

# Sitka

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • ALASKA

*The battle between the Russians and the Tlingit Indians, fought at Sitka in 1804, won for Russia an overseas empire. The Indians lost their independence and much of their culture and way of life. Today, the fort and battle site, native totemic art and culture, and the history of Russia's North American venture, are preserved and interpreted at Sitka National Historical Park.*

When Tlingit Indians destroyed the Russian settlement of St. Michael in 1802, its founder, Alexander Baranof, determined to reestablish the colony. Two years later Baranof led about 1,000 men to present-day Sitka, about 6 miles from the earlier settlement. The Tlingits, on the approach of the Russians, withdrew from their village atop Castle Hill to a stronger fort at the mouth of Indian River near the south boundary of present Sitka National Historical Park. After a siege of several days, during which the Russian cannon caused little damage to the fort, the Indians ran out of ammunition and fled. The Russians then destroyed the fort.

Soon after the battle, Sitka, then known as "New Archangel," became the flourishing capital of Russian-America. Under Baranof's able leadership the town teemed with docks, shipyards, and warehouses. The governor's mansion, called "Baranof's Castle," sat in hulking dominance over the town.

Below, in the town, St. Michael's Russian-Orthodox Church, with its onion-shaped domes, was the largest building.

In time, the Tlingits returned to Sitka and built their houses near the Russian settlement. Two Sitkas emerged—one the Russian New Archangel, the other the Tlingit "Ranche"—and were sharply separated by a stockade. Built as part of this wall were several blockhouses, a native market, and the Church of the Resurrection. To some Sitka Russians, God and the Czar seemed unreal and far away, but to the "Ranche" Tlingits, the Christian Cross and the Czarist cannon were visible realities.

Incongruously, the cross beckoned from the Russian church while the blockhouse cannon menacingly covered the Indian community. The stockade was symbolic of the conflicting cultures and suggested a truce of tension and necessity rather than one of trust.

For more than 60 years Russian Sitka was a source of furs and a stronghold on the American continent against rivals from Spain, England, and New England. Finally, in 1867, the Russians sold for money what they had bought with bravery, bullets, and blood. Alaska (and Sitka) became an American possession.



Sitka in 1869, shortly after it was occupied by the U.S. Military.

## FEATURES OF THE PARK

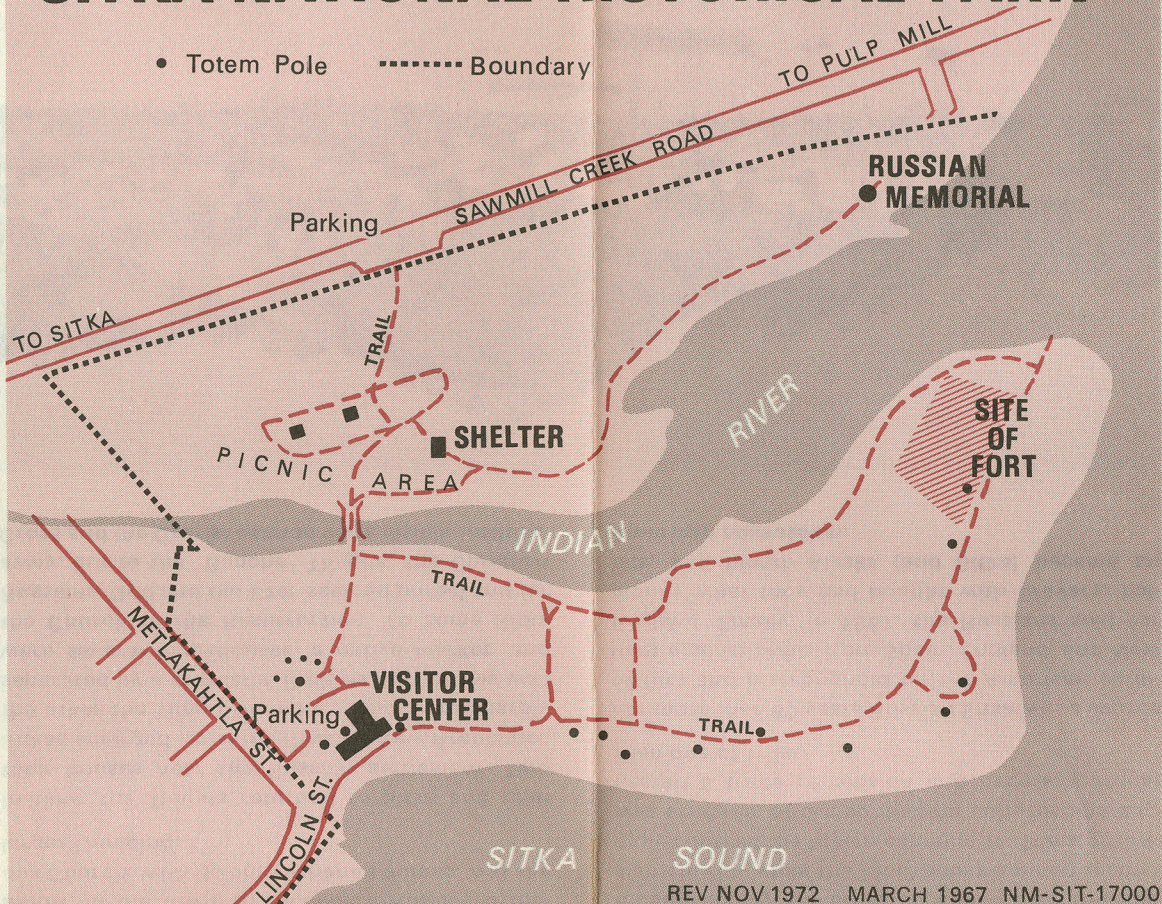
A self-guiding trail, which begins behind the visitor center, leads into the heart of an Alaskan forest. A few minutes spent here will give you a better understanding of the totem poles, the historical scene, and the natural environment.

