

Gros Morne National Park of Canada

Climate

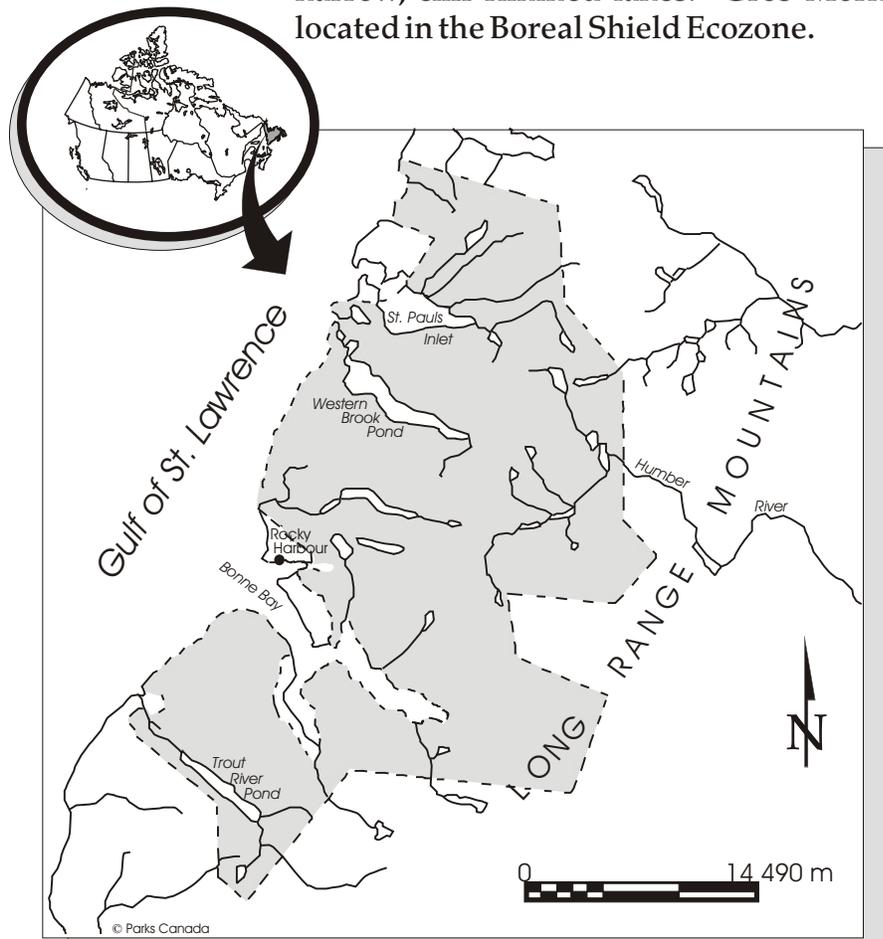
The park's location on the west coast of Newfoundland gives a definite maritime flavour to its climate. Frequent winds blow off the Gulf of St. Lawrence, moderating the seasonal temperature change and providing moist air for abundant precipitation. Temperatures in the lowlands average between 15°C and 20°C in the summer and -5°C and -10°C in the winter. The highlands are usually windier, wetter and several degrees colder.

Geology

The geological diversity of Gros Morne is its most renowned feature and the main reason for its designation as a Unesco World Heritage Site. The Tablelands plateau is a 500-million year old slice through the earth's crust and upper mantle and a natural textbook for the study of plate tectonics. The sedimentary rocks of the coastal lowlands show remains of long-extinct sea creatures, while the exposed barrens of the Long Range reveal rocks more than 1 billion years old. These features of Gros Morne have been carved by glaciers to create massive cliffs and valleys and some of the most dramatic landscapes in Canada.

Location

Gros Morne National Park is located on the west coast of the island of Newfoundland and covers 1 805 km². The park protects representative areas of two of Canada's natural regions: the Western Newfoundland Island Highlands and the St. Lawrence Lowlands. Gros Morne has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site because of its complex geological story and dramatic scenery. The vast alpine Long Range plateau dominates the eastern half of the park. To the west are the coastal lowlands, with their strips of boreal forest and bog and fringe of beaches, cliffs, and tidepools. In the south are the Tablelands - a striking, barren mountain with an unusual ecology. Glacier-carved landscapes are found throughout the park and include Bonne Bay fjord and a series of narrow, cliff-rimmed lakes. Gros Morne is located in the Boreal Shield Ecozone.



Vegetation

Gros Morne has a rich diversity of plants to match its wide range of habitats. Much of the park is boreal forest, with balsam fir as the dominant species. This tree varies much in its growth habit, ranging from stunted coastal "tuckamore" to 200-year "old growth" trees at the eastern boundary. Bogs and fens are also common and worth exploring for beautiful flowers such as the dragon's mouth orchid. Other notable plant communities include the arctic-tundra on the Long Range plateau and the serpentine barrens of the Tablelands. Gros Morne is also home to a number of rare plants. These are associated with rare habitats such as exposed limestone cliffs and late snowbeds. Several hardwood tree species, including red maple and yellow birch, reach their northern limit for Newfoundland in the park's Bonne Bay area. In total, Gros Morne has over 700 species of vascular plants, representing about 60% of the island's flora.

Wildlife

Gros Morne National Park and the island of Newfoundland have fewer animal species than the adjacent mainland of Canada. There are no native reptiles or amphibians, and only 14 native mammal species. Woodland caribou are important herbivores in the park area, migrating seasonally within the park and to forested areas outside. Arctic hare and rock ptarmigan are species of the far north, but are also found at the higher elevations in Gros Morne. Moose, snowshoe hare, and red squirrel are among the most abundant and commonly observed animals in the area today, and have been introduced to the island by humans. Species at risk include the Newfoundland marten and the Harlequin duck. Common and Arctic terns nest on islands in the park area. Atlantic salmon spawn in many of the region's rivers.



Activities

Hiking is the best way to discover Gros Morne. The park's trails range from easy walks along the coast to strenuous climbs onto alpine barrens. A scenic highway through the park allows visitors to see a wide range of landscapes. Boat tours are available to visit the park's lakes and marine areas. Swimming is an option in salt or fresh water, as well as in the park's indoor pool. Five campgrounds are found within the park, while roofed accommodation and private campgrounds are available in neighboring communities. Interpretive evening programs and guided hikes are offered throughout the summer. In winter, visitors can ski on groomed trails or explore the vast back-country. The Visitor Centre near Rocky Harbour serves as a year-round interpretation facility. The Discovery Centre at Woody Point has interactive exhibits and interpretive programs to help visitors explore and enjoy the World Heritage of Gros Morne.

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