

Kennecott-McCarthy Visitors Guide

*Local knowledge for travel in Alaska's
Greater Copper country*

Kennecott
McCarthy
Chitina
Kenny Lake
Copper Center
Glennallen
Valdez



2021



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Thanks for your interest in Kennecott and McCarthy (KMXY), located in the traditional territory of the Ahtna Athabascan people who've inhabited the area since time immemorial. Situated at the center of Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the largest park in the country, it's a worthy destination, contiguous with Kluane National Park in Yukon Territory, Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska, and British Columbia's Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park. Altogether, they comprise one of the largest protected areas on the planet, part of a 24-million-acre World Heritage Site.

The wild landscapes and fascinating history of the Wrangell-St. Elias area are deservedly renowned. This national park was established not only to protect these features, but also to honor the traditions of people living within the park who depend on local resources. About a million acres of land inside park boundaries are privately owned by individuals, Native corporations, the State of Alaska, and other parties. The area is rich with superlative natural features and a deep sense of place.

The greater Copper River Valley provides a gorgeous context for Kennecott and McCarthy. Take your time and savor all that Eastern Alaska has to offer.

Like all businesses based in KMXY, this Visitors Guide is locally-grown. I'm glad to connect my friends and neighbors here and in nearby communities with independent travelers from Alaska and beyond, especially after the lingering pandemic disruption.

I hope this edition leads you to memorable experiences and new friends. Safe and happy trails, and see you in the Wrangells.



Jeremy Pataky
Publisher



Kennecott-McCarthy Visitors Guide is published by Overstory Consulting and available at widespread distribution sites throughout the Copper River valley and beyond, and online, compliments of our advertiser-partners. Let them know we sent you! Available by mail with paid shipping. Download the entire guide for free on our website and click through to our advertisers.

Top: A view of Kennecott, photo by Teresa Houze. Above: photo by Tamara Harper. Cover: Kennecott at dusk, photo by Jeremy Pataky.

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Ad sales: kmxxy.guide@gmail.com or 244-7717. Maps: Kristin Link.

KMXYvisitorsguide.com



Tip: If your itinerary includes Anchorage or the Kenai Peninsula, consider riding the ferry between Valdez and Whittier. Drive your vehicle aboard and enjoy the marine environment. You could drive out from Anchorage, for example, visit the Wrangells, continue on to Valdez, and ferry to Whittier. From there, you're just a 50-scenic-miles drive from where you started. Call 1-800-642-0066 or find the Alaska Marine Highway System online.

How many miles to McCarthy?

<i>from</i>	
Chitina	60
Kenny Lake	88
Copper Center	111
Glennallen	125
Valdez	178
Tok	264
Glacier View	216
Anchorage	314
Fairbanks	374



Spectacular views of the western Wrangell Mountains greet eastbound travelers outside Glennallen. L to R: Mt. Sanford (16,237'), Mt. Drum (12,010'), and Mt. Wrangell (14,163'). Mt. Blackburn (16,390') is out of frame to the right. Photo: Jeremy Pataky.

Getting to McCarthy

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Drive | From Anchorage, drive north out of town. Go east on the Glenn Highway to Glennallen, south on the Richardson Highway toward Valdez, then east on the Edgerton Highway to Chitina. Continue east on the McCarthy Road. Allow a minimum of seven hours to drive from Anchorage.

More rental car companies have begun to allow their vehicles on the road, but check your company's policy. The McCarthy Road, one of only two that lead into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, begins in Chitina. About 40 of its 59 miles are gravel. It's maintained by the State of Alaska, not NPS. See the "The McCarthy Road" section for more info.

Shuttle | Two van shuttles connect Anchorage, Glennallen, Chitina, and McCarthy. Reservations required. Also, some private van tour companies include McCarthy on multiday package trips, like

Wrangell-St. Elias Charters

Shuttles between the airport in Anchorage and McCarthy, and anywhere in between (Palmer, Sutton, Sheep Mt, Eureka, Glennallen, Copper Center, Kenny Lake, and Chitina)

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Get Up and Go and Great Land Adventures.

Fly | Wrangell Mountain Air (back cover) operates scheduled, daily flights between Chitina and McCarthy. You can drive, hitch, bike, shuttle, or float to Chitina. From there, leave your car (if you have one) at the airstrip and fly to McCarthy. Copper Valley Air Service (above) operates passenger and mail service between Gulkana, just north of Glennallen, and

McCarthy. This “mail plane” option runs each Monday and Thursday, weather permitting. Charter service available seven days per week. Using their mail partner, it’s easy to fly between Anchorage and McCarthy with a transfer. Finally, if you’re a private pilot with your own plane, the world’s your oyster. McCarthy has a large State of Alaska-maintained airstrip and the park features numerous bush strips, including some with public use cabins.

Human Power | Many have reached the Kennicott Valley under their own human power. The most common method is bicycling, but competent trekkers conclude wilderness trips in McCarthy and Kennecott. KAWY

Copper Valley Air Service delivers the mail twice per week, weather permitting, and provides passenger service between Anchorage, Gulkana, McCarthy, and May Creek. Photo: Jeremy Pataky.



Around the Copper River Region

Glennallen is named after Captain E.F. Glenn and Lt. Henry T. Allen, early leaders in the U.S. military exploration of the Copper River basin. Allen was a descendant of Reuben Sanford, namesake of Mt. Sanford, a major volcano in the western Wrangell Mountains all named by Allen.

Glennallen lies west of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Four Wrangell Mts. peaks are visible in clear weather: Sanford, Drum, Wrangell, and Blackburn.

KCAM790 broadcasts weather, road info, and “Caribou Clatters,” a billboard service that relays messages between people with no other way to communicate at 7AM, noon, 5 & 9 PM.

The Greater Copper Valley Visitor’s Information Center is located at the junction of the Richardson and Glenn Highways.

Glennallen’s the supply hub of the Copper River region, with groceries, schools, medical care, DMV and other governmental offices, a library, and more. Cross Road Medical Center provides urgent care.

The Glenn Highway, connecting Anchorage and the Richardson, was completed in 1945.



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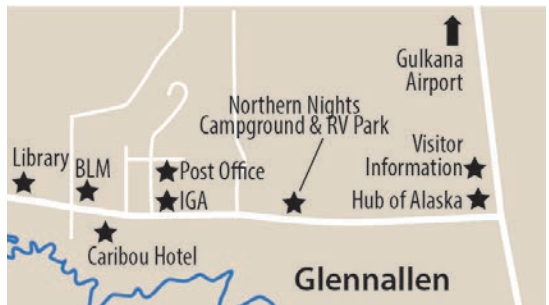


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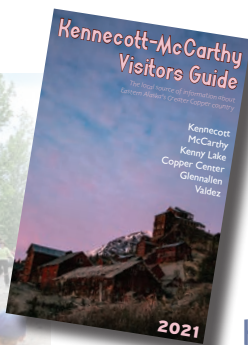


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Copper Center is located on a loop road off the Richardson Highway, Mile 100, just one mile west of the confluence of the Klutina and Copper Rivers.

