

12-DAY MOUNTAINEERING COURSE



Alaska Mountaineering Schools' 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 12-Day Mountaineering Course is our flagship program for those who want to develop the skills needed for a multi-day expedition in a glaciated mountain range. Designed to model a Denali-style expedition, the course begins with a fixed-wing aircraft flight to a glacier in Denali National Park and Preserve. Rather than remaining at a single base camp, the expedition travels through the mountains, establishing new camps along the way. Ten full days in the field give participants time to build a strong foundation in glacier camping, mountain travel, and personal care before progressing to technical climbing objectives. Through repeated practice in a remote mountain environment, students develop the competence and judgment needed to become capable expedition members.

SPECIFICATIONS

Experience level: No previous outdoor or climbing experience is required.

Fitness: You do not need to be a competitive athlete, but you should be physically fit and have the stamina 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

- Designed for beginners: No previous outdoor or climbing experience is required. The course begins with the fundamentals and progresses as each student develops competence and confidence.
- Ten full days of field-based learning: The extended course length provides time to practice essential skills repeatedly and apply them to real expedition and climbing objectives. Students take on greater responsibility throughout the course.
- A maximum 1:3 instructor-to-student ratio: Small instructional groups provide close supervision, individual coaching, and meaningful opportunities for every student to participate.
- Preparation for independent mountain travel: The goal is not simply to guide students through a successful course. AMS teaches the camping, travel, climbing, leadership, and decision-making skills needed to return to the mountains and operate without supervision.
- A complete expedition system provided by AMS: AMS supplies and maintains the group tents, stoves, kitchen shelters, cooking equipment, ropes, anchors, sleds, emergency equipment, and other shared gear needed for the course. Students learn with dependable equipment selected specifically for Alaska Range expeditions.
- Expedition food planned and packed by AMS: Our dedicated food-packing room, freezers, and storage facilities allow AMS to plan, portion, and pack

complete field rations before every course. Each cook group receives a carefully designed menu and a complete kitchen system. Students can concentrate on learning expedition cooking rather than shopping for and provisioning the course themselves.

- Crevasse rescue training before departure: Students begin practicing crevasse self-rescue at the AMS training facility before flying to the glacier. This creates a foundation that is reinforced in real terrain throughout the course.
- A traveling expedition—not a base camp: Students repeatedly move through glaciated terrain, select campsites, and build organized, storm-resistant camps. Transporting all expedition supplies teaches students to manage loads, understand their carrying capacity, and distinguish essential equipment from unnecessary weight.

EXPEDITION STYLE & REMOTENESS

- AMS mountaineering courses operate as traveling, self-reliant expeditions in the remote Alaska Range. Students learn to live in a glaciated environment, prepare meals, care for themselves and their teammates, move camp, travel safely as a rope team, and pursue climbing objectives. Before focusing on technical climbing, they develop the camping, travel, and personal-care skills needed to function safely and efficiently in the mountains.
- Unlike a base-camp course, where an aircraft delivers equipment directly to a single camp, a traveling expedition must transport everything it needs. Each time the course moves, the team carries its food, fuel, shelter, personal equipment, and shared gear. Students learn to understand their physical carrying capacity, distribute group loads, and make thoughtful decisions about weight and essential equipment.
- The course emphasizes hands-on learning and the repeated application of new skills in varied terrain. As students become more capable, they take greater responsibility for camp systems, glacier travel, route finding, and expedition decisions. This progression develops the practical skills and judgment needed to become a dependable expedition member and, eventually, to pursue mountaineering without supervision.
- Remoteness has real consequences. Mountain weather can prevent aircraft from flying into or out of the course area. If an illness or injury occurs when aircraft cannot fly, evacuation to medical facilities may be difficult and could take several days. Students must therefore learn to manage their health, communicate concerns early, and contribute to the team's well-being.

- As is common on mountaineering expeditions, 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.

