



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**Saint John  
Valley  
Heritage Trail**  
*Maine*



## Saint John Valley Heritage Trail

Maine

*History seems to appear around every corner in Fort Kent and Saint Francis for travelers getting underway on the Saint John*



History seems to appear around every corner in Fort Kent and Saint Francis for travelers getting underway on the Saint John Valley Heritage Trail. The gravel trail rolls along the south bank of the Saint John River for nearly 17 miles between the two towns and offers clear views of forests and farmland across the river in New Brunswick. It's used primarily by mountain bikers, ATV riders, and snowmobilers who can connect to more than a thousand miles of off-roading on Maine's Interconnected Trail System. (In the winter, snowshoeing and dogsledding are also permitted.)

The trail traces the former Fish River Railroad, which opened in 1902 and was sold a year later to the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad (BAR). The old Fish River Railroad Station, taken over by BAR, remained in operation until

1979 on Market Street about 0.8 mile north of the trailhead. It's now a museum open during the summer and run by the Fort Kent Historical Society.

Beginning on Market Street in Fort Kent, the trail immediately crosses the Fish River, a tributary of the Saint John River. Leaving the trail at the first cross street (Aroostook Road) with a wide shoulder and sidewalk, you can visit the Fort Kent State Historic Site 0.6 mile north. The wooden blockhouse is the only remaining fortification of the Aroostook War, also known as the Pork and Beans War, which took place in 1838–39. Diplomats settled the border dispute between Canada and the United States before battles broke out, although militias were mustered throughout the region.

Back on the trail, watch for road crossings and spurs that lead to restaurants, service stations, and other businesses. When you stop, you may overhear a local dialect of French spoken in stores and cafés. Descendants of French colonists settled all along the Saint John River Valley in the 1700s after the British government deported them from Acadia for refusing to support the crown. The families and Acadian culture survive to this day.

Beyond town, the trail follows the Saint John River through forests and wetlands. Although the trail parallels ME 161 for several miles, the mixed forest remains quiet and serene. The trail crosses to the north side of ME 161 at mile 8.2 in Wheelock and rolls along the riverbank, offering the best views of villages and farms in New Brunswick. About 4 miles later, the trail again crosses SR 161, passing behind homes and shops.

About 0.25 mile from the trail's end on Sunset Drive in Saint Francis, you'll pass a 1904 vintage railroad turntable that local high school students restored for the Saint Francis Historical Society Museum. A path leads from the turntable to the museum on SR 161/Main Street (across the street from the



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**States:** Maine

**Counties:** Aroostook

Length: 16.9miles

**Trail end points:** Market St./SR 161 btwn W. Market St. & N. Perley Brook Rd (Fort Kent) to Sunset Dr. south of Main St./SR 161 (Saint Francis)

**Trail surfaces:** Crushed Stone

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** ATV, Fishing, Horseback Riding, Mountain

