

SWEETS & SIDES TO BRING  
TO A HOLIDAY FEAST

WINTER WEEKEND  
IN WOODSTOCK



WINTER  
2023

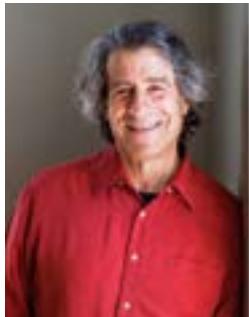
# Our Vermont

*Yours to experience—  
the traditions, people, and places  
of the Green Mountain State*

# Giving Thanks

I have never counted and I am certain I never will, but in my nearly 45 years here at *Yankee* I figure I have either written or edited several thousand stories, with nearly all being about people and places and extraordinary happenings in New England's six states. This is the most compact region in the country—in which a traveler can experience mountains, ocean, villages, and cities within a few hours' drive—so it might be easy to think our states are interchangeable. Of course, we know they are not.

Emily Dickinson once wrote that she thought “New Englandly.” And I know what she means by that. But I also believe there is a “Vermontly” sense of belonging to the Green Mountain State, this place that seems unlike any other.



That “Vermontly” feeling is what has made the *Our Vermont* project so enjoyable for us here at *Yankee*. Four times a year, as the seasons flowed one into the other, managing editor Jenn Johnson designed a collection of stories and images that, for us, help define Vermont. Some of the articles have come from *Yankee*'s archives; others from our recent interviews and road trips to meet Vermonters now. When the pages come together, we see the landscape, the people, the food, the essence of this individualist state looking back at us.

Those of you reading these words who live here will understand what I mean. If you live elsewhere (and judging by the letters we've received, many of you do), take the advice I gave in my very first letter of this series, and come visit Vermont: “Drive slow, windows down. Wild turkeys will be loitering in the bushes. Be alert for the flick of a deer’s white tail. Try to get lost. The roads will always lead somewhere special.”

This holiday issue marks our farewell to *Our Vermont*, but the Green Mountain State will always hold a special place among us at *Yankee*. As I type these words, *Yankee* is putting together its own winter issue, and inside is a photo story by Shelburne photographer Jim Westphalen, whose images capture the timelessness he finds in the villages and along the back roads of Vermont.

We thank The Vermont Country Store for the opportunity to know its home state in a deeper way than ever before. It is hard to imagine any store anywhere that holds a place as close to its heart as this one.

*Mel Allen*

Mel Allen  
editor@yankeepub.com

# YANKEE

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*On the cover: The Beach Gallery and Lodge log cabins take on a fairy-tale glitter during the Shelburne Museum's annual Winter Lights display.*

*Photo by Adam Silverman*

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# With Lots of Love

*No matter what is written in holiday cards, they say so much more.*

**M**y mother's favorite part of the Christmas season was the exchange of cards. "It's the one time of year I get to hear the news," she would explain. She did not live far from where she was born and raised, but many of her friends, following the end of World War II, had settled in faraway places.

Sometime in November, she would set up the card table in her bedroom, organize the cards and envelopes around her, and begin. Like a scholar bent over an important work, she would spend days crafting her cards, writing each one individually. In her round, open script, she shared what mattered to each of these far-flung friends. A little tower of plump, sealed envelopes would slowly rise beside her. Once, in the 1950s, a cousin of hers began the tradition of sending out typed newsletters, not even signed personally. My mother felt cheated by this mass production of the yearly greeting.

She always tried to get her cards into the mail by the first week of December. She sent them off as if on the wings of carrier pigeons. She expected something in return.

And her wish was always granted. Waiting for the mail truck to ease away from the mailbox, she would pull on her coat, wrap her head in a woolen scarf, and tuck her feet into her fleece-lined boots for the walk up the driveway, often through new-fallen snow. She would return, clutching the thick, square envelopes, sometimes red or green, like prizes. "There's one from Claire!" she would exclaim. Claire, her next-door neighbor growing up, was by then living in Florida, the wife of an Army captain, and she always wrote the long messages for which my mother hungered.

My mother wouldn't open the cards right away but leave them unopened on the hall table. When my father would come home from work, they opened them together and sometimes read them out loud. My sister and I would sit with them and hear about friends like Claire, whom we had never met, but about whom we knew a great deal.



Some of my friends today have abandoned sending cards. Too expensive, they explain. Too time-consuming. But, like my mother, I never want to lose touch. Without Christmas cards, I would never know that the little boys I once baby-sat for are now men with interesting jobs and children about to go away to college. *How can it be?* I wonder to myself. Another friend is getting divorced, and yet another married. All that life has to offer seems to unfold on this little Christmas stage, which, for my mother, began at a card table.

And so, starting in November, I settle at the kitchen table and begin to write. My mother would be disheartened to know that most of us, by now, have adopted the method of her forward-thinking cousin, recounting the major events of our year in newsletter style. For the rest, the part that counts, I sometimes stay up till midnight, scribbling personal notes, watching snow fall, and, in the morning, mail them off with lots of love and the strong hope of a return. —*Edie Clark*

# Guest Stars

*Side dishes and desserts to complete anyone's holiday feast—including your own.*



PHOTOS BY ADAM DETOUR  
STYLING BY CATRINE KELTY

## Herbed Sausage Dressing

**1 loaf (about 1 pound) soft French or Italian bread, cut into 1-inch cubes  
1 stick (½ cup) salted butter  
2 cups finely chopped yellow onions  
1 cup finely chopped celery  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley  
3 tablespoons chopped fresh sage  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme  
1 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed  
2 large eggs  
2½ cups reduced-sodium chicken stock**

Preheat your oven to 275°F. Arrange the bread cubes in a single layer on two baking sheets and bake until they are completely crisp and dried, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and place the bread cubes into

a large mixing bowl. Increase the oven temperature to 350°F and grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the onions, celery, garlic, salt, and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 8 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the herbs, then transfer to the bowl with the bread cubes.

In the same skillet, cook the sausage over medium-high, breaking it up into small pieces using two forks, until just cooked through and starting to brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Add this to the bread cubes. In a small bowl, whisk together the eggs and chicken stock. Pour over the bread cubes and mix until the ingredients are thoroughly combined and the bread is soft.

Transfer the dressing to the prepared baking dish, cover tightly with foil, and bake for 40 minutes. Remove the foil and continue baking until the top has browned and the internal temperature has reached 165°F, about 30 minutes more. *Yields 8 servings.*



## Creamed Spinach with Almond Bread Crumb Topping

### FOR THE SPINACH

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (1 stick) salted butter, plus more for the baking dish
- 3 12-ounce packages frozen spinach, thawed and drained
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup all-purpose flour
- 4 large cloves garlic, finely minced
- 3 cups warm milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons sour cream (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

### FOR THE TOPPING

- 2 tablespoons salted butter, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup panko bread crumbs
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup slivered almonds
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat your oven to 400°F and set a rack to the middle position. Butter a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and set aside.

Remove most of the water from the spinach by squeezing it. It doesn't have to be bone-dry, but you want to get most of the liquid out.

Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the flour and garlic, and whisk until smooth and glossy. Add the milk, 1 cup at a time, whisking as you go. Keep whisking until thickened and smooth. Add the Parmesan cheese, sour cream, nutmeg, and salt. Stir, then add the spinach and stir until evenly combined. Pour into the prepared pan.

To make the topping, stir together the butter, panko, almonds, cheese, and salt, then sprinkle over the spinach. Transfer to the oven and bake until the topping is nicely browned and the spinach mixture is bubbling, 20 to 25 minutes. If you want the topping even browner, run it briefly under a broiler on the lowest setting. *Yields 8 to 10 servings.*

'Tis the Season



## Maple-Pecan Sweet Potato Casserole

*Blending the sweet potatoes in a food processor instead of mashing yields an airy, velvety puree that bakes up light and smooth.*

**4 tablespoons salted butter, melted**  
**3 pounds sweet potatoes**  
**1 cup chopped pecans**  
**¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar**  
**2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided**  
**½ teaspoon kosher salt**  
**6 tablespoons salted butter, softened and cut into 1-inch pieces**

**2 large eggs**  
**½ cup pure Vermont maple syrup**  
**¼ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Preheat your oven to 425°F and grease a 9-by-13-inch (or 3-quart) baking dish.

Scrub the sweet potatoes, place on a foil-lined baking sheet, and pierce all over with a fork. Bake until very tender, about one hour. Remove from the oven, reduce the oven temperature to 350°F, and allow the sweet potatoes to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, make the pecan topping: In a bowl, use a fork to stir together the pecans, brown sugar, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and kosher salt. Add the melted butter, stir until combined, and set aside.

