

= Pinkham Notch =

Pinkham Notch (elevation 2032 ft . / 619 m) is a mountain pass in the White Mountains of north central New Hampshire , United States . The notch is a result of extensive erosion by the Laurentide ice sheet during the Wisconsinian ice age . Pinkham Notch was eroded into a glacial U shaped valley whose walls are formed by the Presidential , Wildcat , and Carter Moriah ranges . Due to the volatility of the area 's climate and rugged character of the terrain , a number of rare or endemic ecosystems have developed throughout the notch .

The notch was discovered in 1784 by Jeremy Belknap , but its isolation prevented further development for several years . The construction of New Hampshire Route 16 has led to increased accessibility and a rise in tourism . Its location makes it a hub for hiking and skiing .

= = Geography = =

The notch separates the Presidential Range , which forms the western wall , from the Wildcat Range , which forms the eastern wall . Two rivers drain the notch ; the Ellis River drains the south end and is a tributary of the Saco , and the Peabody River drains the north end and is a tributary of the Androscoggin .

The bulk of the western slope of the notch is formed by Mount Washington , the highest peak in the northeast United States , reaching 6 288 feet (1 917 m) above sea level . Mount Washington rises more than 4 000 feet (1 200 m) above the floor of the notch . A number of glacial cirques are found on this side of the notch . The Great Gulf and its tributary cirques form the largest cirque in the White Mountains . South of the Great Gulf is Huntington Ravine , with a rocky , precipitous headwall renowned for its rock and ice climbing . The slope then dips into the Ravine of Raymond Cataract , a non glacial " V shaped " valley with a notable waterfall . After this comes Tuckerman Ravine , with a uniform , smoother headwall that is known for its high quality skiing . After passing the Gulf of Slides , a smaller and lesser known cirque , the notch opens up and continues until Jackson .

The eastern slope of the notch consists of the Wildcat and Carter Moriah Ranges , slightly lower than the Presidential Range to the west . The Wildcat Range consists of five peaks , named A , B , C , D , and E from northeast to southwest in order of height . Wildcat A is the highest , at 4 422 feet (1 348 m) . From the main ridge , the slopes drop very steeply , but not precipitously , to the floor of the notch . The Wildcat Mountain Ski Area occupies the western slopes of Wildcat up to the col between D and E peaks . As the notch rounds E peak , the slope becomes extremely steep , and Wildcat Ridge begins to drop to the end of the notch .

The Carter Moriah Range lies to the north of Wildcat Ridge , forming the eastern side of Pinkham Notch all the way to the Androscoggin River . From south to north , the peaks overlooking the notch are Carter Dome (4 832 ft / 1 473 m) , Mount Hight (4 675 ft / 1 425 m) , South Carter Mountain (4 420 ft / 1 347 m) , Middle Carter Mountain (4 600 ft / 1 402 m) , North Carter Mountain (4 530 ft / 1 381 m) , Imp Mountain (3 720 ft / 1 134 m) , and Mount Moriah (4 049 ft / 1 234 m) .

= = Environment = =

The climate , and as a result , the flora and fauna , of Pinkham Notch varies greatly with elevation . As elevations increase on the walls of the notch , climate and ecosystems change to those of increasingly northern occurrence . Biomes range from a low elevation northern hardwood forest at the base of Mount Washington to alpine Arctic vegetation near the summit comparable to vegetation found at the latitude of Labrador .

= = = Below 2500 ft . ? Northern hardwood forest = = =

The lowest elevations of Pinkham Notch are occupied by a northern hardwood forest . This forest

type is primarily deciduous and consists mostly of sugar maple , American beech , and yellow birch . There is also a proliferation of understory and forest floor plants ; common examples include wild sarsaparilla , painted trillium , hobblebush , and Indian cucumber @-@ root .

