

MOUNTAINEERING COURSE – 6 DAYS



AMS Student practicing fixed line ascension in the Alaska Range.

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Alaska Mountaineering School (AMS) promotes excellence in responsible mountaineering and wilderness travel by educating and guiding others. While AMS relies on this Mission Statement for orientation, we are always guided by our core curriculum which focuses on safety, leadership, teamwork, climbing skills, “Leave No Trace” ethics, and fun. Every AMS program incorporates the core curriculum. Our class progression and hands-on approach gives participants the confidence and knowledge to repeat what they have learned on their own. Our ultimate goal is to build a strong foundation for a lifetime of enjoyment in the backcountry.

The six-day mountaineering course introduces people with little or no climbing experience to mountaineering in a challenging and remote glaciated environment. Moving and building camps, roped glacier travel and crevasse rescue, avalanche transceiver searches, and mountain climbing techniques are all on the agenda. We assume everyone is interested in future Alaska Range climbs and model the course after a climbing expedition such as on Denali (Mt. McKinley). Six days is a short amount of time to cover a large number of topics, move camp, and climb a peak, so prepare to be a sponge for information.

COURSE SPECIFICATIONS

Deposit: \$250 *Balance Due:* 60 days prior to the starting date

Group Limit: 9 students, 3-4 Instructors

Tuition Includes: Professional instruction, round trip glacier flight, field food and fuel, group camping and climbing equipment, space in the AMS campground (tents are not provided).

You are responsible for: Transportation to and from Talkeetna, lodging, National Park Service Park Entrance Fee (\$10) to be paid in Talkeetna during the first day of the course (or show your Annual Pass), 1 lb of lunch/snack food (suggested), travelers cancellation insurance (highly recommended), personal equipment and clothing, AMS equipment rentals.

FEATURES OF THIS COURSE

- 1:3 instructor/student ratio, up to 9 students
- Mountaineering skills progression: anchors, belaying, self-arrest, snow climbing
- Crevasse rescue, roped glacier travel, and moving camp
- One summit attempt
- Glacier camping, winter survival skills
- Avalanche awareness, rescue, and route finding
- Leadership, expedition planning, and group dynamics

EXPEDITION STYLE AND REMOTENESS

AMS mountaineering courses are self-reliant expeditions that travel in a remote location in Denali National Park and Preserve. We do not have a standard location where we go every time. We prefer going to pristine areas where there are no other parties; there are more learning opportunities. It is difficult to teach about route finding when there is already a trail in place from the last group. It is only possible to have this agenda with the most experienced instructors whose judgment you can trust. Once the plane drops you off, if weather becomes unflyable, evacuation to modern medical facilities may take several days. Throughout the expedition students learn to enjoy living in a glaciated mountain environment, prepare awesome meals, care for themselves and each other, and climb "harder than they look" Alaskan mountains. AMS course format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of terrain. AMS courses model climbing and camping techniques that prepare students to pursue mountaineering in the most severe environments.

ENVIRONMENT AND COURSE LOCATION

Denali National Park and Preserve is home to America's biggest and wildest mountains. A few days prior to the start date, your instructors decide their first choice landing zone for the course. The decision is based on snow conditions and the best peaks to climb at the given time. There are many excellent locations in the Park, some first explored by AMS, so finding a suitable location to fulfill course goals is not difficult. Each course area, with its variety of terrain, beauty, and isolation is challenging and demands respect. Climbing routes are chosen to fit the progression, gradually increasing in difficulty. Expect to be on snow and ice for the duration. Weather is extremely variable and changes without warning. Expect sun, wind, snow, even rain, and expect them all on the same day.

COURSE PROGRESSION

The goal of this course is to develop the skills and judgment necessary to pursue mountaineering in a remote glaciated environment. We want to prepare students to return to the Alaska Range without instructors and repeat what they accomplished during the course. Subsequently, instructors have an extensive class list and carefully thought out course progression to fulfill this goal. The transference of skills leads to the transference of responsibility, and by the end of the course, students are leading rope teams and making route finding decisions under their instructors' watchful eyes.

THE FIRST DAY

On the starting day of the course, students and guides/instructors will meet at 9:00 a.m. at AMS. This is a busy day, so please be on time and take care of all personal business before hand. Instructors will do a check of each students gear and equipment to make sure that it is adequate. Any rentals needed are issued at this time; we prefer not to do this prior to the start date as we are busy briefing and packing group gear and food. After instructors go through your equipment and issue any rental items you will need, they will provide a course orientation. At 12 pm, lunch at AMS is provided. After lunch, we will cover fixed line ascension, visit the NPS Ranger station in Talkeetna, and then we pack, dress, and fly onto the glacier in a ski-equipped fixed wing plane, such as a Cessna 185 or a DeHaviland Beaver or Otter. The 30-45 minute flight into Denali National Park is the quickest way to access the snowy, glaciated peaks of the Alaska Range, and is a spectacular and memorable highlight to the course. Once you arrive at the glacier the rest of the evening will consist of campsite selection, tent spacing, group kitchen set up, stove use and care, and of course dinner!

