

The Many Views of Monadnock: A Driving Tour

There's a slower pace and evidence of bygone eras in southwestern New Hampshire.

Thank you for joining us on this driving tour of the Monadnock region in southwestern New Hampshire.

The area takes its name from the relatively small yet stately "mountain that stands alone," Monadnock. The name Monadnock probably comes from the Abenaki Indian word *menonadenak*, or "smooth mountain." Geologists later made *monadnock* a descriptor for any erosion-resistant peak standing alone on an eroded plain. (It's thus somewhat redundant to say "Mount Monadnock," since the word *monadnock*, in Abenaki or in English, already contains the idea of "mountain.")

If you dragged the 3,165-foot peak 100 miles north to the White Mountains, you'd barely notice it among the loftier Presidentials, but here its distinctive, broad-shouldered profile is a focal point. Monadnock anchors this corner of the state and quietly presides over all the fields, forests, lakes, country roads, and small towns.

One might think that the mountain looks the same from any direction, but that's not at all true. The land to the north is hilly (so much for the "eroded plain"), with elevations up to 2,000 feet and higher, and studded with lakes. In the mid-19th century you'd have seen cleared hilltops and pastures bordered by stone walls — grazing land for vast flocks of sheep. But today the forests have taken over, and often you know a town is there only by the tall white spire of a church steeple marking the village center.

From the south, you see the steep, looming profile of Monadnock that so awed and charmed Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne, and other 19th-century writers and philosophers. The light and shadow are different from the south, where the land falls away toward the Massachusetts border, and old stage roads such as Route 119 and Route 124 (Third New Hampshire Turnpike, built in the early 1800s as a link from Boston to the bridge across the Connecticut River at Bellows Falls, Vermont) snake through the woods, often opening to breathtaking views of the mountain.

"They who simply climb to the peak of Monadnock have seen but little of the mountain," Thoreau wrote in his journal. "I came not to look off from it, but to look at it. The view of the pinnacle itself from the plateau below surpasses any view which you get from the summit."

Throughout this tour, which circumnavigates Monadnock, we offer many stops affording views of the mountain, and you'll soon become familiar with its multiple forms.

In addition to Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne, and numerous other writers who have rhapsodized over its beauty, painters have coated enough canvas with the mountain's humpback likeness to build a tent big enough to cover it. At the turn of the century, the town of Dublin became the center of this activity, attracting artists Abbot Thayer, Frank Benson, and Rockwell Kent.

Even today the Monadnock region is a cultural gem. For its size, it has an inordinate number of nationally known writers, painters, photographers, illustrators, and craft workers.

Tour

This tour follows an 80-mile loop in a clockwise direction. You may easily adapt the route to your personal itinerary as a one-, two-, or three-day drive, depending on how often you want to stop along the route. (One day will provide you an overview of the area; three days offer ample time to shop, dine, and go for a hike.)

Keene

If coming "from away," as the locals say, you might like to make Keene (population 23,000) your headquarters. Keene has a lot to offer, such as the Colony Mill Marketplace (dozens of specialty shops in the renovated 1838 Faulkner and Colony woolen mill) and a Main Street lined with trees, several excellent restaurants, many boutiques, and the Hannah Grimes Marketplace, which sells only locally made products.

Lodging choices include the E. F. Lane Hotel on Main Street, the Holiday Inn Express, Best Western Sovereign Hotel, or Super 8. Or, perhaps you'd prefer to stay in one of the region's historic inns, such as the Hancock Inn or the Inn at Jaffrey Center, or one of many smaller inns and bed & breakfasts in the area.

Now let's find our starting point:

Dublin

Begin in Dublin (population 1,500), at the headquarters of *Yankee Magazine* and *The Old Farmer's Almanac* [1], on Route 101 where a flagpole stands in the middle of the road.

On one side is the red clapboard house-and-barn that serves as the offices of both publications. Across the parking lot is the Dublin fire department, and across the road are Dublin's town hall and library. Stop in at the Yankee Publishing offices and small store with hats and totes, as well as the latest issues and books by the editors and contributing writers. Both Yankee (first published in September 1935 by Robb and Beatrix Sagendorph) and *The Old Farmer's Almanac* --the oldest continuously published periodical in the country -- are icons of rural New England.

Set your odometer to zero as you turn right out of the Yankee parking lot. Less than a mile west is a stunning view of Monadnock across Dublin Lake, which you may enjoy from the town cemetery, so let's head there now.

