Hidden Alaska Report 2024

Objective: A climb a Big Wall in the Kichatnas Alaska, changed to South face of Mooses tooth



Moose Tooth

Overview of the Expedition

One word sums up our Hidden Alaska Expedition which we so worked hard for 'Frustration!'. Sometimes the stars align and sometimes everything seems against you! It was definitely the later on this Expedition. The team planned hard to climb a first ascent in the Kichatnas but was beaten back by storming weather for flying. Then unseasonably warm conditions, avalanches and in particularly loose and bad rock. The team was experienced, well prepared and psyched! The initial objective we intended to climb will still be there. But on arrival in Talkteena, Alasksa, the weather made it impossible to fly into the remote Kichatna Spires. Unless the pilots can see where they are flying they will not attempt such a dangerous landing. The super northerly airstream made landing in the Kichatnas impossible. On arrival in Talkeetna we had 5 days of very bad weather in the Alaska Range and due this poor vis and strong winds it was impossible to fly. On the 5th morning there was a chance of a weather window. To say we were keen to escape the town was an understatement. So the team packed a Otter piloted by experience bush pilot Paul Roderick. We took off intending to go to the Kichatnas. After 20 min in the air Paul told us it was a non-starter going to the

Kichatnas due to the weather esp winds. Frustratingly we had to make a snap decision. Either return to Talkeetna and wait out more days or try climb elsewhere. Returning to Talkeetna was not popular alternative, another week there looked like the team might wollow in a depressed state of caffeine induced coma and boredom! Paul suggested the South Face of Moose's Tooth as an option. A place where Twid had visited in the past ice climbing the gully "Shaken not Stirred". It had 1000m granite walls and had only little attention by Big Wall climbing. Why not impressive Walls south facing so hopefully all the fresh snow may clear quickly. So the team decided to try here. It was deeply frustrating not to head to our main objective but time can be an issue with climbing such big wall routes and approach times are long with transferring gear back and forth. Time was starting to feel tight. It had been over a week already leaving the UK so it was important to get stuck into something. So we headed for the Moose's Tooth to try our luck!



The Moose's tooth South Face from the 'Root Canal Glacier'

The Climbing attempts on the Moose's Tooth

Attempt line 1



When we eventually landed, the weather was clear in this part of the range. But we had to contend with the unseasonably hot conditions that were playing havoc in the mountains. In particular with avalanche activity. Due to the increased activity and frequency of the avalanches we decided to leave the approach below a particularly bad avalanche runnel and steep slope till things had cooled down. On the whole temperatures were very high in the season causing lots of issues for climbers. This initial approach to the col overlooking the south face, when cooler, was straightforward with odd crevasses. One at the col we took great care to weave amongst the crevases and steeper slopes till directly below the rock face itself. Our haul bags full of climbing gear and ropes pushed us deep into the soft recent snows on the glacier. After a couple of hours of wading we made the base of the huge face. Our initial thoughts and impression was really positive. We could see a direct line up the face with the odd section of what could be softer rock. We chose a line and prepared to climb. Mark started off climbing the initial 100m of steep snow, into mixed ground, into a bergshrund, over it and eventually onto the rock wall itself. We just kept tieing ropes onto the end as Mark hauled 200ms of rope and himself up the now collapsing

bottomless mushy snow. The team collected at the high point. An intimidating place below such a big wall and especially now with last week's snow fall from high ledges. While we contemplated our next pitch a small sluff-avalanched came down the face close by to our right. Spooked we retreated, it seemed the better part of valour at this point. We decided to get the night freeze take place and start early the next morning before questing out on the wall for real.



