



## Canada's Last Frontier

Established 1870  
1st Territory

### Did You Know?



- The Northwest Territories has eleven official languages: Inuktitut, French, English, Gwich'in, Cree, Chipewyan, North Slavey, South Slavey, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuqtun, and Dogrib.
- When Northerners travel down south of the territory, they say they're going "outside."
- Virginia Falls in Nahanni National Park is almost twice as high as Niagara Falls!
- During autumn and winter, the Aurora Borealis, or "northern lights," can be seen in the Northwest Territories. These colourful, dancing lights are caused by solar wind particles interacting with gases in the earth's atmosphere.
- Canada's most famous northern manhunt took place in the Northwest Territories. Albert Johnson—the Mad Trapper of Rat River—avoided capture for weeks, survived a bomb explosion in his cabin, and scaled a 2,134-metre (7,000-ft) cliff in the middle of a blizzard, before finally dying in a shootout with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Northerners refer to traditional native dishes as "country food." Country food is usually made from fish or game that people have caught or hunted themselves.
- The South Nahanni River is considered one of the best whitewater runs in the world for adventurous canoeists and kayakers.
- Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, holds the record for the coldest city in Canada, with an average annual temperature of  $-5.4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

### Quick Facts



**Capital city:** Yellowknife

**Population:** 44,469

**Total Area:** 1,346,106 square kilometres (519,734 sq miles)

**Population Density:** 0.03 persons per square kilometre (0.01 per sq mile)

### The Place



#### Climate

The Northwest Territories has two major climatic zones: the arctic and the subarctic. These two zones are separated by the *tree line* (the farthest north trees can grow). The arctic is north of the tree line, where most of the land is tundra and *permafrost* (permanently frozen ground). The subarctic is below the tree line, where there are some forests. The arctic has cool, short summers where the temperature stays around  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $50^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and winter lasts at least nine months out of the year. The subarctic area has a longer summer, but winter in both zones is long and icy. Temperatures of  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-60^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) are common throughout the territory in the winter months. During this time there are many blizzards and *whiteouts* (blizzards which make it impossible to see the horizon). Overall, the territory receives very little precipitation, and the arctic is so dry it is actually considered a desert.



#### Average Seasonal High and Low Temperatures

Spring: -2/-12°C  
Summer: 18/9°C  
Fall: 0/-7°C  
Winter: -18/-26°C

## Geography

The Northwest Territories lies in the middle of Canada's two other territories: Yukon and Nunavut. It is roughly shaped like a rectangle and stretches over 1,346,106 square kilometres (519,734 square miles). It covers a wide range in elevation, reaching from sea level up to 2,773 metres (9,098 feet) atop an unnamed peak often called Mount Nirvana in the Mackenzie Mountains, which separate the territory from Yukon. Much of the territory is part of the Canadian Shield, an enormous section of ancient rock millions of years old. In between the mountains and the Canadian Shield is a huge region of prairies.

Many large islands in the Arctic Ocean are part of the Northwest Territories. The largest of these are Prince Patrick, Banks, and Victoria islands. The Mackenzie River is the largest river in the territory and the second largest in North America, after the Mississippi River. It flows out of Great Slave Lake and travels north to empty into the Beaufort Sea. Great Slave and Great Bear lakes are the largest in the territory. Great Slave Lake is also the deepest lake in North America, with depths of 610 metres (2,000 feet).



## Wildlife

The types of wildlife in the Northwest Territories vary depending on the region. In the arctic area, there are large numbers of seals, walrus, polar bears, whales, falcons, and snow geese. Farther south in the warmer subarctic area, moose, bears, wolves, and caribou are more common.



## Flora and Fauna

### Common Animals

Arctic fox  
Beluga whale  
Bison  
Black bear  
Bowhead whale  
Caribou  
Dall's sheep  
Lynx  
Marten  
Moose  
Mountain goat  
Muskox  
Polar bear  
Seals  
Wolf  
Wolverine

### Common Plants

White birch  
Alaska birch  
Alpine fir  
Black spruce  
Tamarack  
Trembling aspen  
Willow  
Water arum  
Western dock  
Prairie crocus  
Fringed aster  
Dwarf fireweed  
Common red paintbrush  
Woodland Horsetail  
Hooded ladies' tresses

## Endangered Animals

Eskimo Curlew  
Ivory Gull  
Peary Caribou  
Whooping Crane

## Environmental Issues

### Caribou Conservation

Caribou herds in the Northwest Territories are getting smaller. Many people hunt caribou, and some families depend on the caribou for their livelihoods. The decline in caribou herds has a large economic effect on the territory. The government has worked on strategies to help recover the caribou population. These strategies look at the difficulty the territory will face in making changes and offer solutions for management and communication problems. The territory is hopeful that these changes will help the caribou population grow.



