

Forever Wild

Newsletter of the Friends of Baxter State Park

Autumn 2004

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Friends
of
Baxter State Park

President's Column

By Charles Jacobi
President

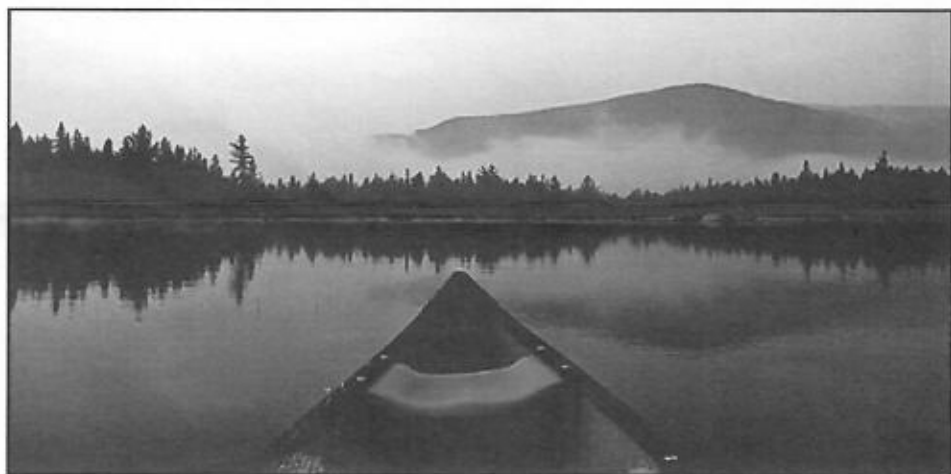
The Park we know today is wilder than 50 years ago because of the path taken by the Authority and Park staff.

The Friends organization is beginning to forge its own identity and take its own path as well, recognizing that even in the context of Baxter's vision and deeds of trust, there can be alternative approaches. In this newsletter, you will see that we have been very busy in the policy arena.

The pundits tell us that only death and taxes are a sure thing, but I can also tell you that if you put 15 Baxter Park enthusiasts in a room and ask them if something is right for the Park, they will not all agree either. And that's all right. We want our board to have healthy discussions to help frame all sides of an issue and then come to decisions so everyone knows where we stand.

Early this summer, I got a call from a reporter asking our position on the proposed removal of some Dacey Pond cabins. We didn't have one. I said we understood the decision had already been made by the Authority,

(Continued on page 4)



Russell Pond, in the heart of the Park, is a crown of colored jewels in the fall. Visitors familiar with this special place often return year after year.

Photo by Bill Bentley

FOB Supports Park on Several Issues But North Peaks Trail Request Denied

Over the past few months, the policy committee has been actively researching and discussing a number of Park issues with the intent of communicating the Friends' position to the Park staff, the Authority, and you, our members. Here are the up-to-date results of that effort.

Dacey Pond Cabins: We supported the Authority decision to remove the Lookout and Outlet cabins and replace them with a larger Northeastern log building farther from the shore (see President's column at left).

Our letter said this was consistent with Baxter's vision and good wilderness management. Pond shorelines are sensitive areas ecologically and experientially. Removing the cabins improves the visual landscape, gives the pond a more remote feel, and protects water quality. These are all important wilderness values.

North Peaks Trail: This trail was

closed by the park in 2002 because of fears of renegade camping and resource impacts related to the proposed International Appalachian Trail route, maintenance difficulties due to remoteness, and low use. The Board discussed this at length two years ago, but never followed up on it until now.

Our position is that these impacts can be managed to protect resources. The IAT concerns have diminished as a designated route to the east is now expected. Personal contact with most AT hikers is now the norm where the AT enters the Park. We feel the

(Continued on page 3)



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The Friends of Baxter State Park is an independent citizens' group working to preserve, support, and enhance the wilderness character of Baxter State Park, in the spirit of its founder, Governor Percival Baxter.

