

## WILDERNESS PARTNERS

*Buzz Caverly and Baxter State Park*

by Phyllis Austin

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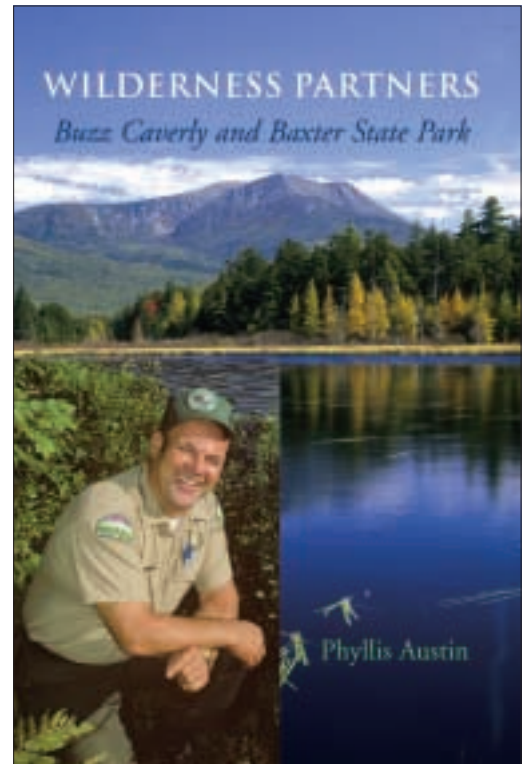
“Phyllis Austin, a legendary reporter in Maine, brings all her skills to the task she has set for herself, showing how a remarkable man defended and preserved over more than four decades one of America’s great wilderness enclaves. She aptly celebrates the sweep and boldness of a rare achievement. But the fascination for this reader lies in the nitty-gritty revealed here: the daily crises and irritations, acts of heroism and pettiness, political and bureaucratic maneuvering, that line the way as Buzz Caverly pursues his mission to keep Baxter State Park as “wild” as it can be in the give and take of modern life. As she tells this complex story, Austin's own deep passion for Katahdin’s rugged landscape is everywhere apparent.” —Frank Graham, Jr., Field Editor, *Audubon*

“Every New Englander knows about that giant Katahdin, and every Mainer knows the story of Percival Baxter and his generosity. But now we have a new giant to learn about, Buzz Caverly, whose inspiring story is intertwined with that of the park he loved.”

—Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy*

**B**uzz Caverly first joined the ranger staff at Baxter State Park in 1960, when the new park was just taking shape under the direction of Helon Taylor and the park’s donor, Percival Baxter, who wished the park to be “forever wild.” Buzz’s legendary career in the park—one of the most unusual wilderness areas in the nation—culminated when he became park director in 1981. Over the years he saw tremendous changes in attitude about land conservation, public access, and park management. From the “Wild West” days of the 1960s to the intensely managed years of the 1990s and beyond, the clash of personalities and politics is entertaining and inspiring, and reveals the minefield of people and issues Buzz had to negotiate to save the park’s wilderness character.

When Percy Baxter first met Buzz Caverly, he had no idea that this young ranger from Cornville would become his strongest advocate in keeping the park “forever wild.” But by the time



Buzz retired in 2005, a visitor to the park was guaranteed a much more authentic experience of “forever wild” than Buzz himself encountered when he became a ranger in the just-developing park of 1960. The once-plundered forest had recovered from its worst abuses and was moving toward the original undisturbed forest that Thoreau passed through in 1846 on his way to Katahdin. Vehicle access was limited, garbage dumps were gone, and buses and RVs were banned. Unessential buildings had been removed and facilities concentrated to minimize human impacts. Coyotes had returned on their own. The state-endangered American pipit, Roaring Brook mayfly, the northern bog lemming, and the Katahdin arctic butterfly were better protected. The park’s innermost wilderness sanctum—the Klondike—remained trail-free and safe from all but intrepid bushwhackers. Scientific research was restricted to only those projects that would not harm the park’s resources. Buzz’s list of goals, whether increasing protection for wildlife or decreasing the amount of development inside the park, was always framed and informed by his understanding of Percival Baxter’s vision.

Baxter Park attracts more than 60,000 visitors a year because it is a premier wild place unlike any other in New England—and, in some respects, the whole country. Buzz Caverly’s imprint is everywhere in the park—the land, the mountains, the roads, the campgrounds, the trails, the flora and fauna, and the people who oversee the daily life of the place. Buzz knew in his heart what he wanted to accomplish—defending and enhancing the park’s wilderness character. In the minds of Buzz’s many admirers across the country, he is a rare kind of wilderness hero.



By the time Buzz Caverly left the park as director in 2005, Phyllis Austin had been reporting on park politics and controversies for thirty-five years, first for the Associated Press and then for the statewide weekly, *Maine Times*. A professional journalist whose focus has been on environmental issues for many years, Phyllis has written for numerous national, regional, and state newspapers and magazines and is a past recipient of two honored fellowships: the John Knight Fellowship at Stanford University and the Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship.

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