### National Park

First Nations peoples and Canada's federal government plan for a new national park in the Northwest Territories that will be named Thaydene Nene National Park. In 1970, a proposal was made for a park, but the area was never settled on because some First Nations were against it. However, native communities are now willing to talk about the park. The area that will be considered for the park is much greater than what was originally planned on, covering more than 30,000 square kilometres (11,583 square miles). The park will preserve and protect many natural beauties, including the Great Slave Lake, which is the deepest lake in North America, and also serve as a refuge for wildlife, including caribou, bear, beaver, and many more.



## Resources and Industries

### Agriculture

The extreme cold climate of the Northwest Territories is a difficult climate for farming. As a result almost all the food in the territory has to be brought in from southern Canada.

### Manufacturing

Most of the territory's manufacturing is related to the mining industry. Diamond cutting and polishing has become an important business with the discovery of diamond mines in 1991. Most of these diamonds are then sold to European

countries such as the United Kingdom and Belgium.

## Mining

Mining is the territory's most valuable industry. Almost every known mineral can be found in the Northwest Territories. Mining is the second largest employer, after the government. Diamond mining brings hundreds of millions of dollars into Canada each year. The two main diamond mines are the Ekati and Diavik mines, which are both located around 300 kilometres (180 miles) north of Yellowknife.



## History

### Time Line

<b>6000 BC</b>	
6000 BC	The ancestors of the Dene live in what is now the Northwest Territories
<b>2000</b>	
2000	Pre-Dorsets arrive in the Canadian Arctic
<b>AD 1000</b>	
AD 1000	The Thule people move to the Arctic Islands; the Vikings reach Baffin Island
<b>1500</b>	
1576–78	English explorer Martin Frobisher makes three trips to Baffin Island
<b>1600</b>	
1670	The Hudson's Bay Company is formed



1700

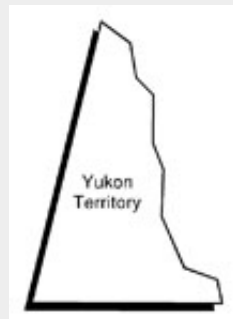
1771 Chipewyan Chief Matonabee and Hudson's Bay Company explorer Samuel Hearne reach the mouth of the Coppermine River



1800

1870 Canada purchases Hudson's Bay Company lands, uniting them with the North-western Territory to form the Northwest Territories

1898 The Yukon Territory is created from the western portion of the Northwest Territories



1899 The Dene sign Treaty 8, agreeing to share their land with *non-aboriginals* (non-natives) in exchange for medical assistance and education

1900

1905 The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan are created from the southern portion of the Northwest Territories



1919 The Dene sign Treaty 11, agreeing to give up their land rights in the upper Mackenzie River Valley and move onto reserve land

1921 Oil is discovered near Norman Wells



1933 Gold is discovered in Yellowknife Bay



1967	Yellowknife becomes the territorial capital	
1972	The Métis Association is established to defend the rights of Métis residents of the territory	
1974	The Dene Declaration demands self-determination, or independence and the right to govern themselves	
1978	The Dene Nation is proclaimed	
1981	The Canadian Constitution recognizes the existing <i>aboriginal</i> (native) rights	
1982	Northerners vote in favour of dividing the Northwest Territories into two separate territories	
1983	Richard Nerysoo becomes the territory's first native premier	
1992	Nellie Cournoyea becomes the first female premier of a Canadian territory	
1998	The first diamond mine in Canada opens in Lac de Gras	
1999	The new territory of Nunavut is created out of the northeastern portion of the Northwest Territories, reducing its size by two-thirds	
<b>2000</b>		
2006	The government and <i>aboriginal</i> groups agree to set aside more than 30,000 square kilometres (11,583 square miles) of land around Great Slave Lake as a national park	
2010	A hunter kills a hybrid grizzly-polar bear (grolar bear), and scientists predict more hybrid bears will be born as a result of climate change	
<b>PRESENT</b>		

**The Dorset and the Thule**

Thousands of years ago, Paleo-Indians lived in what is now the Northwest Territories. The Dorset people occupied the land from about 1000 BC to AD 1000. They were known for the igloos they built out of snow blocks and lived in during the winter months. They were *nomadic*, meaning they moved often, following the food supply.

