

MOUNT ISRAEL

by Steve Smith

ELEVATION: 2630 ft./802 m

LOCATION: Between Sandwich Range and Squam Range, Town of Sandwich

USGS MAP: 7 ½' Center Sandwich

GEOGRAPHY

Mt. Israel is a small but prominent peak that rises S of Sandwich Dome, SE of Sandwich Notch, and NE of the Squam Range and Squam Lake. With one foot in the White Mountains and the other in the Lakes Region, Israel offers good views of both as reward for a solid half-day hike with a big-mountain feel. Israel has two summits on its short ridgecrest. The 2630-ft. NE summit is the highest; the SW summit is only slightly lower at 2619 ft. Ledges at both summits provide a superb panorama of the Sandwich Range, and another ledge on the S side of the mountain opens a good vista over Squam Lake and Lake Winnepesaukee.

The S slope of Israel hosts a hardwood forest with many red oaks, including some very large specimens, unusual for the White Mountains. In the 1800s the lower slopes were largely covered with pastures. The ridgecrest is cloaked in a dense forest of spruce and fir.

From the SW summit of Israel a westerly ridge drops to a col and rises to Dinsmore Mtn. (2303 ft.). On the W side of Dinsmore is the southern of two low passes that make up Sandwich Notch; this 1470-ft. gap separates Dinsmore and Israel from the Squam Range to the SW. From here the Bearcamp River flows SE, dropping over Beede Falls, then heads E along the base of Dinsmore and Israel. The broad plain S of Israel is sometimes called the Mt. Israel Intervale. To the E of Israel is a low-lying area of swamps and beaver ponds.

To the NW of Israel is another flat, swampy area, drained by the upper section of the Beebe River. On this plateau are 10-acre Guinea Pond,

6-acre Kiah Pond, and several beaver ponds and meadows. On the N side of Israel is the low spur of Guinea Hill (1798 ft.). A powerline hugs the N base of Dinsmore and Israel and cuts across the flat saddle between Israel and Guinea Hill. The upper reaches of the Cold River wrap around the N side of Guinea Hill, and beyond this stream to the NE is the sharp wooded cone of Young Mtn. (1990 ft.).

NOMENCLATURE

Mt. Israel was named for Israel Gilman, who settled in the interval S of the mountain in the 1760s. Dinsmore Mtn. was named for a family who lived in Sandwich during the 1800s.

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Ca. 1768: Israel Gilman and family settle in valley at S base of Mt. Israel. By 1775 town of Sandwich has 245 residents.

1803: Crude road is built through Sandwich Notch, connecting town of Sandwich with Mad River valley to NW, and providing important trade route between northern part of state and seacoast.

1812: Eliphalet Smith and his father Jacob Smith build homestead at site of today's Mead Conservation Camp. House is destroyed by fire in 1830s; main section is rebuilt in 1860s by Lewis Q. Smith.

1876: Moses Sweetser's guidebook describes trailless route up Israel, traversing pastures for first two-thirds of ascent, then proceeding up "highly inclined ledges." Book notes that summit is extensive uplifted ledge bearing beacon of U.S. Coast Survey. Detailed description of view is provided.

1901: Guidebook published by Wonalancet Out Door Club notes that Mt. Israel is still trailless, the ascent being made over pastures and then ledges, as noted in Sweetser's guide.

1916-1918: Beebe River logging railroad is built, extending 22 mi. from Pemigewasset River at Campton up to base of Mt. Whiteface. Part of line runs through flat area on N side of Israel – its bed is used by today's Guinea Pond Trail. Major logging operations are completed by 1924, but parts of line are intermittently used until 1942.

1922: *AMC Guide* notes state fire station has been established on summit, accessed by steep trail from E. Mountain may also be ascended from pastures that extend far up S side. By 1925 alternate, less steep trail has been established from E.

1929: Ice storm wipes out firewarden's trail, and tower is no longer staffed. Short-lived new trail leads up S side.

