PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING ALASKA

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THE LAST FRONTIER

EVERYTHING IS BIG IN ALASKA.

The fish are huge. The mountains are tall. The rivers are wide. Go fishing or hiking, and these symbols of grandness can be rationally comprehended. They can be measured and photographed and bragged about when you get back home. It's an adventure traveler's paradise.

But to fully comprehend just what *big* means in Alaska, consider this: While you can drive your car across some continental U.S. states in a few hours, here it would take you that much time in a jet to get from end to end.

What this translates to is a land that offers unlimited opportunities for the traveler who is willing to get off the beaten track and explore the nooks and crannies that really make Alaska remarkable. Whether it's a deep fjord or a meandering river, a massive icefield or a steep mountain, Alaska is where the most adventurous of travelers are drawn.

The Unofficial Guide to Adventure Travel in Alaska offers you some insight into this vast land with a section-by-section outline of the state's best outdoor adventures—from rafting a Class V river and climbing a 15,000-foot mountain to hiking a scenic trail and cycling across the state. We realize that Alaska's vastness alone makes it such an alluring place to the thousands of adventure travelers who come here each year, but we also know from experience that it can be overwhelming to take in at once.

Alaska is the largest state in the union: one-fifth the size of the contiguous United States and larger than California, Montana, and Texas combined. The land is tremendous, covering some 586,000 square miles. It is home to North America's tallest mountain—Mount McKinley, also known as Denali—and many other peaks that are among the highest in the United States. Statistics are even more

mind boggling: Alaska is home to some 3,000 rivers, 10,000 glaciers, and, incredibly, more than 3 million lakes. And wildlife roams through it all: bears, moose, and, in the waters, whales and fish.

Yet Alaska is also one of the least populated states in the country, with just about 650,000 residents, most of them living in the state's three largest cities and outlying areas.

These qualities combined give the outdoor traveler even more incentive to come here. Here is a place where, despite progress and all that comes with it—high rises, cell phones, buses, cars, government—you can still reach the wilderness relatively easily. Think about this: It is entirely conceivable to land at one of Alaska's international airports, grab a taxi, and drive as few as five miles to the nearest state wilderness park. Pay the driver, slip on your backpack, and your adventure has begun. It really doesn't get any better than this.

Of course, there are many more-elaborate trips that can be taken in Alaska, and those are the ones of which truly memorable moments are made. But it's fun to imagine that such a place still exists in the United States in which the wilderness remains so predominant.

More than a century ago, Alaska's population wasn't nearly as large as it is today, but the arrival of the Gold Rush brought people by the thousands, setting the foundation for today's population. When hardy miners, searching the land and water for glistening rock, hit the jackpot in the late 1800s, this harsh land suddenly had something irresistible to offer. Prospectors flocked here in search of riches beyond their wildest dreams. Some found them; others died trying.

Today, adventure travelers the world over come to Alaska with the same zeal those prospectors had, only what they seek is priceless. It is Alaska's unyielding beauty that draws visitors, who come to climb its highest peaks, travel its longest rivers, and visit its most isolated villages. They drive limited roads, photograph plentiful wildlife, and cruise glacier-studded waterways. After experiencing the Last Frontier, as Alaska is so often referred to, those visitors often become residents. And it's easy to understand why.

The landscape of Alaska was wild and awe inspiring for millennia before the discovery of gold, and has remained so since. Indigenous people were first to recognize the grandeur of this place. They worshiped the land for the riches it gave: not gold, but food and shelter. Despite the challenges of this extreme country, they survived and thrived. Today, their songs and stories tell of a time when they spoke directly to the land and the land spoke back.

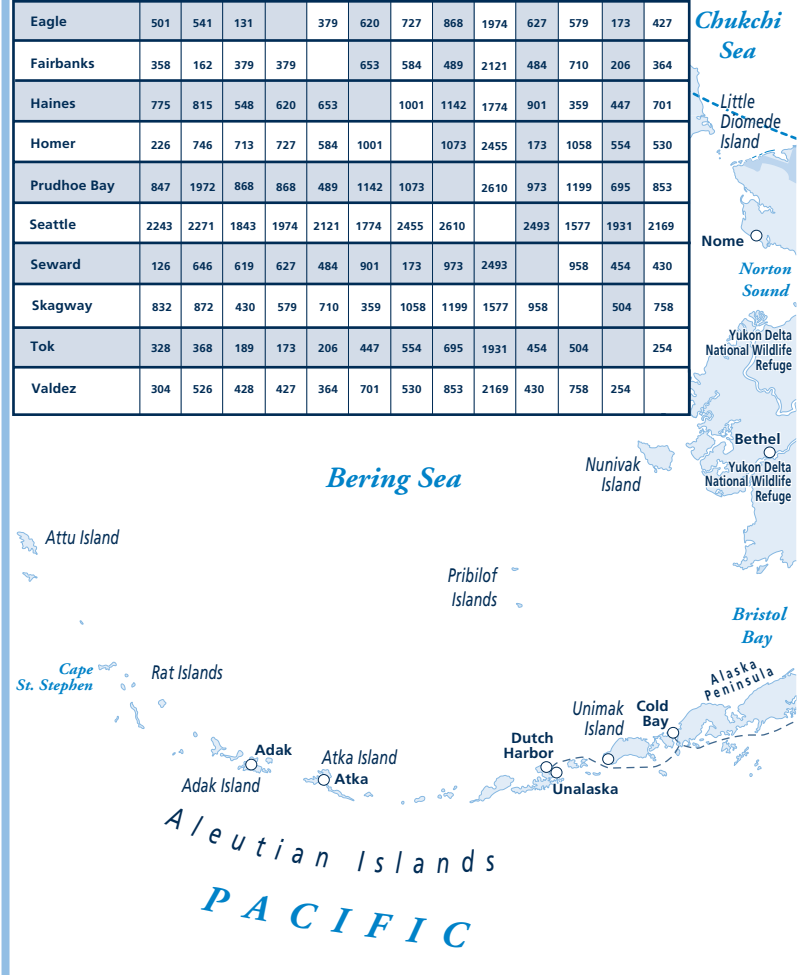
Early outsiders like authors Jack London and Robert Service also appreciated the country for its rugged splendor. Their stories and poems romanticize the place, and can we argue with them? If we imagine London, cozy in his Yukon cabin, watching the aurora borealis on a frigid winter evening, it's no surprise that he was inspired to pen his classic, *Call of the Wild*.

alaska

MILEAGE CHART

Approximate driving distances in miles between cities.

