

AMERICAN ALPINE INSTITUTE LTD
Bellingham, Washington

MONT BLANC, MATTERHORN, AND EIGER ASCENTS PROGRAM
EQUIPMENT LIST

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Climbers in Europe have developed an extensive system of huts enabling them to travel fast, light, and unencumbered through the Alpine wilderness. While some of these huts are very small bivouac shelters accommodating six to eight people, other are more like hotels with over a hundred beds and a well stocked kitchen. This in combination with easy access has made the Alps into an alpine playground where generally short approaches, light packs, and big routes are the norm.

Even though the mountains and huts are usually close at hand climbers cannot forget that the storms, the wind, and the cold of an early dawn are every bit as serious here as in other comparable ranges. The Alps are high with many peaks rising to over 13,000 feet; Mont Blanc itself is over 15,700 feet high. The moist maritime climate and the northerly latitude, about the same as Portland, Oregon or northern Maine, can combine to produce severe storms. Climbers must not underestimate the seriousness of the weather in the Alps.

Typically, temperatures on Mont Blanc drop well below freezing at night (when we begin our ascent) but warm up in the bright sunshine of the day. The summit is often cold even during a fine day and there is almost always a strong breeze. The Matterhorn and the Eiger are somewhat warmer, being at a lower altitude, with rock climbing often requiring light gloves in the morning but, in good weather, warming once the sun has been up an hour or two. When the weather is unstable you can expect snow or rain and a cold, cold wind.

The equipment you bring must function well in a wide variety of conditions. Your clothing should be warm, lightweight, dry quickly, and allow you good freedom of movement. The layering principle, which uses several thin layers of insulation (rather than one thick one), covered with an outer weather-proof shell, meets these needs well. Typically, alpinists will wear a layer of long underwear made from polypropylene or similar synthetic, another insulating layer of pile or fleece, and a Gore-Tex shell, in addition to gloves/mittens and a hat.

We will stay in the huts and hotels for the entire program unless you want to camp. Most camping equipment is available for rental at very reasonable prices in Chamonix. Please take the time to prepare your equipment carefully, and to the extent possible, become familiar with it by using it in the field. If you have any questions don't hesitate to call the Institute office.

CLOTHING

Boots - Leather Mountaineering boots, plastic boots will work but are not recommended. Mont Blanc is a cold, long, snow and ice climb. Though the technical demands of the route are not great, the cold and high altitude mean that boots need to be warm and waterproof. A warm and relatively stiff leather mountaineering boot is the best choice. A great example would be the La Sportiva Nepal Top Extreme, well water proofed and preferably broken in. For The Matterhorn and the Eiger a good boot choice would be La Sportiva's Trango or Trango Extreme or a boot that is very similar. (A good selection is available in Chamonix or Zermatt, and we'll have time to rent or buy them if you need them.)

If you have not climbed fifth class rock in big boots before, we highly recommend you practice on a local crag before your trip. There is climbing up to about 5.5 on both the Matterhorn and the Eiger.

Rock Climbing Shoes - Before we climb Mont Blanc we usually make two or three warm-up and acclimatization climbs near Chamonix. Depending on conditions and your interests, we may want to make an ascent which would be best climbed in rock shoes. If you already own a pair of rock shoes we recommend you bring them. If you don't own a pair and had no plans to purchase any, they are not absolutely necessary for this program.

Note - We will not bring rock shoes on our climbs of the Matterhorn or the Eiger. This is because of the cold and the mixed nature of the climbing.

Gaiters - Knee high. For programs occurring from August on gaiters need not be knee high.

Socks - Wool or synthetic. Bring two complete changes. Climbers frequently wear a thin liner sock, and one pair of thick socks depending on boot fit.

Long Underwear Bottoms and Tops - This will be your base layer and should be lightweight polyester, polypropylene or similar synthetic.

2nd Layer (Top) - Expedition weight long underwear top, 100 weight powerstretch, very light weight fleece, Schoeller, or a lightweight windshirt (i.e. Marmot DriClime) are good examples of this multi-use layer.

