



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Natural Resources

DIVISION OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION
Office of History & Archaeology

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June 23, 2026

Paul Ollig
Acting Superintendent
National Park Service
Denali National Park and Preserve
[Heather feil@nps.gov](mailto:Heather_feil@nps.gov)

File No. 3130-1R NPS / 2026-00640

Subject: Determination of Eligibility and Effect for Slippery Creek Mine Cabin (MMK-00116)

Dear Mr. Ollig,

The Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (AK SHPO) received your correspondence and the accompanying report *Determination of Eligibility, Denali National Park and Preserve, Slippery Creek Mine Cabin* on June 5, 2026.

Following our review of the documentation provided, we concur that the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of exploration and settlement at a local level with a period of significance from 1937 to 1972. We recommend that future site investigations include further consideration under Criterion C and D with an expanded boundary to include potential historic mining debris around the cabin.

Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, AK SHPO concurs with the finding of No Historic Properties Adversely Affected for the proposed cabin repairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment. Please contact Amy Hellmich at amy.hellmich@alaska.gov if you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Meitl".

Sarah Meitl
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

SJM:ash



Eligible X Not Eligible

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Slippery Creek Mine Cabin

Other name: Shannon's Camp at Slippery Creek, Shannon Dunkle Mine, Dunkle Mine, Peters (sic) Dome Mine, Pedro Dome Mine, Mineral Mountain, Merinser

AHRS number: MMK-00116

FMSS Location: 258901

CRIS-HS Number: 036548, 036549

Park Number: B32

2. Location

Map sheet: USGS McKinley (A-3), Alaska

MTRS: F020S019W16

Latitude: 63.3037"N **Longitude:** -151.2433"W (per USGS, [Slippery Creek \(ARDF #DN151\) Au \(usgs.gov\)](#))

City or town: 23 miles southwest of Kantishna (end of the Park Road, mile 92) in Denali National Park and Preserve, AK, Located 3.5mi. N of Peter's Dome on the N flanks of the Alaska Range within Denali National Park. Mt McKinley summit lies about 7mi. to the SE.

Borough (or Census Area): Denali

Land Status: Federal

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary is rectangular in form and encompasses just the cabin and cold storage box. From **Point A** (63°11'28.02"N, - 151°12'24.51"W) directly west for 65' to **Point B** (63°11'28.05"N, - 151°12'23.06"W), turn south for 37' to **Point C** (63°11'27.66"N, - 151°12'23.03"W), then back east for 65' to **Point D** (63°11'27.68"N, - 151°12'24.47"W), then turn north for 37' back to **Point A**.

Boundary Justification: The area that would have been considered Slippery Creek Mine has been remediated, the last remaining portion that retains integrity is the general area of the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin. This boundary includes only the cabin and the cold storage box. If after further field work this year (2026), this boundary may expand to include additional sites associated which still retain integrity.

3. Description

Ownership of property: National Park Service

Category of property: Site

Property's function:

Historic: DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

Current: VACANT/NOT IN USE

Materials:

Foundation: WOOD - Log

Walls: WOOD - Log

Roof: METAL

Summary Paragraph:

Slippery Creek is a lode mining site situated on the north side of the Denali massif, just northeast of Peter's Dome. It features a single cabin facing north, positioned on a moderate slope with views of the McKinley River flats. The rectangular cabin has a shallow gable roof clad in sheet metal pans, running east/west. The building is of log construction with craftsmanship evident in the joinery. The cabin seems to have been originally built as two separate structures, later unified by enclosing the intervening space with walls and extending the roof. The cabin measures 15' x 41' and is composed of an east room, a west room, and an arctic entry area between the two rooms. Although the exact construction date is unknown, a 1941 photograph shows the cabin in its current form. The area of Slippery Creek was remote from the other developed mining districts within Denali, was first prospected in the 1910s and 1920s. It is likely that the building replaced a tent site present in 1930. Most mining activity occurred during the 1960s and 1970s; changes made to the cabin during this period seem minimal and are not well documented. In 2025, the National Park Service stabilized a partial, non-structural roof and wall failure in the central infill bay.

Originally associated with other mining features which have been reclaimed, there also remains a scatter of associated features including a cold storage box on the south of the building.

It should be noted that a placeholder date in the cabin records (List of Classified Structures) led to the impression that the site previously received a consensus Determination of Eligibility (cDOE) in 1995. This is not the case; Slippery Creek Mine cabin has not been evaluated for the National Register prior to now.

Setting

The site is in one of the most spectacular areas of the Denali National Park and Preserve (DNA). Centrally located within the park boundary, it sits in designated wilderness on the northern edge of the peaks surrounding Denali. The views to the south are primarily enclosed by Mineral Mountain¹ and the surrounding glacier-carved geography; Peter's Glacier is to the southwest and Muldrow Glacier to the southeast. The views to the north are expansive, looking out over the gently sloping arctic tundra and kettle lakes. Wonder Lake is approximately 20 miles to the northeast across the McKinley River. The cabin sits at 4100' elevation on a triangle of land between an unnamed drainage (possibly known as Iron Creek) and the headwaters and northwest fork of Slippery Creek, which has other branches that join as it eventually flows into the McKinley River. Calling this site Slippery Creek is thus unspecific, perhaps explaining why the area has been referred to by several other names.

¹ While not a common place name and is also not found in the USFS place names database, Crown Jewel of the North Vol. 2 it says this area is known informally as "Mineral Mountain."

As described by the park's Resource Management Specialist Stephen W. Buskirk in 1976, "The Wickersham Wall of Mount McKinley rises so sharply above the Peters Glacier that the north peak of the mountain can be viewed only by walking a ways north of Mineral Mountain. Evidence of glaciation, past and present, is manifest throughout the area. Vegetational attempts to secure this unstable periglacial zone are young, and what vegetation there is consists of dry alpine tundra and early successional pioneers." The setting remains much the same today, though pussy willow (*Salix spp.*) and alder (*Alnus spp.*) have grown up in the disturbed areas around the cabin and are encroaching on it, causing damage to the building.

In the 1980s, the park undertook a mining reclamation project at Slippery Creek to remove other site features including: a switchback road up the north face of Mineral Mountain; an adit at the top of the road; a road to an airstrip about two miles north of the site; and the airstrip. Other than the cabin, remaining existing features post-date the period of significance or have deteriorated so that they no longer have integrity. These include: two Caterpillar bulldozers; several oil drums; the remains of an air compressor; what may be lumber sled frames (alternatively posited as sill log foundations for canvas wall tents of the initial camp)²; a partial corduroy road; and an earth-integrated wooden cooler box. Near the collapsed adit, the remains of what was once the structural support around the mine opening are still visible down the hill, while a wooden equipment shed is no longer extant. Some human-made terracing to create the building site is still discernable immediately behind (south) of the cabin.

