



Section 16: Widow's Clearing Trail to the Bridges Trail

SNAPSHOT

This varied section begins on an ungroomed trail within the Green Mountain National Forest, traverses the groomed trails of Middlebury College's Rikert Outdoor Center, then follows a new backcountry route through National Forest before finishing on a snowmobile corridor trail.

NOTE: Please remember to check in at the Rikert Outdoor Center and purchase a trail pass if you are utilizing the CT within their trail system. CTA members receive a coupon for a discounted trail pass in their Membership Rewards Book.

LENGTH

9.4 miles (15.13 km)

DIFFICULTY

This is an easy-to-intermediate ski with some short steeper portions on the backcountry section. The terrain is rolling, there are multiple access points, and the middle of the route is a groomed ski trail.

TRAIL ACCESS POINTS (south to north)

1. Widow's Clearing Trail Parking Area - Ripton

From the village of Ripton head east on Route 125 for approximately one mile. Turn right (south) on FR 32 and go 1.8 miles. The parking area is on the left (east side) of the road. From the parking area, cross FR 32 to the west side and follow yellow CT side trail blazes and the Widow's Clearing Trail, approximately 0.5 miles south. Then cross to the east side of FR 32 again and follow for 0.2 miles to join the CT.

2. Chatfield Parking Area (Route 125) - Ripton

From the village of Ripton head east on Route 125 for approximately 3.5 miles. Turn right (south) on Brooks Road (FR 67). Just after crossing a bridge, the Chatfield Parking Area will be on your right. To follow the CT north from the parking area, turn left out of the parking area and ski or walk north on Brooks Road back across the bridge and turn left (west) into the large field and look for blue CT blazes. To follow the CT south, go to the west end of the parking area.

3. Rikert Outdoor Center - Ripton

From the village of Ripton head east on Route 125 for approximately three miles. The cluster of yellow buildings on your left is the Breadloaf Campus of Middlebury College, the site of the Rikert Outdoor Center. Turn left (north) and park near the large barn. Ski east across the large Stadium Field to the Battell Trail entering the woods, and follow yellow CT Side Trail blazes east 0.2 miles to the CT.

4. Natural Turnpike Parking - Ripton

From the village of Ripton take Natural Turnpike (FR 59) north and then northeast for approximately 3.5 miles to the intersection of FR 59 and FR 54. Bear left on FR 54 and the parking lot will be immediately on your right. Following the yellow CT blazes, ski south for 0.1 miles on a narrow snowmobile trail, and then turn left (east) on a wider snowmobile trail (VAST #7A) and unplowed road (FR 59), to join the CT after 0.5 miles. To ski south on the CT, ski straight ahead on FR 59 another 0.3 miles. To ski north on the CT, turn left on the bridges trail.

NOTE: The plowed but gated portion of FR 54 and the western half of FR 59 (plowed) together are known locally as "The Natural Turnpike." The CT Side Trail (yellow blazes) follows the eastern, unplowed portion of FR 59 0.5 miles to the CT.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION (south to north)

From the Widow's Clearing Trail Parking Area, cross FR 32 to the west side. Follow the yellow CT side trail blazes and Widow's Clearing Trail south (left) for 0.5 miles, paralleling FR 32. The trail goes up a switchback, then crosses to the east side of FR 32 again. Continue for 0.2 miles to **join the CT (0.0)**.

The CT winds through rolling terrain north to the Water Tower Trails, the **Sundown Trail (1.0)**, and the **North Star Trail (1.2)**, where there is a trail map posted of the Water Towers Trails. Keep right (northeast) at both of these trail junctions to remain on the CT north.

Continue skiing east and downhill and over a bridge about 0.75 miles to **Widow's Clearing (2.0)**, the site of an old farmhouse with an old foundation and stonewalls. Continue east and down a steeper hill through the woods to **Chatfield Parking Area (2.6)** on FR 67 just south of Route 125.