1934: *AMC Guide* reports trail climbing mountain from NE, joining old firewarden's route in upper part. This path is abandoned by late 1940s.

1937: Wentworth Trail is opened up S side of mountain by Squam Lakes Association; is partially relocated after 1938 hurricane.

1943-44: George J. Mead purchases 2443 acres from Mt. Israel north to Black Mtn. on Sandwich Dome to prevent extensive lumbering operation.

1950: Mrs. George Mead donates 2443-acre tract to U.S. Forest Service, including Mt. Israel and area to N. As part of arrangement, buildings at base of Wentworth Trail are established as wilderness base camp for youths (known as Mead Base), leased to Daniel Webster Council of Boy Scouts of America under special use permit starting in 1953.

1952: WMNF has opened Mead Trail, connecting summit of Israel with Black Mtn. on Sandwich Dome. Path ascends Israel from abandoned logging RR bed on NW. Soon Guinea Pond Trail is established along RR grade.

Late 1950s: Powerline is built along NW base of mountain.

1993: New Bearcamp River Trail is completed through valley to S and E of mountain. Cook Farm near Mead Base has been protected through conservation easement.

1999: Boy Scouts end use of Mead Base; in ensuing years buildings are used by trail crews of Wonalancet Out Door Club and Squam Lakes Association and name is changed to Mead Conservation Center.

TRAIL APPROACHES

SOUTH APPROACH from Mead Conservation Center

Wentworth Trail

4.2 mi. round trip, 1800-ft. elevation gain

TRAILHEAD (930 ft.): The shorter of the two trail routes to Mt. Israel starts at a former Boy Scout camp (Mead Base), now called Mead Conservation Center and used as housing for WODC and SLA trail maintenance crews, located on a side road off the Sandwich Notch Rd. near its E end. From NH 113 in Center Sandwich (11.6 mi. N of US 3 in Holderness and ca. 6 mi. W of NH 25 near South Tamworth), turn NW onto Grove St. – look for signs for Sandwich Notch Rd. and Mead Conservation Center. In 0.4 mi. bear L on Diamond Ledge Rd. (do not bear R onto Mt. Israel Rd.), which leads past fields with fine views S and then changes to gravel. At 2.4 mi. from NH 113 turn R onto the road leading to Mead Conservation Center, where Sandwich Notch Rd. continues ahead. Drive 0.4 mi. up the side road to its end and park in the field on the R, below the camp buildings.

The Wentworth Trail provides a fairly stiff climb to the top of Israel. There is some rough footing in places along the upper mile. In addition to views from the summit, it passes vistas S to the Lakes Region from a ledge and N to the Sandwich Range from the slightly lower SW summit. From Mead Conservation Center, yellow-blazed trail passes to L of buildings, enters woods at trail sign, and climbs moderately through mixed hardwoods. It passes through stone wall at 0.3 mi., then swings R to traverse across slope past more stone walls. Cross small brook and turn L to climb beside it, then bear R, away from brook, and climb steadily, passing magnificent large maple on R. At 1.0 mi./1775 ft. swing L by huge oak and slab steeply up across slope clad in unusual forest of red oak. Ascend by zig-zags, steeply in places, amidst oaks and mixed woods, with ice storm damage evident. One final traverse to L (W) leads up into spruces. At 1.5 mi./2350 ft. pass under rock face up on R. Here trail turns R up short steep, rough pitch; down a few yds. to L is ledge with good stand-up view (partial if seated) S over Lakes Region, including Squam Lake, part of Winnepesaukee, their surrounding mountains, and distant peaks.

