

Cardigan State Park

Hiking Information

Mount Cardigan's 3,155-foot treeless granite summit affords outstanding views of west central New Hampshire, with a panorama that includes Mount Monadnock and the White Mountains, Camel's Hump in Vermont, and Pleasant Mountain in Maine.

The 1.5-mile West Ridge Trail rises 1,200 vertical feet from the state park on Cardigan's west slope, and provides the easiest access to the summit. Trails on the east side of the mountain are much longer and generally steeper. From the east side base at the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) lodge to the west side base at the state park is about 35 miles by road. As there are no shuttles that travel between the two areas, it is especially important to check your map before leaving the summit and select a trail that will lead to your car. Hiking trails are blazed in different colors based on their location on the mountain. Trails on the east side (AMC lodge) are blazed in yellow; trails along the north-south ridge are white; and trails on the west side (state park) are orange. Colors are independent of trail names. The South Ridge Trail, for example, changes from orange to white at Rimrock.

Mount Cardigan has been a popular mountain destination since the early 1800s, and especially since 1867 when a carriage road was built to the summit at a cost of \$200. In 1855, a devastating forest fire left the treeless, exposed granite mountaintop that persists today. A wooden fire lookout, built in 1904, was replaced by a steel tower in 1924. The State of New Hampshire acquired 700 acres in Orange in 1918 and formed the Mount Cardigan State Reservation. Today the reservation contains more than 5,000 acres in Orange and Alexandria. A big boost came to the park in 1933 when the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built trails and a new entrance road, and extended a telephone line to the fire tower. The reservation has been, and continues to be, the beneficiary of a remarkable civilian effort.

The Cardigan Highlanders is a volunteer group that does the trail maintenance necessary to keep the trails open and stable. The Highlanders clear trails of brush and downed trees, install and clear waterbars, build bridges, blaze trails, and maintain signs. New volunteers are welcome to help with the trail work, and join in the training and camaraderie that are resulting benefits. (Enfield, NH 03749-0104; telephone 603/632-5640)

The Friends of Mount Cardigan is a nonprofit organization with a mission to promote, protect, and maintain the state park base parking and picnic area for the enjoyment of all. Seasonal and longer-term projects are tackled by members to keep the area clean and inviting. Projects are supported by donations and fund-raising efforts. Your support is welcome. For more information contact: Friends of Mount Cardigan, RR #1, Box 199, Canaan, NH 03741; telephone 603.523.7760 or 523.4274, or find them on the web at www.friendsofmountcardigan.com.

Cardigan is a carry-in/carry-out park. Please take your trash, including biodegradables, out with you and dispose of them properly. There is no drinking water. Camping is not permitted on the mountain. For more information about Cardigan State Park, contact: N.H. Division of Parks and Recreation, PO Box 1856, Concord, NH 03302; telephone 603.271.3556.

Cardigan State Park
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