

Red Hill: A storied mountain

Ed Parsons - Feb 26, 2021 Updated Feb 26, 2021



Lake Kanasatka (in foreground) and Lake Winnepesaukee from Red Hill fire tower. (ED PARSONS PHOTO)

Red Hill (2,030 feet) in Moultonborough is a storied mountain. I was reminded of that last Sunday when I climbed it with two friends, Pam and Bruce Andruskiewicz of Tamworth.

We arrived at the trailhead on Red Hill Road about 1:30 p.m. The lot was nearly full but some people had completed the hike and were leaving. In the end we were pleased to only meet four people on the hike and had the summit and fire tower to ourselves.

A popular 3.6-mile loop hike on the mountain is taking the 1.7-mile Red Hill Trail to the summit and descending the 1.4-mile Cabin Trail back to the parking lot. Along the way, you encounter many of the mountain's stories.

In a half mile, the trail crosses an old jeep road, now a snowmobile trail. There is an info kiosk placed by the Lakes Region Conservation Trust at that point, one of a series on the loop hike.

In the year 2000, the trust began acquiring land on the mountain, culminating in today's 2650 acre Red Hill Conservation Area. Today, the mountain is forested, but Red Hill had been cleared, pastured and farmed since the late 18th century.

Next to the kiosk was the cellar hole of the Horne family. Son Charles was envied because he could sled from his doorstep to the schoolhouse down on Red Hill Road.

It was a beautiful winter day with bright sun reflecting off the snow and an achingly blue sky between dark branches above us. No matter the season, this always reminds me of a Frost poem entitled "Fragmentary Blue."

As we ascended, across from a small ravine the snow slope was disturbed by the foot-falls of deer in a giant deer yard beneath tall oaks. According to the Lakes Region Conservation Trust's Land and Stewardship Director Dave Mallard, the large expanse of Red Hill has plentiful wildlife, with a plentitude of food like acorns and beechnuts.

Nearing the summit, we passed the Eagle Cliff Trail on the left, which follows the ridgeline north. Then we walked out in the open next to the fire warden's cabin and storage cabin, and the Red Hill fire tower.

Today, the tower is owned by the Lakes Region Conservation Trust. A local group called the Red Hill Fire Tower Association, comprised of the fire departments of nearby towns, spend what is needed to staff it during fire seasons and maintain it. It is a simple

agreement that works. Mallard said that the town of Holderness is presently taking the lead on this and doing a great job.

We climbed the tower to the platform just under the locked cab. We bundled against the cold breeze. The 360-degree view was great. Though there was no tower when Henry Thoreau, Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson each separately climbed to the summit, there were no obstructing trees and the view was the same.

We continued across the summit and headed down the Cabin Trail. Dave Mallard laid out the Cabin Trail and completed it with volunteers in 2013 and 2014. It is a great trail, spreading out people on this popular mountain.

It wound down through open hardwoods. In a saddle we reached an old hunting cabin once owned by the local Dane family of the valley below. Continuing, we heard a couple snowmobiles on the nearby jeep road in the saddle, but before reaching it, we passed signs to the stone foundations of the Cook family homestead.

Generations of this family farmed and ran an inn there from 1785 to 1910. It is a good example of how homesteads were often at a raised altitude to be above early frosts. Jonathan Sr., who received a grant to homestead there by fighting in the Revolutionary War, often guided grateful guests to the summit.

The trail then coincided with the snowmobile trail for a while and at the first kiosk again, we took a left on the Red Hill Trail, and descended to our car.

To get to the trailhead, take Sawmill Way off Route 25 in Moultonborough. Turn on Red Hill Road, and continue after it turns to dirt.