

The Alaska Mountaineering Course



Alaska is one of those places that many people long to visit. It lives up to its reputation of being wild, big and remote. The mountains of Alaska are no exception to that. Being out in the mountains is breathtaking, the vistas are huge and we are unlikely to see anyone else while on expedition. Living and travelling in this landscape will be an adventure. There will be highs and lows that come along with your journey in the wilderness that will leave you fully satisfied and proud of what you have achieved.

This expedition will arm you with a wide array of technical and leadership skills to enable you to embark with confidence on your own trips. From the beginning of the course you will be involved in discussions about route selection, risk management, and goal setting. This intense involvement in all aspects of the trip means that what you learn will stay with you and become second nature, so you can translate these skills into your own adventures later on.

No previous mountaineering experience is necessary for this course, only a willingness to learn and desire for adventure and challenge. We start at the beginning, teaching you the basic day to day skills of mountain life: moving with a heavy backpack, selecting and setting up a campsite, and staying warm and dry in challenging weather. As the course progresses, you will take an increasingly active role in the running of the expedition, ultimately having the opportunity to develop your leadership skills by taking on the role of group leader, with the support of your instructors.



The Mountain Training School

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The Alaska Mountaineering Course is a rich and rewarding experience. We will go to places few other people go, see things few other people see and face challenges you might once have thought you were not capable of.

Challenge Yourself.

Meet Some of Your Instructors

(Note, this is just a small sampling of our course instructors. Your actual instructors will vary by course)

Merrie Beth Board



Merrie Beth is from Golden Canada. She has an incredible depth of experience and will be one of a handful of women to become a full alpine guide under the Canadian system later this year. She embodies so many qualities you would want in your instructor, strong, sharp technical skills and an infectious enthusiasm no matter how tough the going is.

Jaya Marr



Jaya is one of the Directors of the Mountain Training School. Originally from New Zealand, she considers Alaska her second home. She worked for 6 seasons in Alaska and was a member of an all female expedition on Denali 5 years ago. Her inspiration comes from working with students and seeing them progress and surprise themselves with what they are capable of. 'The harsh conditions of the mountains bring out the best in people and allow them to see themselves in a way that never happens in town. I never get tired of that'.

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Dennis Haskell



Dennis is originally from New Zealand and began his guiding career on the Fox Glacier. From there he has been guiding and ski patrolling in Canada, Alaska and Patagonia. He is a qualified NOLS instructor. Students who have been on an expedition with Dennis invariably rave about his super calm approach to life in the mountains and his natural ability to help students to learn the many technical and leadership skills contained within the expedition.

Course Details

Cost

The Alaska Mountaineering course is \$6995 USD. Places can be reserved with a \$2000 deposit via our website with a credit card, as part of the course application. Final payment is due 90 days before the course begins, and can only be paid by check or bank transfer.

Group Details



Groups are capped at 9 students, and are run with a maximum of a 3:1 student to instructor ratio. Most groups have 6-9 students and 3-4 instructors.

Course Dates

The course is 42 days long in total and spends approximately 38 days in the field. Our upcoming course dates are as follows:

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2012

April 1 to May 12

2013

March 24 May 4
May 12 to June 22

2014

March 23 to May 3
May 11 to June 21

What's Included

Course tuition includes professional instruction, food, local transport, national park fees, logistic support, and group and climbing equipment.

What's Not Included

You will need to provide your own equipment per our gear list, medical and evacuation insurance, optional trip cancellation insurance, and flights to/from Anchorage, Alaska.

Your Mountaineering Curriculum Includes

Mountaineering Fundamentals

You will begin to learn to assess and mitigate the risks faced by mountaineers while traveling and climbing in the mountains. You will learn how to climb steep snow and ice, develop an understanding of group management, and explore techniques for efficient movement in semi-technical terrain.

Glacier Travel, Camping, and Glaciology

You will explore bare ice and snow covered glaciers, learn how they are formed, and how to minimize the risks associated with travel and camping on glaciers. You will also learn about different types of snow shelters like snow cave and qhinzees

Snow and Ice Skills

You will learn to move in snow and ice, how use an ice axe, crampons, and snowshoes, and learn self-arrest. You will also complete an American Avalanche Association Standards Level I Avalanche Course.



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Belaying and Abseiling

You will see and practice top rope belaying, lead belaying, top belaying, use of a variety of belay methods, both with standard gear and improvised, and the use of your body while belaying. You will be able to abseil using standard and improvised methods, as well as how to back up a system for increased safety.

Anchor and Protection Evaluation and Construction

You will have the opportunity to construct and evaluate “IDEAL” anchors and to place and evaluate protection in a variety of mediums, such as snow, ice, and rock.

Selection and Use of a Variety of Rope Systems to Increase Safety

You will learn techniques and applicability of solo travel systems, glacier travel procedures, use of running protection, and use of belays to increase safety while in the mountains, all while moving efficiently. You will further learn techniques to manage and maintain the rope before, during, and after a climb.

Rescue

You will have the chance to understand a variety of self and group rescue techniques, including escaping a belay, tandem abseils, ascending a fixed line, team crevasse rescue, and single rope crevasse rescues, including complex hauls.

Wilderness First Aid



In order to be able to fully look after yourself and your teammates it is essential to have some basic first aid skills. Your instructors will take you through a thorough introduction to dealing with the first aid challenges you are most likely to meet in the mountains. Subjects covered include wound care, patient assessment and how to deal with hypothermia.

Our Core Outdoor Curriculum

This is made up of 6 tenets. These skills represent the basic knowledge

every outdoor leader should be proficient in, whether you're backpacking, mountaineering, rock climbing, or (heaven forbid) kayaking.

