

Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Upper Ammonoosuc Cultural Heritage

The area surrounding the town of Groveton, NH abounds with opportunities for outdoor recreation, cultural heritage exploration and wildlife viewing. The Kilkenney Range and Percy Peaks provide challenging and fun hikes to great views, and the Upper Ammonoosuc River carries paddlers through both wilderness and picturesque New England villages. Historical societies, museums and interactive heritage exhibits dot the landscape from Berlin to Colebrook and offer visitors in-depth insight into the characters and events that shaped the landscape. The following is a sample itinerary which is designed to reveal some of the many resources available to you when you journey through this part of Coos County.



Day 1

Begin your exploration of Coos County history by learning stories of New Hampshire's great log drives. Peruse exhibits in the re-created circa-1900 logging camp at the [Northern Forest Heritage Park](#) in Berlin. The Heritage Park also offers 90-minute boat tours along the Androscoggin River narrated by knowledgeable local historians. These tours pass the historic boom piers (man-made islands) used to sort the thousands of logs floating downstream en route to the pulp and lumber mills.

To investigate another slice of North Country cultural heritage, you can travel further north along Route 16 to view the 170-foot [Nansen Ski Jump](#) built in the mid-1930's. Berlin was once home to a large community of Norwegian immigrants whose skill and enthusiasm for winter sports led to the creation of the ski jump and the oldest continually operating ski club in the United States. Although unused since 1982, the jump was once the tallest steel tower jump east of the Mississippi and hosted the Olympic Ski jump trials and Eastern State Championships.

Enjoy a sandwich and ice cream cone at the [Northland Dairy Bar and Restaurant](#) in Berlin or drive north to the town of Milan for a sandwich at the [Milan Luncheonette and Variety](#) or [Ursula's Snack Shack](#).

Spend the rest of your day preparing for your canoe trip on the Upper Ammonoosuc and exploring the towns of Berlin, Milan and Errol. Canoe and kayak rentals and camping supplies are available in Errol at [L.L. Cote](#) and [Northern Waters Outfitters](#).

While you prepare for your paddling adventure, consider the benefits of hiring a local guide to join you. The [Kingdom Guide Service](#) can assist with logistical preparations and shuttle services. Along the river, guides also reveal the subtleties of the river's natural ecosystems and tell stories of both the Native and non-Native people who have inhabited the landscape through history.

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Enjoy a juicy steak, seafood special or sandwich topped off with an ice cream sundae for dinner at the Northland Dairy Bar. Stay the night in Milan at the [Dubee Our Guest Bed and Breakfast](#) or camp at the [Milan State Park](#) looking out on exquisite views of the Presidential Mountains. The [Great Northern Moose](#) also offers comfortable rooms and camp sites further north along Route 16.

Day 2

Your paddling voyage will begin at [Yesterday's Country Store](#) along Route 110 in West Milan. If you need a few basic supplies for your journey on the Upper Ammonoosuc, you can purchase snacks, sandwiches and fishing licenses and gear here. Breakfast supplies are also available.

Just down the road, at the intersection with Route 110A, you will find an access point where you can wet your paddle in the waters of the Upper Ammonoosuc River. The river twists and curves past the Percy Peaks and Kilkenney Mountains and into the town of Stark, NH.

Abenaki Indians, "The People of the Dawn," relied a great deal on waterways of this area for easy and swift transport. The rivers acted as trade routes and also helped the Abenaki to make seasonal migrations from south to north to help ensure greater success with hunting and gathering. Their history in Northern New England dates back 10-12,000 years when the landscape was dominated by open grasslands and inhabited by caribou and mastodon. As the planet warmed and the species of plants and animals evolved, the Abenaki were forced to transform from a purely hunter and gatherer society and began supplement their food sources by cultivating beans, squash and corn.

European settlers arriving in New Hampshire in the early 1600's also used the rivers and streams of the region for transportation and trade routes. Many of the towns that now dot the rivers date back hundreds of years. The town of Stark, established in 1788, is named after the Revolutionary War General and



hero of the battles of Bunker Hill and Bennington, John Stark. His famous words "Live free or die!" remain New Hampshire's official state motto and a statue of the General stands proudly in Stark's town center.

