



# MILLINOCKET, MAINE

KATAHDIN FROM COMPASS POND  
BY NORTH LIGHT GALLERY

## TRAIL TOWNS

BY MICHAEL LEE

Millinocket is also known as “The Magic City.” It earned that name when the per capita income here was one of the highest in Maine. The Great Northern paper company was in full production and most of the residents were hired by the mill right after high school. They lived a quality life and loved the outdoors. Many owned “camps” on the surrounding lakes and embraced the tranquility they found there. The town

grew around the mill, strategically built on the west branch of the Penobscot River in the early 1900s.

Times are different now. The mill is closed and may not re-open. Millinocket struggles to find a new identity and jobs for its residents. Fortunately, it is also the nearest town to Baxter State Park just 16 miles to the north, and recreational opportunities abound in the area. Current trends might indicate a bright future for Millinocket as a recreational gateway community.

After northbound hikers summit Ka-

tahdin to complete their hike they head to Millinocket, their last Trail town, to celebrate and plan their trip home. Southbounders begin arriving here in May to get an early start but are often delayed until the trails become free of ice and snow. In some years that might be as late as mid-June. A local joke here is that there are only two seasons—winter and the fourth of July.

Katahdin, the highest mountain in Maine, is the centerpiece of Baxter State Park and is clearly visible from many neighborhoods in Millinocket. “The

Park,” as it is known locally, covers more than 200,000 square miles of wilderness including numerous mountains, lakes, ponds, and streams and has more than 200 miles of hiking trail, 14.4 of which are part of the A.T. In gifting the park to the people of Maine, after he spent some 30 years purchasing the many tracts of land that it occupies, former governor Percival Baxter set up an authority charged with fulfilling his wish for it to remain “forever wild.”

Standing at the summit of the 5,267-foot Katahdin, and looking out on the vista of lakes and mountains stretching

in all directions, is a fitting culmination for the long journey thru-hikers make. Hiking Katahdin is also a rite of passage for many Mainers and an annual pilgrimage for many others, including the writer of this article.

People come here not only for hiking but also cross country skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, rock climbing, winter mountaineering, moose watching, and white water rafting. They all appreciate the magnificent scenery that goes along with these pursuits, from the solitude and stillness of snow covered mountains in winter to the rush of crystal clear

streams flowing into sparkling trout ponds in the spring. Here you find scenery that can only be described as both wild and pristine at the same time.

It is also not crowded up here. Even with some 90,000 visitors each summer, solitude abounds. Imagine hiking a 3,000-foot mountain with magnificent views of Katahdin and its surroundings, covered with wild blueberries at the summit. Then imagine that you might be the only person signing out at the trail register for that particular hike on a midweek day in the middle of August. Having your own private mountain to



