

Alaska's Inside Passage A Prospector's Journey

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Intellectual Publishing
2010

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Intellectual Publishing
312 South 1000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84102

ISBN 1-933170-54-9

Orders to:
LMC Source
P.O. Box 131266
Spring TX 77393
800-873-3043

web address: <http://www.lmcsource.com>

Design & Illustrations by Mark Loertscher

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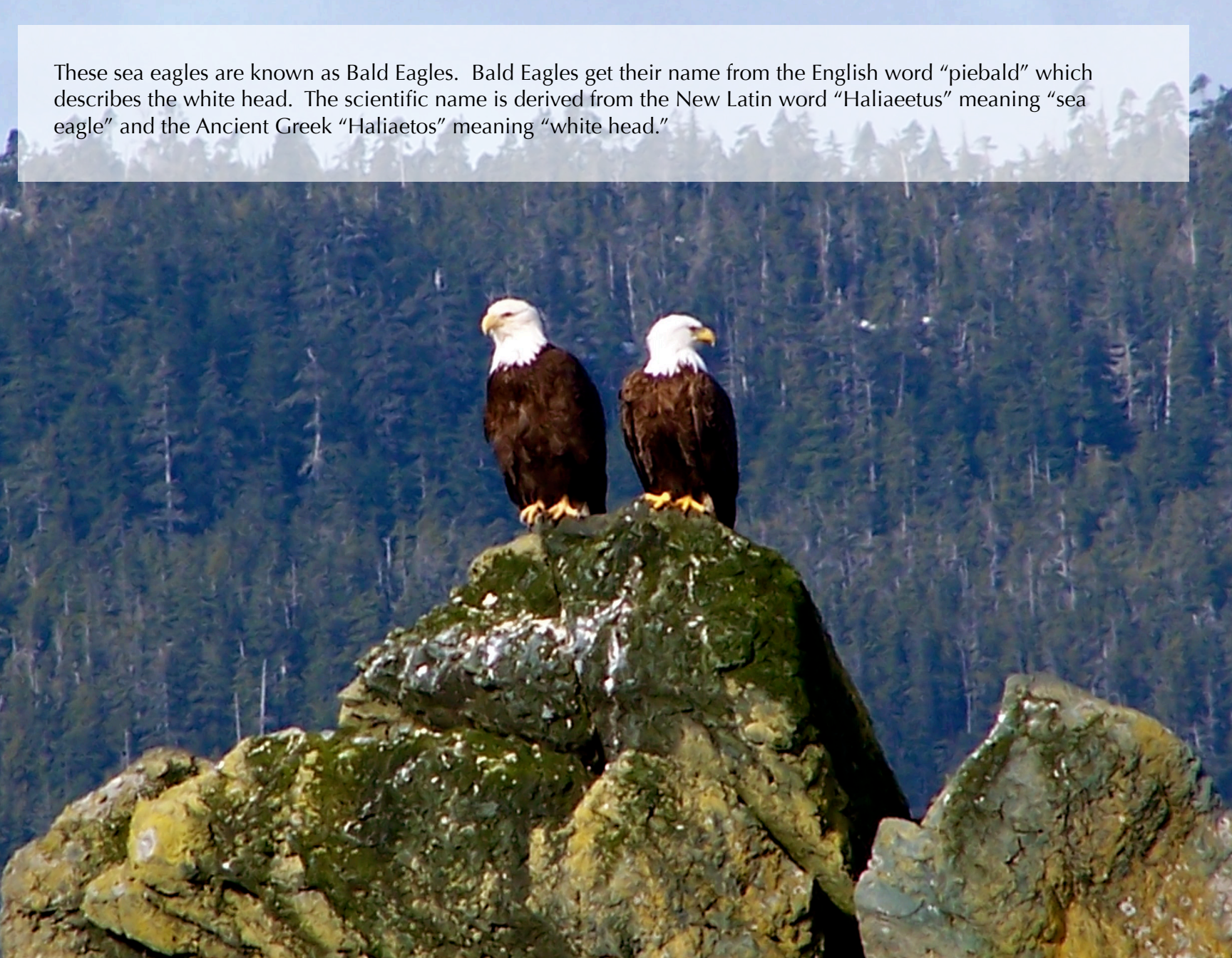
A Prospector's Journey

At the turn of the 20th century, gold was discovered in the Yukon Territory. Many prospectors flocked from the lower 48 states seeking their fortunes, traveling through the Inside Passage of Alaska. The Inside Passage contains unforgiving and beautiful land and seascapes, stretching from the cities of Ketchikan in the south to Skagway in the north.

