

Offbeat Maine

BATH

Aside from being of Maine's more scenic towns, Bath is also well known for its slightly quirky side. For example, every year on the first Sunday in March, the Bath Elk's Lodge hosts its annual Belt-Sander Races. The event is run by the United Bikers of Maine, who donate all proceeds to the Maine Children's Cancer Program. There are usually up to 3 dozen competitors who turn up with their work tools to join the race. One might wonder where the idea to race belt sanders came from; let's just say it was born of a mixture of "professional pride, alcohol consumption and testosterone." Competitors participate in either stock or modified classes, stock being your basic sander pulled from the toolbox, modified being customized with hard-wired electronics or added weights; the belt-sanders are then lined up on a plywood track with rails on it, and whichever one makes it the farthest wins. Believe it or not, you can learn more about it at the Central Maine Power Tool Racing Association's website, mysite.verizon.net. Sure it's a little random, but hey, us Mainers had to find something to occupy our time until we can watch real racing at the Wiscasset Raceway when it opens in the summer!

BELFAST

Located in Belfast, Perry's Nut House (aptly named, it seems), originally founded in 1927 by Irving Perry as a general store specializing in tropical nuts, has evolved over the years into one of Maine's most eclectic tourist attractions. Under Perry's ownership, the shop also offered an unusual collection of rare stuffed animals (no, not like Pooh-Bear... we're talking taxidermy here; the assemblage was fondly nicknamed the "Animarium" by Mr. Perry), a variety of types of nuts from around the world, and pretty much every other type of curio you could imagine. Today the Nut House still displays many of these eccentricities in addition to selling homemade fudge and gifts.

BUCKSPORT

If you are heading towards Acadia National Park, you will glimpse the grave of Colonel Jonathan Buck while driving past the Bucksport Cemetery. This grave has a mysterious stain on it in the shape of a foot and leg that never goes away, no matter how many times it is scrubbed. There are several local legends attached to this phenomenon, the two most popular being: #1: Colonel Buck burned his mistress for being a when he found her to be pregnant, and she promised to return and dance on his grave. It is believed to be her foot and leg that appears on his tombstone. #2: (Not for the faint of heart) Allegedly Colonel Buck burned a local witch and one of her legs rolled out of the bonfire. A curse was called down upon the Colonel by the witch's deformed son - "your tomb shall bear the mark of a witch's foot for all eternity!" Not the most horrifying of curses, when you think about it, but all the same, his descendants repeatedly tried to clean the foot off the stone and are said to have replaced the monument twice but the foot keeps coming back! So what really happened? No one knows for sure, but here are some points to consider:

- 1) *Colonel Buck was a Justice of the Peace; he didn't have the authority to burn anyone; in addition, he was an honorable, industrious man who actually founded the town.*
- 2) *Colonel Buck was born in 1719, long after the last witch was killed in America.*
- 3) *No witches were ever put on trial in Maine.*
- 4) *The stain appears on a monument erected in Colonel Buck's memory 75 years after he died. His real grave is in another part of the cemetery and is unblemished.*
- 5) *Visitors have noted another stain high up on the monument -- a sideways heart shape. This may signify that Buck had either a secret love of the "witch," or perhaps of women's feet.*

Believe what you will... it's still an interesting sight to behold. The town of Bucksport is also known for a number of other bizarre occurrences: in 1892 a circus elephant named Charlie broke loose and roamed the town a free animal. He was captured 2 weeks later, with the help of a pit bull, who cornered the elephant so his handlers could secure him. In 1876 and 1898, two of the state's most grisly and mysterious murders took place, attracting detectives and press to Bucksport from all over New England.

CASTINE

Although the Wilson Museum in Castine is actually a good distance from us, it is near Acadia National Park, so if you are heading that way for a day trip, you will want to be sure to check it out. The museum, founded in 1921 by Dr. John Howard Wilson, has a very diverse collection of historic artifacts reflecting Native American culture, local & maritime history and paleological remnants from all over the world. Amusingly, the Museum also has in their collection two horse-drawn hearses that were used in Castine 100 years ago... a bit morbid perhaps, but interesting all the same.

CUSHING

Right outside of Rockland/Thomaston is the famous Olson House, where artist Andrew Wyeth painted "Christina's World," the moving portrait of his crippled friend Christina Olson dragging herself through the field beside the house. The Farnsworth Museum in Rockland sells passes to the Olson House, where you can see why Wyeth so favored the spot for the subject of many of his works and learn more about him and the Olson family.

DAMARISCOTTA

Along both sides of the Damariscotta River, you can see over 6,000 years worth of oyster shells piled in massive middens. There are over one million cubic feet of shells piled up - some of the heaps are 30 feet high, left from early Native Americans. Researchers think that they must have had to eat 35 million bushels of oysters over time to create these middens! Today the abundant oyster population that once grew in the river no longer exists, so local oyster farmers use aquaculture to harvest them. The best spot for viewing is the Glidden Midden, which is right off of Glidden Road in Damariscotta. There are pretty walking trails along the river, and the middens are a unique place for a picnic lunch so long as you don't leave any garbage.

