



2023 Basic Alpine Climbing Course Student Handbook

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Fred Beckey,
photograph in
High Adventure,
by Ira Spring, 1951

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Course Schedule

Large Group Instruction & Evaluations (December - May)		
Date*	Lecture/Field Trip	Req/Optional
Dec 4	Lecture 0 - Meet and Greet (PC)	Optional
Jan 6	Lecture 1 - Intro to rock (Zoom)	Optional
Jan 9 & 13	FT #1 - Belay / Lower (PC)	Optional
Jan 24 & 26	FT #2 - Anchors, Rappel intro (PC)	Optional
Feb 19 & 25	FT #3 - Rappel, Belay, Climbing, Anchors (PC)	Required
Mar 2	Lecture #2 - Alpine Rock (Zoom)	Optional
Mar 26 & Apr 1	FT #4 - Rock evaluations (PC)	Required
Apr 5	Lecture #3 - Snow Travel, Crevasse rescue (Zoom)	Optional
Apr 25 & 27	FT #5 - Crevasse rescue practice (Magnuson Park)	Optional
Apr 30 & May 6	FT #6 - Snow travel, snow anchors (Snoqualmie Pass)	Required
May 11	Lecture #4 - Glacier travel, climbing team (Zoom)	Optional
May 23 & 25	FT #7 - Crevasse rescue evaluation (Magnuson Park)	Required

* if more than 1 date/session scheduled, students attend 1 only

SIG Instruction, Practice & Evaluations (Jan. – May)		
Date	Activity	Req/Optional
Scheduled by SIG	Skills practice at PC (select Monday evenings)	TBD*
	Conditioners & SIG outings	TBD*
	Fitness evaluation	Required
	Prusiking skill check	Required
	SIG Rock FT (full day)	Required
	SIG Snow FT (overnight)	Required

*at discretion of SIG leaders

All Required Large Group and SIG FTs, Evaluations, and Skill Checks must be successfully completed before going on club climbs

Introduction

Welcome to the Seattle Basic Alpine Climbing Course! The course is a combination of classroom and field instruction to equip you with the skills and experience required to safely participate in Basic Rock and Glacier climbs in the Pacific Northwest. Once you graduate, you are eligible to participate in Basic Club climbs, Alpine scrambles, and Winter snowshoe trips. You are also eligible to apply for the Intermediate climbing course and more specialized climbing courses.

To be successful and have fun, consider these comments from Gunnar K., an active Mountaineers volunteer, leader, and Basic graduate:

1. **Don't be afraid to ask questions or for help.** Your instructors want you to succeed!
2. **Get in the best shape you can.** Being in the mountains is safer and much more fun when you're not struggling to breathe while carrying a heavy pack over uneven terrain. Knowing you have the reserves to move faster in terrain that sees rockfall keeps everyone safer. Consider planning regular weighted hikes with your peers, or doing laps on some of Seattle's steep hills.
3. **We are a volunteer-run club, not a guide service.** See something you want to make better? Offer to help and fix it. Wish you had better guidance on something? Get help figuring it out and write up something you can share with your peers (and future students)!
4. **Completing Basic successfully will take more time than you think it will.** You may look at the schedule and plan around it, but there will be all those extra practice nights, SIG events, supporting courses, more conditioners, etc. Set realistic expectations at home. You will be gone. A lot. Maybe even most weekends and some weekday evenings.
5. **Climbs will get canceled or turned around.** Weather changes. Forest fires happen. Unexpected circumstances take place. There's nothing you can do to change that. Accept it and move on. Learn what you can, and get on another waitlist.
6. **Check and pack the day before.** No matter how exhausted, hungry, stressed or tired you are. Make a packing list and adjust it through the season. Trying to find your headlamp at 2:45 am so you can arrive timely at some Park & Ride at 3:30 am is no fun.
7. **You will get out of this course what you put into it.** If you do the minimum (attend the required field trips and pass the evaluations), you will finish the course, but you likely won't be ready to have fun in the mountains. Attending the optional skills nights, devoting time to training hikes, and arranging to go to climbing gyms with your peers are great ways to more fully prepare for your summer summits. And if you have specific climbs in mind, you are encouraged to apply for the permits yourself and then find a leader for the trip. This is also the best way to meet new climbing partners for future adventures beyond the course!

