

Mount Mansfield, VT, 4,393 ft. – August 29, 2019, HP #23: Steep and Steady

I do not like to drive after dark, but I had not gotten away from the Appalachian Mountain Club's Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, after climbing Mount Washington NH, until after 6:00 p.m. as heavy rain fell. Since I needed to stop for both gas and dinner, darkness befell long before I was able to reach Stowe VT.

During the late evening drive it became apparent how close to Quebec I was as every time I retuned the radio, I would encounter French language stations. In fact, the US/Canada border crossing of West Berkshire VT/Frelighsburg QC is located only about 50 miles north of Stowe.

Between Morristown and Stowe, the rural highway became rutted, and pooled with water forcing me to drive slowly. It was almost 10:00 p.m. before I finally reached Stowe. Had my hope of driving out of the storm materialized I would have passed through the town and headed to Stowe Mountain Ski Resort where I had planned to camp the night at Smugglers Notch, but instead I remained in town taking a motel room.

The next morning, I felt there was no need to hurry as my destination of Mount Mansfield is located not even eight miles from the town of Stowe. Also, the hike I had planned to its summit was under two and a half mile, so I anticipated it to be quick and easy. This route is known as the Long Trail and it climbs up the east side of the mountain from the Stowe Mountain Ski Resort. The classic Long Trail is the oldest long-distance trail in the United States. The full trail runs 273 miles through Vermont from the US/Canada Border to VT/MA state line following the main ridge of the Green Mountains and crossing over Mount Mansfield.

The ridgeline of Mount Mansfield is said to resemble a human face. When viewed looking at its east aspect its prominent features, from right to left, are named Adams Apple at 4,060 feet, Chin (aka highest point) at 4,393 feet, Lower Lip at 4,120 feet, Upper Lip at 3,963 feet, Nose at 4,062 feet, and Forehead at 3,940 feet. The Long Trail climbs up just to the left of the Adams Apple and then heads to the Chin. The last third of a mile is above the tree line and consists of third class scrambling to the summit. This zone above tree line is one of the few places in Vermont where alpine tundra can be found. The alpine tundra community of plants, considered remnants of the last ice age, only live in cold, windy, treeless environments, and are more typically found at elevations higher than the mountains of Vermont. With only 275 acres of alpine tundra remaining in Vermont these rare plants are endangered, and as such a top Mount Mansfield the alpine tundra is often roped off, and hikers are asked to stick to hard surfaces.

Following a leisurely “complimentary” motel breakfast that was both generous and tasty, I made my way to the Stowe Mountain Ski Resort. After initially driving by the Long Trail trailhead, I returned and found it. Across from the trailhead was an open parking lot located about a quarter mile north of the ski resorts gondola at an elevation of 1,600 feet. By 9:30 a.m. I was hiking.

I guess I was tired after my bursts of speed on both Katahdin and Mount Washington the days before, as I found the Long Trail to be strenuous, and not the easy hike I had anticipated. It took me about one and a half hours to cover the very steep natural staircases 1.7 miles up to the Taft Lodge. The lodge is a simple log cabin able to sleep up to 24 hikers. There is nothing lavish about it. Indeed, hikers must provide their own sleeping bags and mats for the wooden bunk platforms, and there is no running water. Finding the cabin empty I decided to hang out there and rest.



After a half hour of resting, I was ready to climb the remaining 743 vertical feet from the Taft Lodge to Mount Mansfield's Chin. I guess the rest had done me good, as this remaining the six tenths of a mile hike required only fifteen minutes to complete.

Overall, upon reaching the top of Vermont, two and a quarter hours had passed since I started hiking. The steep 2.3-mile hike on average had risen over 1,200 vertical feet per mile. Not being used to the humidity my t-shirt was completely soaked with perspiration. Despite the warm summit temperatures, I removed my wet t-shirt replacing it with my warmer long-sleeve fleece shirt.

The summit offered views westward over Lake Champlain to the Adirondacks, eastward over the Connecticut River valley to the White Mountains (home of Mount Washington NH), and northward into Canada. As I took in the view, I chatted with another hiker and confirmed what I hoped, the gondola only charged uphill riders but was free of charge to

ride down the mountain.

When I was ready to descend, I hiked south about a third of a mile, still along the Long Trail, to a sign that pointed east indicating the Cliff Trail. From there down to the gondola consists of a steep decline over large, jumbled boulders making it feel like a cliff. Nothing was technically very hard, but it contained some challenging upper third-class sections, and it was slow going. A few of the boulders even included iron handles. I found the aptly named Cliff Trail to be more challenging than the last third of a mile to the summit from Taft lodge. Overall, from the Chin to the gondola is less than a half mile. The gondola was running, with no lines, so I was able to walk right up and enjoy a restful ride down the mountain. I was back to the parking lot in just over four hours from the time I started hiking.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/jQCDhHAnAjHUokDh6>