

Naturally, N.H. farm delights families

By Tom Long

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

CANDIA, N.H. — Charmingfare Farm is the antidote to every overpriced, overstaged theme park you've ever schlepped around with your children.

Are we there yet?

Even the short country ride off Route 93 to get to this 180-acre farm and zoo is an enjoyable jaunt over verdant hills past golden hayfields.

Don't expect any water rides or farm-themed restaurants. This 22-year-old attraction is as no-frills and authentic as it gets. You'll see goats, sheep, cows, horses, fowl, oxen, and swine. If you're lucky, as we were on our visit, you might even see a lamb born right in front of your eyes at the petting zoo. And for a pittance you can buy a bag of feed and delight in the feeling of a goat's mouth tickling your palm.

"I love the alpaca," said Christopher Brown, 13, of Hudson, N.H., who was sporting an AC/DC T-shirt and a long rock 'n' roll hairstyle. "Its bangs look just like mine."

The farm has recently added wild animals indigenous to North America. They're housed in spacious, natural-looking enclosures.

Children oohed and ahed over the black bear, fisher, cougar, wolf, and porcupine, and the birds of prey presentation.

Don't worry about the kids being seduced by high-priced souvenirs and \$10 hamburgers. "We were reluctant to have any food or gifts," said Charmingfare's Linda Ellis. "We never wanted this to be a Disney World. We encourage people to bring their own food, have a family picnic — but so many people were asking for something to eat that we did end up opening small stands that sell bottled drinks and a few packaged snacks."

The stands also sell a few tasteful, high-quality souvenirs.

And while you'll never find a roller coaster at Charmingfare, that doesn't mean there are no rides. For a small fee you can get pulled around the farm on a Deere tractor/train, a horse-drawn carriage, or oxen-drawn logging scoot.

The farm, open all year, also offers 1½-hour sleigh or hay rides through this same agrarian landscape, which transforms into a color fest in autumn and a winter wonderland in the snowy months.

According to Ellis, native coyote, fox, and wild turkeys have been spotted during the rides. At the end, a bonfire is lighted and guests are encouraged to bring hot dogs and s'mores fixings and cook over the open fire.

Sound idyllic? It is. So much so that some couples

have chosen to get married at Charmingfare, Ellis

said. "At Halloween time when we run our haunted rides, a couple got married. She had the white wedding gown but wore black lipstick and nail polish. We also have a lot of family reunions here. It's a real hoedown feeling with people sitting on hay bales cooking their hot dogs on a campfire."

Eat your heart out, Mickey.

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Charmingfare Farm

Route 27, Candia, N.H.

603-483-5623

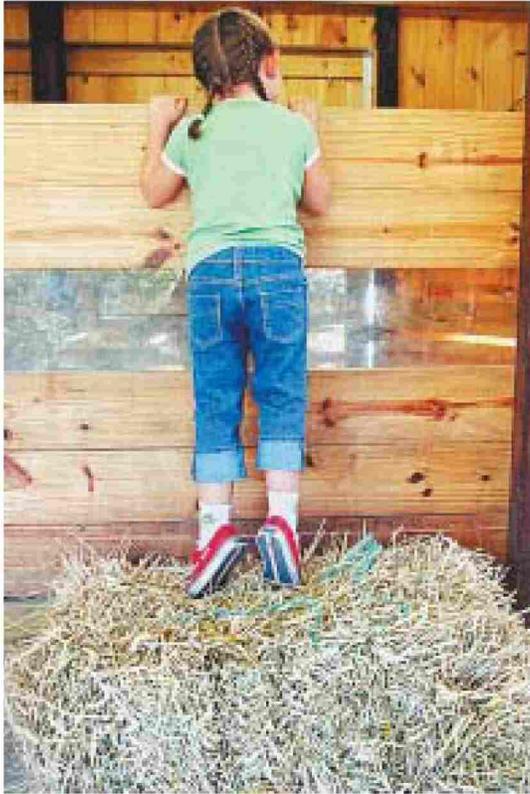
visitthefarm.com

Daily 10 a.m.-4 p.m. until Oct. 1. After that, Saturday and Sunday 11-3 through the end of April.

Admission \$11, children 1 and under free. Horse-drawn, tractor, pony, and oxen rides \$3. Call for information about sleigh and hay rides.

Directions: Charmingfare Farm is about 63 miles or 1 hour from Boston. From Interstate 93 take exit 9 north (ramp bears to right). At the third set of lights take a right onto Route 27 heading east. The farm is approximately 4½ miles on the right.





PHOTOS BY CHERYL SENTER/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Penned lambs awaited attention from Chase Culbertson, 4, at Charmingfare Farm in Candia, N.H., where 5-year-old Riley Donovan stood tiptoe to watch a sow suckle its piglets.