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A C-54A transport departs Newfoundland on the last leg of a mail flight from England to Washington, D.C. Around midnight, over New Brunswick, they transmit a signal to Washington, giving the plane's estimated time of arrival. Nothing further is ever heard from this flight.

The 1963 Greenville B-52C
crash site as viewed
through the plane's nose



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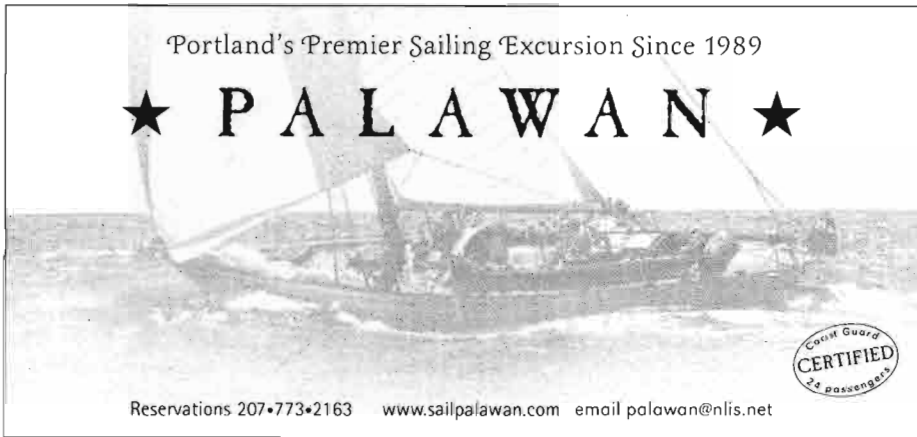
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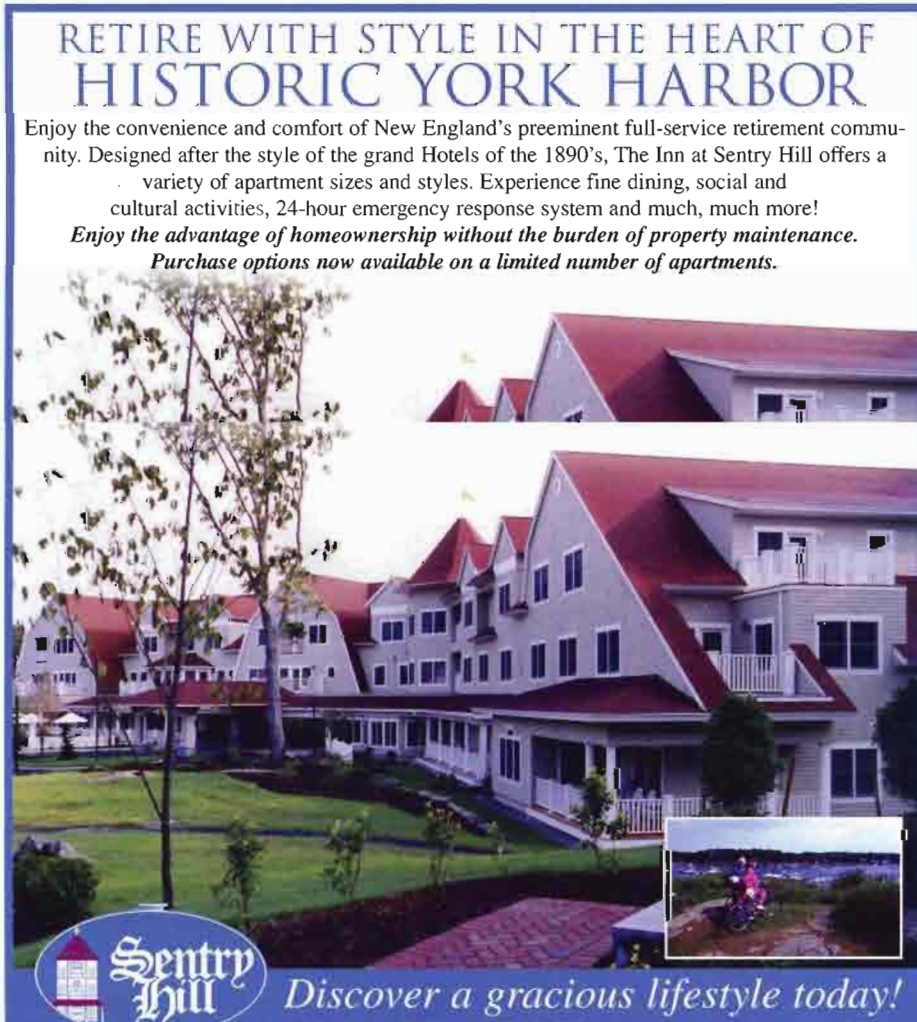

