



Quttinirpaaq
National Park

Hiking Routes Guide

From Tanquary Fiord



Photo: Fred Lemire



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Photo: Ryan Bray

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Visitor Registration and Orientation

It is mandatory for all visitors to register and participate in an orientation session upon arrival in the national park.

Ensure you factor the orientation and registration session into your planning and remember to de-register prior to leaving the national park.



Photo: Ryan Bray

Contact Information

- 1-867-975-4673
- nunavut.info@pc.gc.ca
- parks.canada.ca/quttinirpaaq

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Welcome



Photo: Ryan Bray

Welcome to Tanquary Fiord

One of the main gateways into Quttinirpaaq National Park, Tanquary Fiord is characterized by beautiful peaks, vast glaciers, wide river valleys, and expansive tundra. It is also the starting point for many day hikes and overnight backpacking trips.

Hikers can explore ridge tops, massive river deltas, lush valleys, gigantic mountains, glistening glaciers, and ancient cultural sites within a few days of Tanquary Fiord. Depending on the timing and route, an observant hiker may spot sea and tundra birds, muskoxen, arctic hare and a carpet of arctic wildflowers. The scope and scale of this land is immense and the scenery is breathtaking.

Outlined in this brochure are some of the more popular hiking routes you may want to consider as you plan your top of the world adventure at Quttinirpaaq National Park.

Place Names

The place names included in this guide tell a little of the people who have spent time here.

In 1915, the United States Crocker Land Expedition was in the area searching for land north of Ellesmere Island. They left behind the following names: Tanquary Fiord and Mount Bowman.

Between the 1950s and 1970s the Defence Research Board of Canada worked in this area studying the High Arctic environment, weather, glaciers, animals, technology and processes. Its staff named Mount Timmia, Kettle Lake, Grassy Loop, Macdonald River, Rollrock Glacier and River.

Since Quttinirpaaq National Park establishment, those working in the area have added their own “unofficial” names to the list. We have identified these “unofficial” names, with an asterisk (*) throughout this guide. In time, Parks Canada hopes to support the re-introduction of Inuktitut place names to the area.



Leave No Trace

Quttinirpaaq National Park protects a fragile High Arctic ecosystem. Small disturbances can have a negative impact. Practice Leave No Trace principles during your visit. For more information, visit: www.leavenotrace.ca/principles.

Quttinirpaaq National Park was established to protect both the cultural and natural history of the area. It is prohibited to move, disturb, deface or remove any cultural or natural objects. Look, but stay 2 metres back from rock structures to avoid disturbing them and refrain from building any new rock structures.

There are no designated camping areas in the national park. Camping is allowed anywhere with the exception of Kettle Lake and Lewis Lake, where camping is prohibited for conservation reasons.

Photo: Ryan Bray



Photo: Ryan Bray



Photo: Leah Pengelly



Photo: Fred Lemire

Weather

Weather can change quickly and conditions can be extreme in the High Arctic. Always be prepared and refer to the [Quttinirpaaq National Park Visitor Information Package](#) when planning your trip.

Wildlife

Always give wildlife space: never approach, entice, chase or feed wildlife. Maintain a minimum distance of 200 metres from large mammals and 100 metres from all other wildlife. Refer to the [Safety in Polar Bear Country](#) pamphlet for more information about travelling in polar bear country.

Glacier Travel

Only travel on glaciers if you are trained in avalanche safety and crevasse self-rescue and are carrying the crevasse self-rescue gear (i.e. rope, shovel, probe, avalanche transceiver).

River Crossings

River crossings can be very dangerous. River levels and flow rates can change rapidly depending on the weather. On warm days, due to melt water, rivers may be at their highest in the evening and at their lowest between 2:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. Heavy rains can bring river levels up at any time. Use caution when travelling along river banks. The flow can undercut banks, making them unstable. This is not always visible from above.

Before heading out, check with Quttinirpaaq National Park staff. At each river crossing, assess the flow carefully and seek the safest crossing location. The Macdonald River can be impossible to cross for extended periods; be prepared to wait hours or days for water levels to drop for safe crossing.

