

# Gold and Platinum Placer and Lode Deposits in Denali State Park Open for Recreational Miners

*By Dennis R. Garrett*

**Abstract:** The Petersville Road in South-Central Alaska affords opportunities for year-round mining by providing access to known placer and lode deposits in and near the south side of Denali State Park. These placer and lode deposits described within are rarely visited by prospectors and miners, which is good news for those seeking near virgin, or at least, unhammered ground.

**Introduction:** In the extreme NE corner of the Yentna Mining District, where it shares a border with the Valdez Creek Mining District are numerous placer and lode deposits that contain gold, PGE, Tin Gemstones, fossils, rocks, and other minerals. Historic production has been recorded from these deposits, but in 1985, an expansion to Denali State Park closed the claims and eventually ran the miners off. As a result, the abandoned placer mines have not seen much, if any, mining in over 37 years, and some much longer due to the low price of gold for so many decades and legal issues prior to the Mineral Closure Order.

I have panned and sluiced these streams and gulches and have found very nice color (Gold, Platinum-Group Elements, Cassiterite, Pyrites, other metals, and gemstones), as well as incredible views and the Solitude of Quiet. In this brief article I will provide some information to get you started. Additional, detailed information may be gleaned from the various publications on The Blue Ribbon Mine website, and in the provided external links.

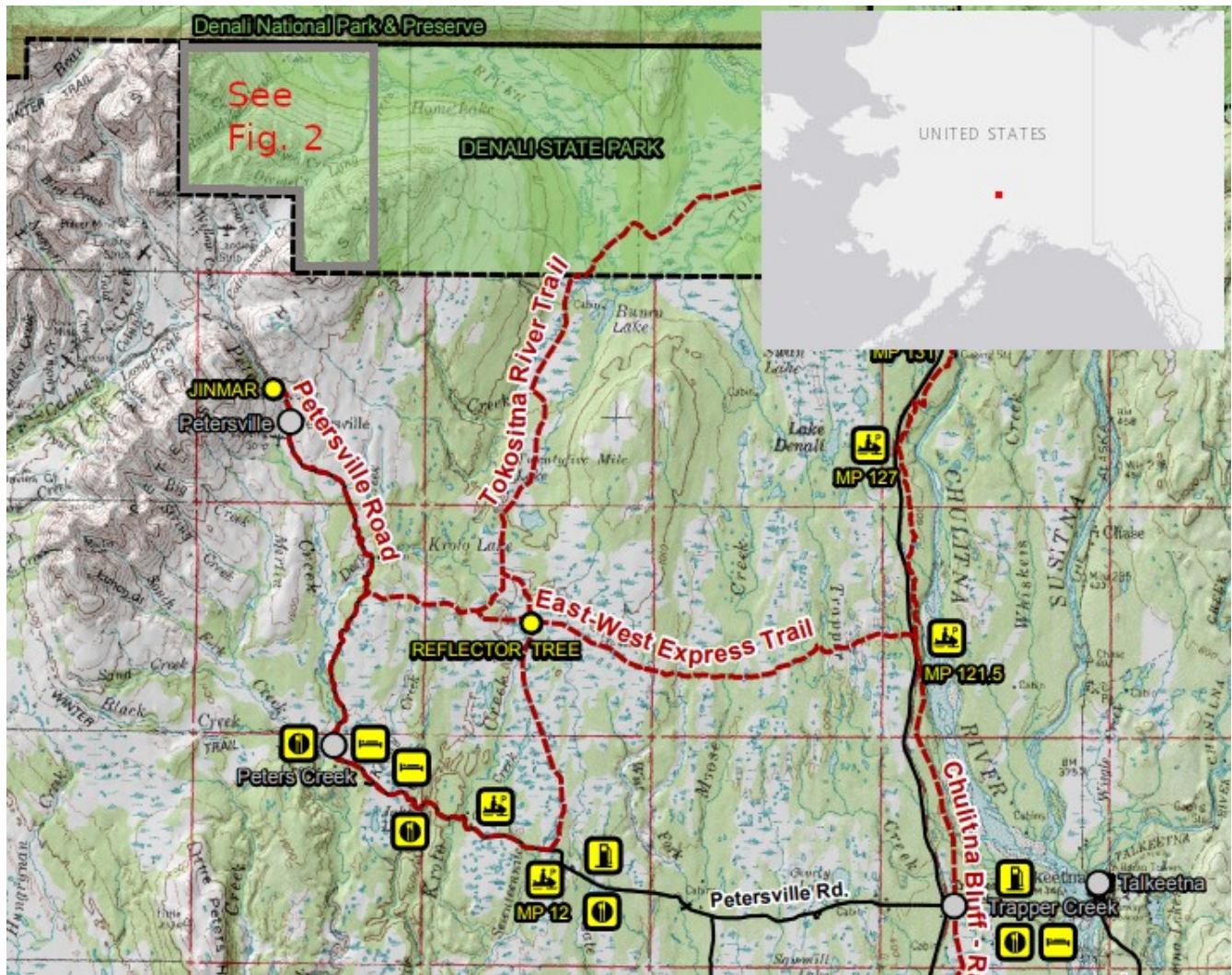
In addition to the various metallic minerals, be observant for other Collecting Opportunities:

