



# 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 7	Lecture 0 - Meet and Greet (PC)	Optional
Jan 8	Lecture 1 - Intro to Rock (Zoom)	Optional
Jan 13 & 16	FT #1 - Belay / Lower (PC)	Optional
Jan 27 & 30	FT #2 - Intro to Anchors and Rappelling (PC)	Optional
Feb 14 & 22	FT #3 - Rappels, Belays, Climbing, Anchors (PC)	Required
Mar 4	Lecture #2 - Alpine Rock (Zoom)	Optional
Mar 15 & Apr 11	FT #4 - Rock evaluations (PC)	Required
Apr 2	Lecture #3 - Snow Travel, Crevasse rescue (Zoom)	Optional
Apr 21 & 23	FT #5 - Crevasse Rescue Demo & Practice (Magnuson Park)	Optional
Apr 26 & May 2	FT #6 - Snow Travel, Snow Anchors (Snoqualmie Pass)	Required
May 6	Lecture #4 - Glacier travel, climbing team (Zoom)	Optional
May 12 & 14	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 ( Monday evenings Jan to May )	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 as a follower in Basic Rock and Glacier climbs in the Pacific Northwest. Once you graduate, you are eligible to participate as a follower in Basic Club climbs, Alpine scrambles, and Winter snowshoe trips. You are also eligible to apply for the Intermediate climbing modules 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!

## Cancellation policy

Participation in the Course can be canceled with a refund until December 14th, a week after the Meet and Greet (Lecture 0). No refunds will be issued after December 14th.

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

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

## Graduation Requirements

To qualify to get on climbs, the following requirements have to be met:

1. Attend all class meetings.
  - Seven field trips, three of which are optional, four are mandatory.  
Two of the mandatory field trips are evaluations with a Pass/Fail outcome
  - Two SIG Field trips - Rock trip and Snow Overnight Scrambling trip (both mandatory).
  - The lectures are virtual. Attendance is not required for graduation. However, you need to be familiar with the content that is covered. We aim to record and publish lectures in case you cannot join live.
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 [info@mountaineers.org](mailto:info@mountaineers.org) 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 (on-line, 30min [eLearning course](#)).
5. Perform a qualifying stewardship service activity (equaling 6 hours - see below).
6. Complete and submit a graduation application – ([link](#), also see [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 plan on recording the lectures and making them available on-line.

## Field Trips

There are usually options for two different dates for each of the field trips, please only sign up for one event from each set. Field trips with an evaluation component have a Pass/Fail outcome.

- FT #1: Top-rope Belay & Lowering. Optional, evening at the Program Center.  
Optional; 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, morning and afternoon option.
- 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 for each set of field trips. You may register on the waitlist for another session you prefer, but please cancel your original registration once 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. Field trips will happen rain or shine, please be prepared.
- 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 likely 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 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 conditions permit.

## Basic Experience Climbs

After attending all class meetings and successfully completing all field trips and evaluations (and the fitness evaluation below), you may sign up for basic experience climbs and begin applying your skills. The following requirements need to be met before your first climb or by June 1st, whichever comes first. If these requirements are not met, your student badge will be temporarily expired:

- Participation in all mandatory Field trips, see page 3, including SIG Rock and SIG Snow FT. In certain circumstances, significant experience can count as equivalency for the SIG field trips.
- Successful Rock and Crevasse rescue evaluation.
- Successful Mt. Si conditioning test.
- Checked off for prusiking.

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. However, 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 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. In late season, glacier routes might become impassable or wildfires impact routes. It might also look like most climbs are full. Sign up for the waitlists. Sometimes, the roster of a trip changes 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 most straightforward way is the Wilderness First Aid (WFA) course through the Mountaineers. The course consists of a weekend-long 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. Note the rolling enrollment timelines. Navigation badges are valid for three years; 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 the 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](mailto: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](http://www.wta.org)
- Washington Climbers coalition: <https://washingtonclimbers.org/>
- Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust: [www.mtsgreenway.org](http://www.mtsgreenway.org)
- Washington Wilderness Coalition: [www.wawild.org](http://www.wawild.org)
- EarthCorps: [www.earthcorps.org](http://www.earthcorps.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 celebrate 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 have not done yet. 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 sickness, injury or life circumstances etc.

There are typically two options:

- If you had to stop before completing all of the field trips, you can start over again in the following year at no additional cost.
- If you have completed all of the field trips, however, could not complete both climbs, you can apply for 'Second Year Status'. See Note below.

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 completed 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.

### Note:

Starting in 2024, everyone who extends into a second year will have to meet the following three requirements during the second year. With this we make sure that perishable skills are up-do-date.

- a) Pass the Rock evaluation again (FT #4);
- b) Join the Snow travel field trip #6 at Snoqualmie pass;
- c) Pass the Mt. Si conditioning test.

## 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.

If you can focus your attention on mastering technical skills taught in the course, rather than worrying about catching your breath, you will learn far more during the climbs and field trips. On an Alpine climb **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. Go on hikes with significant elevation gain at least twice a month, working up to every week if possible. Gradually increase distance, elevation gain and the amount of weight you carry in your pack, working up to your expected overnight pack weight. This should be part of a more rounded conditioning program. Note: there is no additional conditioning reward for carrying the weight downhill - just additional stress on knees. Many people carry water jugs up the trail, and water the vegetation at the top.

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 in Fall/Winter/Spring months.
- 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.
- 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.

## Club standards

The Mountaineers have agreed on [Member Code of Ethics](#) and [Standards of Participant Conduct](#)

**The Mountaineers is a member-based organization. When engaged in Mountaineers activities or visiting Mountaineers facilities, it is expected that Members:**

- Act ethically and respectfully to contribute to a safe and engaging learning environment;
- Engage with all other members with integrity and honesty;
- Follow Mountaineers policies, including behavioral policies and procedures, such as the Member Code of Ethics and Problem Behavior policies;
- Treat people with dignity, respect and compassion to foster a trusting environment free of harassment, intimidation, and unlawful discrimination;
- Will raise any safety concerns as they arise to ensure a safe environment for all;
- Not harass, bully, threaten or discriminate against any member through any means.

**The Mountaineers is a heavily volunteer-driven organization and most leaders are volunteers. It is expected that leaders, in any capacity:**

- Have the necessary skills and experience to competently manage the risks associated with activities they lead and/or instruct for both themselves and others;
- Act for the benefit of The Mountaineers and furthering the mission and goals of the organization;
- If relevant, share any conflicts of interests, real or apparent, that may compromise objectivity when representing The Mountaineers during any activities like volunteer selections or investigations;
- Promote relationships based on mutual respect, fairness and openness;
- Not use a position of authority within the organization for inappropriate coercion of another individual;
- Ensure fair and inclusive hiring, promotions, or appointments for all positions, including of volunteers;
- Complete incident reporting accurately, honestly, and promptly;
- Enhance course & activity capacity while supporting programs.