

The Berkshires: low, green mountains in western Massachusetts; country towns like Lenox and Stockbridge, memorialized by Norman Rockwell; red barns and little white houses. Recently, huge chunks of capital have been invested in this quintessential New England scene: more than a million sunk into a great country-house hotel that's open only in summer, \$75 million for a new museum, \$37 million on a luxury spa, the first of its kind in the Northeast. But the Berkshires are more accustomed to all this attention than their first pristine white-clapboard impression would lead you to suppose.

Lenox and Stockbridge, like Rome, perceive themselves as visited places. They have been invaded long enough to have come to a graceful accommodation with tourism, which is, after all, their major business. Over time, both the image and the reality of the Berkshires have undergone successive transformations. Most prominent today is the spectrum of performing arts developed during the last 50 years: Tanglewood for classical music, Jacob's Pillow for dance, Williamstown with a major regional theater, and the hundreds of alternative offerings that take place all summer. But everyone from the Transcendentalists and the Shakers to Arlo Guthrie has left a mark. That parts of all these pasts survive at all is what gives the Berkshires their layered charm. Travel among the ruins is rich.

How will the area adjust to the latest waves of development? Though it's done well up to now, my first impulse on this trip is to holler, "Badly!" Driving north on Route 7 from Lenox, I run across Guido's, a gourmet market just south of Pittsfield, in the

dead center of the Berkshires. What actually stops me is Guido's traffic jam, directed by a patient, lanky 18-year-old policeman straight out of Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*. It's Saturday noon in July, and cars are surging out of the lot, loaded with Badia a Coltibuono olive oil and fresh figs. All around are jammed shopping malls, outlets and discount stores. Customers of Guido's are weekenders, mostly from New York and Boston, stocking up their second homes. Now that the two great summer escapes for New Yorkers and Bostonians—the series of towns on Long Island known collectively as the Hamptons, and Cape Cod—mean an average four-hour weekend drive, why not the Berkshires? Today trend spotters call the Berkshires a "destination stop," a place to go for two weeks, not a couple of nights.

Of course, the Berkshires have always been a destination stop for some people: Henry James visited Edith Wharton for weeks at her house, The Mount, which is now open to the public. Novelist Wharton was a member of that East Coast plutocracy, mostly New Yorkers, who from the 1880s until the 1929 crash spent at least the month of June here in their 30 to 40-room "cottages." Lenox was flashier and had more cottages; Stockbridge fancied itself more discreet and

**The staff (below) and the stuffed (left) of Blantyre. Opposite page: serious croquet in the shadow of the brick "castle," the hotel's original building from 1902.**

