Denali

Denali National Park and Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Denali
means "the High One" for Athabascan Indians
north of the Alaska Range

To Make a Wild Dream Come True

Charles Sheldon had a dream. Standing on a rise in the Kantishna Hills in January 1908, he pulled out his field glasses—more important to him than his hunting rifle—and looked around. Everything his eyes feasted on could one day be a premier national park, the Yellowstone of Alaska, preserved and protected for one reason above all others: to celebrate restraint as an expression of freedom, our rare ability to save a place so it will one day save us. He studied the ocean of land, storm-tossed by mountains and glaciers, waves of rolling tundra, a landscape like no other, vast, intact, winter-white, and holding its breath, so still yet dynamic, epic and epoch in its dimensions, the America that used to be. Such a grand ambition. More than a dream, it was a spark of idealism, a vision. Could Sheldon do it? Could one person with help from a few committed colleagues and friends successfully campaign for the creation of a national park?

Thomas Jefferson had said it would take 1,000 years for Americans to civilize their emerging continental nation and build cities on the Pacific coast as they had on the Atlantic. It took 50 years. The so-called "myth of superabundance"—that we would never run out of fish and bison and bears and so much else—was rapidly becoming just that: a myth. A Yale man who preferred to be in the wilderness, Sheldon decided to dedicate himself to the conservation cause of President Theodore Roosevelt. He journeyed to Alaska when the young US territory had no roads and only 30,000 people (fewer than five percent of what it has today), and found his way to the mountains.

Due south of him rose the icy granite massif that gold miners in Kantishna and Fairbanks called Mount McKinley but that Sheldon simply called "the mountain," or "Denali," the Athabascan name meaning "the high one." Certainly a mountain like that could take care of itself, being the highest in North America. But what of the magnificent wild animals that embroidered it, the grizzlies, caribou, wolves, moose, Dall sheep, and others that moved over the land with ancient grace? Market hunters were coming into the country with an aim to kill wild game to feed gold miners and railroad workers. It had to stop. Sheldon spent 10 months in the Denali region, then headed back east with one purpose: to make a wild dream come true.

Rethinking Wolves, Wilderness, and Wildness

". . . let us be guardians, rather than gardeners." —Adolph Murie

Adolph Murie had a theory. Wolves were not bad or evil. They were keen predators that helped to maintain healthy populations of prey species by taking out the old, sick, and injured. Wolves, in fact, were beneficial. They made everything around them stronger, healthier, more agile, and alert. This was heresy in the 1930s, when books, films, and legends demonized the wolf, the wild dog that thousands of years ago had refused our obedience training yet remained our four-legged shadow, a ghost of the hunter we used to be. A wildlife biologist who had studied coyotes in Yellowstone, Murie found great inspiration when he came north to what was then Mount McKinley National Park.

Here was a dream come true, a park signed into law in February 1917 by Woodrow Wilson after nearly 10 years of campaigning by Charles Sheldon and other activists. Here was a once-upon-a-time land, the most accessible wilderness in Alaska, a park to protect wild animals by protecting the place where they lived, the first national park created after the creation of the National Park Service in August 1916.

The world was changing and Murie wanted to be part of it. "Ecology" and "wilderness" were beginning to find their way into the American vocabulary. Nature wasn't a commodity people owned, it was a community they belonged to. Over-civilized people needed nature—big, mysterious, wild—to find themselves and lose themselves and find themselves again, to rewrite the definitions of progress and wealth, and be reminded what it meant to be truly alive.

For three years, 1939–41, Murie lived with his family in a cabin on the East Fork of the Toklat River, in the heart of the park, and studied Dall sheep, caribou, and wolves. His young daughter sometimes joined him on the tundra, field glasses in hand, like Charles Sheldon, to watch wolf pups play near their den. A single 90-mile-long road had been built through the park, and while traffic was light, it increased steadily and then jumped in 1972 after a highway was built between Anchorage and Fairbanks.

People were coming to see the once-upon-a-time land, the America that used to be.

As big as the park was, it wasn't big enough. Murie and others wanted to protect its ecological integrity. And so they campaigned, and hoped for a president one day who would be as conservation-minded as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

It took 40 years.

Wild Places Don't Stay Wild by Accident

Jimmy Carter had a final act. In December 1980, with only weeks left in his presidency, he signed into law legislation that established over 100 million acres of new national parks, preserves, and wildlife refuges in Alaska. Mount McKinley National Park, enlarged from two million acres to six million, became Denali National Park and Preserve, with new boundaries to encompass entire watersheds and the home ranges of wildlife populations.

Today, hundreds of thousands of park visitors travel by bus every summer on the single road through the park. The bus system (versus private vehicles) reduces traffic and roadside disturbances so you can better see what you come to see. A single wolf or a bear, breathtakingly close, is priceless. An entire bus goes quiet, cameras softly clicking, as a mother grizzly and her cubs eat blueberries only 20 meters away. Later, everybody talks with new animation, enchanted like children, alive with stories to last a lifetime.