The Bedrock or “Country Rocks” are a variety of Slate/Graywacke/Tps (Tertiary Placer-Ancient Pre-Glacial formations that have been preserved), and often a “False Bedrock”, more than once was a foot or so of horizontal, densely-packed dark gray material that appeared similar to the usual layers, but was in fact, 15” of compressed volcanic ash. Below was a deep V, and very rich pockets.

Other minerals, including semi-precious gems to watch for: Zircons, Agates, Quartz crystals, fossil bones and plant parts, Garnets, Tourmaline, etc. See The Field Guide to Alaska Rocks and Minerals on the download from this author.

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**Access:** Access to the region is via the Petersville Road. I have posted a Drive Guide that is too detailed for this article. It can be found on the web at: <https://blueribbonmine.com/petersville-road-guide>



Map 1: Area Location Map. Base: Talkeetna C-2 and others.

In addition to the placer and lode prospects, deposits, and former mines within Denali State Park that will be described, there is the [Petersville Recreational Mining Area, \(PRMA\)](#) an area set aside for the Public to mine and recreate. This is an excellent place to set up a base camp for your expeditions, and a link to a comprehensive and detailed page about the Petersville Recreational Mining Area can be found by visiting the previous link.

**Note:** No motorized vehicles are allowed in Denali State Park, at least not in the area we are working.

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**Allowed Operations and Restrictions:** “Recreational gold panning is allowed in Denali State Park only if the following conditions are met: no motorized equipment is used; only a gold pan or a shovel, or both, may be used; and no chemicals are used.<sup>1</sup> Recreational gold panning in Denali State Park may be conducted on an anadromous fish stream only between May 16 and July 14 annually.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of recreational gold panning, a person may not extract or disturb natural materials above the ordinary high water line or where live vegetative matter exists in Denali State Park.”

This government-supplied information is shared with the acknowledgment that the reader is responsible for his or her acts. There is no mention of metal detectors, so unless you are plugged into a generator it's probably not 'motorized'. If in doubt, ask.

**Detailed Access Information:** After you cross the bridge over Peters Creek on the Petersville Road, continue on, taking the right fork. This will bring you to the Peters Creek Ford. Cross and keep going straight about 3 miles until you reach a steep slope.<sup>3</sup> **WARNING:** This is a steep slope made by and for dozers on loose gravel. It's strongly recommended that you stop at the bottom and walk it, or ride a quad and ask yourself if you and your vehicle can handle it. If the answer is yes, then head on up. When to get to the saddle and before you drop into Poorman Creek, take the road on the left. A short distance later you will be at the boundary of Denali State Park. From here you can have an easy walk to the locations described further.

While it is not nearly this difficult:



To continue on instead, drop into Poorman Creek and head upstream (Left or West). Respect the mining claims, but at the head is upper Poorman Creek and Dandy Gulch, in Denali State Park, and is rich in rusty gold. I found a nice poke just panning bedrock cracks here, but there is little water for washing the gravels. You may find some Platinum there too.

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1 Note: One may also use a Turkey Baster and a crevice tool, or sluicebox, as neither are “motorized.”