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Outdoor Living

This encompasses a range of backcountry basics, such as navigation, setting up a bombproof camp, creating great meals and gear selection and repair. A solid grasp of these foundation skills is essential to enable you to thrive in a remote environment.

Leadership

You will learn strategies to maximize the potential of group members, foster a supportive learning environment, provide timely and supportive feedback, adapt to stressful or changing situations, and work toward group goals in a positive and proactive manner.

Risk Management

You will actively manage risk in a real world setting. Learning to recognize the hazards you routinely will encounter in the mountains and how to minimize them. You will help develop plans to manage activities for all members of the group, and balance risk and adventure to accomplish the goals of the expedition.

Judgment and Decision Making

You will begin to develop an understanding of the decision making process, applying various decision-making styles to fit the circumstances, making good, conservative decisions, and working toward the development of a “mountain sense.”

Planning and Preparation

You will practice route and rations planning, define and following through on trip goals, create daily route plans, and work at anticipating decision points and mitigating risks during the planning phase.

Environmental Integration

You will learn Leave No Trace camping principles and the natural history of the area. We place a great deal of value on learning how to preserve the inherent beauty and wild nature of the mountains we travel in.



Sample Expedition Itinerary

Weeks 1 and 2

We meet on day one in Anchorage. The first two to three days are spent at the Mountain Training School base camp, where we do some introductory lessons and go through rations planning, and rations packing, as well as preparing our gear for the expedition.

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Then we depart base camp, heading to the Chugach Mountains. This first week is spent with introductory skills and getting used to working with your new team mates. Being able to work efficiently as a team is a critical step to make sure we are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. This phase approach may involve some food caching, heavy bush crashing, river crossings, and boulder field negotiation, among other challenges. As we arrive in glaciated terrain, we begin to learn and use glacier travel skills such as roping up for glacier travel, camping in the snow, crevasse rescue, and other skills needed to thrive in an alpine environment.

Weeks 3 and 4



of becoming good, responsible mountaineers.

In this phase, we will begin to put our newly learned skills to good use. Our objectives for the next two weeks include the introduction of technical mountaineering and snow and/or ice climbing skills. Our goal will be to advance the group in our traverse while climbing some of the many peaks that surround us. The focus here will be on allowing you the opportunity to develop backcountry leadership and judgment skills. We will also continue with our avalanche and first aid curricula, helping further our goal

Weeks 5 and 6

By this stage of the expedition, it is expected that you, the expedition members, will have taken over most of the running of the expedition. While you will be closely supported and monitored by your instructors, you will rotate through the role of “leader for the day,” where you will be in charge of daily planning, route finding, and managing the group. This is your opportunity to lead the group on a glacier, plan a peak climb, and further understand what it takes to run a successful expedition. Our goal for the final two and a half weeks will be to complete our traverse. During this time, the team as a whole decides on what its goals are and the day-to-day plan will be modified to reflect the desires of the group.

Finally returning to the road, we will be picked up and taken back to basecamp and your first hot shower in almost six weeks. The final day is spent de-rigging, finishing up any remaining Wilderness First Aid classes, and attending to any last minute business. The expedition concludes with an incredible feast to celebrate our successes a slideshow on the expedition, and our certification presentation. This 6 week adventure is both incredibly challenging and deeply rewarding; an adventure you’ll never forget.

Equipment

The Mountain Training School provides much of the equipment necessary for the expedition, such as ropes, crampons, ice axes, tents, and cooking gear. However, you are

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responsible for providing some of your own equipment, such as your clothing and sleeping bag. This is detailed in a separate equipment list for this course. Please read over this list carefully. We also offer a range of equipment for sale at a discount or for rent. If this will be your first mountaineering experience, we recommend that you rent some of the more expensive items until you know 1) your preferences and 2) how you like things to fit.



Food and Nutrition

We provide a variety of excellent, well balanced, and nutritious meals for the course. Our meal plan was created with the help of a nutritionist, and has the right balance of carbs, fats, and proteins necessary for optimum performance on a long expedition. However, you can expect to lose a bit of weight on the course.

To give you an idea, you might eat oatmeal, cinnamon rolls, pancakes, or potato pancakes for breakfast, Grizzly Bars (our homemade energy bar), wraps, stuffed cheesy bread, and Snickers bars for your lunch, and curry, pizza, pasta, or burritos for dinner.

We can accommodate vegetarians and some special diets such as gluten free and vegan. There may be an extra charge for special diets.

Fitness

Many students find our expeditions to be very challenging. Our expeditions are among the most physically, mentally, and emotionally difficult on the market; You will be living in an extremely remote environment with people you've never met, carrying a heavy pack over rough terrain, undertaking a full regime of interactive classes, all while adjusting to a new environment. It's a very tough trip.

As such, your initial level of fitness will make a huge difference to your enjoyment of the expedition. We very much want you to be successful and learn as much as possible.

Start exercising now. It's not too important what you do: swim, jog, bicycle, or walk up hills; you want to train for long distance endurance and stamina. We recommend that you take at least a few hikes with a heavy backpack (50 lbs/22kg) before you come to Alaska. With your pack, plan to hike for two to three hours at first (taking breaks every hour or so), increasing to four to six hour hikes as the expedition approaches. Be kind to

The Mountain Training School

your knees, and use trekking poles on your training hikes, especially while walking downhill. By mixing regular endurance training with some training hikes, you should be able to quickly adjust to the demands of the expedition. If you have any worries about your health, talk to us and your doctor beforehand.

For more information, check out our Fitness page on our website.

Any other questions?

Please feel free to contact us by email or phone (listed at the bottom of each page of this document) if you have any questions, comments, thoughts, or concerns. We're happy to help in any way we can.