



Bureau of Land Management  
2021

2020

# The Dalton Highway



Visitor Guide

## Experience America's Arctic



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## The Dalton Highway

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Produced and Designed by



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Cover photo: Fall colors around Nutirwik Creek by AIVC Staff

# Ultimate Road Adventure

The Dalton Highway is a rough, industrial road that begins 84 miles (134 km) north of Fairbanks and ends 414 miles (662 km) later in Deadhorse, the industrial camp at Prudhoe Bay. It provides a rare opportunity to traverse a remote, unpopulated part of Alaska to the very top of the continent. Traveling this farthest-north road involves real risks and challenges. This publication will help you decide whether to make the journey, how to prepare, and how to enjoy your experience. Please read this information carefully.

## Know Before You Go

- There is no public access to the Arctic Ocean from Deadhorse. You must be on an authorized tour. Call toll-free 1-877-474-3565; in Fairbanks, 474-3565.
- There are no medical facilities between Fairbanks and Deadhorse, a distance of 500 miles (800 km). For emergency information, see the back page.
- Food, gas, and vehicle repair service are extremely limited. See page 5.
- There are limited cell phone service or public Internet connection between Fairbanks and Deadhorse. Contact your cell phone provider.
- In 2019 the BLM hauled 20 tons of Dalton Highway trash to Fairbanks, the nearest landfill. Please do your part by reducing waste and returning to Fairbanks with what you brought.



## Arctic Interagency Visitor Center

The award-winning Arctic Interagency Visitor Center introduces visitors from around the world to the unique and extreme environment of the Arctic. Explore interpretive exhibits, walk the nearby nature trails, and talk with our knowledgeable staff to learn more about the region's history, natural environment, and recreation opportunities. The visitor center is a partnership between the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and hosts an Alaska Geographic Association bookstore.

**Open Daily from May 24 to September 16, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
Phone: 907-678-5209 or 907-678-2014 (summer only).**

[www.blm.gov/learn/interpretive-centers/aivc](http://www.blm.gov/learn/interpretive-centers/aivc)  
FREE digital public maps - [www.blm.gov/maps/georeferenced-PDFs](http://www.blm.gov/maps/georeferenced-PDFs)

# Built for Black Gold

In 1968, oil was discovered at Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's North Slope. Excitement was high at the prospect of new money to fuel Alaska's boom-and-bust economy. The nation was in the throes of an energy crisis and pushed for an 800-mile-long (1290 km) pipeline. But first, Native land claims had to be settled, permits granted, environmental safeguards designed, and a road built to get workers and supplies north to the oil field.

When finally approved, construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was run like a wartime project—money was no object and time was of the essence. The weather conditions, terrain, and the immensity of the project were all extreme. Engineers overcame permafrost, mountain ranges, and the relentless flow of the Yukon River in the process. Incredibly, the Haul Road was completed in just five months and the pipeline in three years (1974-77). The previously remote Arctic was changed forever.

## Haul Road or Highway?

At first, the highway was called the Haul Road because almost everything supporting oil development was “hailed” on tractor-trailer rigs to its final destination. In 1981, the State of Alaska named the highway after James W. Dalton, a lifelong Alaskan and expert in arctic



Road and pipeline workers remember the hardships of completing the highway – long hours of extreme cold, miles of dust, shirts black with mosquitoes, and months of exhausting work.

engineering who was involved in early oil exploration efforts on the North Slope.

The highway was open only to commercial traffic until 1981, when the state allowed public access to Disaster Creek at Milepost 211. In 1994, public access was allowed all the way to Deadhorse for the first time. Today, the Dalton Highway beckons adventurous souls to explore a still-wild and mysterious frontier. Respect this harsh land and appreciate the opportunity to visit a special part of our world.



*“...I trucked the Haul Road to Prudhoe a few hundred times and fished Grayling Lake and hunted the South Fork Koyukuk for 10 years in a row. I really, really miss it—the beauty, quiet, and the freedom it brings one’s mind. It’s definitely the best mental medicine on earth.”*

*Marshall Casteel  
Myrtle Creek, Oregon*



# Preparing for the Long Haul

## Before you leave Fairbanks

- Inspect all tires and make sure they are properly inflated
- Check all vehicle fluids
- Replace worn hoses and belts
- Empty your RV's holding tank and fill the water tank
- Purchase groceries and supplies

## Bring for your vehicle

- At least two full-sized spare tires mounted on rims
- Tire jack and tools for flat tires
- Emergency flares
- Extra gasoline, motor oil, and wiper fluid
- CB radio

## Bring for yourself

- Insect repellent and head net
- Sunglasses and sunscreen
- Rain jacket and pants
- Warm clothes, including hat and gloves
- First aid kit
- Drinking water
- Ready-to-eat food
- Camping gear, including sleeping bag
- Personal medications
- Toilet paper and hand sanitizer
- Garbage bags

## Safety Tips

### Phones and Internet

- There is no cell phone coverage or public Internet access between Fairbanks and Deadhorse. Both are available in Deadhorse. Coldfoot Camp has wi-fi (fee).
- Pay phones: You can use a calling card at the Yukon River Camp, Coldfoot, Wiseman, and Deadhorse.
- Satellite phones: Some companies in Fairbanks rent satellite phones; check the phone directory under radio.

### Drinking Water

It's best to bring water with you. If you must use stream water for cooking or cleaning, treat it first by boiling rapidly for 3-5 minutes, or by using iodine tablets or a water filter. *Giardia* is widespread in Alaska waters and is highly contagious.

Wildfires are common along the Dalton Highway. ►  
The majority are started by lightning.

## Weather

Summer temperatures can occasionally reach the high 80s F (27-30°C) south of the Brooks Range and average in the 50s F (10-15°C) in Coldfoot. Thunderstorms are common in early summer, especially between Fairbanks and the Yukon River, and may bring lightning and sudden squalls. In general, June and July are drier months, but rainy days are frequent throughout the summer.

Weather on the North Slope is frequently windy, foggy, and cold. Snow can occur at any time of the year, especially from the Brooks Range north. In Deadhorse, average summer temperatures are in the 30s and 40s F (0-5°C).

## Flash Floods

Heavy or prolonged rain can cause local flash floods anytime during the summer. Running water may cover the road or wash out culverts and bridges. Do not attempt to cross flooded areas.

## Wildlife

Treat all wild animals with caution. Keep a clean camp so you don't attract wildlife. Do not approach or feed any animals. Moose and muskoxen may appear tame, but can be dangerous if approached too closely. Never get between a cow and her calves. If moose feel threatened they will flatten their ears, raise the hair on their neck, and may charge. Wolves and foxes on the North Slope may carry rabies. Avoid all contact between these animals and yourself and your pets. See page 17 for more information on where to look for wildlife.

## Wildfires

Wildfires may burn out of control and across the highway. Do not drive through areas of dense smoke or flames—you could get trapped by swiftly changing conditions and find yourself unable to reach safety.





## Visitor Information Centers

### In Fairbanks

Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, Alaska Public Lands Information Center  
101 Dunkel Street, #110  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Phone: 907-459-3730  
Fax: 907-459-3729  
www.alaskacenters.gov/  
Fairbanks.CFM

### At the Yukon River

Yukon Crossing Visitor Contact Station  
Located on the east side of the highway just north of the Yukon River bridge.  
No phone. Closed in winter.

### In Coldfoot

Arctic Interagency Visitor Center  
Coldfoot, MP 175  
Phone: 907-678-5209  
Open daily from late May to early September.  
Closed in winter.



## Services Are Limited

**Notice:** There are no public services at Department of Transportation maintenance stations or Alyeska Pipeline Service Company pump stations.

**Medical Facilities:** There are no public or emergency medical facilities along the Elliott or Dalton highways.

**Banking:** There are no banks. ATM machines are available in Deadhorse. Most services accept major credit cards and traveler's checks.

**Groceries:** There are no grocery stores along the highway. Snack food and cafés are available at limited locations.

**Phone:** There is limited cell phone coverage and no public internet access from the Elliott Highway Milepost 28 until just outside of Deadhorse.