Narrative Description:

Slippery Creek Mine Cabin

CRIS-HS 036548

FMSS 258901

Building

Constructed Before 1941

Contributing

The Slippery Creek Mine Cabin is a vernacular building that is simple and symmetrical in appearance. It is one-story, rectangular in plan, and has a gable roof clad in sheet metal with the gable running east/west. It measures 15 'x 41'. It has been characterized in some documentation as a dogtrot, a style of house popular in the Southeastern United States around the same time period. This is inaccurate as there are crucial differences: a dogtrot has an integrated structure with a breezeway between two rooms to provide cooling; the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin has separate structural components and an enclosed space between two rooms that functions more as an arctic entry as the doors to both rooms are off of this space. In this way the cabin is a true design response to its environment and setting.

² Saleeby p. 295

The foundation consists of wood sills resting directly on the ground. Currently, there are eight log courses above grade on the south side and ten on the north, the latter representing full height of building. On the south side of the cabin the slope was excavated when the cabin was built in order to clear a level building site. This effectively forms a swale that collects snow and debris against the south elevation of the building, covering the lower courses.

The cabin is constructed of square double notched logs hewn flat on the vertical faces. At the corners the logs project 11 past the joins and have ends that are sawn off flush. What is now one building appears to have been two freestanding cabins that were joined during the historic period when the space between them was enclosed, creating an envelope comprised of rooms on the east and west ends with a storage bay in the middle. The easternmost room is 16' wide, the middle arctic entry is 12' wide, and the westernmost room is 11'6" wide.

The roofing system consists of a log ridgepole of a single span the length of each room with two log purlins on either side. These are overlaid with rough-sawn half logs of varying sizes covered in tar paper and horizontal runs of flat sheet metal, now rusted. Roof pitch is 3:12, with an approximately 12" overhang on all sides. There are two chimneys, one on each of the two rooms; both are on the north pitch of the roof. Historic photographs show that these were once stove pipe chimneys several feet tall but now only the lower galvanized metal insulators are in place.

The front (north) façade displays the unique construction of the cabin with the two originally separate cabins (which now function as rooms) on either end with the central enclosed storage bay in between. It contains two windows, one on each room, and a door that opens into the middle bay. All windows are fixed, consisting of a single 6-light sash set horizontally into the wall and framed with 1"x4" dimensional lumber. Doors on the cabin are a variation of a horizontal plank board and batten door. The enclosed center bay is easily identified by the infill log sections or panels, which do not align exactly with the log coursing on either side, as well as the corner joins of the cabins/rooms.

The eastern façade contains a single window with the sash missing. The gable ends of the cabin additionally have operable vents, covered on the interior with a sliding wooden shutter.

The southern façade employs the same pattern of fenestration as the front of the building. The western façade contains the same single window as the eastern; this has a plank cover fitted into the opening with the sash in place behind. Likewise, the same vent is cut in the gable end above the window. The log ends on this exposure show the most deterioration.

On the interior, the easternmost room measures 16' x 14'. Burlap chinking is evident between the logs, and the insides of the doors were once covered in canvas. The floors appear to also be the same rough-sawn half logs of varying widths as the roof decking, laid cut side up. The western room, which measures 11'6"x14', was primarily a living and

cooking area featuring a central wood burning stove and a single door into the storage bay on the eastern side. There is also a small modern propane stove set on a worktop on the eastern wall. It contains chairs, tables and shelving that are all handcrafted, often using wooden explosives boxes. Many historic artifacts remain in place including cooking and eating implements; first aid kit and medications; books, magazines, and calendars; rope clotheslines attached to the purlins; two smaller tables and one larger worktable; and seven chairs. There is some water staining in the upper southwest corner and impending rot of the floor due to debris accumulation and saturation. However, overall this part of the cabin is in the best condition.

The eastern room functioned mostly as a sleeping quarters though along the south wall it also holds a large, prefabricated unit containing a sink and double ovens. There is a bedframe (previous recording indicated multiple sets of bunkbeds present)³, folding chair, and shelving in the room as well. The wood burning stove is missing. The room has a single door on the western side opening into the storage bay. As the eastern window sash is missing it is open to the elements and precipitation comes in through the door as it is not protected by the collapsed portion of the storage bay. Consequently, this room shows some signs of deterioration.

The two rooms are separated by the storage bay or arctic entry, which sits between them. This enclosed area measures 12' x 14'. It has four doors, one on each side; the north and south are exterior doors and the west and east are interior doors into the rooms. There are numerous mining supplies in this area, including shovels, pans, chains, and pails. As described, roof and wall failure has greatly impacted this part of the building.

Additional character-defining features are in the details of the building; the room vents and most door handles are hand carved.

Slippery Creek Mine Cold Storage Box

CRIS-HS 036549

FMSS 258901

Structure

Constructed Before 1941

Contributing

Small, approximately 1'6"x2', wood plank box set in the base of the terrace in the back of the Slipper Creek Mine Cabin site. Open to the elements, previously had a board and batten flat roof.

³ Saleeby p. 295

4. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

Criterion A: Yes

Criterion B: No

Criterion C: No

Criterion D: No

Areas of significance: Exploration/Settlement

Significant date(s): 1937

Period of significance: 1937-1972 (could alternatively be 2 periods: 1937-1939; 1970-1972, which should be expanded till 1988 in the future)

Level of significance: Local

Significant person(s): N/A

Cultural affiliation: N/A

Architect/Engineer: N/A

Statement of significance:

The Slippery Creek Mine Cabin is significant at a local level under Criterion A, in the areas of Exploration/Settlement, as it represents nearly the full span of mining history at Denali National Park and conveys the story of the drive for mineral resource discovery and extraction in Alaska and the efforts that this required, with a period of significance of 1937-1972.

The Slippery Creek headwaters area is marked by its remoteness. Unlike other districts within Denali National Park and Preserve, it never boomed with mining development. This has preserved the excellent wilderness values of the northern slopes of the mountains around Denali peak. Difficulties in transportation and the ultimate poorness of the mineral finds are the primary reasons that the Slippery Creek Mining Camp cabin is the only vestige of attempts to develop this locale. While there was some resource extraction activity in the 1960s and 1970s, it remained small scale. Park managers, recognizing the inherent natural values, looked to quickly return the site to a wilderness character once it was acquired by the government. Ancillary features that showed a mining history were removed from the landscape through a reclamation project. Although the surrounding landscape has lost integrity due to missing, altered, or later features, the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin itself remains highly intact and continues to convey its historic significance. It retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship, as it has not been moved or substantially altered, stands within its original remote mountain environment, and preserves original hand-crafted log construction and details. The cabin also maintains integrity of feeling, as the area remains isolated and undeveloped, allowing visitors to sense the challenges of its historic use. While the loss of some mining-related landscape features slightly diminishes integrity of association, the cabin still clearly reflects early exploration and settlement in this part of the Alaska Range.

