

*Local Knowledge for Travel in Alaska's Greater Copper Country*

# Kennecott-McCarthy Visitors Guide



Kennecott  
McCarthy  
Chitina  
Kenny Lake  
Copper Center  
Glennallen  
Nabesna  
Valdez

2023



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Welcome! Kennecott and McCarthy sit at the center of Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the largest park in the country. The wild landscapes and fascinating history of the area are renowned. Located in the traditional territory of the Ahtna Athabascan people who've inhabited the area since time immemorial, this national park was established not only to protect the land, but also to honor the traditions of people living within the park who depend on local resources.

The area is rich with superlative natural features and home to people with deep senses of place. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park is contiguous with Kluane National Park in Yukon Territory, Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska, and British Columbia's Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park. Altogether, they comprise one of the largest protected areas on the planet, part of a 24-million-acre World Heritage Site.

To reach Kennecott and McCarthy, travelers transit the Copper River Valley, a 20,649 square mile area in East Alas-

ka. Also called the Copper River Basin, it's bounded by the Chugach National Forest to the south, the Alaska Range to the north, the Wrangell Mountains of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park to the east, and the Talkeetna and Chugach mountains to the west. The Copper River, one of the continent's major ones, begins at the northern base of the Wrangells and flows 250 miles to the Gulf of Alaska near Cordova.

Along with stunning mountains and glaciers, rivers and lakes, tundra and wetlands, you'll find world class flightseeing, wild floats, great fishing, rich history, and good food. You'll meet warm locals proud to call the place home and happy to share it.

Like all businesses based in Kennecott- McCarthy, this visitors guide is locally grown. We're glad to connect friends and neighbors with independent travelers from Alaska and beyond. I hope this guide leads you to memorable experiences and new friends. Safe and happy trails—see you in the Wrangells.



Jeremy Pataky  
Publisher

### How many miles to McCarthy?

from Anchorage	314
Calgary	2,073
Chitina	60
Copper Center	111
Fairbanks	374
Glacier View	216
Glennallen	125
Haines	699
Kenny Lake	88
Seattle	2,204
Tok	264
Valdez	178
Whitehorse	648



Cover: Day hikers crest a hill of Root Glacier ice against a backdrop of far-off Mount Blackburn, miles away at the head of the Kennicott Valley. Above: Mount Drum (12,010') rises on the east edge of the Copper River Valley as viewed from the Glenn Highway traveling toward Glennallen. Drum is part of the Wrangell Mountains, or Kelt'aini, meaning The Ones that Control the Weather, to the Ahtna Athabascan people who live in the Copper Valley. Photos by Jeremy Pataky. Top: The Kennecott mill building and neighboring structures viewed from south of National Creek. Photo by Teresa Houze.



OVERSTORY  
CONSULTING

[KMYVisitorsGuide.com](http://KMYVisitorsGuide.com)

## Kennecott-McCarthy Visitors Guide



2023  
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### INPUT & CONTRIBUTIONS

Feedback & submissions welcome by mail at KMY Visitors Guide, PO Box MXY Glennallen AK 99588 or by email.

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# Come and Stay Awhile

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Photos by Jeremy Patay



# Planes, trains (well... not anymore), & automobiles

*Trying to sort out transport? You have options.*

**DRIVE** From Anchorage, drive north. Head east on the Glenn to Glennallen, then south on the Richardson toward Valdez, then east on the Edgerton to Chitina. Keep going, finishing on the McCarthy Road. Allow a minimum of 7 hours from Anchorage. More rental car companies have begun to allow rentals on the road, but check your company's policy. See the McCarthy Road section for more info.

**SHUTTLE** Multiple companies connect Anchorage, Glennallen, Chitina, and McCarthy via van. Also, some private tour companies include McCarthy on multiday van trips, like Get Up and Go and Great Land Adventures.

**FLY** Wrangell Mountain Air (back) connects Chitina and McCarthy. Copper Valley Air Service (opposite) flies passengers and mail between Gulkana, just north of Glennallen, and McCarthy. Using Copper Valley and Reeve Air, it's easy to fly between Anchorage and McCarthy with a transfer, or by combo ground/air. If you're a private pilot, the world's your oyster. McCarthy has a large strip, and the park features numerous bush strips, including some with public use cabins.

**SWEAT** Many have reached the Kennicott Valley on their own power. The most common method is bicycling, but competent trekkers have concluded wilderness trips here, as well. HMWV



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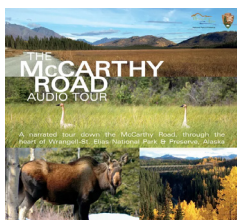




## Great Audio Makes Great Roadtrips

Most folks who visit McCarthy spend a good amount of time on the road, so here are some listening recommendations to enrich your time in the Wrangells. Cell coverage varies. Do not rely on streaming while you drive; download when you can and enjoy them for miles.

**OUT HERE** McCarthy local Erin McKinstry, a freelance journalist and audio producer, tells stories of life in rural Alaska in her podcast, *Out Here*. The first season explores the McCarthy area, delving into off-grid living, raising kids in the wilderness, bucking the nine-to-five lifestyle, subsistence living (or not), and living in a community of individuals with little official governance. Oh yeah—there's also a bear story or two. Think of it like a book with an intro and seven chapters. All of the episodes are derived from personal experience and interviews



with 18 area residents. Subscribe wherever you get podcasts. [outherepodcast.com](http://outherepodcast.com)

### END OF THE ROAD

This podcast explores the remote reaches of Alaska from those who have lived it, produced by the local nonprofit Wrangell Mountains Center. The show captures stories and reflections on nature and place in the Wrangells and the McCarthy community. Subscribe wherever you get podcasts. [wrangells.org/end-of-the-road](http://wrangells.org/end-of-the-road)

### NPS AUDIO TOURS

The National Park Service produced audio tours for both the McCarthy and Nabesna Roads. Listen while you drive and learn more about geology, history, flora, and fauna. Download the audio (and transcription if you want it, too) for free or ask for CDs at the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Visitor Center in Copper Center, or Chitina or Slana Ranger Stations. [nps.gov/wrst/learn/photosmultimedia/audio-tours.htm](http://nps.gov/wrst/learn/photosmultimedia/audio-tours.htm) RMWY

Top: Wrangell Mountains Center executive director Jon Erdman interviews WMC co-founder and board member Sally Gibert inside the Old Hardware Store in downtown McCarthy; photo by Jessie Sheldon. *Out Here* artwork by Ian Gyori.

## CHECK BEFORE YOUR TREK

Did you know you can stay in the know on all DOT road construction projects, including those on major travel routes like the Parks Highway, Richardson Highway, and Alaska Highway? Get information on all projects in these areas and across Alaska. Plan your trek ahead of time at [511.alaska.gov](http://511.alaska.gov).



Pay parking and camping await travelers at the end of the McCarthy Road. The photo shows much of Base Camp Kennicott (ad pg 13) and just out of frame to the left is additional camping and lodging through Glacier View Campground and Kennicott River Lodge (ad pg 1). A walk across "the footbridge" spans the Kennicott River to the east side of the bridge opposite the parking areas. Downtown McCarthy is about a one mile shuttle ride or walk from there, and Kennecott is about five miles. Just out of view to the right, free shuttle vans come and go. Some lodging, made with advance reservations, provide their own private pick up shuttles. For those staying in or near McCarthy or Kennecott, handcars provided by McCarthy Area Council (ad page 22) make schlepping luggage across the bridge easy. The river flows from the glacial lake just to the north. The lake grows larger each year as the ice retreats. In the distance, Kennecott shows in the boreal forest at the base of the mountain slopes, and the Stairway Icefall, source of the Root Glacier, is visible to the right of Donoho Peak. Photo by Scott Clendaniel.



# the Road to McCarthy

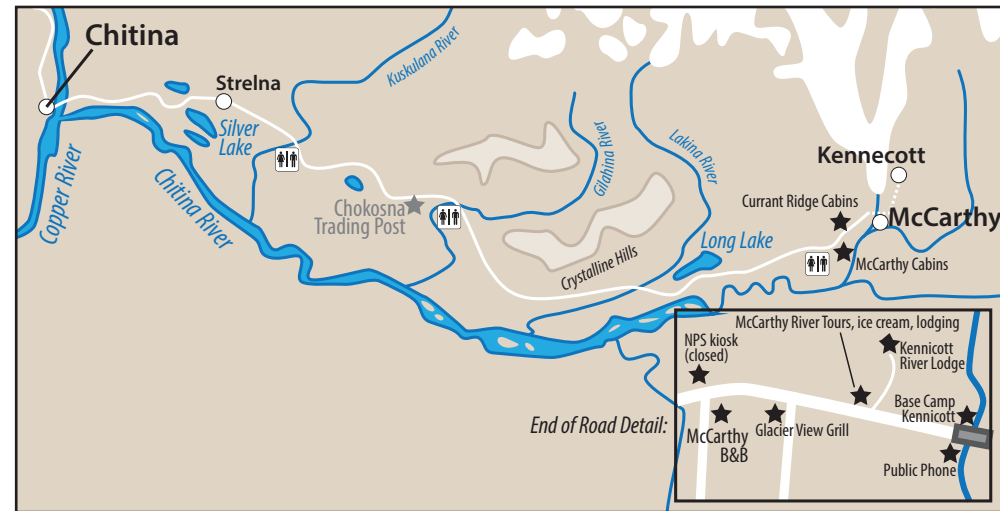


**SAY YES** Few roads are as storied as the McCarthy Road, one of only two that enter Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. It offers unrivaled scenery, vast and varied wilderness, independent and neighborly folk, and adventure. It skirts the base of the Wrangells, gaining about 1,000 feet between Chitina (500 feet) and its end near McCarthy. The road terminates in the center of the 13.2-million acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, but the road corridor threads lands owned by the state, Ahtna Native Corp., and individuals. About 40 of the McCarthy Road's 59 miles are gravel. It's maintained by the state, not the National Park Service.