UN-FLYABLE WEATHER

Be aware, Alaska has unpredictable weather which can prevent flying into or out of the mountains on schedule. Bush planes can only fly if the weather is suitable. In the event that courses and expeditions are unable to fly to the glacier at the scheduled time they will base out of the AMS Talkeetna Facilities which consist of the office and staging area, Schoolhouse, and Matt Porter Rock Gym. This allows instructors and students to stay on track with the course curriculum, view slideshows and additional educational media, practice fixed line ascension and other climbing techniques. Usually un-flyable weather persists only for a day or two and then courses are able to fly into the Alaska Range. Sometimes courses can be weathered in the Alaska Range beyond their end date. We will do our best to ensure that your course ends on schedule and most do. However, we recommend allowing 2 days on the return end of your travel plans (and/or purchasing flexible airline tickets) in the event that weather inhibits your course from flying off the glacier on schedule. Please refer to Travel information sheet.

TEAM WORK

A functioning and effective team is a sign of strong leadership. However, to provide the best program possible we expect all students to stay organized, learn self-leadership and good expedition behavior (EB), be supportive, solution oriented, hard working, patient, self motivated, to participate fully, have fun and support the goal of being on a strong and safe expedition. Each member must ultimately be a regular contributor for any expedition to be successful.

GUIDES/INSTRUCTORS

AMS guides and instructors are unique professionals who love the mountains in Alaska and have a gift for climbing, teaching, and mountain guiding. Just being a good guide is not enough to guarantee success. Our guides are talented climbers with extensive backcountry experience to draw upon. Lead guides and instructors have a wealth of experience in the Alaska Range as well as teaching mountaineering progressions. All of our staff are familiar with altitude-related problems, extreme weather, and know how to set the pace for a successful expedition. All our staff members have mountain rescue, avalanche safety, and wilderness medical training. Their knowledge of the natural and climbing history of the area and personal stories of climbing in Alaska add immensely to any program.

FOOD

AMS provides hearty, nutritious and balanced meals for its programs. Your instructors spend a day packing rations at AMS's rations facility. We believe that cooking nutritious meals you would also eat at home is an important part of expedition life. Looking forward to breakfast is a good start to any day; and looking forward to dinner helps you push harder. While there will be plenty of food, we recommend that you bring one pound of your favorite trail food as insurance that you have your favorite snack foods. All our meals can accommodate vegetarians; please call if you need more specifics.

REFERENCES

AMS is a professionally run operation committed to high standards at all levels. We urge you to carefully research and look into climbing with us. Search for Alaska Mountaineering School and our directors; Caitlin Palmer and Colby Coombs on the Internet. Talk to climbing rangers at the Talkeetna Ranger Station ph. 907-733-2231. Try calling your local climbing store and ask if they have heard of us. We are small, but our word of mouth reputation extends far. Our guides and instructors represent a tight group of over 50 professional educators and mountain guides whose professional affiliation includes: Jackson Hole Mountain Guides, Exum, AMGA, NOLS, Valdez Heli Guides, Mountain Trip, and Mountain Madness.

Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as course area, participants, and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our goal for each student to accomplish the following objectives:

SAFETY AND JUDGMENT

AMS teaches mountaineering skills that promote the health and safety of all expedition members. Each graduate is expected to:

- manage the hazards of traveling and camping in a glaciated mountain environment
- recognize and prevent cold injuries and altitude-related illnesses
- display a knowledge of personal limitations, and the judgment to stay within them

LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

Students are exposed to techniques of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. Each graduate is expected to:

- display understanding of instructors' decision-making processes through discussion and questioning
- demonstrate good expedition behavior with a positive attitude and desire to achieve group goals
- effectively communicate ideas and concerns with individuals and within the group
- use good judgment and attention to detail to participate fully in a safe and environmentally sound expedition

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

An important part of every course is to incorporate minimum-impact techniques into our expedition strategy. Each graduate is expected to:

- understand minimum-impact living and traveling skills appropriate to a glaciated environment
- appreciate the concern for maintaining pristine quality in wilderness areas
- incorporate leave no trace techniques where appropriate

WINTER CAMPING

AMS courses learn and practice minimum-impact backcountry skills that are safe for the individual and environment. Each graduate is expected to:

- select a campsite, build a fortified perimeter camp, and stay within the confines of wanded areas
- live comfortably and efficient camping, cooking, and dressing for a variety of conditions
- be organized and take care of personal and group equipment
- build a snow kitchen and prepare nutritious meals

MOUNTAINEERING SKILLS

Learning the skills to become a safe and competent climber is the primary goal of AMS Mountaineering Courses. Each graduate is expected to:

- master basic knots and rope handling techniques
- place snow protection and build anchors
- understand and demonstrate belay techniques appropriate to the situation: glacier travel, running protection, and fixed lines
- competently set up 2, 3, and 4 person rope teams with sleds for glacier travel
- set up a Z-pulley system and ascend a fixed-line
- demonstrate efficient and safe glacier travel, route finding techniques and navigation skills
- demonstrate snow and ice climbing techniques for moderate and steep terrain
- recognize and avoid avalanche terrain, make stability assessments, demonstrate avalanche transceiver search techniques
- establish a skill base to be a strong expedition member on mountaineering expeditions, such as Denali.