

# LET IT SNOW

## WINTER ACTIVITIES IN VERMONT

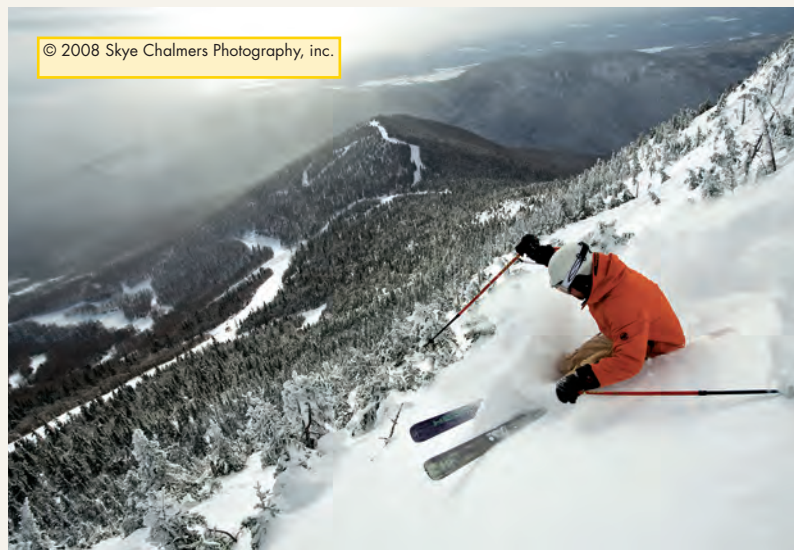
by Elise Coroneos

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IN FOCUS LET IT SNOW



## SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING IN VERMONT



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Less than 5 mi from the Canadian border, Jay Peak is Vermont's northernmost ski resort.

Ever since America's first ski tow opened in a farmer's pasture near Woodstock in January 1934, skiers have headed en masse to Vermont in winter. Today, 20 alpine and 30 nordic ski areas range in size and are spread across the state, from Mount Snow in the south to Jay Peak near the Canadian border. The snow-making equipment has also become more comprehensive over the years, with 70% of the trails in the state using man-made snow. Here are some of the best ski areas by various categories:

**GREAT FOR KIDS** **Smugglers' Notch, Okemo,** and **Bromley Mountain** all offer terrific kids' programs, with classes organized by age categories and by skill level. Kids as young as 3 (4 at some ski areas) can start learning. Child care, with activities like stories, singing, and arts and crafts, are available for those too young to ski; some ski areas, like Smuggler's Notch, offer babysitting with no minimum age daytime and evening.

**BEST FOR BEGINNERS** Beginner terrain makes up nearly half of the mountain at **Stratton**, where options include private and group lessons for first-timers. Also good are small but family-friendly **Ascutney** and **Bromley Mountains**, which both designate a third of their slopes for beginners.

**EXPERT TERRAIN** The slopes at **Jay Peak** and massive **Killington** are most notable for their steepness and pockets of glades. About 40% of the runs at these two resorts are advanced or expert. Due to its far north location, Jay Peak tends to get the most snow, making it ideal for those skilled in plowing through fresh powder. Another favorite with advanced skiers is Central Vermont's **Mad River Glen**, where many slopes are ungroomed (natural) and the motto is "Ski it if you can." In addition, **Sugarbush, Stowe,** and **Smugglers' Notch** are all revered for their challenging untamed side country.



© Henryk T. Kaiser / age fotostock

Mount Mansfield is better known as Stowe.



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Stratton Mountain clocktower

**NIGHT SKIING** Come late afternoon, **Bolton Valley** is hopping. That's because it's the only location in Vermont for night skiing. Ski and ride under the lights from 4 until 8 Wednesday through Saturday, followed by a later après-ski scene.

**APRÈS-SKI** The social scenes at **Killington, Sugarbush,** and **Stowe** are the most noteworthy (and crowded). Warm up after a day in the snow in Killington with all-you-can-eat pizza on Monday nights and daily happy hour specials at the Nightspot Outback, or stop by the always popular Wobbly Barn. For live music, try Chez Henri in Sugarbush or the Matterhorn Night Club in Stowe.

