

# The Long Weekend

Eats · Sleeps · Adventures · Short Flights

## Unraveling the Mystery of Bellows Falls, Vt.

By LLOYD ROSE  
Special to *The Washington Post*

Beautiful Victorian wood-frame houses. A wide, brilliant-blue canal. A town square presided over by a Florentine-style clock tower. On this spring day: sunshine, folks outside the ice cream spot, the local man behind the burgeoning arts scene pedaling sedately by on his bicycle. But the horror writer H.P. Lovecraft saw this benign scene differently. Here he is on the surrounding countryside, sensing what evil lies in the heart of green, pleasant and highly domesticated Vermont:

"The dense, unvisited woods on those inaccessible slopes seemed to harbor alien and incredible things, and I felt that the very outline of the hills themselves held some strange and aeon-forgotten meaning as if they were vast hieroglyphs left by a rumored . . . race whose glories live only in rare, deep dreams."

Okay, not hieroglyphs, exactly. But petroglyphs, carved in massive chunks of fallen granite that lie along the banks of the Connecticut just where the town's first bridge was cut across the river in 1785. Not something easy to find on the East Coast. They're a little hard to spot initially, though you can get right next to them if you're willing to scramble down into a 40-foot gorge, clambering over trees that have fallen across what didn't rightly qualify as a path in the first place. I personally do not recommend this.

The easier, more sensible and just as satisfying choice is to walk out on the right side of the Vilas Bridge, just past the bronze plaque explaining its history, and look over. Almost directly below, someone has helpfully painted a couple of slashes of pale yellow paint just above the incised heads so you can locate them and gaze to your heart's content on the little round countenances, their skulls more circular than oval, their eyes dots, their tiny mouths little O's, as if they were startled to see you looking down at them. Some of them have two stick-like appendages extending from their heads. Could these be . . . antennae? Or could they be primitive antlers, indicating deer? One face has a stick protruding below it. Could it be . . . a lollipop? You won't



BY AL BRADEN



BY GENE THORP — THE WASHINGTON POST

Well, all right, maybe the petroglyphs aren't all that eerie. But what about the Hraefnwood Coffee House, its name a tribute to Lovecraft's master, Edgar Allan Poe, which promises "Great Coffee . . . Evermore!" This stands at the end of the Exner Block, a row of buildings fronted with pressed tin, now housing galleries and studios, as well as the Hraefnwood. Once again, no spookiness here, just a comfortable, sophisticated brown and teal interior with windows looking over the canal and excellent cappuccino.

then, only 12 years ago, as Mayor bluntly states, calling it "a village . . . developmentally stalled since the Great Depression."

Bellows Falls has indeed known some hard times. Powered by the eponymous falls, its mills and factories once turned out woolens and paper and a wide range of farm equipment. All that has been gone a long time. But, as Mayor implies at the novel's end, change was afoot:

In 1995, Robert McBride, an expat New York City abstract painter started the Rockingham (County) Arts and Museum Project, an organization devoted to proving not only the artistic but also the social and economic value of the arts to his adopted community. To RAMP is owed those Exner Block studios and galleries sitting — defiantly, you might say — right across from a burned-out building. Ask people involved in the state's small-town civic life, including Jay Hathaway of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Deborah Murphy of the Vermont Railway System, and they mention McBride as the force behind rejuvenation in Bellows Falls.

It was, in fact, Murphy who pointed McBride out to me as he whizzed by on his bicycle. She was taking me to see another of the town's fascinating bits of history, the Bellows Falls De-



BY MICHAEL

No one really knows who created the petroglyphs above, in Bellows Falls. The town, left, is steeped in history, including the "Witch of Wall Street."

where the Green family in and out of the day from May 31 to 10. And before you can visit the Museum, a barrel-roofed building here from Massachusetts the lover of industrial architecture, it's a fine piece of its wood booths on the floor, chrome coat-

Lovecraft was in the 1920s, but clearly the Vermont he saw or imagined give it one more look at Bellows Falls. Not the black-market enough in her own private fiend for Green, the Witch of famous millionaires early 20th century.

A financial genius miser. To save downed her young son and he ended up here in Bellows Falls. A green-shaded light beneath the obelisk. Nothing adorned and her husband's names of Edward (Ned) and her daughter of those oddities in country grav-