

Our Island: Haven in the ice pack

Qikiqtaruk has always been a gathering place. Inuvialuit have used the site for thousands of years and remnants of old dwellings are still visible. In the late 1800s, American whalers established a station at Pauline Cove where ships were protected from storms and sea ice. Since then, the Anglican Church, Hudson's Bay Co., other fur

traders, reindeer herders, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the RCMP were all present on Herschel Island at some point in the past 100+ years.

Today, Inuvialuit families continue to use the area for traditional activities while researchers from around the world study the unique and rapidly changing arctic environment. Park rangers manage the park, welcome visitors and share stories of the past.



Wildlife Viewing



Between land and sea, the island's dry polar climate supports a surprising web of life. The answer lies in ocean currents. The huge driftwood trunks that litter the beaches in this treeless land originate from as far away as the Liard Basin. They were delivered by the nutrient-rich outflow of the Mackenzie River. Billions of tiny organisms feed a diversity of fishes that, in turn, attract a myriad of air, sea and land animals, including one of the largest colonies of Black Guillemots in the Western Arctic. Listen to their gentle whistles near the old Anglican Mission House.

Despite near extinction by early commercial whalers, Bowhead Whale migrate past the island in the fall, gorging on the abundance of tiny plankton. The white Beluga Whale is commonly seen from

the island. If you are lucky, a Bearded Seal may pop its head out of the shallow bays. But the most common marine mammal is the Ringed Seal, who fish Arctic Cod, Arctic Char, Pacific Herring and Arctic Flounder along summer sea ice edges. Peregrine Falcon, Rough-Legged Hawk, and Snowy Owl hunt a variety of songbirds and small mammals.

When the ocean freezes in winter, land mammals can walk to the island. They also swim across in summer. Grizzly Bear, Muskox, and Barren-ground Caribou are all commonly seen. Red and Arctic foxes hunt Collared and Brown lemmings and Tundra Vole, who nibble grasses, sedges and flowers. In winter, Polar Bears den on Qikiqtaruk's northern slopes.

When viewing and photographing wildlife, **keep your distance**. Use binoculars, scopes and telephoto lenses to get a better look.

Hunting, trapping and fishing in the park

Visitors may encounter Inuvialuit subsistence users within the park. When you see our friends or families harvesting caribou, seal or Arctic Char, you are

witnessing an ancient and enduring way of arctic life.

If you are an Inuvialuit hunter please respect other park users. Store meat and dispose of carcasses away from visitor areas. There are no-hunting zones in the historical and settlement areas.



Publications

- Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: a natural and cultural history of Yukon's Arctic island* – Christopher R. Burn
- Qikiqtaruk – Inuvialuit Archaeology on Herschel Island* – YG
- Herschel Island: A Guide to Historic Resources* – YG
- Waves Upon the Shore: An historical Profile of Herschel Island* – Rob Ingram & Helen Dobrowsky
- Explore Herschel Island! & The Bishop Who Ate His Boots* – virtualmuseum.ca

Available at Environment Yukon offices, Visitor Information Centres or from: www.env.gov.yk.ca:

- Checklist of the Birds of Herschel Island*
- Flora of Herschel Island Territorial Park*
- Into the Yukon Wilderness*
- Yukon Wildlife Viewing Guide*
- How you can stay safe in bear country*

Maps

1:50,000 - *Herschel Island* (sheet 117D12E)
1:250,000 - *Herschel Island* (sheet 117D)

Contacts

Yukon Parks
867-667-5648 (Whitehorse)
867-777-4058 (Inuvik)
Toll-free in Yukon 1-800-661-0408, ext. 5648
yukon.parks@gov.yk.ca

Historic Sites Unit
867-667-5386, or toll-free in Yukon 1-800-661-0408, ext. 5386

Emergency (RCMP Inuvik)
867-777-1111

www.yukonparks.ca

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A GUIDE TO

Herschel Island Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park

Qikiqtaryuk "it is island"



Welcome to our island in the polar sea

Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk became Yukon's first territorial park in 1987. A result of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, the 116 km² park protects a rare combination of natural and human heritage.