BAIL OUT POINT: *The Chatfield Parking Area offers an intermediate bail out point with quick access to Route 125.*

Turn left (north) on FR 67 (also called Brooks Road) and take a short road walk over the Middlebury River to a large field. Head northwest across the field and down into a dip and back up to **Route 125 (3.0)**. Cross Route 125 onto an unnamed groomed trail and join the trails of Middlebury College's Rikert Outdoor Center. Stay right and continue straight on the Picnic Loop at the Horse Pasture.

At the junction with the **Battell trail (3.3)**, turn right (east) onto Battell to follow the CT north, or turn left (west) on to Battell to get to the Rikert Nordic Center (yellow building) in 0.3 miles.

NOTE: The Rikert Outdoor Center has several one-way trails to facilitate racing and training. To conform to the Center's one-way traffic, the inbound and outbound CT Side Trail routes (yellow blazes) to and from the Rikert Outdoor Center are different. Please follow the yellow CT Side Trail blazes to reach the Rikert Outdoor Center and obey the one-way and other ski center signs. If races are in progress you may be directed to follow an alternate route.

To get to the Rikert Outdoor Center from the CT (0.3), follow the yellow CT Side Trail blazes. At the junction with the Battell trail, turn left (west) on to the inbound portion of the Battell trail, ski 100 yards then turn right staying on Battell. Follow the yellow CT Side Trail blazes to get to the yellow ski center building. Be sure to check in and pay the appropriate trail fee at the Rikert Nordic Center.

To return to the CT from Rikert Outdoor Center (0.3), follow the yellow CT Side Trail blazes. Head southeast across the stadium field and enter the woods on the outbound portion of the Battell Trail. Follow the yellow CT Side Trail blazes to the Horse Pasture and the junction with the CT on the far (east) side of the Horse Pasture. Turn left on Picnic Loop to join the CT north, or turn right on Picnic Loop to follow the CT south.

To continue skiing the CT north of Rikert Outdoor Center, turn right (east) onto Battell at the junction. Follow the Battell trail northeast for 0.25 miles, crossing the Brandy Brook, and take your next left up a short hill to the junction with the Gilmore trail.

Turn right (north) on the Gilmore trail and immediately cross **Steam Mill Road (FR 59) (3.5)**. Continue following the Gilmore trail for less than 0.5 miles, where the CT turns left off the Gilmore trail onto occasionally groomed trails. For 0.75 miles, follow the Upper Gilmore trail over a bridge and eventually up some slightly steeper grades to the **Brown Gate trail (4.7)**. The trail is just northwest of FR 59 or VAST #7A, and will take you to the brown gate (4.7).

The CT turns left (northwest then west) on the Brown Gate trail and continues downhill for 0.75 miles. Continue straight on the Brown Gate trail at the junction with the unmarked Kiwi trail and over a bridge next to a beaver dam. Continue following the Brown Gate Trail southwest up a hill to the junction with the ungroomed Blue Bed House trail.

The CT turns right (northwest) on the Blue Bed House trail following more rolling terrain. This trail is marked with orange blazes, and after about 0.5 miles, leads left (west) 0.2 miles to the old Blue Bed House ruins on the right side of the trail. The CT continues northwest to the **Blue Bed House meadow (6.2)**. Continue skiing downhill through the meadow and into the woods past the Old Farm Road trail that leads left (southwest) to the Robert Frost Cabin about a mile away. Continue straight on the CT down a steeper hill to **Wagon Wheel Road (6.7)**, an intermittently plowed road and the northern end of the Rikert trail network.

Turn right (east) on Wagon Wheel Road, follow for 200 yards, and turn left (northeast) on the narrower backcountry portion of the CT which briefly parallels Wagon Wheel Road. After a series of long gradual ups and short downs, the CT climbs some steeper pitches before turning north and leveling off for about 0.75 miles.