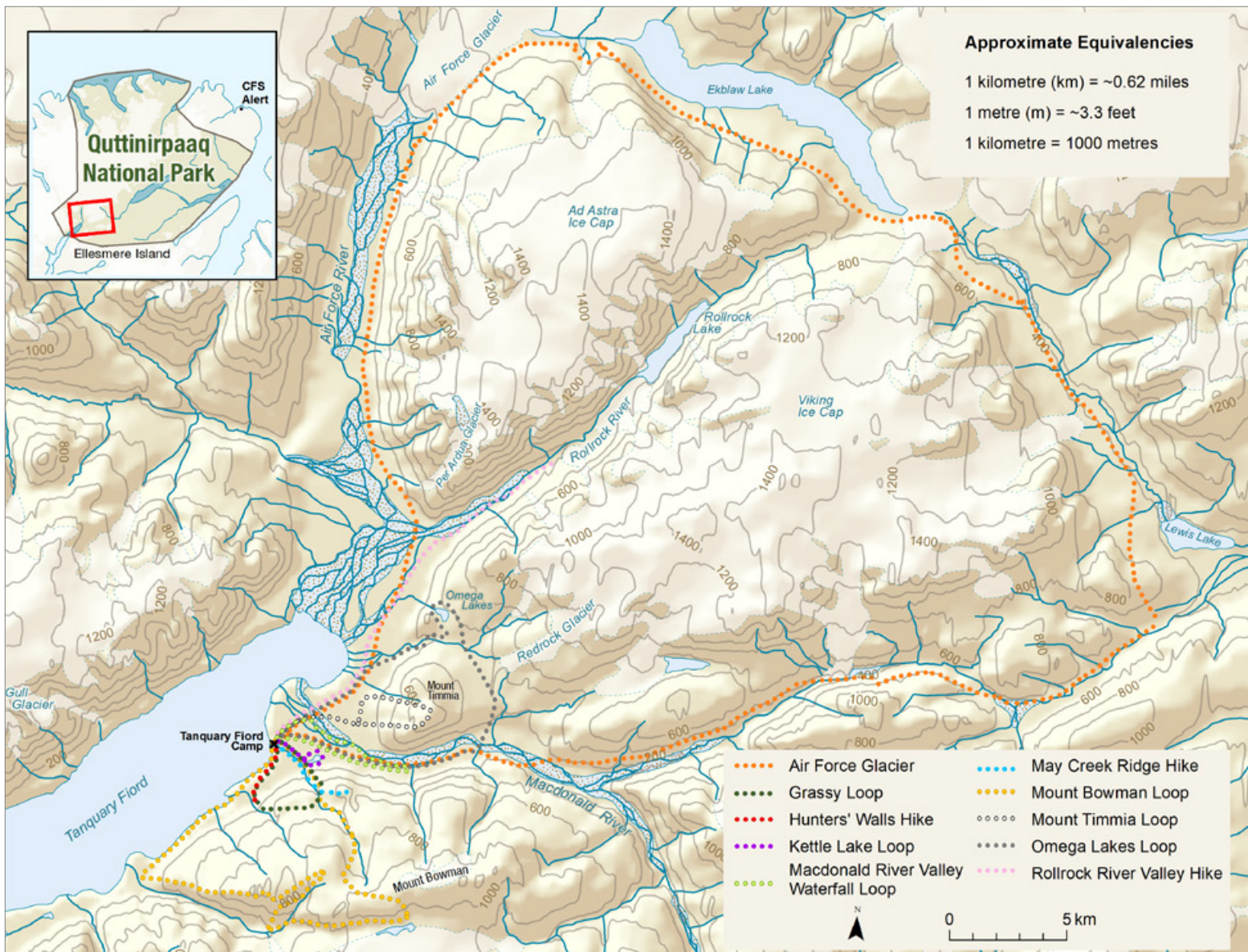


Your group should have advanced skills in wilderness first aid and be prepared to handle any medical, wildlife or weather related emergency. If someone in your group is uncertain about their skill level, consider travelling with an experienced guide.

Overview Map



Photo: Fred Lemire



The routes suggested in this guide are for reference only. There are no maintained trails in the national park and the maps in this brochure are meant as a guide, NOT for navigation. All distances are approximate. It is important to rely on your own maps, equipment, preparation, and experience when exploring Quttinirpaaq National Park.


Day Hikes


Hunters' Walls* Hike

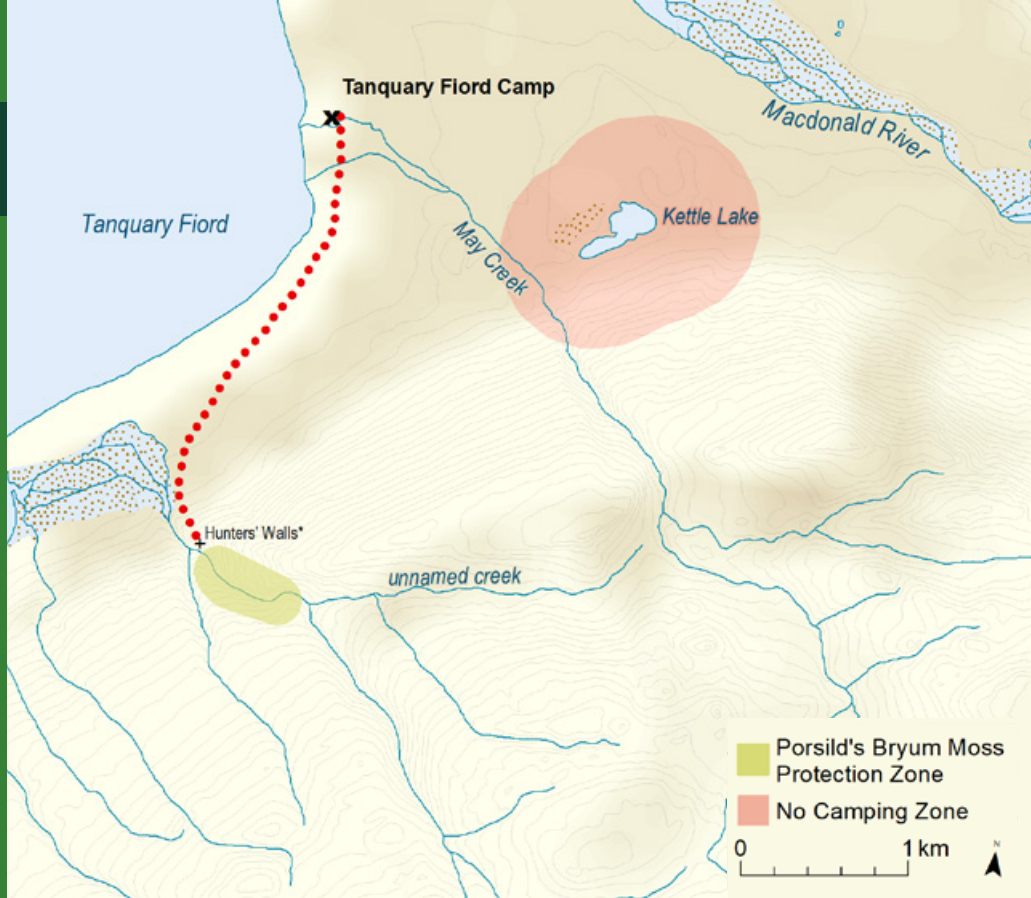
 **DISTANCE:** 6 km (return)

 **TIME:** Approximately 2 hours

 **ELEVATION GAIN:** 140 m

 **DIFFICULTY:**
Easy to Moderate

 **RIVER CROSSING:**
May Creek: Cross near
camp to stay dry



Overview

This half-day hike will lead you across an ancient sea floor, mud flats and then bring you to a pre-historic Thule site. A lookout provides breathtaking views of Tanquary Fiord and Gull Glacier.

Suggested Route

From Tanquary Fiord Camp, cross May Creek and walk south from camp for approximately 3 kilometres toward the base of the ridge and an unnamed creek. Do not cross the creek; follow the left bank of the creek up the steep hillside for about 100 metres where you will see the Hunters' Walls*.

Highlights

- Along the shore, sea ice provides interesting and ever-changing sculptures.
- Weathered bones and ancient artifacts can be seen along the way.
- Look for fossilized seashells far from the shore. These are evidence of an ancient seabed.
- Two man-made rock walls. Their purpose is unknown but it is thought that they may have been used as blinds by hunters, thus the name Hunters' Walls*.
- A small waterfall can be seen just upstream of the Hunters' Walls*.



Reminder:






This is an area of special preservation and archaeological importance. Please do not touch the rock structures.

