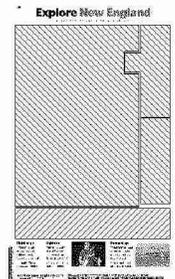


FRED FIELD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The author leads Jonathan Grobstein, 8 (front), and his brother Benjamin, 10 (rear), of Brookline, and the author's son, Jake Jermanok, 10, of Newton.



New Hampshire

SPECIAL SECTION

PINKHAM NOTCH

Mt. Washington turns a cold, wet eye on a boys' rite of passage

By **Stephen Jermanok**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



With each higher step, the three boys became more and more excited by the views and I grew more and more anxious about the black cloud hovering above us. We were on the steepest part of our ascent up mighty Mount Washington.

Climbing 1,000 feet in less than a mile, the narrow, rock-studded Lion's Head Trail is best suited for a mountain goat. Yet, our party of six was inching up the slope, awed by the vistas of Wildcat Mountain and the anonymous ridges that panned in every direction. Standing on the broad shoulders of New England's tallest peak, an uninterrupted carpet of green formed the valley below. We were on top of the world and oh so vulnerable.

As we made our way atop the headwall of Tuckerman Ravine, that ominous cloud unleashed a fury of hail, torrential rain, and

powerful gales. In less than a minute, we were completely soaked. As the hail pelted the face of my son, Jake, 10, he looked up at me with frightened eyes, knowing full well that a landscape without trees offers no protection. His friends, Benjamin and Jonathan Grobstein, ages 10 and 8, were desperately trying to put on their winter hats and gloves. But at the moment, mental comfort was far more important than any physical comfort we could hope to find.

"Don't panic," I said, talking to myself as much as I was trying to calm the boys' nerves. "We can do this. We're almost at the top. Just put one foot in front of the other. Slowly, so we don't slip."

Much has been made about the wrath of Mount Washington. The highest winds ever recorded, 231 miles per hour, occurred atop the peak on April 12, 1934. Every year, search-and-rescue squads have to save at least 100 people in the White Mountains who fail to understand the vast difference in weather between the parking lot and the summit. And those are the ones who are fortunate. Walk into the Pinkham Notch Visitors Center at the base of the mountain and an interpretive display tallies

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the number who have been killed in the Presidential Range: 139.

We thought we were ready that late June morning when we began

our climb carrying layers of clothing to protect us from the cold and rain, but nothing can quite prepare you for the sudden change of weather above treeline.

Volunteer Steve Ahearn had warned us at the visitors center that the weather up top "was not so good." He pointed to the temperature at summit, which read 37 degrees Fahrenheit with a windchill factor in the teens. He noted that there was still a danger of falling ice on the upper part of the Tuckerman Ravine Trail, so we'd have to switch over to Lion's Head.

We weren't deterred. I had been hounded for two years by my friend Greg Grobstein to climb the 6,288-foot behemoth. But I didn't want to subject the boys to the arduous climb until they had hiked Monadnock in southern New Hampshire and Mount Mansfield, Vermont's tallest peak. Now, they

were eager to bag the big one. Greg's dad, Mike, a runner who looks much younger than his 64 years, flew in to anchor the team.

Within minutes of setting out, we breathed in the aroma of fragrant pines and stopped to watch a raging waterfall churn white froth over the rocks. About a mile

up, we would cross that river again on a series of wooden bridges. Indeed, the first 2.4 miles of trail were a gradual ascent through a shaded forest of birches and firs. Except for Benjamin and Jonathan fighting over who would carry the heavier backpack, this

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FRED FIELD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The author and his son, Jake Jermanok (right), and Benjamin Grobstein look over their route up Mount Washington at the Appalachian Mountain Club center at the base of the mountain.

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