



Alpine Institute

Backpacking and Wilderness Skills Equipment Checklist

Your course will take place in Bellingham, Washington. This area enjoys a typical maritime climate of mild temperatures throughout the year with frequent precipitation in the winter and generally pleasant summers. The preferred climbing season extends from about late April, through the summer, to the end of September. Summer highs can be up in the 80's but more commonly are in the 60's to 70's. Nighttime lows are usually around 50°F. Rain is not uncommon, particularly before mid-June. Rain is less common here than in other climbing areas on the coast, because the mountain is in a rain shadow. A typical day in the summer might begin cool and pleasant, warm to the lower 70's by afternoon, and drop to a night-time low between 40-50°F. For this course you will be expected to provide your own lodging, with one exception. On the third evening of the program, the team will be in the backcountry. For the frontcountry portion of the class, many students will opt to camp at Larrabee State park about 20 minutes away from our office and where your course will be taking place. At AAI we take equipment and its selection seriously. Our Equipment Services department is expertly staffed by climbers, skiers and guides. Additionally, we only carry products in our store that have been thoroughly field tested and approved by our guides. This intensive process ensures that all equipment that you purchase from AAI is best suited to your course and future mountain adventures. Please contact us to select equipment for your course. The primary goal of any backpacker should always be to carry as little as possible. What is left out of a backpack is often just as important as what is placed inside. Conditions in the mountains vary dramatically from season-to-season, and sometimes even throughout the same day. This can make the process of preparing equipment for a trip difficult. On the one hand, a hiker wants to be light. But on the other hand, a hiker wants to have everything he or she needs if there is a storm.

This list was designed for the “worst case scenario,” a trip with significant inclement weather. In serious conditions it's not uncommon for a backpacker to need every piece of clothing and equipment on this list. However, if a program does not encounter significant weather, there may be items here that are not used. As you prepare for your trip, it's important to plan for the worst and hope for the best. Please be sure to check the forecast several days prior to your course to ensure that you are properly prepared.

Call or E-mail the Equipment Shop for Advice on Gear.

Please feel free to contact the equipment shop for advice as you prepare for your program. We are happy to provide you with equipment advice whether or not you choose to purchase or rent equipment at AAI. We take your comfort and safety seriously.

Call: (360) 671-1570

Email: shop@AlpineInstitute.com

Equipment Shop Website: Shop.AlpineInstitute.com

FRONTCOUNTRY CLASSROOM ESSENTIALS

Smart Phone

Buy
 Own

Gaia Smartphone App

Buy
 Own

Altimeter Smartphone App or Watch

Buy
 Own

Guide Pace Smartphone App

Buy
 Own

Compass

Buy
 Own

Map tool with UTM Grid Reader

Buy
 Own

Notebook and Pen/Pencil

Rite in the Rain paper might be a good thing to consider if notes need to be taken outside.

Buy
 Own

Laptop

Optional, but many students find that this helps significantly in their scholastic exercises.

Buy
 Own

Comfortable Clothing

For the classroom, being outside, and around town.

Buy
 Own

CLOTHING

Sun Hat

Ideally fits under a helmet. Ball caps with a button on top are NOT recommended. Visors or athletic hats are more comfortable, vent better, and are easier to clean and dry out.

Buy
 Own

Sun Glasses

Preferably with UVA/UVB protection.

Buy
 Own

Headlamp

Bring extra batteries or charger for rechargeable battery style. Ideal range is 200-350 lumens.

Examples: Petzl Swift RL, Petzl Actik

Buy
 Own

Liner Gloves

Thin, lightweight, wool or synthetic gloves. Size to fit snug but not too tight. Phone-compatible fingertips and palm texture are nice to have. These could be worn alone in temps greater than 25°F when it is dry. UPF rated are ideal.

Examples: OR Vigor Sensor, The North Face Etip Grip

Buy
 Own

CLOTHING CONTINUED

Hard Shell Glove (Optional)

Waterproof and insulated. If the glove lacks insulation, size it to fit a liner glove inside. Mainly used in wet conditions, cold temps, or when not moving.

Examples: Black Diamond Renegade, OR Highcamp.

NOTE: April-May courses are often much colder and may require more heavily insulated gloves like the Black Diamond Guide.

Buy
 Own

Undergarments

Wool or synthetic. Long, compression-style undergarments can help reduce inner thigh chafing.

