

## **ROGERS LEDGE**

ELEVATION: 2965 ft./904 m

LOCATION: Pilot Range, Township of Kilkenny and Town of Stark

USGS MAP: 7 ½' Stark

## **GEOGRAPHY**

Rogers Ledge is the highest of a cluster of small but dramatic peaks that rise in isolation at the N end of the Kilkenny region of the WMNF. The mountain gains its distinction from the great granite cliff on its S face, the top of which provides a stunning view over the Kilkenny highlands and beyond to the distant Presidential Range. The cliff is accessible from N or S via the Kilkenny Ridge Trail. At the foot of the ledge is an upland plateau that drains NW to Mill Brook and SE to Cold Brook. Nestled on this spruce-wooded shelf is tiny, boggy Kilback Pond. To the SW of the plateau is the 3510-ft. Unknown Pond Ridge.

On its SE side Rogers Ledge is joined by a high col to trailless, birch-clad Deer Ridge (2808 ft.), which extends 2 mi. to 2785-ft. Deer Mtn. at its S end. To the E of Rogers Ledge is the valley of Fifield Brook, and on the NE a broad saddle, dotted with beaver ponds, divides the mountain from Square Mtn. (2735 ft.), which is notable for the huge cliff on its S side. Extending E from Square Mtn. is another cliff-fronted peak known as Greens Ledge (2492 ft.).

On the NW side of Rogers Ledge is a 2804-ft. spur known as North Peak, with ledges and views but no trail. The northern slopes of this knob are drained towards South Pond by Cold Stream. From North Peak the

ridgecrest descends over a lesser bump to a saddle that separates it from 2517-ft. Mill Mtn.; on the E side of this divide is the Devil's Hopyard, a remarkable mossy ravine full of tumbled boulders, sort of a mini-Ice Gulch or Mahoosuc Notch. This is accessible via the Devil's Hopyard Trail, a short spur off the N end of the Kilkenny Ridge Trail.

Because of its removal from the major hiking areas of the Whites, Rogers Ledge sees relatively little hiker traffic. The fairly long but mostly easy approach leads through beautiful hardwood, birch and conifer forests, and the view is second only to The Horn among the peaks of the Kilkenny region.

## **NOMENCLATURE**

For many years Rogers Ledge and North Peak were known as the Peaked Hills, South Peak and North Peak, and were described as such by William H. Peek in *Appalachia* in 1888. The name Greens Ledge was then used for what is now Square Mtn. These designations appeared on AMC maps for several decades. Somewhere along the way the mountain picked up another, offensive name, and in the 1940s and 1950s "Nigger Nose" appeared on maps and signs and in trail descriptions.

One avid explorer of the Kilkenny region, the Rt. Rev. Robert McConnell Hatch (then Episcopal Bishop for the Diocese of Western Massachusetts) was disturbed enough by this inappropriate name to undertake an effort to change it. For a new name he chose Major Robert Rogers (1727-1795), a New Hampshire native and leader of the famed Rogers' Rangers, who won renown in the French and Indian War. The Rt. Rev. Hatch's initial inquiries

in the mid-1950s evoked a negative response from the authorities. A few years later he teamed up with Edward DeCourcy, editor of the Newport, NH *Argus-Champion*. Their cause received a tremendous boost when the Automobile Legal Association lent its support. Though the ALA wanted to name the peak after the late President John F. Kennedy, the Rt. Rev. Hatch's choice of Major Rogers was chosen as the new name for the peak. The announcement was made by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in November, 1964. The next summer the Rt. Rev. Hatch and his hiking friend Jack Farr trekked out to the summit and affixed a brass plaque into the rock at the top of the cliff, bearing the new name of the mountain. The plaque is still there today. (For a full recounting of this nomenclature tale, and a vivid description of the Kilkenny region, see the Rt. Rev. Hatch's article, "Rogers Ledge," in the Dec. 1965 *Appalachia*.)

## **HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS**

**1870-1871:** Working for Charles H. Hitchcock's NH Geological Survey, Joshua H. Huntington explores northern part of Kilkenny region, including ascent of Square Mtn. (then called Green's Ledge), which he measures at 2708 ft.

