

The Glenn Highway

EMBODIES ALL SIX QUALITIES OF A SCENIC BYWAY. . .



Scenic

This resource offers a heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and man made elements of the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience. All elements of the landscape – landform, water, vegetation, and man made development – contribute to the quality of the corridor’s visual environment. Everything present is in harmony and shares in the intrinsic qualities.



Historic

This resource encompasses legacies of the past that are distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or man made, that are of such significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation of the past. The historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns, and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped, and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and association.



Cultural

Evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features include, but are not limited to crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events, vernacular architecture, etc. and are currently practiced. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities and/or ethnic traditions.



Natural

Those features of the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landform, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity but the natural features reveal minimal disturbances.



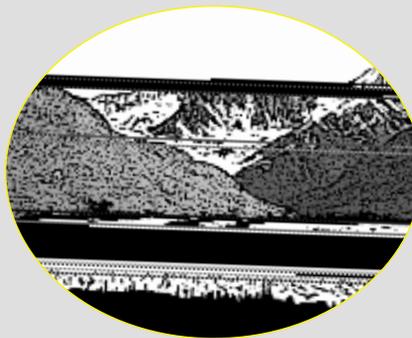
Recreational

Outdoor recreational activities are directly associated with and dependent upon the natural and cultural elements of the corridor’s landscape. The recreational activities provide opportunities for active and passive recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to downhill skiing, rafting, boating, fishing, and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be well recognized.

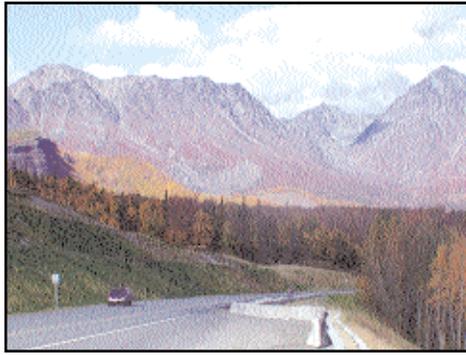


Archaeological

Those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activity that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor’s archaeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains and other physical evidence, have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past.



The qualities of the Glenn Highway are as diverse as they are abundant. Our Partnership Board (after some struggle!) narrowed the qualifying qualities to two—scenic and historic. Yet, to demonstrate that the historic and scenic qualities are “just the tip of the iceberg”, all six qualities are mentioned in this document.



3

The Six Intrinsic Qualities OF AN ALL AMERICAN ROAD

The Glenn Highway All American Road embodies all six qualities, and more, of a national scenic Byway program. It is:

- Scenic
- Historical
- Cultural
- Natural
- Recreational
- Archaeological

A nationally designated Scenic Byway needs to fulfill one of these qualities, and an All American Road designation needs to fulfill two qualities. What follows is a discussion of how all the qualities are met for the proposed Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway.

SCENIC QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

Glaciers. Moving rivers of ice. Glacially sculpted mountains and valleys. Vast pristine landscape. Matanuska and Knik Glaciers. Snow-capped mountains. Coastal flats. Pristine forests. Tundra. Milky-blue glacier runoff, braided rivers. Deep, crystal clear lakes. Moose, bear, mountain sheep, wolves, caribou. Fox, lynx, coyotes, porcupines, eagles. Salmon, trout, whales. Log cabins, spirit houses, Russian Orthodox churches. Historic roadhouses spaced a day's travel apart. Wooden barns and farmhouses. Green pastures with milk cows, horses, and musk ox. These are the scenes that visitors see and remember from their drive along the Glenn Highway.

Although most of Alaska's highways are scenic, the Glenn Highway is special for two reasons: the diversity of scenery, and the ease of viewing the scenery while driving. Traveling from the spectacular upper Cook Inlet into scenic farm country, then between the Chugach and Talkeetna mountain ranges up onto a tundra plateau, the Glenn Highway moves through the diversity of impressive scenery Alaska has to offer. The panoramas and vistas change mile after mile, giving visitors a dynamic visual experience.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



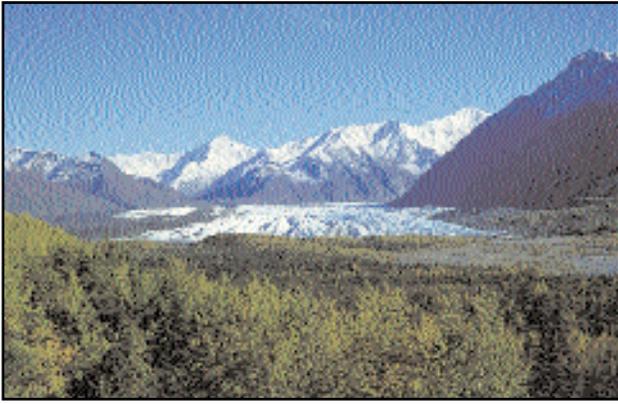


Photo courtesy of LDN

The Matanuska Glacier

Water in its many forms—glaciers, rivers and lakes—adds to the awesome scenic experience of traveling the Glenn Highway corridor.

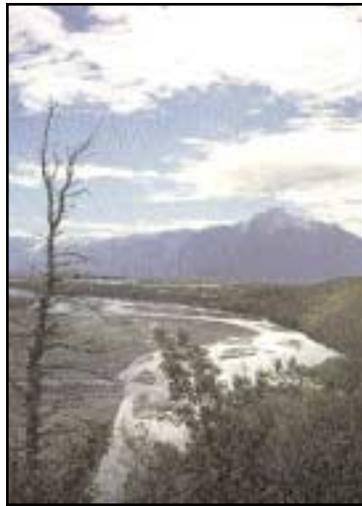


Photo courtesy of LDN

The Matanuska River

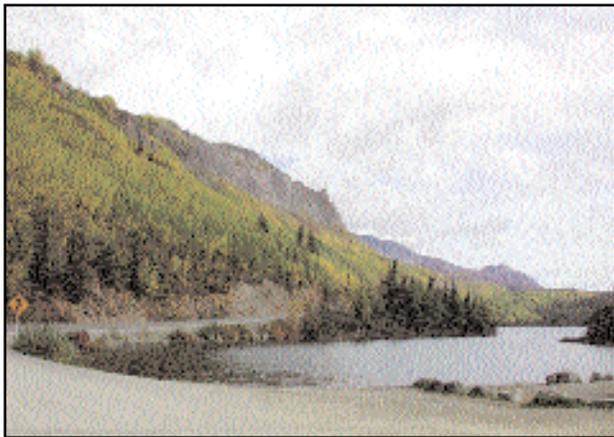


Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

Long Lake

Water and Ice

Water in its many forms—glaciers, rivers and lakes—adds to the awesome scenic experience of traveling the Glenn Highway corridor. The Matanuska Glacier, looming over the Glenn Highway with its huge crevasses and steep lateral moraines, winds its way down from Mt. Marcus Baker in the Chugach Mountains to the valley defining the Glenn Highway. It is the dominant feature of the corridor. Signs of the glacier's force on the landscape begin near Anchorage where lakes and kettle ponds were formed as the glacier retreated. The aptly named Mirror and Long Lakes, and the stunning Eklutna Lake, are remnants from the glaciers that reached into Cook Inlet, covering the area of current-day Anchorage with almost 3,000 feet of ice.¹

Just north of Eklutna, Upper Cook Inlet's Knik Arm becomes visible near the Palmer Hay Flats. These spectacular marshland flats are part of the vast outwash plain created by the Matanuska and Knik Glaciers as they drain into the Knik Arm of Upper Cook Inlet.

