



Ice Mountain (Courtesy: Kent Mason)

Ice Mountain, a giant natural refrigerator in West Virginia

by: Sam Kirk Dec 6, 2023

NORTH RIVER MILLS, W.Va. (WBOY) — West Virginia is full of natural wonders, including one that stays cool all year round.

Ice Mountain is located in remote Hampshire County, West Virginia, but the plants that grow there are from much further north and normally only grow in the boreal region below the Arctic Circle.



Flora of Ice Mountain Preserve (Courtesy: Kent Mason)

According to The Nature Conservancy, which owns and protects the 146-acre preserve, children who lived nearby used to come to the mountain for ice chips in the middle of summer to make cold drinks and ice cream.

The elevation isn't particularly high, which accounts for different foliage in other parts of the state, but the sloping mass of boulders at the bottom of the mountain—called the talus—collects ice during the winter. Throughout the year, the cold air seeps out from approximately 60 small vents at the foot of the mountain, making the temperature much cooler.

Plants like twinflower, dwarf dogwood, Canada mayflower and bristly rose can all be found at Ice Mountain, according to the West Virginia Department of Tourism.



Twinflower (Public domain)



Dwarf dogwood (Courtesy: U.S. Forest Service)



Bristly rose (Courtesy: Black Hills National ...



Canada mayflower (Public domain)

The site is a National Natural Landmark because, and according to the National Park Service, it is “the best representation of the unique interaction between mass wasting and the maintenance of boreal vegetation within the Appalachian Ranges.”

People who want to visit Ice Mountain can schedule a guided tour with The Nature Conservancy by calling 304-496-7359. Visits are open for most of the year, but the organization requests that tours be scheduled three weeks in advance and that groups be limited to 15 people.

As part of the conservation of the mountain, The Nature Conservancy is working to control invasive species, maintain trees that shade the ice vents, and continue research of the ice vents system with West Virginia University.