

# KAHILTNA DOME EXPEDITION

*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

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The Kahiltna Dome Expedition is designed for climbers who wish to climb to a spectacular location, gain some altitude experience, and summit a demanding intermediate mountaineering objective. You will access the mountains by ski plane and begin reviewing mountaineering and winter camping basics. At first, you'll focus on reviewing building camp, sleeping warm, roping up for glacier travel, and learning crevasse rescue skills. You will progress to glacier travel and practicing crevasse rescue in a nearby crevasse. The following day, you will move camp to the base of Ski Hill. As you progress, you'll fine-tune essential mountaineering skills: rope coiling and knots, dividing into 3 and 4-person rope teams, breaking down camp, load sleds, and travel up-glacier. You will move to new camps, and learn how to quarry saw snow blocks to build protective walls. Once you reach 10,000', you will build a high camp and review snow climbing, crampon use, and additional belay techniques in preparation for summit day. When conditions permit, you will climb Kahiltna Dome. In addition, when you return to base camp for the flight out, you will have an excellent idea of what it takes to climb Denali's West Buttress as a member of an AMS-guided expedition.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Difficulty: This is an intermediate-level expedition.

Prerequisites: This expedition requires excellent mental and physical condition. You must be able to carry a 40-50 pound pack while pulling a 30-40 pound sled for 5 hours with breaks and be comfortable living and tent camping in a remote mountain environment without road access. This expedition requires having a basic understanding of the material covered in the *Illustrated Guide to Crevasse Rescue*, which will be sent to you upon enrollment.

Fitness: Mountaineering in Alaska is more like a marathon than a sprint. You need stamina because the days are long. While there will be lower-energy in-camp instruction, be prepared to be physically active every day for 8 + hours of climbing, glacier travel, and building camp. You must train and be ready to be active, carry and drag the abovementioned weight, and thrive in the remote Alaska Range mountains.

Deposit: \$3000, due upon registration

Course balance due: 120 days before the starting date

Group limit: 4 climbers, 2 guides

Tuition includes: Professional mountaineering guides, a roundtrip glacier flight, all food during your course, all group camping equipment such as tents, stoves, and shovels, all group climbing equipment such as ropes and anchors, and 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

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- 1:2 instructor-to-student ratio
- Specific peak ascent objective: Kahiltna Dome, 12,525'
- Upper Kahiltna Glacier is our course location and climbing route.
- All food, fuel, stoves, cookware, and tents are provided.
- Fixed line ascension at AMS prior to flying into the Alaska Range.
- Climbers pack their own lunches with a vast assortment of food in the AMS food room.

## **EXPEDITION STYLE AND REMOTENESS**

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The AMS Kahiltna Dome Expedition is a self-reliant expedition that travels off-trail in a remote mountain range in Alaska. Throughout the expedition, climbers learn to care for themselves and live comfortably in a glaciated mountain environment. They take turns helping with the group tasks, the breakdown and movement of camp, and belay each other in steeper terrain. The expedition format inherently emphasizes hands-on learning and applying new skills in various terrains. It also teaches self-reliance. While in the mountains, if the weather is unflyable, evacuation to modern medical facilities can be difficult and may take several days. AMS courses model climbing and camping techniques that prepare newer climbers to pursue mountaineering in a glaciated mountain environment. As is common on mountaineering expeditions, participants can expect to have mixed-gender sleeping tents during their course.

## **ENVIRONMENT & EXPEDITION LOCATION**

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Your expedition flies into Denali National Park and Preserve, home to America's tallest and wildest mountains. The landing strip is located at 7,200' on the Kahiltna Glacier, which flows off the southwest slope of Denali. Kahiltna is the Tanaina native people's name for the river coming off the glacier. We will travel up and camp on the Kahiltna to 10,000' and build our high camp. Expect to be on the glacier for the entire expedition and be prepared to encounter all weather and conditions.

## **WILDERNESS APPRECIATION**

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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. To do this, we must think ahead and prepare, stay organized, bomb-proof our camps, and pay special attention to hygiene. These Leave No Trace techniques make us a stronger expedition and more likely to achieve our climbing goals.