Upon entering the lower Matanuska Valley, and intermittently for the next 40 miles, the braided Matanuska River is visible with its undulating patterns of gray silt and water. Travelers on the Glenn Highway have the fortune of watching this mighty river snake its way down to Knik Arm. Many mountain rivers and streams tumble down the mountains and join the Matanuska River along its course, and offer fishing and viewing opportunities.

Entering the Matanuska River Canyon, signs of the great Matanuska Glacier can be seen in the glacial striations on the roadside rocks, and can be felt from the cool breezes traveling down the canyon. Around MP 100, the glacier comes into view from the highway. Visitors can stop to get a closer look at the blues, grays and whites of this massive river of ice.

Mountains and Valleys

From beginning to end, the Glenn Highway winds along the base of the majestic Chugach Mountains.

1. Lorie Dilley and Thomas Dilley, *Guidebook to Geology of Anchorage, Alaska*, Lorie Dilley and Thomas Dilley, Anchorage, 2000, p. 93.



When the Glenn Highway reaches the Matanuska River Valley, a series of bridges cross the Matanuska and Knik Rivers. The highway then turns into the Matanuska Valley, which at its broadest is 15 miles across and at its narrowest is less than 1.5 miles across. The highway provides a pocket view of Mt. Marcus Baker with a summit peak of 13,175'. Other peaks such as Mt. Sergeant Robinson (10,415'), Mt. Wickersham, Mt. Siegfried, Mt. Thor, and Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden Peaks are also viewable from the highway. The Knik Glacier can be viewed in the distance on a clear day as it winds its way down the valley from the Chugach peaks. The highway then passes through the community of Palmer, with its farms and green fields and panoramic 365-degree mountain view, and then moves up onto a low bench at the base of the Talkeetnas. The Talkeetna Mountains, rugged, folded, and ice-carved, are older than the Chugach, as evidenced by the relatively even summits.

A drive on the Glenn Highway affords some of the most scenic and intimate mountain views found in Alaska. It is this scenic quality that dominates the highway, while telling a story of ongoing and dynamic geological and glacial processes. Mile by mile, individual mountains add intrigue and splendor with their telling names such as King Mountain, Castle Mountain, Anthracite Ridge, and Sheep Mountain. Near Eureka Roadhouse, Gunsight Mountain becomes visible, with a hollowed out notch in its top, reminiscent of looking through an old-fashioned, fixed-iron sight when trying to aim the barrel of a rifle. Farther up the road are Mounts Drum, Wrangell, and Sanford. With its peak at 16,237 feet above sea level, Mount Sanford is the 7th highest mountain peak in the United States.

Flora and Fauna

The lush flora and fauna along the Glenn Highway corridor has sustained life for thousands of years. Year round, the tapestry of the changing vegetation and seasons brings unending delight to those on the road. The harsh winter landscape of wind and ice softens in spring with the silver furry catkins of the

Moving RIVERS OF ICE



Photo courtesy of State of Alaska DNR

Although glaciers cover about five percent of Alaska, Alaska's road system presents limited glacier viewing opportunities.

The Glenn Highway is unique in this respect. Two of the several glaciers along the Glenn Highway the Matanuska and Nelchina are easily viewed from the Byway. Others, like the Knik Glacier can be viewed with a short side trip off the Glenn Highway.

But what exactly is a glacier, and how does it exert such power in shaping the landscape?

A glacier is a mass of ice made of snow that does not melt from season to season, and that becomes compacted and crystallized. Once the mass reaches a critical thickness of about 120 feet, pressure at the base causes the snow and ice to move under its own weight. Once the mass starts to move, it is considered a glacier.

As they move, grow, and melt glaciers profoundly change the landscape in many ways. Glaciers weight and scour the earth below, and in periods of melting, cause erosion and dumping.

Source: Lorie Dilley and Thomas Dilley, *Guidebook to Geology of Anchorage, Alaska*, Lorie Dilley and Thomas Dilley, Anchorage, 2000, pp. 87-88.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



Occupants in the corridor use wild plants for their nutritive values including elderberry (left) and blueberries (right)



Photo courtesy of LDN

Photo courtesy of LDN



Photo courtesy of LDN

Vegetation pattern along the corridor



Photo courtesy of Sheep Mountain Lodge

Spruce and willows backed by the Chugach

willows, and green of new leaves on the birch and aspen. The lush verdant undergrowth enriches the scene as the land turns toward summer.

Summer travelers are rewarded with a grand and diverse wildflower display. Along the Glenn Highway the rich palette of plant life consists of yellows, blues, lavenders, whites and pinks of plants with such names as Eskimo Potato, Marsh Felswort, Grass of Parnassus, Soap Berry, White Oxytrope and Labrador Tea. The range may be a broad swath of fireweed, a field of purple iris on the Palmer Hay Flats, or an isolated Chocolate Lily or Calipso orchid growing amongst the crowd.

As summer gives way to fall, the texture and tone of the tapestry turns to gold. Whether it is the muted gold of the hay flats or the brilliant yellows of the cottonwoods and aspens, the corridor assumes a warm hue that truly makes for an autumnal celebration. By mid-September along the road and mountainsides, the trees provide a contrasting yellow relief to the rugged outline of the Talkeetna and Chugach ranges. Spruce occasionally breaks up these wide brushes of yellow with their dark, almost black, greens. Looking up the mountainsides, travelers can also detect the crimson groundcover of Kinnikinnick (bearberry) and blueberry. Autumn is high time for berry-picking along side the highway.

In season, the Glenn Highway provides a wonderful roadside wildflower display. In any given year, changes in temperature, cloud cover, elevation or snow levels account for the longevity and range of wildflowers along the highway and on the mountainsides.

The scenery changes dramatically as the highway climbs out of the Matanuska River canyon and into the marshy bogs of the taiga of interior Alaska. The landscape opens up to reveal windswept plateaus, aged black spruce forests, and distant mountains. This is an ecosystem like no other where the black spruce trees struggle for survival in the boggy permafrost fields of the tundra.



In terms of wildlife, the Glenn Highway makes for a viewing experience not readily found on most highways in the country. The fish and wildlife resources of the Chugach Mountains alone account for more bear, moose, and eagles than found in any State or National Forest in the Lower 48. The convergence of mountain, valley, river and stream accounts for the rich range of wildlife habitats through which people and animals have traversed for centuries.

Along this major flyway, travelers can look to the sky and see spectacular Vs of swans, endless formations of Canada geese, and fields covered with sandhill cranes, as well as numerous song birds returning from their wintering grounds. One can also see raptors and ravens and can marvel at an eagle swooping down to snatch a salmon in the Matanuska River, or at the sandhill cranes performing their courting dance on the Palmer Hay Flats. On the land, wildlife sightings add to the visual enjoyment and wonder. It is not uncommon to see moose chomping on willows, migratory caribou traveling in large herds, Dall sheep munching peacefully a few hundred vertical feet above the road, or an occasional bear or wolf. In the water, salmon can be seen struggling and pushing up the rivers to spawn in clearwater streams, and arctic grayling, and rainbow trout are year-round residents. To the north and west of Palmer, one can see the Matanuska Valley Moose Range.



