

WESTERN MAINE HUT HIKE

European-Style Hiking Through Maine's Western Mountains

After 29 years of guiding hiking and walking trips in some of Europe's most beautiful areas, we are excited to be offering a hut-to-hut experience right here in our own backyard.

This 8-day trip affords the opportunity of experiencing two of Maine's premier wilderness areas, with accommodations provided by two outstanding outdoor organizations, the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) and Maine Huts and Trails.

Our first 3 days of hiking will be spent in the Moosehead Lake Region, staying in AMC lodges, followed by 4 days spent hiking between three of the Maine Huts and Trails' newly constructed huts in Maine's Western Mountain Region. Both are characterized by old-growth forests, high Appalachian peaks, glimmering secluded lakes and ancient Native American waterways. From the splendid gorge of Gulf Hagas, the "Grand Canyon of the East," to the stately 4,000-footers of Bigelow, Sugarloaf and Crocker, we'll hike sections of the storied Appalachian Trail (AT), canoe the Dead River and end our trip in the warmth and comfort of backcountry lodges and huts that are so uniquely "Maine."

This year we are very fortunate to be joined by Maine naturalist Ron Joseph. After a 33-year career as a Maine wildlife biologist, Ron now specializes in leading birding, moose-watching and tree-identification trips. Ron knows and loves his native state as much as anyone we know. And best of all, his enthusiasm about the Maine outdoors is contagious. An experienced moose caller, Ron has a good chance of getting us in proximity to these amazing animals.

For those who have been curious about European style hut-to-hut hiking, this trip is a great introduction. And for those who have hiked hut-to-hut in Europe, this trip offers a familiar experience closer home.

Itinerary



Locations: Moosehead Lake region and the Western Maine Mountains

Group Size: 6 – 10

Accommodations: Country lodges, and comfortable backcountry huts or eco-lodges. One night in a B&B.

Length: 8 days

Grade: Strenuous, with one strenuous-plus day

Day 1: Travel to AMC's Gorman Chairback Lodge

After meeting as a group at the Portland Jetport, we will travel to Gorman Chairback Lodge, located in the heart of inland Maine. The lodge was originally built as a private camp in 1867 and later used as a traditional Maine Sporting Camp. The AMC has renovated the lodge as part of their Maine Woods Initiative Project, which protects 100,000 acres of land, including part of the 100-Mile Wilderness along the AT.

The AMC is the nation's oldest outdoor-recreation organization and their continuing mission has been to "promote the protection, enjoyment, and the understanding of the mountains, forests, waters, and trails of the Appalachian region." All of the AMC huts and lodges are models for environmentalism, education and stewardship, and Gorman Chairback Lodge is a shining

example. These comfortable cabins have twin, triple, and quad rooms. Shared facilities.

After settling in, we will take a walk along some of the lodge's trails and hopefully spot a moose.

Day 2: Third Mountain

After a hearty breakfast, we'll set off on a day hike. Departing the lodge, we'll head up Third Mountain Trail as it climbs to meet the Appalachian Trail and Chairback Ridge. We will likely cross paths the AT "Thru Hikers" trying to reach Mount Katahdin and the end of their 2,200-mile journey. We will have the option of continuing on the shore of West Chairback Pond where we can have a picnic lunch.

Elevation gain: 1,190'; Elevation loss: 1,190'; Distance: 6.5 miles; Hiking time: 3 - 4 hours.

There are a few hiking options for today. The weather will be a determining factor to which hike we can do.

Day 3: Hike to Little Lyford Lodge

Today we set off for Little Lyford Lodge. We'll follow Henderson Brook Trail as it descends past a series of small waterfalls and pools before it joins the AT. Crossing the Pleasant River, a normally shallow but fast-moving river, we'll hike through the beautiful old-growth pine stand of the Hermitage before starting on the Gulf Hagas Rim Trail. Gulf Hagas, known as the "Grand Canyon of the East," is a stunning 4-mile gorge with steep, narrow slate walls. Dropping over 400 feet in four miles, the river has created a dazzling series of waterfalls, pools and chutes. We'll have great views from the rim before reaching the head of the Gulf Trail, and continue on to the Little Lyford Pond Camps. Elevation gain: 650'; Elevation loss: 700';

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Distance: 8.2 miles; Hiking time 6–7 hours. There are other options for hiking to Little Lyford Pond Camps, including following the 6.8-mile Lodge-to-Lodge Trail.

Little Lyford Pond Camps has been in existence for over 135 years. Now run by the AMC, it offers outdoor experiences year round. These huts have triples and quads. Shared facilities.

Day 4: Morning hike and travel to Grand Falls Hut

We have a couple of options today for a morning hike, or you may also decide to linger over coffee before traveling to The Forks and the Grand Falls Hut.

One option is a hike up Indian Mountain (2,338'), which offers fine views of the AT's 100-Mile Wilderness from its summit. Another option is to stay closer to Little Lyford and hike the Pond Loop Trail, which goes around the scenic shores of Little Lyford Ponds. Indian Mountain: Elevation gain: 1,138'; Elevation loss: 1,138'; Distance: 4.4 miles; Hiking time: 3–4 hours. Pond Loop Trail: Elevation gain: 150'; Elevation loss: 150'; Distance: 2.1 miles; Hiking time: 1–2 hours.

