

Leading Lassies Trip Report 11th-13th April

The Des Rubens and Bill Wallace grant kindly provided the University of Stirling Mountaineering Club with £1500 of funding for our 2025 project 'Leading Lassies.' This trip spanned across three days in Inverlochy, Glen Nevis, with 13 members attending. The generous funding went towards the cost of accommodation, hiring MCIs, and fuel. This trip report will provide a summary of what our members gained from Leading Lassies.



Trip Overview

11/04/25:

On Friday, three club members headed to Glencoe and did a grade 2 scramble up summit buttress on Beinn A' Chrulaiste. Afterwards, they headed up the glen for the first time on the trip to get a few climbs in, before heading to Inverlochy. The rest of the group remained in Stirling until the afternoon to finish off any remaining assignments and organise the kit for the trip.

12/04/25:

On the second day of the trip, we had the wonderful MCIs Gillian Parker and Di Gilbert host guiding days.

Gillian Parker took Matylda, Tina, Fay and Louise to the Polldubh Crag and taught them to lead on trad. They were guided through gear types and safe placements of gear, as well as rope safety and abseiling. They finished off their day consolidating their lesson by leading up 'The Gutter' (D) multi-pitch route and abseiling down.

Tina reflected that "Leading lassies provided me with the exciting and unique opportunity to develop my confidence and skills in the field of outdoor climbing, specifically lead climbing. I had a great time learning gear types and placements and rope safety work in Glen Nevis, finishing off the day with a little lead climbing and abseiling down the gutter route (also in Glen Nevis). Climbing outdoors was always something I wanted to start doing, however I often felt I didn't have the knowledge or confidence to safely carry it out. Thanks to this amazing skills weekend and our guide, Gillian, I feel that I can start to climb outdoors and further develop in lead climbing. I also hope to pass on the skills and knowledge I learned to other club members."



Fay also commented that "Leading lassies was a fantastic weekend, dare I say the best trip the club has ever ran! The course allowed me to upskill in a comfortable and safe environment and helped me to feel more confident climbing outside and trusting climbing gear. If something like this was available to all club members in future years it would make climbing in the club safer, and more accessible and who doesn't want that!" Fay has gone on to second her first mountain route of Calibans Creap on Cir Mhor on the Isle of Arran. Louise, who was also in Gillian's group, stated that "this was the first year that the club has held the Leading Lassies trip, but it already felt like a yearly tradition. The guides were fantastic, and it was inspiring and encouraging to be surrounded by women doing cool things. I learnt so much and it has enabled me to take the next step into climbing, with a boost to my confidence and skills. Most of all - it was fun! Can't wait for the next one." This feedback highlights the importance of making the leading lassies trip an annual trip, as future club members can feel this same sense of empowerment, hopefully encouraging future generations of talented female climbers, and women who will go into the outdoor industry.



Furthermore, on the Saturday, Abby and Grace went to Kingussie crags with guide Di Gilbert, described by Grace as a “great learning crag.” Based on their experience, they focussed on starting to lead, discussing guidebooks, seconding and anchor building beforehand. They both climbed ‘The Groove’, ‘Classic Crack’ and ‘The Edge.’ Grace stated that “both of us led our first couple of routes and felt super confident coming out of it!” This demonstrates the variation of locations that were used on the trip, in order to teach on the best learning crags.



Those who did not get guiding on the first day still made the most of it. Hannah, Aimee and Maya did a sunny hill walk up Binnein Beag from Glen Nevis. The ascent to 943 metres was steep and challenging in the heat, but overall, a very good day on the hill.



13/04/25:

On Sunday, Di Gilbert and Lena Hunter lead two separate guiding groups. Hannah, Aimee, Maya and Maria went to Polldubh Crags and spent most of the day going through anchor building with Di Gilbert, climbing two routes on the Southwest Buttress on top rope, to practice anchor building, as they were all relatively new at leading. Aimee, who was relatively new to trad climbing at the time, stated that “the main thing I have learned from leading lassies is how to build anchors. This has made climbing much more accessible for me as I can now set up ropes on any crag that has suitable anchor points. I have also learned that communication is key.” Aimee has since gone on to complete her first trad lead, ‘Access Route’ (D) at Auchinstarry Quarry, in which the skills gained from leading lassies were vital.



As well as this, Maria, who is also a relatively new climber in the club, commented that “I really enjoyed Leading lassies, it was an amazing experience. From this opportunity I have learnt the basics of outdoor climbing, including rope work skills, safety, and placing equipment. As well as this I now know how to set up climbing anchors which has allowed me to do top rope climbing outdoors. I have learnt so much from this experience and if this opportunity was to be offered again, I would definitely take it. Highly recommended to all female club members for next year.” This emphasises the importance of having a project such as leading lassies to upskill our newer club members and provide a safe and accessible place for those making the jump from indoor lead to outdoor trad.



