

White Mountains Scenic Tours

The White Mountains Trail National Scenic Byway Northern White Mountains Loop Southern White Mountains Loop

Whether your travels take you along the White Mountains Trail National Scenic Byway, the Northern Loop, or the Southern Loop, you're in for a treat. Along the way, you'll discover spectacular scenery, covered bridges, historic sites, picturesque towns and villages, and friendly people.

The White Mountains Trail - A National Scenic Byway

Take a Grand Tour

The White Mountains have long been known for natural splendor, cultural richness, historical charm and stimulating recreation—as well as some of the most beautiful scenery in the eastern United States. The **White Mountains Trail**, designated a National Scenic Byway, encompasses all these aspects over the course of its 100-mile route. The Trail is a loop tour that winds through sections of the 800,000-acre White Mountain National Forest and past many of the region's most popular attractions. It can be driven in a day or can be the object of an entire vacation's worth of relaxation, exploration, and discovery. The Northern and Southern Loops are fascinating routes to explore, affording a unique look at life in and around the White Mountains.

Parts of the Trail have been used by travelers for centuries. In the early 19th century, the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and landscape painter Thomas Cole, among others, drew attention to the White Mountains. In short order, visitors in search of wilderness adventure and glorious scenery began to arrive in significant numbers. Many vistas we admire today along—and near—the White Mountains Trail are little changed since then.

North Woodstock to Franconia Notch

NATURAL & HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST: Mt. Pemigewasset and the Indian Head profile, the Basin, Boise Rock, the former site of the Old Man of the Mountain, Old Man of the Mountain Museum, Franconia Notch State Park, Franconia Notch Recreation Path, Echo Lake, Profile Lake, New England Ski Museum, Hugh J. Gallen Scenic Vista.

INTERPRETIVE SITES: White Mountains Visitor Center, Rte. 112, North Woodstock. Flume Visitor Center, Rte. 3, Lincoln.

The White Mountains Trail begins at the **White Mountains Visitor Center** in North Woodstock. You may be tempted to linger here to visit exhibits and the friendly bear inside the Gift Shop. The town offers a good selection of tax-free shopping at dozens of unique stores, a large selection of lodgings, superb dining and a calendar of special events.

West of North Woodstock on Route 112 is **Lost River Gorge and Boulder Caves**, a natural wonder that has drawn visitors since the turn of the 20th century. Today you can tour the fascinating gorge on boardwalks, crawl through caves, visit the nature garden, see geological displays and pan for fossils and gemstones. Lost River Gorge is a favorite with children and adults who love exploration and scenic vistas.

The White Mountains Trail, however, follows Rte. 3 north. On that route are two very different family attractions: **Clark's Trading Post**, with its trained bears, antique Americana and steam trains; and **Whale's Tale Water Park**, the only complete water park in the region, recently named "Best in Class Water Park in America."

Farther north, Rte. 3 joins I-93/Franconia Notch Parkway, a stretch that takes you through the 6,440-acre **Franconia Notch State Park**, along a route framed by the towering peaks of the Franconia and Kinsman mountain ranges. The Park includes the **Flume Gorge**, a natural 800-foot chasm with waterfalls, covered bridges, a

scenic pool, glacial boulders, and Wolf's Den Cave. Echo Lake, the Basin (a deep glacial pothole), Cannon Mountain, and the former site of the Old Man of the Mountain are further north on the Parkway. The **Cannon Mountain Aerial Tramway** serves skiers in winter and sightseers the rest of the year. **The New England Ski Museum** (see page 26), at Cannon Mountain's base, offers a look at our skiing heritage; while the **Old Man of the Mountain Museum** (see page 26) examines the famous natural stone profile. Be sure to stop and take in the views along this stretch—and don't forget your camera!

Route 3 between I-93 and Route 302, to Twin Mountain

NATURAL & HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST: Mt. Cleveland Overlook, Mt. Cleveland Scenic Vista & Picnic Area, Beaver Brook Wayside Area.

This section of the Trail is brief, and is notable primarily for the wonderful Mt. Cleveland overlook, which gives you the opportunity to stretch your legs and make sure your camera is within easy reach. You'll be needing it, because what follows is some of the most gorgeous scenery along the White Mountains Trail.

Wildlife is also plentiful along this section of the Trail—it's an excellent area to catch sight of deer and moose in particular. Hikers should also know that the Twin Mountain area accesses a number of hiking trailheads.

