

Climbing Mount Waldo in Frankfort

Difficulty: moderate to difficult

Distance: noted for each of the 3 trails (South Trail, Old Quarry Trail, North Trail)

Vertical rise: noted for each of the 3 trails

Maps: Maine Atlas and Gazetteer, Map 23, D1

Directions: given for each individual trail

Mount Waldo is notable from around Penobscot Bay as a huge white coastal dome. On a clear day at the summit, you can see far out in the ocean, far west into central Maine, even Mt. Katahdin to the north on an exceptionally clear day. It is the highest part of the Mt. Waldo granite pluton (underground bedrock mass), which encompasses Mt. Ephraim in Searsport as well.

When the North American and Eurasian plates were grinding together 350 million years ago, crushing some minor plates between them, the molten Mount Waldo granite body resulted from heat and pressure deep in the crust. Where the continents crashed together, along the Sennebec Pond Fault, the Mt. Waldo granite welded them together. Later, when the continents broke and drifted apart, the granite held parts of the continents together, and they broke apart in new ways.

Directions: Drive US 1 north from Belfast. From the bridge across the Passagassawakeag River, it is 9.9 miles to US 1A. Turn left on US 1A, drive 5.2 miles, and turn left on Spout Hill Road. From here it is 0.7 mile to Murray Lane*, 1.9 miles to Mt. Waldo Road**, and 2.5 miles to Tyler Road***.

The South Trail up Mt. Waldo begins 1.3 miles down Murray Lane*, but you may want to park along the way and walk in. It is rough. One mile in, you cross a brook coming down from the mountain, and 0.3 mile after, the trail begins at a small parking space on the right. It is just over a mile to the summit, first climbing steeply through woods filled with boulders plucked by the glacier and left lying around when the glacier melted. Near the top, the trail breaks over a ridge and rises less steeply through open blueberry barrens. The exposed summit has a smooth northwest side, polished by the advancing glacier, and a rougher, choppy southeast side where the glacier plucked off rock on its way down. Total distance (road and trail) is 4.5 miles RT, 3 hours RT, 800 foot vertical rise.

The Old Quarry Trail can be found at the end of the Mt. Waldo Road**. About 30 yards beyond the last house, there is a small parking area on the left. From here, the trail follows the old railroad bed half a mile to the old quarry. Granite blocks were carried by rail down to a wharf on the South Branch of Marsh Stream at the present site of the boat launch, where remains of the storage buildings are still visible. Fort Knox in Prospect was built with stone from this quarry. Caution should be taken on the cliffs around the quarry pond. Do not jump or dive into the pond. Several deaths and injuries have occurred over the years from diving into unseen boulders.

You can hike from the quarry to the summit on a mountain biking trail if you can find it. Climb the north quarry face, the one with the most graffiti, and walk behind it and past it, gradually passing the quarry pond on your left. Watch for an old woods road, and follow it a few yards, looking for pink ribbons on your left. If you can locate the pink ribboned trail, it will lead you 1.24 miles to the summit. The trail follows the contours of the mountain, making a gradual ascent over bare ledges and through rich woods. Total distance is 3.5 miles RT, 3 hours RT. 950 foot vertical rise.

The North Trail is shorter, and some vehicles drive up it, which seems contrary to the spirit of mountain climbing. To find this quicker hike, keep driving on Spout Hill Road, past Mt. Waldo Road to Tyler Road***. Turn left on Tyler Road, and left again at a 90o corner, onto a dirt road. If the road gets too rough, you can park part way and walk. Two miles in on the left, the trail up the mountain is a wide white path of smooth granite, 0.83 mile to the top. Total distance: 2 miles RT, 1.5 hours RT. 550 foot vertical rise.

While at the summit, you will see north Penobscot Bay to the south, Islesboro, North Haven, and Vinalhaven its largest islands. Southwest the Mount Desert Range forms the horizon behind Blue Hill. Due east, Schoodic and Tunk Mountains bump out of forested landscape. Glimpses of the Penobscot River Valley and smaller lakes and ponds surround the mountain. Look down and notice the coarse-grained white granite under your feet.

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