

Trips

We asked our Facebook fans: What do you bring on a winter hut trip?

- Hot chocolate with marshmallows
- Down booties
- Ear plugs
- Glowsticks



NIGHT LIGHTS: GET AURORA BOREALIS FORECASTS AT [BIT.LY/ABFORECAST](http://bit.ly/abforecast) BEFORE OVERNIGHTING AT THE CARIBOU BLUFF CABIN (MILE 33).



Life List: Northern Lights Ski Tour, Alaska

See the world's best sky show from your private backcountry cabin.

➔ Epic adventures come in two flavors: The kind you're happy to survive, and the kind you can't wait to repeat. This ski tour through the vast wilderness north of Fairbanks could easily fall into the former category—if not for the cozy huts and well-marked trails that make its plentiful attractions accessible. In fact, I've journeyed there twice for this 11-day, 92-mile loop a hair south of the Arctic Circle, in the White Mountains National Recreation Area (it's easy to create a shorter trip). The recreation area boasts a million acres of peaks, valleys lined with craggy cliffs, and wildlife that rule the terrain from here to Russia. One typical day, a momma and baby moose strolled down the trail ahead of me and I spotted wolf prints in the snow. Even as a newcomer to cross-country ski touring, I found the rolling terrain manageable as we circumnavigated 4,593-foot Cache Mountain, though I boot-packed occasional steep stretches. The trails are as good as groomed, thanks to occasional snow machine traffic (not enough to spoil the solitude). Good luck finding more affordable accommodations (\$25 per cabin per night), yet the network of 14 homely cottages is well-maintained and equipped, each with bunks, table, lantern, and stove; BYO propane. Simply knowing that their warmth awaited us each night made the skiing all the sweeter, and they cut my sled weight, too; I was able to bring my three-season bag. I planned my trips near the first day of spring (March 20 in 2013) for the best sun-to-snow ratio of the year—the tundra still mercifully frozen, yet each day longer than the last. The season also brought bluebird skies, high temps in the 30s, and lingering sunsets. But perhaps the best moments came after dark, as dazzling northern lights danced across the star-streaked sky. Call me an addict, but I'm already planning a third go-round. —Cameron Martindell

Do it Start at mile 28 on the Elliott Hwy, tour 7 miles to Lee's Cabin; 7 miles to Eleazar's; 19 miles to Caribou Bluff; rest day; 12 miles to Wolf Run; rest day; 9 miles to Windy Gap; rest day; 12 miles to Caribou Bluff; 12 miles to Eleazar's; 7 miles to Lee's or 14 miles to car.
Season March offers easiest travel. **Cabins** Reservations required; \$25/cabin/night **Contact** (907) 474-2251; bit.ly/BLMwhitemtns

See the Map View an interactive GPS track of the author's trip at backpacker.com/hikes/1082823.