

High Alaskan Ascents, Mt. Jarvis, 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 likely fly straight onto the mountain or if weather precludes a fly-on to the glacier, 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 Denali 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 ascend satellite peaks or ridges around 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 Nation Park provide a perfect step up from glacier climbing in the lower 48 states, and are excellent preparation for Denali 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:
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. Wrangell (14,163') and Mt. Jarvis (13,422') Expedition

Mt. Wrangell, one of the prominent peaks in Wrangell – St. Elias National Park, is a massive shield volcano. Its volume is over 220 cubic miles, which makes it more than twice the size of Mount Shasta, CA, the largest stratovolcano by volume in the Cascades.

In 2017, on an attempted expedition to nearby Mt. Sanford, our bush pilot wasn't able to land on the icy Sheep Glacier on Sanford and instead dropped the team in a broad saddle between Mt. Wrangell and Mt. Jarvis. Due to extended bad weather, the team was only able to climb Mt. Jarvis, a fun alpine peak rising 5,000 feet above the surrounding glacier. (See a [trip report](#) from that 2017 expedition.) The team had hoped to climb Mt. Wrangell as well, and we'll return to accomplish this "twofer" with a camp situated mid-way between Mt. Wrangell and Mt. Jarvis. The distance between the two peaks is about ten miles, so a second (and third) camp will be situated partway towards each of the two peaks in turn, bringing the team to within striking range of each summit.

This program is the perfect "first big expedition" visit to Alaska. Although there is no technical climbing, we will travel over glaciated terrain throughout the trip establishing additional camps beyond our landing site. We will expect to experience Alaska weather, cold and altitude at its finest. Skis or snowshoes are both suitable for this program.

The group meets in Anchorage on day one. Our bush pilot will arrange for a pickup early the following morning and transport us the scenic five-hour drive to a remote airstrip near Chitina. From here we experience one of the most spectacular scenic flights imaginable into base camp at 8,500 feet on the Nebesna Glacier. The glacier-landing site is broad and flat and a perfect location for base camp. The team will establish two additional camps prior to the summit attempt. The route involves glacier travel throughout. 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. The two summit days will be with light packs and will involve some spectacular views.

There are few areas in the world that can compare with the pristine beauty of Wrangell – St. Elias National Park, and our ascents will be climbs to remember for a lifetime.

Dates:

May 4-13, 2021

Landcost:

\$3,250

(Does **NOT** include bush pilot fee (quoted \$1,100 for 2020), arranged shuttle from Anchorage to Chitina (\$400 for 2020), 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.

“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: mountainguides.com/comments.shtml

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 (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 \$400 (2018 quoted 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. Bush pilot fee is quoted at \$1,100 for 2018. The night will be spent camping at the lodge and we will be provided with dinner and breakfast. In some instances, like for Mt. Bona or Sanford, 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. A carry to the first camp location is possible.
- Day 5-11** Depending on weather and climbing conditions we will start the climbs. This will involve establishing two or more satellite camps beyond base camp during route finding missions. A carry of supplies will usually be made between each camp. The summits of both Wrangell and Jarvis will take one alpine day from a camp located within striking distance of the peak, depending on weather, the route selected, route preparation (if necessary), and snow conditions.
- Day 11 or 12** Pickup by our bush pilot, weather permitting. If picked up on Day 11, it is possible the team will spend the evening of Day 11 in tents at the bush pilot's lodge, enjoying the sauna and a good meal. If our objective is closer to Chitina (like Mt. Bona or Wrangell), it is most likely 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/synthetic double boots only. La Sportiva Spantik; La Sportiva Baruntse; Scarpa Phantom 6,000 or 8,000; Scarpa Inverno; or similar.
- Overboots: 40 Below Purple Haze are recommended to ensure warm feet for April and early May climbs. 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. If your double boots are new with expedition liners, you can normally do without overboots for May and June climbs if you have normal circulation. Some high altitude boots now come with built in gaiters which is also acceptable alone.
- Socks: Three complete changes of heavy wool/synthetic 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 Hardware 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 very warm 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).
- Sun cream/Lip balm: SPF 30 or higher.
- Sleeping bag: Rated to -20 F **or lower**. Best and lightest is a Gore-Tex covered down bag. A synthetic bag is 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, should have 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
- Snowshoes***: Lightweight with traction bindings. MSR makes good snowshoes.

-Continued Next Page -

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 azithromycin. 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 (likely), 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, Kindle or small journal and pen, thick paperback (easy to cut in half to share or trade). 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. If you bring a lot of digital gear, consider bringing a small, portable solar charger.

*** available for rent

“I wanted to send you a quick note to express my thanks for the Alaskan Ascents (Mt. Bona) climb. We all had a great time. In particular, I wanted to let you know that Sheldon and Austin did a terrific job in coaching us to reach the summit. To me, so far, it's the quality of the guides that represent the distinguishing mark of IMG within the industry. It is quite clear that emphasis is placed in selecting professionals who not only know their stuff inside-out on the slopes but who also can relate well to the climbers on a personal level, identify challenges and support the climber(s) in overcoming them. Sheldon and Austin exemplified this throughout the week. Again, an incredible experience, and I look forward to my next climbs with IMG...”

—Sven S.

“The Mt. Bona trip was everything I expected and then some. The place is absolutely beautiful... everyone worked and lived well together... the food selection was outstanding... and, I don't need to tell you how enjoyable Mark and Eric were. They both also seemed to get a special thrill out of the place and the people. I have always wondered how much professional guides enjoy regularly herding amateurs like us up and down mountains... I could see that both Mark and Eric were sparked by the fact that they were on a remote mountain they hadn't been before with a group that was easy to manage...”

—Jim M.

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