	Anchorage	Circle	Dawson City	Eagle	Fairbanks	Haines	Homer	Prudhoe Bay	Seattle	Seward	Skagway	Tok	Valdez
Anchorage		520	494	501	358	775	226	847	2234	126	832	328	304
Circle	520		530	541	162	815	746	1972	2271	646	872	368	526
Dawson City	494	530		131	379	548	713	868	1843	619	430	189	428
Eagle	501	541	131		379	620	727	868	1974	627	579	173	427
Fairbanks	358	162	379	379		653	584	489	2121	484	710	206	364
Haines	775	815	548	620	653		1001	1142	1774	901	359	447	701
Homer	226	746	713	727	584	1001		1073	2455	173	1058	554	530
Prudhoe Bay	847	1972	868	868	489	1142	1073		2610	973	1199	695	853
Seattle	2243	2271	1843	1974	2121	1774	2455	2610		2493	1577	1931	2169
Seward	126	646	619	627	484	901	173	973	2493		958	454	430
Skagway	832	872	430	579	710	359	1058	1199	1577	958		504	758
Tok	328	368	189	173	206	447	554	695	1931	454	504		254
Valdez	304	526	428	427	364	701	530	853	2169	430	758	254	




0 100 Mi
0 100 Km
Arctic Ocean
Beaufort Sea
Prudhoe Bay
Barrow
Deadhorse
Cape Krusenstern National Monument
Noatak National Preserve
Brooks Range
Anaktuvuk Pass
Dalton Hwy.
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
United States
Canada
Kobuk Valley National Park
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
Kotzebue
Bettles
Coldfoot
Brooks Range
Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
Fort Yukon
Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Dempster Hwy.
Arctic Circle
Chena Hot Springs
Circle
Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
Galena
Unalakleet
Manley Hot Springs
Fairbanks
North Pole
Eagle
CANADA
YUKON
Nenana
Delta Junction
Dawson City, Yukon
Yukon River
Denali National Park
Alaska Range
McGrath
Mt. McKinley
Tok
Kuskokwim River
Talkeetna
Glennallen
Wrangell Mts.
Willow
Wasilla
Palmer
McCarthy
Whitehorse, Yukon
ANCHORAGE
Valdez
Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Lake Clark National Park and Preserve
Kenai
Soldotna
Whittier
Cordova
Dillingham
Cook Inlet
Homer
Seward
Prince William Sound
Skagway
BRITISH COLUMBIA
King Salmon
Halibut Cove
Seldovia
Kenai Fjords National Park
Yakutat
Haines
Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve
Katmai National Park and Preserve
Alaska Marine Highway
Gulf of Alaska
Gustavus
Juneau
Admiralty Island National Monument
Chichagof Island
Admiralty Island
Baranof Island
Sitka
Petersburg
Wrangell
Prince of Wales Island
Kodiak
Kodiak Island
Craig
Ketchikan
Misty Fjords National Monument
Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve
Prince Rupert, B.C.
To Seattle
O C E A N
Unpaved Road
Ferry
Paved Road
State or Provincial Route

southcentral inland alaska

Backpacking
1. Crow Pass
2. Kesugi Ridge

Canoeing
3. Lynx Lake Loop

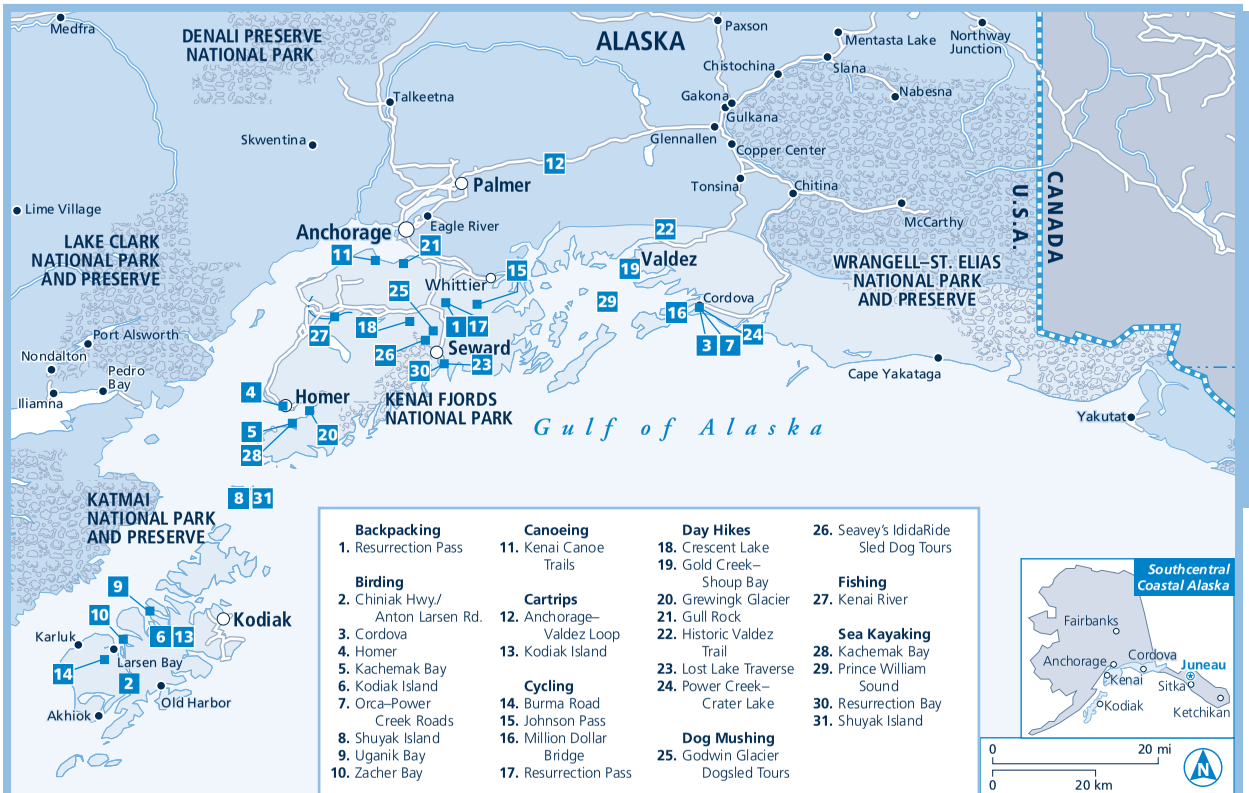
Climbing
4. Mount Blackburn
5. Mount Bona
6. Mount Sanford
7. Mount St. Elias

