

# ***An introduction to the Georges River Scenic Byway***

– Tom Abisalih, © June, 2022

Many of us enjoy the beauty of the St. George River watershed in a number of ways, perhaps sailing the river between Thomaston and its mouth where it empties into Muscongus Bay, or maybe paddling a canoe or kayak on the river above the tide. Fishing the river is always an enjoyable way to spend a couple of quiet hours, too. Of course, landlubbers too have a lot to like about the watershed as the Georges River Land Trust maintains more than 70 miles of trails and 4,000 acres of preserves along the full length of the river from Quigg Island near its source in Liberty to the Pleasant Point Nature Preserve near the mouth of the river in Cushing. There's even public art on view at the Langlais Art Preserve, also in Cushing.

One of my favorite pastimes in the watershed is to explore the area on my motorcycle, and my favorite route is to follow the Georges River Scenic Byway. Running between the source of the river in Liberty and the mouth of the river in Port Clyde, this approximately 50-mile route offers just about anything a motorcyclist could ask for, both on and off the bike. Good coffee, ice cream, hearty breakfasts, satisfying lunches, fine dinners? Check. Lighthouses, maritime history, American history? Check. Craft beers and locally made wines? Check. Scenic vistas, twisty roads, plenty of opportunity to fuel up and stretch your legs? Also check. You name it and I'll bet you can find it along the Scenic Byway, or not too far from it. "Ride along" with me as we head upriver along the Byway and I point out just a few of the attractions along the way.

Today's ride starts on a brisk and clear spring morning in the village of Port Clyde, near the tip of the St. George peninsula. Here's where, if you're so inclined, you can take the Monhegan Boat Line "mailboat" from the mainland to the picturesque fishing village and artists' colony that is Monhegan Island. Today's adventure is on land however, though no less picturesque.

After fueling up with a good hot cup of coffee and a yummy scone at Squid Ink Coffee, it's kickstands up for a quick detour to the Marshall Point Lighthouse. I'm betting by now that you've heard enough about the lighthouse's acclaimed "supporting actor" role so I won't bore you with a retelling but suffice it to say that our visitors from away always get a kick out of taking the short jog along the wooden causeway from the museum lawn to the lighthouse, recreating the famous scene. I like to come here to take in the view of the islands and to fill my lungs with the fresh sea air before I turn the bike around and start the ride inland. From the lighthouse we make our way back to the village and pick up ME SR 131 and the Georges River Scenic Byway. The Byway follows Route 131 north along the St. George peninsula through the picturesque village of Tenants Harbor then on through South Thomaston and on to US Route 1. Numerous art galleries and restaurants dot this leg of the route, offering plenty of temptation to stop and browse or perhaps sample an iconic Maine lobster roll.

As we approach Route 1 in Thomaston we see the large white Knox mansion, Montpelier, on our right. This replica of the original mansion of General Henry Knox, George Washington's Secretary of War, now houses a museum devoted to the General's life, the American Revolution, and the birth of the United States. Knox retired to Thomaston and built the original Montpelier to provide a grand home for his wife, Lucy, and for him to enjoy the quiet life of a gentleman farmer, far away from the political bustle of Philadelphia (then our nation's capital).

Continuing south along Route 1, we pass through the beehive of activity that is Thomaston's Main Street, and on our left we pass the Maine State Prison Showroom which offers a large selection of useful and decorative goods, all hand crafted by the inmates housed in Maine's correctional facilities. Ranging from the beautiful to the whimsical the quality of the craftsmanship on display and available for sale is of the finest kind.

After passing the Prison Store we also pass the Georges Highland Path, and soon turn right off Route 1, continuing to follow Route 131 north. This leg of the journey takes us further inland into Warren and past Oyster River Winegrowers and the Trolley Marsh Preserve. The scenery takes a turn away from the seafaring-oriented and more toward the agricultural, with a smattering of small industry thrown in for good measure. At ME SR 90 we turn left and follow Route 90 south for about 1/2 mile before turning right onto Western Road. We follow Western Road past the Eagles Way Preserve and Beth's Farm Market, where fresh produce is picked daily; locally raised meats and poultry, live lobsters and Cushing-raised oysters, and freshly baked treats are all available – it's impossible not to be tempted by the colorful and delicious food on display here.

