

Mink Bay

Recreational
Trail

Tour Guide

MINK BAY URBAN RECREATIONAL TRAIL

HISTORICAL WALKING TOUR

Mink Bay Trail



This trail system winds through the wetlands and wilderness areas of Mink and Portage Bay and into the green spaces and businesses of downtown Keewatin.

DISTANCE: 4.3 km

TERRAIN: Easy to Moderate

SEASONS: All Seasons

USES: Hiking, Biking, Skiing

WEBSITE: www.kenora.ca

Trail Gateway – Entrance: This trail starts at the Trail Head Sign on Hwy. 17 W. across from the Beach Rd. west entrance. Portions of this property were turned over to the Town of Keewatin from the Lake of the Woods Milling Company and Boise Cascade Canada Ltd. over several years: 1968, 1984 and 1906.

Keewatin (Dump) Nuisance Grounds: As you enter the trail, to the left is the old Keewatin town dump. This site contains many collectibles including old glass bottles. The first section of the Mink Bay Trail is through a boreal forest with different species of hardwood and softwood trees and many bird species.

Trees found along this trail:

White Birch – has the distinctive, white peeling bark. First Nation tribes used the bark to make vessels and construct canoes. Ruffed grouse eat the nutritious buds in the fall and winter.



Poplar – also called the trembling aspen, because a slight breeze makes them tremble – this is the favourite food of the beaver and early settlers extracted a quinine-type drug from the inner bark.



Black Ash – is one of the last trees to leaf out in the spring. It grows well in wet areas and swampy woodlands. Ash lumber looks like oak and is quite attractive.



White Spruce – is important for lumber production. Early First Nation's peoples used the pliable roots to lace birch bark onto their canoes.



Black Spruce – is the evergreen most seen in mossy bogs and swamps. This tree is able to reproduce itself when live lower branches become covered with moss or forest debris, they develop roots and these branches eventually become new trees. It is an important tree in the pulpwood production as the long wood fibres make strong, paper products. The outer twigs can be brewed into a drinkable tea.



White Pine – This tree can reach up to heights of 90 feet and over three feet in diameter. Branches of the older trees become irregular in size and shape due to the prevailing winds. The bundles of five needles, about three inches long, give the tree its soft appearance. The wood is very valuable for lumber, moldings, trim and cabinet work.



Tamarack – the only coniferous tree to lose its needles every fall. It grows on wet sites and the wood is very rot resistant. It makes excellent firewood.



Jack Pine – This scruffy-looking tree has dark, flaky bark and disorganized branching. It is commercially used for lumber and railway ties. It is commonly found on rocky sites.



Balsam Fir – the favourite evergreen for Christmas Trees. The needles stay on well and the tree has a nice aroma. It is not a long-living tree and is identified by the resin blisters on its gray bark.



Pedestrian Walk Bridge:



There is a fork on the main trail leading west to a feeder trail called Mink Bay Rapids Trails which leads to a Pedestrian Walk Bridge opened in 2011 that allows for beautiful views of the Mink Bay Creek. Log booms used to float down this creek to the Sawmill which was situated at the mouth of the bay.

Slabtown:



Before crossing the bridge there is another feeder trail leading west called Slabtown Way. When you reach the shoreline, to the north you will see a small waterfall where pelicans, geese and ducks gather in the spring. You will find sawdust piles along this path which is residue left over from a Sawmill in this area (please be careful, it is like quicksand). For many years it would smolder and burst into flames, threatening the surrounding area. Foxes build fox holes in the sawdust pile and can be seen regularly.

A sawmill was built in Mink Bay in 1879 at the west end of Keewatin, to manufacture ties for the railway. The sawmill burned in 1905 but there are still many existing indications of the Mill. Labourers for this mill first settled north of the tracks in company houses built for the married personnel. Slabs (which were used for fire wood) were a byproduct of the sawmilling process, and the name Slabtown became attached to that area. The town section of Slabtown consisted of a narrow strip of land sandwiched between the tracks and the Winnipeg River. In some places this area was only wide enough for one lot length. The name Slabtown stuck until sometime in the 60's when it was renamed West Bay, and is still called that today. The Slabtown Way feeder trail will lead you back to the main Trail.

