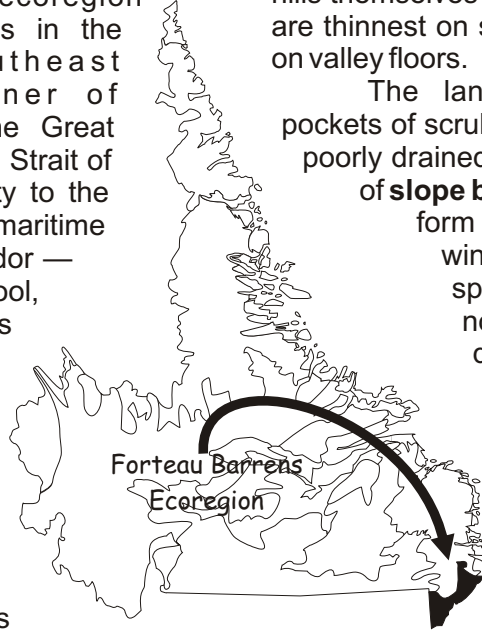


Forteau Barrens


Labrador, where it faces the Great Northern Peninsula across the Strait of Belle Isle. Due to its proximity to the ocean, it experiences a more maritime climate than the rest of Labrador — relatively mild winters and cool, rainy summers. Coastal waters generally freeze in mid-January and break-up occurs in mid-April.

The topography of the Forteau Barrens ecoregion consists mainly of low, flat-topped hills that rise from sea level to about 500 metres. The crests of hilltops

This small ecoregion takes in the southeast corner of



are frequently strewn with loose rock, and the hills themselves are dissected by streams. Soils are thinnest on slopes and hilltops, and deeper on valley floors.

The landscape is characterized by pockets of scrubby black spruce, **barrens**, and poorly drained peatlands composed primarily of **slope bogs** of varying sizes. Most trees form **tuckamore** due to the strong winds and wet soils, although black spruce and larch will grow to normal tree heights on well-drained sites. It is likely that fire has played a role in the formation of the upland barren vegetation, which covers much of this area. 

Soil Profile: Like most of Labrador, the formation of soil in this ecoregion is limited by two factors: cold weather, which keeps the land frozen for much of the year, and glaciation, which scoured the land as recently as 10,000 years ago. Soils are or mostly ortho humo-ferric podzols and stony fibrisols, with rocky outcrops throughout.

Ecoregion: An area that has distinctive and repeating patterns of vegetation and soil development, which are determined and controlled by regional climate. Ecoregions can be distinguished from each other by their plant communities, landscapes, geology, and other features. These characteristics, in turn, influence the kinds of wildlife that can find suitable habitat within each ecoregion.

Barrens: Primarily treeless areas containing low-growing plants that are well adapted to

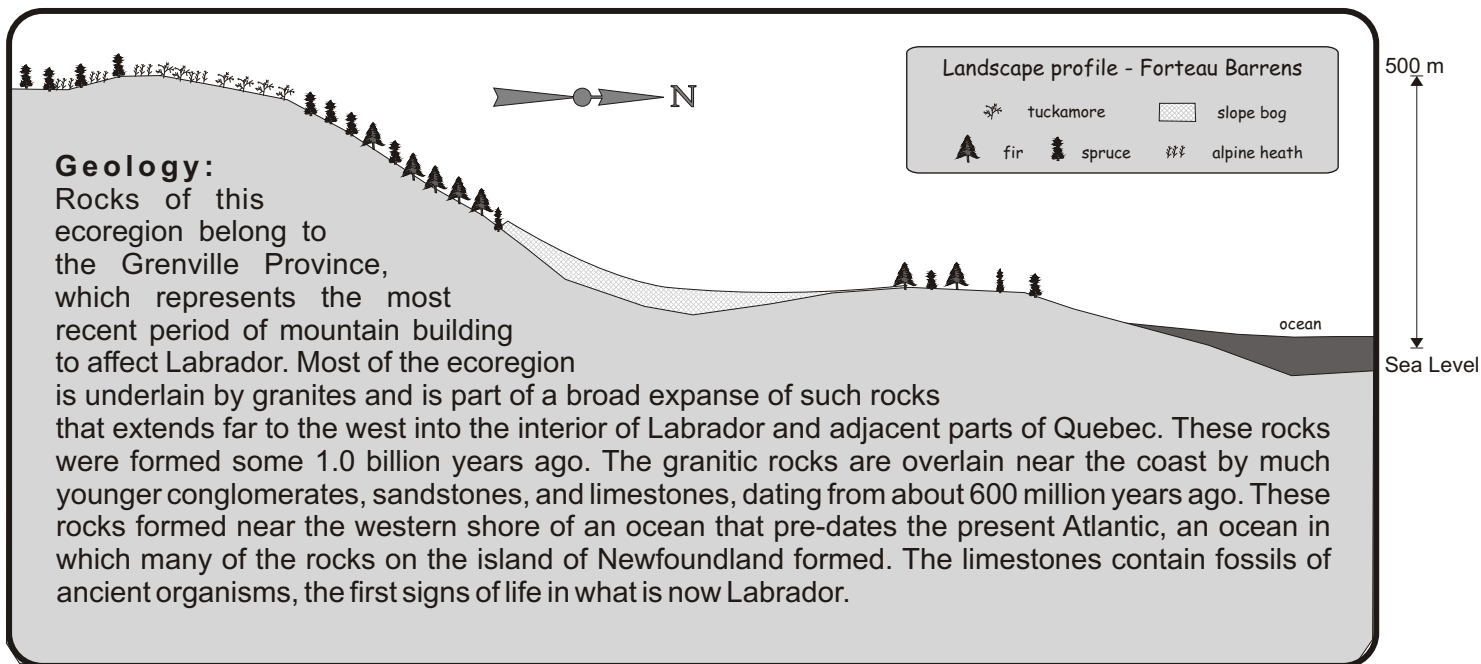
exposed conditions and soils low in nutrients. Barrens are also known as "heath" or "heathlands," since much of the plant life found on them belongs to the heath family.

