



*the North Glade*

## DHASH Winter 2023 Newsletter

In this issue:

- [New Glades at Dutch Hill: One Open, Two to Go](#)
- [New Bridges on Section 1 of the Catamount Trail](#)
- [Improvements Coming to the Rock Cut on the Catamount Trail's Section 2](#)
- [Grout Pond Keeps Getting Better: A Hut, Some Puncheon, and Drainage Improvements](#)
- [Join Us for Tours at Dutch Hill and on the Catamount](#)
- [A Section One Trip Report](#)

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## New Glades at Dutch Hill: One Open, Two to Go



*DHASH President Bill Beattie skis the new glade near the Windmill Trail*

The big news for 2022 was that the US Forest Service approved three new glades for the backcountry terrain at Dutch Hill! These new lines will offer more options for



advanced skiers and riders, as the existing steeper lines often get skied off early. The three new glades will be south of the Life Line and the old Windmill Trail (or to the right of these on the map, where the summit, and not north, is at the top of the map).

These new lines will be true glades—areas on natural terrain where some undergrowth has been cleared. The slope is steep and the trees are tight. This is in contrast to several of the historic ski trails at Dutch Hill DHASH has opened. We say that these historic trails have been “opened,” or “gladed,” and not “cleared,” because numerous trees remain. However, the ground surface on these historic trails was graded smooth many years ago when Dutch Hill was an operating ski area, and so they offer somewhat less challenging skiing and riding compared to the true glades, and are a safer bet in low snow conditions.

The first glade opened, in Fall 2022, is in the woods just to the south of the Windmill and is now skiable! Preliminary reports indicate that it skis well, with the last drop onto the bottom of the old Dutchman’s Holiday Trail being a bit tricky.

How do you find this new glade? Join one of Sam’s first and third Saturday tours at Dutch Hill. The volunteer who helped clear the glade, and was first to ski it, will show you the goods (if the snow is deep enough, of course). You can also skin up to the vista, and a few dozen yards past it start poking around to the right. While the historic ski trails are signed, the true glades are not, in keeping with the backcountry nature of Dutch Hill.

We hope you’ll join us in the Fall of 2023 when we plan to work on one, if not both, of the other proposed glades.

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## New Bridges on Section 1 of the Catamount Trail



The portion of Section 1 of the Catamount Trail from Route 100 in Readsboro north to Harriman Dam is a great tour for beginner cross country skiers. It ought to be—it follows an old railroad bed nearly the entire way. It also skis fairly well in low snow conditions, since that old railroad bed is fairly level. But, there are a number of small stream crossings here that could frustrate even the most experienced skier.

To make this portion of the Catamount Trail more enjoyable for beginner skiers, eleven small bridges were constructed this past fall. Eight of those bridges were built by students from the University of Vermont’s TREK program over the course of three days. This program provides incoming students with backcountry and service experiences just before the start of their fall semester. The other three bridges were



built by trail chief Sam Bartlett and his crew during one of his annual fall work days.

The Catamount Trail Association has been thinking a lot about climate change lately, and it's been looking for ways to help make the trail (and therefore skiing) more resilient during periods of low snow or warm weather, when small drainages can open up. These eleven bridges should make Section 1 a trail that's more fun to ski, especially for beginner skiers, and a good bet when conditions aren't prime on other, more rugged trails.

Funding for the bridges was provided by people who contributed to CTA's Annual Trail Fund, and labor was provided by UVM students and CTA work day volunteers. Please consider a donation to the CTA's Trail Fund, or a donation of your time and energy to work day (or better yet, both), in 2023.

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## Improvements Coming to the Rock Cut on the Catamount Trail's Section 2



One of the most scenic parts along Section 2 is a rock cut, a narrow slice through the hillside where you ski between sheer bedrock walls. The cut was blasted out in the mid-1920's when the Hoosac Tunnel and Wilmington Railroad was relocated higher up, out of the Deerfield River valley due to its inundation following the construction of Harriman Dam.

The rock cut is perhaps also the wettest and muddiest part of Section 2, especially if you're enjoying the Catamount Trail on foot or on bike during the summer months. Yes, this section is popular with bikers, and it's about to get even more popular as the Velomont Trail, a length-of-Vermont mountain bike trail, may co-locate with the Catamount here.

With an eye toward improving the trail for not just skiers but also bikers and hikers, the Catamount Trail Association applied for and received a \$13,400 Enhancement of Recreational Stewardship and Access (or ERSA) grant from the State of Vermont to correct drainage issues on this section. The work is expected to be done during the summer of 2023 with the hope of not just scenic, but also smooth and dry travel through the rock cut in 2024.

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# Grout Pond Keeps Getting Better: A Hut, Some Puncheon, and Drainage Improvements

**The Hut:** Vermont Huts Association (VT Huts), whose mission is to create a network of backcountry accommodations—huts, yurts, cabins, and lodges—on Vermont’s expansive trail system, has just completed construction of a hut at Grout Pond in late 2022. It joins eleven other huts in their system. Many of these huts are owned by another entity but managed by VT Huts, though several, including the Grout Pond Hut, were specifically constructed by the Association itself.



The Grout Pond Hut is located just off the Catamount Trail, on the edge of the existing walk-in camping area managed by the US Forest Service. The hut offers accommodations for up to 10 guests, and features a propane stove for heat, a propane stovetop for preparing meals, and pots/pans/utensils. For more information, <https://vermonthuts.org/>.

