

High Alaskan Ascents, Mt. Bear, Wrangell/St. Elias National Park

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Wrangell/St. Elias is the largest National Park in the United States. It is greater in size than the entire country of Costa Rica. Of its 13.2 million acres, 5 million are permanently covered with snow and ice. This region has the largest concentration of mountain peaks over 14,500 feet in North America and very few visitors. It is definitely one of my favorite places to climb in the world. Come climb in this fabulous pristine wilderness before it gets “discovered.”

Access is surprisingly easy from Anchorage. After a 4 hour drive from Anchorage we'll either fly straight onto the mountain or spend the second night at our bush pilot's remote lodge on the Chitina River. Either way, the next morning bright and early finds us on the glacier at the base of our climb. Most of our objectives are in the Wrangell mountain range. This is inland from the coast and has less precipitation than you might imagine. The temperature range is similar to Mt. McKinley in June, varying from sunny, shirtsleeve days to storms with high winds of 40 mph or more and as cold as -20F.

Our primary goal will be to make an ascent of one of the major peaks in the range (10,000+ to 16,500 feet). Working together as a small, mobile team, we will develop our own “Alaskan style” approach to climbing from a base at our landing site on the glacier. As we fine tune skills in preparation for our climb, we won't overlook opportunities to explore, train or attempt an ascent of a satellite peak or ridge line near camp. Our “Big Peak” will involve one or more additional camps above base camp. It will be a route that requires route-finding skill, exciting climbing and the chance to climb where few have been before.

The peaks of Wrangell/St. Elias National Park provide a perfect step up from glacier climbing in the lower 48 states, and are excellent preparation for Mt. McKinley or other big expeditions. They remain the ultimate destination for those who want to escape crowded popular routes and experience mountains on their own terms.

“Every time I go on one of George Dunn's expeditions, I come back saying, 'that was the best adventure I've ever been on'!!... I had the time of my life on each trip...”

—Bruce G.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at:
www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml

Wrangell/St. Elias: Just The Facts

Not So Good For, Say, Farming:

Wrangell/St. Elias, the Largest National Park in the Country, comprises over 13,000,000 acres of land, all of it mountainous, half covered by snow and ice. Within it lies North America's greatest concentration of high peaks. This is the most extensively glaciated area in the world outside the polar regions.

Yay Government Do-Gooders:

Wrangell-St. Elias and its Canadian neighbor, Kluane National Park, were set aside to preserve the foothills, glaciers and peaks of the three mountain ranges that converge in this park: the Wrangells, the St. Elias and the Chugach.

No B&B's:

The coastal mountains in the St. Elias Range of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park/Preserve, topped by 18,008' St. Elias, are among the least visited mountains of their elevation in North America

Bring A Jacket:

Mountaineering is made especially challenging by a stormy weather pattern including an excess of 100 inches of precipitation a year. Though storms are common any time, full winter conditions can stretch from September to May.

Alaskan Ascents Objective:

Mt Bear Ski Expedition: Alaska is the place dreams are made of. Wild rugged remote peaks. The very definition of wilderness. Endless amounts of snow. It's a ski mountaineer's dream. We will travel into the heart of the wilderness to Mt Bear (14,831'), nestled deep in the St. Elias Range, only 4 miles from the Canadian border. Mt Bear is the ideal ski mountaineers peak with 8,000 feet of nearly unbroken skiing from its summit. Surrounded by views of Mt Logan, Mt Bona, and Mt Churchill, we plan to fly into the East Fork of the Barnard Glacier and ascend the South Side of Mt Bear.

The team will meet in Anchorage, AK on day one of the expedition to do gear checks, and last minute packing before a team dinner. The following morning the team will travel by van to Chitina, AK to meet our bush pilot. We fly with Ultima Thule Outfitters, one of the most renowned flight services in all of AK. Head pilot Paul Claus is truly a legend and has many first ascents and descents in the St Elias range. Weather permitting Paul will fly us right onto the glacier and the beginning of our expedition. If weather does not permit, we may travel to Paul's lodge to await our weather window. Once on the glacier we will utilize intermediate camps as we work our way up the mountain. Days will be spent ferrying loads, moving, camps, practicing skills, and of course skiing! From our high camp we will launch our summit attempt. If weather and conditions permit we will ski directly from Mt Bear's summit. Of course once the summit bid is made, the trip is far from over, and we still have thousands of feet of prized ski descents waiting for us. Once back on the Barnard Glacier, we'll fly out with Paul prior to returning to Anchorage and our flights home.