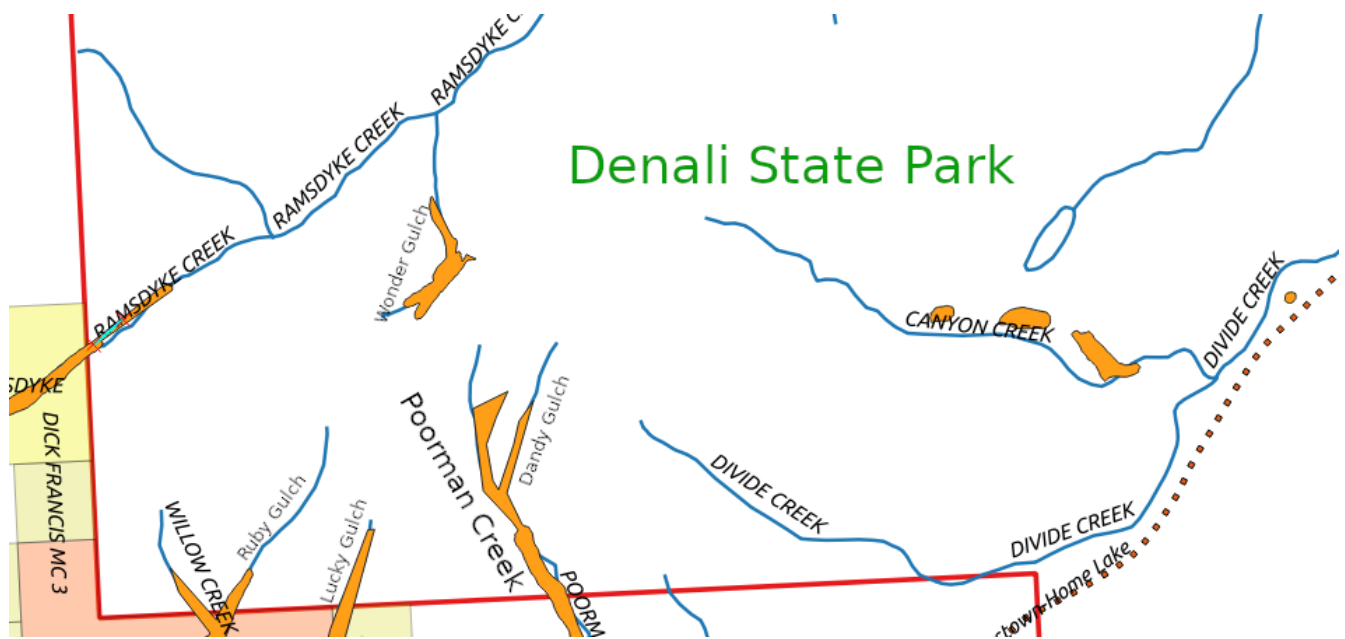
2 The maps included herein clearly indicates there are no Anadromous streams within this collecting area.

3 This is the site of the former “Willow Creek Landing Strip”, but it's been neglected so one may not recognize it as a “Landing Strip”.

