



---

**St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC**  
**Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Alaska**  
**(888) 933-5427 ♦ (907) 345-9048**  
**[www.steliasguides.com](http://www.steliasguides.com)**

---

## **Chitistone Goat Trail Trek – Backpacking in Alaska’s Chitistone Canyon**

The following is a sample itinerary for this trip. Due to individual abilities and goals, as well as the demanding environment of Alaska, our backpack trips are customized for you. The guide will assess weather, logistics and group dynamics to maximize each day’s experience. There are endless possibilities, but we strive to make every trip your best ever.

**DAY 1-** First thing in the morning we will get ready for our trip into the Chitistone Canyon. Your guide(s) will help each person go over their gear to assure that everyone will be well prepared for the upcoming adventure. After loading our packs we'll head for the airstrip for the 20 minute flight by bush plane into a high plateau above the Chitistone River.

The view from the plane is a spectacular collage of mountains, rivers and glaciers. You will fly over the wide, braided Nizina River, the flowing rock glacier on Sourdough Mountain, next to the spectacular mile-high cliffs and through the steep Lower Chitistone Canyon.



Our hiking journey begins on alpine bench with spectacular views of surrounding mountains. We'll set up camp near the small airstrip and spend the day exploring nearby ridges that offer breathtaking views of the glacier-clad Twaharpies peaks and the Chitistone River almost a thousand feet below. This plateau is the hunting ground of bear and wolf and home of sheep, arctic ground squirrels and bald eagles. Sheer rock cliffs border the northern side, immense hanging glaciers straddling their tops. On a cloudless day, Mt. Blackburn will be seen in the distance, the tallest of the Wrangells to the west, turn and view Mt. Bona, the tallest of the St. Elias to the east. Tonight we will sleep for the first time in this magnificent landscape, and in the morning wake to the same spectacular views.



**DAY 2** – Today we will descend Clear Water creek, scrambling next to exquisite waterfalls. At over 5,000 feet, we are at the door to the upper Chitistone Valley. We leave Clear Water Creek, hiking slightly uphill to a saddle. It is the entrance to the “goat trail”, a narrow path built and maintained by Dall Sheep traversing scree slopes that plunge down into the Chitistone Falls River below. We slowly pick our way across the first bowl, the multi-colored rocks make us think we could be hiking in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Footing is generally solid, with patches of hard earth that take concentration. The guides will discuss the hiking methods that will enable you to hike along this trail safely.

When we reach the relative stability of the valley floor we'll begin the hike along the roiling Chitistone Falls River. Our boulder strewn course takes us past rushing tributaries bursting from basins high above and lined with hanging glaciers, free falling waterfalls and hob-goblin rock formations. At another narrow impasse, we begin to climb again and follow the almost imperceptible trail through a wonderland of tundra covered mounds to camp below a massive rock tower soaring into the clouds.

**DAY 3** - Today we'll leave the weight of our big packs behind and grab our daypacks to spend the day exploring the area between here and Chitistone Pass. This is truly one of the most beautiful places on earth. Caribou can be found high along one side of the valley, usually laying down on snow banks, keeping cool until the cool evening. Hoary marmots and Dall sheep roam the hillside on the west, stopping motionless for an instant to monitor our intentions. The pass itself is a rather large expanse, U-shaped from glacial action. To the east are



brilliant glacier covered peaks, the now familiar red rock cleaving through the ice at summits. To the north, a view into Canada, tumbled surface of the Russell Glacier flows into a wide expanse of the White River, which finally merges into rolling hills and distant haze a hundred miles away. To the west is Frederika Mountain and the opposite direction Mt. Sulzer. The west is a Wrangell Mountain, the east is the corner of the St. Elias Range.

Depending on our energy level, on the way back to camp we might scramble onto the surface of the Chitistone Falls Glacier. This picture perfect ice flow is a beautiful example of glacial-morphology and provides an opportunity to discuss its formation, its growth cycles and its intricate formations of crevasses and ice falls.

**DAY 4** - Today we don our packs again and climb to Chitistone Pass. We'll drop off the northern rim of the pass, and eat lunch out of the wind that often howls over the pass as it forces its way between the mountains. Cascading glaciers tumble off the hillside to our left, seemingly close enough to reach



out and touch. After eating we'll walk to a viewpoint of Skolai Valley. A meandering stream curves gracefully away from the jumbled Russell Glacier and forms a large lake at one end of the valley. Opposite, mountains climb back into the sky, corner stoned by Castle Peak. We drop straight down 1500 feet to the valley floor, where we re-enter willow thickets and enjoy the smell of cranberry and cottonwood.

We will set up a camp west of the Skolai Pass airstrip, in an area of willows and gravel outwash.

The tundra and adjoining environment is very fragile and we will camp in areas that do as little damage to the ground cover as possible. We will be watchful for herds of caribou that wander this valley.

**DAY 5** - We will shoulder day packs and climb the bench behind camp, turning west once on top, towards Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. We'll continue around the corner and into the glacier basin, scrambling out onto the moraine for wonderful views of this mystical place. We'll wander up the moraine for as far as we like, eating lunch along the way then returning to base camp. A small bush plane will pick us up that evening. Two at a time, we'll depart Skolai Valley for the flight back to McCarthy will give us wonderful views of the magnificent Nizina Glacier, and the famous folds in the mile-high rock cliffs along the Nizina River.

Upon our return to McCarthy we'll either deliver you to your lodging for a warm shower or provide a log-fired sauna in our bath-house. The therapeutic steam and heat will help ease the re-entry into civilization.



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

*As with all of our Alaskan backpack trip, our Upper Chitistone Goat Trail Trip includes professional, experienced backpacking guides with extensive local knowledge and medical training. We provide the food for the backcountry portions of your trip, including hot and delicious meals morning and evening and plenty of trail 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 any technical gear, such as crampons and ice axes. All you need to bring is your personal gear, (clothing, rain gear, boots, sleeping bag and pad) You can find a detailed list of the backpacking gear that we recommend you bring on our [backpacking equipment list](#).*

*If you would like us to arrange your transportation to 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.*