

**LIVERMORE FALLS GORGE; *A General History***  
*with background on the Pemigewasset River in Grafton County, New Hampshire*

**"One of the most outstanding scenic values on the river is Livermore Falls Gorge"**

-- N.H. Dept of Environmental Services

-- Livermore Falls and Gorge were featured as "*a spectacular site to visit in NH*"  
at the 2009 Eastern States Exposition from the New Hampshire Pavilion.

Location: *N 43.78497 / W 71.66841* – 50' high falls, 584 feet above sea level --  
originally called Little's Falls (the surrounding area was settled by Moses Little in 1771)  
powering first a grist, then saw mill. Judge Arthur Livermore bought the property and  
renamed the falls. Built the Riverview Hotel there.

The spectacular gorge, most easily accessed from the Plymouth (west) rim, was formed  
of metamorphosed schist rock ledge containing **Camptonite**, of very unusual geological  
chemical composition, first discovered in 1879. (samples on display at Campton  
Historical Society). Camptonite has since been discovered elsewhere in the world but is  
still referred to by its Campton name. The gorge and falls occur in three towns –  
Campton, Plymouth and Holderness bordered to the E by the former Baker State Forest,  
now Livermore Falls State Forest. The Holderness east side with its sand outwash and  
island has become a very popular recreation area with excellent swimming.

Located upstream of the confluence of the Baker River at Plymouth, the headwaters of  
the Pemigewasset River (named for a local Native American tribe) are at Profile Lake. It  
then flows through the Flume and Basin and 70 mi. south to where it meets up with the  
Winnepesaukee River at Franklin to form the Merrimack River. It was designated a Wild  
& Scenic River under federal law in 1989. Various log drives were run from Lincoln,  
later to a pulp mill at the Falls. All that remains are the outlines of that mill, built by  
Arthur Homans where logs were beaten into pulp and shipped by bales back to Lincoln,  
are the brick walls, sluiceways and part of the diversion dam into the river. The next pulp  
mill was constructed in 1899 and operated by J.E. Henry of the Parker-Young Co. in  
Lincoln until 1950s. In the early 1950s workers arrived at the Livermore Falls Pulp Mill  
one morning to find doors locked and signs to report to the Parker Young office in  
Lincoln to pick up their last pay checks. After it was closed vandals set fire to it.  
The floods of 1973 destroyed what was left of the coffer dam and brick powerhouse.

A large photo kept at the Plymouth Historical Society shows one such river log drive at  
the turn of the last century. It was extremely dangerous work and men were lost.

Also along the east rim of the gorge were a tannery, shingle mill, fish hatchery (the state's  
first in 1788) and several residences. In 1969 N.H. Fish & Game Dept. commenced  
stocking the river with trout which resulted in a feature article occurred in *Field &  
Stream* magazine.

1969 Army Corps of Engineers proposed building a high hydro-electric dam across the  
gorge (one of four such dams planned in the Pemi Valley) to back up water up into

portions of Campton, Woodstock and even beyond. Proposal never advanced due to opposition, especially from the potentially-flooded towns and the Atlantic Salmon & Shad Restoration Project. Then Ed Clark of Lincoln tried to acquire a permit for a "run of the river" (using the existing flow) hydro generator in 1988 but his application was denied by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission with objections from Atlantic Salmon Restoration folks and others. Ironically today high-voltage electric lines of the Groton Wind Farm Project cross the gorge at this very same point.

1971 New Hampton state Rep. H. Thomas Urie, owner of Calley & Currier crutch factory, formed the Pemi River Council which noted the importance to the region of Livermore Falls and the Gorge. Years earlier Urie had brought suit against the Lincoln mill when paint on the outside of his riverside house had peeled off from the sulfuric-based chemicals used in making paper..

After closing down, in July, 1972 the paper mill at Lincoln reopened as the Profile Paper Company with a Copeland Waste disposal system designed to take out sulfides from discharged wastewater as well as dyes and pulp particles that had been polluting the Pemi since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But when that treatment plant failed, Profile Paper closed the plant in 1975 and, as the river flushed itself of pollution, public attention was again drawn to the river's recreational value.

August 3, 1989 U.S. Senators Gordon Humphrey and Warren Rudman, and U.S. House Reps. Robert Smith and Charles Douglas introduce legislation designating the Pemi as a National Wild and Scenic River as House Resolution #3104, "...to protect the integrity of the river for future generations." Mandated U.S. Park Service to study.

Oct 3, 1997 Special charter train takes state, federal and local officials from Lincoln to Ashland and return as a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of passage of the Clean Water Act, credited with taking the Pemi from one of America's most polluted rivers to now fully swimmable.

Pemigewasset River Trail runs through there. A Pemi River Corridor Management Plan has been prepared.. A 1982 New Hampshire Historic Bridge Committee inventory was prepared by James Garvin, state archeological historian for the N.H. Division of Historic Resources. Joyce B. McKay, cultural resources manager for NH DOT has also prepared a report. [jmckay@dot.state.nh.us](mailto:jmckay@dot.state.nh.us) This location is a favorite of Plymouth State University students for swimming, diving, start river tubing and other activities.

Livermore Falls Gorge is the Nation's only remaining site of a Berlin Iron Works Co. "below deck" double lenticular truss ("pumpkinseed") Towne-type truss bridge built by the three towns in 1885 but cut loose in the 1950s to prevent crossing. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as well as with the Industrial Archeology Society of America. May be the only one of its kind surviving in the U.S.

[ref. *A Water Quality Success Story; Pemigewasset River, New Hampshire*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency position paper, 1979 also *A Magnet for Tourism* by Wayne King from *The Heart of New Hampshire* magazine, April 21, 2007 edition.

