

MT. FORAKER SULTANA RIDGE EXPEDITION

17,400 ft / 5,300 m

Alaska Grade III

10,200 ft elevation gain

18 miles, 22 days

Group limit: 4 expedition members, 2 guides



Mount Foraker is Denali National Park's second highest mountain and sixth highest in North America. Located 8 miles from Denali, it rises above the Kahiltna Glacier like a towering cathedral. Foraker by any route is a mountaineering challenge of the highest caliber. AMS chooses to climb the Sultana Ridge over other routes for its aesthetic appeal but also to avoid exposure to hanging avalanches. The Sultana Ridge is a worthy objective for a seasoned Alaska Range climber: to gain access, we first climb the Southeast Ridge of Mt. Crosson, which is a good climb in itself. A rise on the backside of Crosson is then climbed before traversing 1.5 miles on a classic, double-corniced ridge to the base of the Sultana Ridge proper.

COST

Deposit: \$2,000

Balance due: 120 days prior to the starting date

Includes: AMS professional mountain guides, National Park Service mountaineering special use and entrance fees, base camp fee, round trip glacier flight, field food and fuel, group camping and climbing equipment (tents ropes, snow/ice protection, kitchens), emergency supplies (maps/ GPS, radios, satellite phone; repair, trauma, and drug kits), pre-rigged sleds, 24/7 support during the expedition from AMS headquarters; knowledgeable advice for training, equipment and travel, camp area at AMS in Talkeetna, regular updates on social media during the expedition.

You are responsible for: Arriving with excellent physical and mental fitness, transportation to and from Talkeetna, lodging (AMS campground is free, tents not provided), travelers cancellation insurance (highly recommended), personal equipment and clothing, rental items from AMS, and guide gratuities. *Optional:* Up to 5 pounds/2.25 kilos lunch/snack food.

HISTORY

Sultana, which means "woman" or "wife" (of Denali) is the Tanaina name for Mt. Foraker. In March 1979, Brian Okonek, Roger Cowles, and Dave Johnston made the first ascent of the Sultana, which was also the second winter as-

cent of Mount Foraker. Rising above the Kahiltna Glacier, the Sultana Ridge is an awesome sight from anywhere on Denali's West Buttress route.

GRADE/DIFFICULTY

The unique qualities inherent in Alaska's arctic environment, such as extreme temperature, wind, and snow pack, create climbing conditions in the Alaska Range unlike those for any other mountains in the world. Alaska Grade III is given to the Sultana because of its high altitude, exposure, corning, crevasses, and sustained climbing. Foraker is a formable mountain to climb and demands all the strength, commitment, and mountaineering savvy one could expect from such a classic Alaskan big mountain.

THE CLIMB

We climb the Sultana Ridge of Mt. Foraker in a combination of expedition and alpine styles. We will climb expedition-style, ferrying loads until establishing ourselves at the base of the Sultana Ridge. The first camp on the ridge will be made in a single move and be our high camp. The extra time built in is to accommodate potential bad weather or conditions that might require a third camp on the ridge.

AMS's approach to guided climbs falls in line with our mission as a school of mountaineering. Mt. Foraker's summit is a logical end goal, but we will focus on the means of getting

there, pushing every day to increase our mountaineering skills and performance. We expect all members to share a goal of becoming better climbers on our expeditions.

WEATHER

It is said that the greatest challenge of an Alaska mountaineering expedition is not the climbing, but the storms. Unlike most of the world's highest mountains, Mt. Foraker is 200 miles south of the Arctic Circle, at 63 degrees north latitude. Its location on the planet places it in the subarctic and 35 degrees north of Everest, the same latitude as northern Hudson Bay and central Scandinavia. The average climate around Foraker's summit is probably more severe than any place on earth. The weather on Foraker will dictate our every move. It will force us to be flexible, patient, and spontaneous. Weather is one thing we cannot change; what we can do is work with it.

ACCLIMATIZATION

AMS's expedition climbing strategy is concerned with giving everyone the best chance to acclimate to a lower oxygen environment. Foraker does not pose as big a threat as Denali for altitude-related problems due to its lower elevation at 17,400 ft; yet altitude-related illnesses are still a major concern. On this expedition, we use strategies to accelerate acclimatization, such as climbing high and sleeping low. AMS expeditions carry a pulse oximeter to measure blood oxygen saturation levels and prescription drugs to treat life-threatening conditions. Advanced signs or symptoms of pulmonary and/or cerebral edema are serious, life-threatening conditions that require immediate descent. Each year AMS is briefed by our medical director Dr. Peter Hackett—who pioneered high altitude medical research on Denali—on any advancements in the research, prevention, and treatment of altitude-related illnesses. Our training supervisor Lance Taysom, a life-flight nurse and Park Service mountaineering VIP, certifies all AMS instructors in wilderness emergency medicine. These two professionals together wrote the medical protocols and standing orders that allow AMS instructors to evaluate and treat within the scope of their Wilderness First Responder training. Guides also teach classes on altitude illnesses and discuss the use of Diamox and touch base with everyone individually; but your own self-monitoring is paramount to early detection.

