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# Walking in American History: How Long Distance Foot Travel Shaped Views of Nature and Society in Early Modern America

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Walking in American History: How Long Distance Foot Travel Shaped Views of Nature and  
Society in Early Modern America

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Bachelor of Arts in History and Religious Studies, 2003

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## **Abstract**

The industrialization of transportation, first with railroads, and then with automobiles, took Americans away from foot transport, changing how Americans interacted with one another and viewed their surroundings. The dissertation traces the walking trips of five central figures in this era of mechanized transport, the personal impact of their experiences while walking through a land they were accustomed to skimming across, and the ways in which these personal revelations led to changes in the national consciousness.

Walking upright was central to the development of homo sapiens as a species, and shaped the way they interacted with their environment. Certain aspects of that earliest walking – creativity, connection, independence – have carried through walking throughout history. Walking was integrated into everyday life to the modern industrial age. At that point, while there was continuity with the past, long distance walking took on new meaning with different situation.

By examining the walking of John Muir, Charles Fletcher Lummis, Edward Payson Weston, Vachel Lindsay, and Benton MacKaye, both the changes and continuity come to light. Walking was a way for Americans at the turn of the century to stay connected with their past while undergoing rapid modernization. It was a way to preserve individual while fostering community. It allowed them to connect with the natural world while increasingly being separated from it. It let them focus on the physical in the face of the mechanical. These notions have continued to shape the modern American culture and landscape to the present.

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## **Introduction: The United States at Three Miles an Hour**

After college, I set out on a walk from my campus in central Maine to some undetermined point south and west. I ultimately stopped in Illinois, a trip of roughly 1,700 miles. About 400 miles into my walk, I found myself lost in the South Bronx, looking for a bridge to take me to Manhattan. I knew I needed to go roughly in the direction of Yankee Stadium, so I stopped in a liquor store to ask how to get there. The man at the counter began to give me directions using buses and trains. When I told him I needed walking directions, he replied, “Oh, you can’t walk to Yankee Stadium”, believing the distance to be too far, and also having no idea how to get there other than with buses and trains. I informed him that I thought I could make it as I had already walked here all the way from Maine, and Yankee stadium was no more than a mile or two away, to which he asked, “From Main and what?” When I got across that I had actually walked from the state of Maine, about 400 miles away, he seemed mildly impressed. A moment later, a woman walked out of the back room. He called her over and said, “You’re not going to believe this! This kid is going to walk to Yankee Stadium!”

That interaction provided a window into how the way we move around shapes our view of our surroundings in fundamental ways. The man at the liquor store had a mental map of the South Bronx that looked, I imagine, much like a subway map.<sup>1</sup> Distances and directions mattered less than train lines and bus routes. In his world, two locations are joined not by streets and air and grass, but by the train car that you enter. Similarly, many people I spoke to about my walk could only imagine crossing state lines on an interstate highway. Local roads were literally that: local. My walk showed me a different way of seeing my surroundings. Previous trips that

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1960), 1-14 for a description of the way the means by which we travel shape the way we view and perceive our surroundings.

required me to carry a sleeping bag and tent in a backpack had involved driving, flying, or taking the Greyhound to some mountains, rivers, and deserts. This trip involved travel along primitive trails through mountains, but it also involved my college campus, my great aunt's house, and a liquor store in the South Bronx. It became clear how those places are not divided into compartments, but joined in space, and, for me, by the activity of walking. Traveling on foot, forests gradually transformed into farms and towns and suburbs and cities and then back again.

Throughout American history many others have taken long distance walks like mine. The particulars of many of those experiences are lost to us, as are the lessons that the walkers took away with them. Some of those long walks, however, are documented, usually by the walkers themselves. Those experiences and how the walkers regarded them offer insights into their times, insofar as those embarking on the excursions did so in response, and often in reaction, to what they saw as changes and conditions in the nation around them. Some of these super-pedestrians, besides, went on to play prominent roles in social, cultural and political life, roles guided by values and views these persons had taken away from their long-distance tramps. Thus the experiences of long distance foot travel both reflects the evolving nation and has played a role in determining how that evolution took place.

In recent years, especially as we have begun to wake up to the effects of a decades-long binge of automobile travel, historians, philosophers, medical researchers and urban planners have given increasing attention to how Americans have moved around. Some of this attention has been directed toward walking. Historical studies either speak very broadly of walking in general or focus in on a specific person or event in walking or transportation history.

There are several comprehensive histories of walking, the best of which is Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*<sup>2</sup>. Solnit provides a thorough account of the philosophical basis for the long walk and recreational walking in general. She traces its roots to 18th century England, when it both became safer to walk and became increasingly desirable to escape from the industrial, polluted city centers. When English style gardens no longer satisfied walkers, they escaped to the hills, where they traveled ever longer distances. This activity provided the raw material for the Romantics, who in turn inspired Americans like Thoreau, who inspired Muir, and so on. Solnit makes brief mention of some of the longer walks, and provides useful context, but her purpose is not to examine the narrower impact of the walk in American history. Kerry Segrave focuses more directly on the United States in his *America on Foot: Walking and Pedestrianism in the 20th Century*<sup>3</sup>. Segrave's focus is not on how walking has shaped American history, but on how America has shaped walking. His goal is a clearer understanding of the act of walking in any form. At the extreme end of breadth of topic is Joseph Amato's *On Foot: A History of Walking*<sup>4</sup>. Amato seems to define walking as anything that people do while on two feet. His history is more one of bipedalism than of walking. With so many varied topics, there is little room for analysis or specific focus. Amato provides a laundry list of walks and walk-related activities, but does not suggest any ways that the act of walking distinguishes these from others. Thor Gotaas explores related themes at a slightly faster pace in his book, *Running: A Global History*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Kerry Segrave, *America On Foot: Walking and Pedestrianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co. Inc., 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Thor Gotaas, *Running: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

Other works, while not dealing explicitly with walking, address themes and issues that will be central to my dissertation. One such issue is that of wilderness and its evolving meanings in America life. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash offers a fluid definition of wilderness: what seems to be wilderness to a New Yorker might be a manicured park to an Alaskan homesteader. Despite this fluid definition, many of the examples he uses present wilderness as unpeopled, unsettled woods. In doing so, he misses part of the story surrounding wilderness figures who are also long distance walkers, or issues and events related to walking. Of early 19th century long distance walker Estwick Evans, Nash writes, ““For Estwick Evans and other gentlemen of leisure and learning, wilderness had actually become a novelty which posed an exciting temporary alternative to civilization.”<sup>6</sup> What he loses here with his focus solely on wilderness is the interest Evans had in the spots of civilization through which he passed in the old northwest. By walking through town, countryside, and wilderness, Evans saw and appreciated the seamless, fluid connection between them. What he misses, that is, is how ideas of wilderness among long-walkers were in dynamic and subtle relationship with their notions and perceptions neighboring developed places. Nash also mentions John Muir’s trip from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico, which began in earnest his career as an environmentalist, but Nash focuses only on the botanical discoveries he makes, not on his mode of travel. In discussing the Appalachian Trail, Nash focuses just on its role in preserving wilderness. Again this approach misses the intended purpose of the trail as joining together wilderness with civilization. That connection between seemingly disparate worlds is where the trail’s social function of fostering a sense of healthy community comes from.

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<sup>6</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 56-57.



Kenneth T. Jackson explores the role of walking in the formation and layout of American cities in his book, *Crabgrass Frontier*. While much of the book focuses on other forms of transportation on the development of cities throughout the twentieth century, Jackson directly addresses the walking city as well. He writes, “Except for the waterfront warehousing, there were no neighborhoods given over to commercial, office, or residential functions.”<sup>7</sup> Walking as transportation created cities that blended uses and social classes. With changes in transportation came compartmentalization. The wealthy moved out of urban centers. Commercial and residential areas were separated from each other. Jackson’s book shows this trend within cities. By looking at long distance walkers, the same traits can be seen outside of the cities as well. Jackson’s description of such developments underscores the social and physical fragmentation that some of the long-walkers I will study were reacting against.

