

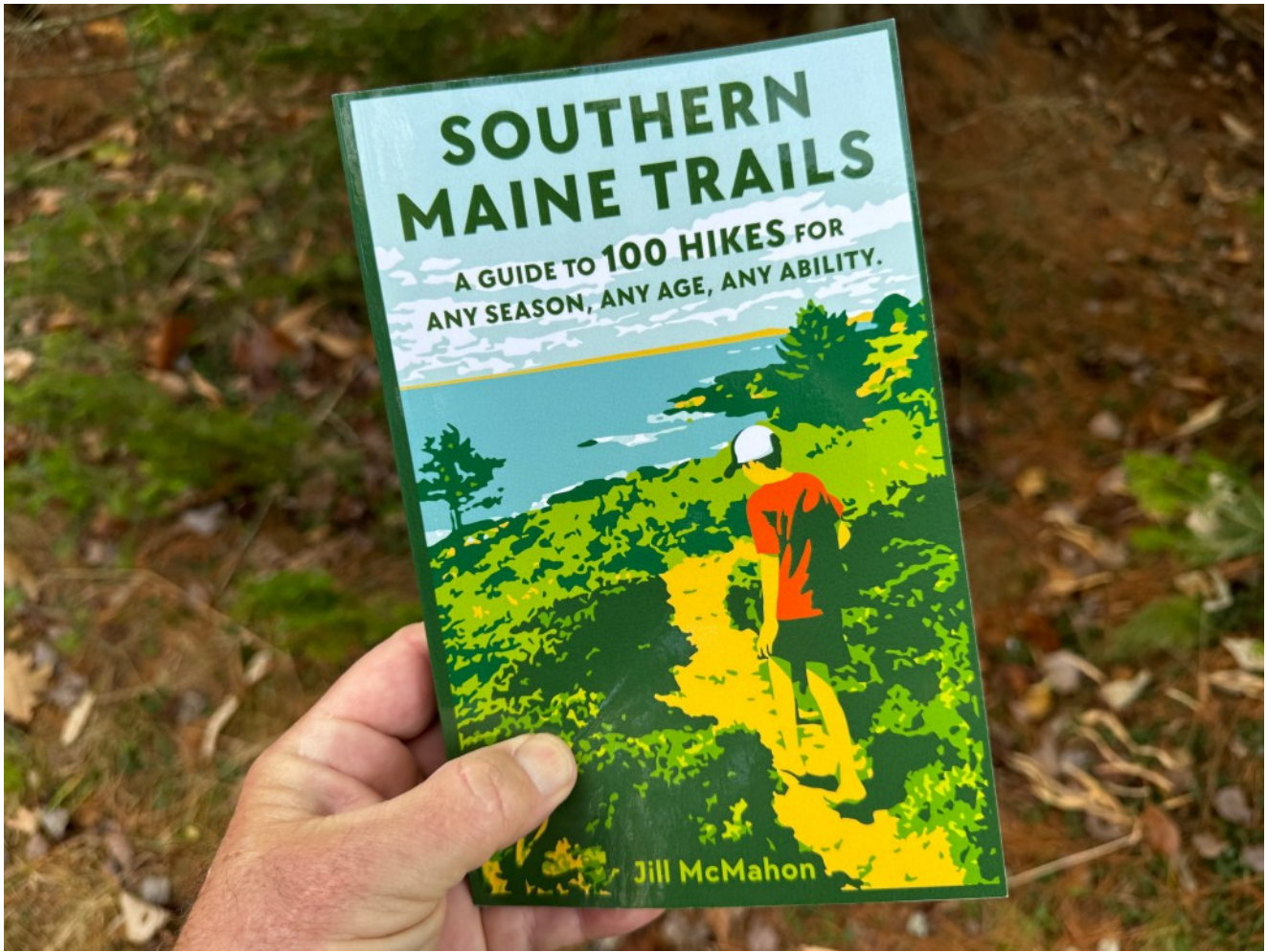
Guidebook highlights 100 wonderful places

