

The Bottom Line

Snow that fell on the Presidential Range earlier this week has now seen warmth and rain, bringing the return of an isothermal, springtime snowpack. Those looking to recreate on snow this weekend should review objective hazards that come with playing in big mountains. A thorough examination of these will help narrow down your focus and likely point your group toward a reasonably safe target. Open holes and undermined snow are widespread to various depths and will need to be avoided on just about every slope. Icefall and rockfall are always possible and best dealt with by crossing quickly through the line of fire or avoiding slopes that have obvious chunks of ice that look like the leaning tower of Pisa. Any sort of fall in steep terrain can have consequences; bring the appropriate tools (ice axe, crampons, helmet) for your objective and don't be afraid to use them even though others may not.

Mountain Weather

Continued rain and possibly a snowflake or two overnight Friday will give way to clearing skies on Saturday. Wind speeds will be elevated early Saturday morning, but should slow through the day while temperatures reach into the 40sF at mid-elevations. Unsettled weather returns Sunday, bringing rain showers through Tuesday with possible thunderstorms on Monday. Those who have the luxury of mid-week adventures should put Wednesday and Thursday on your calendar as the next likely spell of clear weather though forecast certainty 5 days out is tenuous.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Prolonged periods of melt have opened deep cracks and holes in the snowpack. Beware of these at the margins of the snowpack as well as places that have large cliff bands, like the Headwall in Tuckerman. Keep the following hazards in mind as you make terrain decisions in our dynamic spring backcountry conditions:

Moats and other deep melt holes | Waterfall holes | Opening streams and undermined snow | Glide cracks | Falling ice and rock | Avalanches | Sliding falls

Additional Concerns

As of this weekend, the Lion Head Winter Route is still the preferred hiking trail to access the summit from Pinkham Notch. The Sherburne Ski Trail is no longer recommended for use. The Sherburne, and all other ski trails or bushwhacks that access ski terrain this late in the season, have surfaces that are less durable than established hiking trails. In addition to getting your kit muddy and smelly, please be aware that slogging through mud accelerates erosion drastically and means a rockier start to next year's skiing. This mantra also applies above treeline when accessing remote ski lines in Oakes Gulf or even the steep lines in Tuckerman like Dodges Drop, though for a slightly different reason. The alpine environment of the Presidential Range is home to plants that exist nowhere else in the world, in particular the area known as Monroe Flats. Bushwhacking from Lakes of the Clouds Hut to ski in Oakes Gulf takes you directly through the only non-transplanted home of *Robbins Cinquefoil*, a plant which only recently made it off the Endangered Species List. Stick to walking on durable surfaces like rocks, snow and ice.

Helon Hoffer, Snow Ranger; USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest; (603)466-2713 TTY (603)466-2858

Please Remember: Safe travel in avalanche terrain requires training and experience. This forecast is just one of many decision making tools. You control your own risk by choosing where, when, and how you travel. Understand that the avalanche danger may change when actual weather differs from the weather forecast. For more information contact the Forest Service Snow Rangers, the AMC at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, or the caretakers at Hermit Lake Shelters.