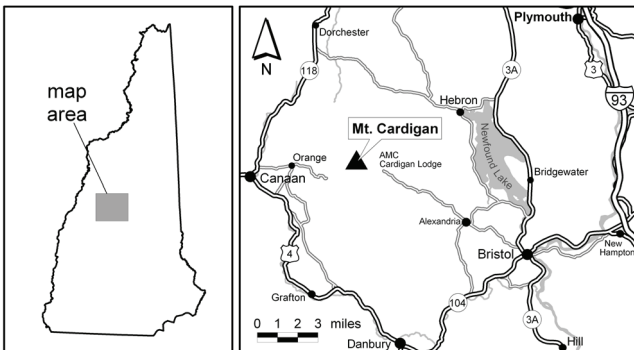


DIRECTIONS

From Bristol, take Rte. 3A north for 2.1 miles to the blinking light. Turn left on West Shore Rd and go 1.9 miles to where West Shore Rd turns right. Stay straight on Cardigan Mtn. Rd. Go 1 mile and turn left onto North Rd. Go 1 mile and turn right on Washburn Rd in Alexandria. Go 200 yds. and bear right on Mt. Cardigan Rd. Go 3.6 miles and stay left at the intersection with Brook Rd. Take Shem Valley Rd 1.5 miles up to Cardigan Lodge. The trailhead is at the far end of the parking lot.



TRAIL USE GUIDELINES

This property is open to the public. Please, for the protection of the area, and for everyone's enjoyment:

- Foot travel only; please stay on the marked trail (snowmobiling is permitted on some trails in winter)
- Do not collect or disturb plants or animals
- Please respect private property
- Carry out all trash and litter

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB & CMSF

Most of Mt. Cardigan is on Cardigan Mountain State Forest (CMSF), which is operated by the NH Division of Forests and Lands in the Department of Resources and Economic Development. However, the trails are jointly maintained by the Appalachian Mountain Club, which also owns the AMC Cardigan Reservation east of CMSF. Since 1876, AMC has been promoting the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers, and trails of the Appalachian region. For more information:

Appalachian Mountain Club
5 Joy Street
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 523-0655
www.outdoors.org

SUBALPINE VEGETATION

In New Hampshire, subalpine communities can be found on peaks and ridges from about 3000 to 4900 ft. in elevation. Like true alpine communities, which occur at higher elevations, subalpine areas generally range from sparsely-vegetated to dwarf-shrubland in structure, but they differ by the presence of *krummholz*. *Krummholz* is a German word meaning "crooked wood," referring to stunted trees roughly 4-6 ft. tall that are dwarfed and pruned by the harsh climate of high elevations. At lower elevations like this (between 3000 and 3500 ft.), the dominant tree comprising *krummholz* is typically red spruce.

Collectively, the communities of the subalpine zone can be grouped into the **subalpine heath - krummholz/rocky bald system**. At Mt. Cardigan, the dominant communities in this system are the **subalpine rocky bald**, which covers extensive areas of exposed bedrock with very sparse vascular plant cover, and the **sheep laurel - Labrador tea heath - krummholz**, where the vegetation is considerably denser. In both communities, characteristic species include mountain cranberry, black crowberry, Labrador tea, sheep laurel, lowbush blueberry, three-toothed cinquefoil, and various mosses and lichens.

Although visually similar, the **montane rocky ridge system** that covers most of the rest of the open upper slopes and ridge of Mt. Cardigan is not a truly subalpine system, because it lacks both *krummholz* and the diagnostic subalpine species listed above.

This brochure was created by the NH Natural Heritage Bureau as part of a series designed to educate the public about the state's special plants and natural communities. More site guides and profiles are available on the Visiting New Hampshire's Biodiversity program page at:

www.nhnaturalheritage.org



NEW HAMPSHIRE
NATURAL HERITAGE
BUREAU

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The DFL is an equal opportunity employer and educator.