When the sweet potatoes are just cool enough to handle, scoop them out and place the flesh into a food processor. Add the softened butter, eggs, maple syrup, nutmeg, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and black pepper and blend until silky smooth. Add salt if needed. Pour into the baking dish, sprinkle the topping evenly over the top, and bake until lightly browned and puffed around the edges, about 40 minutes. *Yields 8 servings.*

## Raspberry-Almond Linzer Bars

*The combination of almonds and raspberries in traditional Linzer cookies is unbeatable, but rolling and cutting dough takes time. Our solution? Linzer bars—just as delicious, in half the time.*

- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 cup almond flour**
- ½ cup powdered sugar, plus more for sprinkling**
- 1 teaspoon almond extract**
- ½ teaspoon table salt**
- 1¼ cups unsalted butter, cut into chunks**
- ¾ cup raspberry jam**

Preheat your oven to 350°F and set a rack to the middle position. Line a 9-by-13-inch pan with parchment paper, leaving extra parchment to hang over the sides (to lift the bars out of the pan later).

Put the all-purpose flour, almond flour, powdered sugar, almond extract, and salt in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse a few times to combine. Sprinkle the butter over the dry ingredients and process until the mixture comes together in a dough.

Using your fingers, press three-quarters of the dough into the pan. It should be even in thickness, but doesn't need to be perfectly smooth. Spread the jam over the bottom layer. Break the remaining dough into grape-size pieces and sprinkle it over the jam. Transfer to the oven and bake until the crust is light golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes. Let the bars cool in the pan for about 20 minutes. Lift out of the pan and set on a wire rack to cool completely. Dust with powdered sugar, then cut into squares. *Yields 12 bars.*

'Tis the Season



## Mocha Bundt Cake with Coffee Drizzle

*This cake uses the old-fashioned technique of adding hot liquid (a mixture of butter, cocoa, and coffee) to the dry ingredients, which gives it an incredibly moist crumb and rich chocolate flavor.*

### FOR THE CAKE

- Nonstick baking spray
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, cut into small chunks
- 1½ cups fresh hot coffee
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder

- ¼ cup buttermilk
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### FOR THE COFFEE DRIZZLE

- 2–3 tablespoons strong coffee or espresso, cooled
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- Pinch salt
- Chocolate curls, for garnish

Preheat your oven to 350°F and set a rack to the middle position. Spray the Bundt pan with baking spray. Set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking soda, and salt.

In a medium saucepan over medium

heat, combine the butter, coffee, and cocoa powder. Whisk constantly until the mixture is smooth and bubbling at the edges, then remove from heat.

Pour the still-hot cocoa mixture into the dry ingredients and fold in with a spatula until just combined. Add the buttermilk, eggs, and vanilla and stir until smooth. Pour the batter into the Bundt pan and bake until the cake is pulling away from the sides and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean, 45 to 55 minutes. Remove from the oven and let sit in the pan for several minutes. Holding a cooling rack over the top of the pan, turn the cake over onto the rack, and remove the

pan. Set the rack over a rimmed baking sheet to cool completely.

Then, make the drizzle: In a medium bowl, pour 2 tablespoons coffee over the powdered sugar and salt, then stir until smooth. The drizzle should be loose enough to pour but thick enough to cling. If the mixture is too thick, add more coffee, one teaspoon at a time; if it's too thin, add more sugar. Pour the drizzle over the cake so that it drips down the sides and any excess collects on the baking sheet. Let the frosting set for 5 minutes, then decorate with chocolate curls. Let the frosting completely set before serving. *Yields 8 to 10 servings.*



## Spiced Cranberry Swirl Meringues

*These fluffy meringue cookies swirled with spiced cranberry sauce look like Christmas itself.*

### FOR THE CRANBERRY PUREE

- 1 cup cranberries
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¾ cup water
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

### FOR THE MERINGUES

- 4 egg whites, at room temperature
- ¾ teaspoon cream of tartar
- Pinch table salt
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¾ cup granulated sugar

First, make the puree: In a saucepan, combine berries, sugar, water, and spices. Stir over medium-high heat until sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil, reduce to medium-low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the berries burst and the sauce has slightly thickened, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a blender and puree. Let cool completely.

Next, make the meringues: Preheat your oven to 225°F and line a pair of baking sheets with parchment paper. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, combine the egg whites, cream of tartar, salt, and vanilla and beat at medium-high speed until soft peaks form. Carefully add the sugar in a slow stream and continue to beat until the meringue is thick and glossy and forms stiff peaks.

Scoop ½-cup mounds of the meringue onto the baking sheets, leaving about ½ inch of space between them. Use a small offset spatula or the back of a spoon to shape the mounds into circles.

Using the back of a teaspoon, make a slight impression in the meringue, then fill it with the puree. Use the tip of a knife to swirl the puree through the meringue. Be as gentle as possible so the meringue doesn't deflate.

Place the baking sheets in the oven and bake until meringues are dry to the touch, about 1½ hours, rotating the pans halfway through. Turn the oven off and allow them to cool completely inside the oven for at least 3 hours and up to overnight.

Store in a sealed container at room temperature for up to a week. *Yields about 12 meringues.*

## Pear-Apple-Cranberry Pandowdy

### FOR THE CRUST

1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface  
1 tablespoon granulated sugar  
¾ teaspoon table salt  
½ cup chilled unsalted butter, cut into small cubes  
4–6 tablespoons ice water  
Milk, for brushing crust

### FOR THE FILLING

6 pears, peeled and cut into 1½-inch chunks  
4 apples, peeled and cut into 1½-inch chunks  
½ cup granulated sugar  
3 tablespoons cornstarch  
Juice and zest of ½ orange  
1½ cups cranberries (thawed if frozen)

Whisk together the flour, sugar, and salt until well combined. Sprinkle the butter cubes over the flour mixture, and use your fingers to smear them in. Stop when the mixture looks like cornmeal with some pea-size bits of butter remaining. Sprinkle 4 tablespoons ice water on top, and stir with a fork until the dough begins to come together. If needed, add another 1 to 2 tablespoons ice water.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead three times, or just enough to make it cohesive. Gather into a ball; then press into a disc and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate 30 minutes.

Preheat your oven to 425°F and set a rack to the middle position. Arrange the fruit chunks in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet with sides at least 2 inches high. Sprinkle with the sugar, cornstarch and orange juice and zest, then use a spatula to mix gently. Sprinkle the berries over the fruit mixture.

Roll out the chilled dough into a rectangle about 9 inches wide, 11 inches long, and ¼ inch thick. Using a knife or pizza cutter, cut into squares roughly 3 inches across. Arrange the squares over the fruit, laying them slightly over each other to create a shingled effect. Brush with the milk.

Bake until juices are bubbling and the pastry is golden brown, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and use a spatula to gently press the pastry down into the juices so it's partly submerged. Return the pan to the oven to bake for an additional 10 to 15 minutes, until the pastry is nicely glazed and the sauce has thickened. *Yields 8 servings.*



# A Worthy Bird

*With time-tested cooking advice from  
the Yankee food editors, this just might be  
the only turkey recipe you'll ever need.*



## COOKING the Turkey:

**1** Line up a source for a fresh local bird. Plan on  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 pound per person, remembering that (if your oven allows) two 14-pounders will be tastier than one 28-pound behemoth.

**2** The day before, remove the innards. Set liver aside. Cover neck, gizzard, and heart with water, 6 cups or so for a 14-pound bird. Add a chunked carrot, a coarsely chopped onion, half a bay leaf, and a small sprig of thyme or pinch of dried thyme leaves. Simmer gently, uncovered, for 2 hours or so. Strain broth and measure it. Discard vegetables. Chop and refrigerate the gizzard, heart, and meat from the neck (henceforth known as the giblets) and the broth.

**3** Early on the Big Day, start stuffing, but don't assemble or insert until shortly before roasting; it should be at room temperature when it goes in, yet shouldn't sit around.

**4** Allow  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 hours for a 12- to 14-pounder, 8 to 10 minutes more for each additional pound. Add 20 minutes to the total to permit juice settling and gravy making.

**5** Heat the oven to 400°F. Put a buttered rack in a shallow roasting pan not too much bigger than the turkey. Cut 3 or 4 pieces of heavy, untreated cotton twine, about 18 inches long, and drape at equal intervals across the center of the rack.

Rinse the turkey inside and out, pat it dry, and sprinkle both cavity and skin with salt and pepper. Stuff loosely, leaving room

for expansion during cooking, then close with turkey skewers or sew up with kitchen thread. Tie the legs together and tuck the wings close to the body.