Photo courtesy of LDN

Moose and eagles are often seen along the highway



Photo courtesy of LDN



Photo courtesy of LDN

Palmer Hay Flats guarded by Pioneer Peak and the Twin Peaks of the Chugach Mountains

HISTORICAL QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

Alaska's First Peoples

The Glenn Highway's corridor links diverse eco-regions with wild resources that are valuable for human survival. Responding to this, historically one major group of Alaska natives, the Athabascans, have inhabited, traveled, and subsisted within the corridor. The Dena'ina and Ahtna are both Athabaskan people who continue to have a strong presence in the corridor and also have strong ties with one another. Eskimos, a different and coastal group of Alaska Natives, have periodically inhabited



Photo courtesy of LDN

An Athabaskan cache at the Alaska Native Heritage Center

The Athabaskan people moved up and down the valley between the Chugach and Talkeetna Mountain Ranges. They stored collected food in "caches" (left) designed to keep supplies safe until used.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



and traveled through the area, primarily focused in Upper Cook Inlet.

It appears that the Athabascan people came from Asia 35,000 years ago across the Beringia land bridge and migrated into Alaska and northwest Canada.² While the arrival of the first peoples to the region remains inexact, within the Glenn Highway corridor there are archeological remains at a number of sites. Occupation of the Upper Cook Inlet is believed to have begun in about 4000 B.C., perhaps by Athabascans. Archaeological evidence suggests that Eskimos clearly occupied Cook Inlet, with seasonal camps along Knik Arm by 1000 A.D. Farther up the corridor, near Long Lake, there is early evidence of a settlement which appears to contain cultural remains from both Eskimo and Athabascan inhabitants.

Around 1650, one theory suggests, the Dena'ina moved in again, and in a decisive battle with the Pacific Eskimos at Points Woronzof and Campbell, the Dena'ina established primary occupancy of Upper Cook Inlet's Knik Arm. Their main settlement at that period seems to have been near or at present-day Eklutna, on the east side of the arm, called "Eydlughet" or "Ikluat," and used only in the winter.³

Athabascan Trade Routes

The Dena'ina and the Ahtna continue to share similarities in language, which can be partly attributed to a legacy of inter-group trading and social networking. Each group would exchange riches and trade goods from their respective areas: the Dena'ina, who resided in the Upper Inlet river valleys offered marine foods and salmon, and then later traded goods from the Europeans. The Ahtna, who were primarily located further east on the Copper River, traded furs and native copper from the interior.

This special relationship between the Dena'ina and the Ahtna, over the centuries, helped establish a network of trails that the Glenn Highway largely follows or parallels today. Travel was primarily by

foot, supplemented by dog sleds for packing supplies. The Matanuska River was too swift and rocky for water transport, so people mainly traveled in winter when moving supplies by dogsled became easier.⁴ Along the route of the Glenn Highway, the Dena'ina and the Ahtna continue to use their earlier place names, and tell their legends about the corridor's landmarks, adding to the corridor's interest.

As part of their culture, the Dena'ina and the Ahtna shared a strong common ethic about respect for the land and its resources. This ethic helped preserve the integrity of the land for future generations. However, it did not leave significant cultural markers, like petroglyphs, or other structures for later travelers to view. The primary evidence of Athabascan peoples' long residence in what is now the Glenn Highway corridor, is in their network of trails, and in their original place names, legends, and stories.⁵

Early European Explorers

The Dena'ina people first encountered Europeans with the Russian explorations of the 18th Century. In the early 1780s, during a period of considerable expansion, Russian traders and trappers traveled from their bases along the southern coast of Alaska in search of new sources of fur.⁶ The Russians explored the Susitna, Matanuska, and Knik river basins, as well as the Copper River Basin, although they were more successful in the former, and established contacts for trading in those areas.⁷

In 1799 the Russian-American Company established a mercantile monopoly that actively drew many native groups into fur hunting and trading. Direct Russian contact in the Upper Cook Inlet area, however, was very limited. Because the Russians in Alaska were few in numbers they developed trade in the interior areas by working through Native middlemen. For example, a winter post for the company appears to have been located on the lower Matanuska River which was operated by a Dena'ina from the Kenai area who served as a middleman for Dena'ina trappers in the region.⁸

2. Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC), *Nay'dini'aa Na' History Unit*, CVTC, Sutton, Alaska, 2001, p. xii.
3. Ann Chandonnet, *On the Trail of Eklutna*, Adams Press, Chicago, 1991, pp. 20-21.
4. Shem Pete, *Shem Pete's Alaska*, University of Alaska, Anchorage, 1987, pp. 256-269.

5. Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC), *Nay'dini'aa Na' History Unit*, CVTC, Chickaloon Village, Alaska, 2001, p. 1-8, and Partnership Board Member Patricia Wade.
6. Frederick Starr, Ed., *Russia's American Colony*, Duke Univ., Durham, 1987, p. 121.
7. Shem Pete, *Shem Pete's Alaska*, University of Alaska, Anchorage, 1987, p. 16.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan



Russian America

The active Russian presence in Alaska only lasted about one-hundred years, and left little evidence in the Upper Cook Inlet. The Russians had no direct control over the Dena'ina or their lands within the region of the Glenn Highway "although they did influence the Dena'ina people in major ways by introducing western trade goods and, after the 1840's, the Orthodox religion"⁹. Dena'ina populations also witnessed an increase in intermarriages and some religious conversion. Additionally, the language of trade in the nineteenth century was Russian, which has influenced the Upper Inlet Dena'ina dialect by introducing over 200 new words.¹⁰ In 1839, however, the Dena'ina suffered tremendously from the contact, however minor, when the population was decimated by smallpox.¹¹

Seward's Icebox

In 1867, the U.S. government signed a treaty and acquired Alaska from a cash-strapped Russia, whose traders had already come close to wiping out the sea otter population in Alaska's waters. The purchase was the accomplishment of the forward-thinking U.S. Secretary of State William Seward. So unpopular was this purchase, seen as a wanton waste of hard-earned money, that threats were made against Seward's life and the deal was derisively termed "Seward's Icebox".¹² Although purchased for what seemed an extravagant price of \$7.2 million, the purchase seemed to be worth it once gold discoveries were made on the Klondike, in Nome, in Hatcher Pass near Palmer, and on Alaska's Interior rivers initiating an exodus of citizens to Alaska. In fact, a small tax on fur seal pelts returned the purchase price of Alaska to the U.S. Treasury by the time commercial gold mining was underway.¹³

U.S. Mapping Expeditions

With the discovery of gold, prospectors wanted maps and information about Alaska's interior with regards to trails and roads, and the government had little to say about its new territorial possession, one-fifth the size of the United States. Seeking to respond to these concerns of the prospectors, the



Photo courtesy of Eklutna Village

The corridor's original people, the Dena'ina, have tried to maintain their traditions and way of life, even in the face of change brought by explorers and settlers. Colorful Spirit Houses and the Russian Orthodox Cross are visible symbols of historical influences that remain to this day.



