

Maine – Where America’s Day Begins

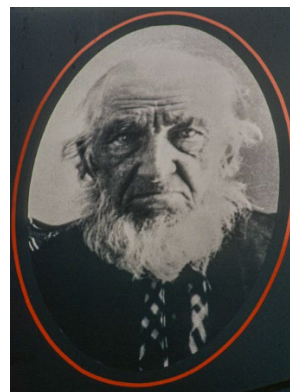
In early August 1999, after an exhausting 10 days of managing the Esri International User Conference in San Diego, I took a week off to visit the state of Maine. Up until that time, for me Maine was just a place on the map and home to lobsters. So, I decided to do my best to discover the “heart” of the state that sees the first sunrise in America. My journey began on a very pleasant flight to Atlanta on which I enjoyed a delicious breakfast of a cheese omelet stuffed with corn and zucchini, along with Canadian bacon, hash brown potatoes, and fresh fruit. Upon landing in Atlanta, I had a short connection to make the flight to Boston, but my luggage followed me none-the-less. (thanks to Delta airlines) It was another very nice flight to Boston in first-class where I enjoyed a superb dinner of rolled chicken breast stuffed with savory wild mushrooms, followed by luscious New York cheesecake for dessert. The flight passed directly over Manhattan Island which gave us incredible views of the city! (including the World Trade Center twin towers, before they were destroyed by terrorists just two years later) Then the flight followed the coast of Long Island to Cape Cod before landing in Boston. I had about an hour to wait for the flight on to Portland, Maine which I spent in the new Delta Airlines Crown Room enjoying a cold pint of Samuel Adams lager. The lounge was beautiful with gorgeous mahogany everywhere – it created a real feel of luxury!

Then I boarded the short 45 minute flight to Portland, the state’s largest city. When I checked into the “Sheraton Tara Hotel” near the airport in South Portland, I overheard the front desk staff telling people the hotel was fully booked, and on top of that, all hotels in Portland were fully booked as well. (I never found out why) So, the only hotel rooms still available were in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, an hour’s drive south! (luckily, I had a confirmed reservation for the night) When the front desk clerk asked if I had a reservation and I said yes, the guy standing in line behind me suddenly said “I’m with him!” But, it did him no good and he was now facing a long drive to Portsmouth at 10:00pm! Having checked into my room, I went downstairs to the “Dirtwater Fox Bar & Grill” where I had a delicious classic club sandwich and a cold pint of local Shipyard Ale. Meanwhile, as I enjoyed my late dinner in the bar, I noticed a large group of young people waiting for taxis to take them to a nightclub called the “Pavilion”. After that the bar became very quiet. Back in my room I watched a movie titled “Analyze This”, a comedy starring Robert DeNiro as a member of the mafia and Billy Crystal as a psychiatrist who team up as an unlikely duo to help each other. Then I feel asleep as rain began to fall outside.

The next morning, I paid a visit to the home and birthplace of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in historic downtown Portland. Until 1901, the house had no inside running water, gas, or electricity! One of the rooms had a lovely view of the garden where he composed one of his most famous poems about a “rainy day”, and by strange coincidence, our guide was reading that same poem as a light rain continued to fall outside the window.



Longfellow House



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Later, during the heaviest rain, I spent the afternoon roaming around the new “Maine Mall”, along with what I estimated to be half the people in the state of Maine! After a couple of hours, I stopped at “Thatcher’s Pub” in the mall for a delicious lunch of fresh grilled Atlantic Haddock and chips – the fish was very light and crisp, much like Halibut. After lunch, the rain ended and I drove down to the old port for a leisurely walk along the waterfront, which was a very interesting collection of commercial fishing and shipping alongside old wharves that had been renovated into new condominiums, restaurants, bars, and shops. The whole area was vibrant with activity! From the waterfront I walked a couple of blocks to the historic Portland Regency Hotel, an elegant old red brick building that had once been an armory in the 19th century. It was surrounded by many beautiful old Victorian buildings and tree-lined red brick and cobble stone streets. I decided to have a seat in the charming lobby bar to savor a pint of Shipyard Ale and take in the 19th century atmosphere. Later, as I explored the historic district of Portland I came to the “Dry Dock Bar” where I had a pint of another local brew called “Geary’s Pale Ale” as I sat outside on the covered porch overlooking the ferry terminal. Ferries arrived and departed every hour or so to numerous islands in Casco Bay. Apparently, many people use the ferries to commute to and from work in the city every day. It was fascinating to watch the activity at the ferry terminal.



Portland Waterfront



Ferry Terminal

The next day, as I left Portland under dreary, grey skies, I encountered lots of heavy traffic heading north on I-95! I persevered, but not without a lot of frustration, after all, there weren’t supposed to be this many people in the whole state of Maine! However, the preponderance of Massachusetts license plates explained it all. At one point, I saw a sign for the “Portland Head Lighthouse” near the town of Fort William, so I exited the interstate and left the hordes from Boston. After a few miles on a narrow road, I discovered a beautiful, classic white tower highlighted against a lovely deep blue sky! As I walked toward the lighthouse, I saw a wild, rocky coast – just as I had expected to see in Maine. It was a short but wonderful visit.



Portland Head Lighthouse

Later, back on I-95, I joined half the people of Boston again as we all headed north past the small town of Augusta, the state capitol! Further on I saw the sign for the exit to Acadia National Park and state route 3. As I exited the interstate, I suddenly realized I was on the long, local route to the national park. But by this time I had no choice other than to continue, despite the “bumper to bumper” traffic approaching the town of Ellsworth due in large part to an accident “smack dab” in the middle of the one and only road to Mt Desert Island in Acadia National Park! However, at the first opportunity I took a fork in the road, which had a lot less traffic, thank goodness. Although I didn’t realize it right away, the choice was wise, since it took me to the historic village of “Southwest Harbor” and a very beautiful, wild part of Acadia National Park. Further down the road I saw a sign for “Cadillac Mountain” so I followed it. After a long steep route up above timberline, I arrived at a parking lot on the summit of the mountain that was crowned by huge grey granite boulders. The view from the top of Cadillac Mountain was nothing short of spectacular – although, the force of the wind was fierce. I could see all the way west to the White Mountains in New Hampshire, more than 100 miles away!



