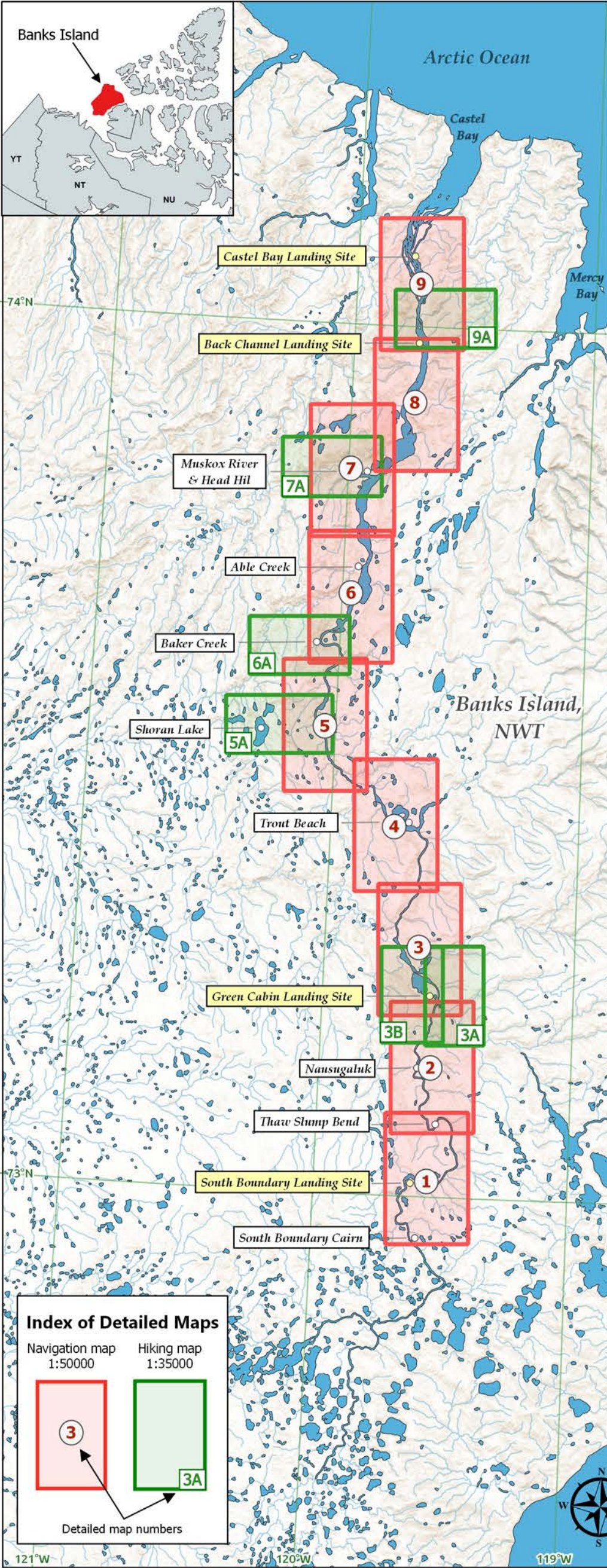




Thomsen River Canoe Route

Banks Island, Northwest Territories

Map version 3 - @2026 Roland Paris
Designed to be printed in colour on legal paper.



@ 2026 Robert James

WARNING: This map likely contains many errors; use it at your own risk. Rely on official and current sources of information, including Parks Canada resources on Aulavik National Park. Located ~800 km north of the Arctic Circle, the Thomsen River is an exceptionally remote canoe route requiring advanced skills in unsupported wilderness travel in potentially harsh conditions. Rescue services are limited and may be delayed for days. Although polar bears are uncommon inland in summer, be aware that the entire river traverses their habitat. If in doubt, consider a guided expedition.

Sunrise & Sunset - Banks Island (~73°N)		
Date	Sunrise	Sunset
June 15	Midnight sun	
July 1	Midnight sun	
July 15	Midnight sun	
August 1	02:30	23:45
August 15	04:15	21:45

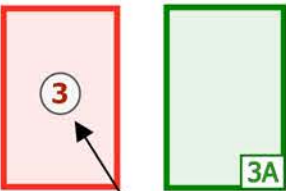
Ave Daily Temp. (Sachs Harbour) in °C		
Date	Avg High	Avg Low
June 15	5	-2
July 1	8	1
July 15	10	3
August 1	9	2
August 15	6	0

Freezing temps & snow can occur any day of the year. Strong winds from Arctic Ocean are common.

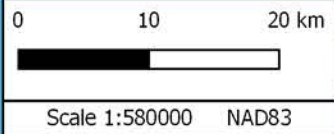
Credits: This map draws from a variety of sources, including Parks Canada publications. Please see the full list of credits and resources listed within this map. (Note: some information may be outdated or inaccurately represented in this guide.)

Index of Detailed Maps

Navigation map 1:50000 Hiking map 1:35000



Detailed map numbers



Victoria Island

Thomsen River Canoe Route Info

Aulavik National Park

- The entire canoe route lies within Aulavik National Park. Maps and information are available on the [Parks Canada website](#) and by emailing infoinuvik-inuvikinfo@pc.gc.ca. Their “Visitor’s Guide to the Thomsen River” is particularly information.

Ingress and egress

- Aklak Air flies Twin Otters to Banks Island from Inuvik: aklakair.ca.
- Landing sites for start of trip: either South Boundary landing site or Green Cabin landing site (see map). In certain conditions, South Boundary landing site may not be usable – check with Aklak.
- Parks Canada lists Muskox River as a landing site, but Aklak Air said in 2026 that they don’t land planes there.
- Parks Canada also lists Castel Bay as a possible landing site, but it’s unclear if it is viable – check with Aklak. (Note: the risk of polar bear encounters is higher at Castel Bay than at Back Channel.)

Pre-trip logistics

- Manitoulin Transport will truck gear to Inuvik (usually within a week from Ontario). If you plan on taking your gear as checked luggage, verify allowances for each airline (Air North flies small planes with limited luggage allowances to Inuvik). Also, build time in Inuvik to ensure that any lost luggage can catch up to you, particularly if your route includes inter-airline transfers. Trucking the gear reduces such risks.
- In Inuvik there is a North Mart (department store with some fresh food, small pharmacy, etc.) and a Home Hardware (order camping fuel in advance).
- Taxis from Inuvik airport to the town are quite expensive (about \$50/trip in 2026). We rented a pickup truck to move our people and gear from the airport to town and to run errands in Inuvik. There are several vehicle rental services in Inuvik. They are not cheap (~\$260/day + tax in 2026 for a Toyota Tundra) but with a large group we saved money versus taking taxis and had more flexibility. (Minivans were not available for rent.)

Duration and timing

- We spent 19 nights on the river – starting at the South Boundary Landing site and ending at the Back Channel landing site – including 9 days of hiking (no paddling). We tended to alternate paddling and hiking days. Some of our paddling days also included short hikes. It was a very leisurely pace. You can complete the trip in much less time, but you’re likely paying a lot to do this trip and it’s an extraordinary place, so try not to rush it.
- Our trip dates were July 4-23 (plus two nights camping on the tundra beside our planes waiting for Sachs Harbour clouds to clear). Parks Canada advises that the river may be iced over until mid June and by early August. Our water levels were good and flowers were blooming.

Delays and travel insurance

- Getting to and from Banks Island from Inuvik often involves delays due to weather. The challenge is not only the weather at your drop-off or pick-up spot, but also in Sachs Harbour, the only settled community on Banks Island, where the Twin Otters must refuel. (For example, our flight to Banks Island from Inuvik was delayed by one day, and our flight back was delayed by two days because of fog in Sachs Harbour. The guided trip preceding us spent an extra day at their pick-up spot because their plane got stuck in the mud and had to be dug out overnight).
- It’s consequently important to build extra days into your plans in case of delays, including buffer time before your scheduled flights home from Inuvik. (You could do a day trip to Tuktoyaktuk and/or Fort Simpson if you return to Inuvik on schedule and have extra time to spend before your commercial flight.) For the same reason, it’s also important to arrange travel cancellation and interruption insurance for every element of your trip, including commercial flights and hotels.

Conditions on the river

- There are no rapids on this river. However, the water is ice cold and in places the river widens, so capsizing could mean a long, cold swim. Also, in some places the river bottom is rocky, so paddlers should at least understand the risks of foot entrapment and have a group plan to deal with any capsizes.
- Because the river is shallow in many places, dragging or lining may be required, depending on water levels.
- The main challenges we encountered were strong winds and cold temperatures. Headwinds can be fierce. Paddlers should be competent paddling into strong winds and whitecaps.
- Be prepared for freezing temperatures + wind chill. Note also that the ground is cold due to permafrost. Take winter layers. Tents that can be fully closed to the wind (i.e., no permanently open mesh) will feel warmer.

Polar bears

- Although polar bears tend to remain near the coast and many of them migrate to the eastern Arctic during the summer (where it is cooler than in the western Arctic), the entire Thomsen River route is polar bear habitat.
- Unfortunately, Parks Canada does not permit firearms in Aulavik Park – a blanket policy for all national parks, regardless of local conditions – and prohibits bear bangers. This leaves air horns and bear spray as the principal bear deterrents. (The only way to take a firearm is to hire an indigenous escort from Sachs Harbour.)
- Parks Canada has a good polar bear safety brochure with additional helpful tips.

Isolation and evacuation

- One of the appeals of this route is its extreme isolation and the pristine wilderness of Banks Island, even compared to many other wild canoe routes in Canada's north.
- But be aware that help can be very far away in case of emergency. Evacuations may take one to several days to complete after calling for help, depending on weather and local conditions. Typically, this would require Parks Canada (the local authority) chartering a plane or helicopter in Inuvik – if one is available.
- Evacuation and medical insurance are essential since you will likely have to pay for the charter. Garmin offers SAR insurance for a reasonable price. You can purchase this insurance and be covered if you are traveling with someone with an InReach and that device is used to call for help. SAR insurance is also available from www.globalrescue.com. But note: SAR insurance typically only covers costs of evacuation to the nearest medical facility. If you require more advanced medical care, you may need a follow-on medivac flight to a larger hospital, such as in Edmonton. This follow-on medivac is generally not covered by SAR insurance, so you may need other travel medical insurance plans. Check into your coverage for all contingencies before you leave. The cost of even a simple evacuation would be mind-bogglingly huge.

No trace

- Limiting one's impact is important everywhere, but the Thomsen River corridor is a pristine environment that sees very few human visitors and there are archeological sites everywhere. Please read and follow Parks Canada instructions regarding no-trace camping and historical artifacts. It is an incredible privilege to visit this wilderness and to walk through these historical and religious sites – please leave them untouched.
- Fires are not permitted in Aulavik N.P. and there is virtually no wood to burn in any event.

Hiking

- Hiking opportunities are endless and glorious.
- It is relatively easy to get turned around on the tundra, so taking navigational aids and basic survival supplies on hikes makes good sense.

Guided trips

- Blackfeather: <https://blackfeather.com/our-trips/thomsen-river/>
- Arctic Wild: <https://arcticwild.com/trip/canoe/thomsen-river-canoe/>

Weather stations

- There are three weather stations on Banks Island:
 - Sachs Harbour – <https://weather.gc.ca/en/location/index.html?coords=71.99,-125.25>
 - Green Cabin – <https://weather.gc.ca/en/location/index.html?coords=73.701,-119.920>
 - Polar Bear Cabin – <https://weather.gc.ca/en/location/index.html?coords=73.701,-119.920>(The last two sites are accessible at the same link – select the desired site from drop-down menu.)