The subject of walking also comes up in biographies on the lives of the walkers. Biographies of John Muir typically treat his walk as the severing of ties between his mechanical, industrial leanings and setting forth wholeheartedly into the realm of nature. Little attention is paid to the continued influence the walk has on his way of viewing the natural world once he arrived in California and began the work for which he is best known. Authors instead focus more upon his first summer in the Sierra as his defining experience.

The Appalachian Trail is central in the story of the life of Benton MacKaye, the trail’s creator. In *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail*, MacKaye’s biographer, Larry Anderson, provides in-depth descriptions of MacKaye’s influences and motivations in constructing the trail, but he does not connect it to the larger tradition of long

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.

distance walking in the United States. Further exploration into the influence of earlier walkers on MacKaye's vision will help to show a greater significance of the trail in American life.

The current body of work concerning walking either is very broad or mentions the topic only peripherally. The histories of walking provide insights into the philosophical, cultural, and historical scope of walking through human history but they are more devoted to documenting the scope of the topic than to examining how it applied to specific beliefs and trends in American history. The biographers of walkers also include some detailed descriptions of long distance walks, but those serve the purpose of illuminating some feature of the walkers' lives. In both cases, whether because of the breadth or narrowness of the subject, the full implications of the long distance walk remain unexplored.

What most previous treatments of this topic lack is the sense of walking in and of itself as an influence, a shaping force and a source of insight among the walkers themselves. Treating an ancient physical action in that way serves to place the specific historical subject into a much broader context. In his book, *On Deep History and the Brain*, Daniel Lord Smail argues that traditional history is too bound by the distinctions of "history" and "prehistory", which essentially ignores anything that comes prior to the Neolithic Revolution, and creates a picture inevitably, if accidentally, reaffirming the sacred history of the Judeo-Christian tradition. By tracing the development of the human brain over time, Smail, feels he can join together the biological thread of a part of body while showing the cultural difference that changes over time. In doing so, the past, he believes, becomes far more relevant to the present. One can gain a similar perspective by focusing on a near-universal human experience such as walking. Walking, at least in short spurts, is something that the vast majority of humanity can identify with. Through the act, we in the present can see both the continuity with the deep past, as well as the

changes throughout historical time. More broadly, this source can show how the turn of the twentieth century industrialization of the United States is both a part of the general human experience, as well as a divergence from it.<sup>8</sup>

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How we travel across our surroundings profoundly affects how we see them. Dennis Shaffer, a psychologist at Ohio State, discovered that when asked how long the white dashes that divide lanes on highways are, most people guess that they are somewhere in the range of two feet. In reality, the dashes tend to be between ten and fifteen long<sup>9</sup>. They seem so much smaller as we typically only pay attention to them while they are flying past us at seventy miles an hour. Similarly, if you are on a subway car that happens to stop in front of one of those advertisements that are painted in a series of frames along the wall to create flipbook-style motion as the train passes at high speeds, what you see are just a row of almost identical, slightly distorted paintings.

Our visual perception of the surrounding world is not the only change that comes with our mode of transportation. How we get around can have an impact on our mental and emotional responses to the world as well. It feels very different – both physically and mentally – to be facing a ten- mile walk home in the rain rather than a ten-mile drive. One feels very long and probably unpleasant. The other is barely worth noticing. Traveling by car, your life can be spread out and spontaneous. The ability to get around quickly and effortlessly allows people to act on whims. Life on foot must be more deliberate

Changes associated with walking came into being well before the advent of mechanized transportation. Lately, biologists and anthropologists have paid greater attention to the central

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> <http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/seeline.htm>

role of walking in the genetic and cultural development of hominids and humans. A Google Image search of “Human Evolution” calls up a variety of those diagrams that show the silhouette of monkey, followed by that of an ape, then that of a heavy-browed squat man with a spear, ending up with a slender, clean cut (and pretty much always white) man. These diagrams seem to be a legacy of an increasingly outdated view that saw human evolution as simple and inevitable. There is an underlying sense of superiority with this upright progress, as though the entire purpose of bipedalism was to free up humans’ hands so we could stroke our chins while contemplating Descartes. This is far from the truth.

Humans are basically unique in our bipedalism. Other creatures spend their lives on two feet, but they typically have feathers and tails, or get around by means other than striding<sup>10</sup>. For roughly the last six million years, hominids have been traveling (often widely) on two feet. Rather than being some a clear improvement by a species on the rise, bipedalism most likely arose from scarcity. In times of cooling temperatures when food sources became less readily available, some ape cousins began to roam. The evolution to bipedalism (which included an arched foot, strong Achilles tendon, S-shaped spine, rotating hips, and more supple brain) favored those that could travel more efficiently and therefore gain access to a wider selection of food. This came, however, with serious tradeoffs. The hominids had to leave the security of the trees of the forest, lost physical strength in exchange for stamina, and entered into a far more dangerous and difficult birth process. For some, this was clearly worth it, and bands of ape-like creatures began to walk longer and longer distances, scraping by scavenging the carcasses of kills that other, better-equipped predators left behind. In the beginning, what defined the line that

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Lieberman, *The Story of the Human Body* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014), 39.

would lead to humans more than anything else was the ability to walk upright. This ability, though, much like modern long distance walking, combined necessity and vulnerability.<sup>11</sup>

Walking took on increased significance with the move away from scavenging toward the advent of hunting and gathering. By 1.9 million years ago, Homo Erectus was moving on to hunting large game. They, and later Homo Sapiens, were no match in raw strength or speed for the animals they went after. Any animal on the savannah could out sprint them. What they did have, however, was far greater endurance. The upright posture that allowed for more efficient movement and breathing, as well as the ability to cool themselves by sweating let them engage in what's known as persistence hunting. This type of hunting involves trotting after an animal, like a gazelle, that is faster and sprints away for a short distance, then stops. The human/ hominid then gradually catches up, forcing the gazelle to sprint away again. The gazelle can continue sprinting short distances, but over the course of the day, through the heat, it gradually tires and overheats, at which point its pursuer can essentially walk up to it and kill it. According to this theory, it is the ability to travel long distances slowly but efficiently that led to the success of humans across a wide range of ecosystems.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathon Kingdon, *Lowly Origin: Where, When, and Why Our Ancestors First Stood Up* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-34 for a summary of the latest scientific works on the origins of bipedalism in humans, and how those origins are rooted in what would appear at first to weaknesses and set backs.

<sup>12</sup> This theory of persistence hunting was originally proposed by the biologist Dave Carrier when he was in graduate school. He and his brother, Scott Carrier, attempted to run down antelope in the open spaces of Wyoming, but failed (they kept losing track of which antelope they had been chasing, and also had done more smoking than running in preparation of their attempt). Accounts of persistence hunting were later confirmed, however, among groups like the Tarahumara Indians of northern Mexico. Dave Carrier published his finding where he could in scientific journals, but Scott Carrier, a radio journalist helped to spread the theory through his radio stories (found now on his podcast, *Home of the Brave* at [homebrave.com](http://homebrave.com)). Carrier's theories were later supported by the research of the Harvard Human Evolutionary Biologist, Daniel Lieberman, who wrote about his findings in his book, *The Story of the Human Body*. Carrier's ideas have also

Long distance foot travel may have been largely responsible for biologically creating humans, but it also may have shaped the way we think and see the world. Naturalist and professor of biology Bernd Heinrich speculates that to travel and hunt in this way required early humans to develop a strong imagination and all the character traits that come along with it. The persistence hunter essentially spends all day chasing something that he cannot see. Taking into account what he knows or thinks he might know about the landscape, the flora, and the fauna, he has to make educated guesses to figure out where an animal might be when it disappears over a rise. He must look at tracks and broken branches and think about what they might mean. Catching the animal requires the persistence hunter to essentially tell himself a story rooted in his surroundings, and then to live out that story with his feet.<sup>13</sup>

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If walking was a major part of the story of the origins of humans, so do many people today believe it will be there at the end. Dystopian, post -apocalypse literature is full of walking. In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, when Guy Montag flees from the ravaged city, with its bombs and four-wall televisions, he walks. Walking is more than just necessity; it is a physical and spiritual refuge for him and the others who leave. As he "watched the great dust settle and the great silence move down upon their world," he wondered where to go and how to get there. He thought to himself,

*[W]e'll walk on the highways now, and we'll have time to put things into ourselves. And someday after it sets in us a long time, it'll come out our hands and our mouths. And a lot of it will be wrong, but just enough of it will be right. We'll just start walking today and see the world and the way the world walks around and talks. The way it really looks. I want to see everything now. And while none of it will be me when it goes in, after a while it'll all gather together inside*

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been supported by naturalist and University of Vermont biologist Bernd Heinrich, who wrote about them in his book, *Why We Run*.