Our 50-mile transfer today, between the Moosehead Lake Region and the Western Mountains, will take about 2 hours. The last 13 miles is a dirt road. This road runs about 1/2 mile from Grand Falls Hut. At this point we will walk the last 1/2 mile to Grand Falls Hut. Any extra luggage needed for the night will be transferred to the hut by hand cart (wheelbarrow) - definitely old school! Grand Falls is the most remote hut in the system. Bunkrooms with 4 bunks in each room. Shared facilities.

We are now in Maine Huts and Trails territory. One of the newest outdoor organizations and a nonprofit, Maine Huts and Trails has begun the work of establishing a 180-mile network of trails and mountain huts through some of the most beautiful and unspoiled landscapes of Maine's Western Mountains. Their mission is to "preserve some of Western Maine's best backcountry for the purposes of conservation and environmentally sensitive economic development, and ensure public access for generations to come."

Day 5: Hike and canoe to Flagstaff Hut

Our day begins with a short descent to the Dead River. A mile and a half into our hike, we'll pass by Grand Falls. An imposing waterfall 40 feet high and 120 feet across, Grand Falls is one of the most powerful and scenic undammed waterfalls in the Northeast. Just past the falls we'll pick up our canoes for a five-mile paddle along the Dead River. Calm in this section of the terrain, it slices through this remote and beautiful corner of Maine. Once we're back on shore again we have another 3 miles of hiking through the woods and along the shore of Flagstaff Lake to the Flagstaff Hut. Bunkrooms with 4 bunks in each room. Shared facilities. Elevation gain: 200'; Elevation loss: 400'; Distance: 13 miles (including canoe); Hiking time: 5–6 hours

Day 6: Hike to Stratton Brook Hut

A morning pontoon boat transfer across Flagstaff Lake will afford great views of the Bigelow Range, with its 4,000-foot peaks, before depositing us on the opposite shore and the start of Safford Brook Trail. Once on shore, we'll begin our climb to the summit of Avery Peak (4,088'). The trail begins gradually as it follows Safford Brook and then begins to climb more steadily. In a little over two miles we will once again join the AT as it heads south to the rocky summit of Avery Peak, with 360-degree views. Descending down the steep, rocky steps of the Fire Warden's Trail, we'll reach the valley and Stratton Brook Pond. From here we'll have a 3-mile gradual climb to the Stratton Brook Hut, Maine Huts and Trails' newest hut. This is a strenuous-plus day, and we'll have certainly earned our dinner! Bunkrooms with 4 bunks in each room. Shared facilities. Elevation gain: 3,245'; Elevation loss: 2,800'; Distance: 12 miles; Hiking time: 7–9 hours

Day 7: Hike to Poplar Hut for lunch, transfer to Claybrook Lodge

We'll get an early start today for our hike to the fourth and last of Maine Huts and Trails huts, Poplar Hut, arriving in time for lunch. A 2.4-mile return hike will bring us back to Gauge Road for our van transfer to Kingfield and our night's accommodations, Claybrook Mountain Lodge. Twin bedded rooms and shared bathrooms. Elevation gain: 400'; Elevation loss: 500'; Distance: 9.4 miles; Hiking time: 4 hours. Shorter hiking options are available for this day. Hiking to the nearest trailhead: Elevation loss: 500'; Distance: 2.8 miles; Hiking time: 1–2 hours. Farewell Dinner.

Day 8: Depart for Portland

After breakfast we'll depart for the Portland Jetport, a 2-hour drive. We will arrive at the Portland Jetport at about 12:00 noon.

Note: Elevation gain and loss refers to the total number of feet ascended and descended in any given day. On many days we gain elevation then lose elevation, then gain, then lose, etc. Time refers to the actual number of hours hiked, not including rest stops. Both are only approximations and will vary with weather conditions.

Who would enjoy this hike: Our Western Maine Mountains Hut Hike is a great trip for anyone interested in hiking the Appalachian Mountains of Maine and experiencing a "European-hut" style vacation close to home. All the lodges and huts used in this itinerary are situated in beautiful, remote, peaceful natural settings that afford the opportunity to experience Maine's varied wildlife. The hiking is varied, and our boat transfer to Flagstaff hut provides the opportunity to learn about the history of the lake and the town it flooded. Having a Maine naturalist hiking along with us also makes this trip perfect for those who would enjoy learning about the flora and fauna of the Maine woods. As Mainers love to say, this 8-day trip is "wicked good." Join us!

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What to Expect

Accommodations and Facilities: Our nights will be spent at both the Appalachian Mountain Club backcountry lodges and the Maine Huts and Trails huts. Together they offer an appealing mix of accommodations: classic, historic "Maine Woods" on the one hand and newly constructed, off-the-grid architect-designed lodging on the other. All the huts and lodges are heated; provide hearty, locally sourced meals; and offer comfortable bunkroom-style sleeping arrangements. Many of the huts are environmentally low-impact, producing their own power by means solar and hydro energy. The atmosphere is friendly and jovial as people, mostly hikers, gather to spend the night.

