

Welcome to



# Resurrection Bay Area

Alaska State Parks

## For More Information

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## Welcome

Resurrection Bay, with its tranquil turquoise or stormy gray waters, rocky islands, and the rugged mountains and glaciers that surround it, is a perfect example of Alaska's coastal beauty. Many of Seward's visitors only see the area's state parks from a cruise ship, but they are missing out.

To really enjoy all this area has to offer, we invite you to get up close and personal. Get your hiking boots, kayak, or boat ready and head out to one of the state park units in Resurrection Bay for an afternoon excursion or weekend adventure. There is a large state recreation area, a small state recreation site, and five state marine parks in Resurrection Bay.

## Area History

The coves and inlets of Resurrection Bay sheltered generations of the Alutiq-speaking people known as Unegkurmiut. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, many Native people were coerced into hunting valuable sea otters for the Russian-American Company. Soon, cultures blended, the Native population declined, and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century most Native villages were abandoned.

Since then, Resurrection Bay has been used by gold-seekers on their way to Turnagain, Nome, and Iditarod. Hundreds of railroad workers boosted Seward's population by 1917. Then, Resurrection Bay experienced a flurry of activity during World War II when the U.S. military constructed fortifications at Caines Head and other points in the bay. Today, you can see glimpses of history from land or water in the Resurrection Bay Area State Parks.

Panama gun mount at Rocky Point in Caines Head SRA

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Marine VHF Channel 17  
For emergencies call 911



North Fork of Tonsina Creek in Caines Head SRA  
Photo courtesy of sunnycove.com



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Derby Cove Creek in Caines Head SRA  
Photo courtesy of Ben Hagedorn

## Area Highlights

### Wildlife

Resurrection Bay provides important and varied bird habitat, attracting birders from around the world to see Tufted and Horned Puffins, Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Bald Eagles, and Spruce Grouse. Black and brown bears and mountain goats also live in the Resurrection Bay area.



Juvenile Black-legged Kittiwake



Steller Sea Lions  
Photo courtesy of Carol Griswold



Humpback Whale near Day Harbor  
Photo courtesy of Tom Kain

Whale watching in Resurrection Bay can be very rewarding, too. Look for spouts and fins of humpback whales and orcas in the bay. Smaller marine mammals such as harbor and Dall's porpoises, sea otters, and sea lions might upstage them by putting on a show.



Varied Thrush (male)  
Photo courtesy of Carol Griswold

Background photo courtesy of Nicole Acevedo

### Wave Action

Boating is popular in Resurrection Bay and is the only way to reach the state marine parks. Most visitors kayak or take a water taxi to these parks, as only Caines Head SRA and Lowell Point State Recreation Site (SRS) have land access. There are no public mooring buoys or docking facilities. Small boats can be pulled up on shore, but should be secured above the high tide line to prevent losing them to tides or rough surf.

### Kayaker's Day Trip Checklist:

- Life jacket (properly sized and fastened)
- Emergency locator beacon or SEND device
- VHF radio
- Spray skirt
- Hatch covers or float bags
- Paddle
- Spare paddle
- Paddle float
- Distress signaling devices (flares, mirror, whistle)
- Bilge pump
- First aid kit
- Dry bag with a set of spare clothes and survival gear
- Enough food and water for trip
- Sunscreen and hat
- Knowledge of wet exit and re-entry
- Float plan

When boating in Resurrection Bay, take appropriate safety precautions. Make sure you are prepared for emergencies and file a float plan with the Seward Harbormaster, describing your trip plan, boat, gear, and size of party. Always wear a life jacket.

