Gros Morne
National Park

Off Trail Hiking on the Tablelands

A UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Rocks of Gors Morne National Park provide some of the world's best illustrations of plate tectonics, and the Tablelands are a key element of that story.

Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Canada

Lookout Hills

Tablelands

Crollys Brook Pond
Wallace Brook
Trout River Gulch
Highway 431
Lookout Trail
Muddy Brook
Snowmobile Trail
Discovery Centre
Woody Point Trail
Woody Point
Bonne Bay (South Arm)
Winter House Brook
Winter House Brook Canyon
Old Trout River Road
GROS MORNE NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA
Shoal Brook
Shoal Brook Pond
Beaver Pond
Gull Pond
Southwest Gulch
Crow Mountain 418m
Crow Hill 378m
The Bowl

A 430641E 5479692N
B 429902E 5477062N
C 429359E 5479755N
D 429874E 5480100N
E 430054E 5480806N
429829E 5478304N
429033E 5477514N

Tablelands Trail
Tablelands unmarked route

428000 m 429000 m 430000 m 431000 m 432000 m 433000 m 434000 m
5483000 m 5482000 m 5481000 m 5480000 m 5479000 m 5478000 m 5477000 m 5476000 m
49° 30' 0" N 49° 29' 0" N 49° 28' 0" N 49° 27' 0" N 49° 26' 0" N
57° 59' 0" W 57° 58' 0" W 57° 57' 0" W 57° 56' 0" W 57° 55' 0" W

Parking
Information
Viewpoint
Forest
Scrub
Serpentine Barren
Wetland
Tundra
Stream / Lake
UTM Point (coordinate)
Trail
Unmarked route
Road
Track or Path

Projection: UTM (Zone U21)
Datum: NAD83

Grid North to True North = 45'
Magnetic Declination (Magnetic North to Grid North) (2014)
= 19° 9.6' W, Annual change 11.9' /year East

Map Scale 1:25 000

1000m 800m 600m 400m 200m 0 500m 1000m

CONTOUR INTERVAL : 20 METERS

Escape the Trails

The Tablelands of Gros Morne National Park is a surreal barren mountain of orange rocks, sheer cliffs and stunted vegetation that looms over Bonne Bay. For experienced and prepared hikers, a trek up its steep slopes is one of the most unique hiking opportunities in eastern North America. Follow one of 4 recommended unmarked routes to the top and experience the exceptional beauty of the Tablelands' barren landscape and dramatic vistas, as well as encounter its rare geology and plants. Use this map and route descriptions to select the best route for you and plan your own Tablelands adventure.

Route Descriptions

There are 4 unmarked hiking routes on the Tablelands that lead you to magnificent vistas, cross rocky terrain, and provide unique and interesting hiking challenges. All routes have steep ascents and descents but avoid impassable cliffs. No special climbing equipment or skills are required. Although the open landscape of the Tablelands lends itself to easy navigation, hikers should be comfortable reading a topographic map and be able to navigate unmarked terrain. If in doubt hikers should ascend and descend by the same route.

Route 1 (E-D): The Lower Bowl (2-3 hours, 3 km return, elevation gain 250 m)

This route is ideal for hikers wanting a short experience. The route climbs halfway up the Tablelands, passes magnificent waterfalls and has stunning vistas of Bonne Bay.

From the parking lot, follow the Tablelands Trail to Wallace Brook. Turn right immediately after the bridge, and walk uphill keeping the brook to your right. It's about a 1 km ascent to the base of "the Bowl". Along your way, the lowermost waterfall is worth a stop. When you get to the base of "the Bowl", find a good place to celebrate, enjoy the view and get some great photos. Return by the same route. If you wish, you can continue to the top of "the Bowl" (See Route 2 description).

Route 2 (E-C): Top of "the Bowl" (5 km return, 3 - 4 hours, elevation gain 470 m)

Want to get to the "top" of the Tablelands? This is the quickest and most direct route, with dramatic views of Bonne Bay, Gros Morne Mountain and Trout River Gulch.

Follow the directions for the Lower Bowl route (Route 1). At the base of "the Bowl", cross the stream that you have just followed up. Head to the top by following the right (northwest) rim of "the Bowl". If you are here early enough in the summer you may be able to cool off on a late snow bed. As you near the top continue to follow the rim around as it gradually turns to the left. When you have reached what you feel is the top, stop, rest, and celebrate. Return by the same route to avoid impassable cliffs.

Route 3 (A-B): Winter House Brook Canyon (10 km return, 4-6 hours, elevation gain 500 m)

This route through Winter House Brook Canyon totally immerses you in the immensity and surreal beauty of the Tablelands, and ends at one of the most spectacular vistas in the park.

Take the Tablelands Trail to its end at the viewing platform and follow Winter House Brook towards the back of the canyon. About 2 km from the platform the stream splits and the canyon steepens. Follow the left (south) branch up to the crest of the canyon, an ascent of 300m. Snow beds often linger in the higher elevations of the canyon until late July, but avoid crossing them because they may collapse as the brook melts them from underneath. At the top, stop and celebrate! Take a breath, have lunch and get some great photos. Return by the same route to avoid dangerous cliffs.

