

## Introduction

The Denali Highway is often overlooked by motorists, yet it offers some of the most spectacular scenery and recreational opportunities in Alaska. For those with a heart for adventure and a little extra time, the highway is an historic and archaeological glimpse of the Last Frontier – wild landscapes in all directions. With planning, an abundance of camping, fishing, wildlife viewing, and hiking opportunities can be yours.

## What to Do

**Camping:** Permits are not required for non-commercial camping on BLM-managed public lands. All camping is limited to 14 days within a 60-day period. BLM campgrounds fill on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Hiking:** Bring topographic maps. Most trails are unmarked. Rubber boots are recommended for crossing wet spots.

**Fishing:** Lake trout and arctic grayling inhabit many lakes and streams. Purchase an Alaska fishing license and view sportfishing regulations at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game website at <http://www.adfg.state.ak.us>, or buy in person from license agents throughout the state, including stores in Glennallen, Delta Junction, Tok, and Cantwell.

**Sightseeing:** The entire route presents outstanding views of the Alaska Range, boreal vegetation, glacial features, and wildlife. Look for caribou, moose, fox, marmot, wolf, ptarmigan, trumpeter swan, and other waterfowl.

**Bicycling:** The Denali Highway and trails in the area can be rough and dusty with wet, boggy areas and sharp rocks. Mileposts and many trailheads are not marked. Come prepared with adequate maps, spare parts and repair equipment.

**Canoeing/Floating:** Tangle Lakes and the upper Nenana, Delta, and Gulkana rivers offer various boating opportunities. Refer to BLM brochures *Delta Wild and Scenic River*; *Gulkana Wild and Scenic River*; and *Gulkana Wild and Scenic River Floater's Guide*.

## Travel Tips

The Denali Highway, 135 miles long, connects Paxson on the Richardson Highway with Cantwell Junction on the Parks Highway. A loop trip from Fairbanks is 436 miles and a loop trip from Anchorage is about 600 miles. Allow several days.

The highway is generally open from mid-May to October 1. Do not attempt to travel the road at any other time, as snowdrifts can block your way. The road is paved for the first 21 miles west of Paxson and for three miles east of Cantwell Junction. The rest of the road is gravel. When driving on gravel, SLOW DOWN, especially when passing another vehicle. Just one small flying rock can damage a windshield – and it could be yours! The maximum recommended speed on the highway is 35 mph.

Before venturing on this road, be sure your vehicle is in good working order. Check your spare tire, and make sure you have a jack and lug wrench. Carry extra water and sufficient food for an emergency situation. You cannot predict how long it will take to get help if you become stranded. Limited services are available 20 to 55 miles apart along the Denali Highway. Cell phone coverage is limited. Do not depend on a cell phone for your safety.

Expect to encounter subsistence hunting and harvesting activities along the highway from the beginning of August until the road closes.

For more information about the Denali Highway, obtain a copy of the \$10 book *Rocks, Ridges & Glaciers: A Geologic Tour Along the Denali Highway* from:

