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## Off-road trails provide great views of autumn in Maine

By Melissa Kim  
Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram

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Sunday, September 17, 2006

It's always sad when Maine's short summer ends, but it also brings us foliage season, one of the most lovely times to explore the state on a bicycle. On two wheels you can get right into the middle of the colorful display, and, if you pick the right route, you'll also get panoramic vistas as well.

Fall is a great season for biking above and beyond the foliage. The days have that cool, crisp feel; gone are the humid days of summer. Off-road trails are generally much drier and more hard-packed than they are in springtime. And, though plenty of people do come to Maine just for leaf-peeping season, it always seems like there are fewer people around.

Hot cider and pumpkin donuts warm you up after a bracing ride. So hit the trail for a few last hurrahs before it's time to trade bikes for skis.

Here are a few picks for off-road adventures in some of Maine's best fall foliage spots.

### BRADBURY MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

This state park is one of the best for mountain biking thanks to the efforts of the park rangers there, along with cooperation from the local mountain biking community. Multi-use trails can get you up to the summit of the 485-foot-high peak where you get surprisingly good foliage views and a glimpse of the ocean as well. The summit is a popular place for birders who come to see hawks and eagles ride thermals during the fall migration season.

The real attractions for mountain bikers are the miles of twisty, winding single-track trails on the other side of the park. These present a fun challenge; wider snowmobile trails may appeal to beginner cyclists.

Where: 528 Hallowell Road/Route 9, Pownal. More information: [www.state.me.us](http://www.state.me.us)

### CARRABASSETT: NARROW GAUGE PATHWAY

This 4.5-mile-long, multi-use pathway follows the sinewy course of the Carrabassett River near the Sugarloaf USA ski resort. The hard-packed gravel trail is wide and level, making it accessible to all levels.

Several new bridges cross wet areas and there are plenty of places to stop for a picnic. The river is a quintessential babbling stream, and mountain slopes rise in all directions, giving you plenty to look at.

There are also scores of other mountain biking trails and dirt roads to explore in the area, especially through the wonderfully wild Bigelow Preserve, making this a great weekend destination.

Where: Look for the main trailhead near the Carrabassett Valley town offices, off Route 16 in Kingfield. More information and a map: [www.carrabassettvalley.org](http://www.carrabassettvalley.org)

### MOUNT BLUE STATE PARK

Mount Blue State Park is one of my favorite state parks. It's situated in such a lovely spot, and the park's many facilities blend in smoothly with the remoteness of the area.

In the fall, all the colors in the autumnal palette are on display in the horseshoe-shaped range that includes Tumbledown, Little Jackson and Mount Blue. The beach at Webb Lake, lying calmly at the feet of these slopes, beckons on a hot day.

There are some 25 miles of multi-use trails to explore here, from rocky single-track to hilly dirt roads to bumpy snowmobile trails. Ask a ranger to recommend a trail suitable for your ability. Some trails can be technical and challenging. If you want a milder adventure, you can always do an out-and-back ride on the unpaved Mount Blue Road.

To get there, drive northwest from Wilton on Route 156 for about 14 miles. In the village of Weld, look for Center Hill Road on the right and follow it as it loops to the left. Look for a parking and observation area on the left.

There's another parking area ahead on the right, and there should be trail maps and a map on the information board at the trailhead as well.

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The main part of the state park is on the other side of Webb Lake where there's camping, picnic areas, a sandy beach, boat launch, nature center and playground. You might need to stop here first to find trail maps and a ranger.

Where: Center Hill Road, Weld. More information:

[www.state.me.us](http://www.state.me.us)

### BAXTER STATE PARK

Why not? You may have hiked or skied here but never thought about bringing a bike. In the fall, when fewer and fewer people visit, the Tote Road is relatively free of cars and gives you a whole different view of the area. It's an out-and-back ride no matter where you start, so the distance is up to you. You could, for instance, start at Kidney Pond and ride to Nesowadnehunk Stream, have a picnic and return.

Leaves changing color on Maine's most majestic mountain slopes; streams, bogs, ponds and wildlife preparing for winter; no cell phones - who could ask for more?

Be prepared to be self-sufficient; bring food, water, tools and spare parts as help is a long way away.

Where: Northwest of Millinocket. More information and a map:

[www.baxterstateparkauthority.com](http://www.baxterstateparkauthority.com)

### ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

Is it too much of a cliché? Don't let that get in your way, because Mount Desert Island has some of the most scenic off-road biking the state has to offer.

In the national park, 40-plus miles of broken-stone carriage roads get you off the road, away from the cars and busses and into the park where the foliage can't be beat.

Look down and you'll see birches, aspens and oaks reflecting off the surface of Eagle Lake or Jordan Pond. Look up and you'll see panoramic vistas of rocky islands dotting blue bays, sounds and inlets nosing up against mountainsides and waves tumbling onto rocky shores.

If you want to share a paved road with leaf peepers in tour busses, try the Loop Road for up-close ocean views or the road up Cadillac Mountain for a workout and the best 360 in the park.

Get a map of the carriage roads from the visitor center; all the trails are well-marked and are suitable for advanced beginners.

Where: Mount Desert Island. More information:

[www.nps.gov/acad](http://www.nps.gov/acad)

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