

## **TABLE MOUNTAIN**

by Steve Smith

ELEVATION: 2675ft./815 m

LOCATION: West of Moat Range, Town of Bartlett

USGS MAP: 7 ½' Bartlett

### **GEOGRAPHY**

Tucked in on the N side of the Swift River valley between two higher ridges – the Moat Range to the E and Bear Mtn. to the W – Table Mtn. is often overlooked by hikers. But viewed from the Kancamagus Highway or other points to the S, this is an impressive little peak, with cliffs and a large scar from a 1984 fire marking its steep face. Those who make the moderate two-mile trek up Table from Bear Notch Rd. are rewarded with wide views of the Swift River valley and the Sandwich Range.

As its name implies, Table has a flat-topped summit when viewed from many angles. On the SW a 2020-ft. col separates it from a 2356-ft. eastern spur of trailless Bear Mtn. (3220 ft.); to the NE a broad 2180-ft. saddle divides Table from the high, wooded mass of Big Attitash Mtn., also known as West Moat (2910 ft.). To the S the cliffs of Table overlook the basin of Haskell Brook, which flows into the Swift River. A broad spur extends SE and S from the summit of Table, forming the E side of the Haskell Brook valley. On the upper shoulder of this spur is a large patch of low scrub that has grown up since the 1984 fire. On its lower SE and S faces, respectively, this ridge bears the Rainbow Slabs and Painted Walls, picturesque cliff bands that are prominent from the Kancamagus Highway just W of Lower Falls. These are popular rock-climbing venues, and the Painted Walls frequently host nesting peregrine falcons. On its E side this S ridge of Table is drained by Deer Brook, whose NW branch flows down from the Table-Big Attitash col.

Other ridges extends NW and N from the summit of Table; these are drained by branches of Louisville Brook on the W and Bartlett Brook on the

E.

## NOMENCLATURE

Table was named for the level-topped nature of its summit. The name was used by Arnold Guyot on his 1860 map of the White Mountains, but was incorrectly applied to neighboring Bear Mtn. By 1876, when Moses Sweetser's comprehensive guidebook made its appearance, the Table name had been established on the flat-topped summit where it has since resided.

## HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

**1876:** Moses Sweetser's guidebook gives brief description of Table Mtn., says it is most easily visited from Swift River road, but gives no details.

**1887-1894:** Bartlett & Albany logging railroad is in operation, extending from village of Bartlett up past NW base of Table, over Bear Notch, and down to settlement of Passaconaway.

**1896:** AMC Snow-Shoe Section hikers staying at Cave Mountain House in Bartlett make winter ascents of Table and Bear Mountains.

**1906-1916:** Swift River logging railroad brings extensive cutting in Swift River valley on S side of Table.

**1916:** 2nd edition of *AMC Guide* notes that Table and its neighbor, Bear Mtn., have been "lumbered to the top." They may be accessed from path through Bear Mountain Notch via lumber roads, but "the traveling is hard."

**1930:** New Bartlett-Passaconaway road is opened through Bear Notch. Section of road N of notch is constructed on bed of former Bartlett & Albany logging RR.

**Early 1930s:** USFS constructs network of trails in Bear Mtn./Table Mtn./Big Attitash area, and Table is accessible by trail for the first time. Deer Brook Trail leads from Lucy Brook Trail in valley of W fork of Deer Brook, up over Table, passing just S of summit, and down to col on W, where another path leads down to new Bear Notch Rd. Another path, Bear Brooks Trail, leads from Swift River to Deer Brook Trail in col W of Table. Another route, Little Attitash Trail, runs across ridge from Big Attitash to Table. Sections of this

network form basis of today's Attitash Trail.

**1936:** *AMC Guide* describes new Reservoir Trail leading from N end of Bear Notch Rd. up valley of Bartlett Brook to ridge between Big Attitash and Table.

**1948:** *AMC Guide* notes that trail crossing near summit of Table is now called Bear Mountain Trail, connecting Bear Notch Rd. with Bear Mtn. and Big Attitash. Cilley Brook Trail now leads from Rocky Gorge at Swift River to second col W of Table. Other trails from Bear Notch Rd. and Deer Brook valley have been abandoned.

**Late 1950s:** WMNF opens Attitash Trail from Bear Notch Rd, across Table and Big Attitash, using route of Bear Mtn. Trail along ridgecrest. Section of Bear Mtn. Trail from Table-Bear col over Bear Mtn. is abandoned, as is old Reservoir Trail.

**1970s and 1980s:** Numerous routes are established on Painted Walls, Rainbow Slabs and main S cliff of Table Mtn. by North Conway area rock climbers.

**1984:** Forest fire started by unattended campfire burns 105 acres on S side of mountain, beginning on October 16. Over 50 firefighters from Bartlett Fire Department, UNH Thompson School of Forest Technology, and USFS battle blaze for six days in steep, difficult terrain. This is largest forest fire in WMNF in many years. Fire scar, cloaked in new light green sapling growth, is prominent on SE shoulder of mountain.