Buy
 Own

Base Layer

A lightweight, wool or synthetic sun hoody is ideal. UPF 30+ sun protection is best. UPF clothing works better than sunscreen.

Examples: Patagonia Capilene Cool Daily Hoody, OR Echo, Rab Pulse

Buy
 Own

Soft Shell Jacket or Windproof Jacket (Optional)

A soft shell jacket is considered an "action layer." Its materials are designed to stretch and breathe while also maintaining wind and water resistance. This allows the user to leave this jacket on for a wide range of temps and conditions throughout the day without the hassle of constantly changing layers.

Windproof jackets are lightweight and packable, but lack the breathability and stretchy nature of the soft shell. Windproof jackets are ideal for blocking wind and light precipitation during low output activities.

Example Softshells: Black Diamond Alpine Start Hoody, Rab Borealis, Mountain Equipment Squall, Patagonia Houdini Air

Example Windproof: Patagonia Houdini, Arc'Teryx Squamish Hoody

Buy
 Own

Active Insulation Layer

Lightweight "gridded fleece" or lightweight synthetic insulated jacket. Hood preferred. Active insulation weight - 40g/m². Heavier insulation weight - 60-80g/m²

Examples: Patagonia R1, Patagonia Nano Air, Arc'Teryx Proton LT

Buy
 Own

Insulation Jacket

AKA the "puffy". Down or synthetic. This piece is worn in cold conditions or when not moving. Hood preferred. If choosing down, water-resistant down treatment is preferred to help prevent matting and loss of insulating ability if the jacket gets wet.

Examples: Arc'Teryx Nuclei FL, Patagonia DAS Light, Patagonia Down Sweater, Arc'Teryx Cerium, Rab Alpine Series

Buy
 Own

Hardshell Jacket (Waterproof Rain Jacket)

Non-insulated jacket with a waterproof and breathable membrane. Three-layer construction is recommended. It must have a hood, ideally helmet-compatible. When sizing, make sure it can fit over other layers. Ski jackets are discouraged because they are usually not waterproof and have heavy insulation.

Look for Gore-Tex, eVent, Drilite, H2NO, Pertex Shield.

Examples: Patagonia Torrentshell, Arc'Teryx Alpha AR, Mountain Equipment Lhotse

Buy
 Own
 Rent

CLOTHING CONTINUED

Base Layer Pants (aka "Long Johns")

Wool or synthetic. Bring 1 for early or late season. Optional for mid-season (depending on weather).

Examples: Patagonia Capilene midweight or thermal weight (Thermal is warmer).

- Buy
 Own

Synthetic Hiking Pants

Thin, weather-resistant, breathable, and stretchy. You will wear these a majority of the time.

Examples: Patagonia Altvia, Mountain Equipment Ibex, Arc'Teryx Gamma FL

- Buy
 Own

Hard Shell Pants (Waterproof Rain Pants)

Non-insulated, waterproof, and breathable membrane. Full side zips are recommended.

Ideally has at least 1/4 length zipper from the bottom of the pant cuff in order to get pants on and off while wearing mountain boots. When sizing make sure it is able to fit over a base layer and soft shell pants. Insulated ski pants are strongly discouraged due to lack of waterproofness and heavy insulation.

Materials: Gore-Tex, eVent, Drilite, H2NO, Pertex Shield

Examples: Patagonia Torrentshell, Arc'Teryx Beta Pant

- Buy
 Own
 Rent

Socks

Wool or synthetic socks that are at least mid-calf height.

Examples: Darn Tough Coolmax Lightweight

- Buy
 Own

Hiking Shoe (Lightweight Boots or Trail Running Shoes)

Lightweight boots can be appropriate for early season programs (mid-June or earlier) when the weather forecast is cold and/or wet. By mid-season many opt for trail running shoes as they are lighter and dry out faster than traditional hiking boots. Be aware that trail running shoes do not offer as much support when traveling with heavy packs. A high stack shoe like a Hoka is not recommended.

Example Trail Shoes: Topo Athletic Terraventure, Altra Lone Peak, La Sportiva Kaptiva, Salomon Sense Ride

Example Lightweight Boots: La Sportiva Trango Tech, Scarpa Zodiac

- Buy
 Own

Trekking Poles

One is required, 2 are highly recommended. Poles help with balance while hiking with a heavy pack and increase security during stream crossings. They also decrease the pressure on your knees during steep descents. For early season, poles should have snow baskets.

