



*Bethlehem R.R. Station*



*The Depot, Profile House, White Mountains*

# Turnpikes, Stage Coaches and the White Mountain Express: Transportation in the White Mountains

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From the beginning, New Hampshire's hills, and particularly its White Mountains, have been both a source of beauty and wonder as well as a source of frustration. Those very attractions that made people want to come to the White Mountains made it difficult for them to get there. As White Mountain tourism developed, so too did the need for better transportation.

In discussing White Mountain history, we sometimes play down mundane activities like road building and road repairs. When we think of men like Abel and Ethan Allen Crawford, we think of original characters who acted as mountain guides, as legendary hunters, and as colorful innkeepers. We forget they earned much of their money working on roads. Each year the turnpike through Crawford Notch washed out, and each year the Crawfords and hired hands put it back together again. Be-

tween 1827 and 1829, for instance, Abel Crawford billed the proprietors of Bretton Woods \$115.32 for road work—including twelve days work in 1829 done under the supervision of his own son, Ethan Allen Crawford.<sup>1</sup>



*Frankenstein Trestle, P. & O.R.R., Crawford Notch*



*Early view of Crawford Notch*

Most roads in New Hampshire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were town roads. It was the responsibility of the local subdivision—town, township, grant, or purchase—to build and maintain its own roads. They would get money through local taxes or by raising a local subscription. Yet local roads were inadequate for long distance travel, and as early as 1796, the state of New Hampshire began incorporating turnpikes.<sup>2</sup> In 1803, the Tenth New Hampshire Turnpike was incorporated. Forty thousand dollars was raised by lottery to build a twenty-mile road through Crawford Notch.<sup>3</sup>

These early turnpikes were built privately. The proprietors of the individual turnpikes, like the proprietors of bridges, would get their money back through tolls; at least that was the way it was supposed to work. For some reason, while New Hampshire people dutifully paid bridge tolls, they balked at paying road tolls. Hence, the state's turnpikes were usually unprofitable for their proprietors, and most reverted to town control by 1840.<sup>4</sup>

What was the result? For one thing it meant that the road through Crawford Notch was something less than it is today. Some travelers in the early 1800's said travel on the Tenth New Hampshire Turnpike was like riding a wagon along a dry river bed; others thought the river bed to be preferable.<sup>5</sup> It might have been possible for the state to remedy the situation, but it was not about to do so. The problem resulted from the location of Crawford Notch. It was not only far away from Concord (not many legislators needed to travel through it), but it benefitted Portland, Maine. The hundreds of wagons and "Portland puns" that bounced and clattered through the notch each year were going to and from the thriving little port city of Portland. Hence, why should New Hampshire pay to develop Portland's hinterland? It was so important for Portland to keep a good road open to Littleton and beyond, that in 1831, the Maine Legislature appropriated and spent \$3,000 to repair the road between Fabyan and Littleton, with private citizens in Portland adding another \$2,000.<sup>6</sup>



*Tuckerman's Ravine, from Pinkham Notch, White Mountains*

Scattered along the various White Mountain roads in the early 1800's were a growing number of huts, hovels, cabins, an occasional substantial house, and several farms. Many of these served as rustic inns and taverns. Yet by the 1840's, the number of tourists was increasing in the White Mountains, and we begin to see the coming of tourist hotels and their professional managers—people like Horace Fabyan, Joseph M. "Landlord" Thompson, Richard Taft, and others.<sup>7</sup>

One reason more tourists came was the increasing ease of getting to the White Mountains. Prior to the coming of the railroad to the mountains, the best means of travel north of Concord and west of Portland in the 1830's and 1840's was by coach. From Boston you might get off at the Weirs in Laconia and cross Lake Winnepesaukee by steamboat, or you might be jostled and tossed about inside the coach all the way to Conway—a trip of about two days from the Massachusetts line. After a particularly rough coach ride along Winnepesaukee's shores, one tourist complained of changes in his "phrenological development."<sup>8</sup> Yet the tourists kept coming.

