

Paddling through Shelburne, NH

While paddling the Androscoggin River through Shelburne's picturesque scenery, one sees a landscape that is little changed from when the first settlers arrived.

The narrow Shelburne valley was settled by colonists much later than the rest of New England and the first colonial explorers entered the valley from Maine around 1760 and received a charter from King George III in 1769 for the establishment of the Shelburne grant. The narrow river valley, only a half mile wide at its broadest and at 700' elevation, was hemmed in by the Carter-Moriah Mountain Range to the south and the Mahoosuc Mountain Range to the north. While the river bottoms provided fertile farmland, the two defining mountain ranges rise dramatically to elevations of 3,000' to the north and 4,000' to the south.

Life was challenging for the early settlers and Shelburne's population has always remained below 400 residents except for a brief period during the building of the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad in 1851. During the early days of settlement, an Indian raid in 1781 resulted in the capture of several Shelburne residents and the death of Peter Poor. The captives spent a night in captivity at Gention Pond before being taken to St. Francis, Canada where they were exchanged many years later. Except for an open AMC shelter at that spot, little has changed since 1781. Poor, reportedly the last settler killed by Indians in New Hampshire, was buried near the Androscoggin River near the outflow of the Austin Brook.

Shelburne remained a small farming village for most of its first 100 years, and then in the mid-1800's a number of large estates were created by wealthy Boston and New York residents for their summer use. Those estates and their grand homes have largely disappeared, with only remnants of the Whitney Farm still remaining from that era. The summer cottage of famed Boston sculptor Anne Whitney is one of the few buildings visible from the river.

The forests of Shelburne have always been a resource to its residents, first logged by the local farmers and then by the large timber barons at the beginning of the 20th Century. It wasn't until the 1860's that Shelburne became a summer destination when several local farms and cottages began to take in summer guests from Boston and points south.

Much of the landscape south of the river was protected with the creation of the White Mountain National Forest in 1917 and addition of 16,000+ acres Carter-Moriah Mountain Range. An additional 1,300+ acres of the Appalachian Trail and its corridor extended that protection through the west and north sections of the town into the Mahoosuc Mountain Range. Recent work by a Mahoosuc Initiative partnership including ARWC, The Conservation Fund, and other partners has protected by

conservation easement more than 8,000 acres of the Mahoosuc Mountain Range in Shelburne and Success Township. As you now look north from the river, every mountain summit viewed, with the exception of Mt. Ingalls, is in public ownership or protected by easement.

Benjamin Willey in his 1856 *Incidents in White Mountain History* wrote of Shelburne “This region is very much infested with bears, especially during the summer months. Many now live on the mountains, preventing the raising of sheep”. When Willey wrote the above description, the Shelburne Valley was much noted for its wildlife, especially for bears and wolves. The wolves are gone, but bears are still prolific and only one sheep farmer remains in the valley. The Shelburne valley is still home to wide ranging moose and bobcat and a healthy population of deer. The eastern coyote has replaced the extirpated wolf as one of the top predators in the valley. Except for the infrequent timber harvests, wildlife occupy the mountain forests with only limited contact with hikers and hunters. Most wildlife will be wary of human contact, so count yourself lucky if you observe a moose or bear, or even a bobcat.