**HISTORY** The road's 59 miles con-

nect the Copper and Kennicott Rivers, roughly following part of the historic 196-mile-long Copper River and Northwestern Railway (CRNW) railroad grade. Constructed between 1908 and 1911 through a herculean effort comparable to the construction of the Alcan Highway or the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline, the CRNW railway ran from Kennecott to O'Brien Creek outside Chitina. It departed the contemporary road system from there, following the Copper downstream all the way to the port of Cordova, on Prince William Sound. The last train to make that journey arrived there on November 11, 1938.

After the railway was abandoned, most of its rails and ties were eventually removed. The corridor was turned



over to the State of Alaska, which placed some culverts and created a road in the 1960s. In 1971, a new bridge was constructed over the Copper River and the railbed was covered with gravel, creating the McCarthy Road. It has been dramatically improved since then; 18 miles were even lightly paved in 2014. Its reputation has also improved, though not on pace with its condition.

**THE EXPERIENCE** Services are limited and cell reception varies. While the road is usually in good shape now, the weather, maintenance schedules, use, and more affect conditions. Also, the better a road gets, the more reckless bad drivers like to get, right? The main variable that will affect your likelihood of a hassle-free trip is your speed—take it slow, especially around the curves. Those who go slow see more, including friendly faces. Those who push it get flat tires and close calls. Mind oncoming vehicles and show

some respect for fellow drivers. Allow at least two hours to get from Chitina to the end of the road under decent conditions. The slow and steady win.

Make sure your spare and jack are functional, but drive in a way that minimizes the chances you'll need them. Increasingly rarely, railroad spikes still churn up in the gravel, especially when the road gets graded. Buckets of spikes have been collected over the years.

Most travelers experience the road without incident. Everything from RVs, sedans, and motorcycles to large box trucks and heavy equipment are common on the road in summer. You will not see any motorcoaches, though—the largest tour vehicles on the road are vans. Your fellow travelers are independent-minded people who've done themselves well by getting off the beaten track.

Enjoy the drive. It's one of the last best roads in America and leads to a stunning place of natural, historical, and cultural import. Welcome, enjoy, and stay a while. **KAWY**



Opposite: A black bear cub crosses the McCarthy Road in spring without looking both ways. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.



Jeremy Palacky



## McCarthy Road by the Mile

Highest mileposts are closest to McCarthy.  
Directions assume one drives west to east.

**Mile 0 Chitina wayside:** this paved pull-out, with vault toilets and exhibit panels, is the start of the McCarthy Road. Beyond, the road goes through a narrow gap known locally as the “rail-road cut.” It was a tunnel, later altered into an open road cut.

**0.4-1** Small pullouts with views of the **Copper R. and Chitina R. confluence.** The Copper is the only waterway that cuts through the Chugach Mountains that arc across southcentral Alaska for over 200 miles. However, the Copper is actually smaller than the Chitina at the

confluence. The Chitina does carry more water year-round, though it’s considered the Copper’s tributary. Even though the Chitina drains a smaller area than the Copper, it gets more runoff due to greater precipitation in its watershed.

The entire **Copper River watershed** drains about 24,000 square miles. Much of this area lies within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. About 3,500 square miles, or 17% of the drainage basin, is covered by glaciers. Because of this influence, high water in the Copper typically occurs not during the snowmelt of spring, but during summer hot spells that cause rapid ice melt.



**Dial 911 in case of life & safety emergency, including fire.**

These 907 area code numbers might help, too:  
823-2235 Chitina VFD (mile 0)  
823-4021 Strelina VFD station (mile 10)  
823-4019 Chokosna VFD station (mile 26.5)  
823-4011 Crystal Creek VFD station (mile 41.4)  
554-2102 Kennicott-McCarthy VFD (mile 60)

Jeremy Palacky

# Base Camp Kennicott

## at the Wrangell-St. Elias Gateway

### Park or Camp at McCarthy Road’s End by the Footbridge • Mile 59.4



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**1.5** As you drive over the Copper River, see the confluence of the Copper and Chitina downstream. After the bridge, the road becomes gravel. The large snowy mountain visible to the north is volcanic **Mount Drum** (12,010’), part of the Wrangell Mountains. The Copper and Chitina carry a great deal of suspended sediment, but very little dissolved sediment—they’re dirty, but not polluted. Millions of tons of natural sediment, mostly silt and clay, flow downstream each year. Muddy waters preclude permanent habitation for most fish, but do accommodate migrating full-grown fish en route to clear-water spawning beds and juveniles running down to the sea each year. The muddy waters also allow state residents to suc-

cessfully salmon fish with dipnets and fishwheels, which don’t work as well in clear water.

**1.6** Immediately after the bridge on the right side of the road is the **Copper River Campground**. This primitive campground has a dozen sites, picnic tables, fire pits, and vault toilets. On the left side side of the road is the Copper River and the **Kotsina River delta**. The NPS has an easement here where you can access and view the Copper River. It can be a decent place to see Alaskans harvesting salmon when the fish run. Note the bright deposits of volcanic material in the Kotsina River bluffs.

**2-2.5** See the **Kotsina**, a moderate tributary of the Copper River, fed by



glaciers draining southward from Mt. Wrangell. Bright debris deposited by volcanic flows are exposed south of the road and in the Kotsina River bluffs a mile to the north.

**5-5.4** Rocks exposed on the left side of the road are basalt and greenstone of the Nicolai Greenstone rock unit, common in the Wrangell Mountains and the source of copper mined near Kennecott. As you continue, you'll see limestone also exposed on the north side of the road. Several small pullouts offer nice views of the Chitina River and Chugach Mountains to the south.

The glacier-fed Chitina is a classic example of a **braided river**. Streams throughout the world exhibit three basic channel patterns: straight, which is uncommon in large streams; meandering, which consists of many curves and bends; and braided channels. The braided channel pattern tends to develop in rivers that carry a lot of sand and gravel, and have fairly steep slopes and frequent fluctuations in water level. Many braided rivers flow in this region. Braided rivers are characterized by dividing and re-uniting channels and by numerous islands and gravel bars.

In the area visible here, the Chitina drops ~13 feet per mile; steep for such a large stream. Glaciers load the stream with sediment ranging from fine clay to boulders. Weather patterns cause flow variations—the river rises during warm and/or wet weather and drops during cold and/or dry weather. Consequently, much of the sediment being transported to the sea is temporarily stored as islands or bars of gravel, sand, and mud along



The wooden Gilahina trestle was originally 890 feet long and 90 feet high. It required one-half million board feet of timber and was completed in eight days in the winter of 1911. Due to the rugged landscape, over 15% of the entire railway was built on trestles like this. Photo by Dave Hollis.

the Chitina. If you happen to view the river after several hot days, most of the islands and bars will be flooded.

**10 Strelna Volunteer Fire Department.** Nearby, a short trail leads to Strelna Lake, with silver salmon, kokanee, and rainbow trout.

**11 Silver Lake** · Rainbow trout.

**12 Sculpin Lake** · rainbow trout, silver salmon, and kokanee.

**17 Kuskulana Bridge** spans a 238' gorge. This is a one-lane bridge. Watch for oncoming traffic. The 600' steel bridge was redecked in 1988 and guard rails were installed. Vault toilets on its east side were provided by NPS in 2007. A spectacular achievement, the bridge was constructed during the winter of 1910. It is the only railroad bridge in this area constructed of steel girders that span a canyon, as opposed to those where timber pilings were driven into streambeds. The bridge is supported primarily by the metamorphic bedrock of the inner gorge rather than the thick layer of glacial gravels near the surface. The Kuskulana's muddy water comes from glaciers on the southern and western slopes of Mt. Blackburn.

**20-21** Shallow **permafrost** affects vegetation and causes poor drainage. This is a good place to consider the challenge of road construction and maintenance in areas of permafrost, muskeg, and swamps.

**26** Views of **Mt. Blackburn** to the north, weather permitting.

**26.5-8 Chokosna Trading Post** and



Chokosna River. Clear waters support salmon spawning beds.

