

# Guide to Crawford Notch State Park

## *On US Route 302*

### *Harts Location, NH (12 miles NW of Bartlett)*

This 5,775 acre park provides access to numerous hiking trails, waterfalls, fishing, wildlife viewing, and spectacular mountain views. Crawford Notch State Park is rich in history with the famous Willey House. There are picnicking areas, parking for hiking, as well as scenic pull-offs and a visitor information center.



## **Park History**

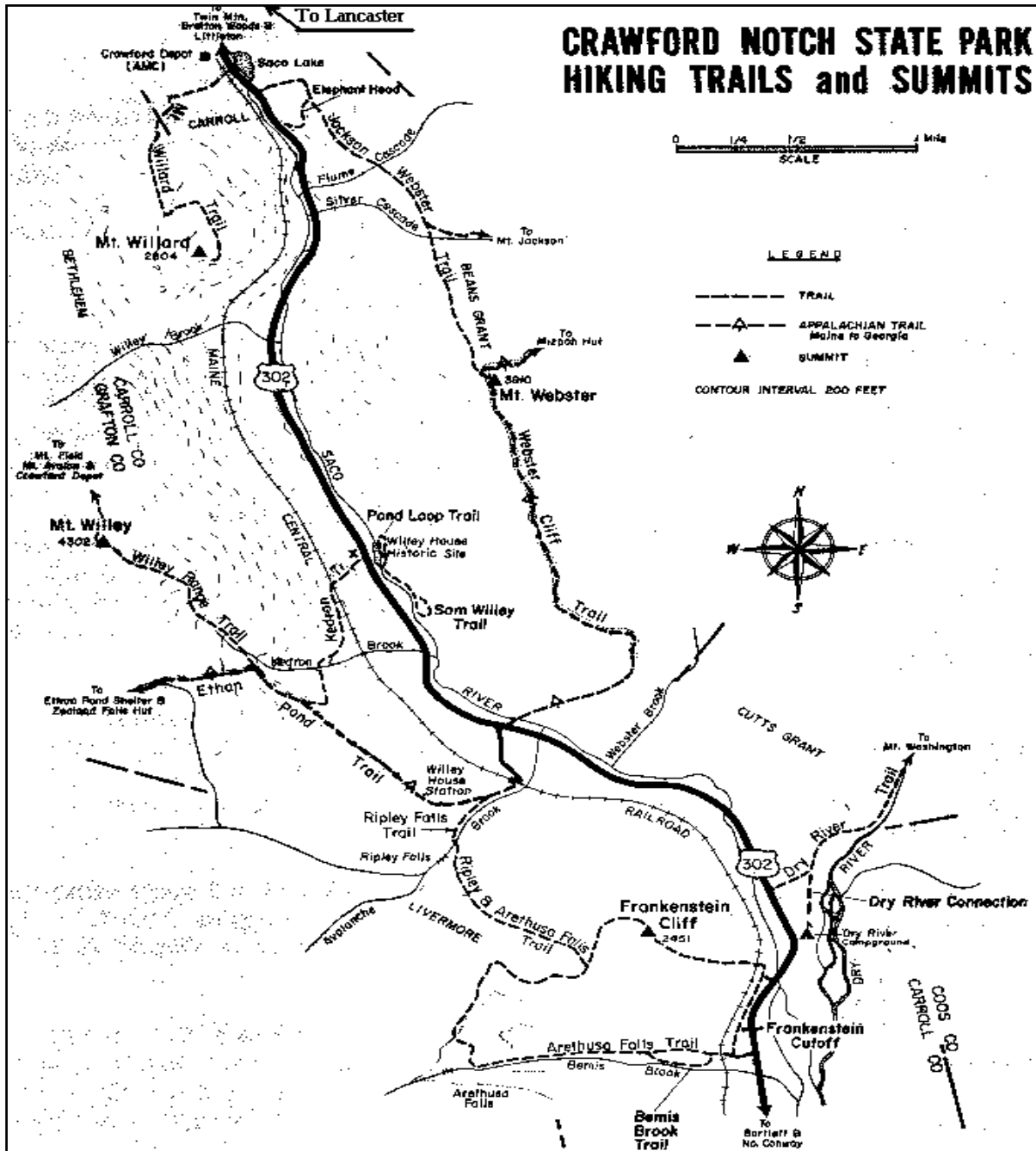
**Discovery:** In 1771 a Lancaster hunter, Timothy Nash, discovered what is now called Crawford Notch, while tracking a moose over Cherry Mountain. He noticed a gap in the distant mountains to the south and realized it was probably the route through the mountains mentioned in Native American lore. Packed with provisions, he worked his way through the notch and on to Portsmouth to tell Governor John Wentworth of his discovery. Doubtful a road could be built through the mountains, the governor made him a deal. If Nash could get a horse through from Lancaster he would grant him a large parcel of land at the head of the notch, with the condition he build a road to it from the east. Nash and his friend Benjamin Sawyer managed to trek through the notch with a very mellow farm horse, that at times, they were required to lower over boulders with ropes. The deal with the governor was kept and the road, at first not much more than a trail, was opened in 1775.

