

The Penobscot River Paddling Trail

The Penobscot is Maine's largest river and the second largest in New England. It drains 8,570 square miles of land. The main stem, which the Penobscot River Paddling Trail covers, is just over 100 miles of mostly wild, scenic, and rural land. Bangor/Brewer is the only urban stretch of river. The Penobscot offers a combination of flatwater and whitewater, and plenty of access points for day use to long distance trips.

The original people of the Penobscot, the Wabanaki, have been here over ten thousand years. Wabanaki still own and reside on islands and shoreline property on the river. European settlers arrived 500 years ago with disease and weapons, decimating the Wabanaki tribes and occupying the land.

In the 18th century, the logging industry changed the river with dams, log jams and debris. Both Wabanaki and European Americans were river drivers. Paper mills sprang up, using water power and discharging effluent into the river. Hydroelectric dams have marked the 20th and 21st centuries, accompanied by development. Log drives ended in the 1970s. Paper mills have closed or moved away. Dams have been removed or negotiated with fish bypass or elevators by the Penobscot River Restoration Project, 1999-2016, founded by seven nonprofits and additional partners.

The river has been recovering its natural heritage, rising through higher water quality classifications, affording habitat for migratory fish to return to their ancestral spawning streams. Native sea-run fish returning include shad, alewives, short-nosed and Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic salmon. Eagle and osprey populations are also increasing, along with other riverine animal species. Wabanaki people have revived cultural heritage canoeing experiences. Fishing for bass, an introduced species, is a popular sport. Today, the Penobscot River is a river reborn, ready for your adventure. Enjoy!

For Your Safety

Use PFDs. All boats must carry an approved life jacket for each person. Use them!

Be prepared for cold water. Wear your life jacket, stay fueled and hydrated, avoid cotton, pack extra clothes in a dry bag, and know the symptoms and treatment for hypothermia.

Know the location of rapids and dams. Warning signage is not always present!

Be aware of river flows before your trip. Check USGS gages and flow forecasts online before your trip.

Etiquette Guidelines

Share the river. Give anglers a wide berth, and be efficient at busy access points.

Respect Private Lands. Please note that all islands in the Penobscot belong to the Penobscot Nation. Permission is required to land. Campsites have been established with permission of individual landowners who may withdraw the privilege if they feel it necessary

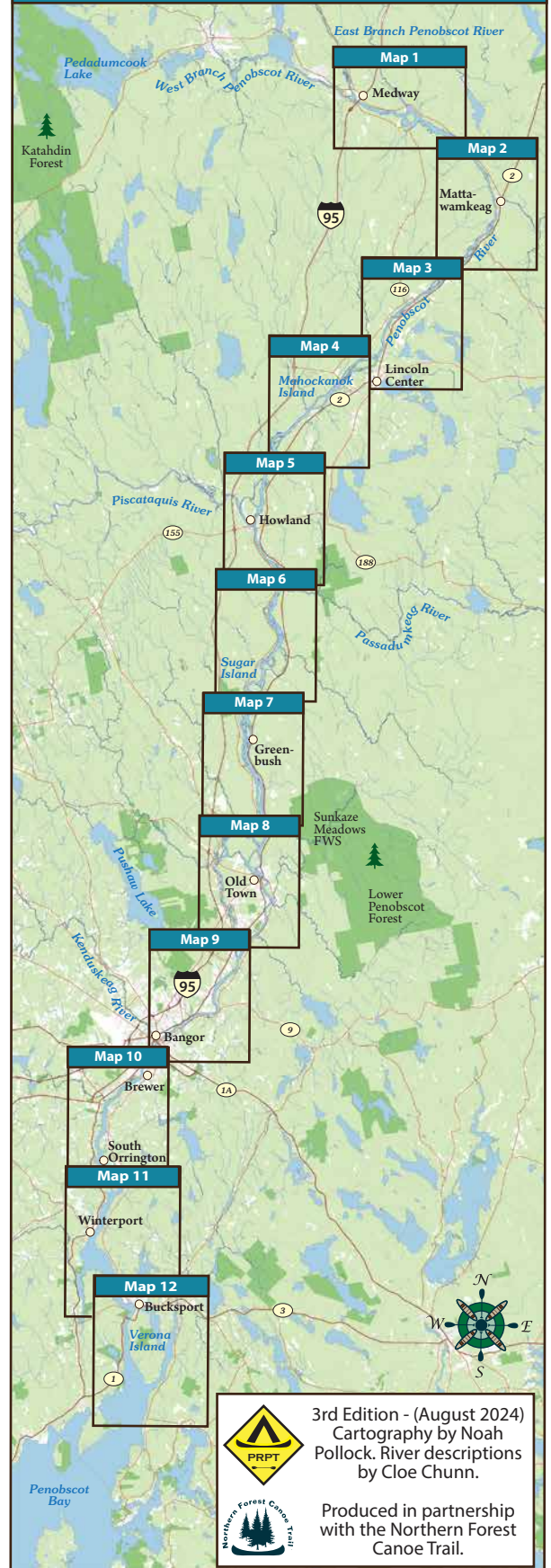
Respect wildlife. Observe wildlife from a distance, and do not disturb nesting birds or basking turtles.

Leave no trace. Carry out all trash.

Prevent the spread of invasive exotic species. Clean, drain, and dry your boats and gear thoroughly between each trip.

Use existing campsites. We depend on the goodwill of landowners.

Overview Map



3rd Edition - (August 2024)
Cartography by Noah Pollock. River descriptions by Cloe Chunn.

Produced in partnership with the Northern Forest Canoe Trail.

Map 1: Medway – Mattaseunk Dam



The **Pine Grove Campground and Cottages** (207-746-5172, pinegrovekamp@gmail.com) is an excellent place to start a river trip. This paddler friendly campground has pleasant riverside campsites and campers are welcome to leave their cars there. The four miles from the campground to Medway boat launch are flatwater.

(RM 0)* The **Medway Boat Launch** (*Niketaweyess* or *Nicatous*, Fork of two rivers) is just upstream of the confluence of the east and west branches of the Penobscot, (*Penawahpskek*, water flowing over white rocks). The paddle from Medway is all flatwater ponded by the dam, more like lake paddling. Scenic forested lands with little to no access give a wilderness feel.

