

BEGINNER HIKES IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS - VOL. 1

By Izzy Risitano @ wheresizzy.com



I have long struggled to answer a question I get asked often- “I haven’t hiked in a long time, what is a good one to get back into it?”

To me, the question demands an answer that is moderate in mileage, ample in views, has plenty of parking, and is straightforward in trail marking. Unfortunately, I never recall the perfect recommendation until hours after I’ve been asked. So, in this long time coming, here is a brief collection of my favorite bang-for-buck, beginner-friendly hikes.

Mount Willard.

By now, I’ve sent at least half a dozen folks up Mount Willard when asked for something family-friendly with great views. Willard starts off Route 302, from the AMC Highland Center at Crawford Notch. It’s important to get to this one early because the roadside parking along 302 gets filled up very quickly. From the car, hikers get to cross the railroad and start on the Avalon Trail briefly, before keeping left to the Mt. Willard Trail. The trail follows steady grades- so much so, that the elevation profile forms a near-perfect gumdrop. Additionally, hikers can stand atop vast ledges (carefully) without ever touching anything scramble-like.

From the top, there are incredible views of Mount Webster and Mount Willey and a bird’s eye view of Crawford Notch. This view is unmatched by how little walking it takes. Mount Willard is an idea for a quick hike or just reminding yourself why you want to be out there.

Mileage: 3.1 miles

Elevation: 900 feet

Difficulty: Easy



Mount Willard Summit, December 2021

The Coppermine Trail.

When I first set out for this one, no part of me expected to find such a unique waterfall, well-constructed shelter, or peaceful corner of the White Mountains.

Nestled just north of Kinsman Notch, the Coppermine Trail begins off Route 116 an easily traveled dirt road, with marked but limited parking. The trail runs alongside Coppermine Brook for nearly the entirety of the trail, making for interesting woods to the falls. Along the way, Coppermine Trail crisscrosses several XC ski trails, but it is obvious where the actual trail goes.

At 2.4 miles in, the Coppermine shelter, a 4-6 person, 3-walled structure, comes into view. Just beyond the shelter, the roar of Bridal Veil Falls gets louder as the falls reveal themselves in all their double-cascading glory. At the base of the falls, there is a gorgeous pool, great for a quick dip.

Mileage: 5 miles

Gain: 1100 feet

Difficulty: Easy



Bridal Veil Falls, April 2022

Mt. Pemigewasset.

Pemigewasset is ideal for when you're "just passing by" the northern corridor of I-93. Right as you enter Franconia Notch, the Mt. Pemigewasset trailhead is accessed by exit 34A, a shared parking lot with the Flume & Franconia Notch Welcome Center. This said, the lot is plowed and empty in the winter yet bustling by summer afternoons, crowded with tourists in line to see the Flume Gorge. From the lot, you get to cross beneath the highway in a dark tunnel and then begin a light ascent up the eastern side of the mountain. The trail is well marked (blue blazes) and gentle- the most time-consuming part will be stepping out of the way for other hikers. This said Mt. Pemigewasset will not be one of serenity, but it is great for a solo hike that doesn't feel too lonely. The top stands at 2,552 feet, with some sharp drops on either side- however, the summit is rather large for a mountain of its stature, allowing for plenty of views without being on top of fellow hikers. Like many peaks in the White Mountains, the top experienced a fire many years ago and has expansive views as a result.

Mileage: 3.8

Gain: 1250 feet

Difficulty: Easy



Mt. Pemigewasset, January 2024

Mt. Avalon.

Mount Avalon is popularly hiked with the three four-thousand-footers, Tom, Field, and Willey. This trio is often cast aside in the NH48 for beauty, yet the views from Avalon alone made this hike a favorite of mine.

Avalon starts on the Avalon Trail from the Macomber Family Information Center off of Route 302. Parking is on the roadside and it is abundantly clear where to park upon arrival. The hike starts with a crossing of the Conway Scenic Railway and continues past the left turn for Mount Willard. The next turn, however, is worth the trip and connects right back to the main trail in a jug handle. The Beecher and Pearl Cascades were something I only bothered with for my trace, but the two cascades were breathtaking and gentle to access. For a considerable time, the trail ascends beside the ridge of Mount Tom to the right, then eventually picks up itself. The rock scramble up Avalon was oddly easier in the winter when less attuned to how steep the rocks were. Despite this, the rise is not difficult and is short-lived. Even after the scramble ends, there is one more small push after the 100-yard sign-spur, where you climb a low-angle "butt-crack" as everyone I've hiked this with has called it. The crack is no means for panic up or down, as it is negotiated in a crab walk on the descent.