## Parking & Trail Access

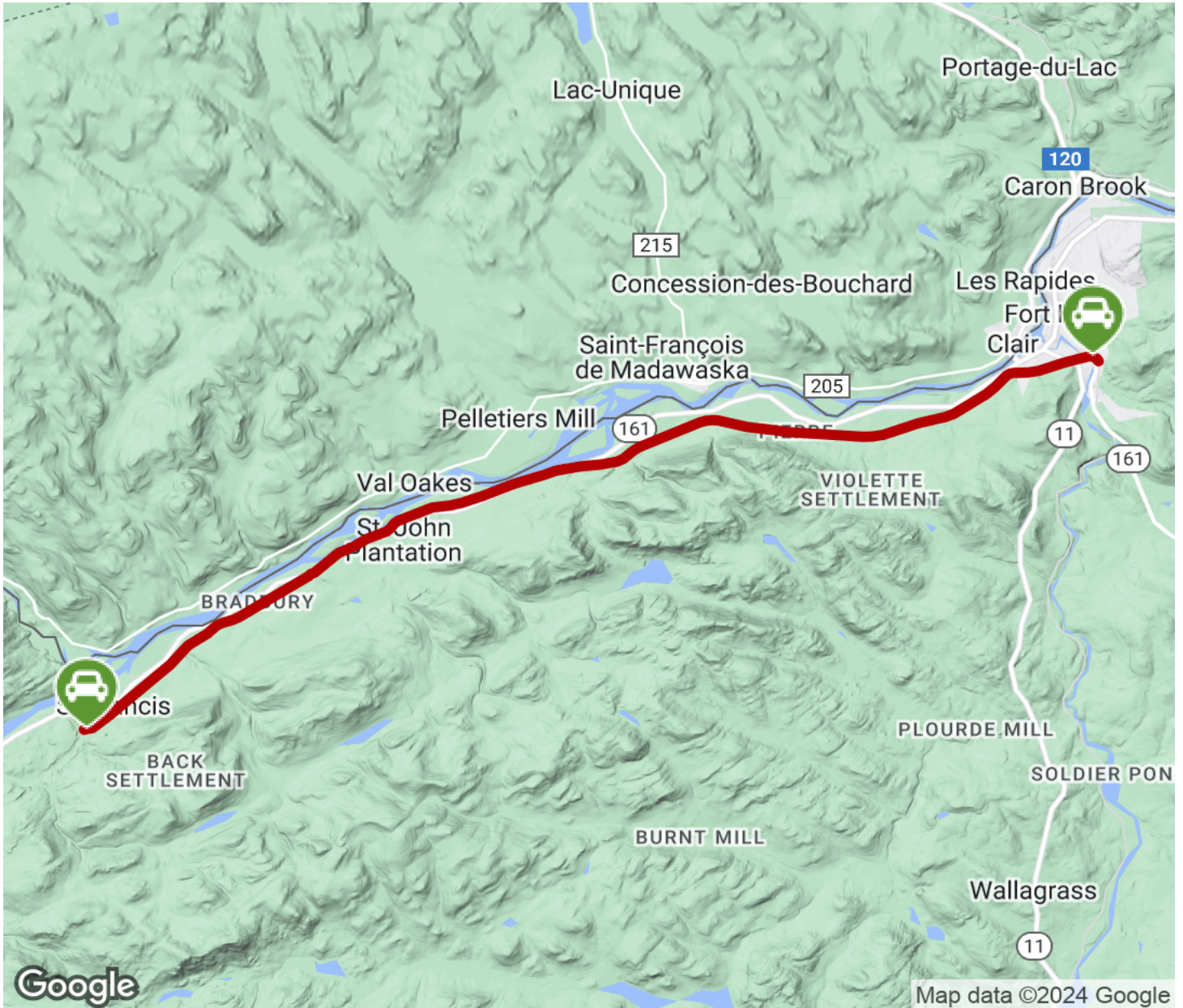
To reach the trailhead in Fort Kent from I-95, take Exit 302 onto US 1 heading north. Go 26.4 miles north on US 1, and turn left to remain on US 1 in Mars Hill. Go another 27.7 miles, and in Caribou, bear right onto SR 161. Go 3.6 miles, turn right to stay on SR 161, and then go 39.4 miles to Fort Kent. Look for parking on the left side of ME 161/Market St. just after passing a convenience store with gasoline pumps on the right.

To reach the trailhead in Saint Francis from I-95, take Exit 302 onto US 1 heading north. Go 26.4 miles north on US 1, and turn left to remain on US 1 in Mars Hill. Go another 27.7 miles, and in Caribou, bear right onto SR 161. Go 3.6 miles, and turn right to stay on SR 161. Go 40.2 miles to Fort Kent, and turn left to stay on SR 161. Go 16.9 miles, and turn left onto Sunset Dr.; look for parking on the left in 0.2 mile.



# Saint John Valley Heritage Trail

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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