

## Let's Go for a Walk 3000 Miles from Home

Oh, oh, oh, who wouldn't go ... for a spring walk to smell the mix of last year's well-rotted plant waste, this year's sweet awakening of life, and the chilled air pushed by fresh-running springs? Who wouldn't go ... even in the burning hot summer to admire the field crops and listen to the chirping birds and insects? Who wouldn't go in autumn when the whole of nature's palette is displayed? Who wouldn't go even in winter to have a soft dry crunch of snow cushioning every step as perchance you investigate a crimson cache left by a local band of howling hunters, the coyotes?



Go? Claire and I did, again and again over the last forty-two years. I claim that we have racked up over 3000 miles using self-locomotion. The following passage will attempt to defend that claim and give you, dear reader, a small sampling of the sights, sounds, and smells we experienced. Coming along? Dress in layers and have good pairs of socks and boots. Drink some water first and carry more, and don't forget the sun screen.



## The River Runs Below Us

When the trees are bare, we can see from our house patches of the aging, meandering Connecticut River and, beyond it, the Vermont hills. The river is shouldered by a wide flood plain on one side or the other, or both, and this is an area that provides much habitat for insects, amphibians, birds and small mammals. It also has provided much recreation for us in our more than four decades living by it. The main attraction, just over a mile's walk away, used to be the long wooden [Bedell Covered Bridge](#). Claire and I trotted all of our visiting guests down to see it at least once, that is, until a violent storm blew all 396 feet of it smashing into the water in 1979.



The Bedell Bridge prior to its 1979 restoration and demise

After all these years we still make the trek to the site and we still trot the guests there because there is lots to see on the way and at the bank. Growing up in Pennsylvania, two blocks from the Delaware River, I was already aware of the calming effects of river

watching. The Delaware is tidal at Bristol – the current reverses — whereas the Connecticut here is a one-way stream south to Long Island Sound. There are 11 dams on it, so the water level is influenced by those as well as the recent weather. The Bedell’s center support, made of 18-inch high slabs of granite, still stands out from the water. We never fail to mark the number of courses of block visible above the surface.

On the way down and back we pass acres of cornfield. Are the stalks tasseled yet? Has the silk darkened? On either side of the dirt road, we can check in late summer for the monarch butterfly chrysalises under the milkweed leaves. Closer to the river, there is backwater on both sides of the road. In spring we watch for tiny frogs hopping from one wet pond to another. In summer we chat with the canoeists or the fishermen who have stopped at the landing to have a picnic lunch. In winter, if it’s not ice-covered, the road may provide us a snow-cushioned stroll, or a heart-pumping slog depending on the depth of cover. In December and January this road was the site of many a walking Madrigal Dinner rehearsal, as Claire and I recited our lines in the play, or tried to sing the alto and tenor parts of the songs.

We used to ski the fields by the river. Back in the 80s and 90s, the snow would pile up so that any fences were buried to allow skiing over them. The knolls here and there gave us good practice making a stepping ascent, and practice in controlling the descents — both a little tricky with smooth wooden skis and a wax slightly too hard or too soft. On one run we’d go north through several fields and arrive at the river bank. If there were still open water, we might even scare up a flock of geese or ducks.

As of 2013, there are more things to do at the river, and places to see. A new walking park was built, through the generosity of Sue Brown, on each side of the main backwater. We can walk in and see if the painted turtles have emerged from the cold mud; see if there are heron; listen to the peepers; gaze at the magical lotus-covered lily pond. Come and let us trot you in and around.





### **The Railroad Ran Behind Us**

Just behind our house is an old railroad bed, part of the defunct Boston to Montreal line. The rails and ties have been removed and we can ski two miles in either direction. With the right wax we could get an eight- or ten-foot glide with every step. The speed one could gather came with two benefits — the will to go even faster for a really good aerobic workout, and the marvelous impression that you were in one of those Victorian era club cars, sipping a brandy between your muttonchops, coasting through the woods behind an old locomotive. Also, I regularly could imagine I heard the duple beat of the first movement of [Brahms Fourth Symphony](#) in sync with my breathing.

Snow has been an iffy thing in recent years, but we still walk the bed on occasion.

### **The Roads Run Back and Front**

From our access to the railroad bed we can go in four other directions. To the North is County Road, rising to the houses of old friends the Patridges and the Tanns. From here we see Vermont and a good deal of Newbury village. We can continue on and walk a couple of side loops before heading home, or, on a weekend, we can strike out on a ten-mile circuit, finishing County Road down to North Haverhill, continuing on Brushwood to Daniels Road and back to our neighborhood, using Countryland Road. The scenery is rustic and the roads have their rises and falls. We take care not to get nipped when passing the farm with geese.

Claire admires a multi-purpose tree at the Patridge farm.



Heading out on Countryland gives us similar choices. We can do an out and back, or a five-mile loop going south and connecting with Court Street which takes you in to the old village on the common. Court Street divides the Common in two. The large green spaces are surrounded by stately homes, an old school, the 1827 Congregational Church, and the nearby Alumni Hall, now an arts center. From there it's a mile north to our house.

