

BASI Mountain Safety Module

About the Course

The objective of the course is to train and assess instructors in leading parties off piste within the ski area boundary. Terrain used will be non glaciated with no planned use of the rope - beyond that is the realm of the ISTD or Mountain Guide.

Practical instruction is given in: equipment for off piste, choice of route, use of skins or snowshoes for short uphill sections, off piste technique, group management, avalanche assessment, use of transceivers and navigation.

Theory lectures are given on: snow and avalanches, navigation, mountain weather, hypothermia, emergencies and responsibilities of a leader.

The assessment is continual through the week on the following subjects;

1. Personal skiing/riding and leading a group off piste
2. Navigation, snow profile and transceiver search

* There will also be a written paper.

All Trainers and Assessors are qualified Mountain Guides or Trainers with specific mountain leadership qualifications who specialise in Off Piste skiing or Snowboarding and Ski Mountaineering.

To illustrate the difference in emphasis between on piste teaching and leading a group off piste let us consider the consequences of having a bad day.

On piste we are dealing with a client who is not satisfied, may complain and probably won't re-book.

Off piste it could be severe injury or death we have to deal with.

To lead a group off piste:

- We must learn to ski or ride defensively. The more serious and remote the situation the more important this becomes.
- We have to be very alert to the risk of avalanche.
- Through navigation skills and preparation, we always know where we are; we also know what the ground and snow conditions will be like round the corner.

This requires from the leader an element of awareness and judgment, which can only come from experience. Teaching on the piste is not relevant to the mountain skills needed. Hill walking, especially in winter, or ski touring are far more appropriate.

If you have little or no navigation experience it is essential that you at least familiarize yourself with a British or French 1:25,000 map and get some experience using it.

This course provides awareness of difficulties + dangers to the practice of leading people off piste. BASI recommends that, instructors who intend to regularly teach "Off Piste" complete the "European Mountain Safety Module". You should also be aware that different countries have different laws regarding the practice of skiing off piste and particularly outside the ski area boundary; therefore it is important to check the legal situation of the country that you are in.