

Endicott Arm and Holkham Bay Trip Information



Written and Provided by: Alaska Boat & Kayak Rental Shop

GENERAL

Located just 45 miles south Juneau is Holkham Bay, the starting point for two world class paddling destinations: Endicott Arm and Tracy Arm. Endicott Arm, the lesser known of the two, is about 40 miles long and ends at the Dawes Glacier, an actively calving and receding tidewater glacier. In addition to the glacier the fjord has 4000-6000 foot peaks reaching steeply up from the edges of the arm, large icebergs drifting quietly, abundant wildlife, and the not to be missed side trip down Ford's Terror. Ford's Terror



is a ½ mile wide 7 mile long inlet located halfway down Endicott Arm. The tide rushes through a narrow choke like a river creating 2-6' standing waves, sheer vertical cliffs rise thousands of feet directly out of the water, large waterfalls spill down from the mountains above. This area and was dubbed by John Muir as "the Yosemite of Alaska." While paddling you will get to enjoy the opportunity to also witness seals hauled out on the icebergs near the glaciers, porpoises, orcas or humpback whales swimming through the arm, bears strolling along the shoreline and valleys, mountain goats climbing on the cliffs above the arm, and sea birds flying, nesting or feeding. In 1980 this area became designated as part of the Tracy Arm-Ford's Terror Wilderness area and has been within the boundaries of the Tongass National Forest since 1907.



TRANSPORT

The transport to the arm is best arranged through Adventure Bound. The kayaks need to be loaded and on the Adventure Bound boat by 7:00am on the day of departure. Kayakers will be dropped off and picked up by the northwest point of Harbor Island at the entrance to Holkham Bay. The drop off/pick up is as pictured to the right, which is why kayaks must be pre-loaded.



Make sure you check with the Captain about the pickup time and be there early as they won't wait for you. After being picked up the Adventure Bound will arrive back into town at 6:00pm. Availability and reservations need to be arranged through Adventure Bound. Transport round trip to and from the Adventure Bound dock with kayaks can be provided by Alaska Boat & Kayak for an additional fee.

RECOMMENDED ITINERARIES

Endicott Arm and Holkham Bay can be experienced in as few as 2 days and as many as a couple weeks, resulting in an endless number of possible itineraries.

Harbor Island and Holkham Bay –

An enjoyable trip can be had without even paddling to/around the tidewater glaciers. For a laid-back Wilderness experience, consider staying in Holkham Bay for 2-4 days. With the Adventure Bound transport it is possible to get dropped off at Harbor Island on the way back out of Tracy Arm allowing you to get the full boat tour (although double check before planning on this, as their operating procedures are subject to change). Once you are dropped off, paddle to the southeast end of Harbor Island and make camp. The Wilderness Rangers will have their summer camp on “Little Harbor Island” just to the east. From here paddle in the bay under the 6666’ peak of Mount Sumdum and Sumdum Glacier with the wildlife and drifting icebergs. Whales, brown bears, and black bears frequently ply the shores by Powers Creek and sea lions, seals, orcas and porpoises are commonly seen.

Harbor Island to Fords Terror

From the drop off at Harbor Island to the Narrows camp in Fords Terror is about 23 miles. A five day trip will allow adequate time to paddle to this camp, have an entire day to spend exploring Fords Terror, and then make the return paddle to Harbor Island. If you are willing to paddle 23 miles in one day, then it could be done in less time.

Harbor Island to Dawes Glacier

To make an 80 mile roundtrip from Harbor Island to the Dawes Glacier will take a minimum of 5 long days. Add an additional one to three days for a slower pace, and an additional day if you plan to fully explore Fords Terror (highly recommended).

HAZARDS and CONCERNS

Endicott Arm and Holkham Bay are generally novice friendly areas to paddle, but there are definitely concerns to have and hazards of which to be aware.

- **Rough Water:** Calm conditions are usually found, however, it can become rough at any time. Wind is the primary cause for rough seas and it is typically stronger on hot, sunny days and increases as you approach the glaciers.
- **Cold Water:** The water is very cold due to the amount of fresh glacial runoff floating on the surface of the sea water and falling is something that should be avoided.

- Calving Glaciers: It is recommended to stay at least 400 yards from the North and South Sawyer glaciers because they are both active tidewater glaciers that are constantly breaking apart at the terminus and calving into the fjord. When the glacier calves it can splinter as it cracks and crashes into the water sending basketball sized chunks flying over 150 yards through the air. As it crashes into the water it can create large waves that can flip a kayaker. If a kayaker is near the edge of the fjord it can cause them to “dry dock” and flip as a result of the water level rapidly dropping before rising with the waves. A third scenario is a phenomenon known as a Shooter. This happens when an iceberg breaks off from underneath the surface of the water and its buoyancy causes it to come shooting up out of the water like a submarine surfacing.

