

Nabesna Road

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias
National Park & Preserve



The Nabesna Road offers a unique opportunity to explore interior Alaska and the northern reaches of our largest National Park. The drive is an adventure in the midst of the Wrangell, Mentasta, and Nutzotin Mountains. Along the way, you will find primitive campsites, lakes and streams for fishing, hiking routes, and opportunities for wildlife and bird watching. But you won't find many people, so if you like taking the road less traveled, Nabesna Road may be right for you.

The Basics

- 42 miles, EACH WAY
- NO FUEL available in Slana or along the Nabesna Road.
- Drive slowly, carefully, and courteously.
- Carry a full-sized spare and an adequate jack.
- This is a remote area with limited services
- Private land exists along the road in many areas. Please respect the privacy of landowners.

What To Expect

A drive on the 42- mile long Nabesna Road is much the same today as it was when it was built by the Alaska Road Commission in 1933 to connect Nabesna Mine to the port in Valdez. Today, Nabesna Road provides access to the northern part of the park offering the chance to experience true Alaska wilderness.

Before beginning your trip, stop at the **Slana Ranger Station** to check on current road conditions and to pick up a park map. Generally, the road is passable by any two- wheel drive vehicle, even most RVs. At times, high clearance and four- wheel drive are recommended beyond Mile 29, where you encounter the first of three creek crossings. Following spring runoff or a heavy rain, these intermittent stream crossings can have high water and deep channels.

Please be aware that private property adjoins many parts of the road and that the Nabesna Mine is private. Please respect the privacy of landowners. Information on federal land access and private property locations is available at park visitor centers.

Enjoy your visit!



Short on services, but big on wilderness!

Mileposts

The following highlights are points of interest along the Nabesna Road. The mileage begins at the intersection of the Glenn Highway (Tok Cutoff) and the Nabesna Road and is based on actual odometer readings.

0.0 Junction of the Tok Cutoff and Nabesna Road.

0.2 Slana Ranger Station, Alaska Department of Transportation Slana Maintenance Yard



The Slana Ranger Station is open Monday through Friday beginning in April and daily Memorial Day through September from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Visitors will find information about the park and local area, exhibits, and ranger lead activities as well as an Alaska Natural History Association book store.

Be sure to check in at the ranger station for current Nabesna Road conditions.



Recreational off road vehicle (ORV's) are allowed on established trails in Wrangell- St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Permits are required and are available at the Slana Ranger Station.

Slana is a small community of about 125 year round residents. The community is loosely defined as beginning at about Mile 55 to Mile 75 along the Tok Cut- Off and along the first four miles of the Nabesna Road. Until the early 1980's, Slana consisted of a few homesteaders and prospectors. Today there is a convenience store, post office, B&B's, RV parks and a K- 12 school in addition to the ranger station and DOT maintenance yard.

0.5 Post Office (Mon, Wed, Fri, 10 AM-1 PM) Hart D. Ranch RV Park & Campground

0.6 Nabesna House B&B

1.0 Original Slana Roadhouse (now private property)

The Slana Roadhouse is visible on the south side of Nabesna Road. The structure you see today was built in the 1930's but there has been a roadhouse on this site since 1912. The Slana Roadhouse is one of the few road-houses that remain of those that served travelers on the trail from Gakona to Chisana, the site of Alaska's final gold stampede.



photo: G. Bleakley collection

Lawrence DeWitt was a prominent trader in the area when he built the present roadhouse to serve travelers along the new Nabesna Road that connected Nabesna Mine to Gakona, and on to Valdez. Lawrence DeWitt's fate is a mystery – he disappeared from the area in 1937 and is generally believed to have drowned in either the Copper or Slana River. Various individuals kept the roadhouse running sporadically until 1957. The DeWitt family still owns and lives on the property. This roadhouse is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1.2 Slana School (K-12) 2005 enrollment was 14 students and one teacher.

1.7 Slana River Access & Primitive Campsites

Public land managed by Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Rafters often use this as a starting point for trips down the Copper River. The confluence of the Copper River and the Slana River is less than a mile downstream. Below the bridge there is public land to the east and privately owned land to the west. The Slana River begins in the Mentasta Mountains, seen to the north. Look for Noyes Mountain (8,235'), the highest in the Mentasta range. The summit is located along the park's northern boundary.