If the hut is not your thing (or isn’t available when you’d like to stay at Grout Pond), the US Forest Service manages over a dozen campsites nearby. Recent and ongoing improvements to the sites will include new tent pads, picnic tables and lean-tos. These ongoing improvements mean camping is restricted through 2023, but the delay will be worth it when it re-opens in 2024.

**Puncheon:** You might be asking yourself, “what is puncheon?” Puncheon is a wooden walkway used to cross wet or muddy areas or small streams. You might also hear it called a bog bridge or a boardwalk. The trails around Grout Pond have plenty of wet or muddy areas, and we’re grateful the US Forest Service is adding puncheon to the trail system here.



Several new sections of puncheon have been installed both on the Pond Loop, which also coincides with Section 4 of the Catamount Trail, and on the West Loop across one particularly troublesome (in both winter and summer) stream crossing. The US Forest Service was aided by the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and by Wilderness Volunteers, a nationwide group that organizes and promotes volunteer service in cooperation with public land agencies.

**Drainage Improvements:** While the Grout Pond area gets a ton of snow, making it a favorite cross country ski destination, you may be surprised to find some parts of the trail nearly bare of the white stuff in early winter, late winter, or following the all-too-common rainstorm in January or February. While we can’t change the weather, we can try to fix some of the drainage issues that make the trail wet or wash away the snow.

The US Forest Service has a cost-share agreement with the Catamount Trail Association to work on a portion of Section 4 from Grout Pond south towards Somerset Reservoir, and possibly the west side of the Pond Loop, a former route of the Catamount. DHASH has mapped the drainage issues in this area and the Forest Service and CTA will be working with a contractor in 2023 or 2024 to make improvements, including a short re-route.

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# Join Us for Tours at Dutch Hill and on the Catamount



Looking to get out this winter in the company of like-minded people? Or maybe you'd just like a little help finding your way around. We've posted a list of DHASH and CTA Winter 2023 tours in Southern Vermont at <https://www.dhash4vt.org/events>, and there's sure to be one that interests you.

At Dutch Hill, we've got backcountry tours (lots of tours) for both experienced skiers and riders, and for those who are a little less confident on the slopes.

Is cross country skiing more your thing? Sure, there are the usual slate of tours on the southern four sections of the Catamount Trail. But you've probably never skied (or even heard of) the Somerset West Side Trail, so why not make an adventurous 12-mile day of it? Or how about a chance to ski a beautiful private trail system near Wilmington?

Want to get out mid-week for a short after-work ski, then retire to a local establishment in the Wilmington area for some food and drink? There's an après-work/après-ski tour on the calendar. Maybe you like your après to include a campfire. There will be one on the shores of Grout Pond after a fun afternoon of skiing there.

Please join us! Here's what's on tap for 2023:

- **Intermediate/advanced tours of Dutch Hill** will be held every first and third Sunday during January, February, March, and maybe even April.
- **Beginner tour of Dutch Hill** for those who feel less confident about their downhill skills on Sunday February 5.
- **Snowshoe tour of Dutch Hill** will loop around the entire perimeter of the former ski area, stopping at the vista summit for lunch, on Sunday January 15 (at the same time as the intermediate/advanced BC tour).
- **Catamount Trail Multi-Day Tour on Sections 1-4**, January 20-23. Skiers are welcome to sign up for as many days as they wish, even one.
- **Catamount Trail Section 1 tour** (easy/introductory) from Harriman Dam to Route 100 and back (Whitingham/Readsboro) on Saturday February 4.
- **Somerset West Side Trail tour**, mostly flat, but considered intermediate due to its 12 mile length, with many views of scenic Somerset Reservoir, on Saturday February 11.
- **Private Trails near Wilmington** (easy/intermediate), a great opportunity to enjoy some ski trails not usually open the public, with nice views of Mt. Snow, on Sunday February 12.
- **Cross-country/downhill tour of Dutch Hill** for those with waxless skis and skins on Saturday February 25 (suitable for advanced XC skiers or beginner backcountry skiers).
- **Après-work tour in the Wilmington area**, an easy/intermediate, mid-week, after work tour, followed by some après-ski food, drink, and socializing, on Wednesday March 1.
- **Daylight Savings Catamount Trail Section 4 tour** (intermediate), late in the day, with après and a campfire on the shore of Grout Pond (Stratton), on Sunday March 12.

For more details, visit <https://www.dhash4vt.org/events>, or <https://catamounttrail.org/events-tours>



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## A Section 1 Trip Report



Heidi Pancake, Section 4's Trail Chief, trekked south to check out Section 1 of the Catamount Trail. Here's her report.

*I skied section 1 of the Catamount Trail years ago from the dam south. I remember it was a lovely ski along a railroad grade dotted in moose beds and tracks. During the last week of 2022, my friend from Massachusetts and I met at the convenient parking lot on Route 100 in Readsboro to ski north to Harriman Dam. The temperature rose above freezing as we skied but there was plenty of snow to ski even after the extreme rain event a few days prior. The river valley was still tucked in shadow preserving the snow.*

*We noticed several new bridges over small streams covered in snow and glided over them happily maintaining our pace up the valley. The Deerfield River glistened in the sunshine and only a few times we had to skirt a low snow rain hole in the trail. As we neared the dam the icicles along the bank were breathtaking. We enjoyed a snack in the sunshine and returned feeling gravity carry us downriver along the rail bed skiing into the sunshine.*

