

Horse Mountain is one of Baxter State Park's easier hikes with great views

By [Aislinn Sarnacki](#), BDN Staff • October 17, 2019

Difficulty: Moderate. Out and back, the hike is about 3 miles. The trail climbs gradually but steadily. Watch your step for exposed tree roots and rocks. Footing is especially tricky near the East Spur Overlook. Take your time traveling over the exposed bedrock.

How to get there: Take Interstate 95 Exit 264, then head north on Route 11 toward the town of Patten. Drive 9.3 miles, then take a left onto Route 159. Drive 9.9 miles, and you'll arrive at Shin Pond Village. Drive another 14.3 miles, staying on Route 159, and you'll reach Matagamon Wilderness Campground, then cross a bridge over the East Branch of the Penobscot River. Continue another 1.8 miles to Matagamon Gate, the north entrance to Baxter State Park. Register at Matagamon Gate, then drive about 0.6 mile on the Tote Road to the trailhead parking area for Horse Mountain, which will be on your left.

Information: Located in the northeast corner of Baxter State Park, Horse Mountain is the first peak to greet you when driving through the park's Matagamon Gate. Rising above the treetops, it's an impressive sight, with dramatic cliffs on its steep eastern side.

The mountain tops off at 1,589 feet above sea level, making it one of the smaller mountains in the park. However, from a bald outcropping on its eastern side, hikers are rewarded with a wide open view of the mountains in the north end of the park.



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Horse Mountain Trail travels up the north side of Horse Mountain in Baxter State Park, reaching the summit in about 1.4 miles.

Starting at a small parking area off the park's gravel Tote Road, Horse Mountain Trail is marked with a sign and a wooden cubby that contains a trail register. Before hiking, be sure to sign in. And when finished, sign out.

Traveling gradually but steadily up the north side of the mountain, Horse Mountain Trail travels through a mixed forest. At the base of the mountain, the forest is composed mainly of deciduous trees, including beech, striped maple, red maple, white oak and white birch trees. And as the trail gains elevation, that forest changes in composition to include more conifers, such as spruce and pine trees.



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A sign marks the trailhead of Horse Mountain Trail on Sept. 27, in Baxter State Park.

About 1.1 miles into the hike, there is a 0.4-mile side trail to East Spur Overlook. An outcropping on the east side of the mountain, this overlook is nearly as high as the mountain's summit. It's marked with a wooden sign and offers an open view to the east and a partially obstructed view to the south. To the east, the terrain is mostly flat, though on a clear day you will be able to make out a few distant mountains. To the south is a cluster of nearby mountains, which are located in the north end of Baxter State Park. These mountains include Billfish, Bald, Barrel Ridge and the Travelers.

To get a more open view of the mountains to the south, you may need to clamber over some uneven bedrock and carefully pick your way around a few evergreen trees and clusters of hardy low-lying plants.

In terms of beauty and views, the overlook is the apex of the hike. Many people turn around from there and hike down the mountain. However, if you'd like to also bag the forested summit of Horse Mountain, you can continue south on Horse Mountain Trail and you'll soon come to a trail intersection. There you can turn right to hike about 0.3 mile to the summit, where the trail deadends.



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A sign marks East Spur Overlook of Horse Mountain on Sept. 27, in Baxter State Park.

In late September of 2019, the summit was not marked with a sign, however, if you look closely, you can make out four blocks that are the remains of a Maine Forest Service fire lookout tower.

According to the Maine Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association, the original tower was constructed of wood in 1913 and was 10 feet tall. In 1917, that was replaced by a 16-foot-tall steel tower. And in 1999, the tower was demolished by the Baxter State Park Authority. This isn't at all unusual. Many fire lookout towers throughout the state have been destroyed because they're no longer used to spot forest fires (that's now done by helicopter), and as they deteriorate, many pose a risk to the hikers that are compelled to climb them.

While planning your next adventure in Baxter State Park, remember that dogs are not permitted. For Maine residents, entrance to the park is free. For non-residents, it's \$15 per day or \$40 for an annual pass. And for both Maine residents and non-residents, camping in the park requires a reservation and a fee that varies depending on the type of camping: lean-to, tent site, bunkhouse or cabin.



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A barred owl perches in a tree beside Horse Mountain Trail on Sept. 27, in Baxter State Park.

For more information about park regulations, camping and seasonal closing of roads, call 207-723-5140 or visit baxterstatepark.org.



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Large, orange poisonous mushrooms stand out beside Horse Mountain Trail on Sept. 27, in Baxter State Park.