



## ALASKA FALL PHOTOGRAPHY CAMERA GEAR

\*\*\*\*\* **A bulleted list of my personal camera gear is at the end**\*\*\*\*\*

**Camera body:** Any modern DSLR or mirrorless body with a manual exposure and “Bulb” capability is suitable for night photography. Late model bodies have better sensors for noise at high ISO settings.

**Batteries:** Bring at least 2 extra and a charger. For mirrorless bodies I charge my battery in camera with a Nitecore NB20000 energy brick and 3’ cord. The cold kills batteries fast.

**Lenses (in 35mm full frame equivalent):** I basically have an f4 lens kit. The only situation I need a f2.8 or faster is for aurora shooting. I use a prime 20mm, f2.8 for most of my aurora shooting. For general landscape and travel work in Alaska, I rarely need a lens wider than 24mm.

I use a short telephoto for landscape work more than another lens. Alaska is full of sweeping distant vistas where there is no means to get closer to the peaks and thus, telephoto compression can really make distant mountains more dramatic. For moose and other wildlife, anything that reaches to 400mm is preferable. Since you will be hauling your gear on foot, think carefully about carrying a huge prime lens. These days I use my 100-500mm for most wildlife photography. Macro lenses, especially 100mm, are very useful but fisheye lenses have limited use.

Consider having lenses with the same filter thread size. All of my lenses have 77mm. My do everything 2-lens kit is a 24-105mm/F4 and a 100-500mm/F4.5-6.3. For all landscape work I frequently use a 2-lens kit consisting of 16-35mm/f4 and the 70-200mm/F4.

**Tripod:** A high quality stout tripod is best suited for Alaska shooting. Cheap travel tripods with too many leg extensions (more than 4) are all but useless here. (Read my blog post on choosing a tripod at <https://activephototours.com/michael-deyoung-travel-tripod-suggestions/>.) You will be shooting on uneven terrain and on soft, spongy tundra. Having a hook under your tripod’s apex is helpful for anchoring your tripod down on soft ground with some extra weight.

**Heads/Plates/Clamps:** These components are more important than the tripod legs. Most nature photographers use a ball head with an Arca compatible clamp. You should have properly fitting plates for each camera body and long lens with a tripod collar. When you fly commercially, I recommend you remove your tripod head and take it in your carry on bag. You can always get another set of legs if the airline loses your luggage.

**Filters:** Some people get alarmed at my take on filters. The only 2 filters I use are polarizers and neutral density. Some companies are combining both into one for creative moving water and cloud work. A circular polarizer is very helpful even on cloudy days to reduce glare on water and wet vegetation. The ND helps slow shutter speeds down for creative motion work. I used to use graduated ND filters all the time. With higher dynamic range sensors I rarely use



them and now just shoot for high dynamic range and blend the images together in post processing.

**Filters I DON'T Use.** I haven't used a UV filter for lens "protection" in decades. They are useless and polarizers are much more effective at cutting haze. I don't want to remove a UV filter every time I want to use a CPL or ND filter. Eventually, too many photographers get lazy and just put the CPL on top of the UV. Guess what? Yes, eventually they will "marry" and without a special tool will be impossible to separate. If you want to "protect" you front element, religiously deploy your lens hood. That, and a lens cap, will protect your front element. I have lenses with front elements that are scratched to hell and there is no noticeable difference in image quality.

**Camera bags:** I use several because there is no such thing as one perfect bag. Bring 2 packs: 1) your "carry everything" camera bag and 2) a smaller pack for day trips where you only take what you need for that shoot. I'm not a big fan of camera backpacks except for airline travel. They are great for having everything, including your computer, for motorized travel. For field trips I use regular hiking packs as photo backpacks aren't really light when empty or good at carrying other stuff you need for long hauls on your back. For any work around open water I use fully waterproof dry bags with waterproof zippers. **AVOID HARD CASES.** Some of the small bush planes we use for remote access don't even allow them and most are too big or inflexible to stow under a helicopter seat or in an open trailer. Soft bags work better.

**Accessories bags:** It's quite common to see shooters leave essential items back at the vehicle. Keep important essentials, at a minimum, with you: extra battery, media cards, all filters, lens cloth, micro-fiber cloth, headlamp, hand warmers, head net, and emergency dark chocolate 😊 in a small grab and go accessory pouch, fanny pack or vest so they are always with you. I use a Think Tank medium Cable Management bag for this purpose.

**Camera Covers:** Nobody should subject their gear to serious water damage in a heavy rain but you can get good images especially colorful macro images in a light rain, mist or snow. The best protection from rain/snow is to have higher-end bodies and pro lenses that can withstand short periods in a light rain with no risk of damage. When not in use I place my gear in a protected bag. Rain covers are just cumbersome to use, especially if there is any wind. I carry a couple of washcloth sized microfibre cloths to either lay over the camera in the rain and save one to wipe it down with afterwards. If you feel better with a rain cover, ThinkTank makes some nice products. In 30+ years in Alaska I've never had a camera ruined from rain.

**Computers:** Post processing and critique are the most valuable parts of a photo workshop and tour. You should have a way to download and edit your images and a way to copy them to a small flash drive for sharing and critique. Make sure you have a card reader that accepts the cards you use.

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**Here is my own Alaska camera gear. I don't carry all of this everywhere.**

Bodies: Canon R5, Canon R7 - backup, wildlife, trail and river adventure body

Lenses: Canon RF 14-35mm/f/4,  
Canon RF 24-105mm/f4  
Canon RF 70-200mm/f4 - my favorite landscape lens for Alaska  
Canon RF 100-500mm/f4.5-6.3  
Canon EF 400mm/F4 DO - my favorite all time telephoto

Tripods: Really Right Stuff TFC-33 (older version of this)  
Colorado Tripod Company Centennial Series #2 (waterproof legs, very stable)  
Benro Tortoise Columnless Tripod #1 (travel and backpack tripod)

Head/clamp: Really Right Stuff BH-40 with lever release on the TFC-33  
Really Right Stuff BH-25 with screw knob on Benro Tortoise  
Colorado Tripod Company Highline Small on Centennial

Plates: Really Right Stuff R5 L-plate

Filters: Breakthrough Photography X4 Circular Polarizer  
Breakthrough Photography X4 Dark 6-Stop circular polarizer with 6-stop ND

Media: SanDisk Extreme Pro CF-Express 64TB  
SanDisk Extreme Pro UHS-2 SDXC various sizes  
Think Tank card wallet with zipper

Bags: Think Tank Speed Freak, Glass Taxi and several cable management pouches.  
Hyperlite Mountain Gear: Elevate 22 and Southwest 2400 (general backpacks)  
Hyperlite Mountain Gear: Camera Pod, both small and large (my fav ultra light padded camera cases that attach to other packs)  
Sagebrush Dry Gear waterproof and immersible bags with dry zippers:  
• Cam Dry Bag, large (holds pro mirrorless body with standard lens)  
• Dry Day Pack, large - for river trips (for big lens protection on boats and open trailers during bear workshops and tours)

Headlamp: Nitecore NU25\_UL - Ultra light with rechargeable battery and red light capability

Computer: Macbook Pro, 16", 2021 model

Software: Lightroom Classic, Photo Mechanic (best program for quick look and first edit of large RAW files), Topaz DeNoise, Sharpening and Gigapixel AI plug-ins.

External Drives: SanDisk 4TB Extreme Portable SSD  
SanDisk Professional 4TB Pro-G40-SSD (fastest at the time)

Portable Battery Pack: Nitecore NB20000 (Smaller batteries don't have enough power to charge my R5 in camera. This one does.)