

Sanford-Dadina Plateau

“Volcanic Traverse”

Wrangell-St.Elias National Park and Preserve

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



High Mountain splendor

MAPS: USGS Quadrangle 1:63,360 Gulkana (A-1), (A-2)

DISTANCE: 15 miles one way. 4-8 days depending on route and side trips.

ACCESS: Fly-in by air taxi from Gulkana Airport to upper Sanford River. Pickup from strip along Dadina River.

DIFFICULTY: Difficult. Requires extensive route finding (*no trails*), crossing glacial moraine, brush, steep rocky hillsides with loose material, and negotiating swift but relatively small rivers.

HIGHLIGHTS: A wild and remote area with unsurpassed scenery. Volcanic peaks (Mount Drum 12,010', Mount Sanford 16,237', and Mount Wrangell 14,163'), alpine tundra, and splendid isolation. Watch for sign of caribou, Dall sheep, grizzly bear, moose, bison, and ptarmigan.

ROUTE:

From the drop off point along the east side of the Sanford River, head 2.5 miles along gravel terraces towards the snout of the Sanford Glacier. At the glacier, depending on conditions you may have to either negotiate the several icy streams flowing from beneath the glacier, and/or cross over sections of the glacier. Be careful! What appears to be just gravel, is actually a thin covering over glacier ice. Crossing the moraine is deceptively difficult and slow. Your destination is the base of the grassy hillside on the south side of the glacier's terminus. Once past the glacier, there is a nice camping area at the base of the hill with clear water nearby.

Ascend the hillside by selecting the least brushy approach near the base. You may have to negotiate heavy brush at the base of the hill. As you climb 1000' to the edge of the plateau, you are rewarded with awesome views of the glacier, river, Mts. Sanford, and Drum and Blackburn. Once you reach the edge of the plateau at 4,800' it appears as if you are on top of the world. There is great hiking for miles in any direction.



View of Sanford River from the plateau

Pick your route, take your time, and enjoy the views of high volcanic peaks, solitude, and a myriad of alpine flowers.