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DISCOVERY



Flags and a monument surround the fuselage of the Greenville B-52C

hike and memorial dedication, I met a local reporter who made no bones about the fact that she objected to our glorifying military aviation and was only there because she was given the assignment. After reviewing the history of the crash with maps, photos, and a model of the accident aircraft, we hiked in to the site and everyone dispersed to look over the wreckage field. I stayed behind to make a few cosmetic adjustments to the memorial before the dedication ceremony. While I was walking around gathering everyone up for the dedication, I found her sitting cross-legged near a large section of the aircraft fuselage in tears. *She got it.* She sincerely thanked me at the end of the day for our efforts to preserve this part of Maine's aviation heritage. Standing at the site, and seeing the destruction, is a very powerful experience.

The most rewarding part of these quiet observances is returning to a crash site with survivors or family members of the victims to honor their sacrifice. We receive many calls, e-mails, and letters from family members and service buddies seeking information about a mishap, and are often able to help narrow down vague details and provide detailed information about what happened and why.

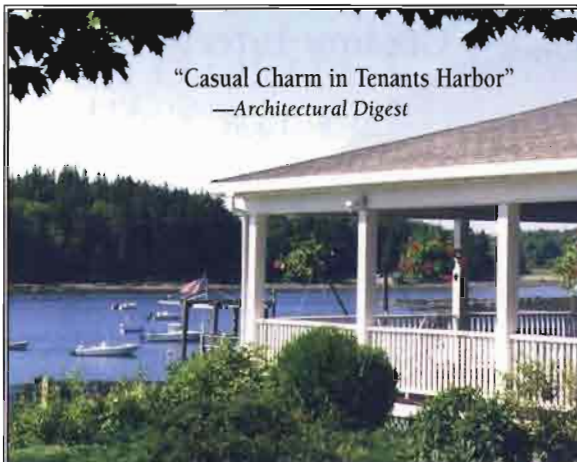
Fortunately, you do not have to spend hours in the microfilm room at a library, and days hiking through the woods to



tained by local groups or state agencies and are easily located and visited by anyone who wishes to see a powerful reminder of the price of our freedom and prosperity. Three sites are of particular interest, because they all have a fairly large amount of wreck-



Memorial at the site of the 1944 crash of a B-17G Flying Fortress near Rangeley



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age still present, they are all in areas frequented by tourists, and there are plenty of local people available to help you find the sites easily.

The Greenville B-52C

This is probably the best known of all Maine crash sites and, through the efforts of the local community, it has been preserved, is easily located, and has good trails throughout. You can drive to within 50 yards of the left-wing portion of the crash site and can tour the entire site without any strenuous hiking.

The crash site is located on the west side of Elephant Mountain. Take the Scammon Road and follow the signs along gravel logging roads. On the way, you will pass the Moosehead Riders Snowmobile Club clubhouse with one of the aircraft's eight J-57 jet engines displayed on the front lawn. The club has played an important role in the preservation of the crash site, and if the building is open, there is a nice display of artifacts from the site, along with articles, official documents, and photographs inside. Every January, around the anniversary of

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the crash, they sponsor a memorial snow-mobile ride to the site.

On the afternoon of Thursday, January 24, 1963, a crew of nine left Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts aboard a 99th Bomb Wing B-52C Stratofortress for the first Advanced Capability Radar penetration training mission to occur on the east coast. The crew was made up of seven of the elite Standardization Division personnel from the 99th and two instructors from a SAC Bomb Wing in New Mexico. After checking weather, the Poker Deck 8-3 training route in Maine was chosen over one in the Carolinas. This U-shaped route would bring the eight-engine intercontinental bomber in over Maine at 500 feet near Princeton, fly around the mountains near Greenville and Baxter State Park to simulate a low-level penetration into the Soviet Union, then climb out near Houlton.

