Chapter Two

GENTLEFOLK ESSAY THE HEIGHTS

WHEN GENTLEFOLK OF THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY went climbing on the Presidential Range, it was widely assumed that horses would do the work. The Crawford family converted their first trail up the Southern Peaks to a bridle path in 1840 and Nathaniel Davis sought to cash in on the Crawfords' success by building his own bridle path up the adjacent Montalban Ridge to the summit of Mount Washington in 1844. Then the Crawfords built a road to the base of a western ridge of Mount Washington, which provided a shorter route to the summit by way of a bridle path managed by the Fabyan family. Finally the Thompson Bridle Path up the eastern side of Mount Washington was built in 1851.

The Glen House was the only hotel on the eastern side of the Presidential Range. It opened in 1852 and the bridle path already ran from the Glen to the summit of Mount Washington. The path was named for the man who kept the Glen House and it's worth noting that the Canadian Grand Trunk Railroad paid the construction costs. This was an investment to draw tourists to the northern end of the Presidential Range and gain a share of the revenue provided by customers of the popular Crawford Path leading up the Southern Peaks of the range.

The first four miles of the Thompson Path were built on the same location as the auto road of today, then known as the carriage road, and the remainder of the bridle path was abandoned when the carriage road was completed to *the summit in 1861. Most of the old location is very difficult to find today,* but traces can still be discovered. As the old texts would put it, persevering effort by an attentive tramper will be rewarded.

Just before the present auto road rises above timberline, there's a wide clearing where the Halfway House used to stand. Soon the road starts a large bend of 180 degrees around a conspicuous outcropping of rock known as the Ledge in the early days and, more recently, Cape Horn. Sections of the summit road have always been identified by the markers along the way and the 4-Mile post is near the beginning of this turn. The last of the dwarf spruce are soon left behind, then the road begins a long traverse of the northeast side of the mountain, passing 5-Mile en route.

The bridle path turned sharply left at the Halfway House clearing and went into the woods at the back of what is a rocky gravel pit today. It went up the steep slope here, thus cutting off the loop of road around the Ledge, and met the present auto road again a short way above the point where the Chandler Brook Trail departs to drop steeply into Great Gulf. There are two paved parking lots at this point. The bridle path entered the back of the upper lot bearing slightly to the left, looking upslope. A conspicuous winter tractor route begins just above this point and heads upslope to cut off the long loop out to Cragway Turn on the auto road, then it rejoins the road just below the point where the Six Husbands Trail departs right and the Alpine Garden Trail departs left. This tractor route was roughed out directly on top of the bridle path, so no traces remain here.

The bridle path crossed the auto road location at 6-Mile and ran close to the Alpine Garden Trail up the slope toward the top of the ridge. This part of the old location is the easiest to see. The horses followed several switchbacks here to ease the grade and these are quite visible from the Alpine Garden Trail, then the bridle path turned sharply right just before the top of the ridge. The horses continued along a meandering and still quite obvious route up the shoulder of Chandler Ridge, then the path cut across the large right-angled loop the road makes around the flat area known as the Cow Pasture. The stone foundation of a structure used in that windswept animal husbandry can be found in the cow pasture, and a few steps away to the

Nineteenth-century gentlefolk liked to climb their mountains sitting down, as in this Winslow Homer view on the Crawford Path up Mount Washington.

Specialized clothing for recreation is a very recent innovation as the mountains count time. In 1915, Sheldon Howe, the author's father, leads the way in white shirt and tie, with his sisters Louise and Harriet, dressed in bloomers, following him. Few people had rucksacks in those days, so Harriet has dropped her sandwiches down her bloomers and they're visible at her knee.

northwest, toward Mount Madison, there's the old spring and the fragile *remains of its wooden framing.*

The bridle path ran diagonally up the slope below the road and, from this viewpoint, it disappeared around the horizon just below 7-Mile. It crossed the road location again to cut off the more moderate last bend below the summit, but at this point the terrain was very much modified for the research buildings built in the 1950s and now razed, so the old route is impossible to find. The bridle path crossed the present auto road for the last time and passed under the cog railway trestle near three large fuel tanks of the summit establishment, then climbed the last few yards to the summit.

Seen on a larger scale, the bridle path followed a nearly straight line up the crest of Chandler Ridge from 4-Mile to the summit. Seen on the closest scale, it quickly becomes obvious that a horse could step higher and manage more difficult terrain than we of the post-horse age would probably imagine.

By the same token, Americans were expected to negotiate more difficult terrain than the dress of the mid-nineteenth century would suggest. Most Americans' clothing was not yet diversified according to activity and a gentleman's turnout would not have been very different from what he wore to work: shirt and tie, vest, jacket, trousers, and probably a bowler hat.

