

PACKRAFTING COURSE



Alaska Mountaineering School's (AMS) mission is to be the best source for wilderness and mountaineering expeditions in Alaska. On all of our programs we provide superior leadership, convey knowledge clearly and effectively, and instill lifelong appreciation for the wilderness environment. As a school, we provide excellence by offering hands-on education from our classroom--the remote wilderness of Denali National Park and Preserve. Our objective is to graduate safe and responsible mountaineers who understand all the mechanisms that result in a successful climbing expedition. We divide our core curriculum for mountaineering courses into four skill categories: Leadership, Wilderness Skills, Risk Management, and Stewardship and Sustainability. AMS's class progression and direct, personal approach bestow the confidence and competence for you to successfully pursue mountaineering for years to come.

THIS COURSE

The 10-day Packrafting course adds an Alaskan twist to the typical backpacking trip. Our professional instructors introduce participants to lightweight backpacking and packrafting. Participants learn by doing, and towards the end of the course, are leading and making educated decisions on route finding and planning the best lines through rapids. You will be introduced to challenging off-trail travel in bear country and the basics of backcountry packraft travel. Course graduates have gone on to pursue packrafting, long traverses, and adventure races in their local areas and all over the world; they continue to write positively about their AMS experiences.

SPECIFICATIONS

Experience level: Intermediate

Deposit: \$500, due upon registration

Course balance due: 60 days prior to the starting date

Group limit: 6 students, 2 instructors

Tuition includes: professional instructors; field food and fuel; group camping equipment; group kitchen equipment; Delorme inReach and SAT phone support; maps, GPS; medical protocols, first aid, medication and repair kits; packraft, paddles, dry-suits, and river safety gear; fully equipped staging area at AMS HQ and AMS Mountain

Shop in Talkeetna; course-long social media updates; pre-course assistance with travel planning and training advice; post-course lodging and shuttle logistics; luggage storage and free parking; camping at AMS campground (tents not provided); 10% discount at the camping at the AMS Mountain Shop in Talkeetna; welcome-back table with fresh food and drinks after your trip.

You are responsible for: transportation to and from Talkeetna, Alaska; hotel lodging; Denali National Park Service (NPS) entrance fee (or show your Annual Pass); trip health and travel insurance; personal clothing and equipment; and AMS equipment rentals.

FEATURES

- 1:3 instructor/student ratio, up to 6 students
- Route finding from glacier to subarctic tundra and river valley
- Packrafting glacial rivers with short sections of Class II whitewater
- River crossing techniques
- Traveling and camping in bear country
- Expedition skills: leadership, expedition behavior, trip planning, climbing styles

LEADERSHIP

AMS models and teaches leadership that is situational. You will learn different leadership styles that depend on specific situations, and see how important Expedition Behavior is to overall success. We teach a solution-oriented approach to conflict resolution, along with effective communication methods. You will develop a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, as well as a clear understanding of both your strengths and potential areas for growth. These are critical for successful climbing. AMS teaches you how to be a leader as well as an active follower, and in doing so you will confidently balance the group's and your own personal goals.

WILDERNESS SKILLS

This AMS course is a self-reliant expedition that explores the remote Alaskan wilderness. Students learn to live safely in a wilderness environment, prepare their own meals, care for themselves, climb mountains, and negotiate waterways. AMS instructors are known for their Alaska expertise, where wilderness dominates and being self-sufficient is a virtue. Your instructor's transference of essential skills through engaging and entertaining presentations will empower you. AMS courses model climbing and camping techniques that prepare students to pursue backcountry travel in the most severe environments.

RISK MANAGEMENT

AMS teaches you to consider and be aware of risks in everything you do, from lighting a stove to putting on your backpack. By applying leadership, wilderness, and technical skills to real climbing objectives you will learn to identify and assess hazards. AMS facilitates experiences that develop good judgement. On AMS courses, you will learn to assess and communicate decisions and actions, create and implement contingency plans, and make informed and thoughtful decisions.

STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

AMS strives to ensure that our wilderness values and environmental ethics are reflected in every aspect of our work. You will learn to apply Leave No Trace principles to

all components of glacier camping, travel, and climbing. We will help you develop your understanding of land-management and environmental issues facing Denali National Park and Preserve. Through exploring the natural world and discussing its compelling geology, glaciology, ecology, and weather, you will come away with a depth of experience and understanding.

THE FIRST DAY

On the starting day of the course, students and instructors meet at 8:00 a.m. at AMS. Your instructors will perform a thorough equipment check with you at this time, but not before. Anything you need will be issued to you; there is no need to reserve any rentals in advance. Any clothing and equipment you do not need can be safely stored at AMS, including your vehicle. After the equipment check, we move into AMS's food room and pack lunches. At AMS everyone packs their own lunches with food they choose to eat from a vast assortment of available options. In the mountains where we are burning calories all day it is better to eat a little every hour throughout the day. The AMS food room resembles an organic grocery store and makes figuring out your lunches quick and efficient. When everything is checked and weighed, you eat a freshly prepared lunch at AMS. It is traditional to bulk up before an Alaskan expedition, so we prepare a lasagna and a healthy salad with non-dairy and vegetarian options. Then you pack up, organize your gear, and dress for the water. We load you into the van and take a very short drive to Christiansen Lake in Talkeetna. At the lake, you practice fundamental paddling and water safety skills. After a full afternoon on the water, you return to AMS, clean up your gear, and settle into the evening. Participants often go together for a dinner in town and camp at AMS or at lodging nearby.