Imagine that you were a prospector infected by gold fever. You would find diverse wildlife and experience breathtaking wilderness during your adventure. As you traveled by boat up the coast, you would see many glaciers that attract and support animals such as Bald Eagles, Sea Lions, Mountain Goats, and Humpback Whales. In this book you will see what many of the prospectors, or stampeders, may have experienced on their way to stake a gold claim during the Klondike Gold Rush.

You will learn about some of Alaska's wildlife, how the Inside Passage formed, and how Skagway played a large part of American history during the Alaskan Gold Rush.


These sea eagles are known as Bald Eagles. Bald Eagles get their name from the English word “piebald” which describes the white head. The scientific name is derived from the New Latin word “Haliaeetus” meaning “sea eagle” and the Ancient Greek “Haliaetos” meaning “white head.”



This powerful flier can soar and reach speeds of 35-44 miles per hour (56-70 km/h). With a fish load, it slows to 30 miles per hour (48 km/h).

Bald Eagles feed primarily on salmon but do hang around for an easy left over meal at landfills, such as one in Juneau, Alaska. Mammalian prey consist of rabbits, raccoons, muskrats, beavers, sea otters, and deer fawns.



A Bald Eagle is shown in flight, soaring across a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The eagle's wings are fully extended, revealing the intricate structure of its dark brown feathers. Its head is turned to the left, showing its characteristic white plumage and a sharp, yellow beak. The background is a vast, open sky with a gradient of light blue and white, suggesting a bright, clear day.

Some of their favorite birds to eat are ducks, gulls, egrets and geese. An eagle's talons are powerful. The talon's toes have spicules that help them hold on to their prey.

Bald Eagles make a shrill cry with punctuated grunts.





These Sea Lions were found basking on the rocks north of Juneau, Alaska. They love to play in the water and bask in the sun on these rock cliffs.



Sea Lions and Seals have many differences. Sea Lions have long, broad front flippers while Seals have clawed front legs. You can see a Sea Lion's ears while Seals' ears are not visible.



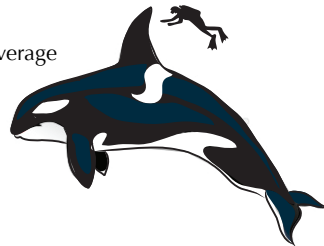
Sea Lions are a part of the Killer Whale's diet. Killer Whales, or Orcas, are not part of the whale family at all, but are the largest member of the porpoise family. The scientific name, *Orcinus Orca*, translates to "one from the realms of the dead."





The baby Orca can weigh around 400 lbs (181 kg) and are born once every five years.

Size comparison against an average human





Orcas travel in pods of anywhere from 3 to 25 animals. A male's dorsal fin can reach six ft (two m) in height. Weighing in at nine tons (eight metric tons), Orcas can grow to 30 ft (9 m) long. There are two types of Orca pods: resident and transient. You can tell that these orcas are transient because the grey spot by the dorsal fin, or "saddle patch," is solid.





While resident Orcas eat mainly fish and squid, transient pods will eat birds, Sea Otters, Seals, Sea Lions, and sometimes whales.



Wild Orcas have not been known to harm humans. Pods can travel up to a quick 34 miles per hour (55 km per hour).





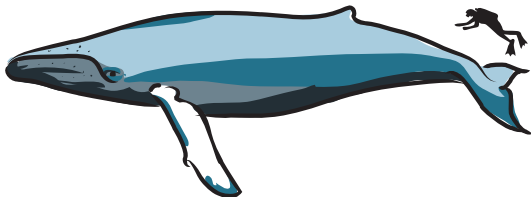
The Humpback Whale is a Baleen-type whale that grows up to 40–50 ft (12 – 15 m) and can weigh up to 79,000 lbs (35,833 kg).



The Humpback has a distinctive dorsal fin which is where the whale gets its name from. When the whale is ready to make a deep dive, it arches its back and reveals its tale.