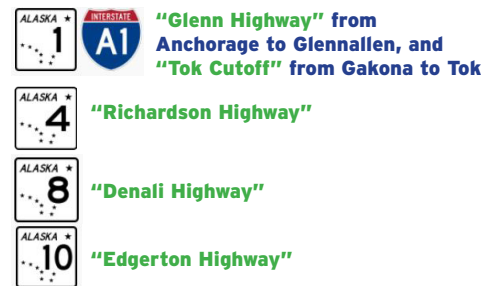
**29 Gilahina River & Gilahina Trestle Wayside.** The impressive ruin of a railroad trestle looms over the road. Near its base, you'll cross a small bridge built in 1990 that spans the Gilahina River, which runs clear, like the Chokosna, instead of silty. Vault toilets courtesy of NPS.

**34.7 Crystalline Hills Trail**, an easy 2.5-mile loop north of the road. The hills are composed mostly of gneiss and gabbro, with some light colored marble on some lower slopes. Dall sheep.

**44.5 Lakina River** (LACK-in-awe) bridge. Packrafters occasionally take out of the river here and hitch rides.

**45.2-47.5** Three-mile-long **Long Lake** is very important to Copper River salmon. Each year, ~18,000 sockeye salmon

*a note on* **HIGHWAY NAMES**



Most Alaskans know their highways by proper names, not numbers. If you ask a local how to get to Highway 10, they might not know. Try "Where's the Edgerton?" and you'll be understood.





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muscle up the silty Copper and Chitina Rivers and spawn here. They enter the lake as late as September and spawn through April. Glacial till and gravels deposited by ancient glaciers and streams blanket the slopes around the lake. Large pullout on east end of the lake.

**47.9** View remnants of a CRNW trestle across inflow streams.

**55 Forestry pullout** Toilets.

**56.5 McCarthy Cabins** Turn south.

**56.7 Currant Ridge Cabins**

**58-58.4** The Kennicott Glacier and River can be viewed from turnouts. Glacier ice is blanketed by rock, ranging from large boulders to very fine glacial flour. The Kenn. is only five miles long and runs from the glacier down to the Nizina. Bluffs along the Kenn. indicate down-cutting by stream erosion after the glacier melted back from its earlier size. From here you can see how the river valley gets progressively deeper downstream. The river drops 250+ feet in its short run from the glacier to the Nizina. At that confluence, the Kenn.'s erosional canyon is over 350 feet deep; ten miles further downstream, the Nizina is en-

trenched 600+ feet at the Chitina confluence.

**58.5 Shuttered NPS kiosk.** Day-only parking, toilet, trailhead.

**58.6 McCarthy B&B,** NPS private staff housing, **Camp McCarthy,** turnout. *Visitors should not turn here unless staying at one of the local westside residences or businesses. If your phone or GPS says to turn here to reach McCarthy, do not fall for it—the phones are confused. The vast majority of visitors want to go straight. Proceed to the end of the road.*

**59 As the Glacier Melts Cafe / McCarthy River Tours & Outfitters / Kennicott River Lodge office.** Ice cream, espresso, gear rentals, day and multi-day trip booking, lodging (ad page 1).

**59.4 Base Camp Kennicott** (ad page 13) and road's end. Car camping and parking. Mill tour and day and multi-day trip reservations with St. Elias Alpine Guides and Copper Oar (inside front cover). After-hours pay station makes late arrival easy.

**You made it** Enjoy drive-up lodging by reservation at establishments on the west side of the Kennicott River, or convenient camping with easy access to Mc-



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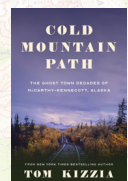
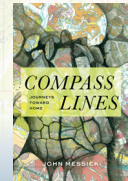
Carthy and Kennecott at the road's end, or park and head to your rented room or cabin across the footbridge, where shuttles and other pickup services meet travelers. Visitors can't drive their own vehicles into McCarthy town—the public road ends at the river, where a footbridge allows pedestrian access. Daytime shuttles to McCarthy and Kennecott are readily available, plus pre-arranged after-hours shuttles for guests with reservations. From the bridge, it's a pleasant one mile walk or bike ride into McCarthy, or five to Kennecott. Welcome! HMHY

an award-winning, off-grid micropress  
publishing books across genres & latitudes



**PORPHYRY PRESS**

The country's most remote book publishing company is the McCarthy-based, award-winning publisher of *Cold Mountain Path* by Tom Kizzia & *Compass Lines* by John Messick.

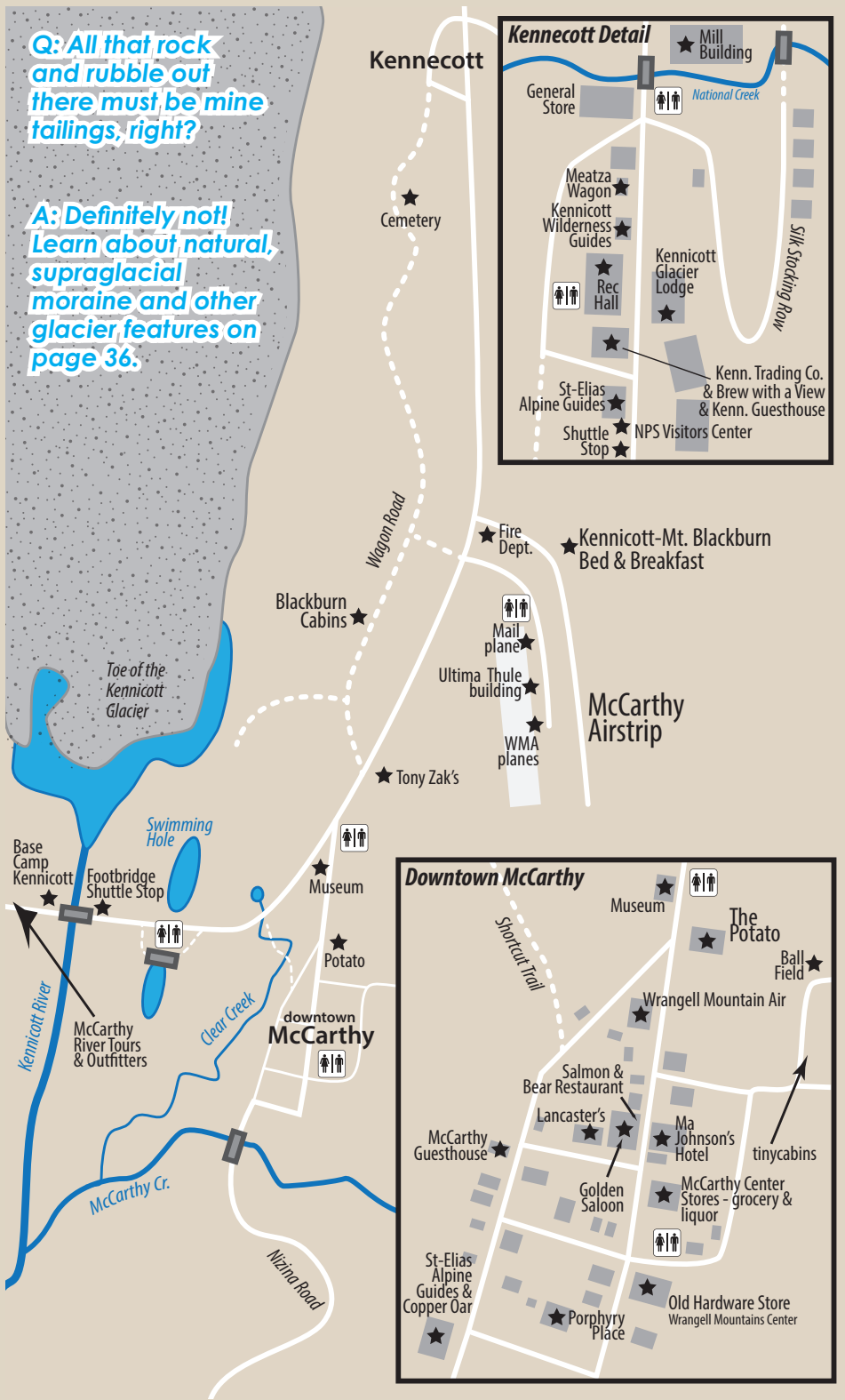



don't go home without  
these two essential reads

**porphyry.press McCarthy, Alaska**

**Q: All that rock and rubble out there must be mine tailings, right?**

**A: Definitely not! Learn about natural supraglacial moraine and other glacier features on page 36.**



**Kennecott Detail**

- General Store
- Meatza Wagon
- Kennicott Wilderness Guides
- Rec Hall
- St-Elias Alpine Guides
- Shuttle Stop
- Mill Building
- National Creek
- Silk Stocking Row
- Kennicott Glacier Lodge
- Kenn. Trading Co. & Brew with a View & Kenn. Guesthouse
- NPS Visitors Center

**McCarthy Airstrip**

- Fire Dept.
- Blackburn Cabins
- Mail plane
- Ultima Thule building
- WMA planes
- Tony Zak's
- Kennicott-Mt. Blackburn Bed & Breakfast

**Downtown McCarthy**

- Museum
- The Potato
- Ball Field
- Wrangell Mountain Air
- Salmon & Bear Restaurant
- Lancaster's
- Ma Johnson's Hotel
- McCarthy Guesthouse
- Golden Saloon
- McCarthy Center Stores - grocery & liquor
- St-Elias Alpine Guides & Copper Oar
- Porphyry Place
- Old Hardware Store
- Wrangell Mountains Center
- tinycabins

**Geographical Features:** Kennicott River, Clear Creek, McCarthy Cr., Nizina Road, Wagon Road, Toe of the Kennicott Glacier, Swimming Hole, Base Camp Kennicott, Footbridge Shuttle Stop, McCarthy River Tours & Outfitters.



