

Nugget Creek Trail

Wrangell-St.Elias National Park and Preserve

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



Nugget Creek Cabin & Mount Blackburn

Access: Trailhead on Kotsina Road (mile 14.5 McCarthy Rd)

Distance/Time: Approximately 15 miles each way. 2-4 days

Maps: USGS Maps-Valdez (C-1); McCarthy (C-8) 1:63,360; Valdez, McCarthy 1:250,000

Difficulty: Easy and level, with moderate stream crossings. Occasional gentle climbs and negotiating several stream crossings. This is also a nice route for mountain biking, ATVs, and snowmobile travel.

Highlights: Road accessible, public cabin, great views of Mt. Blackburn

Note: Proper food storage is required. Bear Resistant Food Containers (BRFC) are available from park visitor centers.

Route:
At mile 14.5, turn north off the McCarthy Road onto the Kotsina Road. The community of Strelna you pass through is private property. After about 2½ miles turn right onto the Nugget Creek Trail. This is where Strelna Creek first appears on your right. Go down to the water's edge to see the trail continuing on.

Parking at Strelna Creek requires permission from the Chitina Native Corporation. The trail begins with a ford at Strelna Creek. Some wet and possibly muddy trail conditions will be encountered. This beginning portion is along an easement across private land which ends at approximately 3400 feet. Please do not camp in the first two miles. Drinking water may be difficult to find for the first 5 miles. After several miles, the trail gains some elevation and conditions are drier, making for relatively easy hiking for the remaining 13 miles.

Stunning views of Mt. Blackburn start at Squaw Creek. There is also are small camping areas and water at Squaw, Clear and Sheep Creeks. Dry, Squaw and Sheep creeks are small and may have little or no water during drier weather conditions. Porcupine Creek is subsurface. Nugget Creek, near the end of the trail is the largest crossing after Strelna Creek. At very high run-off Nugget Creek may be impassible. The public use cabin is directly across the creek. There is a small camping area with a bear resistant food locker located on the west side of Nugget Creek.

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Nugget Creek Cabin

Just beyond Nugget Creek is a public use cabin. Beyond the cabin the trail continues up the hill for superb views, alpine hiking, and a historic copper mine. You can also explore the nearby Kuskulana glacier and views of Mt. Blackburn. Note that there is also a privately owned cabin on the hill nearby.

Mining History

Attracted by Ahtna reports of float copper, prospectors began examining the Kuskulana River and its tributaries about 1899. James McCarthy was one of the first to examine Nugget Creek, named for a two-ton copper nugget which prospectors had discovered in the stream bed. McCarthy staked numerous claims in the vicinity and

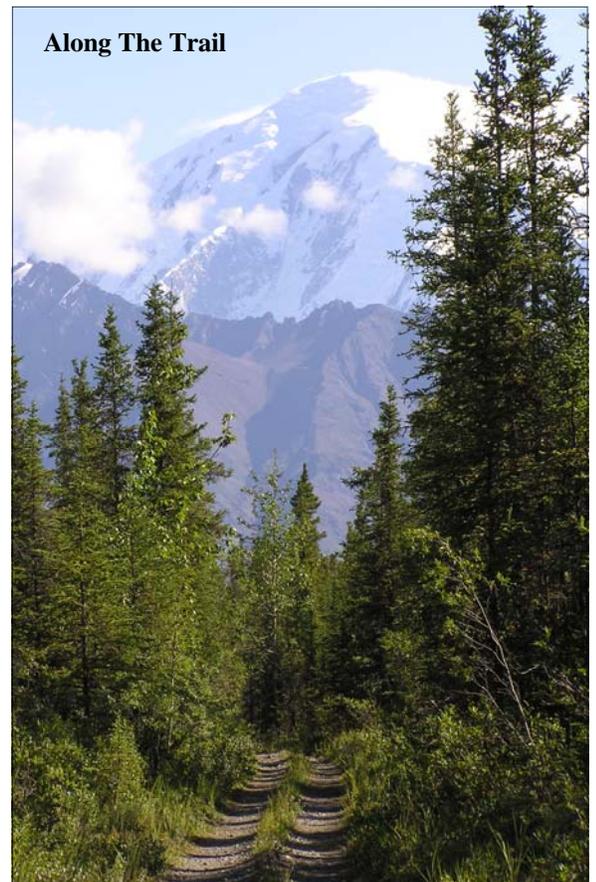


built a small cabin, only the sill logs of which remain. Alaska Consolidated Copper eventually acquired McCarthy's claims, but although the company mined property on Nugget Creek for about a decade, it was a wasted effort. Nugget Creek's entire production consisted of two carloads of high-grade ore shipped prior to 1916, and 160 tons of hand-sorted ore shipped after. The company's failure to locate additional ore eventually forced it to abandon its effort in 1919.

The Nugget Creek Public Use cabin was built in 1966 by Tom Byron, who intended to homestead the area. It was subsequently improved by Jerry Coppess. The cabin is now owned and maintained by the National Park Service. Maximum stay is 14 days in a calendar year. First come first served basis. No reservations.

Potential Hazards:

- Swift and cold melt water streams may have sudden changes in water volume and velocity due to heavy precipitation upstream or excessive snowmelt caused by warm temperatures. Be prepared for various types of inclement weather, including rain and possible snow.
- Bears may be present anywhere along this route. Proper food storage is required.
- Excursions onto the Kuskulana Glacier should not be attempted without prior knowledge and experience in glacier travel and safety. This is a remote area, and rescue or medical evacuation possibilities are limited.



