

Pioneer Ridge / Austin Helmers Trail

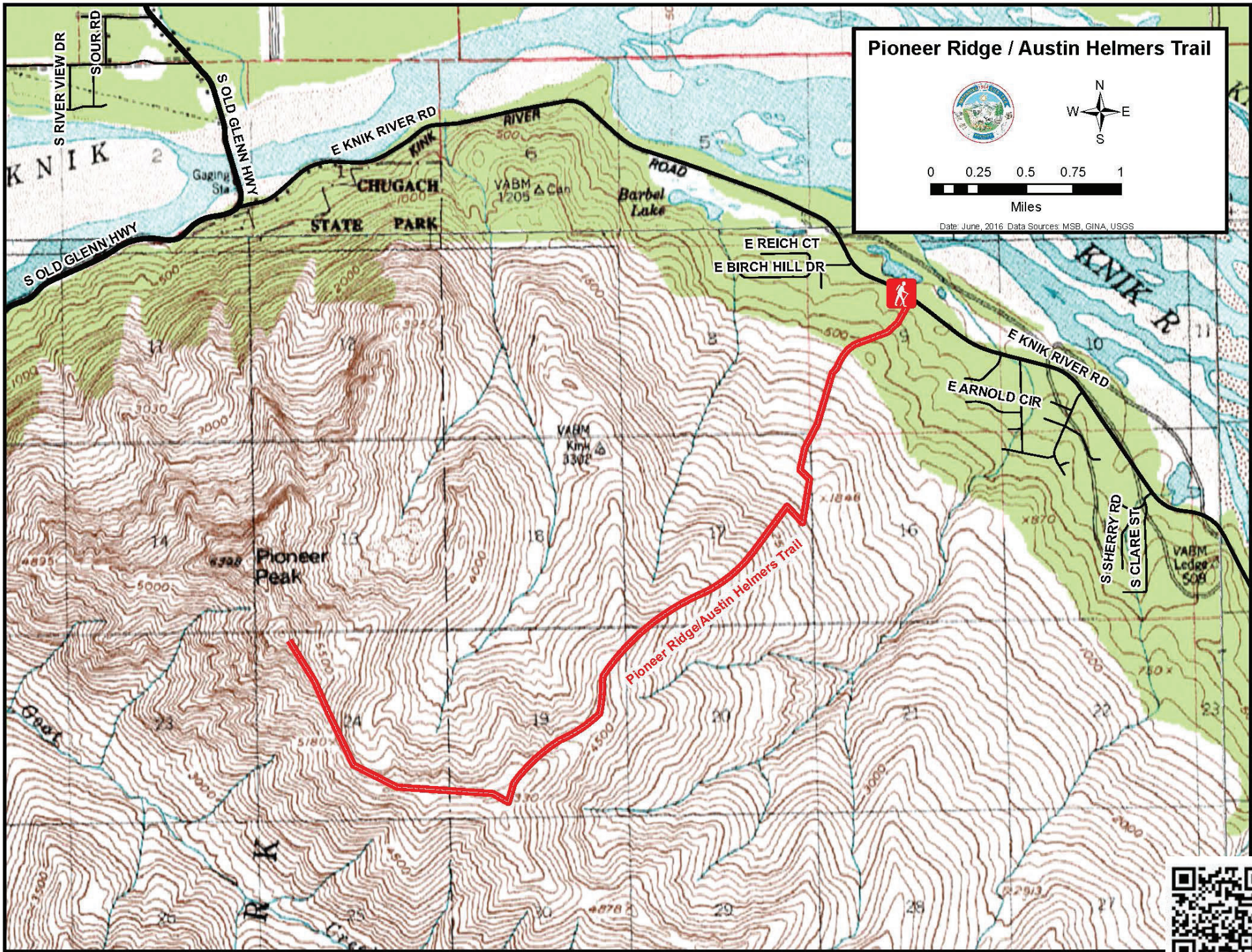


0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1



Miles

Date: June, 2016 Data Sources: MSB, GINA, USGS



PIONEER RIDGE

Austin Helmers

Parking Fee

\$5/day \$40/annual pass



PIONEER RIDGE

Austin Helmers

AT A GLANCE

- TRAILHEAD** Knik River Road, mile 3.5
- USE** Hiking, backpacking, running
- DISTANCE** Distance: 12 miles
- LEVEL** Moderate to Difficult
- ELEV. GAIN** 6,398 feet at summit



Stefan Hinman

HOW TO GET THERE

From Palmer take the Old Glenn Highway for 9.5 miles, cross the Knik River Bridge. Take a left on Knik River Road. Drive for 3.5 miles to the trailhead parking on the right.

TAKE NOTE

Be prepared to encounter bears and moose. Dogs must be on a leash. Bring layers, including light rain jacket and hat, for sudden weather shifts. Bring extra water and food. Start early. The hike is long. Sore feet and knees are expected after 12 miles of work. Know your physical limits. The hike can take up to 12 hours.

DESCRIPTION

The Pioneer Ridge-Austin Helmers Trail can be completed in a long day, though some prefer to camp. It begins in forest. The route traverses the northeast slope of Pioneer Peak, climbing more than 5,000 feet in 4.5 miles. At 2,000 feet, the trail switchbacks, and then opens onto a treeless ridge at the 11,000-foot distance marker. A picnic table is soon to come. For some, this is a nice goal in itself. At 3,200 feet, hikers crest the ridge. By the 5,300 foot elevation, the top of Pioneer Ridge Trail is achieved. Views reach far to the Knik Glacier, the Matanuska River Valley, the Talkeetna Mountains and, on a clear day, Denali is lit up in the sunny distance.

Before pushing to one of the summits, consider the sunset hour and your energy level. From the ridge, it's another 1.5 miles to the south summit. Dogs beyond here become problematic. While the summit push is moderate, it sometimes requires hikers to scramble on all fours for balance. The crumbly Chugach Mountain terrain is known to deposit loose rock in your hand, what's called "Chugach crud." Test all handholds and footholds before trusting. Steep drops-offs and unclear paths require your focus. Arriving is grand at 6,398 feet above the Valley floor.



Kate Arnold

MAT-SU BOROUGH TRAIL



Kate Arnold

