



# ST. ELIAS ALPINE GUIDES, LLC

## Glacier Travel and Mountaineering

### ITINERARY

#### Topographical Maps: McCarthy 1: 250,000 & McCarthy (C-6) 1: 63,360

**DAY 1** - We will begin the day with an equipment check. St. Elias Alpine Guides has a detailed equipment list with strong recommendations. This list, while not the “gospel” should be closely followed when deciding on equipment. Please give us a call well before arrival if you have questions. We will be looking at the type of equipment you’ve brought and its durability. We will drive up to the McCarthy airfield to meet our bush pilot for the flight into a small remote airstrip along the west side of the Kennicott Glacier around 3500 feet in elevation. We immediately leave “civilization,” and gain access to a truly pristine mountain wilderness. The short flight traverses the seemingly impenetrable rock covered ice of the Kennicott Glacier. We fly past iceberg filled Hidden Lake and gain magnificent views of 16,390-foot Mt. Blackburn, numerous icefalls and the craggy Ahtna peaks. Once on the ground, we will shoulder packs and begin ascending either one of the ridges that leads to the glaciers high above us, or climb directly up the steep alpine glacier just to our south. We have over 2000 vertical feet to tackle, thus camp will be made before we access the snow-covered glaciers.

**DAY 2** - In the morning we will discuss safe glacier traveling skills: how to rig yourself up for self crevasse rescue, how to make sure your pack and other equipment are attached to the rope, and how to anchor yourself if a climbing member falls into a crevasse. Route finding will be a major focus as we finally reach the snow-covered glaciers and begin to pick our way around crevasses and ice seracs (large chunks of ice that have broken off from the edges of crevasses on steep terrain). We will talk about why to choose a certain path, and where danger from avalanches or rock fall may be encountered. Our goal is to find a good solid site for Base Camp. Once found we will teach how to establish a glacier camp; building snow walls, digging kitchens, anchoring tents. We’ll go over the use of group equipment such as stoves, cook tent, etc. Throughout the expedition we will begin stressing human impact. We’ll talk about natural hazards, horseplay, and risk awareness.

**DAY 3** - Education is a prime directive and we hope that everyone will take full advantage of the guides’ experience and knowledge by asking questions. We’ll grab our gear and hike to a steep snowfield. Here we will cover the spectrum of snow climbing. We’ll discuss the differences between snow, ice and rock climbing, and the special techniques needed on snow for belaying and anchoring. Next will be the placing of anchors--snow flukes and pickets. Everyone will get the chance to “fall” on their own anchor placement and get hands on learning of good and bad placement. Ice axe arrest is a vital skill while snow climbing and we will spend time focused on proper technique. “On the job training” will be the focus, and everyone will take a turn “falling”--on their back, on the stomach, upside down, every which a way! We will choose an “easy” peak within distance and put to use the skills we have learned and practiced as we make our way to its summit. We’ll return to Base Camp by afternoon and relax. Depending on the conditions, we may have to switch to a night climbing schedule. In early summer it never truly gets dark in Alaska, and snow conditions are much safer during the cold of the night-- snow bridges over crevasses are stronger and there is less avalanche danger. Around midnight we’ll start cooking “breakfast.” The first climb is for acclimatizing, and we’ll head up a nearby peak. We’ll pick one that is not technically difficult and just work some of the kinks out. The sun will have set, but a beautiful soft alpine glow will bath surrounding peaks. Sunset and sunrise are all one event here, and by 2 or 3 am, a brilliant scarlet sky in the east will announce the sun’s return. We’ll be back in camp by 10 am, eat “dinner” and hit the rack!

**DAY 4** - This day/night we will make our “graduation” climb. We will continually stress safe climbing technique, avalanche awareness and mountaineering hazards. We’ll climb steep snow and loose rock, using the culmination of experience we’ve learned from the previous days. We will stay a little on the conservative side of climbing knowing that we are totally dependent upon ourselves for emergency procedures, but certainly we can challenge ourselves! Our climbing will be dependent upon each individual’s skills and goals.

**DAY 5** - We will retrace our route down to the landing site, where we’ll rendezvous with the plane late in the day for the flight back to McCarthy.

#### What’s included:

- 5 days/4 nights in the backcountry of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Knowledgeable/experienced guide(s)
- Great food
- Group gear including tents and cooking gear, etc. (see backpacking equipment list for personal gear requirements)
- Climbing equipment including ropes, snow and ice anchors, crampons, ice tools, and snow shoes
- Bush flight to/from McCarthy and the “Fosse” landing strip alongside the Kennicott Glacier