

## High Alaskan Ascents, 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 the second night is normally spent at our bush pilot's remote lodge on the Chitina River. The next morning bright and early finds us landing 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 make other ascents of unclimbed peaks near camp. Our “Big Peak” will involve one or more additional camps above basecamp. 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 Nation 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.

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*“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.

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### 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. Bona (16,421 feet) via the Klutlan Glacier

Mt. Bona is an extinct/dormant shield volcano, the highest 16,000-foot peak in Wrangell/St. Elias National Park. The Duke of Abruzzi named the mountain for his racing yacht after first sighting the peak from afar. The first ascent of Mt. Bona was accomplished in 1930 by A. Carpe, A. Taylor & T. Moore, via the Russell Glacier.

The group meets in Anchorage on the afternoon of day one for equipment checks and to go over group gear. Our bush pilot will arrange for a pickup early the following morning and transport us by van on a scenic four-hour drive to a remote airstrip near Chitina. From here we will either fly in to our pilot's lodge on the Chitina River for the evening or directly on to the mountain as conditions and time dictate. On the flight in to the mountain, we will experience one of the most spectacular scenic flights imaginable into base camp at approximately 9,000 feet on the Klutlan Glacier. The glacier-landing site is broad and flat and a perfect location to get started on our journey. The team will establish two additional camps prior to the summit attempt. The group will make one advance load carry to each camp in order to keep loads light and help with acclimatization. The team will practice rope travel, crevasse rescue and other expedition skills as necessary during the approach. A high camp will be established between 12 and 14,000 feet. The summit day will be with lighter packs and will involve some spectacular views. The final summit dome is normally excellent cramponing up to the summit ridge. If time allows, an optional ascent of close neighbor Mt. Churchill (15,638') may be possible the day after the ascent of Bona.

There are few areas in the world that can compare with the pristine beauty of Mt. Bona and Wrangell/St. Elias National Park, and our ascent will be a climb to remember for a lifetime.

#### Dates:

May 19-30, 2012

#### Landcost:

\$2,850

(Does **NOT** include bush pilot fee, arranged shuttle from Anchorage to Chitina, 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 6 climbers and 2 veteran guides. A perfect size for good group interaction and enjoyment of the climb.

## High Alaskan Ascents Standard 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 (\$30-\$40). 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 \$115 round trip. The drive to Chitina takes about 5 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 at the lodge and we will be provided with dinner and breakfast. In some instances, our selected peak is closer to the Chitina airstrip than the lodge. In these cases, we will either overnight at the airstrip (an unfurnished cabin is available), or be flown directly to the base of our objective.
- Day 3** Weather permitting, we will fly to our landing site on the glacier and establish a permanent base camp.
- Day 4** Review and training in glacier climbing skills and rope work. We want to start getting comfortable climbing as a team and begin reconnoitering our climbing objectives.
- Day 5-10** 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.
- Day 10-11** If we are lucky enough to finish our summit climb early, the remaining days will be spent in exploration, ascents of smaller peaks, training in advanced skills, or simply relaxing and enjoying the mountains. The options are endless.
- Day 11 or 12** Pickup by our bush pilot, weather permitting. We will spend the evening of Day 11 at the bush pilot's lodge, if the group schedule permits, enjoying the sauna and a good meal. If our objective is closer to Chitina, we will be picked up on the morning of Day 12. We will fly directly to the Chitina Airstrip and drive to Anchorage by that evening. 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 Required Personal Equipment List

- Boots: Plastic double boots only. Asolo AFS 8000, Koflach Arctis Expedition with aveolite liners, Scarpa Inverno with high-altitude liners or comparable.
- Overboots: 40 Below Purple Haze or Outdoor Research Brooks Ranger Overboots are recommended. An expedition weight Supergaiter is acceptable. A good snug fit is extremely important for either choice. If using overboots, bring a regular gaiter for the approach.
- Socks: Three complete changes of heavy wool/synthetic socks with liners.
- Underwear: Two lightweight or medium weight synthetic tops and one medium weight longjohn bottom.
- Shirt: Expedition weight synthetic (100 weight Polartec), or equivalent.
- Soft Shell or fleece: jacket and pants. Full-length zips are recommended for pants.
- Storm shell Waterproof/breathable jacket and pants. Jacket should have a close-fitting, attached hood. Pants must have full-length zippers. Bib pants are warmer and help to keep out drafts.
- Down parka: Expedition weight parka with attached hood. Size large enough to wear over all other layers.
- Hat: fleece or wool hat with separate face mask, neck gaiter or balaclava.
- Sun hat: Baseball hat, large bandana is useful too.
- Gloves: Two pair, one fleece and one Gore-Tex ski or climbing glove.
- Mitts: Heavy fleece mitts with a Gore-Tex overshell.
- Glacier glasses: Dark with good side shields.
- 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 15 or higher.
- Sleeping bag: Rated to -20 F **or lower**. Best and lightest is a Gore-Tex covered down bag. Next best is a synthetic bag. A good compression stuff sack is highly recommended.
- Pads: 1 closed cell foam pad and 1 Thermarest pad.
- Pack: Large (6,000 cu.in.) 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
- Seat harness: Adjustable leg loops are best
- Carabiners: Two pear shaped locking, and two regular, minimum.
- Ascenders: Bring a set, one rigged to clip into your seat harness, one with a leg loop. I prefer Petzl ascenders. Optional: bring just one ascender and a couple of 7mm prussik loops.
- Crampons: 12 point hinged flat frame crampons. Make sure they stay on over your overboots. Grivel G-12's with the New-matic binding work well.
- Ice axe: 70 cm. with leash.
- Belay device: on climbs rated Alaskan grade 2 or higher, a belay device such as the Black Diamond ATC XP is required.
- Ski poles: Collapsible poles are highly recommended.
- Snowshoes\*\*\*: Lightweight with traction bindings. Atlas, Tubbs and Sherpa are recommended brands.
- Avalanche transceiver\*\*\*: Recommended for most, but not all trips.

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## High Alaskan Ascents Equipment List (continued)

- 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; moleskin, Second Skin or Compede. 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). 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" webbing and 4-6 long bungie cords.
- Lockable duffel: To store street clothes, towel, toiletries, and items to be left with bush pilot.
- Toiletries: Toothbrush and small tube of paste. One roll of t.p. in a ziplock 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), camera and film, small journal and pen, thick paperback. A headlamp is usually not necessary in Alaska by mid-April, but might be useful for reading or emergencies in the middle of the night. The new LED headlamps are nice and light.

\*\*\* available for rent

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*“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.

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