

7-DAY MOUNTAINEERING COURSE

AMS programs provide progressive, hands-on education that is focused on self-sufficiency. The curriculum prioritizes safety, teamwork, skill development, respect for wilderness, and enjoyment of the mountain environment. Students learn by doing and take on greater responsibility as their skills, confidence, and judgment develop. Our goal is not simply to help students succeed during a course, but to prepare them to apply what they have learned on future expeditions without instructor supervision.



COURSE DESCRIPTION

The AMS 7-Day Mountaineering Course is designed as an introduction to self-supported expedition climbing in a remote glaciated mountain environment. The seven-day format gives enough time to cover the essential skills in winter camping, glacier travel, crevasse rescue, and snow and ice climbing.

SPECIFICATIONS

Experience level: No previous outdoor or climbing experience is required. Familiarity with the knots listed in the pre-course materials is strongly recommended.

Fitness: You do not need to be a competitive athlete, but you should be physically fit and prepared for full days of activity. Backpacks can weigh up to 45 pounds at times.

Deposit: \$500, due upon registration.

Course balance: The remaining balance is due 60 days before the course start date.

Group size: Up to 9 students with a maximum ratio of 3 students per instructor.

Tuition includes:

- Professional mountaineering instruction
- Round-trip glacier flights
- All food rations during the course
- Group camping equipment, including tents, stoves, kitchen shelters, cooking equipment, shovels, and snow saws
- Group climbing equipment, including ropes, anchors, and sleds
- Use of personal climbing equipment, including an ice axe, crampons, helmet, harness, carabiners, rock shoes, and mechanical ascender
- Emergency first-aid, communication, and repair equipment

Participants are responsible for:

- Transportation to and from Talkeetna
- Lodging before and after the course (limited camping at AMS is free)
- Denali National Park and Preserve entrance fees
- Travel cancellation insurance
- Personal clothing and other items identified on the equipment list
- Rental fees for any additional personal equipment rented from AMS

FEATURES

- The seven-day format delivers a focused introduction to those wishing to pursue remote self-sufficient expedition-style climbing.
- Designed for beginners: No previous outdoor or climbing experience is required. Arriving familiar with the required reading

and having practiced the knots will allow more field time to be devoted to mountain systems and practical application.

- Six full days of field-based learning: AMS's hands-on progression connects core mountain skills like glacier camping and personal care with roped travel, rescue, snow climbing, and a summit objective.
- A 1:3 instructor-to-student ratio: Small instructional groups provide close supervision, individual coaching, and meaningful opportunities to participate.
- A traveling expedition: This course intentionally mirrors an actual Denali expedition, moving and building a camp in a new location. Student-led rope teams bring the team back to the airstrip on the morning of departure.
- A complete glacier camping and traveling system provided by AMS: All the food and fuel, tents, stoves, kitchen equipment, ropes, anchors, sleds, sled duffels, emergency equipment, and many personal equipment items such as crampons and ice axes.

EXPEDITION STYLE & REMOTENESS

AMS mountaineering courses operate as self-reliant expeditions in the remote Alaska Range. Students learn to live in a glaciated environment, prepare meals, care for themselves and their teammates, travel safely as a rope team, and pursue an appropriate climbing objective. The focused itinerary maintains an efficient pace and concentrates field time on essential expedition systems, practical application, and teamwork.

Remoteness has real consequences. Mountain weather can prevent aircraft from flying into or out of the course area. If illness or injury occurs when aircraft cannot fly, evacuation may be difficult and could take several days. Students must manage their health, communicate concerns early, and contribute to the team's well-being. Students share sleeping tents, and tent assignments may be mixed-gender.

ENVIRONMENT & COURSE LOCATION

AMS mountaineering courses take place in the Alaska Range within Denali National Park and Preserve. Students and instructors travel by ski-equipped aircraft from Talkeetna to a remote glacier, often on the Kahiltna, Pika, Ruth, or Eldridge Glaciers. The location and route are selected according to weather, snow, glacier conditions, and available terrain. Students should expect to live, camp, and travel in a glaciated mountain environment for the duration of the course.