It was the railroad, however, that made the big difference in both travel and tourism in the White Mountains. The railroad literally put the White Mountains at Boston's back door. At first, during the 1840's, the railroad only approached the mountains, shortening the coach ride to expanding White Mountain hotels. By 1853, however, there was rail service to Gorham and Littleton. As additional rail lines developed in and around the mountains, once sleepy towns like Plymouth, Gorham, and Conway became gateway towns of unprecedented prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

The railroad made it possible for more people to come to the White Mountains from greater distances. Bostonians in 1887 could leave Boston at 7:30 in the morning and be at the Profile House in time for supper—unless of course they chose to take the more direct stage route through Franconia Notch—in which case they could leave Boston after breakfast and be boating on Echo Lake by late afternoon. New York was not much further away by



*Fabyan House, Bretton Woods*

train in 1887. It took about eleven hours to get from Manhattan to the front porch of the Crawford House.<sup>11</sup>

The same trains that could bring more tourists to the White Mountains could also carry more supplies and luxury items to the grand hotels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An intimate connection developed between the hotels and the rail lines (and after 1895, the Boston & Maine Railroad). The hotels needed the railroad to bring tourists, supplies, and the mail. They responded frequently by building their own railroad stations, where hotel employees might meet incoming guests in elegant hotel coaches.<sup>12</sup> Railroads, for their part, printed White Mountain maps, guidebooks, and collections of scenic photographs of favorite tourist attractions. By the turn of the century, Fabyans and the Crawford House appeared on Boston and Maine maps of New England in print as bold as the cities of Lawrence, Lowell, and Manchester.<sup>13</sup> The day's schedule in the various grand hotels would be built around the arrival of trains, particularly the day White Mountain Express from New York and its nighttime counterpart.

Yet by the turn of the century, travel throughout the White Mountains was about to experience a transportation revolution of a different kind—one that would drastically diminish the role of the railroad and cripple many of the grand hotels. In the summer of 1899, a Stanley Locomobile was driven to the top of Mount Washington on the Carriage Road.<sup>14</sup> The automobile had arrived.

The automobile was seen at first as a curiosity, not an alternate form of transportation. It was something to race to the top of Mount Washington, not something to drive long distances. It was a new and interesting toy, much like the bicycle had been in the 1890's. Just as hotel owners had built bicycle paths in the 1890's, they organized automobile tours after 1900.<sup>15</sup> Automobiles were also used by hotels to shuttle guests to and from railroad stations. The only real problem created by the first automobiles in the White Mountains was that they scared horses. Owners of the Mount Washington Hotel and the Mount Pleasant House suggested that horses would overcome this fear if someone drove a car around inside

the stable yard, and they later opened an automobile school for horses.<sup>16</sup>

By 1920, if not a few years earlier, it was obvious to all that the automobile was no mere toy that scared horses. The automobile was creating major changes in White Mountain travel and tourism. The automobile brought a kind of freedom unavailable by train—the freedom for individuals and families to travel anywhere they wanted, and at great speeds. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the automobile also brought a new generation of Americans into the White Mountains: a generation of Americans who, in the spirit of Theodore Roosevelt, wished to get back to nature and seek a rugged yet personal experience in America's vanishing open spaces. Nor were these new tourists as wealthy as those of the late nineteenth century; they might be anyone with a week or two of free time and the \$300 it took to buy one of Henry Ford's cars.<sup>17</sup>

The result of all of this was improved roads, automobile garages and service areas, the tourist camp, the motor court, and tourist cottages. By the 1930's, next to the time honored names of the Crawford House, the Alpine House, and Thayer's Hotel, we find advertisements for Cozy Corner Camp and the U-Auto-Rest Hotel.<sup>18</sup> Increasing numbers of private homes and farms also took in boarders. More people than ever before began pouring through notches that one hundred years before were sometimes impassable on foot. Ironically, as improved roads and inexpensive cars made it easier than ever before to get to the White Mountains, people began spending less time there. By the First World War, it became fashionable to "do" the White Mountains and then move on. Accelerated speeds meant accelerated pace.<sup>19</sup>

