



FOREVER WILD



Newsletter of Friends of Baxter State Park

Winter 2024

Vol. 23 No. 1

Executive Director's Column

by Aaron Megquier

Editor's Note: This column from our archives was first published in the summer 2014 issue (Vol 13.3) of Forever Wild.

I began making yearly trips into the Russell Pond area in the mid 1980s, a little over 20 years after Governor Baxter made his final gift of land to the citizens of Maine. As an eight year-old boy, I insisted on water breaks every few minutes and a stop for food once an hour. Walking the seven miles into Russell Pond was an all-day affair, and my Dad had the patience of a saint.

After crossing Wassataquoik Stream on the Tracy Horse Trail, we would always stop for a break at New City. The fields were open and grassy then, with scattered trees. There was a big spruce growing along the trail. We would lounge in the shade under the tree, finding animals in the clouds overhead and eating granola bars. The murmur of Wassataquoik Stream and the wind on Russell Mountain are forever part of my vision of wilderness. For some reason, I was never surprised by the rusty plow beside the trail, or the barrel hoops among the leaves. They were all part of the story.

Three decades later, New City looks quite different, but the changes are largely a matter of botany. First it was timothy and hawkweed, then meadowsweet and blueberry, now white pine and balsam fir. A few small openings remain, but the spruce where I spent so many happy hours daydreaming has been absorbed by the expanding forest.

Our focus in this issue of *Forever Wild* is the process of 'rewilding'. Elsewhere in these pages, Nancy Orr, Jensen Bissell, and Nate Skvorak ruminate on what this means. For me, one of the defining characteristics of wilderness is that it changes due to natural forces rather than human influence. Natural change does not always fit our aesthetic. A tornado could carve a ragged swath through New City tomorrow,

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Shane Miller, BSP Lands Manager, explains harvesting techniques during a Friends tour of the Scientific Forest Management Area on October 27, 2023.
– Photo © Hope Rowan

Tour of the Scientific Forest Management Area

By Liz Burroughs

All day, we've been a chatty bunch. Twenty-five North Woods enthusiasts - some foresters, some ecologists, some forest landowners, some conservationists, and some, like me, just visiting Baxter's Scientific Forest Management Area (SFMA) for the first time and eager to learn. There have been impassioned conversations about harvest methods and equipment; wildlife; carbon sequestration; spruce budworm and forest fires; logging history; forest products and markets; and Governor Baxter's vision for this 30,000-acre rolling landscape at the north end of the park. But there's something about this particular stand in this particular late-afternoon slanted light that commands quiet.

We've walked into the Frost Pond Unit of the SFMA: a 150-acre parcel that has been identified as exceptionally old and undisturbed. Though not untouched, it has escaped harvesting for well over a century. These woods are dominated by hemlock and red spruce, many of which are well over 200 years old - broad at their bases and towering above us. Nava Tabak and Shane Miller, Natural Resource Director and Land Manager for the park, respectively, help put into words what's different here from the vast majority of the Northern Forest. It's darker, because taller trees cast more shade. It's cooler and more moist, a welcoming environment for mosses and lichens; it feels lush and green even in late October. Large fallen trees on the forest floor have decomposed to the extent that they are just moss-covered mounds - spongy underfoot and fertile ground for new seedlings. The structure of the forest is complex and layered. Standing here, I can begin to imagine

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Friends of Baxter State Park strives to inspire passion for the Park's wild character in the spirit of Percival Baxter. We promote exemplary use, natural resource stewardship, and a healthy Katahdin region to ensure the Park forever remains a refuge.

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or a lightning strike could ignite a fire and burn the entire area to the ground. Under both scenarios, this part of the Park would arguably be wilder than it was before.

This ongoing change allows us to sense the passage of time against a yardstick that is fluid and beautiful. We return year after year to places that are achingly familiar, but ever so slightly different. Is it we who are changed, or the place itself? The only honest answer is both. The forever wild management of Baxter State Park gives us the opportunity to see forces at work that are larger and infinitely more complex than ourselves, and watch them shape the places we love over a lifetime.

Member Musings: Miscellany from our Membership

Edited by Rachel Spatz Bidstrup

CALM *adj* Nearly or completely motionless; undisturbed; composed; quiet.

noun An absence or cessation of motion; stillness; serenity; tranquility; peace.

verb To make or become calm; quiet.

his 86th year...

may Katahdin memories

calm mountain longings

Chimney Pond shoreline...

