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zoom in on america

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ALASKA

Lake Clark Pass near Port Alsworth, Alaska (AP Photo/Mark Thiessen)

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Zoom in on America

GEOGRAPHY OF ALASKA

The name Alaska is derived from the Aleut word “Aleyska,” meaning “great land.” Alaska’s state Motto is “North to the Future”. The state’s capital, Juneau, is located in the southeast region and has a population of 31,275 (2010 Census). The state’s nick name is “The Last Frontier”.

On a list of the 20 highest peaks in the United States, 17 are in Alaska. The highest of them - 20,320 ft. above sea level - which is also the highest peak in North America, is Denali. This Alaska Native name was recently restored by President Obama on the grounds of deep cultural significance. The President’s move ended a long Denali-Mount McKinley naming dispute. Numerous mountain peaks are known by the name of their first European explorers as well as by their much older names in the languages of indigenous tribes who have inhabited the region. In Athabaskan Denali means “The Great One.” The second highest summit both in Canada and the United States is Mount Saint Elias (18,008 feet). It is likely that 18th century European explorers and mapmakers named the mountain after Cape Saint Elias. The local Tlingit language name for the mountain is *Yas’éit’aa Shaa*, meaning “mountain behind Icy Bay”. Third on the list of America’s highest peaks is Mount Foraker (17,400 feet or 5,304 meters), located in the central Alaska Range within the boundaries of Denali National Park. Mount Foraker is named after Joseph B. Foraker, a U.S. Senator from Ohio. In the local language, Mount Foraker’s name is “Menlale,” meaning “Denali’s wife,” a reference to the peak’s closeness to Denali.

Alaska has more than 3,000 rivers. The third longest river in the United States is in this state. It is the Yukon River, which is almost 2,000 miles long. Even more impressive

is the number of lakes - over 3 million lakes. The largest, Lake Iliamna, encompasses over 1,000 square miles.

There are about 100,000 glaciers in Alaska. They range from tiny cirque glaciers to huge valley glaciers. There are more active glaciers and ice fields in Alaska than in the rest of the inhabited world. The largest glacier, the Malaspina, is 850 square miles. Five percent of the state, or 29,000 square miles, is covered by glaciers.

Alaska has 6,640 miles of coastline and, including islands, has 33,904 miles of shoreline.

Alaska has more than 70 potentially active volcanoes, several of which have erupted in recent times. The most violent volcanic eruption of the century took place in 1912 when Novarupta Volcano erupted. The eruption created the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes which is now part of Katmai National Park.

On March 27, 1964, North America’s strongest recorded earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.2, rocked central Alaska. Each year Alaska has approximately 5,000 earthquakes, including 1,000 that measure above 3.5 on the Richter scale. Of the ten strongest earthquakes ever recorded in the world, three have occurred in Alaska.



A bicyclist rides along the Sheep Creek Road bike trail as the first snow of the season continues to fall around Fairbanks, Alaska, on Wednesday morning, September 18, 2013. (AP Photo/Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Eric Engman)

PURCHASE OF ALASKA

The purchase of Alaska in 1867 marked the end of Russian efforts to expand trade and settlements to the Pacific coast of North America, and became an important step in the United States rise as a great power in the Asia-Pacific region. Beginning in 1725, when Russian Czar Peter the Great dispatched Vitus Bering to explore the Alaskan coast, Russia had a keen interest in this region, which was rich in natural resources and lightly inhabited. As the United States expanded westward in the early 1800s, Americans soon found themselves in competition with Russian explorers and traders. St. Petersburg, however, lacked the financial resources to support major settlements or a military presence along the Pacific coast of North America and permanent Russian settlers in Alaska never numbered more than four hundred. Defeat in the Crimean War further reduced Russian interest in this region.

Russia offered to sell Alaska to the United States in 1859, believing the United States would off-set the designs of Russia's greatest rival in the Pacific, Great Britain. The looming U.S. Civil War delayed the sale, but after the war, Secretary of State William Seward quickly took up a renewed Russian offer and on March 30, 1867, agreed to a proposal from Russian Minister in Washington, Edouard de Stoeckl, to purchase Alaska for \$7.2 million. The Sen-

ate approved the treaty of purchase on April 9; President Andrew Johnson signed the treaty on May 28, and Alaska was formally transferred to the United States on October 18, 1867. This purchase ended Russia's presence in North America and ensured U.S. access to the Pacific northern rim.