Maya, who had trad seconding experience beforehand, was able to feel confident about moving to the next stage, stating that: “Leading lassies was an amazing opportunity, it really helped me develop my trad climbing skills and allowed me to gain confidence in areas I was less confident in, such as anchor building. Working with the guides and other club members was truly a great time, super appreciative to those who organised the trip and dedicated time to make the trip happen.” Since the trip, Maya has led two routes, ‘Grassy Corner’ (VD) and Staircase Route (M), at Kips Crag, showing how our members have safely excelled. The feedback from Di’s guiding days indicates that her teaching was a massive success in achieving the main goal of bridging the confidence gap for women in the club.



The group with Lena Hunter also gave very positive feedback. Rosie and Lizzie were taken up Scimitar Ridge, learning more about moving together and decision making whilst climbing. Rosie states that “Lena took Lizzie and I into Glen Nevis on Sunday morning and was brilliant in tailoring her instruction and teaching to our mixed skill level and what we were both looking to get out of the day. We were able to learn and develop techniques allowing us to move together over rock routes and assess different terrain which we might encounter on longer mountaineering routes placing traditional protection in places such as the Alps and areas of Scotland. This was brilliant for both of us and gave me real confidence in my efficiency on the rock, and opened new ideas of how to place gear, manage rope and become slick with systems.”



Matylda, who was in the second group, commented that: “As a master’s student and support worker, I do not get much time to participate in club trips, especially climbing as the knowledge gap in climbing seemed too big and I had no time to overcome it. The trip provided me with time for myself to develop climbing techniques and knowledge.” Since leading lassies, Matylda has undergone some impressive leads, such as ‘Dwr Budr’ (HVS) and ‘Scream’ (S) at Auchinstarry Quarry, as well as most of the severs and VSs at Kips Crag. Matylda says she “loves telling people I can trad climb now” and is eager to get more experience. As well as this, Abbi commented that she ‘saw climbing from a different perspective’, demonstrating how the leading lassies project has opened new doors for people, providing the time and space for safe and healthy progression in trad climbing.



Abby and Grace continued their leading on Sunday. They headed to Glen Nevis and picked out some single pitch crags at their level; “it was great to get out feeling much more confident and safer in leading than I had before, as well as being in such a supportive group” Grace says, which highlights the success of the main aim of the trip.

Everyone’s experience on leading lassies demonstrates how Gillian, Di’s and Lena’s guiding, and the supporting and empowering environment of a female-only trip, can inject confidence in and provide a space for opportunity for the women in our club, gaining our members skills which can be continually passed down to encourage a safe and positive club culture.

Anchor Building skills

During leading lassies, members were able to learn vital anchor building skills, to become competent and confident leaders. Di Gilbert did a great job at instructing anchor building skills, teaching Hannah, Maya, Maria and Aimee how to build safe and strong anchors, both remote and localised. After spending the morning practising anchor building, they consolidated their knowledge on the Southwest buttress at Polldubh Crag, establishing secure anchors and belaying each other on different routes on top rope.

Anchor building skills included:

- 1:4 ratio coaching
- Local and remote anchors
- How to use slings and equipment
- Different types of anchors
- Examples of safe and unsafe anchor building
- Clove hitches and ropework
- Belaying stationed above the climber



Learn to lead

Gillian Parker led a 'learn to lead' session with Matylda, Tina, Fay and Louise at Polldubh Crag. They were guided through gear types and safe placements of gear, as well as rope safety and abseiling. They finished off their day consolidating their lesson by leading up 'The Gutter' (D) multi-pitch route and abseiling down. Abby and Grace also underwent a 'learn to lead' session with Di Gilbert, which focussed on starting to lead, discussing guidebooks, seconding and anchor building. On the second day, Lena Hunter guided Abbi and Matylda, who also focussed on consolidating their trad knowledge. This group expressed that they gained a lot from this session, which opened a new perspective on climbing.

Learn to lead included:

- Interpreting guidebooks
- Gear types
- Gear placement
- Rope safety
- Competent and safe leading
- Abseiling



Advanced trad

Lena Hunter hosted an advanced trad day for Lizzie and Rosie, taking them up Scimitar ridge in Glen Nevis, where they learned more about moving together and decision making whilst climbing. Abby and Grace's 'learn to lead' session with Di Gilbert also advanced on their trad skills and knowledge.

Advanced trad included:

- Gear placement
- Rope safety
- Abseiling
- Efficient leading
- Moving together
- Decision making



The USMC would like to thank the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace fund for their contribution to the 2025 'Leading Lassies' trip. This funding has empowered the women in our club and offered such a valuable opportunity and great memories for our members, who have gained and consolidated many skills which can be passed down to future members.