Whales communicate by using “whale song.” Whales have no vocal cords, but create the song by forcing air through their massive nasal cavities, almost like humans blowing their noses really loud. These tones are very low and can last 10–20 minutes.

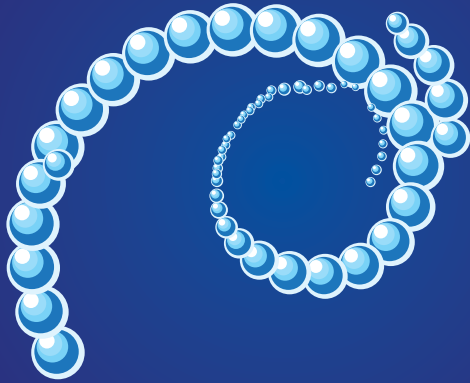


Size comparison against an average human

Whales don't have teeth, but rather Baleen to filter out the water and keep larger creatures in its mouth.

The Baleen is made up of material much like our fingernails.





One unique feeding method a group of baleen whales uses is the bubble net technique. A group of whales uses their blowholes to shoot out air under and around the fish, creating a ring of bubbles to trap the fish.

These rings of bubbles can reach up to 100 ft (30 m) in diameter.

Some whales use vocalizing to herd the fish into the rings. The small schools of herring, salmon, and mackerel are some of the whale's favorites.

Whales also like to eat tons of these shrimp-like creatures called krill. Krill comes from the Norwegian word meaning "young fry of fish."



In the spring and summer months , Humpback Whales migrate to the western coast of Alaska and Canada to feed. Whales need to store fat for the winter months. Whales travel up to 15,000 miles (25,000 kilometers) to find tropical waters in the winter. The whales breed and give birth in tropical waters like Hawaii.





This lighthouse near Prince Rupert, Canada shines a red light instead of a bright white light. Why a red light? This light helps the Horned Puffin avoid flying into the light house.

The beautiful landscape of the Inside Passage was formed by glaciers. A glacier is not a large body of frozen water, but is really an accumulation of snow over long periods of time.



The Sawyer Glacier is a good example of a tidewater glacier, which is a glacier that actually meets the sea. The part of the glacier that we can see appears large, but the part underwater that we don't see can reach 500-600 feet (152-183 meters) deep.





