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TRAVEL

Midcoast's Rugged Beauty

■ **Where You Can Dine On Lobster, View The Rocky Shores**

June 24, 2007

By BETH J. HARPAZ, Associated Press

GEORGETOWN, Maine -- Smell the wild roses, fly a kite, scramble on the rocks and wade into the surf. All this and more makes for a long, perfect summer day along the winding roads and rugged shores of midcoast Maine. A series of peninsulas here juts into the ocean, and every byway offers its own treasures.

The area is about 35 miles from Portland. From I-295 north, take Route 1 to Bath, where ships have been built on the Kennebec River since 1826. Today Bath Iron Works builds vessels for the U.S. Navy. It is a secure defense site with no public access, but you can see the towering cranes at the shipyard from the road.

You can also visit the Maine Maritime Museum nearby to learn more about the state's seafaring heritage. The museum offers cruises on the Kennebec.

From Bath, take Route 209 to Popham Beach State Park in Phippsburg. In early summer, you might see a flock of piping plovers here. Pack a picnic, and bring a kite! Even a \$5 plastic one bought at a general store will do.

The wind currents here are perfect for kite-flying. And the surf always seems a little warmer, and a little calmer, than at some of

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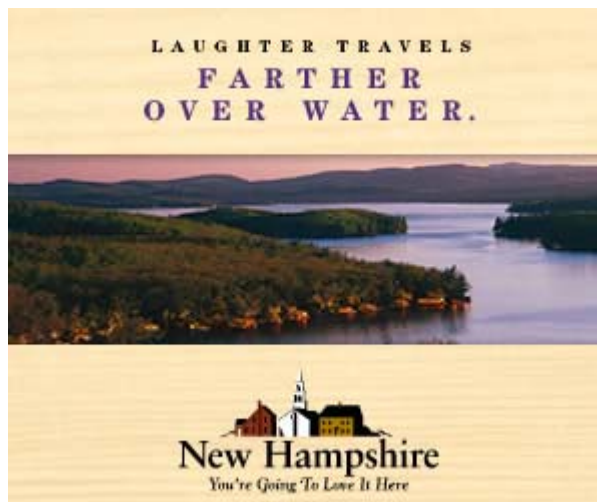


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Maine's other ocean beaches.

Wind, rain and tides caused some damage to the beach at Popham earlier this spring, but "we have cleaned up everything, and even regular beachgoers will have to search to find the effects of the April storms," said Jim Crocker, a spokesman for the Maine Department of Conservation.

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Also in Phippsburg, down Route 216, you'll find the Bates-Morse Mountain Conservation Area, where the trail runs through a balsam and spruce woodland, a salt marsh, and to the top of Morse Mountain. The small parking lot fills up fast, though, and there are concerns about overuse, so if you can plan your visit for a weekday or off-season, it would help preserve the area, according to Bryan McNulty, spokesman for Bates College, which manages the property and uses it as a research haven for students and professors.

Down the next peninsula, along Route 127, is Reid State Park in Georgetown. Here you'll find the rugged, rocky coast and crashing waves that Maine is famous for. Make your way across the rocks and gaze out to sea. You might see a fishing vessel or even a dolphin out there.

Check the tidal schedules with park rangers on your way in. If the timing works out, at low tide, you can wade out to some little islands just offshore. Look for crabs and other creatures in shallow tidal pools as the water recedes. But don't attempt to wade out if the tide is coming in - it's too dangerous. The water gets deep fast. You could lose your footing and be over your head before you know it.


Also at Reid, look for the tranquil lagoon between the parking lot and the beach. This still, natural pool is a nice alternative to the often icy ocean water. A tangle of wild pink beach roses perfumes the air here in late summer.

Bring insect repellent with you - on a humid or overcast day with no breeze, you might be bothered by gnats or mosquitoes.


For supper, stop by the Five Islands Lobster Co., where you can dine on chowder, lobster or just about any other type of seafood (and for picky kids, burgers and chicken tenders). For dessert, there's an ice cream stand. (But use the bathroom at Reid park before you leave - Five Islands Lobster only has portable toilets.)

With so much to do in midcoast Maine, you might not be able to see it all in a day. But you can always return for more.

If you go: For information on the Maine Maritime Museum, visit www.bathmaine.com; for Popham Beach State Park and Reid State Park, visit

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