We continue on Western Road and then turn right onto ME SR 235 and continue on into Union. While we're in Union, be sure to notice the (a little higher up than expected) whimsical street signs – I won't spoil the surprise by telling you what they are if you haven't noticed them yet. They never fail to put a smile on my face when I see them. As we approach the center of Union, the Byway turns left off Route 235 onto Common Road. On Friday afternoons from May to October there is a vibrant Famers Market featuring access to more than a dozen local farmers' and crafters' produce and wares. Just a little further on is the Union Fairgrounds, home of the Maine Wild Blueberry Festival in July, as well as many other activities and events, and the Matthews Museum of Maine Heritage which also features an impressive collection of Moxie memorabilia as well as Moxie related merchandise for sale.

Continuing past the fairground we take a left onto ME SR 17, then a quick right back onto Route 131 past the Pool Preserve and into Appleton, past the Fisherman's Trail, where we're treated to sweeping highland views of Sennebec Pond and a riddle: What's blue that's red when it's green? You'll find the answer at the end of this piece.

We continue on 131 into Searsmont, where the Byway turns left just as we enter the village, onto ME SR 173/Woodmans Hill Road, which we follow westerly, past the Gibson Preserve and the Porter Preserve, and on into Liberty. Be sure to slow down and take in the old time feel of Liberty's village as you pass through. In Liberty the Byway leaves Route 173 and continues onto ME SR 220 for a short stretch until the Scenic Byway reaches its northern terminus at ME SR 3. This isn't the end of our tour, however.

We leave the Byway and turn left onto Route 3 traveling west along Lake Saint George, the source of the St. George River, and through Lake Saint George State Park. Shortly after passing the park we arrive at our destination, Lake St. George Brewing Company. The craft brewery offers a number of tasty beers and ales both in cans to take along with you, and on draft to enjoy in their tap room or outdoors in their spacious rustic beer garden which boasts an inviting fire pit and plenty of seating. There's also an assortment of snacks on offer in the tap room as well as the Pinnacle Grill food truck. Although I can highly recommend all their brews, I'm particularly fond of their Headwaters Kolsch, not only for its great taste and

drinkability, but also because a portion of the sale of each can goes to supporting the GRLT. Please do stop in, sample their fine beers, and thank them for their support of our organization.

After a tasty lunch and a brief rest in the beer garden it's back on the bike for the return trip along most of the Byway, which interestingly rides quite differently in the opposite direction whence we came. On the return trip we continue along Marshall Shores Road to Stickney Road to Tower Road to Route 220. We turn left and continue north on Route 220/Pinnacle Road until we reach Route 173. At Route 173 we turn right, putting us back on the Scenic Byway, where we start to retrace our route along the Byway back to the St. George peninsula.

On our way back to Port Clyde, we stay on Routes 17 and 131, skipping the section of the Byway past the fairgrounds and Union village. We pick up the Byway again at the intersection of Routes 131 and 90, and continue south on Route 131 through Warren, Thomaston, South Thomaston, and into St. George. While passing through South Thomaston, be sure to note the Riverview Hayfields Preserve, and the sweeping views of the St. George River.

Shortly after the Fort Point Trailhead, notice ME SR 73 on the left. If we were to follow Route 73 north we'd pass through the village of Spruce Head, past Waterman's Beach, the Weskeag Headlands Preserve, and on to the Owls Head Transportation Museum, but that's a ride and a story for another day.

Today's ride takes us past Route 73 along Route 131 until we turn right onto Wallston Road. This detour off the Byway will bypass Tenants Harbor, bringing us closer to The St. George River to give us a better perspective of the river and some of its numerous coves. We continue on Wallston Road past Otis Cove where we take a right onto Turkey Cove Road. We follow Turkey Cove Road past the Meadow Brook Preserve and on to Turkey Cove. Shortly after coming into view of Turkey Cove we again turn right, onto Glenmere Road which we follow past Deep Cove and on to Route 131. We turn right yet again, back onto the Byway for a brief ride to our final destination for the day, the Dip Net Restaurant and a dockside seafood supper.

I hope you've enjoyed this brief introduction to the Georges River Scenic Byway. Although this time we took the tour by motorcycle, I can assure you that it's just as much fun by car – in fact doing it by car gives you plenty of room to bring home all those irresistible finds you picked up along the way. No matter how many times I explore the Byway, I always find something that makes me happy, my bike has ample saddlebags. Safe travels!

*Riddle answer:* Unripe or "green" wild Maine blueberries are actually red! You'll notice a number of wild blueberry barrens along our route.

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Tom Abisalih, an avid motorcyclist, is the husband of GRLT Board member Lucy Crocker Abisalih and is happy to be spending more and more time every year in the watershed, based at their summer home in Cushing.

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Attach files (?):

George's River Scenic Byway from Marshall Point Lighthouse to Lake St George Brewing.gpx  
Lake St George Brewing to the Dip Net.gpx