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Alaska Mountaineering – Mt. Bear Expedition

If remote mountain climbing in Alaska appeals to you; Mt. Bear is as deep in the St. Elias Mountains as you can get. Located just five miles from the Canadian border, 14,831 foot (4,520 m) Mt. Bear qualifies as a "big mountain" with nearly 5,000 ft. (1,524 m) of vertical relief.



There are several route possibilities

which enable us to tailor the climb to your ability. Mt. Bear also makes for a fantastic ski mountaineering ascent, with a possible traverse of the mountain for parties with a little extra time. Mountain skills are helpful, but not absolutely necessary as these skills can be taught as required prior to and during the expedition. This is a nine day climb or a twelve day mountain traverse.

Trip Highlights:

- Remote, seldom climbed peak deep in the St. Elias Mountains of Alaska
- Fantastic ski mountaineering opportunities
- Spectacular views of the high peaks of the Wrangell and St. Elias Mountain Ranges
- Challenging mountain climbing in Alaska with experienced guides

Mt. Bear 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.

DAY 1: Your trip begins this morning in Anchorage, Alaska. 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 the tiny mountain town of McCarthy. Located in the magnificent Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, McCarthy offers the perfect jumping off point for mountain climbing in Alaska. Within minutes of leaving Anchorage, the scenery becomes impressive. On one side are the steep, snow-capped peaks of the Chugach, and on the other side, the tidal flats of Cook Inlet. Turning east, the Glenn Highway follows the Matanuska River valley where the long days of summer produce the famous sixty pound cabbages. 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.



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, and only twenty five miles from McCarthy.

At Glennallen you follow the highway south towards Valdez. As you drive, keep your eyes peeled for glimpses of the famous Alaska Pipeline paralleling the highway to the right. 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. If you look closely, you can sometimes see the original rail pushed aside into the bushes along the road, and careless travelers have been known to get flat tires from century-old railroad spikes. Evidence of

the engineering feats of the early inhabitants of this region can still be seen in the form of railroad trestles and bridges that still stand today. 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.

Mountain climbing in Alaska has some unique challenges and every trip begins with an equipment check. St. Elias Alpine Guides has a detailed list, with various recommendations, coming from three decades of mountaineering in Alaska. Following the equipment check, you and your guide discuss logistics, delving into specific expedition menus, their nutritional values, and how to package it all for the trip. You also discuss equipment in depth; what kind of tents, ropes, and sleeping bags are best and why. Once everything is in order, you and your guide make plans to rendezvous with your bush pilot in the morning and settle in for a meal and a good night's rest.

DAY 2 – Like any good Alaska trek, you begin your day with a bush plane flight. Your plane, equipped with skis, flies you and your guide from McCarthy, up the length of the Chitina River Valley, and past the bulk of the Bona/University massif. You turn northeast, up the Barnard Glacier, with its massive feeder glaciers, and climb to cross the rugged divide into the head of the Klutlan



Glacier. The Klutlan Glacier is composed of many major forks, each which would be a major named glacier anywhere else. Your pilot lands on one fork of the East Fork of the Klutlan at approximately 9,500 ft (2,895 m) elevation. Mt. Bear is obscured by one of its sub-peaks, but, on a clear day 16,421 ft (5,005 m) Mt. Bona is visible miles to the west. Here you establish a “bomb-proof” basecamp, protected from inclement weather by strong snow walls. You and your guide spend the rest of the afternoon sorting loads, testing your snowshoes or skis and reviewing glacier travel and rescue procedures. You’ll be dealing with crevasses for nearly the entire climb, and your guide wants to make sure you’re ready for them.

DAY 3 - Your goal today is to carry a load to 11,500 ft. (3,505 m). After a hot breakfast you load up your packs and sleds and prepare for the day. While it’s

possible to move your entire load and camp in one day, this early in the trip it's better to move just one load to "knock the rust off" your travel practices and get used to the altitude without the heavy packs.

Dropping slightly downhill, you turn up another fork of the Klutlan Glacier, following a sinuous path through the crevasses. The angle eases, and here you locate your next camp. The scenery surrounding you is breathtaking, however, the icefall ahead looks intimidating. With a chuckle your guide assures you that he knows the secret passage way through the tortuous terrain ahead. Digging your load in and marking it well, you retrace our route back to Base Camp.



