WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN SUMMARY

418: GROS MORNE NATIONAL PARK (CANADA)

Summary prepared by IUCN (April 1987) based on the original nomination submitted by Canada. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

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1. LOCATION:

Located in the Province of Newfoundland on the western shore of the Great Northern Peninsular of Newfoundland. The boundary comprises a series of Canada Lands Surveys posts and the Ordinary Low Water Mark of the Gulf of St Lawrence. 49°18'-49°59'N, 57°25'-58°10'W.

2. JURIDICAL DATA:

Established under a Federal/Provincial Agreement signed by the Governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador on 13 August 1973. The same authorities amended this agreement on 18 May 1983, whereby approximately 9,300ha were returned to the province. Clear title to all lands was acquired in 1984 by the provincial government and has subsequently been transferred to the federal government, under the administrative responsibility of Environment Canada, Parks.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

The park comprises three distinct physiographic components: marine, a coastal plain and an alpine plateau. The major ecological units include coastal plain, piedmont moraines, the frontal slopes and upland areas of the Long Range mountains, the southern hills, and the Klippe Complex. The marine areas included in the park comprise inlets, inter-tidal and sub-littoral zones, fjord inlets, a fast flowing tidal passage and deep sea marine areas. A number of steep sided, glacial valleys cut through the Long Range scarp face forming deep, oligotrophic fjords, with vertical cliffs up to 685m high. An upland alpine plateau with perched lakes, bare rock and valleys covers a large proportion of the eastern central park. There is also an unusually complete palaeontological sequence which has been proposed as the world stratotype for the Cambrian-Ordovician boundary.

Vegetation, frequently stunted by strong prevailing winds in more exposed areas, forms up to 36 distinct communities, with some 750 vascualar species and 321 bryophytes, representing about 60% of Newfoundland's flora. Faunal diversity resembles an oceanic rather than continental-shelf island and is markedly reduced compared to the mainland. However a number of species scarce in Canada are found, including pine marten, lynx, caribou, arctic hare and seals. The more common marine mammals that can be observed from the park, albeit with a diminishing frequency in recent years include pilot whale, minke whale and finback whale. The avifauna comprises 230 arctic, boreal and pelagic species, with strays from the mainland, the north-west Atlantic and Europe. The park is significant as a breeding site for harlequin duck, blackpoll warbler, common tern, and arctic tern.

There are a number of archaeological sites in the park and human habitation can be traced back to the maritime archaic Indians, 4,500-3,000 years ago. St Pauls Inlet in the north may have been colonised by Vikings around 1000 years ago.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION:

The park boundary excludes eight coastal settlements with a population of about 6000; there are no residents in the park. The management plan indicates that development of park infrastructure and the private sector tourist industry will diversify and enlarge employment opportunities for local communities. A total of 192,903 people visited the park in 1980-81. In addition to 120km of metalled roads a system of hiking trails allows access to more remote areas. A number of campsites, with a total of 240 site emplacements, are located in the park, and hotels and other services are available in the adjacent communities. Although the park is not at present formally established under the National Parks Act, legal protection is given by a number of Federal and Provincial statutes including the federal Forestry Development and Research Act, the Fisheries Act, the Migratory Birds Convention Act and the provincial Newfoundland Wildlife Act.

The park landscape and natural resources have been disturbed by previous land uses and hunting has reduced wildlife populations. Further, a number of exotic species have been introduced, to the detriment of the indigenous fauna. Nevertheless, protection since 1973 has seen populations increase, with the exception of American marten Martes americana which has been eliminated from the park.