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# Denali Highway

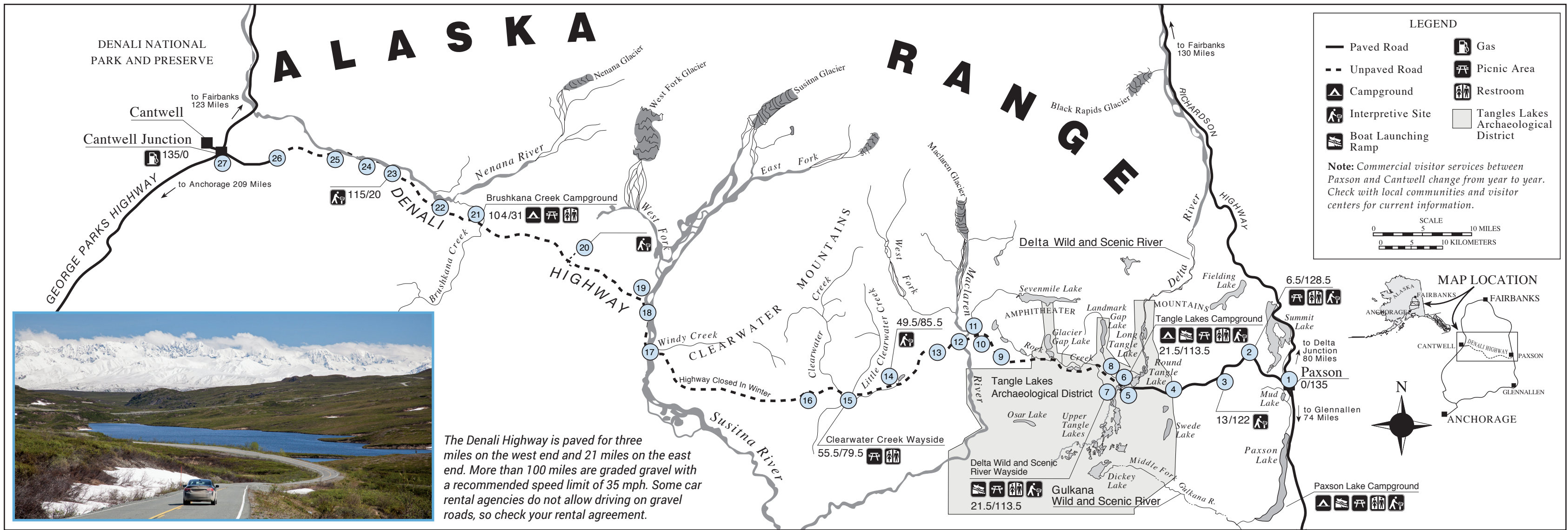
## Points of Interest



## Map & Guide



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



The Denali Highway is paved for three miles on the west end and 21 miles on the east end. More than 100 miles are graded gravel with a recommended speed limit of 35 mph. Some car rental agencies do not allow driving on gravel roads, so check your rental agreement.

## Points of Interest

**Note:** Points of interest are listed in numeric order traveling east to west. Approximate milepost (MP) numbers are also listed for travel in either direction. For travel east to west, set your odometer at 0 at Paxson and use the first set of MP numbers. For travel west to east, set your odometer at 0 just as you turn onto the Denali Highway at Cantwell and use the second set of MP numbers.

**1 Paxson, on Richardson Highway**  
MP 0.0/135

Paxson Lodge was closed in 2014. The nearest services are at Meir's Lake Lodge, MP 170 Richardson Highway, or Tangle River Inn, MP 20 Denali Highway.

**2 Alaska Range/Glacial Geology**  
MP 6.5/128.5

This State of Alaska-maintained wayside with picnic area, vault toilet and interpretive panels offers sweeping views to the north of one of the state's greatest mountain ranges,

the Alaska Range. Several peaks in view have elevations greater than 12,000 feet. This range extends in a great arc from Cook Inlet through the Denali massif (a principal mountain mass) and on to the Canada border, a distance of 650 miles. The Gulkana Glacier, seen from this point, was formed from the buildup of snowfields high in the Alaska Range. Layers of snow accumulated year after year and compacted into ice. As the glacier became heavier, it began to move downslope, scraping and gouging the rock. This action, called glacial erosion, contributed to the rugged, jagged appearance of the Alaska Range and created the long U-shaped valleys you can see from the road.

**3 Wrangell Mountain Viewpoint**  
MP 13.0/122.0

The Wrangell Mountains are about 78 air miles to the southeast. Mount Sanford (16,237 ft) is the prominent

peak on the left, Mount Drum (12,010 ft) is on the right. In the center is Mount Wrangell (14,163 ft), which occasionally releases steam. It is the northernmost active volcano on the Pacific Rim. Look for the Denali Highway orientation sign on the south side of the road.

**4 Tangle Lakes Archaeological District (east boundary)**  
MP 16.0/119.0

More than 500 archaeological sites indicate that ancient peoples inhabited this area for at least 10,000 years. Because this district has some of the densest concentrations of archaeological resources in the North American subarctic, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. To protect these prehistoric reminders of the past for further study, off-road vehicle travel is limited to designated roads and trails from this point west to MP 38. Collection of artifacts is illegal.

**5 Pavement Break** MP 21.0/114.0  
Pavement ends/begins.

**6 Tangle Lakes Campground**  
MP 21.5/113.5

This BLM-managed campground, equipped with water pumps, vault toilets, a boat launch, and 45 campsites on a first come, first served basis rests amid a series of long, narrow lakes known as the Tangle Lakes. The lakes are connected by the Tangle River and form the headwaters of the Delta River. The campground boat launch provides access to the lakes and is the designated put-in for the popular 30 river-mile Delta Wild and Scenic River float trip (refer to the BLM brochure Delta Wild and Scenic River). A 1/2-mile non-motorized trail at the campground offers expanding views of the river corridor, lakes and campground.

**7 Delta Wild and Scenic River Wayside** MP 21.5/113.5

This BLM wayside is for day-use only (no camping). It is equipped with a picnic area and vault toilets. The boat launch provides access and parking for extended wilderness canoe trips in the Upper Tangle Lakes system to the south, where numerous lakes of all sizes provide important wildlife habitats.

**8 Landmark Gap View**  
MP 22.5/112.5

Landmark Gap is a glacially scoured cut in the mountains that formed during an ice age more than 10,000 years ago. The gap was a caribou migration route and a favorite Alaska Native hunting area in centuries past. The Nelchina caribou herd still migrates through this area. The mountain peaks visible through the gap are McGinnis Peak (11,400 ft) and Mount Moffit (13,020 ft).

**9 Alaska Range and Maclaren River Viewpoint** MP 37.0/98.0

You are now at an elevation of about 4,000 feet, just a short distance from Maclaren Summit (4,086 ft), the second highest highway summit in Alaska. Stop and enjoy the panoramic view of the Alaska Range and the Maclaren River. Mount Hayes (13,832 ft) and the Maclaren River and Glacier are dominant features, but you may also see Aurora Peak, Mount Shand and Mount Geist. The Maclaren River flows from the Maclaren Glacier south to the Susitna River and then into Cook Inlet just west of Anchorage.

