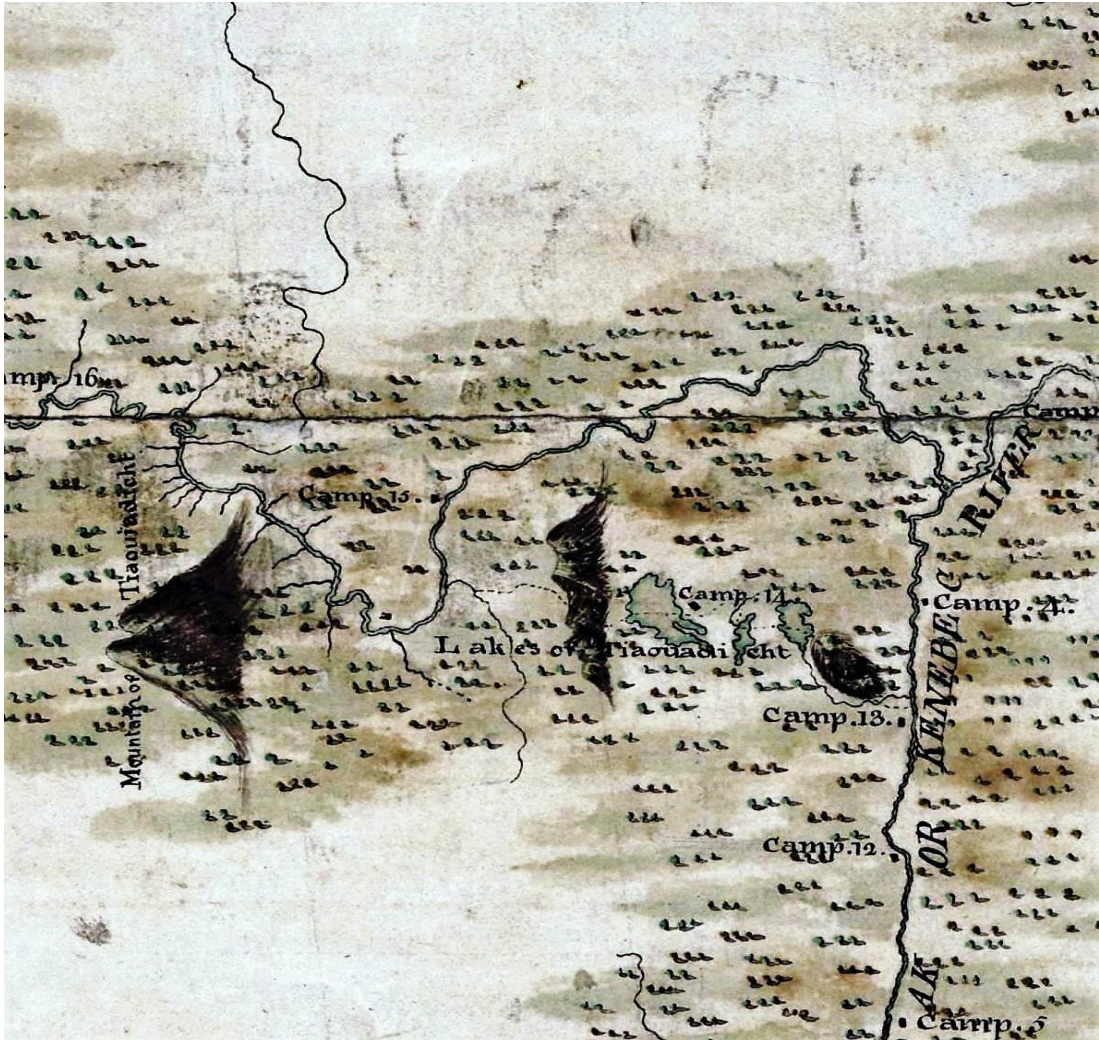


The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail

A Hiker's Guide to the Historic Portage Route Used to Invade Canada, 1775.