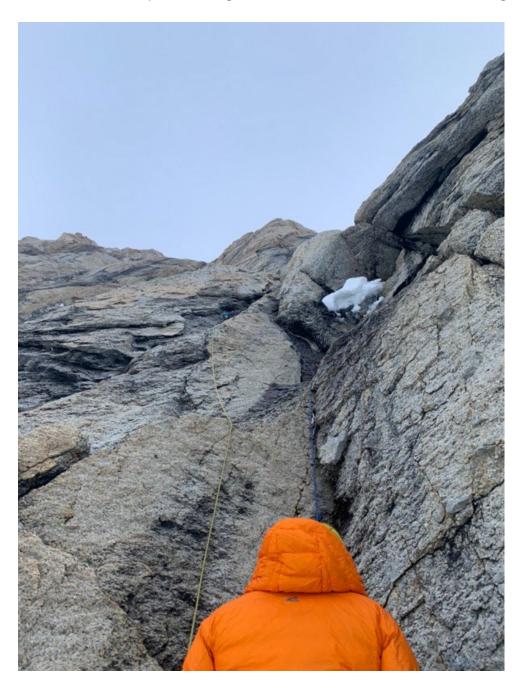
Next morning at 2am we set off for our climb, the surface of the snow had frozen sufficiently enough to allow us to walk across the surface without sinking to our thighs, even crampons biting well on the surface. We made good progress even with our huge bags back to our starting spot. Reascending our fixed ropes we got the high spot on the wall and started to climb. Initially the cracks were filled with snow and well frozen in ice. It was quickly evident that the nice looking pink granite was actually not so solid and more like stuck together cornflakes! Nuts and cams didnt bite well into the cracks and protection was hard to get. With the icy conditions the climbing was a mix of aid and free climbing. Serious and run out with dubious rock. We carried on for an number of pitches till the sun became so hot on the face small sluffs of snow started to peel off the ledges above us. This time bring small avalanches and the odd rock. We built as good an anchor as possible in the cornflakes and abseiled down our fixed line back to the base. Idea was to arrive early again the next morning and push our route higher. Next morning we headed up early again, with what little freeze we had. This time the snow wasn't that frozen. Still hopeful the rock quality would improve . We wanted the climbing to become safer hopefully once we reached a stronger looking crack line.

Mark, keen as ever, headed off first again and climbed a free pitch for 60m. Very few trustworthy runners appeared and with crumbling granite. Still he did reach the stronger line and hopefully looking for better rock. Unfortunately what looked good in the binoculars wasn't actually a solid crack but braced huge expanding flakes stuck on the wall. The seriousness of the climb was full on! With virtually no trust worthy runners Mark felt carrying on was too dangerous. I agreed. Seemed suicide pulling on such bad rock. The problem now was that Mark couldn't find any anchors he trusted to abseil down off! We had no option but to drill an escape bolt in the granite. Mark drilled a hand bolt in what seemed to be like a bowl of cornflakes! These bolts we carried purely for emergency and this was definitely a desperate situation. Unable to go up or reverse the bold, unprotected long pitch this was one of those moments to play safe. Mark gingerly abseiled off the single bolt back down to where I was belayed. We abseiled to the base of the wall over numerous abseils and just in time before the heat again started the previous weeks snow sluffing. It was crazy heat now for this part of the season. Hottest Id experienced in 24 yrs of Alaska climbing. This combination of a week of snow pack plus heat wasnt great. We retreated back to our haul bags and spent the next day ferrying our vast equipment pile back to base camp! Not an ideal start but we were still keen. But in 38yrs of climbing Big Walls we hasn't seen such bad rock! Made our local loose sea cliff climbs of the Llyn Peninsula, North Wales, seem like the best rock in the world!

Attempt Line 2



After a day of bad weather and mulling things over in the tent the team decided to try a different new line on the South Face of Mooses Tooth. A buttress left of the famous Ham and Eggs couloir. Amazingly we got reception on our phones at a nearby high col allowing us to do some hasty googling and mountain research. From our research we found that the buttress had had a recent new climb made by some Polish Climbers. A line on the left end of the face. Perhaps this indicated the rock was better, on this section compared to the true South Face where we had been. Optimistically we picked out a strong unclimbed line that led around 900-1000m to the summit ridge of the Moose's Tooth. Hopes were high for better rock and faster free climbing.



