

Baxter State Park Announces AT Hiker Permit Process



Myron Avery established the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) on Baxter Peak in 1933, two years after Percival Baxter donated more than 6,000 acres on Katahdin to the State of Maine as the first parcel of Baxter State Park. Since the A.T.'s establishment, the Baxter State Park Authority has hosted the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail. The Trust Guidance and informal communications left by Percival Baxter to direct the governance and management of Baxter Park are silent regarding the A.T. They are not silent, however, as to the need to balance human use and resource protection.

For the past decade the increasing numbers of A.T. long-distance hikers entering the Park has been drawing the attention of Park management as the Park has applied increased resources to administer this group's unique needs.

Use of the Park by A.T. long-distance hikers has increased an average of 9% annually over the past 25 years. In 1991, the total number of recorded A.T. long-distance hikers in Baxter State Park was 359. In 2016, 2,733 A.T. long-distance hikers registered in the Park, an increase of more than 700% from 1991. Even in the last year (2016), 23% more A.T. hikers registered in the Park than in 2015.

In order to protect the natural resources of Katahdin and the visitor experience at Baxter Park, The Baxter State Park Authority has managed hiker access to Katahdin and Baxter Peak for several decades under a limited use model - with the exception of A.T. long-distance hikers. All Park visitors, both resident and non-resident, with the exception of AT hikers, work within a system that limits daily hiker access to Baxter Peak on Katahdin.

Based on the significant growth rates of the A.T., the Baxter Park Authority has determined that the time has come to include AT hikers in the same model respected by all other Katahdin hikers. This plan includes commercial, camp, school, guided and other organized groups entering the Park on the A.T. and planning to hike Katahdin via the A.T.

In 2016, Baxter Park initiated an A.T. Hiker Permit Card process that required A.T. hikers in Baxter Park to acquire a permit card. This process will continue, but to improve our management of A.T. long-distance hikers in the years ahead and to be consistent in our

management of all of BSP visitors wishing to climb Katahdin, the number of permit cards available to A.T. long-distance Hikers in 2017 will be capped at 3,150.

All Northbound and Southbound Thru Hikers, Section Hikers and Flip-Flop A.T. Hikers entering Baxter Park in 2017, including commercial, camp, school, guided and other organized groups, will be required to secure an A.T. long-distance Hiker Permit Card for the Hunt Trail section of the A.T. This permit system applies to every hiker, so each member of the group will be required to secure an A.T. Hiker Permit Card prior to hiking the A.T./Hunt Trail out of Katahdin Stream.

The number of cards available in 2017 is 417 cards more than were issued in 2016.

A.T. Hikers will be required to have a stamped permit card prior to hiking the Hunt (A.T.) Trail from Katahdin Stream Campground to Baxter Peak.

Here are the specifics that A.T. Hikers will need to know:

1. A.T. Hiker Permit Cards will be available when the Hunt Trail opens to hiking in the spring (usually in early June).
2. A.T. Hiker Permit Cards must be secured **in person** at Park Headquarters or Katahdin Stream Campground. Hikers must provide their actual name, trail name and an emergency contact phone number to receive a card.
3. There is no fee for a card.
4. The cards will be issued to four categories of long distance A.T. hikers: **Northbound, Southbound, Section and Flip-Flop**. Each hiker will be required to self-determine and declare their category prior to being issued an A.T.-Hiker Permit card.
5. The available number of A.T.-Hiker Permit Cards for 2017 will be **3,150**.
6. Hikers must stop at the Katahdin Stream Ranger Station to have their permit card stamped. Hikers can obtain a yellow hiker registration sheet at this time.
7. **Permit cards will be date-stamped at the time of issue. Permit cards are valid for a period of seven days from the date stamp on the card. For example, a permit card date stamped 9/23/17 will be valid through 9/30/17.**
8. If all available 2017 permit cards have been issued, registration of A.T. hikers will end for the season, the Long Distance Hiking campsite will be closed and normal access protocols will apply to A.T. Shuttle traffic arriving at Togue Pond Gatehouse.
9. If all available cards have been issued, A.T. hikers may still complete their hike by entering the Park through the Togue Pond Gate following the same process as other day use or camping visitors.