



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 game 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*, most of the former Mount McKinley National Park, is managed to maintain the undeveloped wilderness parkland character. Backcountry use is regulated and most traditional 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 two 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 and short growing seasons 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 visitor center 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 dwarf birch, willows, and alder. Plants of the dry tundra occur above shrubline. Meadows abound where soil moisture is high, and in areas of lower soil moisture complete plant cover is replaced by scattered patches of plants amidst barren rock. Mountain avens, dwarf fireweed, moss campion, numerous saxifrage species, and forget-me-not (Alaska’s state flower) dot the rocky landscape, offering stunning summer displays of delicate blossoms. Many of these tiny highland plants grow closely matted to the ground, creating their own livable microclimate. Vascular plants are entirely replaced by lichens and mosses above 7,200 feet. Although small in stature, plants of the dry tundra are important because their nutrients provide food for many species of park wildlife, both large and small.



Park tour buses in the mid-1930s
Skinner Foundation, Alaska State Library

The History

Euro-Americans making their way to interior Alaska in the 1900s found native Athabascans living here. Five Athabascan language groups have traditional-use territories surrounding and extending into Denali National Park and Preserve: Ahtna to the east, Dena’ina (or Tanaina) to the south, Upper Kuskokwim to the west, Koyukon to the north, and Lower Tanana to the northeast. For thousands of years Athabascans adapted to this country as small, semi-nomadic bands using areas along major river drainages reaching into the Alaska Range. Spring through fall they hunted the lowland hills and mountains for caribou, sheep, moose, bear, and small mammals. They preserved berries, gathered edible plants, and harvested fish. As snows began to fall, they moved to lower river valleys for better protection from severe weather. Winter and summer trails linked groups and settlements and led through major passes of the Alaska Range. Legislation expanding Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980 recognized the importance of the connection between native peoples and the land, and the need to provide an opportunity for those engaged in traditional subsistence activities to continue to do so. For many local rural residents the use of natural resources ensures more than survival. It sustains a culturally

significant subsistence way of life. Athabascan people and their ancestors, bound to a strict code of respect towards nature, have been the land’s stewards and caretakers. Much of Denali’s legacy exists today largely because they have nurtured it so well. Denali’s National Park System legacy exists largely because Charles Sheldon, a naturalist, hunter, and conservationist, determined to establish a park after he traveled here between 1908 and 1908 with packer and guide Harry Karstens. Karstens later made the first ascent of Mt. McKinley and would be the first superintendent of Mt. McKinley National Park. Sheldon’s efforts largely saw Mt. McKinley National Park established in 1917. From the start, scientific investigation played an important role in park history. In 1980, Congress more than tripled the size of the park and renamed the area Denali National Park and Preserve. Denali has also been designated an International Biosphere Reserve significant for research into subarctic ecosystems. As access and visitation increased along the narrow, graveled park road, the National Park Service put in a bus system in 1972 to protect visitors and reduce threats to wildlife while maximizing opportunities to view wildlife. By using this system today you help preserve the park’s wilderness character still so little changed since Sheldon’s day.



Alaska Range peaks above the Thorofare River
Ed Cooper Photo

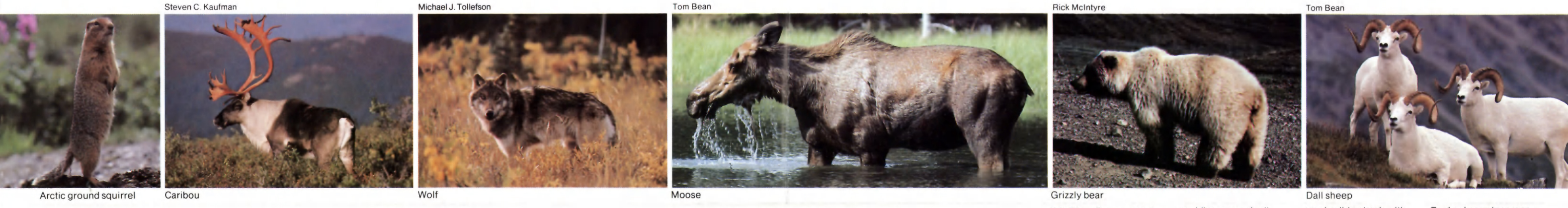
The Mountain

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 snowy summit at 20,320 feet, the mountain’s vertical relief of some 18,000 feet is greater than that of Mount Everest. 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 75 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 several hundred million years ago, when ocean floors and terrestrial lands were scrambled and uplifted together in the collision of two tectonic plates. Portions of the seafloor were pushed up over the top of slowly lifting continental lands, and the uplift of the range continues to this day. The granite rocks of Mount McKinley

intruded into these uplifting ocean sediments some 56 million years ago, and millions of years of subsequent erosion has exposed this intrusion at the top of Mount McKinley.