Follow Route 101 west up the hill. At 0.1 mile, turn right onto Old Common Road. Here you'll find the entrance to Dublin School, a private college-prep academy [2]. A few faculty residences sit alongside the grand private homes. Paul and Nancy Lehmann opened Dublin School in 1935 with eight male students and four teachers. It's co-educational now (since 1971) and emphasizes community values through jobs on campus and volunteer work at local organizations. In the spring, look for galvanized buckets hanging on some of the trees. They're collecting maple sap, which will be boiled down to maple syrup, the liquid gold of this region.

In 0.3 of a mile you'll come to a fork in the road; stay to the right. Soon you'll come to the intersection with Old Pound Road. Find a place to park so that you can explore the cemetery [3] on foot. Walk to the far west side for picturesque views of Monadnock, framed by the water, the nearby ridges, and the trees. Take note of the waist-high stonewalls with gate near your parking spot. This enclosure dates to the 18th century and was once a holding pen for stray animals.

Back in your car, take Old Pound Road south (left) to Route 101, only 0.1 mile away. Turn left at the stop sign onto the highway. Backtrack toward the Yankee parking lot, but just before the Dublin fire station, turn north (left) onto New Harrisville Road (also called Dublin Road).

At 1.6 miles, you'll see a space on the right-hand side of the road to pull off. Enjoy broad views across the rolling hills of Hancock, a town we'll reach later in the tour. The height of land in the middle of the landscape is Crotched Mountain. Also look for the 82-foot-wide dish that is a radio telescope, used to monitor astronomical phenomena. This station is one of 10 in North America.

Harrisville

In 3 more miles you'll reach Harrisville (population 1,000). Nearly the entire village of this 19th-century mill town is part of a National Historic District, so the town is likely to remain its sweet self forever. Here tidy red-brick buildings and a large granite mill are strung along the millstream that once powered a woolens factory. On the hill sits a long boardinghouse. The buildings are fully restored, thanks to a savvy nonprofit group that leases them out to various businesses, including the internationally known Harrisville Designs, makers of looms and fine woolen yarns for handweavers and knitters.

Turn right across a small bridge to find parking for the Harrisville Designs retail shop [4]. Then continue north/northwest on Main Street. At the fork, stay to the left. This byway is now called Chesham Road.

Go west along Chesham Road toward the junction with Breed Road. Along the way you'll pass the Harrisville Inn B&B [5] and Brown House Bakery [6]. At the stop-signed intersection, you'll find the former Chesham Depot train station, slightly to the left and diagonally across from you. Across the street is the workshop and small showroom of Shaker-style furniture maker Stephen Barlow [7].

Set your odometer to zero again here. Head north toward Nelson on Breed Road, which will take you past Silver Lake. It's 1.4 miles to Silver Lake. Just up the hill from the lake is Pear Tree Studio [8], where Marcy Schepker remakes wool sweaters into plush toys and wearable art.

At 2.5 miles, pull over at Child's Bog [9], at the intersection of Breed and Nelson Roads, to glance back toward the south and a singular view of Monadnock. With no spurs or surrounding slopes at this angle, it rises up dramatically. Then turn left at the stop sign to continue to Nelson.

Nelson

You'll reach Nelson's town green (population 600) at 4.7 miles [10]. Look for the Congregational church, library, town hall, and town offices (in the old Brick Schoolhouse).

Like most of the small towns in the northern range of the Monadnock region, Nelson was settled in the decade before the American Revolution, reached its peak population (both human and sheep) before the Civil War, and has miraculously remained unspoiled -- its hills too steep and rocky to farm or build on, its dirt roads sometimes impassable. Summer people have been coming here since the 19th century, just to enjoy the beautiful surroundings.

If you come on a Monday night or the second Saturday of each month, you can enjoy a contra dance at the town hall. This traditional New England folkdance features two lines of people moving to the directions of a caller. The roots of the contradance revival, in the mid-20th century, may be traced right here to the Monadnock region.

Continue on the paved road northwest through Nelson toward Route 9. A brook meanders alongside, and the road crosses it in a few places. At 6.7 miles, turn right at the stop sign, then left in 0.2 of a mile to access the Route 9 East on-ramp. At the stop sign, turn right onto the highway.

You'll travel east on Route 9 a total of 6 miles. Along the way, with your odometer at 9.4 miles, you'll see a sign for Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway parking [11]. Just ahead, this white-blazed trail crosses the road, as it makes its way nearly 50 miles from endpoint to endpoint.

