

HISTORIC USE

In 1778, while on an expedition from England to obtain more information about western North America and to search for a northwestern passage to Europe, Captain Cook lay at anchor off the mouth of the "River Turnagain," and wrote the following description:

On the north side of the river the low land again begins, and stretches out from the foot of the mountains, down to the banks of the great river; so that, before the River Turnagain, it forms a large bay, on the south side of which we are now at anchor; and where we had from twelve to five fathoms, from half-flood to highwater.

On the next day, two small boats were sent out to land on the lowland along the southwest side of the Arm and there to bury a bottle with some pieces of English coin dated 1772, and a paper with the date and the name of King George III. As a result of Captain Cook's voyage, Turnagain Arm received its name and became a point of historic interest.

Another event which more dramatically forced attention upon Turnagain Arm, changing its natural character and introducing a new influence, was the discovery of gold. In 1895, prospectors crossed to the north side of Turnagain Arm from mining camps at Hope and Sunrise, and discovered gold along California Creek. Soon, mining activity spread to Glacier, Crow, Bird, Indian and Rainbow creeks. A ferry was established in 1898 to transport people and supplies from the Hope-Sunrise area on the south shore to Bird Point on the north shore, thus reducing the time and trouble to traverse the overland route. By 1915, the Seward Trail had been extended to Eklutna and Knik where it connected with the Valdez and Iditarod Trails. A mail trail, referred to now as the Johnson Trail, was built paralleling the north shore of the Arm and connecting with the Seward Trail. Crow Pass and Indian Pass trails were in heavy use as supply routes to the Iditarod gold fields in interior Alaska. A telegraph trail and line were established along the Arm to facilitate extension of the railroad.

In 1918, the railroad was completed as far north as the present site of Anchorage, with flag stops at Bird Creek, Indian, Rainbow and Potter. In 1950, the highway was constructed along the Arm and paved in 1954. Both the highway and railroad now operate within a transportation corridor through the park.

Reminders of the recent history are the trails that carried gold seekers over Crow Pass and Indian Pass, remnants of the telegraph, the old mail trail (much of which has been replaced by highway construction), rusted mining machinery, and cabins and roadhouses that have diminished to barely distinguishable remnants.

In the 1920's, a diversion dam was constructed at Eklutna River not far below the Eklutna Lake outlet. It served for 30 years as the major source of power for Anchorage. Because of the high silt content of the water, it was necessary to periodically interrupt the river's flow at the lake, drain the dam, and push the accumulated silt through a large hole constructed at the base of the dam for that purpose. Within ten years of the permanent closure of the dam, it became completely silted over and remains so today.

A powerline and pipeline carve their way through the western part of the park, supplying power for Anchorage and fuel for the military. Several miles of road in the Indian and Bird Creek valleys remain as evidence of commercial logging that occurred until 1973. Roads and clearings exist throughout the park where early homesteaders have been and left. Communications antennae, reflectors, dishes and poles dot prominent peaks and points around the park's edges. A few small gold claims, some still being operated under valid claims that were in existence prior to the establishment of the park, remain along some of the park's streams.

Four significant archaeological sites have been identified within the park boundary. As more specimens are gathered from these and future sites, knowledge of the early history of man in the area will increase.

Thirty-five historic and archaeological sites have been discovered within the park. These, and others when identified, will receive considerable attention as the implementation of this plan goes forward.

CURRENT RECREATIONAL USE

In 1973 the Anchorage Municipal Parks and Recreation Department commissioned an independent parks and recreation survey. Over 93 percent of those responding said that "recreation is vital" to them. For many, the availability of recreation opportunities is a strong reason for their residence in Anchorage.

Current recreational uses of the park are predominantly influenced by the location and adequacy of access, and by weather. Heaviest use accompanies the warming weather of summer and is concentrated near the periphery of the park or near developed facilities. Hunting and trapping are permitted activities within areas designated by the Department of Fish and Game, and attract a significant number of people to the park between Labor Day and May 1st of each year.

Winter use of the park is increasing dramatically as cross-country skiing, climbing, hang gliding, and snow machine operation have become very popular.

Major activities occurring within the park are camping, picnicking, berry picking, photography, wildlife viewing, backpacking, hiking, nature study, sightseeing, rock and ice climbing, hang gliding, boating, fishing, hunting, cross country skiing, downhill skiing and snow machine operation.

CURRENT NON-RECREATIONAL USE

Non-recreational uses of the park include rights-of-way for roads, electric transmission lines, and pipelines. Prior to the establishment of the park, numerous special use permits were issued by the federal government and by the Alaska Division of Lands. Many of these permits have expired. Use permits, where justified, are now issued by the Division of Parks.