## A Brief History of McCarthy & Kennecott

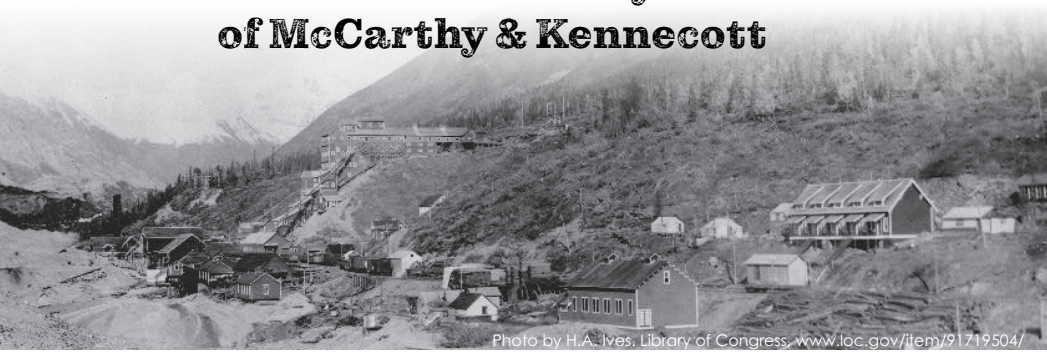


Photo by H.A. Ives. Library of Congress. [www.loc.gov/item/91719504/](http://www.loc.gov/item/91719504/)

Archaeological evidence indicates that people entered the Wrangell Mountains about 1000 AD. The Ahtna people settled along the course of the Copper River. A few Upper Tanana speakers settled along the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers. The Eyak people settled

near the mouth of the Copper River on the Gulf of Alaska. Along the coast, the Tlingit people dispersed, with some settling at Yakutat Bay.

The first Europeans in the area were Russian explorers and traders. Vitus Bering landed in the area in 1741. Fur traders followed. A Russian trading post was established in 1793 on Hinchinbrook Island near the mouth of the Copper River. A competing post was established in 1796 at Yakutat Bay. Reports that the Native people used pure copper tools inspired early Russian forays up the lower Copper River. The upper river was not reached by outsiders until 1819, when the Copper Fort trading post was established near Taral (downstream of Chitina). A party that departed Taral in 1848 with the intention of reaching the Yukon River was killed by the Ahtna, ending Russian exploration.

The U.S. acquired Alaska from Russia in 1867, but it took the discovery of gold in the Yukon Territory in the 1880s to spur interest in the Wrangell Mountains region. George Holt was the first American known to have explored the lower Copper River, in 1882. In 1884, John Bremner prospected the lower riv-

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er. That same year, a U.S. Army party led by Lieutenant William Abercrombie attempted to explore the lower river, and found a passage to the country's interior over a glacier at Valdez Arm. In 1885, Lieutenant Henry Allen fully explored the Copper and Chitina Rivers, eventually crossing the Alaska Range to the Yukon River system and eventually reaching the Bering Sea.

While exploring the Chitina River region, Allen sought out Chief Nicolai, chief of the Copper River Ahtna, at his hunting camp at Dan Creek. Allen and his men were at risk of starvation, and Nicolai rescued them by sharing food and supplies. Allen also saw the Ahtna's copper knives and tools, and some believe that Nicolai showed Allen a source of the native copper.

In 1899, William S. Abercrombie blazed a new trail from Valdez through the Chugach Mountains at Thompson Pass and onward. For the first time, the Copper River headwaters were relatively easy to access. Abercrombie sent Oscar Rohn up the Chitina River, as well. Rohn encountered prospector James McCarthy and named a creek after him in exchange for supplies. He also named the Kennicott Glacier after another explorer and described the valley in detail. His report spurred a great deal of subsequent geological surveys in the region. A year after his 1899 report, prospectors Clarence Warner and Jack Smith discovered Kennecott's uber-rich Bonanza copper deposit.

The prospectors sold their claims to 28-year old Stephen Birch, a mining





Welcome to McCarthy, an unincorporated community outside the bounds of any organized Alaska borough. *If you enjoy this place and want to contribute to its vitality, consider donating to McCarthy Area Council (MAC), a volunteer-run nonprofit working to improve life for locals and visitors in the area.* Toward that end, MAC:

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- engages agencies and partners
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engineer from New York sent to Alaska to look for investment opportunities for the wealthy Havermayer family. Birch, confident that money could be made, set out to gain clear title to the claims and obtain financial backing from the Guggenheims and J.P. Morgan.

Construction of the 196-mile Copper River and Northwestern Railroad (jokingly called the Can't Run and Never Will) from Kennecott to Cordova began in 1907. The railroad would bring supplies in to the mines and take ore out.

The construction challenge was massive. The railroad had to span rivers, mountains, and active glaciers on its way to Kennecott from the coast. Construction of the railroad was awarded to Michael J. "Big Mike" Heney who had completed the famous Yukon and White

Pass Railroad from Skagway. This fierce Irishman ensured the first trains rolled into Kennecott four years later. In the meantime, Stephen Birch had been busy. Despite the inhospitable terrain, he had managed to transport enough equipment into Kennecott to begin mining. When the train finally arrived, he loaded it with copper ore valued at \$250,000. With the key link complete, production ramped up.

Kennecott was a company town. Most miners lived in company housing and everything revolved around mining operations. The town was "dry" and miners were not allowed to bring their families. Nearby, the town of Shushana Junction began developing. This small town eventually changed its name to McCarthy and became the site of a turn-

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around station for the train. McCarthy was quite a miner and railroader town, with all the "entertainment" a young man on the frontier might want. Restaurants, hotels, saloons, pool halls, a dress shop, shoe shop, garage, hardware store, and red light district all served more than 800 people in the area. Kennecott and McCarthy coexisted for the 27 years that Kennecott operated. Residents still maintain traditions from those days, such as the 4th of July ball game.

By 1938, after selling a staggering \$200 million in ore, the rich copper deposits were depleted and the mines of Kennecott—and thus the railroad—ceased operations. The mill town was abandoned along with almost everything in it. Dishes were left on tables, medical records were left in the hospital, and

mining equipment was abandoned. In the years that followed, several groups attempted to resume mining operations in the area, but the high cost of transportation from such a remote area proved too much. Things became pretty quiet until the 1970s when tourism began to develop.

### McCARTHY & KENNECOTT NOW

Tourism fuels the majority of the contemporary local economy. Subsistence activities are also important for many year-round permanent residents. People from all over the world visit the area each year to explore Kennecott and experience some of the most pristine wilderness left in the world. Since Kennecott became part of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, some aspects of the bygone company town days have



returned. By no means a pure agency outpost, the site includes a great deal of private property, private business, and local residents. Though the bordellos are gone and the population is smaller than the old days, McCarthy is still the social hub for the area. The McCarthy Road provides access, roughly following the old rail bed from Chitina to McCarthy.

## THE NATIONAL PARK ERA

Though it would take decades to come to fruition, the seeds leading to the creation of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park were sown soon after the last train left the valley. After a flight over the area in 1938, Ernest Gruening, Director of U.S. Territories at the time and later Alaska's governor and a U.S. Senator, recommended the area as a national park or monument. In a memo to the Secretary of the Interior, he wrote: "The region is superlative in its scenic beauty and measures up fully and beyond the requirements for its establishment as a National Monument and later as a National Park. It is my personal view that from the standpoint of scenic beauty, it is the finest region in Alaska. I have traveled through Switzerland extensively, have flown over the Andes, and am familiar with the Valley of Mexico and with other parts of Alaska. It is my unqualified view that this is the finest scenery that I have ever been privileged to see."

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter declared the area a National Monument because of its cultural and scientific significance. When Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980, the area became

part of the 13.2-million acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park, the largest in the U.S. Wrangell-St. Elias is one of four contiguous conservation units spanning some 24 million acres that have been recognized by the United Nations as an international World Heritage Site. The original designation included Wrangell-St. Elias and Kluane National Park Reserve in Canada's Yukon Territory. In 1993, both Glacier Bay National Park and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park in British Columbia were added to that designation. Altogether, it is the largest internationally protected area in the world.

