

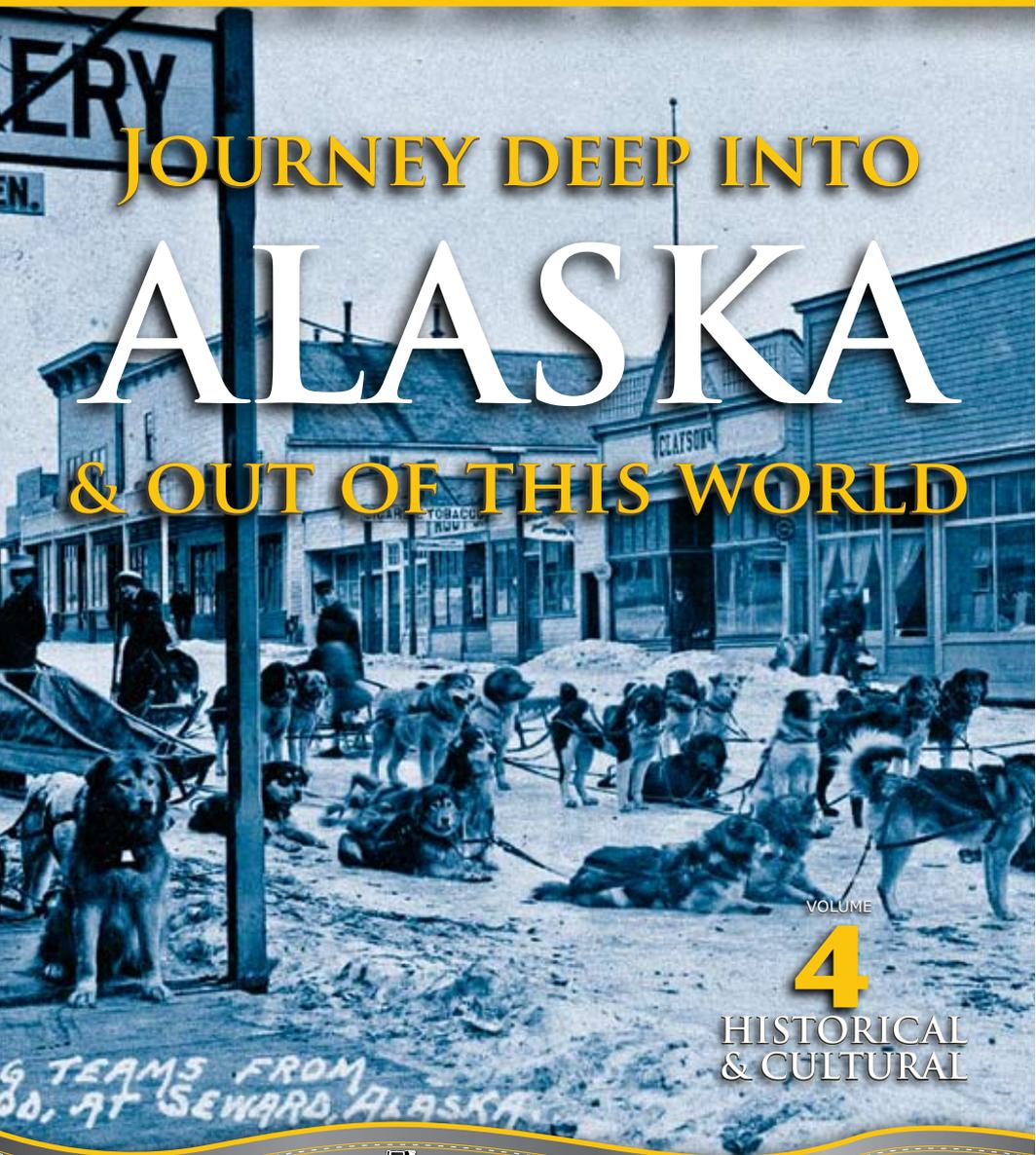
# THE SEWARD HIGHWAY

## ROAD GUIDE

JOURNEY DEEP INTO

# ALASKA

& OUT OF THIS WORLD



VOLUME

# 4

HISTORICAL  
& CULTURAL

6 TEAMS FROM  
D.D. AT SEWARD, ALASKA



# WELCOME TO THE SEWARD HIGHWAY

## ALASKA'S ALL AMERICAN ROAD & SCENIC BYWAY

*The Seward Highway is alive with spectacular Alaskan scenery, wildlife, history, and recreational opportunities.*