A noticeable landform resulting from this tectonic squeeze of Alaska is the Denali Fault. This large crustal break stretches 1,300 miles from the Yukon border down to the Aleutian peninsula and is the subject of much controversy among geoscientists. The fault traces through the Alaska and Aleutian ranges in a mad jumble of peaks that includes active volcanoes. Earthquake tremors both mild and moderate are frequent occurrences in the park and preserve. Numerous glaciers still radiate from the high peaks of the Alaska Range. 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 restless collision of tectonic plates. Mount McKinley may become even more spectacular as the range continues to rise about one millimeter a year.



Steven C. Kaufman

Michael J. Tollefson

Tom Bean

Rick McIntyre

Tom Bean

Arctic ground squirrel

Caribou

Wolf

Moose

Grizzly bear

Dall sheep

Wildlife of Taiga and Tundra

Spring, summer, and fall provide a compressed respite from the sub-arctic’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 follow the melting snow during their migration to higher areas as the season 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—digging roots as well as eating grasses and other forbs, berries, ground squirrels, moose or caribou calves, and occasional caribou. They are seen throughout the park. Sows generally bear two cubs, sometimes one, and not uncommonly three. They too are

fiercely protective of their offspring. Wolves and grizzly bears play an important role as predators; at every 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-*

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 remain in a torpor or deep sleep most of the winter. Ground squirrels and marmots hibernate, their body functions virtually halted. Beavers, red squirrels, and pikas 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.

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.*

Enjoying Denali

How to Get Here

By Road The main park entrance is 237 miles north of Anchorage and 120 miles south of Fairbanks via Alaska 3; the road is open all year.

By Train The Alaska Railroad has daily summer passenger service to the park from Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Service is limited in winter. Write: Alaska Railroad Corporation, Passenger Services, P.O. Box 107500, Anchorage, AK 99510. Call: 1-800-544-0552 (continental USA and Hawaii) 907-265-2494 (Anchorage); 907-456-4155 (Fairbanks).

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

For Reservations For shuttle bus and campsite reservations call: 1-800-622-7275 (nationwide) or 907-272-7275 (Anchorage or foreign countries). Get reservations in person up to two 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 rain all day.

Denali

snow. Bring clothing for temperatures from 35°F to 75°F. A hat, mittens or gloves, and raingear are essential. Sturdy footwear, insect repellent, binoculars, and a camera are desirable. Unpredictable weather in May, early June, and mid-September may change openings and closings of park roads and facilities.

Winter Activities Riley Creek Campground is open year-round; registration not required in winter. The park road is closed to vehicles, but the backcountry is accessible by your own snowshoes, skis, or dog sled. Check at headquarters for weather conditions and backcountry permits.

What to Do in the Park and Preserve

Park Orientation In summer stop first at the visitor center near the park entrance to get a copy of the *Denali* *Alpen-glow* and camping and backcountry permits and to purchase bus tickets.

There is an entrance fee; (16 and younger are free). Seniors (62 and older) and persons with disabilities can get Golden Age and Golden Access passes that waive entrance fees. The Denali Annual Pass and the Golden Eagle Pass are also available. Write to the park for information about access for visitors with disabilities.

Public Transportation Private vehicles are restricted beyond Savage River (mile 15). Shuttle bus service begins Memorial Day weekend and ends after Labor Day. Buses travel regularly from the visitor center to Toklat River (6 hours round-trip), Eielson Visitor Center (8 hours), and Wonder Lake (11 hours). Reserve tickets by phone or up to two days in advance in person at the visitor center. Seats are in heavy demand, and waits of up to two 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 reboard on a space-available basis. There is no food service. Bring food, drink, warm clothes, and raingear.

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

Air Tours Aircraft can be chartered outside the park for tours.

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. Stays in park campgrounds (one or several) are limited to a total of 14 days; checkout is 11 a.m. Campsites can be reserved by phone up to two days in advance except for Sanctuary River and Igloo Creek campgrounds, which are available by walk-in at

the Denali Visitor Center. Camp only in designated campgrounds. Camping is prohibited in parking areas and on roadsides. Morino Campground is for visitors arriving without vehicles (backpackers, train passengers, and private pilots). Organized groups (nine people or more) may get space at Savage River Group Campground by advance reservation.

