

THE INTERNATIONAL APPALACHIAN TRAIL

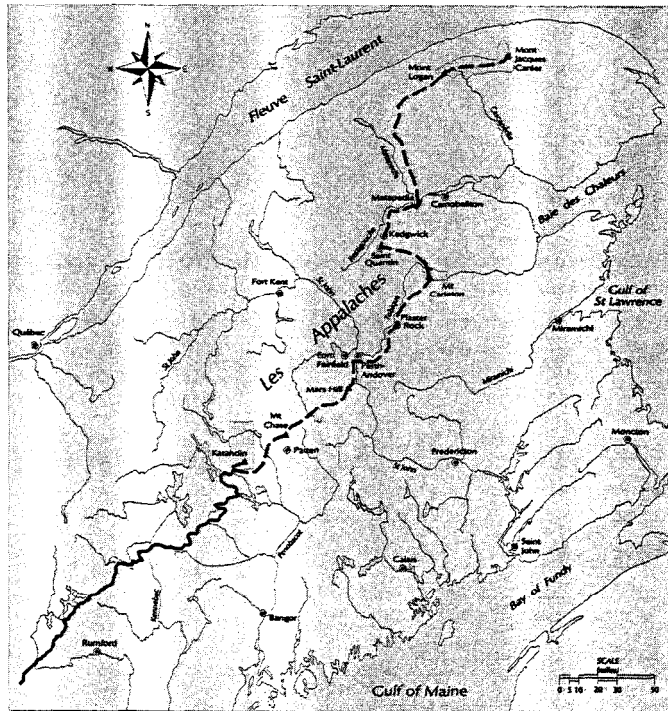
Spanning a Two-Nation Bioregion

BY WILFRED E. RICHARD

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL (AT) IS A NATIONAL FOOT PATH created more than 50 years ago and follows the natural landscape of the most prominent inland feature of the eastern United States: the Appalachian Mountains. Its length, running from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mount Katahdin, Maine, is approximately 2,200 miles (3,540 kilometers). However, the International Appalachian Trail (IAT) or the Sentier International des Appalaches (SIA) is a more recent creation, first begun only in the mid-1990s. In the United States it picks up in northern New England near the northern terminus of the AT and runs north and east, following the Appalachian region into Canada through northwestern New Brunswick and into the central Gaspé region of the province of Quebec. This additional length represents another 435 miles or 700 kilometers, though the exact length is still to be determined. The interesting story, however, is following the complex process through which two sovereign nations, two languages, two cultures are constructing a footpath onward, north and south, through North America's Appalachian Mountains. It is this process that I discuss here.

A Man and an Idea

In the 1950s and 1960s, a young Maine resident, Richard B. "Dick" Anderson, avidly fished the salmon rivers of northwestern New Brunswick and the "Gaspésie" region of Quebec. This place became Dick's "special place." Dick went on to earn a degree in fishery biology at the University of Maine at Orono, became executive director of the Maine Audubon Society, and, in the early 1980s, Maine's commissioner of conservation. Thus his orientation to this cross-border region of Canada was given an outlet at a policy level, and he provided leadership to several initiatives, such as establishment of the St. Croix International Waterway Commission, a cross-border river planning authority (Richard 1991), and the attempted reintroduction of caribou into northern Maine from herds in Newfoundland. These cross-border initiatives came in a region where cross-border dialogue has traditionally been the way of doing things—even back to the War of 1812 when both Canadian Maritimers and Maine Downeasters provisioned the British Navy with food and other stores (Davis 1970), and onto the joint initiative that established and manages Roosevelt-Campobello

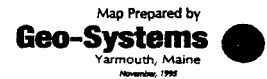


'Un sentier international sert de symbole tangible d'engagement de travail conjoint entre les États-Unis et le Canada, comme voisins, de sauvegarder notre environnement et de manifester la grandeur de notre paysage commun.'

'An international trail serving as a tangible symbol of US - Canadian commitment to work as neighbors, to sustain our common environment and to celebrate the grandeur of our common landscape.'



Appalachian Trail
Proposed SIA/IAT
Proposed SIA/IAT
(Completed trail or Landowner approval)



Proposed route of the Sentier International des Appalaches/International Appalachian Trail. Map by Geo-Systems.