**6** Place the turkey on the rack. Loosely gather the ends of the strings and set them on the rack just behind the tail. Saturate a piece of cheesecloth with melted butter and drape it over the breast. Place a tent of foil over the breast, shiny side up. Put the turkey in the oven, breast toward the door, and reduce heat to 350°F.

**7** When one-fourth of the allotted time has passed, lift the foil and pour about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of broth (made from extra turkey parts, not Step 2) slowly over the bird. Replace foil and turn the pan 90 degrees, so that the turkey is facing left or right. (If your oven is too small, give the pan a 180.) At half-cooked, remove foil and cheesecloth, add another  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup liquid, and turn so the breast faces the back of the oven (a 180 again).

Don't add liquid after this point. Basting doesn't moisten directly; it creates steam under the bird—and tastier gravy over it. Using too much, or adding liquid, makes leathery skin and flabby meat.

At three-fourths cooked, rub the bird all over with the end of a stick of butter. Rotate 90 degrees.

**8** Take the turkey from the oven when an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thick part of the thigh registers 170°F. Use a pancake turner to loosen the bird from the rack, then gather the strings up over the back and lift 'er onto a heated platter. Pull the strings away. Put the turkey in a warm place; tenting it with foil will hold heat in but will also steam the skin and make it less crisp.

## MAKING the Gravy:

**9** Pour the juices from the pan into a fat-separating pitcher with measuring marks. The amount of fat-free juice plus the amount of Step 2 broth equals your total number of cups of liquid. Return 1 tablespoon of fat to the roasting pan for each cup of liquid. Supplement with butter if there isn't enough fat from the turkey. Stir twice as much flour. (Three cups liquid needs 3 tablespoons fat and 6 tablespoons flour.)

**10** Put the roasting pan over two burners on medium-low heat. Cook the flour mixture, stirring often, for 4 or 5 minutes, then slowly whisk in the cool broth—hot liquid makes lumps. Add the reserved pan juices and simmer the mixture, stirring and scraping to get the browned bits, until the gravy is thickened to a smooth, coating consistency. It will not be super-thick. Cut the liver into small cubes and stir them in along with the chopped giblets. The gravy is done as soon as the liver is cooked, in about 3 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. —Leslie Land





'Tis the Season

# Take a Bough

*How to decorate for Christmas with elegant—and even unexpected—greenery from your own backyard.*



TANA TEEL/STOCKSY

I confess: Even though my family lives on a farm and has evergreens all around, we buy our Christmas tree. We buy the roping that twines our lampposts and the wreath that hangs on our door. But something is there in the New England spirit that balks at purchased greenery, and it doesn't seem like Christmas to me until I prowl around the property, pruners in hand, basket over arm, gathering improvements that will make the decorations our own. Here are some suggestions for enhancing your own holiday greenery.

**Needle-leaf species:** By holiday time it's perfectly safe to prune evergreens without risk of promoting late, soft growth that can be winter-killed. Pines, firs, spruces, cedars, hemlocks, and junipers should be shaped judiciously, because they will not re-sprout from bare wood. Make thinning cuts to remove too-long or crossing branches, and never cut the central leader unless you want your tree to become a bush. Yews will grow back from bare wood and may be pruned as hard as you wish. Sheared hedges won't yield much unless you allowed them to get really shaggy last summer.

**Broad-leaf shrubs:** These are less hardy and therefore less common in New England gardens, but rhododendrons, kalmia or mountain laurel, mahonia, pieris and andromeda, and the tougher hollies are all likely to be around. Pruning these in winter is safe, but you will be sacrificing future bloom, so confine your cuts to removing badly placed branches. Cut them back to just above a branch fork.

**Berries to look for:** Winterberries, barberries, bittersweet, burning bush or euonymous, and wild roses are all fast growers that you can cut freely. Trim the thorns from stem bases while you're still outside with the pruners, and the branches will be a lot easier to work with once you get indoors.

**Miscellaneous:** Don't overlook decorative red-twigs dogwoods, which send up brighter spring growth when cut back hard in winter. If the snow is not deep, you may find Christmas ferns. Put the stems in water vials to keep them fresh before adding them to an arrangement. Keep an eye out for "turkey tails," the thin, ruffled, subtly striped fungi that grow on fallen trees. The beautiful, bright green moss relative called ground pine or princess pine does grow here, but very slowly, so it should not be collected.

**The Commercial Branch:** Christmas tree growers will have prunings at a good price, though the selection will be limited to whatever pines, firs, and spruces are being grown for trees. Many large-scale growers have machinery for making wreaths and roping; the ones that do offer these basics at prices close to wholesale. Florists, of course, offer exotic temptations that don't grow here. Huge, leathery magnolia leaves, variegated holly, boxwood, even roses (put the stems in water vials) all make elegant accents against a backdrop of native boughs. While you're at the shop, get a roll of florist's wire for rigging your arrangements. Don't forget that these things are



for display in sheltered places—holly is a lot tougher than magnolias or roses, but it too will freeze and turn brown if temperatures go much below freezing.

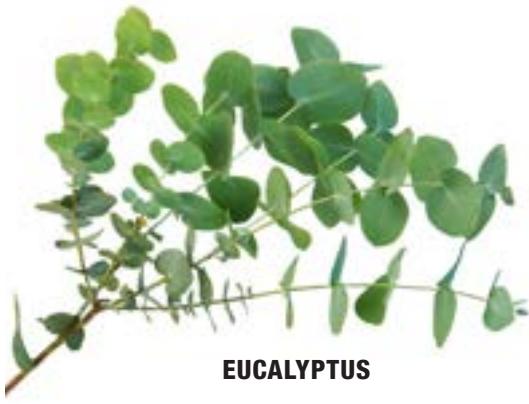
All woody branches collected from hardy trees will stay fresh outdoors for several months without any special handling. Indoors, the top limit on good looks and safety is about three weeks. Store branches in buckets of water in a cool place until you're ready to decorate. Wreaths sandwiched between solid doors and glass storm doors will turn brown quickly if the door gets any sun. This arrangement is fine facing north; otherwise go for those two-part magnetic hangers that suspend the wreath on the outside glass.

—Dorinda Beaumont

# BRANCHING OUT

A greenery sampler for DIY decorators looking to deck their halls.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: TRIGGA/ISTOCK; SCISSETTI ALFIO/SHUTTERSTOCK; MELINDA FAWVER/SHUTTERSTOCK; SPLINE\_X/ISTOCK; 12PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK; MARK FLEMING; STUDIO 888/SHUTTERSTOCK; POPOVAPHOTO/ISTOCK; MARK FLEMING; TAMARA KULIKOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK; INFOFLOWERSPLANTS/SHUTTERSTOCK



EUCALYPTUS



MUGO PINE



EASTERN HEMLOCK



FALSE CYPRESS



BOXWOOD



WHITE PINE



NORWAY SPRUCE



COMMON JUNIPER



BALSAM FIR



WINTERBERRY



BLUE HOLLY

'Tis the Season

# The Christmas Loon

*A stranded bird inspires hopes of a holiday miracle.*

**W**e began to worry about the loon in early December. *What was it still doing here?* For 18 years, we'd watched the loons come and go from the Vermont lake we live on, arriving in April as soon as the ice disappeared, raising a chick or two over the summer and fall, then heading for their winter fishing grounds off the New England coast in November, before the ice returned.

But this one didn't go, and it was running out of time. Loons have solid bones built for diving, and feet set like propellers in the rear. Pure poetry underwater, they are complete klutzes on land, barely able to push along on their bellies, and they are heavy. Like a seaplane, they need a long stretch of open water to get airborne. An iced-in loon is a dead loon. Coyotes and eagles. Cold and hunger.

As the December days slipped by and the first tongues of ice began to extend from the coves, the dozen or so households that rim the lake grew anxious. It was the first order of conversation when we bumped into each other walking the road that hugs the western shore. *It's going to fly, right? What if it doesn't?*

That may sound like a lot of fuss about one bird, but loons have a special hold on the lakeside communities they share their summers with. It's that mournful howl echoing off the hills, a finger of wildness running down your spine.

And yet, for all that wildness, they are also paragons of domesticity. The same pair of birds return year after year, making their nest in the sheltered cove, cruising past our docks on their daily rounds, dauntlessly serving an endless string of minnows to their fumbling chicks. They are one of us. So when a chick finally flies for the first time in late fall, heading for the Gulf of Maine or Nantucket Sound, from which it will return in a few years to set up its own home somewhere nearby, we get the quiet joy of completion.

