

History Time Line

For Denali National Park & Preserve

- c.15,000 B.C. to 1900's Several separate cultural groups all belonging to the rich and complex Athabaskan tradition develop special refinements in tools, clothing, food processing, travel and housing that reflect their special knowledge of the Denali region they call home. Those occupying this area roam the upper reaches of the various river systems and the foothills of the Alaska Range in their search for the big game on which they depend. Those living in the Minchumina area northwest of the current park are some of the last Native Alaskans to be contacted by European/Americans. By the turn of the 20th century, diseases brought by non-native visitors, traders and settlers cause significant losses in Native populations. Other changes brought by newcomers to the Denali area cause severe distortions of Indian patterns of life to which current Athabaskan people continue to adapt.
- 1794 The first recorded reference to Mt. McKinley appears in the journal of British explorer George Vancouver. He notes "distant stupendous mountains covered with snow and apparently detached from each other."
- 1834 Russian Creole explorer Andrei Glazunov notes in his journal that he "saw a great mountain called Tenada to the northeast." His rendering of the name, Tenada, is traced to the Ingalik Dengadh. (The Koyukon name Deenaalee is the source of the modern Denali; all Athabaskan variants north of the Alaska Range mean "The High One.")
- 1839 Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell, publishes a map of Alaska approximately locating the massif with the label "Tenada." Due to cartographic ambiguities, the mountain is dropped from later Russian maps. Thus the Native naming fades from use.
- 1867 Russia sells Alaska to the United States of America.
- 1868 William H. Dall proposes the name "Alaskan Range" which later becomes modified to "Alaska Range" by local usage.
- 1878 Trader-prospectors Arthur Harper and Al Mayo report the first known record of Mt. McKinley as a single peak from the Interior. Harper's son Walter, born of an Indian mother, would be the first man to set foot on McKinley's summit a generation later.
- 1889 Frank Densmore and several companions, while prospecting near Lake Minchumina, come closer to the mountain (within 65 miles) than any previously recorded expedition. Densmore's enthusiastic descriptions of the great mountain to the southeast prompt fellow prospectors to call it "Densmore's Mountain."
- 1896 Prospector William A. Dickey names the mountain "after William McKinley of Ohio, who had been nominated for the Presidency, and that fact was the first news we received on our way out of that wonderful wilderness. We have no

doubt that this peak is the highest in North America, and estimate that it is over 20,000 feet high.”

- 1897 Dickey’s descriptions of “Mt. McKinley” are published in the New York Sun on January 24.
- 1898 Robert Muldrow makes the first professional instrument determinations of Mt. McKinley’s altitude and position, confirming that its height exceeds 20,000 ft. His figure of 20,464 ft. comes remarkably close to today’s accepted altitude of 20,320 ft. above sea level.
- 1899 A party of the U.S. Geological Survey disputes Dickey’s claim of naming the Mt. McKinley massif but the New York Sun promptly calls their attention to the two year precedence of Dickey’s map and his naming of the peak which were published and widely circulated in 1897.
- Joseph S. Herron names 17,400 ft. Mt. Foraker after U.S. Senator J.B. Foraker of Ohio. (According to Orth’s Dictionary of Alaska Place Names, Native names included variants on Denali--thus treating Foraker as part of the massif--and “Sultana” and “Menlali,” meaning Denali’s Wife.)
- 1902 July 22: Felix Pedro discovers gold 16 miles north of what would soon become the town of Fairbanks. The town, founded by merchant E.T. Barnette, is named for U.S. Senator Charles W. Fairbanks of Indiana at the suggestion of Judge James Wickersham.
- August 6: Alfred Hulse Brooks is the first person known to set foot on the slopes of Mt. McKinley. He turns back after reaching approximately 7,500 ft.
- 1903 National Geographic Magazine publishes “A Plan for Climbing Mount McKinley” in which Brooks suggests the best way to ensure mountaineering success would be to approach the mountain from the north.
- Judge James Wickersham makes the first attempt to climb Mt. McKinley. His expedition travels up the Peters Glacier on the north side of the mountain and reaches nearly 8,000 ft. before finding the route impassable. “Our only line of further ascent would be to climb the vertical wall of the mountain at our left, and that is impossible.” That vertical wall, now known as Wickersham Wall, rises 14,000 feet from Peters Glacier to McKinley’s North Peak.
- Judge Wickersham and the four other members of this expedition stake the first mining claims in the Kantishna Hills.
- Dr. Frederick A. Cook attempts to climb Mount McKinley via Peters Glacier. The expedition reaches 11,000 ft. on the North Peak’s northwest buttress before turning back. They name the high point of their climb Mount Hunter after one of their financial backers. The name “Hunter” did not remain on the mountain they had just named. Instead, on today’s maps “Mount Hunter” designates a much higher mountain on the south side of Mount McKinley. Cook’s expedition is the first to circumnavigate the McKinley massif.
- 1905 Early prospectors stake mining claims in the Kantishna Hills. The new boom town of Eureka grows to roughly 2,000 inhabitants.

