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VACATION VERMONT

# Willoughby and Groton: Crown jewels of lakes

## Other great lakes

Although Lake Champlain is about 7,000 square miles smaller than Lake Ontario, the smallest of the official Great Lakes, to Vermonters it has long been our own great lake. Although many locals and tourists are aware of the opportunities for recreation on Lake Champlain, there are several other large bodies of water that are often overlooked. The three next largest have plenty to offer as well.

### ■ LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG:

The state's second largest lake stretches across the northernmost part of the state and sprawls across the border into Canada. With multiple beach accesses across the Northeast Kingdom, Memphremagog spans 6,317 acres in Vermont alone, which is only one-quarter of its total area. Like other lakes in the Kingdom, it supports an excellent assortment of trout and salmon fishing.

### ■ LAKE BOMOSEEN:

When traveling in the more southern section of the state, be sure to check out Vermont's third largest lake, located between Castleton and Hubbardton. This 2,360-acre lake has a town beach and access through Lake Bomoseen State Park. Bomoseen is known for its excellent bass fishing and hosts bass tournaments.

### ■ HARRIMAN RESERVOIR:

Even farther south than Lake Bomoseen is this 2,040-acre body of water. Beach access is in Whitingham, near the Massachusetts border. A variety of trout can be fished from its waters, as can landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, smelt and perch.

■ **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Call the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation at 241-3655.

— Mirra Shernock

By Mirra Shernock  
Free Press Correspondent

Driving through the Northeast Kingdom, it is impossible to go 10 minutes without seeing a body of water. The area boasts 37,575 acres of public lakes and ponds. These areas are largely untouched by development. Except for general stores and campgrounds, there is nothing out here but water, farmland and mountains.

"It's the last piece of paradise in the lower 48," said Darcie McCann, director of the Northeast Kingdom Chamber of Commerce. "People come here because it is one of the last places left where you can get the quintessential New England experience."

In the summer, that means lakes. For fishing, boating, water skiing, swimming and canoeing, there is no place like the Northeast Kingdom. Although the Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates there are 809 public ponds and lakes in Vermont, there is an unusual concentration in this area.

There are no figures on which lakes are the most visited or which are best for a particular activity. Director of Fisheries Tim Hess said, "We could probably 'oh-this-one' you to death."

The consensus is that Vermonters find their own favorite spots.

### Lake Willoughby

One definite local favorite is Lake Willoughby in the town of Westmore. Carved by glaciers, Willoughby lies between two peaks, Pisgah and Hor. The cliffs rise dramatically from the water, which is clear enough to see right to the bottom in the more shallow areas. This is a real treat for swimmers.

"It's magical up here," said



Photo courtesy of Chip Allen

**Lake Groton is the centerpiece of Groton State Park. It's located off Vermont 232 in southern Caledonia County.**

Ralph Allen, 23, of Northfield. "It's very mysterious because it's so deep and dark, but I still get a safe feeling from being here."

On either end of the lake are public beaches where the water is shallow enough for families. For the more adventurous, there are areas where the depth reaches 300 feet. Take Vermont 5A along the eastern shore, about a five-mile drive, and there are places where one can just park the car and jump into the water.

The area around Lake Willoughby is great for mountain biking and hiking. Peregrine falcons nest in the cliffs along the lake and paths, and other wildlife dwell along the shore. The scenery is breathtaking and like most of the Northeast Kingdom, there is little to detract from the beauty. "It's the best of both worlds because there are all the amenities but it's still largely undisturbed," McCann said.

Willoughby is also known for its fishing. The lake is one of three in the region listed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife as an area for landlocked salmon. Willoughby is best known for sur-rendering huge lake trout, according to the Department of

Fish and Wildlife. Potential swimmers should know that it is listed as a coldwater fishing area.

For more information on Lake Willoughby and any other lakes and ponds in the Northeast Kingdom, call the Northeast Kingdom Chamber of Commerce at (800) 639-6379.

### Groton State Park

South and west of Lake Willoughby, off Vermont 232 is Groton State Park, the state's largest recreational area, either publicly or privately owned. Take a dirt road through the forest to Boulder Beach on Lake Groton, a day-use recreation area.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of state parks in Vermont. As part of the celebration, all the parks opened early and is charging only 75 cents per person through June 26. Regular fees are \$2 for adults, \$1.50 for children in day-use areas. Senior citizens who present the Green Mountain Passport are admitted free. Groton is a carry-in, carry-out park. This means there is very little motor boat traffic on the lake. Except for people with private lake access, boaters can only launch what they can lift.

Jimmy Soutar, 25, a Groton State Park employee, has been working in the state parks for five years and grew up on Lake Groton. Although he has been water skiing on the lake for many years, he appreciates the quiet that comes with less boat traffic.

"To me, this lake is cleaner than other lakes. You can go swimming and the bottom is sandy, not mucky," he said.

Boulder Beach, which exists on a corner of the three-mile-long lake, has picnic tables, a snack bar and a full bathroom complex with shower facilities. These amenities were built in 1985, according to Ray McIntyre, regional ranger supervisor for the state parks in the Northeast Kingdom. This was



1. Lake Memphremagog
2. Lake Willoughby
3. Lake Champlain
4. Lake Groton
5. Lake Bomoseen
6. Harriman Reservoir



Photo courtesy of Chip Allen

**Lake Willoughby in Westmore is ideal for both swimming and fishing.**

during the time the site was chosen as the location for a Grape Nuts commercial.

Sitting by the lake, McIntyre recounted some of the other history of the area. Boulder Beach was built in the 1960s. It wasn't until the 1930s that there was even a road to this lake. "It used to be the only way you get to this area at all was by train," he said.

An estimated 100,000 people pass through the park every year. Many come to enjoy the campgrounds, swimming and fishing. Others come during the winter to use the extensive cross-country ski trails and to go snowmobiling. Fishermen can expect to find bass and perch, as well as pickerel, sunfish and bullpout.

For more information on Boulder Beach, call 584-3823.

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