Cycling
8. Anchorage–Valdez
9. Bird-Gird Trail
10. Eldutna Lake
11. Hatcher Pass
12. Kenai Peninsula Tour
13. Tony Knowles Coastal Trail

Day Hikes
14. Bird Ridge
15. Flattop
16. Gold Mint Trail
17. Pioneer Ridge–Austin Helmers
18. Reed Lakes
19. Winner Creek Gorge

Dog Mushing
20. Chugach Express Dog Sled Tours

Fishing
21. Copper River Basin



Backpacking
1. Resurrection Pass

Birding
2. Chiniak Hwy./ Anton Larsen Rd.
3. Cordova
4. Homer
5. Kachemak Bay
6. Kodiak Island
7. Orca–Power Creek Roads
8. Shuyak Island
9. Uganik Bay
10. Zacher Bay

Canoeing
11. Kenai Canoe Trails

Cartrips
12. Anchorage–Valdez Loop
13. Kodiak Island

Cycling
14. Burma Road
15. Johnson Pass
16. Million Dollar Bridge
17. Resurrection Pass

Day Hikes
18. Crescent Lake
19. Gold Creek–Shoup Bay
20. Grewingk Glacier
21. Gull Rock
22. Historic Valdez Trail
23. Lost Lake Traverse
24. Power Creek–Crater Lake

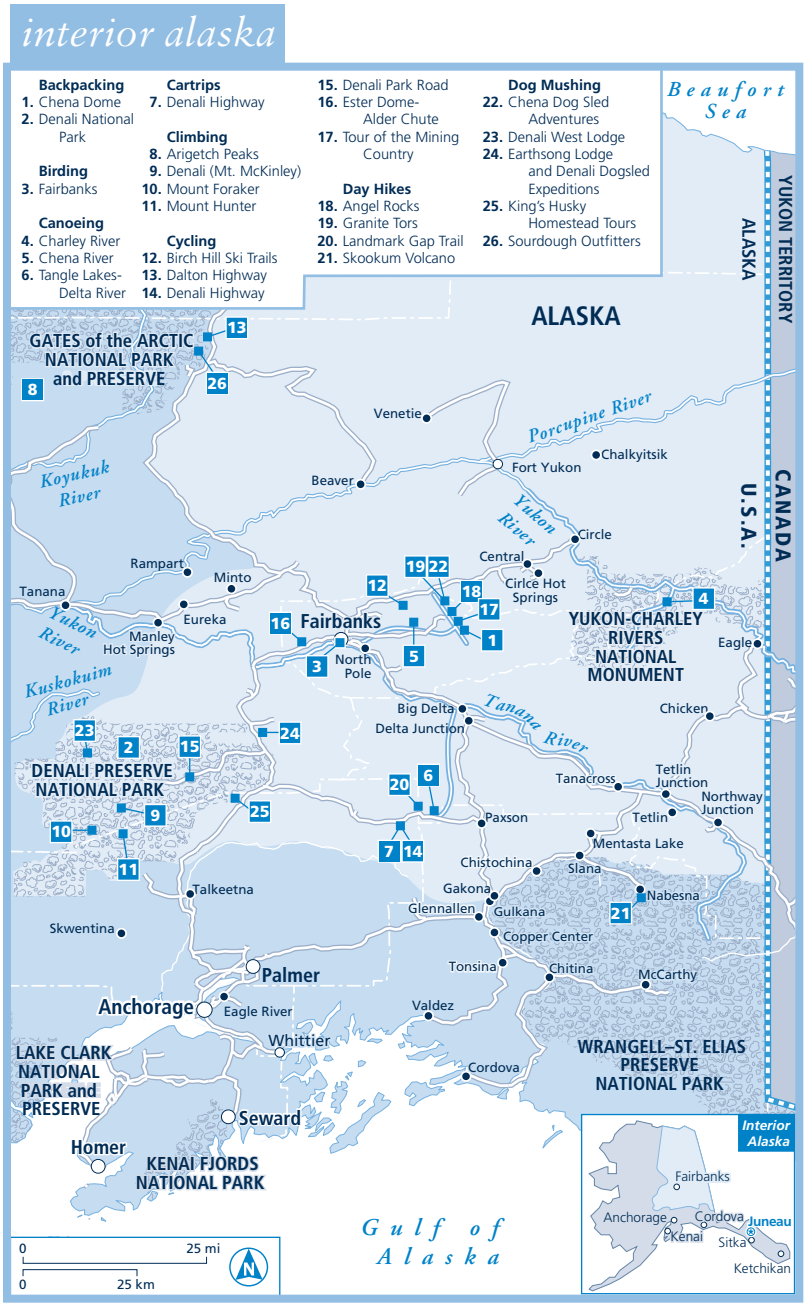
Dog Mushing
25. Godwin Glacier Dogsled Tours
26. Seavey's IdidaRide Sled Dog Tours

