

George Parks Highway



National Scenic Byway Master Interpretive Plan

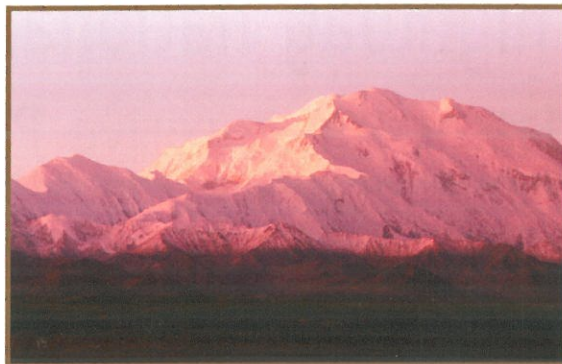
October 2012

George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway

— Master Interpretive Plan —



George A. Parks



Rex Milton/Alaska Division of Tourism



Prepared for: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, State Scenic Byways Program
Prepared by: Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Interpretation and Education Unit
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—Mission Statement—

Enhance the experience for byway travelers by promoting a safe and comfortable journey while presenting high-quality interpretation that reveals the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway's intrinsic qualities.



Chulitna River

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1. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

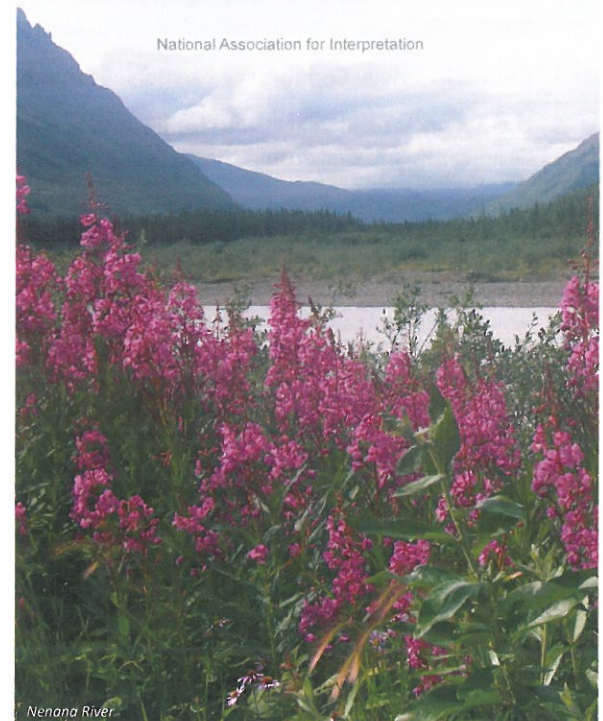
The George Parks Highway—commonly called the Parks Highway—runs 323 miles from the Glenn Highway in the Matanuska Valley to Fairbanks in the Alaska Interior. Completed in 1971, this highway is one of the most important roads in Alaska for commerce and recreation. The Parks Highway and a short section of the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway link the state’s two largest cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks, with spectacular natural surroundings and unparalleled recreational opportunities. The Parks Highway winds through scenery that typifies Alaska and captures the imagination of people from all over the world; the continent’s highest peaks and largest inland glaciers, alpine tundra, taiga forests, and roaring rivers are all visible from the highway.

Two hundred and thirty miles of the Parks Highway is designated a National Scenic Byway, from milepost 132 to its northern terminus in Fairbanks. The Byway crosses three boroughs and Native Corporation, state, private, and federal lands. It connects the communities of Trapper Creek, Cantwell, McKinley Village, Healy, Nenana, Ester, and Fairbanks and passes two of Alaska’s preeminent parks—Denali National Park and Denali State Park.

The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan, completed in November 2008, identified the need for a byway interpretive plan to “promote stewardship, enhance visitor connections..., update existing interpretation, and tie together the different resources and sites along the byway.” The National Park Service and Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, are the principal agencies responsible for existing interpretation. While their individual styles are representative of their agencies’ design standards, the traveler would benefit from separate byway facilities and products that highlight communities and interpret the corridor as a whole.

“Interpretation forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.”

National Association for Interpretation



The interpretive plan helps the Byway partnership and land managers make decisions regarding the establishment and maintenance of interpretive sites and services.

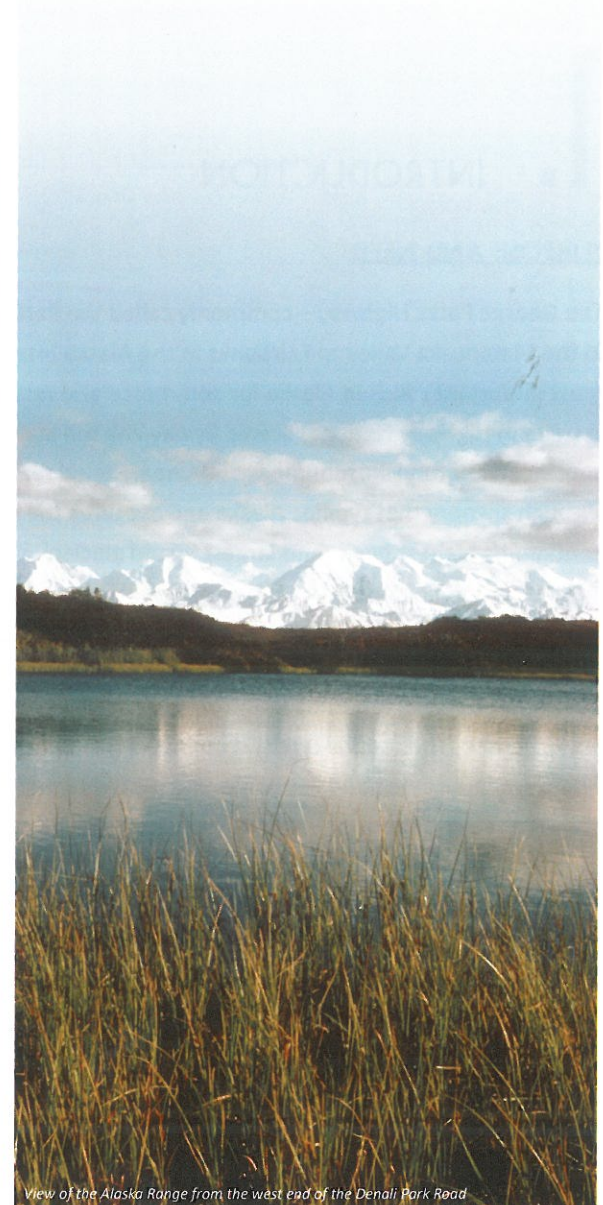
PARAMETERS AND PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

This plan is based on a number of assumptions including the Byway's current and future use and the function of the Parks Byway Community Partnership. Significant changes to travel patterns, byway facilities, the partnership, or agency policies may require modifications to the plan.

1. The recommendations in the interpretive plan are consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan.
2. The Parks Byway Community Partnership is composed of stakeholders with varied interests from communities in the Matanuska-Susitna, Denali, and Fairbanks-North Star boroughs; the partnership will continue to grow and maintain cooperative relationships with byway communities, federal and state agencies, travel and tourism businesses, and private and not-for-profit organizations.
3. The Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the intrinsic qualities of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway by providing travelers with a safe, comfortable, and educational adventure (as outlined in the corridor partnership plan.)
4. The Parks Byway Community Partnership spearheads fundraising for byway projects.
5. The Byway is used year-round for leisure, residential, and commercial travel; leisure travel is significantly greater during the summer months.
6. Denali National Park and Denali State Park are primary tourist attractions on the central portion of the Byway; Fairbanks is the Byway's northern attraction and gateway.
7. Interpretation will be developed to promote stewardship of and connections to the Byway's unique landscapes and cultures, as outlined in "Goal 3" in the partnership plan.

PLANNING PROCESS

The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway interpretive planning process began with preliminary scoping in April 2011. The planning team held public meetings in Trapper Creek, Denali Park, Fairbanks, and Nenana from April 18-20, 2011. The meetings were advertised in a press release, in local newspapers, radio stations, and in post offices. The purpose of the meetings was to notify the public of the scope of the project and collect comments concerning interpretive planning efforts. Thirteen people attended in Trapper Creek, twelve in Denali Park, eight in Fairbanks, and four in Nenana. Comments were collected until May 6, 2011.



View of the Alaska Range from the west end of the Denali Park Road

The public provided input on stories they would like to be told, anticipated positive and negative impacts of roadside improvements, and other suggestions on how the Byway could be improved to benefit Alaskans. Many of the comments were related to management hopes and concerns, often citing the need for adequate year-round restroom facilities that will be well maintained. Others stated that they expected increased interpretation to provide for educational and economic opportunities. Numerous natural and cultural history topics were identified as potential interpretive topics.

The following is a summary of comments received from the public meetings held in Trapper Creek, Denali Park, Fairbanks, and Nenana.

Interpretive Topics:

- Transportation history highlighting the railroad and highway
- Wildfires
- Ice Road Truckers
- Cultural and human history including Native history, early explorers, gold rush and coal mining, market hunting and trapping, transportation infrastructure, homesteaders, and contemporary settlement
- Nature (flora and fauna)
- Outdoor recreation
- Arts
- The Denali Sourdough climb in 1910
- Subsistence
- Cantwell as the southern gateway to Denali National Park
- The Rabidoux trapping cabin in Trapper Creek
- The Trapper Creek Landing on the Susitna River where the Petersville Road begins
- The mystery of the Cache Creek murders
- Geography
- Climate
- Mary Carey (pioneer, author, and founder of McKinley View Lodge)
- The Michigan 59ers

- Place Name Origins

Anticipated Benefits of an Interpretive Plan:

- Will provide a better visit for tourists
- Byway brochure guiding visitors to highlights, restrooms and services, recreational opportunities, etc...
- Increased educational opportunities
- Economic benefits
- Strengthen connections to land and communities
- Increased interpretive signage
- Roadside cleanup
- Better use of recreational opportunities
- Increased highway safety
- Bear awareness

Anticipated Concerns:

- Possible light pollution from improved waysides
- Concerned about negative impacts of increasing the number of pullouts without restrooms
- Need to keep maintenance costs as close to 0% as possible
- Trespassing on private property

- Need to avoid “strip development” in Denali State Park
- Need to maintain toilets and trash receptacles

Other Suggestions:

- Improve traffic flow by adding passing lanes, turnouts, etc.
- Improve facilities at popular trailheads
- Need adequate year-round restroom facilities to protect resources from litter and human waste
- Need consistent signage without creating “sign pollution”
- Extend the Byway south to include Palmer to Fairbanks
- Improve intersections and pedestrian facilities at the Parks Highway and Denali Park Road for safety
- Plow pullouts year-round
- Eliminate trapping in highway pullouts
- Large corporate visitor center and bus employees need to use interpretive information
- Enhance safety at the north end of the Chulitna Bridge
- Create cohesive interpretive exhibits the length of the Byway

PARKS BYWAY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MISSION STATEMENT

Through cooperative planning and continued sustainable development, the Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to maintaining the scenic qualities of the Byway corridor and honoring the spirit of the last frontier by providing a safe, comfortable, and educational adventure to be enjoyed by every traveler. The Parks Byway Community Partnership further contributes to the communities and places of interest along the corridor by promoting tourism, supporting the local culture, and enhancing the economic base of the region.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Parks Byway Community Partnership identified five goals in the Corridor Partnership Plan that outline the overall vision of the team and express what the Partnership wanted to accomplish with the plan. The following goals from the Corridor Partnership Plan are relevant to interpretation along the Parks Highway:

- *Goal 2:* Protect and enhance the intrinsic qualities of the Byway through cooperative planning, education, and partnerships
- *Goal 3:* Develop and implement an interpretive plan to promote stewardship of and connections to the Byway's unique landscapes and cultures
- *Goal 5:* Support enhancing traveler services and facilities along the Byway to provide a safe and enjoyable traveling experience for all users.¹

This interpretive plan establishes a mission statement and a separate set of goals and objectives specific to interpretation that complement and support the Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan goals. Before travelers are able to benefit from any interpretation, they must first have their basic needs met. With the traveler's needs in mind, the mission of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway Master Interpretive Plan is to:

Enhance the experience for byway travelers by promoting a safe and comfortable journey while presenting high-quality interpretation that reveals the Parks Highway Scenic Byway's intrinsic qualities.

Intended to fulfill the mission, the following goals for interpretive media are general statements about what the plan hopes to accomplish through interpretation. The corresponding objectives are specific ways to measure whether the goal has or has not been accomplished.

¹ Dept of Natural Resources, The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan (Prepared for the Dept of Transportation and Public Facilities, 2008), 55-56.



Public meeting in Denali Park, April 2011

1. Based on this plan's recommendations, maintain existing and develop new interpretive media and facilities that reveal the Byway's interpretive themes.

- After viewing interpretive media, the majority of travelers on the Parks Highway will be able to state the interpretive theme used in each display.
- After viewing interpretive media, the majority of travelers will have a positive response toward efforts to protect the resource for future use.
- The majority of travelers will be inspired by the interpretive media to personally relate to the interpreted resource.
- The majority of travelers will be able to state at least three new facts related to the Byway's intrinsic qualities after viewing interpretive media on the Parks Highway.

2. Establish guidance for a consistent and meaningful design of wayfinding, marketing, and interpretive signs and displays.

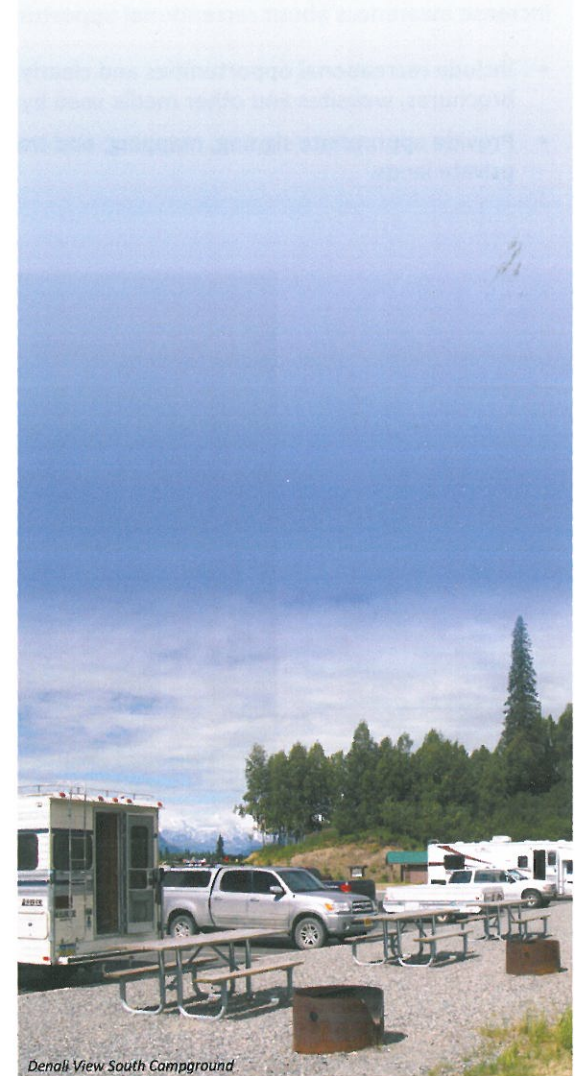
- The majority of travelers will be able to recognize a unified appearance of community entrance signs and interpretive displays on the Parks Highway.
- The majority of visitors will be able to confirm that they received adequate wayfinding information and interpretive opportunities.
- As new signs are produced and existing ones are updated and replaced, the America's Byways logo will be included on them in addition to the State Scenic Byways logo.

3. Establish a framework for evaluating new and existing interpretive media.

- Evaluate new text and designs for signs, displays and brochures prior to fabrication according to this plan's recommendations.
- Implement at least one evaluative technique (questionnaire, interview, comment box, etc...) annually for each major section of the Parks Highway to determine the effectiveness of interpretive media in the corridor.

4. Promote safe and responsible travel on the Byway.

- Travelers and recreationalists will be able to confirm that they were provided adequate year-round safe traveling tips and emergency contact information in brochures, rack cards, newsletters, websites, and other media.
- Encourage agency and community partnerships to assist with maintenance of trash receptacles and toilets at frequently used pullouts.
- Collaborate with local communities and organizations to determine where waysides need improvement and ensure that pullouts are enhanced every 50-70 miles to include toilets, bear-resistant trash receptacles and picnic tables where appropriate.



- To reduce impacts to natural and cultural resources, incorporate outdoor ethics and stewardship principles into interpretive materials.
- The majority of travelers will be able to discuss Leave-No-Trace and Tread Lightly principles after viewing interpretive media.
- After viewing interpretive media, the majority of travelers will feel that the resources of the Parks Highway deserve respect and stewardship.

5. Increase awareness about recreational opportunities in the Parks Byway corridor.

- Include recreational opportunities and clearly identify ADA accessible trails in new and updated brochures, websites and other media used by visitors for travel planning.
- Provide appropriate signing, mapping, and travel information for recreational sites on public and private lands.



