



Mount McKinley massif, by Bradford Washburn

Denali, the “High One,” is the name Athabascan native people gave the massive peak that crowns the 600-mile-long Alaska Range. Denali is also the name of an immense national park and preserve created from the former Mount McKinley National Park. The changes in names and boundaries that have occurred over the years can be confusing, as they indicate the way various parts of the park and preserve may be used today. In 1917 Mount McKinley National Park was established as a wildlife refuge. The park and the massif including North America’s highest peak were named for former senator—later President—William McKinley. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) en-

larged the boundary by 4 million acres and redesignated it as Denali National Park and Preserve. At 6 million acres, the park is larger than Massachusetts. It exemplifies interior Alaska’s character as one of the world’s last great frontiers for wilderness adventure. It remains largely wild and unspoiled, as the Athabascans knew it. Denali National Park and Preserve is managed as three distinct units. *Denali Wilderness*, the former Mount McKinley National Park, is managed to maintain the undeveloped wilderness parkland character. Backcountry use is regulated and most usual national park regulations apply here. Denali Wilderness is closed to sport and subsistence hunting and trapping activities. *Denali National*

Park additions, established by ANILCA in 1980 (excluding Denali Wilderness), allow customary and traditional subsistence uses by local rural residents. This recognizes the longstanding dependence on wildlife, fish, and plant materials for subsistence in rural Alaska. *Denali National Preserve* allows subsistence uses and also allows sport hunting, trapping, and fishing under Alaska Fish and Game regulations. There are 2 such preserve areas.

Paradoxically this expansive landscape, habitat of large caribou, moose, and grizzly bears, lies adorned with miniaturized plants. Their diminutive

size contrasts with their large importance as food to the animals that live or migrate through here. These plants and animals have long been adapted to survive northern life, but there is newness in the landscape too. The rivers are so young and so laden with pulverized rock, called rock flour, that they can wander across their broad, flat valleys to set new channels in a matter of days. The delicate beauty of the tundra plants and the youthful wanderings of the rivers are striking counterpoints to the lofty, isolated, and often cloud-covered grandeur of the Mount McKinley massif.



East Fork of the
Toklat River

Ed Cooper Photo

The Land

More than 650 species of flowering plants as well as many species of mosses, lichens, fungi, algae, and others grace the slopes and valleys of Denali. Only plants adapted to long, bitterly cold winters can survive in this subarctic wilderness. Deep beds of intermittent permafrost—ground frozen for thousands of years—underlie portions of the park and preserve. Only the thinnest layer of topsoil thaws each summer to support life. After the continental glaciers retreated 10,000 to 14,000 years ago, hundreds of years were required to begin building new soils, and to begin the slow process of revegetation. Denali’s lowlands and slopes consist of two major plant associations, taiga and tundra.

Taiga (pronounced *ti-ga*), a Russian word for northern evergreen forest, describes the scant tree growth here near the Arctic Circle. Much of the park and preserve’s taiga lies in valleys along the rivers. White and black spruce, the most common trees, are interspersed with quaking aspen, paper birch, larch, and balsam poplar. Stands of deciduous trees occur along streamside gravel bars or where soils have been disturbed by fire or other action. Woods are frequently carpeted with mosses and lichens. Many open areas are filled with shrubs such as dwarf birch, blueberry, and a variety of willow species. The limit of tree

growth occurs at about 2,700 feet in the park and preserve. For comparison, the elevation at the park hotel is 1,750 feet. Above the tree limit, taiga gives way to tundra.

Tundra is a fascinating world of dwarfed shrubs and miniaturized wildflowers adapted to a short growing season. There are two types, moist tundra and dry tundra, with myriad gradations in between. Moist tundra varies in composition: some areas contain tussocks of sedges and cottongrass; others contain dwarfed shrubs, particularly willows and siders. Plants of the dry tundra occur above shrubline. There, meadows abound. Higher up the mountain slopes close to 7,000 feet, complete plant cover yields to scattered patches amidst barren rock. These tiny highland plants grow closely matted to the ground, creating their own livable microclimate. Mountain avens, dwarf fireweed, moss campion, dwarf rhododendron, and forget-me-not (Alaska’s state flower) dot the rocky landscape, offering stunning summer displays of delicate blossoms. Although small in stature they loom large in importance because their nutrients provide food that sustains even the largest species of park wildlife.



