

The History of Sled Dogs in Denali National Park and Preserve

Mt McKinley National Park was established in 1917. In 1980 it was renamed Denali National Park and Preserve. The Park now covers 6 million acres (that's almost twice the size of the state of Connecticut!). It is also home Mt. McKinley. At 20,320 feet high, it is North America's tallest mountain. Besides all of the tall mountains in the park, you will also find large areas of tundra and taiga forests. Many different types of birds and mammals live in the park, including moose, ptarmigan, caribou, grizzly and black bears, Dall sheep and Arctic ground squirrels.



Moose



Ptarmigan



Caribou



Grizzly bear



Dall sheep



Arctic ground squirrel

Stewards of a Special Place

Denali National Park Rangers are stewards of a very special place that belongs to you. They protect and preserve over six million acres of wild lands in Alaska. A few select park rangers are very lucky because they are also stewards for a very special part of the park – the Denali sled dogs.

Park Rangers take good care of the park's sled dogs so that they can continue to help them take care of the park. Sled dogs and rangers are a team that works together to preserve and protect this special place. Because these rangers are so reliant on the dogs and work so closely with them on a daily basis, sled dogs are a great study topic to understand life in the subarctic.

The sled dog kennels is located near the work offices of Denali's park rangers. There are 33 dogs currently at the kennels, but the numbers fluctuate as puppies are born and dogs retire. Every day park rangers must be at the kennels to feed and water the dogs as well as give them attention from humans. The primary purpose of these dogs since 1922 has been to provide transportation in a park where mechanized vehicles are mostly prohibited.



The Job of a Sled Dog

Denali's kennel began in the 1920s in the first few years of the park's history. Then, dog teams patrolled the boundaries helping the rangers prevent poachers from illegally killing wildlife. Today, during the winter, the sled dogs continue to work hard providing a variety of services. Their work has focused on transporting construction materials to restore and repair historic ranger patrol cabins throughout the park, removing litter from the Toklat River area after several floods have scattered old bridge and construction debris, and assisting park scientists with delivering scientific monitoring equipment to a remote site.

During the summer, the sled dogs greet hundreds of visitors everyday in the kennels. Visitors can pet and play with the dogs, before being treated to a dog sled demonstration.



Photo Credits: p. 1, Mt. McKinley (Tim Rains); Moose, Ptarmigan, caribou, Dall sheep, Arctic ground squirrel (Brian Mayhew); Grizzly bear (NPS photo); p. 2, kennels, sled dogs (NPS photos)

Questions:

1. Name five animals at Denali National Park? Do these animals live in your area? If not, why?
2. What is the primary purpose of the sled dogs at Denali National Park?
3. What are some other things you would like to learn about the Denali sled dogs?