**WINNEPISIOGEE AND WHITE MOUNTAIN**

**MAIL STAGE.**

**The Proprietors of the Winnepisiogee and White Mountain Stage Company** by a recent arrangement have extended their line from Southbury to Concord, N. H. and their Stage will thereafter run as follows, viz:

**Will leave Concord every Tuesday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Albany in Conway, N. H. at 6 P. M. Will leave Conway every Wednesday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Concord at 6 P. M. Will leave Concord every Thursday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Hart's in Southbury, N. H. at 4 P. M. Will leave Southbury every Friday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Concord at 6 P. M. Will leave Concord every Saturday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Conway at 6 P. M. Will leave Conway every Monday at 4 A. M. and arrive at Concord at 6 P. M.**

**The Company will furnish their Passengers with an elegant and convenient COACH, good teams and careful drivers.**

**Those Gentlemen and Ladies of Boston and its vicinity who wish to visit the WHITE MOUNTAINS** may be transported to the Eastern and Northern parts of the State at New-Hampshire at 100 cents, and will be taken across to the Stage at Southbury, Concord, North-Hampshire, and from that place they can find a passage to the WHITE MOUNTAINS by Stage to Concord in one day between the hours of 4 A. M. and 6 P. M. when returning from a passage from Boston to Conway in the days without being so through, which cannot be done in the ordinary way.

**No exertion will be wanting on the part of the Company to accommodate.**

OCTOBER 2, 1892.

P. S. Said Stage passes through Canterbury, Northfield, Southbury, Gilsum, Gifford, Meredith, Coats-Holmes, North-Hampshire, Southbury, Tinsmouth and Eaton to Conway.

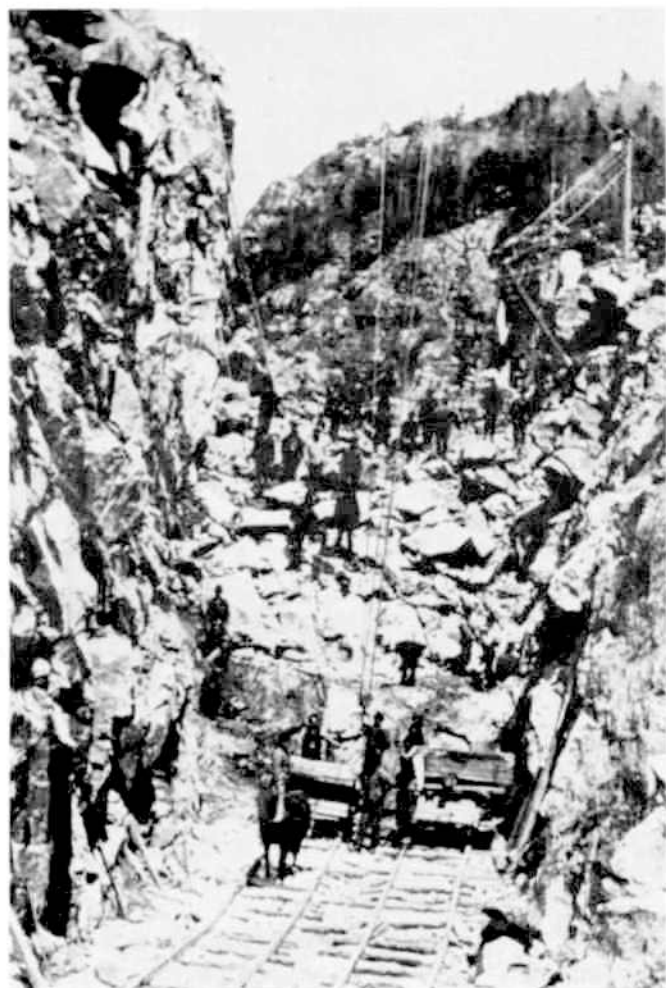
Improved transportation had made all of this possible. The White Mountains had passed through a series of stages—from a hauntingly beautiful area explored by a few, to a rural playground for the nation's rich, to a vacation area enjoyed by the nation as a whole. Some lamented the passing of the old order, when wealthy guests spent long weeks enjoying a lifestyle transported to elegant White Mountain hotels. Yet others praised the twentieth century trend. Said one writer in 1913, "where one pilgrim discovered the White Mountains then, a hundred enjoy them now. The region has ceased to be a New England monopoly and is a national possession."<sup>20</sup>