Acadia National Park



Cadillac Mountain

Following the incredible experience on the summit, I descended the steep narrow road to the historic whaling town of Bar Harbor. As I drove into the town I was overwhelmed by the huge number of tourists and the heavy traffic – a sense of claustrophobia suddenly overcame me and a strong urge to “get out of town”! Leaving town, I saw “No Vacancy” signs everywhere which meant I had no hope of finding a place to stay for the night anywhere near Bar Harbor. With the hordes of tourists closing in around me I continued driving north on US Route 1 hoping to find a nice place to stay along the coast. But even the worst “dump” of a motel had a No Vacancy sign posted. (In some sense I began to feel a perverse kind of humor as I imagined the cheap rundown motel would begin to put out their No Vacancy sign, even if they were not fully booked, just to show people driving by they were actually a popular place to stay! It was much like I remembered in the 1950’s when air-conditioning in cars was an expensive luxury, so as young teens, we would “cruise” through town with our car windows rolled up, even in the hottest weather, just to “impress” everyone with our air-conditioning, which we didn’t have!)

After a long drive north on US 1, I began encountering much less traffic, as well as fewer towns. The sun was rapidly setting by then, so it was definitely time to look for a place to stay for the night. As I was approaching the small town of Machias, every place I saw was either full or not worth a night’s stay. Suddenly, a very weird looking old house resembling the one depicted in the “Adams Family” films appeared. The house had a very distinctive “Mansard” style roof and a small sign outside – “Mariner B&B”. So, I took a chance to stop and check it out, only to find it was abandoned, despite the lights illuminating the sign! (weird) After the “false alarm” at the Mariner B&B, I drove back through town, with no success in finding accommodations for the night – even at the miserable looking “Riverside Motel” which was no where close to a river. Then just as I was leaving town headed west on US 1A, I spotted the “Clark Perry House B&B”, but there were no lights on. So, I figured it must be closed –

however, just to be sure, I turned around and drove by one more time. Same thing, no lights, but on my third “drive by” the porch light came on! I immediately took this as a signal to stop and enquire. Just then, the entire Machias Fire Department roared past in response to what I would never know. After several attempts, the doorbell went unnoticed until finally a young girl came to the front door and invited me inside. She showed me to a beautiful, large room upstairs in the magnificent old Victorian house – such a wonderful place, especially late in the evening. There were only three bedrooms and I appeared to be the only guest.



Clark Perry House B&B - Machias

Upon her recommendation, I walked over to “Helen’s Café” nearby where I ordered Helen’s specialty, a huge seafood platter for dinner. It came with fresh grilled salmon, haddock, shrimp, and of course lobster. After the superb dinner, I had to have a slice of her famous blueberry pie made from local berries! When I returned to the B&B I heard music from an Italian opera softly floating through the house – it was a very quiet, relaxed night’s sleep. (Just to note, the front door had been left unlocked for me) The next morning, I enjoyed a delicious breakfast of homemade granola and fresh fruit served in the lovely Victorian era dining room. Along with the granola came a large bowl of fresh blueberries, peaches in thick cream, toast and coffee – all of which was served by the young girl and her big yellow tabby cat named “Reuben”! (I wasn’t sure if there was anyone else in the house – it was that quiet) Machias was pretty much a “dry” town, as was most of northern Maine, so I bought a 6-pack of Shipyard Ale at the local “agency liquor store” to take with me in the event I couldn’t find a place to buy beer later on. (Unfortunately, I forgot to buy an insulated pack and ice to keep it cold!) Leaving Machias, I drove several miles north past huge areas of “blueberry barrens” – large natural bogs where wild blueberries grow in abundance. Later I found out that local companies hire people to “rake” the berries for harvesting in the fall. There are many of the region’s recipes that use wild blueberries, and the same can be said for Alaska as well.



Blueberry Bog

As I followed the rugged coast, I spotted a sign for the “Bold Coast Trail”, so I decided to stop and check it out. The trail is a 10.4 mile loop along the very edge of the coast with cobble beaches, sheer rocky cliffs, sweeping ocean panoramas and dramatic views of the “Bold Coast” of Maine. It was well worth the stop.



Bold Coast



“Bold Coast Trail”

Further north on state highway 191 I saw two gigantic 950-foot-high steel towers at the US Naval Radio Station near the small coastal town of Cutler. The station transmits VLF (very low frequency) radio communications to the US Navy Atlantic Fleet, including the Polaris FBM (fleet ballistic missile) system, and other submerged submarines operating in the Atlantic and Arctic Ocean regions. Several miles further north I came to the picturesque old fishing village of Cutler, situated on the rocky coast just south of the border with New Brunswick, Canada.



Fishing Village of Cutler



West Quoddy Lighthouse

From Cutler I followed a narrow road hugging the coastline to the West Quoddy Lighthouse at the end of the road. The historic lighthouse is a beautiful classic “candy striped design” and one of the oldest lighthouses in America, having been built in 1808 under orders from President Thomas Jefferson. It stands on the easternmost point of land in the continental US, and as such, it’s the first place in America to see the sunrise every day. From the lighthouse it was a short drive north to the town of Lubec where I crossed the border into New Brunswick and on to Campobello Island where President Franklin Roosevelt maintained a lovely cottage as his “summer retreat”. It is beautifully maintained by the US National Park Service and Parks Canada and furnished exactly as the Roosevelt family left it in 1949 following the president’s death. As I toured the cottage I was struck by a gorgeous oval window in the drawing room with a beautiful view of St John’s Bay. The cottage was built by the Roosevelt family in 1897 as a summer retreat which they used frequently.