Enjoy this incredible place. Learn about the history of Kennecott, hike on the Root Glacier, float a glacial river, take a multi-day backcountry trip, go flight-seeing, visit the museum, eat out, relax and take in the views. KMMKY

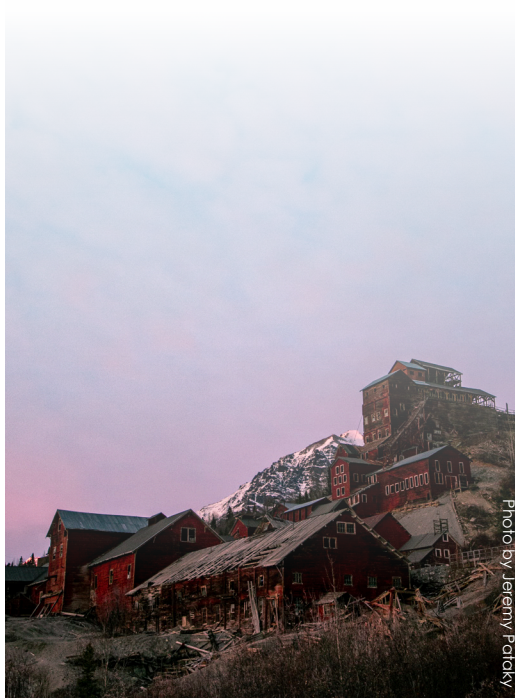


Photo by Jeremy Patrick

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## SPEAKING OF LISTENING

The popular folk musician **John Denver** traveled to Alaska and even McCarthy, where he filmed a significant portion of a film (actually) called *Alaska, the American Child* (1978). He also wrote a song about McCarthy. It was first released on his 1976 studio album, *Spirit*. Lest Kenn-i/e-cott horde all the spelling-related fun (see pg. 31), that first release was dubbed "Wrangle Mountain Song." In subsequent releases, the spelling was corrected to "Wrangell Mountain Song." Scan the QR code to hear it on YouTube:



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## Bear Country Basics

**B**lack and grizzly bears live in the Kennicott Valley. Do your part to keep people safe and bears wild. People who let bears eat human food create a hazard for the entire community.

**Campers** Store your food, your pet's food, and even toiletries properly. Use enclosed containers in vehicles at campgrounds or private property, and bear-safe containers in the backcountry (check them out at NPS Kennecott Visitor Center). Keep a clean camp and store cooking supplies, dishes, and secured food away from tents. Locate tents, kitchen, and food storage 100

yards apart from one another. **Hikers, Runners, & Bikers** Stay alert and attentive. Keep your stuff with you. Bears do venture onto glaciers. Make noise to avoid surprising one, especially in dim light or dense vegetation. Learn to prevent encounters and how to behave if you do meet a bear. Read "Bear Facts" or "Traveling in Bear Country," available in NPS visitor centers. Consider watching the 30 minute film called *Staying Safe in Bear Country* on YouTube.

**Bear spray** is a well-proven, effective deterrent. KMMY



Left: Claw scars in aspen trees are common around McCarthy and fun to see. Black bears spend a lot of time in trees and climb them when threatened. Cubs learn early to climb trees for safety. Bears also climb aspen trees in the spring to access and eat catkins. Above: Plants are a huge part of bears' diets, especially in interior Alaska, and early greenup along roads in spring can attract bears, like this one encountered near McCarthy. Photos by Jeremy Pataky.





# Kenn · i/e · cott

**HISTORY** Prospectors Clarence Warner and “Tarantula” Jack Smith returned from the Wrangell Mountains in the summer on 1900 with samples of what turned out to be 70% chalcocite they found along the limestone-greenstone contact above the east edge of the Kennicott Glacier. The find would prove to be one of the richest copper deposits ever found anywhere.

Mining engineer Stephen Birch, in Alaska from back East seeking to invest Havemayer family wealth, bought shares of the Bonanza claim and began working on the astronomical fiscal and logistical challenges of getting whatever ore might be mined there all the way out of the mountains to the coast.

Birch and the Havemayers partnered with J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheims to create the Alaska Syndicate to build a railroad and develop the mines. They hired Michael J. Heney, who had built the White Pass & Yukon Railroad out of Skagway, in the fall of 1907. The herculean effort took four brutal years, and while that work was ongoing, Birch began developing the mines in anticipation of the eventual train link. Mining began before the railroad was finished. To do that, they dismantled a steamship and hauled it in pieces over the moun-

tains from Valdez to the Copper River to use, along with sled dogs and horses, for hauling equipment in to get started. Once the train did arrive in 1911, it turned around with a first payload worth \$250,000 just ten days later.

Kennecott work was long, hard, and dangerous. In the end, they worked five mines near Kennecott, transporting all the ore to the mill town back in “camp” for processing. At the operation’s peak, about six hundred men worked in the mines and mill town, earning higher pay than they might have in the lower 48. Kennecott workers mined and concentrated at least \$200 million worth of ore.

From its origins in Alaska’s Kennicott Valley, Kennecott Copper Corporation grew into one of the largest minerals companies in the world, reaping huge profits spurred by the country’s high demand for copper. Late in 1938, the mines closed and the train left, never to return.

What happened in this remote valley in the wake of that early 20th century era between the closing of the mines and the coming of the Nation-

Top: A hiker approaches the National Creek bridge south of the Mill Building on a bluebird autumn day, setting out through Kennecott for the Root Glacier trail, with views of Mount Blackburn and Donoho Peak in the distance.

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al Park Service in the early 80s? NYT bestselling author Tom Kizzia wrote the must-read book, *Cold Mountain Path*, on those “lost decades” of McCarthy and Kennecott (p. 39). The book was published locally by Porphyry Press, a new book publishing company based in McCarthy presumed to be the most remote book publisher in the country. (Full disclosure—Porphyry Press was founded by the publisher of this guide.)

Although Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was established in 1980, the National Park Service did not acquire the buildings and lands of the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark until June of 1998. It was all private property prior to that moment. Today, the mill site is a patchwork of public and private property.

### KENNECOTT OR KENNICOTT?

The mining company was named after the Kennicott Glacier. No one really knows why Kennecott Copper Corporation ended up with a different spelling than its namesake. Most say it was a clerical error. The company’s founder, Stephen Birch, was even said to have spelled it Kennycott, with a y. Whatever the case,

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after the mines closed in 1938, many references to the area included the “i” spelling of Kennicott to distinguish what remained from the departed Kennecott Copper Corporation. Today, Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark encompasses not only the mill site, but the surrounding land and mining claims that formed the foundation for the Kennecott Copper Corporation, later the Kennecott Minerals Company. In general, Kennecott tends to indicate historic features and the settlement. Kennicott most often indicates natural features, like the glacier, river, and valley. Debates and discrepancies around spelling continue to this day. KMMY



Left: A backpacker traversing the Root Glacier after a spring overnighter to Donoho Basin pauses to admire large blue pools on the Root Glacier and a glimpse, far to the south in the photo's right side, of the Chugach Range across the Chitina River valley. Photo by Jeremy Pataky. Top: Late sun spills past Mount Blackburn into the Kennicott Valley and onto the mill building. Photo by Luke McKinney.

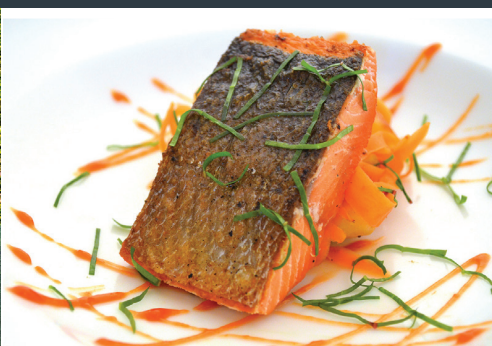




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# Creeks and Rivers

Two kinds of streams flow in the area. McCarthy Creek and the Kennicott River represent one type; much of their water comes from melting glacier ice. They carry a lot of silt and “rock flour” as a result. The other type consists of clearwater streams originating from snow melt or springs. Examples include Clear Creek, National Creek, Bonanza Creek, and Jumbo Creek. They run clear year-round, unless erosions from heavy rain or spring snowmelt muddies the water.

Glacial streams are subject to occasional floods. Snow melt and ice melt peak in July and can turn streams into torrents. The Kennicott R. is subject to an annual outburst flood from glacier-dammed Hidden Creek Lake located along the west margin of the Kennicott Gl. ten miles upstream from the terminus. This outburst flood (called a **jökulhlaup**) usually occurs sometime in July, though it has become more sporadic, often resulting in exceptionally high water (and spontaneous footbridge celebrations). McCarthy Creek, because it traverses the unstable landscape of a long valley downstream from its glacier, often carries a lot of non-glacial sediment. The head of McCarthy Creek valley is a convergence zone for precipitation that can generate destructive floods from heavy rain.

Campers near streams should keep in

mind how water levels can rise suddenly and without warning. Silty water is poorly suited for drinking, but it can be used by collecting it in a container and waiting for sediment to settle out.

Thanks to local geology, the clearwater streams carry “hard” water with a substantial dissolved mineral content that precipitates as scale in the bottom of teakettles. Nearly all the nearby clearwater streams cross private land whose residents use them for domestic water. Please avoid polluting these streams. HMWV



Top: High water in the Kennicott River during the July 2016 jökulhlaup, seen from east of the footbridge beyond the McCarthy Road, looking west toward Fireweed Mt. and Base Camp Kennicott. Above: The braided Nizina River seen from a bush plane. Photos: Jeremy Pataky.