COVID-19 guidelines

The Basic Alpine Climbing Course follows COVID-19 guidelines from the Mountaineers, which follow federal and local guidelines. Please read up on these guidelines that are updated as the changing situation requires.

[COVID-19 Response — The Mountaineers](#)

Cancellation policy

Participation in the Course can be canceled with a refund until December 10th, a week after the Meet and Greet (Lecture 0).

For general cancellation policies of the Mountaineers, please see here:

[Cancellation & Refund Policy — The Mountaineers](#)

Graduation Requirements

To prepare yourself to get on climbs:

1. Attend all class meetings.
 - Five class meetings/lectures, most of which are virtual.
 - Seven field trips, three of which are optional, four are mandatory.
Two field trips are evaluations with a Pass/Fail outcome
 - Two SIG Field trips - Rock and Snow Overnight Scrambling (mandatory).
2. Membership in a small instructional group (SIG) with its own meetings, outings, and practice sessions. Your SIG leaders will be your direct mentors and your first point of contact. SIGs will have different schedules for practice nights, conditioners, and outings; SIG will differ in style, focus, intensity etc. SIG leaders put a great effort into running their SIGs. If your SIG does not work out at all for you, please check in with the Course leads.
3. Passing the fitness test is a prerequisite to getting on climbs. Some climbs require more than passing this conditioning evaluation; please consult with your SIG leader and develop a plan to be fit and successful on climbs.

To graduate from the course:

1. Complete at least one Basic Rock climb and at least one Basic Glacier climb in a safe and competent manner. Basic Alpine climbs do not count for graduation purposes.
2. Possess a valid Mountaineers Wilderness First Aid certification when you apply to graduate.
If you have taken the Wilderness First Aid or Responder course outside of the Mountaineers, please reach out to the First Aid Committee with your certificate to be granted a badge.
3. Possess a valid Mountaineers Wilderness Navigation certification when you apply to graduate.
For those who have abundant navigation experience, please reach out to the Navigation Committee to see if you are eligible for their equivalency process. Typically, this involves helping at the workshops and field trips so you can be evaluated for the necessary skills. At these workshops and field trips, you will be paired with a senior instructor.
4. Possess the Low Impact Recreation badge ([eLearning course](#)).
5. Perform a qualifying stewardship service activity (see below).
6. Complete and submit a graduation application – ([link under Course Materials](#)).

Class Meetings/Lectures

Class meetings will feature speakers and presentations on a variety of climbing-related topics. The Meet & Greet at the Program Center will include a Course overview. All other lectures will be virtual. Please consult the course listing on the website for details including dates and required reading assignments.

- Lecture #0 - Meet & Greet, Course Introduction
- Lecture #1 - Intro to Rock
- Lecture #2 - Alpine Rock
- Lecture #3 - Snow Travel, Avalanche Awareness
- Lecture #4 - Glacier travel, trip planning and climbing team

Students are encouraged to attend these lectures as there is quite a good amount of content covered in preparation to be a better climber. The slides of lectures will be available online, see [Course Materials](#). We will try to record the lectures and make them available on-line.

Field Trips

There are usually options for several different dates for each of the field trips. You must successfully complete each field trip before progressing to the next. Field trips with an evaluation component have a Pass/Fail outcome.

- FT #1: Top-rope Belay & Lowering. Optional, evening at the Program Center. Students who have a belay card from a local climbing gym can skip this field trip.
- FT #2: Anchors and Introduction to Rappel. Optional, evening at the Program Center.
- FT #3: Rappel, Belays, Belay Escape. Mandatory, full day at the Program Center.
- FT #4: Rock Skills Evaluation. Mandatory, half day at the Program Center.
- FT #5: Introduction to Crevasse Rescue. Optional, evening at Magnuson Park.
- FT #6: Snow Travel - Ice axe and Crampons & Snow Anchors. Mandatory, full day at Snoqualmie Pass.
- FT #7: Crevasse Rescue Evaluation. Mandatory, evening at Magnuson Park.