Contacts

- Parks Canada Western Arctic Field Unit Inuvik – (867) 777-8800
- RCMP Inuvik detachment – (867) 777-1111
- Aklak Air Inuvik – (867) 777-3555
- Home Hardware Inuvik – (867) 777-2566

About me

- Email: roland.paris@gmail.com. You can access this map and others I've made [here](#).
- I also have a sideline as a search and rescue volunteer – hence all the safety stuff above. If you're an outdoorsperson (and if you're reading this, you probably are!), please consider volunteering for your regional search and rescue organization (list of groups: <https://sarvac.ca>). You'd be surprised how busy we are, and how much help you could contribute.

Map Details

Kilometre markings

The map displays two kilometre marking systems:

- The first (in red) are markers every 5 km from the South Boundary landing site to Back Channel.
- The second (in gray) corresponds to markers on the 2026 version of the Parks Canada map. It starts at the park’s southern boundary cairn (not South Boundary landing site) and ends at the mouth of the river.

To download a GPX file of the red kilometre markings, visit: <https://www.rolandparis.com/canoeing>.

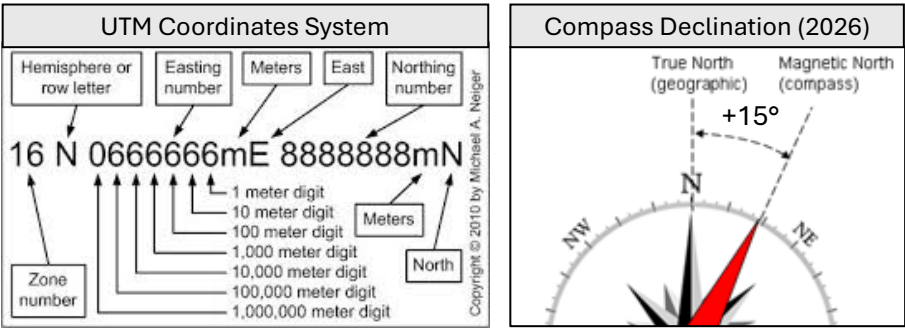
Map scale

All paddling maps are 1:50,000. Hiking maps are 1:35,000. The contour interval is 10 metres.

Other navigational markings

Most of the map pages show both UTM and Lat-Long coordinates on the frame. Grid squares are based on UTM (each square = 1 km²).

The north arrow indicates true north, not magnetic north. Magnetic declination (for a manual compass) was +15.9° at South Boundary landing site and +15.1° at Back Channel.



Coordinates of selected locations on map

The following coordinates were verified by direct observation in 2026. (“Camp” refers to viable camping locations at the time of our trip. Note: Conditions change, and there are no established campsites on the Thomsen River.)

Location	Latitude	Longitude	Location	Latitude	Longitude
S. Boundary landing site	73.015771	-119.636561	Shoran L. south end	73.509212	-120.315028
Thaw Slump bend camp	73.090704	-119.508695	Baker Cr. camp (river left)	73.63197	-120.08231
Nasogaluak site	73.1508403	-119.593968	Baker Cr. camp (river right)	73.63317	-120.07448
Painted Sands	73.1854670	-119.562146	Able Cr. sheltered camp	73.724175	-119.910148
Green Cabin	73.23070	-119.54066	Muskox River camp	73.83175	-119.87131
Trout Beach camp	73.425014	-119.718170	Head Hill indigenous site	73.837276	-119.990984
Shoran L. trailhead camp	73.540803	-120.083926	Sheltered camp (approx.)	73.88508	-119.748891
Shoran L. north end	73.542842	-120.305368	Back Chan. landing site	73.990081	-119.729108

Some of the coordinates listed above differ from those on the 2026 version of Parks Canada's *Thomsen River* map. Based on our field observations, several of those Parks Canada map coordinates were off by several hundred metres (e.g., Head Hill archeological site, Abel Creek campsite, Back Channel landing site).

Credits

Most information sources are indicated on the map sheets. See also the list of references.

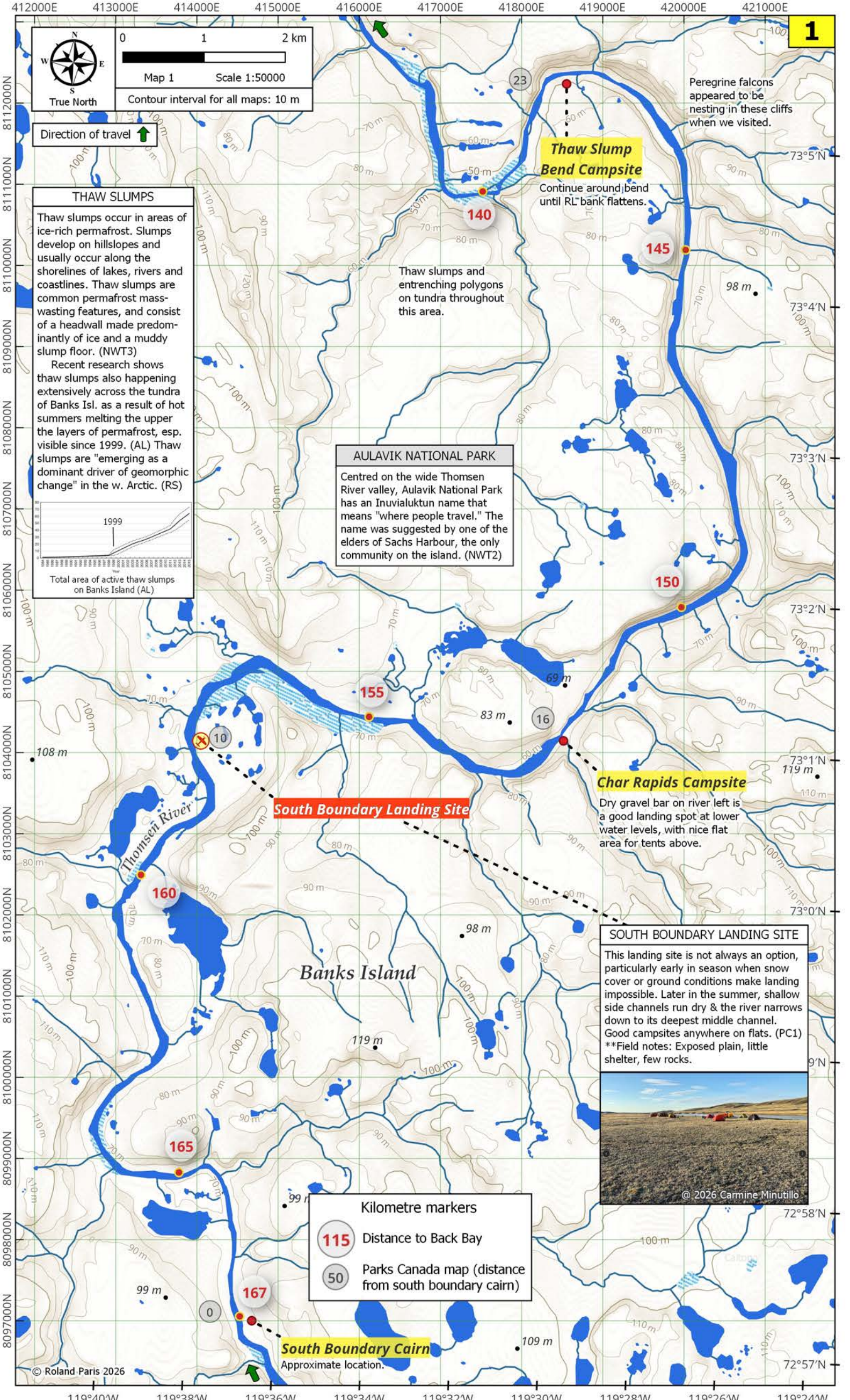
A warm thank you to my tripmates: Dawne and David Robinson, Rod Rogers, Robert James, Damir Kusec, Eugene Jankowski, Carmine Minutillo, Beth and Bruce Bellaire, Michael Hatton, and Suzanne Rochford. Thanks also to the helpful staff at the Western Arctic Field Unit of Parks Canada and at Aklak Air, and to Antoni Lewkowicz, Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Ottawa, for sharing his deep knowledge of Banks Island.

This map was created with QGIS version 3.42.2-Münster (open-source software), <https://qgis.org>. Map layers: CanVec Series, Natural Resources Canada, <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/8ba2aa2a-7bb9-4448-b4d7-f164409fe056> (Government of Canada, open source). Projection: EPSG:26911-NAD83.

WARNING

This map likely contains many errors; use it at your own risk. Rely on official and current sources of information, including Parks Canada resources on Aulavik National Park and its staff.

Located approximately 800 km north of the Arctic Circle, the Thomsen River is an extremely isolated canoe route requiring advanced skills in unsupported wilderness travel in potentially harsh conditions. Rescue services are limited and may be delayed for days. Although polar bears are uncommon inland in summer, be aware that the entire river traverses their habitat. If in doubt, consider a guided expedition.



N

E

S

W

True North

012 km

Map 1

Scale 1:50000

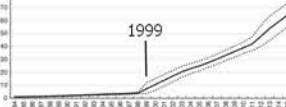
Contour interval for all maps: 10 m

Direction of travel 

THAW SLUMPS

Thaw slumps occur in areas of ice-rich permafrost. Slumps develop on hillslopes and usually occur along the shorelines of lakes, rivers and coastlines. Thaw slumps are common permafrost mass-wasting features, and consist of a headwall made predominantly of ice and a muddy slump floor. (NWT3)

Recent research shows thaw slumps also happening extensively across the tundra of Banks Isl. as a result of hot summers melting the upper layers of permafrost, esp. visible since 1999. (AL) Thaw slumps are "emerging as a dominant driver of geomorphic change" in the w. Arctic. (RS)



Total area of active thaw slumps on Banks Island (AL)

AULAVIK NATIONAL PARK

Centred on the wide Thomsen River valley, Aulavik National Park has an Inuvialuktun name that means "where people travel." The name was suggested by one of the elders of Sachs Harbour, the only community on the island. (NWT2)

Thaw Slump Bend Campsite

Continue around bend until RL bank flattens.

Peregrine falcons appeared to be nesting in these cliffs when we visited.

Char Rapids Campsite

Dry gravel bar on river left is a good landing spot at lower water levels, with nice flat area for tents above.

