Planned Alaska route

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> Author's Note (2010): This article was researched and written in 2007 as part of the preparation for our year-long Journey on the Wild Coast (/Journeys/WildCoast.html). This map outlines a portion of our proposed route (which we more-or-less followed) and the text describes many of these places in more detail. See the current version of our website here (/Issues/), where we discuss a variety of natural resources issues affecting the state of Alaska.

Prospective route through Southeastern and Central Alaska

Click on the map to read about a specific place, or scroll down to go through our route in order.

(/photos/IMG_7660n.jpg)
Ketchikan is behind the cruise ships
Click for Ketchikan, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Ketchikan.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Ketchikan (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ketchikan) - September 2007

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This city of 8,000 people is the fifth largest in Alaska. Ketchikan is a long and narrow place, stretched out along the steep coastline of the nearly unpronounceable Revillagigedo Island (Revilla). In the summer, Ketchikan is a popular stop on the cruise ship (IMG_7653.jpg) circuit, where boatloads of tourists (IMG_7670n.jpg) can double the city's population each day. Ketchikan briefly hit the national stage in 2005 during the "Bridges to Nowhere" controversy, when a $223 million appropriation was placed in the federal highway bill to build a bridge from Ketchikan to nearby Gravina Island, home of the Ketchikan airport and about 50 people. In the winter, the tourists leave, and Ketchikan residents are left with their annual 152 inches (3862mm) of rain. Ketchikan was founded in 1900 as a gold mining town, and many old mine sites remain nearby.

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(/photos/IMG_7414edit.jpg)

Misty Fiords National Monument (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misty_Fjords_National_Monument) - September 2007

At the southern tip of the Alaska panhandle, east of Ketchikan, and part of the Tongass National Forest (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misty_Fjords_National_Monument), the Misty Fiords (or Misty Fjords) National Monument encompasses over 2 million acres of steep rainforest fjords.
Glaciers have carved the granite rock into nearly vertical fjords, where waterfalls pour into the ocean from the hanging valleys

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above. Every slope that's not vertical rock is covered in a dense rainforest of cedar, spruce, and hemlock. Orcas cruise the main waterway of Behm Canal, while the harbor seals shelter in the smaller bays and inlets.

Almost all of Misty Fjords is designated wilderness, but a chunk of about 150,000 acres in the middle was left out for the possible future development of the Quartz Hill Molybdenum deposit (http://www.sitnews.us/Kiffer/Mining/072806_mining.html). US Borax (http://www.borax.com/) abandoned its mine plans in 1991 when molybdenum prices dropped, and the site was bought out by the Canadian mining company Teck Cominco (http://www.teckcominco.com/), which still says that the mine will be developed when molybdenum prices rise.

Most visitors to Misty Fjords come on day trips from large cruise ship tours, usually to Rudyerd Bay (/photos/IMG_7522n.jpg) (the Rudyerd runway, in summer). The rest of the monument is quite isolated. In 2004 I went on a multi-week kayak trip in the Misty Fjords, circumnavigating Revillagigedo Island (http://aktrekking.com/2004/MistyFjords/MistyFjords1.html).

More Misty Fjords info fromGorp (http://gorp.away.com/gorp/resource/us_wilderness_area/ak_misty.htm), and Wilderness.net (http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=wildView&WID=361&tab=General).

(/photos/1112219641_290_3.jpg)
lava flow on Blue River
Baichtal, J. F.

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Iskut-Unuk River cones (http://www.avo.alaska.edu/volcanoes/volcinfo.php?volcname=Iskut-Unuk%20River%20Cones) - September 2007

This is actually in Canada, but chronologically, it fits here.
The Iskut-Unuk River cones are a series of cinder cones along the Iskut River (http://www.avo.alaska.edu/volcanoes/volcinfo.php?volcname=Iskut-Unuk+River+cones) in northwest British Columbia. These volcanoes at the southern part of the Stikine Volcanic Belt are responsible for a number of basaltic lava flows in the region. The small (7000 ha)Lava Forks Provincial Park (http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/lava_forks.html) protects the site of the youngest of these flows and Canada's most recent volcanic eruption (early 1900s).
As is common in volcanic areas, the rocks in the Iskut and Unuk River valleys are rich in minerals, and this area is home to several underground gold mines, including the Eskay Creek Mine (http://www.eskaymining.com/) - operated by Barrick Gold (http://www.barrick.com/)
Though Cominco (http://www.teckcominco.com/) closed its Snip Mine near Snippaker Creek in 1999, the Friends of the Stikine (http://www.panorama-map.com/STIKINE/stikine.html) claim that during its operation the 100,000 pound hovercraft to transport ore and supplies along the lower Iskut and Stikine Rivers significantly damaged wildlife and salmon spawning habitat. Mining exploration is ongoing in the region.

