



Winter Mountaineering Skills

Climbing Sierra peaks in the summer months is usually a warm, casual experience but ascending the same peak during winter can be a totally different proposition. Snow, cold temperatures, wind, short days, and avalanche hazard conspire to make a more serious and difficult climb.

For this program we have selected Mt. Morrison, located above Convict Lake, between Mammoth and Bishop. At 12,268 feet Morrison dominates the skyline as one drives Highway 395 to Mammoth. It's steep North Face and Buttress has been described as the "Eiger of the Sierra" but we will avoid the rotten rock of these routes ascending the easier, but challenging, south-east ridge.

Itinerary

Day 1; We will spend the first day working on rope techniques and on snowskills and getting used to climbing snowed up rock in heavy boots and making sure that everyone is up to speed on the basics before we head into the mountains. We will also cover the basics of avalanche beacon use and rescue.

Day 2; A day of ice climbing at June Lake. While we probably will not be climbing anything this steep this gives you the confidence to tackle the less steep snow and ice we might encounter on the ascent

Day 3; We approach our camp from the Convict Lake trailhead and after climbing steeply up over the huge old lateral moraine enter Tobacco Flat with wide open slopes and head up to our camp at about 9900 feet alongside a small, unnamed frozen lake. Here we hope to have sufficient snow depth to dig a snow cave to provide a snug wind free new experience.

Day 4; We ascend a bowl that leads to a spectacular overlook of the North Face of Morrison and then wind our way up mixed rock and snow slopes to the summit and descend the same way.

We return to camp and then to the trailhead and the vehicles on the last day.

Meeting place and time

We will meet the first day at 7.30 a.m. at Tom's Place on the west side of Highway 395 halfway between Mammoth and Bishop. We will meet for breakfast and an equipment check. From here we will head to our snow site for the first day of instruction. For the nights of day one and two you can camp but we find most people prefer to use a Mammoth or Bishop hotel/motel or better for acclimatization, use the relative comfort of Tom's Place. We can assist in making reservations for you if you wish.

Dates, Prices and Inclusions

Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site for dates and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or cancelling. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary climbing group gear, avalanche beacons, tents, kitchen gear and dinners, lunches and breakfasts while in the mountains (you bring snack items).

For this trip we do split our time between front country and backcountry with some time spent in town. We do not include the following; hotel/motel on days one and two, meals on days one, two and morning of day 3. We do include meals while in the backcountry on day 3 and 4.

Other information

The SMC web site has photos, a map and more information.

Remember this is a winter trip! Trips in the mountains often do not stick to the plans we make in the comfort of home so be prepared for changes and be adaptable. Safety is our number one concern and we will be evaluating the avalanche hazard and making decisions accordingly. But always remember that on a winter trip the summit is not as sure a bet as it would be during summer...

The map for this area is the Convict Lake 7.5 minute USGS quadrangle. We highly recommend getting at least one day and night at altitude immediately prior to the trip and if coming up early suggest that you stay at Tom's Place or in Mammoth.

You can travel on skis or snowshoes for this trip. We have snowshoes available for rent and can coordinate ski rentals with Mammoth Mountaineering Supply.

Prerequisites

Basic climbing skills are useful, but not essential and we will review these prior to the start of the climbing. Prior winter climbing and camping experience is not necessary.

Equipment List for Winter Mountaineering

The following list is a general guide and will assist you in packing for the program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have specific questions regarding equipment and if you need assistance prior to making a purchase. The following list will vary according to the prevailing weather, and your individual requirements. Items on the list with an * may be rented from SMC.

Essentials

- Boots: A high quality mountaineering boot is essential to keeping your feet warm. We recommend a plastic boot such as an Asolo or Scarpa. Leather boots such as the Sportiva Nepal are also good, but leather is much more difficult to dry out should they get wet.
- On the snow transportation.* This can be snowshoes or skis. With skis you will need skins. With snowshoes bring ski poles. For telemark and alpine touring rentals call Wilson's East-side Sports (760) 873-7520 or Mammoth Mountaineering (760) 934-4191. We rent snowshoes.
- Poles.* Telescoping probe type are best.
- Ice axe.* A general purpose mountaineering axe of 70cm or so.
- Crampons.* These must be compatible with your boots. A step in type is a lot easier to manipulate in cold conditions.
- Harness.* A step-in type works best such as a Black Diamond Alpine Bod.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.*
- A belay/rappel device of some type.
- Internal frame backpack of about 4000 cubic inches. We like the Gregory Makalu.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about -10°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and or Ridgerest. A 3/4 Thermarest on a Ridgerest makes a good combination. Bring a repair kit along with a Thermarest in case of holes.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks
- Gaiters. These should fit snugly over the top of the boots.
- Long underwear top and bottom. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable.
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene.
- Warm shirt. Expedition Capilene or light Synchilla.
- Another fuzzy sweater top of some sort.
- Pile jacket. The Windstopper fabric works well and is not too bulky.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice. This is optional & can replace the previous item.
- Good quality rain/wind pants and rain jacket. Must be water proof and jacket must have a hood. Do not skimp on your rain gear.
- Warm hat that covers the ears.
- Visor hat (for sun).
- Mid to heavyweight capilene or Windstopper gloves.

- Shell gloves or mittens.

Etc.

- Sunglasses, high quality with keeper leash. The type with side shields are recommended. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair.
- Ear plugs for noisy tents.
- Personal kit; tooth brush, etc.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen. A 1 oz. bottle will be sufficient.
- Two 1-quart plastic water bottles with insulating jackets
- A pee bottle is far more pleasant than getting out of the tent in the middle of the night. Mark it well though to avoid confusion!!
- Personal first aid kit, foot care, and any required medications. We will have a large group medical kit; go light on your own kit. Bring plenty of blister treatment items.
- Headlamp with extra batteries and bulb.
- Camera, film and spare batteries.
- Eating utensils. Bowl, cup, fork and spoon.
- A Swiss Army type knife.

Food

- We will provide backcountry meals including breakfast, dinner and lunch but bring some snack items like cliff bars, power bars, gorp concoctions. For the front country days you will need to provide main meals and day snacks. A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

Group gear that will be provided and divided amongst the group prior to starting the trip

- One shovel for each person
- Avalanche transceiver for each person
- One probe per two people
- First aid kit
- Ski repair kit
- Food.
- Tents.
- Cooking equipment.

You specifically don't need

- ⊗ Cell phones. They rarely work anyway.
- ⊗ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- ⊗ Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- ⊗ Items that are not on this list.