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## THE WHITE MOUNTAINS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

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THE White Mountains of New Hampshire form the most elevated block of high ground in the northern half of the Appalachian Highlands. In Mount Washington they reach 6,293 feet and this height is only exceeded east of the Mississippi by a group of summits far to the south in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Physiographically, the region consists of a highly dissected tableland of the type so well exemplified by our British hills, and shows a complicated radial system of drainage. Generally, the eastern half of the mountain tract, the whole of which measures roughly 35 miles by 35, is drained by the large rivers Androscoggin and Saco through Maine to the sea, while the western half drains either westward to the Connecticut and so to Long Island Sound or southward by the Pemigewasset into the Merrimac, whose mouth is not far north of Boston. These rivers and their tributaries divide the high ground into a number of blocks mainly trending north and south and provide a series of through routes of corresponding direction. The principal ones, all of which carry a high-road and the central one a railway as well, are the well-known passes of Franconia, Crawford, and Pinkham Notches; in all three the summit or height-of-land lies at about 2,000 feet. The most imposing mountains are those that compose the Presidential Range between the Pinkham and Crawford Notch roads, and here lie ten out of a dozen summits above 5,000 feet. The country lay full in the path of the great Pleistocene ice sheet and the heavy glaciation has so softened the contours of the land forms that only small areas of bare rock are exposed. The



steepest places lie everywhere in the "headwalls" where the glacial carries bite deepest into the rounded flanks of the otherwise rather featureless hills.

It might be thought that a mountain country of size, structure and elevation, thus sufficiently similar to our British Highlands, might bear a general scenic resemblance to what we are familiar with. This is far from the case, for one must remember that the area is not situated in the west coast climate of these islands but in a continental east coast climatic region and in the heart of the coniferous forest belt. The whole region, from valley floor to about 4,750 feet, is completely smothered by forest—spruce, balsam fir, and birch on the high slopes, and the same with an admixture of maple and aspen on the low ground. This is all second growth, for despite the steepness of the slopes, the valleys were logged in the latter half of last century for the valuable white pine and hemlock, and there is now hardly any virgin timber of any size. The woods give to climbing in the White Mountains a particular atmosphere, and most of the parties who make expeditions there seem to approach their task as a problem in woodcraft rather than mountaineering.

Route finding, where no trail has been cut, can be a very troublesome problem; in the hollows one plunges on among alder thickets and swampy patches; on the hillside it is often almost impossible to get a view. Fallen timber and dense young growth make for a snail's pace and drive the climber higher in the hope of seeing where he is going, and when a break in the trees gives the expected view, it is often only a tantalising vista of quite unrecognisable wooded spurs. The occasional avalanche tracks, here called slides, that scar the woods with scree and debris, are real blessings, for they offer rapid if rough lines of ascent and from them one can get an unobstructed view. Access in the woods has been immeasurably improved by the extensive cutting of trails so that, in the Presidential Range at least, every conceivable route has a properly marked and named path. This does not apply in the same way to some other less frequented areas and at the head of the east branch of the Pemigewasset

there is a wilderness 15 miles square where the enthusiast can lose himself to his heart's content.

I found the geographical nomenclature most absorbing. We are so accustomed to find our mountain vocabulary drawn from northern sources that it is a little strange to find words from the southern speech being used to describe hill features. A roaring burn, a thundering ghyll or beck, is here a brook or stream. A romantic lochan or tarn in a high corrie set with birches and sweet scented balsams is no more than a pond, and the corrie itself is a gulf or ravine. The open slopes above treeline are lawns, open treeless patches below that level are ledges and I have already mentioned the very expressive terms, headwall and height-of-land. The place names of northern New Hampshire fall into the same categories as are found elsewhere in North America. There are the names of Indian provenance that remind us that these hills were once the hunting grounds of the Abenakis and the Penobscots and that along their valleys passed many a war party in the old French wars. As always it is the rivers that bear the old names and the Indian names of hills are relatively few in number and recent in origin. The larger settlements tend to bear names of English places—Chatham, Conway, Woodstock, Gorham. In contrast with the beautiful Indian river names the peaks and passes are burdened with tasteless and unimaginative designations, the names of presidents and statesmen, local inhabitants and scouts, and we find an interminable string of Pine Mountains, Cedar Hills, Elk Brooks and Bear Mountains. This is not to say that there are not features with fine and mouth-filling names such as Nineteen Mile Brook, Swift Diamond River, Wild River and so forth.