## **EXPEDITION PROGRESSION**

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This expedition aims to climb Kahiltna Dome while inherently developing the skills and judgment necessary to successfully climb other high glaciated peaks. From day one, you will be using glacier camping techniques for winter conditions. The first couple of days are spent on the skills necessary for everyone

to route find on an active snow-covered glacier, rescue others, and self-rescue in the event of a crevasse fall. The Kahiltna Glacier is 45 miles long and will be your home away from home. The transference of skills leads to the transference of responsibility. By the end of the expedition, you may have the opportunity to lead a rope team under the watchful eyes of your guides.

## **THE FIRST DAY**

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Meet with guides at 8:00 a.m. at AMS Headquarters. There will be muffins, fruit, coffee and tea. After an orientation, we divide into two groups for equipment check and lunch packing. Your guides will review 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 like to pack our lunches/trail foods individually, and we provide all the nutritious food. Please read the Lunch Packing List for more information. By mid-day, we serve a hearty lunch at AMS. After lunch, we dress in field clothing, wear 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 with a commercial Air Service 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 expedition. After arriving on the glacier, we will travel a short distance and build 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 be on time and take care of all personal business beforehand.

## **UNFLYABLE WEATHER**

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Alaska's mountain weather is unpredictable and challenging to forecast. It can prevent flying in or out of the mountains on time. If your course is unable to fly, we will 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 the expedition, expect to see a wide range of weather. Expeditions can also be delayed due to mountain weather and the inability to fly out. We avoid running low on rations by flying in with five to seven days of extra food and fuel. We recommend allowing two days on the return end of your travel plans (and/or purchasing flexible airline tickets) in case of delays. Please refer to the Travel and Logistics sheet.

## **LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK**

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Successful expeditions are equipped with technical skills, but most importantly, they know the importance of good leadership skills when achieving group goals. At AMS, developing leadership and teamwork starts with gaining experience with tangible hard skills and developing good judgment. We teach leadership, emphasizing the importance of organization, and caring for basic needs like hydration, nutrition, and staying warm, making us stronger and more effective team members. Teamwork is essential on any multi-day expedition, and discussions about teamwork and leadership will be held throughout this course with daily meetings.

## **GUIDES**

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AMS guides are chosen on the basis of their experience level as climbers and educators. They are true professionals with extensive training in backcountry emergency medicine, avalanche safety and rescue, and land stewardship. All guides undergo formal training with AMS. Equally important, they understand the leadership and group dynamics, which make expeditions successful, rewarding, and fun. Guides model expert decision-making and judgment calls in order to reach a group and individual's goals and needs. AMS guides demonstrate superior knowledge and competency in all mountain skill areas, but above all, they are amiable, approachable, and understand the importance of effective leadership.

## **FOOD**

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What to eat and how to cook it is vital to the success of any traveling expedition. As important as tying dressed knots, having a proper kitchen with the correct rations will make or break an extended trip. Your guides will prepare the breakfasts and dinners during this climb. We know that looking forward to a hearty dinner helps us push to the finish line. AMS' ration plan can be adjusted to accommodate vegetarians and other dietary needs, but be aware that breakfast and dinner meals are communal. We technically all eat out of the same pot. Please contact AMS with any dietary needs so we can be sure to accommodate them.

## **REFERENCES**

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Alaska Mountaineering School is a small, family-run mountain guiding and instructional 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 online 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. AMS is a long time mountaineering concession permit holder within Denali Park and Preserve. This permit is competitive and requires a higher standard.

## **EXPEDITION OBJECTIVES**

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The Kahiltna Dome Expedition is unique due to variables such as participants and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, we aim for each climber to accomplish these objectives in the following areas.

### **Safety and Judgement**

AMS emphasizes mountaineering skills that promote the health and safety of all expedition members.

- 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**

Climbers are exposed to different methods of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior.

- Display understanding of guides' 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 expedition is a wilderness experience and learning Leave No Trace skills.

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

### **Winter Camping**

AMS expeditions use camping skills that protect the user and the environment:

- Select a campsite, build a fortified perimeter camp, and stay within the confines of waded areas.
- Live comfortably camping and dressing for a variety of conditions.
- Be organized and take care of personal and group equipment.