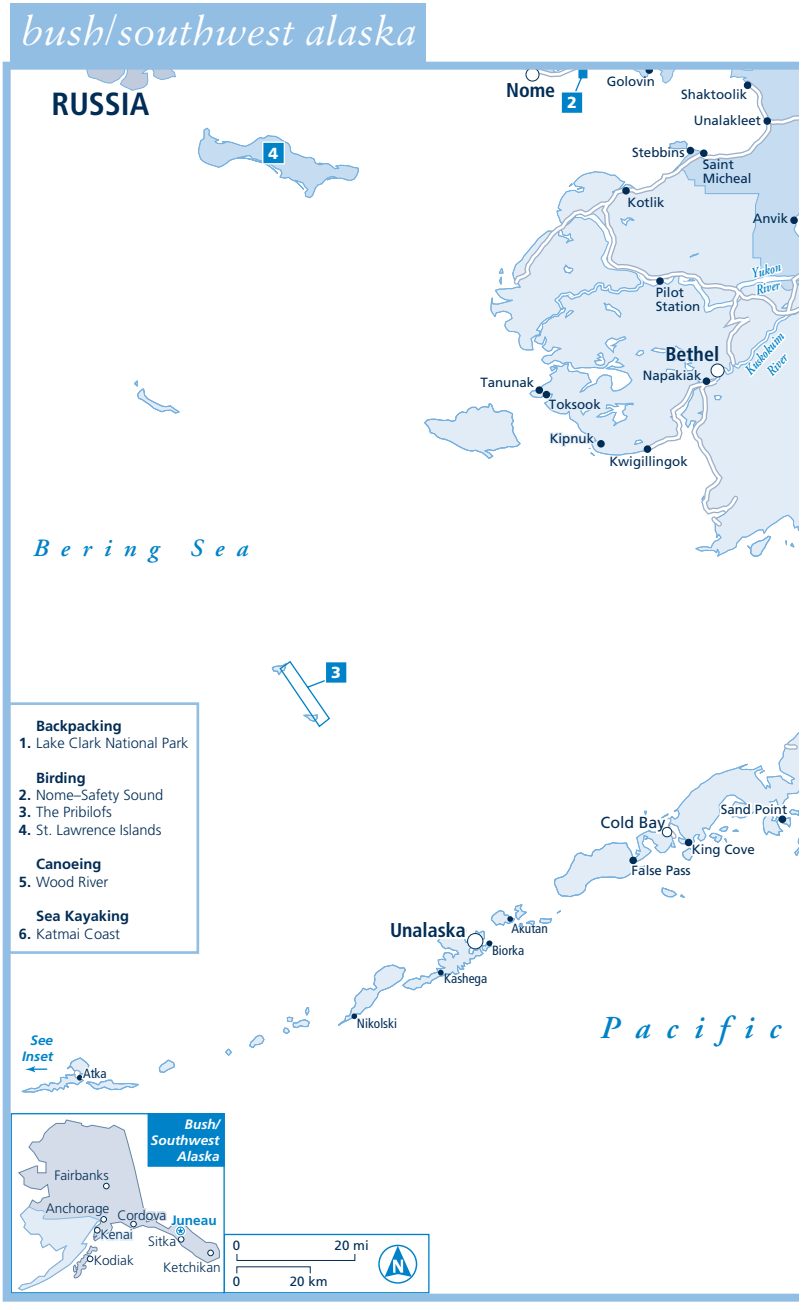
Fishing
27. Kenai River

Sea Kayaking
28. Kachemak Bay
29. Prince William Sound
30. Resurrection Bay
31. Shuyak Island


southeast alaska
YUKON TERRITORY
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Yukon River
Teslin Lake
BRITISH COLUMBIA
ALASKA
Yakutat
Gulf of Alaska
Skagway
Klukwan
Haines
ALASKA
GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
Excursion Inlet
Juneau
Elfin Cove
Hawk Inlet
Pelican
Chicagof Island
Tenakee Springs
BRITISH COLUMBIA
CANADA
U.S.A.
PACIFIC OCEAN
Sitka
Baronoff Island
Kuiu Island
Kake
Kupreanof Island
Petersburg
Wrangell
Port Alexander
Point Baker
MISTY FIORDS NATIONAL MONUMENT
Prince of Wales Island
Klawak
Craig
Ketchikan
Hydaburg
Metlakatla
Prince Rupert
Graham Island
Backpacking
1. Chilkoot Pass
Birding
2. Dredge Lakes
3. Eagle River
4. Haines
5. Mendenhall Wetlands
6. Point Bridget State Park
Cartrips
7. Haines and Skagway
Cycling
8. East Glacier Trail
9. Haines–Skagway
10. Prince of Wales Island
Day Hikes
11. Mount Riley
12. West Glacier
13. Deer Mountain
14. Indian River
Fishing
15. Tenakee Springs
Sea Kayaking
16. Glacier Bay
Southeast Alaska
Fairbanks
Anchorage
Cordova
Kenai
Juneau
Sitka
Ketchikan
0 25 mi
0 25 km
N

interior alaska




bush/southwest alaska
RUSSIA
Nome
2
Golovin
Shaktoolik
Unalakleet
Stebbins
Saint Micheal
Kotlik
Anvik
Yukon River
Pilot Station
Bethel
Napakiak
Kuskokwim River
Tanunak
Toksook
Kipnuk
Kwigillingok
4
Bering Sea
3
Backpacking
1. Lake Clark National Park
Birding
2. Nome–Safety Sound
3. The Pribilofs
4. St. Lawrence Islands
Canoeing
5. Wood River
Sea Kayaking
6. Katmai Coast
Cold Bay
Sand Point
King Cove
False Pass
Unalaska
Akutan
Biorka
Kashega
Nikolski
Pacific
See Inset
Atka
Bush/ Southwest Alaska
Fairbanks
Anchorage
Cordova
Juneau
Kenai
Sitka
Kodiak
Ketchikan
0 20 mi
0 20 km
N


Kaltag
Long
Poorman
Kuskokwim River
Big Delta
Delta Junction
Grayling
Shageluk
Takotna
Medfra
McGrath
DENALI PRESERVE
NATIONAL PARK
Paxson
Iditarod
Flat
Talkeetna
Gakona
Gulkana
Glennallen
Holy
Cross
Crooked
Creek
Stony River
Red Devil
Sleetmute
Skwentina
Copper
Center
Tonsina
Palmer
Anchorage
Eagle River
LAKE CLARK
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE
Lime Village
1
Whittier
Valdez
Cordova
Port Alsworth
Nondalton
Seward
Pedro Bay
Iliamna
Iliamna
Lake
5
Homer
KENAI FJORDS
NATIONAL PARK
Dillingham
Manokotak
Naknek
King Salmon
KATMAI
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE
6
Egegik
Becharof
Lake
Gulf of
Alaska
Kodiak
Karluk
Larsen Bay
Old Harbor
Akhiok
ANIAKCHAK
PRESERVE
NATIONAL
MONUMENT
Ocean
Inset
Attu
Bering Sea
Pacific
Ocean


