

Mt. Cutler Trails (2019 July) Hiram, Maine

From the bridge over the Saco River in Hiram, the front ledges of Mt. Cutler rise high above the village.

Above those ledges, what appears to be the summit of the mountain is really the end of a ridge extending more than a half mile to the west. Trails to the ledges and beyond start from the village and also from the Hiram Hill Road, a half mile further north on the Pequawket Trail highway (State routes 5 & 113).

Trail heads

North Trail (D) on the map starts on the Hiram Hill Road (HHR). From the Saco River Bridge in Hiram, drive 0.6 mile north on Pequawket Trail (Rt. 5/113). HHR (shown on the map by "Gravel Pit") is on the left just before the bridge over Red Mill Brook.

Starting up the HHR, cross the railroad tracks and look up the road; the trail-head parking area is on the left, where the road curves uphill to the right. North Trail starts at the entrance to the parking area. Look for blue-painted blazes marking the trail. You will also see a well-house in the woods near the road and trail. (*Avoid the well; a private water supply.*)

Moraine Trail. (at **N** on the map). From the RR crossing of Hiram Hill Road, walk 1/6 mile south on the RR. A trail sign shows the start of this trail, marked with white paint blazes.

Barnes Trail, the original trail on Mt. Cutler, starts



at the site of the old Maine Central Railroad Depot (**P** on the map). At the west end of the Saco River Bridge, start south on River Road, then immediately turn right on Mountain View Avenue. Where the avenue turns nearest to the mountain, cross the first set of railroad tracks, and park in the area between the tracks. There is a kiosk. A trail sign is across the tracks, south of the parking area. The trail is marked by red-painted blazes on trees and rocks and, on ledge areas, with rock cairns.

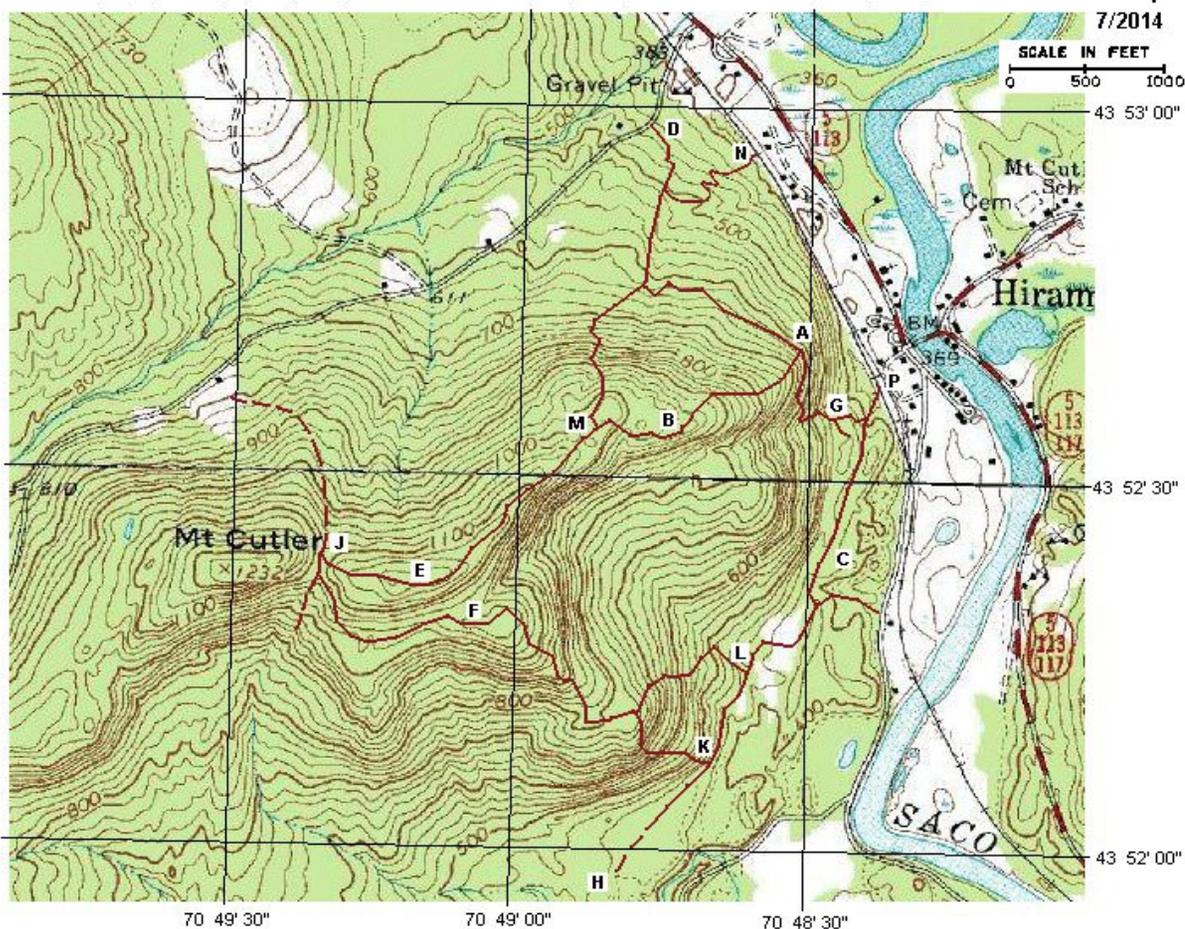
Snowmobile Trail access. The Snowmobile Trail also starts at the Barnes Trail parking area. A short distance up hill beyond the railroad tracks, the two trails diverge. Snowmobile Trail continues south, while Barnes Trail turns right, entering Merrill Park.