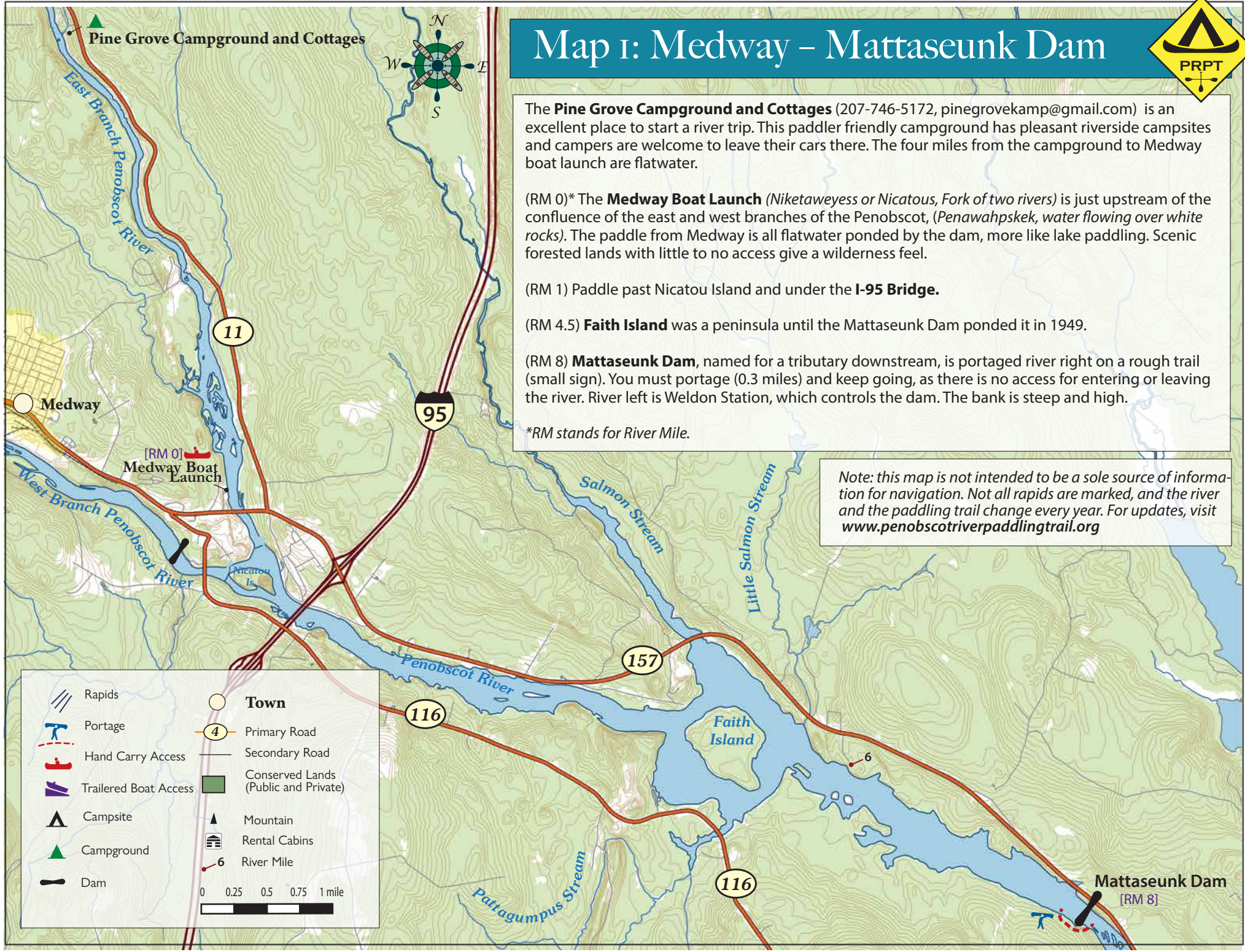
(RM 1) Paddle past Nicatou Island and under the **I-95 Bridge**.

(RM 4.5) **Faith Island** was a peninsula until the Mattaseunk Dam ponded it in 1949.

(RM 8) **Mattaseunk Dam**, named for a tributary downstream, is portaged river right on a rough trail (small sign). You must portage (0.3 miles) and keep going, as there is no access for entering or leaving the river. River left is Weldon Station, which controls the dam. The bank is steep and high.

*RM stands for River Mile.

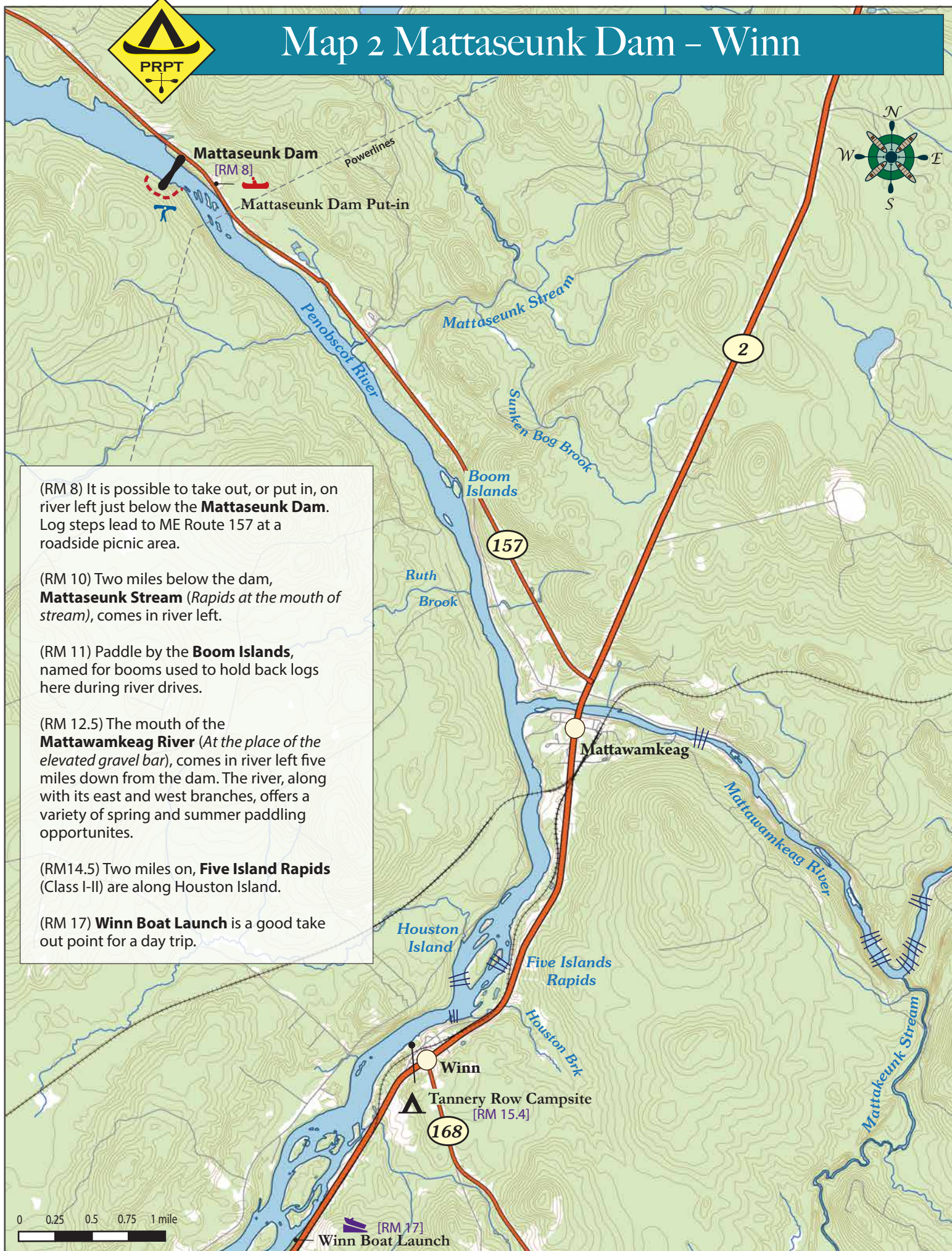
Note: this map is not intended to be a sole source of information for navigation. Not all rapids are marked, and the river and the paddling trail change every year. For updates, visit www.penobscotriverspaddlingtrail.org



	Rapids		Town
	Portage		Primary Road
	Hand Carry Access		Secondary Road
	Trailered Boat Access		Conserved Lands (Public and Private)
	Campsite		Mountain
	Campground		Rental Cabins
	Dam		River Mile

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 mile

Map 2 Mattaseunk Dam – Winn



(RM 8) It is possible to take out, or put in, on river left just below the **Mattaseunk Dam**. Log steps lead to ME Route 157 at a roadside picnic area.

(RM 10) Two miles below the dam, **Mattaseunk Stream** (*Rapids at the mouth of stream*), comes in river left.

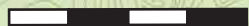
(RM 11) Paddle by the **Boom Islands**, named for booms used to hold back logs here during river drives.

(RM 12.5) The mouth of the **Mattawamkeag River** (*At the place of the elevated gravel bar*), comes in river left five miles down from the dam. The river, along with its east and west branches, offers a variety of spring and summer paddling opportunities.

(RM14.5) Two miles on, **Five Island Rapids** (Class I-II) are along Houston Island.

