



Nunavut Parks & Special Places – Editorial Series

January, 2008

SYLVIA GRINNELL TERRITORIAL PARK



Dark grey cumulus clouds contrast with the lush green of the tundra. Rain showers march across distant hills, and the sunlight shines silver on the sea. Brilliant magenta and pink dwarf fireweed lines the sides of the paths, and yellow poppies create fluorescent spots on the gravel ridges. In between, the slopes are crowded with flowers white mouse-eared chickweed and bistort like tiny candles, clusters of brooklet saxifrage in wet seeps, and white bladder-campion with shining petals over inflated capsules, minute greenhouses sheltering developing seeds. The hoarse cry of a raven breaks the stillness, a rough-legged hawk circles in the sky, playing tag with the clouds, and an arctic hare hops away with casual indifference, a tuft of grass hanging from its mouth. Below, the river sings its constant song – the ballad of the rapids. In the distance, fishermen cast their lures into the rushing stream in hopes of interesting

a passing arctic char, and the shouts of children echo from the hillsides as they play around a picnic table.

It is a summer afternoon in **Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park**, and the tundra flaunts its summer majesty. This is the Arctic at its gentlest – a cape of green across the rocky hillsides. It is close to town, and families frequently escape to the peaceful hillsides to picnic after work. This attractive river is also popular for canoeing and kayaking river, plus offers good char fishing from late spring to early fall. Low falls at the lower end of the river become a series of big rapids at high tide.

For the newcomer to Nunavut, or for someone with a limited amount of time to spend on the land, this park is a marvelous introduction to the Nunavut landscape and ecology. Low rocky bיכלים א atjaqnaaq listen to the land aliannaktuk en osmose avec la terre



hills alternate with sedge meadows along the river and heath tundra on the slopes. Colourful lichens create patterns on the rocks, and the rocks themselves tell a story of tectonic movements in the earth and later polishing by huge continental ice sheets. Tundra nesting birds like Lapland longspurs, horned larks, redpolls, and snow buntings enliven the land with their songs and courtship in spring. Peregrine falcons and roughlegged hawks nest on cliffs nearby and hunt over the park all summer. It's a birdwatcher's delight, as more than 40 species of birds have been recorded from the park. Caribou, arctic hares, ptarmigan, and arctic foxes are frequently sighted from the hiking trail or by hikers out on the land, and in some years, lemmings are common in the low areas along the river.

The river has in the past harboured an abundance of arctic char, but a commercial fishery during the 1940s, 50s and 60s resulted in declining char populations, and the commercial fishery closed in 1965. The populations are gradually rebounding, and fishing for arctic char is now frequently quite good, especially in mid- to late summer. (Licenses are necessary, and there are strict limits to the catch.) The tides in Frobisher

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Bay average about 8-9 metres, so fishermen must take care when walking in any area that appears to be inundated by salt water, as the tide comes in relatively quickly.

HIKING TRAILS

Several trails offer different levels of hiking through these landscapes. The River Valley Hiking Route winds over the hills and down into the river valley near the entrance of the park. This trail provides easy hiking and there are benches at overlooks, which adds to the comfort of using the trail for elders and small children. Interpretive signs along this trail add dimension and enjoyment to a visit to this park. The River Valley route offers good birding along the river and coast, through tundra, boulder fields and gravel shelves. The Hilltop and Meadows routes offers unobstructed views from the high points in the park, and crosses bedrock outcrops and tundra meadows. Both trails are largely "unstructured" - with only trail markers to guide your hike.

The American explorer Charles Francis Hall, seeking a passage through Baffin Island in 1860, named the Sylvia Grinnell River for the granddaughter of a family friend and benefactor. But, the park area has importance long before Hall. Just outside the park boundary to the south of the falls, on the east side of the river, lies one of the most important archaeological sites in Nunavut, the Crystal II site. It contains three semi-subterranean houses representative of the Thule culture, but artifacts from the older Dorset culture were also found here, indicating a longer occupation. The site provided important evidence of the distinctions between the Dorset and Thule cultures as it was occupied by Dorset, and then abandoned. A layer of vegetation developed, which separates the evidence of Dorset use from later use by the Thule people. The site is marked by a small plaque. The area around and below the falls was undoubtedly used by the original inhabitants of the park, and there are many signs of human use.

