

WILDLIFE

Northernmost Park

A road is being built into Alaska's Mount McKinley National Park. Visitors have had to reach it by train or small plane. Animals seldom seen in the states will be photographed.

By HENRY W. PIERCE

► YOU WILL SOON be able to drive to a wilderness playground where the summer sun shines more than 18 hours a day, where grizzly bears amble across vast stretches of open country, where broad-horned Alaska mountain sheep can be seen perched on rocky ledges, and where the highest mountain in North America cuts into blue sky.

This is Alaska's Mount McKinley National Park, the northernmost national park on the American continent.

For the first time, an automobile road is being built into the area. Last year most of the 7,000 adventurous tourists who visited Mount McKinley had to take a four-hour train ride from Fairbanks, Alaska. Those who wished to drive their own cars along the only road inside the park had to ship their vehicles in by rail. The park's 3,000-foot airfield is not large enough for big commercial planes.

The new road, however, is going to change this. Preparations are underway to accommodate record numbers of tourists in what may well be America's fastest growing recreational area. During the next 10 years the Federal Government plans to spend \$2,600,000 on buildings and utilities alone. New camp grounds, shelters, roads, trails, visitor centers and utility systems are on the drawing board.

Private enterprise has been invited to take over Government-operated McKinley Park Hotel.

Covers Wild Territory

Mount McKinley National Park sprawls across some of the wildest territory ever to haunt a Jack London novel, but it is not the eternal ice box sometimes described by fiction writers.

Although winter temperatures occasionally plummet to 50 below zero, the three-month summer sees the mercury climb into the 60's and 70's. Rain, when it comes, begins and ends abruptly. And in good weather you can enjoy more than 18 hours of sunshine a day.

When the new road, called the Denali Highway (denali is an Indian word meaning "Home of the Sun," originally given to Mount McKinley), is completed next spring, you will be able to drive into McKinley Park from the Richardson Highway near Fairbanks.

As you approach the park you will pass through stretches of open country called

tundra, dotted here and there with small, symmetrical pine trees. This country is typical of that in the park itself. There are no vast forests such as you might find in northern Maine or Minnesota. The landscape is very much like that in the lower Colorado Rockies.

If the park is chiefly tundra, why will people visit it?

For the following reasons:

First, the scenery is unexcelled. Mount McKinley fingers a piece of sky 20,269 feet above sea level. This is higher than any other North American mountain. Near Mount McKinley, Mount Foraker reaches up 17,317 feet. Two other mountains soar more than 11,000 feet, comparable to the Montana Rockies. Glacial streams bubble through steep tundra valleys and shimmering Wonder Lake reflects Mount McKinley's snowy peaks.

Second, you can see animals you may never see anywhere else. You can see huge, wide-antlered Alaska moose standing knee deep in clear water or peering cautiously from willow thickets.

You can see white Alaska mountain sheep with their thick curving horns; a big sheep stands more than a yard high at the shoulders and weighs 200 pounds, and its lambs can easily jump six feet in the air. You can see furry Toklat grizzly bears lumbering across the tundra or hungrily digging for ground squirrels. You can observe foxes, porcupines, beavers and mink.

If you are fortunate, you may even catch a glimpse of a wolf or wolverine. The hard-to-spot lynx, a kind of wildcat, lives here too, but the stealthy fellow usually manages to stay out of sight.

Then there are the caribou. The big reindeer-like creatures belong in a class by themselves. They are found in no national park in the 48 states. Sometimes they can be seen wandering alone or in pairs, sometimes in herds of several hundred.

A good sized caribou bull stands about four feet high at the shoulders and weighs over 350 pounds. The animals' trails are easy to find, but a search for the creatures themselves can lead anywhere from the low-lying barrens to high, steep mountain ridges.

Hunting any of these animals is, of course, prohibited.

