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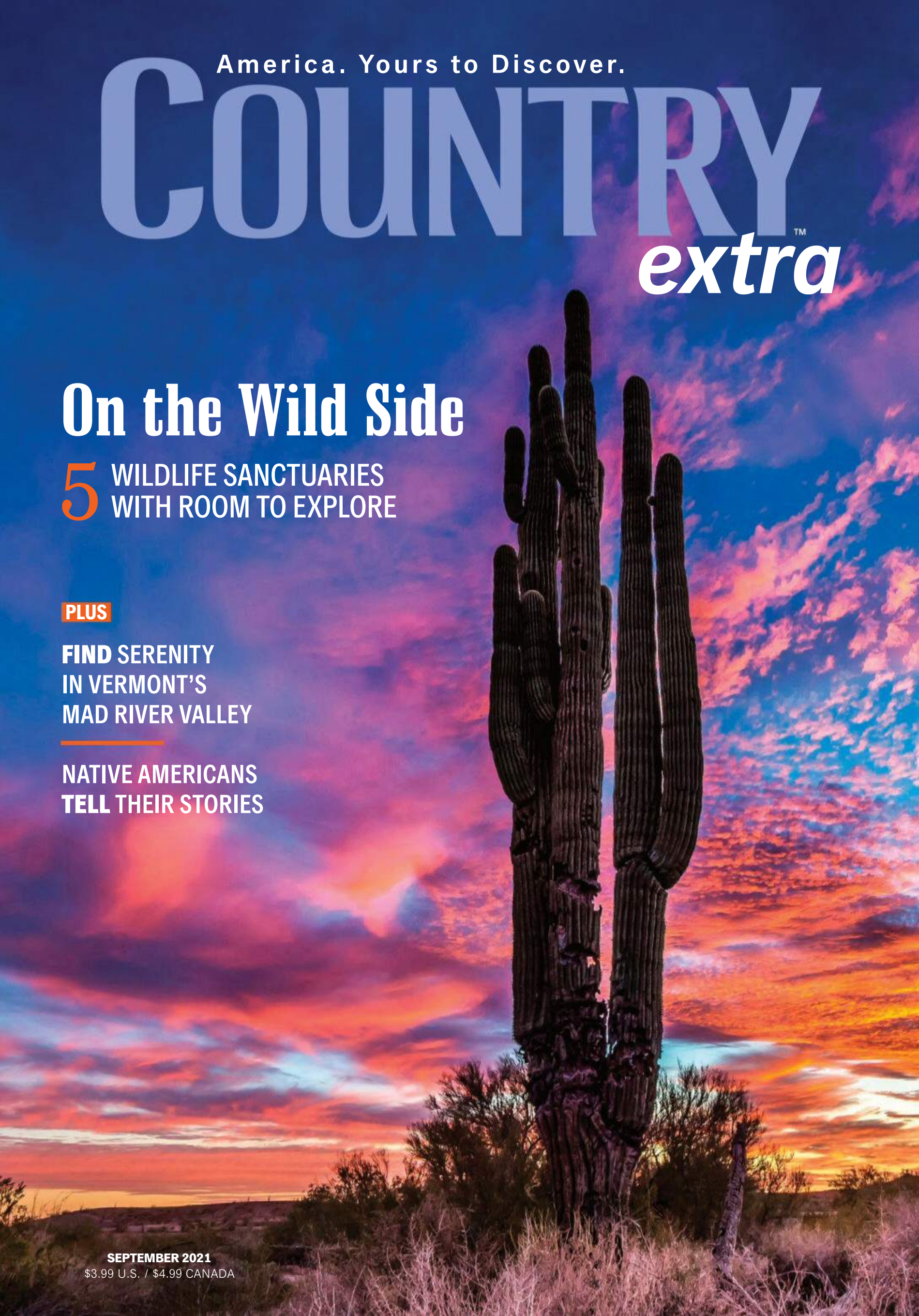

## On the Wild Side

5 WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES WITH ROOM TO EXPLORE

PLUS

**FIND** SERENITY IN VERMONT'S MAD RIVER VALLEY

NATIVE AMERICANS **TELL** THEIR STORIES

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Double rainbows cross the sky over Vermont's Mad River Valley.