Katahdin peaks reflected

on still spring waters

Katahdin winds blow

Over mounds in pink gravel

diapensia

These three traditional form haiku were written and submitted by Liga Jahnke, a longtime member of *Friends*. Liga has been writing haiku almost as long as her husband, Leonard "Chip" Jahnke has been an in-the-park (mostly) solo backpacker – since the 70s. He is still working and exercising with the goal of another trip to Baxter! They live in Friendship, Maine.

Member Musings is an edited collection of submissions based on a prompt. Submissions can be in any form such as essays, poems, sketches, artwork, photography and other miscellany. The prompt for our next edition is GIFT. Submissions can be sent to rachel@friendsofbaxter.org or PO Box 322, Belfast, ME 04915 and must be received no later than February 15, 2024. Space is limited and all submissions may not be published. We look forward to your submissions!



In Memoriam:

Milton Wright

Milton "Milt" Wright of Readfield, passed away on July 17, 2023, at the age of 84. He was a member of Friends of Baxter State Park for two decades, and served on our Board of Directors for many years. Milt climbed Katahdin for 58 consecutive years and enjoyed introducing others to hiking in Baxter State Park. He also served as president of the Maine Appalachian Trail Club, the Executive Director of the Maine Education Association, and was instrumental in setting up the hiking trail system in Readfield. Milt was involved in numerous organizations throughout the state of Maine and was honored by the town of Readfield with the Spirit of America award.

Gary McGregor Boone

Gary Boone passed away August 1, 2023 in Presque Isle, Maine at the age of 94. He attended Bowdoin, Bates, and Brown, and received a Ph.D. from Yale in 1958. Gary was a professor of geology at Syracuse University, and spent his summers as a research geologist with the Maine Geological Survey from 1961 to 1989. Gary was a long-time member of Friends of Baxter State Park, and took a particularly keen interest in our youth programs. He was fascinated by the Wassataquoik watershed, and published an essay entitled *A Wassataquoik History* in 2011 in collaboration with Friends. This essay was revised and reprinted in 2018 with a new epilogue by Barbara Bentley, and included a beautiful, full-color historical map of the Wassataquoik watershed.

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Tour *Continued from pg. 1*

what the Maine woods looked and felt like in pre-colonial times.

This was the October 27 SFMA tour organized by Friends of Baxter and led by Nava, Shane, and BSP forester Dee George. Park Director Kevin Adam also joined us for much of the day. Former Director (and FBSP Board Member) Jensen Bissell was another wonderful resource, providing some historical context. The Frost Pond Unit was our last stop, an example of a stand whose ecological values as a late successional forest are given top priority in its management. The only silvicultural interventions that will take place here will be in cases where these characteristics are threatened.

Earlier in the day, we had looked at a series of stands exemplifying various other goals of the SFMA. While ecological values are a consideration in all of them, the overall goals of the SFMA, as set forth by Baxter in 1955, are to balance ecological health with economic viability. Baxter was inspired by demonstration forests he'd visited in Europe, Chile, and Russia where this balance was emphasized, and he envisioned similar work here when he donated the SFMA portion of the park in 1955.

The current SFMA staff is responsible for interpreting and filling in the details of this broad mission, with the help of a statewide advisory committee. "It's all about diversity," Nava told us at the start of the day. We came back to that word a lot throughout the tour, in discussions of tree species, age classes, and habitat types - at both the stand and landscape level. As Shane and Dee talked about all of the considerations that go into their planning (ecological, economic, scientific, aesthetic, recreational, historical, social, and educational), their intimate knowledge of each stand was both evident and impressive. They projected a sense of stewardship and legacy that is fitting for this place. Tour participants left feeling inspired and grateful for Governor Baxter's gifts, for this day of camaraderie and enriching discussion, and for the smart and dedicated people who are managing this incredible resource.

For more information about the SFMA direct from the experts, please visit friendsofbaxter.org/sfma to watch recorded presentations by Alec Giffen, Nava Tabak, Shane Miller, and Jensen Bissell.



Participants in the Friends tour of the Scientific Forest Management Area on October 27, 2023.

– Photo © Steuart Thomsen



– Calendar cover photo © Jym St. Pierre

2024 Baxter State Park Calendars for sale

The 2024 Baxter State Park calendar has been selling like hotcakes, and we have just a few dozen remaining! These calendars make wonderful gifts. You can order online at www.friendsofbaxter.org, mail a check to PO Box 322, Belfast, ME 04915, or call (207) 505-5779. All proceeds benefit Friends of Baxter State Park.

