

Welch and Dickey Mountains

General description : *A popular family loop hike over two picturesque peaks.*

General location : *Northeast of Plymouth, about halfway between Interstate 93 and the town of Waterville Valley*

Length : *4.5 miles.*

Difficulty : *Moderate.*

Elevation gain : *1,600 feet.*



Special attractions: *Open ledges with attractive views of the Sandwich Range, the Mad River, and the mountains of Waterville Valley.*

Finding the trailhead :

From the Campton, Waterville Valley exit of Interstate 93 (exit 28) drive east on New Hampshire Route 49. Cross Route 175 and stay on Route 49 at the first junction with Upper Mad River Road (also Burbank Hill Road), which enters on the left 3.7 miles from the interstate highway. Turn left at the second junction with Upper Mad River Road after another 1.8 miles and cross the Mad River. Drive 0.7 mile and turn right onto Orris Road at a sign for the Welch-Dickey Trail. When Orris Road turns sharply left after 0.6 mile, continue straight on a dirt lane that ends at trailhead parking.

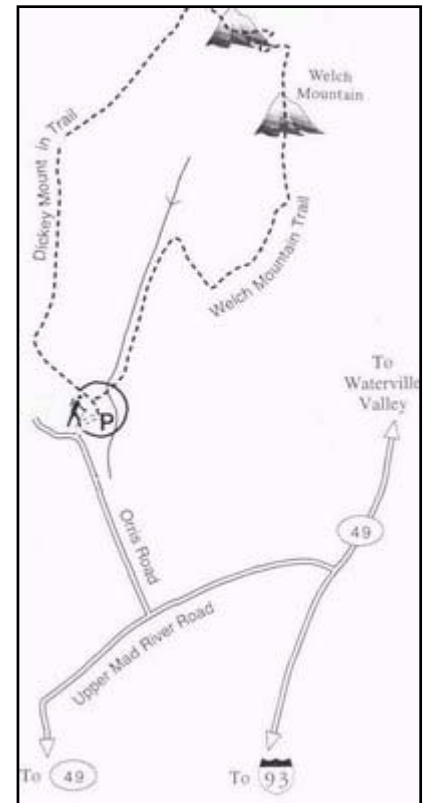
The hike :

Standing well under 3,000 feet, the summits of Welch and Dickey Mountains offer a moderate, half-day loop hike with all the satisfaction of a much more ambitious climb. Terrific views and the chance to scamper over bare ledges and faces of soaring granite make this hike a hit with kids. Just save it for a day when those sloping rocks are certain to stay dry. The trail diverges to form a loop at a hiker's registration box just ten yards from the parking lot. The path on the right leads 2.0 miles to the summit of Welch Mountain. The path on the left climbs an equal distance to



Dickey Mountain's higher top. A 0.5-mile connector trail links the twin peaks.

To start, turn right onto the Welch branch, following a path that quickly crosses a stream on a jumble of large stones. Hemlock and spruce mingle with hardwood forest, as the trail gently climbs through a watershed with the riffles and rills of a small brook visible on the left. After rising quickly for 100 yards, the yellow-blazed trail turns hard to the right between hulking glacial erratics about seven-tenths of a mile from the trailhead, wanders a few paces, and then zigs left again as it leaves the stream behind. Patches of low-bush



blueberries and the summer scent of pine surround the ascending trail as it curls over a slab of bedrock granite that only hints at the climb ahead.

Painted blazes soon bend the path to the right across a flat mountain shoulder where the rolled edge of an open cliff makes a natural resting point. Enjoy the view of the Mad River Valley, distant Mount Trip pyramid, and the nearby Sandwich Range, but don't be discouraged by Welch Mountain rising at your back. The climb to that looming summit isn't as difficult as it looks.

From the outlook ledge, the trail follows painted blazes into a grove of oak and beech and soon begins a sloping traverse with nearly continuous views. You'll forget how hard you're breathing on these steep faces of rock as a breeze springs up to cool you and vistas of Mount Moosilauke and the Pemigewasset Valley open to the west and south. Watch carefully for painted blazes as the trail twists and turns through rocky scrambles and squeezes between narrow cracks in giant granite boulders. Tracks worn into bedrock over eons by falling water rumple the path beneath your feet, as the trail begins the final push to the small, open summit. Finally perched on a split boulder at the top of Welch



Mountain, you're greeted by wide-angle views that include Waterville Valley, the prominent ledges of Dickey Mountain, and the bumpy contours of central New Hampshire that fall away to the south. The connector trail that links the peaks drops quickly from Welch's summit, weaves between rocks and boulders, and brushes through dense clusters of mountain azalea and Labrador tea. Passing a cairn with a stone post at the low point in the col, the trail wanders through evergreens and offers a new perspective on the summit you've just climbed. After scrambling to Dickey's peak, the trail passes directly over the highest



point on the mountain, but the best views and resting spots are found on a broad ledge 0.2 mile to the north (right). Without trampling the vegetation, try to follow a faint path that weaves across patches of rock to this large granite slab that adds impressive vistas of Franconia Ridge, Cannon Mountain, and the Kinsman peaks to your view of the Mad River Valley. Zigzagging between blueberries and stunted evergreens, the return route down the western slopes of Dickey Mountain soon leads to a series of granite slabs with expanding southern views. Follow the cairns and painted blazes to the rim of these long ledges and turn for a summary look at the pair of

peaks you just traversed. With a last glance over your shoulder, enter the nearby woods where a steep trail drops from the scenic heights and then descends steadily to join an old logging road that traces the valley floor. Turn left at the junction with the logging road for an easy 0.1-mile stroll that ends at the parking lot.