Copper Center's origins connect with the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, when prospectors sought an all-American route to Dawson City (so they could bypass Canadian law enforcement outside Skagway/Dyea). At that time, the Ahtna had summer fish camps on the Copper River and winter villages throughout the region. In 1905, a school was built in Copper Center, which eventually attracted Native families to town.

The population now is around 450, including the nearby village, Kluti Kaah.



Businesses include RV parks, river boat charters, lodging and dining, gift shops, and tour companies. The **George I. Ashby Memorial Museum** is located on the loop road next to the Copper Center Lodge.

Kenny Lake, pop. 400, is located from Mile 1 to 17 on the Edgerton Highway and mile 1 to 8 of the Old Edgerton, and was one of the last farming communities settled in the country.

The Ahtna people were the area's first inhabitants. Settlers arrived in the early 1900s along the new road connecting Chitina to the interior. Ina and Guy Simmons, originally from Kansas City, MO, ran the Kenny Lake Roadhouse for a decade starting around 1920.

When the copper mines closed in 1938, Chitina and Kenny Lake experienced an exodus. A few people remained living a rural lifestyle.

During the 50s, the community grew. The state began converting the CRNW railroad corridor into a road in 1960 while also completing major upgrades to the Edgerton. The new highway opened in 1964. In

1971, it was paved as far as the Lower Ton-sina River. In 1991, the pavement reached all the way to Chitina.

The Alaska Homestead Act brought more settlers into the area in the 1960s through its end in the 80s. Folks were expected to build cabins and live on the land for at least six months per year for five years to "prove up," thus becoming the legal land owners. Many then subdivided and sold property parcels.

Many locals still raise farm animals and grow hay and vegetables. There's a public school and library, a feed and seed business, general stores, lodging and dining options, and more.

Well water is scarce for much of the area; most residents haul water from community wells or have it delivered.

The Kenny Lake Fair always draws a crowd.



CHECK BEFORE YOUR TREK

Did you know you can stay in the know on all DOT road construction projects, including those on travel routes to McCarthy? See work that's happening on the way to McCarthy, as well as other projects across Alaska. Plan your trek ahead of time at AlaskaNavigator.org.

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Chitina (“CHIT-nuh”) offers a post office, food, gas, a hotel, B&Bs, alcohol, light groceries, and a post office. It’s located at the end of the Edgerton Highway, which branches off the Richardson Highway between Glennallen and Thompson Pass. The McCarthy Road starts at Chitina and leads into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Chitina’s airstrip serves the backcountry and McCarthy through Wrangell Mountain Air.

Chitina’s heyday coincided with the operation of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway, built to link Kennecott mines to market. It hauled copper ore and supplies between the mines and Cordova. Chitina provided an intermediate stop for trains and passengers. Trains, stagecoaches, dog sleds, and steamboats all passed through Chitina during its boom years, 1910-1938.

The Chitina NPS Ranger Station (823-2205), a 1910 log cabin, is located at the end of the paved Edgerton Highway near the beginning of the McCarthy Road, about an hour from the Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center and park headquarters near Copper Center. It provides exhibits and info and the road, hikes, fishing opportunities, and more.

The station is decorated with historic photos featuring Chitina. It was constructed to house J.C. Martin, manager of the Ed S. Orr Stage company, whose initials are legible on the ceiling. The home was deemed “one of the neatest and most substantial log cabin cottages in Alaska.” Locals rehabilitated it in 1991-1992.

Today, dipnetting, fish wheeling, and boat fishing near Chitina attract AK residents in droves (relatively speaking—it’s nothing like the Kenai, for example) each summer from as far away as Fairbanks

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and Anchorage. Copper River reds (sock-eye) are famous across the world. This far upriver it’s strictly a personal use and subsistence salmon fishery. These upstream waters feed residents well. Commercially harvested Copper River salmon are caught down in the delta. Licensed nonresidents still have plenty of fishing options, including lakes near Chitina and along the McCarthy Road, the Klutina and Gulkana Rivers, saltwater fishing in Valdez, and more.



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Chitina marks the last chance to get gas—make sure you have enough to get out and back (120 miles round trip). As you head out, look upstream from the bridge to see some remnant fish-wheels—most got wrecked in recent fall floods, and the shifting Kotsina R. complicated access. Downstream, view the

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confluence of the Copper R. and Chitina R., and perhaps some dipnetters.

Half of Chitina's 100 or so residents are Ahtna—Native descendants of the famed people who appear in white gold miners' and explorers' journals. Chitina's original Native settlement was Taral, on the trade route south to the coast. The Ahtna were expert traders.

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Valdez (val-DEEZ, not val-DEZ) is located on the shores of Prince William Sound, 175 scenic miles from McCarthy.

In 1897, the Port of Valdez was a launch point for gold rushers heading inland. It bustled in the first two decades of the last century. Mining and shipping were staples, along with fishing, fox farming, and tourism.

On March 27, 1964, the infamous Good Friday Earthquake struck 45 miles west of Valdez. Lasting over four minutes, it caused underwater landslides and tsunamis. One washed away the waterfront, drowning 30 people. Over 114 were killed in Alaska by the quake.

The Valdez townsite was condemned for unstable ground. In 1967, three years after the quake, the entire town was moved four miles east to its present location. 52 buildings were moved. The rest were razed. The route into the old site is just past the road to the airport.

During the 70s, the Port of Valdez became a vital link for the TransAlaska Pipeline, which terminates at a 1,000 acre marine terminal there. Perhaps that made

Topping out at 2,678' in Thompson Pass, the Richardson highway winds through the Chugach Mountains and some of Alaska's most stunning scenery. Stop often to view sights like Worthington Glacier (above) as well as features of the built environment like the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and pumpstations, snowfences, and electrical lines routing hydro power from the plant in Valdez to the Copper River Valley.

up for losing out on the contest with Cordova around the turn of the century to serve as the rail link for Kennecott.

Today, the population is about 4,500 people who work for the city, the oil industry, winter and summer tourism, fishing, or transportation and shipping. It's a fantastic place to fish for halibut and salmon and to backcountry ski and ice climb in the winter. Sea kayaking and helicopter flights are great. Wildlife abounds.

Check out the Valdez Visitors Information Center and the Valdez Museum and Historical Archives located downtown. (And the Potato restaurant!)



