



# Rocky Memories

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation  
Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

Welcome!

Generations of hikers have been enticed by **Purgatory Chasm's** rugged beauty and the fanciful names of its rock features. Many of the creative monikers were coined as a way to attract tourists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These features and the stories behind their unusual names are part of what makes Purgatory Chasm so memorable. As you go through this tour, think about the generations of tourists who have visited these spots. What might they have thought about the chasm as they saw it for the first time?

Begin this hike at the dedication plaque just inside of the chasm. This bronze plaque marks **the chasm's entrance. It shows the year in which Purgatory Chasm became a State Park and the names of the park's first three commissioners, including Herbert Ray.** Ray saw the potential of the chasm as a recreational resource and persuaded the Whitin Machine Works to sell Purgatory Chasm to the Commonwealth.

Your first stop will be His Majesty's Cave on your right, about 30 feet past the plaque.



*A postcard image of Purgatory Chasm, before the Hurricane of '38.*



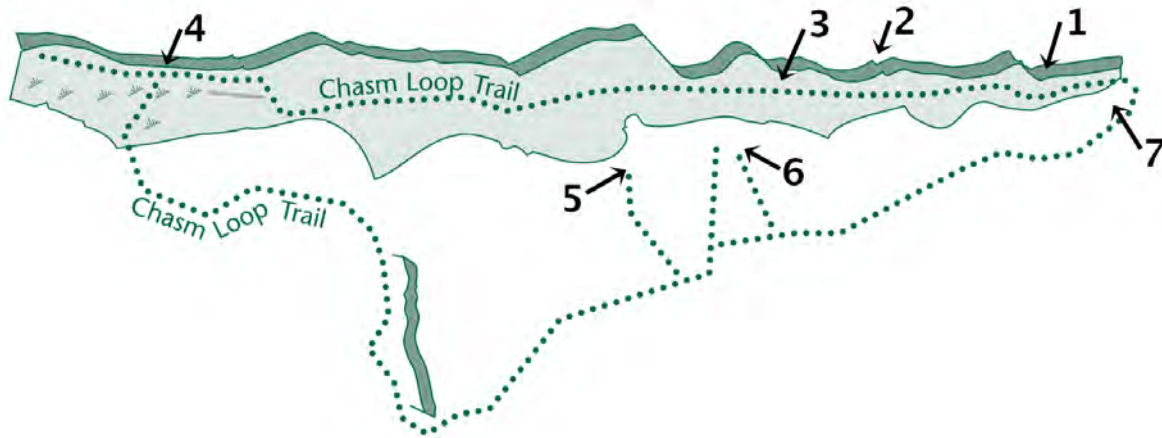
Purgatory Chasm State Reservation  
198 Purgatory Road, Sutton MA  
(508) 234-3733

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Rocky Memories Chasm Hike is approximately ½ mile over moderate terrain. The blue blazes along the trail mark the path. Please take care while hiking in and around the chasm. The first few hundred feet involve climbing over the boulders in the chasm, please watch your footing. As you follow the trail, please keep the following in mind:

- Take your time, plan a few footsteps ahead
- Assist others in your group as needed.
- Sturdy footwear is recommended.
- Please stay on the blazed trail.
- The park is carry-in, carry-out, please bring all trash home with you.
- Please do not climb on the chasm walls.
- The rocks are slippery when wet, so avoid hiking during or soon after rain.

The Chasm Trail is closed during the winter in icy/slippery conditions.



## STOP 1 - HIS MAJESTY'S CAVE



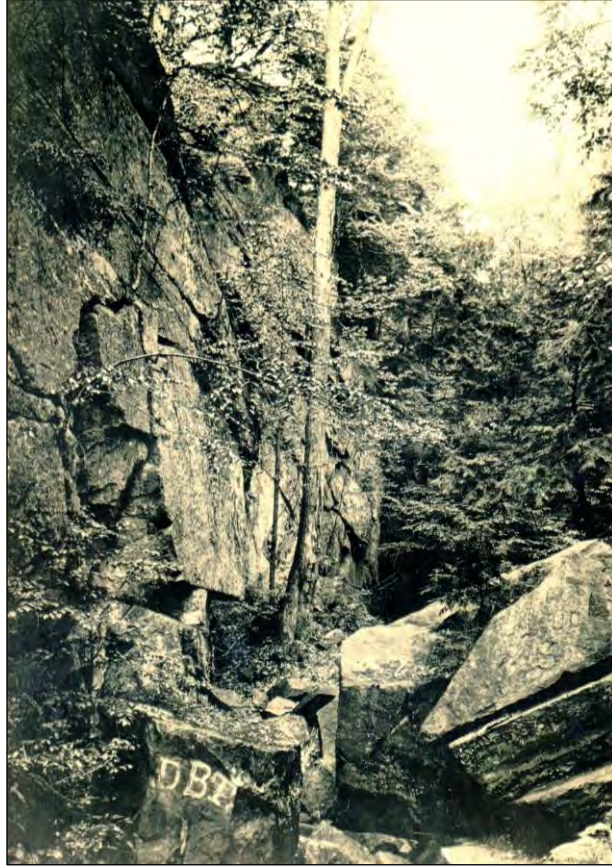
*Entrance to His Majesty's Cave in the 1930's*