The present landscape in Sylvia Grinnell Park was sculpted by immense ice sheets from the Laurentide Glaciation, which retreated from this part of the arctic about 7100 years ago. Ice some 400 metres thick scoured the land and left deposits on the southeastern sides of ridges and escarpments. The weight of the ice sheet depressed the land, and it has rebounded about 12 metres since relieved of the weight of the ice. Glacial rebound beaches are visible as horizontal terraces along the hillsides.

TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

A visit to Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, is not complete without a visit to this jewel, located about a kilometre from town, a 30-minute walk via a road that passes around the south end of the airport. **Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park** centres around the lower third of the Sylvia Grinnell River, which flows into Frobisher Bay slightly to the southwest of the airport.



The park is used by snowmobilers, dog sledders and cross-country skiers in winter and spring, and is close enough to be accessed easily by skiing from Iqaluit. A spring ski into the park, when the snow buntings are returning and the ptarmigan are courting, when the days are long and the snow sparkles under your skis, is sheer heaven, and one of the wonders of arctic life. Facilities in the park include comfort stations near the parking areas, barbecue pits, picnic facilities, and a viewing platform There is no fee for either day use or camping. The park pavillion overlooks the falls, and can be rented for special events.

Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park is accessible to large numbers of people and provides an arctic experience for many people who visit Iqaluit but do not go further into Nunavut. It is a real treasure, so close to the capital. The park's Master Plan will see the park cross the Sylvia Grinnell River, extending all the way to **Qaummaarviit Territorial Park**, near the head of Peterhead Inlet, providing multi-day wilderness experiences right in Nunavut's capital city. At Qaummaarviit, grassy swales alternate with rocky bedrock hills and colourful heath tundra on this attractive island, which bears some of the best-preserved examples of structures made by Inuit prior to the coming of outsiders to this land, truly providing a window into the past.

Operators in Iqaluit offer day trips by vehicle to the interpretive trail part of the park, and, during the snow season, trips by snowmobile to the entire park. During the open-water season, operators offer trips by boat for picnics and hiking in this park. Some operators rent kayaks or canoes for short trips on the Sylvia Grinnell River. For further information, check the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations, and services.

NUNAVUT PARKS & SPECIAL PLACES

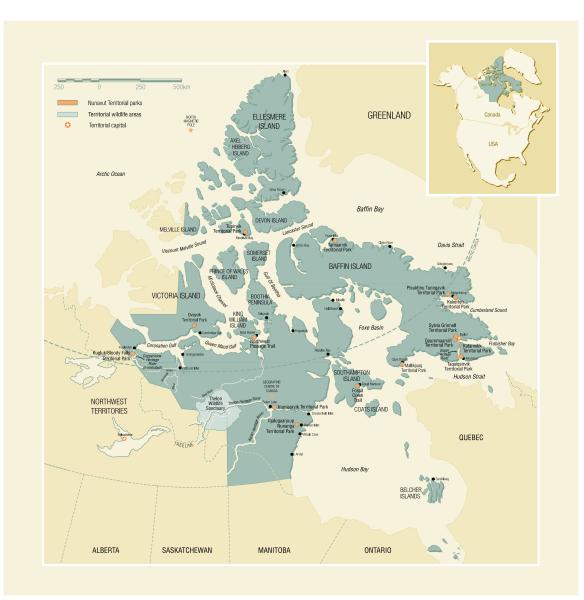
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SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN NUNAVUT

Nunavut's Territorial Parks offer some of the most breathtaking scenery and magnificent wildlife imaginable, but there are risks when traveling in a remote area. You must be self-reliant and responsible for your own safety. The extreme environment can change quickly, challenge your survival skills and face you with an emergency. Also remember, when you travel in Nunavut you are in polar bear country. Polar bears are strong, fast and agile on ice, land, and in water.

For more information on Safe and Sustainable Travel and Polar Bear Safety in Nunavut please visit our website at www.nunavutparks.com.



▲ 867.975.7700
▲ 867.975.7747
parks@gov.nu.ca
nunavutparks.com

NUNAVUT PARKS & SPECIAL PLACES Department of Environment Government of Nunavut P.O. Box 1000, Station 1340 Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0 NUNAVUMMI UNNAGIURHIQVIIT & INNIITURLIIT Havakviat Avatiligiyikkut Nunavut Kavamatkut Qiuqutaa 1000, Nayugaa 1340 Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0 PARCS ET ENDROITS SPÉCIAUX NUNAVUT Ministère de l'Environnement Gouvernement du Nunavut

Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0

Case Postale 1000, Succursale 1340