

Alpine Guides

Aoraki/Mount Cook, New Zealand

Mountain Experience Course

Summer 2010/11



Photo by Rob Chalmers, MEC1 2008/09

Your Introduction to the High Mountains

Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, New Zealand

Spans 7 days: Low guide to participant ratio

8 scheduled course options November thru February

Leading New Zealand Guiding Since 1966

The MEC and you

The Mountain Experience Course (MEC) is the perfect starting point for people developing an interest in the high mountains, and in travelling and camping above the snowline.

The MEC is designed for people with a background in hiking/tramping. No prior knowledge of rope systems or climbing is required. All “technical” climbing equipment is supplied, and the cost of the course is kept down by not relying on aircraft access.

One of the strengths of the MEC is the extremely flexible format. This uses the Mount Cook Village area and the superb venues in the surrounding mountains. Every course will be slightly different, as we choose the mountain venue depending on the weather, and snow conditions at the time.

Experience Required

The most important prerequisite is a high level of aerobic fitness. The MEC is about getting out there and gaining a knowledge of the alpine environment by “doing it”!

With all travel being on foot, a good level of fitness and the ability to carry a backpack is required. A solid bushwalking/trekking background is ideal. Previous alpine climbing or rock climbing experience is not required.

See the “Pre-trip Information” notes for advice on fitness and training for mountaineering

2010/11 Dates & Pricing

Goods and Services Tax (GST) in New Zealand rises to 15% on 01 October. Trips booked and paid in full by 30 September will beat the pre-GST rise price

Price to 30 September 2010: NZ\$1995 per person

Price from 01 October 2010: NZ\$2025 per person

The course fee includes the following:

- Guiding fees
- Alpine Guides Technical Manual (92 pages)
- All meals (including snacks and energy bars)
- Hut fees
- Local transport
- A range technical equipment (see the [Equipment Checklist on page 7](#))
- Local accommodation for any nights necessary during the course

Course	Dates
MEC 1	Nov 07-13
MEC 2	Nov 21-27
MEC 3	Dec 05-11
MEC 4	Dec 12-18
MEC 5	Jan 09-15
MEC 6	Jan 23-29
MEC 7	Feb 06-12
MEC 8	Feb 20-26

We buy fresh produce for every program we run so you are guaranteed to eat well. Most dietary regimes can be catered for. Please make a note of what you like to eat on your booking form.

Maximum Bookings

We keep our course sizes small. All MECs are limited to a maximum of 8 participants. The maximum guide to participant ratio is 1:4.

Minimum bookings

We minimise any disturbance to your travel plans by [guaranteeing to run the course you are booked on](#), with the following modification:

[One person only: we shorten the course to 5 days](#)

Reporting Details

All MEC's begin at 13:30 at Alpine Guides shop in Mt Cook Village on the start date, and finish at 12:00 midday on the last day. These times fit with scheduled bus services

See the "Pre-trip Information Notes" for more details on transport options.

Private Courses

If the MEC format or the dates do not quite work for you - or you have a group of friends considering a course - contact us about arranging a private course.

Private Mountain Experience Courses can be arranged at any time over the summer months (November - April) for groups of 2 or more people. This option allows you to choose the dates, duration, and tailor the content to your specific requirements.

Please contact us for details on pricing, and guide availability.

What You Will Learn

The safe enjoyment of the mountain environment depends upon good judgement, technique, and equipment. Our guides will help you develop skills through the practise of climbing on snow, ice, and rock, and spending time in the high alpine environment.

Apart from the great experience, you will also climb at least one peak, or cross an alpine pass - or both. You will come away from the MEC with many new skills that will serve as a grounding for future adventures in the mountains.