South Boundary Landing Site

SOUTH BOUNDARY LANDING SITE

This landing site is not always an option, particularly early in season when snow cover or ground conditions make landing impossible. Later in the summer, shallow side channels run dry & the river narrows down to its deepest middle channel. Good campsites anywhere on flats. (PC1)

****Field notes:** Exposed plain, little shelter, few rocks.

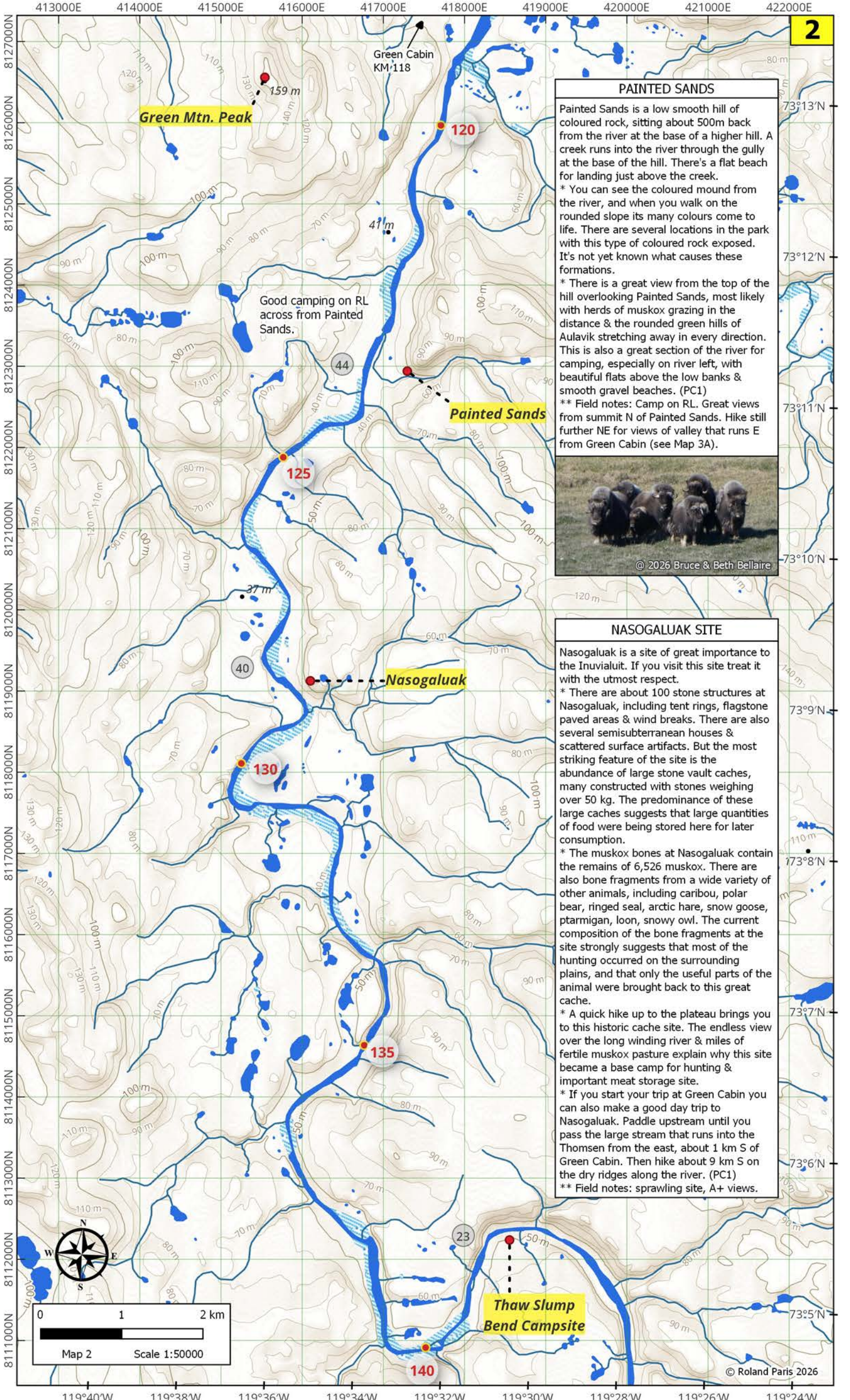


© 2026 Carmine Minutillo

- Kilometre markers**
- 115** Distance to Back Bay
 - 50** Parks Canada map (distance from south boundary cairn)

South Boundary Cairn

Approximate location.



Green Mtn. Peak

Green Cabin
KM 118

Good camping on RL
across from Painted
Sands.

Painted Sands

Nasogaluak

**Thaw Slump
Bend Campsite**

PAINTED SANDS

Painted Sands is a low smooth hill of coloured rock, sitting about 500m back from the river at the base of a higher hill. A creek runs into the river through the gully at the base of the hill. There's a flat beach for landing just above the creek.

* You can see the coloured mound from the river, and when you walk on the rounded slope its many colours come to life. There are several locations in the park with this type of coloured rock exposed. It's not yet known what causes these formations.

* There is a great view from the top of the hill overlooking Painted Sands, most likely with herds of muskox grazing in the distance & the rounded green hills of Aulavik stretching away in every direction. This is also a great section of the river for camping, especially on river left, with beautiful flats above the low banks & smooth gravel beaches. (PC1)

** Field notes: Camp on RL. Great views from summit N of Painted Sands. Hike still further NE for views of valley that runs E from Green Cabin (see Map 3A).



© 2026 Bruce & Beth Bellaire

NASOGALUAK SITE

Nasogaluak is a site of great importance to the Inuvialuit. If you visit this site treat it with the utmost respect.

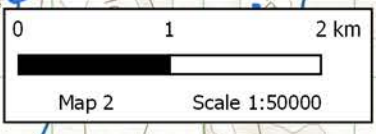
* There are about 100 stone structures at Nasogaluak, including tent rings, flagstone paved areas & wind breaks. There are also several semisubterranean houses & scattered surface artifacts. But the most striking feature of the site is the abundance of large stone vault caches, many constructed with stones weighing over 50 kg. The predominance of these large caches suggests that large quantities of food were being stored here for later consumption.

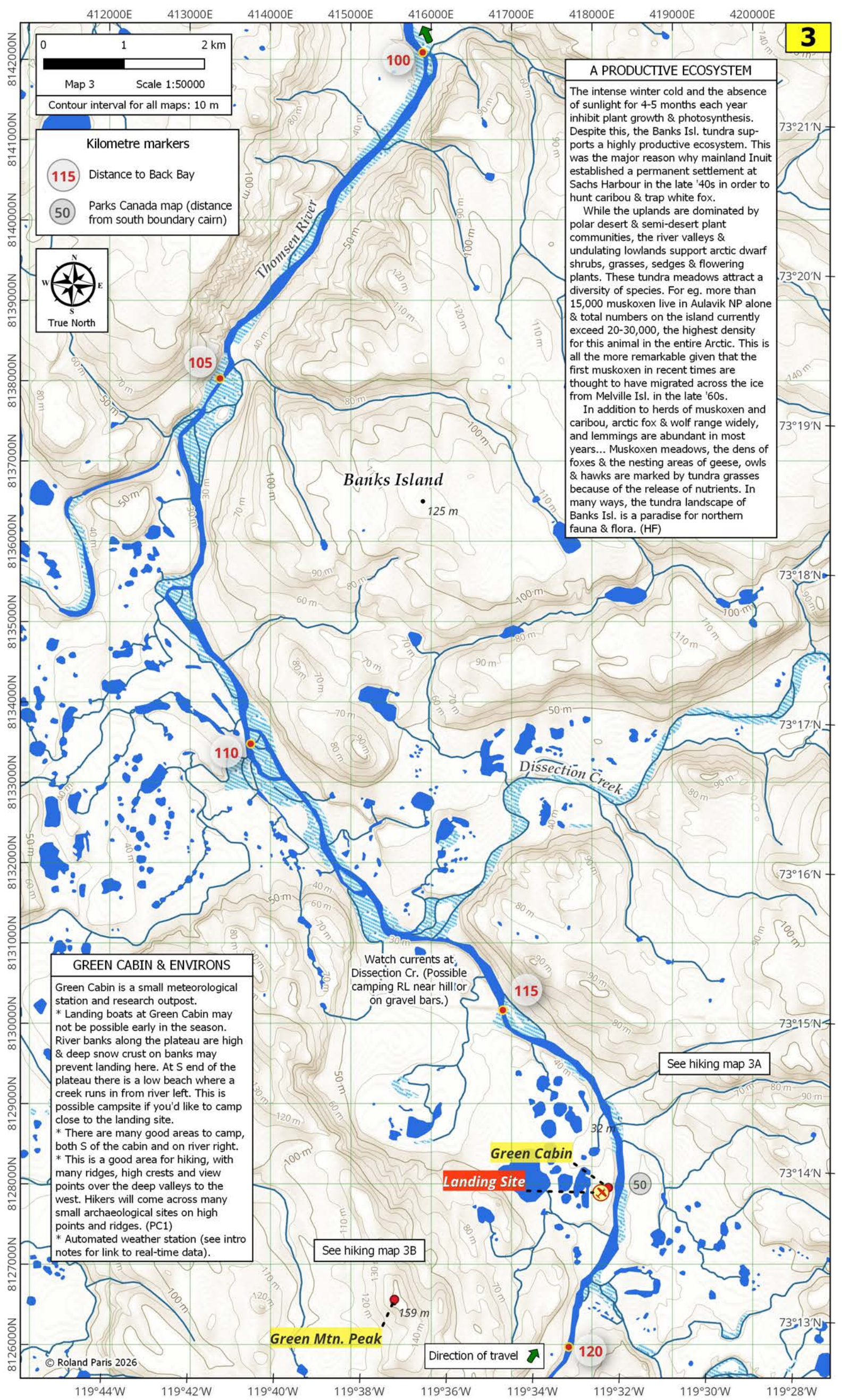
* The muskox bones at Nasogaluak contain the remains of 6,526 muskox. There are also bone fragments from a wide variety of other animals, including caribou, polar bear, ringed seal, arctic hare, snow goose, ptarmigan, loon, snowy owl. The current composition of the bone fragments at the site strongly suggests that most of the hunting occurred on the surrounding plains, and that only the useful parts of the animal were brought back to this great cache.

* A quick hike up to the plateau brings you to this historic cache site. The endless view over the long winding river & miles of fertile muskox pasture explain why this site became a base camp for hunting & important meat storage site.

* If you start your trip at Green Cabin you can also make a good day trip to Nasogaluak. Paddle upstream until you pass the large stream that runs into the Thomsen from the east, about 1 km S of Green Cabin. Then hike about 9 km S on the dry ridges along the river. (PC1)

** Field notes: sprawling site, A+ views.





0 1 2 km
Map 3 Scale 1:50000
Contour interval for all maps: 10 m

Kilometre markers
115 Distance to Back Bay
50 Parks Canada map (distance from south boundary cairn)



A PRODUCTIVE ECOSYSTEM
The intense winter cold and the absence of sunlight for 4-5 months each year inhibit plant growth & photosynthesis. Despite this, the Banks Isl. tundra supports a highly productive ecosystem. This was the major reason why mainland Inuit established a permanent settlement at Sachs Harbour in the late '40s in order to hunt caribou & trap white fox.
While the uplands are dominated by polar desert & semi-desert plant communities, the river valleys & undulating lowlands support arctic dwarf shrubs, grasses, sedges & flowering plants. These tundra meadows attract a diversity of species. For eg. more than 15,000 muskoxen live in Aulavik NP alone & total numbers on the island currently exceed 20-30,000, the highest density for this animal in the entire Arctic. This is all the more remarkable given that the first muskoxen in recent times are thought to have migrated across the ice from Melville Isl. in the late '60s.
In addition to herds of muskoxen and caribou, arctic fox & wolf range widely, and lemmings are abundant in most years... Muskoxen meadows, the dens of foxes & the nesting areas of geese, owls & hawks are marked by tundra grasses because of the release of nutrients. In many ways, the tundra landscape of Banks Isl. is a paradise for northern fauna & flora. (HF)