Friends of Baxter State Park
PO Box 1442
Bangor ME 04402-1442

In the Mail

Old Growth Question Brings Clarification from SFMA Manager

Dear Friends,

I am a lifelong resident of Millinocket and have a deep appreciation of our natural surroundings. I learned of your organization from an article in the *Bangor Daily News* concerning a buffer zone around the Baxter Park, and I'm hoping that your group may be of help concerning a particular issue I have with the Park.

Last fall, there was an article in our local newspaper stating that the Park was engaged in the harvesting of spruce trees and there were pictures of these giant spruce lying on the ground, waiting for shipment to whomever was buying the logs. I was terribly saddened by the event. We are losing our mature forests in northern Maine at a phenomenal rate and Baxter Park may be one of the last places on the East Coast of the U.S. with trees as old as the ones that were cut in the Park.

I have never had the opportunity to walk through a patch of old growth forest and I fear I never will be able to. I hope that as protectors of the Park you also feel that harvesting old growth trees should not be done.

As you know, there is a lot of pressure from people who wish to enjoy the Park, on its trails system and its ecosystem. I feel that some of that pressure on existing trails could be alleviated by creating new trails through patches of these majestic old growth trees. I do believe that Percy (Baxter) stated that the Park should continue to exist in its "natural and wild" state.

Timber harvesting is certainly not a natural occurrence, and he would be adamantly opposed to the practice. I do not know the reason for the harvesting. Perhaps it's for money to

fund the Park's operating expenses. Whatever the reason, we should not destroy the very thing that people are coming to experience.

Bernard Madden, Millinocket, ME

Tree harvesting occurs only in the Scientific Forestry Management Area (SFMA) in the northwest corner of the Park. This area, comprising about 14% of the Park's acreage, was established as a part of Baxter State Park by Gov. Baxter to showcase the latest methods of tree harvesting that will sustain the forest on a long-term basis. You might contact the Park and arrange for a visit to the SFMA. Ed.

Here is additional information from SFMA Manager Jensen Bissell:

Of the 29,587 acres in the SFMA, only 2% would be classified as "old growth" — most of which is in reserve status and off-limits to harvesting. No harvesting takes place on the remaining 175,000 acres of Baxter Park. Similarly to the SFMA, the forever-wild portion of Baxter Park holds only small areas of old growth forest — but much of the Park's forest will gain old growth characteristics over the next 50 to 100 years.

It Could be Worse!

Dear Friends,

In the Spring Newsletter, a reader wrote about imagining it would be "awful" to have a national park around Baxter, with "the concession stands, the population explosion..." I feel this embodies a sense the area will never change. Of course it will.

I can equally imagine how awful it would be to not have a national park in the area.

Land use changes could result in large houses on ridge tops, camps crowding the water frontages, the night lit up with light, landholders both large and small placing no trespassing signs, loss of access to ponds and streams, and a myriad of unpleasant changes in the region.

It may not be the best idea, but things could be far worse.
Gary Stellflug, Mt. Desert, ME

Friends Supports Park on a Number of Points

(Continued from page 1)

the North Peaks Trail is a valuable part of the trail system that adds to the range of wilderness experiences, offering a quiet above-treeline alternative to trails up Katahdin. The Park Director responded to our letter, and the Park position has not changed. We respect that decision but hope that in the future some much needed comprehensive trails planning will take place and the North Peaks Trail can be reconsidered.

We also communicated to the Authority our support for these other recent decisions:

1. To protect wildlife and reduce impacts to soil and vegetation at Sandy Stream and Stump ponds, Park staff will increase their education efforts, narrow existing trail corridors, and restrict visitor use to existing trails. The moose will be pleased and so are we.

2. Opening day reservations were recently limited to no more than 20% of the sites for any campground. This offers better equity for campers and is more efficient for staff. We support the eventual elimination of opening day, which we know is difficult for those used to the system. The Reservations Sub-committee of the Advisory Committee deserves much credit for this and other improvements to the reservation system.

