

Lost River

Distance: 0.75-mile loop

Elevation Gain: 300-foot descent

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours, but you could stay longer

Difficulty: Easy for all ages (as long as you do not have problems climbing up and down stairs).

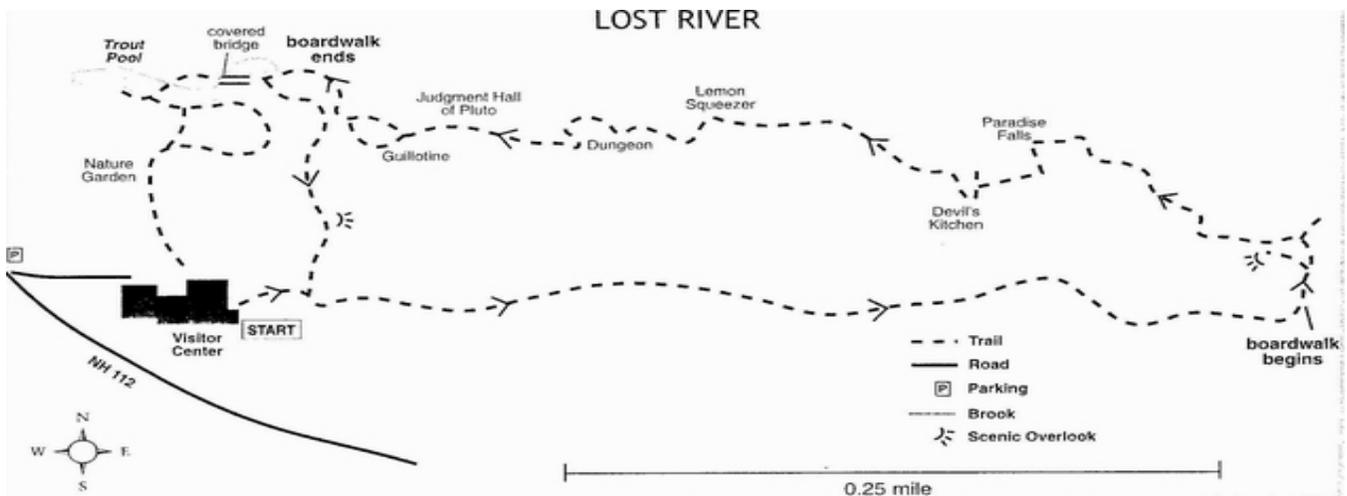


Directions from Lincoln, NH : Take Rt 112 West to the Entrance for Lost River which is on the right side of Rt 112

Don't let its status as a hyped New Hampshire attraction discourage you from a visit. Lost River is impressive—a mysterious river that flows between and beneath large boulders as you stroll easily on a boardwalk or wiggle down narrow passages into candlelit caves. Lost River is a sure bet to excite the family and to teach you about nature too. In addition to the gorge, Lost River also features a wildflower garden and displays on White Mountain logging, minerals, birds, and mammals which will appeal to both grown-ups and children. You could easily spend several leisurely hours walking and viewing the exhibits. Lost River Reservation is owned by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF) and run by New Hampshire Attractions. It has a visitor center, gift shop, and snack bar. There is an admission charge. The reservation is open from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. in May, June, September, and October, and from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. in July and August. Call for opening and closing dates in May and October, which are weather dependent (603-745-8031). Tickets are sold until one hour before closing time.

The Trail :

