



Triple Lakes TRAIL

The Value of WILDERNESS

Denali's six million acres includes North America's highest mountain, an international biosphere reserve, and two million acres of legally designated Wilderness. In 1964, the Wilderness Act created a national preservation system with the idea that we could preserve this natural state of wildness and create a place where humans have no lasting impression. A few steps into the trail and you enter the legally designated Wilderness of Denali. As you hike, contemplate the different ways to value wilderness and find what this special place means to you.

Wild LANDS

Wildlands offer an opportunity for Alaska Natives to continue their subsistence way of life, central to their heritage for many millenia. For others it provides an opportunity to experience the unaltered landscape of a wilderness and imagine what it was like to come into the country during the pioneering days of Alaska. Today, wildlands offer a chance to test our spirit and define who we are. By hiking a trail in bear country, rafting a river or climbing Mount McKinley, we discover what we are capable of—our strengths and our weaknesses. We can be forever changed by our experiences and revelations.

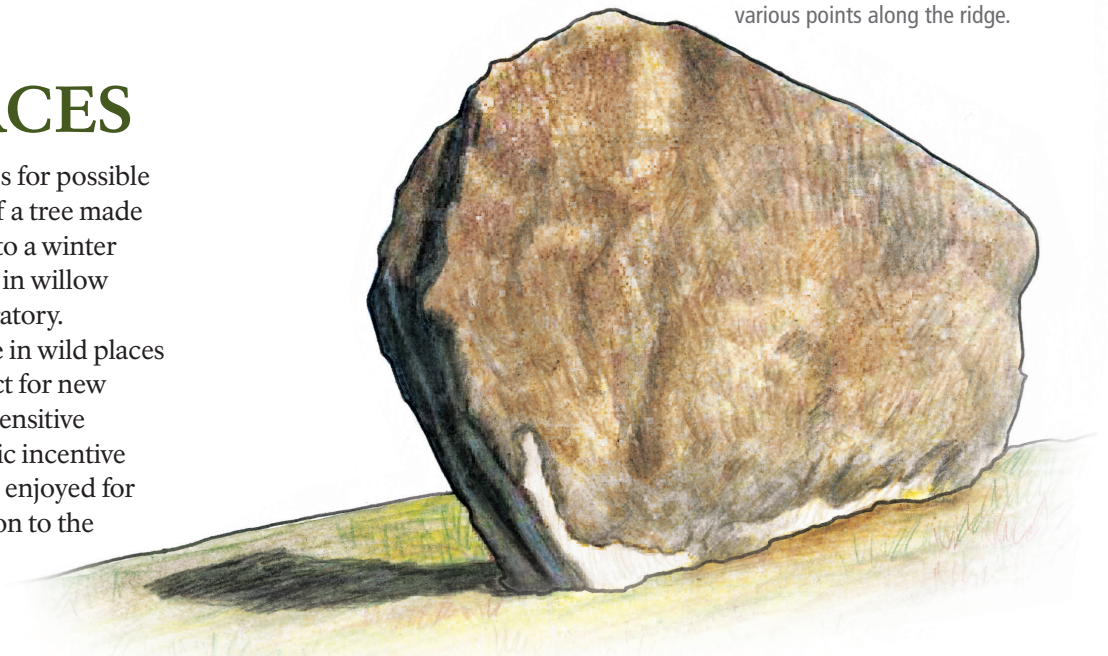
Wild RESOURCES

We have long valued wild resources for possible economic gain, such as the value of a tree made into lumber or a wolf pelt made into a winter parka. Aspirin was first discovered in willow before being synthesized in a laboratory. Maintaining a diversity of plant life in wild places preserves opportunities to prospect for new natural compounds. Ecologically sensitive tourism provides a strong economic incentive to preserve wild places intact to be enjoyed for generations with minimal disruption to the landscape and its inhabitants.

Aesthetic Value

Geology

The appealing views along the trail are due in part to the Nenana Glacier that flowed through the Triple Lakes Valley, 9 to 25 million years ago, sculpting these deep, wide, u-shaped valleys. The glacier left behind exceptionally large boulders, including the two that stand out on a distant hill west of the trail, visible from various points along the ridge.