Along The Trail

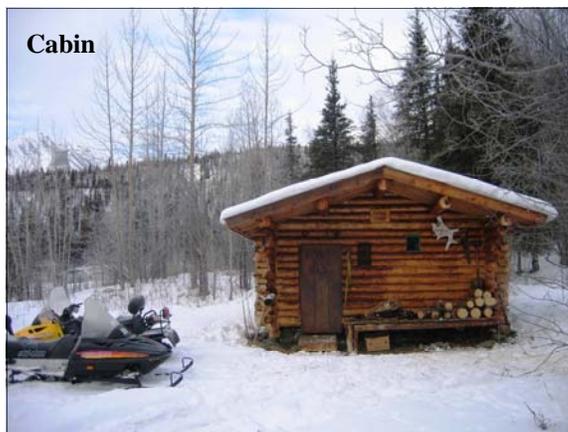
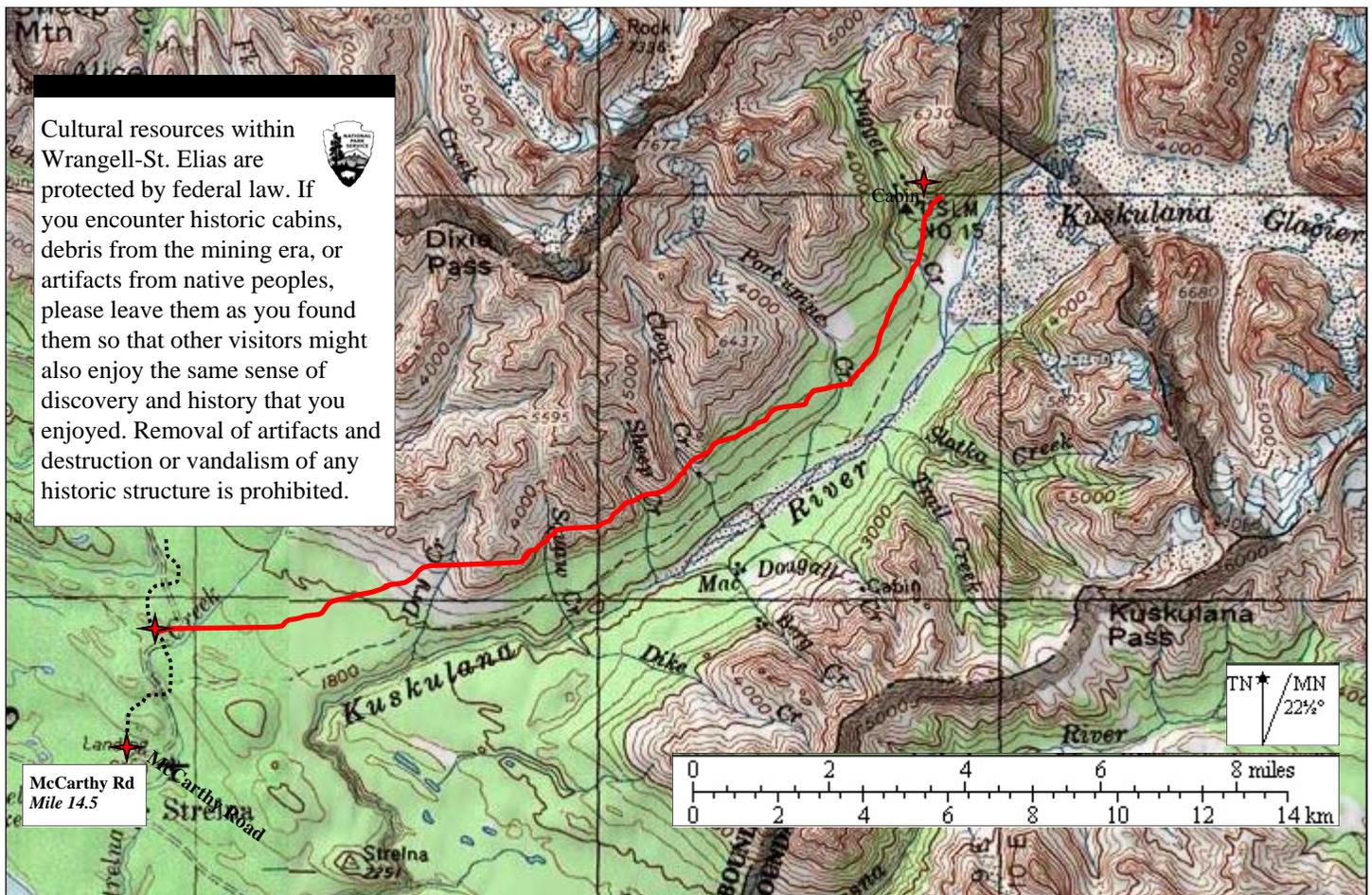
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Cultural resources within Wrangell-St. Elias are protected by federal law. If you encounter historic cabins, debris from the mining era, or artifacts from native peoples, please leave them as you found them so that other visitors might also enjoy the same sense of discovery and history that you enjoyed. Removal of artifacts and destruction or vandalism of any historic structure is prohibited.



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