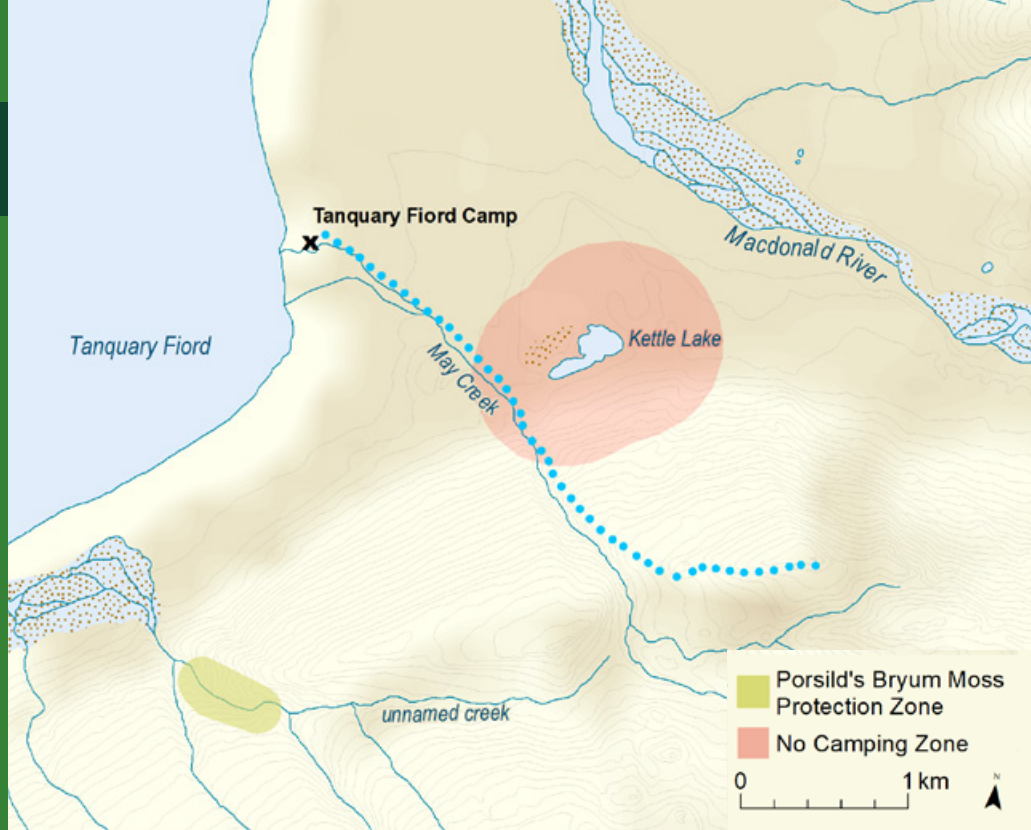


Hunters' Walls*
Photo: David Gray

Day Hikes

May Creek Ridge Hike

-  **DISTANCE:** 8 km
(main route, return)
-  **TIME:** Approximately 4–6 hours
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 640 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** 0



Overview

This route ascends up a steep hill along the east side of May Creek. At the lookout, hikers are rewarded by fantastic panoramas of Tanquary Fiord, Grassy Loop, Macdonald River Valley, and the Air Force River.

Suggested Routes

Travel along the east side of May Creek across the flats and up the ridge. Once at the large bench (approximately 500 metres in elevation), follow the ridge line for another 100 metres of elevation gain to a high point with a good view.

Alternatively, hike to the south west end of Kettle Lake and travel east along a large gently sloped bench until you are east of Kettle Lake. Then, switchback along a steeper bench running uphill towards May Creek. At May Creek rejoin the main route to the highpoint. This adds a few kilometres to the route, but follows a gentler slope.

Highlights

- You may notice four large rock piles along May Creek near Kettle Lake. These ancient piles are actually a Thule fox trap and three Thule food caches. The Thule people were the ancestors of today's Inuit. For more information about cultural history sites in the Kettle Lake area, ask for the *Kettle Lake Walking Tour from Tanquary Fiord* pamphlet.
- Panoramic views of Mount Bowman, Grassy Loop, Tanquary Fiord, Viking Ice Cap, Mount Timmia, Per Ardua Glacier, Air Force and Macdonald River Valleys.






Reminder: The area surrounding Kettle Lake is an area of special preservation and archaeological importance. Please stay at least 2 metres from rock structures. Camping is NOT permitted within 1.5 kilometres of Kettle Lake.

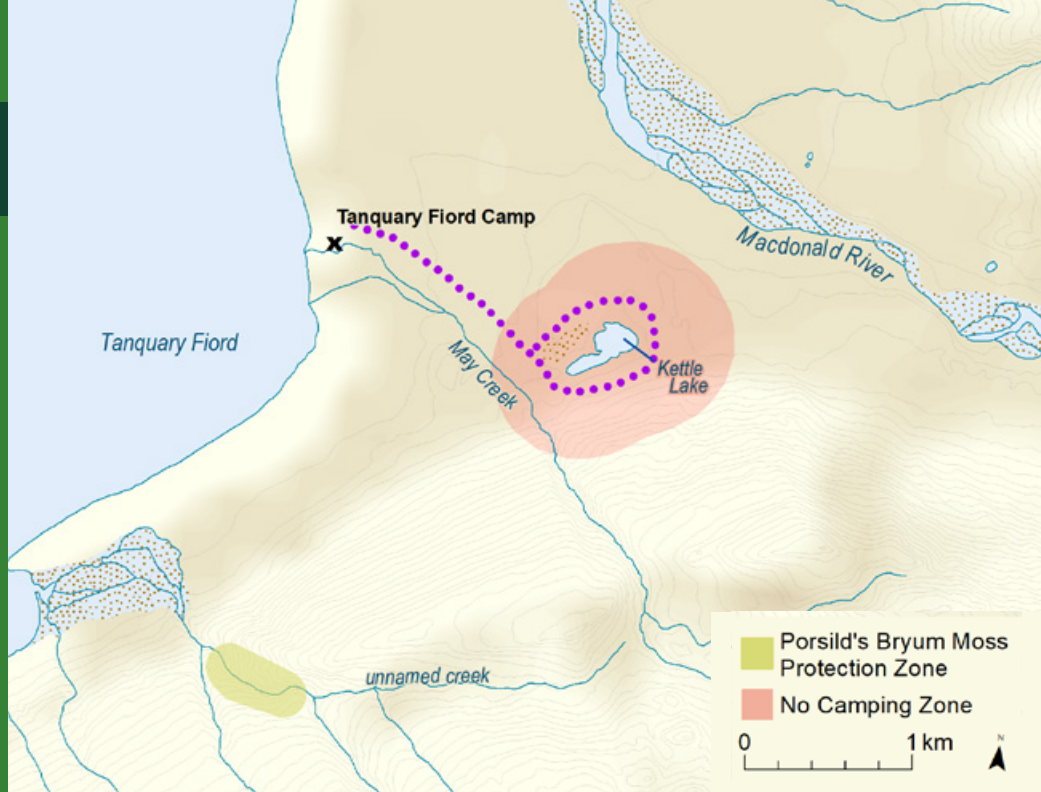


Use caution on top of the ridge and stay well away from the edges, the ground is unstable and may give way.

Day Hikes

Kettle Lake Loop

-  **DISTANCE:** 5 km
-  **TIME:** Approximately 2–3 hours
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 70 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Easy to Moderate
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** 0



Overview

This route climbs an ancient ridge to a clear fresh water lake that is as welcoming now as it would have been to the ancient people that once camped along its shores.

Highlights

- Cultural features dating back to the first people known to have lived in the High Arctic.
- Scenic views of Kettle Lake, the Macdonald River Valley and the surrounding peaks, such as Mount Timmia and Per Ardua Glacier Peak.
- Wildflowers in the creek corridor in July.
- Waterfowl and shore birds.

Suggested Routes

Starting from behind Tanquary Fiord Camp, staying east of May Creek, follow the lower edge of the ridge until you reach the ridge low point. Travel up the low point to reach the bench and travel northeast until you see Kettle Lake below you. Stay on the flat dry plateau above the lake as you circumnavigate it in a clockwise direction. After circumnavigating the lake, travel back to Tanquary Fiord along the route you took to the lake.