Stark is a charming town tucked below the Devil's Slide cliff band. Look for nesting Peregrine Falcons on the cliff face. Opportunities for the amateur and professional photographers abound in this small town which is home to a beautifully maintained covered bridge, church, [Heritage Center](#) and Inn.

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You can disembark from the river at the doorstep of the [Stark Village Inn](#) and stay here for the night. You will need to provide your own dinner as there are no restaurants in town. The inn keeper will send you on your way the following morning after a full breakfast.

If you prefer to camp, you can travel further downstream and stay at the Northern Forest Canoe Trail's Frizzell Campsite. Camping is also available east of Stark at the Northern Forest Canoe Trail's ordwell Campsite.

Before arriving in Stark, you will pass through the area that was once home to Camp Stark, a POW camp where 250



German and Austrian soldiers were imprisoned during World War II. The prisoners, the majority of which were captured in Northern Africa and Normandy, worked in the woods cutting pulpwood during their stay. Despite the difficult conditions in the camp, stories of mutual kindness are told by town's people, guards and prisoners alike. Some of the friendships that formed during this period endured long after the war and continue to flourish today. In 1984 former prisoners returned to Stark to visit the site of the dismantled camp and to see their old friends still living in the town. Allen V. Koop writes about the POW camp and the relationships between the prisoners and locals in his book, *Stark Decency*.

Day 3

You may decide to leave the river behind and explore the hiking trails leaving from the [South Pond Recreation Area](#) in Stark. The short trail to the [Devil's Hopyard](#), a rocky gorge, is a fun adventure for both adults and kids. South Pond is also a great place for relaxing on the beach, swimming and fishing. The 160-mile [Cohos Trail](#) passes through this area as well.

If you want to continue your journey on the river, paddle downstream to the town of Groveton, New Hampshire. Quiet paddlers often spot Osprey, Canadian geese and moose along this section of the Upper Ammonoosuc. You will also pass the striking twin Percy Peaks. Hearty adventurers can follow the [Percy Peaks Trail](#) to the top of these mountains. The northern peak has great views of the valley below.

As you paddle, make sure that you keep your eyes peeled for the two dams along this stretch of river. Short portage trails carry you safely around these structures. One of these dams, known previously as the Red Dam, is breeched. It is safer to portage around the dam, but if you choose to paddle through, be sure to scout it first.

A lovely park in Groveton with a covered bridge, historic train engine and caboose and Northern Forest Canoe Trail Kiosk offers a nice spot for a picnic. The park looks out at the Wausau Mill which, until 2008, was one of the last operating mills in the region. You find lunch in Groveton at [Stone's Pizza](#) or in Northumberland at [Everybody's Place](#).

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To learn more about Groveton's history, visit the old Meeting House now known as the [Northumberland Historical Society Museum](#), built in 1799. The museum's collection includes an original meeting table and wood stove as well as photographs and other historic artifacts. Best of all, the couple that runs the museum is full of stories of the people and events that shaped Groveton and Northumberland. Not far from the meeting house is the site of the old Fort Wentworth which was erected in 1755 "to protect settlers against hostile Indians." It was also intended to challenge Fort Ticonderoga and the French presence on Lake Champlain. A plaque marking the actual site of Fort Wentworth stands on private property and is accessible with permission.

You can find lodging for the night at [The Village Motel](#) in Northumberland or at one of many [inns, motels and campgrounds](#) in Lancaster.

If you are in Lancaster on Saturday morning, you can buy delicious breads, local produce and products at the Lancaster Farmer's Market from 9-12. There are several fun shops where you can purchase gifts, clothes and high quality footwear in Lancaster.

Lancaster is also home to the [John Wingate Weeks Estate Park](#), the historic hunting lodge of the famous Senator, Congressman and Secretary of War who worked tirelessly to create the White Mountains National Forest. The park offers sensational 360 degree views of the White Mountains from a stone fire tower. On Thursday evenings you can also enjoy a free program on local history, ecology, or current issues.