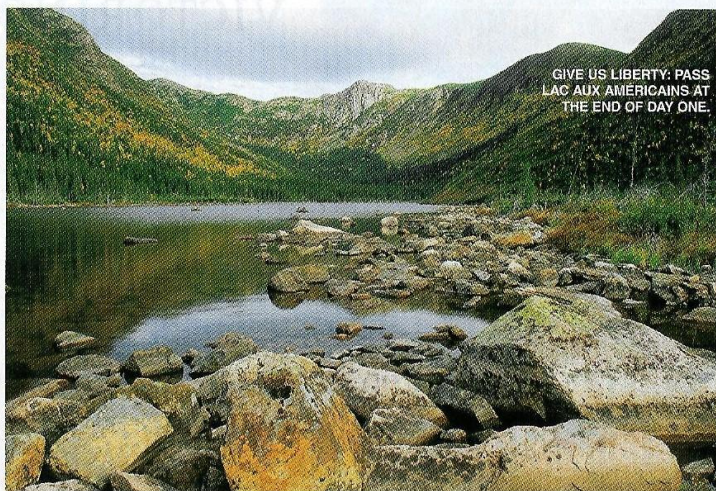


DESTINATIONS



GIVE US LIBERTY: PASS LAC AUX AMERICAINS AT THE END OF DAY ONE.



(Igor Kharitonov, Jamaica Plain, MA)

International Appalachian Trail, Parc National de la Gaspésie, Quebec

Find caribou, moose, and bald eagles on a hut-to-hut trek in an undiscovered park.

I love the White Mountains, the Daks, and Baxter State Park—like every other Northeasterner. That's why I drove straight past all of them to find something lonelier and more exotic for BACKPACKER readers: a place where the caribou south of the St. Lawrence River roam freely on Québec's second highest peak, Mt. Jacques-Cartier; a place where moose, eagle, and owl sightings are fast and frequent; and a place where trails wind through lush forests and up craggy peaks dotted with comfortable huts warmed by woodstoves. Parc National de la Gaspésie is a trekker's dream. And it's only a day's drive from Boston.

Make a weekend of it on a 12.5-mile point-to-point trek on the International Appalachian Trail (a 1,900-mile extension from Katahdin to Labrador), from the bus-serviced Mt. Jacques-Cartier trailhead through the rugged McGerrigle Mountains. Start with an ascent that gains 1,500 feet over three miles to the 4,160-foot summit named after the explorer who claimed Canada for France. On my trip with a friend in September, we climbed through the boreal landscape in dense fog with strong wind blowing cutting bits of hail. As we reached the summit's observation tower, a bull caribou ambled across the path, then disappeared into the fog.

From the summit, descend into the spruce to hike atop the long, swooping saddle to reach 3,740-foot Mt. Xalibu. We didn't see a single hiker. Descend 3.1 miles, passing cliff-lined Lac aux Américains to arrive at Le Roselin, a hut with bunks, bathrooms, and group kitchen. Next day, the trail mazes 7.2 miles through a mossy and moose-y forest before reaching the visitor center, with a neck-craning view of blocky Mt. Albert. I've never had such nonstop scenery—for so long—to myself.

Map *International Appalachian Trail Topographic Map* (\$30, sia-iat.com) **Contact** Huts are \$23.50 CAN per night per person; reserve three weeks in advance. Keep \$16 CAN cash on hand for the shuttle to Mt. Jacques-Cartier; it leaves once per day at 9 a.m. from the visitor center. sepaq.com/pq/gas **Trip ID** 1378043



(Emily Marten, Clemson, SC)

Creekside Loop, Pisgah NF, NC

Looking for a mellow weekend with swimming options? We have you covered.

I thought my backpacking days were on hold. I was five months pregnant, and taking care of my midsection was hard enough without puffing up a Therm-a-Rest or sweating up a steep trail. But when an opportunity arose that was too good to pass up (being a BACKPACKER Reader Leader! Hello!), I threw my reservations aside and said to my husband, "Heck—let's do it!"

We picked the gentle 11-mile Creekside Loop in the Mills River area of Pisgah National Forest. It has minimal climbing, many opportunities to dabble toes in the water, and enough camping options that we could tweak our itinerary if we needed to.

From the Turkeypen trailhead north of Brevard, take the Mullinax Trail through hemlock and rhododendron over 3,000-foot Mullinax Gap to the Laurel Creek Trail. This tracks the creek for 1.6 miles to the Bradley Creek Trail junction, a good place to camp if you don't want to push it. Take Bradley Creek to a left on the Riverside Trail. There are a half-dozen easy creek crossings in this stretch (nice for my swollen ankles). We camped riverside at mile 8.6, in a hemlock-shaded spot with a fire ring. Next day is an easy 2.4 miles to the trailhead, where we high-fived for getting in one more trip before becoming new parents (to a girl!).

Map *Pisgah Ranger District* (\$12, natgeomaps.com) **Contact** (828) 257-4200; fs.usda.gov/nfsnc **Trip ID** 1371071