Ruth Glacier. Alaska Division of Tourism



Denali View South Wayside

2. OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES²

INTRODUCTION

The Alaska and National Scenic Byways programs identify six intrinsic qualities that serve to capture the spirit of adventure and sense of magic found on American roads: natural, recreational, scenic, historical, cultural, and archaeological. A corridor resource inventory of these qualities can be found in the appendix. In the case of the Parks Byway, while all six qualities recognized by the National Scenic Byways Program are exemplified, the natural and recreation resources are world-class. This Byway offers views of Mt. McKinley and passes through a protected subarctic ecosystem almost as large as Massachusetts that contains the largest inland glaciers in Alaska, a gorge deeper than the Grand Canyon, one of North America's lowest mountain passes, and fossils of national significance. Travelers come from all over the globe to sample this Byway's recreation opportunities. Adventurers and athletes come to participate in world-class mountaineering activities. Others traverse the Byway to view the five largest terrestrial mammals in the northern hemisphere, hike in the colorful tundra, take a sled dog ride, snowmachine in a winter wonderland, or view the northern lights. Many residents commute between Alaska's two largest cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks, for business and pleasure, to get supplies, and to experience urban culture.

Scenic opportunities and cultural and historical experiences also abound as exceptional secondary intrinsic qualities. A statewide survey that looked at intrinsic qualities of Alaska's byways supports these claims—it was found that Alaskans believed the Parks Byway exhibited not just one or two, but a diversity of interrelated intrinsic qualities.³

² This chapter is heavily borrowed from the Intrinsic Quality Assessment found in the Parks Highway Corridor Partnership Plan. See: Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks, Interpretation and Education, The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway, Prepared for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (Anchorage: 2008), 9-39.

³ Greg Brown, Alaska Scenic Byways Statewide Study (Anchorage: Alaska Pacific University, 2002).

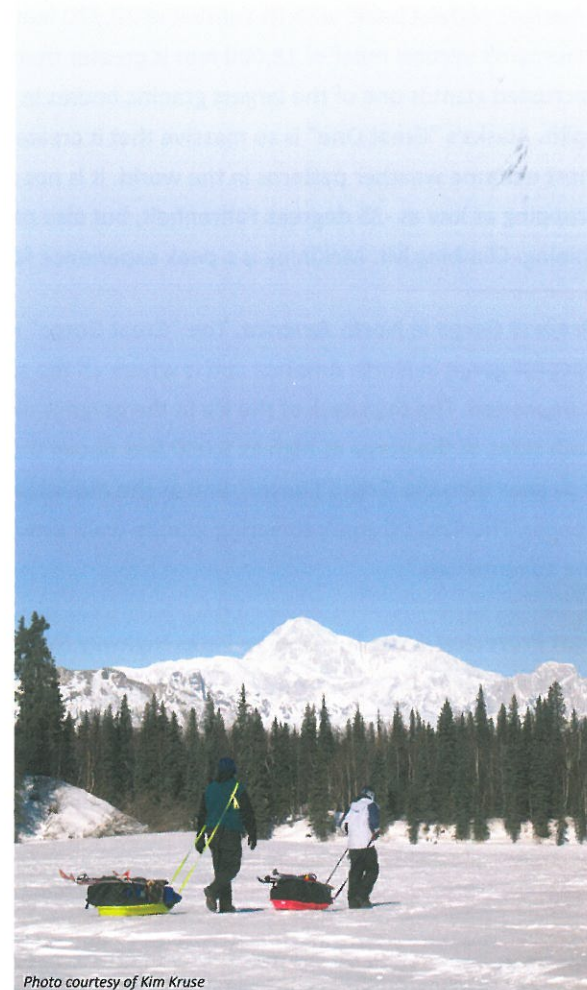


Photo courtesy of Kim Kruse

NATURAL QUALITIES

Natural quality applies to those features in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landform, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity, but the natural features reveal minimal disturbances (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Tallest Mountain in North America. The Alaska Range, one of the greatest mountain uplifts on the continent, dominates the landscape of this region. Looming above other mountains in the range is Mt. McKinley, North America's highest peak, with its summit at 20,320 feet. From the base of Mt. McKinley to its summit, the mountain's vertical relief of 18,000 feet is greater than that on Mt. Everest. This beautiful ice and snow-encrusted giant is one of the largest granitic bodies in the world and it continues to "grow" due to tectonic uplift. Alaska's "Great One" is so massive that it creates its own weather systems, resulting in some of the most extreme weather patterns in the world. It is not unusual for climbers to prepare for temperatures dropping as low as -35 degrees Fahrenheit, but also packing a T-shirt for when the wind is calm and the sun is shining. Climbing Mt. McKinley is a peak experience for mountaineers seeking an extreme adventure.⁴

Deepest Gorge in North America. The "Great Gorge" of the Ruth Glacier, flanking Mt. McKinley, is the deepest gorge in North America and is where all the snow that falls on the southeast side of Mt. McKinley is deposited. The thickness of the ice in the gorge is more than 3,800 feet deep and granite cliffs rise on both sides of the gorge as high as 5,000 feet above the ice's surface. The "Great Gorge" of the Ruth Glacier is deeper than the Grand Canyon, and as the mountains rise, the Ruth Glacier continues to cut the valley deeper. The Great Gorge's towering granite walls provide scenery, fascinating geology, and high-angle fun for the adventurous.⁵

Vast Protected Area. The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway provides visitors with superb opportunities to experience a complete subarctic ecosystem in settings relatively undisturbed by humans, while offering a phenomenon surprisingly rare in Alaska: road-accessible wilderness. Immense tracts of public land surround the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. The Byway lies on the eastern edge of Denali National Park and Preserve, one of the largest national parks in the United States. The park began with almost



Dall's sheep
Photo courtesy of Alaska Division of Tourism



Gray wolf
Photo courtesy of Robert Angell/Alaska Division of Tourism

⁴ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Mountaineering," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/mountaineering.htm> (accessed January 31, 2012); Bill Sherwonit, ed., *Denali: A Literary Anthology* (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2000).

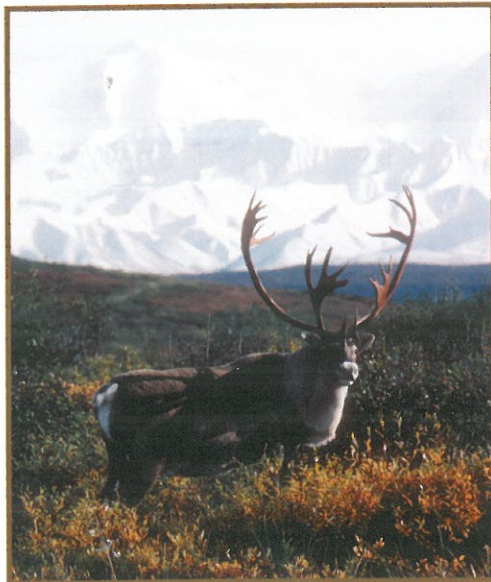
⁵ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Ruth Glacier," http://www.nps.gov/dena/naturescience/ruth_glacier.htm (accessed January 30, 2012).

1.6 million acres set aside in protected status in 1917 and has grown to more than six million acres.⁶ The United Nations Man and Biosphere Program designated the park an International Biosphere Reserve where long-term research can be done on natural processes in a protected area for comparison to human altered areas.⁷ Wild and relatively untouched, this park is considered by some as one of the world's last great frontiers for wilderness adventure. Adjacent to Denali National Park, the Byway also passes through Denali State Park (325,240 acres) and its associated State Recreation Areas that are integral parts of this spectacular region. Together, these neighboring parks create a protected area about the size of Massachusetts that enables an array of flora and fauna to coexist in an unspoiled natural environment.

Located about 35 miles west of Fairbanks and encompassing approximately 500,000 acres, the Minto Flats State Game Refuge is a large wetland complex established for the protection, enhancement, and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats. Minto Flats provides habitat and staging areas for waterfowl, mammals, and fish, recreation opportunities close to Fairbanks, and important subsistence resources for Alaska Natives.⁸

Largest Inland Glaciers in Alaska. Alpine glaciers drape the heights of Mt. McKinley and its companion peaks in the Alaska Range. Glaciers cover more than one-sixth of Denali National Park and Preserve. The Kahiltna Glacier is a massive sheet of ice stretching 44 miles in length, making it the longest glacier in the Alaska Range.⁹ Easily viewed from the Byway, glaciers flow down from the high peaks to river valleys; the Chulitna River's milky waters and braided channels are typical of a glacial stream. Glacier topography is characteristic of this region; the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway guides visitors over ground moraines and drumlin fields, and snakes around kettle lakes, eskers, and outwash plains.

One of North America's Lowest Mountain Passes. Broad Pass is one of the lowest elevated passes along the North American mountain system and it provides travelers with expansive views. Just south of Cantwell, Broad Pass is one of the most beautiful areas on the Byway, with its broad alpine valleys and mountain peaks on either side. Loons, swans, and other waterfowl use Broad Pass as a stopover on their trip north or as breeding and brooding grounds during the summer. Caribou are temporary residents during migration season. In fall, when blueberry leaves are gold and bearberry leaves scarlet, this area is a compelling stop. This long, wide basin affords panoramic views of Mt. McKinley and the imposing 30-mile spine of Curry and



Caribou
Photo courtesy of R. Valentine/Alaska Division of Tourism

⁶ Frank Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*. Volume 1—General Park History to 1980 (Anchorage: National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, 2006).

⁷ National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program, "Denali National Park and Preserve," <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/cakn/dena.cfm> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁸ Alaska Dept of Fish and Game, "Minto Flats—State Game Refuge Area Overview," <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=mintoflats.main> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁹ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Glaciers/Glacial Features," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/naturescience/glaciers.htm> (accessed January 31, 2012).

Kesugi ridges in the Talkeetna Range. Uniquely situated on the divide between Cook Inlet and Yukon River watersheds, Broad Pass also is noteworthy for separating the Chulitna and Nenana river basins and dividing the Cook Inlet and Yukon River watersheds.

Critical Fossil Finds. The Denali region is emerging as a site of important fossils, including footprints credited with being the first evidence of dinosaurs found in interior Alaska. These tracks, estimated at 65-70 million years old, shed light on the roaming habits of prehistoric creatures and support the theory that dinosaurs migrated to Alaska from Asia across the Bering Land Bridge. Field studies have also yielded dinosaur skin impressions, imprints of plant life, fossilized pollen, coprolites, and impressions left by a variety of bugs and worms. Visitors can view samples of fossil tracks and more at Denali's Murie Science and Learning Center.¹⁰

RECREATIONAL QUALITIES

Recreational quality involves outdoor recreational activities directly associated with and dependent upon natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape. The recreational activities provide opportunities for active and passive recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to, downhill skiing, rafting, boating, fishing, and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be well recognized (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Wildlife Watching and Alaska's "Big Five." The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway provides access to trails and waterways that lead to opportunities to experience what may be the best chance to view some of the largest northern mammals in the world. Here, many travelers are able to fulfill a life-long goal of viewing Alaska's "big five" in their natural habitat. From the comfort of vehicles, George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway visitors can see caribou resting on snow patches, moose browsing in stands of willow, Dall's sheep grazing high on the hillsides, wolves trotting across the tundra, or bears feeding on ripening blueberries. Bird life in the region is also especially rich. The area features thousands of lakes providing diverse avian habitat and attracting more than 130 bird species from all over the world. Sandhill cranes, loons, and bald eagles frequent Minto Flats State Game Refuge. The refuge has one of the highest quality waterfowl habitats in the state, which makes for excellent viewing and hunting opportunities.

¹⁰ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Dinosaur Track Found in Denali," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/naturescience/upload/Dinosaur-Fossil-Find.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2012); Denali National Park and Preserve, "Dinosaur Discoveries in Denali National Park and Preserve Provide New Information on Prehistoric Ecosystems," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/parknews/dinotracksmay08.htm> (accessed February 1, 2012).

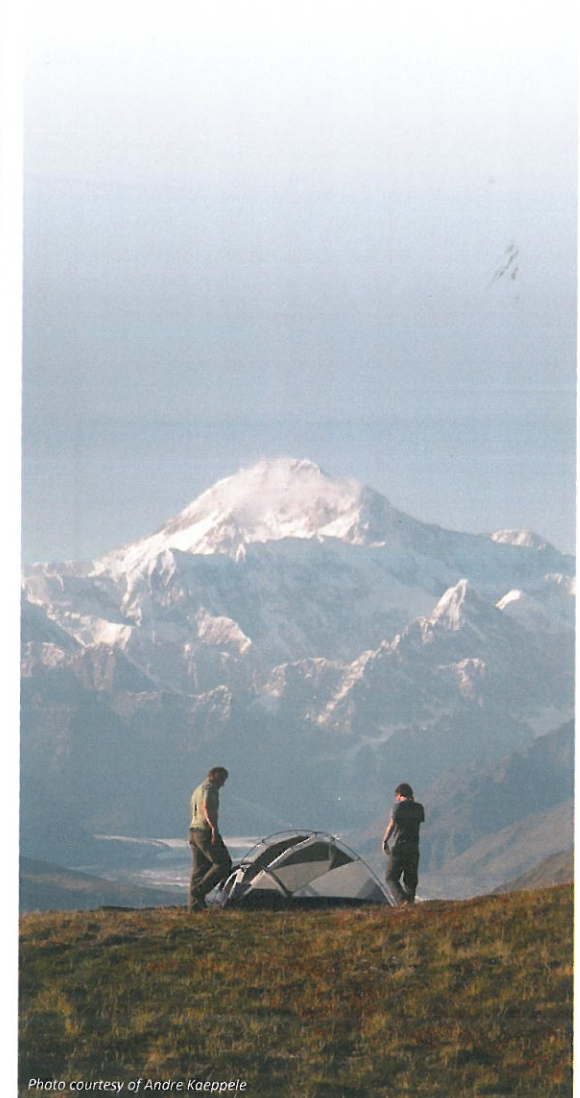


Photo courtesy of Andre Kaeppeler



Climbing Mt. McKinley



Sadler's Alaska Challenge. Photo courtesy of Challenge Alaska



World-Class Mountaineering. This region sports once-in-a-lifetime mountaineering opportunities, considered by some to be the best in the world. Mt. McKinley is part of the world-renowned “Seven Summits Challenge” to climb the highest peak on each of the seven continents. This soaring goliath, the tallest in North America at 20,320 feet, has captured the imagination of mountaineers from all over the world, men and women with sparkling eyes and sun-crinkled faces. Typically about 1,200-1,300 people a year attempt to climb Mt. McKinley, with roughly half reaching the summit. Other peaks in the Alaska Range, such as Mt. Foraker and Mt. Hunter, also draw experienced mountaineers and technical climbers.¹¹

Limitless Multi-Use Outdoor Recreation Opportunities. The Parks Highway Scenic Byway’s extensive landscape supplies limitless outdoor recreation opportunities for local residents as well as visitors from all over the world. Those traveling the Byway can participate in an abundance of outdoor activities depending on the season. In winter, travelers can choose from aurora viewing, snowmachining, snowshoeing, dog mushing, cross-country and backcountry skiing, winter camping, and ice-fishing. Warm-weather recreation opportunities abound in summer and fall, including hiking, camping, kayaking, biking, hunting, fishing, flightseeing, river rafting, wildlife viewing, glacier trekking, backpacking, horseback riding, fall-color viewing, berry picking, and more.

Unparalleled Hiking. This Byway offers some of the best hiking and backpacking in the nation. In the summer months, hikers and backpackers can enjoy exceptional views of Mt. McKinley and the entire southern arc of the Alaska Range under the “midnight sun.” Denali National Park and Preserve is predominantly a trail-free park, and offers outstanding route-finding backpacking opportunities across the tundra, spectacular vistas, encounters with wildlife, and the experience of traveling the land much as the first explorers did. Its neighbor, Denali State Park, has over 40 miles of trails for hikers who prefer established routes. The Kesugi Ridge trail system in the State Park is becoming one of the most popular backpacking routes in the state. Kesugi Ridge is a long, narrow spur of geography paralleling the Alaska Range across the Chulitna River basin that offers extraordinary vistas of rugged mountains bordered by the largest inland glaciers in Alaska. In clear weather, the ridge offers the most spectacular views of Mt. McKinley in the entire area.

Longest Wheelchair and Handcycle Race in the World. The Sadler’s Alaska Challenge (previously known as the Sadler’s Ultra Challenge), sometimes referred to as the “Tour de France” of wheelchair and handcycle racing—is the longest and toughest wheelchair and handcycle race in the world. It runs between Fairbanks and Anchorage, encompassing the entire length of the Byway. Athletes travel from around the globe to

¹¹ Denali National Park, “Current Climbing Activity,” www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/current-statistics.htm (accessed January 30, 2012).

participate in this six-day, 267-mile test of athleticism. These incredible athletes demonstrate the “ability” of people with disabilities and inspire hope for all.¹²

Dog Mushing—the Alaska State Sport. This is an Alaska adventure vacation of a lifetime for some byway visitors. While whizzing by beautiful scenery behind barking and exuberant dogs, visitors are treated to a high-speed excursion across the frozen tundra. Many local mushers and professional outfitters offer tours of their dog kennels and a variety of dog sled rides. Trails along and around the Byway provide mushers with a flat, smooth surface, and these, coupled with the wind and cold temperatures of winter, make for a memorable ride.

