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## **Alaska Backpacking – Skolai Pass to Nizina River Multi-Sport Adventure**

Our Skolai Pass to the Nizina River Multi-Sport adventure traverses some of the most impressive terrain the Wrangell-St. Elias has to offer! The bush plane flight to Skolai Pass shadows your route; up the Nizina River Canyon, over the Nizina and Rohn Glaciers, skirting Rohn Ridge and crossing the Frederika Glacier, to finally land in the alpine tundra of Skolai Valley. Surrounded by hanging glaciers and alpine peaks, you'll cross fast flowing rivers, hike on glaciers as they shape the landscape, climb rocky ridges, and descend to the source of the Nizina River. After 8 days, you and your Alaska mountain guide change from land to water travel, boarding rafts and silently floating beneath towering rock walls weeping with thousand foot waterfalls. At the take-out you rendezvous with a bush plane for the flight back to McCarthy.



### **Trip Highlights**

- Exploring the Wrangell-St. Elias wilderness on foot and by raft
- Wilderness backpacking over glaciers and tundra
- Exploring ice-berg filled Nizina Lake
- Spectacular views of the seven lobes of the Hole-in-the-wall glacier and the high peaks of the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains

### **Skolai Pass to Nizina River Multi-Sport Adventure – 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** – This morning, our friendly and knowledgeable staff will pick you up in Anchorage, for the scenic drive to our headquarters in the tiny town of McCarthy. McCarthy is located in the middle of the spectacular Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and provides the perfect “jumping off” point for all of our wilderness adventures. You follow the highway up the Matanuska River Valley (where long hours of sunshine in the summer

produce 60 lb cabbages), along the rugged Chugach Mountains to the hamlet of Chitina. The unpaved McCarthy road begins here and follows the old rail bed of the old Copper River and Northwestern Railroad for 60 miles to McCarthy. In the early 1900’s, millions of dollars of copper ore traveled from the mill town of Kennecott, over this very route, to steamships waiting on the coast in Cordova. This evening, once you’re settled into your accommodations, you’ll have a chance to meet your guide and go over the preliminary details of your trip.

**DAY 2** – Your Alaska backpacking adventure starts at our headquarters in the historic Motherlode Powerhouse in McCarthy. Our Alaska 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.

**DAYS 3-8** –Backpacking in the Wrangell-St. Elias is unlike anywhere else in the world. The rugged wilderness remains virtually untouched by man. This is the land of grizzly bear, Dall sheep, caribou, and hoary marmots. Trails are few and your Alaska mountain guide must read the terrain to determine the best route to travel. You'll quickly learn that, in these remote regions, there's no substitute for experience and good judgment. St. Elias Alpine Guides has been roaming these mountains for 30 years and you're in good hands. Your route takes you across



diverse terrain; up Skolai Creek to Frederika Creek, and up the mighty Frederika Glacier to a high, alpine pass. Here, if the weather permits you have views of glacier-clad Frederika Peak and the high peaks of both the Wrangell and St. Elias Ranges. Continuing across the pass your route descends to the Rohn Glacier and follows it to where it flows in to the Nizina Glacier and finally iceberg-filled Nizina Lake and the Nizina River.

You'll camp in green alpine tundra, silty flats, and amongst glacial moraine. Depending on the speed and goals of the group, you may have a chance for a layover day, where you can drop the big packs and ascend a small peak or wander through an alpine valley, returning to the same camp at night.

**DAY 9** – Today you and your guide switch modes of transportation and meet your rafts, rigged and ready, at mid-day on Nizina Lake. The mood is festive as you feast on a fresh, deli lunch and pack your packs into drybags. The backpacking has been spectacular and you're looking forward to sitting back in the rafts and letting the current sweep you through the wilderness. When you're all set you shove off and head off down the river. Tonight you'll make camp beneath the Mile-High cliffs at the mouth of the Chitistone Valley. Just up this valley is the

start of our Chitistone Canyon Expedition, one of the most spectacular backpacking trips in Alaska. Wispy waterfalls pour thousands of feet off the cliffs and beaver ponds dot the forest. After feasting on a tasty dinner prepared by your guide, you relax into a deep slumber, lulled to sleep by the sound of the river.

**DAY 10** – The routine is different this morning but the majestic wilderness remains your constant companion. After a tasty breakfast, you and your guide continue down the Nizina River, through wide, braided channels of silt-laden water. The river bends to the west and you pass the remains of a historical steel bridge that seems incongruous with the wilderness you've been traveling through. This bridge was built in the early days as a means of accessing the gold mines of May Creek, to the south of the Nizina River. You take out near a canyon just above the confluence with the Kennicott River and set up camp on a sandy river bar. River life is good!



**DAY 11** – Your epic journey ends today at the confluence of the Nizina and Chitina River, where once again you switch modes of transportation. Trusty Wrangell Mountain Air bush pilots meet you and your guide and whisk you away to “civilization” in McCarthy. As you fly over the thick spruce forests and rugged peaks, you have a new-found appreciation for the raw power of this mountain kingdom. You picture the first explorers in this area, pushing on without the modern conveniences of internal frame packs, Gore-Tex clothing, or reliable maps. Maybe, after your journey, you feel some of their pioneering spirit and are already planning your next adventure. We'd love it if you let us tag along! Returning to McCarthy, you treat yourself to a hot meal and maybe even a therapeutic soak in our rustic, wood-fired sauna.

**DAY 12** – Today is a travel day. We'll retrace the route back to Anchorage (or we are happy to arrange flights for an additional cost) and make sure you're settled in at your hotel before waving farewell (for now). We recommend that you schedule your return flights for the day after this in case of weather delays while you're in the backcountry.

## What's Included?

As with all of our Alaska backpacking adventures, the Skolai Pass to Nizina River Multi-Sport Adventure includes professional, experienced backpacking and river 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 and rafting equipment lists.

Additionally, this trip includes transportation to and from Anchorage. If you would like us to arrange 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.