MOUNT McKINLEY

NATIONAL PARK - ALASKA

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR

Harold L. Ickes, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Newton B. Drury, *Director*

CONTENTS

Historic Events

1902 A. H. Brooks and D. L. Raeburn, of the Geological Survey, United States Department of the Interior, made a survey of this mountain range and were the first white men to set foot upon the slopes of Mount McKinley.

1903 May. A party under leadership of Judge James Wickersham made the first attempt to climb Mount McKinley but was not successful.

1910 William Taylor and Pete Anderson made the first successful ascent of the north peak of Mount McKinley.

1913 First party under Archdeacon Hudson Stuck and Harry Karstens reached summit of the south peak of the mountain.

1917 Mount McKinley created a national park by act of Congress.

1932 The Lindley-Liek party climbed both the north and south peaks. They were the first expedition to accomplish this feat.

1934 First ascent made of both peaks of Mount Foraker by C. S. Houston, Dr. T. G. Brown, and G. C. Waterston.

SEASON
JUNE 10
TO
SEPTEMBER
10

Mount McKinley

NATIONAL PARK

ALASKA

A DALL (MOUNTAIN) SHEEP RAM.
Photo by Dixon.

MOUNT McKINLEY NATIONAL PARK, situated in south-central Alaska, was created by act of Congress approved February 26, 1917, and on January 30, 1922, was enlarged to 2,645 square miles. On March 19, 1932, Congress approved an extension on the north and east sides, enlarging it to its present area of 3,030 square miles.

The principal scenic feature of the park is mighty Mount McKinley, the highest peak on the North American Continent. This majestic mountain rears its snow-covered head high into the clouds, reaching an altitude of 20,300 feet above sea level, and rises 17,000 feet above timber line. On its north and west sides McKinley rises abruptly from a plateau only 2,500 to 3,000 feet high. For two- thirds of the way down from its summit it is enveloped in snow throughout the year. Denali, "home of the sun," was the name given to this impressive snow-clad mountain by the early Indians.

Near Mount McKinley are Mount Foraker, with an elevation of 17,000 feet; Mount Hunter, 14,960 feet; and Mount Russell, rising 11,500 feet above sea level.

ASCENTS OF MOUNT McKINLEY

Mount McKinley is crowned by two peaks. The south pinnacle is 20,300 feet in altitude, and the north peak is only 300 feet lower. The first attempts to conquer the mountain were made in 1903, one party being under the leadership of Judge James Wickersham and the other headed by Dr. Frederick A. Cook; but neither was successful. In 1906, Cook made a second attempt which he claimed was crowned by success. In 1910, however, four "sourdoughs" who were not satisfied with Cook's story, undertook the climb, and two of them, Taylor and Anderson, reached the north peak. In 1912, a party under Dr. Herschel Parker and Belmore Brown succeeded in getting within a few hundred feet of the summit of the south peak.

