This initiative has been funded by AVALANCHE HAZARD & TRAVEL ADVICE TABLE.

KEY SNOW STABILITY OBSERVATIONS

1:50,000 15˚30˚45˚

1:25,000 15˚30˚45˚

Map Scale
Slope Angle
50m
10m

What do these diagrams mean?
These show the snow stability observations which the avalanche forecaster considers most important and are included in the online avalanche information reports. So if any of these are highlighted in the avalanche forecast, it is important that you read the reports carefully to establish where the hazard lies. It is also vital that you look for these signs yourself while travelling in the winter mountains.

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COMPLEX TERRAIN & TERRAIN TRAP EXAMPLES

CLIFF VALLEY

Mountain Rescue - Call 999 or 112

Be prepared to supply the following information:
• Who is calling: name, phone number, location.
• What happened?
• Where did the accident happen?
• When did the accident happen?
• How many completely buried victims?
• Weather in the area?
• Avalanche beacons worn?

sportscotland Avalanche Information Service
Snow And Avalanche Foundation of Scotland
British Mountain Guides
Glenmore Lodge National Outdoor Training Centre Scotland
Plas y Brenin National Outdoor Training Centre England
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British Association of Ski Patrollers
British Mountaineering Council
Police Scotland
Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland
Scottish Mountaineering Club
British Association of International Mountain Leaders
Mountain Training UK
Mountain Training Scotland
Association of Mountaineering Instructors
SLF (Snow and Avalanche Research) Switzerland

GUIDELINES FOR WALKERS, SKIERS, CLIMBERS, and SNOWBOARDERS

90% OF VICTIMS TRIGGER THEIR OWN AVALANCHE

WIND EXPOSED RIDGES

SNOW DEPOSITION

100m +

SAFE ROUTE

SAFE TERRAIN EXAMPLE

SOUTH EAST ASPECTS

LEE SLOPES

WIND 15+ MPH FROM THE NORTH WEST

SLOPE ASPECT (Direction slope faces)

9

WEAK LAYERS

WINDSLAB WARM TEMPERATURES.

WET SNOW PACK

SURFACE GRAINS CORNICES
IDENTIFYING AVALANCHE HAZARD IN THE HILLS AND MOUNTAINS THROUGHOUT THE WINTER IS A CHALLENGING PROCESS.

Constantly changing weather factors, from temperature and snowfall to wind speed and direction, can affect the strength and stability of the snowpack. So it’s vital to keep a close watch on conditions during the season — especially throughout any mountain excursions.

This guide outlines the decision-making process and the fundamental considerations of assessing avalanche hazards in the winter mountains. With the advice on these pages, together with the corresponding resources overleaf, you should be able to make better judgements on where and when to go.

When making any decision in the winter mountains always consider these 3 factors:

- Avalanche hazard, weather and mountain conditions.
- You and your parties’ personal skills and experience.
- The landscape you intend to visit.

These factors should be considered during each of these 3 important phases:

- **PLANNING**
  - At home in the weeks, days and hours before setting out.

- **YOUR JOURNEY**
  - Throughout your mountain journey.

- **KEY PLACES**
  - At key places/times instances during the day.
This is the most important phase in evaluating avalanche hazard. By gathering avalanche information and updates on conditions throughout the winter, you will be better equipped to make the right decisions on any excursion – as well as having an indication of what’s happening beneath the snow’s surface.

### ATTENTION!

**Snow is lying on the hills and mountains?**
Expect the risk of avalanches in many locations.

**Windy?**
Windy above speeds of 15mph will transport snow and form unstable windslab.

**Cold or Warm?**
Low temperatures over a few days (e.g., freezing levels at 900m and below) produces and maintains instabilities in the snowpack, while warm temps and rain at summit levels produce rapid instabilities in the snowpack.

### ADVICE

Read published avalanche reports and consider weather forecasts for wind, precipitation and temperature. Obtain any additional information from other people or organisations on where and what level of hazard exists.

Check map and, using wind direction, work out where new snow will probably lie. It will usually form on a range of sheltered or lee slopes. Read avalanche report text carefully to determine the places where new and unstable snow may be accumulating.

Read avalanche reports regularly and research snowpack history to identify where avalanche snow instabilities may be. Read weather forecasts daily, noting weather patterns, including wind speed and direction, temperature, precipitation amount and freezing levels.

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It is essential that you are confident in using crampons and ice axes, as it is important to travel securely to avoid avalanche-prone slopes. If you are on skis or snowboard, it is important that you carry transceivers, probes and shovels – and that you are well-practiced in using them.

