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Alaska Backpacking – Donoho Peak Wilderness Exploration

For many of us, the word Alaska conjures up images of rugged mountains, brawling rivers, abundant wildlife, and the independent people it takes to live in America's "Last Frontier." In reality, Alaska is all of this, and we're truly lucky to have all of it right outside our back door. The Donoho Peak Wilderness Exploration is an excellent introduction to the rugged terrain and supreme natural beauty found in the Wrangell St. Elias National Park. And, since the trip departs from our doorstep, we're able to offer the trip to you at a very affordable rate.

Trip Highlights:

- Majestic views of 16,390 ft (4,995 m) Mt. Blackburn and the mile-high (1.6 km) Stairway Icefall.
- Expert instruction on wilderness backpacking techniques in Alaska
- Opportunity to summit 6,696 ft (2,040 m) Donoho Peak
- Exploring the streams, blue pools, and moulins of the Root Glacier.



Donoho Peak Wilderness Exploration – 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, you and your guide set out to explore the historical towns of McCarthy and Kennecott. Early in the afternoon you don your packs and follow the old wagon road north out of Kennecott. This road was built in the '20's to supply the Erie Mine, six miles up the Root Glacier. In May and June brilliant blue lupine bloom alongside the path. As summer matures, dwarf fireweed and wild rose splash pink and vermilion next to the route.



A mile from town you'll pass a tumbled down shed, the original "dynamite shack." All good miners put it a healthy distance out of town! During your hike you and your guide will stop several times along the way to discuss glacier formation and morphology. For the first two miles, the route parallels the immense Kennicott Glacier. As the trail breaks out from the forest, you

are greeted with a view of the Wrangell's highest peak...Mt. Blackburn 16,390 feet (4,995 m)...a mere twenty miles distant. Continuing across two pure mountain streams and hiking slightly downhill, you and your guide find a perfect camp in a small level pocket adjacent to the Root Glacier. After setting your packs down and taking a brief rest, you grab your crampons and ice axe and hike down to the glacial ice.

Cramponing is simply hiking on ice with the aid of spikes attached to the bottom of your boots. With simple instruction and practice, crampons open up an entire new-world. You'll feel like "Spiderman", scampering securely around on the ice. You and your guide practice basic techniques, and walk around to several beautiful and delicate ice formations before returning to camp for dinner.

DAY 2 – After a tasty breakfast, you and your guide carry your packs down to the clear ice of the Root Glacier. The hike down takes us through the lateral moraine, an area of scoured gravel and dirt, where only 50 years ago, the ice was flush against the hillside, scraping away ground and trees, nature's bulldozer. Using the crampon techniques you learned the evening before, you hike out onto the Root Glacier and head west, towards the opposite side. The surface of the glacier is aerated, creating an uneven layer that crunches as you walk. Water runs every where, joining into small streams. At level spots, the water collects and shimmers an azure blue. In other spots, the water picks up speed, and carves deep "Grand Canyon" like ravines in the ice, forming the most beautiful

and enticing water slides. Another 50 degrees warmer and you might think about a quick swim! As the ice gives way to the melting water, holes form, known as moulins (French for “mill”) many of these holes are huge black caverns, dumping straight down hundreds of feet into the very heart of the glacier. A roaring water fall cascades into the darkness. They are wonderful, eerie formations. The green tundra of your campsite is close, but you and your guide must negotiate the last portion of glacier and then scramble through lateral moraine before finally reaching camp. After dinner, you may decide to take a hike down to the Root Glacier to view a large waterfall that undercuts the glacier itself, forming a huge ice cave hundreds of feet below the surface.

DAY 3- Day packs only today. In which direction you head is totally up to the group. Perhaps there is an interest to spend the day exploring more of the glacier, or to learn the skills of ice climbing. For this you and your guide carry a rope and ice tools, and spend the day on faces of varying steepness, learning and reviewing rope work, front pointing, crevasse rescue, rappelling and belaying.



Or perhaps, a summit attempt on 6,696 ft (2,040 m) Donoho Peak beckons. From its summit, on a clear day, the views of the Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains are fantastic. There is a chance to glimpse Mt. St. Elias itself, America’s second highest peak at 18,008-feet (5,488 m), or Canada’s highest, Mt. Logan, at 19,950-feet (6,080 m). The climb is long and requires scrambling over loose rock near the top. But the views along the way make stopping at any point easy and worth the effort. Perhaps you’d simply like to take a day hike along a small and barely perceptible trail through the brush to a large lake. From



its shore there is a clear view of Mt. Blackburn’s magnificent south face. Rising over 10,000 vertical feet, this glacier swept massif presents a unique photo opportunity. From this lake, you can hike another two miles to another glacially fed lake and enjoy lunch seemingly under the gleaming slopes of this beautiful mountain.

DAY 4- Returning to civilization conjures up dual emotions; the anticipation of relaxing in our wood-fired sauna with a cold drink compete with the feeling of losing a good friend...quiet and solitude. Re-crossing the Root Glacier, you and your guide peer down more moulins, hop rushing blue streams and eat lunch on the medial moraine. By early afternoon, you find yourselves hiking back down the old wagon road leading into Kennecott, munching on crow berries or gazing at the brilliant reds and yellows of fall. A ride awaits you in Kennecott to take you back down the abandoned railroad bed to McCarthy and a hot meal.

What's Included?

As with all of our Alaska backpacking adventures, the Donoho Peak Wilderness Exploration trip includes professional, experienced backpacking guides with extensive local knowledge and medical training. We provide all food for the backcountry portions of your trip, including hot and delicious meals morning and evening and plenty of snacks and lunch food for mid-day nourishment. St.



Elias Alpine Guides also provides shared group gear, including stoves, pots, and tents, as well as any technical gear, such as crampons. All you need to bring is your personal gear, (clothing, rain gear, boots, sleeping bag and pad) You can find a detailed list of the backpacking gear that we recommend you bring on our [backpacking equipment list](#).

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.