*Linking Anchorage and Seward, the highway takes travelers on a 127-mile journey alongside rivers, lakes and a glacial fjord, through rainforests and snowcapped mountain passes, past glaciers and prime wildlife viewing areas, and into stunning beauty all along the way.*

## JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

*This route is thousands of years old. First carved by glaciers, the path to Resurrection Bay evolved into a major transportation route for Native hunters and traders, explorers and gold miners, and finally, rails and pavement. Many people and historic events helped shape this scenic byway, and you'll see the evidence all along the way.*



Resurrection Bay and Seward, Alaska, 1913-1949 Alaska Museum at Rasmuson Center. AMRC-b88-52-31  
Cover Photo Credit: Express dog teams from the Iditarod at Seward, Alaska 1917. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center AMRC-b81-19-2

## HISTORIC EVENTS

### FIRE & ICE

Tens of millions of years ago, tectonic forces brought land masses north and pushed mountains into the sky. But it's not over yet. Ocean and continental plates are still colliding, occasionally shaking up the State and breathing life into volcanoes you can see on the horizon today.

Carving out a route for the Seward Highway took time. A few million years of glacial action did the trick, as massive glaciers scoured the land during at least five ice ages. You can see evidence of the icy action as you drive. Look for U-shaped valleys — the telltale signature of glacial action — and look for the glaciers themselves, still carving away.

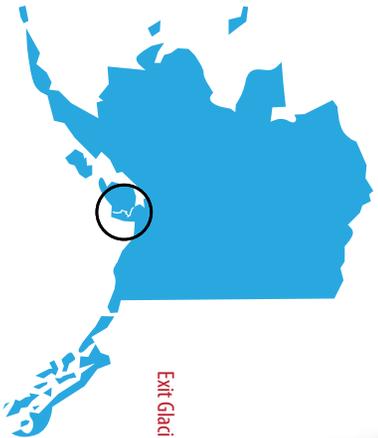
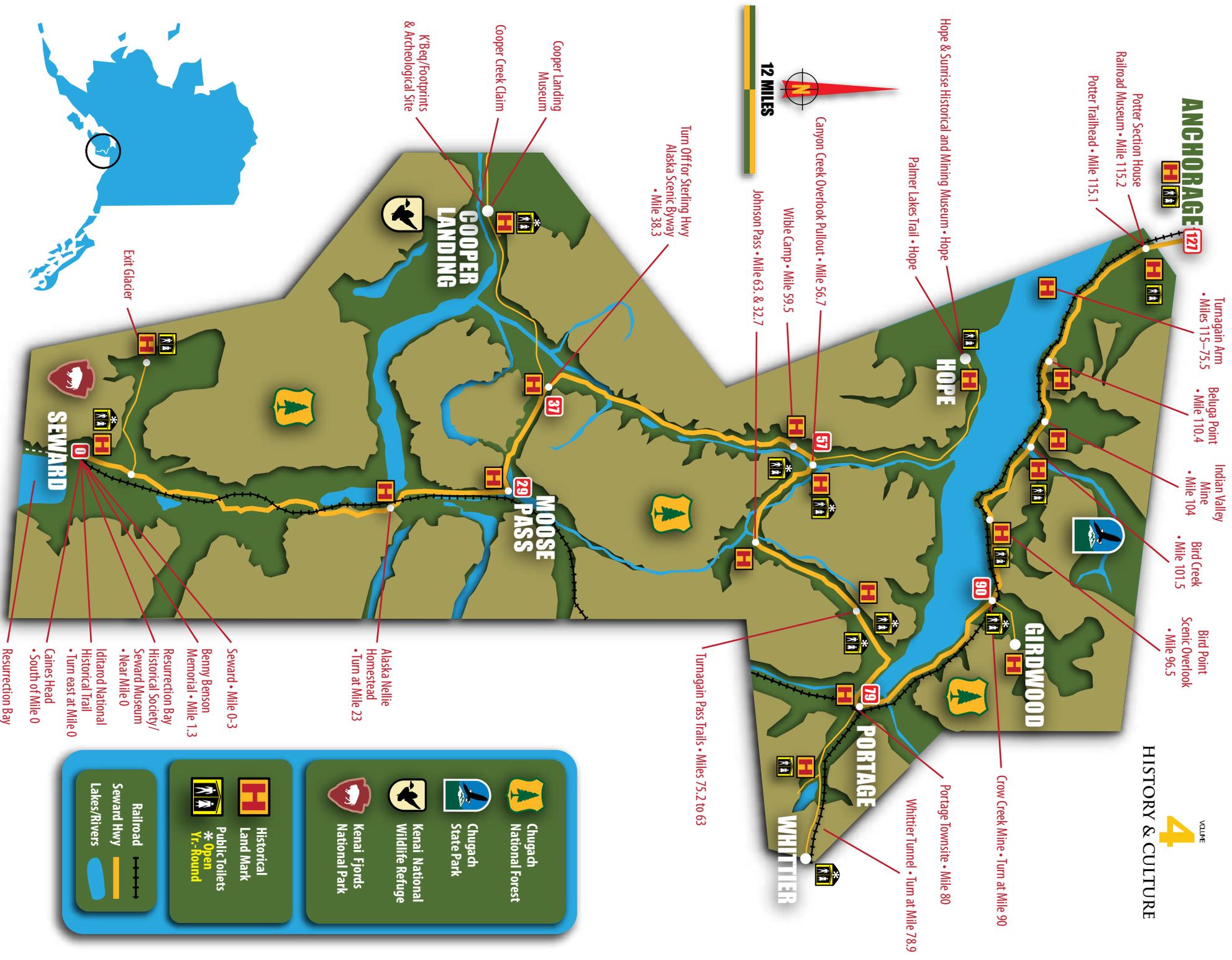
### EARLY PEOPLES

