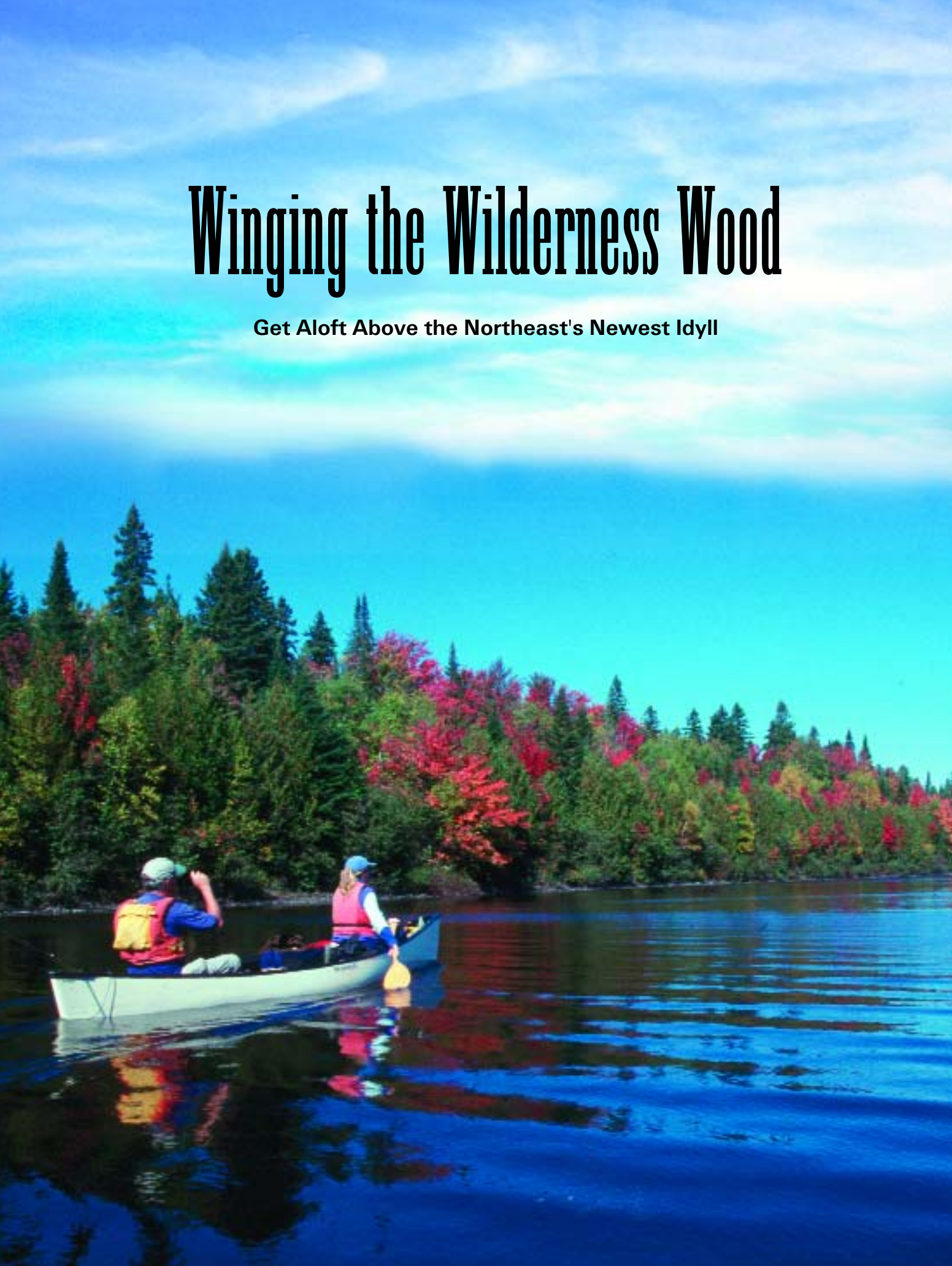


# Winging the Wilderness Wood

Get Aloft Above the Northeast's Newest Idyll



From the air, a waterworld splendor

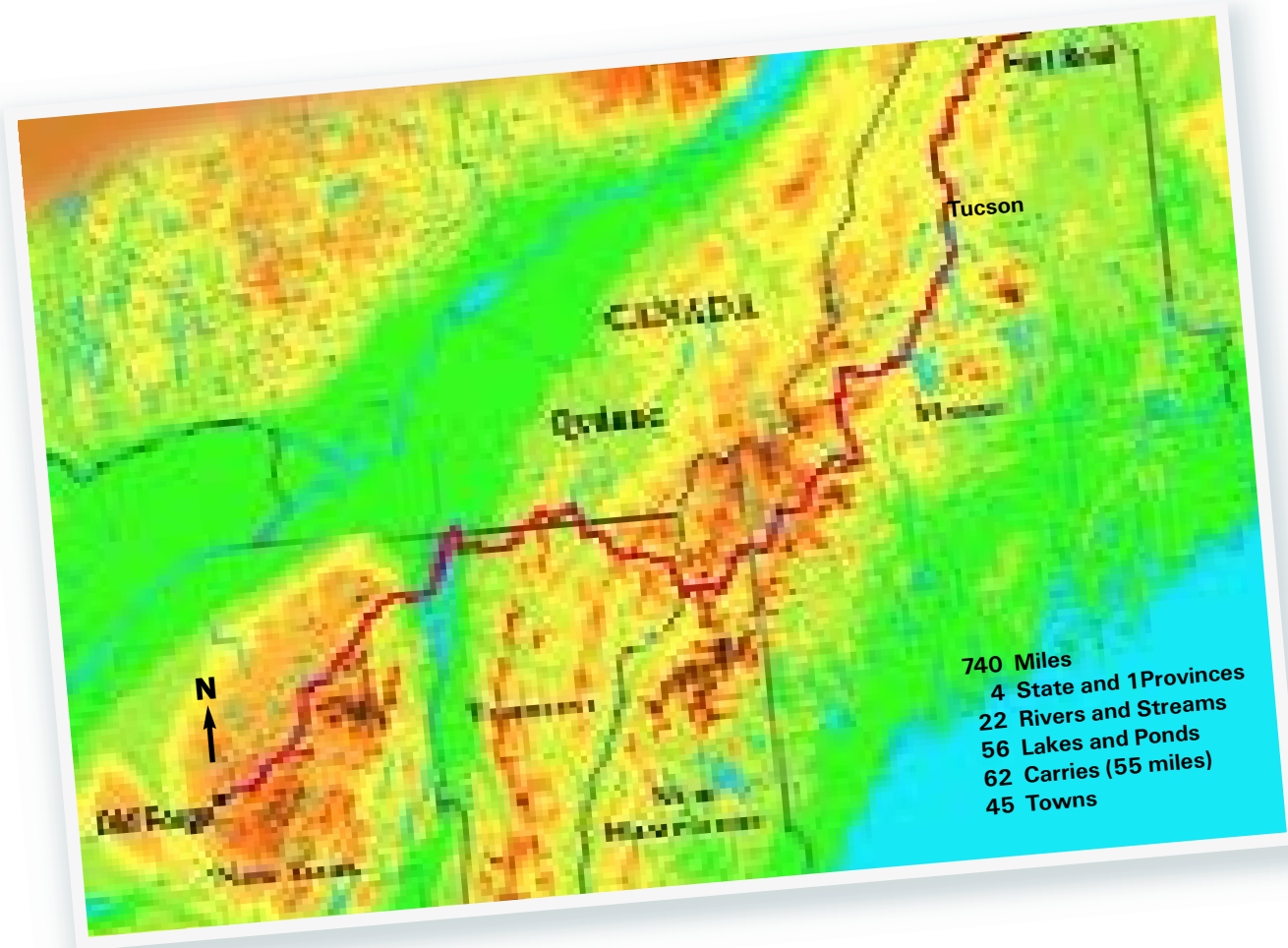
John Willard, seaplane pilot, isn't all that surprised that his little slice of paradise up in Maine is part of the hippest, hottest, most happening thing since the Appalachian Trail was established decades ago. "The lakes, mountains and general scenery are spectacular," says the owner of The Birches, a Rockwood, ME resort and seaplane base on the banks of beautiful Moosehead Lake. "The people are very friendly and float-planes are loved everywhere you land."

Looks like all the love is about to grow. Expanding to embrace 740 miles of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, to be precise. These are the waters of the newly christened Northern Forest Canoe Trail, officially opening this summer, the trail that links

Old Forge, New York to Fort Kent, Maine in a glory of navigable waters where if a canoe or kayak isn't your usual mode of transport – and sport – but a seaplane or plane-plane most certainly is...well, Willard will tell you: "I've been flying this area extensively for 20 years," says the former rafting guide. But "it was the Canoe Trail that opened my eyes to just how beautiful...how spectacular this part of the world is."

He should say. The Northern Forest, 26 million acres of woods straddling Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont, is the stuff of Henry David Thoreau. "Nature was here something savage and awful though beautiful," he wrote in *The Maine Woods* after his wanderings in the area,

*Our truest life is when we are  
in our dreams awake  
– Henry David Thoreau*



“...rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact!” It is also the stuff of those who came before – long before: the Iroquois, Mohawk, Penobscot and other tribes who established fur and trading routes along 30,000 miles of brooks and streams. Not to forget that the Northern Forest also contains the headwaters of all of New York’s and New England’s major rivers, including the Allagash, the Connecticut and the Hudson, the 740-mile Canoe Trail that cruises them all is a splendor of travel spectacle.

