Bog

Continued from Page C1

Yet when he started studying the state's peatlands in earnest in the '80s, he couldn't find much in-depth information about the ecology of this important habitat. Over the past few decades, he has worked to fill in that gap of knowledge.

"As I was reaching my retirement, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if people could appreciate the beauty of peat bogs?'" Davis said. "One thing led to the next, and by 2002 we were constructing [the Orono Bog Boardwalk]."

Starting at the east edge of the Rolland F. Perry City Forest, commonly known as the Bangor City Forest, the Orono Bog Boardwalk is 4,200 feet long, starting as one path and splitting into a loop. Because of this "lollipop" shape, walkers have to walk the first part, which is 800 feet, twice, making for a 5,000-foot-long walk — just shy of 1 mile.

Today, the boardwalk is operated and managed by a committee and a group of devoted volunteers as a joint venture of the University of Maine, the City of Bangor and the Orono Land Trust.

Davis, now retired, is professor emeritus at the University of Maine School of Biology & Ecology and Climate Change Institute. He and his wife, Lee Davis, live in Orono. The couple travel often and enjoy spending time outdoors, hiking, camping and photographing wildlife. But when they're home, they frequently volunteer at the boardwalk, leading visitors on guided nature walks through the bog.

On Wednesday morning, after opening the boardwalk to the public for the day, Davis walked its entirety, looking for areas in need of repair. But for the most part, he was observing the flora and fauna of the landscape he knows so well.

A bird flew over the boardwalk ahead and perched atop a stunted black spruce tree nearby. Davis studied it through his binoculars.

"A palm warbler," he concluded. "They breed out here, and it's the only place they breed in the Bangor area. They're specific to this environment. They build their nests in bunches of black spruce."

The songbird, with its yellow throat and cinnamon cap, is included on one of the bog's many interpretive panels, which were designed by Davis to help people learn more about the peatbog as they travel the boardwalk. Information about black spruce trees is also included in these panels, which are located at rest areas, along with wooden benches, throughout the boardwalk.

In addition to writing the text for each panel, Davis also shot many of the photographs of plants and animals shown on the displays. In his retirement, he has grown increasingly interested in nature photography.

"I love natural beauty. That's why I do a lot of photography. It helps me focus on nature, actually and figuratively," he said with a smile. "I've been collecting photographs of plants that grow in bogs and fens for 10 years, but I didn't know I was going to use them in a book."

About 70 percent of the stunning color photographs in the guidebook, "Bogs and Fens," were shot by Davis. The rest he acquired, with permission, from fellow botanists.

"The light is becoming harsh," Davis observed Wednesday as he made his way around the boardwalk loop. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for photography, he explained.

About halfway around the loop, Davis came to a section of the older wooden walkway that was slightly off kilter. He took note of the section, which would need to be fixed by a local carpenter and boardwalk volunteer. Now more than 10 years old, the wooden boardwalk, constructed out of hemlock, is starting to decay.

"Now it needs to be fixed almost every day," Davis said.

Beloved by the public, the boardwalk is now not only being fixed, but it's slowly being reconstructed with more durable, composite materials. The Bog Boardwalk Capital Campaign, an effort to raise the $1.1 million to replace the boardwalk with longer-lasting materials, began in early 2012. Since then, the committee has raised enough funds to replace about half of the boardwalk.

In support of the campaign, Davis is selling "Bogs and Fens" at the visitor center at the start of the Orono Bog Boardwalk, and all profits from the book sales there will benefit the Orono Bog Boardwalk.

In addition, Davis will be signing and selling his new book at the Orono Bog Boardwalk at 11 a.m. Saturday, June 25. After the signing, he will guide anyone who is interested on a walk on the boardwalk, where he will demonstrate how to use the book to identify wildflowers and other plants.

"Bogs and Fens," which is paperback and 304 pages, retails at $24.95. It is available online through booksellers such as Amazon.com and on the publisher's website at upne.com.

The Orono Bog Boardwalk is open 7 a.m.-6:30 p.m. through Labor Day; 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. through the rest of September; and 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Oct. 1-16. To learn more about the boardwalk and the Bog Boardwalk Capital Campaign, visit umaine.edu/oronobogwalk, where directions to the boardwalk and a map are available.

Shad

Continued from Page C1

at the base of a set of rips, or anywhere there's a current change or any kind of structure that's going to be an obstruction for them."