We started earlier the next morning with not much freeze in the snow pack. Hauling a huge load to the base of the face. After the initial 200m of negotiating the bergshrund, steeper snow than it looked, some ice climbing and rope drag from hell we arrived at the base of our intended line. A line of corners and cracks that led the full height if the face. The first pitch took some persuading to go, but succumbed eventually

after some time cleaning ice, rubble and snow. Iced cracks and loose rock didnt help. The belay above was in a ice filled corner. Everything seemed held together just by ice. Sun came around and we escaped before the afternoon avalanches started to rumble. The next day we climbed a steep hard and ice filled corner for a couple of pitchs till the sun turned again the ice into running water. The subsequent shower, while climbing, drenched both myself and Mark. Getting dripping soaked on every stitch of clothing. We retreated to get out of our soaked clothes and try and dry out. The next day we climbed high on a couple of tricky aid pitches hoping to gain a nice corner better rock and drier conditions. The rock quality did improve for a while until the final section revealed the corner above was actually not a solid Yosemite style clean dihedral but one with a huge detached crumbling flake of 50m on one side . If it prised off it certainly would land on the leader and belayer. Licking our wounds we retreated to base camp to mull our options.

After a night of chatting it was decided the risk of prising the flake off was not worth it and the general rock quality was so bad its likely higher up we would meet more of the same. So decided to bail on this line. Another day of abseiling and retrieving our gear, rack and ropes brought us back to square one again.

As trad climbers used to sea cliff climbing, loose and soft rock we were familiar with negotiating sections of poor rock but this was in a different league. It was just horrible!

Now temperatures were soaring and avalanches raging down most of the gullies on this side of the Moose's Tooth. It was not a time to consider climbing an ice line even though we wanted to try to make a summit, salvaging something from the climbing expedition. But we really did see an option but to head home. We decided enough was enough and we contacted TAT for a pick up off the Glacier and fly out. Our time was running out even if the dehydrated food stock was still high. Firstly we had to wait a couple of days for some bad weather to clear before the clouds cleared. Then soon after we heard the drone of an Otters engine landing on the Root Canal glacier. Glad to be alive we flew out for a shower and some hot food.

We would not recommend these rock lines to anybody or in generally anything rocky on this side if the Moose's tooth. Unlike the Kichatna Spires where the rock is generally fabulous! Moose's tooth was off our Christmas Card list!

General information Dates 23rd May 24 to 26th June 24 Team

Mike Turner

Aged 57; Ifmga Internal Mountain Guide.

Bio of climbs: Extensive rock climbing; winter climbing; ski mountaineering and mountaineering. 40 years of Alpine climbing Experience in summer and winter conditions. 50+ Expeditions to the Greater Ranges and remote areas. 100+ Big Wall climbs.

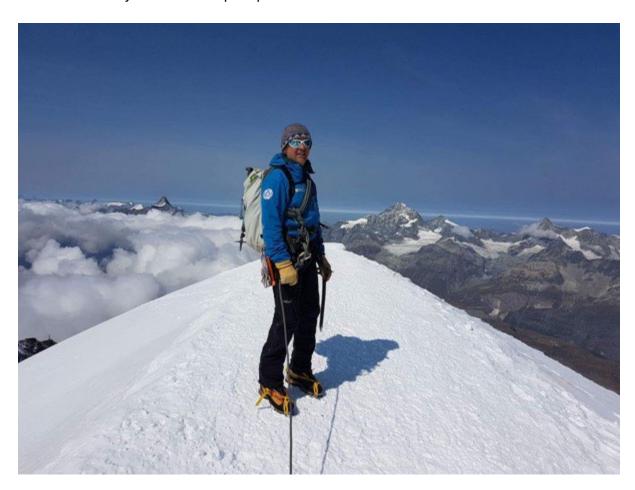
Areas climbed out side Europe: Pakistan 8 Expeds; Baffin 2 Expeds; Greenland; Alaska 18 Expeditions; Mexico; Russia; Georgia; Morocco 50+ trips; Turkey; Mali; Madagascar; extensive climbing across US; Peru; Brazil; Patagonia; Venezuela; China. Nominated for Piole D,Or numerous times.

