

## 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 lode 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 nonessential 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.

## For More Information

Alaska State Parks  
Mat-Su/Copper Basin Area Office  
7278 E. Bogard Road  
Wasilla, AK 99654

(907)745-3975

[www.alaskastateparks.org](http://www.alaskastateparks.org)



# 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 300,000 mountainous acres, historic sites, and diverse wildlife, Hatcher Pass is one of Alaska's favorite backcountry getaways.

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, biking, berry picking, paragliding, and horseback riding will thrill you in the summer. Skiing (cross-country and downhill), snowboarding, sledging, snowshoeing, and snowmachining will chill you in the winter. Beautiful alpine scenery can be appreciated any time of the year.

Miners may have grabbed most of the gold, but they left the best parts behind. So, lace up your boots, and top off the rig, because the memories will be priceless.



Independence Mine  
Photo courtesy of Dan Kehlenbach



## Huts

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.



Ridge above Summit Lake  
Photo courtesy of Nicole Acevedo

## Hiking

Hatcher Pass has plenty to offer those making their way by foot. The scenic walk around Summit Lake is short and easy. Gold Mint Trail is moderate and popular, but those looking for a challenge can hike the Reed Lakes Trail.

See the map inside this brochure for descriptions of some popular trails. You can find more detailed information at [www.alaskastatetrails.org](http://www.alaskastatetrails.org).



Little Susitna River  
Photo courtesy of Nicole Acevedo

## 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 RVs, trailers and large vehicles. The drive can be slow, but the views are worth it. The road ends at mile 71.2 on the Parks Highway near Willow.

Backcountry ridge walk in Hatcher Pass EMA  
Photo courtesy of Matthew Johnson



Hatcher Pass East Management Area  
Background photo courtesy of Nicole Acevedo



Alaska State Parks

## 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.

Although the mine shut its doors in 1951, there's still a bit of gold left. Prospectors are allowed to recreationally pan for gold within the park—provided it's with shovels only.

### Summit Lake State Recreation Site

Summit Lake State Recreation Site (SRS) is located at mile 19.3 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.

## Wildlife

Hatcher Pass's alpine landscapes may seem devoid of wildlife because most alpine inhabitants are camouflage experts. However, if you stand still, listen, and watch carefully, you may detect movement. Moose, caribou, sheep, black and brown bears, wolf, wolverine, coyote, beaver, fox, marten, mink, hare, Arctic ground squirrels, collared pikas, hoary marmots, and lynx can all be found in the area.

Look up and you may see a bird of prey soaring above you, scanning the area for its next meal. Ptarmigan, spruce grouse, songbirds, and small mammals all live here and are on their menu. Some birds, such as Lapland longspurs, whimbrels, and long-tailed jaegers, occasionally shortcut their normal migration and nest in this area. Keep your binoculars and camera close!



Porcupine  
Photo courtesy of Bill Evans



Brown Bear  
Photo courtesy of Rolland Martin



Ground Squirrel  
Photo courtesy of Steve Neel



Bald Eagle  
Photo courtesy of Bill Evans



Hoary Marmot  
Photo courtesy of Gina Smith



Lynx  
Photo courtesy of Gina Smith



Collared Pika  
Photo courtesy of Be Waits  
[www.denali-guidebook.com](http://www.denali-guidebook.com)



Northern Harrier  
Photo courtesy of Christopher Taylor

## 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 1960s and 1970s, Anchorage residents would flock to the old Fishhook Inn to use the rope tow. Today, the Hatcher Pass area is one of the best cross-country skiing destinations in the state. Independence Mine SHP and Archangel Road are regularly groomed and popular with skiers. Ample slopes attract snowboarders and downhill skiers as well.



Left—1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Edith Spitzer, Army Nurse, skiing at Independence Mine in 1943. Notice Boomtown in the background.  
Photo courtesy of ALSAP/Sanferd Spitzer.