Park tour buses
in the mid-1930s

Skinner Foundation,
Alaska State Library

The History

Many generations of native Athabascans wandered over this region before Caucasians began to discover and explore it. Nomadic bands hunted lowland hills of Denali’s northern reaches spring through fall for caribou, sheep, and moose. They preserved berries for winter, netted fish, and gathered edible plants. As snows began to fall, they migrated to lower elevations, closer to the river valleys’ better protection from winter’s severe weather. Much of the Alaska Range formed a mighty barrier between interior Athabascans and Cook Inlet Athabascans to the south.

The park was originally established to protect its large mammals, not because of majestic Mount McKinley. Charles Sheldon conceived the plan to conserve the region as a national park. Naturalist, hunter, and conservationist, Sheldon first traveled here in 1906 and again in 1907 with a packer and guide named Harry Karstens. (Karstens later made the first ascent of Mt. McKinley’s south peak and would serve as the park’s first superintendent.) Sheldon devoted much of his 1907 travels to studying boundaries for the proposed national park that would include territories suitable for a game refuge. When Sheldon returned to the East in 1908, the Game Committee of the Boone and Crockett Club, of which he was chairman, launched the campaign to establish a national park. Largely due

to these efforts, Mount McKinley National Park was established in 1917. Its populations of Dall sheep and other wildlife were now legislatively protected. However, Mount McKinley itself was not wholly included within the boundaries.

Sheldon wanted to call the park Denali, but his suggestion would not be followed until 1980. That year the boundary was expanded to include both the Denali caribou herd’s wintering and calving grounds and the entire Mount McKinley massif. More than tripled in size, the park became Denali National Park and Preserve. It was also designated an International Biosphere Reserve significant for its potential for subarctic ecosystems research. Predator-prey relationships exist in balance here as they may have existed elsewhere before human intrusions. Denali National Park and Preserve remains a subarctic wilderness of wild life and glaciated mountains.



Alaska Range peaks above
the Thorofare River

Ed Cooper Photo

The Mountain

Mount McKinley has been called the Alaskan landscape’s most impressive feature. While you may not see this great peak during your stay here, *it is there!* Mount McKinley is the highest mountain on the North American continent. Measured from the 2,000-foot lowlands near Wonder Lake to its summit, this mountain is considered by many to be the highest in the world. The vertical relief of 18,000 feet, greater even than that of Mount Everest, tops out on the snowy summit at 20,320 feet. McKinley’s north summit is North America’s second highest peak at 19,470 feet. Temperatures at the summit are severe even in summer. Winter lows at just 14,500 feet can plummet below –95°F! During storms, winds can gust to more than 150 mph. Permanent snowfields cover more than 50 percent of the mountain and feed the many glaciers that surround its base. The mountain’s granite and slate core is, in fact, overlain by ice that is hundreds of feet thick in places.

Mount McKinley reigns in lofty isolation over the Alaska Range, that magnificent 600-mile arc of mountains that divides south-central Alaska from the interior plateau. Its life as a mountain range began some 65 million years ago, the result of the Denali Fault, North America’s largest crustal break. This fault, where two tectonic plates have moved against each other,

stretches for 1,300 miles from the Yukon border down to the Aleutian peninsula. There the Alaska and Aleutian Ranges meet in a mad jumble of peaks that includes active volcanoes. Earthquake tremors both mild and moderate are frequent occurrences in the park and preserve. The building of these massive mountains began out of a flat lowland. The material that Earth’s inner turmoil thrust up has subsequently been eroded, sculpted, and weighed down by huge masses of ice. Numerous glaciers still radiate from the high peaks of the Alaska Range, where the frigid temperatures prevent their melting. Some of the glaciers are visible from the park road. The debris-laden snout of the 35-mile-long Muldrow Glacier lies within a half mile of the park road. The park and preserve owes its beautiful landscape contrasts—wide, low plains and dark, somber mountains; brightly colored peaks and sheer granite domes—to the Denali Fault. Geologists say that Mount McKinley still rises today.



Steven C. Kaufman

Michael J. Tollefson

Tom Bean

Rick McIntyre

Tom Bean

Wildlife of Taiga and Tundra

Spring, summer, and fall provide a compressed respite from the subarctic’s long season of deep cold. For most animals, it is a busy time during which they must garner most of their annual food supplies. Dall sheep, relatives of the bighorn sheep, graze the alpine tundra for the young shoots of mountain avens. Ewes and rams live apart in summer, while the lambs are getting their start. In early summer sheep are at lower elevations, but they will follow the snowmelt higher and higher as summer progresses.