At the top, there are unbelievable views of the central Presidential Range, with Washington's identifiable towers at the center. This has long stood as my favorite view of New Hampshire's mightiest range.

Mileage: 3.6

Gain: 1540 feet

Difficulty: Medium



Mount Avalon, January 2022

Welch Dickey.

Sister mountains Welch & Dickey are the it girls of the Waterville Valley. Visible & identifiable from many surrounding mountains for its vast bald faces, these two are highly trafficked for good reason. The lot requires a \$5 fee to an iron ranger but is one of the larger parking areas in the White Mountains. This short loop is best done with an ascent of Welch and descent of Dickey, counterclockwise. The trail is highly eroded in the lower stretches but turns to rocky ledges just a mile in. These ledges are grippy and easy to ascend in dry conditions, despite their bare appearance. From this early point, the mountain is both scenic and easy to climb. While the top has just as good a view as the rest of the hike, it is still a great area to stop for lunch, with plenty of "furniture rocks." After the summit of Welch, there is a small col to descend before ascending Dickey, which has slightly less impressive views than its neighbor. On the descent, be sure to keep looking back at where you've traveled- the ledges are magnificent!

Should you finish too early in the afternoon, I would recommend a drive a bit further north on 49 to the Drakes Brook/Sandwich Mountain Trailhead to explore Fletcher Cascades. This relatively steady, 3.2-mile out and back begins on the Drakes Brook Trail and takes you into a stunning step-cascade, with plenty of Pink Lady Slippers should you visit during wildflower season. Do not attempt without a proper GPS app, as this trail is not marked in its entirety!

Mileage: 4.4 miles

Gain: 1800 feet

Difficulty: Medium



Welch Dickey, May 2022

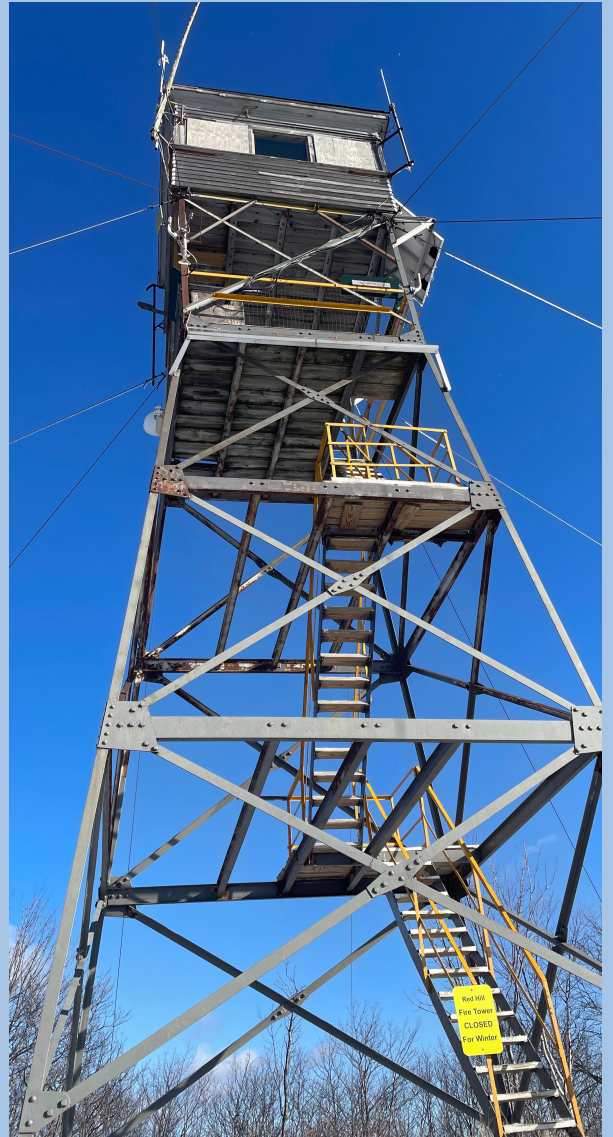
Red Hill.

