

This Day in History... May 3, 2003

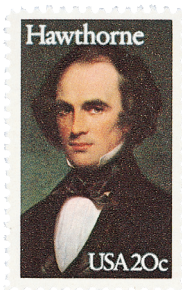
The Old Man of the Mountain

On May 3, 2003, the Old Man of the Mountain rock formation in New Hampshire collapsed.

The 40-foot-tall “face” in New Hampshire’s White Mountains was composed of Conway granite. Five ledges formed its appearance. When lined up, these ledges gave the appearance of an old man looking to the east. According to geologists, a combination of the glacial movement and the forces of seasonal freezing sculpted the face. It is believed the “old man” had existed for as long as 10,000 years.



Issued for the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the formation.



Hawthorne stamp from the Literary Arts Series

Francis Whitcomb and Luke Brooks of the Franconia surveying team reportedly first discovered the formation in 1805. It quickly became a major tourist attraction, in part due to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story, “The Great Stone Face,” which called it “a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness.”

Statesman Daniel Webster also contributed to its notoriety, saying of the formation, “Men hang out their signs indicative of their respective trades; shoe makers hang out a gigantic shoe; jewelers a monster watch, and the dentist hangs out a gold tooth; but up in the Mountains of New Hampshire, God Almighty has hung out a sign to show that there He makes men.” Over the years it was known by many names, including The Great Stone Face, the Profile, and The Old Man.

In 1906, Reverend Guy Roberts of Massachusetts was among the first people to publicize the formation’s deterioration. Over time, the freezing and thawing of ice in the granite ridges combined with vibration from nearby traffic to open gaps in the figure’s forehead.



This stamp was issued for Webster’s 150th birthday.

During the 1910s, tie rods were placed in the granite to prevent the cracks from widening. The state legislature later provided \$25,000 to keep the formation intact. Upkeep was performed every summer. In 1945, the Stone Face was made the official state emblem of New Hampshire and would eventually be featured on the state’s license plate, state route signs, and quarter.



From the Bicentenary Statehood Series

In spite of all the preservation efforts, the formation collapsed on May 3, 2003. The people of New Hampshire were saddened by the loss of the Great Stone Face, leaving flowers at its base in memoriam. Some people suggested adding the profile to the state flag. Others proposed building a plastic replica, but this idea was rejected. One year after the collapse, coin-operated viewfinders were installed, allowing visitors to see the cliff as it once was. A state-sponsored memorial was begun in 2010.

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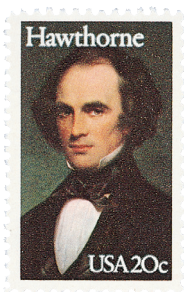
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