

T H E N • E • W DEERFIELD

TOM KEER

WHEN ANGLERS TALK about the Deerfield River, they discuss its trout-filled stretches in western Massachusetts near the Vermont line. But the river's headwaters flow off the Green Mountains of southern Vermont, and few anglers are aware of the wild-trout rebirth going on there. Better water and fisheries management are creating rich rewards on three tailwaters, and fly fishers are finding excellent fishing on river stretches that have been dewatered for over 50 years.

It's called the "upper Deerfield," a manmade hydro-electric water system that runs from its 400-square-mile Vermont drainage basin in four river branches: the main Deerfield, and the East, North, and West branches. The improved water management on these upper sections since 1998 has provided the Deerfield with constant flows, and its newly rewatered reaches now have some of the best fly fishing for wild trout in the state. Some stretches of the upper Deerfield for the first time have constant, reliable flows of cold water below three bottom-flow-release dams.

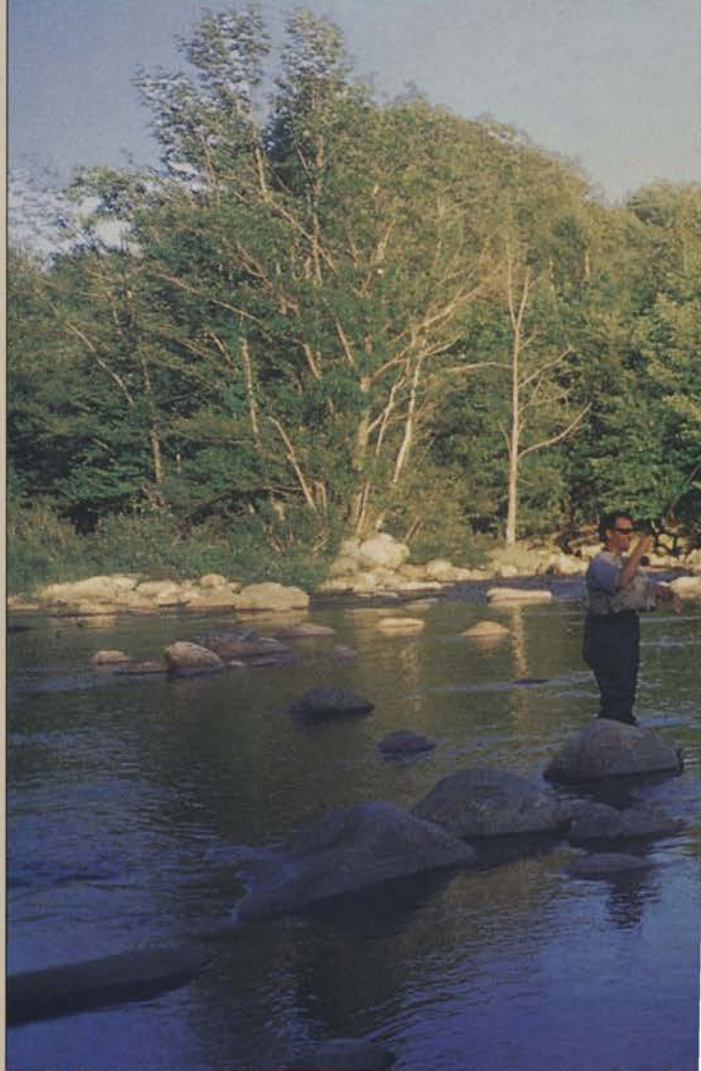
How has the upper Deerfield changed from the lifeless summer frogwaters of old? It was made possible by the new water flows required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) under its relicensing of the dams. There are no more flushes followed by manmade drought when the dams are shut off like faucets. The steady flows have created a fabulous bottom-flow-release river, tributary, and lake fishery in and below the Deerfield's three upriver reservoirs.

Between three tailwaters and several productive tributaries, Vermont's Deerfield provides more alternatives for quality fly fishing for wild trout than any other drainage in New England.

