

# THE GUILFORD REGISTER

ADVENTURES & STORIES FROM THE MAINE HIGHLANDS



SEPTEMBER 2026 • VOL. 2, NO. 9 • FREE

## LEAF PEEPING

THE BEAUTY OF THE MAINE HIGHLANDS IN THE FALL

## MORE THAN ICE

THE SURVIVAL OF THE PISCATAQUIS COUNTY ICE ARENA

## WABANAKI

A NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY OF PISCATAQUIS COUNTY

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## More than Ice: It's Community

By John McNamara

Drive along West Main Street in Dover-Foxcroft on a cold January evening, and you'll see the parking lot full — minivans dropping off kids in hockey bags, grandparents heading in for public skate. That's the Piscataquis County Ice Arena, known locally as the PCIA, and Piscataquis County hasn't always had something like it. It's a relatively new chapter in the region's story, and it's already reshaping what winter and summer look like for families across the county.

Why an ice arena, and why here? Piscataquis County is Maine's least populous county, a place defined by woods, lakes, and small towns rather than big institutions. For generations, organized ice sports here meant driving — often an hour or more — to Bangor, Orono, or beyond to skate on a real sheet of ice. Pond hockey and backyard rinks filled some of the gap, but the county didn't have a true indoor facility with reliable ice and real seating.

That changed because of the Libra Foundation, a Maine-based philanthropic organization that had already been investing heavily in the region — including in the revitalization of Monson. Libra's leadership had spent years getting to know the people and communities of Piscataquis County. It saw something many outsiders miss: some of the best places to live in the country, with natural beauty and economic potential that deserved investment. Building an ice arena in Dover-Foxcroft became part of that broader bet on the county.

The foundation put millions of dollars into the project and, rather than operating it directly, structured ownership through the August Corporation, a Libra subsidiary, with day-to-day operations initially handed to Foxcroft Academy. That partnership mattered — a private foundation could fund the building. Still, it took a local institution with deep community roots to actually run it, staff it, and keep it woven into daily life. But even that eventually changed. Foxcroft Academy educates generations of children. They weren't prepared to take on the long-term responsibilities of maintaining and growing an ice arena for the county, so a few years after opening day, another Libra subsidiary, Pineland Farms, took on temporary operational responsibilities.

Today, the PCIA offers a full sheet of ice with seating for more than 200 spectators, is home to the Penquis Youth Hockey Association and Ice Dance International, and runs learn-to-skate programs and open public skating year-round. In the off-season, when the ice comes out, the same floor gets used for roller skating and a few other community events — but for the most part, the building goes quiet just as the calendar turns to spring. That needs to change.

The PCIA gave rise to a renewed Foxcroft Academy club hockey program that pulled in players from Piscataquis Community High School in Guilford, kids who'd never had the chance to play organized hockey before because there wasn't anywhere nearby to do it. Today, that is changing again as more schools in Maine consolidate teams because fewer students are available for certain sports. It's hard to believe that hockey is a

dying sport in Maine high schools. Foxcroft Academy will no longer manage a standalone hockey program. Instead, it will merge with a school almost an hour away, introducing new challenges for students and parents as they navigate long-distance practices and games. How the PCIA will play a role in this new direction is yet to be seen.

It would be easy to think of an ice arena as a nice amenity — a fun place to skate on a Saturday. But in a county like Piscataquis, where young families sometimes leave for places with more to offer their kids, a facility like this does something more structural. It gives children a reason to stay engaged, gives teenagers a place to belong, and gives parents one more reason to believe raising a family here is a good decision, not a compromise. It creates jobs, draws visiting teams and their families into local restaurants and shops, and gives the county a genuine draw that towns many times its size don't have.

The PCIA's future is in jeopardy. Its continued growth depends on the same kind of community buy-in that has made Riverfest, Whoopie Pie Festival, the Red Hot Dog Festival, and so many other community-focused events integral to the community — donations from local businesses and residents.

