



State ski industry in good shape

Insider: Snow-making helps smaller areas

BY JOHN HOLYOKE
BDN STAFF

While skiers at Saddleback Mountain in Rangeley are anxiously awaiting word on whether their favorite mountain will open for the season, a ski industry insider said that situation doesn't reflect on the overall health of the state's ski areas.

In fact, Greg Sweetser, executive director of the Ski Maine Association, said that investments made at smaller community ski areas have helped build a thriving ski scene in the state.

According to published reports, Saddleback — the state's third-largest ski mountain — announced in June that it would not open this season unless it could arrange financing to replace an aging chairlift. No news has been forthcoming, and skiers in the region are wondering whether the mountain will open.

Sweetser said the resort will open at some point, though he doesn't know when.

"The analogy of a speed bump sums it up," Sweetser said. "I'm confident that they're going to continue operation at some point. It's a big facility. It's got everything. It's got winter. It's got summer. It's got hiking. It's got a nordic center."

Sweetser said he's hoping Saddleback officials will have something to announce later this week. In the meantime, he said the Saddleback situation doesn't detract from an otherwise robust Maine ski scene.

And while some might think of Maine's big three — Sugarloaf, Sunday River and Saddleback — when they think of skiing and snowboarding, Sweetser said the state's smaller community ski areas are copying some of the practices at the large resorts and carving out valuable niches.

"One thing that has really shown through on the smaller ski areas — the Titcomb Mountains, the Hermon Mountains, BigRock, Black Mountain — [is that] Christmas week is important to the industry," Sweetser said.

"Titcomb [in Farmington] is just a perfect example. They've slowly picked away and expanded their snowmaking to the point where they can now assure their membership and pass-holders that they're going to have skiing at Christmas," he said. "That has solidified their membership base."

Sweetser explained that at smaller ski areas, prospective members have often waited to buy season passes until they see snow on the ground. And if no natural snow showed up, they'd play it by ear, skiing at their local hills only on nice days.

With a predictable blanket of snow on the ground thanks to snowmaking efforts, that piece of the equation can be eliminated.

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AISSLIN SARNACKI | BDN

The view from Mount Megunticook in Camden recently.

1-Minute Hike Mount Megunticook in Camden

Difficulty: Moderate-strenuous. Hiking to the summit and back down on Mount Megunticook Trail is about 4 miles and includes a few steep, rocky sections of trail. Hikers can opt for a longer loop hike by exploring the mountain on the Ridge Trail or Slope Trail.

How to get there: Mount Megunticook is located in Camden Hills State Park, which is located at 280 Belfast Road (Route 1) in Camden, just north of the

downtown area. Enter the inland portion of the park, on the west side of the road. (If you are driving toward downtown Camden from the north, it will be a right turn.)

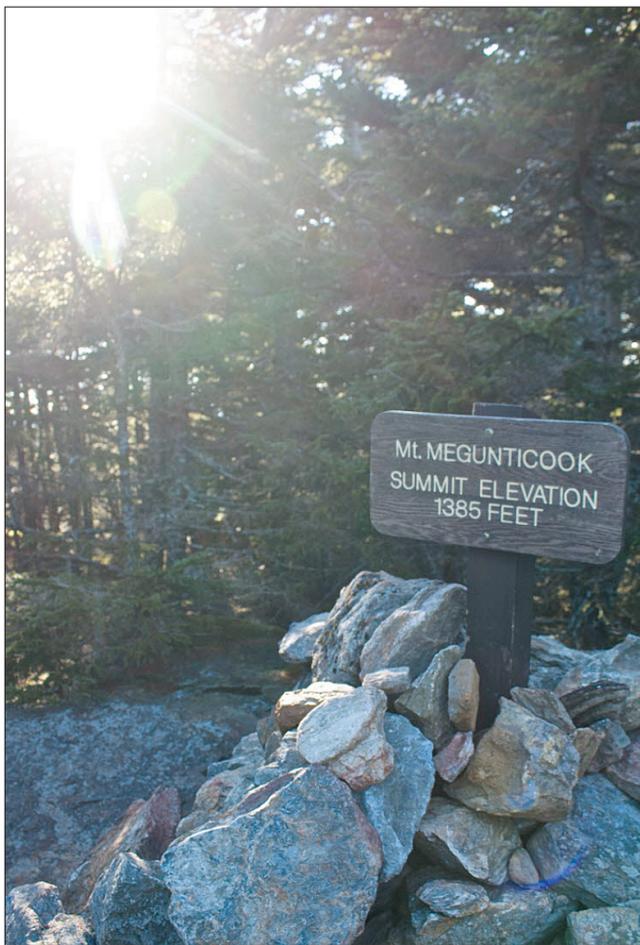
Soon after the turn is a gatehouse where you'll pay a small entrance fee (\$1.50-\$4.50, depending on your age and residency). During winter months, this gatehouse is not manned; leave your fee in the locked compartment near the gate after parking in the winter parking area to the left.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Mount Megunticook Trail begins on the west side of the park campground, which is just beyond the campground road to reach the trailhead, which is marked with a sign that reads "Mt. Megunticook Foot Trail."

Another option is to walk (or in the summer, you can drive) past the gatehouse and turn left onto Mount Battie Road. After 0.2 miles, turn right into the hiker's parking area, where you'll find the trailhead for Nature Trail. Follow that trail for 0.1 miles and you'll come to an intersection; turn right and hike 0.3 miles to Mount Megunticook Trail; then turn left and hike up the mountain.