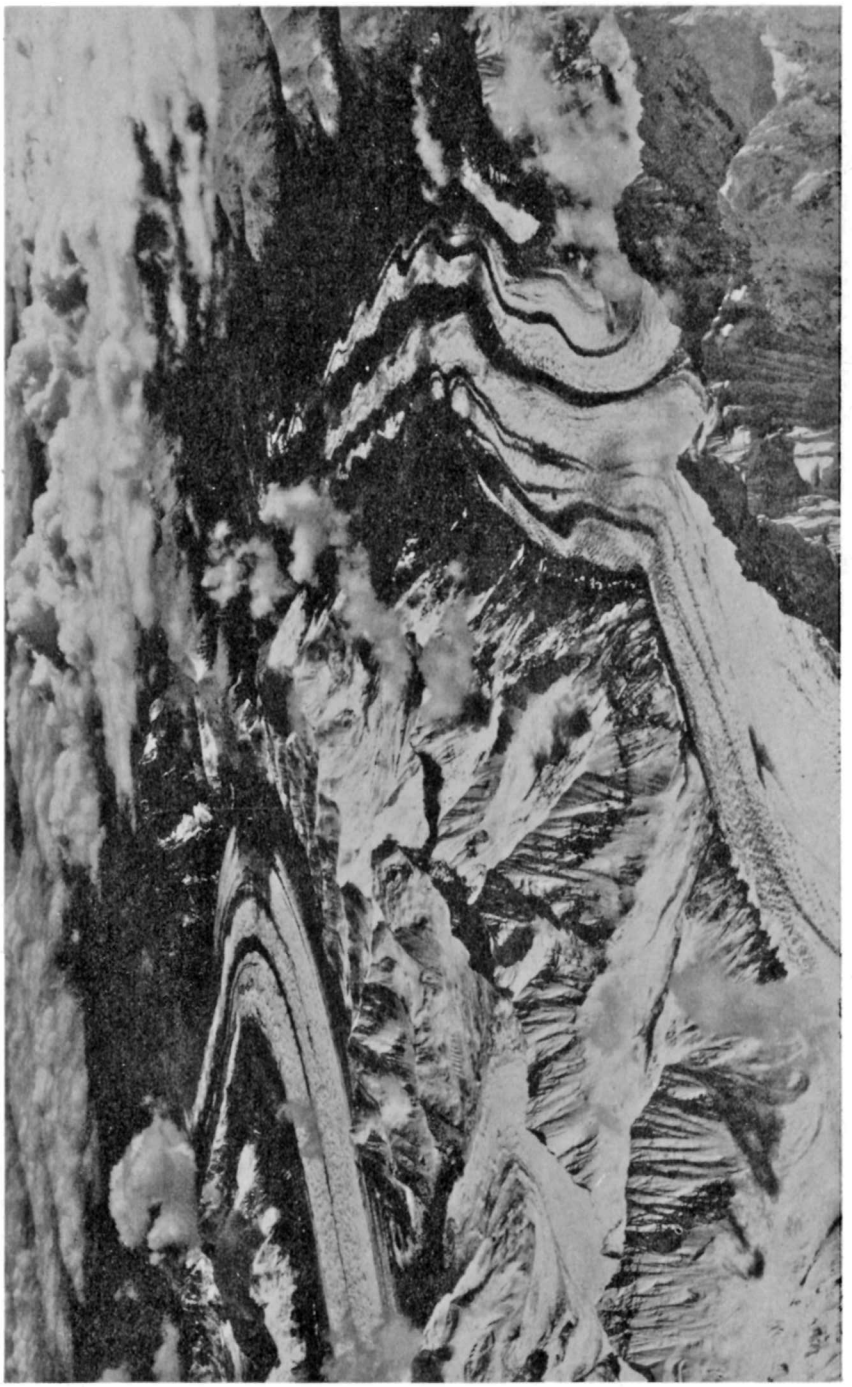


Photo by Bradford Washburn—Copyright, National Geographic Society.

GLACIERS FLOWING FROM ALASKA RANGE.

On June 7, 1913, Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, Harry Karstens (later superintendent of the park), and two companions reached the summit of the south peak. They were the first men ever to achieve this goal. Nearly 19 years later, on May 7, 1932, a party composed of Alfred D. Lindley, Minneapolis attorney; Harry J. Liek, former superintendent of McKinley Park; Erling Strom, ski expert from Lake Placid, N. Y.; and Grant Pearson, a park ranger, accomplished the same feat. On May 9 they also climbed the north peak and achieved the distinction of becoming the first expedition to ascend both peaks of the great mountain.

GLACIERS

All of the largest northward-flowing glaciers of the Alaska Range rise on the ice-covered slopes of Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker. Of these the largest are the Herron, having its source in the névé fields of Mount Foraker; the Peters, which encircles the northwest end of Mount McKinley; and the Muldrow, whose front is about 15 miles northeast of Mount McKinley and whose source is in the unsurveyed heart of the range. The fronts of all these glaciers for a distance of one-fourth to one-half mile are deeply buried in rock debris. Along the crest line there are many smaller glaciers, including some of the hanging type.

The greatest glaciers of the Alaska Range are on its southern slope, which is exposed to the moisture-laden winds of the Pacific. The largest of the Pacific slope glaciers, however, lie in the basin of the Yentna and Chulitna Rivers. These have their source high up in the loftiest parts of the range and extend south far beyond the boundaries of the park.