At about 2:40 p.m., severe turbulence was encountered near Greenville and the pilot, Lt. Col. Dante Bulli, began to climb out, aborting the training mission for safety reasons. Suddenly, there was a loud bang and the plane went into a right bank from

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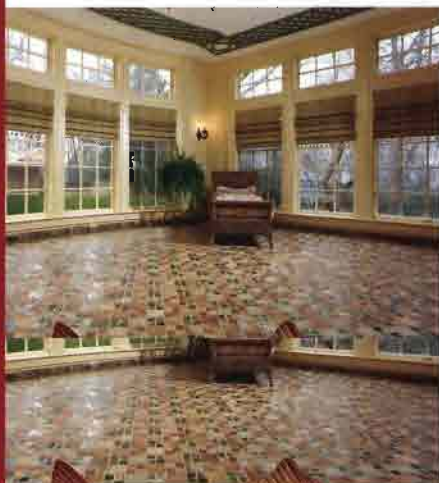
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DISCOVERY

which the pilot could not recover. Eight seconds later, the aircraft plunged into the snow-covered mountain and burst into flames. When rescuers reached the site in sub-zero temperatures the next morning, they found that only three of the nine-man crew had ejected and only two had survived. Col. Bulli had landed in a tree and survived the night after climbing down and seeking shelter in his survival kit sleeping bag atop his life raft. Navigator Gerald Adler, flying in the Electronic Warfare Officer's upward firing ejection seat, had been shot through the treetops by the seat's rocket and tumbled in the snow, landing upright, still in his seat, without his parachute ever deploying. He survived the night by wrapping up in his parachute but later lost part of one leg to complications from frostbite.

Adler left the Air Force and pursued a successful career in law. Bulli continued flying and later returned to Maine as Deputy Wing Commander of the 42nd Bomb Wing at Loring Air Force Base.

The cause of the crash was a design flaw in this "high-tail" B-52 designed exclusively for high-altitude operation. The stresses of turbulence while flying at low altitude had caused the large vertical stabilizer to snap off the aircraft, putting it out of control. Four B-52s were lost this way, one before the Greenville crash, one a few days later in New Mexico, and one a year later in Maryland. Later models of the B-52 were designed for the low-level mission and are distinguished by their "low" squared-off tails designed for the stresses of treetop flight.

The Rangeley B-17G

This site used to require a long, hard hike and good navigation skills to visit, but the stresses of treetop flight.

The Rangeley B-17G

This site used to require a long, hard hike and good navigation skills to visit, but in recent years a gravel logging road has been constructed along the edge of the crash site and a New Hampshire group has erected a nice memorial there to the crew. It is located on the north slope of Deer Mountain, actually in the Township of Lower Cupsuptic. The road into the site is reached by traveling Route 16 near Cupsuptic Lake. Get local directions before heading in, since road conditions and new woods road construction change yearly.

Around noon on Tuesday, July 11, 1944, a four-engine B-17 Flying Fortress appeared below a 1,000-foot overcast near the village

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DISCOVERY

of Rangeley. The plane, on a cross-country navigation training mission out of Nebraska, had last contacted Grenier Field in New Hampshire by radio two hours earlier. It is believed that some time after this, the aircraft radio went out and the crew became lost. They flew around Rangeley for about an hour and a half, probably trying to find a landmark to get back on course for Dow Field in Bangor. A little after 1:30 p.m., the plane disappeared into the overcast to the north of Rangeley and was not heard from or seen again.

Two days later, a search plane spotted the crash site on Deer Mountain. The plane had struck the mountain in a banking turn and cartwheeled through the woods, disintegrating along a long narrow path. The Army Air Force's Arctic Rescue Team out of Presque Isle reached the site the following afternoon. It was quickly determined that all 10 crew on board had died in the crash.

Some of the wreckage was later buried during a logging operation, but a hike through the woods will reveal scattered pieces of the large aircraft of a type that played such an important role in the war in Europe.

The Baxter Park C-54A

Late on the evening of Monday, June 20, 1944, a four-engine C-54A transport departed Stephenville, Newfoundland, on the last leg of a mail flight from England to Washington, D.C. Around midnight, the plane reported by radio to Presque Isle Army Air Field that they were over the Moncton, New Brunswick, radio range station. Shortly after, the radio operator transmitted a Morse code signal to Washington, giving the plane's estimated time of arrival. Nothing but silence followed this final transmission.