TRAILS END FESTIVAL



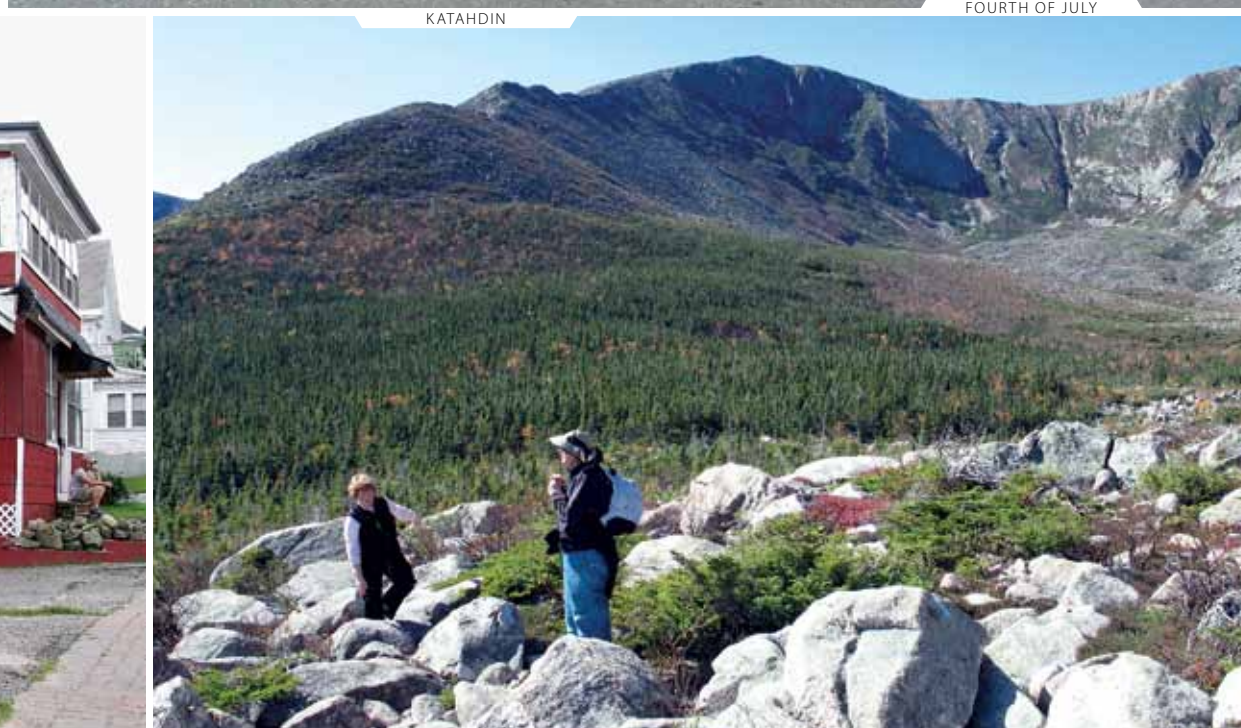
TWIN PINE



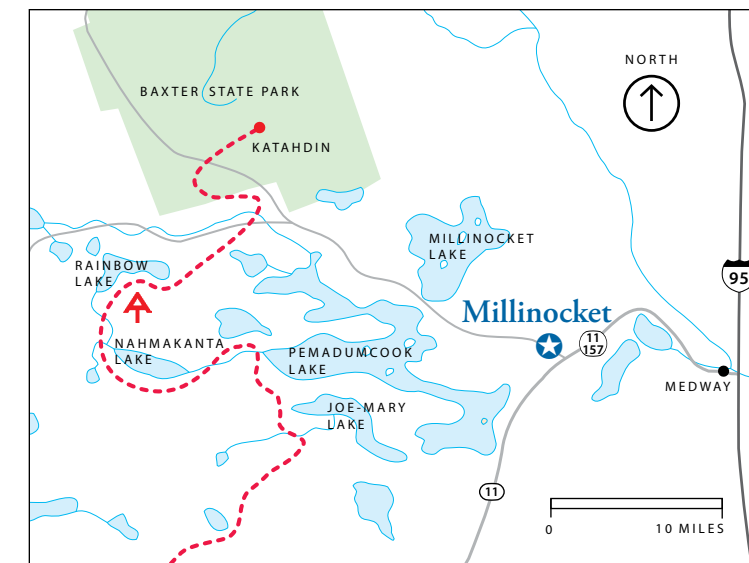
MOOSE



FOURTH OF JULY



KATAHDIN



hike for a day sometimes happens here.

Paul and Jaime Renaud finished a hike on the A.T. in 2007 and discovered Millinocket on their way home. They liked the place so much they returned to fulfill their dream of owning a hiker hostel and restaurant. They are now the proud owners of the A.T. Café and the A.T. Lodge, both located on Penobscot Avenue in downtown Millinocket. Paul also runs a shuttle service to and from “the Park” and to the bus stop in Medway. An old door in the café bears the signatures of completing thru-hikers over the past few years. Trail photos surround the walls, and the tasty food is home cooked and hiker friendly. Along with other interested locals they sponsored the first successful Trails End Festival in Millinocket in September, 2008, which is scheduled again for this fall.

The Katahdin Area Chamber of Commerce Web site lists many different accommodation options for visitors to the area ranging from the inexpensive A.T. Lodge to the luxurious Five Lakes Lodge on the Twin Lakes just outside of town. Camping information for Baxter State Park is available at the park Web site and the park office in town.

If you visit Millinocket this year don't be surprised if you find a camera crew from the Discovery Channel recording future episodes of the new reality adven-

ture series *American Loggers*. Featuring the Pelletier family of Millinocket, the series looks at the life of these loggers—working year round in sometimes brutal weather and in some of the most rugged country in the northeast. Their new American Loggers restaurant can be found on Penobscot Avenue. The Scootic Inn across the street and the Blue Ox next door are also popular restaurant bars for visitors and locals. There are two supermarkets in town along with three banks, a post office, a candlepin bowling alley, and the beautiful Northlight Gallery, which showcases the work of local artists. People who have lived in Millinocket all their lives and those visiting for the very first time generally agree that this town adds some truth to the popular slogan: “Maine—the way life should be.”

Born in Australia, Michael Lee is a freelance writer, hiker, pilot, and author of the book *Turn Stress Into Bliss* ([www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com](http://www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com)). He divides his time between his home in Massachusetts and his “camp” on South Twin Lake near Millinocket, Maine.

For more information visit:

[www.katahdinmaine.com](http://www.katahdinmaine.com)

[www.baxterstateparkauthority.com](http://www.baxterstateparkauthority.com)

PHOTOS BY NORTH LIGHT GALLERY, MICHAEL LEE (FOURTH OF JULY), AND ZYLA NUIE (MOOSE).