



St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC
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Alaska Mountaineering – University Peak Expedition

Located deep in Alaska's St. Elias Mountains, and rarely climbed, 14,470 ft (4,410 m) University Peak provides climbers with a world-class mountaineering challenge in a stunning setting. An ascent of the North Ridge combines challenging, technical terrain with high altitude to make for a memorable adventure. University Peak is among the 20 highest peaks in Alaska and the 50 highest peaks in the United States.



Climbers should have good physical conditioning and solid technical experience (i.e. Rainier and Denali, or ice climbing and Aconcagua, etc).

Trip Highlights:

- World-class climbing in the remote St. Elias Mountains.
- Spectacular views of the University Range.
- Expedition can be completed in under 10 days.
- Leave your footprints on a remote, seldom-climbed peak in Alaska!

University Peak Expedition – 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 quite a bit of variation, but we always strive to make every trip your best ever.

Some facts about the mountain.....

At 14,470 ft (4,410 m), University Peak is among the 20 highest peaks in Alaska and the 50 highest peaks in the United States. The mountain can be considered a southern outlier to the large massif of Mt. Bona, however, it is much steeper than Bona. University Peak was named by Terris Moore in 1930, on the first ascent of Mt. Bona, after the



University of Alaska. First climbed in 1955 by Keith Hart, Leon Blumer, Sheldon Brooks, Tim Kelly, Norman Sanders, and Gibson Reynolds, University didn't see a second ascent until 1997 by St. Elias Alpine Guide Dave Stahaeli, local pilot and climber Paul Claus and Swiss climber Ruedi Homberger. Later that same year, Carlos Buhler and Charlie Sassara pushed the limits and pioneered a difficult route (Alaskan grade 5) up the East face of the mountain from the Barnard Glacier. This route involved 8,500 ft (2,600 m) of 50 to 80 degree snow, ice, and rock capped by a 300 ft (91 m) vertical ice cliff. This noteworthy climb was featured in the top 50 climbs of North America.

DAY 1 – Your trip begins this morning in Anchorage. One of our knowledgeable and friendly staff members will pick you up at your hotel and drive you and your gear to our headquarters in McCarthy. The Glenn Highway follows the Matanuska River Valley and as you approach Chickaloon Pass, the white ice of the mighty Matanuska Glacier fills the valley below. On a clear day the magnificent Wrangell Mountains will be directly in front of you as you descend the pass.



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Mt. Drum stands out and looks the highest, because it is much closer. In reality it is the smallest of these large peaks at 12,010 feet (3,660 m). Mt. Sanford at 16,237 ft (4,949m) is on the left (north), and the huge dome of 14,163 ft (4,316m) Mt.

Wrangell is to the right (south). Mt. Wrangell is the largest active volcano in the world. On a clear day, it is even possible to see the massive form of Mt. Blackburn in the distance. At 16,390 ft (4,995m) this spectacular peak is the tallest of the Wrangells.

Turning east at the Edgerton Cutoff, the Copper River Valley lies directly in front of you and you make your way to the tiny hamlet of Chitina and the beginning of the McCarthy Road. Originally the rail bed of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad; the unpaved McCarthy Road snakes through thick spruce forests, along the edge of the Wrangell Mountains, as it winds its way to McCarthy. As the end of the road comes into view, the roaring Kennicott River slices the road like a knife, and a narrow footbridge is all that connects this side to the town of McCarthy. From the river, it's just a short distance to McCarthy and the Mother Lode Powerhouse, the home of St. Elias Alpine Guides. You'll spend the rest of today with your guide checking gear, and if you've got any energy left, briefly refreshing some basic skills. A rope, hung from the three-story ceiling of the Motherlode Powerhouse, is the perfect place to practice crevasse self-rescue.

DAY 2 – In the morning, you and your guide drive up to the McCarthy airstrip to meet our bush pilot for the flight to University Peak. With the aid of wheel skis, he sets you down at about 10,500 feet (3,200 m) on the snow-covered, upper portion of the Hawkins Glacier. This area is commonly known as Beaver Basin, after the DeHavilland Beaver our pilot used to fly. The first climbers on this mountain ascended the entire Hawkins Glacier from the Chitina River, however, the glacier has changed dramatically since then and a large icefall now blocks the route. You'll see it as you fly by.



As the sound of the plane's engines fades away and the silence returns, you are enveloped by the remote grandeur of the St. Elias Mountains. Out here, far from any other people, you and your guide are dependent on each other for safety and rescue. There are no "Park Rangers", in this area, and you must always climb safely and prudently. The first order of business is to set up base camp. You "dig in", creating strong snow walls to protect your tents from inclement weather. After camp is set up, you and your guide head out for a review of crevasse rescue techniques.