Historical information:

Exploration/Settlement

Mining first peaked in 1905 during the gold rush to the Kantishna Mining District in the northwestern part of what is now Denali National Park and Preserve. The logistics of getting gold and other minerals to market proved the biggest obstacle to success in this remote portion of Alaska. By most accounts, many prospectors left the area between 1920-1930. However, new claims were sought in the 1930s across the valley in the northern foothills of the Alaska Range. The cabin was built in the rush of optimism that the Slippery Creek area would pay out to such an extent that a branch line of the new Alaska Railroad would be warranted.

The cabin is constructed from logs harvested outside the park and likely flown in by W.E. Dunkle, “Alaska’s Flying Miner” who had optioned claims from local prospector Bill Shannon. The construction is a higher standard than most miner’s cabins in the region. The quality of the log shaping and joinery perhaps indicates that the building was intended for more permanence than a simple, hastily built shelter. Its design truly vernacular in that it is a response to the environment.

When the cabin was built, there was promise in the claims around it. An airstrip was bladed to facilitate access to the extremely remote site. Soon, however, tests showed that the quality of the ore would not warrant the difficulty in mining and shipping and the cabin was abandoned.

Starting in the historic period, Slippery Creek is often noted as being in the Kantishna Mining District (Saleeby, etc.). This seems to have originated from USGS for administrative purposes. While certainly linked, the two are also distinct from one another, geographically separated and subsequently having different nuances in their history. The Kantishna Mining District Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) prepared by DENA Historian Erik Johnson in 2018 presents a robust regional history and context. Much of this pertains to Slippery Creek, but the site itself falls outside of the boundaries established for the MPDF resources.

Documented occupation of the larger area surrounding Slippery Creek dates back 2,500 years, and a few Athabascan bands still used the area when gold prospectors began to arrive. A flurry of mining activity first peaked in the western part of what is now Denali National Park and Preserve around the Kantishna Hills with a “gold fever” stampede in 1905-1906.⁴ A pronounced lull followed and most of the new inhabitants left again, though there was a slight resurgence in the 1920s that began to fan out into the surrounding terrain. Looking for new claims, in 1920 Joe and Fanny Quigley, who were mainstays of the Kantishna mining district, “found promising copper-zinc deposits at Copper Mountain (now Mount Bielson) within the park. Hundreds of claimants staked this and nearby mineralized zones, including Slippery Creek in the Mount McKinley foothills. But commercial values eluded the miners, and most of these claims—often after

⁴ Johnson MDPF, E5

years of hopeful assessment work—were abandoned and lapsed.”⁵ This pattern was widespread, as almost all mining in the region was deserted in the late 1920s and early ‘30s during the Great Depression.

McKinley National Park was created in 1917 to preserve the grandeur of place and protect wildlife. The original park boundary “reserved some 2,200 square miles laid out in a rough parallelogram nearly 100 miles long and averaging 25 miles wide, running from the southwest to the northeast. At its upper end it expanded to the north to include the mountainous sheep and caribou country of the Toklat and Teklanika drainages. The boundaries excluded the Kantishna mining district and the forested moose country to the northwest where many miners wintered and hunted. The park captured the ridgeline of the Alaska Range, which backdropped the bordering piedmont plateau, the great valley of the Denali Fault, and the north-side outer ranges crossed by the north-flowing Toklat and Teklanika rivers.”⁶ Excluding Kantishna was intentional, a concession to Alaskan constituents by U.S. House of Representatives Delegate James Wickersham. Indeed, because the district continued to be a hub for mining, ongoing resistance to its becoming part of the park meant it was not included until a boundary expansion in 1978 (finally realizing a 1965 NPS proposal to withdraw the lands, held by BLM at the time, from development).⁷ Slippery Creek, on the other hand, has been within the park since its inception; the enabling legislation allowed for new claims within the boundary.

The dual pressures to create better transportation to the area – mining and visitation – increased following the park’s establishment. In 1923 the massive undertaking to build the Alaska Railroad was completed, extending from Seward to Fairbanks, with a station at the eastern end of the park at McKinley Park Station. Meanwhile the Denali Park Road was started in 1922, reaching Wonder Lake in 1936, the northern park boundary in 1937, and Kantishna in 1938.⁸ Additionally, between 1925-1927, the Alaska Road Commission bladed the airstrip at Kantishna Aviation Field.⁹ All of these developments were at least 20 miles from Slippery Creek, and in the case of the rail head, much farther.

According to Norris, by 1923 Bill Shannon had filed a claim at Slippery Creek¹⁰, while others place the claim in 1920-’21 and the catalyst of the small rush to the area.¹¹ Willard J. “Bill” Shannon, also known as Grubstake Bill or Wild Bill Shannon was a long-time prospector, miner and trapper in Denali, sometimes working with his brother Edward P. Shannon. Though some like Grant Pearson, who started as a ranger in 1925 and went on to become park superintendent, felt he was shifty and tried to avoid resource protection restrictions,¹² Bill also contributed in positive ways. He briefly enjoyed renown as the first musher of the dog sled relay in The Serum Run, which famously transported

⁵ HRS Chapt 6

⁶ Brown HRS 1991, PDF p. 223

⁷ Norris Vol. 1, p. 180-181

⁸ Norris, Vol. 2 p. 332

⁹ Norris Vol. 1 p. 66

¹⁰ Norris Vol. 2 p. 329

¹¹ Mushing Magazine, <http://www.mushing.com/mysterious-disappearance-wild-bill-shannon>

¹² “My Life of High Adventure” by Grant Pearson pg. 104

diphtheria antitoxin from Nenana to Nome under extremely adverse conditions in January 1925.¹³ This “Great Race of Mercy” saved hundreds of lives.¹⁴

Rather than keep discoveries to himself, Shannon was a promoter of the Slippery Creek area and broadcast (indeed, likely inflated) findings to draw interest and financing. In the summer of 1926 the *Alaska Daily Empire* printed under the headline *Bill Shannon Makes a Strike*: “He said he had been very successful and had staked extensive deposits of high grade silver, bearing copper. The ore vein is 200 feet wide and he traced it by open cuts over 6,000 feet. Shannon said he also discovered a deposit of quick silver ore immediately north of Mt. McKinley, [a] field which has practically been unexplored before.”¹⁵

In 1929 Earl Pilgrim wrote “A Report on the Shannon Lode Properties,” which he sent to B.D. Stewart, Territorial Supervisor of Mines. The report states:

These claims are located in the Slippery Creek Area of Mt. McKinley National Park immediately to the north of Mt. McKinley at the heads of Iron Creek, Slippery Creek and the East Fork of Birch Creek...

