

10-DAY DENALI PREP COURSE

Alaska Mountaineering School promotes excellence in responsible mountaineering and wilderness travel through educating and guiding others. AMS programs follow a progression that prioritizes safety, teamwork, skill-building, respecting wilderness, and having fun. Our hands-on, you do it approach leads to successful outcomes. We want you to be able to repeat the skills you learned without supervision.



COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Denali Prep is designed for the aspiring climber who wishes to climb North America's highest peak. Modelled after a Denali expedition, you will access the mountains by ski plane then begin learning the basics of mountaineering and winter camping. At first you'll focus on building camp, sleeping warm, and cooking food. As you progress, you'll learn to coil ropes, tie knots, and build snow anchors. You will progress to glacier travel and practicing crevasse rescue in a real crevasse. Breaking up into 3 and 4-person rope teams, you will break down camp, load sleds, and travel up glacier learning to route find. You will choose a new camp, probe it for crevasses, and learn how to make a quarry and saw snow blocks to build protective walls. Once you reach 10,000' you will build high camp and take a day learning snow climbing, crampon use, and more advanced belay techniques in preparation for a summit day. By the time you get back to basecamp for the flight out you will know what it takes to climb Denali.

SPECIFICATIONS

Experience level: No previous outdoor or climbing experience required.

Fitness: You need to be fit, not a competitive athlete, but good stamina for all-day outings sometimes carrying 35-40 lbs.

Deposit: \$500, due upon registration

Course balance due: 60 days prior to the starting date

Group limit: 9 students, 3 instructors

Tuition includes: Professional mountaineering instructors, roundtrip glacier flight;; all food during your course; all group camping equipment such as tents and stoves and shovels; all group climbing equipment such as ropes and anchors; all emergency first aid, communication, and repair equipment.

You are responsible for: Transportation to and from Talkeetna, lodging before and after the course, entrance fees to Denali National Park and Preserve, travelers cancellation insurance, personal equipment and clothing, and AMS equipment rentals.

FEATURES

- 1:3 instructor student ratio as the gold standard.
Crevasse self-rescue class in AMS before departing.
- A carefully planned menu and complete kitchen for each cook group.
- Mountain Hardwear Trango tents, Black Diamond kitchen shelters, and Hilleberg classroom.

EXPEDITION STYLE & REMOTENESS

AMS Denali Prep course is a self-reliant expedition that travels in a remote mountain range in Alaska. Throughout the course, students learn to live in a glaciated environment, prepare their own meals, care for themselves, move camp, and climb Kahiltna Dome. The course format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of terrains. It also teaches self-reliance. 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 any glaciated mountain environment. As is common on mountaineering expeditions, students should expect to have mixed-gender sleeping tents for at least some of their course.

ENVIRONMENT & COURSE LOCATION

Your course flies into Denali National Park and Preserve, home to America's biggest and wildest mountains. The landing strip is located at 7200' on the Kahiltna Glacier which flows off the southwest slope of Denali. It was named by Lt. J. S. Herron in 1902, Kahiltna being the Tanaina native people's name for the river coming off the glacier. We will travel up the Kahiltna to 10,000' and build our high camp. Expect to be on glacier for the duration of the course and be prepared to encounter all types of weather and conditions.

WILDERNESS APPRECIATION

AMS is based in Talkeetna in order to access the incredible wilderness of the Alaska Range. Anyone who spends days in these mountains will naturally achieve a wilderness experience. By role modeling the best practices for conserving these areas, AMS hopes to develop the wilderness conservationist in all of us. Thinking ahead and preparing, staying organized, bomb proofing our camps, and paying special attention to hygiene. These Leave No Trace techniques make us a stronger expedition and more likely to achieve our climbing goals.

COURSE PROGRESSION

The goal of this course is to develop the skills and judgment necessary to successfully climb Denali's West Buttress route. To help fulfill this goal, instructors follow an extensive class list and carefully thought-out course progression. From day one you will be practicing glacier camping techniques for winter conditions. The first couple of days are spent on the skills necessary for everyone to route-find safely on a glacier, and to rescue others and self-rescue in the event of a crevasse fall. With Kahiltna Dome being the final objective, the course progresses to more advanced terrain and steeper snow and proceeds through crampon techniques, running belays, and avalanche assessment and rescue skills. Depending on conditions, ice or rock climbing is also taught. 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 the watchful eyes of instructors.