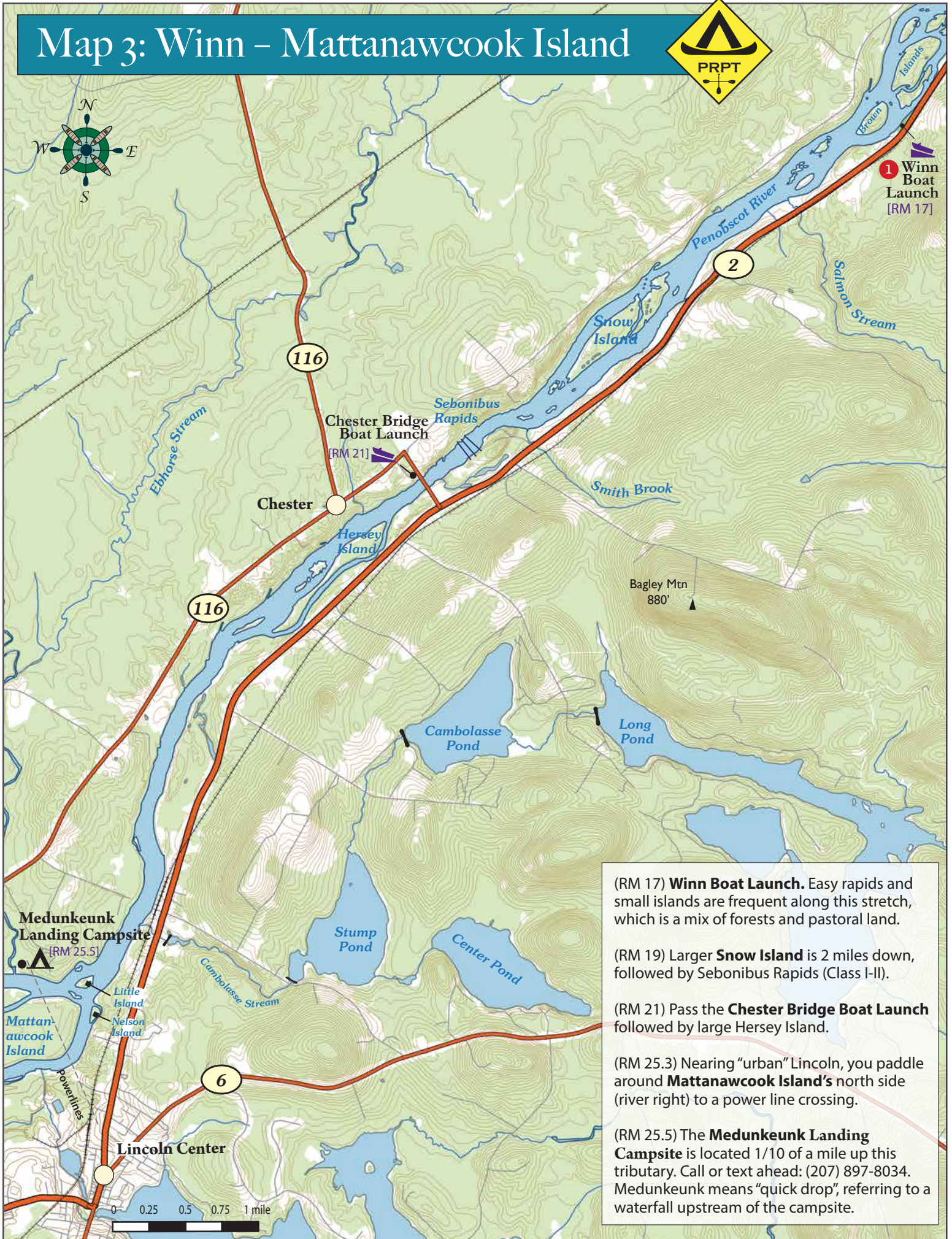
(RM 17) **Winn Boat Launch** is a good take out point for a day trip.

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 mile



[RM 17] Winn Boat Launch

Map 3: Winn – Mattanawcook Island



1 Winn Boat Launch [RM 17]

Chester Bridge Boat Launch [RM 21]

Bagley Mtn 880'

Medunkeunk Landing Campsite [RM 25.5]

Mattanawcook Island

Lincoln Center

(RM 17) **Winn Boat Launch**. Easy rapids and small islands are frequent along this stretch, which is a mix of forests and pastoral land.

(RM 19) Larger **Snow Island** is 2 miles down, followed by Sebonibus Rapids (Class I-II).

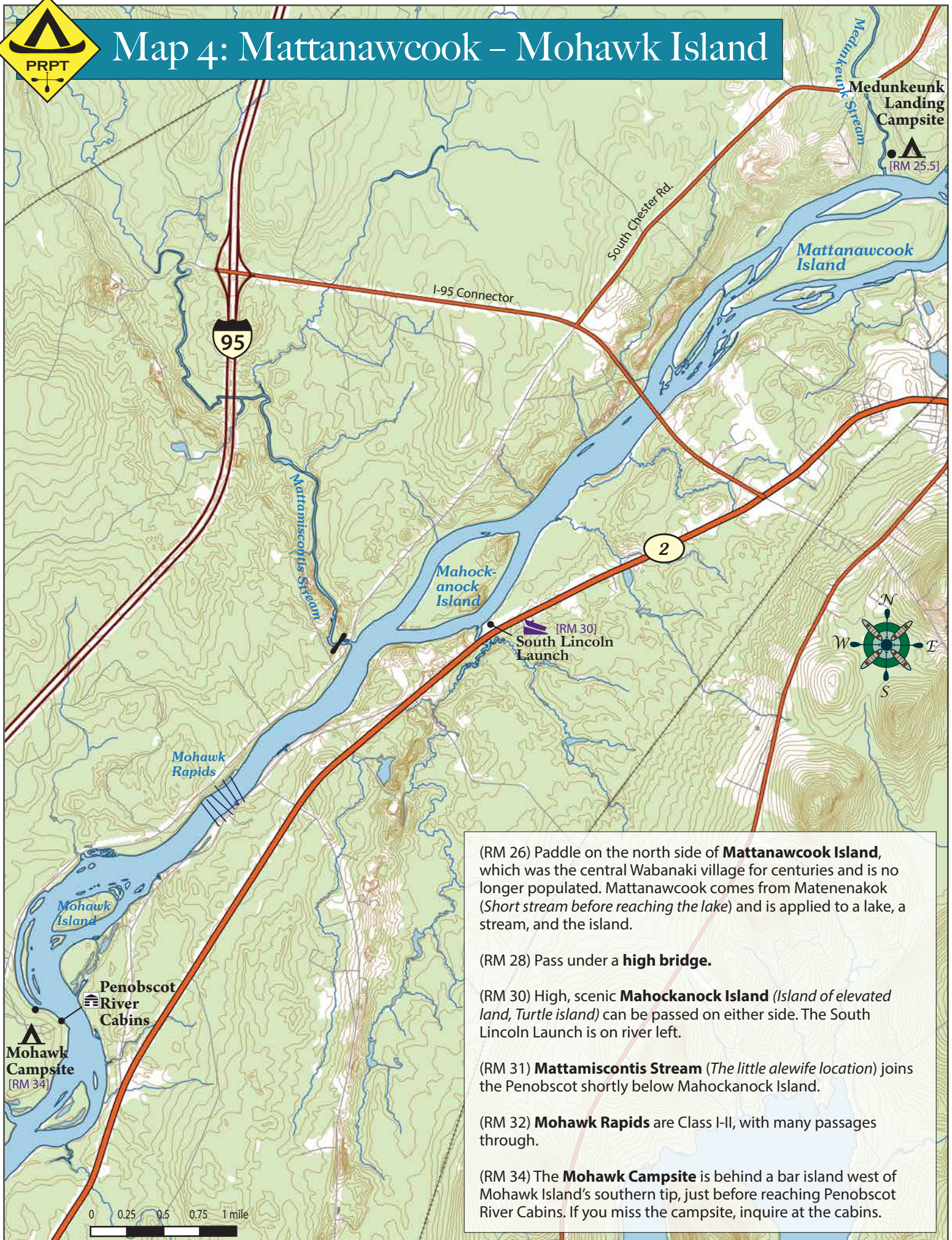
(RM 21) Pass the **Chester Bridge Boat Launch** followed by large Hersey Island.