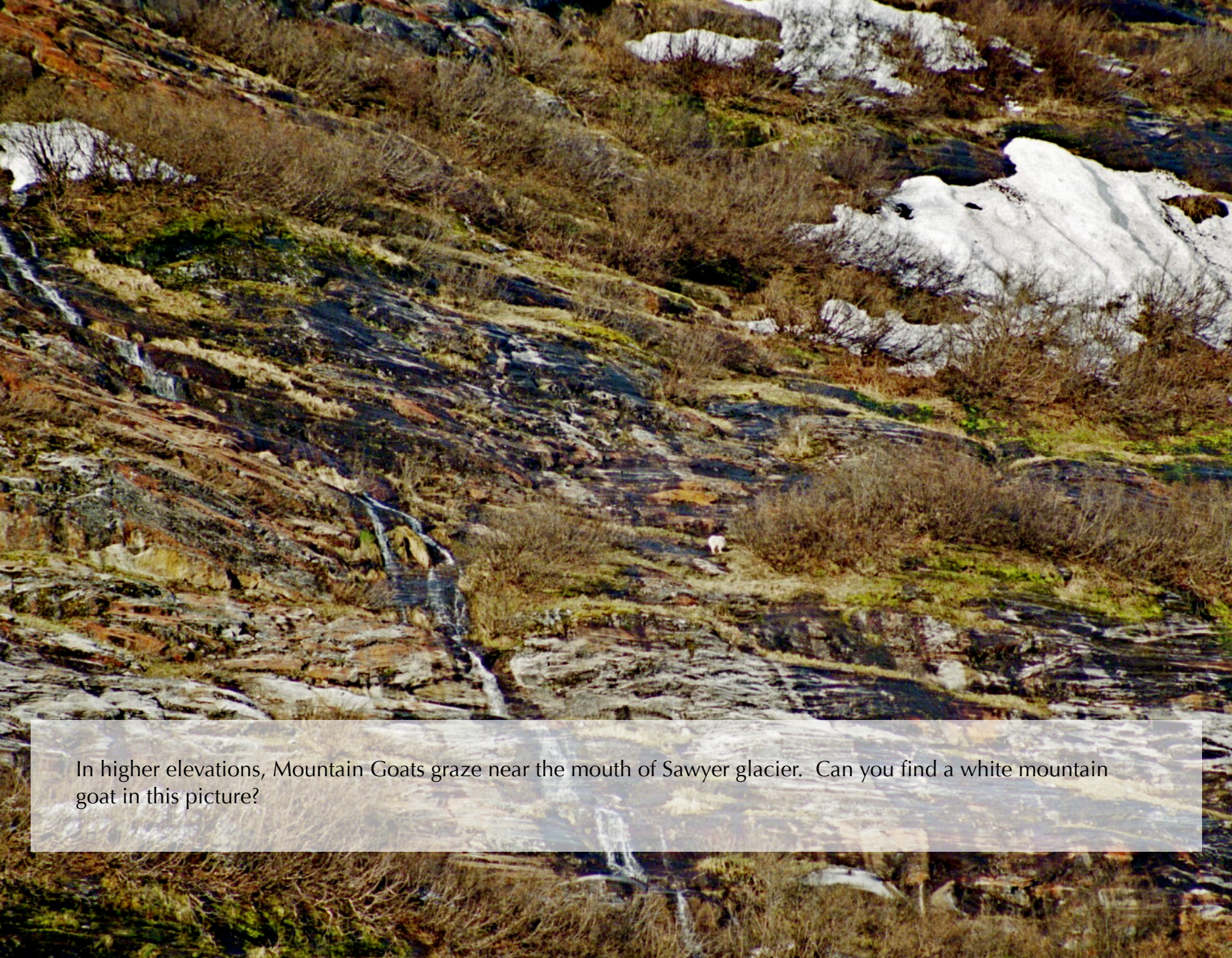
The Sawyer Glacier is found south of Juneau, Alaska and is at the end of a 30 mile (48 kilometers) long fjord called Tracy Arm.

A fjord is a long, narrow inlet with steep sides that were once carved by glaciers. One-fifth of the Tracy Fjord is covered in ice.

Black and Brown Bears, Deer, Wolves, Harbor Seals, and a variety of birds, such as Arctic Terns and Pigeon Guillemots live in the area.







In higher elevations, Mountain Goats graze near the mouth of Sawyer glacier. Can you find a white mountain goat in this picture?





In the mountains of Alaska, bears love to eat these yellow flowers called "Skunk Cabbage." Just as the name implies, these beautiful flowers really do smell like a skunk.

Don't get too close...

Many mountains and fjords were created by glaciers more than a mile (1609 meters) high.





Fjords were carved as deep as a 1,000 feet (305 meters) by glaciers and filled up with sea water.



The rounded tops on these mountains were created by gigantic ice chunks during the last Ice Age 2 million to 14,000 years ago.