This area can be reached at present by aeroplane or by pack animal in summer and by aeroplane or by dog team in winter. From the end of the Park Highway, which is now completed to the east Fork of the Toklat River, it is approximately 70 miles by trail to this area. The Park Road is now completed 41 miles from McKinley Park Station on the Alaska Railroad. By aeroplane the property can be reached from Fairbanks within 2½ hours. A railroad constructed by the shortest available route would be approximately 108 miles in length to connect with the Alaska Railroad at Lignite or at Kobe. A highway would follow the present trail and be about 110 miles from McKinley Park Station.¹⁶

Shannon penned a letter separately to Stewart, further pushing for shipping access. He writes, “Should Mr. Pilgrim’s report on my properties prove favorable are we going to let the matter rest there? Why not go right on through and help me to develop a mine, if a mine be there, that is develop sufficient tonnage, if present, to warrant the building of a branch railroad to connect the properties with the Alaska Railroad...”¹⁷

Pilgrim’s report did not prove very favorable, however. He found that there was no appreciable quantity of high-grade ore, and that “nineteen samples were taken on this group of claims, only one of which represents an average width and value”¹⁸ in gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, and iron. There was some quality stibnite (antimony). Evidently

¹³ Grefrath, Richard W. (1 August 2004). "The Cruellest Miles: The Heroic Story of Dogs and Men in a Race Against an Epidemic"

¹⁴ While they travel the same routes, The Serum Run did not give rise to the Iditarod modern dog sled race.

¹⁵ The Alaska daily empire. [volume] (Juneau, Alaska) 1912-1926, August 02, 1926, Page 8, Image 8 « Chronicling America « Library of Congress (loc.gov)

¹⁶ Pilgrim, Earl 1929. [pe066_01.pdf \(alaska.gov\)](#) p. 2

¹⁷ Pilgrim, Earl 1929. [pe066_01.pdf \(alaska.gov\)](#) p. 3 of his letter

¹⁸ Pilgrim, Earl 1929. [pe066_01.pdf \(alaska.gov\)](#) p. 4

this was enough for Shannon to continue to hope, as photographic evidence shows that he had a wall tent camp in place at Slippery Creek by 1931 that was in approximately the same location the cabin would be built,¹⁹ and by the mid-1930s had attracted outside interests to his group of claims in the area which included: Group 1: Slippery Creek – Iron Creek Copper Group Terminus Claim, Green Back Claim, Magnetite Claim, Old Sourdough; Group 2: Native Copper Prospect Question Mark Claim; and Group 3: Cinnibar-Antimony Deposit (sic) Merinser Claim.²⁰ Together, these stretched about three miles.

Wesley Earl Dunkle, known as “Alaska’s Flying Miner,” is thought to have had an interest in the Slippery Creek area as early as 1915, though no claims were filed.²¹ Dunkle (1887-1957) was a prominent figure in the mining history of Alaska. Born in Pennsylvania and educated in mining engineering at Yale, he went on to work for several Guggenheim Corporation subsidiaries and notably is credited with the discovery of the Jumbo copper deposit at Kennecott.²² He earned his pilot’s license in 1932 and was a founding member of Star Air Service which later became Alaska Airlines. Dunkle’s skill in flying was crucial to the development at Slippery Creek.

During 1936 Bill Shannon continued to file new claims which he then optioned to Dunkle along with some of his existing ones, namely the antimony-bearing lodes at the Straightaway Glacier (MM176) and Merinser (MM174) prospects.²³ This precipitated the largest changes to the Slippery Creek site in 1937, marking the start of the period of significance. In that year, Dunkle needed housing for the men and equipment to work the claims. In a sensational feat, he “flew a small tractor from the Golden Zone mine to the Shannon properties in a Ford Trimotor, the first time a tractor had been flown across the Alaska Range.”²⁴ Park Superintendent Liek’s reports noted that Dunkle “has a crew of men cutting logs for buildings and timbers to be used in the mine. This timber was cut about 1 mile north of the park boundary.”²⁵ In August, he flew out with Dunkle to “inspect mine and buildings.” While there is no documentation of who built the cabin or when, these factors indicate that it was constructed in 1937.²⁶

To accommodate fixed wing flights, “Shannon had promised Dunkle that he would ‘level off and mark a field for landing, about a mile below the camp on the West Fork of Slippery Creek.’ Dunkle later reported...that the field was ‘six hundred feet long and

¹⁹ Camp at the head of Slippery Creek, Shannon's Camp. 1930. Index card: Head of Slippery Creek, Shannon's Camp. Kantishna district, Yukon region, Alaska. 1930.

<https://library.usgs.gov/photo/#/item/5d0bf70fe4b0941bde4fc94d>

²⁰ Pilgrim, Earl 1929. [pe066_01.pdf \(alaska.gov\)](#) p. 1

²¹ Norris Vol. 2 p. 325

²² Walter Van Horn and Bruce Parham, “Dunkle, Wesley Earl,” Cook Inlet Historical Society, *Legends & Legacies, Anchorage, 1910-1940*, <http://www.alaskahistory.org>.

²³ Heiner and Porter, 1972, Mt. McKinley quadrangle, serial number 39; W. E. Dunkle letter dated Sept. 10, 1936 to J. G. Baragwanath

²⁴ Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, April 22, 1937.

²⁵ SMR notes & 1941 photos PDF from Erik: excerpts from Supt Monthly Reports

²⁶ Norris comes to the same conclusion about construction date; Vol. 2 p. 352.

forty feet wide at 3,000 feet altitude, which is not so sweet.”²⁷ The landing was indeed treacherous and Dunkle crashed a Stinson aircraft there in July 1937, though without harm to himself or passenger. It is unclear if this landing strip was in the same location where a later one was put in to service Slipperry Creek. Other landscape features are not mentioned in historical accounts of the site, though it is possible that two small structures were built at this time on what later became called Mineral Mountain (neither extant today). One was a small shop or equipment shed, square in plan and constructed of framing covered in half-sawn logs.

Dunkle quickly optioned property to Anaconda Copper Co. in 1937. Together, they drove a short adit to gather samples, possibly on the Merinser claim.²⁸ Results of the sampling and testing showed that a resource on the order of tens of millions of tons was available at the prospect, but that it was too low-grade and refractory to be developed at the remote location in Slipperry Creek. The claims were returned to Shannon, and it was reported that the site was abandoned by 1939.²⁹

Photographs taken in 1941 show the cabin in its current configuration with the center bay infilled. The roofing over this section is different than that over both rooms. Around the cabin there are several piles of logs, a tube steel frame, a raised platform (resembling a low cache), and an overturned outhouse directly south of the cabin. An aerial shows what may be a fence or drainage line slightly farther south of the cabin, and road ruts leading to and from the cabin. In present day, there is no indication of the fence lines though the road traces are still visible to the north while to the south have been eliminated through reclamation. All vegetation is tundra, with none of the brushy growth that exists today.