NH NATURAL HERITAGE BUREAU

VISITING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY

MOUNT CARDIGAN SUBALPINE SUMMIT & ROCKY RIDGE



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Forests & Lands

This brochure was paid for with funds from
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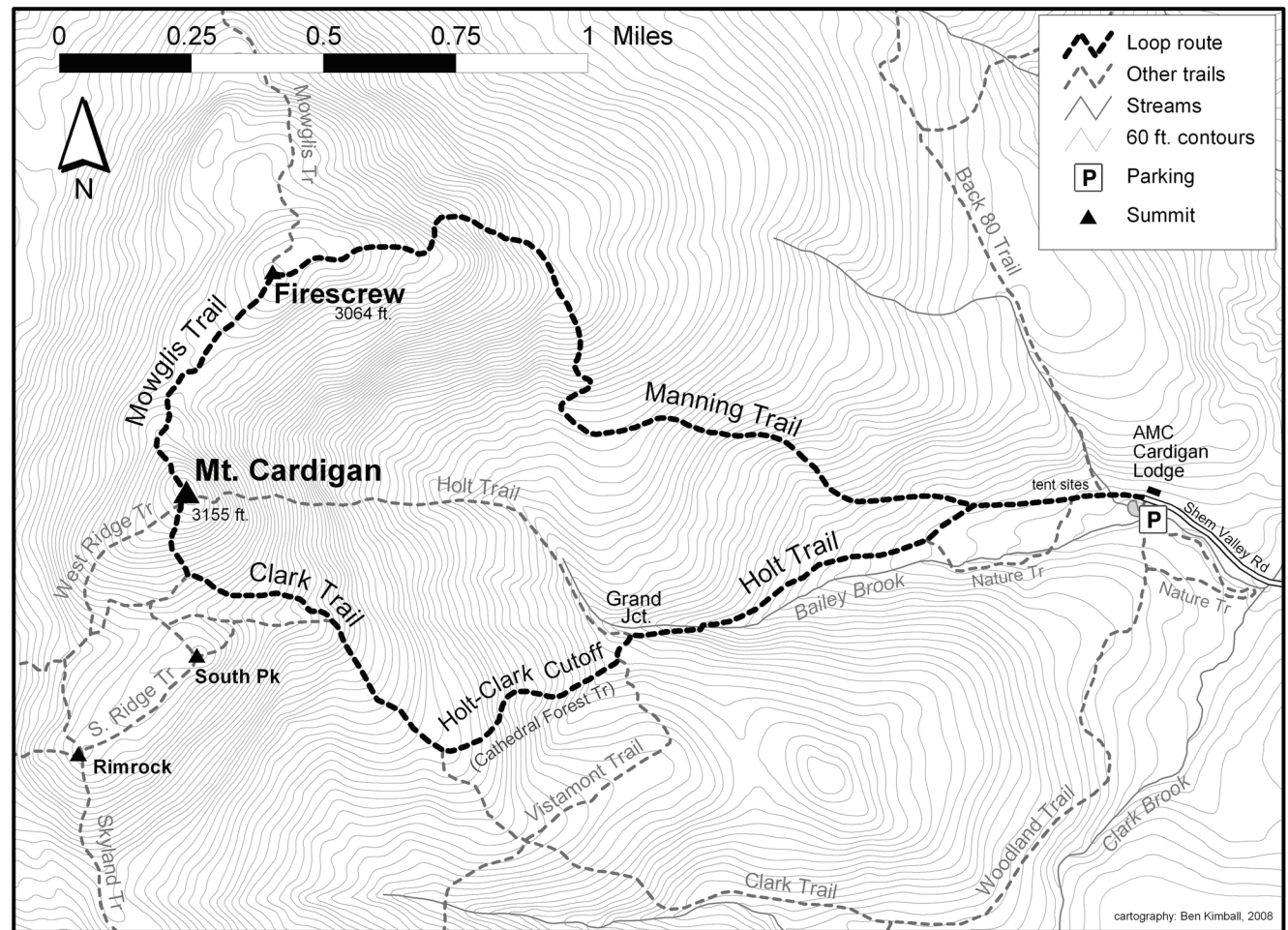
TRAIL DESCRIPTION: With its open summit and expansive views of west-central New Hampshire, Mt. Cardigan is an extremely popular destination for hikers. This scenic loop hike will bring the visitor through many of the mountain's noteworthy ecological features.