**Settlement:** The Crawford family, the first permanent settlers in the area, exerted such a great influence on the development of the notch that the Great Notch came to be called Crawford Notch. In 1790, Abel Crawford, his wife Hannah (Rosebrook) and their growing family settled on the land granted to Sawyer and Nash, at what is now Fabyans in Bretton Woods. Two years later Eleazer Rosebrook, Hannah's father, and his family moved to Abel's homestead, who in turn, settled 12 miles away at the head of the notch in Hart's Location, for more "elbow room." Both families operated inns for the growing number of travelers through the notch. Abel's inn was the Mount Crawford House. Ethan Allen, Abel's son, inherited the inn operated by the Rosebrooks. In addition to being established innkeepers, the Crawfords were famous mountain guides that escorted visitors to the top of Mt. Washington. In 1819 Abel and Ethan Allen opened the Crawford Path, the footpath they had blazed to the summit. By 1840 horses could be on the trail. In 1821, Ethan Allen blazed a shorter route up Mt. Washington that is closely followed today by the cog railway. **Railroad:** Increasing tourism to the White Mountains generated interest in the building of a railroad through Crawford Notch. The construction of the railroad was considered a difficult engineering feat that was thought to be impossible by many. The railroad, built by Anderson Brothers of Maine, was opened in 1857 and ran from Portland, through the notch, to Fabyans, the area where Ethan Allen had operated his inn. Great difficulties and expenses were encountered due to the gain of 1,623 feet in elevation in the 30 miles between North Conway and Fabyans. There is an average rise of 116 feet per mile for the 9 miles between Bemis Station at the south end of the notch and Crawford Depot. Impressive Frankenstein Trestle, originally built of iron, and later replaced by steel, is 80 feet high and 500 feet long, while the Willey Brook Bridge is 100 feet high and 400 feet long.



**Crawford Notch State Park:** Most of the land in Crawford Notch was acquired by the state of New Hampshire in 1913. It was the result of a bill passed by the legislature in 1922 aimed at rescuing the northern region of Hart's Location from excessive timber harvest. The bill failed to include the northern, most scenic

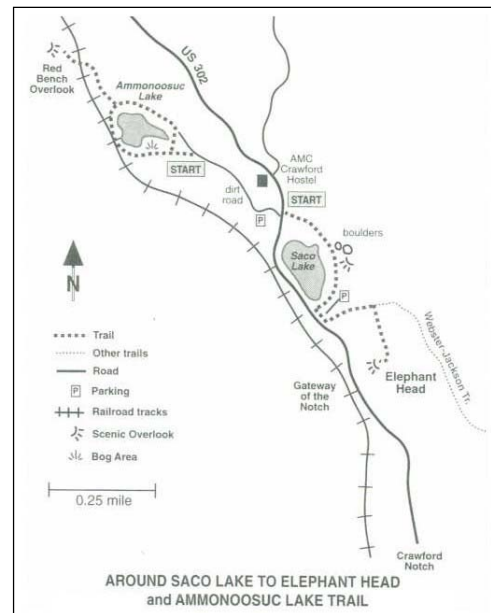
part of the notch, which the state purchased in 1912 for \$62,000. Almost 6,000 acres are included in the state park. The land extends on both sides of the highway to the summits of the mountains that border the Saco River Valley. In 1922 the Willey House clearing was leased to Donahue and Hamlin of Bartlett who built a cabin colony of peeled spruce logs for vacationers. More log buildings were added including rest rooms, a restaurant, and gift shop, but eventually the state took back the clearing for its own operations.



