



# American Mountain Guides Association Top Rope Site Managers Courses

**Course Summary:** The Top Rope Instructors Course is a comprehensive course emphasizing the educational and technical proficiency necessary to instruct top rope climbing in a group and/or institutional setting. We offer this course in two locations; Joshua Tree in Southern California or in the Eastern Sierra based from Bishop.

**Course Description:** The American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) top rope instructor training course emphasizes the technical and educational proficiency necessary to safely and professionally instruct rock climbing and climbing related activities in a group setting. The forty five hour course plus exam is intended to help transition recreational climbers into becoming model climbing instructors. An AMGA certificate in Top Rope Site Management will be given to all who successfully complete the program.

The course revisits and improves existing personal recreational climbing skills and introduces guide specific skills. Topics include: expanding your repertoire of belay systems, knots, harness choices, and rappelling methods; exploring and practicing methods of teaching and modeling these skills, coaching participants effectively, noting external and internal hazards, sorting through the equipment, administrative, legal and ethical expectations and responsibilities associated with being a climbing instructor, practicing a variety of anchor configurations and learning many subtleties about anchoring, establishing and managing redirected and belay-from-above top rope climbing sites including various belays and backup methods, extending anchors, negotiating the edge when rappelling, general site management, environmental concerns, coaching, belay transfers, assisting and rescuing climbers, promoting Leave No Trace, and understanding the experiential learning model along with briefing and debriefing processes and learning and teaching styles. We might even get some climbing in...

**Target audience:** outdoor instructors, aspiring guides, and climbers who facilitate top rope climbing programs in group settings such as camps, schools, universities, therapeutic groups, and climbing schools.

**Course Prerequisites:** Participants must have prior top rope climbing experience that includes an ability to comfortably set up top rope climbs, to belay, and to rappel without guidance. Familiarity with anchoring including natural and artificial anchors is also required. The terrain context for the course is top rope sites with an easy approach, situations where leading/soloing is not necessary to reach the anchors. If you are unsure of your skills please talk to the SMC TRSM Course director, Todd Vogel prior to enrolling in the program.

### Summary of prerequisite skills:

Knots: figure 8 family, two loop bowline and bowline variations, grapevine, ring bend.

Belaying: use of a variety of belay plates.

Rappelling: use of figure 8 or belay plate.

Anchoring: able to comfortably utilize natural and artificial anchors to create equalized and redundant anchor systems that have minimal extension. Comfortable with use of cordellettes and runners and evaluating your own anchor systems.

Climbing: able to climb comfortably on mid fifth class terrain and to rappel over edges without coaching.

Gear: has required gear for the course and is comfortable with its use.

Participants may be asked to demonstrate skills prior to the course.

**Course Instructors:** The course is instructed by AMGA certified rock guides or alpine guides who have completed an instructor training program specific to the curriculum. The instructor for most courses is Todd Vogel, AMGA certified rock guide (level II).

**Dates and Prices:** Check our brochure or web site. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of rescheduling, or cancelling. The course fee includes; camping and AMGA membership and course administration fees. Current professional members pay a reduced rate. All participants must be, or become, associate members (and maintain membership) in the AMGA. Food is not included.

**Course length and ratios:** The course is 45 hours in length and will not exceed a ratio of six participants to one instructor and a maximum of twelve students on a course. A minimum of four participants is required to run this course.

**Course Manual:** numerous handouts are included with the course.

**Course completion:** Upon completion of the course participants will receive an oral performance evaluation. After the performance evaluation participants may opt to take the practical skills exam component of the course. After successful completion of the course and exam participants will receive from the AMGA a certificate of Top Rope Site Management. Participants should receive this within one month of completion of the course. The card is only valid when accompanied by the evaluation and is valid for three years from the date of issue. After three years, participants will need to maintain their skills through participation in another top rope instructors course or upgrade their skills through an AMGA guides course. Participants must also maintain an active membership in the AMGA to keep the certificate valid.

**Marketing use by participants:** Organizations who teach or utilize only top rope climbing methods may advertise that their instructors have “completed an AMGA approved top rope instructor training program” only if all of their climbing staff have participated in such a program. Otherwise programs may only market a specific program that will be run by a course graduate at a ratio not to exceed one certified top rope site manager per six students. Programs not meeting the above criteria or teaching other aspects of climbing should seek out instruction through certified guides and undergo AMGA accreditation and peer review.

