

Wrangell-St. Elias

Official Map and Guide

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



George Herben

Mt. Sanford and several other peaks in the Wrangells can be seen from nearby highways. Drum, Blackburn, and Sanford



The Chitstone River flows through a many-hued and glacier-carved gorge and then plunges over a sheer 300-foot wall.



Tom Bean

If one species symbolizes the park's wildlife, it is the Dall sheep that inhabit its interior highlands.



Tom Bean

Profusely braided Chitina River flows from Chitina and Logan glaciers on the park's eastern boundary to the Copper River on its

western boundary. The mighty Copper starts on the Wrangells' north side and empties into the Gulf of Alaska.



Jim Bories

A boater makes his way on the Kennicott, which is a minor river when compared to the Copper, Chitina, and Chisana. Kayak-

ers increasingly ply bays and inlets near Yakutat.



Washington State Historical Society

Men built 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 the 18,000-foot Mt. St. Elias, second highest peak in the United States.



Tom Bean

With massive Hubbard Glacier as a backdrop, camping in Disenchantment Bay is enchanting. The glacier flows out of

the St. Elias Mountains in Canada into the United States. Here, it surges into the bay.

Preeminent Mountain Wilderness

Incredible. You must see Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve to believe it. Number and scale loom large here, magnified by splendid isolation. The largest U.S. national park, it equals six Yellowstone, with peaks upon peaks and glaciers after glaciers. Follow any braided river or stream to its source, and you will find either a receding, advancing, or tidewater glacier. The park lets you sample representative Alaska wildlife as well as historic mining sites. Hike its mountains, float its rivers, ski its glaciers, or fly over this landscape, and you witness living geology. You sense discovery, the feeling you might be the first to see such sights.

The peaks' sheer numbers quickly quell your urge to learn their names. Just settle back and appreciate their beauty, mass, and rugged grandeur. That roads are few means many travelers will not enter the park itself, but major peaks—Blackburn, Sanford, Drum, and Wrangell—are seen from nearby highways. Or position yourself in one spot and watch sun, clouds, and storms play hide and seek with single peaks or ridges. Watch moods change by the minute here. Four major mountain ranges meet in the park, which includes nine of the 16 highest peaks in the United States. The

Wrangells huddle in the northern interior. The Chugach guard the southern coast. The Saint Elias Mountains rise abruptly from the Gulf of Alaska to thrust northward past the Chugach on toward the Wrangells. And the eastern end of the Alaska Range—mapped as the Nutzotin and Mentasta mountains—forms part of the preserve's northern boundary.

The Wrangells are volcanic in origin, but only Mount Wrangell remains active—last reported erupting in 1900—with vents of steam near its summit. With adjoining Kluane National Park in Canada, all these ranges form North America's premier mountain wilderness. Covered year round with snow, the highcountry stands cloaked with icefields and glaciers. Near the coast, North America's largest subpolar icefield, Bagley Icefield, spawns giant glaciers, the Tana, Miles, Hubbard, and Guyot.

The Malaspina Glacier flows out of the St. Elias Range between Icy and Yakutat bays in a mass larger than the state of Rhode Island. So much glacial silt rides it that plants and trees take hold on the glacier's extremities and grow to maturity only to topple over the edge when it melts.

Flowing from glaciers are multitudes of meandering rivers and braided streams. Largest is the Copper River, forming the park's western boundary. The Copper rises in the Wrangells and empties 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 productive mines between 1911 and 1938 and lured many people to the area. Gold was extracted from the Nabesna area then, too. Mining still takes place on private lands in the park, and evidence of earlier mining includes ruins of the Kennecott mines, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In mining's heyday Indian villages expanded and several new towns sprang up. Copper Center, Chitina, Gulkana, and Chistochina are among the old Athabaskan settlements. The coastal town of Yakutat is a traditional Tlingit fishing village.

While vegetation may appear sparse, especially in the interior, the park is home to a variety of wildlife. Both 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. Many rivers, streams, and lakes provide spawning grounds for salmon and other fish. The Copper River drainage and Malaspina forelands mark major flyways for migratory birds and provide prime nesting sites for trumpeter swans. The park's coastal areas are habitat for marine mammals, including sea lions and harbor seals.

Wrangell-St. Elias, Kluane National Park in Canada, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, and Tatshenshini-Alsek Park in British Columbia are now together a World Heritage Site—at 24 million acres the world's largest internationally protected area—recognized for exceptional interest and universal value. At more than 9.6 million acres, the park's designated wilderness represents nearly 10 percent of the entire National Wilderness Preservation System. Nor are these facts the end of superlatives! Explore the park and discover still others for yourself.

Land Distinctions

Some areas in Wrangell-St. Elias, including Kennecott townsites and Native corporation lands, are private. Native lands may be entered by permit only. Please respect the privacy of owners. Most private land lies along frequently used roads. Stick to these roads and to the trails, so you don't trespass. See maps at park headquarters or ranger stations for current information.