For three decades after its purchase the United States paid little attention to Alaska, which was governed under military, naval, or Treasury rule or, at times, no visible rule at all. Seeking a way to impose U.S. mining laws, the United States constituted a civil government in 1884. Skeptics had dubbed the purchase of Alaska "Seward's Folly," but the former Secretary of State was vindicated when a major gold deposit was discovered in the Yukon in 1896, and Alaska became the gateway to the Klondike gold fields. The strategic importance of Alaska was finally recognized in World War II. Alaska became a state on January 3, 1959.

*(From the Office of Historian:
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/alaska-purchase>
- U.S. Department of State)*



Members of the Auke Bay clan and hundreds of others greet seven canoes arriving at the Auke Recreation Area beach in Juneau, Alaska, in a Coming Ashore ceremony on Wednesday, June 6, 2012. (Photo AP)

GOLD RUSH

Value of Advice

George Washington Carmack, his wife Kate, a native of the Tagish First Nation people, and other members of her family made a discovery that changed the lives of thousands of Americans at the turn of the 20th century. It happened one day in 1896 when they were fishing for salmon in the Klondike River (on the border of Alaska and Canada in the Yukon territory) and Robert Henderson, a prospector looking for gold in the area, told them: "Go to Rabbit Creek and look for gold there." They acted on the advice and did indeed find gold! Unfortunately for Robert Henderson, by the time he learned about the find, all the creeks rich in gold had already been claimed. Rabbit Creek was later appropriately renamed Bonanza.

A Ton to Carry

When George Carmack's party returned to San Francisco in July 1897, the news of gold exploded and swept the country as fast as was possible at the time. The American economy was in bad shape as the depression of the 1890s had left many without jobs and some in extreme poverty. Hence, the news of gold poured hope into many hearts. Men and women of various occupations began to get ready to head north and search for gold. However, this was no easy or inexpensive venture. Given the harsh

weather conditions in the Yukon territory, the "stampeder" - as the gold seekers were called - had to, by law, have a supply of provisions and equipment including a tent, warm clothes and boots, tools and kitchen utensils, medicines and food that would last them a year in the harsh Arctic conditions. In weight the luggage amounted to about a ton. Staple food included flour, bacon, butter, beans, condensed milk, sugar, tea, coffee, vegetables, salt, corn meal, pepper and mustard. Without these provisions a stampeder faced no chance of surviving, and Canada's Northwest Mounted Police, a unit which held guardianship over the territory, saw to it that the stampeder complied with the regulation. Nevertheless, it was not a rare thing for a gold-seeker to lose all his possessions in the violent rapids of the Klondike River during the last leg of the journey to the gold fields of Dawson.

More Precious Than Gold

Having made their crossing aboard anything that could float all the way from Seattle or San Francisco, the gold-seekers landed in Alaska. One hundred thousand of these stampeder, three quarters of whom were Americans, then made their way on to the gold fields in hope of finding riches. Little did they know about the challenges that 500 miles of Alaskan territory separating them from the gold fields of Dawson had in store for them. Many never com-



Mountains are reflected off Port Valdez in Valdez, Alaska, on Thursday, February 27, 2014. (AP Photo/Mark Thiessen)

pleted the journey. They perished in avalanches, whirlpools and rapids or simply from exhaustion and exposure to the cold. Once they were on the trail from their landing point in Alaska - Skagway or Dyea heading to Dawson, there was no turning back. They needed perseverance and faith, qualities the stampedeers did not lack. Perseverance kept them going up and down the Chilkoot Pass sometimes as many as 40 times to transport their one ton of supplies on their backs. That part of the trail earned itself the name of "the meanest 32 miles in the world." And it was certainly faith that made one woman resuscitate her boyfriend when he was dug out from under an avalanche and declared dead by the rescuers. She kneeled by his body and breathed air into his lungs, and according to on-lookers "suddenly, miraculously, the guy lived." (from the PBS film "Gold Forever")

Different Goals

Not all stampedeers were after gold. Some planned to build what we might call in modern speech "infrastructure;" that is hotels, bars, stores, and other services the gold-seekers

required. There were also engineers and doctors among them. And, there were men of letters and adventurers, like the great author Jack London, who came looking for inspiration for their stories. Unfortunately, there were also con-men and bandits who striped the stampedeers of their possessions or forced them to pay sky-high prices for goods or services that often did not even exist.

