Hazen Trail

Wilder & Norwich, VT

Trail Map

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing*

Description: The Hazen Trail provides a great escape within close proximity to the largest population center in the Upper Valley. Connecting Norwich and Wilder, Vermont, the 1.5 mile trail traverses forest and farmland along the Connecticut River and connects with the Montshire Museum Ridge Trail. Its natural communities, cultural landscapes, and unique geological formations make for a fascinating and enjoyable hike. The trail corridor also provides a special ecological haven for wildlife that may otherwise be threatened by the development of the ever burgeoning Hanover area.

Photo 1: *Brookside Farm hayfield along the Hazen Trail*

To the south of the Montshire Museum property, the Hazen Trail runs through two properties conserved with the Upper Valley Land Trust. The 174-acre Brookside Farm was conserved in 1992, with funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. The trail is named Hazen in honor of the family who has owned the farm continuously for over two centuries. In 1998, the 21-acre Agri-Mark property at the southern end of the trail was also conserved, thanks to funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Watershed Grant Program. This area is now called the Maanawaka Conservation Area and is managed by the Hartford Conservation Commission.

Directions:

To start from the Montshire Museum, go up the hill from Ledyard Bridge and turn left onto Montshire Road before you reach the highway. Park along the side of the road and walk down the museum driveway to the Ridge Trail (right), which leads to the Hazen Trail (If you are visiting the museum and have purchased an admission sticker, you may use their parking area). To start from Wilder, go north on Route 5 through Wilder village. After passing Chestnut Street on the right, take the next right onto an unnamed, dirt road. The trail begins here, next to a metal gate.

Exploring the Hazen Trail

The **geological history** of the Upper Valley can be captured by a visit to the Hazen Trail. The Connecticut River runs roughly parallel to a discontinuity or **fault** in the earth's crust—an area of continental collision and separation. The difference in rock type between Vermont and New Hampshire can be explained by this fault. Vermont tends to have older sedimentary rock such as limestone and shale; New Hampshire has younger igneous and metamorphic rock such as granite.

The Hazen Trail boasts a view of what is arguably the region's most distinctive glacial artifact: **the Hanover Esker**. Eskers are formed when sediment is deposited in river tunnels that run in or under a glacier. When the mouths of these subsurface channels become clogged with debris, the sediment load carried by the water simply settles in the channel. The river level continues to move upward, building up the esker as it deposits more

and more debris along the same line. When the glacier melts, a long, narrow ridge remains. The Hanover Esker runs parallel to the Connecticut River on the New Hampshire side. Visitors can get a view of it from the second power-line cut along the trail, as well as from the open area just to the north of the cut.

Photo 2: *The Hanover Esker appears as a long, low ridge across the river*

The active geological history of the area is also evidenced by the numerous **bedrock upthrusts** along the Hazen Trail. These are the result of ancient faulting, when heat and pressure far below the earth's surface forced metamorphic greenschist up and over the existing bedrock. Cliffs of this greenschist were later created during glacial advancement. Then, at the end of the last Ice Age, the glaciers melted, smoothing the outcroppings and leaving large **glacial erratics** or boulders as they retreated. During this time, glacial melt formed the giant **Lake Hitchcock**. The lake slowly drained over thousands of years, down-cutting to form the present Connecticut River and leaving **terraces** that represent previous lake levels.

Photo 3: *Bedrock upthrusts along the trail*

It was upon one of these fertile terraces of silt and clay that Thomas Hazen III decided to settle and begin farming around 1770. In 1775, Hazen built a homestead that has since housed eight generations of his family and remains the oldest two-story house in Hartford. The historic homestead is currently included in the National Register of Historic Places. Hazen's **Brookside Farm** has been owned and farmed continuously by the same family for well over two centuries.

The farm adapted to the times, following the general agricultural trends of northern New England. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the Hazens raised sheep, and by the 1840s, the town of Hartford had eight times more sheep than humans. During the later half of the nineteenth century, the Brookside farm made the transition to dairy cows and eventually to beef cows. The farm supplemented its livestock with apple and maple products. Considering the farm's rich history and its importance to her family, Palla Hazen decided to conserve the Brookside Farm and allow for public access along the Hazen Trail. The trail skirts one of the farm's hayfields that is still used to support livestock production.

Beyond its distinctive geological and cultural history, the Hazen Trail corridor is home to a set of diverse natural communities. Its mix of hardwood and softwood forest makes for good birding opportunities, and the trail is designated as a **Connecticut River Birding Trail** site. According to Bill Shepard, CRBT Project Coordinator, "the glory of a forested birding walk is song." Singing longer through the season than almost any other bird, the Hermit Thrush is the Vermont state bird. The faint, flute-like song of the Red-eyed Vireo echoes throughout the forest even in the middle of a hot summer day. Another species of interest is the Eastern Kingbird, called king for a reason: its genus is Tyrannus tyrannus, and it is known for its aggressive nature over other birds.

Birds are not the only species of interest along the Hazen Trail. An old forest of **black locust** trees lies just to the south of the hayfield. A leguminous deciduous tree, the Black Locust is an aggressive invader species and a valuable source of timber. A form of ginseng called **blue cohosh** can also be found in the rich loam of shady forested areas along the trail. The plant grows to between one and three feet tall with small greenish-yellow flowers during the spring. Used medicinally by Native Americans to induce labor and menstruation, its rootstock is still harvested and used as a uterine stimulant and to treat rheumatism.

Photo 4: *Eastern Kingbird*

Photo 5: *Blue cohosh*

Trail Use Guidelines

- Carry out what you carry in.
- Stay on the trail and use only designated trailhead parking areas.
- Stay off trails during spring melt, when soils are soft and easily eroded.
- Be respectful of other trail users and be courteous to trail neighbors.
- Control your dog(s). Do not allow dogs to disturb livestock, wildlife, or sensitive natural areas. Pets are not allowed on some trails.
- Close farm gates behind you.
- For your safety during hunting seasons, wear blaze orange.
- Follow Leave No Trace guidelines.
- *Please note: there is a no-dog policy on the Montshire Museum's portion of the trail*

Trail Maintenance: Montshire Museum personnel take care of the trails on museum property. The Hartford Conservation Commission heads up trail maintenance on non-museum property. The UVLT monitors the trails approx. once a year and notifies the Hartford Conservation Commission of any interested potential volunteers.

While these trails are available for community 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.