World-Class Snowmachining. In terms of accessibility and vistas, the area around Cantwell, especially treeless Broad Pass, offers nationally significant cross-country snowmachining conditions. While on one of the lowest-elevated mountain passes in the nation, snowmachiners can take in panoramic views of beautiful Broad Pass, including the largest mountain in North America. During this time of year, pullouts along the Parks Byway near Cantwell often are crowded with empty snowmachine trailers, their owners playing in deep snow on wide-open tundra. Once the snow falls, these pullouts become great jumping-off points for more remote destinations made accessible by the snow pack. Some of these areas are on private property, but can be accessed with a land-use permit. Cantwell also is a popular staging area for snowmachining on the unmaintained Denali Highway. There are also numerous snowmachining opportunities on the Byway’s northern section.

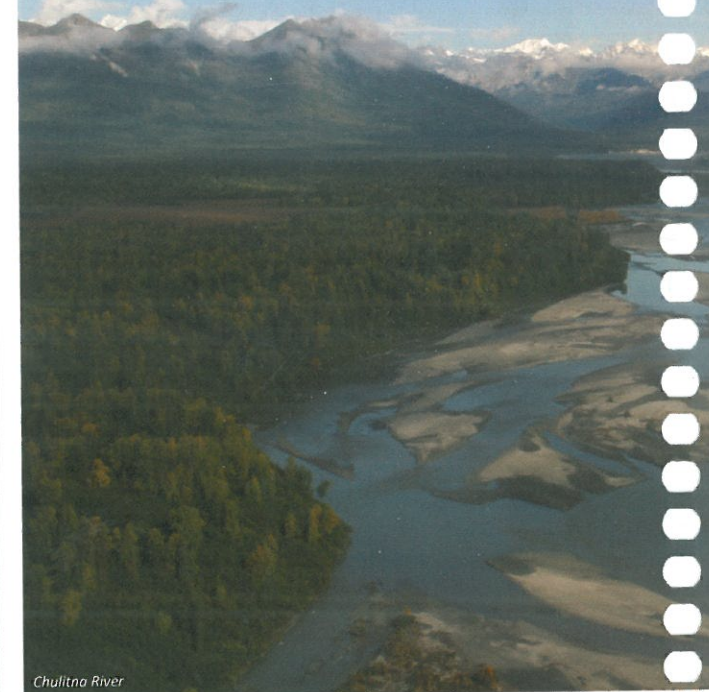
Accessible Aurora Viewing. During the winter months, when nights are long and dark, George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway travelers can experience a remarkable phenomenon. Winter travelers are treated to the Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis—shimmering ribbons of color that flirt and dance across the night sky in varying degrees of intensity and form. Aurora displays are spectacular because most of the Byway is situated far away from city light pollution, providing for exceptional viewing opportunities in the clear winter skies. Travelers can simply pull over, face north, and lean back to get an experience of a lifetime.

Guided Excursions. Numerous outfitting and tour companies offer a variety of excursions within the region, including flightseeing trips to Mt. McKinley, rafting the Nenana River, and dog mushing on frozen rivers. Snowmachine and aurora viewing tours are growing in popularity, as are flightseeing and glacier landing trips. Most tour companies are located in Fairbanks and Talkeetna, but some operate out of Cantwell, Denali Park, and Healy.

¹² Challenge Alaska, “Sadler’s Alaska Challenge,” http://www.challengealaska.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=143&Itemid=115 (accessed February 1, 2012).



Dog mushing along the Parks Highway



Chulitna River



Photo courtesy of Mike Morris

The South Denali Visitor Center Complex. South Denali is a planning project with a 30-year history resulting from a shared vision among regional public land managers that the South Denali area should have expanded visitor facilities and recreational opportunities. The State of Alaska received funding in 2008 for the first phase of this project with additional funding provided in subsequent years. Access to the planned visitor center is at mile 135.5 of the Byway.

This project will greatly enhance recreation opportunities in the area by improving recreational access throughout the South Denali region. Year-round activities will be available, including interpretation of natural and cultural resources, viewing Mt. McKinley, hiking, camping, summer trails for non-motorized use, and winter trails for both motorized and non-motorized use.¹³ Short trails and boardwalks are planned to guide visitors through the tundra to viewing areas. Less improved long-distance trails will carry adventurous travelers up to the Curry Lookout and down to the Susitna River. The extensive trail system will link to the Mt. McKinley Wilderness Lodge, the Byers Lake Campground, and the Kesugi Ridge trail system. Additionally, agency partners will create access from the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway to the Chulitna River downstream of the mouth of Troublesome Creek for rafts, kayaks, and other small, non-motorized watercraft. The entire South Denali Visitor Center Complex will be a destination in itself and have sufficient activities and amenities for a visitor to spend days experiencing this region.

SCENIC QUALITIES

Scenic quality is the heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements of the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience. All elements of the landscape—landform, water, vegetation, and manmade development—contribute to the quality of the corridor’s visual environment. Everything present is in harmony and shares in the intrinsic qualities (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

One of Alaska’s Most Scenic Byways. The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway shares with travelers some of the state’s most memorable scenery. As visitors travel north from Anchorage, the landscape noticeably changes at the start of the Byway at mile 132 by becoming more intricate and interesting. Here, travelers can catch a glimpse of Mt. McKinley peaking above the dense forest. As the road begins to curve through rolling, undeveloped topography, expansive views of unique and diverse landform features materialize in all directions: the continent’s highest peaks, active glaciers, churning rivers, muskeg bogs, and

¹³ National Park Service, Denali National Park and Preserve Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Denali Park, AK: 2006).

rich boreal forests. Leaving a lasting impression on visitors are jaw-dropping views of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range, the imposing spines of Curry and Kesugi ridges, the picturesque eroded cliffs above the East Fork Chulitna River, the steep-walled gorges of Hurricane Gulch and Nenana Canyon, the panoramic vastness of Broad Pass, the churning Nenana and Tanana rivers, and the boreal forest of Interior Alaska.

A Kaleidoscope of Color. Seasonal changes bring scenic variety; in fall, the tundra converts into a kaleidoscope of color. Each fall, visitors, residents, and professional photographers make the pilgrimage up the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway to bask in the brilliant fall colors of the tundra: scarlet blueberry shrubs, sunflower-yellow willows, and pumpkin-orange shrub birch. In winter, vivid hues from Aurora dance in the sky overhead. Nationally recognized under the Clean Air Act Amendment, Denali National Park and Preserve is a designated Class I Airshed.¹⁴ The outstanding air quality and absence of city lights along most of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway provides ideal conditions for daytime viewing and night sky visibility.

HISTORIC QUALITIES

Historic quality encompasses legacies of the past distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or manmade, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir and appreciation for the past. The historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns, and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped, and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling, and association (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

First Peoples. People have traveled through and inhabited this area for nearly 10,000 years; numerous archaeological sites confirm Alaska Natives used the area for trade and subsistence.¹⁵ The first people to enter this region were hunters, recently migrated from Asia over the Bering Land Bridge.¹⁶ They entered a world dominated by the brute physical facts of massive landforms, ice, roiling glacial rivers, and a climate usually frigid and only occasionally warm. Athabascan natives who once lived entirely on the area's rich resources, traditionally occupied lands along the Byway corridor, and rivers, such as the Susitna and Tanana, served as important transportation and trade routes. Today, descendants of these first peoples still reside in

¹⁴ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Air Quality Monitoring," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/naturescience/upload/airquality2009.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹⁵ Kari, James and James Fall (editors), *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 2003).

¹⁶ William E. Brown, *Denali: Symbol of the Alaskan Wild: An Illustrated History of the Denali-Mt. McKinley Region, Alaska* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1993), 15.



Alaska Veterans Memorial, Denali State Park

Byway communities, maintaining their traditions through a subsistence lifestyle and using some of the same hunting grounds as their ancestors did years ago.

Early Explorers. Non-native people first explored Interior Alaska following the territory's purchase from Russia in 1867. Many of the place names along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway are derived from this period's explorers and military men, such as Lt. John C. Cantwell and Captain Michael J. Healy. The first Caucasian explorer to rave about the beauty and wildlife of the alpine country was geographer Alfred Brooks, on a U.S. Geological Survey expedition that traversed the Alaska Range in 1902. On this journey, he wrote:

"...the broad lowland of the Sushitna Valley lay spread before us, the dark greens of its spruce forest contrasting with the lighter greens of the open marshes and the bright gleam of small lakes and winding water courses. Beyond rose a range of highlands, and then, forming the sky-line, snow-covered Alaskan mountains."¹⁷

His accounts of a possible route up Mt. McKinley enticed the legendary Judge James Wickersham to lead the first attempted ascent of the peak in 1903. "Glare ice" and a "spur as sharp as a house roof rapidly rising to where it was nearly perpendicular," as well as constant snow slides forced a retreat. Wickersham's account vividly captured his successes and failures on the mountain and inspired future attempts to reach the summit. His story of exploration still captivates readers today. Of the Wickersham Wall that later carried his name, he wrote:

"Immense masses of snow and ice high on the mountainside broke loose with the report of a cannon. With rapidly accelerating speed they shot down the ice encrusted slope, gathering momentum every second...& finally striking the glacier with the roar of a hundred great guns."¹⁸

Golden Heart City. In 1901, Captain E.T. Barnette established a trading post on the banks of the Chena River. Although Barnette was originally headed for Tanana Crossing, the sternwheeler Lavelle Young could not navigate the Tanana River's fast moving, shallow water, so it deposited Barnette on the Chena instead. Lucky for him, one year later, Italian prospector Felix Pedro discovered gold approximately 16 miles north of Barnette's temporary trading post and Barnette smartly decided to stay. The subsequent gold rush attracted prospectors to the area; in 1902, then District Court Judge James Wickersham suggested naming the post Fairbanks after Indiana senator Charles Fairbanks, who later became U.S. Vice President under Theodore

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ Jonathon Waterman, *High Alaska: A Historical Guide to Denali, Mount Foraker, and Mount Hunter* (Golden, Colorado: AAC Press, 1996), 39.



Roosevelt. Mostly due to Barnette’s entrepreneurial spirit and promotion of the city—and help from Wickersham—Fairbanks continued to grow, acquiring government offices, a jail, post office, telephone service, fire station, and bank. Judge Wickersham moved the Third Judicial District from Eagle to Fairbanks in 1903 and Barnette became Fairbanks’s first mayor that same year. By 1910, the official population was 3,451, with thousands more working claims on creeks north of town.¹⁹

The Race Up Mt. McKinley. In 1903, Dr. Frederick Cook and five partners completed the first circumnavigation of the mountain. Cook and his party made a determined attempt to climb the scantily-charted Mt. McKinley, but were “checkmated” at 11,300 feet by steepness, scarce provisions, and weather.²⁰ In 1906, Cook returned to Alaska and successfully explored the southern approaches of the mountain. Running short of time, the expedition turned back. Cook and his assistant horse packer, Edward Barrill, changed their minds at the last minute and returned to the Denali region for an impulsive final attempt to conquer Mt. McKinley. Cook claimed that he reached the summit on the East Buttress and returned to Cook Inlet in only two weeks. Barrill, however, acknowledged three years later that they never made it higher than 10,000 feet.²¹ C. E. Rusk, leader of the 1910 Portland Oregon Mazama Mountaineering Club expedition, in his report debunking Dr. Cook’s claim that he was the first person to reach the summit of Mt. McKinley wrote:

“...as we gazed upon the forbidding crags of the great mountain from far up the Ruth Glacier...we realized how utterly impossible and absurd was the story of this man who, carrying a single pack, claims to have started from the Tokositna on the eighth of September, and to have stood on the highest point of McKinley on the sixteenth of the month. The man does not live who can perform such a feat. Let us draw the mantle of charity around him and believe, if we can, that there is a thread of insanity running through the roof of his brilliant mind...If he is mentally imbalanced, he is entitled to the pity of mankind. If he is not, there is no corner of the earth where he can hide from his past.”²²

In 1910, four prospectors inspired by Cook’s suspicious claims decided to prove that “if anyone is able to reach the summit of the mountain...surely Alaskans can.”²³ The “Sourdough Expedition” conceptualized in Bill

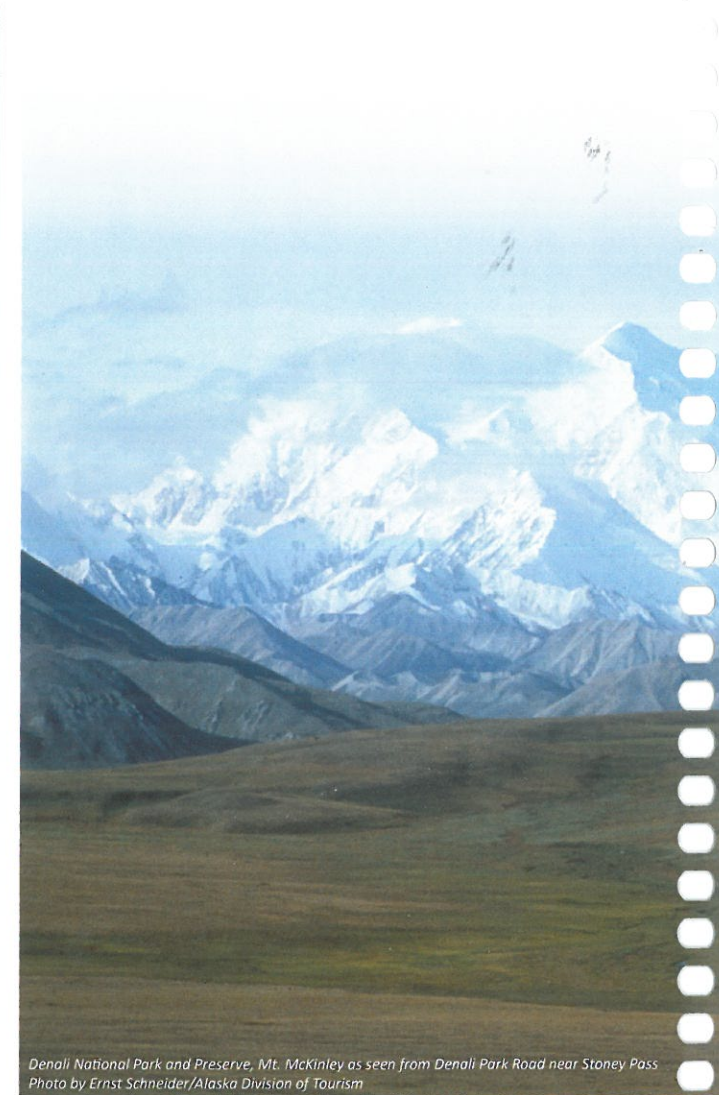
¹⁹ Dermot Cole, *Fairbanks: A Gold Rush Town that Beat the Odds* (Seattle: Epicenter Press, 1999); State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online: <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/comddb/CIS.cfm> (31 October 2011).

²⁰ Robert Dunn, *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer: A Story of Failure on Mt. McKinley* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 171.

²¹ Waterman, *High Alaska*, 42.

²² Quoted in William E. Brown, *A History of the Denali–Mount McKinley, Region, Alaska: Historic Resource Study of Denali National Park and Preserve, Volume 1—Historical Narrative, “Chapter 3: Challenge of the Mountain”* (Santa Fe: NPS Southwest Regional Office, 1991).

²³ Terrence Cole, ed., *The Sourdough Expedition: Stories of the Pioneer Alaskans who Climbed Mt. McKinley in 1910* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co, 1985), 7.



Denali National Park and Preserve, Mt. McKinley as seen from Denali Park Road near Stoney Pass
Photo by Ernst Schneider/Alaska Division of Tourism



McPhee's Washington Saloon in Fairbanks when Tom Lloyd, a 50-year-old Kantishna miner, claimed that he knew how to reach the summit. McPhee stated that Lloyd was too old and fat to accomplish such a challenge, but Lloyd said that for two cents he would do it just to prove McPhee wrong. Rather than two cents, McPhee and two others offered \$500 apiece to pay for expenses. Lloyd, Peter Anderson, Charley McGonagall, and Billy Taylor accepted the challenge and departed from Fairbanks in late December 1909. The crew carried with them a 14-foot flagpole flying a six-foot by twelve-foot American flag in hopes that it could be seen on the summit using a telescope on a tall building in Fairbanks. Although Lloyd did not reach the summit himself, two of his partners, Billy Taylor and Peter Anderson, became the first to reach the North Peak, which at 19,470 feet is just slightly lower than the 20,320-foot South Peak.²⁴

The first complete ascent of Mt. McKinley was co-led in 1913 by Hudson Stuck, Alaska's Episcopal Archdeacon, and Harry Karstens, who would become the first Superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve. Alaska Native Walter Harper and theology student Robert Tatum completed the team. Their arduous journey up the mountain took over two months and witnessed clashes of temperament and style, a tent fire, digestive problems, and oxygen deficiency. However, they made it to the top. Of the view from the summit, Stuck wrote:

"It is difficult to describe at all the scene which the top of the mountain presented, and impossible to describe it adequately. One was not occupied with the thought of description but wholly possessed with the breadth and glory of it, with its sheer, amazing immensity and scope. Only once, perhaps, in a lifetime is such vision granted..."²⁵

Creation of Denali National Park and Preserve. In 1906-1908, naturalist Charles Sheldon roamed the area now known as Denali National Park and Preserve. During this time, he made extensive observations of the life histories of Dall's sheep and other animals living in the area. Although he was a sport hunter, he became alarmed at the impending demise of wildlife due to overhunting by commercial hunters and aggressively worked to convince Congress to establish a national park in the area. His efforts for preservation of Denali's wilderness and wildlife culminated in the original establishment of Mt. McKinley National Park in 1917 (later renamed Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980). After Congress passed a bill to create the park, Sheldon had the honor of personally delivering the act to President Wilson.²⁶ Harry Karstens said of Sheldon:

"He was continually talking of the beauties of the country and of the variety of the game and wouldn't it make an ideal park and game preserve...He came in the following July

²⁴ Ibid, 7-9.

