

# Pukaskwa National Park of Canada Pronounced "Puk-a-saw"

## Climate

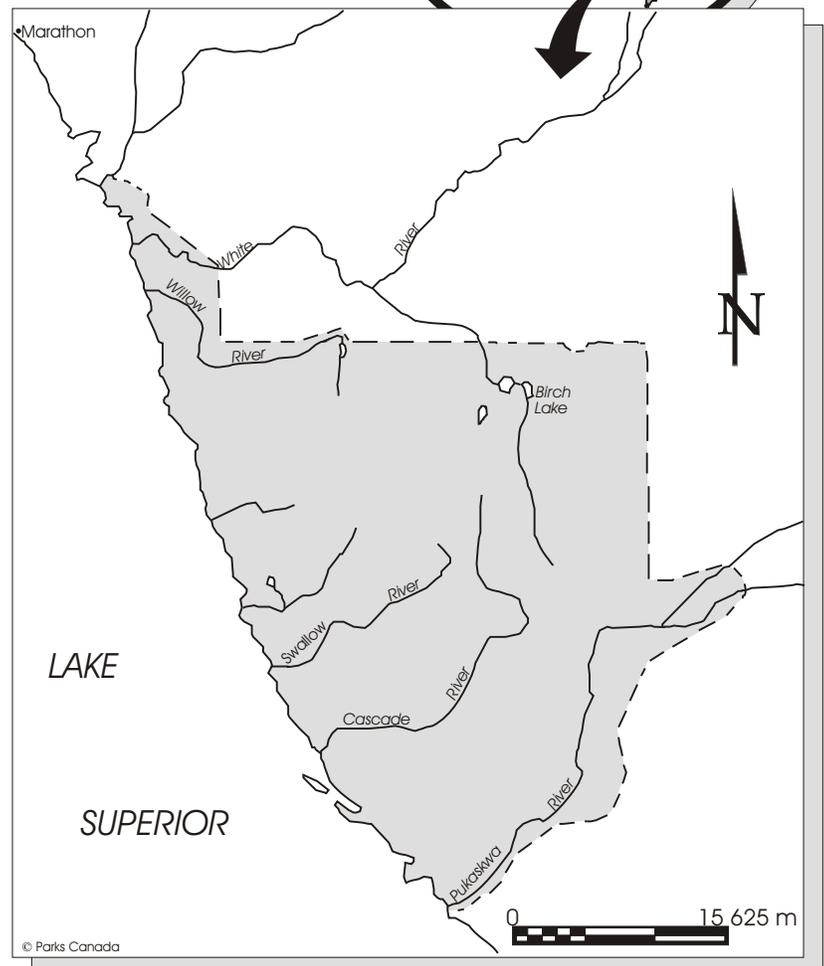
Weather along the Lake Superior coast is very unpredictable, with shifting winds and sudden storms. Mean daily temperatures are only 7°C (May) to 15°C (August). Precipitation comes in from the lake, bringing about 9 cm during the spring and summer months. The lake itself, with its shifting currents and swells, has an average temperature of only 4°C.

## Geology

The raw land that is Pukaskwa still shows the effects of the Ice Age. The legacy of the ancient glaciers can be seen everywhere. The characteristic granite of the Canadian Shield underlies the thin acidic layers of grey-brown soil. Though this landscape was formed from Precambrian rocks, it was the glaciers that sculpted its final shape. Traces of past human activity can be found throughout the area. Pukaskwa's boulder beaches have mysterious, shallow rock structures fashioned by ancient peoples.

## Location

Pukaskwa National Park is located at the north-east end of Lake Superior, half-way between Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie. The park includes over 120 km of rugged Superior shoreline and stretches about 50 km inland for a total area of 1 878 km<sup>2</sup>. Since 1978, Pukaskwa has protected a representative sample of Canada's Central Boreal Uplands Natural Region. Pukaskwa has been described as "the wild shore of an inland sea". Pukaskwa is located in the Boreal Shield Ecozone.



## Vegetation

A consistent pattern repeats itself endlessly across the Pukaskwa region: white spruce, black spruce, and balsam fir. This pattern is typical of the boreal forest, and also includes fast-growing birch and poplar, as well as tamarack and jack pine. Many bogs support black spruce, Labrador tea, and blueberries, which thrive in the acidic soils. Along the southern edge of the region, species from the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest region such as white and red pine, sugar maple, ash, and cedar intermix with boreal species. The cooling effect of the lake allows alpine and arctic plants, including northern twayblade and Franklin's lady's slipper, to grow in the park. The northern end of the park is mainly open coniferous forest with thick mats of lichens growing between the trees. Fire is an essential process in Pukaskwa's boreal forest. There is proof that fire has been a part of Pukaskwa's forest for over one thousand years. In this cool climate, fire hastens decomposition and returns nutrients to the soil. Periodic fires create a vegetation mosaic of different ages and types. This provides a wide variety of habitats which support many species of insects, mammals and birds. Working with other agencies, Pukaskwa has a program of prescribed fire in order to safely reintroduce fire to some parts of the park.

## Wildlife

Wildlife management is a difficult science, an attempt to balance the needs of wildlife with the lifestyles of humans. Of particular concern is the survival of the park's small woodland caribou herd. Numbering only some 12-15 individuals, this population is the most southern in Canada. They share the hinterland with loons, beaver, timber wolves, black bear, moose, lynx, snowshoe hares, red and flying squirrels, and grouse. About 200 species of birds have been recorded in the park. Rivers abound with walleye, pike, and trout. Rainbow trout, lake trout, speckled trout, salmon, and whitefish thrive in the deep, cold waters of Lake Superior's many bays and coves.

## Activities

The park's Coastal Hiking Trail, 60 km in length, winds through the boreal forest and rocky landscape of the Shield. The well-marked route begins at Hattie Cove and features campsites near its finer beaches and bays. Visitors must register before venturing into the backcountry. Hattie Cove is the centre for most of the park's activities, and has a campground, picnic area, trails, parking, and a Visitor Centre. Besides hiking, opportunities for white-water canoeing exist on the easily accessible White River (any time during the open-water season) and for more highly skilled paddlers the remote Pukaskwa River (during spring run-off). Paddling on Lake Superior is an ideal way to explore the park's coastal headlands, but visitors are advised that, even in summer, the waters are frigid and the lake's character unpredictable. A Coastal Canoe Guide pamphlet outlines the 160 km route from Hattie Cove to Michipicoten Harbour. In the winter, Pukaskwa is a delight for snowshoers and cross-country skiers. A 6 km groomed trail is maintained in the Hattie Cove campground area. The "Friends of Pukaskwa" are a volunteer group that supports the park through nature publications and mementoes. Their outlet in the Visitor Centre sells trail guides and fishing licences. Park staff offer a comprehensive interpretation program full of events and activities.

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