist or sometimes completely buried. Your guide will use their navigational skills to keep you on the right track, avoiding the corniced and dangerous edges of the North Face cliffs whilst keeping away from the infamous Five Finger gully on the right.

About 500m from the summit we avoid the edge of Tower gully and the final stretch to the summit begins. Within the last 150m we have to change direction to avoid Gardyloo Gully, a large crevice in the plateau, which has its edges hidden by a large cornice. From there, we make our way to the summit area, marked by the summit shelter and the trig point. The ruins of the old Observatory are usually totally buried under snow. Enjoy the moment of reaching the top of the UK in Winter, a real achievement! But remember, you're only half way through your day, we still have to descend.

We head back across the plateau and depending on snow conditions, sometimes descend the broad depression of the Red Burn back to half way or rejoin the zig zags lower down.

As we return to the Glen with weary legs but big smiles, you can sit in the Ben Nevis Inn in front of fire and have a celebratory drink to mark your success.

We'll then return you to your accommodation and say our farewells before you finish your trip with us.





## Your Guides

The most important part of the service we offer is by far the guides on our team. When on the summit plateau of Ben Nevis, in strong winds, blizzard conditions and heavy snow it is essential that you are with someone who makes you feel safe and looks after you as well as encouraging you to enjoy this aspect of being in the mountain environment

All of our guides are:

- Highly experienced working in the Scottish Highlands in all seasons.
- Active climbers and mountaineers themselves ( i.e. they climb for fun in their spare time as well as working in the mountains!).
- They have the appropriate professional qualifications in Mountain Leading gained through a rigorous training and assessment process.
- They have professional insurance.
- Qualified in First Aid Appropriate to the Mountain Environment.
- They are friendly, professional, enthusiastic and have a genuine passion for working in the mountains, which they hope to pass on to you!



*.Dave enjoying some ice climbing high on Ben Nevis*



# The Mountain Environment

The Scottish Mountains are a truly special place to be. Whilst they may not be as high as the Himalaya or the European Alps, they offer a true wilderness and can be as dramatic as any mountain range anywhere in the world.

The weather in the Scottish Mountains can change rapidly, with a seemingly friendly and benign blue sky day disappearing within hours to give way to ferocious winds, blizzards and freezing temperatures.

Your guide will stay up to date with the latest mountain weather forecast services to give you as much information as to what conditions to expect. Having said that however, the weather forecasts aren't always accurate so being prepared for most eventualities is vital.

During your time on the mountain, your guide will carry out a dynamic risk assessment of the conditions and monitor closely the progress of the team. It is sometimes necessary to turn around before the summit of a peak is reached due to deteriorating weather, avalanche risk or some other factors concerning group members. Our number one aim is to get you off the mountain safely. Getting to the top, whilst is important to us and to you, is a secondary aim. Ben Nevis and the Scottish Mountains claim many lives every year and we are here to prevent our clients adding to these statistics! Having said that, we do have a very high success rate for our chosen ascents and will do everything we can to maximise your chance of safely reaching the summit.

Occasionally the mountain weather is such that an attempt of a particular summit e.g. Ben Nevis is just too dangerous. If that is the case, appropriate alternatives will be offered, for example, another peak which is more sheltered from the wind or less prone to avalanches.

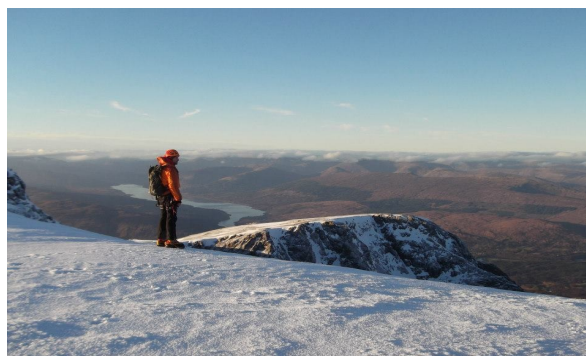
For skills courses we may make use of one of the indoor climbing facilities available to us in Lochaber and can look at various aspects of what we had planned to cover in a different environment.

We will do what we can to ensure we give you the most productive experience during your time with us.

In Winter, avalanches can and do occur. Your guides are trained in avalanche awareness and avoidance and so will minimise your time in an environment where avalanches may occur.

