



# Trail Report – December 2011

A recent round of cache placements in the Anchorage area have added to the burgeoning popularity of the **Turnagain Arm Trail**, along the south edge of Chugach State Park. This route was formerly known as the Old Johnson Trail, paralleling Turnagain Arm and the Seward Highway for 9.4 miles between Potter and Windy Corner. It is one of the Park's most-used trails, favored for its fabulous views, oft-seen wildlife, excellent birding opportunities and early spring availability. The south-facing location makes it one of the first trails to dry out at the end of winter.



Wintersmith photo, from [GCJWHS](#) Windy Trail to the Old Road

In 1915 the footpaths along this shoreline were developed into a construction and freight trail to support construction of the Alaska Railroad. The railroad grade was built just above tidewater without discernible change in elevation, as is necessary for rail travel. However, the construction trail rose and fell as needed across the hillsides and valleys to ease the passage of men, materials and draft animals. Today the Turnagain Arm Trail in most places follows the old pathway. A keen eye can make out the location of early construction camps and where the grade was cut into the hillside to make the trail wide enough for horse-drawn sledges and wagons.



View of trail (center right) and railroad grade along Turnagain Arm, looking toward Rainbow Valley. Alaska Engineering Commission 1917 photo by P.S. Hunt. Today's trail follows the original pathway here.

By 1918 the Alaska Railroad was completed between Seward and Anchorage, obviating the need to haul freight on the old trail. The Seward Highway was built in 1950 and paved by 1954, covering portions of the trail in places. Successive waves of highway and railroad expansion have encroached further on the trail. Several of the old work camp sites have been reworked into facilities for Chugach State Park use, most notably at the Potter Section House and McHugh.



Railroad construction camp at railroad mile 96 near McHugh Creek with Turnagain Arm in background. Alaska Engineering Commission 1916 photo. Photographer: P.S. Hunt. Today this area is overlain by the parking and picnic areas at McHugh Creek Trailhead.

Wildlife commonly viewed along the trail include moose and Dall sheep, while less frequently black and brown bear, lynx, and coyotes may be seen. Beluga whales are often visible in Turnagain Arm at high tide, feeding on the salmon runs up Turnagain Arm in late July and August. Bald eagles are common close to the waters of Turnagain Arm, while Golden eagles are more often seen further inland. During spring and fall the raptor migration flights along Turnagain Arm draw birders from around the world to see dozens per hour make passage past aptly-named Bird Point.



Ladybug Kids' photos of Dall Sheep and wildflowers, near [GCJWHS](#) Windy Trail to the Old Road - exemplary of the area's natural beauty

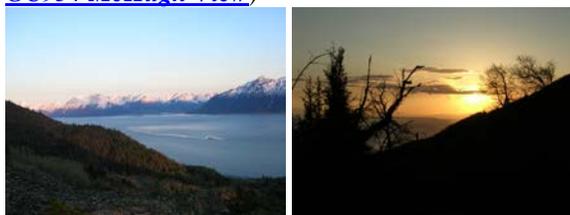
The 9.4 miles of trail are well-maintained and mostly easy walking. Some areas are equipped with boardwalks to cross marshy wetlands. Typical walking surface is well-packed gravel. Just off the trail are Sitka and white spruce, mountain hemlock, aspen, cottonwood, Alaska paper birch and the ever-present devil's club. Wildflowers abound in season, as do a wide variety of Alaska's berry species. Thus, not only sturdy and possibly waterproof walking shoes but thick pants are recommended gear for geocachers hiking the Turnagain Trail. As this trail traverses Alaska's backcountry, take time to familiarize yourself with ['Bear Aware'](#) information and [moose encounter](#) tactics before you go.

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**Turnagain Arm Trail** consists of three distinct sections, each suitable for a day's outing in pursuit of smileys and a hike with terrific scenery. An excellent asset here for geocachers and hikers alike is [Northwest Trails](#) – a free map overlay of most trails found in southcentral Alaska. Vehicles need a Park Pass or must pay \$5 per day for parking at State Park trailheads. Distances along the Seward Highway are given in miles from its southern terminus in Seward. Note the highway mileposts do not correspond to the railroad mileposts. Cohofive's Seward Highway Cache Tour series aren't included in the caches described here along the Turnagain Arm Trail. This trail log is adapted from the Chugach State Park website:

**Potter (MP 115) to McHugh (MP 112) - 3.3 miles**

*More than a dozen caches are found along this section, with another dozen on the upper trail loop above McHugh (including one of Alaska's oldest caches – [GC954 McHugh View](#))*



*Scobey (left, looking east) and Ladybug Kids (right, looking west) took these photos of a McHugh View sunset one spring evening*

MP 0.0 Parking at the Potter Trailhead

0.4 Trail levels off and follows a bluff east through birch, aspen and cottonwoods. Note that the trail here is wide enough for a wagon.

