

## Irish Hill Story

The Irish Hill ridgeline is a series of peaks which rise behind Berlin Pond and provide a watershed for pure water for our communities. It is still an undeveloped area which offers recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, forest woodlands and watershed integrity.

Protection of these values moved conservation groups to take action in 1999.

The Irish Hill Preservation Project began when a consortium of partners including the Berlin Conservation Commission, the Vt. Land Trust and the Vt. River Conservancy purchased 140 acres of land using grants and donations. The property title was deeded to the State of Vermont. The 406-acre ridgeline purchase followed in 2000 and was also protected with an easement and deeded to the Town of Berlin. In 2002 a 110-acre parcel near the Brookfield Road trailhead was purchased and now protects both sides of Darling Road Trail from development. A 48-acre parcel was purchased in 2008 which connects the grouping of public lands to the north with the southern ridgeline public properties. Both the 110-acre and 48-acre parcels are protected by easements and owned by the Town of Berlin. Montpelier's Conservation Commission joined the effort, and the project scope was widened to the Berlin Pond watershed in a continuing conservation effort. Montpelier has used Berlin Pond as its water supply since 1884 and soon after that date the city began purchasing a protective buffer around the pond.

*Trails:* Historically, the trail to the summit has been used for decades. “*The Paine Mountain Guidebook*” written by Bill Osgood describes the Irish Hill Ridge Walk as follows. “Just a short distance up Darling Road trail [once a class IV road, now a legal trail] a lively stream crosses the road, and it is well worthwhile to pause here and examine the bridge, which was cleverly constructed of huge native stone slabs.”

Unfortunately, in the spring of 2001 this old stone culvert collapsed from silt buildup due to fill placed on the trail to facilitate a 1997 logging operation. Volunteers built a small bridge over the stream which serves users well.

Bill continues, “Another stopping point a little farther along is the cellar hole and barn foundation of the Stewart Farm.” Two markers give brief histories of the home and barn with pictures of the structures before their collapse in the early 1950's. Irish Hill is believed to be titled such because of the Irish farmers who settled this hillside. “After passing the Stewart Farm site, be on the watch for a left-hand turn headed south rather steeply uphill. This road is of fairly recent construction and built to service the telecommunications towers on Irish Hill. This is now the best route for hiking.

About halfway up this new road you will arrive at a long south turn and on the left, or east side is a good example of what geologists call a “Roche Moutonnee” or “Sheep Rock”, which is a landform sculpted by the “Big Ice”. It is worth a side trip to the top from which there are fine views northerly.

The summit of Irish Hill (2,130 feet) is capped by two telecommunications towers guarded by a chain-link fence (you will not want to linger as the view is not very good anyway).”

A recently cleared vista on the first peak (about a quarter of a mile before the cell towers) offers sweeping views. Blue blazes direct you to turn west up a short steep hill and then south a few feet to the clearing.