Ski Mountaineering Skills: Combining both excellent general mountaineering skills and backcountry ski skills into ski mountaineering gives us the opportunity to experience one of the most exhilarating sports, ski mountaineering. Your guides will help you combine these two wonderful disciplines as we make our attempt on Mt. Bear.

Alaska Adventure: The very name Alaska makes us think of adventure. In a place where nothing is certain, we will embrace the adventure laid before us. Weather, snowpack, and route conditions dictate our final plan. Rest assured, your IMG guides and team are ready to take on this unique aspect of ski mountaineering in such remote place. Check out our [Trip Report](#) from IMG's 2014 Mt Bona expedition for more about the adventure of climbing in AK.

Skills Needed: Team members need to have solid skiing skills and experience with general mountaineering.

Skiing Skills:

- Advanced to expert skier on off-piste terrain in a variety of snow conditions
- Experience backcountry skiing
- Experience with uphill travel on skis (skinning)
- Experience skiing with a heavy pack in intermediate terrain

General Mountaineering Skills:

- Cramponing skills on moderate snow and ice
- Ice axe usage on moderate snow and ice
- Self and team arrest
- Rope team travel

2017 Dates:

May 6-17, 2017

Landcost:

\$2,950

(Does **NOT** include bush pilot fee (quoted \$1300 for 2017), arranged shuttle from Anchorage to Chitina (quoted \$500 for 2017), meals and lodging other than on the mountain or at our bush pilot's lodge, or required [travel insurance policy](#) for trip cancellation, medical treatment, evacuation etc.)

Group starts and finishes in Anchorage

Climber/guide ratio 3/1

A World Class Destination

A perfect shakedown for Denali:

The peaks of the Wrangell/St. Elias Range involve terrain very similar to an ascent of Denali. This program is the perfect training ground for those who want to learn more about high Alaskan climbing.

Great climbing in its own right:

Why bother with the crowds and hassle of Denali? Wrangell/St. Elias National Park offers pristine glacier climbing in one of the most spectacular areas in the world. A true Alaskan experience with a strong likelihood that your party will be the only group on the mountain!

The perfect sized group:

The team will be limited to 3 climbers per guide. Maximum group size is 9 climbers and three guides. A perfect size for good group interaction and enjoyment of the climb.

REQUIRED Insurance

IMG requires that all* trip participants purchase [Travel Insurance](#) that includes coverage for medical evacuation, repatriation and medical expenses for the duration of their IMG program. Trip Cancellation Insurance is strongly recommended. Trekking and mountaineering programs are true "adventure travel." **The insurance requirement does not apply to IMG customers on programs within the continental USA, but is strongly encouraged.*

Insurance and Travel Arrangements

We invest in insurance coverage for commercial liability and medical and disability insurance for our employees while participating on our programs. We cannot insure you for your personal needs, but we do expect you to be as fiscally responsible as we are. We require that you insure yourself against potentially expensive difficulties that may arise. First, Trip Cancellation Insurance may provide financial relief should you be forced to withdraw from the program before it even happens. Next, make sure you have adequate Travel Insurance for coverage should you have a problem during the trip. Medical care and evacuation in remote locations can be expensive. For more information, please see our page on [cancellation, rescue/repatriation insurance](#) or contact the IMG Office.

International Mountain Guides has worked closely with various travel agents throughout the years and are happy to make recommendations to our customers based on their needs once confirmed on a program.