**SNOWBOARDING** Boarders (and some skiers) will love the latest features for freestyle tricks in Vermont. **Okemo** has a superpipe and five terrain parks, including a new gladed park with all-natural features; **Stratton** has a half pipe, rail garden, and four other parks. **Mount Snow's** Carinthia Peak is an all-terrain

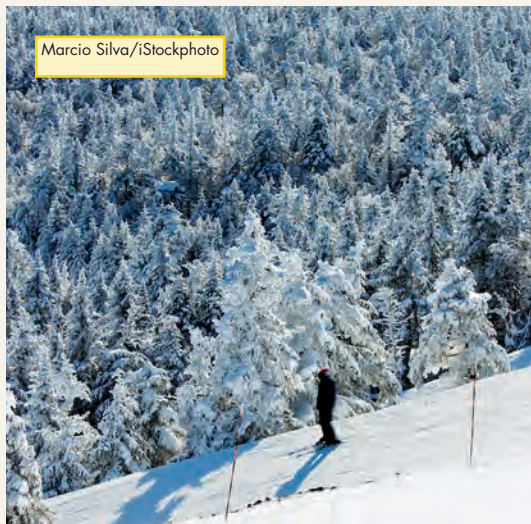
park—dedicated mountain, the only of its kind in the state. Head to **Killington** for Burton Stash, another beautiful all-natural features terrain park. Note that snowboarding is not allowed at skiing cooperative **Mad River Glen**.

**CROSS-COUNTRY** To experience the best of cross-country skiing in the state, simply follow the Catamount Trail, a 300-mi nordic route from southern Vermont to Canada. **The Trapp Family Lodge** in Stowe has 40 mi of groomed cross-country trails and 60 mi of back-country trails. Another top option is **The Mountain Top Inn & Resort**, just outside of Killington. Its Nordic Ski and Snowshoe Center provides instruction for newcomers, along with hot drinks and lunches when it is time to take a break and warm up.

**TELEMARK** Ungroomed snow and tree skiing are a natural fit with free-heel skiing at **Mad River Glen**. **Jay Peak** also has telemark rentals and instruction.



## MOUNTAIN-RESORT TRIP PLANNER



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### TIMING

■ **Snow Season.** Winter sports time is typically from December to April, weather permitting. Holidays are the most crowded.

■ **March Madness.** Most of the season's snow tends to come in March, so that's the time to go if you want to ski on fresh, nature-made powder. To increase your odds, choose a ski area in the northern part of the state.

■ **Summer Scene.** During summertime, many ski resorts reinvent themselves as prime destinations for golfers and mountain bikers. Other summer visitors come to the mountains to enjoy hiking trails, climbing walls, aquatic centers, chairlift and horseback rides, or a variety of festivals.

■ **Avoid Long Lift Lines.** Try to hit the slopes early—many lifts start at 8 or 9 AM, with ticket windows opening a half-hour earlier. Then take a mid-morning break as lines start to get longer and head out again when others come in for lunch.

Top left, Killington's six mountains make up the largest ski area in Vermont. Top right, Stratton has a Snowboard-cross course.

### SAVINGS TIPS

■ **Choose a Condo.** Especially if you're planning to stay for a week, save money on food by opting for a condominium unit with a kitchen. You can shop at the supermarket and cook breakfast and dinner.

■ **Rent Smart.** Consider ski rental options in the villages rather than those at the mountain. Renting right at the ski area may be more convenient, but it may also cost more.

■ **Discount Lift Tickets.** Online tickets are often the least expensive; multi-day discounts and ski-and-stay packages will also lower your costs. Good for those who can plan ahead, early-bird tickets often go on sale before the ski season even starts.

■ **Hit the Peaks Off-peak.** In order to secure the best deals at the most competitive rates, avoid booking during school holidays. Presidents Week in February is the busiest, because that's when Northeastern schools have their spring break.

