

POINT PELEE NATIONAL PARK ONTARIO

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LOCATION

Point Pelee National Park is in extreme southwestern Ontario about six miles south of Leamington. The Park is a narrow V-shaped peninsula of sand jutting into Lake Erie near its western end.

It has an area of about 3,500 acres made up of attractive sand beaches, forests, open parklands and a large, unique and interesting deep fresh water marsh of some 2,000 acres.

The Park is the most southern mainland in Canada and is at the same latitude as northern California. Its geographical position and its location within Lake Erie give the Park a mild climate which allows plants and animals that are not found elsewhere in Canada to live.

PURPOSE

Point Pelee is one of Canada's 18 National Parks which form a chain of nature sanctuaries extending from Mount Revelstoke in British Columbia to Terra Nova in Newfoundland. These Parks have been established for the preservation of selected areas in their natural state for the benefit, education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

This vast area of more than 29,000 square miles is administered by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

Point Pelee was established as a Park in 1918 specifically to protect and preserve the unique plants and animals of the area. It was agreed that this rare type of marsh and this small remnant of the original and true deciduous forest of North America should be in national ownership to safeguard them for the people of Canada for all time.

The vegetation is not only of historical and aesthetic value. It keeps the sand from being blown away by wind or washed into the lake by storm waves and water currents. If this happened most of the value of the Park would be lost.

To assure the Park's survival and to allow the plants and animals to develop naturally without human interference, a small area was established as a Nature Reserve in 1942. It is fenced and access to it is limited. The natural history of the Nature Reserve may be seen and studied from the Woodland Nature Trail which runs through part of it.

NATURAL FEATURES

GEOLOGICAL

Point Pelee is a spit of Eastport sand which has been transported and shaped by the water currents of Lake Erie. The Point has been built since the glaciers melted from the area some 7,000 to 10,000 years ago. Sand is unstable and the land is still being built up and at times torn down by natural forces like water currents, storm waves, and wind. Many of the individual plants growing on the Park are efficient sand-binders and the entire vegetational complex holds the sand in place. Nature has been given some assistance in the fight against erosion; some areas of the Park have been withdrawn from visitor use and elaborate protective measures are continually carried out to prevent beach erosion by storm waves. Without artificial protection, a series of storms could cut a channel across the Park.

The bedrock of the area is Devonian limestone, laid down in shallow seas some 300 million years ago. It is deeply buried under the sand of the Park



The Point Pelee marsh—a world in itself to explore.

and no outcrops are seen in the area. Small fossils, from the rocks, may be occasionally found on the beaches.

PLANTLIFE

The true deciduous forest of North America occurs in Canada in a narrow belt of light soil along the north shore of Lake Erie, and Point Pelee National Park is one of the few areas where this forest and its associated animals still exist in a near-primeval state.

Such trees as black walnut, red mulberry, cottonwood, sycamore, white sassafras, black maple, shagbark hickory, bitternut hickory, basswood, chestnut oak, and other deciduous trees are common. Hackberry and red cedar, which are abundant, are representative of a more southwestern flora. The evergreen or coniferous trees of the north which are familiar to most Canadians are entirely absent or represented by a very few trees.

The growth of shrubs in the Park is luxuriant and consists of many kinds. Some of the rare or interesting kinds, for Canada, are hop-tree, spicebush, Drummond's dogwood, common catbrier and Canada or fragrant sumac.

Climbing vines of many kinds festoon the shrubs and trees making veritable tangles. Although not usually thought of as a part of the forest scene so far north, lianas drape and hang from many of the tall trees. Grape, poison ivy, and Virginia creeper are the large vines that form these lianas.

Wildflowers grow profusely. Among the rare wildflowers are prickly pear cactus, flowering spurge, wild potato-vine, and swamp-mallow. Some of the other attractive ones, which have a more general distribution, are large-flowered bellwort, jewelweed, herb-Robert, blue cohosh, enchanter's nightshade, Dutchman's-breeches, sweet cicely, tall bellflower, wild blue phlox, wild columbine, wild bergamot, waterleaf, may apple, spring beauty and wild leek.

The large marsh with its aquatic plants and animals is a fascinating place to observe nature and a boardwalk has been built over part of it for visitors to use. The boardwalk is the first of several developments that are planned for public enjoyment of the natural features of the park.

WILDLIFE

There are many kinds of small animals in the Park and some of them like the eastern mole, northern katydid, giant swallow-tailed butterfly, and mole cricket are restricted in distribution in Canada to the immediate area. Fowler's toad and Baird's white-footed mouse are present and also range a little farther northward.

Other animals that may be of interest are seaside grasshopper, grey squirrel, mink, raccoon, muskrat, cottontail, blue-tailed skink, fox snake and white-tailed deer. The park area probably has more kinds of turtles than any other section of Canada.

In the autumn the southward migration of the monarch butterfly, dragonflies, and wasps is an interesting sight. Standing on the narrow sandy beach at the tip of the Point one can see these insects, and birds too, leaving to cross the Lake. Sometimes huge aggregations of the migrating monarch butterfly festoon the shrubs and trees as they rest for the night or during inclement weather.



Prickly pear cactus affords a lesson in nature interpretation.

BIRDLIFE

Point Pelee National Park is one of the best areas in Canada for the study and observation of birds. It is on the spring and autumn migration route of many kinds. Some of the migrants are



*The southern tip of Canada's mainland—
where waves greet man and gull.*

rarely seen in other parts of Canada. Rare birds, also, remain to nest in the Park. Among these are prothonotary warbler, Bewick's wren, blue-gray gnatcatcher, orchard oriole, cardinal and yellow-breasted chat.