## TRAIL APPROACHES

NORTHWEST APPROACH from Bear Notch Rd.

### **Attitash Trail**

3.8 mi. round trip, 1350-ft. elevation gain

TRAILHEAD (1260 ft.): The hike to Table begins at the W trailhead for Attitash Trail. Look for small gravel parking area, marked by sign and hiking symbol, on S side of Bear Notch Rd. at sharp curve, 2.7 mi. S of US 302 and 6.6 mi. N of NH 112 (Kancamagus Highway). Note that Bear Notch Rd. is not plowed in winter between gates one mi. in from S end and 0.6 mi. up from N end.

The moderately difficult climb to the S ledges of Table Mtn. is a pleasant and usually uncrowded half-day jaunt. Its attractions include fine forests, a cascade, several sun-drenched viewpoints, and an interesting look at an area regenerating from fire. From parking area, Attitash Trail quickly crosses branch of Louisville Brook and climbs moderately S up old logging road. At 0.3 mi. trail bears R onto older road and follows easy grade along edge of high, steep bank above Louisville Brook through nice hemlock forest. At 0.6 mi./1520 ft. look for sluice-like cascade down to R. Above waterfall trail comes close by brook at nice small, sliding ledge cascade, and crosses E branch of brook at 0.7 mi. Trail soon bears L off old road and mounts steep pitch with log steps, climbs along E side of small ridge through hemlock and spruce, and breaks out into fine hardwood forest at 0.8 mi.

You now climb at easy to moderate grade through broad hardwood ravine, with fine rock step and waterbar work evident. At 1.3 mi./2000 ft. reach flat col between Table and E spur of Bear Mtn. amidst ice-damaged beech and maple. Trail turns L here to begin steeper ascent up SW ridge of Table – first looping out to L (N) and back, then climbing steadily to edge of fire-scarred area and first outlook ledge at 1.5 mi./2200 ft. Here there are views S and W to Mt. Chocorua, Mt. Paugus, spurs of Passaconaway, and Bear Mtn. Burned area is marked by scrubby deciduous growth and dead bleached snags, standing and fallen. Steep gravelly pitch through eroded gully, with somewhat tricky ledge scramble, leads up to next outlook ledge; use caution in gravelly areas, especially slippery on descent. View here expands to Passaconaway and Sleepers to SW. Climb up ledge ramp to fine flat perch a few ft. R of trail at 1.7 mi./2400 ft.

Fairly steep ascent continues through scrubby pin cherry growth and up conifer-lined corridor. Gravelly pitch leads to large sloping ledge with wide view S. Scale more gravel-fringed ledges and reach broad, flat granite perch on R at 1.9 mi./2600 ft. This has widest view on mountain – 180 degrees to S from Moat Range on L to Bear Mtn. on R. Behind this ledge, gravelly side path leads 20 yd. N to sloping ledge with stand-up view to Owl Cliff, South Hancock, Mt. Tremont, Bartlett Haystack, Mt. Carrigain, and

distant West Bond and Mt. Bond seen through Carrigain Notch. For additional vista to Moat Range, continue NNE along trail as it traverses shelf at easy grade through dense growth below summit (high point is up to L – wooded and tangled with no trail). After ca. 0.1 mi. trail begins to descend, and at about 0.15 mi. look for path on R that climbs up two small ledge steps and leads 10 yd. to open ledge offering unusual views across valley of Deer Brook to entire W side of Moat Range, including two densely wooded summits of Big Attitash, and glimpse of Carter Dome and other distant peaks to NNE. Visiting this viewpoint adds 0.3 mi. and 50 ft. elevation gain to listed hike totals.

NORTHEAST APPROACH from West Side Rd. in North Conway

### **Moat Mountain Trail, Attitash Trail**

9.6 mi., 3200-ft. elevation gain one way for complete traverse to Bear Notch Rd. with car spot

With carspot, Table's ledges can be visited as part of seldom-travelled traverse of Attitash Trail over Big Attitash Mtn., starting at N trailhead for Moat Mountain Trail. East of Table Mtn., Attitash Trail is noted for obscurity, and was site of high profile three-day search for lost hiker in 2001. Parts of trail have since been cleared, but other sections may be overgrown. It receives little use, is steep and rough in places and is suitable only for experienced hikers. Some hikers will enjoy the primitive, wild nature of the traverse over Big Attitash. For more detailed description of this route, see chapter on Big Attitash Mtn.

Route follows Moat Mountain Trail at easy grade for 2.4 mi., passing Diana's Baths, then takes Attitash Trail on long climb up valley of Lucy Brook, with several stream crossings. After steep, rough climb, reach spruce-wooded, viewless summit of Big Attitash at 4.9 mi./2910 ft. Trail runs W over two other summits along beautiful wooded ridge, then swings SW, soon passes framed view W and NW through trees, and descends, with one very steep pitch, and past glimpse ahead to Table from gravelly opening, to broad, hardwood-cloaked Big Attitash/Table col at 7.1 mi./2150 ft. Cross small gravelly stream and climb fairly steeply, angling to up L on E side of Table with gravelly footing. Grade eases as fire scar area is entered.