Arnold Expedition Historical Society

2021

The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail

Written by Stephen Clark

A Trail Established by Native Americans.
Utilized by the Arnold Expedition of 1775.

With the cooperation of:

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National Park Service
Maine Appalachian Trail Club
Weyerhaeuser Corporation
Wagner Woodlands

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Mike Walker

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Cover: Montresor, John. A map of the Sources of the Chaudiere, Penobscot, and Kennebec Rivers (1761). Retrieved from the Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/item/74692578> (Accessed February 24, 2018.) Great Carrying Place Portion of the map.

Great Carrying Place Portage Trail

12.2 Miles Between Wyman and Flagstaff Lakes

In the distant past, ancient Americans had developed an elaborate system of travel routes along Maine's numerous waterways. After the last ice age, people ranged northward, deep into the interior as far as the forks of the Upper Kennebec River, Moosehead Lake, and points north.

More modern Native Americans developed routes from the Atlantic coastal dwellers to reach the St. Lawrence River villages. The most used followed two rivers, the south-flowing Kennebec and the north-flowing Chaudière.

This route ascended the Kennebec, surmounting four falls with relatively short portages. These were Ticonic (Waterville), Skowhegan, Norridgewock (Madison), and Caratunk (Devil's) Falls in present-day Solon. There were several native villages along this section of the river. When natives ascending the river encountered the mountains near the present-day community of Caratunk, the river became very dangerous to navigate. It became a continuous series of rapids, fast water, including several huge waterfalls. It was far too difficult for their fragile birchbark canoes.

To avoid this almost impassable stretch, the natives discovered a 13-mile portage that lay almost due west. It rejoined the Kennebec's West Branch, now known as the Dead River. Once this was reached, the river was much more navigable.

This portage, because of its length and difficulty, became known as the Great Carrying Place. Luckily, the portage utilized three small ponds, easing the tremendous effort required to traverse the route. How many centuries the Great Carrying Place portage trail had been used before the arrival of Europeans is not known.

In 1761 an English army engineer, Montresor, was ordered to explore this route from Quebec City to the Atlantic coast. He documented the route in a later published journal, which included crude maps.

In 1775, the fledgling American army sent two contingents of soldiers north to capture Quebec City and annex all of Canada to expand the Revolutionary War. In September, one army of approximately 1100 soldiers left Cambridge, near Boston, beginning a march overland to Newburyport. They embarked on eleven small schooners that sailed up the coast to the Kennebec to Pittston, Maine.

Here the army took possession of 220 hastily constructed flat-bottom boats called bateaux and continued up the Kennebec to Fort Western, the last outpost. On Sept. 25, they began their

epic journey, ascending the Kennebec into the wilderness. The first companies arrived at the entrance to the Great Carrying Place portage October 6-7. Using a confiscated copy of the Montresor map to guide them, they began the arduous 13-mile portage. Their first challenge was a 3-mile climb out of the valley, gaining 800 ft. in elevation (2/3 the height of the Empire State Building) carrying 400 lb. wooden boats.

The soldiers had to expend great effort to carry their heavy loads up a steep, rocky trail out of the valley to the first pond.

Because of the tremendous effort needed to carry their heavy bateau and repeated trips to get the nearly half-ton of supplies per boat, many became very weakened and sick. It took them 5-7 days to portage to the Dead River compared to a day for a modern hiker!

For more detailed information, read Kenneth Roberts *March to Quebec*, a compilation and analysis of the soldiers' many journals, or read his later great historical novel, *Arundel*.

In the late 1960's, the newly formed Arnold Expedition Historical Society (AEHS) began to rediscover and protect the old portage route that had remained obscure for more than two centuries. The land upon which the portage trail was located had been altered by two centuries of timber harvesting and, more recently, by camp lot development. However, in many places, it was still mostly intact.

Today, the AEHS has diligently striven to protect and reestablish much of the original Great Carrying Place route by acquired easements, working with cooperative landowners, and utilizing a portion of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail's protective corridor. The Great Carrying Place portage trail is also registered with the National Park System's National Battlefield Protection Program.

