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## **Alaska Mountaineering – Mt. Sanford Expedition**

From the broad summit plateau down to the lush tundra that surrounds its base, Mt. Sanford, with its massive bulk, is the 6th tallest peak in the United States at 16,237 ft (4,949 m). The Sheep Glacier route is moderate climbing - Alaska Grade 1 - and with 13,000 feet (3,962 m) of vertical gain along the way, there is plenty of climbing and scenic views overlooking the bulk of Mt. Blackburn, the shield volcano of Mt. Wrangell and the Fuji-like pyramid of Mt. Drum.

The Sheep glacier, arduous but not steep, is moderately crevassed, and brings other "big mountain" characteristics such as altitude, weather, white-out navigation and a large dose of remoteness.

Participants should be strong backpackers or beginning climbers with strong legs. For the intermediate backcountry skier, Sanford offers stellar big mountain lines. Mount Sanford is an 8-12 day trip.



### **Trip Highlights:**

- Great Alaska mountaineering expedition for strong climbers of all skill levels.
- Excellent ski mountaineering opportunities in the early season.
- Breathtaking views of the massive volcanoes of the Wrangell Mountains.
- Learn new skills from experienced Alaska mountain guides and increase.

### **Mt. Sanford 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.

### ***Some interesting facts about the mountain.....***

Mt. Sanford was named in 1885, by Lieutenant Henry Allen after a superior officer in the War Department. It is a shame that this name simply doesn't do justice to the magnificence of this beautiful mountain. Mt. Sanford, at 16,237 feet (4,949 m) anchors the Wrangell Mountains on the northwest corner, and is the first huge glaciated mountain seen as one approaches this magnificent wilderness, either from the Alaska Highway from the east, or Anchorage from the west. Formed just to the north of the St. Elias Mountains, the Wrangells are volcanoes formed



by the fiery collision of tectonic plates that lead to the birth of the immense St. Elias and Ice Field Ranges to the south and east. Mt. Sanford, Mt. Blackburn, and Mt. Wrangell, are all massive volcanoes, with Mt. Wrangell being the most recent peak to erupt, in 1916. During this eruption, 3 feet of ash was deposited on the Copper River Valley below. Mt. Sanford and the rest of the Wrangells are relatively unknown mountains. First climbed in 1938 by Bradford Washburn and Terris Moore, Mt. Sanford was the second major peak of the Wrangells to be scaled. Climbed less than

50 times, Mt. Sanford is still a wilderness climbing experience, as well as an immense, glacier covered Arctic peak. An attempt on this remote giant gives a climber a great introduction into world class mountaineering. You won't have to stand in line, waiting to clip onto fixed ropes here, like you do on Denali. There are numerous unclimbed faces and ridges waiting for the footprints of future mountaineers. Additionally, Mt. Sanford is an excellent ski mountaineering experience, and the route up the Sheep Glacier, in early season, gives the expedition members exposure to great skiing terrain, high altitude, and the cold of Arctic mountaineering.

**DAY 1-** We meet you at your hotel, in Anchorage, early in the morning and begin the drive to your staging site (This could be Glennallen, Chistochina, Chitina or McCarthy depending on where our pilot wishes to fly us in from). Within minutes of leaving Anchorage, the scenery becomes impressive. On one side are the steep, snow-capped peaks of the Chugach, and on the other side, the tidal flats of Cook Inlet. Turning east, the Glenn Highway follows the Matanuska River valley where the long days of summer produce the famous sixty pound cabbages. As you approach Chickaloon Pass, the white ice of the mighty Matanuska Glacier fills the valley below. On a clear day the magnificent Wrangell Mountains will be directly in front of you as you descend the pass. Mt. Drum stands out and looks the highest, because it is much closer. In reality it is the smallest of these large peaks at 12,010 feet (3,660 m). Mt. Sanford at 16,237 ft (4,949m) is on the left (north), and the huge dome of 14,163 ft (4,316m) Mt. Wrangell is to the right (south). Mt. Wrangell is the largest active volcano in the world. On a clear day, it is even possible to see the massive form of Mt. Blackburn in the distance. At 16,390 ft (4,995m) this spectacular peak is the tallest of the Wrangells, and only twenty five miles from McCarthy.

Depending on where your flight is departing from, our Alaska mountain guides will check your equipment either in Anchorage or at our headquarters in McCarthy. St. Elias Alpine Guides has a detailed equipment list with various recommendations, coming from three decades of mountaineering in Alaska.

After the equipment check you and your guide discuss logistics, delving into specific expedition menus, their nutritional values, and how to package it all for the trip. You also discuss equipment in depth; what kind of tents, ropes, and sleeping bags are best and why. Once all the checks are complete, you and your guide rendezvous with your bush pilot and fly in to the mountain this afternoon or spend the night and prepare for a flight first thing the following morning.

**DAY 2-** The bush plane sets you down just above the Sheep Glacier at approximately 5,500 feet (1,676 m). You and your guide establish a cache here, and then move equipment down a steep glacial moraine to the Glacier where you establish a base camp. To protect the camp from high winds, you dig your tents into the snow and create a large wall around them made of snow blocks. This technique, as well as many more you'll encounter, is standard of an Alaska glacier trek. Your guide welcomes questions and is always happy to teach new skills to those willing to learn.