Roosevelt Cottage – Campobello Island, New Brunswick

From Campobello Island I took a small local ferry to Deer Island, and as I waited to board the boat, I picked some fresh, sweet wild raspberries next to the ferry landing. Once on board, I noticed it was powered by an “articulated” engine mounted on the side of the boat that allowed it to navigate in tight spaces. As the small ferry made its way across the Bay of Fundy, we passed a large school of sardines – a feeding frenzy for the seagulls! Once we landed on Deer Island, it was a short but pleasant drive across the island and then aboard another small ferry to the old town of Eastport, Maine.



Deer Island Ferry



Bay of Fundy

While the historic old town was beautiful, accommodations were hard to find in the late afternoon. However, I was fortunate to secure the last room available at the historic “Weston House B&B”. After checking in to a very nice single room overlooking the harbor, I found out that several famous people had stayed here, including John James Audubon. For dinner that evening, my hosts highly recommended a traditional Lobster dish at the “Baywatch Café” on the harbor.



Weston House B&B



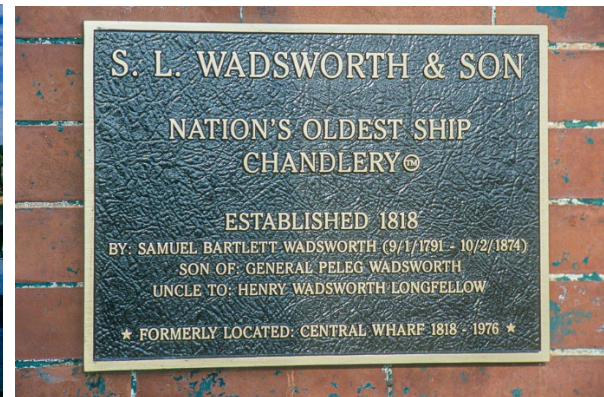
Eastport Harbor

As I sat down at a table outside on the deck of the restaurant, I couldn't help but notice that the entire building "leaned" at an obvious angle northwest towards the sea! But it didn't seem to adversely affect the quality of the food or the gorgeous view of the sunset. Shortly, the owner came with the menu – an interesting piece that had a map of the local area and an ad for the restaurant on the other side. As I enjoyed the succulent taste of the fresh lobster tail, I overheard conversations of the locals around me – "thick" Maine accents. Before dinner my server had suggested a cold pint of "Sea Dog Windjammer Blonde Ale" from a new brewery in Portland. It went very well with my dish of fresh seafood. Meanwhile, I overheard several stories from the local fishermen also having dinner in the restaurant. After the superb dinner, I walked back to the Weston House B&B in the cool evening air, which was filled with smells from the sea and sounds of seagulls overhead – a great way to end the day!

Early the next morning, I took a walk around the old town of Eastport, photographing the many old red brick buildings dating back to the 1870's and 1880's. Most of them were in various stages of conversion into a curious mix of new shops, restaurants, and bars. However, among the historic shops still doing business was "C.J. Wadsworth & Son" on Main Street – the nation's oldest ship's chandlery! The old antique store next to it had a large sign in the window, "Closed – hours by chance or by appointment"! On my way back to Weston House B&B there were many beautiful views of fishing boats docked in the harbor and old storefronts reflected in the still water.



Eastport Waterfront



Chandlery

I arrived back at Weston House just in time to join everyone for a sumptuous breakfast of scrambled eggs topped with fresh tarragon (hand picked from the garden that morning), together with fresh baked orange-ginger muffins! It was the perfect beginning to the day. While I was staying at the B&B, I noticed that none of the guests locked their doors. The owners of Weston House had two lovely black Scottish Terriers who were always around for attention, which they had no problem getting from the guests.

Before leaving Weston House, I learned that the owners were a couple who had retired from The US Forest Service in California.

As I was leaving Eastport, I couldn't help but notice all the gorgeous old white clapboard houses designed in the classic "Federal" style architecture. Another thing I noticed was the fact that there were no "bars" in the town, just a couple of restaurants that served only beer and wine. It confirmed my observation that northern Maine must almost be "dry". I headed north on US 1 and just outside of Eastport was the famous "Rayes Mustard Mill", where I was fortunate to see the old mill in operation using the same massive granite grindstones since 1902! In the old days, the huge 6 foot diameter grindstone wheels were turned by a complex series of large overhead belts driven by a massive steam engine. Today, the very same system of overhead belts continues to operate, but now driven by a large electric motor. After a short guided tour of the grinding room, we were shown to the "tasting room" where there were many different mixtures of mustard with such ingredients as garlic, honey, herbs, and wine – all were excellent, along with a variety of homemade pretzels. As I left the mill, I bought a couple of jars of mustard and a postcard.



Raye's Mustard Mill - Eastport

Then, I continued my journey north on US 1 toward the small town of Calais, which the locals pronounced as "Callus" – very un-French! Near Calais was the small coastal village of "Robbinston" where a beautiful huge white mansion with tall slender Greek colonnades stood overlooking the St Croix River. The mansion had been converted into a lovely B&B, and the original owner, Captain John M. Brewer, had lent his name to the place. Ironically, just across the road was a small rest area maintained by the state of Maine, that consisted of nothing more than your "typical" outdoor toilet. The sign pointing the way read "Outhouse" - nothing like honesty!



Captain Brewer House – Robbinston



Further down the highway was a beautiful National Park Service "wayside" overlooking St Croix Island in the middle of the river. The island is the historic site of the first French settlement in North

America when Samuel Champlain landed in 1609. He and his expedition almost perished that winter from extremely cold weather and starvation. From the wayside I finally came upon the historic old town of Calais, across the St Croix River from St Stephen, New Brunswick. On the edge of town, I found a lovely trail along the shore of the river following the abandoned Maine Central Railroad that began at an old railway depot in town. As I made my way through the thick brush, I discovered the old railroad grade continued around the bend in the river and eventually led to the remains of an old switchyard and roundhouse, complete with a working “turntable”.