Route 4 (A-E): Winter House Brook Canyon to "the Bowl" Loop (12 km loop , 6-8 hours, elevation gain 540 m)

Caution: *This route crosses part of the Tablelands plateau where there are few landmarks. You must be able to navigate featureless terrains. Use of compass or GPS is recommended. This route should not be attempted when low cloud covers or threatens to cover the top of the Tablelands. Allow at least 4 hours before sunset to complete this section of the route.*

For experienced hikers who want a full-day adventure, this route takes you to all the great viewpoints and tests your navigational skills all without having to retrace your steps.

Follow Route 3 to the top of Winter House Brook Canyon. From there, keep the canyon to your right and head west across the back of the canyon. At the canyon's northwestern corner, traverse a small valley, crossing at the point you judge the safest. Turn north and keep the canyon to your right for about 1 km. This brings you to one of the Tablelands most dramatic views, over very steep cliffs. From here use your compass or GPS to navigate across the plateau towards "the Bowl". When you reach its rim, follow the northwest (left) rim down to its base. Do not descend the southeast (right) rim because there are numerous cliffs. Cross the brook at the bottom of "the Bowl", and head down to the trail keeping the stream to your left.

For Your Comfort and Safety

Be aware and prepared for the conditions you will face when hiking the Tablelands. Remember, you are responsible for your own safety.

Be aware:

- There are no route markers to the top of the Tablelands. You must rely on your own skill to navigate these routes.
- Expect steep ascents and descents over rocky terrain and loose ground.
- There are many steep and impassible cliffs. Use caution, and only ascend and descend the mountain along suggested routes.
- Expect changes in weather, as well as cooler and windier conditions at higher elevations.
- Continually assess weather conditions and turn back if weather deteriorates or the top of the Tablelands is in cloud.
- Cell phone reception is unreliable on the Tablelands. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Do not cross snow beds or enter snow caves. They may collapse as brooks melt them from underneath.

Be prepared. We recommend:

- Sturdy footwear – hiking boots recommended.
- Windbreaker (preferably waterproof), sweater, and long pants.
- Water (at least 2 litres per person) and snacks.
- Map and compass or GPS.
- "Take the Essentials" (www.adventuresmart.ca).

Etiquette

- Collecting rocks, plants or animals is prohibited. Please leave this place undisturbed for other visitors.
- Do not litter. Pack out all your garbage.
- Park entrance fees apply. Your fees help maintain Gros Morne National Park.
- Please watch where you are stepping... some plants are very rare and others are very old!

In Case of Emergency: 1-877-852-3100

Weather Forecast (www.weather.gc.ca)

The Tablelands:
Astounding rocks, plants and views!

The Tablelands are visually striking, have an amazing geological story and are home to a variety of rare plants. This mass of rock from the Earth's mantle was bulldozed here as continents collided about 480 million years ago. Later glaciers carved its valleys and canyons. Today its poor soil supports a sparse but varied plant community.

The Earth's Mantle Exposed

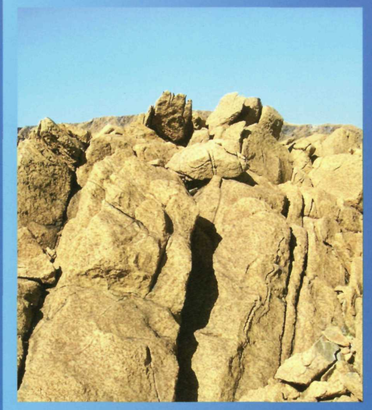
It's the geologic origin of the Tablelands that makes it so special. It is from the mantle, the middle layer of earth, bulldozed here as continents collided. How it got here was an amazing revelation to geologists.

In one of the earliest applications of the plate tectonic theory, geologists showed that the Tablelands originated as a slab of mantle from under an ancient ocean crust. As continents collided, about 480 million years ago, it was bulldozed up into the Appalachians Mountains as they were being built. When the collision ended, the ancient ocean had been destroyed and a supercontinent, Pangaea, had formed. The young Appalachians ran down its centre, with the Tablelands deeply buried within. Hundreds of millions of years later, erosion exposed the Tablelands. Today, this is one of the few places where a piece of the Earth's mantle is revealed and accessible for study. The Tablelands gave geologists new insights into mountain building, the collision of continents, and destruction of oceans all key evidence for the Theory of Plate Tectonics. This is one of the reasons for Gros Morne National Park's designationas a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Peridotite

Peridotite is an igneous rock from the Earth's mantle and makes up most of the Tableands. Unlike rocks that form in the Earth's crust, peridotite is rich in magnesium, iron, chrome, cobalt, copper, aluminium and nickel but low in lighter elements like potassium and calcium.

The iron in the rock rusts to make the peridotite orange on its surface, but it has a dark interior when broken open. The dark green minerals are olivine and the lighter coloured crystals are pyroxene.