They have comfortable bunkroom sleeping arrangements - including triples, quads, and bunk rooms for 6. **Rooms are shared** - you should expect to share with up to 6 others in a bunk room. Shared facilities with hot showers. Our last night is in Claybrook Lodge which has private twin rooms and shared facilities. You will need a three-season sleeping bag, towel and pillow case for use in the huts as they are not provided.

Meals:

Breakfasts: Full, New England-style breakfasts will be served at the inn and lodges. Hearty buffet-style breakfasts will be served at the huts. Breakfast is served family style at 7:30 am.

Lunches: All lunches are included and will usually be a packed lunch including sandwich, fruit, snack, and beverage. Lunches are packed at breakfast and will be ready to go when we depart.

Dinners at our various accommodations are generally served around 6:00 pm. At the huts there is one seating and the menu is set. The meals are plentiful and vegetarian options are not a problem. Please let us know of any special dietary needs when you register.

Typical Day: One of the exciting things about hiking in Maine's Western mountains is there is really no such thing as a "typical day." Although there are many factors which influence a day including itinerary, weather and length of the hikes, there will be some basic routines. At some point during each day we will describe the hike and discuss any hiking options (if any.)

Most days we start hiking around 8:30 am, though on some days we will start earlier. This gives us time to linger on the trail and stop at points of interest. It also allows us to cover the majority of the distance before the day becomes hot, or the weather deteriorates. Lunches will be picnic-style along the trail. We will arrive at the huts between 3:30 and 5:00 pm. This allows time to relax or explore on your own before dinner, which is usually served at 6:00 pm.

Hiking Grade: The Western Maine Mountains Hut Hike is graded strenuous, with one strenuous-plus day. Some days there will be options of shorter, less strenuous hikes. Though most trails on this route are well graded and well defined, there are places that have "delicate" footing on rocky and/or tree-rooted terrain, and some sections can be feel a bit "airy" (open and exposed on one side). Most hikers find they have no problem on these sections. Not every day is strenuous, though participants should be in appropriate condition and comfortable hiking on a variety of different terrain types and in a variety of weather conditions.

Any hiking trip in the mountains requires a certain amount of effort, and proper fitness training will enhance your enjoyment. In the mountains, time and elevation gain or loss, as opposed to distance, tend to be the determining factors when defining hiking grades or level of difficulty. We have done our best to grade our trips consistently. Please call us for further clarification. We are happy to offer names of past participants.

- **Easy:** Hike 3 to 4 hours daily carrying a day pack on generally gentle terrain. Distances from 4 to 8 miles. Elevation gain and loss 500' to 1,500'.
- **Moderate:** Hike an average of 4 to 5 hours daily on varied terrain. Distances from 5 to 9 miles. Elevation gains and losses generally 1,500' to 2,500', or about 2 hours.
- **Strenuous:** Hike from 5 to 7 hours daily on varied terrain, with consistent ascents and descents of 2 to 3 or more hours, generally 2,500' to 3,500'. Distances from 6 to 11 miles. There are some sections that include steep ascents and descents.
- **Strenuous Plus:** Hike from 5 to 8 hours daily on rocky, challenging terrain with consistent steep ascents and descents of 2 to 3 or more hours generally 3,000' to 5,000'. Distances from 6 to 15 miles. Though each day is not strenuous plus, there are some sections that include rough terrain and open and exposed trails.

Trails and Weather Conditions: The days can be warm and sunny, and the nights cool and clear. It can also rain and be windy, and there is a slight chance of a dusting of snow or frost on the higher elevations.

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For all our trips you can expect to be outdoors for most of the day and not always within quick reach of shelter. This being the case, we are more at the whim of Mother Nature than your average traveler. Naturally, we hope the weather will cooperate, but as often is the case in the mountains, it can change quickly and without much notice. Though we will be checking forecasts daily, you should be prepared for some hiking in wet or adverse conditions, or for a change in itinerary.

A Reminder: Bathroom facilities on the trail can be scarce at times and don't always show up when you need them. It's best to be prepared to search out a private spot off the trail if need be.

Luggage: Luggage will be transferred each day to the next hut. Keep in mind, every day you will be packing and unpacking your bag and moving it in and out of a hut or inn. The extra luggage you do not need each night will be kept safely in the van for the trip.

* **Note:** extra items **must** be in a large backpack or a camp duffel with back pack straps. 25 lbs is maximum weight.

* Normally the hut crew can drive the extra luggage all the way to the huts on the jeep roads, however if weather or other issues close the access road, the crew needs to carry our extra luggage and having backpacks makes this much easier. The last ½ mile to Grand Falls Hut we will push our extra bags in a hand cart from the end of the dirt access road to the hut.

Laundry: It's best to plan on hand washing clothes, laundry service is not available.