Answer: Trivia Question in Fall Newsletter

In our last newsletter, we asked "What vegetable has a variety named Katahdin?" The answer is potato. Congratulations to Anne, Gabriella, Mark, Barbara, Ginny, Fran, Kent, Sam, Laurie, and Rick for answering correctly!



President's Column

by Josie Quintrell

How wonderful to see so many Friends, new and old, at the "Meet the Leadership" reception at Colby College at the end of November. As the days grow shorter, the temperatures fall, and we don our winter coats and boots, it was lovely to come together in a warm space to share our passion for the Park. Thank you to Kevin and his team – Lori, Nava and Rob – for joining us. Special thanks to Bissell Brothers Brewing for donating the beer that made the evening festive.

Our Board of Directors gathered at Mount Chase Lodge in late October for our annual retreat. This retreat is the one time we meet in person to reflect on the past year and plan for the coming year. The 2022 strategic plan guides our discussions about how best to meet our mission to preserve, support and enhance Baxter State Park's wilderness character through education, advocacy and youth programs. In 2024, Friends will continue to support and enhance the popular youth programs – the Maine Youth Wilderness Leadership Program and the Baxter Youth Conservation Corps – work with Park leadership and staff to find ways we can support their work, monitoring and respond to policy issues, enhancing volunteer activities, and continuing to build awareness about the Park.

Please join us for our Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 6 at Colby College to learn more about the activities of Friends, for updates on the Park, including an update on the Daicey Pond cabin rebuild, and for ways that you can get involved. We welcome your participation and input.

Best wishes for 2024!



Attendees enjoying the Friends reception with BSP leadership staff at Colby College on November 28, 2023.
– Photo © Stuart Thomsen



Keith Wehmeyer, BSP Maintenance & Transportation Supervisor, explains the restoration work planned for the Tamarack cabin (#3) at Daicey Pond. Wehmeyer and BSP Director Kevin Adam will provide an update on the Daicey project at our Annual Meeting on April 6, 2024.
– Photo © Aaron Megquier



Update from Baxter State Park

Editor's Note: This update is excerpted from a written memo presented to the BSP Authority at its meeting on October 24, 2023. It has been edited for brevity and use in this newsletter.

Natural Resources Update:

Staff have continued collecting alpine phenology plot data, controlling invasive plants (including a newly discovered occurrence of knapweed at Trout Brook Farm), and installing acoustic bat detectors. They also assisted IF&W staff with fish surveys on several ponds in the Park. Researchers from agencies and academic institutions have continued their work in the Park in the fields of geology, water quality, and rare plants and animal surveys. In July Park staff and volunteers participated in Maine Audubon's annual loon count, and staff have since compiled and submitted the data to Maine Audubon. In total 51 loons were observed in the Park through this survey, which represents a high number for the Park. At least some of this success is due to the strong effort by Cassandra Knudsen (Interpretive Specialist) to recruit participants to survey 23 waterbodies – the highest number surveyed since this data collection began in 2002. In October, Senior Geologists from the Maine Geological Survey Bob Johnston (retired) and Lindsay Theis provided an afternoon training for BSP staff. The group was introduced to the bedrock and surficial geology of the Park and explored Traveler Rhyolite formations and the potholes and alluvial fan of Howe Brook.

Information & Education Update:

Information & Education Park staff published a new issue of "Wildnotes" – the Park's long-standing annual publication with useful information for Park visitors. This publication is provided at the Visitor Center and the Park gates, and typically also distributed to regional information outlets such as the Katahdin Region Chamber of Commerce and Maine highway information centers. This year the publication included an annual insert with news for 2023 (while the main body of the publication includes no dated information and thus remains relevant in future years).

In September the Park hosted visiting artist Donna Chase for two weeks at Kidney Pond. Donna provided informal talks and a workshop for the public, in addition to displaying her artwork in an open house format at the Kidney Pond library towards the end



BYCC crew members working on a section of new bog bridging on the Pogy Notch Trail just outside of South Branch Pond campground.

– Photo © Aaron Megquier

of her stay. Interpretive Specialist Cassandra Knudsen began planning for an update of the displays at the Visitor Center and developed a new program about the Park's bats, which will be presented at campgrounds and community events. Interpretive staff have also fulfilled various sign requests from staff in the Park.

