

Aulavik

National Park of Canada

“Pronounced Ow-lah-veek”

Climate

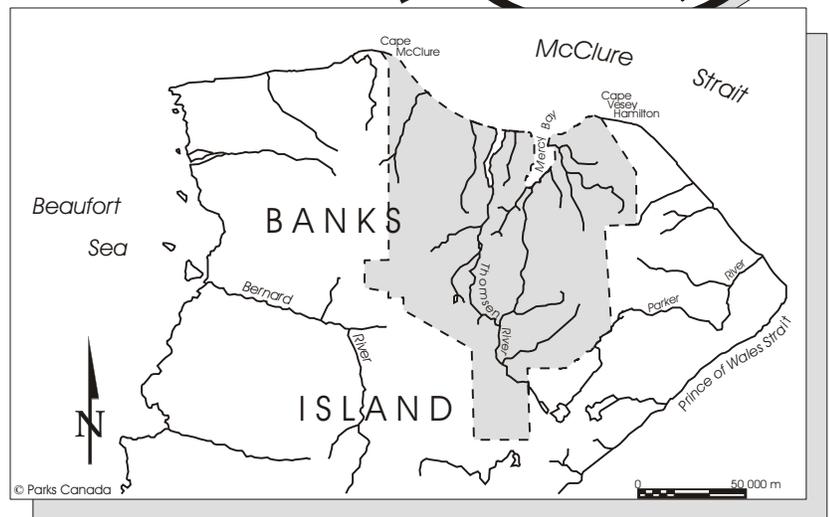
The most demanding aspect of Aulavik is the climate. Average July temperatures in Sachs Harbour include lows of 2.8°C and highs of 9.6°C. On occasion, summer temperatures can soar as high as 25°C, although sub-freezing temperatures and snow are just as likely. Due to the usual presence of sea ice in McClure Strait, fog is a frequent companion. The wind is an almost constant factor and severe winds are common. During the brief summer, biting insects are normally not a severe problem due to the cool temperatures and wind, although visitors should still come prepared with insect repellent.

Geology

Aulavik is an area of spectacular river canyons, rolling hills, lush valleys, and desert-like badlands. One can see signs of the recent passage of the continental ice sheets in the rounded hills adjacent to the river. Deep limestone canyons frame the Mercy River Valley in the northeast of the park. Badland areas dominate the western end of the park. Elsewhere there is patterned ground, a group of geometric depressions in the earth. The Thomsen is the northernmost navigable river in Canada, and numerous tundra lakes are peppered across the surrounding land.

Location

Aulavik National Park, at the north end of Banks Island in the Northwest Territories, is an arctic wilderness, and a relatively recent addition to the park system. Its potential was first identified in 1978, and 12 275 km² of land, focusing on the Thomsen River area, were agreed upon in 1992. The park, which is situated more than 600 km north of the Arctic Circle, protects part of Canada's Western Arctic Lowlands Natural Region. Aulavik is an Inuvialuktun word that means "the place where people travel", and the area has indeed seen some significant voyages. In the mid-1800's, Robert McClure searched the Arctic for the lost crew of Sir John Franklin. Though he failed to find Franklin and his crew, his search did prove fruitful in no small measure with his discovery of the long-sought Northwest Passage. Aulavik is located in the Northern Arctic Ecozone.

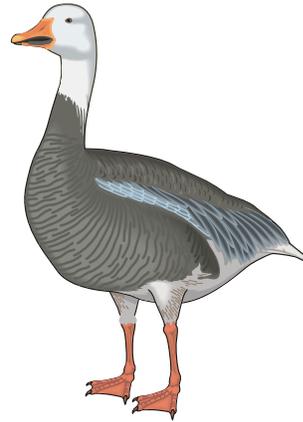


Vegetation

Vegetation is sparse in much of the region. In wet areas, however, there is a heavy cover of sedge grasses, cottongrass, mosses, and purple saxifrage. Lichens encrust much of the exposed rock. Summer brings on a brief flourish of delicate wildflowers like mountain avens, purple oxytrope, and pink lousewort. Shrub willows, like the arctic willow, provide an important food source for grazing muskoxen and caribou.

Wildlife

The park appears almost barren of life in the winter. Only muskoxen and caribou remain to face the harsh climate. Among the bird species, only ravens, ptarmigan, and the occasional snowy owl opt to stay in the cold and darkness. Lemmings scurry through tunnels beneath the snow, but the land is otherwise almost lifeless. In the summer, the land comes alive under the 24-hour sunshine. Animals fatten themselves for the next winter, and bear their young. Snow geese, red phalaropes, and other waterfowl nest on the sedge meadows along river valleys. Other birdlife includes sandhill cranes, Sabine's gulls, terns, jaegers, and raptors like rough-legged hawks and gyrfalcons. Banks Island supports an estimated 65 000 muskoxen, with some 16 000 concentrated in the Thomsen River Valley. The threatened Peary caribou, the smallest of the caribou species, migrate through the park. Other mammal species include Arctic fox, Arctic wolf, and ermine. The occasional polar bear also wanders through the park.



Activities

Like most of Canada's arctic national parks, Aulavik is accessible mainly by chartered aircraft. Visitors can enjoy canoeing and kayaking on the Thomsen River, camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing. Visitors should be prepared for total self-sufficiency, and a no-trace camping ethic is strongly recommended since waste of any kind will remain visible for decades. Visitors must register with the park office. Since Aulavik is a new park without an extensive resource inventory, visitors are encouraged to record and report any wildlife sightings, including notes on species, numbers, location, and any nesting or den areas. Care should be taken, however, to maintain a discreet distance from these areas.

For more information, contact:
Chief Park Warden
Aulavik National Park
P.O. Box 29
Sachs Harbour, Northwest Territories
X0E 0Z0
Telephone: (867) 690-3904
Fax: (867) 690-4808
Website: www.pc.gc.ca/aulavik