

climber, climbing, crampons, doubtful, glacier, guides, heels, hike, rope, stable, unsafe, weather

There's only one thing that's certain about the weather in Alaska... it changes all the time! There's rain, wind, snow...and sometimes it's fine with lots of sunshine. But today, there's rain and fog all the way from Denali National Park to the town of Talkeetna. There, a group of visitors is planning to fly onto a glacier and ski down it. But the weather has other plans.

Visitor: So, can we go today?

Colby: Er, not until the pilots are comfortable with the weather.

Colby Coombs then explains that the clouds are too low, so the group can't fly. Colby and Caitlin Palmer are mountain (1)_____. They run a (2)_____ school. They teach beginner (3)_____ and help experienced climbers to reach the top of Denali, also known as Mount McKinley. It's the highest mountain in North America. Colby and Caitlin are good climbers. They're not usually (4)_____ when they're in the mountains. But even they won't take a small plane out in bad weather.

Colby: It's kind of ornery weather...you usually have to factor in a day or two to put up with bad (5)_____.

So, Colby and Caitlin decide on another plan. Instead of taking the group to ski down a glacier, they will take them to climb up one. One that they can reach by car: the Matanuska glacier. Matanuska is a very big (6)_____. It's 27 miles long and two miles wide. The name "Matanuska" comes from an old Russian word for the Athabascan Indians, who live in the area. The glacier is in a low area that has many trees. It formed 2,000 years ago, but it's always changing. The group gets ready to climb out of Matanuska's formations, a 30-foot wall of ice. Caitlin explains how to climb it, and it's not going to be easy.

Caitlin: The most (7)_____ you're going to be is when you have all the points of your (8)_____ sticking on the ice. Erm, front points in ...

(9)_____down. And if you're going to place a tool ... really solid. OK off we go.

Great.

The (10)_____across Matanuska is beautiful. But, it can also be very unsafe. One summer, a young man fell into an opening in the ice called a cirque and died. There are also stories of beginner hikers who get lost and almost die from the cold. There are crevasses everywhere as well. The climbers have to careful; they could easily fall in. The group walks across the glacier. It's very cold; they have to keep moving to stay warm. Finally, they reach solid ice—the heart of the glacier. From here, it's a wonderful view. There's a glacier lake with many seracs in the background. Seracs are large pieces of blue glacial ice that stick up in the air. The pieces are made when the glacier moves. Colby explains that an area with many seracs is called an "ice fall". He also adds that they can make the area (11)_____. This is because the seracs are very big and may fall. He adds that a good climber wouldn't hike below an ice fall! The group enjoys climbing the glacier. It's hard work, but Colby and Caitlin make it look easy.

Woman Climber: Whoops—that was bad!

Next, one of the new climbers tries.

Woman Climber: Here I come!

It's a very special feeling as they get to the top!

Woman Climber: Whoah! Thank God for the (12) _____!

Alaska is home to 100,000 glaciers. These people can say they have successfully climbed one—Matanuska. Now, just 99,999 more glaciers to climb.

Woman Climber: Ok, I'm up. I made it. Whoo!

Answers:

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