The northern hardwood forest also contains the greatest diversity of animal life in the notch . Mammals include chipmunks , raccoons , white @-@ tailed deer , black bears , and moose . There are also a large number of birds in this forest ; frequently seen are red @-@ eyed vireos , hermit thrushes , and ovenbirds . Amphibians are also found in the northern hardwood forest . Red efts , the terrestrial stage of development for the red @-@ spotted newt , congregate in large numbers after heavy rains ; also present are American toads , spring peepers , and wood frogs .

At around 2 @, @ 000 feet (610 m) , species from higher forest zones begin to mix with the northern hardwoods in what is known as the " transition zone " . As elevation within this zone increases , species from the lower hardwood forest begin to drop out . By 2 @, @ 500 feet (760 m) , yellow birch is the only deciduous species that remains , and the forest becomes a spruce @-@ fir forest .

= = = 2500 ft. to 4000 ft . ? Spruce / fir forest = = =

As elevation increases , the forest is subjected to colder temperatures , increased moisture , and acidic , infertile soils . As a result , conifers , or " softwoods " become the dominant species . Two trees , red spruce and balsam fir , are present throughout this zone , with paper birch , striped maple and mountain ash present in its lower levels . Like the hardwood forest below it , the spruce @-@ fir forest also holds understory plants ; commonly found are wood sorrel , Indian pipes , Canada mayflowers , and bluebead lilies . Fungi are also common in the moist environment .

Most of the animals in the spruce @-@ fir forest have ranges that extend into the balsam fir forest higher up . Warblers are abundant ; more than ten species exist in this forest type . Other common birds include brown @-@ capped chickadees , spruce grouse , and yellow @-@ capped woodpeckers . Mammals include the red squirrel and the pine marten .

= = = 4000 ft. to timberline ? Balsam fir forest = = =

As elevation continues to increase , only the hardiest trees remain in the forest , which is composed almost exclusively of balsam fir . Most of the understory plants and animals from the upper spruce @-@ fir zone , however , can be found in this forest . Moisture causes nutrients to be stripped from the soil and brought to lower elevations , and decomposition takes place at a rate that is too slow to replenish them .

In the upper reaches of the balsam fir zone , winds and temperatures are extreme enough to force the trees into stunted , " bonsai @-@ like " shapes . Known as krummholz , from the German word for " crooked wood " , trees in this area are often bent into bizarre shapes by the combined effects of wind , temperature , and airborne ice particles . Branches that are perpendicular to the prevailing winds are often killed , leaving " flag trees " that point in the direction of the wind . Eventually , conditions become extreme enough to prevent any tree growth ; the elevation at which this occurs is known as tree line , and usually occurs at around 4 @, @ 500 ft (1 @, @ 400 m) in the White Mountains , depending on wind exposure .

= = = Above timberline ? The alpine zone = = =

On the highest slopes of the west wall of the notch , trees are unable to grow , and an " alpine zone " of alpine @-@ Arctic vegetation exists . Vegetation in this zone tends to be lichens , sedges or small , low @-@ lying plants that can resist the constant exposure to the wind . Most plants in this area are perennial ; the growing season is far too short to allow for annuals .

Alpine plants usually occur in communities spaced between barren talus slopes . Cushion @-@ shaped *Diapensia lapponica* usually grows in communities in the windiest areas , and in less exposed sites sedge , heath , snowbank , and alpine bog communities can be found .

= = History = =

Pinkham Notch was originally a riverine , " V @-@ shaped " valley until the Laurentide Ice Sheet shaped it into its current form , a " U @-@ shaped " valley . This shaping occurred during the Wisconsin Ice Age , 25 ? 50 @,@ 000 years ago . The geology of the region became greatly altered by this event ; much of the weaker rock was stripped from the region , leaving only highly @-@ resistant mica schist . As the glaciers retreated , a layer of glacial till was deposited , including several glacial erratics . A notable glacial erratic in the area is Mount Washington 's Glen Boulder .