Information: The highest of



AISSLIN SARNACKI | BDN

Mount Megunticook is in Camden Hills State Park, which is just north of the downtown area. The trail begins on the west side of the park campground.

the Camden Hills, Mount Megunticook rises 1,385 feet above sea level at the heart of Camden Hills State Park. Though the mountain's summit is forested, there are several open granite ledges located along its slopes that offer stunning views of the Penobscot Bay.

Several hiking trails and multi-use trails explore Mount Megunticook, forming a vast network that

can easily be navigated by using a park trail map.

Many people hike the mountain on the Mount Megunticook Trail, which winds up the mountain's eastern slope through a mixed forest that includes many tall oak trees. The first leg of the trail climbs the mountain gradually but steadily and includes a few steep sections where stone stairs

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Review of deer season

My first indication that this year's deer season might be a bit different than those in the past came way back in July, when I took a drive past my group's favorite hunting spot.

I saw sunlight filtering through formerly dark growth. The woods were — different.

In retrospect, after a month of tromping through the forest in search of deer, I realize "different" isn't really the right word.

In many spots, the woods were simply nonexistent.

Before we go any further, let me make one point perfectly clear: I am not complaining.

The land, after all, doesn't belong to me or to my hunting buddies. We appreciate the fact that a landowner of a large parcel allows us access to hunt at all and have long known that some day, some year, logging crews would arrive and our happy hunting grounds would change.

Again.

Yes, again. My friend Chris Lander grew up hunting these woods, back when another landowner called the shots. For more than 30 years, he has spent November days there, first with his family and now with me, his brother Billy and our friend Pete Warner.

Chris and Billy know those woods so well. When they're talking to each other about where they hunted, they often refer to logging roads that no longer exist or dark growth that used to be or "the spot where dad jumped that doe."

The Lander boys remember back when those deer woods were last cut, some 20 or 25 years ago. Those long-ago skidder paths — some of them, at least — served as our deer hunting highways, leading to stands and blinds and rocks we'd sit on. Those paths led to the edge of a brook where deer hid out, and they served us well — until they didn't.

About five years ago, we really started to notice the change. Alders encroached on those paths, then covered them completely. Once-easy traverses of a nearby ridge became grueling marches. Thick stands grew thicker. Shooting lanes grew in. And we wondered what would happen if we ever did see an actual deer. Would we have enough time to get off a shot?

If the land had been ours, we would have cleared out a few lanes, offering longer range shots than would improve our odds.

But we didn't. The trees weren't ours. We left them alone. And we watched as year by year, season by season, the forest thickened around us.

"One of these years, they're going to cut this again," we told each other. "That'll clean things up."

And then they did.
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JOHN HOLYOKE

Conservation trio Emerson, Thoreau, Muir connected in photographer's book

BY ANTHONY BRINO
BDN STAFF

Scot Miller has been photographing the Katahdin region for almost two decades, a body of work that he uses in a new book exploring a "circle of ideas" about America's natural heritage.

"We are fortunate that we don't have to be wealthy in America to have the opportunity to appreciate wild beauty," said Miller, a photographer based in Texas who spoke at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, where his photo exhibit "Thoreau's Maine Woods" can be seen at the Reed Gallery.

Miller's new photography and philosophy book, "Emerson, Muir, Thoreau: A Photographic Trilogy of American Wildness," is an attempt to "visually connect the philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir and Henry David Thoreau" and pay homage to their effect on America's open lands and conservation movement.

Miller's book includes his photographs of Katahdin, the east branch of the Penobscot River and western mountains such as Yosemite, juxtaposed with passages from Emerson's "Nature," Muir's "American Forests" and Thoreau's "Walking."

"It's difficult to imagine the modern conservation movement without their influence," Miller said. "All three men were freethinkers."

The book traces "a circle of ideas" between the authors that "begins and ends with Emerson," whose 1836 essay "Nature" was "one of the first and most important works in the emerging conservation movement," Miller said. "It was thought-provoking. It was messing with the status quo."

Emerson, a Massachusetts native, "advocated for a direct experience with nature" in contemplative, creative and philosophical language — "In the woods, is perpetual youth" — that captured people's attention.

"There are parts where I would think he was writing after an acid trip in the 1960s," Miller said. "You can just imagine what people were thinking 180 years ago reading this."

As a senior at Harvard in 1837, Thoreau discovered Emerson and later came under his mentorship. Among other things, Emerson encouraged Thoreau to keep a daily nature journal, whose records of spring flower bloomings have been used by modern researchers to track warm springs.

Thoreau built on Emerson's foundation and helped bring the appreciation of nature as an activity to public appeal, at a time when many viewed natural resources "as endless," Miller said.



SCOT MILLER

Photographer Scot Miller's trips to the Katahdin region are featured in his Presque Isle Photography exhibit, "Thoreau's Maine Woods," and shaped his interpretation of American conservation.

Thoreau was "the first American writer to advocate for preserving lands and creating national preserves," and he also was a "saunterer," Miller said. "He pretty much walked every

day when he could, at least in the afternoon, which I think is something we can all aspire to."

Thoreau's "Walking" essay wasn't published until after his
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