<sup>13</sup> Bernd Heinrich, *Why We Run: A Natural History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

*and it'll be me. Look at the world out there, my God, my God, look at it out there, outside me, out there beyond my face and the only way to really touch it is to put it where it's finally me, where it's in the blood, where it pumps around a thousand times ten thousand a day. I must hold it so it'll never run off.*<sup>14</sup>

Walking was his recourse at the end of his world as he knew it, but it was also a beginning; the start of a new evolution. It was his way to connect so deeply with the world around him that he was truly a part of it, and it a part of him. Guy walks and the world walks. He is bound to his environment through his action.

Much other fiction of this genre also touches upon walking to varying degrees. A long walk is the central event of Stephen King's, not terribly literary, but very compelling, *The Long Walk*. This story is set in a vaguely dystopian version mid 1970s Maine. It seems a lot like regular 1970s Maine, except the reader occasionally hears about a Socialist military dictatorship that rules the country. Part of how the government keeps control over the populace is to hold a yearly sporting event called "The Long Walk". Each spring, one hundred carefully selected young men begin this walk in northern Maine, near the Canadian border. They must walk at a pace of four miles an hour without stopping or slowing down. If they stop or fall below pace (as measured by personal satellite devices), they receive a warning. If they walk for two hours without falling below pace, they can get rid of an accrued warning. If, however, they go through three warnings, they are immediately shot and killed by one of the soldiers in an accompanying transport. The last surviving walker, after days of ceaseless walking, has any dream or desire granted. This event, somewhat like the Pedestrian competitions of the late nineteenth century, in which competitors walked until they literally dropped, fulfilled a deep need in this increasingly managed, controlled society. The walk created the impression and spectacle of human struggle and agency, while simultaneously demonstrating and reinforcing the power of the state. It

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<sup>14</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953,) 161-162.

provided a vicarious experience and safety valve for the throngs who came to watch it or to wager on it from afar.<sup>15</sup>

Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalypse work, *The Road*, is also all about a walk. After society has collapsed, a father and son set out through the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina on their way to coast in search of any remnants of civil community. In this version of the end times, not just civilization, but the natural world has been destroyed, so the few survivors have to scrounge what canned food they can in order to survive. The bad ones also have turned to cannibalism and will murder and eat anyone not of their own small group. The father and son trudge along as that is all there is left to do. Any remaining mechanized travel, of which there is very little, brings danger and evil. Walking here is all that remains, and it provides what little hope there is in an otherwise hopeless world.<sup>16</sup>

Not all creative writers felt they needed to obliterate modern American society in order to get at what was real and true and lasting. Sinclair Lewis used walking in his 1920 work, *Main Street*, not in societal collapse, but in the midst of bland, provincial, middle class life in the upper Midwest. The citizen of the self-satisfied town of Gopher Prairie who Lewis portrays more favorably than the others is the Socialist handyman, Miles Bjornstam. He stays apart from the materialism and hypocrisy that plagues the rest of the town. He keeps the town functioning and moves through all segments of society, but is fully part of no one segment, dwelling instead in the margins. What helps him to do this is his annual hike. He leaves town every spring, walking west to the mountains, ostensibly to engage in horse trading, but really to connect with the natural world that is real, not the faux-nature of the increasingly industrially farmed plains. He invites the main character, Carol Kennicott, the disillusioned, naïve progressive, to come with

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen King, *The Long Walk* (New York: Signet, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).



him, but she knows she can't. "While you're playing mumbly peg," he tells her, "Pete and me will be rambling across Dakota, through the Badlands, [and] into butte country."<sup>17</sup> The antidote to the destructive boredom of the town is his walk. When he returns, he is able to continue acting against the destructive forces that Lewis saw in middleclass early twentieth century America. Unbeknownst to most of its citizens, Gopher Prairie was continuously feeling the effects of the long walk through the disruptive person of the Bjornstam, the Red Swede.

References to walking also pepper the pages of Lewis's contemporary, Sherwood Anderson, in his work, *Winesburg, Ohio*. This series of stories delves into similar topics surrounding rural and small town life as does *Main Street*. The lives of the characters are, as they are in Gopher Prairie, governed by the narrow, conservative, judgmental incursions of their families and neighbors. One of the most stern and practical citizens of Winesburg was the farmer, Jesse Bentley. Bentley was a successful farmer and tinkerer, who was held in remote awe even by his family members. As Anderson describes him, though, there had been "two influences at work in Jesse Bentley and all his life his mind had been a battle ground for these influences." On one side, Bentley had come to maturity in the post Civil War years, when modernization and industrialization was everywhere you turned. He bought machines to replace humans who worked on his farm. Efficiency and mechanization were his chief goals. On the other side "was the old thing in him. He wanted to be a man of God and a leader among men of God. His walking in the fields and through the forests at night had brought him close to nature and there were forces in the passionately religious man that ran out to the forests and nature."

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<sup>17</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Signet, 1920), 117.

Anderson presents the human and natural connections that came with walking here as the direct contrast to the modern industrialism of the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

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Walking has long been a powerful symbol in non-fiction life of the United States as well. At times this has been on display in one of the most visible arenas of American life, presidential politics. Two different presidents, separated by almost two hundred years, chose to use the act of walking as a way to set the tone of their presidencies. Thomas Jefferson in 1801, and Jimmy Carter in 1977 both chose to walk rather than ride for the events surrounding their inaugurations.

Jefferson, who had a life-long love of taking strolls around his residences, decided to travel to his inauguration in the fancy carriage that Washington had chosen as a symbol of the power and prestige of his office. Instead of getting dressed up and being driven around, he simply dressed himself in his plain, republican-simplistic outfit, and walked the few blocks from his boarding house to the capitol. He wanted to distinguish himself from what he saw as both the personal and political excess of the previous Federalist administrations, and the best way he found to do that was to engage in an activity common to all.<sup>19</sup>

His walk to the inauguration served a deeper ideological purpose, and helped to reinforce one of the central messages of his address. Jefferson tried to place himself as just another citizen of the country and said that upon taking office he would approach the important duties of his job “with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge, and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire.”<sup>20</sup> The image of the lone walker supported here his

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<sup>18</sup> Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Random House, 1919), 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> <https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/selected-documents/first-inaugural-address> A description of these events can be found in the editorial note to the online papers of Thomas Jefferson held by Princeton University.

<sup>20</sup> <https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/selected-documents/first-inaugural-address-0>

view of what it meant to be president. Humility and openness, fundamental pieces of walking from the time hominids started doing it on two feet, was something that Jefferson wanted to make clear was part of being president. He had a republican fear of a too-strong leader and wanted to convey the limitations of that person. The president as walker helped to show someone who might be personally strong and upright, but was also accessible and humble.

While there are commonalities among all forms of walking, there is an added layer of significance surrounding long, purposeful walking trips. Throughout all of human history, for myriad reasons, people have undertaken these long trips. Sometime these have been to find food or escape a threat. Sometimes these have been for exploration or recreation. Whatever the case, traveling vast distances by foot, passing through an array of landscapes, encountering a diversity of people and places, provides the walker with a perspective on his surroundings that he could gain in few other ways. The long distance walker, whether conscious of it or not, is uniquely placed to be both strange and familiar; always moving, but doing so slowly enough that he comes into communion with the people, places, and things that he passes.