Photo courtesy of LDN



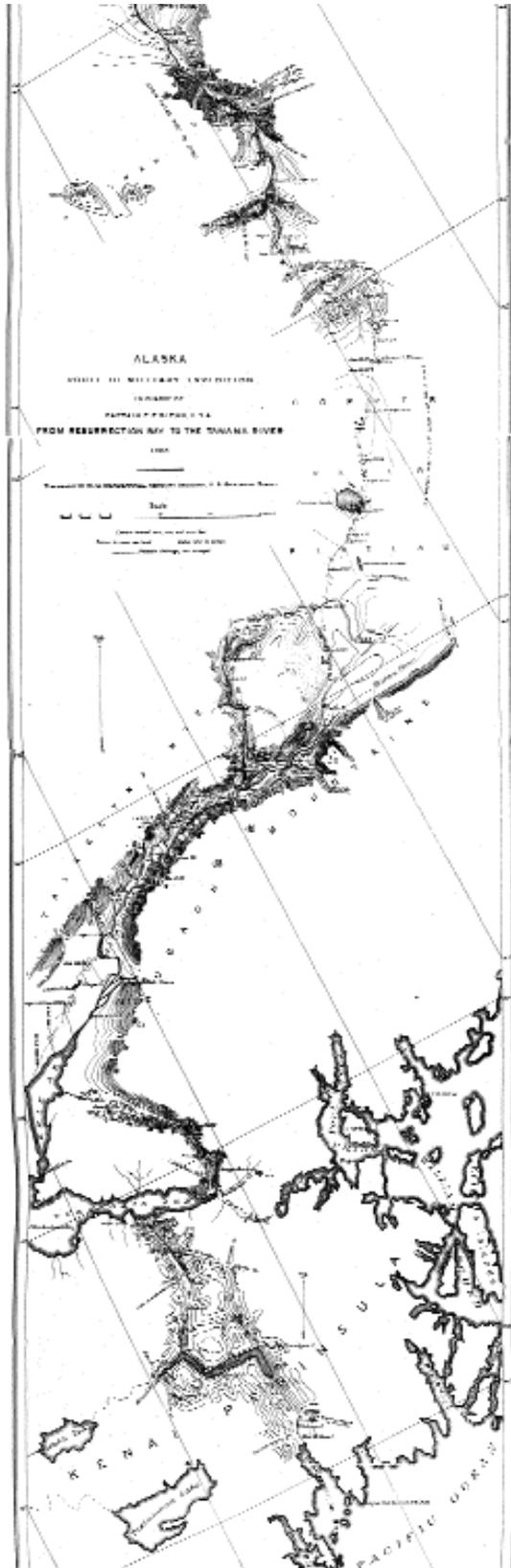
Photo courtesy of LDN



Photo courtesy of LDN

9. Sherm Pete, *Sherm Pete's Alaska*, University of Alaska, Anchorage, 1987, p. 19.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. Ann Chandonnet, *On the Trail of Eklutna*, Adams Press, Chicago, 1991, p. 23.
 12. Frederick Starr, Ed., *Russia's American Colony*, Duke Univ., Durham, 1987, p. 272.
 13. Ernst Gruening, *The State of Alaska*, Random House, New York, 1954, p.35.





Early Military map of the Glenn Corridor

US Geological Survey, Twentieth Annual Report Part VII, Map no. 16

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan

U.S. government sent military expeditions across Alaska to map trails and gather geological and survey information on the territory. One of these efforts was the Military Expedition No. 3 which sought an easier passage to the famed gold mining town of Circle City rather than over Thompson Pass or through Canada. Earlier efforts by Lt. Henry Allen had revealed a passage to Cook Inlet from the Copper River, and in 1898, Captain Glenn sent Joseph C. Castner to scout and blaze a trail to Circle City from Cook Inlet.¹⁴ It was an arduous six-month journey by horseback and foot, generally along the current Glenn Highway route, through marsh and swamp, fighting alder and cottonwood brush, and crossing frigid glacial streams. The information they obtained proved useful to the U.S. government and the miners.¹⁵

Miners and trappers were among the first to take advantage of government mapping in the Matanuska River corridor. By 1894, prospectors heard about the rich coal veins in the Matanuska Valley from local Indians. For the next two years some sporadic prospecting was followed by W.C. Mendenhall's maps of the Matanuska coalfields, which led to the first attempt to reach the area by rail.¹⁶

Opening the Last Frontier

By the early part of the 1900's a more concerted push was underway to open America's last frontier, by connecting the coastal areas of Cook Inlet and beyond with the riches of Alaska's interior. It became a priority to connect the seaport of Seward with the mines and towns further north by rail, which led to the appearance of frontier rail towns that supplied those working and became home to a growing rail belt population.

In 1904, the privately financed Alaska Central Railroad began laying track from Seward toward the Tanana River with hopes of using Matanuska coal to fuel its engines. These reports of coal and gold fields that could be accessed through the Valley attracted many to the region. Old and newly created trails proved vital to accessing these resources. One was

14. Claus-M. Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails*, Univ. Press, New York, 1986, pp. 5-6.

15. Capt. E. F. Glenn, *Alaska, 1898, Tanana River Exploring Expedition*, facsimile reproduction of the original report, 1964, Shorey Book Store, Seattle, 1964.

16. Vicki Cole, *Knick, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys*, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Palmer, 1985, p. 75.



the Watson's Summer Trail, which by 1906 had become a popular route along the Matanuska River to Frank Watson's coalmine near Castle Mountain.¹⁷

Matanuska Valley Coal

Thus, while gold rushes triggered much activity in other areas of the state, a lesser-known coal rush began in the Matanuska Valley. In places such as Wishbone Hill near Sutton, Chickaloon, and Buffalo Mine, the promise of bituminous coal deposits and lignite formations supported talk of rail development and the subsequent growth in a rail belt population.

U.S. Government involvement in coal mining played a key role in supporting the Matanuska Valley's development as it attracted people to relocate to work the mines, and it led to the construction of transportation routes and infrastructure to service the mines. It has been said that, "The final release in 1915 of 19 mining tracts in the Matanuska Valley... brought on a coal boom that supplied a solid economic base for the next half century".¹⁸

Powering the Pacific Fleet

In 1912, the U.S. Navy eyed the Matanuska deposits near Chickaloon as a fuel source for the Pacific fleet. The U.S. Navy operated the government town of Chickaloon, a leasing unit that was withheld by the government when Congress released land for coal entry claims in 1912. That following winter, Alaska teamster Jack Dalton freighted coal on the ice of the Matanuska River to haul the coal to a testing site where the Navy could determine its usefulness for steamship use.¹⁹

The route Jack Dalton took helped those interested in rail development to decide where to place the line. Once the coal was deemed satisfactory, the Alaskan Engineering Commission (AEC) was constituted and funded by the US Congress to construct the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks.²⁰ Construction began in 1914 and Congress appropriated additional funds to purchase the bankrupt Alaska Central Railway, which operated out of Seward, and the Tanana Valley Railroad, another bankrupt railroad



Coal-driven engine of the Alaska Railroad.