Route 302 through Crawford Notch to Bartlett

NATURAL & HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST: Rte. 302— Crawford Notch: Mount Washington Hotel, Silver Cascade, Flume Cascade, Crawford Railroad Station, Saco Lake (headwaters of the Saco River), Willey House, Frankenstein Cliff, Bartlett Covered Bridge.

INTERPRETIVE SITE: Crawford Notch Visitor Center and Willey House Site—Rt. 302, Crawford Notch State Park.

The **Twin Mountain and Bretton Woods** area was first settled by Abel Crawford in 1792. Abel and his son, Ethan, built the Notch House, signaling the beginning of the hotel era there. Abel was also responsible for building the first path to the summit of Mt. Washington, a route which is still in use today. In recognition of his efforts, Crawford is deservedly known as "the father of White Mountains tourism".

The tradition of hospitality that Abel Crawford began culminated in 1902 with the building of one of the grandest hotels of all: the Mount Washington Resort. In 1944, the hotel played host to the World Monetary Conference, which simultaneously established the gold standard and secured Bretton Woods' place in history.

Just off Rte. 302 in Bretton Woods is the **Mt. Washington Cog Railway**, the world's first mountain-climbing cog railway. When the Cog was first proposed, the New Hampshire legislature was so doubtful of the project's success that they gave the builder the right to build the "railway to the moon!" They didn't get that far, of course, but today you can ride the Cog to the summit of 6,288-foot Mt. Washington. While you're there, stop in to see the "Old Peppersass," the world's very first mountain-climbing locomotive, which puffed its way to the summit on July 3, 1869.

From Bretton Woods, continue on Rte. 302 as it travels past the historic Mount Washington Resort, site of the 1944 **World Monetary Conference** with displays and photos of the historic event. Next you'll travel through Crawford Notch and **Crawford Notch State Park** to Bartlett. Along this stretch of road you'll encounter several scenic overlooks, beautiful waterfalls, the site of the historic Willey Slide (where in 1826, Samuel Willey, his family and two hired men lost their lives in a landslide) and the trailheads for some of the most popular hikes in the White Mountains.

Hiking trails, in fact, can be found all along the White Mountains Trail: everything from short, easy walks suitable for family groups to wilderness adventures. Trails to 20 4,000-foot summits are also accessed from various places along the White Mountains Trail.

The next section of the Trail takes you through the **Mt. Washington Valley**. A summer resort since the early 1800's, the area became a winter resort in the 1930's and has never looked back. There are five downhill ski areas, miles of cross country trails and so many things to see and do that vacationers come year-round. The Valley also has a well-deserved reputation as a sales tax-free shopping mecca, boasting nearly 200 stores.

From Rte. 302 in the center of **Bartlett**, you can choose from two routes. The shorter, open late spring to late fall, heads south over Bear Notch Road to the **Kancamagus Highway**; at its highest point, an overlook offers breathtaking views of Mt. Washington. The more popular longer route follows Rte. 302 east to Glen, where it joins Rte. 16 south through North Conway and Conway. Before reaching Glen, you'll find **Attitash**, a mountain of fun with something for everyone from alpine slides and scenic chairlift rides, to waterslides and mountain biking.

A slight detour north will bring you to a real family favorite: **Story Land**. As the name implies, here you'll explore the wonderful world of childhood with all sorts of rides, activities and shows—it's a perennial favorite that has been entertaining families for over 50 years.

North Conway and Conway

NATURAL & HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST: Saco and Swift River Covered Bridges, Eastman Lord House Museum, White Horse and Cathedral Ledges, Moat Mountain Range, Intervale Scenic Vista, Abenaki Indian Camp, Echo Lake State Park.

INTERPRETIVE SITES: Intervale Rest Area, Rt. 16, Intervale; Conway Visitor Center, Rt. 16, Conway; Mt. Washington Weather Discovery Center, Mt. Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce, Rt. 16, North Conway.

Route 16 passes through Intervale, past the **Intervale Scenic Vista**, and then continues south to **North Conway**. The North Conway-Conway area is said to have the largest concentration of shopping, restaurants, recreational facilities and lodgings in the White Mountains. North Conway Village is home to the **Conway Scenic Railroad** and its beautifully restored 1874 Victorian station. You can choose from scenic round-trip train rides of varying duration to Conway, Bartlett, or through the dramatic landscape of Crawford Notch.