Around the year AD 1000, the Thule people moved to the Arctic Islands and *displaced* (drove out) the Dorset people. The Thule were good at navigating waters and living off the fish of the sea. They built kayaks in which to hunt seal and used harpoons to hunt whales. They also built larger, open boats called *umiaks*, which women sailed. They lived in permanent villages and slowly moved further south to hunt caribou. The Thule are the ancestors of the modern-day Inuit.



### Trade Wars

In 1770, the Hudson's Bay Company of Great Britain heard of rich copper deposits near the Arctic Ocean. The company ordered explorer Samuel Hearne to go find the copper. At the time, the Chipewyan people were trading with settlers at Prince of Wales Fort, near what is now the city of Churchill. Chipewyan Chief Matonabee knew of the copper deposits and took Hearne on a trip to find them, although they actually found little copper.

At the same time, the Montreal-based North West Company was expanding its fur trade. That company also sent an explorer named Alexander Mackenzie down the river to the Beaufort Sea in 1789. The river Mackenzie sailed down was later named after him. Shortly after the trip, the North West Company began setting up trading posts all along the Mackenzie River. The two companies fought for control over the trade in the area, and soon it became the most profitable area for fur trade in the land. Before the rivalry could get out of control, the British government combined the two companies under the Hudson's Bay Company name.



### Sold!

The land that belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company was called Rupert's Land, after King Charles II's cousin. In 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to the new government of Canada, and it was renamed the Northwest Territories. Up until this point the *aboriginal* (native) residents of the territory had been able to continue living their traditional way of life, only interacting with European settlers at trading posts as they exchanged fur and *pelts* (animal skins) for cloth and other supplies.



Once the Northwest Territories were part of Canada, however, people from all over North America and parts of Europe started settling in the territory. Missionaries, fur traders, whalers, and gold diggers all made their homes in the vast northern land. The *aboriginals* were surrounded by new customs and people and forced to adjust to the settlers' way of life. Many settlers married *aboriginals*, and their children were called *Métis*, meaning "mixed blood." They grew up in a culture of their own, a mixture of both European and native traditions.

### The Northwest Passage

For years, many European explorers came to the Northwest Territories in search of what they called the Northwest Passage. This passage was believed to be a sea route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Arctic Ocean. These explorers, many of them British, wanted to use the Northwest Passage as a trade route to Asia, hoping it would be an easier and faster way to transport goods to markets there. Sir John Franklin was one well-known explorer who made three different expeditions to the Northwest Territories.



In 1854, Franklin set off with two ships to map the uncharted portions of the Northwest Passage. His ships were well equipped with heating devices and food storage for the long voyage. But, Franklin's ships were never heard from again. Search parties combed the area for years but were unable to find any trace of the ships. Then, searchers stumbled across a written record of what happened to them. Franklin's ships had become stuck in frozen water, and the crew had been unable to free the ship from the ice. Franklin and all 128 men died from starvation or disease. It wasn't until 1906 that the Northwest Passage was finally navigated successfully. Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen crossed it in a voyage that took three years.

### Bush Pilots

Many of the communities in the Northwest Territories can only be reached by air because no roads have been built. In the early 20th century, *bush pilots* became quite popular. *Bush pilots* transport people and goods in and out of remote areas in the Northwest Territories. Early flights were often dangerous and risky because of the unpredictable weather and rugged terrain. Many pilots were forced to make emergency landings and use their imaginations along with whatever materials they had on hand to repair their planes, get back in the air, and reach their destinations. The first bush pilots to fly into the territory flew into Fort Simpson in 1921. They crash landed and had to build a new propeller out of dogsled planks and boiled moose-hide glue. Northern pilots quickly became well-known heroes as they made travel in the Northwest Territories easier, contributing to the growth of the territory.



