

Training report from Celine

I went to Plas Y Brenin in Snowdonia to take on the 5-day Mountain Skills training in May. Whilst the emphasis of the course is very much on navigation – which I needed rather desperately – it offers many other learning opportunities such as how to wild camp responsibly and sustainably, how to plan a route, how to stay safe using ropes and how to use weather forecasts. A lot to cram in over 5 days...

On Day 1 we looked at the basics of weather systems and map reading. We went out to Moel Siabod with a map each, concentrating on the different types of paths that exist and looking for signs – natural or man-made – to ensure we were following our chosen route.

Day 2 started with preparations for our overnight camping expedition. We looked at weather systems in more details, and how it affects route planning particularly when considering wind speed and direction against climb and ground exposure. We also looked at equipment essentials and how to pack as lightly as possible.



We headed to Pen y Pass and started our expedition on the Miners' Track. We were given a series of increasingly specific/ difficult navigation challenges and asked to take turns to lead the rest of the group in pairs. After lunch at Llyn Llydaw, we made our way up to East and West Peaks, then joined the Watkins Path before we traversed to Cwm Tregalan and set up camp for the night. We talked about the ethics of wild camping, which could be surmised as: leave the site as you found it. A small group got back out in the dark to learn and test the basics of night navigation.



We woke up on Day 3 to fog and rain. Once we packed camp and put the site was back to its original state, we made our way to up to the Snowdon summit. Our task was to decide on the most direct route from our camp back to the Watkins path, making sure we were not blown away by the strong winds once we reached the ridge. The foul weather actually gave us perfect learning conditions. After a rather quick break at the café – which closed 15 minutes before we reached the summit – we made our way down back to Pen Y Pass via the PYG track.

The theme for Day 4 was safety. We spent the morning discussion the various hazards that can arise in the mountains and learned how to use ropes. We made our way to the Ogwen Valley to practice with ropes and actual rocks near the lake. Back at the centre, our last task of the day was to work in pairs to plot a 2-day route, taking weather, pace, direction, distance, terrain, inclination, water sources, shelter and so on into planning. We then had to present our plan to get feedback from the group and the instructors.



Day 5 saw us scramble up the North Ridge of Tryffan, in strong wind and sunshine. Again, our instructor explained the basic notions of scrambling (route finding and grading), then took us up and down what turned out to be a fabulous mountain. We even practiced some rope work in a sticky patch. Back at the centre, our 3 fantastic instructors gave us tips and resources to continue our conquest of all things alpine.



I left Snowdonia with grazed knees, good navigation skills and a taste for scrambling. This is, without question, one of the most enjoyable weeks I've spent outdoors. Plas Y Brenin offers decent accommodation, good food, fabulous instructors and great learning opportunities.

Thank you to ABMSAC for supporting this fab experience!

Celine Gagnon, July 2019

Training report from Howard Telford

My navigational certificate came through the post today and it reminded me write a summary of the course.

Bronze Navigation Course. My first choice of course was cancelled at short notice so I looked around for a course at a similar price and found one based on Hebden Bridge. As it turned out it was a good choice as I had not been to the area before (and it was cheaper!).

Although I have been navigating in the mountains (and elsewhere) for a very long time it was very helpful to be able to compare my level of competency with a national standard. I was informed that I could have taken the Silver course but this was an excellent refresher in navigation techniques using just a map and compass.

What we covered. We revised map symbols. The number of paces for a 100m distance and the time to walk 100m over different types of terrain. I now have a crib sheet to help me work out time for various distances. We also covered choice of route and splitting the route into smaller manageable legs. This enabled me to recognise a navigational error quickly and take corrective action to relocate. The bronze course requires the use of linear features, (e.g. paths, tracks etc. as handrails.) We did stray from the syllabus and took bearings over open ground to find an objective. (This is covered in Silver). We also got some advice on access issues and legislation and our responsibilities within the Countryside Code.

I would recommend other members to take this course and/or I could provide some training at the Bronze standard on a less formal basis.

Howard Telford, July 2019