

Hiking Safety

The White Mountain National Forest, covering 780,000 acres in New Hampshire and Maine, is well known by hikers and nature lovers for its diverse and dramatic features. Its most commanding landmark, Mt. Washington, is at 6,288 ft. the highest peak in the Northeastern United States. With gorges, cascades, boulder-strewn ravines, stark summit cones and lush forest glens, the White Mountain National Forest is an exciting setting whether you're on a backpack trip or a weekend drive.

This great national forest is traversed by several major roads which give access to the extensive system of trails. Many of the area's most famous attractions - such as the summit of Mt. Washington, Tuckermans Ravine, the Flume - are good destinations for a day hike. Hikers with more time can cover a lot of territory in these mountains without running out of trails.

As you will see from the trail descriptions, there is a great variety in length, locale, and degree of difficulty. Our maps have been designed to help hikers plan a route that suits their experience and available time.

Although nature is vulnerable to man's sometimes unwise use, the mountains in the region demand respect - they are known for violent storms, arctic winds, and sudden weather changes. Many people have lost their lives on the summits from exposure due to lack of sufficient equipment and knowledge. The precautions for hiking above treeline are simple but all important: Before attempting one of the Class II or III hikes described on these maps, be sure you are well prepared. Learn map and compass orientation and survival techniques and, if possible go on a preliminary trip with someone who knows these mountains. Whatever your hiking experience, we hope you'll find these maps and guides to be a great help as you get to know the White Mountains better yet.

Trail Classification These hikes vary greatly in difficulty, ranging from short woods walks to long, strenuous traversed of treeless peaks. The following classification system is an attempt to give the hiker a general idea of a trail's difficulty. Such a system depends, however, entirely on the individual hiker or group's stamina, ability and desires. Only experience and common sense can be ultimately relied upon in making a selection.

- Class I This refers to a trail that is free of serious obstacles. These trails are generally short with not much gain of elevation.

- Class II This refers to a trail that is steeper and often longer than those in Class I and may have a rough footway, but is free of extended difficulties.

Class III This refers to a trail that is long, steep, and rough, or that has very difficult shorter sections requiring difficult stream crossings or scrambling. These trails are generally not suitable for younger children.

No camping or open fires (except stoves) are allowed

- Above treeline (trees must exceed 8 ft. at a suitable site)
- Within 200 ft. of any trail (unless a designated campsite is present)
- Within 1/4 mi. of certain streams, rivers, and roads (except on or in campgrounds, shelters, and designated areas). NOTE: Hikers must camp at least 1/4 mi. away from AMC huts and many shelters.

Wilderness Areas A wilderness is recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are allowed to remain in a natural state, as little as possible affected by man (except as a visitor who does not remain). Officially, a Wilderness Area is a tract of at least 5,000 acres of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence. The Wilderness Areas in the White Mtns. are the Great Gulf, Presidential-Dry River, Sandwhich Range, and Pemigewasset Wilderness Areas. No permits are necessary for the use of the other Wilderness Areas. Campsites must be at least 200 ft. from the trail (except designated sites) and groups are limited to 10 persons.

Huts The nine Appalachian Mountain Club Huts (or "Hotels in the sky") offer everything from beds to meals and, if you are just passing by, shelter from wind or rain. Six of the huts are open only during the summer. Carter Notch Hut and Zealand Falls Hut are open for winter travelers, as is Pinkham Notch Camp, the AMC's headquarters and reservation office for the region.

Shelters and Lean-Tos These simple walk-in shelters, placed conveniently along major trails in the White Mt. National Forest, are maintained by the U.S. Forest Service, AMC, and several other groups. The shelters and lean-tos are capable of housing 8-12 people; and overnight fee is sometimes charged. Accommodation is on a first come/first served basis. Some shelters offer nearby tentsites. Carry a tent if you will be camping overnight, even if our route utilizes shelters, as adequate space cannot be relied upon - especially in the summer months. Several of the shelters are due to be removed in the future years, as they now fall within Wilderness Area boundary.

Campgrounds The White Mountain National Forest provides many roadside campgrounds, special recreation areas and picnic grounds. The campgrounds accommodate auto campers with running water, toilets, firepits, parking space and tentsite. The daily fee varies. Some campgrounds close in October; others are open year-round. The opening date for most seasonal campgrounds is May 15 or thereabouts. The Forest Service will supply current listing upon request.

Weather Conditions Weather in the White Mountains is very unpredictable and should be respected. These Mountains are known for some of the worst weather in the world - wind speeds have been recorded at 200+ miles per hour! Never see off for the higher summit during rainy or stormy weather. The conditions will only worsen above treeline, and there will certainly be risk of exposure. Snow conditions exist even in summer, and violent thunder and lightning storms brew up out of nowhere with little warning. Rain and sleet are more often than not found at the higher summits, so be prepared with rain gear. If you should encounter arctic winds laden with rime ice, cover your nostrils to avoid breathing in the freezing fog. Maybe at one of the higher summits on a clear day you will be fortunate enough to experience one of the many rewards of mountaineering: a panoramic view of an endless green and blue world below, stretching out and away, blending in with the sky.