### The Territory Today

Over the years, the Northwest Territories has slowly gotten smaller, as pieces of land have been used to form other provinces and territories. Ever since the Northwest Territories was split in two with the creation of Nunavut in 1999, the territorial government has been trying to decide whether to adopt a new constitution and, with it, a new name for the territory. A new constitution would address the important issue of division of power within the government between native and non-native residents. Some people believe the territorial government should be given the same rights as provincial governments have, with more control for the territorial government and less monitoring from the federal government. A new constitution or name would go along with the territory's attempt to redefine itself, as well as reflect its people, culture, and outlook for the future.



## The People

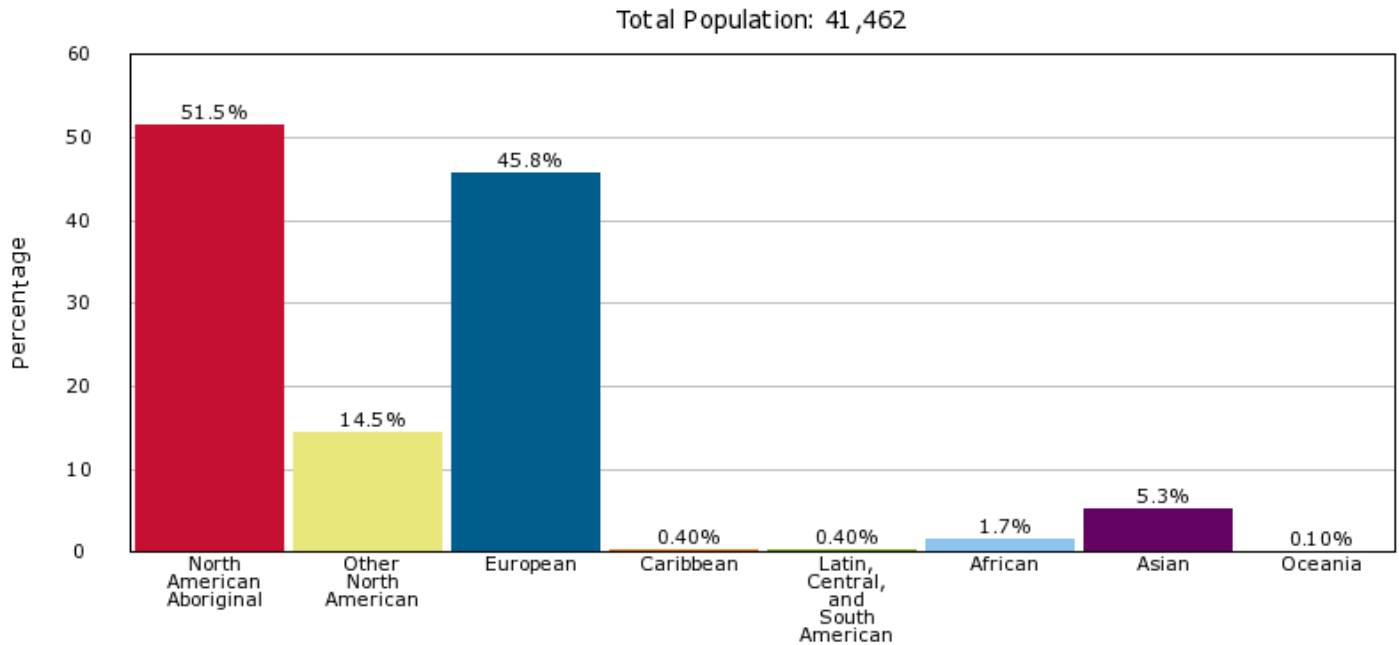


### Population

The majority of Northerners live in the cities and towns along the Mackenzie River or around Great Slave Lake. Almost half of these live in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories. Half the population is made up of *indigenous*



(native) peoples, including Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples. The birth rate is very high in the Northwest Territories, well above the national average. Its population has been increasing steadily and has more than doubled since World War II.



Canadians may belong to more than one group. Totals may not equal 100%.