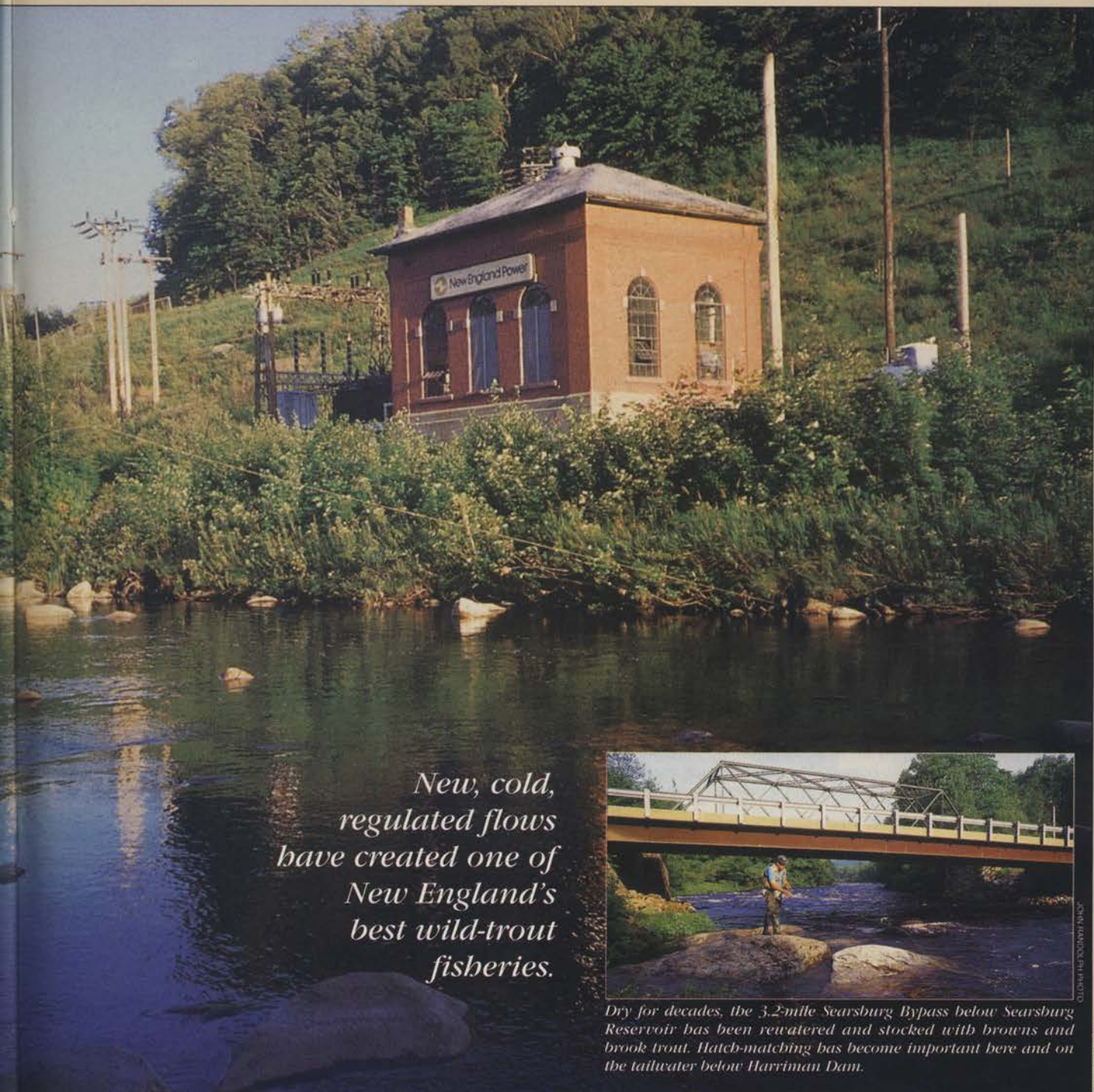
VFS
chat

Join author Tom Keer in
The Virtual Flyshop Chat
Room, February 7 at
noon EST.

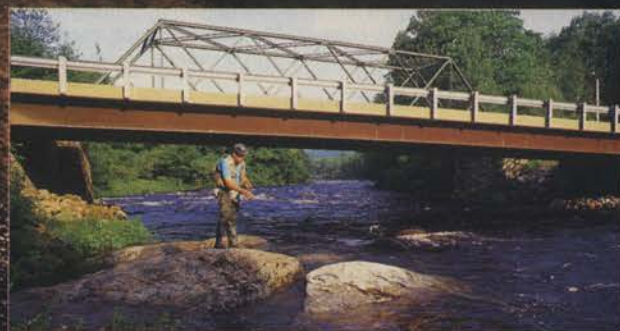
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BARRETT & CATHY BECK PHOTO



New, cold, regulated flows have created one of New England's best wild-trout fisheries.



Dry for decades, the 3.2-mile Searsburg Bypass below Searsburg Reservoir has been rewatered and stocked with browns and brook trout. Hatch-matching has become important here and on the tailwater below Harriman Dam.

