

## Funny River Horse Trail



Round Trips: 20.8 miles, Horse Trail Lake. 40 miles, timberline (*The Benchlands*)

U.S.G.S Maps: Kenai B-2, B-3, A-2

Difficulty: Moderate

Elevation Gain: Trailhead parking to Horse Trail Lake- 450 feet;

Horse Trail Lake to timberline- additional 1250 feet

Hiking Time: Horse Trail 2-4 days (1 week to 10 days, if alpine areas explored)

High Point: 2000 Feet (timberline)

**Trailhead:** The trailhead is located at approximately mile 7, Funny River Road, on the south side of the road.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Funny River Horse Trail provides access to the high country between the Killey River and Tustumena Lake. It begins in spruce, birch, and aspen forest, and eventually travels through hemlock forest. The first section (1<sup>st</sup> couple of miles) passes through several swampy areas. The trail there is very wet and muddy, and waterproof boots are a necessity. Except for the wet sections, the trail is relatively dry. It climbs gradually in elevation, ending at timberline. The trail receives little maintenance, and numerous windfalls cross the trail over most of its length. Where the trail ends at timberline (20 miles from the trailhead), alpine tundra begins. Much of the tundra provides easy hiking, though there are wet areas where travel is difficult because the vegetation consists of crowberry tussocks; the tussocks are closely spaced, a couple of feet high, and are surrounded by muck. Such a tussock area is encountered for the first mile or so of tundra after the trail ends. However, most of the alpine area, known locally as the *Benchlands*, can be a delight to explore.

**CAMPING:** Camping is available at Horse Trail Lake, or anywhere along the trail you can find a suitable place to pitch your tent. Above timberline, and beyond the end of the trail, there are numerous areas suitable for camping. Late in the summer, water sources are limited. Filter what you find. No firewood is available above timberline, and you must rely on a camp stove. Take a good tent, and peg it well; the area above timberline is subject to high winds. Do not disturb alpine tundra vegetation, as it is very fragile; be sure to leave no trace of your visit.

**Precautions:** This trail has a high concentration of brown bears. Hikers and hunters have been severely mauled, and even *killed* by bears along this trail. Extreme caution should be exercised. Travel in groups, make plenty of noise to alert bears, keep a clean camp, and *never* run from a bear! Follow good bear safety precautions when camping. If you come across a dirty camp, especially one that appears to have been ransacked by bears, move on and camp elsewhere. The alpine area is subject to heavy fog or clouds, especially during evening hours and inclement weather. The resulting low-visibility makes navigation very difficult. You must have good navigational skills, as well as map and compass (and possibly a GPS) to find your way in these conditions.

**ACTIVITIES:** Berry-picking and mushroom-picking can be good along the trail during late summer, especially the first several miles. The alpine areas can be good for low-bush cranberries and crowberries. Wildlife viewing is also good in the alpine areas. Look for big bull moose, caribou, brown bear, wolves, wolverine, lynx, Dall sheep, and marmots. Birds to be seen include golden eagles, short-eared owls, be sure to take along a good pair of binoculars or a spotting scope. Because the alpine areas are treeless, views are unlimited.

**WINTER ACTIVITIES:** Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and dog sledding. Snow machines are prohibited above timberline.

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