Well-placed young ladies would have large wardrobes, but they would not have many choices. Their dresses would be older or newer, or plainer or fancier, or made for summer or winter, but they would all be dresses—a woman could not decide among a skirt or pants or shorts. This was flood-tide ante-bellum America and young women would look very much like Scarlett O'Hara, lacking only Rhett Butler on the stairway. The dresses of the time were extraordinarily complicated and a stylish lady aspired to the shape of an elaborately-draped bell. Her outfit would be close-fitted down to the high waistline, then widen steadily to her toes over a skirt stiffened by several petticoats, one of which would have been a crinoline stiffened with horsehair, the whole decorated by flounces and ruffles to taste and worn over ruffled pantaloons and high stockings. Thus prepared, she would deflect any untoward meteorological effects with a shawl as wide as she could reach and a bonnet.

The workload of such an outfit would be considerable, but fashions of the *late twentieth century are so distant from those days that an exact apprecia-*tion is difficult. So, in the interests of White Mountain studies, I brought

illustrations from the 1855 section of a fashion encyclopedia to a dressmaker of my acquaintance for a comparison in real-world terms. She said that a woman of today who went out wearing a blouse and a comfortable skirt would be carrying between a yard and a half and two yards of material. Then, using a bridal gown she'd just made for dimensions, the dressmaker studied the 1855 illustrations and calculated that a stylish young woman ascending the heights in that year would be wearing at least 45 yards of material. Depending on the fabric, this could weigh as much as a well-provided overnight pack of our times, and the amount of moisture it would absorb on a wet day could make it a truly significant factor on a hike. But it would preserve a lady's modesty from throat to toes and, not incidentally, make anything unladylike not just unthinkable but practically impossible.

LIZZIE BOURNE
SEPTEMBER 1855

On the morning of September 13, 1855, Lizzie Bourne bowled a string of tenpins at the Glen House. The other guests were impressed. In those years a young woman was expected to be, at the most, demure. Here was a game girl, and the guests remarked on her vigor and vivacity.

Lizzie was the daughter of the Honorable Edward Emerson Bourne, judge of probate for York County, Maine, which included the large mercantile city of Portland. She was twenty years old in the summer of 1855 and she'd always wanted to spend a night in the hotel on top of Mount Washington. Her uncle George was a principal in the shipbuilding firm of Bourne & Kingsbury in Kennebunk, and he agreed to go with her on such a trip, then his daughter Lucy persuaded him that she could come, too.

Those three, together with George's wife and another couple, arrived at the Glen House on September 12, a day of damp and glowering weather in the valleys surrounding the Presidential Range. The next morning brought steady rain and no promise of better skies, so they engaged horses for a ride up the mountain the next day. Then shortly before noon the sky showed promise of clearing and while the 1:00 P.M. dinner was being served, Lizzie launched a campaign to walk for a way up the road on foot that afternoon. In fact, she and her cousin wanted to go to the summit and spend that very

night, which would surprise the party they'd left behind. She prevailed, and George Bourne and his daughter and niece stepped off the veranda of the Glen House at 2:00. Lizzie waved goodbye to those who remained behind and she kept turning to wave until she was lost from sight. In the words of another guest, "Sunshine was around their steps as they walked cheerfully up this new road."

