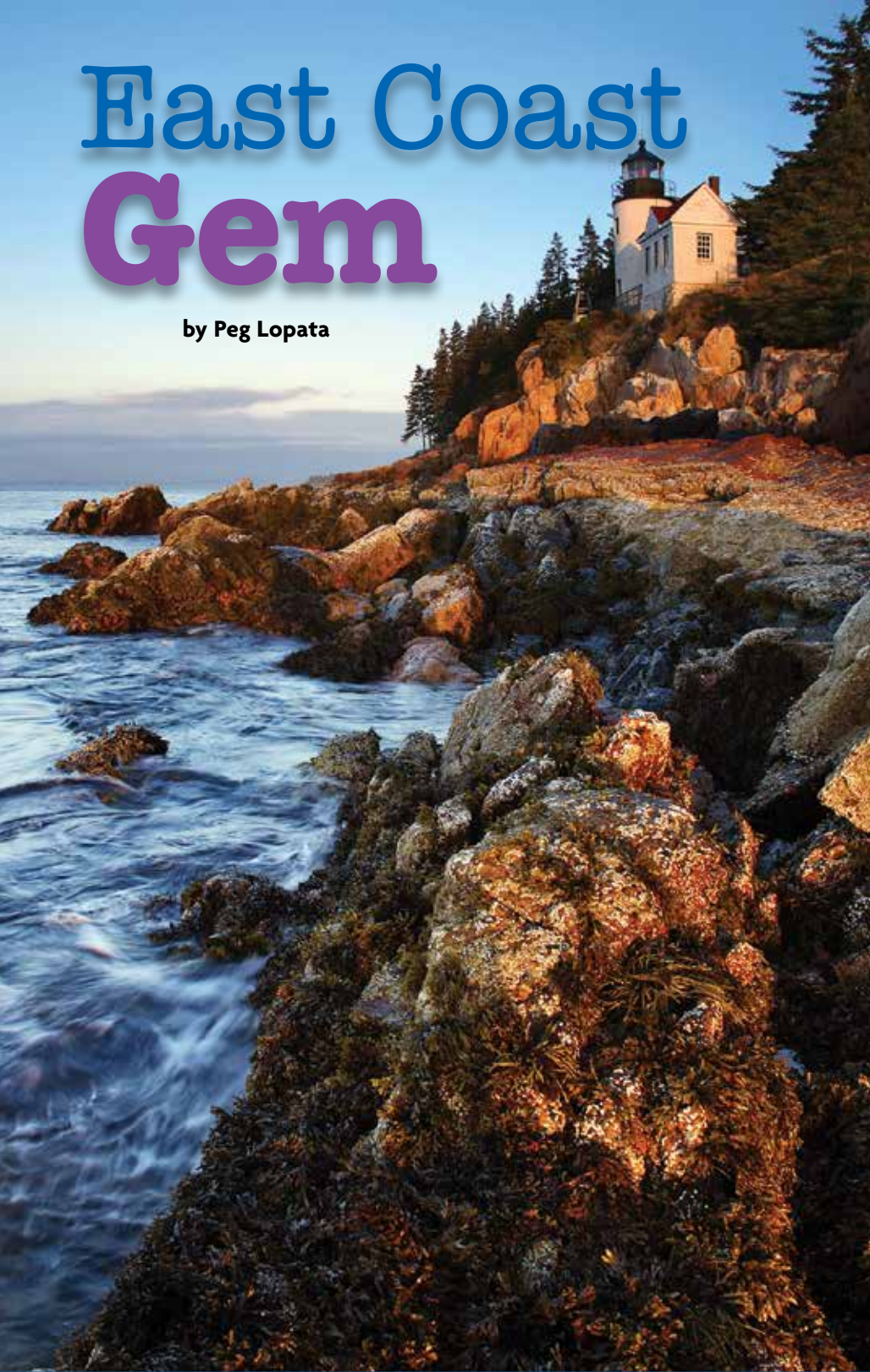


East Coast Gem

by Peg Lopata



Visitors to Acadia National Park never forget it. Beauty often is about dramatic contrast—for example, sea and mountains side by side. Acadia’s location on Maine’s rocky offshore islands gives visitors plenty of both.

Outside artists and journalists first visited Mount Desert Island (which is part of Acadia today) in the mid-1800s. Painters, such as Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, captured the rugged scenes of crashing sea and dramatic hills on their canvases. Their work inspired others to visit. Those first summer tourists, or rusticators, enjoyed the country life. They forged friendships with the island’s local residents. The hard-working and hardy year-round residents continued to make their living off the waters. By the end of the 19th century, however, tourism was a major industry.