TOM KEENE PHOTO

The new regulated flows have changed the East Branch of the Deerfield from the Somerset Dam to the Searsburg Dam. The 3.2-mile "Searsburg Bypass" habitat from Searsburg Reservoir to Harriman Reservoir has been "rewatered" under new federal minimum-flow requirements. Vermont has stocked this stretch with brook and brown trout, enhancing a pre-existing smelt-based fishery in Harriman Reservoir. Landlocked salmon and rainbow smelt also run from the reservoir into the Searsburg Bypass stretch.

And during the past two years the Vermont

Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, using an innovative trap-and-transfer program, helicoptered wild trout from the Deerfield and West River headwaters into the Readsboro stretch of the Deerfield below Harriman Dam to help restore a wild brook-trout fishery. Last fall that rewatered and restored two-mile stretch of water provided excellent fly fishing for wild brookies.

Starting in the Headwaters

IN FLY-FISHING TERMS, THE DEERFIELD flows almost from the

Orvis Company in Manchester, Vermont, to the Thomas & Thomas rod company in Turner's Falls, Massachusetts. It covers some 40 miles from its southern Vermont origins, then runs along the Mohawk Trail through western Massachusetts before it joins the Connecticut River below Turner's Falls.

The main Deerfield (see map) runs south out of the Somerset basin, parallel with Forest Service Road 71, the dirt access road leading to the Somerset Reservoir. It joins the East Branch, which runs from the base of the Somerset Reservoir Dam to the Searsburg Reservoir. The main stem of the Deerfield then flows from



Aquatic insects flourish once again in the Searsburg Bypass (above) section of the Deerfield, where hatch matching is important for taking browns and rainbows (right). The East Branch trailhead (below) marks the beginning of from 5 to 6 miles of prime bike-in brookie fishing.

Searsburg Reservoir south to the northwestern end of Harriman Reservoir (Lake Whitingham). It continues out of Harriman Reservoir southward through Readsboro, joining with the West Branch to flow into Sherman Reservoir. (The Massachusetts/Vermont line divides the reservoir.) The North Branch runs from West Dover along Route 100 through Wilmington, where it enters the Harriman Reservoir.

The Vermont Deerfield has dozens of small tributaries, most containing populations of native brook trout. They include Black Brook and the nearby East Branch north of Somerset Reservoir. Both can be reached from the Kelly Stand Road out of East Arlington or West Wardsboro and, from the south, along Forest Service Road 71, which runs from Route 9 to Somerset Reservoir and the Kelly Stand Road.

The lower North Branch has poor fishing for brookies, except in spring in its lower reaches and in Cold Brook. Wilder Brook on the western side of Harriman Reservoir has good fishing for small brookies.

On these streams, where there are few hatches to match, small streamers and bucktails fished downstream on short



DEERFIELD

T · A · C · T · I · C · S

THE VERMONT FISHING SEASON opens the second Saturday of April and closes the last Sunday of October. In the early season when snowmelt and rain runoff elevates the water tables, streamers and nymphs fished deep can take trout. Smelt patterns are popular just upstream from Harriman Reservoir, as rainbows, browns, and the occasional landlocked salmon move in to skinny water to feed.

Leech and dace patterns tempt reluctant browns, and attractor bucktails are excellent choices for brook trout. As

water flows stabilize, from mid- to late-May, emergers and dries are key. Compara-duns and Compara-nymphs in a variety of sizes and colors are excellent mayfly imitations, and LaFontaine Emergent Pupae imitations (bright green, tan, or brown) work well for caddis.

Standard Catskill ties work well for most dry-fly situations, and parachute patterns that sit in the film fool difficult fish. Elk-wing and Goddard Caddis dries are hot when the caddis action is in full swing, and large golden or black stonefly nymphs and Stimulators

work later in the season when stoneflies are abundant.

Jim Knabe, owner of Taddinger's, a full-service fly shop in Wilmington, Vermont, and guide Butch Granger favor emergers and parachute dries over standard Eastern dries. Carry some bug repellent for the early-season; the no-see-ums can be thick.

rods during the early-season runoff are solid choices, and #16-#18 Royal Wulffs, Trudes, and Humpies work well during the midseason. The tea-colored small streams fish better in spring and fall, when you can pick pockets through their boulder runs, pools, and riffles. Vermont general fishing regulations prevail—a 12-brookie bag limit per day (no size limit), with bait and artificials allowed.