²⁵ Sherwonit, Denali: A Literary Anthology, 137.

²⁶ Tom Walker, Kantishna Musers, Miners, Mountaineers: The Pioneer Story Behind Mt. McKinley National Park (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing, 2005), 51-68, 189-203.

hunting for the Biological Survey and stayed a year, during that time...we had located the limits of the caribou run. We would talk over the possible boundaries of a park and preserve which we laid out practically the same as the present park boundaries.”²⁷

The Golden Spike. Nenana, situated at the confluence of the Nenana and Tanana rivers, has traditionally been an important gathering place for hunting, fishing, trade, meetings, and celebrations between Athabascan Native groups. When gold was discovered in Fairbanks in 1902, activity in Nenana increased; a trading post was established, St. Mark’s Episcopal mission and school were built and a post office opened by 1908. Construction of the Alaska Railroad doubled Nenana’s population and in 1923, U.S. President Warren G. Harding drove the golden spike at Nenana, signifying the railroad’s completion. The Nenana Railroad Depot is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and houses the Alaska Railroad Museum.²⁸

The Serum Run. Nenana was the start of the famous Serum Run whereby in late January and early February 1925, 20 mushers and their dog teams transported life-saving diphtheria vaccine to Nome, a town on the edge of Alaska and on the edge of a potentially deadly epidemic. The Iditarod Sled Dog Race, which travels more than 1,000 miles from Anchorage to Nome, was founded in 1973 to commemorate the efforts of the mushers during the 1925 Serum Run.²⁹

The Curry Hotel. Deadhorse Hill, now called Curry Ridge, was roughly halfway between Seward and Fairbanks along the Alaska Railroad. In 1917, the same year Denali was designated a national park, the Deadhorse Roadhouse was built and would be managed until 1923 by Nellie Neal Lawing, known as Alaska Nellie. Major changes at the Alaska Railroad stop took place starting in 1922 when Deadhorse Hill was renamed Curry and construction began on a lavish and modern hotel. The new Curry Hotel opened in 1923 and provided guests with such luxuries as tennis courts, a three-hole golf course, swimming pool, ski lift, and a suspension footbridge crossing the Susitna River. In addition to the hotel, the Alaska Railroad had space for operations at the site called Curry, including railroad shops, bunkhouses, cottages, train depot, laundry, creamery, bakery, schoolhouse, and an airstrip. It was a bustling community of railroad and hotel employees mixed with overnight visitors until the “palace in the wilderness”³⁰ burned to the ground in a fire in April 1957. Following the fire, Curry rapidly disappeared. Some buildings were relocated to other communities and other



President Harding driving in the golden spike that completed the Alaska Railroad; Nenana, July 15, 1923. Alaska State Library, Margeurite Bone Wilcox Photograph Collection ASL-P70-85



Leonhard Seppala and three dogs Alaska State Library, Harry T. Becker Photograph Collection, ASL-P67-122



Curry Hotel, 1923 Alaska State Library Alaska Railroad Tour Lantern Slide Collection ASL-P198-45

27 Quoted in William E. Brown, *A History of the Denali–Mount McKinley, Region, Alaska: Historic Resource Study of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Volume 1–Historical Narrative, “Chapter 5: Charles Sheldon and the Mount McKinley Park Movement” (Santa Fe: NPS Southwest Regional Office, 1991).

28 State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, “Nenana,” <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012).

29 Mike Coppock, “The Race to Save Nome,” *American History* 41 No. 3 (Aug 2006): 56-63.

30 Kenneth L. Marsh, *Lavish Silence: A Pictorial Chronicle of Vanished Curry, Alaska* (Trapper Creek, AK: Trapper Creek Museum Sluice Box Productions, 2003), 95.

buildings were demolished. Little can be seen where the hotel once stood and nature has reclaimed most of the old settlement.³¹ The vanished community comes to life once a year when the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage sponsors a popular annual ski train to Curry on the Alaska Railroad where skiers ride the train to the old hotel site for an all-day ski in the wilderness. (ALSAP for photos; also a lot of photos in Alaska Railroad Collection shown in Lavish Silence)

An Unlikely Partnership. Don Sheldon, an Alaska bush pilot, and Bradford Washburn, the director of the Boston Museum of Science, met in 1951 and began a 15-year partnership. Washburn’s long-term survey of Mt. McKinley and its neighboring peaks began in 1955 and required numerous glacier landings. Sheldon was the perfect pilot for the job with a newly installed set of retractable skis on his Super Cub. Sheldon also became well known for the many life-saving flights he accomplished and Washburn became well known for his knowledge and expertise of mountaineering in the Mt. McKinley region. Their partnership resulted in the creation of the first large-scale map of Mt. McKinley.³²

The First Parks Highway Advocate. Mary Carey moved to Alaska as a recent widow in the early 1960s hoping to find a teaching position. She soon decided that what she really wanted was a homestead in the shadow of Mt. McKinley, so she resigned teaching in 1964 to pursue her homesteading adventure. Mary was a tireless advocate for construction of the Anchorage-Fairbanks Highway, now called the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway, which would pass through her homestead. Frustrated that after \$35 million were spent, construction halted on the highway just after crossing the Susitna River, leaving a 68-mile gap. Mary “declared war” on Governor Bill Egan and his administration in 1966 using the columns she wrote for various newspapers to stress the importance of the road and demand that it be completed. After the Parks Highway was finally finished in 1971, Mary built the McKinley View Lodge at mile 134 and then proceeded to write 15 books including a book written about the Parks Highway, *An Auto Trip to Alaska’s Shangri-La*.³³ (Orange 99-106, 188-198; Blue 125-130)

CULTURAL QUALITIES

Cultural quality is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features include, but are not limited to, crafts, music dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events,



Caribou along the Parks Highway

³¹ Ibid, 26-49, 108-116.

³² James Greiner, *Wager with the Wind: The Don Sheldon Story* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 71, 83.

³³ Mary Carey, *Alaska, Not for a Woman* (Boston: Branden Press, 1975), 99-106, 188-198; Mary Carey, *An Auto Trip to Alaska's Shangri-La* (Tex-Alaska Press, 1989), 125-130.

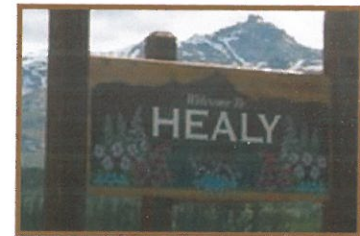
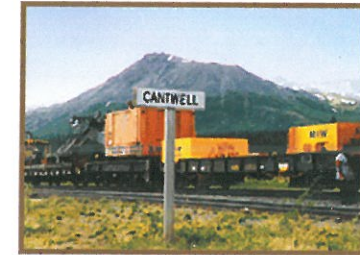
vernacular architecture, etc. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities and/or ethnic traditions (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Unique Frontier Culture. The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway provides travelers with the opportunity to experience a unique frontier culture, discernible by modern-day trappers, explorers, mountaineers, miners, and homesteaders. The communities of the Byway are rich in this shared culture born of the quintessential Alaskan theme of wilderness and characterized by self-sustainability and traditional values. Roadhouses along the Byway provide a feeling of stepping back in time. Some of these roadhouses have offered travelers meals and lodging since before the road was constructed in 1971. The following is a brief summary of how the communities of Cantwell, Healy, Anderson, Nenana, Ester, and Fairbanks contribute to this corridor's unique cultural atmosphere.

Cantwell, which includes the federally recognized Native Village of Cantwell, originated as an Alaska Railroad construction camp in 1916. At one time, the Cantwell Section House was composed almost entirely of Indian women. One of the stories now legendary is the Cantwell all-women crew of gandy dancers, laborers who drove spikes into rails to hold them in place. The rhythm of their sledgehammers, swung to a regular beat, earned them their nickname. It is said that the female crew kept the best-maintained line on the entire railroad.³⁴

Highway tourism and transportation dominate Cantwell's economy; however, the community retains strong Native traditions, with subsistence values remaining an integral part of the lifestyle.³⁵ Wild food harvests are a primary example of these values and are crucial for maintaining important cultural traditions.

Healy is a mining and railroad town that has evolved into a diverse community with year-round visitor services. Home to the Usibelli Coal Mine Inc. (previously known as the Healy River Coal Company), the hills near Healy produce about 1.5 million short tons of coal each year, which is exported as far away as South Korea. Healy coal continues to be a major contributor to the economies of the area and the rest of the state. Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. was named the 2007 Governor's Exporter of the Year and is listed in Alaska Business Monthly as one of the top 49 Alaska Businesses.³⁶



Welcome sign at Healy on the Parks Highway

³⁴ Mary Carey, *An Auto Trip to Alaska's Shangri-La* (Tex-Alaska Press, 1989), 149.

³⁵ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, "Cantwell," <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012).

³⁶ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, "Healy," <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012); Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc., <http://www.usibelli.com/UCM.html> (accessed February 2, 2012).

Anderson is a small town located six miles west of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway, accessed via a paved road at milepost 283.5. Clear Air Force Station is also accessed by this paved road, and many Anderson residents are affiliated with the base, which played a role in Alaska's Cold War history. One of the early homesteaders in the area, Arthur Anderson, sub-divided his 80-acre property in 1959 and sold many of the lots to civilian employees of Clear Air Force Station. Soon after Anderson's land sales, the town was incorporated in 1962. Anderson is best known to travelers for their 616-acre Riverside Park and the annual Anderson Bluegrass Festival.³⁷



Nenana Railroad Depot and Museum.
Photo by John Coombs



Alfred Starr Cultural Center.
Photo courtesy of City of Nenana



Welcome sign near Ester Gold Complex

Nenana is the shipping hub for tugboats and barges along the Tanana River, transporting fuel, freight, and supplies between river communities from late May to September. Visitors to Nenana can learn more about this unique community at the Alfred Starr Cultural Center and the Alaska Railroad Museum where interpretive displays reveal the history and culture of local Athabascan heritage, the story of St. Luke's Episcopal mission, railroad history, and more. Nenana is perhaps best known for the annual Nenana Ice Classic. Started in 1917, the event commences in late February or early March with the Tripod Raising Festival, and then culminates with a dramatic finish when the Tanana River ice breaks in late April or early May. Cash prizes are given to winners who guess the exact minute of break-up. For those interested in high-speed action, the Tesoro Iron Dog™ snowmachine race and the Yukon 800 speed boat race both pass through Nenana.³⁸

Ester is an eclectic community located at milepost 351. The town was founded as a gold mining camp around 1905. The historic Ester Gold Complex, where the town celebrates its gold mining roots was built in 1936 by the Fairbanks Exploration Company.³⁹ The Malemute Saloon was even the setting for Robert Service's poem, *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*. The opening lines read:

***A bunch of boys were whooping it up in the Malemute Saloon;
The kid that handles the music box was hitting a jag-time tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady that's known as Lou.***⁴⁰

³⁷ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, "Anderson," <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012); City of Anderson, <http://www.anderson.govoffice.com/> (accessed February 2, 2012).

³⁸ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, "Nenana," <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012); Official website of the Nenana Ice Classic, <http://www.nenanaiceclassic.com/> (accessed February 2, 2012); Official website of Iron Dog, <http://www.irondograce.org/> (accessed February 2, 2012).

³⁹ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Community Database Online, "Ester," <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm> (accessed February 2, 2012).

⁴⁰ Robert Service, *Collected Poems of Robert Service* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1966).

Fairbanks is Alaska's second most populous city and a popular destination and jumping-off point for many Alaska visitors. As with many urban centers, Fairbanks has a myriad of cultural activities and events throughout the year that entertain both visitors and residents. Even temperatures below -50°F don't hinder the fun! Fairbanks hosts winter events such as the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race in February and the World Ice Art Championship held late February through March. When the sun shines warmly again in spring, residents and visitors look forward to the Midnight Sun Festival, the Golden Days Celebration, the Tanana Valley State Fair, and many more annual summer celebrations. There are also several museums and cultural centers in Fairbanks, including the new Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center downtown and the University of Alaska's Museum of the North.

Multi-Community Carnival. The regional Winterfest Celebration in the Denali Borough showcases the season responsible for the corridor's frontier lifestyle with a wide range of activities that provide opportunities to safely enjoy winter and sample the amenities the area has to offer. This annual festival connects the region's culture with the recreation opportunities through a variety of activities for all ages and skill levels, including dog sled rides, cross-country skiing, snow sculpting, snow bowling, dog fur spinning, avalanche safety, snow shelter building, history presentations, snowshoe walks, winter bicycling, track finding, and storytelling. Denali National Park and Preserve, the Denali Borough, and the Denali Borough School District are among the key sponsors of the Winterfest Celebration, and all Denali Borough communities are included in the festivities.⁴¹

ARCHAEOLOGICAL QUALITIES

Archaeological quality involves those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activities that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor's archaeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains, and other physical evidence have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir and appreciation for the past (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

This intrinsic quality will not be significantly marketed due to the sensitivity of archaeological sites along the corridor. Known resources include sites associated with Athabascan groups and major prehistoric sites such as the Teklanika Archaeological District, a property inside Denali National Park listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A number of sites in the Healy vicinity near Dry Creek, Panguingue Creek, and Nenana Gorge have also yielded important information. Joining efforts with area archaeologists to appropriately interpret archaeological sites would ensure that protection of these sensitive resources remains unchanged.

⁴¹ Denali National Park and Preserve, "Winterfest Celebrations," <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/winterfest.htm> (accessed February 2, 2012).



Ice Park in Fairbanks
Photo courtesy of the Fairbanks
Convention and Visitors Bureau



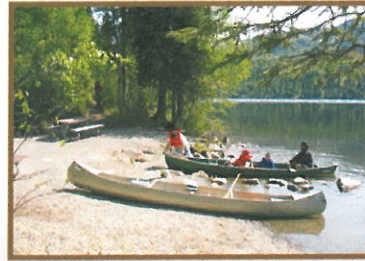
WEIO (World Eskimo-Indian Olympics,
Fairbanks)
Photo courtesy of the Fairbanks
Convention and Visitors Bureau



Ice sculpting at Winterfest



A swan stopover along the Parks Highway



Byers Lake



Fireweed along the Parks Highway





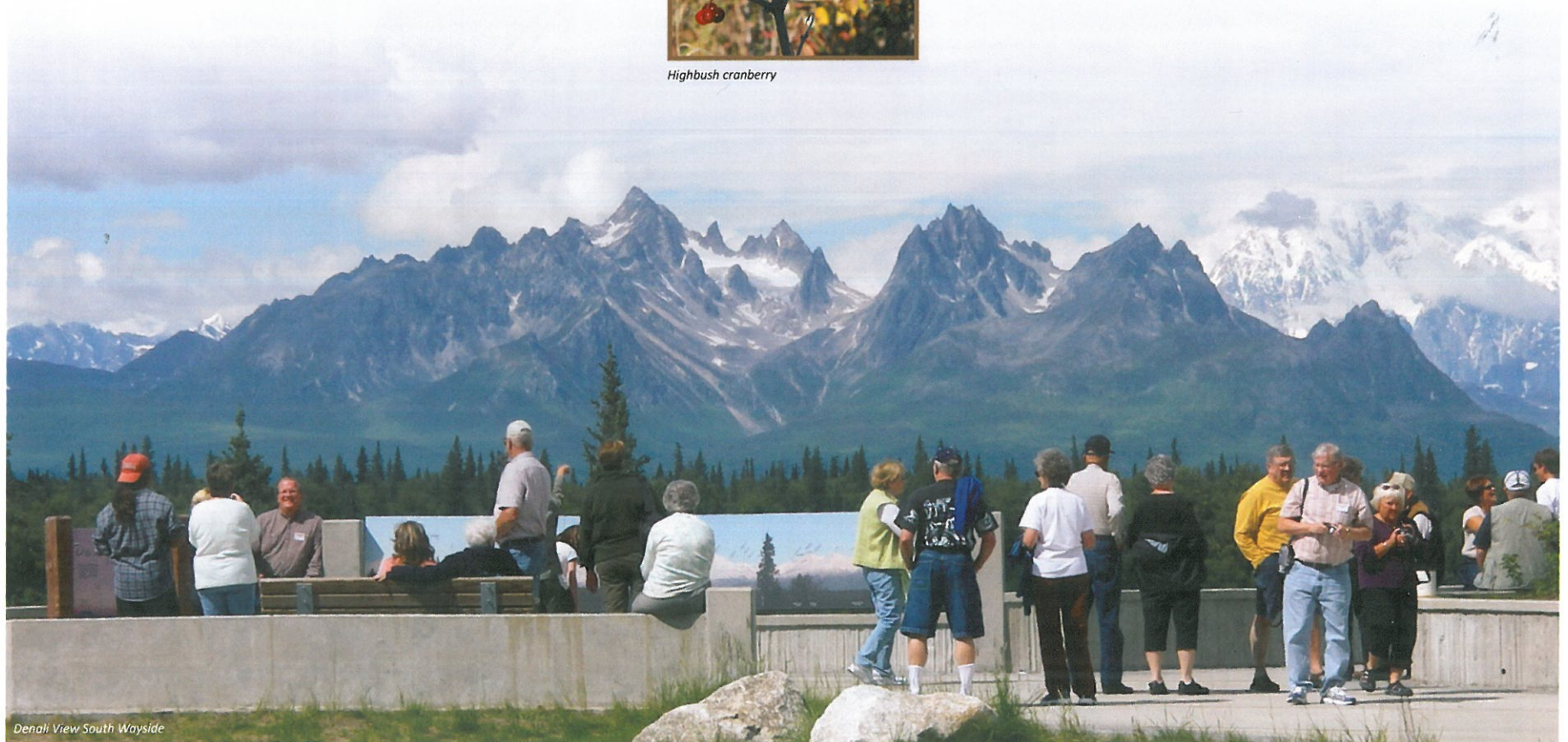
Bearberry



Highbush cranberry



Narcissus-flowered anemone



Denali View South Wayside

3. AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

An audience analysis uses past trends to help determine what interpretive sites and services are the most appropriate. The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway is approximately 230 miles long and, due to its length, does not necessarily receive the same visitors at the southern end of the Byway as the northern portion. Most available information about travelers is general and focuses on visitors to Alaska as a whole, but some specific information from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Denali National Park and Preserve, the Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau, and highway traffic data provide a glimpse into regional statistics. Using various studies and reports, one can learn who is visiting Alaska, what their motives are, and what they expect to do while they are in the state.