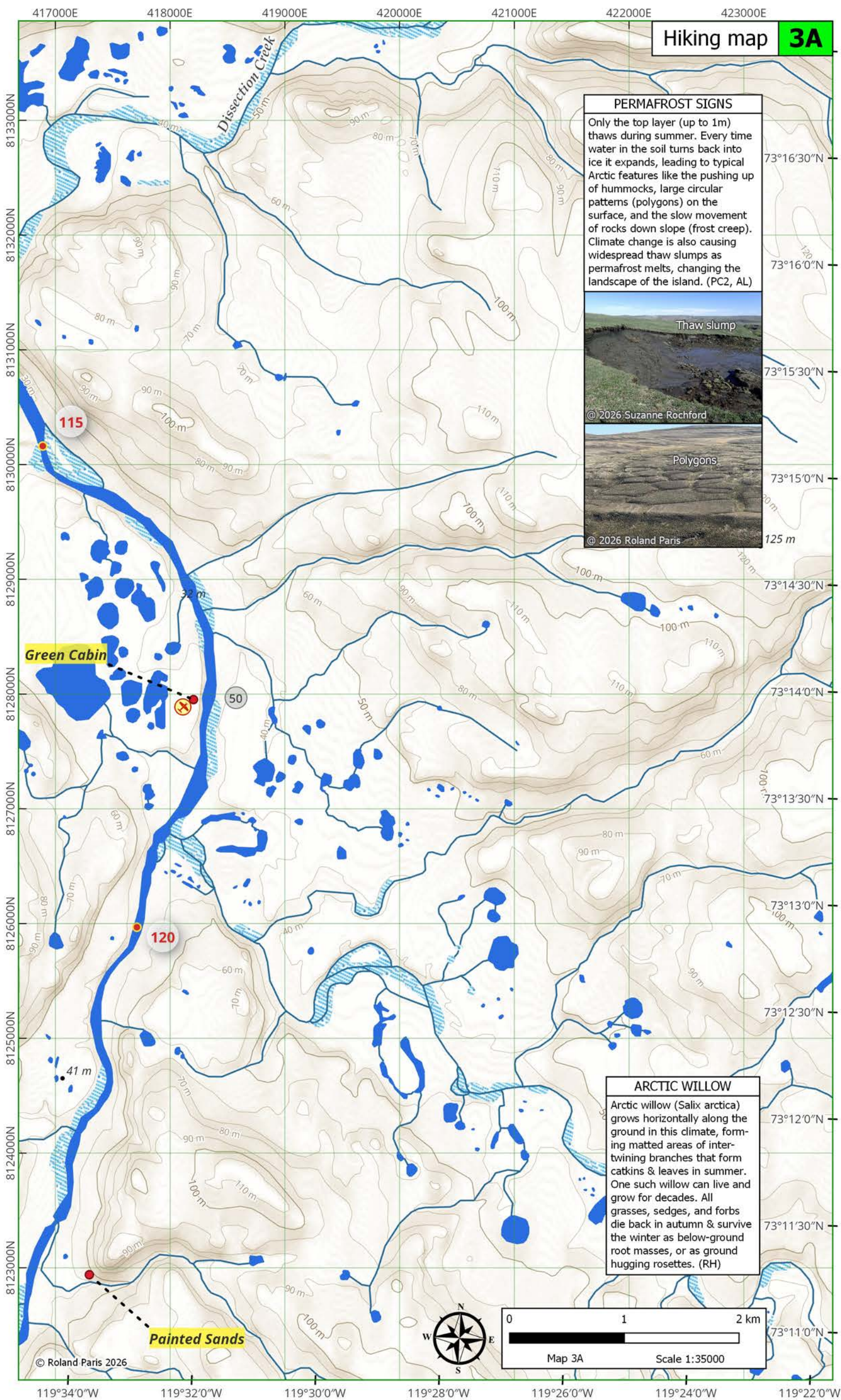
GREEN CABIN & ENVIRONS
Green Cabin is a small meteorological station and research outpost.
* Landing boats at Green Cabin may not be possible early in the season. River banks along the plateau are high & deep snow crust on banks may prevent landing here. At S end of the plateau there is a low beach where a creek runs in from river left. This is possible campsite if you'd like to camp close to the landing site.
* There are many good areas to camp, both S of the cabin and on river right.
* This is a good area for hiking, with many ridges, high crests and view points over the deep valleys to the west. Hikers will come across many small archaeological sites on high points and ridges. (PC1)
* Automated weather station (see intro notes for link to real-time data).

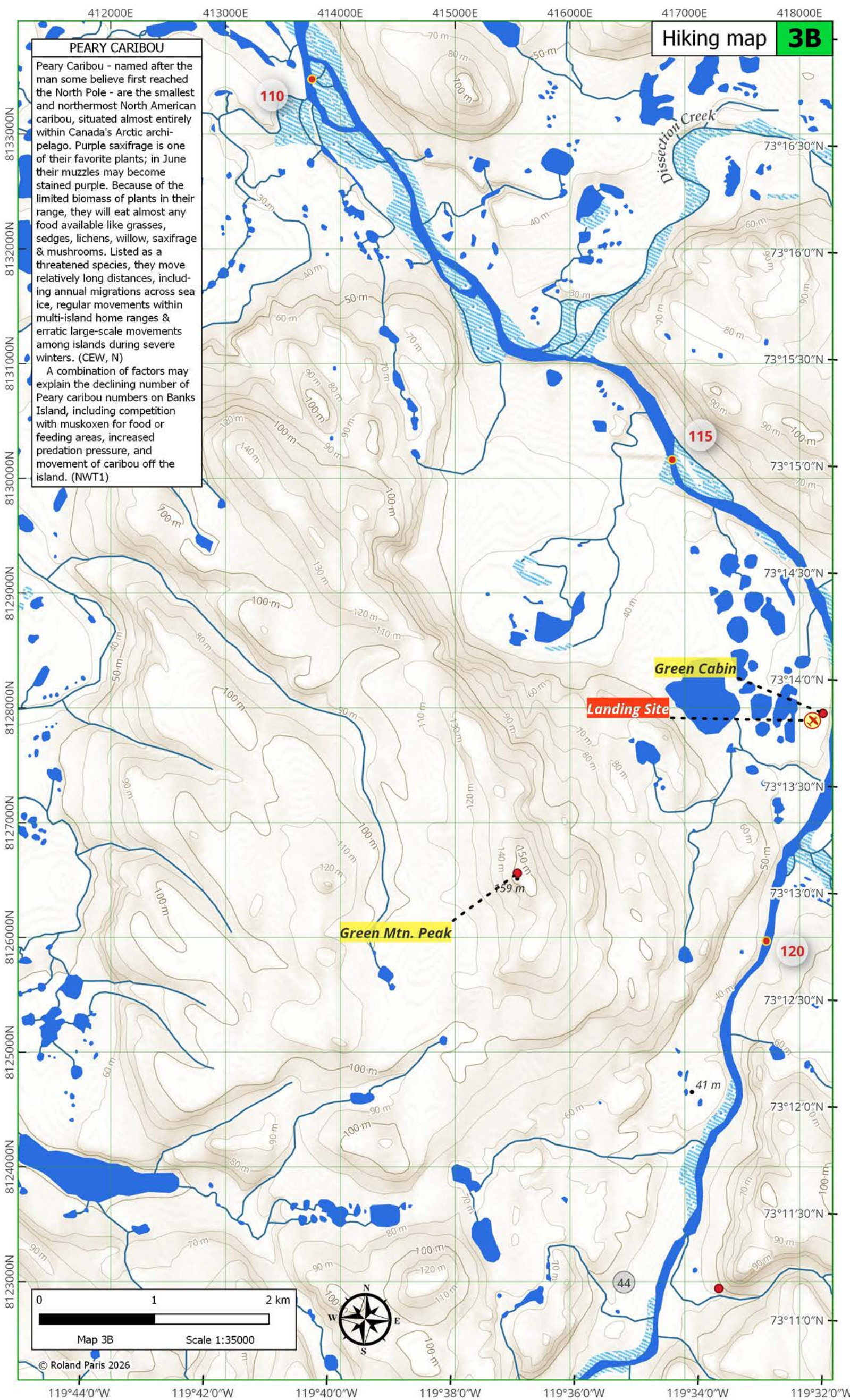
Watch currents at Dissection Cr. (Possible camping RL near hill/or on gravel bars.)

See hiking map 3A

See hiking map 3B

Direction of travel





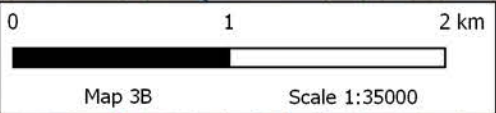
PEARY CARIBOU

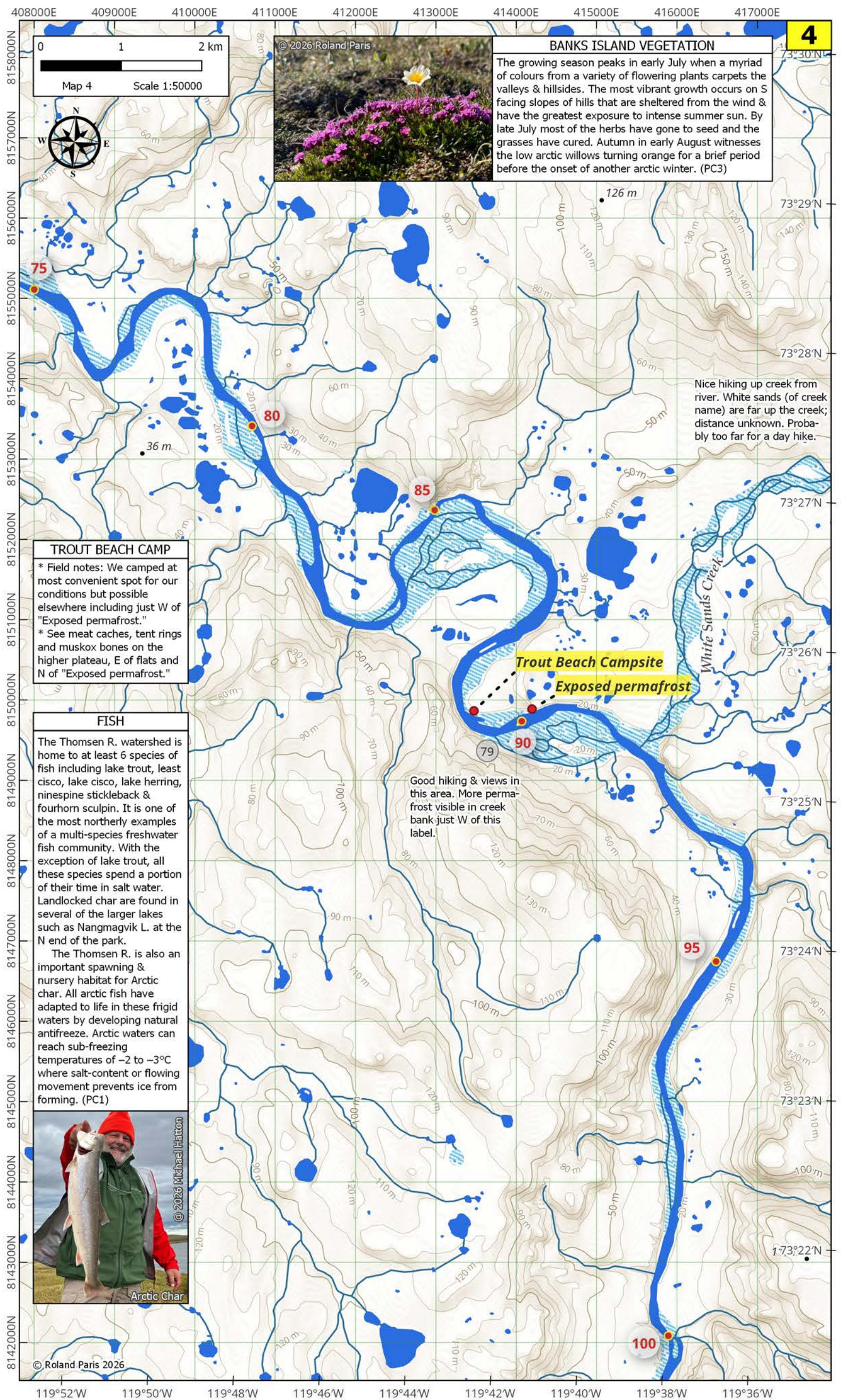
Peary Caribou - named after the man some believe first reached the North Pole - are the smallest and northernmost North American caribou, situated almost entirely within Canada's Arctic archipelago. Purple saxifrage is one of their favorite plants; in June their muzzles may become stained purple. Because of the limited biomass of plants in their range, they will eat almost any food available like grasses, sedges, lichens, willow, saxifrage & mushrooms. Listed as a threatened species, they move relatively long distances, including annual migrations across sea ice, regular movements within multi-island home ranges & erratic large-scale movements among islands during severe winters. (CEW, N)

A combination of factors may explain the declining number of Peary caribou numbers on Banks Island, including competition with muskoxen for food or feeding areas, increased predation pressure, and movement of caribou off the island. (NWT1)

Hiking map

3B





0 1 2 km
Map 4 Scale 1:50000



© 2026 Roland Paris

BANKS ISLAND VEGETATION

The growing season peaks in early July when a myriad of colours from a variety of flowering plants carpets the valleys & hillsides. The most vibrant growth occurs on S facing slopes of hills that are sheltered from the wind & have the greatest exposure to intense summer sun. By late July most of the herbs have gone to seed and the grasses have cured. Autumn in early August witnesses the low arctic willows turning orange for a brief period before the onset of another arctic winter. (PC3)

Nice hiking up creek from river. White sands (of creek name) are far up the creek; distance unknown. Probably too far for a day hike.

