

Breaking Trail

Stories of from rich history of trail development in the White Mountains on the eve of AMC Trail Crew's Centennial in 2019. These stories may become historical scholarship, a web resource, a book, or even part of an interpretive installation at Camp Dodge. The crack team of researchers and writers includes Lee Burnett, Bob Proudman, Bob Watts and Tim Davis, PhD.

Before the Whites had trails ...

"They had much difficulty in managing to get through; they, however, proceeded slowly; sometimes crawling under a thicket of trees, sometimes over logs and windfalls, until they arrived where they could walk on top of the trees. This may seem to some strange, but it is nevertheless true."
-- "Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

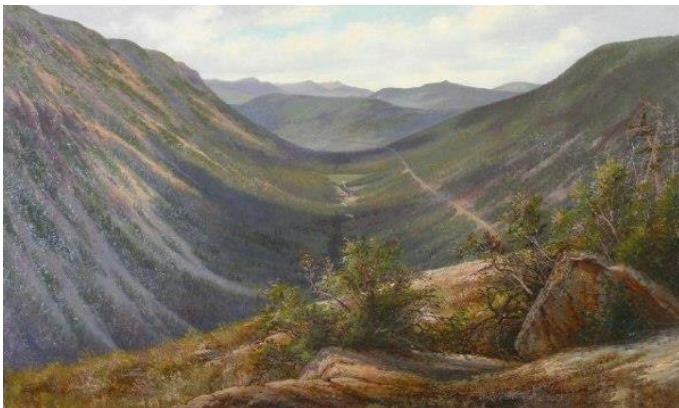


*Mount Washington from the Ellis River
By Benjamin Champney*

This early trek up the western flanks of Mount Washington was made just before the Crawford Path was cut in 1819. The party of gentlemen on foot, led by Abel Crawford, never reached the summit and ended up spending a rainy night in the woods without food or fire. They stumbled out the next morning a little worse for wear:

"These men wore fine and costly garment into the woods, but when they returned, their clothes were torn and much injured by the brush, and their hats looked as if they had been through a beggar's press."
-- "Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

In rugged places, horses became liabilities ...



Crawford Notch from Mount Willard by Edward Hill

"Horses were pulled up the narrowest and most jagged portion of the Notch between Mount Webster and Mount Willard, and let down again by ropes." -- "The White Hills" by T Starr King (1876)

Since carriages were useless, horses dragged loads strapped to poles travois-style.

"The first article of commerce that was carried in this way from the sea-shore, through the solemn walls and over the splintered outlet of the Notch, was a barrel of rum."

-- "The White Hills" by T Starr King (1876)

Once the trail clearing started, so did the accidents ...

"As I was standing on an old log chopping, with my axe raised, the log broke, and I came down with such force that the axe struck my right ankle and glanced, nearly cutting my heel cord off;"

-- "Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

This is Ethan Allen Crawford's story of clearing a path along the Ammonusuc toward what is now the Base Station in 1823. He continues:

"I bled freely, and so much so that I was unable to stand or go. The men that were with me, one a brother of mine, and another stout man, took the cloths we had our dinner wrapped in, and tied my wound as well as they could, and they began to contrive means to get me out of the woods. They cut a round pole, and with their frocks which they wore tied me in underneath it, and thought they could carry me in like manner as we bring dead bears through the woods; but in this way I could not ride. They then let me down and took turns in carrying me on their backs until we got out of the woods;"

--"Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

Back home, an old woman dressed Crawford's wound with freshly-pounded clover leaves in a manner learned from the Indians:

"... this stopped the blood so suddenly that it caused me to faint; this was a new thing to me - a large man to faint! - which made me feel rather queerly, but there was no help for it. This wound laid me up pretty much the rest of the summer."

-- "Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

Crawford's injury becomes badge of sacrifice ...

"So it is that men suffer various ways in advancing civilization, and through God, mankind are indebted to the labors of men in many different spheres of life."

-- "Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains" (1846)

-Lee Burnett

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