Some tips for the Field Trips:

- If you have schedule constraints that limit your choices, register early while all the dates still have openings.
- Register for only one session at a time. You may register on the waitlist for another session you prefer, but please cancel your original registration immediately if you get in.
- If you will be late or must cancel due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, email, text, or call the Field Trip Leader. Contact info is in the website activity listing.
- Prepare for field trips like you would for a climb and be on time.
- Treat instructors and students with respect. If you feel that you are not being treated well or taught appropriately, please see the Station Leader or Field Trip Leader.
- If you observe something that you believe is unsafe, immediately bring it to the attention of the nearest Instructor.
- Bring food and water; these will be long days. Often there will be no official meal breaks, and you will have to eat and drink between activities.
- Come prepared. Make sure you have the appropriate climbing equipment in time for every field trip. When in doubt about things like footwear (rock shoes or mountaineer boots, say) bring both.

SIG Field Trips

These trips are either already scheduled and posted on the course page by your Small Instructional Group (SIG) leader or will be coordinated soon with you. The leaders will organize only one trip. It is required by the student to attend these trips to be successful and graduate from the course. If you are not able to make it to your SIG's field trip, please be vocal and reach out to other SIG leaders who may have a spot for you on their trips.

- FT SIG Rock: Rock Climbing, Belay, Rappel, Anchors, Multi-pitch practicing
- FT SIG Snow Overnight: Snow Anchors & Belays, Crevasse Rescue, Snow Camping, Roped Travel, Alpine start with a scrambling objective, if weather permits.

Basic Experience Climbs

After attending all class meetings and successfully completing all field trips and evaluations, you may sign up for basic experience climbs and begin applying your skills. There are three categories of basic climbs: Rock, Glacier, and Alpine. Basic Alpine climbs typically include sections of both rock and snow climbing but without sustained roped climbing in either. To graduate, you must complete two climbing trips in a satisfactory manner: one Rock and one Glacier climb. Alpine trips are well worth the time, but because they typically do not involve extended glacier travel or multi-pitch rock climbing, they do not count toward graduation.

Take note: *Every* climb (alpine or not) and every scramble you complete will strengthen your application for Intermediate climbing, if that is your ultimate goal.

Many students find that they have to sign up for several trips (and waitlists) before achieving a successful summit. Climbs are very weather-dependent, and early season climbs especially (before July) are often canceled due to weather or unfavorable conditions. It might also look like all climbs are full – so sign up for the waitlists! Sometimes, the rosters change a lot. A few days before the climb, email the leader(s) to let them know that you could be packed ready to go at the last minute – and then go if the opportunity arises!

Mountaineers Wilderness First Aid

A current backcountry First Aid certification is required for graduation. The easiest way and what most students do is to take Wilderness First Aid (WFA) through the Mountaineers. The course consists of a weekend Wilderness First Aid course and an evening session with practical Scenarios. See more on the [Mountaineers First Aid webpage](#). Sessions are offered throughout the year but space is limited. Students who wait until mid-season often find they cannot get into a WFA session before October graduation. Get your first aid certification ASAP. It is possible to obtain training from outside providers. Please check in with the First Aid committee, see [here](#) for equivalency.

Other more advanced certifications may also satisfy the first aid requirement - [Wilderness First Responder \(WFR\)](#), Wilderness EMT (WEMT), and Remote Medicine for Advanced Practitioners (RMAP) are accepted. You will need to supply a copy of a valid and current certification; additionally, you may need to complete a Wilderness First Aid evening Scenario session (at no cost) to receive the Wilderness First Aid badge. But, do not wait until the last minute to ask, in case your certification does not satisfy our requirements!

Front-country medical certifications do not provide sufficient training to handle remote medical emergencies. Basic CPR, Red Cross First Aid, training as an M.D. or R.N. or equivalent do not meet the graduation requirement.

Mountaineers Wilderness Navigation

Navigation using a map, compass, and GPS is a critical mountaineering skill. You must have a navigation badge before graduation which you get by taking the [Mountaineers navigation course](#). The course includes two online components, one evening workshop, and one full-day field trip. Navigation badges are valid for three years, so if you already have a current one for instance as part of the Alpine scramble or Snowshoe courses recently, you do not need to repeat the navigation course. Check that your badge has not expired when you apply for graduation.