- 1906 Studies of mountain sheep bring hunter/naturalist Charles Sheldon to the Mt. McKinley area. After 45 days collecting specimens for the Biological Survey, Sheldon decides to return to the region later for more in-depth studies. Sheldon names Cathedral Mountain as he scans it looking for sheep.
- 1906 A climbing party including Dr. Frederick A. Cook, Herschel C. Parker, and Belmore Browne attempts to climb Mt. McKinley from the south side and is unsuccessful. Disbanding the party in mid August, Dr. Cook makes a third attempt with horse packer William Barrill. On September 27th, after just two weeks, Dr. Cook sends off the telegram, "WE HAVE REACHED THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT MCKINLEY BY A NEW ROUTE FROM THE NORTH." Thus begins a great controversy.
- Gold boom over. Mass exodus of miners from most areas in Kantishna.
- 1907 Charles Sheldon returns to the Mt. McKinley area and builds a cabin on the Toklat River. He arrives about August 1, and remains until June 11, 1908. Harry Karstens assists Sheldon with packing and other camp duties. It is during this time that Sheldon becomes concerned that "market hunters" will decimate the area's sheep populations.
- 1908 Charles Sheldon mentions the idea of a "Denali National Park" in his journal entry for January 12.
- Dr. Cook writes To the Top of the Continent, including a summit photograph to help support his claims. It is this photograph that eventually discredits him.
- 1910 Alaskan Sourdoughs Thomas Lloyd, Charlie McGonagall, Billy Taylor and Pete Anderson attempt to climb Mt. McKinley. Thomas Lloyd never goes above the base camp near 11,000 ft. However, Taylor and Anderson make it to the top of the North Peak with a bag of donuts, a thermos of hot cocoa, and a fourteen foot long spruce pole to fly the American flag. (McGonagall turns back near 18,000 or 19,000 ft. since it is no longer his turn to carry the pole.) Due to conflicting stories, their amazing accomplishment is discredited until 1913.
- Herschel C. Parker and Belmore Browne lead the Explorer's Club-American Geographic Society Expedition charged with finding solid proof concerning Dr. Cook's claims of climbing Mt. McKinley. Parker and Brown, discover Dr. Cook's "Fake Peak" at around 5,300 feet and some 19 miles from Mt. McKinley's true summit.
- 1912 Herschel C. Parker, Belmore Browne and Merle La Voy attempt to climb Mt. McKinley (for a third time) via the same route followed by the Sourdough Expedition in 1910. They are turned back "within an ace of success" by bad weather and a shortage of supplies only 200 ft. below the summit.
- 1913 Hudson Stuck, Harry Karstens, Walter Harper and Robert Tatum reach Mt. McKinley's South Peak (the true summit) on June 7th, the first expedition to attain the highest point in North America. Walter Harper, a Native Alaskan, is credited with being the first man to reach the summit.

- 1915 Alaska Railroad construction between Seward and Fairbanks begins.
- 1916 Maurice Morino (the man Morino Campground is named after) homesteads in the Frontcountry area and sets up a roadhouse.
- 1917 February 19: Congress passes a bill to create a Mt. McKinley National Park. Charles Sheldon is delegated to deliver the act personally to President Wilson, who signs it on February 26th and gives the pen to Sheldon.
- 1921 April 12: Director Mather sends a 10-page letter of instruction to Harry Karstens, formalizing the multifaceted charge that Karstens takes on as first Superintendent of Mt. McKinley National Park. He receives an interim appointment as Ranger-at-Large until funds become available July 1st. He is stationed in Nenana.
- 1922 Park headquarters moves from Nenana to the Riley Creek area.
- East boundary extended to the one hundred and forty-ninth meridian.
- 1923 Savage River Tourist Camp established. 34 visitors stay there during the 1923 season.
- July 8-9: The Brooklyn Eagle Party of 70 persons holds dedication ceremonies for Mt. McKinley National Park.
- July 15: President Warren G. Harding's party of 70 persons arrive at Mt. McKinley National Park on their way to Nenana to drive the "Gold Spike," the symbolic signal of the completion of the Alaska Railroad between Seward and Fairbanks.
- 1924 Carl Ben Eielson, an early Alaskan aviator, flies a W.W.I Jenny to Copper Mtn., landing on the Thorofare Bar below the current location of Eielson Visitor Center. Hering, a Fairbanks miner, places a mining claim on the mountain.
- 12 miles of park road completed.
- Forest fire burns in the area where the Park Hotel is currently located.
- 1925 Park headquarters moves from Riley Creek to its present location.
- 1926 Park sled dog kennels constructed.
- 1927 Completion of a stage coach road from the Savage River Tourist Camp to the head of the Savage River. Construction began in 1926 and the road was last used in 1941.
- 1928 Visitation to the park is 400 to 500 visitors.
- 40 miles of park road completed.
- 1930 Copper Mtn. renamed Mt. Eielson.
- Construction begins on rangers' quarters building at park headquarters.

