

# Taylor Highway History

The Taylor Highway is a route through gold mining history. Prospectors searched for gold in the Fortymile region well before the famous Klondike stampede of 1897. As early as 1881, gold-bearing gravels were discovered on the North Fork of the Fortymile River, foreshadowing the area's future reputation as the richest goldfield in the Yukon valley.

Major discoveries in 1886 and 1887 set off Interior Alaska's first gold rush. Communities such as Jack Wade, Chicken, Franklin, and Steele Creek rose almost overnight, and miners quickly wore a series of trails between Eagle and the mining towns and camps. These trails later became wagon roads that, in turn, became parts of the Taylor Highway, built during the winter of 1945-1946 and completed in 1951.

Most of the old cabins and roadhouses of the early gold seekers are gone now. What remains are the piles of mine tailings, abandoned gold dredges and sluice boxes, and overgrown ditches that once channeled water to the placer mines. Many of the names along the highway

recall the early days of the gold rush: Logging Cabin Creek, Jack Wade Creek, and Lost Chicken Hill. Active mines dot the route as a reminder that the lure of gold still lives in Fortymile country.

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# Taylor Highway

## Fortymile Gold Country

## Travel Guide



*Mosquito Fork Dredge*

*Early miners (Stout Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives)*

## Know Before You Go

The Taylor Highway is open seasonally from April to mid-October. Beyond milepost 64 the Taylor Highway is a gravel road. Conditions range from good to poor depending upon maintenance and weather conditions. The road becomes narrow and winding, particularly north of Jack Wade Junction. Use caution and travel slowly, especially on hairpin curves.

Between the small communities along the highway, be prepared for limited facilities for gas and tire repair, drinking water, and trash disposal. All basic services are available in Tok, Chicken, and Eagle. BLM campgrounds offer minimal facilities, and travelers are advised to carry their own water supply and be prepared to pack out their own trash. RV travelers should fill their gas tanks and use dump stations before traveling the Taylor Highway.



*Taylor Highway*

## A New Landscape

Wildfires in 2004 and 2005 burned much of the spruce forest along the highway, clearing the way for new growth. As you travel the highway, notice how the area is regenerating. Pink fireweed and fresh green clumps of willows are the first plants to spring up in the blackened landscape. Cottongrass and blueberry shrubs get an infusion of nutrients from the burned forest, growing thick and lush. In some areas, birch trees are replacing the burned-over spruce in a process that will take several decades.



*Area burned by wildfire along the Taylor Highway*

## Subsistence Use

Signs are posted on Federal land to mark the boundaries of a special type of hunting area. Regulations under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), passed by Congress in 1980, allow rural residents of Alaska to hunt game such as caribou in these areas. Subsistence hunters must have an Alaska hunting license and comply with seasons and bag limits. Finding the boundaries of Federal land along the Taylor Highway is very challenging, so the BLM has posted these signs to help rural residents hunt legally.



## Top of the World Highway

### Boundary Milepost (MP) 9

Boundary served the mining community in the Walker Fork, Cherry Creek, and Canyon Creek drainages for many years beginning in the 1890s. Part of the original Boundary Lodge, built in 1926, is still standing.

### Fortymile Caribou Herd MP 12

An interpretive panel tells the story of the decline of a herd that once numbered over half a million and how an international team formed a coalition to manage for the herd's recovery.

### Davis Dome Wayside MP 13

This wayside offers a view of the vast expanse of the Fortymile area. Caribou are sometimes seen here. Watch for migrating hawks in spring and fall.

### International Boundary MP 14

Elevation 4,127 ft (1,258 m). United States and Canada customs offices are open only during the summer months, usually from May 15 to September 15. Dates can vary so call ahead (907-774-2252) to be sure. Hours are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Alaska time. The Top of the World Highway continues to historic Dawson City and the Klondike gold fields.



*Davis Dome Wayside, Top of the World Highway*



## Points of Interest

### Tetlin Junction Milepost (MP) 0

The buildings on the northwest corner of the intersection are what remain of the old Fortymile Roadhouse.