Wild SCIENCE

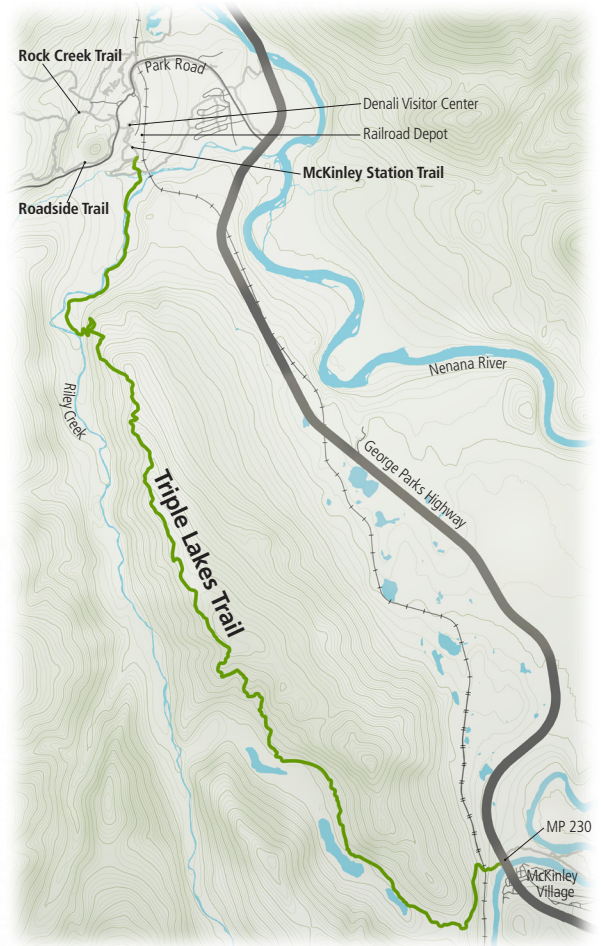
Intact ecosystems are becoming rare on the planet. Wild places like Denali provide the opportunity to study natural functions, such as the ebb of glaciers, the influence of fire on the landscape, and the migration patterns of caribou. Such scientific studies can provide a baseline from which we can look at disturbed ecosystems and better understand how we interact with the land and its inhabitants. In their ecological function, wildlands make life on Earth possible: plant photosynthesis produces oxygen; water pools underground to create chemical-free aquifers for our water sources; undisturbed permafrost prevents vegetation from decaying and releasing carbon into the atmosphere. The continuation of life on Earth requires countless natural cycles to remain intact.

Wild SPIRIT

Whether viewing the drama of the Alaska Range, the rich volcanic colors of exposed rock at Polychrome or listening to the lofty trill of the white-crowned sparrow, often we are drawn to the natural aesthetic qualities of wildlands and continue to surround ourselves with these pleasing patterns of nature. For some, wildlands are an escape from a bustling world and take advantage of the therapeutic qualities that wilderness can offer, like quiet and solitude. There is an enriched quality to this wilderness that draws people here to find that spiritual connection to natural space. Denali's wilderness is a setting that can provide solitude, space, and time for reflection. It is a place to immerse oneself in a landscape of extremes that remains as wild as our primitive roots.



White-crowned sparrow,
Zonotrichia leucophrys



Recreational Value

World War II

During World War II, the U.S. War Department found value in taking advantage of the recreational opportunities the park provided. From 1942-1953, some of the first hikers on this trail (then called the *Yanert Lakes Trail*) were servicemen on a weeklong rest and relaxation trip in the park after a tour in Alaska.

Spiritual Value

Athabaskan Balance

Athabascans believe that natural entities are endowed with spirits that affect human behavior. They follow a set of guidelines out of respect for these spirits and value these lands as an opportunity to find that spiritual balance. For example, the gray jay is associated with cold weather. Because they nest in early spring, children are warned away from gray jay nests as disturbing them will bring on another bout of frigid weather.



Triple Lakes Trail
Strenuous
9.3 miles/14.9 km, 5 hrs one way
Please stay on trails.

This trail guide was produced in partnership by the National Park Service and the Alaska Geographic Association.