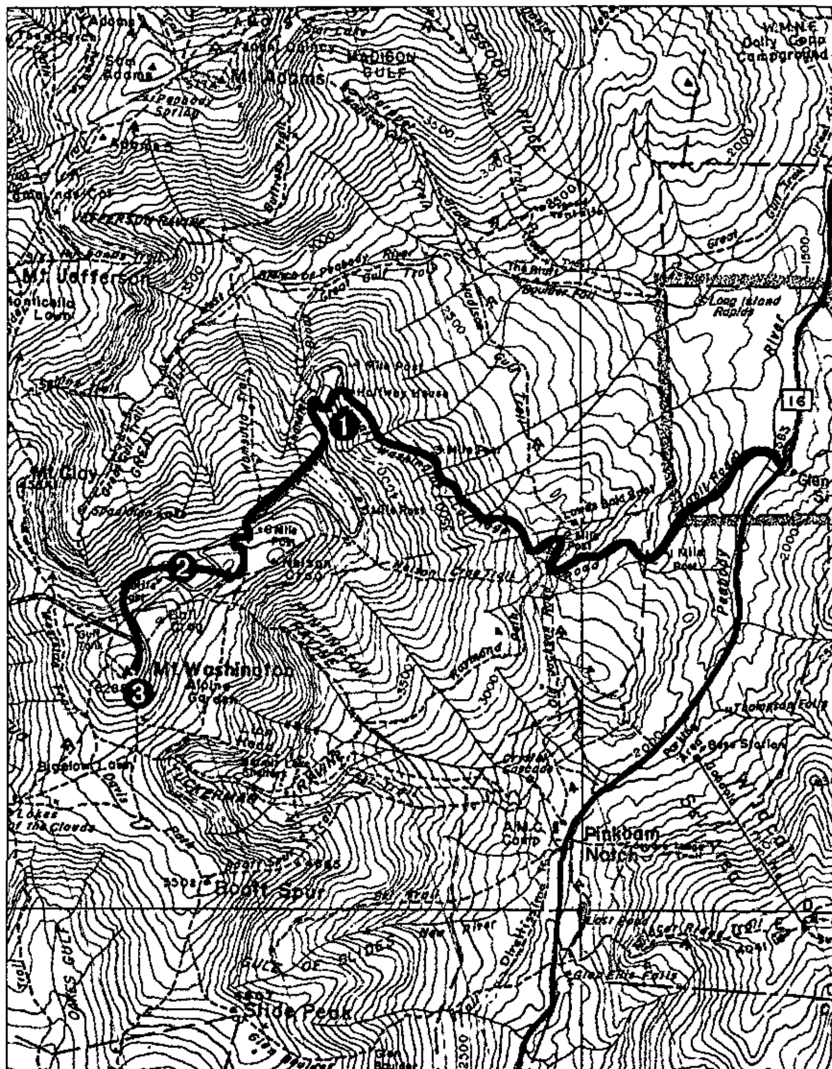
Lucy and Lizzie Bourne were very excited at the prospects of a night in the summit hotel and even more so when they crossed the Peabody River bridge in the meadow fronting the hotel and met Mr. Myers, a particularly courteous gentleman who was supervising construction higher up on the mountain road. George Bourne glanced at his watch just then, and it showed 2:15 P.M.

Mr. Myers was going up the road himself, and he walked along with the Bournes for about two and a half miles, pointing out notable views and other objects of interest as they went along and describing the difficulties of building a carriage road under the unfavorable circumstances found on Mount Washington. At some point Mr. Myers was detained by his duties and the Bournes went on alone.

Only the first four miles of carriage road were built at that time, half of the eventual route, and the Bournes paused at the end of the prepared track. They'd risen 2,437 feet above the valley and there were 2,288 ahead of them.

The way ahead, however, bore no resemblance to what they'd just passed over. The first four miles led by steady but moderate grades through a mixed forest of hardwoods and evergreens and the shelter was about the same as they'd find in any forest lane at home. At the farthest advance of the carriage road there was a building known as Camp House, mainly used by guides on the bridle path and workers on the carriage road. The bridle path led on from here and soon rose above the tree line, and from there to the summit the Bournes would face a wasteland of jumbled broken rocks, sharp-edged, rough-faced, and often in precarious balance underfoot. Worse than that, they'd find no shelter at all from the violent weather that threatens at every season of the year: gale-force winds, rain and snow, and impenetrable cloud banks clinging to the ground.

In the summer of Lizzie's climb, many visitors would engage a guide to ensure their way to the summit. Mr. Bourne knew this but he decided that he



1. Lizzie Bourne first hit severe weather at the Ledge
2. Admired sunset from Cow Pasture
3. Sought shelter just short of summit

did not need a guide; the carriage road was unmistakable and he knew that the bridle path was easy to follow, too. When the three Bournes reached the end of the road they met a construction crew and asked about conditions up ahead. The men replied that the path was clear and the weather seemed favorable, and the family started on to the summit. George was a meticulous person and he again glanced at his watch; it was exactly 4:00 P.M.

They made the short steep climb to the crest of a prominent ledge above the tree line—in the manner of the day, Mr. Bourne described this ledge as "a mountain." When they topped the crest they were immediately struck by a much stronger wind than they expected, so strong that the ladies had to sit down until there was a lull that let them start moving again. They were not dismayed; in fact, they seemed to relish the blast and Mr. Bourne thought that the ladies went on with renewed vigor.

They found another "mountain" up ahead, then another. They pushed on to the top of each one, every time expecting it to be the last. They were going more slowly now, because the ladies had to sit down frequently to catch their breath. Then they climbed what they expected was the last mountain and walked out onto the conspicuous flats of the Cow Pasture. There in the west was the setting sun that, as George Bourne wrote later, "enrobed in his mantle of gold and crimson, bade us adieu."

The three Bournes sat there for a few minutes, admiring the grand spectacle of the departing day. They got up to climb onward and suddenly the clouds dropped onto them. Two members of the Spaulding family emerged from the gloom; they were keepers of the hotel on the summit and they thought these late-afternoon climbers were in good spirits.

