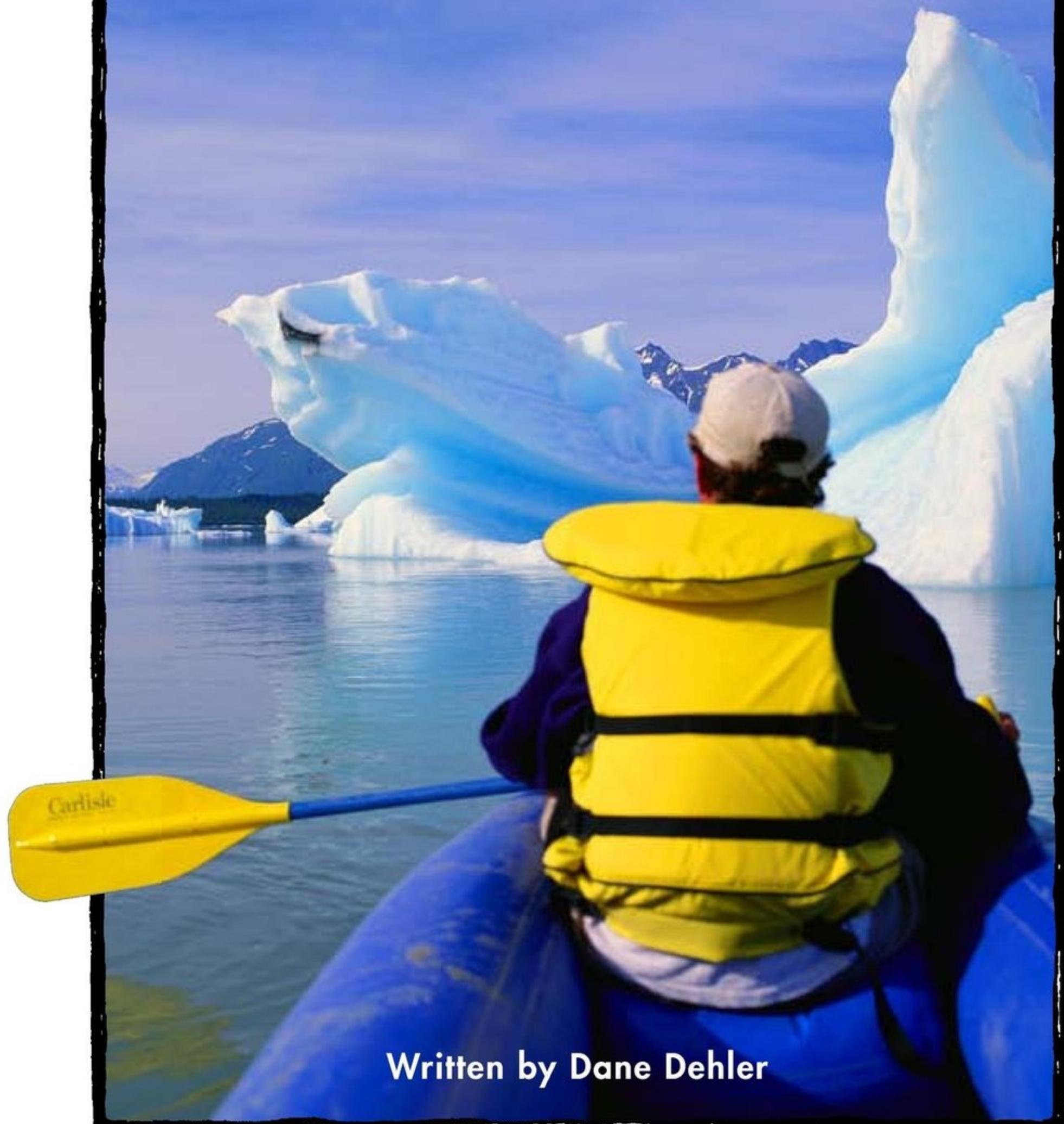


LEVELED BOOK • R

Alaska:

