

Visiting the Scenic Areas of the White Mountain National Forest

Snyder Brook Scenic Area (1961): This 36 acre stand of old growth hemlock, red spruce and northern hardwood forest follows the lower reach of Snyder Brook. Elevations range from 1300-1600 feet. Parking is available at the Appalachia parking lot on US Route 2 in Randolph. The AMC acquired the land in 1895 to preserve the scenic beauty around Gordon, Salroc and Tama Falls. The club donated this beautiful area to the U. S. Forest Service in 1937. The Brookbank and Fallsway Paths maintained by the Randolph Mountain Club provide the best opportunities to see the old growth forest and water falls.

Rocky Gorge Scenic Area (1961): This scenic area is located along the Kancamagus Highway, eight miles west of Conway. The Swift River plunges 20 feet over broken granite ledges. This 70 acre area of natural beauty also features Falls Pond, hidden away behind a glacial esker covered with red spruce and white pine forests. Parking is available and the 1-mile long Lovequist Loop Trail circles six-acre Falls Pond. Fishing is permitted in the Swift River with a valid state license but no swimming is allowed due to the dangerous jagged rocks and turbulent stream.

Lafayette Brook Scenic Area (1961): This 990 acre scenic area is located in Franconia with access provided to a viewing point near the Hugh Gallen Memorial at the north end of the Franconia Notch Parkway and a side road (formerly Route 3) that starts opposite Route 18. This scenic area features spectacular views of Mount Lafayette and an old growth spruce forest on the back slope of Eagle Cliff. A 12-mile loop hike that strong hikers may want to try in good weather starts at the Greenleaf Trail. It is 2.7 miles to the AMC Greenleaf Hut and a short distance down to Eagle Lake, which is in the scenic area. Another mile brings you to the summit of Mount Lafayette, sixth highest peak in the White Mountains. Follow the Appalachian Trail north over the North Peak of Mount Lafayette and then descend via the 4.7-mile long Skookumchuck Trail to the Franconia Bike Path. It is a four-mile walk back on the paved bike path to your vehicle near the start of the Greenleaf Trail.

Gibbs Brook Scenic Area (1961): This 900-acre scenic area along Gibbs Brook has a large amount of old growth red spruce and yellow birch. The area is a candidate Research Natural Area because of its natural condition and lack of any previous logging. The oldest maintained trail in America, the Crawford Path, built in 1819 runs through the center of the scenic area. The scenic area starts a quarter mile above Route 302 across from the AMC Highland Center in Crawford Notch. The nearly two-century old trail climbs to a shoulder of Mount Clinton, named for an early botanist who explored this area and for whom *Clintonia borealis* is named. The old growth forest here is home to the American marten, fisher and a variety of birds including spruce grouse, boreal chickadee, gray jay and black-backed woodpecker.

Pinkham Notch Scenic Area (1961): This 4,200 acre area includes Tuckerman Ravine, Huntington Ravine, Crystal Cascades and Glen Ellis Falls. The Mount Washington Auto Road, Davis Path, Glen Boulder Trail, Wildcat Ridge Trail, Wildcat Ski Area and the Old Jackson Road bound the Pinkham Notch Scenic area. The Tuckerman Ravine Trail to Hermit Lake is perhaps the best trail to experience this area. The Alpine Garden was formerly part of this scenic area but is now a designated Research Natural Area.

Sawyer Ponds Scenic Area (1961): The Sawyer Ponds Scenic Area occupies a deep basin area and is reached by a one mile hike from the Sawyer River Road in Livermore. The 1,130-acre area features Sawyer Pond, a 44-acre pond over one hundred feet deep in places and smaller Little Sawyer Pond with a depth of 28 feet. Much of the forest is old growth spruce and northern hardwoods. An old burn between Owls Cliff and Mount Tremont features paper birch. This is a beautiful place for an autumn hike.

