



Rikert Broad Brook Trail & Veterans Memorial

Sharon/South Royalton, VT

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing*

Description: The Rikert Trail in Sharon and South Royalton, Vermont is many things. It is a special community resource, a rich and diverse habitat area, a memorial to American veterans of war, and a tribute to a man who loved nature, his land, and his country. The half-mile long trail traverses relatively easy terrain following Broad Brook. Along the trail is a granite bench inscribed with the words "Solace in Nature," as well as a plaque dedicating the area as a veteran's memorial. Visitors who know the story behind this trail can perceive not only solace in nature, but also a tangible sense of history and place.



Photo 1: *Veterans dedicate the Rikert Trail*

After a half a century of living on and managing his forested property, Hugh Rikert wanted to assure that it would be cared for after he was gone. The Upper Valley Land Trust understood how important this was to Rikert and, in 1998, helped him to place a conservation easement on his 22 acre property. The easement allows for public access to a trail. To this end, the Rikert Trail was established with the help of the Sharon Conservation Commission.

Directions

From the junction of Routes 14 and 132 in Sharon, follow Route 13 north for 0.4 miles and turn left onto River Road. Continue along River Road for 1.4 miles, passing under the I-89 overpass, until you reach Broad Brook Cemetery. Turn left on Broad Brook Road and go 0.8 miles. Turn right onto Harlow Road and continue for 0.8 miles to a trailhead pull-off on your right. Trail entrance is across the gravel road from the pull-off.

Exploring the Rikert Trail

In the words of Hugh Rikert: "I was born on the 11th hour of the 13th day of the 11th month of the 13th year of the century. They're all odd numbers, so it follows that I'm odd too." While he chose "odd," perhaps a better word to describe Rikert and his legacy would be distinctive or unique. After serving in World War II in the Aleutian Islands and in France, Italy, and Norway, he purchased the 22 acre Sharon/South Royalton property in 1948. Rikert tried his hand at farming, but soon realized that his small property could not produce much of a yield. Rikert enrolled in forestry courses and discovered a new passion. He spent time working for the New England Forestry Foundation and began to manage his own land.

Rikert lived a frugal and simple life, owning nothing of value except his land and choosing **trees over money**. Rikert related to a Valley News reporter, "I made up my mind I didn't want it to go to building lots or shopping malls or something, so I said to myself, I'll plant the trees. And 'course, that didn't (win) favor with everybody else. Human nature, you know. They want building lots. Quick money. So I made up my mind to get it into trees as quick as possible." To this end, Rikert experimented with planting white and red pine, Norway spruce, larch, locust, oak, and black walnut, some of which he sprouted from seed. Some of the stands that Rikert planted over 50 years ago will soon reach a harvestable size.



Photo 2: *Hugh Rikert with his homemade snowshoes*

Rikert instinctively understood the importance of **biodiversity and ecosystem health** long before they became buzzwords: “The more we do toward preserving species of different plants, the better we’ll be in the end. Same with wild animals, as far as that goes. Except woodchucks. They pick on my garden” (*Valley News*, November 8, 1998). Rikert respected all species (except woodchucks) for their individual roles in the ecosystem, as well as for their potential use-value for humans. He concentrated much of his energy on those species traditionally under-appreciated by foresters. For example, Rikert used the strong but flexible wood of the hop hornbeam tree to make his snowshoes. Because of his keen understanding of ecology and passion for trees, the property is lush and full of diversity.

Beyond its trees, the Rikert Trail showcases a wide variety of **fern species**. Common along the trail is the **Interrupted Fern**, whose bright green fronds can reach to human heights. Other fern species found in abundance along the trail include: **Fancy or Intermediate Woodfern**, with its delicate and lacy appearance; **Sensitive or Bead Fern**, which wilts at the first sign of frost and can be identified by its coarsely divided, simple leaflets; **Maidenhair Fern**, whose unusual fronds grow in a circular or semi-circular shape; **Christmas Fern**, whose dark green, leathery leaflets remain green year-round; and **Marginal Woodfern**, with its large spore cases dominating the underside “margins” of the sub-leaflets. Ferns are a good indicator of ecosystem health and diversity because each species has specific habitat conditions (pH, humidity, light levels, soil type, temperature, etc.) in which it can survive.

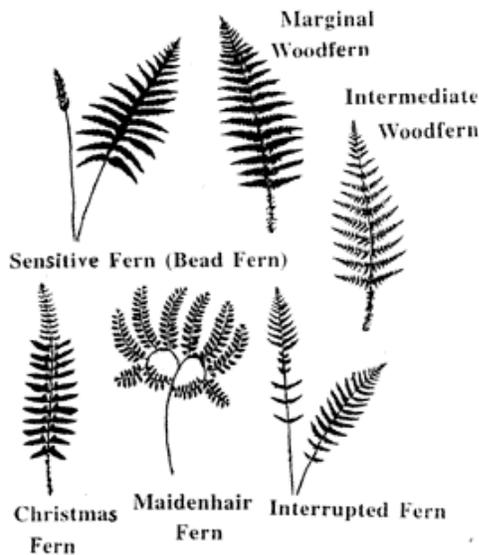


Photo 3: *Identifying fern species*



Photo 4: *Ferns along the Rikert Trail*

Rikert’s desire to conserve his land was closely tied to his wish to dedicate his land as a **memorial forest to veterans** and to those who have lost their lives or loved ones in service to their country. He told *Valley News*, “It seems to me it’s a more appropriate way of remembering what the veterans have done for this country than would be just a big stone slab. It’s something alive.” A plaque affixed within a rock has since been erected along

the trail. It is a reminder of Rikert's dual appreciation for those who served their country and for the solace to be found in the natural world.

Hugh Rikert passed away on October 10, 2000 at the age of 86. He lived to see the fruition of his greatest desires—the protection of his beloved land and its dedication to American veterans of war. Today, it is as if these woods are watched over by the generous spirit of Hugh Rikert, whose legacy will protect them forever. Rikert's long-time friend and the co-owner of his property for many years, Robert Creesy, says of the trail: "it is nicely laid out and lends just the sort of peacefulness that Hugh was after."



Photo 5: *This natural area is dedicated to veterans and to those who have lost their lives or loved ones in service to their country. In 1998, World War II veteran Hugh Rikert permanently conserved this place with the Upper Valley Land Trust, so that fellow veterans and their families may find peace and rejuvenation in its natural beauty and serenity, as he did.*



Photo 6: *Solace in nature*

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](#).

Trail Maintenance: It is UVLT's responsibility to monitor and maintain the trail. However, local volunteers assist with much of the maintenance. [Sharon Academy](#) students have assisted with trail projects in the past.

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 Stewardship Director Jason Berard (603-643-6626) to report trail maintenance needs or recommendations.