Kayaking among Columbia Glacier icebergs in Eastern Prince William Sound out of Valdez.
Photo: Corey Belt.

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Glacier View is the local name for everything between Glenn Highway mileposts 88 and 117. This stretch between Chickaloon, below and west, and Eureka, above and east, is home year-round to about 150 people.

Glacier View has a Baptist church and a K-12 school that had 40 kids enrolled in 2019. Victory Bible Camp has operated youth summer camps since 1947. The first lodge in this area was Sheep Mountain Lodge, at Mile 113.5.

Today, Glacier View has a handful of lodges, restaurants, campgrounds, guide and tour services, and a zipline. Folks enjoy hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, and berry picking. The area's main attraction is the 26-mile long Matanuska Gl., source of the same-named river that drivers (and some flyers) trace between here and Palmer. The private Glacier Park Road at mile 102 provides access. Guided hikes are available year-round.

The secret of Glacier View, though, is the miles of historic trails leading into the beautiful Talkeetna Mountains high-country. During hunting season, they buzz with ATVs. In winter, the community grooms ski trails.

Two hours out of Anchorage, Glacier View is a photogenic spot, and a great transition zone for folks going to or coming from McCarthy.

Blackburn Heritage Foundation

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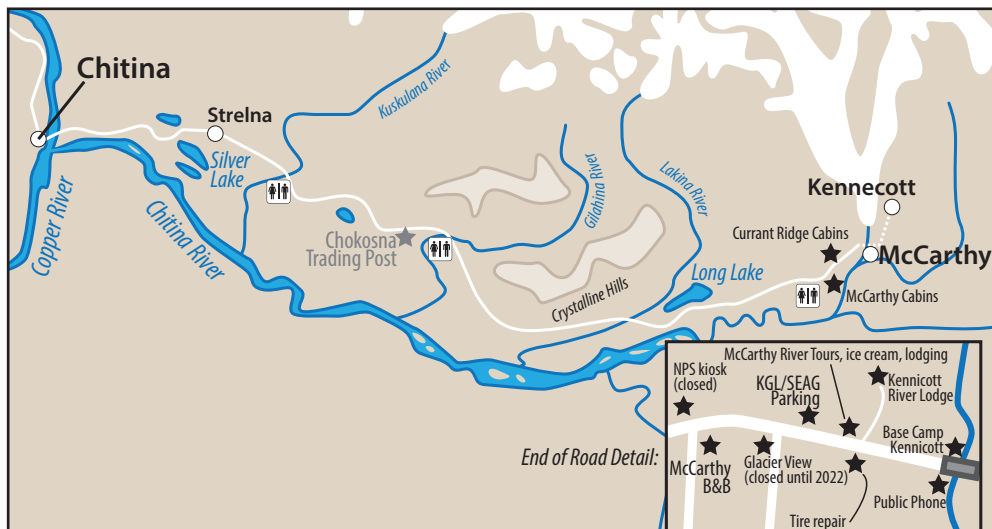
Few roads are as storied as the McCarthy Road, one of only two roads entering Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. It offers unrivaled scenery, vast and varied wilderness, independent and neighborly folk, and adventure. It skirts the base of the Wrangells, gaining about 1,000 feet between Chitina (500 feet) and its end near McCarthy. The road ends in the center of the 13.2 million acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, but the road itself and much adjacent land is owned by the State, Ahtna Native Corp., and individuals.

History | The road's 59 miles connect the Copper and Kennicott Rivers, roughly following part of the historic 196-mile-long Copper River and Northwestern Railway (CRNW) railroad grade. Constructed between 1908 and 1911 through a herculean effort comparable to the construction of the Alcan Highway or the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline, the CRNW railway ran from Kennecott to O'Brien Creek outside Chitina. It depart-

ed the contemporary road system from there, following the Copper downstream all the way to the port of Cordova, on Prince William Sound. The last train to make that journey arrived there on November 11, 1938.

After the railway was abandoned, most of its rails and ties were eventually removed. The corridor was turned over to the State of Alaska, which placed some culverts and created a road in the 1960s. In 1971, a new bridge was constructed over the Copper River and the rail bed was covered with gravel, creating the McCarthy Road. It has been dramatically improved since then; 18 miles were even paved in 2014. Its reputation has also improved, though not on pace with its condition.

The Experience | While the road is usually in good shape now, the weather, maintenance schedules, use, and more affect conditions. Services are limited and cell reception varies. The main variable that will affect your likelihood





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of a hassle-free trip is your speed—take it easy, especially as you approach and round curves. Keep it under 35 mph. Those who go slow see more, including waves and smiles. Those who push it get flats and looks. Mind on-coming vehicles and show respect for fellow drivers. Allow at least two hours from Chitina to the end of the road under decent conditions. Keep your speed down and don't push it.

Make sure your spare and jack are functional, but drive in a way that minimizes the chances you'll need them. Rarely, old railroad spikes still churn up in the gravel, especially when the road gets graded. They're not as common as they once were. Buckets of spikes have been collected over the years.

Most travelers experience the road without incident. Everything from RVs, sedans, and motorcycles to large box trucks and heavy equipment are common on the road in summer. You will not see any tour buses, though—the largest tour vehicles on the road are vans. Your fellow travelers are independent-minded people who've done themselves well by getting off the beaten track.

Enjoy the drive. It's one of the last best roads in America and leads to a stunning place of natural, historical, and cultural import. Welcome, enjoy, and stay a while. **KARLY**



Flat tire near McCarthy?

If you have a tire in need of repair at the end of the road, remove it and drop it off at the marked lot on the south side of the road about a half mile from the footbridge. Kaleb Rowland picks up flats with pre-payments daily (usually by 3 PM), repairs them off-site, and returns them, repaired, around 5 PM. The tire kiosk has detailed instructions on what to do to ensure your tire gets fixed. Cash only. The store in McCarthy has an ATM, though we recommend that you bring cash with you.

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Creeks and Rivers

Two kinds of streams flow in the area. McCarthy Creek and the Kennicott River represent one type; much of their water comes from melting glacier ice. They carry a lot of silt and “rock flour” as a result. The other type consists of clear-water streams originating from snow melt or springs. Examples include Clear Creek, National Creek, Bonanza Creek, and Jumbo Creek. They run clear year-round, unless erosions from heavy rain or peak spring snowmelt muddies the water.