In 1980 Wrangell-St. Elias was established as a national park and preserve of 13.2 million acres. See Activities (right) for the differences between hunting and trapping regulations for the national park and national preserve portions.

Travel Logistics

The park can be reached from Anchorage via Glenn Highway (Alaska 1). At Glennallen, Glenn Highway meets the Richardson

Highway; it skirts the park's western boundary en route to the coastal city of Valdez, served by the Alaska Ferry. The Tok Cutoff coming south from the 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, by the old Copper River and North-



western Railroad route. This road is not regularly maintained—ask for current conditions before you start out. The trip takes about four hours and ends up at the Kennicott River, where you need to hand-power a cable tram across the river to McCarthy and the privately owned historic Kennecott mining complex.

The northern park area is reached via the Nabesna Road. From Slana on the

Tok Cutoff, it extends 45 miles to Nabesna, a privately owned but inactive mining community. Check on road conditions at the Slana Ranger Station.

Aircraft may be used within the boundaries except in support of subsistence hunting in the park. You can charter aircraft in most communities, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Valdez, Cordova, Glennallen, Tok, and Yakutat. Cordova and Yakutat have daily commercial jet service. Regularly scheduled buses run between Anchorage and Valdez in the summer, with stops in the Tok Cutoff and Richardson and Edgerton highways.

Lodging, Services

Check on accommodations and make your reservations well in advance. Services are few, and their seasons will vary. Motels, restaurants, and roadhouses offer usual tourist services in the major communities on highways near the park and also in the coastal communities of Yakutat, Valdez, and Cordova. Write to the park for a list of privately operated fishing camps, guide cabins, and lodges with full service that offer rustic accommodations within the park.

The Bureau of Land Management and the state of Alaska run campgrounds along the Tok Cutoff and Richardson and Edgerton highways.

Activities

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

Some major activities besides sightseeing are backpacking, camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, mountaineering, river running, kayaking along the coast, and crosscountry skiing. No matter what you choose to do, please read Precautions (right).

Backpackers and dayhikers generally set out from points along the Slana-Nabesna or Chitina-McCarthy roads. Trails are few; most hiking is across what may look like untraversed terrain. You may tent-camp anywhere with-

in the boundaries except on private property. Car campgrounds lie along the nearby highways.

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

The Copper and Chitina rivers offer excellent rafting and kayaking. The 77 miles down the Copper from Chitina to the Gulf of Alaska boast some of the park's most rugged terrain. Kayakers increasingly explore the bays, inlets, and coast in the Yakutat and Icy Bay areas.

March, April, and May—after severe cold weather but with the lowlands still

snow-covered—are best for crosscountry skiing.

In the national park, local rural residents may carry out traditional subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping activities. This policy recognizes rural Alaska's longstanding reliance on wildlife, fish, and plant materials.

In the national preserve, the same local subsistence uses are permitted, as are sport hunting, trapping, and fishing for non-residents. Alaska licenses are required. Be sure not to trespass on the private property.

Weather

As in most of interior Alaska, the summers here 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, with fewer mosquitoes than July. Fall can be delightfully clear but is a short season. Winters are cold and dark; temperatures drop to -50°F. Winter snow cover averages two feet, but days are often clear. Spring's clear skies, lengthening 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, so plan for delays.

Precautions, Notes

Help may be days away in this vast region; be extraordinarily careful. And you must have the proper survival gear and skills to handle mountainous terrain.

Backcountry hikers must be self-sufficient, carry enough food to cover a delay, and be prepared for wilderness. Rain gear and wool or pile clothing are essential. Ask park rangers or residents of the area about weather conditions and if you should try to reach certain points. They know weather and terrain difficulties from experience.

Walking over spruce muskeg with a pack can take more time than you may expect. What looks from a distance like scrub lands tests 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 streams and rivers. Many are impassable, even for experts. Others can change quickly from trickling creeks to raging torrents. Be cautious. Only those with expertise in cold weather camping and with survival techniques should even attempt winter camping.

Snowmachines, horses, and dog-teams may be used. Backcountry permits are not required, but travelers are encouraged to complete a "Backcountry Itinerary," available at any park office.

For more information, visit park headquarters at mile 105.5 Old Richardson Highway—near Copper Center—or write or call Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 439, Copper Center, AK 99573; 907-822-5234, www.nps.gov/wrst on the Internet.

In season, you may contact: Nabesna Ranger Station, Slana, 907-822-5238; Chitina Ranger Station (summer only), Chitina, 907-823-2205; or Yakutat Ranger Station, Yakutat, 907-784-3295.

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Top photo by George Herben: Kennicott and Gates glaciers sweep down from the Wrangells' Mt. Blackburn and Regal Mountain.

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