At 13 miles on the odometer, you'll reach the junction with Route 123. Turn right and take the road south. After the first few houses, the road is lined mostly with trees. You're traversing a 12,000-acre conservation area. This "supersanctuary" is managed by the Harris Center [12], which maintains a small nature center as well as access to trails for hiking and waters for paddling. If you want to stop at the center, turn right at 18.1 miles onto Hunt's Pond Road and follow the signs.

Hancock

On Route 123 go about 2 more miles to reach Hancock (population 1,600), a picture-perfect New England village, with its quarter-mile Main Street of late-18th and 19th-century homes, spired church, and the handsome Hancock Inn. Nearly every one of these buildings is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Hancock Inn [13] has been in continuous operation since 1789, visited by thousands, from cattle drovers and rum runners to aristocrats and presidents. In the meetinghouse, Paul Revere's bell #236 chimes the hour.

When you're ready to continue on, take Route 137 south from Hancock. As you pass the gazebo on the town green, set your odometer to zero again.

Route 137 twists and turns for about 7 miles to Carr's Store, on the far eastern side of Dublin. Along the way look for Davis Brook Farm [14] (opens in early May), purveyor of more than 500 daylily varieties, and Del Rossi's [15] restaurant, purveyor of pasta and live folk and bluegrass music.

At 7.4 miles -- the junction with Route 101 [16] — turn left to follow the highway east. Glimpses of the mountain from this stretch of road reveal a hulking ridge rising gradually from the surrounding lands.

Peterborough

Ahead, the town of Peterborough (population 5,700) sits in the valley of the Contoocook River, which flows north. As you descend the hill, Pack Monadnock and Temple Mountain fill the horizon. Peterborough is home to the MacDowell Colony, founded in 1907 to give writers, artists, and musicians a refuge from everyday worries so that they may concentrate solely on their work. It's here that Thornton Wilder wrote the play *Our Town*.

To reach Peterborough's historic downtown, look for the stoplight intersection [17] -- the junction with Route 202 -- at 12 miles. Turn left onto Grove Street. It's only 0.5 of a mile until you turn right into School Street and Depot Square [18]. A train ran through here years ago, and after serving as a town parking lot, Depot Square is once again the center of activity. New stores have set up shop and old ones have gotten facelifts.

Here you'll find an antiques store, two women's clothing boutiques, an art store and gallery (the Sharon Arts Center, with a large selection of quality handcrafts), offices, restaurants, a small movie theater, and a fine

independent bookstore. Browse the stacks at the Toadstool Bookshop (there's a branch in Keene's Colony Mill Marketplace, too), where titles number 45,000, with another 5,000 used and out-of-print books in an adjacent room.

After you've also strolled the shops on Grove and Main Streets, follow Depot Street north. Almost immediately, at the stop sign, turn right, cross the stone bridge in the right-hand lane, and then at a second stop sign, turn right again. (In another few yards, the road will fork, but stay to your right, by the river.) Glance back over your right shoulder; Depot Square is nestled below, next to the Contoocook River. The Toadstool mural was recently painted by a MacDowell Colony artist. You're now headed southbound 0.7 of a mile on Route 202 to the junction with Route 101. Turn left at the stop sign. Set your odometer to zero again.

The Black Swan [19], at 0.3 mile on the right, sells handcrafts and gift items and the North Gallery at Tewksbury's [20], at 0.9 mile up the hill at the corner of Routes 101 and 123, has jewelry, prints, toys, crafts, and antiques.

Farther east on Route 101 is Miller State Park [21]. Look for the left turn at 3.9 miles. The park is a favorite among locals because its central feature, a smaller mountain called Pack Monadnock, has a paved road you can drive to the top. In April and May, look for hawks soaring high above as they migrate north.

Retrace your route back to Peterborough's stoplight intersection [17] at the crossroads of Routes 101 and 202. Descending the hill toward it, many residents know this angle of Monadnock as the "coming home" view. Here, looking from the east, the mountain appears to have three peaks. (The real summit is the one on the left.)

At the stoplight intersection, turn left on Route 202 toward Jaffrey. Just south of the junction is the oldest existing basket manufacturer in the United States, the Peterboro Basket Company [22]. To visit, turn left in 0.2 of a mile and stay to the left; just ahead in a few yards you'll see the factory and outlet store on the right side of this little street. For trivia buffs, answer this: Artists at the MacDowell Colony are delivered lunch packed in a what? You're right!

Jaffrey

Back on Route 202, heading southwest, travel 4.4 miles. A left turn here onto Old Sharon Road takes you up a hill to Coll's Farm [23]. It's known regionally for its eggs, which are sold in the farm's gourmet and natural foods market. It's also a good place to purchase locally harvested maple syrup.

Travel about another 2 miles south on Route 202 to Jaffrey (population 5,500). As you come around a tight curve, you'll pass D.D. Bean & Sons on the right. Established in 1938, D.D. Bean's claim to fame is that it's now the largest manufacturer of paperbook matches in North America.

Turn right at the stoplight intersection onto Route 124 toward Jaffrey Center, and turn your odometer to zero. Here, Jaffrey's two-block Main Street [24] has a few antiques shops, including Seaver & McClellan and Alice Blue. If you've worked up an appetite, ask for a table at Aylmer's Grille.

Two miles west, Jaffrey Center (chartered in 1773) was the original site of the town, until the settlement at East Jaffrey boomed with its water-powered mills; the seat of government moved there and dropped the "East."

Jaffrey Center today is pristine and undeveloped, one lovely old house after another. It's more spread-out than any of the previous small villages and so has a grander feel. On the left, at 1.8 miles, is the Inn at Jaffrey Center [25]. The wraparound porch invites visitors to linger on warm days; inside, locals favor the cozy bar and Sunday brunch in the airy dining room.

At 2.0 miles, there's a yellow blinking light; turn right onto Laban Ainsworth Way. Set back 0.1 of a mile from the road is the large, steeped 1773 meetinghouse with its Old Burying Ground [26], in which Willa Cather, novelist of the American West, and Amos Fortune, an African slave who bought his freedom, are buried. Cather was so hooked on Jaffrey Center after her first visit in the summer of 1918 (she lived in a tent facing the mountain and worked on her novel *My Ántonia*) that she returned to stay at the old Shattuck Inn nearly every summer until her death in 1947.

Mt. Monadnock

Most visitors to this region make it a point to hike to the top of Monadnock, the second-most-climbed mountain in the world (after Mount Fuji in Japan). Monadnock State Park headquarters [27] is on Dublin Road, off Route 124. To get there, travel 0.3 of a mile west from the yellow blinking light, and turn right. From here, it will be 1.6 miles to the park entrance road (Poole Road). Along the way on Dublin Road, you'll pass the 18-hole Shattuck Golf Club, well-known for its stunning setting and challenging links.

Monadnock is the people's mountain, with a choice of six trailheads to start from and 36 maintained trails (totaling 40 miles) of varying difficulty to reach the 3,165-foot summit. Anyone in reasonably good shape and well-equipped can make the climb. Note, however, that the hike takes 4 to 5 hours round trip and should be taken seriously. Wear stiff sneakers or hiking boots and carry food, water, and a warm sweater for the summit.

The shortest way to go (and one of the most popular routes) is the White Dot Trail. It leaves from park headquarters and makes a direct line to the top in 2 steep miles. William Royce laid out the trail in 1900 and is said to have ridden his horse to the summit by this route. But no horses (or dogs) are allowed on the mountain these days — you'll have to go on foot.

Behind the wheel again, head back to Route 124. At the junction of Dublin Road and Route 124, reset your odometer to zero. Turn right (west) to continue the tour. (From here it will be 10.7 miles until you get to Route 101, completing the loop around Monadnock.)

Drive slowly west on Route 124, savoring each glimpse of the mountain, which often feels close enough to touch. From this angle, the south face rises right out of the field and forest, creating a sense of steepness to the long ridge with its dollop of bare rock. At 2.2 miles, for a 0.3-mile stretch, an open field provides glorious views.

At 4.6 miles, the road crosses Perkins Pond [28]. To the right are sweeping views of the mountain, which sports yet a different look -- solid and weighty. As you gain distance from the mountain's base, notice also how much more peaked the summit appears from this angle. The exposed rock at the top adds to its ruggedness.

Continue northwest on Route 124 as you wend your way along the last few miles. Stonewalls along the road are relics of the days when this now-wooded land was open pasture for sheep.

At the intersection with Route 101 in Marlborough [29], a right turn takes you east back to Dublin center, where we started the tour [1]. (Along this stretch of Route 101 look for Friendly Farm, home to many barnyard animals who like to be petted and fed; opens in late May.) Or, turn left to head west to Keene [30].

We hope you've enjoyed this tour of the Monadnock Region, and leave with many wonderful memories and the promise to return.