For the last seven years, the PCIA has struggled to find its footing. For six months of the year, the arena is iceless — the doors are closed, locked, and the hidden treasure of Piscataquis County sits silent except for one or two events. Now, more than ever, is a time for change, and that is where Piscataquis Forward ([www.piscataquisforward.org](http://www.piscataquisforward.org)) comes in. Piscataquis Forward aims to operate the ice arena—to elevate the experience and invigorate the community to do more and want more from the facility. Piscataquis Forward is working with schools, municipalities, and businesses throughout Piscataquis County and beyond, hoping to revive—and save the PCIA from permanent closure.

To be part of the next generation of the PCIA, Piscataquis Forward is asking the community to pitch in and donate to save the ice arena— and to be part of the next iteration of a collaborative space that has the potential to help generations of children thrive. Donations can be made electronically here: [www.piscataquisforward.org/capital-campaign](http://www.piscataquisforward.org/capital-campaign)



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## When the Highlands Turn: Fall in Maine's North Woods.

By John McNamara

There's a particular week in late September when you can smell autumn coming to the Maine Highlands before you see it. The mornings sharpen. Woodsmoke starts drifting from a few early chimneys around Greenville and Dover-Foxcroft. And somewhere up on the ridgelines above Moosehead Lake, the first maples start to turn — not all at once, but in patches, like someone testing paint colors on a canvas the size of a county.

By the time the color truly arrives, the Maine Highlands — that broad, lightly populated stretch of Piscataquis County running from the Moosehead Lake region down through the 100-Mile Wilderness and into the farm towns along the Piscataquis River — puts on one of the more understated, unhurried foliage shows in New England. It doesn't have the traffic-jammed scenic byways of the White Mountains or the postcard-perfect villages of the Litchfield Hills. Instead, it has scale: hundreds of thousands of acres of hardwood and softwood forest, much of it working timberland, rolling out in every direction with barely a billboard in sight.

The Highlands owe their fall display to a mix of tree species that reads almost as if it were designed for maximum contrast. Sugar maples turn the deep orange-reds that people drive hours to see. Red maples go scarlet early, often the first trees to flip in late August up at higher elevations. Yellow birch and paper birch add streaks of gold and cream. And running through it all, the dark green of spruce and fir stands stays put, giving the hardwood color something to burn against.

Elevation plays a bigger role here than in most of Maine. Because the terrain climbs steadily from the river valleys up toward Big Moose Mountain, Borestone Mountain, and the peaks along the Appalachian Trail corridor, the color doesn't arrive everywhere on the same day. Higher ground north of Greenville and along the Barren-Chairback Range often peaks first, sometimes by mid-September. Meanwhile, the lower river valleys around Dover-Foxcroft, Milo, and Sangerville hold their green a week or two longer. That staggered timing is good news for visitors and locals alike — it stretches what might otherwise be a five-day window into nearly a month of shifting color, depending on how far you're willing to drive or hike.

Moosehead Lake remains the anchor of the region's fall reputation, and for good reason. A boat trip out of Greenville, or simply a drive up Lily Bay Road, puts the whole lake in front of you with Mount Kineo rising out of the water and the surrounding hills lit up in reflection. Squaw Mountain (Big Moose) offers a hike short enough for an afternoon but with a summit view that takes in most of the lake and a good chunk of the Highlands beyond it.

