

THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

By Ken McNaughton

On Friday 19 September 2015, I flew to Boston and drove my rented Fiat 135 miles (217 km) north into the White Mountains. These cover a quarter of the state of New Hampshire and a small portion of western Maine. Part of the northern Appalachian Mountains, they are the most rugged mountains in New England. The most famous peak is 6,288-foot (1,917 m) Mt. Washington, the highest in the northeastern U.S. For 76 years, this peak held the world record for fastest surface wind gust (231 mph or 372 km/h).

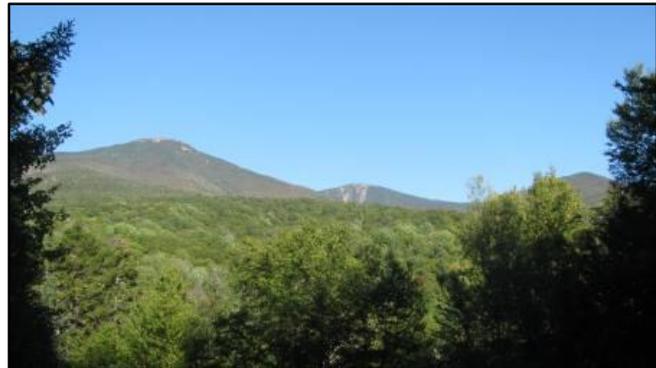


Figure 1. From Flume Gorge (l to r): Mt. Liberty 4,460', Mt. Flume 4,327' and Mt. Osseo 3,834'.

After checking in at the Rivergreen Resort at Lincoln and having lunch at the Black Mountain Burger Company, I headed into the Franconia Notch State Park. This straddles eight miles (13 km) of Interstate 93 as it passes through Franconia Notch, a mountain pass between the Kinsman Range and Franconia Range. The 65-mile (105 km) long Pemigewasset River (the “Pemi”) flows through the notch. There are numerous geological wonders in the park but I wanted to see the Flume Gorge at the base of Mount Liberty (Fig. 1). Cut by the Flume Brook, it features walls of Conway granite that rise to a height of 70-90 feet (21-27 m) and are only 12-20 feet (3.7-6.1 m) apart.

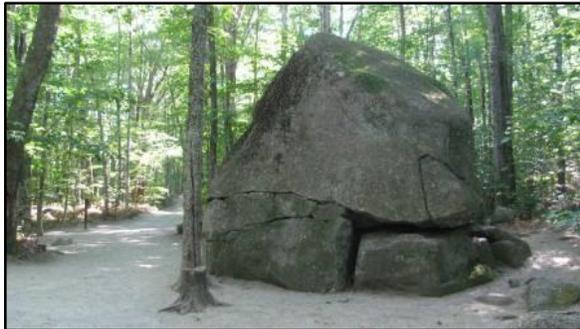


Figure 2. Mute reminder of past glacial age.

Figure 3. Flume Gorge narrows to 12 ft wide and 90 ft deep.

The two-mile (3.1 km) trail that includes the gorge passes by the Great Boulder (Fig. 2), a silent tribute to the numerous glacial ages that helped reduce the Appalachian Mountains from their former lofty jagged peaks. The trail crosses the Pemi via a covered bridge built in 1886 and comes to Table Rock, a horizontal section of Conway granite 500 ft (150 m) long and 75 ft (20 m) wide, over which the Flume Brook flows as it approaches the Pemi. A narrow boardwalk (Fig. 3) crisscrosses the 800-ft (240 m) long gorge, which



culminates in the 45-ft (13.6 m) Avalanche Falls. The trail continues to meander through the forest, passing Liberty Gorge, the Sentinel Pine Covered Bridge and the Pool, a basin 40-ft (12 m) deep and 150 ft (45 m) in diameter that is surrounded by cliffs 130 ft (39 m) high. After this exhilarating excursion, I flopped between the hot tub and the swimming pool at Rivergreen and kept a 7pm reservation at Gypsy’s Café in Lincoln. I had two waitresses—one a novice and the other supervising—and enjoyed Indonesian swordfish with peanut sauce, white rice and asparagus tips, followed by lemon berry mascarpone cake and decaf coffee.

