



# Welcome!

**Welcome to Port au Choix National Historic Site,** part of Parks Canada's diverse and ever-growing family of protected places from sea to sea.

There's a lot to see and do while you're here. Explore the limestone barrens and look for plants and fossils found nowhere else in Canada. Walk in the footsteps of the ancient cultures who first inhabited this spectacular landscape. Keep an eye out for sculptures offering glimpses into ancient Aboriginal ways of life.

Count on spending about two hours at the site to explore the Visitor Reception Centre and the hiking trails.

While in the area, watch for the beaver symbol along the highway – it's your indication that other fascinating Parks Canada places are in the vicinity. Think about including a visit to these locations in Western Newfoundland and Southern Labrador: Gros Morne National Park, L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, and Red Bay National Historic Site.

# Millennia of history

The scale of Port au Choix's human history is vast. For over 6,000 years, this place has been a crossroads for various native North American and European cultures. Each of these cultures has had a unique connection to this place, but the common threads for all have been the land, the sea, and the resources they provide.

During Port au Choix's long history, people have been drawn here by the rich marine resources including fish and seals. That heritage endures today – many people who live in the nearby community of Port au Choix still depend on the sea for their livelihood.

## Port au Choix's ancient – and more recent – cultures

Evidence of four ancient cultures has been uncovered at Port au Choix; in archaeological terms, these are the Maritime Archaic, Dorset and Groswater Paleoeskimo, and "Recent Indians" or the ancestors of the Beothuk.

Beginning in the late 1920s, archaeologists excavated sites belonging to these cultures, uncovering remains reflecting domestic, hunting and ritual practices. The unusual alkaline quality of the limestone bedrock in the area helped preserve many organic objects like bone, antler and ivory.

Their work has helped us understand more about the unique ways each group lived in the region. We know that this was an important place for Newfoundland's first people, the Maritime Archaic, who made special trips here to bury their dead. Later the Groswater and Dorset, both with origins in the Arctic, established settlements in a number of locations and focused on harp seal hunting. Finally, shortly before the arrival of Europeans in the region, the ancestors of the Beothuk people established a number of small habitation sites. It was these archaeological discoveries that resulted in Port au Choix becoming a national historic site. To learn more about all of these cultural groups, explore the exhibit in the Visitor Reception Centre.

## Your Port au Choix Experience Visitor Reception Centre

At the Port au Choix Visitor Reception Centre, friendly and knowledgeable staff are on hand to answer your questions about the exhibits and offer suggestions for your visit. The permanent exhibits feature original artifacts and a full-scale archaeological diorama of a Dorset house. Sit back and relax while you watch Ancient Cultures, Bountiful Seas, a short film presenting an overview of the cultural history of the area. Before you leave, spend some time in the boutique, operated by the Historic Sites Association – revenue from your purchases goes to support projects to interpret and preserve Port au Choix.



View of the coast on the north side of Point Riche peninsula

Sealskins drying

# And don't forget – get outside!

Port au Choix's landscape offers many opportunities to pause and drink in the staggering, rugged beauty of this part of the world. Venture out onto the limestone barrens and listen to the ocean. Feel the wind on your face and imagine this place as it was when these ancient peoples lived here.

There are toilets and picnic tables located along all three of Port au Choix's trails. Consult the map and trailhead panels for exact locations. Please keep in mind while you're at Port au Choix: weather patterns can change quickly. Wear sturdy footwear and warm, windproof and waterproof clothing – even in summer. And don't forget your camera.

## Dorset Trail

The Dorset Trail brings you across the gentle terrain of a unique "limestone barrens" landscape. The barrens are home to more than one hundred rare plants, including the yellow lady slipper orchid and the endangered Fernald's braya, which grows nowhere else on earth. Help ensure the protection of these rare plants by always staying on the trail.