**1876:** Moses Sweetser's guidebook makes no mention of the Peaked Hills, but does describe Green's Ledge (today's Square Mtn.), which is "lined on the S. by remarkable cliffs, at whose foot are piles of boulders, one of which is 70 ft. long and 50 ft. high." Book also gives description of view.

**1888:** AMC explorers William H. Peek, Eugene B. Cook, W.S. Hunt, R. Cutter, Joseph A. Pike and "a baggage man" spend several days exploring

northern Kilkenny region. On first day they climb Mill Mtn. from S. Next day they visit Devil's Hopyard, South Pond and North Peak of Rogers Ledge. They descend SE and camp, and on third day explore cliffs of Square Mtn. (then called Green's Ledge). Of the view from Square, Peek wrote, "The abyss at our feet and between us and Deer Mountain was such as would satisfy most seekers of the terrible." Writeup of trip appears in *Appalachia*.

**1892-1903:** Upper Ammonoosuc Lumber Company logs area to E of Rogers Ledge and neighboring peaks, building railroad up West Branch of Upper Ammonoosuc River.

**1903:** Spring forest fire burns 25,000 acres in Kilkenny region, including area around Rogers Ledge. Present birch forest regenerated in wake of this blaze.

**Ca. 1905:** Mill Brook valley to W of Rogers Ledge is logged for softwoods using horse-and-sled method.

**1916:** 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *AMC Guide* offers brief description of bushwhack routes to Square Mtn. (then called Greens Ledge) and Devil's Hopyard. No information given on Rogers Ledge.

**1934:** *AMC Guide* opines about Devil's Hopyard, "This wild and picturesque gorge should be visited by more trampers."

**Mid-1940s:** WMNF opens trail traversing Rogers Ledge from NE to SW. Path begins off West Milan Trail, skirts Square Mtn. to N, and ascends Rogers from NE, with short spur to summit. It then descends to plateau S of cliff and continues over next ridge to Unknown Pond. About same time Mill Brook Trail is opened between York Pond and town of Stark, crossing plateau to S of Rogers Ledge. Another path leads from South Pond through Devil's Hopyard and around S side of Mill Mtn.

**Mid-1950s:** Maintenance suspended on trails to Rogers Ledge and Devil's Hopyard, but path to Hopyard is reopened by 1960.

**Late 1950s:** Rt. Rev. Robert McConnell Hatch makes numerous explorations in Kilkenny region, writes several pieces for *Appalachia*. After a decade's campaign, he succeeds in having name of mountain changed to Rogers Ledge.

**1969:** *AMC Guide* describes unmaintained trail leading from Mill Brook Trail to Rogers Ledge.

**1972:** Devil's Hopyard Trail now ends in gorge, W section of trail abandoned.

**Late 1970s:** WMNF extends road up Mill Brook valley. W half of Mill Brook Trail is abandoned. Youth Conservation Corps has begun work on trail from South Pond to Rogers Ledge.

**Mid-1980s:** Kilkenny Ridge Trail is completed from South Pond over Rogers Ledge and on to Unknown Pond and Mt. Cabot.

## **TRAIL APPROACHES**

SOUTHEAST APPROACH from York Pond Rd.

### **Mill Brook Trail, Kilkenny Ridge Trail**

8.4 mi. round trip, 1600-ft. elevation gain

(Add 0.8 mi. round trip if you park before fish hatchery gate.)

TRAILHEAD (1550 ft.): This approach starts at the Berlin Fish Hatchery off York Pond Rd. From NH 16 in Berlin, follow NH 110 for 7.1 mi. to the W and turn L on York Pond Rd., marked by sign for Berlin Fish Hatchery.

Drive down York Pond Rd. to gate at hatchery entrance at 4.8 mi. Except in

winter, this gate is usually closed from 4 pm to 8 am, but may be unlocked. For current status call the hatchery at 603-449-3412. If in doubt, park in pulloff on L side of road just before gate and walk down the road. If you're sure you'll be out before 4 pm, drive another 0.2 mi. on York Pond Rd., then turn R on side road (marked by sign for Mill Brook Trail) and drive 0.2 mi. up it and park in designated area near fish hatchery building. Mill Brook Trail passes to L of building.