Eventually the CT intersects **Steam Mill Road (FR 59) (9.1)**, which is also a major snowmobile trail (VAST #7A). Turn left (north) onto FR 59 and follow the snowmobile trail for 1/3 mile, where the CT exits the snowmobile trail to the right (north) on the **Bridges Trail (9.4)**.

To reach the Natural Turnpike Parking area near the junction of FR 59 and FR 54, stay on the snowmobile trail following yellow CT Side Trail blazes and continue west for approximately 0.5 miles. At the bottom of a hill, turn right off of FR 59 and stay on the snowmobile trail to reach the parking area.

DISTANCE TO LANDMARKS

Mileage Northbound	Landmark	Mileage Southbound
0.0	Widow's Clearing-CT Junction	9.4
2.0	Widow's Clearing	7.4
2.6	Chatfield Parking Area	6.8
3.0	Route 125	6.4
3.3	Battell Trail Junction/ Rikert Outdoor Center	6.1
3.5	Steam Mill Road (FR 59)	5.9
4.7	Brown Gate Trail	4.6
6.2	Blue Bed House Meadow	3.2
6.4	Wagon Wheel Road	3.0
9.1	Steam Mill Road (FR 59)	0.3
9.4	The Bridges Trail (FR 59-CT Junction)	0.0

SIDE TRAILS AND LOOPS

From the Widow's Clearing Trail Parking, a number of short easy loops can be found by heading west on the Wilkinson Trails on the west side of FR 32. For the more advanced Water Tower Trails, follow the Widow's Clearing Trail or CT Side Trail south then east 0.7 miles, then the CT north 1.0 miles via the Widow's Clearing Trail to access the Water Tower Trails.

The extensive, groomed trail network at Rikert Ski Touring Center provides many opportunities for loops and side trail exploration. Be sure to stop in at the ski center to pay the fee and pick up a trail map. Follow the directional signs on the trails, as many of the trails are one-way to facilitate races and training. Visit www.rikertoutdoor.com for more information.

Where the CT north leaves the Wagon Wheel Road, a side trail to the left leads 3.4 miles to the village of Ripton and the Chipman Inn. There are numerous loops and side trails off this route that can be explored, but to reach the village of Ripton and the Chipman Inn, follow the blue and green flagging. Once in Ripton, catch the Snow Bowl Shuttle Bus back to Rikert Outdoor Center, or into Middlebury. Check www.trivalleytransit.org/addison_routes/snow-bowl-shuttle/ for the bus schedule and route.

SHUTTLE DIRECTIONS

Please use caution and common sense when using these directions. Some roads may not have signs. After a heavy snow it may be difficult to locate the trailhead or end-of-plowing. Your GPS will not replicate all of these routes and may direct you to a road that is not plowed, closed and impassable. When in doubt, follow someone familiar with the local area.

Look for blue blazes (Catamount Trail), yellow blazes (Catamount Trail Side Trail) or CT parking signs which may be present. If the road seems impassible, park and explore on foot. Always park clear of access roads and gates. Leave room for others to park including snowmobile trailers. Do not park in snowplow turnarounds.

The location of the Catamount Trail on these maps is approximate. Temporary reroutes are not displayed. Always visit the Catamount Trail Association website for the latest trail information and maps. www.catamounttrail.org

Drive to Widow's Clearing (north to south)

1. From the end of plowing at 3614 Natural Tpk. in Ripton (S16 access point <4>), (N 43.99702 W 72.98167) drive south for 3.6 miles.
2. Turn left on Rte. 125 and drive 0.7 miles.
3. Turn right on Goshen Rd. and drive 1.8 miles to the Widow's Clearing Parking lot at 2127 Goshen Rd. (S16 access point <1>)

Drive to Natural Turnpike (south to north)

1. From Widow's Clearing parking lot at 2127 Goshen Rd. (S16 access point <1>), drive north 1.8 miles.
2. Turn left on Rte. 125 and travel 0.7 miles.
3. Turn right on Natural Tpk. and travel 3.6 miles to the end of plowing at 3614 Natural Tpk. in Ripton (S16 access point <4>).