Yellow lady's slipper



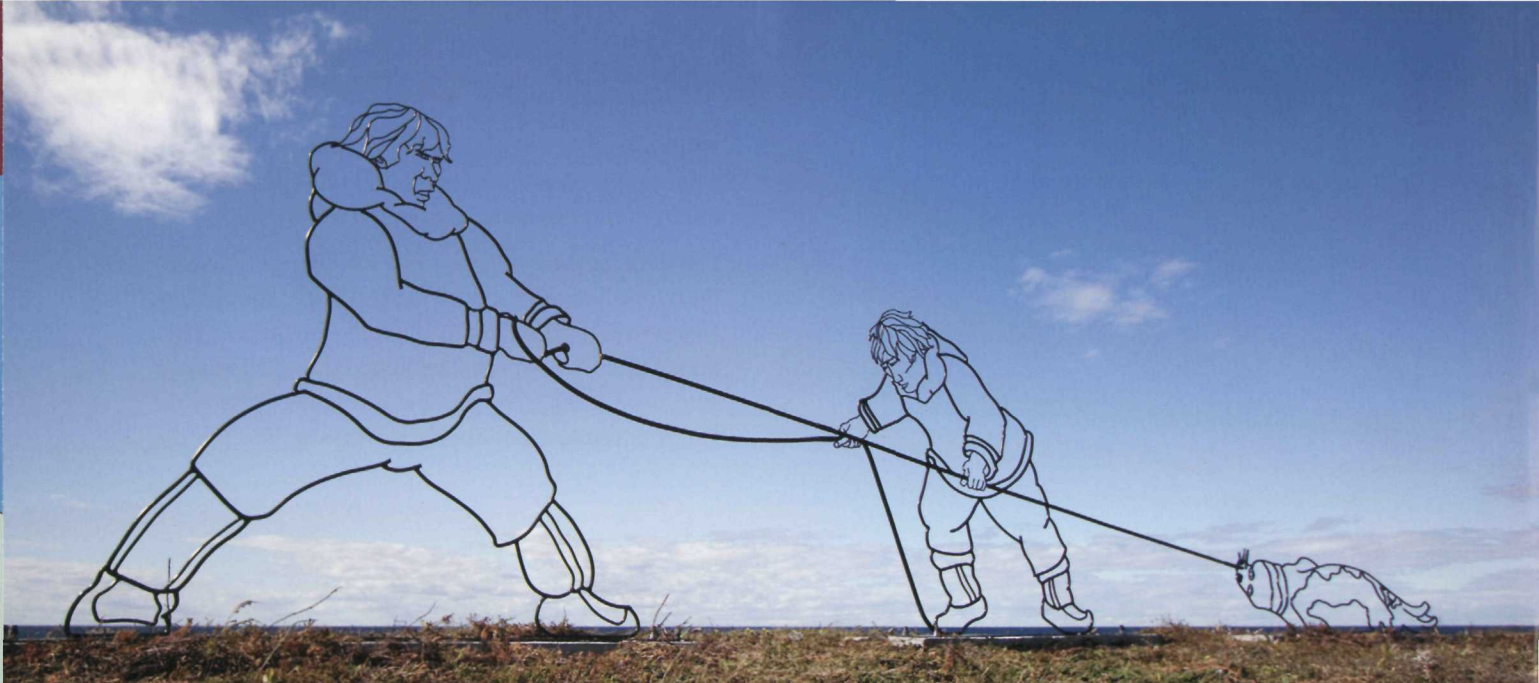
For spectacular ocean views, take the offshoot loop including the lookout at Crow Head, around the mid-point of the trail. There are some steep steps along this section.

This trail ends at Phillip's Garden, site of a major Dorset habitation, occupied for 800 years beginning 2 000 years ago. The site's emerald green meadow is a distinctive feature; the soil still benefiting from the deposit of seal remains left behind by the Dorset.

## Phillip's Garden Trail

This easy walk to Phillip's Garden skirts the northern shoreline of the Point Riche peninsula. Along the way, you'll find a coastal "tuckamore" forest (small, dense trees), spectacular ocean views, and you may see fishing boats and whales in the distance. Note the dramatic and ancient limestone sea beds that are now exposed along the coast. On the terrace of land above and just east of Phillip's Garden you will be standing on the site of an earlier Arctic group, the Groswater, who lived here for 800 years beginning approximately 2800 years ago. Look down toward the shore to see the Seal Hunter sculpture.

If you'd like a longer walk to points beyond Phillip's Garden, continue along the coast on the Point Riche trail to the lighthouse (see map).



Seal hunter sculpture, along Phillip's Garden trail

## Point Riche Trail

The Point Riche Trail connects Phillip's Garden to the Point Riche lighthouse. It's a windswept landscape with exposed ancient sea beds and expansive ocean views. Along the way, you might see caribou, sea birds, and whales. The trail is rugged; please be careful as you approach Phillip's Garden from the Point Riche direction. There is a steep decline which can be slippery when wet. Watch for the Kayak Sculpture, along the coast.

Near the lighthouse, don't miss the Dorset Doorway, an artist's conception of a Dorset house from Phillip's Garden, and one more sculpture, the Sealskin. Near the Doorway, there are interpretive panels and a plaque.

## Maritime Archaic Burial Ground

(See Gathering Circle on the map.) Located in the centre of town, across from the fish plant on the main street, you'll encounter a site where – beginning 6,000 years ago – the Maritime Archaic buried their dead in elaborately furnished graves. This location would have been sacred for these people. Pause in the stone Gathering Circle and take time to view the interpretive panels.

## Stay connected

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[www.parkscanada.gc.ca](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca)

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