

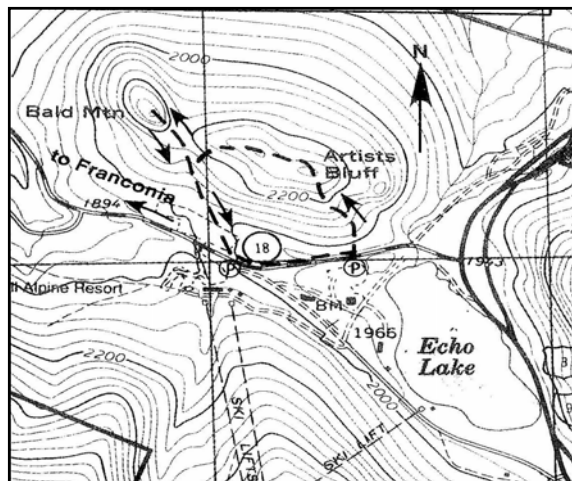
Artist Bluff and Bald Mountain

Distance (round trip): 1 1/2 miles

Walking time : 1 1/4 hours

Vertical rise : 400 feet

Franconia Notch, with its state park and famous Profile, two lakes, the Tramway, and ski trails, all bordering the I-93 Franconia Notch Parkway, has too many attractions for a quick visit. Don't try to see all the lakes, streams, precipices, and rock formations in a day. Along with Cannon Mountain, Eagle Cliff, and Mount Lafayette, they are overpowering. First, get a hiker's perspective. If time is short and the urge to escape speeding cars and wandering tourists is imperative, climb Artist Bluff and Bald Mountain at the north end of the Notch. You need only an hour or two. Stop and look at the Profile—New Hampshire's unique Old Man of the Mountains. Then drive north on the parkway past the Tramway and its cable cars. Keep Echo Lake on your left. At the end of the lake exit onto NH 18, which soon brings you to the parking area for Echo Lake Beach. Leave your car there.



The trail to Artist Bluff starts on the north side of NH 18. Walk back east from the parking area. The trail is on your left near a highway route sign and west of the outlet from Echo Lake. Climb the highway embankment by a path worn in the gravel. At a sign for the bluff the trail enters the woods and leads up among big rocks. There's a steep climb up a gully. Near the top, you turn right on a spur trail a few yards to Artist Bluff. This is a rock cliff from which artists might paint the Notch, but it's more often a vantage point for photographers.



The view is magnificent across Echo Lake to Eagle Cliff and Mount Lafayette, left, and to Cannon Mountain on the right. For a complete hike above the north and western gateways of the Notch, return to the trail and turn right. Climb the remainder of the gully and over the wooded height above. The trail leads up and down over the knolls. You pass another ledge lookoff before you descend to the sag below Bald Mountain's summit.

Watch for the tall old spruces along the trail. Most of them have been struck by lightning, and their trunks bear the vertical scars. The trail joins a former carriage road up from NH 18. Turn right for Bald Mountain. Climb the trail by a series of steps over rock from the first switchback. On the rocky open summit you stand clear of the small spruces. You look west over Franconia village, far away to the Connecticut River valley, and into Vermont. Cannon Mountains ski slopes are south. Turning around left, you look into the deep Notch, again across Echo Lake. Return to the junction with the Artist Bluff Trail. Turn right and follow the trail down the graded, ancient carriage road to NH 18. It ends at the parking area for skiers on the Roland Peabody Memorial Slope. Keep left across the parking area and walk beside NH 18 back to the Echo Lake Beach parking area.