



## WHAT TO WEAR? HIKING, 1904–1924



Ida Rachel in men's pants, 1904.  
*Courtesy Bondcliff Books*

In the first years of the Twentieth Century, the women's fashion industry began to turn some attention to clothing for outdoor sports. Magazine images showed women with tennis rackets, paddles, and swimming gear, but hiking was a novelty.

When women did break tradition and set out on hiking and camping expeditions, it was noticed, and luckily some of them liked to write about it. One such woman was Ida Rachel James, who, with her husband Walter, left an extraordinary record in the form of a journal describing hiking trips to the White Mountains between 1899 and 1926. In 2005 her grandchildren published it in

two volumes titled *Our Mountain Trips*.

Ida Rachel's description of a 1904 trip to Mt. Chocorua shows the pleasure she took in being an adventurous, non-conforming woman who liked to hike and camp. On this trip the couple was accompanied by a friend, Eleanor Sweet, who was eager to be introduced to the new activities. The trio set out by train to Ossipee, then stage and cart to the trailhead. It was June, and they were besieged by bugs. Ida calls them "three-sized friends" — midges, black flies, and mosquitoes. The group had come prepared to fish, but had bad luck, and the camp food they had brought along was inadequate. When they reached a boarding house on the return trip they were covered in red bites and famished but the two women hid outside, unsure that they would be allowed in, dressed as they were in men's pants. Luckily, they were welcomed once the dining room was empty.

In 1911, Walter took a mountain trip on his own, from Passaconaway (reached by stagecoach from the Conway train station) along the "Swift River Trail" (now the Kancamagus Highway) to the "Waterville cut-off" and Livermore Trail to Waterville, where he stayed at Elliott's Hotel. He met a couple from New York City at the Passaconaway House. Mr. Mitchell set out with him for the part of the hike to Waterville. Mrs. Mitchell was along for some of the hiking, too, but did not opt to make the whole trip, maybe because, unlike Ida Rachel, she had not converted from long skirts to more practical hiking clothes.

Walter's photo shows her crossing a stream with her outer skirt rolled up, with Mr. Mitchell looking skeptical.



Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, 1911. *Courtesy Bondcliff Books*

By the 1920s Walter and Ida Rachel were setting out on their mountain trips in their Model T Ford and bringing along more supplies and comfortable camp furniture. Ida's hiking outfit was now a fashionable and practical pair of wool bloomers, as would soon become available in sewing patterns for women campers.



LEFT: Ida Rachel in bloomers, 1923. *Courtesy Bondcliff Books*

RIGHT: Butterick pattern, 1925

Source: *Our Mountain Trips* by Ida Rachel Butterfield James, Lucy Ardena Butterfield, and Walter H. James. Littleton, NH: Bondcliff Books, 2005.