

Gates of the Arctic

Gates of the Arctic National Park
Gates of the Arctic National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Boreal forest fall colors

Young caribou

Tundra in summer

Evening camp

Tundra fall colors

Inuksuk, "stone person"

On the south slope of the northernmost Rocky Mountains, the foothills give way to ragged peaks. On the north slope the nearly treeless tundra stretches north to the Arctic Ocean. In fall, golden leaves drape the southern slopes and the tundra blazes red on the northern slopes. These parklands protect important habitat for the caribou of the Western Arctic, Central Arctic, and Teshepuk herds. These herds range widely eating the low-lying plants and slow-growing lichens that carpet the land. The caribou continue to be vital to local Native communities. The Nunamiut and Athabaskan peoples and some non-Native local residents pursue subsistence ways of life in the park today. Please respect their property, camps, and equipment. Remote wildness and rugged distance characterize Gates of the Arctic and demand self-sufficiency from all who come here. Wilderness survival skills are essential. The park contains no developed facilities. The land features natural, archeological, and historical objects by the thousands. Please leave them as is, for others to enjoy.

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Alaska's Ultimate Wilderness

Few landmarks bear names on topographic maps here. The park name came from wilderness advocate Robert Marshall, who traveled the North Fork Koyukuk country frequently from 1929 to 1939. Marshall called two peaks, Frigid Crags and Boreal Mountain, the gates from Alaska's central Brooks Range into the far north Arctic. Wind, water, temperature, and glacial and tectonic actions sculpted wildly varied landscapes in this east-west trending part of the Rocky Mountains. Southerly foothills step into waves of mountains rising to elevations of 4,000 feet that culminate in limestone or granite peaks over 7,000 feet in elevation. Then the ranks reverse at the Arctic Divide: tundra stretches to the Arctic Ocean. Six national wild rivers—Alatna, John, Kobuk, Noatak, North Fork Koyukuk, and Tinayguk—and other waterways cross the park. Many people seek remote wilderness and solitude here. A primary goal of park management is to protect these opportunities.

People have been a part of the ecosystem here for 10,000 years. Nomadic hunters and gatherers traveled between the mountains' forested southern slopes and the Arctic Coast. Now their descendants depend on and use park and preserve resources. A Nunamiut Eskimo village, Anaktuvuk Pass, lies inside the park. Winter is long, and summer is active. Plants and animals move through life cycles quickly before winter sets in.

From November to March, most activity ceases while -20°F to -50°F temperatures persist. The dry interior climate sees little snow, but what falls stays to wrap land and rivers in ice and silence. As a low-riding Sun starts its warming ascent in April, dogsledders come out. Backpackers and river runners arrive in mid-June, as the rivers become free of ice. No trails or visitor services exist in the park. You must be self-sufficient.

Created to ensure the arctic environment's integrity, the park contains major parts of the range and habitat of the Western Arctic caribou herd. Grizzly and black bear, wolf, moose, Dall sheep, wolverine, muskox, and fox also live here. At spring breakup the few resident bird species are joined by migratory species from Europe, South America, Asia, tropical archipelagos, and the contiguous United States. Wildlife is varied but widely dispersed—because large areas are needed to sustain life in the Arctic. Wildlife sightings may be greatly affected by your party size, travel patterns, and the weather.

Sparse black-spruce forests called taiga (Russian for "land of little sticks") dot north-facing slopes and poorly drained lowland. Boreal forests of white spruce, aspen, and birch typically are found on south-facing slopes. Near tree line, the shrub-thicket community of dwarf and resin birch, alder, and willow appears. Heath, moss,

and fragile lichen make up the understory. Alpine tundra communities occur in mountainous areas and along well-drained, rocky ridges. Alder thickets and tussocks in valleys and on slopes often impede hiking in the Arctic. Backpackers often make only five miles per day. Take your time: don't try to squeeze a 21-day arctic trip into a 14-day "lower-48" trip.

The 1980 legislation that created the park and the preserve protected 8.4 million acres. It mandated that the area be managed to maintain its wild and undeveloped character, opportunities for solitude, and the environmental integrity of its natural features and to provide for wilderness recreation. Fish and wildlife, arctic habitats, cultural resources, and traditional subsistence uses also were protected. With the adjacent Noatak National Preserve and Kobuk Valley National Park, Gates of the Arctic comprises one of the world's largest parkland areas.

Backcountry Visitors

Gates of the Arctic, in the central Brooks Range, is a wilderness park accessible to backcountry travelers. The park has no signs, facilities, roads, or trails. Travel is by foot or boat (canoe, raft, or kayak). In this arctic wilderness you must be well prepared and self-sufficient. In much of the park it may be days or weeks before you encounter another person. It is your responsibility to: 1 choose where to go, 2 decide how to travel, and 3 have the appropriate equipment and skills for a safe, enjoyable trip.

Preparation For backcountry information visit www.nps.gov/gaar or contact the Bettles Ranger Station. Our website covers trip planning, bear safety, river crossings, boating

safety, wildlife viewing, weather, insects, Leave No Trace practices, designated Wild Rivers, further reading, commercial accommodations, guide services, outfitters, commercial air services, and air charter services. Our website is more detailed and complete than our printed material. For maps and map information visit store.usgs.gov.

Choosing Where To Go Deciding where to go can be a challenge. Gates of the Arctic is huge—2.6 times the size of Connecticut—and access is limited. Read about the park, study maps, determine your access points, and make a plan.



Park staff, air charter services, guides, or outfitters can provide information. Flexibility is key to successful trips. Weather can delay, by days, your flights in or out of the park. How far you can hike in a day may vary greatly from the "typical" five miles. *Do not use the map in this brochure for hiking. Use USGS topographical maps.*

Getting to the Park Charter planes can fly you into the park. Access points are limited to gravel bars or bodies of water accessible by float plane. Hiking from the Dalton Highway is popular but limited by river crossings. Commercial air service serves Anaktuvuk Pass, and you can hike from there into the park.

Backcountry Orientation Get a backcountry safety and Leave No Trace orientation from a park ranger at the Bettles Ranger Station, Arctic

Interagency Visitor Center, or Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station. Backcountry permits are not required but registration is strongly encouraged for your safety.

Leave No Trace Please be responsible and practice the principles of Leave No Trace:

- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Leave what you find.
- Minimize campfire impacts.
- Respect wildlife.
- Be considerate of other visitors.

Subsistence Use Local residents use the park for subsistence activities (hunting, fishing, trap-

ing, and gathering). Camps, fishnets, traps, and equipment are private property. Private land exists in the park; use restrictions may apply.

More Information
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 26030, Bettles, AK 99726
907-692-5494
e-mail: gaar_visitor_information@nps.gov
www.nps.gov/gaar

Fairbanks Administrative Center
4175 Geist Road, Fairbanks, AK 99709
907-457-5752

Bettles Ranger Station
907-692-5494
June through September: Open daily 8 am to 5 pm including holidays.

October through May: Open Monday through Friday 8 am to 5 pm except holidays.

Arctic Interagency Visitor Center
907-678-5209
Open daily Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station
P.O. Box 21102, Anaktuvuk Pass, AK 99721
907-661-3520
Open seasonally.

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Gates of the Arctic National Preserve are two of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, please visit www.nps.gov.

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