The Last Frontier



Written by Dane Dehler

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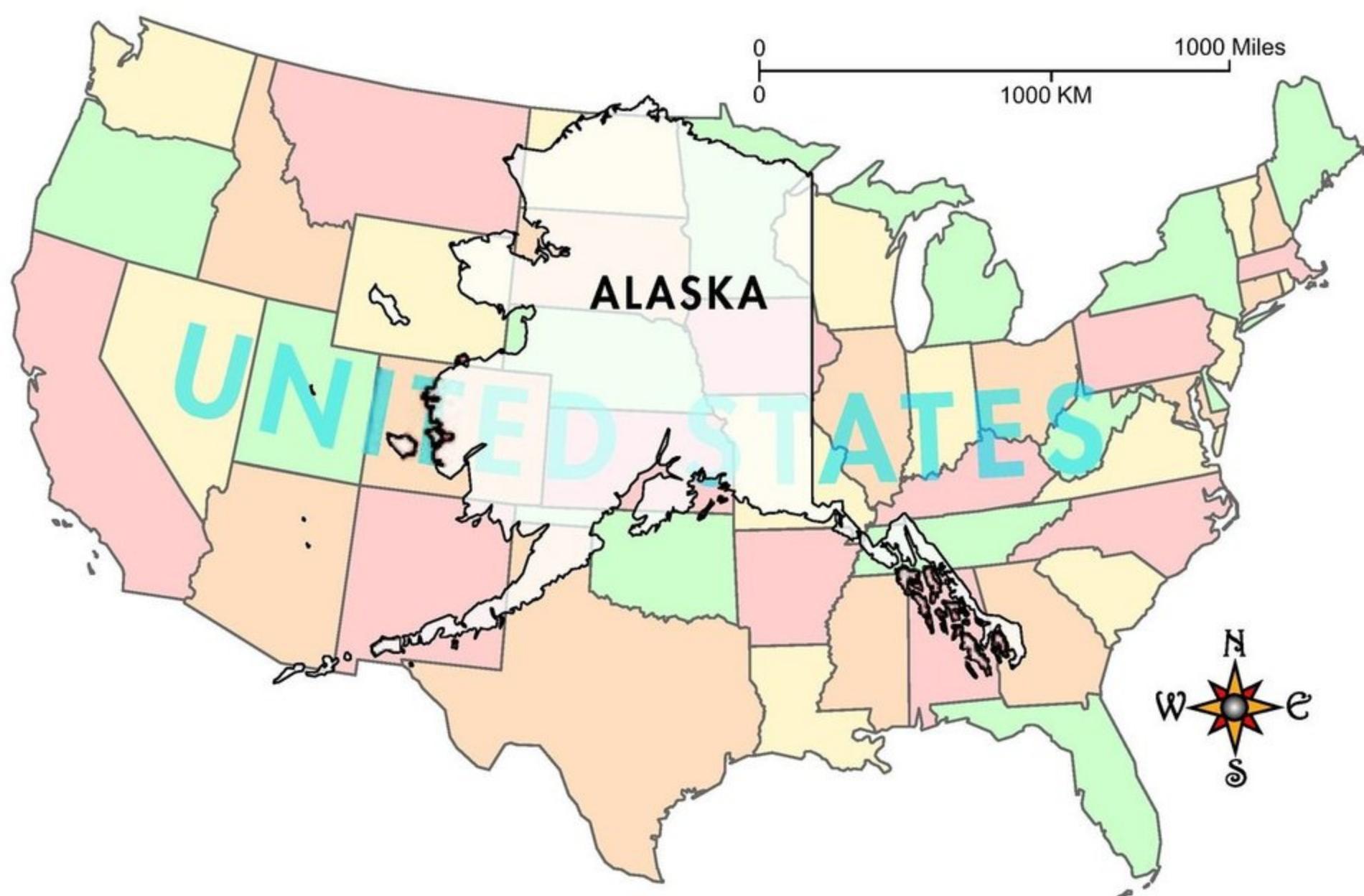
Alaska is famous for its dramatic landscape and harsh climate.

Welcome to Alaska

At the very top of North America lies a cold, wild land: Alaska. Alaska is west of Canada. It sits on the **Arctic Circle**, between the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans. The climate there is stormy and cold. But Alaska has beautiful scenery, amazing wildlife, and great natural resources. Because it has such huge, empty spaces, some people call Alaska “The Last Frontier.” Alaska has an exciting history and a bright future. This book will tell you all about America’s last frontier.

Alaska's Land

Alaska is enormous, covering over 1.7 million square kilometers (about 660,000 sq mi). The coastline of Alaska is longer than the coastline of the rest of the United States put together. Alaska is almost as large as the entire country of Mexico!



Alaska is more than twice the size of the next-largest state, Texas.

Because it is so big, Alaska includes many different landscapes. Southeast Alaska lies along the Pacific Ocean next to Canada. It has weather similar to Vancouver, British Columbia, or Seattle, Washington, with a great deal of rain and relatively warm winters.



