

Chauvin Guides International

Huntington Ravine

Located East/Northeast of the summit of Mount Washington, Huntington Ravine is one of the premier alpine/ice climbing areas of the Northeastern US. With climbs starting at an elevation of 4500' and finishing around 5400', not only are they some of the longest in the area, but they are also completely above tree line. Given the severity of the weather on Mount Washington, this can create challenges well above what the difficulty rating would suggest.

All of the climbs when in mid winter condition are mixed snow and ice climbs that follow more or less distinctive gullies. Most are rated between NEI II and III. On a good day these climbs can be a fun day out for the experienced climber, but in bad conditions (which can happen often and quickly) even the hardest and most knowledgeable of ice climbers will be severely challenged.

Just getting to the base of the climbs in mid winter requires a 400' snow climb on 30 to 35 degree snow slopes. This coupled with the mixed snow and ice nature of the climbs means that avalanche hazard is an important consideration when climbing in the ravine. Early in the season before the lower snow slopes form, the 400' vertical ascent from the floor to the base of the climbs can be a desperate snow and verglassed covered scree pile, with sections of post holing.

The approach to the floor of the ravine requires a 2.6 mile hike that climbs 2100' up a wide and generally packed trail. The reason it is wide and packed out is because the US Forest Service Snow Rangers drive a snowcat and snowmobiles up it to do their avalanche forecasts. The descent can be up to 3.5 miles long with a 3400' elevation loss. This combined with the lower snow slope and the climb makes for a long day on the mountain. Given that winter days are short, fitness and efficiency are important qualities a climbing party should possess before climbing in Huntington.

Trailhead and Approach

The trailhead is located at the AMC Pinkham Notch Camp on US Route 16, eighteen miles north of North Conway. Follow the Tuckerman Ravine Trail. After 1.1 miles you will reach the summer Huntington Ravine trail. The quickest way to Huntington in the winter though, is to continue up the Tuckerman Trail, crossing over a bridge over the Cutler to a fork one-tenth of a mile past this bridge. Here you will take the right fork. This trail is also driven on by the USFS, so again it is wide and packed out. In a short while you will arrive at the Harvard Cabin. Continue past the cabin, following the snowcat trail, until you reach the floor of the ravine.

Facilities

At the trailhead the AMC runs a lodge and visitor center. Along with lodging and family style meals, you can also get a wide array of info. Posted here are; avalanche forecasts made by the USFS, weather reports and morning conditions from the summit weather observatory, and trail conditions info. Up the trail two miles from Pinkham is the Harvard Cabin. This rough hut and its tent sites are the only camping and overnight accommodation allowed at the base of Huntington (see "Rules and Regulations" below). Avalanche conditions and weather are also posted here if an early start forced you to miss the report at Pinkham. For fee and other information contact the AMC at Pinkham Notch.

Rules and Regulations

The most important rule is there is no camping in the Cutler River Drainage except at the Harvard Cabin below Huntington Ravine, and the Hermit Lake Shelters below Tuckerman Ravine. This includes all the area along the trail, both ravines and an area above tree line roughly extending from Nelson Crag (the northern arm of Huntington) following the height of land over the summit of Mount Washington to Boot Spur (the southern arm of Tuckerman). Also there are no fires allowed at either Hermit Lake Shelters or the Harvard Cabin. For other rules contact either the AMC at Pinkham Notch or the Androscoggin Ranger Station in Gorham, NH.

Rescues

From December 1 to June 1 the US Forest Service is in charge of rescues in the Cutler River drainage. To report an accident, there are caretakers at both the Hermit Lake Shelters and the Harvard Cabin. There is also a USFS cabin at Hermit Lake. The Harvard Cabin also has a radio with directions for its use in an emergency. This radio will get you in contact with the AMC Pinkham Notch Visitors Center. There is always someone who will answer the phone at the AMC. The number there is 603 466 2721. There is a message that will play and eventually they will tell you to press 6 if you are calling between 11pm and 6am. There are a number of rescue caches located in strategic places in the area. The one that is most important for the ice climber is the one on the trail just before you reach the floor of the ravine. There you will find litters, blankets, avalanche probes, and other useful equipment.

Maps

The best map of the area is titled Mount Washington and the heart of The Presidential Range produced by Brad Washburn of the Boston Museum of Science and distributed by the AMC.

Estimated Hiking and Climbing Lengths and Times

(times vary depending on route chosen, conditions, and climbing style)

Pinkham to Ravine Floor	2.6 mi	2100 ft ↑	1hr 45min
Ravine Floor to Base of a Climb	.3 mi	400 ft ↑	1hr
Base of the Climb to Alpine Garden	.4 mi	900 ft ↑	1hr 30min to 4hr
Alpine Garden to Lion's Head	.9 mi	400 ft ↓	45min
Lion's Head to Snowcat Trail	.9 mi	1500 ft ↓	1hr
Snowcat Trail to Pinkham	1.8 mi	1500 ft ↓	45min
Total	6.9 mi	3400 ft ↑ ↓	6hr 45min to 9hr 15min