

# Maine to Edinburgh, what da Vinci saw, too

Continued from preceding page

sions in a studio or outdoors, artists can place a blank sheet or canvas directly on top of the image and trace it. Johannes Vermeer (1632-75) was reputed to rely on a camera obscura in his studio. In the novel named for the Dutch painter's masterpiece "Girl With a Pearl Earring," author Tracy Chevalier imagines a conversation in which Vermeer explains its purpose to his young assistant, Griet: "The camera obscura helps me see in a different way," he explained. "To see more of what is there." That intensity and fresh perspective helps explain why an artist would want to look at the landscape from inside a dark room.

Camera obscuras are located throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Asia, Canada, and Cuba but by far the greatest number are in the United Kingdom and United States. They are frequently near bodies of water — coastline, harbors, rivers — chosen for their scenic beauty. Although most are privately owned, those open to the public vary widely in character.

The first one I ever visited was built in Edinburgh in 1853. It is part of the city's "World of Illusions" attraction, along with exhibits of holography and other visual effects. The camera obscura is inside Outlook Tower, just below Edinburgh Castle. The clarity of the Scottish panorama visible on a table inside the dark tower was startling.

One of the world's largest camera obscuras is on Eastern Arizona College's Discovery Park Campus in Safford. Unlike the one in Portland, it is static (there is no movable mirror). Built into a classroom wall in a fixed position is a 500-pound, three-element, 40-inch lens that provides an impressive view of Mount Graham, site of an international observatory. Discovery Park is the observatory's visitors center, a nature park and education center focusing on science and technology.

According to Harry Swanson, dean at Discovery Park, visitors come from everywhere. "In 2002, we had a group that travels around the world just to visit cam-



JANET MENDELSON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Ethan, 7, (left) Daniel, 3, and Meghan Tanguy, 9, of Hampton Falls, N.H., study how the camera obscura works at the Children's Museum of Maine in Portland.

era obscuras," said Swanson. Built in the late 1990s, the camera obscura is in a classroom that holds 68 people. "The view here is of desert in the foreground," he said. "In the distance is 10,720-foot Mount Graham, reportedly the tallest mountain in Arizona. I get a big kick out of seeing ravens and turkey vultures upside down. Sometimes there are ATVs kicking up dust."

Back in Portland, Sheila Tanguy of Hampton Falls, N.H., and her children, Meghan, 9, Ethan, 7, and Daniel, 3, were enthralled. "I thought it would be just another camera," said Meghan, "but this was better and probably weirder."

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## If you go . . .

**Children's Museum of Maine**  
142 Free St., Portland  
207-828-1234; kitetails.com  
Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.,  
Sunday noon-5, through Labor Day.  
First Friday of the month free 5-8 p.m.  
Admission \$7, under age 1 free; includes camera obscura tour. Group rate \$5 per person for 10 or more, made at least 24 hours in advance; \$3 camera obscura only.  
**Discovery Park Campus, Eastern Arizona College**  
1651 West Discovery Park Blvd.

Safford, Ariz.  
928-428-6260  
eac.edu/discoverypark  
**Camera Obscura and World of Illusions**  
549 Castlehill, Edinburgh  
camera-obscura.co.uk  
**Information**  
foredown.virtualmuseum.info  
A website on British museums and a camera obscura at Foredown Tower Countryside Centre that maintains a list of camera obscura locations worldwide.

# Spoil yourself with a special sunset tour on Nantucket

NANTUCKET — Most people imagine a Nantucket sunset of fading gold on a boat-speckled harbor. But there are other island sunsets to be seen here from unspoiled vistas.

On Tuesday, the Trustees of Reservations offers its weekly sunset tour in the Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge's 1,100 pristine acres on the island's northern tip. You cannot find a more smashing sunset on the island, said Stephen Nicolle, refuge property superintendent.

"The sunset tour is quite popular," Nicolle said of the two-hour expeditions held Tuesdays in July and August. "It's big with photographers, and it's a great place if you're interested in shorebirds. We usually see a lot of seals, too."

Coskata-Coatue (pronounced "co-skate-uh co-too," the two names are Wampanoag for "at the broad woods" and "at the pine forest") has a pair of brand-new 12-passenger all-terrain vans to negotiate the 5½ miles to the best place to see a sunset: atop the Great Point Lighthouse. There has been a lighthouse here since 1818, the latest one built in 1986, two years after a storm reduced the old one to rubble.

Other tours are held on the refuge, including natural history tours twice a day and a new fishing discovery tour, but the sunset trip provides spectacular views: All of Nantucket is visible as is Martha's Vineyard, Tuckernuck and Muskeget islands, and Cape Cod.

*Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge, Wawwinet Road, Nantucket, 508-228-5646, thetrustees.org/pages/293\_coskata\_coatue\_wildlife\_refuge.cfm. The sun sets the schedule. Nonmembers of Trustees of Reservations \$40, members \$30.*

PAUL E. KANDARIAN

# THE BOSTON GLOBE'S WHERE TO STAY NEW ENGLAND & BEYOND

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