

Eastern Parks

Nopiming Provincial Park



Introduction

With an area of 1,429 km², Nopiming Provincial Park is characterized by rock outcrops, lakes and rivers of the Canadian Shield dominated by jack pine, and scattered marshes; black spruce/tamarack bogs are common.

Classified as a Natural Park, its purpose is to preserve areas that are representative of the Lac Seul Upland portion of the Precambrian Boreal Forest Natural Region; and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

The park will:

- Preserve areas of woodland caribou habitat;
- Provide nature-oriented recreational opportunities such as canoeing, hiking and mountain biking in a largely undisturbed environment;

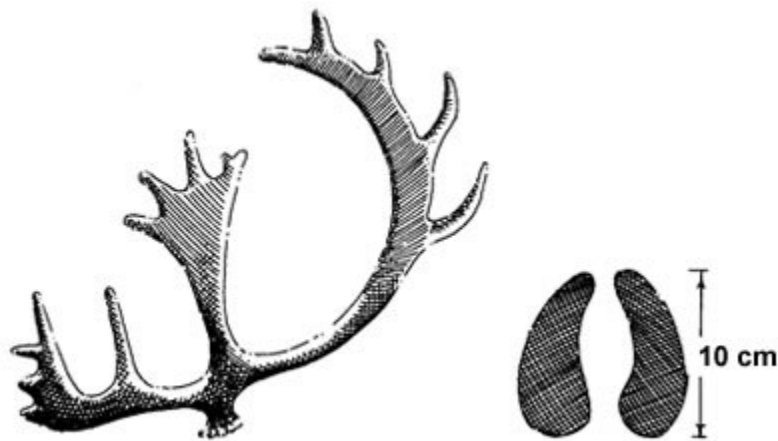


Native bead work on buckskin clothing

- Provide high quality cottaging, camping, boating and fishing opportunities, and accommodate related facilities and services;
- Promote public appreciation and understanding of Nopiming's natural and cultural heritage; and
- Accommodate commercial resource uses such as forestry and mining where such activities do not compromise other park purposes.

Nopiming is an Anishinabe (Saulteaux, Ojibwe) word meaning "entrance to the wilderness." The park is about 200 km north east of Winnipeg.

Manigotagan River Park Reserve consists of 250-m wide strips of land by Turtle Lake, and along the north and south shores of the river to PTH 304.



Woodland caribou antler and track

The Land

Rock is a prominent feature of Nopiming Provincial Park, frequently appearing as hills and ridges, as outcrops in the middle of a forest, and as shoreline cliffs spotted with orange and black lichens. Where the rock is not visible, it is only a short distance beneath the surface. It is the foundation of the landscape.

The Precambrian rocks formed more than 2.5 billion years ago and the area was once part of an immense mountain range, similar to today's Rocky Mountains. By about two billion years ago however, the mountains were eroded by the slow, persistent action of wind and water.

The last Ice Age, which ended about 10,000 years ago, and the resulting glacial Lake Agassiz, put the finishing touches on the landscape. As the glacier melted, it deposited clay, gravel and small boulders on the bare rock. Additional deposits of clay and sand were left by Lake Agassiz.

The first vegetation to appear on the bare surface were various lichens, still found on virtually every exposed rock. However, lichens are not proper plants for they lack leaves, stems and roots. Each lichen consists of two organisms living together for mutual benefit. One obtains minerals from the rock and holds moisture, thus enabling the other to produce food.

Today, the most widespread forests consist of leaf-bearing aspen (poplar) and birch, mixed with evergreens like jack pine and white spruce. The underbrush is largely hazel, alder and mountain maple. Some of the poorly drained, low-lying places are covered with stands of black spruce which are alive with insects during the summer. Unfortunately, few people venture in to experience this strangely illuminated green world. In winter, the spruce bog is one of the most hospitable parts of the forest.

From the crocuses of spring to the goldenrods which announce autumn, a bright array of flowers continuously appears in Nopiming. In late June the blue flag or wild iris appears among shoreline grasses while rare orchids flower briefly on the forest floor. About the end of July, blueberries are plentiful in areas that were burned over by the great forest fires of 1983.

Some of the larger mammals at home in the park include timber wolf, black bear, moose, white-tailed deer and woodland caribou. Occasionally, there are reported sightings of cougar which were believed to be extirpated in Manitoba.