For many New Englanders, this is a relatively new pleasure. The birds were nearly wiped out in the 19th and 20th centuries—victims of hunting, habitat loss, and lead poisoning from sinkers, which they sometimes ingest. Forty years ago, Vermont was down to seven nesting pairs. Massachusetts had none. Since then, a resurgence. Vermont recently climbed to over 100 pairs, New Hampshire has more than 300, and Maine, with its vast expanse of glacial lakes, boasts 1,700.

Our own little lake, a half-mile oval, is only big enough to support a single pair, but we've been on an amazing run, fledgling one or two chicks a year for 15



years. We credit our success to Eric Hanson, the biologist who has spearheaded the Vermont Loon Recovery Project for more than 20 years.

Working on a shoestring budget that supports only a part-time position (he grooms ski trails in the winter), Eric has cultivated a network of hundreds of volunteers living on loon-likely lakes, teaching us to protect and improve nesting sites, to educate anglers on loon-safe practices, and to steer kayakers away from nests.

Eric is always on call to field a question or rescue a loon in trouble, so he was my go-to in August of 2020, when our only chick of the year was killed by an eagle. My son found the carcass on the shoreline, the malefactor perched on a branch above like a cartoon villain.

Eagles and loons are bitter enemies. Loons shriek like air-raid sirens when they spot an incoming eagle. For years, I'd watched eagles dive-bomb loon chicks without ever taking any, and I'd stopped worrying, especially once the young were nearly full-grown and able to dive on their own, as this one had been. So the death came as a shock.

Get used to it, Eric counseled. In northern Maine, nearly half the loon chicks are lost to eagles. Even adults are vulnerable. As both loon and eagle populations grow, expect to see a lot more predation. It's normal. It's fine.

Sure. But this was one of us. In 2021, our loon pair produced no chicks for the first time in memory. It felt like our karma had turned.

**B**y the winter solstice, a skein of ice covered most of the lake. With dismay, we watched the loon become trapped in an ever-shrinking pool in the center. No fish, no way out, and nights that were only getting colder.

The village was abuzz with rescue plans. Several neighbors offered their skiffs. But it was impossible. The ice was too thick for boating and too thin for walking.

By Christmas Eve the loon's world was down to a 10-foot hole, which the loon was keeping open with its watery pacing, like the pupil in the eye of a giant that couldn't fall asleep.

Our neighbor, Karin McNeil, had a clear view of the loon from her living room window. Karin's a romantic, known to call out to loons in hopes of a response. She wrote Eric Hanson, who checked the ice with his auger: two inches; not enough.

Eric does a handful of loon rescues every year. Some birds get entangled in fishing gear. Others land on ponds that are too small for takeoff, or on roads mistaken for rivers. Very few are ice rescues, because of the danger. The only time he'll try it is when the ice gets thick and the hole closes, forcing the loon onto the ice, so it can't dive.

"Why bother with rescues at all?" I asked Eric. If loon populations are growing, what does it matter?

"It matters for that loon," he replied. But that's not all, he added. "It's the people that bird touches. The story that bird tells."

At dusk we followed the road to the point closest to the loon's hole, peering through the gloom. The loon flapped its wings halfheartedly and gave its *Who's out there?* call, waiting for a reply that never came. It sounded weak.

A freezing rain fell all Christmas Day. When I passed Karin on the road, she was still working on ways to somehow get a boat out there. I tried, as gently as possible, to suggest that it might be out of our hands.

Karin's husband, Ben, a longtime student of Buddhism, meditates at dawn, gazing out at the lake. The morning after Christmas, the rising light revealed a stark tableau: The loon, still in its hole, staring at an eagle perched on the edge. For a long time, the two adversaries regarded each other in silence, just a few feet apart. Then the eagle lifted off, turned a widening gyre around the hole, and flapped away.

What to make of this parley? Eric Hanson has no idea. Neither do I. I can picture the Far Side cartoon, but I can't figure out the caption. All I know is that something lit a fire under that loon. Afterward, it finally tried to free itself, managing to flop its way out of the hole before crashing back onto the ice a few yards away. It turned and hopped awkwardly back to its shrinking prison.

But when Karin checked the ice a few hours later, the loon was gone. Sunk to the bottom of the lake? Or miraculous escape?

She called Eric Hanson. News! A motorist had reported a loon struggling on the road at a fork near the lake. Eric was en route but an hour away, and a game warden had been dispatched from a nearby town.

The directions were vague, but Karin thought they might refer to a spot south of the lake, where the hills converge below the dam. If so, the loon had managed to flap and flop a half mile before crashing into the snowy road. She grabbed an old overcoat for loon catching and raced out the door. The world was still glazed in ice from the Christmas storm, so she covered the half mile to the road below the dam by foot. She looked up and down the road. No loon. Where does a loon on a road go? Most of the possibilities she could think of weren't good.

Her mind was flitting through the handful of other spots that might fit the motorist's description when a big black truck with the golden Vermont Fish & Wildlife logo came slowly up the road and stopped in front of her.

The window rolled down and a young, clean-cut warden looked out. "I'm looking for a loon," he said.

"Me, too," Karin replied.

The warden, Mike Scott, parked his truck and joined

## Karin did her best loon call in the direction of the trail: *Who's out there?*

*I am!* came the immediate reply.

the foot search. A hundred yards up the road, a trough in the snow the width of a loon belly dropped down a precipitous bank and disappeared into the trees in the direction of the swift creek that runs out of the lake. On either side of the trough were the scratch marks of webbed feet. Karin did her best loon call in the direction of the trail: *Who's out there?*

*I am!* came the immediate reply. She spotted the loon in the creek, paddling hard to stay in place. She called several times, and every time, the loon answered.

Mike donned waders, grabbed a blanket, pulled on his elbow-length wildlife-wrangling gloves, and slid down the bank. Karin followed.

The loon grew increasingly agitated as Mike eased himself into the water downstream of it, feeling his way over the ice-encrusted rocks. Before he had his footing, the loon turned and charged downstream, striking with its dagger-like four-inch bill. Mike caught it by the neck, trying not to topple backward into the stream, and wrapped the blanket around its body. Holding it like a thrashing bagpipe, he carefully made his way out of the creek and up the bank.

Eric showed up a half hour later. While Mike held the loon still, Eric checked it for injuries, feeling his way along its wing and leg bones. It was healthy and plenty feisty. They eased it into a box—the loon taking Mike's glove with it—and Eric took it to Lake Champlain, which doesn't freeze over completely, working on a poem about staring into the deathly eye of an eagle as he drove.

Eric's favorite loon-release point is a promontory behind the ECHO Center, on the Burlington waterfront. He carried the box out to the point and opened it. The loon slid out onto the water, flapped once to zip its feathers back into place, hooted at him, and paddled away. It was the sixth bird of 2021 that had gotten a second chance thanks to Eric's efforts. With any luck, it spent a week or two fattening up on lake perch, then made its way to the sea. I pictured it there, as I watched the hole in our lake seal over. By New Year's, a blanket of snow erased everything, and the lake at last fell into its winter slumber, dreaming of spring. —Rowan Jacobsen



'Tis the Season

## HOLIDAY SPECIAL

# Out & About

*We round up some favorite events that are worth the drive this season.*



*Winter Lights at the  
Shelburne Museum*

## LIGHTS

### ESSEX JUNCTION

#### Winter Lights in the Park

Trees throughout Maple Street Park glitter with illumination as speakers play seasonal tunes. Make a merry scavenger hunt out of spotting special ornaments hidden in the branches. *11/23–1/1; ejrp.org*

### SHELBURNE

#### Winter Lights

Visitors can explore an extravaganza of lights throughout the museum's campus, including the steamship *Ticonderoga*. Look for the festive Ice Bar on Dec. 7, with sips and snacks (separate admission, 21+). *Select dates 11/24–1/6; shelburnemuseum.org*

### SOUTH ROYALTON

#### Christmas Lights at the Joseph Smith Birthplace

Extensive grounds around a monument to the founder of

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints blaze with color each holiday season, as visitors make a slow circuit of the site's paved drives to take it all in. *11/24–1/1; facebook.com/JSBirthplace*

### QUECHEE

#### A Forest of Lights

Although wild critters are the stars at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS), the landscape steps into the spotlight during A Forest of Lights, when the VINS Forest Canopy Walk and surrounding woodland are dressed in thousands of twinkling bulbs. *Select dates 11/24–1/3; vinsweb.org*

### ST. ALBANS

#### Festival of Trees

In one of the state's loveliest downtown green spaces, Taylor Park, dozens of stately trees are illuminated for the annual Festival of Trees and laser light show on Nov. 25. And all season long, visitors are invited to

take a "Tree Walk" to view decorated trees in downtown shop windows. *11/25–12/3; vtfestivaloftrees.com*

