

Safety First

ROBERT SPEIK '50 KNOWS HOW TO SAIL a boat, race a motorcycle and cast a trout line. He also knows a thing or two about climbing mountains.

Since the late 1960s, Speik has summited more than 300 peaks in the U.S. and Switzerland, ranging from the Matterhorn to peaks in the Sierras and Cascades. He's also spent the past 30 years instructing climbers on the skills, gear and ethics of mountain climbing and backcountry hiking.

Speik was introduced to backpacking during a trip to Yosemite, and got hooked. He then enrolled in a basic mountaineering class, quickly moving from student to instructor to chair of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter Mountaineering Training Committee. After retiring from a career in mortgage banking, he continued teaching mountaineering at Central Oregon Community College in Bend, Oregon, where he moved with his wife, Margaret "Tommie" '49, so they could be near the Cascades.

"I've always had this bent toward mentoring and have been interested in teaching since I was at Pomona," says Speik. Now in his 80th year, he still climbs in the summer, gives lectures on mountaineering and has developed a comprehensive Web site, www.traditionalmountaineering.org, which is filled with news, photos and advice on matters such as "leave-no-trace" practices.

Before heading for the mountains, Speik recommends that would-be climbers read the "bible" of the sport, *Mountaineering, The Freedom of the Hills*, published by The Mountaineers of Seattle, Washington. Whether you're a novice or an expert, proper training and equipment are keys to reducing the inherent risks of climbing.

In addition to the 10 Essential Systems developed by The Mountaineers, Speik emphasizes the importance of climbing with a companion and letting a "responsible person" know where you are going, what you plan to do and when you expect to return. "It's like filing a flight plan at the airport or a float plan when you go out on a boat," he says. Cell phones for shorter trips and satellite phones and/or personal locator beacons for remote areas make it possible to contact search and rescue as soon as something happens.



Ten Essential Systems

Each hiker or climber should carry a light daypack with personal gear, sized for the trip and season. Assembling a pack is easier now than a decade ago, Speik says, noting that LED headlamps weigh in at two ounces and cell phones can be slipped into a pocket, making it possible to follow one of his credos—"go light and fast, fit and experienced."

1. Navigation. Never go without a U.S.

Geographical Survey 1:24,000 topography map or equivalent, a declination-adjusted base-plate compass, an inexpensive newer GPS system and the skills to use them together.

2. Sun protection. High altitude produces bad sunburns. Protect eyes, neck, ears and nose.

3. Insulation. Dress for the weather (pay attention to the forecasts) and take additional layers of synthetic clothing (such as polypropylene, pile and Gore-Tex) to keep you warm and dry if you have to stay in one place because you are lost, injured or must wait with an exhausted companion. Clothing should be sized to the individual and designed for the season.

4. Illumination. Carry a two-ounce LED headlamp. Don't get caught returning in the dark.

5. First aid supplies. Take a wilderness first aid class from the National Outdoor Leadership School. Assemble a small supply, including Neosporin, large Band-Aids, gauze pads, athletic tape and any prescription medicine you need.

6. Fire. Waterproof matches and a fire starter can be combined with a couple of adjustable propane pocket lighters. Remember, when you most need a fire, it will be windy, wet and cold. Learn how to stay warm without a fire.

7. Tools. Carry a small sharp folding knife.

8. Nutrition. Take high carbohydrate, low-fat energy bars and freeze-dried meals.

9. Hydration. Carry quarts of water as needed, and perhaps the gear to make more from snow.

10. Emergency shelter. Pack a six-ounce insulating pad and a nine-ounce bivy sack. In snow, add a strong plastic shovel, snow caving skills and/or a four season two-pound tent. ❖

For more information: www.traditionalmountaineering.org