The experience of the long distance walker has overlapping elements throughout the world, but has unique traits in the United States. In the modern age, this has largely to do with the combination of vast spaces and the thorough embracing of transportation technologies by the populace which made walking, one of the most basic of acts, seem strange and out of place. Even spanning back thousands of years, however, long distance walking seems to hold a unique place on the land that would become the United States. Certainly, in the age of European exploration, the Americas were the scene of a type of deliberate travel, sometimes involving walking, that was new to the world. Even before that, though, there seems to perhaps be some deep memory at

work among the native groups, left over from the relatively rapid and recent peopling of these continents on foot, and passed down through stories, muscles, and genes.

Walking features prominently in the origin stories and even in the names of many Native American groups. A common theme in creation stories is that of a tortoise and hare like race, or a group walking across the landscape the landscape in search of a place to live healthy, fruitful lives.<sup>21</sup> The people that came to be the Nez Perce referred to themselves as the *Cupnittpelu*, which means “The Walking Out” people.<sup>22</sup> They defined themselves by the act of walking out of the mountains and into the grasslands of present-day eastern Washington. Similarly, the Jemez people of the southwestern deserts tell a story of their origin that begins with the group embarking on a long walk. Along the way, the people die of from starvation and disease, and finally they are shown where they can remain, in cliffs and canyons of what is now New Mexico.<sup>23</sup> Walking was how they came to their homelands, but also how they defined their lands (how far could they walk in a day), and how they kept themselves knitted together in contact.

These themes dominate Paula Underwood’s written out oral history of her Iroquois ancestry. Her book, *The Walking People*, is an account of a people traveling by foot. Her description of their search for a place to be, as the title of her suggests, focuses entirely upon the act of walking. She writes, “...it was a happy time/ a good walking time/ a learning time... These were not angry people/ they were sharing people/ who taught us much/ of what was safe to eat among the grasses.” She saw her people too as being defined by walking. It was how they

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<sup>21</sup> I will address racing stories later in the chapter on Charles Lummis. These seem to reflect the experience of persistence hunting, which provided sustenance for the group. And walking-centered creation stories are certainly not limited to Native Americans (see the Israelites wandering in the desert before being guided to the promised land).

<sup>22</sup> Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 213.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Green, ed., *Native American Folktales* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 36-39.

literally found their place in the world, moving from New York to Ohio, but also how they interacted with their world. To walk over the world was to learn about it and create relationships with it and with other people.<sup>24</sup>

The earliest long distance walker of European descent in the Americas was the Spanish Explorer, Cabeza de Vaca. While this walk was unplanned and resulted from the expedition's disaster, it shares many themes with modern long distance walks. He was one of four survivors of a shipwreck on the Gulf Coast in the early 16th century during a disastrous attempted expedition of conquest. Over the course of several years, he made his way along the coast back to Mexico, where he finally ran into a group of Spanish soldiers. Along the way, he had gained respect from and been protected by the Native American groups he encountered. This was partly because of fortunate encounters in which he seemingly healed them, but what initially kept him from being considered nothing but an enemy was his lowly appearance and his mode of travel. He wrote in his account of his journey, "Horses are what the Indians dread most, and the means by which they will be overcome."<sup>25</sup> Even at this early date, the relatively modern and dominant horse transportation created personal distance. Out of necessity, he was on foot, and so was far less threatening to the Native Americans. That Cabeza de Vaca was traveling on foot and covering a wide geographic shaped how he viewed the people he met, how they viewed him, and how the two sides interacted with each other. It also won him and his companions some respect from the Indians and created common ground with them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Paula Underwood, *The Walking People: A Native American Oral History* (San Anslemo, CA: A Tribe of Two Presses, 1993), 39.

<sup>25</sup> Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 68.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Goodwin *Crossing the Continent, 1527-1540: The Story of the First African-American Explorer of the American South* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 234-283; Andres Resendez *A*

In the eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson hatched a plan to use a walker in a similar, purposeful way to explore the American west. His plan was to have a wandering American named John Ledyard travel alone and on foot across the continent. Ledyard was an adventurous American in the late colonial and early national years, had traveled widely. He was one of the first Americans to visit the Pacific Northwest on a voyage with Captain Cook. Later, he traveled around Europe, where he hatched a scheme along with Jefferson in which Jefferson, “suggested to him the enterprise of exploring the Western part of our continent by passing thro St. Petersburg to Kamschatka, and procuring a passage thence in some of the Russian vessels to Nootka sound, whence he might make his way across the Continent to America.”<sup>27</sup> He was to undertake his walk attended only by a couple of dogs. This trip, which was to take place in the late 1780s to early 1790s, would have projected a view of a smaller, less powerful nation than did the larger, military-style expedition of Lewis and Clark a little while later. Jefferson and Ledyard hoped that Native Americans who first encountered a man and his dogs walking through the woods might have felt more at ease with the nation whose coming he represented. Ledyard never made it. He started catching rides early on his walk out of Moscow, but then faced the Siberian winter, deportation, and shortly thereafter, disease and death in Egypt in 1789.

Hints of what more modern long distance walking would look like came with the 1819 walk of Estwick Evans, a lawyer from Concord, New Hampshire. As early as the 1810s, walkers set out to recapture some kind of vanishing way of life that a newer, more modern, faster paced world was erasing. Evans was one of the first Americans to have set out on a walk for purely recreational (in the truest sense of the word, as he is trying to re-create something that is lost)

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*Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 157-184 for other accounts of the four survivors’ walk along the gulf coast.

<sup>27</sup>Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Jon Ledyard, May 17, 1786 , available online at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffwest.html>,

purposes. Like other walkers, Evans was motivated by the rapid development of the economy and American industry. Like the others, his walk showed him commonalities between different geographic regions, ethnic groups, and socio-economic classes in the country. The erasure of boundaries between humans and the natural world, between people of different ethnic backgrounds (particularly whites and Indians), and between members of different classes were present in the story of Evans's walk. The nature of these interactions were slightly different than late 19<sup>th</sup> century cases as society was less industrialized, the landscape less developed, the social classes less stratified, and Indian/ white relations more fluid. Evans, however, still provides a useful foreshadow for all of the issues with which later walkers will grapple.

In 1819, he made his "pedestrious tour" of the north woods, walking in from Concord, New Hampshire to Detroit and back. Evans already felt that the natural world was disappearing around him. He set out on his walk, he explained, because he "wished to acquire the simplicity, native feelings, and virtues of savage life; to divest myself of the factitious habits, prejudices and imperfections of civilization; to become a citizen of the world; and to find, amidst the solitude and grandeur of the western wilds, more correct views of human nature and of the true interests of man."<sup>28</sup> Evans chronicled more than just the wilderness portions of his walk, though. He was intrigued with the settlements and farmland that he walked through as well. Deliberately traveling on foot gave him the ability to see the way the civilized world blended with the natural. Through the physical discomfort inherent in a winter walk in the north country, it also allowed him to empathize to a degree with the suffering of others. Evans, a solidly respectable upper middle class citizen, found himself, out of necessity, sharing accommodations with some of the poorest residents along his route. The slow pace of walking did not give him the option of

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<sup>28</sup>Estwick Evans, *Evans' Pedestrious Tour: Concord, New Hampshire, 1819* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2007), 102.

continuing on to look for other lodging in many cases. When he encountered groups of Indians, wandering and disease-ridden, he shared his own meager food supply with them. Still, he was pleased by what he found. Walking put him into contact with people he would not otherwise have met. Even at this early stage of industrialization, Evans felt a need to return to past simplicity. His walk gave him a unique perspective in which traditional boundaries of class and geography were blurred.

In the decades after Evans's walk, the Transcendentalist movement began consciously to flesh out the ideas that would lend themselves to modern long distance walking. The Transcendentalists built off of the English Romantics to create a natural philosophy that went along with the landscape of the United States. Influential Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau blended walking into his ideas of man's relationship with nature and with his community. His ideas on walking were a rejection of modern society, but they also depended upon the structure of modern life. He found walking to be a more humane mode of transportation in comparison with the train, but he also walked regularly along the railroad tracks. In the same way, he took a railroad shipping container and turned it into his cabin at Walden Pond. Thoreau, like Evans, was in the business of repurposing and re-creating the industrial world around him, in part through foot travel. But Thoreau never went on any truly lengthy walks, remaining instead relatively local. His significance is in his explication of some of the philosophy around walking in the nineteenth century United States.