Dauphinee said shad get confused when they reach a change of current, and they will often hunker down and wait for water temperature or light to change.

It didn't take him long to find a likely spot at the tail of Shad Rips, and in 20 minutes, he brought three shad to hand.

Why shad? Because they're feisty and fun to catch. According to a Maine Department of Marine Resources fact sheet, shad are sometimes called "the poor man's tarpon," because they fight hard and tend to leap from the water.

Shad can range from 3 to 9 pounds and can grow to 30 inches. They feed on plankton but will strike lures, baits and flies.

Shad are anadromous fish and return from oceans to rivers — such as the Penobscot — to spawn in the spring.

All of which made them an attractive target for this group of anglers.

As did this: Pete Douvarjo of Sedgwick is a registered Maine guide who splits his time taking people on fishing trips — family fun outings and shark adventures off the coast, smallmouth bass trips on the Penobscot — and was looking to do some advance scouting for a shad fishery he expects to explode in the coming years.

"I talk to my colleagues on the Kennebec [River], and they have this unbelievable shad fishery," Douvarjo said. "[Shad trips] would be a good thing to be able to offer, even if you only do it once or twice a year.

And what does the appearance of shad after such a long hiatus mean to him?

"This is the river coming back to life. That's what this is," Douvarjo said.

Pat Keliher, commissioner of Maine's Department of Marine Resources, didn't fish on Friday. But when told about the group's success, he said he wished he'd brought a fly rod with him to a Penobscot River Restoration Project celebration in Howland that was held earlier this week.

At that celebration, attendees were told that a single shad also had been counted at a dam in Enfield, about 20 miles upriver from Old Town.

"We had so little information on what was happening with shad in the river [we didn't know what to expect]," Keliher said. "It really wasn't until some studies were done by [the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] and UMaine that we said, 'It looks like we may have more shad here than we expected.'"

While the return of river herring to the river — more than 1.2 million thus far in 2016 — was expected, the shad remained a bit of a mystery.

Keliher said that intensive stocking of river herring helped "seed" the river, and biologists were confident that they'd head to sea, then return to spawn.

Shad were not stocked, he said. The shad were in the river already, looking for a way to get upstream.

"It was really hard to say how they would respond to some of the early dam removals. But obviously, it's been a great response," Keliher said. "It just goes to show you: You expand these rivers, you open up these rivers, and the fish respond."

AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

A sign marks the summit of Aziscohos Mountain, which on a clear day, offers a panoramic view of the many mountains and lakes of western Maine and New Hampshire.

Hike

Continued from Page C1

while other sources state "Aziscohos" is likely derived from a similar Penobscot word meaning "covered with mud." Having hiked the mountain on a rainy day in June, I can confirm I saw plenty of both — pine trees and mud — on the mountain.

Further, many sources about the mountain offer a different spelling: "Aziscoos." In fact, this spelling of the mountain's name is used in an article about the mountain's history, laminated and posted at the trail intersection near the summit of the mountain.

Today, Aziscohos Mountain is located on privately owned property, but hikers continue to climb to its summit using two trails. Those who attempt to hike the mountain do so at their own risk. Although it is located on a well-traveled road, the trail is fairly remote. There is no trail register, and no one checks in on the trail on a regular basis. Also, cellphone service is extremely limited on the mountain.

The 2-mile Aziscohos Mountain Trail starts on Route 16, exactly 1 mile east of Aziscohos Dam, and is maintained by the Trails for Rangeley Area Coalition, a local group that maintains a handful of hiking trails in the Rangeley Lakes area. The trail is marked with red blazes and starts out fairly easy, traveling through a hardwood forest and up a gentle slope. As is the case with many mountain trails, the trail becomes increasingly steep and rocky as it nears the summit. Just below the summit, in a sheltered area, the trail intersects with the Tower Man's Trail. At this intersection, veer left to hike the remaining 0.1 mile to the summit, which is marked with a wooden sign nestled in stunted evergreens.

(There is no sign at the trailhead, but a short distance into the forest, a sign reading "Aziscohos Mountain" is posted on a tree and beneath it a smaller sign reading "RT 3.4," indicating the hike is 3.4 miles round trip. However, a sign at near the top of the mountain contradicts this, indicating the trail is 2 miles long, so up and back would be 4 miles. In the AMC Maine Mountain Guide, 10th edition, Carey Kish confirms the trail is, indeed, 2 miles.

