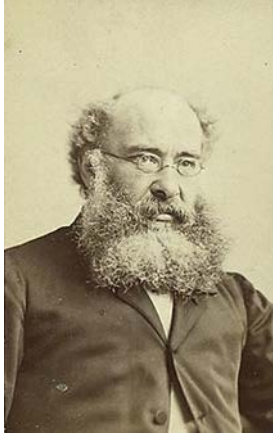


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## Mountain House and Owl's Head by Anthony Trollope 1862

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Anthony Trollope, 1815-1882

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### Introduction

**Anthony Trollope**, (born April 24, 1815, London, Eng. – died Dec. 6, 1882, London) English novelist whose popular success concealed until long after his death the nature and extent of his literary merit. A series of books set in the imaginary English county of Bassetshire remains his best loved and most famous work, but he also wrote convincing novels of political life as well as studies that show great psychological penetration. One of his greatest strengths was a steady, consistent vision of the social structures of Victorian England, which he re-created in his books with unusual solidity.

The Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*

One of the most popular and beloved writers of the 19th century, Anthony Trollope was also an insatiably curious traveler. He was the quintessential Victorian voyager – adventurous and energetic, with a fine sense of humor and irony – and his career in the General Post Office gave him the opportunity to travel widely. By 1882 he had been twice around the world. These selections from his reports on the

West Indies, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa make for delightful reading, as fresh as when they were written. And they reveal Trollope as a professional and enthusiastic investigator of political, social, and economic conditions. To read his travel writings, suggests Graham Handley, "is to become aware of the character of the man and the qualities which make him one of the most interesting literary personalities of his time. His enthusiasm for life, like his enthusiasm for writing, was uncurbed to the end."

Graham Handley, *Trollope The Traveller*, Ivan R. Dee publisher, 1995, 286 p.

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We went with the mails from Sherbrooke to a village called Magog at the outlet of the lake, and from thence by a steamer up the lake to a solitary hotel called the Mountain House, which is built at the foot of the mountain on the shore, and which is surrounded on every side by thick forest. There is no road within two miles of the house. The lake therefore is the only highway, and that is frozen up for four months in the year. When frozen, however, it is still a road, for it is passable for sledges. I have seldom been in a house that seemed so remote from the world, and so little within reach of doctors, parsons, or butchers. Bakers in this country are not required, as all persons make their own bread. But in spite of its position the hotel is well kept, and on the whole we were more comfortable there than at any other inn in Lower Canada. The Mountain House is but five miles from the borders of Vermont, in which State the head of the lake lies. The steamer which brought us runs on to Newport, – or rather from Newport to Magog and back again. And Newport is in Vermont.

The one thing to be done at the Mountain House is the ascent of the mountain called the Owl's Head. The world there offers nothing else of active enterprise to the traveller, unless fishing be considered an active enterprise.

I am not capable of fishing, therefore we resolved on going up the Owl's Head. To dine in the middle of the day is absolutely imperative at these hotels, and thus we were driven to select either the morning or the afternoon. Evening lights we declared were the best for all views, and therefore we decided on the afternoon. It is but two miles; but then, as we were told more than once by those who had spoken to us on the subject, those two miles are not like other miles. "I doubt if the lady can do it," one man said to me. I asked if ladies did not sometimes go up. "Yes; young women do, at times," he said. After that my wife resolved that she would see the top of the Owl's Head, or die in the attempt, and so we started. They never think of sending a guide with one in these places, whereas in Europe a traveller is not allowed to go a step without one. When I asked for one to show us the way up Mount Washington, I was told that there were no idle boys about that place. The path was indicated to us, and off we started with high hopes.



J.D. Woodward

*Lake Memphremagog North From Owl's Head, Engraving,  
Wood 1872-74*

I have been up many mountain, and have climbed some that were perhaps somewhat dangerous in their ascent. In climbing the Owl's Head there is no danger. One is closed in by thick trees the whole way. But I doubt if I ever went up a steeper ascent. It was very hard work, but we were not beaten. We reached the top, and there sitting down thoroughly enjoyed our victory. It was then half-past five o'clock, and the sun was not yet absolutely sinking. It did not seem to give us any warning that we should especially require its aid, and as the prospect below us was very lovely we remained there for a quarter of an hour. The ascent of the Owl's Head is certainly a thing to do, and I still think, in spite of our following misfortune, that it is a thing to do late in the afternoon. The view down upon the lakes and the forests around, and on the wooded hills below, is wonderfully lovely. I never was on a mountain which gave me a more perfect command of all the country round. But as we arose to descend we saw a little cloud coming towards us from over Newport.

The little cloud came on with speed, and we had hardly freed ourselves from the rocks of the summit before we were surrounded by rain. As the rain became thicker, we were surrounded by darkness also, or if not by darkness by so dim a light that it became a task to find our path. I still thought that the daylight had not gone, and that as we descended and so escaped from the cloud we should find light enough to guide us. But it was not so. The rain soon became a matter of indifference, and so also did the mud and briars beneath our feet. Even the steepness of the way was almost forgotten as we endeavoured to thread our path through the forest before it should become impossible to discern the track. A dog had followed us up, and though the beast would not stay with us so as to be our guide, he returned ever and

anon and made us aware of his presence by dashing by us.

I may confess now that I became much frightened. We were wet through, and a night out in the forest would have been unpleasant to us. At last I did utterly lose the track. It had become quite dark, so dark that we could hardly see each other. We had succeeded in getting down the steepest and worst part of the mountain, but we were still among dense forest-trees, and up to our knees in mud. But the people at the Mountain House were Christians, and men with lanterns were sent hallooing after us through the dark night. When we were thus found we were not many yards from the path, but unfortunately on the wrong side of a stream. Through that we waded and then made our way in safety to the inn. In spite of which misadventure I advise all travellers in Lower Canada to go up the Owl's Head.

### Sources

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John Douglas Woodward

*Lake Memphremagog South From Owl's Head, Engraving, Wood 1872-74*



LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG SOUTH FROM OWL'S HEAD