

MAINE CANOE COUNTRY

Northern Maine

Way up in northern Maine, surrounded east, west, and north by Canada, the 92-mile Allagash Wilderness Waterway is the top canoeing destination in the northeastern United States, offering pristine lakes,

amazing white water, towering forests, and a chance to commune with the soul of the great North Woods. Civilization is distant, effectively ending at the town of Greenville on Moosehead Lake (see p. 28), and other people are scarce—even in the relatively long May–October season, the area typically sees only about 10,000 paddlers.

The waterway was established in 1966 by Maine's state legislature, with the goal of conserving the Allagash's natural beauty and undeveloped character. Venture far by land and you'll eventually hit a logging road or clear-cut—evidence that this part of Maine is one vast tree farm, its 3.5 million acres primarily owned and managed by logging companies. Around the rivers and lakes, though, things remain as they've always been, the wet forest climate providing a perfect habitat for diverse plant and animal species, including moose, black bear, deer, beaver, bald eagles, and loons.

Typically, Allagash trips begin at Chamberlain Lake, west of Baxter State Park (see p. 29) and continue north to Allagash Village and the convergence of the

Allagash and St. John rivers. The trip takes about a week, with more than half the route passing through a series of lakes, spiced by stretches of Class II white-water and milder rapids. Highlights along the route include gorgeous views of Mt. Katahdin from Chesuncook Lake and, at the northern end, the 40-foot tumble of Allagash Falls. Campsites are available along the route.

Northern Maine also offers prime canoeing on the St. John River and the Upper West Branch of the Penobscot. The St. John is a



The Allagash Wilderness Waterway is part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

classic weeklong trip, with many Class I and II rapids and two stretches of Class III. The best time is in spring, soon after the ice has melted and the water is high. The Penobscot is a calmer passage with few rapids, none difficult.

WHERE: About 90 miles north of Bangor, beginning just west of Baxter State Park.

Visitor info: Tel 207-941-4014; www.maine.gov/doc/parks. **HOW:** Allagash Canoe Trips in Greenville (tel 207-237-3077; www.allagashcanoetrips.com) offers guided trips May–Oct; weeklong trips from \$750 per person. **WHEN:** May–Oct. **BEST TIME:** early Oct for solitude, lack of bugs, and moose mating season.