The spring migration between March 15 and June 1 is a spectacular event. At the height of the season in May well over a hundred kinds may be tallied in one day by one observer. Reverse migration may also be seen in the spring. In this case birds that are migrating northward, having arrived at the Park, reverse their direction and fly again southward. Binoculars are essential if you wish to spot and observe birds.

The autumn migration southward is also an extremely interesting time at the Park. This begins in August but is at its height during September and October. The hawk migration during the latter part of September is nearly always a spectacular show with many hawks of several kinds in the air at one time. Many migrating birds such as the various swallows, redwinged blackbirds and blue jays, form large aggregations or flocks worth seeing.

FISH

Large-mouthed black bass, northern pike and carp are the game fish found in the ponds of the large marsh. In spring the run of American smelt and later the spawning run of white bass, along the shore of Lake Erie within the Park, supply good fishing from the beaches. Walleye (locally called pickerel) and yellow perch are caught off-shore.

Game fish are not the only fish of interest in the Park. Many other kinds are present, including the Western lake chubsucker, which was first discovered in Canada, in the marsh ponds in 1949.

The fishing seasons vary from year to year and Park authorities should be consulted for the latest current regulations.

HOW YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PARK

An understanding of the local natural history will greatly increase the enjoyment you derive from your visit. An Interpretive Service is maintained during the summer months. The Park Naturalist will help with your questions and provide organized illustrated talks, field trips, and other interpretive techniques for your benefit. Visitors should consult Park offices and bulletin boards for current nature programmes and activities.

The Woodland Nature Trail is of the self-guiding type. Much may be learned by the visitor himself, by walking this Trail. Some of the plants are labelled, and a self-guiding trail pamphlet and other literature on the plants of the Trail are available.

HOW TO SEE THE INTERESTING FEATURES

The road system of the Park provides access to every part of the Park including the features already mentioned. The Woodland Nature Trail, swimming beaches, picnic areas, parking areas, and camping areas are easily located from the map.

The main road, which runs in a north-south direction, is approximately six miles in length. It is suggested that walking is the best way to explore the Park. Leave your car in one of the convenient parking areas and then leisurely stroll the smaller roadways, woodland paths or along the beach where cars are prohibited.

When visiting the Park one should not miss the opportunity of standing on the most southerly part of the mainland of Canada. This is the extremely narrow beach at the southern end of the main road. The most southern part of Canada is Middle Island in Lake Erie, 17¼ miles southwest of where you stand on the tip of Point Pelee. Pelee Island, which is usually plainly visible, is only nine miles southwest.



*An inquisitive raccoon in the safety
of his favourite log.*

GENERAL INFORMATION

PARK ADMINISTRATION

A resident Superintendent is in charge of the Park. The protection of the Park and the visitor is in the hands of the Warden Service assisted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Visitors may obtain detailed Park Information from any of the Park Wardens or at the Park Information Centre.

SEASON

The Park is open throughout the year but it is only from May to the end of September that all the facilities are provided.

CAMPING

There is one serviced campground located approximately 4½ miles south of the Park entrance, equipped with kitchen, laundry, washroom facilities and showers.

Accommodation for 125 tents and 15 trailers is provided. The campground is operated on a first come first served basis and visitors are advised to inquire at the Park entrance for space during July and August. Picnic facilities are located at various points throughout the Park.

PRESERVATION

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 remain undisturbed. Even the wildflowers are not to be picked; they are to be left for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching or molesting wild animals is not permitted. This is in the interests of the animal, as well as the human who could receive serious injury.

Please help protect your own Park for future enjoyment. It is part of your national inheritance.

PREVENT FIRE

Campfires may be kindled only in fireplaces provided for this purpose and must be completely extinguished before campers leave the site. Visitors observing an unattended fire should attempt to extinguish it if possible and promptly report it to the nearest Park Warden. Fire in a National Park can cause damage which cannot be repaired in a hundred years.

PETS

Dogs and cats may accompany visitors into the park. For the protection of park animals, however, dogs must be kept on leash.

MOTOR LICENCE

Motoring visitors are required to obtain a Park motor vehicle licence at the entrance.

HOW TO REACH THE PARK

Point Pelee National Park is accessible by automobile from Leamington, on Highway No. 3 and from Highway No. 18. Leamington may be reached by bus either from the east or west or from Windsor. Through air or train service is available to Windsor.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PARK

The missionary explorers, Fathers Dollier and Galinee, who were the first Europeans known to have ascended the Great Lakes as far as Sault Ste. Marie, were shipwrecked and camped on Point Pelee in 1670.

In the Pontiac War, Lieutenant Abraham Cuyler's detachment of Royal Americans and Queen's Rangers was attacked on the beach by Wyandot Indians on May 28, 1763; 54 were killed and 4 were wounded.

During the War of 1812, General Brock's expedition landed at Pelee on August 12, four days before taking Detroit and capturing an American army commanded by General Hull. The beach and portage were much used in early lake navigation.

Point Pelee was originally known as the Point Pelee Admiralty and Naval Reserve and held by the Crown as Naval Reserve lands. About 1849 the area was inhabited by Chippewa Indians, who cleared some land for growing corn and oats but principally spent their time hunting and fishing.

The commercial fishing industry in Lake Erie later attracted a few white settlers who acquired title to the lands occupied by them through "squatters' rights".

Persons wishing additional information may address their enquiries to:

The Superintendent,
Point Pelee National Park,
Leamington, Ontario,

or

National Parks Branch,
Department of Northern Affairs
and National Resources,
Ottawa, Canada.

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