Thoreau wrote an essay devoted entirely to walking, in which he gave a detailed account of the history and philosophy of the act. What is perhaps his clearest statement on the benefits of walking, though, is a brief passage within *Walden*. Thoreau writes,

*One says to me, "I wonder that you do not lay up money; you love to travel; you might take the cars and go to Fitchburg today and see the country." But I am*



*wiser than that. I have learned that the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot. I say to my friend, Suppose we try who will get there first. The distance is thirty miles; the fare ninety cents. That is almost a day's wages. I remember when wages were sixty cents a day for laborers on this very road. Well, I start now on foot, and get there before night; I have travelled at that rate by the week together. You will in the meanwhile have earned your fare, and arrive there some time tomorrow, or possibly this evening, if you are lucky enough to get a job in season. Instead of going to Fitchburg, you will be working here the greater part of the day. And so, if the railroad reached round the world, I think that I should keep ahead of you; and as for seeing the country and getting experience of that kind, I should have to cut your acquaintance altogether.*<sup>29</sup>

His mindset here is simultaneously created by the increasingly industrialized world and rejects it. Modern transportation fostered a “love of travel” in many. The world was opened up to the tourist who could not travel essentially anywhere he could imagine. That same transportation that made people want to travel also robbed travel of its full meaning. Walking, in this case, highlights the illogic of the extreme compartmentalization of the modern world. In the world of industrial capitalism, the most essential physical acts get farmed out to corporations. This hypothetical situation captures the tension that will play out at the end of his century and the beginning of the next between walkers, workers, industry, and technology.

After the Civil War, as a side effect of the rampant industrialization that took place, long distance walking began to take on a new meaning. Many of the same elements that had been there from the beginning of hominid bipedalism (vulnerability, connection, creativity) remained, but at this point walking stood apart in a way it had not before. The years after the Civil War saw a massive expansion of the railroads, including the creation of the transcontinental lines. Before the 1860s, a trip across the continent, while not typically undertaken exclusively on foot, happened at a walking pace. By 1869, a person could travel from coast to coast in a matter of days. Information could travel that distance instantaneously. The blank spaces between the main

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<sup>29</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Random House, Inc, 1937), 47.

lines were increasingly filled in with commuter trains and street car lines that twice daily carried people farther than was possible to walk over the course of several days. With every mile of rail built, three mile-an hour travel became more obsolete.

By the end of the Civil War, the long distance walker was beginning to stand out in a way he had not before. Perhaps none stood out quite as much as a many who came to be known as “Leatherman”, who continuously walked a roughly 365-mile loop in western Connecticut and Westchester County, New York from sometime in the late 1850s until his death in 1889. Leatherman got his name from his outfit, which he made himself from cutting off the tops of discarded boots. He walked silently, living in caves, taking small amounts of food from gardens, and occasionally begging food and tobacco from houses. Even though they saw him for decades, no one knew anything about him. Local residents’ thoughts and feelings about him changed as the conditions of their country changed.. As a silent, circuitous wanderer, passing through about every month on a fairly predictable schedule, Leatherman became a mirror for those who encountered him, and someone who connected them to their surroundings and to each other.<sup>30</sup>

When people first really began to notice Leatherman in the years after the Civil War, their ideas about him ranged from the romantic to the exceptionally negative. One early story that circulated about him was that he was a Frenchman named Jules Bourglay who had fallen in love with the daughter of one of France’s most powerful leather merchants. In order to prove himself worthy of her hand, he was to run his father-in-law-to-be’s business. Jules had run it into the ground, was not allowed to marry his love, and, as a penance, had banished himself to the wilds of America, forever to wander under a burden of heavy leather. Most, however, viewed him in the early days with a mixture of pity and disgust.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2011/05/26/136649653/leatherman-remains-a-mystery-even-in-death>

Perceptions of Leatherman began to change after the Panic of 1873. In the wake of this downturn, the roads were filled with tramps who were scouring the countryside looking for work or other ways to get by. Those who saw Leatherman during these years tended to group him with them. From 1873 through 1879, nearly all of the portrayals of him were negative and focused on the apparent uselessness of his life and his greedy, conniving nature. A writer in the *Bristol Press* wrote in 1874 that Leather Man, “wanders forlornly without a seeming motive, or definite object in life.”<sup>31</sup> Other accounts of the mid 1870s go on to describe how he eats gluttonously while begging, displaying his greed. Another write describes his ‘piercing black eye that denotes anything but a lack of intelligence’, which suggests knowing calculation on his part. Leatherman came to stand in for a class of people who added nothing to the world, but who will swindle others out of what they have. He, like the barren caves in which he lived, was dark, dangerous, and produced nothing of value.

As the economy began to improve, so did people’s views on Leatherman begin to change. Accounts of his travels began to suggest that his mode of existence is not only not harmful, but actually beneficial. An article in the *New Haven Daily Palladium* from March of 1883 comments that, “He looks tough and rugged, indicating that wandering life agrees with him.”<sup>32</sup> His wandering was imbued with purpose in this view. In the increasingly industrial world of late nineteenth century America, where more and more people were removed from vigorous manual labor and the outdoors, deliberate exercise in fresh air was beginning to be viewed as a good thing. Leather Man is portrayed here not as an aimless, idle vagrant, but as a healthy outdoorsman.

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<sup>31</sup> *Bristol Press*, Thursday, October 29, 1874. Also available in *The Old Leatherman: Historical Accounts of a Connecticut and New York Legend*, Ed. By Dan DeLuca (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *New Haven Daily Palladium*, March 9, 1883. Also available in DeLuca, 23.

By the late 1880s, it was clear that Leatherman's health was declining. His incessant tobacco use caused a cancer in his mouth that began to eat away at his lip and jaw. People who had seen him for decades looked on in pity and horror as he covered his gaping wound with a piece of leather so he could painfully swallow pieces of bread softened with coffee. In the winter of 1889, a farmer came across one of the caves that Leatherman frequented on his loop and found his body inside. Whatever the time and situation, Leatherman, with his silent but glaring presence, became a poultice for his onlookers, bringing to the surface their fears and hopes about their own lives as he walked though. His odd figure regularly passing through their lives made it impossible to ignore the good and bad of the world outside their homes and comfortable towns. His constant, repetitious journey – what some in the 19<sup>th</sup> century might still have called a “progress”, showcased instead Leatherman's unraveling. The example of the walker could both inspire onlookers towards lofty goals and sow fear and revulsion at the sight of inevitable decay and decline.

The evolution away from walking as commonplace was furthered by the introduction of personal vehicles that could rapidly take people from door to door. This began with the invention of the safety bicycle, which sped up personal transportation for potentially everyone, and then took off with Henry Ford's democratization of the automobile in 1913. Once cheap cars and cheap fuel were available, the infrastructure followed suit. Expansion of towns, cities, roads, and the spaces in between happened with the car, rather than the person, in mind. Between the World Wars, the car and all that came with it conquered the country. The post-World War II Eisenhower interstate system seemed to seal the deal in the shift in how Americans thought about their landscape and their own physical places in it. With a grid of interstate overlaying the entire country, the collective mental map has shifted. Many people today are unaware that one

can undertake interstate travel on anything other than an interstate, and with the exception of some places in the western half of the country, non-motorized travel is prohibited on those. Riding in a car on an interstate highway creates a distorted view of the landscape. While the traveler might be only a few yards away from a building or river that he passes, it might actually take miles of travel to exit the system and get there. The system is isolated from its surroundings in the same way that a railroad is, where what matters most is not where the tracks go, but where the stations are. Exits are more significant than landscape. It is a world that makes the twelve-foot lane marker look like it's two feet long.

The growing idea that the world is how it looks from the train or the car, however, is incorrect. Along with the train/ car centered mindset and infrastructure that grew up between the Civil War and World War II, there developed a more subtle mindset and infrastructure built at a more human scale. At the heart of this system was walking, and especially long walking trips. With the widespread use of the train, and then the automobile, these long trips took on a new meaning while carrying elements of old with them. By examining the lives and walks of several of these walkers and looking at both their ideas and perspectives, as well as the views of the wider world towards them, one can trace the development of the system that grew up along with American industrialization. This system and mindset, because it is subtle, can be difficult to see. Within it are what may seem at first like contradictions. It grew in response (sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious) to industrialization. Sometimes it has acted as an antidote to the ills of the modern world. Sometimes it has served to reinforce and strengthen that which it grew in response to.