As the last ice age subsided, it did not take long for humans to discover the rich resources of the region. People of the Paleo-Arctic culture, relatives of the Bering Land Bridge migrants from Russia, arrived to the Kenai Peninsula about 8000-7000 B.C. These early people inhabited river areas and likely hunted caribou and bear. About the same time, Ocean Bay people came to the outer coasts, taking advantage of the ocean's bounty.

Over time, other groups arrived in the area by both land and sea. The Marine Kachemak people lived along the deep fjords and ocean waters. Riverine Kachemak people thrived on the region's salmon-rich rivers and lakes, hunted land mammals and traded with other groups, such as the ocean-faring Sugpiaq, a Pacific Eskimo group also known as Chugach, or the Chugach Alutiiq. The Dena'ina people likely migrated overland from Alaska's interior and built villages at the confluence of salmon-rich rivers like the Russian and Kenai Rivers. The Dena'ina fished the rivers, hunted inland, and may have even used their boat-building skills to turn newly acquired animal skins into vessels to float themselves home, down river.



Native Family after the Hunt, 1910. Elsie Blue Collection, Seward Community Library SCL-15-84

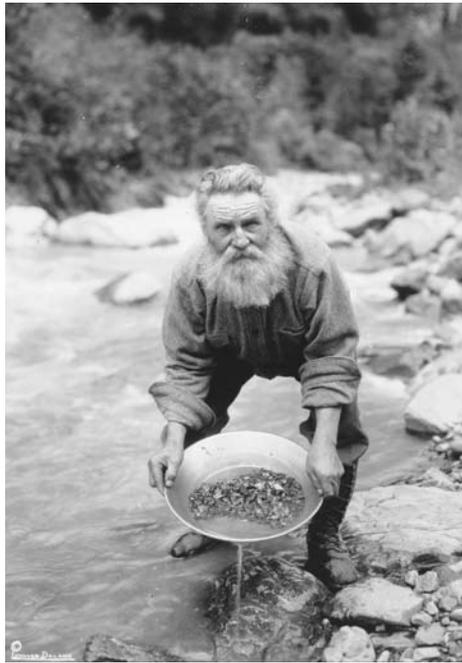


## GOLD

The fiery forces that birthed the region's topography also left behind a precious gift buried in the rock. Gold was discovered in the Turnagain Arm region in 1890. Three years later, miners began staking claims in Resurrection, Bear, and then Sixmile creeks.

