

Retrace Harrison Ford's footsteps

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Sept. 05--For the first time in five years, Lancaster County visitors can see the farm where "Witness" was filmed.

They can also see and learn more about other nearby locations with ties to the 1985 movie, which earned Harrison Ford an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor and raised the worldwide level of consciousness about the Amish lifestyle.

To celebrate the silver anniversary of the film's release, just eight tours will visit the "Witness farm," which now is owned by an Amish family. Scheduled at 5 p.m. on Saturdays in September and October, each tour will be limited to 14 participants.

Seriously geeky "Witness" fans also will get an insider's list to six additional, though more obscure, sites that have connections to the movie.

In the suspense/drama that also contains threads of romance, Ford plays John Book, a Philadelphia detective investigating a brutal murder at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station. His key witness is an Amish boy named Samuel. In his efforts to protect Samuel and his mother, Ford gets shot and flees with the pair to their family farm in Lancaster. Once there, he goes into hiding to recover from his wound and then solves the mystery surrounding the murder.

But does anyone remember the movie or care enough about it to sign up for an anniversary tour?

"We think so," says Brad Igou, a Lancaster County native and sociologist who has organized the tour as president of The Amish Experience at Plain & Fancy Farm. "Some people are so dedicated to the movie that they track down the farm's location on their own. It's not visible from the road, so it takes some detective work to locate it.

"Members of the Amish family who own the farm say cars often stop on the crest of the hill overlooking the farm. They open their car windows to take some pictures, then turn around and drive way.

"People who stop to inquire about our other Pennsylvania Dutch country tours frequently ask if we have one that includes the 'Witness' farm," he adds. Most times, they're disappointed with the answer they receive.

But for this new milestone in the film's history, Igou was able to coordinate a few tours for serious fans. The last time the farm was open for limited tours was 2005, when the film's 20th anniversary was being observed.

"Back then, we also wondered if there'd be any interest in 'Witness'-based tours," Igou says. "We were amazed. There were stories about them in newspapers around the country and in other parts of the world. Some of the film's

fans even flew in from Australia and Japan, specifically to take the 'Witness' tour. And once word got around about them, the remainder of the tours sold out."

Igou, teaching English in Japan at the time "Witness" was released, says, "The movie really put Lancaster County and the Amish culture out to a mass audience to a degree that had never been done before. Because people knew I was from Lancaster, I even was asked to do presentations about the Amish for Japanese audiences."

The anniversary tours will enable visitors to see and photograph the farm from several locations, including the crest of the hill and while standing on the front lawn.

"They'll see the summer kitchen, barn and pond and get a little sense of what an incredibly peaceful and quiet place this would be for someone like the city cop Ford portrayed. An interesting detail shot for photographers on the tour will be the reconstructed birdhouse like the one Book hit with his car and then rebuilt before leaving the shelter of the Amish community."

Although visitors can't go inside the farm's buildings, they may see or be greeted by members of the Amish family who own the farm, as well as see Amish craftsmen completing a new farmhouse for the family. The one shown in a few of the movie's scenes has been demolished to make room for the new home.

The two-hour Witness and Covered Bridge Tour also will include the village of Intercourse, where the movie's fight scene occurred, and a stop at Zimmerman's Store, where Book makes a call on a pay phone and realizes who is behind the murders.

The tour guide leading the 'Witness' fans' excursion will have a notebook containing still photos of the movie and will add some anecdotes and stories as told by Lancaster County residents who had some role in producing the film. An example? Igou notes that a diving enthusiast and supplier provided oxygen tanks to the actor who is "smothered" when Book releases the silo's contents so that he could breathe while the footage was being shot.

Really geeky "Witness" fans also will be given a list of six more Lancaster County locations with ties to the movie, like a now-vacant lot along Harrisburg Pike where filmmakers built the silo and a copy of the men's room at 30th Street Station and the location of a building where a floor of the Philadelphia police station was re-created.

But there's more....

"Our tour will take a special route that traverses narrow country roads in southern Lancaster County that are seldom taken by visitors. There are stretches of this purely Amish countryside where no power lines are visible anywhere. This truly is in the heart of Amish country, with beautiful scenery everywhere you look," Igou says.

Traveling in the 14-passenger minibus, tour participants also will go through three historic covered bridges and learn more about the Amish way of life as they go, Igou says.

He adds, "Our tour recognizes that many people have become interested in Amish culture by watching a Hollywood movie and gives them a chance to go beyond the movie and see how the Amish live here today."

At the end of the tour, each guest will receive a small Amish-carved toy horse, much like the one Samuel receives just before he leaves his Lancaster County home for a fateful train trip with his mother.

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WITNESS TOURS

-- **What:** The Witness Movie Covered Bridge Tour

-- **When:** 5 p.m. Saturdays in September and October

-- **Where:** Tours depart from the Amish Experience Theater at Plain & Fancy Farm, along Route 340 between Bird-in-Hand and Intercourse

-- **How much:** \$45.95 per person

-- **Tip 1:** Because tours are limited to 14 people, advance reservations are strongly suggested.

-- **Tip 2:** The tour lasts a little over two hours and is not recommended for small children.

-- **Info:** 800-555-2303, <http://www.amishexperience.com>

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