



Colors of Fall

By Bernadette LaManna

Leaf Peeping at Prospect Mountain

When my older brother and I were kids, it was considered an accomplishment to climb Prospect Mountain. We didn't refer to it as "hiking." For his efforts, my brother was rewarded with a commemorative coin. Several years later, I became the proud holder of a signed and dated, wallet-sized card to attest to the fact that I, too, had "scaled the mountain." We had achieved our respective feats during summertime, when we spent much of our school vacation at family camps in Lake

of choice, if for no other reason than because of all the publicity it received—deservedly or not—for having the most glorious colors of all. I've since visited the Adirondacks in all seasons, and, in autumn, the foliage is every bit as beautiful as in our neighbor state, particularly from the vantage point of Prospect Mountain.

Access to Prospect Mountain by motor vehicle is via the Veterans Memorial Highway, renamed from

space, visitors are asked to leave their vehicles at the third lookout on the mountain. From there, you can either take the continuously running "view-mobile" up to the bucolic summit, or hike on the trail—described as a 10-15 minute challenging walk. For serious hikers, there's a marked trail that begins on the western edge of Lake George Village and crosses the Northway (I-87) on a screened-in bridge, eventually ending near the summit.

On a clear day, the 100-mile view from Prospect Mountain's summit encompasses five states.

George. By now, the coin and the card are long gone, but the mountain and our memories remain.

Back then, our family cleared out of the north country by Labor Day, and I never even glimpsed the Lake George area in any other season until I was a young adult. When it came to viewing fall foliage, Vermont was the destination

Prospect Mountain State Parkway after a long and contentious debate. The roadway opens in late May and closes around Columbus Day in mid October, well beyond peak foliage time in the Adirondacks. For a small fee, motorists can make the nearly six-mile drive to access the summit, which stands 2,030 feet above sea level. Due to limited

On a clear day, the 100-mile view from Prospect Mountain's summit encompasses five states. It also includes Lake George Village with the backdrop of Black Mountain; New York's Adirondack High Peaks; Vermont's Green Mountains; New Hampshire's White Mountains, and, on a VERY clear day, the Laurentians of Canada.



Visitors to the summit can also view remnants of the world's largest cable railroad and the fireplace of the long-gone Prospect Mountain Hotel (successor to a previous facility that also burned to the ground). The hotel was built by Dr. James Ferguson of Glens Falls in the late 1800s. Accessible only by horse-drawn carriage, the location of the hotel was popular with wealthy nature lovers and people who had respiratory problems, such as tuberculosis. Although the hotel burned down only a few years after its construction, it was quickly rebuilt.

By 1895, a Mr. William Peck had become the new owner of the property. He and the Horicon Improvement Company arranged for the Otis Engineering Company (of elevator fame) to build a cog railway, known as the Prospect Mountain Incline Railway, on the mountain.

About 30 years later, it was rumored that the hotel would become a gambling casino. Disturbed by this prospect, George Foster Peabody, who had acquired the mountain in 1904, gave it to New York State for public use.

Fred Pabst, Jr.—founder of what is now known as the Bromley Ski Resort in Vermont and whose father established Pabst Blue Ribbon beer—built small, “J-bar” ski areas throughout the Northeast, including on Prospect Mountain in 1938. Some people familiar with the mountain are unaware that, at the time, it had the



© Scott Thomas Photography

Visitors can take the continuously running "viewmobile" from the third lookout to the summit.

only overhead cable lift in New York State, which may also have been the longest one in the country. Although the ski area closed

Wally Haley



Prospect Mountain is just one place to enjoy the spectacular fall foliage found in New York State. A number of mountains known for their winter attractions offer fantastic vantage points for viewing nature's spectacle. For information about possible gondola and

lift tours, leaf peepers should check out the websites for Swain Mountain (western New York), Bristol Mountain (Finger Lakes), Whiteface Mountain (Adirondacks), and Belleayre and Hunter mountains (Catskills).

Swain Mountain
www.swain.com

Hunter Mountain
www.huntermtn.com

Whiteface Mountain
www.whiteface.com

Bristol Mountain
www.bristolmountain.com

Belleayre Mountain
www.belleayre.com

around the time of WWII, another one was operated during the 1950s, but little is known about it.

Decades after the Prospect Mountain House burned down a second time and a steel fire tower was erected in its place, proposals and plans for the area waxed and waned until 1954, when Governor Tom Dewey signed legislation to build a highway up the mountain. Finally, Governor Nelson Rockefeller made funds available for this purpose by signing the necessary legislation in 1964. Five years later, the Veterans Memorial Highway opened.

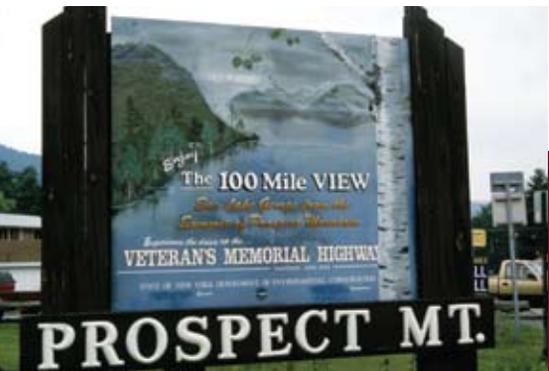
Now, everyone can enjoy spending time on Prospect Mountain. So pack a picnic and your camera, gather family or friends, and practice your “oohs” and “ahhs” for the spectacular fall colors you’ll see on and around the mountain.

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Lake George Village

Robert M. Goodwin



NYS DEC

Visit the Mountain

summit also offers a large picnic area and, on clear days, the aforementioned 100-mile view as well.

Hikers – There is no fee for hikers. The red-marked 1-5/8 mile Prospect Mountain Hiking Trail leads to the summit of the mountain. To reach the trail from Lake George Village, turn west on Montcalm Street (away from the lake) to Smith Street; turn south 1/2 block to the trailhead sign. The trail crosses I-87 on an elevated and “caged” walkway. Although there are a few strenuous spots along the way, climbing to the summit is not considered difficult for people in reasonably good shape. Part of the trail follows the road bed of the former railway that served the once-thriving hotel on the mountain.

The free “viewmobile” offers round-trip transportation to the summit from the last of three lookouts/parking areas, or hikers can cover the remaining distance to the top on foot.

Visitors are encouraged to explore the summit area; enjoy views of Lake George and the High Peaks (visible from a rock outcropping on the northwest portion of the summit), and note the historic remains of the hotel and railway.

For more information on Prospect Mountain, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9176.html and www.adk.org/trails/ProspectMountain.aspx, or call 518-668-5198.

Drivers – The Veterans Memorial Highway is open daily from Memorial Day through mid to late October. There are different fees for different types of motor vehicles; for cars, the fee is \$8.

Take the Adirondack Northway/Route I-87 (which cuts across the bottom of a former ski slope) to Exit 21. Go one mile north on Route 9, and turn left at the entrance to the Veterans Memorial Highway, also known as NYS Route 917A. Within about ten minutes, this 5+ miles two-lane highway leads to a parking lot, where there is a large picnic area. The