Bering Land Bridge
Official Visitor's Guide

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

A Bridge to the Past, Present & Future

Comprised of 2.7 million acres on the Seward Peninsula in northwest Alaska, Bering Land Bridge (BELA) is one of the nation's most remote national park units. Because of this, it offers unparalleled opportunities to not only experience some of America's most isolated wildlands, but also the rich heritage of Alaskan Native cultures, past and present. Visitors to the preserve will find themselves in the midst of natural hot springs, ancient lava flows, and the largest maar lakes in the world in a land still used by local residents in the same way their ancestors have used it for generations.

Bering Land Bridge was established as a National Preserve on December 2, 1980. This designation enables the land to be federally protected, but also utilized for public hunting, gathering, trapping, fishing, and subsistence use. With a coastline just 55 miles from Siberia, it is the westernmost national park unit in the continental United States.

The preserve protects a significant expanse of land remaining from the prehistoric "land bridge," also known as Beringia, which spanned from modern-day Asia to North America over 12,000 years ago. The bridge was up to 1,000 miles wide, and was a land mass that allowed for the exchange of human, flora, and fauna populations between continents. As the climate warmed at the end of the last ice age, sea levels rose and the land mass was closed off, separating the continents. Today, evidence of ice age species and prehistoric human settlements can be found in the preserve.

There are no roads into Bering Land Bridge, so travel opportunities can be limited. The most common access is by snowmobile, small airplane, boat, or on foot. With a growing body of information about North American natural history and indigenous cultures, the preserve offers valuable opportunities for visitors to understand and explore the vast wildlands of northwest Alaska.

Superintendent's Welcome

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, a little known park unit with a huge story! The preserve, which is just smaller than the state of Connecticut, lies at the heart of continental crossroads that profoundly influenced the distribution of life in the Western Hemisphere.

The park headquarters are in Nome, a rural community of 3,600 residents, which is known for its gold rush history, Alaska Native cultures, and as the end of the famous Iditarod sled dog race. The preserve is a place where the rich variety of wildlife, fish, and plants have sustained the indigenous people of the region for thousands of years, and where subsistence is essential to the economic, cultural, and social existence of the region's people. The villages of Shishmaref, Wales and Deering are located right outside the preserve boundary; residents consider the preserve part of their backyard.

The story of Beringia and that of the park is near and dear to my heart, not only because my ancestors crossed this land bridge, but also because my grandmother was originally from Russia, and I have relatives who still live in the Chukotka region. I am honored to be the superintendent of a park that has played a unique role in the history of the Americas. I encourage you to browse our website, utilize this visitor guide, and to contact us for more information. *Igamsiqanaghhalek*- Thank you very much!

Jeanette Koelsch
Superintendent, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

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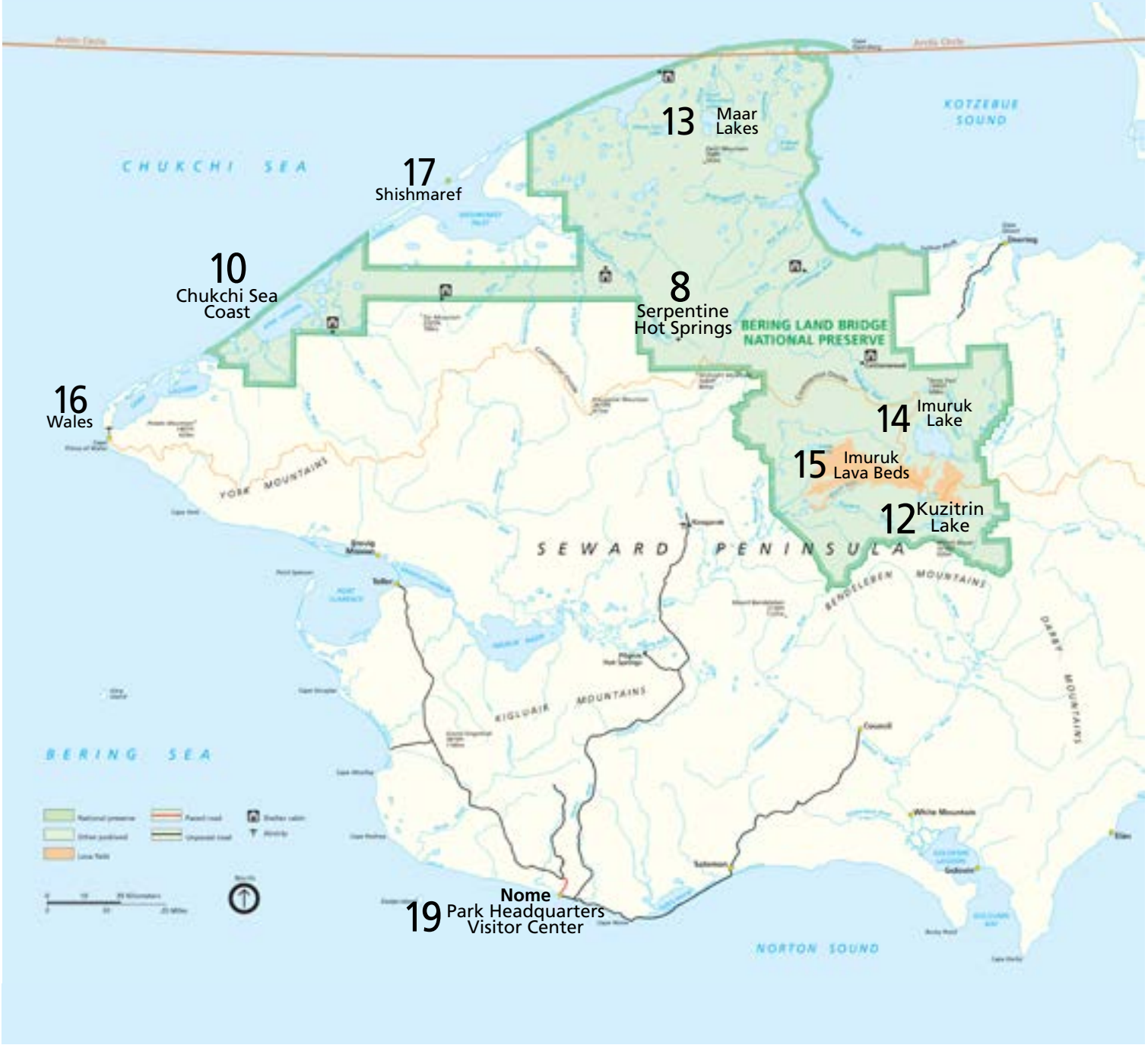
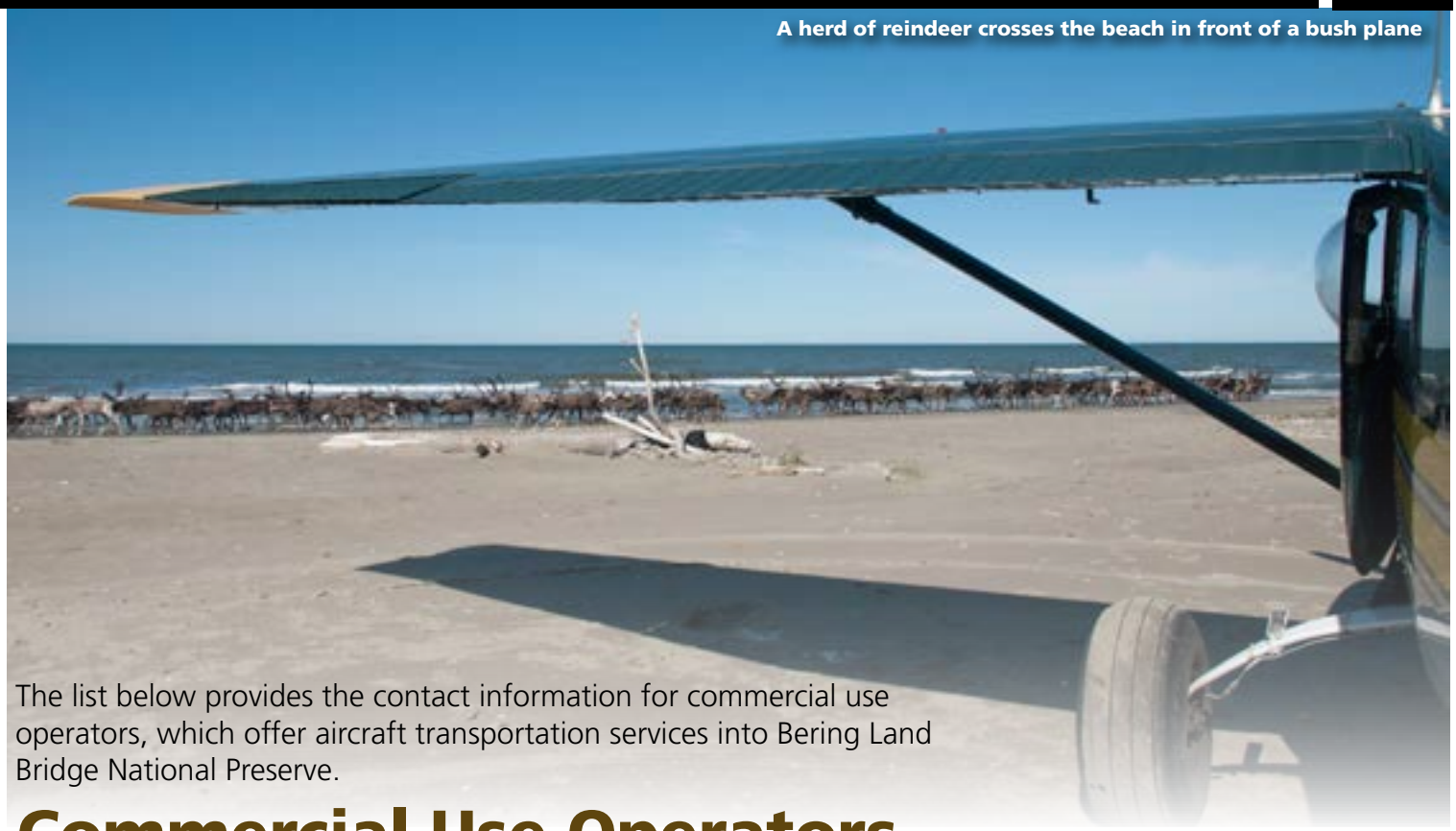