Rather than contradictions, however, the variety of meanings found when looking at long distance walking are more parts of a cycle. Like the act itself, the historical significance of

walking is necessarily in motion. The eighth century Zen Buddhist poem, *The Sandoki*, contains the verse, “Within darkness there is light, but do not look for that light/ Light and darkness are a pair, like the foot before/ and the foot behind, in walking.” In a talk explaining this verse, Zen teacher Suzuki Roshi described it as demonstrating the oneness of seeming opposites. Walking demands that the foot ahead and the foot behind change. “When you walk,” Roshi says, “the step ahead immediately becomes the foot behind. Is a step with your right foot the step ahead or the step behind?”<sup>33</sup> If you try to determine an absolute answer, then you necessarily stop, and you are no longer walking. The act of long-distance walking generally, and its impact on the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries much more specifically, is similarly too complicated to capture in a simple snapshot. The place of walking in an industrial age is sometimes a way to connect to the past, sometimes a way to deal with the present, and sometimes a way to plan for the future. It is the meeting place, where extremes wrap back around to rejoin. These long walks necessarily involve motion, often over great distances, but they are also about being rooted firmly in place. It minimizes the negative impact that we as humans can have on the landscape, while at the same time showing that some level of impact is inevitable. Each of the long-distance walkers surveyed here passed through some version of this cycle.

The earliest walker who will be examined here is the budding naturalist, John Muir. Muir had been dipping his toes into the natural world, bouncing from one identity to another for his young life when in 1867 at the age of 29 he decided commit to plants and the outdoors by leaving his industrial background and walking one thousand miles from Louisville, Kentucky to the gulf coast of Florida. This walk became a turning point in his life during which he would clarify and solidify his passion for the outdoors. The connection that he felt with the landscape

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<sup>33</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness: Zen Talks on the Sandokai*, Mel Weitsman and Ed. By Michael Wenger (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999), 123-127.

and plant and animal life that he walked through helped him to devote his life fully to nature and environmental causes. The act of walking brought his interactions with the natural world to the level of a religious, or spiritual experience. Muir would take that level of meaning with him as he went west and began laying down the foundations of modern environmentalism.

What walking did for Muir's relationship with the natural world, so did it do for Charles Fletcher Lummis's relationship with ancient Native American civilizations. Lummis set out on his long walk in 1884, shortly after almost graduating from Harvard. His circuitous route from Ohio to Los Angeles, California took him, he claimed, over three thousand miles, through the southwestern desert. Here, he was drawn to old Spanish, and even older Native American communities. When Lummis started his walk, he was full of stereotypical ideas about people of Mexican and Indian descent. The walk forced him to shed many of these. In this case, the act of walking forced him to essentially be at home where ever he found himself. He did not have the ability to push on hundreds of miles to the next city, but had to take food and lodging with whomever he found himself near at sunset. Among the Native Americans in particular, who, in this region, had deep traditions of long distance foot travel, Lummis found he not only identified closely with the people and places he passed through in the present, but also with those who had come before him. Walking created a geographic and temporal connection that would shape the rest of his life's work as a writer and advocate for the traditional cultures of the Southwest.

While a very small percentage of the population was actually packing up and leaving home for long walks in the decades following the Civil War, millions were connected directly, if less intensely, to long distance walking through the popular sport of Pedestrianism. Pedestrian competitions varied widely. Some were walking races that covered hundreds or thousands of miles of roads between cities or coasts; others were track event that could go on for hours, days,

or even weeks. The most successful and popular of the Pedestrians was Edward Payson Weston, who at various times in the late nineteenth century won races and held records in distances such as: Boston to Washington DC, Portland, Maine to Chicago, Pacific Ocean to Atlantic Ocean, and six days on an 800-foot track. The walking of Weston and the other Pedestrians was both a product of and antidote for the modern, industrial world. Workers could no longer count on staying fit through their daily existence, and so needed an accessible way to do so. People also felt increasingly removed from the most basic, human aspects of life. Really long walks seemed to be the answer to most of these concerns. It was a way to stay fit. It was a way to keep connected to nature (if walking outside), and a means of tapping into the most basic human experience (if witnessing the survival delirium in the last few hours of a six day track race). Through Weston and the Pedestrians, walking became both a way for the country to both vicariously reject the modern industrial world through this elemental human act, while simultaneously accepting it through the precisely measured tracks, mass produced miles, and walking-related products that promised to sell health and wellness to the consumer.

Also looking back to an earlier, pre-modern time was the walker and poet Vachel Lindsay. Lindsay looked back to a slightly more recent time and tried to recapture something more authentic than the world he found in the early twentieth-century United States by styling himself after a medieval troubadour. He traded his verse for food and lodging along the three long walks that he undertook: one from Florida to Kentucky in 1906, another from New York to Ohio in 1908, and the last from Illinois to New Mexico in 1912. His idealization of a pre-industrial past that he saw as being intimately tied to acts like roaming the land on foot comes through in many of poems in which he honors figures like Johnny Appleseed, and disparages the effects of travel by automobile. In doing so, Lindsay was taking part in a wider movement in the



late nineteenth and early twentieth century that turned to the medieval era for examples of more authentic ways of life.

Leaving a more tangible footprint on the country was the conservationist and Progressive-style planner, Benton MacKaye. MacKaye developed his love for walking as a boy growing up in a small New England village in the 1880s. He went on excursions into the woods that began in the center of his small central Massachusetts town, out into the surrounding farms and fields, then into the forests and low hills, ending up on a mountain which towered over the region. From the summit, MacKaye could see the varying landscapes through which he had passed as they had felt to him as he walked: as part of a single unit. Walking, for him, was a way to blend land and lifestyle. Traveling by foot as he did erased strict distinctions like urban, rural, and “primeval”. He took this mindset with him as he began work for the forestry department in the early 1900s, trying to organize the nation’s forests in such a way that they preserved the proximity of land uses he experienced in his boyhood village. In 1921, after having bounced around various government and private agencies, he wrote a proposal for a walking path that would accomplish the same goal. This path was to span the length of the Appalachian Mountains, create dense communities that were surrounded by rural lands, which were in turn surrounded by relatively untouched forests. His goal was to integrate Americans into the landscape in a real way through their work and through their walking, and, in doing so, to combat the metropolitan sprawl that was spreading across the eastern seaboard. Ultimately, the communal aspect of his Appalachian Trail plan failed. In some ways, the wilderness ethos that replaced it would further the compartmentalization MacKaye initially was fighting against, but the trail would survive, thrive, and multiply. It provided the first piece of what would become a fairly extensive, if somewhat hidden, grid of long distance footpaths that crisscrosses the United

States today and quietly, but permanently offers an alternative to the ostentatious interstate highways.

These walkers all share common elements with each other. Along their walks they found themselves more deeply connected with their surroundings. What they saw as their surroundings, and the lens through which they view them, however, varied. Muir looked to nature. Lummis to indigenous people. Weston connected to the physical body and where it intersected with industry and consumerism. Lindsay found connection with a supposedly more humane past. MacKaye saw walking as a way to move into a more equitable and just future. Through their examples, writing, and labors, each shared their perspectives with a wider audience. Each lived his own life, but, for at least part of it, each one saw it pass by at the same speed.

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Walking – particularly long distance walking – is woven throughout the experience of the American people. In large and small ways, it shaped the experience of Native Americans journeying to the Western Hemisphere thousands of years ago, of slaves who were chained in coffles and marched to new cotton lands in the west, and of modern hikers out for recreation. In some ways walking in this space is similar to other places around the world. Everyone is simply putting one foot in front of another. However, the vast spaces, rate of development, and unique relationship to the landscape in the land that would become the United States sets it apart. In a place that had for so long focused on covering great distances quickly, the decision to walk, and to walk for non-essential reasons, stands out.