In 2014, the AEHS obtained permission from a benevolent landowner to utilize a portion of their land to connect two segments to establish a continuous trail. Also, the National Parks System's Appalachian Trail governance body gave the AEHS permission to utilize about three miles of the Appalachian Trail near West and Middle Carry Ponds. These initiatives have allowed the Society to complete a continuous, marked, and maintained hiking route, closely following the original portage route. Unfortunately, both ends of the actual portage trail are inundated by impoundments (Wyman and Flagstaff Lakes). However, most of the course still can be followed.

The portage trail is not only an outstanding hiking experience through remote Central Maine woodlands, but also an adventure in retracing our Revolutionary War heritage. In retracing the route, the hiker follows the same pathway used for centuries by Native Americans as well as our brave Revolutionary forefathers.

There may be a question as to which direction would be the best to hike, east to west or west to east. Either is a fine hike! However, to more closely emulate the experiences of the soldiers of the 1775 Expedition, the better way is east to west, Wyman to Flagstaff Lakes [Kennebec to Dead Rivers].

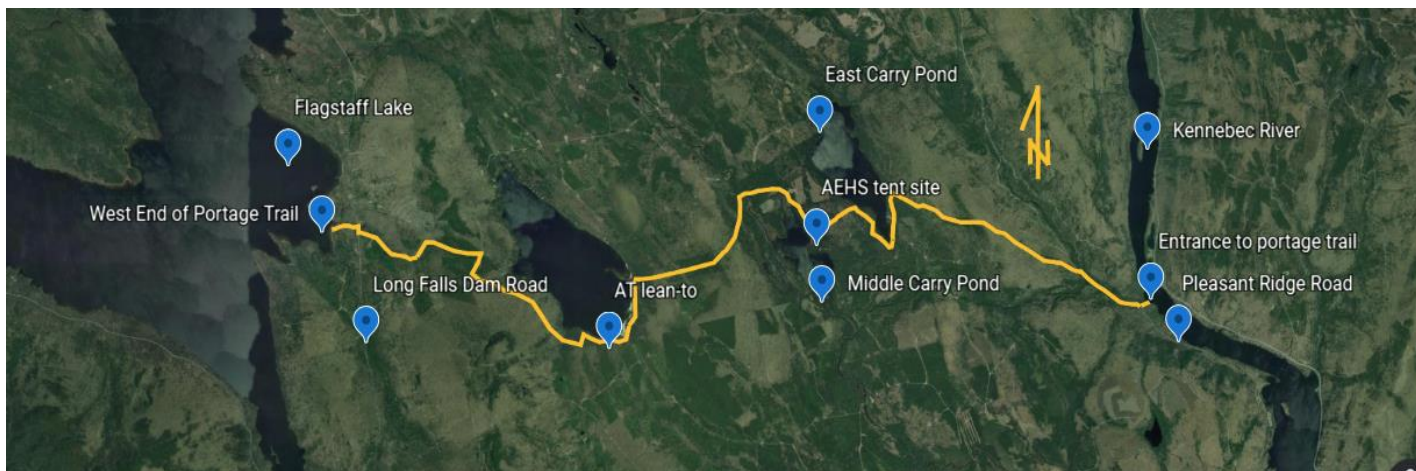
It most likely will be hiked as a one-day experience being a moderate 12 miles in length. But it could be done as an overnight as well. There is an authorized AT campsite near the south end of West Carry Pond and another near the AEHS' Nichols Cabin on Middle Carry Pond.

As you experience the hike, please respect the private camps you will occasionally pass. They treasure their privacy and are our friends!

The trail description is given for each direction; east to west and west to east.

When you take a quiet break along the trail, listen carefully for the clandestine shouts and talk of the Expedition soldiers. Although their footsteps have been long erased, the spirits of these brave soldiers are still heard along the way. Good Hiking!

Note: The entire portage route is marked by orange blazes.



Overview of the Great Carrying Place Portage Trail.