Of major significance is the existence of the Eklutna and Eagle River Power Reserves. The Eklutna Power Project development is complete, and future changes affecting the park are not anticipated. The Eagle River Power reserve remains untapped, and a variety of projects are possible there, ranging from the drilling of deep water wells to the damming of the river and consequent flooding of the valley. Flooding would effectively disrupt many park uses and resident wildlife, and would constitute a considerable man-made alteration of the natural environment.

Although Ship Creek supplies part of the Anchorage and military water supply, this use has a negligible effect on the park. Future plans to expand the draw of water from this source could alter the fisheries habitat and recreational uses along Ship Creek, and will require careful review by the Division of Parks. A dam on Ship Creek with the resulting impoundment in the park is a possibility.

USE CONFLICTS

A major potential land use conflict needing resolution is the existence of non-public lands within the park boundary. These include private land holdings and land selected by Eklutna Inc. under provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

of 1971. Each represents potential constraints on public use, recreational opportunity and daily operation of the park.

The Seward Highway reconstruction project being undertaken by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is in potential conflict with park values. Careful and cooperative planning will be required to improve the existing highway while preserving the scenic and recreational qualities along the Turnagain Arm.

The unauthorized use of off-road motor vehicles in the park has created conflicts with non-motorized users, wildlife, watershed areas, soil suitability, and vegetation, particularly in the summer season.

Within the Ship Creek and Campbell Creek drainages there are potential conflicts between the demand for more intensive recreational development and the need to protect these vital watersheds which are primary sources of Anchorage's water supply.

Conflicts exist between park users who desire open hunting and trapping of mammals and birds and those who desire large and accessible wildlife areas for the viewing and photographing of wildlife near Anchorage. An additional difficulty is the split management authority over these uses between the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska Division of Parks.

A use which existed prior to the Park's establishment is the extraction of natural resources, primarily gold and timber. As a result, several associated roads and structures were built, mostly in the Bird Creek area, which created use patterns and activities which are neither in the best interests of most park users, nor the preservation of the natural environment of the park.

Approximately twenty-five mining claims existed within the park boundary when it was created in 1970. Most of these claims have lapsed by becoming inactive. The active claims that remain are on Bird Creek and at Bird Point. The amount and location of additional access points which might be considered subsequent to the implementation of this plan must be carefully considered in order to avoid jeopardizing the park's capacity to withstand additional use.

The careless or inappropriate use of firearms exposes park users to unnecessary danger, unwanted noise, and litter.

Garbage and litter, either carelessly or intentionally discarded, have the effect of reducing the aesthetic values of an area, attracting bears, and results in reducing the enjoyment of the park user.

RECREATIONAL TRENDS

Visitor counts indicate rapidly increasing use of the park, even though there has been very little facility development concomitant with this increase. It is expected that this use trend will continue as nearby population centers continue to grow.

Recent polls indicate a national increase in public interest in physical fitness. It is anticipated that this trend will put additional pressure upon all our recreational resources, particularly ones adjacent to large population centers, such as Chugach State Park. Decreasing supplies of petroleum are also expected to focus recreational activities closer to where people live, and encourage less motorized forms of recreation.

The increased demand on outdoor recreation facilities is reflected by the outdoor recreation equipment industry both locally and nationally. The number of specialty backpacking stores, catalogs for recreation supplies, cross-country ski outlets and motorized recreation vehicle businesses has increased several-fold since 1971.

Light-weight clothing and equipment and advances in design, construction and materials have made the outdoor experience more enjoyable and accessible to more people. These factors point toward an expectation of increasing demand for use of Chugach State Park.

Travelers along the Seward Highway between Anchorage and Girdwood traverse 25 miles (40 kilometers) of the park's southern edge. This tour contains some of the most unique scenery found within the Park. Based upon 1975 Department of Transportation and Public Facilities traffic counts and predictions, this area of the park is expected to receive extremely heavy use in the future. Traffic is expected to increase to 16,100 vehicles per day by 1996. According to actual counts made at Potter Creek (where the highway enters the park) there were 775 daily vehicles in 1959, 1,762 in 1969, and 2,985 in 1975.

Concomitant with population growth and social and economic factors, several assumptions indicate an increasing demand for use of the park over the next several years:

1. Many people will have larger disposal incomes in the future, allowing larger expenditures for recreation.
2. Personal values, interests, skills and competence will be more oriented toward leisure activities.
3. People will continue moving into the State to take advantage of its recreation opportunities, as exemplified by the park.