International Park on a New Brunswick island located off the coast of Maine (Richard 1992, 1993).

The international border between Maine and the Canadian provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick was established through the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1843 to avert a war by separating Loyalists and Americans along with forest and agricultural resources. A century and a half later, the IAT/SIA is envisioned as a bioregional means to bring people together in a peaceful manner within a recreational and economic context.

During the gubernatorial campaign in April 1994, Dick's idea of the IAT/SIA was publicly supported by then-candidate



The proposed route would connect with an existing trail in the 802-kilometer Parc de la Gaspésie. Photo by Wilfred E. Richard.

Brennan who on Earth Day stated “this narrow trail connecting the special wild places in each of our political jurisdictions will serve as a reminder that the mountains and the rivers and the forests are our real heritage, our common biological and geological bond.” The concept and proposal were picked up, and media from Boston to Los Angeles ran stories on the trail.

One Trail: Two Cultures

At the northern end of the AT is the state of Maine, which shares a border, about evenly, of 630 miles (roughly 1,000 kilometers) with the Canadian provinces of Québec and New Brunswick. Maine has the unique distinction among the “lower 48” of having the greatest percent of its land border with another nation. As a consequence, Maine has long been both a transit point and place of migration for both English and French Canada. Much of the Canadian land mass contiguous to Maine is represented by the French culture and language. As the IAT/SIA also traverses this French region, communications along it are expressed in two languages: English and French. And the trail has two official titles: The International Appalachian Trail (IAT) and The Sentier International des

Appalaches (SIA). The IAT/SIA utilizes these two acronyms in the form of a “T” with SIA as the horizontal member and IAT as the vertical member. This is the official trail logo of the IAT. All publications of the trail and trail signs are printed in both French and English and the metric system is used to convey distances. The 700-kilometer trail is scheduled for completion on Earth Day in the year 2000.

The Appalachian Bioregion

The region is defined by the Appalachian Mountains. If one were to conduct an on-the-ground examination of this Maine-Québec-New Brunswick corner of North America, one would find many more similarities in geological composition, vegetation, and wildlife than dissimilarities. The Appalachian chain, as the geological backbone of this region, runs to the north through Maine, New Brunswick, and then continues to the tip of the Gaspé where it submerges under the Atlantic Ocean before re-emerging on the island of Newfoundland, which with Labrador was the 10th and last province to join the Canadian federation.

The weather and climate of this bioregion, from sea level to the heights of the Appalachians, are dramatically

influenced by the north Atlantic Ocean. Vegetation is similar, represented by large stands of spruce and fir forests, which serve as the basis of the Northeast’s pulp and paper industry; species of wildlife are also similar. However, there is a greater incidence of animal life that is higher up in the food chain as one goes farther north where eagles, moose, deer, bear, coyotes, and even wolves and caribou are found. Agriculture practices have resulted in large potato fields and dairy herds, spring peas, winter broccoli, and impressive stands of rye, wheat, and barley. And, most recently, the growing of flax for linen has been reintroduced.

But the central unifying factor in the region is one geological feature—the Appalachian Mountains. Each one of the three political entities of Maine, Quebec, and New Brunswick are represented in the trail by a prominent point of reference. The highest point in each of these three IAT/SIA states are: Katahdin (5,268 feet; 1,606 meters), Jacques-Cartier (4,160 feet; 1,268 meters), and Carleton (2,690 feet; 820 meters), respectively. Actually, the trail constitutes a somewhat forced geological configuration in order to fit these three jewels as the center pieces of the trail. Mount Carleton is a geological feature, a few miles removed from the contiguous Appalachian massif.

The Trail Sine Qua Non: A Shared Cross-Border Endeavor

There are other regional considerations—primarily economic. Northern Maine, the Gaspé, and northwestern New Brunswick share an economy that is largely natural-resource based. An often experienced consequence of this “end of the road” border location is a lack of economic activity. Thus, a cross-border trail could serve as an international draw of tourist-recreationists and their dollars—both Canadian and U.S.

Trail Politics

To quote then-gubernatorial candidate Brennan, “The International Appala-

chian Trail/Sentier International des Appalaches is a symbol of U.S.-Canadian commitment to work together as neighbors, to sustain our common environments, and to celebrate the grandeur of our common landscape. It connects mountains, crosses rivers, threads through spruce and fir forests, and connects the people and cultures of the state of Maine and the provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick.” (Maine Chapter of the IAT, no date).

