

Glacier Trekking According to Yoda

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Sitting on the side of a dusty, abandoned wagon road in the middle of Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, adventures of my past came colliding with adventures of my present.

I held in my hands a collection of metal, straps and other unidentifiable objects that strongly resembled those old metal roller skates of my childhood. You know what I'm talking about – the things that attached to your sneakers, tightened with a key that you wore around your neck, but that still popped off when you hit a crack in the sidewalk.

In front of me spread the massive slopes of the Root Glacier, more than two miles of centuries old ice, snow, and particles of dirt, moving its way along the earth's surface at the speed of, well, a glacier. Although other humans had traversed the path we were on, it was most definitely the road less traveled for the more than three million visitors who come to Alaska each year.



The technical term for the roller skate devices is crampons – basically a metal frame that attaches firmly to your boot via a series of intertwined leather straps. Metal claws on the bottom and toes of the frame dig into the ice and keep you upright on the rolling slippery glacier.

It was a warm day with some in our group hiking in shorts, but the breeze drifting across the surface of the glacier reinforced that we were climbing on a mountain of packed ice and snow. At first our steps were baby-like slow as we learned to walk with our feet father apart and lifted a few inches higher with each step.

Soon we got the hang of it and began moving up the side of the glacier, keeping our balance with ski poles. We stepped gently over tiny streams of barely melted ice, trickling a path to the ocean. So pure and fresh it was that our guides encouraged us to fill our bottles and drink.

We peered into blue pools called moulines that were as deep as the mountain itself and life-threateningly dangerous if we stumbled and fell. The ice picks, axes and ropes that our guides carried around their waists were reminders that this was not any old walk in the park.

As a professional writer, I find these experiences both thrilling and frustrating. It's nearly impossible to describe the beauty, the freshness and the spirit of glacier trekking in Alaska. In the vernacular of Yoda,

“Sometimes there are no words, there is just do, or do not.”

Exhilarated by our day-long experience and just a little sore in our gluteus maximus, we toasted our own bravado that evening with a glass of wine and a hearty pot roast dinner at the Kennicott Lodge.

Outside, the glacier continued to creep by on its own trek to the ocean, seemingly unaware of the life-defining encounter it had provided to the celebrating humans inside.

By Diana Lambdin Meyer, RED Travel Writer

Photo by Bruce N. Meyer