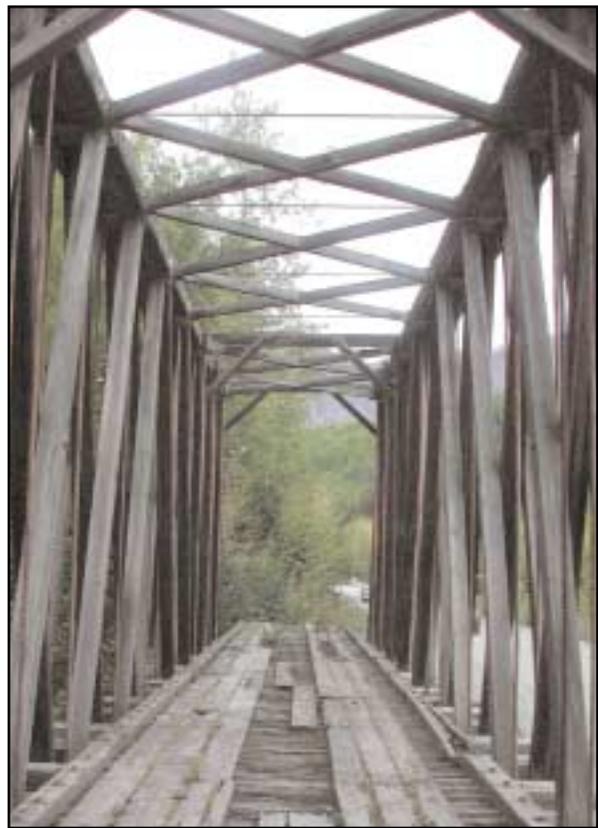
Photo courtesy of LDN



Sutton's Coal Wash Plant

Photo courtesy of LDN

In the early 1900's, places such as Wishbone Hill near Sutton, Chickaloon, and Buffalo Mine, became valuable for their bituminous coal deposits and lignite formations. Although many mineral claims still exist in this area, the early era of coal mining came to a close in 1922 when the U.S. Navy found an alternate coal source.



The old Chickaloon River Bridge

Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

17. Mary Cracraft Bauer, *The Glenn Highway*, Bentwood Press, Sutton, Alaska, 1987, p. 6.
 18. Vicki Cole, *Knick, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys*, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Palmer, 1985, p. 77.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. Mary Cracraft Bauer, *The Glenn Highway*, Bentwood Press, Sutton, Alaska, 1987, p. 6.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



Stories of Travel

ON THE EARLY GLENN HIGHWAY

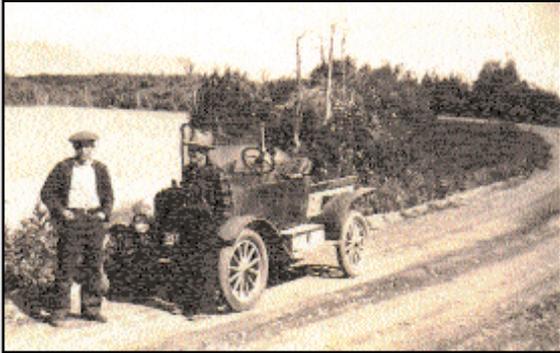


Photo courtesy of Cliff Steadman

Rain, Sleet or Snow...

Cliff Steadman knows the Glenn Highway corridor like the back of his hand. Starting in 1946, Cliff started a long career of delivering mail, freight and occasional passengers along the pioneer Glenn Highway. His route stretched from Palmer into the Interior and included more than just delivery.

In the early days, Cliff provided a "frontier service" meaning that he was corridor residents' contact with the outside world, up until 1964 when radio went into operation at Glennallen. For years, Cliff would find alarm clocks in residents' mailboxes which he would set to the right time. In addition, he ran errands for people, he provided help to stranded motorists along his route, and once, he almost had to deliver a baby in his truck!

Cliff filled a useful public service in the remote and rugged corridor, and when he retired, no one was surprised when he moved out to live along the Glenn Highway. Cliff filed for a homestead in 1963 at MP 104 on site he had noticed early in his career as a protected location. By the time he filed for the homestead, he had driven by the site 4,000 times. At age 97, Cliff continues to live at MP 103 to this day, and keeps busy with gardening and telling stories of the Glenn Highway's early days.

Source: *Pioneer Trucker*, by Robert L. Tucker. *Alaska Ruralite*, December, Number 33, 1984, and interview with Cliff Steadman (now 97 years old and his daughter Nancy).

that operated out of Fairbanks. Construction of the mainline from Seward to Nenana was completed in 1923 when President Warren Harding traveled to Alaska to drive the Gold Spike signifying completion of the Railroad.

Prior to the railroad construction, the trek from Chickaloon to Knik took three and a half days. The Navy wanted a speedier solution and set forth to oversee the coal operations as well as support the railroad's efforts. Matanuska Valley coal was slated for U.S. Navy use only and the Navy oversaw all operations, even the construction of housing for civilian workers.²¹

Evolving Transportation Needs

A key site in the valley's mining and rail operations was Sutton. As the Chickaloon rail spur was being constructed, Sutton grew as a railroad supply station in 1917. Between 1920 and 1922, Navy money constructed a coal washing plant which burned down a year later. The foundations still remain and can be seen from the highway. In 1922, the Navy shut down the Chickaloon Mine as the Navy decided it no longer required "clean" coal for steamship use and opted for east coast coal. The barracks and other buildings of Chickaloon village provided by the U.S. Navy were moved elsewhere. One enduring landmark of this time is the Chickaloon River Bridge, which was constructed in 1917.²²

The rise in importance of another mode of transportation, the automobile, hastened discussion of the Glenn Highway as a major road corridor from Anchorage to Matanuska. In 1932, the Alaska Road Commission was placed under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army. A portion of the Glenn Highway was begun a year later, a sign that business interests in Anchorage, the region's young urban and commercial center, had succeeded in their drive to secure funding for a road from Anchorage to Matanuska.

Construction of the Glenn Highway

Alaska's strategic location during WWII offered

21. Vicki Cole, *Knick, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys*, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Palmer, 1985, p. 84.
22. *Ibid*, pp. 84-88.
23. Claus-M. Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails*, Univ. Press, New York, 1986, pp. 208-209.
24. Mary Cracraft Bauer, *The Glenn Highway*, Bentwood Press, Sutton, Alaska, 1987, p. 7.

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan



another reason to move forward with the Glenn Highway construction. Alaska's significance to U.S. defense during WWII secured additional funding for road construction that could enable the movement of troops and tanks. By June of 1940, work had begun on the Glenn Highway from both Anchorage and Glennallen.²³

Other measures were taken to bolster Alaska's, and the U.S. defense; including the construction of Fort Richardson along the Glenn Highway. The stretch of highway outside Anchorage bears witness to Alaska's rich military history, which is evident in the presence of Elmendorf Air Force Base, Fort Richardson, and the largest Army National Guard station in the United States. This part of the highway provides interpretive opportunities for discussing the strategic importance of Alaska during WWII, during and after the Cold War and the Vietnam War.