Trails Update:

Two days in July were devoted to brushing 2 miles of the Pogy Notch Trail. Two weeks in August were spent spike camped in the SFMA where four Trails Department staff (3 crew members, and the Trail Specialist) cleared trails of blowdowns and pruned the overgrown corridor with a combination of hand tools and our two brush saws purchased in the same month. In late September/early October our 3-person trail crew spent eight days camped out at Russell Pond brushing back the corridor on the Northwest Basin Trail, as well as the Grand Falls Loop Trail. Blazes were refreshed on the North Traveler Trail, as well as the first four miles of the Freezeout Trail by their respective volunteer adopters.

In July the Baxter Youth Conservation Corps spent two days clearing leaves and debris from turnpike swales and drainage ditches on the Chimney Pond Trail from the trailhead to Basin Ponds. Drainages above Basin Ponds were cleared by trail crew staff. Additionally, the Baxter Youth Conservation Corps spent one week brushing back the corridor of the Horse Mountain Trail, South Branch Falls Trail, and the trail to one of the lean-tos in South Branch Campground.

The Trail Crew spent 5 weeks during July, August, and September at Chimney Pond. During this time the trail crew built 9 new stone water bars, an 8' long x 3' tall stone retaining wall, a French drain, one stone check step, brushed ~300 yards of overgrown vegetation below tree line on the Saddle Trail, replaced two trail signs, and began construction of a major stone turnpike inside a large ditch scoured into the trail along Saddle Brook

during the flooding event in October 2022. The turnpike project was met with much difficulty due to the underlying boulder field that prevents any digging within the trench. Difficulties were compounded by equipment failure as our 40+ year-old masonry drill was very unreliable and is now retired. Progress will continue next year with the help of our Cobra Combi Demolition Drill as well as our new masonry drill.

Three weeks in July and August were devoted to making further progress on our 0.4-mile reroute of a portion of the OJI Trail. The new reroute incorporates a modern sustainable design and will bring trail users out of a bog that was previously forcing hikers off trail and impacting the surrounding environment. The new reroute is 95% complete and will be opened early in the summer of 2024.

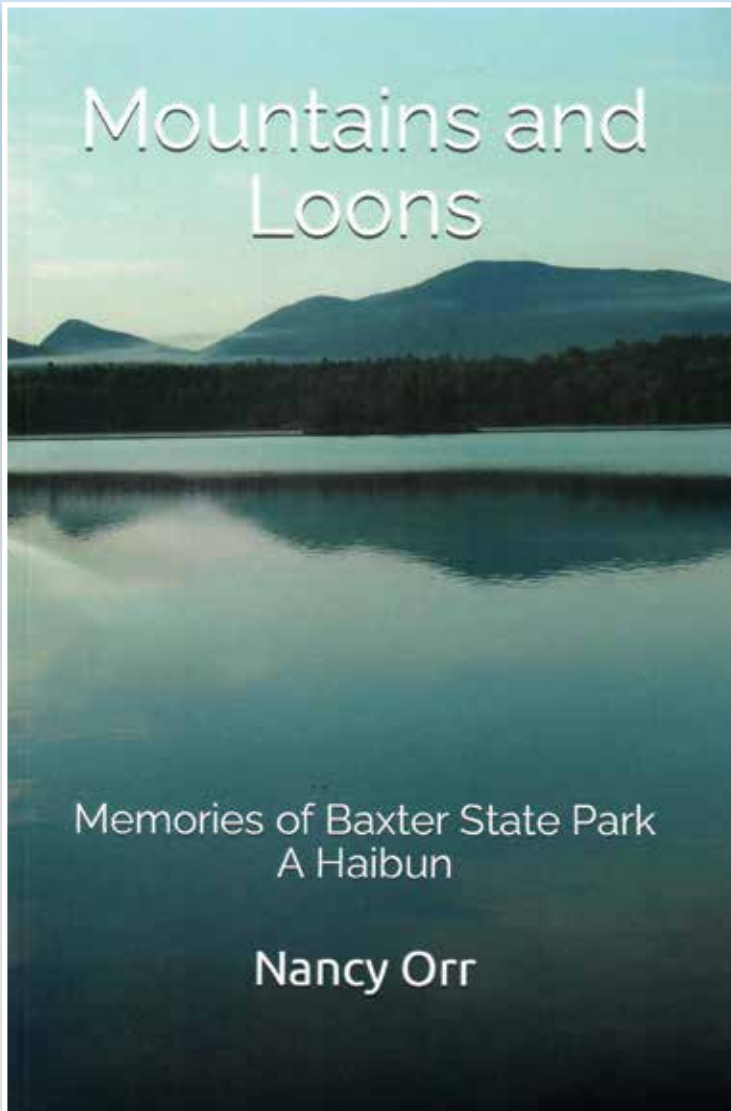
The BYCC spent one week in July installing ~150' of new bog bridging from the Pogy Notch Trailhead to the North Traveler Trailhead. Additionally, they spent one week installing ~30 stepping stones on a seasonally muddy portion of the Katahdin Lake Trail. The Maine Appalachian Trail Club Trail Crew spent two weeks in August and September spike camped on the Hunt Trail Relocation that began in the mid-2010s. They built a major stone waterbar, made improvements to the tread by removing stumps and roots left behind during initial clearing, and quarried a large quantity of stone to a future staircase location. Work will continue in 2024 by the BSP Trail Crew. Trail Specialist Kris English and Trail Supervisor Brennan Turner replaced a ~75' bridge/boardwalk that consists of 5 separate spans over Blacksmith Brook and the adjacent bog. This project is 95% complete, and final polishing tasks and cleanup will be completed during mid/late October once the campgrounds are closed and traffic on the trail becomes significantly reduced.