### **Camping and meeting place:**

**Joshua Tree.** We will camp at either Sheep Pass or at Indian Cove. Once we have a campsite reserved we will let you know the site number. Please contact us prior to the program for this information!

**Bishop.** We have a campsite reserved in the Bishop Creek area. Please contact us prior to the program for this information!

**Getting to Joshua Tree:** find your way to Southern California. If you are flying to get to the program the Ontario airport is your best bet as it is only two hours from Joshua Tree. Rental cars are available there. Driving from the west: take interstate 10 to the Yucca Valley/Hwy 62 exit. Proceed through Yucca Valley and the town of Joshua Tree. Continue west on 62 approximately 7 miles to the Indian Cove entrance to Joshua Tree National Park. This is about half way between Twentynine Palms and Joshua Tree. Head into Indian Cove and the group campground is on your right just before the entrance road “T’s”. An entrance fee of \$10 is charged at Joshua Tree Park and is good for seven days. A Golden Eagle Pass will work too. Yucca Valley is your best place to shop for supplies before heading into the Park. The Indian Cove entrance station has water but otherwise the nearest supplies are in Twentynine Palms, a twenty minute drive from the campground. The nearest phone is 15 minutes from the campground. For programs that base out of Sheep Pass Campground the nearest supplies are a forty minute trip and the nearest phone is half an hour away. There is no water in the Sheep Pass campground.

**Getting to the Bishop Area:** If flying to the area and renting a car: your best bets for airports are: Reno, Nevada (cheap car rentals, four hours drive from Bishop), Ontario, California (five hours from Bishop), Las Vegas, Nevada (Cheapest air tickets generally and cheap car rentals, five hours drive from Bishop), and finally, Los Angeles (five hours drive from Bishop). If this course takes place in early winter snow storms are a strong possibility. If this is the case Reno Airport can get closed on occasion while it generally will take a major disaster to close the Las Vegas Airport. So factor this into your planning and when perusing flights.

# **Curriculum Outline:**

**order of topics may be rearranged as needed.**

## **Day 1**

- Introduction/course overview, ice breakers, instructor & participant introductions, backgrounds, participant goals, course objectives and course overview.
- Professional philosophy and ethics: professional expectations, creating a standard of care, guiding/instructing versus climbing, terrain limitations, client instructor relationship, role modeling, client safety, comfort, and time management, on-going education.
- Administrative concerns: legal issues, equipment record keeping, medical training, program goals and boundaries, consistency
- Site selection: new site suitability, impact potential/access, terrain classification.
- Sample presentations:
  - harness application.
  - knots.
  - belaying: a detailed look at position, friction, anchor, signals, teaching, backing up belays, belay escapes, practice.
- Bouldering: site selections, spotting, coaching techniques, site selection, when is bouldering appropriate/inappropriate?
- Climbing equipment: a detailed discussion, instructor equipment.

## **Day 2**

- Climbing as a tool for growth: experiential learning model, use of new games/initiatives that relate to climbing.
- Participant fears: what are they, recognizing, ways of minimizing.
- Site management: the instructional team/roles, safety/environmental briefings, maintaining the big eye, instructor safety.
- Establishing the common point: anchoring details, bolts, natural features, artificial gear, SERENE: strong, effective, redundant, equalize, no extension; practice.
- Learning/teaching styles: self-evaluation, participants evaluation, coaching movement and skills to different styles.
- Group debrief: understanding debriefing/what, so what, now what.

## **Day 3**

- Redirected top rope climbs (slingshots): extending over the edge, instructor safety, belay/belayer management (anchor options, stance, signals, backups), base management, knot pass avoidance, coaching, topping out, pluses and minuses of redirects, practice.
- Establishing the common point: reprise.
- Rappelling: rappelling versus lowering, devices, backups, using a releasable setup, teaching rappelling: progression, modeling, client and instructor safety, practice.

## **Day 4**

- Traditional top ropes (top belays): advantages/disadvantages, instructor versus client belays, belaying from harness versus belaying from anchor, belay options: plate Munter, Grigri, other options, lowering clients, back up methods, practice.
- 2nd-4th class terrain: recognizing and dealing with hazards, use of fixed lines, frictions knots, practice.
- Assistance and rescue skills: Assisted 2:1 hoist with independent belay, other ascending options: knotted rope, ascending system; belay escape, practice.
- Emergency Planning: what if thinking, prevention, emergency plan.
- Course summary and review.

## **Day 5**

- Evaluation and loose ends.
- Group and one on one debriefs.
- Conclusion late afternoon.