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(/photos/iskutStikine.jpg)
Iskut-Stikine confluence from Google earth.

wilderness.net (http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm)

Stikine River (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stikine_River) - September 2007

The Stikine River is best known for the Grand Canyon of the Stikine: a 60 mi (100 km) long and 1,000-ft (300-m) deep gorge through the mountains run by only a few hardcore paddlers. The currents in this canyon are strong enough to prevent salmon from swimming upstream, limiting salmon runs to the lower third of the river.
The majority of the Stikine flows through B.C., but the last 40 miles are in Alaska, in the Stikine-LeConte (http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=wildView&WID=579&tab=General) wilderness.
In the mid-70s and early 1980s BC Hydro was planning a major hydroelectric project that would have included two very large dams in the Grand Canyon of the Stikine, and three more on the Iskut (the Stikine's major tributary). Local residents and conservation groups such as the Friends of the Stikine (http://www.panorama-map.com/STIKINE/stikine.html) put up strong opposition to this plan, which eventually fell apart due to the prohibitive cost of building it in such a remote area. The Stikine River Provincial Park (http://www.spacesfornature.org/greatspaces/stikine.html#) now protects the Grand Canyon, and the Mt. Edziza and Spatsizi Provincial Parks contain large areas

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of the watershed at higher elevations.
But the lower Stikine River, the Iskut River, and all of the Stikine's other tributary valley bottoms remain vulnerable. Currently, the main potential threat to the Stikine watershed comes from mining, particularly a coal deposit on the Spatsizi River.

(/photos/IMG_7652.jpg)
(/photos/IMG_7642n.jpg)

Tongass National Forest (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tongass_National_Forest) - September and October 2007

At 17 million acres, the Tongass (http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/index.shtml) encompasses most of Southesat Alaska, and is our largest national forest.
Though its land area is huge, two thirds of the Tongass is not actually forest, but snow, ice, rock, and non-forest vegetation. And only 4% of the Tongass is the low-elevation old growth most important for wildlife and most productive for timber. Over half of thishas already been logged (http://www.inforain.org/tongass/).
The most controversial timber sales in the Tongass are in the roadless areas (http://www.inforain.org/maparchive/mAdtl.php?mbID=410). In September 2006, a landmark court decision overturned Bush's repeal of the Roadless Rule (http://www.akrain.org/pressroom/pressreview.2006-10-06.8099665109/view), reverting to the 2001 roadless area protections established under Clinton. However, the Tongass was exempted from that ruling, and it is unclear what

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the fate of its vast roadless areas will be.
More info on the Tongass and the controversy over its logging from the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (http://seacc.org/healthy-forests/tongass-history) and the Alaska Rainforest Campaign (http://www.akrain.org/)

Click for Juneau, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Juneau.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Juneau (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juneau) - October 2007

The only state capital that can't be reached by road, Juneau is home to about 31,000 people. Over the years, several propoals have been made to move the capitol closer to the major population center in Anchorage, and the state is also considering a controversial proposal to connect Juneau to the road system via Skagway.
Hugging a steep coastline in an area of heavy snowfall, Juneau has the distinction of being one of the largest municipal avalanche hazard areas in the country (https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/systemops/fs/alaskan/tfrs/juneau/jnu-adn/). Avalanches have hit, damaged or destroyed at least 72 buildings within a 10-mile radius of downtown Juneau in the past century. Check out this map of avalanche paths (http://www.juneau.org/avalanche/images/DowntownJuneauMapBIGWEB.jpg) around downtown Juneau.
Juneau is a major destination on the Southeast Alaska cruise

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ship circuit with approximately 900,000 visitors each summer
Depending on the exact location, Juneau gets anywhere from 55 to 90 inches of precipitation per year - still less than half as much as some other parts of Southeast Alaska.