A herd of reindeer crosses the beach in front of a bush plane

The list below provides the contact information for commercial use operators, which offer aircraft transportation services into Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.

Commercial Use Operators

AIR TAXI						
Air Juneau, Inc.	PO Box 1846	Kenai	AK	99611	907-252-7888	sheila@airjuneau.com www.huntandfishalaska.net
Fox Aircrafts, LLC	6049 Hart Lake Loop	Wasilla	AK	99654	907-301-2770	stevefox180@yahoo.com www.foxaircraft.com
Golden Eagle Outfitters, Inc.	PO Box 692	Delta Junction	AK	99737	907-388-2225	trips@alaskawildernessexpeditions.com www.alaskawildernessexpeditions.com
Arctic Backcountry Flying, LLC	PO Box 924	Kotzebue	AK	99752	907-442-3200	bruce.tweto@hageland.com www.flyera.com
Northwestern Aviation, Inc.	PO Box 1010	Kotzebue	AK	99752	907-442-3525	Jimkincaid0@gmail.com www.alaskaonyourown.com
Arctic Wild	PO Box 80562	Fairbanks	AK	99708	907-479-8203	Sally@wildarctic.com www.wildarctic.com
BIG GAME TRANSPORT						
Air Juneau, Inc.	PO Box 1846	Kenai	AK	99611	907-252-7888	sheila@airjuneau.com www.huntandfishalaska.net
Golden Eagle Outfitters, Inc.	PO Box 692	Delta Junction	AK	99737	907-388-2225	trips@alaskawildernessexpeditions.com www.alaskawildernessexpeditions.com
Northwestern Aviation, Inc.	PO Box 1010	Kotzebue	AK	99752	907-442-3525	Jimkincaid0@gmail.com www.alaskaonyourown.com

4 Prehistory

Mammoth vertebra found in 2012

In Brief WHAT MAY APPEAR TODAY TO BE AN immense landscape of flat tundra, lava fields, rolling mountains, oxbow rivers, and shallow lakes was once the sole terrestrial passage between Asia and the Americas. With seawater frozen up into colossal glaciers, the ocean floor was exposed for thousands of years, long enough for plants, animals, and even humans to move back and forth between the continents.