This approach provides a long, quiet walk up the valley of Cold Brook with fine hardwood and birch forests, then follows Kilkenny Ridge Trail for short, steep climb to Rogers Ledge. Follow grassy road curving to L past hatchery building for 150 yds.; just before road ends, bear sharp R at trail sign, and in another 50 yds., as you draw even with small dam, make sharp L onto footpath leading into woods. In another 100 yds. bear L where older road diverges R. Road soon narrows to trail as you climb easily up valley of attractive Cold Brook, in mixed woods at first, then hardwoods. Yellow blazes fade out after first 0.5 mi. At 1.3 mi. you climb to R away from stream, then drop down to follow brook closely again through interesting area with wet meadow-like areas that may be overgrown. At 2.2 mi./2250 ft. trail swings up to R again and ascends slope high above small side stream. You continue ascending along side of valley, with one leveling and dip, as birches begin to dominate forest. At 2.9 mi./2500 ft. trail eases off on high, remote plateau wooded with white birch, many of them now dead or dying. You traverse this tableland for 0.4 mi., then descend gently through open fir and birch woods to meet Kilkenny Ridge Trail at 3.6 mi./2400 ft.

Turn R here on yellow-blazed Kilkenny Ridge Trail and climb moderately

through more birches, passing side trail R to Rogers Ledge backcountry campsite at 3.7 mi. After short zig-zags trail swings R for short, steep climb, then L to traverse along base of ledge. After 100 yds. bear L again for stiff 0.1 mi. climb up N slope of Rogers Ledge. At top of climb Kilkenny Ridge Trail turns R, with partly wooded summit of Rogers Ledge up to L; at high point there is small ledge with view S. However, best views are found along two other short side paths to L of trail. First path leads to somewhat protected ledges at brink of cliff. A few yds. to W second path leads to flat perch just behind large, flat shelf at top of cliff that provides main viewing area at Rogers Ledge. You must drop down five-ft. ledge step to access this wide, sunny, spectacular perch, which offers great snoozing potential along with sweeping 180-degree view to S.

#### **NORTH APPROACH from South Ponds Recreation Area**

##### **Kilkenny Ridge Trail**

8.2 mi. round trip, 1850-ft. elevation gain

TRAILHEAD (1120 ft.): N end of Kilkenny Ridge Trail starts at South Pond Recreation Area near village of Stark. Road to South Pond leaves S side of NH 110, 14.4 mi. W of NH 110 in Berlin and 10 mi. E of US 3 in Groveton. Drive 1.8 mi. down this road to its end at South Pond parking lot, bearing R at 0.7 mi. You may have to pay entrance fee at South Pond, which has fine swimming beach; in 2010, the fee was not being charged to day hikers. In off-season, road is gated 1.1 mi. from NH 110, adding 0.7 mi. each way to hike distance.

This approach uses the N end of Kilkenny Ridge Trail for a gradual to

moderate climb to Rogers Ledge. It offers some nice walking along the shore of South Pond at the start, and the option for a side trip into the wild gorge known as Devil's Hopyard. (This adds 1.2 mi./150 ft. to trip totals.)

From S end of parking area, follow easy stretch of yellow-blazed Kilkenny Ridge Trail along W shore of South Pond for 0.4 mi.; first 0.2 mi. is graded for wheelchair access. There are several attractive viewpoints across water. At 0.7 mi., shortly after crossing Devil's Hopyard Stream, Devils' Hopyard Trail diverges R, leading up side valley to remarkable gorge with large mossy boulders and underground stream. (This rough, slippery trail soon recrosses brook and ends in 0.7 mi. under cliffs in impressive natural amphitheatre.) Kilkenny Ridge Trail continues S, approaches and then crosses Cold Stream, runs briefly alongside it, crosses smaller brook, then makes long gradual ascent through hardwoods up E side of shallow valley, providing pleasant walking. Farther up trail passes through one sapling area (old clearcut), then more conifers mix in with the hardwoods, and trail crosses another brook. Trail makes R, then L turn at 2.5 mi./2100 ft. At 3.0 mi. trail swings to R, climbs easily past Stark/Kilkenny town line at 3.2 mi., then ascends fairly steeply with rocky footing for a short distance. At top of pitch it bears L and levels briefly, then climbs steadily through ferny birch forest, making several jogs to L. Reach point near summit of Rogers Ledge at 4.1 mi./2960 ft.; here Kilkenny Ridge Trail turns L to descend steeply down N slope, while several side paths lead R to best viewing ledges at top of cliff. High point is 20 yds. ahead at L turn.

