

MOUNT MCKINLEY

At the northern edge of the continent, close to the Arctic Circle, stands the highest mountain in North America. A massive monument to the forces of nature, Mount McKinley reigns over an immense wilderness park where Dall sheep, caribou, grizzly, lynx, moose, and wolf dwell together in a balanced natural system.

"The High One" of the Alaska Range

Small wonder that the Indians of Alaska called Mount McKinley *Denali*—"The High One." No other mountain in the world, not even in the Himalayas, rises so dramatically above its own base and stands in such lofty isolation over its neighbors. McKinley's summit, crowned by twin peaks, soars to an altitude of 6,194 meters (20,320 feet), rising 4,800 meters (16,000 feet) above the surrounding landscape.

McKinley is by far the most impressive feature of the Alaska Range, a curved chain of mountains that stretches 930 kilometers (580 miles) across the lower third of Alaska. Though most of the peaks are less than half McKinley's height, the range acts as a natural land barrier between Anchorage on the coastal lowlands and Alaska's interior to the north. West of the park the range forms a drainage divide for rivers flowing west to the Bering Sea or south to the Gulf of Alaska.

McKinley's geology features a portion of the Denali Fault System, the largest crustal break in North America, that stretches for 2,100 kilometers (1,300 miles), across the full width of the State of Alaska. Associated with the Alaska Range, the fault passes through the park, separating the most ancient rocks in Alaska from those of much younger age. Events that took place between these extremes have created a beautiful land with contrasting wide, low plains, and dark, somber mountains, brightly colored peaks, and sheer granite domes.

Surprisingly, much of Alaska north of the park never was covered by the last continental ice sheet, which retreated 10,000-14,000 years ago. The park lies at the northern limit of this ice age glaciation, which covered most of the northern hemisphere. From the park road you can see numerous ice flows still radiating from the high peaks of the Alaska Range, where extreme temperatures keep them from melting. The snout of Muldrow Glacier, 56 kilometers (35 miles) long, lies within 1 kilometer (about 0.6 mile) of the park road. Silt-laden streams that flow from these glaciers form wide gravel bars that serve as natural pathways into the wilderness.

A Land of Little Sticks and Tiny Flowers

Only plants that have adapted to long, bitterly cold winters can survive in this subarctic wilderness. Large areas of the park are locked in deep beds of permafrost—ground that has been frozen for thousands of years. Only a thin layer of topsoil thaws each summer, enough to support life; and limited sun for most of the year stunts the growth of most plants and gives them little time for reproduction.

Taiga, "the land of little sticks," is a term of Russian origin that vividly describes the scant growth of trees near the Arctic Circle. Much of the *taiga* in the park lies in relatively narrow strips that follow the winding path of rivers through the park. Sometimes water-saturated surface soils slip downslope over the underlying permafrost and the *taiga* takes on the comic appearance of a "drunken forest."

White and black spruce are most common in the *taiga*, interspersed with quaking aspen, paper birch, and balsam poplar. Pure stands of deciduous trees occur along streamside gravel bars or where soils have been disturbed by fire and other causes. Frequently the woods are carpeted with a thick, springy mat of mosses and lichens. The more open areas are filled with shrubs such as dwarf birch, blueberry, and several species of willow.

Timberline, the limit of tree growth, occurs at about 823 meters (2,700 feet) in McKinley park, much lower in elevation than it does in warmer mountain regions to the south. On the wind-swept slopes above timberline, the *taiga* gives way to the *tundra*—a fascinating world of dwarfed shrubs and miniature wildflowers adapted to the short growing season and the thin crust of life-giving topsoil. The *tundra* habitat is of two main types, although there are many gradations between the two.

Moist tundra vegetation generally grows at the lower mountain elevations in flatter, poorly drained areas where glacial runoff, snowmelt, rain and ground thaw collect in many scattered ponds. *Moist tundra* varies in appearance and composition. In some areas tussocks of cottongrass and sedges grow. In other places, dwarfed shrubs, especially willows and birches, predominate.

Plants of the *dry tundra* live scattered among the barren rocks of the higher elevations, and upward to regions of perpetual ice. Here, the tiny plants of the highlands cling precariously to the ground, spreading outward like a mat, to soak up daylight. White flowered dryas, dwarf fireweed, moss campion, dwarf rhododendron, and forget-me-not—the Alaska State flower—all dot the rocky, well-drained landscape in a stunning display of delicate blossoms.