THE FIRST DAY

On the starting day of the course, students meet with instructors at 8:00 a.m. at AMS. There will be muffins, coffee, tea, and juice. After an orientation, we divide into two groups for equipment check and lunch packing. Your instructor will go

through all your equipment with you and ensure you are properly outfitted. Any items needed can be rented or purchased at this time. There is no need to reserve in advance. Please read the Equipment List for more information. You will also be packing your lunches in the AMS food room. We pack our lunches individually and all the food is provided. Please read the Lunch Packing sheet for more information. By mid-day, we serve a hearty lunch at AMS. After lunch, we dress in our field clothing, put on harnesses and helmets, and do our first climbing class: fixed line ascension. After class, we take care of last-minute items, store any gear we are not using, and head over to the Talkeetna airport. Our transportation to the glacier is on ski-equipped, fixed-wing airplanes like the DeHaviland Single-engine Turbine Otter. The 45-minute flight into the mountains is a spectacular highlight of the course. After arriving on the glacier, we take a few moments to enjoy the amazing setting before traveling a short distance and building our first camp. Once camp is built we'll enjoy our first dinner and go to bed warm and dry. It is a busy day, and we ask you to please be on time and take care of all personal business beforehand.

UNFLYABLE WEATHER

Alaska's mountain weather is unpredictable and difficult to forecast. It can prevent flying into or out of the mountains on time. If your course is unable to fly, we are able to stay busy teaching classes at AMS and you will be given the option to camp here. Although rare, persistent stormy weather at the beginning of a course could result in a location change. During a course expect to see a wide range of weather. It is not unusual to have snow and rain during the same course. Courses can also be weathered in the mountains and unable to fly out. We avoid running low on rations by flying in with a week of extra food and fuel. 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 also refer to the Travel and Logistics sheet.

LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK

Successful expeditions are properly equipped and have the necessary technical skills, but most importantly they practice good leadership and learn to work together to achieve group goals. At AMS, developing leadership and teamwork starts with gaining experience and developing good judgment. We teach leadership which emphasizes the importance of taking care of our basic needs like hydration and nutrition and staying warm in order to make us stronger and more durable team members. How to make teamwork work is essential on any multi-day

expedition and an important discussion built on throughout your course.

INSTRUCTORS

AMS instructors all started as climbers who fell in love with teaching. Like all good teachers, they are compassionate about laying a strong foundation for their students to build upon. They are attracted to AMS because as a school, we prioritize education over guiding. Our format and curriculum can only be taught by climbers who are well-rounded in many aspects of the outdoors. AMS instructors know how to cook real food, but more importantly, they know how to teach you the fine art of one-burner cuisine. They work at AMS because they can teach navigation and glaciology as well as ice climbing and glacier travel. Certifications are required in emergency medicine, avalanche, Leave No Trace, and food handlers. All instructors must go through formal training prior to arriving at AMS.

FOOD

What to eat and how to cook it is vital to the success of any multi-day backcountry expedition. Just as important as tying your knots, having a good kitchen set up with the right food will make or break an expedition. AMS is eager to share with you its favorite recipes, rations, and ultimate kitchen by providing all of it for your course. You will learn how to prepare tasty, nutritious, and hearty meals. We know that looking forward to breakfast and knowing just what to do is a good way to start each day. Just as looking forward to dinner helps us push to the finish line. AMS' ration plan can accommodate vegetarians and other dietary needs pretty well. We have a section of our food packing room devoted to gluten-free, dairy-free, and wheat-free products as well as others. Please contact AMS so we can make sure we can accommodate any dietary needs.