Crews worked on the twenty-foot wide original Glenn Highway for four years. In some sections, they used the old railroad bed, tearing up the old ties and laying their road. The tracks themselves had been torn up the previous year by the railroad. The ties were used to build a cookhouse at the base camp in Sutton. However, in most places, the road builders had to cut the roadway themselves, following the faint traces of the trail Castner followed, which had become a pack trail used by miners heading to the gold fields. From Chickaloon east, there were no wagon trails, no lodges, and only open country.²⁴

There was a lot of pressure on the Alaska Road Commission to complete the road quickly. Tensions and feelings in the territory were running high during the early 1940s, in part because the Japanese had attacked the Aleutian Islands. During construction of the highway, the Army posted guards at all bridges from the Knik River to the Chickaloon River.²⁵

By 1945, the same year the war was over, the Glenn Highway was completed and connected to the Alcan (or the Alaska-Canada) Highway through Canada. "It was a rough road, narrow and bumpy, muddy at

times too, but it was a road and for the first time in Alaska's history, Alaska was connected overland to the Lower 48."²⁶

Homesteading on the Last Frontier

Although the natural wealth of fauna through the region supported a subsistence-based economy for the earliest settlers, the rich soils of the Matanuska Valley provided an untapped resource for agriculture. A special act on May 14, 1898 extended the original 1862 Homestead Act to the new territory of Alaska. However, due to the climate and cold soils, Alaskan homesteading was not easy, and by 1914 fewer than 200 homestead applications had been filed.²⁷ Fewer still were actually awarded homesteads because of the difficulty in meeting proof requirements to show agricultural use of the land. The Alaska Railroad hired M.D. Snodgrass to promote agriculture and encourage homesteading along the corridor in the late 1920s. His information was used to promote the Matanuska Colony project.²⁸

As road, rail, and wagon trail improvements were put in place, however, it became easier for those who would seek to take advantage of the rich Matanuska River valley soils. A railroad clearing fire between the small rail communities of Matanuska and Palmer in 1915 ushered in the earliest wave of homesteaders to the area. From 1915 to 1920, up to 400 settlers built farms to raise livestock and grow vegetables that would survive the elements. Matanuska became a community center for the new residents. Although many farms became profitable, the community of Matanuska began to fail during the 1930s because of flooding and the exodus of workers at the end of railroad construction in the area.²⁹

The federal government established a Matanuska Experiment Station to develop strains of cattle suitable for Alaska and it also introduced sheep to the valley. Life was arduous in the valley, especially for its early farmers.

The Matanuska Colony

A new wave of settlers infused life into the Valley in

25. Mary Cracraft Bauer, *The Glenn Highway*, Bentwood Press, Sutton, Alaska, 1987, p. 10.

27. "The Last Homestead", BLM Alaska Frontiers, Fall 2001, p. 4.

28. Vicki Cole, *Knick, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys*, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Palmer, 1985, p. 160.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.



The community of Palmer grew strong from its agricultural economic base. The original colony provided a school and a local hospital and the colony experiment also benefited Alaska as a whole. Locally produced farm goods would reduce living costs in the territory, provide extra business for the railroad, and feed a growing population.



Photo courtesy of MSCVB

An early Matanuska Colony settler



Photo courtesy of Anchorage Daily News

A picturesque Mat-Su farm against the Chugach Mountains

1935 with the arrival of the "New Deal" Matanuska Colonists. These 203 Midwestern families, strove to establish the community of Palmer as the region's major agricultural and commercial center. Each family drew lots for their 40-acre tracts. The families chose one of five floor plans and only one barn design, a feature that has left an imprint on the landscape.³⁰

Settling the Last Frontier

The more robust settlers who were able to adjust to life in Alaska soon realized a good profit could be made in farming. Seven colony farms are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While the colonists had varying degrees of success with the project, the community of Palmer grew strong from its agricultural economic base, and its role as processing center for agricultural products. George Palmer built his second store on the bank of the Matanuska River. The colony also provided a school and a local hospital. The colony experiment also benefited Alaska. Locally produced farm goods would reduce living costs in the territory, provide extra business for the railroad, and feed a growing population.

Compared to the expanse of the Midwest, the mountainous landscape of the Talkeetna and Chugach ranges offered a dramatic change. "My first impression of the Valley was, I just wanted to push them [the mountains] away so I could see," recalled Colonist Lillian Eckert. "It felt so far away from the rest of the world. I felt hemmed in."³¹

From the Post-War Boom to the 21st Century

The Glenn Highway construction ushered in a new boom in homesteading in the Anchorage area, the Matanuska Valley, and also in Eagle River. This area, outside the rich glaciated soils of the valley, attracted homesteaders who sought mountain living while still maintaining some connection to the military bases or the growing city of Anchorage. With a new highway, the railway system, and strong communities in place, life was becoming easier on the last frontier. In 1959, Alaska became the 49th

30. Vicki Cole, *Knick, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys*, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Palmer, 1985, p. 170.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
 32. "The Last Homestead", BLM Alaska Frontiers, Fall 2001, p. 4.



State of the United States under the Alaskan Statehood Act. By 1988, homesteading in Alaska had legally closed.

Following statehood, the communities along the lower Glenn Highway grew from small outpost towns to major communities. Today, Anchorage is Alaska's major urban and transportation center, and is the state's largest city, with a population of about 260,000 people-over 40 percent of Alaska's population. Although Anchorage has had some difficult times, including the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964, it has rebounded, and continues to grow. Anchorage and the communities of the Matanuska Valley and river corridor also participated in the economic boom that came with the construction of the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline in the 1970s.

The growth center of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is what the borough refers to as its core area. This area encompasses much of the developed area between the communities of Wasilla and Palmer. This area over the last two decades has consistently been the fastest growing area of the State, with Borough population expanding from approximately 17,000 in 1980 today's figure of approximately 65,000 population.

CULTURAL QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

Anchorage is known as Alaska's largest village and is often the site of the Alaska Native Federation convention. It is also a truly international city, with communities of people from as far away as Samoa, Korea, Japan, Russia, Mexico, and South America. Local markets reflect the cultural variety as do the signs advertising local businesses. As the Glenn Highway exits downtown Anchorage, the traveler has an opportunity to visit the Anchorage Museum of History and Art and see exceptional displays of early Alaska transportation and art. A little farther down the highway, the traveler has an opportunity to visit the Alaska Native Heritage Center, which offers exhibits and educational materials on the life and culture of Alaska's Native peoples. Built as an interactive experience, it reflects the native history of organized



Photo courtesy of LDN

Anchorage in its early days as a tent city at the mouth of Ship Creek



Photo courtesy of LDN

Anchorage has grown into Alaska's urban and transportation center, but still provides great outdoor activities, including salmon fishing in Ship Creek (for silvers and kings).

With a new highway, the railway system, and strong communities in place, life was becoming easier on the last frontier. Following statehood, the communities along the lower Glenn Highway grew from small outpost towns to major communities.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



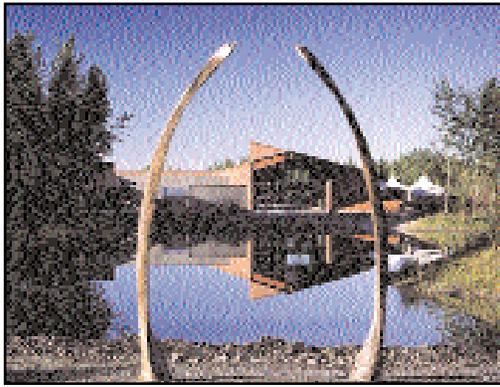


Photo courtesy of LDN

The Alaska Native Heritage Center seen through the whale bone archway

Eklutna's St. Nicholas Church—the corridor's oldest existing building—and the adjacent Museum are a very important cultural resource for the residents of Eklutna, Alaskans, and visitors.