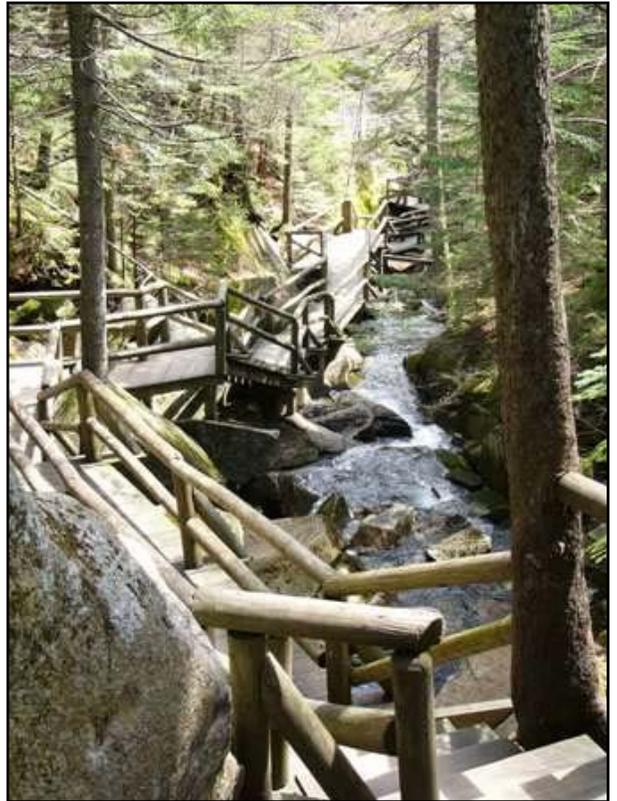
Pick up a trail map and guide at the visitor center before you head out on the trail. Please note that the trail is not recommended for people with heart, breathing, and leg problems due to the one thousand stairs you will need to negotiate. The trail is one loop, so it is virtually impossible to get lost. The 300-foot descent into the gorge has stairs and plenty of benches. In the gorge itself the well-maintained boardwalk ensures easy walking despite rushing water and rocks. You can explore some or all of the caves by scrambling down ladders and through narrow passageways, or you can keep to the main trail if dark, damp confined places make you uncomfortable. The descriptions at each cave entrance give you some sense of what you will be getting into. Some of the caves may be closed at times due to high water levels. At the end of the gorge trail, you can return to the visitor center either by walking past a lookout with a view of the Kinsman Range or by ambling through a covered bridge, past a trout pool, and then through the Nature Garden.



Highlights

The main attraction here is the gorge of Lost River with its long boardwalk and assortment of caves. The caves have names like Thor's Cauldron, the Devils Kitchen, Cave of Silence, and the Judgment Hall of Pluto. Many have narrow entrances and are lit by candles, contributing to the mysterious atmosphere. One particular cave, the Lemon Squeezer, is so narrow that it can only be entered by those small enough to fit through a narrow wooden passageway, i.e., your children but (more than likely) not you.

The geology of the gorge and how it was formed are well described in the exhibits and the pamphlet. In brief, water melting from the last glacier (12,000 years ago) carried abrasive gravel and sand that swirled around the river with such force that the potholes and the walls of the gorge were carved out. The more resistant pegmatite rocks were eroded less than the granite, so they form some of the more distinct features of the gorge. Potholes perched high above the river show that the water level was once much higher than at present. While walking through Lost River, show your kids the difference between the lighter pegmatite and the grayish granite. A very long time ago even before the glaciers, molten lava from deep within the



earth flowed into cracks in the granite, then "froze" to form the pegmatite dike in the granite. Look for the large crystals of feldspar and mica in the pegmatite, along with small crystals of garnet and quartz. The final stage in the formation of the Lost River gorge occurred after the glaciers retreated. Over time huge boulders split off from the walls of the gorge by the freezing and thawing action of water. These boulders tumbled into the gorge, in places burying the "lost" river. The "slag" of loose rocks below the Dilly Cliff, visible at an outlook near the visitor center, was formed by a similar process of freezing and thawing. The geological processes that formed the Lost River Reservation are still going on. Every winter and early spring water seeps into cracks in the rocks and then freezes. Eventually, new boulders may come tumbling down to create new caves in the Lost River. Brook trout have been stocked in some of the deeper pools in the gorge and in the trout pool at the end of the trail. Brook trout like the cold waters of the larger White Mountain streams. They are particularly fond of streams with a mixture of pools, riffles, and fallen trees and brush. The Forest Service has placed brush and dead snags over parts of a number of streams in the White Mountains to enhance the habitat value to trout. It's a good place to tell your kids that wildlife typically abhors prim-looking rivers and well-manicured forests. The path down to the river is a good place to try identifying a number of common trees and flowers of the White Mountains. Trees include striped maple (very obviously "striped"), red maple, white (paper) birch, and yellow birch (very yellow bark). Hobblebush is the dominant under-story shrub, but mountain holly, with its tiny spine-tipped leaves and red midsummer berries, and mountain maple are also present. Herbs of the forest floor include clintonia, painted trillium, red trillium, Canada mayflower, goldthread, mountain wood sorrel, and white wood asters. Rock and long beech ferns cover some of the rocks, and turtleheads grow along the stream. Balsam fir is common in the cooler, shadier sections of the gorge. When you reach the Nature Garden at the end of the trail, you can see how well you've done. The creators of the Nature Garden have created a swale, forest, field, bog, and even a small alpine area. The plants are labeled and grouped by the habitat in which they typically occur.