Nopiming has more than a hundred lakes of varying sizes and depths, with shorelines of rock cliffs, spruce bogs and sand beaches. For decades anglers have known about their walleye (pickerel), northern pike (jackfish), trout, tulabi, whitefish and perch.

The First People

For the most part, Nopiming's lakes are wide portions of the numerous rivers which connect the park to Manitoba's historic waterways, the Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg. Rivers like the Bird (Oiseau), Maskwa, Black and Manigotagan are the traditional routes into the wilderness. Age-old portages allow canoe travel between lakes or different river systems.

Archaeological research in the vicinity of Nopiming has provided evidence that various groups of Native people lived there for at least the last 8,000 years. One location produced evidence of a "workshop" where tools were fashioned from native copper some 4,000 years ago. Fragments of pottery constructed about 1,500 years ago, show that early inhabitants used local clay for their work. Their decorative signs tell of an important human quality-for a craftsman who takes time to add a touch of beauty, creates something more than a utilitarian object.

Some of the cutting and scraping tools were made from the local white quartz. Other tools made from special rocks found in distant places such as South Dakota and near Lake Superior, suggest that there was extensive travel and trade with other people. A great variety of bones at old campsites indicate that these Aboriginal people made their living hunting, gathering and fishing.

Since about 1800, most of the area east of Lake Winnipeg was the land of the Anishinabe (Saulteaux), a branch of the Ojibwe nation, who migrated westward from Sault Ste. Marie. Today, their descendants live on the east shore of Lake Winnipeg.

In past years, it was their custom to fish at the river mouths during spring and summer. The waters were alive with goldeye, whitefish and mammoth sturgeon attempting to leave the lake in order to spawn.

In late fall, people moved upstream where the necessities of life were more readily available. Like today, many of the shallower lakes abounded with wild rice, and a good harvest helped them through winter's harshness. Moose and caribou were more easily hunted in winter. Clothing and blankets were made from the hides of these and smaller fur-bearing animals like beaver and muskrat.

Before the arrival of the Anishinabe, this was the land of the Cree. A legend tells of how and why they came.

Long, long ago, the Cree lived far northward ... One season, as the leaves were falling, game was very scarce. Their hunters had to go great distances to find a moose or a small herd of caribou. Geese and ducks flew south early, meaning that a hard winter was soon to come. They were eating mainly the fish, rabbits and a ptarmigan which the women and children caught.

One day some hunters returned, again with little meat. They brought news that their enemies were preparing for war against them in order to take the hunting grounds. Since the Cree had barely enough food for themselves, the people prepared to defend their territory.

The invaders came one morning as the mist was rising from the great lake. The Cree met their canoes on the shore and two days and nights of furious battle followed. The Cree fought bravely but they were greatly outnumbered from the start. After the second night, those who remained decided to flee into the bush.

In the days that followed they crossed many rock ridges, swamps, bogs, rivers and forests. Finally, they were forced to stop because of hunger, cold and exhaustion. They sat ... waiting for the enemy to overtake them. The enemy, however, was far behind. The great silence surrounding them was broken only by the owl's call and the wolf's howl. The spirits of their dead danced in the sky as Northern Lights.

As they waited a strange, soft light suddenly appeared in the forest. A young, golden-haired woman stepped into the light before the people. Her beauty soon dispelled their fears and distress. She beckoned them to follow.

She led them southward for several days until they arrived at a small lake. What they saw was indeed a welcome sight. A thick growth of wild rice which was ripe and ready to be harvested. Here was a good wintering place.



The weary travellers rest by Rice Lake

The band was very weary after the long journey and they paused only to eat a few handfuls of rice. They laid spruce boughs on the bare rock and fell into a deep sleep.

When they awoke, the woman was gone. Where she had laid her head, there were strands of golden hair imbedded in the rock.

[This is a shortened version of "The Legend of the Princess of Rice Lake," which appeared in the *Precambrian* (Vol. 13, 1949).]



Late in the winter of 1911, a trapper named Duncan Twohearts, set out from his trapline at Turtle Lake. Although the days were getting warmer and longer, the ice was still strong enough to support him and his dog team.

Besides bundles of fur, Twohearts had a small canvas bag full of rocks he had collected at Rice Lake. He was going to show them to old Arthur Quesnel, the trader at Manigotagan. The rocks had streaks of yellow running through them. Quesnel and his friend Capt. Pelletier quickly recognized that this was gold.