(RM 25.3) Nearing “urban” Lincoln, you paddle around **Mattanawcook Island’s** north side (river right) to a power line crossing.

(RM 25.5) The **Medunkeunk Landing Campsite** is located 1/10 of a mile up this tributary. Call or text ahead: (207) 897-8034. Medunkeunk means “quick drop”, referring to a waterfall upstream of the campsite.



Map 4: Mattanawcook – Mohawk Island



(RM 26) Paddle on the north side of **Mattanawcook Island**, which was the central Wabanaki village for centuries and is no longer populated. Mattanawcook comes from Matenenakok (*Short stream before reaching the lake*) and is applied to a lake, a stream, and the island.

(RM 28) Pass under a **high bridge**.

(RM 30) High, scenic **Mahockanock Island** (*Island of elevated land, Turtle island*) can be passed on either side. The South Lincoln Launch is on river left.

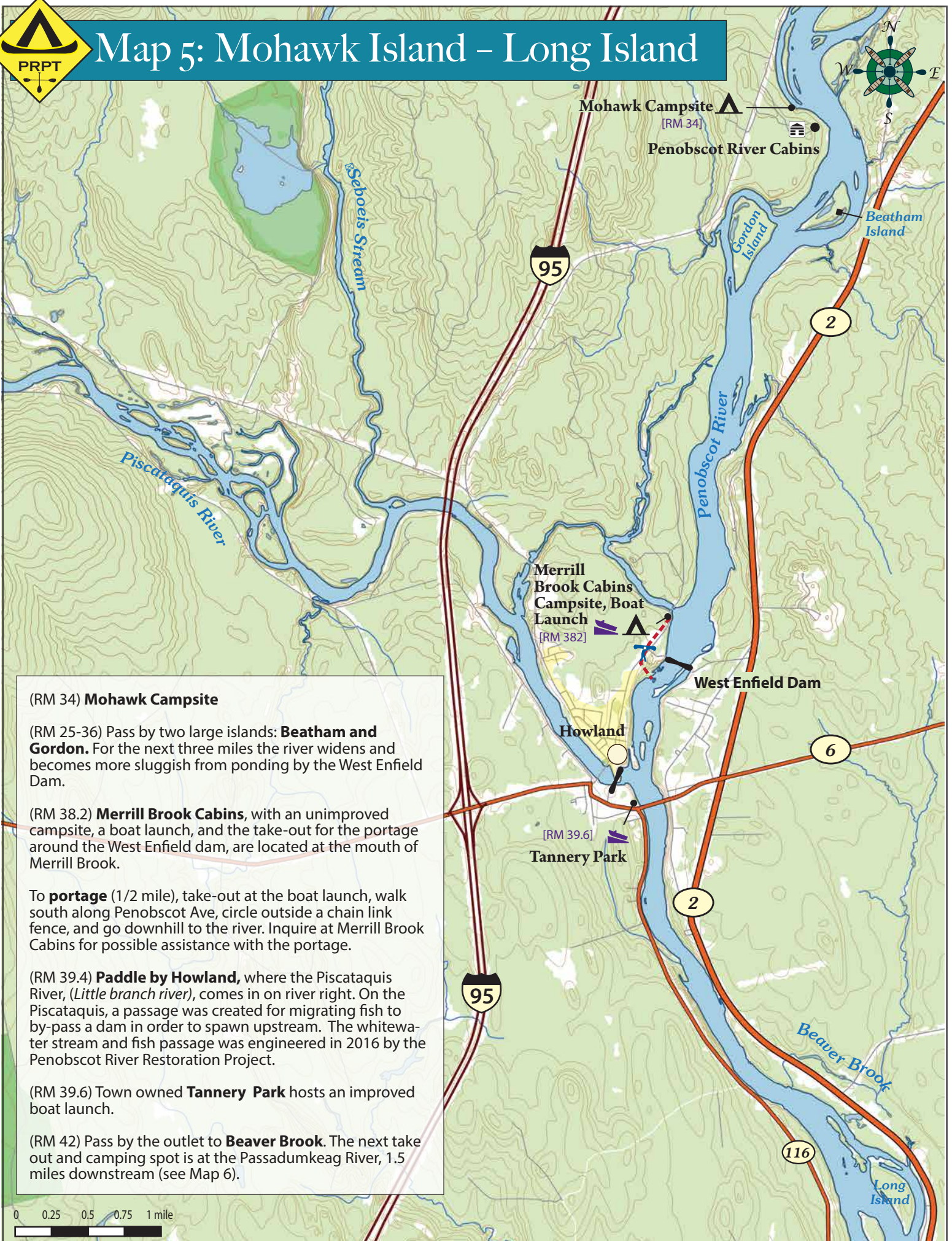
(RM 31) **Mattamiscotis Stream** (*The little alewife location*) joins the Penobscot shortly below Mahockanock Island.

(RM 32) **Mohawk Rapids** are Class I-II, with many passages through.

(RM 34) The **Mohawk Campsite** is behind a bar island west of Mohawk Island's southern tip, just before reaching Penobscot River Cabins. If you miss the campsite, inquire at the cabins.



Map 5: Mohawk Island – Long Island



(RM 34) Mohawk Campsite

(RM 25-36) Pass by two large islands: **Beatham and Gordon**. For the next three miles the river widens and becomes more sluggish from ponding by the West Enfield Dam.

(RM 38.2) **Merrill Brook Cabins**, with an unimproved campsite, a boat launch, and the take-out for the portage around the West Enfield dam, are located at the mouth of Merrill Brook.

To **portage** (1/2 mile), take-out at the boat launch, walk south along Penobscot Ave, circle outside a chain link fence, and go downhill to the river. Inquire at Merrill Brook Cabins for possible assistance with the portage.

(RM 39.4) **Paddle by Howland**, where the Piscataquis River, (*Little branch river*), comes in on river right. On the Piscataquis, a passage was created for migrating fish to by-pass a dam in order to spawn upstream. The whitewater stream and fish passage was engineered in 2016 by the Penobscot River Restoration Project.

(RM 39.6) Town owned **Tannery Park** hosts an improved boat launch.

(RM 42) Pass by the outlet to **Beaver Brook**. The next take out and camping spot is at the Passadumkeag River, 1.5 miles downstream (see Map 6).

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 mile



Map 6: Long Island – Sugar Island



(RM 42.5) Pass by **Long Island**. The next ten miles are checked with islands, large and small, gentle rapids. The river is flanked by a silver maple floodplain forest.

(RM 43.8) Confluence with the **Passadumkeag River** (*Pasitamkikok, Stream at the place above the gravel bar*), and Boat Launch.

(RM 44) **Point Passadumkeag Campground** has tent sites (for a fee), a store for resupply, and short order food.

