



Besaw Iron Furnace Interpretive Center

The Only Blast Furnace Still Standing in New Hampshire

The octagonal stone stack that is visible on the far bank of the Gale River is all that remains of a 200-year-old iron smelter shown on an 1805 map of Franconia.



The New Hampshire Iron Factory Company rebuilt the original furnace several times, adding hot blast after 1840 and extending the height to its present 32ft. Chiseled into one of the heavy stones in the west arch opening is "S. Pettee, Jr. 1859". Pettee was a well-known iron master who was associated with several blast furnaces in New England. He was the last known foreman to operate this furnace.

The furnace was built of local granite. Its interior is lined with firebrick, laid in a cylindrical shape. The space between the firebrick and stone exterior is filled with clay.

Farmers burned trees to make charcoal to fire the furnace. Iron production declined by 1865 as the ore and trees diminished and as iron production in Pennsylvania progressed at less cost. The furnace was abandoned with a belly full of once-molten iron. The furnace had been inactive for twenty years when, in 1884, the shed that surrounded it burned to the ground.

Visitors can see a scale model of the furnace and the shed that enclosed it. Also on display at the Interpretive Center are an ore cart, stove, kettles and tools, as well as panels explaining the process. The Franconia Heritage Museum offers additional displays of iron and books on the subject.

The Interpretive Center is maintained by the same volunteers who manage the Franconia Heritage Museum.



NOTE: Viewable anytime from the Picnic Area. The stone stack, itself, is on private property across the Gale River. Trespassing is prohibited due to the danger of falling stones.

No Admittance Fee - Donations Welcome