# Crawford Notch State Park Hiking Guide

## Saco Lake Trail:

One of the Crawford Notch region's lesser known, lesser used paths, this mixed trail- and-road loop hike circles the picturesque six-acre pond at the top of the Notch, just north of the narrow Gateway. The trail walk is just 0.3 mile in length, while the road walk alongside the pond's western shore is 0.2 mile. Feature attractions include the darkly wooded crags and ledges known as Idlewild, the ample views westward toward the peaks of the Willey and Rosebrook Ranges, and a small canine grave-yard dating back to the early years of this century. The blue-blazed trail begins at the south end of the lake near a small parking area. It crosses the lake's outlet on a bridge, then enters the woods as it begins to circle the pond. Passing over several log bridges-guaranteed to delight young hikers-the trail soon reaches Idlewild, a two-tiered ledge from which are obtained excellent views of Saco Lake, the nearby mountains, and the former Crawford House site. Idlewild accessed by a short, steep stone-step path, which is no doubt easier to ascend than the wooden ladders once used by hotel guests to get to the top of the ledge. Iron railings stretch across the ledge to prevent visitors from falling forward. From Idlewild the trail continues its circuit of the lake, passing over more log bridges, passing by more viewpoints, and passing near the dog graveyard, reached in 50 feet by a path to the right. The woods path ends a short distance from Saco Lake's northwest corner where there is a fine view across the water towards Mount Webster. Continue left from here along the highway for the short walk back to your vehicle.



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## Elephant Head Spur:



degree view.

This short, easy spur path off the Webster-Jackson Trail takes hikers to the top of the landmark Elephant Head rock profile, which forms the east side of the Gateway to the Notch. A panoramic view of the Notch, the surrounding mountains, the old railroad depot, and the former Crawford House site are obtained by those perched atop the Elephant's ledgy head. Begin your hike on the Webster-Jackson Trail, but proceed for just 0.1 mile, where a sign will direct you right onto the spur path to Elephant Head. The grade along this blue-blazed trail is easy, but the footway is very damp and muddy in sections. After a more moderate climb to the top of the ledge that forms the Elephant Head, drop down 40 yards to an extensive open ledge with a 180

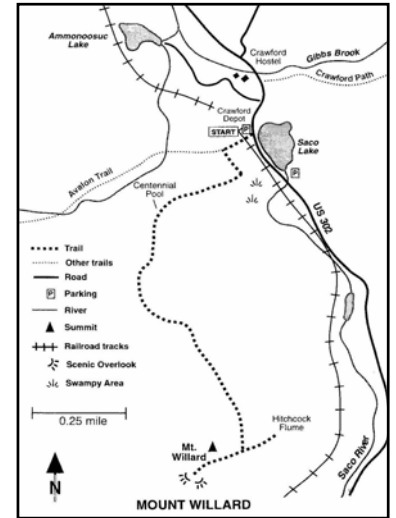
## Mount Willard

Round trip Distance : 3 1/4 miles

Walking time : 2 1/2 hours

Vertical rise : 925 feet

Perhaps the most popular hiking trail in the Crawford Notch region, this well traveled 1.6 mile path provides an easy ascent route to the summit ledges of 2,804-foot Mount Willard. The little railroad station at the north entrance to Crawford Notch is an information center operated by the Appalachian Mountain Club, which has acquired the site of the vanished Crawford House. There at the station you might ask about visibility before you climb Mount Willard, only a day of "ceiling and visibility unlimited" does justice to the breathtaking views from the summit cliff.