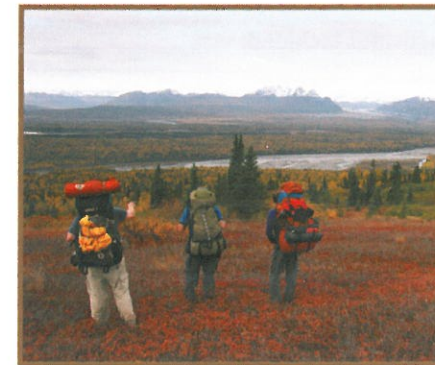
The Alaska Visitor Statistics Program studies visitor volume and conducts a survey of visitors' trip purposes, transportation methods, lengths of stay, destinations, lodging, activities, expenditures, satisfaction, trip planning, and demographics. A study was conducted by this program in 2006-2007 in two parts to study both summer visitors (May 1 – September 30, 2006) and winter visitors (October 1, 2006 – April 30, 2007).¹

Results of the summer study revealed that approximately 1.63 million people visited Alaska between May 1 and September 30, 2006. Of these visitors:

- 59% arrived by cruise ship, 36% by air, and 5% by highway/ferry
- 82% cited vacation/pleasure for trip purpose, while 9% were visiting friends or relatives



Denali View South Wayside



The Chulitna River and the Alaska Range

¹ State of Alaska Dept of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Alaska Visitor Statistics Program: Alaska Visitor Volume and Profile, Summer 2006, Conducted by McDowell Group, April 2007, available online: <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/ded/dev/toubus/pub/AVSPSummer2006Final.pdf>; State of Alaska Dept of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Alaska Visitor Statistics Program: Alaska Visitor Volume and Profile, Fall/Winter 2006-2007, Conducted by McDowell Group, November 2007, available online: http://www.dced.state.ak.us/ded/dev/toubus/pub/FW_whole_doc.pdf [December 27, 2011].

- 39% came from the western U.S., 19% from the southern U.S., 13% from the eastern U.S., 13% from the Midwest, 6% from Canada, and an additional 9% came from other international countries
- Average age of visitors was 51.6
- 60% of visitors traveled in couples and 22% traveled in groups of three or more
- 25% had children living in their homes
- 39% were retired or semi-retired
- 60% graduated college
- Male and female visitors evenly split the study group with 50% each
- The most common overnight destinations were Anchorage, Denali, Fairbanks, and the Kenai Peninsula

The top ten activities included:

- Shopping (71%)
- Wildlife viewing (53%)
- City/sightseeing tours (44%)
- Day cruises (40%)
- Train (38%)
- Hiking/nature walk (30%)
- Museums (28%)
- Native cultural tours (20%)
- Fishing (20%)
- Historical/cultural activities (18%)

The study of fall/winter visitors to Alaska revealed a much smaller number of travelers than in the summer. Between October 2006 and April 2007 approximately 249,500 people traveled to Alaska. In comparison to summer visitors, the fall/winter study showed:

- 42% were visiting friends or relatives as their primary purpose, 39% were traveling on business, and only 12% cited vacation/pleasure as the purpose of their trip
- 75% had previously been to Alaska
- 72% went to Anchorage, 22% went to Fairbanks, 14% to Palmer/Wasilla, and 4% to Denali
- The top ten activities included:
 - Visiting friends/relatives (49%)
 - Shopping (48%)
 - Business (44%)
 - Wildlife viewing (19%)
 - Hiking/nature walk (10%)
 - Museums (9%)
 - Northern lights (7%)
 - City/sightseeing tour (6%)
 - Historical/cultural attractions (6%)
 - Snow skiing/boarding (5%)
- 92% were from the United States
- 57% were from the western U.S., but also 18% from the southern U.S., 10% from the Midwest, 6% from the eastern U.S., 4% from Canada, and 4% from other international countries
- Average age of visitors was 45
- 66% of visitors traveled alone
- One-third had children living in their homes
- 20% were retired or semi-retired
- 60% graduated college



Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race



Byers Lake, Denali State Park



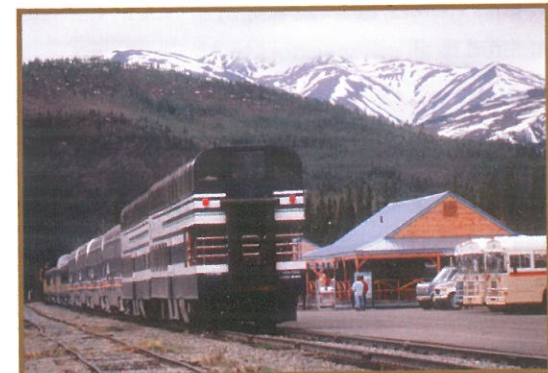
Studies of visitors who travel to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, which lies in the southern portion of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway, show that approximately 780,000 people visited the borough in 2006/2007.² Of these visitors, it is estimated that 332,000 were from out-of-state and 90% of them visited during the summer months. The remaining 446,000 visitors to the Mat-Su Borough were Alaska residents, mostly from Anchorage. Almost 60% of Alaskans visiting the borough did so in the summer months. Overnight tourism in the Mat-Su Borough increased significantly from 2005 to 2010.³ Bed tax receipts more than tripled during this period, probably due to the opening of large destination lodges in the borough. The visitor industry in the borough caters to independent travelers and a large number of Anchorage residents who own recreational property in the Mat-Su Borough.

- Denali National Park and Preserve is a major tourist destination for visitors to Alaska and it is easily accessed using the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. A study was conducted for the park from August 1-7, 2006 and resulted in 815 responses (81.1% response rate).⁴ Conclusions from the study reveal that:
 - 41% traveled in groups of two, while 58% were family groups
 - Ages ranged from 1-90, but 69% were between 41 and 70 years old
 - 94% primarily spoke English
 - 9% had a physical condition that affected their experience – of these respondents, 59% had difficulty with trails
 - 85% were first-time visitors
 - 92% were from the United States
 - 88% said that Denali National Park and Preserve was one of many destinations on their trip, but 84% said that their primary reason for the visiting the area (Healy and Trapper Creek/Talkeetna) was to see the park
 - The most important reasons cited for visiting the Denali region included:
 - Viewing wildlife (93%)
 - Enjoying scenic beauty (93%)
 - Visiting Alaska (89%)
 - Viewing Mt. McKinley (82%)
 - Viewing glaciers (73%)
 - Experiencing wilderness (72%)

² McDowell Group, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, Prepared for Matanuska-Susitna Borough, June 2008.

³ Neal Fried, "The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Growth Continues to Eclipse Rest of Alaska," Alaska Economic Trends 30, No. 12 (December 2010): 12-19.

⁴ Bret Meldrum, Jessica Evans, and Steven Hollenhorst, Denali National Park and Preserve Visitor Study, Summer 2006, University of Idaho, Park Studies Unit, Visitor Services Project Report 180, August 2007.



Denali Depot
Photo courtesy of Ernst Schneider, Alaska Division of Tourism

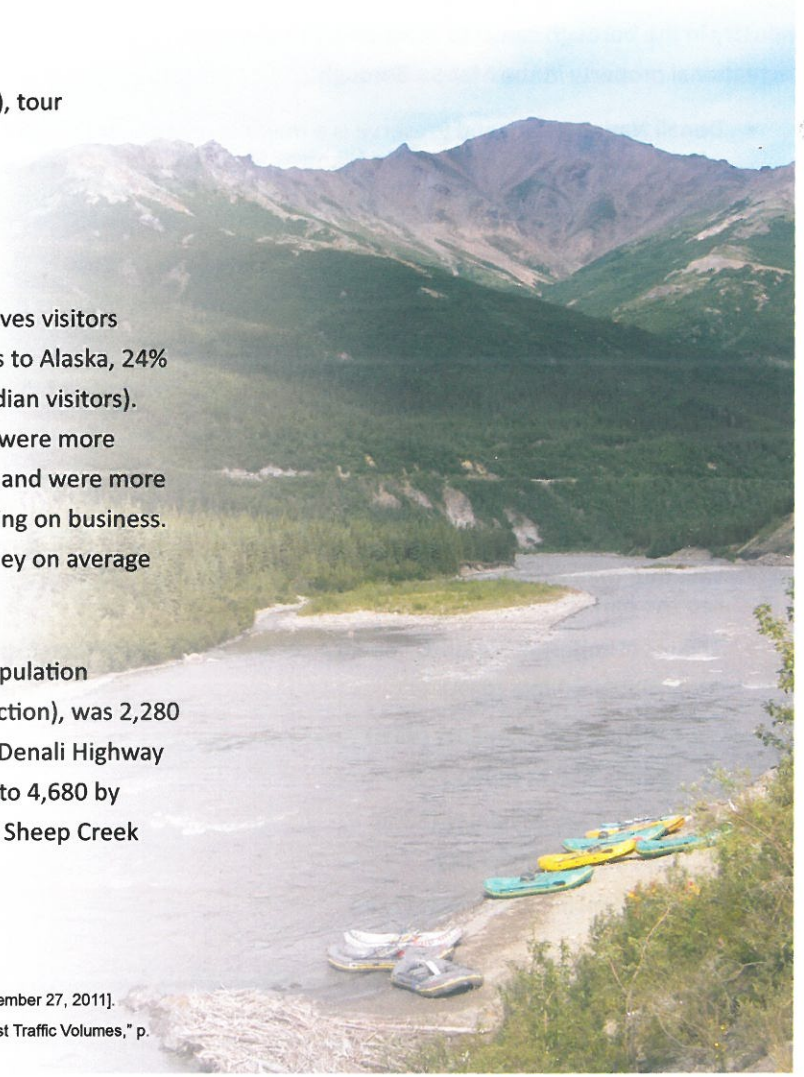
- Visiting a National Park (57%)
- Enjoying natural quiet/sounds of nature (56%)
- Learning local and native culture and history (51%)
- Spending time with family/friends (49%)
- Visiting Denali as part of a package tour (49%)
- Enjoying solitude (41%)
- Educational opportunities (36%)
- Recreational opportunities (35%)
- Visitors used various transportation methods during their trip including the train (47%), tour motorcoach (28%), rental vehicle (22%), personal vehicle (20%), and airplane (12%)
- 74% stayed overnight in the area
- 97% of visitor groups had members who were not Alaska residents
- 54% were visiting with a packaged tour

At the northern terminus of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway, Fairbanks receives visitors who are more likely to stay overnight rather than visit the area as a day trip.⁵ Of all the visitors to Alaska, 24% will go to Fairbanks. The city has a higher percentage of international visitors (excluding Canadian visitors). In comparison to all other visitors in Alaska, visitors to Fairbanks used rental cars more often, were more likely to travel by air (98%) and stay in hotels, were very interested in viewing northern lights, and were more likely to be first-time visitors to the state. Approximately 41% of Fairbanks visitors were traveling on business. Fairbanks visitors' average length of stay in state was 8.8 nights and they spend the most money on average compared to all other visitors to Alaska.

Traffic volume on the Parks Highway is expected to increase based on historical trends and population growth.⁶ The average annual daily traffic from milepost 128 to 210 (at the Denali Highway junction), was 2,280 in 2007 and is expected to increase up to 4,800 by 2030. From milepost 210 to 304 (from the Denali Highway to the Nenana Highway), the average annual daily traffic was 3,365 in 2007 and may increase to 4,680 by 2030. Similarly, the average annual daily traffic from milepost 304 to 324 (Nenana Highway to Sheep Creek Road) was 7,825 in 2007 and could increase to 11,780 by 2030.

⁵ Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau, Research, <http://www.explorefairbanks.com/assets/visitor-industry-research.pdf> [December 27, 2011].

⁶ Alaska Dept of Transportation and Public Facilities, Interior Alaska Transportation Plan, November 2010, Table 5-4 "2030 Forecast Traffic Volumes," p. 195. Available online: <http://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/studies/iatp/files/full-iatp.pdf> [December 27, 2011].



4. INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretation is meant to enhance a visitor's experience by revealing what makes the sites and resources of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway significant, and it is a valuable tool because it "forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource."⁷ Effective interpretation prompts an appreciation of resources that fosters stewardship. Interpretation along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway will not only tell visitors what is significant about the corridor's resources, but it will also aim to help visitors understand the values of each site.

Interpretive themes and subthemes are the central messages visitors should understand about a particular interpretive site or presentation associated with the Scenic Byway. Themes foster a sense of continuity and assist planners when organizing the content for interpretive materials. Each interpretive product developed will support the primary interpretive theme and one of the subthemes.

Effective interpretation prompts an appreciation of resources that fosters stewardship.

⁷ National Association for Interpretation, "Definitions Project," available online: <http://www.definitionsproject.com/definitions/index.cfm> [December 28, 2011].

PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEME

Connections: The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway is a vital corridor that provides connections to urban and rural communities, various cultures, historic sites, ecosystems, landscapes, and outdoor recreational opportunities.

INTERPRETIVE SUBTHEMES

- 1. Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- 2. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- 3. Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- 4. Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- 5. People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- 6. Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- 7. Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.
- 8. Frontier Culture and Pioneer History:** The communities of the Parks Highway corridor have a shared frontier culture characterized by self-sustainability and traditional values and is discernible by past and present trappers, miners, explorers, mountaineers, and homesteaders.

Through interpretation,
understanding;
through understanding,
appreciation;
through appreciation,
protection.

—Quoted in Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting our Heritage* (p. 38)

5. EXISTING INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION

As stated in the George Parks Highway Corridor Partnership Plan, “existing interpretation along the Parks Byway corridor is limited and represents only a fraction of the byway’s interpretive potential.”⁸ Existing information and orientation centers, as well as interpretive centers and waysides are detailed in the following tables.

ORIENTATION AND INFORMATION

There are many places where visitors and residents may gather information about the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. Tables 1 and 2 show the locations where travelers can orient themselves and obtain information about the Byway.



⁸ Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks, Interpretation and Education, The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan, Prepared for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (Anchorage: 2008), 50.

Photo courtesy of Becky Buxton/Princess Tours

COMMUNITY WELCOME SIGNS

Milepost	Name
132.3 (northbound); 168.5 (southbound)	"Entering Denali State Park" signs
209.4	"Welcome to Cantwell" sign
231.4 (northbound); 237.8 (southbound)	"Welcome to Denali National Park" signs
248 (northbound); 249.9 (southbound)	Healy signs
283.1 (northbound); 284 (southbound)	Anderson and Clear AFS signs
301.3 (northbound); 305.3 (southbound)	Nenana City Limit signs
304.5 (northbound); 304.8 (southbound)	Nenana signs
356	"Welcome to Fairbanks" sign

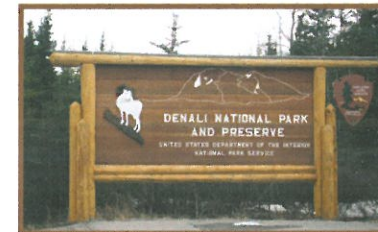
Table 1. Locations Of Community Highway Signs



Welcome sign at Fairbanks on the Parks Highway



Welcome sign at Anderson off the Parks Highway



*Entrance sign for Denali National Park and Preserve on the Parks Highway
Photo courtesy of NPS*

INFORMATION CENTERS

Site	Location
Alaska Public Lands Information Center (APLIC)	Anchorage - 4th Avenue and F street; Fairbanks - 101 Dunkel Street (Airport Way eastbound ramp to downtown)
Downtown Anchorage Visitor Center	Anchorage – 4th Avenue and F Street
Mat-Su Visitor Information Center	Access from Trunk Road at Milepost 35.5 Parks Highway (near the junction of the Parks and Glenn highways)
Mat-Su/Copper Basin Area State Parks Office	Wasilla - 7278 East Bogard Road
Visitor Contact Station, Alaska Veterans Memorial	Milepost 147.2 Parks Highway
Denali National Park Visitor Center	Access from Denali Park Road at Milepost 237.4 Parks Highway; located at approximately MP 1.5 Denali Park Road
Denali Chamber of Commerce	Access from Healy Spur Road at Milepost 248.8 Parks Highway; located at MP 0.6 Healy Spur Road
Nenana Visitor Information Center	Milepost 304.8 Parks Highway (access from A Street Exit); corner of Parks Highway and A Street
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	Fairbanks - 101 Dunkel Street (Airport Way eastbound ramp to downtown)

Table 2. Locations Of Public Information Centers

INTERPRETATION

Existing interpretation is primarily associated with Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve. There are, however, other entities offering interpretation along the Byway’s northern half, principally in the cities of Fairbanks and Nenana. The communities where interpretive opportunities are the least concentrated are Healy, Cantwell, Clear, and Anderson.