From outlook scramble up steep pitch, climb steadily a short way, then amble easily along ridgecrest through dense spruces. Reach ledgy top of SW summit at 1.8 mi./ 2619 ft. Here there is fine view N to Sandwich Range – preview of wider views from true summit. Trail makes sharp R

along ledges, then soon swings L and descends over ledges, and crosses more semi-open scrubby ledges (follow markings carefully). It swings R and L over another ledge with partial view of Lakes Region, then makes short easy climb through spruces to jct. L with Mead Trail at 2.1 mi./2610 ft. Continue ahead 75 yds. up to rocky, cairn-topped knob that is true summit of Israel. Good views N and W from here and from sloping ledges down in front. From front (N side) of summit knob, somewhat obscure unmarked path leads ca. 100 yds. to E, dropping over a couple of ledge steps, then running through patch of woods to expansive open ledges with views to N and E. A fine E-facing perch is accessible another 30 yds. to the E, dropping off ledge and up onto another ledge, opening views around to the S.

NORTHWEST APPROACH from Sandwich Notch Rd.

Guinea Pond Trail, Mead Trail

6.6 mi. round trip, 1300-ft. elevation gain

TRAILHEAD (1320 ft.): The Guinea Pond Trail starts from the Sandwich Notch Rd., 4.9 mi. S of NH 49 and just S of a crossroads and powerline. The trailhead is 5.8 mi. N of NH 113 in Center Sandwich. Allow plenty of time for the slow drive on this narrow, rough road. Trailhead parking area is 100 yds. up Beebe River Rd. (the road that runs W from the crossroads) on N side. There is no parking at start of trail.

This is a longer and easier approach to Mt. Israel, passing by some interesting wetlands, with the option of a short side trip to Guinea Pond. From trailhead, follow old road up past gate and through powerline clearing. Here trail picks up old grade of Beebe River logging RR and runs nearly level through hardwoods, then enters extensive area of swamps and meadows, with some wet footing and occasional vistas of Sandwich Dome from open areas. Pass second gate at 1.2 mi. and 0.1 mi. beyond follow bypass R through birch woods to avoid flooded area; at start of this bypass is picturesque view over beaver pond to ridge of Sandwich Dome. Return to RR grade at 1.6 mi./1450 ft. and in another 40 yd. reach jct. R with Mead Trail. (For side trip to Guinea Pond, continue ahead on Guinea Pond Trail,

quickly passing jct. L with Black Mountain Pond Trail. Ahead are three brook crossings; first two can be avoided via bypass on R side. At 0.2 mi. from Mead Trail jct., side trail leads 0.2 mi. over easy terrain, with one mucky section, to swampy shore of pond. The side path is at times subject to beaver flooding, which can render it nearly impassable. Bear L at fork and hop out on rocks and logs for pretty view of Sandwich Dome across pond. Out-and-back trip to pond from Mead Trail jct. is 0.8 mi. with minimal elevation gain.)

From jct. with Guinea Pond Trail, Mead Trail heads SE. It climbs over low knoll, passes through wet sag and crosses powerline. It then climbs at easy to moderate grade through hardwoods, soon crossing brook and ascending along its S side. Severe ice storm damage is evident in places. At 0.9 mi. from Guinea Pond Trail (el. 1900 ft.), cross back over stream and climb moderately through birches. Grade steepens at L turn in birch-cloaked ravine, then trail enters spruce forest at 2425 ft. and ascends steadily to jct. with Mead Trail, 1.7 mi. from Guinea Pond Trail. Turn L to reach rocky summit knob in 75 yds.

Long, interesting loop – including waterfalls and historic sites – can be made over Mt. Israel from either trailhead, using Wentworth Trail and Guinea Pond Trail/Mead Trail routes combined with 0.6 mi. of Bearcamp River Trail and 2.3 mi. section of Sandwich Notch Rd. Total for loop is 8.2 mi. with 1850-ft. elevation gain; add 0.8 mi. for out-and-back side trip to Guinea Pond. From trailhead for Wentworth Trail at Mead Conservation Center, yellow-blazed Bearcamp River Trail follows gated road to W, passing SLA-operated campground on R, then swings L off road, crosses small brook, and enters fine hemlock forest. Trail ascends easily through tumble of large glacial erratics and at 0.4 mi. passes Cow Cave on R. Tradition avers that a stray cow survived an entire winter under this overhanging ledge. A short distance farther, unmarked path diverges sharp L and leads 100 yds. to top of open area of ledges and cascades on Bearcamp River. Main trail continues ahead to pool at base of beautiful Beede Falls at 0.5 mi., turns L to cross stream, then rises easily to parking area for Sandwich Town Park on Sandwich Notch Rd. at 0.6 mi. Turn R on

