

BLUEBERRY MOUNTAIN (Benton Range)

by Steve Smith

ELEVATION: 2662 ft./811 m

LOCATION: Benton Range, Town of Benton

USGS MAP: 7 ½' East Haverhill

GEOGRAPHY

Blueberry is a low and gently sloping mountain near the S end of the interesting Benton Range, a chain of small ledgy peaks that extends for several miles between Mt. Moosilauke and Mt. Clough to the E and the Connecticut River valley to the W. The broad crest of Blueberry wears a dark cloak of conifers, with bright granite ledges showing through here and there. In the late 1800s the entire upper mountain was devoid of trees, yielding abundant blueberries and stellar views. The higher slopes are now covered with a scrubby growth of red pine, spruce and shrubs, but there are still a number of gently sloping open ledges that afford interesting if not spectacular or panoramic views, in particular perhaps the best of all vistas of Mt. Moosilauke. These semi-open areas extend well down on either side of the ridge. Though recent logging has impacted the lower sections of trail at either end, the climb of Blueberry is still a pleasant and rewarding trek in a quiet corner of the White Mountains.

Blueberry's immediate neighbor to the N is wooded, trailless Jeffers Mtn. (2994 ft.), whose long crest forms the highest peak in the Benton Range.

From there the ridge runs N over the narrow ridge of The Hogsback (2810 ft.), also trailless, which is fronted with a long line of W-facing quartzite cliffs, and on to the steep, rocky peak of Sugarloaf Mtn. (2609 ft.), which has an unofficial trail that is now dangerous to use since ladders that once provided access up a very steep ledge have rotted away. Black Mtn. (2830 ft.), the northernmost peak in the range, is detached from the others and is described in a separate chapter.

From the flat summit of Blueberry the scrubby ridge descends S to the minor peak of Owls Head (1967 ft.), which drops off in a tremendous SW-facing cliff overlooking NH 25, man-made Oliverian Pond, and the upper valley of Oliverian Brook. This cliff is well-known to rock climbers, though access across the flat area at its base has been difficult at times. In 2007 the cliff and the area at its base were added to the WMNF, and there are plans to construct a climber's trail to the base of the cliffs with a footbridge over Oliverian Brook.

The E slopes of Blueberry fall into the valley of Jeffers Brook, which is traversed by the North and South Rd. The SW slopes are drained by Blueberry Mountain Brook, which empties into Oliverian Pond.

NOMENCLATURE

No mystery here. In the 1800s, when the upper slopes were mostly treeless, there were blueberries here, and lots of them, along with an abundance of huckleberries. There are still some to be found, but not in such lavish quantities.

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

1876: Moses Sweetser's guidebook extols the virtues of Blueberry Mtn. and Owls Head. He describes ascent route to Owls Head from road to S and notes that Blueberry can be climbed up the ridge from Owls Head or from the valley to the E. "For about 1 M. from the summit the mountain is free from trees and is covered with alternate bands of carpet-like moss and granite ledges moderately inclined. The work of ascent and exploration is thus rendered easy and pleasant." He describes view, "of great extent and beauty," and also says there is signal-beacon of U.S. Coast Survey on highest point.

1888: Frank O. Carpenter describes Benton Range in *Appalachia* article and gives timetable for traverse of range from Black Mtn. to Owls Head - 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ mi. in 11 hr. Only trails on range are up Black from W and down from Blueberry to Warren Summit (Glenclyff).

1916-1928: Early editions of *AMC Guide* note that "there appear to be no trails to Blueberry," though starting in 1925 maps in book show several paths on the mountain.

1930: Dartmouth Outing Club builds shelter near summit of Blueberry, 50 yd. SE of high point; this is removed in early 1940s.

ca. 1930: WMNF opens Blueberry Mountain Trail, traversing mountain from NW to SE, route largely followed by current trail. Also opened are Owls Head Trail, climbing over Owls Head and joining Blueberry Mountain Trail on ridge, and Jeffers Mountain Trail, running from Blueberry summit N along ridgecrest over Jeffers Mtn.

Mid-1930s: CCC reconstructs North-South Rd. through valley and notch to

E of Benton Range.

1946: Owls Head Trail and Jeffers Mountain Trail have disappeared from *AMC Guide*, among many trails abandoned during World War II.