Pelletier went inland to inspect the north shore of Rice Lake, and shortly thereafter, the Gabrielle, the Rachel and the San Antonio claims were filed in the name of Alexandre Desautels, a prospector and guide from Winnipeg.

The discovery of gold sparked an era of prospecting in the Wanipigow River watershed as well as in the area now known as Nopiming. These regions became the cradle of gold mining in Manitoba.

Prospectors from Kenora and Winnipeg flooded the area in canoes, following the old travel routes of Aboriginal people-the Bird (Oiseau), the Manigotagan and other rivers. With the possibility of striking it rich, the Shield wilderness took on a new meaning. Prospecting became a new way of seeing the old landscape, for the gold had always been there, since the molten rock had begun to cool.

In the period of exploration that followed, there was widespread staking, for there were many surface showings of "free gold," or uncomponded gold which is visible to the unaided eye. Exotic gold rush names like Hidden Treasure, Paystreak, Lucky Strike and Gold Pick were attached to parcels of land in the wilderness and guarded jealously. Each claim represented someone's hopes and dreams.

Some of those who came were long on enthusiasm but short on practical experience. There was more than one claim filed for fool's gold or pyrites.

This gold rush was different from those of California and the Klondike where nuggets of the yellow element could be panned from a stream. The gold here was held fast by the Precambrian Shield and could only be extracted with a great deal of effort.

Prior to 1920, there was little development north of the Winnipeg River except for a few log cabins belonging to trappers and prospectors. Any ore that was obtained had to be packed in sacks and hauled away for processing. It became apparent that a full-fledged mining development would be required. This was to change the complexion of activities significantly. It



Duncan Twohearts (c 1911),
trapper from Turtle Lake

was beyond the means of any one prospector to set up a mine, so some of them became salesmen and tried to peddle their claims to financial backers.

One of the earliest and most successful mining developments was the Central Manitoba Mine, 6.5 km north of Long Lake. Its original claims were the Redwing, Goldbird, Fighter, Growler and Kitchener. Eventually, the Central Manitoba Mine comprised 5 shafts, each sunk into a different gold-bearing quartz vein.

The Kitchener, staked in 1915 by Louis Simard, was the site of the first shaft. One February morning as the men were handsteeling the shaft elsewhere on the property there was a total eclipse of the sun. The shaft was thus called the Eclipse. Timber for the headframe and other buildings was obtained at nearby Stormy Lake, noted for the tall spruce around it.



Gunnar Gold Mine, near Beresford Lake, 1937

Manitoba Archives

The Central Manitoba's heavy equipment was brought in during the winter of 1926-27 by boat to Manigotagan, and after freeze-up, by horse-drawn sled along a winter road to the mine site. It was apparent that a more direct route had to be established to ease the flow of supplies and equipment. Work commenced on a winter road between Long Lake and Great Falls, about 70 km (43 miles) to the south, a power transmission line was built from the new dam, and electricity was introduced to the mine in 1927 when it went into full production. Prior to this all machinery was steam operated.

The summer route to the Central was a complex and changing one. The first part was by freighter canoes up the Manigotagan River system. However, because of its 30 portages, it was abandoned

after a few years of use. A more efficient water-land route used the Wanipigow River as far as Government Landing. From there, horse-drawn wagons (later trucks) followed the 29-km (18-mile) Caribou Road to Caribou Landing. Work on this road began as early as 1922 when it was just a path between mineral claims. Today, a portion of it remains close to its rugged original state. From Caribou Landing freight was taken by boat across Quesnel Lake to Manigotagan Lake which was connected to Long Lake by means of a tracked portage. Once across Long Lake, roads led to the Central and other mines.

As the Central grew, a small community began to evolve. About 125 people were employed by the operation alone. This place in the wilderness had an air of permanence. During the Depression of the 1930s, many walked the long road to the Central and other mines in search of work. The community of Wadhope took its name from the initials of the financing syndicate and Hope, which was the name of one of the more promising mineral claims in the Central's holdings.

The life of the mine and the small community was brief, as exploration failed to turn up any worthwhile veins below the 114 m (375 ft.) level. In its years of production from 1927 to 1937, the Central produced 4,537 kg (160,034 oz.) of gold and 738 kg (26,032 oz.) of silver with a total value of \$4,106,970, at prevailing prices.



