

Meeting International Standards Seminar 23-25 June 2000 Le Tour, Chamonix, France

Report by Andrew Friedemann (South African representative)

Summary of the first UIAA Meeting International Standards Seminar hosted by the UIAA Training Standards Working Group and Federations des Clubs Alpin Francais at Chalet Le Tour, Le Tour, Chamonix France.

Introduction

The UIAA Training Standards Group under the leadership of John Cousins of the UKMTB, presented a very worth while training standards symposium at which 18 members representing 12 countries were present.

Predominantly based in the CAF Le Tour chalet, the discussions were moved out to the surrounding mountain areas on occasion for practical implementation of training ideas.

International Standards

Most countries and federations represented at the seminar were in favour of inter recognition of training standards that comply with the UIAA model standards.

This was seen as a problem however as there are distinctive terrain and skills differences between the various countries. It was suggested that if a country wished to have its training recognised by another UIAA member country, it would need to apply to that country directly, and that the UIAA would not be in a position to automatically deem the standards to be equal.

However it was agreed that the Model Standards could be the starting point of any discussions between countries or federations.

Mr Cousins looked at the South Africa MDT Prospectuses and Syllabi and it was agreed that they compare with the Model Standards so would be accepted by the UIAA as is.

The next meeting of the Standards Working group would be on the 15th September and to be discussed would be:

- Finland: Awaiting revised standards
- Ireland: Recommendation to accept written standards
- Quebec: Recommendation to accept written standards
- Singapore: Recommendation to accept written walking leader standard (for jungle trekking)
- **South Africa: Recommendation to accept written standards**

Mr cousins or another appointed representative of the UIAA Standards Training Group would need to visit South Africa to observe a training course in progress and to familiarise themselves with the South African Mountain environment to ensure that the Training Standards we have set up satisfy our unique mountain terrain.

Should this visit be satisfactory it would be recommended at the next General meeting of the UIAA that South Africa be permitted to claim UIAA approval for the scheme for the next five years. This could happen as early as February 2001.

It was agreed with Mr Cousins that South Africa moves on to the next stage of its application to gain UIAA approval of the MDT.

Environmental Training for Mountain Skills courses.

Karin Steinmetzer of the German Alpine Club gave a talk on the German Environmental Training Team.

The ETT has been specifically put together to provide the Environmental aspect of their training scheme. The team consists of 25 people who all have finished their mountain skills training program and also hold an academic degree in environmental studies. These trainers are paid by the Alpine club to teach part time on courses.

Participants attending a formal mountain training course will spend 8 hours covering the environmental syllabus under the supervision of an ETT member.

Different exams are written for the Mountain walking and Climbing courses, as the syllabi are designed specifically to accommodate these environments.

A practical session on the Col Du Monte was held to show some of the techniques used by the ETT trainers. This practical highlighted the importance of candidates being able to identify by sight and touch the various plant types and their importance in the mountain environment. What was interesting to me was that a large percentage of the alpine flora in Europe is seen as invasive plants in South Africa, requiring knowledge of local environmental protocols when travelling.

Examinations for this area are largely written with a variety of methods from "Spot the mistake", & animal habitat identification to drawing suitable routes onto a given picture being used as testing methods.

Something, which SA could develop as Germany has, is a uniform set of environmental handouts used on all courses. This standardises the information being given out and makes sure the topics are being covered.

Training the Young

Ruedi Meier of the Swiss Alpine Club, gave a short session in the differences in training the young as opposed to adults. This revolved around a change in the person's priorities.

Pleasure:

For a child, knowledge is acquired by playing. Play gives him pleasure and helps their apprenticeship. In a climbing competition for example they will see the fun rather than the result. It is the adult that forces the win at all costs attitude onto the child so destroying the fun.

Adults seek pleasure in bagging summits, high altitude and chrono-performances.

A youth instructor can become disappointed when they realise that the children are more interested in the frog in the pond than the climbing wall.

Apprenticeship:

Adults learn by analysing the action and balance of a moving climber, where as a child learns by imitation. This means our attitude and own technique is vitally important when working with children, as they will copy our bad habits.

Methodology:

Different methods need to be used to teach adults and children. For example to teach adults balance on a climb, it is possible to analyse movement using diagrams depicting the individual parts of a climber's movement.

With a child it would be more effective to make a game out of it by asking the child to climb with one arm in imaginary plaster cast. Climbing with one hand, the child will test out the effects of gravity and distribution of weight by playing with their centre of gravity. This is amusing, a form of play and to the child a game.

Technique and technical knowledge are the base skills. Methodology provides the means of reaching the goal, which is pleasure in mountaineering. The pleasure is indispensable for the motivation.

Generally when working with, or training children it is important to always look for the pleasure aspect and design your training around having fun. Children learn technical aspects such as belaying very quickly and as such grow bored just as fast. Children have a simple outlook on life and the skills we are teaching them. We do not have to convince them with long drawn out yet convincing arguments. Just teach the skill and move on.