Example: Black Diamond Expedition

- Buy
 Own
 Rent

Internal Frame Pack

50-65L is a recommended size range. Mountaineering specific packs, instead of backpacking packs, are a good way to shave weight. ☆ Example : Osprey Mutant 52, Black Diamond Mission 55, Osprey Atmos 65

- Buy
 Own
 Rent

CAMPING

Tent

3 season tents can be used if the rain fly goes all the way to the ground on all sides. A “bathtub” floor for the inner tent is also recommended. This means that the inner tent has a water-resistant floor material that scoops up from the floor 4-12" before changing to mesh. If your tent does not have wind lines, an additional 6-10ft of 3mm accessory cord is needed for rigging your rainfly in a mountain environment. (You can rent a 4-season and it's possible to share if you would like).

-Early Season: Double wall 4-season tent recommended.

-Mid Season: 4-season or 3-season tent.

-Late Season: 4-season tent recommended.

Example 4-season: Hilleberg Unna, Black Diamond Eldorado

Example 3-season: Big Agnes Copper Spur, REI Half Dome

- Buy
- Own
- Rent

Sleeping Bag

Synthetic or down. If you bring a synthetic bag, bring one on the lower end of the temp range since synthetic bags tend not to be as warm as down. If you sleep cold, bring a warmer bag than required. If choosing down, water-resistant down treatment is preferred to help prevent loss of insulating properties if the bag gets wet.

- Early Season: 0° to 20°F (-18° to 6°C)
- Mid Season: 20° to 30°F (-6° to -1°C)
- Late Season: 15° to 20°F (-10° to -6°C)

Examples: Mountain Equipment Fireflash, Western Mountaineering Alpinilite, Rab Mythic Ultra 180

- Buy
- Own
- Rent

Compression Stuff Sack

For your sleeping bag. If it is a down bag, a waterproof compression sack is recommended.

- Buy
- Own

Sleeping Pad

- Early Season: Bring 2. One inflatable and 1 closed-cell foam. The foam pad helps insulate from the snow and serves as a backup to the inflatable pad.
- Mid/Late Season: One inflatable pad or closed cell foam pad.

Examples: ThermaRest XTherm

- Buy
- Own
- Rent

Stove and Fuel

Liquid fuel or canister stove. Fuel is available at our Equipment Shop the morning of the course.

NOTE: Many people choose to share stoves, fuel, and tents to decrease weight. However, some people prefer to camp in their own tents and use their own stoves. This can be determined on the morning of the first day of your program.

Examples: Soto Windmaster, MSR Windburner

- Buy
- Own
- Rent

Pots

Bring 1 pot.

- Early Season: Bring a bigger pot for melting snow, 1.5L to 2L
- Mid/Late Season: 0.5L to 1L

NOTE: If you have a complete stove system like the Jetboil or MSR Reactor and plan on eating out of your integrated pot, then you do not need to bring another pot.

- Buy
- Own

CAMPING CONTINUED

Utensils

Don't forget the official "most forgotten item" - The spoon or spork. Long-handled spoons make stirring hot liquids safer and metal ones tend not to break as easily in cold temps.

- Buy
 Own

Bowl

- Early Season: Bring a plastic bowl or mug, preferably with insulation
- Mid/Late Season: Bring a plastic bowl, insulation not necessary

NOTE: If you have a Jetboil or MSR Reactor type stove and plan on eating out of your integrated pot, then you don't need to bring a bowl. The same applies if you plan on using commercially packaged dehydrated or freeze-dried meals.

- Buy
 Own

Lighters

Bring 2. You will have the opportunity to buy them the morning of the course.

- Buy
 Own

Food

You are responsible for your own food for the duration of the course. Please consult our meal planning page.

- Buy
 Own

Hydration

A 3L capacity is recommended, though some people need more. A common approach is to bring a 2-3L bladder and a 1L hard-sided bottle. The bottle is important as a backup to the bladder if it gets punctured. A hard-sided bottle may also double as a mug for hot water, though not every bottle is designed to hold boiling water. Drinking tubes must also have a lock on the bite valve.