this narrow dirt road (with several short paved sections), which ascends steeply for short distance, then at easier grade with occasional level stretches and descents. At 1.1 mi., just before trailhead for Crawford-Ridgepole Trail on L, old road on R leads to short distance to cellar hole from 1800s. In another 0.2 mi. on main road, huge Pulpit Rock – used as perch for sermons by 19th century preacher – looms on R; top can be accessed with cautious scramble up back side. Road continues climbing to 1470-ft. height-of-land between Bearcamp River and Beebe River watersheds, then descends to trailhead for Guinea Pond Trail on R, 2.9 mi. from Mead Conservation Center. Along this descent, path leads across field on L to mid-1800s cemetery – please treat this final resting place with respect. To continue loop, follow Guinea Pond Trail and Mead Trail to summit of Mt. Israel, then descend Wentworth Trail to starting point. WINTER: The Wentworth Trail is an excellent snowshoe trip for intermediates, with a few short steep pitches providing some challenge. The approach roads are plowed and well-sanded, though sometimes icy underneath; park either at the jct. of the Mead Base Rd. with the unplowed Sandwich Notch Rd., adding 0.4 mi. on foot each way, or at a parking spot on R side of Mead Base Rd. 0.2 mi. in from the main road. In recent years the road has been plowed and sanded almost to Mead Base due to new house construction, but be sure not to block the driveway or road.

VIEW GUIDE

South View Ledge: This ledge 1.5 mi. up the Wentworth Trail offers a partly restricted view over the Lakes Region to the S. It is mostly a standup view, and you must move around to get the full panorama through gaps in the trees. On the far L, looking SE, the Ossipee Range spreads beyond island-dotted Red Hill Pond. Mt. Shaw, highest in the range, rises in the back to the R of center. To the R of the Ossipees the Moose Mtns. and Copple Crown Mtn. are seen on the horizon. Farther to the R are Moultonborough Bay and part of the main reach of Lake Winnepesaukee, with the Blue Hills range (including Blue Job Mtn.) in the distance. Looking S, Winnepesaukee disappears behind the sprawling Red Hill. Over the L

end of the Red Hill ridge are Mt. Major, the Quarry Mtns. and Mt. Klem in the eastern half of the Belknap Range. The higher western peaks of the Belknaps – Belknap, Gunstock and Piper – are seen just to the L of Red Hill's tower-topped summit. Extending to the R of Red Hill is a beautiful panorama of Squam Lake. Dinsmore Pond is closer in front of the L end of Squam, with Bean Hill in Northfield on the horizon. Pack Monadnock Mtn. (L), and Crotched Mtn. (R) are on the horizon over the center of the lake. Towards the R side of Squam are (L to R) the wavy crest of Hersey Mtn., distant Mt. Kearsarge seen over a nearby spur of the Squam Range and East Rattlesnake, Ragged Mtn. over West Rattlesnake (with Lovewell Mtn. over its L end), and far-off Sunapee Mtn., seen over Bridgewater Mtn. just to the L of little Mt. Livermore in the Squam Range.

