

MONDAYTUESDAYWEDNESDAYTHURSDAYFRIDAYSATURDAYSUNDAY

Go!

July 8, 2005

268 miles
108 scoops
5 tasters
2 days

THE
GREAT
MID-HUDSON

meltedown!

The real scoop



Going out for ice cream on a hot summer day is as American a ritual as going to church or watching football on Sunday. So much so that in 1984, President Ronald Reagan declared July "National Ice Cream Month." In honor of this sacred celebration of tasty goodness, we set out to find the best ice cream to be had in the Hudson Valley/Catskill area.

STORY BY
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Judging nearly every ice cream stand in four counties is not an easy job; 268 miles, 108 scoops and two days later, you don't even want to know there is such a thing as ice cream.

We gathered a team of five tasters, and each chose a representative hard-serve flavor. I tried chocolate, Germain Lussier tried cookie dough, Robin A. Rothman tried mint chocolate chip, Sandy Tomcho tried sherbet and Heather Hastie was a wild card, trying anything from cake to Smurf — whatever the establishment recommended. We looked at each place for ambience, service, scoop size and taste.

Our trail took us as far south as Warwick, as far north as New Paltz, and as far west as Milford, Pa.

What we discovered is that, though they may share a name, not all establishments' flavors taste the same. Additional amenities were also variables.

Most of the places we visited consisted of walk-up windows, but a few places, such as the Riverside Creamery, offered a comfortable, air-conditioned space during a 90-degree meltdown on June 27. Both Cherry Top and Blueberry Mountain have miniature golf. Bellvale Creamery had a kitschy dairy-farm look to it with a terrific view of Warwick. But, as we also discovered, looks aren't everything. The Dairy Cone in Newburgh, for example, looks well-worn, but it serves one of the better ice creams we tasted.

What makes a good ice cream is a very personal matter, but in general it shouldn't be too sweet or too bland. Everyone wants "just right." In terms of hard-serve brands, most places import Hershey's, Perry's or Welsh's brand ice cream. And one place we know of carries Edy's brand ice cream — the Book Cellar Café in Middletown, which isn't even "an ice cream place," per se.

However, in a bold and interesting move, some of the better ice creams we tasted, such as Bellvale Creamery, were homemade.

Here's a rundown of how each flavor turned out during our trip and where to

find the best in each category.

► **Chocolate:** With chocolate, you know what you're going to get. It's always going to be chocolate, but you want something that stands out. Several places offered subtle differences. Thorndale Dairy Bar's chocolate had a fudge quality. Richard's was coffee-like, and Frosty Rock Creamery's hinted at caramel. Bellvale Creamery had the all-around best-tasting chocolate, and Lickety Split had a heavy, creamy chocolate custard. The places that had Hershey's, Perry's and Welsh's brand ice creams tastes like standard, tried-and-true chocolate.

► **Cookie Dough:** As Germain assessed, the cookie dough was the easiest to grade because it can be judged visually. To succeed, there should be a generous amount of chocolate chips and cookie dough. Quickway Twin Cone had tons of chocolate chips, but it had only half a piece of cookie dough in it. Others, such as the Ice Cream Stand, were more like vanilla ice cream with cookie-dough flavoring; there were very few chips or dough.

"There should be at least three different flavors in cookie dough; chocolate, cookie dough and vanilla. Only a handful of places did that," Germain says. Those places included the Riverside Creamery, Milford Snack and Dairy Bar, Dairy Cone and Bellvale Creamery.

► **Mint Chocolate Chip:** Like cookie dough, you can begin to tell if a mint chocolate chip is good or not by looking at it; it's either going to have teeny tiny Hershey's kiss shapes or big chunks of chocolate. Another thing that surprised Robin was that most of the mint chocolate chip ice creams she tasted were dyed green. Like the brown coloring in Coca-Cola, the green color in mint chocolate chip has nothing to do with flavoring. Bellvale Creamery was the only place that didn't have color.

"They do it on purpose because they



think it's supposed to be green," Robin says. "There are some places — and I consider it a mark of confidence in the flavor — that will just leave it white."

Once you bite into it, the flavor can vary. A lot of places tasted the same, but of the homemade batches, Sweet Stuff's had a very tangy taste. Sunshine's odd-tasting version was "shocking" at first, but got better with every bite and ended up tasting quite good.

► **Sherbet:** Sherbet pretty much tastes the same in most places. There are the generic sherbet flavors — lemon, lime, raspberry and orange. The only difference is whether the sherbet is scooped together or it already comes mixed. The one place that stood out for Sandy was Cookies & Cream's Mango Bango and Mighty Sprightly, which Sandy says tastes like Sprite.

