

Lonesome Lake

Distance (round trip): 3 1/4 miles

Walking time: 2 3/4 hours

Vertical rise: 1,000 feet

Difficulty : Moderate



One thousand feet above Franconia Notch is Lonesome Lake, one of the finest family hikes in the White Mountains, and a goal for climbers and visitors who take advantage of the graded trail to walk in and see a true mountain lake in a spectacular setting. No longer "lonesome," quite the opposite, the much-used trails, along with the plywood hut of the AMC, and the voices of hikers with their colorful packs and clothes, give a modern touch to the ancient scenery. The lake has been popular since the days of mountain inns after the Civil War, but still today, you cannot drive there. The only way to reach the lake is by walking. You can't see the lake from the road below. The trail still mostly follows the old bridle path, along which many vacationers from the now-vanished hotels rode to the lake for the magnificent views of the mountains on both sides of the Notch. Legend names President Ulysses. S. Grant as one of the notable visitors. According to the story, he came to the Notch and the Profile House in 1869. A yellow coach and six bay horses driven by Ed Cox, a famous "whip," brought him from Bethlehem in fifty-five minutes—a fantastic rate of more than thirteen miles an hour. In later years, a steam train and rails brought guests to the Profile House, -which burned in August 1923.

The views from Lonesome Lake are indeed, great—comprehensive, craggy, wild, and dominated by the treeless peak of Mount Lafayette. From the lake, trails lead to Cannon Mountain, Mount Kinsman, and Kinsman Pond. The Appalachian Trail passes by the lower end of the lake. As many as forty-six hikers can be accommodated at the AMC's Lonesome Lake Hut, situated on the west shore facing the Franconia Range. There is a trail around the lake, ½ mile, passing the site of old log cabins. A stand of tamarack makes a fine display of yellow in the fall. The lake is 2,734 feet above sea level. Westward, the evergreen forest rises to the ledges of Mount Kinsman. To reach the trailhead, park at Lafayette Place, on the Franconia notch parkway (I-93), The Parkway, is split here, so you have a choice. Northbound, there is east side parking. Southbound, parking is available on the west side at Lafayette Campground. Whichever you choose, walk to the south end of the parking lot for the campground. A pedestrian underpass connects both sides.

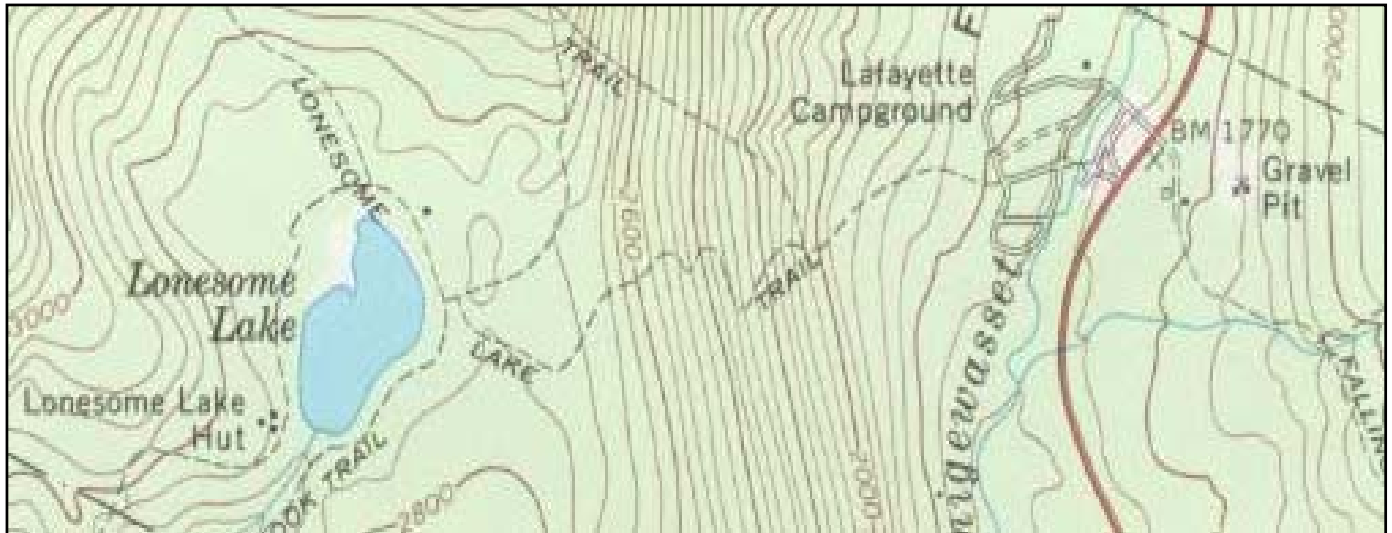


The Lonesome Lake Trail begins with a sign before a footbridge. Avoid the asphalt bike path that enters the woods straight ahead from the parking. Cross the bridge over the brook, which is the infancy of the Pemigewasset River. Follow yellow blazes and signs past the campsites. The Pemi Trail to the Basin branches left. Stay on the Lonesome Lake Trail. Leaving the campground behind, you proceed into the forest of tall hardwoods. No-strain climbing limbers your legs. Not far beyond a left corner and a small bridge, you pass by the Hi-Cannon Trail on your right. This is about a half-mile from your car. Now the trail lifts you up-ward by the switchbacks

originally designed for horses and riders. You may note the slope's steepness and welcome the angling path that you follow. The ridge, which looked so easy from Lafayette Place, seems to have deceived you. Soon the sounds of the traffic below will disappear, and after the 2nd long switchback, the trail will begin to level out, and, after about 1 mile, you detect a slight descent. The lake is ahead in its flat wooded setting.

You come to a trail junction. Pause here and study the trail sign and the numerous trails listed. Orient yourself to the map. Even look behind you to familiarize yourself with the trail you've been on, so you'll recognize it when you return to it.

Continue to the left on the cascade brook trail, and soon you will come to a junction with the cascade brook trail. Turning left on this trail brings you down to the basin. Continue ahead onto the Fishin' Jimmy Trail and cross a small bridge over cascade brook, which is the outlet for the lake. You will soon come to a small platform, where you may rest and take a quick swim in the clean waters of Lonesome Lake. To reach the AMC hut, there is a small trail just opposite the platform. The AMC Hut has Pit Toilets, and offers rustic overnight bunkhouse style stays with advance reservations required.



For the return route, walk the Around Lonesome-Lake Trail on the west shore. This area is mostly a BOG, and the trail is mainly on wooden logs, although it is very easy to follow. There are many openings thru the forest, which offer great views of the Franconia Range, as seen below. From left to Right are Mt. Lafayette (5260 ft), Mt. Lincoln (5089 ft), and Little Haystack (4880ft). It's hard to believe that between this lake and the mountain range is the Franconia Notch Parkway (I-93), where you started your climb. You don't hear nor see the highway. Continue around the lake to the junction with the Lonesome Lake Trail. Turning Left would bring you up to the summit of Cannon Mt, and turning right continues the around the lake route. At the Junction of Lonesome Lake trail and Cascade Brook Trail, turn left and you are on the way back down to Lafayette Campground where you started.



View of The Franconia Range from the West Side of Lonesome Lake