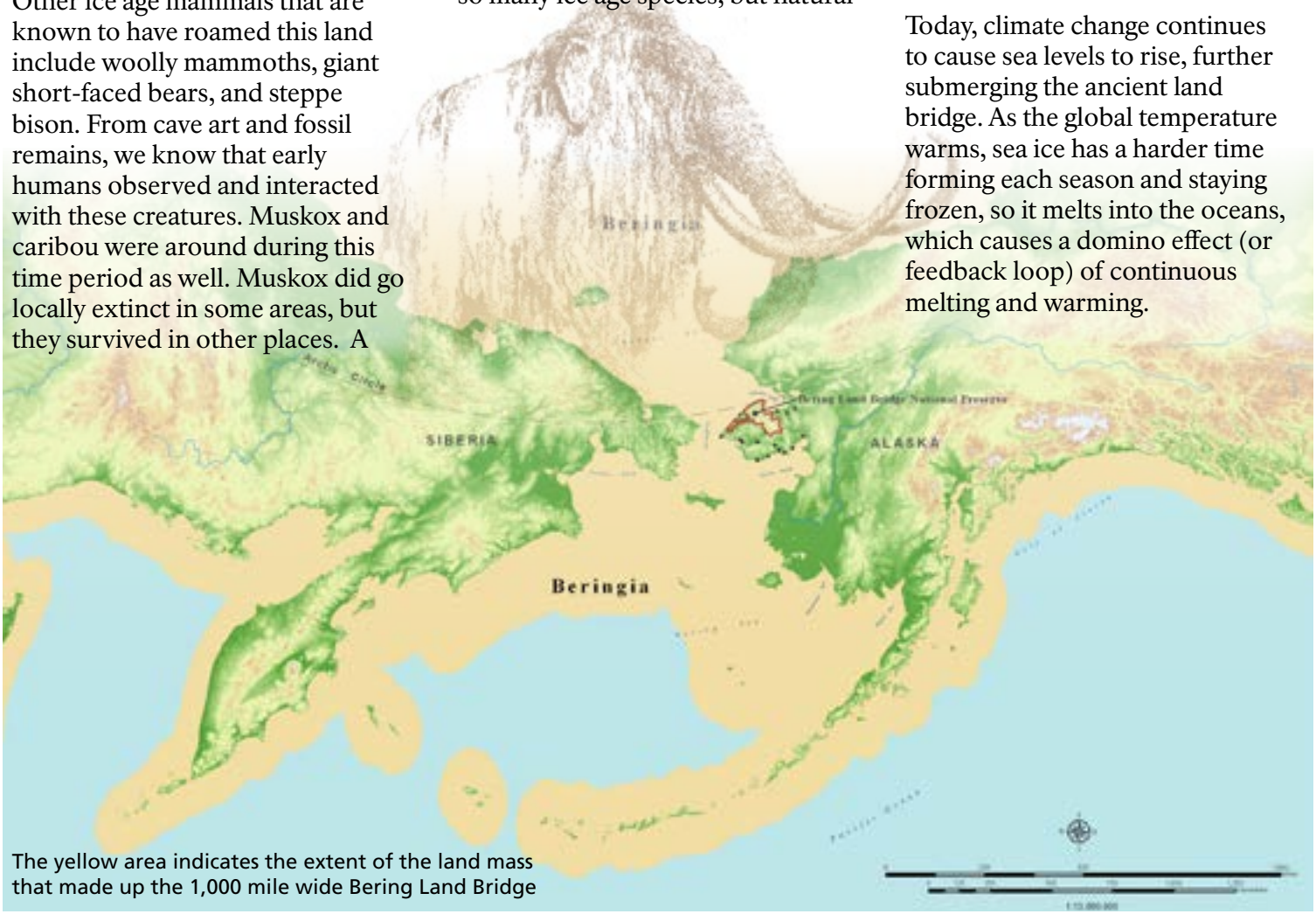
The Last Ice Age

This time period is also known as the Pleistocene epoch, which lasted from about 2 million to 10,000 years ago. It was a time of extreme climatic change, where prehistoric hippopotamuses lived in a subtropical England, and humans crossed the Bering Land Bridge alongside now-extinct saber-toothed cats and American lions.

Other ice age mammals that are known to have roamed this land include woolly mammoths, giant short-faced bears, and steppe bison. From cave art and fossil remains, we know that early humans observed and interacted with these creatures. Muskox and caribou were around during this time period as well. Muskox did go locally extinct in some areas, but they survived in other places. A small herd was brought over from Greenland to Nunivak Island in southwestern Alaska in the 1930s, and in the 1970s their descendents were reintroduced to the Seward Peninsula. Today the population has expanded its range into Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.

It is believed there was no single cause for the ultimate extinction of so many ice age species, but natural climate change is one known factor. As the climate warmed, glaciers melted and the sea level rose, cutting off access to Asia and changing the available resources that so many species relied on for survival. Although some human populations were migrating via boat along the coast by then, in many ways the two worlds were severed.

Today, climate change continues to cause sea levels to rise, further submerging the ancient land bridge. As the global temperature warms, sea ice has a harder time forming each season and staying frozen, so it melts into the oceans, which causes a domino effect (or feedback loop) of continuous melting and warming.



The yellow area indicates the extent of the land mass that made up the 1,000 mile wide Bering Land Bridge

Plants and Wildlife 5

Muskox

Wildlife

Due to its vast nature, it is possible to stay for days out in the backcountry of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve and never see a large mammal, but that doesn't mean they aren't out there. Brown bears, muskox, fox, caribou, moose, wolves, and wolverines all make their homes in the preserve, as well as a wide variety of other small mammals, insects, and arachnids. Visit the animals page on our website for more info!

Wild Iris

Plants

Far from the barren landscape it might appear to be, in summertime the tundra is vibrant with color and plant life, home to over 300 species of vascular plants, including wildflowers, berries, small trees, and shrubs. There are also several hundred more mosses, fungi, and lichens that survive year round. Check out the plants page on our website for more info about common species you'll find in Bering Land Bridge.

Northern Pintails

Birds

At the crossroads of the Asiatic-North American Flyway, over 170 bird species are known to migrate up to 20,000 miles every year to spend the summer in Bering Land Bridge. Visitors can expect to see a wide variety of raptors, songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds as well as Asiatic species, sandhill cranes, ptarmigan, and tundra swans nesting in the preserve. Download a full checklist here.

Hunting, fishing, and trapping

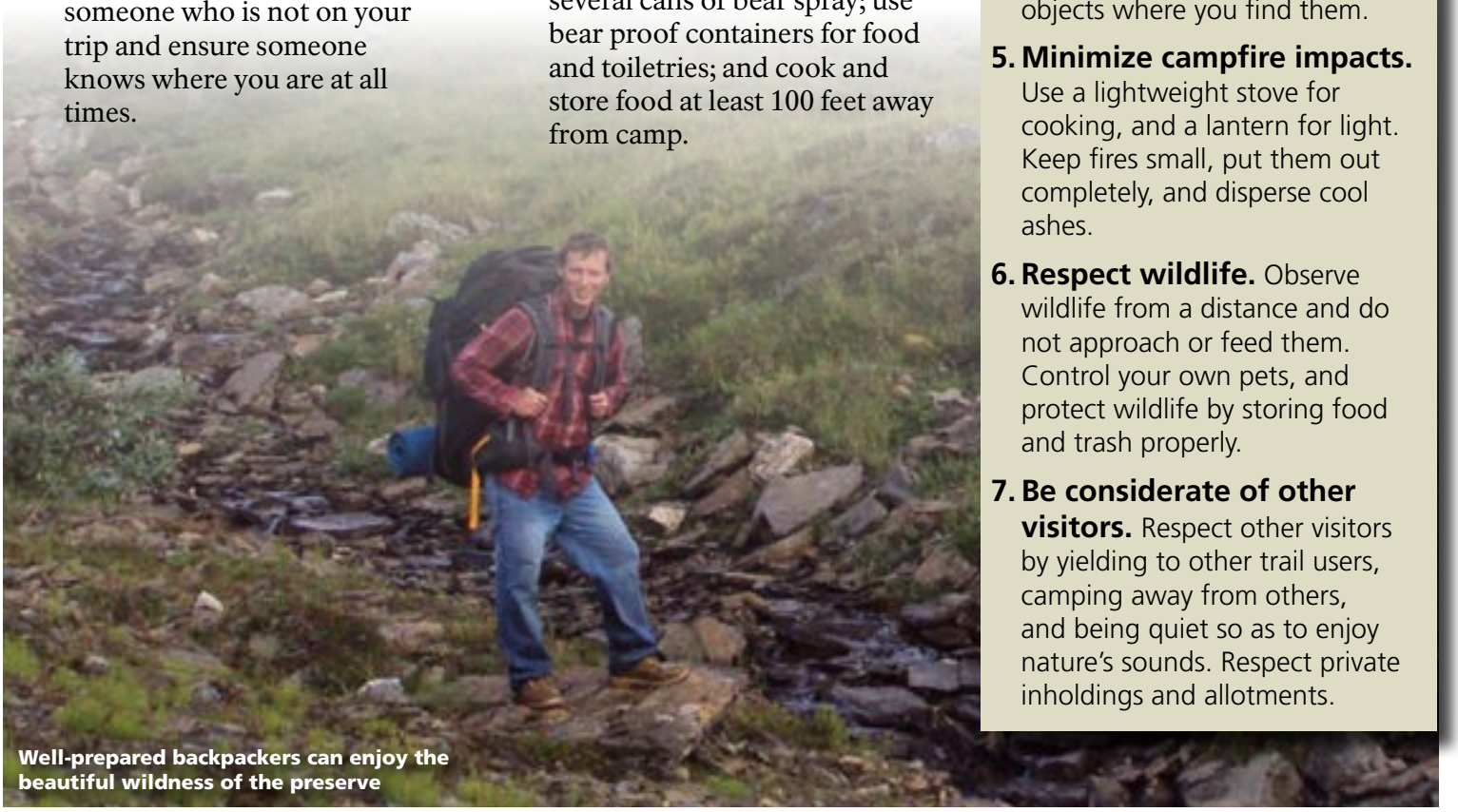
Because Bering Land Bridge is designated as a National Preserve, sport hunting and fishing are permitted with proper required state-issued licenses and permits.