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# Ice Science

From the banks of the Kennicott River at the end of the McCarthy Road, visitors see a peculiar landscape upstream. Jumbled piles of rocks, sand, boulders, and gravel are heaped as if dumped by enormous earth-moving machines.

It's the entirely natural **terminus** of the Kennicott Glacier, though. The piles beyond the melt lake are not rock all the way through. Rather, they're ice hummocks mantled by a surface layer of debris ranging in size from fine silts to boulders. Near the terminus, finer materials typically blanket the ice at thicknesses of up to one foot. On steep faces, the debris may be less than an inch thick, or it might slough off entirely, exposing glacial ice. As the ice under all that rock melts, the lakes grow larger each year as the glacier recedes.

Plenty of bare white ice exists further up-glacier. At higher altitudes, in the **accumulation zone**, some of each winter's snowfall survives summers, persisting under successive years' snows to eventually form glacier ice. Coaxed by gravity, it flows downslope, coalescing into the long valley tongue of the glacier.

Glaciers collect rocks as they move, scouring them from the glacier bed and valley walls, pulverizing them into fine sand, silt, and **rock flour** in the process. Some rocks are dumped on the surface by landslides or avalanches. Converging streams of glacier ice also produce a lot of erosion at their junctures, with the resulting rocks being carried along by the glacier as stripes of surface debris separated by "highways" of clear, white ice. These stripes are **medial moraines**.

At lower altitudes, winter snows all melt, exposing glacier ice to heat from sun, wind, and rain. This area is called the **ablation zone**. Some of the ice carried down from higher altitudes is thus lost each year. As it melts, the rocks **entrained** inside and on top of it do not melt, of course. They pile up. The farther down the glacier one looks, the greater the amount of rock debris one will find accumulated on the surface.

Finally, in the lowermost reaches of the glacier, the entire surface is covered with such debris and the underlying ice is mostly concealed. Because the mantle is uneven, summer heat seeps unevenly through to the ice, forming an unstable surface char-



Left top: Evening views from the lower Root Glacier. Photo by Jessica Speed. Left bottom: A tiny crevasse affords a glimpse into ice otherwise hidden by light surface moraine on the Root Glacier. Near right: The Root Glacier's many features delight afternoon hikers. Far right: A hiker peers into a big moulin beside the glacier's medial moraine. Bottom right: A hiker on the rocky Kennicott Glacier toe turns back toward the glacial lake after photographing Mount Blackburn. Photos by Jeremy Pataky.



acterized by chaotic hollows and hummocks.

A person viewing this glacier's terminus from nearby on ground or water sees only the end product—a raw, rock-covered surface. A short climb up the mountainside above Kennecott gives a good overview of the lower glacier and the evolving surface moraine. From a small plane, one can see the whole process laid out from start to finish—high-altitude accumulation zone sweeping down to the ablation zone and on out to the rotting terminus—a truly unforgettable experience that helps one learn how glaciers work. To really begin understanding the processes at work before you and the sensory panoply of glacier environments, consider 1) boating around in the terminal glacial lake, 2) hiking on the white ice of the glacier, and 3) flightseeing above for bird's-eye views.

The lower Kennicott Glacier has been **downwasting**, or thinning, for many years. The ice flow has become inadequate to replace melt loss. Within the

last decade or two, the lower miles of the glacier have thinned to the point where pressure at the glacier bed is insufficient to sustain sliding. This part of the glacier has come completely to rest. The ice now simply sits inert, no longer flowing forward, melting beneath its mantle of rocks. The adjacent boreal forest steadily stakes its claim on whatever emerging deglaciated habitat isn't inundated by melt lakes or streams.

First-time visitors sometimes misinterpret the rocky surface moraine north of the footbridge as leftover debris dumped by the mines, dismayed at their effects on the landscape. When they learn that this is actually the natural work of glaciers, their outlook changes. Glaciers reshape landscapes on a scale that makes historic local mining activities seem comparatively miniscule. Here, one can watch and even hear these natural forces still very much at work on the land. KWRY

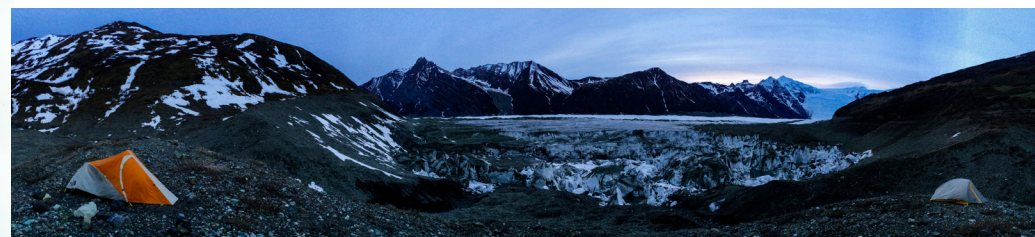
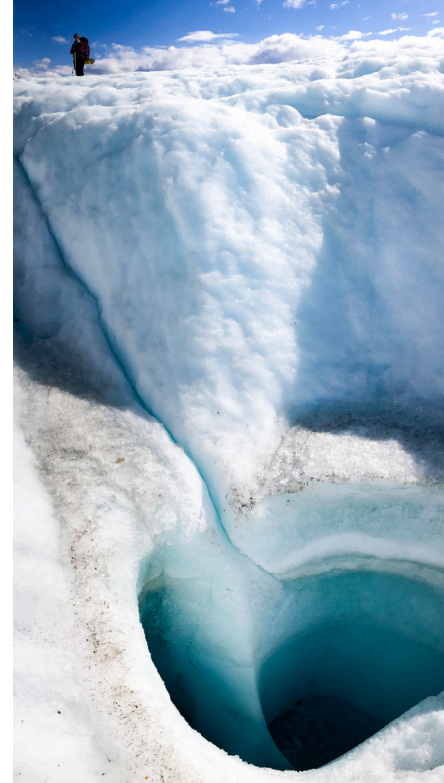




# Alaska's Glacier Capitol



**K**ennecott-McCarthy is a destination unto itself, yes. It's also a trailhead. Beyond lies superb hiking on both bare ground and glacier ice. Guided half- and full-day Root Glacier hikes, plus numerous self-guided day and multi-day and multi-sport routes, all begin here via public lands free of user fees or permitting hassle. Absolutely no other land as glacier-rich and wild as that beyond the KMYX gateway can be found with such ease of access in all of Alaska—a fact that only gets truer by the year as glaciers retreat. KMYX



Facing page: The Root Glacier provides easy access to top-ropeable ice walls. Top left: A backpacker standing wisely back from the precipice lends scale to a large moulin on the Root Glacier. Photo by Jeremy Pataky. Top right: Aerial views of Kennecott mill town show it contextualized within a glacier and mountain landscape. Kennecott provides ready access to land-based trails and routes as well as the Root Glacier, visible here up-valley where it merges with the larger, morainey Kennicott Glacier. The point visible on the right where white ice meets the Root's rocky medial moraine is where most folks access the glacier by way of a two mile trail hike. Photo by Jeremy Pataky. Top pano: The challenging climb to Donoho Peak's 6,696' summit outside of Kennecott between the Root and Kennicott Glaciers affords panoramic views. Roughly left to right, here, are Donoho Lakes, middle and upper Kennicott Glacier, Hidden Creek Lake, Mt. Blackburn and neighboring peaks, Packsaddle Island, LaChapelle Glacier, Goathair Ridge, Gates Glacier, Stairway Icefall, and upper Root Glacier. Photo by Mickey Kenny. Bottom pano: Late night summer light settles in camp at Erie Lake beside upper Root Glacier. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.



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# The Copper River Basin



**G**lennallen is named after Captain E.F. Glenn and Lt. Henry T. Allen, early players in the U.S. military exploration of the Copper River basin. Allen was a descendant of Reuben Sanford, namesake of Mt. Sanford, a major volcano in the western Wrangell Mountains all named by Allen.

Glennallen lies west of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Four Wrangell Mountains peaks are visible in clear weather: Sanford, Drum, Wrangell, and Blackburn.

KCAM790 broadcasts weather, road info, and “Caribou Clatters,” a billboard service that relays messages between people with no other way to communicate, at 7AM, noon, 5, and 9 PM. The Greater Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce Visitor Information Center is located at the junction of the Richardson and Glenn Highways.