SERVICES	Yukon Crossing	Five Mile <sup>☞</sup>	Coldfoot	Wiseman <sup>☞☞</sup>	Deadhorse
Gas	✱		✱		✱
Tire/Vehicle Repair			✱		✱
Restaurant	✱	✱	✱		✱
Lodging	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱
Public Phone	✱		✱	✱	✱
Post Office			✱		✱
Shower	✱	✱	✱		✱
Water		✱	✱		✱
Laundry			✱		✱
Dump Station		✱			
Tent Camping		✱	✱		
RV Parking		✱	✱		
Gift Shop/Local Crafts	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱
Visitor Center/Museum <sup>☞</sup>	✱		✱	✱	

<sup>☞</sup> closed in winter

<sup>☞☞</sup> limited services in winter

# Road Conditions

The road is narrow, has soft shoulders, high embankments, and steep hills. There are lengthy stretches of gravel surface with sharp rocks, potholes, washboard, and, depending on the weather, clouds of dust or slick mud. Watch out for dangerous curves and loose gravel, especially between Livengood and the Yukon River (MP 0-56). You may encounter snow and ice north of Coldfoot any month of the year. Expect and prepare for all conditions.

The Dalton Highway is paved from Milepost 37 to 49 and from Milepost 90 to 197 (Gold Creek). Beyond that there is pavement (with breaks) from Milepost 335 (Happy Valley airstrip) to 362. Road construction occurs in various areas and can cause some delay.

## Proposed Road Construction

- 2020 & 2021 Dalton MP 362 - 414
- 2020 Dalton MP 115 - 126

## For current road conditions:

- [511.alaska.gov](http://511.alaska.gov)
- [www.alaskanavigator.org/fairbanks](http://www.alaskanavigator.org/fairbanks)

# Rules of the Road

- ✓ Big trucks have the right of way.
- ✓ Slow down when passing other vehicles to avoid damaging them with flying rocks.
- ✓ Always drive with your lights on so others can see you.
- ✓ Keep your headlights and taillights clean so they are visible.
- ✓ Stay on the right side of the road.
- ✓ Don't stop on bridges, hills, or curves.
- ✓ Check your rear-view mirror regularly.
- ✓ If you spot wildlife, pull over to a safe location before stopping.
- ✓ Slower traffic should pull over at a safe location and allow other vehicles to pass.

## Mileage Chart



Miles (km)	Fairbanks	Livengood	Yukon River	Arctic Circle	Coldfoot	Atigun Pass	Galbraith Lake	Deadhorse
Fairbanks	•	84 (134)	140 (224)	199 (318)	259 (414)	328 (525)	359 (574)	498 (797)
Livengood	84 (134)	•	56 (90)	115 (184)	175 (280)	244 (390)	275 (440)	414 (662)
Yukon River	140 (224)	56 (90)	•	59 (94)	119 (190)	188 (301)	219 (350)	358 (573)
Arctic Circle	199 (318)	115 (184)	59 (94)	•	60 (96)	129 (206)	160 (256)	299 (478)
Coldfoot	259 (414)	175 (280)	119 (190)	60 (96)	•	69 (110)	100 (160)	239 (382)
Atigun Pass	328 (525)	244 (390)	188 (301)	129 (206)	69 (110)	•	31 (50)	170 (272)
Galbraith Lake	359 (574)	275 (440)	219 (350)	160 (256)	100 (160)	31 (50)	•	139 (222)
Deadhorse	498 (797)	414 (662)	358 (573)	299 (478)	239 (382)	170 (272)	139 (222)	•



## Road Tips

### Car Trouble

If your car breaks down, get off the road as far as possible and set flares. Towing services are available in Fairbanks, Coldfoot (907-678-3500) or Deadhorse (907-659-3308). You will need to provide credit card information by cell phone (near Fairbanks or Deadhorse), otherwise by satellite phone or in person if you can arrange for a ride.

### CB Radios

Truckers and road workers monitor Channel 19. With a CB you can ask them if it's safe to pass or tell them when it's safe to pass you. In poor visibility, you can warn oncoming trucks if there are other vehicles close behind you. You can communicate with flaggers, pilot cars, and heavy equipment operators.

### Emergency

Be prepared for minor emergencies. In a critical emergency, use a CB radio to call for help and relay a message to the State Troopers. If you are in cell phone range (Fairbanks or Deadhorse) you can call the Troopers at 800-811-0911. It may be many hours before help arrives.

### Rental Cars

Many rental car agreements prohibit driving on the Dalton Highway and other gravel roads. Violating the rental car agreement can be very expensive, especially in the event of a malfunction or accident.

### Repairs

Prepare to be self-sufficient. Limited tire and repair services are available at only two service stations between Fairbanks and Deadhorse—a distance of 500 miles (800 km). They can have parts delivered from Fairbanks, but that's expensive.



Fueling up in Deadhorse.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How long does it take to make the trip?

Much depends on weather, road conditions, road construction, and your own interests. The roundtrip to Prudhoe Bay and back demands at least four days. Under good conditions, expect the following driving times from Fairbanks to:

Yukon River	3 hours
Arctic Circle	5 hours
Coldfoot	6 hours
Atigun Pass	8 hours
Deadhorse	13+ hours

Factor in an additional 1-2 hours per day for rest stops, wildlife viewing, construction delays, and bad weather.

### Can I drive, walk or cycle to the Arctic Ocean?

NO. Public access ends at Deadhorse, about 8 miles (13 km) from the ocean. Security gates on the access roads are guarded 24 hours a day and permits for individuals to travel on their own are not available. There is only one authorized tour provider. Reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance. See back page for information.

### Are the bugs really that bad?

YES! Hordes of mosquitoes emerge in mid-June and last into August. Biting flies and gnats last into September. Insects are worst on calm days and in low, wetland areas. Hike and camp on ridges or wide gravel bars along rivers where a breeze may provide relief. Insect repellents containing DEET are most effective. A head net and bug jacket are essential if you plan on any outdoor activities.

### When is the best time to visit?

A late May trip offers a chance to see thousands of migrating birds, but snow may still cover the ground. From June until mid-July wildflowers brighten the tundra and caribou congregate along the Coastal Plain. Mid-August brings rain, cool days, frosty nights, and the northern lights. Brilliant autumn colors peak around mid-August on the North Slope, late August in the Brooks Range, and early September south of the Yukon River. Snow begins to fly by late August or early September.

### Does the highway close in the winter?

No. The road remains open for trucks hauling supplies to the oilfields and camps. Although the highway is maintained year-round, in winter services of any kind are only available in Coldfoot (MP 175) and Deadhorse (MP 414). Winter driving conditions are extremely hazardous. Drivers face snow, ice, wind, whiteouts, and dangerous cold with windchills to  $-70^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-57^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Travel between late October and early April is not advised.



Dwarf birch in autumn.

# Points of Interest

## Hess Creek Overlook (MP\* 21)

This pullout looks over Hess Creek meandering west to meet the Yukon River. In 2003, the Erickson Creek Fire burned almost 118,000 acres (47,200 ha) in this area.

## Yukon River (MP 56)

The mighty Yukon River winds nearly 2,000 miles (3,200 km) from Canada to the Bering Sea. Athabaskan people first traveled this river in birchbark canoes. During the gold rush, wood-fired sternwheelers ferried gold seekers and supplies for trading posts. Today, Yukon River residents use motorboats in summer and snowmachines in winter to travel this natural highway.



▲ Take a break at BLM's Yukon Crossing Visitor Contact Station, located on the right just after crossing the bridge. Volunteers are there to assist daily in summer. A short walk takes you to viewing decks on the riverbank.

## 5 Mile (MP 60)

Public campground, one of four operated by the BLM along the Dalton Highway. It is near an artesian well with potable water and the only public dump station. See page 18.

## Roller Coaster (MP 75)

North of the Yukon River, travelers encounter a series of steep hills named by truckers in the early years of pipeline construction, including Sand Hill (MP 73), Roller Coaster (MP 75), Mackey Hill (MP 87), Beaver Slide (MP 110), and Gobblers Knob (MP 132). Truckers today use the same names.

## 86-Mile Overlook

At MP 86.5, turn west and follow an access road uphill to an active gravel pit for an excellent view of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge to the east. Watch out for heavy equipment.



