

## Trails and trail clubs

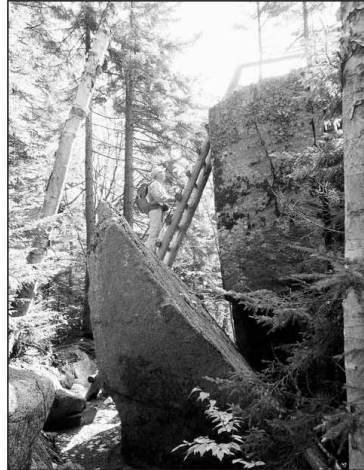


### Passing TIME

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A local attraction that has been rewarding residents and drawing visitors since the late 1800's is the hiking trail system. In the 1840's and 1850's, people began coming to the Lakes Region and the White Mountains to enjoy the scenery. Tourist guide books told them about railroad and stagecoach service, hotels and boardinghouses, and common scenic attractions, but did not go so far as to tell them how to get "into" the mountains. That changed when active outdoor pursuits, and "adventure" became popular in the 1870's. Hiking clubs were formed in Portland and Boston and on college campuses, with an aim of finding routes to overlooks, peaks and ridges. The Appalachian Mountain Club - now the oldest continuously-operating hiking organization in the U.S. - was founded in Boston in 1876 to explore wildlands, collect information, make maps, "open new paths", and make "improvements". In the AMC's second year, women were admitted to membership and immediately became active in hiking and trail-building. Coinciding with the growing popular interest in hiking, Moses Sweetser published the first hiking guidebook in 1876, "The White Mountains: A Handbook for Travellers," with approach descriptions (there were not many trails yet) for reaching most of the major peaks.

Other clubs were established with a focus on particular areas. Founded nearby were: the Waterville Valley Athletic and Improvement Association, 1888, and the Wonalancet Outdoor Club, 1892. Waterville Valley was unique in the White Mountains in already having a trail system built by hotel owner Nathaniel Greeley



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#### On a trail in Waterville Valley.

during the 1850's. Greeley's ambitious bridle paths and trails went to the surrounding mountains and overlooks and ran completely out of the valley to Woodstock (today's Tripoli Road), to Crawford Notch, and to Whiteface Intervale in Sandwich. The Waterville club maintained Greeley's trails, added new ones, and is still at work there today. The Wonalancet club was brought into being by slightly-built, young, but determined Katherine Sleeper, who ran a boardinghouse and made the locale a destination for hikers and outdoorspeople. She got residents to cut trails to the surrounding Sandwich Range peaks and build shelters, and she also worked to protect old growth forest from logging. Kate married Chinook sled dog breeder and Antarctic explorer Arthur Walden (Jan. 9, 2014) and together they hosted hikers for many years. The Wonalancet Outdoor Club is still maintaining trails - including that to Mount Katherine, named for Kate - and issuing updated maps. These clubs now operate in cooperation with the White Mountain National Forest, which was created with their and other organizations' advocacy in 1911.

Organizations dedicated to conservation appeared in the early twentieth century, corresponding with lake-shore development and massive, destructive logging in the surrounding mountains. One of the earliest was the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, established in 1901

to do what its name said. By 1910, it was buying timberland at Mount Sunapee for a potential state park, by 1912 it was building trails, and today it owns 178 reservations, some fifty-eight of which have trails. In 1904, the Squam Lakes Association was founded to protect the watershed of the Squam Lakes basin. It too acquired land for conservation and established trails, now totaling more than fifty miles in length. The Squam Lake Conservation Society, founded in 1960, and the Lakes Region Conservation Trust, established in 1979, own scenically prime conserved land in the Lakes Region, much of it with trails. In 1963, the New Hampshire legislature enabled towns to establish conservation commissions. Those volunteer commissions manage town forests, including building trails. Town forests in Meredith alone have some fifteen miles of trails, including one cut by yours truly. Anyone interested in the rich history of trail clubs should see the Museum of the White Mountains' exhibit (in Plymouth): "Trail Clubs: Connecting People with the Mountains", featuring photos, maps, artifacts, and even a lean-to, open from now until March, 2016.

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*Meredith resident Rebecca Bissonnette graduates from Lasell College*

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