From the AMC's Cardigan Lodge, begin at the Manning Trail / Holt Trail trailhead. The route is initially a broad woodland road, passing several large campsites. After approximately 0.3 miles, stay to the left at the junction. Follow the Holt Trail as it parallels Bailey Brook, and at 0.5 miles cross the brook on a wooden bridge. In another 0.3 miles, at the location known as Grand Junction, turn left on the Cathedral Forest Trail (also known as the Holt-Clark Cutoff). For the most part, these trails will be passing through *sugar maple - beech - yellow birch forest*, which covers the lower slopes of Mt. Cardigan. This is the classic "northern hardwood" forest, which has a tree canopy dominated by a mix of sugar maple, American beech, and yellow birch. At the junction with the Clark Trail, turn right, and continue up toward the summit.

Emerging from the trees, the trail enters a *red spruce - heath - cinquefoil rocky ridge*, which occupies the southern and eastern slopes of Mt. Cardigan between 2500 and 2800 ft., and extends north along the ridge to the upper reaches of Firescrew. Consisting of extensive areas of exposed bedrock and patches of scrubby vegetation, these patches are generally characterized by short red spruce trees, shrubs in the heath family such as lowbush blueberry and sheep laurel, and an herb layer with three-toothed cinquefoil and common hairgrass.

At roughly 2800 ft. elevation, as the trail approaches the Mt. Cardigan summit, there is a transition in the vegetation to the **subalpine heath - krummholz/rocky bald system**. Here, the tree species are only present in the stunted and twisted krummholz form, and a suite of plants appear that are indicative of subalpine habitats. These include mountain cranberry, black crowberry, and Labrador tea. In addition, there are three rare species in the subalpine system: mountain firmoss, Bigelow's sedge, and head-like sedge (which in NH is only known from Mt. Cardigan and Mt. Washington). A variety of subalpine lichens also cling to the bare rock surfaces.

From the summit and its fire tower, you will have a panoramic view of the surrounding rural landscape, with the White Mountains rising to the north, Vermont's Green Mountains to the west, and Orange Mtn., Ragged Mtn., and Mt. Kearsarge to the south.



At this point begin following the Mowglis Trail down the north side of the summit cone, through the col and onto the long ridge that connects to Firescrew, Mt. Cardigan's northern shoulder. In 1855, a massive fire burned the mountaintop so severely that all the vegetation was destroyed. With no roots to secure it, most of the soil washed away with the rains. Most of the ridge is still in the slow process of returning to a forested condition. Along the ridge, there are several small wetlands (called *montane level fen/bogs*) with a distinctive set of plant species typical of lower elevation peatlands. A layer of *Sphagnum* mosses support herbs such as cotton-grass, three-seeded sedge, sundews, and white beak-rush.

Near the summit of Firescrew, about a half mile from the fire tower, turn right on the Manning Trail and descend, steeply in places, down through hardwood forest, eventually returning to the AMC Lodge after roughly 2.5 miles.

FRAGILE VEGETATION: The open summit of Mt. Cardigan is host to a diverse array of subalpine plants, including several species that are rare in New Hampshire. These low-growing plants are adapted to the highly stressful environment (thin soils, cold temperatures, and high winds that desiccate exposed leaves). Despite their ability to survive these inhospitable conditions, however, the plants that grow here are actually rather fragile, and vulnerable to being trampled by hikers. Some of the plants at the summit have already been lost. When hiking in this habitat, please keep to the areas of exposed bedrock, and avoid stepping on both the vegetation and the patches of bare soil that may provide areas for the plants to colonize in the future. With our diligent care and attention, these threatened plants can keep growing on Mt. Cardigan.