Errol NH & Great North Woods Dark Sky Viewing & Stargazing Guide

A practical nighttime driving guide from Errol, New Hampshire

Milky Way • Meteor Showers • Northern Lights • Easy Scenic Stops

PLAN THE SKY	CHOOSE A VIEW	DRIVE RESPONSIBLY
Check moon phase, clouds, and darkness before leaving.	Match an open horizon to what you hope to see.	Use lawful parking; respect closures and wildlife.

Presented by Errol Motel

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Enjoy the North Country night sky. Come back to Errol.

Why Errol Works for Night-Sky Viewing

The forests, waterways and relatively sparse development around Errol create opportunities to enjoy a darker sky than many visitors see at home. On clear nights, you may spot a broad field of stars, the Milky Way, satellites, and meteors. During stronger geomagnetic activity, the Northern lights may also be visible. None of these sights is guaranteed: clouds, moonlight, season, and sky conditions all matter.

This is a driving guide. The emphasis is on locations reached by vehicle, with only short approaches where appropriate. Conditions and permission to park can change.

CHECK ACCESS BEFORE LEAVING

The locations are not designated as seasonal outings, but snow, ice, flooding, road maintenance, gates, and temporary closures can prevent access at any time. A public launch or scenic road is not necessarily a designated overnight parking or viewing area. Never block ramps, gates, traffic, or emergency access.

Choose the Right Night

- **Moon:** A new moon, or hours after moonset, usually gives the best chance to see faint stars and the Milky Way. A bright moon can still make a beautiful lakeside scene.
- **Clouds:** Check the hourly cloud forecast, not just the daily forecast. Fog over water can limit visibility even when nearby skies are clear.
- **Timing:** Allow full darkness to develop; in Summer that can be later than expected. For ordinary stargazing, begin once twilight has ended.
- **Eyes:** Give yourself roughly 20–30 minutes away from bright light to adapt to darkness. Use a dim red light when possible.

Quick-Check QR Codes

Moon Phase

Aurora Forecast

Local Night-Sky Driving Stops

The directions and approximate mileages are planning references, not guarantees of access or permission to park after dark. A public launch, roadside turnout or scenic viewpoint may have posted hours, restrictions, or changing conditions. Check signs and current rules, and do not stop if there is no clearly lawful and safe parking space.

North Mountain Pond Road — Androscoggin River Access

Drive East on NH Route 26 toward Upton. Turn onto North Mountain Pond Road just before crossing the Androscoggin River and follow it to the public river access. It has a nice open view to the North and East. Use the area only if current rules and posted signs permit; never block the launch or access road.

Scout in daylight and do not approach the water or walk along the road if a safe, permitted place to stop is unavailable.

Umbagog Lake Public Boat Launch — Route 26

Drive East on NH Route 26 toward Upton to the signed public boat launch at the Southern end of Umbagog Lake, approximately 4 miles from the motel. The open view across Umbagog Lake creates beautiful reflections of the stars on calm nights and offers an excellent chance to spot the Milky Way (Summer through early Fall) and shooting stars.

Follow posted hours and restrictions; do not obstruct boat-launch operations. Avoid the ramp, slippery surfaces, and the shoreline in darkness.

Steamer Diamond Boat Launch — Dam Road

Drive North on NH Route 16 about 2 miles and turn onto Dam Road toward the boat launch. The location offers Northwest and West views across the Androscoggin River with very little light pollution. This is probably the easiest place to see the Milky Way without hiking.

TEMPORARILY CLOSED

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service reports that the Steamer Diamond boat ramp AND parking area closed for construction continuing through Spring 2027. Do not visit during the closure. Reopening is not guaranteed on a specific Spring date.

NH Route 16 Pull-offs Toward Wilsons Mills

Drive North on NH Route 16 toward Wilsons Mills, Maine. There are several pull-offs for 15 miles. Once you're near Wilsons Mills, you're in some of the darkest skies in New England, with very little development.

Stop only at an established pull-off where parking is lawful, not posted against use, and the vehicle can stand entirely clear of traffic. A broad shoulder or informal clearing is not automatically a lawful pull-off. If uncertain, continue driving; never stop on curves, bridges, private entrances, or gated roads.

Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge Area

Drive North on Route 16 toward the refuge area and surrounding wetlands. The refuge headquarters is approximately 5.5 miles North of Errol. Around the refuge headquarters and nearby access roads, there are several open marsh and meadow viewpoints. These provide wide horizons while still being easy to reach by car.

Do not enter refuge-managed outdoor facilities after closing. Any public roadside stop outside refuge facilities must be independently lawful and safe.

REFUGE HOURS MATTER

Refuge outdoor facilities generally open 30 minutes before sunrise and close at sunset unless otherwise posted. Do not use refuge trails, launches, or facility parking after closing without express permission. Public roadside viewing outside restricted facilities must meet applicable parking rules.

Choosing a View by Sky Direction

- **Northern Lights:** Favor an unobstructed Northern horizon and consult NOAA's forecast; faint aurora may be low in the sky.
- **Milky Way:** In Summer, its bright central region is generally best seen toward the Southern sky from Northern New England, at suitable hours.
- **Meteor Showers:** A broad open sky is more useful than a single horizon. Give yourself time and avoid bright lights.
- **Water Reflections:** A calm, accessible shoreline can be beautiful, but never approach icy, unstable, or slippery edges after dark.