3.2 Trail sign at the Y. Follow trail south to the McHugh Trailhead; trail to north leads to Table Rock.

3.3 McHugh Trailhead



*This 1912 US Coast & Geodetic Survey [benchmark](#) is one of the earliest placed along Turnagain Arm, predating construction of the railroad, the old Johnson Trail, and the founding of the city of Anchorage. This bit of history is encountered while searching for [GC5583 Gilligan's...](#), a McHugh Creek-area geocache placed in 2002. Gilligan's is one of the geocaches found along the Turnagain Arm shoreline, easily accessible from the State Park. Here on this islet travelers once landed by boat at high tide, after crossing the Arm from Sunshine or Hope while headed north to the goldfields of interior Alaska.*

**McHugh Creek Picnic Area – MP 112**

*A half-dozen caches populate the area surrounding McHugh Creek's parking area, including a technical climbing cache and hides along the shoreline.*

At the picnic area, Mile 112 Seward Highway, the trailhead to Potter is in the upper parking lot and the trailhead to Rainbow is in the lower parking lot.

**McHugh (MP 112) to Rainbow (MP 108) - 4.2 miles**

*Nearly two dozen caches are to be found on this section*

- 3.3 Rainbow trailhead at stairs in lower parking lot.
- 3.35 Trail crosses bridge over McHugh Creek & heads uphill.
- 3.4 At the Y follow the sign pointing east to Rainbow. The trail to the north follows the creek uphill and heads toward McHugh Peak, as well as the loop connecting back to the trail's Potter section.
- 3.7 Trail levels off and crosses a scree slope, evidence of an avalanche area. The trail then narrows, an indication that it may not follow the original wagon trail. The trail alternates between rocky slopes with few trees and excellent views, and heavily vegetated sections.
- 4.9 Viewpoint on a rocky ledge. Trail turns inland, winding behind a knoll and Beluga Point.
- 5.0 Side trails lead off either side of the main trail. One goes north, uphill; the other crosses a knoll and continues down to Beluga Point and the highway.
- 6.3 Trail switchbacks down into Rainbow Valley.
- 7.1 Trail crosses gravel road.
- 7.5 Rainbow trailhead and parking lot.

**Rainbow (MP 108) to Windy Corner (MP 106) - 1.9 miles**

*Currently there are seven caches along this stretch of trail*

- 7.5 Rainbow Trailhead and parking lot. Trail begins uphill.
- 7.6 Trail levels off.
- 8.2 Spruce tree growing over trail leads to top of a rock ledge and views of Windy Corner and the town of Hope across the arm.
- 9.25 Switchbacks head down to the highway.
- 9.4 Windy Corner Trailhead at Mile 106 Seward Hwy.



*The prolific and photogenic caching team Baradora made the difficult look easy in their recent winter find here at [GC36VNE Mile 8](#), a cache located just above the trail between Rainbow and Windy Point.*

*The editors of 'Around the State' welcome your articles. We'd love to publish your favorite trails in your own back yard! Send your articles, photographs and ideas to [skinnerwesley@gmail.com](mailto:skinnerwesley@gmail.com), attention "Around the State"*

# GEOCACHE ALASKA! INC.

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## Election Results for 2012 Board of Directors:

48 responses out of 90 ballots sent = 53% return. Vote counts shown as: (percent, raw votes)

**President:** **Wes Skinner/NorthWes** (95.8%, 46),  
Larry Mitchell/**PedalPushin** (2.1%, 1)\*^, Tim LaForge (sic)/**Tundra Tim** (2.1%, 1)\*

**Vice President:** **Joe Edwards/AKFossil** (97.9%, 47),  
Tim LaForge (sic)/**Tundra Tim** (2.1%, 1)\*

**Treasurer:** **Roberta Bromlow/Polgera** (95.8%, 46),  
Tim LaForge (sic)/**Tundra Tim** (2.1%, 1)\*, Abstain (2.1%, 1)\*

**Webmaster:** **Scott Aleckson/SSO JOAT** (97.9%, 47),  
Harold Faust/**Ridgeseeker** (2.1%, 1)\*

**Secretary:** **Michael Malvick/Ladybug Kids** (97.9%, 47),  
Tim LaForge (sic)/**Tundra Tim** (2.1%, 1)\*

**Members at Large:** **Randy Cler/cavyguy** (89.6%, 43),  
**Lisa Echard/Flightriskak** (83.3%, 40),  
**Tom Noble/Tomanoble** (83.3%, 40),  
**Ray Menzie/akgh519** (83.3%, 40).

*Other Member at Large candidates receiving votes: Trish Stowe/stoweak (33.3% 16),  
Scott Sagraves/fuzzybelly (6.3%, 3)\*, Anthony Roof/firemanak (2.1%, 1)\*,  
Tim LaForge (sic)/Tundra Tim (2.1%, 1)\**

\*denotes write-in

^not a current GeocacheAlaska! Member

The 2012 Board of Directors will be introduced on December 9<sup>th</sup> at GeoFest. Don't hesitate to contact your Board of Directors by phone or via email (either the GeocacheAlaska! Website or through the cacher to cacher email on the geocaching.com website) with your ideas and concerns.

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## See you Dec 9 at the 7th Annual Geofest – [GC32WBK](#) – Time for Winter Fun!



One of the highlights of the evening is a homemade dessert contest, with dessert-themed geobling prizes!

Desserts being entered in the contest must be checked in by 6:15 and judging will begin at 6:20.

Prize categories are 1) pies and cobblers; 2) cakes and cupcakes; 3) other (cookies, bars, etc.).

The judges will score appearance/presentation (10 points), taste/flavor (20 points), and geocaching creativity (5 points). First and second prize will be awarded in each category and an overall people's choice prize will be awarded.