



Getting Started: I'm waving a two-pound plastic baggie of flour over my head, expostulating its edibility compared to Frank's obviously excess baggage. Then the baggie bursts, crowning me in a glorious halo of white flour. I scrape most of the flour off Frank and the hangar floor.

It's worth knowing the fly-in baggage restrictions before inviting heavyweight trippers on a shared aeroplane! (DEH CHO insists on \$5 per pound after a limit of 330 pounds per person, including canoe and personal body weight.) We unpack, repack, dispute, and weigh each item a few times.

After a roaring start in a flyweight, single-engine Otter, accompanied by four tourists (who had no baggage at all), this sightseeing alternative sure is spectacular. As we splash down at Island Lakes, we are delighted by our start location in the scenic Ragged Range, presumably well below any treacherous rapids. It is drizzling, and the place includes a cabin complete with a waterproof porch.

On our second morning, a mother black bear wanders into camp to introduce her cute, scrawny cub to humans. Fortunately, the food barrel is locked. The warning is obvious: Nahanni Country is Bear Country!

Nahanni Magic: Descending from the soaring peaks of the Ragged Range, summer glaciers drain into emerald-green lakes, creating fertile oases of breathtaking beauty in a vast, barren landscape. Spruce forests surrounding glacial lakes are carpeted with a rich variety of mosses, lichens, and wildflowers, with dwarf blue lupines blooming everywhere. Sunlight filtering through the spring mists gives warmth and life to a fairyland kaleidoscope of miniature alpine flowers, which lend an enchantment to our rambles, and a profound reconnaissance of the Dene people's legends of heaven: leopard orchids, pink wintergreens, bearded bellflowers, purple monk's hood, blue columbines, clusters of dwarf raspberry blossoms, gentians, wood betony, black-tipped groundsel, exotic mushrooms and lichens, alpine roses, and carpets of delicate twinflowers emitting sweet perfumes.

Cirque of the Unclimbables: An arduous 10-hour trek on a gorgeous sunny day (it only rained twice), takes us to a crystal-green glacier lake graced by a circle of majestic mountain peaks, and illuminated by a sunset complete with pink lining. Alpine fairy meadows beckon. The trail is wet, wet, wet — and we even get lost for a while, following various moose trails as we descend through the bog and the dampness. A rhapsody of flowers, mosses, and lichens covers the forest floor, including a magic saxifraga oppositifolia specimen which stands sentinel, like a red pine cone, with gold tips — and tiny round-leafed orchids with delicate mauve trimmings.