

Land of the Midnight Sun



Mini Fact:

A seventh-grade Alaskan student, Benny Benson, won a contest to design the Alaska territory's flag in 1927.

Alaska, our 49th state, gained statehood in 1959. But it was 150 years ago, on March 30, 1867, when the United States purchased Alaska from Russia. Let's learn more about this fascinating and faraway state.

Native people

Alaska was home to different groups of native people for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. Experts believe some early people reached Alaska by a prehistoric land bridge in the Bering Sea.

Different groups of people settled in different regions of Alaska, including the Aleuts, Athabascans, Haida and Inuit.

Today, fewer than 1 million live in the huge state of Alaska. Most of them speak English, but about 5 percent still speak one of many native languages.

Explorers arrive

In the mid-1700s, Russian explorers gathered pelts from sea otters, and other fur traders began to explore the region. Russia sold the territory for \$7.2 million, or about 2 cents per acre, to the United States. But for several years, Americans lived only in the area of Sitka, the capital of the territory until 1906.

Settlers rushed to Alaska looking for gold in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Today, mining is still an important industry in

Alaska. Gold, silver, lead and zinc are also found there.

Oil!

When oil was discovered in Alaska, the region grew again. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System carries hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil each day across 800 miles, from Prudhoe Bay on the North Slope to Valdez in the south. The pipeline and its maintenance provide jobs for many Alaskans.

However, oil has also caused problems for Alaska. In 1989, the tanker Exxon Valdez caused an enormous oil spill. At least 11 million gallons of oil polluted Prince William Sound. Animals and plants are still affected by the spill.

Natural treasures

Glaciers cover about 1/20th of the state and attract many tourists. They range in size from 1 to 50 miles long, and 300 to 10,000 feet thick.

The tallest mountain in North America, Denali, rises 20,310 feet above sea level. It's part of the Alaska Range in the southern central part of the state.



Denali

More than 130 volcanoes dot Alaska's lands. Most lie along the Aleutian Arc, where the Aleutian Islands are.

"Land of the Midnight Sun" is one of Alaska's nicknames. In the far north, the sun does not set at all from May until August. Some farmers take advantage of the long hours of sunlight to grow giant vegetables!



An Alaskan mother and child in 1929.

photo by Edward S. Curtis, courtesy LOC

Alaska's wildlife

Our biggest state is known for its amazing wild animals. The Kodiak bear, a type of brown bear, is one of the largest carnivores, or meat-eating animals, in the world. The Kodiak is much bigger than other brown bears, with males reaching up to 1,500 pounds.

Visitors to Alaska also look for whales, seals, puffins, polar bears, moose, caribou and deer.

On the run

Of course, Alaska's most famous animals may be its sled dogs. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race takes place every year in early March. The race runs two routes in alternate years; this year, the southern route will take mushers over 998 miles.



Dogs at the start of the 2010 Iditarod race.

photo by Frank Kovalchek

In 2016, the winning team completed the race in eight days, 11 hours, 20 minutes and 16 seconds.

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/2j5KAcV
- youtu.be/2rE6UQNZXP0
- nps.gov/klgo/index.htm

At the library:

- "Exploring the States: Alaska, The Last Frontier" by Emily Rose Oachs
- "Alaska" by Tamra B. Orr

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of Alaska are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



ALASKA, BEAR,
EUROPEAN, EXPLORERS,
GLACIER, GOLD,
IDITAROD, JOBS, KODIAK,
LANGUAGE, LEAD,
MIDNIGHT, MOUNTAIN,
NATIVE, OIL, PIPELINE,
RUSSIA, SILVER, STATE,
SUN, VOLCANO, ZINC.

L I O M V E V I T A N R P M T
D A E L S T A T E M U E V O D
R M I D N I G H T S C I E U U
R V O L C A N O S U N C G N K
S I L V E R H I G W I A A T O
R G I D I T A R O D Z L U A D
A O Q A K S A L A N R G G I I
E L S E N I L E P I P I N N A
B D N A E P O R U E P V A O K
E X P L O R E R S B O J L S G

Cook's Corner

Twice-Baked Potatoes

You'll need:

- 4 medium russet potatoes (7 to 9 ounces)
- vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup milk

- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 4 ounces shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- pinch of ground black pepper



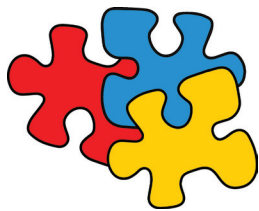
* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

What to do:

1. Rub potato skins with vegetable oil to ensure crispness. Bake potatoes for 1 hour at 400 degrees until done. Carefully remove potatoes from oven and cool for 10 minutes.
2. Cut potatoes in half lengthwise and scoop out pulp with a small spoon. Mash potato pulp with a fork until smooth.
3. Add remaining ingredients until well combined. Spoon mixture into empty potato shells.
4. Increase oven setting to broil. Broil potatoes for 10 to 15 minutes until crisp.

Puzzling

Unscramble the words below that remind us of Alaskan animals.



avinrcoer _____
ufinfp _____
lhwae _____
ocibuar _____

Answers: carnivore, puffin, whale, caribou.

Mini Jokes



Tess: What is a termite's favorite breakfast food?

Tori: Oakmeal!

Tim: What did one termite say to another when they saw a burning building?

Todd: "Let's have a barbecue!"

Eco Note



In early January, Alaska's Bogoslof volcano produced a series of ash eruptions on a remote island in the Aleutian chain. Some trans-Pacific flights were forced to change course to avoid the ash plumes about 850 miles southwest of Anchorage.

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For later:

The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race begins on Saturday, March 4. Watch your newspaper for articles about the race.

Teachers:

For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bbs.amuniversal.com/teaching_guides.html

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