

Summer is coming on fast and it's time to start preparing for your trek, if you haven't already. You should start thinking about gear and also conditioning for your Alaskan adventure.

## GEAR

You should already have received the gear list that itemizes and discusses all the things that you'll need to bring. Please read that list carefully before sending off questions as most issues are addressed there. But if you still have questions feel free to send us an email or give us a call.

There are a few gear items that warrant a little extra attention since so many people ask about them.

### CLOTHING

You should err on the side of too much insulation rather than not enough. In addition to your primary fleece or other insulating outer layer you should have a secondary layer such as a micro fleece top or vest, depending on how cold you get. When you step outside the gear store into 85 degree heat in June, you will be tempted to think "oh man, I don't need two layers." But Alaska is really far north and a bit cooler than Georgia in the summertime. When the sun dips below a ridge the temperature will drop dramatically. So bring the extra layer and if you're unsure about taking it along discuss it with your guide.

### TREKKING POLES

I always get some people asking whether these are really a necessity. You may be a very experienced backpacker who never uses poles so you might not feel the need. But our travel in the backcountry of Wrangell-St. Elias is 100% off trail. And not just off trail but sometimes over rugged terrain such as boulder fields, glaciers and just rough ground. I have never had a single client who wasn't glad they had poles. So yes, you really do need these.



### WATER SHOES

Some treks involve a significant number of stream crossings which make it worthwhile to take along some sort of water shoe. These can be lightweight trail shoes or heavy-duty sandals but flip flops, Crocs or very light weight sandals will **not** suffice. No one will be allowed to cross in bare feet. Some treks have more crossings than other so here is a breakdown.

Donoho: There is just one stream crossing on this trip so it's really not worth carrying shoes unless you want camp shoes.

Seven Pass: There are about three wet-boot crossings on this trek.

Pyramid Peak: Lots of crossings on this one. On the last day there are so many crossings that it's often easier to just hike in boots. There are crossings on four of the seven days.

Skyscraper: This is a nine day trek so my preference is to keep down weight and bulk and not take shoes. But there are several crossings on the route.

Iceberg Lake – Skolai Pass: Couple crossings. Since we don't carry full packs every day it's easier to include them on these trips.

Skolai to Wolverine: 3–4 crossings. water shoes might be useful

Steamboat Hills: No need for water shoes as the crossings are fairly easy.

If you think you want to take water shoes then bring them with you. You can make the final decision once you have your pack fully loaded. Often folks decide to leave them behind once they see how full their pack is.

## **BEARS**

### FOOD CANISTERS

The bear canisters we use most often are the Bear Vault which measures 12.7 x 8.7 inches. If you want to see what it looks like go on rei.com and do a search. People are often surprised at the size when get here. It does take up a good amount of space so you need to be sure that your pack will accommodate this canister. Everyone will carry one of these.



### FIREARMS

Trek Alaska does not carry any firearms into the backcountry as a defense against bears. There are several reasons for this but the primary one is the weight and inconvenience of carrying a firearm of sufficient power to stop a bear.

A recent study found that pepper spray actually had a higher success rate than firearms when it comes to deterring a bear attack. Bear attacks are extraordinarily rare in the backcountry and I have only once had cause to even take out my pepper spray and have never yet had to discharge it.

### BUGS

This is addressed in the gear list but it's such a concern for a lot of folks that it's worth repeating. Bugs are rarely a big issue once we get out into the backcountry. Bring along a small amount of DEET but there is not really a need for head nets and such.

## **CONDITIONING**

An Alaska trek is not a triathlon but you should prepare for the trek. The better your level of conditioning the more you will enjoy the wilderness travel.

You should already have some sort of exercise program going as part of your daily life. But you should start to kick things up a bit. Almost without exception, people are not in as good condition as they think.

For a lot of folks a workout regime means a trip to the gym for an hour three times a week. This is okay as a baseline but you'll need to amp it up a bit to get ready for the summer hiking season.

The best way to get in shape for hiking is by doing some hiking. A stairmaster is not a substitute for getting out on the trails. However, many folks live in urban environments that are far from good hiking areas. You might be surprised though – many cities have parks and preserves with trails even in the middle of the city. So check out all the possibilities.

If your stuck with the gym as your main exercise environment then make the most of it. If you use a treadmill then set it at a high angle. Rotating stair steppers (Step Mill) are better then Stairmaster machines. And get some intervals of high intensity in there. The old adage – no pain no gain – is trite but true.

But even better than stair steppers are actual stairs or better still, hills.

And as the date for the trek gets closer you need to start incorporating a backpack into the equation. If you can get out on some hikes then make some of them with a fully loaded pack, even if it's just a day hike. This will help your conditioning and psychologically it also helps you to get used to the extra weight.

So you don't have to do 15 mile hikes every other day but you should increase your conditioning above the level of your regular routine.

## **IN THE BACKCOUNTRY**



Just a few words about what to expect once you get out into the backcountry with your guide. For many, this is the first time on a guided trip so there is often a bit of uncertainty about the role of the guide and what is expected of the guest.

In terms of carrying gear, the guide will probably have a slightly heavier load than most guests. But the guide is not a porter. The group gear such as tents, food, cooking gear, etc. is divided among the group.

When the group is on the move, the guide will be responsible for navigation, route finding and group safety. The guide will keep an eye on everyone to make sure everyone is doing well. But the members of the group also have responsibilities to the guide as well as the rest of the group. If you need a break, want to stop for a photo, feel a hot spot forming on a foot... just let the guide know. Sometimes people are reluctant to speak up about such issues because they don't want to hold up the group. But when we're in the backcountry our schedule is our own and stopping for a photo or a rest break is not an interruption.



#### IN CAMP

The first time we set up camp the guide will give the group a few pointers on setting up the tents and help with site selection if needed. But for the most part everyone will set up their own tents as well as work as a group to set up the dining tarp.

If you don't have a lot of backpacking experience and have questions about anything such as how to set up your tent or the best way to pack your gear don't hesitate to ask your guide for help. Your guide is always happy to share his/her knowledge and experience.

### **SEE YOU SOON!**

That's it for now. If you have questions about any of this just drop us an email.

You will receive a final information packet a few weeks prior to your trip which will cover what to do when you arrive at McCarthy such as where to park and where to meet for your group meeting the night before the trek.