The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail, 12.2 miles.

East to West (Wyman to Flagstaff Lakes)

The east end of the Great Carrying Place (GCP) begins on the west shore of Wyman Lake. To reach the starting point, travel via US 201 to Bingham, ME. At the south junction of Maine Highway 16, turn left (west) onto Route 16 and immediately cross the Kennebec River. At the end of the bridge, turn right (north) onto an unnumbered highway. It is 9 miles to the GCP drop-off point. This route passes through the hamlet of Pleasant Ridge Plantation. Where the road forks, bear right onto the Carry Ponds Road, which soon becomes a gravel roadbed. After closely paralleling the west shore of Wyman Lake for several miles, reach the GCP route at a turn-off and prominent AEHS sign on the right side of the road. This is an excellent point to spot cars or as a picked-up point.

To reach the east end of the GCP Portage Trail from the turn-off, follow a tote road (not passable by car) downhill .2 miles to where the GCP trail emerges from the lake. The way is marked by orange blazes. The original Kennebec River take-out point now lies several hundred yards away, deep under the impoundment.

0.0 mi. Begin hike of the GCP at lakeshore. Retrace your steps uphill, back to the pull-off on the Carry Ponds Road. The trail route will be marked by orange blazes.

0.2 mi. Turn right (north) following gravel Carry Ponds Road, a private logging road. This road is sometimes called the Pleasant Ridge Road. Follow narrow road north, watching out for large logging trucks. Carrying Place Stream parallels this road closely to right. This road has been built over the old portage route.

0.7 mi. Roadway cross Stony Brook. Just after crossing brook on left is an unmarked trail leading 0.3 mi. to spectacular Stony Brook Canyon. This is a series of waterfalls dropping over ledges in a narrow granite canyon. This is the best such feature in the area. The brook is the last water for many miles. Continue north following road.

0.8 mi. GCP Trail bears left (west) off-road onto old, worn tote road. The trail ahead climbs steadily out of river valley. This is the approximate location of the old GCP Portage Trail. To portage their heavy bateaux, food, and military equipment, the soldiers had to make this 3 1/4 mile climb to East Carry Pond as many as six backbreaking trips.

1.4 mi. Cross the so-called Mountain Road, leading to Carry Ponds. Continue on trail westward. The trail beyond is less steep and passes through beautiful mature hardwoods.

2.9 mi. The trail reaches high point on ridge then bears more S.W. gradually downhill toward East Carry Pond. From this point, the original portage trail bore more westerly to reach the

pond. This portion of the actual path is now obliterated by timber harvesting operations as far as the pond.

3.3 mi. Reach gravel Eagle Trail Road near East Carry Pond. Bear left (south) onto road. Ahead road swings around the south end of East Carry Pond. The original portage trail reached the pond at a point 0.1 mi. further north. The soldiers then had to cross the pond for a half-mile to reach the west shore and continue the portage toward Middle Carry Pond.

3.6 mi. Reach a "T" junction of gravel roads. Bear right (west) onto the Middle Road and follow it around south end of East Carry Pond. To left is Mountain Road leading back into Kennebec Valley. There are several private camps along this road. Please respect their privacy.

3.9 mi. Pass undeveloped boat launch for East Carry Pond. Continue west following gravel road.

4.1 mi. Turn right leaving road, enter woods path.

4.3 mi. Reach shore of East Carry Pond. Turn left onto more worn trail.

5.0 mi. Cross small stream on bog bridge. Last water for some distance.

5.1 mi. Reach graveled Middle Road. Route turns right. Ahead is a driveway leading down to Middle Carry Pond and the Nichols's cabin. There is also a campsite here for trail hikers.

The Expedition's soldiers relaunched their bateaux in the pond and crossed it for 3/4 mile to reach its inlet, Sandy Stream.

5.7 mi. Road reaches a major junction with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The GCP Trail and AT merge for the next 3.3 mi. The AT is marked by white blazes.

