

Interlake Parks

Hecla / Grindstone Provincial Park



Introduction

With an area of 1,084 km², Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park is characterized by a peninsula of land, a series of islands and adjacent waters in Lake Winnipeg. Landscapes are varied, and include areas of coniferous and mixed forests, limestone cliffs and silica sand beaches, as well as marshes, bogs, fens and wet meadows.

Classified as a Natural Park, its purpose is to preserve areas that are representative of the Mid Boreal Lowland portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region; and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

The park will:

- Provide nature-orientated recreational opportunities such as hiking, wildlife viewing and cross-country skiing in a largely undisturbed environment;



Yellow-headed blackbird in Grassy Narrows Marsh

- Provide opportunities for a wide range of high-quality intensive recreational activities and permit associated developments such as campgrounds, commercial resorts, harbours and cottaging;
- Protect and maintain Aboriginal cultural sites on Black Island and the Icelandic fishing settlement on Hecla Island;
- Promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features; and
- Accommodate commercial resource uses such as hay and peat leases, where such activities do not compromise other park purposes.

The northern end of Hecla Island is about 175 km from downtown Winnipeg-an easy 2 1/4-hour drive.

Origin

Hecla Island is on the eastern edge of sedimentary rocks that underlie the plains of southwestern Manitoba. On Black Island and along Lake Winnipeg's east shore, these sedimentary lowlands give way to the Precambrian Shield, consisting of ancient granitic and volcanic rocks. There are three good locations on Hecla where visitors can take a close-up look at the sedimentary formations-the spectacular, rugged cliffs at the north end, and at two abandoned quarries which are more easily accessible.

At the north point, a 5-m cliff exposure (see figure), reveals a portion of the 400-million-year sequence of events that formed Hecla Island.

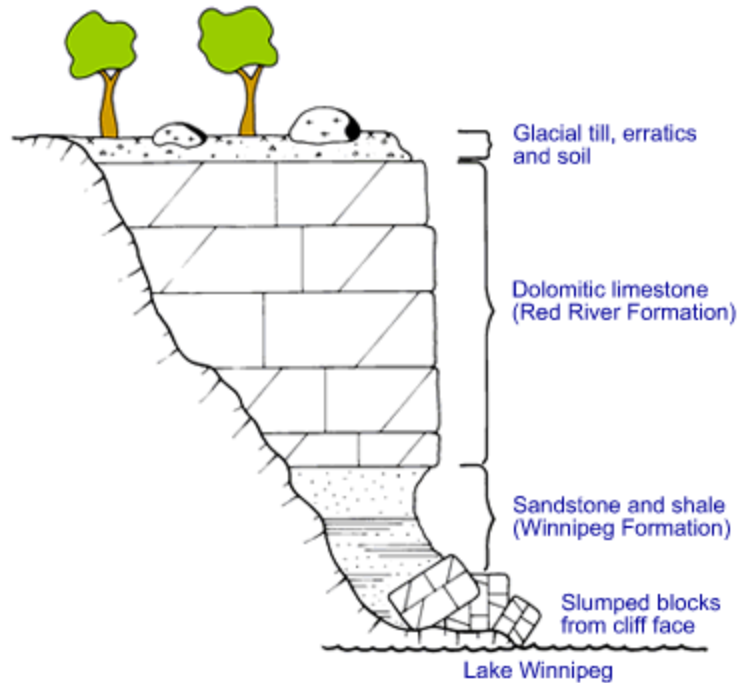


Figure: Profile of north point cliff

Courtesy of Manitoba Energy and Mines

The sandstone/shale segment represents marine deposits formed in a shallow, tropical sea, which flooded what is now Manitoba and the North American continent about 450 million years ago. It lapped on the weathered and eroded rocks of the shield and deposited beds of sand. Over several million years, the sea gradually deepened, allowing for the deposition of sand intermixed with shale (mud).

The change from sandstone to limestone is very sharply defined and reflects a deepening of the sea to several tens of metres. Resembling today's Caribbean Sea, it was clean and wide open which allowed the proliferation of marine life, most of which had calcareous skeletons. Dead fauna settled on the bottom of the sea to form layers of limestone; their shells are now fossils, generally too small to be seen by the naked eye.

On top of the limestone, as seen in the figure, is a poorly sorted mixture of clay, sand, gravel and boulders, referred to as glacial till. This ground-up remains of rocks eroded from the bedrock surface by continental glaciers that covered Manitoba from time to time. Rock and boulders (known as glacial erratics) may have originated several hundred kilometres from here.