bush/far north alaska
Birding
1. Kougarok Road
Cartrips
2. Dalton Highway
Cycling
3. Anvil Mountain
Dog Mushing
4. Jerry Austin's Alaska Adventures
Fishing
5. Selby Lake–Kobuk River
Arctic
Wainwright
Chukchi Sea
Brooks Range
Point Hope
NOATAK NATIONAL PRESERVE
Kivalina
CAPE KRUSENSTERN NATIONAL MONUMENT
Kiana
Kotzbue
Noorvik
RUSSIA
BERING LAND BRIDGE PRESERVE NATIONAL PARK
Buckland
Taylor
Wales
3
1
Koyuk
Elim
Golovin
Nome
Shaktoolik
Unalakleet
4
Stebbins
Saint Micheal
Lawrence Island
Kotlik
Grayling
Anvik
Bering Sea
Yukon River
Pilot Station
Bethel
Kuskokwim River
Napakiak
Tanunak
Toksook
Nunivak Island
Kipnuk
Kwigillingok
Bush/Far North Alaska
Fairbanks
Anchorage
Cordova
Juneau
Kenai
Sitka
Kodiak
Ketchikan
0
20 mi
0
20 km


Barrow
Ocean
Colville River
NATIONAL MONUMENT
Brooks Range
Anaktuvuk Pass
GATES of the ARCTIC
NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
KOBUK VALLEY
NATIONAL PARK
5
Koyukuk
River
2
Rampart
Minto
Tanana
Koyukuk
Kokrines
Yukon River
Eureka
Fairbanks
Nulato
Galena
Ruby
Manley Hot Springs
Kaltag
Long
Poorman
Kuskokwim
River
Medfra
Takotna
Mcgrath
DENALI PRESERVE
NATIONAL PARK
Shageluk
Iditarod
Flat
Holy Cross
Talkeetna
Crooked
Creek
Red
Devil
Stony River
Sleetmute
Skwentina
Palmer
Anchorage
Eagle River
Lime Village
LAKE CLARK
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE
Whittier
Seward
Port Alsworth
Nondalton

After all these years, the world has realized that the true wealth of Alaska remains. In contrast to our cramped and hurried lives, in which high-rises block the skies, highways bisect the ground, and crowds fill every space, Alaska lets us breathe, slow down, and appreciate the earth. It's a good way to live.

Unfortunately, the very thing that makes this state so alluring—its endless possibilities and unlimited destinations—also can be intimidating to visitors who don't know where to begin. That's where *The Unofficial Guide to Adventure Travel in Alaska* comes to the rescue. The most-often-heard lament among travelers to this state is that they didn't get to see everything they wanted. Believe us, they're not alone. There are lifelong Alaskans who *still* have not seen the entire state, so what's the hurry for those of you seeing it for the first time?

This guide strives to narrow your focus, readjust your internal rules of measurement, and help you see that the vastness of Alaska does not have to be overwhelming. Slow down. Enjoy the special moments. Watch the sun set behind a snow-capped mountain, or peer through binoculars at a pair of bear cubs frolicking on a hillside. Sip some locally brewed beer and listen to street musicians perform. Set up camp and roast marshmallows by the fire. Paddle to a remote cove and stop to watch sea otters play.

unofficial **TIP**
Adjust your perspective and think *s-l-o-w.*

In other words, think of Alaska as more than just a one-time vacation. This state is larger than most European countries, and there is no way you'll be able to see it all in a week, two weeks, even three.

Take time to absorb the enormousness of a place that still retains a bit of Last Frontier wildness despite the ever-quickening encroachment of progress.

No matter which part of Alaska you visit, you will experience a feeling of vastness. The distinct regions each have their own climate, culture, and geography, with unique opportunities for adventure—from rafting to backpacking to dog mushing to fishing. The one aspect they all share, however, is room to roam.

A QUICK GLIMPSE *at* OUR REGIONS

WHEN PLANNING A VISIT TO ALASKA based on outdoor adventure, the most important question to ask is, "What do I want to do?" How you get there, which region of the state you'll need to go to, and how to organize the logistics will fall into place quite easily after that first question is resolved. *The Unofficial Guide to Adventure Travel in Alaska* is set up with this premise in mind, offering a breakdown of activities and outfitters in our special-interest chapters.

However, if your trip happens to be limited to a specific region—for example, your great uncle on your father's side has sent you a ticket to Fairbanks, or you have just enough frequent-flier miles to get you to Anchorage—simply start by perusing our region-by-region chapters. More details on each area are available in their respective chapters, but here's a quick overview.

SOUTHCENTRAL INLAND ALASKA

SOUTHCENTRAL INLAND ALASKA BEGINS WITH the state's largest population center, the municipality of **Anchorage,** and moves inland toward **Talkeetna** to the north and the **Copper River–Glennallen** corridor to the west. At just over 260,000 people—more than 40 percent of the state's residents—Anchorage is the hub of Alaska's economy. With its port, train station, and international airport, it serves as a gateway for travelers from around the globe. Yet the sprawling metropolis is surrounded by wilderness: the waters of **Cook Inlet** and the dense spruce, birch, and aspen forest of **Chugach State Park.** It is entirely conceivable, then, to have an outstanding outdoor adventure without ever leaving the city limits.

Naturally, Anchorage has a cosmopolitan side. The most discriminating travelers will find shopping, theater, art galleries, museums, and fine dining to suit their tastes. A short drive south brings you to the world-class ski resort at **Mount Alyeska.** To the north lie such gems as the **Matanuska-Susitna Valley,** which has incredible rafting, hiking, four-wheeling, and biking options, as well as a chance for mountaineering, even in the summer.

SOUTHCENTRAL COASTAL ALASKA

THE COASTAL WATERS AND COMMUNITIES that make up **Prince William Sound,** the **Kenai Peninsula,** and **Kodiak Island** are included in the region we call Southcentral Coastal Alaska. These areas are overwhelmingly the best places for water sports such as fishing, adventure cruising, and kayaking, but don't overlook the superior hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing. The Kenai Peninsula satisfies just about any outdoor dream, which is why it is known as Alaska's playground to residents, who flock there when they have their own vacation time to spend.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA

OFTEN REFERRED TO AS "THE PANHANDLE" to reflect its status as the long, thin branch of the state holding it all together, Southeast Alaska is an especially diverse region, offering lush forests, rich native culture, and limitless coastline. It is the ideal place for adventure cruising as well as kayaking, wildlife viewing, birding, fishing, and biking. Of its communities, only **Skagway** and **Haines** connect to the road system, but it is an easy area to visit by air and water. The region's largest city, **Juneau,** is also the state capital. From here, day trips to outlying waterfront villages can easily be arranged. The state

ferry system forms an integral part of life for those who call Southeast Alaska home.