No Other Access Points! Hiram Village and Hiram Hill Road trail heads are the only allowed trail access points! Although the Snowmobile Trail (**H**) continues south, do not seek other access to trails from either the River Road or from the Douglas Road.

Mt. Cutler Trails Sketch Map

This map is a general description of trails on and near Mt. Cutler. The map does not have trails located with perfect accuracy, but the map does give a reasonable picture of trail routes and junctions. Trail descriptions give details not clearly shown in the map. Note that some man-made features on this map have changed since 1964. Some changes: the Saco River Bridge was replaced, many houses were built on Hiram Hill Road, and 2 homes built near the Snowmobile Trail.

USGS Topographic Map 1964 (1988) - Grid marks estimated, except 43 52' 30" from topo map image. **Trails Sketch Map**



Some visitors have asked why the trails do not continue to the true summit of Mt Cutler (Shown as "X 1232" on the map). The reason is that much of this mountain is on private property. For many trails, the land owners have given permission for the trail development. The current owners of the true summit lands have also given permission for developing trails in that area. Although a new trail has not yet been marked, you are free to find your own way to this highest summit. There is a good view from western ledges of this peak.

The Mt Cutler Park and Conservation Area is 173 acres of public park owned by the Town of Hiram. This includes most of the Main Ridge of the mountain from A to E on the map and most of the north slope areas.

Please be thankful for ALL private land-owners who are allowing you to have access for hiking, hunting, and sight-seeing on other lands of Mt Cutler. Be considerate of these land-owners: *Whatever you carry in, please also carry out.* Also, please do not try to use any other access to the trail system except the trail heads through Merrill Park (**G**) and near start of the Hiram Hill Road (**D** or **N**). Access from River Road, Douglas Road, and Richardson Road should be used only for emergencies such as rescue from injuries or for fire-fighting.

