

Forecasting is not perfect – Remember it's a forecast not a certainty – it may change unexpectedly at the last moment or be completely wrong for your planned hiking location. Check multiple forecast services frequently. Be sure to include the [Mt. Washington Observatory Higher Summits forecast](#) . Note that this forecast applies to summits in the Presidential range and on the Franconia Ridge as well as mountains with significant exposure such as Mt. Moosilauke. Other recommended forecast services to check are: [US Weather Bureau](#) and [Mountain Forecast](#).

Mountains create their own weather - A good example happened on Oct. 23, 2020. In the morning above the notches (Franconia and Crawford) the sun was out, some clouds, pleasant and nice. For the notches and south: cool, low 50's, foggy with heavy drizzle at times, wet - perfect conditions for hypothermia while hiking.

Treeline Challenges - Winter hiking above tree line can be very challenging. Whiteouts and/or poor visibility can happen regardless of the forecast. Always carry a hard copy map. Work out compass bearings ahead of time between known locations above tree-line. If you are not comfortable using a compass go with someone who is. When reaching treeline and planning to return the same way, leave a marker such as flagging tape, wand with reflector tape, or GPS waypoint so as to easily find the trail opening location on the return hike.

Wind speed - Checking the forecast for wind speed and wind chill is as important as the chance of precipitation. Above tree-line you can have a blue bird day but high winds can create a ground blizzard that kicks up the snow reducing visibility making it harder to follow a trail. Wind speed also affects the wind chill temperature. A few years ago Androscoggin Valley Search and Rescue braved some extreme conditions near Mt. Adams to recover the body of mountaineer Kate Matrosova. Here is a [Video Clip](#) from that event illustrating the challenging conditions for some of the rescuers. Note at the beginning of the clip how difficult it is to walk for the people in the background.

Shoulder season hiking – Shoulder seasons (fall and spring) can be extremely challenging and at times dangerous. Depending on your elevation ground conditions can vary from bare dry ground to icy rocks and winter conditions with deep snow. You need to be prepared for a wide variety of conditions that require having multiple clothing choices, spare clothing, and multiple traction devices - microspikes, crampons, and snowshoes.

Backup hike – Always have a backup hike if the intended hike doesn't look doable or safe when you arrive at the trailhead. This can happen for different reasons - forecast changed for the worse, bad driving conditions, no parking available, etc.

Turning around - Don't hesitate to turn around if conditions worsen or you and/or others do not feel safe. This is more likely to happen in winter and shoulder seasons. Don't feel you have to just tough it out. In summer you may be able to get away with taking more chances. The margin of error in winter is smaller or non-existent. Always have an agreed turnaround time that has a buffer of daylight.

Peak bagging obsession in winter can kill you - Some hikers, regardless of their level of experience, are bound and determined to get those peaks checked off no matter what the weather is. SAFETY FOR EVERYONE IN YOUR GROUP SHOULD BE YOUR FIRST PRIORITY.

“Getting to the top is optional. Getting down is mandatory” - - Ed Viesturs, [No Shortcuts to the Top: Climbing the World's 14 Highest Peaks](#).

In case of an emergency in NH when you cannot safely self-rescue or assist another to safety, you can **TEXT to 911**. Your message should be brief and include the nature of the emergency and location. Texting to 911 is also available in Vermont and Maine.

Suggested reading:

Where You'll Find Me: Risk, Decisions, and the Last Climb of Kate Matrosova, 2017 *by Ty Gagne*

The Last Traverse: Tragedy and Resilience in the Winter Whites, 2020 *by Ty Gagne*

Critical Hours: Search and Rescue in the White Mountains, 2018 *by Sandy Stott*

Death on Mount Washington: Stories of Accidents and Foolhardiness on the Northeast's Highest Peak, 2018 *by Randi Minetor*

Desperate Steps: Life, Death, and Choices made in the mountains of the northeast, 2015 *by Peter W. Kick*

Death in the White Mountains: Hiker fatalities and how to avoid being one, 2017 *by Julie Boardman*

Not Without Peril: 2009, 150 years of misadventure on the Presidential Range of New Hampshire *by Nicholas Howe*

Don't Die on the Mountain, 1998 *by Dan H. Allen*