True Heroes

There were many heroes of the Klondike gold odyssey, but perhaps some of the greatest were the mail carriers who had to travel hundreds of miles rain or shine to deliver valuable letters and parcels. They risked their lives and overcame unimaginable hardships to uphold the motto of the day "the mail must go on." And go on it did: Ben Atwater, Ben Downing and Percy DeWolfe are just three of the exemplary mail carriers of the period. However, they would have never been able to complete their work, had it not been for their loyal helpers and often only companions on the trail: their sled dogs!

FROM FUR RANDEZVOUS TO IDITAROD

Alaska is a natural location for a winter carnival. Anchorage's **Fur Rendezvous**, or Fur Rondy, as locals call the festival, dates back to the 1930s when the town had only 3,000 inhabitants. The monotony of long winter days was broken when miners and trappers brought their goods to

town to trade. Anchorage resident Vern Johnson came up with the idea to organize a three-day sports tournament at that time. Together with his friends, he organized skiing competitions, hockey, basketball and boxing as well as a children's sled dog race. The accompanying parade



Jim Lanier, of Chugiak, Alaska, drives his team through the blowing snow on the Yukon River outside Ruby, Alaska, on Saturday, March 11, 2006, during the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. (AP Photo/AI Grillo)

and bonfire offered a colorful break from the dull whiteness of snow and drew the whole population of Anchorage out of their homes. To this day the Fur Rendezvous is much anticipated by Alaska residents. The centerpiece of the Festival is the World Championship Sled Dog Race, which gathers sled dogs and mushers not only from across Alaska but from the whole world. The Native Alaskan tradition known as the Blanket Toss was added to the Festival

program in 1950. Other attractions include the running of the reindeer, snow sculpting, snowshoe football, and ice hockey games. Soon after the Festival, in early March, **the Iditarod**, an annual long-distance sled dog race, starts in Anchorage. It takes anywhere between 8 and 15 days for mushers and their dogs to cover the distance of about 1,800 km from Anchorage to Nome, in western Alaska, to complete the race.

MOOSE ON THE ROAD

Alaska's largest city, Anchorage is situated on the edge of the wilderness and in a harsh climate. It has become an attractive destination for wild animals that face food scarcities in their natural environment, especially during the winter.

Moose in particular seem open to exploring city life. The picture of this large animal walking slowly down the street, proudly displaying its antlers, has become a landmark of Anchorage.

It is estimated that more than 1,500 moose spend their winter in Anchorage, showing up in neighborhoods and yards and sometimes even in the downtown area. While in lesser numbers, moose can also be found in the city during other parts of the year.

Moose are attracted to the city mostly by food; they nibble on the branches of trees and bushes in people's yards, as well as Halloween pumpkins and other garden treats.

Moose wander down city streets; in yards, and on trails. They sleep in deep snowbanks and in parking lots. On rare occasions moose are bold enough to enter buildings—including one moose that entered the emergency ward of a hospital through automatic sliding doors.

Not all moose encounters have a happy ending. The presence of moose on streets can cause traffic jams and collisions that can be fatal for both moose and people. The moose also can destroy trees and shrubs and sometimes get themselves tangled up in outdoor Christmas lights. Although moose have gotten accustomed to being close to humans, they also can attack if they feel threatened.

While moose are a big tourist attraction, tourists need to be aware that for their own safety as well as for the safety of the moose, they must not approach the animals too closely or feed the animals. A moose that becomes too familiar with humans and relies on them too much for food may be proclaimed dangerous and killed.



In this March 23, 2012 photo, a moose crosses a road near Anchorage, Alaska. (AP Photo/Anchorage Daily News, Bill Roth)

CONTEST

ZOOM IN ON AMERICA ANNUAL CONTEST CHOOSE THE BEST ZOOM IN ON AMERICA COVER OF 2015

December 2015 TRIVIA QUESTION

Why is January 3, 1959 an important date for Alaska?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

First 3 correct answers will
be awarded with a book prize

Deadline: January 10

November 2015 Answer:

Thanksgiving Holiday is celebrated in the United States on the fourth Thursday in November.