Nabesna Road



4.0 Junction with “4-Mile” Road - Gravel surface begins

“4- Mile” Road leads north into the Slana Settlement and to Brenda’s Natat Creek Gardens, a commercial greenhouse, Huck Hobbits Hostel, and the Homestead Church.

Slana Settlement was created in 1983 when the BLM opened over 10,000 acres north of the road to homesteading. It was one of the last opportunities for homesteading federal land in the United States. Homesteaders could get a patent for the land they staked after meeting certain requirements, including occupancy, for \$2.50 an acre. Eight hundred claims were filed, but more than half were soon abandoned. Harsh Alaskan winters took their toll. Many tried to live year- round in hastily built tiny cabins or even tents, with temperatures down to - 60°F. There were few employment opportunities in the area and the climate was not suited to farming. Only a little over a hundred claims were eventually patented. Today, about 50 people live in the settlement year round. Some work away from home, some operate business from home, and others are retired.

5.0 Wrangell-St. Elias National Park to the north (left) and National Preserve to the south (right)

Wrangell- St. Elias National Park & Preserve was established in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act (ANILCA). The primary difference between lands designated as Park versus Preserve is that sport hunting is allowed within Preserve lands. Moose is the primary species hunted in the Preserve. All hunting must be conducted in accordance with Alaska State laws, seasons, and regulations.

6.1 Rufus Creek primitive campsite (picnic table)

Fishing for Dolly Varden available. Throughout the drive, you may notice small metal pipes extending from the ends of many of the road culverts. Each spring, State maintenance crews connect truck- mounted steam boilers to these pipes to melt out the solid ice, and allow for water passage through the culvert.

11.0 Suslota Lake Trailhead

This is a multiple- use trail with access to the north. Park in the gravel pit on south side of road at mile 11.1 and walk back 225 feet to trailhead on north side of road. The trail is very wet, boggy, and not recommended for hiking.



12.2 Copper Lake Trailhead & primitive campsite (picnic table)

This is a multiple- use trail with access to Copper Lake to the south. Copper Lake has opportunities for Lake Trout, Grayling, and Burbot fishing. The first 2.5 miles are suitable for hiking. At this point the trail crosses Tanada Creek which can be high and fast. Trail conditions deteriorate beyond this point. Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station. Distance to Copper Lake is approximately 12 miles one way.

15.0 Views of the Wrangell Mountains

to Over the next few miles, enjoy the splendid views of high snow- clad volcanoes of the Wrangell Mountains. Mt.

18.0 Sanford (16,237') is the tallest mountain that can be seen from



the Nabesna Road (and the 5th highest peak in the U.S). To the left of Sanford is the rounded, icy dome of Mt. Wrangell (14,163'). It is the park's only active volcano and occasionally a steam plume can be seen rising from the summit. Wrangell's broad sloping profile is an excellent example of a shield volcano. The jagged summits of Tanada Peak to the left of Mt. Wrangell and Capital Mountain to the right of Mt. Sanford are actually highly eroded remnants of once massive shield volcanoes.

16.6 Kettle Lake primitive campsite (picnic table)

17.8 Dead Dog Hill Rest Area & primitive campsites (picnic table, outhouse)

Nice view of Noyes Mountain and the Mentasta Mountain range to the north. This is a great site to take a break for some wildlife viewing or bird watching. There are views of wetlands, a small lake, and boreal forest. Moose are frequently seen here and Caribou migrate through this area in the spring and fall. During spring and summer, look for nesting ducks and trumpeter swans.



19.2 Caribou Creek Trail



Park at the gravel pit on the north side of the road at mile 18.9. The actual trailhead with access to the north is at mile 19.2. This is a multiple use trail and is an excellent hiking trail. The trail is approximately 3.5 miles long and offers awesome views of the Wrangell Mountains and the tangles of lakes and rivers below. At the end of the trail there are many opportunities to continue hiking into the Mentasta Mountains by following game trails or striking out on your own. Moose, Dall Sheep and grizzly bears are seen in this area. Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station.

21.8 Rock Lake primitive campsite & rest area *(outhouse, picnic table, trash bin)* access to Viking Lodge Public Use Cabin

Reservations are required for use of Viking Lodge. Contact the Slana Ranger Station to sign up for this public use cabin. The 1/4 mile trail to the cabin is on the north side of the road.



