



Day-hiker's Dream

BY SHERRY
BALLOU
HANSON

Maine's Monhegan Island provides a quick respite with plenty of trails to quiet the soul.



Folks who love to hear the wind whispering through a forest or who enjoy standing on high, rocky headlands above the open Atlantic will never want to leave Monhegan Island.

"If you can't find something here to fill your eye and make your heart sing, perhaps you need to spend more time sitting in the sun on the rocks—on Monhegan," said frequent visitor Carol Jaeger of Round Pond, Maine.

Monhegan is approximately one-and-three-quarter-miles long and one-half-mile wide and features almost 17 miles of hiking trails. These paths meander across meadows of wildflowers, onto natural bogs, through tall spruce and fir woods, and out to dramatic headlands on the east side of the island.

In fact, the cliffs on the island's east side at the end of the Burnthead and the Whitehead trails are a manageable distance for a day visitor to reach. And those cliffs—towering 140 feet and 160 feet, respectively, above the ocean—are two of the highest points on Maine's coast.

The Essentials

The only way to get to this island, lying 10 miles off the coast of Maine, is by boat. Three passenger-only ferry lines carry people daily in high season, roughly June through August, while one line operates all year. Getting there is easy and fun.



The solid granite Monhegan Island Light (opposite, inset), rebuilt following storms that inflicted heavy damage on the original 1824 station, towers 48 feet above the island—including the Blackhead cliffs (opposite) and the harbor (above)—to help sailors navigate the Maine coastline.

For those who don't bring lunch, there is food aplenty, beginning with the Barnacle Cafe on the dock. At the village center, North End Market sells groceries and deli-style fare, and the Monhegan House is open to the public for breakfast.

Other dining opportunities include outdoor picnic tables at Shermie's Fish House on Fish Beach or sandwiches at Carina. Ferry passengers also can follow the main road to the top of the hill after disembarking to find the Island Inn, where they can eat in or pick up a packaged lunch to take on a hike.

Hitting the Trails

A day visit to Monhegan allows about four hours between the ferry's arrival and departure, plenty of time to take a hike and visit a gallery or shop. Favorite hikes for daytrippers include the moderately difficult Whitehead Trail, which treks across the island to the cliffs in only about 45 minutes from the wharf.

The cliffs at the end of Burnthead Trail are also within easy reach. Beginning with a short, steep climb, the trail becomes a pleasant walk mostly across open meadows to its culmination at the high ledges on the southeast side.

"When I think about hiking on Monhegan, I think about the cleanliness of the air and the taste of salt in it, whether standing on a cliff edge staring off toward Spain or walking in silent woods at the heart of the island," said Jaeger.

Other popular options include walks to shops and restaurants at the village center; to the Monhegan Historical & Cultural Museum, and to Lobster Cove on the

Planning Your Trip

Monhegan Boat Line, www.monheganboat.com, runs a 60-minute trip from Port Clyde to Monhegan all year. Boothbay Harbor's seasonal line Balmy Days, www.balmydayscruises.com, takes 90 minutes, while New Harbor's seasonal line Hardy III, www.hardyboat.com, gets passengers there in one hour. Parking is provided on the mainland, and passengers should call ahead to reserve passage.

Because the only public toilet facilities on the island are pay toilets located behind Monhegan House, visitors are encouraged to use the facilities on the ferry boats. There are also no public garbage cans, so guests must pack out their refuse when departing.

For information, contact www.monheganwelcome.com. For an advance look at a trail map, log on to www.monheganassociates.org/trails/map.htm. For travel-planning assistance, contact your local AAA office or AAA.com/travel.

■ Sherry Ballou Hanson is a freelance writer based in Brunswick, Maine.



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island's south side, where lies the wreck of the tugboat *D.T. Sheridan*. The cove is a great place to watch the surf and picnic.

Those interested in any hiking should pick up a Monhegan Associates trail map, available from any shop on the island. The map lists 18 trails, showing distance starting from the village and the level of difficulty for each. Because most of the woodlands are thick and uncut, visitors need the map to follow designated trails and navigate between them.

Most of the trails are marked by small numbers on trees and sometimes on rocks at the beginnings and intersections of

trails. But there are few signposts, and trails that pass over rock ledges and cliffs are often marked only with cairns (piles of stones).

Along the trails, birds and wildflowers abound—as do insects, so the smart hiker brings bug spray. And he or

she also remembers sunblock for protection against the brilliant sun dancing off the water.

A word of warning: Swim Beach in the village is the only safe place to swim. Water temperature here is only about 60 degrees in summer. Tides run hard and there is a strong undertow, so visitors are strongly cautioned not to attempt to swim or wade at Lobster Cove or anywhere on the east side of the island.

Other Diversions

The Monhegan Historical & Cultural Museum, open daily in summer, is housed in the former light-keeper's house beside the lighthouse, which was built in 1850 and is operated now by computer. The museum is on the Registry of American Historical Sites.

Manana Island nestles in Monhegan Harbor and is home to the U.S. Coast Guard's old fog signal. On Manana is a rock purported to contain ancient Norse or Phoenician inscriptions.

Monhegan Island's artist colony has existed for more than 100 years, and art lovers can browse galleries and studios galore. And for those who find one day on Monhegan just isn't enough, lodging opportunities include a couple of bed-and-breakfasts, rooms, suites, apartments and cottages. Many places provide breakfast. **H&A**

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