# GREEN

SANDY MACYS

Dana Freeman savors the many delights of Vermont's Mad River Valley.

# MOUNTAIN GOODNESS

For years, Saturdays in my house meant a trip to the Mad River Valley for my children's weekly ski program at Sugarbush Resort. As I made the early morning trek along Route 100, I was so concerned with getting my kids to their lessons on time that I hardly had time to enjoy the beauty of the valley and, frankly, took it for granted. I'd whiz by boutique shops and restaurants in towns like Waterbury and Waitsfield and think about how I'd make time one day to explore this idyllic place on the east side of Vermont's Green Mountains. In the years since my kids have grown, I've regularly returned to the Mad River Valley and experienced it at a much more leisurely pace and through a different and unhurried lens.

### TAKE THE SCENIC ROUTE

With rolling hills, gentle curves and scenic vistas, Vermont's Route 100 is aptly considered one of the most picturesque drives in New England. While I haven't driven all 146 miles of the byway, I can tell you that the stretch between Waitsfield and Warren is not only stunning but offers an abundance of things to see and do along the journey.

If, like me, you are a sucker for covered bridges, you are in luck. You can see three of them on a short loop that starts and ends at the Mad River Chamber of Commerce in Waitsfield (handy if you need a map or more information). Right outside the parking lot, you will find the Great Eddy Covered Bridge, also known as the Waitsfield Covered Bridge. Built in 1833, it is the oldest operating covered bridge in Vermont.

To find the Pine Brook Covered Bridge, head north on Route 100, make a left onto Tremblay Road and then a slight detour north on North Road. Also known as the Wilder Covered Bridge, the Pine Brook

BARN: ANDRE JENNY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; TOWN OF WAITSFIELD: MIRA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

bridge dates back to 1855 and is still intact and fully operational.

Wind your way south, past Waitsfield Common, and you will come upon the beautiful von Trapp Greenhouse. It is owned by the grandson of Georg von Trapp of *The Sound of Music* fame. Stroll through the stunning display gardens, which are in full bloom and open from spring through early fall. Directly across the street is the newly opened von Trapp Farmstead—a must for cheese lovers. Be sure to sample the Oma.

To see the last covered bridge in the area, located in Warren Village, drive south. The views of Mount Ellen along this part of Common Road are magnificent. Approximately 2 miles before you arrive at the Warren Covered Bridge, make a pit

SIGNS: DANA FREEMAN

Picturesque Waitsfield is a charming village with much to offer visitors to the Mad River Valley (above). Continuing clockwise: Follow the sign to all the goodies at the von Trapp farm store; a round barn near Waitsfield.

stop for lunch or a cold drink at the East Warren Community Market.

**EXPLORE NATURE**

Vermont is an outdoor playground. A walk along any section of the Mad River Path is a fantastic way to explore the valley on foot. This network of public pathways connects the surrounding towns and communities with trails that range from easy to strenuous.

If you aren't up for a hike, walk the 1.2-mile West Greenway path. You'll find the trailhead in the parking lot off Meadow Road, just below Route 100. Follow the dirt trail as it winds its way alongside the Mad River, ending across from the 1824 House, an excellent spot for a sandwich. If you want to get in the river, the Silver Trout in Waitsfield offers fly-fishing lessons and guided tours.

Another short but rewarding walk I take is the .5-mile Waitsfield Country Roads loop. It has lush Green Mountain views and passes by the lovingly restored

Autumn transforms the valley, from farm fields in Waitsfield (below) to the von Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe (top).

HAY BALES: JEFF HUNTER/GETTY IMAGES; VON TRAPP: MIRA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; FAIR: TOM CROKE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The Waitsfield Farmers Market welcomes visitors with live music, local treats and a relaxed Vermont atmosphere.

Skinner Barn, which dates back to 1891 and sits on a former dairy farm.

Nestled in the heart of the Green Mountains, Blueberry Lake is another hidden gem. One of the most gorgeous outdoor spaces in the valley, it offers beginner and intermediate hiking trails, plus a swimming area.

