

The Trail

Offering an escape to a unique and remote section of the Steese National Conservation Area, the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail winds through a visual feast of sweeping mountain vistas, brilliant wildflower displays, and the unceasing light of the midnight sun. Pinnell Mountain, the highest point along the trail at 4,721 feet (1438 m), was named for Robert Pinnell, who died while climbing nearby Porcupine Dome.

The trail is 27 miles (44 km) long and traverses a series of alpine ridge tops that are entirely above timberline. Mileage is measured from Eagle Summit (mile 0) toward Twelvemile Summit (mile 27). Where terrain makes the trail difficult to follow, rock cairns and wooden posts areas indicate the trail. Many parts of the trail require good navigational skills, especially when visibility is poor.

Hikers using the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail should expect a physical challenge. Most of the trail has at least an 8 percent grade and in many sections the grade exceeds 25 percent. At Eagle Summit, Pinnell Mountain, and Table Mountain, the trail features long switchbacks with 600-foot (182 m) elevation changes over a distance of one-half mile (0.8 km).

The Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail is closed to summer use of motorized vehicles, and pets must be under control at all times. All visitors should have detailed USGS maps covering the trail: Circle B-3, B-4, C-3, and C-4.

For more information, contact:

Bureau of Land Management
Eastern Interior Field Office
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844
907-474-2200 or 1-800-437-7021
www.blm.gov/ak

Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail

BLM

Alaska



Safety

The Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail traverses the high ridges between the White Mountains and the Crazy Mountains. Storms moving through the Yukon or Tanana valleys reach this high ground and stall. The results are windy conditions, low clouds, ground fog, rain, hail, or snow. Temperatures can drop below freezing in April, while highs can reach to the middle 80's in July. Be prepared for snow at any time of the year.

There are two shelter cabins located on the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail. The Ptarmigan Creek Shelter Cabin is located near mile 10.1 (16.2 km) in a saddle just below Pinnell Mountain. The North Fork Shelter Cabin is located at mile 17.8 (28.6 km) on the back side of a hill. These small cabins provide emergency shelter, away from strong wind and blowing rain or snow. They operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Hikers should always have tents and be prepared to use them in case the shelters are occupied.

Water is available at both shelter cabins from a catchment system constructed to collect melting snow and rain. All water should be treated before cooking or drinking. Other water sources can be found in small ponds scattered along the trail, and in the early summer, snow may be melted. Carry plenty of water, even if you are only doing a day hike.

All of Alaska is bear country. Remember to watch for bears and other wildlife. Cooking should take place outside the shelter cabins so that animals are not attracted to them. Cook food away from sleeping areas and downwind from tents. Always keep a clean camp. Human waste should be buried at least 200 feet (60 m) from water sources, and all garbage, including toilet paper, should be hauled out. Please do not leave food in the cabins for the next people to pack out. Remember – “If you pack it in, pack it out.”



Ptarmigan Creek Shelter Cabin.

Vegetation

Spectacular wildflowers and shrubs are a highlight of hikes along the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail. Depending on when you visit, many different kinds may be in bloom. Here are just a few of the types of vegetation you will find along the trail.

Alpine Azalea. (*Loiseleuria procumbens*) Heath Family. Forms mats of many light pink, five-petaled flowers.

Frigid Shooting Star. (*Dodecatheon frigidum*) Primrose Family. Look for drooping, magenta flowers on short, single-stalked plants with large basal leaves.

Purple Oxytrope. (*Oxytropis nigrescens*) Pea Family. A tiny, grayish-leaved plant with dark purple flowers that produce a seed pod.

Arctic Bell Heather. (*Cassiope tetragona*) Heath Family. A dark green, dwarf shrub with scale-like leaves and white, bell-shaped flowers.

Mountain Cranberry. (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) Heath Family. An evergreen mat-forming shrub with glossy, ovoid leaves and pinkish, bell-like flowers that produce an edible berry.



Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail

Arctic Sandwort. (*Minuartia arctica*) Pink Family. Forms large mats of white, five-petaled flowers.

Arctic Forget-Me-Not. (*Eritrichium aretioides*) Boraginaceae Family. Bright blue flowers on short, dense clusters of branching stems.

Bistort. (*Polygonum bistorta*) Buckwheat Family. A spike of bright pink flowers on single stalks with long, pointed leaves.