These notes are based on a short trip that I paid to the region in May 1938. My wife and I alighted, at about 4 P.M., at the station of Gorham on the Androscoggin. Since crossing the Canadian border an hour or two before the train had traversed the wilderness known as the North Country. Here were low hills of bare rock, burned-over valleys with the whitened trunks rising from banks of black and grey ash, and big rivers with the trees crowding down to the

rocky banks. We knew there was a bus service that would drop us at Pinkham Notch Camp of the Appalachian Mountain Club a dozen miles away, but we didn't realise that there was only one bus a day and that we had missed it by five hours. The day was damp and the mist curled among the trees a few hundred feet above us. The river roared coldly on our right and twisted among great moraine heaps, the cars passed steadily, accelerating as we tentatively gave the sign of the road. By the time it was dark and had begun to rain heavily we had revised our ideas about American hospitality of the highway. The trudge was memorable, however, on zoological grounds, for we followed a half-seen blackish greyish animal at one point. We followed it excitedly, though a little timidly for I was sure it was a skunk, but it seemed to vanish. We cast cautiously about until I suddenly came face to face with the object in the fork of a small tree and found it to be a huge porcupine. I had never thought of them climbing trees—probably because a hedgehog doesn't.

Pinkham Notch Camp is a fine example of the larger mountain establishments of the Club. A couple of large log houses and some small cabins lie in a clearing at the summit of the pass. There are a number of hutmen, mostly Dartmouth College students, and food is supplied. I shall not forget the evening spent round the huge open fireplace for it was then that I made my only personal acquaintance with a cannibal, or rather with one who had once been a cannibal. (Although I have reason for believing his yarn implicitly, I have not yet met anyone else who will credit it. I therefore reluctantly refrain from telling this most interesting story.)

Low cloud next day forced a postponement of the ascent of Mount Washington and the substitution of the shorter traverse of Mount Wildcat (4,460 feet). The trail wound among the trees and only once or twice came out of the woods to cross open rocky slopes where there should have been—but were not—terrific views across at the great ravines on the eastern flank of the Presidential Range. The route led steeply upwards and we were glad to avail ourselves of the

magnificent hand-holds afforded by roots and tree trunks. After crossing half a dozen tops, all densely wooded, the path dropped very steeply to Carter Notch between our mountain and the higher Carter Dome which is crowned by an imposing fire-watching tower of steel. Carter Notch is a most exquisite place with two little ponds lying between tree-clad cliffs and a small log cabin at the waterside. After a meal we dropped down into the thick woods along Nineteen Mile Brook and I regret that here my woodcraft failed me and I became entangled in a maze of logging roads all entirely similar, all marked with indecipherable blazes on the trees and ending in clearings encumbered with piles of spruce slash, the cut branches after lumbering. My defence is that logging roads do not get on to maps and a hillside can soon relapse into wilderness if the trails are not regularly cut back. At dusk we got clear and followed the valley road back to the Camp.