TRAIL APPROACHES

SOUTHEAST APPROACH from Long Pond Rd. (FR 19, formerly North and South Rd.)

Blueberry Mountain Trail (E section)

3.5 mi. round trip, 1100-ft. elevation gain

Add 0.6 mi. round trip, 100 ft. for western viewpoint

TRAILHEAD (1558 ft.): The Blueberry Mountain Trail traverses the mountain from SE to NW. To reach the SE trailhead, take NH 25 to the village of Glenclyff and turn N onto High St. (formerly Sanitorium Rd.). At 1.0 mi. from NH 25 turn left onto gravel Long Pond Rd. (formerly North and South Rd., which runs over a height-of-land to NH 116 in Benton) and drive 0.7 mi. to trail sign and parking area on L.

The SE approach is the shorter and easier of the two routes to Blueberry. Once past the logged areas (which are becoming less evident over time) near the start, it is a very pleasant hike, especially in the upper section with its attractive conifer woods and ledgy areas with views. From parking area, trail climbs easily up wide logging road, bearing L at 0.1 mi. with logged area on R. At 0.2 mi., trail turns R up steep bank (look for yellow blaze) and ascends moderately on old woods road through hardwoods, recrossing logging road at 0.4 mi.

Trail continues moderate climb in open hardwoods, with logging becoming

less evident, then turns R at 0.8 mi./2075 ft. and enters deep spruce forest. It climbs easily along wooded ledges, and at 1.1 mi. swings L and climbs up first semi-open ledges, with partial view back to W side of Mt.

Moosilauke. Trail then traverses across semi-open ledges and scrubby areas of red pine and low shrubs. It turns R at 1.2 mi./2300 ft., soon passing opening on L with view S to Carr Mtn., then angles along E side of ridgecrest, dipping into woods of spruce and pine. After level stretch of 0.1 mi., emerge from woods and climb more steeply up ledges; at top of pitch, at 1.5 mi./2475 ft., side path leads 20 ft. L to ledge shelf with fine view of mountains to S. Trail now climbs at easier grade over ledges and through scrub, emerging in open area at 1.6 mi. Continue up to side path at 1.6 mi./2540 ft. that leads a few yds. R to open, gently sloping ledge with excellent view towards Mt. Moosilauke and its Slide Ravine – a fine lunch spot. Continue easily upward, passing another view of Moosilauke, enter deep spruce woods, and reach crest of broad, flat summit ridge. At 1.7 mi./2630 ft., just past boulder on L side of trail, cairn indicates side path to actual summit on R. This path zigzags up through cut in ledge and climbs, with one short scramble, to scrub-fringed ledge at summit in 90 yds.; there are standing views here over trees to Moosilauke and mountains to S, but little view if sitting. Several old iron pins and faint trace of triangle etched into summit ledge indicate that this was a station used by the U.S. Coastal Survey in the late 1800s.

For views NW to Connecticut River valley and distant mountains in Vermont, and N to other peaks in Benton Range, follow less-used W section of Blueberry Mountain Trail NW across ridgecrest, through scrub

and over ledges, descending easily with a few ledge steps and one dip into wet spot, with occasional glimpses of northern peaks of Benton Range. Just past sharp turn to R (NW), 0.3 mi. beyond summit side path, there is good view R to Sugarloaf, Black Mountain and The Hogsback. A short distance beyond, from top of large open area of gently sloping ledge, there is wide view NW into Vermont; elevation here is 2530 ft.

NORTHWEST APPROACH from Blueberry Mountain Rd.

Blueberry Mountain Trail (W section)

5.8 mi. round trip, 1500-ft. elevation gain

Add 0.2 mi. round trip, 100 ft. for Mt. Moosilauke viewpoint

TRAILHEAD (1176 ft.): This end of the trail starts from a side road off the gravel Lime Kiln Rd. in Haverhill. From the S, take Lime Kiln Rd. N from NH 25 at East Haverhill for 1.4 mi. and stay straight on Page Rd. where Lime Kiln Rd. turns L. From the N, take Lime Kiln Rd. E, then S from NH 116 near Center Haverhill. At 3.5 mi. from NH 116, turn L onto Page Rd. Follow Page Rd. for 0.8 mi. to a junction L with Blueberry Mountain Rd. and the sign for the trail. There is a gate 0.1 mi. up Blueberry Mountain Rd.; there are several places to park between the junction and the gate. Do not block the gate.