Continue on gravel road and 50 yds. Cross Sandy Stream, the inlet of Middle Carry Pond.

5.8 mi. Just beyond stream, reach junction of gravel roads. Be careful to bear left onto Lane Pond Road. Continue to follow white blazes of the AT route.

5.9 mi. Portage trail and AT turn sharp right (west), leaving gravel road and enter foot trail. To left, through woods, it is 0.3 mi. downhill to Sandy Stream to where the Expedition's bateaux were taken out of Middle Carry Pond to begin the next segment of the long portage westward to West Carry Pond. A future trail will be built to reach the pond at that point. Continue to follow AT westward, soon emerging onto a prominent esker.

6.0 mi. The trail leaves esker and descends into a wide swamp, crossed by a long bog bridge. This swamp crossing was prominently and disparagingly mentioned in many of the soldier's

journals as they waded knee to thigh deep through the muck under their heavy loads. Some complained of having their shoes sucked off!

After crossing the swamp, portage trail and AT climb a broad wooded ridge that separates Middle and West Carry Ponds.

7.6 mi. Reach shore of beautiful West Carry Pond at Arnold Point. This is the last of the three Carry Ponds. It is an excellent place to swim on a hot day. This location was an encampment for the Expedition as each contingent passed through. Col. Benedict Arnold encamped here Oct. 14. The next day the Expedition's soldiers rowed 1.2 miles west across the pond to a small cove. Note the high ridge beyond the pond. The soldiers had to laboriously ascend it. On a clear day, one can spy the twin 4,000-foot peaks of Bigelow Mtn. The soldiers labeled it "The Forked Mountain."

Follow shoreline south then west around south end of pond.

8.6 mi. Pass the West Carry Pond Lean-to (accommodates 6) near shore of pond. This is an authorized AT campsite. Continue along shore of pond on AT.

8.9 mi. AT leaves shore of pond and proceeds westward.

9.0 mi. Reach trail junction with GCP connector trail. This is to be followed to reach the next segment of the GCP route.

Leave AT at this point and follow connector trail. It is marked by orange blazes. In a short distance, cross several drainageways and continue northward gradually ascending ridge. Trail eventually merges with an abandoned logging road.

9.2 mi. Bear right onto this woods road.

10.1 mi. Leave woods road, turning right, and enter trail.

10.2 mi. Reach gravel Boise logging road. Turn right (north). Route follows this road for only 0.2 mi.

10.4 mi. At crossing of Boise Road and Spring Road, turn left (west) onto Spring Road. This is an important turn! The Spring Road, was built over the original route of the old GCP Portage Trail.

To right (east), Spring Road descends 0.4 mi. and dead-ends on the west shore of West Carry Pond.

Continue on GCP portage route westward following Spring Road. After short distance, road begins a long gradual descent into the Dead River Valley.

11.9 mi. Reach paved Long Falls Dam Road. To the left, it is approximately 21 miles south to reach ME Highway 16 at No. New Portland. To right, the LFDR continues 6 miles to the dam that impounds Flagstaff Lake. This prominent road junction is a good place to spot cars or use as a pick-up point.

To continue on GCP portage route, turn right (north) onto LFDR and proceed downhill for only 75 yds. Then turn left (west), leaving road, and cross a wide logging yard. On far side, re-enter woods on old tote road. Continue to follow orange blazes.

12.1 mi. Cross maintained Maine Huts and Trails winter ski trail. Continue west, soon catching glimpses of lake.

12.2 mi. Reach shore of Flagstaff Lake and end of portage trail. The impoundment was constructed in 1950 and covers roughly the last $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of the old portage trail before it ended at Bog Brook and the Dead River. In this last stretch, the route crossed a vast spruce bog, which the soldiers called a "savanna." They encountered great difficulty crossing through the knee and thigh-deep mud and hidden roots, carrying their heavy loads.

Flagstaff Lake is a huge, 22-mile long impoundment submerging the Dead River and its valley. The Expedition's route does not emerge from the lake until it reaches a point in the present town of Eustis.

