



Across the flats lie the low mountains, small ponds in green tundra valleys, sandy beaches, and rocky hillsides of Mallikjuaq Island. Pre-Dorset and Dorset people occupied this site as long ago as 2000 BC, but most structures are of Thule origin (300 to 800 years ago), and modern Inuit (during the last 200 years). The printed guide includes topographic maps of the trail and explains the various structures located along the way. These structures are in some cases partially restored, but for the most part are as time has left them, and knowing where they are in order to find and photograph or observe them is part of the adventure.

On your hike, you'll encounter nine winter houses clustered at the edge of a pond. Generally, the Thule lived in stone and sod houses with roofs of skins supported by the jawbones and ribs of bowhead whales. When spring thaws made these uninhabitable, the people moved out into skin tents. Along the trail, you will find small stone hearths, storage caches of stacked boulders, and tent rings, many with sleeping platforms outlined by stones. You'll also find stone markers called *inuksuit* that indicated good camping spots, places where something was stored, or trails for others to follow. The large square-

topped piles of rocks are kayak stands, which were used to elevate the skin *qayaq* (kayak) out of the reach of hungry dogs.

The trail circles a low mountain, and descends to the area above the beach, where there are many beluga bones, and an area with several long narrow piles of rocks which mark grave sites. There are many tent rings along this slope, and an interesting cone-shaped fox trap that was used to trap the foxes that were so destructive around a camp. They were constructed of stones, much as an *iglu* is built, with the stones fitted cleverly in ever-narrowing rings. Bait was placed inside, and the hole in the top would allow an arctic fox to climb up the outside and jump down into the trap. Once inside, it could not gain a foothold in the inward-slanting walls to climb out. Fox traps here are almost all older than 100 years; once the traders brought the leghold trap, no one would take the trouble to build a stone fox trap.

FASCINATING FLORA AND FAUNA

From the abundant wildflowers carpeting the summer tundra to the intriguing lichens creating colourful patterns on stones or the juicy berries that bead the fall tundra, the plant life of the arctic is endlessly fascinating. The trail guide includes information on arctic adaptations in plants, including the bright yellow arctic poppy, a true solar collector, with blooms that follow the sun. There are fragrant shield ferns in the rocks, brilliant moss campion cushion plants, prostrate willows, tiny bells of white arctic heather, and, in wet areas, silky tufts of the arctic cotton.

Birds commonly encountered in summer hikes on Dorset and Mallikjuaq Islands include northern ravens, those clever

scavengers who can sense a polar bear kill for several kilometres, gyrfalcons, snowy owls, and rock ptarmigans. The steep hillsides of both islands provide good lookouts for viewing marine mammals and birds. Off the island, seabirds like black guillemots, thick-billed murrelets and dovekie fish in the surf, or fly to their nesting cliffs. Marine mammals such as ringed seals and beluga whales are often seen in the sea near the community. The huge black bowhead whales are rare, but sometimes seen. Land mammals are less common but the large arctic hares are occasionally seen by hikers on the island. There's also a possibility of spotting a caribou, so visitors are advised to keep scanning the land.

TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

The Mallikjuaq Territorial Park Trail Guidemap offers clear directions to the island and interprets the park's many features. You can obtain a copy from Nunavut Tourism, the Mallikjuaq Park Centre or Cape Dorset's hamlet office.

Any of the trails of Dorset and Mallikjuaq can be walked in two to five hours – some are easy to walk, some more difficult. Mallikjuaq Island is accessible in summer by a 10-minute boat ride from Cape Dorset or on foot (a sometimes wet scramble across the tidal flats, with caution as to the state of the tide). When trekking to the island at low tide, you may pass people from the community out digging clams in the flats. Guides are available to take you to the park by boat and add immeasurably to the experience; they are able to share stories of the land and interpret the structures far better than simply reading about them in a guidebook. The park centre in Cape Dorset can help you arrange a trip. Camping is

permitted on the island, and the park centre can also help you by suggesting good sites. Polar bears, though rarely seen in the park, are always a concern.

In winter and spring, walking or snowmobiling across the ice to Mallikjuaq is easy and the time on the island is not constrained by the tides, although the sea ice itself rises and falls with the tides. Hunters and travelers establish trails through the jumbled shore ice to the smoother sea ice, and skiers or snowmobilers can easily follow these. Operators offer guided trips to the island with a tour of the ancient structures and a snack or lunch. In any season, travelling with a local operator will add to your comfort level, and you will learn far more than trekking alone.

Dogteam trips to the island are also frequently available, and great fun. It's a thrill to set out behind a team of excited Canadian Inuit dogs (Nunavut's official animal), flying along over the snow with

the only sound the huff of the dogs' breath and the whisper of the runners on the snow. Sitting down to have lunch and hot tea on the sled, surrounded by snoozing sled dogs and the exquisite arctic scenery leaves memories with you forever. You'll hear stories of life on the land from people who likely spent their childhood in small camps, traveling with their families to good fishing spots or places where caribou or seals could reliably be caught.

Don't forget to spend time in Cape Dorset itself, an important and interesting part of your experience. Established around a Hudson's Bay Company trading post in 1913, Cape Dorset has the highest per capita number of artists of any community in Canada. Art is an ancient heritage here, from the tiny carvings of the Pre-Dorset and beautiful bone and ivory figures carved by the Dorset, to the utilitarian Thule implements, and the great variety of art created by today's Inuit. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-op produces and sells



an internationally renowned series of prints, and carvings, jewellery, and original flat art pieces are readily available.

The Mallikjuaq Park Centre, located in Cape Dorset, displays many artifacts from the area and portrays the history of Dorset and Mallikjuaq Islands, and is a good starting point.

For more information on **Mallikjuaq Territorial Park** and the park centre, check the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com, or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■

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