This is a living park. You are entering the home of the Inuvialuit, the original people of the western arctic coast.

Keep it Wild

Plan ahead. Prepare to leave no trace

Travel and camp on durable surfaces. Avoid crushing fragile artefacts, delicate tundra plants and hidden bird nests. Use existing trails and recommended routes. Avoid the sensitive Inuvialuit grave areas. In the uplands, spread out on durable ground. Camp in the driftwood shelters.

Dispose of waste properly. Pack it in, pack it out. Use the outhouse. In the backcountry, cover human waste in a small hole 60 m from water, camp and trails.

Leave what you find. Leave natural, historical and cultural artefacts undisturbed. Please report finds to park staff.



YG-Sara Nielsen

Minimize campfire impacts. Use stoves or existing fire rings. Keep campfires small. No fires are permitted in the backcountry.

Respect wildlife. Observe from a distance. Never feed them. Keep pets under control.

Be considerate of others Respect the interests of other island users, namely tourists, researchers, hunters and residents.



Getting There



From mid-June to mid-September, you can charter aircraft out of Inuvik, NT (250 km southeast). The island is often shrouded in fog, particularly in late summer, and flights can be delayed for hours or even days. Be prepared with sufficient gear and food. For self-supported trips to Herschel Island, leave a trip plan with a friend or the RCMP.

A Park Permit is required to land an aircraft or commercial boat on the island.

Boating



Boat charters may operate out of various Mackenzie Delta communities. If you are self-supported, bring adequate fuel for the return trip, as gas is not available at Herschel Island. Smaller boats and yachts may anchor in Pauline Cove, where whaling ships took shelter from the crushing ice long ago. Cruise ships anchor offshore and boat in by zodiac.

If you are rafting or kayaking the Firth River on the Yukon mainland, you can end your trip at Herschel and return by pre-arranged flight. Boating around the island for a day trip is only recommended under extremely calm conditions as the exposed northern cliffs offer no safe or sheltered places to disembark. Be aware that weather can change very quickly.



#50-762, Courtesy Mystic Seaport Museum Inc.

Wildlife and You

Bears aren't the only wildlife attracted to human smells. On Herschel, Red and Arctic foxes and gulls are notorious thieves. Help them stay wild and healthy by keeping your food and garbage secure.

Grizzly or Polar bears may be encountered anywhere on the island, at any time of year. Learn about bears and how to prevent negative encounters. Food and garbage are the number one attractants. Never leave food, dishes, garbage, cosmetics or any smelly item where a bear could get it, especially in your tent. Cook and store attractants and waste in bear-proof containers 100 m away from your camp.

Ask the park rangers about recent bear activity and rules. Pick up a copy of *How you can stay safe in bear country*. Ask to view the *Staying Safe in Bear Country* video.

Facilities

Camping



Bring all the equipment necessary for independent camping in an arctic environment. Facilities are limited to driftwood windbreak shelters for tenting, fire rings, outhouses, and a limited supply of water and driftwood. Camping permits (\$12 per night) and fishing licences are available from the park rangers.



Community House



Visit the interpretive displays in the Community House. Built in 1893 by the Pacific Steam Whaling Company, it was used as a gathering place, RCMP headquarters and the residence of the Stringer family. From here you can wander the buildings and layers of history of Simpson Point, imagining the bustle of the whaling period and the thousands of years of Inuvialuit settlement. When time permits, park rangers offer tours.

Hiking



Wander the beaches at Simpson Point and Avadlek Spit or trek upland tundra in the footsteps of Arctic explorers and Inuvialuit hunters. Follow designated trails and routes and stay clear of the Inuvialuit burial sites. Simpson Point in particular is covered in delicate and unseen natural, historic, paleontological and archaeological remains. Stay away from unstable cliff edges. They continually and suddenly collapse into the sea. Tundra cracks also give way to dangerous caverns of melting permafrost muck.

If you plan to hike in the park, let the rangers know where you are going and when you expect to return.