Glacial streams are subject to occasional floods. Snow and icemelt peaks in July and can turn streams into torrents. The Kennicott R. is subject to an annual outburst flood from glacier-dammed Hidden Creek Lake located along the west margin of the Kennicott Gl. ten miles upstream from the terminus. This outburst flood (called a **jökulhlaup**) usually occurs sometime in July, though it has become more sporadic, often resulting in exceptionally high water (and spontaneous footbridge celebrations). McCarthy Creek, because it traverses the unstable landscape of a long valley downstream from its glacier, often carries a lot of non-glacial sediment. The head of McCarthy Creek valley is a convergence zone for precipitation that can generate destructive floods from heavy rain.

Campers near streams should keep in mind how water levels can rise suddenly

and without warning. Silty water is poorly suited for drinking, but it can be used by collecting it in a container and waiting for sediment to settle out.

Thanks to local geology, the clear-water streams carry “hard” water with a substantial dissolved mineral content that precipitates as scale in the bottom of teakettles. Nearly all the nearby clear-water streams cross private land whose residents use them for domestic water. Please avoid polluting these streams. KMWV



Top: High water in the Kennicott River during the July 2016 jökulhlaup, viewed from the east end of the footbridge at the end of the McCarthy Road, looking west toward Fireweed Mt. and Base Camp Kennicott. Above: The braided Nizina River viewed from a Wrangell Mountain Air flight. Photos by Jeremy Pataky.

McCarthy Road Milepost Notes



*Higher mileposts are closer to McCarthy.
Directions assume one is driving west to east.*

Mile 0 | Chitina wayside: this paved pull-out, with vault toilets and exhibit panels, is the start of the McCarthy Road. Beyond, the road goes through a narrow gap known locally as the “railroad cut.” It was a tunnel, later altered into an open road cut.

0.4-1 | Small pullouts with views of the Copper R. and Chitina R. confluence. The Copper is the only waterway that cuts through the Chugach Mountains that arc across southcentral Alaska for over 200 miles. However, the Copper is actually smaller than the Chitina at the confluence. The Chitina does carry more water year-round, though it’s considered the Copper’s tributary. Even though the Chitina drains a smaller area than the Copper, it gets more runoff due to greater precipitation in its watershed.

The entire **Copper River watershed** drains approximately 24,000 square miles. Much of this area lies within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. About 3,500 square miles, or 17% of the drainage basin, is covered by glaciers. Because of this influence, high water in the Copper River typically occurs not during the snow melt of spring, but during summer

hot spells that cause rapid ice melt.

1.5 | As you drive over the Copper River, see the confluence of the Copper and Chitina R. downstream. After the bridge, the road becomes gravel. The large snowy mountain visible to the north is volcanic **Mount Drum** (12,010’), part of the Wrangell Mountains. The Copper and Chitina carry a great deal of suspended sediment, but very little dissolved sediment—they’re dirty, but not polluted. Millions of tons of natural sediment, mostly silt and clay, flow downstream each year. Muddy waters preclude permanent habitation for most fish, but do accommodate migrating full grown fish en route to clear-water spawning beds and juveniles running down to the sea each year. The muddy waters also allow state residents to successfully salmon fish with dipnets and fishwheels, which don’t really work in clear water.

1.6 | Immediately after the bridge on the right side of the road is the **Copper River Campground**. This primitive campground has a dozen sites, picnic tables, fire pits, and vault toilets. On the left side of the road is the Copper River and the **Kotsina River delta**. The NPS has an easement here where you can access and view the Copper River. This can be a decent place to see Alaskans harvesting salmon when the fish run. Note the bright deposits of volcanic material in the Kotsina River bluffs.

2-2.5 | See the **Kotsina**, a moderate tributary of the Copper River, fed by glaciers draining southward from Mt. Wrangell. Bright debris deposited by volcanic flows

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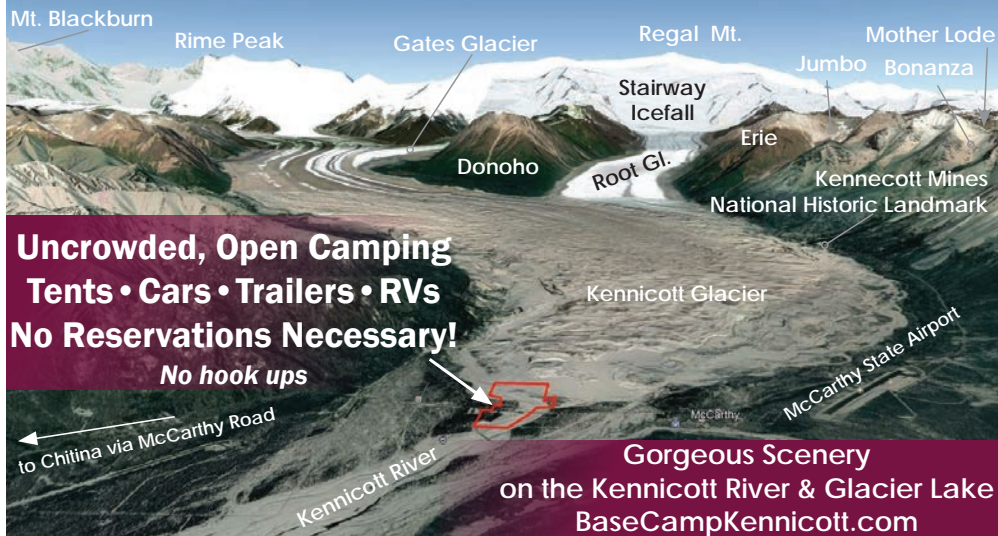
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are exposed south of the road and in the Kotsina River bluffs a mile to the north.

5-5.4 | Rocks poorly exposed on the left side of the road are basalt and greenstone of the Nicolai Greenstone rock unit, common in the Wrangell Mountains and the source of copper mined near Kennecott. As you continue, you'll see limestone also exposed on the north side of the road. Several small pullouts offer nice views of the Chitina River and Chugach Mountains to the south.

The glacier-fed Chitina is a classic example of a **braided river**. Streams throughout the world exhibit three basic channel patterns: straight, which is uncommon in large streams; meandering, which consists of many curves and bends; and braided channels. The braided chan-

nel pattern tends to develop in rivers that carry a lot of sand and gravel, have fairly steep slopes, and frequent fluctuations in water level. Many braided rivers flow in this region. Braided rivers are characterized by dividing and re-uniting channels and by numerous islands and gravel bars.

In the area visible here, the Chitina drops ~13 feet per mile; steep for such a large stream. Glaciers load the stream with sediment ranging from fine clay to boulders. Weather patterns cause flow variations—the river rises during warm and/or wet weather and drops during cold and/or dry weather. Consequently, much of the sediment being transported to the sea is temporarily stored as islands or bars of gravel, sand, and mud along the Chitina R. If you happen to view the



river after several hot days, most of the islands and bars will be flooded.

