



PA ROADTRIPS

AN OCCASIONAL GUIDE TO THE HIDDEN GEMS ALONG THE ROAD

Cruising the artisan cheese trail in Franklin County

It's in the little cheese shop beneath the big clock tower in the village of Gap that we hear about the artisan cheeses of Franklin County. So we head west out the old Lincoln Highway, through Lancaster's mix of modern hustle and traditional bustle, through the glorious orchards of Adams County (where they grow more than 150 kinds of apples) and we find our way into the undiscovered Amish farmlands thriving along the Kittatinny Ridge.

We pull into Otterbein Acres, the pristine Amish farm of John and Lena Fisher. Here they raise grass-fed lambs and chickens, John builds birdhouses you'll want to live in, and their eldest daughter Barbie transforms their sheep's milk into the best Pecorino Romano this side of Naples. John lights a coal lamp and guides us downstairs to the cheese cellar and we get a gander of row upon row of golden wheels of perfect Pecorino.

"Barbie's little brothers and sisters rub these wheels with olive oil once a week for six months," John tells us. "That's what gives this cheese such a golden rind. Don't peel it, best to grate it and toss it all together." (We do just that when we get it home, and it's heaven with spaghetti.)

John and Barbie send us off with a couple pounds of Pecorino and a big chunk of their Gouda, too, and tell us to look out for a guy making goat cheese they heard about somewhere south of Greencastle.

Next stop is Whispering Brook Farm, a Mennonite dairy farm with a perfectly logical address on Edenville-Cheesetown Road, on the way to Cheesetown, of course. Here the specialty is good old-fashioned cow's milk. Extra sharp and mellow smoked cheddar. Baby Swiss that's melt-in-your-mouth. We bite off a chunk of jalapeño jack and it's the perfect combo of cream and warmth. The farmer's daughters make us home-smoked ham-and-cheese hoagies to tide us over as we go looking for the goat cheese.

It's not easy, but worth the search. We get a tip from a wonderful coffee roaster in Greencastle (another story well worth the telling.) Along a forked gravel lane, bear right at the "Pipe Dreams" sign (it's missing a few letters) and we find a fellow

tossing hay to dozens of goats. We call out, "are you Bradley Parker, goat-cheese maker?"

"I am indeed, sir," he affirms.

"We've been looking all over the county for you."

"Well, get out of the car and let's talk about it," he laughs.

As he walks toward the barn, the snow-white nannies fall in line behind him, like following a cheese-making pied piper. And we fall in line behind the goats.

We taste the curds. We taste the cream. We taste the aged and the fresh. Brad Parker's Pipe Dreams cheese is tart, it's pungent, it's like butter; it's all delicious. We see large parcels of it, fresh and hanging in cheesecloth, its whey dripping into buckets below. "I feed the whey to the hogs out back," says Mr. Parker. "That makes 'em the best pork chops you've ever had."

Sounds like another mouth-watering reason to return. Today, Franklin County's burgeoning world of artisan cheeses is enough to map out a pretty good roadtrip. Maybe it was Napoleon who said an army travels on its stomach. It's true enough for us.

Well, it's time to find a welcome motel and a happy tavern. We'll see you round the bends and back roads.

The Shunpiker's Guide is a presentation of the Pennsylvania Tourism Office who wants to know where ya been, what've ya seen, where ya eating? Start the conversation with an e-mail to shunpiker@visitPA.com.

Flannery's Tavern

It's been an apothecary and an impromptu morgue during the Civil War. Tonight, John Flannery is cooking up lively calamari, succulent scallops and a menu full of passion. Best-of-class dining at easy-wallet prices. Don't miss this one. 5 North Main Street, Mercersburg. 717.328.5011



Squire Smith Inn

Ross and Melanie Bates make you feel welcome at this Civil War-era B&B. You'll wake up to local Tuscarora Mountain maple syrup and a pot of coffee roasted just down the road apiece. Only four rooms, so call ahead for reservations. 47 North Main Street, Mercersburg. 877.445.5218. www.squiresmithinn.com



Pipe Dreams Fromage

Bradley Parker studied with the masters in France and brought home the secrets to making the creamiest, richest, most flavorful of cheeses. (Best with honey or crusty bread or roasted beets.) Drive slow and peel your eyes to find his happy goat farm, bet you'll make a new friend and take home a great story with some creamy trophies. 2589 Shanks Church Road (where it meets Grant Shook Road) Greencastle. 717.597.1877



Whispering Brook Cheese Haus
COUNTRY STORE

Whispering Brook Cheese Haus

Wisconsin's got nothing on this wonderful cheddar. The "cheese haus" is right on the farm, and everything comes right from the dairy. Brown eggs and cold milk are in the fridge with a variety of cheeses, so bring a cooler and pack it tight. Edenville-Cheesetown Road, just east of Edenville on the way to Cheesetown, of course. 717.369.2355



Otterbein Acres

The Gouda is good and the cheddar is better but come for the Pecorino Romano. Every wheel is rubbed with olive oil each week for months until it's golden rind says "mangia" with an Amish accent. Take home some fresh eggs and grass-fed lamb while you're at it. On Otterbein Church Road, in northeast Franklin County. Please, no Sunday sales. 717.423.6689



The Old Franklin County Jail

One of creepiest places you'll ever love. Three tiers of prison cells built in 1818, including dungeons below and the original gallows out in the courtyard. Ask for Denny, the best volunteer tour guide who will fill your head with stories and give you the delightful wiles! Think Alcatraz in Dutch Country. 175 E. King Street, Chambersburg. 717.264.1667

Cordell's Gardens

Last year 4,000 people came to see the flowers at Merle and Beulah Cordell's farmhouse. Merle admits Beulah does most of the gardening, but he's been helping out best he can for 40 years. Nothing formal, just stop by and smell the roses. Look for the sign that says **Welcome to Tour Gardens at 8979 Grindstone Hill Road, southwest of Chambersburg near the village of Clay Hill. Well worth the beautiful drive.**