Southcentral Alaska also lies along the Pacific coast. It includes Alaska's largest city, Anchorage.

Do You Know?

Alaska is home to Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America. Mount McKinley towers 6,194 meters (20,320 ft) above sea level. That's as tall as over 1,000 houses stacked on top of each other!



Alaskan landscapes are often as rugged as they are beautiful.

Most of the land in Alaska is in what many Alaskans call “the Interior.” The Interior is full of mountains, glaciers, and Arctic **tundra**. The climate is freezing cold, and it can also be quite dry. Very few people live in this part of the state.

Do You Know?

The most northern part of Alaska is known as the “land of the midnight sun.” Above the Arctic Circle, the Sun does not fully set for 24 hours during the summer solstice. But during the winter solstice, the Sun does not fully rise for 24 hours. The amount of sunlight varies as Earth’s tilt causes the Arctic Circle to turn toward and away from the Sun. Summer temperatures can be above 32 degrees C (90° F), while winter temperatures can drop below –50 degrees C (–60° F).



Alaska is famous for its snowy mountains, giant forests, crystal-clear lakes, and beautiful coastline. This wild land is home to grizzly bears, moose, polar bears, wolves, bald eagles, and caribou. Whales, seals, sea lions, sea otters, and fish live in its waters. Many animals in Alaska have thick fur or blubber to keep warm.



Some animals, such as the willow ptarmigan (TAR-mi-gan), Alaska's state bird, change color from summer to winter. In summer, they are speckled brown to blend in with the ground, but in winter, they turn white to blend in with the snow. This color change helps them hide from animals that want to eat them.

Alaska's state bird: the willow ptarmigan

Alaska's History

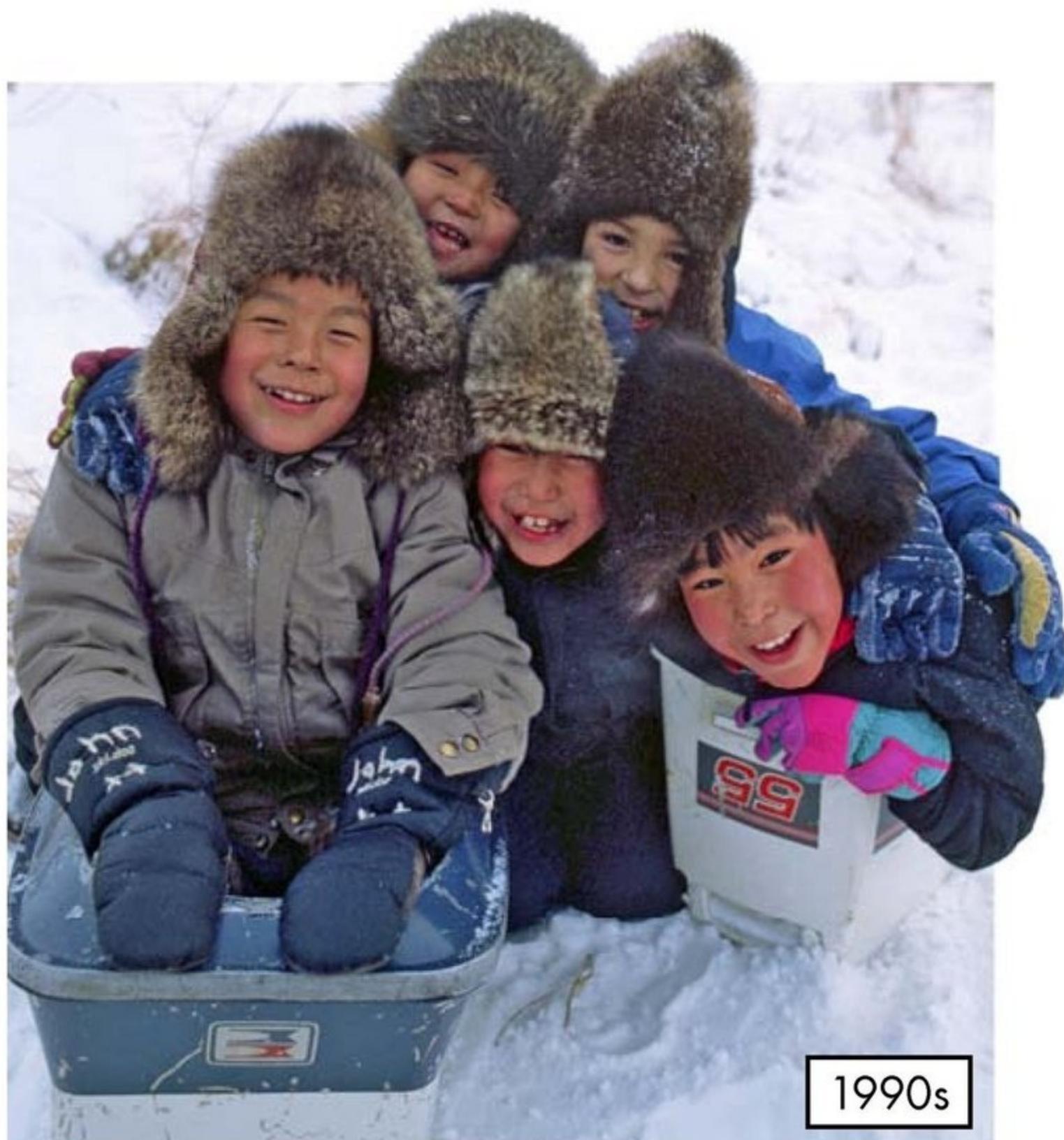
Native Americans first came to Alaska over ten thousand years ago. Many Native