By 1896, fortune seekers flocked to the region by the thousands. The rush was on. The new communities of Sunrise, Hope and Girdwood all sprang to life. In fact, in early 1897 with 10,000 people living in Sunrise it became for a brief period the largest city in Alaska.

That didn't last long. By 1898 most of the miners had moved on to the Klondike Gold Rush. By 1906 Sunrise claims had faded into oblivion. Hope and Girdwood held on. Today both communities are popular recreation sites — and Hope is considered the best-preserved gold rush community in Southcentral Alaska.



"Two-Step" Jake Hirsch panning for gold. Skinner Foundation. Photographs, Alaska Steamship Company, 1890s-1940s. Alaska State Library - Historical Collections, ASL-P44-03-015

## 1964 EARTHQUAKE

On March 27, 1964, at 5:36 p.m., the second strongest earthquake ever recorded on the planet struck Alaska. With a magnitude of 9.2, the earth shook for nearly four minutes. Pavement cracked. Steel rails bent. Homes slid into the sea. And large portions of land dropped several feet. Then came the tsunamis.

The effects to this region were devastating. Damage to the railroad alone was estimated at \$30 million (1964 dollars). Seward was virtually destroyed when a tsunami caused by the quake shook loose oil from storage tanks that set the town on fire. Some highway communities like Kern, Portage and Sunrise, never recovered.

*View of large crack in Seward Highway in Southcentral Alaska caused by 1964 Earthquake. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, AMRC. Ward W. Wells Collection, AMRC-wws-4176-95.*



## POINTS OF INTEREST

### ANCHORAGE • Mile 127

Anchorage is very young, geologically speaking. During the last of many ice ages, glaciers retreating back down Turnagain and Knik Arms both dropped silt and debris here, forming a giant glacial outwash plain upon which Anchorage was built.

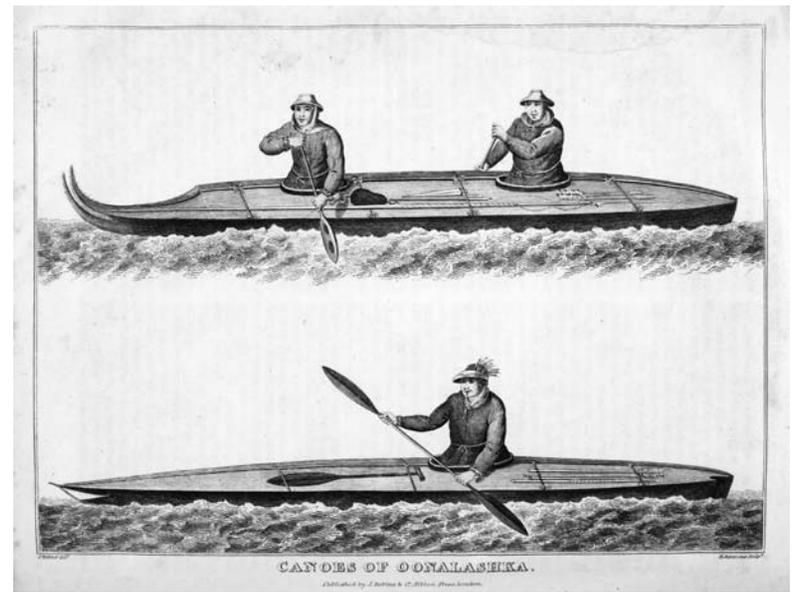
Humans first came to the area about 5000 B.C. Captain James Cook "discovered" the inlet in 1778 on his quest to locate the Northwest Passage. Prospectors passed through on their way to various gold rushes in the late 1800s. Then in 1912, the Alaska Railroad finally established a construction camp here and put Anchorage on the map. A tent city sprang up and grew rapidly. Over the years, air transportation, military build-up and North Slope oil discoveries all helped the city prosper.



