



St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC
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Glacier Hiking in Alaska – Half Day Root Glacier Hike

As far as Alaska day hikes go, our Half Day Root Glacier Hike is hard to top. From stunning vistas of 16,390' Mt. Blackburn and the mile-high Stairway Icefall to fascinating blue pools and sculptured ice, this is truly time well spent. In our 30 years of alpine guiding in the Wrangell St. Elias National Park we've found this adventure to consistently provide unique, once in a lifetime experiences for people of all ages and all abilities.

Your adventure begins at our office in the historic mill town of Kennecott, Alaska. Here you will meet your professional mountain guide who will fit you for crampons (steel spikes worn on your shoes to make hiking on the glacier ice a breeze) and make sure that you have all the essentials for a day of fun and discovery



From our office, you and your guide set off down the main street of Kennecott, passing the red and white buildings that stand as a reminder of the highly successful copper mining operation that boomed here in the early 1900's. The main street gradually turns into the two-mile glacier trail that was originally built in the '20's as a wagon road to supply the Erie Mine, six miles up the Root Glacier. In May and June, brilliant blue lupine bloom alongside the path. As summer matures, dwarf fireweed and wild rose splash pink and vermilion alongside the path. A mile from town you'll pass a tumbled down shed, the original "dynamite shack," remnants of the early copper mining days. All good miners put the dynamite shack a healthy distance out of town!

The trail gradually descends toward the edge of the Root Glacier and as your guide pauses to explain the local geology, flora, and fauna, you'll enjoy spectacular views of the rock-covered Kennicott Glacier and 6,696' Donoho Peak. Continuing on down the lateral moraine, the air becomes slightly cooler and the vegetation changes as you near the edge of the ice and the freshly exposed moraine found there. 2 miles one-way, the



trail to the glacier is moderate with some steep sections, so be sure to bring good hiking boots, and a pack to carry your gear. You and your guide pause at the edge of the ice to don crampons and learn some cramponing techniques and glacier safety.

Day hiking on the Root Glacier has been likened to a walk in the tide pools near the ocean and you can literally

spend hours discovering the fascinating details on its surface. Water runs all over the ice surface, joining into bubbling streams and waterfalls. In steeper terrain, the water picks up speed, and carves deep canyon-like ravines in the ice, forming beautiful and enticing water slides. At level spots, the water collects and reflects a breathtaking blue. Another 50 degrees warmer and you might think about a quick swim! As the ice gives way to the melting water, holes, known as moulins, form. Although many of these holes are huge black caverns, with a roaring waterfall dumping straight down hundreds of feet into the very heart of the glacier, some no bigger around than your arm and make a sound like a gurgling coffee pot.

After enjoying "lunch with a view" you and your guide reluctantly start making your way back to the town of Kennecott. Your adventure is far from over, though, so keep your eyes peeled for ice climbers on one of our Full Day Ice Climbing trips or wildlife making its way along the lateral moraine. For those of you who are also interested in taking one of our historic Mill Tours don't worry, we'll have you back to town in plenty of time to take a break before the tour starts.

