

Aniakchak

ANIAKCHAK
NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE
ALASKA



Aniakchak encompasses some 235,000 hectares (580,000 acres) on the Alaska Peninsula about 16 kilometers (10 miles) east of Meshik-Port Heiden, and 640 kilometers (400 miles) southwest of Anchorage. The outstanding feature is the caldera, whose 9.5-kilometer (6-mile) average diameter makes it one of the world's largest. The caldera remained hidden from the outside world until 1922, when a government geologist noticed that the area's taller peaks formed a circle on the map he was mak-

ing. Even today few people have seen it. Fewer still have set foot here.

Inside the caldera you are confronted by a bizarre world. Walls on all sides, 600 meters (2,000 feet) high, isolate and enclose you. Cinder cones rise from the crater's floor amid the charred debris and strange formations of past volcanic activity. Ancient lava flows spread out from plugged vents in twisted streams of rock. In one corner of the caldera, fed by warm springs, a lake has

formed. Its outlet, the Aniakchak River, rushes through a spectacular gash in the caldera rim and flows 43 kilometers (27 miles) to the Pacific.

Geology, plant succession in a devastated area, and weather phenomena are significant features. The abundant wildlife also shows how new life comes to a devastated area. Whitewater enthusiasts can raft the river.

ACCESS

Reaching Aniakchak is no simple task. Reeve Aleutian Airways, Inc., has a flight between Anchorage and Port Heiden Airfield two or three days per week. From Port Heiden Airfield you could walk 16 kilometers (10 miles) to the monument and preserve, a difficult hike. The tundra meadow terrain is interspersed with thickets of willow, alder, and birch. Few people have tried this walk.

Wien Air Alaska has a daily flight from Anchorage to King Salmon, where you can charter an airplane to the monument and preserve. Seasonal ferry service from Kodiak on the Alaska Marine Highway serves lower Alaska Peninsula villages. Some villages have aircraft charter service. Access is expensive.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The nearest hotel accommoda-

tions are at King Salmon, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) away. There is primitive camping in the monument.