- Bag and possession limits vary by species and by area, so always check current hunting regulations.
  - Alaska State Regulations: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferegulations.main
  - Alaska Fish and Game: http://www.adfg.state.ak.us/
- Please keep in mind that some areas within the preserve are private land. Do not enter private land without the landowner's permission.

6 Backcountry Safety

Best Practices

- **For ALL trips,** pack at least 3 days of extra food (especially if you are flying in). Rapid, unexpected weather changes may prevent you from getting out of the backcountry.
- **Be prepared** for extremely variable weather, by packing rain gear and multiple clothing layers all times of year. Temperatures can range from 90° to -40°F depending on the season.
- **Always bring a well-stocked medical kit.** Anywhere in the preserve, you are over 80 miles from the nearest hospital and 540 miles from Anchorage, the nearest major medical facility. Under optimal conditions, expect a minimum 4 hour wait for any emergency medical assistance.
- **Leave an itinerary** with someone who is not on your trip and ensure someone knows where you are at all times.
- **Due to its remote location,** there is no cellphone service anywhere in the preserve. It's advisable to bring a satellite phone, Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), or other satellite tracking device.
- **Call us at (907) 443-2522!** Even though there are no backcountry permits required for Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, you are welcome to contact park staff just to let us know you're there. Tell us about current conditions, what you're doing, the name of your pilot and plane tail number, and any other information you want to relay.
- **Wildlife safety is of utmost importance.** Make a lot of noise so as not to surprise bears or other large wildlife; bring several cans of bear spray; use bear proof containers for food and toiletries; and cook and store food at least 100 feet away from camp.



Well-prepared backpackers can enjoy the beautiful wildness of the preserve

Leave No Trace

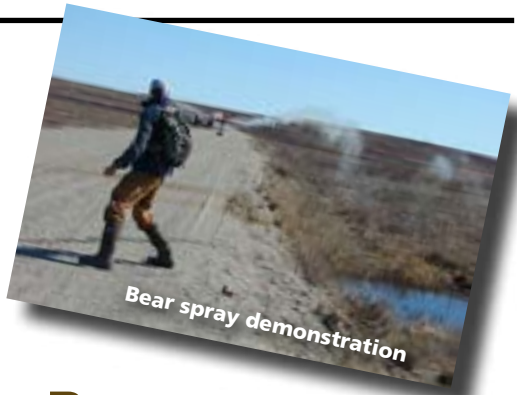
1. **Plan ahead and prepare.** Know the regulations where you're going; prepare for extreme weather; travel in small groups; use a map, compass, and GPS.
2. **Travel and camp on durable surfaces.** These include established trails, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow; camp at least 200ft. from water sources; walk single file on established trails and keep your campsite small.
3. **Dispose of waste properly.** Pack it in, pack it out. Deposit human waste 6-8in. deep and at least 200ft. from water, camps, and trails. Use biodegradable soap at least 200ft. from water for any sort of cleaning activity, and disperse any wastewater.
4. **Leave what you find.** Examine what you find, but leave it be. Avoid building structures, altering the landscape, or transporting invasive species. Leave natural and man-made objects where you find them.
5. **Minimize campfire impacts.** Use a lightweight stove for cooking, and a lantern for light. Keep fires small, put them out completely, and disperse cool ashes.
6. **Respect wildlife.** Observe wildlife from a distance and do not approach or feed them. Control your own pets, and protect wildlife by storing food and trash properly.
7. **Be considerate of other visitors.** Respect other visitors by yielding to other trail users, camping away from others, and being quiet so as to enjoy nature's sounds. Respect private inholdings and allotments.

Brown Bear

In Brief BROWN BEARS WILL NOT TYPICALLY attack, but the key is to avoid surprising the bear, approaching it, or appearing as a threat. To get to see a bear on the tundra is an incredible opportunity, so enjoy, value, and respect the animal from a distance (at least 100 yards), and your experience in the backcountry will be truly rewarding.

Know the Signs

- Large piles of scat
- Bear tracks
- Claw marks
- Tufts of fur
- Large, dug-up areas
- Animal trails of cleared brush


Bear spray demonstration

Be prepared

- Keep ALL food, toiletries, and cosmetics in bear-resistant food containers (BRFC).
- Prepare and consume food, clean your cookware, and store your BRFCs at least 100 yards away from your tent and equipment.
- Know how to use bear spray, and keep it handy at all times.
- Be visible and make noise. Sing loudly, clap, make whatever sounds you can, or call out "hey bear!" frequently.
- Travel in groups of at least 2 people, if not more. In the backcountry, there is safety in numbers.

Be aware

- Scan the landscape periodically. Check the horizons for any signs of large wildlife moving around in the distance over hilltops, ridges, or tundra.
- Be especially vigilant around streams, lakes, and other water sources.
- Autumn is a time when bears fatten up for the winter; they also camouflage better against the brown tundra, so be extra watchful.
- Spend as little time as possible in places that could put you in impassable situations with wildlife, such as dense vegetation.

Know what to do

- If you encounter a bear, give it as much space as possible and stay far away from it.
- If a bear approaches you, speak calmly but loudly to it and make yourself appear larger by waving your arms or holding your pack over your head. Stand your ground.
- Defensive behavior includes huffing, snorting, jaw-popping, or charging. If you see this, stand your ground! Talk calmly and loudly, move slowly away, make yourself appear larger, and be ready to use your bear spray.
- If a bear charges at you, now is the time to use your bear spray (as long as you're upwind -- otherwise you risk spraying yourself!). Continue to stand your ground. Most charges do not end in contact.
- In the unlikely event that contact is made by a brown bear, ***play dead***. Lie face down on the ground with your hands covering your neck and legs spread apart so the bear cannot turn you over. Do not move until the bear is gone, or unless it begins attacking vigorously. If it does begin to feed on you, ***fight back for your life.***

8 Serpentine Hot Springs "Iyat"

In Brief

SERPENTINE Hot Springs is one of the most visited areas in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. With a gravel airstrip, hot springs piped in to an enclosed bathhouse, and a bunkhouse open year round, Serpentine offers an accessible way to experience the unique and remote wildness of this region. Frequented by travelers and locals alike, Serpentine is a place of both cultural importance and geological significance. Visitors come to Hot Springs Valley to observe wildlife, bathe, relax, and hike among the extraordinary granite spires, also known as "tors," which tower over the landscape. The Inupiaq word for Serpentine Hot Springs Springs is *Iyat*, which means "cooking pot" or "a site for cooking," and with one step into this steamy oasis, you can easily see how it got its name. For centuries the hot springs have been recognized as a place of spiritual healing and tradition, a quality that continues to be valued and respected by all who visit.

Serpentine has something different to offer every season. In summer, mild temperatures provide ideal weather for hiking through the tundra. In fall, the slopes are teeming with wild berries and ablaze with brilliant colors. In winter, the bathhouse offers a steamy escape from the frigid conditions outside. And in spring, the land is transformed into a rainbow of wildflowers.