### Sand Dunes MP 0-7

Dark gray sand dunes can be seen on both sides of the road. More than 10,000 years ago, strong winds carried loose sediments from the plains around the Tanana River, piling them against the low mountains to the northwest.

### Mount Fairplay MP 14

A good view of Mount Fairplay, elevation 5,541 ft (1,689 meters) is directly ahead.

### Fortymile Caribou History MP 21

Read about the life cycle of caribou and the fall and rise of the Fortymile herd at the interpretive panels.

### Glacial Effects MP 34

The gently rounded ridges of the surrounding Yukon-Tanana Uplands were never covered in ice, in contrast to the rugged, glaciated Alaska Range in the distance.

### Mount Fairplay Wayside MP 35

Stop at the viewing deck for a commanding view of the surrounding valleys and Mount Fairplay.

### Logging Cabin Creek Wayside MP 43

This is a nice picnic area overlooking the creek. Note: the parking area is small and not recommended for large vehicles.

### West Fork Campground and River Access MP 49

The campground has seven pull-through spaces and 18 back-in spaces. At the overlook on the upper road look for trumpeter swans and moose on the small lake. The river access point for the West Fork of the Dennison is the southernmost access point on the 400-mile Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River System. For more river information, ask for the BLM brochure *Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River*.

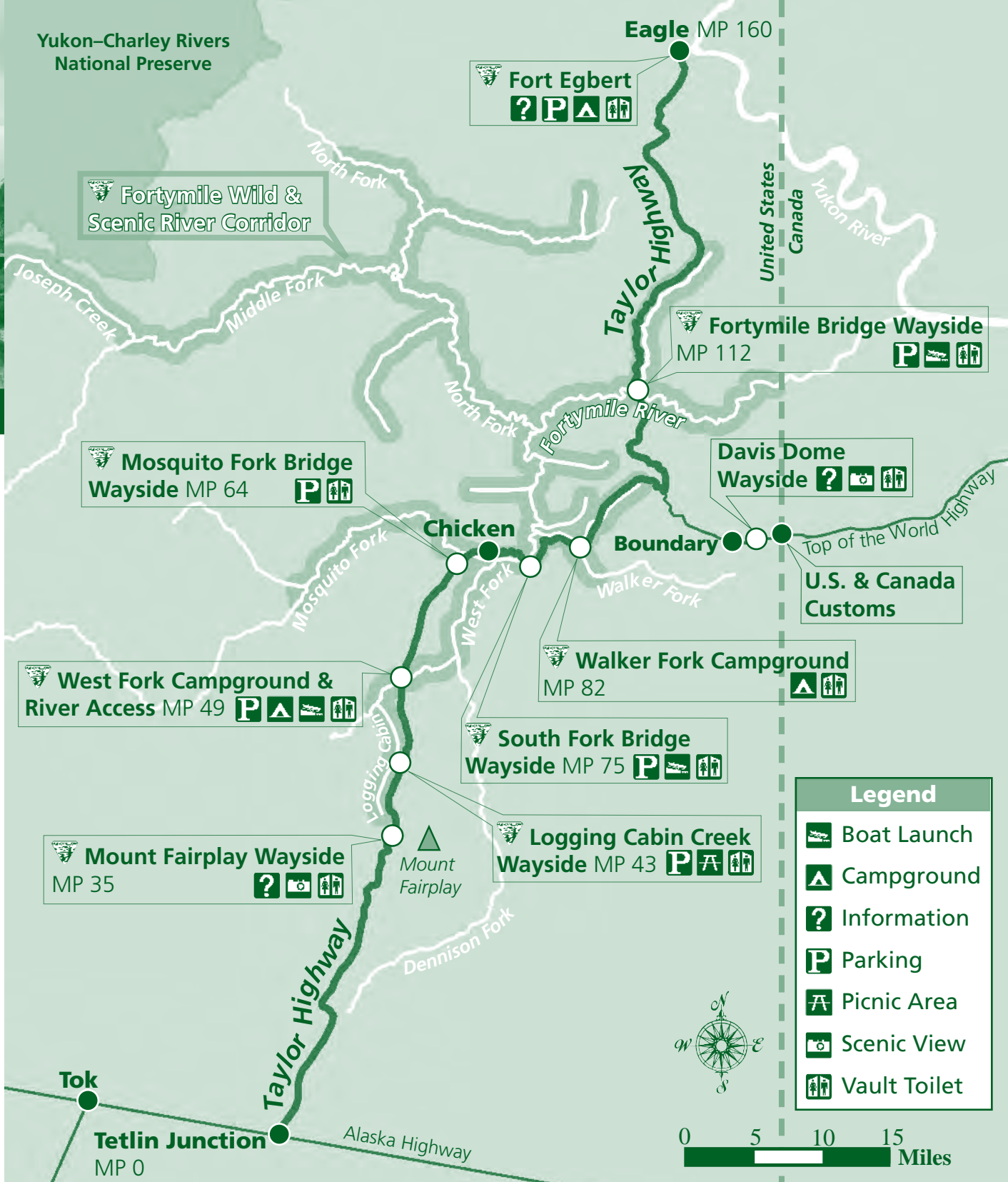
### Chicken MP 66

This gold mining town began around 1898. Its residents have been mining ever since. This is a good place to stop and explore. Historic Chicken and the Pedro Dredge are on the National Register of Historic Places. Both are privately owned and offer tours.

### Chicken Creek Bridge MP 67

The Fairbanks Exploration Company operated a dredge in this area from 1959 to 1965. At its peak, an average run of the dredge, operating 24 hours a day for two weeks, brought in about \$40,000 in gold. The road at the bridge was built on tailings, gravel that is discarded and piled up during mining operations.

Yukon-Charley Rivers  
National Preserve



## Taylor Highway

### Mosquito Fork Dredge Overlook Trail MP 68

Park in the turnout on the west side of the road. The trail begins on the east side of the road. Walk the 1.5-mile trail leading to an overlook above the remains of the Mosquito Fork Dredge. The dredge operated less than two seasons before it shut down in 1938.