Pass side path L to ledge with views to E, then make level 0.1 mi. traverse through dense growth to highest S-facing ledge viewpoint on Table at 7.7 mi./2600 ft. Continue 1.9 mi. on Attitash Trail for descent to Bear Notch Rd.

## WINTER

Because of the 2.1 mi. road walk each way on unplowed and heavily snowmobiled Bear Notch Rd., Table Mtn. is not often climbed in winter. The Attitash Trail to Table is, however, an excellent snowshoeing route, with easy to moderate grades up to the col. The steeper section up the ledges is more challenging, with the hardest spot being the gravelly gully just above the first outlook. Crampons should be carried in case there are icy patches. On a sunny, calm winter day the S-facing ledges invite you to linger. Parking is available in a large lot plowed for snowmobilers on L side of Bear Notch Rd. 0.6 mi. up from US 302; elevation here is 750 ft. Round trip in winter is 8.0 mi. with 1850-ft. elevation gain. Add 0.3 mi. and 50 ft. to extend trip to E view ledge.

## VIEW GUIDE

The widest view is from the nearly flat ledge on the S side of the trail near its highest point on the mountain. This spot has sun throughout the day and is roomy enough for several hikers. On the L, close by to the E, is a broadside view of the Moat Range, with North Moat on the far L (ENE) and ledgy Middle and South Moat to the ESE. The wild spur of SW Moat is directly under South Moat. To the R of South Moat the ridge extends out to the knobby spur of Haystack. Part of Douglas Mtn. in Maine's Saddleback Hills is seen over the ridge to the R of South Moat, and the Burnt Meadow Mtns. are seen over Haystack. Many other low ridges and hills in eastern New Hampshire and southern Maine are seen in the distance beyond the mouth of the Swift River valley. Close at hand to the SE is the brushy fire scar on Table's shoulder. To the SSE a stretch of the Swift River is seen in front of the darkly wooded backside of White Ledge; also visible is the red roof of the Albany Covered Bridge. Green Mtn. in Effingham is prominent in the distance to the L of White Ledge. Through the col to the R of White

Ledge are parts of Silver and Ossipee Lakes.

To the S, beyond the broad basin of Haskell Brook at your feet and the Swift River valley beyond, is the sprawling mass of Chocorua. Its numerous northern spurs are on the L, including two twin, nameless humps and the higher Blue Mtn., and on the R are the Three Sisters ridge and the top of the main summit, a small sharp point from this angle. Copple Crown Mtn. is seen in the distance between the twin humps, with the Moose Mtns. to its L, and the scrubby top of Carter Ledge peers over the col between Blue Mtn. and the Three Sisters ridge. To the SSW Mt. Paugus is seen above a sharply truncated, cliff-faced spur ridge on the W side of Haskell Brook. Falls Pond nestles in the valley to the L of this spur. On very clear days Mt. Monadnock can be spotted over the saddle between Chocorua and Paugus, with part of Red Hill on the R. Farther R, the spurs known as Wonalancet Hedgehog and Nanamocomuck lead up to the great dome of Mt. Passaconaway. The impressive cliff of Square Ledge is seen in profile below Nanamocomuck. Two-tiered Hedgehog Mtn. (the “Albany Hedgehog”), with a triangular white ledge on its side, crouches at the R base of Passaconaway. The Sandwich Range continues to the R across the two rounded Sleepers to the three sharp peaks of Tripyramid, with the tip of Potash Mtn. visible beneath. On the far R the view is closed in by the long, dark crest of Bear Mtn., with a prominent rounded knob on its S end.

A standing view to the NW is available from a ledge reached by a side path on the N side of the trail up behind the highest S-facing outlook. Peaks seen to the R of Bear Mtn. (L to R) include Owls Cliff, South Hancock and its bold S spur, North Hancock, Mt. Tremont, Mt. Carrigain with Bartlett Haystack beneath, and West Bond and Mt. Bond through Carrigain Notch. Through the trees you can see Mt. Guyot between Mts. Lowell and Anderson, South and North Twin (with Duck Pond Mtn. below North Twin), and Mt. Nancy.

The ledge just off the Attitash Trail ca. 0.15 mi. E of the main outlook features a wild and dramatic view to Big Attitash Mtn. and the Moats across the sprawling, multi-forked valley of Deer Brook – the inner recesses of the Moat-Big Attitash-Table range. The various darkly-wooded humps of Big

Attitash are nearby on the L, with the summit knob set back on the R. Farther R are North, Middle and South Moat, showing their wild side. The darkly wooded spur of SW Moat is below and in front of South Moat. In the distance to the L of Big Attitash are Carter Dome/Mt. Hight/Rainbow Ridge on the L (with low, ledgy Green Hill, a spur of Iron Mtn., below) and Jackson's Black Mtn. on the R. Shelburne Moriah Mtn. can be seen through the gap to the L of Black.