Serpentinite

Serpentinite, another rock seen on the Tablelands, is green and often has fine white lines forming a scale-like pattern. It forms when peridotite metamorphoses.

Carved by Ice

The Tablelands may be almost half-a-billion years old, but its cliffs and valleys were formed only recently – in geologic time. About 3 million years ago, a series of glaciations advanced and retreated over this area and shaped the park landscape, cutting out its cliffs, canyons, valleys, and fjords.

About 15,000 years ago the last glaciers began to melt and exposed the U-shaped valleys of the Trout River Gulch, Winter House Brook Canyon and "the Bowl". Both "the Bowl" and Winter House Brook Canyon are cirques which were carved by small glaciers that flowed out to join the main glacier.

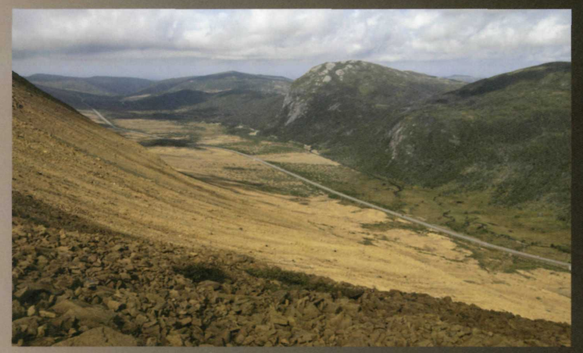
Today, snow beds linger late into summer in both of these places, and if annual temperatures were to drop a few degrees these snow beds would not melt from year to year and become new glaciers.

"The Bowl" in Winter

During the winter, large amounts of snow drift into "the Bowl" and the back of Winter House Brook Canyon. On these north facing slopes the snow will last well into the summer.

Trout River Gulch

The large U-shaped valley of Trout River Gulch was carved by a glacier that flowed west out to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



Winter House Brook Canyon

Winter House Brook Canyon is a glacial cirque carved out by a smaller glacier that flowed out from the back of the canyon.

A Tough Place to Hike - A Tougher Place to Grow

You think it's hard to walk here? Try growing here. The soil of the Tablelands forms from the breakdown of peridotite and serpentinite, and has the same toxic mix of metals and low nutrients as these rocks. The soil is also very basic due to high levels of magnesium. With little shelter and high elevations, harsh sub-arctic weather conditions are also a factor impacting plant growth. Wind and ice prune the branches, frost pushes roots out of the ground, and plants dry quickly in the near constant winds while rain drains quickly in the rocky soil.

Like we said, the Tablelands is a tough place to grow. It takes special adaptations to live here and for those few that do, growth is slow.

Common Juniper

Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is just plain tough. Frost heaves their roots, wind and snow prunes their branches, the lack of nutrients starves them, and the rocky soil holds little water. For this reason, common juniper grows slowly on the Tablelands where they can be hundreds of years old.

Cinquefoil

Shrubby Yellow Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruiticosa*) is another tough plant able to grow in harsh conditions. Common on the Tablelands, it flowers for most of the summer. This wiry plant can live for more than 50 years.

Harebell

Harebells (*Campanula rotundafolia*) are common on the Tablelands and bloom throughout the summer.

They like basic soils and can be found growing in limestone-rich areas as well. Their thin flexible stems are well adapted for the windy conditions of the Tablelands.

Moss Campion

Moss Campion (*Silene acaulis*) is a long lived perennial that flowers here in early June. This tough arctic-alpine plant is able to survive the harsh weather conditions by growing low to the ground and anchoring itself with a deep tap root. It is thought that some of the Moss Campion on the Tablelands are hundreds of years old.

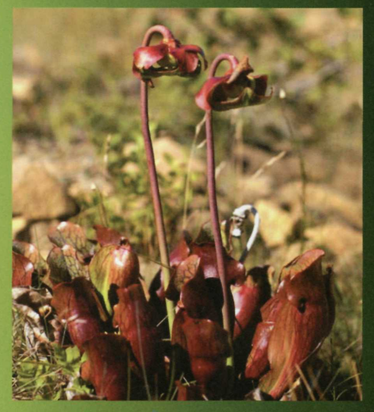
Serpentine Sandwort

Serpentine Sandwort (*Arenaria marcescens*) grows only on serpentine soils. It can tolerate extremely high levels of metals like iron, nickel, chromium and aluminum. Toxic serpentine soil is not stopping this plant.

Pitcher Plant

Pitcher Plants (*Sarracenia purpurea*) are well adapted to the low nutrient soils of the Tablelands because they trap their own food.

Insects drown in the rainwater held in pitcher shaped leaves, and then are shredded and consumed by insect larvae and microbes. The pitcher plant absorbs the nutrient rich liquid. Yum.



Grey Wool Moss

Grey Wool Moss (*Rhacomitrium lanuginosum*) looks like a pile of dirty grey wool when dry but turns bright green in mist and rain. It is an arctic moss, one of the first colonists in post-glacial lands.