

# The Mountain House Information



## History:

Don Sheldon, a master glacier pilot who was revered by the climbers he flew into the Range, intended the Mountain House as a modest shelter for mountaineers, skiers, photographers, and wilderness-seekers. Don tied lumber to the wing struts of his Cessna 180 and Super Cub, making numerous flights into the Gorge before he had enough materials to build the hut. It was constructed in 1966 by two Talkeetna locals. The Mountain House sits on a five-acre rock and ice outcrop located at the 6,000 foot level, in the middle of what is now known as the Don Sheldon Amphitheater of the Ruth Gorge; perhaps the most scenic and spectacular spot in Denali National Park & Preserve. The Mountain House is owned by Roberta Sheldon and has been managed by Alaska Mountaineering School, LLC (AMS) since 2006. The directors of AMS, Colby Coombs and Caitlin Palmer have been guests of the Mountain House and have known Roberta for many years; we are honored to be a part of its rich history.

## How To Get There / House Description:

The Mountain House can only be accessed by a ski-equipped plane authorized to land in Denali National Park & Preserve. It is your responsibility to research flight services based in Talkeetna and to make reservations for transport to the Mountain House. NPS maintains a list of authorized air taxis: <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/support-services.htm>. Once you arrive at the landing site on the east side of the outcrop visitors hike up-glacier and ascend a 30-35 degree snow slope which gains access to the south end of the rock outcropping where the hut sits. The distance is approximately 300 yards and any difficulty depends on snow conditions and whether some one has broken trail before you. The Mountain House is a hexagonal hut, approximately 14 feet in diameter with large windows, four sleeping benches, and a wood stove. It can accommodate five people relatively comfortably if one person is willing to sleep on the floor. Larger groups typically sleep in tents they pitch on the property and use the hut as a base to warm up and dry out.

## Season and Weather:

The Mountain House is located in the Alaska Range, a remote and glaciated mountain range known for its unpredictable and severe weather and winter conditions. The rental season is from mid-March to mid-July. At any time, it is possible to experience sudden snow or windstorms, which decrease visibility and can result in large amounts of precipitation. Storms can cause you to be hut-bound and weathered in beyond your scheduled pickup date. The month of March is considered the tail end of winter, and while the days are getting longer and the temperatures warming, winter conditions prevail. April and May are typically the most popular months. June is warm and beautiful, but the higher temperatures cause the snow to soften. Increased temperatures in July eventually lead to poor runway conditions. The hot summer weather causes the glacier to deteriorate usually by mid-July and aircraft no longer can land.

Fall and winter visitations to the Mountain House are not recommended due to extreme weather, decreasing temperatures, lack of daylight, and poor glacier travel conditions.

**Equipment:**

Visitors to the Mountain House must provide all of their own gear such as sleeping bags, cooking utensils, clothing, and personal items. Visitors must also provide all of their own food. It is recommended to bring extra food as changeable weather can sometimes cause a party to be weathered in for several days beyond their intended stay. The hut's wood stove is too small for cooking purposes and visitors should bring their own camp stoves. THESE STOVES SHOULD BE OPERATED OUTSIDE THE HUT TO REDUCE THE HAZARD OF FIRE. Food should be stored inside the hut to prevent ravens from raiding food caches.

**Communications:**

The Mountain House is located at a remote region therefore communication is spotty at best. Cell phones do not work at that location; satellite phones are used with some success. Technology is constantly changing so consult with your air taxi for a recommendation for the best way to stay in touch with them while you are in the mountains. Satellite phones may be rented in Anchorage from Alaska Satellite Communications: 907-868-1782, [www.alaskasatellitecommunications.com](http://www.alaskasatellitecommunications.com) or from local telephone companies. Check with them in advance regarding purchasing or renting satellite phones and their use.

**First Aid Kits:**

The First Aid kits are NOT maintained at the Mountain House and therefore should not be relied upon. Any supplies have been left there as a good will gesture by past visitors. Please bring your own and be prepared to be as self sufficient as possible.