### ARTISANAL IMMERSION

Not only do we have an impressive number of local artists in Vermont, we also have organizations like the Mad River Valley Arts that support and showcase them through carefully curated art shows, workshops and events.

Aside from the art galleries sprinkled about the towns, there is a full lineup of fairs, festivals and shows from July through early fall. One of my favorites is the Mad River Valley Craft Fair in Waitsfield. The fair will celebrate its 50th anniversary on Labor Day weekend. There will be more than 100 juried artists, live music, artist demos and made-in-Vermont food and beverages to sample.

For more locally produced goods, check out the Waitsfield Farmers Market, which takes place on the town green every Saturday from mid-May to mid-October. It is one of the largest and most popular markets in the state and is a total experience. I like to arrive early to grab a pastry from Red Hen Baking Co. and peruse the stalls while listening to live music. You will find stands with local produce, cut flowers, prepared foods and unique handmade goods.

### OFF THE BEATEN PATH

There are a number of places unique to the Mad River Valley that are unusual

# *Around* THE VALLEY

## STAY

Each of the nine rooms and two suites at the **Pitcher Inn** (below) embodies a unique Vermont theme. Stay in the School Room, modeled after a Vermont one-room schoolhouse, or the Lodge Room with its massive fireplace and king-size bed. The inn has two restaurants that are open to the public, including Tracks, an indoor/outdoor pub. ***pitcherinn.com***

## PLAY

Accommodating all levels of riders, the **Icelandic Horse Farm** in Fayston (above) offers trail rides and multiday treks throughout the Mad River Valley. Whether you are an experienced equestrian or a novice rider, you will love riding this good-natured, gentle breed across meadows, over streams and through the woods. Even if you don't ride, you are welcome to visit the farm to see the horses. ***icelandichorses.com***

## SHOP

Housed in a building from 1839, the renowned **Warren Store** (below) is one of the most famous country stores in Vermont. The shelves are stocked with products from local suppliers. Find anything from maple syrup to candles, toys, home goods and fashion accessories. It is a great place to poke around for souvenirs or pick up provisions from the deli for a picnic. Try the Vermonter—grilled cheese with cheddar, bacon and, of course, maple syrup! ***warrenstore.com***

## SAVOR

You don't have to be a foodie to appreciate a visit to the **Mad River Taste Place** (above)**.** This culinary shop showcases the best edible items from local purveyors. Meet the makers, sample the goods, learn about food producers and indulge in a selection of Vermont cheeses, butter, beers, spirits, honey, coffee, jams, jellies and more. ***madrivertaste.com***

## INDULGE

Vermont is synonymous with Ben & Jerry's ice cream, but Vermonters will tell you that you cannot visit without trying a creemee (aka soft serve ice cream). Head to **Canteen Creemee Co**. and order the Bad Larry (maple ice cream drizzled in maple goodness). ***canteencreemee.com***

HORSE FARM: KAREN AZOFF; INN: SANDY MACYS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; OTHER PHOTOS: DANA FREEMAN; VIEW: SHANN BIGLIONE/GETTY IMAGES

and worthy of a visit. When my kids were little, we frequently went to the Big Picture Cafe because it's one part diner, one part beer garden and one part movie theater. Plus, they are famous for their Very Small Donuts. You cannot leave Vermont without having at least one of these maple-glazed treats.

The Knoll Farm is another all-rolled-into-one type of place. With buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, this family-owned farm raises Icelandic sheep, has a yarn shop featuring small-flock yarns, grows eight varieties of organic blueberries (ripe and ready for picking mid-July through August) and has a retreat center known as the Refuge. You can purchase a day pass that lets you pick your own berries, visit the sheep and explore miles of hiking trails. The Farm Store sells convenient premade picnic baskets with a full spread of cheeses, salami, chutneys, fruit and chocolate.

I feel incredibly fortunate to live near the Mad River Valley and make it a habit to visit this thriving community.

Waterbury Trail leads to this stunning view of the valley from the top of Mount Hunger.