



St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC
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Introduction to Alaska Mountaineering Course

This Alaska mountaineering course focuses on learning the skills necessary for exploring heavily glaciated terrain. The course includes instruction in "hard skills" such as equipment selection and use, glacier travel technique, snow and ice climbing skills, and crevasse rescue. Additionally, throughout the mountaineering course, participants will learn "soft skills" such as personal skill recognition, hazard assessment, risk management, and improved judgment. We like to refer to these skills collectively as Mountain Sense.



You will have the opportunity to apply your new skills in the last few days of the course with a "graduation climb" up one of the numerous peaks flanking 16,390 ft (4,995m) Mt. Blackburn. No previous climbing experience is necessary, however participants should be in good physical condition.

Trip Highlights:

- Participate in an Alaska mountaineering course amongst the rugged beauty of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Develop new skills to safely travel on glaciers and steep snow
- Learn proper technique and safety from professional mountain guides
- Practice emergency techniques such as self-arrest and crevasse rescue

Intro to Alaska Mountaineering Course – Detailed Itinerary

The following is a sample itinerary for this course. Due to individual abilities and goals, as well as the demanding environment of Alaska, all of our courses 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 course your best ever.

DAY 1 - Your Alaska mountaineering course 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.



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There you meet your pilot and board a bush plane for the 20 minute flight north up the Kennicott Glacier. 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 the Root and Kennicott Glaciers, the historic copper mining town of Kennecott, and iceberg-filled Hidden Creek Lake. However, don't forget to look out the front windshield; 16,390 ft (4,995m) Mt. Blackburn, 12,741 ft (3,883m) Rime Peak, and the snow-covered, twin Ahtna Peaks seem close enough to touch. Your pilot sets the plane down smoothly on a dirt landing strip and as the noise of his engines fades, the majesty of this mountain kingdom envelopes you. You and your guide set off up an adjacent ridge, heading for the snow-covered glaciers high above, and make camp within striking distance of the tumbled blue ice. As you savor dinner under the Midnight Sun, a soft breeze blows and the sound of rushing water is punctuated by the noise of the glacier as it groans down the mountainside.

DAY 2 - After a hearty breakfast and a hot cup of tea, class begins with a discussion on safe glacier travel. Techniques for rigging yourself for self-crevasse rescue, attaching your pack and equipment to the rope, and how to anchor yourself if a partner falls in a crevasse are among the morning's topics. Setting out from camp, you and your guide are immediately faced with route-

finding challenges as you reach the snow covered glaciers and start picking your way around crevasses, seracs (large chunks of ice that have broken off of the glacier on steep terrain), areas with potential rockfall, and avalanche paths. Your goal today is to locate and establish a basecamp which will be your base of operations for the duration of the course. Once you've found a likely place your guide will teach you how to make your snowy home more comfortable; digging a kitchen, building snow walls, setting up the cook tent, and anchoring your tent. Leave No Trace ethics will be stressed throughout the course to minimize our impact on the pristine mountain playground we call home.



DAYS 3 - 4 - The soft morning light of the Wrangell Mountains rouses you from your tent and when you look out your door you may have to pinch yourself to make sure you're not dreaming. Snow covered peaks surround your camp. The mountaineering possibilities are endless. The steep snowfields above camp are your classroom these next

few days and you are encouraged to take advantage of your guide's knowledge and experience by asking questions. Snow climbing, belaying, and anchor construction with flukes and pickets are some of the topics of instruction. You'll even be able to test "fall" on your systems to build trust and learn how they perform.

Self arrest with an ice axe is another important skill that you'll learn these days and your guide will have you practicing falls in every conceivable direction (headfirst, feet first, upside down, etc) until your technique is well developed. As your skills progress, the call of the nearby summits is too much to resist and before you and your guide head back to camp you'll have the opportunity to practice them as you make your way to the top of one of them. Returning to basecamp, in the afternoon, leaves time for relaxation and review. You'd better get to bed early tonight because tomorrow is your "graduation climb".



DAY 5 - Waking up in the wee hours of the morning to get an “alpine start” you’re surprised to find that it’s still light. At the peak of the summer the sun shines in this part of Alaska for about 21 hours a day! However, this sure makes it easy to brew a cup of tea and get your gear together for your “graduation climb”. Today is when you and your guide will put all of your new skills together and attempt a nearby summit. From the “hard skills” of route finding, anchor building, snow and glacier travel, and avalanche avoidance to the “soft skills” of risk management, knowing your limits, and using good judgment, this climb will test what you’ve learned the past few days. As always, safety and having fun are our number one priorities so the climbing will be tailored to your skill level and personal goals.

DAY 6 - Still reveling in the success of your “graduation climb” and great times spent in the wilderness, you and your guide make your way back to the airstrip today to meet the bush plane.

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.



What's Included?

- *Guiding and instruction from skilled professionals. Our guides have extensive experience, as well as medical, rescue, and avalanche training.*
- *Bush plane flights to and from the mountain range.*
- *Delicious breakfasts, lunches, and dinners while in the mountains.*
- *Group equipment: stoves, tents, ropes, snow protection, fuel, etc.*

What you're responsible for:

- *Personal gear – check the gear list for this trip for a complete description.*
- *Transportation to and from McCarthy (see below).*
- *Lodging for the nights before and after your trip (see below).*
- *Food while not on the mountain.*
- *Guide gratuity – Please let us know if you have any questions about this.*

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.