Photo by Whitney Root

## Finger Mountain Wayside (MP 98)

Stop at Finger Mountain to take in the panoramic views, explore the alpine tundra, and stroll the half-mile interpretive trail. Expect strong winds on this high ridge.

## Arctic Circle Wayside (MP 115)

Follow the side road a short distance to the Arctic Circle sign and viewing deck with interpretive displays. Enjoy your lunch in the picnic area or drive the side road one-half mile uphill to camp in the BLM campground. (Renovation work possibly ongoing summer 2020). Call 907-474-2200 for potential closures.



\*MP refers to milepost from the beginning of the Dalton Highway.



## Gobblers Knob (MP 132)

The pullout here offers an excellent view of the Brooks Range to the north. To see the midnight sun on solstice, climb up the hill to the east.

## Grayling Lake Wayside (MP 150)

An ancient glacier carved this U-shaped valley and left a shallow lake. Moose feed on the nutrient-rich aquatic plants in summer. Charcoal, stone scrapers, and other artifacts found nearby indicate that Native hunters used this lookout for thousands of years.

## Coldfoot (MP 175)

The original gold rush town of Coldfoot was located on the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River near the mouth of Slate Creek. It got its name in 1900 when early prospectors reportedly got “cold feet” and left before winter set in.



▲ This replica of a miner's cabin is part of a gold mining exhibit under development in Coldfoot near the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center.

## Marion Creek Campground (MP 180)

This developed campground is operated by the BLM and offers 27 sites. See page 18 for campground details.



▲ Please note that all buildings in the Wiseman area are private property. Please stay on the roads.

## What is the Arctic Circle?

The Arctic Circle is an imaginary line encircling the Earth at latitude 66°33' North where the sun does not set on summer solstice (June 20 or 21) or rise on winter solstice (December 21 or 22). As you travel farther north there are more days with 24-hour sunlight in summer or 24-hour night in winter. At the top of the world—the North Pole—the sun doesn't set for 180 days.

## Wiseman (MP 189)

Just after crossing the Middle Fork Koyukuk Bridge #1, take the turnoff to the west and follow the signs 3 miles (5 km) to the historic village of Wiseman. Established in 1907 when miners discovered gold in nearby Nolan Creek, the town was once a bustling community. Many residents today subsist by hunting, trapping, and gardening, and welcome visitors.



## Sukakpak Mountain (MP 204)

A massive wall rising to 4,459 feet (1,338 m) that glows in the afternoon sun, Sukakpak Mountain is an awe-inspiring sight. Peculiar ice-cored mounds known as palsas punctuate the ground at the mountain's base. “Sukakpak” is an Iñupiat Eskimo word meaning “marten deadfall.” Seen from the north, the mountain resembles a carefully balanced log used to trap marten.



Yellow Dryas





▲ *“...We enjoyed the vast panorama of the Brooks Range... endless mountains rising and falling as if the waves of some gigantic ocean had suddenly become frozen in full motion.”*

Robert Marshall, *Alaska Wilderness*

### **Farthest North Spruce (MP 235)**

As you approach the headwaters of the Dietrich River, trees grow scarce until they disappear altogether. This last tall spruce, approximately 273 years old, was killed by a vandal in 2004.

### **Chandalar Shelf (MP 237)**

Dramatic views encompass the headwaters of the Chandalar River to the east. The next few miles traverse a major winter avalanche zone. State transportation workers stationed here fire artillery shells to clear the slopes above the highway.

### **Atigun Pass (MP 244)**

You cross the Continental Divide at Atigun Pass (elev. 4,739 ft/1422 m). Rivers south of here flow into the Pacific Ocean or Bering Sea, while rivers to the north flow into the Arctic Ocean. Watch for Dall sheep, which are often on the road or on nearby slopes. Storms can dump snow here even in June and July.

### **Galbraith Lake (MP 275)**

This is all that remains of a large glacial lake that once occupied the entire Atigun Valley. A short distance to the east lies the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. To reach the BLM public camping area follow the access road at MP 275 west for four miles (6.4 km). The last two miles are on an unimproved road.

### **Toolik Lake (MP 284)**

The University of Alaska Fairbanks established a research station here in 1975, and conducts studies on arctic ecosystems and global climate change. Please take care to avoid their research sites, scattered throughout the surrounding area. There are no public facilities here and no camping. Access to the station is by invitation only.

### **Slope Mountain (MP 300)**

Slope Mountain marks the northern boundary of the Bureau of Land Management public land. From here north, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources manages the land around the Dalton Highway and Prudhoe Bay.

### **Happy Valley (MP 334)**

Originally the site of a pipeline construction camp, Happy Valley offers easy access to the Sagavanirktok River as well as room for camping. The airstrip is active, so avoid camping or parking there.

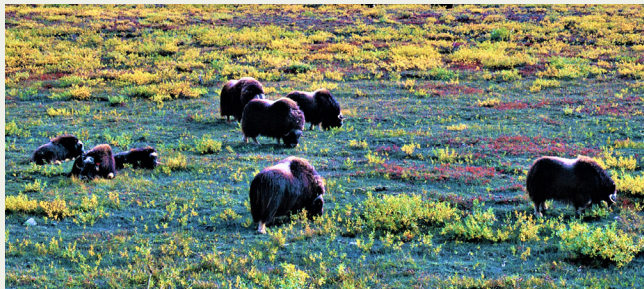


Photo by AIVC Staff

▲ Watch for muskoxen near the river from here to the coast. When resting, they look like large, dark humps with a cream-colored “saddle.”



### Sag River Overlook (MP 348)

A short trail leads to a viewing deck with interpretive displays. On a clear day, you can see the Philip Smith Mountains 35 miles (56 km) away. “Sag” is short for “Sagavanirktok.” The name is Inupiaq in origin and translates as “swift current.”

### Franklin Bluffs (MP 383)

Iron-rich soils on the far bank of the river give the bluffs their vivid colors. They are named after Sir John Franklin, the British explorer who mapped the Arctic coastline and searched for the Northwest Passage. Scan the gravel bars along the river for muskoxen and caribou.

### Deadhorse (MP 414)

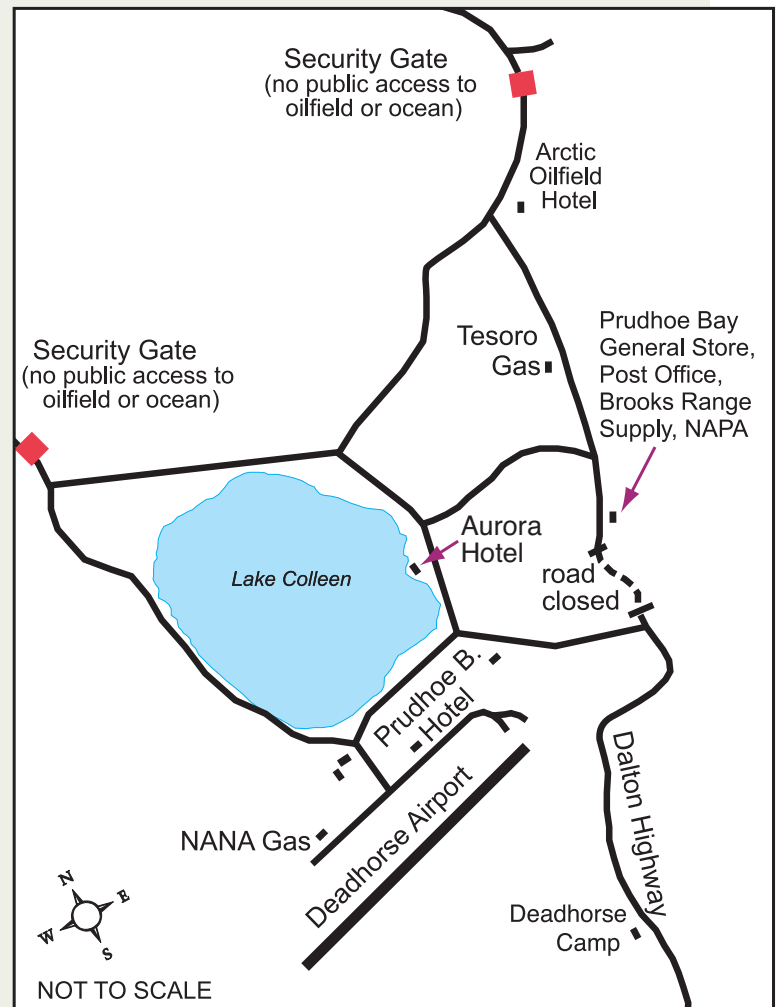
Deadhorse is not a town but an industrial camp that supports the Prudhoe Bay oilfields. There are few amenities for visitors. Lodging is extremely limited and there are no grocery stores, public outhouses, or camping areas. The public highway ends about eight miles from the Arctic Ocean. You must be on an authorized tour to visit the Arctic Ocean. See back page for information.

