

Mount Pemigewasset

Distance (round trip) : 2 3/4 miles

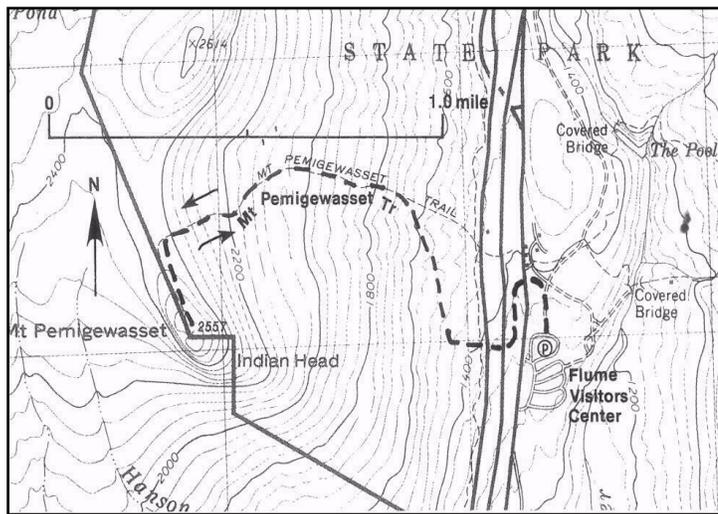
Walking time : 2 1/4 hours

Vertical rise : 1,170 feet

Mount Pemigewasset, at the south end of Franconia Notch, is the buttress for the Indian Head, whose impassive profile looks down upon the motels and restaurants along old US 3 and to I-93 curving to the south. The summit's cliff-top also has views of peaks far and near. The mountain extends north from the cliffs forming the Indian Head, and the trail to the top in that direction starts near the parking for the Flume Visitor Center. The open ledges at the end of the climb give the mountain an individuality that is more spectacular than its height would suggest, for its elevation is only 2,554 feet, less than half that of Mount Lafayette five miles away to the northeast.



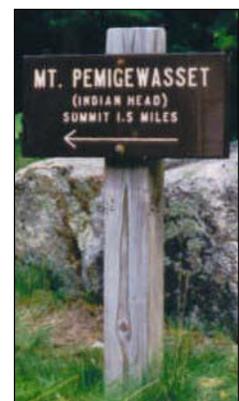
After the tourist attractions of the Notch, you'll be refreshed by this climb above the parkway and by the view of the mountains and valley. At sunset, you watch the horizon glow, and you are treated to a much rarer sight: the low-angled shadows and the brilliancy of late sun on the peaks of the Notch, a series of gleaming crests above the purple valley. It will be time then to return the 1 1/2 miles to the highway and your car. For a sunset hike, take a flashlight with new batteries and a picnic supper in a small knapsack. If you linger on the mountain you will find that the twilight of the summit has changed to darkness in the valley. In the days of mountain inns, instead of returning to a parked car, you would have crossed a lawn to the lights and hospitality of the Flume House.



To reach the trail, drive to the north section of the parking area at the Flume Visitor Center. The Franconia Notch Bike Path has its southern end here. Leave your car and walk up the bike path about a hundred yards to a sign on the left for the Mount Pemigewasset Trail. This gravel path soon takes you through an underpass below former US 3, now called the Flume Service Road. Blue blazes mark the way up toward woods and a footbridge. Turn left over the bridge and follow the trail through hardwoods to a second underpass, and then to a third, completing your passage under the parkway. You might pause

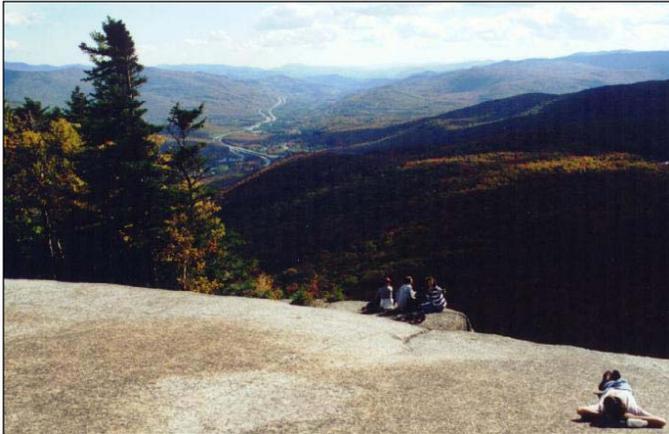
to admire the intricate stonework of granite facings on the concrete underpasses. Two hundred feet upward takes you into a forest of beech, maple, yellow birch, white birch, and other deciduous trees. The trail swings to the right and begins slabbing the contour, where it has been dug into the slope or provided with stone steps. You cross three small brooks on bridges of three flattened logs. After the third log bridge turn left up a steep rise. You are on the old trail that existed before the parkway and Flume Visitor Center. Here the climb really begins, but along a curving, moderate route among the great trunks of ancient beeches and maples. At one corner you will face a particularly massive beech.

Look up at the claw marks in the smooth, gray bark. A black bear, one fall, climbed up this tree to eat the beechnuts in the branches. Both large and small black bears have this urge and capability. Keep watching as you move on and you may find other beeches with claw marks, although I doubt if you will find any recent,



unhealed scars. Bears have five toes and five claws, yet usually only four show on trees. The little toe on the inside of the paw (unlike the human toe arrangement) does not often dig into the bark.

Steady climbing lifts you to the north side of the mountain in a growth of spruce and fir. The almost level trail follows for a short distance the edge of a wooded dropoff on your right. Three yards of upward scramble put you into a green tunnel with a stone floor. On a good day, you emerge with blinking eyes into bright sunlight. The slanting ledge ends in emptiness and distant mountains. With trees at your back you are standing beside the scalp lock of the Indian Head. Here is the place to bring wandering children under control.



The view immediately ahead below the cliff is one of both forest and human enterprise along US 3 and I-93. To the right, a leafy forest turns brilliant yellow, red, and orange in early October. It stretches away to a swampy area along Harvard Brook known as Bog Eddy. Beyond this and bearing northwest you see the cut of a powerline, then farther away the triangular shape of Mount Wolf. The Kinsman Ridge Trail traverses that mountain as a section of the AT. The long ridge to the southwest is Mount Moosilauke, the western most of the White Mountains. Looking to your left you'll see the ski trails on Loon Mountain

east of Lincoln. Beyond and to the right is Mount Tecumseh; to the left, Mount Osceola, now without a firetower.

Together they form the north wall of Waterville Valley. For a complete eastern view, follow the ledge in that direction, keeping along the fringe of evergreens on your left. Walk upward to the left and step onto the lookout ledge for the Franconia Range. From the south northward the peaks are as follows: pointed Mount Flume and its massive slide, then somewhat nearer Mount Liberty with its stepped rock summit, next Mount Haystack all rock and sun and cloud shadows. Below it is the top of the vast rock sheet called Shining Cliff so very visible from Lafayette Place. The next is Mount Lincoln. Then comes the highest of them all, Mount Lafayette, and just to the left, the dome of North Lafayette. Franconia Notch appears as walls of rock framing distant sky. The walls are Eagle Cliff to the right and that rock-climbers' playground, the expanse of cliffs on Cannon Mountain, some crags of which form the Old Man, although the famous profile is not visible from here. The summit of Cannon Mountain is capped by the little block of the Tram terminal. Pointed evergreens in front of you form delicate ornamentation against the panorama, and in time may grow up to obscure it. At present the green tips give the view a truly northern setting as a final reward for you as you turn around and descend the way you came.