3. A recent evaluation of commercial use in the Park was timely and necessary. Although it is not now a problem, we support the continued monitoring of this growing use.

4. We support the Park's commitment to using a formal planning framework called "limits of acceptable change," to address the day use issue, especially in the Katahdin area. This framework is used by many other land managing agencies today. We look forward to participating in this process.

Visit our website for more



Resting from a Walk in the Park, members of one of the two "walks" held this past summer gathered at Chimney Pond for their portrait. These two- and three-day informal visits to the Park have been a popular feature of the Friends of Baxter State Park for several seasons. It is a great way to meet other Friends while getting to better know the Park.

Photo by Bill Bentley

information on all of the above. Please write and let us know how YOU feel about these decisions.

The policy committee also developed some principles and procedures to follow and has the following issues (out of many!) on top of its "to do" list: day use and parking; a long-range Park plan; cultural resources and structures; the East Branch lands outside the Park's east boundary; snowmobiles; and the Maine Woods National Park proposal. We will also try to be prepared for fast-breaking issues as they arise. You can expect to hear more from the Friends' policy wonks over the next year.

— Charlie Jacobi

Membership Matters— and You Can Help

Our membership continues to grow. At present, we have 437 members.

Most new Friends come to us through personal contact, so please send in names and addresses of prospects. We can double our membership if each of

us recruits ONE new member!

Don't forget that gift memberships are an excellent way to spread the word about our organization, and you can pass on that Friends' business card you received with your membership renewal. Special thanks to those of you who have found new members!

Friends presently come from 26 states and two Canadian provinces. Only 60% of our members are from Maine, so think globally when looking for new members.

All memberships will be due for renewal in March of 2005. Look for a notice in the mail at the beginning of the new year. Those whose memberships have lapsed for a year or more are encouraged to re-join then.

And if you didn't get to the Park this year, you might like to view the video of "Wilderness and Spirit, a Mountain Called Katahdin." Contact Barbara Bentley to borrow our copy.

**Visit our Website!
www.friendsofbaxter.org
Courtesy of GWI.net**

President's Column

(Continued from page 1)

and that we were looking to take a broader position for all historic resources throughout the Park. We wanted to be prepared for the next time (yet another sure thing!). Right after that, things heated up, and we had to get busy and figure out what we really thought about the Daicey Pond issue.

It was a good lesson for us. We learned we had to be nimble. We learned to ask questions. What did the Deeds of Trust say about historic resources? What are the real and

perceived threats to natural resources? What wilderness values are enhanced with removal? Do these cabins really have historic value? What shape are they in and has every ounce of utility been squeezed from them? Could they be moved back from the shore (or out of the Park) and be restored to conserve their utility and historic value? Why should the Park spend its time and money on something that is not part of its mission? Was the public involvement process related to this decision adequate?

We supported the decision to

remove the cabins after a lot of that healthy discussion mentioned above. And the policy committee will continue to deliberate the larger issue of historic resources in the Park.

In another decision, taken more recently, we have diverged with the Park. The Board asked that the North Peaks trail be reopened; the Park believes it should remain closed. We still disagree but made our case.

If in five years we overlay the path taken by the Park/ Authority and the path taken by the Friends, they will not be a perfect match. But they will probably be pretty darn close.

Friends of Baxter State Park
PO Box 1442
Bangor ME 04402-1442

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We're looking for New Friends!

Do you know someone who might be interested in the Friends of Baxter State Park? Their membership will add another voice supporting Governor Baxter's wilderness.

I'd like to be a Friend. Sign me up!

Name

Street

City, State and Zip Code

_____ \$1,000	Gov. Baxter Society
_____ \$500	Katahdin Club
_____ \$250	Knife Edger
_____ \$100	Hamiln Peaker
_____ \$50	Sponsor
_____ \$30	Family
_____ \$25	Individual

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