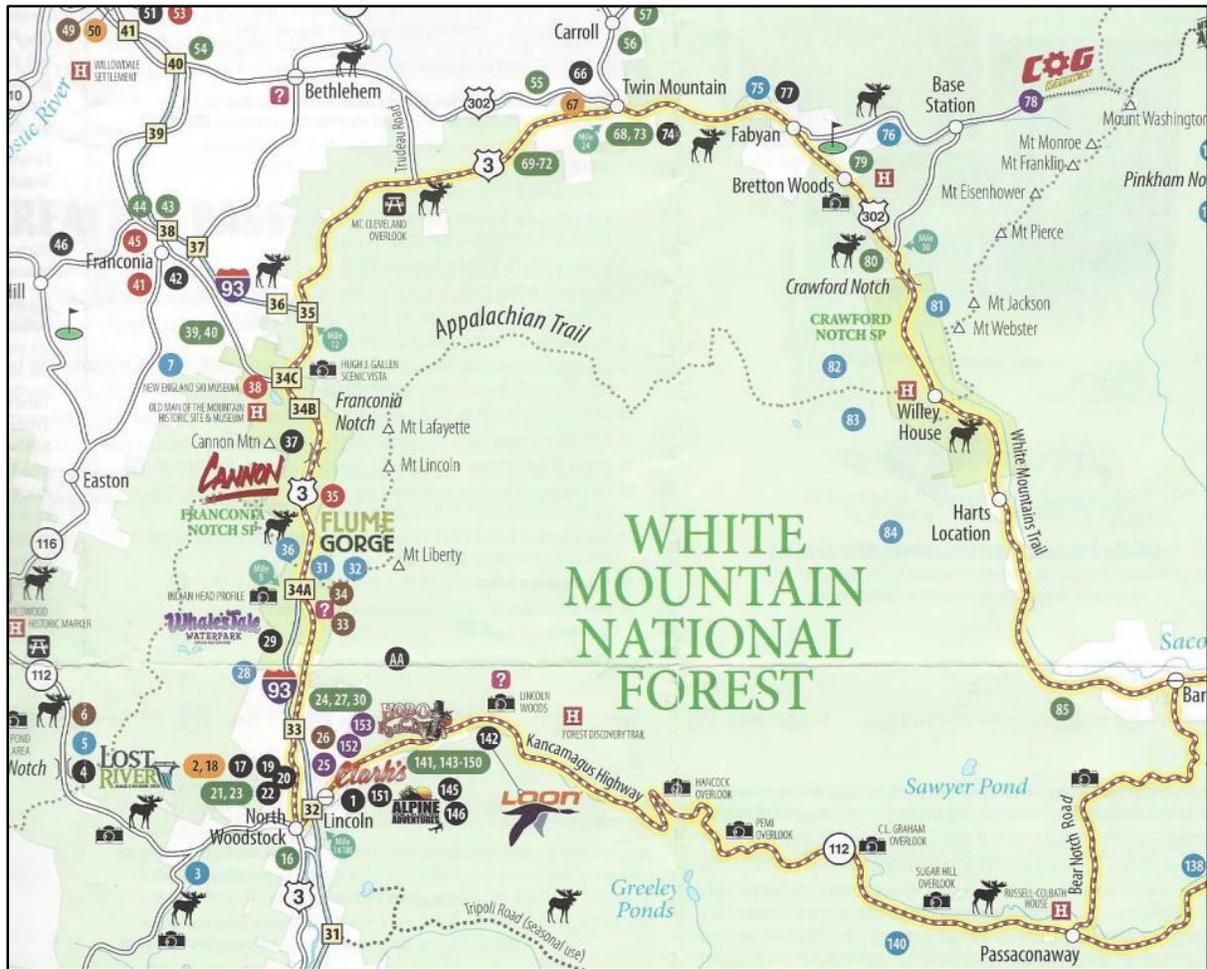


Figure 4. Map shows Lincoln, North Woodstock, Loon Mountain, Flume Gorge and Routes 93 and 112.

Lincoln is at the junction of the north-south Route 93 and the east-west Route 112 (Fig. 4). Rivergreen is on Route 112, just east of Route 93. On Saturday morning, I drove five miles (8 km) west on Route 112 to North Woodstock, a quaint little village that boasts the beautiful Cascade Park (Figs. 5 & 6). The Pemi swirls and cascades across and around numerous smooth sculpted rocks that are accessible for walks and meditation. Across the street I had breakfast at the Woodstock Inn for \$8.29, including a three-cup pot of decaf coffee, orange juice, a sticky bun, a one-egg omelet, fried potatoes and sausage, with a garnish of orange slice and kale.

I had come to the White Mountains to attend the 40th Annual New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival. As I drove away from the Woodstock Inn, I saw a man at the bus stop dressed in full Scottish regalia photographing a voluptuous lady similarly dressed, but with a short kilt and plunging neckline. I slowed down and yelled out “Hey!” They both looked at me and I said, “Best dressed couple!” They grinned and waved as I drove back to the Rivergreen. It was going to be hot so I chose an outfit that would be comfortable in the open air—my McNaughton kilt, with wide black leather belt and large silver Scottish thistle buckle, McNaughton Clan sword kilt pin; coarse white cotton Highland shirt with leather thong lace-up at the neck; black woolen Balmoral hat with red pom-pom pulled low over the right ear; sturdy black leather shoes; and long white woolen socks with McNaughton tartan flashes either side. I wanted to tuck my McNaughton *scian dubh*—a short ceremonial dagger—into my right sock but did not check baggage on the plane and couldn’t carry it through security. I wanted to be hands-free, so I crammed my money and other essentials into the little leather purse at the back of my sporran.



Figure 5. Cascade Park, North Woodstock.