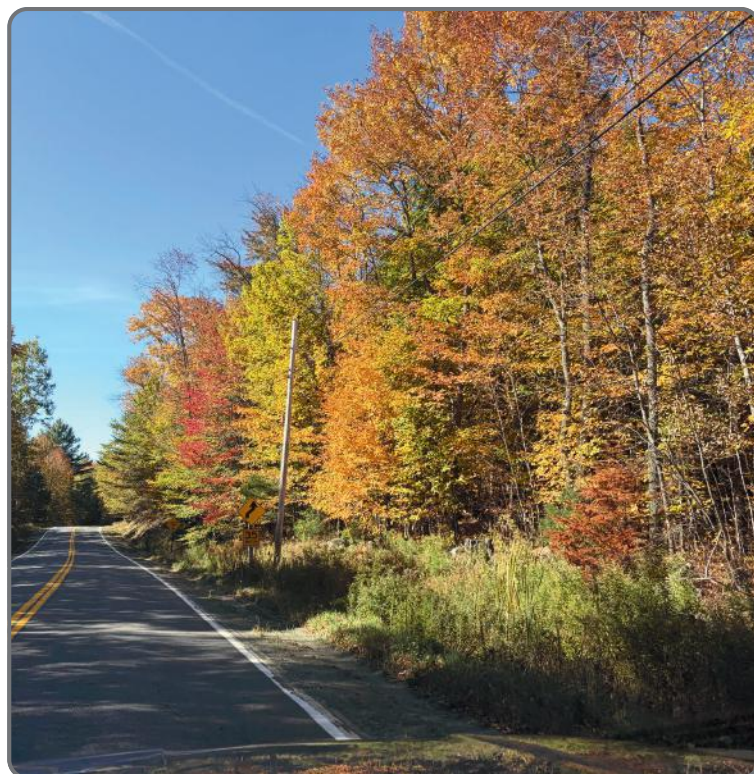
Further south, the 100-Mile Wilderness gets most of its attention from thru-hikers finishing the Appalachian Trail. Still, fall is when the section trails — into places like Gulf Hagas, sometimes called "the Grand Canyon of Maine" — earn their reputation. The gorge's waterfalls, framed by turning hardwoods, are among the most photographed stretches of trail in the state, and they're accessible enough for a day trip rather than a full backpacking commitment.

For people who'd rather stay closer to town, the drive along Route 6/15 between Dover-Foxcroft and Greenville is itself a foliage tour, rolling through farmland, past the Piscataquis River, and into forest without much need to leave the car. And the historical societies scattered through towns like Atkinson and Sangerville often time their fall open houses to coincide with peak color, giving visitors a reason to get out and walk a village green as well as a mountain trail.

What sets the Highlands apart from more heavily touristed fall-color destinations is that so much of this land is still working land. Farms like Rogers Farm and the dairy operations around the county keep their fields in production right through the color season, and it's common to see hay bales or grazing cattle set against a hillside of turning maples — a reminder that this is agricultural and timber country first, scenic backdrop second. Bartlett Yarns, still running in Harmony on the edge of the region, draws on wool from local flocks that graze the same hillsides that draw the leaf-peepers.

That working character shapes the season's pace here. There's no elaborate festival infrastructure built around foliage the way there is in some parts of New England — no shuttle buses, no ticketed viewing platforms. Instead, farm stands sell late-season produce, small-town diners stay open a little later for hikers coming down off the ridges, and historical societies host fall gatherings that often double as informal foliage reports, since everyone in the room has an opinion about which road has the best color that week.

Typically, color begins showing at higher elevations in early-to-mid September, reaches a broad peak across the region in the last week of September into the first week of October, and lingers in the river valleys through mid-October before the birches go bare, and the spruce-fir green takes back over. As with anywhere in the North Woods, the exact timing shifts year to year with rainfall and temperature — which is really just an excuse to check back more than once.



## You're Not Busy, Are You?

By Walter Boomsma

I haven't counted, but I've heard a lot of people whining lately about how busy they are. Perhaps I've done my fair share of claiming busyness, although I try not to, partly because of a bias I developed a few years ago when I was asked by a client to teach "time management." Since I believe prescription without diagnosis is malpractice in medicine, management, and education, I looked at what was going on in his organization.

I concluded that time management wasn't the issue. Priority management was the issue. The corporate culture had developed an unintended value that appearing overworked and stressed was important. I joked that most employees seemed too busy to do any meaningful work.

There's an old joke about the company president who issued the memorandum that "We will keep having meetings until we figure out why nothing is getting done." Talk about confusing activity with accomplishment!

I suppose it's always been true, but lately it seems like being busy is some sort of badge of honor. The busier you are, the bigger and shinier badge you get to wear. I think it's contagious. I know it's competitive.

