

HIKING ROUTES
NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK

The varied topography of Nahanni National Park provides many excellent opportunities for hiking. A few of the more popular and accessible routes are briefly described. None of the trailheads or routes in the park are marked, but are easily discerned by topographic features. Specific route selection is left largely up to the individual. Common sense and some knowledge of mountainous backcountry travel conditions and hazards are essential.

An estimate of distance and minimum travel times is given. Specific kilometre figures referred to along the South Nahanni and Flat Rivers are from the Parks Canada canoeing pamphlet "South Nahanni and Flat Rivers."

Topographic maps are recommended for all off-river hikes, and are available from:

Canada Map Office
615 Booth Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E9

Further details and information on specific conditions are available from the warden stations at Nahanni Butte and Rabbitkettle Lake.

1. South Nahanni River - Glacier Lake

distance: 10 km one way time in: 5 hrs.

mapsheet: 95 L time out: 5 hrs.

Glacier Lake is a gateway to the rugged mountains of the Ragged Range and the "Cirque of the Unclimbables". Access is gained from the South Nahanni River north of the National Park boundary.

Depart northwest from the mouth of Brintnell Creek, following the trail along the bank of the S. Nahanni. The trail is indistinct, but old blazes will be apparent at most spots. After one kilometre a snye coming off the S. Nahanni will be encountered, look for a heavily blazed pine tree about half way along the snye. The trail makes a 90 degree left turn and heads southwest at this point. Follow the trail over rolling hills until it nears Brintnell Creek, then swing to the west and follow the creek valley to Glacier Lake. Hiking around the lakeshore is very rough, some groups have portages is a light canoe to gain easier access to the north end of the lake.

2. S. Nahanni - Secret Lakes

The Secret Lakes are a series of small, deep lakes nestled in a steep-sided mountain valley. Two routes of access are practical;

1) Km 4 - Secret Lakes

distance: 8 km. one way time in: 5 hrs.
mapsheet: 95 E time out: 4 hrs.

Depart from the high, northeast bank of the South Nahanni River immediately below the Rabbitkettle River. Travel east through muskeg, creek beds and game trails over a low pass into the Secret Lakes Valley.

2) Km 15 - Secret Lakes

distance: 10 km. one way time in: 5 hrs.
mapsheet: 95 E time out: 4 hrs.

Hike up the creek bed joining the South Nahanni River at Km 15. The creek bed will take you into the Secret Lakes Valley on a gradual incline, making a longer but less strenuous trip than the previous route. Most of the creek bed consists of gravels and small boulders and water should be available from the creek except under dry conditions.

3. Virginia Falls - Sunblood Mountain

distance: 8 km. one way time in: 5 hrs.
mapsheet: 95 F/12 time out: 3 hrs.

Canoe or raft to the north bank of the S. Nahanni River direct_l. across from Virginia Falls Campground. Hike northeast through mature spruce forest until you reach the open scree slopes, follow these to the ridge on your right. Climb the ridge and continue to the peak of Sunblood Mountain utilizing sheep trails and open slopes, but be careful on the treacherous scree. Water will have to be packed along for the trip.

4. Virginia Falls Campground - Marengo Falls

distance: 4 km. one way time in: 2 hrs.
mapsheet: 95 F/12 time out: 2 hrs.

A compass and map are required for this hike. Depart from Virginia Falls Campground following a map and compass bearing to Marengo Falls. Walk generally southwest through terrain of hummocky moss, spruce and muskeg interspersed with higher ridges of pine. A drier alternate route is to depart from 1.5 km. upstream of the campground.

If your bearings are accurate you'll arrive at Marengo Falls, where Marengo Creek cascades 30 metres over a series of limestone ledges. More often than

not you'll come out to the creek either up or downstream of the falls. Orientate yourself by observing the creek. Above the falls it meanders through a grassy, low plain, while below it flows somewhat faster through a wide, gravel bed.

5. Flat River Km 95 - Virginia Falls

distance: 26 km. one way time in: 2 days

mapsheet: 95 F/12, 95 F/5 time out: 2 days

This route provides canoeists on the Flat River with overland access to Virginia Falls. It can also be hiked in reverse, using the Falls as the point of departure.

Hike north up a small creek entering the Flat River just below the junction of the Caribou River. Follow this creek 6 km as it curls to the northwest and climbs almost 1000 metres. Utilize open slopes to the north or south to gain access to the high alpine ridges, then continue travelling northwest on the open ridges for another 6 km. Good camping spots are numerous, the best locations are below the tree line close to water and firewood.

