



MUD CREEK TRAIL

Trail Description
~ 1.5 hour easy walk
~ 2.1 km loop

Explore the transition between two ecological regions: the northern edge of aspen parkland forest blending with the southern edge of coniferous forest.

1 SHADES OF GREEN

Today's forests reflect the soil and drainage patterns of a landscape that was once covered in ice 12,000 years ago. **Look across the bay** at the trembling aspen, then around you for the dark green spruce and notice differences in the trees, reflecting abrupt changes typical of this glaciated landscape.

2 A HARSH REGIME

The wet lowland before you is reminiscent of the sphagnum spruce bogs found through northern Canada. Only the hardiest of plants can exist here. Club-topped black spruce and feathery tamarack are adapted to these wet and acidic soils. Though long-lived and slow-growing, the spruce eventually become top-heavy, and their shallow, wide-spreading roots succumb to the north-west winds. **Do you see any fallen giants in the forest today?**

3 INTO THE SHADOWS

Look ahead into the trees at the forest floor. What do you see? A few plants hugging the ground. Dead leaves. Nothing else. What's missing? Light! A white spruce forest is indeed dark, compared to an aspen stand. Wildlife is also generally scarcer but spruce cones are abundant and the red squirrel makes a successful home. Can you see or hear any squirrels?

4 LOOK NORTHWARD

This rocky peninsula takes the brunt of the north's cold winds, and even in summer the breeze is often cool. **Here, enjoy the feeling of being in the north.** Lakes such as Waskesiu are typical of the north - large basins gouged out during the glacier's decent. The water is clear and cold, supporting pike, pickerel and whitefish in its depths while eagles soar overhead.

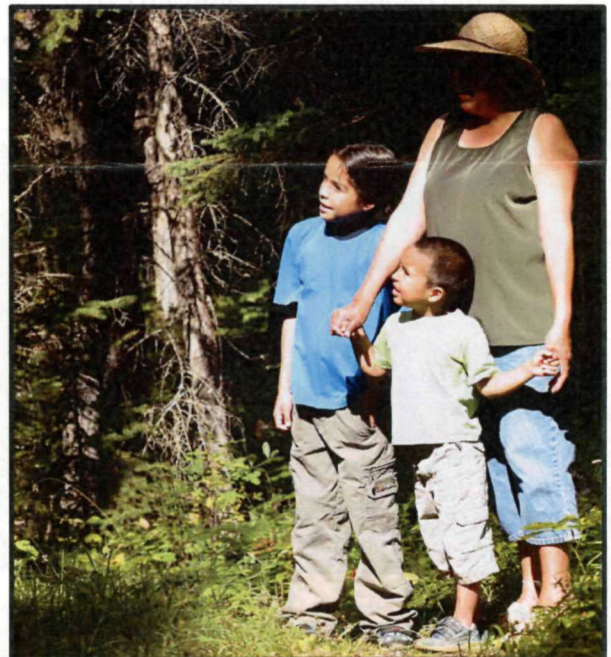
5 A LIVELY SPOT

An aspen forest is overrun with life. Light floods the forest floor, giving the woods an open, airy feeling. **Pick up a trembling aspen leaf. Twirl the stem in your fingers.** Unlike most leaves, the stem is flat, not round; difficult to roll. The flat stem causes the leaf to flutter in the slightest breeze - hence the name trembling aspen.

6 THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES

Two worlds converge where Mud Creek empties into Waskesiu Lake. **Compare the amount of plants** that thrive along the lake shoreline to those along the creek. Notice any differences?

In the 1970s artifacts excavated 100 metres near the creek indicate that hunting, fishing and gathering were all successful here.



7 NATURE'S ENGINEERS

Look to your left off the trail and you see the home of one of nature's finest engineers - the beaver. Mud Creek, with succulent water plants, such as pond lilies, and an abundance of aspen for building materials and food, provides the beaver's life necessities.

8 CHANGES

Everything becomes something else and nothing stays the same. Look around - aspen forest is slowly transformed into spruce forest, as the aspens provide shade that the spruce thrive in... until the shorter lived aspen start dying out in another 40 to 60 years.

9 LIFE'S STAGES

Eat or be eaten - every living thing depends on another for survival. Microscopic floating plants (phytoplankton) feed tiny animals (zooplankton) which feed insects, eaten in turn by fish, which may be captured by a passing osprey. Wherever two habitats meet, life is more abundant because of a greater variety of food and shelter. Take a few moments. Wait. Watch. Listen. Enjoy.

13 REFLECTIONS

You are entering a world of transition - a meeting place; from the bounty of the trembling aspen forest to the sparse spruce woods; from a large lake to a quiet stream. Can you feel the spirit of each zone as you continue along the trail?



10 TURN A CORNER

In the next few minutes you pass through an imaginary boundary between the north and south, from sun-loving wildflowers, through trembling aspen woods, to mixed stands to spruce forest. Step off the trail and look around... feel any differences?

11 NATURAL DEFENCES

Have you noticed the bark on trembling aspen trees? One side is white, the other light green. Rub the white side with your finger. White. Like chalk. The white reflects the sun, so the tree doesn't overheat which could cause the sap to run too early in the spring and harm the tree if it freezes during cold spring nights. Some say that the chalky substance might work like sun screen.

12 READ THE LANDSCAPE

Why such a large valley for such a small stream? The answer lies with the retreat of the glaciers. 12,000 years ago, Mud Creek was a raging river filled with meltwaters of the shrinking glaciers as they receded northward. Imagine days gone by.



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