Quentin Goodman

Glacier Bay National Park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacier_Bay_National_Park) - October 2007

Between the islands of Southeast Alaska and the Gulf of Alaska, Glacier Bay Park (http://www.nps.gov/glba/) consists largely of series of fjords and inlets off of Glacier Bay (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacier_Bay), with calving glaciers at their heads. Glacier Bay Park (http://www.nps.gov/glba/) is over 5,000 square miles (over 13,000 square km), and joins with the neghboring Wrangell-St. Elias (U.S.), Tatshenshini-Alsek (Canada), and Kluane (Canada) parks to form a UNESCO world heritage site (http://whc.unesco.org/), and the largest international protected area in the world. As well as spectacular glacial landscapes, this set of preserves provides important habitat for grizzly bears, Dall sheep, and caribou.
Despite being remote and inaccessible by road, this park recieves almost 400,000 visitors a year, primarily on cruise ships.
Glacier Bay holds the distinction of the fastest measured glacial retreat in the world. As recently as the late 1700s, the entire bay was iced over. Just over 100 years later in 1916, the ice had retreated over 65 miles up the bay. Alaska is warming faster

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than the rest of the planet (http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/2005/), and glaciers here are continuing to retreat rapidly. Click for animated photos of glacier retreat (http://www2.nature.nps.gov/geology/GLBA/glaciers.htm) in Glacier Bay.

USGS

Lituya Bay (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lituya_Bay) - October 2007

Lituya Bay is a T-shaped fjord on the west (and rarely visited) edge of Glacier Bay National park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacier_Bay_National_Park), along the Gulf of Alaska coast. The head of the bay lies along a fault line parallelling the coast, and in 1958 an earthquake on this fault set off a landslide that produced the tallest tsunami ever measured in the world. This wave reached over 1700 feet (500 meters) high, stripping the forests from the hillsides, destroying 3 fishing boats, and killing two people.
More deadly than the tsunami are the bay's tidal currents. The bay has a very narrow entrance, and when it was first discovered by Jean-Francois de La Perouse (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Fran%C3%A7ois_de_La_P%C3%A9rouse), 21 of his men perished trying to scout the entrance.

Michael Collier

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Mt. Fairweather (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Fairweather) - October 2007

One of the peaks that forms the zig-zag boundary between Alaska and British Columbia, Mt. Fairweather is the highest mountain in B.C. at 4,663 meters (15,300 feet). The bulk of the mountain lies in Alaska, however. Part of the massive St. Elias range (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Elias_Mountains) which towers over the Gulf of Alaska (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Alaska), the summit is only 15 miles from the shore. Fairweather was named in 1778 by James Cook, supposedly for the good weather on the day it was discovered. However, with this area recieving about 150 inches of rain per year, a common (and more accurate) interpretation of the name is that Mt. Fairweather is a mountain you'll only ever see in fair weather.

Bruce Molnia, Terra Photographics

Alsek River (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alsek_River) - October 2007

Though the mouth of the Alsek is in Alaska (where we'll be passing by), the majority of the river is located in the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park (http://www.spacesfornature.org/greatspaces/tatshenshini.html) in B.C. The most famous spot on this wilderness river is Turnback Canyon, one of North America's legendary class V+ bigwater runs, where the Tweedsmuir Glacier slams the river into a cliff.

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In the 1980s, Geddes Resources put forward a propoasl to develop the Windy Craggy Mine (http://www.spacesfornature.org/windycraggy.html) - a large open pit copper mine in the Tatshenshini-Alsek watershed, on a peak between the two rivers. Acid mine drainage from the sulphide-rich ore would have posed an enormous threat to both rivers and the surrounding wilderness.
A group known as Tatshenshini Wild (http://www.wildernesscommittee.org/campaigns/historic/tatshenshini) formed in 1989 to fight this plan. With growing opposition to the plan, Tatshenshini Wild spearheaded a large coalition known as Tatshenshini International. At it's peak, the group comprised 50 of the top conservation organizations in North America and represented about 10 million people.
In the end, two things stopped the mine project: strong public opposition, and the objections of the U.S. The U.S. stood little to gain from the mine, which threatened fish runs in U.S. waters, and since the only feasible port for Windy Craggy was in the U.S. at the mouth of the Alsek, the U.S. could have vetoed the project by refusing the port.
In 1993, this wilderness was protected in the Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park, creating the only large river drainage in North America that is protected from headwaters to ocean.