Ghost Forest at Tonsina Point  
Background photo courtesy of sunnycove.com

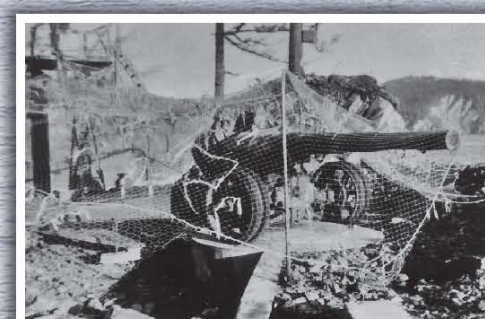
### Historic World War II Fort and Garrison

Fort McGilvray in Caines Head State Recreation Area (SRA) is the most accessible of Resurrection Bay's WWII-era fixed defense installations. A short hike from North Beach will take you to these sites. You are welcome to explore the ammunition magazine, base-end station, gun emplacements, and a few other shelters; however, you will need a flashlight.

Ruins of a "garrison ghost town" on Caines Head SRA's South Beach are also accessible by trail, though some of the structures are just off the trail and somewhat hidden by the dense vegetation. These structural remains are dangerous and exploring them is strongly discouraged. If you are boating, you may also explore Rocky Point for remnants of another WWII-era fixed defense installation.

WWII structures can also be seen atop Chamberlain Point in Safety Cove State Marine Park (SMP), but access is difficult and not recommended.

Other deserted WWII structures in the Resurrection Bay area include searchlight control stations at Topeka Point, including the Iron Door, and remnants of Fort Bulkeley on Rugged Island.



155mm gun at Rocky Point in Caines Head SRA (circa 1944)

### Camping

Camping in the Resurrection Bay area state parks is a rustic backcountry experience. Each of the five state marine parks allows for beach camping. To protect fragile beach rye grass, please avoid camping on vegetated areas. Thumb Cove SMP has a toilet for kayakers and campers located on the western end of the beach, about 250 feet east of the Porcupine Glacier public-use cabin.



Camping at North Beach

### Public-Use Cabins

There are two public-use cabins (PUCs) in Caines Head SRA—Derby Cove and Callisto Canyon cabins. Both can be accessed by small personal boat, water taxi, or by hiking the Caines Head Trail.

Thumb Cove SMP also has two PUCs, Porcupine Glacier and Spruce Glacier cabins, and can be reached by boat. Spruce Glacier PUC is accessed from the beach by a boardwalk.

All four cabins have private toilets and nearby creeks provide fresh water. Drinking water must be treated or boiled.

For more information or to make reservations, visit <http://dnralaska.gov/parks/cabins/>.

Caines Head State Recreation Area (SRA) provides three camping areas: Tonsina Point, North Beach, and South Beach. Toilets are available at each location, but there are no designated campsites. Campsites should be at least 150 feet away from the picnic shelter and 300 feet from the public-use cabins. A food storage locker is located at North Beach under the picnic shelter. Camping is prohibited around Fort McGilvray to protect the historic resources.

WWII-era dock at North Beach in Caines Head SRA  
Background photo courtesy of Jack Blackwell



Inside the Porcupine Glacier Public-Use Cabin in Thumb Cove SMP

## Land Trail Descriptions

### Caines Head Trail ①

**Access:** Lowell Point SRS, about 2.5 miles south of downtown Seward at end of Lowell Point Rd.

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** Approximately 7.8 miles one way to Fort McGilvray (2.3 miles from Lowell Point to Tonsina Point, 3.4 miles from Tonsina Point to North Beach, and 2 miles from North Beach to Fort McGilvray)

**Elevation Change:** 249.2 feet Lowell Point to Tonsina Point; 156.9 feet Tonsina Point to North Beach; 670.9 feet North Beach to Fort McGilvray

From Lowell Point SRS, this trail will lead you through lush temperate rainforest and across Tonsina Creek to a popular camping, day-use area, and beach at Tonsina Point. In August and September, you can watch pink and chum salmon spawn in Tonsina Creek, but avoid disturbing them. Please respect private property and stay on the designated trail.

The portion of the trail between Tonsina Point and Derby Cove is tidally influenced and can only be hiked during a low tide of 3.0 feet or less. During high tide, steep cliffs block passage at two pinch points. Hikers should leave the trailhead at Lowell Point SRS two hours before the low tide to avoid getting stranded by the incoming tide. To hike from North Beach, leave at least one hour before a low tide of 3.0 feet or lower.