After the course you should:

- Be able to camp above snowline/construct a bivvy
- Be confident on uneven/loose alpine terrain
- Be confident traveling/climbing on snow and ice
- Have basic rock climbing/rope skills
- Be able to cross alpine passes/climb moderate peaks with confidence
- Be ready for a more advanced climbing course, like the [Technical Mountaineering Course](#)

Topics covered on your course will include:

- Equipment, what to bring and how to use it
- Alpine camping/bivvying/snow shelters (if conditions allow)
- Snow skills: including using crampons, ice axe and self arrest
- Avalanche awareness
- Map reading/Navigation
- Weather forecasting
- Basic first aid
- Rope and rock climbing techniques
- Climbing on alpine snow, ice and rock
- Awareness of terrain/route finding

Depending on the course venue some glacier travel involved - along with relevant instruction.

Course structure

The dynamic weather of the mountains makes fixed itineraries impractical to follow. Our courses are designed to work around changing weather and snow conditions.

The MEC is split into two parts:

1. Village Section

- Introduction to the area and plans for the week
- Equipment - what to use, how to pack for the mountains
- Climbing Mt Sebastopol: moving on loose terrain, scree slopes, ridge travel
- A full day of rock climbing instruction, including rope handling skills, abseiling, learning basic knots and hitches.

2. Alpine Section

The MEC's alpine venues include Mueller Hut, Ball Pass, Sefton Bivouac, and Twin Streams, amongst others. These areas provide a range of alpine terrain and opportunities to train, and climb peaks on snow, ice, and rock.

These locations are all either within walking distance, or can be walked into after a short drive (inside 20 minutes) from Mount Cook Village.

Mueller Hut area - allows access to the Annette Plateau, with peaks like Annette (2,235 metres) and Mount Sealy (2,557 metres) close by.

Ball Pass - Cross the classic alpine route from Tasman to Hooker Valley. Climb Mount Rosa (2,161 metres), or Mount Turner Peak (2,338 metres).

Twin Streams in the Ben Ohau range is renowned for great alpine rock and allows access on to peaks like Mount Dark (2,496 metres).

During the course we will include map reading and navigation topics, study mountain weather and look at basic snow safety and avalanche awareness.

Each day's activities can have you out and about for at least 8 hours.

When in the mountains, on any nights that you do not spend in a hut you will be creating a camp site. This can be as few as one, or up to 3 nights. Small parties may take a tent, but normally the campsite will be a bivouac.

For bivvying in the mountains you will require

- A good quality sleeping pad
- A sleeping bag, and sometimes (but not always) a bivvy bag

Modern 3-season sleeping bags with breathable water-resistant shells are ideal for alpine camping in fine weather. They eliminate the need for a further layer (a bivvy bag).

We have appropriate bags available to hire, and will supply bivvy bags if required. You are also welcome to bring your own combination of sleeping bag/bivvy bag.

Your guide will provide cooking stoves and fuel, and each person will be expected to carry a share of food and cooking equipment, and to assist with preparing meals. We provide eating utensils.

What You Will Carry

On the alpine section you will carry all the items of clothing and equipment required for the course. You will also be required to carry a share of the group gear and food.

Once at your hut/campsite any equipment and food not required will be unloaded. Only when you move between huts, or walk out to the village will it be necessary to carry everything.

Your pack's weight will vary from about 5 kg, up to perhaps 15 kg when walking in or out of the mountains.

Your guide will go through your gear when the course starts to ensure that you have all the right equipment - but not too much!

You will not require a daypack in the mountains. If you choose to bring one it will be useful for village-based activities.

Footwear

Solid leather tramping/hiking boots are ideal for the MEC. These need to be semi-rigid (to take crampons) and well waterproofed. If you don't own appropriate boots we have these available to rent.

We have various models of crampons, which fit practically all boots. Rock shoes will be provided if required, but bring your own if you own a pair.

Equipment Checklist

Refer to the [equipment check-list on page 7](#) for the specific gear list for the MEC and the items of clothing and personal kit you will need. This is your gear/clothing reference list for this course. Use this list as the guide for your trip and no other.

Please use your discretion when selecting clothing. Plan for colder conditions through November, and warmer conditions from mid-December through mid-March.

