



Mt. Russell Expedition

Most climbers who travel to Alaska do so to climb one of the big peaks; Denali, Hunter or Foraker. But there are countless numbers of lesser peaks dominated by the giants of the Alaska Range that are highly worthwhile climbs in their own right. Many of these are incredibly spectacular and beautiful and probably none are more so than Mt. Russell.

Situated to the west of the main peaks this peak has been overlooked for years and has less than ten ascents to date. There is no reason for this lack of interest other than no one really knows about it. The peak is a spectacular pyramid of snow and ice and we intend to follow the North Ridge. The elevation of 11,670 feet means little problem with acclimatization to extreme elevations leaving the climber to simply enjoy a fantastic ascent away from the crowds of Denali finding the range untouched and unvisited by other parties.

Itinerary: Alaskan mountains are big and subject to the extremes of changeable weather. So we need to be flexible and prepared to adapt plans accordingly. So do not consider this following schedule as set in stone! We will set up a basecamp after flying to the Yentna Glacier via ski plane. Camp will be at about 8,000 and a few yards from where the plane drops us so we can bring in a few luxuries to make basecamp life comfortable and pleasant. The first day will be spent honing glacier travel skills and acclimatizing to the elevation. Once ready we will climb to a high camp at about 10,000 feet via ski or snowshoe. From camp we will climb with light day packs to the top and return to our high camp the same day. Above camp the route follows 45-50 degree snow and ice slopes with a few steeper ice bulges and working around occasional corniced sections. The biggest technical problem is often crossing the large bergschrund on the east side of the ridgeline. Although the route is safe by Alaskan standards we need to have reasonable snow conditions since large quantities of fresh snow will mean significant avalanche danger and we will have no intention of putting ourselves in harms way from these.

Meeting place and time: We meet in Anchorage the night before the trip is slated to commence. You are responsible for transportation to Anchorage, but the office will coordinate the different schedules of everyone. From Anchorage we shuttle up to Talkeetna and hope to fly in shortly after arriving there.

Dates and Prices: Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site for dates and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or canceling. Price includes guiding, permits, demo ice tools and crampons, helmets and group climbing equipment. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group climbing gear, avalanche beacons, tents, kitchen gear and all meals. You may want to bring your favorite climbing snacks to supplement the one's we bring.

Ratios: Climbs will be at a maximum ratio of 1:2

Notes and other information: The best map is Bradford Washburn's "Mt. McKinley" 1:50,000 scale. The best guide is Alaska Climbing by Joe Puryear and published by Supertopo.

Prerequisites: You need to have a high level of comfort in the mountains. You need not have done big peak ascents previously, but should be able to cope with variable and sometimes trying mountain conditions since the snow can be deep offering difficult trailbreaking. Night temperatures can dip below zero but days can be warm. We will be in the snow camping for the entire time and since Alaskan storms are legendary there is the chance of being tent bound for a day or more. So mentally be prepared for this and accept it as a part of the mountain experience. You should be comfortable climbing with snow climbing and French cramponing techniques on slopes up to 50 degrees. There may be some steeper ice with short sections of maybe 70 degrees requiring front pointing skills. We will cover glacier travel skills and prior knowledge of these is not needed.

Equipment List for Mt. Russell Expedition

We will be flying to basecamp so absolutely minimal equipment is not necessary. This list provides you with suggestions for lightweight and compact equipment. If you have any questions don't hesitate to call and ask our advice.

Essentials

- Skis: metal edge alpine touring skis are the best ski choice. Better too short than too long. Get them tuned and check the bindings for tightness and boot fit prior to the trip.
- Snowshoes. These can be substituted for skis and skins. A pair with a built in crampon are best in case you encounter icy snow. Pair these up with an appropriate boot. Warm feet are your primary concern.
- Poles, telescoping probe type are best.
- Climbing skins. Close to the width of the skis' waist. Make sure the glue is in good shape.
- Internal frame backpack of about 3-4000 cubic inches
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about 0°F. If it bulky put it in a compression stuff sac.
- Sleeping pad system. A foam pad and a Thermarest works best.
- Mountaineering boots. Temperatures will not be extreme but the boots must be warm enough.

Climbing equipment

- Technical ice axe. 50-55 cm. Straight shafts are preferable to bent ones for mixed climbing. Must have an appropriate wrist loop.
- Technical ice hammer. 50-55 cm. Straight shafts are preferable to bent ones for mixed climbing. Must have an appropriate wrist loop.
- Crampons. An all round mountaineering type rather than a rigid technical crampons that "balls up" is preferable
- Harness. One large enough to wear over bulky clothing and with buckle style leg loops to get on and off over crampons.
- Helmet. It needs to be able to adjust enough to fit over a hat.
- Belay/rappell device
- Four locking carabiners
- Six regular carabiners
- Prussik system
- 4 single length slings for clipping in gear and equipment.

Clothing

- 4 pair synthetic liner socks
- 4 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks
- Gaiters or overboots. Make sure that they fit properly. Insulated overboots are not necessary unless you need more foot insulation.
- Long underwear top and bottom. 2 pairs. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene
- Warm shirt. Expedition Capilene or light Synchilla
- Another fuzzy sweater top such as synchilla

- Pile jacket
- Pile pants or bibs. 200-300 weight.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice.
- Good quality Gore-tex rain/wind pants and rain jacket.
- Warm hat
- Balaclava; silk and/or pile
- Visor hat (for sun)
- Bandanna for something for facial and neck sun protection
- Liner gloves 2 pair for one set gets wet
- Shell gloves
- Mittens and shells for when it gets really cold

Etc.

- Sunglasses, high quality with keeper leash. The type with side shields are recommended. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair
- Goggles for bad conditions
- Ear plugs for noisy tents
- Personal kit; tooth brush...
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen. A 2 oz. bottle will be sufficient
- Two 1-quart plastic water bottles with insulating jackets
- A small thermos if you have one
- Pee bottle
- Personal first aid kit, foot care, and any required medications. We will have a large group medical kit; go light on your own kit. Bring plenty of blister treatment items.
- Eating and drinking items
- Swiss Army type knife
- Camera, film and spare batteries
- Books, games etc. for the event of storm days in base camp.

Food

- We will provide breakfast, dinner and lunch but bring some snack items like cliff bars, power bars, gorp concoctions. A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

You specifically don't need

- ⊖ Cell phones. They rarely work anyway.
- ⊖ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one)
- ⊖ Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.

We will provide the following.

- Tents. If you have a tent of your own you can bring it for base camp, but we need to determine that it is appropriate. On the route we will use Biblers.
- Stoves and cooking equipment
- Technical climbing equipment