

## **Mt. Rainier: Winter Expedition Ascent**

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The Winter Expedition Ascent takes place in mid-winter: January and February. It is an opportunity to climb Rainier when conditions can be quite extreme, providing valuable experience in cold weather, high altitude conditions. Eric Simonson and George Dunn originated the Winter Expedition Seminar as guides on Mt. Rainier in the mid-eighties. They carry on the tradition today as owners of International Mountain Guides. Mt. Rainier is the ultimate winter challenge with its world record snowfall and rules supreme as the premiere training ground for North American climbers. This program ascends Mt. Rainier in expedition fashion using two or more camps along the way at progressively higher altitudes. We incorporate avalanche level 1 training material into the climb to offer in depth snow training and avalanche risk assessment. This program has two primary goals: to attempt to climb, survive and summit the mountain, and to spend a significant amount of time learning skills and training. Weather can potentially limit our ability to climb higher at any step of the way, but this allows for more time spent training and learning skills to survive what the mountain throws at us. Winter Expedition Climbs ascend through the Muir Corridor (Ingraham Glacier, Disappointment Cleaver, and Gibraltar Ledges routes), but the selected route is weather and snow pack dependent. Camp Muir is always used as the high base for our summit attempts.

### **Why Choose This Program?**

This program is designed specifically for the person wanting to gain more experience in winter conditions in the alpine environment, while learning valuable avalanche evaluation skills. Many people who choose this program are considering future winter alpine climbs and/or backcountry skiing and snow boarding outings with or without guides. This is an excellent test for persons who want to climb Mt. McKinley, Aconcagua, or one of the Himalayan giants, as it does a great job replicating the more extreme conditions you can expect to find on those peaks. In fact it is probably the best way to train for high altitude climbs in the lower 48 due to the extreme conditions and expedition style climbing. It can be quite enjoyable attempting Rainier at this time of year when the mountain is covered in a thick new blanket of snow and there are very few visitors. This program is not suited for those who want the easiest, quickest way up Mt. Rainier with the highest probability of summiting. Climbing Mt. Rainier in winter is very challenging with a significantly lower chance of success. The overall success rate is less than 20% in winter. That makes a winter summit all the more rewarding if you are lucky enough to participate in a climb that gets to the top!

Topics to be covered include:

- Basic techniques with ice axe and crampons
- Glacier travel safety and rescue
- Expedition winter camp setup
- Construction of snow caves and snow shelters
- Avalanche training and field evaluations

We employ a light and efficient philosophy for climbing on this program. We help you go through your personal climbing gear at the start of the program to make sure you have everything essential and nothing more.

Climbing with a 2:1 client-to-guide ratio provides a superior level of support and safety.

**Dates:** January and February (Please see the IMG website for [specific, available dates.](#)) Come prepared for extreme winter conditions with snowshoes required for travel. This is a true winter climbing challenge and a remarkable experience.

**Landcost:** \$1,750

**Client to Guide Ratio:** 2:1

**Trip Length:** 6 1/2 days

## Prerequisite

The Mountaineering Day School is incorporated into this program's itinerary so it is not necessary to take it separately. It is encouraged that you have prior experience with winter backpacking, carrying up to 60 pound loads and are self sufficient in cold, inclement weather conditions. All participants must be in excellent physical condition.

## Itinerary

One fundamental aspect of the Winter Expedition Climb and all of IMG's training seminars is that the itinerary varies from course to course. The guides will determine the route prior to the seminar depending upon the weather, conditions, ability of the group, and skills they want to highlight. The weather and snow pack will play a major role in where the team will camp and move to each day, just as on any cold weather high altitude expedition climb. The seminar progresses up the mountain, putting the team in position for a summit attempt. Trip emphasis will be on safety, route and hazard assessment, winter camps and snow shelters, training in winter expedition skills and attempting to summit if possible.

Summits of Mt. Rainier in the winter are much more infrequent than in the summer season. If our team does manage to summit the mountain it will be a cause for celebration. If we are forced to turn back at 10,000 feet, 12,000 feet or higher, it will be a decision made by the guides but understood by the entire team and one made based on the assessment skills we have learned and practiced during the program. Most days will be centered on training and skill exercises, lectures, and informal discussions at camp, but camp will be moved to give participants hands on experience in establishing safe, sheltered and well constructed camps as well as experience in the day to day skills required for extended expedition camp life.

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*“The professionalism demonstrated by IMG's guides as well as the high standards that they hold their clients up to maximized our chances of reaching the summit...”*

—Greg Y.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at:  
[www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml](http://www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml)

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## Proposed Itinerary:

**Day 1** – Meet at IMG Ashford Headquarters ([Directions](#)) at 2:00 p.m. This pre-climb meeting of 4-5 hours is instrumental in getting the team outfitted, informed, packed and educated prior to departure the following morning. Topics to be covered include an introduction of the entire team, an introduction to Mt. Rainier National Park, its mission and ecology, and a safety briefing. Review personal clothing and equipment. Review group food and gear and sort loads. Demonstration of rigging and loading sleds and expedition packs. Practice basic knots and construct prussik slings. Learn standard operation of avalanche transceivers and other essential information.

Bunk space is provided to all participants at Headquarters this first night. IMG will provide a quick breakfast (muffins, instant oatmeal, coffee or tea) as well. Some participants may prefer to stay at a nearby B&B or motel at their own expense.

**Day 2** – Meet at IMG Headquarters at 8:00 a.m. Load up the IMG van and depart for Paradise (5,400 ft.). The group will don snowshoes, full packs, and share in hauling sleds up to the first camp site, typically located at or below 7,000 feet. The team will learn to set up a winter camp with tents and a cook kitchen. As time allows the group will practice use of avalanche transceivers and make field observations.

**Day 3** – As weather and conditions allow, the team will attempt a move up to Camp Muir at 10,000 feet. If not, training will continue with an introduction of mountaineering skills and construction of snow shelters.

**Day 4** – Glacier training day in the vicinity of Camp Muir. Anchor construction, glacier travel and rescue skills, fixed rope ascension.

**Day 5** – The team normally uses this day to scout the intended route and assess conditions. If conditions are very good, it is also a possible summit attempt day, weather and conditions permitting. During the ascent there will be hands on training in route finding, avalanche hazard assessment, cold weather survival and glacier travel. If no ascent is attempted, the team will continue with training after scouting the route for the following day.

**Day 6** – Final summit attempt day.

**Day 7** – Pack and descent to Paradise. During the descent the group will practice navigation including map and compass and gps. The party will hope to return to Ashford Headquarters by 2-4:00 p.m. but weather and snow conditions may effect our return time.

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***“I was very impressed with how everything was so well organized. It seemed like every little detail was covered. I know you guys have tons of experience with guiding and expeditions and it shows! I've used other guide companies for my previous trips, and I will state emphatically that I will never use another outfit other than IMG. IMG is way better than the others. Way better! You guys are the best in the business...”***

—Jim P

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