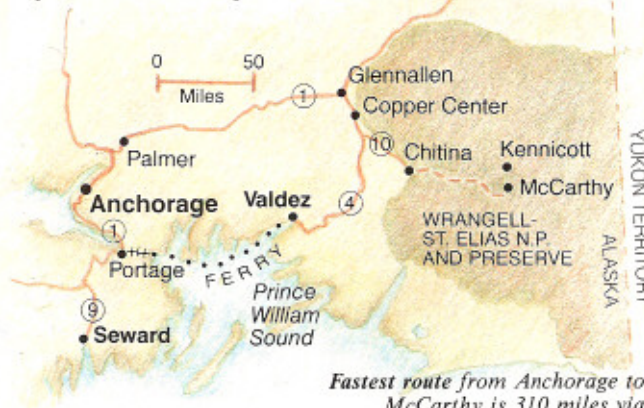




BEN DAVIDSON

*Ore-processing mill dwarfs hikers through ghost town of Kennicott in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve*

## Alaska's huge glacier-and-ghost park



*Fastest route from Anchorage to McCarthy is 310 miles via Glennallen; most scenic way includes a ferry ride via Valdez*



*Snowcapped Wrangell Mountains in heart of park dominate approach to Glennallen on State 1*

**Size alone** makes Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve intimidating. At roughly 13 million acres, the nation's largest national park encompasses hundreds of peak-scouring glaciers on three major mountain ranges: Wrangell, Chugach, and St. Elias. Combined with neighboring Kluane National Park in Canada, it is one of the largest chunks of designated wilderness in the world.

You don't need to be a mountaineer to sample the park's wilderness splendor—or

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its mining history. With a few extra days in an Alaska itinerary, you can make a summertime detour to the outpost of McCarthy—and the nearby ghost town of Kennicott—in the heart of the park.

### **McCarthy and Kennicott: historic towns surrounded by wilderness**

Allow at least one full day just to explore Kennicott, an extensive old copper-mining town and national historic landmark. For several years, the Friends of Kennicott have been working with the Park Service toward preservation of the privately owned site. You may want to allow another day for hiking, horseback riding, or a guided climb on Root Glacier.

Half the adventure of visiting McCarthy is getting there. From parking at the end of the road, you must use a hand-operated cable tram to ferry you and your gear across the wide and silty Kennicott River.

It's a safe ride and not too strenuous, but bring thick gloves to make pulling easier. Across the river, signs guide you on a ¼-mile walk to the center of town.

Once a wide-open mining town, McCarthy today is a shadow of its boomtown glory. In summer, the dozen or so residents operate a museum, a guide service, and rustic lodges that offer basic meals.

Much of this area's past is captured in a small but fascinating collection of photographs and artifacts at the McCarthy-Kennicott Museum, in the town's old railroad depot. Its guide to Kennicott (\$1) will help you find key buildings, including the general store, hospital, and a 14-story ore-processing plant.

You can walk the 4 miles north to Kennicott, or catch a bus shuttle for \$5 per person one way. Built in 1907, Kennicott was a company-run town for what was then one of the largest mines in the world. A sprawling complex of wooden buildings, Kennicott produced more than \$200 million in copper and silver before closing in 1938. Today more than 40 buildings remain. Although the town is still privately owned, you can walk through its streets freely. Most of the rickety old structures are not safe, and entry is prohibited.

### **Hike to glaciers, wildflowers**

Before setting out, backpackers should consult with park rangers at the visitor center just north of Copper Center, on the park's western outskirts. (The center is at mile 105, Richardson Highway, about 11 miles south of Glennallen.) The rugged interior has no marked trails and is best suited for experienced backpackers and mountaineers. It's always a good idea to register your trip. Write or call Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Box 29, Glennallen 99588; (907) 822-5234. The park has a list of authorized backcountry guide services. It can also help you plan day-hikes out of McCarthy.

St. Elias Alpine Guides in McCarthy (see

address under McCarthy Wilderness Bed & Breakfast) offers shorter tours, including a half-day one of the Kennicott ghost town (\$25), and half-day and full-day hikes (\$55 and \$75) into the ice world of Root Glacier. For the glacier, you'll be equipped with boots, crampons, and ice ax, and will learn glacier hiking safety.

You can climb aboard a horse for a short guided trail ride (\$20 per hour) or overnight wilderness trip. Write to McCarthy Trail Rides, Box 871730, Wasilla 99687.

McCarthy Air offers backcountry charters and ½-hour flightseeing excursions (about \$50 per person) out of McCarthy in summer. Write to McCarthy Air, Box MXY, McCarthy via Glennallen 99588.

### **Getting to the park**

From Anchorage, take Glenn Highway (State 1) northeast 185 miles to Glennallen, then head south 34 miles on Richardson Highway (State 4) to the Edgerton Highway (State 10). This sealed gravel road heads 33 miles east to Chitina, where you enter the park on the McCarthy Road, 58 miles of rough dirt that follows the grade of the mining company's former railroad. At road's end, park in upper lots (lower lots are subject to flooding).

The McCarthy road is usually suitable for passenger vehicles (not recommended for trailers or large RVs), but it can be rough or slippery after rains. Check road conditions at the ranger station in Chitina. You can also reach the park on the Richardson Highway via Valdez, which is served by Alaska Marine Highway ferries. For ferry information, write to Alaska Marine Highway, Box R, Juneau 99811, or call (907) 465-3941 or, from outside Alaska, (800) 642-0066.

### **Three small lodges (one really rustic)**

**McCarthy Lodge**, Box 870393, Wasilla 99687; (907) 333-5402. Across the street from the old lodge, which contains a restaurant and bar, is the Ma Johnson Hotel, with 13 rooms and baths down the hall; \$85 double occupancy. A separate four-room bunkhouse (bath across the street) costs \$45. The rates include a Kennicott shuttle bus.

**McCarthy Wilderness Bed & Breakfast**, Box 111241, Anchorage 99511; 277-6867. Rustic accommodations run by St. Elias Alpine Guides feature three rooms in the old Mother Lode Power House and separate log cabin. There is a log-fired sauna-bathroom but no plumbing, running water, or electricity. Rates (\$50 single, \$60 double) include breakfast.

**Kennicott Glacier Lodge**, Box 103940, Anchorage 99510; 258-2350. In Kennicott, this newer building has 12 of the area's most comfortable rooms with generated electricity, running water, and shared baths. Rates start at \$95 per person (double occupancy; children under 13 are \$47.50), including three meals and shuttle to and from McCarthy. □