## CRAFTS

### BURLINGTON

#### BTV Winter Market

City Hall Park hosts a European-style outdoor market Fridays through Sundays where makers and small businesses offer gift ideas galore. Holiday lights and music and cozy firepits add to the ambiance. *11/18–12/23; loveburlington.org/btv-market-winter*

### PUTNEY

#### Putney Craft Tour

Take part in the country's oldest continuous craft tour as you visit local painters, potters, weavers, and other artists—plus a cheesemaker, an aromatherapist, and even a winery. *11/24–11/26; putneycrafts.com*



*Explore richly colored yarns and original knitting patterns at the Green Mountain Spinnery during the annual Putney Craft Tour.*

### BARRE

#### Merry Barre Holidays Craft Fair

Artisans from across Vermont gather at the Barre Municipal Auditorium, offering handmade items and creative crafts just in time for the gift-giving season. There will be free parking and admission, food and refreshments, and daily door prizes. *11/25–11/26; thebarrepartnership.com*

### ESSEX JUNCTION

#### Vermont Holiday Market

The Champlain Valley Exposition hosts a whopping 150+ artisans and craft vendors selling everything from maple products and spices to woodcrafts and artwork. *12/2–12/3; vtgatherings.com*

### CABOT

#### Holiday Festival & Outdoor Market

Warm up with house-made *glühwein* (mulled wine) or hot apple cider at this German-style Christmas market, filled with live music, food, and gift-shopping, hosted by The Den at Harry's Hardware. *12/16; harryshardwarevt.com*

## FESTS

### STOWE

#### A Traditional Christmas in Stowe

A gorgeous tree lighting and a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Claus are complemented by a raft of activities—wagon rides, a holiday bazaar, skating, and much more. *12/1–12/3; gostowe.com*

## WESTON

### Christmas in Weston

Get into the holiday spirit with a visit to a classic Vermont village filled with holiday cheer, shopping, and delicious food—and capped off with a magical fireworks display. *12/2; yourplaceinvermont.com*



## ST. JOHNSBURY

### St. J Sparkles

A holiday concert at the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, kids' crafts at the Fairbanks Museum, and a reading of *A Christmas Carol* by the St. Johnsbury Players are just three highlights of this joyful weekend. *12/8–12/10; discoverstjohnsbury.com*

## GRAFTON

### Christmas in Grafton

The historic town of Grafton bustles all day long with activities including Christmas tree and wreath sales, live music, crafts, a gingerbread house display, wagon rides, a dog parade, and a visit from Santa. *12/9; visitgraftonvt.com*



## SHOWS

### WHITE RIVER JUNCTION

#### *A Christmas Carol*

Filled with music and laughter, *A Christmas Carol* reminds us that it is never too late for kindness and compassion. Northern Stage offers the chance to see Charles Dickens's heart-warming tale all season long, right up to New Year's Eve. *Select dates 11/21–12/31; northernstage.org*

## BARRE/BURLINGTON/RUTLAND

### Vermont Symphony Orchestra's Holiday Pops

Vermont's own indie-soul queen Myra Flynn joins the VSO for its annual family-friendly orchestra concert, featuring Christmas carols, folk music, and one of Flynn's own original compositions. *Barre Opera House, 12/8; The Flynn, 12/9; Paramount Theatre, 12/10; vso.org*

## MANCHESTER

### Maxine Linehan

Following the sold-out world premiere of "This Time of Year" in 2021, acclaimed Irish-American concert and recording artist Maxine Linehan brings her holiday show back to the Southern Vermont Arts Center. *12/9; svac.org*

## BARRE

### *The Green Mountain Nutcracker*

The Moving Light Dance company puts a Vermont twist on a holiday staple as the Maple Sugar Fairy, lumberjacks, and moose help tell the *Nutcracker* story on the Barre Opera House stage. *12/16–12/17; barreoperahouse.org*

## MIDDLEBURY

### "Messiah" Sing

Continuing a tradition going on four decades, friends and neighbors join to sing and play along to Handel's holiday classic, along with performances by soloists from the local community and across the state. The Congregational Church of Middlebury hosts this afternoon of joyful music-making. *12/17; midducc.org/home/calendar*

## SALISBURY/WILLISTON

### *Amahl and the Night Visitors*

The musical tale of a magic star, a shepherd boy, and how unselfish

love can work miracles is brought to life through the talents of Barn Opera. *Salisbury Congregational Church, 12/21; Williston Federated Church, 12/22; barnopera.com*

## HERITAGE

## MANCHESTER

### Christmas at Hildene

Tour Hildene, the beautiful Georgian Revival mansion that Mary and Robert Todd Lincoln once called home, and see how it was decorated in December 1912, during one of a handful of Christmases the Lincolns spent here. *12/1–12/31; hildene.org*

## WOODSTOCK

### Christmas at the Farm

On a trip back to a Victorian-era Christmas at Billings Farm & Museum, you can visit the authentically decorated farmhouse parlor, dip your own candle, shop for unique holiday gifts and Billings Farm cheese, and more. *Select dates 12/2–1/1; billingsfarm.org*

## PLYMOUTH NOTCH

### Holiday Open House at the Coolidge Birthplace

This Christmas tradition features the bedecked birthplace of President Calvin Coolidge, a tree lighting, caroling, and kids' activities. *12/2; coolidgefoundation.org/events*

## WELCOMING HANUKKAH

The Jewish holiday of lights begins this year on the evening of Dec. 7 and continues through Dec. 15. All are invited to share in the celebration at public festivities across the state, including a **Community Hanukkah Celebration** in Manchester (12/10), a **Chanukah Car Parade** in Burlington (12/14), and public menorah lightings throughout Vermont. To learn more:

- [jewishcommunitiesofvermont.org](http://jewishcommunitiesofvermont.org)
- [chabadvt.org/holidays/chanukah](http://chabadvt.org/holidays/chanukah)



# Snow Days

*A winter weekend in Woodstock finds this Green Mountain town at its most cozy and welcoming.*



**Heading off on an old-fashioned sleigh ride at Woodstock's Billings Farm & Museum, an outdoor history museum that immerses visitors in the day-to-day life of a 19th-century farm.**

PHOTO BY JOEL LAINO

Winter can wear down even hard-boiled New Englanders. Many tolerate it; others take refuge in skiing, skating, and snowmobiling. But there is a special subset who relish the deep snow shoveling, the long nights, the nipped cheeks and frozen toes. And there may be no better way to fall in love with this season than to spend a weekend in Woodstock.

First, there's the snow. Woodstock sees more than 80 inches a year (twice as much as Boston, three times more than Hartford), so if you're coming into town on a Friday night, there's a good chance you'll find a fresh blanket crunching under your tires and flurries swirling in the air. You're off shoveling duty, so slow down and notice the frost framing the shop windows, which are kept illuminated with twinkle lights long after Christmas.

Next, there's the concentration of top-notch lodging, shopping, and dining options, remarkable for a town of just 3,000 year-round residents. The most committed city dweller will have no quarrel with a fine dinner followed by an art-house movie at the **Woodstock Town Hall Theatre**.

Finally, there are the locals themselves, many of whom are young and sporty types lured here by the

rolling hills, good schools, and upscale amenities. Seeing young families sipping cocoa after a regional ski meet at the local mountain, **Saskadena Six**, you may even be tempted to move here yourself.

So if you're feeling the long weeks of winter looming before you like a threat, give in. Embrace the cold. Let Woodstock show you how.

## Friday

If you're feeling hungry on your arrival, **Worthy Kitchen** is the perfect stop for a stellar burger and top-notch local beers, including cult favorites like Hill Farmstead and The Alchemist. Since Woodstock's foliage season has long passed, getting a table is easier—as is finding a good hotel room (though if your visit falls in a holiday or school vacation week, book ahead).

**The Woodstock Inn & Resort** is the grand dame, presiding over the town green and welcoming travelers with a roaring fire. Between its plush beds, on-site spa,

and off-site health club down the road (with heated pool and sauna), this is the prime destination for hibernators and fitness fans alike. If you prefer more of a B&B feel,

Freshly renovated in 2018, the Woodstock Inn & Resort is a luxury escape with roots that reach back to 1892.

COURTESY OF THE WOODSTOCK INN & RESORT





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Local skiing fun reaches its peak at Saskadena Six, which has accessible terrain for families as well as challenging options for advanced skiers; classic pantry bowls from Farmhouse Pottery, founded in Woodstock in 2012; the cheery interior Worthy Kitchen, a favorite casual-dining spot for Vermont craft beers and farm-to-table food.



