DAVE SMITH REVIEW OF MRCofS WINTER RIGGING COURSE – FEBRUARY 2013

Hi Folks,

Like Neil before me I was a sole rep from OMRT at the Scottish Mountain Rescue winter rigging training last weekend hosted by the Lochaber Team in Fort William.

I did wonder what I had let myself in for however as Neil has said previously it was really worthwhile, from meeting other Team members (Galloway, Dundonell, Assynt, Torridon, Skye, etc), to seeing round the Lochaber Post and most importantly learning loads about rigging.

Course content can be found here for those that are interested:

<http://training.mountainrescuescotland.org/rigging/rigging-winter/>

In summary:

Fri – discussion on anchors and a scenario. Learnt about IKAR and that in UK we operate on the basis of a 10:1 safety margin (probably should have known this?). Little chat about forces and loads, and how a rescue load could easily be 3kN therefore the system should be designed for 30kN to give the 10:1 safety factor – Alex this is your field right?

Sat – Looked at various snow anchors including stomper belay, horizontal axe, deadmen and snow stakes. Bottom line if its poor snow it’s a poor anchor! Quick test make a snowball - if it packs into a solid lump then the anchors should be good. It was advised that horizontal axes, bollards and deadmen should not be used as a direct belay for an individual but should be an indirect belay through a body belay from a person sitting in a well constructed bucket seat (see article <http://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk/cust_images/pdf/mountainsport%20articles/GMacDec06%20Snoe%20Anchors.pdf>). We then arranged several deadmen in an arc coming to a power point (using a rigging plate with clove hitches. Took 4 of us less than three minutes to set up the rig, it was pretty cool and bomber! Next we did a two stage lower with transition which worked pretty well.

In the evening Shaun Roberts (Glenmore Lodge) gave us an insight into the avalanche in the Chalamain gap.

Sun - back up Aonach Mor which I’m getting familiar with now! Split into two teams and set up a variety of lowers and raises using mostly rock anchors. The rigging stuff was pretty cool there were loads of really good tricks and tips from Stuart Johnson. We also discussed…..how to tie into a stretcher! They seemed to be of the same mind as Mick was a couple of years ago, tie into the eyelets and be done. Stuart Johnson indicated that the reason people tie around the middle dates back to a warning which McIness issued which related to a specific batch of bolts which were quickly replaced thereby correcting the fault.

Lessons for me:

1. I learnt about IKAR and UIAA!

2. Learn the principles, then accept that in any given situation you will have to improvise, adapt and overcome. There will be no two situations the same therefore it’s about understanding the principles and using them to make the rescue happen. Generally there is no right or wrong as there are a number of ways to rig a rescue.

3. This may be obvious to everyone else but it’s just dawning on me - rescue is rescue and not personal mountaineering or climbing. I need to get my head around this. Whilst some principles are the same rescue is a different discipline dealing with different loads (heavier but generally static) and different kit to overcome the specific challenges that comes with it.

3. I need to practice much more with the rescue hardware - so that its use and operation becomes second nature and is slick.

4. I need to get slicker at lowers and raises in as many different locations and conditions as possible

5. The use of a ‘hasty party’ to get to the casualty to perform an assessment and instruct the main party what will be required (3 persons max). Operate off a separate line with less numerous anchors.

6. I need to make sure if I am an edge attendant that I am tied in!

7. I need to practice good stance management – all the ropes stacked running cleanly and the stance is clear of clutter.

8. I need to practice my communication skills which include not becoming impatient (sorry again Dave)! Each person involved in the rigging/ the lower and the raise should be clear about what is required of them i.e. edge attendant to communicate between rescuer and the rigging party; the belay controller to control the rate of descent; the safety backup operator controlling the prussic etc etc.

9. Lastly my safety is number one, your safety is number two and the casualties safety is number three!

A good quote in the rigging manual linked to below said::

*“If you expect to do it professionally you must learn to do it recreationally.”*

Kit Used:

* Rescue 8
* ID
* Paw rigging plate
* Rescucenders
* Double 8mm prussiks
* Pulleys
* Prussic minded pulleys
* Radium knots
* Deadmen
* Snow stakes

The money which is funding this training is going to run out soon at which point the training will stop. I can honestly say whilst I found it quite daunting, and I got into trouble with the missus for being away two weekends on the trot, it was an exceptional learning experience.

If I’m honest I think attendance at these courses should be a core requirement for us all, in much the same way as we are required to have our First Aid certificates after all one of our Teams core capabilities is “to be capable of effecting technical rescues on ground above the high water mark”.

Like Neil I would really recommend that if you can get a pass from your family for a weekend without divorce then it really is worth it.

One last thing, Alex when’s the next rigging training? The ID session was brilliant! 

Smithy

Link to awesome rigging manual: <http://kristinandjerry.name/cmru/rescue_info/National%20Park%20Service/Basic%20Technical%20Rescue%20-%20Phillips.pdf>