- Understand the workings of a snow kitchen and be ready and willing to assist in this important skill.

## Mountaineering

This is an expedition focused on climbing Kahiltna Dome.

- Master basic knots and rope-handling techniques.
- Place snow protection and build anchors.
- Use belay techniques appropriate to the situation: glacier travel, running protection, fixed lines, and alpine terrain.
- Set up 3 and 4-person rope teams with sleds for glacier travel.
- Demonstrate crampon climbing techniques.
- Recognize and avoid avalanche terrain.
- Establish a skill base to be a strong expedition member on a guided AMS Denali Expedition and any climbing expedition.

## DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

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The Kahiltna Dome Expedition's day-to-day itinerary is designed to maximize the chance to summit this unique mountain and give you the experience required to climb Denali's West Buttress Route. Your guides teach and model wilderness ethic, leadership, and expedition climbing skills in a progression that develops competent and self-reliant climbers and team members.

### Guide Briefing and Packing Days

Your Guides 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 poor performance."

#### Day 1: Talkeetna- Kahiltna Glacier, SE Fork

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.

Noon: A hot and hearty lunch is provided at AMS.

1:00 pm: Fixed line ascension at AMS' crevasse rescue classroom. Classes: Knots, waist and chest harness and helmet use, rope ascending techniques.

3:30 pm: Load van. 3-minute drive to the airport. Organize loads for fixed-wing flights.

4:00 pm: Fly onto the Kahiltna Glacier. Travel a short distance and establish camp: probe and wand the perimeter, build walls, make sleeping platforms, set up a group kitchen, and establish the bathroom.

7:00 pm: Dinner.

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, and staying warm at night. Evening discussion: Course Goals.

#### Day 2: Kahiltna Glacier SE Fork, 7,200'

9:00 am–12:00 pm: Practice more knots, rope identification and care, rope handling and coiling, snow protection and anchor systems, and belaying.

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, and self-arrest. 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 3: SE Fork – 7,800' Camp

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

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

#### Day 4: 7,800' camp – 10,000': carry

Carry to 10,000', probe out area, and cache supplies. Return to camp. Crevasse-fall scenarios. Evening discussion: Mountain Weather and Forecasting.

#### Day 5: 7,800' camp – 10,000' Camp: move

Climb to the Upper Kahiltna Glacier, up Ski Hill to Kahiltna Pass near 10,000 ft., and retrieve the cache. Set up a high camp. Evening discussion: Quarries and Building Walls.

#### Day 6: 10,000' Camp

Meet with daypacks ready for a full day away from camp. Climb to slopes on Mt Capps for steep snow climbing and crampon use. Practice fixed lines on the headwall for up-and-down practice and running belays, snow climbing, and self-arrest

techniques. Eat a big meal and rest for the upcoming climb.

Evening discussion: Summit Day Planning

### **Day 7: Summit Day: Kahiltna Dome: 12,525'**

Climbing Kahiltna Dome from our high camp involves a 3,200-foot elevation gain and three miles of climbing a glaciated ridge with crevasses. We will assess snow conditions to reach the ridge on Kahiltna Dome. Snow conditions and weather need to be favorable for this climb. Alternative objectives may be chosen if required, such as Mt Capps, 10,752' or Motorcycle Hill, 11,500' on the West Buttress route of Denali. Evening discussion: Debrief the day.

### **Day 8: Possible Summit Day**

Depending on weather and conditions, climb Kahiltna Dome, Mt. Capps, or to 11,500' on the West Buttress route.

### **Day 9: 10,000' camp – 7,800' camp**

Pack up camp and move back to 7,800 ft. at the base of Ski Hill. Probe a safe zone and set up camp. Eat a big dinner and rest for an early start the following day. Evening discussion: Expedition Planning.

### **Day 10: 7,800' camp – SE Fork - Talkeetna**

Alpine Start. Pack camp and travel back to the 7,200-foot Kahiltna airstrip. Fly back to Talkeetna, enjoy green grass, welcome back fruit platter, and de-issue equipment.