Adjacent to the railroad station is the 18-hole North Conway Country Club; another golf course is Hale's Location Country Club, just off West Side Road.

There's no end to the fun in this area: summer repertory theatre (in-town), concerts in **Schouler Park** in the center of North Conway, terrific shopping along Rte. 16 and in the villages, and a picture-perfect setting. To the west of these towns are White Horse and Cathedral Ledges, both big favorites with rock climbers. A seasonal road goes to the top of Cathedral Ledge where there's a great view of the valley below. And at the Ledge's base is beautiful Echo Lake State Park, with its sandy beach and picnic area.

The North-South Road, which opened in 2002, parallels Rte. 16 from North Conway Village to Rte. 302 in Redstone, and offers views of Pudding Pond, woods and fields along the way. You can access it from Mechanic Street (to head south only) or from Kearsarge, Seavey or Grove Streets, Artist Falls Road, or **Settlers' Green Outlet Village** (one of the area's largest shopping centers) and the White Mountain Outlets.

If you're ready to stretch your legs, head for **Conway** or North Conway Village, either of which is easily explored on foot. You can take a self-guided historic tour of Conway using the brochure available at the Conway Public Library and at the Conway Historical Society.

Just south of Conway, Rte. 16 intersects the **Kancamagus Highway**, which runs for 34 1/2 miles from Conway to Lincoln, and completes the White Mountains Trail loop. (Or begin the Southern Loop here; see pages 52–55.)

The Kancamagus Highway: from Conway to Lincoln

NATURAL & HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST: Watchable wildlife, Swift River, Dugway Picnic Area, Albany Covered Bridge, Passaconaway Historic Site, Hancock, Pemi, C.L. Graham Wangan Ground, and Sugar Hill Overlooks, Sabbaday Falls, Rocky Gorge Scenic Area, Lower Falls and Picnic Area, Greeley Ponds Scenic Area, Discovery Trail.

INTERPRETIVE SITES: Saco Ranger Station and Russell-Colbath House, near Conway on the Kancamagus Highway, Lincoln Woods Ranger Station, White Mountains Visitor Center, North Woodstock.

Undoubtedly, one of the most spectacular sections of the White Mountains Trail is the **Kancamagus Highway**, which stretches 34 1/2 miles from Conway in the east to Lincoln in the west. "The Kanc," as it is known, traverses the **White Mountain National Forest**, crossing the flank of Mt. Kancamagus and climbing to nearly 3,000 feet in the process. Along its length are numerous hiking trails, federally designated Scenic Areas, and overlooks that provide travelers with truly breathtaking views.

The highway was named for Kancamagus, an early Indian Chief of the Penacook Confederacy, who tried to keep the peace between his people and the white settlers. Repeated harassment by the English eventually ended his efforts, and ultimately brought war and bloodshed to the region. In the early 1690's, the tribes of the Confederacy scattered, and Kancamagus and his followers moved on, either to northern New Hampshire or—in some instances—to Canada.

It was Passaconaway, Kancamagus' grandfather, who, in 1627, originally united more than 17 central New England Indian tribes into the Penacook Confederacy. The rich flat land 12 miles from Conway is named for him. This community was first settled about 1790. The Russell-Colbath House is the only remaining 19th century homestead in the area, and serves as a US Forest Service Information Center.

At the other end of the Kancamagus is Lincoln/Woodstock, a major summer resort as early as 1870. Today it's a year-round resort area that offers something for every recreational taste.

Golfers, tennis players, horseback riders and rollerbladers will find ample opportunity to indulge their passion, as will anglers, hikers, cyclists, kayakers and motorsports fans. The area is also known for its fine shopping and numerous restaurants, many of which you'll encounter if you take a stroll along the main street of either town.

Lincoln offers easy access to the White Mountain National Forest, as well as the area's many quality family attractions, including **Loon Mountain Gondola**. Besides the skyride, Loon Mountain offers glacial caves, mountain biking, hiking, climbing walls and more.

In Lincoln, it's all aboard the **Hobo Railroad**, where round-trip train excursions cross back and forth along the Pemigewasset River, offering riders the chance to enjoy a variety of scenic vistas along the way. Most trips have a car attendant serving "Hobo Picnic Lunches" and ice cream. The Station Gift Shop offers a selection of gifts for the whole family—railroad enthusiasts in particular!

