

NATIONAL PARKS PROJECT: THE PARKS

EPISODE 5 – NAHANNI

Full name: Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada

Territory: Northwest Territories

Total area: 30,000 km² (approx.)

Established: 1972 (reserve); 1976 (National Park)

Nahanni National Park Reserve is home to the South Nahanni River, one of the world's legendary waterways. Winding through the Mackenzie Mountains, the river travels 540 kilometres through some of the deepest canyons in Canada, crashing over Virginia Falls, which drops a breathtaking 96 metres – nearly twice the height of Niagara. It is an ancient river, that began cutting its course millions of years ago through a flat plain of sedimentary sandstone before the mountains rose up around it, pushed skyward by the forces of continental drift. And it is a storied river, which naturalist Bill Mason, who wrote the canoeing classic, *Path of the Paddle*, called “the greatest river trip in the world.”

Facts:

- *Pierre Trudeau is famous for having toured the Nahanni. He was so impressed by it that, in 1972, he moved to set the area aside as a National Park Reserve. In 1978, UNESCO further sanctified the Nahanni by inscribing it as the world's first Natural Heritage Site. In 1987, the South Nahanni was designated a Canadian Heritage River.*
- *Nahanni National Park Reserve was originally only 4,766 km². In 2009, the Canadian government expanded it, bringing the total protected area to over 30,000 square kilometres – almost the size of Switzerland. It is now the third largest national park in Canada, behind only Wood Buffalo and Quttinirpaaq.*
- *The first plane to land in the Nahanni area, in 1947, was carrying Pierre Berton, who was on mission to find a tropical valley rumoured to be hidden amidst the snow-capped peaks of the Mackenzie Mountains.*
- *The Nahanni is full of legends that have given the river's sites their macabre names. The most famous story tells of Willie and Frank McLeod, two brothers who went up the river in search of the gold in 1906. They didn't return, and two years later their skeletons were found lashed to trees, with neither their heads nor any gold anywhere in sight. More strange incidents followed, and their stories are now immortalized in names like Deadmen Valley, Headless Creek and Broken Skull River.*
- *Kraus' Hotsprings marks the end of the South Nahanni's great canyons. They were named for Mary and Gus Kraus, who lived in the park for 30 years between 1940 and 1970, growing an array of exotic plants fed by the mineral-rich waters. Their cabin still stands today.*

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National Parks Project – ARTIST BIOS

EPISODE 5 – NAHANNI

MUSICIANS

Shad

Shad is Canada's newest and brightest hip-hop star. The guitar-playing emcee crosses musical boundaries while still paying ample respect to the old school, and drops intelligent rhymes about a broad spectrum of issues, from bohemian urban poverty to the tragic history of his parents' homeland, Rwanda. Eschewing the bravura and posturing typical of new entrants into the hip-hop game, Shad mines the wit and humour of conscious hip-hop while avoiding its platitudes, for a mix that brings the party while tickling the brain. As the Vancouver Sun aptly put it, it's "hip-hop that's good for you." His 2008 record, *The Old Prince*, was nominated for a Juno Award, and his 2010 offering, *TSOL*, made the Polaris Prize shortlist. But Shad's not content to coast on his success; having already earned an undergraduate business degree, he's now pursuing a part-time Masters in liberal arts at Vancouver's Simon Fraser University.

The Besnard Lakes (Jace Lasek and Olga Goreas)

Rockers the Besnard Lakes are huge, expansive, hallucinatory, psychedelic, spaced-out, dialed up and lost in a strange and beautiful dream. The core of the Besnard Lakes is the husband-and-wife duo of Jace Lasek and Olga Goreas. Although they named their band for Besnard Lake in northern Saskatchewan, Lasek and Goreas hail from the Montreal, Quebec, where Lasek runs Breakglass Studio, producing music by some of the country's best young bands. Few, however, achieve the weird majesty of the Besnard Lakes' own music – a combination of '70s prog-rock bombast, tsunami-sized riffs, sweet vocal harmonies, heavy drone and sparkling effects, threaded through with cryptic lyrics about a pair of spies. In 2010, they were nominated for the Polaris Prize, and won wide acclaim for their third album, *The Besnard Lakes Are The Roaring Night*.

FILMMAKER

Kevin McMahon

From his beginnings as a journalist, through his maturation as a filmmaker, Toronto's Kevin McMahon has displayed the qualities one finds in only the best documentary directors: curiosity, a deep respect for his subjects and a fundamental decency. His brand of social commentary works by showcasing what is amazing and inspiring in the world. McMahon began his career in print, garnering a Governor General's Award for Public Service Journalism. After shifting his focus to film, he created a string of docs that examined some of the most iconic subjects in Canadian culture, including Niagara Falls, the Cod fishery, and the influence of Marshall McLuhan. One of his prime objectives is to explore what it means to live in a country with so many vast spaces and so many different people. His recent films include *An Idea of Canada* (2003), *Stolen Spirits of Haida Gwaii* (2004) and *Waterlife* (2009), which spawned an award-winning interactive website.