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Surrounded by peaks



Approaching the glacier



Descending the plateau



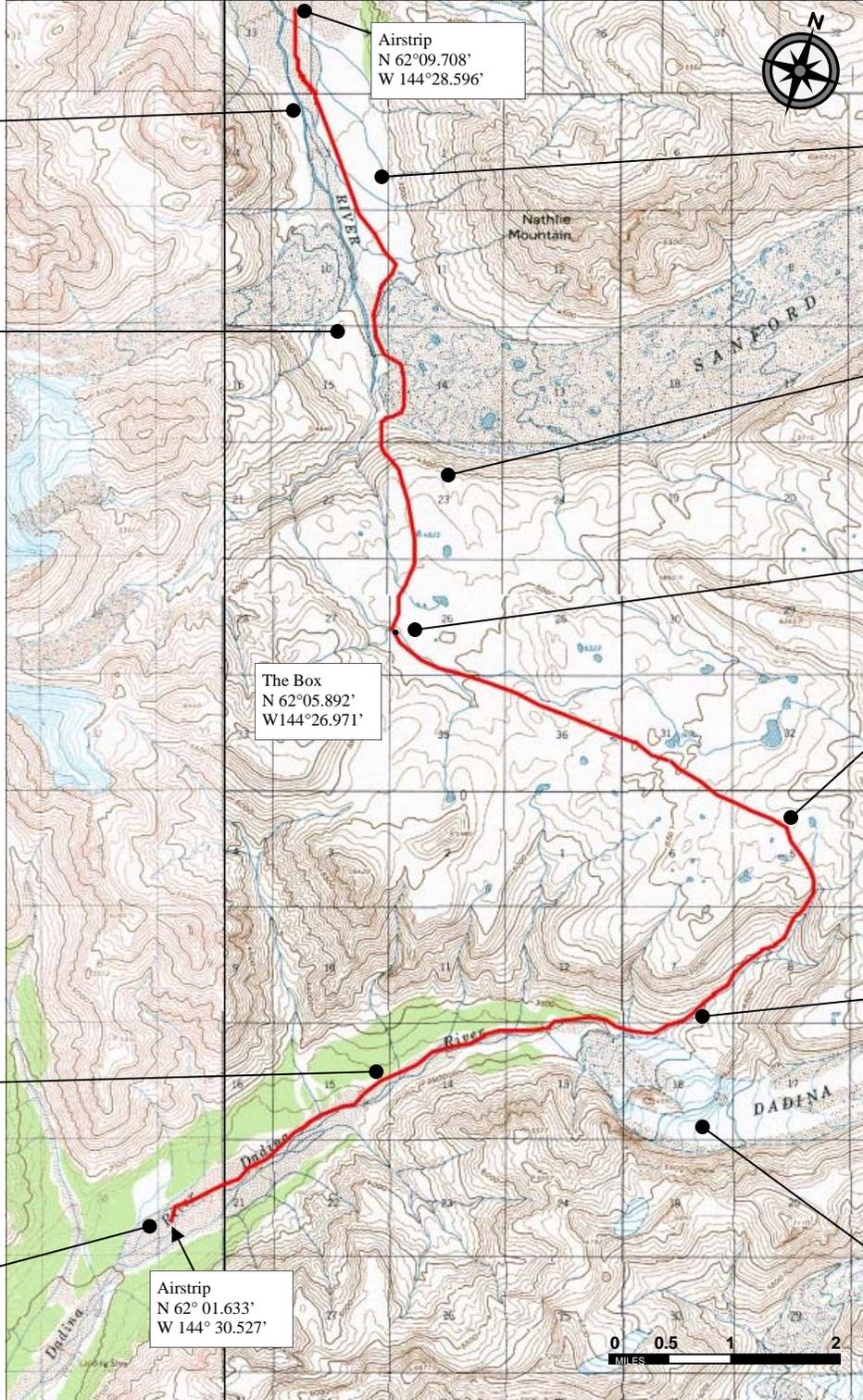
Enjoying an active volcano



Follow the Dadina River



Back to civilization



Along the Sanford River



On the plateau!



Checking out "the box"



Enjoying the view



Down to the Dadina



Dadina Glacier

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There is no established route across the plateau. The northeastern side offers great views of Mount Sanford and steaming Mount Wrangell, while the southern side allows for dizzying views of the Dadina River far below and snowy peaks on both sides. Great campsites are everywhere, but you may have to search for water sources along the two small drainages and/or from melting snow patches. A point of interest is “the box,” an abandoned U.S. Air Force radio shed that is located along the western edge of the plateau and provides convenient dry shelter for hikers.

When you finally decide to descend to the Dadina River, head towards the southwest corner of the plateau. Descend the first drainage north of the Dadina glacier. Although

rocky, this route easily avoids the thick brush encountered in the other drainages and allows for a quick descent and fabulous views of the glacier and valley. Use caution while descending these rocky areas. Many of the rocks are precariously jumbled together and frequently move with the softest footstep.



Descend to the gravel banks of the Dadina River. In the upper sections it can usually be crossed in braided sections. Further down, it would be very difficult if not impossible to cross the main channel. Continue down river along the north side. As the river meanders, you may have to occasionally leave the banks and enter the thick vegetation. Grizzlies are active along this river, so be alert and make noise when entering brushy areas. Also, watch for bison. An introduced herd spends much of its time here.

The airstrip is located approximately 4 miles down river from the glacier. Be on the lookout for two wooded “islands” within the gravel river bed. Look for the spruce trees. The small strip is located just upriver of the first island. If you reach the island you have just passed the strip. The strip may be hard to spot from the ground. Look for flagging. If you camp near the strip before your pickup, a clear stream for drinking water enters the river from the north, approximately 1/4 mile up-river from the strip.



“The Box” provides a luxurious shelter.