See the *Kettle Lake Walking Tour from Tanquary Fiord* pamphlet for more information about the cultural features of this day hike.

Did you know?

Kettle lakes form when large blocks of ice break off from retreating glaciers, and are subsequently buried by glacial sediments, and then melt leaving depressions in the landscape that fill with water over time.



Photo: Fred Lemire

Day Hikes

Grassy Loop

 **DISTANCE:** 10 km (main route)

 **TIME:** Approximately 5–6 hours

 **ELEVATION GAIN:** 500 m

 **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to Difficult

 **RIVER CROSSING:** May Creek and an unnamed creek



Overview

The steep climb and descent of this route are well worth the effort. You'll be rewarded with amazing scenery and breathtaking views that overlook a lush mountain valley and the surrounding peaks.

Highlights

- Hunters' Walls*
- Amazing views of Tanquary Fiord, base camp, many mountain peaks, and a vibrant arctic valley.
- Thule fox trap and three food caches along May Creek near Kettle Lake.

Suggested Routes






Follow the route to Hunters' Walls*. From Hunters' Walls*, continue to follow the left bank of the creek up the steep hillside climbing the ridge until you see Grassy Loop stretching off to the right (southwest). It is identifiable by its lush green vegetation for much of the summer.

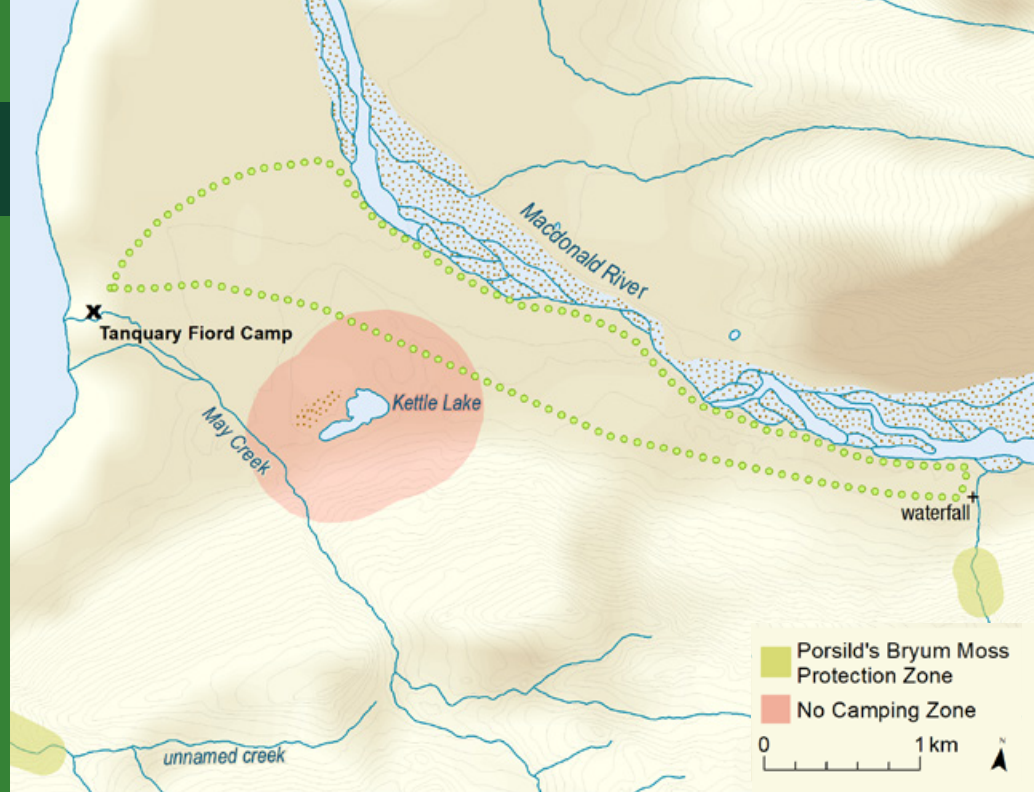
Continue following the left arm (northern arm) of the unnamed creek. Cross May Creek and follow the east bank of the creek back to Tanquary Fiord Camp. (See the May Creek Ridge Hike on page 5 for more details.)



Day Hikes

Macdonald River Valley Waterfall Loop

-  **DISTANCE:** 13 km
-  **TIME:** Approximately 4 hours
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 100 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** 0



Overview

Grazing muskoxen may be seen against a backdrop of colourful mountains, giant glaciers, braided rivers, and a lush green valley. The terrain is relatively flat and stable along the Macdonald River Valley and this hike ends with a waterfall tumbling from the ridge above.

Suggested Routes

From Tanquary Fiord Camp, travel northeast to the Macdonald River. Don't cross Macdonald River; turn right and travel upriver. You will see the waterfall tumbling down the ridge to the right (to the south) approximately 6.5 kilometres upstream along the Macdonald River.

On your return, follow the base of the ridge to a small plateau that leads to Kettle Lake. From there, follow the plateau north of Kettle Lake back to camp.

Highlights

- Overlook of the powerful Macdonald River
- Vast river valley landscapes surrounded by peaks and glaciers
- Views of a beautiful waterfall

Words of Caution:

- This large river often undercuts its banks making them unstable. Undercut banks are not always visible from above.
- If hiking along the river bed, look for safe spots to climb the bank when the river flows against its banks.
- The mist from the waterfall can make the footing near the falls very slippery. Stay back for your safety and that of Porsild's bryum moss.

Did you know?






Porsild's Bryum moss, a threatened species under the *Species at Risk Act*, can be found on the same cliff as the waterfall. To protect this moss, please don't get too close to the waterfall cliffs.

