

A Hamburger Today



New Buffalo, MI: Bite Into a Legendary Burger at Redamak's

Posted by [Todd Brock](#), August 16, 2011

Todd Brock's regular burger beat is Atlanta, but a trip back home to the Midwest took him to within striking distance of a favorite hotspot from his youth. He returned to give it the full-blown AHT treatment.



[Photographs: Todd Brock]

Hold up your right hand so you're looking at your palm. Fingers together, like you're putting on a mitten. That's the shape of the state of Michigan (minus the Upper Peninsula). And when you're describing a specific locale in the Wolverine State, you can do it based on the visual reference of an outstretched hand. "He lives up on the ring finger," or, "Our cabin was out near the tip of the thumb." Well, this burger review takes place down around where hand becomes wrist on the pinkie side. On a real map, it's the spot where Michigan, Indiana, and Lake Michigan all meet. **In Burger World, it's the home of one of the all-time legends, and an absolute must-do on every serious burger lover's bucket list.**

New Buffalo, Michigan, is a quiet beach town of ice cream parlors and bicycle rental shops. Just over 2,000 people call it home, but since the 1940s, its most famous resident has been the sprawling hamburger shack on East Buffalo Street. And, like every small town's most famous resident, [Redamak's](#) has some unique character quirks that the rest of the world simply has to deal with. Like being a cash-only establishment. Or closing down just before Halloween each year and staying closed until spring. (Think about that for a moment. Want the best cheeseburger in a 100-mile radius in November? *Sorry, come back in March.*)



The burgers at Redamak's are world-renowned (a quick pass through the parking lot on this particular Monday showed license plates from Ohio, Iowa, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Florida, and Arizona), but the [menu](#) is exhaustive. It's famously round, with microscopic type crammed into just about every square inch.



Turns out that 18-point Garamond doesn't really work when you have 39 sides (!) to describe. There are some wild choices: mini tacos, breaded mushrooms with ranch dressing (a staple in this part of the world), batter-dipped apple crescents, and a deep-fried cheesecake/brownie bite/bananas Foster trio (yes, those are all "sides"), but truthfully, **I've never found a reason to stray from the chili-cheese fries.** Crinkle-cut and smothered in chunky homemade chili and industrial-strength cheese sauce, they require a fork to eat and border on heavenly.



They may blow it out of the box with sides at Redamak's, but the burger menu is surprisingly and refreshingly spartan. **You can get a hamburger, a cheeseburger, or a Swiss burger. You can get it as a single, double, or triple. That's it.** "With everything" gets you ketchup, mustard, raw onion, and pickles. Lettuce and tomato aren't even available. There's a list of other add-on toppings for building your own "legend," but the choices are pretty basic: grilled onions, chili, mushrooms, jalapeños, green olives, or—and this is still the only place I've ever seen this—**round bacon.**





The burgers are "presented" bundled in wax paper (and not even on trays). When you unwrap it, you'll find that the oozy cheese has melted all over everything (much like a recurring dream I have). Mine had lovely brown burn spots dotting the cheese, which was smooth, thick, creamy, rich... and unpretentiously familiar.

"Is that...?" I asked Jaime, my server.

"Yep, *Velveeta*," she confirmed.

Don't knock it 'til you try it, cheese snobs.



You won't be asked how you want your burger done. Even on request, you won't get a rare or medium-rare burger served to you. Still, **my heavy triple cheeseburger (they use third-pound patties) was phenomenally juicy.**

The place is *always* busy, even with a capacity of 400 in its multiple rooms. They keep adding on over the years to meet demand, despite protest from die-hards. The outdoor beer garden was enclosed in 1998, a "three-seasons room" added in 2002, and it's only been air conditioned since 1995, much to the chagrin of old-timers who complained that Redamak's was becoming "way too modern."



The servers move quickly to keep tables turning over; the kitchen reportedly bangs out 2,500 burgers a day. But lest you think that this is a straight-up food factory/tourist trap (their array of T-shirt colors is impressive, to say the least), get a load of this personal touch. According to the revised 2011 edition of [Hamburger America](#), **each burger at Redamak's is cooked in a skillet...by itself**. I'd prove it with a photo, but my camera and I weren't invited back to the kitchen (I don't have a fraction of George Motz's clout). The current owners (in their 36th year) told George that they do it "to keep the juices with the burger," and I'll vouch for this labor-intensive method's effectiveness. **The cheeseburger at Redamak's is among the best on the planet**. Just remember to bring cash, get there before Halloween, and keep your right hand handy in case you get lost.