Next morning was perfect and the foreshortened cone of Mount Washington, 4,300 feet above the camp, beckoned us early into the woods of Tuckerman Ravine. The woods became thinner and we began to get a view of the upper part of the ravine, the headwall which forms the most notable ski-ing ground in the East. Then we branched sharply to the right and took to a slide up the Lion Head, the north enclosing spur. A very steep pull took us to the crest at 4,800 feet and here, suddenly, we were at timberline. For several hundred feet above the trees there is a dense band of scrub, mostly dwarf spruce, about 3 to 5 feet high, and so impenetrable that, to force a way through, it would be both painful and extremely damaging to the clothes. There are now numerous trails cut through it to reach the open slopes of grass and rocks beyond. Above timberline the mountains rear great bare and rocky tops and, as the passes between them lie above treeline, it must be possible to walk for over 12 miles in the open. The summit cone is a huge heap of jumbled rocks crowned by an ugly group of buildings, including bare hotels, the terminus of a rack railway, shacks, and an observatory which records some of the most outrageous weather on our earth.

There is nothing very alpine about these hills in summer, but in winter the range is very formidable indeed. We in this country have no conception of the enormous masses of snow that drift into the ravines often covering the scrub completely and filling the woods so deep that it is quite impossible to thread them without skis or snow-shoes. The latter foot-gear seems to be more satisfactory in very rough forest. The upper slopes above the ravines become covered with sheets of hard wind-moulded snow and ice separated by broad gravel patches quite denuded of snow. The death rate of these hills in winter is very high; this is not surprising when we read that temperatures of twenty below zero with a 60 mile an hour wind are not uncommon.

Such weather was far from our thoughts as we pushed up the last few yards in blazing sunshine. Our objective was not far away, for the A.M.C. have an excellent hut at Lake of the Clouds only a short distance away and about 1,200 feet below the summit. It is just above treeline and commands magnificent views. Unfortunately, it had not belied its name and had been in the clouds for a week or two before our visit and the blankets were soaking wet. The sleeping accommodation consisted of a couple of bunk rooms with metal beds in three layers. In the morning we breakfasted on enormous piles of fried buckwheat cakes and maple syrup so that we were hardly mobile for some time after breakfast. The traverse of practically all the high peaks of the range came as a delight to a confirmed "Munro-bagger." The high route gave wonderful views into the forest-filled cirques on either side; the only distress was the absence of water on such a broiling day and, when we arrived at Madison Springs Huts on the Adams-Madison Col, Barbara was so exhausted that she fell fast asleep in the bunkhouse and had to be wakened after my return from Mount Madison by lashings of hot tea. Dark clouds building up in the west suggested that the fine weather spell was about to break, so we practically ran off the heights choosing a valley trail running north to the village of Randolph. The wild life of New Hampshire was represented by chipmunks, squirrels, and a group of white-tailed Virginia deer, and

we heard a wonderful demonstration of the warbling of the song-sparrow, a very different bird from his common relation.

A hitch-hike of 7 miles landed us at Dolly Copp public camping site where we had arranged to meet friends. It was pitch dark and we had some difficulty in finding the correct caravan in a field dotted with camp fires. The next night was a horror, hot and steamy, with a plague of the redoubtable blackflies. This insect sails with outstretched pinions through the meshes of mosquito screens and bites like the midges of Tobermory. No wonder our hosts rose at half-past three in pitch darkness to make breakfast, and led me to a swim in a cold dammed-up brook. That, I think, is overdoing it a little. By 8.30 we had struck camp and were bound for the Franconia region. I shall not relate our doings in those hills which are situated about 15 miles to the west. The hills are lower and only reach 5,000 feet in two peaks, but the ridges are narrower and somewhat rougher. Here is found the Great Stone Face of Hawthorne's story, and Franconia Notch is a fine pass with beautiful lakes and other tourist attractions including an aerial cableway up Cannon Mountain. While ascending in it I heard the attendant assure a questioner that there had never been any accidents, a statement that was not very impressive to me, for I knew it had been in operation only one week. A particular interest of the western White Mountains is the wilderness of the east branch of the Pemigewasset which was then completely closed to walkers on account of the fire hazard caused by many square miles of softwood slash. But we had no time to start fires for the holiday ended, somewhat hectically, with a rush back to our starting-point to board the Montreal train.



LAKE OF THE CLOUDS HUT.