

Indian Names and Places

When white settlers arrived in New Hampshire, most of the state was inhabited by Indians. Among those living in the White Mountains were the Abenaki, Sokosis, and Pennacook Tribes of the Algonquin Indians, the Abenaki Indians being the most prominent. Indians had little interest in the mountains but rivers were vital to their existence. The names of many existing rivers derived from the Indians and have been passed on to mountains ridges, notches and other points of interest. Many names honor an individual, most often an Indian chief. It is important to realize that most of these names were adopted by the white settlers often with imperfect understanding of their meanings and pronunciations.

In the White Mountain National Forest, four of the five Ranger Districts have adopted the Indian name of the nearest river, the exception being the Evans Notch Ranger District in Bethel, Maine, named for Captain John Evans who, though not an Indian, was an Indian fighter and one of the original grantees of Fryeburg, Maine.

Ammonoosuc: This word means "fish-place" and applies to the Upper Ammonoosuc River which flows from Berlin to Groveton, the Ammonoosuc River which flows from Carroll to Woodsville, and the Wild Ammonoosuc River which flows from Beaver Pond and intersects with the Ammonoosuc River. Various spellings include 'namaos-auke', 'ompompanusuck', and 'namaos-coo-auke'. The Ammonoosuc Ranger District is located in Bethlehem, NH.

Androscoggin: The Indians called this river 'Amariscoggin' which has the same meaning as Androscoggin - "fish-curing place". The Androscoggin River flows from Lake Umbagog through Berlin, crossing Maine into the Atlantic Ocean. The Androscoggin Ranger District can be found in Gorham, NH.

Pemigewasset: Flowing from the Pemigewasset Wilderness to the Merrimack River, the Abenaki word 'pamijowasik' translates to "swift current" or "rapids". At the entrance to the Franconia Notch State Parkway, Mt. Pemigewasset exhibits the profile of an Indian that according to legend is of the Abenaki chief, Pemigewasset. Find the Pemigewasset Ranger District in Campton, NH.

Saco: "Flowing out" or "Outlet" applies to this river's name that runs from Crawford Notch through Maine to the Atlantic Ocean. Conway, NH is the home of the Saco Ranger District.

Abenaki: 'Wan-ban-auke' or the "people living in the land of the Northern Lights", "dawn land", and "easterns" are all similar meanings of this Indian tribe's name and for a peak found in Dixville Notch.

Acteon: The Pemigewasset Indians named this ridge, which runs from Bald Knob to Jennings Peak in Waterville Valley, after their last chief.

Agiochook: Meaning "the place of the Great Spirit", this was one of the names the Indians called Mt. Washington, the highest peak in the northeast. The Abenaki version was 'kodaak wadgo', "summit of the highest mountain" while the Algonquins called it 'waumbik', "white rocks".

Attitash: Named by Moses F. Sweetser, this Indian name means "blueberries" which once grew in abundance on the mountain's slopes.

Aziscoos: Straddling the New Hampshire/Maine border in northern NH sits this lake, its name meaning "small pine trees". Aziscoos Dam was built in 1909 in Wilson Mills and at the time was the largest dam in the world.

Chocorua: Named for the Sokosis Indian Chief, this mountain is found on the east side of the Sandwich Range which runs from Conway to Campton.