

CHOOSING A CLIMBING SCHOOL

Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School is committed to helping you choose the climbing school or guide service that is right for you. We believe strongly in the value of instructor and guide education and provide the following information to help you make an informed choice.

This was prepared by Jon Tierney, owner of Acadia Mountain Guides.

Jon was one of the earliest individuals to complete the American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) rock guide certification in 1993 and subsequently achieved alpine and ski mountaineering certification to become a fully certified IFMGA internationally recognized mountain guide. He served on the AMGA BOD from 1996 to 2002 and the AMGA technical committee from 1998 to 2008 and was an AMGA instructor/examiner. He also chaired the AMGA Accreditation committee for many years. Jon was the point person behind the development of the AMGA Top Rope Site Manager Course (now called Single Pitch) in 1997 and coordinated it through its youth from 1998 – 2004. He was awarded an AMGA lifetime membership for his educational contributions in 2004. In 2007 Jon stepped aside from the AMGA to help form the Professional Climbing Instructors Association to focus specifically on the needs of the instructional climbing community. He is uniquely qualified to author this information.

There are many quality climbing schools and guides in the Northeast. However, there are differences in quality, substance, and style that can make a particular school or guide a better match for one person or group. Unfortunately *there are also some programs that provide substandard services.* You may be surprised to learn that historically, the training of climbing instructors and guides in the United States has been loosely organized and minimally regulated. Few areas require training to teach or guide rock climbing. While the public is beginning to expect training and certification, there is no government or insurance based requirement regarding outdoor rock climbing instruction especially in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Although risk can never be eliminated, proper training minimizes it. A strong resume of personal climbing is not enough. It must be combined with formal education, evaluation and mentorship to maximize competency and to reduce risks. *Most people expect this of a doctor or engineer - Shouldn't you expect the same from your instructor or guide?*

Since our inception in 1994, Acadia Mountain Guides has consistently offered the public a cadre of highly skilled guides who have been trained and certified by professional organizations before working with clients in the field. Few to no other schools in the country can match this commitment to instructor and guide education. Simply put, I was a believer in guide education and evaluation long before it became a necessary business expense.

When one reviews marketing materials, most climbing schools appear to offer similar products. Crafty language can present a rosy picture to the consumer but what does this all mean? Highly experienced? AMGA or PCIA accredited vs trained vs certified? Fo what training applies to what terrain? How does it relate to you?

In the United States, as in many countries, the needs of climbing instructors and the needs of guides are best served by independently focused organizations. While some individuals are equally adept at instructing and guiding, this is not commonly the case. A person who might be really good at guiding you on Cannon Mountain may not be the best person to teach you how to climb. While both need to be technically proficient climbers, the instructor needs to better understand learning styles and educational outcomes and have a nurturing attitude that supports learning and fun.

The Professional Climbing Instructors Association focuses on the education and certification of climbing **instructors**. Instructors provide early experiences and teach fundamental climbing skills such as belaying, rappelling, anchoring and how to lead climb. They play the pivotal role in forming the habits of new climbers.

The American Mountain Guides Association is best at training rock climbing guides, alpine guides and backcountry ski **guides**. Guides typically focus on leading clients on challenging rock, alpine or ski mountaineering ascents. The primary goal is completing the route safely and there is little time to focus on skills instruction.

The common goal of both organizations is to raise technical and professional standards in the climbing industry.

Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School

Accredited by the Professional Climbing Instructors and the American Mountain Guides Associations
Director – Jon Tierney Internationally Licensed IFMGA Certified Mountain Guide



UNDERSTANDING CLIMBING CERTIFICATIONS

The charts below summarize the training and certification of PCIA and AMGA programs. Both utilize terrain definitions to define the intended scope of practice.

PCIA Modular Courses / Certifications

Base Managed Climbing Instructor: focuses on technical proficiency, safety, core curriculum and educational delivery for sites where anchors can be walked to on top. Time: 4 days

- top rope climbing sites that are belayed from below
- Clifton; Joe's Hole; Ripogenus; Acadia- Canyon, Pebble Beach; NH- Pawtuckaway, Marlow, Lyme.

Top Managed Climbing Instructor: Includes all of the above plus skills to manage participant belays from the top. Time: 5 days

- Otter Cliff

Single Pitch Climbing Instructor: an add on to the above for climbing sites that are belayed from below but require leading up to 5.6 to set up. Time: 5 days

- Central Slabs, South Wall, Camden, Thin Air Wall

Lead Climbing Instructor: same as SPCI but at a higher standard (5.8). Teaches the subtleties how to teach lead climbing. Time: 7 days

Multi-pitch Climbing Instructor: technical and instructional skills on multi-pitch climbs. Requires LCI to start. Time: 15 days including pre-requisites.

- ME and NH guiding except Katahdin.

AMGA Courses / Certifications

Top Rope Site Manager: no longer available. Was similar to the PCIA TMCI.

Single Pitch Instructor: replaced the TRSM and includes verification of recreational leading ability at the 5.4-6 level to set up bottom belay climbs. Minimal emphasis on top belays by participants. Focused primarily on technical skills. Time: 5 days

- Central Slabs, South Wall, Camden but not Otter Cliff if participants belay

Rock Instructor: Focuses solely on technical skills used to guide multi-pitch routes. Time: 15 days. Does not require SPI to start.

- ME and NH guiding except Katahdin.

Rock Guide: multi-pitch routes at a higher 5.10+ grade but does not evaluate educational skill.

- ME and NH guiding, Red Rocks, Yosemite.

Alpine Guide: routes with glaciers, loose rock, and ice.

- Katahdin winter climbing, Alps, Tetons, Cascades

Ski Guide: up and down backcountry ski guiding.

- Katahdin backcountry climbing

Ski Mountaineering Guide: involves mountaineering techniques, rappels, glacier travel, etc.

- Skiing in Alaska, Cascades, Alps

IFMGA: the International Federation of Mountain Guides Association certification is awarded to those completing Rock, Alpine and Ski Mountaineering education (a several year endeavor).

About Accreditation

Intended to upgrade climbing school safety by reviewing operational guidelines, staffing, permits, and insurance. AMGA accreditation requires that one staff member be certified in a discipline. PCIA accreditation requires that all staff members be certified.

Since beginning in 1994, Acadia Mountain Guides has required all guides to participate in formal education, to complete practical certification exams, to attend in house training and to meet wilderness medical requirements. We prefer PCIA certifications for instructional staff and AMGA certifications for rock, alpine or ski guide staff.

Acadia Mountain Guides is the only dually accredited school in New England. Although AMG's local competitors began the same year, AMG has been AMGA accredited twelve years longer.

Acadia Mountain Guides is owned by an IFMGA guide who has been climbing since 1975 and guiding since 1983. By way of comparison, AMG initially trained and certified the current owners of our closest competitor in 2006-07.

Bottom line. Choose your climbing school wisely!

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