A hike to the top of the Harding Icefield Trail gives you a glimpse of what much of south-central Alaska looked like during the last ice age. This strenuous trail climbs approximately 1,000 feet every mile, but spectacular views along the way make it well worth the effort. Even a half-mile hike up the trail gives you a panoramic view of the valley floor and the edge of Exit Glacier.

About 3,500 feet above the valley, the trail ends at the edge of Harding Icefield, a vast expanse of snow and ice stretching as far as the eye can see. Allow at least 6–8 hours to hike to the end of the trail and back. Although it’s only 3.7 miles one-way, the trail is steep, and you’ll want plenty of time to take in the view at the top!

If you decide not to go to the end of the trail, the top of the cliffs at mile 2.3 is a worthy destination. Here you get your first glimpse of the Harding Icefield and have great views of Exit Glacier. Allow 4–6 hours for a round-trip hike to this spot.

At mile 1.5, the trail levels off briefly at an open plateau of small rolling hills blanketed by wildflowers and alpine vegetation. Give yourself 2–4 hours for a round-trip hike to Marmot Meadows.

Hiking off trail or cutting switchbacks kills fragile plants and causes damaging erosion.

Even though tracks may lead elsewhere, please protect this fragile alpine area by staying on the path marked by the orange flags.

This hike can be a fun adventure, if you’re prepared. The weather can be unpredictable. Bears frequent the trail. Let someone know your plans.

- Wear a hat
- Don’t forget your sunglasses and sunscreen. You can sunburn even on a cloudy day.
- Dress in layers
- It’s cooler at higher elevations. Be prepared for rain, strong winds, and even snow!
- Keep bear spray handy
- Know how to use it. Bears are usually not a threat but they deserve your respect.
- Bring water and food
- Water along the trail may contain Giardia. Don’t drink it unless you purify it.
- Carry a trash bag
- Be considerate of other hikers. Pack out toilet paper and all trash.
- Wear sturdy boots
- The trail is steep and often muddy. Wear rugged-soled shoes to avoid slipping on wet rocks.