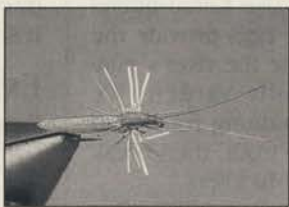
The East Branch

THE FREESTONE EAST BRANCH, which enters the northwest end of Somerset Reservoir, has native brookie fishing a short hike from the trailhead parking lot on the Kelley Stand road via Forest Service Road 383. The fish run from four to ten inches in this small, easily wet-waded stream. When conditions are right, fishing the river's combination of pools and pockets can be excellent.

Black Brook, which has excellent fishing for small brookies, is crossed by Forest Service Road 71. You should consider camping and hiking to investigate its upstream fishing as well as other nearby headwater streams and beaver ponds in the Green Mountain National Forest. You can receive an excellent map of the area by sending \$3 (includes postage) for the Green Mountain National Forest (southern half) topographic map. Contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Forest Service, 231 North Main Street, Rutland, VT 05701-2417, (802) 747-6700, or write to the Manchester Ranger District, 2538 Depot Street, Manchester Center, VT 05255, (802) 362-2307. You can



LaFontaine Deep Sparkle Pupa



Stocking-wing Caddis



Extended Body Compara-dum

DAVID T. SEIBERD PHOTOS

H · A · T · C · H · E · S

PATTERN	SIZE	APR	MAY	JUN	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT
QUILL GORDON	#12-#16	••••						
BLUE QUILL	#14-#18	•••••						
BLUE-WINGED OLIVE	#14-#22	••••••••••••••••••••						
HENDRICKSON	#14-#16	•••••						
RED QUILL	#14-#16	•••						
LITTLE BLACK CADDIS	#14-#18	•••••	•••					
BLUE DUN	#14-#18		•••••					
TAN CADDIS	#14-#18		•••••					
LIGHT CAHILL	#14-#16			•••••				
GRAY FOX	#14-#16			•••••				
BROWN DRAKE	#14-#16				•••••			
SULPHUR DUN	#14-#18				•••••			
SUMMER STENONEMA	#12-#14				•••••			
TRICOS	#20-#26					•••••		
PSEUDOCLOEON	#20-#28					••••••••		
YELLOW STONES	#8-#12			••••••••••••••••				
BLACK STONES	#8-#12					••••••••		

also buy a map at the ranger district headquarters there.

Somerset Reservoir is a three-square-mile lake, owned by the New England Power Company and formed by a 456-foot earthen dam. It can be fished by boat, but fly fishers will find few hatches and fewer fish rising in its relatively barren shallows.

The reservoir's cold, fertile East Branch emerges from the lake through a discharge pipe at the base of the dam. It runs from five to six miles south to the Searsburg Reservoir and provides superb stream and beaver-pond brookie fishing for those willing to hike. Under the new fisheries management, the East Branch will remain a native brook-trout fishery under Vermont general fishing regulations (12 brookies per day limit, bait and artificials allowed).

You can reach this stretch of the East Branch by driving Forest Service Road 71 to the upper end of Searsburg Reservoir and the Deerfield Trail and parking there. A swinging bridge crosses the Deerfield; hike one mile until you reach a second swinging bridge and the East Branch. Some anglers combine fishing with backpacking. They seldom encounter other anglers, but sometimes see black bears in this wild area.

The Deerfield and Searsburg Reservoir

THE MAIN BRANCH, which runs along Forest Service Road 71, is deceptively pretty water, but its acidity and warm summer flows make for poor fishing. The good news is

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THE NEW DEERFIELD . . .



Exstream

Exstream's ViruStat Purification (and filtration) System uses a three-stage process that the manufacturer says removes sediment, bacteria, protozoa, and viruses. A pre-filter eliminates larger pathogens and sediments. The purifying element is the EPA-

registered ViruStat purifier cartridge that uses iodinated resin that only releases iodine when coming into contact with pathogens. A postfilter takes care of any residual iodine, odors, and tastes. Exstream offers two sport-flask systems—the Orinoco (fits into standard bottle racks, 26 oz. capacity, dry weight 7.45 oz., \$39.95), and the MacKenzie (one-liter capacity, dry weight 7.95 oz., \$44.95). Treats 26 gallons of water; replacement system costs \$29.95. For more information, contact Exstream, (800) 563-6968, www.exstreamwater.com.

TFO Gatekeeper

The TFO Gatekeeper filtration system and cap is an extremely small device that you can screw onto most common water bottles and most flexible hydration systems. The Gatekeeper can also be used with TFO's collapsible Flexi-Flask water bottle, which rolls up into a tube. The manufacturer says that the three-stage filter drastically reduces bacteria, protozoa, and industrial contaminants.