Table 3 shows the existing major interpretive centers, museums, and programs. The sites are organized from south to north; a general description is included, along with the agency/organization responsible for its maintenance. Table 4 shows the existing waysides and they are also organized from south to north with a general description and agency identification.



Denali National Park and Preserve Bus Stop



Denali View South Wayside

INTERPRETIVE CENTERS

MP	Site Name	Site Description	Agency
133	Mt. McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge	Ranger-led interpretive programs offered daily during summer	Partnership between private and DNR/DPOR
Between 237-238	Denali National Park and Preserve Entrance	Interpretive facilities include the Murie Science and Learning Center, Denali National Park Visitor Center, Eielson Visitor Center, and trailside interpretation. The park also sponsors natural history tours, campfire interpretive programs, guided and self-guided hikes, and sled dog demonstrations.	NPS
Between 304-305 (From Front Street Exit)	Alaska Railroad Museum	Located in the historic train station and includes numerous displays. Built in 1923, the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.	SOA
Between 304-305 (From Front Street Exit)	Alfred Starr Cultural Center	Interpretive center focused on the history and culture of the Nenana area; exhibits include Native history and artwork, dog mushing, the Nenana Ice Classic, and others	City of Nenana
Between 304-305 From A Street Exit)	Nenana Visitor Information Center	Sod-roofed cabin with an outdoor interpretive panel about the Alaska Native Veterans' Honor Bridge, a model of the Ice Classic tripod and a restored riverboat, the Taku Chief.	Private
358.0 (Airport Way eastbound ramp to downtown)	Fairbanks Area Centers and Museums	There are numerous interpretive offerings within the City of Fairbanks, including those at the Chena River State Recreation Area, Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, and Museum of the North	DNR/DPOR, ADF&G, UAF, and other private agencies

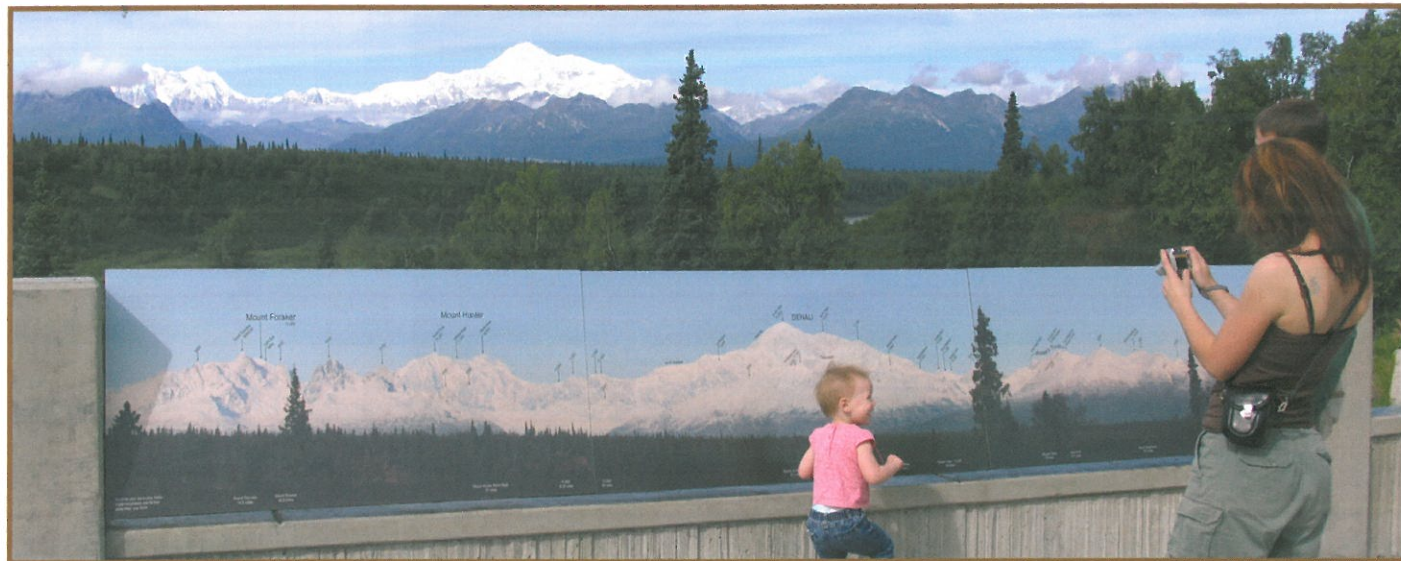
Table 3. Existing Interpretive Centers and Museums (DNR/DPOR—Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation; NPS—National Park Service; SOA—State of Alaska; ADF&G—Alaska Department of Fish and Game; UAF—University of Alaska Fairbanks)

INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDES

MP	Site Name	Site Description	Agency
Between 134-135	McKinley View Lodge	Historic lodge with some information about the original owner, Mary Carey, inside the building.	Private
Between 134-135	Denali View South	Wayside, viewpoint, and interpretive trail. Viewpoint and trail include thirteen interpretive panels covering: Denali, weather, squirrels, eagles, the Ruth Gorge, and the Chulitna River; Alaska State Parks staff and volunteers make informal interpretive contacts with visitors in the summer months	DNR/ DPOR
Between 137-138	Lower Troublesome Creek	Wayside with a double-sided informational bulletin board and a trailhead to the river and walk-in campsites. This area has winter access.	DNR/DPOR
Between 137-138	Upper Troublesome Creek	Wayside with a trailhead for 15-mile hike to Byers Lake Campground. Includes a double-sided informational bulletin board.	DNR/DPOR
146	Byers Lake Campground	Wayside, campground, boat launch, and day use area with many kiosks containing mostly informational bulletin boards; many panels are missing.	DNR/DPOR
Between 147-148	Alaska Veterans Memorial	Wayside with monuments honoring Alaska's military veterans. Includes thirteen interpretive panels covering Alaska military history, bear identification, tundra swans, Denali, and winter animal adaptations; A seasonal visitor contact station is usually operated daily between Memorial Day and Labor Day	DNR/ DPOR
Between 156-157	Ermine Hill Trailhead	Trailhead and wayside with informational displays	DNR/DPOR
Between 162-163	Denali View North	Parking area includes nine interpretive panels covering Denali, the Chulitna River, winter animal adaptations, tundra plants, and bear safety; Alaska State Parks staff and volunteers make informal interpretive contacts with visitors in the summer months	DNR/ DPOR

Between 163-164	Little Coal Creek Trailhead	Trailhead and wayside with information about wildlife, plants, and safety concerns	DNR/DPOR
Between 237-238	Denali National Park and Preserve Entrance	Numerous interpretive opportunities at the Visitor Center complex	NPS
238	Nenana River Bridge Wayside (Nenana #3 Bridge)	Wayside with an interpretive kiosk and trailside interpretation. Panels in kiosk orient travelers to Nenana Canyon and interpret the natural and cultural history of the area.	Denali Borough
276	Tatlanika Trading Company	Campground and RV park with historical and educational displays inside the gift shop	Private
Between 304-305 (From Front Street Exit)	Tanana River Walk in Nenana	There are a series of interpretive panels along the river walk in Nenana that illustrate the cultural history of the community.	Unknown
Between 344-345	George Parks Historical Monument/Blue Star Memorial Highway	Wayside with an informational plaque in honor of George Parks, for whom the highway is named and a Blue Star Memorial Highway plaque honoring armed forces.	DOT&PF

Table 4. Existing Waysides
(DNR/DPOR—Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation; DOT&PF—Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; NPS—National Park Service)



Denali View South Wayside

6. RECOMMENDATIONS⁹

There are two types of interpretation, personal and non-personal, that are commonly used by professionals to effectively interpret a resource such as the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway or an individual site along the Byway.

Personal Interpretation occurs when one person delivers an interpretive program to another person or a group of people. This type of interpretation is interactive and allows visitors to discuss the resource with the interpreter and ask questions. It is flexible and can meet the audience's specific needs, and has the ability to generate publicity and a possible source of income for an individual site.

Non-Personal Interpretation occurs when the interpreter is replaced with a type of media such as a wayside, sign, brochure, website, or exhibit. This type of interpretation does not require the presence of an interpreter; therefore, it is cost-effective. Non-personal interpretive media are not subject to the personality of an interpreter and they provide consistent information over time that can reach large audiences during extended hours of the day.

Offering a variety of personal and non-personal interpretive media provides a greater chance to reach a wider audience. Some visitors prefer attending guided walks or presentations and feel that reading panels or brochures is cumbersome or difficult. Others prefer to read interpretation at their own pace and may feel that guided walks and presentations are intimidating. The following recommendations suggest a variety of personal and non-personal interpretive media that have the potential to enhance the experience for a diverse audience traveling on the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway.

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this planning document to dictate how funding will be acquired for any of the recommended projects detailed in this chapter. This plan is a tool that can be used by interested individuals, organizations, and communities to apply for grant funding to carry out the projects recommended in this document.



Interpreters at the Mt. McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge preparing for a guided tour of Denali State Park



Denali View South Wayside in Denali State Park

THE PROPOSED SOUTH DENALI VISITOR CENTER COMPLEX

The proposed South Denali Visitor Center Complex project at mile 135.5 is a multi-agency partnership that will result in a transportation facility and visitor center where the area's natural and cultural history will be interpreted. A Scenic Byways grant provided significant funding to the State of Alaska for the first phase of the project and construction will begin on the access road in summer 2012. The complex will be a place where visitors can learn about opportunities along the Byway and it will host a variety of year-round activities including scenic viewing and summer and winter trails.

The Byway Committee should also encourage and support potential future infrastructure projects that would benefit tourism north of the Alaska Range.

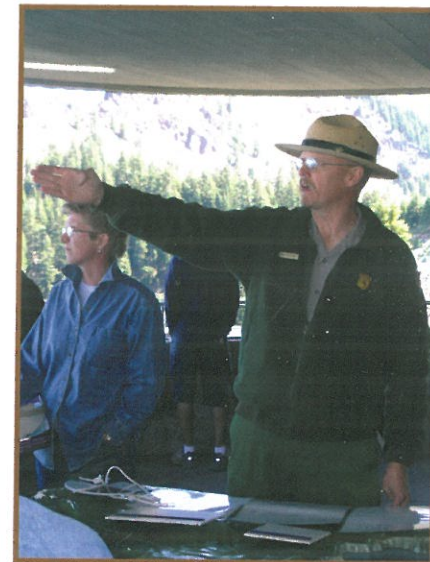
PERSONAL INTERPRETATION

The Byway committee should encourage and support personal interpretive programs along the Parks Highway corridor. They should also share the interpretive themes outlined in this plan with groups providing personal interpretation to ensure that travelers are receiving consistent interpretive messages that will help meet this plan's goals and objectives.

Education programs: The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway committee should encourage curriculum-based programs at interpretive centers and waysides for students in their communities. Visiting local interpretive centers and museums or conducting environmental education programs at local parks or interpretive waysides can make classroom studies more meaningful. Environmental and heritage education programs outside the classroom enrich a student's curriculum through interactive learning that is relevant to the world in which they live.

Guided activities: Numerous businesses along the Byway offer guided activities on both public and private lands. Often, guides present formal and informal personal interpretation during the activity. This provides opportunities for visitors to receive answers to questions that reveal personal connections to the resource being interpreted. The Byway committee should advocate for interpretive training opportunities that could be provided to businesses along the Byway who offer guided activities.

The community of Ester, accessed from the Old Nenana Highway exit at milepost 351, was founded as a gold mining camp in the early 1900s. Until recently, the privately operated Ester Gold Camp and Malemute Saloon offered a collection of musical and comic sketches celebrating the town's gold rush history. It is currently



Interpreter at Denali National Park

closed; however, the history of the gold camp remains an important component of the many intrinsic qualities along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. If this site opens to the public, the Byway committee should encourage use of the identified interpretive themes for guided activities.

NON-PERSONAL INTERPRETATION

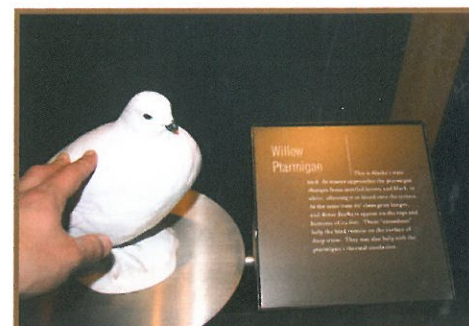
Digital Media

Digital media such as websites, podcasts, and Smartphone apps have the potential to benefit visitors before, during, and after their trip to the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. In most cases, the information developed for one of these programs could be used to produce another program. For example, information provided on a website's interactive map could be reused to produce a brochure or driving tour. This plan includes tables showing existing interpretation and information that could be used to develop any of the following digital media. As new interpretation is added to the Byway, it should also be added to any revisions of road guides, websites, and other media.

Road Guides: A road guide that highlights the Byway's intrinsic qualities and embraces the interpretive themes outlined in this plan would provide travelers with an enhanced experience while touring the Byway. Because the experience is considerably different depending on the season, a unique road guide for summer and winter would best meet the needs of George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway travelers. Ideally, a road guide should be available in multiple formats such as CDs, podcasts, and Smartphone apps in order to reach the largest audience possible. Highlights in the road guide could include descriptions of scenic views, natural history, oral histories, Native culture, prehistory and archaeology, and recreational opportunities.

In addition to the seasonal road guides that would provide a broad overview of intrinsic qualities and recreational opportunities, driving tours should be developed based on specific interests such as an individual brochure highlighting topics such as geologic features, historic sites, or flora and fauna. Groups traveling with children would greatly benefit from an activity book that also focuses on these topics. The road guides could be not only available at visitor contact stations but also on the Byway's website so that visitors may print them from home making these guides easy to update and cost effective.

Byway Website: The George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway is featured on both the National Scenic Byways website (<http://www.byways.org>) and the Alaska's Scenic Byways website (<http://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/scenic/index.shtml>). However, a website dedicated solely to the Byway would present more detailed



Examples of non-personal interpretation

information and would be more useful for visitors. Items that should be included on the website are an interactive map guide with points of interest, seasonably relevant safety tips, natural and cultural history, calendar of events, community highlights, recreational opportunities, and education resources. The website should also provide links to learn about and download podcasts and other digital media associated with the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. Quick response (QR) codes could be placed in any printed materials to lead visitors with Smartphones to new digital media.

Interactive Virtual Tour: Potential travelers could greatly benefit from interactive maps that should be available on the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway’s website or cached on a podcast or Smartphone app. Free programs such as Google Earth provide users with the ability to design a narrated tour that leads people through a map using recording tools for interpretive descriptions and place marks with photos and text.

Orientation and Information

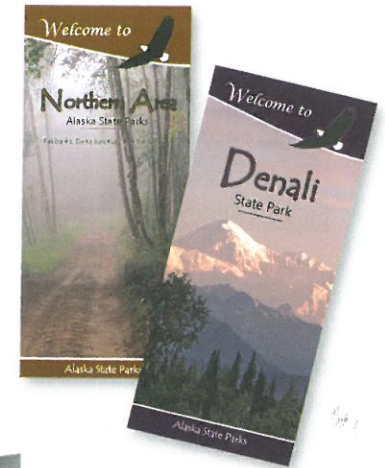
Brochures and Maps: Effective brochures with maps can fulfill an individual’s desire to learn more and create opportunities to enhance the public’s comprehension of the inherent intellectual and emotional connections associated with the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. These also have the potential to benefit a variety of visitors before, during, and after their visit and can be used as a marketing tool. Brochures and maps can reach an even larger audience if they are produced in more than one language.

A new brochure for the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway should include a detailed map highlighting the corridor’s intrinsic qualities and locations where visitors may obtain more information and interpretive services. It should also have an introductory text, describing what makes the Byway unique with photographs of popular destinations and interpretive sites. Other items that should be included on the brochure are restrooms, services, and safe traveling tips.

Community Entrance Signs: Some communities along the Parks Highway have signs that welcome visitors to their town and other communities simply have a city limit sign. Establishing a consistent and unified appearance for community entrance signs would be one way to provide visitors with multiple opportunities to realize that, combined, the communities comprise the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway corridor. Ideally, new community entrance signs should have a thematic design with the America’s Byways logo in addition to the State Scenic Byways logo and they should be located at a pullout that is large enough to accommodate several vehicles.



