



BEST OF THE EAST

As the leaves change and the temperature drops, THE NORTHEAST TRUMPS THE WEST IN THE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SWEEPSTAKES. A guide to some of the fall classics. by ABRAHAM STREEP

CLIMB CATHEDRAL LEDGE

NORTH CONWAY, NH

Think of Cathedral Ledge as the Double-day Field of rock climbing. In 1931, before anyone had set hand or foot on El Capitan's crags, climbing pioneer Robert Underhill made a daring first ascent of New Hampshire's 500-foot granite wall, helping put his fledgling sport on the map. More than 75 years later the face remains unchanged, and North Conway still reigns as New England's top climbing town. "The granite's as hard

as any in the world, full of big roofs with long cracks and absolutely no loose rock," says guide and pro climber Mark Synnott, who's been climbing the region for more than 20 years. In addition to Cathedral, the surrounding White Mountains are full of notches with more than 50 climbable faces, so no one in the diehard community gets bored. "This morning I climbed a cliff in Franconia Notch that I'd never tried before," says Synnott. But don't come to town looking to bolt new routes; the area's famous for traditional climbing, and the locals, who range from scruffy college grads to weather-beaten 70-year-olds, like to keep the rock face the way

Underhill found it. Autumn is the best time to go. There are fewer climbers around, the buggy summer is long gone, and the view's not bad either. Just ask the leaf peepers who gather in flocks at the top of Cathedral to take in Mount Washington Valley. "When you pull yourself over the lip of the cliff after the final pitch, you pop up in front of the tourists," says Synnott. "Their typical reaction is, 'Holy shit! Where'd you come from?'"

GET THERE: For beginner lessons go with Eastern Mountain Sports Climbing School (\$250; emsclimb.com). To explore less-populated notches in the valley, tap Synnott (\$220; newhampshireclimbing.com).

NOTEBOOK



HIKE THE GREAT RANGE

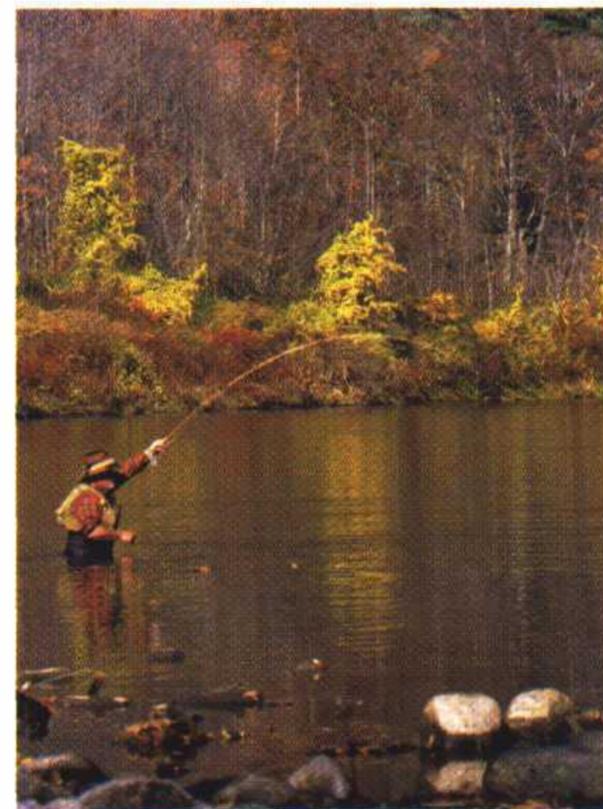
KEENE VALLEY, NY



There are two ways to tackle the Northeast's most spectacular hike, the Great Range of the Adirondacks. The most reasonable method is to park in Keene Valley, hike four-plus miles to the Bushnell Falls lean-to, and set up camp. The next morning, climb New York's highest peak, Mount Marcy — gaining some 2,300 feet in elevation on your trip to the windy summit — before hiking Haystack, Basin, and Saddleback. The next day hike Gothics, Armstrong,

Upper Wolf Jaw, and Lower Wolf Jaw. "You're exposed to the elements, hiking the ridge above tree line," says Wes Lampman, director of field programs for the Adirondack Mountain Club. "You have a 360-degree view of the highest peaks in the Adirondacks." The other way to take on the Great Range? Fill your pack with PowerBars, leave before sunrise, and do the whole thing — all 25 miles and eight peaks — in one fell swoop, starting with Lower Wolf Jaw and ending at Marcy's 5,344-foot peak. Then curl into the fetal position and roll down the mountain.

GET THERE: Crash at Johns Brook Lodge, the only full-service backcountry lodge in the high peaks (adk.org).



FISH THE HOUSATONIC

CORNWALL BRIDGE, CT



There's a six-mile stretch of freestone river in northwestern Connecticut that, come October, rivals any trout stream in Montana. The cool weather brings a frenzied blue-winged olive hatch to the river, and thousands of brown and rainbow trout rise to the surface to sip flies from morning till night. Because the six-mile stretch above Cornwall Bridge is entirely catch and release, the biggest fish have been lurking, and growing, for years, and this fall promises to be the best season in recent history. The state Department of Environmental Protection has banned trout-killing controlled releases from an upstream dam, restoring the river to a natural-flowing state. "I've been fishing this river for 25 years," says Moe Booth, manager of the Housatonic Meadows Fly Shop, "and I've never seen more five-pound fish." Most anglers park at Housatonic Meadows State Park and fish the deep holes above Cornwall Bridge. The current is slow, wading is easy, and the fish are swimming, but you'll be shoulder to shoulder with the next guy. Head upstream to Turnip Island, where the river forks, and wade through fast, hip-high water to the far bank. It's there, in the slow eddies under overhanging trees, that you'll find the trout fins swirling.

GET THERE: Float the river with the Housatonic Meadows Fly Shop (\$350; flyfishct.com). Stay in a private cabin at the Breadloaf Mountain Lodge out back (\$295).

RIDE THE KINGDOM TRAILS

EAST BURKE, VT



Vermont's Northeast Kingdom has long been a haven for an oddball mix of loggers, hippies, and ski bums. But the region is undergoing a face-lift courtesy of the rapidly growing mountain-biking commune of East Burke. In the 1980s a few local riders started to bike logging roads in the surrounding wilderness. By 1994 they'd formed the nonprofit Kingdom Trails Association to coordinate with landowners and build a network of trails. Now the one-gas station village draws 300 mountain bikers to its 100-plus-mile network of trails on weekends. The lure, beyond the supportive local landowners, is a unique sandy esker that skirts the hillside town. The glacial deposit drains runoff quickly, so the trails stay dry even after heavy rains. "We're ski bums up here, so we don't like going slowly and hopping rocks," says C.J. Scott, trails coordinator for Kingdom Trails. "We make bike trails that allow us to feel like we're flying through a glade in wintertime."

GET THERE: A Kingdom Trails season membership costs \$35 (kingdomtrails.org). For rentals visit East Burke Sports, the only shop in town (eastburkesports.com).