An Optional Longer Drive: Western Maine

Quill Hill — Seasonal Vehicle Access

Quill Hill near Rangeley and Stratton, Maine, offers 360-degree views from a summit reached by a four-mile gravel access road during its vehicle-access season. Its official operator specifically welcomes stargazing at night and states that the road is normally open 24 hours a day from late May through mid-October. Vehicle access closes for Winter. Verify current opening dates, road conditions, and nighttime access before traveling.

Height of Land

The roadside Height of Land overlook on Maine Route 17 appears on Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust's Dark Sky Trail and has a recognized scenic turnout. Treat this as a location to investigate, not a guaranteed after-dark stop. Check posted restrictions and current conditions before traveling.

What You May See

The Milky Way

The Milky Way is our galaxy seen as a diffuse band of light. Its bright core is most favorably placed in Summer evenings, with visibility depending on season, time, cloud cover and moonlight. The entire band may be visible at other times of year.

Northern Lights

Aurora is possible in the region during sufficiently strong geomagnetic activity, but it is unpredictable and may be faint. NOAA's forecast is a short-range planning tool, not a promise. A camera may record more color than the eye sees. For the best chance, seek a clear Northern horizon, darkness, and a favorable forecast.

Meteors, Satellites and Planets

A meteor is a brief streak of light from material entering Earth's atmosphere. Some showers recur each year, but peak dates and moon interference vary. Satellites can look like steady moving points; bright planets may also be visible depending on the month. A sky map or NASA's monthly skywatching guidance can help identify what is overhead.

Seasonal Night-Sky Highlights

Spring

Look for prominent Spring constellations and consider checking aurora activity near the equinox. Nights can remain cold even after warm afternoons.

Summer

The Milky Way's bright core is a highlight on clear, dark nights. Summer meteor showers can add occasional streaks of light; mosquitoes and late twilight affect planning.

Fall

Longer nights and crisp weather can create good viewing opportunities, but clouds, fog and early snow are possible. Fall is also a worthwhile season to watch aurora forecasts.

Winter

Orion and other bright Winter constellations stand out. Dress for prolonged cold, check ice and road conditions, and never assume a launch or pull-off is plowed.

A Simple Evening Plan

- **Before Dinner:** Check cloud cover, moonrise/moonset, and the aurora outlook; choose one location rather than trying to visit them all.
- **Before Leaving:** Review access notices and offline maps; tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- **At the Stop:** Park legally, turn off unnecessary lights, remain away from traffic and water, and allow your eyes to adjust.
- **Afterward:** Return to Errol Motel. If the sky is cloudy, enjoy the rest of your trip; no celestial event is guaranteed.

What to Bring

- Warm layers, hat, and gloves, even in Summer
- Red-light flashlight or headlamp and spare batteries
- Phone with downloaded maps; optional paper map
- Folding chair only where there is a lawful and safe place to use it
- Binoculars for broad star fields; tripod for night photography
- Insect repellent in warmer months; water and emergency supplies

Simple Night Photography

Steady the camera with a tripod, turn off flash, and experiment with night mode or a longer exposure. For stars, start with a wide view; for aurora, include the Northern horizon. Keep equipment and people out of travel lanes, boat ramps, and restricted areas. Avoid bright lights that disturb other viewers.

Nighttime Driving & Access Safety

- **Wildlife:** Drive slowly and watch for moose and other animals, especially around dusk and dawn.
- **Roads:** Never stop in a travel lane, on a bridge, on a blind curve or where a vehicle cannot pull entirely off the road.
- **Water:** Boat ramps, wet rocks, riverbanks, and ice can be hazardous after dark. Do not walk onto a launch ramp or ice to improve the view.
- **Property:** Respect gates, signs, private property, and facility operating hours. A map pin does not establish public access.
- **Weather:** Snow, ice, flooding, fog, high winds, and maintenance can change access even at locations that are not inherently seasonal.
- **Connectivity:** Cell service can be limited. Download maps and share your plan before leaving.
- **Lighting:** Use the dimmest practical light and avoid shining headlights or flashlights at other visitors.

SEASONAL ACCESS & WEATHER CONDITIONS

The viewing locations in this guide can be enjoyed throughout the year when conditions permit. However, access may be limited by snow, ice, flooding, road conditions, maintenance, or temporary closures. Parking areas and access roads may not always be plowed or maintained during Winter. Check current conditions before heading out, never drive beyond a closed gate or barrier, and avoid stopping where you cannot safely pull completely off the roadway.

Staying at Errol Motel

Whether you are spending several nights exploring the Great North Woods or stopping in Errol for one night, the night sky can be an easy addition to your trip. Choose a nearby legal viewing area if conditions are good, then return to your room rather than making a long nighttime drive. Staying longer? Watch the forecasts and choose the clearest evening rather than planning around a single date.

ERROL MOTEL	RESERVATIONS
132 Main Street Errol, New Hampshire 03579	603-482-3256 errolmotel@gmail.com errol-motel.com

Reservations are made directly by phone or email.

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Official Resources & Verification

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service — Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/umbagog | Refuge hours, launch status, access notices

NOAA Space Weather Prediction Center

https://www.spaceweather.gov/products/aurora-30-minute-forecast | Short-range aurora forecast

NASA Night Sky Network

https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/planner/ | Skywatching guidance

Quill Hill official site

https://www.quillhillmaine.com/ | Vehicle access and gate updates

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust — Dark Sky Trail

https://rlht.org/home-rangeley-lakes/programs/discovery-trails/dark-sky-trail/ | Western Maine astronomy resources

A Final Note

The best stargazing plan is often the simplest: a clear sky, a safe place to stop, and a little patience. Respect the roads, waterways and people who live here, and enjoy whatever the North Country sky offers that night.