High Alaskan Ascents, Mt. Bear Itinerary

- Day 1** The group will meet in Anchorage on the **afternoon of the starting date** of the expedition. Arrangements will be made for us to spend the night at a local bed and breakfast (name and location to be announced). The cost of this will be up to each individual (average \$60-\$100). We will meet at the bed and breakfast as our flight arrivals permit. The guides will do final equipment checks and go over packing. The afternoon will be the last opportunity to pick up additional food items or gear for the trip. Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking and REI are two of the better climbing stores nearby. We will plan to get together at a nearby restaurant for dinner and a chance to learn more about our fellow teammates.
- Day 2** Early breakfast and departure for Chitina. Transportation to Chitina is prearranged and will cost each individual approximately \$350 (2015 rate) round trip. The drive to Chitina takes about 5 1/2 hours with a lunch stop on the way. At the Chitina airstrip, the bush pilot will pick us up and may shuttle us to his wilderness lodge, about 45 minutes flying time along the Chitina River. The night will be spent camping at the lodge and we will be provided with dinner and breakfast. In some instances, we will either overnight at the airstrip (an unfurnished cabin is available), or be flown directly to the base of our objective as our bush pilot determines is best.
- Day 3** Weather permitting, we will fly to our landing site on the Bernard Glacier and establish a base camp.
- Day 4-11** Depending on weather and climbing conditions we will start the climb. This will involve establishing a high alpine camp or two above base camp during route finding missions. A carry of supplies will usually be made between each camp. The summit will take four or more days depending on weather, the route selected, route preparation (if necessary), and snow conditions. Each day we will climb and ski as the weather, the group and safe conditions permit while allowing time for acclimatization and maximizing the ski descents.
- Day 11 or 12** Pickup by our bush pilot, weather permitting. We may spend the evening of Day 11 at the bush pilot's lodge, if the group schedule permits, enjoying the sauna and a good meal. We may also fly directly to the Chitina Airstrip and drive to Anchorage by that evening. In this case, we'll be sure to stop for showers at a nearby lodge on the way back!
- Day 12** Most likely our return day to Anchorage, arriving by late afternoon. The trip ends with our arrival in Anchorage, but often we try to get together at a local restaurant for a farewell dinner. Book your return flight for late on the evening of Day 12 (after 9:00 p.m.). A more realistic schedule might be to plan to spend the evening in Anchorage and then arrange a morning flight. Whatever your flight plans, be sure to book a flight that is changeable with a minimal penalty. We cannot guarantee your return date, although we commonly make it home on time!

High Alaskan Ascents Expedition

Mt. Bear Ski Expedition Required Personal Equipment List

- Backcountry Ski Travel Gear:
 - Skis with Alpine Touring Bindings, AT Boots, and Skins or
 - Skis with Telemark Bindings, Telemark Boots, and Skins
 - You'll want aftermarket warm, closed cell foam liners for your boots (such as Intuition brand). Another option is overboots: 40 Below Purple Haze are helpful for cold weather climbs. Make sure your overboot/boot combination is compatible with your ski bindings.
- Socks: Three complete changes of heavy wool/synthetic ski socks with optional liners.
- Underwear: One lightweight and one medium weight synthetic top, one lightweight longjohn bottom and one expedition weight bottom.
- Soft Shell jacket and climbing pant.
- Storm shell Waterproof/breathable jacket and pants (Gore-Tex). Jacket should have a close-fitting, attached hood. Pants must have $\frac{3}{4}$ or full-length zippers.
- Down parka: **Expedition weight** parka with attached hood. Size large enough to wear over **all** other layers.
- Insulated over pant. Examples include Outdoor Research Neoplume or Mountain Hardwear Compressor pant.
- Hat: fleece or wool hat with separate neck gaiter or balaclava. Size to fit under helmet
- Face protection: For sun and wind. Buff or lightweight balaclava
- Sun hat: Baseball or wide brimmed hat. Size to fit under helmet.
- Gloves: Two pair, one medium weight and one heavyweight insulated Gore-Tex ski or climbing glove.
- Mitts: Heavy insulated mitts.
- Glacier glasses: Dark with good side shields or wrap around design.
- Ski goggles: Double lens to reduce fogging.
- Water bottles: Two wide mouth plastic bottles with insulating covers (like the Outdoor Research Water Bottle Parka).
- Suncream/Lipbalm: SPF 30 or higher.
- Sleeping bag: Rated to -20 F **or lower**. Best and lightest is a Gore-Tex covered down bag. A warm enough synthetic bag will be heavy and bulky. A good compression stuff sack is highly recommended.
- Pads: 1 closed cell foam pad and 1 Thermarest pad.
- Pack: Large (80+ liters) expedition size internal frame.
- Bowl, cup & spoon: Large (12 oz. or more) insulated plastic cup, large flexible plastic bowl and Lexan plastic spoon.
- Pocket knife and butane lighter
- Alpine climbing harness: Adjustable leg loops are best with at least two gear loops.
- Carabiners: Two pear shaped locking, and four regular, minimum.
- Perlon accessory cord: bring 24 feet for construction of prussik loops. Optional: bring one mechanical ascender in addition to the cord.
- Crampons: 12 point hinged flat frame crampons. Make sure they stay on over your overboots. Crampons with plastic toe and heel retaining pieces do best.
- Ice axe: 70 cm. with leash.
- Ski poles***: Collapsible poles with large ski baskets

