



Backpacking Gear Checklist

This gear list should answer most of your gear questions so please read through this carefully. If you still have questions just send us an email or give us a call. There's nothing that guides like to discuss more than gear.

We can't over stress the importance of keeping your load as light as possible. It's always tempting to over pack and toss in those extras thinking "it doesn't really weigh much and I'll be glad I brought it."

No, you won't. You will regret all those extras every time you hoist your pack onto your back. Optional items like camp shoes, MP3 players, binoculars, extra clothing, etc. can easily add up to 6-7 pounds of unnecessary weight on your back.

Leave the extras at home and always make weight one of the primary considerations when making gear selections. But if you are not sure about something bring it along and ask the guide.

Clothing

While Hiking

Your clothing is a system of layers that you add and subtract according to the dictates of weather and temperature. My own clothing preference when hiking is to wear a pair of very lightweight synthetic socks under a wool sock. I wear light weight nylon pants (no long johns), a polypro shirt and a cap. To this I add insulating and waterproof layers as conditions change.

Don't bring any cotton clothing. Cotton is not a good insulator and once it gets wet it takes forever to dry out. Absolutely no jeans!

- **Convertible pants** – A pair of lightweight nylon pants with legs that zip off and convert to shorts saves you from carrying a pair of both. you will rarely take the legs off however except for stream crossings. If you can't get the convertibles just go with the pants. You will not miss the shorts.
- **Long johns** – A pair of lightweight polypro long-johns – 2 pair of tops and 1 bottoms. This is the layer that goes next to your skin. Light to mid weight is good, don't go for the heavy weight.
- **Fleece pants** – a light weight pair of fleece pants can be nice to slip into when you get to camp, but they are bulky and take a lot of space in your pack. This an optional item. You don't really need them till early to mid August. If you get chilly in camp you'll have the long johns as well as rain pants for extra warmth.
- **Medium weight jacket** – this is your primary insulating layer and can be either fleece or one of the newer materials such as Primaloft. Something like the Patagonia down sweater or similar, would be ideal with a mid-weight fleece under.
- **Secondary jacket layer** – good for when you just need a little bit of insulation over the polypro or together with the primary jacket for when it gets a bit cooler in the evening at camp. This could be a mid weight fleece. These two layers are **critical** - do not skimp. A micro-fleece is not mid-weight. You need to very warm layers of outer wear! You need **TWO** upper body warm layers not just one!
- **Rain jacket** – get a light weight Gore-tex jacket, not a heavy duty one. I like the Marmot Precip jacket and pants, or something similar. Be sure to get a **hard shell** jacket not soft. We have had people take soft shell

jackets and they are great for snow but not waterproof.

- **Rain pants** – go with something lightweight such as the Precip pants. Make sure it has at least partial side zips so you can get them on and off over your boots. Ponchos are not acceptable rain protection. Wind and brush will render a poncho useless.
- **Underwear** – synthetic only NO cotton!
- **Inner socks** – 3 pair of lightweight synthetic
- **Outer socks** – 3 pair of medium weight wool socks (or heavy polypro)
If you are used to hiking with only one sock layer that's fine. Use what has worked for you in the past.
- **Boots** – medium to heavier boots. Don't go with the low cut, very light boots that are little more than glorified running shoes. They are unsuited for use in the rugged, rocky terrain of Wrangell-St. Elias. There are a lot of good boots out there now and the ones that are best for you are generally the ones that fit the best. You need boots that are **over the ankle**. Be sure that your boots are well broken in before you arrive.
- **Trekking poles** – on hiking trails these might be optional but on the rugged, off-trail terrain of Alaska they are really a necessity, especially when you are carrying a full pack. They are an invaluable aid to balance on rough ground and help take a some pressure off the knees. Get ones that come in 2-3 sections so they can be collapsed when not in use. Everyone must have a set of two poles.
- **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. Toes must be covered. Check with us about what you will need for the route you will be traveling. Ask us if you will need water shoes for your route.
- **Gaiters** – these are optional but nice for keeping crud from falling down the boots. You don't need the knee high style, just short ones that come over the top of your boots.
- **Fleece or wool gloves** – you don't usually need these for hiking but for in camp they are good to have on a cool or windy day. If you get fleece get the windproof variety. Even on a warm sunny day it cools down a lot in the evening.
- **Wool or fleece cap** – windproof fleece is best
- **Cap** – a baseball type cap with a bill is great for keeping the sun off while hiking. Get a lightweight synthetic rather than cotton.

