



Hiking the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes



Explore a landscape created by the largest volcanic eruption of the 20th century. The beauty, scale, wildness, and mystery of the Valley make it one of the best places in the world to study the evidence of volcanic eruptions and experience the raw power of nature.

A New Volcano

On June 6, 1912, a new volcano emerged on the Katmai landscape and forever altered this region. Novarupta, meaning newly erupted, erupted on and off for 60 hours over three days, sending ash and pumice into the sky perhaps as high as 20 miles/30 km. Volcanic products from the eruption also rushed down the Ukak River valley as a pyroclastic flow moving at more than

100 mph/160 kph. Overnight, the formerly lush and green Ukak valley was transformed into 40 sq mi/64 sq km of barren ash. Due to the heat of the ash, buried water from the Ukak River, snow, and glaciers steamed through the surface for decades after the eruption as the “ten thousand smokes,” or fumaroles, that gave the Valley its name.

Visiting Novarupta

Novarupta is a mere bump on the Valley floor, rising only 200 ft/65 m above the surface of the earth. Despite its small size, this geologic feature was the source for the largest volcanic eruption of the 20th century.

Novarupta is located approximately 14 miles from the Windy Creek trailhead on the Valley Road, or two miles one way from the Baked Mountain Huts.

Baked Mountain Huts

Originally constructed in 1965 by the University of Alaska Geophysical Institute for research on the petrology and geochemistry of Alaskan volcanic rocks, the Baked Mountain huts still offer a centralized location from which to explore the Valley. The hike to the Baked Mountain huts is approximately twelve miles from the Valley Road and involves two river crossings, a bit of orienteering, and a climb of about 800 vertical feet to the huts. This makes for a long, rewarding day of hiking through the Valley.

Two plywood bunkhouses and an old shed provide protection from howling winds, blowing pumice, and rain and snow. The Baked Mountain huts should be shared by all those wishing to stay in them.

Permits are not required, but a tent is always recommended in case you are unable to reach the huts or the huts are already full upon your arrival.

A three-sided outhouse with a magnificent view of Mt. Griggs on clear days is also available at the Baked Mountain huts. Please deposit all human waste in the outhouse, and pack out used toilet paper, garbage, and food scraps.

The National Park Service does not maintain the huts, so please do your part in leaving the huts in good condition for the next visitors seeking shelter. Remember to latch all shutters and doors closed to prevent additional damage to these structures. Pack out all garbage and belongings from the huts upon your departure and do not leave any refuse behind or bury any in the Valley. Pack it in - Pack it out!

River Crossings

River crossings in this region cannot be approached using traditional techniques. Due to the suspended volcanic ash in the water, it is often impossible to judge water depths visually. Many of the rivers in the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes are actually narrow gorges as deep as 100 feet in places and can only be safely forded in a few places.

Streams, creeks, and rivers change constantly as ash sloughs off canyon walls and erosion alters the channels. Glacier fed rivers are choked with sediments and rise quickly during warm days, making crossings difficult.

If you cannot find a safe crossing and/or you are unfamiliar with Valley rivers, you should not attempt to cross. You may need to wait a day or longer until lower water levels permit safe crossing.

Follow these tips for safe crossing:

- Look for a crossing site where small ripples (not waves) indicate shallow water.

- Cross early in the morning before glacial meltwater contributes to rising water levels.
- Release your pack belt and straps so you can drop your pack if necessary.
- Wearing old athletic shoes or closed-toe sandals during the crossing will protect feet from sharp rocks.
- Allow yourself a retreat; don't commit to one route.
- Use hiking poles or a stick to measure the water depth for each step in murky waters.
- Although narrow spots do exist where it may be possible to jump across rivers, jumping is not recommended due to the risk of serious injury and/or death. Take the time and energy to find a suitable fording location.

Weather Conditions

Weather in the Valley is unpredictable, and may change drastically in a matter of minutes. Hikers should be prepared for conditions ranging from 100 mph winds in the passes, rain, snow, sleet or temperatures of 90°F/30°C, sometimes all in the same day!

High winds in the Valley remobilize the ash layer and can irritate unprotected eyes, scratch optics, ruin cameras, and reduce visibility to a few feet. Dust goggles and proper care of equipment can greatly reduce most issues. Tents must be able to withstand high winds as well, due to the lack of protected areas in the Valley.

Storm fronts blowing over the Aleutian Range can close in quickly with wind, rain or snow, and reduced visibility. Always expect rain and cold temperatures when hiking and bring appropriate clothing. A glorious day can quickly turn into a life-threatening situation for those who are unprepared.

Occasionally, high pressure systems settle over the Valley and temperatures rise into the low 90s. To avoid sunburn and dehydration, sunscreen, a long sleeve shirt, long pants, and a good hat are recommended.

Drinking Water

Depending on the time of year, drinking water can be scarce in the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. Hikers should bring several liters when starting the trip and fill bottles frequently.

During early summer, drinking water can be obtained from melting snow or treating meltwater. Water can also be obtained from filtering water from rivers or lakes. However, the silt and sediment in Valley rivers easily clogs water filters. Allow water to settle first or strain it before

filtering.

At the Baked Mountain huts, water is only available from early season snow melt. After mid June, snow melt is usually unreliable and hikers should prepare to find water elsewhere. A few water containers may exist at the huts for emergency water availability. Use this water as needed, but leave the containers full for the next group upon when departing.

Additional Information

Transportation to the Windy Creek trailhead is available on the Valley bus, which departs daily June 7-September 17 at 9 AM from Brooks Camp. Contact Katmailand at 1-800-544-0551 for fees and more information.

USGS topographic maps for the Valley include Mt. Katmai B-4 and B-5. Visit <http://store.usgs.gov> or call 1-877-786-7047 to purchase maps.

The Brooks Camp and King Salmon Visitor Centers maintain a limited stock only.

Bear-resistant containers are required, and are available free of charge at the King Salmon and Brooks Camp visitor centers. Although permits are not required for backcountry travel or camping, hikers are encouraged to submit a Backcountry Planner at the Brooks Camp Visitor Center.