Maine Central Railroad

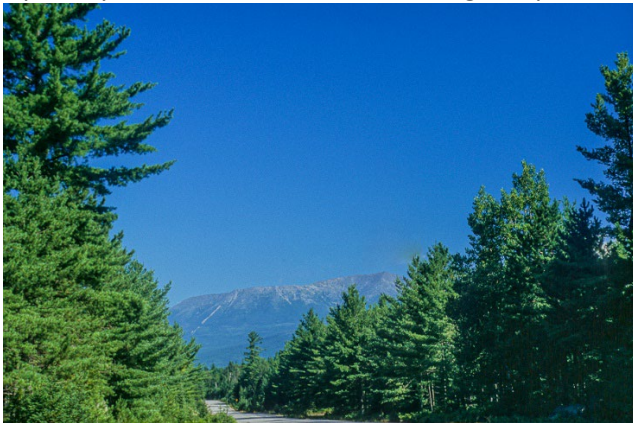
From that point, the railroad tracks continued north and were obviously in use, judging by the shiny rails. (Later, I found out the tracks are now used by the “Downeast Scenic Railroad” tourist train) I continued walking along the railroad for a short distance and suddenly came upon a small hydroelectric power plant where a new railway bridge just above me crossed the St Croix River. It appeared that the USA side of the bridge was closed by a heavy iron gate. But apparently the bridge had been used in the recent past to connect American and Canadian railways. Just then I heard the sound of a waterfall and rapids in the river below. So, I climbed down the steep, rocky riverbank to take a photo. Then, just as I was about to climb back up the bank, three river otters suddenly poked their heads above water, only 15 feet away! But before I could aim my camera, they dove back under the water and were gone. It was fun to see them, even for a brief moment.



St Croix River - Calais

From Calais I continued north on US 1 through the heavily forested Maine countryside. Often there were beautiful panoramic views of the Appalachian Mountains on the western horizon. Eventually I arrived in Houlton where I found the “Shiretown Motel” – about the only decent looking accommodations. After checking in, I took a long walk around the historic downtown district where

there were more than two dozen buildings from the late 1800's that had been beautifully restored. Despite seeing almost all of downtown Houlton, I couldn't find a single bar! I found out later that Houlton is most famous as the site where AT&T initiated the first transatlantic commercial telephone service linking New York and London in 1927 using a massive radio antenna over three miles long and two miles wide! Since it was still early in the afternoon, I decided to take a short drive southeast on US 2 toward Island Falls. The landscape was a lovely pastoral countryside, with mountains in the distance, and especially nice views of Mt Katahdin, highest point in Maine.



Mt Katahdin – US Highway 2



Near Houlton, Maine

Along the way I passed through several small villages, most of which were lucky to have even a general store! Meanwhile, the old highway was very narrow, rough in places, and full of tight curves – certainly nothing like US 2 in North Dakota or Montana. At that point I decided to head back to Houlton by way of I-95 instead. As I merged onto the freeway I saw no traffic, but a few minutes later a couple of large semi-trucks caught up with me very quickly and proceeded to overtake me in short order, despite the fact I was doing at least 75mph! As I pulled into Houlton, a gorgeous sunset appeared and I was able to capture a few brilliant photos.



Downtown Houlton



Sunset on Pleasant Lake

That evening, I had dinner in the “Atrium Restaurant” at the motel, starting with a delicious appetizer of deep-fried lobster claws, followed by a fresh green salad topped with creamy blue cheese dressing. For the main dish I chose the broiled filet of fresh Atlantic salmon – superb! After dinner, I headed downstairs to the “Downunder Lounge” – cleverly named for being located under the restaurant! (I had to wonder if its “disguise” would fool any Aussies who might venture up to Maine!) As I sat at the bar, I was surrounded by sounds of loud heavy metal music, “America’s Strangest Videos” on TV, and the conversations of the locals which occasionally filtered through the rest of the noise. (It was definitely nothing like the experience I had at breakfast in Eastport accompanied by soft classical music!)

Meanwhile, the bartender couldn't figure out how to work the cash register, which began to piss off everyone at the bar.

Early the next morning, I left Houlton and resumed my journey north on US 1. Along the way I stopped for breakfast at "Smith's Truck Stop" just south of Bridgewater and enjoyed the "trucker's special" – a hearty meal of 3 eggs, bacon, homemade biscuits covered in sausage gravy, along with toast. The waitress asked me if I wanted the bread "toasted" or "grilled"? (A guy at the table next to me claimed grilled was better – so that's how I had it) Then I was back on the road past the tiny community of Mars Hill where there were lovely views overlooking the farms and villages in the province of New Brunswick, just as the sun was peeking through the heavy clouds. The rays of the sun cast beautiful highlights on the fields of golden wheat and barley. I continued on through the historic town of Presque Isle on the banks of the mighty Aroostook River. The town has a long history, having been settled in 1819 by British Loyalists, however it is more recently famous as the site where a large balloon named the "Double Eagle II" was launched with 3 people aboard and became the first successful transatlantic balloon crossing in 1978. As I drove northwest, following the river, I passed countless miles of potato fields, for which Aroostook County is famous as one of the largest producers of potatoes in the nation. In many places were large barns half buried in the earth for storing potatoes over the winter.



