

WHAT IS THE SIMSBURY LAND CONSERVATION TRUST ?

Simsbury's land trust was established in 1976 as a private, non-profit corporation. Its mission is to protect, in its natural state and for public benefit, land that has special conservation, scenic or historic value. In most cases this means 1) parcels that are of a size and that have features that provide noticeable impact or 2) parcels that provide a buffer for or extension to land that is already protected for the same purpose. We accomplish this mission by acquiring land, normally through voluntarily donation, occasionally through purchase. Over the past nearly 25 years, the Land Trust has acquired 17 parcels totalling 270 acres.

Since inception, we have concentrated on three land types: ridgeline, wetlands and open fields. Examples of each are featured in this book. It is our hope that by walking these properties, you will come to recognize, or strengthen your conviction in, the importance of this focus. Each of these land types is a rapidly disappearing part of our landscape.

It is sometimes pointed out that change is a natural occurrence and that the natural environment of the town has changed dramatically since the first colonials arrived. However, once these parcels are developed, they will never change again. Ridges, wetlands and open fields contribute greatly to the variety of landscape and natural habitats that help create the unique character and quality of life that sets Simsbury apart from other towns. Each is very much at risk.

You can help us to continue to protect these special places by first, becoming a member and second, by contributing to one or more of our conservation accounts. Together, we can ensure that future residents enjoy the same grand setting and sense of place that we all treasure today.

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GEOLOGY

People often talk of a recognizable sense of place, a particular character, when they speak of Simsbury. Much of what they mean by this derives from a number of geological features highlighted by a grand river valley tucked between two dramatic ridges. Like much of New England, the land that is now Simsbury has had a varied and complex geological history, with lengthy episodes of deposition, deformation, erosion, and glaciation.

The magnificent West Mountain in the northwest corner of town represents the oldest exposed bedrock in Simsbury. This rock formation can be readily viewed in the roadcuts along Route 309 leading to North Canton. Formed between 400 and 500 million years ago (during the Ordovician and Devonian Ages respectively), this bedrock consists primarily of silver-gray, mica-rich schists, highly metamorphosed rocks which probably originated as ocean floor sediments in a long-vanished primordial sea. The sediments were then deeply buried, compacted, and deformed during the plate collisions; ultimately, they created the Appalachian Mountain chain. Over the next 200-300 million years the bedrock eroded, depositing a variety of sediments into a subsiding basin. As these hardened they became the distinctive ledges of brown-red siltstone, sandstone, and conglomerate, from which were built the brownstone buildings along Hopmeadow Street, including the Town Hall and the Methodist Church. An excellent example of this rock can be seen along the entrance to Metacom Road and at the nearby quarry on Quarry Road.

The unusual collection of knolls on the west side of town that poke up unexpectedly along the front of West Mountain (Barn Door Hills, the East Ridge of West Mountain itself, the Hedgehog, Sugarloaf, and Onion Mountain) as well as the massive ridge along the east side of town (Metacomet Ridge, of which Talcott Mountain is the most notable feature), consist of igneous rock from 200 million years ago (Triassic and Jurassic periods). In the earliest Triassic period, Simsbury was tectonically dynamic, with active faults, violent earthquakes, and volcanic activity. Major faults ran north/south and molten rock flowed upwards through at least two of the them. The igneous formations that resulted are composed of a greenish-black, dense volcanic rock called basalt. The slow disintegration of these basaltic ridges has created the fascinating piles of talus at

their base and the unique “trap rock” habitat. (The term traprock is derived from the Swedish “trappa” meaning “stairs”.)

A scant million years ago, during the Pleistocene Era, Simsbury was profoundly influenced by massive continental glaciers. As they moved, giant ice sheets smoothed and rounded local ridges as well as scoured and deepened valleys in their paths. When these glaciers finally melted away some 12,000 years ago, they left behind accumulations of bouldery till and thick deposits of sand and silt sorted by glacial meltwater. Thus, the prominent hills just west and north of the town center consist, not of bedrock, but of sand terraces formed on the margin of a large glacial lake. Other features of the glacial period include the sand plains and eskers throughout the central part of town. It was during this period as well that the Farmington River began flowing north through Simsbury. A retreating glacier deposited a dam in the Bristol area, forcing the river to bend back north. The present flood-plain reflects the river’s activity over the past 10,000 years.

