

A TANK AWAY

The Boston Globe

## A trip back in time in the Pioneer Valley

By Carolyn Y. Johnson, Globe Staff | September 23, 2009

AMHERST - For four years, I lived in the Pioneer Valley, practically unaware of its existence as anything but a bucolic backdrop to college. To my surprise, returning here with a friend and without homework is less an exercise in nostalgia and more an introduction to all that I missed. Just a two-hour drive from Boston, there are three-toed dinosaur tracks in rocks, a vertiginous hike along a ridge with sweeping views of farmlands and towns, and an impressively diverse menu of restaurants.

### Stay

**Hadley Meadow** (113 Rocky Hill Road, Hadley, [www.hadleymeadow.com](http://www.hadleymeadow.com), 413-549-1937), situated in a residential area in the middle of the region's five colleges, is nothing special from the front. But out back, this bed and breakfast sits on the edge of an enormous swath of meadow and boasts a fantastic view of the Holyoke range. Hostess Merle Bruno offers two rooms with private bath, access to an outdoor pool in the summer, and a simple continental breakfast for \$110 a night. In Amherst itself is the **Allen House Victorian Inn** (599 Main St., 413-253-5000, [www.allenhouse.com](http://www.allenhouse.com)), which has rooms from \$75 to \$195 depending on the time of year and length of stay. One tip on lodging in this area: Check the college calendar before planning a trip.

### Dine

For a light meal, try **Fresh Side** (39 South Pleasant St., [freshsideamherst.com](http://freshsideamherst.com), 413-256-0296, \$4-\$15), a cafe best known for its "tea rolls," which are something like Vietnamese salad rolls but with a variety of fillings that include spicy chicken, a Thai version with fresh mint and crushed peanuts, and veggie variants. If you're still hungry, grab a slice of pizza at **Antonio's** (31 N. Pleasant St., 413-253-0808, \$2-\$4), known for its variety of toppings, which can include anything from tortellini to just plain cheese. For dinner, drive down Route 9 and try **Green Street Cafe** (64 Green St., Northampton, 413-586-5650. Small dishes and entrees \$4-\$26), a cozy restaurant that makes fresh-tasting food that follows the rhythms of its garden.

### During the day

For a great day hike, pack snacks and head to **Mount Tom State Reservation** (125 Reservation Road, Holyoke, 413-534-1186). Follow the Metacomet-Monadnock trail for a moderately strenuous hike that skirts basalt cliffs, along a path that occasionally teeters right up against the edge of a long, steep drop. The hike passes abandoned ski slopes, a windmill, and ends at an elevation of 1,202 feet, where transmission towers dot the mountaintop. Round trip is about five miles if you tack on a side trip up Goat Peak, where a lookout tower is said to be a good place to watch for hawks in the fall. If long walks aren't appealing, consider a trip to the **Dinosaur Footprints**, off of Route 5 in Hadley (directions at [www.thetrustees.org](http://www.thetrustees.org)). In just a few steps you are next to slabs of rock where footprints swarm from millions of years ago. To find out a bit more about the Eubrontes and other dinosaurs that created them - and to see a great collection of footprints - go to the **Amherst College Museum of Natural History** (11 Barrett Hill Road, 413-542-2165, [www.amherst.edu/museums/naturalhistory/](http://www.amherst.edu/museums/naturalhistory/)).

### After dark

If you are in the mood to catch a flick, hit the **Amherst Cinema** (28 Amity St., 413-253-2547, [amherstcinema.org/](http://amherstcinema.org/)), which prides itself on championing independent films. After your movie, you'll find that the downtown area is awash in places to catch a beer, a cup of coffee, or a dish of homemade ice cream. If you're on the prowl for a livelier mix of entertainment possibilities, look to Northampton. Here, just strolling down the main street can be a spectacle, with groups of buskers singing and dancing. We lingered over dinner at Green Street Café, where scat singers provided that evening's entertainment. Check out the schedule at the **Iron Horse Music Hall** (20 Center St., Northampton, 413-586-8686, [www.ihcg.com](http://www.ihcg.com)), known for offering an eclectic mix of performers, from singer-songwriters to world music.

Carolyn Y. Johnson can be reached at [cjohnson@globe.com](mailto:cjohnson@globe.com). ■