And from the *SIA/IAT Newsletter* (summer 1995), the general philosophy of “SIA/IAT Rules of the Trail” is: The SIA/IAT is an international footpath traversing the Appalachian chain of mountains from Mount Jacques Cartier, Quebec, in the north, to Mount Carleton, New Brunswick, and on to Mount Kathadin in Maine. The goal of the SW IAT is to create tangible evidence of U.S.-Canadian cooperation and interdependency, to celebrate the interconnectedness between the cultures and bioregions through which the trail passes.

Trail officials make a point of stressing the IAT/SIA philosophy to the public of “thinking beyond borders” as the guiding principle of the trail. On both sides of the border, community support has been critical to trail clearing (*SIA/IAT Newsletter*, spring 1996).

Initially it was assumed by IAT/SIA leadership that a 700-kilometer two-province addition to the 14-state AT would be welcomed by AT leadership. It was further assumed that the most logical place to link the trails would be at the summit of Mount Kathadin. Neither assumption would prove to be valid. Though the governing body of the AT, the International Trail Conference, welcomed the IAT/SIA “as a new or side connecting trail, we were reluctant to making it an extension of the traditional AT” (*AMC Outdoors*, September 1996). Then the Baxter State Park Authority, governing body of the park in which Kathadin is located, indicated a lack of support because of a perceived threat of further population pressure upon the park’s natural environment. At this point, the most likely place that the two trails will connect is the Abol bridge on the southern perimeter of Baxter

State Park (*The Register*, April 1996).

In Canada there was some discussion, made available through e-mail and the web page (*The AT Goes North*, no date), as to whether the trail would best serve eastern Canada by proceeding north through Maine, New Brunswick, and Quebec, or simply proceeding north from Maine through Quebec with the intent of resurrecting the tourist economy of the lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé. It was held by the unidentified authors, writing in French, that if New Brunswick was part of the route, the trail would deviate south of the Appalachian chain, which traverses the Gaspé. Further, it was contended that there is a greater concentration of under-utilized recreational tourist facilities adjacent to the Allagash Wilderness Waterway in both Maine and Quebec. Whether one accepts this line of economic-based reasoning or whether we are seeing a manifestation of Quebec sovereignty involves a bit of speculation.

U.S.-Canadian Differences

Two essential differences exist between the United States and Canada as they bear on the trails completion in the year 2000. First, the provincial governments in both Quebec and New Brunswick are active supporters of the trail in terms of investing money and other resources

into it. Second, crown land, or land owned by a provincial government, is being made available for trail location. Much of the land and trails are located in extant parks. In the state of Maine, neither of these conditions exist. Neither money nor land is being made available by the state or federal government.

There are other factors. On the U.S. side, Maine has one of the smallest proportions of its land contained in parks or otherwise controlled by government. Though property rights in the United States are enshrined within the Constitution, this is not the case in Canada where all land is held by the crown, with individual land rights being residual (Friedenberg 1980; Lipset 1990). Further, crown land is not held by the federal government; it is held by provincial government, which again sets Canadian and U.S. land-use patterns apart. Another factor involves a heated debate over the future of clearcutting in Maine, a debate that has resulted in a “ban clearcutting” referendum. Consequently, paper companies are not eager to engage in ventures that could be perceived as further compromising land rights.

The Trail: A Guided Tour

Although some of the details are still being worked out in terms of actual trail



The proposed route would proceed from Part de la Gaspésie to the Chic-Choc Mountains, a cluster of mountains exceeding 900 meters in elevation. Photo by Wilfred E. Richard.

siting, the trail will generally follow a route that will begin at a point outside of Baxter State Park, the location of Mount Katahdin. It will angle east and north along the park's eastern boundary and then along the east branch of the Penobscot River where it will continue northeast over peaks such as Mount Chase, along rivers, and through rolling farm country to Mars Hill Mountain, which is just inside the Maine border. Mars Hill Mountain (elevation 1,660 feet, 511 meters) is the first place in the United States that the sun's rays fall between March 29 and September 15. The trail then proceeds up the mountain along an Alpine ski run (Big Rock) and then goes due north to Fort Fairfield on the Maine border with New Brunswick. Much of this section of the trail has been completed. The trail then crosses into Perth-Andover, New Brunswick, not only into another nation, but into a different time zone from eastern to Atlantic. The rolling landscape continues, but logging seems to be more of an economic mainstay than farming.