QR code for the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway website



Recommended concepts for Welcome Signs:

- Avoid billboard appearance
- High Visibility
- Low-maintenance
- Cost-effective
- Manageable vegetation removal
- Reflective or well-lit during winter
- Comply with Department of Transportation Sign Design Specifications



Artist's concept of one possible Welcome Sign design

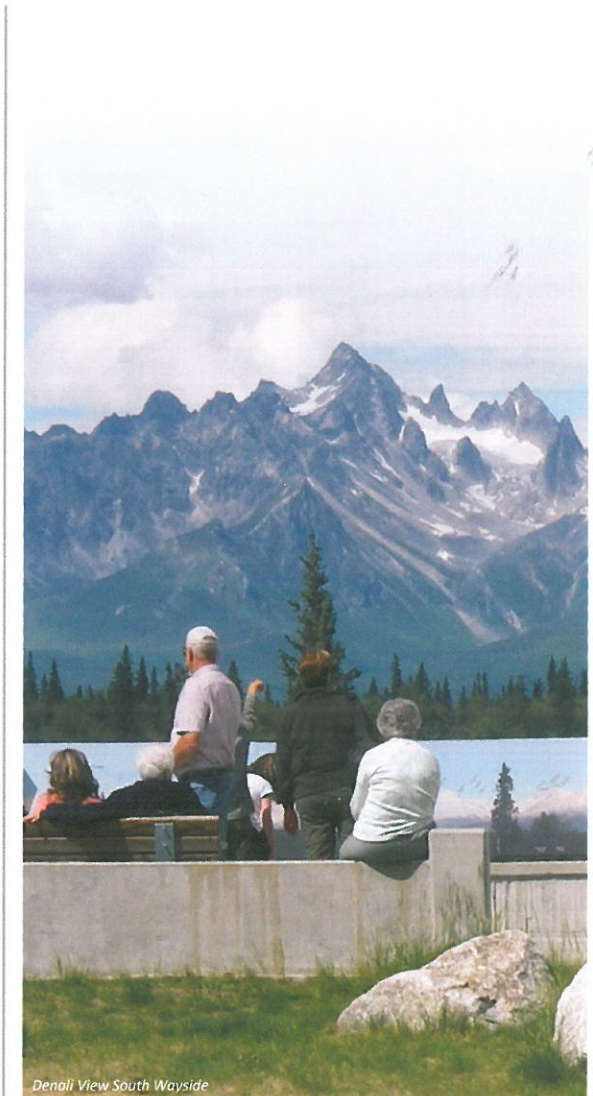
INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDES

Using the interpretive themes outlined in this plan, interpretive waysides have the potential to reach a diverse audience and are cost effective. They can interpret the many outstanding features associated with the Byway and can influence travelers to explore communities. All new and updated interpretive waysides should be consistent in design and relate to this plan's interpretive themes. Decisions regarding the order and placement of recommended interpretive wayside projects along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway were made with reference to public comments, site conditions, distance from one site to the next, audience analysis, land ownership, and professional guidance. Proposed projects are as evenly spaced along the Byway as possible.

The following proposed projects are grouped into phases, with phase one being the highest priority. This list is not intended as a fixed schedule, but rather as a guideline. Projects within each phase are in no specific order, but the first phase should be completed before the second phase. They do not have to be completed one at a time, but rather, multiple projects may be carried out at the same time.

Phase One: Panel Replacement

Projects in the first phase include interpretive waysides that need to be replaced. Interpretation is already in place at these sites, but many panels and kiosks are outdated, damaged, or missing. Before new interpretation is developed, it is recommended that these existing waysides receive appropriate attention to improve the experience for travelers and residents. Visitors will benefit from these projects by receiving current information that reveals a cohesive design and interpretive themes relevant to the Byway. These projects will also benefit communities and businesses along the Byway by instilling a sense of pride and ownership in the new material. The property owner or manager would continue to maintain these waysides after any replacements are made. The following table lists the recommended projects for Phase One organized from south to north.



Denali View South Wayside

Phase One Projects

Milepost	Site Name	Agency	Condition
146	Byers Lake	DNR/ DPOR	Kiosks at Byers Lake are filled with bulletin board information regarding rules and regulations, but there are no interpretive panels.
Between 147 and 148	Alaska Veterans Memorial	DNR/ DPOR	There are two styles of interpretive panels at this site. One set interprets Alaska’s military history; these are all vertical panels with a star-shaped cutout and they are set in a wood frame. The second set interprets local wildlife and aspects of Mt. McKinley. These are a mixture of vertical and horizontal panels in both metal and wood frames. All the panels date to the late 1990s.
Between 156 and 157	Ermine Hill Trailhead	DNR/ DPOR	There is a small pullout at the trailhead. The pullout is not signed well for southbound travelers. The information kiosk with trailhead registration and map of the trail is about one mile up the trail.
Between 162 and 163	Denali View North	DNR/ DPOR	Most existing panels date to the late 1990s and have outdated graphics and content.
238	Nenana River Bridge Wayside (Nenana #3 Bridge)	Denali Borough	This interpretive wayside has kiosks for four vertical panels and two horizontal panels. One of the vertical panels and both of the horizontal panels are missing.
Between 304-305 From A Street Exit)	Alaska Native Veterans’ Honor Bridge interpretive panel (at the Nenana Visitor Information Center)	Unknown	This interpretive kiosk has one panel detailing the Alaska Native Veterans’ Honor Bridge. It has an overwhelming amount of text and is outdated.
Between 304-305 (From Front Street Exit)	Tanana River Walk in Nenana	DOT&PF	A series of interpretive panels along the river in Nenana are in poor condition due to fading and vandalism.
Between 344 and 345	George Parks Historical Monument/Blue Star Memorial Highway	DOT&PF	This wayside has a plaque placed on a large stone with a short biography of George Parks. The pullout is signed from both directions to notify travelers and the stone and plaque are covered in graffiti.
1300 College Road; Fairbanks, AK 99701	Creamer’s Field Migratory Waterfowl Refugve	Private	The refuge has multiple interpretive panels on site that are outdated, faded, and not all of the graphics follow a cohesive design.

Table 5. Phase One Projects
(DNR/DPOR—Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation; DOT&PF—Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; NPS—National Park Service)

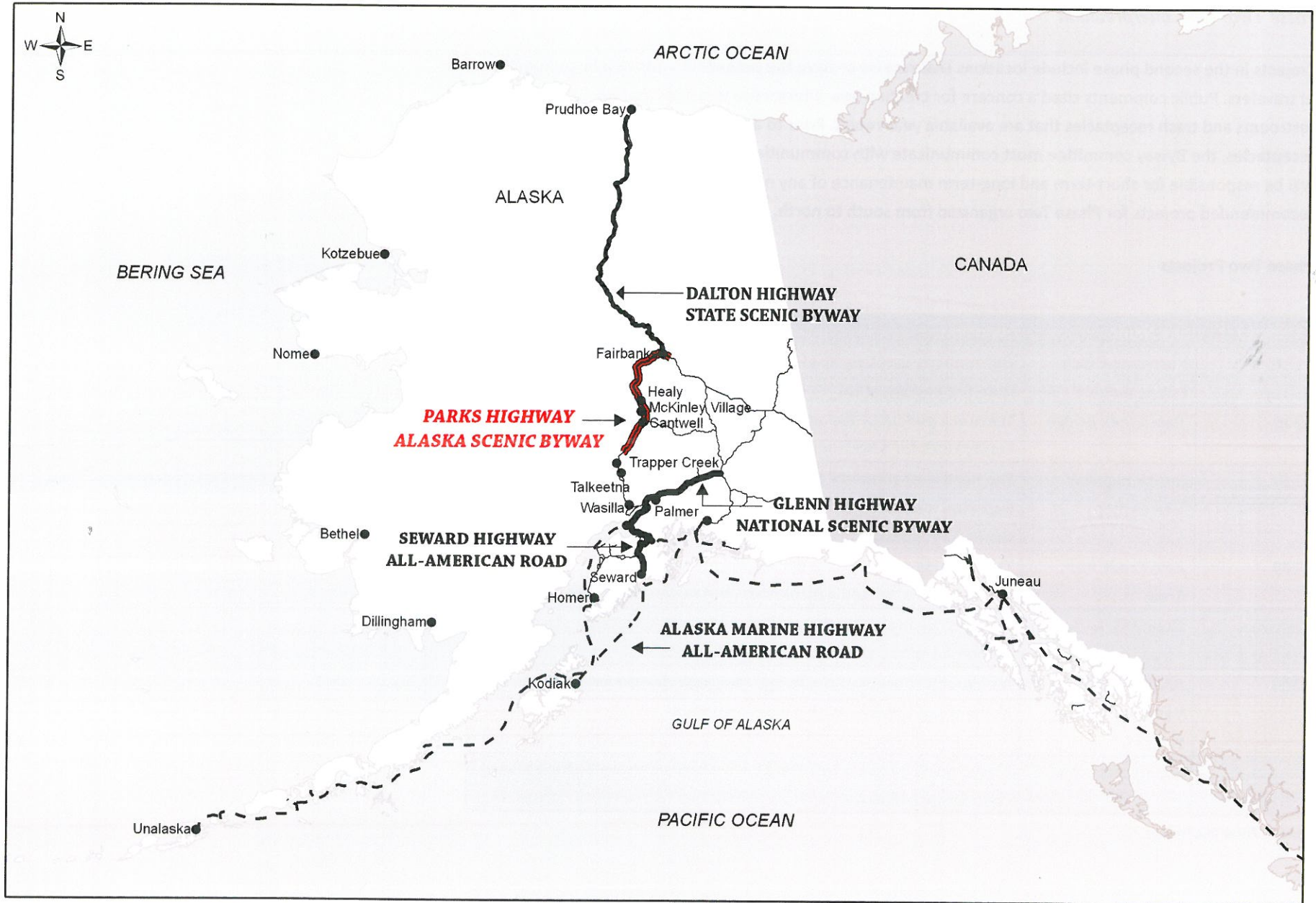
Phase Two: New Interpretation

Projects in the second phase include locations that receive or have the potential to attract a large number of travelers. Public comments cited a concern for creating new interpretive waysides that do not also have restrooms and trash receptacles that are available year-round. Prior to adding new restrooms and trash receptacles, the Byway committee must communicate with communities and businesses to determine who will be responsible for short-term and long-term maintenance of any new facility. The following table lists the recommended projects for Phase Two organized from south to north.

Phase Two Projects

Milepost	Site Name	Condition
174	Hurricane Gulch Bridge pullout	This area has great views of a natural gorge and an unmarked trail from the parking area.
208	Pass Creek Bridge	There is a pullout at the south end of Pass Creek bridge with an empty kiosk for a horizontal interpretive panel.
210	Denali Highway Intersection	The northeast corner of the intersection of the Parks and Denali highways has no wayside services, but it is a major intersection on the Parks Highway.
269	June Creek Rest Area	This wayside has a double-ended pull off with restrooms (open in the summer only) and a picnic area, but no interpretation.
Between 283 and 284	Clear AFS/Anderson access road	This six-mile access road leads travelers past the gate for the Clear Air Force Station to the community of Anderson.
305	Alaska Native Veterans' Honor Bridge	A pullout just north of the bridge has great views overlooking Nenana and the river with a trash receptacle.
Between 351 and 352	Ester access road	This short, 0.6-mile access road leads travelers to the historic mining community of Ester.

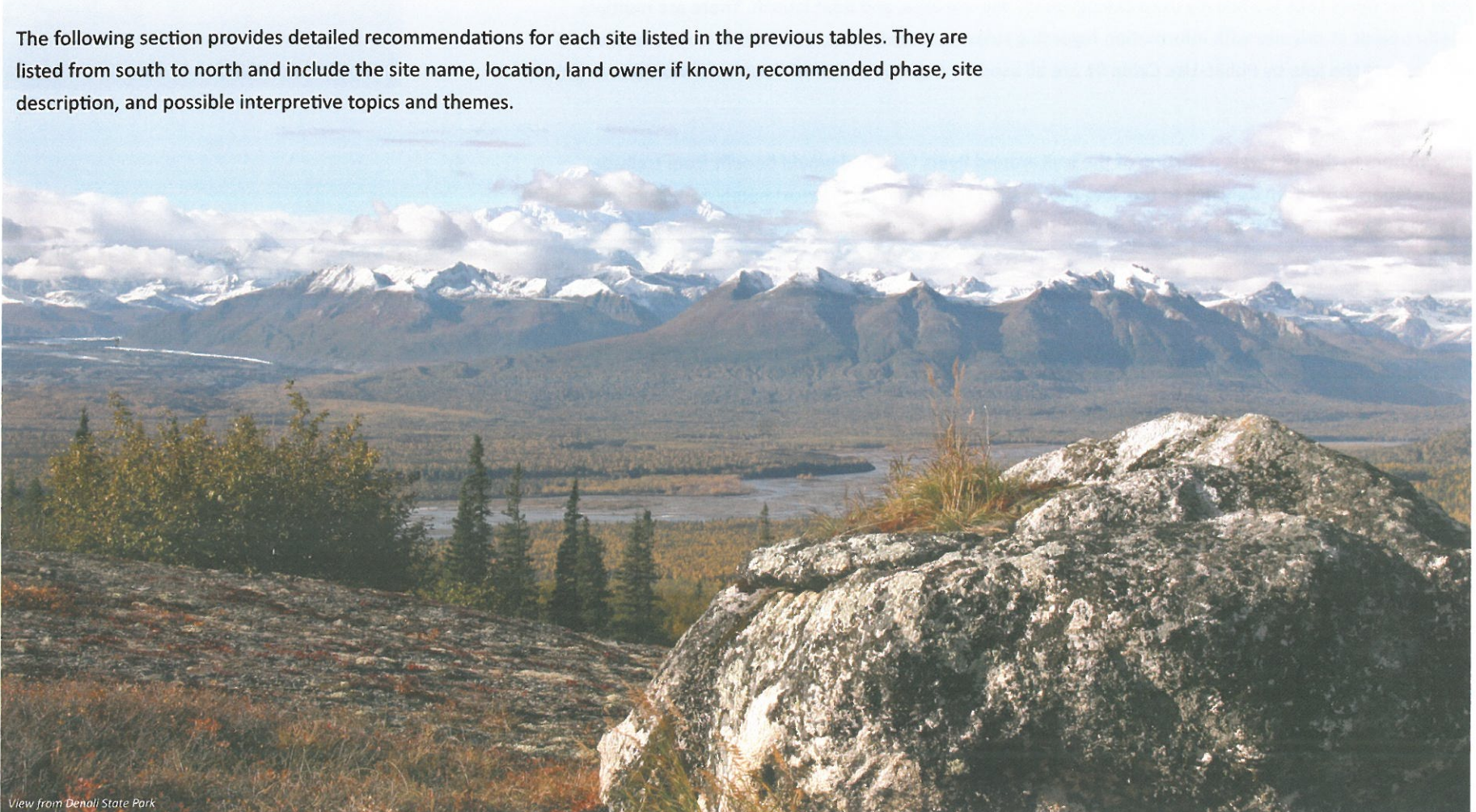
Table 6. Phase Two Projects



Recommended Interpretive Wayside Details

Recommended projects for both phases will use existing pullouts and waysides to improve interpretive media along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. Byway residents anticipated that an interpretive plan would help provide a more meaningful and safe experience for visitors through increased interpretive signage and educational opportunities. However, they were also concerned about additional maintenance involved in adding restrooms and trash receptacles. The Byway committee should establish partnerships and agreements with local businesses and agencies to help maintain nearby interpretive sites.

The following section provides detailed recommendations for each site listed in the previous tables. They are listed from south to north and include the site name, location, land owner if known, recommended phase, site description, and possible interpretive topics and themes.



View from Denali State Park

Site Name and Location:

Byers Lake, milepost 146

Land Owner/Agency:

Department of Natural Resources/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: Byers Lake is a heavily used campground, day use area, and boat launch. There are multiple bulletin boards at this site with information regarding rules and regulations, but there is no interpretation. Four kiosks at the lake by Public-Use Cabin #1 are all used for bulletin boards. At least two should be replaced with interpretation.

Many visitors to this site walk a portion of the trail around Byers Lake and would benefit from trailside interpretation. Approximately five to ten, low-profile interpretive panels (approximately 15 x 18 inches) could be placed along the trail at key features. Seating should also be provided to hikers at each of the interpretive panels.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.





Site Name and Location:

Alaska Veterans Memorial, between milepost 147 and 148

Land Owner/Agency:

Department of Natural Resources/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: The Alaska Veterans Memorial is a site that honors Alaska’s veterans with multiple interpretive panels and plaques. There are also some interpretive panels at the site that illustrate local wildlife and Mt. McKinley. The topics of all the panels are relevant; however they are more than ten years old and need updating, especially those that interpret the wildlife and Mt. McKinley.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region’s landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region’s landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Site Name and Location:

Ermine Hill Trailhead, between milepost 156 and 157

Land Owner/Agency:

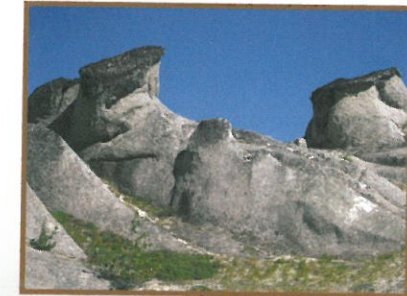
Department of Natural Resources/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Phase and Recommendation:

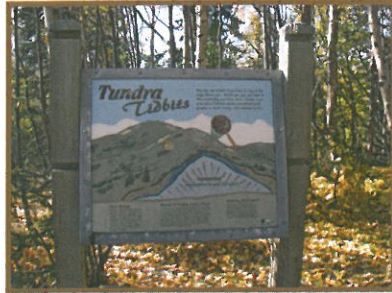
Phase One: This trail connects to the popular Kesugi Ridge in Denali State Park. The pullout is not signed well enough in advance to notify southbound travelers. Currently, hikers must trek about one mile on the trail before coming to an information kiosk that has the hiker's registration book and map. This information kiosk should be replaced by a bulletin board with information on trail specifics at the parking area, rather than one mile up the trail.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.