Wet (arctic) *tundra*, the type that grows on Alaska's north slope where an unbroken bed of permafrost prevents ground drainage, does not grow here, but a very similar type of vegetation can be found in the park.

Animals: The Challenge of Life in the North

McKinley's vast wilderness permits a spectacular array of wildlife to live together in a balanced, natural system. Caribou still follow ancient migration patterns as they move in herds of hundreds or more over open tundra and through mountain passes. Sure-footed Dall sheep survey the rugged country from high, rocky slopes, while moose browse below in willow thickets near the spruce forest. In fall or early winter, all three species enter the rut, and the mature males engage in energy-draining battles for the right to breed with adult females.

Wolves roam huge territories in search of weakened caribou, moose, or sheep that may provide their next meal. Ravens, magpies, and gray jays quickly clean up any scraps left over from a kill. The grizzly bear will feed on any carcass it comes across during its ambles along a river bar or over the open tundra, but its dietary staples are grass, roots, blueberries, peavine, and ground squirrels that it digs from their burrows.

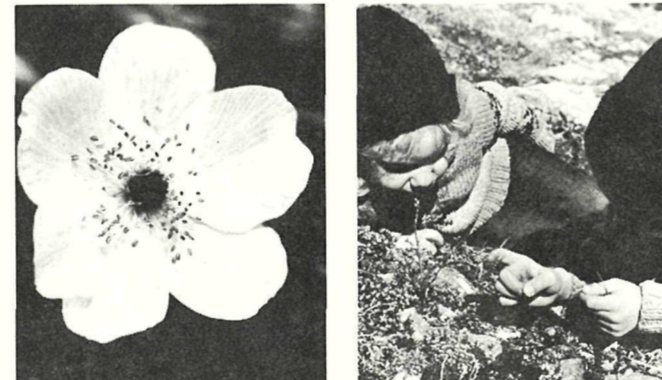
Beavers cut trees and build dams and lodges. The red squirrel caches spruce cones for the winter. The pika and singing vole carefully lay vegetation in loose piles in the underground nests to which they will retreat once the snow flies. Marsh hawks and short-eared

owls swoop low over the tundra in pursuit of voles, ground squirrels, and small birds. The golden eagle soars high overhead looking for small-mammal prey. The lynx hunts the snowshoe hare, its year-round major source of food.

Winter brings severe challenges to subarctic communities. Temperatures become frigid, plant growth ceases, and food is scarce. Grizzly bears meet the problem by fattening up in summer and sleeping most of the winter. Occasionally a grizzly stirs from its deep slumber; but the ground squirrel, a true hibernator, stays curled up with its body functions at a virtual standstill. Beavers and red squirrels subsist on cached foods. The weasel, ptarmigan, and snowshoe hare turn white and continue their struggle for survival above ground under extreme conditions.

Most birds escape the northern winter by flying south. The long-tailed jaeger winters in Japan, the golden plover in Hawaii, the wheatear and arctic warbler in Asia. The arctic tern may travel all the way to Antarctica.

The fragile web of McKinley's interdependent wildlife includes 37 mammal species and 130 bird species. Extreme cold prevents most cold-blooded land vertebrates from living in the park; but one amphibian, the wood frog, makes its home here.



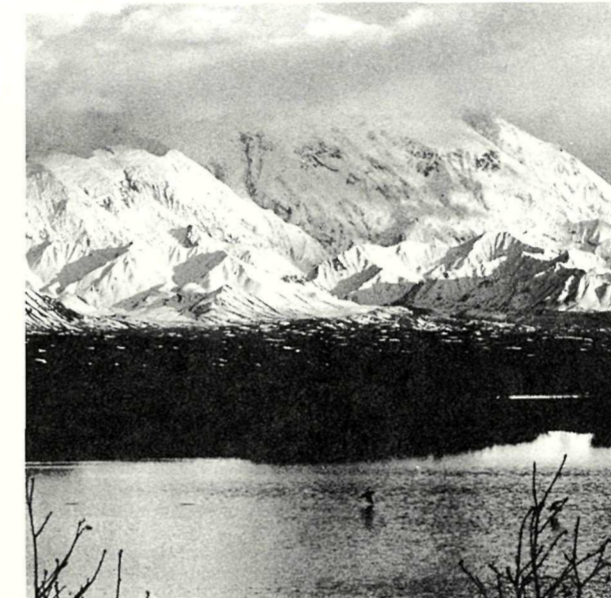
Snowy white is McKinley's abiding hue. It is there in bright patches of snow, where caribou find relief from pestering warble and nostril flies. In the winter, the ptarmigan dons a white coat to match the relentless snows. Then in summer, the bird disappears again into the tundra grasses, its camouflage reversed to brownish. Dall sheep, the only white wild sheep in the world, bound from ledge to ledge with incredible speed and agility. Among the many wildflowers that flourish in the tundra is the Narcissus-flowered Anemone, a small perennial with white-petaled blossoms at the ends of long hairy stems. Lying on the ground you can see a fascinating little world on a scale quite different from the massiveness of things as you hike toward white mountains far away.