DAY 4 - Today is moving day! You break camp and quickly navigate your way through the terrain that had so many questions the day before. Arriving at the gear you cached the day before; you set up camp and dig in. When the work is done you look around and are pleased to see that you are finally getting up high enough to start getting a good look around. The icefall looming ahead still looks intimidating but it's hard not to be please with the beauty and challenge of your Alaska trek so far.

DAY 5 - With each passing day, you can feel your body acclimating to the challenges of the altitude and physical exertion. Your guide knows that "climbing high and sleeping low" is the best way to accomplish this in

preparation for the days ahead. Today your job is to carry a load through the icefall. Your route leads you towards an impossible looking seam. Once inside, you have giant crevasses and ice cliffs to one side, and the mountain bulking up on the other. Surprisingly, though, your travel is relatively straight forward. A final turn at the end and you find yourself above the ice fall. One more gently climbing turn to the south and you've arrived at a location for your new camp at 13,200 ft (4,023 m). Your guide did know the secret passage! After a short break, you dig in your load and retrace your steps back to camp.

DAY 6 - By now you're getting into the rhythms of life in this vast mountain kingdom. You and your guide have become a close knit team, able to perform camp duties and move through terrain more and more efficiently each day. It feels good to be climbing and you find yourself eagerly anticipating the day on which you'll attempt the summit. Today, you break camp and move it up through the icefall. With your previous experience amongst the tumbled seracs and

yawning crevasses, perhaps you find it a little easier to enjoy the glacier sculpture as you climb past. Getting up to high camp feels like quite an accomplishment. You can feel the altitude now and the snow conditions have become firmer. From this camp the views are dramatic. You can easily look north to the remote White River Valley and the dramatic Mt. Natazhat.

DAY 7 - If the conditions are right, your guide will make the call to attempt the summit today. Snow conditions have been firming up as you climb higher and you may choose to swap skis for crampons. Your route ascends easy slopes to the divide or ridge to the east of the summit. From there you turn west and navigate through hills and plateaus to the true summit. The views from the top are simply breathtaking. The Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains stretch out in all directions and you are truly surrounded by some of the great peaks of the world; Mt. Lucania and Steele to the east in Canada, Mt. Logan and St. Elias to the south, Mt. Bona and the rest of the Wrangells to the west. With “perma-grin” smiles on your faces, you and your guide descend to your high camp for a celebration dinner.

DAYS 8 & 9 - 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.

DAY 10 - You awake this morning, still basking in the glow of the success of the previous day. The views seem a little more spectacular and the mood in camp is jovial. Your guide, however, reminds you that you’re really only half way home and you quickly pack camp and start out towards base camp to avoid being pinned down by bad weather. Retracing your route, it’s surprising how much quicker the journey goes on the way down. Arriving in camp is like arriving at home. You set up and spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing and swapping stories.



Note: If you didn't use up your reserve days, you and your guide may decide to try for some easy summits at the head of this fork of the glacier.

DAY 11 - In the morning, after a leisurely breakfast, you and your guide break camp and organize your gear for the flight out. Now is time for that uniquely Alaskan Mountaineering Thing - waiting for the plane. You strain your ears for the first buzz of the aircraft engine and after one or two false alarms, the plane appears. It is on "final", skis kissing the snow and turning to a stop. Your pilot grins and asks how it went, but he knows....your smiles betray you. You load up, and the acceleration of take off lets you know that the climb is finished. You and your guide look out the windows, admiring your handiwork. Before you know it, you are back in McCarthy – in search of the perfect hamburger and a well-deserved soak in our wood-fired sauna.

DAY 12 - The return trip to Anchorage is the final stage of your Alaska trek. We'll retrace our route out the McCarthy Road to Chitina, from Chitina to Glenallen, and down the Glenn Highway to Anchorage. This evening we'll drop you off at your hotel.

What's Included?



As with all of our Alaska mountaineering, the Mt. Bear Expedition includes professional, experienced mountaineering guides with extensive local knowledge and medical training. We provide all food for the backcountry portions of your trip, including hot, delicious meals morning along with evening and plenty of 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 technical gear (ropes, climbing protection, crampons, harnesses, helmets, etc). All you need to bring is your personal gear, (clothing, rain gear, boots, sleeping bag and pad). If you have your own climbing gear, we recommend that you bring it so you can familiar with its use as you

learn and hone your systems for mountaineering in Alaska. You can find a detailed list of the gear that we recommend you bring on our mountaineering equipment list.