For the Mount Willard Trail, hikers park their cars near the station or on the wide shoulders of US 302. Across the road, and despite the whizzing cars, Saco Lake manages to preserve its charm and typifies the romantic term "mountain tarn." From the station usually called the Crawford Depot you step over the Maine Central tracks and take up the trail, which coincides with the Avalon Trail as you enter the woods and come to a junction. Turn left and follow the Mount Willard Trail through woods at the base of the slope. (The Mount Avalon Trail continues ahead to Mount Avalon and Mount Field.) Soon you come to a right turn onto the old carriage road. It once served guests from the famous Crawford House, which burned in 1977. The property is now the site of an AMC hostel. The carriage road at once leads upward. You are scarcely breathing a bit faster before you find that the trail swings to the right away from the road to avoid a totally eroded section. It climbs through the woods above a brook and shortly returns to the road. A right turn keeps you on the grade that was engineered for horses pulling heavy surreys and passengers to the top. You can probably cover the same route with a half hour of walking. It brings you out on top of the cliff. There before you spreads a vast and open sky. Mount Chocorua is the rocky peak.



Nearer on the right looms Mount Willey, solid, bulky, and so steep its spruce forest is scarred by slides. Fortunately they have been less devastating than the slide that buried the Willey family in 1826. Nearer you toward the right Mount Field rises to 4,326 feet. That's twenty-four feet more than Mount Willey. You are standing at 2,804 feet. Opposite across the notch and forming its eastern bastion, cliffs brace Mount Webster. Beyond Mount Webster, the southernmost of the Presidential Range's peaks, Mount Jackson, carries a tangle of spruce and fir to its topmost crags. Beyond those rocks, Mount Washington is

a splendid sight against the sky. You may see above the western ridge a puff of smoke from the cog railway's engine. So far your eyes have been distracted out and aloft. If vertigo is no problem you can gaze down into the impressive depth of the notch below the cliff. It's 1,300 feet—and no protection—down to the highway and railroad tracks. The combination of Mount Willard and children tends to make parents nervous. A length of clothesline and a sturdy tree might be the best solution. Cliffs attract kids to the very edge. People come and go. This is a popular hike. The universal reaction at the instant of stepping out on the rock is awe blended with delight (usually indicated by an involuntary gasp). The impact lingers in your memory. It's not the scenery alone; it's the power underlying our green and stone-ribbed world. Descend by the same route. The only turn to watch for is left into the woods off the carriage road at the top of the badly eroded section.

## Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail

*Round Trip Distance : 6 1/4 miles to Lake of the Clouds Hut, 8 1/2 mile to summit Mt. Washington*

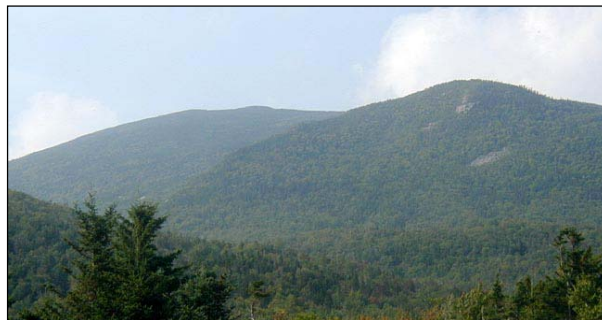
This trail essentially connects the Cog Railway Base Station with Lakes of the Clouds hut atop the ridge between Mt. Washington and Mt. Monroe. The lower half is very easy, while the upper half (above Gem Pool) is rather steep. The path actually begins along Base Road about 1/2 mile below the parking lots. It heads east, more or less paralleling the road on its south side. A mile up the trail, a short spur diverges left and heads north a few hundred yards to Marshfield Base Station. The easy-to-follow path then heads east-southeast along the brook that drains Ammonoosuc Ravine until it meets Gem Pool just beyond the 2-mile point. Gem Pool is a small, picturesque lake formed at the bottom of a small waterfall. Just beyond the pond, the trail climbs steeply through the woods. Before long, the trees become shorter and several of the exposed rocks along the trail offer great views toward the west. Just below 5000 feet you will reach treeline, only a few hundred yards below AMC's Lakes of the Clouds hut. The trail ends at the building about 3.1 miles from its starting point. Open to visitors during the summer season, Lakes of the Clouds hut is a great place to take a break! From the Hut, The summit of Mt. Washington is 1 1/4 miles away.



