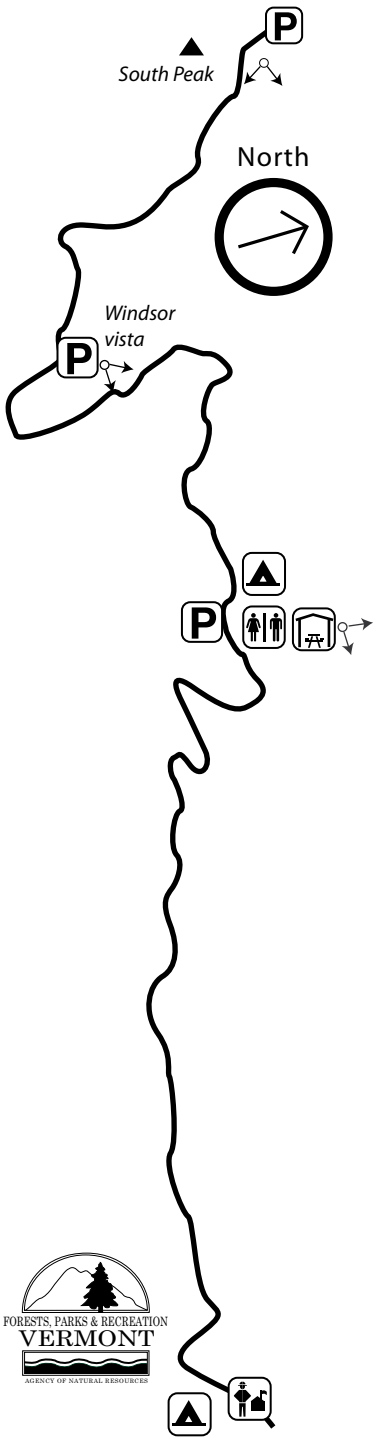
The Mount Ascutney Parkway



The Mount Ascutney Parkway is a 3.7-mile road built by hand and machine by the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1933 to 1937. The CCC established a camp on property acquired for conservation and recreation projects in 1933. During the six year time the camp was active, crews worked on surveying and constructing the parkway, building hiking trails, a campground, a ski jump, picnic sites and forestry projects. Road construction included drilling and blasting much of the route using steam drills, hand tools and some trucks and equipment. The road was paved in the 1960's concurrent with campground expansion. Today, over 15,000 people enjoy the parkway in the summer months to take in long-range views, hike the summit, camp at the base and participate in foot and bicycle races and auto time trials. Hours and scheduled road closures are posted on the park's webpage.

Mount Ascutney rises 2,500 ft. from the Connecticut River Valley to an elevation of 3,144ft. above sea level, forming a dominating topographical feature visible in both southeastern Vermont and southwestern New Hampshire. Grades average 10% on the parkway with some sections as steep at 19%.

Drive Safely

Drive all the way up and down in low gear.

Using the lowest gear keeps stress on your vehicle's transmission to a minimum and helps control your speed on the way down. Low gear can be denoted by an "L," "L1" or "1" or "M1."

Ascending in low gear places less load on your engine and allows it to run cooler.

For Your Safety

- The speed limit is **15 MPH.** Always observe the speed limit.
- Take all curves well on your side of the road as another car may be coming from the opposite direction.
- Cars descending the mountain yield right of way to cars travelling up.
- Turn headlights on for improved visibility to other vehicles.
- All vehicle occupants must wear safety belts.
- If you need assistance, you may reach park staff at (802) 674-2060. For emergencies, dial 9-1-1.

Overheating

Occasionally, engine overheating is experienced. This may mean that the radiator water level is low, but more often is caused by the engine working hard for the size or condition of its cooling system. Try turning off air conditioning and rolling down your windows. If engine overheating becomes apparent, first try running your engine at 1/4 throttle while your car is parked well out of the way of traffic. If coolant temperature has not returned to normal in a few minutes, additional coolant may be needed. You will have to wait for the engine to cool to safely add coolant per your vehicle manufacturer's specifications.

Descending the mountain in low gear will cause the engine to act as a brake and help slow your car. Do not turn off engine while descending. Do not descend in Neutral ("N"). Do not "ride" your brakes unnecessarily. Use measured even braking pressure with well-spaced pauses. This action of the foot pedal allows the brakes to run cooler than does a steady pressure. If your brakes overheat, they will gradually "fade" and you will notice that more pedal foot pressure than normal is needed. If you feel this condition developing, smell hot brakes or see smoke coming from your wheels, stop at the next turnout and allow your brakes to cool for 15-20 minutes. Do not use water to cool your brakes! This will cause severe damage.