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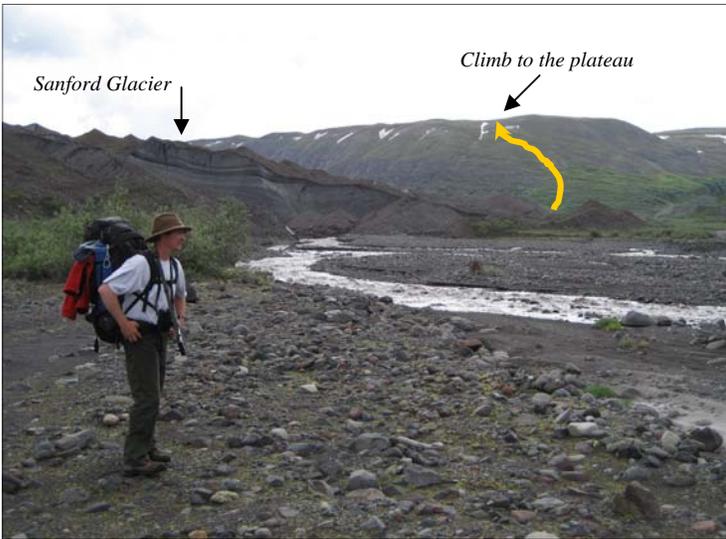
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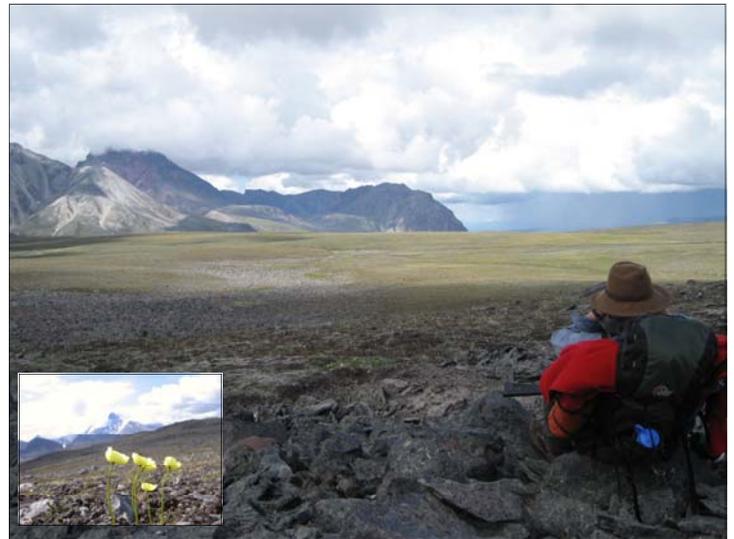
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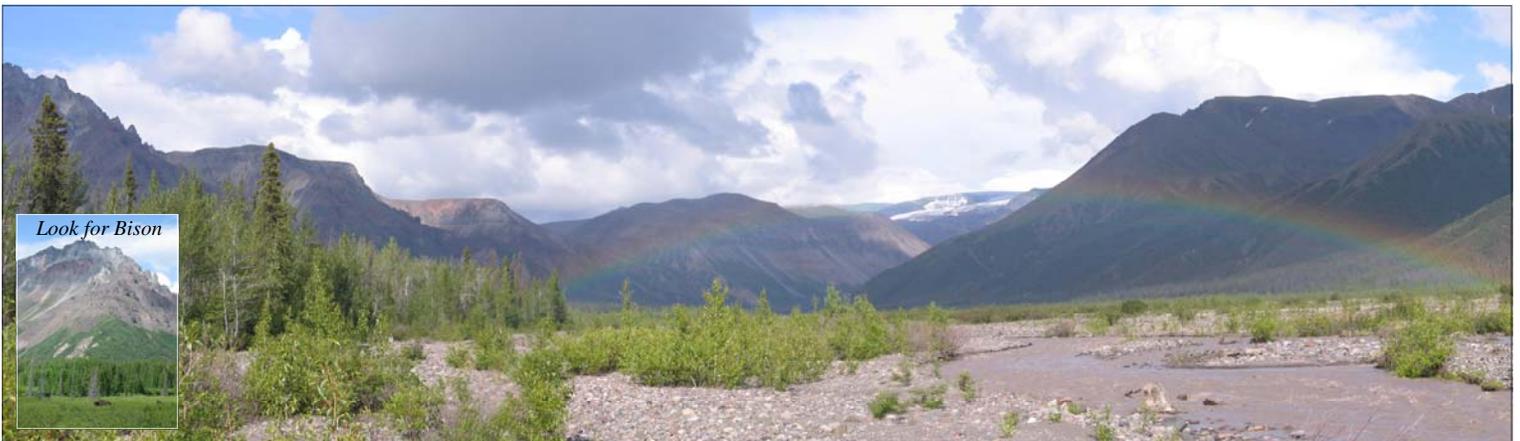
Pick your route across the 5,500' plateau



Heading toward the plateau



On top of the world



Rainbow along the Dadina River