

## Recreational Qualities of the Copper River Highway

The Copper River Highway offers access to some of the best hiking, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, bird watching, and mountain biking to be found anywhere. Public access cabins can be reserved through the US Forest Service and day excursions have access points at Alaganik Slough, 22 mile and 27 mile. The Chugach National Forest campground at the 52 mile mark has overnight facilities for primitive tent camping as well as RVs and a large covered pavilion with cooking barbeques, picnic tables and rest room facilities. Two viewing areas give breathtaking views of Childs Glacier whose immense walls of snow and ice creak and pop, as enormous chunks break off and tumble into the river.

The Million Dollar Bridge, located at “the end of the road” mile 52, can be driven, walked or biked across and provides the exhilarating experience of standing between two glaciers. An informational kiosk recounts the incredible task of building this historic bridge, with workers braving icy catwalks in 100 mile/hr. winds, or working down in freezing concrete caissons in their race against time and weather.

Bird watching and nature trail hiking are the favorite spring and summer activities for visitors to Cordova and the lower Copper River watershed. Sixteen Forest Service maintained trails range in length from 2 hour walks to daylong hikes, into rainforests, along winding rivers, up mountains to incredible views of town and the Delta, and to glaciers. The careful crafting of these trails by Forest Service trail crews makes the journey even more special, with log bridges of huge spruce trees cut in half, stair steps of hemlock etched into the mountains, and fishnet covered planks along wetlands to protect tundra flowers and (keep hikers feet dry). The Forest Service sponsors an annual fall weekend Cordova Fungus Festival, acquainting a growing number of people with these “micro” forest resources.

Orca Inlet provides wonderful daylong or afternoon kayaking trips, with a kayak rental company next to the AC food market. (They have bike rentals as well and fishing skiffs with fish tackle and good advice for finding where the fish are). The local rowing/sculling club practices weekly on Eyak Lake along the Copper River Highway. Canoeing and kayaking can also be done on Lake Eyak but be careful to avoid the low flying float planes that land on the lakes north shore. There is a flight seeing service there for those who want to see the Copper River Delta and Prince William Sound from a “birds eye view.”

Cordova’s harbor sits at the edge of the Copper River Highway which runs through the town to the ferry terminal for the Alaska Marine Highway. The fast ferry, Chenega, has provided the much longed for water transportation access to Cordova and is responsible for an increase in visitor traffic, especially in the summer. With a short drive from Anchorage, a 2 ½ hour ferry trip can now bring Alaskans and their visiting friends to Cordova. Many who come to visit Cordova say it’s like going back in time, enjoying the best of what a true community has to offer.

Summer celebrations of salmon and bluegrass music, square dancing along with a marathon and 5k run, offer active recreation with plenty of good food. Bicycling to the glacier (on fat tire bikes) has become a visitor and local’s favorite activity, with food and camping as the reward at the end of the 52 mile gravel road.

Winter in Cordova has its recreational activities as well, with a town-owned ski lift on Eyak Mountain (elevation 1200 feet) and numerous ski runs of varied difficulty and breathtaking views of the harbor and Orca Inlet. You can also take the lift up, snow shoe or hike back down the Eyak River side of the mountain, and go sledding or skating on frozen Eyak Lake or out the Copper River highway to Sheridan Glacier for an afternoon of skating and marsh mellow roasting. Afternoon sunsets from the deck of the Reluctant Fisherman restaurant in the harbor can round out a good winter day in Cordova.

Cordova has an active Chamber of Commerce, a quaint but adequate downtown with two grocery stores, bookstore and tea shop, hardware, drugstore, two banks with ATMs, rental services for bikes, kayaks, skiffs, and fishing gear, flight seeing and fishing charters, several river rafting outfitters, hiking trail guides, a bike repair shop in the hunting/fishing gear store, two museums, a native cultural center, a video store and several local parks. A small area for tents in the local RV park and a newer platform tent camping area near the ferry terminal provide camping along with the U.S. Forest Service campgrounds at the Million Dollar Bridge. Numerous bed and breakfasts and motels are listed on Cordova's website. The Forest service, located on 2<sup>nd</sup> street, has maps for hiking trails. There is shuttle or taxi service from the Airport and car rental there. But remember, you can't drive **to** Cordova....only **along** its scenic highway, its quaint downtown and harbor, along borders of Eyak Lake, or out to Hartney Bay.