Caribou, like the Dall sheep, travel in groups. Both sexes sport antlers, the only deer family members to do so. Caribou migrate great distances from their calving grounds south of the Alaska Range and northwest of Mount McKinley to their winter range in the northern reaches of the park and preserve. The Denali herd has fluctuated greatly in number over the last 30 years. Today groups of 20 or more may be seen from the park road, quite different from the thousands seen many years ago. Moose, the deer family’s largest members, are not herd animals. Bulls may group

in threes or fours or wander alone until they pursue several cow moose during the rut, or mating season. The calves are born in May and will stay with the cow one or two years. In spring, the cow and calf feed on willows and other new green vegetation. At this time of year, be cautious about traveling in willow thickets. A cow moose can be very dangerous while protecting her calf from a perceived threat. Wolves are rarely seen, but they play an important role in the natural scheme. In winter, wolves generally hunt in packs. Individuals, however, can be sighted as well. Pack organization is strongest during the whelping (pupping) season in spring. The presence of wolves in Denali is an indication of the quality of this wilderness. If you are lucky enough to see a wolf, consider it a rare and privileged experience.

Grizzly bears are omnivores, eating small plants, berries, ground squirrels, moose or caribou calves, and occasional carrion. They are seen throughout the park. Sows generally bear two cubs, sometimes one, and rarely three. They too are fiercely protective of their offspring. Wolves

and grizzly bears play an important role as predators. Ever ready to take advantage of an opportunity, they cull old, newborn, and sick animals from the caribou, moose, and sheep populations.

Smaller mammals abound within the limits of this harsh, northern environment: fox, weasel, wolverine, lynx, marten, snowshoe hare, hoary marmot, red squirrel, ground squirrel, pika, porcupine, beaver, shrew, vole, and lemming. There are 37 mammal species recorded in the park and preserve.

Birdlife is varied and interesting. Most birds migrate long distances between their nesting grounds here in the park and their wintering areas. Wheatears winter in Africa; arctic terns in Antarctica and southern South America; jaegers take to life at sea in the southern oceans. On the open tundra, you may easily see ptarmigan, Lapland longspurs, and various shorebirds. Short-eared owls and northern harriers can be seen soaring low in search of rodents. Golden eagles patrol the higher

you hike so you don’t surprise animals, especially bears. Do not walk toward bears, moose, or other animals. They may feel threatened and react aggressively. Photo-

graph wild animals with a telephoto lens. Close approaches disturb them and endanger you. Keep your campsite clean. Store food in your vehicle, not in your tent.

For backcountry procedures and other safety messages see the *Denali* *Alpenglow*. Never feed any wild animals, including squirrels and gulls that frequent campgrounds.

elevations and ridgetops. Raptors—birds of prey—of the spruce forest are the hawk owl and goshawk. In these forests, you may also see the spruce grouse and varied thrush. Plovers, gyrfalcons, mew gulls, and snow buntings are among the 159 species of birds recorded at Denali. Raven, ptarmigan, magpie, and gray jay are some of the species that winter in the park and preserve.

Winter challenges wildlife with frigid temperatures and the cessation of plant growth. Food is scarce. Grizzlies fatten up in summer and marmots in a torpor or deep sleep most of the winter. Ground squirrels and marmots hibernate, their body functions virtually halted. Beavers and red squirrels hole up and subsist on food caches. Weasels, snowshoe hares, and ptarmigan, however, turn white and continue the struggle to survive above ground against extreme conditions.

Denali

National Park and Preserve Alaska

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

How to Get Here

By Road Denali lies 237 miles north of Anchorage and 120 miles south of Fairbanks. Alaska Highway 3, connecting the two cities, is open all year.

By Train The Alaska Railroad provides daily summer passenger and freight service to the park from Anchorage and Fairbanks. Passenger service is limited in winter.

For information write: Alaska Railroad Corporation, Passenger Services, P.O. Box 107500 Anchorage, AK 99510-7500, or call: 800-544-0552 Continental USA and Hawaii; 907-265-2494 Anchorage; 907-456-4155 Fairbanks.

By Bus Several companies provide service in summer from both Fairbanks and Anchorage. Consult a travel agent.

For Reservations Shuttle bus and campsite reservations are available by calling 1-800-622-7275 (nationwide) or 907-272-7275 (from Anchorage or other countries). Reservations may also be obtained in person up to 2 days in advance at the park visitor center.

