

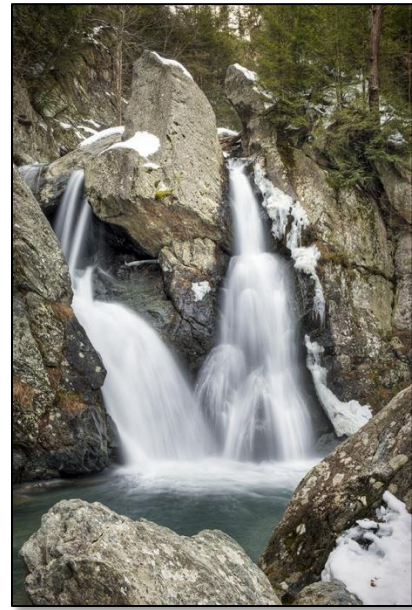
## BASH BISH FALLS

**Description:** Unique 60' double waterfall on Bash Bish Brook.

**Location:** Bash Bish Falls is part of Bash Bish Falls State Park, located in the extreme southwest corner of Massachusetts. The lower parking area is in New York and is part of the adjoining Taconic State Park, where cabins and camp sites are available in season.

The steep gorge runs almost due west; the vegetation along the trail, the south facing slope, is predominantly dry, deciduous forest, mostly oak. The north facing slope only rarely receives direct sunlight and is mostly hemlock and yellow birch.

**Directions\*:** The easiest approach to Bash Bish Falls is from the New York side, from the Taconic Parkway and State Route 22. The approach from the Massachusetts side is more complicated; the roads meander through the Berkshire Mountains, the Mount Everett State Park and the Mount Washington State forest. If you come from this direction, be sure to have good maps and/or GPS unit.



**Photography:** There are four waterfalls and two nice cascades in this park; only the double falls and the cascade below are usually seen, but these are certainly the most dramatic. There are two falls and a nice cascade above the double falls, but these can only be seen from the rim trail. Starting at the very top:

**Top Falls:** The top waterfall is a 10 footer and virtually impossible to photograph. From the upper parking area, follow the service road down to the stream bed, then to the right. The top of Bash Bish ravine is about 30 yards downstream. You can easily hear this waterfall, and watch the water disappear down into the gorge. But the walls of the gorge are vertical here and there is no viewpoint for photography.

**Upper Falls:** Cross the stream at the double falls and follow the rim trail guardrail up the rim trail. The trail is steep but manageable. You will eventually reach a point with a view of the upper waterfall. Bash Bish Brook drops along a resistant basalt dike before turning west to the top of the main waterfall. The upper falls can also be seen by crossing the stream at the base of the double falls and continuing up the rim trail from the upper cascade view. The climb to this viewpoint is easier and shorter from the upper parking area than working up from the main waterfall.

**Upper Cascade:** The upper cascade is between the double and upper waterfalls. It is easiest to view by crossing the stream below the main waterfall and following the guardrail up along the rim trail. This section is very steep but the guardrail is very helpful when carrying camera and equipment. During the spring flow, crossing is very difficult. As the rim trail reaches the top of the

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\* Use the accompanying KML file to generate your own driving directions in Google Earth!

main waterfall, there is a viewing area for the cascades. Entry into this gorge area is prohibited, and rightly so. The gorge rim rocks are not stable, and fall dramatically from a great height. This happens often in spring as ice releases its grip.

Main waterfall & Lower Cascade: The trails from the lower and upper parking areas converge on a large, open area with a good view of the falls. There is a stairway with railing that descends to another viewing area near the base of the waterfall. This area is strewn with many large and small boulders, and there are many vantage points for photography. There are no restrictions on scrambling around, behind or under these rocks. There are many locations for photography here and most images you have seen of Bash Bish Falls would have been made in this area.



Head to the right from the base of the stairway and follow the well worn path. On your left you will pass two rock dikes that provide excellent photographic locations. If you look at the erosion patterns on the rock here you will see that these were once waterfalls themselves, but have been eroded away. As you continue, you will see the lower cascade empty into a calm pool before the last drop. *Tip:* There is a unique photographic location *under* the last dike; if you climb down toward the pool, look left, and back toward the double falls.

Lower waterfall: As you continue along the path and enter the forest, the terrain opens up and you can move to the left. This provides the last look back at the double falls, and overlooks the lower falls. The best view of the lower falls is from the stream bed below. You can reach it with some caution by following the lower path downstream a few dozen yards.

Stream Bed: From the lower parking area, the trail quickly descends to stream level. About 50 yards along, as it starts its incline up toward the main waterfall, the stream bed is accessible through the trees to the right. If you are still on the trail when you reach a rest area and small bench, you have gone too far. Backtrack about 50 feet then head toward the streambed. There are no trails in the stream bed, but when water is low, it is easily travelled. It is possible to bushwhack up the stream bed from the lower parking area when the water level permits and you will be rewarded with many photogenic small spillways, shaded pools, and rock formations. If you stay on the north side of the stream, you can get around many of the large boulders by going around behind them.

The stream bed bushwhack does require a lot of scrambling over wet and slippery rock surfaces. YakTrax will help; I do not go without them. Also remember that there is no cell signal anywhere at Bash Bish, even the parking areas. You cannot reach the base of the lowest waterfall this way. Eventually, the stream bed becomes filled with large boulders that are impossible to pass.

Other views: At the upper parking area, you should clamber up the rocks to attain views westward toward the Catskills. There are guardrails that will prevent falling into the gorge. Follow these to views down into the gorge as well.

**Accessibility:** There are two parking lots; the lower parking area is in New York. The trail from the lower parking area to the double falls is well kept, wide and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long. The upper parking area is only  $\frac{1}{5}$  of a mile from the falls, but the trail is narrower and steep in places. There is no

parking allowed on the highway, and signs threaten towing. In winter, both trails are crossed by icy seeps that can make the trek treacherous. In winter, mists from the waterfall coat the viewing area rocks at the bottom of the stairway with several inches of ice. You must have some additional traction (instep crampons, full crampons, YakTrax, Stabillcers) to be safe (or perhaps only safer).

My favorite day trip to Bash Bish Falls starts at the upper parking area. I descend to the base of the main waterfall, and then to cross the stream to follow the rim trail. The trail follows the gorge rim quite closely and it is important to stay on the safe side of the guardrail. Where the rim trail eventually descends to the stream bed, the area above the top waterfall makes a wonderful end-of-trip rest area.

There have been several deaths here. At one time, Bash Bish Falls was designated as one of the most dangerous parks in the USA. Some of these deaths have been the result of stupidity (jumping from the top of the double waterfall), and others accidental (crossing the stream on fallen tree trunks). There are no bridges across the stream so crossing must be done with caution.

This park is very popular in warm weather so you may wish to time your arrival time to avoid crowds. On several occasions, I have seen several bus loads of summer camp kids arrive at one time and overwhelm the area.

Web: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/western/bash.htm>  
<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/trails/print/mt-washington.pdf>  
<http://nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/83/details.aspx>  
<http://nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/attachments/TaconicCopakeFallsAreaCampingMap,PricesandSchedule.pdf>  
<http://news.travel.aol.com/2009/10/29/most-dangerous-tourist-attractions/> (Slide #9)