Permafrost lies only inches beneath the surface of the Coastal Plain, creating a bizarre landscape of wetlands and ice-wedge polygons. From Deadhorse, you travel over permafrost up to 2,000 feet (600 m) thick. This aerial photo shows caribou on polygonal ground.



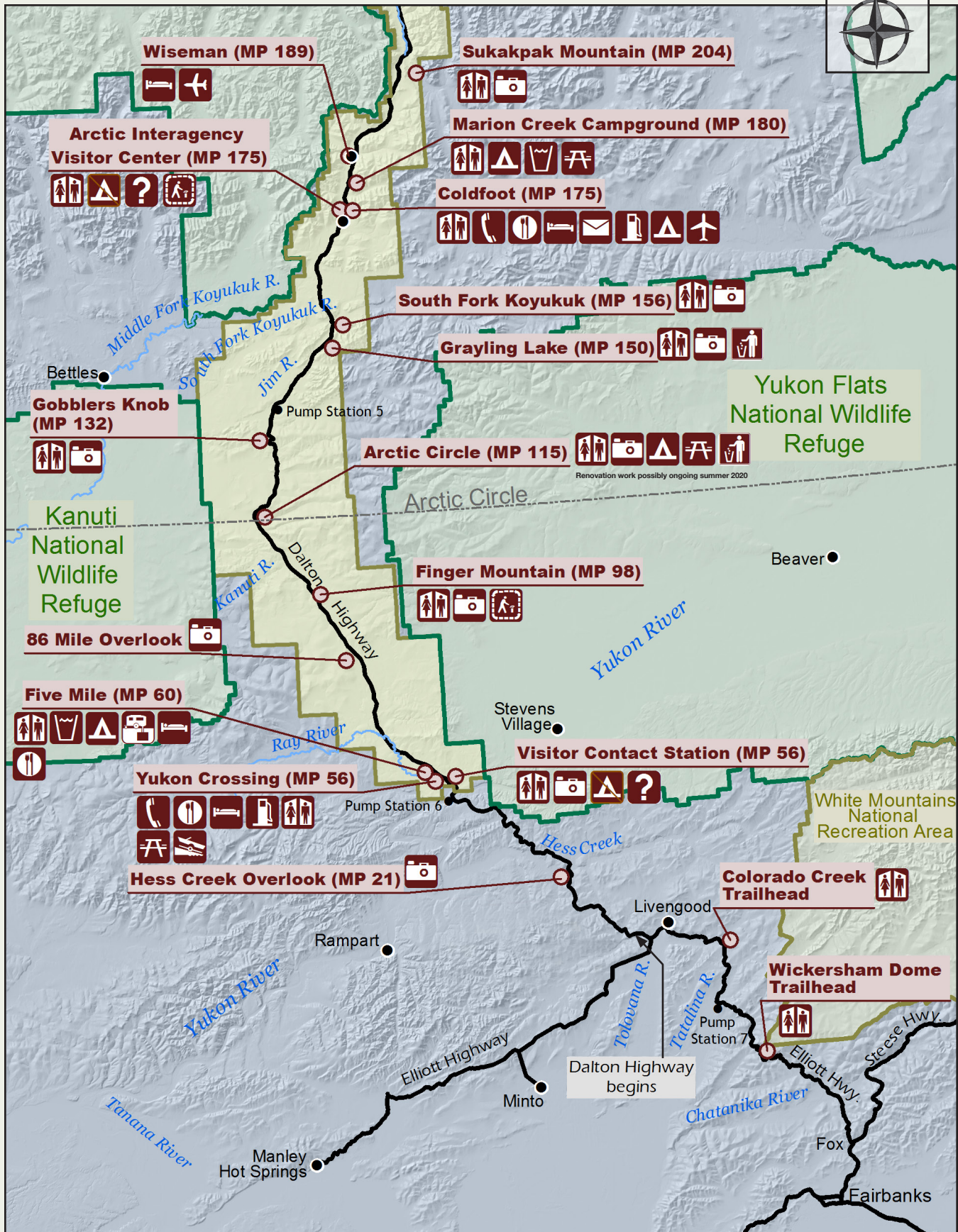
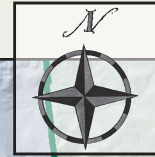
▲ Visitors encounter the chilly waters of the Arctic Ocean.