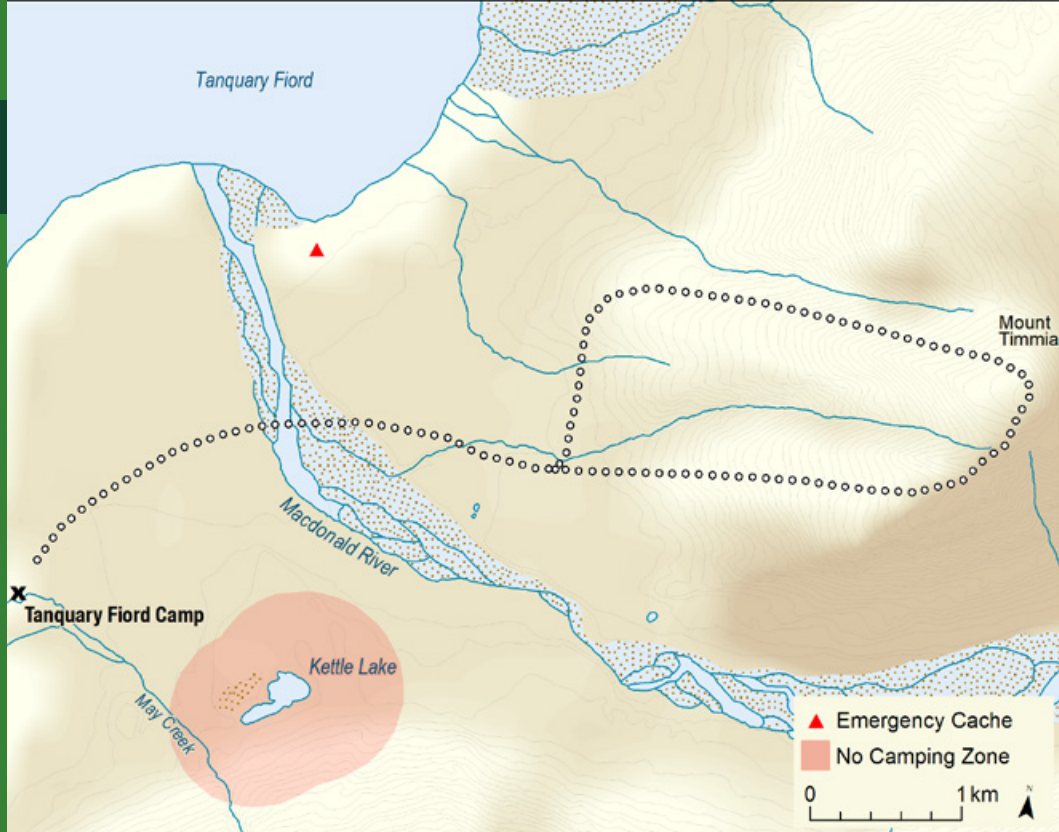


Photo: René Belland

Day Hikes

Mount Timmia Loop

-  **DISTANCE:** 14 km
-  **TIME:** 8–10 hours
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 860 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to Difficult
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** The Macdonald River and some smaller unnamed creeks.



Overview

Hike to the top of Mount Timmia for unparalleled 360° views.

Suggested Routes

Travel northeast from Tanquary Fiord Camp to the Macdonald River and seek a safe crossing point. The terrain is mostly flat between the camp and the base of Mount Timmia.

On Mount Timmia we recommend doing a loop ascending along the right or south side of the mountain and then descending along the centre of the west face to the base of

the mountain. Once at the base of Mount Timmia, retrace your route back to camp. Hummocks¹ on Mount Timmia can also make the surface challenging.

Highlights

- Panoramic views of Tanquary Fiord, Per Ardua Glacier, Viking Ice Cap, the Macdonald River, and Omega Lakes.

¹ See glossary



Did you know?

The Macdonald River Valley is part of the “MuskoX Way”, an ancient travel route that Paleo-Inuit people used when following the muskoX range expansion from Alaska to Greenland.

Overnight Hikes


Omega Lakes Loop

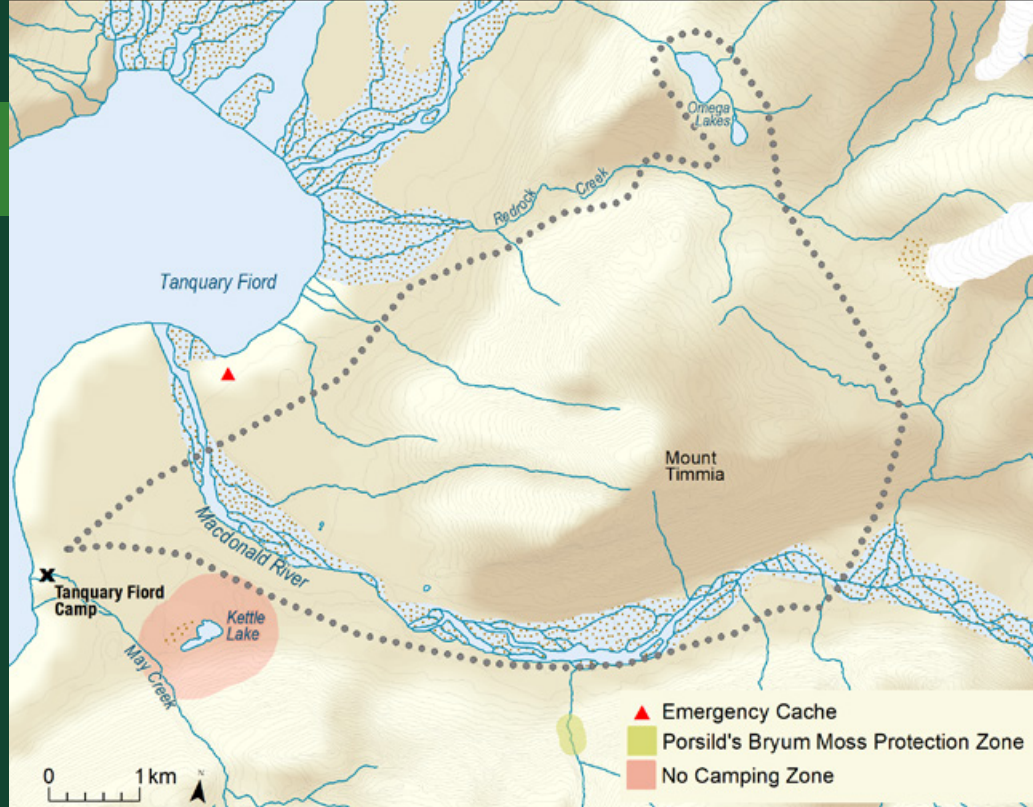
 **DISTANCE:** 27 km (main route)

 **TIME:** 1–2 days

 **ELEVATION GAIN:** 360 m

 **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate

 **RIVER CROSSING:**
The Macdonald River and
Redrock Creek



Overview

This route features amazing scenery where you will experience a changing landscape first hand.

Suggested Routes

From Tanquary Fiord Camp travel northeast and seek a safe crossing for the Macdonald River.

Travel northeast to the Redrock Creek delta and find a safe place to cross to the north side of the creek. Alternately during times of high water, when you reach the Redrock Creek delta follow the creek's south side upstream past several feeder streams crossing to the north side of the river at or before 3.5 kilometres upstream.

At approximately 3.5 kilometres upstream of the Redrock Creek delta, seek a route to the north up the ridge to find Omega Lakes. Some hiking along the side of the hill will be required along Redrock Creek.

To do the loop, from the east side of the Omega Lakes travel south seeking the lowest elevation behind Mount Timmia to the

Macdonald River. Seek a safe place to cross the Macdonald River and travel downstream along the south bank of the Macdonald River. From the Macdonald River travel southwest back to Tanquary Fiord Camp.

Camping Sites: If camping near Omega Lakes, it is best to camp above the lakes where it is drier and away from birds nesting along the shore.