**DAY 3** – Arising early this morning, you find yourself in a remote mountain wilderness. The beauty is breathtaking and the anticipation of the climb has you and your guide excited for the adventures ahead. This is the time when you take a minute to focus on safety. There are no other humans within miles and you and your guide are totally dependent upon each other for safety and rescue. There are no “Park Rangers” here, and climbing safely and prudently is essential. The route today ascends the Sheep Glacier. The first day will be one that is taken slowly, to get acclimatized, to become familiar with the terrain, and to carefully learn crevasse rescue systems.



**DAY 4** – Today you continue to move gear, food, and equipment to the 9,000 foot (2,743 m) level below a large ice prow from the upper glacier. You will be introduced to an acclimatization technique known as "climbing high, and sleeping low" which is the best way to help your body adjust to the higher altitudes. These first days are vital to successfully acclimate and break your body in physically to this new environment, so you continue to take it slow and careful. And, although safety is our number one priority, don't forget to enjoy the amazing scenery and the camaraderie of climbing, shared with your guide.

**DAY 5 thru DAY 9** – You and your guide continue ascending the Sheep Glacier. The terrain is not steep, but the wind and cold can make the skiing conditions....interesting. As you travel,

you work on roped skiing techniques, always making sure to climb safely. At each camp you dig in, making sure that you're prepared for any weather that might come along. During the climb you'll also have the opportunity to discuss the differences between snow, ice and rock climbing, and the special techniques needed on snow for belaying and anchoring. Self-arrest with an ice axe is a vital skill while snow climbing and you and your guide will take time to focus on developing proper technique.

From High Camp there is approximately 2,000 vertical feet (609 m) and several miles (4.8 km +/-) left to the summit. Your guide will make the call to head for the summit if the weather is good, and looks to be holding. Prepare yourself; summit day will be 10 to 12 hours of hard physical work. The terrain is not steep, but the altitude combined with a variety of snow conditions will suck the energy out of legs and lungs. This is where your training program will show its effect! It is important that team members be in good physical condition before embarking on the Expedition.



The summit is always a bonus while climbing in Alaska. Many different factors must be in place to be able to finally stand safely on the top of the Wrangells. Safety is always the main focus of our climbs. If one of the team members needs assistance, everyone needs to be prepared to pitch in and help on a rescue. An accident or rescue might mean the end of the Expedition, but safety and human life is the priority. All team members are expected to work together, to set aside personal needs and goals at times, so that they may work

as a team and make the chances to reach the summit much greater.

**DAY 10** – You and your guide retrace your footsteps and descend the same route. Hopefully you're wearing the "perma-grin" smiles that come from achieving such a worthy goal. We're convinced, however, that even if reaching the summit isn't in the cards, the stunning scenery and good company will have you smiling anyways. You continue down, collecting any caches that you made on the ascent. Nothing will be left on the mountain. Though you and your guide are tired, you try to descend as quickly and safely as possible, to get as low on the mountain as you can. This greatly reduces your chances of being pinned down by bad weather. Once back in Base Camp, you dig in and wait for the bush plane to pick you up. You and your guide are partners now and you pass the time swapping stories and reveling in your amazing experience.

**DAY 11** – Today you retrace your route to Anchorage where we'll drop you off at your hotel. You depart with wishes of "Safe climbing!" and already the wheels are turning; dreaming up your next adventure. Mt. Blackburn, Mt. Drum, Mt. Bona.....?

The Mt. Sanford expedition varies greatly, depending on the time of year it's climbed. In March, April and early May, we climb Mt. Sanford with skis. This mountain is a world class ski mountaineering challenge and offers the chance of memorable turns. The route on the Sheep Glacier is moderately steep, but offers great skiing with all the views, terrain and challenges of a large glaciated Arctic mountain. During these climbs, cold weather is our main concern. The temperature can drop to minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit! Exposed skin can become frozen in a matter of seconds. During the climb, we continually focus on proper clothing and food and fluid intake to be prepared for severe cold. During late May and June, Sanford becomes a mountaineering challenge due to crevasse fields and route finding problems. During these climbs, we focus on teaching the skills of crevasse rescue, snow anchor systems and roped glacier travel.

Depending on the style of the expedition, a climb of Mt. Sanford can take as little as a week, or as long as two weeks. It is imperative that climbers understand that this 16,237 foot giant can be hit by severe storms that crash into it from the immense Alaska interior. The winds can howl at over 100 miles an hour, and a storm can last anywhere from a day, to more than a week! We recommend that climbers schedule at least 10 days for this climb, however, 14 days would give even a better chance of being able to sit out a long storm and still have a shot at making the summit.

### **What's Included?**

As with all of our Alaska mountaineering trips, the Mt. Sanford Expedition includes professional, experienced Alaska mountain 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 mountaineering in Alaska. You can find a detailed list of the gear that we recommend you bring on our [mountaineering equipment list](#).