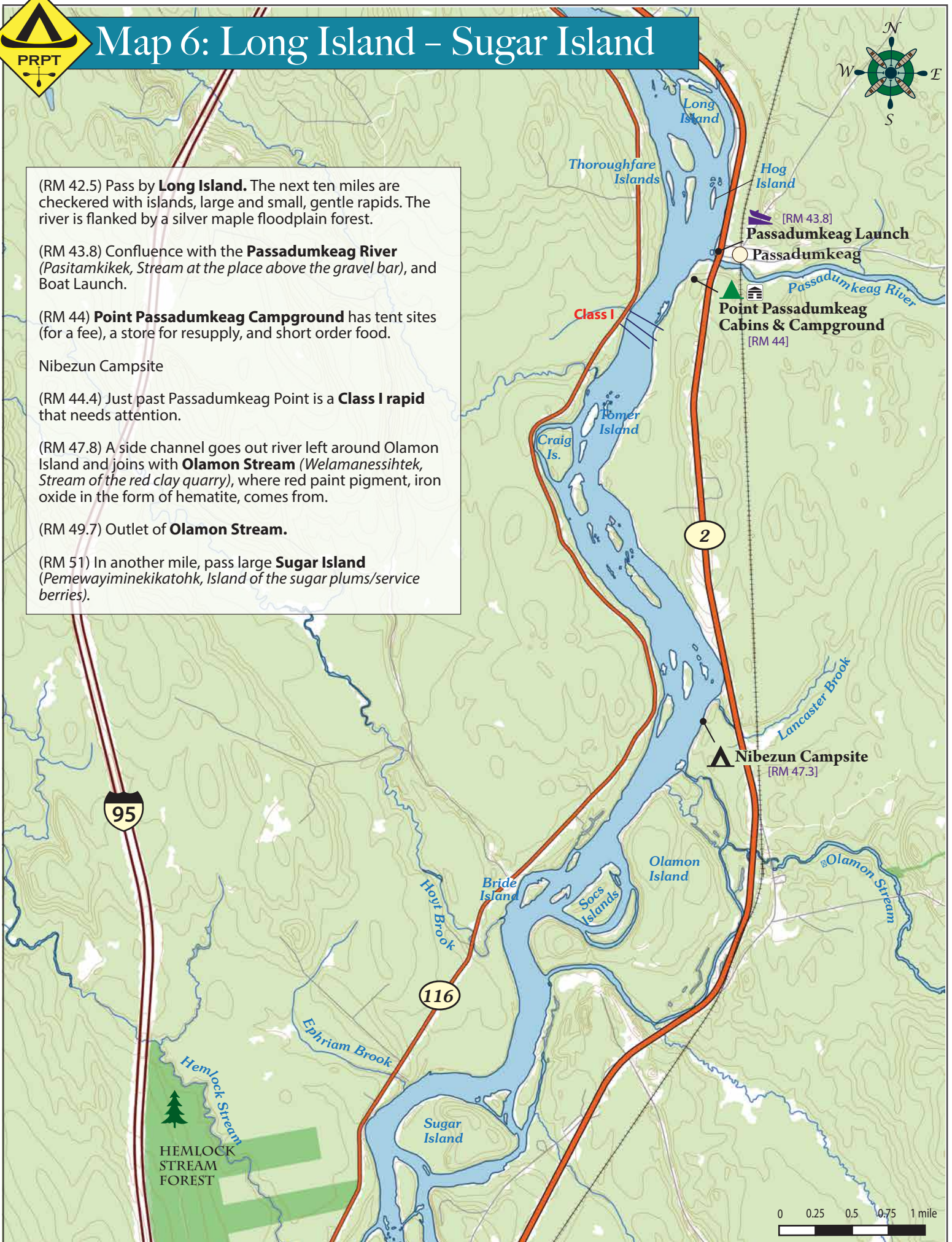
Nibezun Campsite

(RM 44.4) Just past Passadumkeag Point is a **Class I rapid** that needs attention.

(RM 47.8) A side channel goes out river left around Olamon Island and joins with **Olamon Stream** (*Welamanessihtek, Stream of the red clay quarry*), where red paint pigment, iron oxide in the form of hematite, comes from.

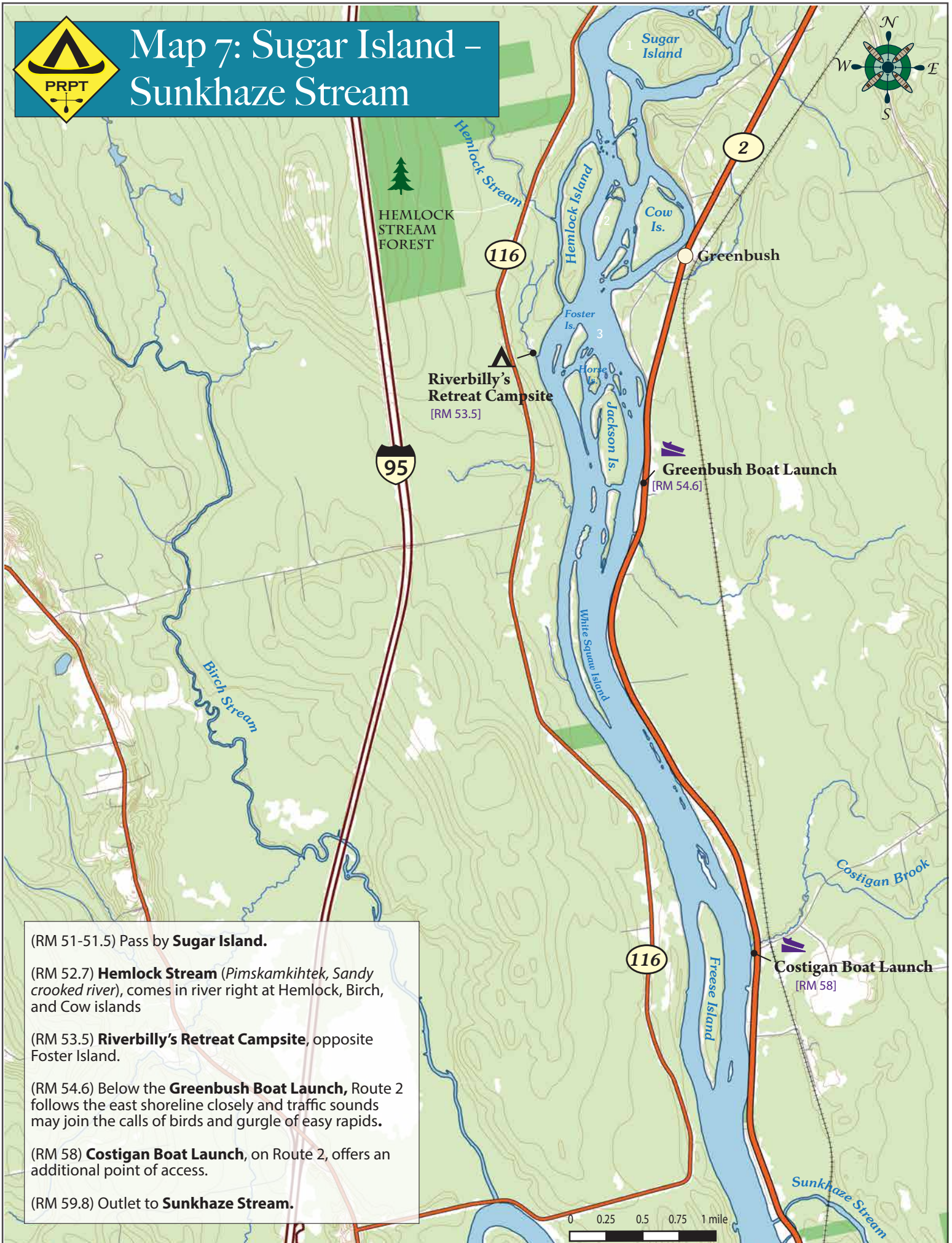
(RM 49.7) Outlet of **Olamon Stream**.

(RM 51) In another mile, pass large **Sugar Island** (*Pemewayiminekikatohk, Island of the sugar plums/service berries*).





Map 7: Sugar Island – Sunkhaze Stream



- (RM 51-51.5) Pass by **Sugar Island**.
- (RM 52.7) **Hemlock Stream** (*Pimskamkihtek, Sandy crooked river*), comes in river right at Hemlock, Birch, and Cow islands
- (RM 53.5) **Riverbilly's Retreat Campsite**, opposite Foster Island.
- (RM 54.6) Below the **Greenbush Boat Launch**, Route 2 follows the east shoreline closely and traffic sounds may join the calls of birds and gurgle of easy rapids.
- (RM 58) **Costigan Boat Launch**, on Route 2, offers an additional point of access.
- (RM 59.8) Outlet to **Sunkhaze Stream**.

Map 8: Sunkhaze Stream – Basin Mill Rapids



(RM 61.3) The river divides into two channels above **Orson Island**. To get to the Ketawamkihtek Campsite, turn right into Stillwater Branch (*Ketawamkihtek, Long sandy stream*). After a 1/4 mile, the campsite will be on the right, upstream of the Twin Islands. You will need to backtrack to the main channel to continue the trail.