Captain James Cook, Alaska State Library - Historical Collections ASL-Cook-James-I

### ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE CENTER • Anchorage

Explore Alaska's many different Native cultures at this museum and cultural center. You'll meet Alaska Natives from all over the state, witness authentic storytelling and dance performances, and walk through replicas of various traditional dwellings. [www.alaskanative.net](http://www.alaskanative.net)



Canoes of Oonalashka, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks, A0867-16

## ANCHORAGE MUSEUM AT RASMUSON CENTER

• Anchorage

One of the most popular attractions in the state, the museum features exhibits and programs on the art, history and cultures of Alaska. If you're traveling with children, there's plenty here for them, too. [www.anchoragemuseum.org](http://www.anchoragemuseum.org)

## TURNAGAIN ARM • Miles 115 – 75.5

In 1778, explorer Captain James Cook was up here searching for the fabled Northwest Passage. When shallow water forced him to turn around — yet again — he dubbed the body of water “Turnagain River.” The name was later corrected to Turnagain Arm (of Cook Inlet).

## POTTER SECTION HOUSE RAILROAD MUSEUM • Mile 115.2

Railroad crews lodged here during construction in the early 1900s. Historic displays and interpretive signs tell the story...as does the huge rotary snowplow permanently parked in back.

## POTTER TRAILHEAD • Mile 115.2

This trail follows the historic Johnson Trail, also known as Turnagain Arm Trail, along the arm to the south. It was used by dog mushers as an alternative to the windy and avalanche-prone Crow Pass to the Eagle River portion of the Historic Iditarod Trail.

## BELUGA POINT • Mile 110.4

Archeological finds here indicate that early Native Alaskans used this area as a campsite, or as a lookout, for incoming beluga whales. It's still a great spot to watch whales...and perhaps the evening sun setting behind volcanoes on the horizon.

## INDIAN VALLEY MINE • Mile 104

Founded in 1910, Indian Valley Mine was one of the few gold mines on the north side of Turnagain Arm. The 100-year old cabin and assay building (now a gift shop and small museum) are among the oldest structures in the area and are listed as a National Historic Site.

## BIRD CREEK • Mile 101.5

In 1897, a handful of miners staked claims here. Mining was a bust, but the railroad kept the settlement alive. Starting in 1909, a sawmill employed 35 workers to extend the tracks west from Kern Creek, southeast of Girdwood.

## BIRD POINT SCENIC OVERLOOK • Mile 96.5

A great spot to learn about the area's natural history, this large day-use site features multiple interpretive signs and access to a 12-mile paved bike trail (with more signs along the way).

## GIRDWOOD • Turn at Mile 90

Originally named “Glacier City,” gold put this community on the map after James E. Girdwood staked his claim at Crow Creek in 1896. There were several gold mines in the area, which was also bolstered by the construction of the railroad in 1915.

Mining continued in the area into the late 1930s. A presidential order closing mines nearly turned Girdwood into a ghost town. But in 1949, bolstered by the construction of the Seward Highway, the community came back to life.

Then in 1954, a group of folks realized they were sitting on a gold mine of a different sort — and created a ski area on Mt. Alyeska in 1960. These slopes ultimately became a training ground for several Olympic athletes, including gold medalist Tommy Moe.

## CROW CREEK MINE • Girdwood

Established in 1896, Crow Creek Mine produced an estimated 700 ounces a month in its heyday. It was one of the most successful hydraulic placer gold mines in the region. Today you can see artifacts and try gold panning yourself.



Looking across Turnagain Arm from mile 88. Alaska Engineering Commission Collection, 1917. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. AMRC-aec-115

## PORTAGE/WHITTIER

### PORTAGE TOWN SITE • Mile 80

Virtually all that's left of this community is a half-submerged building, a rusty truck and a forest of ghosts. The 1964 Earthquake not only shook apart the town, it dropped the land by 10 feet. The high tide flooded the community and submerged tree roots in salt water, killing and preserving the trees, known as a ‘Ghost Forest’.

### PORTAGE GLACIER • Portage

This massive river of ice helped carve out Portage Valley (note its U-shape) and create the fjord that is now Turnagain Arm. It also enabled Dena'ina Indians, Chugach Eskimos, and Russian fur traders to portage over the mountains to Prince William Sound. Today Portage Glacier has receded out of sight, so you'll need to take the boat tour to see it. Stop at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center for details — and lots more about the power of ice and the natural and human history of the land.

