

Crow Pass Crossing Complete Guide

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Multi-day route from Girdwood to Eagle River — camp spots, river crossing strategy, bear canister requirements & weather windows.

■ Region:	Anchorage & Southcentral Alaska
■ Updated:	2024 Season
■ Cost:	Free Resource
■ Website:	AnchorageHikes.com

The Crow Pass Crossing Trail: A Comprehensive Backcountry Guide

Located in the heart of Alaska's Chugach Mountains, the Crow Pass Crossing trail is a 26-mile wilderness trek that connects Girdwood to Eagle River, offering breathtaking scenery, rugged terrain, and unparalleled adventure. This three-day journey takes you through stunning mountain landscapes, glaciers, and valleys, with opportunities to spot wildlife and experience the raw beauty of Alaska's backcountry. As a seasoned guide, I'll share my expertise to help you prepare for this epic journey.

Route Overview

The Crow Pass Crossing trail begins at the Crow Creek Road trailhead in Girdwood and ends at the Eagle River Nature Center. The recommended three-day itinerary allows you to absorb the stunning scenery and tackle the challenging terrain with a manageable daily mileage. The trail takes you through a variety of landscapes, including alpine meadows, glaciers, and river valleys, with a notable highlight being the crossing of the Eagle River.

Day-by-Day Itinerary

- **Day 1: Girdwood TH to Crystal Lake (8 miles)**

The journey begins with a gentle ascent through a lush forest, eventually giving way to alpine meadows and stunning views of the surrounding mountains. The trail then descends to Crystal Lake, where you'll find a comfortable cabin to spend the night. Be sure to arrive early to secure a spot, as the cabin is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

- **Day 2: Over Crow Pass (4,000ft), Raven Glacier, and down to Eagle River (10 miles)**

This day is the most challenging, with a steep ascent to Crow Pass (4,000ft) and a subsequent descent to the Raven Glacier. The glacier crossing can be hazardous, so be sure to follow the recommended route and use caution. The trail then takes you down to the Eagle River valley, where you'll set up camp for the night.

- **Day 3: Eagle River flats to ERNC (8 miles)**

The final day is a relatively easy stroll through the Eagle River flats, with the Nature Center waiting at the end of the trail. Be sure to take your time and enjoy the scenery, as the trail winds its way through a beautiful river valley.

Camp Spots

- **Crystal Lake Cabin:** A comfortable cabin with basic amenities, available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Raven Glacier Moraine:** A scenic spot with stunning views of the glacier, but be aware of potential rockfall and glacier hazards.
- **Eagle River Valley:** A beautiful spot to set up camp, with plenty of opportunities to spot wildlife and enjoy the scenery.

- **Eagle River Nature Center:** The final destination, with amenities and services available.

The Eagle River Crossing

The Eagle River crossing is the most hazardous section of the trail, with knee-deep glacial meltwater and strong currents. To navigate this section safely, follow these guidelines:

- **Trekking Poles Technique:** Use trekking poles to help with balance and stability, and consider using a makeshift pole or staff if you don't have trekking poles.
- **Best Crossing Window:** Aim to cross the river between 6-9 am, when the water is typically at its lowest level. Avoid crossing during peak melt hours (10 am-2 pm) when the water is swollen and turbulent.
- **Emergency High-Water Bypass:** In case of high water, consider taking the emergency bypass trail, which adds approximately 2 miles to your journey. This trail takes you along the riverbank, avoiding the need to cross the river.

Gear List

- **Bear Canister:** Mandatory in some sections, a bear canister is essential for storing food and other scented items. The BV500 is a recommended model.
- **Glacier Glasses:** Essential for protecting your eyes from snow glare and wind.
- **Gaiters:** Recommended for keeping snow and debris out of your boots.
- **River Crossing Shoes:** A good pair of river crossing shoes or sandals with a secure fit is essential for navigating the Eagle River crossing.
- **Emergency Bivy:** A lightweight emergency bivy sack is a must-have in case of unexpected weather or injuries.

Permit & Regulations

- **Alaska State Parks:** The Crow Pass Crossing trail is managed by Alaska State Parks. Be sure to check the park's website for up-to-date information on trail conditions, permits, and regulations.
- **Cabin Reservation:** Reserve the Crystal Lake cabin through the Alaska Department of Natural Resources website (dnr.alaska.gov) for \$65 per night.
- **Bear Canister Requirements:** Bear canisters are mandatory in some sections of the trail. Be sure to check the park's website for specific regulations and recommendations.

Weather Windows

The best time to tackle the Crow Pass Crossing trail is during the summer months (July-August), when the weather is generally more stable and the days are longer. However, be aware that shoulder season (June and September) can bring unpredictable weather, including snowstorms and high winds. Always check the NWS Anchorage forecast before embarking on your journey and be prepared for changing weather conditions.

Emergency Protocols

- **Satellite Communicator:** A satellite communicator, such as a DeLorme or Garmin inReach, is essential for emergency communication. Make sure to bring extra batteries and a spare device, if possible.
- **Eagle River Rescue:** In case of an emergency, contact Eagle River rescue at 907-745-0707. Be prepared to provide your location, the nature of the emergency, and any other relevant information.

In conclusion, the Crow Pass Crossing trail is a challenging yet rewarding backcountry adventure that demands respect, preparation, and experience. By following this comprehensive guide, you'll be well-equipped to tackle the trail's hazards and enjoy the breathtaking scenery that Alaska's wilderness has to offer. Remember to always prioritize safety, be prepared for changing weather conditions, and respect the fragile environment that surrounds you. Happy trails!