

Two dry seasons in the White Mountains, in New Hampshire (United States), were followed by heavy rains on the 28th August, 1826, when from the steep and lofty declivities which rise abruptly on both sides of the river Saco, innumerable rocks and stones, many of sufficient size to fill a common apartment, were detached, and in their descent swept down before them, in one promiscuous and frightful ruin, forests, shrubs, and the earth which sustained them. Although there are numerous indications on the steep sides of these hills of former slides of the same kind, yet no tradition had been handed down of any similar catastrophe within the memory of man, and the growth of the forest on the very spots now devastated, clearly showed that for a long interval nothing similar had occurred. One of these moving masses was afterwards found to have slid three miles, with an average breadth of a quarter of a mile. The natural excavations commenced generally in a trench a few yards in depth and a few rods in width, and descended the mountains, widening and deepening till they became vast chasms. At the base of these hollow ravines was seen a confused mass of ruins, consisting of transported earth, gravel, rocks, and trees. Forests of spruce-fir and hemlock, a kind of fir somewhat resembling our yew in foliage, were prostrated with as much ease as if they had been fields of grain; for, where they disputed the ground, the torrent of mud and rock accumulated behind, till it gathered sufficient force to burst the temporary barrier.

The valleys of the Amonoosuck and Saco presented, for many miles, an uninterrupted scene of desolation; all the bridges being carried away, as well as those over their tributary streams. In some places, the road was excavated to the depth of from fifteen to twenty feet; in others, it was covered with earth, rocks, and trees, to as great a height. The water flowed for many weeks after the flood, as densely charged with earth as it could be without being changed into mud, and marks were seen in various localities of its having risen on either side of the valley to more than twenty-five feet above its ordinary level. Many sheep and cattle were swept away, and the Willey family, nine in number, who in alarm had deserted their house, were destroyed on the banks of the Saco; seven of their mangled bodies were afterwards found near the river, buried beneath drift-wood and mountain ruins.* Eleven years after the event, the deep channels worn by the avalanches of mud and stone, and the immense heaps of boulders and blocks of granite in the river channel, still formed, says Professor Hubbard, a picturesque feature in the scenery.†

When I visited the country in 1845, eight years after Professor Hubbard, I found the signs of devastation still very striking; I also particularly remarked that although the surface of the bare granitic rocks had been smoothed by the passage over them of so much mud and stone, there were no continuous parallel and rectilinear furrows, nor any of the fine scratches or striae which characterize *glacial* action.

* Silliman's Journal, vol. xv. No. 2. p. 216. Jan. 1829. † Ibid. vol. xxxiv. p. 115.