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## **Avalon Trail:**

This trail to the 3,430-foot peak of Mount Avalon-an eastern spur of Mount Field with excellent summit views-runs 2.8 miles from the top of the Notch near the Crawford Depot train station up to the Willey Range, where it terminates 100 yards north of the wooded summit of Mount Field. While lower portions of this trail follow easy to moderate grades, the last mile and a half is steep and rough. For the first couple hundred yards, the trail coincides with the Mount Willard Trail. At an informational signpost 100 yards from the railroad tracks, the trail continues straight ahead and in another tenth of a mile crosses over Crawford Brook. After a short climb, the Cascade Loop trail (see description below) to Beecher and Pearl Cascades diverges left off the main trail. After passing by the upper end of the loop in another tenth of a mile, the Avalon Trail continues at an easy to moderate grade, staying to the right (north) of Crawford Brook for the first 0.8 mile. The grade steepens some after the brook is crossed for a second time. At 1.3 miles, the trail bears left at its junction with the A-Z Trail (for Zealand Falls) and soon begins a steep, rocky stretch leading in 0.5 mile to a col just below and to the west of Mount Avalon's sharp, rocky summit. The summit is reached by a short, steep side trail (left), which in 100 yards leads to the peak's open summit, where excellent views are obtained of Mount Webster and the floor of Crawford Notch, the peaks of the Presidential Range (including Mount Washington), the broad Fabyan plain to the north, and the landmark Mount Washington Hotel, with its familiar fire engine red roof. From the summit spur trail, the Avalon Trail passes over an open flat area, where a nice view of the surrounding peaks is obtained. It then continues for another mile of steep climbing to its terminus near the summit of 4,326-foot Mount Field. At its junction with the Willey Range Trail, go left (south) 100 yards to Mount Field's summit. Go right 0.9 mile to the col between Mounts Field and Tom, where the A-Z Trail intersects. Turn right here for the return trip to the Avalon Trail and the railroad depot.



## **Cascade Loop Trail:**

This short, tenth of a mile long trail diverges left off the Avalon Trail 0.2 mile from its start. A short distance from its beginning, a sign directs hikers left 100 yards to pretty Beecher Cascade, where the waters of Crawford Brook rush through a narrow flume-like gorge. Continue along the loop trail another 150 yards to Pearl Cascade, a less spectacular, but still very picturesque spot where the brook plunges over broken ledges into a wide, round pool. The loop trail terminates in another 100 feet back on the Avalon Trail, 0.1 mile up the path from its lower loop.

## **Sam Willey Trail:**

Considered one of the Crawford Notch region's easiest trails, the Sam Willey Trail provides a gentle three-quarter mile loop walk along the base of Mount Webster and beside the meandering Saco River. Starting 150 feet from the east end of the bridge and dam over Willey Pond (directly across from the Willey House site), the trail bears right and almost immediately passes through the gravelly outwash of a slide off Mount Webster. The blue-blazed trail nears the Saco River, then steers sharp left and skirts the boulder-strewn lower slopes of Mount Webster. At 0.3 mile, the trail splits into a loop. Staying to the left, the trail continues along the base of the mountain, then gradually curves right where it meets the Saco River at a sandy clearing. Maintaining its course on the east side of the river, the trail continues through the woods and passes several short side paths leading to the Saco River's shoreline. At a point where the trail veers away from the river, good views are obtained of the upper slopes of Mount Webster. From here the trail continues a short distance more and ends back at the loop intersection.