From Derby Cove, a half-mile switchback trail leads to the North Beach camping area. An old army road leads hikers from North Beach through a mature spruce forest to the WWII ruins of Fort McGilvray located high on Caines Head. Hikers are rewarded with sweeping views of Resurrection Bay and a chance to explore many of the old buildings. Make sure you take a camera and a flashlight to explore, but leave historic artifacts as they are so others can enjoy them, too.

### South Beach Trail ②

**Access:** Caines Head Trail 1.1 mile south of North Beach

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** 2.7 miles one way from Caines Head Trail junction

**Elevation Change:** 363 feet

This trail follows another military road through the lush coastal rainforest, past ruins of the South Beach Garrison, to South Beach, a small stony beach with lots of wave action. South Beach is a great spot for pitching a tent if you want a somewhat isolated experience with great views of islands and the Gulf of Alaska. The old, rusty steel buildings are not safe to explore.



South Beach in Caines Head SRA  
Photo courtesy of Justin Wholey

### Loop Trail ③

**Access:** South Beach or the Alpine Trail

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** 2.3 miles one way from South Beach to the Alpine Trail

**Elevation Change:** 867 feet

This foot trail winds up and down through the mossy forest past waterfalls and creeks, connecting the Alpine Trail to South Beach and creating an eight-and-a-half-mile loop that starts and ends at North Beach. This is a primitive trail that requires some attention to trail markers.

### Alpine Trail ④

**Access:** Caines Head Trail 0.4 miles south of Derby Cove, or from South Beach at the northern end of Loop Trail

**Travel Means:** Foot

**Distance:** 3.8 miles one way from Caines Head Trail

**Elevation Change:** 1,635.5 feet

The Alpine Trail leads hikers above tree line on a short but steep set of switchbacks to the alpine area below Callisto Peak. Weather permitting, sweeping views of Resurrection Bay and Bear Glacier reward hikers for their efforts.



Kayaking near Callisto Canyon Public-Use Cabin  
Photo courtesy of Kim Kruse

## Marine Trail Description

### Resurrection Bay Marine Trail ①

**Access:** Seward Small Boat Harbor and beach at Lowell Point SRS (limited parking)

**Travel Means:** Boat

**Popular Landings:** Tonsina Point, North Beach, Thumb Cove, north side of spit in Sandspit Point SMP, Sunny Cove, Driftwood Bay, Safety Cove

**Distance:** About 59.5 miles total one way.

**Paddling Difficulty:** Varies by trail segment and weather. May require intermediate or advanced paddling and self-rescue skills.

Exploring Resurrection Bay from the water is one of the best ways to see all that this ruggedly beautiful area has to offer. Kayaks, inflatable boats, small skiffs, and other small watercraft can be pulled up on shore and secured above the high tide mark.

**BOATERS BEWARE:** There are no public mooring buoys and few good all-weather anchorages. Weather conditions can change quickly and dramatically

For more information see "Kayaker's Guide to the Resurrection Bay Marine Trail" at [www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/caineshd.htm](http://www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/caineshd.htm).

## Park Descriptions

### Lowell Point State Recreation Site

This recreation site is a popular day-use area that is close to Seward and has road access. Enjoy a stroll on the sandy beach or launch your kayak from Lowell Point to explore the Resurrection Bay Marine Trail. Hike from the trailhead at the upper parking lot to Tonsina Point, the public-use cabins, or Caines Head. Camping is prohibited here, but there are private campgrounds nearby.

### Caines Head State Recreation Area

**Tonsina Point:** This is a popular destination for hikers and kayakers. Tonsina Creek empties into Resurrection Bay at this point creating waves up to half a mile offshore. Give yourself plenty of distance from the fanned delta when paddling around it and turn back toward the shore once you reach calmer waters. Many kayakers and boaters camp in the woods or on the beach. Toilets and a picnic shelter are available. There are landing opportunities between Tonsina Point and North Beach, including beach access to Callisto Canyon and Derby Cove public-use cabins.

