Welcome to Hatcher Pass East Management Area

Welcome

Long ago, miners wandered into the Talkeetna Mountains searching for gold, but what they found was even more precious. With over 100,000 mountainous acres, historic sites, and diverse wildlife, Hatcher Pass is one of Alaska’s favorite backcountry gateways.

Most of the Hatcher Pass East Management Area is managed by Alaska State Parks. However, portions are cooperatively managed with the Division of Mining Land and Water and the Mat-Su Borough.

Hiking

Three huts, the Snowbird, Bomber, and Mint, are managed by the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. They are available on a first come, first served basis. A fourth, the Lane hut, is not actively managed. See map inside for locations.

Winter Wonderland

As the first miners explored these mountains, they took up skiing as a way to travel the terrain and pass the time. Historic photos show miners skiing when Independence Mine was in operation. In the 1950s and 1960s, Anchorage residents would flock to the Hatcher Pass area in their road vehicles to ski the snow. Today, the Hatcher Pass area is one of the best cross-country skiing destinations in the state. Independence Mine SHP and Anchorage Road are regularly groomed and popular with skiers. Ample slopes attract snowboarders and downhiller skiers as well.

Snowmachining

More than homeowners, skiers use snowmachines to access remote and popular skiing areas. Snowmachining is the preferred mode of travel in most of the backcountry areas in the east. Over 300,000 acres are snowmachined, including the Palmer-Healy, Talkeetna Alps, and the Mat-Su Valley. The Hatcher Pass area is one of the premier snowmachining areas in Southcentral Alaska. You can ride on a wide variety of terrain, ranging from groomed trails to backcountry valleys. Be sure to abide by park rules, and know the hazards of the routes you’re traveling.

Avalanches

Avalanches can occur throughout the Hatcher Pass area. Steep, snow-covered slopes, gullies, and areas below steep ridges are particularly susceptible. Most avalanches happen after heavy or sustained snows and strong winds, but they can happen anytime snow is on the slopes. Take a class to learn the warning signs and techniques, and gear needed to protect yourself. Check local avalanche centers for updates.

Highlights

Independence Mine State Historical Park

At Independence Mine State Historical Park (SHP), you can learn what it was like to live and work in one of Alaska’s largest gold mining camps. Interpretive displays lead visitors through the historic mine buildings and equipment. Guided tours may be offered during summer.

Summit Lake State Recreation Site

Summit Lake State Recreation Site (SRS) is located at mile 13.5 along Hatcher Pass Road. This small cirque lake, or alpine tarn, is a remnant of a glacier that once sat amid these peaks. A trail leading around the lake allows for easy exploration, and a nearby bluff offers exemplary views and is a popular launch site for paragliders.

Touring

Visitors less inclined to blisters and trail mix can still take in the history and scenery along Hatcher Pass Road. Typically open between July and September, depending on snow depth, the road peaks at 3,886 feet and is one of the highest scenic drives in Alaska. The Palmer-Fishhook Road is paved until mile 17.5, but the next 15 miles is a rough, narrow, and steep gravel road and is not recommended for RV’s, trailers, and large vehicles. The drive can be slow, but the views are worth it. The road ends at mile 72.2 on the Parks Highway near Willow.

Area History

Hatcher Pass Management Area, located in the southwestern Talkeetna Mountains, owes its rugged, vertical landscape to tectonic collisions occurring along the Castle Mountain Fault. The fault—crossing under the road a few miles south of Hatcher Pass—forced ancient slabs of rock skyward, with some containing veins of gold that would attract fortune seekers millions of years later.

Robert Lee Hatcher discovered gold near the summit of Skyscraper Mountain in September 1906. After the discovery, the area sprang to life with industry and multiple mining interests. Business was booming, but when the United States entered World War II, gold production was deemed unnecessary and the mines fell silent.

After the mines closed, local residents were quick to realize the value of the access roads leading deep into the mountains. The area surrounding Hatcher Pass became known for its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. In 1974, Independence Mine was added to the National Register of Historic Places and later to the Hatcher Pass Management Area.

In 1992, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough purchased Hatcher Pass and the surrounding area for $1.5 million to provide a cultural and recreational area for the Mat-Su Borough. The entire length of Archangel Road, from Anchorage to the summit of Skyscraper Mountain, is a snowmachining and backcountry snowshoeing route, providing access to remote moose habitat.

For More Information

www.alaskastateparks.org

Contact

For More Information
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**Gold Mint Trail**

**Access:** Mile 14 on the Palmer-Fishhook Road

**Travel Means:** Foot, bike, ski

**Distance:** 16 miles round trip

**Elevation Gain:** 1,000-foot plus gain

Following the west bank of the Little Susitna River to its source in the Mint Glacier Valley, the Gold Mint Trail is relatively easy, but steepens into a glacier-rimmed valley toward the end.

**Reed Lakes Trail**

**Access:** Archangel Road

**Travel Means:** Foot, bike

**Distance:** 9 miles round trip

**Elevation Gain:** 1,600 feet

This trail follows Reed Creek and passes turquoise lakes, waterfalls, and the abandoned Snowbird Mine ending at Upper Reed Lake. The first 1.5 miles are easy and follow an old road to an abandoned cabin. The rest of the trail is challenging and includes a boulder field marked by cairns.

**Gold Cord Lake Trail**

**Access:** Independence Mine Area Parking

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** 1.7 miles round trip

**Elevation Gain:** About 800 feet

Gold Cord Lake Trail is an excellent choice for families with children or groups with different fitness levels. The final section gains moderate elevation to the lake.

**April Bowl Trail**

**Access:** Mile 19 of the Hatcher Pass Road

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** 2.2 miles round trip

**Elevation Gain:** About 800 feet

This trail begins with switchbacks, taking you through a small valley with a cirque lake and several small ponds, it soon turns into a ridge trail and is extremely narrow and rough, ending at Hatch Peak.

**Backcountry Safety**

- ALWAYS let someone know where you're going.
- Hatcher Pass is an AVALANCHE HAZARD AREA. Be sure to take your beacons, shovels, and probes and know how to use them.
- Hypothermia is deadly. Weather conditions can change unexpectedly, leaving the unprepared in danger.
- Learn the hazards of the terrain. Never travel alone, and always carry a pack with safety gear and emergency provisions. You'll never regret being too prepared.

**Legend**

- Area Boundary
- East/West Boundary
- Road
- Parking
- Trailhead
- Hiking trail
- Hiking trail (near)
- Accessible (pavement)
- Interpretive Trail
- Restrooms
- Information
- Snowmachine trail
- Snowmachine route
- Biking
- Cross-country skiing
- Downhill skiing
- Dog mushing
- Hut (privately managed)
- Viewing
- Water

*The E/W Boundary may change in the near future.*

**Trail Descriptions**

For more information on trails in Hatcher Pass East Management Area, visit [www.alaskastateparks.org](http://www.alaskastateparks.org)