

Send to printer Close window

A Unique White Mountains Exhibit

A long time ago — more than 400 million years — the foundation for today's recreational experiences began to form in the white mountains

BY BARBARA COLES



Peter Doucette climbs “way in the wilderness” on the cliffs above the kancamagus highway.

PHOTO BY ANNE SKIDMORE

Most people who go to the White Mountains probably don't think much about how the places that they ski, hike and climb came to be. That's what the staff at the Museum of the White Mountains want to change.

They launched an exhibition that explores the connection between the geology of the eons-old mountain range and the recreation that now takes place there. “We want to be a gateway for people passing through to learning something about the mountains before they venture into them,” says Dr. Catherine Amidon, director of the museum, which opened its doors two years ago on the campus of Plymouth University.

The exhibition highlights some of the most beautiful recreational spots in the White Mountains — Cannon Cliff, Mt. Washington's Tuckerman Ravine and the Franconia Ridge. You'll see them in ultra-high resolution photographs called GigaPans.

Amidon says the GigaPan technology — created by Carnegie Mellon and NASA to allow the Mars rovers to capture high-definition panoramas of the planet — combines hundreds of high-resolution images into one: “At the exhibition, you can see the whole Presidential Range and then zoom in to the point where you can see individual rocks on the summit.”

The geological information is divided into three sections: Climbers and Bedrock (different rock types lead to different styles of climbing), Adventures Shaped by Climate (Ice Age glaciers shaped features of the White Mountains like Tuckerman and Huntington ravines) and Hiking Ancient Mountains (a collision between continents 400 million years ago thrust flat-lying rocks into high peaks, at their maximum height higher than the Rockies today).

Another aspect explored by the exhibition: Changing Climate, Changing Adventure.

Need to Know

The exhibition — “Beyond Granite: The Geology of Adventure” — runs until March 8 at the museum on Highland Street near the university library in Plymouth. The hours are Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Wednesday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon-5 p.m. Admission is free.

A new exhibition — “Trail Clubs: Connecting People with the Mountains” — opens on March 31 and will run for a year. It’s about how trail clubs came together to create the network of trails in the White Mountains that have shaped the experience of hikers. The trail system is maintained by volunteers from the clubs as well as by the White Mountain National Forest.

The museum’s website has a short video that complements the current exhibition “Beyond Granite: The Geology of Adventure.” (Well worth looking at.) Other videos posted include “The Balancing Act: The Story and Legacy of the Weeks Act” and “Passing Through: The Allure of the White Mountains.”

A digital collections database for the museum and university is accessible online at plymouth.edu/museum-of-the-white-mountains/browse. It features high-quality images with sharing, e-mailing, downloading and commenting capabilities.