EDGECOMB

Right down the road from our resort is the "Marie Antoinette House," which has an incredibly interesting history attached to it, according to local legend and documents found in the house's attic. During the French Revolution, after Louis XVII was executed, Marie Antoinette was imprisoned and awaiting her own execution in Paris, where Captain Stephen Clough, of Wiscasset, often conducted shipping business. A frequent visitor to France and disgusted with the results of the French Revolution, Clough was sympathetic of the Queen's situation, so he and others supposedly devised a plan to smuggle Marie Antoinette onto his sloop, *Sally*. Captain Clough's wife was preparing their home in Wiscasset to house the Queen. Unfortunately the house would never receive its royal guest. Many of the queen's possessions were loaded onto the *Sally*, including vases, clocks, tapestries and six royal Persian cats. Ultimately, there was a sudden outburst of violence when it turned out that their plan had been discovered. Captain Clough had to make sail with all haste to escape repercussions for his part in the attempted rescue, so with him went the Queen's possessions and the six longhaired cats still in his care. It is assumed by many that the queen's cats bred with American cats, resulting in the origin of the famous "Maine Coon Cat," known to be a large, rugged cat with a water-resistant, longhaired coat and a hardy constitution, and of course, the tell-tale "M" on its forehead. The legend surrounding the house has also served as an explanation of several rare French antiques that have been passed around coastal Maine for generations. The details to the story are, as with any legend, inconsistent, but it is true that Clough was a supporter of the queen and did conduct business in Paris during the time of the Revolution, and his house, which originally stood on Westport Island off of Wiscasset, was moved here to Edgcomb in 1838. It is also true that a supposed piece of the robe the Queen wore at the time of her execution was found in the attic of Clough's home with an attached inscription saying, "this was taken from the dress which Queen Marie Antoinette wore at her execution, by an eye witness, Captain Stephen Clough." We may never know all the truths of this tale, but all the same it is worth a visit to the house, which is a fine example of historic architecture nonetheless.

FREEPORT

Now here's something unexpected: stop in Freeport and visit "The Desert of Maine." That's right, a desert in Maine! Technically, this 40-acre "Desert" is composed not of sand, but of silt (dried clay and soil leftover from the Ice Age), but it has the same effect as a desert, with the exception of its being located in the middle of a pine forest! The "Desert" was discovered in the 1800's when farmer William Tuttle found that, due to poor crop rotation on the property, his farm's soil was eroding into sandy patches. Eventually, the sand more or less swallowed the farm and Tuttle's family abandoned it; the property was later purchased in 1919 for only \$300 by Henry Goldrup, who proved that one man's disaster is another man's gold-mine by opening the site as a tourist attraction which today receives 30,000 visitors a year! Bring the whole family along, because there are narrated coach tours of the property, gem-stone hunts for the kids, nature trails, a 1783 barn museum with antique tools, and a collection of sand from all around the world.

OWL'S HEAD

In Owl's Head, outside of Rockland/Thomaston, stop at the Owl's Head Transportation Museum, which features collections of transportation history dating back to the 1800's. There are examples of early carriages, boats, automobiles, aircraft, bicycles and motorcycles. Also on display are working replicas of George Cayley's 1804 glider, the first man-made machine to fly, and the Wright Brothers' Kitty Hawk Flyer from 1903. This fun museum is sure to be a hit with the kids.

SCARBOROUGH

This one is for all those with a sweet tooth - a life-sized moose, sculpted entirely of chocolate -- that's a lot of chocolate -- is housed at Scarborough's Len Libby Candies, a specialty gift & candy shop. "Lenny" was sculpted from 1,700 pounds of milk chocolate. Keep in mind that Lenny is fenced in so if you're craving something sweet, you'll just have to go in and buy some of their famously delicious handmade candies!

WALDOBORO

No trip to Maine is complete without a visit to the famous Moody's Diner! Right off of Route 1 in Waldoboro, Moody's has been a Maine classic since 1927. They serve family favorites, everything from roast turkey dinners to hamburgers & fries, and their home-baked desserts are to die for! Moody's is treasured by locals and visitors alike, so keep in mind that there is sometimes a wait to be seated. Also a fun stop in Waldoboro is Fawcett's Antique Toy Museum, where you can view vintage comic art and antique toys dating back to the 1930s. Well-behaved children are welcome. ☺

YARMOUTH

Off of Route 295, DeLorme Map's "Eartha," is a 3-dimensional scale model of earth with mountains and landforms in full 3-D that revolves to simulate the earth's real movements. Eartha was given the title of "World's Largest Revolving Globe" in the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1999. It measures 41.5 ft in diameter, is three stories tall, and weighs 6,000 pounds; it took two years to build and represents earth as it is seen from space.

Some other offbeat and probably totally useless Maine facts:

**About 40 millions pounds (nearly 90%) of the nation's lobster supply is caught off the coast of Maine.*

**Maine produces 99% of all the blueberries in the country.*

**Eastport, Maine, the eastern-most city in the U.S., is the first place to receive sunlight in the A.M.*

**Maine is the only state in the United States whose name has one syllable.*

**90% of the country's toothpick supply is produced in Maine.*

**You can pretty much buy or sell anything imaginable in Maine's popular "Uncle Henry's," a swap'n'sell digest that oftentimes makes for very entertaining reading when you read between the lines... here's one example: "Will swap, slightly used size-18 wedding dress, would like to trade for 357 Magnum!" Clearly the advertiser wanted to settle things without the help of divorce court...*