THE INTERIOR

POINT SMACK-DAB IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STATE, and you've got the Alaska of most visitors' imaginations: the Interior. Towering mountain ranges extend forever along the Parks Highway toward **Fairbanks,** the Interior's largest city. In the north of the state looms the wild **Brooks Range,** and in the south, the **Alaska Range.** In between is land so wide open that when you pass a cabin or small business along the road, you wonder how on earth the people survive.

But survive they do. The Interior is home to hardy Alaskans who brave cold and isolation for the reward of a simple, uncluttered way of life. In summer, endless days and temperatures in the 80s Fahrenheit bring a blessed reprieve, a time to play. This is a region rich in dog-mushing expertise, remote lake and river fishing, and wilderness-hiking and backpacking opportunities galore. And if you want to see wildlife, this is the place to go.

THE BUSH

FANNING OUT FROM THE INTERIOR IS LAND so remote, is simply called the Bush. The majority of Alaska's native people choose to reside here, often living off the land by fishing, hunting, and gathering as their ancestors did before them. The largest communities are **Barrow, Nome, Kotzebue,** and **Bethel,** augmented by dozens of villages scattered across the country. We have included **Southwest Alaska** as part of our Bush chapter because of its remoteness and its sparse population.

The Bush's Inupiat, Yup'ik, and Aleut natives depend on boats, snowmobiles, and dog teams to get around the mostly roadless communities. In winter the rivers freeze, creating ribbon highways for snowmobile and dog-team travel; in summer, boats provide transportation. Today, most communities also have airplane service, connecting the world to these once-inaccessible places. The Bush is where some of the most adventurous of adventurers roam, rafting rivers that perhaps see fewer than a dozen people in any given year, or fishing lakes that don't know the feel of human footprints.

A BRIEF HISTORY *of a* BIG STATE

TWO CENTS AN ACRE.

That's what William H. Seward, the man responsible for purchasing Alaska from Russia in 1867, negotiated for the United States.

At the time, that rate, which totaled $7.2 million, was called outrageous. Critics said Seward was a foolish man. They called the purchase "Seward's Folly" and the land "Seward's Icebox."

But oh, what a bargain it was. Today, not only is Alaska one of the most beautiful states in the country, but it has a wealth of natural resources and a growing economy dependent on tourism. It's still lightly populated compared with other states, and it maintains a frontier attitude in many smaller communities.

The Russians were among the first to explore the area, and vestiges of their presence remain today. From their first ventures to Alaskan territory back in the 1700s, the Russians have shown that they may have sold the territory, but many of them never stopped calling it home.

Vitus Bering was the original Russian explorer. The year was 1741, and Bering and his crew reached what is now called Kayak Island. However, Bering and much of his crew perished in a shipwreck on the return trip. Those who survived the disastrous event and stayed through winter brought home luxurious sea otter skins that spurred other Russian explorers to rush to Alaska. Grigori Shelekhov was one of those entrepreneurs who in 1784 founded the first permanent settlement in Alaska on Kodiak Island and sent Alexander Baranov to manage his company.

Kodiak is, in fact, the first place where the Russians settled, first in secluded Three Saints Bay and later in present-day Kodiak. Their influence is evident in a modern-day walking tour of the city, including the museum, Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Church, and the Saint Innocent Veniaminov Research Institute Museum. There is also a yearly event celebrating the canonization of a Russian priest, Saint Herman, in an area outside of town called Monk's Lagoon.

As the Russians became involved with the sea otter–skin industry, they inevitably clashed with Alaskan natives, who saw the foreign influx as an intrusion on their lives and livelihoods. By 1786 Russian fur traders had made their way to the Kenai Peninsula, and had settled in the area by 1791. Russian Orthodox priests arrived and began introducing the natives to Christianity, and their churches grew.

But tension mounted, and in 1797 a battle for the Kenai erupted between the Dena'ina Athabascans and the Lebedev Company, the fur-trading company based on the Kenai. More than 100 Russians, Dena'ina, and other natives were killed.

Meanwhile, the majority of Russians had moved eastward toward Sitka and other Southeast communities, where they continued to trade furs. By 1796, they had arrived in Yakutat, later settling in Sitka, which became their capital. The Tlingit Indians living in the area knew that submitting to the Russians meant allegiance to their czar and slave labor for their fur-trade company. A battle between the Tlingits and the Russians ensued in 1802, and nearly all the Russians and their Aleut slaves were killed.

In 1804, undaunted by the battle, Baranov arrived ready to fight. For six days he fought the Tlingits, this time overpowering them. The Russians named their newly acquired land New Archangel, and the site known as Castle Hill evolved.

Sitka is one of the best places to learn about Russia's influence on Alaska. Just take a walk around the city. Enjoy lofty views of the surrounding islands and ocean from Castle Hill (where, incidentally, "Russia America" officially became Alaska, USA, in 1867); see a recreated Russian blockhouse; visit the old Russian cemetery and the Lutheran cemetery, where, for some reason, the Russian Princess Maksoutoff lies buried; pass many historic houses; check out Saint Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral; and visit the Russian Bishop's House, which is part of Sitka National Historical Park.

By the time the United States took ownership of Alaska, much of the Russian conflict had subsided. The next wave of activity to reach the state had nothing to do with war and a lot to do with wealth. Gold was discovered near Sitka in 1872, prompting the beginning of a gold rush that would peak at the turn of the century. In 1897, the largest discovery was made in the Klondike, stretching from Canada's Yukon Territory into Alaska and attracting thousands of gold seekers. In 1898, prospectors found gold on the beaches in Nome, sparking another rush to the western part of the territory. The gold rush turned one-street towns into bustling cities of thousands, seemingly overnight.

By 1906, gold production was at its peak, and Alaska got its own nonvoting delegate to Congress. Gold mining was on the decline, but with the influx of so many new residents, other exciting prospects emerged. Copper mining at the Kennicott mine began, and oil production at select spots throughout the land was already under way. By 1912, Alaska was named an official U.S. territory.