### Deadhorse vicinity map



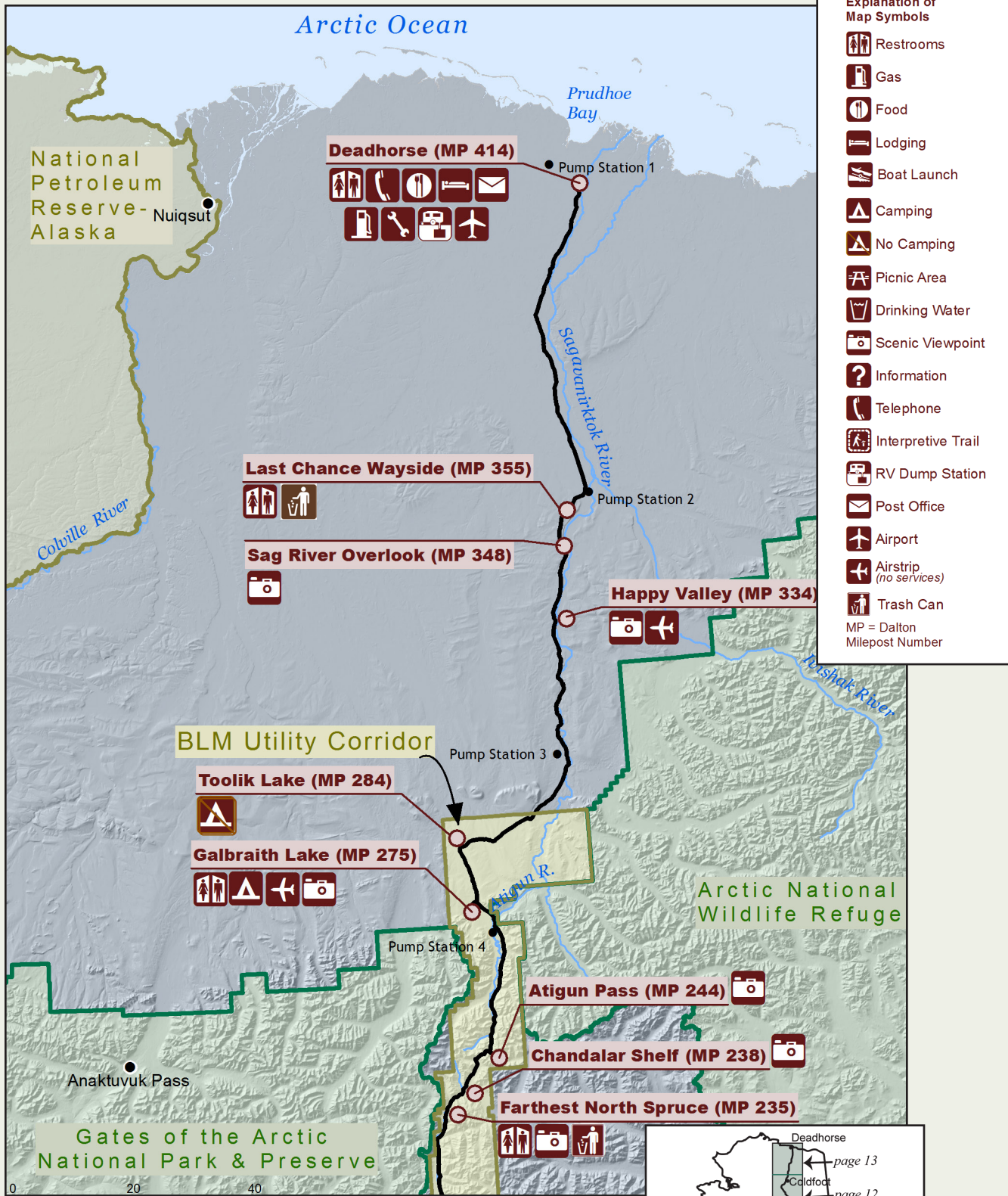


# Fairbanks to MP 215

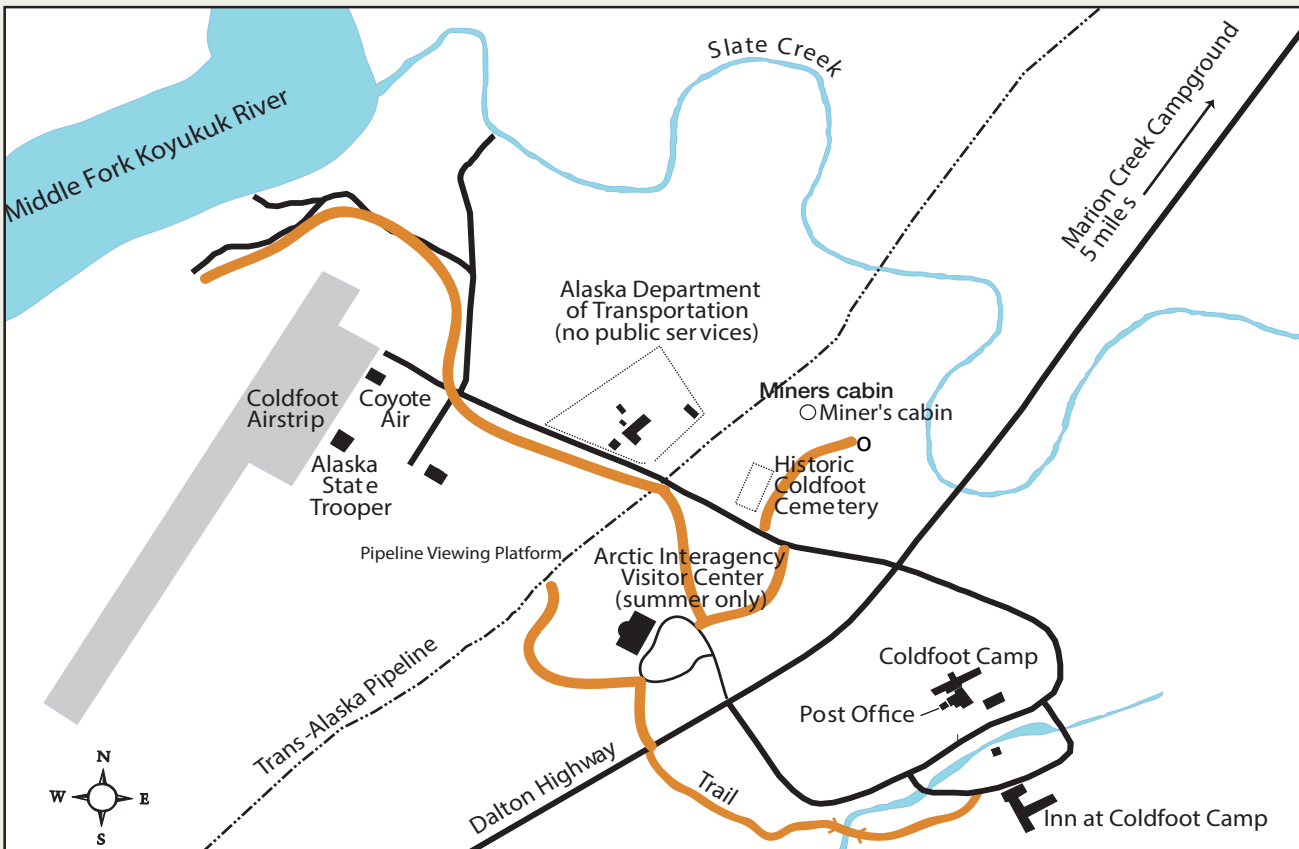




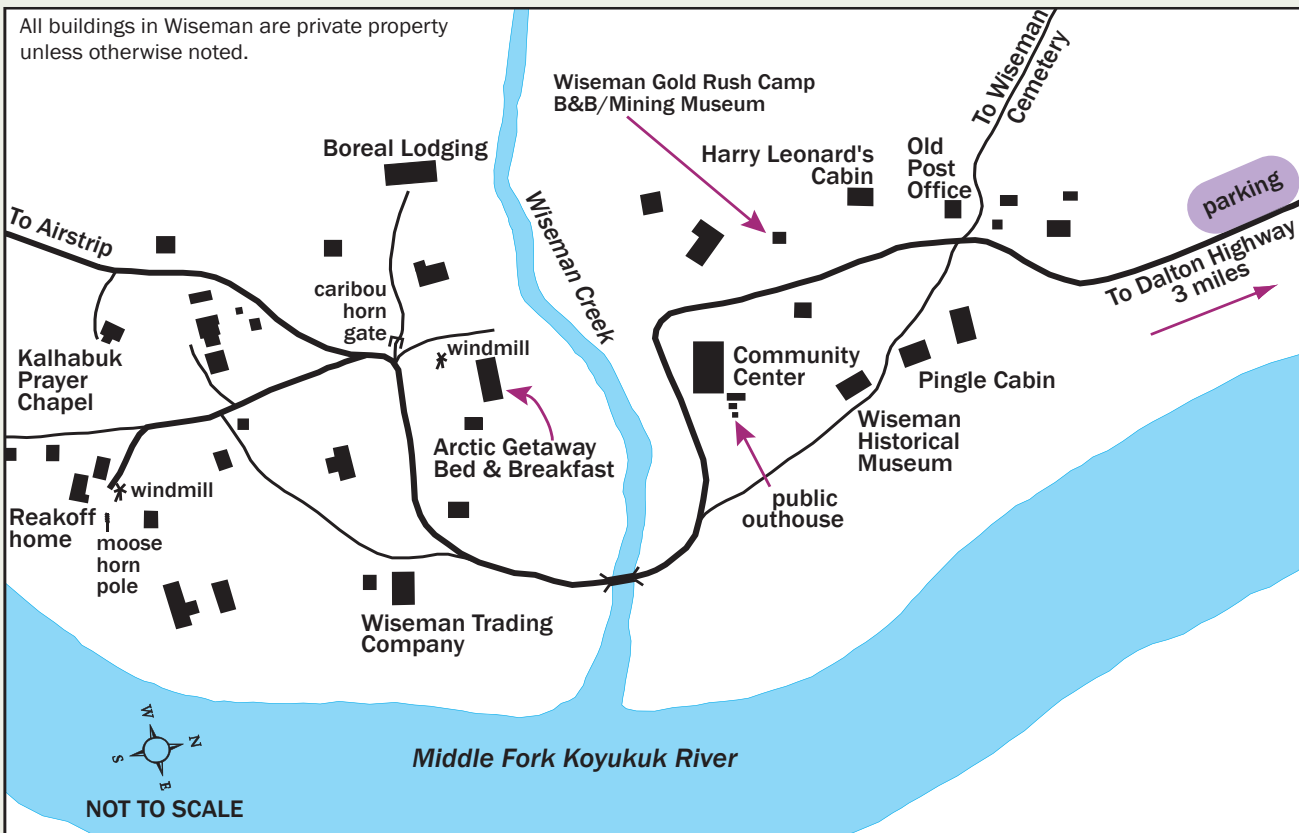
# MP 215 to Deadhorse



## Coldfoot



## Wiseman





# An Icebound Land

The low angle of the sun means less heat to combat frigid temperatures. Thus, permanently-frozen ground, or *permafrost*, lies beneath much of northern Alaska and keeps water close to the surface. Ice creates strange features in arctic landscapes, some of which you can see along the Dalton Highway.