# Equipment list for Top Rope Site Managers Course

- Tent, tarp and car camping equipment.
- Sleeping bag and pad(s).
- Lawn chair.
- Approach shoes.
- Climbing shoes.
- 1 single dynamic rope.
- 1 old beater rope.
- Anchoring materials suitable for crack and boulder/tree tie-off anchors. Several long (50') lengths of static rope or webbing will be useful. Bring plenty of carabiners, both standard and locking.
- Two 30' cordelles of 7 or 8mm cord.
- Harness, belay device, helmet.
- Don't run out and buy the JT guide book but if you have one, bring one. Same with the guidebooks for the Eastern Sierra.
- Clothing for warm or cold, wet or dry. Bring everything from shorts to a down jacket and boots.
- Sunscreen and lip screen.
- Day pack
- Food and cooking gear.
- Notebook and writing equipment

## **Suggested reading**

Knots for Climbers; Craig Luebben; \$4.95

Rope Tech; Bill March; \$12.95

Weathering the Wilderness; Sierra Club Guide William Reifsnnyder; \$8.95

Climbing Anchors; John Long; \$11.95

## **The following may carry the above titles**

Chessler Books

26030 Highway 74

P.O. Box 399

Kittredge, Colorado 80457

800-654-8502

The Mountaineers

1001 SW Klickitat Way

Seattle, WA 98134

800-553-4453

## **Notes**

There is a \$10 entrance fee for Joshua Tree National Park.

The closest water, phone, grocery, fuel, etc. is a forty minute round trip from camp, 15 minutes in Indian Cove.

Having said that it's often nice to sneak into town for a shower or dinner.

In Bishop there are no entry fees. Camping will be about 20-25 minutes from town and Bishop has the usual assortment of restaurants; especially if you like Mexican...

## **PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

### **Cancellation and Deposit Policy:**

For trips of seven or fewer days in length: your reservation is secured with a 50% deposit and the balance is due thirty days prior to the start of the program. A 25% deposit will secure your dates if you are booking more than three months in advance. We accept checks, Visa, or Mastercard.

Cancellation Policy for trips of seven or fewer days in length: If you must cancel, for any reason, with thirty or more days notice you may cancel your dates for a full refund minus a \$100 fee per person. With fourteen to thirty days notice of cancellation prior to the start date of the trip you are liable for 50% of the program fee and with less than fourteen days notice you are responsible for the entire program fee.

Program rescheduling: with more than thirty days notice you may reschedule your trip dates with no charge. With fourteen to thirty days notice of rescheduling you can change your dates if our schedule permits. If our schedule does not permit the change you may keep your original dates or cancel as stated above. Schedule changes are not possible with less than fourteen days notice and we treat such cases as a cancellation. We will only reschedule for the same calendar year.

For trips of more than seven days in length, all corporate or institutional programs: your reservation is secured with a 50% deposit received at least sixty days prior to the start of the program and the balance is due thirty days prior to the start of the program. A 25% deposit will secure your dates if you are booking more than three months in advance but a total of 50% must be received at least sixty days prior to the start of the program.

Cancellation Policy for trips of more than seven days in length and all corporate or institutional programs: With sixty or more days notice: You may cancel your dates for a full refund, minus a \$500 fee per program. With thirty to sixty days notice of cancellation prior to the start date of the trip you are liable for 50% of the program fee and with less than thirty days notice you are responsible for the entire program fee. Program rescheduling: with more than sixty days notice you may reschedule your trip dates with no charge. With thirty to sixty days notice of rescheduling you can change your dates if our schedule permits. If our schedule does not permit the change you may keep your original dates or cancel as stated above. Schedule changes are not possible with less than thirty days notice and we treat such cases as a cancellation. We will only reschedule for the same calendar year.

For any program: If we have not received your balance due with less than fourteen days remaining before the program you may be cancelled from the course and you may lose your deposit. If conditions or circumstances, including weather, preclude running a scheduled program we reserve the right to make the decision as to whether the program will be rescheduled or an alternative provided. In the rare circumstance where we need to cancel a program due to weather you can reschedule without a penalty but no refund will be given. Credits arising from such situations will be honored for 18 months. If circumstances arise that force us to cancel a program that is already in progress we reserve the right to decide whether a credit at a prorated rate or suitable alternative to the program will be issued. We are not responsible for cancellation fees or costs arising from your changed or cancelled flights, lodging, or other arrangements. We recommend obtaining trip cancellation insurance from your travel agent.