Guests of the **Cafe Lafayette Dinner Train** enjoy fine dining and spirits in beautifully restored Pullman and Art Deco dining cars while viewing magnificent mountain vistas and lush forests. The train begins and ends its evening trip in North Woodstock.

Lincoln's diverse past as both a vacation and a manufacturing center is evident: the former J.E. Henry paper mill, for example, today houses stores, restaurants, an inn and the **North Country Center for the Arts**, noted for its summer schedule of plays and children's theater.

The Northern Loop

North of Franconia Notch State Park is the **Franconia-Sugar Hill-Easton** area. This gentle countryside is a bit more rural, the pace slower, the views absolutely gorgeous ... so get off the highway and explore this beautiful area.

Don't miss **The Frost Place**, once the mountain farm of New Hampshire poet Robert Frost, which today has a resident poet and nature trail; the **Stone Stack Iron Foundry** Interpretative Center; the **Sugar Hill Museum**, a gem of a small historical museum with changing exhibits that reflect two centuries of North Country life; Franconia's **Abbie Greenleaf Library**; and the drives along Routes 116, 117 and Sunset Hill Road. The first ski school in America was located in Sugar Hill and is marked by a state historical marker on Route 117.

Continue north on I-93 from Franconia, and you'll come to **Littleton**, considered by many to be the shopping, dining and antiquing center of the northwestern White Mountains. Once part of the Underground Railroad, Littleton at one

time was also home to the largest manufacturer of stereoscopic views in America; many views were of the White Mountains, and were instrumental in helping to promote the area as a vacation destination.

Today you can stroll down Littleton's Main Street on a historic walking tour that includes 23 buildings of architectural interest, plus art exhibits at the library and community house. The **Littleton Grist Mill**, established in 1798, has been restored to its authentic internal workings, and sports enthusiasts shouldn't miss **Moore Dam Reservoir**, a wonderful place for boating and fishing. Littleton is also home to a 300' covered bridge, new in 2004; you'll find it spanning the river between the Grist Mill and Miller's Cafe.

From Littleton, it's a scenic drive on Rte. 135 along the Connecticut River to Lancaster and Rte. 2. Or you may opt to head back on Rte. 302 to Bethlehem which, at 1,500 feet above sea level, is arguably the highest occupied village east of the Rockies. Known for its virtually pollen-free air, it was once the headquarters of the National Hay Fever Association. Today antique shops and restaurants line Main Street.

West of Bethlehem, take Rte. 116 north to Jefferson, or travel farther east on Rte. 302 and pick up Rte. 3 north to Lancaster and Jefferson, home of two popular family attractions, **Six Gun City** and **Santa's Village**, both of which offer a variety of fun rides and activities, all included with your admission. Six Gun City's "Gold Rush Express," is a runaway train family coaster, while visitors to Santa's Village, shouldn't miss the "Reindeer Rendezvous" or the award-winning 3-D film "A Tinkerdoodle Christmas."

Nearby **Randolph**, just east of **Jefferson** on Route 2, is an equally lovely rural village. Hikers are especially fond of Randolph, due to its location at the base of the northern **Presidential Mountain Range**, Mt. Madison and Mt. Adams; and there are many trailheads in the town.

Your next stop is the **Gorham** area, a notable vacation area for families and outdoor enthusiasts, set at the crossroads of Routes 2 and 16. From there, turn south on Route 16 through Pinkham Notch. While the scenery along this stretch is striking as any you've seen, some of the most spectacular views in all the White Mountains—or anywhere, for that matter—are still to come. Whether you choose to take a guided van ride, or drive your own car to the top, a trip up the **Mt. Washington Auto Road** to the top of the highest peak north of the Carolinas and east of the Rockies is an experience that shouldn't be missed. Or, for terrific views of Mt. Washington and a good deal more (on a clear day, it's possible to see all the way to the Atlantic Ocean), treat your family to a ride on the four-passenger **Wildcat Express gondola skyride** or new **ZipRider™** at Wildcat Mountain.

From the base of either Wildcat or the Auto Road, Rte. 16 takes you south to the picturesque village of **Jackson**. Many visitors like to walk the mile and a half loop around the village and the Wentworth Golf Club course; the route takes you through one covered bridge, the "kissing bridge" that leads to the village, and past another on the golf course. There are also shops and restaurants along the way.