This longer and little-used approach to Blueberry features a mellow walk up logging roads followed by a moderate climb up the side of the ridge. Starting in 2013, logging had been ongoing along the lower part of the trail, which may affect the first part of the description below; follow markings carefully along logging roads and through logged areas. Walk past gate

and up grassy, weedy road at easy grade, avoiding two forks to L in first 100 yds. At 0.5 mi., shortly after entering WMNF, turn R onto another road – look for yellow blazes. Follow this road up at easy to moderate grade, soon curving to L and then back to R, passing jct. L with older, overgrown road. Trail continues up road, crossing several small brooks and a few wet, muddy sections. At 1.3 mi./1650 ft. the wider road ends and trail narrows, following older road up into area with many white birches. Grade is easy to crossing of fairly substantial brook at 1775 ft., then trail abruptly steepens for steady climb up through hardwoods. Enter wilder woods of conifer and birch at 1925 ft., and continue up into mossy spruces at 2200 ft. At 2300 ft. trail rises into ledgy, shrubby terrain with many red pines. Follow markings carefully as trail winds up ledgy swaths and narrow shrubby corridors. Grade steepens at 2400 ft. and soon first partial views appear looking back to W. Continue up through semi-open terrain to expansive, gently sloping ledgy opening at 2.5 mi./2530 ft. Here there is good view NW over Connecticut River valley to distant mountains in Vermont, and also N to Hogsback, Black Mtn. and Sugarloaf Mtn. nearby. Trail continues up short distance farther, then turns sharp L, then soon bends L again. Dip into wet hollow and climb out; at double blaze main trail bears R while side path leads 100 ft. L over ledges to view of Sugarloaf, Black and Jeffers Mtns. Main trail climbs easily through scrub and across ledges, with another peek at Sugarloaf and Black, then enters spruce woods and reaches high point on crest of ridge at small ledgy opening at 2.8 mi./2630 ft. Here side path leads L, leading 90 yds. to summit, with partial views over trees.

For excellent view of Mt. Moosilauke, continue 0.1 farther SE along trail,

descending easily to open area of flat ledges (elevation 2540 ft.); best viewpoint is a few yds. L of trail, reached by side path. For view of mountains to S, continue down another 0.1 mi. over ledges and through scrub to short side path R to ledge shelf overlook, elevation 2475 ft. (mileages for these options not included in summary total.)

WINTER

The SE approach to Blueberry is an excellent snowshoe jaunt with moderate grades and gently slanting snowy ledges in the upper section. In thin cover there may be ice on the ledges. Long Pond Rd. is not plowed, adding 0.7 mi. of walking each way and an extra 200 ft. of elevation gain. The road may be groomed as a snowmobile trail. Park at a pulloff on the W side of High St., 100 yds. N of Long Pond Rd. If parking is too tight there, park in the plowed lot for the Glenclyff Trail, 0.3 mi. farther N up High St. This adds another 0.6 mi. round trip and 150 ft. of elevation gain (at the end of the hike) to the winter trip totals. The NW approach would also be fine for snowshoeing, though parking is likely problematical at the trailhead.

VIEW GUIDE

Blueberry's views are not panoramic, but there are interesting angles on mountains to the S, Mt. Moosilauke close by to the E, and the Connecticut River valley and Vermont to the W. On a sunny day with the breeze sighing through the pines, Blueberry's ledges are a very restful place to take in the views.

S View: The best view in this direction along the trail is from a ledge 20 ft. L

(W) of the trail, 1.5 mi. up from the SE trailhead. The view is best if standing and is partly restricted by red pines, but still good, if seated.

On the far L, looking SE through the trees, is the rearing peak of Mt. Kineo, with a ridge extending R over Whitcher Hill (seen behind and R of Blad Hill, a low southern spur of Mt. Moosilauke) and then up to the great bulky mass of Carr Mtn. Stinson Mtn. peers over between Whitcher Hill and Carr. Part of the village of Glenclyff can be seen in the foreground below Carr.

