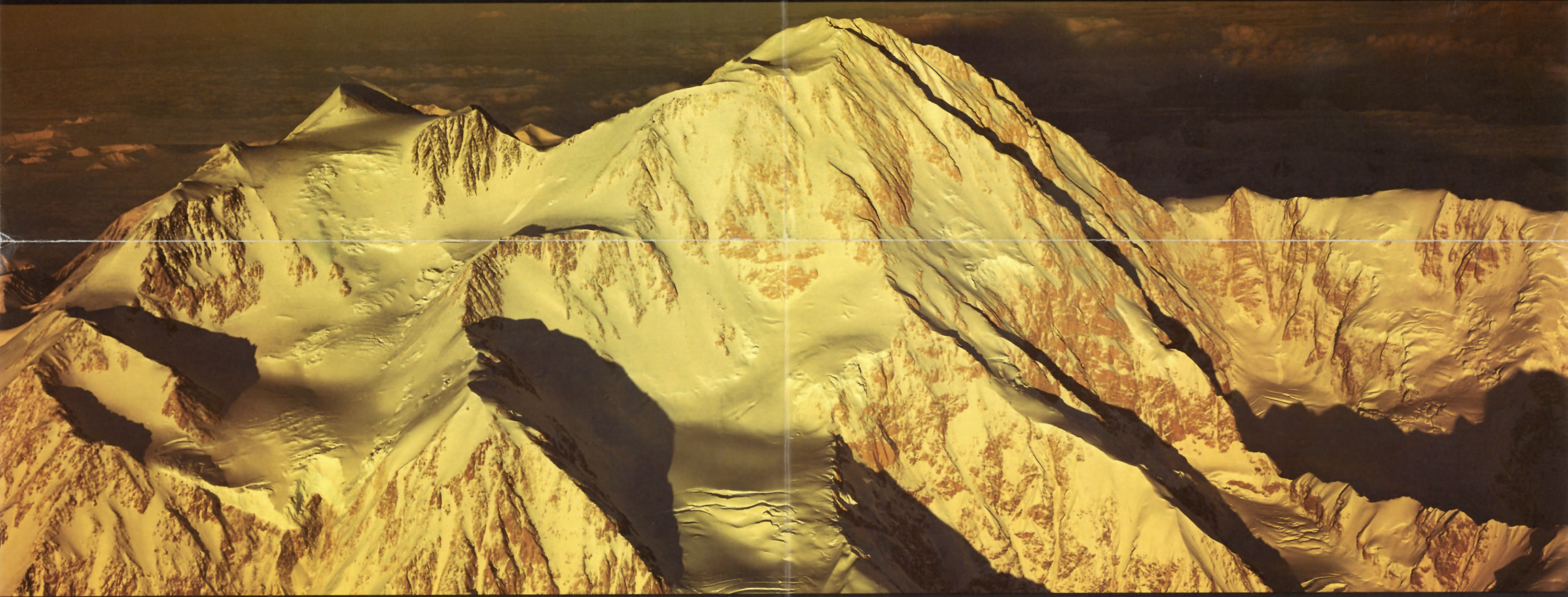




Mount McKinley massif, by Bradford Washburn

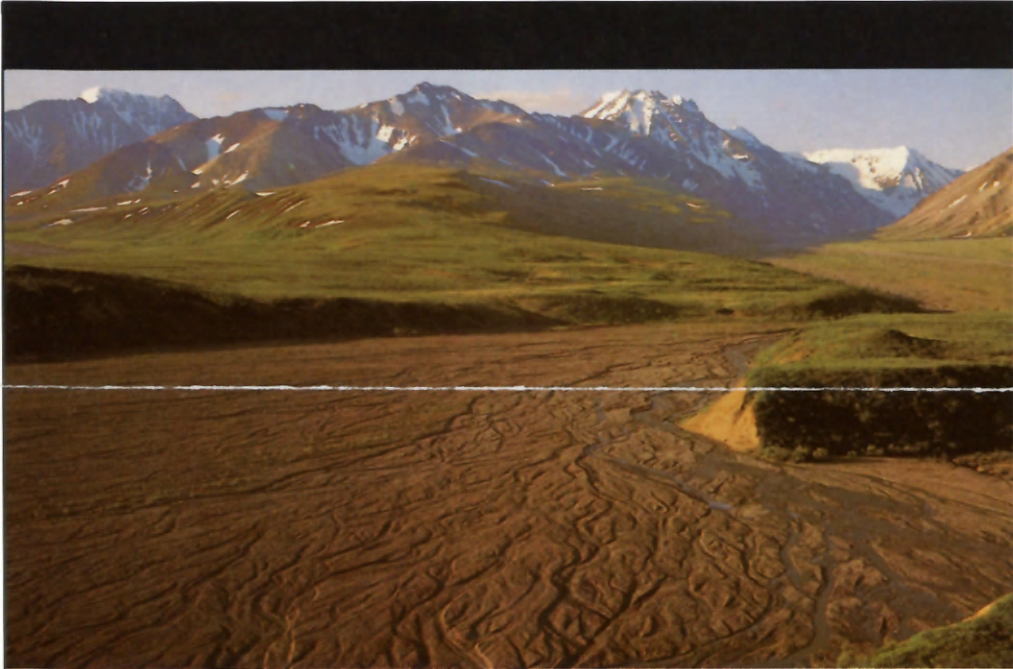
Denali, the “High One,” is the name Athabascan native people gave the massive peak that crowns the 600-mile-long Alaska Range. Denali is also the name of an immense national park and preserve created from the former Mount McKinley National Park. The changes in names and boundaries that have occurred 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 1800s 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, Denaina (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 1906 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.