COURTESY OF THE WOODSTOCK INN & RESORT (SASKADENA SIX); ANSEL DICKY (WORTHY KITCHEN); COURTESY OF FARMHOUSE POTTERY (BOWLS)

however, the nearby **Woodstocker** delivers on style—and breakfast in bed, too.

West of town, the **Lincoln Inn & Restaurant at the Covered Bridge** is a romantic white clapboard farmhouse whose award-winning restaurant ensures you'll hardly need to leave your cocoon. You can't quite walk to town from here, but **Farmhouse Pottery**, the rustic-modern Vermont brand, has its flagship store just down the street. Meanwhile, families flock to **506 On the River Inn** for its indoor pool and farmhouse suites, complete with kitchens.

## Saturday

Most inns here offer breakfast, all quite good, but to caffeinate with the locals, head to **Mon Vert Café**, which specializes in “rustic, local, country food and good strong coffee.” That translates to terrific breakfast sandwiches, yummy muffins, and cozy lattes (regular, matcha, or chai).

If you've come to ski, there are few mountains more charming than **Saskadena Six**, formerly known as

Suicide Six. It's actually a fairly low-octane spot to learn the sport (the instructors are terrific) or spend a day doing runs on its 24 trails (snowboarders welcome). Free of the crowds found on larger mountains, it boasts a hometown charm, as well as the distinction of being one of the country's oldest ski areas and the home of the first rope tow, which must have seemed sport-changing at the time.

Cross-country skiers and snowshoers, meanwhile, can take advantage of the groomed trails maintained by the Woodstock Inn at its **Nordic Center**. These converge with the paths that snake up Mount Peg and Mount Tom, so you can add as much elevation as your skill set allows.

Such exertions merit a hearty lunch, and it's worth tooling over to West Woodstock's **Mountain Creamery** to fill up with a VerMonte Cristo sandwich (ham, turkey, and Swiss on egg-dipped bread, served with maple syrup), mile-high apple pie, and homemade ice cream. Back in the village's commercial district, don't miss the opportunity to visit the **Yankee Bookshop**, a fixture since 1935. Across the street,

*The Joy of Winter*



Built in 1969 using traditional methods and materials, Middle Bridge is a village landmark made even more picturesque by holiday lights.

JOEL LAINO



**Sudie's** specializes in modern-preppy-meets-Vermont-chic clothing, and **Unicorn** is a great place to get lost amid a heaving inventory of fine jewelry, toys, home accents, and gag gifts.

Looking for more outdoor adventure? The **Vermont Institute of Natural Science** in nearby Quechee typically hosts a winter wildlife weekend in January, as well as live raptor programs, wildlife rehabilitation workshops, and a wheelchair-accessible forest canopy pathway that gives visitors a bird's-eye view of the woods.

Cap off your day in South Woodstock, where the **Ransom Tavern in the Kedron Valley Inn** serves excellent Neapolitan-style pies and antipasti in a modern tavern setting.

## Sunday

As the weekend winds down, it's time to go deep on old-school charm. Start with Woodstock's iconic general store, **F.H. Gillingham & Sons**, a rambling century-plus-year-old mercantile that sells everything from French wine to Carhartt essentials. Plus, the toy and home goods departments should take care of any gift-giving you need to do.

For a glimpse into 19th-century Vermont life, spend a few hours at **Billings Farm & Museum**, which captures the moment when dairy farming emerged as one of the state's dominant industries. Established in



FROM LEFT: The signature VerMonte Cristo sandwich at Mountain Creamery in West Woodstock; maple syrup from the Woodstock Farmers' Market makes for a tasty souvenir.

1871 and now overseen by the Rockefeller Foundation, the farm is still home to a thriving herd of Jersey cows, plus Berkshire pigs and Southdown sheep. Visitors can wander through the property's fields and barns, sample cheese made from Billings Farm's own milk, and, on special snowy weekends, take sleigh rides pulled by draft horses.

Before hitting the road, swing by the **Woodstock Farmers' Market** for some road snacks. This indoor market highlights the most noteworthy Vermont-made foods, from cheeses and jams to bread and chocolate; many aren't sold beyond the state's borders, so stock up. While you're at this end of town, don't miss a side trip to Bridgewater's ShackletonThomas, where furniture maker Charlie Shackleton and potter Miranda Thomas make and sell their wares. These heirloom pieces offer a vision of the slower, more handmade life that draws all those young families to town. And if you're feeling sad to leave, you might even consider joining them. —Amy Traverso

*Woodstock will hold its signature holiday celebration, **Wassail Weekend**, on Dec. 8–10. Highlights include a parade with more than 50 horses and riders in holiday costumes and period clothing, a breakfast with Santa, holiday concerts, and historic house tours. For information, go to [woodstockvt.com](http://woodstockvt.com).*



A skier's soaring flight of more than 300 feet (and at speeds of nearly 60 mph) begins atop Harris Hill Ski Jump in Brattleboro.

# Leap of Faith

*Brattleboro's most famous winter landmark once seemed destined to fade away—but the townspeople had other ideas.*

**I**magine a house. But not just any house. It's the house your grandfather built. Your father grew up in it, and you did too. In this house your father married your mother, and your siblings, cousins, aunts, and uncles filled the rooms on holidays. When you think of growing up, when you think of family, what you think of first is this house. Now imagine the house rotting board by board, sinking on its foundation, the roof sagging and leaking, and for too many years you've patched it the best you could, but the house keeps falling apart; there's talk that it isn't safe to live

there anymore. To fix it up will cost tens of thousands of dollars, but your bank account is barren and you have no idea what to do.

That's what it felt like in the winter of 2005 for Pat Howell and Liz Richards, and for all the volunteers who for so long had worked to keep Harris Hill Ski Jump open and hosting its annual tournament held during Brattleboro's Winter Carnival. That year, after the last ski jumper had landed and the spectators had made their way home, the committee members who'd kept the jump patched and running knew that they'd

run out of time and do-it-yourself fixes.

Brattleboro's Olympic-caliber 90-meter ski jump, the only one of its size in New England, was no longer viable. The timbers that supported it were no longer safe. At that point in its history, Harris Hill had hosted ski jumping for 84 years. There had been nine national championships there, and even Olympic qualifiers, with many of the best ski jumpers in North America and Europe. Years past, there'd been weekends when 10,000 people had filled the hillside—some of them climbing trees to get a better view. Now this hard reality: Just as ski jumping had all but died out throughout New England, maybe its day had passed here too.

But what about the warmest memories of cold days on the hill? What about the legacy of Fred Harris? The hill bears his name because he built the ski jump from the ground up. He found the perfect spot, sheltered by trees to protect it from crosswinds, and he saw the first jumpers fly off in 1922. He'd started the Dartmouth Outing Club in 1909, and even while he'd become a successful stockbroker and a world-class sailor and tennis player, he'd thrown himself into building in his hometown a ski jump that would rival any in the world.

It's hard to believe now, but ski jumping once thrived in New England, and the best athletes took to jumping before all else. Time and fate eroded its popularity. In the 1970s ABC's *Wide World of Sports* used to open its popular "the thrill of victory ... and the agony of defeat" montage with footage of a ski jumper losing control and hurtling down a slope. The fact that he wasn't badly injured didn't matter. To high school and some college administrators, the fear of injured students and ensuing lawsuits sent them scurrying to close the jumps. By the mid-1980s, the sport was kept alive only through ski clubs and faithful supporters.

Liz Richards was one of them. Liz had grown up in Brattleboro; she remembered when kids built their own neighborhood jumps, and the best of them went on to jump for their high school, and the best of those tested themselves against all comers at the town's winter carnival. Her son Drew jumped his way to the U.S. Olympic Team. "Everybody came to the tournament," she recalled. "There were cars all the way out Cedar

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARRIS HILL SKI JUMP



FROM TOP: A 1950s crowd scene at the former Brattleboro Ski Jump, which was renamed in honor of founder Fred Harris in 1951; an archive photo of Fred Harris (right) with Alan Sargent, who would serve as Harris Hill's director for nearly three decades.

## The Joy of Winter

Street to Western Avenue. There were doughnuts frying, sugar on snow; it's where you came to see your friends. This was the thing to do."

Pat Howell grew up in Delaware, but when she was young her family came north to Brattleboro for the winter carnival. Years later, after she'd moved to town, she saw that Harris Hill was more than a sports venue. In winter it became the town's heart, its very identity. When visitors turned off the interstate at exit 2, what did they see emblazoned on the "Welcome to Brattleboro" sign? Of course—a ski jumper.