Bruce Molnia, Terra Photographics
Click for Yakutat, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Yakutat.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

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Yakutat (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakutat) - November 2007

Much of Alaska's Pacific coastline is protected in intricate bays and behind islands. So, as the only town on the open coast of the Gulf of Alaska, Yakutat has become the surfing capital of the state.
During World War II, the USAAF stationed a large aviation garrison near Yakutat and built a paved runway. This is part of the reason that despite having a population of only 800, Yakutat has jet service from Alaska Air.
One of the wettest places on our trip, Yakutat recieves an average of 145 inches of precipitation per year.
Originally occupied by Eyak-speaking people from the Copper River area, and later by the Tlingits, Yakutat was only one of a number of Tlingit-Eyak settlements in the region, although all the others have been depopulated or abandoned.
Over the last two centuries, Yakutat has been home to a thriving trade in sea otter pelts, gold mining in the black sand beaches, and a sawmill and cannery. Today, fishing is the largest industry.

Bruce Molnia, Terra Photographics

Malaspina (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaspina_Glacier) and Bering Glaciers (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bering_Glacier) - November 2007

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These two enormous glaciers mark the Gulf of Alaska coast between Yakutat and the Copper River, though neither reaches tidewater.
The Malaspina is a piedmont glacier, where several valley glaciers from the St. Elias Mountains spill out onto the coastal plain, joining into one huge lobe of ice. The Malaspina covers about 1,500 square miles, and is up to 1800 feet thick in some places. It'll take us several days to walk around it. Like most of our glaciers, the Malaspina is shrinking rapidly with global warming. Study of radar data and aerial photographs dating back to 1972 shows that the Malaspina-Seward system lost about 20 m (60 ft) of its thickness between 1980 and 2000; because the glacier is so large, that was sufficient to contribute 1/2 of one percent of the rise in the global sea level.
Combined with the Bagley Icefield, where the snow that feeds the glacier accumulates, the Bering is the largest glacier in North America. Since 1900 the terminus has retreated as much as 7 miles. The Bering Glacier is also subject to periodic surges about every 20 years, followed by periods of retreat. These "advances" are caused by an increase in the flow rate of ice, rather than an actual accumulation. So the glacier terminus can move forward, while the overall volume of ice continues to shrink.

(/photos/Copper.jpg) (/photos/CopperIce.jpg) (/photos/CopperRaft.jpg) (/photos/CopperDunes.jpg)

Copper River (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_River_%28Alaska%29) - November 2007

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If you're not from Alaska, you've probably heard the phrase "Copper River Salmon", more often than you've heard of the river itself. Over 2 million salmon return to the Copper River every year, mostly sockeyes. The early runs of Copper River salmon are whisked down to the lower 48 and are some of the first fresh salmon to appear in the grocery stores each summer, fetching high prices.

The Copper River is the 10th largest river in the U.S. (http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/1987/ofr87-242/) (by flow). It flows through the Wrangell Mountain range, with its headwaters on the north side of Wrangell - St.Elias National Park (http://www.nps.gov/wrst)

Muddy and brown, the majority of the Copper's water comes from glaciers. At peak summer ice-melt in July, the Copper's discharge is 20 times higher than it is in January. Two glaciers (Miles and Childs) calve directly into the Copper, and if you've ever seen a photo of a glacier calving, there's a good chance it was taken on the river's edge across from Childs glacier (the only spot a road reaches such a glacier).

The Copper is named for the Kennicott Copper mine (1910-1938), in the Wrangell Mountains. The Copper's steep canyon leaves little room for anything but the river. When a railroad ran down the river from the mine to get the ore to the port of Cordova, it ran directly over several miles of the Allen Glacier. The Million Dollar Bridge (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Million_Dollar_Bridge) spans the river between Miles and Childs glaciers, and is now as far as you can drive from Cordova.