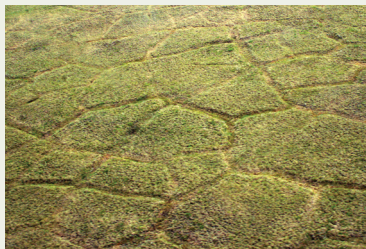
**Pingos** look like isolated hills but have thick cores of ice. As groundwater freezes it forms a lump of ice. As more water migrates inward the lump slowly grows and forces the ground upwards. Pingos can be decades or thousands of years old. Open-system pingos arise from artesian water in the warmer Interior: a tree-covered one lies west of the road at Milepost 32.7. Closed-system pingos form out of ice beneath old lake beds on the much-colder North Slope.



Frost mounds at Sukakpak Mountain.

**Frost Mounds** look like miniature pingos and also have cores of ice. Mounds in various stages occur at Sukakpak Mountain, Milepost 204. They arise as groundwater moves downslope through the soil above the permafrost and freezes, pushing up the tundra. Mounds may appear and melt over one or more seasons or last for many years.

**Thermokarsts** form when lenses of underground ice thaw, often after a disturbance such as wildfire, earthquake, clearing ground for construction, or a warming period. Thermokarst ponds and lakes often have unstable shores with trees or tundra collapsing inwards along the edge. You can see one west of the highway at Milepost 215.



Aerial view of high-centered polygons.

**Ice-wedge polygons** form when the ground freezes, contracts, and cracks in geometric patterns. Water seeps into the cracks and over thousands of years, forms thick wedges of ice that push the soil up into ridges. If the ice in the ridges melts they subside, leaving high-centered polygons. Look for geometrically patterned ground alongside the highway north of Galbraith Lake. Polygons are especially prominent around Deadhorse.

**Aufeis**, or overflow, forms on streams during winter when the channel ice thickens, constricting the stream flow beneath. The water is forced through cracks onto the surface where it freezes. Over the winter, these sheets of water freeze into thick layers that can fill river valleys and last into August.



Aufeis at Galbraith Lake.



Percy Pingo rises south of Deadhorse near Milepost 376.



Small thermokarst near the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Photo by Dennis R. Green

## To learn more

Permafrost and ice-related features in Alaska are clearly explained and illustrated in *Permafrost: A Guide to Frozen Ground in Transition* by Neil Davis. This book is available at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot (in summer) and in Fairbanks bookstores.

# This Is Bear Country!

You may encounter bears anywhere along the Elliott and Dalton highways. Both black and grizzly bears are found south of the Brooks Range, and grizzlies roam all the way to the Arctic Ocean. All bears are potentially dangerous. It is illegal to feed wildlife or leave food where they can get it. Food-conditioned bears become a threat to people and frequently must be destroyed.

These tips provide **minimum guidelines**. Learn as much as you can about being safe around bears!

## Avoid Encounters

**LOOK AND LISTEN:** Bears are active both day and night and may appear anywhere. Fresh tracks and droppings indicate that bears may be close.

**DON'T SURPRISE:** A startled bear may attack.

**MAKE NOISE:** Let bears know you're in the area—sing, yell, or clap your hands loudly. Bells may be ineffective. Be especially careful in thick brush or near noisy streams.

**NEVER APPROACH:** Stay at least 1/4 mile (400 m) from any bear. Sows may attack to defend their cubs.

**KEEP A CLEAN CAMP:** Store food, scented items, and trash in airtight containers away from your tent.

## If You Encounter a Bear

**DO NOT RUN!** Running may elicit a chase response. If the bear does not see you, backtrack or detour quickly and quietly away. Give the bear plenty of room. If the bear sees you, back away slowly. Speak in a low, calm voice while waving your arms slowly above your head.

**IF A BEAR APPROACHES** stand still and keep your pack on. Remain still until the bear turns, then slowly back off.

**IF A GRIZZLY MAKES PHYSICAL CONTACT, PLAY DEAD.** Lie flat on your stomach and lace your fingers behind your neck. Your pack will help protect your back.

**IF A BLACK BEAR ATTACKS, FIGHT BACK.**



▲ Bears often appear tame but are unpredictable. Keep your distance!

## Should I carry a firearm?

Firearms are permitted for personal protection in the Dalton Highway Corridor, although they are prohibited for sport hunting within 5 miles (8 km) either side of the highway. If you are inexperienced and cannot load, aim, and fire accurately in an emergency, you probably should not carry a firearm. An injured bear may attack more violently or create a problem for other people.

## Does pepper spray work?

Pepper sprays have been used successfully to deter bears. Most sprays have an effective range of about 30 feet (9 m), but are greatly affected by wind. Spray should not be used like insect repellent—don't spread it on your clothes or equipment. Before taking it on an airplane, tell the pilot so it can be stored safely.

Wolves may approach people along the Dalton. In 2006, two people were chased and one was bitten. Some incidents appear to involve food-conditioned wolves. Never approach or feed wolves. Do not walk pets in an area where you see wolves or fresh wolf sign—wolves may act aggressively toward pets, even those on a leash. For more information go to [www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov) and type "living with wolves" in the search bar.

## Do your homework

- Ask for the brochure *Bear Facts*, free at any state or federal visitor center. Go to [www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov) and type "living with bears" in the search bar.
- View the video *Staying Safe in Bear Country* at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center.
- Read the book *Bear Attacks* by Stephen Herrero, available at any Alaska Geographic bookstore.



# Watching Wildlife

## Boreal Forest

The boreal forest is the largest forest ecosystem in the world, encircling the entire northern hemisphere. A cold, dry climate and areas of permanently frozen ground dictate what grows here. Scraggly spruce trees may be more than a century old. Wildfires recycle nutrients into the soil and create new sources of food and shelter for wildlife.

Here you will see few animals unless they cross the road. The forest hides moose, wolf, fox, black bear, snowshoe hare, lynx, and over 50 species of songbirds. Beaver, muskrat, and mink may be glimpsed in streams and ponds along with Pacific loon, horned grebe, widgeon, scaup, and northern shoveler.

## Brooks Range

Steep, rocky peaks and glacier-carved valleys dominate this rugged landscape. Extending over 700 miles (1120 km) from east to west, the Brooks Range separates the Arctic's plants, birds, and weather systems from Interior Alaska.

Scan open areas and alpine valleys for moose, caribou, wolf, wolverine, and grizzly. Search the sky for golden eagle and rocky slopes for northern wheatear, Dall's sheep, and Alaska marmot—a species unique to the Brooks Range.

## North Slope

From Slope Mountain north, continuous permafrost lies beneath the surface. Only tough, ground-hugging plants can survive the frozen ground, frigid temperatures, icy winds, and weak sunlight. In this treeless landscape you can see animals from great distances.



▲ The arctic ground squirrel has adapted its lifestyle very well to cope with the Arctic environment



▲ Keep a safe viewing distance to avoid disturbing wildlife.

## Tips for Viewing Wildlife

- Be patient.
- Scan open areas such as mountain slopes, riverbanks, lakes, and meadows.
- Use binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses to bring animals closer.
- Stay inside your vehicle—it acts as a viewing blind and animals are less likely to flee.
- Animals tend to be more active in the evening and early morning hours.

Wolf, wolverine, grizzly, red fox, caribou, and musk ox sometimes forage near the highway. Hunting birds such as northern harrier, short-eared owl, peregrine, and gyrfalcon search for arctic ground squirrels, lemmings, and small birds such as Lapland longspur and golden plover. Scan brushy swales for unusual songbirds, especially Smith's longspur, yellow wagtail, and bluethroat.

## Coastal Plain

With annual precipitation of about five inches—less than the Sonoran Desert—we expect the Arctic to be dry. But underlying permafrost seals the ground. Vast wetlands provide protein-rich sedges and huge populations of insects and other invertebrates—a banquet for migratory birds and other grazers.

Here you may see truly Arctic species such as arctic fox, snowy owl, and pomarine jaeger. Caribou congregate to feed in late June and early July. Muskoxen browse along the Sagavanirktok River. Around the numerous ponds, look for tundra swan, ruddy turnstone, phalarope, white-fronted goose and long-tailed duck. At the coast, you may see yellow-billed loon, Sabine's gull, and three species of eiders—common, king, and spectacled.

