

Maine Wilderness Guides Org.

An Association of Registered Maine Guides



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Reflections on my 76 Allagash Trips by John Wight

I have had 235+ canoe trips in the State of Maine, of which, 76 have been Allagash River trips. I am not well known because I have never had to advertise and I do not write articles for Maine publications. My first Allagash trip was in 1961 with my father, Norman Wight, and that was a 3-week trip starting at the South end of Chesuncook Lake. That trip started my now 59+ years on the river. I will give you two stories of the contrast in time over these years. The first is from 1964 after graduating from private school. The second is from this August with a troop of Scouts from Burlington, CT, in the Covid-19 times we are in.

June, 1964:

An 83 pound canoe, my 35+ pound pack, two paddles and portage pads all on my shoulders but I am on the last gentle downgrade to Allagash Lake. Fully clothed on a hot day, sweating profusely with “Old Woodsman’s” running with the sweat into my eyes, I have small glimpses of water beginning to show up through the trees. I have been portaging for two and a half miles with black flies in early June. There is no relief from them under a canoe and my hands are busy balancing the load and the canoe. With one hand on a paddle, I shuck out of my pack, take a few steps and gently get the canoe off. With mud to my knees, I remove my mud encrusted boots, pants, socks, and two shirts and walk into the water. It is cold, early up here as the alders are barely beginning to show the hint of coming leaves. Cold but such a relief, I believe there was a sizzling sound as I hit the water. But I am here, in this remote place in 1964. No other easy way in in those days unless you could afford to fly, which was legal before the AWW came into existence.

Four to five minutes and I am losing feeling in my feet, I stagger ashore and have to dress again because of the bugs. My partner is coming out of the woods with the rest of our gear, and he does the same as I did. We are half way through a ten day trip and have just completed the second portage in as many days. We have time to set up, rest, and make soup to go with crackers and cheese before dinner. We have a very “bug-proof” surplus WW2 two-man mountain tent and build a fire arbor in case we need to use the canoe to shelter the fire. We eat our snack and go out to troll and cast for trout. We add six, 10 to 11 inch trout to dinner possibilities. Because of the trout, the grease is fried out of four thick slices of smoked bacon... the grease for frying the trout and cooking fry pan biscuits. Lots more fat in those days, but we were young and were working hard.

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Short Bytes:

An Update on MWGO Advocacy by Melanie Sturm

CMP’s Transmission Line

Opponents of Central Maine Power’s (CMP) New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project suffered some recent losses. On August 13, the Maine Supreme Court ruled that the citizen referendum on the NECEC project was unconstitutional, so it will *not* be on the November ballot as hoped. In a second defeat, on August 26, the Board of Environmental Protection denied a stay brought by multiple parties on the Board’s order conditionally approving CMP’s application to construct the NECEC project. These are deeply unfortunate outcomes, but there are other avenues to defeat the project. There is a lawsuit and corresponding legislation challenging the validity of CMP’s lease on the Bureau of Public Lands Cold Stream property in Western Maine and the Army Corps has yet to determine whether it will do a full Environmental Impact Statement. MWGO, which has actively opposed NECEC, will monitor developments.

Katahdin Woods and Waters

On August 24, 2020, Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument celebrated 4 years since its designation. Over the past couple years as the National Park Service has worked to develop management guidance for the Monument, MWGO joined other organizations on a letter recommending a variety of actions regarding recreational use and protection of the wilderness character. A final draft of the Monument’s Framework document, which will guide management into the future, is due out this fall.

LUPC’s Adjacency Rule

For more than 40 years, LUPC’s adjacency rule policy required new residential subdivision, industrial, or commercial development in Maine’s Unorganized Territories to take place within one road mile of existing, compatible development. In 2019, the LUPC finalized an amendment to the adjacency rule, changing the rules and making almost 1 million acres vulnerable to residential development. MWGO opposed the amendment because of the negative impact potential sprawling development would have on wilderness guiding. We also testified in support of a bill in the Legislature, LD 1561, that would have put the new rules on hold until the Legislature had a chance to review them. The bill did not advance and the Legislature adjourned early on March 17 due to COVID19. There will, however, be future opportunities to engage with the LUPC on evaluating the effectiveness of the new adjacency rule.

