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Alaska Backpacking – Skolai Pass Basecamp mini-Backpack

When we picture the perfect setting for a hiking or backpacking trip, the alpine tundra of Skolai Pass is right at the top. To the south, this remote valley is flanked by the exotic Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier with its seven icy tongues. To the north, the mighty Frederika Glacier lumbers down towards Skolai Valley. A day hike to Chitistone Pass provides views deep into the Yukon Territory and of the western edge of the St. Elias Range capped by 16,421 ft (5,005 m) Mt. Bona. Dwarf Fireweed and alpine Forget-Me-Nots dot the tundra in the summer and the piercing red of bear berry and dwarf willow blaze in the autumn. We invite people of all abilities to visit this spectacular backcountry kingdom and no previous experience is necessary. Enjoy!



Trip Highlights:

- Base camping and trekking in a stunning, remote alpine valley.
- Day hike to the expansive views from Chitistone Pass.
- Bears, sheep, and caribou frequent the area.
- Explore the unspoiled Alaskan wilderness!

Skolai Pass Basecamp mini-Backpack – 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 Alaska backpacking adventure starts at our headquarters in the historic Motherlode Powerhouse in McCarthy. Our professional mountain guides have been

busily making preparations for your trip and are excited to get to know you. You are in good hands as they review your itinerary, go over the menu, and make sure that you are properly outfitted for the trip. After the final checks are complete, the excitement builds as you and your guide head for the airstrip. There you'll meet your pilot and board a bush plane for the short flight northeast to a primitive landing strip in Skolai Valley. During the flight be sure to have your camera at the ready. The landscape below is rich with history and stunning natural beauty as you fly past the rock glaciers of Sourdough Peak, sections of an old bridge that spanned the Nizina River in the 1930's, waterfalls pouring off of the Mile-high cliffs, and, off to the east, the University Range and 16,421 ft (5,005 m) Mt. Bona.



Flying north along the Nizina River, the Nizina Glacier is straight ahead. This massive flow of ice creates a natural pass between the Chitina River Valley and the northern lowlands of the Tanana River. It was used during the gold rush of 1915 as a route to Chisana a hundred miles north of McCarthy. Turning east again, the alpine tundra of Skolai Valley comes into view as you fly up Skolai Creek and round Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. Your plane sets you

down in the lush valley and as the noise of its engines recedes you find yourself pleasantly immersed in the unparalleled wilderness of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Shouldering your packs, you and your guide set out to locate an ideal basecamp up towards Chitistone Pass, a great location from which to hike each day. The options are truly limitless!

DAY 2 – Peering out of your tent flap you may need to rub your eyes to make sure that the splendid valley surrounding you is real. Good news! It is, and today you're going to start exploring it. Today you've decided to hike east and climb the 1,500 ft (457 m) up to Chitistone Pass. From the pass the views are astounding. Directly below you and to the northeast flows the ice of the mighty Russell Glacier. Beyond the glacier you can see the mountains and glaciers deep into the Yukon Territory. Falling away to the



south is the vast Chitistone Canyon, the only path between the Wrangell Mountains and the great ice field ranges of the St. Elias Mountains. Chitistone Canyon is home to the famous “Goat Trail” and for those looking for more outstanding adventures we encourage you to come back and hike it with us. Keep your eyes peeled as you return to camp. Skolai Valley is home to wildlife including bears and caribou.

DAY 3 – After a tasty breakfast, you and your guide decide to hike towards the Russell Glacier and loop around the corner for expansive views of the University Range! Maybe you’ll even head down to the valley floor and explore the glacier’s edge! pack daypacks and explore west along Skolai Creek. Returning to camp in the evening, you and your guide relax with a cup of tea and watch the soft light play on the mountain tops.

DAY 4 – After a hot breakfast, you and your guide decide to break camp and ready your belongings for the flight back to McCarthy. However, the plane doesn’t arrive until the afternoon and there’s plenty of time to explore the valley up towards the 7-braided Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. The alpine tundra, dotted with wildflowers is soft under your feet and you revel in the sweet mountain air. Life is good as you explore along the creek and take in the magnificent views. Or maybe you decide to explore along the tumbled channel of Frederika Creek towards the Frederika Glacier. As you walk, you and your guide decide that leaving this mountain kingdom will definitely be bittersweet. On one hand, there is so much more to explore and do that you could spend weeks here taking it all in. On the other, a meal in McCarthy and a soak in our rustic wood-fired sauna sure do sound good!



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.