



HOG HILL TRAIL

TRAIL LOCATION & PARKING

The Hog Hill Trail is located on DCR land and is accessed by turning onto Merrill Rd, shortly north of the traffic light at the Dana Hill and Rt. 140 intersection. Parking for several cars is available at the trailhead at the end of Merrill Road.

UNIQUE FEATURES

The Hog Hill trail provides both forest tranquility and scenic vistas shaped by farming. In particular, the trail offers an insight into the unique operation of the former Kristoff Brothers Pig Farm.

LENGTH & DIFFICULTY

The standard route (red color) is hiked clockwise, and is roughly 2.4 miles long and crosses the open field on return. The Open Field Bypass Route begins at **A** as a wide, grassy lane, but later becomes a rather narrow forest path to **B**, from where the standard route is followed in the opposite direction (2.7 miles in total). The trail route has several hills and is rated *moderately* easy.

ALLOWED & PROHIBITED TRAIL ACTIVITIES

Allowed recreational activities are hiking, snow shoeing, hunting and cross-country skiing. **Mountain biking, horseback riding, motorized vehicles and pets are prohibited.** Check with the DCR for more details.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The trail route begins at gate S21 and follows the old asphalt road up a gentle hill. The road was once the main access road for the Kristoff Pig Farm operation.

0.11 miles: Start of Open Field Bypass Route (pt. **A**). Remnants of a foundation for one of the maternity houses for pregnant sows can be observed.

0.15 miles: The gravel path makes a gentle right turn.

0.18 miles: One of many hay field vistas to the south

0.36 miles: Location of the central element in the Kristoff Farm operation: The cooking facility, now demolished, which turned “garbage” into pig feed.

0.39 miles: The main road now turns right. (The path straight ahead continues for a couple of miles).

0.41 miles: A very short side trail to the right takes you to the top of the cooking vats.

0.50 miles: The recent wire fence encloses a landfill created by the Kristoff family, the liability for which DCR did not want to assume. Thus, the land behind the fence still belongs to the Kristoff family.

0.65 miles: A road to the right leads to an open area with discarded equipment.

0.67 miles: This area was referred to by the Kristoff’s as ‘The Oaks’ and housed several pig pens. This was the boundary of the large Kristoff Pig Farm operation.

0.73 miles: Take trail/road to the left to the ‘Forty Acre Swamp,’ which was not 40 acres, but a red



maple swamp, cleared by George Kristoff in the mid-1960s, to make room for growing squash.

0.89 miles: View over the former red maple swamp.

1.02 miles: Back to the main route; turn left.

1.05 miles: Take the path to the right, leading to a pleasant forest path

1.34 miles: A somewhat steeper downhill section, with occasional wash-outs.

1.53 miles: Views to open hay fields.

1.63 miles: Hay fields to the left

1.75 miles: Location of Happy Hollow Farm, where the farm operation started. The foundation of two decrepit buildings (see photo below) can be seen, which were maternity houses for the pregnant sows then were later used for hay storage.

1.80 miles: At the bottom of the hill, follow the road to the right, through the summer-time tall grass.

1.88 miles: The trail goes from an open terrain to a forested area.

1.92 miles: Continue straight where a road goes off to the left and downhill, leading to a gate near Rt. 140.

1.94 miles: Trail crosses a seasonal stream.

2.02 miles: End point (**B**) of Open Field Bypass Route

2.11 miles: Entrance to the open field where trail route will follow the edge of the woods.

2.24 miles: At the top of the hill where the trail makes a left turn and continues at the edge of the forest

2.40 miles: Back at the start point.



HISTORY OF THE KRISTOFF BROTHERS PIG FARM

The pig farm began modestly before WWII, around the Happy Hollow Farm, located close to Rt. 140. From the late 1940s to the mid- 1960s, George and his brother Joe Kristoff acquired seven adjacent farm sites creating a 600-acre farm located uphill from Happy Hollow. Through talent and hard work, they made it one of the biggest pig farms in New England. In its heyday, some 5000 pigs were raised in free-range pens distributed over a large area of open farmland, along with maternity houses for pregnant sows and 90% of Virginia Baked Hams were born and raised in Sterling.

Feeding so many pigs was no small challenge, but a win-win solution was found. At the time, most families, along with restaurants and institutions, separated their refuse into 'garbage' and 'trash.' Garbage was synonymous with food waste, which became the main source of feed for the pigs. A trailer truckload of garbage arrived daily from Boston. Kristoff Farm also had their own small fleet of trucks that collected garbage from local towns. But by 1953, all garbage had to be cooked. From a brewery, the brothers bought two huge vats in which to cook the garbage with high-pressure steam delivered from two boilers in an adjacent building. The freshly cooked and steaming hot garbage was then brought by smaller trucks to the individual pig pens.

Raising pigs was not the only farm activity. Substantial corn production as well as some 50 head of milking cattle made the dairy operation among the largest in Sterling. For a number of



years, George and Joe produced large quantities of Blue Hubbard Squash, grown on the cleared and drained red maple swamp. The squash were produced on contract for Table Talk Pies in Worcester, and in return the Kristoff Farm received waste from pie makings to be fed to the pigs.

George Kristoff died in the early 1980s around the time Interstate 190 was built, crossing their farm land. The highway brought an end to the legendary pig farm operation. In the 1990s, DCR purchased about 600 acres of the farm, providing access to this special part of Sterling's farm history.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Due to the farming history of this property, grass-lands are a main feature on this trail. Some fields are regularly cut for hay, others are slowly maturing into shrub and young forests. These three habitats are rare in Massachusetts and some of the wildlife that depend on these habitats are also less common. Listen for the "bee-buzz" of the Blue-winged Warbler, the "drink-your-tea" call of the Eastern Towhee or the clear whistle of Eastern Meadowlarks. Thorny and invasive Multiflora Rose bushes line the fields and trail, the fragrance of their white clusters of flowers filling the air in June. Look for hawks soaring over the fields, listen to tree frogs trill in the forests while cicadas buzz in the hot summer evenings. Bobcats have been seen in this area, while butterfly and moth enthusiasts will find a wide variety of Lepidoptera. Pine and oak trees are



most common, but cherry, hickory and ash trees are also in the mix. In early spring, the wet areas are filled with the chorus of frogs and spring peepers. Thickets of mountain laurel bloom in late spring and summer, and pale white stems of Indian Pipe rise up from the leaf litter in the woods.

HOG HILL TRAIL



Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC) Sterling's OSIC was established in 2003 as a permanent town committee, to broaden awareness and enhance access to significant open space, cultural and recreational resources.