► **Wild Card:** Heather was almost guaranteed a good scoop everywhere she went, as she was asking for the house best. Still, some places' bests were better than others'. The notable ones included Thorndale's Birthday Cake, which tasted

like real birthday cake. Riverside Creamery's Panda Paws scored big with its chocolate swirls, shavings and tiny peanut-butter cups. Richard's Dairy Shed Coconut Pineapple included chunks of fresh pineapple mixed in with toasted bits of coconut, and the cream was rich and smooth. Sweet Stuff Homemade Cake Batter was the best of the cake batters, according to Heather.

"There were actual swirls of icing in the ice cream, which heightened the sensation of licking the bowl," she says.

Blueberry Mountain had the most unusual offering: Smurf — blue raspberry with marshmallows. The texture was good, but the raspberry taste was almost nonexistent.

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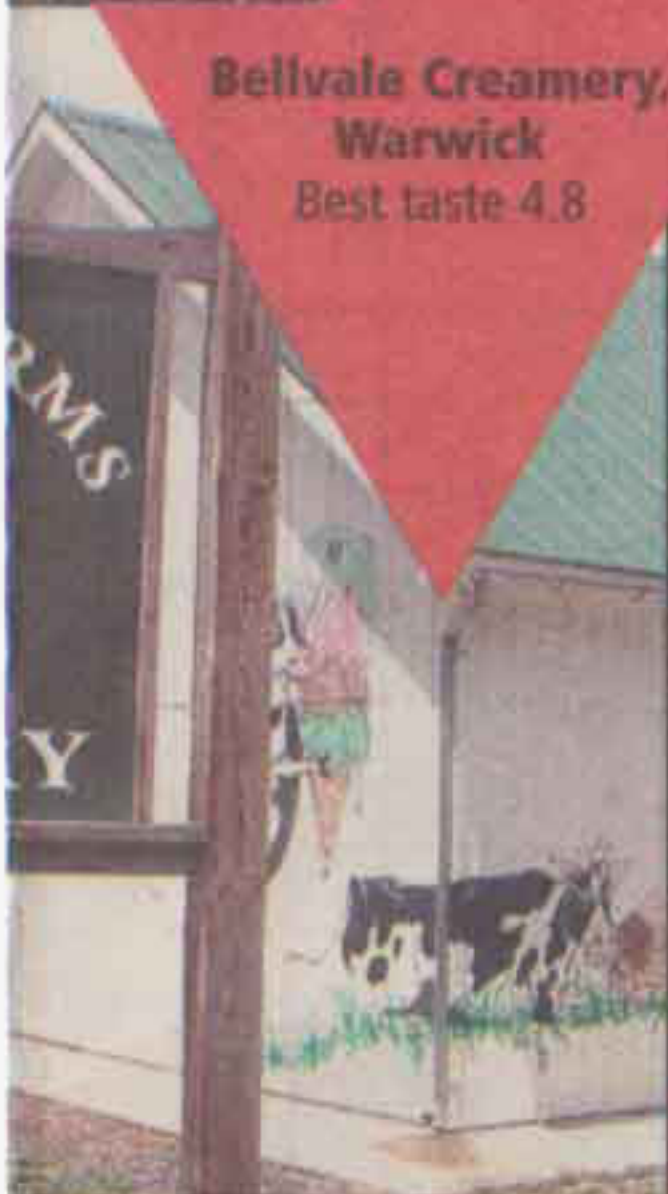
MORE ONLINE

For full report cards on each and every scoop, as well as a photo gallery and an interactive map for all 23 ice cream spots we visited, go to www.recordonline.com.





Riverside Creamery, Port Jervis
Best overall 4.75
Best ambiance 5
Best service 4.8 (tie)
Best scoop size 4.8 (tie)



Bellvale Creamery, Warwick
Best taste 4.8



Frosty Rock Creamery, Town of Wallkill
Best Deal @ \$1.49 with a score of 3.8 for Scoop Size



Dairy Delite, Florida
Best scoop size 4.8 (tie)

Best overall

Our tasters all agree, the best overall ice cream spot is Riverside, but there were a lot of close seconds. Here are each tasters' overall average scores for Riverside and his/her runners-up.

