The wildness of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park is uncompromising, its geography awe-inspiring. Mount Wrangell, namesake of one of the park’s four mountain ranges, is an active volcano. Hundreds of glaciers and ice fields form in the high peaks, then melt into rivers and streams that drain to the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. Ice is a bridge that connects the park’s geographically isolated areas.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 allows the subsistence harvest of wildlife within the park, and preserves the park’s geographically isolated areas. Hunters find Dall’s sheep, the park’s most numerous large mammal, on mountain slopes where they browse sedges, grasses, and forbs. Sockeye, Chinook, and Coho salmon spawn in area lakes and streams and are caught in the Copper River with fish wheels, dip nets, and rod and reel. In the park’s southeastern corner, Tinglit people harvest harbor seals, which feed on fish and marine invertebrates. These species and many more are key foods in the subsistence diet of the Ahtna and Upper Tanana Athabaskans, Eyak, and Tinglit peoples. Local, non-Native people also share in the bounty.

Long, dark winters and brief, lush summers lend intensity to life here. The sounds of migrant birds, including trumpeter swans, thrushes, and warblers, enliven long summer days. In late summer, black and brown bears, drawn by ripening raspberries, frequent the forests and gravel bars. Human history here is ancient and relatively sparse, and has left a light imprint on the immense landscape. Even where people continue to hunt, fish, and trap, most animal, fish, and plant populations are healthy and self-regulating. For the species who call Wrangell-St. Elias home, the park’s size and remoteness ensure a naturally functioning ecosystem.

Inlet of the Earth’s Bounty

People ‘(Tatl’ahwta enn). Their identity is embedded in the earth, water, and ice of the uplands. In summer they moved to the park’s southeastern corner, Tinglit people harvested

Youthful, flat-bottomed creeks. In the Copper River region, where fish wheels, dip nets, and rod and reel. In the early 1900s, new economic opportunities emerged. Some Ahtna people began to work for money, but they also continued to harvest natural resources to provide for their families. Although some Alaska Natives now live in cities, they also continue to participate in the traditional sharing economy.

As newcomers began to arrive in the late 1800s, new economic opportunities emerged. Some Ahtna people began to work for money, but they also continued to harvest natural resources to provide for their families. Although some Alaska Natives now live in cities, they also continue to participate in the traditional sharing economy.

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In the Copper River’s fast-moving waters, people used dip nets to harvest salmon before they adapted fish wheels in the early 1900s. The fish wheel’s arms are like spokes on a wheel. As the current propels the paddles, revolving baskets lift the fish from the water. In summer, you’ll see many of these wheels along the river edges.

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After the Klondike gold strike in 1896, thousands of prospectors poured into Alaska. Many headed to Chisana and Nenana, but found only small amounts of gold. The discovery of copper deposits in the Chitina River valley drew investors who formed a syndicate to develop a mine. To transport the ore they built a railroad, completed in 1911. It linked Kennecott mine to Cordova and from there to profitable markets. At its peak of operation the company employed 600 people, many of them immigrants who worked seven days a week while living in crowded, rough bunkhouses. By 1939, when the mine closed, workers had extracted ore with a market value of about $200 million at that time.

Although Kennecott mine and mill closed, the community continues to thrive. Restoration crews bring life to relics of a time of industrial growth, expanded markets, global migration, and innovation. At Kennecott you can walk in the footsteps of mill workers and their families, and contemplate what made this rugged place home.

Offering yet another way to explore in the summer and spring, Campers find August and September cool, with fewer mosquitoes. For bird’s-eye view, you may fly or charter a plane.
Visit the Park

Get the free park newspaper for current information on hiking, camping, and services. Download it from the park website, www.nps.gov/wrsc, or ask at visitor centers or ranger stations.

Begin your visit at the Headquarters and Wrangell St. Elias Visitor Center. It offers views of the Wrangell Mountains, exhibits, a fire, bookstore, gift shop, short hiking trails, park information, and seasonal ranger talks and walks.

Keneddy Visitor Center, housed in the historic Keneddy House, is a good starting point for Kenneddy Mine National Historic Landmark. It offers museum and glacier views, exhibits, a fire, seasonal ranger talks and walks, and information on historic structures and hiking trails. Slone and Chitistone Ranger Stations are gateways to the two park roads. They provide backcountry trip-planning, road updates, and area information. Yukon Ranger Stations are in Yutkuk, Salmon Glacier, and over one hundred miles of remote coastline.

Safety Opportunities for rescue and evacuation in the backcountry are few; rescue time can be slow. Adequate preparation, experience, and knowledge of remote wilderness areas are required.

Always carry extra clothing and gear for emergencies or weather-related delays. Before you head into the backcountry, fill out a backcountry itinerary at a visitor center or ranger station. Tell a friend or family member about your route and expected return date and time. This is a叫声 country! Get a bear safety brochure at a visitor center or ranger stations. Make noise, stop with your howling, and give way to other users. Read the backcountry use regulations for any area you plan to hike or camp in.

Explore Wrangell-St. Elias

More Information
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