Below—Skiing Hatcher Pass  
Photo courtesy of Dan Joling and the Mat-Su Borough



Little Susitna



Snowmachiner  
Photo courtesy of Mike Morris



Scientists and park employees evaluating snow pack for avalanche safety

## Snowmachining

More into horsepower than ski wax? Hatcher Pass 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.

The entire length of Archangel Road, and Summit Lake SRS to the Gold Mint parking lot, are open to snowmachining.

## 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 snowfalls and windstorms, but they can happen anytime snow is on the slopes. Take a class to learn the warning signs, techniques, and gear needed to protect yourself. Check local avalanche centers for updates.

Photo of Independence Mine and Summit Lake  
courtesy of Steve Neel

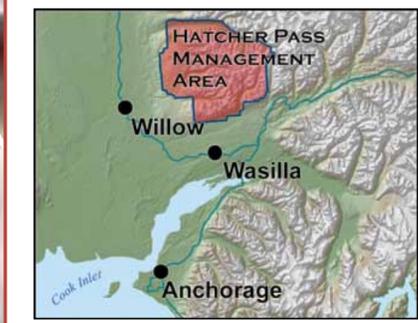
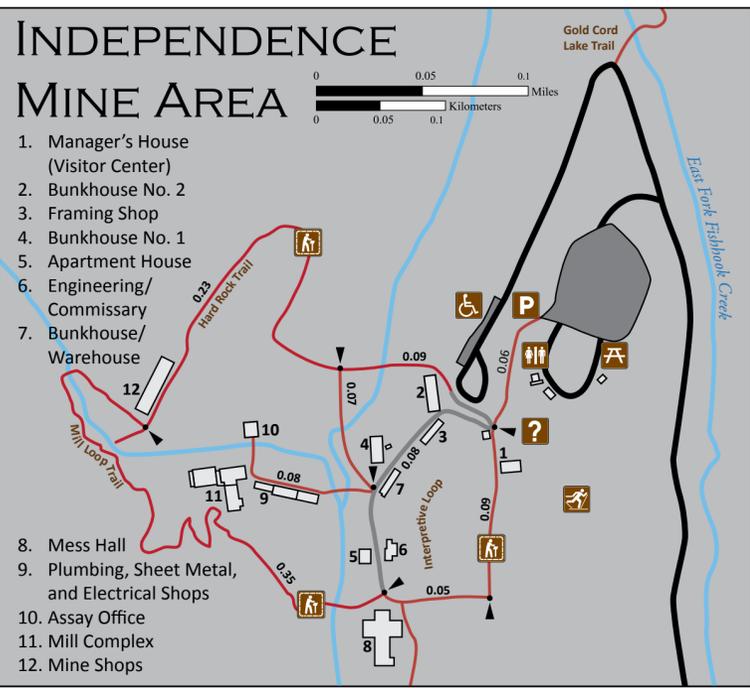
Alpenglow on mountains at Hatcher Pass  
Photo courtesy of Andre Kaeppele

# INDEPENDENCE MINE AREA



1. Manager's House (Visitor Center)
2. Bunkhouse No. 2
3. Framing Shop
4. Bunkhouse No. 1
5. Apartment House
6. Engineering/Commissary
7. Bunkhouse/Warehouse

8. Mess Hall
9. Plumbing, Sheet Metal, and Electrical Shops
10. Assay Office
11. Mill Complex
12. Mine Shops



### Legend

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

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

### 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.



Hut at Mint Glacier  
Photo courtesy of Cecil Sanders

### Trail Descriptions

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

#### Gold Mint Trail 1

**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 2

**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 3

**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 4

**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.



Blueberry picking  
Photo courtesy of Danielle Waagar



Small alpine tarn above Summit Lake along the April Bowl Trail  
Photo courtesy of Nicole Acevedo



Falls at Reed Lakes



Miner's cabin



Mint Glacier  
Photo courtesy of Gordon Sanders



Reed Lakes

