



Snow Travel Skills

Trip Notes

Snow Travel Skills

The use of an ice axe and crampons is fundamental to not only the mountaineer, but also to anyone who wants to be able to move with comfort and safety in the mountains under any conditions. For the backcountry hiker, this course provides the skills needed to safely cross snowy passes and to deal with the mountain snowfields often found in the summer (especially after a heavy winter). Those mountaineers with ambitions of climbing the world's higher peaks will also gain confidence as we work through skills such as self-arrest, crampon technique, and belaying on snow.

Itinerary

After breakfast and finalizing logistics and equipment needs, we'll caravan or carpool to the day's location. Here any number of late season snow patches will be our classroom for the day, hopefully within five or ten minutes of the vehicles.

Since the snow is usually firm first thing in the morning we'll start with crampon skills including an overview of the various types of crampons and how to fit them to boots. A detailed progression including proper use of the ice axe for balance, step kicking, step cutting, and various techniques for ascending and descending snow slopes will take us through the morning.

The afternoon will be spent learning and practicing the important skill of self arrest: stopping a fall on snow with the ice axe. We'll round out the day by learning and practicing snow anchors and belays.

Meeting place and time

We have a number of places where we can conduct this course. Our goal is to use good snow with a minimal approach so we can focus on the skills. We will confirm the exact location with you before the course.

Our normal location is at Ellery Bowl off the Tioga Road and our default meeting place is as follows:

We'll meet in front of the Whoa Nellie Deli and Mobil Mart 7:30 a.m. the morning of the course. Be packed, breakfasted and ready to go. The Deli is about 200 yards west of the intersection of Tioga Pass-Yosemite Road Highway 120 and Highway 395 about 1/4 mile south of Lee Vining. Lee Vining is about an hour north of Bishop and forty five minutes north of Mammoth Lakes on highway 395. Driving time is about six and a half hours from Los Angeles. The Mobil Mart opens at 7:00 a.m. and you can get breakfast there. Opening date for the Mobil Mart varies year to year depending upon snow so we will confirm this with you via email and change it if necessary.

Dates and Prices

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 group climbing gear and helmet if you do not have one.

Prerequisites

No prior climbing experience but prior backpacking and wilderness travel beneficial. You should be fit and prepared to spend the day climbing up short slopes at altitude (likely above 8,000'), and sliding back down them, and climbing up them, and sliding down them.

Ratios

1 guide for 6 participants maximum, to ensure adequate instruction and coaching.

Notes and other information

SMC will provide helmets and group climbing gear. You need crampons, ice axe and a harness with carabiners and a belay device (which we rent if you need, contact us before the course). Food and lodging are not included in the course. We have mountaineering boots available for rental. Please refer to the equipment list for more information.

For background reading, we recommend the classic "Freedom of the Hills" written and published by The Mountaineers.

Acclimatization

We highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000) just prior to the trip. Though we are not hiking far, we will be constantly active during the day. Being acclimatized will help you feel better during the day, allowing you to learn and practice the skills more efficiently. Spending a night in Mammoth would do the trick or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead or campsite. There are campsites along Highway 120 on the way to Tioga Pass; check snow conditions and when they open before arriving. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

Equipment List for Snow Travel Skills

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 the time of year, and your individual requirements. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!** Items with a * can be rented from SMC.

Climbing equipment

- Boots*. Lightweight mountaineering or heavy duty hiking boots are needed. If you have any questions about your footwear contact us. We rent mountaineering boots.
- Trekking/ski poles.*
- 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, ATC style.*

Clothing

- 1 pair synthetic or wool socks. Ski socks are great since they go above the boot cuff of the mountaineering boot.
- 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. Your gloves may get wet and it is nice to have 2 different pairs (total) to change out.

Etc.

- Daypack. A pack of 25-35 L is plenty big enough.
- Sunglasses, high quality with keeper leash. Wrap-around or a type with side shields are recommended. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen. A 1oz. bottle will be sufficient.
- Two 1 L plastic water bottles.
- Thermos for a hot drink during the day.
- Camera/phone camera.
- Pencil and notebook for making notes, optional.
- Hand warmers if you tend to run cold.

Food

- Bring your own water, snacks and lunch for the day. We will be in the field, on the snow, all day