

Mount Greylock, MA, 3,491 ft. – August 30, 2019, HP #24: Moby Dick

It is about 190 miles from Stowe Mountain Ski Resort VT to Adams MA where Mount Greylock, the highpoint of Massachusetts, is located. Having made it back to my rental car at by 1:30 p.m., August 29, following a successful climb of Mount Mansfield, where Stowe Mountain Ski Resort resides, I immediately headed for Adams. The drive was mostly along narrow roads which weaved through small towns and ranged in speed limits from 35 mph to 55 mph. As such it took close to four hours to reach North Adams MA, a neighboring town six miles north of Adams. Along the way, one of the towns I drove through was named Mexico. I wanted to get a picture next to the sign that read “Welcome to Mexico” but the road was too narrow with no safe places to pull over.

Arriving in North Adams I stopped to pick-up some groceries before continuing. My hope was to find a campground between North Adams and Adams, and the next morning hike to the top of Mount Greylock.

Four days prior I had left home and flown across the country to Portland ME prepared to climb Katahdin ME, Mount Washington NH, and Mount Mansfield VT. My schedule generously allowed a full day for each mountain with travel days in between. As a “just-in-case-there-was-time”, I had printed information on Mount Greylock’s Thunderbolt Trail located near Adams, leaving the details to chance.

Not being fully prepared, I drove around North Adams trying to figure out which road led to Adams. In the process I happened upon an Appalachian Trail sign and stopped to check out the map it contained. As I did so a man walking his dog came along and I asked him for some help. Much to my surprise, he informed me I could drive to the top of Mount Greylock via Notch Road located just three mile from where we stood. With the road to the summit so close by I thought I might as well drive up and see what I discovered.



Following the man’s directions, I located Notch Road. I was delighted to see a sign listing a campground seven and a half miles further up the road and just a mile further along than the summit. Problem solved, as I figured I would get a campsite, and the next morning hike to the peak from there. As it turned out Notch Road reached a “Y” with the peak being a mile one way and the campground two miles the other way. As such the six and a half and seven and a half mile distances listed on the sign did not mean the campground and the peak were a mile apart as I had interpreted it.

Since my first concern was to find camping, I turned right at the “Y”. Soon I noticed the turn off to the campground only to discover the road was gated and locked shut. Turning the car around I drove to the summit. At the summit parking lot no one was around to ask about the campground nor collect the parking fee. As such, I was forced to make my way over to the Bascom Lodge, crossing my fingers that I would not get a parking ticket in the meantime.

The stroll from the parking lot took me over the summit and past its 93 foot tall Memorial Tower. At the Tower, likewise, I found no one to ask about the campground. Anyway, since I was there, I quickly ascended the tower via its internal spiral staircase. A bank of windows at the top allowed a 360-degree view.

Hurrying down from the tower, I quickly reached the Bascom Lodge. No one was present at the front desk, so I had to enter the restaurant in search of someone to ask about the campground. A waitress told me to drive past the campground road and I would find a parking lot. From there, she said, I could hike into the campground. I asked how to register and pay, and she said “they” would find me once I was there.

Having nothing else to go on, I trusted the waitress. Finding the parking lot, a sign there read it was for registered campers only. Unfortunately, my mobile phone was unable to get a signal so I could not call the phone number listed on the sign. My only remaining option was to hike into the campground to see if there was a camp host on duty. Planning to stay in the campground, I stuffed my tent and sleeping bag into my backpack. I was worried about leaving the car without a permit but since none of the other four cars in the lot had a visible permit displayed, I decided to chance it. It was fully dark by the time I started hiking toward the campground.

As I hurried along, with my headlamp turned off, I unintentionally snuck up on and disturbed an owl. Quickly turning on my light I was fortunate to catch a sighting of him as he hurried away. Never before had I been lucky enough to be that close to an owl.

The hike was just one and a half miles, and although likeable seemed much longer. At the campground I noticed just two groups of campers. Approaching the closest group, I explained my situation. One of the group had a cell phone with reception, so we tried to call the number I had copied down from the parking lot sign. No one answered but I was able to leave a message with my name and the car’s license plate number requesting that I not be towed. I thanked my helpers deciding I might as well return to the car and stay there. At least that way if anyone patrolled the area I might be able to explain my situation.

The hike back to the car seemed much shorter as it was mostly downhill. Strangely it had not seemed as uphill on the way in. Along the way I checked but the owl had not yet returned.

Arriving back at the car I pulled out my tent as I contemplated setting it up. Upon second thought, I realized that would look bad if a Park Ranger stopped by. In so doing, I discovered I mistakenly had left the tent poles in the trunk of the car – so I would have had to return to the car under any circumstances. The back seat of the car turned out to be fairly comfortable. At one point during the night a vehicle did arrive. However, I did not get up, choosing to not make myself known. Shortly the vehicle left leaving me unnoticed.

