

Peninsula a 'hot spot' for rare plants

You might miss them at first glance. They look small and insignificant, but they're actually rare, and people from the world over are coming to the Northern Peninsula to see them.

The region is held in high regard by people who study and admire rare plants and limestone barrens, and their interest dates back several decades.

In the early 1900s, Merrit Lyndon Fernald, an enthusiastic field botanist and a professor of botany at Harvard University, drew the attention of the world's scientific community to these barrens.

Mr. Fernald returned to Newfoundland several times, enchanted with this diverse landscape of wind-swept coastline, rocky plateaus, marshlands and its many rare plants.

The area from the Port au Choix National Historic Site to Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve at Raleigh is described as the "hotspot" of plant diversity on the Island of Newfoundland. Of the 298 species of plants considered rare on the island of Newfoundland, 104 occur on the Northern Peninsula — and 22 of these species are found only on the Northern Peninsula.

Many of these are Arctic-alpine plants, and visitors would normally have to travel to Northern Labrador or to Baffin Island to see them. Others are only found on limestone soils, where harsh environmental conditions prevent other plants from growing.

The limestone barrens of the Northern Peninsula are globally significant because they are home to the world's total population of Long's Braya, Fernald's Braya, Barrens Willow and the Burnt Cape Cinquefoil.

In the past two decades, much of this habitat has been lost due to human activity. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has determined that Long's Braya, Barrens Willow, and Fernald's Braya are species at risk of extinction.

In an effort to protect this unique habitat, many partners are working together under the Limestone Barrens Habitat Stewardship Program. They are creating opportunities for people to learn about this special feature of the Newfoundland landscape, to share it with visitors, and to protect it for the future.

At Burnt Cape there are community interpreters who offer guided tours and interpretation of the rare plants. At Port au Choix National Historic Site, a new trail crosses the limestone barrens and interpreters at the Visitor Centre can point out some of the special features of the barrens. At Flowers Cove,



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Guided tours are available at the Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve near Raleigh.

guided field trips are offered.

Responsible use by local residents and visitors is essential to ensure the protection of this habitat for future generations.