

## Day Hiker Adventure

### INTRODUCTION

The wilds are without a doubt the lure of most in wanting to experience Alaska. While many means exist to explore, the most intimate remains by foot. This itinerary is for those who prefer an active adventure but are not interested in a full fledged backpacking expedition. Five nights are spent camping to fully savour the wide open spaces, interspersed with stays in comfortable cabins and a lodge, and dining in restaurants. Most days feature a hike of up to four hours in a unique area, with the option to go at your own pace and explore your own interests, be it birding, photography or any aspect of the fascinating natural history. Areas featured range from: the Interior, with a full day heading to the heart of Denali National Park, to the alpine world above treeline in the Alaska Range, to the temperate rainforest of a microclimate in the Chugach Mountains. Other highlights include hiking in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and on the Kenai Peninsula, as well as onto the face of two glaciers.

If looking for a variety of wilderness in digestible doses, and not simply through a window, this may be the itinerary for you. It strikes a balance between the oft touted attractions and the solitary worlds that truly define Alaska. The difference between seeing the country and actually feeling it, is one that surely can't be calculated.



**9 Day / 8 Night**

**\$2335 p/person**

### 2010 Tour Dates Code

May 25 - June 2	9D1
June 9 - June 17	9D2
June 17 - June 25	9D3
July 1 - July 9	9D4
July 17 - July 25	9D5
July 23 - July 31	9D6
July 30 - Aug 7	9D7
Aug 14 - Aug 22	9D8
Aug 22 - Aug 30	9D9

### ABBREVIATED AGENDA

**Day 1 Anchorage - Denali:** travel north towards Denali Park; afternoon hike in the Alaska Range, near Denali State Park; camp just outside Denali Nat'l Park, along river

**Day 2 Denali National Park:** full day natural history and wildlife tour into the center of the park; late afternoon hike on the outskirts, river camp

**Day 3 Denali-Paxson:** traverse spectacular Denali Hwy (gravel); afternoon hike alpine ridge of Maclaren Summit; optl. hike to Gulkana Glacier; Paxson Inn & Lodge - showers!

**Day 4 Paxson-McCarthy:** leave Alaska Range and head into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park; cross Kennicott River to reach private riverside camp; afternoon hike over glacial terminal moraine; explore McCarthy

**Day 5 McCarthy-Kennicott:** travel four miles to abandoned town/mine of Kennicott; exploration; hike to the Root Glacier and onto the face; lunch on glacier; evening hike w/ flightseeing optional; riverside camp

**Day 6 McCarthy- Tolsana:** Morning hike up lateral moraine of Kennicott Glacier; travel west to camp on the Tolsana River; evening hike to geologic oddity of mud "volcano"

**Day 7 Tolsana-Hope:** travel along the Matanuska River between the Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains to the Kenai Peninsula; explore the wild terrain of the Matanuska Glacier; wander gold rush town of Hope; overnight in Discovery Cabins on Bear Creek; dinner "in town".

**Day 8 Hope:** full day hike to alpine lake country; evening barbecue; campfire, hot tub?; overnight in Discovery Cabins

**Day 9 Hope-Anchorage:** optional goldpanning; travel to Girdwood; rainforest hike along Winner Creek; lunch at Alyeska Bakery; late afternoon return to Anchorage

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation, lodging, meals, equipment and guiding. Additional information and a suggested personal equipment list sent upon deposit. Accommodations range from semi-deluxe to rustic. When camping, all group gear is provided, with two persons to a tent, and a full length sleeping pad included. Moderate physical fitness is desirable as this is a wilderness trip with hiking and outdoor activities, though it is not overly strenuous. Alcoholic beverages and gratuities to the guide not included. Group size is limited to eight persons.

