

# Denali

# 2009



Heading up to 11,000 camp © digilbert





*“high altitude mountaineering is all about lying flat with a little bit of mountains thrown in” CT*

### Introduction

This was a 3 person team with the initial intention of climbing the Cassin after acclimatising on the West Buttress. We were all Alaskan virgins. Hopefully this will provide some help to budding Alaskan enthusiasts and will prevent them making all the mistakes that we did. This will also be used with the **Glacier Girls in ... Alaska 2010** when both Cat & Di have forgotten the important bits n pieces.

I have written this with the intention of climbing the West Buttress only.

### UK Planning:

International flights were arranged through KLM, flying with KLM, Northwest Airlines and Alaskan Airlines. Di & Derek's route was Aberdeen to Amsterdam and then direct to Seattle. From Seattle to Anchorage. Flights cost c.£600. Catrin's flight went from Manchester to Amsterdam and then direct to Seattle c.£600. Departing the UK in the morning enables you to arrive in Anchorage the same day due to the 8 hour time difference.

1.5 hours is not enough time to get through customs and passport control in Seattle when entering the USA.

Registration with the Denali National Park had to be done 60 days prior to the expedition date. This was confirmed with a \$25 per person deposit.

Personal insurance was arranged through the Danish company IHI [www.ihl.com](http://www.ihl.com). Annual basic cover was c. £105.

Internal flights were arranged with Talkeetna Air Taxi. This was \$560.00 per person. This included one night's accommodation at the start of the trip and one night at the end. I would not recommend another other company except for TAT for glacier pick up/landings having seen the operation for myself. They are the only company that can do instrument landings when the weather is really pants, so if you are on a deadline at the end, flying with TAT will save you a whole heap of stress.

The new ESTA form for entry into the USA had to be filled in advance. This can be done online.

Denali Overland was pre-booked to collect us from the airport and take us direct to Talkeetna. We managed to link up with one other climber so got a slightly reduced rate of \$140 per person. There are other operators that provide a cheaper service, but DO seem to be happy to do pick ups and drop-offs at anytime which is a bonus if you are arriving late afternoon and want to head straight to Talkeetna.



The Alaska Railroad goes from Anchorage to Talkeetna and is apparently a fab journey. There were 2 for the price of 1 offers in June (\$90 one way for 2 pax), but there is a baggage allowance, so need to check this first before you book.

We pre-arranged our orientation with the National Park for the following day we arrived in Talkeetna. This was done easily via e-mail.

### Anchorage:

Catrin flew out 3 days in advance (due to flights) to buy food & provisions in Anchorage.

Recommendations include Costco (need to pay \$50 for membership) and then there is a very large Carrs supermarket near Costco.

Generally everything is quite expensive – Costco is very cheap but has limited range. REI is cheapest for the freeze dried meals. Alaska Mountaineering (near REI) is very good for advice and posh kit.

Downtown Bike Rental (do have trailers) are brilliant and unless you have a hire car this is the best way to get provisions. The bus system is great, but runs a limited service at the weekends. With more than one person, just get a hire car.

Internet doesn't come cheap i.e. \$6 per hour. Free at the library but you need to book the time slot, so this can be time consuming (it's also out of town, so without a car or bike, is a faff to get to).

The majority of shops (i.e. coffee etc) don't open particularly early. The main season is kicks off around 15th May.

You can get a bus pass for \$4 per day.

USGS map store – they sell the same maps basically as everyone else. No need to go specifically to the store. \$30 for the 1:50,000 scale. You can get this in the land information bureau on 4th avenue.

Airstrip preparation © digilbert



### Accommodation:

Anchorage - stayed at the Alaska Backpackers on Eagle/3rd Avenue when arrived. Clean and cheap compared to anything else and helpful staff.

On the return trip we stayed at the Earth B&B on 12th Avenue ([www.earthbb.com](http://www.earthbb.com)) – this is highly recommend as it does fab breakfasts and is very comfortable.

Talkeetna – we stayed at the TAT bunkhouse. Need your thermarest and sleeping bag. There is a shower.

### Communications:

We did not use any form of communication whilst on the mountain. We had a small netbook with us which enabled us to tap into various free wi-fi spots in the towns.

### Food:

We bought the majority of food in the states with the exception of chocolate and cup a soups.

We aimed between 2500 – 3000 calories per day.

We bought 10 days supply of Mountain house freeze dried food specifically for the high camps and the Cassin. The rest was various lightweight dehydrated meals. The good mountain house meals were mac cheese, lasagne, beef teriyaki, chicken a la king. Non mountain house meals weren't as good.

We used 3 US Gallons of white gas (one gallon for every 6 days)

Good food included: savouries, cheese, butter, parmy, tang, yellow gaterade, uk choc, uk muesli, jerky, bacon bits, crackers, smash (2 packs sufficient for 3 pax), egg powder, cous cous (2 packets max for 3), sausage/good salami, maple syrup, tortellini wraps, cheesy oat cakes, dutchy shortbread, sucky sweets, fruit pastels (UK), jelly energy sweets, cup a soups, pancake mix (ready made),

No nos included: rice, jam and honey, fruit cereal bars, trail mix, cliff bars (froze), coffee, red gaterade, custard, cakes, dried veg, porridge, matches.



