Continental glaciers like the ice sheet now covering Antarctica probably reached parts of Maine during the Pleistocene Epoch, between about 3 million and 10,000 years ago. The continent-wide ice sheet that covered the state of Maine during the Pleistocene, called the Maine Ice Sheet, was several thousand feet thick in many places, and covered the highest mountains in the state. The weight of this huge ice sheet actually caused the land surface to sink hundreds of feet. Rock and bedrock, and they are important indicators of the direction of ice movement (Borns, 1986). During its peak, the ice was several thousand feet thick and covered parts of Maine until about 11,000 years ago, when the last broad spread ended in New England and the entire state was covered (Davis and Jacobson, 1985). Subsequent lowering of the sea level allowed ocean waters to cover much of southern Maine as the glacier retreated to the northwest. Ocean waters extended far up the Kennebec and Penobscot valleys, reaching present elevations of up to 420 feet in the central part of the state.

The last remnants of glacial ice probably were gone from Maine by 13,000 years ago, when an ice sheet spread southward over New England (Stone and Borns, 1986). The grooves and fine scratches (striations) left by the moving ice on bedrock, and the grooves and scratches (glacial saw marks) on the size of boulders, are useful indicators of the pattern of ice retreat (Borns, 1986). During its peak, the ice was several thousand feet thick and extended far beyond the present coast of Maine.

After the ice melted, the sea flooded much of southern Maine as the glacier retreated to the northwest. Ocean waters extended far up the Kennebec and Penobscot valleys, reaching present elevations of up to 420 feet in the central part of the state.

A warming climate forced the ice sheet to start receding as early as 11,000 years ago. Even though glaciers were still present on Maine's mountains and in lowland areas of southern Maine, the weight of the ice was removed from the land surface, the Earth's crust rebounded, and the sea flooded much of southern Maine as the glacier retreated to the northwest. Ocean waters extended far up the Kennebec and Penobscot valleys, reaching present elevations of up to 420 feet in the central part of the state.

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