### WHITTIER TUNNEL • Whittier

The tunnel and the town of Whittier were originally built during World War II by the U.S. Army as a back-up supply port, in case Seward fell under attack. In 2000, the 2.6-mile long tunnel was reconstructed to allow both rail and vehicle traffic through. Toll is charged. [www.dot.state.ak.us/creg/whittiertunnel/index.shtml](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/creg/whittiertunnel/index.shtml) The Prince William Sound Museum provides interpretive exhibits about the Native people of Prince William Sound and Alaska's role in World War II.

## TURNAGAIN PASS TRAILS • Miles 75.2 to 63

Prospectors traveling through Turnagain Pass created trails on either side of the present day highway, following Granite and Ingram creeks. Both routes connected to the original Iditarod Trail, a series of winter trails from Seward to Nome that gave prospectors over-land access to the gold fields of the mining districts of the Interior.



*Genuine Alaskan Prospector from the 1920's, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, John Urban Collection AMRC-b64-1-842*

## JOHNSON PASS • Mile 63.7 & 32.7

Now a popular hiking and mountain biking trail, it was first blazed by prospectors in the 1890s. It later became a wagon road used by merchants and miners, then widened in the late 1900s and used as a thoroughfare in the 1930s.

## CANYON CREEK OVERLOOK PULLOUT • Mile 56.7

Stop here to enjoy views of the river valley, read interpretive panels and ponder the gold in "them thar streams." Alexander King first discovered gold in the area in 1890...triggering the Turnagain Arm gold rush. Many miners camped here at "The Forks," the confluence of Canyon and Sixmile creeks, before prospecting up either stream.

## HOPE/SUNRISE • Turn at Mile 56.7

Alexander King discovered gold here in 1890. After initial efforts proved highly successful, fortune seekers flooded into the area by the thousands. The industry boomed. Communities sprang to life. And towns grew to include hotels, stores, post offices and more. Sunrise took its name after the "multiple" sunrises it experienced as the morning sun poked in and out from behind the mountains. Hope found its name when miners decided to name the town after the next person to walk off the boat. That was 17-year-old prospector Percy Hope.



*Sunrise, Alaska. View of town looking out toward Turnagain Arm, 1905. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, AMRC-b97-6-3*

After two rushes came and went, populations dwindled and only Hope survived. Today Hope is considered the best-preserved gold rush community in the region. Many historic buildings are still in use, including the community's social hall, built in 1902. A few miners still work claims in the area but the town is more of a recreational hub for hiking, biking and recreational gold panning.

## HOPE & SUNRISE HISTORICAL AND MINING MUSEUM • Hope

Here you can relive the gold rush days, with original mining structures, a restored bunkhouse and photographs and remnants of early pioneer living. Restored buildings from the Bruhn Ray Mine Camp (originally located near Canyon Creek) are also on display.

## PALMER LAKES TRAIL • Hope

George Palmer first discovered gold on the banks of Palmer Creek in 1894. A hike up to the lakes will reveal evidence of the Lucky Strike and Hirshey mines, as well as the Swetmann camp.

## WIBLE CAMP • Mile 59.4

Here at the pullout you can read gold rush interpretive signs and see evidence of the camp on the hillside east of Canyon Creek. A strip of alder bush marks where miners dug a ditch for hydraulic mining.

## COOPER LANDING • Turn at Mile 37.7

Located 6 miles down the Sterling Highway, Cooper Landing has a rich Native and pioneer history. Early riverine cultures took advantage of the abundant salmon resources, lived in subterranean houses and devised underground refrigeration systems. After Joseph Cooper found gold here, prospectors flooded into the region. When the gold dried up, many folks stayed and turned to guiding, trapping and subsistence to keep the town alive.



*Cooper's Landing Store and bus bound for Seward. Skinner Foundation Photographs, Alaska Steamship Company, Alaska State Library – Historical Collections ASL-P44-06-235*

## COOPER LANDING MUSEUM • Cooper Landing

This National Historic Site is located along the Sterling Highway at milepost 48.4. The museum highlights the area's mining and pioneer history. There are four historic buildings on the site, including a 1920s cabin and the old Cooper Landing post office. It's also a great spot to enjoy a picnic by the river.

