

Gates of the Arctic

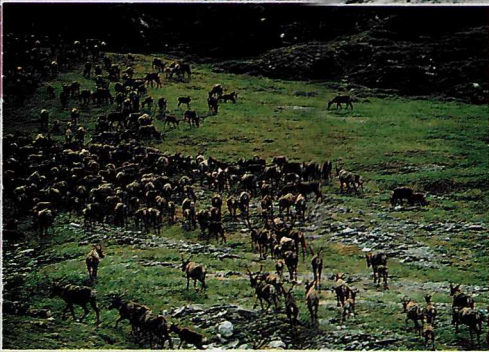
Gates of the Arctic National Park
Gates of the Arctic National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

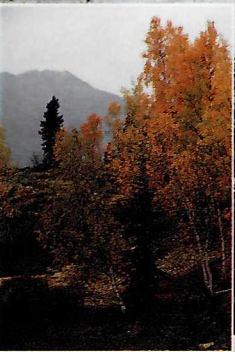
Official Map and Guide



Here in the northernmost Rocky Mountains, foothills become ragged peaks and then the ranks reverse until vast tundra stretches to the Arctic Ocean.

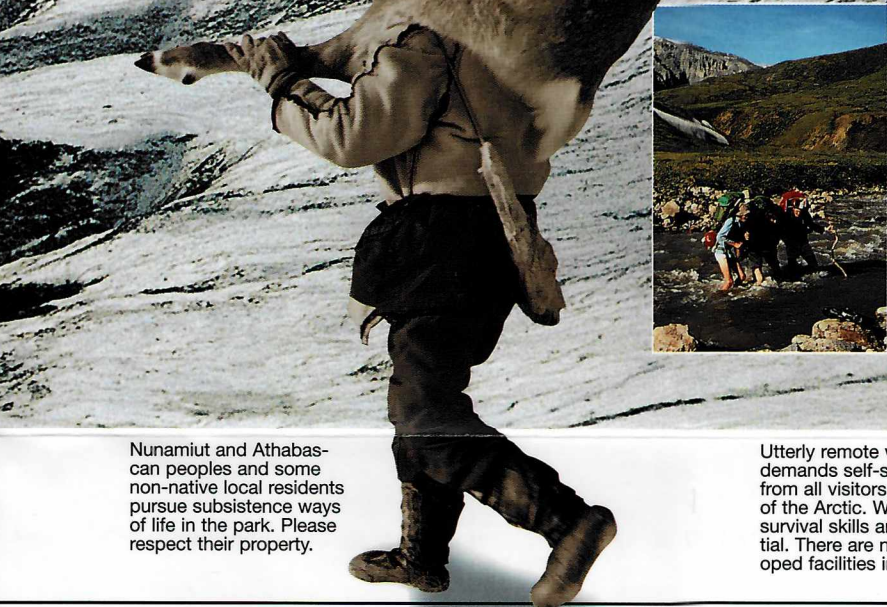


Park lands protect important habitat for the western arctic caribou herd that has been so vital to interior Alaska native economies.



Fall brings subtle reds, yellows, and gold to the palettes of the tundra and foothills foliage.

Cover photo: Remote wildness and unpeopled distances characterize Gates of the Arctic.



Nunamiut and Athabascan peoples and some non-native local residents pursue subsistence ways of life in the park. Please respect their property.



Utterly remote wildness demands self-sufficiency from all visitors to Gates of the Arctic. Wilderness survival skills are essential. There are no developed facilities in the park.



Use safe techniques for crossing streams and rivers, which can be hazardous. Protect delicate tundra and fragile lichen environments by camping only on gravel bars or



areas of hardy heath or moss plants. Watch your step: unstable clumps of tundra grasses can throw you or cause you to twist an ankle.

Alaska's Ultimate Wilderness

Few landmarks are named on topographic maps here. The dramatic title for the park comes from wilderness advocate Robert Marshall, a frequent traveler in the North Fork Koyukuk drainage from 1929 to 1939. Marshall described two peaks, Frigid Crags and Boreal Mountain, as the gates from Alaska's central Brooks Range into the arctic regions of the far north. Natural forces of wind, water, temperature, and glacial and tectonic action have sculpted a wildly varied landscape in this northernmost and east-west trending portion of the Rocky Mountains. Southerly foothills step into waves of mountains rising to elevations of 4,000 feet. These may climax in limestone or granite peaks over 7,000 feet. At the Arctic Divide the ranks reverse as the tundra stretches to the Arctic Ocean. Six national wild rivers—the Alatna, John, Kobuk, Noatak, North Fork Koyukuk, and the Tinayguk—are among the waterways transecting the park. The scene is one of remote wilderness and unpeopled distances, qualities many people seek when they decide to visit Gates of the Arctic. No trails or visitor services exist within the park. Visitors must be self-sufficient.

One Nunamiut Eskimo village, Anaktuvuk Pass, lies within the park. In the past, nomadic hunters/gatherers traveled from the forested southern slopes of the mountains to the Arctic Coast. Today, travelers see few signs of earlier inhabitants. Perpetuation of wilderness qualities is a primary goal of the park's management.

