

Cannon Mountain

Distance (round trip) : 7 1/2 miles

Walking time : 5 1/2 hours

Vertical rise : 2,100 feet

You can ride in a Tramway cable car to the summit, so why climb Cannon Mountain on foot? Because only your own two legs can make the mountain yours. Somehow this also improves the magnificent views of Franconia Notch and Mount Lafayette. For hikers aiming to climb all 4,000-footers, Cannon qualifies by

100 feet. Skiers who have swooped down the snowy trails find that a summer climb, which pits them against this solid height unaided by Tramway or T-bars, gives the mountain new meaning. A rounded block seen from the Notch, Cannon's stark cliffs loom before you as you drive north on the parkway toward the Old Man. The mountain appears as a mass of stone on which evergreens cling with minimum success. Approach from the north, and you see its grassy ski slopes and trails like high pastures and giant paths down through the woods.

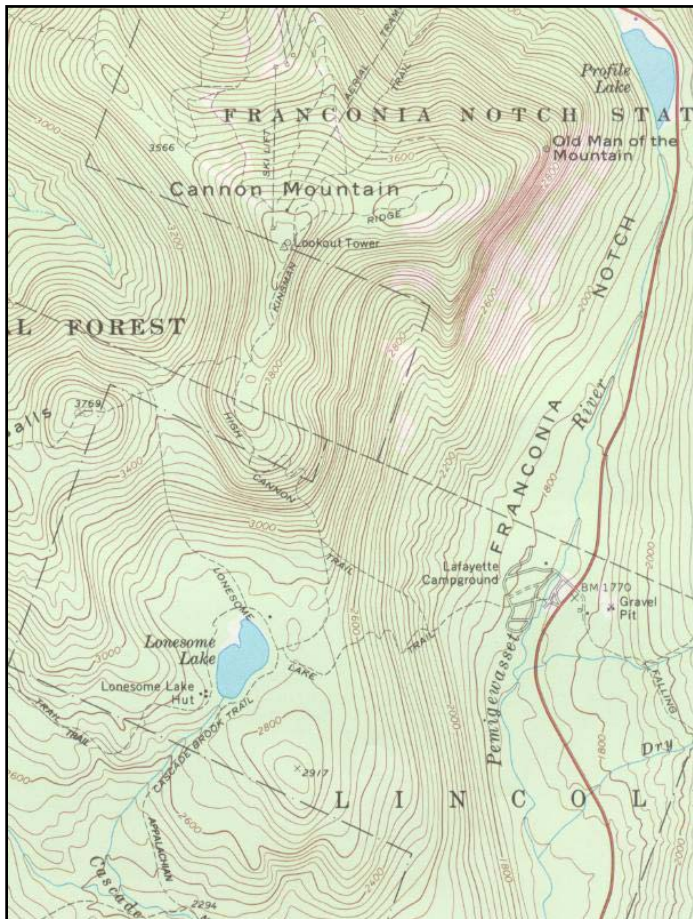


For a loop over the summit, climb the Kinsman Ridge Trail from the north and descend by the Hi-Cannon and Lonesome Lake Trails, returning through the Notch to your car via the northern extension of the Pemi Trail. The Kinsman Ridge Trail begins its zigzag climb about .3 mile south of the Tramway. Watch for the main Old Man exit from the parkway and park your car. The asphalt covers a vanished field known as Profile clearing. It was once the site of the immense Profile House. As you leave your car, look up at the silhouette of the ridge south from the tramway. You can see a horizontal rock—the Cannon-aimed toward Mount Lafayette behind you and outlined against the sky. Your first trail for this loop hike, the

Kinsman Ridge Trail, begins on the right as you walk up the road for viewers of the Old Man, and before you come to a smaller parking area. Take note of the bike path on your left, as you start up the little slope of the road. It will be part of your return route from Lafayette Campground. The Kinsman Ridge Trail climbs a steep bank, and at once you are on your way skyward. Steep for more than 1 mile, the trail gains altitude rapidly by a series of switchbacks. You climb to an opening in the trees and watch the cable cars slide gently up or down the black lines that suspend them. As the trail angles away from the Tramway it becomes more difficult among rock slabs, which erosion has exposed. Watch out for your footing over roots and in gullies of rotten rock. Beyond this climb the trail levels out on the east shoulder. After a passage through small spruce and fir, you come to a sharp right turn. A branch trail, unmarked, bears left to a breathtaking view from open ledges.



North and south the Franconia crests line the horizon: Eagle Cliff, Mount Lafayette, Mount Lincoln, Little Haystack, and Mount Liberty. On a ridge several hundred yards north, and from a camouflage of evergreen scrub, the Cannon aims at Mount Lafayette. From this angle it appears in its true form—a balanced rock shelf. You may wonder whether you're on the Profile's ledges. You're not. The Profile is dangerous, and reinforced rocks form the brooding silhouette far down and out of sight beyond the scrub and rocks. Return to the main Kinsman Ridge Trail. Keep past the right turn leading back the way you came. The trail crosses the east shoulder, then dips into a wooded col. Soon you make a steep climb into the open again among rock slabs and alpine vegetation. All at once you hear voices and find yourself among people at the junction with the Rim Trail from the Tramway. A large sign names the peaks in the panorama. A short trail leads to the summit, and an observation tower puts you above the spruces. The Tramway terminal extends out from a niche, where ski trails begin to dive down. Joining tourists at the tower, you look down the Notch and for an instant you are puzzled by a ribbon in the forest and toy cars. Across this highway, you see the Franconia Range, now part of a 360-degree view. Northward stretches the pastoral valley of the Gale River and Franconia village. South and west, a wilder panorama opens across Mount Kinsman's two summits toward Mount Moosilauke. When you're ready to descend, return to the Kinsman Ridge Trail. Follow it where it passes southward below the summit from the junction where you turned up to the tower. (The trail continues its rugged way fifteen miles to its southern end at the Lost River Road in Kinsman Notch.) Follow it only about ½ mile to the Hi-Cannon Trail where you turn left for the descent.



The Hi-Cannon Trail takes you past a lookoff ledge opening toward Mount Kinsman on your right and Lonesome Lake below you. The trail swings through young firs above cliffs from which there are wide outlooks into the Notch with its parallel ranges east and west. You climb down rocks on two short ladders and pass the eave-like ledges called Cliff House on your left. Continue down a rough stretch into less precipitous woods. Keep left past the Dodge Cutoff, which leads to Lonesome Lake. Hi-Cannon's switchbacks take you down to the Lonesome Lake Trail. Turn left and walk this graded path to Lafayette Campground, where you follow yellow blazes and signs to a foot-bridge. Beyond the bridge turn left and proceed north across the parking area.

Take the bike path entering the woods and follow it across its bridge over the Pemigewasset River, here a small brook. Watch for the Pemi Trail on your right soon after the bridge. This extension of the Pemi Trail from the Basin is for hikers and skiers. Winter use of the bike path has been given to snowmobilers. Or you may want to walk the bike path. The Pemi Trail follows the stream, mostly on the route of the former Profile Lake Trail, and provides more real woody footing. Both routes take you to Profile Lake in about 2 miles. Here the Pemi Trail bears left along the west shore of the lake, whereas the bike path curves north under the parkway, then back toward the lakeside viewing area for the Old Man. Either way you will be joining tourists and sightseers for your return to your car by way of the lodge or below that along the bike path. This Hike can be done as a one way hike in either direction by using the Aerial Tramway and the Kinsman ridge trail.

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