To the west is the spectacular Bigelow Mountain Range protected as part of the Bigelow Preserve. Bigelow Mountain was named in honor of one of the Expedition's officers, Major Timothy Bigelow.

The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail, 12.2 miles.

West to East, Flagstaff to Wyman Lakes

The west end of the Great Carrying Place Portage Trail begins on the east shore of Flagstaff Lake. To reach this point, one must follow the Long Falls Dam Road from North New Portland which leaves Maine Highway 16 in the town's center. Drive north 21 miles to a parking area on the right. A prominent AEHS sign marks the portage trail. Here the graveled Spring Road turns eastward leads out of the Dead River Valley. This is a convenient point to drop off hikers westbound.

To reach the trail's begin, walk downhill northward on the LFDR for only 75 yards, then turn left, leaving the road. Cross a wide yarding area, then enter woods onto an old tote road. The route is marked by orange blazes. This leads 0.3 mi. to the shore of Flagstaff Lake, the beginning point of the GCP trail.

At the lakeshore, the last 3/4 mile of the original portage route is inundated by the lake. It does not emerge until it reaches the Town of Eustis, 22 miles away.



West end of Great Carrying Place Portage Trail. Bigelow Mountain is in the background. In the foreground, what was the vast swamp (Noted as the Savannah in several journals) before reaching Bog Brook and the Dead River, now flooded by Flagstaff Lake. Kalloch photo

To the left is the spectacular Bigelow Mountain range. Bigelow Mountain's name honors one of the Expedition's officers, Major Timothy Bigelow.

0.0 mi. Leave lakeshore and retrace route along the tote road towards the LFDR. You are on the GCP portage route. It is marked by orange blazes.

0.1 mi. Trail cross Maine Huts and Trails winter ski path. Continue east along tote road. Soon emerge and cross wide yarding area.

0.3 mi. Reach paved Long Falls Dam Road. To the left, it is 6 miles to the Long Falls Dam. To the right, it is 21 miles south to the small village of North New Portland. Bear right, uphill. In 75 yds. reach junction with gravel Spring Road at a prominent AEHS sign.

Turn left (east) onto Spring Road, and begin ascent toward ridge ahead. The Spring Road was built upon much of the route of the GCP Portage Trail.

1.8 mi. Near top of ridge, reach road crossing of the Boise Road. From this point, a connector route will be utilized to swing around the south end of West Carry Pond to reach the next segment of the GCP route. Turn right onto Boise Road which will be followed south for only 0.2 mi.

Ahead, Spring Road descends 0.4 mi. and dead-ends on the shore of West Carry Pond. It is the first of the three Carry Ponds.

2.0 mi. On Boise Road, reach point where trail turns into woods. Turn sharp left leaving road.

2.1 mi. Trail emerges onto an old logging haul road. Bear left following this road, gradually descending to southeast.

3.2 mi. After crossing several drainageways reach trail junction with Appalachian National Scenic Trail. At this junction, turn left and follow AT eastward, downhill towards pond. The AT is marked by white blazes.

The AT and the GCP Trail are merged for the next three miles to a point near Middle Carry Pond.

3.3 mi. Reach shore of West Carry Pond. Trail will follow shoreline for next 1.3 mi. around the south end of pond.

3.5 mi. Pass the West Carry Pond Lean-to (accommodates 6) near shore of pond. This is an authorized AT campsite. Continue along shore of pond on.

4.6 mi. Reach Arnold Point on east shore of West Carry Pond. This is an excellent place to swim on a hot day.

This site was an encampment for various Expedition contingents as they passed along the portage. Col. Benedict Arnold encamped here on Oct. 14, 1775, with several companies of soldiers.



Kalloch photo

Route turns east, leaving pond. It follows the exact route of the old portage trail over a low, wooded ridge that separates West and Middle Carry Ponds.

6.2 mi. Trail descends to a huge bog. A long bog bridge crosses to the far side. This bog was prominently and derisively mentioned in many of the soldier's journals. They sank knee to thigh deep in the muck and roots burdened by their heavy loads. Some complained of having their shoes sucked off, not to be recovered.