The first three readers who sent the correct answer were:

Ewelina from Tarnow, Katarzyna from Bircza and Jakub from Rybnik

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you by mail.



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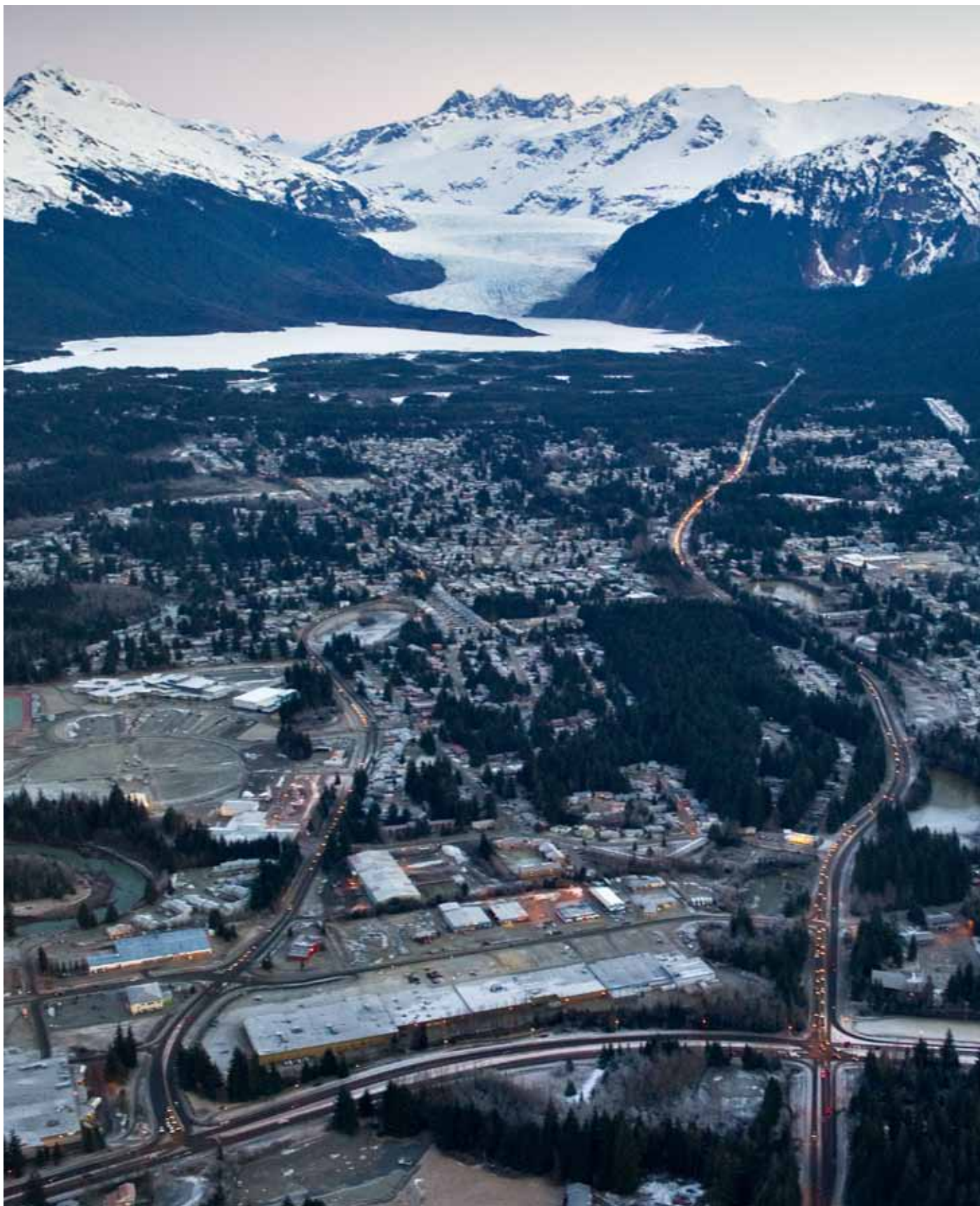
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Riverside Drive, left, and Mendenhall Loop Road, right, glow with the vehicle lights of morning commuters as they feed into Egan Drive, below, in Juneau, Alaska, on Monday, February 3, 2014. The Mendenhall Glacier is in the background. (AP Photo/The Juneau Empire, Michael Penn)