Summit View: The summit of Mt. Israel provides probably the finest available panorama of the Sandwich Range. This northward vista can be enjoyed from the rocky knob that is the actual summit, or from expansive sloping ledges just below to the N. (The most open panorama of the Sandwich Range is from the ledges 100 yd. to the E.) On the far L, looking SW, is bald Mt. Cardigan, with distant Mt. Ascutney on the R beyond the nearer Tenney Mtn. range (topped with a line of wind towers), which is seen over a spur of the Squam Range. Farther R is distant Salt Ash Mtn. in Vermont, and continuing to the R is the flat crest of North Moose Mtn. in Hanover, with Shrewsbury, Killington, and Pico Peaks far beyond on its L and Winslow Ledge to its R and a bit closer. Next to the R, to the W, the long ridges of (L to R) Mts. Stinson, Carr and Kineo sprawl above the nearer crests of Campton Mtn. and Mt. Weetamoo in the Campton Range. The N ridge of Smarts Mtn. peers over just to the R of Stinson's summit, and part of Piermont Mtn. is seen through the gap between Carr and Kineo. Farther R is Mt. Cushman, then Mt. Moosilauke is seen rising impressively to the NW, with lowly Cone Mtn. below and closer. Next to the R is Sandwich Dome, the most impressive peak in the view, its huge bulk rising at the L (W) end of the Sandwich Range, just 4 mi. away to the NNW. To the L of Sandwich Dome's double summit is Black Mtn., its ledgy shoulder. Farther L and lower is the cone of the smaller Black Mtn. (From the SW

summit of Israel, Guinea Pond can be seen below the higher Black Mtn.) Parts of Welch and Dickey Mtns. are seen through the col between the two Black Mtns. On the R side of the Dome is its broad SE ridge. The level crest of the northern Flat Mtn. extends to the R of Sandwich Dome; the tips of (L to R) North Hancock, South Hancock, and Mt. Kancamagus are just seen over the gap between Sandwich and Flat. The Sandwich Range then rises to the sharp peaks of North and South Tripyramid, the latter showing its prominent South Slides. (Middle Tripyramid is hidden behind South Peak.) The remote gap of Lost Pass is seen below Tripyramid. Continuing to the R are the two rounded Sleepers (with a high, remote basin below them) and the flattish West Spur of Whiteface. The southern Flat Mtn., a wooded cone, is in front of East Sleeper. Next to the R is Mt. Whiteface, with its ledgy S summit on the R and the wooded true summit in back on the L. Farther R Mt. Passaconaway peers over a southerly spur ridge of Whiteface. Extending R from Passaconaway are its spurs, Nanamocomuck, Wonalancet Hedgehog with Hibbard Mtn. below, and Mt. Wonalancet. Down below and close at hand in line with these spurs is conical Young Mtn. Farther R is humpy Mt. Paugus, displaying great gravelly scars on its flank. To the R of Paugus the E end of the Sandwich Range is anchored by rockbound Mt. Chocorua, seen beyond the fields of Whiteface Intervale, with the Three Sisters ridge to the L of the peaked summit and a long southerly ridge extending to the R. Part of Middle Moat Mtn. is seen through the gap between the spur ridges of Paugus and Chocorua. Sweetser wrote that as seen from Israel, Chocorua was "girded with cliffs and as sharply cut as the Matterhorn." To the R of Chocorua's S ridge is distant Streaked Mtn. in Maine. Farther R, broad-topped Pleasant Mtn. can be seen rising from the lowlands.

The ledges accessed via the path leading E from the summit expand the view around to the E and SE. The first, flat set of ledges has an excellent sweep of the Sandwich Range. The E-facing perch just 30 yds. farther allows you to see most of the Sandwich Range and around to part of the Lakes Region from one spot. Eastward the view opens out across a broad lowland area with Pleasant Mtn. to the ENE, and the Burnt Meadow Mtns.

seen beyond a slice of Silver Lake and the range of hills in the towns of Madison and Eaton. Farther R are more distant hills to the W of Sebago Lake. To the SE is an excellent view of the Ossipee Range, with Bearcamp and Red Hill Ponds in front. On the L end of the Ossipees, a part of Green Mtn. is visible through the gap between Mt. Whittier and Bald Mtn. Mt. Shaw pokes up in the back on the R side of the range. Continuing to the R, the view swings across the Moose Mtns. and Copple Crown Mtn., the distant Blue Job Mtn. range, a large part of Lake Winnepesaukee, the sprawling Belknap Range (with Mt. Major on its L end and Belknap, Gunstock and Piper Mtns. on its R end), and Red Hill on the far R.