ST. ELIAS ALPINE GUIDES

MULTI-DAY TRIPS

BACKPACKING
EQUIPMENT LIST

The following is a complete list of personal equipment required for our trekking and backpacking trips. We do make some recommendations for particular brands or items, but if you are unsure of any items you own or intend to purchase, please contact us.

If you need to purchase items on this list, please make those purchases well in advance. While Anchorage has quality gear shops, consider them only as a backup for emergencies or last-minute items (unless you are from Alaska), as they may not have the item you need in stock. **There are no gear stores in McCarthy**.

Rentals: We have a limited supply of rental equipment available. Please make arrangements with us in advance.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

- **BACKPACK** - A good external or internal frame pack is required. A pack in the 40-55 liter range should fit your gear and food comfortably. YOU WILL BE CARRYING A BEAR CAN OF FOOD, half of a tent, and some amount of group gear, so make sure it fits. We recommend taking your full pack into a gear shop and packing with one of their bear cans to make sure it fits. We like packs made by Osprey, Gregory, or Deuter.

- **PACK COVER** - This is REQUIRED equipment. You should buy one made for your pack, or an extra-large pack cover if you cannot find a custom fit. This will protect your pack from rain and wet brush, and at night you don't have to worry about your pack getting wet if a storm rolls in. For the hardcore minimalist, you can bring two extra-large trash bags.

- **SLEEPING BAG** - It has been known to snow during any month in Alaska. A good three-season sleeping bag rated to 10-20° F is a must. The question is: down or synthetic? Down loses its insulating ability once wet, but if you are careful to keep the bag dry, down gives the best warmth-to-weight ratio. Feel free to call us to discuss this purchase, or consult your local reputable gear shop. Our favorite sleeping bags are Marmot, Feathered Friends, and Western Mountaineering.

- **SLEEPING PAD** - A full-length pad is best. Therm-a-Rests are great, but remember they can get a small puncture and leak, so we recommend bringing a repair kit. Closed-cell foam pads (a.k.a. Ensolite pads) tend to keep you warmer, but are not as comfortable to sleep on. A combination of an Ensolite pad and an inflatable pad will ensure both warmth and durability throughout the trip. Your Ensolite pad can double as a "glacier couch" for sitting around at camp!

REQUIRED APPAREL

- **HIKING PANTS** - A light wool, synthetic (e.g. nylon, Schoeller), or fleece pant is required. The lightweight softshell pants such as Patagonia's Lightweight Guide Pants work very well too. You'll spend the majority of your time in these so make sure they fit well and are breathable enough to stay comfortable while you're active. Denim, canvas, or any type of cotton is NOT ACCEPTABLE so check the label to make sure before arrival.

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- **LONG UNDERWEAR SET** - Long underwear must be polypro or wool. We recommend bringing a lightweight or midweight set of tops and bottoms such as Patagonia Capilene. Consider 2 sets so you can have a clean set to sleep in at night.

- **MID LAYER TOP** - Layers are the key to comfort and warmth while hiking and camping. This is the first layer over the polypro long underwear top. It can be wool, capilene, “expedition weight” long underwear, a light fleece, etc. Patagonia’s R1 series is a good example of this.

- **INSULATING LAYER** - Another layer! This one is typically used for extra warmth during rest stops or around camp. One suggestion is a warm fleece jacket – “wind-resistant” fleece is great but tends to hold in your sweat while hiking. A lightweight down or synthetic jacket can be used here too, but remember that once down is wet, it loses all insulating ability, so fleece or synthetic insulation tends to work best in Alaska.

- **RAIN JACKET** - This is one of the most important items. Good rain gear will make your adventure much more enjoyable. We recommend bringing a high-quality non-insulated Gore-Tex jacket (not your 10-year-old standby—it’s just too stormy in Alaska). Exceptional rain gear is made by Arc'teryx, Marmot, and Patagonia. Make sure it’s got a comfortable hood that allows you to see and pit zips for ventilation. PONCHOS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE. Wind and brush make them useless.

- **RAIN PANTS** - Again, we recommend a high-quality pair of Gore-Tex rain pants, preferably with a full side zip for ventilation and easy on/off. You can bring a separate pair of uncoated nylon wind pants to wear through the brush and in a light drizzle, if you prefer. This gives your Gore-Tex pants a longer life.

- **SOCKS** - You should have at least 3 pairs of wool or synthetic socks. Sock selection varies on personal preference, but we recommend bringing two mid-weight socks for hiking and one heavyweight pair to sleep in. You may also want to bring a lightweight pair of neoprene socks specifically for river crossings, however, they are optional. Many guides and clients find lightweight liner socks a very comfortable addition that helps with blisters. SmartWool, Thorlo, and Dahlgren make excellent socks.