Photo courtesy of LDN

St. Nicholas Church of Eklutna



Photo courtesy of Patricia Wade

The Chickaloon Village Ya Ne Dah Ah School Dance Students

tribal entities within the State of Alaska and provides a wonderful opportunity for visitors to become informed about all the native tribes of Alaska.

There are two strong Athabascan communities along the Glenn Highway that have their own village governments, land resources, and a desire to maintain as much of a traditional lifestyle and culture as possible. Eklutna Village is located at the junction of several traditional trails. When the highway was first built, it was not uncommon to see people using the highway to walk to their destination. A story was told by an Eklutna Native about a family that lived in Gulkana walking approximately 175 miles to the Village of Eklutna to go to church in the summer time. Stories of people walking in this area are very prolific and they help people understand how society and transportation has changed so drastically in such a short period of time.

Eklutna is the oldest continually inhabited Athabascan site in the corridor, dating back to 1650. The Russian Orthodox Church largely influenced this village in the later 19th Century, and their St. Nicholas Church, open for public tours, is the oldest surviving example of architecture by Athabascans under Russian direction, probably built in 1870. The Museum is a very important cultural resource for the Eklutna People, documenting their history and native language.

Chickaloon Village, located near Sutton, has a larger Athabascan population, including Dena'ina and Ahtna, and is the center of government for the Chickaloon Native community. The government of this village is relatively young and is evolving through a philosophy to help all people without exploiting others or neglecting anyone's needs. This premise and philosophy has helped guide the tribal leadership in development of programs like their Native school (the first one in the State of Alaska), healthcare for their members, daycare for their children, and stewardship of their land and the resources it carries. Their history is being painstakingly recreated by elders and tribal



historians. Little remains of early habitations and because the Athabascans did not build monuments or create petroglyphs, tracing their history is difficult. Tribal historians are having to learn their traditional language and traditional place names for areas around the Byway and recreate their history from stories that have been passed down for generations. This takes intensive research of notes and the published items of other people who came to the area and met with tribal ancestors in the past.

The corridor's history as America's frontier provides compelling and interesting stories of exploration, early trading posts, mining, homesteading, settlement, and community-building in an unforgiving wilderness. The State of Alaska is young, and the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway project is fortunate to document these stories, in part, with the help of some of the people who participated in making this history. The spirit of the pioneers is still in existence today.

The roadhouses along the road give the Glenn Highway a feeling of stepping back to a time when life was rustic and the lodges were a warm haven from winter's icy chill and an opportunity to talk with a friend and catch up on the news. These roadhouses, with convenient distances between, provided meals and lodging once the highway was constructed. Many of these buildings are the original log cabins that were constructed as part of the highway-building project in the late 1940's. Many of the road camps became roadhouses.

One of the lodge owners recalls having a dinner for many of the locals and starting a conversation on how long the roadhouse had been in operation, thinking that this would offer them an opportunity to wax nostalgic with stories of the good old days. To her surprise, the men began to argue about the year the lodge opened for business, and it almost broke out into a fist fight between several parties who could not agree on when the roadhouse first opened its doors. Notable lodges along the Glenn Highway include Eureka Lodge, which opened even before the

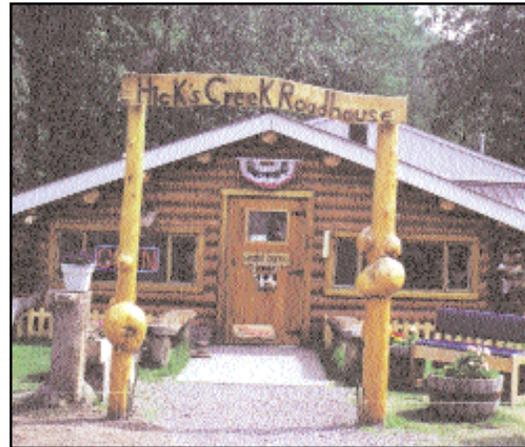


Photo courtesy of LDN

Historic Hicks Creek Roadhouse

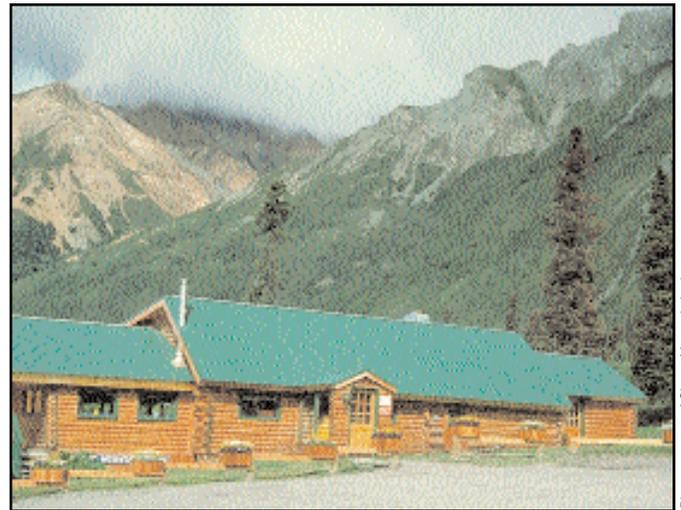


Photo courtesy of Sheep Mountain Lodge

Sheep Mountain Lodge

The Glenn Highway's lodges were largely constructed as part of the highway-building project in the late 1940's, providing lodging and meals to travelers crossing a virtually uninhabited landscape.

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



highway was completed, Meekins Roadhouse, Hicks Creek Inn, Sheep Mountain Lodge, Gunsight Mountain Lodge, Long Rifle Lodge, and King Mountain Lodge.

NATURAL QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

Glaciers

A recurring theme on this corridor is glaciers. The compacted snow that forms the glaciers in this area is thousands of years old, and yet, it is continually being renewed. The grinding action of glaciers have forged the landscape within the Glenn Highway corridor, and are responsible for much of the corridor's beauty. From the highway, telltale signs of successive Ice Ages and periods of melting, erosion, and sediment dumping are visible. The Eklutna Glacier supplies water to Eklutna Lake, which is the Municipality of Anchorage's primary water source. The glacier is accessible by boat or by hiking on one of the trails that begin at Eklutna Lake. The Knik Glacier is visible from the Glenn Highway but is only accessible by boat on the Knik River off of the Old Glenn Highway. The Matanuska Glacier, 24 miles long and 3 miles wide, which is visible and accessible from the highway, continues to play a dynamic role in this landscape. At the end of the Byway corridor the Nelchina Glacier is visible, and could be the focus of an interpretive rest area, should the location of the rest area be at a mile 131 location currently under consideration.

