

The Lakes of The Deerfield Valley

By Christy A. Betit of *The Deerfield Valley News*

When people think of Vermont, water usually comes to mind-the frozen kind that is. But summer water activities in the Deerfield Valley are abundant.

The valley is awash with lakes and ponds and at the top of the list is **Harriman Reservoir**, also known as Lake Whitingham, which is the largest body of water completely within Vermont's borders. It was built by New England Power Company as part of their hydro-electric system and finished in 1923. Over eight miles long, with 28 miles of winding coastline, the lake provides hours of relaxing fun for swimmers, boaters and fishermen alike. The lake can be accessed at a number of points, among them, Wards Cove, Castle Hill picnic area, and Mountain Mills.

To get to Wards Cove from Wilmington, take Route 100 south. About one mile past the junctions of Routes 100 and 9 you will see a sign on the right for Flames Stables. Turn right onto the dirt road and follow it to the lake. Picnic tables are available as well as a roped off swimming area. Wards Cove is popular among local sailing enthusiasts including members of the Windham Sailing Club who moor their sailboats there. For more information on the club, call Bob Strobi, secretary at (802) 368-2932, or email to ibebst@sover.net.

For Castle Hill and Mountain Mills access, head to downtown Wilmington. At the light, go .3 miles south past Poncho's Wreck restaurant and Buzzy Town Park. Continue up Castle Hill and turn right on Fairview Avenue, following the signs to the boat launch. Continue on until the pavement changes to a dirt road. Castle Hill picnic area is on the right, 1/4 mile after the road turns to dirt. Continue on to the end of the road for the Mountain Mills access area.

Power boats and personal watercraft are never in short supply as these two venues offer boaters easy access to the lake. Good picnicking and another roped off swimming area can be found at Mountain Mills.

Lake Raponda, a smaller, secluded lake, offers visitors an even more tranquil day on, in or beside the water. Located on the eastern edge of Wilmington, and nestled deep in the woods, the lake may be difficult to find, but it's a gem. Raponda has boating access (power boats are permitted), picnic tables and a floating dock. From Wilmington, take Route 100 north past the Riverbend Market Place. Take a right onto Higley Hill Road and look for signs for Lake Raponda Road on the right. Follow Lake Raponda Road to the lake.

For more great swimming, head to Grout Pond in Stratton. To get to Grout Pond, from Wilmington, take Route 100 north past Mount Snow. Keep your eyes open for the Stratton-Arlington Road sign on the left. Follow that road until you reach the lake on the right. A parking lot can be found on the left hand side of the road. Power boats are not permitted.

If you're a fisherman, you'll benefit by spending a day at **Lake Sadawga** in Whitingham. The lake was named for the lone Indian Chief Sadawga who, as folklore has it, swam under the lake's

entire "floating island" (a large mass of weeds and other growth) without taking a single breath. A day of fishing at Sadawga may put bass, rainbow and brown trout on your family's dinner plates. To get to Sadawga from Wilmington, take Route 100 south into the center of Jacksonville. Take a right at the T and head straight up a steep hill. Continue past Whitingham School watching for the Town Hill Road sign on the left. Follow that road past the Town Hill Playground and go straight down Town Hill. To enter the access area, take your second left at the bottom of the hill. Power boats are permitted but swimming is not recommended. Weeds and algae make for a slimy swim, but dogs will love it!

Somerset Reservoir is also known locally as a fisherman's paradise. Its quiet, undeveloped coastline offers visitors peaceful paddling and some great catches. Don't forget the bug spray though, as the black flies in those woods have been known to eat large men in one gulp! For a day at Somerset Reservoir take Route 9 west approximately five miles, looking for signs for Somerset Road on the right. Follow that road 10 miles to the reservoir. Power boats are not permitted.

[Ecological and geographic tour of the Somerset Reservoir and its surroundings](#) (PDF)

For more information on Vermont's lakes and parks, call the forest, parks and recreation department at (802) 886-2215. For a complete guide to fishing in Vermont, call the fish & wildlife department at (802) 241-3700.

