



St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC
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Alaska Mountaineering – Alpine Light Expedition

Exploring the mountains with knowledge and experience allows climbers to move "fast and light." The Alpine Light Expedition is an introduction to this method of Alaska mountaineering. The heart of the St. Elias Mountains--a landscape that rivals any mountain kingdom in the world--is a "classroom" filled with opportunities for learning and practicing alpine climbing techniques. The focus of this expedition will be on moving quickly and carefully over many types of terrain, working on route finding, glacier travel skills, crevasse recognition, campsite selection, avalanche evaluation, anchor systems, multi-pitch climbing, ice climbing, and steep terrain climbing. All types of terrain will be explored including snow covered and non-snow-covered glaciers, steep snow couloirs and faces, rock ridges, and technical ice climbing. No previous mountaineering experience is required, however, good physical condition is a must, and strong backpacking experience is required.



Trip Highlights:

- Alaska mountaineering in the spectacular Chugach Mountains
- Learn "fast and light" skills to efficiently climb and backpack in Alaska
- Explore remote glaciers and mountain peaks.
- Experience the spectacular scenery of the Wrangell St. Elias National Park

Alpine Light Expedition – Detailed Itinerary

The following is a sample itinerary for this trip. Due to individual abilities and goals, as well as the demanding environment, all of our Alaska mountaineering trips are customized as they unfold. The guide will constantly make decisions based on weather, logistics and group dynamics to maximize each day's experience. There can be quite a bit of variation, but we always strive to make every trip your best ever.

DAY 1- Your Alaska mountaineering adventure starts at our headquarters in the historic Motherlode Powerhouse of McCarthy, Alaska. Our professional mountaineering guides have been busily making preparations for your trip and are excited to meet you. You know you are in good hands as you begin to get to know them - reviewing your itinerary, going over the menu, and making sure that you have your equipment in order and are properly outfitted for the trip. After the final checks are complete, the excitement builds as you and your guide head for the airstrip. There you meet your pilot and board a bush plane for the 45-minute flight south to the Iceberg Lake region of the Chugach Mountains. During the flight be sure to have your camera at the ready. The landscape below is rich with history and stunning natural beauty as you fly over thick spruce forests, lakes, and the mighty braided channels of the Nizina and Chitina rivers. Try to imagine yourself as one of the early explorers, who in the late 1800's travelled through this region in search of a route to the Yukon goldfields.



On a clear day, Mt. Logan looms far to the east, at the headwaters of the Chitina River, and just to the south of that is Mount Saint Elias. At 19,551 feet (5,959m), Mt. Logan is the second highest peak in North America, and Mount Saint Elias is the tallest in Wrangell St. Elias National Park at 18,009 feet (5489m). As the plane turns slightly to ascend the Tana River you'll fly over the infamous Tana River Canyon. Class IV white water rapids punctuate this glacial

river as it is funneled into a narrow, rocky canyon. At its entrance are 500-foot sand dunes, deposited by the constant wind blowing down canyon from the Bagley Icefield to the south. Just around the corner lies the high alpine valley of Iceberg Lake. Tucked away between the immense Bagley Icefield to the south and the convoluted Bremner Glaciers to the west and north, this remote valley is almost completely surrounded by precipitous, jagged peaks. Spiraling down, your pilot gradually loses altitude in preparation for a truly Alaskan bush landing on the smooth sandbars of Iceberg Lake.

As you wave goodbye to your pilot and silence returns to the valley, the majesty of your surroundings will descend upon you and your guide. Together, you gather your gear and set off to establish and base camp, reveling in the awe and camaraderie that only a true wilderness experience can bring. Depending on where you establish your base camp, you and your guide may spend the afternoon reviewing basic crampon and ice axe skills on one of the numerous hanging glaciers nearby.

DAY 2 - Alpine Light is the definition of this adventure. To go "light", as you climb and backpack in Alaska, you must have a unique set of skills. Your guide is an expert in tailoring the day's activities to your skill level and goals. Whether your expedition starts with ice climbing or glacier travel, this first full day in the mountains will be spent on

teaching and learning, while having fun safely in the mountains. If your group is climbing towards the higher peaks, this day will be one of fine tuning your equipment and choosing the best advanced base campsite from which you can climb several summits

DAYS 3 – 6 – From an advanced base camp, you will have access to two or three glacier covered summits. The first day of climbing, you may start with an “easy” route, working on basic skills of roped glacier travel combined with route finding. The guide will discuss the intricate factors that you will use to make decisions about avalanche, serac, and crevasse dangers. As your experience grows and your skill level expands you will head towards steeper and more difficult terrain. You’ll have the opportunity to work on snow anchors (deadmen, flukes, stacked pickets, picket fences). You’ll be able to work on mock lead climbing, and perhaps get the chance to be on the “sharp” end of the rope. As your climbing skills increase, you decide to move camp to within striking distance of a challenging peak. Creating a “bomb-proof” glacier camp, you and your guide work together as a team on this, the “graduation” climb. By the end of Day 6, after accomplishing your goals, you make your way back to your original base camp.



DAYS 7 & 8 – Pure, clean ice climbing will be the focus of at least one full day of this expedition. You and your guide grab ice tools, harnesses, and helmets and head off to a nearby glacier to learn the techniques for near vertical ice climbing. Unlike water ice, glacier ice is a wonderful medium to climb. It’s very forgiving, easy to place your tools in, and gives your front points wonderful grip. You’ll learn the difference between ice and snow anchors, you’ll work on raising and lowering systems for rescue knowledge, and you will get the chance to climb as much steep ice as you feel like!

The evening of the 8th day will find you and your guide packed and ready to rendezvous with your bush plane flight back to McCarthy. Upon arrival back to “civilization” it’s time for well-deserved rest, good food, and if you’d like, a soak in our rustic wood-fired sauna.

The Alpine Light Expedition is a great course for people of all skill levels to push their own personal limits, learn new things, and spend some quality time in the splendid, Alaskan wilderness.

What's Included?

As with all of our Alaska mountaineering, the 8-day Alpine Light Expedition includes professional, experienced mountaineering guides with extensive local knowledge and medical training. We provide all food for the backcountry portions of your trip, including hot, delicious meals morning along with evening and plenty of snacks and lunch food for mid-day nourishment. St. Elias Alpine Guides also provides shared group gear, including stoves, pots, and tents, as well as technical gear (ropes, climbing protection,



crampons, harnesses, helmets, etc). All you need to bring is your personal gear, (clothing, rain gear, boots, sleeping bag and pad). If you have your own climbing gear, we recommend that you bring it so you can familiar with its use as you learn and hone your systems for mountain climbing in Alaska. You can find a detailed list of the gear that we recommend you bring on our mountaineering equipment list.

If you would like us to arrange your transportation to/from McCarthy/Kennecott and/or lodging while in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, we offer this as a free service to our multi-day clients. Please email or give us a call to discuss the details.