AMS does not rely on a single, predetermined course site. The location and route are selected based on weather, snow, and glacier conditions. This flexibility gives students experience adapting expedition plans to actual mountain conditions—an essential part of Alaska mountaineering. Some of the areas used by AMS were first explored and developed as instructional sites by AMS courses.

Students should expect to live, camp, and travel in a glaciated mountain environment for the duration of the course.

WILDERNESS APPRECIATION

AMS is based in Talkeetna because it provides direct access to the extraordinary wilderness of the Alaska Range. Living and traveling in this environment gives students an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of wild places and their responsibility to protect them.

Wilderness stewardship is taught through daily practice. Instructors model Leave No Trace principles, and students learn to plan carefully, stay organized, minimize their impact, maintain hygienic camps, manage waste responsibly, and build camps that can withstand mountain weather. These practices protect the environment while also creating a safer, stronger, and more effective expedition team.

Our goal is for students to leave the course not only as more capable mountaineers but also as committed stewards of the mountain environments they travel through.

COURSE PROGRESSION

The goal of the course is to develop the skills and judgment needed to pursue mountaineering in a remote, glaciated environment. We want students to leave with a strong foundation that prepares them to return to the Alaska Range or other mountain environments and repeat what they have learned without instructor supervision. To support this goal, AMS has developed a comprehensive curriculum and a carefully planned progression of skills and responsibilities.

Learning begins with the fundamentals of glacier camping and personal care in glacier conditions. 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.

The course then progresses to roped glacier travel, route finding, crevasse rescue, and self-rescue. As students become competent in these foundational skills, instruction advances to crampon techniques, snow climbing, anchor systems, running belays, avalanche assessment, and avalanche rescue. Depending on conditions, students may also practice ice or rock climbing. Peak ascents provide opportunities to combine and apply the skills developed throughout the course. AMS is discreet about advertising specific peaks because the most appropriate climbs depend on location, weather, route conditions, and crowds. As competence and judgment improve, instructors gradually transfer responsibility to the students.

THE FIRST DAY

Students meet their instructors at AMS at 8:00 a.m. on the course start date. Muffins, coffee, tea, and juice are provided while the group gathers. Following an orientation, students divide into smaller groups for equipment checks and lunch packing.

Your instructor will review each item on the equipment list with you to ensure that you are properly outfitted. Any additional equipment can be rented or purchased from AMS that morning; advance reservations are not required. Please review the Equipment List before arriving so that you understand what to bring. Students also pack their individual lunches in the AMS food room. All lunch food is provided; refer to the Lunch Packing sheet for additional information.

AMS serves a hearty midday meal before students change into their field clothing and put on their harnesses and helmets. The first climbing lesson covers fixed-line ascension, giving students an opportunity to practice an important technical skill in a controlled setting before entering the mountains. After class, the group handles final preparations and stores any belongings that will not be taken into the field.

Weather permitting, the group then travels to the Talkeetna airport and boards a ski-equipped, fixed-wing aircraft for the flight to the glacier. Aircraft may include a de Havilland single-engine turbine Otter. The approximately 45-minute flight into the Alaska Range is one of the course's most memorable experiences.

After landing, students organize their equipment, receive an introduction to glacier travel, and travel a short distance to the first campsite. The team then establishes camp, prepares its first dinner, and settles in for the night.

MOUNTAIN WEATHER AND FLIGHT DELAYS

Weather in the Alaska Range is unpredictable and can be difficult to forecast. Conditions may prevent aircraft from flying into or out of the mountains according to schedule.

If weather delays the flight into the Alaska Range, instruction continues at the AMS facility in Talkeetna. Students will be given the option to camp at AMS while waiting for flying conditions to improve. Although uncommon, persistent

weather at the beginning of a course may require AMS to select an alternate course location.

Students should expect a wide range of mountain weather during the course, including the possibility of snow and rain. Weather can also delay the return flight from the glacier. Each expedition carries approximately one week of additional food and fuel so that the team is prepared to remain in the mountains safely and comfortably during an extended delay.

We strongly recommend allowing at least two additional days at the end of your travel schedule and purchasing flexible airline tickets whenever possible. Please refer to the Travel and Logistics sheet for additional planning information.

LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK

Successful expeditions depend on appropriate equipment and technical competence, but they also require people who communicate effectively, exercise good judgment, and work together toward shared goals. At AMS, leadership is not limited to directing others. It begins with personal responsibility.

Students learn that managing basic needs—including hydration, nutrition, warmth, rest, hygiene, and personal equipment—is essential to becoming a strong and dependable team member. They also learn to communicate concerns early, recognize when others may need support, share group responsibilities, and contribute positively during challenging conditions.

As students gain experience, they take on greater responsibility for camp organization, rope team travel, route-finding, and expedition planning. Instructors discuss their decisions and introduce different approaches to leadership, giving students opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. These lessons and discussions continue throughout the course, helping students become both capable leaders and reliable expedition partners.

INSTRUCTORS

AMS instructors are selected for their experience as both climbers and educators. Technical competence is essential, but so are patience, approachability, good judgment, and the ability to help students learn. Our instructors know how to explain and demonstrate a skill, coach students through repeated practice, and gradually transfer responsibility as their competence and confidence develop.

The strength of the AMS instructor team comes from extensive, boots-on-the-ground experience in the Alaska Range. Collectively, our instructors bring backgrounds in expedition climbing, glacier travel, avalanche assessment, wilderness medicine, rescue, navigation, environmental stewardship, and outdoor education. Many have taught and guided with AMS over numerous seasons, contributing their experience to a shared curriculum and schoolwide teaching philosophy.

Every instructor has completed formal AMS training before teaching a course. This training addresses our curriculum, teaching methods, expedition systems, leadership practices, and approach to risk management. Instructors maintain required certifications in wilderness first responder, avalanche, Leave No Trace, and food safety. AMS values practical mountain experience, teaching ability, sound judgment, and professional training when selecting its staff.

Because AMS is a mountaineering school, our instructors measure success by more than whether a team reaches a summit. Safety, learning, teamwork, and the quality of the expedition experience come first. Climbing objectives give students an opportunity to apply what they have learned, but the greater goal is to help them understand how and why mountain decisions are made.

Each instructor brings a different personality and body of experience to the course, while working within the same educational progression. Students first observe, then practice, and ultimately take greater responsibility for camp systems, personal care, rope-team travel, leadership, and route-finding. The goal is not simply to follow an experienced guide, but to become a capable, thoughtful, and dependable expedition member.

Food

Food planning, kitchen organization, and backcountry cooking are essential to the success of any multi-day expedition. Like tying knots or building a storm-resistant camp, knowing how to prepare nourishing meals efficiently helps keep a team healthy, motivated, and ready for each day's objectives.

AMS plans, portions, and packs all course rations in our dedicated food-packing facility. We also provide each cook group with a complete expedition kitchen system. During the course, students learn how to organize a glacier kitchen, operate stoves safely, conserve fuel, manage food supplies, maintain good hygiene, and prepare hearty, nutritious meals in a remote environment.

Meals are an important part of expedition life. A satisfying breakfast helps the team begin the day prepared, while the promise of a good dinner can provide welcome motivation during a long day of travel or climbing. AMS instructors share proven recipes and cooking methods that students can use on future expeditions.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Every AMS course is shaped by its participants, location, weather, snow conditions, and other environmental variables. Instructors adapt the course progression to these conditions while working toward a consistent set of learning objectives. By the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate developing competence in the following areas.

Safety and Judgment

Students learn practices that support the health and safety of every expedition member. By the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate foundational competence in the following areas.