Monument to "Double Eagle II" – Presque Isle



Potato Barn – Aroostook County

Then, just as I made a sharp 90 degree turn on to State Route 164, heading to Washburn, I spotted a large handwritten sign in the window of an old farmhouse directly ahead – "Smile and Go Slow"! The road continued to follow the river and the tracks of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad to the city of Caribou, which has the distinction of being the 3rd coldest and snowiest place in the lower 48 states! Leaving Caribou, I returned to US 1 heading north past more and more fields of potatoes and hay before arriving in the small town of Van Buren, the "Gateway to the St John River Valley". As I drove through town, I began noticing most of the signs were bi-lingual, English and French. The region was settled by many Acadian families after being forced out of Nova Scotia following the British victory over France at the end of the "French and Indian War" in 1763. Later in the afternoon, as I entered a K-Mart store in the small town of Madawaska I heard a fascinating mixture of English and Acadian French, together with the classic thick Maine accent – it sounded almost "syrupy" and was lovely to listen to. Further down the road between Grand Isle and St David, I stopped at a small rest area where there was a gorgeous overlook of the St John River under the bright mid-day sun. From the overlook I continued northwest through the village of Frenchville to the town of Fort Kent. Here I discovered a large old wooden church topped with two elaborate metal domes which were oddly ornate and seemed curiously "out of place". It looked as if it had been abandoned for many years, but in the process of being restored as a museum. As the day went on, the heavy clouds slowly turned to light rain just after I filled up with gas at the Texaco station where I had a choice of paying in US or Canadian dollars. Northwest of Fort Kent I came to the end of US 1 where there was a sign declaring "Start of US Route One – 2209 miles to Key West,

Florida"! From here I headed south for the first time since leaving Portland. The drive along State Route 11 was known as the "Aroostook Road" and very scenic. Apparently, it had been blazed north from Bangor in the mid-1800's through the thick forests and mountains of northern Maine to Fort Kent on the St John River. The purpose of the road was to join the south of Maine with the north in order to dissuade the British from any thoughts of invading from New Brunswick. The route of the highway was very direct, being almost straight up and down the mountains, and the views from the highest points on the highway were spectacular, especially the view overlooking Eagle Lake!

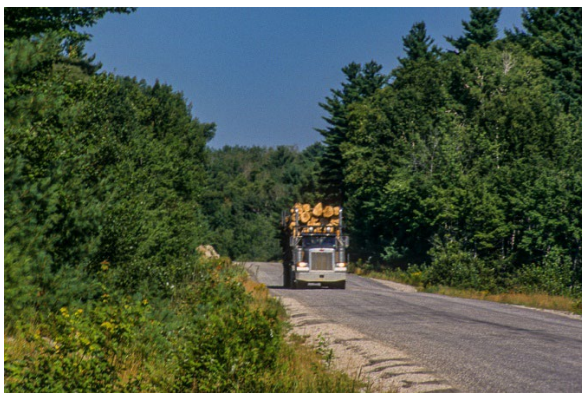


St John River



Eagle Lake

Then, somewhere north of the town of Ashland, I spotted a large moose grazing on the edge of a clearing before it lumbered off into the thick forest. From Ashland I found that I was now driving on a private logging road where I encountered a massive logging operation in the small community of Masardis, population 204! On both sides of the road, huge heavily loaded logging trucks delighted in playing "chicken" with tourists before pulling off into a busy logging yard. (I never saw an accident, just a lot of "near misses") As I passed a giant logging yard, I saw a long line of railroad cars stacked high with logs. Beyond the "Levesque & Sons" logging and milling operation were 12 miles of very rough unpaved road and many construction zones that made for very slow going – a lot like I remembered of the Alaska Highway in the Yukon Territory when Marion and I made our first journey to Anchorage in 1978.



"Levesque & Sons" logging and milling operations – Masardis, Maine

Once I left the logging company road I was back on pavement and in the small town of Patten. Here I stopped at the "Tall Tales Café" for a delicious fish burger. The waitress asked if I wanted "regular" French fries (ie. Frozen) or "homemade" fries – I chose homemade and they were fresh and fantastic! After enjoying lunch, I continued south to the tiny village of "Sherman Station". The majority of the time, State Route 11 was virtually deserted, and together with the beautiful music from my CD player and gorgeous scenery the journey was a wonderful experience! Later in the day, I stopped at "Grindstone Falls Rest Area" alongside the steep, rocky banks of the Penobscot River. As I sat on the bank of the

river, the sun warmed my face, the wind softly whispered through the pine trees above me, and the sound of the rushing rapids in the river made the moment almost a “religious experience”! I felt totally at peace with the world around me – but all things must come to an end.



Grindstone Falls – Penobscot River

It soon became time to join the road south again and highway 11 continued to be my route for the next 20 miles or so until I came to the small town of East Millinocket, a traditional paper mill town built by the Great Northern Paper Company in 1907. Coming into the town I suddenly encountered civilization, industry, and traffic that sort of “slapped” me in the face and brought the reality of the moment into sharp focus!

As I drove further south, my guidebook mentioned a place to stay northwest of Millinocket on the road to Baxter State Park called the “Big Moose Inn”, and it came highly recommended. So, I headed in that direction as the sun was setting.



“Big Moose Inn” – Millinocket Lake

An hour later as I approached the Inn, the parking lot was full of cars – not a good sign for finding a room for the night. I finally found a parking spot at the end of a muddy lane beside the shore of Millinocket Lake. Then I walked up to the office just as rain began to fall with great intensity! When I entered the office, I was told they had only one room left, which I quickly took for \$35 a night. (It included a “shared bath”, but at 7pm I wasn’t about to complain!) The manager led me upstairs to room #8 and pointed out the way to the shared bath. The room was small but cozy. Just as I returned to my car to pick up my luggage, the rain became a torrential downpour, forcing me to sit in the car until it finally subsided. Then I went back to the front desk and mentioned that I had forgotten to pick up my room key, to which came the reply, “we don’t have any room keys”! After depositing my bags in the room, I headed down to the bar, a small one but alive with local “color”. I sat at the bar with a cold pint of local “Katahdin Red Ale” and listened to a conversation at the table near me about whitewater canoe techniques as they continued to play cribbage. There was a lot of “bravado” mixed with liberal doses of

the local ale! I found it very interesting to observe, and I would have awarded them lots of “manhood points”, if points were being given out that evening. The bar had a very eclectic décor, with old rusty logging gear hanging on the walls along with naughty French nude postcards from the early 1900’s! Just outside the bar was a lovely enclosed porch filled with a very rowdy, but friendly bunch. After I finished my beer, I went into the restaurant and sat at a table in the enclosed outdoor patio for dinner. It began with a bowl of delicious homemade corn and potato chowder that was served with a thick slice of toasted cinnamon bread – it was so good I asked for seconds. For the main dish I chose the roasted Haddock stuffed with crab, together with garlic cheese mashed potatoes and steamed fresh vegetables – simply incredible! Throughout dinner, I listened to the soft sound of rain dripping off the pine trees outside. (A marvelous place – a comfortable combination of rustic informality, local color, and an atmosphere of understated “elegance”!)