Mt. Cutler Trails – Trail Descriptions

North Trail (D) starts at entrance of the parking area on the Hiram Hill Road. This trail is marked with blue-paint blazes. Leaving the parking area, the trail is parallel to the road for a short distance, then turns sharp left, where it passes a well-house uphill from the trail. (*An active water supply. Do NOT approach or tamper with the well.*) At about 100 yards, the trail crosses a small stream next to a property corner marker. (*Do not disturb iron pins and flagging tape used to mark property lines.*) The trail continues at moderate uphill grade through hardwood forest in a southerly direction towards the mountain. At about 1/8-mile, at crest of a small ridge, the **Moraine Trail** forks to the left. North Trail follows the west side of a small valley with another stream, then ascends a steep ridge notched by this brook. The trail parallels the brook for 150 yards, passing several gullies visible to the south. At about 1/4 mile, the trail turns left, crosses the brook in a grove of large hemlocks, and ascends to SW away from the brook. A short distance above the brook crossing, the **White Flag Trail** diverges to the left. After another 150 yards, the North Trail reaches the foot of a steep, rocky slope, turns left, and works its way uphill into dense hemlock woods. Short S-curves ascend steeper sections below the hemlock thickets. Climbing higher, through narrow passages in thick hemlocks, the trail emerges on sloping, open ledges with excellent views to the north and northeast. *Use caution on these ledges, especially in wet weather; moss and lichens covering the rocks can be slippery and have caused sliding injuries!* Passing through hemlocks, the trail re-emerges to continue up sloping ledges to join the **Ridge Walk Trail** at a cairn marker (**M**).

[Hiram Hill Road (**D**) to Ridge Walk trail (**M**): 0.5 mi.]

White Flag Trail forks off North Trail at 0.3 mile, a short distance above the highest brook crossing. After crossing a small ridge, it ascends gradually to the SE through long-ago over-grown pastures and gentle ledges. Passing large boulders, stone walls, and remains of pasture fences, it joins the **Barnes Trail** near the front ledges (**A**).

For descent when hiking north on the Barnes Trail: Just above the Front Ledges, the Barnes Trail makes a sharp left turn, and White Flag Trail is straight ahead, rather than turning to the left. Look for white blazes to be followed to descend. North Trail, White Flag Trail, and part of **Barnes Trail** is a nice loop of about 1.5 miles. [North Trail to Barnes Trail: 0.25 mi.]

Moraine Trail / North Trail Link (N). White blazes and signs mark this trail that begins at side of the RR tracks about 1/6 mile south of the Hiram Hill Road. Ascending thru hardwoods with two S-curves, the trail climbs to the east end of an interesting ridge (a glacial moraine) at a stone wall, then follows this ridge to the junction with the North Trail. [RR tracks (**N**) to North Trail: 0.15 mi.]

Barnes Trail, established by Dr. Lowell “Bud” Barnes in the 1950s, is the original trail to the front ledges of Mt. Cutler. *Sections of this trail are very steep and eroded!* Red blazes mark most of this trail. At the Hiram Depot parking area, cross RR tracks to the trail sign, **Barnes Trail** and **Snowmobile Trail** stay together up a steady grade. At about 100 yards the trail divides. The **Snowmobile Trail** continues straight ahead. **Barnes Trail** forks to the right and enters **Merrill Botanical Park (G)** on the map), a grove of large pines (severely damaged in 2010). Before leaving the Park, a short trail branches to the south, through an opening in a stone wall, leading to the “Gold Mine” described in books of local history by Raymond Cotton. Barnes Trail makes a slight dip as it leaves the SW corner of the Park and crosses the (usually dry) outlet of a large vernal pool. Historical dug wells are found in this small valley. The trail ascends quickly to enter the ravine between Mt Cutler and the shoulder south of the mountain. Stay on the south side of the seasonal stream, and follow the steep ascent up the ravine over rough rocks. After about 100 yards westward and upward, the trail turns sharp right and crosses a very rough boulder area (*Caution!*). The trail passes under an overhanging ledge and makes a very steep ascent of the ledges. *Extra caution here, especially when descending!* At the top of this ledge, the trail turns sharp right, and runs northerly to top of the Front Ledges (**A**) overlooking Hiram Village. [RR tracks (**P**) to Front Ledges (**A**): 0.4 mi.]

Ridge Walk is a continuation of the Barnes Trail, gradually ascending the long east-west ridge of Mt. Cutler. Along this ridge are alternating viewpoints with excellent views to the northwest (the Presidential Range) and to the south (to Saco Estuary & Casco Bay). Cairns and some red blazes mark the trail, although it is usually discernible without markers.