Photo by T. Craig

# Recreation Along the Dalton

Here you can experience wild Alaska, where the land beyond the highway and pipeline lies virtually untouched. There are no trails, bridges, or signs to point the way. Choose your own route, encounter your own challenges, and make your own discoveries.

This wild country demands caution, preparation, and self-reliance. Even for a short day-hike, prepare for challenging terrain, unpredictable weather, and medical emergencies. If you have questions about where to go or how to prepare, talk with staff at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot.

## Camping

Recreational camping is limited to 14 days at any one spot. Park well off the road—passing vehicles can fling rocks more than 30 feet (9 m) off the highway—and do not block access roads to the pipeline.

The BLM has four campgrounds (see chart below); none has electrical hookups. Marion Creek, 5 (8 km) miles north of Coldfoot, is a developed campground with potable water (hand pump), both pull-through and tent-only sites, and a Campground Host available from late May to early September.



▲ Marion Creek Campground.

## Hiking

The best hiking is in the Brooks Range, where ridges and stream drainages provide firm footing and the forest thins to low-growing tundra. Throughout the Arctic there are wetlands and bogs that hinder walking. Areas of tussocks — basketball-sized clumps of sedge surrounded by watery moss—are particularly aggravating. Tussock fields occur in mountain valleys and dominate the landscape of the North Slope. Waterproof boots with good ankle support are essential.

Hiking east from the highway will lead you to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, while hiking west leads to Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Choose your route with care and bring topographic maps and a compass with you; a GPS can also be useful. Note: the declination varies 27°-30° or more east of true north—be sure you adjust your compass.

Campgrounds			
NAME	LOCATION	SERVICES	NOTES
<b>5 Mile</b> undeveloped	4 miles (6.4 km) north of the Yukon River at MP 60.	potable water nearby dump station outhouse no host on site	Planning improvements for 2020
<b>Arctic Circle</b> undeveloped	MP 115, up the hill behind viewing deck and picnic area.	NO WATER outhouse trash containers	<i>Possible temporary closures 2020 - 2021</i>
<b>Marion Creek</b> 27 sites, some for RVs	5 miles (8 km) north of Coldfoot at MP 180.	potable water outhouse trash containers host on site	Fee area. A 1.7-mile undeveloped hike leads to a waterfall. Planned trail upgrade 2021
<b>Galbraith Lake</b> undeveloped	MP 275, follow signs to airstrip, then continue past buildings 2.5 miles (4 km) on unimproved road.	creek nearby (treat water) outhouse trash containers	Spectacular views of the lake and Brooks Range.





Photo by Jason Post

## Backcountry

Backcountry visitors to Gates of the Arctic National Park may register at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot (open daily in summer). All hikers may borrow bear-resistant containers for free from the Center on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Hunting

Sport hunting is permitted in most areas, but there are special regulations. **From the Yukon River north, hunting with firearms is prohibited within 5 miles (8 km) either side of the highway.** Bow hunting is permitted within most of this area. Hunting is prohibited in the Prudhoe Bay Closed Area. Sport hunting is prohibited in Gates of the Arctic National Park, but permitted in Gates of the Arctic National Preserve. Be sure you have accurate maps of the boundaries.

For complete regulations, maps of closed areas, and assistance in planning your hunt, please contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at 907-459-7207.

## Fishing

Arctic grayling, whitefish, Dolly Varden, arctic char, lake trout, burbot, and northern pike can all be found in the far north. Fish in the Arctic grow and reproduce slowly and are susceptible to overharvest. Anglers are encouraged to use barbless hooks and release fish without injury.

The following regulations are in effect 5 miles (8 km) either side of the highway: fishing for salmon is prohibited; lake trout are catch-and-release only; daily bag and possession limit for arctic grayling is 5 fish. You need an Alaska sport fishing license and a current regulations booklet for the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

## Off-Road Vehicles

State statute prohibits off-road vehicles within 5 miles (8 km) either side of the highway from the Yukon River to the Arctic Ocean.

## Canoeing and Rafting

There are several excellent river trips along the Dalton. For more detailed descriptions of these rivers, check with the Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Fairbanks or the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center (see back page).

- The Jim River and Middle Fork, Koyukuk River: Class I-II, several access points along the highway.
- Atigun and Sagavanirktok Rivers: Class III-IV+ whitewater, access Atigun at MP 271; Sag at MP 306. For expert boaters only.
- Ivishak Wild and Scenic River: Class II, access by chartered air service from Deadhorse or Coldfoot.

## Gold Panning

Panning is permitted on a few federal stream segments along the Dalton Highway south of Atigun Pass (MP 244). No panning in the pipeline right-of-way (27 feet/8.2 m on either side of the pipeline) and no panning on federal mining claims without permission. **Suction dredging is prohibited in the Utility Corridor.**

For detailed information, pick up a copy of *Panning for Gold along the Dalton Highway* at one of the visitor centers. This free brochure lists creeks and rivers that are open to the public for recreational panning and rates their potential for gold.



Photo by Lisa Shon Jodwails

▲ Kayaker heading down the Atigun River. Many boaters portage around the big drops.





## Do I Need a Permit for That?

If you are thinking of making a film or video for sale, starting a tour operation, or otherwise using public resources for commercial sale, you first need a permit from the agency or agencies managing the area you're interested in. Permit applications can take up to 90 days to process. See back page for agency contact information.

## Backcountry Hazards

If you venture off the highway, know that there are very real risks and proceed with caution. You will probably not see anyone else, and you are likely to be far from help.

- Streams and rivers are bitter cold, and heavy rain or snow can swell them to dangerous levels. Know the proper techniques before attempting to cross, or change your route to avoid hazardous crossings.
- Minimize animal encounters (see page 17); Keep your camp and gear clean; cook at least 100 feet (30 m) from your tent site; use bear-resistant food containers and store them away from camp and cook areas; carry out all waste.
- Treat all water to prevent infection by *Giardia*.
- Prepare for sudden and severe weather; snow can fall anytime in the Brooks Range and on the North Slope. Know how to prevent, recognize, and treat hypothermia before heading out.



## LEAVE NO TRACE

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

## Where's the best place to view the midnight sun?

At the Arctic Circle, the midnight sun circles the northern horizon and drops behind the Brooks Range. The closest view is from the hill above Gobblers Knob at MP 132, 17 miles (27 km) farther north. If you travel north of Atigun Pass (MP 245) you can experience the full 24 hours of sunlight.



## How cold does it get in winter?

The coldest temperature ever recorded in the United States was -80°F/-62°C at Prospect Camp, 39 miles (62 km) south of Coldfoot in 1971. On January 28, 2012, an unofficial temperature of -79° F/-62° C was recorded at nearby Jim River Maintenance Station. Then the weather station battery died.







## Wild Spaces, Public Places



Most of the land you see from the Dalton Highway is federal public land, a legacy for future generations. These areas are so unique that Congress established special designations which honor their special values to the nation and the world.

### The Utility Corridor

In 1971 after oil was discovered on the North Slope, the Utility Corridor was established to protect the route of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. The Corridor's boundaries vary from less than a mile to nearly 12 miles from the pipeline. While the corridor's primary function is the transportation of energy resources, the Bureau of Land Management encourages recreational activities such as hiking, fishing, gold panning, and canoeing on these lands.

### Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve

Much of the Brooks Range west of the Dalton Highway lies within one of the premier wilderness areas in the National Park System. Forester and conservationist Robert Marshall explored the area in the 1930s. Impressed by two massive peaks flanking the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, he called them the "Gates of the Arctic." Encompassing 8.4 million acres, the park and preserve protect primeval landscapes, their flora and fauna, and the culture and traditions of Native people.

### Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Bordering the Utility Corridor near Atigun Canyon, this refuge extends east across the Brooks Range and North Slope to Canada.

It offers extraordinary wilderness, recreation, and wildlife values. The Porcupine Caribou Herd (named for the Porcupine River on the herd's migration route), polar bears, muskoxen, and snow geese depend on its unspoiled environment. Pioneer Alaska conservationists Margaret and Olaus Murie traveled the region by dog team and canoe, and were instrumental in gaining refuge status for the area.

### Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge

Located west of the Finger Mountain area and slightly larger than the state of Delaware, this refuge protects large wetland areas that are critical to nesting waterfowl and other wildlife. These resources provide sustenance for the people of the Koyukuk River valley.

### Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Encompassing an area larger than Vermont and Connecticut combined, this refuge protects a vast complex of lakes and rivers in the Yukon watershed upstream from the Dalton Highway. Wildlife, especially migratory birds such as ducks, geese, and songbirds, thrive in these wetlands and support the hunting and gathering tradition of Yukon River villages.



Woolly Lousewort

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus*)

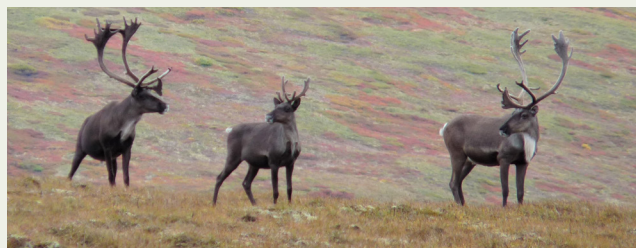
By Erin Julianus

One of the most iconic images of the north country is the caribou: a large bull, his bone white antlers rising high above his head, bedded down majestically among fiery fall shrubs, or a young cow and her newborn calf, touching noses and bonding together among a thousand others on their spring calving grounds.

It is movement, though, that is perhaps the caribou's most defining characteristic. Earnest Thompson Seton described the timeless sweeping grandeur of their seasonal migrations as “[a] living tide flowing over the Arctic prairies.” Their desperate instinct to keep together echoes in their grunts and low chatter as they move across tundra and rivers and broad mountain passes.

The barren ground caribou, one of the four subspecies in North America, is a medium-sized member of the deer family with relatively long legs, large, dexterous hooves, and a broad muzzle. Both the male (bull) and female (cow) have antlers. Even calves grow small antlers that remain in velvet through their first winter. While cow antlers are small and simple, the shape of bull caribou antlers vary greatly. No two sets are the same.

Caribou are incredibly well adapted to their environment. Their hooves and large dewclaws serve them equally well as snowshoes in pillowy snow and paddles in swift river currents. They move effortlessly across uneven ground. The blood flow in their legs helps regulate their body temperature, and their keen sense of smell enables them to identify and seek out preferred forage under the snow. Migration itself is an adaptation to the cyclic seasonal dynamics of the Arctic. Cows arrive on the spring calving grounds just as forbs and grasses are sprouting new, highly nutritious growth essential for lactating new mothers and rapidly growing calves.



The geographic distribution of the barren ground caribou spans two of the largest ecosystems in North America: the tundra and the boreal forest. Although each herd's range and seasonal movements differ, most caribou populations have distinct summer and winter ranges.

The herds of Alaska's North Slope calve and spend the summer in the open tundra and along the coast and winter into and south of the Brooks Range. Countless dramas play out in each of these places: births and deaths, searches for food, and struggles to escape biting insects and predators. The seasons turn, and life endures.

Watch closely for these denizens of the North as you embark on your Dalton Highway adventure. Depending on the time of year, you may see them in the Finger Mountain area or the Koyukuk River Middle Fork valley. You are most likely to see them north of the Brooks Range. They will not always be in large groups. In fact, small bands are more common. Remember to stop and observe. Be patient and allow your senses to adjust to the stillness around you. You may be surprised to see a group of young bulls standing stoically on a frozen lake or a cow and her robust young calf trotting across the tundra. As you watch them, consider how far their legs have carried them and how far they will carry them still. The vastness of the country disappearing behind them may seem somehow tangible in that moment before you journey on to places yet unseen.

*Erin is an Wildlife Biologist at the Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks.*



## Staying connected

As the primary nonprofit education partner of the Dalton Highway region, Alaska Geographic connects people to Alaska's magnificent wildlands through experiential education, award-winning books and maps, and by directly supporting the state's parks, forests, and refuges. Over the past 60 years, Alaska Geographic has donated more than \$20 million to help fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

Alaska Geographic operates stores across the state, including two locations along the Dalton Highway: the Visitor Contact Station at the Yukon River Crossing and the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot.

Your purchases at these locations directly support the Dalton Highway Corridor—a portion of every sale helps fund educational and interpretive programs throughout the region.

To find out more, become a member, or to browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, films, and more, visit one of our stores or point your web browser to [akgeo.org](http://akgeo.org)



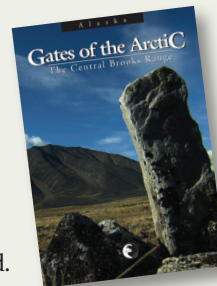
## Alaska Geographic



### Arctic Visions & Voices *A Journey into Northern Alaska*

Alaska's Dalton Highway provides access to National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and BLM public lands, with their bounty of recreational, subsistence, and mineral resources. Meet the people who visit, live, and work along America's farthest-north road and experience the visions and voices of this vast, wild, and magnificent land.

Item #31024     \$8.00 DVD



### Gates of the Arctic: Alaska's Brooks Range

Narrated by Glenn Close

Guiding us through one of Alaska's wildest places, anthropologist Richard Nelson reveals the tenuous, yet rich, nature of life above the Arctic Circle. From unique wildlife to conservationists Bob Marshall and Mardy Murie, this film is ultimately about the people who call wilderness home.

Item #12415     \$9.95 DVD

## Haul It North – Haul It Back South

Lots of time, money, and effort go into hauling trash back to Fairbanks. Let's all pitch in and do our part to keep the public lands along the Dalton Highway safe and clean. Please take your trash with you as you return to Fairbanks.

**2018** – Northern Alaska Tour Company removed 8 tons of trash from the Elliott Hwy. and Dalton Hwy.

**2019** – The Bureau of Land Management transported 20 tons of Dalton Highway trash back to Fairbanks.





Dillon Mountain (L) and Sukakpak Mountain (R).

## Land Managing Agencies

**Bureau of Land Management**  
Central Yukon Field Office  
800-437-7021 or 907-474-2200  
[www.blm.gov/visit/dalton-highway](http://www.blm.gov/visit/dalton-highway)

**Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**  
800-362-4546 or 907-456-0250  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/arctic/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/arctic/)

**Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge**  
907-456-0329  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/kanuti/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kanuti/)

**Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge**  
800-531-0676 or 907-456-0440  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/yukon\\_flats](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/yukon_flats)

**Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve**  
[www.nps.gov/gaar](http://www.nps.gov/gaar)

Fairbanks Headquarters  
907-457-5752  
Bettles Ranger Station  
907-692-5494

**Alaska Department of Natural Resources**  
907-451-2705  
[dnr.alaska.gov/commis/pic](http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/pic)

## Tours and Commercial Services

**Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau**  
907-456-5774 or 800-327-5774  
[www.explorefairbanks.com](http://www.explorefairbanks.com)

**Hunting and Fishing**  
**Alaska Department of Fish & Game**  
[www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov)  
Hunting & Wildlife 907-459-7206  
Fishing 907-459-7207

**Towing**  
Coldfoot: 907-678-3500  
Deadhorse: 907-659-3308

## Arctic Ocean Tours

Only one tour operator is authorized to provide access to the Arctic Ocean from Deadhorse. In 2016, tours are available twice daily from May 24 to September 8. Reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance. Full names and driver's license state and number (passport for international visitors) are required for each traveler. For information and reservations go to [www.deadhorsecamp.com/arctic-ocean-shuttle/](http://www.deadhorsecamp.com/arctic-ocean-shuttle/) or call 907-474-3565 in Fairbanks.

## Emergency Numbers

### Medical emergency

No cell phone service except in Fairbanks and Deadhorse. From land lines at Yukon Crossing, Coldfoot, or Deadhorse call the Alaska State Troopers, or use CB Channel 19 to relay messages for assistance to the troopers.

**Alaska State Troopers**  
Rural Alaska 800-811-0911  
Fairbanks 907-451-5100

### To report wildfires:

**Alaska Fire Service**  
800-237-3633

### To report hunting or fishing violations:

**Fish and Wildlife Protection**  
Alaska 907-451-5100

**Alaska Fish and Wildlife Safeguard**  
800-478-3377