Keewatin Lumbering and Manufacturing Company Ltd.:



If you cross the bridge heading north, the Mink Bay Trail will then follow west along the West Bay Road and leads to the earliest settled section of Keewatin. Mr. John Mather, a developer and promoter, recognized the wonderful economic development potential that the convergence of water power, a railroad and vast forests of pristine timber in this area offered. Although the Town of Keewatin was officially incorporated in 1908, unofficially the town began in 1879 when Mr. Mather started Keewatin's first industry, "The Keewatin Lumbering and Manufacturing Company Limited". A Planer Mill was then added in 1881.

The "Slabtown" era is known to be the first era in the development of Keewatin as a town.



When you walk this area and the water is low you can see the foundation of the mill. The natural beauty and serenity of this wetland makes it possible for residents and visitors to enjoy nature up close and natural.

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Wetland Area: You can continue your walk east along West Bay Road until you reach the Mink Bay Wetland area. The Mink Bay Wetland is used as a nesting and staging site for many species of birds, ducks and raptors. Lesser Yellow Legs and the Redhead Duck have been spotted in this Wetland, along with other species not native to this area, perhaps blown off their migratory routes. Ospreys, eagles and pelicans are common, as well as furbearing mammals such as mink, otter and muskrat.



Pelicans

There is a granite bench where you can sit and view the Mink Bay Creek and listen to the sound of the current in the water. Wetlands are areas where the land is wet either permanently or seasonally. Wetlands occur along the edges of lakes, rivers and streams and in areas where water pools for at least part of the year. Wetlands are transition areas or ecotones that are biologically diverse. Wetlands represent one of the most important life support systems in the natural environment.



Portage Bay Recreation Area:



The wetland also continues further east, at Happy Jack's, to the the Portage Bay Recreational Area on Portage Bay, Lake of the Woods. The Happy Jack's area is so called because an Englishman used to have a house on top of the rocks and would help the children with their homework – his name was Jack Whitmore and he always greeted you with a smile, thus Happy Jacks. This is also the area where the Coffey Dam was built in the 1880's and later a control gate, which is still located here today. The Portage Bay area is home to two ball fields, tennis courts and a skateboard area for recreational entertainment.



You then cross the arched bridge and find yourself at the Keewatin Memorial Arena and Keewatin Curling Club. The Curling Club is privately run and established in 1907. The Keewatin Memorial Arena was established in 1947.

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Beatty Park:



The route then continues east past Beatty Park. Beatty Park is named after Dr. W. J. Beatty, who became Keewatin's first doctor in 1897. He built and operated the Keewatin Hospital until the mid 1930's. He donated this property and requested it to be used as a park for the pleasure and benefits of its citizens and visitors.

Then you travel south and pass through a few community streets in the downtown area to Keewatin Beach.

Keewatin Beach:



Keewatin Beach was donated to the Town of Keewatin by the Five Roses Flour Mill. It has been enjoyed by many since then. In 1967, the Keewatin Kinsmen did a major upgrade to the Park for Canada's Centennial, and changed its name to Kin-Kee-Cen Park. (Kin - Kinsmen, Kee - Keewatin, Cen - Central) Then in 2003, under the direction of the City of Kenora, a new washroom and playground were added and the name was reverted back to Keewatin Beach.

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As you walk along Keewatin Beach Road, you will notice some of the oldest cottages in Keewatin. The yellow wooden one east of the Keewatin Beach is the oldest, original camp left on the Beach Road.

You will then travel further west along Keewatin Beach Road and across the Highway back to the Trail Head Sign on Highway 17 West. The Mink Bay Trail is a quiet, beautiful walk through all seasons.