## Government

### Federal

**Senators: 1**

Non-affiliated: 1

**Members of Parliament: 1**

Liberal: 1

In Canada, members of Parliament are elected from across the country. The leader of the party that wins the most seats in the House of Commons becomes the prime minister. The prime minister is the head of government in Canada. The monarch (today, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom) is leader in name only. She appoints a governor-general to be her representative in Canada. The role of this governor-general is largely ceremonial. In Canada, there are two separate lawmaking bodies, the House of Commons, which is made up of elected members, and the Senate, whose members are appointed by the governor-general under the advice of the prime minister. The House of Commons debates and votes on *bills* (proposed laws). The Senate carefully examines the *bills* and decides whether to approve, change, or reject them. For a bill to become law, it must be passed by both the House of Commons and the Senate and be given *royal assent* (approval) by the governor-general.

## Territorial

**Capital:** Yellowknife, population 19,234

**Territory Abbreviation:** NT

**Premier:** Bob McLeod

**Commissioner:** George Tuccaro

**Members of the Legislative Assembly:** 19

**Female MLAs:** 2

The commissioner of the Northwest Territories represents the monarch (queen of the United Kingdom) and holds a position similar to lieutenant-governor in the provinces. The territory has an elected *legislative* (lawmaking) body, the Legislative Assembly, which represents voters and elects the premier and a Cabinet. Each Cabinet member is placed in charge of a department such as education, health, or environment. The Cabinet members advise the premier, while the Legislative Assembly makes the laws.

## Key Issues

### Literacy

In recent years, the federal government of Canada has reduced funding for *literacy* (reading and writing) programs nationwide. This has left *literacy* programs in the Northwest Territories struggling for solutions. The NWT Literary Council provides *literacy* programs for all official languages in the Northwest Territories to families, individuals, businesses, and schools. Despite having to shut programs down due to the lack of money, the NWT Literary Council continues to service the territory, including *aboriginal* (native) communities, to help people of all ages learn to read and write.



### Resources

The government of the Northwest Territories and the federal government of Canada work together to share *revenue* (income) from the Northwest Territories' resources. For many years, the territories, including Nunavut and Yukon, have wanted more power over their natural resources. The diamond mining business has grown in the Northwest Territories since the discovery of the resource in 1991. Under the current agreement, the Northwest Territories will be allowed more control over its diamond mines and other resources.



## First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal Peoples

More than half the population of the Northwest Territories is *aboriginal* (native), including Inuit, First Nations peoples, and *Métis* (people with both European and native ancestry). Their love for the land is shown in the names they have given it. The Inuit call it *Nunassiaq*, or “the beautiful land,” while the Dene call it *Denendeh*, or “land of the people.” About one-third of the territory’s population is made up of First Nations peoples. Inuit and *Métis* represent smaller percentages.

Most *aboriginals* live outside the cities in smaller communities in forested areas. In the Northwest Territories, the

different First Nations groups all belong to the *Dene*, meaning “people.” The *Dene* and the *Métis* together speak six different languages: Chipewyan, Dogrib, Gwich’in, Cree, North Slavey, and South Slavey. The *Dene* live mainly around the Mackenzie Valley, Great Slave Lake, and Great Bear Lake areas. A small group of Inuit living in the Northwest Territories is known as the Inuvialuit. The Inuvialuit speak Inuktitut and live in the northern region of the territory along the Arctic Ocean coastline in small settlements like Aklavik, Inuvik, and Tuktoyaktuk.

Since the 1970s, the Canadian government has been working with the *indigenous* (native) peoples of the Northwest Territories to settle their land claims, which date back to the original treaties their ancestors signed with the early Canadian government. The Inuvialuit, the Sahtu, and the Gwich’in are three *bands* (tribes) in the territory that have settled their claims. The settlements mean the *bands* own the land they live on and are given all the rights associated with that land, including hunting, fishing, and water rights. They are also allowed to govern themselves, managing their own communities. Other First Nations peoples are currently working with the federal and territorial government to settle their own claims.