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Tomorrow, we would cross the lake and descend to Little Allagash Falls, but we were here in this beautiful and remote place, all alone in a graceful peace. Out came the tobacco pipes as the light fades and the blessed Black Flies have preceded us to bed. We share quiet small talk as we watch the stars filling out with the calls of loons on the lake.

August, 2020:

Covid-19 had a significant effect on this trip with the Burlington Boy Scout Troop 49. First, it caused the total number to drop a bit because families had to sign off on their kids to be on family insurance and not BSA. Still I had to split into two separate groups of three and four canoes to comply with the waterway rules. That necessitated two complete sets of group gear even though we were only two people over the max allowed. We had to camp in separate cells at the same site because of Covid-19. Paddling combinations changed each day, but sleeping arrangements were static. I believe we had 9 tents in all, a few doubles, and a lot of singles. We looked like a small military encampment at times.

This was my last commercial Allagash trip and I could not have picked a better one to be the last. A wonderful scout leader from my first trip with Troop 49 led one group while I led the other. Because we were camped side by side, I could share my stories of history, points of interest, the story of the horse boats, and many tales from all my travels in the North Woods.

The scout leaders and scouts were exceptional, and they did everything with a little guidance here and there. My food is really very good with lots of reflector baking: Apple Pie, Biscuits, Bannock, Brownies, Coffee Cake, and Chocolate Cake, to list a few. Main meals were: Homemade Beef Stew, Chicken Fajitas, Spaghetti, Steak with red potatoes and green beans, Tacos with many extras, Mac and cheese, and Ham steaks in pineapple, cherries, brown sugar and maple syrup, with white potatoes, carrots, and onions. We ate well, but it takes 80 pounds of ice in five coolers to get it done.

The water was low below the falls, but not as low as in the 60s before the first Churchill Dam was replaced. I learned the "horse" channel very early in my days on the Allagash, and we sure used it on this trip. Water was about 325cfs, and channel is more obvious at 250cfs. The whole concept is counter intuitive for most canoeists as the horse channel is on the inside of many long turns, the shortest path for the loaded boats.

I will return to the Allagash with family and friends, and I have no regrets about calling it the end of guiding groups. There will be a Wight up there soon as my son Nathan is a fourth generation Maine Guide and will take over.

Quick Links

- [State says number of wildfires has soared in Maine in 2020](#)
- [Governor Mills Launches \\$200 Million Economic Recovery Grant Program to Support Maine Small Businesses](#)
- [Important Forest Habitat Conserved in Western Maine](#)
- [New Maine ADVENTURE Plate Aims To Strengthen Maine's \\$3B Outdoor Recreation Economy While Inspiring More Opportunities For Outdoor Recreation](#)

Upcoming Events and Dates

- Oct 23-24: [Wilderness First Aid \(WFA\) Course](#) taught by John Tierney through Wilderness Medical Associates, hosted by Mahoosuc Lodge, Newry, ME. For more info, contact Polly: (207) 824-2073 or mahoosucguides@gmail.com
- Oct 23-25: [Open Recertification Course](#) taught by John Tierney through Wilderness Medical Associates, hosted by Mahoosuc Lodge, Newry, ME. For more info, contact Polly: (207) 824-2073 or mahoosucguides@gmail.com

MWGO Professional Members are eligible for a \$50 reimbursement (\$25 for Supporting Members) for WFA, WFAA, WFR, WEMT or Recertification Courses.

From the Field



Looking forward to a better tomorrow? If only it was this easy!
[Trail to Tomorrow](#), Grand Lake Stream Plt, ME
(Photo credit: Jeanne Christie)

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