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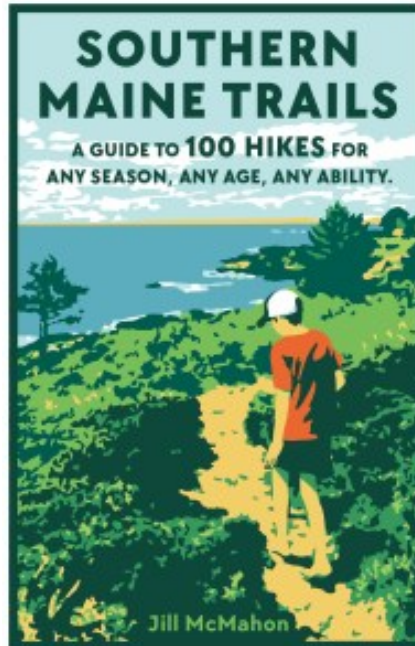




Jill McMahon of Portland is the author of *Southern Maine Trails*, which features 100 hikes for any season, age, and ability. Jill McMahon photo

Florida Lake is an oasis of tranquility just a few miles north of the hubbub of the downtown Freeport shopping district. The 167-acre, town-owned property features a large, shallow lake (it just so happens to be shaped like the state of Florida, hence the name), wetlands, woods and a figure-eight hiking loop that measures just over 3 miles.

The preserve at Florida Lake is just one of many in *Southern Maine Trails*, which features 100 wonderful saunters suitable “for any season, any age, any ability.” The colorful guide was created by Jill McMahon of Portland, and includes a wide variety of trails in 20 towns across the region ranging from Topsham to Wells and Windham to Cape Elizabeth.



From the eye-catching cover to the wealth of walking opportunities contained within its pages, Southern Maine Trails is a beautiful book. Each trail description outlines its potential uses, from hiking, of course, to mountain and fat-tire biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and more, plus whether it's wheelchair accessible and dog-friendly.

The 100 hikes are rated easy, moderate or difficult, and range from a short 0.1 miles to a healthy 10 miles in length (excepting the 22-mile long Eastern Trail). Most are loops, a few are one-way and others are a network where you can choose your distance. There's an address to find the trailhead, and the land/trail manager's name so you know who to thank.



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Four color photos are included with each hike to give you a flavor for your chosen outing. Personal anecdotes by the author about the property, its trails and history provide more enriching background. Detailed driving directions are included where warranted. Simple and concise, the guide will get you where you want to go.

McMahon hadn't done much hiking since back in her college days. But when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the spring of 2020, she needed to find a way for her and her two kids to get out of the house. That's when she challenged them to hike all 37 trails in the Portland Trails system. Then they branched out to other trails around the Greater Portland region.

“It was a great journey of discovery,” said McMahon. “I started learning more and more about the many land trusts and conservation lands available. I scoured Maine Trail Finder, land trust websites and the All Trails app for more. There are so many really special places tucked away. I was amazed by how many hikes are right here in our own backyards.”

After 20 years of not doing very much hiking, McMahon realized she had reverted to novice status in the outdoors. She admits to getting lost a lot at first, but she learned about navigation, taught herself how to use a GPS and read a trail map, and just kept plugging away. She figures that if she can do it, then anyone can do it, and do so safely.

At the end of a year’s time, McMahon had completed 100 hikes. During this period, she also established the Outdoor Movement Project website (www.outdoormovementproject.com), wrote regular blog posts to share her hiking experiences, and produced a weekly email newsletter.

What to do with all this info, McMahon wondered. That’s when the book was born. It took another year to compile and write the guide. Then she hired a graphic designer who did the layout and got the work published. Quite by accident, the book appeared in print on Earth Day three years ago, a fitting conclusion to an exciting and worthwhile project.

“This book is truly for everybody, kids and parents, anyone who loves to hike, a lunchtime trails get-out-and-go kind of book,” said McMahon. “This is a general guide to the trails we explored. I am not a cartographer, forest ranger or Maine Guide. I am a person who loves the outdoors, adventure, writing, and quality time on trails with friends and family.”

Some of McMahon’s favorite trails (“must-do’s,” she calls them) include Mill Brook Preserve in Westbrook, Crystal Spring Farm in Brunswick, Freeport’s Florida Lake Loop, and Spear Hill Trail/Broad Cove Preserve in Cumberland. Hike all 100 trails, though, and you’ll have covered a remarkable 266 miles, all told. Wow!

Carey Kish of Mount Desert Island is the author of Beer Hiking New England, AMC’s Best Day Hikes Along the Maine Coast and the AMC Maine Mountain Guide. Follow more of Carey’s hiking adventures on Facebook and Instagram.

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