10 | Strelna Volunteer Fire Department. Nearby, a short trail leads to Strelna Lake, with silver salmon, kokanee, and rainbow trout.

11 | Silver Lake—rainbow trout.

12 | Sculpin Lake—rainbow trout, silver salmon, and kokanee.

17 | Kuskulana Bridge spans a 238' gorge. This is a one-lane bridge. Watch for oncoming traffic. The 600' steel bridge was redecked in 1988 and guard rails were installed. Vault toilets on its east side were provided by NPS in 2007. A spectacular achievement, the bridge was constructed during the winter of 1910. It was the only railroad bridge in this area constructed of steel girders that span a canyon, as opposed to those where timber pilings were driven into streambeds. The bridge is supported primarily by the metamorphic bedrock of the inner gorge rather than the thick layer of glacial gravels near the surface. The Kuskulana's muddy water comes from glaciers on the southern and western slopes of Mt. Blackburn.

20-21 | Shallow permafrost affects vegetation and causes poor drainage. This is a good place to consider the challenge of

road construction and maintenance in areas of permafrost, muskeg, and swamps.

26 | Views of Mt. Blackburn to the north, weather permitting.

26.5-8 | Chokosna Trading Post and Chokosna River. Clear waters support salmon spawning beds.

29 | Gilahina River & Gilahina Trestle Wayside. The impressive ruin of a railroad trestle looms over the road. Near its base, you'll cross a small bridge built in 1990 that spans the Gilahina River, which runs clear, like the Chokosna, instead of silty. Vault toilets courtesy of NPS. This wooden trestle was originally 890 feet long and 90 feet high, required one-half million board feet of timber, and was completed in eight days in the winter of 1911. Due to the rugged landscape, over 15% of the entire railway was built on trestles like this.

34.7 | Crystalline Hills Trail, an easy 2.5 mile loop north of the road. The hills are composed mostly of gneiss and gabbro, with some light colored marble on some lower slopes. Dall sheep.

44.5 | Lakina River (LACK-in-awe) bridge. Packrafters occasionally take out of the river here and hitch rides.

45.2-47.5 | Three-mile-long Long Lake



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is very important to Copper River salmon. Each year, ~18,000 sockeye salmon muscled up the silty Copper and Chitina Rivers and spawn here. They enter the lake as late as September and spawn through April. Glacial till and gravels deposited by ancient glaciers and streams blanket the slopes around the lake. Large pullout on east end of the lake.

47.9 | View remnants of a CRNW trestle across inflow streams.

55 | **Forestry pullout.** Toilets.

56.5 | **McCarthy Cabins** turn, south.

56.7 | **Currant Ridge Cabins**, north.

58-58.4 The Kennicott Glacier and River can be viewed from turnouts. Glacier ice is blanketed by rock, ranging from large boulders to very fine glacial flour. The Kenn. R. is only five miles long and runs from the glacier down to the Nizina R. Bluffs along the Kenn. R. indicate down-cutting by stream erosion after the glacier melted back from its earlier size. From here you can see how the river valley gets progressively deeper downstream. The river drops 250+ feet in its short run from the glacier to the Nizina R. At that confluence, the Kenn. R.'s erosional canyon is over 350 feet deep; ten miles further downstream, the Nizina is entrenched 600+ feet at the Chitina R. confluence.

58.5 | **Shuttered NPS kiosk.** Day-only parking, toilet, trailhead.

58.6 | **McCarthy B&B**, NPS private staff housing, **Camp McCarthy**, **Aspen Meadows B&B**, **Swift Creek B&B** turnoff. *Do not turn here unless you are staying at one of the above or with another westside local.*

If your phone or GPS says to turn here to reach McCarthy, do not fall for it—the phones are confused. The majority of visitors want to go straight. Proceed to the end of the road.

59 | **As the Glacier Melts Cafe / McCarthy River Tours & Outfitters / Kennicott River Lodge office.** Ice cream, espresso, gear rentals, day and multi-day trip booking, lodging (page 1).

59.4 | **Base Camp Kennicott** and road's end. Car camping and parking. Mill tour and day and multi-day trip reservations with St. Elias Alpine Guides and Copper Oar (inside cover). After-hours pay station makes late arrival easy.

You made it. Enjoy convenient camping with easy access to McCarthy and Kennecott at the road's end, or park and head to your rented room or cabin. Shuttles stop on the east side of the footbridge. Visitors can't drive into McCarthy town—the road ends at the river, where a footbridge allows pedestrian access. Daytime shuttles to McCarthy and Kennecott are readily available, plus pre-arranged after-hours shuttles for guests with reservations. From the bridge, it's about a mile walk or bike ride into McCarthy, or five to Kennecott. Welcome! KMMY



A Brief History of McCarthy & Kennecott

Archeological evidence indicates that humans have lived in the Wrangell Mountains area for well over a thousand years. The Ahtna people the Copper River watercourse. A few Upper Tanana speakers settled along the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers. The Eyak people settled near the mouth of the Copper River on the Gulf of Alaska. Along the coast, the Tlingit people dispersed, with some settling at Yakutat Bay.

The first Europeans in the area were Russian explorers and traders. Vitus Bering landed in the area in 1741. Fur traders followed. A permanent Russian trading post was established in 1793 on Hinchinbrook Island near the mouth of the Copper River. A competing post was established in 1796 at Yakutat Bay. Reports that Native people used pure copper tools inspired early Russian explorations of the lower Copper River. The upper river was not reached by outsiders until 1819, when the Copper Fort trading post was established near Taral (downstream of Chitina). A party that departed Taral in 1848 with the intention of reaching the Yukon River was killed by the Ahtna, ending Russian exploration.

The U.S. acquired Alaska from Russia in 1867, but it took the discovery of gold in the Yukon Territory in the 1880s to spur interest in the Wrangell Mountains region. George Holt was the first American known to have explored the lower Copper River, in 1882. In 1884, John Bremner prospected the lower river. That same year, a U.S. Army party led by Lieutenant William Abercrombie attempted to explore the lower river, and