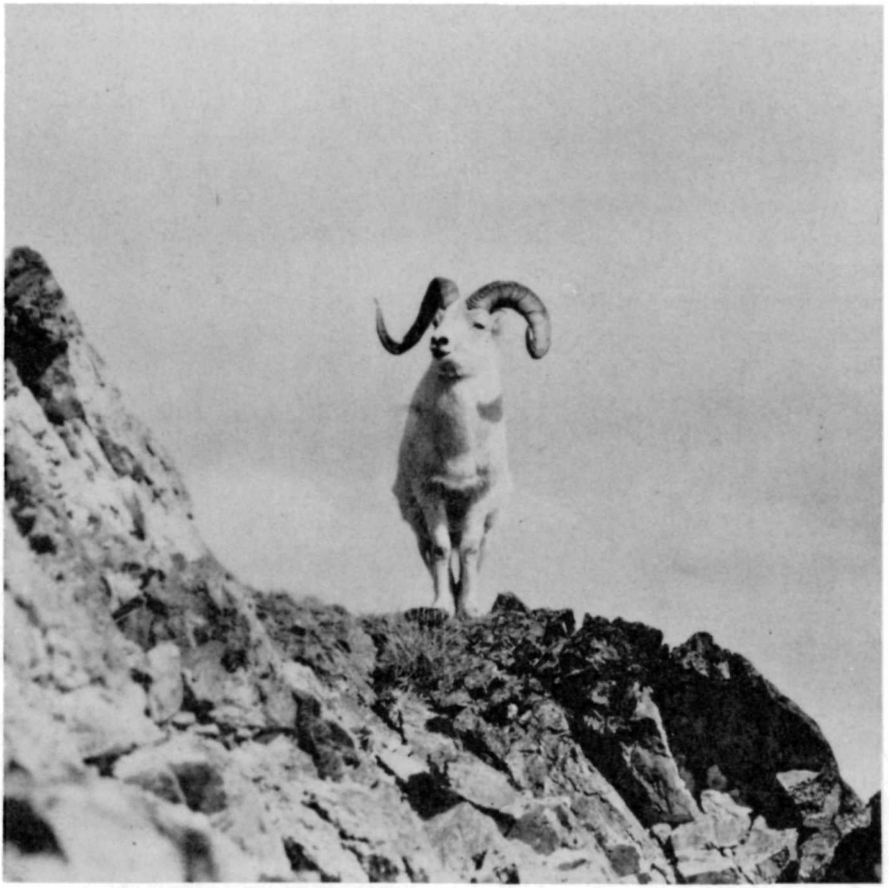
The glaciers all appear to be retreating rapidly, but so far little direct proof has been obtained of the rate of recession. According to a rough estimate of geologists studying the area, the average annual recession of the Muldrow Glacier may be about one-tenth of a mile.

On the inland front but little morainic material is left along the old tracks of the glaciers, and it appears that most of the frontal debris is removed by the streams as fast as it is laid down. Such a process would be accelerated in this northern latitude by the freshets which accompany the spring breakup. The glaciers as a rule are not badly crevassed and many of them afford, beyond the frontal lobes, excellent routes of travel.

Most of the valleys and lowlands of the region were, during the Pleistocene period, filled with glacial ice. This ice also overrode some of the lower foothills, while in the high regions were the extensive névé fields which fed the ice streams.

MAMMALS AND BIRDS

As a park attraction, the animal life of Mount McKinley National Park is surpassed only by Denali itself. Up to the present time, 112 kinds of birds and 35 kinds of mammals have been definitely identified within park boundaries. About 80 out of the total number of birds recorded are known to nest within the park. Nearly all of these



A DALL SHEEP LOOKS CURIOUSLY AT THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

breeding species may be found during the summer along the regular routes of travel.

Because of limited space, only a few outstanding species are listed here. Some of these, such as the willow ptarmigan and the caribou, are not found in any other national park; while the eggs of the surfbird and the wandering tattler have been found in Mount McKinley National Park and nowhere else in the entire world.

Caribou. — Though many thousand caribou graze within McKinley Park, their roving disposition makes their whereabouts at any given time uncertain, and this feature imparts real zest to the quest of those who would seek them out. They travel singly, in pairs, or in small bands, while a herd of hundreds may be in one valley on a certain day and have vanished the next. Then, too, the search may lead anywhere from the low-lying barrens to the high steep ridges of the Alaska and Secondary Ranges.

