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Alaska Backpacking – High Pass Odyssey

For a backpacking trip that covers high passes, expansive glaciers, and even includes an iceberg-filled glacial lake, look no further than the High Pass Odyssey. Spend 8 days exploring the wonders of the Wrangell Mountains – high alpine valleys, glaciers, and views of endless mountains. The schedule even allows for



a “layover day.” On that day it’s not necessary to move camp, so you can take a day hike with a lighter pack as a change of pace. With glacial crossings, tundra travel, and a high pass to navigate, this trip is a great “sampling” of the various terrain that comprises Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Each day brings new sights and new terrain to conquer, and will be sure to keep you busily snapping away with your camera. Starting out at a scenic iceberg-filled lake, this route crosses flowing glaciers, climbs up to a high alpine pass, and offers stunning views of the Wrangell Mountains. The route ends at Skolai Pass, a mecca for wildlife viewing and offering great day hiking opportunities to finish the trip. Due to the trip length and terrain covered, this trip is recommended for those with prior backpacking experience.

Trip Highlights:

- Spectacular views of alpine valleys, glaciers, and endless mountains
- Opportunities to see caribou and bears around Skolai Pass
- Learn new skills from our experienced mountain guides
- Enjoy the thrill of backpacking deep within the remote Alaskan wilderness!

High Pass Odyssey – 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 Alaskan adventure begins in the remote bush town of McCarthy, located deep within the Wrangell Mountains. You'll meet with your guide and prepare for your upcoming trip! On the morning of your adventure, you and your guide will head down to the McCarthy airstrip to catch a bush plane flight into Nizina Lake. Make sure to have your camera ready during the half-hour flight, as the scenery is amazing. Mountains, glaciers, and rivers are beautifully viewed from the air, and the pilots are very knowledgeable to answer any questions you may have.

As you land on the backcountry airstrip at Nizina Lake, hold on tight – it can be a little bumpy. You and your guide will help unload the plane, and then step back and watch the tiny bush plane take off effortlessly into the air. When the buzz of the plane disappears, you'll feel the remoteness of the area around you. Nothing but untouched wilderness for miles.

After your guide covers some basics on bear safety, you'll get those legs moving. You and your guide will follow the shores of iceberg-filled Nizina Lake towards the wide expanse of the Nizina Glacier. Navigating rocky moraine and fissures in the ice, you'll hike onto the glacier (using crampons) and towards your camp for the night, an outcropping of land between the Regal and Rohn Glaciers. While crossing the glacier, fissures, moulins (deep vertical shafts cut into the ice by running water), blue pools, and canyons keep even the amateur photographer busy, and are fun to explore on foot. You'll camp surrounded by ice, enjoying the remoteness of your first night in the Wrangell-St. Elias backcountry.





DAY 2 – As the sun rises over the surrounding peaks, you and your guide will wake up, eat a hearty breakfast, and pack up camp, preparing to traverse to the east side of the Rohn Glacier. While you enjoy the easy travel over the Rohn Glacier's smooth surface, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for prospecting artifacts on the glacier ice – remaining from the

Wrangell's earlier mining days. Exiting the glacier onto the tundra hillside, you and your guide will look for a campsite with a great view of the valley below. Keep an eye out while you navigate the glacier's edge – often you can discover ice caves or other interesting features to explore!

DAY 3 – Today when you crawl from your sleeping bag, prepare yourself for a big climb. Today is the day to ascend the tundra to the top of the high pass. After enjoying a delicious hot breakfast, you pack up camp. Then, it's up, up, and up, working your way up to the pass. Your efforts will be rewarded, however, as the views from the pass are spectacular! You'll set up camp in a spot with a view (there are many to choose from!), and rest those tired legs, getting ready for the next day's adventure.

DAY 4 – If your legs are tired from hiking up to the pass, have no fear. Today can be a rest day, spent high in the mountains exploring the area around camp. You can scramble up various peaks to get a birds-eye view of the Wrangell Mountains, and maybe even look over towards the St. Elias Range. Don't forget your camera today, because impressive panoramic photo opportunities will be in every direction!

DAY 5 – Today, it's time to load up those packs again, and head down towards the Frederika Glacier. You'll put your crampons on again, as



you hike up onto the glacier and down towards the “toe,” or end of the glacier. There are plenty of pools, streams, and moulins to explore as you hike along. After scrambling off the glacial ice, you and your guide will find a nice flat spot to set up camp along the shores of Frederika Creek.

DAY 6 – Breaking camp in the morning, you’ll be able to look up towards the Frederika Glacier and the high alpine pass you navigated the day before under the beautiful morning mountain light. Heading south, you’ll follow Frederika Creek to its confluence with Skolai Creek, and then start climbing up towards the pass. There might be some Alaskan willows to navigate, but the terrain is mostly tundra. During the day, you might take a side-hike to check out a waterfall along Skolai Creek, or stop in at the old mining cabin near the confluence. You’ll end your day up at Skolai Pass, setting up camp, and keeping your eyes peeled for wildlife.



DAYS 7&8 – The next days are available to explore the world-class day hiking that Skolai Pass has to offer before getting picked up by a bush plane. You can head up towards Chitistone Pass, hiking past flowing streams and alpine lakes, towards the colorful views of the Chitistone Canyon. You could also head over towards the Russell Glacier to get impressive

views up towards the University Range. The hiking opportunities out of Skolai are limitless, and you are sure to have a great time exploring the high alpine tundra. Maybe you’ll explore the impressive Seven Sisters – a series of glaciers pouring down from the massive Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. Keep your cameras at the ready for the wildlife that can often be seen at Skolai Pass. Bears, and even caribou frequent the area, providing excellent photo opportunities for hikers. Soon, you’ll hear the buzz of the plane engine, and your pilot will skillfully land the plane on the dirt backcountry airstrip.

Once up in the bush plane, you can get a good birds-eye view of the terrain you’ve been traversing the past 6 days. You’ll have impressive views of the Nizina Glacier flowing down the valley, and will follow its riverbed back towards McCarthy. Once you’re back in town, it’s time for a warm shower (or sauna), and a delicious hot meal to top of your amazing Alaska adventure.

What's Included:

Guiding and instruction from skilled professionals. Our personable guides have extensive experience and local knowledge, as well as medical and rescue training.

- Bush plane flights to and from the backcountry.
- Delicious breakfasts, lunches, and dinners while in the backcountry, including hot and delicious meals morning and evening, and plenty of trail snacks and lunch food for mid-day nourishment.
- Group equipment: stoves, pots, tents, fuel, etc.
- Technical gear: crampons, ice axes (if needed for route)



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 in the backcountry.
- Guide gratuity – Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

If you would like us to arrange your transportation to 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.