- **CREEK CROSSING SHOES** – A separate pair of footwear is necessary for creek crossings. A pair of lightweight running shoes work fine, or a technical sandal such as Tevas or Chacos (no flip-flops or Crocs please). To save weight, these can also be used as your camp shoes.

- **HIKING BOOTS** - These should be medium to heavy full leather boots. La Sportiva, Scarpa, Merrell, Montrail, Lowa, and Vasque make great boots – be sure to consider fit first, and fashion second. We highly recommend that all boots be waterproofed shortly before coming up to Alaska, and Nikwax makes excellent waterproofing products. YOUR BOOTS MUST BE WELL BROKEN IN BEFORE THE TRIP! Please do not let the enjoyment of your trip be severely compromised by blisters. We strongly recommend that you keep your boots in your carry-on luggage for your flight to AK. In the event that your bags get lost or delayed, you'll have boots that fit and we can outfit you with the rest.

- **WOOL or FLEECE HAT** - Something to cover the ears and keep your head warm. A buff works well too!

- **BASEBALL/SUN HAT** - A hat with a bill keeps the rain out, too, and will pair nicely with a mosquito net!

- **FLEECE GLOVES** - A light pair of fleece gloves is a must for warm hands while hiking and around camp. Fleece gloves with WindStopper are best, but regular fleece or even wool gloves work fine as well.

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REQUIRED ITEMS

- **MESS KIT** - A cup, bowl, and spoon. This doesn't have to be anything fancy, and even Tupperware will do!
- **WATER BOTTLE** - Water is abundant so we only usually carry about 1.5 Liters at a time. We will provide you with a souvenir 16 oz Nalgene, and recommend you supplement that with a single 32 oz Nalgene. A hydration bladder (such as a Camelback) is not recommended. Bladders don't hold up great to the rigors of backcountry travel in Alaska and can be difficult to refill in the backcountry.
- **TREKKING POLES** – A pair is required for the rigors of Alaskan terrain. The uneven terrain is the biggest challenge our clients face and the least expected one. Trekking poles help with rugged and dynamic terrain and also come in handy for river crossings. A collapsible pair is best so that you can easily carry them on your backpack when you do not want to use them. The "flick lock" type of adjustment tends to be more durable than the "twist-lock" type. Even if you don't typically use them, we would like you to use them on this trek.
- **CAMERA/PHONE** - Bring a good one, especially with a wide-angle lens - this is the place for it! Don't forget extra batteries and extra memory cards! For the tech-savvy, a phone is a one-stop-shop camera, book, journal, GPS tracker, etc. For those in serious need of a disconnect, consider leaving the phone behind...
- **BOOK/JOURNAL + WRITING UTENSIL** - Some form of personal entertainment will have its place on a rainy day with a little more tent time. A paperback book is recommended but with care, e-Readers work well too. Rite in the Rain makes waterproof notebooks in many shapes and sizes that work with a standard pencil.
- **TOILETRY KIT** - Toothpaste, toothbrush, moleskin (we highly recommend Spenco Second Skin), personal medications (please tell us before the trip of any medications you are taking), and a personal first aid kit (with band-aids, aspirin, etc.). Other personal items to consider are: chapstick, biodegradable soap, dental floss, wet wipes, a small container of waterless hand sanitizer, tampons or pads. Remember that we are backpacking in bear territory, so limit the number of "smellables," such as lotions or perfumes, as they must be stored in the bear cans at night.
- **SUNGLASSES** – We recommend polarized glasses to cut down on glare and the use of a retention device (Croakies, etc).
- **SUNSCREEN/BLOCK** - Even on an overcast day, the sun can be surprisingly persistent and sunscreen becomes especially important if your route includes a lot of glacial travel as the white ice is super reflective and will burn the bottom of your nose and chin!
- **INSECT REPELLANT** - Since the Wrangell/St. Elias has so much ice covering its surface, the bug problem is nothing like the Brooks Range or other tundra-covered regions, but there can be areas with a lot of bugs, so Jungle Juice, BEN's, or some other good repellant with a lot of DEET is important. (Beware that DEET ruins waterproof coatings like Gore-Tex and DWR, so keep it off your rain gear!)