“It is the wild west for floatplane pilots,” that’s for sure, says Willard. It’s the frontier of fun and adventure for every pilot. For not only does the waterway of linked lakes and rivers meander or rocket-with-rapids by some of the region’s most charming villages, grand Adirondack “Great Camp” resorts, and other wonderful stopping-off spots, but

the Canoe Trail if flown is an odyssey of endless Northeast delights.

Credit a trio of visionary canoeists and guides who in 1990 thought, hey, why not connect the Northern Forest’s thousand-year-old fur, trade and travel routes so a paddler can get from New York to Canada with as few portages as possible? Sixteen years and a lot of work later, voilà: 740 glorious miles of paddling – make that, flying – excitement. Forty-five towns; three national wildlife refuges; campsites every 10-15 miles (when completed): the sight-and-delight packed trail that took one canoeist 55 days to paddle is for a flyer accessible in mere hours. Floatplanes can fuel-up at a seaplane base like Rangeley Lake (M57), Nugent Chamberlain Lake (39B) or Moose River (60B); fixed-wing craft can lift-off from any field of choice in Maine, New York, Vermont or New Hampshire. Either way you get aloft, take it

from Willard, who flies a 1946 Piper Cub. Here, in this fantastical wood where Indians, timber magnates and well-known white men like Benedict Arnold and Henry David Thoreau explored, exploited and defined themselves, “there are a very many great places to fly.”

There are many great places to stay and many great things to do along the trail as well. Happily, there are 13 nifty detailed maps annotated by local experts and available at [northernforestcanoetrail.org](http://northernforestcanoetrail.org) to help point them out. Dividing the trail into regions – Adirondack North Country, say, or Islands & Farms Region of Vermont – these trail guides are a handbook to all the Canoe Trail thrill, from the fascinating flora of Maine’s Rangeley Lakes region to the colorful lore of New Hampshire’s Great North Woods. Of course, the story of how the forest below Maine’s Mount Katadin struck Thoreau hardly compares with today’s trail



**Essential ground maps (13 in all):** [northernforestcanoetrail.org](http://northernforestcanoetrail.org).

**For lodging:** The Birches Resort: [birches.com](http://birches.com) (800) 825-9453  
 The Balsams: [thebalsams.com](http://thebalsams.com) (800) 255-0600  
 The Point Resort: [thepointresort.com](http://thepointresort.com) (800) 255-3530  
 Lake Placid Lodge: [lakeplacidlodge.com](http://lakeplacidlodge.com) (518) 523-2700  
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**More information:** [northernforestcanoetrail.org](http://northernforestcanoetrail.org) (802) 496-2285



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# Flying Adventure



joys. The forest looks, he said in awe, “like a firm grass sward, and the effect of the lakes in its midst has been well compared to that of a mirror broken into a thousand fragments and wildly scattered over the grass, reflecting the full blaze of the sun.” Check-in to one of the wonderful resorts along the route and know: if only Thoreau could have been really impressed.

The Point Resort, for instance. Said to be “the most enchanting lakefront sanctuary of its kind in America,” this rustic-luxury lodge in Upper Saranac Lake, NY was built in the 1800s as one of the sumptuous retreats for the wealthy known as Adirondack “Great Camps.” It was the home of William Avery Rockefeller and even today reflects the romance of its era.

Similarly, New York’s Lake Placid Lodge is a grand lakefront retreat where roughing-it extends only so far as the oh-so-elegant “rustic” birch furniture. New Hampshire’s 1869 Balsams Resort, sitting exquisitely on 15,000 acres of North Woods beauty and solitude, is yet another escape where Canoe Trail flyers will find the wining and dining and lake-based activity styled to spoil even a summering Rockefeller.

From Lake Champlain’s Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge and its 500-nest heron rookery, to Raquette Lake’s century-old steamboat, the W.W. Durant, and its pleasant floating lunch, day or overnight delights are many along the waterway where Willard, for one, stays revved pretty much 24/7 for a chance to lift-off in his floatplane and head out for its fun. “We are north of the 45th parallel where few restrictions prevail,” he enthuses about flying the Canoe Trail’s northernmost sections. Here, flying adventure is as available as a pilot is willing to indulge his imagination. The 41-mile section of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway (Map 12), for instance, is Maine at its most gorgeous and gloriously remote – a flight that delights The Birches’ owner to no end. “You can see for a hundred miles!” he enthuses. Still, whether it is flying the heart of Adirondack Park (Map 1), with its easy access to towns and museums (check out Blue Mountain Lake’s impressive Adirondack Museum [adkmuseum.org](http://adkmuseum.org)), or winging above the roaring rapids of the Clyde and Nulhegan rivers (Map 6), any flight along the Canoe Trail is decidedly a flight of fun.

Like Willard says of this new avenue of aviation thrill: “Spectacular!” ✕

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