Seasons are dramatic in length and level of activity: in summer plants and animals must progress rapidly through growth and reproduction cycles before the onset of winter. Most activity ceases with the -20°F to -50°F temperatures that persist from November to March. In the pink, low light of the arctic winter, blue-gray shadows of opposing slopes delineate the white mountains. The dry climate of the interior produces little snow, but what falls endures, wrapping the land and rivers in ice and silence. As the low-riding Sun begins its warming ascent into April's sky, dogsled enthusiasts may be seen in the park. Other visitors begin arriving in mid-June, although many rivers are not yet entirely free of ice. Backpacking and river trips are the predominant activities.

The park, created to ensure the integrity of the arctic environment, contains major portions of the range and habitat of the western arctic caribou herd. Grizzly and black bear, wolf, moose, Dall sheep, wolverine, and fox are also in the park. At spring breakup, the few resident bird species are joined by migratory species from Europe, South America, Asia, tropical archipelagos, and the continental United States. Despite the variety, wildlife is widely dispersed because large areas are required to sustain life in the Arctic. Wildlife sightings may be greatly affected by the size of your party, your patterns of travel, and the weather.

Sparse black-spruce forests called taiga—from the Russian for "land of little sticks"—dot north-facing slopes and poorly drained lowlands. Boreal forests of white spruce, aspen, and birch are typically found on south-facing slopes. Near tree line, the shrub-thicket community of dwarf and resin birch, alder, and willow appears. Heath, moss, and fragile lichen make up the understory. Alpine tundra communities occur in mountainous areas and along

Photo of hunter by Ward Wells, courtesy of the Anchorage Museum of History and Art

well-drained rocky ridges. Alder thickets and tussocks often impede hiking in the Arctic. Backpackers will find both types of vegetation in valleys and on slopes; it is not unusual for backpackers to progress only five miles per day. Take your time: do not try to squeeze a 21-day arctic trip into a 14-day lower 48 trip.

The 1980 legislation that created Gates of the Arctic National Park and Gates of the Arctic National Preserve called for protection of 8.4 million acres of land. Included were mandates for insuring that the area be managed to maintain the land's wild and undeveloped character. Far-sighted provisions also included opportunities to experience solitude, to insure the environmental integrity of natural features, and to provide opportunities for wilderness recreational activities. Fish and wildlife and their habitat, cultural resources, and traditional subsistence uses were also slated for protection. With adjacent Noatak National Preserve and Kobuk Valley National Park, Gates of the Arctic comprises one of the world's largest parkland areas.

Backcountry Visitors

Gates of the Arctic, in the central Brooks Range, is a wilderness park accessible to the backcountry traveler. There are no signs, facilities, roads, or trails in the park. Travel is by foot or boat (canoe, raft, or kayak). As a visitor to this arctic wilderness, you must be well prepared and self-sufficient. In many areas of the park, it may be several days or weeks before you encounter another person. It is your responsibility to: **1** choose where to go, **2** decide how to travel, and **3** have the appropriate equipment and skills for a safe and enjoyable trip.

Preparation Obtain backcountry information by visiting our website at www.nps.gov/gaar or by contacting the Bettles Ranger Station. The backcountry information on the website addresses trip planning, bear safety, river crossings, boating safety, wildlife viewing, weather, insects, Leave No



Trace practices, the designated Wild Rivers, further reading material, commercial accommodations, guide services, outfitters, commercial air services, and air charter services. Our website is more detailed and complete than our printed material.

Choosing Where to Go Choosing where to go can be a challenge, as Gates of the Arctic is large

(2.6 times the size of Connecticut) and access is limited. Read about the park, examine maps, determine your access points, and make a plan. Park staff, air charter services, guides, or outfitters can provide information. Flexibility is the key to a successful trip. Weather can delay, by days, your flights in or out of the park. The distance you can hike in a day may vary significantly from the "typical" five miles. Do not use the map in this brochure for hiking. Use USGS topographical maps.

Getting to the Park You can charter a plane to fly you into the park from Bettles or other locations. Access points are limited by gravel bars or bodies of water on which the plane can land. Hiking from the Dalton highway is possible but limited by river crossings. Commercial air service is available to Anaktuvuk Pass, from which you can hike into the park.

Backcountry Orientation Register your trip and obtain a backcountry safety and Leave No Trace orientation from a park ranger at Bettles Ranger Station, Coldfoot Visitor Center, or Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station. Backcountry permits are not required.

Leave No Trace Please be a responsible visitor by practicing the principles of Leave No Trace.

- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Leave what you find.
- Minimize campfire impacts.
- Respect wildlife.
- Be considerate of other visitors.

Subsistence Use Local residents use the park for subsistence activities (hunting, fishing, trap-

ping, and gathering). Camps, fishnets, traps, and equipment are private property. Private land exists in the park; use restrictions may apply.

Administration Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. www.nps.gov

For More Information Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
POB 26030
Bettles, AK 99726
907-692-5494
e-mail: gaar_visitor_information@nps.gov
www.nps.gov/gaar

Bettles Ranger Station
907-692-5494
June through September: Open daily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. including holidays.
October through May: Open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. except holidays.

Coldfoot Visitor Center
907-678-5209
Open daily Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station
POB 21102
Anaktuvuk Pass, AK 99721
907-661-3520
Open seasonally.

©NPS: 2002—491-280/40230 Reprint 2002
Printed on recycled paper.

Gates of the Arctic

Gates of the Arctic National Park
Gates of the Arctic National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

