Cape Breton Highlands National Park

Nova Scotia
Cape Breton Highlands National Park

Introducing a Park and an Idea

Canada covers half a continent, fronts on three oceans, and stretches from the extreme Arctic more than halfway to the equator. There is a great variety of land forms in the provinces and territories. Canada’s national parks have been created to preserve important examples for you and for generations to come.

The National Park Act of 1930 specifies that national parks are “dedicated to the people . . . for their benefit, education and enjoyment” and must remain “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Cape Breton Highlands National Park, 367 square miles in area, forms part of a huge tangle rising over 1,700 feet above the sea in the northeastern section of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. With its rugged Atlantic shoreline and mountainous background, the park is reminiscent of the coastal areas of Scotland.

The Park Environment

Each national park has its own character, its unique story as a living, outdoor museum. Cape Breton Highlands’ story is the drama of a mountainous landscape with bold peaks, steep but rounded hills which, with their forest cover, resemble a typical Acadian forest, which includes balsam fir, white, black, and red spruce, white and yellow birch, sugar maple, elm, bass, ash, trembling and larg tooth aspen, and balsam poplar. Although evergreens predominate at the higher elevations, large areas of the park’s central plateau are rarely devoid of trees. seldom seen by the visitor, this interesting section is reminiscent of Labrador or other subarctic regions. Here are small ponds and lakes, muskeg, and broad areas of drift heath-barens, in which tender lichens, slender-barked and many other subarctic plants grow. Spruce and other trees, which grow in the interior heaths and along the bold coastal headlands, are stunted and twisted into bizarre shapes. The headlands are also the home of breeding and ground juniper, black crowberry, Oasis laurel, and other plants able to exist despite the wind and salt spray.

The Animals Each Seeks Its Own Habitat

Some of the animals in the park have become accustomed to man and may be observed at fairly close range. How­

ever, they are still wild, and should be viewed and photographed with caution. About 21 species of mammals have been recorded in the park, including most of those found on the Nova Scotia mainland. Characteristic to the area are the lynx, Kan’s hare, snowshoe hare, black bear, red fox, short-tailed weasel, red squirrel, and chipmunk. Beaver are well-established in the park. Resident, flying squirrel, otter, pine marten, and bobcats also inhabit the area.

Small herds of woodland caribou were blown into the park in 1960 and 1969. They joined the moose to bring the animal population of the park closer to its original state before the first European settlement.

So far, over 150 species of birds have been recorded in the park. However, the actual numbers are probably greater.

Many shorebirds nest in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, including the American woodcock, common snipe, spotted sand-piper, and greater yellowlegs. Errant birds, such as the black-bellied plover, ruddy turnstone, turnstone, and white-rumped sandpiper set down during southward migrations from late July to November.

There are a few non-poisonous snakes in the park, including the garter snake. Several salamanders, frogs, and toads inhabit the area. However, the actual numbers are probably greater.

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island is named after him. Ingonish may be one of the oldest communities in North America, as there are indications that it was first settled by Portuguese colonists about 1521. For the first half of the 18th century, Cape Breton Island, or "Isle Royale", was a French colony, and Ingonish, known as "Port d'Orléans", became an important settlement, and only to Louisbourg. After the fall of Louisbourg in 1758, the settlers left. The Acadian expulsions contributed to the formation of new French settlements in the area, notably in the Cheticamp area. Today these are still primarily French-speaking villages.

The park is accessible via the Cabot Trail, which circles Cape Breton Island, or "Isle Royale", was a French colony, and Ingonish, known as "Port d'Orléans", became an important settlement, and only to Louisbourg. After the fall of Louisbourg in 1758, the settlers left. The Acadian expulsions contributed to the formation of new French settlements in the area, notably in the Cheticamp area. Today these are still primarily French-speaking villages.

In the early 19th century, while the island was still a separate British colony, there was a major influx of English, Irish, and especially Scottish settlers. Many of their descendents still live in the same settlements today. In 1820, Cape Breton Island became part of Nova Scotia. Finally, in 1936, Cape Breton Highlands National Park was created to preserve the land and its wildlife in their pristine state.