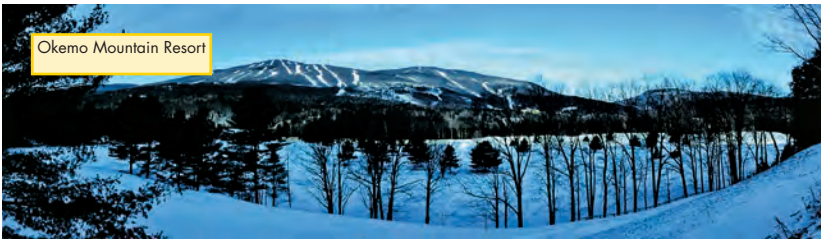
### THINK WARM THOUGHTS

It can get cold on the slopes, so be prepared. Consider heated boots or purchase a pair each of inexpensive hand and feet warmers that fit easily in your gloves and boots. Helmets, which can also be rented, provide not only added safety but warmth.





## VERMONT SKI AREAS BY THE NUMBERS



Okemo Mountain Resort

Okemo's wide slopes attract snowbirds to Ludlow in Central Vermont.

Numbers are a helpful way to compare mountains, but remember that each resort has a distinct personality. This list is composed of ski areas in Vermont with at least 100 skiable acres. For more information, see individual resort listings.

SKI AREA	Vertical Drop	Skiable Acres	# of Trails & Lifts	Terrain Type			Snowboarding Options
				●	■	◆◆◆	
Ascutney Mountain	1,800	150	57/6	30%	40%	30%	Terrain park
Bolton Valley	1,704	165	64/6	27%	47%	26%	Terrain park
Bromley	1,334	177	45/10	35%	34%	31%	Terrain park
Burke Mountain	2,011	250	45/4	25%	45%	30%	Terrain park
Jay Peak	2,153	385	76/8	20%	40%	40%	Terrain park
Killington	3,050	752	141/22	29%	29%	42%	Terrain park, Half-pipe
Mad River Glen	2,037	115	45/5	30%	30%	40%	Snowboarding not allowed
Mount Snow	1,700	588	80/20	14%	73%	13%	Terrain park, Half-pipe
Okemo	2,200	632	119/19	32%	36%	32%	Terrain park, Superpipe, RossCross terrain cross park
Pico Mountain	1,967	214	50/7	20%	48%	32%	Triple Slope
Smugglers' Notch	2,610	310	78/8	19%	56%	25%	Terrain park
Stowe	2,360	485	116/13	16%	59%	25%	Terrain park, Half-pipe
Stratton	2,003	600	92/13	42%	31%	27%	Terrain park, Half-pipe, Snowboardcross course
Sugarbush	2,600	578	53/16	20%	45%	35%	Terrain park, Half-pipe

