

CLIMBING TO THE TOP OF BRITAIN

Read and do the True / False

Each year thousands of people climb Ben Nevis in Scotland, and because of its northerly location, the climate can be bitterly cold. Climber Keith Hewitt describes his first time on Ben Nevis.

It was February, my first big winter climb. Our route was up the north face of the mountain to Tower Ridge. It's six hundred meters up - probably the longest climb in Britain. We planned to camp for three days in the "Corries", which are like big bowls cut into the walls of the mountain half-way up.

We were carrying tents, sleeping bags, and metal spikes for our boots---you'd have trouble on Ben Nevis without them because you get snow so hard it's like walking on ice. Even though some of the group were very experienced, we packed all kinds of safety equipment including lights for attracting attention, hard hats and extra clothing. Although the weather forecast was perfect, with no strong winds, there was still a general feeling of nervousness when we set out. Ben Nevis in winter is always a challenge.

The track soon climbed and my legs felt heavy. Being the weakest member of the group, I had to rest more frequently. The others sometimes stopped for a break to let me catch up, but as soon as I reached them they set off again. I promised myself that in future I would always train properly before a climb. After 200 meters, we reached the beginning of Tower Ridge, the route that would take us to the top of Ben Nevis. It's only a meter and a half wide and the mountain drops away hundreds of meters on each side. We knew we had to keep calm and concentrate on every step as we moved slowly along it.

After seven hours of climbing we reached the top. On a clear day, you can see the sea and right across it to the island of Skye, 48 kilometers away. However, we weren't so lucky, as a mist had come down.

On Ben Nevis, getting back down to a camp can be as much of a challenge as going up. You need to be able to read a map properly - a wrong turn could lead to slopes too dangerous to go down in winter. I was glad we had decided to take it in turns to do that job. That first time, it was only when I was safe in the tent that I could say I really enjoyed the experience. But at least I made it to the top.

TRUE OR FALSE?

	TRUE	FALSE
1 The climbers camp was at the bottom of Ben Nevis.		
2 Their equipment was of little use on the icy snow.	X	X
3. The climbers were well prepared in case of emergency.	X	X
4. The climbers were worried by the weather forecast.	X	X
5. The whole group took regular breaks together.	X	X
6. The writer realized that he had to improve his fitness.	X	X
7. The climbers recognized the danger in taking the Tower Ridge path.	X	X
8. From the top of Ben Nevis, the climbers had a view of the sea.	X	X
9. The climbers shared the responsibility of map reading.	X	X
10. The writer began to relax when he reached the top of the mountain.	X	X

