



# IWLS

International Wilderness Leadership School

## Alaska Heli Skiing & Snowboarding

### Leadership & Guide Training Course Information - 12 days



#### Course Location

The town of Haines, Alaska at the northern end of Alaska's inside passage is surrounded by an extremely jagged, glaciated, mountain landscape, pristine fjords, and wilderness rivers. These mountains rise up to above 6,000 feet directly from the ocean. The variety terrain; from glacier cirques with a multitude of steep couloirs to open undulating bowls of powder make for excellent skiing and riding. This course is town based, and will be set in the town of Haines for the duration of the 12 days.

Haines offers an excellent combination of world class heliskiing terrain close to our heliports and accessible roadside access touring options for no-fly / non-heli supported portions on the course. Lodging will be provided for the duration of the course.

#### Course Goals

- Students will gain a strong technical helicopter ski/snowboard skill set and appropriate traveling techniques.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to professionally deal with emergency scenarios while in the field.
- Students will build confidence in their decision-making framework when negotiating glaciated and avalanche prone areas. Instructors will teach students how to identify and mitigate a variety of risks in backcountry terrain.
- Students will be able to recognize their own leadership abilities and limitations within the context of a group. Students will be given the opportunity to make decisions pertinent to leading small groups in the



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mountain environment under the supervision of professional instructors to help provide feedback and guidance.

- Students will learn to recognize terrain, snowpack, and weather factors that contribute to the formation of avalanches and apply appropriate decision making skills regarding avalanche safety.

## Course Itinerary

*This is a flexible trip itinerary that shows the general progression of the trip. Our exact schedule will depend highly on the weather, strength of the group, and time of year. Helicopter time will be as weather, and conditions allow.*

**Day 0:** Students should plan to arrive into Haines the afternoon prior to their course's scheduled start date. IWLS will provide access to student housing (after 1:00 PM) so students can settle in and prepare for the start of the course. IWLS heli instructors will conduct a pre-trip meeting with the group around 6:00 PM. This meeting will allow for formal introductions and outline the course ahead. We'll also cover an important safety briefing to familiarize the group with working around helicopters and safety when travelling in the backcountry.

**Day 1:** We'll meet with the helicopter pilot, go over helicopter safety, and finish our preparations for our first runs out of the helicopter. After function checking the group's avalanche beacons its time to launch! We'll ease out into the terrain and get a good feel for the snowpack and avalanche hazard before making decisions about more consequence.

**Day 2 - 11:** Each morning will start with a weather check and team meeting; students will work with instructors to run through a real heli-briefing and outline a plan for the day. Students will learn about valuable tools to assess weather forecasts, track snowfall, and assess flying conditions. Morning meetings offer a time to utilize recorded field observations to identify hazards and create an avalanche forecast for our operating area.

Depending on weather we may end the morning meeting and head for the heliport to get some time with the helicopter. If weather warrants no-fly conditions, we may go on standby and cover classroom lessons close to the heli in hopes for a weather window to fly or we may opt to drive out of town for some ground access touring in the Haines Pass.

Skiing open bowls of powder, digging hasty pits, and descending steep couloirs fill our days in these rugged glaciated peaks. Students will have the opportunity to be leaders of the day and advance their decision-making, leadership, and group management skills around the helicopter and on the slopes.

When not flying, we'll use our time to advance avalanche assessment skills, backcountry skiing technique, and technical crevasse rescue and rope skills. Easy road access to great skiing terrain provides a great supplement to time in the helicopter.



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**Day 12:** As the course draws to a close, we will have final peer and instructor evaluations. Students will be evaluated on their understanding and completion of the IWLS curriculum, this includes operation around a helicopter, decision making, leadership skills, ski & avalanche specific curriculum, and more. Upon successfully completing the course students will leave with newfound skills to not only take their personal backcountry travel to the next level but get started in a ski guiding career. We'll conclude the course by mid-afternoon allowing student to depart for home on a late afternoon flight. If students are remaining in Haines they should make arrangements for their own lodging starting this evening.