Highlights

- Mount Timmia towers above you and you will be treated to close views of Redrock Glacier.
- Look for the raised beaches between Macdonald River and Redrock Creek. They are remnants of past sea levels which were much higher thousands of years ago.
- Watch for the iron rich red hill on the north side of Redrock Creek. It is fine particles of this rock that wash into the creek during heavy rain that gives the creek its red colour at times.

Reminder:






Maintain a distance from wildlife that ensures the animal is not disturbed by your presence.

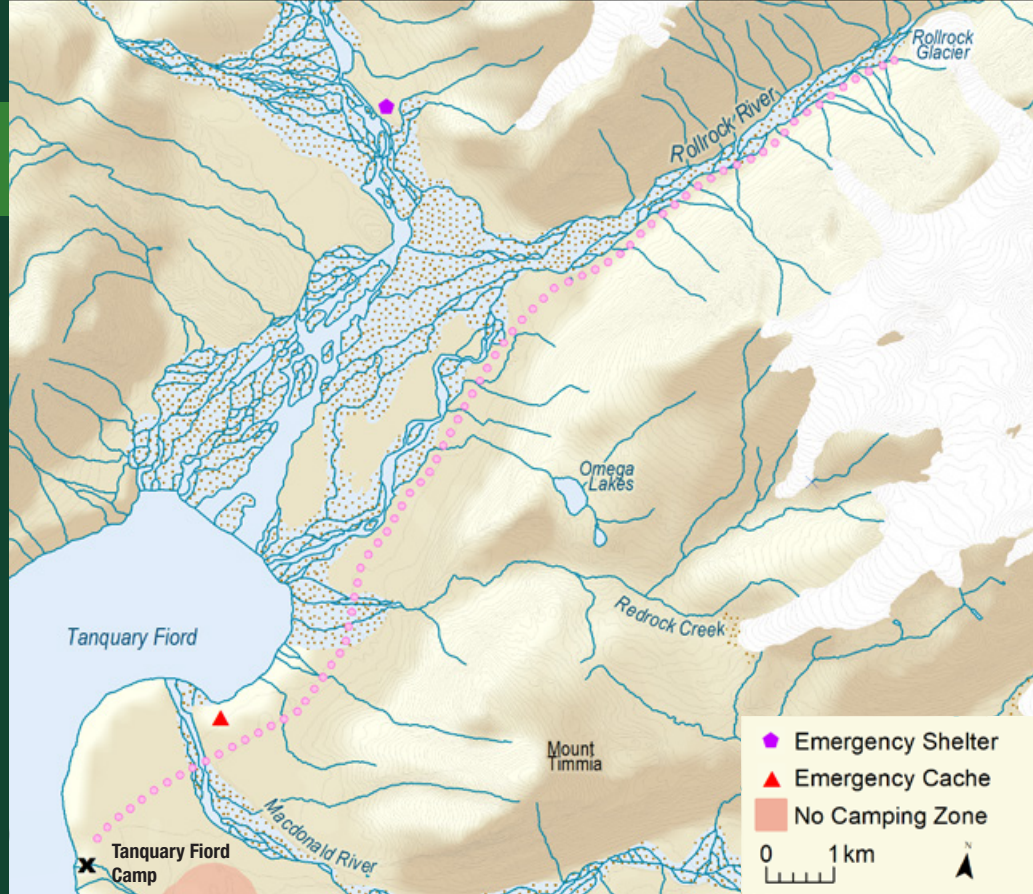


Photo: Ryan Bray

Overnight Hikes

Rollrock River Valley Hike

-  **DISTANCE:** 35 km (return)
-  **TIME:** 2–4 days
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 200 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** The Macdonald River, Redrock Creek and other small creek crossings.



Overview

A multi-day hike that takes you inland to the edge of the Rollrock Glacier. Varied terrain, river crossings and warmer temperatures greet you as you travel away from the ocean.

Suggested Routes

From Tanquary Fiord Camp travel northeast and seek a safe crossing of the Macdonald River. Travel north, seek a safe Redrock Creek crossing and continue north to Rollrock River. Travel upstream along the right hand bank (east bank) of the Rollrock River. Walking on the bench² is an ankle friendly route. There will be moraine³ crossings and hummocks along route.

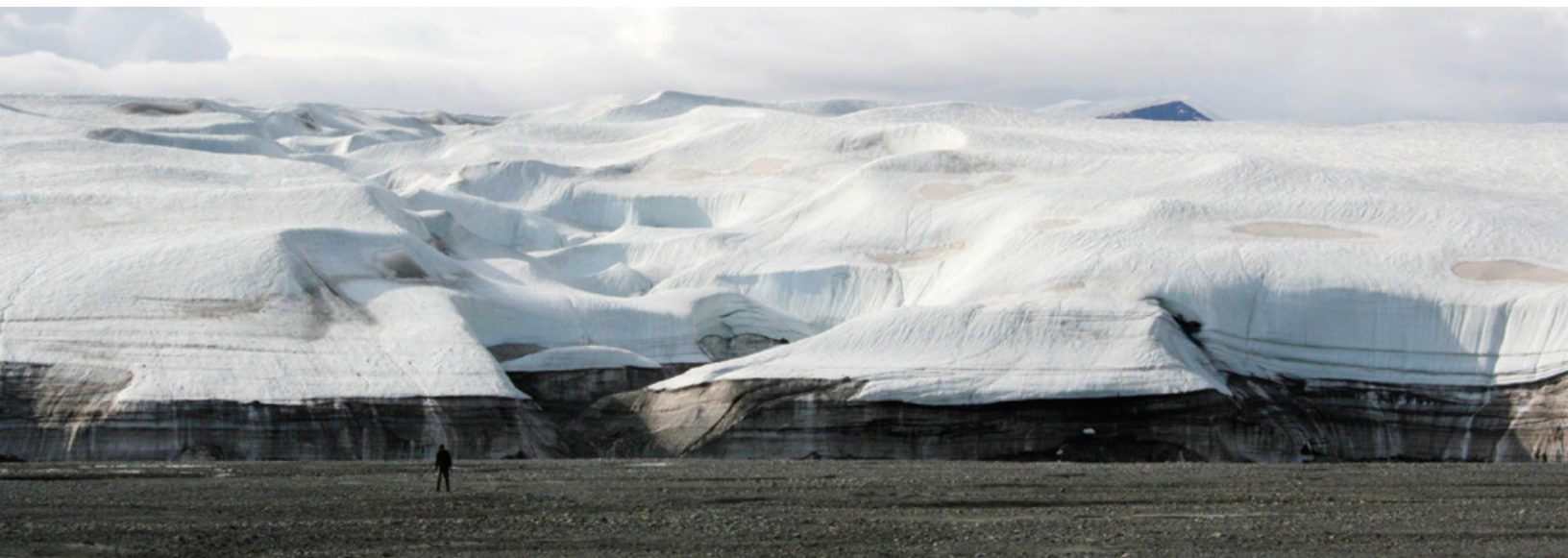
Highlights

- The layers of sediment along the Rollrock River Valley stripe the mountains with eye-catching colour.
- Large boulders have eroded from the mountain, creating colourful talus⁴ slopes.
- If you are watchful and observant, you may see rare Peary caribou.