Things to Know:

- The water temperature in the hot spring outside of the bathhouse can reach a dangerous 170° F. Use the bathhouse for bathing and soaking instead.
- The water from the river contains high levels of coliform bacteria, so be sure to boil or filter it before consuming.
- Leave the spigots running inside the bathhouse at all times, as turning them off would cause the tub to dry up and shrink, resulting in structural damage.
- Serpentine Hot Springs is protected as a cultural resource and should be treated with respect as such.
- Please observe "Leave No Trace" ethics as much as possible, and leave Serpentine Hot Springs cleaner than it was when you arrived!

Features

SECONDLY TO THE HOT SPRING, the large granite spires, known as tors, are one of Serpentine's most unique features. Created through volcanic forces causing magma to cool into soft granite underground, erosion slowly scoured away the softer layers and left hard granite monoliths exposed on towering ridgelines.

Wildlife including raptors, songbirds, brown bears, caribou, muskox, red fox, beavers, and moose can be sighted by the watchful eye. Hundreds of species of plants, mosses, lichens, and fungi are also found here.

Water is fed into the bathhouse from the natural spring outside.

Serpentine Hot Springs "Iyat" 9

Serpentine Hot Springs has something to offer all who visit

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: Located approximately 30 miles from the end of the Kougarok Road, Serpentine can be accessed via aircraft, by hiking, or by non-motorized vehicle. Private planes or flights chartered through authorized air taxies are permitted.

Winter/Spring: When there is adequate snow cover, Serpentine may be accessed by plane with proper skis or by snowmobile. If traveling from Nome by snowmobile, visitors should be prepared to make a two day trip each way.

Geographic Coordinates: 65.8569N, 164.7142W

The Bunkhouse:

- The building is a barracks-like structure divided into 3 rooms that sleep about 12 people. First come, first served.
- The two living areas each contain:
  - Six bunks with thin mattresses (bring your own sleeping bag)
  - A large kitchen table with benches
  - A 3-burner Coleman stove (bring your own stove fuel)
  - A heat stove (bring your own oil or wood)
  - Cookware, dishes, kitchen utensils, cleaning supplies
- The middle room of the bunkhouse is used to store gear, firewood, tools, cleaning supplies, water filters, and other miscellaneous items.
- Camping is relatively unrestricted, with no formal campsites or developed water, power, or sanitation facilities (bring a good tent, water filter, and extra food).

Inside the bunkhouse

- There is an outhouse approximately 100 feet west of the bunkhouse, near the air strip.
- The bathhouse covers a redwood tub used for soaking.
- The tub is fed directly from the hot spring and the cold stream outside, and spigots can be adjusted to control the temperature in the tub.
- Some non-perishable emergency supplies may be available, so please leave these for others in need.
- Recycling is available for aluminum cans in the bunkhouse, but please pack out any other trash you accumulate during your stay.

The bunkhouse

Web Exclusive

Check out Serpentine Hot Springs on Youtube!
http://youtu.be/JXAGodqRR2c

10 Chukchi Sea Coast

Coastal wetlands

In Brief

THE NORTHWESTERN COAST OF THE Seward Peninsula is one of the lesser-visited areas of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and marks the westernmost region of any National Park unit in the continental United States. Carved out by seasonal freezing and thawing, the landscape is a patchwork of ice-wedge polygons and thaw lakes along the Chukchi Sea. Although people have been known to inhabit the area over the last several centuries, evidence of many of these sites has been lost in the erosion that prevails along the shoreline.

Features

CHANGES TO THE LANDSCAPE over time can easily be seen in the erosion that is slowly eating away at the tall bluffs. On the higher part of the shoreline, archaeological sites are being surveyed to understand the impacts of this erosion, how much has been lost, and how much can be preserved.

Evidence of human activity from the Arctic Small Tool tradition (about 2,250 BC) to more recent times in the last several hundred years has been found along the coast. These sites represent an invaluable link to our cultural and natural history, and to the heritage of modern Inupiaq communities. For this reason, it is vital to leave features, artifacts, and the environment as you find them so others may enjoy the same experience of discovery. Archaeological sites are protected by law and those who damage them are subject to fines.

In the summer, the coastal region is fragrant with the salty sea breeze and the zest of Labrador tea on the tundra. The Chukchi coast is an ideal place to observe the crossroads of the Asiatic-North American Flyway, the migratory route of birds that pass between the continents every spring and fall. Here you have the opportunity to see both North American and Asiatic species as they stop over on their epic journeys.

In addition, one of the few remaining active reindeer herds on the Seward Peninsula is managed from the village of Wales along the western coastline. Herds can occasionally be seen throughout the tundra or on the beaches of the Chukchi Sea. Keep an eye out when you're flying over or hiking in this region.

Things to Know:

- Because of its location between the coast and the tundra, Ikpek can be incredibly windy. Be prepared with proper, durable gear and equipment
- Historical sites or artifacts are present along the coast, but please take only pictures, as it is illegal to alter, destroy, or remove archaeological and historic resources.
- There is limited freshwater, although some natural springs can be found on the coastal tundra. Water should always be filtered or boiled before consuming.
- Respect the local subsistence users who frequent the area for hunting and gathering, as this land plays an important role in the lives of many on the Seward Peninsula. In addition, there are many private inholdings and allotments along the coast, so please be respectful of private land.

Short-eared Owl

Back

Reindeer herd on the beach

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: Most parts of the Chukchi coastline can be accessed by boat or by bush plane. Landings can be made on the beach in areas clear of driftwood.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or plane with snow skis.

Geographic Coordinates: 65.9044444N, 167.0847222W

Reindeer

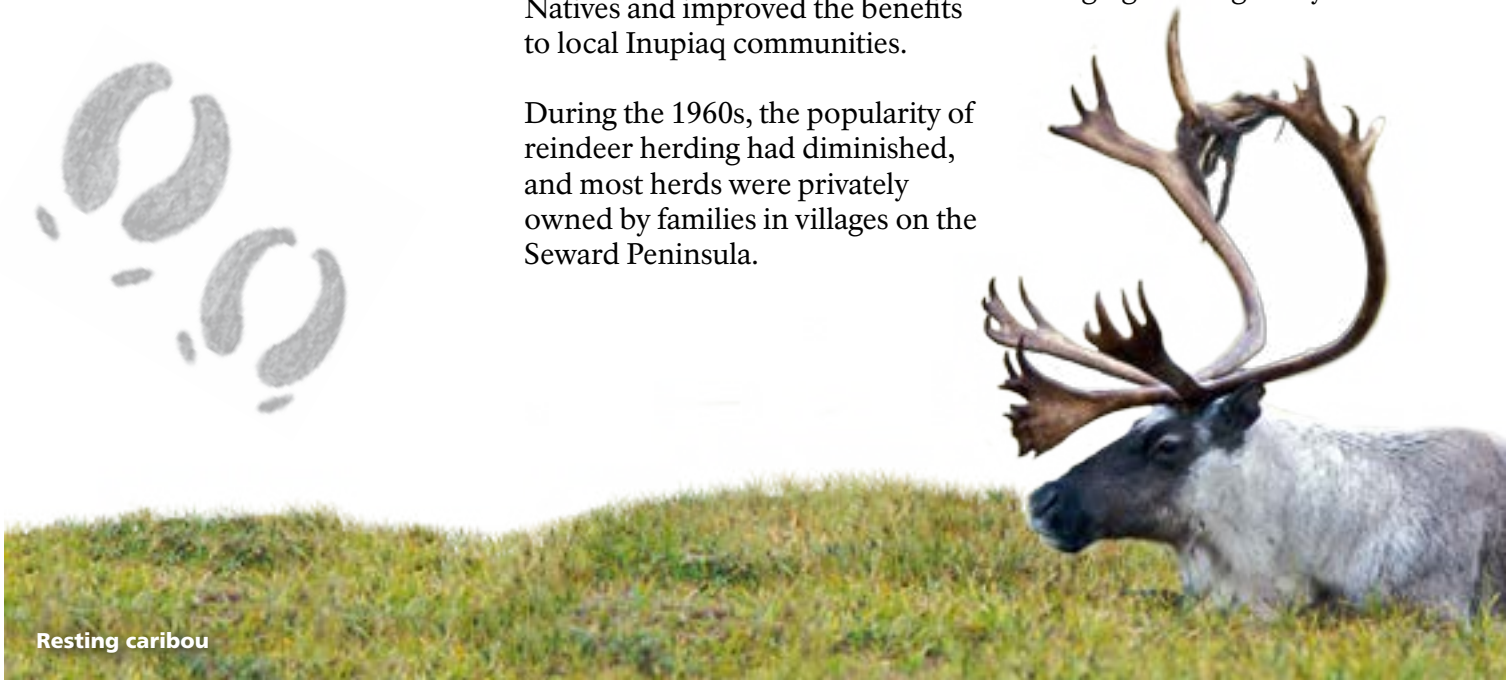
Reindeer were first brought to the Seward Peninsula in 1892, and Inupiaq communities were trained to herd them through apprenticeship programs that combined missionary education with vocational and English language training.