## **Pond Loop Trail:**

This short trail across from the Willey House site on Route 302 provides an easy quarter-mile loop hike along the east shore of Willey Pond and in the woods at the base of slide-scarred Mount Webster. Cross the bridge and dam at the south end of Willey Pond and continue straight ahead for 150 feet to a point where a sign directs hikers to go left for the pond loop. Passing over a graded path in an area where the state formerly operated a summertime animal preserve, the trail skirts the base of Mount Webster for 100 yards, then reaches a short side path to the left which leads in 50 feet to a large boulder with an interesting overhang. The trail then circles to the left and reaches the east shore of the pond where nice views are obtained of Mounts Willard, Avalon and Field. After passing by several shoreline picnic areas, the trail terminates at the east end of the bridge and dam. (Both the Sam Willey Trail and Pond Loop Trail have been designated as the Ethan Allen Crawford Nature Trails).

## **Kedron Flume Trail:**

This 1.3-mile long trail, first opened in 1936, connects the Willey House site in Crawford Notch with the Ethan Pond Trail. The lower portion of this path is easy with moderate grades, while the upper half of the trail is much rougher and steeper. The path begins behind the snack bar and gift shop and in 0.4 mile crosses the now active railroad line. Kedron Flume, an interesting cascade on Kedron Brook, is reached in 1.0 mile. The grade from here to Ethan Pond Trail is significantly steeper. Kedron Flume Trail terminates at the Ethan Pond Trail 1.3 miles from its start off Route 302 and 0.3 mile from the southern terminus of the Willey Range Trail.

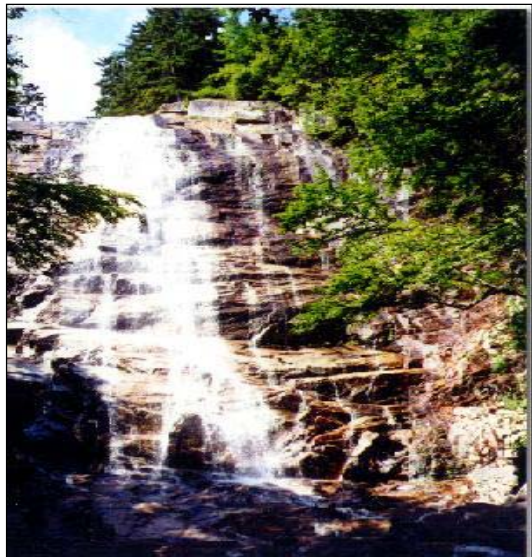
## The Around-The-Lake Trail (Ammonoosuc Lake) and Red Bench Trail:



One of the Crawford Notch region's true hidden gems, Ammonoosuc Lake is a four-acre pond nestled amidst a forest of dark spruces. The lake, once a private preserve for guests at the nearby Crawford House, is reached by a pleasant mile-long loop trail, which begins and ends at the site of the former grand hotel at the top of the Notch. The trail begins at the north end of the old hotel driveway opposite the former carriage barn that is now owned by the Appalachian Mountain Club. Parking is available a tenth of a mile to the south in the main lot of AMC's Crawford Hostel. Following a sign that directs hikers left off the driveway along an old road that once provided vehicular access to the lake, the Around-The-Lake Trail veers right and enters the woods at a marked junction. In a short distance, the loop trail splits, with the left fork circling the pond from west to east and the right fork vice versa. Bearing left from the loop junction, the trail crosses a small stream on a log bridge, then later takes a hard right and reaches Men-ill Spring, a trickle of water once famous for its purity. From the spring, the trail edges along the west shore of the lake on stone steps. Visible over the usually calm waters of the lake are the lower flanks of Mount Pierce (Clinton) to the east.