In Canada, starting with the Tobique River, the trail traverses the Atlantic salmon-river country of New Brunswick. It then turns northeast toward Mount Carleton Provincial Park containing Mount Carleton, a string of lakes, other trails (*sentiers*), and vari-

ous amenities. Next, the trail heads west from the park to the small city of Saint-Quentin at which point it turns due north through the "Restigouche" fishing region of New Brunswick.

Then, near the head-of-tide of Baie des Chaleurs on the Atlantic Ocean, the trail crosses into the Province of Quebec in the salmon-fishing mecca of Matapedia. It then travels northward by way of an abandoned power line and through the mountains of the central Gaspésie, where it connects with the existing trail system of the third jewel of the IAT/SIA, the 802-square-kilometer Parc de la Gaspésie, and the Chic-Choc Mountains, a cluster of mountains all exceeding an elevation of 900 meters. From west to east, the trail proceeds from Mounts Logan, Jacques Ferron, du Blizzard, Ernest Menard, Albert, Comte, and finally onto the IAT/SIA terminus, Mount Jacques Cartier. There is some discussion that the trail could be extended all the way to the end of the Gaspé Peninsula to Le Vieux Cap Gaspé.

The center of the park is actually not the 1,268-meter Mount Jacques-Cartier, but the 1,150-meter Mount Albert. Situated in the valley at the base of the mountain is a very impressive (in terms of architecture and quality of service) park information center with a gift store, a campground, and the very

well-appointed "Le Gîte du Mont-Albert," a sumptuous lodging and dining place where one may retire after time on the trail.

Perhaps the most stunning landscape of the entire AT/IAT trails system is Mount Albert with a tree line of about 2,000 feet (660 meters). Above tree line, is a tundralike plateau ("Table Moise") which emits an inspiring orange-brown glow replete with Arctic flowers, including the trilliumlike *diapensie*, *armèrie du Labrador*, and *bunchberry*—even a herd of caribou. There is a glacial tam near which the park maintains a hut for hikers.

Side Trails and Attractions

Other landscapes, activities, and amenities abound in this Appalachian region. Although not an exhaustive list, some are referenced below:

Northeastern Maine and western New Brunswick—rolling farm country with an abundance (in season) of rye wheat, potatoes, broccoli, flax, peas, and corn.

Houlton—urban experience; supplies.

Restigouche—French and English naval engagement that began termination of French empire in North America (slide); world-renowned salmon fishing.

Carleton Provincial Park—four-season recreational activity

Gaspésie Provincial Park—excellent cross-country skiing.

Gaspé Peninsula—coastal sightseeing, beachcombing, bird-watching, whale-watching, and rock-hounding.

Status of the Trail Today

The establishment of the trail is progressing with rigor. Collectively, about one-quarter of the trail is now in place and usable. Quebec: Local committees are being formed to cut and maintain

"Table Maise," a tundralike plateau above the treeline of Mount Albert. Photo by Wilfred E. Richard.



the trail in four locations along the trail route. Through these groups, it is planned to have the entire province's trail cut in 1996 and 1997. With the existing trails of Parc de la Gaspésie, Quebec's section of the trail will be complete in 1997. At the time of this writing, either completion or permission to establish the trail has been achieved for 250 of Quebec's 300 kilometers of trail. New Brunswick: Eight people have been hired under a government work project to scout and mark the 70 kilometers from Mount Carleton Provincial Park to the town of Kedgwick in the Restigouche region. Information on plants and animals is being gathered in order to locate the trail in interesting, nonthreatened areas. The section of the trail south of the park is scheduled to be finished in 1997. A 15-kilometer section of a former railroad bed has been purchased by the provincial government to be used for the trail. Similar to Quebec's Parc de la Gaspésie, part of the trail network in New Brunswick's Mount Carleton Provincial Park will complement the IAT/SIA. Between Quebec and New Brunswick, better than 122 kilometers of existing park hiking trails have been added as official components of the trail. Maine: The Maine chapter of the IAT/SIA has taken action to become a nonprofit corporation. The International Boundary Commission stated that the use of the international boundary from Mars Hill Mountain to Fort Fairfield, Maine, as part of the IAT/SIA was permissible. This part of the trail was already cleared and has subsequently been marked with the trail blaze. Negotiations continue with major corporate landowners in the area between Katahdin and Mars Hill to assemble parcels of land for trail construction.