The Copper River Delta, which extends for 700,000 acres (2,800 square km) is the considered the largest contiguous wetlands

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along the Pacific coast of North America. It is used annually by 16 million shorebirds, including the world's entire population of western sandpipers. It is also home to the world's largest population of nesting trumpeter swans and is the only known nesting site for the dusky Canada goose.

(/photos/raftRain.jpg)
packrafting a bay near Cordova
Click for Cordova, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Cordova.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Cordova (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cordova%2C_Alaska) - November 2007

A town of about 2,500 people on Prince William Sound. Cordova's primary economy is based on fishing, with some tourism. Currently only accessible by boat (including the state ferry) or plane, there's a controversy in the town over whether the road on the Copper River should be extended from the Million Dollar Bridge (its current end point) to Chitina (where it would connect with state's road system). A wet and snowy place, tucked into the Chugach national forest, Cordova gets over 100 inches of precipitation annually, including over 100 inches of snow.

(/photos/PrinceWilliamSoundSlope.jpg)
(/photos/PrinceWilliamSoundLake.jpg)

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Prince William Sound (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_William_Sound) - November 2007

A convoluted sound full of steep fjords, with glaciers calving into the ocean along the sound's north side. Montague and Hinchinbrook Islands protect the entrance to the sound. Prince William Sound is surrounded by the Chugach National forest. Prince William Sound is best known for the various disasters that have occured there. In 1964, the Good Friday earthquake produced a damaging tsunami that hit several towns in the area.
In 1989, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef, near Valdez, resulting in the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Oil-slicked wildlife appeared on television screens around the nation. The spill caused massive damage to the envrionment, extending far beyond Prince William Sound, to hit 1500 miles of coastline (http://www.conservationgiscenter.org/maps/html/exxon_spill.html) to the west. Much has recovered now, 17 years later.

Click for Valdez, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Valdez.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Valdez (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valdez%2C_Alaska) - November 2007

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The northernmost ice-free port in the U.S., Valdez serves as the endpoint of the Alaska pipeline, bringing oil from the North Slope. The view from Valdez's shore is dominated by enormous tank farms, holding oil destined for shipment. Valdez is also connected to the road system - the first road to hit the coast since Haines (in Southeast Alaska), and Prince Rupert (in B.C.) About 4,000 people live in Valdez.

(/photos/Chugach1.jpg)

Chugach National Forest (http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/) - November - December 2007

The Chugach National Forest is centered around Prince William Sound, streching from the Copper River delta on the east to the middle of the Kenai Peninsula on the west. At 5.6 million acres (23,000 square km), it's the second largest forest in the U.S. (after the Tongass), and the northernmost national forest. Draped over a landscape of steep, glaciated mountains, one third of the Chugach "Forest" is actually rock and ice. Though the Chugach forest is largely wild, with roads in only a few places, none of it is currently designated as wilderness.

Click for Anchorage, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Anchorage.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Anchorage (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchorage%2C_Alaska) - December 2007

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With about 340,000 people, approximately half of Alaska's entire population can be found in the Anchorage metro area. Anchorage has the distinction of being our only significant city with a sizeable population of urban moose and grizzly bears. In 1964, the magnitude 9.2 Good Friday Earthquake (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaska_Earthquake) (on the subduction zone fault off the Alaskan coast) caused major damage in Anchorage. On Cook Inlet, Anchorage sits on a peninsula protruding between Knik Arm and Turnagain Arm. These two inlets are notable for their extreme tidal range and tidal currents. The incoming tide on Turnagain Arm can form a tidal bore (a breaking wave) at higher tides, which surfers sometimes ride.

Knik Arm (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cook_Inlet) - December 2007

A long bay at the northern end of Cook Inlet (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cook_Inlet), separating Anchorage from the MatSu (Matanuska Susitna) valley. Knik Arm is the proposed site of one of Alaska's infamous "Bridges to Nowhere" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knik_Arm_Bridge) - heavily criticized nationwide as an egregious example of pork barrel spending. The bridge would create a more direct connection between Anchorage and the largely rural valley, bypassing the existing route (around the end of the arm through Palmer), and allowing Anchorage to sprawl further. After the uproar, the earmarks for the bridges were removed, but the money still went to Alaska. It's unclear whether the bridge will be built. Knik Arm is about 1.5 miles wide at its narrowest point, and

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known for a 20 foot plus tidal range, and extreme tidal currents. The water is extremely silty, and the shores can be dangerous quicksand.