### Lost Chicken Hill MP 69

Also known as Lost Chicken Mine, it held a pay streak that had been “lost” for many years. It is now privately owned and mined.

### South Fork Bridge Wayside MP 75

Learn more about the Fortymile gold rush at the interpretive panels.

### Walker Fork MP 76 -79

This tributary of the South Fork of the Fortymile River erodes deeply into the landscape, cutting an average of 800 feet into solid rock.

### Walker Fork Campground MP 82

The campground is operated by the BLM and offers 18 camping sites. In the 1930s and ‘40s, this was the site of Lassen airstrip. Year-round air service replaced winter-only sleds delivering equipment and fuel to mining camps on Jack Wade Creek.

### Jack Wade Junction MP 96

Drive north for 64 miles to the historic town of Eagle, or east for 14 miles to Canada and Dawson City via the Top of the World Highway. The Ogilvie Mountains in Canada can be seen to the northeast on a clear day. Steele Creek Dome, elevation 4,015 ft (1,224 m), is to the

north. Caution: the road between here and Eagle is very narrow and is not recommended for large trailers and oversized vehicles.

### Geologic Formations MP 105

As the highway begins a descent into the valley of the Fortymile River, notice the intricately folded metamorphic rocks exposed by the road cut. Look for white marble, quartzite, gneiss, and schist.

### Fortymile Bridge Wayside MP 112

During the gold rush years, the Fortymile River served as the main highway between the Yukon River and the Fortymile Mining District.

### Geologic Fault Zone MP 123

The geologic fault zone that crosses the highway here may not be obvious, but a distinct change in the topography is noticeable over the next few miles. North of the fault there are few cliffs and many old landslides.

### Eagle and Fort Egbert MP 160

On a bend of the Yukon River, Eagle has thrived as an incorporated city since 1897, when the U.S. Army responded to demands for law and order during the Klondike Gold Rush and built Fort Egbert. You can explore the area on your own or take advantage of the Eagle Historical Society’s daily walking tour of the city, museum, and restored buildings at the fort, a National Historic Landmark. For more information, see the BLM “Adventures in the Past” booklet *Eagle – Fort Egbert: A Remnant of the Past*. The BLM maintains an 18-site campground within walking distance of both the fort and town.