## A Typical Day

A typical day starts around 6:30AM, we'll conduct a weather check and talk about a plan for the day. After the morning meeting we'll prepare breakfast and hot drinks. If a big day is planned, you may find yourself awake just before sunrise. Morning meetings are generally 30 – 45 minutes and involve the weather check, looking at recent SNOTEL information, assessing how data ties into field observations and generating a forecast. With a forecast in hand the group will assess a Plan A and Plan B for the day.

Students will play an integral part of the team by coordinating safety briefings, cooking meals, and helping manage/carry a portion of the group gear. IWLS instructors will give students opportunities as leader of the day, responsible for planning the day, putting together the flight manifest, managing radio communications, or facilitating a lesson plan.

The day's activities will vary depending on weather, location, and progression of the course. If the weather supports flying, we may be launching early from town for a day in the field supported by the helicopter. When we're on weather standby for flying we might cover lessons at the house or IWLS classroom, conduct a weather check from various points around town, or opt for a ski tour in the Haines Pass for some road accessed skiing and snowboarding. Regardless of the day's activities, it will be full of learning and adventure.

At the end of each day we'll conduct a debrief and review the accuracy of our morning meeting and forecast. We'll enter information and field observations which will prove useful the following morning for the next meeting. Students will have a chance during debrief to outline their highs and lows for the day and express updated goals based on the progression of the course. We'll finish the day with a delicious dinner, IWLS instructors are skilled at providing a nutritious and flavorful menu that can accommodate a variety of dietary considerations. A typical dinner might include pasta, burritos, or pad thai.

## Requirements

Passports – On no-fly days, when inclement weather prohibits flying, we may go touring in the pass. Trips to the pass travel beyond the US border with Canada and require a US Customs & Border Patrol check-in for re-entry. Passports are required for every student on this course.

Skiing Ability – Students should have advanced skiing ability for this course. They should be able to ski single black diamond runs at any ski area in variable conditions without falling.

Avalanche Airbag Backpacks/Technology – IWLS requires that all participants utilize avalanche airbag technology on our heli-ski program. IWLS has a rental fleet of airbag packs which can be secured for the course for an additional rental fee -- See rental agreement for details.



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## Course Curriculum

The International Wilderness Leadership Schools' educational model nurtures leadership development and creates an awareness of the guiding mentality that is essential for leading safe, fun adventures in the mountains. The combination of technical skills training, practical leadership experience and a true wilderness expedition make the IWLS curriculum world class.

We believe that experiences drive our learning and therefore we use formal and informal classes taught by both instructors and students. Instructors are eager to help facilitate the learning process but ultimately, how much you learn will be dependent on the amount of effort you put into the course.

A detailed curriculum will be provided at the beginning of the course. Below is a partial list of curriculum points that will be covered throughout your course.



## *IWLS General Curriculum*

- **Leader of the Day:** Opportunities to lead the group will be abundant and you'll have the time to learn and practice multiple styles of leadership.
- **Situational Based Decision Making:** Over the course of 12 days, we'll discover ways to make effective and safe decisions in the field.
- **Focused and "Big Picture" Awareness:** Learn to identify objective and subjective hazards in a backcountry setting.
- **Logistics:** Develop the ability to efficiently plan and pack for an extended expedition in the backcountry.
- **Communication Skills:** Learn to communicate to a wide variety of audiences and provide constructive and appropriate feedback during daily group debriefs.
- **Teaching and Lesson Plans:** You'll have the opportunity to develop lesson plans, teach in front of the group, and learn the importance of progressions for teaching technical skills and leadership.