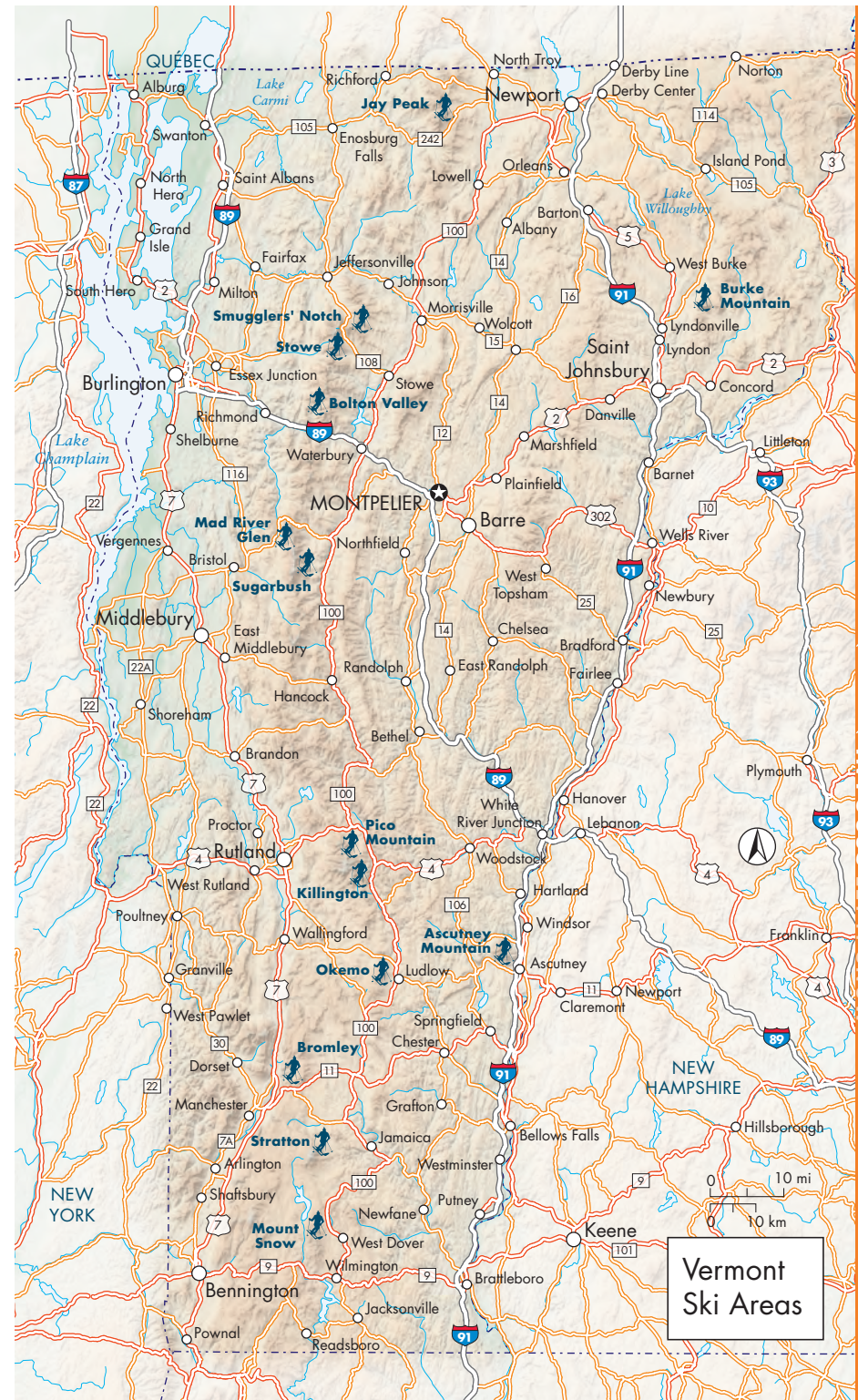
### CONTACT THE EXPERTS

Ski Vermont (☎ 802/223-2439 🌐 [www.skivermont.com](http://www.skivermont.com)), a non-profit association in Montpelier, Vermont, and Vermont Department of Tourism (🌐 [www.vermontvacation.com](http://www.vermontvacation.com)) are great resources for travelers planning a wintertime trip to Vermont.

### KNOW YOUR SIGNS

On trail maps and the mountains, trails are rated and marked:

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- ◆ Advanced
- ◆◆ Expert



Vermont Ski Areas



## MORE WINTER FUN



© Ellen Rooney / age fotostock

A horse and sleigh ride in South Woodstock



© Barry Winiker / age fotostock

Snowmobiling



Don Landwehrle ©2007

Snowshoeing at Trapp Family Lodge

### DOG SLEDDING

Being pulled through the woods by a team of up to eight adult Siberian Huskies, you might feel like you are a pioneer taking on the elements—or like you're in Alaska's Iditarod.

**Pros:** unique experience; kids love it.

**Cons:** dogs can be stubborn; pricey.

■ **Peacepups Dog Sledding** (☎ 802/888-7733 🌐 [www.peacepupsdogsledding.com](http://www.peacepupsdogsledding.com)) at Lake Elmore, 15 miles from Stowe, offers two-hour day tours using a team of eight dogs. Choose between sitting back and riding inside a padded toboggan while your driver (and the dogs) do the work, or join in the driving using a two-person tandem sled. Either cost \$120 per adult (\$60 for kids under 12). Tours head out every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 10 AM, noon, and 2 PM from mid-December to the end of March, weather permitting.

■ Twilight dog sledding tours leave the **Stowe Mountain Resort** (☎ 802/253-3656 🌐 [www.stowe.com](http://www.stowe.com)) for one hour every Tuesday and Thursday. The cost is \$150 for guests of the resort or \$160 for nonguests. This is a sit-down ride inside a padded toboggan.