Looking northeast into North Common, Haverhill



South entrance to South Common, Haverhill



We do this loop more often in the other direction so as not to face a north wind going up the highway. Going out Court Street from the common, instead of taking the loop, we can

head straight east on the extension and go uphill to more rustic scenes and a lovely country house belonging to the Wellington family. A little further on is a farm on both sides of the road. Here you might be delayed by an assortment of animals, and you can probably guess why they cross the road. Yes, this walk also can extend into a loop, one of the longest we've ever taken. It's eleven miles — an endurance feat for us — which we have done even in winter, but old knees and achy feet have us wondering whether we've had our last of it.

Our house in Haverhill sits beside NH Highway 10. There are many times of the day when it is quiet enough to consider for a walk. We go south for half a mile to get to the access road for the covered bridge site. In a little over a mile going north we get to the steel bridge that crosses the river into Newbury. There we can pause and check the water level, the current, and what the wind is doing to the surface. Note to canoeists — even with a north to south current, paddling against a southerly wind is hard work.

If we want a longer trek we can continue across the bridge and up to Route 5 and head north into Newbury village. There is a lively general store with groceries, a deli, and a small eatery in the back. We can fuel up on a juice and a baked good for the two-and-a-half mile return home.

If we drive across to Vermont, there are a couple of delightful walks within 3 miles or so. We head south on 5 to Snake Road and go up to West Newbury where Claire and I saw the transit of Venus. One walk heads along a hillside to Hall's Pond, a pretty little lake surrounded by summer places, and in summer, enjoyed by swimmers using the public beach. We fondly recall two visiting English friends getting a thrill "walking on water" here in late December.



The other walk is a little uphill and south on Roger's Hill Road, along an open ridge. There are spectacular panoramic views [above] in three directions. Straight across the river to the East we see Haverhill and the foothills behind our place and fronting the nearest White Mountain, Moosilauke. A little further north and east we can see many of the majestic Whites, including the distant Mount Washington with often a wispy smoke trail from its cog railway. We can see the lesser peaks further north and others almost due south from this vantage.

Coming back down from West Newbury, we can stop at Four Corners Farm and see what Bob and Kim Gray have to offer in fresh produce. I'm positive that I'm the first one every spring to stop and ask if the spinach has come in yet.

### **The Foothills Run Up and Down**

If we drive north for 20 minutes along a back road toward Benton, we get to one of the Black Mountain trails. At under 3000 feet it doesn't rate more than a mention in a hiker's log, but it does have a steep middle third, and at the top, grand views of the Connecticut Valley and into Vermont. By contrast, a hike up and down Mount Moosilauke, which is a full day affair, offers a 360 degree panorama, including the westerly view offered by Black – but from "The Moose," Black looks like a rocky pimple.



Left to right: distant Mounts Lafayette and Kinsman, Black, and Moosilauke

A second foothill is called Blueberry Mountain, and its trail is accessible from either end. Starting from the West, we cross a pleasant meadow populated by red and white trillium in June. As we climb the trail into the scrub trees, it is bit rooty before we reach the height of

land, where there is a visitors' log. Don't stop there, because a short stroll takes you to large open rock faces that offer fine views to the South and east.

Climbing Blueberry from the other end one follows a logging road leaving from the North and South Road in Glencliff. Claire and I experienced a bit of drama on our first hike here. When the trail begins to climb steeply, one should take frequent views to the rear. Blueberry is close to the Moose and as you climb, it rises behind you like a twin Earth, and you get an awe-inspiring detailed look at its rock slides and other features.

These three peaks in our backyard, Black, Blueberry, and the Moose, have given family and friends those views and good workouts too.

### **Our Echo® Ran All Around It**

We drove this model Toyota® for ten years. It was a great little car, getting 43 mpg on gasoline. Roomy inside. When Claire took a job that involved a long commute, we bought a newer and even more economical Prius. Soon after, our brother-in-law Doug, who had an even longer commute, considered the Echo for his use. The car seemed as if it would hold up for him, but we decided to put it to the test beforehand. We had two purposes in mind. We took the car on all of the drivable back roads we hike — to see what parts fell off, and to measure the distances we had been walking for the last forty years.

The Echo survived the road test, and any estimate we've made for our walks comes to at least 3000 total miles.

### **Returning**

If we have walked 3000 miles from home, we've always returned to it. From the South we make the last rise up the side road called Ladd Lane and see our beloved federal house standing proudly in traditional white clapboards trimmed with black shutters. Before heading inside, I might check for winter ice on the North side eaves, or spring run-off filling the swales, or, in any season, just have a sit on our sunny porch while my back flexes the other way.

Coming home from the East we get a view of the whole neighborhood [right] — a little village of the houses of helpful friends and the Morris dairy farm lining Route 10, with Vermont in



the background. Straight across the river we can see friend Selenda's upper meadow, which on today's walk in early spring was shining with the golden yellow of last year's grass. We might suffer a whiff of what the Morris cows have been up to, and we might hear the whistle from the engine pulling a small line of freight cars on the tracks just across the river. After the walk, a hot shower, a sit in a sunny window, and a sip of spirit, bring on a feeling of contentment and a grateful appreciation of our good health.



Three thousand miles and counting.

Photo credits: Jason and Maia Bobb, Claire and Bob Mead