

Springtime in Vermont

By PAUL POST
The Saratogian

Sun-bathed ski slopes, fresh maple syrup, creeks filled with rushing snowmelt. Southern Vermont has all the best things springtime has to offer. For a weekend jaunt or well-planned day trip, there's an endless variety of sites to experience and enjoy.

One of the best routes is through Salem, Washington County, with a stop at the Chambers family's Dry Brook Farm that straddles the border of New York and the Green Mountain State. With 10,000 taps, it's one of the area's largest maple producers, and its 650-head dairy operation ships to Cabot, Vt., where milk is processed for fluid and cheese.

From downtown Salem, head east on Route 153, and just a few miles out of town bear right on Chambers Road. Dry Brook Farm sits in a pristine little valley.

There's always someone around for people who want to pick up some fresh-made syrup.

"It's been a real good year," owner Bob Chambers said. "It's the kind of year we've been looking for. We'll be making syrup yet for another seven to 10 days."

Continue heading east up and over the mountain to Rupert, Vt., where Route 315 leads to Route 30 and Manchester Center. From there, it's a roughly half-hour drive, still on Route 30, to Stratton Mountain, where there are still three weekends of prime skiing to go.

The aptly named Sun Bowl area speaks for itself. Lifts leading from the main base area face directly into the sun, just right for catching a few warm April rays before heading out on one of 69 trails that still boast base depths of 44 to 64 inches.

Every March, Stratton spends a great deal of time preparing for the U.S. Open Snowboarding Championships. This year, weather permitting, the championship Superpipe and Slopestyle course will be open to everyone through Sunday, April 6. This park is world-class and is designed for pro- and top-level riders. Expert ski or snowboard skills are essential, and so is a Safety Education Session that will be offered at the Sun Bowl lodge. A special park ticket will also be required, in addition to lift tickets. But it's a rare opportunity for people who really want to test their skills.

On April 12 and 13, Stratton will host its Spring Fling Weekend, featuring an annual pond-skimming contest at

BEHOLD!



2 p.m. Sunday. Registration starts at 9 a.m. at the main base lodge.

The first snow golf contest is also scheduled from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, along with a barbecue (11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and live music (3 to 6 p.m.). Even non-skiers will enjoy the atmosphere of browsing through Stratton's Swiss-motif village or simply relaxing outdoors in the fresh mountain air.

Afterward, come back down to Route 30 and continue heading east to the junction of Route 100, one of America's most scenic roads. From Rawsonville to East Jamaica, Routes 30 and 100 run together. Stay south on 100, which goes straight down the heart of the state, past Mount Snow, hitting east-west Route 9 at Wilmington.

From there, it's a short ride east to Hogback Mountain, famous for its 100-mile views into New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The Hogback Mountain gift shop is a must-stop for country crafts and tasty food items.

Near West Brattleboro, check out the Robb Hill Family Farm at 827 Ames Hill Road. A retail shop is filled with treats and fresh maple, and when spring "mud season" is over, the farm offers farm and hay rides by appointment.

At Brattleboro, head north on Route 5 to Putney, home to Putney General Store that epitomizes all that a small-town country store should be. From rural antiques to penny candy, stepping across the threshold is like taking a trip back in time.