In the summer of 1941, skeletal remains were found near Slipperry Creek that were identified, supposedly by his family, as those of Bill Shannon. They were removed to Fairbanks before park authorities were notified; Superintendent Corbley subsequently flew to the site to make a report.³⁰ The death was attributed to “exhaustion and exposure.” One source, lacking citations, states that the remains were discovered by Cora Mitchell, Ole Fisher and Charles Brown “while locating claims on Slipperry Creek.”³¹ While not discussed in the literature, this would indicate that some prospecting continued in the 1940s, though it would seem no major finds were made. With the loss of Shannon as the local promoter, the Slipperry Creek area stayed undeveloped and quiet for almost three decades.

The onset of WWII shut down much of the mining in and around Denali as gold was deemed non-essential to the war effort, though limited antimony extraction continued at Kantishna.³² As written in the draft Cultural Landscape Report for the Kantishna District, “Left unequipped with resources to regularly travel the trans-park road as part of regular

²⁷ Slipperry Creek Dunkle history CCHawley PDF from Erik; from Alaska’s Flying Miner pg. 126

²⁸ written commun., Francis Cameron to M. H. Gidel, July 1937, and F. F. Frick to Reno Sales, November 1937

²⁹ per Grant Pearson (site record; also CRAC Emergency Funds Request)

³⁰ SMR 1941 Shannon remains PDF from Erik. Superintendent’s Report July, 1941

³¹ Mushing Magazine.

³² Foulds p. 93-94

patrols, Acting Superintendent Pearson came to rely on Mr. Maurer and others like him with their bulldozers to open the roadway in the spring and to make the necessary repairs that would permit trucks to freight the ore eastward to the McKinley Park railway station. This cooperative spirit would only last during wartime.”³³ After the war was over, mining operations increased at Kantishna, which remained outside of park boundaries despite several attempts to push changes through legislation. Between 1953 and 1966, three new airstrips each over 1,000’ long were constructed: Crooked Creek, Cantwell, Drashner/Golden North, and Glen Creek. The existing Kantishna airstrip was also widened.³⁴ Post-war time also brought increased visitation, creating competition for access on the Park Road. Combined with the burgeoning environmental movement in the late 1960s this was a recipe for conflict.

Around 1967, Kantishna miner Arley Taylor (1908-1991) re-staked several of Shannon’s antimony and gold claims around Slippery Creek³⁵ and sought new claims for mercury as it was fetching a high price. At the time, mineral extraction within the park boundaries was still legal under the Surface Use Act of 1931. Due to the challenges widely faced on the northern slopes of Denali – remoteness, lack of high-grade potential, and war time – there had not been much recent activity inside the park. However, the general increase in environmental awareness and the preservation of natural resources was bringing new scrutiny. Coming on the heels of being relied upon for park operations, the idea of restrictions further chafed the mining community.

The notes from a Sept. 3, 1969 Mount McKinley National Park Staff Meeting state, “Mr. Ruesch reported briefly on the mining activity on Slippery Creek. Mr. Kuhner³⁶ and his partner are going to Wonder Lake and down the boundary to the McKinley River, and up Muddy Creek to their airstrip. They are going to make the strip 4500 feet long so that if the mine pays off they can fly out instead of making a road. They will be there about another month. Mr. Ritter asked if legislation spells out the mining details as far access is concerned. Mr. Reusch reported that access is granted by the Regional Director.”³⁷ An airstrip of this size would be double of any in Kantishna and may be the one whose traces can still be seen north of the Slippery Creek Mine cabin. The route described above is one that NPS recommended the miners take to reach the site. In a blatant disregard of this instruction, Taylor and a second miner Dan Ashbrook, "walked a pair of cats [Caterpillar tractors] towing sledges" overland through the park from Wonder Lake to Slippery Creek.³⁸ The result was a 25-mile-long strip of damaged and disturbed tundra that created a large visual impact, and thereby a statement. The statement was underlined when a second “cat train” was made the following year, accompanied by other activities such as illegal timber cutting.³⁹

³³ Ibid p. 95

³⁴ Norris Vol. 1 p. 295

³⁵ Heiner and Porter, 1972; Chadwick, 1976. USGS Mineral Resources Online Spatial Data for MM174, Merinser

³⁶ There is no other mention of a “Mr. Kuhner” in any documentation, but it is likely that Arley Taylor was the partner mentioned here.

³⁷ PDF “Slippery Cr update 1969” from Erik

³⁸ Norris Vol. 2 p. 352

³⁹ Ibid.

The ramifications of these actions at Slippery Creek rose to the national level. An excerpt from the DENA Administrative History, "Crown Jewel of the North" elaborates:

Recognizing that several prospectors had "disregarded the regulations, have not registered, and have independently entered the park creating scars and leaving refuse behind," agency staff prepared a document examining prospecting and mining issues both at Mount McKinley and Glacier Bay. That document stated that 310 mining claims had been filed at Mount McKinley National Park between 1917 and 1970; most of these were "the same mineral locations, top filed over and over again, after abandonment by the previous claimant." Only 93 claims were considered presently valid: 44 in the Slippery Creek area, 35 in the area north of Mount Eielson, and 14 along Windy Creek. These claims were held by just two companies and four individuals. The agency declared that mining in the park, and in other park units as well, was "socially uneconomic, however profitable it may be for individual operators." In order to halt future mining-related abuses, a necessary first step would be to stop new prospecting and mining, and that "to prevent actual development would require timely purchase of the rights by the government."

Given the national growth of the environmental movement during the 1960s - a movement that often spotlighted Alaska issues - some voices began to recognize that the problem at Slippery Creek was symptomatic of a broad problem that needed to be addressed at the legislative level. In June 1970, the Public Land Law Review Commission published the landmark study *One Third of the Nation's Land*. That document recommended, on a general level, that "all nonconforming uses in national parks... should be prohibited by statute;" more specifically, however, it recommended that provisions for mining in Mount McKinley National Park should be repealed.⁴⁰

It would take six more years until such legislation was passed and became law. During the intervening time, Taylor continued to file claims⁴¹ and mine stibnite at Slippery Creek, leasing some of them to Mount McKinley Mercury Mining, Inc. This period from 1970 to 1976 represents the most use and occupation of the Slippery Creek Mine cabin, which served as the base of operations for what became the largest producing and longest running mining site in the area (though still very small by commercial production measures). It appears that the worker occupants⁴² made few, if any, changes to the cabin. Many of the historic artifacts inside date to this period, and a number of landscape

⁴⁰ Norris Vol. 2 p. 353

⁴¹ Claims were reported on Slippery Creek by the U.S. Bureau of Mines (1973), several miles north of the front of the Alaska Range. Arley Taylor may also have held placer claims in 1970 on 'Slippery Bench' in Slippery Creek, near the Greenback and Terminus claims (MM173) (Heiner and Porter, 1972, Mt. McKinley quadrangle, location 127)." (from Slippery Creek Mining Ref PDF from Erik. Alaska Resource Data File MM173 and MM151.