Highlights in the Alps: Early repeat of Divine Providence on Mont Blanc; Colton Mac, walker Spur, Croz spur on the Grand Jorasse; North Face of Eiger; Bonatti Pillar Rock climbed to E8 ground up over 85 + E7/8 climbs. Many first ascents across the UK. Consistently red pointed to 8a most years since 1986.

Winter climbed in many locations including extensively in Scotland. Also Iceland, Norway, Morocco, most Alpine Countries, US and Canada.

Works as an International Mountain Guide and Mountaineering and climbing instructor for 35 years. Many years head of Rock Climbing at PYB. Now runs his own Mountain Guiding business.

Born in Wallasey UK 1966. UK passport holder.



Mark Thomas

International Mountain Guide Born 17/12/74 British Passport holder Noteable Ascents

First ascent of 1600m big wall route Baffin Island in 23 days, New Winter Routes in UK winter at Grade VIII,8 inc 'Soul Vacation and Gnomon, New winter routes in Alps at grade VIII,8 inc Jottnar. Longer Alpine routes inc N.Face of G.Jorasses, Droites, Dru. New peaks in Greenland (Watkins Mountains).

Ski and mountaineering expedition inc. 2 new peaks and 2 new ski descents in the Pamir Mountains, Tajikistan.

5 expeditions to India Himalaya – 4 new peaks inc 6000m+ and 6 new routes, unfinished 1st ascent N.E Spur of Nanda Devi East (with Martin Moran), Trishul 6150m – 2nd ascent to true summit, 1st ascent of Tharang 6066m.

1st ascent of 'No Rest For Wicked' 900m big wall route Atlas mountains. 1st Ascent of Thuderstruck, big wall New Route Kitchatna Spires 2022.

New rock routes Lake District inc 'Fever' E4 6b and 'Revival' E5 6b, New rock routes N.Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion inc '20 Years after' E6 6b. Hold the record for climbing all rock routes on Ynys Lochtyn, Wales - 109 routes up to E4 6a, 2.2 kms of climbing in 5hrs 37 mins.

Held the original record for the Lakes 15 classic rock routes round, solo and un – supported.

Qualified IFMGA Mountain Guide, making guided ascents of routes such as the Traverse of the Chamonix Aigs (Twice), West Ridge Salbit, East Face Grepon, Aig Noire Peutery, N.Face Droites and Hard Himalaya ascents inc Trishul 6150m and Tharang 1 6066m alpine style. Jottnar Pro Climber Team 2017 – 2020



Mark contemplating the enormity of packing too much into too little bag space!

Logistics information

Getting to Alaska

We arrived in Anchorage after flying with many city hops. Initially Geneva then via Frankfurt to sunny San Fransisco and finally heading to Anchorage. We were pleased to say no doors fell off our Alaska Air leg! We used Lufthansa as our main airline on the whole they were the most cost effective and best offer with the vags number of bags. The general flight times also were ideal. We would use them again. It took overall around

24 hrs of journey time. Luckily we arrived on time, as did our bags in Anchorage. Lufthansa seemed efficient and good flights. Food excellent. It was important that we had an up to date Esta US travelling visa before lift off!

Getting to Talkeetna from Anchorage

From Anchorage you have a few options. Hire a mini bus transfer which there seem to be two companies offering the service. Talkeetna Trip or Denali Overland. Take the train which runs once a day and was very expensive also not easy to move about with lots of gear. Catch a bus, which doesnt really end up in Talkeetna and has bag restrictions. We used 'Talkeetna trip ' which where a local reliable and friendly company. Its not a cheap trip but best option in our view. We aranged a pick up at a friends place we were staying in Anchorage. Talkeetna Trip took all our bags and us to Talkeetna in two and a half hours. On arrival we checked in with Talkeetna Air Taxis to confirm our arrival.



