

His lambs he viewed with gentle glance
 Dispersed o'er a wide expanse,
 And fed with "mosses from the Manse"
 We view the rocky shore where late
 With soothed and patient ear we sat
 Under our Hawthorne in the dale
 And listened to his Twice told Tale.

It comes on murmuring to itself by the base of stately
 and retired mountains—through dark primitive woods
 —whose juices it receives and where the bear still drinks
 it— Where the cabins of settlers are still fresh and far
 between, and there are few that cross its stream.
 Enjoying still its cascades unknown to fame perhaps
 unseen as yet by man—alone by itself—by the long ranges
 of the mountains of Sandwich and of Squam with
 sometimes the peak of Moose hillock the Haystack &
 Kearsarge reflected in its waters. Where the maple and the
 raspberry that lover of the mountains flourish amid
 temperate dews. Flowing as long and mysterious and
 untranslatable as its name Pemigewasset. By many a
 pastured Pielion and Ossa where unnamed muses haunt,
 and receiving the tribute of many an untasted
 Helicon Not all these hills does it lave but I have
 experienced that to see the sun set behind them avails as
 much as to have travelled to them.

From where the old Man of the Mountain overlooks
 one of its head waters—in the Franconia Notch, taking the
 basin and the Flume in its way—washing the sites of future
 villages—not impatient. For every mountain stream is
 more than Helicon, tended by oreads dryads Naiads, and
 such a pure and fresh inspiring draught gift of the gods
 as it will take a newer than this New England to know
 the flavor of.

Such water do the gods distill
 And pour down hill
 For their new England men.

A draught of this wild water bring
 And I will never taste the spring
 Of Helicon again.
 But yesterday in dew it fell
 This morn its streams began to swell
 And with the sun it downward flowed
 So fresh it hardly knew its road.

Falling all the way, not discouraged by the lowest
 fall—for it intends to rise again.

There are earth air fire & water—very well, this is
 water. down it comes that is the way with it.

It was already water of Squam and Newfound lake and
 Winnipiseogee, and White mountain snow dissolved on
 which we were floating—and Smith's and Bakers and
 Mad rivers and Nashua and Souhegan and
 Piscataquoag—and Suncook & Soucook & Contoocook
 —mingled in incalculable proportions—still fluid yellowish
 restless all with an inclination seaward but boyant.

Here then we will leave them to saw and grind and spin
 for a season, and I fear there will be no vacation at low
 water for they are said to have Squam and Newfound
 lake and Winipiseogee for their mill ponds.

By the law of its birth never to become stagnant for it
 has come out of the clouds, and down the sides of
 precipices worn in the flood through beaver dams broke
 loose not splitting but splicing and mending itself until
 it found a breatheing plaace in this lowland— No danger
 now that the sun will steal it back to heaven again before
 it reach the sea for it has a warrant even to recover its
 own dews into its bosom again with every eve

We wandered on by the side and over the brows of hoar
 hills and mountains—& through notches which the stream
 had made—looking down one sunday morning over
 Bethlehem amid the bleating of sheep, and hearing as we

The existing annotation reads

266.26-28 From . . . way: The Old Man of the Mountain is the likeness of a human profile on Mt. Jackson near Franconia, N.H. The Notch is a nearby gap in the surrounding mountains, and the Flume is a deep chasm through which the Pemigewasset River flows.

On May 3, 2003, the rock formation known as the Old Man of the Mountain collapsed. For a photo and a discussion of the history and structure of this formation, see the following from the Mount Washington Observatory web site

<<http://www.mountwashington.org/about/visitor/oldman.php>>.



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Old Man of the Mountain

The Union Leader NEW HAMPSHIRE SUNDAY NEWS

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New Hampshire Sunday News



Composite Image by Rob
Gallagher (click to enlarge)

A Delicate Balance

Geologists speculate that the Old Man of the Mountain, formed by a retreating glacier during the last ice age, looked out over Profile Lake for more than 12,000 years. On May 3, 2003, the delicate balance that had held the "Great Stone Face" in position through the ages came to an abrupt end.

He was universally recognized, that Old Man staring stoically for centuries from his perch atop Franconia Notch. But how many of us really knew him? Most

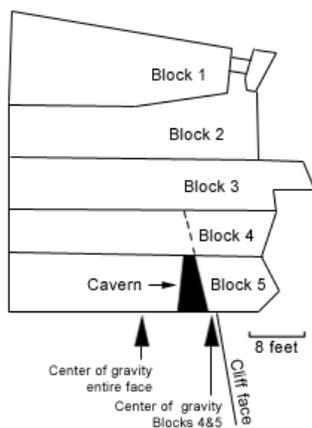
folks stopping beside the road and looking up the mountain, only saw his good side.

His stark, stony features only showed clearly when viewed from the north, looking south. Yet, according to Brian Fowler, owner and president of North American Reserve -- a mining engineering company in Laconia, NH -- who studied The Old Man of the Mountain for the state when it was preparing to build Franconia Notch Parkway in 1976, it was The Old Man's south side -- the side few would recognize -- and other flaws he kept hidden inside, that most likely led to his downfall.

The Old Man actually was made of five slabs of Conway granite balanced atop one another. Seen in this view, but hidden in the familiar view from the north, was a cavern, about four feet wide, behind the Old Man's chin (Block 5) that ran almost the entire width of the Old Man's face. About 80 percent of the chin block hung out over the cliff, according to Fowler. Thus, just about two feet of the chin was anchored to the cliff, held there only by the weight of the four slabs above it. Amazingly, the other four slabs were positioned just so, so that the center of gravity of the chin block was within that two-foot span, allowing the entire Old Man to balance on its chin for centuries.

However, through the years, rain and snow, blown through Franconia Notch on southerly winds, was driven into the cavern and the other cracks between and within the five slabs. One property of water is that it expands when it freezes, and water freezing in a crack in a rock will act as a wedge when it expands, making such cracks larger, eventually splitting the rock. Meanwhile, rocks are comprised of minerals, many of which react chemically with water. Those reactions can weaken the rock from within, eventually breaking it down. Conway granite is loaded with the mineral potash feldspar, which is particularly reactive with water.

According to Fowler, the physical and chemical damage to the Old Man's granite through the years, especially in the cavern, eventually wore away enough rock just behind the chin that the center of gravity of that block moved slightly forward, past the cliff face. When that happened, Fowler believes, the chin tumbled down the cliff, and the rest of the Old man quickly followed.



Old Man's South Face – Brian Fowler made the drawing above (we've modified it slightly) during his study of the Old Man in 1976. It depicts the south side of the stone face, which few folks would have recognized. Fowler believes this view holds the key as to how and why the Old Man fell. (click to enlarge)

MWO Store Feature



The Old Man of the Mountain

By Robert Hutchinson

The Old Man of the Mountain is a photographic memorial of New Hampshire's beloved emblem; the colossal Profile of natural granite high atop a sheer cliff in the White Mountains, which without warning collapsed on May 3, 2003, smashing below into a thousand nameless fragments.

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