



Cobb Hill Trails

Hartland, VT

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing. Part of one trail is shared by snowmobiles.*

Description: The year-round trails at Cobb Hill feature agricultural fields, open pasture, an active sugarbush, and mature forest. A visit provides an opportunity to observe a working farm that demonstrates how local, small-scale agriculture can be economically and environmentally sustainable. From the upper pastures there are excellent views across the Connecticut River Valley. Groomed ski trails, both flatland and challenging, steeper routes, are part of a network of over 23 kilometers of trails maintained by the Hartland Winter Trails association.

The Cobb Hill Cohousing community occupies 23 units of tightly clustered housing on four acres of land in the southeast corner of their 270-acre property. The cohousing group has owned the land since 1997, when it purchased adjoining farms from Will and Jane Curtis and John and Barbara Hunt. Both properties had been farmed for over 200 years but at the time were threatened by the same pattern of subdivision and development that had already taken place on a portion of the Hunts' farm and in much of the surrounding agricultural land. Cobb Hill Cohousing members, with a strong commitment to sustainability, stewardship, and local agriculture, continue to farm the land and have placed the bulk of their acreage under conservation easement with the Upper Valley Land Trust.



Cobb Hill Cohousing

Directions: From Damon Hall in Hartland, follow Route 12N to Hartland Four Corners and turn right onto Mace Hill Road. In about a quarter of a mile take the first left onto Linden Road, entering the Cobb Hill Cohousing property, with its barns and silo directly ahead. Parking is to the right, across from the farm stand.

Donella Meadows and Cobb Hill Cohousing:

Donella "Dana" Meadows was a driving force in the creation of Cobb Hill Cohousing. A pioneering environmental scientist and writer, Dana was lead author of the bestselling book *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972. For thirty years she was an influential voice in international efforts to reverse damaging trends in the environment, the economy, and social systems. Her work is widely recognized as a formative influence on hundreds of academic studies, government policy initiatives, and international agreements.

In the mid-1980's Dana Meadows was one of a small group of people who came together to found the Upper Valley Land Trust. She became the first Chair of UVLT's Board of Trustees and served on the board for five years. From 1996 until her untimely death in 2001 Dana worked with others to bring Cobb Hill Cohousing into being. The project reflects her commitment to stewardship of natural resources, local food production, and community life.

Cobb Hill Cohousing is an intentional community of people who aspire to live in socially and environmentally responsible ways. They endeavor to manage their resources in as sustainable a manner as possible through organic gardening, energy efficiency, and waste minimization. At the entrance to Cobb Hill is a farm stand that sells cheese, eggs, flowers, vegetables, and maple syrup produced on the property. Produce is also sold as part of a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, with subscribers receiving organic vegetables and flowers from a 7-acre garden every week from June through October. The Cobb Hill farm buildings combine a gambrel-roofed barn and attached accessory sheds, a style popular in the 1930's and 40's and becoming increasingly rare in the Vermont landscape. The barn and outbuildings house sheep, dairy cattle, horses, and chickens.



Icelandic sheep

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) provided funding for UVLT's purchase of development rights on the Cobb Hill farm's 245 acres of fields and woodlands, bringing together in a single project VHCB's twin goals of conservation and affordable housing. Cobb Hill Cohousing made a significant contribution to the project by selling development rights to the land for about one sixth of the market value. The income from sale of the development rights, combined with two other gifts of about the same magnitude, subsidized three perpetually affordable cohousing units for lower income families.

Exploring Cobb Hill:

In winter, you'll find it easy to explore the property by following the tracked ski trails. Volunteers groom the trails, so if you see someone working on them while you are out skiing, give a wave and a smile of thanks. Those snowshoeing should travel to the side of the prepared ski track. All groomed trails are for winter use only, and dogs are not permitted. For your safety, please pay attention to trailside signs during sugaring. The hillside calls to mind the late Dartmouth English professor and local rural philosopher Noel Perrin's 1972 book *Amateur Sugar Maker*, in which he describes a modern sugarbush looking just "like the intensive-care unit of some outdoor hospital." Cobb Hill puts out about 1,300 taps and in an average season produces over 300 gallons of syrup.



Harvest at the farm



Dana's Bench in spring

Explore the property in non-snow conditions using the three-season "Dana Trail." A little over a mile long (two miles round-trip), it is for foot travel only. Dogs are permitted if leashed. The trail starts at the trailhead parking area by the farm stand. It passes to the left (south) of the barn and up the driveway beside the residential area of Cobb Hill. It leaves the driveway at the sharp bend just below the upper units and climbs for ¼ mile until it meets an access road. Turning right, the trail follows this road for about 100 feet. It then turns west and ascends to the winter snowmobile

trail. Turning north (right) on the snowmobile trail, the Dana Trail ascends to the top of a ridge. It then follows a spur trail out to the top of a pasture area and a lovely view to the northeast. A sign indicates that the end of the trail has been reached and visitors must retrace their steps to return to the parking area. A stile in the fence permits passage onto the field and over to Dana's Bench. Visitors should not enter the field while cows are grazing.

An additional note of interest about the property comes from Jane and Will Curtis, former owners of one of the two original farms that make up Cobb Hill Farm. For years the Curtises heard rumors that their house had been a station on the Underground Railroad. Indeed, their cellar contained a mysterious crawlspace that they could not otherwise account for. While the Underground Railroad story has never been substantiated, it is known that a freed African American woman lived with the family there and died in the house. The rest of her story is lost to history and can only be left to the imagination.



View from Dana's Bench in summer

Links:

Cobb Hill Cohousing: www.cobhill.org

Hartland Winter Trails: <http://www.hartlandwintertrails.org/>

Trail Use Guidelines

- Use the winter trail only when it has been tracked, and the three-season trail only from spring through fall.
- Dogs are not permitted on the groomed winter trails. Dogs are permitted on the three-season Dana's Trail if they are leashed.
- Trails are open from dawn to dusk.
- Stay on the trail; park only in the designated trailhead parking area.
- Be respectful of other trail users and be courteous to trail neighbors.
- Carry out what you carry in.
- Cobb Hill discourages but does not prohibit trail use during hunting season. The property is actively hunted, so if you walk the trail during that time, wear blaze orange for your safety.
- Follow [Leave No Trace guidelines](#).

Trail Maintenance Responsibility: It is the UVLT's responsibility to monitor and maintain the trails to ensure that no harmful erosion occurs as a result of public access. Residents of the [Cobb Hill community](#) often maintain the trails. [Hartland Winter Trails](#) maintains ski/snowshoeing trails in the winter, and [Vermont Association of Snow Travelers \(VAST\)](#) manages the snowmobile trail.

While these trails are available for public use free of charge, their maintenance depends on the good stewardship and financial support of users. Donations for the trail program may be sent to: Trails, Upper Valley Land Trust, 19 Buck Road, Hanover, NH 03755 or [donate online](#).

Please contact UVLT Vice President Stewardship [Pete Helm](#) (603-643-6626) to report trail maintenance needs or recommendations.