

## Eastern Parks

### Atikaki Provincial Park



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### Introduction

In 1985 the Bloodvein-Pigeon rivers region east of Lake Winnipeg was designated as Manitoba's first wilderness park. Its 3,981 km<sup>2</sup> is characterised by a landscape of rock outcrops and granite cliffs interspersed with a complex of bogs, fens, marshes, rivers and riverbottom forest. The park features three river corridors and associated shorelines, including the Manitoba portion of the Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River.

Classified as a Wilderness Park, its purpose is to preserve physical features and biological communities representative portion of the Lac Seul Upland portion of the Precambrian Boreal Forest Natural Region or "Shield Country." The park contains physical features and biological communities within its approximate 4,000 square kilometre boundary, which is about the combined size of Whiteshell and Nopiming provincial parks. The park will:

- provide opportunities for a range of outdoor recreational experiences from canoeing and whitewater rafting, that depend on a pristine environment, to lodges and outcamps

- promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features and cultural heritage.

The jewel in Atikaki's crown is the Bloodvein River that starts near Red Lake in Ontario, flows through the park, and drains into Lake Winnipeg. Both the Manitoba and Ontario portions of the river have the distinction of being designated a Canadian Heritage River. In order to receive this designation a river must have outstanding significance in terms of human heritage, natural heritage, or recreational values. The Bloodvein is significant, to varying degrees, in all of these categories.



Gammon River

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## Natural History

Located in a part of the Precambrian Shield known as the Superior Province, Atikaki is on some of Canada's oldest rock, formed about three billion years ago. This was once part of a mountain range that over time was reduced to a relatively flat plain by wind, precipitation and changes in temperature. Several glaciers sculpted the remaining surfaces to form the base of today's blue lakes and jade green forests.

Atikaki was buried by ice 11,000 years ago during the Wisconsin glacial period. Meltwater from the glacier formed Lake Agassiz, which at its peak was larger than all the Great Lakes combined, and covered all of present day Atikaki 9,000 years ago. Lake Agassiz gradually drained and by 8,000 years ago, boreal forest was established east of Lake Winnipeg.



Fragrant, white water lily

The scouring and scraping effects of the glaciers have left many outcrops of exposed rock along with many small lakes and rivers where the low areas have filled with water. This often-rugged terrain with an abundance of fresh water offers some of Manitoba's most beautiful scenery and some of Canada's finest water routes. In addition to the Bloodvein, Atikaki also contains all or parts of the Pigeon, Gammon, Leyond, Dogskin, Sasaginnigak and Broadleaf rivers.

Beneath the surface of rivers and lakes, aquatic habitats teem with underwater animals of many shapes and sizes. Among them are such renowned fish species as walleye, northern pike and lake trout.

Atikaki's boreal forest includes black spruce, jack pine, trembling aspen and balsam poplar while stands of white birch, white spruce and balsam fir are also quite common. Extensive moist areas are covered with stands of black spruce and tamarack; floating bogs of sphagnum are dotted with Labrador tea, bog laurel, leatherleaf, and fringed by alder and willows. Wild rice grows naturally along the shores of slow moving rivers and in the bays of shallow lakes.

Waterways are a haven for beavers that build their familiar lodges and dams throughout the park. Beavers share wetlands with muskrat, and painted and snapping turtles. Early in the morning, and as the sun goes down the call of the loon is a familiar song throughout the summer months. With a keen eye most visitors can spot a variety of birds: bald eagles, osprey and gray jays are a few of the most common, and recognizable ones.

The Ojibwe word Atikaki (pronounced: ah-tickah-kih) means "country of the caribou." There is an estimated 300-500 animals within Manitoba's Atikaki-Berens Caribou Range; the park is about 50 per cent of this total area. Two types of boreal forest lichens are important in caribou diet: the light-coloured reindeer moss is eaten yearround and oldman's beard which hangs from branches in mature jack pine stands, is an important winter food. Mature jack pine stands provide high quality habitat for caribou.