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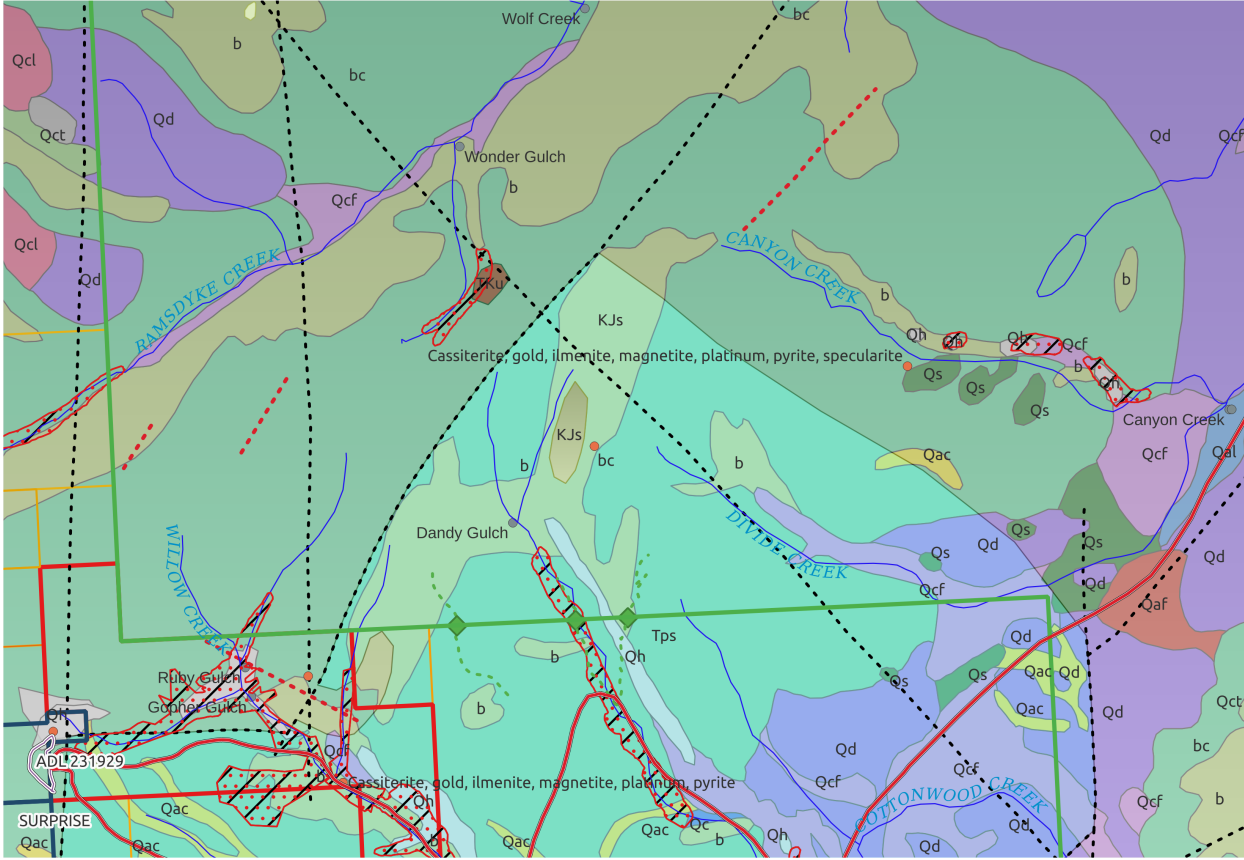
You cannot legally continue on deeper into the Park from here with a motorized vehicle. There is a road that continues on north into the park from Poorman, this is the access to the rich Canyon Creek diggings, but you cannot legally drive there. I have seen a man with a horse and a mule back there before. I walked over with 2 young women for an adventure.

Other access choices are to take a left before the steep hill, drive up Willow Creek, and from there you can walk a short distance to the Willow, Ruby and Lucky sites within the park. There are active mining claims right up to the park boundary, but you may cross over, park or camp there, just don't do any mining without permission from the claim/lease owners.



Map 2: Simplified illustration of Lode and Placer Deposits described below in Southwest Denali State Park.

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Map 3: Surface and Subsurface Geology, Access, and other features (see Fig. 1 below for Key).

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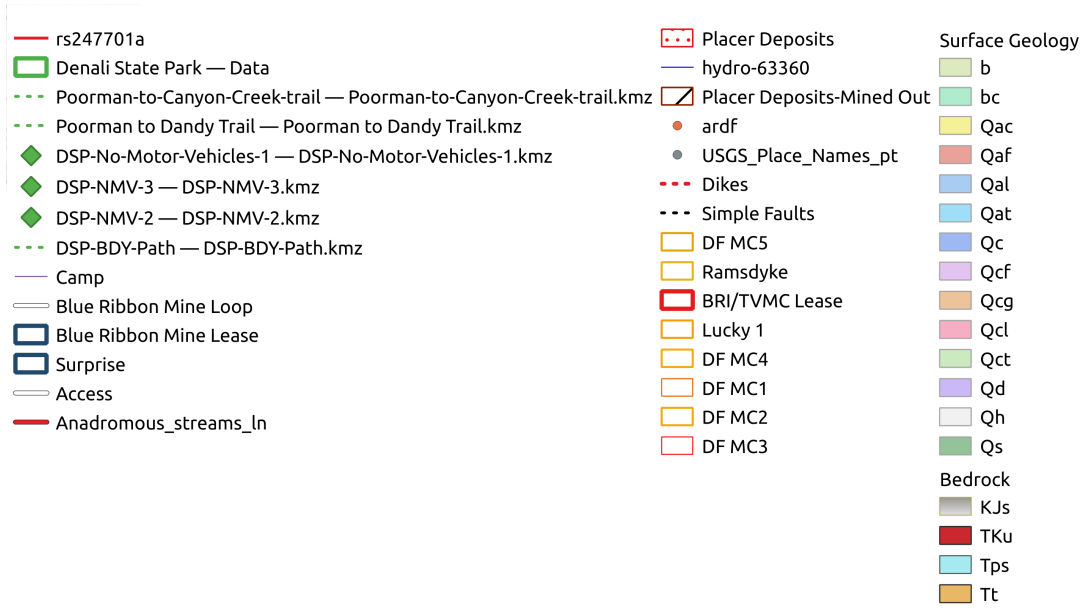


Fig. 1: Key to Map 3 above

Maps created in a modified QGIS/Linux. Request a free, no-tricks coverage of this project.