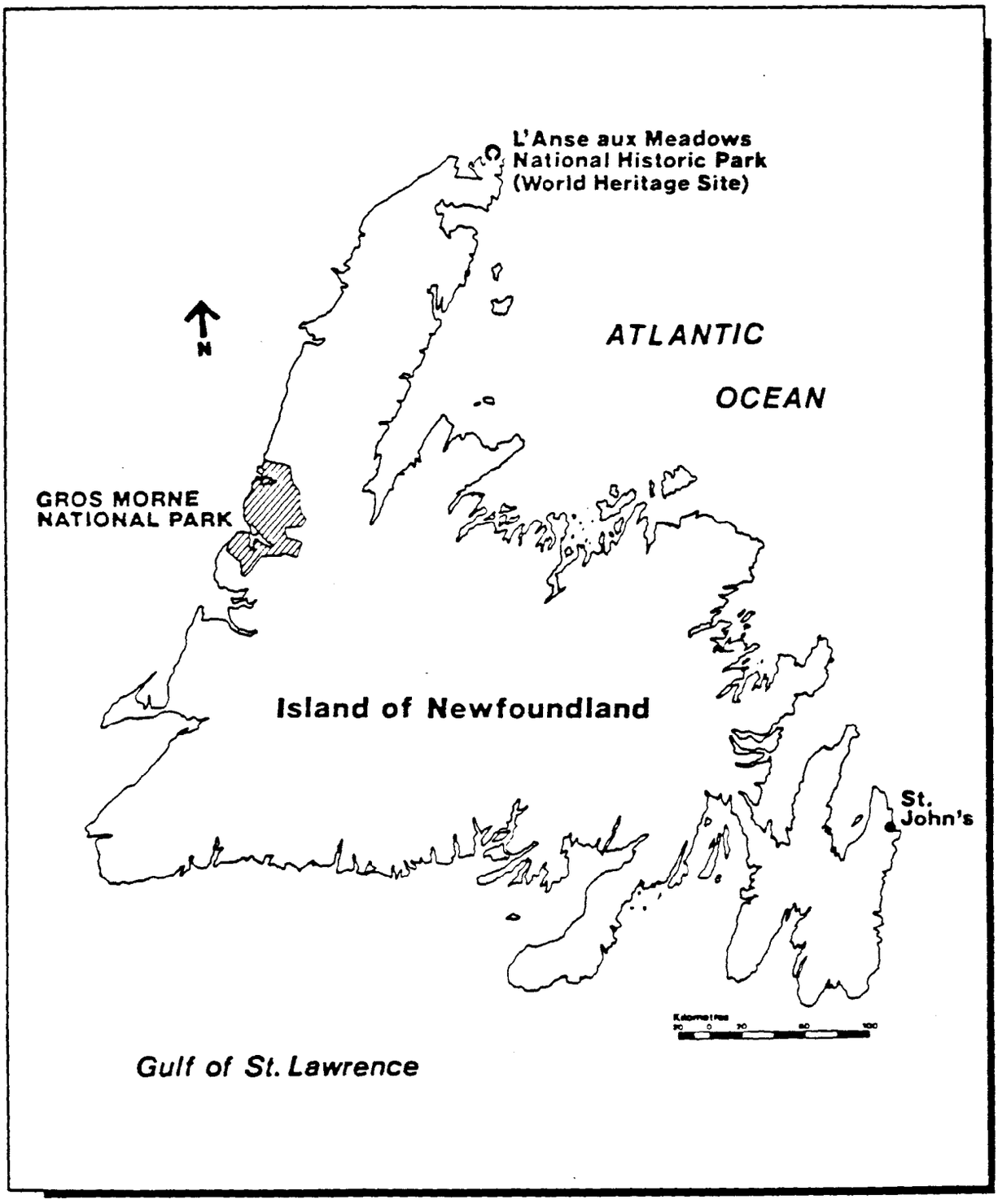
5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

The Gros Morne National Park nomination, as presented by the Government of Canada provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

a) Natural property

(i) Earth's Evolutionary History. The park is a classic locality for portrayal of the geological events that took place when the continental margin of North America was effected by tectonic plate movements.

(iii) Exceptional Natural Beauty. The fjords, waterfalls and geological structures of the park combine to produce a landscape of high scenic quality.


L'Anse aux Meadows
National Historic Park
(World Heritage Site)
N
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
GROS MORNE
NATIONAL PARK
Island of Newfoundland
St.
John's
Gulf of St. Lawrence

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

418 GROS MORNE NATIONAL PARK (Canada)

1. DOCUMENTATION:

(i) IUCN Data Sheet

(ii) Consultations: P. Dearden, A. Dufresne, A. Cloutier, A. Davidson, H. Mills, J.G. Nelson, A. Morgan, R. Scace, J. Marsh, B. May, K. Nichol, A. Boutilier, N. Williams, G. MacDonald, A. Hoole.

(iii) Literature consulted: The Dilemma of Residents and National Parks, Park News 1978, 14 (1).

