



Mountain Climbing



While mountain climbing and off-trail scrambling are recognized as appropriate activities, they are not encouraged. Rock in Glacier is of sedimentary origin, mostly metamorphosed mudstone and limestone. Often loose and unstable, it is generally not suitable for technical climbing.

Many approaches and climbing routes traverse steep snowfields and glaciers. Crevasses, snowfields and snow bridges can hide serious danger. Many times there are cliffs or boulder fields at the base of the snowfield. Please be knowledgeable and careful if your route is over snow.

Use Leave No Trace methods when traveling off trail and on fragile alpine areas. Make sure your presence is known in deep brush and during times when your noise or scent can be muffled by wind or running water.

Before You Go

Inquire at ranger stations for climbing conditions and area closures. You are strongly encouraged to voluntarily register the itinerary of your climb. If you do, please check back in at the nearest ranger station or visitor center on your return. Search and rescue efforts will not be initiated as a result of a climber failing to check back in. A rescue effort will begin only after positive information has been received indicating that a person is overdue.

Be properly equipped and technically qualified in all respects for the particular climb. Prepare for unplanned and unexpected situations. Snow and extreme weather is possible every month of the year in Glacier. You will not be screened for your abilities by National Park Service personnel, although they will be happy to assist you in planning your climb. Keep climbing groups small (4-6 is ideal) for safety and environmental concerns.

Climbing Safety

Start with smaller mountains to test the rock type, your stamina, and your ability. As you develop the appropriate skills, work up to more challenging mountains and routes.

Never climb alone and keep your group together. Don't climb too far ahead of other party members and be prepared to safely belay other climbers if the need arises. When climbing or traversing snow slopes, an ice axe and the skill to safely execute a self arrest are a necessity. You may also need to cut steps and be required to use crampons.

Rockfalls in snow chutes and couloirs are silent killers. Look up! Do not climb above trails, causing rockfall on hikers below. Helmets are **strongly** encouraged.

When there is any possibility of lightning, get off the rocks immediately and find a safe area. Be especially careful crossing streams where there are no bridges.

Carry lots of drinking water to avoid dehydration. Park waters may contain micro-organisms such as giardia, which can cause serious intestinal disorders. Boil, filter, or treat water before drinking.

Know warning signs of hypothermia.

Leave No Trace Outdoor Skills and Ethics

Challenge, adventure, a sense of discovery, and solitude can be part of your backcountry experience. But in order to ensure that Glacier remains unimpaired for future generations, visitors must be motivated by an ethic that compels responsibility toward the resource. It is the task of every backcountry visitor to learn and practice Leave No Trace skills and ethics.

Leave No Trace outdoor skills and ethics is a national program promoting responsible outdoor recreation and stewardship of our public lands. The National Park Service is a cooperating partner in this program, along with other federal land management agencies. Check www.lnt.org for more information.

Practice the 7 Principles of Leave No Trace

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Know and respect regulations and the risks inherent in backcountry travel.
- Select terrain, mileage, and elevation changes everyone in your group can handle.
- Carry adequate food, water, clothing, and the trip essentials (page 2).

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Camp in designated campsites to limit impacts.
- Stay on maintained trails and walk single file down the middle of the trail, even when muddy.
- Shortcutting switchbacks is destructive and illegal.
- If you travel off trail, walk abreast and select the most durable route. Avoid fragile vegetation and saturated soils. Choose durable surfaces such as rock, snow, gravel, or dry grasses for all activities.

Leave What You Find

- All natural and cultural resources are protected by law, with the exception of berries and fish for personal consumption only.
- Never make alterations to tent sites or natural features.
- Avoid new impacts to rehabilitated areas and blocked social trails.
- Rock cairns (piles of small rocks) are often used by other climbers to designate a known off-trail route, especially in the alpine zone. Do not add additional cairns to established routes unless you are sure of the best way and then use them only in moderation. Piling rocks in the park for “artistic” purposes is leaving an impact on other visitors, is considered a disturbance of natural features, and is a form of graffiti.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Avoid conflicts with other types of users.
- Keep group size small.
- Minimize noise in camp.

Properly Dispose of Waste

- Keep Glacier litter free: pack it in - pack it out!
- Never bury food or garbage - pack it out.
- Use toilets when available for both urine and feces.
- In lieu of toilets, deposit feces in a cathole 6-8” (15-20 cm) deep in organic soil, at least 200 ft (61 m) from water. Fill and disguise hole and pack out paper.
- Some overnight trips may require packing out solid human waste.
- Urinate on durable surfaces to reduce vegetation damage from salt-craving wildlife.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

- Self-contained camp stoves are the least impactful.
- Fires are restricted to designated fire pits only.
- When permitted, collect down and dead wood only (size of wrist) and keep fires small and totally contained in fire pit.

Respect Wildlife

- Enjoy wildlife at a distance. Photograph with telephoto lens.
- Never intentionally approach, feed, or harass wildlife.
- Secure food and garbage properly. Remember: a fed bear is a dead bear.

Reference Materials

Glacier’s *Backcountry Camping Guide* is available free at visitor centers, ranger stations, and

USGS Topographic quadrangle maps and numerous climber’s guides are available for purchase at park