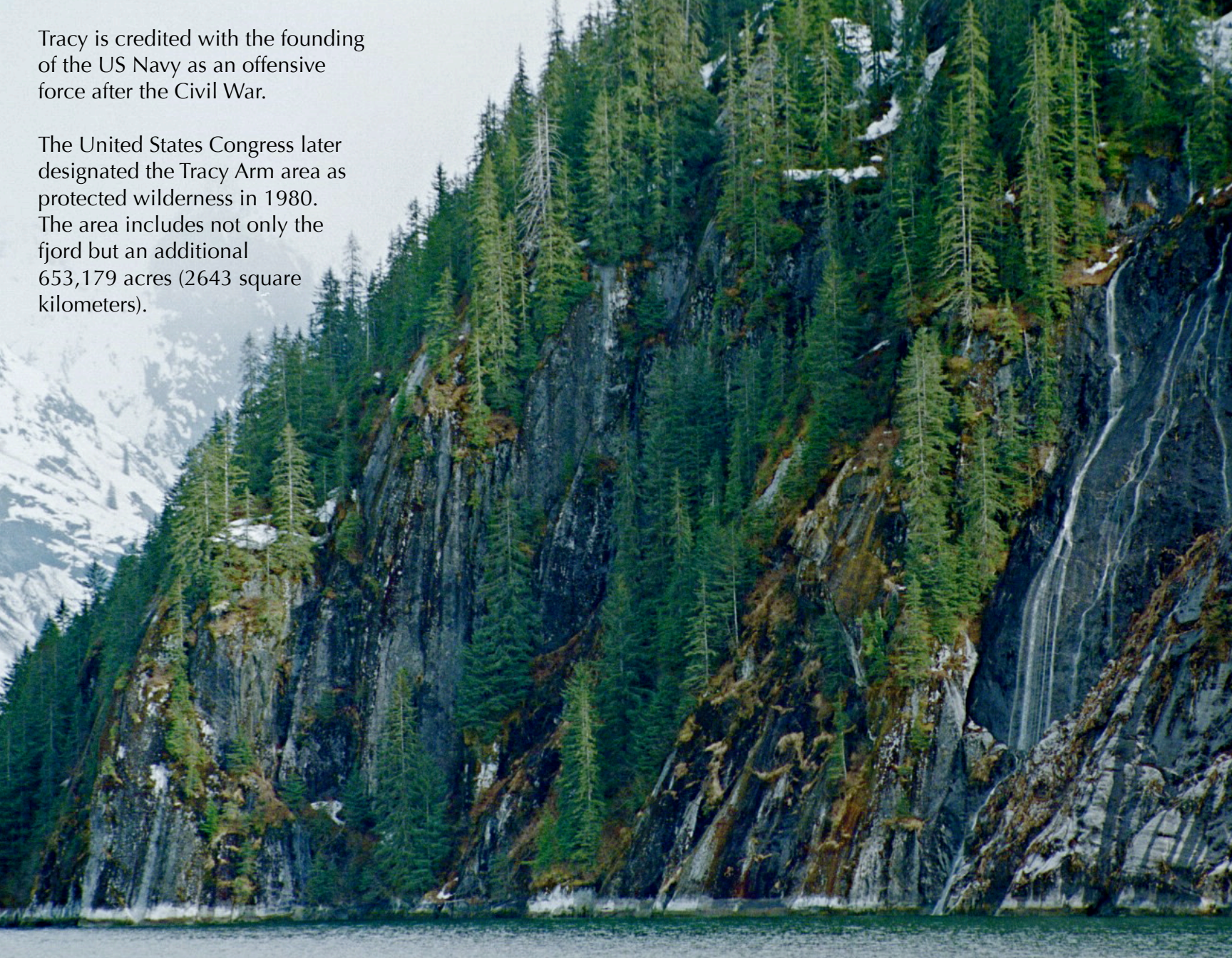
The Tracy Arm Fjord was named in honor of a Civil War General, Benjamin Franklin Tracy.

Tracy received the Medal of Honor for seizing the colors, leading a regiment of soldiers, and holding the line at the Battle of the Wilderness on May 6, 1864.



Tracy is credited with the founding of the US Navy as an offensive force after the Civil War.

The United States Congress later designated the Tracy Arm area as protected wilderness in 1980. The area includes not only the fjord but an additional 653,179 acres (2643 square kilometers).





This is a mountain glacier called the Mendenhall Glacier named in 1892 after Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, who was the Superintendent of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

Under his leadership, his administration surveyed the Alaskan\Canadian boundary.

Before this time, the native Tlingits called the glacier Aak'wtaaksit, "the Glacier Behind the Little Lake." The Juneau ice fields include about 1,500 square miles (3,885 square kilometers) and feed the glacier and three others. The Mendenhall Glacier is a remnant of a mini Ice Age that began 3,000 years ago in southeast Alaska.

As the snow melts, larger ice crystals form; some up to a foot long! The shades of blue in the ice are caused by the ice absorbing all of the colors except the reflected blue color that you can see. The more dense and thicker the ice, the bluer the ice is. The lesser dense glacial areas reflect the white color.





Glaciers have created many of the Alaskan mountains by carving out the land creating valleys and fjords.

The glacier uses these large rocks to form the mountains like a sculptor uses its hands to form beautiful clay artwork. As the glacier flows and moves like a river, it will leave behind some of these once captive rocks.



As glaciers melt, large chunks of ice break off and fall into the water. This is called calving. If the chunks of ice shoot up to the surface from underwater, they are called shooters. These large chunks of ice become icebergs.

