



Mt. Bona (16,421 feet)

Topographical Maps: McCarthy 1: 250,000 & McCarthy (B-2) 1: 63,360

For most of us the word Alaska conjures up images of rugged mountains, brawling rivers, abundant wildlife, and the independent people it takes to live in America's "Last Frontier." In reality, Alaska is all of this, and much, much more.

The sheer size of Alaska is staggering. Its landmass is equal to one fifth of the entire United States. If you could lay Alaska on top of the "Lower 48" it would reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. Alaska's mountains have more vertical relief than the Himalayas, the coastline is longer than all the rest of the states combined, and its weather covers the full range of extremes, hot and dry to snow on the 4th of July.

Wrangell/St. Elias is the largest National Park in our nation. Over 16 Yosemite would fit in its boundaries. This Park is larger than the entire country of Costa Rica. Of its 13.2 million acres, five million are permanently covered with ice and snow. This region has the largest concentration of mountain peaks over 14,500 feet in North America. Combined with neighboring Kluane Park of Canada, Wrangell/St. Elias has been recognized as a World Heritage Area by the United Nations, and constitutes one of the outstanding wilderness resources in the World.

ITINERARY

DAY 1- We will pick you up at your hotel in the morning and begin our drive to McCarthy. Our route will take us along the Chugach Mountains. Within minutes of leaving Anchorage, the scenery becomes impressive. On one side are steep, snow-capped peaks, and on the other side, the tidal flats of Cook Inlet. We will follow the Matanuska River Valley where the long days of summer produce the famous sixty-pound cabbages. As we approach Chickaloon Pass we will sight our first glacier, the mighty Matanuska.

Glaciers are Mother Nature's pathways into the mountains. They gain altitude gradually and the hiker can avoid precipitous ridges. Typical cross-country terrain in Alaska can range from hip-deep bogs and muskeg to impenetrable alder thickets. These frozen rivers are highways in comparison.

On a clear day the magnificent Wrangell Mountains will be directly in front of us as we descend from Chickaloon Pass. Mt. Drum will stand out the most, and look the highest, but that's because it's much closer. In reality, at 12,010 feet, it is the smallest of these large peaks. Mt. Sanford (16,237 feet) is on the left (north) and the huge dome of Mt. Wrangell (14,163 feet) is to the right (south), which is the largest active volcano in the world. If it is very clear, it is even possible to see the massive form of Mt. Blackburn in the distance. This peak at 16,390 feet is the tallest of the Wrangells, and only twenty-five miles from McCarthy.

At Glennallen we will turn south towards Valdez until we reach the Edgerton Cutoff. Here we'll turn due east. The Copper River carves the large valley in front of us. It's 35 miles to the old railroad town of Chitina. Across from the Chitina Bar is the old boxcar from the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad completed in 1910. Along a road just above the bar is an old Model-T with railroad wheels, used after the line was abandoned in 1939

for private transport up and down the tracks. There is still a population of native Ahtna Indians that have inhabited this region long before white people arrived.

We will continue out of Chitina, through a narrow cut in the rocks that gives you the feeling of being on a steam locomotive over 60 years ago. We'll then turn the corner for a panoramic view of the Copper and Chitina Rivers' confluence. Cross the new highway bridge over the Copper River and you'll be on the old railroad bed.

The next sixty miles takes you through spruce forests, alder thickets, along lakes and over gorges. The Kuskalana Bridge will excite everyone as they get to look straight down over 250 feet to the boiling, silt laden waters below. Small homesteads along the way will show that this is a growing region, where people still hope to carve their livelihoods from the land. Several lakes along the road, Silver and Sculpin have good fishing, but further along, more mountains and glaciers begin to dominate the scene.

After a few hours, the end of the road is in sight. The roaring Kennicott River slices the road like a knife. A new footbridge allows the only summer access to the community beyond. Directly to your left (north) is the rock and gravel covered Kennicott Glacier. Once the vehicle is abandoned at the riverside, a walk across the bridge will lead us into McCarthy. A quick ride in one of our McCarthy vehicles will deliver us 1/2 mile to the Motherlode Powerhouse, home of St. Elias Alpine Guides.

The Motherlode Powerhouse was built in 1917 by the Motherlode Copper Company to house the boiler and Allis-Chalmers steam driven turbine producing electricity for their mining operations. It is currently listed in the Registry of Historic Places.

DAY 2- We will begin the day with an equipment check. St. Elias Alpine Guides has a detailed checklist 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 have brought and its durability.

After the equipment check we will discuss expedition logistics, delving into specific trip menus and how to package it all for an expedition. We will continue our discussion with an in depth study of equipment, what kind of tents, ropes, and sleeping bags are best and why. We will grab ice axes, crampons, harnesses and ropes for a review of techniques and terminology. We will cap off the day with a session of crevasse self rescue. You will put your harness on, tie into the rope and then with the aid of ascenders climb the rope to the three story ceiling of the Motherlode Powerhouse, just like you were climbing out of a crevasse.

