

1. What's the best way to carry my axes on my pack?

First of all ignore your Ice axe loops that manufacturers persist putting on rucksacks, infact cut them off, an axe carried in this way can be of danger to fellow mountaineers.

When walking in, slid down from the top and strapped to the side of the sack is best using the side compression straps most rucksacks have.

When not in your hand but not as inaccessible as strapped to your pack you can carry the axe between your body and rucksack. The head nests across the top of the shoulder straps and the spike points to the floor from behind your arm. This allows you to reach behind you and access your axe in an instant for those intermittent snow fields or when navigating.

2. I've got a mountaineering axe, but now I want to climb more difficult routes. Should I get a hammer, or do I need to get a pair of matching technical tools?

My Granddad always told me to have the right tool for the job. You will be glad of that steeply curved pick that bites harder into the ice as you pull on it and the matching pair when you are swinging them looking down from high above the corrie.

3. What's more important for winter walking, an axe or pair of crampons?

Each tool has its specific job, An axe in a well trained hand will stop a slid down a steep slope and give support to prevent that slip or cut reassuring steps when needed. Your crampons will enable you to stand up on that hard neve or get you across iced plateau's. Terrain and snow conditions change dramatically throughout any mountain day, both are therefore essential tools that you need to be skilled and proficient in using to ensure a safe return.

4. I'm planning on climbing grade 5 ice and mixed routes this season. Should I give leashless axes a try? What picks should I get?

Leashless axes have revolution aliated the way I climb, it speeds placing gear, allows your hands and arms more down time and therefore more blood to return then resulting in warmer figures and allows you to match, swap tools, traverse with less swings and more. Try it out on easier routes or foreign waterfall ice. On mixed I either have my leashes tooked into my sleeve ready for when I get scared or I use Lanyards.

I like my Petzl Nomic's for when I am abroad on steep sport type routs however with no adze or hammer they are useless Scotland. A reasonably straight shaft for snow belays and a hammer that you can actually hit pegs with are good things to consider then making your choice.