Mountains and Loons: Memories of Baxter State Park, A Haibun

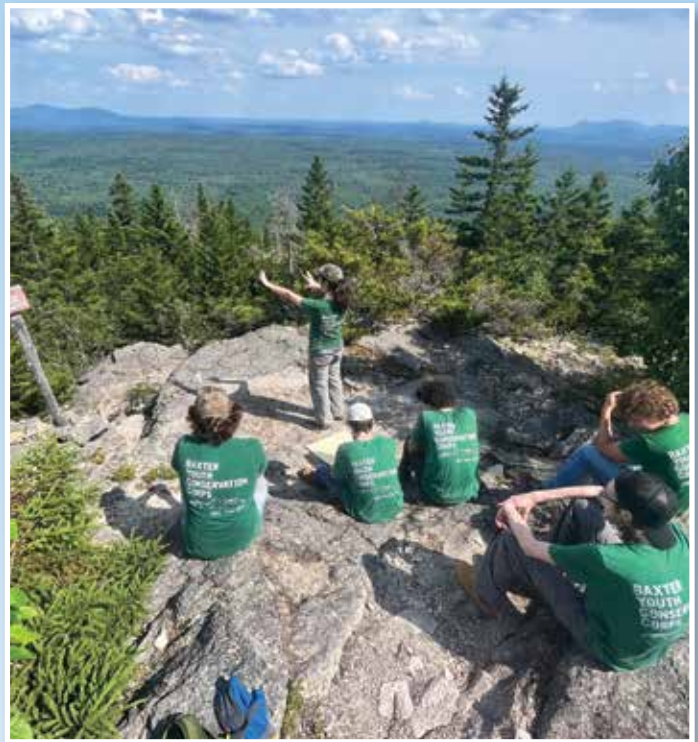
Book by Nancy Orr

Article by Aaron Megquier

Friends member Nancy Orr recently published a wonderful volume entitled *Mountains and Loons: Memories of Baxter State Park*. The book is written as a haibun, a Japanese literary form that weaves together prose and haiku, and often takes the form of a travel journal. Perhaps the most famous haibun is *Narrow Road to the Interior* by Matsuo Basho, written in the early seventeenth century, which I dearly love and keep on my nightstand. I thoroughly enjoyed reading Nancy's memories of the Park – which date back to the early 1950s – through the elegant and insightful lens of her poetry. If you would like your own copy of this volume, it is available for sale on Amazon.



– Book cover image courtesy of Nancy Orr



BYCC crew leader Emma McGraw explains the local geography to crew members on the summit of Horse Mountain. The crew spent a week in July maintaining the corridor on the Horse Mountain Trail, including the summit spur, all the way to the Billfish campsite. – Photo © Aaron Megquier

Back in the Woods with the BYCC

By Aaron Megquier

The Baxter Youth Conservation Corps made a triumphant return to trail work during the 2023 season. For the first time since 2019, we were able to field two trail crews for six weeks of full-time work in the Park during July and August. We welcomed six members for our southern crew based out of Millinocket, and five members for our northern crew based out of Patten. Projects for the summer included:

- Cleaning water bars on the Chimney Pond Trail and South Turner Trail
- Installing 30 new step stones on the Katahdin Lake Trail
- Building 150 feet of new bog bridging at South Branch Pond
- Corridor definition work on the Horse Mountain Trail
- Building a retaining wall at the day use area on Upper Togue Pond

Despite July being one of the rainiest months I can remember, it was an excellent and very productive summer. All together, we donated nearly 1,800 hours of work to the Park this season.