**Firewood:**

Mountain House visitors must provide their own firewood. Your options are:

1. Bring your own dry, seasoned firewood if you have it.
2. Purchase the small firewood bundles from supermarkets or other retailers.
3. One option is to use artificial "firelogs" such as Presto, Duraflame. These are generally packed 6 to a box and are compact to transport. Only half of a firelog should be burned at a time.

NOTE: Firewood should be no longer than 16 inches in length. It should be split and it should be seasoned (dry). Please do not bring green, wet, or unseasoned wood that can cause creosote buildup in the stovepipe, becoming a hut fire hazard. A good way to transport your firewood is in burlap bags. Generally one burlap bag of wood is usually good for one or two days, depending on temperatures. However, your wood should be used sparingly in case you are weathered in beyond your pickup date.

**Garbage:**

To reduce the waste left at the Mountain House all garbage should be flown out to Talkeetna for proper disposal at the end of your stay. Please keep garbage compact and double bagged for the flight out. Careful packing can reduce garbage. Your air taxi may be willing to collect your trash, or they may direct you to the local Transfer Station for inexpensive disposal.

**Human Waste:**

The National Park Service (NPS) requires all visitors to the Mountain House use Clean Mountain Cans (CMCs) for human waste disposal. CMCs are plastic containers that are used throughout the glaciated areas of the Alaska Range. They provide an effective way to contain human waste and transport it out of the National Park for proper disposal. The NPS Talkeetna Ranger Station issues sanitized CMCs when you check in and receives them upon your return for proper disposal and professional cleaning. They should be double bagged for the flight out. Used CMCs are collected in a fenced area on the alley adjacent to the station; do not bring used CMCs into any building.

**Electricity and Water:**

There is no electricity or water available at the Mountain House or anywhere nearby. Bring bottled water for drinking. Snow can be used for washing and cleaning, by melting slowly in pots on the wood stove. Since the average person drinks at least one gallon a day and more is needed for washing dishes, it makes sense to bring two stoves: one for cooking and one for melting snow. Choose a designated location for harvesting clean snow for water production and a separate location for depositing waste water (grey water). Clean water can be harvested at the north end of the ridge (well away from the outhouse, but near the Hut); grey water can be deposited at the south end of the ridge (near the outhouse). There is a screen for filtering grey water and fireplace ash; larger particles should be "packed out" with your trash.

**Mountain House Community**

The Mountain House draws a very special group of visitors who love and care for the hut. It has been the tradition that visitors spend some time cleaning the Mountain House and outside grounds for the next incoming guests. Each year we spend time and money on the upkeep of the hut. If a guest damages something, please let us know and so we can figure the repair costs that are incurred. We cherish the situation where the rental rates are reasonable and the trust in the guests is high, and plan for this to last the lifetime of the Mountain House's operation.

## **Rental Policies:**

### Reserve your stay

To make a reservation please contact AMS in Talkeetna. We recommend you make your reservation as early as possible to secure your dates. Because the visitation season is so short (4 months), most regular visitors book a year in advance. You can make a reservation one year in advance of the month of your desired reservation date, for example: If you would like to reserve the nights of April 22-30, 2010, you may make the reservation April 1, 2009 or later. Reservations require payment in full and are made on a first-come, first-served basis. We must have payment in full for all nights as well as one Group Reservation Form and one Individual Reservation Form in order to hold the reservation.

### Rental Rates:

Please see the Group Registration Form for current rates.

### The Waitlist:

Each season cancellations are made and these newly available dates are offered to people who would like to be on the Wait List. Pick a time frame (month and number of nights) to be placed on the list. A credit card (Visa or MasterCard) is required for placement on the waitlist.

### Weathered-out Policy: Reservation Fee:

No one can control the weather. With this said, visitors who are unable to fly to the Mountain House due to weather will be refunded \$50 per night. The amount retained by AMS is considered a Reservation Fee. If any of the days reserved are flyable then we cannot offer any refund for those days. The Air Service you are flying with decides on flying conditions.