WILDERNESS APPRECIATION

Living and traveling in the Alaska Range gives students an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of wild places and their responsibility to protect them. Instructors model Leave No Trace principles, and students learn to stay organized, minimize their impact, maintain hygienic camps, manage waste responsibly, and build camps that can withstand mountain weather.

COURSE PROGRESSION

The course begins with the fundamentals of glacier camping and personal care. Students practice establishing a secure camp, staying warm and hydrated, preparing meals, managing equipment, and caring for themselves and their teammates. These skills create the foundation needed to travel and climb effectively.

Instruction then progresses to roped glacier travel, route finding, crevasse rescue, self-rescue, snow climbing, anchors, and belay systems. If time, conditions, and student progress permit, avalanche awareness and rescue may be introduced. A mountain objective may provide an opportunity to combine and apply the skills developed during the course. Instructors prioritize essential systems and adapt each day to provide the greatest educational value.

MOUNTAIN WEATHER AND FLIGHT DELAYS

Weather in the Alaska Range is unpredictable and can prevent aircraft from flying according to schedule. If the flight into the mountains is delayed, instruction continues at the AMS facility in Talkeetna. Persistent weather may require AMS to select an alternate course location. Weather can also delay the return flight, so each expedition carries additional food and fuel. We strongly recommend allowing at least two additional days at the end of your travel schedule and purchasing flexible airline tickets whenever possible.

LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK

Successful expeditions require people who communicate effectively, exercise good judgment, and work together toward shared goals. Leadership begins with personal responsibility. Students learn to manage hydration, nutrition, warmth, rest, hygiene, and equipment; communicate concerns early; support teammates; and share group responsibilities. As the course progresses, students are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for camp organization, rope-team travel, route finding, and expedition decisions.

INSTRUCTORS

AMS instructors are selected for their experience as both climbers and educators. Technical competence is essential, but so are patience, approachability, sound judgment, and the ability to help students learn. Every instructor completes formal AMS training and maintains required certifications in wilderness first responder, avalanche education, Leave No Trace, and food safety. Safety, learning, teamwork, and the quality of the expedition experience come before summit outcomes.

FOOD

AMS plans, portions, and packs all course rations and provides each cook group with a complete expedition kitchen system. Students learn to organize a glacier kitchen, operate stoves safely, conserve fuel, manage food supplies, maintain good hygiene, and prepare hearty meals in a remote environment. Efficient camp and cooking systems help the team stay healthy, organized, and ready for each day's objectives.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Every course is shaped by its participants, location, weather, snow conditions, and other environmental variables. Instructors adapt the progression while working toward a consistent set of learning objectives. The seven-day format introduces the following areas and gives students opportunities to demonstrate developing competence.

SAFETY AND JUDGMENT

- Identify common hazards associated with traveling and camping in a glaciated mountain environment
- Recognize conditions that contribute to cold-related injuries and take preventive action
- Attend to hydration, nutrition, warmth, rest, hygiene, and personal limitations
- Communicate changing conditions, concerns, and observations that may affect the team

LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

- Contribute to group goals with a constructive attitude and willingness to share responsibilities
- Communicate clearly within a rope team and the larger expedition
- Give and receive constructive feedback
- Demonstrate attention to detail and consideration for other team members

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Practice minimum-impact camping and travel techniques
- Organize and maintain a clean camp
- Manage food, human waste, and other expedition waste responsibly
- Explain how planning and good expedition practices help preserve the Alaska Range

EXPEDITION CAMPING AND SELF-CARE

- Evaluate and help establish an organized, storm-resistant glacier camp
- Manage personal needs and equipment in varied mountain conditions
- Operate expedition stoves safely and prepare meals
- Break down, transport, and rebuild camp efficiently when the itinerary includes a camp move