Just NW of the Front Ledges, the Barnes Trail becomes the Ridge Walk at the junction with the **White Flag Trail**. From that junction, Ridge Walk enters a hardwood forest, and steadily ascends toward the west. *Some short steep sections require extra caution!* Before entering a hemlock grove there are good views to the NE (Pleasant Mountain, etc.). Above this grove, the trail continues a steady but not-too-steep ascent. It emerges from a small evergreen grove onto the open, South-View Ledge (**B** on the map) with spectacular, panoramic views to the SE, sometimes as far as coastal shores. This vista point is not actually a summit, although it appears to be so when viewed from the village. These ledges are the easternmost end of a long ridge, with the westward end at a notch just below the true summit of Mt. Cutler. [**A** to **B**: 0.3 mi.]

From the South View Ledge, continuing westward, at about 0.2 mile the **North Trail** enters from the north. Just beyond this junction are good views of Burnt Meadow Mountain and Mount Washington, both rising beyond the nearby Paul Wadsworth fields. At about 0.5 mile, the trail crosses a mostly-wooded secondary summit (**E**, 1180 ft) and descends quickly to a notch (**J**) traversed by a sometimes-used ATV trail. (On the map, this ATV trail ends in a dashed-line since the trail passes through private property not open for recreational use.) The

true summit (1232 ft) is a short scramble westward from this notch. [**B** to **J**: 0.7 mi.]

Saco Ridge Trail (Also “South Ridge Trail.”) runs from the notch (**J**) down the most prominent southern ridge, and joins the **Snowmobile Trail**. Leaving the notch (**J**) descend a short distance to the south; watch for cairns and red blaze marks. The trail bears left and slabs along the south side of Mt. Cutler, gradually descending until it reaches a small notch (**F**) between the bulk of the mountain and the upper part of this ridge. The trail makes a short ascent to an open area with views to the east. Near the easternmost edge of this clearing, the trail turns sharp right (at a cairn), enters hardwoods, and descends the ridge. There are good viewpoints looking down the Saco Valley and over the Douglas/Wadsworth/Longfellow Farm.

Before the lowest overlook from Saco Ridge (for view, continue 100 ft on **Old Saco Ridge Trail**), the relocated trail with red blazes turns north in a small clearing with pines. This descends northward, and eventually turns right to descend eastward on an old logging road (**L**) down to the **Snowmobile Trail**. Turn left to return to the trail head at the RR tracks. Notch (**J**) to Snowmobile Trail (**L**): 0.7 mi.]

It is better to avoid the older trail (**K**) since the last descent of the old trail is very steep with a steep scramble down to the valley floor (**K**).

To ascend Mt. Cutler by the **Saco Ridge Trail**, first follow the **Snowmobile Trail** as described below. At about 0.5 mile, a short distance after crossing a planked bridge over a stream, the red-blazed trail forks to the right at a small cairn (**L**), ascending westward up an old logging road. At a height-of-land, the trail turns sharp left off the logging road and ascends wooded slopes to join the original trail in a small grove of pines. Turn right to continue up Saco Ridge.

Snowmobile Trail starts at the same Hiram Depot trail head with **Barnes Trail**. After the initial 100 yards uphill, where the Barnes Trail forks to the right, the **Snowmobile Trail** continues straight ahead. The trail (**C**) remains nearly level, passing two houses that are on the left, below the elevation of the trail, until a slight descent where it enters open fields. Turning towards the mountain, away from the fields, the trail re-enters woods, turns left and crosses a small stream. Just beyond this stream crossing, the **Saco Ridge Trail** leaves to the right at a small cairn (**L**). [RR tracks (**P**) to Saco Ridge Trail (**L**): 0.5 mi. or (**K**): 0.7 mi.]

Beyond **L**, continuing mostly level, the **Snowmobile Trail** passes close to a steep shoulder of the mountain, where the original Saco Ridge Trail begins **K**. *Please do NOT continue further west on the Snowmobile Trail; this is private land where you are not welcome.*

Railroad Tracks. Walking the railroad can be tiresome, but the railroad (RR) can be used to complete loop hikes, connecting the Hiram Hill Road (HHR) with the original Barnes Trail. Use Moraine Trail to avoid part of the railroad walk. [HHR to Barnes Trail (**P**) by RR: 0.5 mi.]

- Mt. Cutler Park & Conservation Area, Town of Hiram, Maine, 2019 (Rev. 2009, 2011, 2014-2019.)