

MAINE | NATIONAL PARKS

# Unspoiled Charm

Find fresh adventure at Katahdin Woods  
and Waters National Monument

By Jen Rose Smith

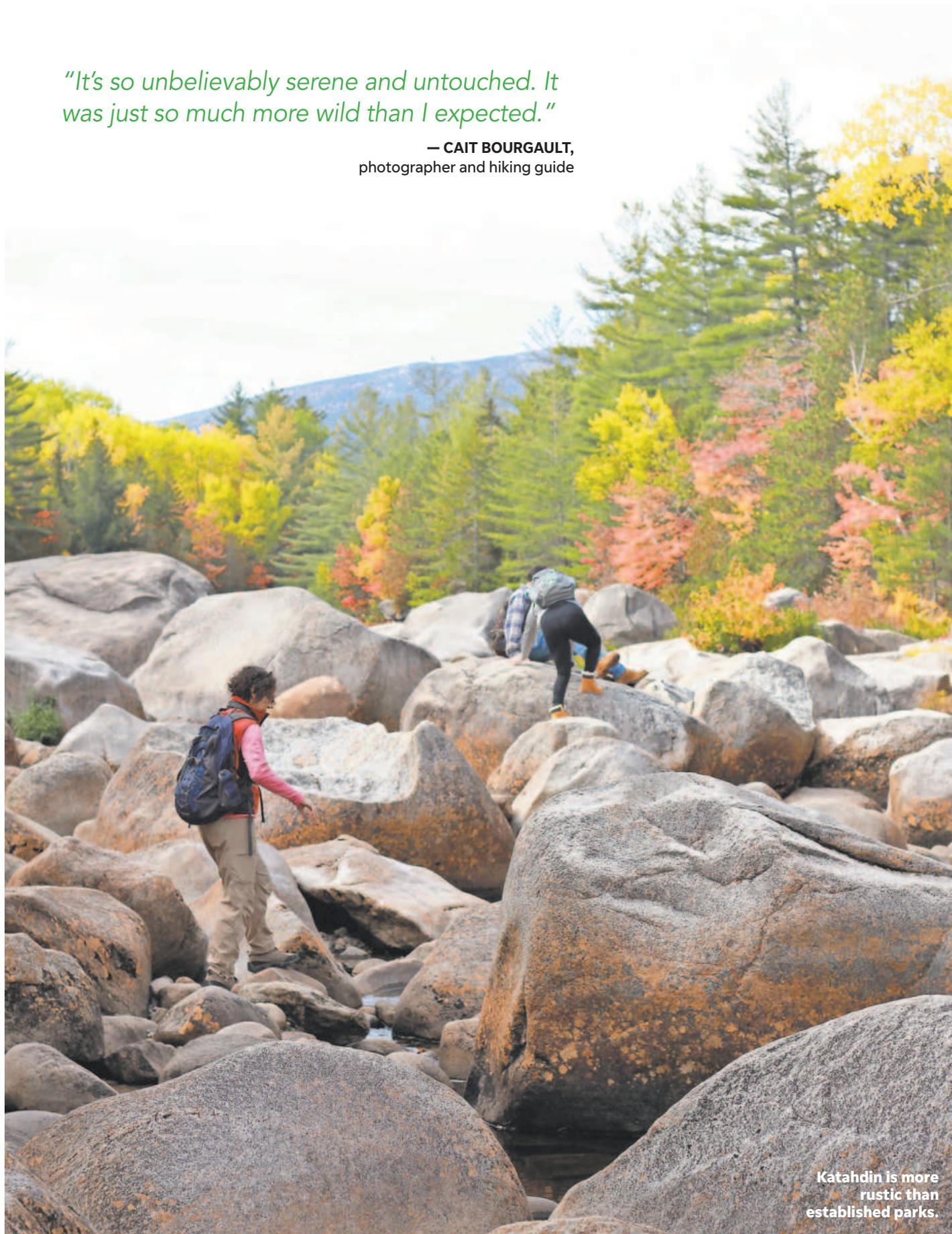
**C**LEAR RIVERS AND HIKING trails unspool through dense forest in Katahdin Woods and Waters. An ancient landscape, it's also one of America's youngest national monuments.

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*"It's so unbelievably serene and untouched. It was just so much more wild than I expected."*

— CAIT BOURGAULT,  
photographer and hiking guide



Katahdin is more rustic than established parks.

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CHRIS SHANE

"You're in the Northwoods and things are pretty rustic," says superintendent Tim Hudson, the sole year-round employee of the monument established in northern Maine in 2016. "But you've got great views, three really nice rivers and (Mount) Katahdin staring you right in the face."

Exploring here offers the chance to see a wild New England forest free from crowded campgrounds, traffic — even paved roads. Giving up a developed park's cushy amenities means roughing it a bit, but it will earn you blissful solitude and the chance to see a new national monument emerge from unbroken wilderness.

For many visitors, the first stop is the 17-mile Katahdin Loop Road, a gorgeous dirt track leading to hiking and biking trails. It's also the starting point for the International Appalachian Trail, an ultra-long-distance route that stretches from the Maine woods to Newfoundland and Labrador. Lean-tos and campsites dot the 30-mile stretch within the 87,500-acre national monument, which offers big vistas of Mount Katahdin — at 5,267 feet, the state's tallest mountain.

Cait Bourgault, a Maine photographer and hiking guide, walked the trail soon after the monument was created. "It's so unbelievably serene and untouched," she

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East Branch of the Penobscot River boasts fine bass fishing.

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says. "It was just so much more wild than I expected." After her campfire turned to embers, Bourgault saw the Milky Way transformed into a splashy band of lights. Because the protected land is one of the darkest places east of the Mississippi River, it claims some of New England's finest stargazing. "The stars just lit up the campsite," Bourgault notes. "There were times I barely needed a headlight."

And with rivers snaking through the monument's most remote corners, grab-

bing a canoe paddle pays off in solitude and scenery. "It is a quintessential Maine canoeing experience," says David Butler, a Maine Path and Paddle guide who leads trips within the national monument. "You definitely get the sense that it hasn't changed since Thoreau paddled it in the mid-1800s."

The East Branch of the Penobscot River twists and turns past jaw-dropping mountain views. Here, moose and bald eagles materialize from the mist and

paddlers pause to fish for each day's dinner. Salmon and brook trout dive for flies at the surface of the Penobscot, which boasts some of the state's finest bass fishing. Even the most veteran nature lovers succumb to the untouched charm. When Bourgault visited the national monument, the native Mainer was astonished by what she found: "If you really appreciate what Maine is, Katahdin Woods and Waters is on the top of your bucket list."

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MAKE A TRIP OF IT



Spend the night in a cozy cabin by Millinocket Lake at the **New England Outdoor Center**, which boasts a sandy beach and fleet of loaner boats. Its River Driver's Restaurant serves a crowd of locals and hikers, and the monument's southern entrance is less than an hour away.

neoc.com

For easy access to the northern edge of the monument, try **Matagamon Wilderness**, with a campground and cabins that are staging grounds for adventures. Hearty sandwiches in the on-site café are perfect fare for packed lunches.

matagamon.com



While there's no permanent visitor center, parks employees staff seasonal contact stations stocked with maps and information. Visit the **Millinocket Welcome Center** on your way to the south end of the park, or stop by the **Patten Lumbermen's Museum** as you travel to the north gate. The most detailed maps are the waterproof versions from **Map Adventures**, with tips on hiking, biking, camping and paddling.

nps.gov/kaww/  
planyourvisit/hours.htm;  
lumbermensmuseum.org;  
mapadventures.com



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