

# COURSE DESCRIPTION

## Advanced Mountaineering Course

AMS' mission is to seek excellence in responsible mountaineering and wilderness travel, while teaching and guiding others. Our core curriculum focuses on safety and judgment, leadership, teamwork, mountaineering skills, "Leave No Trace" practices, and the enjoyment of experiencing the wilderness of Alaska. The Advanced Mountaineering Course provides experienced climbers the opportunity to learn and apply new skills in a challenging mountaineering environment. Focus is placed on decision-making skills necessary for making successful peak ascents in the Alaska Range. With instructors guidance, students evaluate terrain, identify hazards, and make route finding decisions.

### **PRIOR EXPERIENCE:**

The advanced nature of this course requires participants to have a minimum of 2 years of roped climbing experience, be comfortable in exposed locations, and be familiar with belaying, building anchors, and rappelling. Winter camping and downhill skiing experience is encouraged.

### **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 (AMS campground is free, tents are not provided), National Park Service Entrance Fee (\$10) to be paid in Talkeetna during the first day of the course, 1 lb of lunch/snack food, travelers cancellation insurance (highly recommended), personal equipment and clothing, AMS equipment rentals, instructor gratuities.

### **FEATURES OF THIS COURSE:**

- 1:3 instructor/student ratio up to 9 participants
- Mountaineering skills: protection, anchors, belaying, self-arrest, snow, ice, and/or rock climbing
- Peak ascents progression
- Glacier travel and crevasse rescue techniques
- Snow camping: walls, caves, igloos, quinzees, trenches
- Avalanche curriculum: mechanics, transceiver searches, snow morphology
- Rescue scenarios and techniques to reach a fallen climber
- First aid classes: frostbite, hypothermia, altitude-related illnesses
- Travel on the glacier with skis, downhill and uphill progression

### **EXPEDITION STYLE AND REMOTENESS**

AMS mountaineering courses are self-reliant expeditions that travel in remote mountain range in Alaska. Throughout the course, students learn to live safely in a glaciated environment, prepare their own meals, care for themselves, and climb mountains. The course format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of terrain. If the weather is unflyable, evacuation to modern medical facilities can be difficult and may take up to several days. AMS courses model climbing and camping techniques that prepare students to pursue mountaineering in the most severe environments.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND COURSE LOCATION**

Mountaineering courses fly into Denali National Park & Preserve, home to America's biggest and wildest mountains. A few days prior to the start date instructors will choose the specific mountain region and glacier for the course. They look for pristine wilderness and good quality climbing routes suitable for teaching our mountaineering progression. The exact location will depend on current snow and landing conditions. Each of the areas chosen with their variety of terrain, beauty, and isolation are challenging and demand respect. The routes are classic for a mountaineering expedition in Alaska. Expect to be on snow for the duration of the course and be prepared to encounter all types of weather and conditions. Alaska is full of surprises!

### **COURSE PROGRESSION**

The goal of this course is to broaden students' mountaineering experience and develop good judgment to climb in any remote mountain region. After a review of the basics for an Alaska expedition, glacier travel and winter camping, the course focuses on specific climbing objectives. Peak ascents are chosen to compliment classes on climbing techniques. The course breaks camp and moves to new locations to

explore and climb in a variety of terrain. Short-pitching, aid climbing, technical descents, avalanche curriculum, and backcountry skiing are all on the agenda. Students receive verbal and written evaluations at the end of the course.

### **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 which are issued will be done at this time as 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 Cessna 185 or a DeHaviland Beaver. 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 consists 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 (or purchasing flexible airline tickets) in the event that weather inhibits your course from flying off the glacier on time.

### **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. Do not be surprised if you fail to lose weight on the course. A spreadsheet rations program and faithful recipes balance calories, carbohydrates, fats, proteins, and weight to create a variety of tasty and creative meals that build strength and maintain health. We eat pasta, rice and bean burritos, English muffins, and bagels. Other examples include: hash browns, noodles, rice, mashed potatoes, ramen, couscous, soup, tortellini, dried vegetables. We avoid freeze-dried meal-in-a-bags as they are typically inadequate portions and lack in taste. Our rations come from organic wholesalers from Washington state and a modern supermarket in Anchorage. All our meals can accommodate vegetarians; please call if you need more specifics. AMS provides almost all of the food for this course however, we ask that you bring 1 lb. of your favorite lunch food. This will be used to supplement what we have for you here and ensures that you have your preferred snack foods.

### **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

Mountaineering courses vary in length, route and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, instructors strive for the following goals for each student:

## SAFETY AND JUDGMENT

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

- demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a glaciated mountain environment
- participate in making sound decisions affecting the health and safety of the expedition
- display knowledge of personal limitations, and the judgment to stay within them

## LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

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

- work effectively as a team member
- demonstrate sound expedition behavior: commitment to the group, a positive attitude, and cooperation to achieve group goals
- effectively communicate ideas and concerns with individuals and within a group
- show initiative in teaching and leading peers
- employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role
- use decision-making and planning skills to participate fully in a safe, environmentally sound expedition

## ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

**An important part of every course is to teach and practice Leave-No-Trace camping and traveling techniques.**

**Each graduate is expected to:**

- perform minimum impact living and traveling skills appropriate to a glaciated environment
- show respect for pristine wilderness and fostering respect in others

## WINTER CAMPING AND GLACIER TRAVEL

**AMS courses focus on teaching and practicing efficient and responsible backcountry skills.**

**Each graduate is expected to:**

- live comfortably and efficiently in a glaciated mountain environment, camping, cooking, and dressing for a variety of conditions
- travel competently using safe and efficient navigation and route-finding techniques to reduce and avoid hazards
- demonstrate roped glacier travel techniques using skis or snow shoes and lead rope a team
- take responsibility for the organization, maintenance and repair of group and personal equipment

## MOUNTAINEERING SKILLS

**The course goal is to advance all students' climbing ability and make them well-rounded mountaineers.**

**Each graduate is expected to:**

- master knots and various rope handling techniques
- demonstrate proficient crampon and ice ax techniques for snow, ice and/or mixed terrain
- demonstrate belay skills: fixed line, running belays, glacier travel
- protection placement and anchor building techniques
- competently set up a rope system for glacier travel
- lead climbing theory and application
- consistently perform techniques to reduce and avoid hazards
- recognize and avoid avalanche terrain
- demonstrate the ability to remain composed and thoughtful in difficult and exposed terrain
- competently lead a rope team on a safe route on a glacier
- establish a skill base to successfully climb a mountain like Denali