

# Kobuk Valley

KOBUK VALLEY  
NATIONAL PARK  
ALASKA

Kobuk Valley National Park occupies a broad valley along the central Kobuk River in northwestern Alaska, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of the Arctic Circle. The park is approximately 560 kilometers (350 miles) west-northwest of Fairbanks and 120 kilometers (75 miles) east of Kotzebue, the regional center. The villages of Kiana and Ambler lie on its western and eastern sides, respectively. The

park's 692,000 hectares (1.71 million acres) sit in a semi-enclosed bowl, ringed on the north by the Baird Mountains and lined on the south by the Waring Mountains. The boreal forest reaches its northern limit here, and an open woodland of small trees in a mat of thick tundra results.

The Great Kobuk Sand Dunes and the Little Kobuk Sand Dunes extend over some 40 square ki-

lometers (25 square miles) south of the Kobuk River. Relict plants, remnants of the flora that existed during the Pleistocene, still survive in the Kobuk Valley, where the climate approximates Ice Age conditions. The Salmon River flows clear and swift out of the Baird Mountains to the Kobuk River. Inland Eskimos maintain subsistence patterns that have existed for millenia.



## WHAT TO DO AND SEE

There are no National Park Service facilities, trails, or services. People who venture to this park will initially be interested in backpacking in the Baird and Waring Mountains and along their foothills and valleys. Terrain is good for hiking, although occasional stands of willows are encountered. The Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, naked, active, and reaching a height of 30 meters (100 feet), can be reached by an easy hike from the river. The Kobuk River flows placidly through the park, providing interesting motorized and non-motorized river trip opportunities. The Salmon River is fine for canoeing and kayaking. Wildlife includes grizzly bear, black bear, caribou, moose, wolves, and lynx. Gray-

ling, arctic char, sheefish, and several species of salmon inhabit park waters.

## ACCESS

Northwestern Alaska cannot be reached by road. Daily commercial flights serve Kotzebue from both Anchorage and Fairbanks. There are connecting flights to Kiana and Ambler. From Kotzebue you can charter light aircraft to the park. Aircraft can also be chartered from Ambler and Kiana, but make arrangements in advance. Aircraft land on primitive airstrips and gravel bars or, if float-equipped, on the river. Boats can sometimes be chartered in Kiana and Ambler. Backpackers can hike in from Ambler or Kiana.

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

There are no campgrounds in the park. Camping is permitted throughout most of the park. However, it is not permitted in sensitive archeological zones; where it would interrupt subsistence activities; or on private inholdings along the Kobuk River without the owner's consent. Kotzebue has a hotel. Some lodgings are found in Kiana. There are no commercial lodgings in Ambler. Kotzebue has small stores and most basic goods can be bought there. Kiana and Ambler also have small stores. Fairbanks and Anchorage offer all the usual merchandise. Limited guiding and outfitting are available in the region, and air taxi operators and boat owners offer some services.

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## WEATHER AND INSECTS

Winter is long and cold; summer is warm and brief. Temperatures in June, July, and August range from 17°C to 32°C (40°F to 90°F), with daytime highs often in the upper 20s C (80s F). June and July are usually clearest; rain increases in August and September. Winter temperatures can drop to -50°C (-60°F), and -29°C (-20°F) is common. Mosquitos appear in late June, are at their worst in July, and disappear in August. They are most dense in wet lowlands and most sparse in the dry highlands. Whitesocks and gnats hatch in August and continue into September.

## CLOTHING, FOOD AND GEAR

It is essential that clothing and camping gear be of good quality. Tents should be able to withstand strong winds and should have rain flies. Rain gear is often needed. Always carry extra food because scheduled air and boat pickups can be delayed by bad weather. Be familiar with your gear before your trip. You should be competent in hiking, camping, boating, first aid, and survival skills. Winter travel is not advised.

## PRECAUTIONS AND COURTESIES

The park is vast, and a number of dangers may confront you here. For your safety leave a

copy of your planned itinerary with the Visitor Information Center in Kotzebue. Local residents carry on their subsistence way of life within the national park. Their camps, fishnets, and other equipment are critical to their well-being. Please observe the usual courtesies respecting their property and privacy. Bear, moose, and other wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous. They are always dangerous when protecting themselves, their young, and their territories. Ask a ranger about the proper precautions to take when traveling in the backcountry.

Get specific information about your planned trip from:

Superintendent  
National Park Service  
Northwest Alaska Areas  
P.O. Box 287  
Kotzebue, Alaska 99752  
Phone: (907) 442-3890