Viking Lodge Cabin

22.9 Long Lake Access

Beautiful lake with Grayling and Burbot fishing.

24.0 Tanada Lake Trailhead

This is a multiple use trail with access to the south. Distance to Tanada Lake is approximately 6 miles. Trail continues beyond Tanada Lake to the Wilderness Boundary at the confluence of Goat and Pass Creek. This is a popular lake for grayling and lake trout fishing. Due to miles of wet muskeg, the Tanada Lake Trail is not recommended for day hiking. Backpackers use this trail to access Sheep Lake and Grizzly Lake but this is primarily a winter route or used by ORV's. Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station.

24.7 Watershed Divide *(3,320ft)*

While it may not seem as though you have gained much elevation, you have just reached the highest point on the Nabesna Road, and crossed a major watershed divide. All waters flowing west and south from the divide are carried by the Copper River into the Gulf of Alaska. All waters flowing to the east of the divide are carried by Jack Creek into Nabesna River. The Nabesna River and the Chisana River combine to form the Tanana River. The Tanana flows into the Yukon River and finally to the Bering Sea.

27.8 Twin Lakes Camp Area *(picnic tables, outhouse, trash bins)*

Note: Private property to the east of the campground.



Campsite

Several picnic tables, an outhouse, fire rings, and ten informal campsites provide a nice spot for primitive camping. Canoeing and fishing for grayling, lake trout, and burbot is available here. Twin Lakes is a great place to view waterfowl and wildlife. A hike of about a half mile to the south and over the ridge will take you to Jack Lake and more beautiful views of the Wrangell Mountains. To the east of this area is the Skookum Volcano formation.

Ridges to the north and south of Twin Lakes are glacial moraines consisting of gravel deposits. These moraines are all that remain of the glaciers that were very extensive in this area during the Wisconsin Glaciation- the last great Ice Age. When the Wisconsin Glaciation was at its peak 18,000 years ago, most of Alaska, Canada, and the northern United States were covered by snow and ice.



Twin Lakes View

28.0 Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve on both sides of the road Sportsman's Paradise Lodge

BEFORE YOU CONTINUE....



Road conditions can deteriorate beyond Twin Lakes. Trail Creek (Mile 29), Lost Creek (Mile 30.8), and Boyden Creek (Mile 34.3) change their courses frequently and transport tons of gravel, making bridges and culverts impractical. Generally, these creeks are dry or very shallow with a solid base and no impediment to travel. But during spring run off or following prolonged rain, high clearance is needed and occasionally four wheel drive. Evaluate creek crossings before driving across and once you begin, don't stop until you have crossed all water. Remember, help is a long way away.

29.0 Trail Creek crossing & Trailhead

Trail Creek is a multiple- use trail or route that follows the creekbed into the Mentasta Mountains. This is one of the starting points for a popular multiple- day backpacking loop. Hikers generally take three days to hike from the trailhead to a high pass and then back down Lost Creek to the Nabesna Road. This trail is not generally used by day hikers because of the uneven walking surface and thick brush for the first several miles. Dall Sheep, moose, grizzly bears and many bird species are seen in this area and throughout the Mentasta Mountains. Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station.



Trail Creek Hiker

30.8 Lost Creek crossing & Trailhead

Lost Creek Trailhead is at mile 31 on the north side of the road and is a multiple use trail with access to Big Grayling Lake, Soda Creek, Platinum Creek, Mineral Springs, and Soda Lake. Mineral Springs and Soda Lake are approximately 10 miles from the trailhead. This is a wonderful area for hiking and for viewing Dall Sheep. Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station.

32.5 Lava Plateaus

The two prominent plateaus on the south side of the road are remnants of lava flows from Mt. Wrangell that now have permafrost just below the surface. During summer the summer, the permafrost melts causing the slopes of the hills to slide downward. The hummocky area at the base of the western hill, locally known as Sugar Loaf, was caused by prehistoric landslides.

34.3 Boyden Creek crossing

Boyden Creek is subject to changing water levels and may periodically require high clearance and four-wheel drive vehicles to cross.