Fishing is allowed, however, and this is a third reason the area may be the National Park System's fastest growing vacation



MOUNT MCKINLEY—North America's highest mountain is snow-covered at least two-thirds of the way down all year. The tundra in the foreground is covered with a variety of grasses and shrubs. The gravel road is 95 miles long. It is the only one in the park.

area. People who have tasted them say fresh Alaska trout are unbeatable. The Mackinaw trout in Wonder Lake grow to two feet and more, but fishermen are limited to a catch of two a day.

Arctic grayling can be caught with artificial flies in clear mountain streams. You do not need a fishing license in the park, but it is a good idea to get one anyway because some of the streams are beyond park boundaries.

Excellent Mountain Climbing

Fourth, the park is a paradise for experienced mountain climbers. From base to top, Mount McKinley gives climbers one of the longest ascents on earth. To be sure, there are higher mountains in the Himalayas and the Andes, but most of these rise from plateaus which are already more than 10,000 feet above sea level. Mount McKinley rises abruptly from a plateau only 2,500 to 3,000 feet high.

The climb is no day's jaunt. It is a full scale expedition. The mountain is at least two-thirds covered with snow all year, and temperatures at higher elevations are bitterly cold even in midsummer. To make the ascent you need pitons, crampons, ropes. You need special clothes. You need a tent. You need several other people.

Most of all you need experience. The park superintendent will not grant permission to make the ascent unless he is convinced you are a skilled mountain climber fully equipped.

Although the park is largely tundra, it is by no means a desert. White birch trees dot the lower valleys, and cottonwoods and quaking aspen line the streams. White spruce is the commonest evergreen in the park, and willows are everywhere except in the high mountains.

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by A. H. Russell
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The lower slopes are clothed in shrubs that flame into scarlet and orange at the first touch of frost. Bright yellow cinquefoil flowers, snow white blossoms of Labrador-tea bushes, wild roses and crimson bear-berries add their share of color to the landscape. Blueberries, appealing to taste as well as sight, are also abundant.

The vegetation, animal life and geology of the park will be scientifically described for visitors in a proposed new public building near the park headquarters. The building, to be constructed under the "Mission 66" Federal park improvement program, will be a kind of park museum.

Naturalists and historians will interpret many of the park's outstanding features to visitors before they start on tours.

Rugged, 95-Mile Road

The 95-mile-long gravel road within the park is rugged driving. Its hairpin turns, which give excellent views of mountains and Wonder Lake, make many persons decide to trust themselves to the park's bus drivers so they can fully enjoy the scenery. Bus tours, available to visitors who do not ship their cars in by train, will continue after the new highway is built.

Regulations are similar to those in other national parks. They are designed to protect wildlife, scenery and you. Dogs and cats must be crated or kept on a leash. Camping with tents is permitted, preferably at designated camp sites. Only fallen timber can be used for fuel, and fires should not be built unless absolutely necessary.

Park authorities warn that feeding animals is dangerous. Alaska's grizzly bears are among the most ferocious on earth. Killing or catching animals is prohibited. Fishing is allowed only with hook and line.

If you visit the park, plan to pack the same sort of clothing and equipment you would take to a rustic resort in northern New England or Ontario. Clothing should be medium to heavyweight. Include a jacket but do not bother with a heavy winter overcoat. Mosquito repellent will come in handy.

Prices are high in Alaska. However, with reasonable budgeting you should be able to have your vacation for \$12.00 to \$18.00 a day per person, including hotel bills, food, tours and souvenirs.

Science News Letter, August 11, 1956

MEDICINE

Blame Farm Accidents on Horse's Disappearance

➤ **REPLACEMENT** of work horses by farm machinery is partly to blame for the high rate of accidents among farmers. This is because the horse had to be rested periodically during a day's work, and the farmer rested then too. Since tractors do not need rest, the farmer does not rest, and subsequent fatigue leads to accidents. Twice daily breaks are advised by Dr. Franklin H. Top, Iowa City, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Aug. 4).

Science News Letter, August 11, 1956

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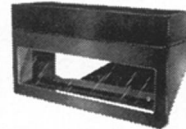
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