Atikaki's woodland caribou are gregarious in winter and can be found in groups, or bands, of 20 to 60 animals. They winter in areas along the park's western boundary and migrate eastward, towards and beyond the Ontario boundary during the summer. They often use islands as calving and nursery areas and are much more solitary during the summer months.

While there are several caribou ranges across the province where woodland caribou inhabit parks, such as those in Grass River and Nopiming, these secretive animals are listed as a Threatened species as defined by the Committee on the status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and the Manitoba Endangered Species Act (MESA).



Caribou

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## People in the Landscape

Archaeological evidence suggests that the area east of Lake Winnipeg has been home to a succession of Aboriginal people for several thousand years. Traditional lifestyles were woven into the fabric of the region's ecosystems. People moved with the seasons, going wherever food, shelter and clothing could be obtained.

In spring, families gathered at special places to take advantage of fish spawning and returning waterfowl; they could socialize and hold religious ceremonies. As summer progressed, berries and medicinal plants were gathered; wild rice matured and ripened in the fall at the end of the growing season. With the onset of winter, people dispersed in smaller family groups to seek out moose, caribou and smaller game including furbearers.

During the fur trade, Atikaki was part of a region known as "Le Petit Nord" or Little North. It included the vast area east of Lake Winnipeg, north and west of Lake Superior. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, there was intensive competition here for furs by independent traders, the North West Company from Montreal, and the Hudson's Bay Company traders based at Fort Albany on James Bay and later, York Factory.

There may have been temporary trading houses established in what is now the park, but furs were usually taken to Berens River, Little Grand Rapids, and Bad Lake (now Knox Lake) and

Red Lake in Ontario. A fascinating, detailed account of these times can be found in Victor Lytwyn's book *The Fur Trade of the Little North*.

Today, the region's Aboriginal settlements include Little Grand Rapids, Pauingassi First Nation, Bloodvein and Hollow Water.

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## **Things to See and Do**

A journey through Atikaki offers countless unique experiences, such as the intoxicating scent released by fragrant, white water lilies, as they open with the bow ripple of your canoe, or breathtaking views from granite cliffs. Each day brings new discoveries. From wolves howling at night, to the raw, awesome power of Shining Falls, nature expresses itself many ways, and the only way you can truly understand it, is to be there.

## **Canoeing**

Whether you follow a trail steeped in hundreds of years of tradition, or plan a route of your own, Atikaki is one of Manitoba's finest canoeing parks. Its 1,000 km of interconnected waterways offer experiences from whitewater rivers to lakes as smooth as glass. Trips of any length are possible, from three-day loops to three-week extravaganzas. Canoeists could spend virtually the whole summer touring the park without ever seeing a road or town, or travelling the same stretch of water twice. The Pigeon River provides some of the best wilderness whitewater in North America for those using canoe, raft or kayak.



Canoeists in whitewater

## **The Bloodvein River**

Rivers are central to our nation's past. To ensure they are part of our future, federal, provincial

and territorial governments established the Canadian Heritage Rivers System in 1984. The Bloodvein River in Atikaki Provincial Park is one of four Canadian Heritage Rivers in Manitoba. From the Manitoba/Ontario boundary, this rugged, whitewater river flows through Atikaki Provincial Park, over 200 km to Lake Winnipeg. Cut deep within the granite of the Canadian Shield, the path of the Bloodvein has remained virtually unchanged since the retreat of the last glaciers, 11,000 years ago. Wilderness travelers from around the globe gravitate to the Bloodvein and Atikaki Provincial Wilderness Park, for white-water rafting, canoeing and kayaking, superb angling, and abundant wildlife viewing opportunities.