MOUNTAINEERING SKILLS

- Demonstrate essential knots and fundamental rope-handling techniques
- Organize and travel as a roped glacier team with sleds
- Place snow protection and construct basic snow anchors
- Use an ice axe and crampons appropriately for snow travel
- Ascend a fixed line and participate in crevasse-rescue systems
- Apply route-finding, camping, travel, teamwork, and climbing skills during an appropriate mountain objective
- Participate in avalanche awareness and rescue instruction if time and conditions permit

REPUTATION & REFERENCES

Alaska Mountaineering School is a small, family-run organization based entirely in Talkeetna and focused on the Alaska Range. We encourage prospective students to compare programs, read reviews, speak with former participants, and ask questions about educational philosophy, instructor experience, course progression, student-to-instructor ratios, and expedition support. AMS is proud of the reputation it has earned within the mountaineering community and is happy to provide references.

SAMPLE DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

This sample itinerary illustrates the intended progression. The order and content of classes and climbing objectives may change according to participants, location, weather, snowpack, glacier conditions, and available terrain. A peak ascent and avalanche instruction cannot be guaranteed. Instructors continually adapt the itinerary to provide the safest and most valuable learning experience possible.

DAY 1: ORIENTATION, EQUIPMENT AND GLACIER FLIGHT

Meet at AMS in Talkeetna at 8:00 a.m. for orientation, equipment checks, packing personal lunches, weighing everything for the flight, and other expedition preparations. After a team lunch, we practice knots, put on our harnesses and helmets, and learn fixed-line ascension. After storing any gear you don't need, we load the van and drive to the airport. We load the plane, fly to Denali National Park & Preserve and land on the glacier. We establish our first camp close to the airstrip. We eat as a group and retire into tents. Tents are either 2 people in a 3-person tent or 3 people in a 4-person tent. That way you have a little extra room for the bulky clothing and sleeping bags.

DAY 2: FUNDAMENTAL CLIMBING AND GLACIER-TRAVEL SKILLS

The first day starts with a group breakfast and then moves right into the climbing curriculum with building and testing anchors and glacier travel techniques. Learn rope identification and care, rope handling, snow protection, anchor systems, belay techniques, rope-team organization, sled management, self-arrest, and glacier travel. We like to go out for a tour for the afternoon. Evening discussion: expedition behavior, teamwork, and leadership.

DAY 3: CREVASSE RESCUE AND SELF-RESCUE

We like to spend the day at a crevasse doing scenarios. Travel is by rope team to a suitable training site where students will practice fixed-line ascension, self-rescue, lowering systems, mechanical-advantage hauling, and team crevasse-rescue procedures. Evening discussion: altitude illness, cold-related injuries, and emergency communication.

DAY 4: GLACIER TRAVEL, ROUTE FINDING, CAMP SYSTEMS

Break camp and move to a new location that positions well for a future peak ascent. Practice route-finding, rope team management, campsite selection, probing out camp, and camp build: quarry, tent platforms, walls, kitchens, bathroom. Typically we are moving downhill from the airstrip. Each tent will have its own kitchen and kitchen shelter. Evening discussion: avalanche hazard.

DAY 5: DAY TRIP TO TRAINING SITE

Rope up and travel to a nearby pass. Set up a training site for: snow climbing, self-arrest, running protection, fixed lines, rappels. Evening discussion: summit day preparation, route selection, weather, hazards, equipment, turnaround times, and descent.

DAY 6: MOUNTAIN OBJECTIVE

Peak ascent day. Group climb of a nearby peak. Evening discussion: debrief the day, plan for student-led rope teams the following day.

DAY 7: RETURN TO TALKEETNA

Break down camp and travel back to the airstrip. After returning to Talkeetna: de-issue gear, complete course evaluations, and take care of anything else needed. The course concludes after equipment return and debriefing.