

# 8-DAY ALPINE ROCK CLIMBING 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

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The Alpine Rock Climbing Course provides experienced climbers the opportunity to sharpen existing skills and learn new ones in a challenging and remote glaciated environment. The focus is on preparing students to climb and commit to more challenging, technical routes in the Alaska Range. The course breaks camp and moves to new locations to explore and climb in a variety of terrain. You will come away with an experience on how to pursue alpine rock climbing in a remote glaciated environment.

## SPECIFICATIONS

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Experience level: This is an intermediate-level course. Applicants should have two years of roped climbing experience and be comfortable following up to 5.8 rock climbing difficulty. Applicants should be comfortable tent camping, climbing in exposed remote locations, be familiar with belaying, building anchors, and rappelling. If you do not have these skills, you can join our 12 day Mountaineering Course to prepare and build your core mountain skills.

Fitness: You need to be fit and lead an active lifestyle. You will need the stamina for all-day adventures: 8-10 hours out of camp, breaking trail and climbing. When we move camp, be prepared to carry a 50 lb. backpack while pulling a 50 lb. sled.

Deposit: \$500, due upon registration

Course balance due: 60 days prior to the starting date

Group limit: 2 students, 1 instructor

Tuition includes: Professional alpine rock climbing instructor, 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 fee to Denali National Park and Preserve, travelers' cancellation insurance, personal equipment and clothing.

## FEATURES

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- 1:2 instructor-student ratio.
- Multi-pitch climbing techniques.
- Rappelling with a pack.
- Advanced crevasse rescue skills.

## EXPEDITION STYLE & REMOTENESS

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AMS courses are self-reliant expeditions that travel in a remote mountain range. Throughout the course, students learn and enjoy living in a glaciated environment, prepare their own meals, care for themselves, move camp, and climb peaks. 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 prepare students for a lifetime of enjoyment pursuing mountaineering in a glaciated environment.

## ENVIRONMENT & COURSE LOCATION

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Mountaineering courses fly into Denali National Park and Preserve, home of North America's highest mountain. The exact location depends on current weather and glacier landing conditions. The Little Switzerland area off the Kahiltna glacier is a common destination.

## WILDERNESS APPRECIATION

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Anyone who spends days in these mountains will naturally enjoy 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**

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The goal of this course is to develop the glacier travel and alpine rock climbing skills and judgment necessary to pursue mountaineering in a remote, glaciated environment. We aim to prepare students to return to the Alaska Range or other remote environments unsupervised, where they can replicate the accomplishments they made during the course. 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. The course will move camp to a location suitable for reviewing rock climbing skills, rock anchors, and lead-climbing techniques. Finally, the course will attempt one or more multi-pitch rock climbs in the area. 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 the instructor.

## **THE FIRST DAY**

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On the starting day of the course, students meet with the instructor at 8:00 a.m. at AMS. There will be muffins, coffee, tea, and fruit. After an orientation, you will complete an equipment check and pack your lunches. 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. Each climber packs their own lunches/ trail foods in the AMS Food Room, and all the food is provided. By midday, 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 with a local commercial Air Taxi Service with ski-equipped, fixed-wing airplanes like the DeHaviland Single-engine Turbine Otter. The 45-minute flight into the mountains is a spectacular start to 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 learn how to go to bed warm and dry.

## **UNFLYABLE WEATHER**

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Alaska's mountain weather is unpredictable and difficult to forecast. Bad weather can prevent flying into or out of the mountains on time. If your course is unable to fly, we will stay busy teaching classes at AMS, and you can camp here at no

additional cost. During the course, expect to see a wide range of weather. It is not unusual to have snow and rain on the same day. Courses can also be weathered in the mountains and unable to fly out. We avoid running low on rations by flying in with 4 days of extra food and fuel. We recommend purchasing flexible airline tickets. Please refer to the Travel and Logistics sheet for more information.

## **LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK**

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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 your basic needs, like proper nutrition and being organized. How to make a team work effectively is essential on any multi-day expedition and an important theme of the course.

## **INSTRUCTORS**

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AMS instructors all started as climbers who fell in love with teaching. Like all good teachers, they are passionate about laying a strong foundation for their students to build upon. They are attracted to AMS because as a school, we prioritize education. Our format and curriculum can only be taught by climbers who are well-rounded in several 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, and Leave No Trace. All instructors go through formal training prior to arriving at AMS.

## **FOOD**

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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 setup 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 them 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 to make sure we can accommodate your dietary needs.

## REFERENCES

Alaska Mountaineering School is a small, family-run operation that cares deeply about teaching students mountaineering in remote, glaciated environments. The owners and managers have a long history of guiding and teaching worldwide on big, snowy mountains. Based 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 who they would recommend if you couldn't go with them. Most will be comfortable recommending AMS.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

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Each course is unique due to variables such as course area, environmental conditions, and class participants. Working with these variables, it is our goal for each student to accomplish the 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
- 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:

- Tie basic knots and rope handling techniques
- Place snow and rock protection and build anchors
- Understand and demonstrate belay techniques appropriate to the situation: glacier travel, running protection, and 5th class
- Set up 2 and 3-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 alpine rock climbing movement techniques
- Rappel with a backpack

## Briefing and Packing Days

AMS likes organization and thoroughness. That requires time. Your instructor dedicates two days before the start date to checking all the equipment and packing the breakfasts and dinners. Every stove is fired up, every radio is checked, and all the ropes are inspected. We adhere to the motto, "Prior planning prevents poor performance."



*Alpine Climbing students on a route in Little Switzerland.*

## DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

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The 8-day itinerary is packed with activities. 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 alpine climbing in a glaciated environment.

### 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: Practice fixed line ascension at AMS.

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

4:00 pm: Fly onto the glacier. Reorganize loads for glacier travel, travel a short distance and establish camp: probe and wand the perimeter, build walls, make sleeping platforms, set up group kitchen, establish the bathroom.

5:30 pm: Make group dinner on the glacier.

Classes: 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: Goals and Expectations, Expedition Behavior, Leadership.

### Day 2

Climbing skills review. Self-arrest. Crevasse rescue. Roped glacier travel. Scouting tour.

### Day 3

Move Day. Camp is broken down and moved to a rock climbing location. Practice movement skills on rock, protection placement, lead climbing techniques, top roping, and rappelling. Evening discussion: Grading and Difficulty Ratings, Climbing Style and Ethics.

### Day 4

Climbing Day. Classes on belaying off anchor plaquette style, belay transitions, and single and double rope lead climbing techniques. Evening discussion: Fall Factors and Material Strength.

### Day 5

Rescue Day. Practice freeing the brake hand, escaping the belay, reaching a fallen climber, passing a knot, short roping,

and improvised litters. Evening discussion: Planning for Climbing Day.

### Day 6

Climbing Day

### Day 7

Climbing Day

### Day 8

Pack up camp. Student-led rope teams head back to the airstrip. Fly back to Talkeetna. Clean up and de-issue gear, write evaluations, and finish logistics. Group dinner at a local restaurant.



*Roped travel on the Pika Glacier*