On the left, up a steep embankment, are found the railroad tracks now regularly used by the Conway Scenic Railroad tourist trains. After a short climb away from the shoreline, the Red Bench Trail leaves left. This interesting half-mile long spur continues north away from the pond and eventually crosses over the railroad tracks. On the opposite side of the tracks, it continues another few hundred yards to a scarlet wooden seat in the middle of the forest. From here is gained a unique perspective of Mount Washington and many of the peaks of the Presidential Range. It is written that 19th century Crawford House artist-in-residence Frank Shapleigh found this spot particularly endearing. From its junction with the Red Bench Trail, the main trail continues to circle the lake in a clockwise fashion. A signed side trail at the northeast corner of the lake leads down to its north shoreline, where the best views of the lake and its surroundings are to be had, including a reflected view of Mounts Webster and Willard to the south. The main trail continues its loop from here, eventually passing a plank seat with restricted views of the pond through the trees. The plank seat is situated at the western base of an interesting geological entity known as an esker. An esker is a long, narrow ridge of sand and gravel that was once the bed of a stream that flowed beneath a glacier. When the glacial ice finally melted, left behind was this gravelly deposit. Several eskers are known to exist in the Crawford Notch-Bretton Woods area. After passing by the plank seat, the trail soon reaches the narrow east end of the pond where its outlet flows over a small concrete dam. From the grassy opening on the south side of the dam—once the site of a bathhouse—the trail continues up the lower portion of the old road, crosses a brook, and turns right, back into the woods, reaching the loop junction in another 100 yards.

## Ripley Falls Trail:



One of the most popular family hikes in Crawford Notch, this half-mile walk leads from the former Willey House Station site to the base of 100-foot high Ripley Falls on Avalanche Brook. It coincides with the Ethan Pond Trail for the first 0.2-mile, then diverges left and slabs a hillside for 0.3 mile before dropping down to the base of the waterfall. A 2.5-mile connecting trail, the Arethusa-Ripley Falls Trail (see below), links Ripley Falls with its sister Crawford Notch waterfall to the south. Parking for this trail is at the end of the short paved road to the east, one mile south of the Willey House site.

## Arethusa-Ripley Falls Trail:

Traversing the high plateau behind Frankenstein Cliff, this trail connects the park's two highest waterfalls via a 2.5-mile long path. Sections of this trail are infamous for being partially blocked by windblown trees, despite yearly efforts by state parks personnel to clear the footpath of the blowdowns. The north end of the trail begins at the base of Ripley Falls, on the south side of Avalanche Brook. Following a moderately steep climb of about a half-mile, the trail levels out and wanders along the ridge at easy grades until reaching the junction of the Frankenstein Cliff Trail at 1.2 miles. The main trail steers right (west), then gradually slabs more south to Bemis Brook and the base of Arethusa Falls. In the opposite direction, the trail begins at the upper end of the Arethusa Falls Trail. After crossing Bemis Brook, the trail angles up and away from the falls and eventually turns more to the east. At 1.3 miles, the Frankenstein Cliff Trail enters (right). After a lengthy stretch of level walking on the ridge, the trail begins its descent to Ripley Falls via a series of switchbacks. A spur trail to the left leads to the top of the falls. A rough trail to the south of the waterfall leads to its base and the northern terminus of the Arethusa-Ripley Trail. As the rocks at the top of the waterfall tend to be extremely slick, especially in times of wet weather, it is advisable to avoid them or risk a fall and possible injury.

## Roadside Waterfalls in Crawford Notch

### SILVER & FLUME CASCADE

**North of Rt. 302 in Crawford Notch. Flume and Silver Cascades can be seen from your car window, but to really appreciate them, take a closer look. Two large lots provide ample parking.**



### BEECHER CASCADES & PEARL CASCADE; GIBB FALLS

**To reach Beecher and Pearl Cascades, park behind the Crawford Depot (further west on Rt. 302) and make the easy .4 mile hike in beginning on the Avalon Trail, then following signs. If you'd like to see a fifth falls, head up Crawford Path, which begins across Rt. 302 from Crawford Depot for a .4 mile hike to 35 ft. Gibb Falls,**