

# The essential Glacier Bay reference. Everything you need for a successful trip.

## Volume 1

Exceptionally thorough, this beautiful three-volume guide covers every inlet of Glacier Bay's spectacular 760-mile-long wilderness coast. Find practical paddling logistics, campsites, extensive maps, and vital tips for dealing with 25-foot tides, brown bears, and icebergs. Ample photography helps each visitor locate stunning glaciers, emerald rainforests, and unsurpassed wildlife. While reading in the tent, dive into Muir's "glacier gospel," discover Huna Tlingit history, and learn how to spot the mythical Silent City, a mirage that swirled around Victorian-era steamships. Unearth fossils transplanted from Siberia, find glaciers that slipped on metaphorical banana peels, hunt "monstars," and revel in the science of whale's earwax, suck muck, blue bears, and more.

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- ★ **VOLUME 1 COVERS** logistics, gear selection, trip prep, and when to go
- ★ Itinerary suggestions and selection
- ★ Tide info for novices and experts
- ★ Nautical chart tips
- ★ Safety tips: bears, ginormous camp-swallowing tides, open water crossings, and the bigger bumper theory
- ★ 81 photographs, maps, and illustrations
- ★ The bay's wilderness as envisioned by John Muir, the Huna Tlingit, cruise ships, and you
- ★ Engaging science, including kayaks as holes in the water, how to make dendrochronologists cry, and enhancing your Scotch with ancient bubbles



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*Mount Abbe and the  
Gilman Glacier, Johns  
Hopkins Inlet.*



*Mom leads the way to the water. Perhaps get travel assistance to the bay from your mom as well? Do whatever it takes to get you and your stuff to the park.*

## 6. Gear, Packing, and the Bermuda Triangle

**W**ANT TO KNOW THE secret to life in Glacier Bay, the key to all bliss and harmony? Stay dry, warm, well fed, and protected from bugs. More than anything else, gear determines the fate of your trip. Great gear, great trip. Invest in the best that you can afford, borrow what you can't buy, and rent the rest. Sadly, to a certain extent, money buys both gear and happiness. As explorer Sir Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes, 3rd Baronet once wrote, "There is no such thing as bad weather. There is only inappropriate clothing." Extend this to tents, and he's spot on for Alaska.

### WEIGHT AND SIZE

Bigger is not better. Keep gear small, so that it fits through those surprisingly tiny hatches, and keep gear light, so the kayaks don't sink to the gunwales. When in doubt, think of a kayak as "the backpack of the sea" and aim for a "less is more" aesthetic, akin perhaps to a Rothko painting or an elite sports car that eschews stripes, decals, and doodads as extraneous, detractive, unnecessary nonsense.

Kayaks look cavernous, but they're not. These boats are nothing more than exaggerated plastic pants, and not the "relaxed fit" variety but something more akin to "package pants" that require lots of careful stuffing. These skinny trousers slip up to our waist and then belt into place with a spray skirt while legs, feet, and rump fill the entire middle of the boat with no room for gear. What's left is the much smaller V-shaped tapered ends of the boat, and even in an expedition-length multi-week boat, your total available storage shrinks to roughly two large backpacks, one in front and a slightly roomier one in back. Double that space for an expedition

double kayak, but don't forget that gear for two people must fit in the boat.

That's not to say you shouldn't bring a nice, big, unabridged copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (I did), or a delightfully roomy, four-season, bomber, deluge-proof, three-person tent just for yourself (so relaxing). And a giant, awesome, golf umbrella (oh yeah, so dry). But the critics scoring your performance from the sidelines cluck and deduct points for an overtaxed kayak that groans painfully against a fast-moving tide. So, I compensate for each luxury item with other uber-light gear like a carbon-fiber paddle (very nice), an ultralight carbon-fiber bear can (ooh la la), and the smallest carbon-fiber sleeping pad that money can buy (OK, it's not carbon fiber, but it does fit in my back pocket where I used to keep my now empty wallet). For better or worse, most folks will be happier when keeping backpacking gear in mind rather than guitars, tiki torches, and beer coolers (sigh).

When renting an unknown boat, as a rule of thumb, count on enough space for two medium-sized duffels or backpacks of gear per person including bear canisters. Even less will be better, lighter, and easier to paddle. If you know the kayak extremely well—for example, you own it—then feel free to bring what fits, but unnecessary weight will almost always cramp your style.

### PACKING TIPS

For the love of all that is good, please don't bring 50- to 60-liter rafting dry bags. Such wishful thinking gets gear as far as Bartlett Cove, and then, in front of all the tourists, you'll face the ultimate indignity of unpacking that bag on the beach, in the rain, and stuffing wet underwear one-by-one through the svelte hatches. Slim and sleek kayaks

mixed with large bags fail miserably, no matter how many Faustian bargains you sign. For some reason, I see these gargantuan bags coming off the plane in Gustavus every summer. Wrong tool, wrong sport.

Instead of one whopping 60-liter bag, stuff everything into a collection of many smaller dry bags, preferably eight-liter and five-liter sizes, and rarely anything larger. A colorful assortment of these bags makes you look like a pro, and the rental staff will nod approvingly. In any rental kayak, eight-liter bags fit perfectly, even into the Bermuda Triangle, that pointy end of the kayak where stuff gets stuck just out of reach of your wiggling fingertips.

And while we are on the subject, beware that Bermuda Triangle. The abominable BT causes excessive cursing and angry dancing when valuable tent stakes (or stoves, spoons, sandals, etc.) jam and refuse to disgorge, even after turning the boat upside down and shaking vigorously. You can rage against the alien abductors of your sandals and threaten to saw off the vile pointy end of the boat, but a better choice is to pack long and easily grabbed items into this forbidden zone, like tent poles. The BT hates that kind of common-sense thinking.