Hiking Denali has exciting hiking for novice and experienced hikers. There are maintained trails in the park entrance area. Walk them on your own or join a ranger-led walk. Take longer crosscountry hikes on your own or take a ranger-led hike. The best hiking routes are along river bars or ridgetops. Streams can be cold, swift, and dangerous to cross. Sturdy footwear is essential. (Overnight hikers, see "Backcountry Permits"). Check at the visitor center for backcountry information and areas closed to hiking.

Mountaineering Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbers must register 60 days prior to beginning their ascent and pay an

Wilderness Safety Denali is a true wilderness. Before venturing into the park, read the safety articles in *Denali*

Naturalist Activities Choose from walks, hikes, campground talks, auditorium programs, sled dog demonstrations, and more. Check the Denali *Alpen-glow* and bulletin boards at the visitor center, hotel, and campgrounds.

Fishing Most park rivers contain a milky suspension of silt or rock flour that fish cannot tolerate. Arctic grayling are caught in a few clear mountain streams. Lake (mackinaw) trout are caught in Wonder Lake. You do not need a license to fish in the Denali Wilderness.

Concession Services From late spring to early fall the park concessioner, located near the entrance, offers hotel lodging, food service, groceries, souvenirs, camper supplies, showers, and narrated wildlife tours by bus. Write: Denali Park Hotel, P.O. Box 87, Denali Park, AK 99755. Call 907-683-2215 (summer), 907-276-7234 (winter).

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 bear-resistant food containers (free of charge). Pack out garbage.

Campfires Campfires are not allowed in the Denali Wilderness backcountry. Campfires are permitted in certain campgrounds. Firewood is sold at a store in the park entrance area.

Motorized Craft Motorized craft are prohibited in the Denali Wilderness.

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.

Sport Fishing/Hunting A state license is required in the park additions and in the preserve for sport fishing. No state license is required in the Denali Wilderness. Live bait or fish eggs may not be used. Sport hunting is

not allowed in the wilderness or park additions. Hunting is permitted in the preserve with a state license and proper tags.

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

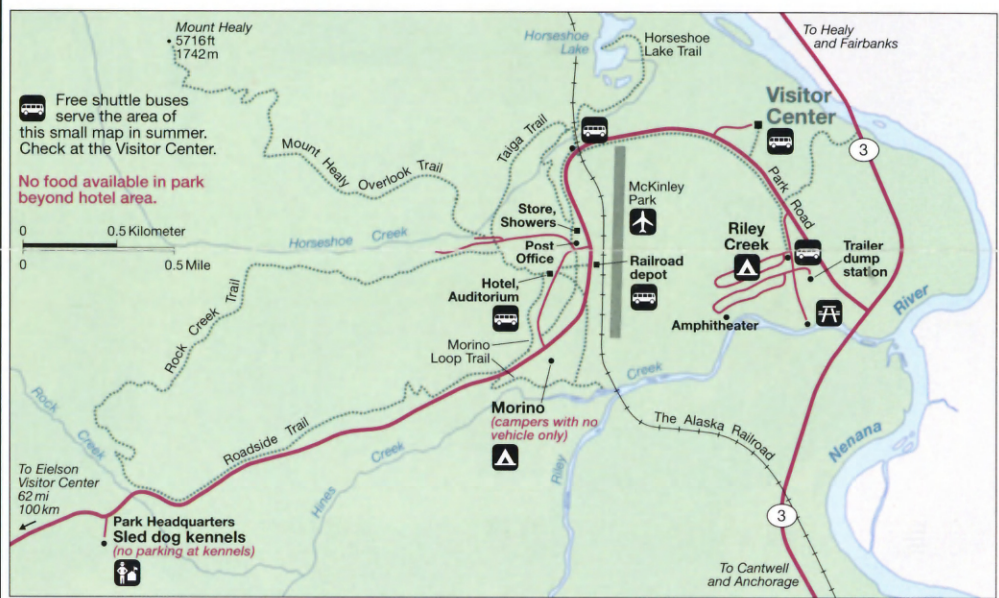
Safe Driving Protect wildlife and yourself by driving safely. Maximum speed is 35 mph.

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

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.

Entrance and Visitor Center Detail Map



Campground	Campsite		RV	Toilet		Water
	Spaces	Tent		Ft	Flush	Tap
Riley Creek	0.5 Miles 0.8 Kilometers	102	•	•	•	•
Morino	1.5 2.4	60	•	•	•	•
Savage River	12.0 19.2	34	•	•	•	•
Sanctuary River	22.0 35.0	7	•	•	•	•
Teklanika River	29.0 46.4	50	•	•	•	•
Igloo Creek	34.0 54.7	7	•	•	•	•
Wonder Lake	85.0 136.0	28	•	•	•	•

*Distances from Entrance

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