TROUT BEACH CAMP

* Field notes: We camped at most convenient spot for our conditions but possible elsewhere including just W of "Exposed permafrost."
* See meat caches, tent rings and muskox bones on the higher plateau, E of flats and N of "Exposed permafrost."

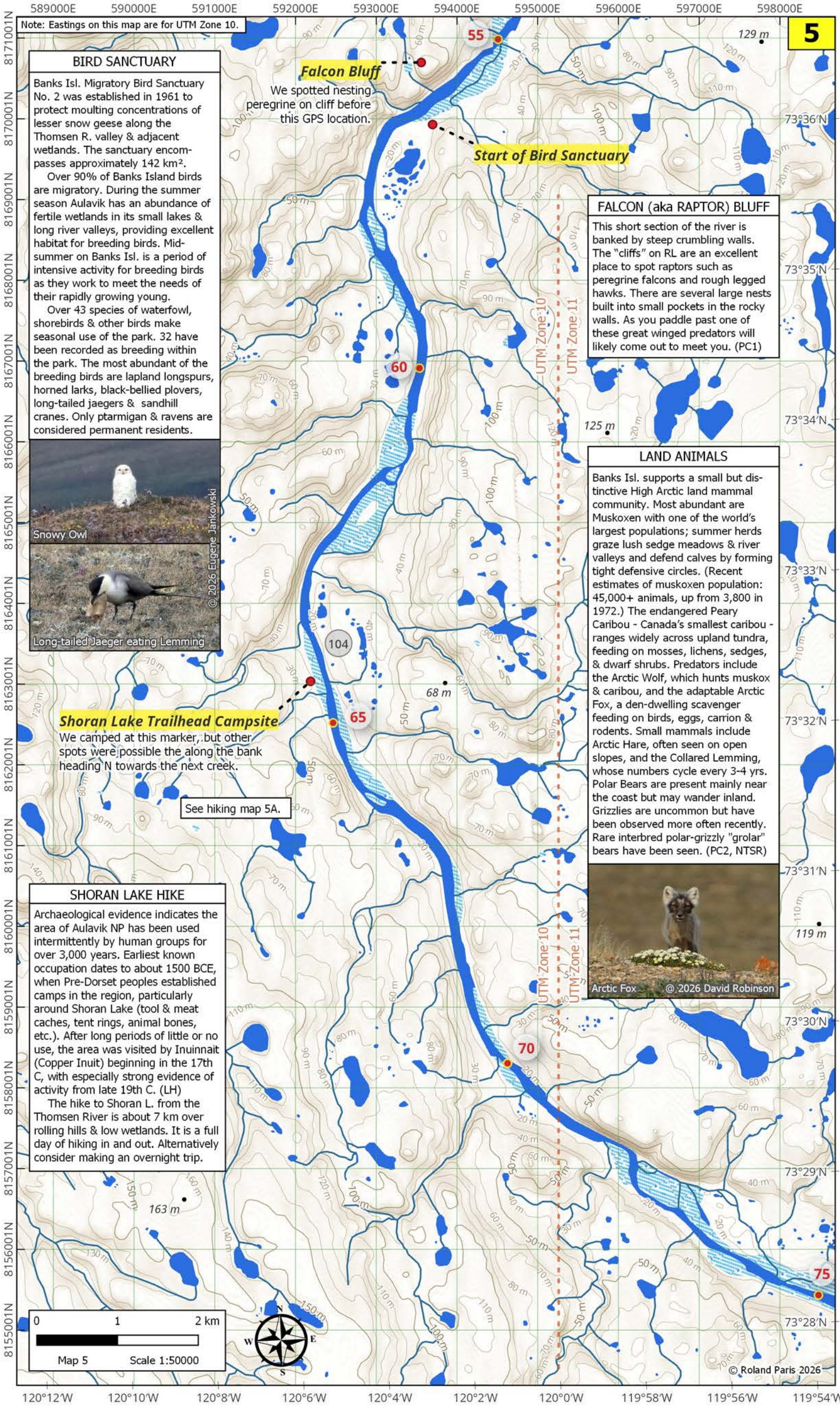
FISH

The Thomsen R. watershed is home to at least 6 species of fish including lake trout, least cisco, lake cisco, lake herring, ninespine stickleback & fourhorn sculpin. It is one of the most northerly examples of a multi-species freshwater fish community. With the exception of lake trout, all these species spend a portion of their time in salt water. Landlocked char are found in several of the larger lakes such as Nangmagvik L. at the N end of the park.
The Thomsen R. is also an important spawning & nursery habitat for Arctic char. All arctic fish have adapted to life in these frigid waters by developing natural antifreeze. Arctic waters can reach sub-freezing temperatures of -2 to -3°C where salt-content or flowing movement prevents ice from forming. (PC1)



Arctic Char

© 2026 Michael Hutton



Note: Eastings on this map are for UTM Zone 10.

5

BIRD SANCTUARY

Banks Isl. Migratory Bird Sanctuary No. 2 was established in 1961 to protect moulting concentrations of lesser snow geese along the Thomsen R. valley & adjacent wetlands. The sanctuary encompasses approximately 142 km².

Over 90% of Banks Island birds are migratory. During the summer season Aulavik has an abundance of fertile wetlands in its small lakes & long river valleys, providing excellent habitat for breeding birds. Mid-summer on Banks Isl. is a period of intensive activity for breeding birds as they work to meet the needs of their rapidly growing young.

Over 43 species of waterfowl, shorebirds & other birds make seasonal use of the park. 32 have been recorded as breeding within the park. The most abundant of the breeding birds are lapland longspurs, horned larks, black-bellied plovers, long-tailed jaegers & sandhill cranes. Only ptarmigan & ravens are considered permanent residents.



Snowy Owl

Long-tailed Jaeger eating Lemming

© 2026 Eugene Jankowski

Falcon Bluff

We spotted nesting peregrine on cliff before this GPS location.

Start of Bird Sanctuary

FALCON (aka RAPTOR) BLUFF

This short section of the river is banked by steep crumbling walls. The "cliffs" on RL are an excellent place to spot raptors such as peregrine falcons and rough legged hawks. There are several large nests built into small pockets in the rocky walls. As you paddle past one of these great winged predators will likely come out to meet you. (PC1)

LAND ANIMALS

Banks Isl. supports a small but distinctive High Arctic land mammal community. Most abundant are Muskoxen with one of the world's largest populations; summer herds graze lush sedge meadows & river valleys and defend calves by forming tight defensive circles. (Recent estimates of muskoxen population: 45,000+ animals, up from 3,800 in 1972.) The endangered Peary Caribou - Canada's smallest caribou - ranges widely across upland tundra, feeding on mosses, lichens, sedges, & dwarf shrubs. Predators include the Arctic Wolf, which hunts muskox & caribou, and the adaptable Arctic Fox, a den-dwelling scavenger feeding on birds, eggs, carrion & rodents. Small mammals include Arctic Hare, often seen on open slopes, and the Collared Lemming, whose numbers cycle every 3-4 yrs. Polar Bears are present mainly near the coast but may wander inland. Grizzlies are uncommon but have been observed more often recently. Rare interbred polar-grizzly "grolar" bears have been seen. (PC2, NTSR)



Arctic Fox © 2026 David Robinson

Shoran Lake Trailhead Campsite

We camped at this marker, but other spots were possible along the bank heading N towards the next creek.

See hiking map 5A.

SHORAN LAKE HIKE

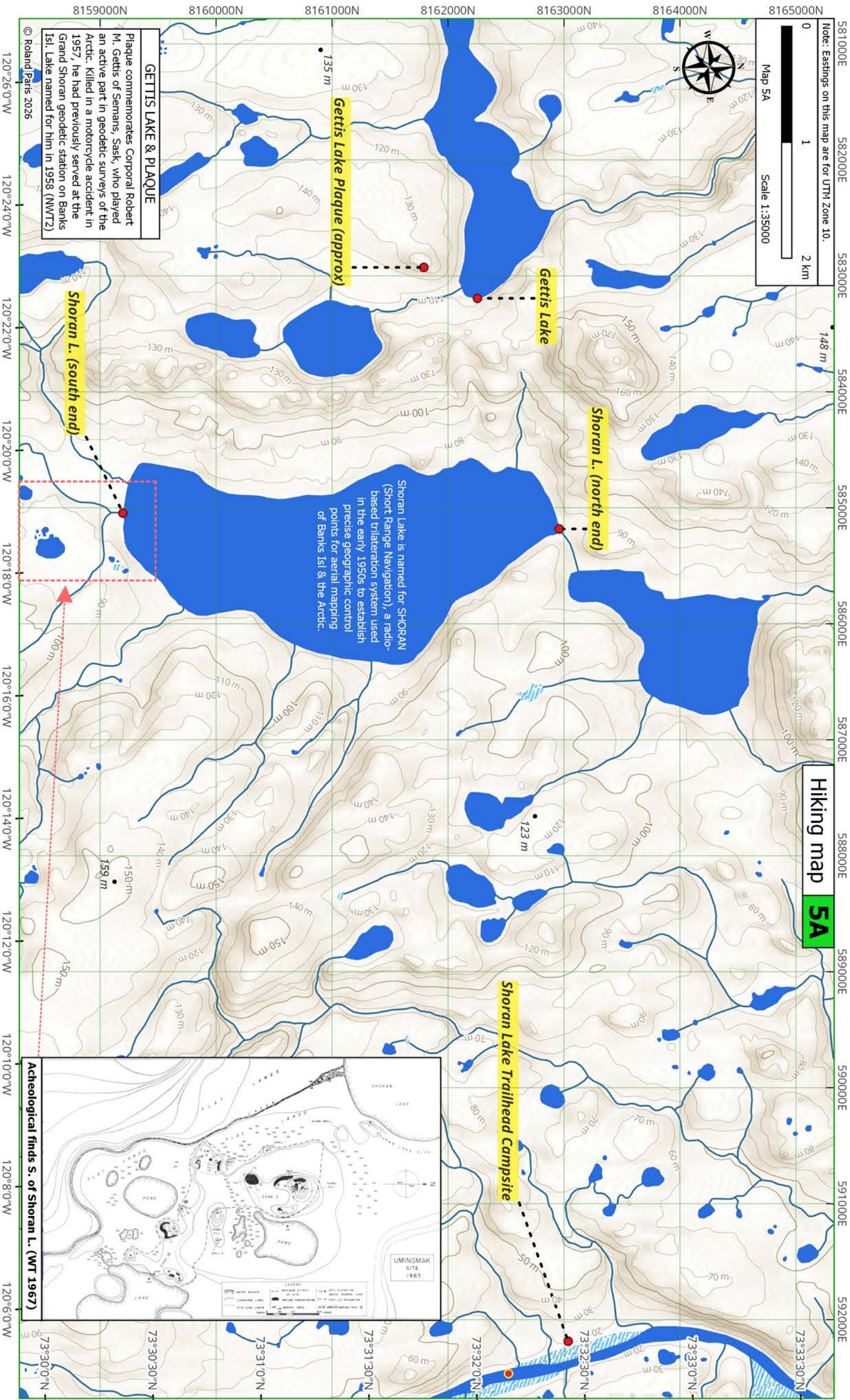
Archaeological evidence indicates the area of Aulavik NP has been used intermittently by human groups for over 3,000 years. Earliest known occupation dates to about 1500 BCE, when Pre-Dorset peoples established camps in the region, particularly around Shoran Lake (tool & meat caches, tent rings, animal bones, etc.). After long periods of little or no use, the area was visited by Inuinait (Copper Inuit) beginning in the 17th C, with especially strong evidence of activity from late 19th C. (LH)