Vegetation at this elevation is low-growing alpine tundra. Abundant wildflowers bloom here during the short Alaska summer (June and July). Look for pikas, ground squirrels and ptarmigan.

## Points of Interest, *continued from previous page*

### 10 Palsa MP 41.0/94.0

(no parking spot) Road construction in 1957 cut into the partially collapsed palsa on the south side of the road and initiated its deterioration. A palsa is a small dome-like frost mound, usually 10 to 20 feet high, containing peat. Closer examination reveals individual ice and peat layers typical of a palsa.

### 11 Kettle Lakes MP 41.5/93.5

Several small lakes and depressions in this area were formed when chunks of ice broke off of retreating glaciers and were buried in the glacial debris. The ice eventually melted, leaving circular-shaped depressions called kettles.

### 12 Maclaren Glacier Viewpoint, Maclaren River Bridge MP 42.0/93.0

The Maclaren Glacier is about 16 miles north.

### 13 Crazy Notch MP 46.0/89.0

The Crazy Notch was formed by the actions of ice and water. The Maclaren Glacier once flowed through the Maclaren River Valley and deposited a lateral moraine – a buildup of rocks on the sides of the glacier. Crazy Notch was created when a glacial stream cut through the moraine. The notch acts as a natural snow catchment, closing the Denali Highway in winter with huge snowdrifts.

### 14 Waterfowl Lakes MP 49.5/85.5

These lakes and ponds are excellent summer habitat for many species of waterfowl and shorebirds. Look for diving and dabbling ducks, geese, grebes, and shorebirds. You may also spot bald eagles, moose, caribou, beaver, and fox in the vicinity. Look for the interpretive sign on the north side of the road.

### 15 Clearwater Creek Wayside/Outhouse MP 55.5/79.5

### 16 Eskers MP 59.0/76.0

You are driving on an esker, a sinuous ridge of silt, sand, gravel, and cobbles that were carried and deposited by a stream that flowed within the glacier, confined by walls of ice. When the glacier



*Horseback riding is one of several ways to enjoy the views along the Denali Highway.*

melted away, these deposits were left as elongated mounds. Eskers along this highway are some of North America's most outstanding examples of this type of glacial feature.

### 17 Susitna River MP 79.5/55.5

The Susitna River is a major drainage system in the Denali region. The river flows south from the Susitna Glacier and the Alaska Range, eventually turning west through the Talkeetna Mountains and then south to Cook Inlet. The Susitna is not floatable because of Devil's Canyon downstream.

The historic Valdez Creek Mine is on the east side of the Susitna River. While the historic mine is now closed and the land reclaimed, small-scale mining continues further up the drainage.

### 18 Valdez Creek Mine Viewpoint MP 85.0/50.0

Look across the Susitna River to the east for a view of the Valdez Creek gold mine reclamation in the foothills of the Clearwater Mountains. Originally discovered by the Peter Monahan party in 1903, the mine produced about 495,000 troy ounces of gold before it closed in 1995.

### 19 Alaska Range Viewpoint MP 85.5/49.5

Watch for a small hill on the north side of the highway. The slight climb for about 600 yards is well worth the effort as it rewards you with a breathtaking view of Mount Deborah (12,339 ft), Mount Hess (11,940 ft) and the Susitna River valley.

### 20 Alaska Range Interpretive Sign MP 95.0/40.0 (gravel "road" on north side of highway)

### 21 Brushkana Creek Campground MP 104.0/31.0

BLM campground with fire pits, water, vault toilets, trail, and 22 campsites that are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

### 22 Taiga MP 111.5/23.5

At northern latitudes, there is a short, cool growing season followed by a long, cold winter. Trees that survive under these harsh conditions have stunted growth caused by permafrost, climatic conditions, elevation exposure, and other factors. These boreal forests, called taiga, are dominated by spruce trees.

### 23 Denali Highway Orientation Sign MP 115.0/20.0

### 24 Nenana River MP 116.5/18.5

(gravel turnout) The Nenana Glacier is the primary source of this glacial river. The river flows into the Tanana River west of Fairbanks. The Tanana River then flows into the Yukon River and out to the Bering Sea. The Nenana is not good for fishing because it carries a heavy glacial silt load during the summer, but its whitewater rapids make it increasingly popular for river running.

### 25 Denali View MP 124.0/11.0 to 130.5/4.5

During clear weather, this section of road has excellent views of North America's highest peak. Approximately 80 percent of Mt. McKinley's 20,310-foot elevation rises above the surrounding landscape, making its base-to-summit rise greater than that of Mount Everest.

### 26 Pavement Break MP 132.0/3.0

Pavement begins/ends.

### 27 Junction with Parks Highway MP 135.0/0.0

The community of Cantwell is approximately two miles to the west.