■ For a taste of how the professionals do it, head to Burke Mountain during **Vermont's Annual Dog Sled Dash** (🌐 [www.sleddog-dash.com](http://www.sleddog-dash.com)). Usually held in February, the event is the largest of its kind in New England, with more than 100 teams entering for part of the \$10,000 purse. Vacationers come to witness the event—put on some snowshoes and trek in to find the best vantage points. If you fancy your own dog-sledding skills, you can register online.

### ICE SKATING

If you want outdoor activity but want to stay in one spot and not be outside for a long time—or not even outside at all, but just feel like you are—ice skating might be just your thing. In Vermont you can skate surrounded by the nearby snowcapped mountains or in the comfort of an indoor professional facility.

**Pros:** excellent activity for groups; easy access (venues are often close to your lodging); inexpensive.

**Cons:** can be crowded.

■ **The Ice Station at Okemo** (☎ 802/228-1406 🌐 [www.okemo.com](http://www.okemo.com)), near the Jackson Gore base, is a roof-covered natural ice rink with a warming area for those with comfort in mind. Open mid-December through April from 2 to 9 PM on weekdays and 10 AM to 9 PM on weekends. The cost is \$4 for rink access plus \$4 to rent skates.

■ Check out **Jay Peak's** (☎ 802/988-2611 🌐 [www.jaypeakresort.com](http://www.jaypeakresort.com)) new, \$7 million full-size rink, which opened in 2010. At the time of this writing, prices were not yet set.

■ For the ultimate outdoor skating experience, head to **Lake Morey** in Fairlee, home to America's longest natural ice skating trail. From December to April, the lake freezes over and is groomed for ice skating, providing a magical 4-mi stretch of ice amid forested hillsides. It is maintained by the **Upper Valley Trails Alliance** (☎ 802/649-9075 🌐 [www.uvtrails.org](http://www.uvtrails.org)). Bring your own skates or find rentals at the nearby **Nordic Skater** (☎ 866/244-2570 🌐 [www.nordic-skater.com](http://www.nordic-skater.com)), which also runs outdoor skating workshops for \$30.

### SLEDDING AND TUBING

Want down-the-mountain action but prefer not to ski or board? Tubing is offered at many Vermont ski areas with lifts to tow riders back up, or you can just ask the locals for the best sledding hills. Either way it is especially popular with kids: get ready to hear the question "Can we do it again?" multiple times.

**Pros:** fun for families and groups; cheaper than skiing.

**Cons:** rides can be bumpy; not for very young (and short) kids.

■ A standout is Stratton's **Coca Cola Tubing Park** (☎ 800/787-2886 🌐 [www.stratton.com](http://www.stratton.com)). Careen down any one of four lanes that stretch up to 750 feet long. Kids must be 5 years or older to ride. Open 4 to 8 PM Friday, 11 AM to 9 PM Saturday, and 11 AM to 3 PM Sunday. Tickets are \$15 for one hour and \$22 for two hours.

■ **Okemo** (☎ 866/706-5366 🌐 [www.okemo.com](http://www.okemo.com)) offers a tubing facility at its Jackson Gore base area as an après-ski activity from 3 to 6 PM on Friday and Saturday (hours may vary). Take a conveyor-style lift to the top of the hill and then ride down one of four groomed lanes. Tubes rent for \$9 an hour. Kids must be at least 42 inches tall to ride.

■ For extra adventure, visitors at **Smugglers' Notch** (☎ 800/419-4615 🌐 [www.smuggs.com](http://www.smuggs.com)) can try airboarding, which uses an inflated sled. First-timers must enroll in an two-hour clinic (\$25), after which they can rent and ride for \$20 (plus a valid lift ticket) from 2 to 4 PM. Riders must be at least 10 years old and 48 inches tall.

### SLEIGH RIDES

Riding a sleigh in Vermont is not quite dashing through the snow on a one-horse open sleigh—the speed is gentle enough that you can sip hot cocoa on the ride, and the sleigh is big, so it usually takes two horses. But you will see Christmas-card-like settings as the sleigh takes you down trails lined with fir trees. Many farms and some resorts offer sleigh rides from December through April, weather permitting. When there is no snow on the ground, horse-drawn carriage rides may be available. The Woodstock area is known as Vermont's horse country, and many local stables have different types of riding options year-round.