Although still just a territory, Alaska played a significant role in the nation's economy, bringing in money from natural-resource development. Construction of the Alaska Railroad began in 1914, and logging in Southeast Alaska was becoming a large industry around the same time. In 1935, Depression-era farming families came to Alaska as part of the Matanuska Valley Project. The government-backed effort to create a self-sustaining farming community in Alaska gave poverty-stricken families free land in exchange for their sweat and toil "bringing up" the wilderness into wide-open cropland and pastures. While many abandoned the project, intimidated by the harsh winters and crude living conditions the first few years, others thrived. Today, countless generations of those first families still call the Matanuska-Susitna Valley in Southcentral Alaska their home. Visitors to the area come to gawk at the giant cabbages, massive carrots, and other vegetables and fruits that grow so huge during the summer.

As those valley farmers settled into their new homes, another region of the Alaska territory came to the forefront of the public eye. Today,

it's a little-known fact that the Japanese invaded American lands during World War II, but in 1942 it was headline news. On a June day on the remote archipelago that makes up the Aleutian Chain in Southwestern Alaska, just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the Japanese came. Planes from a Japanese aircraft carrier bombed the Naval Station and Fort Mears in Dutch Harbor, then occupied nearby Attu and Kiska islands. It was the first time since the War of 1812 that foreign forces had occupied American territory.

Forty-two people from the islands were taken to Japan as hostages, 17 of whom died in captivity. Meanwhile, the U.S. government evacuated the remaining Aleuts from their homes in the Aleutian and Pribilof islands. American troops destroyed many of the homes on the islands to prevent the Japanese from settling in too easily. Many of the natives who once called this remote region home were not able to return for years. Much of their settlement had been burned to the ground, leaving them with nothing.

Fortunately, U.S. forces did not tolerate the occupation for too long. By May 1943, the Japanese had been mostly defeated, but at a high cost to American soldiers. In the end, more than 20 U.S. pilots and 2,500 troops perished.

With the war came better access to Alaska. Recognizing the need to reach to this remote territory, the government approved funds in 1942 to build the Alaska Highway. U.S. Army engineer troops designed and built the primitive, 1,400-plus-mile road in a mind-boggling nine months and six days, from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to what is now Delta Junction in Alaska. It was the first and only overland connection to the Lower 48 states and still one of the primary ways of reaching Alaska today.

Alaska gained statehood in 1959, making it the 49th state to join the nation. Over the years, defining moments put Alaska in the spotlight: On March 27, 1964, on a Good Friday afternoon, a magnitude-9.2 earthquake rattled the state, wiping out the villages of Chenega in Prince William Sound and the community of Portage on Turnagain Arm. Other communities suffered millions of dollars in damage. In the end, the four-minute-long earthquake killed 131 people in Alaska, along with 14 others in Oregon and California who were swept away by tidal waves.

In 1971, Congress approved the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which gave 40 million acres and $900 million to Alaskan natives, officially recognizing their aboriginal ownership of the land. For years the government had been vague about its acknowledgement of natives' land ownership, but the discovery of oil brought incentive for settling the long-standing claim. The signing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act then cleared the way for the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, an 800-mile raised tube that carries oil from the North Slope oil fields to Valdez. The construction of

the pipeline brought thousands of workers to the state, creating a wave of activity. A boom of construction followed, and for a time Alaskans were living large.

In 1980, the Alaska legislature, led by then-Governor Jay Hammond, recognized the value of the oil resource and created what it called the Permanent Fund, which held a quarter of all oil royalties for future generations and was paid out as a dividend to each qualified Alaskan once a year. The first checks, mailed in 1982, paid each qualified Alaskan, including babies and children, $1,000. Today, the legislature is attempting to raid the Permanent Fund to pay for government. If you're visiting Alaska and read the newspapers or watch the news, you'll likely see countless reports about the ongoing debate. So far, the voters have kept attempts to raid the fund at bay. In 2000, the dividend to each Alaskan reached a record high of $1,963.86. In 2004, it dropped to $919.84, the first time since 1995 that it was below $1,000.

Through it all, Alaskans, both native to the land and those who moved north for a bit of adventure but decided it was a pretty good place to call home, have persevered. They have proved that the critics who called Alaska "Seward's Folly" or "Seward's Icebox" all those years ago were simply wrong. Seward just may have been the most brilliant man of his time, recognizing in Alaska a potential that continues to shine today. Oil production, commercial fishing, and tourism are growing industries that offer Alaskans a way to earn a living in a ridiculously beautiful setting. But above all, Alaska's biggest asset is its natural environment. It is something to be celebrated, enjoyed, and, most of all, protected for generations to come.

ALASKA'S NATIVE PEOPLES *and* CULTURES

UNLESS YOUR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE INCLUDES travel in some of the remotest sections of the state, there's a good chance you won't cross paths with that many of Alaska's native people. It's a surprisingly true and unfortunate phenomenon. Alaska natives make up only 16 percent of the population of today's Alaska, although there are 11 distinct cultures and 20 languages among the group as a whole.

But many natives still live in the most remote and wildest areas of the state, putting them off the radar for the traveler who only blows by the larger cities. Even though there are a fair number of natives in the cities, too, they share these places with tens of thousands of other people of all nationalities. In fact, technically speaking, Anchorage is the largest native village in the state, considering that nearly 19,000 American Indian/Alaska natives call it home. That's a larger population than any of the more remote, mostly native communities.

It would be a shame to come all the way to Alaska, though, and not learn more about the indigenous peoples who first called this land home. Their cultures are fascinating and impressive, yet humbling and challenging. A good number of today's natives, especially those in the villages, still live entirely by the same means as their ancestors did hundreds of years before them. They catch fish, harvest berries, and hunt for most of their food. They go whaling and hold potlatches. Their connection to the land is, for many, as close now as it was hundreds of years ago, despite the arrival of electricity, running water, and the convenience of four-wheel-drive vehicles over dogsleds.

WHEN IN ALASKA: NATIVE ETIQUETTE

When you visit an area whose residents are predominantly natives, above all, be respectful. Just as you would while traveling in any other country, whether you're encountering shepherds in Ireland leading their sheep home or aborigines in Australia working on their ranches, avoid the temptation to gawk. In general, treat them as you would want to be treated.