The Games were to be held at Loon Mountain Ski Resort a couple of miles further east on Route 112. Loon Mountain—named for the diving bird common throughout North America—rises to 3,065 feet (934 m) above the valley of the East Branch of the Pemi, which flows into the Pemi at Lincoln. Most of the accommodations for miles around were booked up months ago. Three fleets of buses transported people to the long narrow valley on the banks of the river. I caught a bus right outside Rivergreen and was surprised to find I was the only one fully dressed in Scottish attire. I sat near the front and tried to look nonchalant, since we were two lines of strangers



Figure 6. Pemigewasset River below Cascade Park.

facing one another on either side of the bus and no one was talking. Just before we took off a young man, also fully dressed in Scottish attire, sat next to me. I felt compelled to break the ice, so I quietly asked him about his clan. He boomed out that he was in a pipe band but broke a reed and was still attending. I was interested to learn more but didn’t want everyone to think I was trying to monopolize the bus trip, so I lowered my eyes and continue to quietly ask him further questions.

Benjamin is a seminary student in Boston, having completed three years of a seven-year training to be a Roman Catholic priest. He is able to practice his bagpipes in a quiet room at the seminary. I told him I lived near Baltimore but had to get out because the very popular Pope Francis was coming to town this week. We had an interesting conversation and I suspect we entertained the other passengers very well. After shuffling slowly through separate lines waiting to pay by cash or credit card, I found the Clan Macnachtan tent immediately. We were the

Honored Clan at this Games, which meant we were to lead the Parade of Clans and would be singled out for special mention. Our 20 x 20 ft (6 x 6 m) tent was right near the entrance and I was able to greet our chairman, Peter McNaughton, and to meet some other members of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide who I had read about but had never met.



We were ushered to the front of the line, Peter in front with our standard, the rest of us four abreast, with two of our young children helping to carry our banner in front. A bagpipe band led the way and the other clans followed us. It was a glorious sunny day with a clear blue sky. We were surrounded by green mountains. People gathered either side to take photographs as we marched off. We entered the large parade ground, surrounded by bleachers and happy spectators. I waved frequently and tried to focus on some people in the crowd. Sometimes whole sections of the crowd waved back. The band turned left to march across the center of the ground toward the reviewing stand and then turned right.

Figure 8. Honored Clan Macnachtan on the parade ground; Peter McNaughton, chairman of CMAW holding standard at left and Ken third from left (photo by Ruth McCracken).

The Macnachtan Clan followed but turned left to remain right by the stand. The other clans lined up in the center of the field, two ranks facing each other, each clan with a standard bearer up front. The master of ceremonies announced over the public address system "I have just been informed that the clans have gathered." A wave of emotion swept over me. So this is what



it must have been like in Scotland. A crisis had arisen. The word got around. Clans marched for miles through the glens and over the mountains until they reached this lush valley surrounded by hills. I started to cry. A young woman who was the British Consul brought greetings on behalf of the all the nations of the United Kingdom. The master of ceremonies gave special mention to the Macnachtan Clan and we all shouted the clan motto on cue. Then, as each of the other clans was mentioned, the clan standard was raised and the war-cry was shouted.

Back at the tent we shared lunch and just before our annual general meeting, Jenna McNutt, an associate producer/reporter from the NH1 television station in Concord, sat in our tent and interviewed our chairman for five minutes with her camera whirring. For the rest of the day, I chatted with new and old clan friends and visitors to our tent, visited the tents of other clans, and looked at merchandise for sale. At one point, I was stopped by two elderly brothers who had been sitting opposite me in the bus. They knew I lived near Baltimore because they heard my conversation with Benjamin and they were thrilled to see me marching with the Honored Clan.



One of the actors from the award-winning HBO television series *Game of Thrones* was very successful in the Scottish Heavy Athletic competition — Hafthór Björnsson , the 6’10” 400-lb (2.1 m/181 kg) Icelander who plays “The Mountain.” He carried two stones—gathered from the nearby East Branch of the Pemigewasset River and weighing a combined 508 lb—a record-setting distance of 140’10” (43 m).

I didn’t have time to see all the attractions but I was most impressed by some of the Celtic bands. **Prydein** is an American Celtic rock band formed in Vermont in 1999. **Albannach** is a Scottish band consisting of a lone piper with four percussionists—a main drummer carrying three drums, a lady bass drummer, a bodhran player and a male bass drum player with long hair. All five play with tremendous passion. Once again I was transported to Scotland. Is this what it was like when

war was declared?—the booming drums, the wailing of the pipes, the tossing of the long hair. To get close to the stage I had to brush past an attractive lady in my kilt. As I passed she said “You look great!” I stopped directly in front of her. I was pleased of course, but my wheels turned rapidly. “You look pretty good yourself,” I said. A woman who looked this good was not going to be alone and I was vaguely aware of a handsome man next to her in the crowd. “Tell your husband I said so.” They both smiled and we stood together to watch the band.

The climax of the musical fare for me was the **Red Hot Chilli Pipers**, who formed in Scotland in 2002. They were dressed in smart black-and-red Scottish attire and put on a well-choreographed performance, coming and going across the stage and seemingly enjoying the occasion immensely. At full strength they had three pipers up front, book-ended by two electric guitarists and two mobile drummers. In the back row there was a keyboardist, a full drum kit and a double conga player.



For this 40th Annual New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival the warm, sunny weather was perfect, the location was idyllic and the 40,000 attendees set a new record.

NOTES

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