Above photos courtesy of NPS-LRHolzapfel



Site Name and Location:

Denali View North, between milepost 162 and 163

Land Owner/Agency:

Department of Natural Resources/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: Most interpretive panels at this site date to the late 1990s and, although the topics are relevant, the information and graphics need updating on all of them.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Site Name and Location:

Hurricane Gulch Bridge pullout, milepost 174

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: Enhancements at this pullout would provide a place for travelers to enjoy the views of this natural gorge while also providing a place to learn about natural history. The pullout should be expanded with safe pedestrian access and an interpretive panel illustrating the features of Hurricane Gulch. This would also be an appropriate location for an additional restroom and trash receptacles along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.





Site Name and Location:

Pass Creek Bridge pullout, milepost 208

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: There is an empty kiosk at this pullout that should have a horizontal interpretive panel designed for it. Numerous topics could be considered for this panel including the natural history of Broad Pass, winter recreation, berry picking, and wildlife.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.



Site Name and Location:

Denali Highway Intersection, milepost 210

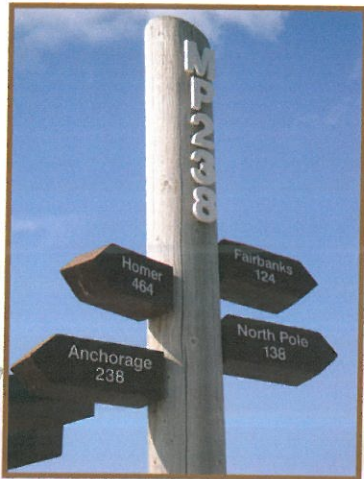
Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: New interpretation should be developed to discuss the history of the Parks and Denali highways and how the Denali Highway was the only road to the region from the coast until the Parks Highway was completed in 1971. Adding an interpretive panel at the intersection of the Parks and Denali highways would provide opportunities for visitors to connect their own travel experiences with those of the past.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.





Site Name and Location:

Nenana River Bridge Wayside (Nenana #3 Bridge), milepost 238

Land Owner/Agency:

Denali Borough

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: This wayside has one vertical interpretive panel and two horizontal interpretive panels that are missing. These spaces should be filled with relevant interpretation based on one or more of the following interpretive themes.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Site Name and Location:

June Creek Rest Area, milepost 269

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: This wayside is plowed in the winter and has trash receptacles and picnic tables, but the restroom is only open during summer. Interpretation should be added to this site to enhance the rest area's scenic views. No more than two interpretive panels should be placed here due to the size of the wayside. Topics could include the scenic views and natural history, as well as the important connecting role that the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway serves to travelers and residents. Because the wayside is plowed during winter, it would be ideal to keep the restrooms open year-round and provide a much-needed service to travelers.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.





1999 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

Site Name and Location:

Clear AFS/Anderson access road, between milepost 283 and 284

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: Many Parks Highway motorists may drive by the access road for Clear and Anderson without knowing that the road leads to these communities and some services. An orientation panel and an interpretive panel should be placed side-by-side at the intersection of the Parks Highway and the access road to Clear and Anderson. The orientation panel should include information such as a map showing where the road leads the traveler, available basic services, and other community highlights. The interpretive panel should introduce the public to the rich Cold War history of the Clear Air Force Station.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Site Name and Location:

Alaska Native Veterans' Honor Bridge interpretive panel, between milepost 304 and 305 from 'A' Street at the Nenana Visitor Information Center

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: This panel interprets an important component of Alaska history; however, the amount of text needs to be reduced and the graphics need updating to make the panel more appealing to a general audience. According to information included on the panel, it was fabricated in August 2000. If the text cannot be reduced, two panels or a frame that can hold a panel on both the front and back should be considered.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.



Site Name and Location:

Tanana River Walk in Nenana, between milepost 304 and 305 from Front Street exit

Land Owner/Agency:

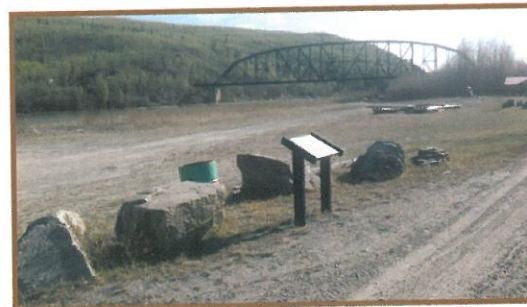
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: The series of interpretive panels along the river in Nenana are damaged and outdated, but the topics are relevant for the site. Any damaged frames should be repaired and all panels should be replaced with updated text and graphics. Topics important in the history of Nenana that should be considered include the Alaska Territorial Guard, Alaska Railroad, Iditarod, and the Nenana Ice Classic.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
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- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.



Site Name and Location:

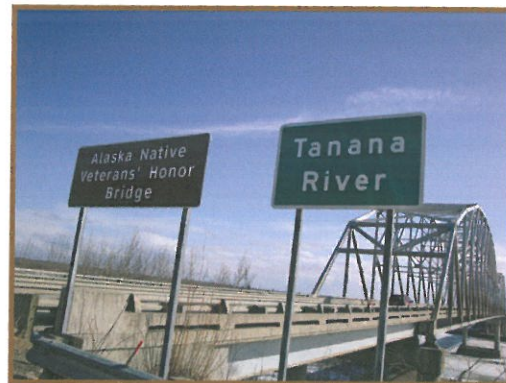
Alaska Native Veterans' Honor Bridge pullout, milepost 305

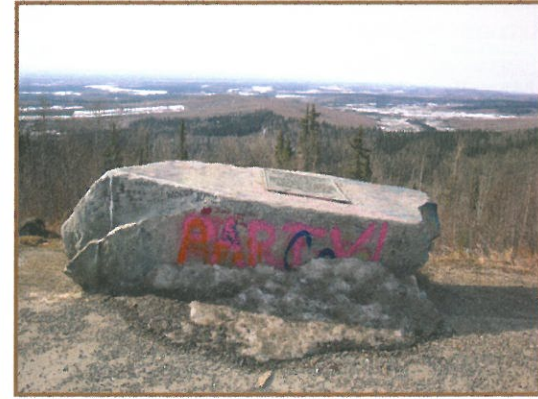
Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: This pullout, located just north of the bridge, has great views of Nenana and the rivers. Because there are good views, there should be some orientation and interpretation available for travelers. An orientation panel could provide motorists with a map of Nenana and the basic services available as well as community highlights. An interpretive panel would provide opportunities for visitors to connect to the cultural heritage of Nenana and the natural history of the area.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.





Site Name and Location:

George Parks Historical Monument/Blue Star Memorial Highway, between milepost 344 and 345

Land Owner/Agency:

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: This wayside honoring George Parks, for whom the highway is named, should be enhanced to make it more respectful for a memorial. Most importantly, graffiti should be removed from the stone and plaque. An interpretive panel about George Parks and his contributions to the road system in Alaska would be an appropriate addition to this wayside. Other possible appropriate enhancements include a restroom and lighting to deter vandalism.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Denali Country Gateway:** The Parks Highway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Site Name and Location:

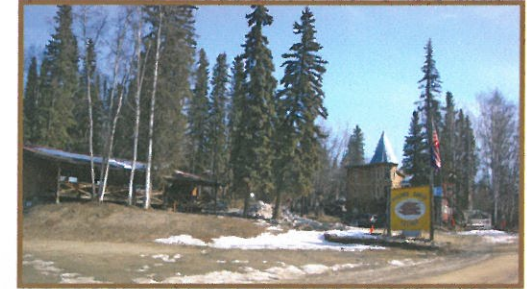
Ester access road, between milepost 351 and 352

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase Two: Many Parks Highway motorists may not know enough about the access road to Ester to entice them to drive the short distance to this community. An orientation panel and an interpretive panel should be placed side-by-side at the intersection of the Parks Highway and the access road to Ester. The orientation panel should include information such as a map showing where the road leads the traveler, available basic services, and other community highlights. The interpretive panel should introduce the public to the town's gold rush history.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes:** Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.
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Site Name and Location:

Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, AK 99701

Land Owner/Agency:

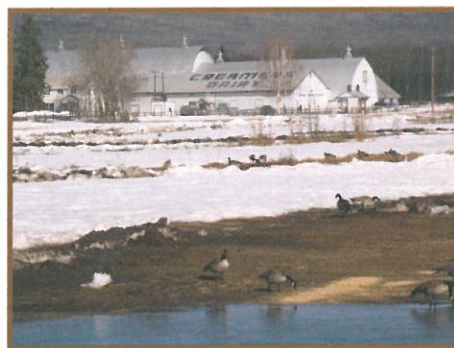
Private, Friends of Creamer's Field

Phase and Recommendation:

Phase One: Creamer's Field has many interpretive panels about relevant topics such as the annual migration of birds to the site and history of Creamer's Dairy. The graphics are outdated, faded, and inconsistent and should be updated to make them more appealing to the public.

Relevant Interpretive Themes:

- **Intact Natural Ecosystems:** This healthy functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience natural history.
- **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a thriving habitat for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Wilderness Values and Recreation:** The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.
- **People and the Land:** People have interacted with this landscape throughout time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.
- **Dynamic Change:** On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscape and its inhabitants.



9. DESIGN GUIDELINES

This chapter provides design guidelines for new interpretation along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. Interpretive sites and materials should use a cohesive design to give the Byway a distinctive appearance and help travelers recognize a visual consistency along the Byway. Some existing sites already adhere to agency design standards such as those located in state or national parks. The Byway committee should take these into consideration when applying the guidelines in this plan to designs for new sites. To best meet the following guidelines, the Byway committee should work with professional interpreters.

Sites that receive updated or new interpretation should use a high quality, professional standard for interpretive panels, parking facilities, structures, kiosks, and restrooms. New interpretive panels should use materials that are both low maintenance and vandal resistant. New facilities should be carefully designed so that they are ADA accessible.

The following section outlines the basic elements of design for interpretive panels. They are intended to guide the Byway committee as they update and develop new interpretation for the Byway.



South Denali View Wayside

PANEL DESIGN

A typical interpretive panel at a wayside will be approximately 36.5 x 30.5 inches, but smaller panels may be used for trailside interpretation. The content of an interpretive panel, including theme and topic, should determine the types of graphics used. Graphics or a font style that works beautifully in one panel may not be appropriate for others.

This plan recommends that a serif font such as Goudy or Garamond is used for titles and headings. A sans serif font such as Calibri or Segoe should be used for body text. Although these are general rules to follow when developing written interpretation, they are not mandates; the contracted interpretive specialist and Byway committee will decide what is appropriate for each panel. Sometimes, typographical techniques can allow the title and headings to work as graphic elements.

Logo

The America's Byways logo should be included in addition to the State Scenic Byway's logo on new and updated interpretive panels. Logos for funding sources should also be included, but having too many logos can clutter a panel and potentially confuse visitors. One option for replacing multiple logo images is to create a funding line on the interpretive panel that is written out. Font size and style should be similar to photo captions.

Title

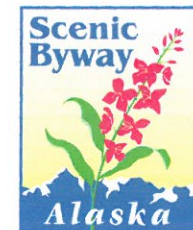
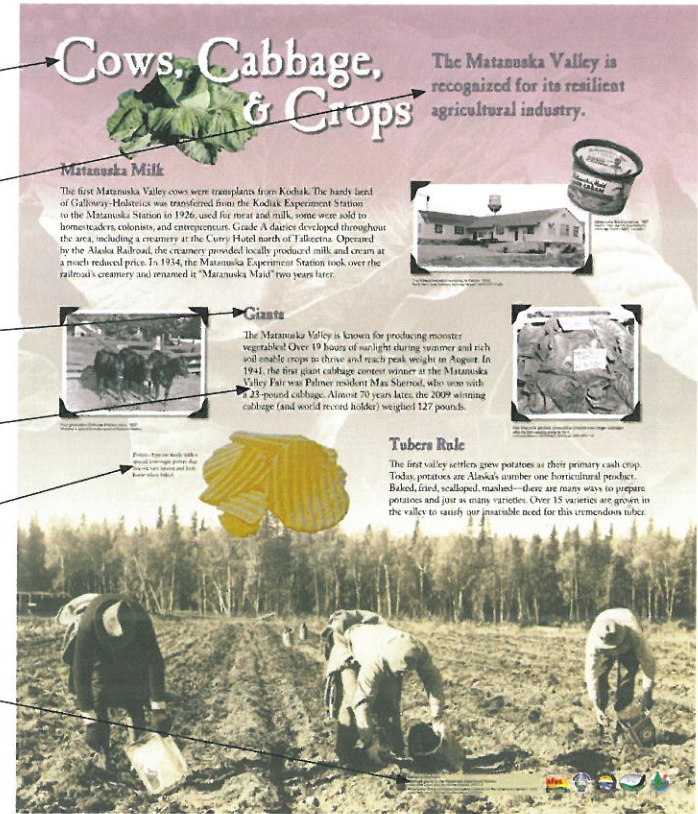
First Level:
Theme statement

Second Level:
Subtitles

Third Level:
Body text

Fourth Level:
Interesting tidbits

Credits and Captions:



Layout

Panels along the Byway should have a similar layout if possible, but the format may be slightly altered to better represent the panel theme or to accommodate agency-adopted standards that are not flexible.

The textual components of a typical panel are as follows

- **Title:** *90-160 pt. type.* The title tells visitors what the panel is about and should intrigue them continue reading.
- **Theme Statement (1st Level):** *60-75 pt. type.* The theme statement presents the overall theme of the panel and provokes the audience to read further. However, if this statement is the only thing the visitor reads, he or she should still grasp the main message of the panel.
- **Headings (2nd Level):** *50-60 pt. type.* The headings introduce readers to the body text. Typically, the theme statement and headings should have the same font type and size.
- **Body Text (3rd Level):** *30-34 pt. type.* The main body of the text supports the theme statement and should relate the resource being interpreted to the audience and reveal something meaningful about the resource.
- **Additional Information (4th Level):** *18-26 pt. type.* This part of the panel reveals interesting information not included in the body text; it can be a quote or poem, or it can be a statement that further describes a process, person, event, or photograph.
- **Photo Captions:** *9-18 pt. type.* Captions should describe the photograph and give credit to the photographer.

Color Palette

Due to the long length of the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway, it would be difficult to restrict all panels to a particular color palette; however, interpretive displays within individual waysides and pullouts should have a consistent color scheme. There needs to be flexibility to ensure that the color palette of individual panels reflects the chosen topic and theme as well as the graphics and surrounding landscape.



Color Wheel

Color Palette

Example: The color wheel above will help you choose complementary colors that will stand out against a background image. The color palette shown below represents the surrounding scenery.





8. EVALUATING INTERPRETATION

Creating guidelines for evaluating the effectiveness of interpretive sites and materials is an essential part of the planning process. The purpose of evaluations is to help the Byway committee measure whether the plan's goals and objectives are being met. The intent of evaluations is to collect information to make improvements and decisions about future planning.

There are many appropriate methods for evaluating interpretation along the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway. A combination of methods will produce the best results. Media, especially interpretive panels, should be evaluated at least every ten years for both content and graphics. Using peer reviews, oral interviews, exit questionnaires, observation, and suggestion boxes would all be effective methods for evaluating the Byway's sites and services.

- **Peer Reviews:** Professional interpreters developing media for the Byway should allow for a peer review process that includes members of the Byway committee. A group of people with varying interests will provide valuable input in the developing stages of interpretation and the product will greatly benefit from this process.
- **Oral Interviews:** Visitors could be approached for a short interview about interpretation along the Byway. Interviews can provide the Byway committee with a person's impressions and allows for follow-up questions to learn more about someone's opinions.
- **Questionnaires:** Visitors could be given a questionnaire with pointed questions to determine whether the interpretative media's objectives were met and the themes communicated. The questionnaire should also solicit ideas for improvement. Volunteers, Byway committee members, or site staff could hand questionnaires to visitors during peak hours at identified points of contact.
- **Observation:** Indirect observation—having someone observe how visitors react to interpretive exhibits—is a good method for evaluating the effectiveness of each display, including its ability to attract and hold a visitor's attention.
- **Suggestion Box:** Suggestion boxes or guest books could be placed in areas of high visitation to provide travelers a place to share their thoughts, suggestions, and ideas. A system should be established whereby the comments are regularly retrieved. Paper and pencils would need to be supplied and restocked. A digital "suggestion box" on the internet could also yield helpful post-trip insights.



South Denail View Wayside

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