Two days of air search along the plane's planned route, the Blissville (New Brunswick)-to-Bangor radio airway over eastern Maine, turned up nothing. Based on infor-

Suddenly, there was a loud bang and the plane went into a right bank. Eight seconds later, the aircraft plunged into the snow-covered mountain and burst into flames.

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mation from other flights on the same night about poor radio beacon reception, thunderstorm activity, and severe winds aloft, the search area was moved further west on the third day. It was only then that the wreckage was spotted on the eastern end of the south slope of Fort Mountain near Mount Katahdin.

Four days later, the Arctic Rescue Team reached the site overland and determined that none of the seven on board had survived.

This crash site requires good physical condition and hiking skills to visit but is well worth the trip since most of the wreckage is still there and much of it is recognizable as parts of a large aircraft. The remote location and the preservation efforts of the state park have helped preserve this site as well as any in Maine.

This is an all-day hike, starting out on Baxter Park's Marston Loop Trail and traversing South and then North Brother Mountain. A trail to the crash site from North Brother, built in the 1950s, was "unofficial" and not maintained. It is now difficult to follow, and bushwhacking to Fort Mountain is required. A consultation with park staff before making this trip is highly recommended.

This site is also unique in that it is one of 11 in Maine that is literally a war grave. In the fall of 1944, long after all seven crew had been sent home and buried, hikers located a body in flight coveralls down slope from the wreckage. Though officially unidentified, there was no doubt in the Arctic Rescue Team members minds at the time that this was the body of co-pilot Disbrow Gill, whose cause of death on the flight surgeon's report was listed as "total cremation." The remains were buried in a rock pile grave near the wreckage.

There is no memorial at this site. Governor Baxter, in conveying the land to the State of Maine, asked that there be no memorials placed in the park, not even to himself.

F-84B Thunderjet Charleston

Second lieutenant Wayne Rabun was scheduled to be part of a formation of four F-84B aircraft for a radar calibration flight. Aircraft problems led to a plane switch, and by the time he got off the ground, he was too far behind schedule to participate with



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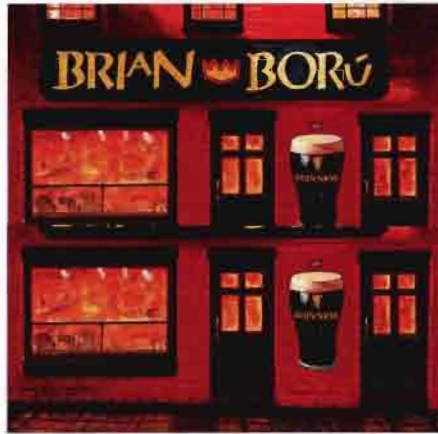
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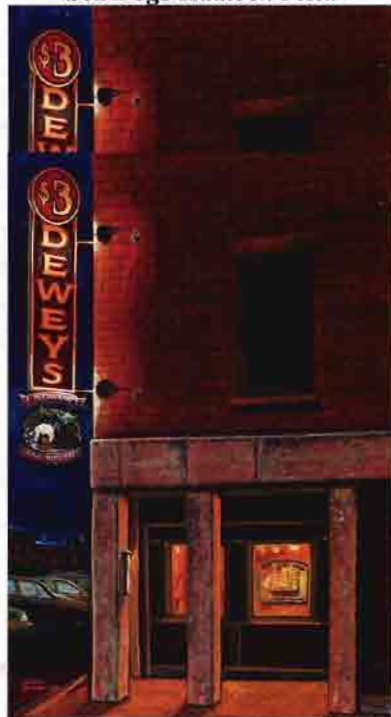


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DISCOVERY

the other three ships. His flight leader advised him to put in some local flying time near the base.

About an hour into the flight, Rabun spotted and joined up with a different three-ship formation headed back toward Dow AFB. He was on a different radio channel, so he had no contact with them and did not know their intentions.

The flight leader began a "rat race" as they neared the base, and Rabun followed as the last ship. The leader did an immelman, and the next two planes followed suit. Rabun thought they were doing a loop, so he kept going over the top. His aircraft exceeded its limiting mach and the controls locked up due to compressibility. In a high-speed dive, the aircraft was overstressed and both wings broke off.