Camping Gear

- **Sleeping bag** – this is one of the most important pieces of gear you carry. Even if your rain gear fails and you get cold and soaking wet you absolutely must have this inner sanctum as a final refuge. Alaska can get wet at times so if you use a down bag you must take extra care to keep it dry. Plastic garbage bags or one of the new, light-weight dry bags will work well.

Down works really well, weighs less and packs small. Some people are afraid of getting down wet but if you take care of your gear it can't get wet. I have spent a lot of summers in the backcountry over the last two decades and my down bag was always dry.

It can snow at anytime of the year in the Alaska backcountry and I have had a couple of inches fall on me in the first week in August. That's unusual but it happens. You want a bag rated for **15-20 degrees** (Fahrenheit). It won't get that cold of course but the ratings are generally way too optimistic. A 40 degree bag is more appropriate for your kid's sleepover than for backcountry use. If you have a night of extra chilly weather you can sleep in some clothing like your fleece layers. But a 15 degree bag is recommended.

- **Sleep pad** – a full length pad is best. Inflatables like the Thermarest are the most comfortable. A patch kit is good insurance to take along. Leaks are not uncommon.
- **Backpack** – backpacks have gotten very good in the last ten years. Pretty much all packs are now internal frame design and these work well for the rugged off trail terrain of the Wrangells. As for size, make sure it will hold all of the gear you will bring plus a **bear canister** filled with food. We recommend taking a duffel with all your gear to the store then pack it all into packs that you are considering. The pack should be large enough to contain your gear without a lot of stuff strapped on to the outside. Few people ever show up with packs that are too large. But many have arrived with packs that were barely large enough for a weekend trip. A pack with around 70 liter capacity is what you want. The important consideration is it must hold the bear canister. We use the Bear Vault brand. You can find these on REI and check the dimensions.

Again, go bigger not smaller. A 50 L. pack is NOT big enough. Every summer we have people show up with packs that are too small but never with ones too big. Go **big**.
- **Pack cover** – this is a must in the rain. Make sure it's a large size and will fit over your pack and anything you might have strapped on the outside.
- **Headlamp** – If your trek is scheduled for June to mid July you won't need a headlamp as there will be more than enough daylight to see inside your tent when you go to bed. After mid July then you should plan to bring a headlamp or small flashlight.

Cooking/Eating

- **Mess kit** – plastic bowl, fork, spoon and mug. Don't get the brittle plastic spoons like you take on picnics or you'll be eating with your fingers. For a mug you want a large insulated plastic type to keep your hot drinks hot.
- **Water bottle** – 1 liter wide mouth, plastic or metal bottle. You can use a hydration bladder if you prefer that approach. A liter of water is all you will need to carry as you hike.
- **Knife** – no big heavy knives that look like they came off the set of Crocodile Dundee. A small folding knife with a 2-3 inch blade is good.

Other Stuff

- **Toiletries** – toilet paper, toothbrush, floss, lip balm, sunscreen, toilet paper, a small amount of biodegradable soap. Get **small** sizes for all of this. People sometimes arrive with family-sized tubes of toothpaste and a bottle of sunscreen that would last all summer on Miami Beach. Space in the bear canisters is always at a premium.
- **Personal first aid kit** – moleskin, band-aids, aspirin etc. Any medication that you usually take.
- **Sunglasses** – bring em.
- **Insect repellent** – a **small** bottle of bug juice will be enough for several people.
- **Head-net** – an optional item, the bugs are rarely that bad. But a head-net weighs nothing.
- **Stuff sacks** – good for keeping your clothes and gear organized. Get the super light silicon/nylon ones if you can find them. Don't get heavy weight sacks with compression straps and buckles.

- **Compass** – optional but nice to have if you want to sharpen your skills. We can teach you more compass skills on the trip if you're interested.
- **Camera** – Be sure to have spare batteries and enough storage for pics. I've seen several people who are already low on flash card capacity before we even leave McCarthy. Memory cards are cheap, get a spare.
- **Book** – this is clearly an optional item but I consider it a necessity. If your stuck in your tent in the pouring rain it can be a life saver or at least a boredom saver. I also like to read for about half an hour before turning in for the night. Small paper backs only – no hard bound copies of Moby Dick please.

Group Gear Provided

We supply all gear that is used by the entire group including:

- Tents
- Dining tarp
- Cook stove
- Fuel canisters and fuel
- Cooking gear
- Group first aid kit
- Emergency VHF radio
- All food and snacks for the trek
- Bear resistant food storage canisters
- Water treatment kit

Please contact us if you have any questions about items on this list.