- 1932 First seasonal naturalist, David Kaye, hired June-August.
Park road completed as far as Thorofare.
Park boundary extended east to Nenana River and north to include Wonder Lake.
- 1933 Construction of current airstrip located near the post office and train depot.
- 1935 Ranger club built to house unmarried rangers (current headquarters building).
- 1937 Road completed to Wonder Lake.
Maurice Morino dies and is buried near the Park Hotel.
- 1938 Civilian Conservation Corp. camp established near headquarters and operated from 1938-1939. The abandoned camp, known as C Camp, becomes seasonal housing.
- 1939 Wonder Lake Ranger Station completed.
First sled dog demonstration.
McKinley Park Station Hotel opens, administered by the Alaska Railroad.
- 1939-1941 Adolph Murie completes extensive study of wolves which leads to the publication of The Wolves of Mount McKinley.
- 1942 Alaska Highway completed.
- 1943 Park Hotel taken over as Armed Forces R & R Center.
- 1948 Teklanika campground established.
- 1952 Temporary campground at Wonder Lake set up. Igloo and Morino campgrounds established.
- 1953 Denali Highway completed from Paxson to Cantwell.
- 1956 Muldrow Glacier surges.
- 1957 Denali Highway completed to park entrance. Visitation increases from 5,000 in 1956 to 25,000 in 1958.

- 1959 Eielson Visitor Center opens.
- Alaska becomes a state. Congress authorizes conveyance of 104 million acres of federal land to the new state.
- 1965 Town of Kantishna closed to new mining claims by BLM.
- 1968 Oil discovered at Prudhoe Bay.
- 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) passed. Forty-four million acres of land and 1 billion dollars awarded to Alaska Natives.
- 1972 Construction of the George Parks Highway (Highway 3) links the park to Anchorage and Fairbanks. Visitation immediately doubles from 44,528 in 1971 to 88,615 in 1972. (By 1987 annual visits soar to 570,071.)
- Shuttle bus system instituted. Riley Creek Information Center opens.
- Park Hotel burns. "Temporary" hotel built which is still in use today.
- 1976 Eielson Visitor Center wildlife observation tower completed. On July 6 approximately 80 climbers summit Mt. McKinley.
- Mt. McKinley NP designated as International Biosphere Reserve.
- 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act enlarges the park from 1.9 million acres to 6.2 million acres and changes the name from Mt. McKinley National Park to Denali National Park and Preserve.
- 95% of the original 1.9 million acres of the park is designated as Wilderness.
- 1984 Naomi Uemura, a famous Japanese explorer, becomes the first person to make a solo winter ascent of Denali. Just after reaching the top he disappears and his body is never found.
- 1985 Federal Court imposes an injunction on further mining in Kantishna until an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) assesses the cumulative impacts of mining.
- 1986 General Management Plan approved by Asst. Secretary of the Interior.
- Road use limitations set at the 1985 plus 15% level.
- 1990 New Visitor Center (VC) completed.
- Lottery system instituted for fall road opening - 300 cars per day for 4 days.
- 1992 Denali National Park and Preserve celebrates its 75th anniversary.
- A record 11 climbers lose their lives on Mt. McKinley, many due to vicious storms and extreme cold. Two others die on Mount Foraker.

- 1993 Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt and National Park Service Director Roger Kennedy visit Denali on separate occasions.
- 1994 Advanced reservation by phone system instituted for park shuttle buses.
Fall road lottery limit increased from 300 vehicles per day (for 4 days) to 400 per day.
- 1995 Permit system for climbing Mt. McKinley begins. This includes a \$150 fee.
Fee system instituted for park shuttle buses. Denali Park Resorts wins the shuttle bus contract. Now both shuttle and tour buses are run by Denali Park Resorts.
Eielson Visitor Center exhibits are remodeled.
Dog kennels rehabilitation begins.
- 1996 Dog kennels rehabilitation is completed.
- 1998 New kennels viewing stands are completed and in use for dog sled demonstrations by the end of the summer.
- 2000 Snow machines are allowed into the old park (the wilderness area) for the first time.
- 2001 Snow machines banned in old park.
- 2002 New Mercantile opens. Old mercantile torn down. Auditorium moved to Healy. Parts of Denali Park Hotel moved to Healy, parts to McKinley Village area. Clearing begins in front country for new facilities.
- 2004 New Murie Science & Learning Center opens. Final season of old Eielson Visitor Center.
- 2005 New Denali Visitor Center opens. Temporary Toklat visitor center opens near road camp mid-summer. Old Eielson Visitor Center torn down.

**Timeline extracted in large part from William E. Brown's books, [A History of the Denali - Mount McKinley Region, Alaska](#), and [Denali: Symbol of the Alaskan Wild](#).