

# Position Statement on Memorials within Baxter State Park

*Friends of Baxter State Park*

*Approved August 12, 2013*

## **Issue**

Members of the public occasionally seek to establish memorials within Baxter State Park for the purposes of honoring an individual or group. The public's ongoing interest in establishing memorials in Baxter State Park is an indication of how highly the Park is valued. Friends of Baxter State Park recognizes and appreciates the emotional nature of these memorial requests, and their good intent. However, **Friends of Baxter State Park urges the Baxter State Park Authority to not permit the creation of any new memorials within Baxter State Park** for the following reasons:

1. Memorials are inconsistent with the "Forever Wild" wilderness values of the Park, which places nature first and people second. Because of their very nature as lasting monuments, memorials pose long-term threats to the wilderness values of the Park.
2. Memorials are inconsistent with Governor Percival P. Baxter's intent as the donor of Baxter State Park. He communicated this intent clearly and in a variety of ways, both through the Deeds of Trust and other formal communications.

Governor Baxter made it clear that he did not want memorials placed within the park, even for Park staff who lost their lives in the line of duty. The death of ranger Ralph Heath on October 29, 1963, and Governor Baxter's response, provide an example of this. Ranger Heath died while attempting to rescue Margaret Ivusic of Boston, who fell to her death while attempting to descend off-trail from the Knife Edge. In the aftermath of Ranger Heath's death, the Appalachian Mountain Club provided funding for two 12-man bunkhouses at Chimney Pond along with a memorial plaque describing Heath's heroic rescue attempt. Upon learning of the plans for a dedicatory ceremony scheduled for September 11, 1965, former Governor Baxter not only had the ceremony cancelled, but personally reimbursed the AMC for the \$5,500 spent on the construction of the bunkhouses and rescue equipment.

Governor Baxter described the incident in a letter dated August 30, 1965, to Baxter State Park Authority members:

*"When I learned about the proposed erection in the Park of the Memorial Tablet I was disturbed and immediately called Mr. Wilkins. No doubt by this time he has returned the \$5,500 to the Appalachian Mountain Club. This gift was made without my knowledge or consent and would constitute a breach of trust as well as being contrary to the spirit of my gift.*

*I ask you and the two other members of the AUTHORITY to have this tablet removed and taken out of the Park altogether. This Park is not to be used in Memorial to anybody not even to myself...*

*As far as Ranger Heath is concerned I paid all expenses for his burial in the family lot and also had erected a suitable gravestone relating his heroic deed in trying to find the lost woman."*

On August 27, 1965, Governor Baxter wrote Austin H. Wilkins, Forest Commissioner, and Baxter State Park Authority member:

*"Any building or Memorial that is erected in my Park will be paid for by myself after my approval. Once we allow anybody to erect a building or memorial in the Park it will create confusion. Everything that is done there of this nature will be done by myself under the supervision of the AUTHORITY."*

In 1967, the U. S. Secretary of Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historical Sites, Buildings and Monuments recommended that Katahdin be listed in the National Registry of Natural Landmarks. In a letter of December 19, 1967, to then Governor Kenneth M. Curtis, Austin Wilkins, Chairman of the Baxter State Park Authority, wrote:

*"He [Baxter] is much pleased with this national recognition of Mt. Katahdin in his wilderness park of 201,000 acres. However, he objects very strongly to any erection of a bronze plaque to be displayed on the site. It is his wish that the park remain as a gift from him to the people of Maine with no other identification. A sign incident occurred several years ago with prompt removal of the plaque. The Baxter State Park Authority wishes to go on record as concurring with Mr. Baxter's request. Thus, in your reply to Secretary Stuart Udall of his letter of November 27, 1967 convey both Mr. Baxter's wishes as well as concurrence by the Authority but emphasize acceptance of Mt. Katahdin to be included in the National Registry of Natural Landmarks."*

Source: Percival P. Baxter's Vision for Baxter State Park: An Annotated Compilation of Original Sources, Vol. IV, Section 7.4.2 Cultural Affairs, 7.4.2.1 Plaques, Memorials and Museums (Friends of Baxter State Park, 2005)

### **Additional Information**

For the purposes of this position statement, memorials include plaques, signs, engravings, sculptures, paintings, structures, markers, or any object placed in the park for the purposes of honoring an individual, group, organization, or event. Memorials also include objects already within the Park that are modified to serve a memorial purpose.

Friends of Baxter State Park recognizes that memorials currently exist in the Park, some of which were personally approved by Governor Baxter during his lifetime. Friends of Baxter State Park supports the maintenance, restoration, or replacement of existing memorials in the Park that meet the following criteria:

1. The memorial was personally approved by Governor Baxter, and established during his lifetime;
2. The continued existence of the memorial does not violate any provisions of the Deeds of Trust; and
3. The memorial is consistent with both the letter and intent of the current Baxter State Park management plan.