

Quttinirpaaq National Park of Canada

Pronounced “Khoot-tee-neelk-paahk”

Climate

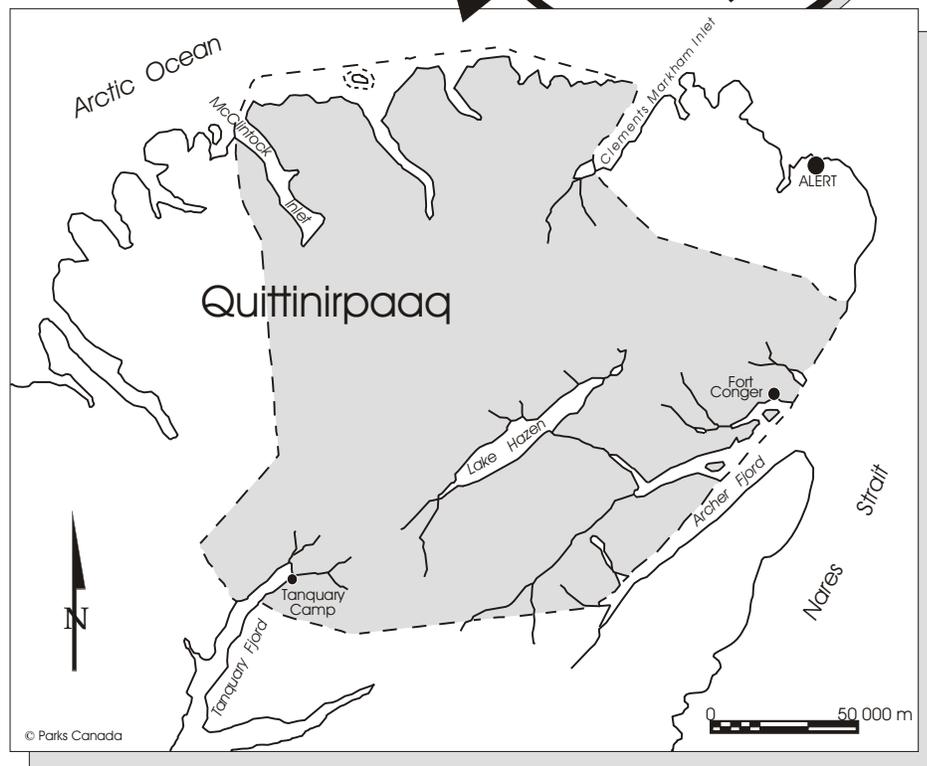
Being as far north as it is, the park has wintry weather conditions even in the summer. July is the only month where temperatures reach into the 0°C to 7°C range. Summer also brings several weeks of continuous daylight. Winters are long and harsh, summers cool and brief, with cold dry winds and very light snowfalls. The area is essentially a polar desert, though thermal oases, such as the area around Lake Hazen, are warm and moist enough to support plant and animal life. Only about 60 mm of precipitation falls here annually.

Geology

The Grant Land Mountains cover the north portion of the park. As well, high arctic glaciers, fjords, ice caps, and a deeply cut plateau exist here. The 900 m thick icefields are a true remnant of the last continental glaciers that covered much of North America during the last Ice Age some 10 000 years ago. Lake Hazen is the largest freshwater lake north of the Arctic Circle.

Location

A national park was proclaimed on Ellesmere Island in 1988. The park is located at the north end of the island, which itself is the northern extremity of the Arctic Archipelago. The park is 44 km east of the Alert military base, and only some 800 km from the North Pole. Access to the 37 775 km² park is via chartered aircraft from Resolute Bay. Quttinirpaaq National Park represents Canada's Eastern High Arctic Glacier Natural Region and a portion of the Northern Arctic Marine Region. The park's near total isolation helps protect its ecosystems. Quttinirpaaq is part of the Arctic Cordillera and the Northern Arctic Ecozones.



Vegetation

This region of polar desert is one of the driest in the Northern Hemisphere. Plants must be hardy enough to withstand these climatic conditions. To this extent, sedge meadows grow where there is enough soil to retain groundwater, including small wetland areas, and along creek and river valleys. Shrub willows survive in areas with enough soil accumulation for them to send down roots. Arctic wildflowers colour the land during its brief summer, especially in the warmer and moister Lake Hazen area. Lichens and mosses make up the remaining species of vegetation.



Activities

Access to the park's interior is largely by small aircraft. Visitors can indulge in challenging hikes, outstanding nature photography (the wildlife has virtually no fear of humans), "flightseeing", fishing, and picnicking. There are no campsites, but some roofed accommodations are available on the south side of Lake Hazen. Random camping in the interior of the park is permitted, but a "no trace" ethic on the visitor's part is strongly encouraged. The arctic environment is extremely sensitive to any human impact. Garbage left behind will take hundreds of years to decompose, and even organic waste will be visible for decades. Visitors are greeted by park staff at Tanquary Fjord, and some interpretive information is available. A trip planning brochure is also available. It is recommended that arrangements are made early, especially for the summer, and that people plan for total self-sufficiency.

Wildlife

The wildlife of Quttinirpaaq National Park is a sparse mix of herbivores and carnivores, generally only as plentiful as the vegetation around it. Arctic hares have been seen gathered in the hundreds. Other herbivores include small herds of muskoxen and Peary's caribou. Arctic wolves, arctic fox, and a few polar bears represent the area's predator population. During the summer, some 30 species of birds nest in the area, including Arctic Terns and Ringed Plovers. Arctic char can be found in Lake Hazen and a few other lakes within the park. Visitors are encouraged to keep track of any animal sightings, making notes on location, numbers, sex, and age whenever possible. Notes on any observed nesting or denning sites, or other ecological information, are also encouraged, though care must be taken not to disturb these sensitive sites.

For more information, contact:
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