Slope bogs: One of several types of bogs that occur throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. They are generally found on slopes in poorly drained areas and can sometimes contain a scattering of pools.

Tuckamore: Also known as "krummholz," tuckamore are

areas where growth-limiting factors (such as exposure to harsh weather, or excess soil moisture) have resulted in dense thickets of stunted coniferous trees.

Ericaceous: A scientific term referring to a family of low shrubs that grow in acidic soils and have leathery leaves and bell-shaped flowers. Some of the many Labrador plants that belong to this group — which is also known as the "heath family" — are blueberry, partridgeberry, crowberry, and sheep laurel.



Vegetation Profile

The landscape of the Forteau Barrens ecoregion is characterized by extensive barrens. Its coastal location has resulted in wet soils and strong winds, which, in turn, have resulted in limited tree growth. Soils are thin, both on slopes and on hilltops. In most lowlands drainage is poor and black spruce is small and scrubby, forming tuckamore less than five metres in height. Even in

those river valleys where soils are deeper and better drained, black spruce and larch often grow to only ten or twelve metres in height.

In some areas, however, where historically there were forests, such as on sheltered slopes, fire and local cutting have removed the tree seed stock and produced open barrens

Barrens are common on exposed hilltops, coastal headlands, and upland areas. Here a scattering of stunted black spruce grow in association with balsam fir, willows, and

ericaceous shrubs. In some places, where snow cover is shallow and discontinuous, a thick lichen cover with some pink crowberry and alpine bilberry occurs. Along the coast, black spruce is replaced by white spruce, which is more resistant to harsh climatic conditions, such as wind and salt spray off the ocean.

In the most exposed, rocky areas, vegetation is minimal, consisting only of a scattering of lichen. Bogs are characterized by wetland plants such as cotton grass and sphagnum mosses.

Species in Focus: White spruce (*Picea glauca*) occurs throughout the province individually or in small groups, rarely in pure stands. Usually taller than black spruce, which it closely resembles, white spruce also has a more northern distribution. Because it is resistant to harsh conditions, it often grows in coastal areas. It also frequently occurs as a "pioneer species" in abandoned fields and other disturbed sites. Pioneer species are those that are the first to colonize locations with newly exposed soil surfaces due to disturbances such as fire and cutting. Such species are usually "light-demanding," which means they require a lot of light for seed germination and seedling growth.

Photo: Parks and Natural Areas Division

Wildlife Profile

Mammals occurring in the forest/shrub habitats of the Forteau Barrens ecoregion include moose, woodchuck, red squirrel, red-backed vole, star-nosed mole, little brown bat, lynx, American marten (known locally as pine marten), flying squirrel, heather vole, woodland jumping mouse, porcupine, mink, snowshoe hare, rock vole, and masked shrew. Northern bog lemming and arctic fox are found in the barrens.

Meadow jumping mouse and meadow vole occur in wetland areas, while in aquatic habitats, beaver, water shrew, muskrat, and river otter are found.

Mammals that inhabit a variety of habitats within the ecoregion are black bear, least weasel, red fox, short-tailed weasel, and wolf.

American pipit and horned lark are birds characteristic of the barrens; rough-legged hawk nest commonly on cliffs. In winter, gyrfalcon feed on wintering seabirds such as murres and dovekies. Low numbers of peregrine falcon nest and migrate through this area.



Low hills covered with tuckamore and barrens characterize much of the Forteau Barrens ecoregion.

Photo: Paul Linegar

Species in Focus: The ivory gull is a small white gull with black legs. It feeds on a wide range of items, from fish and invertebrates to the carcasses and feces of pack-ice



Photo: Paul Linegar

mammals. Ivory gulls breed throughout the arctic regions of the world, generally where there is permanent pack-ice. Nesting sites occur on small reef-like islands, flat coastal areas, or narrow cliff ledges. At the end of summer, ivory gulls disperse southward. They occur commonly along the coast of Labrador in winter, with a handful reaching the island of Newfoundland.