**North Beach:** One of the most popular camping spots in the recreation area, North Beach provides access to a 12-mile trail system. Food storage locker, toilets, and an intermittently occupied ranger station are available here. Do not attempt to tie off to the old WWII-era dock; it is unsafe and you could lose your boat.

**South Beach:** South Beach offers an opportunity to experience the ocean swell and scenic vistas of the barrier islands and the Resurrection Peninsula. Kayaking around Caines Head to South Beach requires intermediate paddling and self-rescue skills as rebounding waves often occur at this prominent headland. It is difficult to land a kayak or vessel here, due to the steep, rocky beach and high surf.

By December, 1942, South Beach boasted four barracks capable of housing 63 men each, officers' quarters, a mess hall, and more. Remains of the garrison can still be seen, but they are collapsing, so exploring them is strongly discouraged.

**Rocky Point:** On the southern end of the recreation area, Rocky Point is only accessible by water. It offers a more protected landing than South Beach, though landing can still be difficult at times. WWII remnants can also be found here, including an ammunition magazine, gun emplacements, power houses for the submarine loop station, and a searchlight station.

### Thumb Cove SMP

This is a popular and particularly scenic anchorage with protected waters, impressive glaciers, and waterfalls cascading down steep rock faces. Caution is advised when boating; there are no public mooring buoys and there can be a lot of varied boat traffic. Visitors are invited to camp on the beach, or reserve one of this park's two public-use cabins. A toilet is available to boaters and campers on the west end of the beach.



Unloading gear at Callisto Canyon Public-Use Cabin  
Photo courtesy of Kim Kruse

### Sandspit Point State Marine Park

This undeveloped state marine park is located on Fox Island about 12 miles from Seward. The north side of the spit, which is a glacial moraine, offers boaters and paddlers a nice beach landing and camping.

Kayakers accessing this park should have intermediate paddling skills and getting here requires paddlers and boaters to cross through an area of high summer traffic. It's a good idea to announce on marine VHF channel 16 that you are crossing. The anchorage near the spit is generally poor due to its exposure to the north wind and landing on the southern side of the spit is not recommended due to ocean swells.

### Sunny Cove State Marine Park

The southernmost state marine park within Resurrection Bay offers intermediate paddlers the opportunity to feel the ocean swell on the southern end of Fox Island, while being able to retreat to a semi-protected beach in Sunny Cove. There are no beach landings on the eastern side of Fox Island until you reach the northern shoreline of the Sandspit Point SMP. Be cautious of williwaws (strong down-drifting winds) with easterly winds coming over the mountains. This park stands out for its unique rock formations including sea arches and a sea cave.

Advanced paddlers and boaters may explore the outer barrier islands including Hive and Rugged islands when conditions permit. Limited landing opportunities exist on these islands and vary depending on the tide. If the weather cooperates, visitors might get views of Bear Glacier, Callisto Head, and the Aialik Peninsula.

If you decide to paddle around Rugged Island, look up. The ruins of WWII-era Fort Bulkeley are perched near the top—an impressive engineering feat.

### Driftwood Bay State Marine Park

Getting to this park takes paddlers across 13 miles of exposed seas and only expert paddlers should attempt to round Cape Resurrection. Dry suits are recommended. This park offers little protection from bad weather and is generally not recommended for anchoring. However, waterfalls, pillow basalt rock formations, lush vegetation, and wildlife viewing make the grueling trip worth it.

### Safety Cove State Marine Park

This park is also difficult to paddle to, as kayakers must first make the difficult trip around Cape Resurrection. Safety Cove offers somewhat better anchorage than Driftwood Bay. Wildlife viewing in the park is excellent and, on clear days, visitors may be treated to views of Ellsworth Glacier as they enter and leave the park. A three-acre lake at the head of the cove incites further exploration of this state marine park and allows for additional recreational opportunities.



Lowell Point SRS

## Legend

	Water Trail/Mileage		Trailhead
	Hiking Trail		Hiking
	Road		Campsites
	State Park Unit		Picnic Shelter
	Kenai Fjords National Park		Public-Use Cabin
	Parking		Toilet
	World War II Historic Site		Ranger Station