



VIVA VERMONT!

American heritage in the Green Mountains

Home sweet home redux: the author gazes upon the family cemetery, where he will someday lie.

I BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW VERMONT HAD ISLANDS — 18 to be exact. Or that the oldest fossilized coral reef on earth is on one of those islands. Last August, I traveled, by way of several bridges over Lake Champlain, the home of Champ (America's Loch Ness Monster), to North Hero Isle,

summer home of the world-famous Royal Lipizzan Stallions. My goal was to ride some of America's most beautiful roads while discovering our country's history and heritage.

I'll start with a little personal history. In 1937, seven Methodist ministers (my granddad being one of them)

sought a refuge for their families to escape the humid New York City summers. They drove a Packard to the end of a muddy Vermont dirt road and found their paradise near Chelsea. My grandpa, grandma, aunts, and uncles (and my German shepherd of 14 years) are all buried there. The 200-year-old cemetery is where I will someday lie. Across the dirt road is the dilapidated church in which grandpa married my mother and father. Steeped in personal family history, Vermont and New England also reflect something deeper — American history.

Leaving Chelsea on State Route 110 to Barre is a wonderful start for any northern Vermont adventure. The sweeping curves and expansive farm-land vistas are postcard perfect. Connecting to US Highway 2, Barre is just a few miles south of Vermont's



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state capital, Montpelier. The capitol building has a striking copper dome covered with gold leaf. But perhaps even more striking is that it's the only capital in America without a McDonald's or billboards. In fact, Vermont does not allow billboard advertising on any of its highways.

Fifteen miles past Montpelier is State Route 100 to Smugglers' Notch. This was where the fun really began. As I passed Waterbury and the original Ben & Jerry's shack, the road began to undulate. Farther up toward the Stowe ski resort, the asphalt snake really comes to life. Catching State Route 108, the serious twisties wind their way to the notch at the top of this mountain road. Choked by boulders, Smugglers' Notch allows for only one-way traffic and an eternal dance of give-and-take by passing strangers. Caves on the west side were supposedly used to hide loot during the War of 1812, hence the name.

(Clockwise from top) Pick a sled, any sled. Wilkin's H-D is where you can rent a ride.

Norman Rockwell lived here. A model stands next to a days-gone-by portrait of herself.

Can you hear me now? Peter Wolf Toth's Whispering Giant.

Leaving Smugglers' Notch, I caught State Route 104 North all the way through St. Albans to US Highway 7, then State Route 78 toward the Vermont islands. Riding through northern Vermont, I was reminded of the revolutionary spirit that prevailed here; Ethan Allen, the Green Mountain Boys, and the battles at Lake Champlain all helped forge what was to become a free America. The patriots hauled abandoned French cannons from Fort Ticonderoga, through Vermont, to a discouraged George Washington. It was those cannons (at the Battle of Boston Harbor) that sent the entire British navy scurrying back to England. State mottos like Vermont's "Freedom and Unity" and New Hampshire's "Live Free or Die" sum up this spirit perfectly.

Vermont's roads immerse you in the Green Mountains and, at the very least, shield you from any cellphone service. Leaving the mainland at West Swanton, my first bridge over Lake Champlain entered East Alburg. Only two miles from the Canadian border, this was where 78 met 2 South (the Theodore Roosevelt Highway). My first stop was



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Isle La Motte, only 6 miles long and 2 miles wide. In 1666, the French chose the island as the site of Fort St. Anne. The first recorded settlement in Vermont, St. Anne remained garrisoned for some time, but was abandoned long before any permanent settlement. Visitors to the 81-acre Goodsell Ridge Fossil Preserve can use a trail that will lead to the aforementioned, oldest known fossilized coral reef on earth. You can view remains of cephalopods, an ancestor of present-day squids, and stromatoporoids, cabbage-like animals that were the primary builders of the reef 480 million years ago.

Back on 2 South, I crossed the lake again to North Hero



(Clockwise from top) Nice complement: an iconic Vermont church and covered bridge make the scene.

Top o' the mornin'. Riders at the ready.

Now that's what I'm talking about, Green Mountain glory.

Island, a summer playground for swimmers, boaters, jet skiers, and those majestic Royal Lipizzans of Austria. American GIs in World War II are credited with saving these beautiful horses from the approaching Russians, who often fed horsemeat to their army. With lunch in mind, I passed the Hero's Welcome Cafe and opted for the veggie wrap, an herb and garlic delight filled with hummus, honey mustard, lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, sprouts, carrots, and Cheddar cheese. In veggie bliss and surrounded by fellow riders on a gorgeous day, I took in the spectacular view of the lake. I thought it couldn't get any better, could it?

Continuing south on 2 over to Grand Isle, I drifted between panoramic vistas of Lake Champlain and deep green sweeping valleys. The bridges connecting the islands ranged from paved granite rock piles to large steel structures. On land, giant grain silos majestically rose above the lush green carpet like domed mosques surrounded by a thousand praying pines.

Crossing back to the mainland into Burlington, I was informed that my budget room was accidentally booked out, and I was instead sent to the Handy Suites for the same price. Not bad. My \$69-a-night crash pad had become a spacious suite with a kitchen, living room, and bedroom big enough to spend the rest of my life in.

Grabbing a bottle of Kendall-Jackson



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at the local market (Vermont allows customers to bring wine or beer into designated establishments), I wandered into the Euro Restaurant. Tucked behind the Handy Suites is Vermont's best-kept culinary secret. The Euro is a comfortable, wonderfully decorated, family-operated, dining treasure. Owner Dudija Karic and her family claim that their relatives, their culinary history, and their recipes can be traced back to the personal chef of the notorious communist leader Marshal Tito.

As refugees from war-torn Bosnia, the Karics came to America with the skill they know best, cooking. A peanuts-and-beer expectation turned out to be an extraordinary dining experience. A fresh dinner salad with the house's own yogurt-based dressing, pumpkin parmesan (yes, I said pumpkin) with a robust red sauce, fresh-from-the-oven garlic rolls, and Indian samosa filled with peas, carrots, and potatoes served with a cranberry yogurt dipping sauce. All of it was home grown and farm fresh. I was in hog heaven.

Ditching Burlington on the ride home, I had to visit Battery Park, named for the artillery stationed there by American forces during the War of 1812. These cannons, aided by the USS President, successfully defended colonial positions against an attack by a British squadron. This is also the perfect vantage point to scout for Champ. You remember

America's own Loch Ness Monster, don't you? Battery Park also hosts one of Peter Wolf Toth's Whispering Giant sculptures/totem poles, 40' high wooden carvings that can be found in every state of the union, and serve as a symbol of unity. On that note, Vermont has a refugee resettlement program that helps uprooted families establish freedom from the oppression of their native soil. Vermont's Senator Patrick Leahy (a grandson of immigrants, like so many of us) called it a renewal of the American promise and a sign that we have not closed our doors to those who will make us stronger. Be it lineage to the Mayflower, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the Green Mountain state's Abenaki tribe, the true spirit of American freedom lives on in Vermont. **AIM**

(Clockwise from top) Equine excellence: Hermann's Royal Lipizzan's summer crib.

Gold rush: Montpelier's Capitol dome.

We're gonna need a bigger boat. Afloat off North Hero Island.

Crunch time: a near miss at Smuggler's Notch.

