

NORTH SLAVE MÉTIS ALLIANCE

PO Box 2301 Yellowknife, NT X1A 2P7



Old Fort Rae | North Arm of Great Slave Lake

Background:

The North Arm of Great Slave Lake has been used since time immemorial by Indigenous peoples who came from the Athabasca, Great Slave, and Mackenzie Valley regions. The Métis have arguably inhabited the area since the early 1700s. By the late 1700s, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had established themselves in the North and it is during this era that the archaeological record really begins to show evidence of a mixing of traditional activities.

Other names for Old Fort Rae include: Isle de Montagne, Mountain Island, Fort Rae, and Rae Point. It was a site of trade, travel, life, and death for Indigenous peoples in the north, both First Nation and Métis.

The Métis worked for the NWTC and HBC moving supplies west and furs east. They helped build and sustain the fur trade as voyageurs, middlemen, labourers, interpreters, winterers, hunters and trappers. The Métis moved into the Mackenzie Valley, often ahead of foreign traders. Multi-talented and skilled Métis workers developed intimate relationships with the neighboring Dëne groups and used their skills as carpenters, fishermen, blacksmiths, farmers, and trappers to dominate work with the fur trade.

Old Fort Rae remains an important cultural site for the North Slave Métis (NSMA) and Tłı̄ch̄ Peoples. There are ancestors buried in a cemetery at the site, and old building foundations still remain. The area continues to provide plentiful fish, caribou, moose, bison, birds, small game, plants and medicines. Cabbage, rhubarb, onions, and other cultivated plants remain as evidence of historic gardens.

It is also important to understand that the entire North Arm was well travelled. There are many unmarked graves throughout the North Arm, and artifacts have been found all throughout travel routes. Though Old Fort Rae is a culturally important and unique site, no matter where you travel in the North Arm, you are following the footsteps of Métis and First Nation ancestors. People still use these routes and sites today, though not in as great numbers as they did during the fur trade and before.

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Protocols:

Before the trip:

- 1) NSMA asks that tour operators appropriately research and build understanding with their tour group guests about the site before conducting a tour.
- 2) Before departing on your North Arm trip, email lands@nsma.net to let us know. We will be at Old Fort Rae most of the summer. Should you stop at the site due to poor weather or dangerous conditions, we want to ensure that tours will not interfere with NSMA activities and our current rehabilitation efforts on site.
- 3) The background section of this document can be used as a starting point to share history and significance of the site with guests when passing by the site or travelling in the area. There is more information available if requested.

During the trip:

- 4) We do not encourage outside parties to visit and travel through Old Fort Rae. However, if bad weather comes please feel free to seek refuge at Old Fort Rae. While on site, please respect the following:
 - a. Stay within the designated areas and do not enter the culturally important zones;
 - b. You are not permitted to use the cabins or facilities;
 - c. If you locate possible artifacts please GPS their location and report back to the NSMA, do not remove the item from the land;
 - d. Should you find trail cameras damaged or knocked over due to wildlife, you are welcome to adjust the camera;
 - e. In general, leave the grounds as you found them and understand that the entire site holds cultural significance, not just the location of the cabins.
 - f. Be aware that a crew will be at Old Fort Rae all summer to restore the infrastructure – it will be dangerous for visitors. Please do not include Old Fort Rae as a backup stop in the case of bad weather in your travel plans as the site will be hazardous. Though, if necessary, you can seek refuge at the site.
 - g. When you return to town, please inform our office that a tour group was on site and provide a brief explanation.
- 5) On your travels across the North Arm, you may find evidence of more camps and people on the Land, which is what we like to see! Good campsites are often maintained, and some supplies left, so that other travellers can be safe and looked after on their travels. The Land is not seen as wild and barren, but rather home for people. We look after it, build on it, and maintain it as it is our home.

After the trip:

- 6) If there was anything noticed at Old Fort Rae or on the North Arm of concern or special interest, please report back to NSMA.