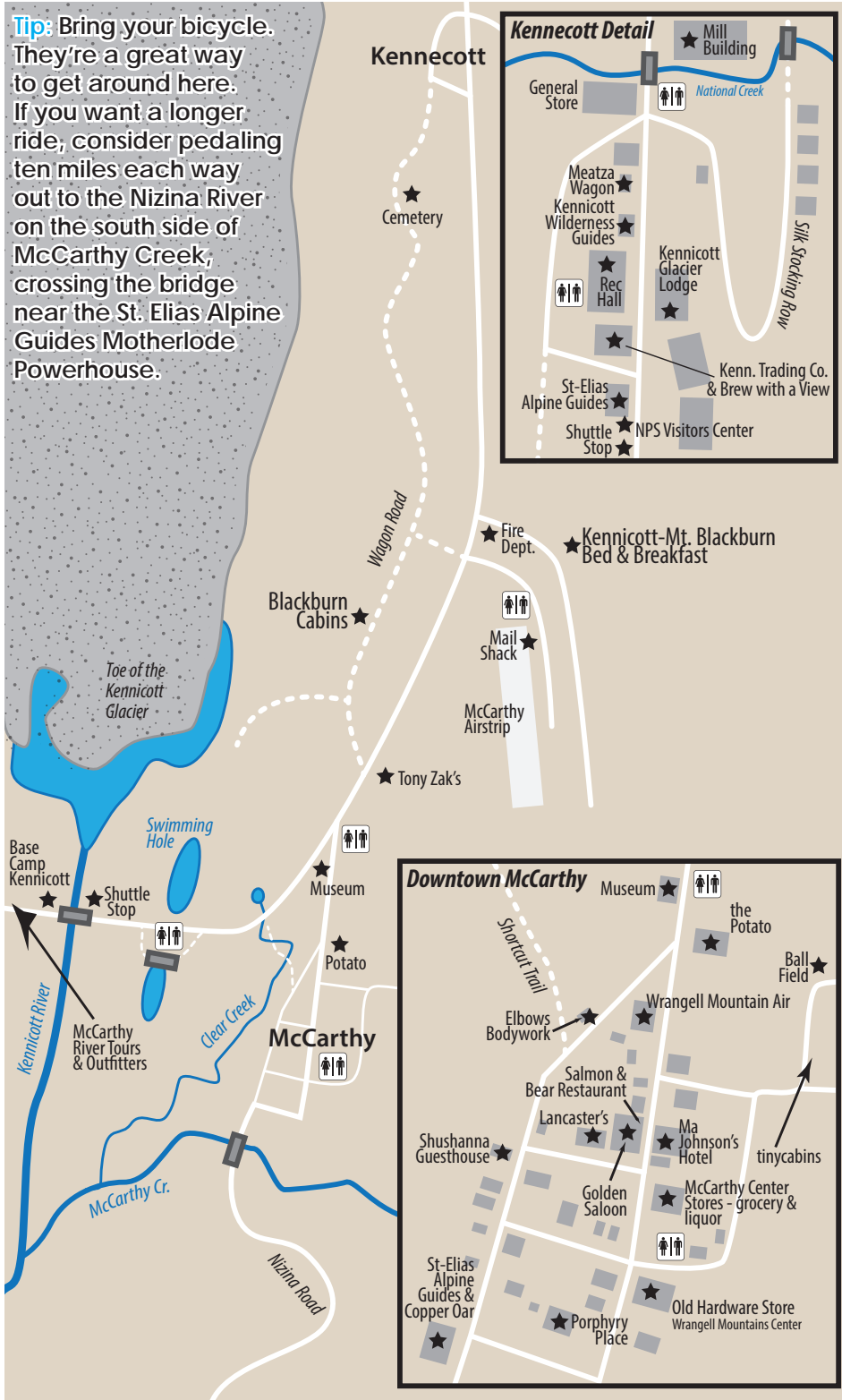
found a passage to the country's interior over a glacier at Valdez Arm. In 1885, Lieutenant Henry Allen fully explored the Copper and Chitina Rivers, eventually crossing the Alaska Range to the Yukon River system and eventually reaching the Bering Sea.

While exploring the Chitina River region, Allen sought out Chief Nicolai, chief of the Copper River Ahtna, at his hunting camp at Dan Creek. Allen and his men were at risk of starvation, and Nicolai rescued them by sharing food and supplies. Allen also saw the Ahtna's copper knives and tools, and some believe that Nicolai showed Allen the source of the native copper.

In 1899, William S. Abercrombie blazed a new trail from Valdez through the Chugach Mountains at Thompson Pass and onward. For the first time, the Copper River headwaters were relatively easy to access. Abercrombie sent Oscar Rohn up the Chitina River, as well. Rohn encountered prospector James McCarthy and named a creek after him in exchange for supplies. He also named the Kennicott Glacier after another explorer and described the valley in detail. His report spurred a great deal of subsequent geological surveys in the region. A year after his 1899 report, prospectors Clarence Warner and Jack Smith discovered Kennecott's uber-rich Bonanza copper deposit.

The prospectors sold their claims to 28-year old Stephen Birch, a mining engineer from New York sent to Alaska to look for investment opportunities for the wealthy Havermayer family. Birch,

Tip: Bring your bicycle. They're a great way to get around here. If you want a longer ride, consider pedaling ten miles each way out to the Nizina River on the south side of McCarthy Creek, crossing the bridge near the St. Elias Alpine Guides Motherlode Powerhouse.



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confident that money could be made, set out to gain clear title to the claims and obtain financial backing from the Guggenheims and J.P. Morgan.

Construction of the 196-mile Copper River and Northwestern Railroad (jokingly called the Can't Run and Never Will) from Kennecott to Cordova began in 1907. The railroad would allow supplies to come in and ore to go out.

The construction challenge was massive. The railroad had to span rivers, mountains, and active glaciers on its way to Kennecott from the coast. Construction of the railroad was awarded to Michael J. "Big Mike" Heney who had completed the famous Yukon and White Pass Railroad from Skagway. This fierce Irishman ensured the

first trains rolled into Kennecott four years later. In the meantime, Stephen Birch had been busy. Despite the inhospitable terrain, he had managed to transport enough equipment into Kennecott to begin mining. When the train finally arrived, he loaded it with copper ore valued at \$250,000. With the key link complete, production ramped up.

Kennecott was a company town. Most miners lived in company housing and everything revolved around mining operations. The town was a "dry" town and miners were not allowed to bring their families. Nearby, the town of Shushana Junction began developing. This small town eventually changed its name to McCarthy and became the site of a turnaround station for the railroad.

McCarthy was quite a miner and railroad-er town, with all the “entertainment” a young man on the frontier might want. Restaurants, hotels, saloons, pool halls, a dress shop, shoe shop, garage, hardware store, and red light district all served more than 800 people in the area. Kennecott and McCarthy coexisted for the 27 years that Kennecott operated. Traditions from those days, such as the 4th of July ball game, still happen today.

By 1938, after selling a staggering \$200 million in ore, the rich copper deposits were depleted and the mines, and thus the railroad, ceased operating. Because of high transportation costs, the mill town was abandoned along with almost everything in it. Dishes were left on tables, medical records were left in the hospital, and mining equipment was abandoned. In the years that followed, several groups attempted to resume mining in the area, but the high cost of transportation from such a remote area proved too much. Things became pretty quiet until the 1970s when tourism began to develop.

