



WELCOME TO VERNON COUNTY

THE HEARTLAND

Photo credit: Haley Brooks

CHASEBURG • COON VALLEY • DE SOTO • GENOA • HILLSBORO • LA FARGE • ONTARIO
 READSTOWN • ROCKTON • STODDARD • VIOLA • VIROQUA • WESTBY

VERNON COUNTY IS THE HEART OF THE DRIFTLESS AREA, DISPLAYING THE RUSTIC BEAUTY OF THE REGION WITH ITS STEEP, RUGGED HILLS, UNTOUCHED BY THE ICE AGE GLACIERS, AND THE PICTURESQUE KICKAPOO RIVER ZIGZAGGING THROUGH.

Outdoor recreation abounds in Vernon County, with water sports, hiking and biking trails, camping, hunting, and fishing. Heavily wooded Wildcat Mountain State Park sits on a steep ridge overlooking the Kickapoo River, providing spectacular views for hikers, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, and horseback riders. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve, between La Farge and Ontario, offers trails for virtually every type of recreation: paved roads for touring bikes, off-road trails for mountain bikes and equestrians, and three trails reserved for hikers. In the winter, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiles traverse the paths. Westby also hosts International & Junior Ski Jumping Tournaments at Snowflake Ski & Golf Club. They are in the process of making the hill a year-round training facility.

Along Vernon County's western border, the Mississippi River is a popular destination for boating and fishing, while the Kickapoo River, Coon Creek, and other waterways are known for idyllic kayaking, canoeing, and trout fishing.

Much of Vernon County's history is steeped in agriculture—primarily, dairy farming and tobacco growing. In recent years, more farmland has shifted to organic produce while former tobacco fields have been transformed into vineyards. Vernon County houses more organic farms than anywhere else in the U.S. outside of California, while 32 vineyards have sprouted up, covering 68 acres. The region's unglaciated hills and valleys have made the terrain a welcome place for smaller farmers rather than big, corporate operations.

Food culture has become big business for Vernon County and a focus of its new image. A major force driving that is Organic Valley, the La Farge-based cooperative of Midwest family farmers who joined forces in 1988. Today, Organic Valley produces organic

dairy products, vegetables, and eggs. It includes more than 1,600 family farms—with 84 added in 2023—and employs more than 900 people.

Another business playing a role in Vernon County's food reputation is GoMacro, whose plant-based nutrition bars are sold nationwide. Launched by a mother-and-daughter team in 2004, GoMacro is based in Viola and emphasizes sustainability, powering its operation with solar and wind energy, and partnering in a recycling program for its bar wrappers.

The Viroqua Food Co+op and many of the local restaurants and cafes focus on organic, locally grown food, contributing further to the food culture and reputation.

Vernon County's agricultural legacy is on display in its farm architecture. It is the No. 1 place for round barns in the U.S. In addition, it is home to the largest Amish settlement in Wisconsin which has grown into a tourist mecca with the thriving auction house for flowers, produce, hay, furniture and quilts. Spring brings out thousands to enjoy the greenhouse amid the bulk food stores and bakeries.

Vernon County also has become a mecca for arts and live music. VIVA Gallery is an artists' cooperative that started in 2004 and features the works of 25 local artists who are painters, potters, weavers, jewelers, and more. An annual art tour in June invites visitors to meet with artists in their studios. Viroqua also brings art outdoors, commissioning murals on several of its buildings.

Live music has been a mainstay in Vernon County for years, and since the pandemic, the trend has gained steam. Some of the popular gatherings are the Driftless Music Festival, Music in the Park, Bonfire Music & Arts Festival, Larryfest, Westby Syttende Mai Festival, Wild West Days, and the new Coon Creek Conservation Days in Coon Valley which will feature Mollie B!

FOR CALENDAR OF EVENTS & CURRENT INFORMATION: WWW.HIDDENVALLEYS.COM

TOP 10 VERNON COUNTY DESTINATIONS

1

KICKAPOO RIVER

one of the most crooked rivers in the world

2

NORSKEDALEN NATURE & HERITAGE CENTER

Coon Valley

3

CHEYENNE VALLEY HERITAGE ROAD TOUR

Round Barns of Vernon County

4

WILDCAT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

Ontario

5

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE

LaFarge

6

BLACKHAWK TRAIL & COUNTY PARK

Victory

7

GREAT RIVER ROAD INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Genoa

8

DRIFTLESS MUSIC GARDENS

Hillsboro

9

ORGANIC VALLEY HEADQUARTERS

La Farge

10

INTERNATIONAL SKI JUMP TOURNAMENT

Westby



Great River Road Interpretive Center
Photo credit: Danika Wehling



Photo credit: Danika Wehling



International Ski Jump Tournament
Photo credit: Kip Kopelke



Driftless Music Gardens.
Photo credit: Reflections of Heaven
PhotoDesign



Right: Kickapoo River. Photo credit: Dena Nechkash



Kickapoo River. Photo credit: Dena Nechkash



Kickapoo Valley Reserve



Wildcat Mountain State Park. Photo credit: Jenny Stelzner

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