Meanwhile, at a table next to me three older ladies were engaged in a lively conversation, though one of them dominated the table. However, it seemed to be OK with the other two ladies who were busy eating their food. When I finished dinner, the place suddenly became quiet and peaceful as a steady rain began falling outside. I paid another visit to the bar where I overheard a very interesting conversation among a group of older locals regarding snapping turtles. It went something like this – “I grabbed him and chopped off his head, but he was still moving. The next morning, I picked him up and put him in the pressure cooker all day – had to hold the cooker down from jumping off the stove. That evening I opened the pressure cooker and my God he was still moving! The only way to kill them is to chop their shell in two!” While there may be some truth to this long tale, it’s a perfect example of “exaggeration” and “fiction”, although I must admit I was fascinated with the story! About the same time, a “person” came into the bar, spoke with a deep, hoarse voice, and looked very masculine – but “she” was the wife of the bartender! When “last call” was announced, I finished my pint of Katahdin Red Ale and walked down to the lakeshore. It was very quiet – just the soft patter of raindrops dripping from the pine boughs, accompanied by the lonesome call of Loons drifting across the still water, broken occasionally by the haunting howl of a coyote in the distance. And as I looked up, the dark night sky was filled with billions of bright sparkling stars. Suddenly, a couple of meteors flashed overhead. At that moment I was lost in the beautiful celestial emptiness of the universe – at peace with myself and the world! It seemed as if had I stared skyward long enough, the vast distance between me and the stars would vanish, and I would feel them touch my face! (that moment was as close to a religious experience as I’ve ever felt) Reluctantly, I had to break off the “cosmic link” and slowly drift back to “reality” before retiring for the night to my small room above the kitchen at the Inn. It didn’t take long to fall asleep in the cool night air of the north woods in northern Maine!

Early the next morning, I awoke to a beautiful clear blue sky – a welcome change from after the previous evening of heavy rain and thunderstorms. I took the opportunity to walk back down to the lakeshore for some photos of the crystal-clear water and the deep green forested hills hugging the shore.



Mt Katahdin – Millinocket Lake



Millinocket Lake

Then it was back to the Inn for a quick breakfast being served as “help yourself” in the kitchen and pantry! (Really a lot of trust here) Upon leaving the Big Moose Inn, I continued on the unpaved Great Northern Paper Company (GNP) private logging road west toward Greenville. Later, I found out the road was known as the “Golden Road” because GNP had spent over \$3 million to build it. As I drove further west through the dense forest, there were wonderful glimpses of Mt Katahdin. All of a sudden, as I came around a sharp curve, I saw a car stopped along the shore of a small lake. Driving by I could see a glimpse of what looked like the head of a moose just above the surface of the lake, so, I decided to stop and take a look. I grabbed my camera and walked down a narrow path through the woods to the edge of the lake. There I was rewarded with a gorgeous view of Mt Katahdin across the lake. The mountain stood majestically under clear blue skies and its reflection in the perfectly still water of the lake was captivating. After taking several photos of the mountain, I became aware of several large moose feeding in the shallows of the lake which was covered in gorgeous white lilies. I took a seat on a large grey granite boulder and quietly watched a large cow and her calf feeding on the rich growth of underwater plants. They stood up to their shoulders in the lake and constantly dunked their heads into the water in search of food. I watched them for quite some time in the warm pine scented summer air – another experience I’ll treasure as a wonderful memory of Maine!



Moose – Millinocket Lake

All too soon it was time to move on and yield the moment to the moose. As I continued driving west, there were many lovely views of Mt Katahdin. Suddenly I came to a large concrete structure that used to be the location where GNP collected a “user fee” from people driving on their private road. Not far beyond it I came to a narrow one-lane bridge “shared” with logging trucks! (There was no doubt about who had the right-of-way!) Just beyond the bridge was a small place known as “Kokadjo Camp” where a sign upon entering the tiny settlement proclaimed “Population – Not Many”! Later I finally reached the company town of Greenville, from where I took the northwest route out of town along the shore of “Moosehead Lake”, Maine’s largest lake, to Lily Bay State Park.



Moosehead Lake – Lily Bay State Park

Nearby was the office of “Katahdin Cruises” that offered scenic boat trips on the lake with close up views of Mt Katahdin at the head of the lake. I wasn’t in time for one of their departures, so I headed to the “Stress Free Moose Pub & Café” for a local beer. As I sat outside on the patio, I had a gorgeous view of the huge lake, studded with countless small islands cloaked in deep green forest. The moment was very peaceful and perfect for quiet contemplation and reflection! (A lovely time to remember)

Later, when I came to the small town of Rockwood, there was a magnificent view of Mt Kineo, a massive, sheer granite monolith on the shore of a small island in the middle of the lake. From Rockwood I headed west, following the Moose River to the old logging town of Jackman where I discovered the “Lumberjack Kitchen”, a small local café on Main Street across from the old railway station. As I looked at the station, I realized I had passed through the town in May of 1981 on my trip across Canada on the Canadian National Railroad, travelling from Montreal to Halifax.



