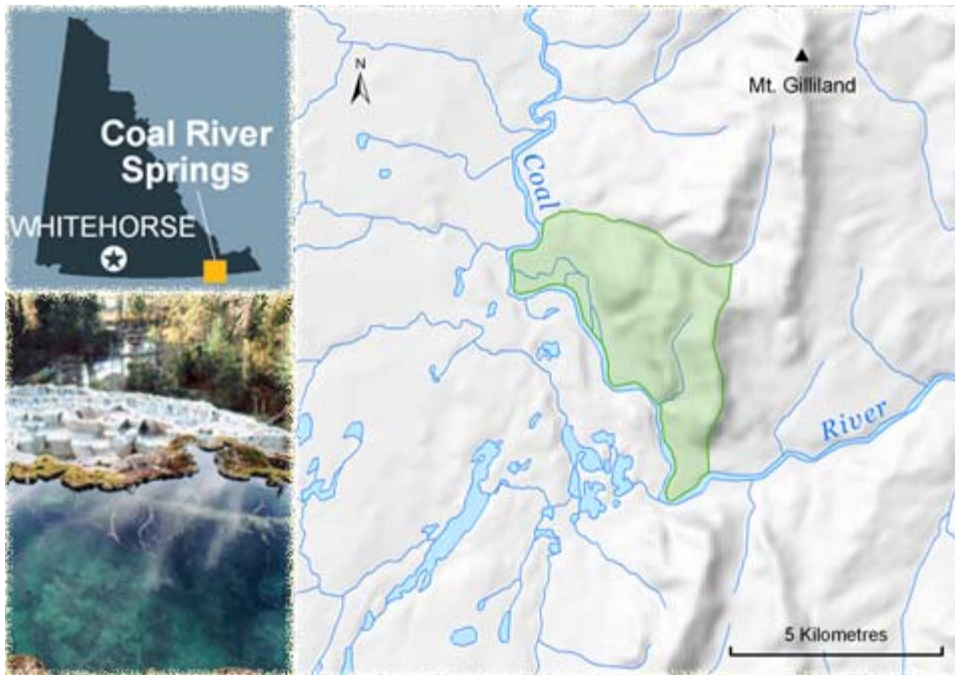


Coal River Springs Territorial Park – Nature



The mountains above Coal River Springs are outcrops of limestone composed mainly of calcium carbonate. As groundwater percolates through the porous limestone, it gradually dissolves the calcium. When the calcium-enriched water emerges from the earth at the foot of the mountains, a change begins to occur. Mosses and other vegetation change the acidity of the water as they absorb carbon dioxide.

As the acidity increases and the icy water warms, its ability to retain the rich

supply of dissolved calcium is reduced. The calcium combines with carbon, separates from the water and forms a precipitate called tufa. The continual build-up of tufa, at a rate of two to three centimetres a year, has created the terraced travertine formations surrounding the springs.

Natural forces are constantly changing the direction of water flow and resultant buildup of the tufa. As mosses grow and calcify, old drainage channels are blocked and new ones created. Moose foraging in the wetlands along the base of the formations often walk on the mounds, occasionally breaking off pieces of tufa and changing the watercourses.

When walking through the surrounding forest, you may observe evidence of past change. Ancient tufa can be found tangled in the roots of fallen trees. Walls of tufa from old dry pools stand like fortresses guarding secret courtyard gardens. Large, healthy trees thrive within these bastions, their roots solidly anchored.

Favourable conditions at the springs help to support an abundance and rich diversity of plant life. The main source pool averages 13 degrees C throughout the year while the mean annual temperature for the area is only -3 degrees C. With moderated temperatures and constant water flow, a number of species uncommon in the Yukon occur at Coal River Springs. Blue grass grows here. The only other place it is found is at the mouth of the Mackenzie River over a thousand kilometres away. Wild sarsaparilla, red and white baneberry, knotweed and water-milfoil are also present around the springs.

Wildlife populations in the Coal River region are relatively unaffected by human activity. Black and grizzly bears have been observed within the present park boundaries. A wolf pack maintains at least one denning site nearby. The constant flow of water attracts beaver that have, from time to time, dammed the system and created extensive wetlands along the foot of the terraces. Fed by the temperate waters, the wetlands produce early-season aquatic plants which attract moose in the spring. As many as six moose have been observed sharing these small wetlands for a brief period in May.

The boreal toad and the northern wood frog are also found in these wetlands. Dolly varden inhabit the Coal River beside the springs and tiny sculpins swim in some of the terraced pools high on the bluff.