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 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 carrion. 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

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.

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.

Enjoying Denali

Please check the park website www.nps.gov/dena or the free visitor guide *Alpenglow*—also available online—to plan your trip or to learn about park programs, safety guidelines, and regulations.

How To Get Here

By Road The main park entrance is 237 miles north of Anchorage and 120 miles south of Fairbanks via George Parks Highway, Alaska 3, which is open year-round. Bus companies provide service to the park in summer.

By Train The Alaska Railroad offers daily summer passenger service to the park from Anchorage and Fairbanks. Service is limited in winter. Contact 800-544-0552, or reservation@akrr.com.

Park Transportation Private vehicles are restricted beyond Savage River (Mile 15). To protect wildlife viewing, limits are set on park road traffic, including buses.

Shuttle bus service begins May 20 and ends in mid-September. Waits are possible for walk-in reservations; have flexible departure plans. Buses travel regularly from the Wilderness Access

Center to the Toklat River (six hours round-trip), Eielson Visitor Center (eight hours), and Wonder Lake (11

hours). Except in wildlife closures, you can get on or off the shuttle buses along the Park Road to hike. You then reboard on a space-available basis.

Interpretive bus tours include the Tundra Wilderness Tour, Denali Natural History Tour, and Kantishna Experience. Make reservations with the park concessioner (see top right).

No food service is offered beyond the park entrance area. Bring food, drink, warm clothes, and raingear.

Emergencies Fire, medical, and law enforcement, call 911.

What To Do in the Park and Preserve

Be Prepared Most people visit between late May and mid-September. Summer is cool, wet, and windy, and it can snow. Bring clothing for temperatures from 35 to 75°F: hat, mittens or gloves, and raingear are essential. Sturdy footwear, insect repellent, binoculars, and a camera are desirable.

Entry Fee The park collects an entrance fee year-round: \$10 per person, \$20 per vehicle, and \$15 for motorcycles. It is valid for seven days. Most of the money stays in the park to improve visitor services and facilities. Interagency Federal Recreation Passes, like the Annual, Senior, and Access Passes, and the Denali Annual Pass, are also valid for entry.

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

More Information Denali National Park and Preserve P.O. Box 9, Denali Park, AK 99755 907-683-2294 www.nps.gov/dena dena_info@nps.gov

Wildlife activity may require areas to be closed to all entry for a few days to several months. Hikers are responsible for knowing current closures.

Bicycles are not allowed on hiking trails. Cycling is allowed in the campgrounds and on park roads and the designated Bike Path. Some shuttle buses have bicycle racks. Ask at a visitor center or check the park website for information to plan a cycling trip.

Hiking Denali has exciting hiking for novice and experienced hikers. There are maintained trails in the park entrance area. Take longer cross-country hikes on your own or join a ranger-led walk. Some of the best hiking routes are on durable surfaces along ridgelines or gravel riverbars. Streams can be cold, swift, and dangerous to cross. Sturdy footwear is essential.

Overnight backpacking trips require careful planning and a backcountry permit, available only after an in-person orientation with

a ranger at the Backcountry Information Center. There is a quota system for backcountry units. Many units require hikers to use bear-resistant food containers (provided). Pack out all garbage.

Camping The park has six designated campgrounds. Stays are limited to 14 nights total. Group sites are available by reservation for nine to 20 people. Camping is prohibited in parking areas and on roadsides. Campfires are permitted only in certain campgrounds.

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

Sport Fishing/Hunting Hunting and fishing are allowed in some park and preserve locations, regulated by federal and state law. Discharging weapons is strictly prohibited in many areas. It is your responsibility to know and to comply with all laws

Alaska Public Lands Information Center (Two locations), Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, 101 Dunkel Street, Suite 110, Fairbanks, AK 99701, 907-459-3730; and 605 West 4th Ave., Anchorage, AK 99501, 907-271-2737

and regulations. For more information consult a park ranger, a visitor center, or the park website.

