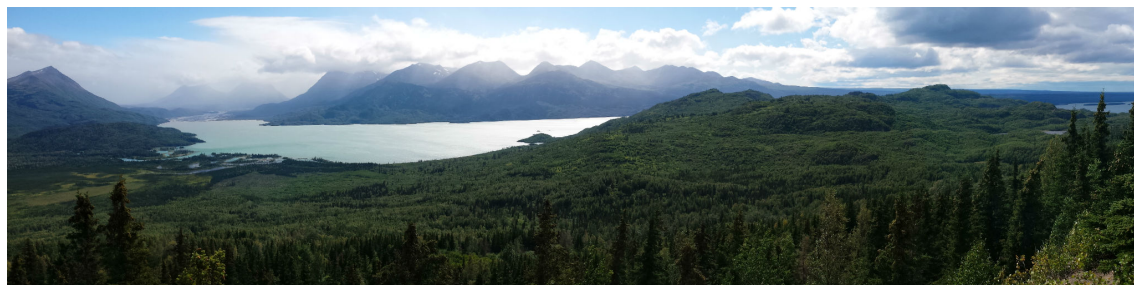


Bear Mountain Trail offers photo and berry-picking opportunities

by Nick Longobardi



Panoramic view from the summit of Bear Mountain Trail. Hinton's Knob divides Skilak Lake into two sections. Skilak Lookout and Vista trails climb up opposite sides of Hinton's Knob. Photo Credit: Nick Longobardi/USFWS.



Great view of Rock Lake from only five minutes up the trail. Photo Credit: Nick Longobardi/USFWS.

Is that expensive camera you bought last winter in hopes of becoming a professional photographer just sitting there collecting dust? Or did you just get a new smart phone and need an awesome background picture for it? No matter which device you prefer to capture pictures on, bring it out to Bear Mountain Trail at mile six of the Skilak Lake Road in Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

Bear Mountain Trail is one of the least hiked trails in the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area. For some unknown reason, it is easily overlooked. Does the name “Bear Mountain” frighten you off? While Skyline Trail has what seems like half the peninsula’s population on it daily, Bear Mountain Trail sits idle waiting for happy hikers to travel up her smooth trail. Being only

0.8 miles from parking lot to summit, it is a short trail with a fair climb of 400 feet in elevation, enough to get any heart pumping. The trail is in excellent condition and hardly ever crowded.

As you climb you will experience stunning views of Skilak Lake. From the top, on a clear day, you can see as far as Lake Clark National Park where Mt. Redoubt is standing tall and proud. You may spot bald eagles floating in the wind as you look down on the Kenai River and Hidden Creek deltas. You can watch from afar as ant-sized boats slowly make their way around Hinton’s Knob after a long day of fishing or rafting.

Looking for berries? Take a hike up the trail with basket in hand. There are plenty of raspberries, high-bush cranberries and blueberries for picking. Make sure to hold on to your hats though—the cool breezes from Skilak Glacier rush up the hillside periodically and blow over the peak. Not at all a bad way to cool off after a hike though!

So if you are looking for a new experience this weekend, head out to Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area and take a stroll up Bear Mountain Trail. Remember to dust off that camera—you’re going to want it for this trail. Happy hiking everyone!

Nick Longobardi is in his second season as a Park Ranger at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Find more information at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.