

Mt. Rainier: 4½ Day Emmons Glacier Summit Climb

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Why Choose This Program?

The 4½ Day Emmons glacier climb is another excellent basic mountaineering training program. It is perfect for anyone desiring a less-rushed summit experience in a more remote alpine environment, away from the greater crowds found on the south side of the mountain. The focus of this small group climb is on glacier skills training, self-sufficiency and teamwork. This climb is physically more demanding than the Disappointment Cleaver route due to the heavier loads carried and longer distance traveled. All group equipment is carried by the team so average pack weight is in the range of 45-50 pounds rather than the 35 pound weight for the standard route. The Emmons route incorporates significant roped glacier travel for which the team prepares and trains each day during the approach to high camp and is a very “do-able” route considering its consistently moderate nature and fewer objective hazards. The Emmons is a great choice if you are looking for a more complete mountain experience training as a team on a less frequented route up the largest glacier in the lower 48 States.

Although climbing Mt. Rainier is never an easy endeavor, a fourth day can sometimes mean the difference between reaching the top or falling short; being able to climb comfortably within your limits, and enjoying the descent. Two nights at or above 8,200ft will give you an increased advantage and help you feel fitter and less oxygen deprived on summit day. This program is recommended for anyone hoping to avoid the greater crowds of the standard route, while continuously learning the skills for glacier travel on a big mountain, and enjoying a less-rushed, more self-sufficient alpine experience.

The approach trail starts at White River Campground and climbs through several distinct plant life zones starting in the dense forests of the Western Hemlock Zone, eventually climbing up through beautiful sub alpine meadows into the alpine zone. We use two tent camps strategically located; one at 8,200ft on the lower Inter Glacier and another at 9,600ft, Camp Schurman.

In addition to the continuous daily training on the climb we include a half day pre-climb orientation and instructional meeting at IMG’s Headquarters in Ashford, just outside the park. We incorporate the bulk of the training en route during each day of the ascent. This increases acclimatization, minimizes total days for the trip and allows for training to be conducted on the mountain in real conditions all the way to the summit and back.

We employ a light and efficient philosophy for climbing on this program. We will help you go through your personal climbing gear prior to departure to help you minimize the weight of your pack.

Climbing with a 2:1 client-to-guide ratio provides a superior level of support and direction. Our group size is never larger than twelve (8 climbers and 4 guides).

Prerequisite:

There are no prerequisites. This is a basic learning climb for big glaciated mountains. Training is conducted during the pre-climb orientation and continually throughout the climb. The required skills (use of crampons, ice axe and roped glacier travel) are incorporated into this program as part of the en route curriculum. All participants are strongly encouraged to train specifically for this program and to have prior experience on overnight backpacking trips. For physical training suggestions check out our training for Rainier page at www.mountainguides.com/rainier-training.shtml

Dates: May – August (Please see the IMG website for [specific, available dates.](#))

Landcost: \$2,091

Client to Guide Ratio: 2:1

Trip Length: 4½ days

Cost includes:

- IMG's world renowned guide staff
- All training curriculum and instruction
- Round trip transportation from IMG Headquarters to the start/end of the climb (Note that this is subject to change based on Covid restrictions).
- Group equipment including single tents, stoves, fuel, climbing ropes and group hardware
- National Park entrance and climbing permits
- Hot water for meals and hot drinks (coffee, tea, cocoa)

Cost Does Not Include:

- Personal gear (see [equipment list](#) for full details)
- Lodging the evening prior to the start of the climb or after the end of the program
- Due to Covid-19 restrictions we will not be providing meals. Hot water will be provided at mealtime. Please refer to our [food suggestions page](#) for more details.

“Just can't even thank you enough for the incredible experience I just had summiting Mt. Rainier with your company... What a remarkable team of guides we had. Making the summit was an amazing experience, but if it had not been for our awesome guides, the whole trip would not have been nearly as incredible as it was. Thank you for putting together such a fine team of exceptional guides. They were patient, funny, experienced, knowledgeable, and excellent teachers. I always felt safe and had a blast. I will definitely be climbing with you again. I've already been looking at your website to see what fits into my schedule for my next climb. Thanks again. You guys are simply the best! I'll be back.”

—Polly P.

“I signed up for this trip with the goals of gaining some basic mountaineering skills and experience, and hopefully reaching the summit of Mount Rainier... I found your entire operation to be first-class, from the registration process and intervening communications through the entire climb with your outstanding guides...”

—Jerry V.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at: www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml

Itinerary

Day 1 – Meet in Ashford at HQ ([Directions](#)) at 2:00pm for the pre-climb meeting. This meeting of approximately 4 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; a safety briefing; issue and fitting of gear; personal gear checks and issue of group gear; proper use of safety equipment including helmets, harnesses and avalanche beacons; introduction to knots, ropes, rope travel and a review of additional critical climbing skills. You are on your own for lodging this night.

Day 2 – Meet back at IMG at 7:00am to prepare to depart for the trailhead. Please eat breakfast before arrival. We will stop at a coffee shop along the way where you'll be able to buy additional snacks. Remember to bring some money because we'll likely stop on the way back for a cold drink as well. Cash works best so you don't have to leave your credit card in the van at the trailhead. It'll take us a couple hours to drive around the Park to the White River trailhead at 4,500ft on the north-east side of Mt. Rainier. The climb starts here. The first section of trail covers three miles through dense forest to Glacier Basin before continuing up more steeply over rough trail and snow to our first camp at 8,200ft on the Inter Glacier. Just below camp we stop for on-snow training in the use of the ice axe, self arresting slips on snow and efficient climbing up and down steeper snow slopes. Upon arrival at the camp site the guides will teach you how to construct a well sheltered and anchored tent camp on the glacier.

Day 3 - The following day we climb a fairly short distance to high camp, adjacent to Camp Schurman, located at 9,600ft on Steamboat Prow, a wedge formation that divides the Emmons and Winthrop Glaciers. Along the way we ascend the Inter and Emmons glaciers which provide us with a perfect opportunity to practice roped glacier travel, one of the skills we will need in ascending the upper mountain the following day. Once at Schurman we learn about constructing a proper expedition camp incorporating LNT techniques, then hold a team informational meeting to discuss the summit climb. We'll have dinner and get to bed early. We begin our ascent before dawn the next day and generally count on a 12-hour round trip to the 14,410ft summit and back to camp.

Day 4 - Our summit day takes us up the Emmons "Corridor" and often onto the Upper Winthrop Glacier depending on the route conditions. The conditions can vary greatly but we usually encounter crevasses and snow bridges, and some moderately steep snow climbing. Throughout the day, the guides will be directing their rope teams, providing safety feedback and hands on training in safe glacier travel. We'll ascend glacier terrain to the very top. We normally hit the summit crater close to the true high point, Columbia Crest. We spend an hour on the summit, weather permitting. Instruction in safe descending techniques begins and the descent normally takes half the time the ascent required. The round trip normally takes 12 hours total. After arriving back at our high camp we get some well-deserved rest during our final night on the mountain.

Day 5 - The following morning we descend the Inter Glacier and retrace our steps back down to the White River Trailhead by noon to 1:00 pm where we load up for the ride back around the mountain to IMG headquarters in Ashford. At HQ we'll wrap up the trip with an awarding of certificates of achievement by the guides. The average program ends around 4 pm but unpredictable variables may impact our return time.