**Day 1** The adventure begins at 8AM, meeting in downtown Anchorage at your B&B or a previously arranged location. From here we'll head northward with a quick stop in Wasilla at the headquarters for the 1000 mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race. The displays and short video here give a good insight into dog mushing in general, as well as the lifestyle and the commitment it takes to train for and run the Iditarod itself. Pushing northward towards the beacon of North America's highest peak Denali (also still referred to as Mt. McKinley), we'll enter into the great Alaska Range of mountains which serves as the divide between the vast drainages of the Yukon to the north and the Matanuska-Susitna Rivers to the south. The location of our hike this afternoon will depend upon recent weather and trail conditions, but will certainly feature some wonderful scenery and the possibility of coming across wildlife such as moose or caribou. Our alpine camp for the next two nights is a private one on a bluff overlooking Jack River, with The Great One, Denali, hopefully deigning to fill our tents' doors . . .

**Day 2** In the morning we'll drive a short distance to the entrance of Denali National Park. A stop at the Visitor's Center will better acquaint us with Denali, and it is here that we will board a Park Service bus to travel into the Park, as the vast interior is closed to private vehicles. The round trip is a full day, and opportunities are some of the best anywhere for wildlife viewing. And then there's the scenery . . . chances are very good to see bears, caribou, moose, and possibly even wolves. Photographic possibilities are excellent, as the bus will stop at any desired location at the group's request. In the late afternoon when we exit the Park, our legs will most likely demand a stretch and a variety of trails await. Should the weather be cooperating another option is flightseeing from a nearby airstrip (costs approx. \$250-285/person). It's a truly indescribable experience to witness the stark and formidable higher elevations from this perspective --and if "The Mountain" is "out", then there's just no question. It's then back to our camp for dinner and an evening tundra exploration.

**Day 3** After breakfast we'll pack up and turn east to cross the spectacular Denali Highway. It is a 135 mile gravel road across wide valleys, alpine tundra and haunting scenery that is open only in the summer months and the only road through this remote area. Crossing glacial river and lake country, wildlife viewing opportunities abound in this large stretch of wilderness inhabited year-round only by the occasional trapper and wilderness hermit. We'll stop along the way at a couple of the unique establishments to mingle with some of the locals. After crossing the beautiful Maclaren River we will gradually climb up to Maclaren Summit (elev. 4082 ft), the second highest point on the Alaska road system. Here we will leave the van for a great ramble above treeline, walking north towards the impressive Maclaren Glacier and mountains of the Alaska Range. This alpine tundra hike is spectacular, allowing for expansive views in all directions. Numerous kettle lakes dot the landscape and the possibility of seeing migrating caribou is good. After reaching Paxson, we will turn north on the Richardson Highway and depart the road to reach the base of the imposing Gulkana Glacier for a quick hike across a swinging bridge and onto the glacier's terminal moraine. A few miles south we'll find our lodging in the comfortable rooms of the Paxson Inn & Lodge.

**Day 4** The Richardson Highway, following the old Valdez-Eagle trail, leads us southward through Glennallen to the Visitor Center of our nation's largest National Park, Wrangell-St. Elias. An undeveloped jewel, the Park coupled with the adjoining Kluane National Park of Canada, is the largest piece of protected wilderness on the planet. We'll pick up a one-lane abandoned railroad grade at the confluence of the Copper and Chitina Rivers, that leads us 60 miles into the center of the Park and the near ghost towns of McCarthy and Kennicott. The road ends at the Kennicott River, with public access to McCarthy limited to a footbridge. We though, will utilize a private vehicle bridge to access our own private facility on the island between the Kennicott River and McCarthy Creek. It's truly a fantastic spot with views in all directions, from the towering icefalls up high, to the glacial creek tumbling just out front. Legs and palates will no doubt demand a short walk to the tiny ghost town of McCarthy (possibly wetting whistles at their unique tavern/watering hole) followed by an "untrailed" hike over the glacial moraine below where the Kennicott and Root glaciers join. It's an eery

landscape seemingly of another planet, and darned beautiful. Working our way back along one fork of the Kennicott river to the confluence with McCarthy Creek, leads us back to camp for dinner and surely an evening fire on the river gravel bar right in front of our tents.