### **Before You Go**

Wilderness travel is as demanding as it can be rewarding. Because the area is so remote and because of the risk involved in such activities, caution is advised. Essential to a successful, enjoyable trip is familiarity with wilderness travel basics and ethics: a reliable canoe and ability to carry out repairs; knowledge of map and compass techniques; proper clothing, camping gear and adequate food provisions; canoe handling skills; ability to read existing water and weather conditions; awareness of fire, wildlife and fishing regulations; good physical condition and an honest knowledge of your personal abilities and limitations. Canoe routes marked on the map are not cleared or marked in the wilderness. They may be difficult to travel in some seasons. Contact Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship for condition updates when planning a canoe trip.

Atikaki's waterways are not recommended for novice canoeists, unless in the company of a reliable, experienced wilderness traveller. For the names of companies that are licensed to offer trips through the park, please contact Travel Manitoba at 204-945-3777 in Winnipeg or, toll free 1-800-665-0040.

If you are planning on canoeing the Manigotogan River Provincial Park south of Atikaki, the Manitoba Eco-Network has developed an interactive web-based map to help you plan your trip. It can be accessed online at [mbeconetwork.org](http://mbeconetwork.org).

### **Camping**

No designated campsites have been developed, and no camping fees are required in the park. Visitors should practise the principles of no trace camping out of consideration for the land and others who follow.

- 1. Plan Ahead and Prepare** - All groups should include a knowledgeable and experienced backcountry leader, campers should consult the park office for information, plan their trip in advance and share their trip plan with a friend or family member.
- 2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces** - Campsites must be kept clean and restored to their original condition prior to leaving. If at all possible, campers should seek a site that denotes prior usage.
- 3. Dispose of Waste Properly** - When washing, use biodegradable soap in a dishpan, and rinse far enough away from water to allow soil to filter and cleanse the waste water. Use one latrine

per party, well into the forest; bury lightly to allow microbes to decompose the waste quickly. Pack in what you pack out.

**4. Leave What You Find.**

**5. Minimize Campfire Impacts** - Use a portable stove.

**6. Respect Wildlife** - Never approach or feed wildlife. Be Bear Smart.

**7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors** - Backcountry campers may not occupy the same site for more than three consecutive days. Backcountry groups staying overnight must not exceed nine individuals. Groups of 10 or more must apply for a Special Events Permit through the local district office.



Campsite

**Angling**

Whether it's going after big ones, keeping only a few pansized fish for an unforgettable shore lunch, or practising catch and release for the pure enjoyment of the sport, angling opportunities are unlimited. Anglers can choose the type of wilderness experience they want while fishing in Atikaki. You can relax at a comfortable lodge, enjoy the quiet isolation of a remote cabin, or savour a secluded campsite along a shoreline.



Fishing at sunset

### **Fly-in Lodges**

Several fly-in lodges with outcamps provide opportunities to visit and use the park. They are set up primarily for sport fishing, but a limited amount of hunting is also offered. For current information on services and rates, contact the lodges directly or Travel Manitoba at 204-945-3777 in Winnipeg or, toll free 1-800-665-0040.

### **Rock Paintings**

For hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, Aboriginal people have used natural pigments to paint images on rock faces at the water's edge. Scattered throughout the park are rock paintings that usually depict animals and people. Their original meaning and use are unknown. Good examples can be found at several locations in the park.

Travellers are welcome to look at these works, but please do not touch or disturb them or any offerings that may have been left there. These sites are sacred to Aboriginal people; they represent teachings that have been handed down over generations. Defacing the paintings would be similar to defacing a church, synagogue or other place of worship.

To protect important sites such as rock paintings, the provincial government proclaimed The Heritage Resources Act in 1986. Under terms of this law, it is illegal to collect, move or alter objects of archaeological or heritage significance without obtaining a permit. A fine may be levied against those who do not comply. In addition, any person finding an object or feature, such as a rock painting, should contact the nearest Manitoba Conservation district office to report the finding. By so doing, it will be possible to have such sites preserved and protected for future generations. Under terms of this law, it is illegal to collect, move or alter objects of archaeological or heritage significance without obtaining a permit. A fine may be levied against

those who do not comply. In addition, any person finding an object or feature, such as a rock painting, should contact the nearest Manitoba Conservation district office to report the finding. By doing so, it will be possible to have such sites preserved and protected for future generations.



