

Denali
means “the Tall One” for the Dene people
north of the Alaska Range

To Make a Wild Dream Come True

Charles Sheldon had a dream. Standing on a rise in the Kantishna Hills in January 1908, he pulled out his field glasses—more important to him than his hunting rifle—and looked around. Everything his eyes feasted on could one day be a premier national park, the Yellowstone of Alaska, preserved and protected for one reason above all others: to celebrate restraint as an expression of freedom, our rare ability to save a place so it will one day save us. He studied the ocean of land, storm-tossed by mountains and glaciers, waves of rolling tundra, a landscape like no other, vast, intact, winter-white,

and holding its breath, so still yet dynamic, epic and epoch in its dimensions, the America that used to be. Such a grand ambition, and more than a dream, it was a spark of idealism, a vision. Could Sheldon do it? Could one person with help from a few committed colleagues and friends successfully campaign for the creation of a national park?

Thomas Jefferson had said it would take 1,000 years for Americans to civilize their emerging continental nation and build cities on the Pacific coast as they had on the Atlantic. It took 50 years. The so-called “myth of superabundance”—that we would never

run out of fish, bison, bears, and so much else—was rapidly becoming just that: a myth. A Yale man who preferred to be in the wilderness, Sheldon decided to dedicate himself to the conservation cause of President Theodore Roosevelt. He journeyed to Alaska when the young US territory had no roads and only 30,000 people (fewer than five percent of what it has today) and found his way to the mountains.

Due south of him rose the icy granite massif that gold miners in Kantishna and Fairbanks called Mount McKinley but that Sheldon simply called

“the mountain,” or “Denali,” a Dene name meaning “the Tall One.” Certainly, a mountain like that could take care of itself, being the highest in North America, but what of the magnificent wild animals that embroidered it—the grizzlies, caribou, wolves, moose, Dall sheep, and others that moved over the land with ancient grace? Market hunters were coming into the country with an aim to kill wild animals to feed gold miners and railroad workers. It had to stop. Sheldon spent 10 months in the Denali region, then headed back east with one purpose: to make a wild dream come true.

Rethinking Wolves, Wilderness, and Wildness

... let us be guardians, rather than gardeners.—Adolph Murie

Adolph Murie had a theory. Wolves were not bad or evil. They were keen predators that helped to maintain healthy populations of prey species by taking out the old, sick, and injured. Wolves, in fact, were beneficial. They made everything around them stronger, healthier, more agile, and alert.

This was heresy in the 1930s, when books, films, and legends demonized the wolf, the wild dog that thousands of years ago had refused our obedience training yet remained our four-legged shadow, a ghost of the hunter we used to be. A wildlife biologist who had studied coyotes in Yellowstone, Murie found great inspiration when he came north

to what was then Mount McKinley National Park. Here was a dream come true, a park signed into law in February 1917 by Woodrow Wilson after nearly 10 years of campaigning by Charles Sheldon and other activists. Here was a once-upon-a-time land, the most accessible wilderness in Alaska, a park to protect wild animals by protecting the place where they lived, the first national park after the creation of the National Park Service in August 1916.

The world was changing and Murie wanted to be part of it. “Ecology” and “wilderness” were beginning to find their way into the American vocabulary. Nature wasn’t a commodity people

owned, it was a community they belonged to. Over-civilized people needed nature—big, wild, mysterious—to find themselves, lose themselves, and find themselves again; to rewrite the definitions of progress and wealth; and to be reminded what it meant to be truly alive.

For three years, 1939–41, Murie lived with his family in a cabin on the East Fork of the Toklat River, in the heart of the park, and studied Dall sheep, caribou, and wolves. His young daughter sometimes joined him on the tundra, field glasses in hand, like Charles Sheldon, to watch wolf pups play near their den. A

single 90-mile road had been built through the park, and while traffic was light, it increased steadily, then jumped in 1972 after a highway was built between Anchorage and Fairbanks. People were coming to see the once-upon-a-time land, the America that used to be.

As big as the park was, it wasn’t big enough. Murie and others wanted to protect its ecological integrity. So, they campaigned and hoped for a president one day who would be as conservation-minded as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. It took 40 years.

