

Wrangell-St. Elias

Official Map and Guide

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
Department of the Interior



George Herben

Mt. Sanford is one of several peaks in the Wrangells that can be viewed from nearby highways. Mts. Drum, Blackburn, and Sanford are dormant vol-



The Chitstone River flows through a many-hued, glacier-carved gorge and turns into a 300-foot waterfall over a sheer wall.



Tom Bean

If any single species symbolizes the park's wildlife, it is Dall sheep, which inhabit the interior highlands.



Tom Bean

The profusely braided Chitina River flows from the Chitina and Logan glaciers on the park's eastern boundary to the Copper River on the western

boundary. The mighty Copper, which starts on the north side of the Wrangells, empties into the Gulf of Alaska.



Jim Bones

Boating is among the many adventuresome ways to explore Wrangell-St. Elias. Here a boater makes his way on the Kennicott, a minor river in

comparison with the Copper. Chitina, and Chisana. Kayakers increasingly are plying bays and inlets near Yakutat.



Washington State Historical Society

Men build a railroad bridge across the Kuskulana River in 1910. Today travelers on the road to McCarthy cross this bridge.



Tom Bean

Skiers on the Malaspina Glacier head toward Mt. St. Elias, at 18,008 feet the second highest peak in the United States.



Tom Bean

With massive Hubbard Glacier as a backdrop, camping in Disenchantment Bay is, if nothing else, enchanting. The glacier, which flows out

of the St. Elias Mountains in Canada into the United States, is surging into the bay.

A Preeminent Mountain Wilderness

Incredible. You have to see Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve to believe it—and even then you are not too sure. The number and scale of everything is so enormous. Peaks upon peaks. Glaciers after glaciers. If you follow any of the many braided rivers and streams to their source, you will find either a receding glacier, an advancing glacier, or a tidewater glacier. Several mountain ranges converge here, and the park includes 9 of the 16 highest peaks in the United States. The total acreage makes this the largest U.S. national park, the size of six Yellowstone. And beyond all that, it contains a representative sampling of Alaska's wildlife and old mining sites indicative of man's early explorations here. Hike into these mountains, float the rivers, ski across the glaciers, fly over the area, and see geology in the making. Amid the splendid isolation comes a feeling of discovery, a feeling that you might be the first person to see such sights. There are so many peaks that you quickly abandon the urge to learn their names and just settle back and appreciate their beauty, their size, their ruggedness. Few roads mean that many travelers will not enter the park itself, but even then some of its major peaks, including Blackburn, Sanford,

Drum, and Wrangell, can be seen from nearby highways. Position yourself in one spot and watch the sun, clouds, and storms play hide and seek with a single peak or ridge. The mood changes by the minute.

Four major mountain ranges meet here: The Wrangells huddle in the northern interior; the Chugach guard the southern coast; the Saint Elias Mountains rise abruptly from the Gulf of Alaska thrusting northward past the Chugach and on toward the Wrangells; and the eastern end of the Alaskan Range, mapped as the Nutzotin and Mentasta Mountains, form part of the preserve's northern boundary. The Wrangells are volcanic in origin, but only Mount Wrangell remains active with vents of steam near its summit. The last reported eruption was in 1900. With adjoining Kluane National Park in Canada, all these ranges form the premier mountain wilderness in North America. The highcountry is covered with snow the year round, resulting in extensive icefields and glaciers. The Bagley Icefield near the coast is the largest subpolar icefield in North America and spawns such giant glaciers as the Tana, Miles, Hubbard, and Guyot.

The Malaspina Glacier flows out of the St. Elias Range between Icy Bay and Yakutat Bay in a mass larger than the State of Rhode Island. It carries so much glacial silt that plants and trees take hold on its extremities, grow to maturity, and topple over the edge as the glacier melts. Flowing from the glaciers are a multitude of meandering rivers and braided streams. The Copper River, the largest, forms the western boundary of the park starting in the Wrangells and emptying into the Gulf of Alaska in Chugach National Forest. In the early 1900s the Kennecott Mining Co. transported copper from its mines near McCarthy by railroad along the Chitina and Copper rivers to ships at Cordova. Ore was extracted from these highly productive mines between 1911 and 1938 and lured many people to the area. During that period gold was extracted from the Nabesna area as well. Today mining still occurs on private lands within the park, and you can see evidence of earlier mining, including the ruins of the Kennecott mines, which have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Indian villages expanded and a number of new towns sprang up in mining's heyday. Copper Center, Chitina, Gulkana, and Chistochina

are among the old Athapaskan settlements. Yakutat, on the coast, is a traditional Tlingit fishing village.