Stewardship

The Mountaineers is Northwest's largest outdoor activity club. We have a great impact on the wilderness environment we love and use, and we want it to be a positive one. As Mountaineers, it is important that we become stewards of the wilderness. This means using "Leave No Trace" travel and camping techniques and actively contributing our labor to environmental projects.

Toward this end, Basic Climbing students complete a day of volunteer stewardship as a graduation requirement. The definition is rather broad, so you may choose an activity that appeals to your interests and fits your schedule. Usually, it is one day of volunteer physical labor, and preferably it will relate to places used by The Mountaineers. Typical activities are trail work, habitat restoration, tree planting, or invasive species removal. Other types of activities may be accepted. If you have a project in mind and your SIG leader is unsure if it qualifies, please contact basic.climbing@gmail.com.

You can find stewardship activities here: <https://www.mountaineers.org/conservation/stewardship>

Or contact the following organizations directly:

- Washington Trails Association: www.wta.org
- EarthCorps: www.earthcorps.org
- Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust: www.mtsgreenway.org
- Washington Climbers coalition: <https://washingtonclimbers.org/>
- Washington Wilderness Coalition: www.wawild.org

Low Impact Recreation

You can earn the Low Impact Recreation badge by watching short videos created by the Mountaineers and taking an online quiz. The course addresses topics such as camping on durable surfaces, management of human waste in different outdoor environments, on- and off-trail etiquette, food management including food storage techniques, avoiding micro trash, and not feeding wildlife.

[Link to the course](#)

Graduation Checklist

- FT #3 - Rappel, Belay, Climbing, Anchors
- FT #4 - Rock evaluations
- SIG Rock FT
- FT #6 - Snow travel, snow anchors
- SIG Snow FT
- FT #7 - Crevasse rescue evaluation
- Fitness evaluation
- Prusiking skill check
- Basic rock climb
- Basic glacier climb
- Wilderness Navigation Course
- Wilderness First Aid Course
- Stewardship
- Low Impact Recreation

Graduation

Submit your graduation application as soon as you have completed all of the graduation requirements. The graduation ceremony, our annual Climbers Reunion, is typically scheduled in late October or early November. File your application by mid-October to ensure that you are recognized at the ceremony – it's a fun event and you will want to be upfront celebrating with your classmates!

[Link to the application form](#)

The Basic Alpine Climbing badge will give you access to other courses that the Mountaineers offer such as Intermediate Alpine climbing modules that include rock, glacier, ice climbing and self rescue; note that other requirements might apply for specific courses. For more information consult the [Seattle Intermediate Climbing page](#).

Pending/Conditional Graduation

If you have completed all graduation requirements except Wilderness First Aid, Navigation, and/or Stewardship, go ahead and apply for graduation, but note which of the three requirements you lack. You will be graduated conditional upon completion of those missing requirements, and you will be recognized at the Climbers Reunion. However, you may not participate in club activities requiring Basic graduate status until all requirements are satisfied. Pending graduates have seven months to complete everything.

Extensions: Second Year Status

Basic Alpine Climbing is intended to be a one-year course but can be completed in two years if circumstances require, for instance you got sick or injured, life circumstances etc. Extension requests should be submitted via the graduation form. Your application should state how far you have progressed in the Basic Course and why you could not finish this year. Specifically:

- How many of the field trips did you successfully complete?
- If you summited any basic climbs, give the peak name, date, and leader's name for each.
- Have you completed first aid, navigation, and stewardship?
- What circumstances kept you from completing the course?

You may apply for an extension at any time when you realize you will be unable to finish the course, but the deadline is November 1st. We do not allow extensions beyond the second year. If you do get extended, you must complete Wilderness First Aid within seven months of the normal graduation date for your class.

Physical conditioning

You need not be a competitive athlete or marathon runner to succeed in this course, but being in your personal best shape will increase your chance for success and will maximize your enjoyment in the alpine. A climber in poor condition may slow the party enough to prevent ever reaching the summit, or even jeopardize party safety. Inadequate conditioning also can contribute to a loss of alertness and an inability to respond properly to the demands of the environment.

