



Paths into the Past: Acadia's Historic Trails

Mount Desert Island's present-day trail system evolved over centuries of human use and settlement of the land. From American Indians who blazed trails on hunting forays to European settlers who connected villages and harvested forests, their activities provided transportation routes on the island long before the first roads were built.

In the mid-1800s, rusticators came to the island to enjoy its beauty and to escape the bustle of large cities. They followed many of the existing paths and trails up mountains, through woods, and along ocean shoreline. Among the rusticators were Hudson River School artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Church. Their renderings of the island attracted city dwellers to experience the Maine coast.

Many of those who traveled to the island were very wealthy. They built 80- and 100-room "cottages" in which to pass their summers. Some cottagers socialized at tennis matches, lawn parties, and horse shows. Others, like the rusticators before them, were lured by the natural beauty of the island and preferred hiking. By the end of the 1800s, an era of active trail building had begun. Trails lost their utilitarian origins and were transformed into paths that promoted interaction with, and enjoyment of, the natural landscape.

In 1891, the first extensive trail plans were drafted. Much of the trail building was sponsored by village improvement societies. An innovative approach to funding construction was the creation of memorial paths. Individuals who financed a trail could name it after the person of their choice. Kurt Diederich's

Climb, which ascends Dorr Mountain's east face, is an example of a memorial path. Plaques were often set along the trails in memory of the person who was being honored.

Actual trail construction took innovative forms as well. Waldron Bates, chair of the Roads and Paths Committee of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association from 1900 to 1909, was the first to incorporate stone stairways and iron rung ladders into trails to traverse cliffs, talus slopes, and other steep areas. An example of his work is Gorham Mountain's Cadillac Cliffs Trail. A plaque at the head of the trail memorializes Bates as "Pathmaker."

Others who followed Waldron Bates carried on his legacy of innovation and craftsmanship. Rudolph Brunnow built the Precipice Trail over the formerly impassable cliffs of Champlain Mountain, and George Dorr, one of Acadia's founders and the park's first superintendent, promoted memorial paths. He oversaw the construction of several stairway trails leading from Sieur de Monts Spring to the summit of the mountain that now bears his name.

By 1915 more than 200 miles of trails existed on the island. That same year, the state of Maine lifted the island's ban on automobiles. By 1920 the major trail building era had ended, while an interest in building motor roads intensified. In 1929 the Seal Harbor Village Improvement Society recorded that "...an inevitable first effect of the oncoming of the automobile was the banishment of the horse and the desertion of foot paths and trails."

The Great Depression, however, brought the New Deal and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to

Acadia National Park. Two camps were established on the island in 1933, one on McFarland Hill (now park headquarters), and the other just south of Long Pond on the west side of the island. A good deal of their work involved trails. East-side crews primarily rehabilitated existing trails constructed by village improvement societies. West-side crews expanded the trail system on newly acquired tracts along the western mountains. The Perpendicular Trail and the Great Pond Trail are examples of work completed by the CCC.

Today, hikers can follow the footsteps of early settlers, American Indians, and outdoors enthusiasts of another era. Acadia's historic trails are still as challenging to present-day hikers as to those of generations past, and their scenic values and ties to the landscape evoke the same sense of awe experienced long ago.

Acadia Trails Forever

Acadia's rich tradition of stewardship continues with Acadia Trails Forever, a trails rehabilitation project funded by \$4 million in user fees and appropriations and \$9 million in private donations from Friends of Acadia. The project funds repairs of the park's 125-mile trail system and establishes the first trails endowment in national park history to maintain the system in perpetuity. Be aware of workers and construction areas as you hike.



Leave No Trace!

- Stay on the trail. Stepping off-trail tramples fragile plant life and causes erosion.
- Step carefully on summits. Rare subalpine plant species grow on many mountaintops. Step on rocks when possible.
- Bury human waste in areas without toilets.
- Carry out all trash, including toilet paper and cigarette butts.

Rules and Regulations

- Pets must be restrained on a leash no longer than six feet and are not permitted on ladder trails.
- Do not feed or disturb wildlife.
- Bicycles and horses are not allowed on hiking trails.
- Fires are not permitted on trails.
- There is no backcountry camping in the park.
- Swimming, wading, and pets are prohibited in public water supplies.
- Please respect private property.

Trail Safety

- Know the difficulty of the trail and your physical abilities and limitations.
 - Carry at least one quart of water (more for warm weather and long or strenuous hikes).
 - Follow blue trail blazes and use a trail map (not the park map).
 - Wear sturdy hiking shoes.
- Dress for variable weather.
- Do not modify or build new cairns. Changes to trail markers endanger other hikers.





This list includes only a small selection of the park's 125 miles of trails. Unless otherwise indicated, round-trip distances include the route out and back on the same trail. Many park trails, however, can be combined to make loops and longer routes.

Use caution while hiking; many trails have steep sections and uneven footing. Stay back from cliff edges; serious falls can occur. In rain, conditions may be slippery. Some trails are accessible. For more information, consult a guidebook or trail map.