**Day 5** A post breakfast van trip up the remainder of the road four miles to the abandoned company town of Kennicott overlooking its glacier namesake, allows an almost unbelievable exploration of an entire town sitting much the way it was when the mines closed in 1938. The Park Service has been busy for the last several years, renovating, shoring and adding interpretive displays to the historic buildings, as well as the incredible 14-story mill building itself. Kennicott is truly a ghost town without equal, with its remoteness dictating that many things were not worth transporting out, coupled with a fortunate lack of vandalism. We'll continue onward by foot paralleling the glacial moraine to reach the face of the Root Glacier itself. If careful, it's possible to walk up onto the face for a little ways. It truly is another world. Heading back down, possibly by the manual method along the old Wagon Road, brings us back to McCarthy for a drink or appetizer in the local restaurant. The contrast between the two towns is now very apparent, with Kennicott the regimented company town, and McCarthy, the nearby free wheeling outlet for all of the those lonely miners . . . Another evening camp dinner and creekside fire with views all about is definitely in order.

**Day 6** Today feels a bit more leisurely, with the morning open to explore such options as fantastic flightseeing (cost approx. \$150-200/person), or, you just might not want to miss a delightful hike up the western lateral moraine of the Kennicott Glacier. The unceasing nature of the glacier's evolution is evident in the continual clatter of rocks yielding to gravity and falling into the ever changing pools of meltwater. The distant views aren't too bad either . . . In the afternoon we'll reluctantly be on our way, winding out of the park and back to pavement to reach Glennallen, now turning west on the Glenn Highway. Camp for the night is not far, on the banks of the Tolsana River, in the Tolsana Wilderness Campground (showers!). After dinner a hike is in order to a nearby geologic oddity --a mud "volcano". Not quite as spectacular as a lava spouting dome, nonetheless this strange phenomenon consists of mostly methane gasses bubbling up from the coal deposits of the Lower Cretaceous and Upper Jurassic formations that underly the Copper River Basin. As the bubbles travel up through the earth to the surface, they pick up and carry fine particles of silt which over time have formed the hill from which the springs emerge. The cold salty water flows all winter and is an important source of liquid to the local creatures large and small, during the long months when all about is frozen.

**Day 7** Today the road leads southwest, leaving the basin of the Copper River and climbing to the divide of Eureka summit, with the Talkeetna Mountains to the north and the Chugach to the south. It's a beautiful mountain drive through to the huge valley of the Matanuska and Susitna rivers, home to most of Alaska's agricultural industry. We'll take a short hike either here or further along past Anchorage, depending on trail conditions. Beautiful views abound as we round Turnagain Arm along the Chugach Mountains and onto the Kenai Peninsula. Turning off the main road and following along the south side of the Arm leads to the little end of the road community of Hope. The second oldest gold rush town in Alaska, Hope is still predominately built of log, from the tiny church to the old Social Hall, still hosting weddings, dances and community functions. It's a very special place and it is here that we'll lodge for the next two nights in cozy log cabins overlooking Bear Creek. We'll dine at the local establishment with possibly a campfire and hot tub to cap the day?

**Day 8** Blueberry pancakes for breakfast should give a good start, before heading out on our hike. We'll leave right from our cabin door, heading up the valley to high alpine country, taking our picnic lunch along. You'll have earned dinner by the time we return, and a leisurely barbecue is planned on the deck overlooking our cabins. Afterwards, if you still feel spry, you might be inclined to sample a bit of the "wildlife" at the local watering hole down by the ocean at the Seaview Bar.

**Day 9** Leaving the Kenai Mountains and skirting the Chugach while winding back around Turnagain Arm brings us to Girdwood, home to the Alyeska Ski Resort situated here due to a much higher level of precipitation than even the adjacent valleys. It is a microclimate that gives rise to a temperate rainforest with flora quite different from Hope, just a couple dozen miles away. Lush ferns and undergrowth along with large spruce trees

### Accessibility/Fitness

This is in great part a wilderness trip and while no particular skills are needed for any portion, a prerequisite for personal enjoyment as well as the ability of the group as a whole to proceed without hindrance, is a moderate level of physical conditioning. This does not mean brute strength or endurance but simply the ability to hike for up to four hours over uneven ground (with breaks) in possibly inclement weather. A suggested minimum level of conditioning would be several hours of steady walking a day in the weeks before the trip. We will also be sleeping in tents for five nights, two nights in a row at two locations.