The ivory gull is an endangered species. In the past, the remote, inhospitable location of colonies protected them from disturbance, however they were considered a delicacy and were still hunted in the winter. More recently, human activities, such as the exploitation of arctic resources, have resulted in further population decline. The Canadian arctic population of ivory gulls is estimated at about 2,400 individuals. Most of the previously known breeding colonies in Canada are now abandoned.

Forest nesting birds include fox sparrow, pine grosbeak, northern waterthrush, and American robin. Yellow warbler, Wilson's warbler, and yellow-bellied flycatcher breed in the shrub/thicket areas. In wetland habitats, short-eared owl are

common, along with Lincoln's sparrow and swamp sparrow.

Shorebirds nesting in the Forteau Barrens include greater yellowlegs, semipalmated plover, least sandpiper, and spotted sandpiper. Migrating shorebirds, such as lesser golden plover and whimbrel, are also present during fall. Common eider winter along the coast, while oldsquaw and scoters migrate through during the spring and fall.

Nesting seabirds include the black guillemot and various gulls and terns, such as the black-legged kittiwake. Other seabirds are present in coastal waters during the winter, including dovekies, thick-billed murres, and to a lesser extent, common murres.

The lakes, rivers, and streams of the ecoregion are home to Atlantic salmon, three-spine and nine-spine sticklebacks, brook trout, rainbow smelt, and American eel. Arctic char occur occasionally. No amphibians or reptiles have been recorded for this ecoregion. 

Climate

Summers in the Forteau Barrens are cool and rainy and winters are mild to cold. Strong winds and storms are frequent, and the growing season is 100 to 120 days.



Annual rainfall
1200 to 1400 mm



Annual snowfall
3.5 to 4.5 m

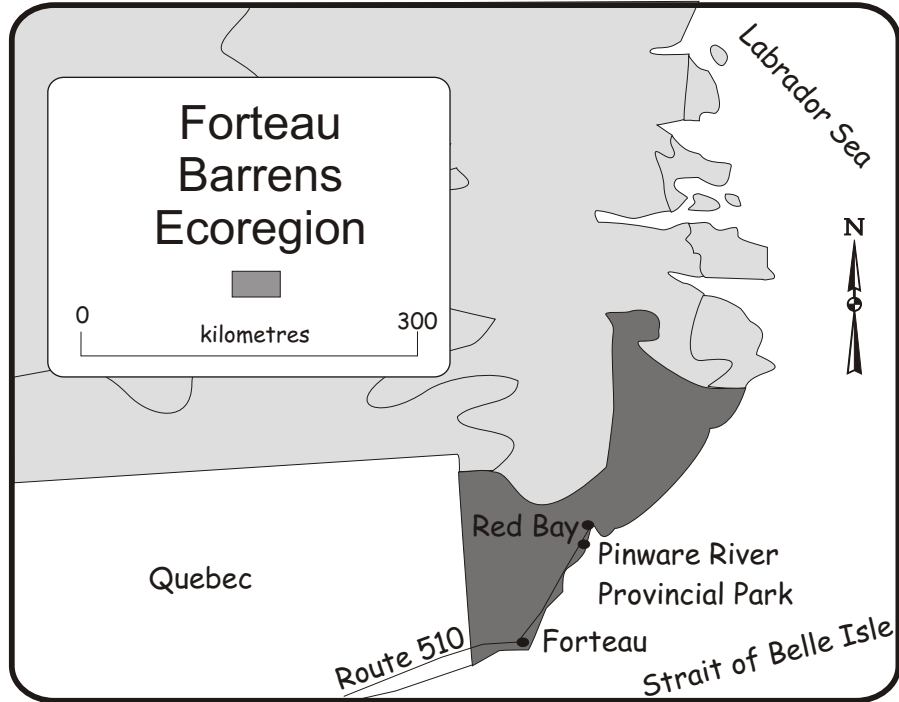


Mean daily temperatures
February -9°C to -12.5°C
July +12°C

Protected Areas Profile

Pinware River Provincial Park, opened in 1974, is the smaller of Labrador's two provincial parks, and one of only a few protected areas in Labrador.


Located about 20 km southwest of Red Bay, this small park contains black spruce, white spruce, and larch as well as bogs, rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and rock outcrops left by glaciers. Deciduous trees such as white birch and balsam poplar can also be found among the conifers. Despite this varied landscape, the park is far too small (only 0.7 km²) to offer ecoregion representation.



Focus on Trout

Brook trout — or mud trout — are dark olive green to brown. In fall, adult brook trout spawn in the gravel bottoms of streams and rivers; the young hatch the following spring. As they grow, they feed on a variety of foods, including plankton, aquatic insects, worms, and other small fish. Some brook trout never leave freshwater; in most cases this is because they

are landlocked, that is, they have no way of getting to the sea.

Others — called “sea trout” — turn silver, migrate to sea where they feed and grow, and then return to freshwater to spawn. These sea trout are anadromous: they spend most of their lives in the sea and migrate to freshwater to breed. Found throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, brook trout is a member of the Salmonidae family, which also includes char, trout, salmon, whitefish, and grayling. 



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