Accommodation and food in Talkeetna

When in Anchorage we managed to stay at a friend's house which saved a huge amount of money. Accommodation was very expensive. Over \$100 per person per night in cheap Hotels bit less in group accommodation. But bonkers. Having a hire car was essential for staying at our friend's place and running about collecting gear and provisions. Cost offset of the hirecar with the cost of accommodation we thought seemed about the same.

Once in Talkeetna we used the bunkhouse which TAT offers free to climbers using their services. Its very basic but has plenty of basic bunkbeds to sleep for free. The shower

might need a tetnus jab to use but at least its got hot water, most welcome on the way out after a few weeks of squalor while living on the glacier.

Food can be bought in a variety of cafes and restaurants. As our stay was extended at the start of the Expedition this ended up being quite an expensive affair. Talkeetna is a tourist hub for site seers, fishermen, hunters and tourist flights. Tourist prices everywhere. We did generally cook our food we bought from Anchorage for the hill esp the fresh foods. But the odd night out kept the motivation high and doldrums low. There is a great sense of an outdoor community in Talkeetna, coming together in such a small village. All folk living and working there really relate to the climbers. The social interaction is posative, something that seems lost in many worldwide mountain hubs these days. As they say in Talkeetna on the notice board at the start of the village: 'Talkeetna a drinking town with a climbing problem!' This approach might if helped!

Flying into the Mountains

Talkeetna Air Taxis provide the main service of flying mountaineers into the Alaska Range. They have grown from a small outfit of a couple of planes to a big business with 6 Otters and other Cesnas. They understand the climbers needs and the office staff are extremely organised and friendly. They take the job seriously and are the only real form of rescue should you need a pick up in a remote area. A big part of their work are tourist flights but the climbers, generally, get priority for any pick ups. Its good to have clear communications directly with the TAT flight controller for weather updates and pick up times. They need at least generally 2-3 days clear days to be sure your of your glacial pick up. Flying out on on your last possible day, hoping to go back to Anchorage is a big risk.

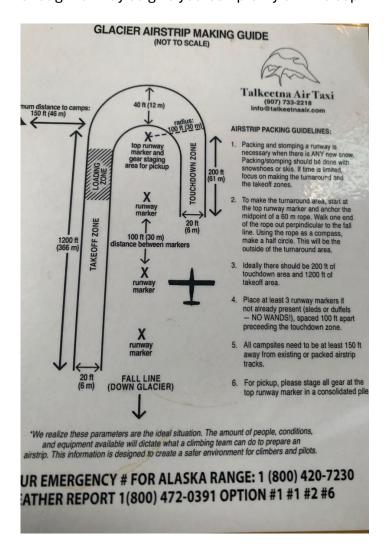


TAT charges for the flights into the mountains plus they charge for any weight over 120 lbs per person. Plus they will sell you **bamboo wands** to help mark the rtes and hold tents down on the glacier. They also hire**plastic sledges** which the climbers use to drag their gear about on the glacier. We had one per person.

The flight controller has full access to the best weather forecasts and satellite images so they can predict weather as good as anybody. Unfortunately for us they could see the cloud and strong northerly winds storming the Kichatnas on the satellite images quite clearly. This kept us waiting!

Once we are going in to the range you need to be suited and booted ready to land onto the glacier. It can be chilly in the plane so wrap up. Any spare travelling clothes you can leave in a container at the base. Its not locked but seems safe enough. Passports and wallets we took with us. TAT can also look after gear in a long term container, for a return trip if required. A good idea if you fancy returning to the area and avoiding the excessive bag charges.

Before pick up on the glacier, you need to stamp out a runway for the planes. This allows the pilot to see the best landing zone/surface, provide a turning area and most importantly a firm runway allows the loaded plane to take off with heavy climbers and their gear. It takes a few hours of stomping up and down in snowshoes to create a good enough runway so give yourself plenty of time esp if the snow pack is soft.