Iditarod Trail (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iditarod_%28race%29) - December 2007

From Knik Arm to the Alaska Range, our route follows a portion of the Iditarod trail. The Iditarod (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iditarod_%28race%29) is a yearly sled dog race run over a roughly 1000 mile course between Anchorage and Nome. The race commemorates the 1925 serum run to Nome (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1925_serum_run_to_Nome), when a series of dog teams and mushers raced to deliver a desperately needed diptheria antitoxin to nome.

Bruce Molnia, Terra Photographics

Alaska Range (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaska_Range) - December 2007

Sweeping east to west across southcentral Alaska, the Alaska range is home to Denali, the highest mountain in North America. It buts into the Wrangell mountains on the southeast end, and Lake Clark on the southwest. The Denali fault runs along the south edge of the Alaska Range, and has been responsible for a number of sizeable earthquakes.

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Twin Lakes (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twin_Lakes_%28Alaska%29) - December 2007

Twin Lakes, in Lake Clark National Park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Clark_National_Park), is a remote spot that's well-known due to one famous resident: Richard Proenneke (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Proenneke). In 1968, he arrived at Twin Lakes to build his retirement cabin in the remote wilderness. He spent most of the next 30 years in this beautiful hand-built cabin, documenting his life in the wilderness through film, photography, and journals. In 1999, at age 82, he moved back to civilization for good, leaving his cabin to the Parks Service upon his death in 2003.
The book One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey , and the film Alone in the Wilderness document his life at Twin Lakes.

Lake Clark (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakutat) - December 2007

The namesake of Lake Clark National Park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Clark_National_Park), Lake Clark is a long skinny lake 40 miles long and 5 miles wide, in Southwest Alaska.
The Tlikakila River flows into the lake on its northeast end, and it drains out through Sixmile Lake and the Newhalen River to Lake Iliamna.
The park is not connected to the road system, and though we will be arriving on skis, most of its few visitors come in the

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summer, on small planes or floatplanes, staying in the wilderness lodges on the lake's edge. The town of Port Alsworth lies on the lake, and serves as park headquarters.

(/photos/Nondalton.jpg)
Click for Nondalton, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Nondalton.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Nondalton (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nondalton,_Alaska) - January 2008

A town of about 200 people on the shore of Sixmile Lake, at the southwest corner of Lake Clark. Most of the people are Alaska Native, primariy Dena'ina Athabaskans.
Village leaders have been heavily involved in opposing the Pebble Mine proposal (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/) near their village.

(/photos/pebbleValley.jpg)
(/photos/pebbleValley3.jpg)

Pebble Valley (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/) - January 2008

Sixteen miles from Nondalton village, low rounded mountains surround a glacier-carved valley. Hundreds of shallow lakes and ponds sparkle in the wet tundra that blankets the valley floor. Rarely visited by outsiders until a few years ago, Pebble Valley could become home to an enormous open pit mine.

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The Pebble Mine project (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/) is a controversial proposal by Northern Dynasty Minerals (http://www.northerndynastyminerals.com/ndm/Home.asp) to build one of the largest gold and copper mines in the world, in southwest Alaska, near Lake Iliamna (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/LakeIliamna/LakeIliamnaPhotos.html). The site lies at the headwaters of two of the world's largest salmon spawning rivers, draining into Bristol Bay.
Northern Dynasty has not yet applied for permits, but theircurrent proposal (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/PitDesign.jpg) involves both a large open pit and an underground mine, as well as removal of the water from the headwaters ofUpper Talarik Creek (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/UpperTalarik/UpperTalarikPhotos.html) and theKoktuli River (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/Koktuli/KoktuliPhotos.html) (important fish habitats (http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/map_resources.htm)).
The site sits at the headwaters of two major Bristol Bay (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/BristolBay/BristolBayPhotos.html) drainages (Nushagak (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/Nushagak/NushagakPhotos.html) and Kvichak (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/Kvichak/KvichakPhotos.html)), and potentially poses a large threat to the region's salmon (http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/map_resources.htm). This proposal has become a major political issue in Alaska (http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/scoreboard.htm), pitting pro-mining forces against local native villages and commercial and sport fishermen.

