

Auyuittuq National Park of Canada Pronounced "Ow-you-eet-took"

Location

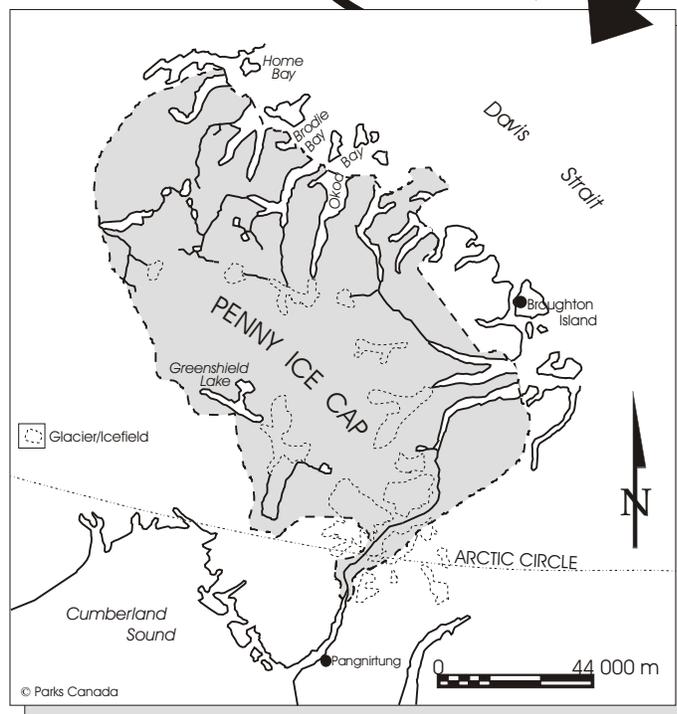
Auyuittuq National Park lies on the northeastern shore of Baffin Island, Nunavut, almost entirely within the Arctic Circle. It was established in 1976. Auyuittuq means "the land that does not melt" and is at the northern extreme of the Canadian Shield, on the island's Cumberland Peninsula. The park protects a representative sample of the Northern Davis Natural Region, and includes 21 470 km² of mountains, fjords, and glaciers. Pangnirtung is the closest community to the park, and is accessible by airline from Iqaluit. The park can also be reached via Broughton Island, but is inaccessible to hikers during ice break-up in July and August. Auyuittuq is a vast, unspoiled arctic wilderness. Auyuittuq is located in the Arctic Cordillera Ecozone.

Climate

The park's polar marine climate causes long, cold winters, and short, cool summers. Snow exists year-round, though precipitation is only about 200 mm annually. Average temperature highs are -23°C in January and 10°C in July. Weather patterns are extreme and unpredictable, and strong breezes usually blow along the fjords. A few brief weeks of endless daylight in the summer are countered by a similar period of endless night during the middle of winter.

Geology

The park's rugged mountain tundra is rich with glaciers, fjords, and is dominated by the massive Penny Ice Cap. This area of solid ice is over 300 m thick and covers some 5 100 km². It is a remnant of the huge ice sheets that once covered much of North America. The Penny Highland mountains, composed of typical Shield granite, reach heights of over 2 000 m. Along the coast, narrow fjords with high (up to 900 m), steep walls show where glaciers have created valley floors below sea level.



Vegetation

There are no trees in Auyuittuq. Plant-life consists of shrub willows, heather, sedge grasses, lichens, mosses, and a short season of colourful wildflowers. They thrive under the moist and sunny conditions of summer. Arctic willow is the tallest tundra species. Other plants include the Arctic poppy, cotton grass, and broad-leaved willow herb. Most plants grow in clumps which helps to preserve warmth, and many grow in tussocks. These are essentially a mound of built-up root systems that continue to increase each year.

Wildlife

The animal life of Auyuittuq National Park is a small but hardy assemblage of 12 mammal species, and about 40 types of birds. Land mammals include lemmings, Arctic hares, Arctic fox, polar bears, and caribou. In the adjacent seas there are populations of Beluga whales, narwhal, walrus, and Ringed, Bearded, and Harp seals. Bird species include snow geese, Eider ducks, and shorebirds such as glaucous gulls. One can also observe ptarmigan, snowy owls, gyrfalcons, ravens, and the occasional finches and sparrows. Sea life is generally more plentiful than that found on land. Most of the animals are distinctly adapted to their arctic environment, possessing thick coats of fur or down feathers, insulating layers of blubber, and short ears to help conserve essential body heat.

Activities

Visitors can obtain the service of an outfitter to take them the final stretch from Pangnirtung to Pangnirtung Pass. Access to the park is either by outfitters' boat or snowmobile, or hiking, or cross-country skiing. Once in the park, visitors are virtually on their own, carrying all their needs with them. Most people come to hike the Pass' trail, which has three designated campsites, though random camping is permitted. Broughton Island and Pangnirtung have hotels and lodges. A few fixed-roof emergency shelters are located in the park. Mountain climbers come from all over the world to scale Auyuittuq's peaks. Cumberland Sound offers excellent fishing for Arctic char. Wilderness trekkers must register with the park office, and a "no trace" camping ethic is strongly encouraged. Even campfires are not permitted. Any garbage or other refuse, including organic waste, remains undecomposed for decades and can diminish a later visitor's park experience.



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