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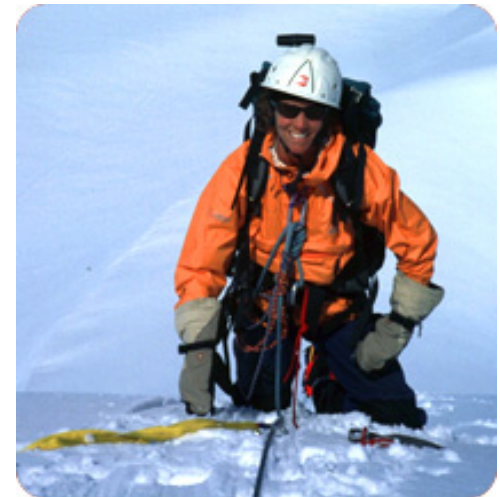
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- **Expedition Behavior and Group Dynamics:** As this course is a true wilderness expedition, interactions between group members need to be supportive and contribute to the efficacy of the group. Learn the finer points of teaching these facilitation skills.
- **Camp Set-up and Maintenance:** Mastering these essential skills will prove valuable whether you are pitching a tent in gale force winds or melting snow for drinking water.
- **Nutrition and Cooking:** A healthy diet is vital for maintaining energy throughout an expedition. Learn to appropriately prepare nutritional and tasty backcountry meals.
- **Navigation:** Learn how to take a bearing, read a topographical map, triangulate your position, and navigate in a whiteout.
- **Weather:** Will the storm arrive in the next 12 hours, or the next 48? Understanding weather patterns and trends will help you plan successful trips in a wilderness setting.
- **Leave No Trace® Ethics:** As adventurers in some of the most pristine environments on the planet it is our duty to respect the natural world.
- **Natural and Cultural History:** Having a strong understanding of cultural history, flora, and fauna is an integral part of leading people in an outdoor environment. You'll learn some of the botany, ecology, and geology that apply to this remarkable area.

## *IWLS Mountaineering Curriculum*

- **General Mountaineering Skills:** The mountain environment is an exciting and potentially dangerous place. You'll discover how to travel on the steep mountain slopes using equipment such as an ice axe and crampons as well as how to teach these skills to your fellow students.
- **Anchors:** Anchor building is a fun yet complex subject. We'll examine single, double, triple and complex anchors, and their different applications. Learn how to place anchors in snow, rock, and ice.
- **Ropes:** 50 meters or 70 meters? 8.0mm or 10.5mm? Single, double or twin? These are all questions you'll be able to effectively answer. We'll also learn how to care for and maintain these important pieces of equipment.
- **Knots:** Learn the appropriate applications for the figure 8, water knot, double fisherman, bowline, and other essential climbing knots.
- **Belaying:** Should we use a fixed belay or a running belay? Our team will learn and practice the finer points of different belay techniques such as the hip belay, running belay, boot axe belay, fixed belay, and more!
- **Ascending:** Fixed lines are an important tool for large groups and guiding applications. We'll learn how to efficiently use, build and maintain them.



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- **Rappelling:** Rappelling down a steep rock face is a thrilling moment and our team will learn how to do it safely. We'll also look at different methods for teaching rappelling and dealing with incapacitated climbers.
- **Rope Teams:** Rope team travel is a complicated endeavor that requires skill, technique and teamwork. We'll cover everything from prussic arrangement to team management.
- **Crevasse Rescue:** Traveling in glaciated terrain requires that every member of the team be proficient in crevasse rescue. We'll learn how to get a teammate out of a crevasse quickly and efficiently.
- **Glaciology:** Students will learn and experience firsthand the intriguing complexities of these enormous rivers of ice and their effect on the land.
- **Escaping the Belay:** What happens when things go array? We'll practice escaping the belay and getting to the aid of an injured climber.
- **Short Roping:** Learn different applications of short roping technique and times & places to utilize it.
- **Timing:** In the mountains, timing is everything: when to embark on your journey, when to turn around, and when to push for the summit. Time management is a critical component of safe travel and plays into many aspects of skiing & mountaineering.