REFERENCES

Alaska Mountaineering School is a small, family-run operation that cares deeply about meeting the high standards it sets. Based entirely in Talkeetna, Alaska, we are focused on the mountains in our backyard, the Alaska Range. Please research AMS and tell us what you find. Ask the other companies that pop up who they would recommend if you couldn't go with them. Most will be comfortable recommending AMS.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

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
- Display knowledge of personal limitations and the judgment to stay within them

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to different methods 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, environmentally sound expedition

Environmental Ethics

An important part of every AMS course is a wilderness experience and learning Leave No Trace skills. Each graduate is expected to:

- Practice minimum-impact camping and traveling skills appropriate to a glaciated environment

Winter Camping

AMS courses teach camping skills that protect the user and the environment:

- Select a campsite, build a fortified perimeter camp, and stay within the confines of wanded areas
- Live comfortably 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
- Set up 2, 3, and 4 person rope teams with sleds for glacier travel
- Set up a Z-pulley hauling system and ascend a fixed line
- Demonstrate efficient and safe glacier travel, route-finding techniques, and navigation skills
- Demonstrate crampon climbing techniques
- Recognize and avoid avalanche terrain, make stability assessments, and demonstrate transceiver search techniques
- Establish a skill base to be a strong expedition member on a Denali expedition.

DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

The Denali Prep course day-to-day itinerary is designed to get the most out of an introduction to Alaska mountaineering. Your instructors teach wilderness, leadership, and technical climbing skills in a progression that develops competent and self-reliant climbers. By course end, you will have learned to identify and manage hazards and have increased your technical knowledge in all aspects of glacier and alpine climbing.

Instructor Briefing and Packing Days

Your instructors dedicate two days before the start date to prepare by briefing, checking equipment, and packing food. Stoves are fired up, tents are set up, radios are checked, and ropes are inspected. We adhere to the motto, "Prior planning prevents p*** poor performance."

Day 1

8:00 am: Meet at AMS for course orientation and overview of the day. Check equipment and issue gear. Pack lunches. Calculate weights. This is a busy day, so please be on time.

12:00 pm: Lunch provided at AMS. Lasagna and salad.

1:00 pm: Learn intro to fixed line ascension at AMS' crevasse rescue facility. Classes: Knots, use of waist and chest harness and helmet, ascending techniques, and releasing the backpack.

4:00 pm: Load van. 3-minute drive to ranger station and airport. Organize loads for fixed-wing flights.

4:30 pm: Fly onto the glacier. Reorganize loads for glacier travel. After a snowshoe-use orientation, rope up and travel a short distance and establish camp: probe and wand the perimeter, build walls, make sleeping platforms, set up group kitchen, establish the bathroom.

6:00 pm: Make dinner; students learn camp cooking.

Practice: Site selection, tent spacing, shovel and snow saw use, wall building, tent pitching, hygiene and sanitation, group kitchen basics, stove use and care, cooking basics, bomb proofing the camp, staying warm at night. Evening discussion: Course Goals.

Day 2

9:00 am–12:00 pm: Practice: more knots, rope identification and care, rope handling and coiling, snow protection and anchor systems, and belaying. Incorporate load-cell to accurately measure forces when testing anchors.

1:00 pm–6:00 pm: Discuss: roping up for glacier travel, rope travel techniques, simple crevasse fall scenarios, transferring a load, snow climbing techniques, use of ice axe, self-arrest. Head out of camp for glacier travel. Evening discussion: Leadership.

Day 3

9:00 am–5:00 pm: Meet with daypacks ready for a full day away from camp. Students organize themselves into rope teams. Group heads to crevasse for self-rescue practice: the site is secured, and anchors are built for lowering and raising systems. Practice: Lowering systems, raising systems, crevasse fall scenarios. Evening discussion: Expedition Behavior (EB).

Day 4

Pack up camp and move to 7,800 ft, Camp 2, at the base of Ski Hill; distance: 5 miles, elevation gain: 600 ft.

Practice: Breaking down camp, caches, sled rigging, navigation techniques, choosing a safe camp, building a latrine. Evening discussion: Altitude-related Illnesses and Cold Injuries.

Day 5

Carry to 10,500', probe out area, and cache supplies. Return to camp; student led rope teams. Evening discussion: Meteorology, Forecasting, Geology and Glaciology of Denali National Park and Preserve.

Day 6

Move to 10,500 ft and build Camp 3. Student led rope teams.

Discuss: Quarries and Building Walls.

Day 7

Classes all day from camp. Practice snow climbing, crampon use, self-arrest, running protection, fixed lines.

Day 8

Summit day, 12,525 ft.

Day 9

Move back to Camp 2, 7800'. Student led rope teams. Evening discussion: Expedition planning.

Day 10

Alpine start, pack up and move back to airstrip. Student led rope teams. Fly back to Talkeetna, enjoy green grass and welcome back fruit platter, de-issue equipment, graduation ceremony.