Crowberry. (*Empetrum nigrum*) Crowberry Family. A mat-forming, evergreen shrub with small, narrow leaves and maroon flowers, producing an edible berry.



Arctic Sandwort growing on the rock scree.

Geology

Hikers on the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail walk across some of Alaska's oldest rocks. Schist, the predominant rock type, forms the prominent tors jutting from narrow ridge tops on sections of the

trail. This schist dates to the Precambrian-Cambrian periods, 700 million to 2 billion years ago, when only the simplest life forms flourished.

Other rock types are visible in different areas along the trail. The area surrounding the North Fork Shelter Cabin is composed of granite. On the eastern side of Table Mountain, the trail parallels an intrusion of light gray rhyolite.

The trail is also an excellent place to view unusual landforms created by Alaska's cold climate. The most visible of these formations are solifluction lobes, which look like draped fabric or ripples on the tundra. Look for them on steep slopes, where freeze-thaw cycles in zones of discontinuous permafrost allow the vegetative mat and top layer of soil to slide downhill over the bedrock.

Other permafrost-related features include polygon-patterned ground fissures and “seas of rocks,” created over thousands of years as frost pushes fractured rocks to the surface.



Solifluction lobes found in the Pinnell Mountain area.

Wildlife

Marmots. Hoary marmots (*Marmota caligata*) live in rock outcrops and rubble fields, including those around the North Fork Shelter Cabin. They feed on grasses, flowering plants, berries, roots, mosses, and lichens. Marmots are social animals that live in colonies. When startled, hoary marmots usually sound a loud whistle, explaining their nickname, “whistling pig,” but they also hiss, squeal, growl, and yip. Enjoy their presence, but respect their “wildness” by maintaining a reasonable distance. Grizzly bears prey on marmots, so watch for bear signs and be alert around marmot habitat.

Pika. The northern or collared pika (*Ochotona collaris*), known as the “rock rabbit,” is closely related to hares and rabbits. Listen for their shrill bark around rock slides or talus slopes. They are remarkable for their well-developed hay-making or grass-collecting behavior. Consider yourself lucky if you see these highly alert animals.

Caribou. Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) are unique among the deer family in that both females and males have antlers. Males shed their antlers after rut (breeding) while some pregnant females carry their antlers all winter and shed them in late spring. Caribou eat lichens, willows, scrub birch, grasses, sedges, and cottongrass. They also eat mushrooms when available. Caribou have been described as having “universal tastes” because they eat a wide variety of plants as they migrate great distances between traditional calving grounds and winter feeding areas. Watch for cow and calf groups and stay well away from them.

Ptarmigan. There are two species of ptarmigan living along the trail: rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*)

and willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*). Both are close relatives of grouse, but unlike their cousins, ptarmigan turn from brown to white with the seasons, making them difficult for predators to see.



Hoary Marmot living among the tundra and rock scree.

Plover. The lesser golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) can be found on the drier hillsides with nests in the tundra moss. These speckled and brown birds are well camouflaged on the tundra. Their winter grounds are in Argentina. Plovers eat mainly insects but also like crowberries and blueberries.

Northern Wheatear. The northern wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), also known as the old-world thrush, is found in rock fields and rock ridges, where it builds nests in cavities between the rocks. They migrate to eastern Asia for the winter.

While hiking, watch for young birds and animals on the trail. Chicks find it easier to run on the trail surface rather than among the tundra vegetation. Caribou calves may be just days old when you see them. Respect all wildlife and give them the right-of-way.

Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail

Trail Characteristics

- Grade**
Average 12%, 82% exceeds 8%. Maximum section is 39% for 38 feet.
- Cross Slope**
Average 8%.
- Width**
Minimum 4 inches wide, average 24 inches.
- Surface**
92% natural surface, 6% wooden planking, 10-12 inches wide, 2% very soft – bog.
- Rock**
Uneven rock surface.
- Drop Off**
Scree slopes.

Trail Information

- Trail Length: 27.3 miles (44 kilometers).
- Elevational Change: 1,691 feet (515 meters).
- Time needed to hike the trail: 3 to 5 days.