- Splitting or Rolling Icebergs: Give icebergs their space, especially the larger ones (even if they are grounded on land). Approximately 90% of an icebergs volume is underwater, as they melt their center of gravity changes and they can rotate or roll completely flipping an unsuspecting paddler. They will also splinter apart creating a mini calving event.



- Limited Places to Camp and Take Breaks: From Fords Terror south to the Dawes Glacier Endicott Arm has a steep shoreline. There are a very limited number of places to be able to camp or to get out of kayaks to take a break. When paddling, take advantage of areas to get out when they arise and be prepared to paddle up to 6-8 miles between these sites. Additionally, many of the areas to get out to camp or break are difficult with slippery rocks, slopes that drop off steeply, and areas that can have dramatic wave action due to the calving glaciers (even when they are several miles away).
- Bears: Bears frequent almost all of Endicott Arm. Both brown and black bears can be encountered anywhere. Make sure you follow the accepted bear camping practices (described briefly on page 6)
- Tides and Currents: The area around Juneau has tidal fluctuations averaging 16’ and peaking at 25 feet. Know the tides while you are paddling and make sure your camp is well above the high tide line. In Endicott Arm there is usually a current flowing away from the glaciers because of the glacial runoff. The ebbing tides add to this current and at large flood tides it may be reversed. Generally the bigger the tide difference the stronger the tidal current. If going into Fords Terror be extremely cautious. At the Fords Terror narrows the tides will move through there like a river creating 2-6’ tall standing waves. Also, there is about a 1 to 1.5 hour delay on the tide change/slack tide at this choke. When paddling further into Fords Terror plan on entering at slack tide and returning back through 6 hours later at the next slack tide.

CAMPSITES

Primitive campsites and locations to get out of the kayaks to stretch your legs, have a snack or take a bathroom break are abundant in Holkham Bay and the northern half of Endicott Arm, but are limited on the southern half of Endicott Arm. From Fords Terror south there are only two camping spots. Please note that all of these mentioned sites are primitive campsites that do not have any amenities, they are simply areas where one can land ashore and find a flat place to set up a tent.

Harbor Island

There is excellent camping at the southeast end of the island that accommodates large groups, has a beautiful beach and flat areas in the woods, but without any available water source. There is a small island to the east, referred to as Little Harbor Island that becomes connected at low tide; the Wilderness Rangers have their summer camp here.

Powers Creek

On the mainland across from Harbor Island is Powers Creek. This area also has excellent camping, but is also heavily populated with bears (primarily brown bears). There are great sites for tents in the woods on the south side of the creek and a nice long beach. At lower tides the beach becomes covered with seaweed covered boulders, but it is otherwise a good landing site. Whales often feed a stone's throw off of this shoreline. There is a primitive trail that leads up through the woods toward Mount Sumdum from this site.

Bushy Island

This site has good flat rock camping above the high tide with space for 2-3 tents. There is no water available.

Sanford Cove

There are several areas to find a spot to camp in Sanford Cove, plentiful water, and enough space for any sized group. Tent sites can be found on the beach as well as just past the alders into the guard timber.

South Shore Camp

This camp is about 9 miles down Endicott Arm from Sanford Cove, just past a small cove. There is good camping above the rye grass in the guard timber or on the beach if the tides are not big. There is water available, but it is not completely clear, definitely treat the water here.

Fords Terror Narrows

This site is one that should not be missed. It sits directly in the middle of the Narrows and from your camp you can watch the tide turn from slack tide into a raging rapid with 2-6' standing waves. Slack tide occurs here as much as 1.5 hours after the slack tide printed in the tide tables

for Juneau/Stephens Passage. Be aware as you come into this site when the tide is incoming as it is possible to get sucked through the tidal rapids. As you approach hug the east shore along the cliffs and wrap around in from the cove to the camping site. Please keep your use of the area to the lower impacted areas and do not set up tents on the upper bluff. At the middle bench there is a wire setup between two trees for use as a bear hang (bring your own rope). There is enough space at this site for at least 5-6 tents and more if you spread out east toward the cove. There is no water in the camp, it will have to be collected from one of the waterfalls on the east shore.

Fords Terror “T” Camp

At the back of Fords Terror there is another excellent site. This site also has an area that is already impacted, please put your tents in these areas to prevent impacting the site further. When you camp here, be aware of the tides and when the narrows will become slack (1 to 1.5 hours after the published slack tide time) and make sure you exit back toward Endicott Arm at this time. Also, be aware that there is a strong tidal current at the “T” going into the east arm of the T. Water is available nearby.