This is what everyone who'd loved Harris Hill remembered: You arrived early. You climbed toward the top, holding onto branches, digging your boots into the snow for leverage. You waited. Suddenly swooping down, as fast as 60 miles per hour, came a skier, and right there in front of you the takeoff—a sound you never forgot, like a flock of wild birds beating their wings—and you watched as the jumper rode a current of air like a human kite, out, out, as far as possible, then dropping into the landing, and you heard the cheers and



the clapping. And then it started again with the next jumper. Could you just let those memories go?

No, you couldn't. So a few people gathered more people, and then a movement to save ski jumping on Harris Hill was under way. The committee called in engineers, but a 90-meter ski jump wasn't something engineering firms knew much about. Estimates to tear down and rebuild the jump approached a million dollars.

But Rex Bell, a committee member who'd once been not only a ski jumper but a coach of the national team, said, *Hold on—we can make this work for half that.* They could do it the way Fred Harris had, without bells and whistles, and do it right. The committee called their fundraising effort "Step Up and Soar." They started making calls, getting the word out.

The town itself gave \$30,000 to get things going, and there were donations and a telethon on local cable with all these people remembering what the jump had meant to them. For \$1,000 you could have your name or the name of a loved one stenciled on one of the 187 new steps for all to see. By the fall of 2007, the committee had raised \$300,000. A lot, but not enough—they needed at least \$175,000 more. Pat Howell wrote a press release stating that they'd come up short, and the AP picked it up. There would be no ski jumping again during the town's 2008 winter carnival, the third year in a row without it.

Who could have known what would happen next?

A trustee of the Manton Foundation, an under-the-radar family foundation in New York with an emphasis on New England, saw the story and was struck by a town wanting to keep its tradition alive. The call came to Pat: The foundation would fund the shortfall. "I called Liz and we both started crying," she remembered.

There wasn't enough time to get it all done for 2008's

**TOP RIGHT:** Spectators line the 209 steps that climb the hill alongside the 90-meter jump, the only one of its kind in New England and one of just a handful of Olympic-size ski hills nationwide. **LEFT:** A skier gets set for takeoff during the 2019 Pepsi Challenge & U.S. Cup competition.



As a real slope rather than a ramp mounted on scaffolding, Harris Hill is one of the few venues in the country where spectators can watch the athletes up close.

ski jumping, but throughout that spring and summer the work went on. No one had anticipated how the price of materials would go through the roof, though, and there they were at that point again: so close, yet once more out of money. With the national economy plunging off its own cliff, eight committee members went to the local bank and pledged \$10,000 apiece in loans. Then once again the angels at the Manton Foundation called. *We want you to succeed*, they said. *What do you need?* When the tears had dried, the Harris Hill Ski Jump committee got back to work.

Which brings us to a sun-splashed February day in 2009. It's noon. A woman stands holding scissors beside a ribbon stretched across the base of Harris Hill. She is Sandy Harris, Fred's only child. She's dressed in black ski pants and jacket; her blond hair blows a bit in the wind.

Along the hillside, people are packed three deep. Children sit watching atop their parents' shoulders. You can smell burgers and sausages frying under the tents.

The athletes, lean as gazelles, their faces young and eager, wait attentively for the ribbon cutting. They've come from Austria, Slovenia, Colorado, Lake Placid, the Midwest, New England.

Can you imagine what Sandy Harris is feeling at this moment? "My first memory is of being with my father at the hill—he'd be working on the hill and I'd play with my toys," she says later. "It was chilling to realize that after all this time, his hill is still so important to the town. There's a sense of his presence. He instilled something in that jump that was contagious. It inspired people to give years of their lives to it. To keep it alive."

She cuts the ribbon and the skiers start down, one, then another. And how can anyone watch and not feel that they themselves have caught big air and are riding the current into the happy cheers of the people of Brattleboro. —*Mel Allen*

## IF YOU GO

■ The next **Harris Hill Ski Jumping Weekend** will be held Feb. 17–18, 2024. On Saturday is the Pepsi Challenge & U.S. Cup; Sunday is the Fred Harris Memorial Tournament. Daily admission is \$25 adult/ \$15 child (ages 6–12). For more information, go to: [harrishillskijump.com](http://harrishillskijump.com)

# Along for the Glide

*Top-notch trail systems and Nordic centers make it easy to step into Vermont's cross-country skiing heritage.*



Flying into a  
winter wonderland  
on Kingdom Trails  
in East Burke.

PHOTO BY  
DENNIS CURRAN

**T**he American cross-country scene is rightfully anchored in Vermont. In 1968, the von Trapp family—whose dramatic escape during the Nazi occupation of Austria inspired the film *The Sound of Music*—opened North America's first all-service Nordic center at their lodge in Stowe. Rentals, lessons, and tours were all offered, paving the way for a new generation of snow enthusiasts to explore the state. Today, many Vermont hills are alive with the sounds of delighted skiers of all abilities and ages. Stowe alone features a whopping 120 kilometers of groomed trails, making it one of the premier cross-country destinations in the East.

It doesn't hurt that Vermont's trails also whisk skiers to some of the finest views in New England. Ready to take to the snow? Read on for a selection of top cross-country destinations in the Green Mountain State. —*Ian Aldrich*

### **Trapp Family Lodge Outdoor Center | Stowe**

There's a reason Vermont's landmark Nordic destination is consistently ranked as one of the country's best cross-country centers. On top of 2,600 pristine Green Mountain acres, a grand 96-room lodge, and a brewery and bierhall, the property also boasts 65 kilometers of groomed trails with an even more extensive backcountry network that could keep you busy all season long. Routes include a 5km trek to Slayton Pasture Cabin, where scenic views are accompanied by hot chocolate, homemade soups, and sandwiches. [trappfamily.com](http://trappfamily.com)

### **Stowe Mountain Resort | Stowe**

Making its home on the southern shoulder of Mount Mansfield, Vermont's tallest peak, Stowe Mountain Resort links its nearly 80 kilometers of Nordic terrain to the area's other major trail networks, including those that course through the von Trapp property. The prettiest trails follow the West Branch of the Little River, while experienced skiers will love The Steeple and The Bruce, backcountry favorites that were among some of the region's first ski trails. Lessons, tours, and rentals are all available. [stowe.com](http://stowe.com)

### **The Woodstock Inn & Resort Nordic Center | Woodstock**

The climb to the top of Mount Tom—and the surrounding views of Woodstock village that greet you there—is just one of the many highlights you'll discover at this Nordic center.

Offering lessons, tours, and rentals, the center features more than 45 kilometers of trails that suit skiers of all types and abilities. [woodstockinn.com](http://woodstockinn.com)

### **Camel's Hump Nordic | Huntington**

From groomed runs to backcountry touring to deep-powder escapes, nearly 60 kilometers of trails await at Camel's Hump, covering more than 1,500 acres in all. Set in the shadow of its namesake Green Mountain peak, this ski area also links to other local-favorite trails, including Honey Hollow Trail, Catamount Trail, and the Camel's Hump Challenge. The area's 5km "Dog Loop" means pet lovers can bring their furry friends along, too. [camelshumpskiers.org](http://camelshumpskiers.org)

### **Bolton Valley Nordic Center | Bolton**

Nordic enthusiasts flock to Bolton Valley, and it's not just because this ski resort lies a scant 20 miles east of Burlington. It's because this is where they can ski the day away on a fantastic 100-kilometer trail system, including 15 kilometers of groomed terrain perfect for those just learning the sport. For skiers looking to go deeper into the woods, Bolton Valley's 1,500 acres abut Mount Mansfield State Forest. Rentals and lessons are also on offer. [boltonvalley.com](http://boltonvalley.com)

### **Dashney Nordic Center | East Burke**

From this Nordic center located at the base of Burke Mountain Resort, you can follow 15 kilometers of scenic trails as they snake through woods, over logging lanes, along country roads, and through farmland in the Northeast Kingdom's famous outdoor-adventure capital. Trails are groomed for classic and skaters alike,



and there's even a pet-friendly loop that allows dog lovers to bring Fido. [skiburke.com](http://skiburke.com)

### **Kingdom Trails | East Burke**

Those who have experienced this nationally known mountain-biking network only in the summer and fall should plan to return when the snow flies for a whole new perspective. On Darling Hill, said to be the “prettiest mile in Vermont,” find 12 kilometers of groomed skate and tracked classic ski trails that wind through field and forest, with expansive mountain vistas. Plus, there are 30-plus miles of fat biking and snowshoe trails if you need a break from your XC routine. [kingdomtrails.org](http://kingdomtrails.org)

### **Catamount Outdoor Family Center | Williston**

Classic types and skaters will find their groove on Catamount’s 35 kilometers of trails, which cut through the beautiful Catamount Community Forest, a town-owned property that encompasses more than 400 acres. The trails here are what you want from a varied day on the snow: flat and hilly, forest and open terrain, with a nice selection of nature views. [catamountoutdoor.org](http://catamountoutdoor.org)