Imagine. Here's a place we did not harvest or plunder or otherwise conquer but allowed it to enrich and to inspire us over many generations. Not only did we care about the place, we cared for it. We defended it, and still do.

There will always be a good economic argument to overcrowd an experience until we redefine what a good economy is. National parks don't happen by accident. They are established—and preserved—by great force of character, heroic at times, often tedious and downright hard. This is stewardship.

Challenges remain. Wolves are routinely shot and trapped in Alaska, some near Denali. The climate shifts, the air grows warmer, permafrost melts, habitats disappear. Every year thousands of people want to climb "the high one" or fly around it. Dedicated people rise to meet the management challenges, to save the wild essence and character of Denali: A Charles Sheldon here, an Adolph Murie there. A few committed citizens can bring about big, thoughtful change for the common good. It always works that way. Now it's your turn.

—Texts by Kim Heacox

Top photo: Autumn Denali reflections. © QT LUONG / TERRAGALLERIA.COM
Middle: Dog teams haul freight at Wonder Lake. © 2011 JEFF SCHULTZ / ALASKASTOCK.COM
Bottom: Dall sheep ram, Polychrome Pass. © 2011 KENNETH R. WHITTEN / ALASKASTOCK.COM

Enjoying Denali

Please check the park website www.nps.gov/dena or the free visitor guide *Alpenglow*—also available online—to plan your trip or to learn about park programs, safety guidelines, and regulations. For firearms regulations check the park website.

More Information
Denali National Park and Preserve
PO Box 9, Denali Park, AK 99755
907-683-2294
www.nps.gov/dena
denali_info@nps.gov

Alaska Public Lands Information Center
Two locations: Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, 101 Dunkel Street, Suite 110, Fairbanks, AK 99701, 907-459-3730; and 605 West 4th Ave., Suite 105, Anchorage, AK 99501, 907-644-3661

Park Bookstore
Alaska Geographic Association
PO Box 230
Denali Park, AK 99755
907-683-1272
www.alaskageographic.org

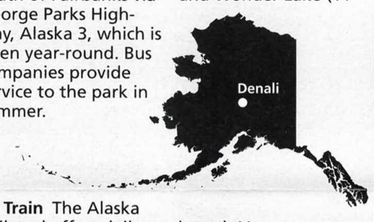
All Reservations for Campsites, Tours, and Shuttle Bus Tickets
Contact the park concessioner, Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture 800-622-7275 (nationwide), 907-272-7275 (international), or www.reservedenali.com

The National Park Service gratefully acknowledges Alaska Geographic for financial support of this brochure.

Follow DenaliNPS on Facebook and Twitter.

How To Get Here

By Road The main park entrance is 237 miles north of Anchorage and 120 miles south of Fairbanks via George Parks Highway, Alaska 3, which is open year-round. Bus companies provide service to the park in summer.



By Train The Alaska Railroad offers daily summer passenger service to the park from Anchorage and Fairbanks. Service is limited in winter. Contact 800-544-0552, or www.alaskarailroad.com.

Park Transportation
Private vehicles are restricted beyond Savage River (Mile 15). To protect wildlife viewing, limits are set on Park Road traffic, including the buses. *Shuttle bus service* begins May 20 and ends in mid-September. Waits are possible for walk-in reservations; have flexible departure plans. Buses travel regularly from the Wilderness Access Center to the Toklat River (six hours roundtrip), Eielson Visitor Center (eight hours), and Wonder Lake (11 hours). You can get on or off the shuttle buses along the Park Road to hike, except in wildlife closures. You then reboard on a space-available basis.

Interpretive bus tours include: Tundra Wilderness Tour, Denali Natural History Tour, and Kantishna Experience. Make reservations with the park concessioner *(see top right of this side)*.

No food service is offered beyond the park entrance area. Bring food, drink, warm clothes, and raingear.

Emergencies Fire, medical, and law enforcement, call 911.

What To Do in the Park and Preserve

Be Prepared Most people visit between mid-May and mid-September. Summer is cool, wet, and windy, and it can snow. Bring clothing for temperatures from 35 to 75°F: hat, mittens or gloves, and raingear are essential. Sturdy footgear, insect repellent, binoculars, and a camera are desirable.

Entrance Fee The park entrance fee, $10 per person, is collected year-round and is valid for seven days. Most of the money stays in the park to improve visitor services and facilities. Interagency Federal Recreation Passes, like the Annual, Senior, and Access Passes, and the Denali Annual Pass, are also valid for entry.

Pets are allowed only on roadways and in some campgrounds. They must be leashed or physically restrained at all times and should not be left unattended. Pets are prohibited on buses, trails, and in the backcountry.

Wildlife activity may require areas to be closed to all entry for a few days to several months. Hikers are responsible for knowing current closures.

Bicycles are prohibited on hiking trails. Cycling is allowed in the campgrounds and on park roads and the designated bike path. Some shuttle buses have bicycle racks. Ask at a visitor center or check the park website for information to plan a cycling trip.