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**Descriptions of Known Placer Deposits** [Note: '[ARDF](#)' refers to the [Alaska Resource Data File for this mine or deposit](#), and can be found by a web search for more detailed information than is possible here-Direct external weblinks provided where available]:

**Canyon Creek**-Placer gold, platinum-group metals, cassiterite, garnet, ilmenite, zircon, magnetite, platinum, pyrite, specularite, garnet, zircon. According to Mertie (1919) stream gravels at this locale have a pay streak which ranges from 1 to 15 feet in width (average: 6 feet) and 2 to 8 feet in depth. Gold is found on or near bedrock. Gravel is mostly cobble-sized clasts 6 inches in diameter with some boulders up to 2 feet in diameter. **Gold, platinum, magnetite, ilmenite, garnet, zircon, and cassiterite, some of which is crystalline with unworn edges, are noted in concentrates by Mertie (1919).** This suggested to him that the gold and cassiterite were largely derived from mineralized rocks of the drainage area. Cobb and Reed (1980) report that most, if not all, references to Long Creek are probably to Canyon Creek. I have walked over there many times over the year when the water is low, usually mid-late July, for some excellent crack-sniping.

**Poorman Creek/Dandy Gulch**-Mining on Poorman Creek began at least as early as 1907 when six men recovered 1,329 ounces of gold in a month with little water. **Concentrates contain cassiterite, gold, ilmenite, iridium, Ir-rich osmium, magnetite, platinum, pyrite, garnet, quartz, and zircon (Cobb and Reed, 1980).** Mertie (1919) reported that Poorman Creek contained the most platinum of any placer in the Kahiltna valley. [ARDF TL043](#). Some of the gold here is very rusty, so look closely.

**Lucky Creek**-Trib. of Willow Creek. **Mineralized quartz veins in Argillite/Slate, bright gold can be panned.**



*Above: Miners on Lucky Creek sluicing rusty gold. Home made wooden sluice.*

**Ruby Gulch** Trib of Willow Creek. Mertie (1919) describes the placer deposit as 4 feet of gravel on bedrock of Tertiary continental deposits. **He reports that mining at the site in 1917 recovered a little fine, flaky platinum with the gold.** [ARDF TL041](#). Dick Francis was found murdered on his claim here in 1939. Look for potholes in the bedrock, as well as tailings and ditches from pre-1940 mining.

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Willow Creek- Cassiterite, gold, ilmenite, magnetite, platinum, pyrite, garnet, quartz, zircon, others. [ARDF TL042](#).



*Img. 2: Upper Willow Creek/Ruby Gulch bedrock, a natural sluice box with “Miners Moss” adjacent to the creek. Fieldbook is for scale. Crack-sniping opportunities abound.*

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**Ramsdyke Creek-Mining** has been reported on Ramsdyke Creek (Cobb, 1973), which runs along the northwest side of the ridge north of the headwater basin of Canyon Creek. **Material panned from cracks in bedrock yielded bright, angular gold.**



*Img. 1: Far side of Gopher Mountain, aka “Hill 3830”, head/divide of Ramsdyke Creek (left to right), and Jody Gulch. View of the Tokositna Glacier and Denali, just right over there! Photo credit: JTG.*

**Wonder Gulch-Trib. Of Ramsdyke Creek. Residual placer and white quartz conglomerate on a highly fractured and weathered bedrock. Gold is bright,** but there is not much water during some times of the year. The brutally-beaten bodies of Frank Jenkins and Joey Brittel were found here in 1939.

This corner of Denali State Park is a road-accessible wilderness rich in minerals, adventures and experiences. Sydney Laurence painted his famous Denali paintings while mining these streams. The areas shown and briefly described are just a guide to your own mining safari, a starting point that may result in some additions to your collection.

About the Author: Dennis R. Garrett is the owner and operator of the Blue Ribbon Mine located in the Yentna Mining District. He is the author of The Field Guide to Alaska Rocks and Minerals, and can be contacted at AkAu79@protonmail.com

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