



Ask A Ranger

Living and Working in Glacier Bay, Alaska



Activity: Ask a Ranger

School Subjects: varies

Grade Level: K-12

Time requirement: 30-60 minutes

National Science Standards Addressed:

Varies

Lesson Overview

Park rangers have a wealth of knowledge about the national park system, the park where they work, life as a ranger, and more. Tap into these stores of knowledge through an informal question and answer session with a Glacier Bay National Park ranger. Topics can cover the flora, fauna, glaciers, geology, and cultural history of Glacier Bay, as well as life in rural Alaska, careers in the National Park Service, and more.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

Have their questions answered by a ranger.

Have communicated informally with a ranger.

Materials

Prior to the program, Glacier Bay National Park will send you:

Maps of Glacier Bay

Other materials as appropriate



Background Information

The National Park Service (NPS) cares for the parks, monuments, and historic sites that belong to everyone. In order to preserve these special places for the future enjoyment of others, NPS employees have a variety of skills, including research, historic preservation, interpretation, law enforcement and more. Park rangers work and live in places as diverse as New York City, American Samoa and Alaska to care for the almost 400 units of the National Park Service.

Glacier Bay National Park is filled with towering mountains, calving glaciers, and pristine ocean waters giving home to many species of animals, plants, insects, and more. However, the Glacier Bay that visitors experience today has not been here forever. A thousand years ago, a large glacier covered much of the area and a grassy outwash plain stretched before it. Several clans of the Huna Tlingit made their home here, surviving on the abundance of this rainforest ecosystem including the annual salmon runs, seals and sea otters, spruce trees, berries and more. A few hundred years ago, the glacier began to advance rapidly, forcing the Tlingit from their homes in a matter of days. The glacier destroyed everything in its path and completely re-sculpted the land and ocean scape of Glacier Bay. In the past 250 years the glacier has retreated 60 miles, revealing beaches, oceans, meadows, mountains, and many smaller glaciers. As the habitat changes, hardy pioneering plants develop into lush rainforests. Wildlife changes with the habitats.

About 40 permanent and 80 seasonal employees care for Glacier Bay National Park each year. Interpretive rangers connect visitors to the park through hikes, illustrated programs, and ship-board commentary. Researchers study humpback whales, oceanography, bears, fish, and more. Protection rangers patrol by motorboat and kayak, protecting the animals, plants, waters, and wilderness and helping visitors. Maintenance workers maintain a mini-city to keep facilities working for visitors and staff. Some live in park housing and other employees live in the small community of Gustavus at the entrance to Glacier Bay. Gustavus has about 350 year-round residents and is accessible only by boat or



Procedure

Prior to the program:

Contact the Glacier Bay National Park education staff to schedule a question and answer session via videoconferencing. Generate questions for the rangers. If questions will have a particular focus, please let Glacier Bay National Park know ahead of time. We can prepare materials related to the topic(s). We recommend setting up a practice session to coordinate videoconferencing technologies before the actual session.

During the program:

Ask the ranger(s) questions.

Extension Activities

This activity can be a valuable and effective learning component to a variety of classroom topics. Consider including Glacier Bay rangers in a career day presentation, a lesson on Alaska, endangered species, animal adaptations, geology, glaciology, Alaska Native culture, western exploration, and more.