When glacial ice melted from the Lake Winnipeg area, about 10,000 years ago, a huge ice dam still existed to the north and east, which blocked drainage of the meltwater. The lake that formed is called Lake Agassiz and may have been up to 200-m deep. When all of the ice finally melted, the lake was able to drain to the north. Hecla and the other islands emerged in their present-day forms as the waters of Lake Agassiz gradually receded. Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba and Winnipegosis became established in the glacial lake's basin.

A much more accessible site, though less spectacular than the north point cliffs, is the central quarry which is near the family vacation cabins. Here the same rock units are spread out over a distance of several hundred metres, near the lakeshore. Unique to this site, are hardened worm burrow casts which weather out of the soft clay portion of the Winnipeg Formation. This quarry was the source of flagstone for ornamental walls in buildings constructed in the park in the 1970s.

The quarry picnic site, situated north of Hecla Village, was worked for lime used in the settlement. Beds of grey and buff limestone of the Red River Formation are exposed in an attractive setting with a good view of Black Island to the east.



Great blue heron



Sedimentary rocks, quarry picnic site

The First People

The Anishinabe (Ojibwe) inhabited the region when the first European explorers arrived. Black Island in particular was known to have special religious significance to people living near Lake Winnipeg.

Although little visible evidence of Aboriginal occupation exists on Black Island, there are several sites at the eastern end where traditional ceremonies took place, like the medicine dance, or Midewiwin. Near Drumming Point, the Midewiwin was held annually during the early summer to ordain new medicine men and perform healing rituals. Chief George Barker describes the scene in his book, *Forty Years a Chief*.

The event lasted eight days, from sunrise to sunset. There was much preparation. A special shelter was erected, facing east and covered with birch bark. It was about 48 feet long and 12 feet wide. Another enclosure was built close by, of the same length and six feet high, but without a roof. It was in here that the actual ceremonies were conducted.

There are also several burial sites, food cache areas, and other features on Black Island that are evidence of this early occupation. Today, Anishinabe of the region gather there annually for berry-picking, hunting and social gatherings. Please show your respect; do not interfere with any of the sites or activities.

The Icelanders Arrive

Despite the fact that Hecla was steeped in natural beauty with cliffed shorelines, marshes, green pastures and good timber, it was not settled by the first group of Icelandic settlers who arrived in Manitoba in 1875. The tract of land granted to the first group by the Dominion government, stretched from Boundary Creek, the northern border of Manitoba at the time, up to and including Mikley Island, as Hecla Island was then known to the Icelanders.

The first Hecla settlers came from the second or "large group" of Icelanders in 1876. Most island settlers came from western and northern Iceland.

The stage had already been set for this migration by a native Icelandic, Sigtryggur Jonasson. After founding the colony in the Interlake, he returned to Iceland as an agent of the Dominion to encourage further immigration.

All Icelanders who came to North America seemed to share a single dream-to establish a separate Icelandic colony where they could maintain their own laws, culture, language and traditions. This, above all else, was the most important thing they sought in their search for a new land. New Iceland, with its four settlements, practised self-government within Canada's North-West Territories from 1875 to 1881.



Commercial fishing demonstration

A New Era

Although Hecla prospered for many years, the settlement slowly declined. Commercial fishing, the main source of income for the islanders, became unprofitable due to competition and low prices, and the farmland never proved very productive. When Hecla School was closed in 1970

as part of the school consolidation program, most remaining families with school-aged children also left the island.

In order to save their community and to provide employment, the remaining residents approached the Manitoba government in the late 1960s to have Hecla Island developed as a provincial park. The park was officially designated in 1969, and developed under the joint federal-provincial Fund for Rural Economic Development (FRED). The causeway was constructed to link Hecla Island to the mainland and the park was officially opened to the public July 26, 1975.

As part of changes in designation under the new *Provincial Parks Act*, Hecla and Grindstone parks were combined as the new Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park, in 1997.



Hecla dock

Things to Do, Places to See

Interpretation

During the summer months park interpreters conduct a full slate of activities including outdoor evening amphitheatre programs, guided walks in the village and marsh, traditional campfire talks and special events.

A highlight of the program is the commercial fishing demonstration and fish fry held twice each summer. This event provides visitors with a unique opportunity to view and to discuss Lake Winnipeg's commercial fishery from the initial setting of the nets through to the filleting and tasting of some of the day's catch.

The interpretation program is designed to connect the audience with the park's natural and cultural resources and thereby create better understanding of, and commitment to the concept of sustainable development.

Hecla Village Scenic Drive

Located off PTH 8 this scenic 7-km route begins south of Hecla Village and winds along the shoreline. The drive offers picture postcard views of Lake Winnipeg with Black Island to the east as a backdrop. Often, fishing boats and barges can be seen on the water while Hecla's air force, a squadron of white pelicans, passes overhead. During spring and fall migration Canada geese are common on the fields; in October, 50 to 75 bald eagles can be seen while driving along the lakeshore. Hecla Village is the showpiece of this picturesque route so be sure to stop for a visit.