Be Prepared

Most visitors come here between late May and mid-September. Summer is cool, wet, and windy, and it can snow. Bring clothing for temperatures from 35°F to 75°F. A hat, mittens or gloves, and rain gear are essential. Sturdy foot gear, insect repellent, binoculars, and camera are desirable. Unpredictable weather in May, early June, and mid-September may change the opening and closing of park roads and facilities.

Public Transportation Private vehicles are restricted beyond the Savage River (mile 14.8). Shuttle bus service begins Memorial Day weekend and ends after Labor Day. Buses travel regularly from the visitor center to Toklat (6 hours round trip), Eielson Visitor Center (8 hours), and Wonder Lake (11 hours). Tickets may be reserved by phone or up to 2 days in advance in person at the visitor center. Seats are in heavy demand, and waits of up to 2 days are normal for walk-in reservations. You may get on or off the bus along the park road except in closed areas, and you may re-board on a space available basis. There is no

Winter Activities Riley Creek Campground is open year round. Registration is not required in winter. Although the park road is closed to vehicle traffic, the backcountry is accessible by your own snowshoes, skis, or dog sled. Check at park headquarters for weather conditions and backcountry permits.

Road Traffic Limits: To protect wildlife viewing opportunities, limits are set on park road traffic, including buses. Expect

delays getting out into the park during the peak season. Many activities are available in the entrance area.

Wilderness Safety: Denali is a true wilderness. Grizzly bears and moose are dangerous. Crossing glacial rivers is

treacherous. Before venturing into the park, read the safety articles in *Denali Angler*, the park newspaper.

For emergencies in the park (fire, medical, and law enforcement only) call 683-9100.

What to do in the Park and Preserve

General Park Orientation In summer stop at the visitor center near the park entrance upon arrival to obtain the *Denali Angler*, camping and backcountry permits, and purchase bus tickets.

There is an entrance fee. People under 17 are admitted free. Seniors (62 and older) and persons with disabilities can apply for special passes (\$10 lifetime Golden Age and free Golden Access) that waive entrance fees. The Denali Annual Pass (\$15) and the Golden Eagle Pass (\$25) are also available.

Camping Riley Creek, Savage River, and Teklanika River campgrounds are accessible by private vehicle. Sanctuary River, Igloo Creek, and Wonder Lake campgrounds—tents only—are accessible by bus. You must register in person for all park campgrounds at the visitor center. Camping in the park campgrounds (one or several) is limited to a total of 14 days, and check out is 11 a.m. You may register for your stay up to 2 days in advance. Camp only in designated campgrounds. Camping is prohibited in parking areas and on roadsides. Morino Campground is for

food service. Bring food, drink, warm clothes, and rain gear. Binoculars are helpful in viewing wildlife.

Tour Bus The Tundra Wildlife Tour and the Denali Natural History Tour are available through the park concessioner in summer. Guide and food are provided. Contact Denali Park Resorts for reservations and prices, 907-683-2215 in summer or 907-276-7234 in winter.

Air Tours Aircraft can be chartered for tours. Arrange these with Denali Air, 907-683-2261.

Hiking Denali offers exciting hikes for both novice and experienced hikers. The only maintained park trails, mostly short loops, are near the hotel. Walk them on your own or join a scheduled ranger walk. Take longer hikes on your own or take a ranger-led hike. The best routes for hiking are along river bars or ridgetops. Glacial streams can be cold, swift, and dangerous to cross. Sturdy foot gear is essential. *(Overnight hikers see Backcountry Permits)*. Check at the visitor center for backcountry information and areas closed to hiking.

visitors arriving without vehicles (backpackers, train passengers, and private pilots). Organized groups (9 people or more) may obtain space at Savage River Groups Campground by advance reservation.

Fishing Most park rivers contain a milky suspension of silt or rock flour that fish can't tolerate. Arctic grayling are caught in a few clear mountain streams. Lake (mackinaw) trout are caught in Wonder Lake. No license is required to fish in the Denali Wilderness unit.

Concession Services From late spring to early autumn the park concessioner, near the park entrance, offers hotel lodging, food service, groceries, souvenirs, camper supplies (including propane), showers, and a narrated wildlife tour by bus. There are no food services elsewhere in the park. For information write: Denali Park Hotel, P.O. Box 87, Denali Park, AK 99755, or call 907-683-2215 in summer, or 907-276-7234 in winter. Other lodging and services are available outside the park.

