



Eielson Area History

DENA 05-29, DNPP

Dedication of the first Eielson Visitor Center on July 15, 1961

1932: Park Road reaches Mile 66.

1934-1948: The site is occupied by Camp Eielson tent camp, named for a pioneer Alaskan aviator. The camp is last operated by concessioner for a short season in 1948.

1954: Last of Camp Eielson is removed and the area is cleaned up.

1956: Design for new interpretive center and rest stop is completed as part of the sweeping NPS Mission 66 initiative.

July 1958: Construction begins. A standard design is modified on site by an engineer assigned to the project so that the windows will face Mount McKinley.



DENA 39-8, DNPP

Site preparations get underway in 1958.

Carl Ben Eielson

was the first pilot to land an airplane in the park in 1924. A pioneer aviator, he attained international renown for several polar expeditions. After he was killed in a crash in 1929, the U.S. Congress changed the name of Copper Mountain to Mount Eielson to honor his memory.



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

July 28, 1960: Building opens to public.

July 15, 1961: Official dedication.

1976: Expansion doubles the size of the building with a restroom addition, wraparound galleria, walkway, and covered outdoor viewing platform.

1978: Joe Hankins Room is dedicated and used as a sales area for the Alaska Natural History Association.

1980s: A bus dispatch office is constructed at the northeast corner of the galleria.

(Timeline continues on reverse side)

Three Views of One Hillside



1939

DENA 12-6, DNPP

Camp Eielson, pictured here in June 1939, served as a tent camp for park visitors for 14 years.



1999

Photo by Kenman Ward

The first Eielson Visitor Center, pictured with a small band of caribou in 1999, operated for 44 years.



2007

NPS PHOTO / JAY ELHARD

The process of demolition, site preparation and construction of the new Eielson Visitor Center, pictured here in 2007, took more than three years.

June 15, 1981: A fatal bus accident occurs east of Thorofare Pass. Two female passengers die at the scene, and an additional 28 people are injured. One more passenger later dies from injuries at a hospital in Fairbanks. Tour buses stop going as far as Eielson after this event.

1995: Interior rehabilitated. New exhibits and displays are added.

September 20, 2004: Last day of operation for the original Eielson Visitor Center.

September 2005: Demolition is completed.

May 2006 to September 2007:

Construction of new visitor center. A large weatherport at the Toklat River Rest Stop serves as a temporary visitor contact station for more than three full summers, from 2005 into early 2008. Fish Creek (Mile 63) in Thorofare Pass serves as an interim turnaround point.

June 8, 2008: The new visitor center opens to the public. The structure is built into the hillside and amounts to 7,422 square feet total. The old visitor center was 3,996 square feet. There are rooftop terraces and a tundra garden, new exhibits and interpretive program space, larger restrooms and a designated area for food and drink. Based on sustainable building practices and use of recycled materials and renewable energy sources, it is a candidate for platinum certification in the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system of the U.S. Green Building Council.

August 12, 2008: The new Eielson Visitor Center is formally dedicated.

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