## *IWLS Helicopter Curriculum*

- **Helicopter Safety:** Safety is always #1, especially when working around helicopters. Students will not only learn the safety fundamentals associated with helicopter skiing, but will continually teach these fundamentals to each other.
- **Flight Preparation:** Developing a complete flight manifest supports good communication and maximizes efficiency for a day of helicopter skiing. Students will have the opportunity to develop flight plan proposals and organize passengers and weights.
- **Landing zone selection:** Working with the pilot to identify safe spots for landings is an essential component of helicopter safety. Learn to assess landing zone viability: wind speed and direction, slope angle, visibility and exposure to objective hazards.
- **Loading and Unloading:** While the pilot will always direct loading and unloading of the helicopter, students need to understand safety elements such as hatch operation, securing loose items, balancing loads, and visual confirmations with the pilot.
- **Communications:** Good communication is essential when working around helicopters. Students will learn appropriate radio communications, signaling, visual cues and protocols for timely and efficient communication with the helicopter pilot.
- **Group Management:** Where should the group be when the helicopter is approaching? How should skiers approach a grounded helicopter? You'll learn techniques for managing clients and facilitating a safe helicopter skiing experience.



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## *IWLS Skiing & Snowboarding Curriculum*

- **Equipment:** Learn the basics of skiing and snowboarding equipment, avalanche safety gear, and how to use and repair your gear efficiently.
- **Skiing & Snowboarding Ability Assessment:** Learn how to assess the abilities of others so you can lead people into the appropriate types of terrain.
- **Skiing & Boarding Instruction:** Modeling and good communication is essential for helping guests develop their skiing and snowboarding skills.
- **Site Selection:** Learn how to choose the appropriate terrain and identify hazards to facilitate a safe, fun time in the mountains.
- **Snow Conditions:** Whether skiing deep powder, spring corn, or breakable crust, learn how to identify variable conditions and employ different techniques to enjoy them safely.
- **Route Finding:** Both descents and ascents demand good route finding skills. You'll develop your hazard assessment and navigation skills to be able to find the safest, most efficient route.
- **Skinning:** Develop your kick turns, edging, and other skinning techniques to climb snow slopes efficiently.
- **Steep skiing:** Jump turns, belayed skiing, and self-arrest are some topics that we'll cover concerning steep skiing.



## *IWLS Avalanche Curriculum*

- **Avalanche Statistics:** Can you trigger an avalanche on a 10-degree slope? How do I calculate a runout angle? You'll learn the answer to these and many more questions throughout the avalanche curriculum.
- **Avalanche Characteristics:** We'll examine loose snow, wet snow, soft slab, and hard slab avalanches along with some potential triggers. You'll learn the definition of terms such as stauchwall, alpha angle, and bed surface.
- **Avalanche Pyramid:** Terrain, weather, snowpack, and human factors all play into the creation of an avalanche. Develop your decision-making skills by breaking down avalanche danger assessment into these components.
- **Snow Stability Evaluation:** Is this snow capable of avalanching? Learn tests that will help you evaluate layers within the snowpack & snowpack characteristics. Develop your documentation skills for accurate recording and analysis of information.
- **Safe Winter Travel:** How do you safely manage a group through avalanche terrain? We'll learn about different travel techniques and consider safe travel methods whether you're ski touring or stepping out of a heli at the top of a steep alpine run.



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- **Avalanche Rescue:** Someone buried in an avalanche has an 87% chance of survival if found within the first fifteen minutes. We'll practice using probes, beacons, and effective search patterns in order to quickly and efficiently find a buried person.

## Journal Writing

Keeping a wilderness journal can help students to record, reflect, and gain from experiences throughout the expedition. The following are examples of topics that may be assigned throughout the course: First-Aid SOAP notes, incident management forms, leadership analyses, trip reports, lesson plans and decision-making analyses.

## Evaluation and Grading

Students who take this course for credit will receive a letter grade. Grading is a measurement of one's knowledge of material, participation, written and oral communication, and one's judgment and awareness. Students will be evaluated on their skills, level of participation, their knowledge and awareness of their own abilities as outdoor leaders, their level of judgment as applied to decisions, and written projects assigned during the trip. Students that don't take the course for credit will receive a written instructor evaluation in place of a grade.

## Certifications

Upon completion of the 12-day helicopter ski/snowboard mountaineering leadership and guide training course, students may be eligible for the following certifications:



**12 Day Heli Guide Training Certificate of Completion**  
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**Level 1 Avalanche Certification**  
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