You will learn far more during the climbs and field trips if you can focus your attention on mastering technical skills taught in the course, rather than worrying about catching your breath. **Expect to carry a 30-pound pack and cover 10 miles while gaining 4,000 feet of elevation on day trips or a 40-pound pack and cover six miles per day, while gaining 3,000 feet on overnight trips.**

You are required to pass a conditioning evaluation by the last scheduled field trip in late May to be eligible to go out on climbs. **Climbing Conditioning Benchmark: At a minimum, be able to hike with a full day pack (20% of body weight but no less than 25 pounds and no more than 50 pounds) up the Mt. Si trail to the boulders (4 miles, 3400' gain) in under 2h.** *If you want to go on more strenuous climbs, two consecutive hikes of Mt. Si or equivalent in one day are a good measure for your fitness. Having completed such a hike will be a great perk when you apply for a strenuous trip.*

The best conditioning for alpine climbing is hiking uphill with a loaded backpack. At least twice a month (working up to every week if possible), do hikes with significant elevation gain. Gradually increase the amount of weight you carry in your pack, working up to at least your expected overnight pack weight. Helpful hint: load your pack with jugs of water - one gallon weighs 8 pounds, and it doesn't have to be carried on the way down. This should be part of a more rounded conditioning program.

If you would like more info on building an appropriate training plan, talk to your SIG leader, work with a personal trainer who specializes in mountain sports (Seattle has many), and check resources from [Uphill Athlete](#) and other books and websites.

Required Equipment Matrix

Refer to this document to learn more about the technical gear required on climbs: [Gearing up for Basic Alpine Climbing Course](#).

A comprehensive list can be found here for your reference: [Typical Gear on a climb](#)

Seminars & Clinics

The Climbing Committee also offers seminars and clinics that are not part of the Basic Course but may be valuable adjuncts to your alpine education. Watch for them on mountaineers.org and the Climbing Highlights e-newsletter which all Basic students receive. Some of such seminars and clinics include:

- Beta & Brews: This seminar provides beta on some alpine climbs in the Washington Cascades. These are scheduled once a month in Fall/Winter/Spring months.
- Leader Development Series: There are numerous seminars that engage students and leaders to develop soft skills that help us all on trips. This helps those who have an inclination to instruct at trips or plan to be a leader one day whether it is a private trip or for The Mountaineers.
- Basic Refresher Clinics: These clinics offer a great refresher session where past year Basic graduates can get together and practice some skills that they could be a little rusty on before going out on climbs.

The Climbing Code

Participants on all Mountaineers sponsored climbs must adhere to the climbing code ([link](#))

- A climbing party of three is the minimum unless adequate prearranged support is available. On crevassed glaciers, two rope teams are recommended.
- Carry the necessary clothing, food, and equipment.
- Rope up on all exposed places and for all glacier travel. Anchor all belays.
- Keep the party together, and obey the leader or majority rule.
- Never climb beyond your ability and knowledge.
- Never let judgment be overruled by desire when choosing the route or turning back.
- Leave the trip schedule with a responsible person.
- Follow the precepts of sound mountaineering as set forth in textbooks of recognized merit.
- Behave at all times in a manner that will reflect favorably upon mountaineering and The Mountaineers.

Club Standards

All members of The Mountaineers, in order to attain the club's purposes—to explore, study, preserve and enjoy the natural beauty of Northwest America—in the spirit of good fellowship shall subscribe to the following ([link](#)):

- To exercise personal responsibility and to conduct themselves on club activities and premises in a manner that will not impair the safety of the party, or prevent the collective participation and enjoyment of others.
- Private property must be respected.
- The use of alcohol and other drugs or medications, when incompatible with The Mountaineers activities because of their effects on ability and judgment, is prohibited when such use would affect the safety of the party or impair the collective participation and enjoyment of others.
- To enter the outdoors as a visitor, leaving behind no debris, environmental scars, or other indications of their visit, which would reduce the enjoyment of those who follow.
- Pets, firearms, or any other items which will impair the safety or enjoyment of others shall not be brought on The Mountaineers premises or taken on club activities.
- To obey those specific regulations imposed by the Board of Trustees, Branches, and Divisions of The Mountaineers, which are necessary to implement the above.
- To minimize the environmental impact on the outdoors by using campfires only in properly designated areas and extinguishing them completely after use; conducting human sanitation and washing away from watercourses, and carrying out all solid waste.

Members of The Mountaineers who deviate from this philosophy and from the specific club regulations may be subject to disciplinary procedures of the club, including expulsion.