

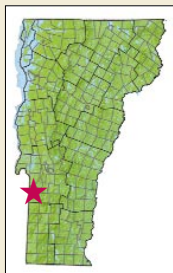


Joan Allen



North Pawlet Hills

NORTH PAWLET HILLS NATURAL AREA



Three forested peaks in the northern Taconic Mountains, locally known as the “Three Sisters,” Haystack, Middle, and Bald Mountains, lie in an extensive landscape of nearly unbroken forest. Haystack Mountain is perhaps the most distinctive of the three peaks, with its sheer cliffs and dramatic outcrops of slate and quartzite. Generations of Vermonters have climbed its steep slopes to admire the panoramic view from the top. From this modest 1,919-foot summit one can see as far west as Glens Falls, NY and south beyond the farms of the Mettowee Valley to Mount Equinox in Manchester.

Warm southern aspect and shallow soils create drought-like conditions on the hills and produce the growth of an exemplary array of unusual natural communities like dry oak woodland, dry oak-hickory-hophornbeam forest, and temperate acidic outcrop. A pair of peregrine falcons has at times made its nest on the summit of Haystack Mountain, while turkeys, moose, grouse, bobcats, and bears roam in the forest below. These forested hills also provide nesting habitat for migrant neotropical songbirds that rely on unfragmented blocks of forest.

Haystack, Middle, and Bald Mountains have long been loved and enjoyed by local residents. This is reflected in the story of the landowners who have worked with the Conservancy since 2001 to create the North Pawlet Hills Natural Area. Mary Louise Burditt’s first memory of the North Pawlet Hills property she sold to the Conservancy was of riding on her older brother’s shoulders during a hike up Middle and Bald Mountains with her family. When she learned about the ecological value of the land, she wanted to make sure it would stay protected for future generations to enjoy as she had. Landowners Donald and Joanne Waite made the decision to sell land to the Conservancy because they saw so much land being purchased and developed and they did not want the beautiful area they lived in to meet the same fate.

In total, the Conservancy has now protected 739 acres at the North Pawlet Hills Natural Area. There is a trail at this preserve and visitors are welcome.

Driving Directions

From Route 30: In Pawlet, turn east onto Waite Road, which is about 1.5 miles north of Pawlet Village. Go about a mile to Tunket Road. Park on Waite Road and walk up Tunket Road — please do not drive up because the road is privately owned and maintained. About 1/2 mile up the road you’ll see a meadow on your left and at the far (north) end of the meadow you’ll see the Conservancy’s sign for the North Pawlet Hills Natural Area and the Colby Chester Trail. Follow the yellow Conservancy trail signs with the green arrows to access the walking trail.

From Route 133: In Pawlet, turn west onto Waite Road, which is about three miles north of Pawlet Village. Go about a mile to Tunket Road. Follow directions as above.



Libby Davidson

Featured Natural Community: Dry Oak Woodland

These distinctive woodlands occur on acidic soils on south-facing upper slopes in southwestern Vermont. The overstory of these woodlands consists of short-statured oaks while the forest floor is dominated by sedges, grasses, and heath shrubs, giving them an open, savannah-like feel.