Though the vegetation may seem sparse, especially in the interior, the park contains a variety of wildlife. Dall sheep and mountain goats patrol the craggy peaks. Herds of caribou feed on the lichen and low woody plants around the Wrangells. Moose browse in sloughs and bogs in the coastal lowlands and in brushy areas, which also attract brown/grizzly bears. Black bears roam throughout the park. Bison were released in the Copper and Chitina River valleys in 1950 and 1962 respectively and remain as separate herds today. Many rivers, streams, and lakes provide spawning grounds for salmon and other fish. The Copper River drainage and the Malaspina forelands are major flyways for migratory birds and include prime nesting sites for trumpeter swans. The coastal areas are habitat for marine mammals, including sea lions and harbor seals.

Enough superlatives; explore the park and discover it for yourself!

Land Distinctions

Some areas within Wrangell-St. Elias, including the Kennecott townsites and Native corporation lands, are private. Native lands may be entered by permit. Please respect the privacy of owners. See maps at park headquarters or ranger stations for information about these properties. Wrangell-St. Elias was proclaimed a national monument on December 1, 1978, and established as a national park and preserve on December 2, 1980, with 13,200,000 acres. See Activities (right) for hunting and trapping differences between park and preserve. Wrangell-St. Elias and adjoining Kluane National Park in Canada were designated a World Heritage Site on October 24, 1979.

Travel Logistics

The park, in southcentral Alaska, can be reached from Anchorage via Glenn Highway (Alaska 1). At Glennallen, Glenn Highway meets Richardson Highway, which skirts the park's western boundary en route to Valdez, a coastal city served by the



Alaska Ferry. The Tok Cut-off coming south from Alaska Highway borders the northwestern corner. From these highways two unpaved roads penetrate the park. The Chitina-McCarthy Road extends 61 miles from Chitina to the Kennicott River just west of McCarthy. The road follows the old Copper River and Northwestern Railroad route. High-clearance, two-wheel-drive vehicles usually can

make the trip in summer, but because the road is not regularly maintained, ask for current conditions before starting. The trip takes about four hours and ends at the Kennicott River. You then must hand-power a cable tram across the river to McCarthy and the privately owned historic Kennecott mining complex. The northern portion of the park can be reached via the Nabesna Road.

From Slana on the Tok Cutoff, it extends 45 miles to Nabesna, an inactive privately owned mining community. Check at the Slana Ranger Station for the latest road conditions. Aircraft may be used within the boundaries except to support subsistence hunting and fishing within the park.

Charter aircraft are available in most communities, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Northway, Glennallen, Cordova, Valdez, Tok, and Yakutat. Cordova and Yakutat are served daily by commercial jets. In the summer, regularly scheduled buses run between Anchorage and Valdez with stops in Glennallen. Several companies provide river and backcountry guide services.

Lodging, Services

Check on accommodations and make reservations in advance, for there are few establishments and their seasons vary considerably. Motels, restaurants, and roadhouses provide standard tourist-travel services in major communities along the highways near the park and in the coastal communities of Yakutat, Valdez, and Cordova.

Rustic accommodations are provided at privately operated fishing camps, guide cabins, and full-service lodges in various parts of the park. For a list, write to the park.

The Bureau of Land Management and the State of Alaska run campgrounds along the Richardson Highway, Tok Cutoff, and Edgerton Highway.

Activities

This is a park for wilderness-oriented activities. Travel services and facilities are limited. Visitors are mostly on their own here and thus must be highly self-motivated and self-sufficient.

Besides sightseeing, major activities consist of backpacking, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, mountaineering, river running, kayaking along the coast, and crosscountry skiing. No matter which activity you pursue, be sure to read Precautions (right).