Headframe - Hope shaft

Despite its short life, the Central proved to be a catalyst for other mining developments in the area, including the introduction of electricity and a transportation system. Some who became unemployed due to the closure found jobs with other mining operations which ran at various times, including the Gunnar Mines at Beresford Lake and the longest lasting, San Antonio Mine at Bissett.

Today, very little remains of the Central. Along the Nopiming Trail, a few kilometres north of Long Lake, there is a break in the rocky, forested, roadside scenery. The reddish sands are the tailings from the Central's ten years of production. At the mine site, the shafts are capped and poplar and alder grow from the foundations of the former mine buildings.

A short distance south along the Trail is the unobtrusive Lone Grave, the resting place of a young man who worked at the Central. He drowned in Long Lake in 1934.

For those who shared in the area's colourful past, this grave has become a part of the landscape.



Lone Grave

Things to See and Do

Canoeing

Nopiming's river-lake systems were "made" for canoe exploration. They offer some of the best road-accessible canoeing in the province. Enthusiasts can plan their own routes suited to the amount of time they have available, or take one or more of the designated, recreation water routes that the park provides.

These are:

- Seagrim Lake
- Rabbit River - Cole Lake
- Bird (Oiseau) River - Elbow Lake
- Manigotagan
- Long Lake to Caribou Landing
- Beresford Lake to Garner or Long Lake

Minimum time recommended for each of these excursions is two days.

Another popular route is the Manigotagan River between Caribou Landing and the town of Manigotagan. Three to four days are recommended.

In order to maintain the beauty of this wilderness, backcountry travellers are encouraged to practise no-trace camping. Be sure to pack out whatever you pack in.

Further information about distances, portages and backcountry camping can be found on a free map, available from the district offices in Lac du Bonnet and Bissett.



Angling

Walleye, northern pike and trout are the main fish species that await anglers in many of the park's lakes and rivers. Please check your angling guide for specific regulations, seasons and limits.

Camping

In the park, camping is only allowed at designated campgrounds and back country campsites. Main campgrounds are at Tulabi Falls, Black Lake, Beresford Lake and Caribou Landing. All developed sites are unserviced but equipped with a fire pit and picnic table; boat launches, drinking water and outdoor privies are provided; firewood is not provided at all campgrounds but may be purchased nearby.

Townsites and Mine Sites

In the early part of the century, this was one of the most active mining areas in Manitoba, producing large amounts of gold and silver. Towns like Wadhope, Long Lake and Beresford Lake were isolated but thriving communities, albeit for short periods of time.

A series of interpretive signs mounted on headframe-like structures, provides information about the area's early townsites and mines. See the map on the reverse side for locations and names.

Caribou of Nopiming

An outdoor exhibit at Black Lake campground depicts the life history of woodland caribou in southern Manitoba.

The park is part of the range of Manitoba's southern-most herd of woodland caribou, named the Owl Lake herd which consists of about 50 - 60 animals. They prefer to forage for their favourite food, lichens, in mature stands of jack pine and black spruce. Calving sites have been identified as islands in lakes or islands of upland habitat in bog areas. Mortality is due to wolf predation, disease, accidents and illegal harvest. Hunting of caribou is prohibited. Monitoring of caribou with radio collars is continuing with the cooperation of local wildlife groups.

Trapper Johnson's Cabin

During the mining era, when a mine shut down, people moved on to find employment and a new home. After the mines closed and the settlement at Beresford Lake moved to Long Lake, John Jack Johnson stayed on to trap. His cabin and an interpretive sign are located at Beresford Lake campground.

Self-guiding Trails

Walking on Ancient Mountains

Situated about 11 km north of Black Lake, the trail leads visitors on to a rock outcrop with a splendid view of Tooth Lake. An accompanying brochure will provide insights to features you can discover along the way. You'll walk through an area that was devastated by the Long Lake Fire in 1983. You can also find clues that tell us that the same place was deep within a mountain, 2.7 billion years ago. Brochures are available from the trailhead and the Black Lake campground office. Return distance is 1.8 km. Allow 1 h 20 min.

Fire of 'Eighty-three

Just south of the junction of PR 314 and the Beresford Lake road, the trail explores the role of natural fires in creating and maintaining the boreal forest. Brochures with descriptive interpretive text that corresponds to sites along the trail are available at the trailhead and the Beresford Lake campground office. Return distance is 1.5 km. Allow 1 h. With the Maberly Lake spur, add 0.7 km and 30 min.