(/photos/LakeIliamna.jpg)

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Lake Iliamna (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliamna_Lake) - January 2008

Lake Iliamna is the largest lake in Alaska and one of the largest in North America, at 75 miles long, and roughly 20 miles wide. It drains into Bristol Bay through the Kvichak River (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/Kvichak/KvichakPhotos.html), its waters drain into Bristol Bay (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/BristolBay/BristolBayPhotos.html). Known for its fishing, Lake Iliamna is home to all five species of pacific salmon as well as trout and grayling. Lake Iliamna has one of only two populations of freshwater seals in the world. And according to some, it also is home to theLake Iliamna monster (http://www.alaskascienceoutreach.com/index.php/features/sis_parttwo/what_lies_beneath_lake_iliamna/).

Click for Pedro Bay, Alaska Forecast (http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK/Pedro_Bay.html?bannertypeclick=miniWeather2)

Pedro Bay (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Bay) - January 2008

A small town (about 50 people), on the northern shore of Lake Iliamna. Despite the tiny size, we got quite lost in Pedro Bay on our 2001 Alaska Peninsula trip (http://www.aktrekking.com/AKPen.html), since the 4-wheeler trails are all unlabeled and go all over the place. Fortunately the residents were quite helpful in putting us straight.

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For a more local perspective, see the Lake Iliamna web cam (http://www.iliamna.com/) from Pedro Bay, and the Pedro Bay News (http://iliamna.com/PedroBayNews.html).
If the Pebble Mine project (http://www.aktrekking.com/pebble/) goes through, the road from Cook Inlet to the mine would go through Pedro Bay.

Bears at McNeil River www.akcf.org

McNeil River (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McNeil_River) - January 2008

On the outer coast of the Alaska Peninsula, near Katmai National Park, McNeil River lies within the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. It's famous for its bears. An enormous number of brown bears (grizzlies) congregate here every summer to fish the salmon streams. If you've seen a picture of a grizzly salmon fishing, there's a good chance it was taken either here, or at Brooks Camp.

Jennifer Adleman, Alaska Volcano Observatory

Cape Douglas (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Douglas_%28Alaska%29) - January 2008

A volcanic peninsula at the edge of Katmai National Park, home to Mount Douglas, and the recently erupting Fourpeaked Volcano.

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(/photos/katmai.jpg)

Katmai Park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katmai_National_Park) - January 2008

An awesome park on the Alaska Peninsula, notable for volcanoes and bears. In 1912, the largest eruption in the 20th century occured here, at Novarupta, forming the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. Aside from its size, Novarupta was unusual because the eruption came out of the middle of the valley, 6 miles away from the peak of Katmai Volcano. The eruption buried the whole valley in a thick layer of volcanic tuff, and all the creeks and rivers in the the valley lie in deep narrow gorges. Though the smokes no longer smoke, it's still an amazing place.
We went through Katmai on our Alaska Peninsula Trek (http://www.aktrekking.com/AKpen.html) in 2001 The other notable feature of the park is that it's home to one of the largest concentrations of brown bears in the world.

bear viewing platform - Jim Gavin

** Brooks Camp** - January 2008

Brooks Camp: home of the Bear Traffic Control.
When people visit Katmai Park, this is the place they usually come, flying in from King Salmon. In the summer, there is both an extremely high concentration of brown (grizzly) bears, and an extremely high concentration of people - there to watch the

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bears.

Amazingly, the Brooks Camp rangers have done such a good job of managing the people, that both species coexist quite peacefully. The bears aren’t allowed to get a hold of any human food. And the humans aren’t allowed to bother any bears. The rangers will radio back and forth all day about bear locations, and divert or delay groups of humans accordingly. If a bear wishes to nap in the middle of the road for three hours, you’re just out of luck.

As a result, while bears in most other places run from humans, these bears ignore them entirely. This makes it much easier to take photos - photos you’ve seen of brown bears fishing were probably taken here (or at nearby McNeil River).

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