A wide gravelly valley is visible to the northeast from this point. Descend to the valley and follow it downstream about 10 km to its confluence with Marengo Creek. Head directly north following a small creek valley and then bushwack to Virginia Falls.

6. Scow Creek - Headless Range

distance: 8 km. one way time in: 5 hrs.

mapsheet: 95 F/7 time out: 3 hrs.

Depart from Scow Creek where it joins the S. Nahanni at Km 214. Hike south up the gravels and boulders of the largely dry creek bed. A fork in the creek bed will be reached after 2 km, continue up the right hand or west fork. After a further 1.5 km a smaller creek bed on the left can be used, along with open ridges, to climb the range. A more gradual route is to continue along the original channel which climbs a low saddle leading onto the range. Once on top and above the tree line, sheep trails lead northeast along the ridges through small plateaus of rock, tundra and stunted alpine vegetation.

Several small ledges and waterfalls in the creek beds will have to be climbed or detoured around. Water availability and hiking conditions will vary according to wet or dry periods during the season.

7. Deadmen Valley - Prairie Creek

distance: 4 km, one way time in: 2 hrs.

mapsheets: 95 F/8, 95 F/1 time out: 2 hrs.

The Prairie Creek alluvial fan is a major feature of Deadmen Valley. Begin hiking north a short way upstream and across river from the campground, staying to the left of Prairie Creek's many channels. After 1.5 km the west creek channel undercuts a low, silty bank. The decision will have to be made to either climb over this bank (thick, tangled bush), or cross the creek (cold, fast water). Ahead will be a narrow gorge where Prairie Creek exists the mountains. By climbing over a low saddle to the west of the gorge you can enter a small floodplain bordered by almost vertical canyon walls.

Bears commonly forage for berries on the Prairie Creek fan, so keep your eyes open to avoid the possibility of a surprise encounter. Upland Sandpipers nest on the prairie areas of the fan. Prior to July 10 you are requested to restrict your activities to the gravel areas of the fan to minimize disturbance to the nesting birds.

8. Sheaf Creek - Tlogotsho Plateau

distance: 10 km, one way time in: 10 hrs.

mapsheets: 95 F/1, 95 F/2 time out: 6 hrs.

Start your hike at the mouth of Sheaf Creek in Deadmen Valley. You should stay on or near the creek bed, and will have to cross the creek many times on the rocks. Follow the creek up to where it just about disappears at the base of the plateau. Go to your right (west) up the steep ridge back leading to the plateau. Near the top there is a small bench and a fairly steep cliff. Scrambling up this low cliff will gain you access to the top of the Tlogotsho Plateau. Water is not always available in the high country in summer, so carry along a good supply. Be prepared for extremes of weather and low cloud which can suddenly occur, making travel and orientation very difficult.

9. Deadmen Valley - Dry Canyon Creek

distance: 10 km, + one way time in: 5 hrs.

mapsheets: 95 F/8 time out: 5 hrs.

The dry gravel fan of Dry Canyon Creek is located at the far eastern end of Deadmen Valley. Hike up the impressive, steep-walled canyon on the gravel beds for the first short way. As the canyon narrows, large boulders will have to be maneuvered around, over and sometimes under. Fossils adorn many of the rocks, pools of water and some runoff is usually encountered. Several draws and ridges to the east provide access to the Nahanni Plateau although no definite route has been established. Dry Canyon is most often hiked as a day trip by following the creek bed in the canyon. Longer, overnight tours to the Nahanni Plateau are possible but require more equipment and preparation.

10. First Canyon - Lafferty Creek

distance: 10 km. + one way time in: 5 hrs.

mapsheet: 95 F/8 time out: 5 hrs.

Lafferty Creek joins the South Nahanni River near the bottom of First Canyon at Km 260. The terrain and canyon are much similar to Dry Canyon, although Lafferty Creek usually flows aboveground over most of its length. Hike up the gravel for the first kilometre, from here the canyon becomes increasingly narrow. Some boulder walking and steep scrambling will be necessary to get through a few tight areas. The creek will have to be crossed in several spots, usually it is low enough that you can cross on the rocks. Lafferty Creek is recommended as a day hike with a light pack, although longer trips are possible.

NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK

Hiking Routes

0 10 20 30 Miles