## COOPER CREEK CLAIM • Cooper Landing

An engineer from the Russian American Company found gold in the area in 1850, making it one of the earliest gold discoveries in Alaska. It wasn't until the 1880s that things started to heat up, after Joseph Cooper found gold here in 1884.

## K'BEQ/FOOTPRINTS & ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

### • Cooper Landing

This archeological site and interpretive center was established by the Kenaitze Tribe and Chugach National Forest. On a short guided tour, visitors can view a Dena'ina house pit and cold storage pits along a wheelchair accessible boardwalk. "Footprints" is a self-guided nature trail. Located across from Russian River Campground.

## TERN LAKE • Mile 37 (Sterling Highway Jct.)

This picturesque lake is courtesy of ancient glaciers that gouged out a depression and left behind a moraine to plug it up. This is a favorite stop for birders and photographers and features an accessible viewing platform.

## MOOSE PASS • Mile 29

Moose Pass has served as transportation crossroads for a hundred years. The earliest settlers arrived here by dogsled in 1909, the year before the Historic Iditarod Trail blazed through, and the site became a key outfitting post for miners headed north with supplies (or south with gold). Entrepreneurs set up a roadhouse and sawmills that served settlers, miners and ultimately the railroad (which set up a construction camp here in 1912).



*Moose Pass Highway Mile 33 1940, Sylvia Sexton Collection, Seward Community Library; SCL-1-1506*

Here you'll find a replica of the 1927 waterwheel that first brought electricity to the community. Leora Estes Roycroft established the town's first post office and school in 1928 before opening the grocery.

## ALASKA NELLIE HOMESTEAD • Turn at Mile 23

She was a sure shot, a quick wit, and a legend on the Kenai Peninsula. Nellie Neal Lawing arrived in Alaska in 1915 and carved out a life as a roadhouse operator, camp cook and big-game hunter and guide. She regaled her guests with stories and turned her roadhouse into a museum for her many trophies. Her homestead is on the National Register of Historic Places. The homestead is no longer open to the public.



*Alaska Nellie at her cabin 1941-1945, Arthur O. Trosvik Collection. University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library, Archives & Special Collections, UAA-HMC-0503*

## EXIT GLACIER • Turn at Mile 3.5

An eight mile paved road leads to the only foot accessible entry to Kenai Fjords National Park. As you near the visitor center, note the signs marking the position of Exit Glacier by year. It wasn't long ago that the road and entire region was under ice. A short, paved, trail takes you from the visitor center along an interpretive path and up to the face of the glacier still shaping the landscape today.



*Aerial of Seward and vicinity, 1940's. Hans and Margaret Hafemeister Collection University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library, Archives & Special Collections, HMC -0126*

## SEWARD

### • Mile 3-0

Seward has played an important role in the region's history for thousands of years. The area was once a crossroads for the Unegkurmiut Eskimo and provided rich resources of both land and sea. Russian settlers took refuge from the stormy seas, established shipyards and built boats here. The town was founded in 1903 when railroad surveyors chose Seward as the ice-free ocean terminal for a private rail line, which later became the Alaska Railroad.

In 1910, the Iditarod Trail system was built, providing a winter dogsled route through the Kenai Mountains/Turnagain Arm Corridor to Alaska's interior gold fields.

During World War II, the seaside town became a critical supply port for the military — and Fort McGilvray was constructed at Caines Head to protect it. After the war, Seward continued to prosper as a cargo and fishing port.

Then tragedy struck. The 1964 Earthquake caused fires and triggered a tidal wave that destroyed much of the town. The Harbor and railroad terminal had to be rebuilt. To get a sense of the magnitude of this event, watch the 'Seward is Burning' slide show at the public library.



## BENNY BENSON MEMORIAL

### • Mile 1.3

Seventh grader Benny Benson, originally from the village of Chignik, designed Alaska's state flag in 1926. In his own words, "The blue field is for the Alaska sky and the forget-me-not, an Alaska flower. The North Star is for the future state of Alaska, the most northerly of the Union. The Great Bear — symbolizing strength."