2nd Layer (Bottom) - Schoeller, Pile or fleece preferred. Seek out quick-drying and wind/water resistant material. Black Diamond Alpine Pants and Arc'teryx Gamma LT Pants are good examples of these types of materials.

Warm Jacket - Pile, fleece or Windstopper.

Insulated Jacket - Lightweight down or synthetic in addition to the warm jacket

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described above. Some good examples of insulating materials are Primaloft, Polarguard 3D or any down jacket/parka. This is different than your outer most waterproof shell jacket.

Rain Pants or Bibs - Gore-Tex or other waterproof breathable material recommended. Full side zips recommended for easy on and off over boots and crampons.

Rain Parka with Hood - Gore-Tex or other waterproof breathable material recommended.

Liner Gloves - Lightweight polypropylene or similar synthetic.

Modular Gloves or Mittens - these include a matched pair of insulating gloves and a pair of waterproof shells offer excellent protection. Good models are made by Outdoor Research, Wild Country and others. (If you bring a pair of these you'll still need to bring the polypro gloves.)

Warm Hat - Synthetic is less itchy than wool.

Balaclava - For a windy summit day on Mont Blanc.

Sun Hat - A baseball cap serves well.

CLIMBING GEAR

Ice Axe - 55cm to 70cm length with standard pick and webbing leash. Shorter tools are somewhat easier to manage when climbing. The lighter the better. Try to avoid long heavy axes. (Axes can be purchased or rented in Chamonix.)

Crampons - Semi-rigid or flexible. Be sure they fit all your boots. Remember that we'll use crampons on the Matterhorn and the Eiger as well as Mont Blanc. Crampons with step-in bindings are usually the easiest to put on however, only certain leather boots are step-in crampon compatible. Please seek advice when purchasing crampons and make sure they can be put on your boots. (Many types of crampons can be purchased or rented in Chamonix.)

Climbing Harness - Should fit over bulky clothing. Adjustable leg loops are nice in this regard.

Carabiners - Bring three, one of which should be locking.

Climbing Helmet

MISCELLANEOUS

Food - AAI does not provide food between climbs or while in the mountains. Food for the climbs can be purchased in Chamonix, Zermatt and Grindlewald. With the exception of the Eiger, whenever we stay in huts, dinner and breakfast can be purchased there. The hut on the Eiger is not catered and we must bring our food for at least that climb. Plan to purchase food at local stores as the trip progresses.

Summit Pack - A summit pack is required. 30 to 40 liters (about 1900 to 2500 cubic inches) is about the right size. Ideally you want this pack to be light and designed for climbing(narrow with compression straps and ice axe loops)

Ski Poles - this is an optional but **highly** recommended item that is useful in two ways:
1) taking the burden off your knees when coming downhill with a big pack and
2) giving you good balance points when making tricky stream crossings.
Telescoping (adjustable) poles are ideal, but non-adjustable ski poles at a length used in alpine (downhill) skiing will work too. Our guides have found them very helpful.

Water Bottles - Two quart size wide mouth nalgenes or similar leak proof bottle.

Headlamp - Bring an extra bulb and batteries. Headlamps which use only two AA batteries are not acceptable.

Pocket Knife or Multitool

Repair Kit - Crampon adjustment tools.

Personal Medical Kit - For blisters, cuts, scrapes, etc.

Glacier Glasses - With side shields.

Sunscreen - With a protection factor of at least 16. For the fair an SPF of 20 is better.

Lip Protection - With a protection factor of at least 16. For the fair of an SPF of 20 is better.

Personal Toiletries

Ear Plugs - Nice to have in noisy huts.

Camera - With lots of film and an extra battery. SLR cameras are not recommended. Small autofocus cameras which can be carried in an outside camera case are best. If you bring a camera you must be able to quickly access it without taking off your pack.

CAMPING GEAR - We only camp at the request of course participants. If you decide to camp you will need these things. Keep in mind that you can readily rent these items in Chamonix. This may simplify your airline travel.

Sleeping Bag - A lightweight summer bag is adequate. Down or synthetic, rated to about 15°F.

Sleeping Pad - 3/4 or full length closed cell or Thermarest.

Utensils - Large cup and spoon minimum. Most also bring a bowl.