Related to these North American caribou are the domesticated reindeer of "Santa Claus" fame, which have been introduced elsewhere into Alaska and have increased enormously. They are merely an Old World race which is smaller and darker than the caribou, with much shorter legs. These two are the only members of the deer family in which both sexes have antlers. Large brow tines, or "shovels," extend well forward over the nose, adding to the grotesque appearance of the huge antlers. Fair-sized caribou bulls stand about 4 feet at the shoulders and weigh over 350 pounds. In September when their coats are at their best, the body appears brown, with a conspicuous white neck and long white beard, the white extending back over the point of the shoulder and continuing as a band along the sides. The cows are colored much like the bulls, except that the pelage often appears paler throughout. The neck is gray rather than white, and the lateral stripe is not prominent.

Almost everywhere in the park the presence of caribou is indicated by the well-defined trails through the tundra. In some localities there are battered willows which the animals have used for rubbing the velvet off their antlers. Caribou also visit the licks, where their large, rounded, cowlike tracks give plain evidence of their visitations.

Alaska Moose.—The Alaska moose is the largest animal found in Mount McKinley National Park. It is larger than a horse, large males weighing as much as 1,700 pounds. It has the distinction of being the largest member of the deer family. In addition to this, the moose reaches its maximum size in Alaska. The males are distinguished by bearing broadly palmated antlers, which grow to tremendous size, some having a spread of over 63 inches. Both sexes carry a "bell' or "dewlap" on the throat; this peculiar appendage is merely a loose, pendant fold of skin, which hangs down several inches at the middle of the throat. The moose is an ungainly creature, with a muscular, overhanging muzzle, which, together with the high shoulders (which may have a height as great as 7 feet 8 inches from the ground) and the sloping hind quarters, gives the animal a rather grotesque appearance.

In color the Alaska moose ranges from dark drown to almost black, becoming lighter on the belly and under parts. At a distance, the moose appears to be a jet black animal. The young moose when first born are reddish brown in color, without spots. Twin offspring appear to be as common as single births.

During the warm summer months the cow moose with their calves are most likely to be encountered along the willow thickets and margins of spruce timber. During the wintertime moose are found in the heavier-timbered areas along the lower streams in the park.

Alaska Mountain Sheep. — The white Alaska mountain (called Dall) sheep are among the handsomest animals of the Mount McKinley region and the most fascinating to pursue and observe. Perhaps no other locality presents such abundant opportunity for their study in large numbers at close

RED FOX FORAGING IN THE SNOW.

range. Two important distinguishing characteristics of this species are the white color and slender, widely curved horns. In contrast, the bighorn sheep of the United States have a sandy-brown color, and the horns are heavier and more closely curled. A good-size ram of the Alaska sheep will stand about 39 inches at the shoulders and weigh approximately 200 pounds.

The single young is born during early May in sheltered nooks under protecting cliffs. Rarely twins occur. Though soon able to follow their mothers about, the lambs spend the first few weeks of their lives close to the rocks for protection against their enemies. By June they dare to venture out on the grassy slopes where they may be seen scampering about in little bands of 4 to 10 under the watchful eye of some old ewe. Playing follow-the-leader over the rocks and steep places, they gain practice in the agility and sure-footedness so necessary to their existence. A lamb can easily negotiate a vertical jump of 6 feet.

The best places to see large bands of sheep during the tourist season are on the slopes of Igloo Creek and the East Fork and Toklat Rivers.

Toklat Grizzly Bear.—To watch a Toklat grizzly bear in his native habitat in Mount McKinley National Park is to enjoy one of the rarest treats which the park affords. The most conspicuous evidence of the presence of grizzly bears is to be found in the numerous small, craterlike holes which dot the ridges along the headwaters of the

Savage, the Sanctuary, and the Toklat Rivers. These miniature craters are merely holes left where grizzly bears have dug out ground squirrels.

Other animals commonly seen are the red fox, hoary marmot, parka squirrel, and porcupine. Wolverine, lynx, wolf, coyote, beaver, marten, mink, snowshoe hare, and Alaska cony are also in the park.

Short-Billed Gull.—Visitors to the McKinley district frequently express surprise at the number of "sea gulls" that breed there over 300 miles inland, far removed from the salt water of the seacoast. The common gull of the McKinley region is the short-billed, although a few of the larger herring gulls are also present. The latter species may easily be recognized by its great size. The short-billed gull is of medium size, having a length, from tip of tail to end of bill, of 17 or 18 inches. These birds are pure white below, while the mantle is pearl gray. The bill is clear yellow, without any decided spot or ring. The feet are olive green.