The filter and one-liter Flexi-Flask cost \$13.99 and have a dry weight of 1.3 oz. It treats 25 gallons and a replacement filter costs \$11.99. Like the SafeWater system, you can add iodine to the water to kill viruses; the Gatekeeper will filter out most of the iodine. For more information, contact TFO's distributor Springbrook, (800) 638-9052, www.sbm-mangrove.com.



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that the fishing improves dramatically south of Searsburg Reservoir (the East Branch), on a 4.2-mile stretch of river running along Route 9 (the Molly Stark Trail). The reservoir's stored water flows cold from the bottom of Searsburg Dam, and a smaller portion is diverted through a penstock, re-entering the East Branch at the generating station on Route 9, a half-mile upstream of Harriman Reservoir.

In the past, the lower East Branch dried up in summer and supported only a small population of brookies. But with a more constant, cold (58 degrees F. last summer), regulated flow coming out of Searsburg Reservoir, browns and rainbows have taken up permanent residence and aquatic insect hatches have flourished. Area guides report that these wild trout provide excellent spring, summer, and fall fishing.

The new flows have also created some of Vermont's best (new) flats dry-fly fishing. On summer evenings Trico, *Baetis* (Blue-winged Olives), and caddis hatches set the table for the trout on the broad, wadeable gravel flats where the East Branch empties into Harriman Reservoir. The reservoir trout dimple the lake surface with their riseforms and local guides say fly fishers take and release as many as 30 trout on good days.

The water from the generating station on Route 9 downstream to Harriman Reservoir is one of Vermont's best autumn fisheries for pre-spawn brown trout, rainbows, brookies, and landlocked salmon, yet it is virtually unknown to most fly fishers. Local guide Butch Granger reports that when fishing from the reservoir flats upstream to the Searsburg Reservoir, his sports have caught and released from 15 to 30 trout and small (16-inch) salmon while fishing Flashback Hare's-ear Nymphs, Bead-head Prince Nymphs, LaFontaine Caddis, and red ant imitations.

Vermont stocks the Searsburg Bypass with brookies and browns, and rainbow trout enter this stretch from the reservoir. The lower East Branch (Searsburg Bypass) calls for 8- to 9-foot rods, and on these reaches the trout feed on predictable hatches (see hatch chart) except during high water or in early spring or late season, when Granger favors smelt patterns fished on sinking-tip lines. The general fishing regulations prevail (12 fish) but no more than six can be either brown or rainbow trout and only two landlocked salmon of fifteen inches or longer can be kept.

Harriman Bypass

THE HEART OF THE UPPER DEERFIELD fisheries project is the 3.5-mile Harriman Bypass, a recently rewatered bottom-flow-

release, regulated-flow river running from the Harriman Dam south to the Route 100 bridge in Readsboro. Vermont fisheries biologists want to turn this ideal trout habitat—with extremely cold water, riffles, runs, pools, and pockets—into a naturally-reproducing brook-trout river.

The construction of the Harriman Dam in 1912 made this stretch of river virtually dry. Since its rewatering a year ago, the fertile tailwater's hatches (mayfly, caddisfly, and stonefly) have begun to blossom, but it will be several more years before we can predict what the dominant mayfly biota will be. *Baetis* will almost certainly predominate in the cold, clear, water, with caddis probably a close second. As mentioned above, the freestoner has been heavily stocked with wild fish and should become a picture-perfect wild brookie fishery.

GUIDES & FLY SHOPS



TADDINGER'S is the only full-service fly shop (and is also an excellent gift shop) in the upper Deerfield area and provides information, tackle, river maps, hatch charts, and guided trips. Taddinger's: Route 100, Wilmington, VT 05363; phone/fax (802) 464-1223; www.taddingers.com.

The best way to fish this water is to drive to the Harriman Dam parking area and walk in below the dam. Another relatively easy access is from the Readsboro school parking lot, walking upstream.

While in the Readsboro area, try the power station to Sherman Reservoir stretch. It can provide good wade-fishing, with large stocked rainbows and browns moving upstream from the reservoir to feed in cool weather. Look along the reservoir's roadside wadeable shallows for bank feeders on summer mornings and evenings.

Other Activities

THERE ARE MANY ACTIVITIES in the Mount Snow Valley that make a great family vacation. For more information, contact the Mount Snow Valley Chamber of Commerce at (802) 464-8092 or www.visitvermont.com.

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