



# ARCTIC LEADERSHIP SKILLS PROGRAMME 2015

## SVALBARD

### Report for the Gino Watkins Memorial Fund

By Mick Pawley, Chief Leader

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the Arctic Leadership Skills Programme was to train a cohort of 14 leaders already experienced in British Exploring expedition methodology, to develop their skills, knowledge and competence to lead on future expeditions in the Arctic thus ensuring that the Society will continue to be able to operate safely in Arctic environments.

The course was designed based on sound theory and practice; and to develop leaders with a clear insight into, and confidence in, leading and operating in an Arctic environment.

Subject Matter Experts were consulted to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive programme. Most of the course participants had been leaders with the Society on previous expeditions, including 2 Chief Leaders.

The principal course objectives were:

- To undertake a rigorous training expedition to ensure leadership and technical skills delivery and consolidation.
- To deliver comprehensive glacier travel, crevasse rescue training and rope skills.
- To deliver a comprehensive Polar Bear behaviour and countermeasure training programme.
- To deliver a comprehensive weapons familiarisation training course, including a practical demonstration of weapon-handling competence.

Principal subjects covered were:

- Leadership
- Camp Craft
- Travel on snow and ice
- Rescue Techniques
- Weapons Familiarisation
- Natural and Cultural History

### **Time Table**

8 June

- Classroom session, course syllabus, itinerary overview, objectives, base camp location, polar travel and field craft, risk assessment exercise – evaluating and recognising the risks in the Arctic environment, Arctic living, polar bear protection
- Weapons familiarisation

9 June

- Range day, rifle and Verrey pistol live firing scenarios
- Setting up perimeter flare defence system

10 June

- Travel to base camp
- Set up polar bear watches, set up base camp, set up perimeter flare defence system
- Further rifle training

11 June

- Glacier travel and crevasse rescue training

12 June

- Recce of glacier access, lay depot

13 - 18 June

- Glacier and field craft training and practice expedition

19 June

- Dismantle base camp

## Observations and Outcomes

We were not able to set up base camp at the Northern access point of the Nordenskiöld Glacier due to winter sea ice in the fjord. Base camp was sited some 2 hours from the glacier snout.

We experienced 3 days of strong winds at base camp with high winds and spindrift visible on the upper reaches of the glacier. This forced the programme to be modified, extending the time spent at base camp.

That time was used to good effect and a rigorous training and development programme filled the days and evenings including perfecting and testing the security fence system and testing the variety of cartridges.

Establishing and stripping out the glacier depot took the best part of 4 days – good experience and practice.

All participants benefitted from the experience; the blend of learning, technical instruction and practice in an expedition environment worked extremely well.

Team working and leadership in expedition conditions were fully practiced and the enthusiasm and personal knowledge and experience of the participants ensured a broader base for discussion and added greatly to the learning experience.

The majority of those taking part intend to lead on a future expedition, and all reported favourably on the personal and collective benefit of the training and learning experience overall.

I recommend that next year's Arctic Leadership Skills Programme takes place in mid-July, at the same time as future summer expeditions.