This fall, the in-depth story of these “lost decades” between the closing of the mines in 1938 and the events of the early 80s will be published by a new McCarthy-based press in a book by Tom Kizzia called *Cold Mountain Path*. See pg. 40 for more info.

McCarthy & Kennecott Today

Tourism fuels the local economy. Subsistence activities are important for many year-round residents. People from all over the world visit each year to explore Kennecott and experience some of the most pristine wilderness in the world. Since Kennecott became part of

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Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, some aspects of the bygone company town days have returned. By no means a mere agency outpost, the site includes a great deal of private property, private business, and residents. Though the bordellos are gone and the population is smaller than the old days, McCarthy is still the social hub for the area. The McCarthy Road provides access, roughly following the old rail bed from Chitina to McCarthy.

History of the National Park

Though it would take decades to come to fruition, the first seeds leading to the creation of Alaska’s Wrangell-St. Elias National Park were sown almost as soon as the last train left Kennecott. After a flight over the area in 1938, Ernest Gruening, Director of U.S. Territories at the time and later Alaska’s governor and a

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U.S. Senator, recommended the area as a national park or monument. In a memorandum to the Secretary of the Interior, he wrote: "The region is superlative in its scenic beauty and measures up fully and beyond the requirements for its establishment as a National Monument and later as a National Park. It is my personal view that from the standpoint of scenic beauty, it is the finest region in Alaska. I have traveled through Switzerland extensively, have flown over the Andes, and am familiar with the Valley of Mexico and with other parts of Alaska. It is my unqualified view that this is the finest scenery that I have ever been privileged to see."

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter declared the area a National Monument because of its cultural and scientific sig-

nificance. When Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980, the area became part of the 13.2 million acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park, the largest in the U.S. and one of four contiguous units spanning 24 million acres that have been recognized by the United Nations as an international World Heritage Site. The original designation included Wrangell-St. Elias and Kluane National Park and Reserve in Canada's Yukon Territory. In 1993, both Glacier Bay National Park and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park in British Columbia were added to that designation. Altogether, it is the largest internationally protected area in the world.

Explore this incredible place. Learn the history, hike on the Root Glacier, float a river, go backpacking in the backcountry, flightsee in the most stupendous Alaska terrain, visit the museum, enjoy some good food, relax, and take in the views. KMMY



A cub steps onto the McCarthy Road without looking both ways.

McCarthy Road Emergency?

Dial **911** with any life and safety emergency. These 907 area code numbers might help, too:

823-2235 Chitina VFD (mile 0)

823-4021 Strela VFD station (mile 10)

823-4019 Chokosna station (mile 26.5)

Tire plugging service, auto fluids, and items for do-it-yourself repairs are available at Mile 26.5 at the Chokosna Trading Post; hours vary (554-1098); often closed during fire season.

823-4011 Crystal Creek station (mp 41.4)

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Jeremy Pataky

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Bear Country Basics



Black and grizzly bears live in the Kennicott Valley. Do your part to keep people safe and bears wild. People who let bears eat human food create a hazard for the entire community.

Campers Store your food, your pet's food, and even your toiletries properly. Use enclosed containers in vehicles at campgrounds or private property, and bear-safe containers in the backcountry (check them out at NPS Kennecott Visitor Center). Keep a clean camp and store cooking supplies, dishes, and secured food away from tents. Locate tents,

kitchen, and food storage 100 yards apart from one another.

Hikers, Runners, & Bikers Stay alert and attentive. Keep your stuff with you. Bears do venture onto glaciers. Make noise to avoid surprising one, especially in dim light or dense vegetation. Learn to prevent encounters and how to behave if you do meet a bear. Read “Bear Facts” or “Traveling in Bear Country,” available in NPS visitor centers. Bear spray is a well-proven, effective deterrent. *HWY*

Gotta Go?



Public vault toilets Five public toilets are maintained in McCarthy by McCarthy Area Council. If you experience gratitude for that in the midst of vast tracts of otherwise-mostly-toiletless wilds, note the donation box in the outhouse by the museum, north of the Potato. NPS maintains toilets at McCarthy Road waysides, in Kennecott, and early on the Root Glacier Trail. Put nothing but toilet paper and human waste down the holes. *HWY*

Kennecott or Kennicott?

“Kennecott” tends to indicate historic features. “Kennicott” most often indicates natural features, like the so-named glacier, river, and valley.

No one really knows why Kennecott Copper Corporation ended up with a different spelling than its namesake, the Kennicott Glacier. Most say it was a clerical error. Whatever the case, after the Kennecott mines closed in 1938, and prior to the designation of the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark in 1986, many references to the area included the “i” spelling of Kennicott to distinguish the departed Kennecott Copper Corporation from the natural and historic features experienced today.

The National Park Service manages Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark, which encompasses not only the mill site, but the surrounding land and mining claims that formed the foundation for the Kennecott Copper Corporation, later the Kennecott Minerals Company. KMMV

Right: Visitors explore Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark and enjoy the picturesque Mill Building. Below: A hiker approaches the National Creek bridge south of the Mill Building on a bluebird autumn day, setting out through Kennecott for the Root Glacier trail. Photos: Jeremy Pataky.

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Kennicott Glacier 101

From the banks of the Kennicott River at the end of the road, visitors see a peculiar landscape upstream. Jumbled piles of rocks, sand, boulders, and gravel are heaped as if dumped by enormous earth-moving machines.

It's the entirely natural **terminus** of the Kennicott Glacier, though. The piles beyond the melt lake, which grows larger each year as the glacier shrinks, are not rock all the way through. Rather, they're ice hummocks mantled by a surface layer of debris ranging in size from fine silts to boulders. Near the terminus, finer materials typically blanket the ice at thicknesses of up to one foot. On steep faces, the debris may be less than an inch thick, or it might slough off entirely, exposing glacial ice.

Plenty of bare white ice exists further up-glacier. At higher altitudes, in what's called the **accumulation zone**, some of each winter's snowfall survives summers, persisting under successive years' snows to eventually form glacier ice. Coaxed by gravity, it flows downslope, coalescing into the long valley tongue of the glacier.

Glaciers collect rocks as they move, scouring them from the glacier bed and valley walls, pulverizing them into fine sand, silt, and **rock flour** in the process. Some rocks are dumped on the surface by landslides or avalanches. Converging streams of glacier ice also produce

a lot of erosion at their junctures, with the resulting rocks being carried along by the glacier as stripes of surface debris separated by "highways" of clear, white ice. These stripes are called **medial moraines**.