Wild Places Don’t Stay Wild by Accident

Jimmy Carter had a final act. In December 1980, with only weeks left in his presidency, he signed into law legislation that established over 100 million acres of new national parks, preserves, and wildlife refuges in Alaska. Mount McKinley National Park, enlarged from two million acres to six million, became Denali National Park and Preserve, with new boundaries to encompass entire watersheds and the home ranges of wildlife populations.

Today, hundreds of thousands of park visitors travel by bus every summer on the single road through the park. The bus system (versus private vehicles) reduces traffic and roadside disturbances to enhance the visitor experience.

A wolf or a bear, breathtakingly close, is priceless. An entire bus goes quiet, cameras softly clicking, as a mother grizzly and her cubs eat blueberries only 20 yards away. Later, everybody talks with new animation, enchanted like children, alive with stories to last a lifetime.

Imagine: Here’s a place we did not harvest or plunder or otherwise conquer but allowed to enrich and inspire us over many generations. Not only did we care about the place, we cared for it. We defended it and still do. National parks don’t happen by accident. They are established and preserved by great force of character, heroic at times, often tedious and downright hard. This is stewardship.

Challenges remain. Wolves are routinely shot and trapped in Alaska, some near Denali. The climate shifts, the air grows warmer, permafrost melts,

habitats disappear. Every year thousands of people want to climb [Mount McKinley] or fly around it. Dedicated people rise to meet management challenges, to save the wild essence and character of Denali: a Charles Sheldon here, an Adolph Murie there. A few committed citizens can bring about big, thoughtful change for the common good. It always works that way. Now it’s your turn.

—Texts by Kim Heacox

Top: Alaska Range reflections. © OT LUONG / TERRAGALLERIA.COM
Middle: Dog teams haul freight at Wonder Lake. © 2011 JEFF SCHULTZ / ALASKASTOCK.COM
Bottom: Dall sheep ram, Polychrome Pass. © 2011 KENNETH R. WHITTEN / ALASKASTOCK.COM

Check the park website or go to a visitor center to plan your trip and learn about park programs, safety, and regulations. Also use the official NPS App to guide your visit; download the park to use offline.

More Information
Denali National Park and Preserve
PO Box 9, Denali Park, AK 99755
907-683-9532
www.nps.gov/dena
denali_info@nps.gov

Alaska Public Lands Information Centers
 Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center,
 101 Dunkel St., Suite 110, Fairbanks, AK 99701,
 907-459-3730
 Anchorage Alaska Center, 605 West 4th Ave.,
 Suite 105, Anchorage, AK 99501, 907-644-3661

Park Store
Alaska Geographic Association
PO Box 230
Denali Park, AK 99755
907-683-1272
www.akgeo.org

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

Follow DenaliNPS on social media.

 **National
Park Foundation**
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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By Road The main park entrance is 237 miles north of Anchorage and 120 miles south of Fairbanks via George Parks Highway, AK 3. 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. Call 800-544-0552 or www.alaskarailroad.com.

Transportation In summer private vehicles are restricted beyond Savage River (Mile 15). To protect wildlife viewing, Park Road traffic is limited.

The courtesy shuttle from the park entrance to Savage River is free. For a fee, transit bus service runs mid-May to mid-September from the Denali Bus Depot to Toklat River (6 hours roundtrip), Eielson

Visitor Center (8 hours), and Wonder Lake (11 hours). You may get on and off along Park Road to hike, except in wild-

life closures. You may reboard as space is available. Walk-ins may face a wait time.

Expanded tour bus services include a narrated program.

Reservations For all reservations of tours, campsites, and transit bus tickets, contact the park concessioner Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture at 800-622-7275 (US), 907-272-7275 (international), or www.reservedenali.com.

Food Service and Necessities No food service is offered beyond the park entrance area. Bring food, drink, warm clothes, raingear, and other necessary items.

Be Prepared Most people visit between mid-May and mid-September. Summer is cool, wet, windy, and possibly snowy. Bring clothing for temperatures from 35 to 75°F (2 to 24°C). A hat, mittens or gloves, and raingear are essential. Sturdy footwear, insect repellent, binoculars, and a camera may also help.

in winter and shoulder seasons local services are limited. Riley Creek Campground near the park entrance is open all year. Park Road stays open to Park Headquarters at Mile 3.4 and could be open farther into the park depending on weather conditions. Reach the backcountry by snowshoes, skis, or dogsled. Check road status and weather and get backcountry permits at the winter visitor center.

