

Wanna see America's largest zipper? Of course you do. It's in Vermont

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BARRE – As the granite capital of the state, this central Vermont community is home to a trove of wonderful stone sculptures.

That includes one really large zipper.



What's called America's largest zipper - a 74-foot-long granite sculpture - unfurls off North Main Street in Barre. (Photo: BRENT HALLENBECK/FREE PRESS)

“Unzipping the Earth” is the name of the 74-foot-long zipper created in 2014 by Calais sculptor Chris Miller. It’s not attached to a 450-foot-long pair of pants, but instead rests alongside the Studio Place Arts building on North Main Street in Barre. The sculpture serves as a downtown pocket park complete with seating and a collection of greenery growing out of its middle.

The website Roadside America, which keeps tabs on such superlative curiosities, calls the sculpture the “Largest Zipper in America.” Google Maps goes even grander, referring to the sculpture as the “Largest Zipper in North America.” A similarly-named steel-and-concrete sculpture in Canada stretches only 50 feet in length.

With the apparent lack of a World Zipper Council or similarly authoritative ruling body, the determination of the Barre sculpture's place in the pantheon of tremendous fasteners may never truly be known.

It is, however, a fun work of art.

"I have an office along the zipper and I enjoy hearing young children practicing their counting as they walk along the teeth of the zipper," Sue Higby, executive director of Studio Place Arts, wrote in an email to the Burlington Free Press. "I'll hear them say, 37, 38, 39... 60!" Higby calls herself the "official gardener" of the sculpture who pulls weeds and plants perennials in the space.



The Barre zipper sculpture by Chris Miller has won several awards, including a Public Place Merit Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects in 2014. (Photo: COURTESY STUDIO PLACE ARTS)

Miller, in an email to the Free Press, said Studio Place Arts commissioned him to put the sculpture between the gallery and the Barre City Place building being constructed at the time.

"The basic concept they started with, was a stone wall holding a garden, with a granite sculpture at the more visible street end. The further constraints were that it must be kept very low to the ground, be whimsical and fun, and since it was sandwiched between two long buildings, it should not be linear!"

Miller said most of his projects these days are public-art pieces. He is working in the next year on two stone-truck landscape pieces, then a more-serious 12-by-28-foot monument for the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences that is designed to resemble the ruins of the Parthenon.

He offers one more superlative for "Unzipping the Earth." Rather than "Largest Zipper in America" or "Largest Zipper in North America," he calls it the "World's Longest Granite Zipper."

"It may be the only Granite Zipper," according to Miller, "so may also be the smallest, so not so big a deal!"

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