Buying food and Provisions

On arrival in Anchorage we had a hire car for a few days this allowed us to collect all our provisions, food, gas etc. Taxis around Anchorage are very expensive so a hire car seemed a better option. Still we got charged alot on the compulsory hire car insurance! Buying food we opted to shop in Wallmarts and Cars in Anchorage. Great for bulk buying and cheapest prices. Some bits were bought on route in Wasilla half way to Talkeetna also. Wasilla home to Sarah Palin! Mark thought he met her while buying some cream cheese! Perhaps a look a like! Its hard to get about in Anchorage with so much food and the car proved its worth.

REI the big American outdoor brand was good for buying gas for the stoves and any forgotten climbing gear and water bottles. Sells everything from guns to gps, tents to tomahawks! Helpful staff well on the gun counter!

Its best to buy everything in Anchorage rather than Talkeetna. There is only a small shop in Takleetna and its very expensive.

Food list we used
Breakfast
2 porridge oat pkts per person per day.
Bagels 5 days worth
Cream cheese foil pkt
Coffee instant One pkt
Tea bags About 50 tea bags
Tang 2 tubs
Dried milk I big bag

Cliff bars

Snickers

Twix

Beef jerky

Main meals on bivi

10 days of dehydrated food for bivis. Buy a variety of brands was the advise I got recently

ramen

Smash Tesco UK

Instant rice

Brownies

custard imported from Tesco UK

Cheese triangles 2 per day per person

Base camp food

Bacon

Stake

Dried egg

Small potatoes

Small carrots

bag of pasta

jar pesto

wraps
Jam in a tube
biscuits
cheese
Dried salami

Big black rubbish bags 30 ish biggest for marking runway and securing tents Lighters x4 Ziplock plastic food bags Chopping board Sharp knife Chilly sause

Gas and Cooking

We took enough gas 250grm cylinders of epi gas type, bought at REI to cover us for the trip. One gas cartridge per two days plus 3 spare. We had 18 cartridges. Many Americans take Colman fuel stores but we have always found this not as convenient, smelly and open for fuel spilling.

We took 2 stoves. One jetboil stove and a pocket rocket for cooking with a bin pan. 2 Big pans worked well for cooking in while at base camp but most things we ate just relied on just adding hot water from the jet boil. A hanging set makes cooking ok inside the tent in bad weather and out of the wind. Plenty of spare lighters are important!

Communications

We took an iridium **Sat phone** and bought 100 minutes from a local company in Anchorage for \$190. This is essential for security in case of accident plus allows you to chat to TAT about weather for pick up. The odd phone call home is always nice for the relatives who worry while you're away having fun! We used around 80 minutes in total. Mostly chatting to TAT about conditions and weather.

An **inreach** is another essential piece of kit for the mountaineer. They are a small lightweight piece of gear. Just sits in your rucksack in case of emergency. It can text messages to people and is ideal in case of an accident while you are in a big face climbing. It's hard to communicate by Garmin Inreach all the time as it takes hours to figure out the texting system, so having the combo Sat phone and inreach is a good call! The inreach does have an eperb function when you press the button a pre set rescue chain will be started. Best not let this happen as there might be a charge of humungous proportions if used incorrectly. We never used the eperb!

Rescue and the National Park Service

The Kichantas is not in the Denali National Park per-say but you dont need a park permit for this area. Bit like a Disneyland entrance ticket for the mountaineer! It is in the Alaska Range so you buy a Park ticket, for us the trip \$45. The National Park service is a professionally run National organisation. Basically Police, with a smile and green outfit .They offer sound advice to help climbers enjoy their stay and also protect the environment. When you buy a park ticket they take your details: names; itinerary; sat phone numbers; next of kin; tent colour etc. TAT also take all this information.

In case of emergency your first point of call is the airline ,TAT for us, then the Park service can help to will liaise also with the local airline outfits. They have access to a chopper should it be necessary. TAT has a small chopper also. Also the Park Rangers are fully trained in rescue and can help. Many are accomplished mountaineers and Guides. Just the sort of person you need to drop in when the 'shit hits the fan!'. But we assumed, any rescue off the mountain, would be up to ourselves. As Mountain Guides we are all trained in mountain rescue and the required ropework.

