

Winter Skills: Coaching Crampon Techniques Part 1 by Stuart Johnston MIC

Where do I start? What should I be teaching? coaching winter skills isn't easy for example; do you know where to practice?

“GETTING STARTED”

What level of cramponing will you be coaching? Path to mountain is generally a good starting point. Approach paths can and will often be very icy so, knowing when to put on and take off crampons is one of the most important decisions your clients will confront and is a key proactive skill to safe winter travel.

TIP

- ✓ You don't need to be high on a mountain to begin a crampon session icy paths are an ideal starting point

“KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT”

The increasing popularity of lightweight crampons could put walkers' lives at risk, (See Trail Magazine article Jan 09) remember lightweight crampons are designed for bendy boots and path walking where the angle is low enough for the whole boot to be in contact with the ground. Lightweight walking crampons in the main have no front points and therefore are not ideal crampons for beginners when venturing on to terrain with angles above 15 degrees. Wearing the right footwear is vital before matching a crampon, you need to think about what do you need the footwear and crampon to do? Think about skills your client will be Practising! don't make assumptions get the planning right from the very start.

TIPS

- ✓ Check client boots and crampons are fit for purpose
- ✓ Verify type of boot and crampon client will use prior to coaching session
- ✓ Always check crampons fit correctly before leaving the car park
- ✓ Learn to shorten crampons by pushing the link bar forward to size then bolt to hold in place
- ✓ Always carry a robust crampon adjustment / repair kit.



Choosing the right crampon is essential above G14, for walking & mountaineering

“TERRAIN CHOICES”

Some key considerations' from path to Mountain.

- Frozen snow easy angle
- Ice - easy angle
- Iced rock, rough terrain, low angle
- Mixed terrain, rock, snow & ice

“Planning considerations”! safe run-outs are extremely important when working on easy or steeper angles, should the client slip where will they slide?

It is not advised to solely rely on self arrest skills when a beginner slips or trips over their front points. Choose a training location that minimises fall risk to the client. It is all too easy for a client to slip and slide out of control on a slope, pick up speed and crash in to boulders, Ouch...

TIPS

- ✓ Plan a session at the bottom of a slope and progressively build the clients confidence
- ✓ Check crampon fitting at the bottom of a slope, if there's a problem you can easily fix it on flat terrain
- ✓ Ensure clients wear safety helmets
- ✓ Get familiar with different crampon types
- ✓ Crampon fix kit should include;
 - 2 x small nuts and bolts
 - 1 x spare long link bar
 - 1 x long crampon spare strap
 - 1 x lightweight multi-tool
 - 1 x long cable tie
 - 1x 20cm length of sheathed electrical wire



TIPS

- ✓ Beware of aluminium crampons they were originally made for the US market and will likely fail on mixed terrain
- ✓ A steel crampon like above will not snap or break easily
- ✓ Always check straps and readjust to suit boots
- ✓ Encourage clients to team up and check the blind spots of crampon fitting. The blind spots are mainly, sole and heel fittings

“CRAMPON TECHNIQUE”

So what techniques work best? “It depends” there are many brilliant publications that cover crampon techniques in fine detail from path to ascending and descending easy to steep snow covered slopes. The coach needs to be familiar with all crampon techniques and types of terrain and angles those techniques work.

COACHING TOOLS & TECHNIQUES FOR THE HILL

“MASTER IT”

Well planned and practised demonstrations with minimal fuss and explanations is the way forward, especially when the weather makes the outdoor classroom hard to see and hear. If your clients get cold they will loose interest and learning, very quickly. Cold clients will trip and fall much easier than warm one.

But what about the coaching? The purpose of coaching is to produce behavioural change and growth within the client, there are no barriers for entering coaching however, knowing nothing or little about coaching minimises the likelihood of producing good development or results.

It is useful to distinguish between coaching tools and coaching techniques for example: **Coaching Tools** are instruments like crampons and knowing how they work, such coaching tools include evaluation tools and 360 degree reviews of technical Performance.

The term **Coaching Techniques** refers to the way in which we use coaching tools or in the way which the coaching tool is used. Good coaches know that valid and accurate behavioural information and Insight is the building blocks for safe decision making in a serious training mountain setting.

The question is how to acquire reliable and proven behavioural coaching tools and techniques? The biggest assets we have is proven knowledge and experience.

I have personally found practical creativity an exciting approach to use.

To be creative you need to have the basic techniques well practised and be highly motivated to try out new ideas of coaching best practice.

The tools in this section are to help you become more creative.

Technical Creativity

- Improving your strategy and planning
- Generating radical ideas
- Looking at poor technique from different perspectives
- Making creative leaps
- Carrying our safe experiments
- Do it and problem solve
- Draw from experience improve knowledge

Creativity is sterile if action does not follow from it. Ideas must be evaluated, improved, polished and safe before they have any value.

Be flexible on which crampon method you plan to Introduce / demonstrate first, the key, is to use the terrain as you find it. You can easily miss excellent coaching opportunities as you become fixated with a particular patch of snow on the mountain. Best practise, use the terrain as you find it, don't be concerned to where and what other coaches are doing out there. Trust your own Planning and judgement.



Ice bouldering
Practising front pointing techniques for ice climbing

Knowledge Exchange

Tips for your clients

“BE A QUICK FITTER”

We know that crampons can be awkward to fit on the hill, think ahead and get them on when the ground is level enough to keep you stable.

- Practise fitting crampons at home—aim for under a minute
- Crampons should grip firmly on your bots without the binding straps done up
- Use them on a gravel path to check they fit before getting on to the mountain
- Have your crampons handy at the top / inside of your rucksack
- Knowing when to put them on is a proactive skill, if in doubt err on the side of caution and put them on anyway
- To fit crampons always select a safe spot if necessary cut a step using your ice axe
- As conditions change be prepared to take off you don't need to take them off for every rocky section
- Anti-balling plates limit snow clogging under your crampons, if it gets bad consider taking the crampons off, as the snow is probably soft enough to not require crampons

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