

# Noatak

NOATAK  
NATIONAL PRESERVE  
ALASKA

The clear-running, medium-sized Noatak River flows within a broad and gently sloping valley stretching more than 240 kilometers (150 miles) in an east-west direction. Here the boreal forest ends, merging into treeless tundra on the valley's southern edge. Caribou cross this broad expanse migrating to and from their calving grounds. The

Noatak River basin, one of the world's finest remaining vast wilderness areas, has been named an International Biosphere Reserve.

The Noatak River has the largest undisturbed mountain-ringed watershed in North America. The preserve encompasses 2.6 million hectares (6.5 million acres) of this basin lying

north of the Arctic Circle in northwestern Alaska. It is some 560 kilometers (350 miles) northwest of Fairbanks and 97 kilometers (60 miles), at its closest point, north of Kotzebue, the regional center. The Native village of Noatak is several kilometers downriver from the preserve's southwestern boundary.



## WHAT TO DO AND SEE

There are no National Park Service facilities, trails, or services. People will initially go to the preserve to float the Noatak River and backpack the encompassing mountain foothills. Gentle and slow moving except in its distant headwaters, the Noatak offers fine canoeing and kayaking, a natural highway through a remarkable landscape. Wildlife includes caribou, wolves, black and grizzly bear, and lynx. The waters of the Noatak basin hold arctic char, whitefish, grayling, and several species of salmon.

## ACCESS

Northwestern Alaska cannot be reached by road. Daily commercial flights serve Kotzebue from both Anchorage and Fair-

banks. From Kotzebue, you can charter light aircraft or boats. Average flight time to drop off passengers in the central Noatak basin (and return empty to Kotzebue) is 2.5 hours. Air charters to the upper Noatak are offered from Bettles. Aircraft land on very primitive airstrips and gravel bars, or if float-equipped, on certain river stretches. Scheduled flights also operate between Kotzebue and Noatak. Summer weather is variable and can curtail travel to and from the preserve.

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

There are no accommodations or campgrounds within the preserve. Camping is permitted throughout the preserve. However, there are numerous pri-

vate inholdings along the lower Noatak River in the preserve. These properties should be respected. Kotzebue has a hotel, and small stores which carry most basic goods. Fairbanks and Anchorage offer all the usual merchandise. A few guides and outfitters work out of Kotzebue, and outfitters at Bettles will fly canoes and passengers to the upper Noatak River.

## WEATHER AND INSECTS

Long, cold winters and short, mild summers are the rule. Temperatures during June, July, and August range from 40°C (40°F) to 29°C (85°F), with mid-summer temperatures averaging 15-23°C (the 60s and 70s F). But sub-freezing temperatures can occur on summer nights. June is generally the clearest summer month; cloudiness increases in July and August. Summer fog in the coastal area around Kotzebue can create transportation problems. Winter temperatures sometimes drop to -45°C (-50°

F) and temperatures of -28°C (-20°F) occur regularly. Strong winds produce a severe wind-chill factor. Mosquitos appear in late June, are at their worst in July, and disappear in August. They are most dense in the wet lowlands and least dense in the drier highlands. Whitesocks hatch in August and are present until the first heavy frosts in September. Good insect repellent and a head net are highly recommended.

## CLOTHING, FOOD, AND GEAR

It is essential that clothing and camping gear be of good quality. Rain gear is often needed. Tents should be able to withstand strong winds and should have rain flies. Always carry extra food because adverse weather can delay your scheduled air or boat pickup. 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 preserve is vast, and a number of dangers may confront you here. The Noatak basin is one of Alaska's least traveled areas. A passing aircraft may not even be seen for days. You are particularly "on your own"

here. For 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 preserve. Their camps, fish-

nets, and other equipment are critical to their well-being. Please observe the usual courtesies respecting their property and privacy. Ask a ranger about the proper precautions to take to avoid dangerous encounters with bear, moose, and other wild animals.

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