Americans fished and hunted sea mammals such as seals. They used **kayaks** to travel along the coast



and dogsleds to move on land. They made warm clothes from caribou fur and waterproof boots from sealskin.

Long ago, one Native American nation, the Inuit, lived off Alaska's land and sea. Many Native Americans still live in Alaska today, although most live a modern lifestyle.





Alaska is actually closer to Russia than it is to the rest of the United States. Russian culture can be seen in churches like this one in Sitka, Alaska.

Because Alaska is so far north and so cold, Europeans did not come there until 1741. Russian fur traders were among the first Europeans to come to Alaska. Alaska even belonged to Russia for a while. By the 1800s, American fur traders were also coming into Alaska from the south. In 1867, the United States bought Alaska from Russia.

Bill of sale
between
Russia and the
United States

to have received at the Treasury De-
partment in Washington Seven
Million Two hundred thousand dol-
lars: (\$7,200,000) in coin, being the
full amount due from the United



Thousands of people rushed to the Yukon for gold.

Many Americans thought Alaska was worthless until a sudden discovery in 1896. Gold was found in Canada's nearby Yukon Territory. Miners from all over the world came through Alaska, hoping to get rich.

Alaska finally became a U.S. state on January 3, 1959. Children were invited to create its state flag. Seventh grader John Benson created the winning design.



Alaska state flag; John Benson chose the flag's blue background for the sky and the Great Bear constellation for strength.

On March 27, 1964, a giant earthquake shook Alaska, destroying parts of Anchorage. The “Good Friday Earthquake” killed 131 people. It is still one of the most powerful earthquakes ever measured.



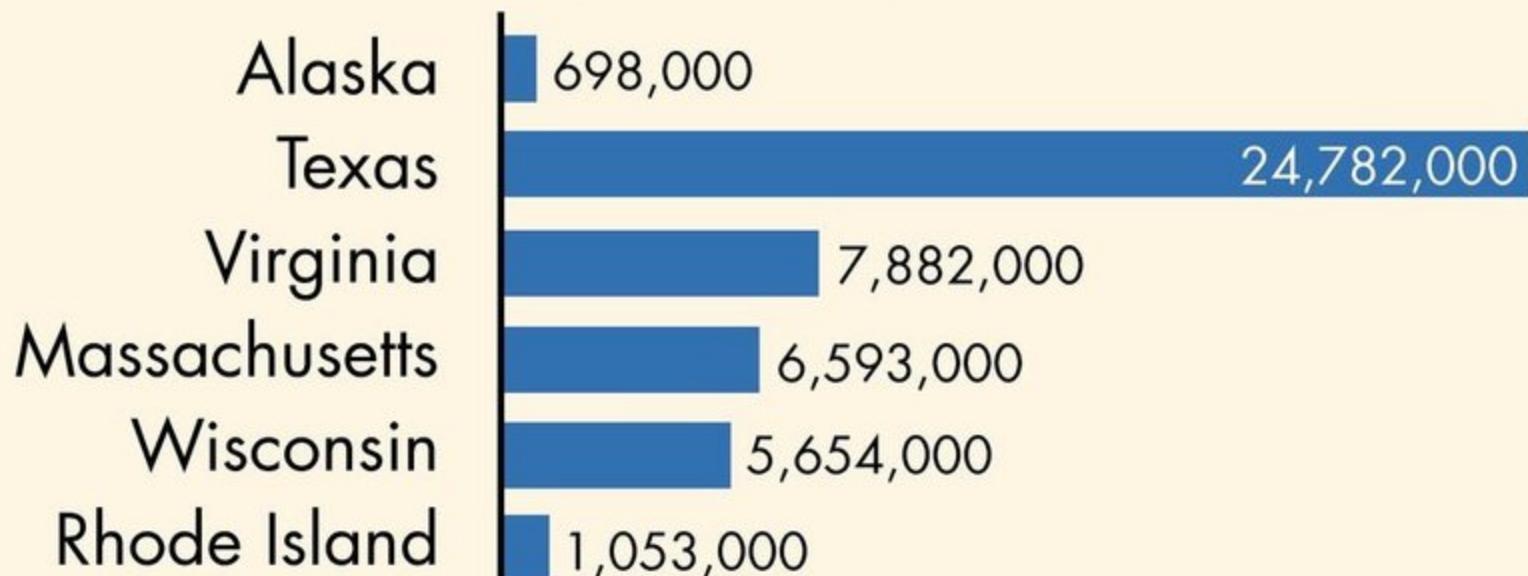
The Good Friday Earthquake destroyed many parts of Anchorage. It also caused a tsunami that reached Hawaii.

