



Sleepers Meadow

Newbury, VT

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing*



The trails at Sleepers Meadow take visitors on a journey that begins at a historic farmstead, travels through vast meadows with views of the White Mountains and the Fairlee Palisades, and continues into peaceful and secluded forests. With approximately 1.5 miles of moderate terrain, Sleepers Meadow can provide a short get-away or hours of exploration. Complementing its scenic, recreational, and historic value, the property is also home to a Vital Communities Valley Quest—a place-based, educational treasure hunt.

Photo 1: *Saddleback field at Sleepers Meadow*

Directions

From the intersection of Routes 5 and 25, go north on Route 5 through Bradford village and past Oxbow High School. Continue 3.7 miles from this point to a large barn on the west side of the road (0.4 miles beyond Snake Road). A sign for Sleepers Meadow is leaning against the barn. Please park next to the trailhead parking sign, just off the side of the driveway between the barn and the flower beds.

Exploring Sleepers Meadow

Sleepers Meadow was named after the first white settler, Samuel Sleeper, to discover it and camp there in 1762. During the American Revolution, the property was purchased by Joseph White. The Whites built the **English-style barn** and **Georgian house** circa 1785, both of which are now on the Vermont Historic Register. Today the barn remains the largest of its architectural style in the state. White and his family did not occupy the farm for long. They were soon run out of town because of his English loyalties and his involvement in a plot to kidnap a local patriot. White left the property to his brother, Doctor Samuel White. Dr. White was an esteemed surgeon and practitioner of herbal medicine throughout the region, traveling as far as Saratoga to tend to those wounded in battle.



Photo 2: *English-style barn, circa 1785*

Not long after the Revolution, ownership of Sleepers Meadow passed from the Whites to the Chamberlains. Then in 1815, the Eastman family bought the farm. Caught up in the Merino sheep craze that hit northern New England in the first half of the 19th century, the Eastmans made the transition from subsistence to larger-scale farming and expanded the barn in the 1830s. However, the sheep heyday died out at mid-century, as agriculture moved westward to more fertile farmland. At the same time, the Eastmans lost several of their daughters in a scarlet fever epidemic. The family decided to make the move west to start anew. They sold the farm to C.C. Doe who introduced horse breeding to Sleepers Meadow. The Does built a Victorian mansion on a nearby hillside; the farmhouse was occupied by tenants who ran the farm.



Photo 3: *Historic South Newbury Post Office*

For the first half of the 20th century, Sleepers Meadow was owned by the Hildreth family. It was under this ownership that Sleepers Meadow became the hub of activity in South Newbury. Hildreth moved his **General Merchandise, Feed, and Grain Store** to the farm, along with the **South Newbury Post Office**, after its previous location on the banks of the Connecticut River was flooded. The post office was set up in 1913 in the shed attached to the rear of the house, using the since-retired zip code 05066.

Throughout the 1920s, the Hildreth family also rented out guest rooms in the farmhouse; the children slept in the barn during the summer months to make room for these travelers. On a visit to Massachusetts, the family saw small **tourist cabins** and decided to build some on their property. These cottages, built in 1930, were the first along Route 5 north of Massachusetts. The cottages were popular until the spread of modern motels in the 1950s, which took away much of the overnight business. However, the cottages were made into “house-keeping cabins” in the late 1950s, allowing guests to stay for extended summer vacations. The tourist cabins remained in operation until 2001.

In 1952, Sleepers Meadow was bought by the Whitney family. Roscoe Whitney was drawn to the size of the barn—which was large enough for the 100 head of cattle he needed to support his large family—and to the historic value of the farmhouse. After their neighbor’s house burnt down because of a lack of accessible water, the family decided to safeguard their own historic farmstead by creating a permanent water source. They built the **farm pond**, which is visible from both the Rim Walk and Mount Hag trails, in the mid-1950’s for fire protection and for use by livestock. When Roscoe Whitney died in 1959, his wife Isabel and her step-daughter’s husband, Charlie Cole, took over operations. Isabel remained the South Newbury postmaster until the post office was consolidated in 1982 and ran the tourist cabins as well. She was also a weather observer for the National Weather Service for nearly a half century.

The trails at Sleepers Meadow pass through a large **saddleback field**—a flat valley between two hills and above the main river valley. The topography of the field is the result of ancient down-cutting of the Connecticut River. It provides far-off views of the White Mountains, along with a sense of seclusion from the surrounding roads. In the middle of the meadow is a rocky hump of slightly higher elevation than the surrounding field. Selenda Girardin—daughter of Roscoe and Isabel Whitney and the current owner of the property—and her playmates called this “**Maple Island**” during their childhood games of make-believe. Whether it is for a game of make-

believe or just to sit peacefully and enjoy the view, Maple Island is still a special place to visit.



Photo 4: *Sleepers Meadow tourist cabin, 1930*



Photo 5: *Farm pond*

Throughout the past century and a half, reforestation has made open meadow habitat increasingly rare in northern New England. **Open meadows** such as Sleepers Meadow are important to overall ecological health and biodiversity because they provide habitat for plant and animal species that cannot survive in forest cover. Birds nest in the tall grasses, certain species of raptors hunt for their prey, and reptiles bask on sunny rocks. Open meadows are also, however, an ecological haven for invasive weed species such as dandelion, ragweed, oxeye daisy, Canada bluegrass, and many others. The clearing and farming of these areas depleted the nutrients in the already thin layer of topsoil, allowing for the invasion of non-native, sun-loving species with the ability to withstand harsh conditions.



Photo 6: *Make-believe on Maple Island*

Since the days when Selenda Girardin played make-believe on Maple Island, Sleepers Meadow has become a quieter place. The family ceased farming in 1988, although they have allowed some of their neighbors to continue using the property for cultivation, pasturage, and haying. With the passing of her mother in 2000 at age 91, Selenda took over care of the historic homestead. Visitors will be immediately amazed by the beauty of her abundant gardens of daylilies. Having lived at Sleepers Meadow for the vast majority of her life, Selenda's love of the place shines through: "For just about 50 years, my family has enjoyed the peace, discovery, and usefulness of this particular area of the Upper Valley and it is very gratifying to know that this special place is now preserved for us and for others who can enjoy it on foot" (Selenda Girardin, "On the Trails at Sleepers Meadow," Behind the Times, October 2001).



Photo 7: *Selenda's gardens and the barn at Sleepers Meadow*

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](#).

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 at contactus@uvlt.org or 603-643-6626 to report trail maintenance needs or recommendations.