



The Maasdam, the first cruise ship of the season, ports in Bar Harbor in May 2015.

ASHLEY L. CONTI | BDN

Acadia

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event last year in response to feedback from visitors eager to escape the sound of engines and smell of exhaust.

Not only do visitors enjoy the relative peace, but park officials have gotten a glimpse at the effects of restricting traffic. They'll keep that in mind as they develop their plan for how Acadia will welcome visitors over the next few decades.

"We want people to have the opportunity to spend time in the park — not searching endlessly for a place to park!" Schneider wrote.

With visitors come dollars

Where once a handful of philanthropists saw mountains, lakes and rocky ocean beaches to be protected and preserved in perpetuity, now scores of tourist-related businesses depend on this landscape for hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

"It's huge," said Martha Searchfield, executive director of the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce and longtime owner of Canterbury Cottage Bed-and-Breakfast. "[The park is] our biggest tourism partner. It's been 100 years that [the surrounding communities and Acadia] have existed together. They've grown up together."

Central to that shared history was the great fire of 1947, which swept across 17,000 acres on the eastern side of MDI, destroying the grand hotels that catered to East Coast high society and dozens of seasonal mansions owned by the old, wealthy families of Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Their cottages destroyed, many of those families never returned.

As a result, island residents who had worked for the rusticator class pinned their economic futures on Acadia National Park and automobiles to bring tourists to the island. Motor hotels — or motels — sprang up in Bar Harbor, as did restaurants and shops.

"The park is responsible for creating Bar Harbor as it is today," said Eben Salvatore, director of MDI operations for Ocean Properties, which owns several of the most notable hotels



Emma Mattingly, 9, does the warrior pose during an Acadia Stand Up paddleboard yoga class at Echo Lake in Southwest Harbor in June 2015.

on the island. "The only thing that sets Bar Harbor apart is Acadia."

Christopher Strout worked in Bar Harbor as a seasonal kayak guide for nearly a decade, packing up at the end of each summer to seek out work off the island. But now, the Kenduskeag native runs his own paddleboard business, a venture he says wouldn't have been viable more than five years ago.

The presence of Acadia and the increasing variety of outdoor activities the park attracts has enabled Strout to stay in Bar Harbor year-round, he said. He started out four years ago as a one-man show working out of his apartment, but now he has a seasonal retail shop downtown. His business, Acadia Stand Up Paddleboarding, offers paddleboard rentals, tours and lessons.

Each summer, Strout, 36, employs half a dozen people, most of whom work part time.

The business is helping him achieve his goal of putting down roots on MDI, he said. Strout plans to remain in Bar Harbor and one day start a family.

"I love this place," Strout said. "This is where I want to stay."

Strout's business is among a skyrocketing number of private

companies permitted to offer services inside the park. Over the past dozen years, the permits have ballooned by nearly 500 percent, from 39 in 2003 to 226 in 2015.

Of those authorized last year, 132 were charter bus companies, while others included photography and painting workshop instructors, summer camps for children, and expedition guide services for activities such as bicycling and kayaking.

When they're not enjoying the outdoors, all those visitors need somewhere to lay their heads. Bar Harbor has seen an explosion in hotel development in recent years, with five large hotels built in or near the central village since 1995.

But the building boom may be headed for a slowdown, according to Salvatore.

"You can't make more land," he said. "We're not bumping against the ceiling, but we're within reach of it."

Yet the success of this economic strategy — which is expected to continue paying dividends for decades to come — is causing a forward-looking examination of how to cope with pressures of increasing visitation.

Tourism is rising by land and by sea. The cruise ship business

is booming, with yearly cruise ship visits to Bar Harbor quintupling from 22 in 1990 to a state record of 127 two years ago.

More than 150,000 cruise ship passengers visit MDI annually. They spend on average a little more than \$120 in each port they visit, according to cruise industry officials, translating to \$17.8 million in Bar Harbor in 2015.

The growth of cruise ship tourism is a prime example of how the park's economic impact could continue to expand, said Chris Fogg, former executive director of the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce who now runs the Maine Tourism Association.

Plans to rebuild a defunct ferry terminal on Route 3 for cruise ships is thought to boost tourism without building more hotels or roads for cars. Presently, large ships must anchor in Frenchman Bay and ferry passengers to shore. Ships now cancel their visits when the weather turns bad. With a renovated terminal, large cruise ships could dock regardless of the elements.

If environmental trends hold true, however, it could become even easier to dock a cruise ship in Bar Harbor.