² See glossary






³ See glossary

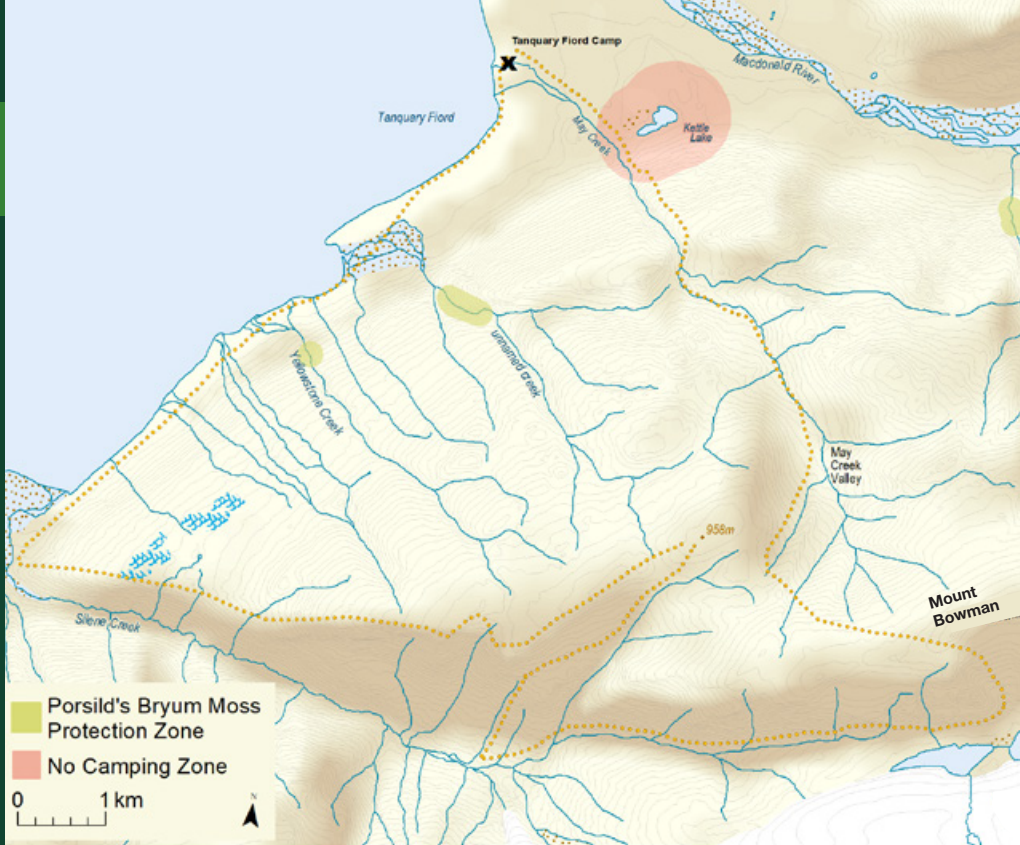
⁴ See glossary



Overnight Hikes

Mount Bowman Loop

-  **DISTANCE:** 40 km (main route)
-  **TIME:** 3–5 days
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 1150 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to Difficult
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** May and Yellowstone Creeks. Silene Creek can be a roaring river during warm weather. Following the creek bed is **not recommended**.



Overview

This multi-day hike brings you up on to Mount Bowman and back. Along the route see fossilized shells from an ancient seabed, glaciated mountain tops, brightly-coloured wildflowers and unique sandstone formations.

Suggested Routes

From Tanquary Fiord Camp cross May Creek and travel southwest towards the base of the unnamed creek. Once at the unnamed creek seek a safe route up the hill; this can be anywhere between the left bank of the unnamed creek and the left bank of Silene Creek. Continue hiking past Grassy Loop to the top of the ridge overlooking Silene Creek.

Head toward the highpoint marked 958 metres on the 1:50:000 Tanquary Fiord Camp Map. Once at the high point you have two options.

- The main route is more challenging but also more scenic. Begin at 958 metres and head southwest following the gentlest slope to the valley below staying on the north side of Silene Creek. Travel east along the valley, parallel to the Macdonald Ice Cap*, until you reach the glacial pond.
- The alternate route is easier: travel southeast following the ridge for about 1.5 kilometres until you can look down and see the massive Macdonald Ice Cap* and the glacial pond at its base. From the overlook travel east approximately 2.5 kilometres then follow the gentlest contours of the land south to the foot of the ice cap and the glacial ponds.

From the glacial pond, you can follow the alternate route up the slope towards the highpoint marked 958 metres on the map and turn into May Creek Valley. Travel north along May Creek Valley (see the May Creek hike on page 5 for details) back to Tanquary Fiord Camp.

Highlights

- Ancient seabed fossils as you ascend the hill between unnamed creek and Silene Creek.
- Views of Viking and Macdonald Ice Caps* and countless majestic mountains.
- Dramatic close views of the Macdonald Ice Cap*.
- In early July, the meadows below are covered with a carpet of purple saxifrage.

Recommended Camping Spots

- There are some camping spots around point 958 metres if your tent has a small footprint but you will need to fill your water containers along route to ensure you have water at camp.
- Along the alternate route there are some relatively flat vegetated camping spots between the foot of the slope and the Macdonald Ice Cap*. Up slope of the glacial pond.
- Camping is not permitted within 1.5 kilometres of Kettle Lake.

Reminder: Do not disturb or remove fossils or shells.