The study of glaciers is called Glaciology. The name Glaciology comes from the Middle French dialect "glace" meaning "ice" or the Latin "glacies" meaning "frost, ice."

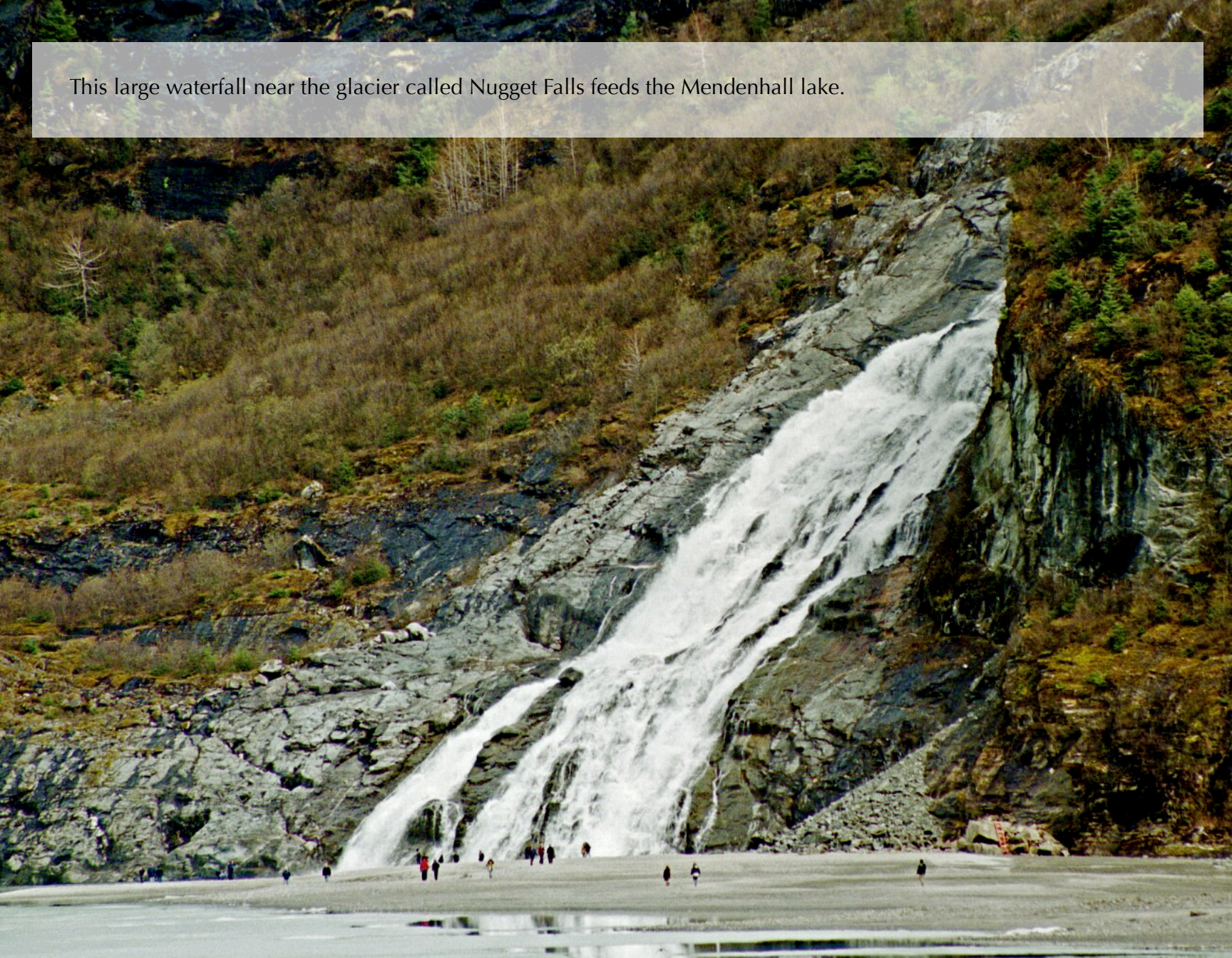






Glaciologists from the Juneau Ice Field Research Program have found that since the year 1700, the Mendenhall Glacier has receded 2.5 miles (4.0 kilometers) and continues to recede at a rate of 25-30 feet (7-9 meters) per year.