⁴² Buskirk spoke with Cliff Murphy and Elmer Cornell, "both of whom have worked at the mine in past summers."

features were noted by Stephen Buskirk, DENA Resource Mgt Specialist on a visit in 1976. He reported the following:

1. An airstrip approximately 2000 feet long and 30-40 feet wide, near the confluence of the east and west Forks of Slippery Creek, three miles north of the cabin.
2. Two roads connecting the airstrip with the cabin. The westernmost of the two was abandoned in 1975 due to severe rutting. A new one, to the east, has been used since that time. Very little cat work or maintenance has been done on these roads. A four-wheeled drive pickup truck is merely driven over the same route many times.
3. A natural log cabin approximately 14' 1 x 24' 1, which sets at the base of Mineral Mountain.
4. Two more roads south of the cabin lead to the abandoned cinnabar mining shaft and to the present stibnite extraction site.
5. The abandoned cinnabar mining shaft.
6. A small log shop near this shaft.
7. The stibnite extraction site. Ore is extracted from the side of Mineral Mountain at the end of a steep switchbacked cat trail. The leveled platform at the end of the cat trail is roughly 40' x 100'.⁴³

Not mentioned in the narrative but evident in the accompanying photographs are what appears to be an outhouse to the northeast of the cabin, and the remains of what may have been wooden frames or a partial corduroy road to the southwest. West of the cabin there is also the wreckage of a helicopter, though no information could be found about how it came to be there or when it was removed. The cabin itself does not exhibit any changes.

Mining was still taking place at the time of Buskirk's trip, primarily on the western side of what the miners started referring to as Mineral Mountain, the peak that rises up behind (south of) the cabin.⁴⁴ He detailed the means of extraction as relying on the same two D-6 and D-5 Caterpillar tractors that had been driven to the site in 1970, which remain on-site today. These were used to scrape the surface until the deposit was exposed; ore was then broken up and loaded into burlap bags that were taken by sledge down to the cabin area, from there by pickup truck to the landing strip, and then flown out in small aircraft to Nenana.⁴⁵ Production was reported to be 975 bags in 1974 with the highest annual return of \$60,000, down to 250 bags in 1975. Between declining output and the passage of the Mining in the Parks Act of 1976 – followed in 1978 by all “old park” mining claims being declared invalid – the site was likely abandoned again some time in these two years.

Declaring the claims invalid meant that the National Park Service “made no plan to either buy out the existing claimants or alter boundaries to conform to active mining areas.”⁴⁶ Rather, each claim was contested by the BLM and claimants could dispute the

⁴³ Memo_Buskirk_1976 PDF from Erik

⁴⁴ Norris Vol. 2 p. 353

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Norris Vol. 2 p. 357

determination. Arley Taylor was one of the few who chose to do so, along with Mount McKinley Mercury Mining Company. The case was settled in 1981 after an Interior Department solicitor found that, “because there is not sufficient mineralization [at the claims] to warrant a prudent man to further invest his time and effort and money with the prospect of a valuable mine...the contestees have failed to prove...that any of the contested claims are valid.”⁴⁷

The process of reviewing the claims and finalizing determinations coincided with major changes for the park. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was enacted that included expanding the park boundary and redesignating the entirety as Denali National Park and Preserve. Over two million acres were designated as wilderness, encompassing Slippy Creek and the surrounding area. A further aspect of ANILCA that “the federal lands within Denali National Park and Preserve were withdrawn from location, entry, and patent under the United States mining laws, subject to valid existing rights.”⁴⁸

The long-recognized wilderness values of the Alaska Range region now took precedence at Slippy Creek. Reclamation work appears to have begun in 1983- 1984, after an intensive survey was done of the overall historic mining area that year.⁴⁹ Photographs show a large hand crew camped around the cabin and working to remove the cat road on the west side of Mineral Mountain. Sod revegetation was also placed on the airstrip and its access road. At this point in time, the shed on Mineral Mountain was still standing, though the adit covering had fallen. The cabin appears to be in good condition with the roof intact.

Major efforts then followed with planning and site work in 1987. The park prepared an Environmental Assessment for “Landscape Restoration of Former Mining Claims in Upper Slippy Creek”⁵⁰ to “specifically [address] the road construction which occurred during the 1970s when bulldozers were brought into the site. This action is needed to remove the only signs of human use from an otherwise pristine portion of the Denali National Park Wilderness.”⁵¹ Compliance also included an Archeological Clearance Survey of the proposed borrow area on the west bank of Slippy Creek, used for gravel to fill road ruts, and the switchbacked part of the road up Mineral Mountain not yet addressed. Perhaps fittingly, the on-site D-6 Caterpillar tractor was used for this work,⁵² along with a small backhoe. Many of the landscape features – mostly dating to the 1970s but perhaps some to the 1930s habitation – were thus removed at this time. It is an important distinction that the features were removed rather than not maintained; the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Cumulative Impacts of Mining ROD PDF, 1990; p.2). *further information in this document re: court injunctions in the 1980s.

⁴⁹ recorded by a NPS survey crew (Snow, Creech, and Ostrogorsky) 1983.

⁵⁰ In 2001 the park prepared an EA and 10-year plan “Reclamation of Mined Lands Program, Denali National Park and Preserve”. Plan addresses Kantishna-area mine sites and does not include Slippy Creek.

⁵¹ _RES 779 EA for landscape restoration of former mining claims in Upper Slippy Creek PDF

⁵² Information from Brad Ebel, Aug. 2007. (Slippy Creek dozers info 2007 Word doc). There was an informal plan for the tractor’s removal from the site that involved driving them out, but this was impractical both in causing more damage and their questionable operability.

intentional naturalizing of the landscape becomes as important a theme as the mining it sought to erase.