Entrance Fee The entrance fee is collected year-round for visitors age 16 and up (15 and under are free) and is valid for seven days. Most fee money stays in the park to improve visitor services and facilities. The Denali

Annual Pass and the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass Series are valid for entry of the passholder and up to three others in the group (age 16 and up).

Pets You may walk pets along Park Road, in parking lots, on campground roads, along the Roadside Bike Trail from the park entrance to the visitor center campus, and on the Roadside Hiking Trail between the visitor center campus and park headquarters. Pets must be leashed with a six-foot or shorter lead. Do not leave a tethered pet unattended. Collect and dispose of pet waste.

Wildlife Activity may require areas to be closed to all entry for a few days to several months.

Biking Biking is allowed year-round in some areas of the park. Bicycle racks are available on buses, but capacity is limited. Check the visitor center or park website for more information.

Hiking Denali has trails for novice and experienced hikers. Join ranger-led walks or take longer cross-country hikes on your own. Some routes are on durable surfaces along ridgetops or gravel riverbars. You are responsible for knowing current closures. Sturdy footgear is essential. Streams can be cold, swift, and dangerous to cross.

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. Unit descriptions are available online. Many 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 for 9–20 people are available by reservation. Camping is prohibited in parking areas and on road-

sides. Campfires are allowed only in certain campgrounds.

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

Sport Fishing and Hunting Fishing and hunting are allowed in some park and preserve locations, regulated by federal and state law. Discharging weapons is strictly prohibited in many areas. You are responsible for knowing and complying with firearms laws and regulations. For more information visit the park website, ask a park ranger, or check at a visitor center.

Mountaineering
Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbers must register 60 days prior to the start of their ascent and pay a special-use fee. Contact the Talkeetna Ranger Station, Box 588, Talkeetna, AK 99676, 907-733-2231.

Emergencies call 911

At the Denali Visitor Center, 1.5 miles from the park entrance, you can explore exhibits, talk to park rangers, and experience the award-winning park film *Heartbeats of Denali*. The Park Store, Morino Grill, and Murie Science and Learning Center are nearby.



The Eielson Visitor Center, 66 miles inside the park, exemplifies the park's commitment to sustainable practices. You can reach the Eielson Visitor Center by transit bus.

ALL IMAGES—NPS

This map of Denali National Park and Preserve shows a network of trails and roads. Key features include:

- Denali Visitor Center:** Located in the center, with a distance of 9.1 miles (14.6 km) to Cantwell and Anchorage.
- Denali Bus Depot:** Situated to the northeast of the visitor center.
- Denali Creek:** A major waterway flowing through the park.
- Trails:** Numerous trails are marked, including the Horseshoe Lake Trail, Roadside Bike Trail, and various forest loops.
- Facilities:** The map shows the Park Headquarters, Sled Dog Kennels, and various service areas like the Riley Creek Day Use Area.
- Scale:** A scale bar indicates distances of 0, 0.5, and 1 mile.
- Notes:** A note mentions that in winter, the Park Road stays open to headquarters at mile 3.4 and could be open farther into the park based on weather conditions.

Campground	Campsite		RV**	Toilet		Water Tap
	Spaces	Tent		Vault	Flush	
Riley Creek	<i>**Miles</i> 0.4	Kilometers 0.7	145	•	•	•
Savage River	12.8	20.5	32	•	•	•
Sanctuary River	22.6	36.4	7	•	•	•
Itekanika River	29.1	46.8	53	•	•	•
Ingloo Creek	34.0	54.8	7	•	•	•
Wonder Lake	85.9	138.2	28	•	•	•

**Distance from Park Entrance

**Limited number of sites can accommodate RV's up to 40 feet maximum.

Wilderness Safety
Denali is true wilderness. Before you venture into the park, read the safety messages on the park website. Grizzly bears and moose are dangerous. Crossing glacial rivers can be treacherous.