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

Leadership and Teamwork

Students practice leadership, teamwork, communication, and positive expedition behavior throughout the course. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the reasoning behind important expedition decisions through observation, discussion, and questioning
- Contribute to group goals with a constructive attitude and a willingness to share responsibilities
- Communicate ideas, observations, and concerns clearly within a rope team and the larger expedition
- Give and receive constructive feedback
- Demonstrate sound judgment, attention to detail, and consideration for other team members
- Participate fully in a safe, organized, and environmentally responsible expedition

Environmental Stewardship

Wilderness appreciation and responsible travel are integral to every AMS course. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Practice minimum-impact camping and travel techniques appropriate to a glaciated mountain environment
- Organize and maintain a clean camp that protects the surrounding environment
- Manage food, human waste, and other expedition waste responsibly
- Explain how thoughtful planning and good expedition practices help preserve the wilderness character of the Alaska Range

Expedition Camping and Self-Care

Before students can climb effectively, they must learn to live comfortably, care for themselves, and contribute to an organized expedition in a winter environment. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Evaluate and select an appropriate campsite
- Establish an organized, storm-resistant glacier camp with clearly marked safe travel areas
- Camp, cook, dress, and care for themselves in a variety of mountain conditions
- Manage hydration, nutrition, warmth, hygiene, and rest so they can remain healthy and contribute to the team
- Organize, use, and care for personal and group equipment
- Build and maintain a snow kitchen
- Operate expedition stoves safely and prepare hearty, nutritious meals
- Break down, transport, and rebuild camp efficiently while accounting for the weight and importance of every item carried

Mountaineering Skills

Technical climbing skills build upon a strong foundation of camping, self-care, teamwork, and mountain travel. The course introduces students to the systems needed to travel and climb as capable members of a mountaineering expedition. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate proficiency with essential knots and fundamental rope-handling techniques
- Place snow protection and construct basic snow anchors
- Demonstrate belay techniques appropriate for glacier travel, running protection, and fixed lines
- Organize two-, three-, and four-person rope teams for glacier travel with sleds
- Construct a mechanical-advantage hauling system and ascend a fixed line
- Participate in crevasse rescue and demonstrate self-rescue techniques
- Travel efficiently on a rope team and apply fundamental route-finding and navigation skills
- Demonstrate appropriate snow-climbing, crampon, and ice-axe techniques
- Practice ice-climbing techniques when terrain and conditions permit
- Recognize avalanche terrain, contribute to snow-stability observations, and conduct an avalanche-transceiver search
- Apply camping, travel, climbing, and teamwork skills while participating in mountain objectives

- Establish the foundation needed to become a strong and dependable member of future mountaineering expeditions, including expeditions on Denali

REPUTATION AND 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.

BEFORE THE COURSE: AMS PREPARATION

Organization and attention to detail are essential to a successful expedition. Before students arrive, AMS instructors and staff spend two days inspecting, testing, organizing, and packing the group equipment and food. Stoves are fired, radios are checked, ropes and climbing equipment are inspected, repair and emergency kits are prepared, and group rations are packed. This preparation reflects an important expedition principle: prior planning prevents poor performance.

SAMPLE DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

DAY 1: Orientation, Equipment and Glacier Flight

8:00 a.m.: Meet at AMS for introductions, course orientation, and an overview of the day. Instructors check each student's clothing and equipment, issue rental and group gear, and help students pack individual lunches. Expedition loads are organized and weighed. Please arrive on time and ready for a busy day.

Midday: AMS provides a hearty team lunch.

Afternoon: Students receive an introduction to fixed-line ascension at the AMS crevasse-rescue training facility. Classes include essential knots, fitting and using a harness and helmet, ascending techniques, and procedures for releasing a backpack during self-rescue.

The team then travels to the Talkeetna airport, organizes aircraft loads, and flies to the glacier in ski-equipped aircraft. After landing, students reorganize their loads, receive an introduction to snowshoe and rope-team travel, and move a short distance to establish the first camp.

Students learn to probe and mark the camp perimeter, identify safe travel areas, construct snow walls and sleeping platforms, pitch tents, establish the group kitchen, and designate sanitation areas. Evening instruction includes campsite selection, shovel and snow saw use, stormproofing, stove operation, expedition cooking, hygiene, and staying warm at night.

Evening discussion: Course goals and Denali National Park and Preserve regulations.

DAY 2: Fundamental Climbing and Glacier Travel Skills

Morning classes introduce additional knots, rope identification and care, rope handling and coiling, snow protection, anchor systems, and fundamental belay techniques.