TRAINING

All applicants must adopt a goal of being in excellent physical condition at the start of the expedition: please don't show up sick, injured, or out of shape. You get there by training beforehand. On any mountaineering expedition, some factors are completely out of anyone's control, including weather and people's individual acclimatization rates. By joining a professionally run expedition, you leave expedition logistics, food, equipment and leadership to us; yet you are responsible for and have control over your physical fitness and climbing ability. It is imperative that everyone joining our expeditions is physically fit when the expedition begins. The better condition you are in, the more you will enjoy the climb, the safer it will be for you, and the better chance for summiting. The more climbing experience you have prior to the climb, the more comfortable you will be on Foraker.

The amount of time needed for training depends on your base level of fitness. Athletes need only to adjust their training habits to include Denali specific routines. Others may have to plan a year or more of serious training in advance to ensure success. Safe climbers make being in shape a priority. Those who are able to should get out and climb as much as possible. Those with less time to climb can lift weights, run, bike, swim, practice martial arts, and red-line the Stair Master. Scramble up peaks, climb snow and vertical ice, embark on a rigorous multi-day winter backpacking trip, ski uphill as well as downhill, go snowshoeing. Pushing yourself in uncomfortable environments while staying focused and alert is good training; you cannot successfully prepare for this expedition in your office or solely with training indoors. It is important to focus on developing stamina and technical skills over brute strength. *Note: For specifics on the climbing skills needed for any expedition, see our document, Expedition Training Resources.*

EQUIPMENT

Foraker is not a mountain on which you can "just get by" with mediocre equipment. Your gear will be put to the ultimate test. A carefully planned layering system will be more comfortable, efficient, and lightweight, and hold up better en route. Carefully read the Expedition Personal Equipment sheet; it answers most questions and gives recommendations for particular items. Try to have equipment questions answered by a knowledgeable salesperson in a local climbing store; they are often the most informed about the pros

and cons of a particular brand or style. Feel free, too, to contact AMS with any gear-specific questions. Once you are in Talkeetna, please wait until the morning of the first day to check equipment at AMS; we are busy preparing for the expedition a full three days before day one of the climb. Your guides will insure you are properly outfitted before you go. The AMS Mountain Shop is able to provide all your equipment needs from head to toe and give you a discount.

FOOD

AMS provides nearly all of the food for this expedition. To ensure satisfaction, we ask that you bring some of your preferred hot and cold drinks and four pounds of your favorite trail lunch or snack food to supplement the choices you have from the AMS rations. Part of this food will be saved for summit day. More information on food is provided on the Expedition Food sheet. Please contact us ahead of time if you have any dietary restrictions or allergies.

MT. FORAKER ITINERARY

Weather and snow conditions will ultimately determine our progress on the mountain. This itinerary is a rough timeline and outlines a possible schedule. Our style on the mountain is flexible and will fluctuate on a 24-hour clock depending on conditions. With lucky weather, most expeditions return a day or two early. However, delays at the start with unflyable weather and storms at high camp may result in our running out of time. It is possible for us to extend the length of the expedition for those who have a flexible schedule and desire to tough it out for a few extra days at high camp. There is a cost associated with this to compensate the guides.

Day 1

2:00 p.m. orientation and gear check at AMS, with time to rent or purchase gear from the AMS Mountain Shop and select and pack lunches. You are free at 6:00 p.m. to enjoy the evening in Talkeetna.

Day 2

8:00 a.m. meet at AMS for skills practice and National Park Service orientation, then lunch; final packing, weighing, and loading gear for a 4:30 p.m. flight to Kahiltna SE Fork base camp, 7,200 ft, 60-mile flight. Elevation gain: 6,850 ft.

Day 3

Move to Advanced base camp, 6,600 ft, at the base of Mt. Crosson's Southeast Ridge. Distance: 3.4 miles.

Day 4

Carry to Camp 1 (8,300 ft) on Crosson's southeast ridge. Distance: 1 mile. Elevation gain: 1,700 ft.

Day 5 ¹ **Note:** If you arrive in Talkeetna early, please wait to check

Move to Camp 1 (8,300 ft). Distance: 0.5 mile. Elevation gain: 1,700 ft.

Day 6

Carry to Camp 2 (10,400 ft). Distance: 1.2 miles. Elevation gain: 2,100 ft.

Day 7

Move to Camp 2 (10,400 ft). Distance: 0.6 mile. Elevation gain: 2,100 ft.

Day 8

Carry up and over Mt. Crosson to Camp 3. Distance: 3 miles. Elevation gain: 3,100 ft.

Day 9

Move up and over Mt. Crosson to Camp 3. Distance: 1.5 miles. Elevation gain: 2,400 ft.

Day 10

Carry up around peak 12,472 ft to a ridge cache site. Distance: 3 miles. Elevation gain: 1,700 ft.

Day 11

Move up around peak 12,472 ft, past the ridge cache, to Camp 4 (Ridge Camp). Distance: 2 miles. Elevation gain: 600 ft.

Day 12

Move to Camp 5 at the base of the Sultana Ridge. Distance: 1.5 miles. Elevation gain: 300 ft.

Days 13, 14, 15, 16

Summit days. Distance: 1.25 miles. Elevation gain: 5,900 ft.

Days 17, 18, 19

Return to Kahiltna SE Fork base camp. Distance: 9.5 miles. Elevation gain: 2,400 ft. Fly to Talkeetna.

Days 20, 21, 22

Weather days.