SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Gulf of Alaska

Resurrection Bay

Seward

Moose Pass

Hunter

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Johnson Pass Trail

Trail Glacier

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Grandview

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Bartlett Glacier

Deadman Glacier

Tunnel

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Placer River Gorge

Spencer Glacier

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Portage Glacier

Burns Glacier

Skookum Glacier

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Portage Pass

Byron Glacier

Middle Glacier

Explorer Glacier

Whittier

Turnagain Arm

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Seward Highway

PORTAGE

Girdwood

Bird Point

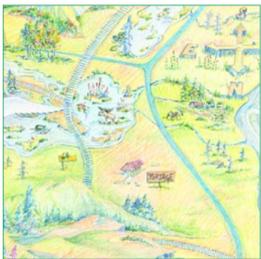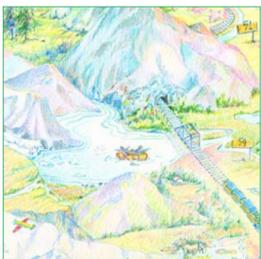Anchorage

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

THE ALASKA RAILROAD ANCHORAGE TO SEWARD HIGHLIGHTS

It takes but a moment to find out why this particular stretch of Alaska is the most stunning slice there is to behold. As the Anchorage Train Depot soon dissolves from view, the scenery changes from hotel facades, decorative flower baskets, and sidewalk vendors, to awe-inspiring landscapes punctuated by wildlife, hardy stands of birch and spruce, rugged cliffs, a vast inlet, and a sea of corrugated mountain peaks. Anchorage to Seward — unquestionably, the Alaska Railroad's flagship run. The Chugach National Forest, which you're passing through, is 5.6 million acres and contains over 10,000 glaciers, making it one of the most spectacular temperate rain forests in North America. Printed upon this chart is a wealth of historical highlights, points of interest, and a charming rendering of the train route as it meanders toward Resurrection Bay. Keep your map close at hand for insights into the towns and landmarks along the way.

Portage: On March 27 — Good Friday — 1964, the strongest earthquake ever recorded in North American history hit Southcentral Alaska at 5:36 pm. It measured 9.2 on the Richter scale, and shook for four and a half minutes. When the shaking stopped the elevation here had dropped around 12 feet. The Alaska Railroad, as well as many businesses, was drastically affected by the quake. Rail north and south of Anchorage was bent and twisted, bridges were buckled or destroyed, and many stretches of track were completely covered by mud slides. It took the Alaska Railroad $27 million to repair all the damage caused by the quake. Several houses from the townsite remain as well as trees that were killed by the saltwater absorbed into the root system. This salt eventually killed the trees and acted as a type of preservative.

Spencer: Spencer Glacier is about a mile from the tracks and is one of the most beautiful glaciers on the journey between Seward and Anchorage. The Alaska Railroad and Chugach Adventure Guides (operating under permit from the Chugach National Forest) offer a raft trip on Spencer Lake where you can float among the icebergs and come close to the face of Spencer Glacier. Professional guides lead the trip and explain the natural history of the area. The trip ends with a gentle raft trip down the Placer River. Surrounded by the soaring ramparts of the Kenai Mountains, it is hard to believe you are a few hours out of Anchorage, Alaska's largest city.

The Loop District: Back in the early days, the Alaska Railroad used steam engines that could climb about a 1% grade. The Railroad built a series of huge train trestles called "the loop" that filled the entire valley. Trains would enter the loop and make a big circle, crossing 150 feet over the track they had been on. This decreased the grade of the track and allowed the steam locomotives to climb the hill. The loop was an expensive section of track to maintain and when the Railroad started upgrading to diesel locomotives in the late 1940s into the 50s, they bypassed the loop and gradually disassembled it. The loop was replaced by the 'S' Curve, and today large pylons are all that remain of the loop.

Seward: Seward was the first settlement on Resurrection Bay, established in 1772 by Alexander Baranov. Baranov and his crew were sailing from Kodiak to Yakutat looking for a location with good timber to found a shipbuilding community when he was forced to seek refuge from violent weather. It was Easter Sunday when this bay provided life saving shelter for Baranov and his men, and thus he named it Resurrection Bay. Seward is named after Secretary of State William H. Seward, who negotiated the treaty to buy Alaska from Russia for the bargain price of $7.2 million in 1867. The Seward population has grown steadily and today it is the home to almost 3,000 people. It's a popular tourist stop where people can tour Kenai Fjords National Park, go fishing, hiking and kayaking or visit the many shops in town.

FAIRBANKS

TALKEETNA

MATANUSKA RIVER

KNIK RIVER

KNIK ARM

ANCHORAGE

TURNAGAIN ARM

GIRDWOOD

PORTAGE

WHITTIER

PORTAGE VALLEY

SPENCER GLACIER

TUNNEL

BARTLETT GLACIER

GRANDVIEW

HUNTER

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND

SEWARD

GULF OF ALASKA