Please read our "Notes on Equipment and Clothing" for specific details on clothing and equipment items. Contact us if you have any questions.

Optional items

Not compulsory, but feel free to bring along any of the items if you wish.

The rest of the details...

You'll find answers to most questions in our additional detailed notes: [Pre-trip Information Notes](#), and [Equipment and Clothing](#).

These are designed to help you plan and prepare for your Alpine Guides trip. Download these from our website using the links below.

Pre-trip Information

Includes details on bus travel to Mount Cook, insurance, personal fitness, accommodation, and more...

http://www.alpineguides.co.nz/download/notes/pretrip_info.pdf (600 Kb)

Equipment & Clothing

What to look for when choosing clothing and equipment for mountaineering in New Zealand

<http://www.alpineguides.co.nz/download/notes/equipment.pdf> (750 Kb)



Photo by Rob Chalmers, MEC1 2008/09

Equipment & Clothing Checklist

Mountain Experience Course (MEC)

Use the check list below to ensure you bring along the gear specifically for your trip. Please try to let us know what you need to rent as soon as possible **before** you arrive. Get in touch if you have any questions.

	Bring ✓	Borrow ✓
1. Equipment provided free of charge		
Ice Axe		
Ice Hammer		
Crampons - 12 point, semi automatic		
Helmet		
Harness		
Belay Device		
Ice Screw x 1		
Snow stake		
Prusiks x 3 (1 long, 2 short), Sling x 2 (1 long, 1 short)		
Karabiners: large screw-gate x 3, snap-link straight-gate x 5		
Avalanche Transceiver (provided if required)		
Snow Shovel (provided if required)		

Use our gear free of charge, or bring your own

Calculate your approx. rental cost below. For the MEC we charge 6 days rental.

2. Equipment and Clothing for rent	Bring ✓	Rent ✓	Cost/day	x # days	Total
Mountaineering Boots - leather or plastic			15		
Sleeping Bag - 3 season bag			15		
Backpack, 55-65 litres			7		
Bivouac Bag (optional)			7		
Sleeping Pad (optional - required for bivouacs)			1		
Hiking Poles / each (optional)			5		
Storm Jacket			10		
Overtrousers (full length leg zip if possible)			10		
Gaiters			5		
Total estimated rental cost					

3. Required Personal Equipment (not available to rent)

- Headlamp
- Sunglasses - good quality wrap-around
- Water Bottles 2 x 1 litre widemouth (Nalgene)
- Waterproof pack liner
- Plastic survival bag (or bivouac bag)
- First Aid Kit - basic kit, incl blister tape
- Toiletries, including toothbrush sun screen and lip cream
- Leatherman or Swiss tool

4. Required Personal Clothing (not available to rent)

- Underwear (2 sets)
- Socks (3 pairs)
- Thermal underwear: 2 x tops, 1 x pants
- Mid-weight fleece jersey
- Warm jacket: down or fleece
- Warm hat / balaclava
- Climbing trousers: soft-shell are ideal. Light weight trekking pants (worn over thermals) are okay - they must be quick drying
- Waterproof warm gloves x 1 pair - leather gloves are good for rope work
- Light-weight (polypro) gloves x 1 pair
- Sun Protection: baseball cap or legionnaire hat scarf / neck gaiter (buff) and "glacier shirt"
- Hut footwear - running shoes or sandals / holey soles (must be lightweight)

5. Optional Gear - not required - but recommended

- Day pack approx 20 litre, useful for non-mountain activities
- Telescopic hiking pole - bring one
- Compass - bring if you own one
- Rock shoes - bring if you own a pair
- Drinking mug: Supplied in huts - but you can bring your own
- Sleeping pad - lightweight (if you want to sleep out)
- Bivouac bag - if you want to sleep out. Survival bag will suffice.
- Soft-shell jacket
- Shorts - worn over long johns is okay in summer
- Ski Goggles (for white-out conditions)