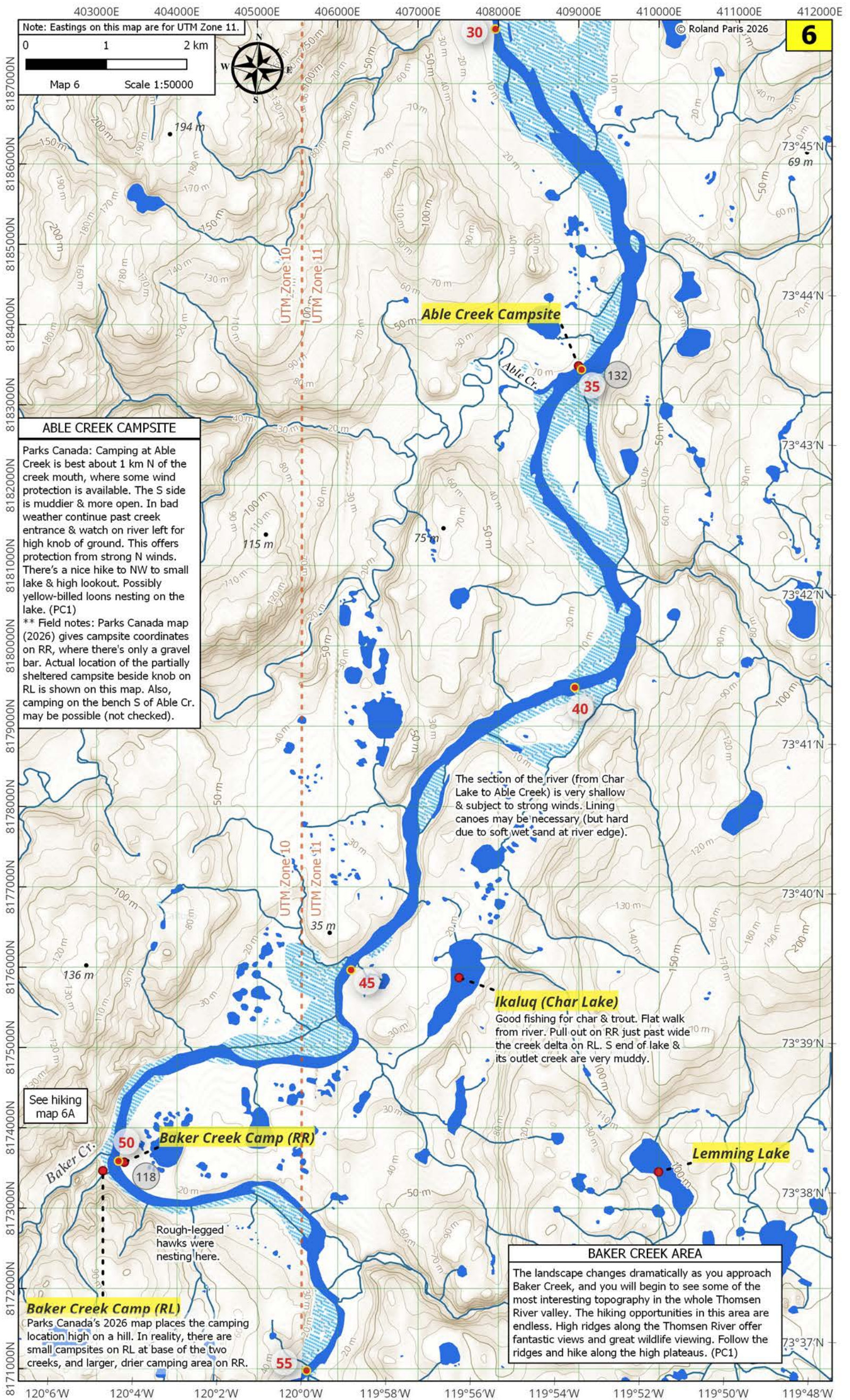
The hike to Shoran L. from the Thomsen River is about 7 km over rolling hills & low wetlands. It is a full day of hiking in and out. Alternatively consider making an overnight trip.

0 1 2 km
Map 5 Scale 1:50000



© Roland Paris 2026





Note: Eastings on this map are for UTM Zone 11.

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6

0 1 2 km
Map 6 Scale 1:50000



ABLE CREEK CAMPSITE

Parks Canada: Camping at Able Creek is best about 1 km N of the creek mouth, where some wind protection is available. The S side is muddier & more open. In bad weather continue past creek entrance & watch on river left for high knob of ground. This offers protection from strong N winds. There's a nice hike to NW to small lake & high lookout. Possibly yellow-billed loons nesting on the lake. (PC1)
** Field notes: Parks Canada map (2026) gives campsite coordinates on RR, where there's only a gravel bar. Actual location of the partially sheltered campsite beside knob on RL is shown on this map. Also, camping on the bench S of Able Cr. may be possible (not checked).

The section of the river (from Char Lake to Able Creek) is very shallow & subject to strong winds. Lining canoes may be necessary (but hard due to soft wet sand at river edge).

Ikaluq (Char Lake)

Good fishing for char & trout. Flat walk from river. Pull out on RR just past wide the creek delta on RL. S end of lake & its outlet creek are very muddy.

See hiking map 6A

Baker Creek Camp (RR)

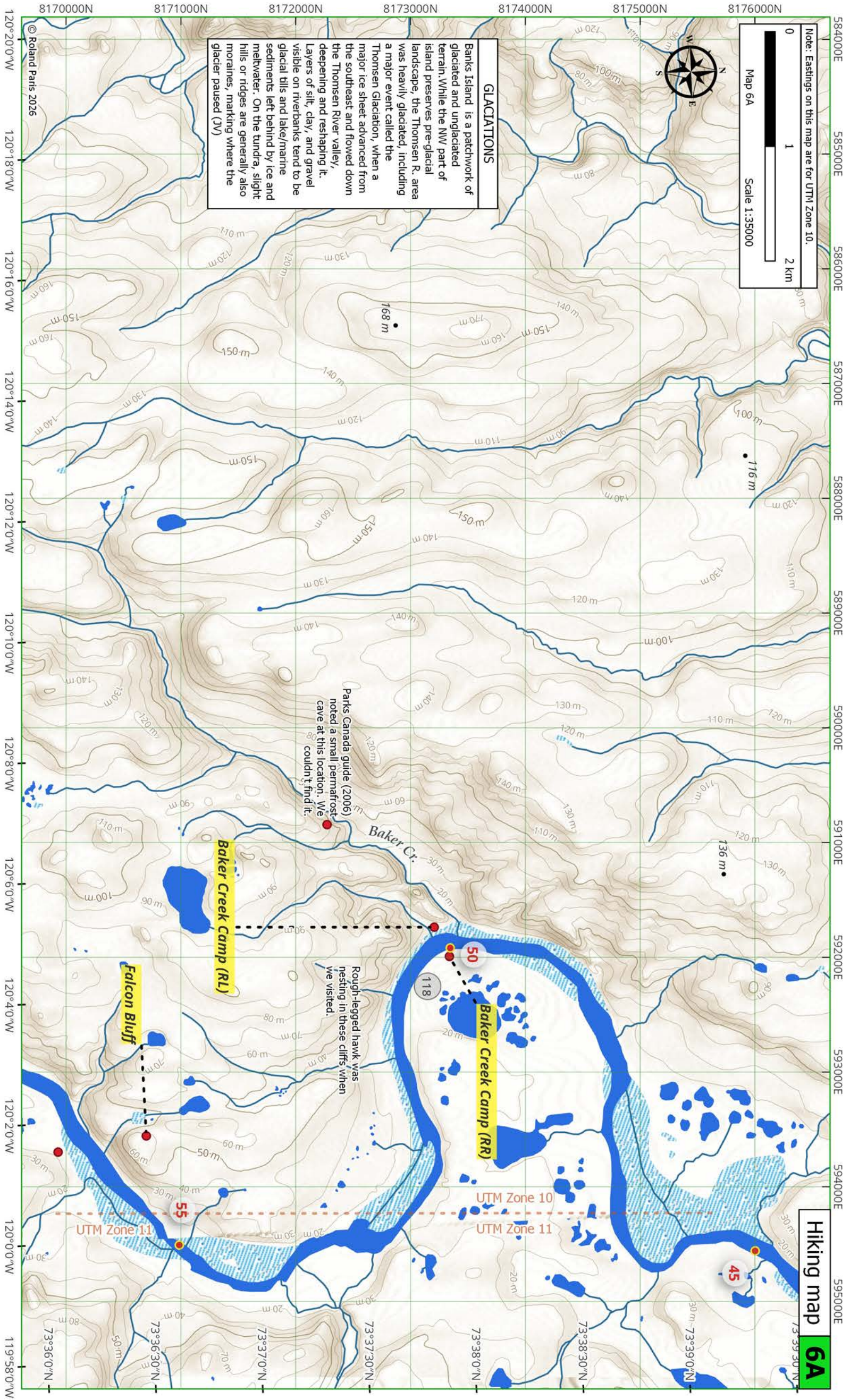
Rough-legged hawks were nesting here.

Baker Creek Camp (RL)

Parks Canada's 2026 map places the camping location high on a hill. In reality, there are small campsites on RL at base of the two creeks, and larger, drier camping area on RR.

BAKER CREEK AREA

The landscape changes dramatically as you approach Baker Creek, and you will begin to see some of the most interesting topography in the whole Thomsen River valley. The hiking opportunities in this area are endless. High ridges along the Thomsen River offer fantastic views and great wildlife viewing. Follow the ridges and hike along the high plateaus. (PC1)



Note: Eastings on this map are for UTM Zone 10.

