Cossingham Road Farm Trails

Norwich, VT

Trail Map

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing*



Photo 1: *"fields and forests at Cossingham Road Farm"*

The trails at Cossingham Road Farm in Norwich, Vermont take visitors on an escape through open fields and managed forests. Here traditional outdoor recreation is the name of the game, with the Appalachian Trail a stone's throw away and 6 kilometers of trails designed for cross-country skiing. The area is truly a community resource. Covering moderate terrain with a few steep areas, the trails were designed and built by John Morton of Morton Outdoors and forester Greg Chase.

The conservation of the 120-acre Cossingham Road Farm is the result of the tenacious efforts of Liz Russell, who owned land abutting the Sise family property. With its sale on the horizon, Russell wished to see the property conserved. However, she was unsure how to secure the funds needed to buy both the property and its development rights. It was then that the idea of selling her family's summer home in Rhode Island came to her. The home was built by her great-grandfather in 1904, and, even considering its upcoming maintenance needs, deciding to sell was not easy. But with the money from the sale Russell was able accomplish her goal of conserving the property. Furthermore, she decided to include a provision for public access in the 2002 conservation easement with the Upper Valley Land Trust.

Directions: Head north on Main Street through Norwich. After passing Dan & Whit's, turn left onto Beaver Meadow Road and follow for 0.4 mile to Bragg Hill Road. Turn left and proceed 1.2 miles. Turn left on Cossingham Road and proceed 100 yards to Trail Parking sign on your right.

Exploring Cossingham Road Farm:

Visitors to Cossingham Road Farm will cross rolling fields that speak to the farm's **agricultural history**. During the 19th century, the Cossinghams, who moved to Norwich from Virginia, owned some 600 acres of productive farmland. Over time, portions of their property were divided up and sold. In 1947, the Sise family bought an area of approximately 180 acres—which includes the current Cossingham Road Farm—for $3,600. Although the Sises did not continue to actively farm the property, Russell sees its rural agricultural tradition as important. To that end, she hosts various livestock, which help to keep the open portions of the conserved property from reverting back to forest cover.



Photo 2: *"guest cow working hard to uphold the farming tradition"*

Cossingham Road Farm has great value in its opportunities for year-round, outdoor recreation. In a community with a strong **cross-country ski tradition**, open and accessible areas for winter recreation are invaluable. Russell points out that, until the

late 1980s, people were free to ski pretty much wherever they pleased, and property owners did not feel threatened. Things have since become less informal: the public is just not as welcome on private land, and areas for outdoor recreation must be organized by trails alliances, town committees, etc. Russell is happy to provide an area for community members to recreate: "People are so excited to have a place that is a defined area—a welcome place. They are always so gracious." Russell's positive experience of opening up her property to respectful and gracious users can set an example and encourage other generous property owners to consider doing the same.



Photo 3: *"enjoying the winter on skis and snowshoes"*

Cossingham Road Farm's proximity to the **Appalachian Trail** further increases its value as a recreation area. The 2,164-mile AT crosses the Connecticut River in the area, skirting Cossingham Road Farm on its way. An official access point is located off of Cossingham Road—a short distance past the end of the maintained portion of the road. Small community trails within such close proximity to the AT, such as those at Cossingham Road Farm, compliment the greater AT corridor by increasing its scenic value and extending the values of outdoor recreation to local communities.

The value of community places in which to recreate is enhanced by the natural character of the area. Cossingham Road Farm boasts a variety of natural habitats and ecological features of interest. Nearly 70 species of birds have been identified by sight or sound on the farm. If they are lucky, visitors may see moose tracks or a barred owl along the forested portions of the trail. A hawk's nest sits high in a maple tree near the height of land (at the extreme back end of the West Loop), and an area of late-successional Hemlock along the ravine provides good winter habitat for deer.

Also near the height of land (and to the right of the trail when traveling counter-clockwise around the West Loop), is a **vernal pool**. Ponds such as this one exist only from the wet spring months until they dry up in late summer. Still, they play an important role in the ecosystem, especially as habitat for amphibians. For example, the spotted salamander ventures out of its home in the forest floor only to use vernal pools as breeding ground in the springtime. Because of their ephemeral nature, vernal pools have fewer predators for the salamander. The male deposits sperm for the female to collect. She then lays her eggs in the vernal pool, where the young hatch and go through several transformations to prepare them for a terrestrial life.



Photo 4: *"vernal pool"*

Also of note along the trail is the large, uprooted "tip-up mound" of a blown-over tree. Such a mound marks the beginning of the creation of **pillow-cradle topography**. When the roots of a tree are ripped out of the ground during a wind event, a large amount of earth comes with them. This leaves a pit, next to which the decaying roots and earth create a mound—hence the "pillow" and "cradle." This particular mound (to the left of the trail about one-third of the way along the West Loop) has not progressed very far in this process. Pillow-cradle

topography is arguably the longest lasting forest evidence: up to 800 years after the disturbance, the bumpy topography of the forest floor can reveal the particulars of an ancient wind-event.



Photo 5: *"tip-up mound"*

The contrast of forest and field, ecological and cultural history, conservation and use makes Cossingham Road Farm a unique community resource. Its trails provide solace and reflection, exercise and recreation, lessons in ecology, and a tribute to land conservation all at once. Russell recognizes the value of her property: "I love it—it's a beautiful piece of land and it's very peaceful up there. It has a sense of quiet and openness—even in the woods. It's liberating and very restorative."



Photo 6: *"Cossingham Road Farm, photograph by John Cossingham"*

Links:
Appalachian Trail Conference: www.appalachiantrail.org

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: The landowner mows the trails. The Norwich Trails Committee assists with most other trail maintenance. The UVLT monitors the trails once a year and provides assistance, if needed.

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