If you're a social media buff, see how many timeline posts you can find claiming, "Well, I don't have much to do..."

Contrast that with those who are compelled to report their entire day's schedule. It has a humorous aspect. "Gee, I'm so busy I barely had time to find these cute cat/puppy pictures to share."

I'm sorry to say, I'm not impressed by busyness, particularly when it becomes a reason (excuse) for failure to do something others are depending on. I know several people who will spend a lot of time explaining how busy they are, how much they have to do, and how sorry they are they haven't gotten to... I bite my tongue so I don't observe out loud; they could have crossed a few things off the list in the time they spent telling me their story.

If your goal is staying busy, that's not a difficult achievement. But it doesn't necessarily equate to any meaningful accomplishment. Doing nothing can be an accomplishment, too.

I had the good fortune to attend a few lectures by Ned Hermann back in the late '80s. Ned was a true pioneer in the field of creative thinking and reasoning. He was also a great storyteller. In one of his lectures, he was explaining "theta" — those low-frequency brain waves associated with the early stages of sleep and the process of dreaming. They are also associated with enhanced creativity. He shared that he was sitting in his recliner, pushed back and relaxed, consciously entering a theta-like state. When his wife called to him to take out the trash, he replied, "Can't now... I'm working."

I don't think it would have been any less true if he'd said, "Can't now... I'm busy." What might appear as "doing nothing" may have great value. It really is about value.

Busy is about being engaged—it's not about being overworked and overwhelmed. Busy is not a bad thing when it means the busy person is anxious to contribute and is seeking action.

The question we may need to ask ourselves occasionally is whether or not we are busy (engaged) with things that are truly important. How we decide importance may be a different topic

for a different day. For now, let's agree being busy for the sake of being busy isn't effective or efficient. When we think we're too busy to do certain things, we're really saying those things aren't important. Or at least they aren't important enough to make time and find the energy for, along with the other stuff.

It sounds rude, but I've found myself wishing people would be more honest and offer the explanation, "That's not something I'm willing to make important right now." Being honest might be as important as being busy.

You're not busy, are you?



*Walter Boomsma is an educator, writer, and the author of *Small People—Big Brains*. With a background in teaching and public speaking, he blends practical wisdom with a deep appreciation for lifelong learning. His work often explores themes of personal growth, communication, and community engagement, encouraging readers to think differently and discover meaning in everyday experiences. Through his writing and outreach, Walter strives to spark conversations that lead to understanding, empathy, and positive change.*

