

Mining History Association

Annual Conference, June 15-19, 2017

University of Alaska-Fairbanks

Fairbanks, Alaska

ALASKA TRAVEL BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

Alaska offers outstanding opportunities for viewing wildlife and dramatic landscapes. Fairbanks is an interior city, located on a wide river basin with rolling hills to the north and a view of the Alaska Range to the south on a clear day. If this is your first time to the Frontier State, we recommend adding some days before or after the conference to explore other regions. To characterize the areas:

NORTHERN AND WESTERN ALASKA

Although they are the least populated regions of Alaska, the northern and western portions of the state are in no way devoid of interest. The region is intersected by the Brooks Range (the northernmost extension of the Rockies). North of here, the North Slope comprises large expanses of tundra. The northern and western regions are home to two of the most remote National Parks in the system: Bering Land Bridge and Gates of the Arctic. The Dalton Highway, which runs north of Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay, has gained both fame and infamy through its association with the TV series *Ice Road Truckers*. While direct access to Prudhoe Bay is not permitted, you can drive most of the Dalton and cross the Yukon River. Be aware, however, that rental companies will charge additional fees because much of it is unsealed.

A popular day trip from Fairbanks is to fly to Barrow, a town positioned on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, and which offers a range of support services for the Prudhoe Bay oil field. The third week of June sees the staging of Nalukataq, the blanket toss celebration that local Inuit hold to celebrate successful whale hunts.

Another popular destination is to fly west to Nome, a community situated on the south side of the Seward Peninsula that juts into the Bering Sea. Nome came to worldwide attention in 1898 following the discovery of placer gold. By 1900, Nome had become a tent city, with thousands of prospectors panning the beach sands. The hills to the north of Nome still show numerous signs of past activities, from abandoned dredges to miles of water ditches dug into the hillsides.

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA (Anchorage, Homer, Seward, Valdez)

As the most easily accessed part of the state, southcentral offers numerous opportunities to see mountain scenery, glaciers, and wildlife, in addition to some spectacular historic sites. Anchorage, Alaska's largest city, serves as a hub for the southcentral region. A 2.5 hour drive south of Anchorage will take you down the Turnagain Arm (a deep fjord where the high and low tides differ by 30 feet), and across the Kenai Peninsula to the port town of Seward. There you can walk up to a glacier and/or join any of the several operators running whale watching and sea kayaking trips. Here you are also passing through gold country. On the way to Seward, top in Girdwood to visit the Crow Creek Mine (where one can rent sluice boxes for working the creek gravels), or hike the first stages of the Crow Pass trail to reach the remnants of the Monarch gold mine. Make an excursion on the Kenai Peninsula to the pre-Klondike rush towns of Hope and Sunrise.

North of Anchorage, and weather depending, visit the Independence Mine State Historical Park in Hatcher Pass (approximately 1.5 hours by car). The park includes many of the 1930s-era mine buildings, bunkhouses, the manager's residence, and the mess hall.

For a multi-day excursion that's worth the effort, make a trip to the historic site of Kennecott in Wrangell St. Elias National Park (more information below), and then down to the port of Valdez, terminus of the Alaska pipeline. From here you can take a ferry over to Seward, but you will need to book tickets in advance, and especially if traveling by car.

SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA

Accessible primarily by plane and sea, southeastern Alaska is known for its fjords, forests, and totem poles. This region is also well steeped in mining history. Skagway, at the head of Lynn Canal, became a launching point for late 19th century gold rushers, who, after moving over to Dyea, began an arduous trek overland to the Klondike via the Chilkoot Pass. Beyond touring the historic town, you can also take a scenic day trip on the White Pass and Yukon Railway, which began operations in 1900. See <https://wpyr.com> for more information.

Juneau, Alaska's state capital, was also a center for hard rock gold mining, where operations pioneered the profitable working the low-grade ores. One can spot the ruins of the Alaska Juneau Mill from the Mt. Roberts aerial tramway, tour the ruins of the Alaska Gastineau Mine, and wander among the stamp battery foundations at the Treadwell Mine on neighboring Douglas Island. For something other than mining, consider taking a flight out to Sitka—once the capital of Russian America.

MORE ABOUT KENNECOTT

This spectacular historical copper mine is located in the middle of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the nation's largest national park. In 1900, prospectors discovered the immensely rich copper ore, containing up to 70% chalcocite, on a high mountain ridge abutting the Kennicott [with an "i"] Glacier. More spectacular was the significant investment required to make a go of it. The Morgans and Guggenheims invested millions of dollars in the enterprise. The funds were used to construct a large processing mill and building a 200-mile-long railroad to take the copper concentrate to the port town of Cordova for shipment to Tacoma, Washington. Profits from this venture launched the Kennecott Copper Corporation. Kennecott closed in 1938, but today one can visit the mill town, take a tour through the 14-story mill (complete with equipment), and, for the stout of heart, hike up 4,000 feet of elevation to reach the mines.

Getting to Kennecott can be an adventure in itself. By road, one travels along a portion of the former route of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad between Chitina and McCarthy. The McCarthy Road is 60 miles long, and only a small section is paved—the remainder is a washboard. There are no services and no gas if you breakdown. At the end of the road, one walks across a bridge and either continues a mile further into the town of McCarthy, or takes a shuttle 5 miles to the Kennecott Mine (cost \$5). Most rental companies discourage or do not allow travel on the McCarthy Road. A few that do allow travel on the road are A1 Car Rental, Payless, and Advantage—but double check at time of booking. You can also still get to Kennecott by working in one of the following alternatives.

Air Service to Kennecott. If you get your car to Chitina, Wrangell Mountain Air offers three flights daily from Chitina to McCarthy for \$258 per person.

Shuttles to Kennecott. If you get your car to Glennallen, Backcountry Connections (www.alaska-backcountry-tours.com) offers daily service from Glennallen to McCarthy, \$149 for a round trip. Alternatively, if you do not have a rental car at all, the Wrangell-St. Elias Tours (www.wrangell-steliastours.rezgo.com) offers daily service (except Thursday) between Anchorage to McCarthy. The trip takes 10 hours, and costs \$195 each way.

Accommodations in Kennecott. Accommodations at Kennecott are available, but book early. The Kennicott Glacier Lodge is located right in the mill town of Kennecott proper. In the town of McCarthy, there is the McCarthy Lodge & Ma Johnson's Hotel. Close to the footbridge at the end of the McCarthy Road is the Kennicott River Lodge (not to be confused with the Glacier Lodge). Some Bed and Breakfasts also operate in the area.