Mountaineering All Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbers must register 60 days prior to beginning their ascent and pay an administrative fee of \$150. Groups heading for other peaks are urged to register. For information write: Talkeetna Ranger Station, Box 588, Talkeetna, AK 99676, or call 907-733-2231.

Naturalist Activities These include walks, hikes, campfire talks, auditorium programs, and sled dog demonstrations. Check the *Denali Angler*, and bulletin boards at the visitor center, hotel, and campgrounds.

Firearms Firearms must be unloaded, cased, and stored out of view. Leave them at park headquarters when backpacking in the wilderness area. Firearms are allowed in the preserve and park additions only.

Motorized Craft Motorized craft are prohibited in the Denali Wilderness, including snow machines and ATVs.

Food Storage Campers must store all food, including sealed cans and bottles, in the bear-resistant food lockers found in campgrounds or in closed hard-sided vehicles.

Commercial Activities Permits are required for commercial activities conducted in the park or preserve.

Sport Fishing and Hunting A state license is required in the park additions and the preserve for sport fishing. No state license is required in the Denali Wilderness. Live

Regulations

Backcountry Permits Backcountry use permits for overnight camping must be obtained in person at the visitor center in summer and at park headquarters in winter. There is a quota system for backcountry units. All units require use of a bear resistant food container issued free of charge. Pack out all garbage.

Closures Some areas may be closed because of wildlife activity. Closures may last for a few days or several months. Entering closed areas is prohibited. Obtain information at the visitor center.

Safe Driving Protect wildlife and yourself by driving safely. Maximum speed is 35 mph.

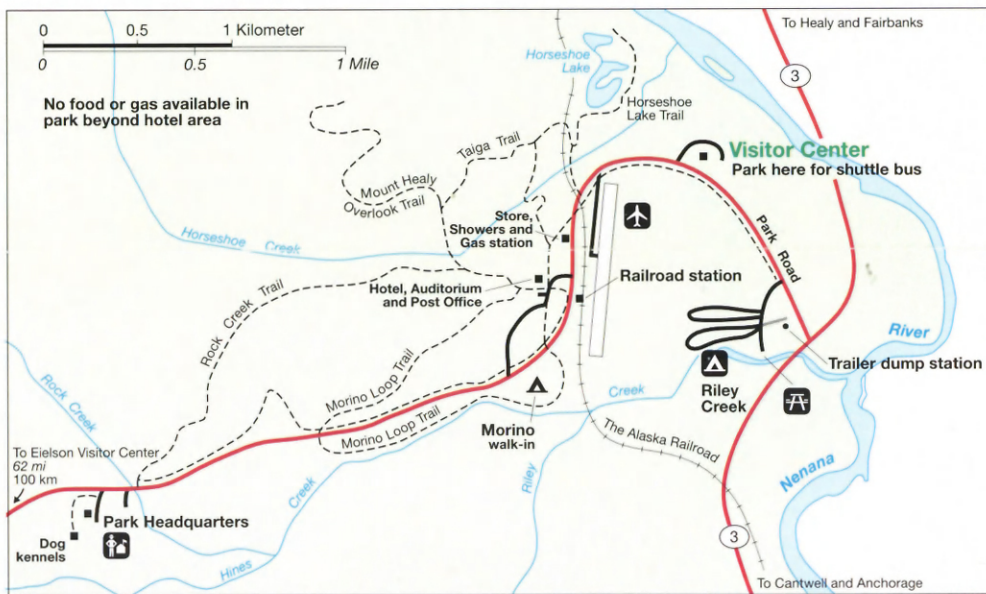
Pets Pets are allowed on roadways and in campgrounds only and must be leashed or physically restrained at all times. They are prohibited on buses and trails or in the backcountry. Pets must not be left unattended.

Food Storage Campers must store all food, including sealed cans and bottles, in the bear-resistant food lockers found in campgrounds or in closed hard-sided vehicles.

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Entrance and Headquarters Area Map



Campground	Distance from Entrance*	Campsite				Toilet		Water
		Spaces	Tent	Trailer	Camper	Pit	Flush	
Riley Creek	0.8 0.5	102	•	•	•	•	•	•
Morino	2.4 1.5	60	•	•	•	•	•	•
Savage River	19.2 12.0	34	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sanctuary River	35.0 22.0	7	•	•	•	•	•	•
Teklanika River	46.4 29.0	50	•	•	•	•	•	•
Igloo Creek	54.7 34.0	7	•	•	•	•	•	•
Wonder Lake	136.0 85.0	28	•	•	•	•	•	•

*Kilometers/Miles

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