Are you fit for travelling in deep snow? Are severe winter conditions a possibility (windy, blizzards, hard and icy snow surface)? If the terrain is remote, steep and complex, this will require good mountain skills. Ensure you have a flexible plan.

Read published avalanche reports to determine where and what level of hazard exists. Do you understand what the hazard level actually means in your chosen location? Use the contour tool to check slope angles and shape.

Look at a map to determine where new snow may lie. It usually forms on a range of sheltered or lee slopes. Read avalanche report to determine where other unstable places may be or speak to people who have current knowledge of the area, like ski patrol or trusted local climbers.

Good navigation and route finding is essential to avoid unstable slopes and the threat of being carried into bad places (e.g., terrain traps or convex slopes) by even small avalanches. Carefully read avalanche reports, maps and guide books to identify potentially hazardous places.

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**RESOURCES**

- **WEATHER & CONDITIONS**
- **YOU & YOUR PARTY**
- **MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE**

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# YOUR MOUNTAIN JOURNEY

You should already have a good understanding of the avalanche hazard before you set out. Throughout the day you should continually observe weather and snow conditions both underfoot and around you – and consider its effect on avalanche hazards along your planned route.

## ATTENTION!

| Poor visibility? | You will not be able to make route choice observations. |
| Avalanche activity? | Seeing avalanche activity indicates an unstable snowpack. |
| Windy? | Snow moving around at your feet or on ridges etc indicates unstable snow is accumulating. |
| Snowpack cracks underfoot? | Small or large surface cracks, and whoomping sounds are clear signs of instability. |
| Cold or Warm? | Low temperatures over a few days (e.g. freezing levels at 900m and below produces and maintains instabilities in the snowpack, while warm temperatures and rain at summit levels produce rapid instabilities in the snowpack). |

## ADVICE

| Advice | |
| Consider large scale, safer terrain features for travel. Accurate navigation will be necessary to avoid potential unstable slopes. |
| Note the aspect where the avalanche took place and avoid slopes of similar aspect. |
| Snowpack instabilities should be expected - note aspects where new snow is accumulating and select an alternative. |
| Weaknesses are present in the snowpack, as well as windslab - note aspect and select alternative. Monitor how the snowpack behaves underfoot throughout the day. Think ahead: if this is what you find here, what does it mean for the rest of your journey? |
| Remember info from avalanche report but use your senses too - look and feel constantly. Instabilities will persist in the snowpack when it is cold. Check for cracking underfoot throughout the day and during your journey - note aspects. If it is warm, consider cornice collapse triggering avalanche from above. |

## YOU & YOUR PARTY

| Poor visibility? | Can you navigate well? |
| Equipment and Clothing? | Do you have the right clothing and equipment, and know how to use it? |
| Are the conditions different to what you expected? | Are you (and party) coping well? |

##資源

| Advice | |
| Monitor your progress if the snow is deep and the winter conditions are severe. If terrain is remote, steep and complex, good mountain skills and fitness will be vital. If you are unsure, consider an alternative plan. |
| Check to see you have everything you need before starting out. If you are wearing transceivers, make sure that they are turned on and check your partner's too. Carry a probe and shovel. |

## WEATHER & CONDITIONS

| Unstable slopes? | Can you see that your proposed journey crosses identified unstable slopes or are you uncertain? |
| What is happening around you? | Snow distribution continually changes, especially during windy days. |
| Complex terrain? | This will require good navigation and consideration of avalanche hazard especially in poor visibility. |

## MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE

| Advice | |
| Consider alternative routes and safer terrain. Be aware of collapsing cornices and/or people above you triggering an avalanche. |
| Always look at the landscape around you and observe where snow is lying or where unstable slopes could be. Use this information throughout the day to help you choose safer routes to travel. |
| Good route finding is essential for avoiding unstable slopes and the threat of being carried into confined places by avalanches. Carefully read avalanche reports and relate this information to maps and guide books to identify potentially hazardous places. |
By the time you reach the foot of a key slope during your journey, you should be well aware of the avalanche hazard — through careful planning and from making observations throughout the day. If you are not, you will be at a huge disadvantage, without the knowledge and understanding to make good decisions. At key places, consider your own condition. Are you fatigued? How is your party? Is the weather poor? Be open to changing your plan.

