



## Iyat Serpentine Hot Springs

Inupiat call this place Iyat, meaning “cooking pot” or “a site for cooking.” During the Gold Rush era of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was called Arctic Hot Springs, but today most people know this place as Serpentine Hot Springs. Located in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, the hot springs offer opportunities for healing, recreation, and simple solitude.

### A Place of Tradition and Healing

Archaeological evidence suggests the hot springs were discovered soon after the arrival of the first people to northwest Alaska 12,000 years ago. Since the time of the earliest visitors, a powerful energy has been recognized over Hot Springs Valley.

The surrounding granite spires, or “tors,” once had individual names and Inupiaq traditions say that the valley is home to powerful spirits. These spirits played important roles in the selection, training,

and performance of shamans who cured and healed the sick through the control of supernatural forces.

Modern traditional uses include healing ceremonies, and soaking to relieve the pain of arthritis and other ailments. To the Inupiaq of the region, Serpentine Hot Springs still plays an important role in the gathering of tribal groups and individuals for rejuvenation and sharing of medical cures and subsistence practices.

### From Mining to Modern Day

It is thought that the first non-Native to see the hot springs was Charles McLennan, who arrived in May 1900 by dog team. He named the nearby creek “Serpentine,” staked mining claims, and raised crops for miners who were working claims along the nearby Kougarok River. Soon after, a small resort called Arctic Hot Springs developed and became popular with the miners, but was abandoned by 1910.

In the late 1930s, a landing strip was graded above Hot Springs Creek. A surplus military building was moved in 1953 from Nome to the springs and refurbished as a bunkhouse, which is still standing today. The original bathhouse was replaced by the people of Shishmaref in 1976, and in 2012 it was rebuilt, though the original tub remains intact.



Dog team

### Preserving our Past

Ancient artifacts give us a glimpse into the past, and have allowed us to piece together the history of Serpentine Hot Springs. Taking or disturbing artifacts from federal public

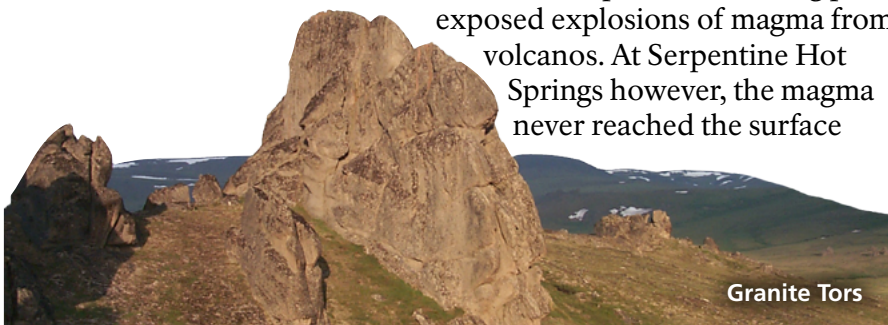
lands is a felony. Please enjoy the hot springs responsibly, leave any artifacts you may find, and report them to the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve office in Nome.

### An Ever Changing Landscape

The mountains south of Serpentine Hot Springs mark the northernmost reach of the continental divide. These peaks were created from plates colliding under the earth, causing an uplift of mountains on the land. In other areas of the preserve, shifting plates exposed explosions of magma from volcanos. At Serpentine Hot Springs however, the magma never reached the surface

because internal pressures were not strong enough to push through the overlying rock. Trapped in chambers underground, the magma cooled slowly, forming a coarse, soft granite that was later shaped by the forces of erosion.

As the rolling hills have been scoured away by wind, rain, and glaciers, the solid granite ridges have been revealed. Streams carry gravel and silt from higher elevations, carving valleys and exposing rock formations. As you hike, look for the geologic features that tell the dynamic story of Serpentine Hot Springs.



Granite Tors

Discover Life  
Surrounding  
Serpentine

There are hundreds of species of plants at Serpentine, including several hundred mosses, liverworts, lichens, and fungi. Summer is colorful with wildflowers such as Kamchatka rhododendron and fireweed, while autumn brings the spectacular hues of blueberries, cloudberry and a bright red ground cover of bearberry leaves. Vivid orange Xanthoria lichen can be found on tors where falcons roost almost year round.



Muskox

Diverse habitats create a variety of areas to view wildlife. In lowland brush and rock-strewn hillsides, look for small mammals like voles, shrews, and arctic ground squirrels. You might see herds of muskox or caribou grazing on open tundra, and brown bears sauntering down the hillsides. Wolverines, wolves, and foxes may hide in the dense willows. Along streams, look for freshwater fish and waterfowl, while songbirds can be sighted darting through the surrounding vegetation. Near tors and ridgelines, keep an eye out for birds of prey like rough-legged hawks and golden eagles soaring overhead and roosting in the rocks.

**Plant & Wildlife Precautions:**

- Though there are many edible berries and plants in the area, avoid Monk's Hood, a poisonous purple flower.
- Store food indoors or in bear resistant containers.
- Occasionally muskox can be found at the hot springs; keep your distance and do not approach, as they are known to charge if threatened.
- Make a lot of noise while hiking, especially in dense brush, to avoid startling large animals like moose or bears.

Explore the Beauty

People come to Serpentine Hot Springs to bathe, relax, hike, and observe wildlife. Hiking through the wet tundra of the valley can be a challenge, but travel along the ridges is relatively easy once you get there. Take drinking water, insect repellent, food, and your camera. Summer weather usually poses no direct threat, but it is good to be aware of potential conditions. Storms can build up quickly and low-lying clouds



Hikers at Serpentine

may obscure landmarks and make finding your way difficult. Waiting for you at the end of your hike, however, is a soak in hot, mineral-laden water from the springs. The bathhouse is built over a shallow redwood tub with views of the tors outside. Sunrise and sunset bathe the tors in golds and reds. Winter brings snow, ice, and frost. With each day comes new sights and experiences.

Prepare for Your Visit

The springs are in a wild, remote location and some dangers threaten the unprepared. Sudden storms can create a rugged and hostile environment. Winter temperatures may drop to -40° F. The spring water can be as high as 170° F, yet the stream seldom rises above 50° F. In winter, ice builds on the floors of the bathhouse and walkway, making footing treacherous. Being aware of these hazards helps to make for a safe and enjoyable trip.

to the springs share the responsibility of caring for it and removing accumulated trash. Each person leaves the area in a condition that contributes to the next person's enjoyment.

Overheating in the hot tub, especially while under the influence of alcohol, can bring on shock and heart failure. Medical attention can be days away.

Serpentine Hot Springs has a relaxed and sharing atmosphere. All who find their way

Many also leave extra supplies for those who might arrive in emergencies. You are encouraged to respect these traditions and your reward will be a truly memorable experience.

How to Get There

Serpentine Hot Springs lies over 30 miles from the end of the Kougarok Road. Summer visitors usually reach the springs by aircraft, although it is also accessible by hiking or other non-motorized methods of travel, such as biking.

website, [nps.gov/bela](https://nps.gov/bela). Some commercial use operators provide transportation services to Serpentine Hot Springs from Kotzebue.



A list of authorized commercial use operators, which provide aircraft transportation to Serpentine, can be acquired from the preserve

When there is adequate snow cover in winter, many people travel to the springs by snowmobile from Nome or local villages. The distance is over 100 miles from Nome, so travelers should be prepared to make a two day trip each way.

Contact us for more information! Park offices are located in the Sitnasuak Building at 214 Front Street in Nome, and the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center in Kotzebue. Visit our website at [nps.gov/bela](https://nps.gov/bela) or request more info by mail or phone:

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