



Time for Nature



Checking out the campsites Ivvavik National Park of Canada

Ivvavik National Park of Canada does not see a lot of visitors. This remote northern park is off the beaten path for all but the most adventurous. Yet each spring and fall a team of Parks Canada staff travels the Firth River to make sure the environment stays healthy.



Most visitors to Ivvavik travel the Firth River, camping at some of the 35 sites along its length.
© Parks Canada, Lynch, W., 1991.

Keeping an eye to the ground

Most visitors to Ivvavik travel the Firth River, camping at some of the 35 sites along its length. Like the environment of all northern parks, these sites can be especially vulnerable to disturbance. With 24 hours of daylight in the summer, the growing season for plants is short but intense, occurring exactly when most visitors come to the park. Once the vegetation at a site is damaged, it is slow to recover. Damage to vegetation can also lead to soil erosion, which exposes the permafrost below and may cause large sections of the riverbanks to collapse.

Monitoring the Firth since 1997

When the Parks Canada team arrives in spring, they check each site for hazards to visitors or the presence of sensitive wildlife. A caribou carcass at a campsite may attract grizzly bears to a visitor's tent, and campers may disturb active animal dens or nests. If potential problems are spotted, Parks Canada will close the site.



Parks Canada monitors the impacts of visitor use on vegetation at campsites along the Firth River.
© Parks Canada, 2004.

In the fall, the team monitors the impacts at each site. Is there evidence of erosion? Did summer visitors create new foot trails or expose roots? Is there waste to remove?

Most visitors to the remote park are “seasoned veteran campers and kayakers,” says Operations Manager Ron Larsen. “They tend to be well-practiced at leaving minimal impacts.”



Focusing on the problem areas

When there is a problem, Parks Canada staff begin a detailed examination. They take photos at regular points along a transect, and note the composition and density of site vegetation. If warranted, Parks Canada will close the campsite. Site closure allows the plants to recover naturally, as surrounding vegetation re-establishes itself over the affected area.



Nunaluk Spit has little vegetation to disturb, so camping at the site does not cause any damage. © Parks Canada, 2004.

Not all sites are sensitive

Certain sites are vulnerable and can be affected by heavy use by campers. Others, however, withstand regular use. Most visitors use Nunaluk Spit, where the Firth River flows out into the Beaufort Sea, as their final pick-up spot. This is gravelly spot has little vegetation to disturb, so using the site does not cause any damage. In some other areas, nature wipes the slate clean at spring break-up. Large sheets of ice are pushed downstream at that time, scouring the bank and clearing away signs of human use.



In some areas, sheets of ice from spring break-up scour the riverbank and clear away signs of human use. © Mervin Joe, 2005.

Help protect the park environment

Like Ivvavik's "seasoned campers", each of us can do our part to keep campsites healthy.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/ivvavik