

# EXPLORING FRANCONIA NOTCH



After six years of getting the “where can we go hiking” question, we finally put fingers to keyboard and created our favorite explore tour of the Franconia Notch. This trip offers hiking at all levels (from 3-year old in sandals to expert ice climber), great picnic spots, our most famous natural (and a man-made) attractions, swimming, some gift-shopping, two museums, two rides, three “profiles” and the opportunity for oh-my-gosh views. You simply can’t do it all in one day, and some things (like horseback riding or bicycling) require reservations. Bring bug spray (or snowshoes), a camera, and a jacket (even in summer, the weather can change).

Placing the inn on your left hand side, drive to the crossroad at the end of the golf course (just 100’ up the road), and turn left onto Lafayette Rd. This is a lovely old road, and almost immediately on your left you’ll see everyone’s favorite house – the stone house – allegedly build out of a single glacial erratic from the original Sugar Hill parade ground (near the Sampler Barn). Drive to the bottom of the hill, turn right (past the Franconia Inn on your right and gliderport/Nordic ski center on your left) and take your first left, onto Wells Road. Wells road winds along including a 90-degree left about a 1/4 mile in and eventually lands you on Rte 18 after passing a good moose bog. Turn right, and go uphill (“3-Mile-Hill”) through a major “Sugar Bush” (see the maple-sap lines on the left in the springtime, and the collection tanks there year round), to a blinking light (ski season only). On your right is Cannon Mountain. On your left is the Cannon Mountain Parking Lot. Turn left into the lot, drive to the back, and park.

The trail head to **Artist’s Bluff** and **Bald Knob** leaves from the back left corner of the lot, and is appropriate for all levels. This trail splits into a T after about 10 minute’s walk. We like to go left first toward Bald Knob. There is some rocky scrambling at the top, but the views of Cannon Mountain, down Franconia Notch and west over the inn and the Green Mountains are stupendous. See if you can spot a black bear on the ski slopes in the green seasons – Cannon is known for

that! If you brought a picnic, the Knob is the place to enjoy it. There are some pretty good drop-offs, so be careful with children or if you have flimsy footwear. Then, head back toward Artist’s Bluff, where you’ll find rockclimbers galore, and great views of Franconia Notch.

You can return the way you came at this point, but we like to head down to the road and across the street to **Echo Lake State Park** for bracingly-cool swimming and a sandy beach (summertime), or just fun echoing (all year). There is a concession stand for snacks, and a bathroom (seasonal).

If you want to, head back along the road to your car, and drive to the Cannon Mountain Tram lot (pass Echo Lake, get on the highway and head South one exit). We often walk as it can’t be a half mile. Hike along Echo Lake (there is a road) to the Franconia Notch State Park Headquarters. There you’ll find two “must sees.” First, stop at the **New England Ski Museum** which is open 10-5 daily. Say “hi” to Kay. It is tiny, free, has a wonderful little gift shop, and gives a great overview of the ski and ski patrol industry in America, with a special section dedicated to the 10th Mountain Division troops of WW2. Plus, of course, local hero and Olympic Medalist Bode Miller generally has something on display there – he is from just down the road and learned to ski at Cannon. Then, take a ride to the top on the **Cannon Mountain Aerial Tram** (the nation’s oldest aerial tram, open most of the year). As you ascend, look back at the Artists Bluff cliff; can you see an indian profile, complete with “war bonnet”? The rim trail here offers spectacular views of the notch, and access to the observation tower. In winter, you will want snowshoes if you intend to hike around or down. There is also a concession stand at the top of the mountain for snacks and a facilities break if needed.

If you have the spunk, you can hike (or snowshoe) down the mountain via **Lonesome Lake** (again, great swimming in season), and then hike back to your car. Aim for the Lafayette Campground or for Echo Lake. Worst case, you’ll end up about 2 miles from your car, but it is a lovely walk along the headwaters of the Pemigewasset River (we call it the Pemi – down south it turns into the

Merrimack), through the notch, past Profile and Echo Lakes.

Nancy is lazy and often prefers to ride the tram down – but no matter how you descend, stroll to the **Old Man of the Mountain Historical Site** and see where our famous rock profile “old man” was, and why he was so spectacular. (If you hike down, you’ll pass it on your way back). If you planned ahead, you can pick up **bicycles** here (arrange in advance), and pedal down the bike path through the notch – or in winter you can **snowshoe** or **ski**. If not, if you walked, head back past Echo lake and left on the road to the blinking light, which is where you should find your car.

This time, do hop in your car. If you are at the Bald Knob parking lot, turn left out of the lot, then head south on I-93/Franconia Notch Parkway. If you are at the Franconia Notch State Park, get back on I-93 south. Take the exit that says “parking for the Basin” past Lafayette Campground. **The Basin** is one of Nancy’s favorite parts of NH, in any season. The trail here is paved and accessible for wheelchairs. Plan on a flat 1/3 mile stroll through the woods, with interpretive signage. It is part of the 12 mile bike path through the Notch which is popular for snowshoeing or cross country skiing in winter. In summer, the rocks and natural formations provide perfect pools for swimming and picnicking.

Then, back in your car and again head south on I-93 to the **Flume Gorge** (follow the signs). Open seasonally, this is a several-hour walk through one of NH’s most scenic wonders, complete with covered bridges (2 of them), and an extensive gift shop. It is a “must do”. In winter it is closed – theoretically. They pull up the boardwalks, and everyone just walks over the low fence and heads to the gorge to watch (or engage in) ice climbing – it is stunningly beautiful. Bring snowshoes. It is a great winter hike.

If you continue south on Rte 3 or I-93 from the Flume, you’ll pass **Indian Head Resort** – stop for a

minute and pay the few cents admission to climb the tower and see the other famous mountain profile of an indian chief.

Kids love the **Whale’s Tale Water Park** (seasonal) with its slides and “tornado” ride (called the giant toilet bowl by locals). End up in **LinWood** (Lincoln & Woodstock) which has some great shopping and restaurants. Our favorites include a stop to see friends Adrienne and Julie at their wonderful gallery, **Thru the Artist’s Eye**, on your left on Rt 3 in Woodstock. When you reach Rt 112 (the Kancamagus Highway), turn left in the direction of Lincoln. You’ll pass under the highway, through the gauntlet of ski shops, and find the **Gypsy Café** on your left – great food! A mile farther, turn right to **Loon Mountain** for a trip to the summit on the **gondola**. In summertime there is **horseback riding** (call first), **mountain biking**, and a **climbing wall** at Loon as well.

Heading north again on I-93, stop for just five minutes at **Boise Rock**, and learn how the horse saved the man.

As you head north, you’ll have a great view of the five ski slopes of Cannon Mountain that seem to end in Echo Lake. The steepest of these is Avalanche, site of the first world cup races in 1967 (won by Jean Claude Killy), and Nancy’s “yard sale” fall (assorted skis and gear scattered all the way down) 3 years ago. Next to it is Polly’s Folly, which claimed parts of Lon’s knee in a blizzard.

By now you’re exhausted – simply come home to Sunset Hill House for an **end-of-day cocktail** and a chance to relax while watching the sun set. Don’t forget – dinner reservations are recommended in the Restaurant at Sunset Hill, or just walk in to the tavern. Our dining schedule is available at the front desk. Let us know what you liked best of this tour, and anything we should add or change – and as you go meet our neighbors, tell them that Nancy and Lon at Sunset sent you along, and say hi for us! Enjoy!



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