The Birch Stream Boat Launch is 1.5 mile past the Long Sandy Campsite, near a small bridge.

(RM 61.7) Proceed between **Orson Island and Indian Island**. This is the safest, most direct route. If you go river left you will encounter ledge drops and rapids at Joe Pease Rips.

(RM 62.4) The **Milford Dam** requires either a short, steep portage or a longer carry, neither of which are signed or developed. The longer portage (0.5 mi.) goes from the Old Town boat launch through town to Binette Park. The shorter, steeper portage (0.3 mi) begins just below the bridge to Indian Island. Follow a rough trail up to a parking lot, walk past a mill building, and put-in at the park.

Below the dam is a series of wide rapids. **Check the USGS Eddington gauge online before paddling.** Less than 3 feet: low water, easier, but may be scratchy. 3-7 feet: medium water, suitable for boats outfitted for whitewater. 7+ feet: high water, **experts only**. For detailed rapid descriptions, check out the **"Bashabaez Penobscot River Race Course and Paddling Route"** on Maine Trail Finder.

(RM 63.6) **French Island** (*Matewanikanok, Place for tanning hides*), is residential.

(RM 63.8) **Shad Rips** are Class II-III at medium water. Start right of center. These rapids are less rocky and better at low water than the **French Island Rips** (Class II-III), where the safest route is far river right. These rapids can be portaged by using the city streets on French Island. Jim Mitchell has established the **SW French Island Campsite** in his backyard at the island's southwest tip.

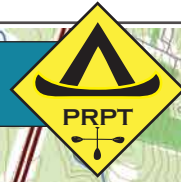
(RM 65): **Great Works Rapids** (*Macewessis, Bad falls*), are some of the most challenging on the Paddling Trail and are Class III-III+ at medium water. Scout from river left to pick a line, which will vary with different water levels. These rapids were the site of the Great Works Dam, removed by the Penobscot River Restoration Project in 2012. Portaging (300 yards) is possible along a gravel road.

(RM 67) You are paddling along **Marsh Island**, (*Wasahpskek menehan, Slippery ledge island*) named for the stretch of Class I-II rapids along here (*Wasahpskek Rapids, Slippery ledge*) because a slippery ledge gave a bad pole-hold, noting that this stretch of rapids was difficult for the canoeist poling upstream.

(RM 68.7) The **Stillwater River** (*Mskithtek, Place where the water is still*) come in below the Orono Dam, beginning the half-mile **Basin Mills Rapids** (*Nalemsakehekan, Falls where the river forms a channel*) Class II-III in medium water.



Map 9: Basin Mills Rapids – Bangor



(RM 68.7) **Basin Mills Rapids** are Class II-III in medium water, with the easiest line far left at levels above 3'. Best portage (0.3 miles) is on river right – take out downstream of the hydro station and follow Broadway to the wastewater plant.

(RM 69.5) The **Orono Boat Launch**, located on river right, is a good alternative launch point for those seeking to avoid the upstream rapids.

(RM 70.5) The **Oak Glen Campsite** is situated on a river terrace below the Penobscot Valley Country Club.

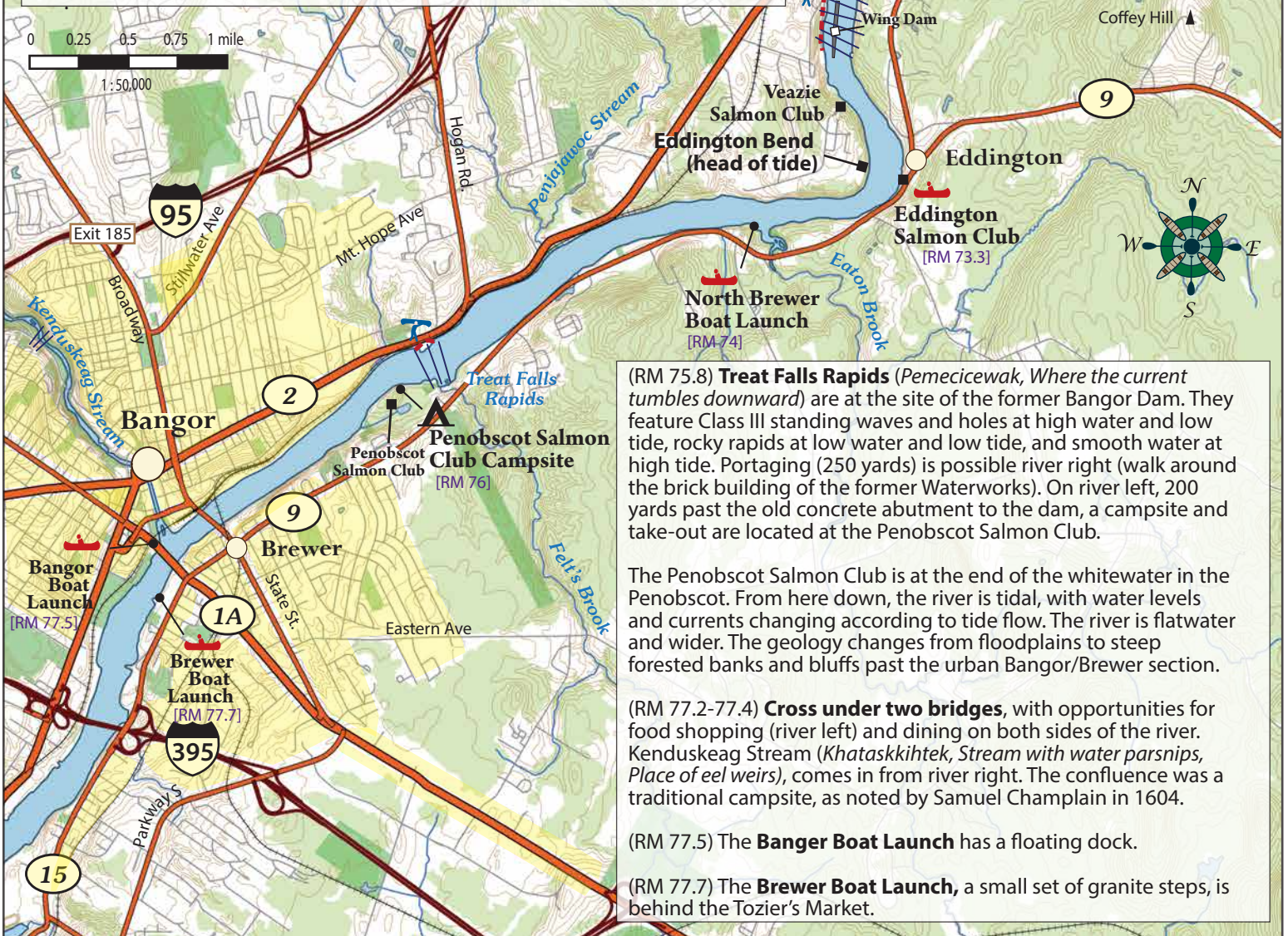
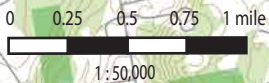
(RM 72) The **Eddington Boat Launch** is on river left.

(RM 72.5) **Veazie Rapids** (*Wapanopentek*, *White waterfall cascade*) are Class I-II and last for a 1/2 mile at the site of the former Veazie Dam, removed in 2013 by the Penobscot River Restoration Project. Stay river right for the best line. The rapids can be challenging in medium or high water, (Class II-III), especially with a loaded canoe, but can be portaged river right (take out upstream of the Wing Dam and carry 0.3 miles along Veazie St. to small park).

(RM 73.3) Another half mile of easier rapids takes you to **Eddington Bend**, the highest extent of tidal influence on the river. The Eddington Salmon Club, river left, has a small adjacent boat launch.

