

Hiking Caps Ridge Trail

Caution: Harsh weather conditions and sudden violent storms are common in this area and have claimed many lives. The last mile of the Caps Ridge Trail is totally above timberline and is exposed to the full force of these storms. Plan ahead and carry extra clothing and food while hiking in this area. Remember that storms increase in severity quickly above treeline. If you are experiencing difficulty, Turn Back before it is too late.

Access: From Route 302 turn onto the Cog Railroad Base Station Road across from the Bretton Woods Ski area approximately 4.5 miles east from Route 3 in Twin Mountain. Follow the Base Station Road for approximately 4.5 miles to the intersection with the Jefferson Notch Road and the Mt. Clinton Road. Turn left onto the Jefferson Notch Road for 3.3 miles to the parking lot at the height of land.

Trail Beginning: 3008 ft. elevation (902 m). The trail starts at the parking lot at the height of land on the Jefferson Notch Road.

Trail Ending: 5715 ft. elevation (1715 m). The trail ends on the summit of Mt. Jefferson at the junction with the Castle Trail.

Camping: To limit resource damage and enhance the recreation experience of all users, the following regulations are in effect:

1. Camping and fires are prohibited above treeline. (gas stoves are permitted).
2. Camping and fires are prohibited within 0.25 miles of the Jefferson Notch Road from the height of land to the Cog Base Station Road.
3. Fire permits are not required to use wood or charcoal fires within non-restricted areas of the White Mountain National Forest. However, you are responsible for any fires you kindle and are subject to a fine and any suppression costs if the fire escapes.

Although this is the shortest trail to timberline in the White Mountains, it is very steep and rocky and therefore quite difficult. The trail leaves the parking lot and ascends steadily the lower part of the ridge. At 1 mile the trail opens up to the first views of Mt. Jefferson. At 1.1 miles The Link enters from the left, connecting the Caps Ridge Trail to the Castle Trail. The trail now follows the narrow crest of the ridge becoming much steeper and more challenging. At 1.5 miles the trail reaches the lowest cap (4400 ft.). The trail is now entirely open and continues very steeply reaching the highest cap (4830 ft.) at 1.8 miles. At 2.1 miles it crosses the Cornice Trail which, to the left leads to the Castle Trail and to the right goes to Monticello Lawn and points south. The Caps Ridge Trail continues up the cone reaching the summit at 2.5 miles. It now descends the back side a short distance and ends at the intersection with the Jefferson Loop Trail, Castle Trail and Six-Husbands Trail.

The Caps Ridge Trail is the highest trailhead on a public road in the White Mountains. This convenient access to the third highest peak in the White Mountains can be attributed to the Jefferson Notch Road which was commissioned as a State thruway in 1903. Due to its elevation, it is the highest maintained state road in New Hampshire. The vegetation above treeline is quite rare and fragile. It has adapted to the harsh conditions it experiences above timberline, but is very susceptible to hikers stepping on it. Please help to preserve the alpine vegetation by staying on the trail.