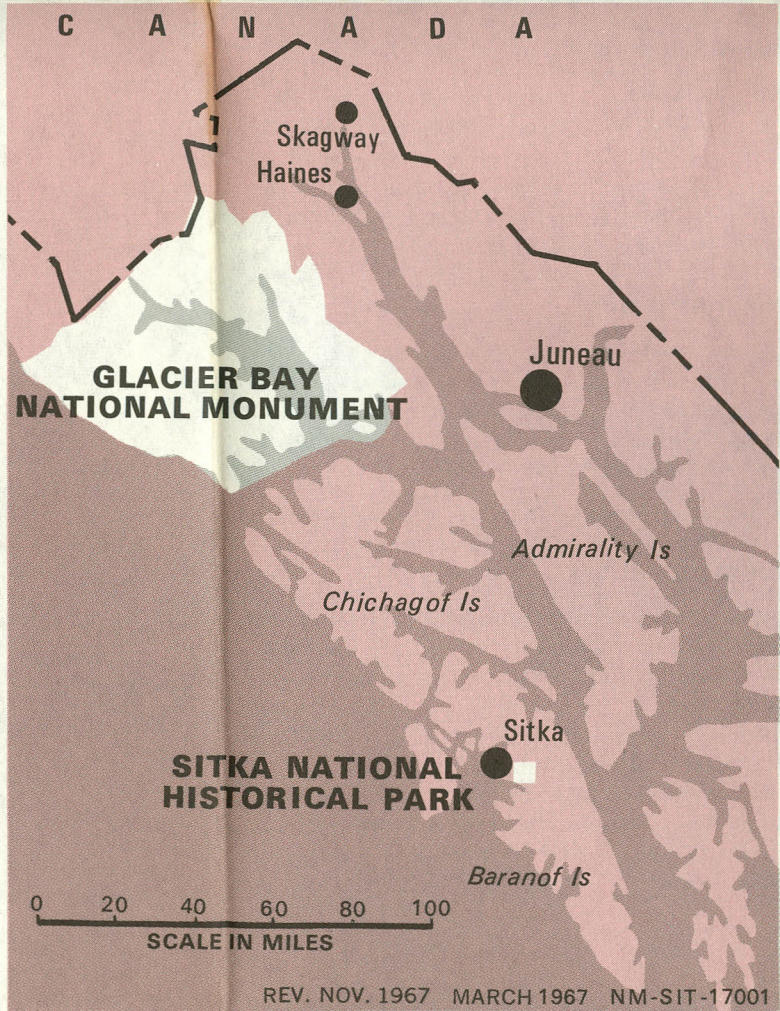
The visitor center houses the information desk, exhibits, audiovisual room, native craft workshops, and administrative offices. Exhibits depict the story of native history and culture and describe life in Sitka when it was a stronghold of the Russians. Interpreters are on hand to help you understand and enjoy your visit.

The 14 totem poles and four house posts near the visitor center and along the trail were obtained by Gov. John Brady and exhibited at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition and the 1905 Portland Exposition. The seven house posts in the visitor center and the house front on the visitor center porch are from Sitka.

Sitka Battleground, near the mouth of Indian River, is the site of the 1804 Tlingit-Russian battle. The Tlingit fort—14 shelters enclosed by a palisade of young tree trunks—occupied the clearing under the trees and was burned by the Russians after the battle. Archeologists found the charred logs when excavating the old wall in 1958. The fort is now outlined by white stakes.

# SITKA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK





## **ABOUT YOUR VISIT**

The park is within walking distance of downtown Sitka, where hotel accommodations and taxi service are available. Sitka can be reached by scheduled airline direct from Seattle, Juneau, and Anchorage, and is a port of call on the Alaska Marine Highway system.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Sitka National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For information about the area, write to the Unit Manager, Sitka National Historical Park, Box 738, Sitka, AK 99835.

For information about the craft workshops, write to the Director, Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center, Box 738, Sitka, AK 99835.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.