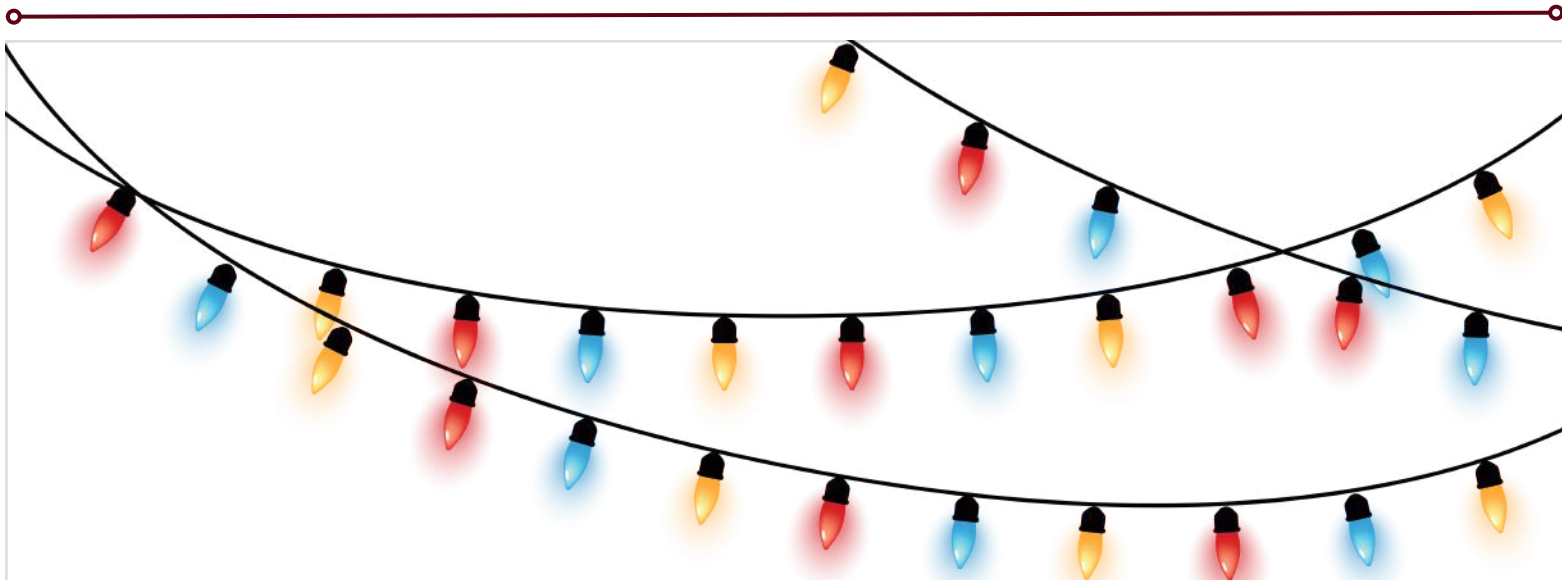


The Piscataquis County Ice Arena is offering a variety of ice skating programs, from beginner lessons to learning to play, figure skating, youth hockey leagues, and adult hockey leagues, and more. Join a team, come enjoy public skate, and see how much fun you can have at PCIA!

Find out more at:

**[www.thepcia.com](http://www.thepcia.com)**

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## The Wabanaki — the Native American History of Maine

By John McNamara

Long before Maine had a name, before there was a border to cross or a state house to build, the land was home to the Wabanaki — the "People of the Dawnland." The Wabanaki Confederacy includes five nations: the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet (Wolastoqiyik), Mi'kmaq, and Abenaki. Their history in this territory stretches back more than 12,000 years, making them among the longest continuous inhabitants of any region in North America.

The Wabanaki built their lives around Maine's rivers, lakes, and coastline. Rivers like the Penobscot, the Kennebec, and the St. Croix weren't just geographic features — they were highways, food sources, and the backbone of seasonal life. Communities moved with the rhythms of the year: fishing for salmon and alewives in spring, gathering shellfish and hunting along the coast in summer, harvesting nuts and berries in fall, and moving inland to hunt moose and deer through the winter.

Birchbark canoes, still an iconic symbol of Maine today, were a Wabanaki innovation perfectly suited to the region's network of waterways. Lightweight and durable, these canoes let people travel enormous distances, connecting communities across what's now Maine, New Brunswick, and Quebec. Villages were often seasonal rather than fixed, a practical response to a landscape that offered different resources at different times of year, not a single place that could sustain a community year-round.

European contact began in earnest in the early 1600s, when French and English explorers and traders arrived along the Maine coast. The fur trade initially created a kind of interdependence—Wabanaki communities exchanged furs for European goods like metal tools and cloth—but it also brought devastating consequences. Epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other diseases to which Native populations had no immunity swept through Wabanaki communities in the decades following contact, killing an estimated 75 to 90 percent of the population in some areas before large-scale colonization had even begun.

The 17th and 18th centuries brought a long, brutal era often called the Anglo-Wabanaki Wars, a series of conflicts tied to the broader struggle between English and French colonial powers for control of North America. The Wabanaki frequently allied with the French, partly out of shared interest in resisting English expansion and partly because French missionaries, particularly Jesuits, had built relationships with some communities. These wars — including King Philip's War, King William's War, and Dummer's War, among others — devastated Wabanaki populations and pushed communities off ancestral lands. Bounties were placed on Native scalps by colonial governments, a grim chapter that's now recognized as a form of state-sponsored violence bordering on genocide.