6.3 mi. At the end of the bog, trail climbs onto and follows a prominent geological esker.

6.4 mi. Reach gravel Lane Pond Road. Turn sharp left (north), following road.

Formerly, the old portage route continued ahead to the shore of Middle Carry Pond (a side trail to pond is planned).

Continuing on gravel road, soon reach junction with Middle Road. Bear right and immediately cross Sandy Stream, the inlet to Middle Carry Pond.

6.5 mi. Reach critical trail junction. The Appalachian Trail turns off-road to left (north). Do not follow the AT further. Continue following the Middle Road ahead to reach the next segment of

the portage route. The route from this point is marked with orange blazes. Road parallels north shore of Middle Carry Pond.

7.1 mi. Road crosses original portage trail between East and Middle Carry Ponds.

Turn left (north) onto portage trail leaving road. The course is a delightful woods path following the original portage route.

To right, down driveway, a short distance is the shore of Middle Carry Pond, where the expedition's bateaux were launched to cross the pond. The AEHS Nichols Cabin is located here. There is also a campsite which can accommodate overnight hikers.

7.2 mi. Cross small stream on bog bridge. Continue ahead on portage trail.

7.9 mi. Reach shore of East Carry Pond. Bear right (south) onto less worn woods path.

8.1 mi. Reach graveled Middle Road and turn left following road.

8.3 mi. Pass on left, boat launch area for East Carry Pond. Continue ahead. Route swings around south end of East Carry Pond, passing occasional private camps.

8.6 mi. Reach junction of graveled roads. Turn left onto the Eagle Trail Road. Ahead is the Mountain Road.

8.9 mi. Reach junction with foot trail. Turn right onto woods trail leaving road. In 0.2 mile, cross small stream and ascend ridge.

9.3 mi. Reach high point on ridge. This rejoins the original portage trail and bears more easterly. Begin descent into Kennebec River Valley through a beautiful mature hardwood forest.

10.8 mi. Cross the so-called Mountain Road. Continue on trail eastward, descending more steeply into the valley.

11.4 mi. Reach main gravel road. This is known as either the Pleasant Ridge Road or the Carry Ponds Road. Turn right (south) and follow road downhill. Watch for large logging trucks that frequently use this road.

11.5 mi. Roadway crosses Stony Brook. This is the last brook water to be encountered.

Before brook crossing, to right (west) is an unmarked trail leading 0.3 mi. to spectacular Stony Brook Canyon. This is a series of waterfalls tumbling over ledges in a narrow granite canyon. It is the best such feature in the area.

Continue south following road. Soon, one observes the large Carrying Place Stream which is the outlet of East Carry Pond, in a deep ravine to the left. The Expedition followed along this stream from its confluence with the Kennebec River.

12.0 mi. This point is identified by a large turn-out left on east side of road and a prominent AEHS sign. This point is an ideal place where cars may be spotted or hikers may be picked up. It is 9 miles south through Pleasant Ridge Plantation to reach the Town of Bingham on US 201.

GCP route turns left (east) onto a tote road, leading downhill to Wyman Lake, paralleling Carrying Place Stream.

12.2 mi. Portage trail ends on west shore of Wyman Lake. The impoundment dam was constructed in 1936. It inundates most of the old valley farmlands for 15 miles of the Kennebec River.

It also covers the last several hundred yards of the old portage trail that began at the confluence of Carrying Place Stream and the river. That point was the historic beginning of the Great Carrying Place. The first contingent of the Expedition reached this point in their bateaux, on Oct. 6-7, 1775, after ascending the Kennebec from Fort Western (Augusta). The Expedition was comprised of about 1000 soldiers at that point. Approximately 600 reached the shores of the St. Lawrence River near Quebec in early November 1775.

We hope you have enjoyed a great hike and have felt the spirits of the brave soldiers as you followed in their footsteps!