The other trail, The Tower Man's Trail, is 2.4 miles long, according to an old sign at the intersection near the top of the mountain. It has not been maintained in recent years, but locals sometimes use it. Its trailhead is also on Route 16, close to the Aziscohos Dam.

Atop Aziscohos Mountain, hikers are rewarded with a view of the surrounding mountains, lakes and ponds of western Maine and nearby New Hampshire. Major landmarks include the long, narrow Aziscohos Lake to the north and a chain of mountains to the west that include Half Moon Mountain, Diamond Peaks and Mount Dustin.

Because of the open view atop Aziscohos Mountain, a fire lookout tower was erected on its summit in 1910, according to the Forest Fire Lookout Association Maine Chapter, then rebuilt three times, in 1917, 1919 and 1929.

According to information posted near the mountain's summit, Basil Melvin was the mountain's last watchman in 1968. Thus abandoned, the tower collapsed by the mid-1980s, and the majority of the ruined tower was removed from the mountain in 2004, according to the Forest Fire Lookout Association. However, the concrete base of the tower still remains.

For information about the mountain and the state of the trail, call the Trails for Rangeley Area Coalition at 864-3951.

Personal note: On a bit of a whim, I booked a cozy 1950s cabin in Rangeley last weekend so I could spend a few days exploring trails in western Maine. Accompanied by my husband, Derek, and our dog, Oreo, we spent three days checking out a variety of trails, from easy bird walks to rugged mountain trails. And though the sun refused to shine all weekend, we had a good time outdoors, enjoying lupine fields and waterfalls in the rain.

Aziscohos Mountain, a hike I read about on mainetrailfinder.com and in AMC's Maine Mountain Guide, was the last outing of our trip. I heard the mountain offered some of the finest views in the state, but when we hiked it on Sunday, the summit was socked in with clouds. Bracing myself against a cold, wet wind, I photographed the summit sign, then retreated to the sheltered trail intersection before the summit, where I stubbornly stood in the rain for a 40 minutes, waiting for the clouds to clear.

"They're not going anywhere," Derek said.

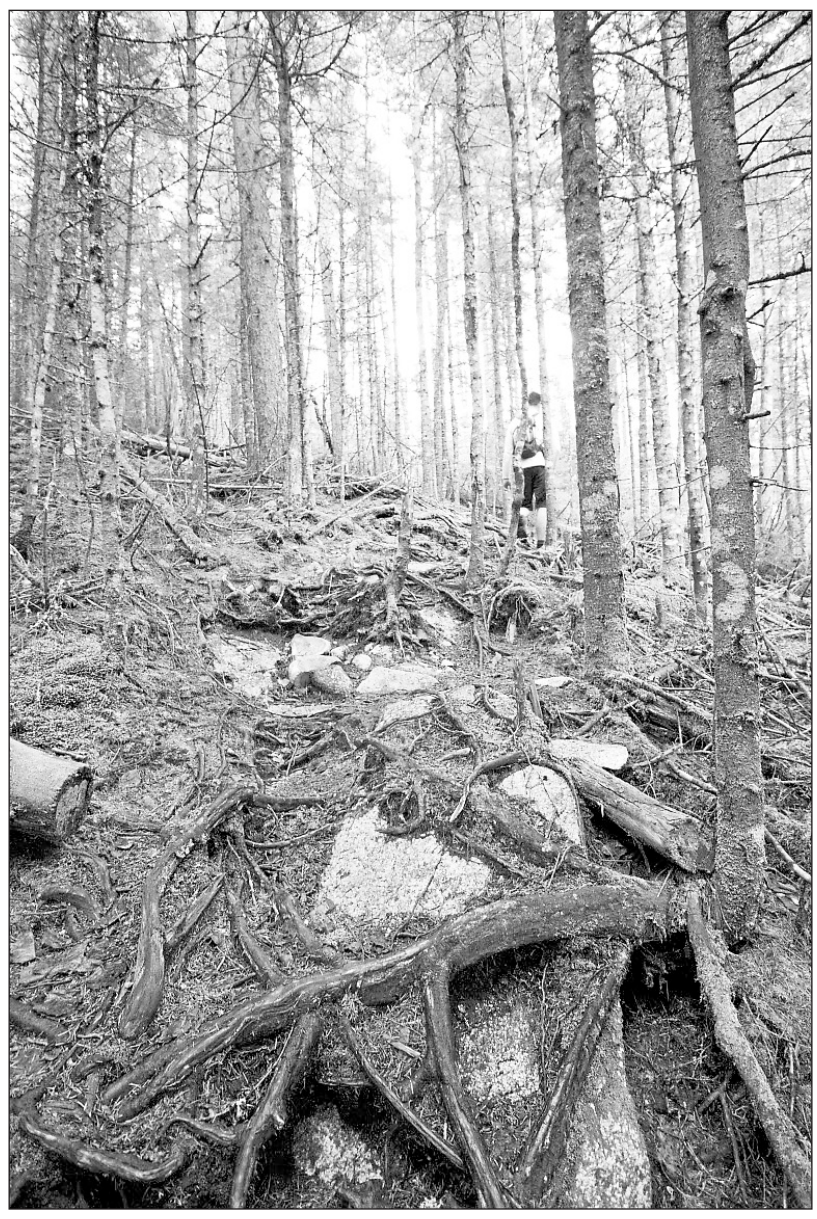
"Do a sun dance," I suggested, watching the dreary sky overhead.