(iv) Previous site visit: 1968.

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Gros Morne is one of 41 protected areas in the Canadian Taiga Biogeographical Province. Other World Heritage sites in this Province include Nahanni and Wood Buffalo and these are physically not comparable to Gros Morne. No other park in the Nearctic has the unique geological structures as found in the nominated site. There are other occurences of ophiolites in eastern Canada but none rival the exposures found in Gros Morne. The park is quite different from Terra Nova, Newfoundland's other national park, possessing greater relief and much less vegetative cover.

The inland fjords which are a distinguishing physiographic feature of the Park are also found at Harp Lake (a geological fault lake in Labrador) and in the Torngat area of north Labrador. The latter site has been proposed as a National Park for its exceptional landscape features and its caribou herd. In any case, Gros Morne is unique in terms of its values in understanding of plate tectonics and the exposure of the "Moho discontinuity". Moreover, the relationship of the Cambro-Ordovidian boundary is also of high geological interest and may be designated as a world stratotype for the transition between the two basal periods of the Paleozoic Era.

3. INTEGRITY

Prior to its protection in 1973 the area was subject to various uses which had resulted in some depletion of wildlife populations and forest cover. Since then, however, establishment and management of the park has largely excluded resource harvesting and such use that does take place is carried out according to management strategies developed in cooperation with area residents. Efforts in nature conservation have been directed to restoration and perpetuation of species and habitats within the context of the management plan.

Over two-thirds of the park is now zoned "wilderness" or "preservation". The political impact of 6,000 people living in the area is relatively small and there are no private land holdings inside the Park. The allowances that allow wood cutting and snowshoe hare snaring for domestic use (apparently necessary to strengthen political support for the park) is strictly controlled and of minor impact on the park (15% of the area is affected). It also seems that these settlements will remain small in future, given the limited economic opportunities in the region, and that these traditional harvesting activities may be phased out. In any case, the geological features on which the nomination rests will not be adversely affected in the long term by modest shifts in populations and developments in these communities.

A proposal made to install a cable car to the plateau for tourism was approved by some conservationists and has not been implemented. It is still mentioned in the management plan as is a possible downhill ski development.

The most serious threat to Gros Morne appears to be the possible construction of a hydro-electric transmission line as part of the Lower Churchill power scheme. An environment assessment of the project determined that the selected route would have impacts on the park's caribou population and vegetation. The probability and severity of these impacts needs to be clarified.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A significant formal requirement respecting the long-term integrity of the Park's landscape and resources is the adherence of Gros Morne to the Schedule of the National Parks Act. Notwithstanding current application of various federal and provincial statutes which enable "the total protection and management of the park's lands and resources, until it is proclaimed as a national park", one reviewer has noted that inclusion of the Park in the Schedule is desirable prior to its addition to the World Heritage List. Other instances in Canada of listing prior to inclusion in the National Parks Act Schedule have occurred (e.g. Nahanni National Park). However, the appropriate sequence of events at other sites suggest that it may be desirable to uphold expectations concerning national protective legislation at World Heritage Sites.

5. EVALUATION

The Gros Morne nomination establishes a convincing case for "outstanding universal value" as this phrase relates to outstanding representation of major stages of the earth's evolutionary history (Criteria (i)). The area's geological features persist in a completely natural state and are not known to be under immediate threat of substantial human-induced modification.

The Park is a classic locality for understanding of earth's evolutionary history in terms of evolution of an ocean basin and evolution of a continental margin. Several examples are provided to emphasize the completeness of the landscape from an evolutionary perspective; those examples include materials reflecting mantle and crust sequences, the presence of xonotlite, and the best known collection of graptolites in the world.

With respect to Criterion (iii) - that of an area of exceptional natural beauty - this too, is considered to be met in respect of both the natural landscape of Gros Morne and the size and physcial and biological integrity of the area protected.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing evaluation is supportive of the inclusion of Gros Morne National Park on the World Heritage List and IUCN recommends that it be inscribed. The Bureau has sought and received (September) further information on:

1) the timing for completion of the legal process which will formally bring the Park under the protection of the National Parks Act (no date yet set but process is underway), and

2) a clarification on the possible impacts of the transmission lines from the Lower Churchill power scheme (the scheme is considered unlikely but would not have significant impacts on the park).