The origins behind the name of this cave are sadly lost. One story has it that it was named after King George III during the American Revolution as a place where he was better suited to living, rather than their grand castles and manicured estates. The first mention of this name is from the late 1800s, so this is unlikely. It could instead refer to how relatively spacious this cave is and it was thought to be **"fit for a king."** **We'll probably never know the real story.**

**Our next stop is at Lover's Leap.** Follow the chasm trail about 150 feet. The sign marking it will be on the right-**hand side of the chasm's wall**, about 12 feet above the chasm floor.

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## STOP 2 - LOVER'S LEAP



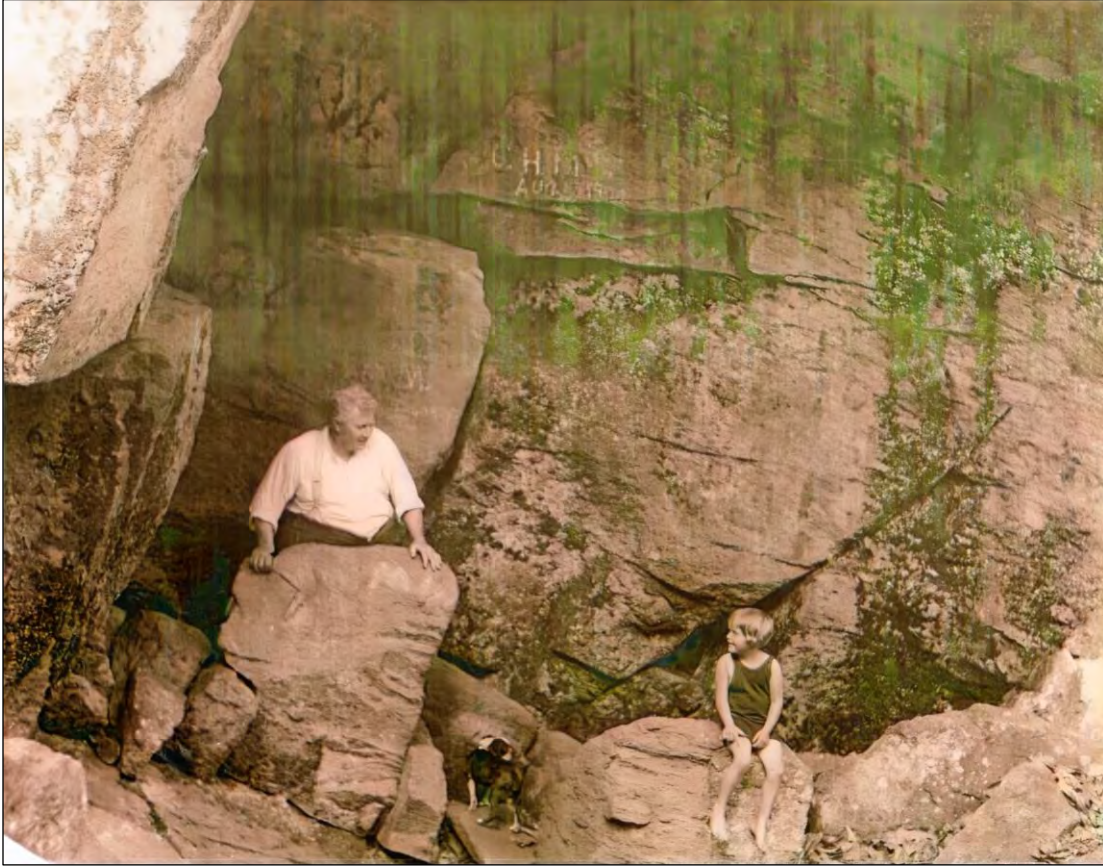
*Looking up at the edge of Lovers Leap – early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