As with all aspects of mountaineering, all risk cannot be removed completely but we will do everything possible to safeguard your well being throughout your trip with us.

To get the most out of your time in the mountains, be prepared for some hardship but also try and enjoy it. Sometimes the most memorable experiences are the ones which are tough at the time but afterwards they can feel positive and stay with us for a lifetime.



*A stunning Winters day on the Ben Nevis summit*





## Fitness and Training

As a general rule, the fitter you are, the more you will enjoy your experience and the better the chance you have of achieving your objective, e.g. reaching the summit of Ben Nevis.

In Winter, fitness plays a much greater role as the ability to move fast on and off of the mountain can often mean the difference between making use of a short weather window and enjoying views from the summit or being stuck in bad conditions all day.

By far the most useful experience is mountain experience. If you have climbed peaks in the Highlands, the Lake District, Peak District, North Wales or abroad, this will certainly set you in good stead for your trip in the Scottish Mountains.

Having said that though, not everyone is located within a short distance of hills and mountains to train on.

Other forms of exercise can be adapted to help prepare you for the mountain environment.

Taking some sort of exercise regularly and knowing how your body copes with this is essential.

**Walking**- try walking with a rucksack of about 5-8kg for several hours, taking in as many hills and as much uneven ground as possible. Walking over boulders is good to keep you light on your feet and is good for balance.

**Running**- try running with a light rucksack of 2-3 kg and try and run up and down as many hills as you can. Go for distances of around 5-10k rather than short sprints.

**Cycling**- good for endurance and leg muscles but make sure you choose a hilly circuit for training.

**Swimming**- great all round form of exercise but not very mountain specific.

In general, good cardio-vascular fitness is the most useful but some sort of conditioning of the leg muscles and joints is very important too.

Aim to be exercising 2-3 times per week.

Above all else, a sense of determination and real desire to enjoy the experience really helps!



## Equipment List part 1

### **Technical Kit- Hire can be arranged**

- ☐ **Winter walking boots** - Need to be at least B1 rated and be able to take a C1 crampon. E.g. Scarpa Manta (B2), Scarpa SL (B1)
- ☐ **Crampons**- C1 or C2 crampons e.g. Grivel G10 or G12's (Make sure C number of the crampon is equal to or less than the B number of the boot)
- ☐ **Ice-Axe**- General Walking or Mountaineering Axe- 55cm length ideal

### **Personal Kit/clothing**

#### **Outer clothing**

- ☐ **Waterproof jacket** - e.g. GoreTex, E-Vent, Paramo, Hyvent, etc
- ☐ **Waterproof trousers**- e.g. GoreTex, E-Vent, Paramo, Hyvent, etc
- ☐ **Warm hat plus + 1 spare**
- ☐ **Waterproof gloves + at least 1 spare pair of gloves**
- ☐ **Gaiters**- stops snow from getting into your boots.

#### **Inner/mid clothing**

- ☐ **Thick walking socks**
- ☐ **Wicking baselayer/thermal** - keeps moisture away from your skin and reduces how cold you feel as a result. Cotton is not suitable.
- ☐ **Trekking trousers or Thermals**- to be worn underneath waterproofs.
- ☐ **Insulated mid layer**- to be worn underneath waterproofs but on top of thermal/baselayer for example a lightweight fleece or Primaloft top.
- ☐ **Spare warm layer**- e.g. fleece or Primaloft



## Equipment List part 2

### Other kit

- ☐ **Food and water** - around 1-2 litres of water and plenty of snacks and high energy foods to get you through the day.
- ☐ **Rucksack** - **40-45** litre recommended
- ☐ **Rucksack liner/Drybags**- Nearly all rucksacks are **not waterproof** so either a large poly-bag liner or several smaller dry-bag type bags recommended.
- ☐ **Survival bag**- Plastic type, available for a couple of pounds.
- ☐ **Sun screen, sun glasses** - mountain sun can be fierce.
- ☐ **Ski/ Snow goggles** (not essential but recommended)- very useful when walking into the wind and spindrift.
- ☐ **Personal medicines**
- ☐ **Whistle**
- ☐ **Head Torch**
- ☐ **Trekking poles** (Optional) - can take 3 tonnes of loading off of your knees over the course of a day and also good in deep snow.

Any specific questions about kit then get in touch and we'll be more than happy to help and advise you.