Water Activities

Water, water everywhere, and now, it's time to play. On a hot scorching day, there's nothing you want more than to take a dip in the lake. But paddling around on your squeaky duck floaty can get old quick. Rescue your family and friends from the doldrums of mere swimming by stopping at High Country WaveRunner & Water Sport Rentals. Owned and operated by local residents Mark and Wendy Pederson, visitors can rent waverunners, jet boats and pontoon boats for use on Harriman Reservoir.

The shop is open daily, (with mother nature's approval), with mid-week hours starting at 10 am and weekend hours, 9 am. Renters will receive operation and safety lessons from certified boat safety instructors.

Upon request, the Pedersons will put together a delicious picnic lunch for you and your party for a nominal fee. Taking advantage of this service may be your best bet as there are no food vendors on the lake.

Two and three passenger waverunners can be rented and may be operated by those 18 years and older. The following are waverunner rental fees: half hour-\$40; one hour-\$65; half day-\$130; full day-\$195.

Jet boats can accommodate up to seven passengers. Operators must be at least 21 years old . The following are jet boat rental fees: \$75 per hour; \$150 half day; and \$225 full day.

Pontoon boats can accommodate 10 people and operators must be at least 21 years old. Cost for a half day is \$195 and full day \$275.

To reach High Country from Wilmington center take Route 9 west two miles past the light until you reach lighthouse corner on the right. Have you just spent your work week meeting deadlines with triple espressos coursing through your veins? If you're looking for a slower pace you should definitely try canoeing or kayaking. Equipe Sports located on the Mount Snow Access Road offers full-day rentals of single-man kayaks for \$30 and rentals of canoes and double kayaks for \$40. All rentals are class II boats which are designed for flat water. Rentals include paddles, life jackets and car-top carriers. Equipe employees will offer some tips on the sport such as how to get in and out of the boat-it's not as easy as it sounds!

Grout Pond and **Somerset Lake** are on the top of Equipe employees' list of recommendations for canoeing and kayaking. The power boat ban, the pristine water and the abundance of wild life make these venues a relaxing alternative, particularly for the over-caffeinated crowd. Equipe Sport is open from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., seven days a week. Call (802) 464-2222.

Green Mountain Flagship Company, celebrating its 25th anniversary this summer, is owned and operated by Dick Joyce. Joyce hand-built his passenger boat, the "Mt. Mills," and has been offering cruises of Harriman Reservoir ever since. Captain Joyce will give you a historic account of the lost village of Mt. Mills hidden beneath the water's surface while you enjoy the picturesque scenery during a one and a half hour cruise.

Cruises take place from mid-May through the end of October at varying times. Cost is \$9 for adults, \$8.50 for seniors, \$5 for children three through 12 and free for kids under three. Those interested in cruising should call ahead to reserve a space. For a unique place to hold a wedding, birthday party, reunion, conference or other event, call Joyce to make a request. Meals and live entertainment are available for parties of 25 or more.

For those who prefer to cruise au natural, check in with Joyce about the nudist cruises. He's offering two this season, taking you to the valley's best kept secret-The Ledges-New England's largest nudist beach.

GMFS also offers sailboat, kayak and canoe rentals, starting at \$19 for canoes and kayaks and \$24 for sailboats. Joyce will give you pointers on how to get started. For more information on GMFS, call (802) 464-2975.

Your trip to the Deerfield Valley isn't complete until you've spent a day at **Mount Snow's Snow Lake**. The newest addition to the resort includes a waterfront area with activities that include picnic areas, an interactive water playpool for children, boat rentals and a sand volleyball court. Fountain Mountain, the resort's waterpark, is designed for children 12 and under and offers splash areas, "lemondrops" and "tea buckets" which drop and squirt water. It is located adjacent to Snow Lake Lodge. Cost is \$5 per day for kids. Adults are admitted free and adult supervision is required.

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