Summit day © Catrin Thomast





### Actual Itinerary:

Note: all timings include photo stops, food breaks, losing plot with pulks etc etc – i.e. we were on holiday ☺ They do not include dismantling/setting up camp which took ages.

|    |              |   |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1  | Mon 11th May | Arrive Anchorage after missing connection. Stay in Anchorage.   |
| 2  | Tue 12th May | Transport to Talkeetna. Briefing with Ranger Service. Organise kit  |
| 3  | Wed 13th May | Fly Talkeetna – Kahilta Base Camp (45 mins).<br>Bury 7 day food cache for end of trip flight delays.<br>Single carry to North East Fork Camp at 7686ft (5 hours). Cache for Cassin. |
| 4  | Thu 14th May | Single carry to 9970ft camp (5 hours).  |
| 5  | Fri 15th May | Single carry to 11000ft camp (2 hours).   |
| 6  | Sat 16th May | Single carry to 14100ft camp (7 hours). It looks like most people load carry and bury cache above windy corner.   |
| 7  | Sun 17th May | Rest.   |
| 8  | Mon 18th May | Load carry to 16100ft up the fixed lines (3.5 hours) and return to 14000.   |
| 9  | Tue 19th May | Tent bound - wind.  |
| 10 | Wed 20th May | Collected the cache at 16100 and carried up to 17000 camp (2.5 hours + 2.5 hours).  |
| 11 | Thu 21st May | Rest. Bad weather.  |
| 12 | Fri 22nd May | Move up to 17000ft camp.  |
| 13 | Sat 23rd May | Rest.   |
| 14 | Sun 24th May | Waiting for weather break.  |
| 15 | Mon 25th May | Headed up to Denali Pass. Very windy. Returned to 17000 camp.   |
| 16 | Tue 26th May | Summit day (6 hours up + 2.5 hours return). Moved down to 14000 camp.   |
| 17 | Wed 27th May | Tent bound- snow.   |
| 18 | Thu 28th May | Poor weather. Moved down to NE fork cache (6 hours). 12+ inches fresh snow.   |
| 19 | Fri 29th May | Move to Kahiltna BC.  |
| 20 | Sat 30th May | Tent bound.   |
| 21 | Sun 31st May | Tent bound am. Late evening flight to Talkeetna   |
| 22 | Mon 1st June | Talkeetna   |
| 23 | Tue 2nd June | Talkeetna   |
| 24 | Wed 3rd June | Talkeetna   |
| 25 | Thu 4th June | Transfer from Talkeetna – Anchorage.  |
| 26 | Fri 5th June | Anchorage   |
| 27 | Sat 6th June | Fly UK  |
| 28 | Sun 7th June | Arrive UK   |

If you want a detailed kit list, just ping me an email and I'll send as an excel spreadsheet.

Pretty much everything needs to come from the UK with the exception of white gas and bamboo canes (provided FOC from TAT)

Sledges were provided from TAT at base camp.

Forget about ski's for the West Buttress – take snow shoes. Of note, we never used ours even after a huge dumping of snow.

Jetboils do not work once things get cold.

“Expedition” type down clothing are just FAR too bulky and impossible to do anything in.

Good – merino socks, guide book, more glue in repair kit, playing cards, tent underlay, big pan for snow melt, primaloft pants and jacket, snow pegs, spare pan handle, stove base and spare bottle, muppy up cloth for tent drips, washing up liquid and scourer, uk puzzle books, podcasts, aspirin, ginko, tummy stuff, big enough ruck sack, wet wipes and handwash, little dry bags, big dry bags for depots, bungee for sledges, rechargeable batteries for the GPS, solar charger (Solio or Power Monkey).

Nono – platypus, jetboil (above10000), plastic shovel, headtorch, spare flash cards.

???? – overboots, gimp mask, bothy bag.

Cat & Di both used alpine size rucksacks (45 litre). These worked fine – just looked like a couple of DofE candidates.

#### Finance summary:

Figures are based on per person.

|  |                                  |       |
|--|----------------------------------|-------|
| International flight                           | £560                             |       |
| Internal flight (TAT)                          |                                  | \$560 |
| National park registration (includes peak fee) |                                  | \$210 |
| Transfer to Talkeetna (return)                 |                                  | \$140 |
| Accommodation in Anchorage (\$30.00 per night) |                                  | \$90  |
| Accommodation in Talkeetna (\$10.00 per night) |                                  | \$30  |
| Food in Anchorage                              |                                  | £238  |
| Fuel   | \$10 per US Gallon for white gas | \$10  |
|  | \$40 gas canister                | \$10  |

Roughly works out at £1500 per person.

This trip was funded by Mr Visa ☺

#### Thanks:

Lots of very good (and some duff!) advice received.

Thanks in particular to Stuart MacDonald [www.stuartmacdonald.org](http://www.stuartmacdonald.org) for loaning us the snow shoes; pearls of wisdom from Andy “the youth” Houseman, Ross Hewitt, Heather Morning & Steve Hartland.

Big thanks to Scarpa, Grivel & Deuter as always.



Di Gilbert Mountaineering