35.3 Jack Creek Rest Area *(picnic tables, trash receptacle, outhouse)*

Jack Creek has several campsites with picnic tables in the area across the bridge, as well as a vaulted toilet and a trash receptacle. Grayling fishing is available here. There are views of the Boyden Hills to the north and Skookum Volcano formation to the south.

Dall Sheep

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve contains one of the largest concentrations of Dall sheep in North America – some 15,000 sheep in more than three million acres of habitat.

Can You Spot Them?

Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli dalli*) are found in habitat consisting of open alpine ridges, high altitude meadows, and extremely rugged “escape terrain.” Sheep use these areas for feeding, resting, and to escape predators. They usually stay at higher elevations but in this area they are known to descend to springs and mineral licks at lower elevations and even cross the road. Careful observers can usually spot small flocks on the high mountainsides over the next few miles.

36.2 Skookum Volcano Trail *Access to the south. Hiking trail only.*

The Skookum Volcano Trail/route is 2.5 miles one- way to a beautiful high pass. The elevation at the trailhead is 3,000’ and rises to an elevation of 5,800’ at the pass. Hikers can easily explore other routes or expand this hike into a multiple- day trip.

Hikers enjoy opportunities for wildlife viewing, spectacular scenery, alpine plants, and volcanic geology. This trail leads through an extinct, deeply eroded volcanic system and provides an opportunity to examine volcanic geology. Over the course of millions of years erosion has exposed dramatic examples of rhyolite and dacite domes, andesite lava flows, vents, and many erosion- resistant dikes.



40.2 Reeve Field Trailhead

This is a multiple use trail (4.5 miles) with access to the north. There are views of Devil’s Mountain to the east and the Nutzotin Mountains to the southeast. The middle three miles of the trail cross very wet muskeg. The last 1/2 mile crosses a public easement through private property. *Please stay on the trail.* Recreational ORV permits are required and available at the Slana Ranger Station.

This route is now impassable for automobiles, but during 1941, trucks hauled materials and equipment all the way from Valdez to this rustic runway (located on a gravel bar along the Nabesna River). Pilot Bob Reeve cut everything into pieces small enough to fit in his Boeing Trimotor, flew them to Northway, about 40 miles north, and then had them re- welded. This effort was organized to build the Northway Airport, a

Wilderness panorama



critical stopover in ferrying lend- lease aircraft to the Soviet Union during WWII. By the time Reeve completed the project that November, he had transported an amazing 1,100 TONS of supplies, including 300 workers and all the accouterments for a full scale airport. It was good timing. One month later, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave Northway new relevance, and it became a critical element in the defense of Alaska.

42.0 End of the State maintained road.



From here on, the road provides access to private lands at Nabesna Mine, and is not regularly maintained. During wet weather, this section may require four wheel drive, or even become impassable.

Services:

**End of the Road B&B,
K-Air Flight Services,
Ellis Big Game Guides, Devil's Mountain Lodge.**

Continue on foot:

Miles 42 to 46 of Nabesna Road make for interesting hiking and the mine buildings and tailings are visible from the road. Park at Reeve Field Trailhead (Mile 41) and walk from there or arrange for parking at Devil's Mountain Lodge.

Approximately 1/2 mile past the lodge, a trail leads south towards the remains of the abandoned Rambler Mine, an area that was active after WWII, but never patented, and now part of the park.

The trail is steep, brushy and un-maintained, but the effort rewards you with superlative views of the Nabesna River and Nutzotin Mountains.



**** Avoid mine tailings****

Avoid walking on and coming in contact with mine tailings. Mine tailings are the "waste" left after gold, silver, or other minerals have been extracted from the ore in the mine's mill by a variety of processes. Tailings contain elevated levels of metal, and are acidic. The orange and red color of the tailings is caused by oxidation.

46.0 Nabesna Gold Mine *(Private Property)*

Carl Whitham staked the claims that became Nabesna Gold Mine in 1925. The mine operated until 1945 when war time restrictions required its closure. By that time over 73,000 tons of gold ore valued at \$1,870,000 had been shipped to the Tacoma, Washington smelter, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of silver. Limited, small scale mining has occurred since that time. Nabesna Mine is still privately owned.



For more information on the fascinating history of the Nabesna Mine and surrounding area, read *Nabesna Gold* by Kirk Stanley or *Mountain Wilderness* by William R. Hunt, both available at the Slana Ranger Station or Park Headquarters.