0 1 2 km

Map 6A Scale 1:35000



GLACIATIONS

Banks Island is a patchwork of glaciated and unglaciated terrain. While the NW part of island preserves pre-glacial landscape, the Thomsen R. area was heavily glaciated, including a major event called the Thomsen Glaciation, when a major ice sheet advanced from the southeast and flowed down the Thomsen River valley, deepening and reshaping it. Layers of silt, clay, and gravel visible on riverbanks tend to be glacial tills and lake/marine sediments left behind by ice and meltwater. On the tundra, slight hills or ridges are generally also moraines, marking where the glacier paused (V)

Hiking map **6A**

UTM Zone 10

UTM Zone 11

UTM Zone 11

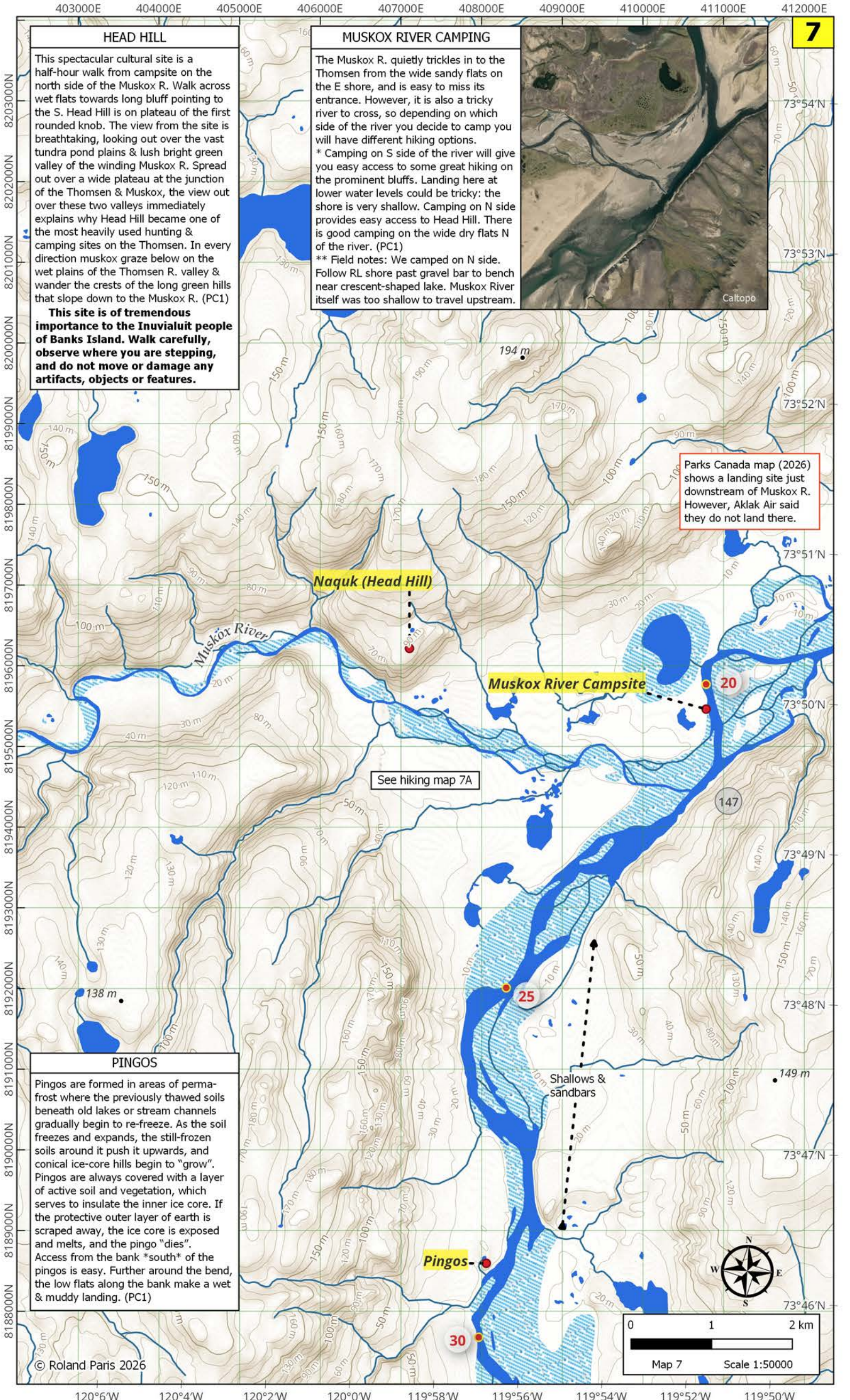
Baker Creek Camp (RR)

Baker Creek Camp (RL)

Falcon Bluff

Parks Canada guide (2006) noted a small permafrost cave at this location. We couldn't find it.

Rough-legged hawk was nesting in these cliffs when we visited.



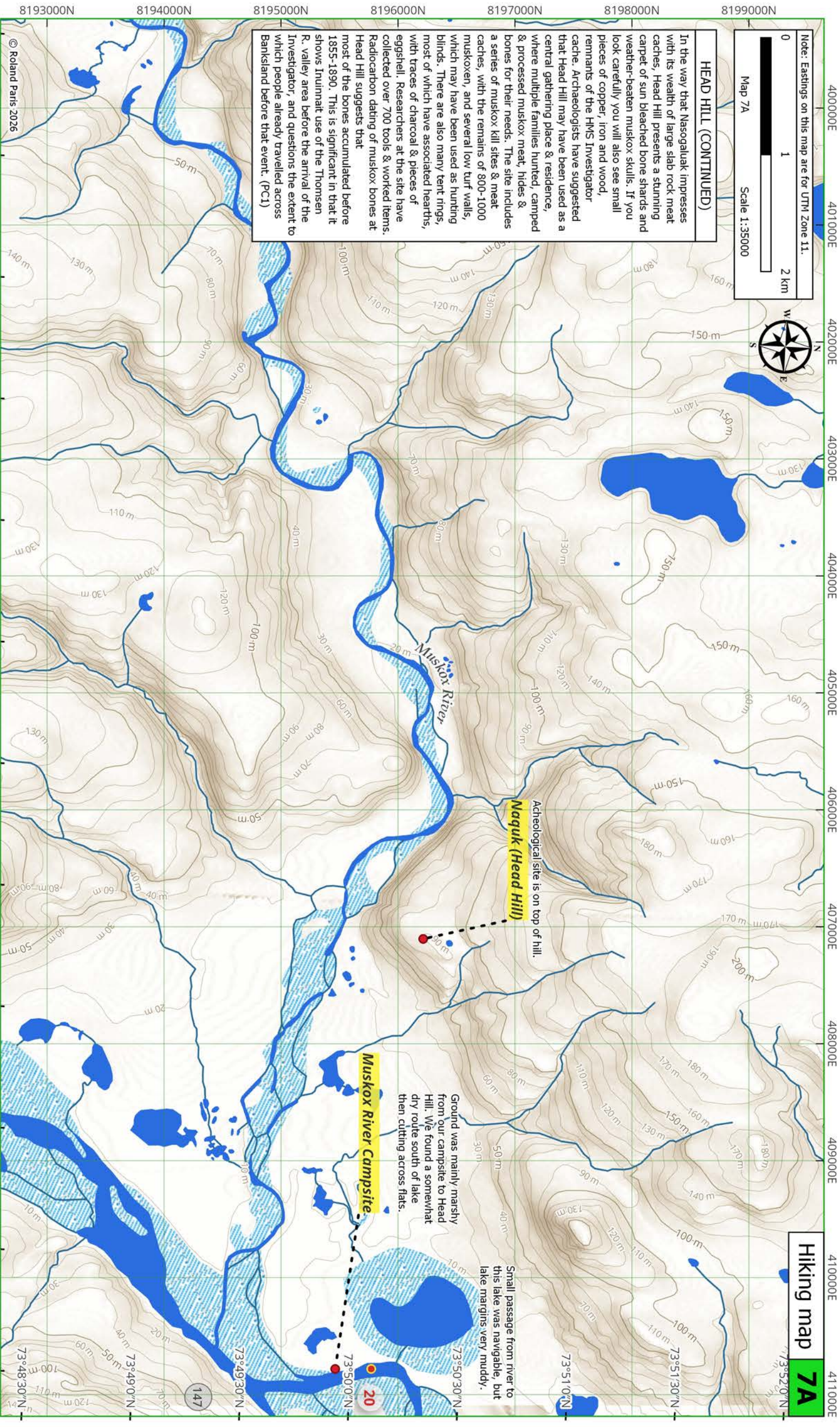
HEAD HILL (CONTINUED)

In the way that Nasogaluak impresses with its wealth of large slab rock meat caches, Head Hill presents a stunning carpet of sun bleached bone shards and weather-beaten muskox skulls. If you look carefully you will also see small pieces of copper, iron and wood, remnants of the HMS Investigator cache. Archaeologists have suggested that Head Hill may have been used as a central gathering place & residence, where multiple families hunted, camped & processed muskox meat, hides & bones for their needs. The site includes a series of muskox kill sites & meat caches, with the remains of 800-1000 muskoxen, and several low turf walls, which may have been used as hunting blinds. There are also many tent rings, most of which have associated hearths, with traces of charcoal & pieces of eggshell. Researchers at the site have collected over 700 tools & worked items. Radiocarbon dating of muskox bones at Head Hill suggests that most of the bones accumulated before 1855-1890. This is significant in that it shows Inuit use of the Thomsen R. valley area before the arrival of the Investigator, and questions the extent to which people already travelled across Banksland before that event. (PC1)

Note: Eastings on this map are for UTM Zone 11.

0 1 2 km

Map 7A Scale 1:35000



Small passage from river to this lake was navigable, but lake margins very muddy.

Ground was mainly marshy from our campsite to Head Hill. We found a somewhat dry route south of lake then cutting across flats.

Acheological site is on top of hill.

Muskox River Campsite

Naqak (Head Hill)

8193000N 8194000N 8195000N 8196000N 8197000N 8198000N 8199000N

120°14'0"W 120°12'0"W 120°10'0"W 120°8'0"W 120°6'0"W 120°4'0"W 120°2'0"W 120°0'0"W 119°58'0"W 119°56'0"W 119°54'0"W 119°52'0"W

400000E 401000E 402000E 403000E 404000E 405000E 406000E 407000E 408000E 409000E 410000E 411000E

411000E 412000E 413000E 414000E 415000E 416000E 417000E 418000E 419000E

AN ANCIENT ARCTIC LANDSCAPE

At first glance this valley appears surprisingly old. The hills are deeply dissected by countless gullies, broad weathered slopes mantle the uplands, & the Thomsen River occupies a valley far larger than its present flow requires. For decades these features were interpreted as evidence that this part of Banks Island had escaped the last ice age.

Research over the past two decades has largely overturned that view. Detailed mapping of glacial landforms, sediments and radiocarbon ages indicates that the northwest Laurentide Ice Sheet probably covered virtually all of Banks Island during the Last Glacial Maximum. Rather than remaining ice-free, this area was likely overridden by thin, cold-based ice that was frozen to its bed and moved only slowly. Such ice is a remarkably ineffective erosive agent. Unlike warm, fast-moving glaciers that scour bedrock and excavate valleys, cold-based ice can preserve older landscapes almost intact beneath it. (TL)

The result is a geological paradox: although this landscape was glaciated, many landforms may pre-date the last glaciation by hundreds of thousands of years. Since the ice retreated roughly 14,000 years ago, frost weathering, seasonal snowmelt, and permafrost processes have continued to slowly reshape the valley, while the braided Thomsen River has migrated across its broad floodplain, abandoning old channels and creating new ones.

For geomorphologists, Banks Island provides one of the clearest examples anywhere in the Arctic of how ancient landscapes can survive repeated glaciations when protected beneath cold-based ice.

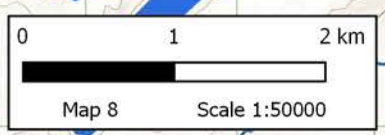
Back Channel Island

Campsite
Dry, flat, exposed bench.

