

# Wrangell - St. Elias

WRANGELL - ST. ELIAS  
NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE  
ALASKA

Wrangell - St. Elias National Park and Preserve stretches north 170 miles from the Gulf of Alaska to encompass a superlative 12.4 million acre region of mountains and forelands bounded by the Copper River on the west and Kluane National Park and Territorial Game Sanctuary of Canada to the east. Together, these American and Canadian units encompass the greatest expanse of valleys, deep canyons, and towering mountains in all of

North America and include ten of the highest peaks on the continent. Expansive icefields and some of the largest, longest, and most active glaciers in the world are found here. Nourished by glacial meltwaters, large braided river systems drain the region. The diverse landforms, from seacoast to high mountains, provide habitats for an excellent representation of the fauna of interior and coastal Alaska. The valleys and lowlands of the area

are particularly important, supporting a diverse spectrum of biological communities which are evolving in direct response to changing natural conditions and the advance and retreat of glaciers. There are several historic mining sites located within the Park and Preserve including the privately owned Kennicott Copper Mines, abandoned for fifty years, and the nearby town of McCarthy.

## WHAT TO DO AND SEE

Opportunities for wilderness backpacking, fishing, hunting, car camping, river running, mountain climbing, cross-country skiing and other forms of winter recreation abound. Prospective visitors are cautioned to remem-

ber that this is a truly vast and remote area. While there are several guide services available, many of the facilities and safeguards one expects in a more developed National Park Service area will not be found here. There

are many historic routes into the wilderness; however, there are no maintained trails or developed river crossings. Careful planning is the key to a safe and enjoyable visit.

## ACCESS

Two roads provide surface access into the park and preserve. The Chitina-McCarthy road extends some 65 miles up the Chitina River Valley from Chitina to the Kennicott River (just west of McCarthy). The road follows the historic route of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. During the summer it is generally passable by high clearance two-wheel drive vehicles. However,

because this road is not regularly maintained, you are encouraged to get current road conditions before starting the trip. Crossing the Kennicott River to access McCarthy and Kennecott currently requires the use of two unmaintained hand-powered cable trams. Road access into the northern section of the park/preserve is from Slana (on the Tok Cutoff) along a State secondary route which ex-

tends some 45 miles to the abandoned, and privately owned, mining community of Nabesna. All other access is by air or boat. Charter aircraft services are available in most Alaskan communities including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Northway, Glennallen, Cordova, Valdez, and Yakutat. Costs vary by the type of aircraft and the flight time involved.



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## ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

Rustic accommodations are available at privately operated lodges, cabins, and camps scattered throughout the park and preserve. These range from fishing camps and guide cabins to full service lodge facilities. A complete listing of these facilities is available if requested. More standard services are available in the motels, restaurants, and roadhouses located in most communities along the road corridors surrounding the park and preserve and in the coastal communities of Yakutat and Cordova. Several developed campgrounds

are operated by the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Alaska at strategic locations along the Richardson Highway, Tok Cutoff, and Edgerton Highway.

## WEATHER AND INSECTS

Weather in most of the area is typical of interior Alaska. Summer brings cool, often cloudy and rainy weather, which can interfere with scheduled air pickups and make trips longer than expected. Clear, hot days are not uncommon, particularly in July, which has the warmest weather. August is cooler and wetter, but is generally more mosquito free. Fall

is excellent, but of short duration. Winters are cold and dark, with temperatures dropping to  $-50^{\circ}\text{F.}$ , but clear weather is common. Average snow cover is about two feet.

## CLOTHING, FOOD & GEAR

To visit the backcountry you must be self-sufficient, carry enough food to cover unexpected delays, and be prepared for the Alaskan wilderness. Rain gear and wool or pile clothing is essential and the novice Alaska traveller would be wise to seek the counsel and assistance of experienced folks.

## PRECAUTIONS AND COURTESIES

This is a vast and sometimes hostile region. Animals are **wild** and should be respected because they can kill or maim careless or naive people. You should know your gear and possess the wilderness travel and survival skills needed to enjoy an area where sources of assistance are frequently miles and weeks away. Hikers

unfamiliar with river crossing techniques will have a difficult and hazardous journey since even the smallest creek can rapidly become an impassable barrier. Winter travel is recommended only to those experienced in cold weather camping and survival techniques. For your safety, we suggest that you leave your itinerary with someone and con-

tact that person upon the completion of your trip. Much of the land within the park and preserve is privately owned. In addition, local residents carry on subsistence activities which are critical to their lifestyle. Please observe the usual courtesies respecting their property and privacy.

*For further information write:*  
Superintendent  
Wrangell - St. Elias  
National Park and Preserve  
P.O. Box 29  
Glennallen, Alaska 99588