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OPTIONAL ITEMS

- **EYE MASK + EAR PLUGS** - There are no black-out blinds on our tents, so if you think you might have trouble sleeping under the midnight sun or next to a noisy tent mate, consider an eye mask and ear plugs to assist.
- **BUG NET** - Lightweight and teeny tiny, this little item can save the day if your camp ends up getting swarmed. A head net paired with a brimmed hat will keep the net off of your face. Full body net suit not required.
- **HIKING/ RUNNING SHORTS** - Lightweight nylon shorts are quick-drying and easy to carry. Recommended for swimming and/or river crossings or for the occasional super hot day with no bushwhacking.
- **PUFFY JACKET** – An additional layer for people who are often cold, this is a lightweight but warm layer to wear in camp at night. Synthetic works best when wet, but down provides the most insulation for the weight. For folks from warmer climates, cold days and evenings can feel like "winter" so be prepared to stay warm.
- **FLEECE OR PUFFY PANTS** - Those wishing to be super warm and toasty around camp, and don't mind carrying a little extra weight, can bring a pair of fleece or puffy pants. Great if you "sleep cold."
- **OVERMITTS** - These should be a lightweight pair of nylon or Gore-Tex shells that protect the hand from wind and keep your gloves dry in the rain. A good example of this is the OR Revel Shell Mitts. These can save the day if it's particularly blustery out.
- **GAITERS** - This is an optional but highly recommended item that can help protect your pants from crampons, brush, mud, and keep the water out of your boots on shallow river crossings. Check with us regarding your specific trip to see if you'll need to bring a pair.
- **ADDITIONAL FOOTWEAR** - If you are OK with the extra weight, a pair of running shoes are good to wear around camp, or for a day hike if your heavy hiking boots are bothering you. Some folks carry sandals, such as Tevas or Chacos, which are great for river crossings but are not good for hiking and not as warm around camp. Crocs are a great camp shoe but not appropriate for hiking or creek crossings.
- **TOWEL** – A highly recommended item, a hand towel is generally large enough for drying off after swimming or river crossings. MSR's Packtowl is the techie alternative.
- **STUFF SACKS** - Optional according to preference, but very handy. Bring an assortment of sizes for separating different clothing items. We strongly recommend that you keep your clothing, sleeping bag, and anything else you don't want to get wet in waterproof stuff sacks. A large trash compactor bag (with a couple of backups) can be used to line the entire inside of your pack for a cheap alternative.
- **THERMOS** - If you like hot drinks a lot you may consider 16oz thermos for additional warmth throughout the day or at camp (Thermos, Hydroflask).
- **BINOCULARS** - Nice to have for animal sightings and views of the distant peaks.
- **COMPASS** - An option for you (not for us!), but if you don't know how to use one, here's a great chance to learn! A compass such as the Silva Ranger with compensation for declination is very handy.
- **KNIFE** - The Swiss army knife is the old standby and the newer multi-tools (Leatherman) work great too! Everyone has their own preference on the tools-to-weight ratio.

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GROUP EQUIPMENT

- **TENTS** - We will provide tents for you or you can bring your own. If you plan to use our tents, be aware that you will likely be paired up with another group participant. If you'd like to bring your own tent, it needs to be a 3-season tent with a vestibule - the MSR Copper Spur is a popular model.

- **BEAR CANISTER** - Each participant will be given a full bear canister at the start of the trip. It will be full of food and other group items like stoves or the cook tent. The bear canisters are full-sized and the exact dimensions depend on the brand (we use several interchangeably). A good estimate of space is two basketballs stacked on top of each other. A full bear can will weigh about 11lbs, and will become emptier as the days progress, giving you the chance to put your own stuff in there as space opens up.

- **AN OCCASIONAL ITEM** – You may also be asked to carry a small additional item such as a fuel canister or tent pole.

- **FOOD** - We supply all the food on our backpacking trips and most of it will already be prepacked in the bear cans we give you. You will be given the chance to pick out snacks for yourself during orientation and you'll want these easily accessible during the day. Depending on the length of your trip you can expect to fill a half-full gallon zip lock bag with snacks.

- **COOKING EQUIPMENT + FUEL**- We'll bring everything we need for cooking delicious meals in the backcountry. For backpacking trips we use lightweight gear and pack just enough fuel to last the trip (plus a little extra for emergencies). All this stuff will already be in the bear cans you receive, but occasionally a fuel bottle won't fit and will be loose.

- **TOILET SUPPLIES** - We will provide you with toilet paper and some ziplock bags for your dirty paper (which gets packed out). Your guide will bring a trowel or their ice axe for the group to share to dig catholes as needed. You may choose to bring additional wet wipes if you want to.

- **SAT PHONE/INREACH** - Your guide will have a satellite communication device for coordinating bush flights and to use in emergencies. You do not need to bring your own emergency location device but can if you want to. We highly encourage you to disconnect as much as possible when you're out in the backcountry and often find that folks underestimate the strong tether they feel to the outside world when they know they can or are expected to send a daily text to someone back home.

Your guide will go over all your gear with you during orientation but if you have any questions while planning and packing, please don't hesitate to reach out!