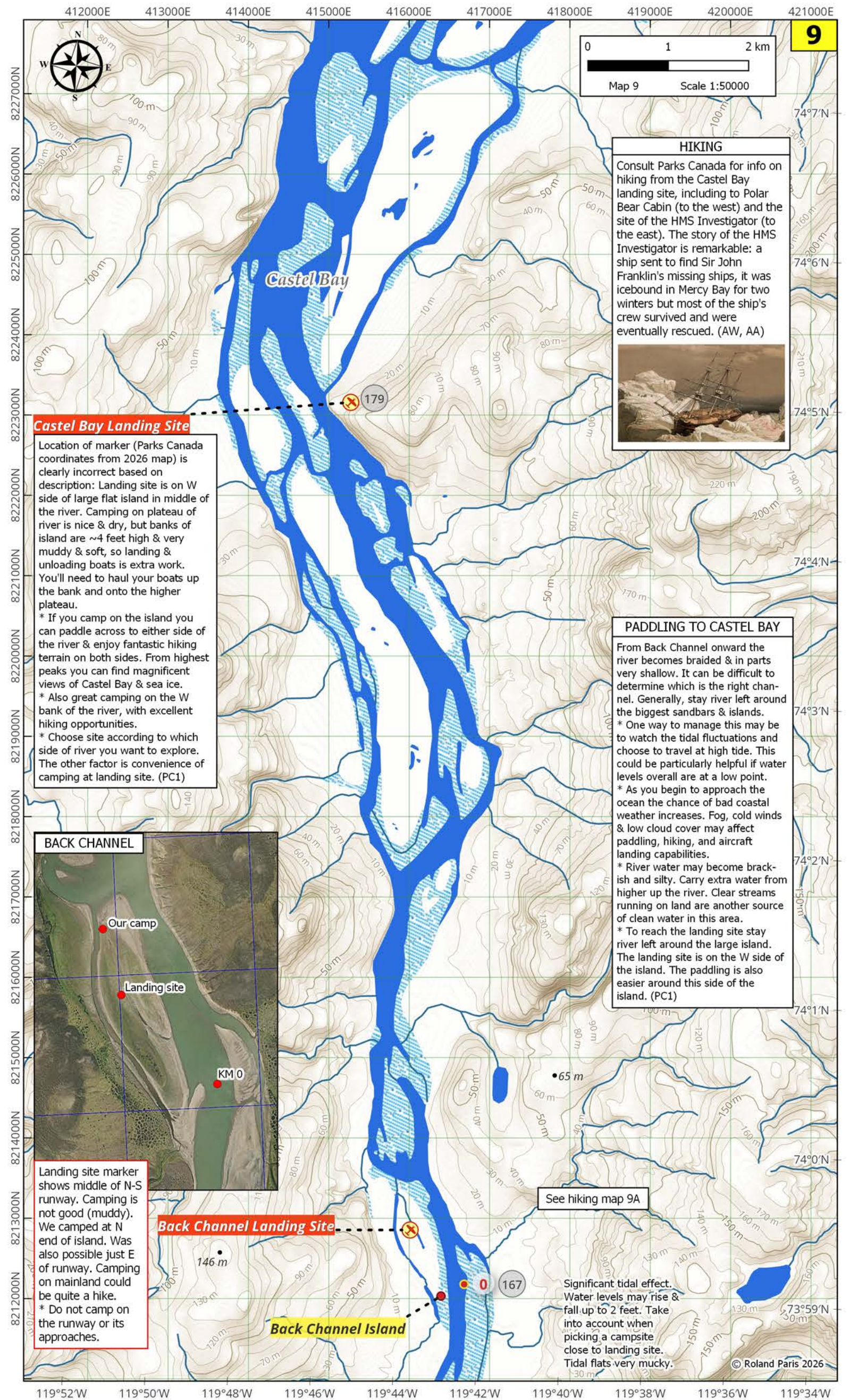
Long stretch of shallows

Some protection from N wind in creek valleys. Also very good hiking options.

Sheltered campsite
Approx. location.



119°52'W 119°50'W 119°48'W 119°46'W 119°44'W 119°42'W 119°40'W 119°38'W 119°36'W



HIKING

Consult Parks Canada for info on hiking from the Castel Bay landing site, including to Polar Bear Cabin (to the west) and the site of the HMS Investigator (to the east). The story of the HMS Investigator is remarkable: a ship sent to find Sir John Franklin's missing ships, it was icebound in Mercy Bay for two winters but most of the ship's crew survived and were eventually rescued. (AW, AA)



Castel Bay Landing Site

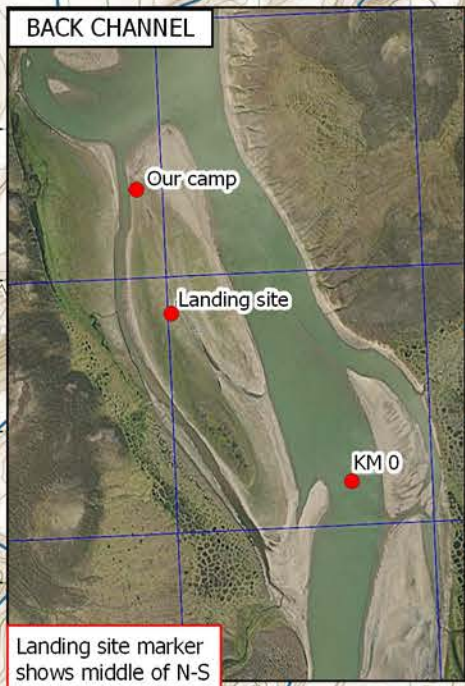
Location of marker (Parks Canada coordinates from 2026 map) is clearly incorrect based on description: Landing site is on W side of large flat island in middle of the river. Camping on plateau of river is nice & dry, but banks of island are ~4 feet high & very muddy & soft, so landing & unloading boats is extra work. You'll need to haul your boats up the bank and onto the higher plateau.

- * If you camp on the island you can paddle across to either side of the river & enjoy fantastic hiking terrain on both sides. From highest peaks you can find magnificent views of Castel Bay & sea ice.
- * Also great camping on the W bank of the river, with excellent hiking opportunities.
- * Choose site according to which side of river you want to explore. The other factor is convenience of camping at landing site. (PC1)

PADDLING TO CASTEL BAY

From Back Channel onward the river becomes braided & in parts very shallow. It can be difficult to determine which is the right channel. Generally, stay river left around the biggest sandbars & islands.

- * One way to manage this may be to watch the tidal fluctuations and choose to travel at high tide. This could be particularly helpful if water levels overall are at a low point.
- * As you begin to approach the ocean the chance of bad coastal weather increases. Fog, cold winds & low cloud cover may affect paddling, hiking, and aircraft landing capabilities.
- * River water may become brackish and silty. Carry extra water from higher up the river. Clear streams running on land are another source of clean water in this area.
- * To reach the landing site stay river left around the large island. The landing site is on the W side of the island. The paddling is also easier around this side of the island. (PC1)



Landing site marker shows middle of N-S runway. Camping is not good (muddy). We camped at N end of island. Was also possible just E of runway. Camping on mainland could be quite a hike.

- * Do not camp on the runway or its approaches.

Back Channel Landing Site

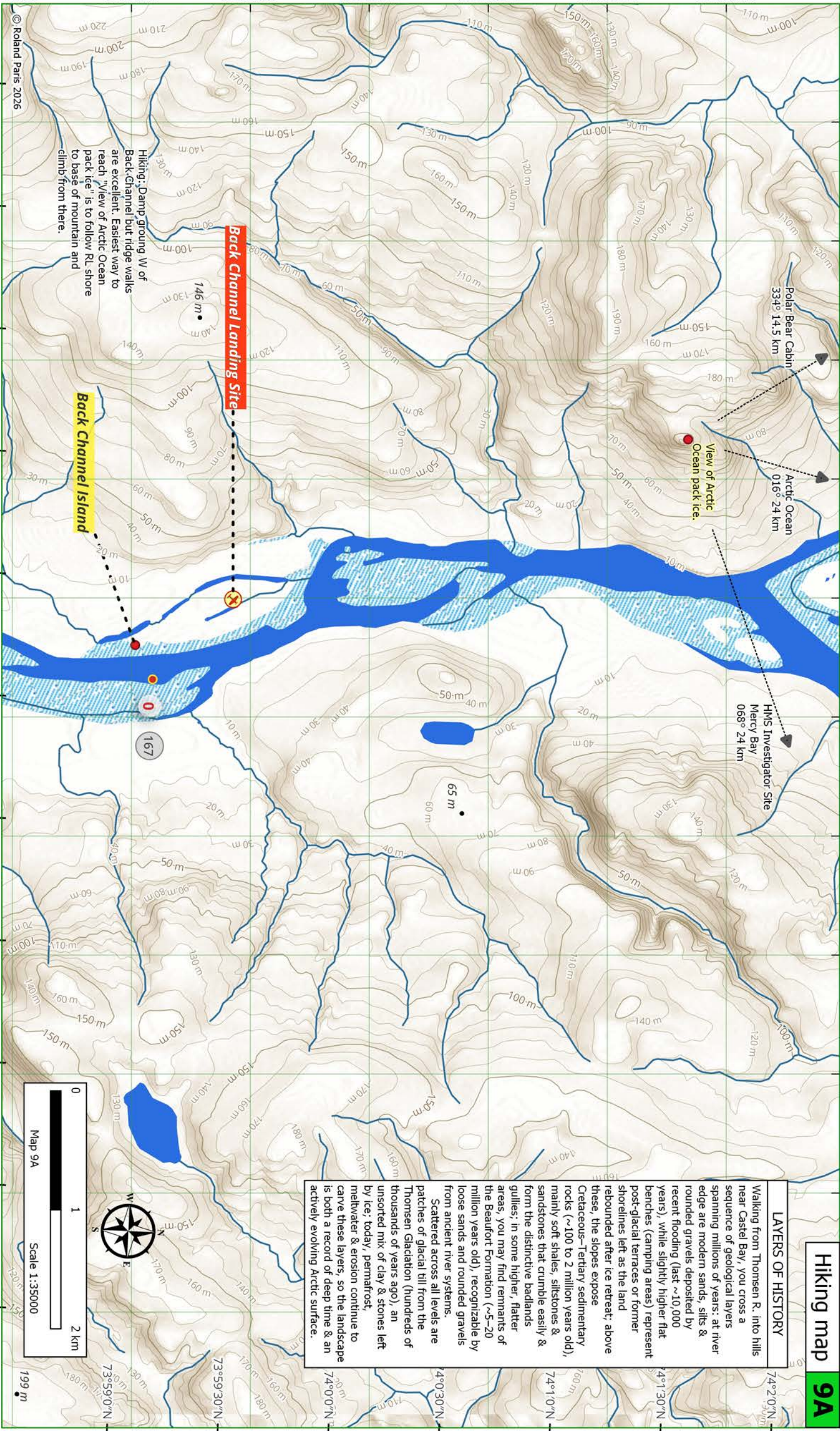
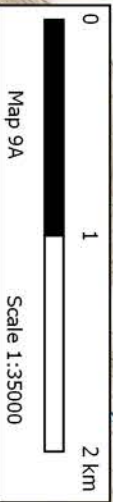
Back Channel Island

See hiking map 9A

Significant tidal effect. Water levels may rise & fall up to 2 feet. Take into account when picking a campsite close to landing site. Tidal flats very mucky.

LAYERS OF HISTORY

Walking from Thomsen R. into hills near Castel Bay, you cross a sequence of geological layers spanning millions of years: at river edge are modern sands, silts & rounded gravels deposited by recent flooding (last ~10,000 years), while slightly higher flat benches (camping areas) represent post-glacial terraces or former shorelines left as the land rebounded after ice retreat; above these, the slopes expose Cretaceous-Tertiary sedimentary rocks (~100 to 2 million years old), mainly soft shales, siltstones & sandstones that crumble easily & form the distinctive badlands gullies; in some higher, flatter areas, you may find remnants of the Beaufort Formation (~5-20 million years old), recognizable by loose sands and rounded gravels from ancient river systems. Scattered across all levels are patches of glacial till from the Thomsen Glaciation (hundreds of thousands of years ago), an unsorted mix of clay & stones left by ice; today, permafrost, meltwater & erosion continue to carve these layers, so the landscape is both a record of deep time & an actively evolving Arctic surface.



8211000N

8212000N

8213000N

8214000N

8215000N

8216000N

8217000N

412000E

413000E

414000E

415000E

416000E

417000E

418000E

419000E

420000E

421000E

422000E

119°52'0"W

119°50'0"W

119°48'0"W

119°46'0"W

119°44'0"W

119°42'0"W

119°40'0"W

119°38'0"W

119°36'0"W

119°34'0"W

119°32'0"W

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