

HIKING OFF THE EASTERN DENALI HIGHWAY

With highway-accessible alpine tundra, the Denali Highway region is a hiker's delight. Here are some suggested hikes in the eastern third of the highway, from Paxson to the Maclaren River. It is useful to know that within the Tangle Lakes Archeological District (about miles 16 to 38), ATVs are allowed only on specific designated trails, while the hiker is free to ramble on all federal and state lands, as well as on motorized trails. (All lands are public with the exception of a few inholdings, where you will see lodges and cabins.) These lands have been the hunting grounds of Alaska Natives for 10,000 years. Treat them with respect, and leave artifacts undisturbed. Mt. Hayes A-4 and A-5 topo maps cover most of the area and are valuable to have along.

Named trails:

- Mile 16 (south side): **Swede Lake Trail** is a designated motorized trail, leading past Swede Lake and on to the Middle Fork of the Gulkana and the Alphabet Hills. BLM has hardened the muddiest sections, but there are better trails to hike.
- Mile 17 (north side): **Rusty Lake Trail** is a new non-motorized trail. Rising gently to a lake about a mile in, it is a good place to stretch your legs or to acquaint visitors with alpine tundra.
- Mile 24.6 (north side): **Landmark Gap Trail North** is a designated motorized trail. It has boggy spots, but leads, in about 3 miles, to Landmark Gap Lake, edged with hiking terrain and rugged views.
- Mile 24.8 (south side): **Landmark Gap Trail South** is a designated motorized trail. Having some wet spots and lacking great scenery, it is best left to ATVs.
- Mile 30 (north side): **Glacier Lake Trail** is designated motorized. Once very boggy, it has been re-routed to drier ground. It is 2.3 miles to Glacier Lake, and the state is extending it to Sevenmile Lake.
- Mile 37 (south side): **Osar Lake Trail** is also designated motorized. Starting near the highway's high point and descending gently for eight miles to Osar Lake, it is easy walking. There are some good views of the Maclaren River and, in season, big patches of moss campion flowers. In August and September, it is heavily used by motorized hunters.
- Mile 37 (north side): **Maclaren Summit Trail**, although designated motorized, is closed to motorized hunting, and is little-used by ATVs. You can edge around a short stretch of puddles at the beginning, and then enjoy a dry trail that rises gently, has good views, and features a host of alpine flowers. This is a good place to take visitors. Maps show the trail extending about three miles, but one could hike farther.
- Mile 40 (north side): **Sevenmile Lake Trail** has been a designated motorized trail, but the first 1½ mile is so muddy that the state might abandon the trail when Sevenmile Lake is accessible via Glacier Lake Trail. It starts on the Maclaren River floodplain and rises about 900 feet over 6½ miles. Partway in, a short branch to the left goes down to Boulder Creek. It is closed to motorized hunting. (Note: there are two Sevenmile Lakes off the Denali Highway. There's a short one at mile 7 of the highway, and then there is this one, which is seven miles long.)

Other routes:

- Before the highway drops to Ten-Mile Lake, a faint trail accesses a long high ridge on the south.
- From a pullout where the highway crests at about mile 12½, cross to the north side of the highway. A jeep trail will take you far enough to get through some brush. A footpath continues uphill. When it fades out, you can continue in good hiking terrain, finding wildflowers and perhaps unusual birds.
- Eskers, those sinuous gravel ridges deposited by streams under now-vanished glaciers, abound in the region, and they are perfect hiking routes. A long one runs along the east side of Upper Tangle Lakes, south of the highway. Another runs along the west side of Lower Tangle Lakes, north of the highway. BLM has constructed a short access trail starting at the sign-in kiosk of its Tangle Lakes Campground.
- Whistle Ridge, which parallels the Denali Highway from about mile 30 to mile 36, is a bedrock ridge which you can access from several locations, then hike along the top.