	1st place	2nd place
Brian (Chocolate)	Riverside Creamery 4.75	Lickity Split 4.50
Germain (Cookie Dough)	Riverside Creamery 4.75	Milford Dairy and Snack Bar 4
Robin (Mint chocolate chip)	Riverside Creamery 4.75	Family Farm 4.5
Sandy (Rainbow sherbet)	Riverside Creamery 4.75	8 way tie!
Heather (Wild card)	Riverside Creamery 5	Family Farm/ Sweet Stuff tie 4.75

Perfect 5s for taste

- ▶ Bellvale Creamery's After Dinner Mint, Blueberries and Cream, Bellvale Bog and Chocolate
- ▶ Riverside Creamery's Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and Panda Paws
- ▶ Dairy Cone's Cookie Dough and Strawberry
- ▶ Sunshine's Chocolate and Rainbow Sherbet (Orange and Raspberry mix)
- ▶ Thorndale's Birthday Cake
- ▶ Cherry Top's Coconut
- ▶ Sweet Stuff's Homemade Cake Batter
- ▶ Richard's Dairy Shed's Coconut Pineapple
- ▶ Milford Dairy and Snack Bar's Rainbow Sherbet
- ▶ Cookies and Cream's Rainbow Sherbet (Mighty Spriggy and Mango Bango mix)
- ▶ Lickity Split's Chocolate Custard

HOW THEY MEASURE UP

Scores were determined by averaging the ambience and service of the establishments and the size and taste of the scoops as voted on by all five tasters. Cost indicates the price of a small cup of hard serve ice cream.

RIVERSIDE CREAMERY

Score: 4.75
Where: 5 Water St., Port Jervis
Call: 856-8560
Cost: \$2

FAMILY FARM

Score: 4.15
Where: 253 Tower Road, Scotchtown
Call: 692-6787
Cost: \$2.35

MR. CONE

Score: 3.95
Where: Route 17M, Monroe
Call: 783-7002
Cost: \$2.75

LICKITY SPLIT

Score: 3.92
Where: 31 Lake St., Monroe
Call: 781-7310
Cost: \$1.60 (ice cream), \$3.50 (custard)

BELLVALE CREAMERY

Score: 3.9
Where: 385 Route 17A, Warwick
Call: 988-5414
Cost: \$2.17

DAIRY CONE

Score: 3.9
Where: 157 S. Robinson Ave., Newburgh
Call: 561-4253
Cost: \$1.59

SWEET STUFF

Score: 3.9
Where: 88 Dunning Road, Town of Wallkill
Call: 344-3347
Cost: \$2.26

THORNDALE DAIRY BAR

Score: 3.9
Where: 43 Maple Ave., Pine Bush
Call: 744-5382
Cost: \$2.45 (ice cream), \$1.75 (sherbet)

COOKIES & CREAM

Score: 3.85
Where: 11 Main St., New Paltz
Call: n/a
Cost: \$2.35

FROSTY ROCK CREAMERY

Score: 3.85
Where: 255 Dunning Road, Town of Wallkill
Call: 342-5700
Cost: \$1.49

WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

Score: 3.85
Where: 80 Matthews St., Goshen
Call: 294-8935
Cost: \$2

DAIRY DELITE

Score: 3.6
Where: North Main St., Florida
Call: 651-3600
Cost: \$2.20

MILFORD DAIRY AND SNACK BAR

Score: 3.6
Where: 307 W. Harford St., Milford, Pa.
Call: 570-296-6337
Cost: \$1.80

RICHARD'S DAIRY SHED

Score: 3.6
Where: 1103 Route 17K, Montgomery
Call: 457-5112
Cost: \$1.95

SUNSHINE ICE CREAM

Score: 3.55
Where: 88 N. Plank Road, Newburgh
Call: 561-5570
Cost: \$2.08

CHERRY TOP

Score: 3.5
Where: 949 Route 32, Newburgh
Call: 564-6340
Cost: \$1.85

BLUEBERRY MOUNTAIN

Score: 3.45
Where: 655 Route 17M, Town of Wallkill
Call: 344-2500
Cost: \$2.20

TANTILLO'S FARM MARKET

Score: 3.34
Where: 730 Route 208, Gardiner
Call: 255-6196
Cost: \$2.08

WALLY'S ICE CREAM PARLOR II

Score: 3.3
Where: 846 Route 17M, Monroe
Call: 782-5656
Cost: \$2

CUSTER'S LAST STAND

Score: 2.9
Where: 214 Kingston Ave., Wurtsboro
Call: 888-4761
Cost: \$1.75

MARY JANE'S DAIRY BAR

Score: 2.9
Where: 5334 Route 9W, Newburgh
Call: 561-8450
Cost: \$1.95

THE DUGOUT

Score: 2.85
Where: 170 Route 32, Central Valley
Call: 928-0839
Cost: \$2.25

QUICKWAY TWIN CONE

Score: 2.75
Where: Route 17, Bloomingburg
Call: 733-1881
Cost: \$1.80 (\$2.50 for two, \$3.30 for three)

ICE CREAM STAND

Score: 2.19
Where: 1007A Route 209, Cuddebackville
Call: 754-7575
Cost: \$2.25

SCOOP US!

If we missed what you consider the hottest ice cream joint around, tell us about it. We'll add it, and your comments, to our online version! E-mail us at poptopics@th-record.com.