



St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC
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Alaska Mountaineering: Technical Mountain Course

If you've got personal mountain climbing experience and are looking to take it to the next level, or have taken our basic mountaineering course, then our Technical Mountain Course is a great next step. This mountain school takes place in the rugged Granite Range of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, where you will build on your experience and learn the skills necessary to potentially lead climb on mountain glacier terrain and snow covered peaks. Our mountaineering courses are taught by experienced mountain guides to ensure you're receiving the highest quality and most current instruction available in Alaska mountaineering.

Trip Highlights:

- Climbing in the rugged Granite Range of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Learning the skills necessary to achieve your own mountaineering goals while climbing mountains in Alaska!
- Course focused on preparing participants for lead climbing
- Small group size maximizes your learning opportunities



TECHNICAL MOUNTAIN COURSE: DETAILED ITINERARY

The following is a sample itinerary for this trip. Due to individual abilities and goals, as well as the demanding environment of Alaska, all of our 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 substantial variation, but we always strive to make every trip your best ever.

Prerequisites: Basic mountaineering skills, such as our 5 Day Mountaineering Course, the equivalent course elsewhere, or personal climbing experience during which you've learned basic climbing techniques and ropework.

DAY 1 - Early in the morning we will outfit for our trip into the Granite Range. Our headquarters, the historic Motherlode Powerhouse, is a perfect arena for spreading out your gear and having our professional guides go over each item, explaining why it is essential or not needed for the upcoming adventure. You'll also discuss the specifics of the trip, current climbing conditions and your overall itinerary.



After the equipment check, we will review various ropework skills in the Powerhouse. We will practice prussiking into the rafters of the building, review crevasse rescue systems, and play a bit on our climbing wall. While refreshing our memories, we will also be adding new tricks to your rope skills.

DAY 2 - We wake up early, have a big, hearty breakfast, and head for the small gravel airstrip in town. We load up into an Alaskan bush plane for the 45-minute flight to the remote Granite Range. The flight is amazing, a surprise highlight of the trip. Flying over the rugged Alaskan bush is serene, breathtaking and awe-inspiring. Gliding over immense glacial rivers, spruce forests, and shallow lakes, we will make our way up the Tana River to its source, the immense Tana Glacier. After flying over the glacier, we bank east into a remote valley that is flanked by the precipitous, jagged peaks that will be our classroom. We'll spiral down, losing altitude to line up for landing on a smooth sand bar near an emerald colored lake. The rest of the day is spent humping our solid loads up to a high camp on the glacier. The terrain is challenging, but the climbing lines ahead are inspiring and already the wilds of Alaska are starting to stir something in us...

DAY 3 - Four thousand feet of icy playground, steep couloirs and near vertical rock looms over us. The opposite side of the glacier climbs slower to culminate in broader snow covered summits. Everywhere we look we observe a different terrain, a different route, different difficulties and challenges. This first full day in the mountains will focus on refreshing our glacier travel skills as our climbing team sweeps the area, assessing climbing conditions, surveying possible routes and setting our goals and objectives. We will go through realistic rescue scenarios, incorporating our ropework into the alpine environment, discussing the advantages and disadvantages the terrain gives us. Throughout the day, you will be learning new techniques that will prep all participants for leading, as well as getting our gear honed and team dynamic tight.

DAY 4 – From our advanced base camp, we will have access to two or three great summits that are enveloped by glaciers. This first day of serious climbing, we may choose to start with an “easy” route, during which your guide will discuss the intricate factors involved in route finding, including assessing avalanche, serac, and crevasse dangers. You'll have the opportunity to place snow anchors (deadmen, flukes, pickets, etc) and possibly some mixed anchors (ice screws and

snow anchors combined with passive pro and/or pitons, etc), all under the supervision of your guide. After a solid day's climb, the summit affords breathtaking views of the Bagley Icefield, largest subpolar icefield in the world. It's like a sea of ice, with islands of magnificent mountains.

DAY 5 – Pure, clean ice climbing will be the focus of at least one full day of this expedition. On a shattered hanging glacier, you will grab two ice tools, your helmet and learn the techniques for near vertical ice climbing. If you have ice climbing experience, we'll push your limits and improve upon your technique. Unlike winter frozen waterfall climbing, glacier ice climbing is a wonderful medium to learn on as it is very forgiving and allows easy placement of your ice tools and gives your crampons incredible traction. All team members will get a chance to place ice screws and build various ice anchors, with your guide giving helpful advice all the while. Everyone will get the chance to climb as much steep ice as their forearms will allow!