Overnight Hikes


Air Force Glacier Return Hike

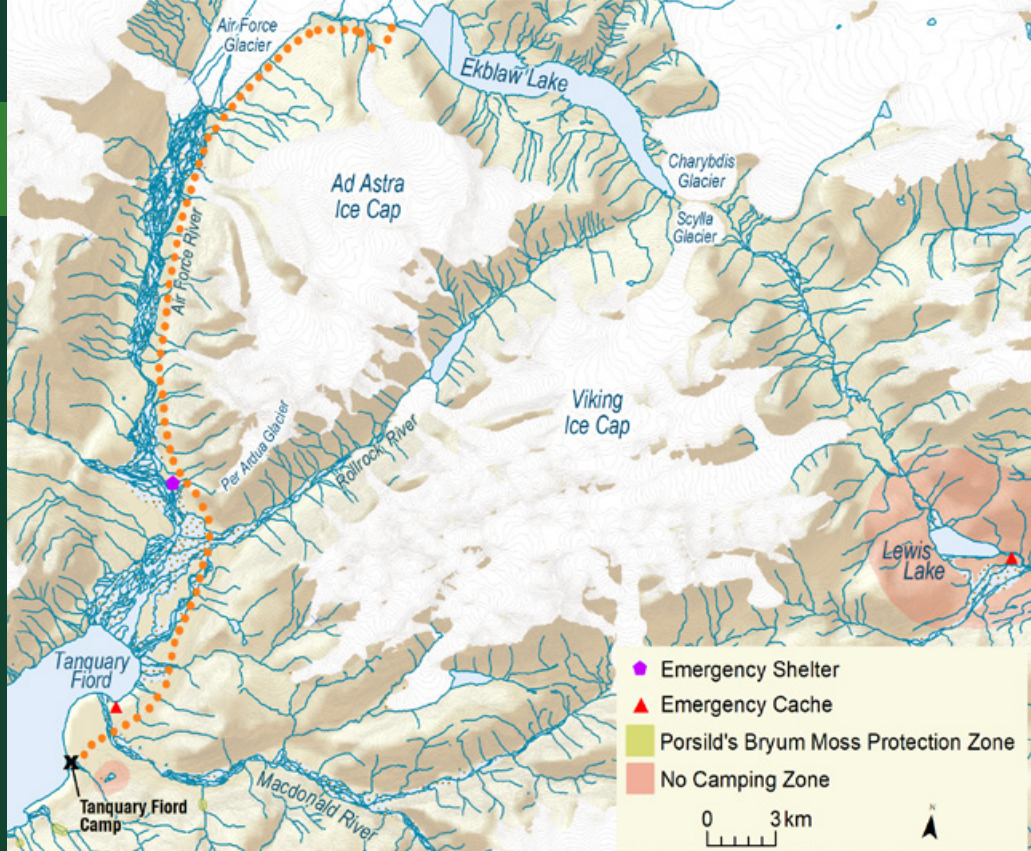
 **DISTANCE:** 80 km (return)

 **TIME:** 3–5 days

 **ELEVATION GAIN:** 450 m

 **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to Difficult

 **RIVER CROSSING:**
Macdonald River and
Rollrock River



Overview

This return route hugs the edge of land and water: first Tanquary Fiord and then Air Force River reaching the cerulean waters of Ekblaw Lake at the turnaround point.

Highlights

- Walk through the awe inspiring Air Force River Valley.
- View the massive and spectacular Air Force Glacier.
- See the colourful sediment layers on the mountains.
- Witness the turquoise colours of Ekblaw Lake.

Suggested Routes

Follow the Rollrock River Valley Hike route as far as the Rollrock River.

At the Rollrock River carefully seek a good crossing. This river bed can be muddy and rocky. Once you cross the Rollrock River, hike northwest to the Air Force River. Travel along the east side of the Air Force River to the Air Force Glacier. Along the Air Force River, the footing is variable: rocky, flat tundra, wetlands, and in some spots you will be traveling on moraines. It is generally best to walk up on the bench above the river bed.

Once at the Air Force Glacier follow the glacier drainage, north then east to Ekblaw Lake. This is the farthest point of the return hike.








From May Creek Ridge with Tanquary Fiord, the Air Force River and Glacier in the distance.

Photo: Ryan Bray

Overnight Hikes

Air Force Glacier Loop

-  **DISTANCE:** 120 km (40 km of the Air Force Return Hike one way plus an additional 80 km)
-  **TIME:** 6–12 days
-  **ELEVATION GAIN:** 450 m
-  **DIFFICULTY:** Moderate to Difficult
-  **RIVER CROSSING:** Macdonald, Lupus*, Very, and Rollrock Rivers. Choose your crossings carefully as conditions can change rapidly.



Overview

Take the challenge and complete the longest hike in Quttinirpaaq National Park. Glaciers, rivers, wildlife, mountains: you'll experience them all.

Suggested Routes

Follow the Air Force Glacier Return Hike to Ekblaw Lake. At the Ekblaw Lake travel along its south shore. Cross the moraine between Scylla and Charybdis Glaciers. The moraine can have challenging, wet footing, and is best crossed along the ridge at its peak. Do not cross the glaciers without glacier training and self rescue equipment. Continue traveling southeast along the bench on the west side of Lewis River until you see Lewis Lake. Staying to the west of Lewis Lake, travel south until you come to the Very River. Follow the Very River upstream to the west. Depending on the conditions, you can travel on either side of the river.

At the junction of the Very River and Lupus River*, travel downstream along the south side of the Lupus River*. Where the Lupus River* meets the terminus of the Lupus Glacier* climb approximately 50 metres up, above the rock outcrops, to bypass the glacier and continue traveling downstream along the Lupus River*. Depending on the river conditions, you may need to cross the river or hike along the side of the

steep talus slopes as you continue traveling downstream. Use your judgment; this is a tough section.

Parks Canada recommends crossing the Macdonald River within the first 4 kilometres downstream of the Lupus* & Macdonald River junction. It is also possible to cross further downstream at the Macdonald River delta. Once across the Macdonald River head back to Tanquary Fiord Camp.

Note: Camping within 3 kilometres of the shores of Lewis Lake and 1.5 kilometres of Kettle Lake is not permitted for conservation reasons.

Highlights (in addition to the Air Force Glacier Hike)

- One of the best chances of seeing muskoxen or the rare Peary caribou in the national park (Lewis River)
- Close views of the Lupus Glacier*
- Seeing a diversity of dramatic valley landscapes
- Completing the longest hike in Quttinirpaaq National Park!

Wildlife & Cultural Features Along Routes

	Hunters' Walls*	May Creek Ridge	Kettle Lake	Grassy Loop	Macdonald Valley	Mount Timmia	Omega Lakes	Rollrock Valley	Mount Bowman	Air Force Glacier (return)	Air Force Glacier (loop)
BIRDS											
Sandpipers (<i>Calidris varius</i>)											
Long-tailed jaeger (<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>)											
Gyr Falcon (<i>Falco rusticolus</i>)											
Snow goose (<i>Anser caerulescens</i>)											
Glaucous gull (<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>)											
Rock ptarmigan (<i>Lagopus muta</i>)											
Red knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>)											
Raven (<i>Corvus corax</i>)											
Lapland longspur (<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>)											
Snow bunting (<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>)											
Long-tailed duck (<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>)											
Red-throated loon (<i>Gavia stellate</i>)											
MAMMALS											
Muskox (<i>Ovibos moschatus</i>)											
Arctic hare (<i>Lepus arcticus</i>)											
Arctic wolf (<i>Canis lupus arctos</i>)											
Peary caribou (<i>Rangifer tarandus pearyi</i>)											
Collared Lemming (<i>Dicrostonyx groenlandicus</i>)											
Arctic fox (<i>Vulpes lagopus</i>)											
VISIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES											
Hunting Blinds											
Fox Trap											
Settlement Area											
Food Cache											

Glossary of Terms

Bench: A long, relatively narrow strip of relatively level or gently inclined land that is bounded by distinctly steeper slopes above and below it.

Hummock: A small mound rising above the surrounding ground. In Nunavut hummocks are normally 10 to 30 centimetres tall.

Moraine: A mound or ridge of material left behind by a moving glacier usually soil, gravel and boulders.

Talus: A slope formed by an accumulation of rock debris at the base of a cliff or mountain.