



Nunavut Parks & Special Places - Editorial Series

January, 2008

### SOPER HERITAGE RIVER



A ribbon of green against a gray-green backdrop of rocky uplands, the Soper River flows through the heart of the Meta Incognita Peninsula on the south end of Baffin Island. At the lower end, the river empties into Soper Lake and from there into Pleasant Inlet on the Hudson Strait.

Inuit call this river the *Kuujuaq*, or "great river", and have traveled through this natural inland corridor for centuries. The English name, Soper River, honours J. Dewey Soper, a biologist who undertook exploratory surveys along the Meta Incognita Peninsula and in the valley of the river that now bears his name.

The lush plant life of the valley supports good numbers of caribou, and the area has always been a prime hunting area for Inuit. Due to its importance as a hunting and travel corridor for Inuit for several centuries, its natural beauty and wealth of wildlife and birdlife, and its incredible recreational opportunities, the Soper was designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1992. The Canadian Heritage Rivers Program is Canada's national river conservation program, and promotes, protects, and enhances Canada's leading rivers.

Approximately two-thirds of the river flows through Katannilik Territorial Park, which was created shortly after the designation of the Soper. The Inuktitut term "Katannilik" means "where there are waterfalls", and refers to the many waterfalls cascading down the valley walls into the Soper valley. The Itijjagiaq Trail, a traditional travel route through the Soper River valley and across the Meta Incognita Peninsula. is today followed by skiers, snowmobilers, dog teams, and hikers in summer, as well as Inuit hunters, and local people traveling between Kimmirut and Iqaluit.

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en osmose avec la terre-



The valley of the Soper is sheltered from harsh winds and supports a lush profusion of arctic wildflowers as well as unusually tall willows, many more than 3 metres tall and growing faster than similar willows in some parts of central Alberta. In mid-summer, the wildflowers are spectacular, and berries ripen toward mid-August. By early September, the tundra is resplendent in its vivid fall colours.

Wildlife viewing opportunities are superb; caribou may be seen in all seasons, as can arctic foxes, arctic hares and lemmings. Wolves and polar bears are occasionally seen, so having a knowledge of bear safety and having bear deterrents along is advisable. Some 40 species of birds have been seen in the park, and the summer months are a good time to see rock ptarmigan, peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, snowy owls, as well as waterfowl such as red-throated and Pacific loons, red-breasted mergansers, brant geese, and, toward the end of the summer, migrating snow geese. Small tundra birds are everywhere – snow buntings, horned larks, Lapland longspurs, and northern pipits. Shorebirds probe the edges of lakes and along the tidal flats, and the distinctive alarm cry of the golden plover echoes along the ridges. Arctic terns nest on gravelly

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shores along the river, and thick-billed murres and black guillemots can be seen on the sea near Kimmirut.

At the southern end, the river flows over Soper Falls into Soper Lake. Along the river there are striking rock outcrops, deeply incised caribou trails, interesting glacial landforms, superb shows of wildflowers, and much more. Geology enthusiasts will be delighted by the variety of outcrops, fossils, and interesting rocks including lapis lazuli, marble, mica, graphite, fossiliferous limestone, and garnets. The mica and lapis lazuli deposits are located on parcels of Inuit-owned land within the park boundaries and require special permission to access.

At the Kimmirut end, where Soper Lake empties into the ocean, there is a set of "reversing falls" that brings salt water into the lake. Here the 10 metre tides on Pleasant Inlet cause the river to actually reverse at high tide, and salt water flows into Soper Lake (also called *Tasiujajuaq*). Care should be taken when paddling this area on a rising or falling tide.

#### **CULTURE AND HOSPITALITY**

Also in Kimmirut, the Katannilik Park
Centre, and the Soper House Gallery
located in the historic Dewey Soper house
next door, offer interpretive exhibits and
displays of local art, frequent opportunities
to meet the artists, and a place where you
can purchase sculptures, prints, and other
local arts and crafts. Park centre staff keep
track of visitors to the park and will also
help arrange drop-offs and pick-ups in the

park. They will also help visitors arrange for home-stay accommodations in Kimmirut.