Due to problems experienced with the F-84 ejection system, planes were flying at this time with the seats disarmed. Rabun fought and eventually opened the canopy and bailed out. The tail struck him, fracturing his arm.

The aircraft fuselage crashed and burned in a farm pasture. Rabun landed safe but injured nearby. The wings were not located during the crash investigation.

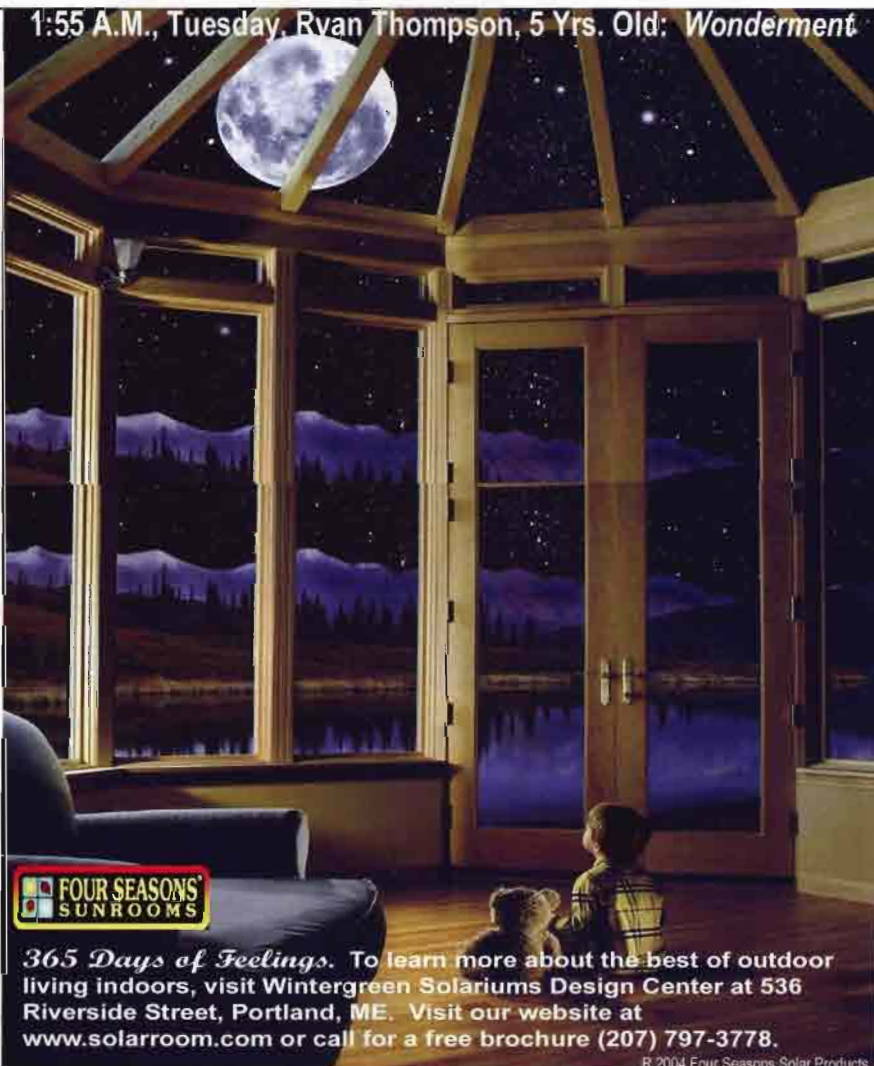
In the summer of 2000, I was contacted by a landowner, through Turkeys Unlimited, to identify some aircraft wreckage on his property. I originally thought this would turn out to be a USMC F4U Corsair that crashed in the area, but the location did not match up well. The F-84 was a second guess. The wreckage turned out to be the wings and canopy that broke from the plane and landed in a wooded area some distance from the documented crash site.

It was easy to identify the starboard wing. Markings were still visible after 50 years exposure to the elements. Following crash-site courtesy, all wreckage was returned to original positions so that bottom-side markings stay preserved.

At the site, we also discovered a section of fuselage skin with part of the canopy

A word about the etiquette and ethics of visiting a crash site. These sites are memorials to those who died serving their country and should be granted the same respect as memorials located in more urban settings. If you turn over a piece and find some interesting markings, be sure to put it back face down to reduce the effects of weather and time on the markings. Remember, some Maine crash sites are literally war graves. So visit, reflect and enjoy, but let future generations do the same.