South of Fords Terror Entrance Camp

There is good camping near a stream across and a little east from Fords Terror. Walk up through the rye grass to find suitable sites.

North Dawes Inlet

From Ford’s Terror this is the next camping option. There is a large tidal flat here and a long boat carry will be required at low tides. Find an area on the eastern side of the back of the North Dawes inlet and make sure that you setup above the high tide line. There is a stream right next to camp.

Dawes Glacier

This is an amazing camping area that has a view of the Dawes Glacier and is located on the south shore about 1.5 miles from the terminus of the Dawes Glacier. There is a small cove that faces the glacier, a VW Bus sized boulder propped on the cliff side by the cove and a waterfall next to it. Camp well above the high tide line in the open area in the alders. The calving of the glacier can cause large waves to crash on shore. Be aware when getting into and out of your kayaks. For waste disposal, it is best to bushwack through the alders and go on the opposite side rather than in the cove. Waste deposited into the cove will have a hard time exiting and being flushed into the open ocean.



LEAVE NO TRACE

Endicott Arm/Holkham Bay is a Wilderness area and receives minimal impact from humans, particularly anywhere on the land. One of the great things about the area is that it looks the same as it did 100 years ago (with the exception of the fjord being longer). As a paddler you are able to experience the feeling of being the first to explore the arm. In order to preserve this Wilderness character it is important that you follow the seven Leave No Trace principles. Below are the seven principles as well as some guidelines for the Endicott Arm Wilderness area.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare: make sure that you have all of the appropriate route knowledge, clothing, gear, safety equipment and food so that you do not have to disturb the natural environment (i.e. cut pieces of trees to make a shelter because you forgot a tent)
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces: choose tent sites that will not destroy fragile plant life, avoid using the same footpaths to prevent social trails from forming
3. Dispose of Waste Properly: Pack out all trash – this includes biodegradable things such as apple cores or orange peels, human waste should be dealt with in the intertidal zone in areas where the current will flush the waste out to sea, if you choose to use toilet paper then pack it out!
4. Leave What You Find: Unless it is trash left by previous travelers
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts: Use a stove to cook on, if possible avoid making fires altogether, if you choose to make a fire then build a small fire in the intertidal zone, only burn wood up to the diameter of your wrist and make sure that everything is burnt completely, no one wants to see large charred pieces of wood floating around on or on the beach where they camp
6. Respect Wildlife: Follow the Alaska National Marine Fisheries Service wildlife viewing guidelines and regulations by not approaching marine mammals closer than 100 yards and limiting time to observing one individual to 30 minutes. Keep your food in bear resistant containers to prevent the bears from getting into your food and becoming habituated to people. Keep a clean kitchen free of micro food trash, we DON'T want to feed ANY wildlife...even squirrels, birds, voles, and mice.
7. Be Considerate of Others: If there are other travelers in the Arm, keep your visual and auditory impact to a minimum. Follow the other LNT principles so that future travelers can appreciate the Wilderness to the fullest extent.

MARINE WILDLIFE

Seals, porpoises, orcas, humpback whales, river otters, and sea lions can all be spotted in



Endicott Arm. It is a pupping area for seals, and as such, care should be taken to try to not disrupt the seals on the icebergs near the glaciers. Seals are more wary of kayaks than motorized boats, so please try to stay more than 100 yards away from the seals hauled out on icebergs if at all possible. Sea lions, porpoises, and humpback whales are more common toward the mouth of the arm. When you encounter these animals follow federal regulations and

remain 100 yards away from them and do not place yourself directly in their path. Animal encounters from a kayak are to be cherished moments, just remember to provide them the respect they deserve.

BEARS

Endicott Arm is a heavily populated bear area. It is important to follow bear camping guidelines. Food must be stored in bear resistant containers (hanging is not an option at most of the camping sites). Food and other “smellables,” such as toothpaste and deodorant, should be kept away from the tents. Cooking should be done in the intertidal zone so that all the associated smells will be washed away by the ocean. When traveling in Endicott Arm you should also bring along bear spray and noise makers, such as whistles and signal horns. If you do have a bear encounter the first thing to do is group together and let the bear know you’re there by talking to it in a loud, low voice. If the bear approaches you should stand your ground, particularly if you have food around/with you. These bears are not conditioned to human food, and we want it to stay that way. If you do not have food with you that the bear could get to, then it is also acceptable to slowly back away while continuing to stay close and talk to the bear.