The Law and training schemes.

A member of the UIAA Legal Commission gave an interesting talk about the work they were involved in.

Some key points of interest included:

- Volunteer leaders have the same legal responsibility as professional guides.
- A leader must be able to show that they were using the latest recognised equipment and techniques or they could be held accountable in law.
- A person leading a group must be able to show that they have attended whatever training is available in their country if they wish to be leading parties in mountainous terrain. This includes volunteer leaders and members of clubs who lead groups on club outings. Failure to have attended training is a valid argument for a negligence claim.
- Assistants to group leaders must also have been trained and qualified to lead groups.
- Trips must be adapted to the client's ability, and not the leaders whims.
- When working with children, even non-activity time is the leaders responsibility.
- Bad weather is the leaders responsibility. So if the weather turns bad then you must change the trip to accommodate it. Saying the weather was responsible for the accident is no protection from the law.
- If the group consists of just a group of friends, then there is no responsible person unless one is obviously seen as the expert in the group. For example a guide (this includes MDT trained people) going out with a group of friends. The guide is assumed to be the responsible person.
- When a client is involved, the guide is always responsible for all actions.

- There is always an obligation to assist others in trouble, but if you are leading an inexperienced group, your group's safety is paramount.
- A leader has a legal obligation to remain in direct control of all members of the party, so splitting the party is an obvious violation of this obligation.

A very important point brought up, was that re certification of persons accredited by any training scheme is vital to protect the scheme/association/trust from negligence litigation.

Leaders of mountaineering parties have two forms of legal responsibility:

Criminal responsibility:

Where a death or major injury has occurred then a fine or imprisonment is possible.

Civil responsibility:

Where damage or loss has been incurred then the leader will be responsible to repair such damage or loss. This is where it is important that leaders and training schemes have insurance to cover these costs.

Movement on difficult terrain

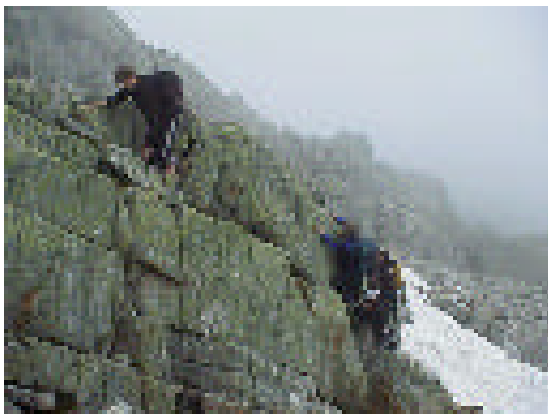
This session was held on the Plan Du Aguille just below the snow line of the Mont Blanc massive.

Discussion revolved around the techniques taught for movement over difficult terrain and the specific problems in various regions.



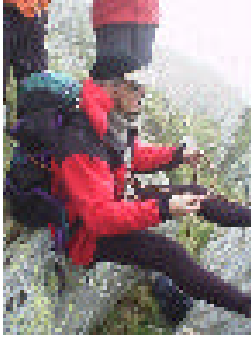
Some of these included:

- Singapore explained the problem of people being hit on the head by machetes being used by the hiking party. (Jungle trekking)
- The problem of gradual movement onto steeper terrain and the leader not noticing the change.
- The South African problem of mountain fires.
- River crossings. This caused some amusement as comment was made that if you had to cross a river you were on the wrong route, where are the bridges?

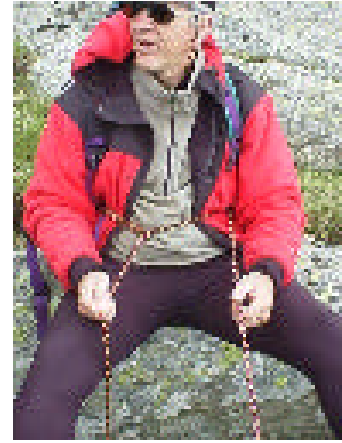


A practical exercise was undertaken where the party decided on differing routes across scree slopes, snow, and steep narrow ledges. After completing the movement the various options were discussed in detail highlighting the benefits and dangers of each according to differing group compositions.

Movement on steep ground, particularly the lowering of members of mountain walking parties was discussed and practical exercises undertaken.



A member of the Federation Quebecois Montagne & Escalade, demonstrated a method they use for lowering a person. Similar to a standard body (waist) belay, it effectively involves tying an Italian hitch around your waist. This gives far more control over the rope and there is less chance of getting rope burn. Without any better suggestions we decided to call it the “Quebec Belay”



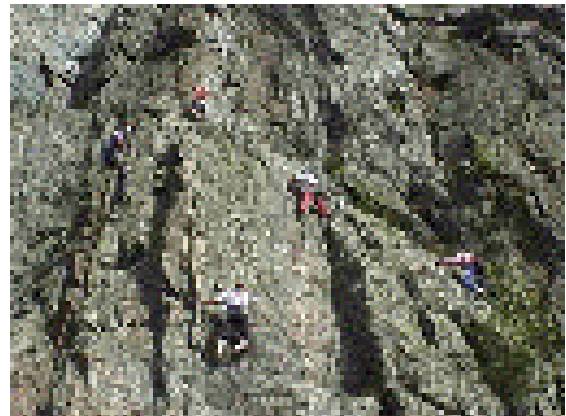
Teaching Lead Climbing

This session was unfortunately delayed and then had to be shortened considerably due to an accident involving the deaths of three Spanish climbers from their youth training section. The instructors were tied up for most of the seminar dealing with the legal aspects of the accident and the repatriation of the bodies.