The rocks here are not forgiving. This is the site of the chasm's first known fatality. In 1876, after a picnic with her husband George, Ellen Prentice unintentionally tumbled into the chasm. **The Boston Globe** describes the incident. *“They visited “Purgatory” on Friday morning. Reaching the place they sat down on the brink of the ravine on its southerly side, where the precipice is from seventy to eighty feet high. After sitting awhile, noting the changes in the twenty years since they had seen the chasm, they rose to leave, ... Mrs. Prentice said she **must take one more look and then “I am going.”** when her husband turned just in time to see her go over the precipice. She fell a distance of approximately seventy feet.”*

Follow the trail for about **65'** and you will find what remains of the **Devil's Pulpit** on your right. Look for the rock on the ground with an alcove behind the stone.

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## STOP 3 - DEVIL'S PULPIT



*Herbert Ray and his granddaughter at Devil's Pulpit*

This was once the favorite place to give a speech during a family outing; a popular activity in **the 1800's**. **The pulpit stone stood upright like a natural** lectern and the chasm acts as a natural amphitheater. Sadly, the rock tipped over in 1994. Feel free to share aloud your own inspirational words before moving to our next stop.

Continue **about 800'** to the end of the chasm, just before the footbridge turns to the left, where you will find your next stop, **the Devil's Coffin on your right**.

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## STOP 4 – DEVIL’S COFFIN



*The coffin-shaped rock rests in the middle of this vintage photo.*

More than a century ago, someone carved the words of warning “Prepare to meet thy god” into the left wall of this cave’s entrance. Within the chamber, there is a rock that looks similar to a coffin. This type of “talus cave” is formed when large stones rest upon each other in a heap, creating spaces between the rocks.

When you are done here, continue about **1000’** along the Chasm Trail Loop as it turns left when you exit the chasm. **Keep following the blue trail marks to Fat Man’s Misery** on your left.

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## STOP 5 – FAT MAN’S MISERY



*Posing for a family photo at Fat Man’s Misery*

In the early days of the park, this was a popular place. This narrow space between two rocks is about 20 feet deep, and only 1.5 feet wide.

**Use caution in this area; the ledge is close by. If Fat Man’s Misery is intimidating, follow the trail marks to our next stop, the Devil’s Corn Crib, which is a smaller version of this feature.**

**Continue following the blue blazes for 300’ until you reach the Devil’s Corn Crib on your left.**

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## STOP 6 – DEVIL’S CORN CRIB



*Another tight squeeze awaits at the Devil's Corn Crib*

**How many ears of corn would it take to fill the Devil's Corn Crib?** This formation's name is named for its resemblance to an old-fashioned corn crib. These cribs were used to dry and store grains. A real corn crib would need a roof to keep the rain out. This squeeze between two rocks is only about 5 feet deep.

The next, and final, stop is the glacial chair. Continue along the blue blazes about **400'** until you reach a rock that resembles a chair.

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## STOP 7 – GLACIER CHAIR



*The Glacier Chair overlooks the chasm's entrance.*

As you finish your hike, you may be looking for a place to rest. At the end of the trail, you will find The Glacier Chair, a rock shaped like a couch. Its concave shape and relatively smooth texture are signs that a glacier passed over this stone. Resting upon the chair today will connect you to geological events that happened here more than ten thousand years ago.

To return to the pavilion continue following the blue blaze to the path by the old stone building.

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## CONCLUSION

Which memories of the trail will you share with your friends and family? Did you find any rock formations that still need a quirky name? Did you take a photo that can share on social media? **Don't forget to tag @massdcr!**

There are still many more places to explore and things to do at Purgatory Chasm. Consider an expedition to Little Purgatory, or search for the Spring House. Join us for an interpretive program if you want to learn more. Purgatory Chasm hosts guided hikes, interactive displays, and special events on a seasonal basis. For event details, please visit us online at [www.mass.gov/info-details/DCR-programs-and-events](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/DCR-programs-and-events) or look for postings in the park.



Purgatory, Sutton, Mass.  
*Gardner - Hot hours ride in cars.  
Train for west here - Thurs. 11*  
A. P. Lundberg, Worcester, Mass.

Historic postcard from *before the Hurricane of '38.*