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Historical timeline for Acadia National Park

BY BILL TROTTER
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1901

Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations is formed by wealthy seasonal residents on Mount Desert Island to preserve the island's pristine scenery and to maintain public access to it. The growing use of automobiles and portable sawmills inspire their conservation efforts.

1916

President Woodrow Wilson authorizes the establishment of Sieur de Monts National Monument on Mount Desert Island with 6,000 acres of land donated by the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations.

1919

Congress votes to change Sieur de Monts National Monument to Lafayette National Park.

1929

The name of Lafayette National Park is changed to Acadia National Park.

1942-1945

After getting hundreds of thousands of visits each year, visitation to Acadia plummets during World War II.

1947

A devastating forest fire (one of several in Maine that year) sweeps across 17,000 acres on eastern Mount Desert Island. The fire destroys dozens of summer cottages, compounding the economic losses many seasonal rusticators experienced during The Great Depression and World War II. Many wealthy families leave and never return.

1960

Annual visitation levels to Acadia leap over the 1 million mark for the first time and stay there, going from an estimate of 755,900 in 1959 to more than 1.6 million the following year. Park officials won't speculate about the cause of the sudden increase, but it coincides with the national expansion of the Interstate highway system in the 1950s and 1960s and, more specifically in Maine, with the northward extension of Interstate 95 from Augusta to Fairfield in 1960.

1966

Official Acadia visitation estimates permanently pass 2 million per year.

1990

Hoping to get more accurate figures, the National Park Service changes its methodology for estimating the number of annual visits to Acadia, resulting in a change from 5.4 million visits in 1989 to 2.3 million visits the following year. Despite the change in methodology, the trend in year-to-year fluctuations since 1960 generally remains in range of 30,000 to 300,000 visits.

1990s & 2000s

The number of hotel rooms in Bar Harbor increases as five new large hotels are built. During the same time period, the number of yearly cruise ship visits to Bar Harbor increases from 22 in 1990 to a state record of 127 in 2014.

2015

The park's annual visitation estimate increases to 2.81 million visits, the highest yearly calculation since 1995, when it had 2.84 million visits.

Stories of Acadia

A couple in paradise

Dave and Vickie Lloyd

Favorite spot: Stargazing on deck of their home in Southwest Harbor, with the ocean to their left and the stars reflecting on a pond right in front. "Standing here is like being on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise," Dave Lloyd said. "You have stars below you and stars above you."

Dave and Vickie Lloyd wouldn't have ended up in Maine if it hadn't been for a chatty airplane seatmate who bent Dave Lloyd's ear during a business trip about 20 years ago. That man told Lloyd about a place called Mount Desert Island, and his plan to retire there.

When Lloyd found his job as an insurance fraud investigator had been eliminated, he remembered that conversation, and decided to take a look at the island. Over a six-month period, he and Vickie Lloyd found the Seawall Motel in Southwest Harbor, bought it and moved to the island. Their business sits on property that abuts the park,



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Dave and Vickie Lloyd, owners and operators of the Seawall Motel in Southwest Harbor.

and the couple enjoy welcoming visitors from around the globe each year.

"[Acadia means] peace, comfort," Dave Lloyd said. "We fell out of high-pressure work and ended up here. The park brings people from around the world, and we visit with them, we enjoy them, we learn from them. ... I'm sorry that [readers] can't smell this fresh sea air that we're smelling right now. It's deluxe."

With that said, the ocean's potential power and fury are never far away, as the Lloyds relearn every time a winter storm runs ashore. Their home, adjacent to the motel, gives them a front row seat to Mother Nature's handiwork in good times and bad.



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The Seawall Motel in Southwest Harbor.

During one such storm, the waves washed over the seawall and Seawall Road for four consecutive high tides.

Lloyd says that the aftermath of a storm can cover the road with gravel and football-sized stones, which are cleared by large trucks with snowplows attached.

"The biggest rock I saw on the road was a piece of granite that was easily 3 feet long and 2 feet wide and 1 foot thick," he said. "It was heavier than I could budge. And I tried."

Despite living on the edge of

the ocean, the prospect of climate change and rising sea levels don't concern Lloyd much. If the sea does rise, he said, his buildings would be among the first claimed by the sea. But he thinks any such change would be a long-term event.

"If it does come, I think it will come slowly enough that there won't be any dramatic washouts, and ultimately, if it comes, the pond will become a saltwater marsh, and we'll have ocean-front property," he said. "But I don't see that happening. Certainly not in the short term."