*Benny Benson holding the Alaska State Flag at the Jesse Lee Home, Seward, Alaska. Alaska State Library, Historical Collections ASL-P01-1921*



*Engraving of William H. Seward, who negotiated the Alaska Purchase in 1867. Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection. Alaska State Library — Historical Collections ASL-P20-023*

## RESURRECTION BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SEWARD MUSEUM

### • Near Mile 0

Inside this museum you'll discover the fascinating history of Seward. From a fine collection of Native baskets and ivory carvings to gold rush artifacts and memorabilia, it's all here. In the summer, watch for special showings of "The History of Seward" and "The History of the Iditarod Trail."

## RESURRECTION BAY • Mile 0

Glaciers carved out this deep fjord thousands of years ago. Early cultures soon thrived on the rich resources of the sea. On Easter Sunday 1792, Alexander Baranov sailed into the bay trying to get out of a storm. He found shelter here and dubbed it Resurrection Bay. Baranov established a shipbuilding yard here and constructed the schooner Phoenix.

## IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL • Turn east at Mile 0

Over time, this 2,300-mile trail system has taken many different people from this spot to Interior villages like Iditarod and all the way to Nome on Alaska's west coast. The first to forge the path as a trading and transportation route were Native Dena'ina Indians and the Inupiat and Yupik Eskimos. With the discovery of gold in the late 1800s, miners, settlers and mail carriers took to the trail on their dog teams. Today, "The Iditarod" is known by most as a dog mushing race, following the last 1,150 miles of the route from Anchorage to Nome.

## CAINES HEAD • South of Mile 0

In 1942, U.S. soldiers built and stood watch at Fort McGilvray, strategically positioned at Caines Head to protect the port of Seward — a critical supply line for the war effort (and Alaskans). The army positioned about 500 soldiers here and built other outposts around the bay. Today, visitors can reach the abandoned fort by boat or 6.5-mile hiking trail. Bring your flashlight to explore the fort. [www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/caineshd.htm](http://www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/caineshd.htm)



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### EMERGENCY

Alaska State Troopers: 911 or (907) 269-5511

### ROAD CONDITIONS

Call 511 or visit <http://511.alaska.gov>

### LOCAL VISITOR CENTERS

Anchorage CVB 907-276-4118 [www.anchorage.net](http://www.anchorage.net)

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center 907-783-2326

[www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/chugach\\_pages/bbvc/bbvc.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/chugach_pages/bbvc/bbvc.htm)

Girdwood Chamber of Commerce [www.girdwoodchamber.com](http://www.girdwoodchamber.com)

Whittier Chamber of Commerce [www.whittieralaskachamber.org/](http://www.whittieralaskachamber.org/)

Hope Chamber of Commerce [www.advenalaska.com/hope/](http://www.advenalaska.com/hope/)

Cooper Landing Chamber & CVB 907-595-8888 [www.cooperlandingchamber.com](http://www.cooperlandingchamber.com)

Moose Pass Chamber & CVB 907-288-3111 [www.moosepassalaska.com](http://www.moosepassalaska.com)

Seward Chamber of Commerce, CVB 907-224-8051 [www.seward.com](http://www.seward.com)

### RECREATION INFORMATION

Alaska Department of Fish & Game: (907) 465-4100 [www.adfg.state.ak.us](http://www.adfg.state.ak.us)

Alaska Public Lands Information Center (Anchorage): (907) 271-2737

Cooper National Forest: (907) 743-9500

Chugach State Park: (907) 269-8400

Public Information Center (Anchorage): (907) 269-8400

US Forest Service: (907) 743-9500 U.S. Forest Service

USDA Forest Service Glacier Ranger District: Girdwood (907) 783-3242

USDA Forest Service Seward Ranger District: Seward (907) 224-3374



### WEATHER CONDITIONS

Alaska Weather Information: 1-800-472-0391 or (907) 266-5145

Avalanche Information Center: [www.cnfaic.org](http://www.cnfaic.org)

National Weather Service: [www.arh.noaa.gov](http://www.arh.noaa.gov)



### OTHER SEWARD HIGHWAY GUIDES INCLUDE:

Volume 1: Scenic Wonders

Volume 2: Communities

Volume 3: Recreation

Produced by the Seward Highway All-American Road Partnership.

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