The Slippery Creek Mine cabin site was recorded via a Mining Inventory and Monitoring Program - Cultural Resource Site Inventory Form in 1990.⁵³ Done with archeological methodology, the form presents a detailed list of the artifacts remaining on site and describes the cabin. Several of the heavily deteriorated wooden frames around the cabin are mis-identified as log foundations; earlier photographs show these to be the possible cache platform, sledges, and partial corduroy road. A shallow depression appears to be all that is left of the 1970s outhouse. Again, the cabin is reported in good condition, including the roof. By the time it was evaluated for the List of Classified Structures in 2000 (LCS 036548; now CRIS-HS), the cabin was exhibiting deficiencies and was listed as Fair condition. Regional Historical Architect Mary Tidlow documented the building with notated drawings that suggested several preservation treatments. These were not addressed, and the cabin fell into poor condition for the 2007 and 2013 reassessments. In 2014, emergency funds were requested from NPS Cultural Resource funds to stabilize the cabin and repair the roof, but this project was not carried out until 2025. Additional structural repair work has been proposed for 2026. The cabin overall retains integrity to its initial construction in 1937.

Application of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criteria:

Criterion A - The Slippery Creek Mine Cabin is significant at a local level under Criterion A, in the areas of Exploration/Settlement, as it represents nearly the full span of mining history at Denali National Park and conveys the story of the drive for mineral resource discovery and extraction in Alaska and the efforts that this required, with a period of significance of 1937-1972.

Criterion B - The building is not known to be associated with the lives of significant Persons.

Criterion C - The building does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction. Although it is built to a somewhat higher standard than other cabins in the area, it remains an unexceptional example of vernacular architecture, and its importance is better understood within broader historical patterns rather than through its design.

Criterion D - The building is unlikely to yield further information important in understanding local, regional, or national history.

⁵³ K. Miller, R. Walser, R. Bland, 1990.

Integrity:

The landscape as a whole does not retain integrity as many features are missing, have been removed or are heavily deteriorated, or post-date the period of significance. However, the cabin itself continues to convey significance and retains all aspects of integrity:

Location: The cabin has not been moved and therefore retains integrity of Location.

Design: The design of the cabin has not been altered since the historic period. It appears that there were originally two individual cabins that were joined to create one building when the space between them was infilled with roof and wall panels. However, the earliest documentation of the cabin - a photograph from 1941 - shows the cabin in its current form. This indicates the alteration took place early on and perhaps was even part of the original building design and not a subsequent change.

Setting: The spectacular setting of the cabin has not been changed or intruded upon. Situated at the base of Mineral Mountain near Peters Dome on the northern edge of the peaks surrounding Denali, the site overlooks the expansive tundra flats to the north. Unlike the Kantishna Hills, this area was never extensively developed and the Slippery Creek Mine remained a lone outpost. The evidence of mining activity that took place there has largely been obliterated but can still be seen in road traces and equipment remaining at the site.

Materials: The cabin retains integrity of Materials in that it has had minimal interventions since its original construction. There do not appear to be any replacement logs or other elements in the foundation or walls. From past photographic documentation, it appears that the portion of roof over the storage bay had a different cladding than over the two rooms. At some point the whole building was roofed in the galvanized metal which covers it now.

Workmanship: The unaltered nature of the building means that it retains integrity of Workmanship as well. The cabin as a whole is built to a higher standard than many miners seasonal dwellings. It is constructed of logs that were shaped by hand both on their faces and for the joinery, which remains tight despite harsh weather conditions and being unoccupied for decades. There are several handcrafted details which remain in place, such as a carved wooden doorknob and the sliding vent covers.

Feeling: While its promoters tried to bring more development to the area, the west fork of Slippery Creek was never heavily developed and is now located in designated wilderness. The cabin therefore retains its feeling of remoteness. Visitors to the site still experience a feeling of isolation and a sense of the challenges of living and working in such a spot.

Association: Integrity of Association has been slightly diminished by the removal of other landscape features that showed the site's mining history. However, the cabin conveys significance to the Exploration/Settlement of this part of the Alaska Range.

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- 6. Form Prepared By:** Allison Kennedy, Acting Historical Landscape Architect, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office.

7. Additional Material

Maps:

Map 1. Topographic Map, Denali A-3 NE Quadrangle, Inset on actual location

Map 2. Slippery Creek Mine Cabin Boundary Map from Google Earth Aerial, with inset to provide context for the site in the landscape.

Map 3. Slippery Creek Mine Cabin Photolog Map based off of boundary map with inset from Google Earth Aerial.

Figures:

Figure 1. Slippery Creek Camp, 1930, DENA Archives

Figure 2. Slippery Creek Mine cabin, looking north. 1941; photographer unknown. DENA Archives

Figure 3. Slippery Creek Mine cabin, looking east. 1941; photographer unknown. DENA Archives

Figure 4. Slippery Creek Mine cabin, aerial view. 1941; photographer unknown though likely Dunkle flying. DENA Archives

Figure 5. Structures on Mineral Mountain at the adit. Date and photographer unknown. Structures removed during site remediation. DENA Archives

Figure 6. Slippery Creek Mine Cabin, looking southeast with unidentified person in doorway. Merry-Travers, 1965. DENA Archives

Figure 7. Cabin and site overview, looking north. Buskirk, 1976.

Figure 8. Slippery Creek mining operations, looking south. Cabin and equipment in the foreground; switchback road up Mineral Mountain in background. Buskirk, 1976.

Figure 9. Switchback road up Mineral Mountain, looking east. Buskirk, 1976.

Figure 10. Slippery Creek air strip, looking south; cabin is several miles distant at the base of the central peak (Mineral Mountain). Buskirk, 1976.

Figure 11. First phase of Mineral Mountain road reclamation. 1983; photographer unknown. DENA Archives

Figure 12. Second phase of Mineral Mountain road reclamation, using the D-6 cat. 1987; photographer unknown. DENA Archives

Photographs:

Photograph 1. Aerial overview of Slippery Creek Mine cabin site, looking southwest. The cabin and Caterpillar tractors can be seen; there are faint road traces that are still recovering. Grant Crosby, June 2022.