#### Notes

1. Miscellaneous Town Records, Carroll, N.H., New Hampshire Historical Society.
2. Norman W. Smith, "A Mature Frontier: The New Hampshire Economy, 1790-1850," *Historical New Hampshire* 24, No. 3 (Fall 1969): 8-9.
3. Frederick W. Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), 27.
4. Smith, "Mature Frontier," 9.
5. Isaac Hill, "Region of the White Mountains and the Moosehillock," *Farmers Monthly Visitor* 1, No. 7 (July 15, 1839): 97.
6. Peter B. Bulkley, "Horace Fabyan, Founder of the White Mountain Grand Hotel," *Historical New Hampshire* 30, No. 2 (Summer 1975): 56.
7. Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains*, 160-174; Bulkley, "Horace Fabyan," passim.
8. Thomas Hamilton, quoted in Catherine Campbell, "The Gate of the Notch," *Historical New Hampshire* 33, No. 2 (Summer 1978): 114. For coach routes to the White Mountains, see the "White Mountains, N.H." section of John Hayward, *The New England Gazetteer* (Boston: John Hayward, 1839, or subsequent editions).
9. Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains*, 220-224.



Junction of the B.C. & M.R.R. and the Mount Washington Cog Railway



The Great Cut, P. & O. Railroad, Crawford Notch

10. Gorham was reached by rail in 1851, and between 1850 and 1860, its population jumped from 224 to 907. Since Plymouth was already a developed town in 1850, its population rose more modestly during the 1850's, from 1,290 to 1,407. Conway experienced rapid growth in the 1870's as a result of the arrival of both the Portland and Ogdensburg from the east and the Eastern Railroad from the south. Between 1870 and 1880, Conway's population rose from 1,607 to 2,094 (U.S. Census figures).

11. Boston & Lowell Railroad, *Mountain, Lake and Valley by the B. and L.* (Boston: Boston & Lowell Railroad, 1887), 199 and 204.

12. See the records of the Barron Hotel Company, New Hampshire Historical Society. These include hotel registers, invoice books, employee files, shipping records, company financial records, and miscellaneous accounts of hotels operated by the Barron family, including the Crawford House, Twin Mountain House, Fabyan House, and Summit House.

13. For a good example, see *Summer Excursions to the White Mountains, Mount Desert, Montreal and Quebec, Winnepesaukee, Memphremagog, Rangeley and Moosehead Lakes, and the New England Beaches* (Boston: Boston & Maine Railroad, 1897).

14. *Among the Clouds* 23, No. 42 (August 31, 1899): 1.

15. *A Year Book of Bretton Woods in the White Mountains: 1908-1909* (Carroll, N.H.: by the management, n.d.), 18.

16. *A Year Book of Bretton Woods*, 18-19.

17. Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969): sv-xxiii, 167-176, and passim.

18. See the *White Mountain Directory*, vol. VII, 1932-1934 (Beverly, Mass. and Portland, Me.: Crowley & Lunt, 1932): 725, 727, 755-757.

19. Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains*, 408.

20. Ralph D. Paine, "Discovering America by Motor," *Scribner's Magazine* 53, No. 2 (February 1913): 146.