

# 7-DAY MOUNTAINEERING 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.*

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The AMS 7-Day Mountaineering Course is an abbreviated version of our 12-day course. It is designed for anyone who wishes to travel and climb on a multi-day expedition in a glaciated mountain range. We fly into the Alaska Range via fixed-wing aircraft to land on a glacier. This is not a base camping course, but one that moves to at least one new location. Five full days in the field will be busy if we are to build a foundation of essential mountaineering skills. Throughout the course, participants learn by doing; gaining confidence to camp and travel on a glacier, and climb mountains in a remote environment.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

Experience level: No previous outdoor or climbing experience required.

Fitness: You need to be fit and have good stamina for all-day outings and sometimes carry a 35-40 lb backpack.

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, 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, travelers cancellation insurance, personal equipment and clothing, and AMS equipment rentals.

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## FEATURES

- 1:3 instructor / student ratio as the gold standard. Fixed-line ascension 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.

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## EXPEDITION STYLE & REMOTENESS

AMS mountaineering courses are self-reliant expeditions that travel 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 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 model climbing and camping techniques that prepare students to pursue mountaineering in a glaciated mountain environment. As is common on mountaineering expeditions, students may have mixed-gender sleeping tents for the duration of their course.

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## ENVIRONMENT & COURSE LOCATION

Mountaineering courses fly into Denali National Park and Preserve, home to America's greatest mountain range, the Alaska Range. The exact location depends on current weather conditions, but it is usually within the Pika, Ruth, or Eldridge glaciers. Expect to be on a glacier for the duration of the course.

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## 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, We hope to develop the wilderness conservationist in all of us. Thinking ahead and preparing, staying organized, storm 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.

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## COURSE PROGRESSION

After a gear check, lunch packing, and our first climbing class, we fly into Denali National Park and Preserve and land on a remote glacier. We build our first camp, cook our first meal, and enjoy our first night out together. Climbing ground school, route finding on a glacier, and lowering each other into

crevasses are the focus of the next couple of days. By the fourth day, we are ready to put our skills to work, pack up camp, and move to a new location. Students lead rope teams, build camp, and break into small cooking groups. Focus shifts to snow and ice climbing techniques and the belay methods used to protect ourselves. Avalanche awareness and snow study are followed by rescue and transceiver searches. Putting it all together, we climb a peak or two. The last day is an alpine start with student-led rope teams back to the landing zone for pickup. The AMS progression is a moderately steep learning curve at first, but through repetition, it becomes natural and easy to build on.

## **THE FIRST DAY**

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On the starting day of the course, students meet with instructors at 8:00 am 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 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 on ski-equipped, fixed-wing airplanes like the De Havilland 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.

## **UNFLYABLE WEATHER**

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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 to the Talkeetna or Chugach Mountains. 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**

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AMS instructors all started as climbers who fell in love with teaching. Like good teachers, they are passionate about their responsibility for laying a strong foundation for their students. 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**

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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 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. 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 ensure we can accommodate your dietary needs.

## **REFERENCES**

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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.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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Each course is unique due to variables such as course area, 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 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 snow climbing techniques and the use of crampons
- Recognize and avoid avalanche terrain
- Establish a skill base to be a strong expedition member on mountaineering expeditions like Denali

## **DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY**

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Our 7-day mountaineering course's day-to-day itinerary is designed to make sure you get the most out of an introduction to Alaska mountaineering. Your instructors teach wilderness, leadership, and technical climbing skills in a progression that helps to develop competent and self-reliant climbers. By course end, you will have learned to identify and manage hazards and increased your technical knowledge in all aspects of glacier travel and mountaineering. Note that at the end of each day in this itinerary, we debrief the current day and make fresh weather observations and analyses.

### **Briefing and Packing Days**

AMS likes organization and thoroughness. That requires time. Your instructors dedicate two days before the start date to checking all the gear and packing the food. 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."

#### **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

1:00 pm: Dress for the field

1:30 pm: Fixed line ascension class

3:00 pm: Pack up, weigh everything for the flight

3:30 pm: Load van. Drive a short distance to the airport. Organize loads for flight.

4:00 pm: Fly onto the 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.

6:00 pm: All group dinner

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, staying warm at night. Evening discussion: Course goals and expectations, plus Denali National Park and Preserve history and regulations.

## **Day 2**

7:00 am: Group breakfast. Class: food ID and nutrition.

9:00 am–12:00 pm: Basic climbing skills: More knots, rope identification and care, rope handling and coiling, snow protection and anchor systems, and belaying.

1:00 pm–6:00 pm: 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. Head out of camp for glacier travel. Evening discussion: Expedition behavior, intro to leadership.

## **Days 3 - 4**

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 a crevasse for self-rescue practice: the site is secured, and anchors are built for lowering and raising systems. Students lead rope teams in glacier travel along a known 30-degree snow slope. Snow climbing and crampon practice are followed by ice axe self-arrest practice. The site turns into a ground school for running protection and fixed lines. Evening discussion: Avalanche Awareness.

## **Day 5**

Break camp down, pack up, and travel to a new location. Students lead the rope team and campsite selection processes. Each tent has its own kitchen shelter. Evening discussion: Planning a peak ascent.

## **Day 6**

All-day peak ascent with classes on route-finding, running protection, belaying, and snowpack stability. Evening discussion: Next steps for pursuing mountaineering.

## **Day 7**

Early morning camp breakdown. Student-led rope teams head back to the airstrip. Fly back to Talkeetna. Clean up and de-issue gear, write evaluations, and finish logistics. Final farewell.