**Pros:** great way to see scenery; fun group activity.

**Cons:** slow speed; not comfortable if it's windy or snowing hard.

■ **The Mountain Top Inn & Resort** (☎ 802/483-2311 🌐 [www.mountaintopin.com](http://www.mountaintopin.com)) just 11 mi from Killington, offers a Sleigh and Dinner Package for \$150 for two adults (includes tax and gratuity). The sleigh ride through the resort's wooded trails followed by a three-course dinner is the perfect nightcap. Call for the regularly scheduled 30 minute rides starting at \$25 per person, with discounts for children. Private rides are also available.

■ **The Kedron Valley Stables** (☎ 802/457-1480 🌐 [www.kedron.com](http://www.kedron.com)), in South Woodstock, runs hour-long sleigh rides for up to three people for \$95, or for four to eight people for \$115. For groups over eight, there's an extra charge of \$14 per each additional person.



Okemo Resort



Tubing down Magic Mountain.

## SNOWMOBILING

Travel a snow-covered highway through densely forested valleys, past snow-capped mountains, and into friendly villages—all without exerting your own energy. Thanks to the extensive trails administered through the state's VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers) system, it's possible to see extensive back country normally beyond the realm of visitors. Snowmobiles usually hold two riders.

**Pros:** you can cover a lot of ground.

**Cons:** can be noisy; expensive; controversial because of environmental impact.

■ Snowmobile rentals are available at several ski areas, including **Killington** (☎ 802/422-2121 🌐 [www.killingtonsnowmobiletours.com](http://www.killingtonsnowmobiletours.com)) and **Okemo** (☎ 800/328-8725 🌐 [www.killingtonsnowmobiletours.com/okemo](http://www.killingtonsnowmobiletours.com/okemo)). Both have one-hour guided tours across groomed ski trails (\$89 for one person, \$119 for two). If you are feeling more adventurous, take the two-hour backcountry tour through 25 mi of the Calvin Coolidge State Forest (\$144 for one person, \$189 for two). Helmets and boots are included.

■ For an after-hours perspective, try night snowmobiling at **Smugglers' Notch Resort** (☎ 802/644-8851 🌐 [www.smuggs.com](http://www.smuggs.com)) and **Stratton** (☎ 802/824-5399 🌐 [www.stratton.com](http://www.stratton.com)). Smugglers' evening tours depart daily on the hour from 5–8 PM from around mid-December to early April, weather permitting. Stratton night tours are available on Saturday nights and holiday nights at from 5–8:30 PM, with additional nights available upon request. The cost is \$80 per snowmobile per hour.

## SNOWSHOEING

Hikers wanting to explore nature in the winter can do so in depth thanks to snowshoes, which easily attach to your boots. Snowshoeing allows you to get up close and personal with the surrounding wilderness. Tranquil trails are easy to find in the Green Mountain State; just avoid those shared with snowmobiles. Some alpine resorts now have networks of snowshoeing trails. Many places that rent cross-country ski gear, like the Trapp Family Lodge, also rent snowshoes. Poles help snowshoers stabilize, especially on uneven and steep terrain.

**Pros:** inexpensive; great exercise; easy to do (no lesson required).

**Cons:** small children might get worn out quickly; can be a lot of work; colder than cross-country skiing because you're not moving fast.

■ **Mount Olga Trail** (🌐 [www.trails.com](http://www.trails.com)) is the most popular snowshoeing destination in Vermont. Located in Wilmington's Molly Stark State Park, the trail is 2.3 mi long. The hike is relatively easy, climaxing with a 360-degree view of southern Vermont and northern Massachusetts.

■ Northeast Vermont's **Kingdom Trails** (☎ 802/626-5862 🌐 [www.kingdomtrails.org](http://www.kingdomtrails.org)) is a network of more than 100 mi of trails used for snowshoeing (hiking and mountain biking in summer). A day pass is \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids ages 8–15, and free for kids 7 and under. Guests at East Burke's **Inn at Mountain View Farm** (☎ 800/572-4509, 🌐 [www.innmtview.com](http://www.innmtview.com)), the closest inn to the beginning of the trails, receive free access.