Examples: Nalgene 32oz bottle, Hydrapak Seeker 2-3L, MSR Dromedary 4-8L

- Buy
 Own

Water Purification

Water purification of some form is required. The popular tabs that our guides use, Aquatabs, are available at the Equipment Shop the morning of the course. Pills that take an hour or less to purify are recommended. Steripens are an acceptable alternative to purification tablets. It is strongly encouraged to use the brand Aquatabs, as they work the fastest and have the least amount of flavor once administered.

NOTE: Pumps can be damaged by silt in the glacial water and can easily freeze at night and crack. However, many of our guides are finding success using some of the integrated pump/bladders like the BeFree and Quickdraw

Examples: Aquatabs, Steripen, Katadyn BeFree, Platypus Quickdraw

- Buy
 Own

OTHER ESSENTIALS

Toothbrush and Toothpaste

Travel size recommended

- Buy
 Own

Hand Sanitizer and/or Wet Wipes

Required. Used after going to the bathroom and before eating. Wet wipes can be used for the "mountain shower."

- Buy
 Own

Alarm Clock

You will be responsible for waking up at certain times throughout the program. Be sure if you use your phone as an alarm that you have enough backup battery to accommodate for this. If you plan to use a watch, be sure your alarm is loud enough to work for you.

- Buy
 Own

ESSENTIALS CONTINUED

Toilet Paper

The provided solid waste bags have a small amount of toilet paper with them, but most people do not find this to be adequate. Estimate how much you'll need for a program of this length and place that in a plastic zip-lock bag. An extra zip lock bag can be helpful for pack-out of used paper.

- Buy
 Own

Pee Cloth (Optional)

A reusable, antimicrobial pee cloth, used in the place of toilet paper or wet wipes.

Example: Kula Cloth

- Buy
 Own

Urination Device (Optional)

Pee funnels such as the GoGirl or Freshette.

- Buy
 Own

Menstrual Cup (optional)

There are many things to consider about backcountry menstruation. [Click here for more info](#)

Example : Diva cup, Saalt, Lunette

- Buy
 Own

Sunscreen

At least an SPF of 30+, zinc-based is preferred. Small travel-size tubes are recommended so you can put them in a close-by pocket for easy access.

Examples: ZBlok 45, 2oz containers are a nice size.

- Buy
 Own

Lip Balm

Make sure it is SPF Rated.

Example: Blistex Gold Five Star Protection SPF 30

- Buy
 Own

Personal First Aid Kit

- Band aids
- Blister Treatment
- Prescription Drugs
- Ibuprofen, etc
- If you wear contacts, make sure you have spares if you can't see without them

- Buy
 Own

Repair Kit

- Inflatable sleeping pad patch kit
- Duct tape (can be wrapped around trekking pole or water bottle. Gorilla Tape tends to be the best brand for the mountains).
- Zip ties
- 6-10ft of 3mm accessory cord
- 2 trash bags that are big enough to line the inside of your pack with

- Buy
 Own

OTHER OPTIONAL ITEMS

These items are not required, although many are nice "luxury" items that can make your expedition more enjoyable. Remember that a few ounces here and there add up to extra pounds on your back and knees during your expedition.

Entertainment

Books, games, cards, music player, kindle, etc. For evenings or rainy days in the tent.

- Buy
 Own

OTHER ITEMS CONTINUED

Pee Bottle

Used at night or when the weather is poor so you don't have to get out of your tent. A 32oz or larger capacity is strongly recommended. Many guides use a bladder instead of a bottle to increase capacity.

Example: Hydrapak Seeker 2L, Collapsible 48oz Nalgene

- Buy
 Own

Portable Charging Device

Phone charger, battery pack, or solar panel. You are responsible for your alarm clock each morning. If you are going to use your phone, be sure you have enough power to accommodate this.

NOTE: Solar panels should only be used to charge battery packs. Battery packs should be used to charge devices. Inappropriate use of a solar charger could lead to the depletion of a device's power.

- Buy
 Own

Ear Plugs

For defense against snoring and high winds.

- Buy
 Own

Insect Repellent

Biting insects such as mosquitoes and blackflies can be prevalent during different times of the season depending on conditions and location. This is a nice item to have just in case.

Sometimes even a headnet is a nice item to have.

- Buy
 Own

Camera

Phone cameras or small point-and-shoot cameras are preferred. SLR cameras are not recommended due to their size and bulk.

- Buy
 Own

Car Charger

Consider bringing an extra battery pack as well, having a lot of people using car charger cables is difficult.

- Buy
 Own