### Weathered-In Policy:

In the event of a delayed return flight to Talkeetna from the Mountain House due to weather, as a good will gesture visitors will not be charged additionally.

### Cancellation & Refund Policy:

Cancellations must be made 60 days prior to the start date of your stay. Once we receive notification of the cancellation we will issue a refund of \$50 per night. If cancellations are made less than 60 days prior to the start date of the intended stay there will be no refund. We recommend that you purchase cancellation insurance, you can check with a travel agent for policies or try TravelEx or TravelGuard for insurance.

### Cancellation & Transfer Policy:

Although unlikely, AMS reserves the right to cancel your Mountain House stay. If AMS cancels, the rental balance, which you have already paid, will be refunded to you. AMS is not responsible for other personal costs associated in these cases. If you wish to transfer the dates of your intended stay, the request must be made 60 days prior to the start date of the original reserved days. If the transfer is approved, there will be a \$50 transfer fee that will be due immediately. Transfers can only be made within the same calendar year.

### Required stop at National Park Service:

Before you depart for the Mountain House everyone in your party must check in with the National Park Service at the Talkeetna Ranger Station (located downtown Talkeetna on B Street) and pay the Park entrance fee (\$10 per person, \$20 per family; waived if you present a valid Annual Pass) and file a Backcountry Registration (no fee). You will also obtain your Clean Mountain Cans (CMCs) at this time. First-time visitors to Talkeetna may wish to spend some extra time visiting the Ranger Station.

### Required Check in at AMS:

Once you have visited NPS you are required to check in at the AMS office prior to your Mountain House departure. We will cover visitation procedures, and issue the Mountain House keys. This meeting must be done either the start date of your reservation or the day before. Please respect your reservation dates: WE WILL NOT ISSUE KEYS EARLY.

### Camping before or after your Mountain House stay:

Some of you may wish to camp on the Ruth Glacier before or after your Mountain House stay. This is not recommended. If this is something you wish to do please be aware that we will not issue Mountain House keys prior to your scheduled stay.

## **The Mountain House is Not for Everyone!**

Most people experienced in wilderness environments see the Mountain House as a charming and unique structure in a truly spectacular setting. Others may view it as a rough hut on primitive terrain in an unfriendly climate. The Mountain House is suitable for the adventurous spirit who can live comfortably without any modern conveniences and take care of themselves without a guide. **YOU MUST BE PHYSICALLY FIT AND MENTALLY FLEXIBLE.**

### **Preparedness:**

The Mountain House is located on a rock outcrop with steep sides that drop to the glacier below. Crevasses have been known to form near the Mountain House. While no crevasses have posed any serious problems for more than 30 years, it is important that visitors be aware of their existence. The route to the Mountain House from the landing strip can become soft and "punchy" and it is recommended that everyone use snowshoes or skis with skins to access the hut. There is no radio communication at the hut. Cell phones do not work there.

The possibility exists of being weathered in. **YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER RESERVING THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE IF YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT COMMITMENT TO KEEP FOLLOWING YOUR PLANNED STAY.** Likewise, if you are on medication you should take an extra supply in case of delays. Aircraft scenic flights can be contacted on the glacier on good weather days, but on bad weather days no one is flying. You may want to consider renting a satellite phone, but even satellite phone reception can be unreliable.

For all the preceding reasons it is necessary for visitors to possess a reasonable degree of outdoor experience and self-sufficient savvy. It is not recommended that children travel to the Mountain House. Finally, before departure from Talkeetna, all visitors are required to sign Mountain House and AMS "Acknowledgement of Risks" and "Release of Liability" forms which emphasize the signer's recognition that s/he is traveling in remote wilderness. Staying at the Mountain House is unique and rugged when compared with most other conventional outdoor locations and **CERTAIN RISKS CANNOT BE ELIMINATED WITHOUT DESTROYING THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF THE PROPERTY.**

We wish you well with your trip preparation!