WINTER

Rogers Ledge is a rewarding objective for experienced snowshoers, who will find plenty of solitude and adventure in the Kilkenny forests. The easiest winter approach is from the Berlin Fish Hatchery, where the gate is kept open all winter and parking is available near the building by the start of Mill Brook Trail. That trail is not well-blazed and may require diligence to follow if unbroken, and there are several sidehill sections that can be tedious in crusty conditions.

## **VIEW GUIDE**

The great shelf of rock atop the Rogers Ledge cliff is one of the great viewing perches in the White Mountains, with abundant sun exposure and plenty of room to spread out. Ranges visible include the Mahoosucs, Carters, Crescents, Presidentials and Pilots.

On the far L, looking E and SE, is a remarkable broadside view of the long chain of peaks forming the Mahoosuc Range. Old Speck, highest in the range, is on the far L. From here the range continues to the R over Mahoosuc Arm, Mahoosuc Mtn., Fulling Mill Mtn., the several sharp peaks of Goose Eye Mtn., Mt. Carlo, Mt. Success (with little spruce-capped Round Mtn. below in the foreground), and the broad mass of Baldcap Mtn., under which is part of the city of Berlin. The rounded northern swell of birch-clad Deer Ridge is close at hand just R of Baldcap, and in the distance, over the saddle to the R of Baldcap, is Caribou Mtn. near Evans Notch, with Gammon Mtn. on its L. Next to the R is Cascade Mtn. in the lower Mahoosucs, with Durgin Mtn. and Speckled Mtn. behind on the R in the distance. Jericho Mtn. near Berlin is seen under Butters, over the dip between the two nearby swells of

Deer Ridge. The broad crest of Mt. Hayes is under Speckled, seen over the southern of the two swells on nearby Deer Ridge. East Royce peers over just to the R of Speckled.

Next to the R are the three Moriahs – L to R, Shelburne Moriah, Middle Moriah and Mt. Moriah. Lowly Sugar Mtn. is seen under Middle Moriah, off the R slope of Deer Ridge. To the R of Mt. Moriah is the lower Imp Mtn., then North and Middle Carter are seen above the dark crest of Black Crescent Mtn., seen beyond the high plateau just S of Rogers Ledge and the broad basin of the Upper Ammonoosuc River. The Carter Range continues R over South Carter, Mt. Hight and the great Carter Dome, seen over the SW spur of Black Crescent. The U-shaped gap of Carter Notch is to the R of Carter Dome, with the peaks of Wildcat A and B rising on the other side.

Next to the R, looking S some 20 mi. away, the great peaks of the Northern Presidentials take center stage; L to R are Mt. Madison, Mt. Adams with the great maw of King Ravine gouged into its flank, Mt. Washington in back, Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Monroe, Mt. Franklin, the dome of Mt. Eisenhower, and Mt. Pierce. The view of the Presys is especially dramatic seen beyond the nearby plateau and the sweep of the Upper Ammonoosuc basin. Below the Presys and dwarfed by them are Mt. Crescent, Mt. Randolph and Pond Hill. To the R of the Presidentials, seen to the SW beyond the conifer-splashed plateau at your feet, is the broad swell known as Unknown Pond Ridge, clad in birch from base to crest. The very tips of North Weeks and its knobby E spur poke above the L end of this ridge. Down on the plateau, to the L of the high point of Unknown Pond Ridge, is the glimmer of tiny Kilback Pond. Peering over to the R of the Unknown Pond Ridge summit are (L to R) part

of Mt. Cabot, the sharp peak of The Horn, and The Bulge. On the far R, looking W across the Mill Brook valley, is a fine broadside view of the Pilot Ridge, a chain of wild, trailless summits with the pointed peak of Hutchins Mtn. to the R of center.