In 1968, oil was discovered on Alaska’s northern coast. Oil has completely changed Alaska’s **economy**. It is the biggest business in Alaska today.

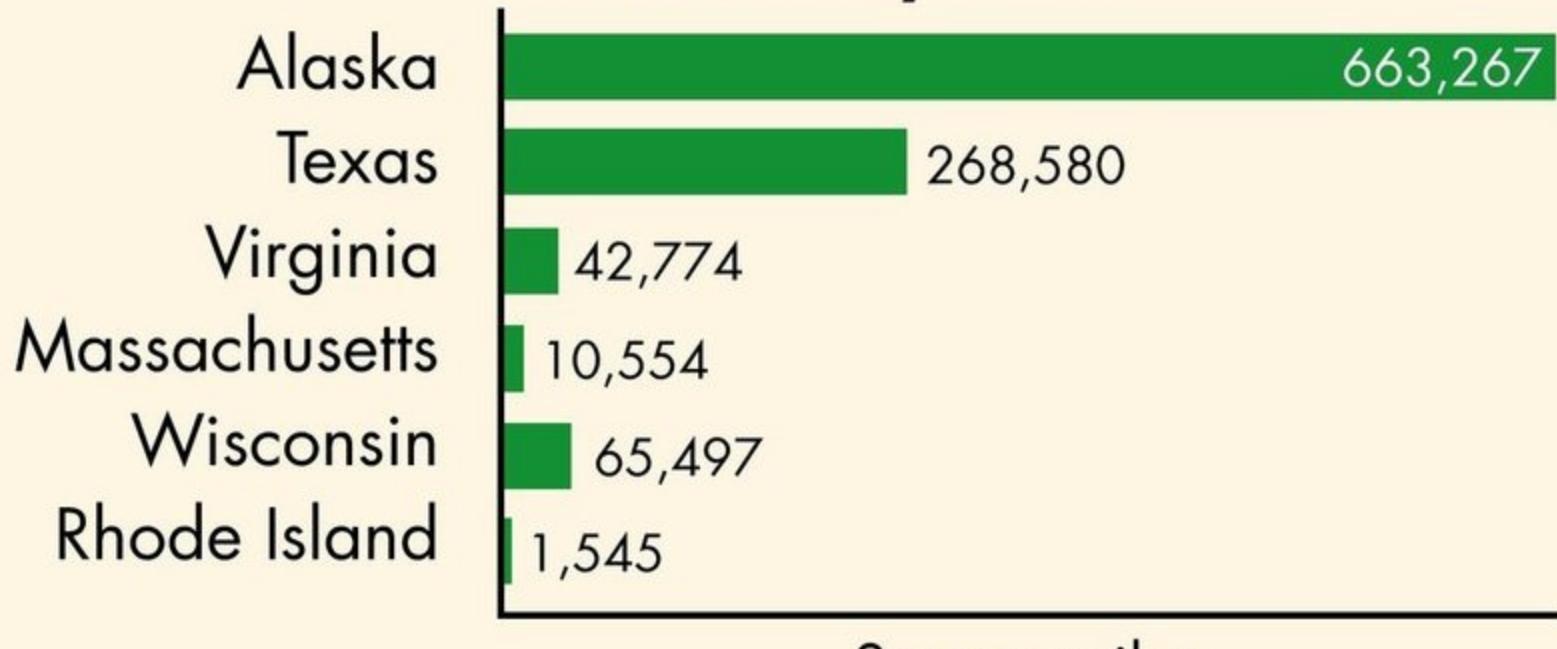
Alaska Today

Although Alaska has the largest area of any U.S. state, it has almost the smallest population. In 2009, the population of Alaska was about 698,000 people, which is only about the population of Fort Worth, Texas. Most of Alaska's people live in the cities. Anchorage, the largest city, has the state's largest port. Alaska's capital is Juneau (JOO-noh). But there are no roads going to this city. You can get there only by sea or by air!

Population by State



Land Area by State



Square miles

The economy of Alaska is based on natural resources. Oil is the biggest business in Alaska. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline is a giant oil pipe that stretches across the entire state from north to south. It carries oil from wells on the northern coast to a port on the Pacific coast. From there, ships carry the oil to the rest of the United States.



The Trans-Alaska Pipeline runs 1,300 km (800 mi) and can carry 2 million barrels of oil per day.

Do You Know?

The state of Alaska makes so much money on oil that it doesn't have to charge income tax or sales tax. In fact, the citizens of Alaska actually get money from their government. Some Alaskans receive almost \$2,000 per year!

Fishing is also very important in Alaska. Alaskan boats catch cod, salmon, crab, and other **delicacies**.

Today, Alaskans are proud of being tough and different. Many Alaskans enjoy outdoor sports such as hunting, fishing, and riding snowmobiles. Alaskans have a great spirit of **individualism** in their politics and in their daily lives.

Fishing in Alaska is one of the world's most dangerous jobs. The seas around Alaska are rough, stormy, and freezing cold.



Many Alaskans take pride in living on the "last frontier" away from big cities. Some areas require boats or planes to get to them.



The northern lights are usually visible only in the far north.

Alaska's Beauty

The beauty of Alaska touches every part of life. During the darkest days of winter, the sky above Alaska sometimes fills with light. The **aurora borealis**, or northern lights, shine when tiny particles from the Sun get pulled toward Earth by the planet's magnetic field.

