

Denali National Park and Preserve

A Different Kind of Wilderness

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Once again, the *IJW* has ventured into new territory. In previous issues, the *Journal* has featured various countries (such as Finland, Canada, and South Africa), continents (such as Antarctica and South America), and topics (such as wild rivers and monitoring). One issue even had a focus on the state of Alaska in the United States, but this is the first issue concentrated on one place. Denali National Park and Preserve is that place. Whereas one issue of the *IJW* could never communicate all of the information of interest about this place, several articles were developed specifically to provide readers with some understanding of Denali's wilderness character. We suspect that most people coming to the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Alaska in the fall of 2005 know something about the park and the mountain officially called Mt. McKinley, but known by the local name, Denali, to many. We hope these articles increase readers' awareness of some of the park's wilderness characteristics.

At three times the size of Yellowstone National Park, its 6 million acres (2.4 million ha) make it a giant among giants. Our national parks in Alaska include the largest U.S. park, Wrangell-St. Elias, at 13 million acres (5.2 million ha), Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve at over 8 million acres (3.2 million ha), and several parks over 2 million acres (0.8 million ha) (e.g., Katmai, Glacier Bay). It is not its size that distinguishes Denali, however, but the mountain. Among mountains in North America, Denali is

the highest. With increasing numbers of people attempting to summit its 20,320-foot (6,193-m) peak each year during a limited climbing season, the park faces many complex management issues, including human waste, air traffic, safety, and competition for space.

We hope, however, that after reading these articles readers will think about more than the mountain when they hear "Denali." About 500 people make it to the summit of Mt. McKinley each year, and they each have a story to tell. They often dream of this trip for years, and they come from all over the world. There are people who make their living flying these climbers in to a base camp at 7,200 feet (2,195 m), and flying other people in just to look at the many glaciers and mountains in the Alaska Range. These pilots have a unique relationship with the visitors and the park. There are also people who hunt, fish, trap, pick berries, and live in sight of the mountain, and visitors come from around the world to backpack and see the wildlife from buses that carry visitors along the single road that extends nearly 90 miles (145 km) into the park. Schoolchildren in Alaska also have tremendous opportunities to study vegetation and wildlife in the park, and modern technology allows them to share this place with others around the world.

Denali is a special place in this world. Get to know it a little.