UNFLYABLE WEATHER

Alaska's weather is unpredictable and stormy, and occasionally prevents flying into or out of the mountains on schedule. In the event that courses are unable to fly on time, your instructors continue with their class progression at AMS's indoor climbing gym. We will do our best to ensure that your course ends on schedule and most do. Still, we recommend allowing 2 days on the return end of

your travel plans (and/or purchasing flexible airline tickets) in the event of delays. *Please refer to the Travel and Logistics sheet for more information.*

INSTRUCTORS

AMS instructors love the Alaskan mountains and have a gift for climbing, teaching, and guiding. Our instructors are talented climbers with extensive backcountry experience. Lead instructors have a wealth of experience climbing in the Alaska Range, as well as teaching mountaineering progressions. All of our staff is familiar with altitude-related problems and extreme weather, and they know how to set the pace for a successful course. Every one of them has mountain rescue, avalanche safety, Leave No Trace minimum impact certification, and Wilderness First Responder medical training. Their knowledge of the natural and climbing history of the area and their personal stories of climbing in Alaska add immensely to every program. Our guides and instructors represent a close group of educators and mountain guides with varied professional affiliations. *A note on certification:* Other than our own Mountain Guides Course, there is no available certification in the United States or Europe that takes into account the expedition skills necessary to guide in the varied terrain and scope of the Alaska Range. AMS has developed a comprehensive training program for our field staff that includes a time-tested apprenticeship program, technical training, and evaluation system, which results in mountain guides with a depth of Alaska Range knowledge found only at AMS.

FOOD

Food is vital to the success of any expedition. Learning what foods to bring and how to prepare them are essential skills taught on AMS mountaineering courses. AMS's bulk rations facility allows us to maintain a high standard of food intake during our courses. AMS receives twice weekly deliveries of fresh food from Anchorage suppliers and deliveries of dried food from an organic distributor in Oregon. Commercial freezers and refrigerators, bulk food bins, and custom-built rations tables with food scales line the walls. Large chest freezers have been converted into refrigerators to safely store field rations once they have been packed. No other company comes close to AMS's attention to detail and thoroughness when it comes to course

and expedition food. No matter what your dietary requirements or preferences, AMS's food operation will meet your needs.

REFERENCES

AMS is a small, professionally run operation committed to high standards at all levels. Our history offering mountaineering courses and expeditions in Denali National Park and Preserve reaches back to 1983, and everything we do today is built from decades of hands-on experience. We urge you to do your due diligence and research Alaska Mountaineering School and its directors, Caitlin Palmer and Colby Coombs. Word of mouth is our greatest advertisement.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

It is our goal for each student to accomplish objectives in the following areas:

Leadership

- Display an understanding of instructors' decision-making processes through discussion and questioning
- Communicate effectively using words that remain respectful and inclusive of team members
- Demonstrate competence, make sound decisions, and display a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty
- Demonstrate good expedition behavior with a positive attitude and a desire to achieve group goals
- Give 100% effort and attention to assure a safe expedition

Wilderness Skills

- Practice educated campsite selection, and build a fortified perimeter camp with tents and/or megamid shelters
- Maintain personal and group strength with effective camping, cooking, dressing, and personal hygiene skills
- Be organized, care for and repair personal and group equipment
- Travel competently using appropriate map and compass skills, as well as off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques
- Consistently use appropriate bear awareness with camping and travel techniques

Risk Management

- Manage the hazards of traveling and camping in bear country
- Manage the hazards of packrafting
- Recognize and prevent cold injuries
- Display knowledge of personal limitations and the judgment to stay within them

Stewardship and Sustainability

- Perform Leave No Trace minimum-impact living and traveling skills
- Familiarization with the natural history of Denali National Park and Preserve
- Understand the conservation issues facing Denali National Park and Preserve

Packrafting

Carrying a 5-pound boat opens up a whole new world of possibilities in wilderness travel. Students will be introduced to the basics of packrafting and will progress to more advanced travel, culminating as the course makes its way from the mountains to the town of Talkeetna. Each participant is expected to:

- Demonstrate proper use and care of their boat and its equipment
- Use effective body and boat positioning to control their boat in calm and whitewater
- Participate in reading and scouting glacial rivers for safe descent and efficient travel
- Learn the basics of self- and group river rescue

SAMPLE ITINERARY

This is an example of a 10-day packrafting course. Activities vary depending on course location, weather, and water conditions

Day 1

8:00 a.m.: Meet with your instructors at AMS in Talkeetna for course orientation, individual gear check, lunch. *Classes:* At Christiansen Lake. Packraft familiarization, movement on flat water, and personal preparation.

Day 2

Group breakfast, paddle on moving water. Practice skills while rafting down a local river. Return to Talkeetna's main street, walk back to AMS HQ to clean, dry gear, and prep for the next leg of the course. Camp overnight at AMS or provide your own lodging. *Classes:* paddling environment: wind, weather, waves, water, river features, and river rescue basics.

Day 3

Leave for our packraft and backpacking traverse. Fly into our drop-off point and hike/paddle back to Talkeetna. *Classes:* navigation and maps, GPS, gear packing and pack packing, bear awareness, efficient backcountry travel, river crossing and camp setup, Leave No Trace ethics.

Day 4

Break down camp, pack up and continue trekking to a river where we put in. *Classes:* paddling with a loaded boat, efficient river travel, paddle signals, gear maintenance.

Day 5-9

Continue traversing through the Alaskan wilderness, ascending high passes and floating glacial rivers. *Classes:* self-awareness, wilderness ethics, land management, more navigation, geology, weather, emergency procedures, efficiency in travel: water, tundra, rivers, and brush.

Day 10

Float the last stretch of river or hike the last stretch of tundra and get picked up at the roadside. Return to AMS, return rental equipment, clean and organize group gear, evaluations and logistics. Group dinner at a local restaurant.