If you are close enough and able to, ask before taking photographs.

Native cultural events are steeped in tradition. Many of them represent the living or the dead, and are of a religious nature. The same goes for native burial sites. Again, resist the urge to take photos without asking first.

You may notice that native Alaskans speak slowly and often take time to respond to a question or comment. Do not become unnerved by this or assume they do not hear you.

Likewise, try not to interrupt when conversing with native Alaskans. It is purely a Western tendency to try finishing another person's thoughts or jumping in with your own opinions. By Alaska native standards, it is considered rude—although it would also be rude to point it out.

When traveling, especially in remote areas, be sure to have the proper permits for traveling on native-owned land. With the advent of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, more than 40 million acres of Alaska land is native owned. That means it is private. Some native corporations require a fee for use of its land; others only require that visitors to get permission, and a few do not allow public access at all. (For details on traveling on native land, see Part Three, Getting Around, page 44.)

In general, there are three groups of Alaska natives—Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut. The terms *Inuit* and *Native American* are sometimes used in place of *Eskimo* and *Indian* in an effort to be considerate, but that doesn't work in Alaska. It is true that in many other places, *Eskimo* is considered a derogatory word because it is said to mean "eater of raw meat"; however, using the term *Inuit* is not accurate in an Alaskan context because the Inuit language is restricted to the peoples of Arctic Canada and portions of Greenland. In Alaska and Arctic Siberia, where Inuit is not spoken, the

comparable terms are *Inupiat, Yup'ik,* or one of the other cultural names within that region.

For the most part in Alaska, *Indian* and *Eskimo* are not offensive words. In fact, Eskimos pride themselves on their heritage. Still, if you feel uncomfortable using such terms, ask instead what culture a native is from. The natives of the northern reaches of Alaska will not use the word *Eskimo* when answering. Instead they likely will name a more specific culture, such as Inupiat, Yup'ik, or Cup'ik.

These three designations are further divided into five cultures, based on similarities in tradition, language, and proximity. At the Alaska Native Heritage Center, considered the defining authority on the subject, there are houses representing each of the five cultures, and visitors to the Anchorage-based center can learn how the varying native groups lived. They include Athabascan; Yup'ik and Cup'ik; Inupiat and St. Lawrence Island Yupik; Aleut and Alutiiq; and Eyak, Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida. As the state continues to grow and those from all over the United States and other nations arrive, Alaska's first peoples are finding it more important than ever to celebrate their heritage and educate those who want to know more about them.

ATHABASCAN

YOU'LL SEE THE WORD *Athabascan* spelled two ways, with a *c* and with a *k,* but don't be confused—they are one in the same. The geographic region for the Athabascan people traditionally begins in the Interior, just south of the Brooks Range, and follows all the way to the Kenai Peninsula, which is described in more detail in the South-central Coastal chapter. Before the advent of modern transportation, the Athabascans lived along five major rivers, including the Copper, Yukon, Tanana, Susitna, and Kuskokwim. They were a nomadic people, often traveling hundreds of miles to follow their best sources of food, depending upon the time of year and severity of the seasons.

Today, Athabascan people live throughout the entire state, as well as the Lower 48 states. According to the Alaska Native Heritage Center, "the Athabascan people call themselves 'Dena,' or 'the people.' " They are taught a respect for all living things; hunting is for subsistence only. They also are taught to share, perhaps a throwback to a time when combining resources was the only way groups could survive. Sharing is a community-wide belief, and those who have, give.

When you see the name *Denali*—and, believe us, you will if you set foot into this state—give a nod to the Athabascan people. Denali, the native name for Mount McKinley, North America's largest peak, is an Athabascan term meaning "high one."

TLINGIT, HAIDA, EYAK, AND TSIMSHIAN

THE HAIDA ARE AN INDIAN GROUP OF ABOUT 800 who emigrated from Canada and now live in Southeast Alaska, the Prince of Wales Islands, and surrounding areas. The Tlingit, about 11,000 strong, live

mostly in the southeast. The Tsimshian are a small group from Metlakatla living in the area on their own reservation. The Eyak are natives related to the Athabascans but influenced greatly by the Tlingits. The Eyak language is nearly extinct, with only one speaker known to still be living.

INUPIAT AND ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND YUPIK ESKIMOS

THE INUPIAQ AND THE ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND YUPIK people call themselves the "Real People," according the Alaska Native Heritage Center, and their homelands are in north and northwest Alaska. They depend largely on subsistence and still hunt whales, seals, walrus, and other large animals, and gather berries in season. They also hunt birds and fish when the conditions are right. These groups of natives are in the same category because of their similar subsistence patterns, the way they constructed their homes, and the tools they used to survive.

St. Lawrence Island Yupiks speak Siberian Yupik, which is different from the languages spoken by other Yup'ik Eskimos (thus the difference in the spellings *Yupik* and *Yup'ik*).

YUP'IK AND CUP'IK

THESE GROUPS OF ESKIMOS LIVE IN SOUTHWEST Alaska in such communities as Nome, Unalakleet, and Perryville. Their names come from the dialects of the languages they speak. Like the Yupiks of St. Lawrence Island and the Inupiat of north and northwestern Alaska, they depend upon a subsistence lifestyle for their livelihood, and elders tell stories of traditional ways of life to teach younger generations about their heritage.

ALEUT AND ALUTIIQ

SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST ALASKA ARE THE ORIGINAL regions for the Aleut and Alutiiq peoples, although today they live all over the state and beyond. Traditionally, Aleuts and Alutiiqs depended upon the ocean for their livelihoods, living off what they could catch from the sea, creeks, rivers, or even lakes. Their territory ranged from the North Pacific and Bering Sea, from Prince William Sound to the end of the Aleutian Chain. In places such as Kodiak Island, the influence of Russians, which began in the 18th century, can still be seen today. The Orthodox Church became the focal point of every village, and the native people in these communities adopted many of the Russian traditions and the language.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? The **Alaska Native Heritage Center,** which provided the bulk of information for this section, can be contacted at 8800 Heritage Center Drive, Anchorage 99506; ☎ 800-315-6608 or 907-330-8000; **www.alaskanative.net.**