Greeley Ponds Scenic Area (1964): the 810 acre Greeley Ponds Scenic Area contains an area of old growth red spruce, two mountain ponds, and rugged cliffs between Mount Kancamagus and the East Peak of Mount Osceola. The U. S. Forest Service acquired the property after a public campaign by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and other citizen groups. The easiest access is from the Kancamagus Highway using the Greeley Ponds Trail for 1.4 miles. The trail formerly continued to Waterville Valley but Hurricane Irene washed the trail south of the lower Greeley Pond away in 2011. There are no current plans to rebuild the trail.

Nancy Brook Scenic Area (1964-2005): The 460 acre scenic area along Nancy Brook was designated a Research Natural Area as a result of the 2005 White Mountain Forest Plan. This former scenic area is now 1,590 acres in size and has another designation as a Nancy Brook Virgin Spruce Forest and Scenic Area under the National Natural Landmark program. This is believed to be the largest old growth spruce forest in the northeast. The Nancy Brook Cascades and Nancy and Norcross Ponds can be reached after a 4.5-mile hike by the Nancy Pond Trail from a trailhead on Route 302. The area is well known by serious birders who seek the spruce grouse, black-backed woodpeckers and boreal chickadees that are found here.

Lincoln Woods Scenic Area (1969): Originally the largest designated scenic area at 18,500 acres, the current size has shrunk to 1,200 acres. Concerns over proposals to build a highway through the Pemigewasset wilderness (small w) connecting the Kancamagus Highway to Route 302 through Thoreau Falls and Zealand Notch led to intense efforts by organizations such as the AMC to seek designation by Congress as a Wilderness. A 1966 letter from Forest Supervisor Gerald Wheeler to AMC President Preston Saunders indicated that the Forest Service preferred to use the faster approach of scenic area designation by the Regional Forester and seek a higher level of protection in the future. This higher level of protection was achieved in 1984 when Congress designated the 45,000-acre Pemigewasset Wilderness, which included most of the former Lincoln Woods Scenic Area. Today only a small remote area remains between Whitewall Mountain and Mount Willey. The land was acquired in 1936 from the Parker-Young

Company for \$2.50 an acre! Visit the former scenic area using the Ethan Pond Trail, Shoal Pond Trail and the Twinway.

Mount Chocorua Scenic Area (1986): This is the last area to be designated and was created as a result of the 1986 White Mountain Forest Plan. The size is 6,100-acres and features Mount Chocorua, an iconic New Hampshire Mountain peak. The area almost became part of the Sandwich Range Wilderness but it appears that Wilderness designation would have had adverse effects on this popular hiking area and backcountry facilities such as Camp Penacook and Jim Liberty Cabin. There are numerous trails that ascend Mount Chocorua and perhaps the Piper Trail is the most famous and popular. I like the Champney Falls Trail and the Carter Ledge Trail, where an uncommon stand of Jack Pine can be seen.

Northern Peaks (Proposed 18,000 acre Scenic Area): No discussion of designated WMNF Scenic Areas is complete without mention of the proposal to designate the Northern Peaks of the Presidential Range as a scenic area. The proposal came about as a controversy between the WMNF and local citizens in Randolph who objected to a proposal by the U. S. Forest Service to have a timber sale in an area on the lower slopes of Mount Bowman in Randolph. The proposal would have included the northern and western slopes of Mount Adams, Madison, Jefferson, Clay, Washington, Monroe, Franklin and Pleasant (now Mount Eisenhower). The U. S. Forest Service felt that the current level of protection was adequate and in the end the proposals for a timber sale and a scenic area was dropped.

In summary, the history of designated scenic areas on the WMNF provides a fascinating picture of early efforts to preserve areas of outstanding beauty and old growth forests. Today nine of ten designated scenic areas remain while the Nancy Brook Scenic Area was designated as a Research Natural Area that carries a higher level of protection. Visiting each of these scenic areas will give the reader a better understanding of this aspect of White Mountain National Forest history.