Hecla Village

The village is comprised of six restored buildings—a church, school, community hall, a period home, fish station and the partially completed boarding house—and several others that are stabilized. The 1-km Hecla Village Self-guiding Trail provides a glimpse of the island's past and allows visitors to enter some of the restored buildings, including the Tools and Machines Exhibit that is in a former ice house. Special interpreter-led tours are available to fully explore the village.

Hecla Island Heritage Home Museum depicts the lifestyle of an Icelandic family in the 1920s to 1940s. It is operated by the Descendants and Friends of Hecla Island Heritage Inc., a co-operating association that assists Manitoba Conservation with the interpretation of Icelandic culture on the island.

Another highlight of the village is a visit to Hecla Fish Station, a former ice house, filled with displays which interpret the commercial fishery on Lake Winnipeg. To top off the visit, a delicacy like fresh pickerel may be purchased from local fishermen.

Hiking Trails

The Grassy Narrows Marsh Trails introduce visitors to the rehabilitated and managed marsh located at the south end of Hecla Island. Dykes developed by Ducks Unlimited complement a series of trails and boardwalks which allow hikers and cyclists to explore the marsh. Viewing towers and blinds have been strategically situated for close observation of wildlife, including waterfowl, pelicans, hawks, terns, rare western grebes and Hecla's largest mammal, the moose. In an early 2001 aerial census, 28 moose were observed on the island, 41 on the northwest part of Grindstone Point and 10 on Deer Island.



Hecla Church. Restoration complete 1973-1975.

Just inside the park entrance is the **Wildlife Viewing Tower Trail**. This 20-minute return walk leads to a viewing tower, several on-site signs describing moose biology, and a spotting scope for close observation of prime moose habitat and with a little luck-moose.

The 10-km return **West Quarry Trail** begins at the campground office and ends at an abandoned quarry and fishcamp. For a shorter hike (3.5-km return), the trail is accessible from the end of the north shore subdivision road.

The **Gull Harbour Trails** system connects the major recreational facilities of the Gull Harbour area. These include the campground, swimming beaches, golf course, picnic areas, tennis courts, amphitheatre, marina, and the Gull Harbour Resort and Conference Centre. A highlight of the system is the scenic **Lighthouse Trail** which leads out along a thin peninsula with Gull Harbour on one side and the Lake Winnipeg narrows on the other. Don't forget to take your camera on this pleasant 1 1/2-hour return hike.

Accommodation

Options for overnight stays run the gamut from primitive wilderness camping to a luxurious resort. Visitors may camp on any of the other islands provided they pre-register, as a safety precaution, with a Natural Resource Officer before setting out. On Hecla Island, camping is only permitted at the established 213-unit campground. Electrical hook-ups and showers are available.

Nearby, 19 one-room family vacation cabins which can accommodate two, four or six persons are available for rental. A central washroom / shower building is also wheelchair accessible.

For a unique overnight experience, an island home located in Hecla Village has been converted into a bed and breakfast. The Solmundson Gesta Hús, overlooking Lake Winnipeg, is charming, comfortably furnished with brass beds and colourful duvets. And where else may breakfast include freshly caught pickerel fillets?

Swimming

Hecla has two beautiful, white sand beaches. Sunset Beach is located on the northwest shore of Hecla Island just north of the campground. The larger, Gull Harbour beach, is on the south shore of the bay within walking distance of both the campground and the resort.

Fishing

Fishing for pickerel, perch, pike, freshwater drum (silver bass) and the occasional catfish is a popular pastime. Favoured locations are the government docks at Gull Harbour and Hecla Village, and the old ferry dock on the west side of the causeway.

In Winter

Hecla offers an excellent system of cross-country ski and snowmobile trails for winter enthusiasts. Snowshoeing or a short walk along one of the trails in the Gull Harbour area can also make for a pleasant afternoon outdoors.

Several fishing huts are available on the lake, complete with wood stoves, so those adventurous enough can try their hand at ice fishing. Don't catch anything too large or you'll have difficulty trying to land it through the hole in the ice!



Sunset, east shore

Junior Naturalist and Park Explorer

Would you like to become a Junior Naturalist or a Park Explorer? It's easy. Just work on the activities in these booklets and return to us.

Manitoba Parks will make you an official Junior Naturalist or Park Explorer. On the back page of each booklet you will find a place to check off everything you do.

The Junior Naturalist booklets are appropriate for children between the ages of 6 and 9. Park Explorers are between the ages of 10 and 12 years.

- [Hecla/Grindstone Junior Naturalist](#)
- [Hecla/Grindstone Park Explorer](#)