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High Alaskan Ascents Equipment List (continued)

- Avalanche transceiver***: Recommended for some, but not all trips
- First Aid kit: Each individual must carry a small personal first aid kit to avoid depletion of the group kit. You should have the following: aspirin (or Tylenol); ibuprofen; antacid (Pepto Bismol, Rolaids); anti- diarrhea medication (Imodium); Band-Aids; athletic tape; Second Skin or Band-Aid Blister Cushions. Consult with your doctor and bring any recommended prescriptions necessary for your health. Consider bringing a prescription of acetazolamide (Diamox) 125 or 250 mg. tablets for climbs over 14,000 feet (to be used only in emergency). Also consider bring a broad spectrum antibiotic like Ciprofloxacin. Earplugs are useful for sleeping.
- Lunch food: Bulk lunch items will be provided (Pilot bread, block cheese, pb&j, sardines, etc.). Bring your own energy bars, gorp, candy, special cheeses, sausage, jerky, drink mix, etc. About 10 lbs. total for two weeks is normal. This will be used as climbing snacks during the day and at night in the tent.
- Sled rigging: If we use sleds to move camp, bring 20' of 1" flat webbing (for towing the sled) and another 20' of ¼ inch cord (for lashing down your duffel on the sled).
- Lockable duffel: To store street clothes, towel, toiletries, and items to be left with bush pilot.
- Large duffel: for carrying group gear on your sled. A large, lightweight model is best, like the REI Classic XL duffel.
- Toiletries: Toothbrush and small tube of paste. One roll of t.p. in a Ziploc bag. Bring your own towel and soap for use at the bush pilot's lodge if we overnight there.
- Optional items: Collapsible shovel (aluminum is preferred over plastic), compact digital camera, small journal and pen, thick paperback. A headlamp is usually not necessary in Alaska by mid-May, but might be useful for reading or emergencies in the middle of the night. A small LED headlamp works great for this purpose.

*** available for [rent](#)

“After 10 years of mountaineering trips with close to a dozen different outfitters and guide services (as well as a number of self-organized trips), I've learned what goes into making a climb challenging, enjoyable, fulfilling, and safe. George Dunn and his programs are top rate in my opinion: he has immense experience and knowledge; his programs are well organized and executed; he provides destinations and climbs that can fit a variety of skill levels, backgrounds, and interests; he brings an even-handed, level-headed positive attitude to the different circumstances encountered during an expedition; and his associate guides are excellent. In the future whenever I feel the itch to get away and go climbing, I'll check on what George has got scheduled before I make any other commitments...”

—Marc C.

“I had the pleasure of spending time in one of America's most pristine, magnificent and wild areas: the St. Elias range... This trip was one of the most delightful I've done because of the good leadership, companionship and incredible scenery... If you want a great adventure and a good time, this is a place to go, and do it with Geo!...”

—Nola R.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at: www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml