

# MOUNT MANSFIELD

## A PEAK EXPERIENCE

*by* HEATHER DUNN

**M**ount Mansfield is the pinnacle of Vermont. The highest peak in the state at 4,393 feet, it attracts over 40,000 visitors each year. Named after the now-disestablished town of Mansfield, Vermont, it rises up as a distinctive landmark with spectacular, sweeping views in all directions. When viewed from a distance, the mountain resembles a man's facial profile in repose, and so the ridgeline features are aptly named: the Forehead, Nose, Upper and Lower Lips, Chin and Adam's Apple. The summit is located at the Chin. The ridgeline is accessible to all, making it a top destination for local and out-of-state visitors alike.



# “When you’re up on top of Mount Mansfield ... you see the world with a little bit of a different perspective.”

**F**or people looking for exercise and challenge, the many trails on Mansfield make this mountain a hiker’s paradise. Smugglers’ offers guided treks up the eastern and western sides of the mountain on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during the summer. These treks are considered difficult and should not be taken on by first-timers. Marissa Saltzman, a hiking guide for Smugglers’ says of summiting Mansfield, “It’s a great opportunity, but you should work your way up to it.”

Hiking enthusiasts with some experience who are well prepared for a full day on the mountain are in for quite a treat when they sign up for the treks. On a clear day, the views include Lake Champlain, the Adirondacks of New York, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Southern Vermont, and Canada. “When you’re up on top of Mount Mansfield, and you’re looking down at everything below you, you see the world with a little bit of a different perspective,” says Saltzman. There’s also the camaraderie of the outing, she notes, adding, “You take 10 people on a hike who don’t really know each other, and by the time they’re hiking back down the mountain, they’ve bonded in a really special way.”

Betzi Goodman, a veteran guide on Smugglers’ hiking outings, recommends the preparation for a Mansfield hike start the night before. Eating a good meal, getting a good night’s sleep, and pre-hydrating the day of the hike can

make a big difference for hikers. Betzi observes, “Even on a seemingly cloudy, cool day, it’s still an extensive hike.” Hiking guides encourage 2 to 3 liters of water, sturdy hiking boots or shoes with good tread, warm layers (including one to break the wind), and a substantial lunch.

What makes Mount Mansfield even more special is that there are other ways to experience the summit. Traveling by car or gondola ride makes the experience possible for anyone, regardless of age or athleticism. The four-mile Auto Toll Road, built in 1870, is a winding unpaved road that switchbacks up the side of the mountain, starting on Route 108 on the eastern side of the mountain and finishing at the Nose. At the Toll Road’s end, the Green Mountain Club staffs a visitor center with caretakers who can provide information on trail conditions, mountain ecology, environmental impacts, and geology. After parking the car, visitors can follow the white blazes of the Long Trail, the oldest long distance hiking trail in the United States. This trail extends the length of Vermont from the Massachusetts border to the Canada border, spanning a total of 273 miles. On Mount Mansfield, the Long Trail follows the ridgeline and leads walkers from the Toll Road a short distance to a lookout with extensive views in all directions.

More adventurous guests can continue along the Long Trail one mile to the true summit and highest point in the state atop the Chin. This is a good outing for families with children who are not quite old enough for an extensive hike, but enjoy scrambling over rock surfaces and are prepared with sturdy footwear, water, and snacks. Families should be careful to stay on the main trail, however, as side trails can offer an unexpected adrenaline rush with ladders, cliffs, and rock scrambles.

Another way up the mountain in the summer and fall is on the Gondola Skyride at Stowe Mountain Resort. This fun ride is gentle and relaxing, and riders can enjoy the view. There is even an option to sit down for a meal at Cliff House Restaurant at the top. The ride ends just under the ridgeline on the eastern side of the mountain. A hiking trail called the Cliff Trail is located a few hundred feet from the top of the Gondola and offers the opportunity to hike up to the Long Trail for more extensive views. This trail is considered extremely difficult with rock scrambles and ledges and is not recommended for families with children.

SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, ROCK PILES KNOWN AS CAIRNS HAVE BEEN USED TO MARK PATHS IN NATURE, PARTICULARLY ON MOUNTAIN PEAKS ABOVE THE TREELINE.

Due to the elevation of the mountain, Mount Mansfield is one of three summits in Vermont to showcase a unique arctic alpine community. The vegetation and wildlife resembles that which lived in New England during the ice ages. This vegetation hangs in a delicate balance and can be dramatically impacted by human traffic. When entering the summit area, guests are asked to do the “rock hop” to avoid stepping on the fragile plant life. Dogs are also leashed in this area to reduce impact. This harsh environment can be tricky for humans too. All visitors should be ready for a quick change in weather. Richard Goff, a Smugglers’ hiking guide and ski instructor, advises, “People should have a coat of some sort, because it’s very likely that you’re going to have some wind and bad weather is possible.”

If you and your family have not had a chance to visit Mount Mansfield, make sure to include it in this year’s vacation.

“It’s all about going out and exploring,” says Betzi Goodman. Whether that is on a hiking trail, riding up the Gondola or driving the Toll Road, Mount Mansfield has something for everyone. Remember to be prepared with water, food, footwear, and your camera, and you’re bound to create memories that will last a lifetime.

*Heather Dunn resides in Waterville, Vermont with her husband Topher and two dogs. She is an avid hiking enthusiast, who has completed both the Long Trail in Vermont and the John Muir Trail in California end to end. She is a 6th grade math and science teacher and has enjoyed working at Smugglers’ in both winter and summer seasons for many years.*

## MANSFIELD OUTINGS

The Auto Toll Road has a fee of \$28 per car with up to 6 passengers (additional passengers are \$10 each). About a 10 minute drive from Smugglers’.

The Stowe Gondola operates for summer and fall visitors between June 22 and October 14, 2013. The cost is \$25 for ages 13 and older and \$17 for ages 6-12. A family pass (two adults, two children) may be purchased for \$76.

The Cliff House Restaurant offers lunch service during the summer season beginning on June 29, 2013.

For anyone looking to get out and move, but not ready for Mount Mansfield, there are extensive offerings of hikes, wikes, and walks on the Smugglers’ property and beyond. These activities can be found in the Resort Information Guide.

## VISIT THE GREEN MOUNTAIN CLUB

The Green Mountain Club (GMC) is a non-profit membership organization whose mission is to preserve and protect the Long Trail. The headquarters is located on Route 100 in Waterbury Center, halfway between Stowe and Waterbury and includes educational displays, hiker information, and a store with maps, hiking books and GMC gear and apparel. There is also a short hiking trail, which is ideal for families, located in the fields behind the headquarters. The trail showcases the original Journey’s End shelter from the end of the Long Trail. This shelter was slotted to be replaced, so to preserve its history, the GMC dismantled it and had it reconstructed in the woods behind the headquarters. This is certainly a fun stop on the way to or from Smugglers’ from points south.