Glennallen is the supply hub of the Copper River region, with groceries, schools, lodging, medical care, DMV and other governmental offices, a li-

brary, and more. Cross Road Medical Center provides urgent care. The Glenn Highway, connecting Anchorage and the Richardson, was completed in 1945. Glennallen developed around the site of the camp. It became a commercial center for traffic along the Glenn and Richardson highways. It is one of the few communities in the region that was not built on the site of a Native village. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Tok Cut-Off was constructed from a point 15 miles north of Glennallen to Tok,

Mount Drum (12,010') rises on the east edge of the Copper River Valley as viewed from the Glenn Highway traveling toward Glennallen. Drum is part of a wild range along the Alaska-Canada border called the Wrangell Mountains, or Kelt'aini, meaning The Ones that Control the Weather, to the Ahtna Athabascan people who live in the Copper Valley. Three other mountain chains join the Wrangells to bound the Copper River Valley. To the south, the Chugach Range runs along the coast. The Talkeetnas separate the valley from the Matanuska Valley to the east. The Alaska Range's eastern parts arc north, separating Copper River country from Tanana and Yukon River country. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Tok Cut-Off was constructed from a point 15 miles north of Glennallen to Tok,





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135 miles east on the Alaska Highway. This improved Glennallen's position as a commercial hub. Also, in 1956, a Jesuit school, Copper Valley School, was opened. This facility increased the population considerably by bringing to the region a number of staff and students from Holy Cross Mission in western Alaska. In 1961, "Glenallen" was renamed "Glennallen" by the US Postal Service, adding the extra 'n'.

Construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline boosted Glennallen's economy, as does the ongoing service needs of the pipeline. The economy of the area was negatively impacted by the construction of the George Parks Highway, which connected Anchorage to Denali National Park and Fairbanks along the Alaska Railroad route, diverting traffic away from the Copper Basin. <sup>RMWV</sup>



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An indifferent raven perches on a wooden sculpture of an eagle and salmon outside the entrance to the Copper Valley Market in Glennallen. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.



Richardson Highway travelers will see the trans-Alaska oil pipeline that connects Prudhoe Bay with the Valdez Marine Terminal. Some pullouts allow access for a closer look. The pipeline is 48 inches in diameter, 800 miles long, and crosses three mountain ranges and over 500 rivers and streams. By turns above ground in some places and underground at others, it was the largest privately funded construction project to date in 1977 when it was completed after a two year, \$8 billion effort. Oil first moved through it on June 20, 1977.

14 miles N of Glennallen, 2 miles S of the Gakona River, overlooking the Copper River. Gakona, or Ggax Kuna', is Athabascan for Rabbit R.

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Just two roads lead into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park... the McCarthy Road on the other side of the range, and the Nabesna Road. Facing: NPS photo by Bryan Petryl.

Right: The 53 mile (85 km) long Nabesna Glacier is the longest valley glacier in North America and the world's longest interior valley glacier. It flows from an icefield blanketing the northern slopes of 14,163 feet (4,317 m) Mount Wrangell. It flows east past other volcanic peaks including Blackburn and Atna and then turns north to its terminus about 15 miles south of the old mining settlement of Nabesna at the end of the Nabesna Road. The vast Nabesna Gl. is fed by ~40 tributary glaciers. Its melt forms the Nabesna River, which flows north through Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge and into the Tanana River, a major contributor to the Yukon River. By contrast, much of the water in the park nearer McCarthy sheds into the Copper River watershed. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.





**Tok Cut-off** (Route 1) The Glenn Highway · Tok Cut-off is the main route linking the Alcan and Anchorage. That full distance is 328 miles, and 125 of them comprises the Tok Cut-off, connecting Tok and Richardson Highways at a point 14 miles north of the Richardson and Glenn Highways junction.

**Chistochina** is on the Tok Cut-off. It began as an Athabascan fish camp. In 1887, the village access trail became part of the Valdez-Eagle Trail, which was constructed by miners during the gold rush. A trading post was established in the early 1900s. Chistochina is still an Athabascan village, and has remained one of the most traditional Ahtna Athabascan villages. Elders in the village pass on traditions and culture to youth.

**Posty's Sinona Creek Trading Post** (ad pg. 49) Fuel, propane, groceries, snacks, authentic Native arts, crafts, and gifts. Open year-round at Tok Cut-off MP 34.5.

**Slana** is the name of an Alaska Native village and a river. The Nabesna Mine opened nearby in 1923 and employed 60 people at its height. It operated sporadically till the late '40s. Slana grew rapidly in the '80s through federal homesteading around the Slana Roadhouse, listed in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Visit or call the NPS Ranger Station at Slana (907-822-4701) for road conditions and info.

**Nabesna Road** Explore the north

end of the park by driving the Nabesna Rd., a quiet, scenic, unpaved 42-mile road crossed by intermittent flowing water. It begins an hour south of Tok at the Slana Ranger Station—worth a stop. The Skookum Volcano hike is among the area's most spectacular, but approaching the trailhead toward the end of the road by car requires transiting a steep-ditched single-lane stretch just prior. 4WD and good clearance is recommended back there. The drive (or bike ride) affords views of the Wrangell, Mentasta, and Nutzotin Mountains and access to several hikes, campgrounds, and public use cabins, plus wildlife viewing potential. The cabins require reservations. Private lodging options on the Nabesna Road offer a wonderful chance to get to know this area. A great option for bicyclists is to park near the Slana Ranger Station (907-822-7401) and ride to Wrangell Mountains Wilderness Lodge at 28 mile for the night, then out to the end of the road and back before pedaling out on day three. Birders love the area in spring, when a variety of birds can be spotted around Twin and Jack Lakes. Binoculars or scopes are useful for finding Dall sheep lambs, ewes, and rams on the hills above Jack Creek. Cell coverage is spotty and fuel is unavailable, so gas up first and be self-reliant. Allow 1.5 hours each way at least. A word of caution about the old bulldozer road beyond road's end—do heed the warning signs and don't park near 42 mile. The old road is impassable to highway rigs a short way in, and it just might take a while to summon a tow. HWY




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# Copper Center

**Copper Center** is on a loop road off the Richardson, about 100 miles north of Valdez and one mile west of the Klutina and Copper Rivers confluence. Its origins connect with the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, when prospectors sought an all-American route to Dawson City via Valdez (so they could bypass Canadian law enforcement outside Skag-

way/Dyea). At that time, the Ahtna had summer fish camps on the Copper and winter villages throughout the region.

Old Copper Center began when gold rushers gave up on trying to reach the distant Klondike and stayed, creating a market for entrepreneurs to provide materials and services to them as well as the nearby Natives. The community of Copper Center is a point along the historic Valdez to Eagle Trail, which began as a Native trail. The first telegraph line in Alaska traced the route. In 1905, a school was built in Copper Center, which eventually brought Native families to town. The trail was upgraded to a wagon road in 1910, then to an automobile road in the '20s that got paved

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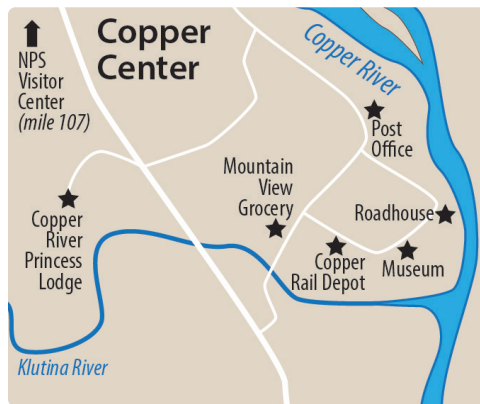
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in 1957 as the Richardson Highway.

The population, including the nearby village, Kluti Kaah, totals about 450. Businesses include RV parks, river boat charters, lodging and dining, gift shops, and tour companies. The George I. Ashby Memorial Museum is located on the loop road next to the Old Town Copper Center Inn & Restaurant, the current incarnation of the historic Copper Center Lodge. That place is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Fire destroyed the original building in 2012—a decade ago this year.

**Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center in Copper Center** The NPS operates visitor centers in Chitina, Kennecott, Slana, and Copper Center. The latter isn't really in Copper Center, though it's close—10 miles south of the

Glenn/Richardson junction in Glennallen, at Richardson mile 106.8. It's not really in the park, either, but provides info on the whole park, and views of the western Wrangell Mountains from a nature trail—a great place to stretch legs and eyes mid-journey. Keep a sharp look out for the brown signs that mark the entrance—easy to miss. The campus has restrooms, plenty of parking for rigs big or small, a theater with a park film, picnic tables, exhibits, and the park's main administrative and management offices. Great book and gift shop. Hours can vary. Call 907-822-7250 to check them or to ask questions. Parking lot is gated and locked at 5:30 PM in summer and closed in winter. No overnighting. Check out the Ahtna Cultural Center—a must to learn about local Athabaskan culture (907-822-3535). KMMV





# Kenny Lake & Chitina

**Kenny Lake**, pop. 400, is located from mile 1 to 17 on the Edgerton Hwy and mile 1 to 8 of the Old Edgerton, and was one of the last farming communities settled in the country.

The Ahtna people were the area's first inhabitants. Settlers arrived in the early 1900s along the new road connecting Chitina to the interior. Ina and Guy Simmons, originally from Kansas City, MO, ran the Kenny Lake Roadhouse for a decade starting around 1920.

When the copper mines closed in 1938, Chitina and Kenny Lake experienced an exodus. A few people remained, living a rural lifestyle.

During the '50s, the community grew. The state began converting the CRNW railroad corridor into a road in 1960 while also completing major upgrades to the Edgerton. The new highway opened in 1964. In 1971, it was paved as far as the Lower Tonsina River. In 1991, the pavement reached all the way to Chitina. The Alaska Homestead Act brought more settlers into the area in the 1960s through its end in the '80s. Folks were expected to build cabins and live on the land for at least six months per year for five years to "prove up," thus becoming the legal land owners. Many then subdivided and sold property parcels.

