

Pemi-Trail

Location : Franconia Notch State Park

Distance : 4 miles one way, can be divided into 2 separate trips of 2 miles each.

Altitude gain: 500 feet

Difficulty: Easy



The Pemi Trail is a relatively level hike that runs along the Pemigewasset River in Franconia Notch from the Flume to Profile Lake, a total distance of 5-6 miles. You can gain access at a number of points along its length, so you have the option of hiking part, or all of the trail. The four-mile section between the Basin and Profile Lake is described here. With two cars you can avoid backtracking and thus be inspired to hike a greater distance along the trail. The elevation change is so gradual that it really does not make much difference which direction you hike. For a shorter hike you could park a second car by the hiker's parking lot at the Lafayette Campground, about halfway between the Basin and Profile Lake.

The combination of flowing water, dense forest, wildflowers, occasional views, and possible wildlife sightings makes for a very pleasant walk. Since you are in a dense "tunnel" of forest most of the time, this is a good trail for a hot summer day (and you can swim at Echo Lake after you finish). Traffic noise may be evident for much of the walk, particularly from Lafayette Campground so Profile Lake. However, the numerous small cascades and wonderful views of the cliffs and talus slope of Cannon Mountain more than make up for this nod to civilization.

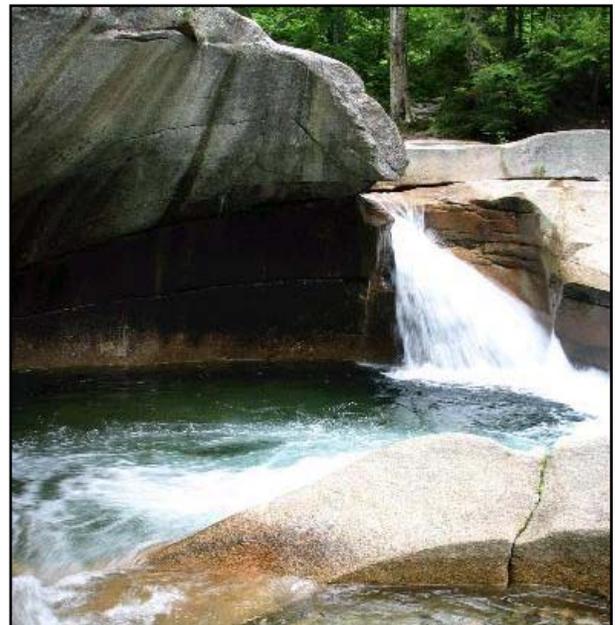
For those looking for a longer hike, the 1.6-mile section between the Flume and the Basin is generally similar to the part described below.

Getting There :

This description assumes you are hiking from the Basin to Profile Lake. Park at the Basin parking lot on either side of 1-93 (Franconia Notch parkway) and follow the signs to the Basin. The first sign for the Pemi Trail is a short distance beyond the Basin, near the trailhead to the Basin-Cascade Trail. There are many little trails in the area, but you should have no trouble finding the Pemi Trail.

The basin is a 40 foot wide, 20 ft deep pothole, carved out by the swirling action of the river. Stop and see the basin and then look for the sign for the Pemi Trail. .

The trail is marked with blue blazes and parallels the Pemigewasset River, the Franconia Notch Highway, and a bike path through the notch for its entire length. The trail is not too heavily used, so the path tends to be softer on feet than many White Mountain trails. At various points in the first section you walk on the sandy soil of the river's flood plain.



After two miles (about an hour) you reach Lafayette Campground. The exact route of the trail is hard to follow within the campground, but if you walk along the road closest to the river you'll eventually pick up the blue trail blazes again. The campground is a convenient place to use rest rooms, have a lunch at the picnic grounds, refill your canteens, or end your walk if you've had enough. Visit the small camp store to pick up soda, snacks, and worms and crawlers for fishing before resuming the second half of the walk. After departing the Lafayette Campground, the trail passes over the bike trail and enters a boggy area with lots of sphagnum moss. It traverses the slowly moving water on wooden boards, then crosses to the east side of the Pemigewasset River on a wooden bridge.



Soon after, a left fork of the trail takes you to a wonderful vista of the cliffs of Cannon Mountain. Pass back to the west side of the river on another bridge. The trail joins up with the paved bike path for a short distance, becomes a dirt path again, and passes a series of beaver dams near the south end of Profile Lake.

The trail then follows the west shore of Profile Lake with great views of Eagle Cliff and Mount Lafayette. At the north end of the lake, a right turn at a side trail takes you across a marshy area to the viewing area for the Old Man of the Mountain historical site, or you can continue straight for a more direct route to the parking lot at Profile lake..

For the return to the Basin, You can follow the Pemi trail all the way back, or transfer to the paved bike path anytime along the way for the return trip.

Highlights :

Because the hike is in a flood plain, this is a good place to teach children about rivers. The sand they see in the flood plain between the Basin and the Lafayette Campground may seem out of place in the mountains, but it reveals the handiwork of the river. When snow melts and heavy rains fall in the spring, rushing water erodes the sides of the mountains, carrying all kinds of soil particles into the river. The smaller particles of silt and clay are carried farther down the river, leaving the heavier sand behind. In the spring the river typically overflows its channel, covering the entire flood plain in some very wet years. Evidence of this flooding is the sandy soil beneath your feet on the trail. Between the campground and Profile Lake the banks of the river are steep sided, with no obvious flood plain. This is an area where the gradient of the river is steeper, and the rushing water is still eroding a channel through newly exposed bedrock.



