

# Nikolai Pass

Wrangell-St.Elias National Park and Preserve

National Park Service  
US Department of the Interior



**Access:** From McCarthy or fly to the airstrip in the pass and hike back to McCarthy

**Distance:** 30 miles round trip

**Time:** 4-5 days

**Maps:** USGS Maps-McCarthy 1:250,000; McCarthy 1:63,360 (B-5), (C-5)

**Difficulty:** Moderate to difficult with moderate route finding



**Note:** Proper food storage is *required*. Bear Resistant Food Containers are available from any park visitor center

## Route:

To access McCarthy Creek walk through town on the main road, pass the historic hardware store. When the road ends, turn left onto a short trail to the river. Cross McCarthy Creek via a small log footbridge. Follow the river up valley.

You will eventually meet a trail that you can follow. Recent activity by some local residents makes this route (as far as the confluence with Nikolai Creek) appear more as a road than a trail. After about three miles the river has washed out the route. Walk up and over the slump paralleling the creek to avoid crossing the river. Find the trail at "5-mile cabin (about 4 miles from the McCarthy Creek footbridge)" between an old cabin and the area where the original route crossed the river. You will need to cross the creek at this point or turn around. Please note that McCarthy Creek is possible to cross at low water but may be very dangerous at higher water volumes. Use your best judgment and turn around here if necessary. From this point folded and faulted dikes in the rock face are visible. If you chose to cross the creek continue about 300 yards where you will cross back. Shortly thereafter the trail leads you through an original tunnel left from the mining era. The route continues up McCarthy creek crossing the creek twice more before the junction with Nikolai Creek. A campsite can be made at the confluence.

The route up to Nikolai Pass follows the historic wagon route along the south side of Nikolai Creek. The historic route is choked with alder and can be a difficult bushwhack. After 2 miles, you can continue to the Nikolai Mine taking the tributary coming in from the east (right) just after the mine to hike up to the airstrip on the ridge. Or hike the 4.5 miles up Nikolai Creek to Nikolai Pass. It is an elevation gain of 2100 feet, and there are several streams which come from the snow melt and offer drinking water.

A high camp on the ridge offers opportunities for day hiking along the ridge and views of the Nizina River Valley and the mountains to the east. The Green Butte mine and buildings (private property) can be seen to the north along the east side of the valley above McCarthy Creek. Return to McCarthy by following your original route in.

## Potential Hazards:

- Flooding has washed out portions of the route. Use caution and good judgment when traversing these sections.
- During most of the summer months, McCarthy Creek is high, making crossings difficult, dangerous and even impossible at times. The best time to enjoy hiking up McCarthy Creek is late summer through winter when the creek is low.