## Famous People



**Rob McVicar**

- *Andrew Dexter* – Power lifting champion
- *Michael Kusugak* – Children’s author
- *Margot Kidder* – Actress
- *Guy Mary-Rousselière* – Missionary
- *Rob McVicar* – National Hockey League goalie
- *Mary Okheena* – Artist



**Margot Kidder**

- *Geoff Sanderson* – National Hockey League player
- *Eric Schweig* – Actor
- *The Beck Family* – Métis sled dog racers
- *Glenna Hansen* – Politician



**Geoff Sanderson**



**Michael  
Kusugak**

## Cultural Notes



### Arctic Winter Games

The Arctic Winter Games is an international sporting competition held every two years for athletes from the northern and arctic regions of the world. The games were first held in 1970 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, with athletes from the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Alaska. Now participants come from as far away as Russia, Scandinavia, and Greenland. Events include alpine skiing, figure skating, snowboarding, and speed skating. But athletes also compete in more unique and traditional *circumpolar* (north of the Arctic Circle) sports. These include snowshoeing, dog *mushing* (sledding), and Inuit games. The Arctic Winter Games are an opportunity for northern athletes to get together and celebrate their unique heritage and culture.



### Nahanni River Legends

The Nahanni River region of the Northwest Territories is known for its great whitewater rapids and beautiful wilderness. But, during the Klondike Gold Rush, the area was said to be haunted by the ghosts of gold prospectors who disappeared trying to cut through the Nahanni on their way to the Yukon. In 1908, the headless corpses of two prospectors were found and a series of mysterious deaths fed the growing legends. Today the unusual place names in and around the Nahanni River area are a reminder of its strange history: Headless Valley, Broken Skull River, Hell's Gate, Crash Lake, Death Canyon, and Funeral Range.



## Fun Facts & Contacts

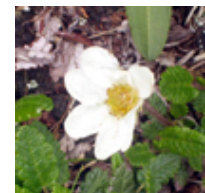


### Official Emblems

#### Territorial Flower

##### Mountain Avens

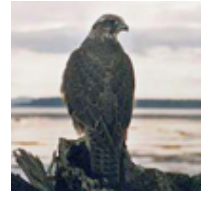
This little white and yellow flower looks somewhat like a daisy and is a member of the rose family. It is usually found in high, rocky areas.



## Territorial Bird

### Gyrfalcon

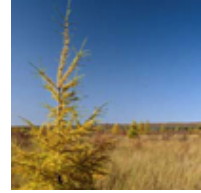
This is the largest of the falcons and is found in the tundra and Arctic islands throughout the territory. They are skilled hunters and fast fliers.



## Territorial Tree

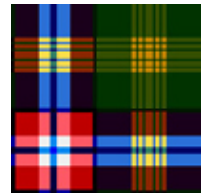
### Tamarack

This is a smaller tree that grows from 6 to 15 metres (20 to 50 feet) high. It replaced the jack pine as the official tree in 1999.



## Territorial Tartan

The white represents the snow, while the green stands for the forest. The yellow symbolizes the birches in autumn, and the red represents the tundra. The blue stands for the territory's many waters.



## Territorial Coat of Arms

The two gold *narwhals* are a common species of whale found in the Arctic. The compass rose represents the Magnetic North Pole, which is currently in the Northwest Territories. The jagged white strip stands for the dangerous polar ice. The wavy blue line represents the Northwest Passage through which early explorers looked for a trade route to Asia. The diagonal line represents the tree line, which separates arctic from subarctic areas. The green section symbolizes the territory's trees, and the red symbolizes the tundra. The gold stands for the many minerals found in the territory, while the white fox represents the fur trade, which was important in the early days of the territory.



## Major League Sports Teams

There are currently no Major League sports teams in the Northwest Territories.

## For More Information

To learn more about the Northwest Territories, see [www.gov.nt.ca](http://www.gov.nt.ca). Or contact Northwest Territories Tourism, Box 610, Yellowknife, NT, X1A 2N5; phone (867) 873-7200; web site [www.spectacularnwt.com](http://www.spectacularnwt.com).

Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042  
Fax: 1.800.864.0019  
[www.culturegrams.com](http://www.culturegrams.com)

# Northwest Territories

## EXTREMES

Lowest: The lowest elevation is sea level, at Beaufort Sea.

Highest: An unnamed peak in the Mackenzie Mountains is 2,773 metres (9,098 ft) high.

Hottest: On 18 July 1941, temperatures at Fort Smith hit 39.4°C (103°F).

Coldest: The coldest temperature, also recorded at Fort Smith, was -57.2°C (-71°F) on 26 December 1917.