### Clothing/Equipment

While all group equipment is provided, this is an outdoor trip and personal gear should be chosen carefully (see separate packing list). The weather we might encounter could range from temperatures in the low thirties to the mid eighties, with rain of course always a possibility. This variety would suggest being prepared for the coldest to ensure comfort at all times, with multiple layers of versatile clothing the best approach. **Clothing:** Four to five changes of lightweight clothing are recommended (laundry facilities available on Day 7) which can be layered on cooler evenings. For outerwear, a sweater or pullover is perfect with the best being made of polypropylene pile (fleece) accompanied by a light jacket or vest. A high quality, two piece rainsuit is necessary which can also be used as a windbreaker or outer shell and should include a hood or else a rain hat. A hat is also ideal for the sun, with some also preferring an additional light stocking cap and gloves. Footwear should be suitable for the intended hiking, fairly lightweight and comfortable - this is not a time to break in new boots! **Sleeping Bag:** Should be comfortable to thirty degrees to ensure warmth if it gets damp, with mummy styles recommended. (NOTE: Clean, appropriate sleeping bags can also be rented from Adventure Alaska for a fee of \$30 for the trip - please indicate in advance if needed). A very comfortable full -length ThermoRest sleeping pad is provided, that with another gizmo, doubles as a wonderful camp chair. A daypack enough to hold a jacket, camera, water bottle, lunch is also necessary.

### Luggage

Soft-sided luggage, duffles or travel packs are best. Total amount of personal gear for the trip including sleeping bag, should not exceed fifty pounds and should be manageable. Extra luggage can usually be stored in Anchorage during the trip if necessary. While this is not a backpacking trip, you will need to be able to carry your gear a short ways (up to 50 yards), as these are wilderness camps.

### Accommodations/Meals

**Accommodations:** Include a roadhouse/lodge and cabins, the latter without private baths, as well as five nights camping. The lodge and cabins are set up for double occupancy while camps are of course camps. Camping will be with two persons to a tent designed for three. All of the camps are our own, and do feature dining shelters, outhouses, and other amenities. **Meals:** Some of the meals will be in established facilities, sometimes with a limited menu. While in camp, due to the nature of wilderness travel, choice will often be limited to a single entree with choice of side dishes. We make no pretense toward gourmet cuisine, though all meals are hearty and cookbook-worthy! Special dietary needs cannot always be met, though vegetarianism is not a problem. Let us know if you have any special or medical dietary requirements and we'll be happy to discuss the options. Alcoholic beverages are not included.

### Pre/Post-Trip Lodging/Trip Addons

Many types of lodging are available in Anchorage as are independent extensions before or after your trip with us. Facilities fill up very early during the summer season. Please advise us of your interests well in advance so that we are able to guarantee suitable accommodations. If you need suggestions for other things to do, just let us know.

### Miscellaneous

**Money:** Though most everything is included in the overall price, purchases for souvenirs, alcoholic beverages etc, can be made with either cash, traveler's checks in US Dollars, or, accepted in most places but not all, credit card. **Traveler's Insurance:** is strongly recommended, as the season is very short and our cancellation policy is necessarily quite strict. Ask us for recommendations. **Emergencies:** A trip list of the individual accommodation addresses and emergency phone numbers with the specific dates when you will be there is sent prior to trip departure. As some places are quite remote, the best way to be reached while on the trip, is through the Adventure Alaska office in Hope. Smoking is not permitted in the vans and nearly all lodging facilities in Alaska are non-smoking. Cell phone use is strongly discouraged in the van. Gratuities to your guide not included.

### Suggested Reading

Each client's appreciation will be immeasurably heightened by gaining some background beforehand of Alaska and the areas of our travels. A wide selection of books and information is available from Alaska Geographic: 810 E 9th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501; (866) 257-2757; [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org) and also from our local bookseller, Title Wave Books, in Anchorage - [www.wavebooks.com](http://www.wavebooks.com); 907-278-9283