Most backpackers and dayhikers start from points along the Slana-Nabesna or Chitina-McCarthy roads. There are few trails, so most hiking is across what appears to be previously untraversed terrain.

You may tent-camp anywhere within the boundaries except on private property. Campgrounds are located along nearby highways.

The park's many glaciers, icefields, rivers, and steep rock walls present endless challenges for mountaineers. Mounts Drum, Sanford, Blackburn, and St. Elias are favorites for climbing expeditions.

The Copper and Chitina rivers offer excellent rafting and kayaking opportunities. The 77-mile trip down the Copper from Chitina to the Gulf of Alaska takes rafters through some of the park's most rugged terrain. Kayakers increasingly are exploring the bays, inlets, and coast in the Yakutat and Icy Bay areas.

The months of March, April, and May, after the severe cold weather but with the lowlands still snow-covered, are the best ones for crosscountry skiing.

Within the national park, local rural residents may carry out traditional subsistence hunting, trapping, and fishing activities. This policy recognizes a long-standing reliance on wildlife, fish, and plant materials for subsistence in rural Alaska.

Within the national preserve, the same local subsistence uses are permitted as are sports hunting, trapping, and fishing for nonresidents. You must have an Alaska license to hunt, fish, or trap. Be sure not to trespass on private property.

Weather

The weather here is like that of most of interior Alaska. Summers are cloudy and cool, but clear, hot days are not uncommon in July, the warmest month. August and September tend to be cool and wet, but with fewer mosquitoes than July. Fall can be delightfully clear, but the season is short. Winters are cold and dark, with temperatures dropping to -50°F. Though the average snow cover in winter is two feet, days are often clear. In the spring, clear skies, increasingly longer days, and warming temperatures break winter's hold on the land with dramatic quickness.

Remember, the weather can change by the minute and make trips longer. Plan for delays.

Precautions, Notes

Assistance may be days or miles away, so be extraordinarily careful in this vast region. You must possess proper survival gear and skills to handle mountainous terrain.

Backcountry hikers must be self-sufficient, carry enough food to cover unexpected delays, and be prepared for the wilderness. Rain gear and wool or pile clothing are essential. Ask Park Service rangers or local residents about weather conditions and the reasonableness of trying to reach certain points. From experience they know the difficulties of dealing with the weather and terrain.

Walking across the spruce muskeg with a pack can take much more time than expected. From a distance

the landscape may look like scrub lands, but place a foot in it and you quickly find out the land tests your endurance as you hop from tussock to tussock and try to avoid hidden pools of water. You can be knee deep in water or flat on your back before you know it.

Hikers must be familiar with safe techniques for crossing rivers and streams. Many are impassable, even for experts. Others can change from trickling creeks to raging torrents quickly, so be especially cautious. Only those with expertise in cold weather camping and survival techniques should attempt winter camping.

Snowmachines, dog-teams, and horses may

be used. Backcountry permits are not required. Travelers are encouraged, however, to complete a "Backcountry Itinerary," available at any park office.

For further information, visit the headquarters at mile 105½ Old Richardson Highway near Copper Center, or write or call: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 29, Glennallen, AK 99588, 907-822-5235. In season, you also may contact: Nabesna Ranger Station, P.O. Box 885, Slana, AK 99586, 907-822-5238; Chitina Ranger Station, P.O. Box 110, Chitina, AK 99566, 907-823-2205; Yakutat Ranger Station, P.O. Box 137, Yakutat, AK 99689, 907-784-3295.

Cover photo by George Herben: The Kennicott and Gates glaciers sweep down from Mt. Blackburn and Regal Mountain in the Wrangells.

Map Warning
Do not use this map for hiking. Obtain Geological Survey topographical maps and study them before you head out. No

matter the season, we suggest you leave your itinerary with someone and contact that person upon your return.

World Heritage Site
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was designated a World Heritage Site on October 24, 1979. All sites on the World Heritage List are "considered to be of such exceptional interest and

such universal value that their protection is the responsibility of all mankind." The World Heritage Convention has been signed by more than 111 nations.