### **Sleepy Hollow Inn, Ski & Bike Center | Huntington**

Night skiing isn’t reserved solely for the downhill crowd. Sleepy Hollow Inn offers 32 kilometers of trails for skate and classic fans, including a 2.5-kilometer loop that you can tackle under the lights. Even better: Sleepy Hollow’s modern snowmaking operation means the resort’s trails are often open earlier in the season than most other Nordic centers. [skisleepyhollow.com](http://skisleepyhollow.com)

### **Craftsbury Outdoor Center | Craftsbury Common**

Postcard-perfect Vermont is on full display along Craftsbury’s 105 kilometers of groomed trails, which lead skiers through farms, fields and forest. For those truly serious about the sport, Craftsbury’s esteemed



Rikert Outdoor Center,  
Middlebury

roster of coaches can also take your classic or skate game to the next level. [craftsbury.com](http://craftsbury.com)

### **Rikert Outdoor Center | Middlebury**

In the heart of the Green Mountains, glide down trails that have trained national champions and generations of family skiers. This fully ADA-accessible outdoor center sits amid woodsy terrain dotted with stone walls and farm fields—you may even spy Robert Frost’s summer cabin. There are more than 55 kilometers of trails for skate and classic skiing, snowshoeing, and fat biking, all just a quick drive from the dining and shopping scene in Middlebury. [rikertoutdoor.com](http://rikertoutdoor.com)



# Raising the Bar

*Handcrafted confections from Brattleboro's Tavernier  
Chocolates take sweet treats to a new level.*



Made in Vermont

**P**orcini rosemary truffles... roasted chestnut and smoked maple bonbons... bars of white and dark chocolate redolent of spruce and wild mint.

This isn't your typical chocolate factory, Charlie.

At Tavernier Chocolates in Brattleboro, the finest chocolate—the high-cacao-and-cocoa-butter-content product called *couverture*—is the matrix for an exotic variety of flavors, many derived from ingredients foraged right here in Vermont. The results are sure to surprise even the most sophisticated of chocolate connoisseurs: Few of us, even if we're aficionados of the finest dark Swiss product, are prepared for the savory elements that enliven Tavernier's extensive line of bars, bonbons, drinking chocolate, and chocolate "charcuterie." And the surprise is that it all works.

The proof is in a bite of chanterelle cardamom truffle, a juniper spruce bonbon, or a morel truffle that weaves together nuances of shagbark hickory syrup, morel mushrooms, and browned butter. In each sampling, the sum amounts to far more than the seemingly disparate parts.

Those parts are melded together by a small team, never more than five in number, led by Tavernier founders Dar Tavernier-Singer and her husband, John Singer, who started this sweet venture nine years ago. The pair come from non-chocolatey backgrounds: John in business, music, and coffee roasting; Dar in art, biology, chemistry, and the restaurant business. Historically there were Taverniers in France who were confectioners, and although they may or may not all be directly related, Dar feels an ancestral connection to the craft.

"We try to stay as local as possible with our ingredients," says Dar. "There are a few exceptions—European porcini, lavender from France—but we've met most of the foragers we deal with at local farmers' markets, especially the one in Brattleboro. Halifax Hollow in Halifax, for example, is our supplier of ingredients like wild peppermint and spruce needles."

And that black garlic they use? It's created by curing bulbs at low heat for up to 288 hours, and comes from Putney's High Meadows Farm, Vermont's first certified organic grower. "It works well with a chocolate we import from the Dominican Republic," says Dar.

Dar and John rely mostly, however, on chocolate from cacao trees in Ecuador, which they have visited.



FROM TOP: A fresh batch of chocolate goodies gets under way in the Tavernier kitchen in Brattleboro; inspiration for a holiday party, starring Tavernier's rich chocolate charcuterie paired with fruit and cheese; Bûches de Noël maple sugar logs, made with Vermont maple sugar, maple syrup, and buttermilk.





FROM LEFT: John Singer and Dar Tavernier-Singer, founders of Tavernier Chocolates; studded with fruits, nuts, seeds, flowers, and salts, Tavernier's bars and tablets become edible works of art.

"It's ethically sourced," Dar explains, "and 'origin made.' This means that the growers who do the harvesting of the cacao beans work closely with the people who do all the fermenting, roasting, and processing, and more of the proceeds stay in the local economy."

And unlike cacao grown in large plantations established on deforested land, Tavernier's Ecuadorian product comes from trees growing in forests among shade trees—"the way cacao trees naturally occur," Dar points out. Ecuador's cacao cultivators also use grafting to create hardier strains of delicate, disease-prone varieties prized for their rich flavor.

The small South American country even provides the sugar used in Tavernier's powdered drinking chocolate. The spruce needles that lend a distinctive flavor to some of those mixes, of course, are a purely Vermont product.

What Tavernier calls chocolate charcuterie isn't in the salumi family, as the name might imply (even these break-the-rules chocolatiers don't go *that* far). The product is a sort of chocolate paté, a sliceable, spreadable compound that might be flavored with honey, chèvre, and lavender; with miso, maple, and coconut milk; or with blue cheese and smoked salt. Chocolate charcuterie is made for pairing, and Tavernier's website has plenty of ideas for companionable cheeses, fruits, wines, and spirits.

Tavernier is located in a former cotton mill in Brattleboro, a brick behemoth that houses a warren of small enterprises. All of the company's products are made in a pair of rooms tucked behind the retail shop, which has a case stocked with a display of bonbons a

## IF YOU GO

■ **Tavernier Chocolates** is open 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, with extended hours during the holidays and on "pop-up" days. The shop is located at 74 Cotton Mill Hill, Suite A124, in Brattleboro. 802-257-5806; [tavernierchocolates.com](http://tavernierchocolates.com)

■ On Dec. 2, the businesses located in the Cotton Mill Building will hold an open house; at Tavernier, there will be samplings of hot drinking chocolate and chocolate charcuterie.

jeweler might envy, and a rack of bars studded with almonds, ginger, or maybe spruce needles. Just steps away, liquid chocolate in 50-pound batches streams constantly through a tempering machine, keeping the elixir at a temperature that gives it the right "shine and snap" once solidified, Dar explains. Meanwhile, production shelves burgeon with fresh supplies of ingredients including allspice, cinnamon, juniper, lavender, and those subtle-flavored fungi: morels, chanterelles, black trumpets, porcini.

And, of course, chocolate. —Bill Scheller

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*Tavernier Chocolates bars, bonbons, charcuterie, and other products are sold at the shop and online, with shipping throughout the U.S. Bars are also available at nearly 80 wine, cheese, and specialty foods shops, mostly in New England and New York. Bonbons are sold exclusively at the shop and online.*



The streets of St. Albans fill with seasonal sparkle during the Holiday Tractor Parade.

# The Light Brigade

*In St. Albans, the holidays give working machines a time to shine.*

**B**ig wheels roll through downtown St. Albans each December in what has become one of the region's most anticipated annual events: the Holiday Tractor Parade.

The tradition of decking out hardworking vehicles for the holidays isn't unique in Vermont, or even elsewhere the world (European farmers have been getting their glow on for years). But the St. Albans event—which is set in Franklin County, home to the most dairy farms in the state—stands out for its size and international flavor. Last year more than 60 vehicles turned out, some from as far away as Quebec.

"Tractor" here is an inclusive term, as the parade is open to workhorses of all shapes and sizes. A police cruiser, its flashing blues complemented by a twinkling sea of smaller lights, serves as pace car for a procession that may include bedazzled dairy-delivery trucks, fire trucks, cement mixers, and snowplows. Some rigs haul floats, others cruise solo, but all come bearing hundreds and even thousands of holiday lights.

Big and noisy as it is, the whole affair has a kind of intimacy to it. Freed from their daily chores, these blue-collar vehicles have been fussed over like Cinderella before going to the ball. They are cleaned up, decked out, and made ready for their night on the town.

Now hosted by the Dairy Farmers of America—St. Albans, the tractor parade got its start in 2013 as an initiative by local dairy farmers as a way to say thanks to their community. And while that may have been their intent, the cheering families who brave a chilly December evening to applaud and cheer for them show that the "thank-you's flow both ways. —*Joe Bills*

## IF YOU GO

■ The **St. Albans Holiday Tractor Parade** will be held Dec. 8, with a 6 p.m. rollout from St. Albans Creamery & Supply on Federal Street. [facebook.com/creameryandsupply](http://facebook.com/creameryandsupply)



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