By the early 1900s, herding became increasingly popular. With a total population of around 640,000 reindeer, the 1930s represented the period of greatest abundance in the herding industry. In 1937 the federal Reindeer Act was passed, which outlawed herding by non-Natives and improved the benefits to local Inupiaq communities.

During the 1960s, the popularity of reindeer herding had diminished, and most herds were privately owned by families in villages on the Seward Peninsula.

Today, all reindeer in western Alaska are managed by only a handful of herders, and herds on the Seward Peninsula can occasionally be seen on the tundra, the beach, or grazing in the coastal areas of the preserve. The preserve even has a special mandate allowing for herders to graze their reindeer on land within its boundaries.

Caribou and reindeer are the same species, as they have the same scientific name (*Rangifer tarandus*). However, the term "reindeer" identifies domestically managed populations, while caribou are free ranging and migratory.



Resting caribou

12 Kuzitrin and the Twin Calderas

Things to Know:

- Exercise caution when hiking on lava flows and the calderas, as there are large spaces between rocks and open pits that could be a falling hazard. Abundant lichens cover hidden holes.
- Respect the archaeological sites in this area and leave them undisturbed for the enjoyment of others.
- Freshwater from Kuzitrin Lake should be filtered or boiled before consuming, as it may contain harmful levels of bacteria.
- Be aware of wildlife in the area – Kuzitrin is home to wolves, brown bears, fox, moose, and caribou – exercise extreme caution by making a lot of noise when hiking.

The Twin Calderas

Kuzitrin Lake and ancient stone structure

In Brief SITUATED IN THE SOUTHEASTERN region of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Kuzitrin Lake is known for its prehistory and geology. In addition to the beautiful lake at the foot of the mountain range, Kuzitrin boasts the Twin Calderas, a pair of inactive cauldron-like volcanic features. Preliminary research suggests that the man-made stone features in the area may date back to over 4,000 years ago, possibly used for caribou drives and hunting blinds.

Features

WITH EXTENSIVE LAVA FIELDS to the north and the Bendeleben Mountains to the south, Kuzitrin Lake is nestled in a strikingly beautiful region of the preserve. The Twin Calderas are situated about 1.3 miles from the western end of the lake, and hardened lava flows extend across the soft tundra. Although the calderas are now inactive, they were originally formed by the emptying of underground magma chambers in a violent eruption.

For centuries, this area has been used by local populations for subsistence purposes. The ground is littered with caribou remains, and ancient herding drive lines can be identified along the slope down to the lake. Artifacts and features may be encountered in this area; please respect the resources and leave them as you find them for others to enjoy, and for scientific study. Archaeological sites are protected by law and those who damage them subject to fines. In additon, if these are moved, the evidence can become contaminated or the original location of the artifacts can be lost or disturbed, effectively destroying any opportunity to piece together the past.

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: About 90 miles northeast of Nome, Kuzitrin is accessible by float plane landing in the lake, by non-motorized vehicle, or by foot.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or plane with snow skis.

Geographic Coordinates: 65.385278N, 163.215278W

Back

In Brief They may sound like they're from a different planet, but maars are in fact broad, low-relief volcanic craters from violent eruptions created by groundwater coming into contact with hot magma. Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is the site of the largest maars in the world. Like most maars, these are filled with water, creating lakes. The largest of all are the Devil Mountain Lakes, an unusual double crater formation in the northern portion of the preserve.

Features

The record-breaking sizes of the maar lakes in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve can be attributed to the permafrost layer on the Seward Peninsula. This creates an especially violent eruption when it comes in contact with magma. These range in size from 13,000-26,000 feet in diameter and can be nearly 1,000 feet deep.

Although some maars erupted as far back as 200,000 years ago, the Devil Mountain Lakes are among the youngest maars in Alaska, created about 20,000 years ago during the last ice age. The North and South Killeak Maars are the second and third largest, respectively, followed by the Whitefish Maar; together, these are known to be the northernmost maars in the world.

If you stand at the water's edge in the Devil Mountain Maar, you'll be surrounded by 15-story high bedrock cliff walls that were generated by the blast. Can you imagine the natural power it must have taken to create such an embankment? As you explore these unfathomable features, know that you are one of the fortunate few who have ever ventured to this wild and powerful land.

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: The maar lakes are accessible by float plane landing in the lakes, by non-motorized vehicle, or by foot. The Devil Mountain Maars are about 130 miles from Nome.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile.

Geographic Coordinates: 66.394722N, 164.488333W

North Killeak Maar

Devil Mountain Maars

14 Imuruk Lake

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: Approximately 100 miles northeast of Nome, and about 60 miles south of the Arctic Circle, Imuruk Lake can be accessed in the summer by float plane landing in the lake, by non-motorized vehicle, or by foot.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or plane with snow skis.

Geographic Coordinates: 65.5977N, 163.2005 W

Kayak paddles found near Imuruk Lake

In Brief

The Imuruk Lake area encompasses about 1,100 acres of the southeast region of the preserve. In addition to brown bears, moose, wolves, and fox, wolverines can also be found around Imuruk Lake, as well as small mammals such as muskrats, arctic ground squirrels, shrews, and lemmings. Evidence of human activity from as far back as 6,000 years ago has been uncovered nearby as well.

Features

Imuruk Lake is about eight miles long and no more than 10 feet deep, with surrounding rolling hills ranging in altitude from about 150-1,800 feet. Located just north of the Benedeleben mountain range, granite and metamorphic rocks make up the larger hills. The surrounding vegetation is typical of the tundra, and includes willows, alders, dwarf birch, and cotton grass tussocks.

Fossil evidence of prehistoric mammals has been found as well. Woolly mammoths, steppe bison, and horses, as well as ancient plant matter in the older sediments of Imuruk Lake, have revealed some of the prehistoric past of Bering Land Bridge.

More recently, Alaska Native populations inhabited the Imuruk Lake area up until about 1850, using it for caribou hunting and other subsistence activities. In the early 1900s it was also used for some gold mining. Today it is enjoyed by locals and outside visitors for hunting and recreational purposes.