Even after the wars ended and Maine became a state in 1820, Wabanaki communities faced continued pressure. Land was steadily taken through treaties that were often coercive or outright fraudulent, and state policies restricted where Native people could live, how they could govern themselves, and even whether their children could be raised within their own

communities. Penobscot and Passamaquoddy children were sent to boarding schools designed to strip them of language and culture, a policy mirrored across the country.

Despite this, Wabanaki people didn't disappear — a point their own historians and leaders have long emphasized. The Penobscot Nation maintained its homeland on islands in the Penobscot River near present-day Old Town. The Passamaquoddy maintained communities at Indian Township and Pleasant Point in Washington County. Basket-making, canoe-building, and other traditional crafts persisted as both cultural practice and economic livelihood, especially as a market developed among tourists visiting Maine's coast and lakes in the 19th century.

One of the most significant modern chapters came in 1980, with the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. The Penobscot Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe had sued the state, arguing that land transfers in the 1790s and early 1800s violated the federal Nonintercourse Act, which required congressional approval for such transactions. The resulting settlement was one of the largest in U.S. history, providing roughly \$81.5 million in compensation and enabling tribes to purchase around 300,000 acres of land. It also established a complicated legal relationship between the tribes and the state of Maine that continues to generate debate, since Maine's tribes have historically had less sovereignty under this settlement than most federally recognized tribes elsewhere in the country — a disparity Wabanaki leaders have pushed for decades to change.

Today, the Wabanaki nations remain an active and visible part of Maine's identity — not a historical footnote, but living communities with their own governments, schools, and cultural institutions. The Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Mi'kmaq Nation are all federally recognized and continue to steward their homelands, revive their languages, and advocate for greater sovereignty. Understanding Maine's history means understanding that Wabanaki history isn't a prologue to the state's story — it's the foundation the rest of it was built on, and it's still being written today.



## The Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail: Where History, Wilderness, and Community Meet

By John McNamara

On August 31, 1846, Henry David Thoreau left Concord, Massachusetts, and headed for Bangor and the backwoods of Maine. It was the first of three trips he would make into the North Woods, journeys that would eventually become *\*The Maine Woods\**, published after he died in 1864. Today, those same waters and portages form the backbone of the Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail, a 400-mile loop stretching from Bangor to the northern edge of Baxter State Park that has become one of Maine's most meaningful outdoor and cultural corridors — and one with real significance for Piscataquis County.

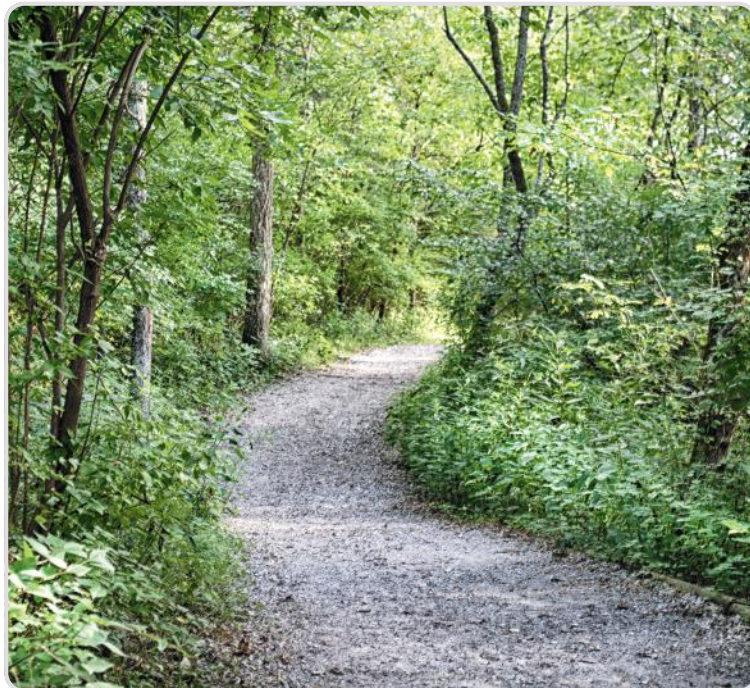
What makes the Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail different from a typical hiking or paddling route is that it isn't really new at all. The waterways Thoreau traveled — Moosehead Lake, the West and East Branches of the Penobscot River, Chesuncook Lake, and on into the Allagash — were ancient canoe routes used by the Wabanaki people for thousands of years before Thoreau ever set foot in them. "Wabanaki," meaning "people of the dawn land," refers collectively to the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Abenaki, and Micmac tribes, and two Penobscot guides in particular, Joe Attean and Joe Polis, led Thoreau through the wilderness on his 1853 and 1857 trips.

