The granite found in the streams and mountain tops of the High Peaks region was formed more than 400 million years ago, when sediments in an ancient inland sea were pushed down into the earth and under great pressure and temperature melted into granite and then rose up. A million years ago, glaciers advanced over all of Maine. The numerous huge granite boulders, strewn along the Orbeton Stream were deposited there more than 12,000 years ago when the mile-thick ice of the last ice age began to melt forming an enormous lake behind the ridgelines of Saddleback, Reddington, Crocker and Bigelow Mountains. As temperatures rose further, “Glacial Lake Bigelow” broke through its frozen high peaks dams. Geologists have determined that the Orbeton Stream canyons and huge boulders we see today resulted from the glacial lake’s first great melt water flood!

Maine’s Working Forest

The wide range of standing softwood and hardwood “seed trees” on the trail leading to the Hardy Stream indicates you are passing through a “working forest.” It has been sustainably harvested and re-harvested every generation for close to 300 years, and – with permanent conservation - will continue to produce valuable forest products for future generations and a home for many species of wildlife. Left uncut are the steeper slopes of the High Peaks region was formed more than 400 million years ago, when sediments in an ancient inland sea were pushed down into the earth and under great pressure and temperature melted into granite and then rose up. A million years ago, glaciers advanced over all of Maine. The numerous huge granite boulders, strewn along the Orbeton Stream were deposited there more than 12,000 years ago when the mile-thick ice of the last ice age began to melt forming an enormous lake behind the ridgelines of Saddleback, Reddington, Crocker and Bigelow Mountains. As temperatures rose further, “Glacial Lake Bigelow” broke through its frozen high peaks dams. Geologists have determined that the Orbeton Stream canyons and huge boulders we see today resulted from the glacial lake’s first great melt water flood!

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This section of the trail begins with a walk through historic downtown Phillips—the neighborhood where Cornelia “Fly Rod” Crosby both grew up and later retired. Follow the blue and white trail signs past Crosby’s home, the Phillips Historical Society and across the Sandy River. A footpath at the end of Amble Street will lead you through the forested grounds of the Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum and along the Sandy River to Sanders Railroad Station.

From the Station, turn left onto Bridge Street. For the next five miles follow trail signs along old abandoned railroad beds through mixed hardwood forests, paved and unpaved roads and an old logging road that rises in a roller coaster fashion along one of the many glacial eskers that pepper the area. The steep drop and rise at the far end of the esker will bring you to a pleasant stretch of Reeds Mills Road and a terrific view of the north side of Tumbledown Mountain. A mile and a half walk along the gravel road will bring you to the intersection with Fish Hatchery Road and the trailhead for the Madrid–Saddleback section. Just up the road from the trailhead is the Star Barn Bed & Breakfast.

From the kiosk at the junction of Fish Hatchery Road and Reeds Mills Road, follow the trail signs across the Orbeton Stream to a grassy footpath leading to a kiosk just inside the tree line. Over the next four miles, the footpath follows Orbeton Stream and woods roads before coming to Hardy Stream. There are terrific swimming and fishing spots along the bolder-strewn stream; there is also a challenging stretch of towering pine and cedar trees sharing the same space with gigantic moss-covered boulders. Extreme care should be taken here.

The next three and one-half miles follows a footpath along Hardy Stream with great views to the north of some of the “High Peaks” including Saddleback Mountain, Mount Abram and Spaulding Mountain. The footpath passes the remains of an old horse logging camp before joining up with a three and one-half mile stretch of a motorized trail that will pass by Moose and Deer Pond, Eddy pond and the Appalachian Trail (AT) on the western shoulder of Saddleback Mountain. One mile beyond the AT, the trail joins with the Rock Pond Hiking Trail, a one and one-half mile section that passes Midway and Rock Ponds before ending in the parking lot at Saddleback Mountain Resort.