



American Alpine Institute

The Spirit of Alpinism

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Alpine Rock Climbing – Itinerary – Sierra-Nevada Itinerary

Part 1: Introduction to Alpine Rock Climbing 6-Days

Course Information

The objective of the Introduction to Alpine Rock Climbing course is twofold. First, an individual who completes this course should be able to set-up and manage a top rope on a single pitch crag. And second, the individual should be able to operate as a competent team member, able to follow a leader, on a multi-pitch alpine rock climb.

The alpine conditions during this program will determine the exact daily routine. Some of the material may be presented on different days in order to take advantage of good alpine weather.

Day 0 – Arrive

Arrive in Mammoth Lakes, California. It is possible to fly to either Reno or Las Vegas and then rent a car to drive to the Sierra. Reno is approximately 3-hours from Mammoth Lakes and Las Vegas is approximately 4.5-hours from Mammoth Lakes.

Day 1 – Meet, Course Overview

On the first morning we will meet at The Looney Bean Cafe at 8am. There we will go through our equipment for the course and make sure that everyone has the appropriate mountain equipment. We can also complete any rentals that need to take place in order to outfit the participants. Once we have completed this we will travel 10-minutes to Horseshoe Slabs.

Curriculum: Selection, care and use of climbing gear; review basic knots and hitches; practice basic belay technique and belay commands; practice climbing movement skills with a focus on alpine climbing; and complete an introduction to rappelling for single and multi-pitch terrain.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 5:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp

Day 2 – Climbing Protection, Anchors, Following Multi-Pitch Climbs

The second day will expand on the knowledge gained during the previous day's lessons. Students should be able to build their own top rope anchor off of bolts and manage a single pitch crag by the end of the day. The team will drive approximately 35-minutes to either the Iris Slab or Benton Crag.

Curriculum: Introduction to active and passive climbing protection; introduction to basic anchor set-ups for top roping; practice lead belay techniques; practice with anchors, and single-pitch management; and complete an introduction to following a leader in a multi-pitch setting.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 5:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp

Day 3 – Snow School

This day has been set aside as a day for snow school. Options for snow school locales are the Mammoth Area, Ellery Bowl, Little Lakes Valley or after an approach to another objective.

Curriculum: Selection, care and use of snow climbing equipment; walking on snow using in-balance and out-of-balance movement; practical application of self-arrest techniques from all positions; use of crampons on moderate to high angle snow and ice; nine principal positions of the ice axe; three types of glissade; snow anchors (pickets, flukes, deadmen, bollards); and snow belay systems (static and dynamic, stomper belays, butt-axe belay).

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 2:1

Note: This day is conditions dependant and if there is limited snow, the team will choose one of the following alternative options: (1) The lessons may be truncated and taught after an approach to a multi-day climb. (2) An additional climbing objective may be selected. (3) The team may elect to work on climbing self-rescue skills.

Lodging: Either front-country car camp or backcountry camp.

Days 4-6 – Technical Objectives

Days 4 through 6 are reserved for technical objectives. Objectives will be selected based on their relevance to members of the team. Each objective will require team members to practice all of the skills they learned in the preceding days in a high multi-pitch setting.

Note: It should be noted that objectives may be in the backcountry and may require one or more nights out in the field. If this happens and there is additional time in the afternoons after making approaches, additional lessons may be provided. These may include lessons on the following:

- Leave No Trace Techniques
- Mountain Weather
- Self-Rescue Techniques
- Regional Geology and Ecology
- High Altitude Illness and Treatments

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 2:1

Lodging: Either front-country car camp or backcountry camp. After Day 6, those going home will be dropped off. Those staying will car camp.

Day 7 – END of Part 1

Depart or continue with Part 2: Intermediate Alpine Rock Climbing.

Part 2: Intermediate Alpine Rock Climbing 6-Days

Course Information

The objective of the Intermediate Alpine Rock Climbing course is for students to develop the skills to lead basic alpine rock climbs by applying modern equipment and strategies.

It should be noted that not every student is ready to be “on-the-sharp” end after completing the Introductory Alpine Rock Climbing program or something similar. Every course includes some students that are ready for this serious responsibility, and some students who are only ready to rehearse traditional rock leadership in an alpine setting. Regardless of whether a student is ready mentally or physically to lead, every student will walk away with the technical skills required of a multi-pitch leader.

The alpine conditions during this program will determine the exact daily routine. Some of the material may be presented on different days in order to take advantage of good alpine weather.

Day 0 – Arrive

Arrive in Mammoth Lakes, California. Or finish the Introduction to Alpine Rock Climbing course.

Day 1 – Meet Group, Course Overview

Meet in Mammoth Lakes at 8am at The Looney Bean Cafe. Once the team has met, they will complete an equipment check and ensure that all students have appropriate gear for the program. If students are combining the Introductory and Intermediate programs, they may be able to skip this section while new students are checked.

Curriculum: Selection, use and care of traditional climbing gear; discuss traditional racking techniques; develop an understanding of practical applications of both passive and active protection in a leadership setting; complete an introduction to traditional anchors for leaders; develop an understanding of the practical applications of different lead belays; develop an understanding of the applications of the auto-blocking device; and complete an introduction to simple rescue techniques.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 4:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp

Day 2 – Anchors, Rope Management and Multi-Pitch Climbing

Curriculum: Introduction to multi-directional anchors; develop an understanding of the practical application of anchor and rope management; complete an introduction to single and multi-pitch leading procedures. Once this is complete the students will practice multi-pitch climbing by employing “mini-pitches” on a fourth or low-fifth class single pitch crag.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 4:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp

Day 3: – Rappelling and Multi-Pitch Strategy

Curriculum: Cleaning anchors and rappelling, techniques for rappelling multi-pitch lines; discussion of lead climbing strategies; both physical and mental; guided example of a short multi-pitch line; and mock single and multi-pitch leading practice.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 4:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp

Day 4 – Fall Factors and Falling Safely

Curriculum: Discussion of falling, fall factors and how they apply to the leader; continued mock leading practice; optional falling practice on gear and/or bolted anchors; optional student-lead climbs in a single-pitch setting; and optional approach to backcountry multi-pitch line

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 2:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp or backcountry camp, dependent on objectives

Days 5-6 – Student Lead Alpine Climbs

The final two days of the program are reserved for student-lead alpine rock climbs. These climbs will be selected based on student strengths and desires. The program's instructors will mentor students as they make these final leads on a high alpine objective.

Curriculum: These final two days will be practical application of all the skills learned throughout the rest of the program.

Guide-to-Student Ratio: 2:1

Lodging: Front-country car camp or backcountry camp, dependent on objectives

Day 7 – END of Part 2

Travel day return home