Hiking Denali has trails for both novice and experienced hikers. Trails are maintained in the park entrance area. Join ranger-led walks or take longer cross-country hikes on your own. Some of the best routes are on durable surfaces along ridgetops or gravel riverbars. Streams can be cold, swift, and dangerous to cross. Sturdy footgear is essential.

Overnight backpacking trips require careful planning and a backcountry permit, available only after an in-person orientation with a ranger at the Backcountry Information Center. There is a quota system for backcountry units. Many units require hikers to use bear-resistant food containers (provided). Pack out all garbage.

Camping The park has six designated campgrounds. Stays are limited to 14 nights total. Group sites are available by reservation for nine to 20 people. Camping is prohibited in parking areas and on roadsides. Campfires are permitted only in certain campgrounds.

Food Storage Campers must store all food and scented items, *including sealed cans and bottles*, in bear-resistant food lockers found in campgrounds, or in closed, hard-sided vehicles.

Sport Fishing/Hunting Hunting and fishing are allowed in some park and preserve locations, regulated by federal and state law. Discharging weapons is strictly prohibited in many areas. It is your responsibility to know and to comply with all laws and regulations. For more information consult a park ranger, visitor center, or the park website.

Mountaineering Denali and Mount Foraker climbers must register 60 days before starting their ascent and pay a special use fee. Call the Talkeetna Ranger Station, Box 588, Talkeetna, AK 99676, 907-733-2231.

Winter Activities The Park Road stays open to headquarters at Mile 3.4, and could be open farther into the park, based on weather conditions. The backcountry is reached by snowshoes, skis, or dog sled. Riley Creek Campground near the park entrance is open all year. Check at the winter visitor center for road status, weather conditions, and backcountry permits.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

Visitor Centers To Serve You



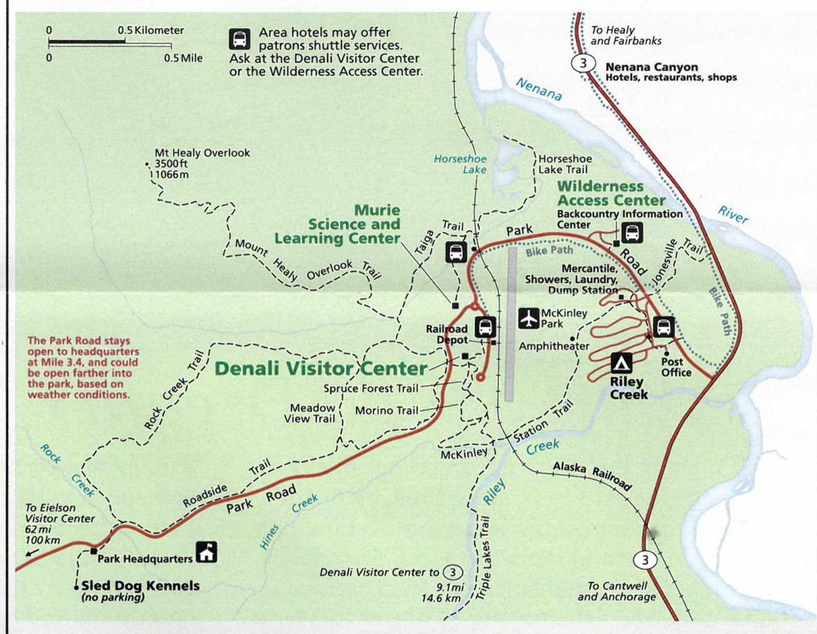
The Denali Visitor Center Campus is 1.5 miles from the park entrance. At the visitor center explore the exhibits, talk to park rangers, and see the award-winning park film, *Heartbeats of Denali*. A bookstore, Morino Grill, and the Murie Science and Learning Center are nearby.



Eielson Visitor Center, 66 miles inside the park, can be reached by shuttle bus. It exemplifies the park's commitment to sustainable practices.

NPS PHOTOS

Entrance and Visitor Center Area



Campground	*Miles	Kilometers	Campsite Spaces	Tent	RV**	Toilet Vault	Flush	Water Tap
Riley Creek CG	*0.4*	0.7	145	•	•	•	•	•
Savage River CG	*12.8*	20.5	32	•	•	•	•	•
Sanctuary River CG	*22.6*	36.4	7	•		•		
Teklanika River CG	*29.1*	46.8	53	•	•	•		•
Igloo Creek CG	*34.0*	54.8	7	•		•		
Wonder Lake CG	*85.9*	138.2	28	•		•	•	•

*Distances from Entrance
***Limited* number of sites can accommodate RVs *up to 40 feet maximum*

Wilderness Safety
Denali is true wilderness. Before you venture into the park, read the safety messages in the free visitor guide *Alpenglow*. Grizzly bears and moose are dangerous. Crossing glacial rivers can be treacherous.

©GPO:2016—393-466/30661 Last updated 2016
Printed on recycled paper