Ptarmigan.—There are in Mount McKinley National Park three species of ptarmigan which belong to the grouse family. The more common form, the willow ptarmigan, is generally to be found in the willow bottoms and is noteworthy because it occurs in no other national park. The willow ptarmigan has a variety of calls, and the cock has a characteristic "crowing" which often awakens the visitor at midnight or in the early morning hours. The rock ptarmigan, a little smaller than the willow ptarmigan, is found from the more open tundra bordering the rivers to the top of the sheep hills. It has a long guttural call. The third and smallest species, the white-tailed ptarmigan, in

THE ELUSIVE SURFBIRD.

the summer lives principally on the mountain tops near the heads of the valleys. This species has a call like a scream. All three of these Arctic grouse are white in winter and brown in summer.

Surfbird.—The surfbird is one of the most elusive avian citizens of Mount McKinley National Park. For nearly 150 years, since the species was first given its scientific name, its nest and eggs remained unknown. The surfbird winters in South America as far south as the Strait of Magellan. It breeds among the mountain tops of central Alaska. Twice each year, in migration, it traverses the Pacific coast of North and South America.

Joseph Dixon, formerly of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California, and now associated with the National Park Service as field naturalist, has been a member of five expeditions to Alaska. During each of these trips the unknown nest and eggs of the surfbird were diligently sought, but continued search produced only negative results. On May 28, 1926, the first and only nest of this rare bird known to science was discovered and recorded by Mr. Dixon and George Wright (The Condor, vol. XXIX, pp. 3-16, January 1927). The natives of Alaska had a legend that the surfbird lays its eggs "on the bare mountains in the interior." For those who are keenly interested in bird life, to catch a glimpse of the elusive surfbird, or, better yet, to find its nest, will mark the achievement of the rarest ornithological experience that the park has to offer.

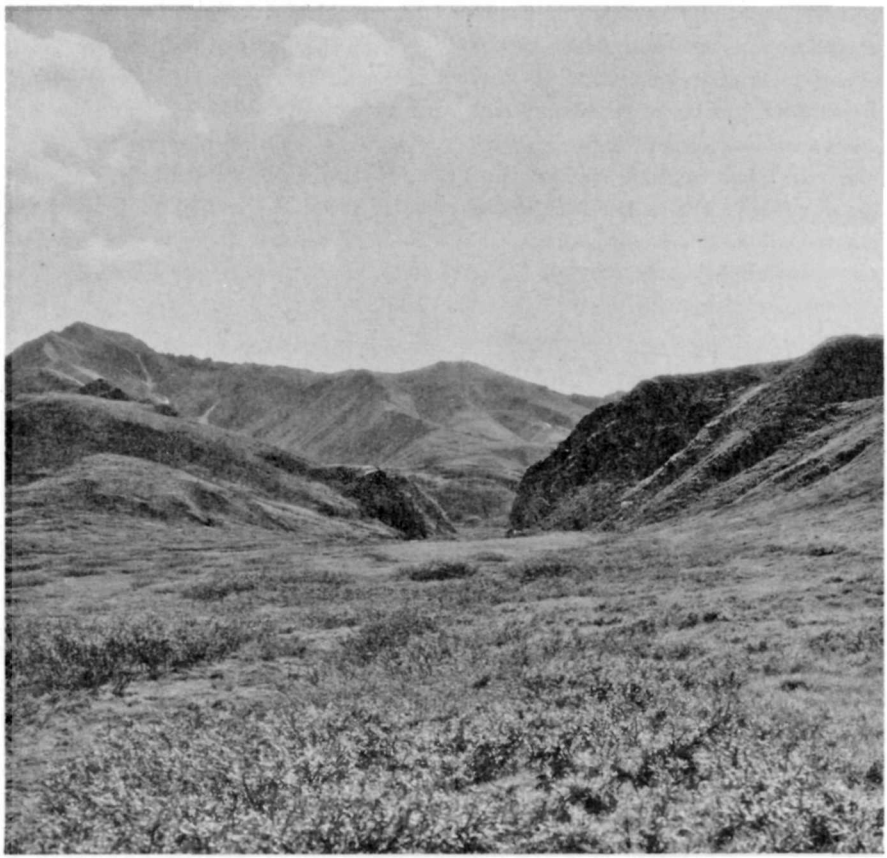
Wandering Tattler.—Only two nests of this shorebird have been found and both of these were discovered in Mount McKinley National Park by Oleus and Adolph Murie. Both nests were found on gravel bars. The birds are about the size of a killdeer plover, and are dark slate-colored, blending well with the gravel bars on which they are generally found.

