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## UNIQUELY NEW HAMPSHIRE

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I TOLD AN OUT-OF-STATE FRIEND—"from away," as they'd say up north in Coos County—that I was writing a book about New Hampshire. "Oh, that won't take long," she responded, winking slyly. "It's such a tiny state." New Hampshire is smaller than most states, but just try to write a book about it. After more than two decades in the Merrimack Valley, I've come to understand that the Granite State—so named for the abundance of that coarse-grained igneous rock—is hardly small, and as I rediscover almost every day, anything but predictable.

Local history can be full of insignificant facts—*first this, largest that*. We may be surprised to hear that the first potato grown in North America was planted in Londonderry, or that New Hampshire is larger in land miles than Massachusetts, its neighbor to the south. But such minutiae hardly render a complete portrait.

Endowed with rich natural resources and a quirky, self-reliant citizenry, New Hampshire itself is the revelation. Its beauty has attracted writers like Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Cather; the painters Homer, Cole, and Stella; and the poets Frost, Cummings, and Simic. The potential for inspiration endures, whether you're viewing the graceful, sloping lawn of the Cornish estate where the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens lived and worked or standing on the shore of First Connecticut Lake at twilight as the loons begin to cry. Now *these* are experiences you can wrap a trip around.

### ■ TOPOGRAPHY

New Hampshire spreads out to the north and west from the blue Atlantic like a lopsided wedge of pie, encompassing an extremely varied topography: distant mountains and intimate seacoast, serene lakes and mad rushing rivers, floating bogs and boreal forests. And incredible mountains! Mount Washington, at 6,289 feet the tallest mountain in the Northeast, can be found here, along with Grand Monadnock, the most-climbed peak in North America. *Well, okay*—it takes most people less than two hours to hike Monadnock's 3,165 feet.

Dense forest cloaks most of the state's mountains, so stupendous views don't come easy—you must climb to the top, where your reward will be eye-popping perspectives on lakes, farmlands, and distant rivers. New Hampshire has been called

*Steeple of the Congregational Meetinghouse in Fitzwilliam.*