Many locals still raise farm animals and grow hay and vegetables. There's a public school and library, a feed and seed business, general stores, lodging, and more. Well water is scarce for much

Top: Notice the different colored waters converging in the right third of the header photo at the precise confluence of the Chitina (right) and Copper (left) Rivers, as seen from a bluff between "the cut" at the edge of Chitina town and the Copper River bridge. The distant white mountain is Blackburn, or K'ats'i TI'aadi to the native Ahtna. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.

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of the area; most residents haul water from community wells or have it delivered. The Kenny Lake Fair always draws a crowd.

**Chitina** ("CHIT-nuh") offers a post office, food, gas, a hotel, B&Bs, alcohol, light groceries, and a post office. It's located at the end of the Edgerton Highway, which branches off the Richardson Highway between Glennallen and Thompson Pass. The McCarthy Road starts at Chitina and leads into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Chitina's airstrip serves the backcountry and McCarthy through Wrangell Mountain Air.

Chitina's heyday coincided with the operation of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway, built to link Kennecott mines to market. It hauled cop-

per ore and supplies between the mines and Cordova. Chitina provided an intermediate stop for trains and passengers. Trains, stagecoaches, dog sleds, and steamboats all passed through Chitina during its boom years, 1910-1938.

The Chitina NPS Ranger Station (907-823-2205), a 1910 log cabin, is located at the end of the paved Edgerton Highway near the beginning of the McCarthy Road, about an hour from the Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center and park headquarters near Copper Center. It provides exhibits and info on the road, hikes, fishing opportunities, and more.

The station is decorated with historic photos featuring Chitina. It was constructed to house J.C. Martin, manager of the Ed S. Orr Stage Company, whose initials are legible on the ceiling. The





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home was deemed “one of the neatest and most substantial log cabin cottages in Alaska.” Locals rehabilitated it in 1991-1992.

Today, dipnetting, fish wheeling, and boat fishing near Chitina attract AK residents each summer from as far away as Fairbanks and Anchorage. Copper River reds (sockeye) are famous throughout the world. This far upriver it's strictly a personal use and subsistence salmon fishery. These upstream waters feed residents well. Commercially harvested Copper River salmon are caught down in the delta. Licensed nonresidents still have plenty of fishing options, including lakes near Chitina and along the McCarthy Road, Klutina and Gulkana Rivers, saltwater fishing in Valdez, and more.

Chitina marks the last chance to get

gas—make sure you have enough to get out and back (120 miles round trip). As you head out, look upstream from the bridge to see some remnant fish-wheels—most got wrecked in recent fall floods, and the shifting Kotsina R. complicated access. Downstream, view the confluence of the Copper R. and Chitina R., and perhaps some dipnetters.

Half of Chitina's 100 or so residents are Ahtna Athabaskan, descendants of expert traders. Chitina's original Native settlement was Taral, on the trade route south to the coast. RWWV

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Above: Of Alaska's 15 highest peaks, 12 are in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. One of them, Mount Wrangell, or, K'ett'aeni, to the Ahtna (and K'etedi when erupting), is a massive shield volcano, visible here on the right. It rises over 12,000 feet above the Copper River. On cloudless days, small puffs of steam often vent visibly from the north crater near the summit. Photo by Jeremy Pataky.





Topping out at 2,678' in Thompson Pass, the Richardson Highway winds through the Chugach Mountains and some of Alaska's most stunning scenery. Views including sites like Worthington Glacier (pictured) as well as features of the built environment like snow fences, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and its pump stations, and electrical lines routing hydro power from Valdez to the Copper River Valley.

# Valdez

**Valdez** (pronounced val-DEEZ, contrary to many an assumption) is located on the shores of Prince William Sound, 175 scenic miles from McCarthy.

In 1897, the Port of Valdez was a launch point for gold rushers heading inland. It bustled in the first two decades of the last century. Mining and shipping were staples, along with fishing, fox farming, and tourism.

On March 27, 1964, the infamous Good Friday Earthquake struck 45 miles west of Valdez. Lasting over four minutes, it caused underwater landslides and tsunamis. One washed away the waterfront, drowning 30 people. Over 114 were killed in Alaska by the quake.

The Valdez townsite was condemned for unstable ground. In 1967, three years after the quake, the entire town was moved four miles east to its present location; 52 buildings were moved. The rest were razed. The route into the old site is just past the road to the airport.

During the 1970s, the Port of Valdez became a vital link for the TransAlaska Pipeline, which terminates at a 1,000-acre marine terminal there. Perhaps that

made up for losing out on the contest with Cordova around the turn of the century to serve as the rail link for Kennecott.

Today, the population is about 4,500 people who work for the city, the oil industry, winter and summer tourism, fishing, or transportation and shipping. It's a fantastic place to fish for halibut and salmon and to backcountry ski and ice climb in the winter. Sea kayaking and helicopter flights are great. Wildlife abounds.

Check out the Valdez Visitors Information Center and the Valdez Museum and Historical Archives located downtown... the Potato, a second location of the famous McCarthy joint! KMNY

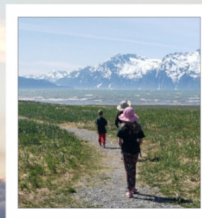
## DON'T MISS...

**Old Town Site** The road into town passes by the original town site. A tsunami triggered by the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake destroyed Old Valdez. You can still see the layout of its streets and port. Check out the related museum by the ferry terminal.



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## Forest Service Visitor Center

On the right just before you come into Valdez, a log cabin stands at the base of the hill. Worth a stop, this US Forest Service Visitor Center has loads of info on wildlife and area public-use Forest Service cabins, as well as a small gift shop. View the waterfall out back and look for salmon spawning when the time is right.

**Dayville Road** Drive out Dayville Road to see the other side of Valdez Arm. The drive leads past the Allison Creek Hydroelectric station and a hatchery, a great place to view wildlife. Bears, sea lions, and seabirds frequent the area to feed on salmon. A bike path parallels the ocean. Allison Point Campground offers toilets, parking, and RV camping. The road ends at the terminus of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, where oil rigs often dock.



www.valdezmuseum.org

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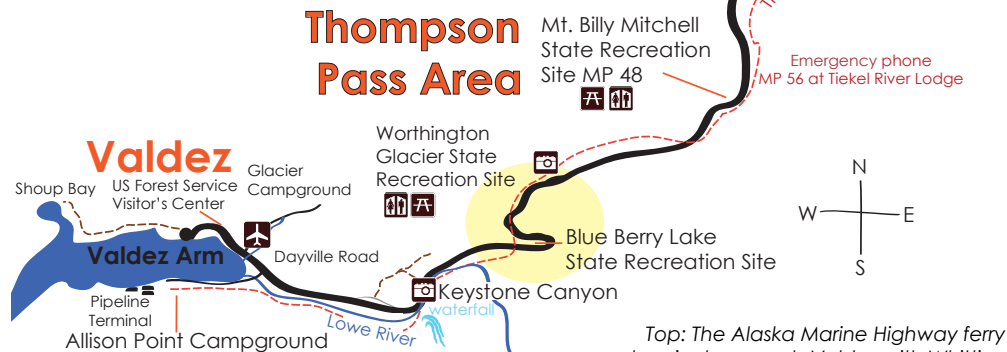
# Getting to Valdez

**DRIVE** Proclaimed one of “America’s Most Scenic Roads” and known to Alaskans as the “Adventure Corridor,” the drive to Valdez provides breathtaking views of glaciers, waterfalls, and mountains. The drive through Thompson Pass passes the Worthington Glacier. During winter, the pass is buried under snow (hence the tall snowplow guide posts and snow barricades along the way).

**FLY** Short daily flights from Anchorage offer spectacular views of the coastal Chugach Mountains, vast icefields and glaciers, and Prince William Sound.

**FERRY** The Alaska Marine Highway is a beautiful way to reach or depart Valdez while experiencing the marine environment. The 100 mile crossing between Valdez and Whittier makes loop routes possible, linking, say, Anchorage,

McCarthy and the Copper Basin, Valdez, and Whittier (itself just 50 miles from Anchorage). Expand your itinerary with a well-worth-it trip to Cordova by ferry or short flight, as well. RHWY



Top: The Alaska Marine Highway ferry terminal connects Valdez with Whittier, Cordova, and points beyond.

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## ABOUT THE APP

The Ahtna Land app is designed to provide users with the ability to check land ownership while hunting, fishing, or recreating in the Ahtna region. Major landowners are identified by name and unique color. The user can select a variety of base maps including topographic and aerial imagery maps to aid in navigation and identification of landmarks. Major roads and mileposts are also included to aid the user.

## APP FEATURES



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A great tool for showing property boundaries, public and private landowner names and more - empowering you to adventure responsibly.



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See your current location in relation to the property boundaries, landmarks, major roads and mileposts. Check if the land you are on is private or public land.



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DEPARTMENT**

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