Providing daily round trip transportation for our crew members is key to the success of the program. After many years of renting vans for the BYCC, we purchased a seven-passenger van from Wiscasset Ford in June. In addition to significant financial and logistical benefits, this also made it possible for our college-age crew leaders Emma and Mike to be able to drive the van. This has been a game changer for the program.

The application is already open for next year's BYCC, and we're looking forward to another incredible season in 2024.



Bay Nadeau (second from right) and his fellow participants in the 2023 MYWLP planning their route up Katahdin.

– Photo © Asa Berry

Rachel Carson

By Bay Nadeau, 2023 MYWLP Participant

Editor's Note: Bay Nadeau of Searsport, Maine was a participant in our 2023 Maine Youth Wilderness Leadership Program. He wrote this essay on Rachel Carson in response to a research assignment that participants completed as part of the program.

Rachel Carson was many things: an author, a biologist, a wildlife advocate, and one of the most influential wildlife conservationists in history. She was a catalyst for change in the movements against pollution and pesticides and spoke out against chemical companies and the US government's policies in her writing. [She] received a lot of backlash for her work. When she proposed an article about DDT to *Reader's Digest*, they called it too "unpleasant." After writing *Silent Spring*, chemical companies villainized her. They called her "hysterical," a communist, and unqualified as a writer because she was a woman.

Even fellow scientists joined in the criticism of her work, such as Dr. William J. Darby. He wrote an article reviewing *Silent Spring*, in which he titled "Silence, Miss Carson." In this, he shamed her for not agreeing with the views of "responsible" and "broadly knowledgeable" scientists and said the book was illegitimate and "should be ignored." She ignored the stereotypes of typical science writing and wrote with emotion and organically.]

As a writer in the field of science, it is important that what you are writing is factual, credible, and educational, but Rachel Carson went beyond that. Her writing had character, emotion, and artistic descriptions that made even the smallest and simplest creatures sound completely fascinating. For example, when you go to the beach, have you ever seen that dark, algae-covered line across the rocks on the beach? That is called the black zone, one of many tidal sections of the beach. It's pretty simple, nothing too interesting. Well, here's how Rachel Carson describes it in one paragraph of *The Edge of the Sea*:

"The black zone of the shore has a meaning above and beyond its drab and lifeless aspect—a meaning obscure, elusive, and infinitely tantalizing. Wherever rocks meet the sea, the microplants have written their dark inscription, a message only partially legible although it

seems in some way to be concerned with the universality of tides and oceans. Though other elements of the intertidal world come and go, this darkening stain is omnipresent. The rockweeds, the barnacles, the snails, and the mussels appear and disappear in the intertidal zone according to the changing nature of the world, but the black inscriptions of the microplants are always there. Seeing them here on this Maine coast, I remember how they also blackened the coral rim of Key Largo and streaked the smooth platform of coquina at St. Augustine, and left their tracings on the concrete jetties at Beaufort. It is the same all over the world from South Africa to Norway and from the Aleutians to Australia. This is the sign of the meeting of land and sea."

I have been to the beach many times, and I have never seen the black zone in such a beautiful way. Rachel Carson continues to inspire young naturalists and impact the world. Despite Rachel's groundbreaking work and her bold, passionate writing style, she was a shy, quiet person. Her obituary in the *New York Times* says she was the essence of "gentle scholarship" and said, "People remembered Miss Carson for her shyness and reserve as well as her writing and scholarship." It's just such an amazing example of how even the quietest voices can become the most influential and important, and after all, that's exactly what Rachel Carson fought for. She cared deeply for all the voices of the ecosystem and remembered that it's the connections between all organisms that allow our world to thrive.

Baxter State Park Trivia

Question: Traveler Mountain is:

- 1) Located mostly outside the Park boundary
- 2) The highest volcanic mountain in New England
- 3) Home of Maine's highest fire watch tower
- 4) Named after Gerald M. Traveler
- 5) All of the above

Please send trivia answers to Rachel Spatz Bidstrup at rachel@friendsofbaxter.org.



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Thank you!

Save the Date: Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 6, 2024

Friends is thrilled to host our first in-person Annual Meeting since 2019. Please join us on Saturday, April 6, 2024 at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. We'll gather for coffee at 8:30 am, meet from 9:00 am to noon, and then enjoy lunch together afterward. More details and a full invitation to follow.