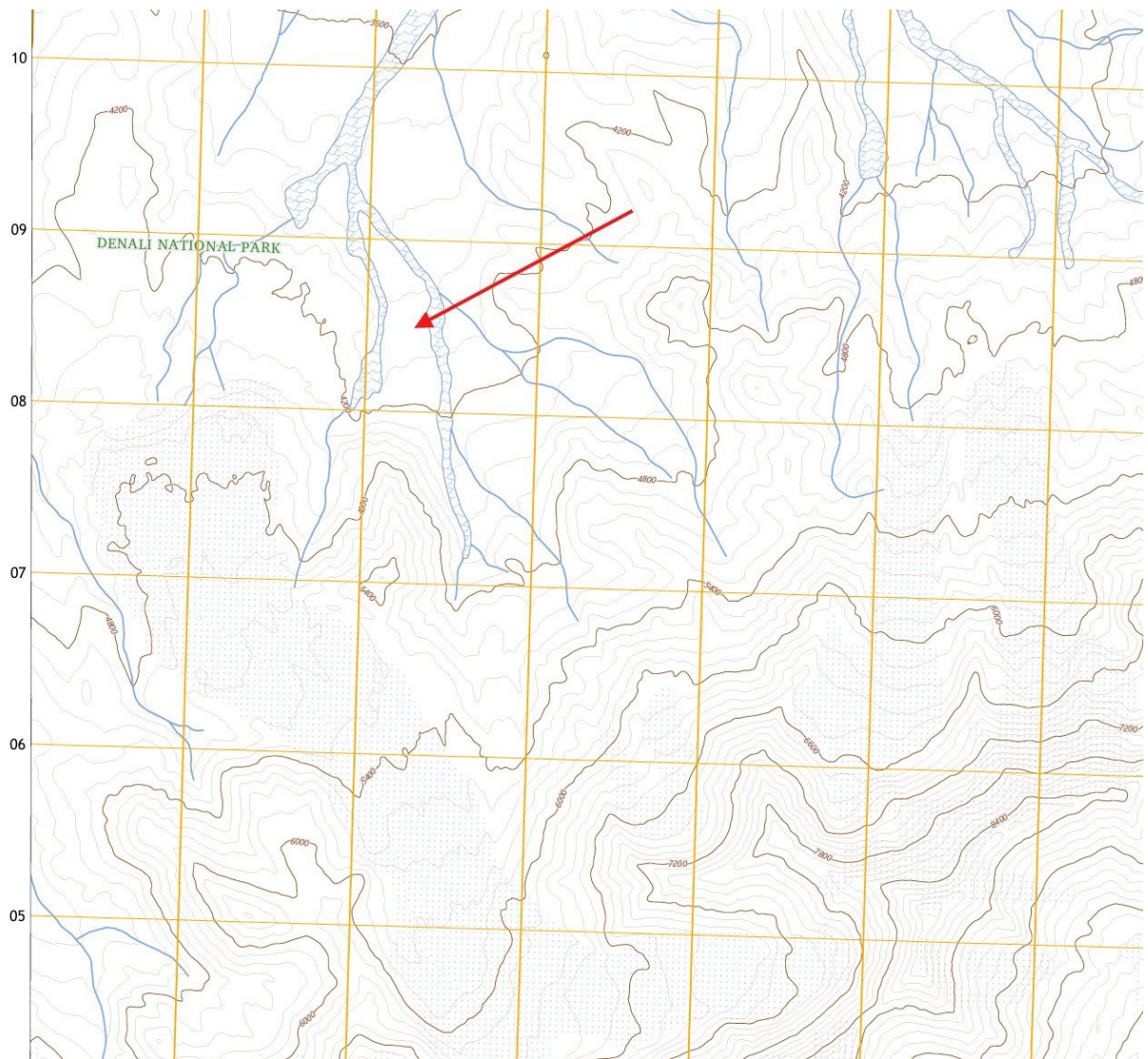
Photograph 2. Front elevation of Slippery Creek Mine Cabin after initial stabilization completed, 2025.

Photograph 3. East gable elevation of the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin, 2022.

Photograph 4. West gable elevation of the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin, 2022.

Photograph 5. Cold Storage Box on the southern/uphill side of the Slippery Creek Mine Cabin.

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Map 1: Denali A-3 NE Quadrangle



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Map 3: Photolog Map based off of boundary map with inset from Google Earth Aerial.

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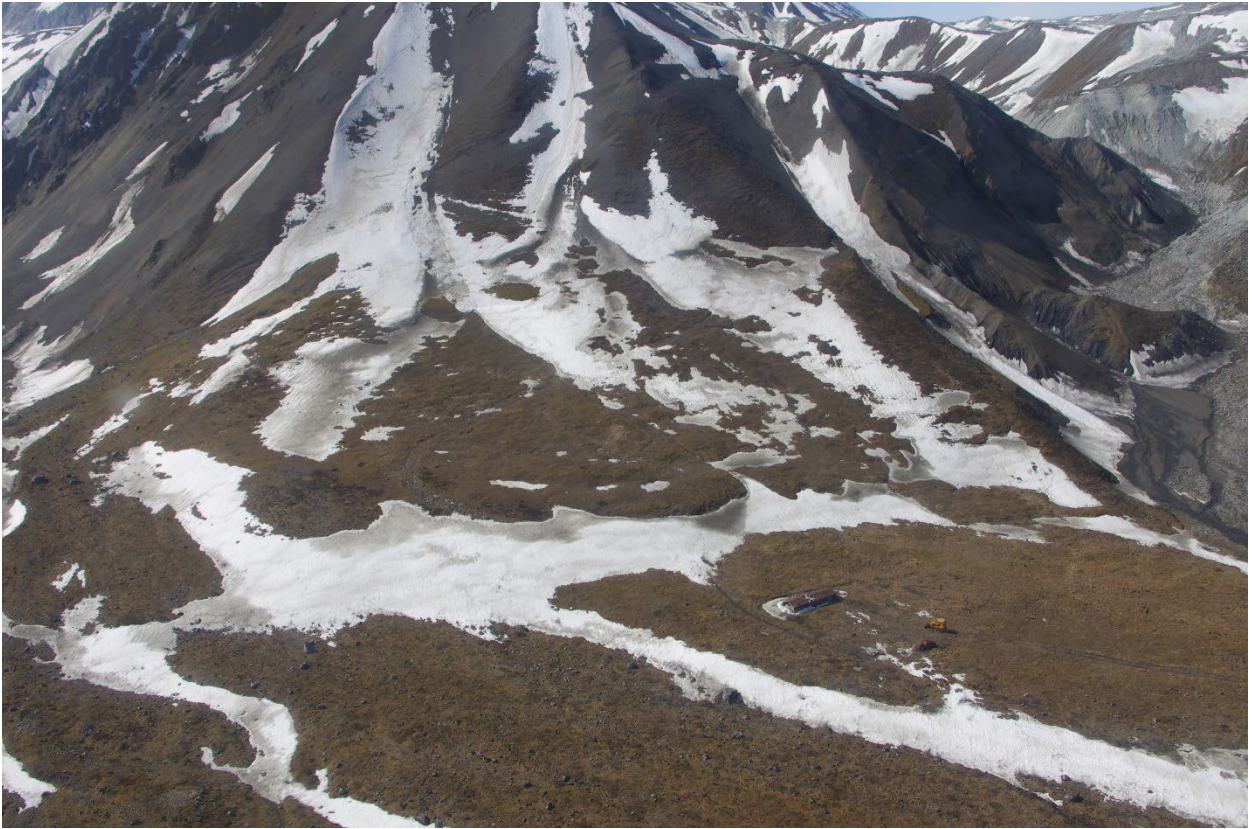


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