Sculpted by Water and Wind

Water, especially following the melting of successive glaciers, has been a powerful force in shaping the landscape. One episode of unusual warming and rapid erosion in the Tertiary era moved an accumulation of 5,000 vertical feet of sediments to create Anthracite Ridge near current-day Sutton. The glacier-fed Matanuska River continues to relocate tons of rich silts to the Matanuska Valley and Upper Cook Inlet, where the rich alluvial plain supports the agricultural community of Palmer.

Winds also continue to shape the corridor's landscape. The winter wind that roars down the valley from the Matanuska Glacier flows along the river channel and when it reaches sufficient speed, it picks up silt that replenishes the rich farmland soils from the dry parts of the riverbed. In the summer, strong winds blow off the Knik Glacier at the other end of the Matanuska Valley, carrying and redepositing silt from this glacial river. This silt becomes suspended, traveling many miles on air currents. Drifts of silt can often be seen the leeward side of trees after such wind storms.

Geologic Forces

The undulating terrain and steep rock outcroppings along the Glenn Highway corridor speak of a very dynamic and complex natural setting. The area has a tremendously complex geology that has frustrated road builders past and present that helps to create the spectacular views that are enjoyed along the Byway. Because of the variety of natural and geologic forces that can be seen in action, the area is a geologist's dream and the location of many educational field trips. The vast array of minerals, fossils, faults, and geologic formations make the corridor an outdoor classroom for people of all ages.

The spectacular landforms along the Glenn Highway are a product of fire and ice. Situated on the northern edge of the "Ring of Fire" surrounding the Pacific Ocean, the landscape has been shaped by forces as quick and powerful as earthquakes, and as dramatic as volcanoes. From Anchorage to Gunsight Mountain, the Glenn Highway follows the Border Ranges Fault. This active fault zone, typical of much of Alaska's fragmented geologic history, is where two spectacular mountain ranges of very different origin, character and sediment meet: the Chugach and the Talkeetnas. A thrust of the earth's crust formed many of the Chugach Mountains, and the Talkeetna Mountains were formed primarily by subsidence when one tectonic plate was forced under another plate, creating the mountain range where the two plates meet. This collision created granite formations that are rich in mineral resources, and

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan



that have been mined for decades by various groups. Hatcher Pass, just north of Palmer off the Glenn Highway, is the site of one of Alaska's major hard-rock gold discoveries. Gold mines are still active in the area. Interpretive signs at MP 113 explain the volcanic origins of the Sheep Mountains and the presence of gypsum. Included is an explanation on why Dall sheep are attracted to mineral licks in these mountains.

RECREATIONAL QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

As previously mentioned, the area around the Glenn Highway for all segments provides outstanding hiking opportunities, short or long, strenuous or a leisurely stroll. Between Anchorage and Chugiak, the Glenn Highway is paralleled by a paved pathway that is excellent for biking, roller-blading, and for cross-country skiing in the winter. Several nearby lakes and rivers provide opportunities for fishing and rafting. Several flight-seeing companies operating out of Merrill Field in Anchorage offer a wide variety of flight services, from a flight seeing tour, to back country skiing, to fly-in fishing excursions. This segment also provides access to the Eagle River Nature Center and its many miles of trails accessing Chugach State Park. The nature center provides excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and various nature program seminars and programs for children are presented on a regular basis.

The musk ox farm outside Palmer provides a different kind of diversion on the corridor. People can come face to face with the mighty musk ox in a controlled pastoral setting with the backdrop of the Talkeetnas and the Alaska Range.

The opportunities for recreation along the highway from Sutton to the end of the corridor include hiking, biking, rock collecting, fishing, river rafting, trail rides, wildlife viewing, gold panning, guided glacier treks, big and small game hunting, and winter sports such as cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, and snowmachining, and dog mushing, the state sport of Alaska. More experienced adventurers take

The spectacular mountains and landforms along the Glenn Highway are a product of fire—volcanoes along the Pacific Ring of Fire, and ice—the sculpting and earth-moving of many ages of glaciation.



Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

Looking west along the Matanuska River with the Glenn Highway carved into the Talkeetna Mountains

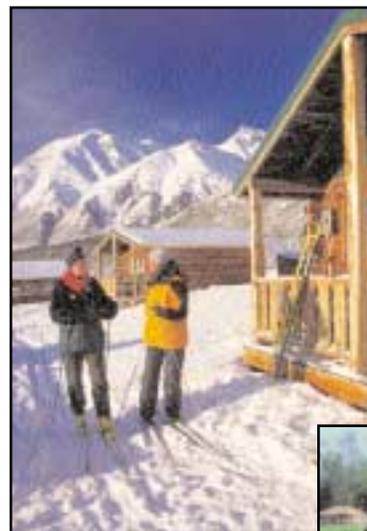


Photo courtesy of Sheep Mountain Lodge

Skiers outside Sheep Mountain Lodge



Photo courtesy of MSVCE

The Musk Ox of the Mat-Su Valley

The Six Qualities of an All American Road



Year-round, the Glenn Highway Corridor offers a diversity of recreational opportunities.

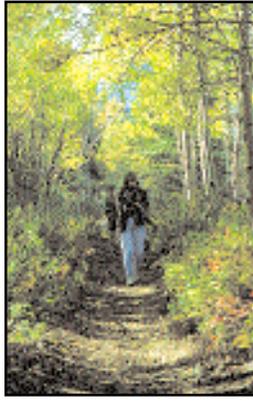


Photo courtesy of LDN



Photo courtesy of LDN



Photo courtesy of ADOOT&PF



Photo courtesy of MSCVB

advantage of backpacking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, and ice climbing. The open plateau/tundra areas at the end of the corridor are a recreation paradise in the winter when the ground is frozen and the mosquitoes and other biting insects of the area are wintering over. Local lodges provide warmth and shelter when the weather turns bad.

In addition to snow sports, the area around Eureka is a jumping off point for off road adventures, photo excursions, or for hunting moose, caribou, and bear. Because of the open skies, with no mountains to obstruct the view, it offers an excellent opportunity for viewing the Northern Lights or constellation spotting. It is also a prime area for watching raptors soaring in flight.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL QUALITIES OF THE GLENN BYWAY

There are archaeological sites along the corridor that are currently being inventoried. For protection of these specific sites, the locations are not advertised.

Anthracite Ridge near Sutton was formed when warmer climate vegetation, including ginkgo trees, were buried here, creating coal resources and easy-to-find fossils that have attracted mining interests and paleobotanists. Dinosaur fossils, like "Lizzie" the Hadrasaur, have been found near Gunsight Mountain.



Photo courtesy of Eklutna Village

People have moved through the Glenn Highway's corridor for hundreds of years, leaving artifacts and opportunities for interpretation, however the archeology of the corridor is just beginning to be inventoried. One known site of historic human habitation is Eklutna, pictured above.





Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

“One morning you awake to green leaves and new life sprouting. The sunlight increases, and there is much to do and little time for sleep. Flowers fill the forest and grass needs to be cut. Mother moose and babies graze in the marsh and fields. Summer residents return with new stories. Tourists roll in and histories are exchanged about our area and lifestyle. It is then that I realize how special we are and how precious our lifestyle is.”

JUDITH K. NIX, KING MOUNTAIN LODGE OWNER
 Year-round Glenn Highway Corridor Resident and Partnership Board Member

The Six Qualities of an All American Road