(RM 74) **North Brewer Boat Launch**, near mouth of Eaton Brook.

(RM 75) Outlet of **Penjajawoc Stream** (*Crooked stream*).



(RM 75.8) **Treat Falls Rapids** (*Pemecicewak*, *Where the current tumbles downward*) are at the site of the former Bangor Dam. They feature Class III standing waves and holes at high water and low tide, rocky rapids at low water and low tide, and smooth water at high tide. Portaging (250 yards) is possible river right (walk around the brick building of the former Waterworks). On river left, 200 yards past the old concrete abutment to the dam, a campsite and take-out are located at the Penobscot Salmon Club.

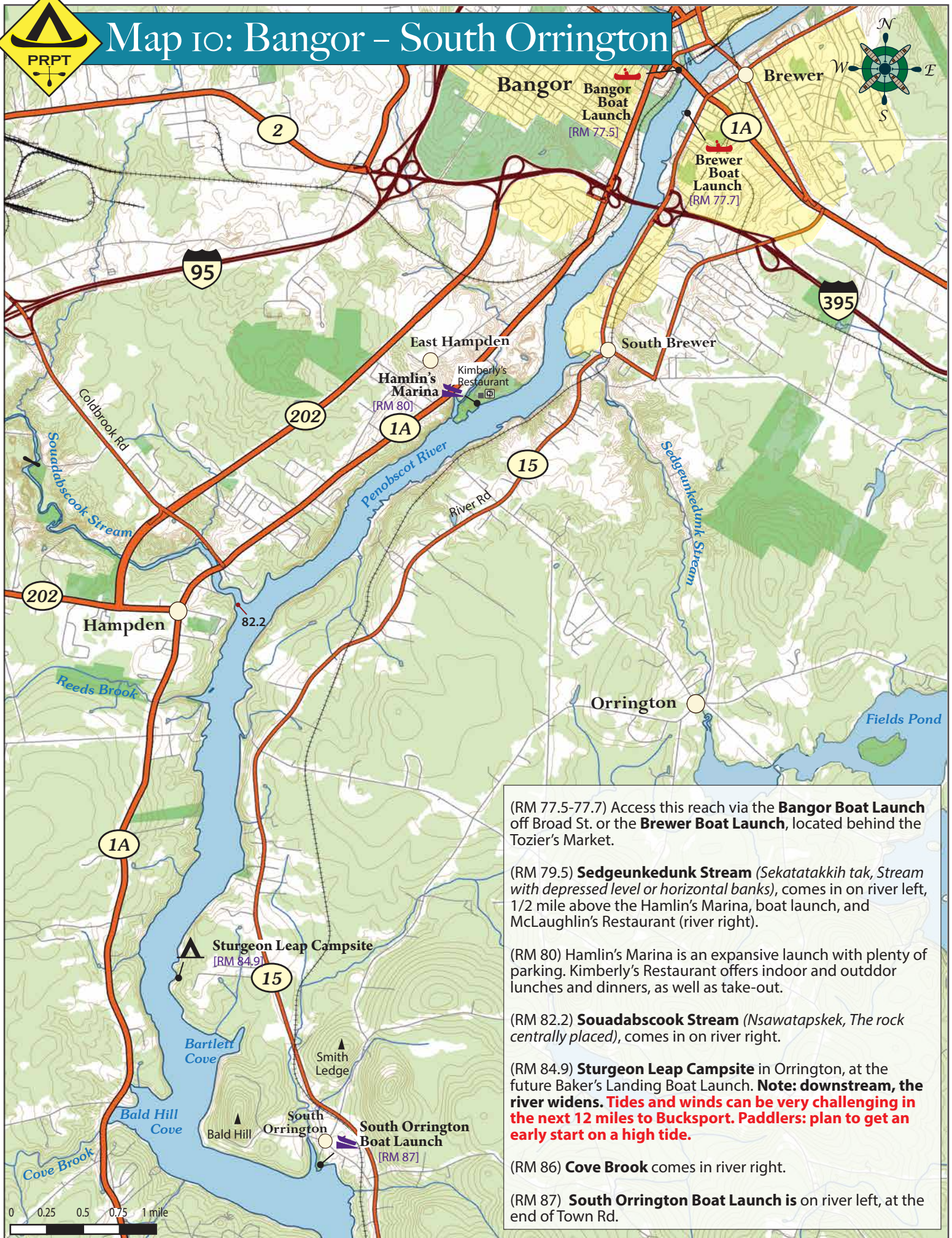
The Penobscot Salmon Club is at the end of the whitewater in the Penobscot. From here down, the river is tidal, with water levels and currents changing according to tide flow. The river is flatwater and wider. The geology changes from floodplains to steep forested banks and bluffs past the urban Bangor/Brewer section.

(RM 77.2-77.4) **Cross under two bridges**, with opportunities for food shopping (river left) and dining on both sides of the river. Kenduskeag Stream (*Khataskihteck*, *Stream with water parsnips*, *Place of eel weirs*), comes in from river right. The confluence was a traditional campsite, as noted by Samuel Champlain in 1604.

(RM 77.5) The **Bangor Boat Launch** has a floating dock.

(RM 77.7) The **Brewer Boat Launch**, a small set of granite steps, is behind the Tozier's Market.

Map 10: Bangor – South Orrington



(RM 77.5-77.7) Access this reach via the **Bangor Boat Launch** off Broad St. or the **Brewer Boat Launch**, located behind the Tozier's Market.

(RM 79.5) **Sedgeunkedunk Stream** (*Sekatatakkih tak, Stream with depressed level or horizontal banks*), comes in on river left, 1/2 mile above the Hamlin's Marina, boat launch, and McLaughlin's Restaurant (river right).

(RM 80) Hamlin's Marina is an expansive launch with plenty of parking. Kimberly's Restaurant offers indoor and outdoor lunches and dinners, as well as take-out.

(RM 82.2) **Souadabscook Stream** (*Nsawatapskek, The rock centrally placed*), comes in on river right.

(RM 84.9) **Sturgeon Leap Campsite** in Orrington, at the future Baker's Landing Boat Launch. **Note: downstream, the river widens. Tides and winds can be very challenging in the next 12 miles to Bucksport. Paddlers: plan to get an early start on a high tide.**

(RM 86) **Cove Brook** comes in river right.

(RM 87) **South Orrington Boat Launch** is on river left, at the end of Town Rd.



Map II: South Orrington – Verona Island

(RM 87) **South Orrington Boat Launch** (*Walintek, Cove in a river*), on river left, is located at the end of Town Rd.