This large waterfall near the glacier called Nugget Falls feeds the Mendenhall lake.







The White Pass railroad starts in Skagway, Alaska and extends 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) long upward to 2,885 feet (879 meters) to the top of White Pass. It took about 35,000 workers to complete the 110 mile (177 kilometers) track to the Yukon Territory and it was completed on July 29, 1900.

The construction of the railroad pass started when the prospectors, or stampeders, were advancing up the Chilkoot Trail at the height of the Klondike gold rush.





This is the start of Dead Horse Canyon. Before the railroad was built, stampedeers were required to take a ton (907 kilograms) of supplies with them to ensure survival on the long journey to the Yukon Gold Fields.







Because of the harsh environment, most of the horses, mules, and donkeys carrying a ton (907 kilograms) of supplies could not survive the steep and rough rigors of the trail. Many of the animals perished in this canyon, hence the name Dead Horse Canyon.



The stampeders returned to Skagway to purchase more mules and horses because the animals died of exertion and exhaustion. The cycle of death continued until the prospector's ton (907 kilograms) of supplies made it to the top of White Pass.





Building the railroad was very hazardous work. When two men were blasting rock to clear the way for the tracks, the noise echoed so loudly that tons of loose rock hurled down the mountain, burying the men and their work animals. The boulder that buried them was too heavy to lift. The railroad thus honored the site by marking it as their resting place.