Successful mountaineering in Alaska requires good decision making. An early

decision you and your guide make is when to climb. You may want to change to a night schedule because 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 you retire to your tents for some sleep.



DAY 3 - Today you begin the important process of acclimatization. For the days ahead to be successful and enjoyable, it is essential to hydrate well, and take your time getting prepared to ascend higher. Acclimatizing today is particularly crucial because you landed at such a high altitude. You and your guide head out on skis or snowshoes, for some important reconnaissance of the seracs in Beaver Basin.

DAY 4 - Today, you and your guide set out to move your camp to the North Saddle at approximately 11,500 ft (3,505 m). Leaving behind a larger tent and some other “comforts”, at base camp, you go alpine style, carrying a light camp and plenty of technical gear. The route crosses the flats of the basin and begins a long ascending traverse to the saddle. The saddle is very narrow and your goal is to set up camp in the bergschrund of the glacier. Dropping below you, to the south, is a narrow glacier that feeds into the Barnard Glacier with expansive views of Mt. Bear in the background.

DAY 5 - Today is summit day! From your High Camp you have nearly 3,000 vertical feet (914 m) left to the summit, so your guide will only make the call to head for the summit if the weather is good, and looks to be holding. Summit day will be a long day of hard physical work. You rise with the early morning sunlight, and immediately start with your first technical challenge as you climb out of the saddle. The climb is characterized by a narrow ridge, occasionally surmounting ice bands. Great photo opportunities abound on



this portion of the climb. Gradually the technical difficulties abate as you approach the summit.

Weather permitting, you'll have unobstructed views out over the Chitina River Valley to the great peaks of the St. Elias Range. The bulk of Mt. Bona is behind you, and the dramatic granite summits of the Twaharpies Peaks rise to the west. After wallowing in summit glory, you descend back to high camp. Though, you're beat down tired, the pump of achieving this notable summit has you walking on air.

DAY 6 – A good night's sleep hasn't done much to dilute your excitement. As you and your guide leave to descend through the shadowed slopes to Base Camp you're still war whoopin' and slapping high fives. It feels like you've reached a 5-star hotel when you reach the big tent with all the amenities; Crazy Creek chairs.....extra hot cocoa.



DAYS 7 & 8- Reserve days. Typical of most significant mountain climbing in Alaska, there is always a need for an extra day or two to weather out a storm or deal with unforeseen circumstances. These days are not optional. If you and your guide have any energy left, you may try a one day climb of Little Alpamayo; a summit of 12,000 feet (3,657 m) with a beautiful, clean snow and ice face,

striped with flutings, reminiscent of the famous Alpamayo in Peru.

DAY 9 – You awake today feeling refreshed and satisfied with a great climb. Reflecting back, you definitely have some stories that will make your climbing buddies green with envy. You and your guide enjoy breakfast and then sort out your gear in preparation for the flight back to McCarthy. The sound of the plane's engines becomes distinct and soon enough it's landing in a cloud of snow. Grinning, your pilot asks how the trip went....but he already knows; the smiles on your faces have betrayed you. You return to McCarthy, a hot meal, and well-deserved soak in our wood-fired sauna. Life is good!

DAY 10 – Waving goodbye to your new found friends in McCarthy, you head back to Anchorage. Though this trip is over, your wheels are already turning, planning your next visit to McCarthy. Don't worry....we understand. This evening, we'll enjoy a celebratory feast of pizza and beer at the renowned Moose's Tooth in Anchorage. The place will be filled with climbers but we can guarantee that their tales won't hold a candle to yours!

The summit is always a bonus while climbing in Alaska. Many different factors must be in place to be able to finally stand safely on the top of the St. Elias Mountains. Safety is always the main focus of our climbs. If one of the team members needs assistance, everyone needs to be prepared to pitch in and help on a rescue. An accident or rescue might mean the end of the Expedition, but safety and human life is the priority. All team members are expected to work together, to set aside personal needs and goals at times, so that they may work as a team and make the chances to reach the summit much greater.



What's Included?

- Guiding and instruction from skilled professionals. Our guides have extensive experience, as well as medical, rescue, and avalanche training.
- Round trip transportation between Anchorage and McCarthy.
- Ski plane flights to and from the mountain range.
- Delicious breakfasts, lunches, and dinners while in the mountains.
- Group equipment: stoves, tents, ropes, fuel, etc.

What you're responsible for:

- Personal gear – check the gear list for this trip for a complete description.
- 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.