Mt Kineo – Moosehead Lake



Jackman Railroad Station

At the café I sat in the small dining room and enjoyed a delicious grilled Haddock burger. Then I looked up and noticed a beautiful ornate antique tin ceiling so typical of the late 1800’s. However, the décor in the rest of the café with its bright red plastic chairs and tablecloths could best be described as “non-descript post-modern”! Later, as I was about to leave, the owner told me the old building had been a bank in the late 1800’s. Next to the café was a motel that had a sign outside – “If you can’t stop, at least smile on the way by”! From Rockwood I joined pavement once again as I continued south on state highway 201 toward Farmington. It was a very scenic route in spite of the cloudy weather. My initial thought was to stop for the night in Farmington, but as I drove through the town, I couldn’t see any accommodations that excited my interest, so I decided to carry on to the village of Bethel on US 2. On the way to Bethel I passed the old paper mill town of Rumford, the birthplace of the late Senator Edmund Muskie. Rumford sits at the base of the White Mountains and near to 177 foot-high Pennacook Falls on the Androscoggin River – a very scenic spot.



Androscoggin River



Rumford, Maine

A short distance from Rumford I came to a sign on the side of the road - “Welcome to Mexico”! The town itself had no apparent relationship with the country of the same name. However, the village was incorporated in 1818, the name being inspired by the local sympathy for Mexico’s fight for independence from Spain in 1810. It was hard not to notice the town was all decked out in bright colors so typical of Mexican culture.



The sun was setting as I arrived in Bethel, an historical village situated on the banks of the Androscoggin River in the foothills of the White Mountains National Forest – a lovely location. As I drove into the village, I saw the “Bethel Inn and Country Club” that looked like the perfect place to spend the night. When I enquired at the front desk, I was very lucky to get one of the last two rooms available. It was a beautiful room with antique furnishings and a large fireplace. After checking in to the room, I walked down the main street and spotted the “Sunday River Brewing Company” pub next to the “Moose Tales Restaurant”. I ordered a very nice India Pale Ale at the brewery before heading next door to the restaurant for a superb dinner of fresh Haddock and shrimp.



Bethel Inn & Country Club

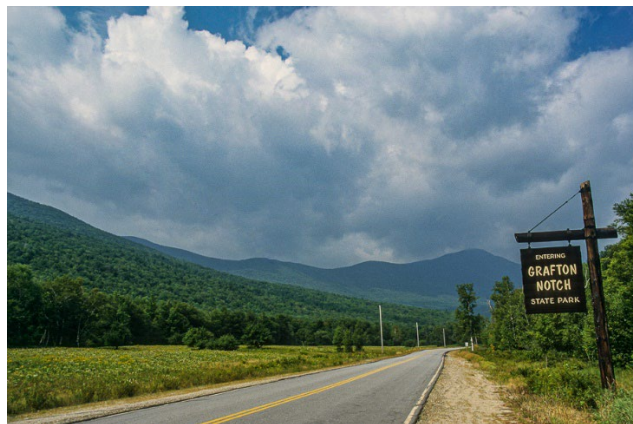


Bethel, Maine

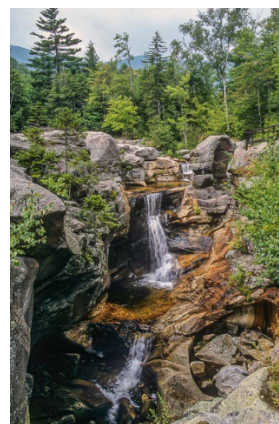
After dinner I walked down Main Street for a couple of blocks to the “Milltown Tavern” for a cold pint of “Sunday River Porter” to finish the evening. Then, just as I was leaving the tavern, I heard a sharp clap of thunder and barely had time to return to the hotel before the clouds let loose with a torrent of rain. As I sat in the hotel lobby, the sound of the water pouring off the roof outside resembled that of a waterfall. The heavy thunderstorms continued throughout the night, but by early morning the rain had become a gentle, relaxing sound as I enjoyed a delicious breakfast.

When I left Bethel, despite the light rain, it didn’t seem to stop the village from preparing to celebrate “Sudbury Canada Days”. History has it that apparently when Maine was still a territory of Massachusetts, the name of the village was Sudbury, and the residents successfully registered as being annexed to Canada! That of course was annulled when Maine became a state in 1820. Bethel remains a beautiful, classic New England town with a small, but prestigious private college and a famous old opera

house. I found the village to be a delightful place with many grand old Victorian homes, some of which have become lovely B&B's. It was a quintessential example of New England and such a remarkable place to discover. Heading north again, I drove through "Grafton Notch State Park" near Errol, New Hampshire. When I arrived in the state park, the sun was just beginning to peek through heavy clouds to yield some beautiful views of the surrounding mountains and waterfalls, such as "Screw Auger Falls" where the river had carved a very sinuous path through solid grey granite. In the early 1800's a sawmill was built below the falls to harness the power of the falling water, but the mill burned down in 1860.

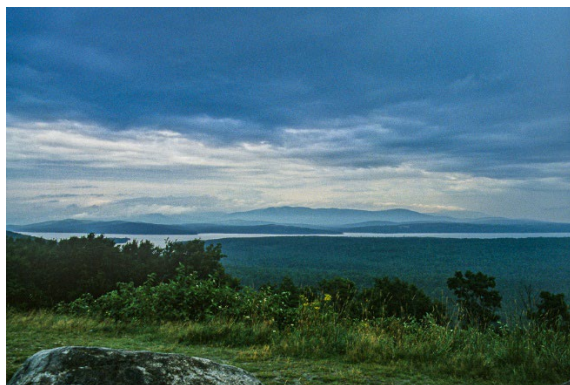


Grafton Notch State Park – White Mountains National Forest



Screw Auger Falls

From Grafton Notch State Park, I drove on to the small New England town of Errol, New Hampshire which had a large sign on the edge of town proudly announcing it was the "Home of the Moose Burger"! State highway 26 took me back into Maine where I encountered more rain showers. When I came to Rangeley Lake on scenic state highway 17 the rain became intense, so much so that by the time I reached the summit of the highway it was a torrential downpour. (So much for being a "scenic" byway!) Later, I found out that Rangeley Lake is a designated water landing zone for seaplanes, although I never saw one land in the intense rainstorm. Continuing south, the rain slowly tapered off and the sun even popped out occasionally to say "Hi" – very welcome indeed.