Also avoid see-through plastic dry bags and sticky rubberized PVC dry bags that won't shove easily into the bow or stern, rip easily on screws and other kayak fittings, and in smaller sizes wedge permanently into the BT. Instead purchase bomber, reputable, coated fabric dry bags that slide in and out of the kayak with grace. If you can't remember what's inside the opaque nylon bag, then a magic marker will do the trick, but a collection of bright colors is usually sufficient to remember "blue = sleeping bag" and "orange = clothes." For sensitive electronics, use two dry bags with one inside the other, or get small waterproof dry boxes such as Pelican cases. To compress dry bags to their smallest possible size, use your knee to burp out air before rolling down the top. To keep out water, roll the top at least three times before buckling closed.

Awkward bear canisters, bulky sleeping bags, and three- to four-season tents hog more space than any other gear. The incompressible canisters nest happily underneath the stern and bow hatches where the boat swells widest, but to avoid competition for this precious resource, compress, squeeze, disassemble and separate everything else into small bags—sensing a theme? Remove the poles from the remainder of the tent and use a compression sack for the fabric. Stuff the sleeping bag directly into an eight-liter dry bag, but if yours won't fit without a jackhammer, try the next larger size at 10 to 15 liters. In a large expedition kayak, you *might* get away with a 20-liter dry bag—but your plus-sized bag and uncompromising bear canisters must all squeeze into the exact same space under the stern hatch, leading to anger management issues, and for physicists, curses against the Dirichlet Pigeonhole Principle (a fancy way of saying three bags won't fit into two holes). When 15-liter bags don't work, borrow or cough up for smaller gear if possible.

Other common offenders? Closed cell foam pads that roll into giant burritos from hell, unnecessarily large cooking pots, aluminum-frame camp chairs, and full-sized backpacks that barely fit through the hatch and eat inordinate amounts of space when they do. And while a tarp isn't a bad idea, those blue hardware-store versions balloon to 50 times their package size and never refold tightly. If you must bring a blue beast (and to their credit they shed rain like nothing else), try to keep it under 20,000 square feet or foist it off on your friends with the roomier double kayak.

## GEAR LIST

Backpackers in the American wilderness tradition will recognize much of the camp gear, but of course, everyone has a favorite widget that I will fail to promote with appropriate vim and vigor—folding camp-stove bread toaster, hand-crank blender,

collapsible wheelbarrow. How dare I overlook the hygienic advantages of a 1,500-watt, solar-powered, portable, foldaway, electric toothbrush with floss side holsters. But that's as it should be. We are all individuals.

Companies come and go, but I find sea kayaking gear from Kokatat, Stohlquist, NRS, Werner, Aqua-Bound, Sea to Summit, and SealLine to be reliable. There are always exceptions and lemons. I make a few specific product recommendations, but of course the available models evolve and disappear daily. When in doubt, err on the side of quality and light weight.

### Kayak gear

- ★ **Kayak:** Essential. An expedition kayak is necessary for all but the shortest trips. Plastic boats are more durable, but fiberglass is lighter, often faster, and more easily repaired. The popular polyurethane folding kayaks by Feathercraft work exceptionally well, pack into luggage, and are among the easiest to repair in the field (duct tape) but are sadly extinct and expensive on the used market.
- ★ **Spray skirt:** Essential to keep water out of the cockpit. Waterproof nylon spray skirts are easy to adjust and snap into place, but neoprene skirts fit with a tighter seal. Either are fine in Glacier Bay.
- ★ **Paddle:** Essential. Experts prefer light carbon fiber paddles, but fiberglass takes more abuse. Overuse injuries like tendinitis and carpal tunnel plague longer trips, and a featherweight paddle can save the day. Some companies like Werner and Aqua-Bound can custom-cut a new paddle into four interlocking lengths that fit into standard airplane luggage, but two-piece paddles can fit in special paddle cases or ski bags.
- ★ **Sponge:** Essential for sopping up the inevitable puddles in your boat. Turning the boat upside down never quite works.
- ★ **Cockpit rain cover:** Optional, but useful during the night when storms will fill the boat. Most people just turn their boat upside down. A cover can also keep out hives of marauding killer bees looking for a new home, which happened to my wife in Baja but remains far-fetched in Glacier Bay, at least until climate change inflicts more damage.
- ★ **Tide tables, NOAA:** Essential. At a bare minimum, carry a table of the Bartlett Cove tides. I also carry tables for Composite Island, Muir Inlet, and Tarr Inlet, though Tarr seems to be wildly inaccurate. To save space you can cut out the appropriate days and laminate the paper for protection.
- ★ **Nautical chart:** Essential. Use *The Kayaker's Companion to Glacier Bay: Annotated Chart* or the *NOAA Chart 17318*, both available in waterproof versions. For bathymetry—aka water depths—and other water features pertinent to kayaking, these two nautical charts are better choices than traditional topographic maps like the Trails Illustrated below. An alternatively available NOAA booklet-style version is acceptable on yachts, but I find the constant flipping more awkward than useful in a kayak. When printed at full size, NOAA certifies their pdf as legal for navigation, but the NOAA chart is not error free and needs revision. Sadly NOAA has officially mothballed all future updates to their print charts. The more recent *Kayaker's Companion* chart fixes many of NOAA's errors and includes pickup locations, campsites, reliable water sources, notable hazards, tidal cut depths, and other pertinent park information.

*For some of the best waterfalls, try Tidal and Rendu Inlets. Other excellent locations include Johns Hopkins Inlet, Upper Muir Inlet, and just about anywhere after a five day rain.*