Take It Easy and Have A Pleasant Trip

History

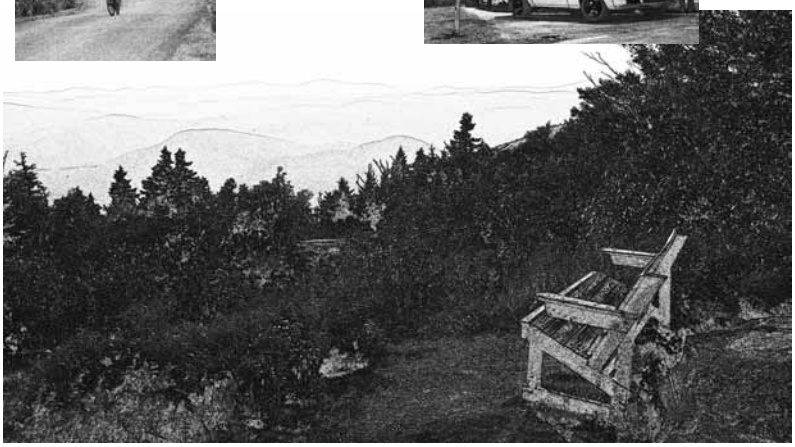
The origin of "Ascutney" is from the Abenaki "*Cas-Cad-Nac,*" meaning "mountain of the rocky summit;" an appropriate name for this prominent mountain peak rising abruptly from the Connecticut River valley. A permanent settlement, "Ascutegnik," of peoples of the Cowasuck band of Abenaki tribe existed on lands near the mouth of the Sugar River. In modern geographic terms, this is across the Connecticut River from Ascutney Village on Route 131. Native peoples likely hunted, fished and camped around the mountain particularly at lower elevations.

Over time, European settlers adopted the place name "Ascutney" to refer to both the white settlement on the western side of the Connecticut River, and the prominent mountain peak. The mountain has long been featured in the history of Ascutney Village, the towns of Weathersfield and Windsor, which it lies in, and in the state of Vermont. Mount Ascutney was home to the first purpose-built hiking trail in the United States. A group of local residents constructed a trail in 1825 to coincide with the visit of dignitary Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (known commonly as General Lafayette, a French aristocrat and military officer in the American Revolutionary War). While Lafayette didn't end up visiting the area, the trail became popular regionally. The next trail was built in 1858 and approximates the current-day Windsor Trail. This carriage-road style trail led to the high-elevation Tip Top House, which capitalized on summit tourism which was popular at the time. The modern trail system dates to the late 19th century and now consists of 4 base-to-summit trails on state land. The Ascutney Trails Association, the oldest trail organization in the United States, was formed in 1903. Park development occurred in the 1930's as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps and in the early 1960's with campground expansion,. The Futures Trail was built in 1983. Most recently, a new camping loop of cabins opened in 2018.

Across the river from Windsor, Vermont in the rural town of Cornish, New Hampshire, a collective of artists and sculptors settled with the peak of activity from the 1880's to the 1930's. Thus, the area became referred to as the Cornish Colony. Notable artists that lived in the area were Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Maxfield Parrish, Charles Platt, Thomas Dewing and writers Winston Churchill and J.D. Salinger. The estate of Augustus Saint-Gaudens is now Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park, part of the National Park System.

Geology

Mt. Ascutney is a "monadnock" meaning that it is not part of a continuous mountain range. Geologically, Mt. Ascutney is more closely related to the White Mountains and Ossipee Mountains of New Hampshire, than to the Green Mountains of Vermont. The mountain is part of the White Mountain plutonic-volcanic series of igneous rocks. The mountain began forming over 125 million years ago when magma erupted up during several periods over time into surrounding metamorphic rock. These intrusions are called plutons[1]. These plutons slowly cooled into the igneous rock we today call granite. Over time, the metamorphic rock was worn down around the tougher granite which remains as the mountain seen today which itself is but the small base of what was a much more massive mountain millions of years ago.[2] Most recently, glaciers scoured the area over 13,000 years ago and stripped away much of the softer surrounding metamorphic rock as well as chunks of Ascutney granite. Pieces of granite and syenite were carried as far away as Massachusetts.



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1 From "Geology of Vermont Lands," September 1998, by Marjorie Gale and Ginger Anderson.

2 Adapted from "The Roadside Geology of Vermont and New Hampshire," by Bradford Van Diver. Published by Mountain Press, 1987.