Eventually, wealthy and famous people from eastern cities came to enjoy the wilderness, too. They built mansions, referred to as “cottages,” to make their visits comfortable. On Mount Desert Island, they enjoyed less formal

Acadia offers a unique combination of ocean setting, rocky shore, and mountain heights.

and more relaxing summer vacations than they experienced at their extravagant homes in Newport, Rhode Island. They appreciated the site’s invigorating salt air, slow-paced life, and spectacular natural beauty.

Fearing development would ruin the things that made the island area so beautiful, conservationist George B. Dorr worked to preserve the land.



He and several other men, including Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot, formed a land trust. They gave 6,000 acres of donated land to the federal government in 1916 for the purpose of creating a national monument. It was named Sieur de Monts for an early French explorer. By 1919, the land became the first national park east of the Mississippi and was called Lafayette National Park. The park's name changed again in 1929 to Acadia.

Among Acadia's unique features, the 45 miles of carriage roads and bridges that were built from 1913 to 1940 stand out. They were a gift of multimillionaire John D. Rockefeller Jr., son of the founder of Standard Oil.

Rockefeller wanted the network of roads and bridges to make Acadia available to all. They were designed for horses and carriages, not cars. They are considered the best example of broken stone roads still in use in the United States today. The material used was quarried from local granite sites. Rockefeller incorporated 17 stone-faced bridges, too, each with a unique design.

Rockefeller got caught up in an exciting era of road building. He supervised the project using state-of-the-art techniques. He made sure the roads were laid out to include scenic views. He also took into account the hilly terrain and avoided flattening hills or felling trees unnecessarily. Native plants were used beside the roads to keep them in harmony with the natural surroundings.

Traveling along the carriage roads is just one way to explore Acadia's history. The park also has historic trails that once were used by indigenous people and European settlers. By the end of the 1800s, trails that had been cut through rock and forest as a way to connect villages or carry on forestry were being enjoyed for the pleasure of experiencing the natural world.

Some of the trails included iron rung ladders and stone stairways.

Within Acadia's more than 47,000 acres are Mount Desert Island, Isle

Wealthy visitors built "cottages" on Mount Desert Island to enjoy their rustic summers in comfort.

CHECK OUT ACADIA

PARK ACREAGE: 47,000 acres

COOLEST FEATURES: 45 miles of historic carriage roads and bridges, Cadillac Mountain, Thunder Hole, more than 120 miles of historic hiking trails

ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY: Biking, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, hiking, swimming (both ocean and freshwater), bird watching, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing

WANT TO LEARN MORE? Go to www.nps.gov/acad



FAST FACT

Explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano is credited with giving Acadia its name. When he sailed by its shoreline in 1524, he claimed it reminded him of Arcadia, Greece.





Harbor seals can be seen along Acadia's cold-water shores.

The drama of water pouring through Thunder Hole is a site to see . . . and hear!

Coniferous refers to an evergreen, needle- and cone-bearing tree.

Deciduous refers to trees that shed leaves.

A **fjord** (also spelled "fiord") is a long narrow inlet with steep cliffs.

au Haut, the Schoodic Peninsula, and other conserved areas. For a small park, it offers much: ponds, lakes, coves, marshes, beaches, forests, and 26 mountains.

The park lies in two types of plant zones, northern **coniferous** forest and temperate **deciduous** woods. So the fields and forests are filled with a great variety of plants—more than 1,100 species. About 30 freshwater plants are considered locally rare.

Wildlife abounds at Acadia as well. More than 40 species of mammals, including harbor seals and eastern coyotes, reside there. It is home to bald eagles and peregrine falcons. Herons nest on the offshore islands. The park is considered one of the country's best places to watch

birds. In the fall, visitors can join a ranger on top of Cadillac Mountain to watch and identify migrating raptors flying south.

Geologically, Acadia is unique because it includes the East Coast's only **fjord**, Somes Sound. At Thunder Hole, water pouring into the rock chasm sometimes makes a roar like the sound of thunder. Sand Beach offers an interesting shoreline made almost entirely of broken shells. Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the U.S. Atlantic coast, challenges hikers. A short loop around Jordan Pond, a lake formed by glaciers 10,000 years ago, offers a more relaxing hike. Acadia's dramatic setting and natural beauty truly make for an unforgettable visit. 🏞️

Peg Lopata has been a regular contributor to *COBBLESTONE*.

