



## Places – Sites – Monuments History

### Great Head

Map: US Geo 1922

GPS (Global Positioning System) Latitude, Longitude: 44.328804, -68.174173

Visiting Great Head was one of the early sites on Mount Desert Island that was considered an essential experience by early rusticators and is still considered so today.

"Guidebooks and Promotional Brochures in the 1860s and '70s.

In the late 1860s and 1870s recreational walking, boating, and buckboard rides were the most fashionable activities for visitors. Advertisements printed by steamship and railroad companies promoted island scenery, particularly the interesting rocky coast. Touring the island's rock formations and climbing along the shore, also known as "rocking," was a popular pastime. Many of the rocks were named, some with more than one name.

Walks to rock formations as well as inland mountains and lakes were described in travel guides for the island. Guidebooks written in the 1860s and 1870s harkened back to the pre-Civil War era of mountain tourism by combining poetry written during this earlier period and frequently emphasizing the visual qualities captured in paintings by Cole and Church. Clara Barnes Martin published her first guide to Mount Desert Island in 1867, and other writers, including Benjamin Franklin DeCosta, Samuel Drake, Albert Bee, Moses Sweetser, and William Lapham, soon followed. Though these authors perpetuated the romance of exploring pathless mountains, they also provided detailed directions to these destinations. Many routes were still "scrambles," but others, such as the Duck Brook Path and the ascent of Newport [Champlain] Mountain, were well-developed, marked trails. Tourists typically hired guides to lead them to the more remote destinations such as the summits of Sargent and Western Mountains." - Brown, Margaret Coffin. *Pathmakers – Cultural Landscape Report for the Historic Hiking Trail System of Mount Desert Island: History, Existing Conditions, & Analysis* (Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation, 2006) p. 26-27. - Listed as prepared by Margaret Coffin Brown.

The Pathmakers book is the bible for all things to do with the history of Acadia National Park. Particularly see:

Mountain Scrambles by Artists and Rusticators, 1830s-60s.  
p. 20-26

Rocking, Walking Guides and Hiking Clubs, 1860s-1890  
p. 26-33

"Our next ramble is to Great Head, the finest headland on the island, and the highest, it has been said, between Cape Cod and New Brunswick. It lies a short mile beyond Schooner Head, and is reached by the same road. Approaching the Head, we have a fine view of Newport's southern end descending to plunge into the sea. High up on the ledges are the nibbling sheep, foraging among the closely-cropped grass. Reaching the farm-house, most persons here leave their carriages, though the road extends some distance further into the woods. The way is perfectly plain. The left-hand track leads by a gradual ascent directly to the Head. The woods are here and there largely sprinkled with fine old birches. Arriving at the highest point, a view is had far and wide of the grand old ocean, while landward rise the mountains.

This whole peninsula recently became the property of a Philadelphia family that has a taste for landed trifles. Among their effects, it is said, is an islet in Lake Superior, and a snow-peak in the Swiss Alps. But Great Head need not feel ashamed of itself in any company.

In one place there is a rough and steep descent nearly to the water, while in another a sheer wall leans forward, threateningly over the sea. By descending the former a fine view of the face of the cliff is had; while a little way west, just below the gulch sprinkled with white rocks, is a cyclopean den called Stag Cave, from the resemblance to a stag which the imagination may easily conjure up when looking steadily upon some intrusions of milky quartz in the side of the wall.

Visitors are fond of coming to Great Head again and again to spend the whole day in sauntering from point to point, catching each new expression of the cliffs; or, book in hand, bestowing themselves under some convenient rock, to keep one eye on the stereotyped page and the other on the changeful deep." - DeCosta, B.F.. *Rambles in Mount Desert with Sketches of Travel on The New-England Coast* (A.D.F. Randolph & Co., New York, A. Williams & Co., Boston, 1871) p. 136.

Benjamin Franklin De Costa (1831-1904)

"Great Head – A little farther westward [than Schooner Head] is Great Head which shelters the only beach on the Island and a very small one at that. Great Head is a prominent object when passing from Bar Harbor to Southwest Harbor by water. "No description can do justice to its savage grandeur. It is not to its height alone that it owns its impressiveness, but to the peculiar massiveness of the rocks, overhanging of the whole cliff, and the never-ceasing beat and roar of the waves below." - - Lapham, William Berry. *Mount Desert with Pen & Pencil* (1887) p. 15. - A Second Edition - with special covers published for the Maine Central Railroad.