

Rutland

VERMONT

BY MATT LARSON

In south central Vermont, an immense fold of billion-year-old rock rises to form a broad forested plateau strewn with glistening ponds and lush wetlands. Above, the ancient rock is mantled by the evergreen-bedecked ridges and rocky summits of the Green Mountains. To the west, the folded and cleaved slates of the Taconic Mountains bind a narrow valley. In this valley, atop broad bands of marble, lies Rutland.

Rutland was chartered in 1761 as one of the New Hampshire Grants. The first settlers arrived in 1770 led by Colonel James Mead. In the early 1800s marble deposits were first unearthed in Rutland, and in the 1830s extensive deposits of high-quality marble were discovered. Within a decade small firms had begun excavations. After the railroad arrived in 1851 these quarries began to turn a profit.

Marble fueled enough growth and investment that when Rutland was incorporated as a village in 1886, quarry owners ensured the district that contained the

bulk of the marble was split off to become West Rutland and Proctor. In 1892, portions of the village and town of Rutland were incorporated as a city, and the remaining town of Rutland that encircled it was primarily rural.

Today, visitors to Rutland can see this history in Rutland's Downtown Historic District, especially in the buildings constructed of or embellished with local marble. Merchant's Row, a restored street that dates back to the 1870s, was then one of the most prominent streets of commerce in New England. Main Street Park,

DEER LEAP MOUNTAIN AND MERCHANT'S ROW
BY MATT LARSON

DELI SANDWICHES • SALADS • HAND-CARVED SANDWICHES



A.T./L.T.



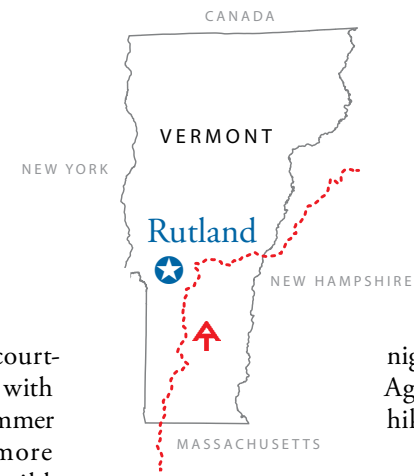
BACK HOME AGAIN CAFE



HISTORIC DISTRICT



LONG TRAIL FESTIVAL



once the site of the courthouse jail, now teems with activity during the summer months. All told, more than one hundred buildings in Rutland are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Rutland's history abides in the nearby mountains as well, especially Killington Peak, the highest point in southern Vermont. In 1879 a government signal station was erected on Killington. The road that ascended the western flank of the mountain to the installation was soon employed by local entrepreneurs who used it to construct a hotel. Another trail to the summit was soon cut from the east. For the rest of the century, Killington was an oft-climbed peak. When the popularity of the hotel declined, shortly after 1900, the structure was abandoned, soon to fall apart and disappear.

Although the hotel's glory days were short-lived, Killington Peak is still a hiker's favorite. An extensive web of trails centered on the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail systems also offers many other options, including outings well suited for all ages and abilities. Group outings led by members of the Killington Section of the Green Mountain Club are a fine way to explore local trails and learn more about the region.

Not to dissuade you from exploring Rutland's many fine eating and drinking establishments on your own, but you can't go wrong by starting your day with a freshly brewed cup of Café Terra's house blend coffee, or stopping at the Back Home Again Café for a wrap. For those of you on the Trail and looking for a

night's rest, the Back Home Again Café also operates a hiker hostel.

During the summer months, there are free concerts on Wednesdays and Sundays under the gazebo on the green. On Tuesdays and Saturdays you can talk to local farmers and artisans about their foodstuffs and wares at the farmer's market in Depot Park. On Fridays, Merchant's Row is transformed into an open air market offering delectable food from downtown restaurants, art being created and displayed, and a diverse array of music.

In August Rutland's festival season commences with the Long Trail Festival, a celebratory gathering that offers outdoor activities, the best in local music, educational presentations, opportunities to "give back" to the trail, and lots of family fun. Now in its third year, it is quickly becoming an essential sojourn for hikers hoping to renew old friendships and make new ones. Art in the Park, which features fine art, crafts, music, and art and craft activities for children, has two appearances, one in August and one in October. The Vermont State Fair returns to the state fairgrounds every September.

All in all, the qualities that make Rutland a favored stopover town among the thru-hiking community top the list of traits that make it a great place to visit: a compact downtown with pubs, restaurants, and other services within easy walking distance and ready access to trails. Add fairs and festivals, local artisans, seasonal foods, and live music to the mix and you have the makings of a fine hiking holiday.

For more information visit:

www.rutlandvermont.com

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