However a shortened session was held at a popular crag just outside Chamonix.

The main points coming out of this session were:

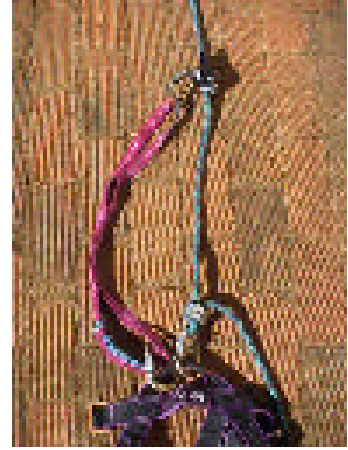
- To safeguard first time Trad. lead climbers, the use of a route especially put up for this is used in Spain. The route has mixed protection with every second running belay being a bolt. The climber then places Trad. gear between the bolts. This has the effect of teaching the climber to place gear but without the total risk of a Trad. route. The bolts are placed 4 to 5 meters apart on average. Everyone present agreed that this was a suitably efficient way to start a lead climbers career but still maintain the aspect of responsibility and due care, required by the legal fraternity.
- Instructors should not be solo climbing when teaching Trad. gear placement to novices as is often the case. It was accepted that the risk involved to the instructor as well as the lead climber is too great to be justified in a training scenario.



Supervision of novice belayers or the supervision of multiple belayers by a single pitch supervisor was discussed with four methods of improving safety being discussed.

- **Serial Belaying** – two belayers on each rope belay the climber. The less experienced of the two novice belayers being behind the main belayer. This allows the supervisor to move around teaching the belayers rope handling techniques, while still providing a high level of safety to the climber. In this manner it was accepted that up to four climbers could be climbing under one supervisor’s care while maintaining safety.

- **Mechanical** – a Shunt or other suitable mechanical device could be placed on the live rope ahead of the belay device with a moderately long sling so that should the belayer completely fail to stop the fall the device would take over.
- **Direct Backup** – the supervisor would if the climbs are close to each other, (as was the case in Chamonix), hold the dead ends of the ropes all together in his own hands so that he was in direct backup should a belayer let go the rope during a fall.
- **Knots** – as a climber begins to climb and they are a few meters off the ground a knot tied either by the belayer or the supervisor is tied in the dead end of the rope. This means should the belayer fail completely the climber will not ultimately reach the ground. Still risky but a failsafe.



Grigri – the Grigri was discouraged for use in teaching belaying as it promoted bad habits.

Administration

Administration of training schemes came under the spotlight briefly with all countries seeming to have the same problems.

The UK seemed to have the best system using a sticker system whereby instructors on courses complete a candidate's logbook by sticking a sticker in to show that the course has been completed. This still had its downfall even in the UK, as some instructors would fail to send in the course and candidates details to the main office.

It was suggested that a triplicate receipt book be used whereby the candidate in addition to the sticker, receives a receipt and the second copy goes to the admin. officer. The third remains in the book for the instructor's reference. These receipt books would be official training scheme books only issued to registered instructors. It would also give the training administrator a reference as to who provided the course if the instructor failed to send in the receipts. Instructors register yearly and if they cease to train then the receipt books are returned to the administration officer.



Funding options for training schemes were briefly discussed with the following being the most common:

- Government
- Lottery
- Candidate fees

Assessments:

A flexible approach to assessing trainees was emphasised. Rigid rules rarely worked in all cases and the main question asked was how do you assess Leadership?

No convincing answer was found after a lot of discussion but the following assessment methods were recommended as options:

- Observation
 - Simulated scenarios
 - Actual scenarios using a real party
- Questioning
 - Written exams
 - Oral exams
- Logbook assessment
- Reference from other climbers / referee endorsement
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment
- Accreditation of prior learning

It was important to have an Appeal system in place to handle trainees who were not happy with the result of their assessment. This was agreed by all.

Conclusion:

The seminar closed with John Cousins thanking everyone for attending and a short discussion on the merits of such seminars.

It was felt that these should be held every two to three years and that there was a lot of benefit to be gained from them. Problems encountered during this first meeting would be a learning point for future meetings and it was hoped that everyone would give their ideas for future improvements.

During the course of the seminar a lot of interest was shown in South Africa, and a lot of myths and legends dispelled. Singapore with its limited space, showed interest in bringing their youth program to South Africa for training in our mountains.

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