The new Taqaiqsirvik Territorial Park

Campground provides a place to camp in Kimmirut.

The Soper River Guidebook provides detailed information about wildlife and the ecology of the park and good canoeing information regarding rapids, takeout spots, campsites, emergency shelters, and park structures along the route, as well as information as to how to arrange for drop-offs and pickups in the park. The guidebook contains fold-out topographic maps with interesting features marked and described in the text. It is indispensable for a trip on the river. Its sister guidebook, The Itijjagiaq Trail, is also of great value for those considering a trip into this park.

### TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

The Soper is one of the premier canoeing rivers in Nunavut, and is readily accessible from Iqaluit. The large watershed ensures a good flow of water throughout the summer, and about 50 kilometres of navigable waters from July through September. It is not a technically challenging river, so can be enjoyably canoed, kayaked, or rafted by novice paddlers. The great variety of side streams that flow into the valley, offer numerous falls, cascades, and different experiences, making it an excellent 5-7 day trip from Mount Joy.

Paddlers can also be taken by boat on Frobisher Bay to the northern end of **Katannilik Park**, where they can hike in along the Itijjagiaq Trail, but, generally,







paddlers fly in by chartered aircraft to landing sites near Mount Joy or at Livingstone Falls, and paddle the river to Kimmirut. The lower third of the river is level and slow, so it is also possible to fly to Kimmirut where you can rent canoes and gear for a trip on the lower Soper. Operators take paddlers upriver to Soper Falls or Falcon Bluffs, and they paddle downstream to the mouth of the river where they are picked up and taken the final 3 kilometres into Kimmirut.

A trip on the Soper is not a casual day outing. It is necessary to plan carefully to avoid problems with weather or polar bears. You are also required to register with Nunavut Parks before your trip. Using the services of a guide/outfitter reduces the risk and enhances the experience.

For help in planning a trip, or to find information on licensed operators providing access services or guide services in the park, visit the Nunavut Territorial Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com. You can also call the Katannilik Park Centre in Kimmirut or the Unikkaarvik Visitors' Centre in Iqaluit for assistance or recommendations. 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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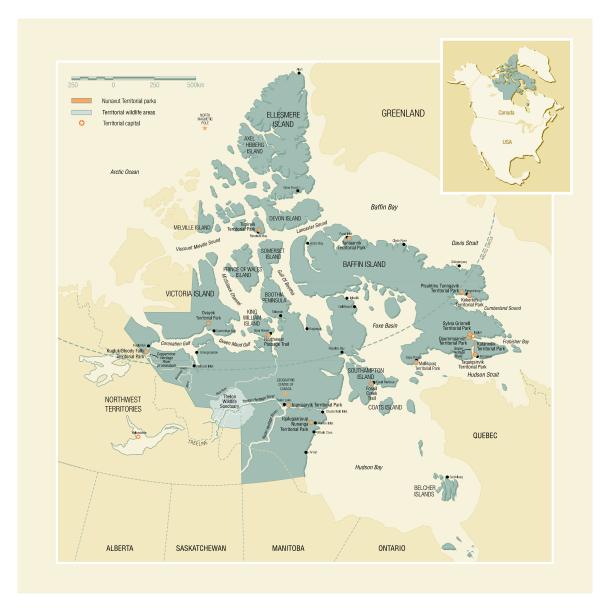
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#### SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN NUNAVUT

Nunavut's Territorial Parks offer some of the most breathtaking scenery and magnificent wildlife imaginable, but there are risks when traveling in a remote area. You must be self-reliant and responsible for your own safety. The extreme environment can change quickly, challenge your survival skills and face you with an emergency. Also remember, when you travel in Nunavut you are in polar bear country. Polar bears are strong, fast and agile on ice, land, and in water.

For more information on Safe and Sustainable Travel and Polar Bear Safety in Nunavut please visit our website at www.nunavutparks.com.



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