The Park service also provides free of charge CMC. Clean mountain cans. We were given 4 and we filled 2. This allows for all the human solid waste to be brought out in a can! Extra bio gradable bags provided for the cans to be stored in on the way out. I think your poor waste will depend on the weather and size of your team! We thought it would be an excellent research project for a student, to create an equation on these factors. This could be useful thing!

Environmental

Our alpine climbing trip on the Root Canal Glacier in Denali National Park was a remarkable experience, surrounded by towering granite peaks and expansive ice fields. The environment was both breathtaking and harsh, with sweeping views of glaciated valleys under the crisp, clear sky. The glacier itself was an imposing field of ice, cracked with deep crevasses, and nestled at the base of some of the park's most iconic mountains, including the towering Moose's Tooth. Despite the beauty of the landscape, we remained mindful of our impact, ensuring we adhered strictly to Leave No Trace principles.

To minimize our environmental footprint, we were diligent about packing out all of our waste, including trash and human waste. We used portable toilet systems CMC's and packed out feces in biodegradable bags, ensuring that nothing was left behind. Trash was carefully stored and sealed to prevent it from being scattered by wind or wildlife, and we carried everything out with us at the end of the trip. By taking these steps, we preserved the pristine nature of the glacier, leaving it as we found it, so future climbers can enjoy the same unspoiled environment.

Once in Talkeetna the National Park service run a recycling system to sort all the different types of waste. Dont thing the job of cleaning out the CMCs cans was a popular one!

Maps

We used gps on the trip. Its worth knowing its virtually impossible getting hold of paper maps in Anchorage/Talkeetna so try Stanfords in London before you go.



Moose's Tooth 62degrees 58' 09 N 150 degrees 36' 48" W Denali National Park Preseve , Alaska, US

Costs

Lufthansa Europe to Alaska £1097 X2 =£2194
Tat flight into the mountains \$2922 +382=£2396.43
Hire Car Anchorage £577
Talkeetna Trip transfer \$660 £494.26
Gas \$63 £47
Food Walmart/ Cars/ Morrisons etc \$899+\$232.95 =£847.74
Food while on travel and in Anchorage -Talkeetna \$905= £677.74
Esta \$50 £37.44
Park fee \$45 £33.70
Sat phone card \$190 £142.29
Inreach £30
Insurance £700+
Total Cost £8177.60

Sponsorship
Mount Everest Foundation £3500

Gino Watkins £3000

We wish both these organisations it was most welcome. We give our permission to both organisations to use this information, in their records and as they see fit to help further Expeditions in the future.

Equipment

Such places like Alaska require equipment for all mountain styles of climbing. We had Big Wall equipment for a big project, ice and mixed climbing gear and a rock rack for big free climbing sections. Getting around you need snow shoes, skis are nice but that stretches the amount of equipment beyond the reasonable.

Our rack consisted of 3 fullsets of cams, 40 quick draws, 20 pitons, rps, pekkers, hooks, mashies and full etriers and ascenders. Our ice screws consisted if 16 light screws.

We took 60 m half ropes, a single rope and plenty of static rope for fixing on a wall in bad weather. We had hand drilled bolts for emergency belays only.

Stoves a jet boil and picket rocket worked well.

We had a portaledge for two person including an expedition fly

Tents we had a big base camp tent VE25 North face plus a small first lite BD bivi tent. Snow shoes essential

Our first aid kit was pretty major for base camp and we all carried a small first aid each on the hill.

A small solar charger is handy for charging phones, inreach and Sat phone

Insurance

We had a combination of Global Rescue and my Swiss health Insurance CSS that covered us for medical, rescue and repatriation. Its quite a cost to the Expedition. Essential for US obviously with medical costs. The BMC offered a price that was far too high in our opinion for such trips.

Useful Contacts

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Many thanks to the people who helped with this Expedition. We would like to thank particularity Ollie Sanders from the Arctic Club and Gino Watkins and John Porter from the Mount Everest Foundation. Without their endless enthusiasm these organisations would struggle. Please as Mark or myself for any help regarding travel to these Ranges we are more than happy to help anybody to have a successful Expedition.



