



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

If you're interested in expanding your outdoor skills and mountain climbing experience, our Expedition Course is a great introduction to Alaska mountaineering. The course takes place deep in the heart of the remote Chugach Mountains, where you will learn how to assess and minimize risks to efficiently travel on mountain glacier terrain and snow covered peaks. Our mountaineering courses are taught by experienced mountain guides to ensure you're receiving the highest quality and most current instruction available in Alaska mountaineering.

Trip Highlights:

- Alaska mountaineering in the spectacular Chugach Mountains
- Exploring remote glaciers and rugged mountain peaks.
- Learning the skills necessary to achieve your own mountaineering goals while climbing mountains in Alaska!
- Experiencing the solitude and awe-inspiring scenery of the Wrangell St. Elias National Park



8-Day Alaska Mountaineering Course - Detailed Itinerary

The following is a sample itinerary for this trip. Due to individual abilities and goals, as well as the demanding environment of Alaska, all of our 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 adventure starts at our headquarters in the historic Motherlode Powerhouse of McCarthy, Alaska. Our professional mountain 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'll gather your gear and set off to establish a base camp reveling in the awe and camaraderie that only a true wilderness experience can bring.

You and your guide will make an initial assessment of the terrain and decide which pathway might allow the easiest access into the high peaks. You will cross sandbars, tundra covered meadows and rocky debris as you make your way to the icy tongue of the glacier that slides down the mountain. Once on the ice, the party dons crampons and your guide will begin pointing out subtleties in the terrain that indicate potential hazards. After a solid day of approach, the ridgeline basks in alpenglow. Camp is struck, hot cocoa enjoyed, and anticipation is high.

DAY 2 – You wake to sounds in the kitchen, as your guide is preparing hot drinks. The group is up early, and after a hardy breakfast, camp is packed and we begin the steep ascent towards the higher peaks. We cross the firn line where snow begins to cover the crevasses, and after a thorough explanation and review of skills, the team ropes up. This day will be one of fine tuning your equipment, learning/reviewing basic glacier travel skills, and choosing the best advanced base campsite from which the team can climb several summits. A campsite is selected and probed for hidden hazards, the kitchen is dug out, tents are set up, and the views are simply incredible.

DAYS 3 and 4 – Climbing mountains in Alaska requires good, solid skills and 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, learning, and having fun safely in the mountains. From your advanced base camp, you will have access to two or three glacier covered summits. This first day of climbing we 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.

Pure, clean ice climbing will be the focus of at least one full day of this expedition. You and your guide grab to ice tools, your helmet 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 as it is 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!

DAY 5 – You wake to snow. This prompts a discussion on working with the cycles of the mountains. Aside from learning technical skills, a major objective on our mountaineering courses is to convey the *soft skills* of mountain climbing, or “mountain sense”. To the untrained eye, an old and wise mountain man or woman can move through the most difficult terrain with such efficiency that it would appear the laws of physics don't apply to them. This is mountain sense. Our goal is to give our clients the skills to experience the mountains on their terms, to help develop their own mountain sense. Over the course of the day, you have several discussions with your guide about watching the weather, reading the terrain and conditions, and learning how to read that signs that tell mountaineers when to climb, and when to stay put. Various hard skills that have been taught or reviewed over the previous days are practiced and improved. Your guide and teammates share knowledge with one another. The day is restful, but much is learned.

DAYS 6 and 7 – Everyone is excited to put their new skills to the test, and the group decides to head for a steeper climb. You work on mock lead climbing, and perhaps get the chance to be on the “sharp” end of the rope. You'll have the opportunity to work on snow anchors (deadmen, flukes, stacked pickets, picket fences) for belay stations as well as climbing protection.

After several days of climbing, practicing and focus, your sights move to a steep, formidable peak that has been looming over camp. You will work together as a team on this, the “graduation” climb. It is difficult and challenging – your guide will help you to push your own limits and to understand your own limitations. The exposure is exhilarating, and the final push to the summit brings the elation of a long sought after goal. The wind blows in your face as you let out a triumphant yowl, taking in the sweeping views and ecstatic with your accomplishment.

DAY 8 – You, your guide and the team pack up camp and descend back to the valley floor to rendezvous with our bush plane flight back to McCarthy. The descent goes by quickly, not only because of the strength and stamina gained over the course, but also because our newly honed skills and sharp eye make navigating easy. Lounging on the airstrip, waiting for the plane, the stories begin and highlights of the trip are recounted, until the telltale buzzing of a small aircraft

catches your attention. While flying, the deep satisfaction of your experience and achievements sets in. You look at the mountains below and can pick out potentially safe routes as well as possible hazards. You look to Mount Saint Elias on the horizon, and just maybe, you see a climbing line that inspires you... someday...

Upon arrival back to “civilization” it’s time for a celebratory meal, a soak in the Saint Elias Alpine Guides rustic wood-fired sauna, and some well-deserved rest. You look forward to sharing this adventure with friends and family.

The 8 day Expedition Course is a great mountaineering course for people of all skill levels to push their own personal limits, learn new skills, and spend some quality time in the splendid, Alaskan wilderness.

As with all of our Alaska mountaineering courses, our 8 day Expedition Course 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 ([LINK](#)).

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.