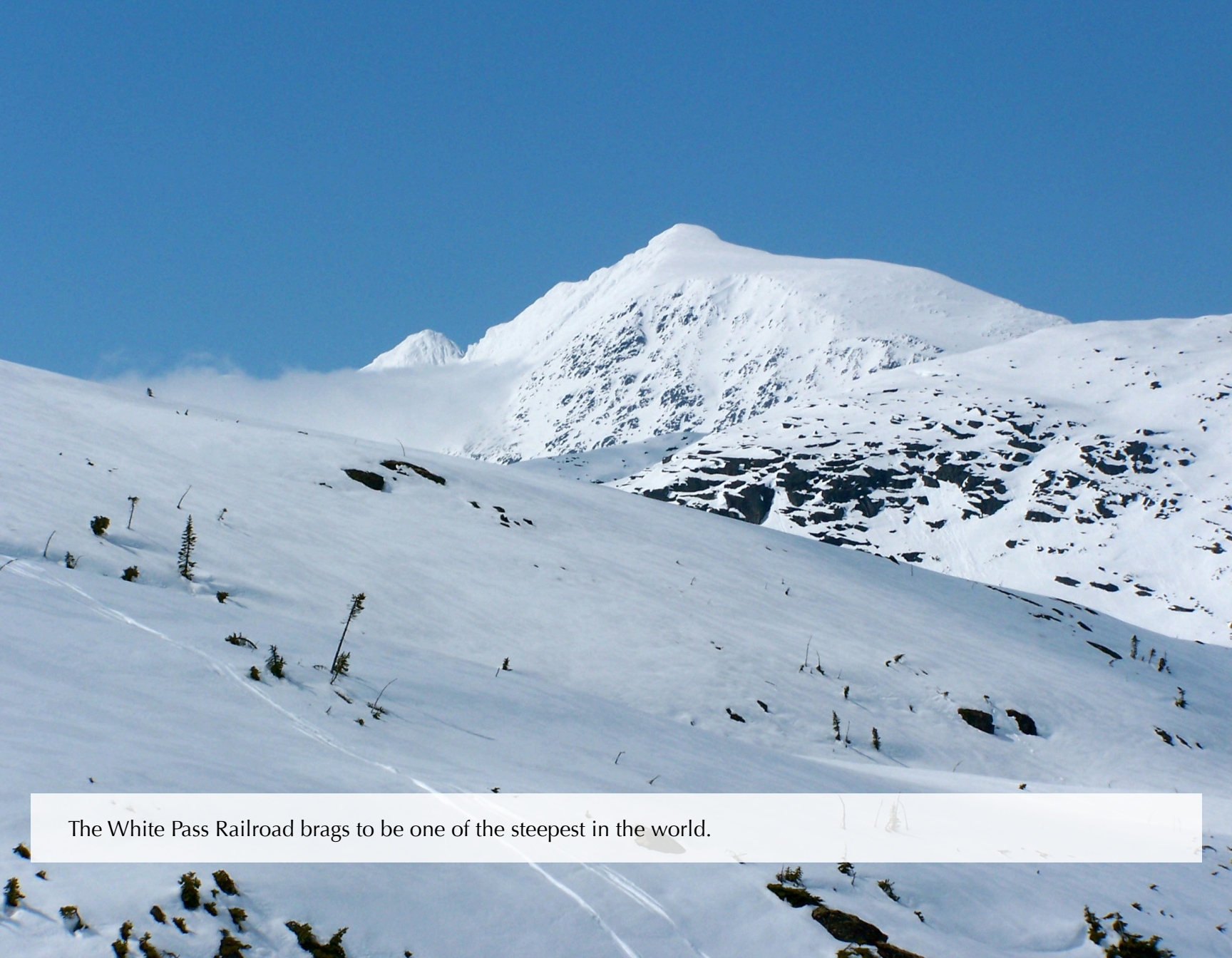




By the time the gold rush was over, the railroad was completed.

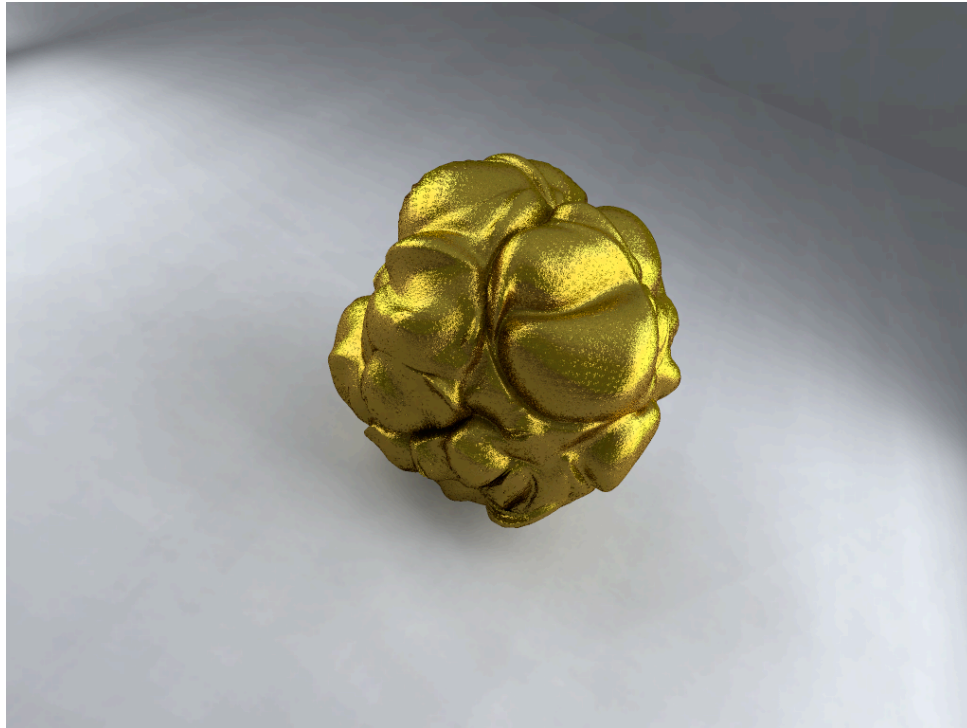
WHITE PASS Skagway
20.4 Miles
Elevation 2888 ft.





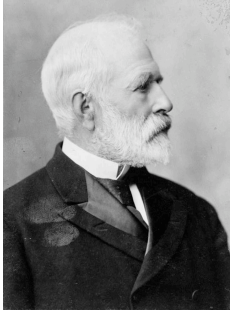
The White Pass Railroad brags to be one of the steepest in the world.

Gold fever attracted many Americans to the Inside Passage of Alaska. The stampeders and their pack animals faced many hardships. They experienced extreme difficulty in moving their supplies, fell victim to the swindling schemes in Skagway, and sacrificed money, homes and sometimes their lives to find their fortunes. The Inside Passage offered great wonders to those prospectors on their way to the Yukon Territory and is one of Alaska's last frontiers.



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