

# Rural Ramble gets big welcome back

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By CECILIA NASMITH  
STAFF WRITER

It seems one year's hiatus has only made people want Rural Ramble more.

Forced to skip 2001 because of the danger posed by hoof-and-mouth disease, the popular annual event returned this weekend with a vengeance. Twenty-three Northumberland locations, from Petherick's Corners in the northeast to Dale Corners in the southwest, put on a show for visitors that highlighted each one's specialties.

From the maple butter and maple artifacts at Sandy Flat Sugar Bush near Warkworth to the pony rides and giant apple at Burnham Family Farm Market near Port Hope, there was a world to discover at each stop. There was an interesting piggy-backing network in place too, for example, with a Women's Institute baking crafts and food sale at High Pointe Inn and Equestrian Centre near Baltimore and Rebound Youth Services Northumberland offering games and face painting at Homac Acres Inc. near Codrington.

Dave Ward was kept busy jotting down figures as the vehicles drove into Homac Acres.

"We just had somebody from England," he said briefly with as much excitement as he had time for. He noted it on his sheet, which also had a column for the number of children in each vehicle.

"A lot of people are coming with grandchildren, nieces and nephews," he said. "We see the backseats are usually full of kids."

"And some of these people are upset that they couldn't do this last year."

At Homac, the children could wander around pens arranged into aisles to show off cows, calves and donkeys (including a tiny three-week-old one many children wanted to bundle up and take home with them).

Miss Piggy, obligingly rooted for edibles in the soft ground of her pen, and the children were also invited to step into a cage with rabbits they could hold and pet.

The grown-ups would have been more apt to enjoy the cattle penning demonstration, where workers on horseback cut out specific calves from a herd and got them into the pen. When the bleachers were full, spectators drifted to the bales of hay that had been set out for overflow seating.

Hoskin Farms Ltd., north of Grafton, also had much to mesmerize both children and adults, including demonstrations of milking



PHOTO BY MANDY MARTIN

**IN THE COUNTRY:** The picturesque, century-old Hoskin Farms Ltd. stop drew crowds during Rural Ramble on the weekend. The Stoneybrook homestead northwest of Grafton featured milking demonstrations and 4-H exhibits.

and washing down the floors of the cow parlour. Everyone walking in was given a small vial of cream to shake into butter as a first-hand demonstration of how churning used to work. Free chocolate milk and ice cream were distributed, with the 4-H Club set up at a barbecue to sell hot dogs and hamburgers.

Once the children downed their treats, they were free to check out the baby cow in the Cow Palace (a little building made entirely of hay bales), feed the baby calves, enjoy the model farm set out on a table under a tree and play in the cow-corn pool — a wading pool filled with cow corn and some great Tonka toys to transport loads of the maize pellets around.

Volunteer Danielle Williams said the Hoskin farm had seen well over 200 visitors come in within the first two and a half hours alone.

"Their response is, 'Thumbs up!' and, 'Excellent!', 'We had a great time, thank you very much,' and, 'We'll be back next year,'" Ms.

Williams said.

"There are a lot of things for the kids to do here, and the people with kids are really thankful," she added.

Ms. Williams heard many comments from people who had seen the milking demonstration. "They think it's just amazing, with all the electronics," she said. "Many of them thought they still do it by hand."

In fact, computers play a role in almost every farm operation, according to the Rural Ramble program, for such functions as milking, livestock mating, machinery functions, marketing, financing, feeding, record keeping, weather information, nutrient reports, disease control and crop rotations.

The program estimated Northumberland farms have investments in some 3,400 tractors, 2,000 farm trucks, 1,000 balers and 400 combines, among its 1,336 agricultural operations in the county, farming some 274,809 acres.

An appetite for health



Liana Palmer and Andrea Nelson of the Codrington Women's Institute presented the BHSC's Brian Todd with a cheque for \$2,500. The funds were raised through 10 dinners catered by the Institute this year.

Ben Rutledge photo

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