Legend

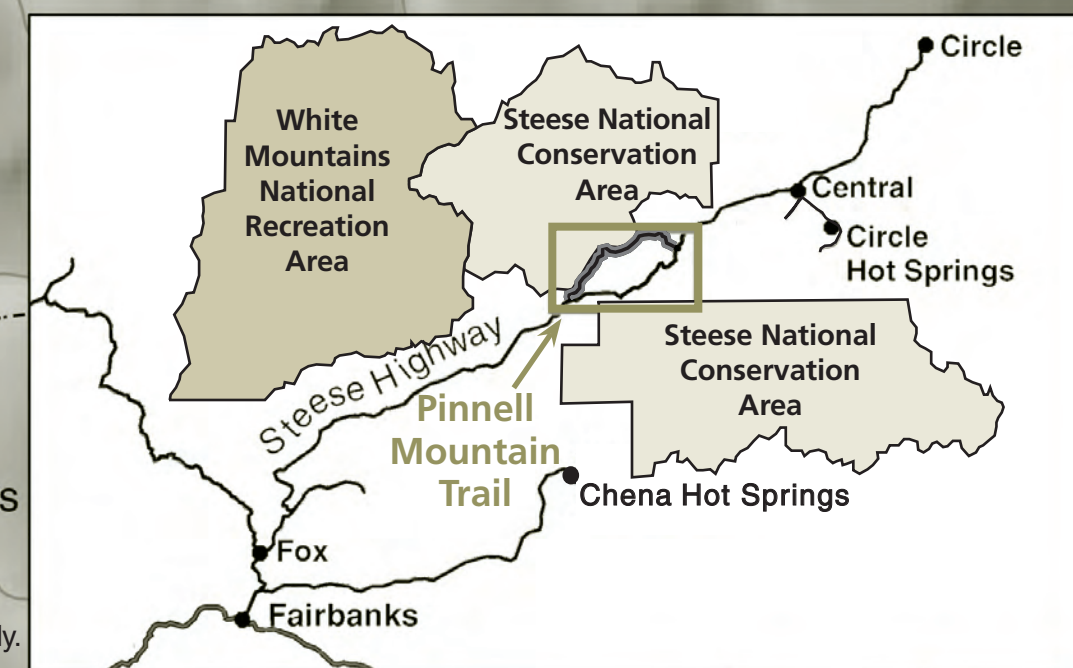
- P** Parking
- ?** Information
- Hiking Trail**
- Trail Shelter**
- River Access**
- Fishing**
- Vault Toilet**
- 1** Mileage Marker

Global Positioning System (GPS) Coordinates

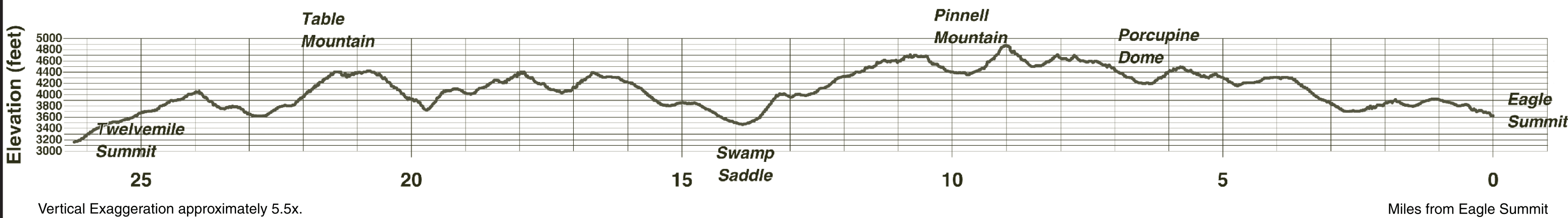
- Eagle Summit: N65°29.087', W145°24.869'
 - Ptarmigan Creek Trail Shelter: N65°30.186', W145°37.728'
 - North Fork Trail Shelter: N65°28.733', W145°49.043'
 - Twelvemile Summit: N65°23.865', W145°58.376'
- These coordinates (in WGS84 datum) are approximate and should not be used as your only means of navigation.



Location of area shown on map



Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail in Profile



The National Trail System

The Pinnell Mountain Trail was established by Congress in 1968 and nominated as a component of the National Trails System in 1971. The trail is one of the few maintained primitive hiking trails in interior Alaska. It is managed for a primitive experience, where users feel isolated from the sights and sounds of man, encounter a high degree of risk and challenge, and use outdoor skills. On the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail you can experience the remote backcountry areas of the Steese National Conservation Area and enjoy outstanding views of the White Mountains, the Crazy Mountains, the Alaska Range to the south, and the surrounding Yukon-Tanana uplands and Yukon River valley.