



## GREATEST MOUNTAIN

A Vision by James Eric Francis, Sr.

A couple of years ago, as part of his graduate work at the University of Maine, Penobscot artist and historian James Francis told his professor he wanted to create a scale model of Katahdin using a CNC machine to cut the layers to build the model. His teacher asked him, “Why Katahdin?” and suggested Francis spend some time figuring out why he wanted to focus on Katahdin before he began to build the model. This was the beginning of the complex, challenging, and inspiring project that became *Greatest Mountain*.

Katahdin translates from Penobscot to English as “Greatest Mountain.” While some say this reflects the fact that Katahdin is the highest mountain in Maine, Francis points out that when the mountain was given this name by the Penobscot people, Maine and its boundaries did not exist, and the Wabanaki people were certainly familiar with higher mountains in their traditional territory, in what is now New Hampshire. So it seems that this mountain is the greatest because of some other essential aspects of its existence, something that makes it so much more important to the Penobscot people.

To bring this sacred mountain to life, Francis combined research about Katahdin - both through Penobscot histories and accounts of non-Native travelers and writers - with images, music, stories, and the Penobscot language.

The song you hear was composed by Francis and tells the story of Gloscap, the Wabanaki culture hero, when he decided to leave the people and travel to his lodge in the north: Katahdin. The song’s title, *mináč kənamihol*, translates to “I’ll see you again,” sharing the belief that Gloscap will return to the people someday. The song is sung by Francis, David Caparaz, Doming Caparaz, Gabe Paul, Bert Polchies, Dominic Polchies, and Chris Sockalexis.

Along with the song, the voices you hear are of Penobscot people sharing stories that were gathered and written down by Penobscot author Joseph Nicolar in his 1893 book, *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man*. These stories are read by Francis, L. Cheryl Francis, Maria Girouard, Jennifer Neptune, Dominic Polchies, Charles Norman Shay, and Chris Sockalexis.

The images you see moving across Katahdin are a compilation of time-lapse photographs taken by Francis over the night of November 15 and 16, 2014. They were shot from Millinocket Lake, looking toward the Katahdin’s south face. Francis came to the mountain on this cold clear night and set up his camera to take repeated 6-second exposures. When he came back to the camera in the middle of the night, he discovered a wonderful, additional gift: the northern lights had come out and framed the mountain. Francis recounts that at this point in the project he was beginning to feel overwhelmed by the challenges of bringing his vision to reality. But just a short time earlier, he had finished recording the story of how Gloscap created the northern lights, and this beautiful convergence came to him as a sign from the Creator to keep pushing to bring *Greatest Mountain* to completion.

Additional imagery includes other still photographs, video, and original artwork created by Francis as he has documented Katahdin over the years.