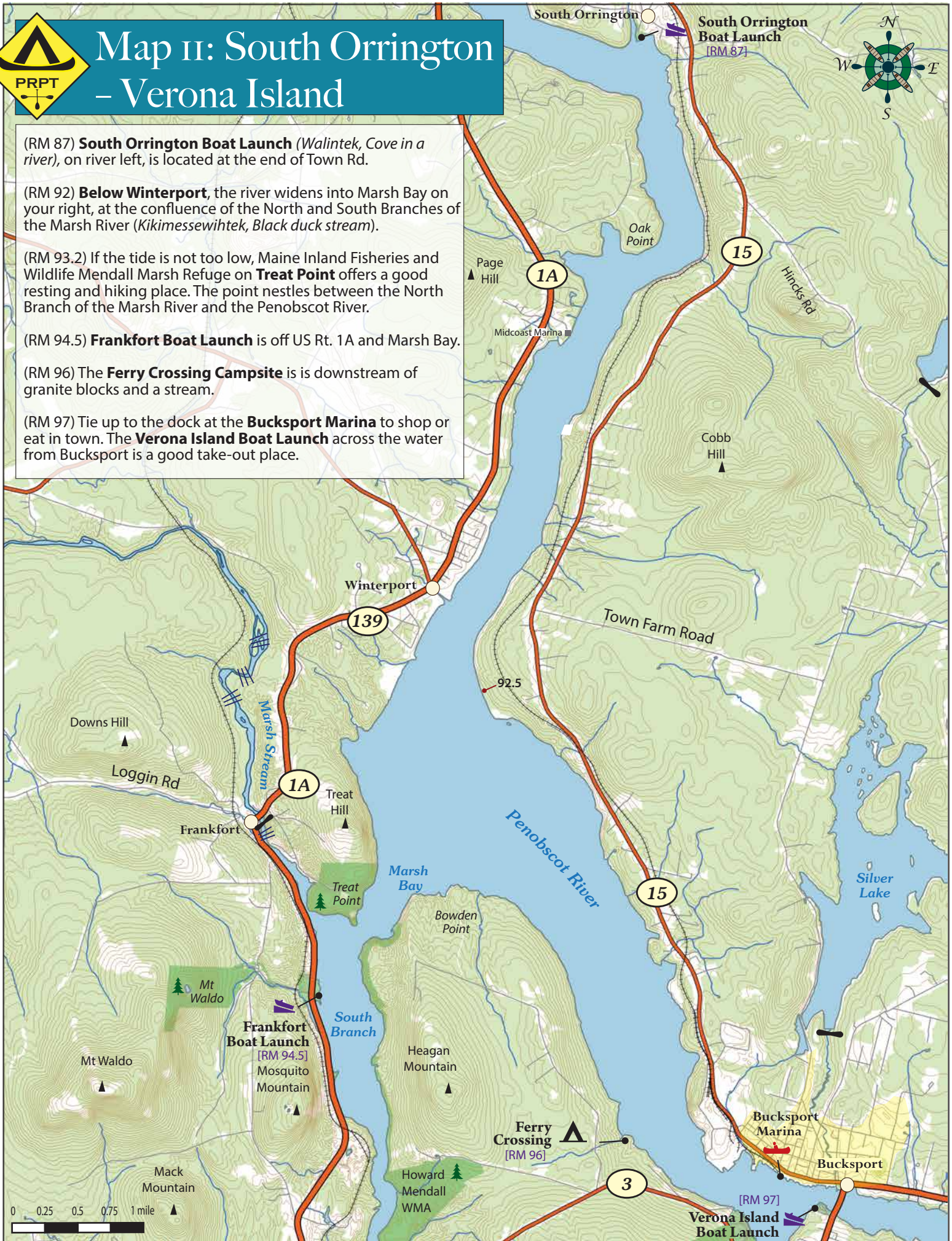
(RM 92) **Below Winterport**, the river widens into Marsh Bay on your right, at the confluence of the North and South Branches of the Marsh River (*Kikimessewihtek, Black duck stream*).

(RM 93.2) If the tide is not too low, Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Mendall Marsh Refuge on **Treat Point** offers a good resting and hiking place. The point nestles between the North Branch of the Marsh River and the Penobscot River.

(RM 94.5) **Frankfort Boat Launch** is off US Rt. 1A and Marsh Bay.

(RM 96) The **Ferry Crossing Campsite** is downstream of granite blocks and a stream.

(RM 97) Tie up to the dock at the **Bucksport Marina** to shop or eat in town. The **Verona Island Boat Launch** across the water from Bucksport is a good take-out place.





Map 12: Bowden Point to the Fort Point

Below Bucksport, the Penobscot merges into North Penobscot Bay. Sea kayaks are the best paddlecraft of choice here. It is important to follow tide and weather forecasts carefully.

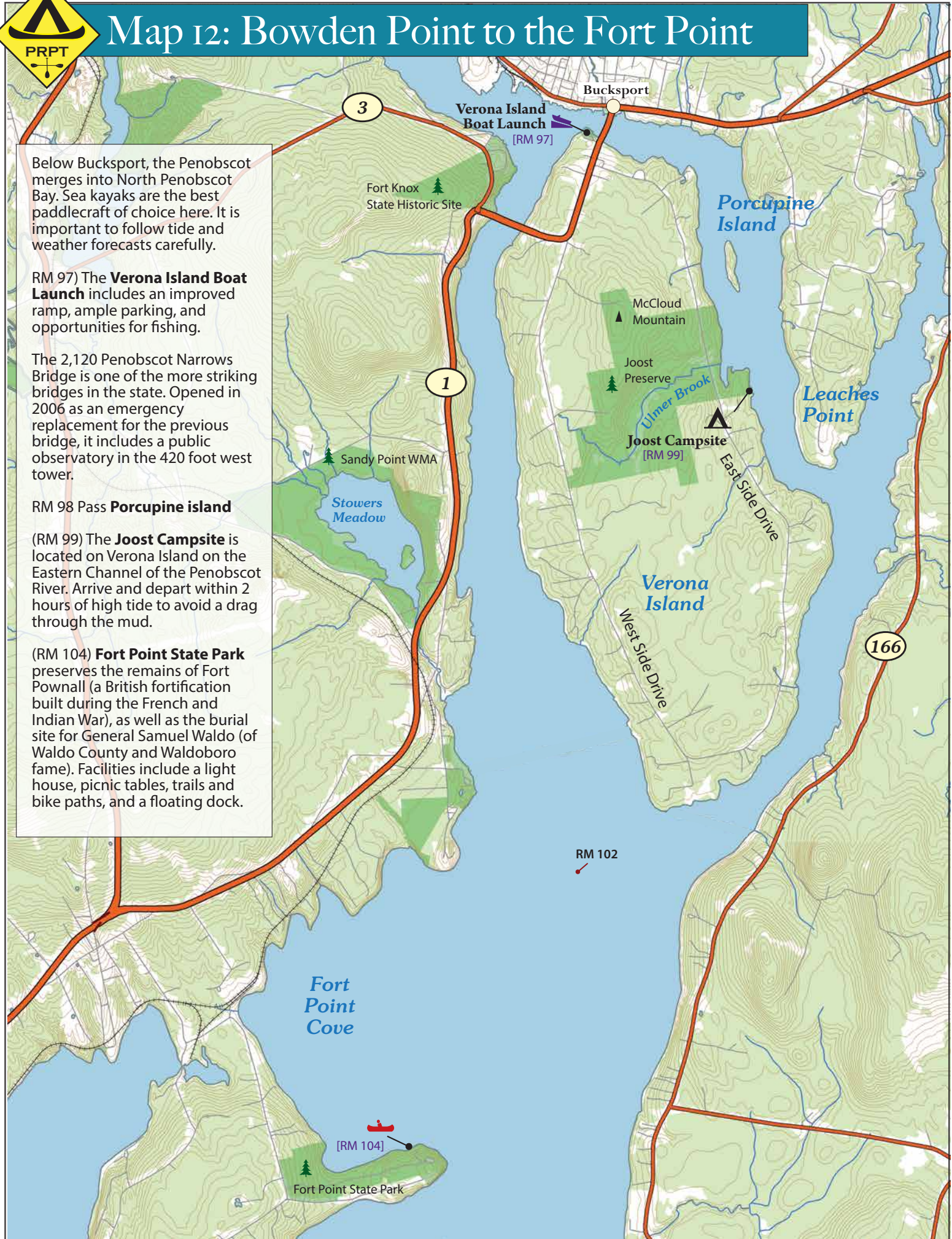
RM 97) The **Verona Island Boat Launch** includes an improved ramp, ample parking, and opportunities for fishing.

The 2,120 Penobscot Narrows Bridge is one of the more striking bridges in the state. Opened in 2006 as an emergency replacement for the previous bridge, it includes a public observatory in the 420 foot west tower.

RM 98 Pass **Porcupine island**

(RM 99) The **Joost Campsite** is located on Verona Island on the Eastern Channel of the Penobscot River. Arrive and depart within 2 hours of high tide to avoid a drag through the mud.

(RM 104) **Fort Point State Park** preserves the remains of Fort Pownall (a British fortification built during the French and Indian War), as well as the burial site for General Samuel Waldo (of Waldo County and Waldoboro fame). Facilities include a light house, picnic tables, trails and bike paths, and a floating dock.



RM 102