One of the fastest-growing parts of the Alaskan economy is tourism. People from all over the world come to see Alaska's beautiful landscapes and amazing wildlife.

Each year, thousands of tourists come to Alaska. They go on cruise ships to see icebergs and whales. They ride snowmobiles to see snow-covered mountains. They hike through national parks hoping to see grizzly bears or moose. The beauty of Alaska is one of the state's greatest natural resources.

But not everyone agrees about how to **preserve** this beauty. Alaskans make most of their living from oil. Some people say that drilling and shipping oil hurt the state's wildlife and natural beauty. Many people want to set aside huge areas of Alaska that cannot be drilled for oil or changed by humans in any way. But other people say this is a waste of resources.

In Alaska,
industry often
sits side by
side with
wilderness.





Polar bears hunt seals from sea ice. As the sea ice melts, the bears have a more difficult time finding food. Climate scientists study ice cores to find answers about global warming.

Climate change may also hurt Alaska's beauty. If the climate warms up, Alaska's glaciers will likely melt, and polar bears will have a more difficult time finding food. However, people in this cold land often enjoy warmer winters. And the ice-filled Arctic Ocean may soon be open for shipping and fishing.

Alaska's future will definitely be like its history—full of adventure and excitement. The state's huge size, small population, amazing beauty, and cold climate will continue to keep it America's "Last Frontier."

Glossary

Arctic Circle (<i>n.</i>)	an imaginary line circling the Earth near the North Pole (p. 4)
aurora borealis (<i>n.</i>)	the northern lights, caused by charged particles being pulled into Earth's atmosphere by Earth's magnetic field (p. 16)
delicacies (<i>n.</i>)	foods that are considered very rare and tasty (p. 15)
economy (<i>n.</i>)	the businesses and money of a place (p. 12)
individualism (<i>n.</i>)	the idea that each person is different and that everyone should be allowed to live life as he or she pleases (p. 15)
kayaks (<i>n.</i>)	canoelike boats that are easy to paddle and can hold a lot of cargo (p. 9)
preserve (<i>v.</i>)	to take care of and save for the future (p. 17)
relatively (<i>adv.</i>)	when compared to other nearby or similar things (p. 5)

tundra (*n.*)

a habitat of open, flat grasslands where it is too cold for trees to grow (p. 7)

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