Were the day clear I could see Mount McKinley from the window. As I picture in my mind its stupendous height, I compare it to our science. Many have assailed its flanks; some have proclaimed untruths about it; some have climbed by great effort well up the slopes; a very few, the best by natural selection, have reached the summit and there attained the broad vision denied those at lower altitudes. As for me, I am satisfied to have been able to traverse the great lowland to the base and to climb the foothills.

—Alfred Hulse Brooks

Clouds shroud McKinley, high above Wonder Lake.



Men and Mount McKinley

On January 24, 1897, with national attention focused on the Alaskan gold rush, a New York newspaper carried a startling story. The author, a gold prospector in Alaska, had traveled inland from Cook Inlet, there to discover a great mountain higher than any he had ever seen before. The experienced mountain man, William A. Dickey, was confident he had gazed upon the highest peak in North America.

... it compelled our unbounded admiration, Dickey wrote; ... never before had we seen anything to compare with this mountain.

Dickey's article would set others on a course northward, not for gold but to confirm the report of America's grand rival to Mount Everest. The mountain had long been known to Alaskan Indians by its name, Denali, "the great one." Soon most of the world would be calling it by the name Dickey gave it after he returned from the wilderness and heard of William McKinley's nomination to the presidency. It has been said, although some challenged the statement, that Dickey had been forced to travel with several "free silver men" and was reacting to their peevish arguments when he named the mountain after the 19th century's leading advocate of the gold standard.

A brief 20 years later, through the exploits of several energetic men, Mount McKinley would capture enough public admiration to be established as one of the nation's largest national parks. In 1902 Alfred H. Brooks and D. L. Raeburn of the U.S. Geological Survey studied the geology of the Alaska Range. Mount McKinley was placed on the map. And Brooks, for whom the Brooks Range in far north Alaska was named, became the first white man known to have set foot upon its slopes. The next year Dr. Frederick A. Cook contributed new geographic knowledge of the area by leading a daring trip completely around Mount McKinley.

Not long afterwards, Charles Sheldon, a noted conservationist, arrived on McKinley's slopes to study Dall sheep and other wildlife. Sheldon was a member of the Boone and Crockett Club of New York, which began as a hunting organization and later had broadened its efforts to include wildlife conservation. The wilderness wonders displayed within sight of the mountain convinced him that the area should be protected, and Sheldon became the prime figure in efforts to make it a national park.

In 1910 a party of four Alaskan sourdoughs pioneered the Muldrow Glacier route up the mountain, and two, William Taylor and Pete Anderson, made it to the top of the lower north peak at 5,934 meters (19,470 feet). The south peak, the true summit, was finally conquered in 1913 by Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, Walter Harper, Robert G. Tatum, and Harry Karstens, who later served as superintendent of the park. Both teams used sled dogs on the first phases of their climbs.

Meanwhile Sheldon's promotion of the park idea in the Congress had attracted valuable allies who wanted to promote travel to Alaska. But it was the provision calling for the protection of McKinley's wildlife that eventually cleared the way for passage of the bill. The act creating Mount McKinley National Park was signed by President Wilson in February 1917. At present the size of the park is 784,913 hectares (1,939,493 acres).

HELP PROTECT THE PARK AND YOURSELF

To preserve the park and to make your visit as safe as possible, please follow these regulations:

Hiking Permits. A back-country use permit for overnight camping must be obtained and then returned when the trip is complete. Permits are issued at the Visitor Orientation Center, Eielson Visitor Center, and at any ranger station during the summer season. In winter they must be obtained at park headquarters. A stove is recommended for backpacking; do not bury or leave behind any garbage or trash. Everything packed in must be packed out; litter in the back country destroys the wilderness values of the park for everyone.

Vehicles at Campsites. Only one vehicle is permitted at each registered campsite.

