



Interstate 93 - Franconia Notch Parkway

A controversy—the likes of which the notch had not seen since the battles that led to the creation of the Franconia Notch State Park—erupted over the legislature's approval in 1959 for a north-south interstate highway that would run from the Massachusetts border all the way through the notch. It took until 1966 for the state to propose a specific route

alignment for the northern segment, and then the pitched battle began. Environmental groups, led by the Appalachian Mountain Club, were outraged that an interstate highway would penetrate this natural scenic area, arguing that it would irreparably damage a unique environment and that a new highway simply was not needed in the face of the important historic and natural character of the notch. Furthermore, there were fears that the blasting required to widen the roadbed might substantially alter the arrangement of rocks that made up the Old Man of the Mountain. In 1970, U.S. Secretary of Transportation (and former Massachusetts governor) John Voipe, postponed indefinitely any intrusion of Interstate 93 through the notch, though construction continued on sections both north and south of it. Then followed seven more years



of wrangling, during which the White Mountain Environment Committee (WMEC)—a coalition of the AMC, SPNHF, and others—got a federal injunction to stop the construction. A compromise was finally reached. Congress passed a special amendment to the legislation that regulated the federal interstate system. In place of a full-fledged four-lane divided highway through Franconia Notch, eight miles of parkway could be substituted. Planning and designing this new solution took another six years, during which time the WMEC remained intimately involved. When the Franconia Notch Parkway



opened officially in 1988, it was one of only two substandard stretches in the entire federal highway system of 42,000 miles. But it was large enough to handle the traffic volume, and amenities abounded. The Flume got a new visitor's center; the Old Man got a new parking area; Lafayette Place was redesigned with a new parking lot for hikers, and a ten-mile bike path. The road widening forced the relocation of several trailheads, but these are well marked, too. For all its diversity, Franconia Notch's supreme feature is still the mountains. Leaving behind the controversy, the tourism, the changes that time has wrought, one can ascend Lafayette's long sides to gain a timeless freedom and a long view above it all.