At lower altitudes, winter snows entirely melt, exposing glacier ice to heat from sun, wind, and rain. This area is called the **ablation zone**. Some of the ice carried down from higher altitudes is thus lost each year. As it melts, the rocks **entrained** inside and on top of it, of course, do not melt; they pile up. The farther down the glacier one looks, the greater the amount of rock debris one will find accumulated on the surface.

Finally, in the lowermost reaches of the glacier, the entire surface is covered with such debris and the underlying ice is mostly concealed. Because the mantle is uneven, summer heat seeps unevenly through to the ice, forming an unstable surface characterized by chaotic hollows and hummocks.

A person viewing this glacier's terminus from nearby on ground or water sees only the end-product—a raw, rock-covered surface. A short climb up the mountainside above Kennecott gives a good overview of the lower glacier and the evolving surface moraine. From a small plane, one can see the whole process laid out from start to finish—high-altitude

Opposite: Looking south during an evening stroll on the Root Gl. Right: Root Gl. features discovered on day hikes out of Kennecott; photos by Jeremy Pataky. Below: Part of the view from Donoho Peak summit: Donoho lakes, Hidden Creek Lake and valley, upper Kennicott Gl., Mount Blackburn and other peaks, LaChapelle and Gates Gl., Stairway Icefall and upper Root Gl.; photo by Mickey Kenny.



accumulation zone sweeping down to the ablation zone and on out to the rotting terminus—a truly unforgettable experience that helps one learn to see how glaciers work. To really begin understanding the processes at work before you and the sensory panoply of glacier environments, consider 1) boating around in the terminal glacial lake, 2) hiking on the white ice of the glacier, and 3) flightseeing above for bird's-eye views.

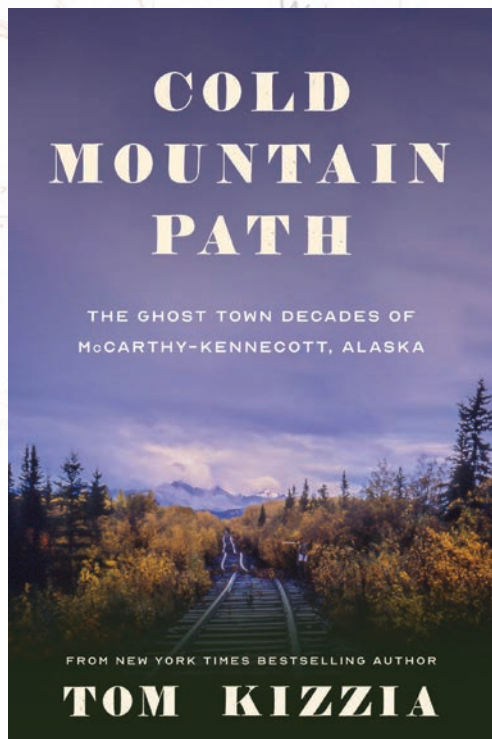
The lower Kennicott Gl. has been “downwasting,” or thinning, for many years. The ice flow has become inadequate to replace that lost to melt. Within the last decade or two, the lower miles of the glacier have thinned to the point where pressure at the glacier bed is insufficient to sustain sliding. This part of the glacier has come completely to rest. The ice now simply sits inert, no lon-

ger flowing forward, melting beneath its mantle of rocks. The adjacent boreal forest steadily stakes its claim on whatever emerging deglaci-ated habitat isn't inundated by melt lakes or streams.

First-time visitors sometimes misinterpret the rocky surface moraine north of the footbridge as leftover debris dumped by the mines, dismayed at their effects on the landscape. When they learn that this is actually the work of the glacier, their outlook changes. Glaciers naturally reshape landscapes on a scale that makes the historic local mining activities appear comparatively miniscule. Here, one can actively watch and even hear these natural forces still very much at work on the land. *RMKY*

A hiker on the rocky Kennicott Glacier toe. Photo: Jeremy Pataky.

Help Make History



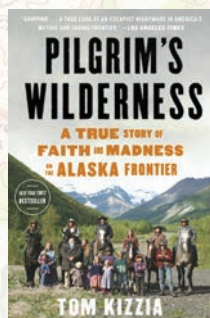
This fall, McCarthy's own new micropublishing house will release a book by the bestselling author of *Pilgrim's Wilderness*—the rich untold story of this Wrangell Mountains valley after the last copper train left.

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Preorder to receive an early copy of the book and invitations to online book events, and to help get this McCarthy publishing company off the ground. Add-on options include limited edition hardbacks, chances to connect with the author, and more.

A portion of proceeds from every copy sold anywhere will be donated to the nonprofit McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum.

Go to porphyry.press/cold-mountain-path or scan the QR code to learn more or buy.



Tom Kizzia's nonfiction bestseller, which takes place in McCarthy and the Wrangells, can be found at the museum in McCarthy. They will also sell *Cold Mountain Path* once it's out.

"Kizzia has written an uncommonly insightful book about postfrontier Alaska, an ambitious literary work disguised as a page-turner."

JON KRAKAUER, author of *Into the Wild*

porphyry.press



GET THE *Ahtna* **LAND APP**

CHECK LAND OWNERSHIP WHILE ON THE GO

ABOUT **AHTNA**

Ahtna, Inc. is an Alaska Native Regional Corporation based in the Southcentral Interior of Alaska.

ABOUT **THE APP**

The Ahtna Land app is designed to provide users with the ability to check land ownership while hunting, fishing, or recreating in the Ahtna region. Major landowners are identified by name and unique color. The user can select a variety of base maps including topographic and aerial imagery maps to aid in navigation and identification of landmarks. Major roads and mileposts are also included to aid the user.



APP **FEATURES**



LAND **BOUNDARIES**

A great tool for showing property boundaries, public and private landowner names and more - empowering you to adventure responsibly.



YOUR **LOCATION**

See your current location in relation to the property boundaries, landmarks, major roads and mileposts. Check if the land you are on is private or public land.



PLAN & **RESEARCH**

Check to see if your planned adventure takes you across private land. If you need to cross Ahtna land, purchase of an Ahtna land use permit will be required.



PROTECT & **PRESERVE**

Help protect and preserve the lands in the Ahtna region by using them responsibly and ethically. Using the app will help you be an informed land user.

DOWNLOAD THE **AHTNA LAND APP**



Download on the
App Store



GET IT ON
Google Play

GET A **PERMIT**

Please remember that Ahtna lands are private lands. We ask that you respect this land as it is our home. To access our lands, a Land Use Permit is required at all times:

www.ahtna.com/permits

CONTACT THE
**AHTNA LAND
DEPARTMENT**

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Glennallen, AK 99588

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