The trail's name and mission trace back to a nonprofit called Maine Woods Forever, which spent years assembling a detailed map tracking each of Thoreau's three journeys day by day. A Penobscot elder from Milford, Butch Phillips, served on the planning committee and pushed to formally recognize the Wabanaki guides whose knowledge made Thoreau's trips possible in the first place. That decision shaped the entire project: this isn't simply a memorial to a famous writer, but a shared commemoration of the guides and the culture that gave Thoreau access to what he called "the unhandseled globe."

Each of Thoreau's three trips followed a distinct route. In 1846, he climbed partway up Katahdin. In 1853, Joe Attean guided him to Chesuncook Lake. In 1857, Joe Polis led him from Moosehead Lake all the way to Indian Island near Old Town, traveling down the East Branch of the Penobscot along the way. Together, those routes cover roughly 325 miles of water between Greenville and Indian Island, much of it running directly through Piscataquis County.

Greenville and Moosehead Lake sit at the launch point for two of Thoreau's three expeditions, putting our corner of Maine at the trail's geographic and symbolic heart. Mount Kineo, rising out of Moosehead Lake, carries its own Penobscot creation story and was part of what drew Thoreau north in the first place. That overlap of natural landmark, Native history, and literary pilgrimage is rare, and Piscataquis County is uniquely positioned to offer it to visitors.

For a region that depends heavily on outdoor recreation and seasonal tourism, a named, mapped, storied trail is a real asset. It gives paddlers, hikers, and history-minded travelers a reason to come to Greenville and the surrounding towns beyond "the lake is pretty" or "the trailhead is nearby." It gives them a narrative to follow — literally the same water Thoreau paddled, with the same landmarks he described in his writing. That kind of storytelling



draws a different, often more dedicated, type of visitor: people planning multi-day trips, booking guides, staying in local lodges and campgrounds, and spending money at outfitters and restaurants along the way.

The trail isn't just a line on a map. Every third week of July, the Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail Festival brings programming to the region built around the trail's dual history. Past sessions have covered everything from Maine's brook trout and moose biology to Wabanaki and settler history, often presented in partnership with the Penobscot Nation's Cultural and Historic Preservation office. It's a rare event that treats natural history and Native history as inseparable rather than as two separate topics, and it draws people specifically because of that framing.

That kind of programming matters for the local economy in ways that are easy to overlook. Festival visitors fill rooms and campsites during a week that might otherwise be quieter. Local guides get hired to lead paddling trips retracing Thoreau's actual route. Businesses that sell maps, gear, or meals to trail-goers see a bump. And because the trail spans hundreds of miles rather than a single trailhead, its benefits aren't concentrated in one spot — they spread out across Greenville, the surrounding townships, and down through the Penobscot watershed.

For longtime Piscataquis County residents, the Thoreau-Wabanaki Trail reminds us that the wilderness in our backyard has been valued, traveled, and cared for by people for far longer than it's been written about. For visitors, it's an invitation to experience that same wilderness with some context — to understand that the routes they're paddling were canoe highways long before they were literary landmarks. And for the local economy, it's a genuine, low-impact driver of tourism that fits naturally with what this region already does well: quiet lakes, deep woods, and a strong sense of place.

Whether someone comes for a single afternoon on Moosehead Lake or commits to retracing all 300-plus miles of Thoreau's route, the trail offers something increasingly rare — a piece of Maine tourism that's rooted in real history rather than manufactured for the occasion.



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