Imuruk Lake

Imuruk Lava Beds 15

Lava flows cover over 100,000 acres in the preserve

In Brief

THE VOLCANIC BASALT FIELDS OF THE preserve are the result of eruptions from about 75 vents (small volcanic cones) in the region. Covering more than 100,000 acres, the lava fields provide an opportunity to watch vegetation recapture a landscape that has been totally devastated by harsh natural processes. The largest vent is the Lost Jim Cone, which is relatively recent in geological history, formed less than 2,000 years ago.

Lava formations

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: Accessible by bush plane, float plane to land on the lake, on foot, or by non-motorized vehicle.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or plane with snow skis.

Geographic Coordinates: 65.4886N, 163.2969W

Features

ALTHOUGH THE MOST RECENT vents erupted in the 1600s, some date all the way back to about 5 million years ago, even earlier than the last ice age. Also known as the Lost Jim Lava Flow, the Imuruk Lava Beds are made up of Pahoehoe flows, meaning the top layer cools and hardens while the bottom continues to flow, creating an ever-changing landscape over time, forming a ground cover of swirling, folded patterns.

The Lost Jim Cone, named for a a USGS surveyor who got separated from his group while mapping the area in 1947, extends over 17 miles westward from its source. Made of olivine basalt, the lava is anywhere from 10-150 feet thick, originating at a 100-foot high cone. The next youngest feature is known as the Camille lava flow, which spread about 24 miles from its vent.

Things to Know:

- Planes cannot land on the lava flows – landings should be made on the nearby tundra or on Imuruk Lake, with the the lava fields accessed by foot.
- Make sure to have durable footwear, as the lava beds are sharp and can tear up most materials.
- Exercise caution when hiking across lava beds. There are often large gaps between boulders that can present falling hazards.

Pahoehoe flows

Despite its harsh past, these basalt fields are now home to many burrowing rodents, insects, lichens, mosses, and dozens of species of vascular plants. Caribou are known to frequent the area to eat the lichens. As you hike across this region, you will find yourself traversing a gently rolling landscape of broadly-domed summits and volcanic cones. You may even find small lava tubes and caverns carved out by the volatile liquids and gases that created the ground you are standing on, but do not enter these spaces, as the rock is unstable and highly hazardous.

16 Wales

Umiak frame in Wales

Wales With a population of about 160 people, Wales is the western-most village in the continental United States (and yes, you can actually see Russia from there on a clear day!). Like other villages on the Seward Peninsula, most residents lead subsistence lifestyles of hunting, gathering, trapping, and reindeer herding. Because of its location along whale migratory routes, historically it was known as a prominent center for the whaling industry. It was also the gateway of the reindeer industry on the Seward Peninsula during its boom in the early 20th century.

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: Located 111 miles northwest of Nome, Wales is accessible via charter or commercial airline from Nome.

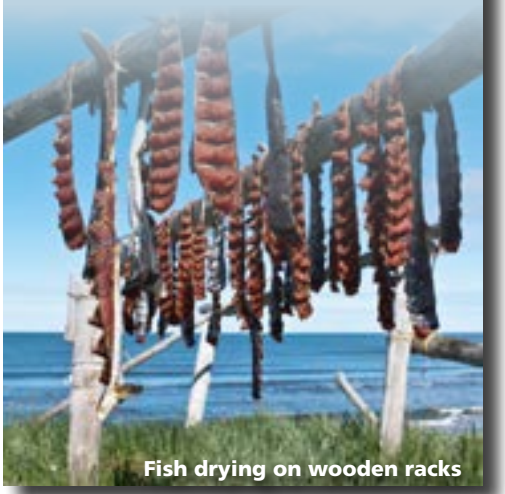
Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or charter or commercial airline.

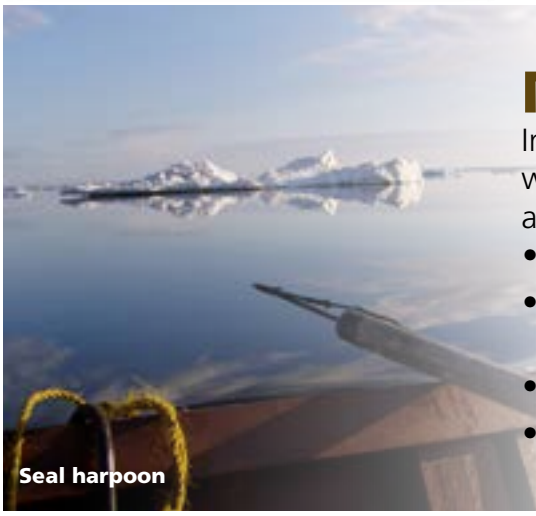
Geographic Coordinates: 65.609170N, 168.0875W

One of the oldest villages on the Seward Peninsula, the 2.8 square mile community's population once exceeded 500 people. But due to the 1918 influenza epidemic, the population declined sharply. Water is derived from melting snow in the winter, and a nearby creek in the summer. Currently very few homes have plumbing or running water, so be prepared with your own supplies if you visit Wales.

Subsistence

- Subsistence is the practice of obtaining resources directly from the land or sea for survival, rather than sport.
- In the spring and fall, sea mammal hunting takes place as communities harvest whale, walrus, and seal.
- Berries, roots, and greens are harvested from the tundra in late summer and fall, and wild game such as caribou, moose, bear, muskox, ducks, and ptarmigan are hunted in the fall and winter.
- Fishing takes place throughout the summer, and fish can often be seen hanging to dry on racks in camps and villages. In winter, ice fishing is done on frozen lakes and rivers.


Fish drying on wooden racks


Seal harpoon

Muktuk, anyone?

Get to know the local cuisine! Inupiaq culture has some of the most unique food in the world, and while you're not likely to find these dishes served in restaurants, they are commonly consumed in many private households.

- ***Muktuk***: whale skin and blubber, eaten raw, pickled, or breaded
- ***Akutuq:*** (a.k.a Eskimo Ice Cream) Wild berries mixed with seal oil and reindeer or caribou fat.
- ***Avarruq:*** Thin strips of whale flukes, eaten frozen or raw.
- ***Stink Flipper***: Seal or walrus flipper buried and fermented for several months, prepared, and eaten frozen.

Things to Know:

- Both Shishmaref and Wales are dry towns: sale or importation of alcohol is prohibited.
- In coastal villages, summers are usually foggy with temperatures averaging 40° to 50°F; winters average from -12° to 2°F with about 30in. of snow.
- The Chukchi Sea is typically frozen mid-November to mid-May.
- Be respectful and aware of the subsistence lifestyle; many locals suppliment their living by selling art, including carvings, beading, and sewing.

Web Exclusive

Check out Local Perspectives on Climate Change in Bering Land Bridge:
http://youtu.be/O3EVNES5Wc4

Shishmaref

LOCATED ON SARICHEF ISLAND in the Chukchi Sea, Shishmaref is 5 miles offshore from the mainland. With a population of 563, it is one of the larger Inupiaq villages on the Seward Peninsula. Residents rely heavily on traditional subsistence practices, harvesting sea mammals, fish, birds, and large game throughout the year to meet most of their food needs. Sometimes known as the "friendliest village in Alaska," Shishmaref has been inhabited for about 400 years and has seen many changes over that time.

Climate change is a very real and immediate issue for the village. As erosion eats away at the island, entire households have been evacuated and buildings swallowed by the sea; melting ice makes winter hunting a perilous affair; and it is feared that the eventual relocation of the village will result in the loss of the culture, dialect, and traditions that make the community what it is today.

There are two general stores in Shishmaref. Most homes and buildings do not have plumbing or running water. When visiting the village, be prepared with your own supplies, as variable weather can delay travel and resources may be limited.

