

Bethel Region Itinerary

Suggested months (June through October, starting in summer of 2009)

Relax, Rejuvenate and Reconnect in the Historic Bethel Region

Relax, rejuvenate and reconnect! Visitors have been coming to Bethel for over a century to refresh both body and soul. The region's forested mountain landscape provides many opportunities for outdoor recreation – and the perfect natural setting for enjoying a range of alternative healing therapies.

This itinerary involves very limited automobile travel depending on what additional activities you plan (see directions and approximate travel times below) and is best undertaken in summer or fall.

Day One

Start your tour at the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce Information Center located just behind the movie theater on Cross St. The Center has info on all the great activities and sites in the area.

Once you are oriented, ask the Chamber staff to direct you to the Bethel Historical Society. They will call ahead to arrange a tour of the Society's Regional History Center as well as a walking tour of the historic district. The Society's museum and library collections include a wide range of materials documenting the rich heritage of northern New England, with a major focus on western Maine and the White Mountain region of Maine and New Hampshire.

Ask the folks at the Historical Society to point out the former home of Dr. John George Gehring at the end of historic Broad Street. Dr. Gehring was a pioneer in recognizing the need to address both mind and body to provide effective treatments for all types of illnesses, combining his unique medical, mental and physical therapies. Dr. Gehring's clients were wealthy and famous. During his time, Bethel became known as the "Harvard of the North" because so many of his patients were affiliated with Harvard.

To step up the action (and get your heart rate up a little!), go for a swim at either the Artists' Covered Bridge, the most photographed covered bridge in Maine, built in 1872, or at Angevine Park, located on North Road about 2.2 miles from its intersection with Route 2. It is a kid-friendly, ½ acre man-made pond with a sand beach and restrooms on the property. Angevine Park is open from 9:30 a.m. to dusk. There's no lifeguard on duty. These tranquil spots surrounded by beauty are examples of what makes Bethel so special.

There are many fine places to stay in the Bethel area and the Chamber of Commerce has a full listing of accommodations. Travelers with an interest in history might stay overnight at the Rivendell House B&B, a recently updated 140-year-old farmhouse that offers an afternoon tea and a full country breakfast as part of their exceptional customer service or at the Austin's Holidae House B&B, a renovated Victorian home built in 1906 for a local dowel mill owner that offers WIFI and other fully made-to-order amenities. Try dining at S.S. Milton, serving American cuisine with a down-home touch in an eclectic and homey environment combined with the most healthy, nutritious selections. If you hit it right, you may get to have locally harvested fiddleheads, and they always have Maine lobster in season.

Day Two

The restorative effects of Bethel's invigorating atmosphere are legendary. To fully enjoy the fresh air, head for the Wight Brook Nature Preserve for a child friendly walk to the base of the falls that flow over granite criss-crossed with veins of milky quartz, or try Mt. Will, a "carry in-carry out" foot trail developed by the Bethel Conservation Commission to increase public awareness of the natural resources and beauty of the Androscoggin River Valley. The overall Mt Will loop is 3 ¼ miles and typically requires about 2 ½ hours walking time.

For those who would rather get their exercise shopping, not to worry! Bethel Village offers a variety of great shopping opportunities, including Wild Rose, Mt. Mann Jewelers, Linda Clifford - Scottish and Irish Merchant, Maine Line Products and more!

By afternoon, you may be ready to sample from among Bethel's many fine alternative therapy providers - Dr. Gehring's present day counterparts. Experience the ultimate in rest and relaxation at Many Hands Massage, offering a wide variety of massage options including their namesake massage - two massage therapists working you at the same time. Or you might wish to indulge yourself at SpiritWings Compassionate Healing & Enchanting Gifts which features compassionate healing with services such as Reiki and intuitive readings.

And to end the day, check out the warm and inviting atmosphere at Jolly Drayman at the Briar Lee Inn. And did we mention how nutritious both British and American dining selections are?

Day Three

To expand your outdoor exploration of the Bethel region, visit Sun Valley Sports and Guide Service. Sun Valley offers guided wildlife tours, ATV rides, kayak trips, fishing trips, or visitors can rent equipment to make their own adventure.