TREES AND PLANTS

The white spruce, with its somber foliage and clusters of tawny cones, is the commonest evergreen tree in the park.

The graceful white birch is found in the lower valleys. The cottonwoods and the quaking aspen are near the streams. The willows are abundant, ranging from small trees in favorable localities through the shrublike forms, until they dwindle to matlike growths on the mountain slopes. To escape the rigors of the climate, these latter hide their tortuous woody stems underground, thrusting only the catkins of their flowers and a few conspicuously net-veined leaves to the surface during the brief summer. The erect dark-red catkins of dwarf willow are common near Savage River.

Shrubs.—The thickets which clothe the valleys and the lower slopes of the mountains are composed of many varieties of shrubs, principally the dwarf birch, or "Buckbrush," a dull green in summer but flaming scarlet and orange at the touch of frost. The shrubby cinquefoil shows bright-yellow buttercuplike flowers. The blueberry yields berries that are an important source



POLYCHROME PASS.

of food to Indian and white man alike. The woolly Labrador-tea has rusty underleaf surfaces and clusters of snow-white flowers, as has the spirea. The bearberry grows in dense mats and shows glandular dotted leaves and crimson berries. The only prickly shrub in the park is the lovely wild rose. This is especially abundant near the park entrance.

Herbaceous Plants. — Scattered through the ground cover are the delicately tinted pink and blue heads of valerian and the drooping bells, ranging in color from deepest pink to palest blue, of the bluebells, also known as chiming bells or languid ladies. As the summer advances the large-flowered blue larkspur and the monkshood thrust their showy blossoms above the thicket growth.

In the shade of the spruces, the broad white bracts of the low bunchberry or dogwood glimmer in the early part of the season, while in the fall they show bunches of bright red berries. The delicate pink bells of the twin flower cover the old mossy logs,

and the crowberry, with its tiny awl-shaped needles and shiny black berries, twines over the moss and lichens. Diminutive pyrolas in white and pink space their waxy bells along their stems. Near the park entrance and at most lower altitudes the fireweed covers all otherwise unoccupied space with its sheet of bright pink flowers. Only occasionally does one find the tall fumitory with its finely divided leaves and lyre-shaped and yellow-tipped pink blossoms.

In the sandy river bed and along the roadside the large-flowered water willow herb flames bright cerise, and the lemon-yellow arctic poppy grows in scattered clumps. A number of leguminous plants populate the sandy bars, the purple vetch being the most conspicuous.

Farther up the valley a knotweed with large rose-pink spikes is abundant and contrasts sharply with the fragrant deep-blue forget-me-not, the Territorial flower.

Beds of the beautiful little shooting stars occur in damp spaces, and on the drier slopes there grow great carpets of the dryas, with white flowers somewhat resembling strawberry blossoms. There is also a yellow variety. When the petals fall they are succeeded by a tuft of silvery seed plumes and are often found covering acres of the sandy gravel bars as well as the mountain slopes. The foliage is the favorite food of the mountain sheep during the summer.

CLIMATE

The climate of Mount McKinley National Park differs on the two sides of the Alaska Range. On the inland side of the mountains there are short, comparatively warm summers and long, cold winters, with low precipitation. The area draining into the Pacific enjoys a more equable climate, the summers being longer and cooler and the winters warmer than in the interior, with much greater precipitation.

The average snowfall in winter varies from 30 to 45 inches during the whole of the season, while in the summer the total precipitation never amounts to more than 15 inches. Temperatures range from 60° to 80° in the summer, and in the winter, although at times the thermometer reaches 45° and 50° below zero, it usually averages 5° to 10° below.

