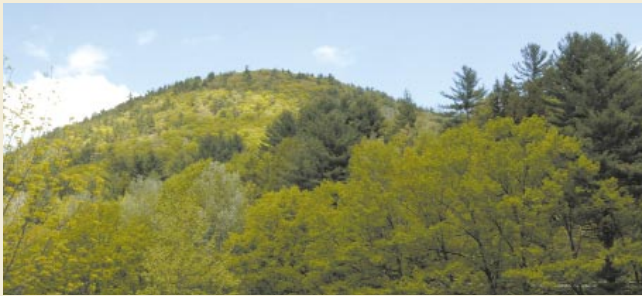


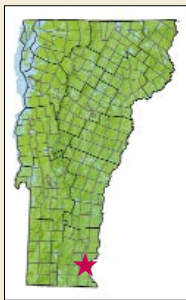


Sarah Wakefield



Black Mountain

BLACK MOUNTAIN NATURAL AREA



Black Mountain rises abruptly from the West River in Dummerston to a horseshoe ridge with a summit of 1,280 feet. The mountain originated as a mass of molten rock deep beneath the surface of the earth between 345 and 395 million years ago. Magma rose from beneath the crust of the earth and intruded into the native rock, forming a granite dome. Over the past 350 million years or so, erosion

has exposed the granite that forms the core of the mountain. The mountain's dry, granitic top and outer slopes are covered by a thin layer of poor, acidic soil. These conditions have contributed to the presence of a number of plant species that are very rare in Vermont such as pitch pine and scrub oak trees. A 70-acre pitch pine-oak-heath woodland near the summit is similar to communities more often associated with the sandy areas of southern New England's coastal plains than with mountain tops in Vermont.

There is also a 100-acre red pine community clearly visible from the village of West Dummerston. Historic wild-fire episodes have contributed to the health of the pitch pine/scrub oak woodland and red pine forest, which depend on fire to spur forest regeneration. A large and unusual population of mountain laurel scattered across the mountain produces a magnificent display of showy white flowers in June.

The West River, which passes alongside Black Mountain, may be even older than the mountain itself. Some think the river was present in ancient times, and as the mountains rose, the river kept its course. During the Ice Age, approximately 2 million years ago, vast sheets of ice advanced and retreated over the area, leaving a deep deposit of sand and gravel, called a kame terrace, on the south side of Black Mountain. It is possible to see this flat area, dominated by white pine, near the beginning of the trail.

The West River, an important tributary of the Connecticut River, was identified as a priority for protection because of its exemplary aquatic systems. Its waters support

two species of state-threatened mussels as well as a number of fish that spend part of their lives in freshwater and part in saltwater like Atlantic salmon, American shad, Blueback herring, and American eel. The river's shoreline communities—floodplain forests, rivershore grasslands and cobbles, and emergent marshes—support many species, including two globally rare species of beetle, and the federally endangered Northeastern bulrush.

The Nature Conservancy has protected 332 acres at Black Mountain Natural Area with fee ownership and conservation easements. From the top of Black Mountain there are expansive views of Mount Monadnock and the West River and Connecticut River Valleys. Visitors can enjoy the natural area by following the trail that begins near the West River and heads up the mountain.

Driving Directions

From 1-91, get off at Exit 4 to Putney. Take a left off the exit ramp and go south 2.4 miles on Route 5 and turn right on the East West Road. Continue through East Dummerston and Dummerston Center for 4.5 miles and turn left onto Quarry Road (unpaved), just before the covered bridge over the West River.

Go south on Quarry Road. At 1.4 miles the road becomes Rice Farm Road at an out-of-service, green steel bridge across the West River. From here go 0.5 mile to a parking pull-off on the right. The natural area is across the road from the pull-off, up a long grassy drive on the left.

From Brattleboro, travel north on Route 30 about 6.6 miles to East West Road and take a right onto this road to cross the West River. Just across the river, take a right onto Quarry Road and travel south on it, following the directions above from Quarry Road.



Libby Davidson

Featured Natural Community: Pitch Pine-Oak-Heath Rocky Summit

This is a rare natural community in Vermont that is dominated by pitch pine and can include scrub oak and mountain laurel. It grows on dry, open, rocky ridges of acidic bedrock in warmer areas of the state.