

Roadtrip. **The Washington Post**. Washington, D.C.: Apr 11, 2004. pg. M.08

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Where: Upper Montgomery County, Md.

Why: Fine crafts, pets in paradise, creamy cones and country air.

How Far: About 50 miles, or 40 minutes from Beallsville.

Hey, city slickers -- there's more than cows in them thar hills! The area surrounding Sugarloaf Mountain is also home to a sophisticated group of artisans, and during the Countryside Artisans Tour this Friday through Sunday, you can see them in their element. Take a self-guided drive to their barnyard and backyard studios -- picnic in hand -- and you'll find downtown-gallery quality sans the (sometimes snooty) downtown attitude.

Our trip hits just a few of the hot spots. (For a full list of artisans and other details, visit www.countrysideartisans.com.) Your first destination is Seneca Creek Joinery, where owner Chris Holmgren uses authentic, 18th-century-style processes to craft furniture and smaller souvenirs, such as striped-maple Scandinavian-style bowls, left-handed cooking spoons and peanut butter paddles. On your way north, you'll pass Sugarloaf Pet Gardens -- a real pet cemetery! -- before veering west to Dancing Leaf Farm. There, Dalis Davidson hand-spins vibrant yarns from the wool of the sheep she keeps in the field out back. The resident dog, Tasman, wears a sign reading "Need Yarn?" as he escorts visitors to the studio.

In Hyattstown, sculptor Linda Tetens has made her mark with huge abstract pieces crafted from "found" steel, like those you'll see outside her Maple Grove Studio; take a peek inside to see two smaller sculptures made of hundreds of door keys. Then head to Dancing Pig Pottery in Damascus, where Virginia Virkus's Newgrange pottery takes inspiration from Celtic designs such as the Uffington horse tattooed on her back.

At your last stop, the Art of Fire, you'll find the marriage of art and science in the glasswork made on site. Watch Foster Holcombe, Theda Hansen and their skilled team perform a finely choreographed ballet that moves between the "bench," where the glass is blown and worked, and the "glory hole," where the fire is about 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit, before ending at the annealer, where finished pieces cool slowly.

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