

Sunrockice Mount Cook (3754m) 6 Day Program

Available 1 October - 31 March 2002

The Mount Cook program is six days long to give the best possible chance of climbing Mount Cook in normal summer conditions. The season is Mid November to mid February. The Guide to climber ratio is 1:1 only.

Experience Required

There is no longer an 'easy' or 'safe' climbing route on Mount Cook, due to major climatic and glacial changes over the last several years. You must be familiar with glaciated terrain, and fast on crampons, with the ability higher on the mountain to move quickly on mixed ground with two ice tools. Our minimum requirement is a high level of fitness, with the technical skills of a successful Sunrockice Intermediate course participant, or equivalent.

Mt Cook and the Grand Plateau

(Photo : Tom Lowell)



Risk acceptance

Mountaineering is a hazardous activity. The Guide's first priority is always client safety. He or she is trained to decide whether the Mt Cook Linda glacier route can be safely attempted in the prevailing conditions, or if an alternative ascent should be considered.

Alternative Options

Weather conditions, ice and rock fall danger, the extent of crevasses, snow surface conditions, fitness and experience define the acceptable margins for a Mt Cook climb. If Mt Cook is not a safe option, your Guide will offer an alternative venue and ascent for your trip, perhaps Elie de Beaumont or the Minarets from the Tasman glacier, or Mts Tasman, the Minarets, Haidinger, Lendenfeld, or some other challenging peak from the Franz or Fox glaciers.

Conditions:

1. A period of 6 days guided climbing is covered in the cost, even though Mt Cook may take less in very good weather. If your ability and the conditions in the mountains allow, you may, at your Guide's discretion, undertake another climb, or return early to Mt Cook Village. No refund is due in this eventuality.
2. It may sometimes be possible to stay on for extra days, depending on your Guide's schedule. Extensions due to poor weather or conditions, including your fitness and ability, will cost an additional NZ \$575 per day for Guide, food, and hut fees.
3. No refunds will be given if you have to walk in to Plateau hut, or out to Mt Cook Village, by any route.

Route Description

The traditional and still most commonly guided route is the Linda glacier to the North-East ridge and ice cap from Plateau Hut (2200m / 7200ft). Height gain to the summit is 1700m (5500ft) from the Grand Plateau. It is a long and serious climb, rarely taking less than 15-18 hours return.

Crossing the Plateau to the Silberhorn corner access to the Linda glacier is usually easy and fast, which is to be appreciated at 1am on the summit day. The Linda glacier has little technical terrain, other than some crevasse crossings. There is, however, considerable objective danger from ice cliffs and rock fall at the Teichelmann Corner, necessitating a 'no stopping' policy at that point.

Crossing from the upper Linda glacier to the Linda Shelf involves traversing the infamous 'Gun Barrels' both quickly and carefully. The angle of the ice steepens, and can be either short-roped or pitched leftwards on to the Shelf proper. Usually Guide and climber can then move easily together across the Shelf to the NE ridge, the first safe stopping point on the route, reached around daylight. Then several short rope and pitched sections of moderate mixed ice and frost-shattered rock lead up to and through the 'summit rocks'.

The so-called summit rocks are climbed via ice runnels through rock, mostly of moderate angle, for three rope lengths to the ice cap, still some distance from the true summit. Conditions on the ice cap vary from easy snow-ice to fragile 'sastrugi' (heavily rimed) ice. While the terrain is low-angled, it is exposed to wind, and there can be no let up in concentration.

Techniques range from moving together to sometimes pitching sections up to the summit chandelier, where the route joins the north ridge, after 8-10 hours of nearly continuous climbing. (The last 30m of overhanging summit ice is no longer climbed, since much of the East Face fell off on December 14th 1991). A suitable safe peak is reached at the Summit Chandelier. From here you can see both the Pacific Ocean to the east and the Tasman Sea to the west, given clear conditions.

After high peak celebrations and rest, the descent follows the ascent route. The cap can be reversed by short roping in good conditions, or by lowering if not, and the summit rocks are best dealt with by quickly lowering the top three pitches. Softening snow on the Shelf often helps getting across and through the Gun Barrels, and then it's a matter of descending the technically easy Linda glacier. From the high peak return to Plateau hut usually takes 7-10 hours, arriving back in the late afternoon or early evening.

Ice cap at dawn (Photo : Guillaume Dargaud)



Mt Cook ice cap (Photo : Guillaume Dargaud)



Summit rocks (Photo : Guillaume Dargaud)



Fly in

The walk into Plateau hut via the Ball Shelter, Boys glacier and Cinerama col access is a hard 1½-day ascent. We prefer to maximize high climbing time by flying a Cessna 185 aircraft to Plateau hut at the first opportunity, depending on weather and snow conditions. At your Guide's discretion, you may then work up fitness and technique on a smaller climb, (such as the Anzacs), before attempting Mt Cook.

Fly out

We do try to fly out from Plateau Hut, if the weather and conditions allow Cessna 185 aircraft landings on the Plateau. The alternative is the Cinerama Col route, a strenuous 6-8 hours to the road end, or possibly upgrading to a helicopter at extra cost, negotiable on the day.