



AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

Little Spencer Mountain is seen from a bridge on Spencer Pond recently near the small town of Kokadjo in the Moosehead region.

Hike

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Information: Little Spencer Mountain rises about 3,000 feet above sea level on the east side of Moosehead Lake and is home to the most technical, steepest hiking trail in the Moosehead region.

The 1.5-mile hiking trail that climbs to the summit of Little Spencer Mountain is called the Ram Trail and was established by Dr. Richard A. Manson, who explored various routes to the summit of the mountain in the late 1960s from Spencer Pond Camps. Though challenging, it's believed the Ram Trail is actually the easiest route up the mountain, which is littered with boulders and has several dramatic cliffs.

The trail, marked with orange and pink flagging tape, starts out in a forest of maple and birch and soon meets a small brook, which it follows for a short distance. This section of the trail is usually muddy.

As the trail climbs the mountain, it becomes increasingly steep and rocky. The forest transitions to mostly pine and hemlock, and the trail crosses a jumble of angular boulders and a slide of gravel and small loose rocks called "scree." In areas without trees, the route is marked with cairns — small rock piles — instead of flagging tape.

Along the way, hikers are rewarded by several viewpoints to the west.

The most difficult part of the trail is about 1 mile into the hike and is called The Chimney. This narrow, nearly vertical crevice is a challenge for most hikers. Two ropes, anchored to trees, help hikers get through The Chimney's two steepest sections. In some areas, you will need to

grip the rope with both hands and brace yourself against the rock with both feet, finding footholds to climb higher.

Not long after The Chimney, the trail leads to open ledges on the mountain's west slope, which can be accessed by an unblazed side trail. For those afraid of heights, the ledges can be a bit daunting. However, they offer breathtaking views of Spencer Pond, Moosehead Lake and many of the area's mountains, including Big Moose Mountain, Elephant Mountain and Mount Kineo.

From the ledges, the Ram Trail continues up the mountain for about 0.3 mile to the summit of Little Spencer, which is marked with a large

cairn. The cairn is usually topped by a summit sign, but in early October the sign was missing. While the trail technically ends at the cairn, you can walk past it, wading through a sea of stunted spruce for about 100 feet, to get a good view of Big Spencer Mountain to the east and, beyond that, Katahdin. Big Spencer Mountain has an elevation of 3,230 feet above sea level, making it just a tad taller than Little Spencer.

Some sources measure Little Spencer at 3,040 feet above sea level, while the sign at the trailhead states it's just 3,007 feet.

Descending Little Spencer Mountain is arguably more dangerous than the ascent.



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Pauline Eldredge and her 9-year-old son, Ateon, hike up a steep section of the Ram Trail near the summit of Little Spencer Mountain near Kokadjo recently.

Holyoke

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touring the state with his old buddy, retired state trooper Mark Nickerson, as both sign their books during speaking engagements.

"We did over 100 [speaking stops] last year, and I'm booking right into June of next year already," Ford said. "I never would have dreamed that it would have worked out like that."

As it turns out, even some of the "characters" he describes in his books have started to become moderately famous.

Longtime Ford readers will remember the character of "Grover," whose real

name was used with the reputed poacher's permission.

"Grover was probably one of the most notorious night hunters that central Maine had. I only got him once for night hunting. But we kind of had a rapport," Ford said.

Grover was excited when he learned Ford was going to tell some of those stories and told the author to "tell it like it was."

Ford said he has and recently learned Grover has his own followers.

"I got a call last month from a guy in Waterville," Ford said. "He said, 'John, I bought your first two books. Grover's already signed 'em. Can I get you to sign 'em?'"

So what's next for Ford? Well, don't be surprised if you see another volume of

warden stories show up on shelves in a year or two.

Remember those diaries he kept for years? They're not tapped out quite yet. And Ford, who describes himself as the "worst student to ever walk through the doors of Sanford High School," might not be finished quite yet.

"I could probably write two more [books] easily," Ford said. "I don't know if I will or not. But if my high school English teacher even knew I was a published author on one [book], it would have killed her on the spot."

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

Be extra careful with your footing, especially while hiking over loose rock and climbing down The Chimney.

The trail is maintained by Spencer Pond Camps, which can be reached at 745-1599. For more information, visit spencerpond.com.

Personal note: I had my eye on Little Spencer Mountain for several years before finally hiking it on Oct. 4 with my husband, Derek, and a group of fellow hikers from Connecting with Nature, an outing group organized by The JD Foundation in Abbot.

I learned about the group Connecting with Nature less than a year ago and decided to write a story about them, which ran in the Bangor Daily News Outdoor section in March. Since then, I've chatted a few times with the group's leader, Victor Morin, who grew up hiking Little Spencer and Big Spencer mountains. When he learned that I hadn't hiked Little Spencer yet, and that I wanted to, he set up a group hike on a date I could attend. So, thank you, Vic, for making it happen.

The short, steep, rocky hike has now been added to my list of favorites. The views of the



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Spencer Pond is seen from an overlook on the Ram Trail on Little Spencer Mountain recently near Kokadjo. Beyond Spencer Pond is the shining surface of Moosehead Lake, as well as Kineo and Little Kineo mountains.

Moosehead area from Little Spencer's ledges and summit were well worth the trembling legs I experienced while descending The Chimney.

While I love hiking solo, I was happy to have safety in numbers on this particular hike. The Chimney was much easier to traverse with the support of the group. Vic crouched at the top of The Chimney and coached each hiker through, suggesting footholds and handholds. And others stationed themselves along The Chimney, spotting

people and helping with the ropes.

Three women in the group decided that The Chimney was not for them and turned around to have lunch at a viewpoint and descend the mountain at a slow pace, proving that you don't have to make it to the top of a mountain to have a successful hike.

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

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Paint Drop-Off Event

It's Free!

Saturday, October 10
9 am - 1 pm

Bangor Public Works Garage
530 Maine Avenue
Bangor, ME



Bring your old leftover paint for recycling

This event is open to households and businesses from any place in Maine. Households may bring any amount of latex or oil-based paint, stain or varnish. Businesses may bring latex paint, but there are restrictions on oil-based paint. Contact PaintCare for details.

PaintCare also has more than 60 permanent drop-off sites throughout the state (most are paint stores that volunteer to take back paint). For details on what we accept and the amount of oil-based paint accepted from businesses, visit www.paintcare.org/me or call (855) 724-6809.

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