Upon waking up 4:30 a.m. I had the idea of heading up to the summit to catch the sunrise. With no reason not to, I drove up to the “Y” in the road where I had noticed a pull-out. From there I walked three quarters of a mile to the summit along a section of the Appalachian Trail. I topped out at 5:30 a.m. with just a hint of orange in the otherwise dark sky. The Memorial Tower was locked, so it was fortunate I had climbed it the evening before. I was not completely sure the summit was officially open to the public this early in the morning, so I positioned myself off to the east and south of the of the

Tower, out of easy view. After a while a middle-aged couple arrived, having walked over from Bascom Lodge. I stayed silent, as such they never noticed me. They gave up on the sunrise before I did, walking back to the Lodge shortly after they arrived. I on the other hand decided to hang around until 6:00 a.m. figuring the ball of the sun would appear by then. However, it never arrived. On the return hike I photographed the sign next to the road listing the summit elevation and name of the mountain.



At only 3,491 feet, Mount Greylock does not seem to be too remarkable. Nevertheless, I found it to be an intriguing place with an adventurous vibe to it. Signs around the campground and on the summit indicated many hiking trails, hidden completely within its tree covered surface. The two short hikes I took were very nice. Herman Melville found Mount Greylock so inspirational that legend has it the mountains long, saddle-like profile inspired him to write "Moby Dick". With such fondness for the mountain, Melville was even known to have a special observation

deck at his home near Pittsfield MA allowing him to view it at will as the weather allowed.

Although I technically stood on the highpoint of Massachusetts the evening of August 29, I do not consider that as my official summit date. Afterall, it was completely by happenstance that my circumstances caused me to be there. August 30, I deliberately hiked to the peak, and spent a half an hour there making it my official date for the record.

I was back at the car before 6:30 a.m. with a 230-mile drive to Portland ME in front of me. Preferring to travel via back roads, I examined my road atlas and plotted a route via Highways 9 and 202 through Keene NH and Concord NH.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/sAXi3R4CZNgVwfuN8>

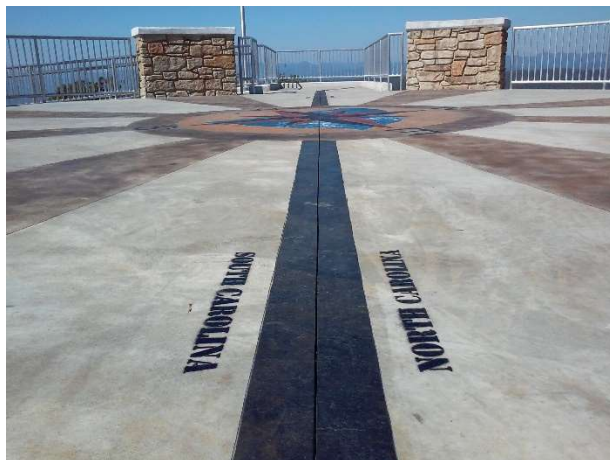
Sassafras Mountain, SC, 3,553 ft. – October 3, 2019, HP #25: On the Border

October 3, fifteen minutes after midnight I caught a red-eye flight from Salt Lake City UT to Greenville SC via Charlotte NC. I arrived at 9:30 a.m. eastern daylight time and picked up a rental car. Before leaving Greenville I stopped to pick up a few groceries. Then drove directly to the South Carolina highpoint.

Sassafras Mountain is located on the border of North and South Carolina and is shared by both states. The portion in South Carolina raises to the highest natural point of the state. From the Greenville Airport to Sassafras Mountain is about a 150-miles.

I arrived at the parking lot located just below the summit at noon. About a city block length walk uphill from the parking stood the then newly opened (as of April 2019) elevated observation deck. The observation deck resides half in South Carolina and half in North Carolina. A black painted line across the concrete floor of the deck represents the shared border. Even the staircase to the top of the platform is evenly divided between the two states with a handrail down the middle. To the southeast of the platform on the South Carolina side a stone marker with a plaque claims the state's high point. I knelt behind the stone marker with the summit tower behind me, posing for a photograph.

This mountain is named after the tree of the same name. The name is also associated with tea. Moreover, the Aerosmith song "Love in an Elevator" mentions sassafras. Sassafras is one of the Blue Ridge Mountains which are part of the Appalachian Mountains. The eastern continental divide runs along the peak.



There was just one other person on the top when I arrived. He seemed to be using field glasses to observe birds in the sky. I attempted to be friendly, but he did not seem to want to chat. In addition to the black line, the cement floor of the deck is also painted with a compass rose showing the border of the Carolinas to run from the northwest to the southeast. At top the platform Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia can all be viewed. When looking into South Carolina a radio tower sits to the left of the observation deck. Next to the observation deck, on the grounded, I located a survey marker.

Nearby under some rocks I discovered a jar with a summit logbook inside. I signed the log indicating this to be the twenty fifth US state highpoint I had stood upon.

I had wandered up the main path from the parking lot, so for variety I opted to head down from the northwest, or opposite, side of the platform. This took me down a very short dirt path which turned south and dropped me off at the parking area.

I enjoy visiting South Carolina's highest point, and the views it offered were wonderful. All the same this highpoint lacked a sense of achievement. Perhaps that can be attributed to the lack of physical effort needed to reach it, or maybe because not much adventure was involved in attaining it?

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/oMkjQfWqTyuCMjUv6>