"Look at Oreo," he said, pointing to our dog. He was shivering. My resolve crumbled, and with a nod of my head, we headed back down the mountain.

We weren't rewarded by sweeping views at the summit, but we still had an enjoyable hike. The forest at the base of the mountain was a sea of bright green leaves, the muddy trail lined with ferns and wildflowers such as white bunchberry blossoms and foam flowers and yellow bluebead lilies. Farther up the mountain's slope, we stopped to look at mushrooms and tiny ice-filled caves, formed in the spaces between large slabs of granite.

The hike was a physical challenge. The steep slope, combined with slippery, wet granite and tree roots, required us to pay attention to our footing and help each other from time to time. The experience led me to dream about even taller mountains, greater challenges and sunnier days.

For more of Aislinn Sarnacki's adventures, visit her blog at actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com. Follow her on Twitter: @1minhikegirl.



AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

The Aziscohos Mountain Trail is rocky and crossed with slippery tree roots near the top of the mountain.

Holyoke

Continued from Page C1

It's only been three years [since the first dam was removed as part of the Penobscot River Restoration Project], and this is already happening."

Before the dams came out, stripers couldn't get to Old Town. Neither could shad. Or other fish.

Now, they can. And you can catch 'em.

Later than night, Dauphinee returned to the river with his son, and the pair caught 30 more stripers. In the week since then, that total has risen to more than 100 stripers caught and released. I didn't fish much that first day, choosing to take photos instead, but returned earlier this week and hooked a striper of my own.

Downriver, the Pate family of Orrington has been having similar luck, Sue Pate reports. The group often fishes from their dock, and uses bloodworms for bait.

On Sunday, the group caught 20 stripers. On Tuesday, they caught 39 more.

"Have you noticed the river is teeming with baitfish?" she wrote in an email. "We have never seen so many little fish. When the sun goes down, the river sparkles with all the silver flashes. It is awesome! The river is alive, indeed!"

The Penobscot River Restoration Project was never a one-species recovery plan, even though the river's most popular fish — the Atlantic salmon — was certainly included in the laundry list of species that would benefit.

But since the idea was hatched, signatories and supporters have often had to educate others with a simple message: This isn't a salmon project. This is a river project.

And now, the river is responding.

In the coming days, you'll likely begin seeing more and more people on the Penobscot, casting from shore or fishing from boats.

Good news travels fast, after all.

Douvarjo, who organized the group that fished in Old Town last week, said he's amazed at what he's seeing on the river.

"This, to me, is the most exciting thing that's happened in a long time: To catch stripers," Douvarjo said. "How many miles above the ocean are we?"

Rough estimate: 30? 40?

The day, Douvarjo told us, was not simply thrilling. It bordered on historic.

Consider: The Penobscot has had dams on the lower river for a long, long time.

"It's got to be 200 years since anybody's caught a striper this far upriver. It's got to be," Douvarjo said. "We're pioneers!"

John Holyoke can be reached at jholyoke@bangordailynews.com or 990-8214. Follow him on Twitter: @JohnHolyoke.

JOHN HOLYOKE | BDN

Denis Dauphinee of Bradley celebrates after he catches his first striped bass in seven years during a recent trip on the Penobscot River.