George Bourne, however, thought that Lizzie seemed to be tired—she needed to be helped over the rougher steps. They thought the next pitch was the last mountain they'd have to climb, so they gathered their strength and, as George wrote, "We at last reached the Summit. It was now late in the twilight and the shadows of night were fast creeping upon us; but to our sorrow another mountain stood before us, whose summit was far above the clouds."

The Bournes kept going as long as they could see well enough to find the bridle path, but Lizzie was weakening and they had to stop often so she could rest. Finally they could see no longer and they stopped. In George's

The only known photograph of Lizzie Bourne.

words, "It was very cold and the wind blowing a gale, the night dark and fearful, and we were upon the bleak mountain without a shrub, rock or tree under which to find shelter. What was to be done? To lie down and commit our souls to the keeping of a merciful Father, probably to sleep that sleep that knows no waking?"

George Bourne decided not to sleep that sleep. He was very tired himself, but he realized that something had to be done and he was the only one to do it. Each of the ladies had a shawl, but Lizzie had lost her bonnet in the wind. They were still on the path, so the ladies lay down in the treadway and George

went to work gathering stones and building up a wall to protect them from the wind. This was difficult work. It was full dark now, the wind was blowing a gale, the clouds were right down on the ground, and he had no light and no clear idea of what was around him. He'd work until he was tired, then he'd lie down next to the ladies to rest himself and give them a little warmth and a bit more protection against the terrible blast.

George Bourne made a routine of this: he'd gather stones, lie down, get up and, as he put it, "thrash around" to warm himself, gather more stones and for his windbreak, and lie down to warm the ladies again. This worked rather well. They seemed comfortable and George believed they'd survive the night. At 10:00 P.M. he finished a stint of thrashing and wall-building and lay down to warm the ladies again. He took Lizzie's hand to encourage her and found that it was cold: "Her spirit had winged its way to that better land where the black mountain chill could not reach her. She was dead—had uttered no complaint, expressed no regret or fear, but passed silently away."

Now there was only Lucy to keep warm, so George kept up the thrashing for himself and the warming for his daughter, "And thus passed the long, long weary night. Oh, how anxiously did we watch for the first gleam of morning." At that first light, the two of them got up, walked a few steps, and saw the Tip-Top House right in front of them.

George knocked on the door and, as he said, "aroused the inmates," who were keeper Spaulding and his family. They knew that the temperature had dropped below freezing during the night, so two ladies and two gentlemen left straightway and soon returned with Lizzie's body. A boy was sent to run down the mountain with word of the trouble while the others tried to help Lizzie. "Hoping against hope, for four hours they labored with hot rocks, hot baths, and used every exertion to call back her spirit, but all in vain."

Mr. Joseph Hall was stopping at the Glen House, a right-hand man for the Crawfords in their trail-building and a guide of deep experience in these mountains. He'd started up the carriage road that morning and had passed Mr. Myers' Camp House, then he met the boy near the Ledge. He returned to Camp House and directed the workers to make a long shallow box while he cut a stout pole in the woods. Then he took some straps from a horse's pack saddle and he and another man went on to the summit.

The Spaulding women prepared Lizzie's body and placed it in Mr. Hall's box and packed it carefully with bed linen. Then Mr. Hall used the pack

Lizzie Bourne's final resting spot years after her death, just yards from the safety of the Tip-Top House.

saddle straps to hang the box from the pole he'd cut, and he and Mr. Davis and another man shouldered the load, tallest man in front, and they started down the road. It took them three hours to reach the Glen House. The news had preceded them and George Bourne's wife met them crying, "Oh! Lizzie—Lizzie!" The Bournes and their friends returned with her to Portland, "And," wrote her uncle, "though the angel of death had set his seal upon her brow, yet a sweet smile still lingered and she seemed as one lying in angelic slumber."

A little later, Mr. Hall received a letter from Judge Bourne. "Moses was taken up from Mount Pisgah, Aaron from Mount Hor, and Lizzie, frail child of earth, to heaven from Mount Washington. Knowing her as I did, I am sure she would have chosen Mount Washington as the place to pass from earth to heaven."

FRIENDS SAID THAT THE BOURNE FAMILY NEVER RECOVERED from the loss of their beloved Lizzie. Curiously, though, several newspaper accounts and the marker on Mount Washington and her elaborate tombstone in the family burying ground give her age as twenty-three, not twenty.

George Bourne wrote several sharp notes to local newspapers correcting the error, but the memorials were not changed.

Mr. Hall returned to the summit and built a tall pile of stones on the place where Lizzie died, and when he was done he topped it with a block of rose quartz. After his long life in service of the mountains, he never went back.