Mountaineering Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbers must register 60 days before beginning their ascent and pay a special use fee. Contact: Talkeetna Ranger Station, Box 588, Talkeetna, AK 99676, 907-733-2231.

Winter Activities The Park Road is closed to vehicles in winter beyond Headquarters at Mile 3.4, but the backcountry is accessible by snowshoes, skis, or dog sled. Riley Creek Campground near the park entrance is open year-round. Check at the winter visitor center (Murie Science and Learning Center) for weather conditions and backcountry permits.

Visitor Centers To Serve You



The Denali Visitor Center Campus is 1.5 miles from the park entrance. At the visitor center explore the exhibits, talk to park rangers, and see the award-winning park film, "Heartbeats of Denali." The bookstore, Morino Grill, and Murie Science and Learning Center are nearby.

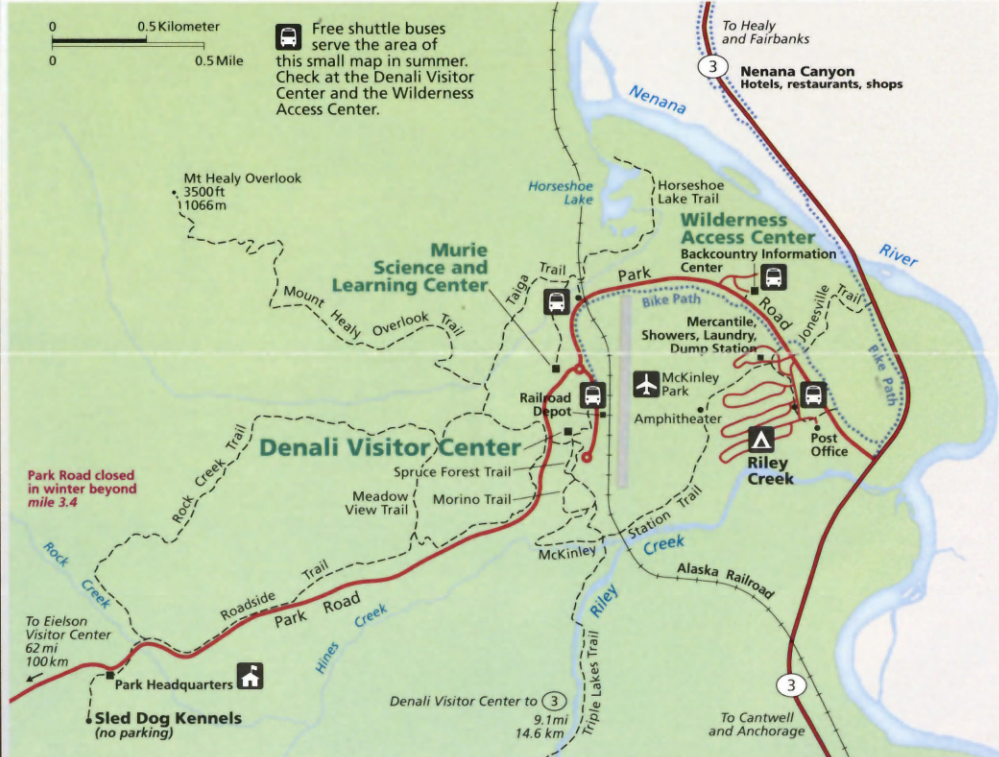


Eielson Visitor Center is 66 miles inside the park. It exemplifies the park's commitment to sustainable practices.

Park Bookstore Alaska Geographic Association P.O. Box 230 Denali Park, AK 99755 907-683-1272 www.alaskageographic.org

All Reservations for Campsites, Tours, and Shuttle Bus Tickets Contact the park concessioner, Doyon/ARA-MARK Joint Venture 800-622-7275 (nationwide), 907-272-7275 (international), or www.reservedenali.com.

Detail Map: Entrance and Visitor Center Area



Campground	Miles Kilometers		Campsites		RV**		Toilet		Water	
			Spaces	Tent			Vault	Flush	Tap	
Riley Creek CG	0.4	0.7	146	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Savage River CG	12.8	20.5	33	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sanctuary River CG	22.6	36.4	7	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Teklanika River CG	29.1	46.8	53	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Igloo Creek CG	34.0	54.8	7	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wonder Lake Jct.	84.4	135.9	28	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Wilderness Safety Denali is true wilderness. Before you venture into the park, read the safety messages in the free visitor guide *Alpenglow*. Grizzly bears and moose are dangerous. Crossing glacial rivers can be treacherous.

