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## Bay State's greats

**State highlights 1,000 top attractions, from the obvious to the puzzling**



(Photo: Suzanne Kreiter/Globe staff)

By Peter Schworm, Globe Staff |

Alford, a wisp of a town on the New York border, has no gas station or stores, much less history-book landmarks like Concord's Old North Bridge or natural beauty on the order of Truro's sand dunes.

But now it has this chestnut to offer tourists: an official state designation as one of 1,000 "Great Places" in Massachusetts.

Even some residents are incredulous.

"Have you ever been here?" asked Carol Sue Donelan, an outgoing member of the town's Historical Commission. "There's nothing in the town center. I can't imagine why people would visit."

With fanfare yesterday, a state panel and tourism officials released a list of 1,000 places in Massachusetts they deem so noteworthy they should not be missed.

The long list of attractions, the brainchild of a Legislature looking for ways to spur tourism and spotlight lesser-known locations across the state, naturally featured mainstays of the state's Colonial past and landmarks on the order of Fenway Park.

But many spots with seemingly limited appeal dotted the list, including a hot dog stand in North Adams, a thermometer museum in Wareham, and a mosquito-infested swamp in Southeastern Massachusetts that some say is cursed.

A 12-member state commission compiled the inventory over the past year and a half. Drawing from more than 12,000 online nominations from the public, they designated places in nearly every community in the state.

Though some sites seemed like a stretch, officials said the state's wealth of historical, cultural, and natural attractions made for hard choices.

"One thousand looked like a large number when we started," Eric Turkington of Falmouth, a former state representative who led the panel, said at a State House press conference.

"By the time we were done, we were trying to squeeze things down," he said.

Some greeted designations in their towns with delight and great hopes for hordes of tourists.

"This is spectacular," exclaimed Cathy Racine, whose Charlton Sewing Center made the list.

She said she gets about 40 customers on a good day to the store, which is billed as "New England's Sewing Sanctuary" and has a collection of antique sewing machines.

But maybe more will come now. "I would love a stampede," she said. "I can handle it."

Boston led the way with 84 attractions, followed by Cambridge, Salem, and Nantucket with 16.

Six communities — Gloucester, New Bedford, Springfield, Worcester, Lowell, and North Adams — boasted at least 10 locations on the list.

But many communities were recognized for just a single site, from Abington (Ames Nowell State Park) to Wrentham (the outlet malls).

Kelly's Roast Beef, Old Sturbridge Village, and Sullivan's at Castle Island in South Boston were among the most nominated attractions, officials said.

The public input contributed to the eclectic nature of the list, which encompassed the serene campus of Wellesley College and the quintessential Route 1 kitsch of the Kowloon Restaurant in Saugus.

The state is not allocating any money to publicize the list, beyond posting it on its tourism website.

But at locations that draw only a trickle of visitors, people were grateful for any recognition at all.

"It's fantastic to be included," said Tristram Seidler, an ecologist at Nasami Farm in Whately, a 75-acre native plant nursery. "We've definitely had a low profile, although we do have some signs on the highway."

Brushing aside questions of the list's arbitrary nature, state officials said the catalog highlighted what is "special and magical" about Massachusetts.

Noting the exclusion of other worthy sites, they hinted at still more locations to come.

"The difficulty was not getting up to 1,000, but getting down to 1,000," said Smitty Pignatelli, a state representative from Pittsfield.

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