How to get there:

Summer/Fall: 126 miles north of Nome, and 100 miles southwest of Kotzebue, Shishmaref is accessible via charter or commercial airline from Nome.

Winter/Spring: Accessible by snowmobile or charter or commercial airline from Nome.

Geographic Coordinates: 66.2556N, 166.0722W

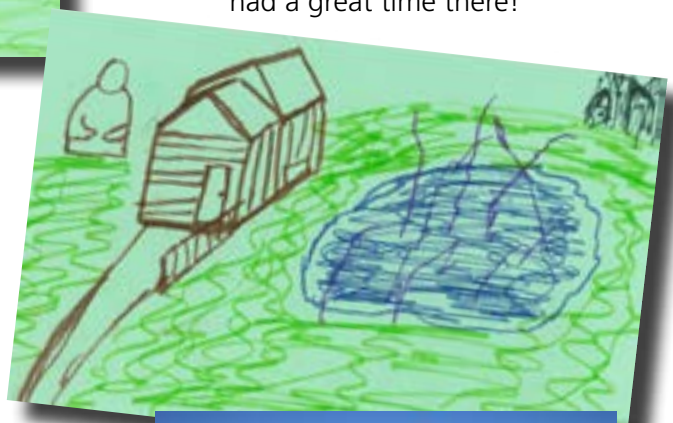
Shoreline of Shishmaref

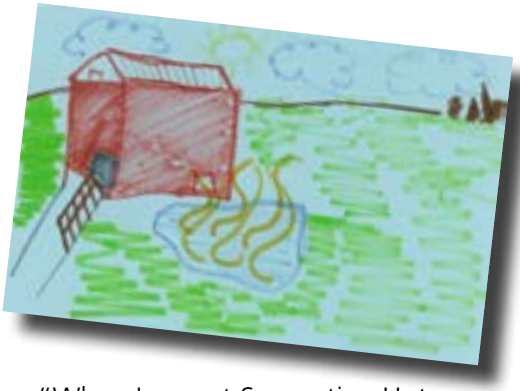
18 Youth Perspectives

In Brief For the youth of the Seward Peninsula, Serpentine Hot Springs plays an important role in the passing of traditions from one generation to the next. Junior high and high school students from the Native Village of Shishmaref shared their experiences at the hot springs through writing and art. Check out what they saw and reported about their experiences!

"Serpentine Hot Springs is a beautiful place to visit. There are many things to do there such as riding, relaxing in the bath house, hunting caribou, or just enjoying the view. When I went to the hot springs, I had a chance to learn how to butcher a caribou. [We] also hunted ptarmigan, it was a lot of fun."

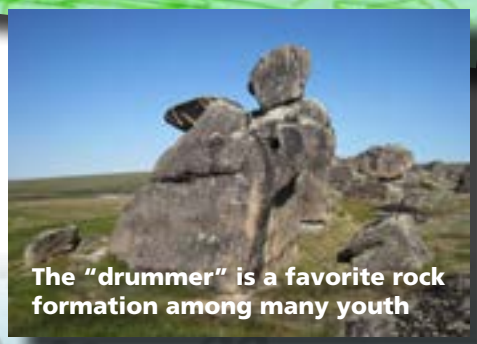
"When I was at Serpentine, I walked around and saw how the land was formed. I also swam in the pool. I had a great time there!"



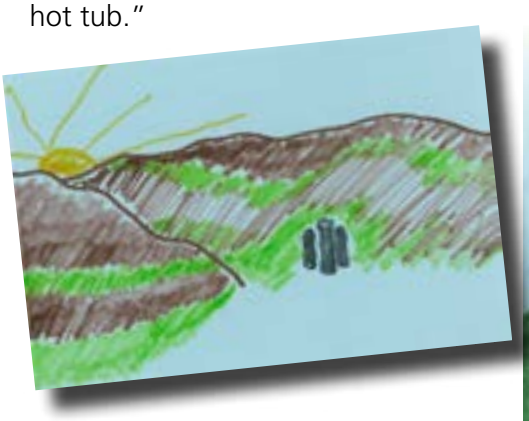


"Serpentine Hot Springs is a very fun place to go. I went there last winter and I had a blast. I went to the hot tub... the beaver dams, climbed the big drummer, went sliding and riding. I hope people that didn't go there experience how fun it is to be there. I'm hoping to go there again this year!"

"When I was at Serpentine Hot Springs, I remember seeing ptarmigan, lots of willows, moose. I remember sliding and going in the hot tub."



The "drummer" is a favorite rock formation among many youth



"It's not all about the bath tub, it's also about experiencing the nature and having a great time with friends and family!"

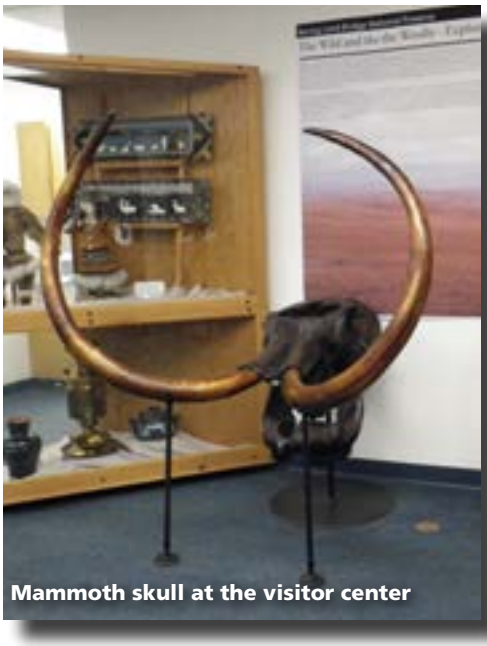
Bering Land Bridge Visitor Center

Visitor Center Hours:
June 1st - August 31
Monday-Saturday 9-5

Sept 1 - May 31
Monday - Friday 10-4:30

Visitor Center Street Address:
214 Front Street
Nome, AK 99762

How to get there:
The visitor center for Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is located in the Sitnasuak Building in Nome, Alaska. Nome is not connected by road to other parts of Alaska, so access to the town is primarily through commercial airlines. Open year round, the visitor center is about 90 miles south of the preserve border. It offers exhibits and films about Bering Land Bridge, as well as visitor and school programs. Ranger-led hikes are offered throughout the summer, and with the Iditarod finish line just down the street, mid-March is a special time of year for cultural events as well. Even if you can't make it to the preserve itself, stop by the visitor center to stamp your National Park passport, pick up free visitor information, and check out the Alaska Geographic Bookstore.


Mammoth skull at the visitor center

Climate Averages in Nome:

Month	Average high (°F)	Average low (°F)	Precip. Inches	Snowfall inches	Hours of Daylight*
Jan	13.4	-1.8	0.98	9.9	4:11
Feb	13.6	-2.3	0.75	6.2	7:00
Mar	17.7	1.0	0.60	0.65	10:08
Apr	26.8	12.4	0.65	5.8	13:35
May	43.0	31.1	0.74	2.6	16:57
Jun	53.9	40.6	1.14	0.2	21:21
Jul	58.6	46.6	2.15	0.0	22:09
Aug	56.0	45.2	3.23	0.0	18:05
Sep	48.6	37.2	2.51	0.4	14:36
Oct	34.0	22.9	1.58	4.9	11:20
Nov	23.0	10.8	1.28	10.9	7:56
Dec	15.8	0.9	1.01	9.9	4:51

*Number of daylight hours on the first day of each month

Alaska Cotton Grass

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