### ATTENTION!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor visibility?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considerably limits your ability to make safe route choices and may expose you to avalanche hazard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avalanche activity or unstable snow?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeing avalanche activity indicates an unstable snowpack.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Windy, drifting snow, snowing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is snow continuing to accumulate?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncertain?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You think there may be instabilities and/or the weather is poor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other people?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If other people are around, does that make it ok?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid grouping together on a slope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does it feel right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you are feeling uncertain there may be a good reason.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ADVICE

| If you cannot see slope shapes and you believe that slopes are unstable, or if you are uncertain, consider alternative plans. |

| Note the aspect where the avalanche took place. If you have observed signs of instability, avoid slopes of similar aspect. |

| Snow pack instabilities should be expected, especially high up in gullies and at the tops of slopes. Snow accumulating at rates greater than 2cm/hr is critical for increased instability and avalanches. |

| Make decisions collectively and only proceed when everyone is confident. Avoid pressing on because you think others want to continue. Are you fatigued? Is the weather intimidating? Be open to changing your plan. |

| Avalanches can occur on a slope even if tracks or people are already present. Weaknesses in the snowpack may be confined to small areas but once triggered can effect the whole slope. |

| Keeping a good distance apart is always good practice when travelling and reduces exposure to avalanche involvement. Think about where to stop. |

| Consider consequences of an avalanche small or large. Are you in narrow valleys, below or above cliffs and boulders? These can all worsen the avalanche effect. Avoid these places if you are uncertain or instability is present. Choose alternative route. |

| Avoid convexities, these are places where the snowpack is under greatest stress, activity here may trigger an avalanche. |

| It is not always possible to be certain about the stability of a slope. If you are concerned, choose safer route options, consider alternatives or retreat. Remember you can always come back another day. |
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KEY SNOW STABILITY OBSERVATIONS

TERRAIN FACTORS & OBSERVATIONS

1. SOUTH EAST ASPECTS LEE SLOPES
   - SLOPE ASPECT (Direction slope faces)

2. WIND 15+ MPH FROM THE NORTH WEST
   - SAFE TERRAIN EXAMPLE

3. SKI STICK (Straight arm, walking stick length) Touching snow surface
   - SLOPE ANGLE

4. WIND EXPOSED RIDGE
   - 100m + SAFE ROUTE

5. CLIFF

6. VALLEY
   - AVOID CONVEX SHAPED AREAS

7. CONVEXITIES

What do these diagrams mean?

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So if any of these are highlighted in the avalanche forecast, it is important that you read the reports carefully to establish where the hazard lies. It is also vital that you look for these signs yourself while travelling in the winter mountains.

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Complex terrain & terrain trap examples

- CLIFF
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WINDSLAB
Attention!
Weaknesses developing in the snowpack due to wind transportation of snow and the formation of windslab.

Advice
Look for signs of snow being blown around or snow cracking underfoot. Note affected slopes, select safe terrain.

WARM TEMPERATURES. WET SNOW PACK
Attention!
Wet snow instabilities due to warm temperatures and/or rainfall saturating the snowpack. Produces deep and heavy snow avalanches, especially with rainfall at summit levels.

Advice
Look for signs of snow cracking underfoot. Note affected slopes, select safe terrain.

SURFACE GRAINS
Attention!
A surface grain type that may present snowpack instability with subsequent snowfalls. Develops during calm, cold and clear periods, especially overnight.

Advice
Look for signs of sparkling snow crystals on the surface. Note affected slopes and be alert to new snowfall.

CORNICES
Attention!
Cornices that may present a hazard due to collapse and/or providing an avalanche trigger.

Advice
Cornices will become unstable, especially during stormy periods with drifting snow and in heavy thaws. Look above you for cornice threats. Note affected slopes, select safe terrain.
### AVALANCHE HAZARD & TRAVEL ADVICE TABLE

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<td>Natural avalanches may occur – and a single person load is likely to trigger an avalanche on some slopes. Good visibility and route-finding in mountain terrain is important, as is experience in avalanche hazard evaluation. It’s vital that you manage your group carefully and use mountain features (e.g., ridges and protected slopes) to travel safely.</td>
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<td><strong>MODERATE</strong></td>
<td>Human-triggered avalanches are possible, so good visibility and good route selection is important, especially in steep locations as indicated in the reports. You should manage your group carefully, keeping good spacing between people to reduce loading on slopes, while using mountain features (e.g., ridges and protected slopes) to travel safely.</td>
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<td>Human-triggered avalanches not likely. Generally safe travel conditions.</td>
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- Association of Mountaineering Instructors
- SLF (Snow and Avalanche Research) Switzerland

Use this contour tool for determining slope on your map.

Ref: 000-0114 | Design SBP Creative, Edinburgh