During the summer months the sun shines more than 18 hours a day. On June 21, the longest day in the year, the sun is visible at midnight from the top of mountains approximately 4,000 feet high, and photographs may be taken at that time. In Fairbanks this occasion is usually celebrated by a midnight sun festival, with a baseball game as one of the athletic events.

Winter in this park has unique charm, which appeals to the hardy adventurer. It is first announced by the flaming colors made by the frost-touched alder, cottonwood, willow, and quaking aspen. In contrast to these are the great masses of dark green spruce and the sphagnum mosses above timber line. Access to practically all portions of the park can be had by dog team during the long arctic winter, when an indescribable stillness hovers over everything.

FISHING

The grayling, a very hardy species, is found in park waters. They are sporty fish and weigh 1 to 2 pounds. There are also trout in some of the park streams which are classified locally as Dolly Varden. Their weight is in the neighborhood of 1 pound. At Wonder Lake, about 35 miles due north of Mount McKinley, there are Mackinaw trout.

ROADS AND TRAILS

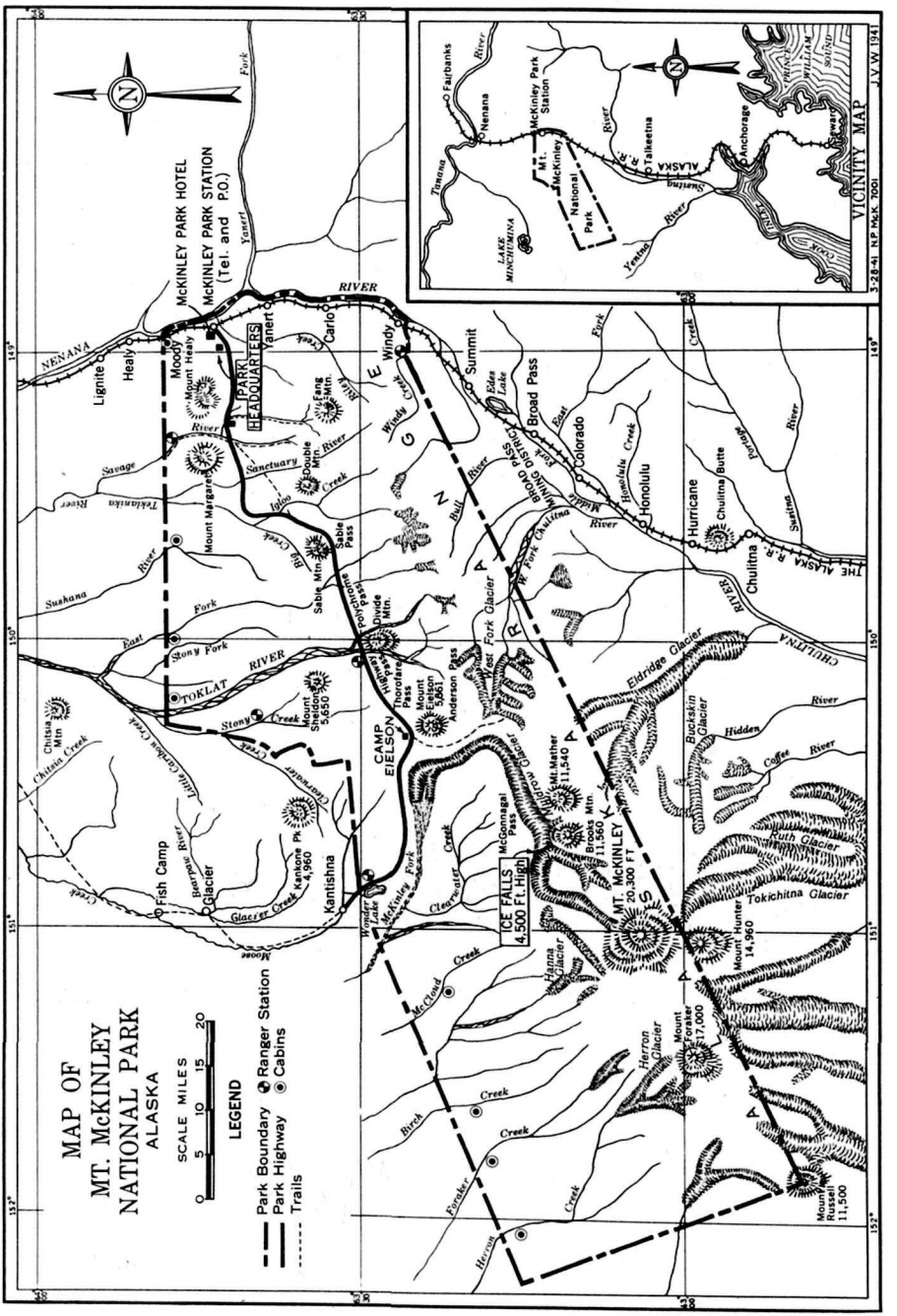
There are now 89 miles of excellent gravel highway within the park. This road begins at McKinley Park Station on the Alaska Railroad at an elevation of 1,732 feet above sea level.