DAY 3- In the morning we will drive up to the McCarthy airstrip to meet our bush pilot for the flight to Mt. Bona. We will land at about 10,500 feet on the Klutlan Glacier. Once the plane is gone, we are alone and dependent on each other for safety and rescue. There are no "Park Rangers" here, and we must always be aware of climbing safely and prudently. We will immediately set up our base camp.

First off, setting up camp involves creating a large snow wall to protect us against the wind. Throughout the process we'll continually talk about what we are doing and why. Taking advantage of your guides' experience by asking questions is key to your education on the mountain.

The first couple of days are important to the expedition. We may want to change to a night schedule since the snow conditions are better in the coldest part of the day. Since it never truly gets dark in the early parts of the Alaska summer, night climbing is simple and hopefully the snow bridges over the glacier's crevasses are much stronger and there

is less avalanche danger in the midnight hours. So, after setting up camp we'll retire to our tents for some sleep.

DAY 4- Today we'll begin the second important step for the climb; ACCLIMATIZING. We'll make sure that we hydrate well, and take our time getting prepared to ascend higher. Acclimatizing today is particularly crucial because we landed at such a high altitude. We'll head out on a short ski (or hike on snowshoes) to a ridge overlooking the University Range and the Chitina Glacier. After the short adventure, we'll return to base camp to discuss more winter camping techniques and refresh crevasse rescue skills, also crucial to the climb.

At times the weather at base camp will try to deceive us. There is a small microclimate here that often involves cloudy conditions and the illusion of incoming storms. At higher camps we'll be able to more accurately judge the true weather conditions we'll expect for summit day.

DAY 5- Shouldering packs we'll ski or snowshoe to 12,000 feet. (Note: If skiing, this first day of travel is more difficult than the other portions of the expedition. On skis, you should be comfortable skiing while wearing a heavy pack. On snowshoes, the route is not difficult). Camp 2 will be established here, again making sure we build large snow walls for wind protection and a comfortable "home" no matter what the weather may throw at us. With clear skies we will be able to see the immense massif of 14, 831-foot Mt. Bear, which straddles the Alaska/Yukon border to the east.

DAY 6- Today will be dedicated to acclimatizing. Weather permitting 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!

DAY 7-DAY 8- We'll move camp to 14,000 feet and establish Camp 3. This airy site sits below the plateau between 16, 421-foot Mt. Bona and 15, 638 foot Mt. Churchill. From our camp our view encompasses the entire southeastern portion of the Park; 19,850-foot Mt. Logan, 18,008-foot Mt. St. Elias, Mt. Lucania, Mt. Steele, and King Peak, all in Kluane Park, Canada. Far south, towards the coast are innumerable unnamed and unclimbed peaks spreading west from St. Elias, into range after range of the Chugach. From this height we are able to get a much better preview of the weather we can expect for the upcoming summit days.

DAY 9- DAY 10- Ascending above Camp 3, we'll cross Mt. Bona's broad plateau. We'll cache our skis or snowshoes and strap on crampons for the climb to the summit. The snow conditions are usually hard, windblown neve. The summit ridge is the steepest and most technical part of the climb with an angle of 40 degrees or more, but there is no vertical climbing on this route. During this part of the ascent, we'll negotiate crevasses, practicing our route finding techniques from earlier in the climb. There are two false summits that we'll scramble over en route to the final pinnacle. The wind can be severe at this elevation of over 16,000 feet as we make our way along this exposed summit ridge, and we

must be prepared, gloves and mittens always on, face masks if needed, stopping periodically to drink and make sure we are hydrated and feeling OK. We will not only put our equipment to the test this day, but our physical and mental strength as well! Finally the summit...and a 360 degree view of the immense Wrangell Mountains to the west, the frozen Ice field Ranges to the east, the symmetry of the St. Elias Range to the Southeast and the unexplored Chugach Range to the southwest. It is a view of a lifetime (If weather conditions and desire allow, after the ascent to Mt. Bona's summit we can make a bid for 15,638-foot Mt. Churchill or spend some time skiing on one of the mountain's slopes).

DAY 11- We begin the descent to base camp for our flight back to McCarthy. We'll follow the same route, picking up any caches that we made on the way up. A quick descent is important so that we don't get caught high on the mountain by bad weather. Once back in camp, we'll dig in and wait for our bush plane.

DAY 12- Weather permitting, the plane will pick us up early and we'll return to McCarthy and the wood-fired sauna! There we will wash the accumulated grit off and retell climbing stories of our adventure!

DAY 13- After a night's rest and a great climb, we'll head back to Anchorage. You will be dropped off at your hotel or the airport.

What's Included:

- Transportation to/from Anchorage
- 9 days/8 nights in a remote portion of the Wrangell/St. Elias National Park
- Knowledgeable/experienced guide(s)
- Great food starting with lunch on the first day in the mountains and ending with lunch or dinner on the final day before flying back to McCarthy
- All group gear including tents, stoves, some climbing gear, etc. (please see mountaineering equipment list for personal gear requirements)
- Bush flight to/from McCarthy and Mt. Bona

Please contact SEAG for information on McCarthy accommodations at the beginning and end of the expedition