

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Mountain Guide Course

The Alaska Mountaineering School's mission is to seek excellence in responsible mountaineering and wilderness travel while teaching and leading others. Our core curriculum emphasizes safety and judgment, leadership, teamwork, mountaineering skills, "Leave No Trace" practices, and of course, fun! The Mountain Guide course is designed for individuals who wish to pursue a career in guiding or teaching at AMS or for another mountain guiding organization committed to high standards. This 12-day course provides an excellent opportunity to learn how to guide clients on Alaskan expeditions and how to teach a mountaineering progression to students. The course accomplishes this goal in a challenging and remote glaciated environment. Alaska's mountains are uncompromising and they present unique demands to the mountaineer. This course provides a platform to launch a career in big mountain guiding.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE

The advanced nature of this course requires that students have a minimum of 3 years roped climbing experience, know how to belay, build anchors, and rappel and be comfortable in exposed locations. Participants are required to have some experience winter camping. Participants should be familiar with avalanche mechanics and rescue procedures. Downhill skiing experience is also recommended. Though not required, anyone seriously interested in pursuing a career in guiding or outdoor education should also be certified in Wilderness First Responder.

COURSE SPECIFICATIONS:

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

Group Limit: 6 students, 2-3 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 6 student maximum
- Review of alpine mountaineering skills and teaching techniques for each skill
- Glacier travel and crevasse rescue school and how to run one
- Glacier and winter camping techniques for extreme environments
- Peak ascents: belays and fixed line techniques, route finding, problem solving applied to suitable objectives
- Teaching and guiding "soft skills": leadership and communication, managing conflicts in any group
- Avalanche curriculum: mechanics, transceiver use, snow morphology, identification & avoidance and teaching techniques
- Rescue scenarios, summit days gone wrong, contingency plans

EXPEDITION STYLE AND REMOTENESS

The Mountain Guide course is a self-reliant expedition that travels in a remote mountain range in Alaska. Throughout the course, students live on glaciers, prepare their own meals, care for themselves, and participate in everything. Class format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of terrain. From these areas, evacuation to modern medical facilities can be difficult and take to several days.

ENVIRONMENT

The Mountain Guide course flies into Denali National Park & Preserve, home of the Alaska Range and North America's most impressive mountain range. The exact location depends on landing conditions and instructor preference, we will be surrounded by excellent terrain for pursuing the goals of this course. Each area, with their variety of mountains, beauty and isolation are challenging and demand respect. Course routes are classic for a mountaineering expedition in Alaska. Expect to be on snow for the duration of the course, and be prepared for any weather: wind, snow, rain, and sun.

COURSE PROGRESSION

The Mountain Guide course begins with a review of the basic curriculum for any Alaska mountaineering expedition: how to route find safely on glaciers with a group, and to rescue each other and self rescue in the event of a crevasse fall. Simultaneously, we will be

practicing glacier camping while living in probed, wanded, and wall-protected areas. Course progression continues with the application of these skills to real scenarios and many of their unexpected situations. Course routes strike a balance between base camping and moving camp to experience a variety of terrain. Technical and non-technical peak ascents provide opportunities to review specific hazard management techniques such as fixing lines and running protection. Guiding protocols and techniques unique to Alaska are discussed and practiced. Instructors provide 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.

TEAMWORK:

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

Every course varies in route, group dynamics, and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, instructors strive for the following goals for each student:

SAFETY AND JUDGMENT

AMS teaches mountaineering skills that 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
- Show initiative in teaching and leading peers, teach one class in an area of their choice

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:

- Demonstrate proficiency in tying knots and rope handling techniques
- Demonstrate proficient crampon and ice axe techniques for snow, ice and/or mixed terrain
- Demonstrate belay skills: fixed line, running belays, glacier travel, 5th class
- Competently set up a rope system for glacier travel: 2, 3, and 4 person teams plus extensions
- 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
- Demonstrate rescue techniques: short roping, lowering an injured climber, litter building