TRAIL	DESCRIPTION	STARTING/ENDING POINT	ROUND-TRIP DISTANCES	
Very Easy				
Bar Harbor Shore Path	Harbor and island views	Bar Harbor Town Pier	1 mile	1.6 km
Cadillac Summit Loop Trail	Panoramic views of Frenchman Bay	Cadillac Summit Parking Lot	.4-mile loop	0.6-km loop
Jordan Pond Nature Trail (self-guiding brochure available)	Evergreen forest	Jordan Pond Parking Area (not the restaurant parking area)	1-mile loop	1.6-km loop
Wonderland Trail	Evergreen forest to rocky shoreline	Route 102A, one mile south of Seawall Campground	1.4 miles	2.2 km
Easy (uneven ground but fairly level)				
Bar Island - <i>Accessible 1½ hours on either side of low tide.</i>	Sand bar to forested island	Bridge Street (off West Street) in Bar Harbor	varies	
Most carriage roads. Check with staff for specific routes and carry a carriage road map.	Varied environments, from forests to lakesides to ocean views	Access at Jordan Pond, Bubble Pond, Eagle Lake, Brown Mountain Gatehouse, Parkman Mountain, or visitor center	varies	
Great Meadow Loop	Connects town to park through forest and meadow	Off Cromwell Harbor Road (walk from town of Bar Harbor)	2 miles	3.2 km
Ocean Path	Sand beach to sea cliffs— <i>Be careful near cliff edges!</i>	Sand Beach or Otter Point Parking Area	4 miles	6.4 km
Ship Harbor Trail	Evergreen forest to rocky shoreline	Ship Harbor Parking Area on Route 102A	1.3-mile loop	2.3-km loop
Moderate (some steep grades, some level stretches)				
Bear Brook Trail (to summit of Champlain Mountain and return)	Pine slopes, views of Frenchman Bay	Bear Brook Parking Area (400 feet beyond Beaver Dam Pond)	2.2 miles	3.5 km
Beech Mountain Loop	Vista of Long Pond on the northwest route	Follow signs from Somesville to Beech Mountain	1.1 miles	1.8 km
Bubble Rock Trail	Mixed forest with views of Jordan Pond	Bubble Rock Parking Area	1 mile	1.6 km
Cadillac Mountain North Ridge Trail	Open ascent, views of Frenchman Bay	North Ridge Trail Parking Area on the Park Loop Road	4.4 miles	7.1 km
Gorham Mountain Trail	Forest opening to granite ascent	Gorham Mountain Parking Area	1.8 miles	2.9 km
Great Head Trail	Evergreen forest along sea cliffs	Eastern edge of Sand Beach	1.4-mile loop	2.2-km loop
Great Pond Trail (first one mile)	Rocky shoreline, walk one mile and return	South end of Long Pond (near Southwest Harbor)	2 miles	3.2 km
Jordan Pond Shore Trail	Rocky shoreline along water's edge	Jordan Pond Parking Area (not the restaurant parking area)	3.2-mile loop	5.1-km loop
Strenuous (steep grades, many steady climbs) - Trails with iron rungs (Beehive, Precipice, Ladder, and others) are not recommended for small children.				
Acadia Mountain Trail (return via fire road)	Views of Somes Sound, steep descent to fire road	Acadia Mountain Parking Area on Route 102	2.5 miles	4 km
Beehive Trail	Iron rungs on ledges of exposed cliffs, very steep	100 feet north of Sand Beach Parking Area	0.8 miles	1.3 km
Beachcroft Trail (Champlain Mountain)	Rocky, open slopes	Route 3 at the north end of the Tarn	2.4 miles	3.9 km
Cadillac Mountain South Ridge Trail	Forest opening to gentle granite ascent	Route 3, 100 feet south of Blackwoods Campground entrance	7.4 miles	11.9 km
Dorr Mountain (Ladder Trail to East Face Dorr Trail, return via South Ridge Dorr Trail and Canon Brook Trail)	Stone steps and iron rungs to open ridge and forest	Route 3 at the south end of the Tarn	3.3 miles	5.3 km
Perpendicular Trail (Mansell Mountain)	Rocky stairs, few iron rungs with views of Long Pond	South end of Long Pond (near Southwest Harbor)	2 miles	3.2 km
*Precipice Trail	Iron rungs and ladders on exposed cliffs, very steep	Precipice Parking Area	1.6 miles	2.6 km
Sargent Mountain (Giant Slide Trail to Sargent North Ridge Trail, return via Grandgent Trail to Giant Slide Trail)	Ravine, evergreen forest, steep sections to open ledges	Giant Slide Trailhead on Route 3/198 north of Northeast Harbor	5 miles	8.1 km

*The Precipice Trail and portions of the East Face, Jordan Cliffs, and Flying Mountain Trails are generally closed from March 15 to August 15 to protect nesting peregrine falcons. Check with park rangers for more information.