Rangeley Lakes Region

Further south on state highway 17 I stopped at the local Irving gas station in Livermore Falls for a cup of hot coffee. Meanwhile, behind me to the northwest were dark, menacing storm clouds, and in front of me was a dark, menacing motorcycle gang called "Acadian Scars". Though they looked very rough, they were actually quite polite as they talked with the people around the gas station. As I was leaving the station, they were suiting up in their leathers in anticipation of rain on the road ahead – and they were right! Just a few minutes later, the storm hit with a vengeance! (The motorcycles and I found ourselves in the very heart of the storm) I made a short stop on the edge of the road to check my

highway map for an alternate route south, in an attempt to avoid the worst of the storm ahead. I found a rather complicated route that took me via highways 108, 133, 106, 219, 117, and finally 118 to Waterford. Although it was a rather “circuitous” route, I enjoyed lots of sunshine as I drove through the lovely landscape of green hills and dales in rural Maine. And, I had the entire road almost to myself, but the dark threatening storm clouds were always not far behind me. Waterford was a small sleepy antique lakefront village with very few places to stay for the night. So, I made a quick decision to head directly to Kennebunkport on the coast, knowing full well that I would undoubtedly have great difficulty finding accommodations in such a popular tourist destination, but I was yearning for the sea air again! According to the highway map, the shortest route was by way of state highway 302 around Sebago Lake and then on highway 35. Shortly after turning on to highway 35, I was engulfed in heavy “bumper to bumper” traffic headed north to Portland – in total contrast to the “wilds” of Maine through which I had been traveling the past few days. It was nothing but tacky strip development and obnoxious billboards every 50 feet! I was anxious to get away from it all, but there were no other alternative routes – so I was stuck! Finally, after almost an hour, I was able to turn off on to highway 99 where I found much less traffic and a lovely rural countryside with lots of brilliant sunshine that followed me all the way to Kennebunkport. But just as I approached the historic old seaport, it turned into a “zoo” of tourists and once again I began to feel claustrophobic as I sat almost at a standstill in the bumper to bumper traffic. And to make matters worse, I was surrounded by “No Vacancy” signs everywhere! Finally, I spotted an empty parking spot and decided to check the hotel across the street, even though knowing they would be fully booked but hoping they would know of any available accommodations in town. They directed me to the town’s Visitor Information Center nearby where I found a woman who ran the place as she was busy cleaning one of the toilets! When she eventually looked up and saw me, she told me she knew of just two places with vacancies – the “Beechwood Resort” and the “Tides Inn”, both of which were located on state route 9 several miles east of town. I followed her directions and headed out of town – happy to be away from the frantic tourist activity. It was several miles of narrow twisting highway before I spotted the Beechwood Resort. A nice-looking place, but as soon as I turned into the driveway, I suddenly had a strong feeling I really wanted to stay somewhere on the coast, not in the woods. So, I reversed course in search of the Tides Inn, which I realized might be some cheap, tacky motel nowhere near the ocean. But at least I could always return to the Beechwood Resort. I almost flew by the sign for “Tides Inn” before I saw the road to “Goose Rocks Beach”. After driving down a narrow road for a mile or so I came to a small collection of beach houses facing a lovely stretch of beach. Next to the small houses was a large 3-story house with a lighted sign – “Tides-Inn-by-the-Sea”! It was a beautiful old building and I prayed they would have a room available. As luck would have it, I was able to book their very last room for the night!



“The Tides-Inn-by the Sea” – Kennebunkport, Maine

I found out later the Inn was listed on the National Historic Register and been host to many famous people, including John James Audubon and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle among others. The old house was beautifully decorated with lovely painted designs on the doors and a warm, homey parlor filled with antique wicker furniture.

That evening, I enjoyed a fantastic dinner in the classic old dining room, which began with a delicious appetizer of Thai spiced prawns, followed by Tuscan fettucine served with generous portions of lobster, scallops, shrimp, and clams. A chilled glass of crisp Byron Chardonnay made a perfect choice of wine. Finally, dessert was served – a wonderful mango coconut sherbet topped with a chocolate covered strawberry! (A superb dinner and excellent menu) After dinner, I retired to the small pub next to the parlor for another glass of wine in front of a roaring fire in the huge stone fireplace. Then, before heading up to my room, I sat on the front porch and watched the rain fall softly on the beach as the surf rolled in. Later I was told the story of “Emma”, the resident ghost of the Inn.

Early the next morning I took a long walk on Goose Rocks Beach in the light rain – a very nice way to remember the Inn. After a delicious breakfast in the dining room, I checked out and headed north on highway 9, passing through beautiful old traditional New England coastal villages to Cape Elizabeth.



Goose Rocks Beach



Cape Elizabeth

Along the way, I passed many “lobster pounds” – places where very fresh whole steamed lobsters are served that require a small wooden mallet to “pound” or break apart the hard shell. It wasn’t long before I came to the Portland airport, after a brief stop at the “Maine Mall” to buy a small bag in which to carry home all the stuff I had acquired during the week I had driven around the state. After checking in for the flight to Boston and on to Salt Lake City, I had a cold pint of Shipyard Ale in the “Shipyard Brewport Pub” in the airport. As I sat in the pub, I finished writing my travel notes and reflected upon all the wonderful places I had visited in the great state of Maine – a place I will definitely return to for another visit!

Photo Gallery



Abandoned House – Errol, New Hampshire



Old Church – Fort Kent, Maine



Old Homes – Kennebunkport, Maine



Old Church Graveyard – Machias



Waterfront – Machias, Maine



Mars Hill, Maine



St John River



Mt Katahdin – Aroostook County



Aroostook River – Presque Isle, Maine