Red Hill is my favorite hike to chat with locals on. The Lakes Region is easily the area I feel safest hiking alone- the woods are open, I always run into old dogs, and it is frequented by the same local hikers all the time. Red Hill is just north of Center Harbor and begins from a good-sized lot in a gorgeous neighborhood. Both Red Hill and Cabin trails are wide and steady for their duration. The top has views of the lake whether you climb the tower or not, but I strongly recommend ascending the several flights to the top to fully grasp Squam Lake's size. The descent begins just past the tower and gives way to a Cabin and old homestead, with info signs too! The easy, views and history at Red Hill make it an underrated White Mountains highlight- all while being close to home!

Mileage: 3.73 miles

Gain: 1,305 feet

Difficult: Easy





Red Hill, January 2023

The Scaur & some other sights.

The trail network that roots from the Livermore Trailhead is among my favorite places the trace has brought me. Whether a big day on the rocky slides of the Tripyramids or a low-mileage day enjoying waterfalls on Cascade Brook, this area is full of views, rare sights, and proper marking.

For the sake of this info sheet, I'll narrow the sights of this route to Big Pines, The Scaur, Waterville Flume, and Norway Rapids. Starting from the Livermore Trailhead, keep straight down the gravel path of Livermore Road until the first turn, marked with a WMNF wooden sign, for the Big Pines. This 0.2 spur trail leads to a cluster of towering pines that are an absolute marvel. From here, double back to Livermore Road and keep going until Kettle's Path, which will take you up to the Scaur- a 180-degree view looking out towards Tecumseh (Waterville Valley Ski Area). From the Scaur, take a right down Irene's Path, "affectionately" named for Hurricane Irene, which knocked out the now abandoned Flume Brook trail that once ran alongside the new route. This trail is visibly more overgrown but remains well cared for and marked until the Flume, a much less trafficked site than many of the larger ones in the National Forest. From the flume, the trail runs out pretty flat until Old Skidder Route, which loops right back onto Livermore Road- this section is terrific for a run! The last stop on the Waterville tour is a quick out and back to Norway Rapids, again marked with a wooden sign on the left side. If you're carrying a filter, this water is some of the best tasting I've had out there. To finish your loop, keep running or walking down Livermore Road back to the car. If you're hungry at the end of the day, I cannot recommend Covered Bridge Farm Table in Campton enough.

Mileage: 8.59 miles

Gain: 1568 feet

Difficulty: Easy/medium



The Scaur, August 2023

Cherry Pond.

This jaunt along a National Recreation Trail is certainly the easiest on the list, but it is not to be overlooked. The hike created by the Presidential Rail Trail, Shore Path, and Rampart Path affords views over Cherry Pond to the Pliny Range and a serene bird-watching spot at Little Cherry Pond. The route starts from Airport Road in Jefferson, where one walks in 1.4 miles to Waumbek junction on the rail trail. If you take a right at Waumbek junction, there is a wooden deck overlooking Cherry Pond that you could sunbathe on for hours. Beyond this, Rampart and Shore paths are great waterside sections of the Cohos trail to enjoy before looping back for Little Cherry Pond Loop. Unlike its neighbor, Little Cherry Pond is not as wide in mountain views, but plentiful in wildlife viewing opportunities. The birds alone had me captivated during my entire stay at the pond.

Should you want to extend the day, I would recommend continuing on the Rail Trail or making a driving tour out of Route 302 and Base Station Road for views of the mighty Washington on a clear day. And since it would be a shame to drive home hungry, check out Yaya's deli just north of the Route 3 and 302 junction.

Mileage: 4.5 miles

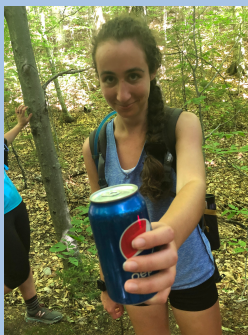
Gain: 124 feet

Difficulty: Very easy



Cherry Pond Observation Deck, May 2023

Before you go



Always download your routes ahead of time on AllTrails or Gaia, carry a portable charger, weather appropriate clothing, and seasonal footwear. You can never be too prepared!