Safe Driving. The park road was built for scenic enjoyment and not for high speed. Maximum speed is 56 kilometers per hour (35 mph) except where lower limits are posted. Fast driving is dangerous to you and the wildlife you have come to see.

Other Vehicles and Boats. Trail bikes and motorcycles must not leave the park road. Snowmobiles are permitted only along the shoulders of Alaska Highway 3 through the park. Off-road use of snowmobiles is prohibited. Motor-powered boats are not permitted on any park waters.

Natural Features. The park was established to protect a natural system. Destroying, defacing, or collecting plants, rocks, and other features is prohibited. Feeding, capturing, molesting, or killing any animal is prohibited.

Firewood. Use only down and dead wood. A gasoline stove is recommended because firewood is scarce.

Wildlife Protection Zones. The Sable Pass wildlife

protection zone is prime grizzly bear habitat and offers excellent opportunities to observe and photograph bears and other wildlife from the road. The zone is strictly off limits for hiking. Visitors who get out of their vehicles to view the animals must remain on the road. Other protection zones are established temporarily as the need arises. Check at the Visitor Orientation Center or any ranger station to learn the locations, and please do not enter.

Limits on Fishing. No fishing licenses are required. Limits for each person per day: lake trout (2 fish), grayling and other fish (10 fish or 10 pounds and 1 fish).

Hunting Prohibited. Firearms must be surrendered or made inoperative upon entering the park. The hunting ban is strictly enforced.

Controlling Pets. Pets and wildlife don't mix. Pets must be leashed or under restraint at all times. They are not permitted with you on trails or in the back country.

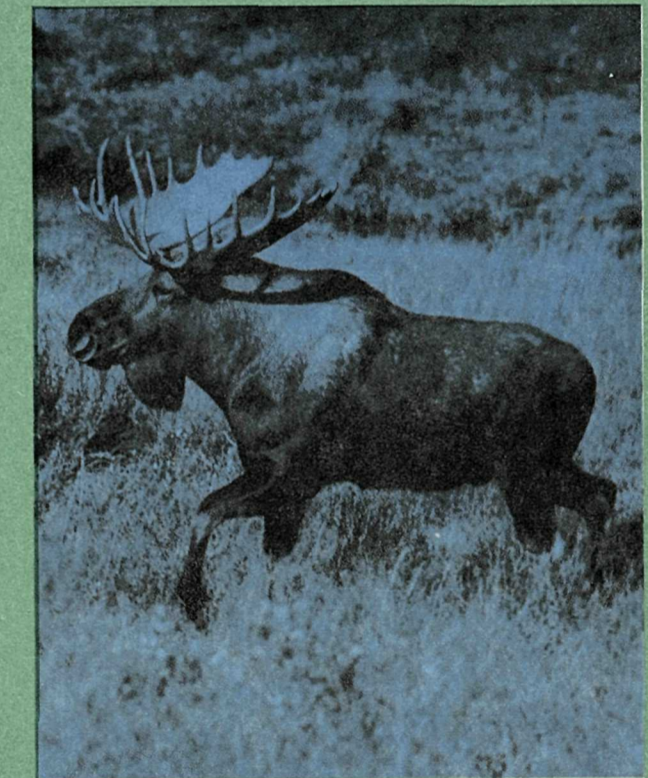
WRITING FOR INFORMATION

Further information on campground reservations, the park transportation system, and other details useful in planning your trip can be obtained by writing to: Superintendent, Mount McKinley National Park, P.O. Box 9, McKinley Park, AK 99755. A National Park Service information office is located at 334 West Fifth Ave., Suite 250, Anchorage, AK 99501.

A price list of maps and booklets about park animals, plants, geology, and hiking may be obtained by writing to the Alaska National Parks and Monuments Association, McKinley Park, AK 99755.

We're Joining the Metric World

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations.



A healthy moose can stand off a pack of wolves with its powerful front legs.

ANIMALS: KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Bear, moose, and other wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous. They are always dangerous when protecting themselves, their young, and their territories. Take the following precautions:

- Make noise when you hike. Bears are especially dangerous when surprised. By announcing your presence and letting bears know where you are, you give them a chance to retreat.

- Do not walk toward bears, moose, or any animals. They think you mean harm.
- Never try to feed any wild animal.
- Photograph wild animals using a telephoto lens. Trying to get close because you don't have enough lens power will only disturb the animal and endanger yourself.
- Keep your campsite and your equipment clean. All food should be sealed in containers so odors will not attract any animals.

Administration

Mount McKinley National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

