



blinds made of stacked rocks hid the hunters until caribou came close enough to be killed with a well-placed arrow. Stone caches permitted storage of dried meat, hunting implements, or winter clothing. Stones arranged in “V” shapes cradled caribou skin kayaks near crossing places where swimming caribou fell prey to the spears of the hunters. There are stone walled circular structures, called “waiting places”, where the people could wait for the caribou, unseen from below. The caribou crossings on this river were vitally important to the people, and they were governed by strict rules for behaviour at a crossing, so the caribou would continue to use it. And, there are places where people camp today, waiting for the caribou, fishing for lake trout, goose hunting, or berry picking in the fall.

One 30 kilometre area along the Kazan, between the Kazan Falls and Thirty-Mile Lake, is a crossing place where the Caribou Inuit have hunted for generations. Caribou caught here provided the necessities of life, and allowed the inland Inuit to survive the harsh winters. Because of this historical significance, it has been designated as the Fall Caribou Crossing National Historic Site. The land here was cherished and

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care was taken not to offend the spirits of the land. It is now honoured for all to enjoy and appreciate.

The upper Kazan flows through transitional boreal forest and tundra. Near the outflow of Ennadai Lake, the forest has thinned to sparse black spruce and a few tamarack growing in protected areas. These isolated trees are stunted by harsh winds and dry summers; some are “flagged”, with branches growing only on the side away from the prevailing winds.

In the river’s middle and lower reaches, the land near the river varies from rocky hills to plains. The Kazan was located beneath the centre of ice of the last continental ice sheet. The ice was thickest here, flowing out to east and west, and it remained here longer than at any other place in mainland Canada. Greatly depressed by the weight of the ice, the land is still “rebounding” at one of the highest rates in the world – more than half a metre a century.

For most of its course, the river cuts through the rocky Kazan Uplands. The topography varies from small sedge meadows to tundra to barren rock, from gently rolling hills to steep cliffs and from calm lakes to swift-water narrows and rugged waterfalls. Paddlers enjoy the Three Cascades, a series of 5–7 metre waterfalls between Angikuni Lake and Yathkyed Lake, and the beautiful Kazan Falls, where whitewater drops 25 metres, then rushes for 2 kilometres downstream through a red sandstone gorge. Striking layers of blood-red sandstone on the east side of the river originated as wind-blown sand dunes more than 1.8 billion

years ago. Slabs of this stone have been used by Inuit over the years, to build *inuksuit* and kayak stands, tall pillars of stone used to elevate the precious caribou skin kayaks above the reach of the sled dogs. Along the portage above the falls, there is a cairn which has been used since 1973 as a repository for messages from river travellers.

WILDLIFE AROUND EVERY BEND

This apparently barren wilderness is the land of the huge Qamanuriaq caribou herd. Its 500,000 animals move along and across the Kazan during the summer in one of the largest movements of land mammals in the world. The once-rare muskox population, decimated by nineteenth century European demand for muskox robes, are also frequently seen, and wolves, foxes, and even the rare wolverine occasionally make an appearance. Rounding a bend to come upon an immense barrenground grizzly shambling along a sandbar is an unforgettable experience.

Birding along the Kazan is spectacular. Four species of loons, including the rare yellow-billed loon, can be seen along the river and on the lakes. Raptors, including peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, and rough-legged hawks nest on cliffs along the river. Tundra swans rear their cygnets along the shores of the lakes, and arctic terns nest on rocky islands and sandbars in the rivers. Snowy owls and rock and willow ptarmigans are often seen.

Fishing for lake trout and arctic grayling along the Kazan is usually quite rewarding, but paddlers are urged not to depend on fish for sustenance. Across the North, fish should be used to supplement a wilderness diet rather than being a mainstay.

The Kazan is still vitally important to the Caribou Inuit, and many people from Baker Lake still travel to the river and upriver in spring and summer to spend time on the land, hunting and fishing as their forefathers did. It is a special experience to meet families that are out on the land, and paddlers enjoy the interactions.

At the river's mouth, the river branches into several channels through a 7 kilometre wide delta. The paddle across Baker Lake is strenuous, and usually into a headwind, so groups can be windbound for days. Many groups arrange for a pickup by motorboats at the mouth of the river where it empties into Baker Lake so they do not miss their outbound flights in Baker Lake.

TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

For paddlers, the Kazan is usually reached by chartered floatplane from Baker Lake, Nunavut, or from Lynn Lake, Churchill, or Thompson, Manitoba. Baker Lake receives scheduled flights from Winnipeg, Churchill, Iqaluit, and Yellowknife through Rankin Inlet.

Baker Lake has long served as the "terminus" for trips on the Thelon and the Kazan, but

it now also can serve as the starting place as well. Tour operators in Baker Lake offer day trips by motor boat and flight-seeing trips to the Kazan River and the Kazan Falls. After the final paddle down to Baker Lake, canoeists can look forward to a hotel stay or a nice camping area at **Inuujaarvik Territorial Park**. Facilities at the park include tent pads to accommodate eight tents, a cookhouse/shelter, outhouses, a fire pit, picnic tables and a barbeque.

While in Baker Lake, paddlers should not miss an opportunity to visit the Vera Akumalik Centre, the Inuit Heritage Centre, and the Jessie Oonark Centre, as well as several art galleries. It is often possible to meet and talk to many local artists who often carve in front of their houses. You'll find everything from stone carvings to jewellery, traditional tools, fabric wall hangings, and more.

Displays in the Vera Akumalik Centre and the Inuit Heritage Centre interpret the Caribou Inuit culture and the history of the area. In the Heritage Centre, you may meet elders who have stopped in for tea and a chance to visit.



For assistance in planning a trip on the Kazan River or for more information on the **Kazan Canadian Heritage River**, the Vera Akumalik Centre, and **Inuujaarvik Territorial Park**, check the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com, or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■

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