During the afternoon, students learn to organize rope teams and practice glacier-travel techniques, introductory crevasse-fall procedures, transferring loads, snow climbing, ice-axe use, and self-arrest. The team then travels outside camp to apply these skills on the glacier.

Evening discussion: Expedition behavior, teamwork, and an introduction to leadership.

DAY 3: Crevasse Rescue and Self Rescue

Students prepare daypacks for a full day away from camp and organize into rope teams. At a suitable crevasse, instructors secure the training area and establish appropriate safety systems. Students practice fixed-line ascension, self-rescue, and the lowering and hauling systems used in crevasse rescue.

Evening discussion: Prevention and recognition of altitude illness and cold-related injuries.

DAY 4: Moving Camp and Crevasse Route Finding

The team breaks down camp and travels to a new location selected according to conditions and access to potential climbing objectives. Under close instructor supervision, students begin taking responsibility for rope-team organization, route-finding, campsite selection, and camp construction.

After marking a safe perimeter and securing expedition equipment, the team completes a crevasse route-finding exercise. Instructors may stage a simulated crevasse fall so students can practice an organized team rescue.

Evening discussion: Introduction to avalanches and avalanche terrain.

DAY 5: Snow Climbing, Protection and Avalanche Rescue

Student-led rope teams travel to appropriate snow terrain for instruction in efficient movement, crampon use, snow climbing, and ice-axe self-arrest. Students are introduced to running protection and fixed-line systems before navigating back to camp under instructor supervision.

The day also includes avalanche-transceiver searches and rescue practice.

Evening discussion: Planning a peak ascent, establishing turnaround times, descent considerations, and continued avalanche education.

DAY 6: Mountain Objective

The team undertakes an all-day mountain objective when conditions permit. Students apply route-finding, rope-team

travel, snow climbing, running protection, and leadership skills. Snowpack observations and stability assessments may be incorporated along the route.

Evening discussion: Debrief the day.

DAY 7: Moving Camp, Snow Shelters and Navigation

The team breaks camp and moves to another location selected for access to suitable rock, ice, or additional mountain objectives. Students assume greater responsibility for rope-team leadership, route-finding, load management, and campsite selection.

When conditions permit, students construct an emergency snow shelter, sometimes called a “digloo.”

Evening discussion: Navigation, map reading, compass use, and travel in limited visibility.

DAY 8: Rock and Ice Climbing

Where suitable terrain and conditions exist, students practice rock- and ice-climbing movement techniques. Classes may include setting up top-rope systems and placing rock and ice protection.

Evening discussion: Climbing difficulty ratings and Alaska mountaineering history.

DAY 9: Protections and Multi-Pitch Systems

Students build upon the previous day’s climbing skills by practicing mock leads while protected by a top rope. Instructors evaluate movement, protection placement, rope handling, and decision-making. The day may include a demonstration of multi-pitch climbing systems.

Evening discussion: The geology and glaciology of Denali National Park and Preserve.

DAY 10: Rappelling and Improvised Rescue

Students practice rappelling techniques appropriate to different terrain and situations. Depending on available terrain and student progress, exercises may include rappelling with a heavy pack and assisting an injured climbing partner.

Evening discussion: Improvised rescue systems and emergency litter construction.

DAY 11: Advanced Mountain Objective

When conditions and student progress permit, the team undertakes a more advanced climbing objective. The day may incorporate multi-pitch climbing, fixed lines, rappelling, route-finding, and other skills developed throughout the course. Students take greater responsibility for planning and leadership while instructors continue to supervise and evaluate decisions.

Evening discussion: Debrief the day.

DAY 12: Return to Talkeetna

The team makes an alpine start, breaks down camp, and prepares the glacier site for departure. Student-led rope teams travel back to the airstrip, where the group awaits suitable flying conditions.

After returning to Talkeetna, students clean and return group and rental equipment, complete course evaluations, and take care of final logistics. The course concludes with a group dinner at a local restaurant.