Winter Mountaineering

Trip Notes
Winter Mountaineering

Climbing Sierra peaks in the summer months is usually a warm, pleasant ‘Range of Light” 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 our peak ascent we have selected Crystal Crag, located high above the Lakes Basin near Mammoth. The peak, while of moderate elevation, gives the opportunity to put our skills to use on a real peak in a winter setting.

Itinerary
Day 1: We will spend the first day working on rope techniques and snow skills, getting used to climbing snowy rock in big 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 or Lee Vining. While we probably will not be climbing anything this steep on Crystal Crag this day gives you the confidence to take on the less steep snow and ice we might encounter on our ascent.

Day 3: We approach our camp from the Lakes Basin trailhead just out of Mammoth. We start out on a groomed ski trail for several miles and then head to camp near Crystal Crag. Our distance to camp is 3.5 miles with 1,200 feet of gain and 200 feet of loss. We dig a solid camp protected from the weather and get into the details of camp life that can make any winter trip enjoyable.

Day 4: Carefully assessing and discussing the avalanche danger, we make our way to the col at the base of the West Ridge. From here we connect snow ramps, short rock steps along the ridge crest, moving together or in pitches until we gain the summit.

Meeting place and time
Our meeting place the first day will be dependent on conditions at the time; the office will contact you with details prior to the trip. We will meet somewhere in the Bishop/Mammoth area. For the nights of day one and two you can camp but we find most people prefer to use a hotel/motel. We can recommend accommodations based on where most course days will be taking place.

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 canceling. 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 and your favorite hot drinks).

For this trip we 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. On Day 3 we include lunch and dinner; on Day 4 we include breakfast and lunch.

Other information
The SMC website has photos, a map and more information.

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. Remember that on a winter trip Sierra weather is not as predictable as it often is in summer and conditions may well dictate a change of plans. Be flexible.

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.

Prerequisites
Prior rock climbing experience will enhance your enjoyment of this course. At a minimum you should know how to tie into a rope and be familiar with belaying. If you are not familiar with these then spend an hour or two at a local gym to get up to speed. We will review belay skills prior to the start of the climbing and coach movement through out the program. Prior camping skills are required, but not necessarily in winter. You can travel on skis or snowshoes for this trip; most people however choose snowshoes. If traveling on skis, you need to be proficient; this is not a ski skills course. We have snowshoes available for rent and can coordinate ski rentals with Mammoth Mountaineering Supply.
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 or if you need assistance prior to making a purchase. The following list will vary according to your individual requirements. Items marked with an * are items that we rent or we can coordinate rentals with a local shop. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!**

**Climbing equipment**
- Boots**: A high quality mountaineering boot is essential for warm feet. We recommend a plastic boot such as an Asolo or Scarpa or a leather boot such as a Sportiva. We have rentals.
- On the snow transportation. This can be snowshoes or skis. With skis you will need skins. For telemark and alpine touring rentals call Eastside Sports (760) 873-7520 or Mammoth Mountain-ing (760) 934-4191. We rent snowshoes.
- Poles.** Telescoping probe type are best.
- Ice axe.** A general purpose axe appropriate to your height.
- Crampons.** These must be compatible with your boots.
- Harness.** We recommend an alpine style harness that is easy to put on with large boots and crampons.
- Helmet. Should be comfortable and lightweight. We provide these for the program if you do not have your own.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.**
- A lightweight belay/rappel device.**

**Other essentials**
- Internal frame backpack of 60-70 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about -10°F.

**Clothing**
- 2 pair synthetic or wool socks. Ski socks are great since they go above the boot cuff.
- Gaiters. Necessary only if pants don’t cover boot top. If there is a gap, snow will get in and your feet will be wet and cold.
- Long underwear top and bottom.
- Warm pants, to layer between base and waterproof layer, such as softshell fabric. Get a lined style if you tend to run colder.
- Another fuzzy sweater top, such as fleece or Polartec.
- Pile/fleece/softshell fabric jacket.
- 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. Don’t skimp on your rain gear.
- Warm hat that covers the ears.
- Visor hat (for sun).
- Neck gaiter.
- Lightweight windstopper-type gloves.
- Shell gloves or mittens.

**Etc.**
- Sun glasses. Good quality. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair in case of breakage.
- Water Bottles. Two quart (1 liter) wide mouth bottles. Hydration systems and hoses typically freeze, even with an insulation sleeve.
- 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!!
- Headlamp. With a spare set of batteries.
- Eating and drinking equipment. An insulated mug with a lid. This can double for a bowl. Fork and spoon.
- Pocket knife. Small Swiss army style, not a large Leatherman.
- Personal toiletries. Toothbrush and toothpaste. TP & a ziplock bag to carry out the used.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. 30+ SPF. A 1 oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Personal Medical Kit. The guide will carry a large kit so yours will predominately consist of foot repair items, mild pain killer such as Advil, and bandaids.
- Camera/phone camera. Small enough to fit in a pocket; please no giant cameras with multiple lenses.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping gear in outside the tent should it rain.
- Optional reading material, journal, Kindle, etc.
- Hand warmers if you tend to run cold.
- Goggles and a face mask are great if it becomes stormy.

**Food**
- On Day 3 we include lunch and dinner; on Day 4 we include breakfast and lunch. Bring your own snack items like cliff bars, power bars, or gorp concoctions for all days. Also bring your favorite hot drink (tea, hot chocolate, cider etc.) 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.

**Shared Equipment Provided by SMC**
- Shovels
- Avalanche transceivers
- Probes
- First aid kit
- Ski/snowshoe repair kit
- Food
- Tents
- Cooking equipment
- Group climbing equipment

**You specifically don’t need**
- Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- Items that are not on this list.

**Additional Thoughts**
- Some people, particularly women, tend to run colder than others. If this is the case add another layer or two, a warmer sleeping bag, warmer boots and extra handwarmers.
- Women – see our “Women on the Trail” information sheet at the Women’s Trips pages on the website.