Projecting to the R from Carr is low, rounded Ames Mtn., with Page and Dickinson Hills over the saddle between them. Forbes Mtn. is on the horizon over Ames. In the distance to the R of Ames, the Oregon-Mowglis Mtn. ridge extends R to Firescrew and ledgy Mt. Cardigan. On clear days Ragged Mtn. (L, just to the R of Forbes) and Mt. Kearsarge (R) can be seen over this ridge to the L of Cardigan. Close in to the R of Cardigan is the low hardwood hump of Wyatt Hill. Far to the S, on clear days, the long crest of Sunapee Mtn. can be spotted on the horizon, with Melvin Hill in front of it on the L. Farther R and in the middle distance is Sentinel Mtn., with a powerline crossing it, and Thompson Hill beyond. Next to the R bulky Smarts Mtn. looms over the nearer, flat-topped Mt. Mist, with Black Hill seen under the ridge descending L off Smarts. Part of Wachipauka Pond sparkles at the base of Mist. Farther R the ledgy, wavy crest of Mt. Cube is seen over the level top of Webster Slide Mtn., whose great cliff is mostly hidden from view, but seen partly in profile. On the far R there is a partial view of Piermont Mtn. through a gap in the trees. Stonehouse Mtn. (a spur of Smarts) is seen between Cube and Piermont, with Vermont's Glebe Mtn. (on its L) and Stratton Mtn. (on its R) visible on the horizon on very clear

days. Terrible Mtn. is seen to the R of Stratton. Farther R the Killington Range can be seen through another gap in the trees.

E View: A gently sloping ledge just R (E) of the trail 1.6 mi. up from the SE trailhead opens a reverential view of Mt. Moosilauke, seen broadside with the cone of South Peak on the R, the bald, flat crown of the main summit on the L, and the deep ravine of Slide Brook, scored by a necklace of gravelly slides, between the peaks. The large wooded bulk of Mt. Clough is nearby on the L.

Summit View: Partial views can be seen over the trees to the E and S while standing atop the summit ledges, reached by a 90 yd. side path. Visible peaks include Moosilauke, Carr, Ragged, Cardigan, Cube and Piermont.

NW View: An open ledgy area on the trail 0.3 mi. NW of the summit side trail offers a good view W and NW over the Connecticut River valley to Vermont and N to other peaks of the Benton Range. By moving around, on the far L you can see Mt. Cube, Mt. Ascutney, Stonehouse Mtn., distant Stratton Mtn. and Piermont Mtn. Down in the valley parts of the various villages of Haverhill can be seen, as well as a portion of NH 25 and many fields and farms. On clear days many peaks in the main chain of the Green Mtns. can be seen on the horizon. To the SW, through gaps in the trees, are the sharp peaks of Killington and Pico, joined by a long ridge.

Extending to the R is the long chain of peaks between Sherburne Pass and Middlebury Gap, including Mt. Carmel, Bloodroot Mtn., Farr Peak, Cape Lookoff Mtn., Philadelphia Peak, Monastery Mtn. and Worth Mtn. Due W are Breadloaf, Wilson, Grant and other peaks in Vermont's Presidential

Range, seen over a nearer and lower ridge of the Northfield Mtns. A bit more to the N (R) is the long ridge bearing the rounded summits of Mts. Abraham and Ellen. The prominent range of bulky peaks to the NW, about 25 mi. away, is the Signal Mtn. group, consisting of Knox, Butterfield, Signal and Spruce Mtns. The tops of Mt. Ethan Allen and Camel's Hump can be seen on the L side of this range, and to its R Mt. Mansfield's long crest and the sharp peaks of the Sterling Range are visible beyond the several peaks of the Worcester Range. Closer in to the R of the Sterling Range are the sharp little knob of Owl's Head and other summits around Groton State Forest. The twin rounded summits of Marshfield and Burnt Mtns. are behind Owl's Head on the R, and farther R and more distant still are the Woodbury Mtns. Farther R and closer is symmetrical Blue Mtn., with a series of peaks near West Danville, VT behind on the R. The sharp peak of Belvedere Mtn. peers over the R end of the latter range with neighboring Tillotson Peak and Haystack Mtn. farther to the R. Next to the R, far off to the NW, the rounded hump of Big Jay and the sharp tip of Jay Peak can be spotted over a nearer gentle ridge; the Jays are visible only on very clear days. Close at hand to the NNW are three ledgy neighbors of the Benton Range; L to R are the rounded cone of Sugarloaf Mtn., the flat crest of Black Mtn. in the back, and the ragged cliffs of The Hogsback.