Most recently, the Maine Chapter has constructed (October 1996) the first new trail shelter on the IAT/SIA Trail. It is of the traditional "Adirondack Shelter" design and is the first of 10 or so that will be constructed in Maine (there will be one every 10 miles). Working with the northern campus of the University of Maine at Presque Isle, and its Park and Natural Resource Man-

agement Program in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Services, an agreement has been reached through which faculty and students will be responsible for maintaining the trail between Mars Hill Mountain and the Border crossing at Fort Fairfield.

The forest products industry is somewhat wary about what they see as a possibility of compromising their rights over their land by extending use to the IAT/SIA. In particular, paper companies fear that National Park Service protection would follow, as was the case with the AT (Fletcher 1996) with purchase of the 2,200-mile (3,540 kilometers) AT corridor by the federal government. Government purchases included wide trail corridors and viewsheds in some areas. Pending federal acquisitions in western Maine have prevented ski trail expansion at Saddleback Ski Resort out of concern for the "viewscope."

Conclusions

Although the concept for the IAT/SIA developed in the United States, it is in Canada with crown lands and government support where implementation has occurred more quickly. In the United States, support of the large landowners, the timber companies will be absolutely critical to the success of the project. Strong government involvement in the United States is not anticipated. In Canada, both provinces have taken existing trails in both Québec (Parc de la Gaspésie) and New Brunswick (Mount Carleton Provincial Park) and simply assigned them the additional function of being part of the IAT/SIA. And, additional lengths outside of the parks also have been purchased and developed. This dual use strategy has



Canadian hikers on the trail near Mount Albert (above). Bunch berry can be found in abundance with several other varieties of arctic flowers on the trail (right). Photos by Wilfred E. Richard.



not been accepted on the U.S. side of the border where IAT/SIA organizers had assumed (wrongly) that the international trail would begin within Baxter State Park. But, the IAT/SIA at this point will begin outside of Baxter State Park.

In essence, the IAT/SIA fares better north of the border than it does south of the border. In both Canadian provinces, a collective 138 kilometers of trail are now hicable, with another 30 kilometers in New Brunswick to be completed before the end of 1996. By the end of 1997, all of Canada's 540 kilometers will be in service. In Maine, of its 160-kilometer commitment, 30 kilometers (about one-fifth) have been implemented on the ground. Table 1 summarizes and offers an estimate of trail status as of November 1996. I estimate that at this time about 52% of the trail either has been developed or the land for the trail has been committed. But this is rapid progress in a U.S. public/private development. Bear in

**Table 1: International Appalachian Trail (IAT)
Sentier International des Appalaches (SIA)
Trail Implementation Schedule and Progress, November 1996**

| Jurisdiction | Final Trail Length (km) | Developed or Committed (km) |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| New Brunswick | 240 | 85 |
| T | 300 | 250 |
| Maine | 60 | 30 |
| <hr/> | | |
| Totals | 600 | 365 (52%) |

mind that it was only 1994 that the concept of an IAT was proposed by Candidate Brennan and Dick Anderson.

Finally, one would hope that by the time the Canadian section of the trail is near completion, the private and public authorities on the U.S. side will

have made progress in mobilizing the land and financial resources required to complete the link between the AT and the IAT/SIA—to achieve the vision of one integrated North American footpath. For long-distance trail buffs the IATISIA will really expand possibilities by linking the two longest trail systems

in North America. These are the combined AT and the IAT/SIA, and the coast-to-coast Trans-Canada Trail, which will be intersected in New Brunswick.

And, developing along the coast of Maine is an expanding “Maine Island Trail Association,” which recently has become associated with Canadian islands in New Brunswick. This is an association that provides landfalls for small boat operators. This water-based trail system could eventually stretch from Provincetown, Massachusetts, to Briar Island, Nova Scotia, thus forming another cross-border bioregion recreational alliance, this one focused on water in the Gulf of Maine. **IJW**

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