If you're in the mood for another scenic detour, explore Five Mile Circuit (Rte. 16B), which joins Rte. 16A in the village. This route will take you past Black Mountain, a ski area in the winter; the **Eagle Mountain House golf course**; **Jackson Falls** (a perfect place for a picnic or a cooling dip on a hot summer day); and the town's community church and library. There's also a pleasant short walk along Wildcat River and through the town park.

When you're ready to move on, head south on Rte. 16, which joins up with Rte. 302 in Glen, and continues on to **North Conway** on the White Mountains Trail.

The Southern Loop and the Lakes Region

There are a number of ways to make a loop through the southern White Mountains and the Lakes Region; here are a couple possibilities.

Plymouth to Waterville Valley

INTERPRETIVE SITE ALONG THE WAY: Waterville Valley Region Chamber of Commerce, Rte. 49, Campton.

Off I-93 Exit 28, at the end of Route 49, you'll come to the **Waterville Valley** area, which includes the towns of Waterville Valley, Thornton, West Thornton and Campton. Waterville Valley is cupped by high peaks and encircled by the White Mountain National Forest. In this self-contained village, everything is within walking distance or a free shuttle ride.

Back on I-93 head south and take Exit 26 to Routes 3A and 25 for Plymouth and Rumney to **Polar Caves Park**, the first of the 16 White Mountains Attractions you encounter. The glacial cave tours, which have fascinated families for more than 80 years, are self-guided. In addition, there are petting animals, exotic birds, and gem mining. After a visit here, you'll want to backtrack a little, to I-93 north.

Plymouth is a university town, with all the sports, arts, educational and other activities that you'd expect. Follow Rte. 3 into Ashland, a good spot to shop and grab a bite to eat, then continue on to Holderness, home to the prep school of the same name. This is the Squam Lake area, made famous in the film *On Golden Pond*. Take a boat tour around the lake or visit the **Squam Lakes Natural Science Center**.

Stay on Rte. 3, and you'll come to **Meredith**, another great shopping town. Enjoy the view from the public parking by the piers before continuing south on Rte. 3 to **Weirs Beach**, widely known for its part in the annual June Motorcycle Week. Weirs Beach is also home to the **M/S Mount Washington cruise ship**.

From Meredith, turn west onto Rte. 104 to return to I-93 and your starting point.

A second tour begins in **Conway**, in the eastern White Mountains, where you're faced with two attractive route choices. The first follows Rte. 153 through Eaton, East Madison, Freedom and Effingham to Rte. 25 which joins Rte. 16 in Ossipee, then south to Wolfeboro on Rte. 28. This takes you past beautiful Crystal Lake and rural farmland.

An equally scenic option is to take Rte. 16 south from Conway, past **Chocorua Lake**, with its famous view of Mt. Chocorua. Farther south, in West Ossipee, you can turn west on Rte. 25 toward Moultonborough, Center Harbor and Meredith, or continue south and pick up Rte. 28 to beautiful and historic **Wolfeboro**, America's oldest summer resort. There's an excellent historical museum in the center of town, plenty of shops and restaurants, and you can watch the M/S Mount Washington come in at the town pier.

From Wolfeboro, Rte. 109 north to Mirror Lake, through Melvin Village to Moultonborough, is an especially scenic drive. In **Moultonborough**, you might want to stop at the old country store, a historic site in itself. Return to Rte. 25 and go west through Center Harbor, home to some very interesting shops, including one of the largest quilt shops in the country. Head north on Rte. 25B, then right on Rte. 3 to the center of Holderness (described above).

From Holderness, take Rte. 113 east to Center Sandwich, the town where the **League of New Hampshire Craftsmen** began. You can see the work of many local craftspeople—as well as others from across the state—at Sandwich Home Industries in the village. From here, you can head back to Rte. 25 and your starting point, or take the more leisurely tour by continuing on Rte. 113 through picturesque Wonalancet, birthplace of the world-famous Chinook breed of sled dogs, and on to Tamworth, home of the Barnstormers, the nation's oldest professional summer theater, and the Remick Country Doctor Museum & Farm. Follow Rte. 113 east to pick up Rte. 16 in Chocorua, then it's on to your starting place in Conway.