1:55 A.M., Tuesday, Ryan Thompson, 5 Yrs. Old: *Wonderment*



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release mechanism attached. Lt. Rabun told the first area residents on the scene that he remembered pounding on the canopy, the shock of his chute opening, waking up on the ground. He had no recollection of leaving the aircraft or being struck by the tail.

B-25, near Perham

This B-25 Mitchell bomber was one of a flight of eight deploying to the European Theatre of Operations through Presque Isle AAF, with the next destination Gander, Newfoundland. Shortly after takeoff, it was learned that while the ceiling over the field was above the acceptable minimum, the entire surrounding area was not, so the aircraft were recalled.

One plane disappeared but later landed in Gander safely. Six landed back at Presque Isle. This aircraft, the eighth, was witnessed by a farmer to come out of the ceiling in a steep dive and crash into a remote swamp, killing the crew of seven. The tail section had sheared off and landed a quarter of a mile from the point of impact. Loss of control due to disorientation was listed as the probable cause by the inquiry board.

A second B-25 crashed nearby later that day, killing another seven-man crew.

Two German sympathizers were later arrested for tampering with a B-17 at the Presque Isle base, leading to a theory that these two Mitchells were the victims of sabotage.

As many American aircrew died in training accidents stateside in World War II as died in combat. These fliers, and those who followed in the Cold War, were young, earnest, and serving their country with honor when their lives were cut short by sudden catastrophic events. Standing at the site of one of these mishaps seems a strange pastime for an amateur historian, but it is an honor when their lives were cut short by sudden catastrophic events. Standing at the site of one of these mishaps seems a strange pastime for an amateur historian, but it is an important part of telling their stories for future generations. Standing among the wreckage and reflecting on the events, the crew, and the families left behind will give you a new perspective on the lesson that freedom isn't free.

Peter Noddin is a safety professional in the insurance loss control field and lives in Edwary, Maine. He is the current president of the Maine Aviation Historical Society and an avid amateur aviation archaeologist. He maintains the Maine Aviation Archaeology website at www.geocities.com/petef86a/.



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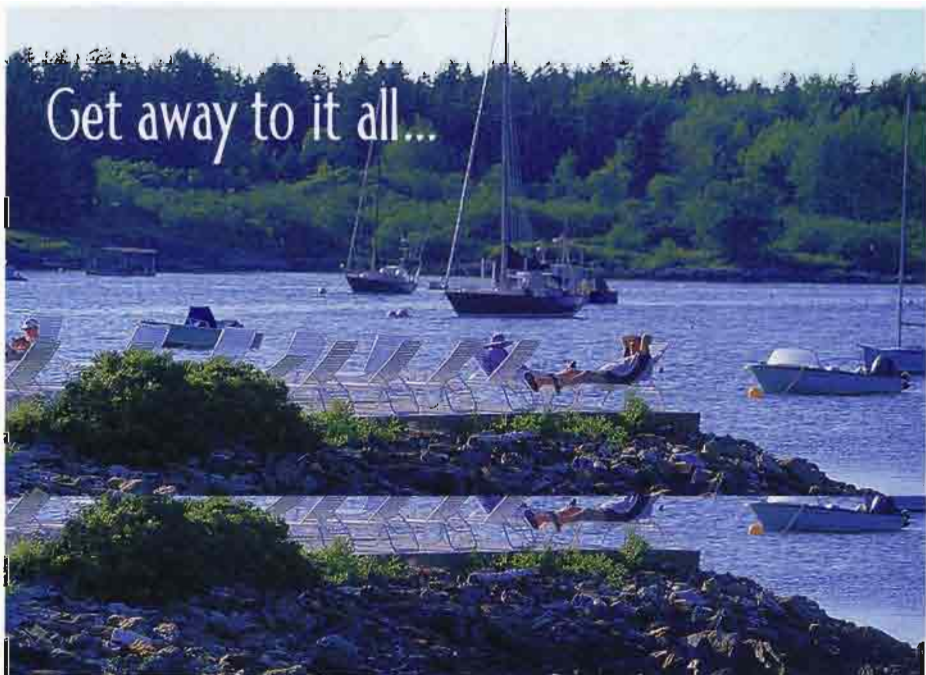
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