



## Cold Play

### Insights from a winter day at Maine's Reid State Park

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY SHERRY BALLOU HANSON

**T**he end of land during a Maine winter can be a cruel place where January's icy wind favors no one and only tolerates those dressed in enough layers to keep out the deep, cutting chill.

New England's farthest northeastern state has countless peninsulas along its rocky coast. It's early afternoon as I drive Route 127 down the Georgetown peninsula. The road winds through evergreen forest, snaking along marshes where acres of cattails have frozen in place. Sunlight sparkles off ice in those marshes, blazing over frozen swamps where trunks of trees long dead stand sentinel. Maples and oaks rest after their rich autumn fire, their shades of red and orange and brown just memories. White birches that burst brilliant yellow in October are now lacy skeletons.

As I wind my way down the peninsula, I notice pairs of ducks feeding in shallow open waters along the edges of tidal bays. Deer abound, and even a few moose live here. Herring gulls are ever present, though they come inland during storms, and I'll sometimes see

flocks of them resting on rooftops or in fields, all facing the same way. Storms bring howling winds and great waves that crash on the beaches and ledges, throwing off spume as they roll over.

My destination is Reid State Park at the peninsula's end. Under a bright sun, I park the Jeep and walk over a wooden bridge. I often come to the open water beach and ledges to write in my journal. The starkness and drama of Maine's rocky coast have also given birth to many a poem.

I perch on a flat slab of granite and take a photograph of Seguin Island Light; commissioned by George Washington in 1795, it's one of Maine's oldest lighthouses. Then I take out my journal. A red chipmunk skitters out of a crevice and comes right up, probably looking for a handout. I've brought nothing, for to feed the wildlife here would diminish their ability to feed themselves and lead to cruel deaths.

I see only one other person—a young man in a wheelchair who spins his way along paths that are accessible to him. The people who come here

in winter are looking not for passive entertainment but for a connection to the elements, something sadly missing from much of everyday life.

When the sun dips, I climb to the top of the cliffs in time to watch the glitter of distant surf fade. As the sun sinks farther, the edges of a long, heavy cloud just offshore light up in shades of copper and gold.

My hands are cold now. As I put away my journal, I reflect on winter's stark beauty. A visitor might think everything dead, but this is an illusion. Maine's maples and oaks may be bare, but spruce and white pine trees are rich with new growth and the hemlocks hang heavy with cones. Spruce, fir, and white and red pine prevail, sheltering animals from the worst of winter's storms.

Winter is long, but underneath the darkness and ice at Reid State Park lie the seeds of rebirth. With the bright-blue fire of spring and the sun's warmth, I, too, am reborn and inspired to create new work. ❄️