Or if you must head home, we suggest you leave enough time to visit the Poland Spring Preservation Society and Park. Historically visitors to Poland Spring claimed to have been cured of both pain and illness by the waters, thus leading to the expansion of the historic Poland Spring Resort. The Poland Spring Museum is housed in the former bottling plant (built in 1907) and has interactive science displays and bottling memorabilia. Within the park there are five miles of recreational and nature trails. Also on the grounds are the Maine State Building, one of only five buildings in existence from the Chicago Worlds Fair in 1893 and the All Soul's Chapel a non-denominational chapel. Both buildings are owned by a non-profit and are listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Sidebars

1) Special Events

- Harvest Fest and Chowdah Festival. The town is decorated with scarecrows and other harvest decorations as visitors enjoy arts and crafts, a farmer's market, mill tours, demonstrations, the famous chowder cook-off, canoeing, hiking, and guided or self-guided bike tours. 3rd Saturday in September.
- Mollycokett Day. Named for a legendary female Pequawket Native American healer, this festival includes a five-mile road race, town parade,

arts and crafts, games, live entertainment, food, a duck race, and fireworks.

3rd Saturday in July. www.mahoosucarts.org

- Family Fishing Festival. Free family event! No fishing license, fishing pole, or prior experience required. Learn the art of catch and release while learning to cast, or learn to tie a fly. There is a two-fly competition for the experienced angler. Come; take part in the learning and the competition. 1st Saturday in July.

2) Local Grown.

- Farmer's Market. End of May to end of October on Saturday from 9-12 at the Bethel Family Health Center, Railroad Street. Healthy and nutritious foods available. Seasonal vegetables, pork, beef and chicken, goat cheese, eggs, flowers, perennials, baked goods.
- Good Food Store. Specializing in natural foods, gourmet specialties, organic produce & Maine-made products and also carry fine wines, cheeses, & micro-brewed beers.

3) Local Products

- Timberlakes Home Store. Their classic Shaker chair has won the admiration of collectors around the world and has been handmade in Bethel since 1974. The Timberlakes also manufacture an entire line of wooden utensils, cutting boards and other gift items.
- Mt. Mann Jewelers features lovely jewelry made from locally mined gemstones.

4) Kids and Learning

- Stop by and visit Piglet, Eeyore, Roo and Rabbit at Pooh Corner Farm. Meander through a beautiful garden center. There is a nice walk from Pooh Corner into the White Mountain National Forest.

5) Getting Outdoors

- Go on a Scenic Chairlift Ride. Take a ride up Sunday River's North Peak chairlift to hike, enjoy a picnic lunch or just take in the incredible views of the Mahoosuc Mountains and Sunday River Valley. Enjoy the fresh rejuvenating air and refresh your spirit.
- The Androscoggin River Recreational Walking Trail is a 1.5 mile point-to-point trail from the Riverside Rest Area on Rt. 2, three miles east of Bethel to the River View Resort. This trail provides the visitor an opportunity to see the river up close and enjoy the serenity of a wooded setting.
- The Bethel Recreational Path is a nearly one-mile, multi-use paved trail. It commences at Davis Park (which has a playground, skateboard park, covered picnic tables, toilets, and a public boat launch), extends across the Androscoggin River on a beautiful new multi-use bridge, loops under the roadway, and ends on North Road. Exciting plans for future expansion on either end are in the works! The path features an authentic, scaled replica of the famous Artists' Covered Bridge and it is fully handicapped-accessible with parking available at both ends. It is utilized by walkers, rollerbladers, joggers, and cyclists, and in the winter by snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers.
- Route 26 National Scenic Byway offers several spectacular photo opportunities. The 21-mile (one hour) drive that connects with a New

Hampshire Scenic Byway and passes through Grafton Notch State Park is a pristine landscape with tons of great shots. The park has a number of visitor amenities including many swimming holes in the Bear River and mountain hiking trails, two of which lead to Screw Auger Falls and Mother Walker Falls. The area is visually pristine, complete with photogenic scenery and wildlife viewing areas.

6) Fun Facts

- Bethel holds the World's Tallest Snowman record in the Guinness Book of World Records, set in 1999 at 113'7". In February of 2008, they topped their own record by building the World's Tallest SnowWoman at a towering 122'1"
- Mollycokett, a Pequawket healer and herbalist, once saved the life of baby Hannibal Hamlin. He grew up to be Vice President under Abraham Lincoln.

7) Mileage (and driving time)

- From Portland: 73.34 miles/1 hour 43 minutes
- From Bangor to starting point: 132.31 miles/2 hours 48 minutes
- From Boston to starting point: 171.83 miles/3 hours 22 minutes