DAYS 6 and 7 – These days will be focused on getting all climbers into the leading mindset. You'll work on mock lead climbing, placing protection and route finding, all under the close supervision of your guide. We will focus on building upon the skills gained so far, and applying those skills to the climbs that we take on each day. Your guide will focus on the skills each climber needs to work on, and choose terrain that will challenge each member of the team while allowing the guide talk you through the moves and challenges. Depending on the skill level of the team, we can head for moderate terrain with plenty of learning opportunities, or possibly head for extremely challenging, high angle, mixed routes. This classroom has it all.

DAY 8 – As your experience grows and skill level expands, we'll set our sights on steeper and more difficult terrain. Approaching a steep, formidable peak, the quiet internal crackle of anticipation is the only hint of the intense excitement coursing throughout the team. For the majority of the climb, participants may take turns on the "sharp" end of the rope. As the climbing gets more ambitious and the summit nears, your guide takes the lead, weaving through rock and ice with confident style and grace. With their example, you put your skills to the test and climb with conviction – the vertical feet tick away, as it seems like your consciousness melts into the mountain. Your heart pounds and pupils dilate with the excitement of the climb, but before you know it, you're pushing through a cornice to the summit ridge, and more spectacular views.

DAY 9 – Today your guide may choose to focus on light and fast alpine climbing techniques. Light and fast alpine climbing is a specific approach to traditional mountaineering that seeks to leave behind everything but the minimum gear required to reach the objective. To go "light," you must have good skills, and after 7 days of climbing together, the team is capable and competent.

We may start at “dark-thirty” for the best climbing conditions, moving quickly over the frozen snow. The team swaps leads as your guide covers a host of techniques designed to expedite the climb. Terrain is covered quickly and the summit mounted just as the sun breaks the horizon. Breakfast with a view that few will ever have the opportunity to experience – and you begin to reflect on the amazing adventure that you’ve had.

DAY 10 – You, your guide and the team pack up camp and descend back to the valley floor to rendezvous with our bush plane flight back to McCarthy. The descent goes by quickly, not only because of the strength and stamina gained over the course, but also because our newly honed skills and lead-climber’s eye make navigating easy. Lounging on the airstrip, waiting for the



plane, the stories begin and highlights of the trip are recounted, until the telltale buzz of a small aircraft catches your attention. While flying, the deep satisfaction of your experience and achievements set in. You look at the mountains below and can pick out potentially safe routes as well as possible hazards. As you fly into the Kennecott Valley, you look to Mount Blackburn at the head of the valley, and just maybe, you see a climbing line that inspires you...

Upon arrival back to “civilization” it’s time for a celebratory meal, a soak in the world famous Saint Elias Alpine Guides rustic wood-fired sauna, and some well-deserved rest. You look forward to sharing this adventure with the gang back home.

The following subjects are the focus of this expedition:

- Camp sites - selection, objective dangers, probing, wanding, digging in, snow walls, block walls
- Shelters - snow pits, caves and igloos, discuss advantages, discuss danger of wetness while digging, emergency needs
- Caches - building, site selection,
- Sanitation - bagging waste, washing hands, pitching in
- Water - snow melting, purity, amounts
- Expedition behavior
- Group psychology
- Group dynamics under stress
- Evacuation - self sufficient, technical, ground, air
- Minimal impact - routes to chose, sites, importance
- Logistics and expedition planning - transport, schedules, amounts
- Climbing equipment - types, differences, specific uses
- Knots - tie in, anchoring, glacier travel vs. rock/ice climbing, figure 8, follow through 8, bowline, water, munter, garda, clove hitch

Rope work - glacier travel, tautness, zigzagging, tie in
Ice axe - types, techniques, proper use on different terrain
Crampons - types, step ins, strap ons, French technique, American technique, front pointing, traversing, care, protection from
Ascending - types, emergency, fixed line, crevasse rescue
Snow anchors - snow- pickets, flukes, dynamic belays, shock loading, back up, stacking, bombproof
Anchors - types, snow, ice, rock, equalizing, back-up, checking
Rescue - techniques, rope management, belay escapes, self, group, crevasse
Survival - separated from group, procedures, rescue
Leading - experience, practice, dangers, anchors, rope work
Leadership - experience, skills, techniques, attitude
Route finding - terrain types, what to avoid, objective dangers, experience, factors
Self arrest - techniques, all positions, different tools
Crevasse rescue - self-ascending, group, Z-pully, drop loop

What's included:

- 10 days/9 nights in the wilderness of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Knowledgeable/experienced guide(s)
- All group gear including tents, stoves, etc. (see mountain climbing equipment list for personal gear requirements)
- Great food
- Bush flight to/from McCarthy

If you have your own climbing gear, we recommend that you bring it so you can familiarize yourself with its use as you learn and hone your systems.

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.