The road continues through the park, past Sanctuary River, Igloo Creek, Sable Pass, East Fork River, Polychrome Pass, Toklat River, Highway Pass, Stony Creek, Stony Hill, Thorofare Pass, Camp Eielson at Mile 66, and Wonder Lake, passing out of the park at Moose Creek and ending at Eureka, where there are extensive placer and quartz gold mining operations. From many points along the road, visitors have excellent views of Mount McKinley and other peaks, as well as of some of the smaller active glaciers; and animals are always seen.

Yanert Lakes Trail leads from McKinley Park Hotel to three lakes nestling in a crag-fringed valley. The 5-mile trail reveals glorious panoramas; also breathtaking glimpses of Riley Creek far below. Grayling fishing is good in the lakes. Return trip may be varied by going down Riley Creek.

A fine foot trail, a mile and a half long, leads from McKinley Park Hotel to Horseshoe Lake which is close to the Nenana River. Here the activity of a beaver colony can be observed and picnicking and bathing enjoyed.

PATROLLING THE PARK BY DOG TEAM.



MAP OF MOUNT MCKINLEY NATIONAL PARK.

Sackman Photo.

MOUNT McKINLEY AS SEEN FROM WONDER LAKE.

Permission to build camp fires must be obtained from the superintendent.

ADMINISTRATION

Mount McKinley National Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. The officer in immediate charge is the superintendent. All complaints and suggestions regarding service in the park should be addressed to him at McKinley Park, Alaska.

Park headquarters is located at Mile 2 on the highway.

No public facilities will be available within the park during the emergency; however, plans for local visitation will be worked out jointly by the General Manager of the Alaska Railroad, the Superintendent of Mount McKinley National Park, and local Army officers.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

[Briefed]

Let no one say, and say it to your shame,
That all was beauty here until you came.

The Park Regulations are designed for the protection of the natural beauties and scenery as well as for the comfort and convenience of visitors. Complete regulations may be examined at the office of the superintendent of the park. The following synopsis is for the general guidance of visitors, who are requested to assist in the administration of the park by observing the rules.

The destruction, defacement, or disturbance of buildings, signs, equipment, or other property, or of trees, flowers, vegetation, or other natural conditions and curiosities is prohibited.

Camping with tents is permitted. When in the vicinity of designated camp sites these sites must be used. Only dead and down timber should be used for fuel. All refuse should be burned or buried.

Fires shall be lighted only when necessary, and when no longer needed shall be completely extinguished. They shall not be built in duff or a location where a conflagration may result. No lighted cigar, cigarette, or other burning material shall be dropped in any grass, twigs, leaves, or tree mold.

All hunting, killing, wounding, frightening, capturing, or attempting to kill, wound, frighten, or capture any wild bird or animal is prohibited. Firearms are prohibited in the park except with the permission of the superintendent.

Fishing in any manner other than with hook and line is prohibited. Fishing in particular waters may be suspended by special regulations.

Cameras may be freely used in the park for general scenic picture purposes.

Gambling in any form or the operation of gambling devices, whether for merchandise or otherwise, is prohibited.

Private notices or advertisements shall not be posted or displayed in the park, excepting such as the superintendent deems necessary for the convenience and guidance of the public.

Dogs and cats are prohibited on Government land unless such animals are on leash, crated, or otherwise under physical restrictive control at all times; however, the superintendent may designate areas to which dogs and cats may not be admitted.

Mountain climbing shall be undertaken only with permission of the superintendent.

The penalty for violation of the rules and regulations is a fine of not more than $500, or imprisonment not exceeding 6 months, or both, together with all costs of the proceedings.

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