Rock painting at Sasaginnigak Lake

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### **Access**

An attractive feature of Atikaki is its relative proximity to Winnipeg and its International Airport, which makes it easily accessible from other parts of Canada and the world. Most lakes in the park are no more than a one-hour flight by charter aircraft from the city. Arrangements can be made with lodges, outfitters or air charter companies in such communities as Bissett, Riverton and Lac du Bonnet. Up-to-date information on businesses that service the park is available from Travel Manitoba.

There is no direct road access into the park. A popular overland route begins at Wallace Lake Provincial Park on PR 304. One lengthy portage east to Siderock Lake and two more north lead to Obukowin Lake. Canoeists can also travel from Wallace Lake up the Broadleaf River—when water levels are high—to Aikens Lake.

### **Interprovincial Wilderness Area**

Recognizing the value and ecological importance of the boreal forest, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and have established a Manitoba-Ontario Interprovincial Wilderness Area. This wilderness area, which lies along provincial borders, encompasses over 9,400 sq km and includes Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and the Eagle- Snowshoe Conservation Reserve in Ontario, and Atikaki Provincial Park and parts of Nopiming Provincial Park in Manitoba. This partnership fosters co-operation between the two provinces regarding research, resource management, marketing and management of recreational opportunities.

### **World Heritage Site**

In Feb 2012, Pimachiowin Aki (“land that gives life” in Ojibwe) World Heritage Project was submitted to UNESCO for nomination. If successful, 33,400 sq km of boreal forest will be protected from large scale, industrial development. The nominated area is comprised of five First Nation traditional land use areas, Atikaki Provincial Park in Manitoba and Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and Eagle Snowshoe Conservation Reserve in Ontario. More info: [pimachiowinaki.org](http://pimachiowinaki.org)

### **Park Management Plan**

Park management plans provide details of what land uses are appropriate and assure that new activities or developments are compatible with the long-term management of parks. The Atikaki Provincial Park and Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River Management Plan is available at [manitobaparks.com](http://manitobaparks.com).

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### **Reference Material**

Various maps of the area are available from Canada Map Sales outlets throughout Manitoba, or from Manitoba Sustainable Development. These include aerial photos, National Topographic System (NTS) maps (1:50,000 and 1:250,000 scales) and general information maps prepared by Réal Bérard (Kautunigan Route, Sasaginnigak Canoe Country, Little Grand Rapids Canoe Routes, and The Oiseau-Manigotagan Waterways). Contact:

Canada Map Sales  
1-877-627-7226 (toll free)  
or, 204-945-6666 in Winnipeg  
[canadamapsales.com](http://canadamapsales.com)

Those planning their route through Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, or other parts of Ontario should be familiar with applicable camping, fishing and hunting regulations and fees. For more information, including a park map, contact:

Woodland Caribou Provincial Park Box 5003, Red Lake, Ontario P0V 2M0  
1-807-727-1329

### **For more information:**

Leave No Trace: [leavenotrace.ca](http://leavenotrace.ca)

Be Bear Smart: [gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/](http://gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/)

Manitoba Provincial Parks: [manitobaparks.com](http://manitobaparks.com)

Manitoba Eco-Network: [mbeconetwork.org](http://mbeconetwork.org)

Canada Map Sales: [canadamapsales.com](http://canadamapsales.com)

Woodland Caribou: [ontarioparks.com](http://ontarioparks.com)

Canadian Heritage Rivers: [chrs.ca](http://chrs.ca)  
World Heritage Site Nomination: [pimachiowinaki.org](http://pimachiowinaki.org)  
Travel Manitoba: [travelmanitoba.com](http://travelmanitoba.com)



Jack pine cones