The notch first appears in recorded history in 1784 , when an expedition led by Jeremy Belknap camped in the notch before ascending to the summit of Mount Washington through Huntington Ravine . Pinkham Notch was far more isolated than neighboring Crawford Notch ; as a result , the first settler of Pinkham Notch came in 1827 , 43 years after habitation of Crawford Notch . The first settler , Hayes Copp , built a homestead in the then @-@ uninhabited area , near where the Dolly Copp campground stands today . Copp and his wife lived alone in the wilderness until Daniel Pinkham completed the first road through the notch between in 1836 , finally providing a link between the Copp homestead and civilization . In 1851 , a railroad was built to Gorham , and a hotel , the Glen House , was constructed to accommodate passengers . Mount Washington was the main attraction in the area ; a bridle path was constructed from the Glen House to hotels on the summit , which was later improved into what would become the Mount Washington Auto Road . Completion of the road in 1861 led to a massive increase in tourism .

Meanwhile , logging began in the Pinkham area . After almost total deforestation of the White Mountain region , the White Mountain National Forest was created in 1911 , and the Mount Washington area was added to the national forest in 1914 . With the preservation of the area , emphasis shifted from logging to recreation . The Appalachian Mountain Club converted a logging camp near the height @-@ of @-@ land into what is now the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center in 1921 . The Appalachian Trail was built through the visitor center , making it an important trailhead for ascents of Mount Washington . Meanwhile , ski trails began to be constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps on Wildcat Mountain , and the ski resort was opened in 1958 .

= = Recreation = =

Pinkham Notch is easily accessible by New Hampshire Route 16 . Numerous opportunities for recreation exist in the area .

= = Hiking = =

Mount Washington is a common objective , and is often climbed from Pinkham Notch . There are numerous trail approaches from the Appalachian Mountain Club 's visitor 's center . Although trail distances seem short , the trip to the summit should not be underestimated ; most trail approaches involve at least 4 @,@ 000 vertical feet (1 @,@ 200 m) of climbing , including an ascent of the rocky summit cone and the boulder @-@ strewn upper slopes . Weather changes very quickly , and one must be prepared for extreme conditions . The Tuckerman Ravine Trail is the most popular trail in the notch , ascending to the summit via the headwall of Tuckerman Ravine . The Huntington Ravine Trail is widely considered the most difficult trail in New Hampshire , making its way up the precipitous headwall of neighboring Huntington Ravine , where there are several rock climbing opportunities .

On the other side of the notch , the Wildcat Range is a popular objective . The five summits can be reached via the Wildcat Ridge Trail ; the first two miles are extremely difficult , and require skill on short , yet exposed , rock scrambles . This part of the trail is frequently bypassed by following the ski area 's Polecat Trail to the summit of D Peak .

The Appalachian Trail , which extends over 2 @,@ 150 miles (3 @,@ 460 km) from Georgia to Maine , runs along the Presidential Range before crossing the notch and ascending to the summits

of the Wildcat Range .

There are also less challenging hikes that are equally scenic , yet better suited for families with young children . Popular objectives include Glen Ellis Falls , a waterfall on the Ellis River , and Square Ledge , with an impressive view of Mount Washington for modest effort .

= = = Skiing = = =

The area also has many opportunities for both alpine and Nordic skiing . The bowl of Tuckerman Ravine is famous for its extremely steep backcountry skiing . Long lines are common during the peak spring @-@ skiing season of April and May . Wildcat Mountain offers groomed ski trails and lifts , and is a better choice for less @-@ experienced skiers . The centerpiece of the ski @-@ area is the gondola , which runs during the summer , and offers views of the Presidentials with no expended effort .

For Nordic skiing , Great Glen Trails offers a large , groomed trail system that also includes the lower half of the Auto Road . Several warming huts are scattered around the trail system , including scenic Great Angel Cabin , with views of the Great Gulf and surrounding peaks . Great Glen also permits biking on the trails during the summer , and is the only mountain bike facility in the notch . Another cross @-@ country trail system exists in the town of Jackson , extending as far as the summit of Wildcat Mountain .