How To Get There
Most visitors motor to Cape Breton Highlands National Park, which is situated 25 miles north of Sydney, and 12 miles northeast of Halifax. The park is accessible via the Cabot Trail, which crosses from the mainland over the Canso Causeway. During the summer there is a bus service to the park from Sydney, which is accessible both by air and rail. Cape Breton Island is accessible via the Trans-Canada Highway, which crosses from the mainland over the Canso Causeway.

How To Enjoy The Park
Seasons – The park is open all year, although visitor services are seasonal. Summer is the busiest time, but visitors to the park at other seasons, particularly in autumn, are increasing every year.

Snowmobiles – These must stay on trails designated for their use, and permits must be obtained from park wardens or the administration office. All other motorized vehicles are restricted to public roads.

Hiking – This is one of the best ways to explore the park. Cape Breton Highlands has more than 20 trails, many leading along the sea coast, around lakes, and into the interior barrens. Some trails provide access to good fishing views of surf-washed coast.

Some Don’ts
National parks are selected areas set apart as nature sanctuaries and special care is taken to maintain them in their natural state. For this reason, all birds, animals, wildlife, trees, rocks, and fossils are to be left undisturbed. Even the wildflowers are not to be picked; they must be left for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching, or molesting wild animals is not permitted.

Please help protect your park for future enjoyment. It is part of your national heritage.

You may bring your dog or cat, but dogs must be kept on leash. Permits or vaccination certificates are not required.

Where To Stay
Camping brings you into the closest contact with the natural environment and the values for which the park was created. Camping facilities are provided at seven campgrounds, the largest of which are Broad Cove, Cheticamp, Black Brook, and Ingonish Beach.

Duly fees vary and depend on whether the site is serviced or unserviced. Camping space is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and the maximum allowable stay is two weeks. Campgrounds open about May 20 and close about October 15, depending on the weather.

It is not permissible to camp outside established campgrounds, although visitors on overnight trail trips may camp en route, provided they register with a park warden before and after each trip, and obtain a campfire permit.

A variety of other accommodation and visitor services are available in villages on the Cabot Trail, just outside the park. Details are available at the park information centres. In addition, the park offers a variety of other visitor facilities, including an 18-hole golf course and a half-mile-long supervised ocean beach.

Fires
Campfires may be set only in established campgrounds, although visitors on overnight trail trips may camp en route, provided they register with a park warden before and after each trip, and obtain a campfire permit.

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Fishing – Fishing in the park is by permit, available at a nominal charge at the administration building, information centres, or from a park warden. Fishing regulations and up-to-date information can be obtained from information centres. Visitors can arrange deep-sea fishing trips with local fishermen.

How To Get The Most Out Of Your Visit
To help you understand and appreciate the park's complex natural environment, you are urged to take advantage of the free interpretive program, conducted by a professional naturalist and his staff. It will provide you with an insight into how climate, sea, land formations, plants, and animals are interrelated, and make your stay more rewarding.

During the day there are conducted field trips; in the evening, informative talks are held, illustrated with slides and films.

Self-guiding trails, exhibits, interpretive signs, and viewpoints also explain the park's natural features.

Information on the interpretive program is available from bulletin boards, information centres, and park staff.

Where To Get Information
Detailed information may be obtained at information centres located at the Ingonish Beach and Cheticamp entrances. Uniformed staff will answer questions, provide maps, outline travel routes, and refer visitors to various areas and facilities in the park. Special events are posted on bulletin boards.

Park wardens, though not primarily responsible for general information, will help visitors whenever possible.

Additional information on national parks is available from the Superintendent, Cape Breton Highlands National Park, Ingonish Beach, Nova Scotia. For information on other national parks write the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.

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Cape Breton Highlands National Park

- Highway (Cabot Trail)
- Secondary Road
- Walking or Hiking Trail
- Lake, River, Creek
- Mountain
- Warden's Cabin
- Picnic Area
- Campground
- Viewpoint

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