The walkers of the period between the Civil War and World War II best exemplify the changes taking place, and bridge the gap between the past and the future. The modern world that was coming out at this time was one that was shaped by increased industrialization and

commercialization. Work became less physical and more mechanized. Commutes became longer, but also faster. Types of recreation and the places in which it took place became more distinct. The walkers of this time blend traditional community and progressive freedom, the spiritual and the practical. They both helped added to the further compartmentalization that came with modern life, and allowed for continued integration of people, places, and perspectives. The changes in the pace of transportation and of life in general made their walking more distinctive than what had come before while maintaining a link to a pre-industrial age when the act was more a normal part of life. When viewed together, they provide a link between that deep past and the modern world.

### **John Muir's Progress: Muir's Walk to the Gulf as Pilgrimage**

Throughout the winter of 1866-1867, while John Muir worked in a machine shop in Indianapolis, he planned a walk through the southern United States, with subsequent exploration in South America. Inspired by the travels of Alexander Von Humbolt, Muir envisioned himself as a botanical explorer, cataloguing new plants while intrepidly tramping through the wilderness. As he entertained these daydreams, in his everyday life he became increasingly tied to the modern, industrial world. His growing success in the machine shop made it more and more likely that he would become a partner. This would provide him with material and professional success and comfort, but that would come at the expense of his dreams of exploration.

Both potential paths seemed derailed when on March 6, 1867, Muir was blinded in his right eye while adjusting the belt of a circular saw. While trying to undo the lacing of the belt, he lost his grip on a pointed file, which then flew into his eye.<sup>34</sup> With fluid leaking from his pupil, he bandaged his eye and made his way back to his rooms, where he would lie in darkness, both eyes sightless - the left in sympathy with the right - throughout the early spring. As he lay in the dark, waiting and hoping that his vision would return, his priorities revealed themselves to him. In a letter to his friend and mentor, Jeanne Carr, Muir wrote, "the tremendous thought glared full on me that my sight was lost I could gladly have died on the spot because I did not feel that I could have heart to look at any flower again."<sup>35</sup> As his sight returned over the coming weeks, his

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<sup>34</sup> Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 111

<sup>35</sup> John Muir to Jeanne Carr, April 6, 1867, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/18118/rec/17>

conviction grew that his future lay not in the industrial world into which growing success was binding him, but in the less-certain natural world.

It was with this realization that he began planning his southern trip in earnest. What had been a daydream was quickly becoming a reality. Muir had long had a close relationship to nature. He had wandered the hills and seashores of his boyhood home in Scotland and explored the peripheries of his family's Wisconsin farm as an adolescent. As a young man, he had even undertaken lengthy walks on which he and his companions traveled hundreds of miles on foot, collecting plants as they went. These forays and excursions, however, were stutter steps into nature. Even the long walks were loops planned only to take him temporarily into nature before retuning him to worldly existence on the farm or the factory. The walk that he was planning in the aftermath of his temporary blindness would be different. It would be a one-way botanical pilgrimage out of his old life and into a new identity. Through this walk, both because of his mode of travel and scope of the trip, Muir came to imbue the natural world with a sublimity that would remain to some degree throughout his life and help shape the way Americans in general would view the natural world and its place within the broader landscape.

Analyses of Muir's walk have been used both to gain greater insight to his intellectual and philosophical development and to understand better the environmental history of the United States. His biographers, foremost among them Donald Worster, rightly treat this walk as a defining and formative moment in Muir's early career. In his chapter, "The Long Walk", Worster refers to this journey as a pilgrimage and provides a detailed account of what Muir encountered along the route. He captures Muir's sense of destiny that propelled him, writing that "Muir felt he had no control over his choices or destination. Something mysterious was pulling

him away from bourgeois respectability and driving him into the forest.”<sup>36</sup> He goes on to describe how Muir was shaped by his encounters with new people –rich and poor, black and white – and grew in his appreciation of and closeness with the natural world through his botanizing. The piece that is missing, however, is an analysis of Muir’s mode of transportation. Over the course of this journey, walking itself becomes a character. His choice in how he traveled was deliberate and it colored his interactions with both flora and fauna (humans included). Worster somewhat retroactively acknowledges this when he wrote about Muir’s 1903-1904 trip around the world. He suggests that while Muir saw many people and places, he did not really benefit from this trip and gained no new insights into the nature or humans. “Had he walked the whole distance,” Worster writes, “it might have been different.”<sup>37</sup>

Earlier biographies, while always including the walk to the Gulf, tended to gloss over the act of walking entirely. In his book, *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement*, Stephen Fox presents this trip primarily as a way for Muir to break away from the Christianity of his father and discover a broader, almost pantheistic natural spirituality.<sup>38</sup> Frederick Turner devotes more time than others to Muir’s walk in his book, *Rediscovering Nature: John Muir in His Time and Ours*. He explores the connections that Muir made with his natural surroundings as he walked, and also contrasts this walk with the earlier explorations of Boone, DeSoto, and Ponce DeLeon while drawing comparisons to the travels of the Bartrams.

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<sup>36</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1981), 50-53.

He does not, however, delve into what about the trips, apart from the personal temperaments of those involved, differentiated or connected them.<sup>39</sup>

Even the book devoted entirely to this walk neglects the importance of the act of walking. James Hunt's *Restless Fires: Young John Muir's Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf in 1867* provides an excellent recounting of the walk with detailed historical context and in-depth analysis of the trip as a formative event for Muir. "The walk", Hunt writes, "proved to be the crucible in which Muir's extraordinary capabilities were forged."<sup>40</sup> The act of walking, however, appears more as a nondescript part of the scenery rather than a major player in the story. For example, Hunt recounts an instance in which Muir was swept of his feet and taken down stream on an attempt to ford the Chattahoochee River in Georgia. Hunt writes that after this, "Muir considered making a boat to use 'for a sail instead of a march through Georgia.'"<sup>41</sup> While Hunt leaves that episode there, Muir went on in his journal to say that it would not be as productive to travel by boat rather than walk.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, Muir was conscious of the fact that his experience was very much shaped by his mode of travel.

Other studies that use Muir's walk to illustrate some greater point about the landscape and environment of the Southern United States in 1867 tend to ignore his mode of travel as well. In her study of the ideas of wilderness in the post Civil War South, Lisa Brady briefly cites

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<sup>39</sup> Frederick Turner, *Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985), 131-133.

<sup>40</sup> James Hunt, *Restless Fires: Young John Muir's Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf in 1867-68* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The "thousand mile walk" from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirjournals/id/115/rec/1>, 20.

Muir's walk, but only to describe what he sees.<sup>43</sup> She mentions nothing of this walk that would have been any different had this journey been taken by horseback or boat. But in choosing to walk this distance, Muir was seeing his surrounding in a different way than he would have by other means. He was also seeing himself in a very different way. Walking was central to his deliberate attempt to reinvent himself on this trip and to become the person that he believed he was meant to be.

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Once it was clear that his eye would heal and he would be able to embark on his trip to the South, his planning for it was fueled by a sense of fulfilling his destiny. In both his own view and in that of his closest friends, the injury and healing of his eye provided focus in his life. Writing immediately upon hearing of his injury, Muir's friend and mentor, Jeanne Carr, wrote to him, "I have often in my heart wondered what God was training you for...He has made you a more individualized existence than is common, and by your very nature...removed you from common temptations."<sup>44</sup> She wrote this not knowing if he would still become a naturalist, but with a strong belief that he would regain his sight. Points of crisis, especially ones that involve physical injury, can often engender a sense of some greater force being at work. That was true for Carr about Muir. Whatever he did once his sight and fate were decided would be imbued with this added purpose.

That Muir shared the sense of destiny at work in his trip is evident in his accounts of his walk. The published version of this walk, published posthumously in 1916 as the book, *A*

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<sup>43</sup> Lisa Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes During the American Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 136-137.

<sup>44</sup> Jeanne Carr to John Muir, March 15, 1867. *Kindred and Related Spirits: The Letters of John Muir and Jeanne C. Carr*, Bonnie Gisell, ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001), 3-4.



*Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, was clearly edited. So was his unpublished journal. Large passages in the journal are erased or crossed out as he created a narrative on the trip itself. He also left himself little notes, such as “(Tell story of guerillas.)”,<sup>45</sup> which clearly show that he was selective in what he recorded. This kind of self-awareness shaped how he interacted with the world around him. Muir was not passing through the landscape with an unbiased, objective eye, but was, in large part, making real a story that he already had in his mind.

This story was informed by both his previous interactions with the natural world and by his upbringing in a strict Calvinist home. Although he moved away from the religion of his father, his religious background still influenced him heavily as he walked. In addition to the poems of Robert Burns, the reading materials that he brought along with him were John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and the New Testament. It is another Christian work, however, that seems to have influenced his notion of his walk. That book was John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This text has been central to protestant Christian thought for centuries. As historian Mark Stoll shows in his exploration of the role of religion in American environmentalism, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*, it was also central to how people thought about the landscape. Through Bunyan’s story and the accompanying illustrations, the landscape became infused with the moral and religious sentiment. The terrain through which the pilgrim, Christian, traveled was itself a character in the story. As Christian traveled through it as he did, struggling against it while simultaneously allowing it to convey to his spiritual end, the land became sacred. Stoll goes on to list this work as one that Muir had frequent access to in his upbringing.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The “thousand mile walk” from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 33-35.

In later letters, Muir confirms this and demonstrates that Bunyan's book is both well known and important to him. Writing to his brother from California in 1869, Muir signs off, "Farewell Tomorrow I will be trudging up the mountains burdened like Christian in pilgrims progress."<sup>47</sup> Although he did not specifically refer to the work in his journal, he clearly used it as a lens onto his own experience—as a journey through the worldly to the eternal. Consciously or unconsciously, Muir used the story of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a template for his own experience on his walk.

Many in the United States used Bunyan's tale as a foundation for how to think about travel in the mid nineteenth century. Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1843 story, "The Celestial Railroad", imagines a traveler following Christian's route by train. With Mr. Smooths-the-Way as his guide, the traveler stows his burden in the baggage area, takes his seat, and looks out the window as the train speeds towards its destination, which is supposedly heaven. The track builders have built a bridge over the slough of despond and tunneled through the mountainous obstacles en route. The way is still narrow, but the rails hold the train on, and someone else is in charge of making the engine move. The closer the train gets to its destination however, the more concerned the traveler becomes. He finally transfers to a steam ferry, and the view from the deck confirms that he has indeed traveled not to heaven, but to hell. Hawthorne and his readers were certainly aware that there was something lost with the ease of modern travel. Whether or not Muir knew of Hawthorne's story, it is likely that he, and most who knew Bunyan's work, would have

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<sup>47</sup> John Muir to Daniel Muir November 15, 1869, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/11723/rec/4>

applied its significance during years of dramatic transition in human movement through the world.<sup>48</sup>

The deliberate construction and editing of this trip into a meaningful narrative was more than just a product of how Muir wrote about it. He shaped and crafted his actual experience as he went, and the tool that he used for this was his feet. His mode of transportation – walking – was both purposeful and unnecessary. He dismissed the notion of sailing down the Chattahoochee because he knew he would not gain the full experience through boat travel. Walking, he knew, would put him into the closest possible contact with the land, plants, animals, towns, and rivers that he passed. It would also untether him from any preset agenda or place. Having just his feet and a small pack, he could go on roads or off, wherever destiny and the universe, of which he declared himself a resident, would take him.<sup>49</sup>

The seeds for many of the insights that came to full bloom on Muir's walk to the Gulf were sown four years earlier in 1863. At the end of the his spring semester at the University of Wisconsin that year, Muir and two friends "turned [their] backs on the good university" and headed off on a three-hundred mile walk through Wisconsin and Iowa.<sup>50</sup> Fueled by the end of their studies for the year and by the warmth and beauty of the emerging northern summer, the three young men were eager to set out.

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<sup>48</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Celestial Railroad" in *Selected Tales and Sketches* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 316-335.

<sup>49</sup> Muir labeled the inside cover of his journal, "John Muir, Earth Planet, Universe". From the start, he had a sense that he was taking part in something greater than himself, something universal.

<sup>50</sup> The most detailed account of this excursion comes in a letter from Muir to his brother Daniel. In which he recounts the highlights over several pages that he wrote several months after the trip ended. Letter from John Muir to Daniel Muir, December 20, 1863. Comparing this account to other letters he wrote during the trip, it is clear that he was selective in what information he presented.

Pointing west, they threw themselves into the world. Muir and his companions set off, “eager for the tramp, as long confined colts for the canter,” cross-country avoiding roads until they arrived at the town of Blue Mound west of Madison. From there they traveled down the Wisconsin River Valley until it flowed into the Mississippi, and then crossed into Iowa. Along the way the trio collected botanical specimens and made geological observations. They slept out at night, found food where and when they could, and spent their days exposed to the elements.<sup>51</sup>

On the surface, except for some specific details, this walk seems very much like Muir’s 1867 walk to the gulf, and indeed his later readers would group them together. There were, however, many important differences that turned this early tramp into more of a lark and less of a pilgrimage, as his subsequent walk would be. First, there were the things they carried. Muir left with a tent, blankets, hatchets, some books (including his new testament), and his plant collecting materials. There is some overlap here with his later walk, but significantly on that one he carried neither a tent nor a hatchet. The tent made the earlier trip into much more of a regular camping trip. With a tent, the camper can set up where ever there is a flat piece of land. He is self-sufficient, but he is also isolated somewhat from his surroundings. He does not have to depend upon the people and land around him in the same way as he would without one. The hatchet too suggests a different relationship to one’s surroundings. Muir would not have carried this unless he intended to chop things – most likely wood for fires. Four years later, despite facing cold nights, Muir would not take one. He warmed himself either in people’s homes, or simply accepted the cold.

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<sup>51</sup> John Muir to Daniel Muir, December 20, 1863, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Also available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/18060/rec/1> .

Another major difference was the fact that he traveled with friends on this trip. Traveling with others also tends to reduce dependence, and therefore interaction, with others outside of that group. In this case having companions also served to make the tone of this trip much less serious than his later one. Muir and his companions were not bound solely to walking as a form of transportation. At one point they took a train to La Crosse, Wisconsin and then built a raft to explore the dells. They also purchased a boat, which they briefly intended to sail and row back upstream along the Wisconsin River to return to Madison. When the current proved too strong, they pulled it on shore, took off their hats in mock respect, gave an overly dramatic speech in which they promised the boat to a friend in Dubuque, and “after placing two postage stamps upon it to make it go, pushed it into the current and marched slowly away through the tall grass for the hills.”<sup>52</sup> Despite the collecting and scientific observations that were purported reasons for this excursion, for Muir and his friends it was at least equal parts youthful lark. When one of his companions was no longer having fun and decided to go home, that basically ended the trip for them all.

It was upon leaving the University of Wisconsin for this trip that Muir, in an act of revisionist remembering in the autobiography of his early years, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, said that he “was only leaving one University for another, Wisconsin University for the University of the Wilderness.”<sup>53</sup> This was not the case. He was years from having his mind made up and would continue to bounce around from one life plan to the next while moving from place to place. During the summer of this walk, he also traveled with letters of introduction from to prominent people in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he planned on attending medical school in the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>53</sup> John Muir, *Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), 287.

fall. The lack of seriousness and decisiveness does not mean, however, that Muir gained nothing of substance from his walk.

Often in spite of himself, this kind of travel turned out to be deeply formative for Muir. Traveling in this way reconnected Muir to the nature he had always felt close ties to. Immersing himself in the landscape made him identify with plants in a way he might not have otherwise. He saw human traits in the flowers, describing “Thousands of happy flowers” along a hillside near La Crosse. These he believed were “planned & made & planted & tended by the Great Creator himself”.<sup>54</sup> While these statements show the continued influence of his strict Christian upbringing, there are also hints of his later and greater identification with nature that he gained while walking. The sights of natural wonder stirred Muir to contemplate the eternal, signs of which he believed he saw written across the landscape.

At least as important as the spiritual and philosophical development of Muir along this walk were insights he gained related to more practical matters. Walking slowly through a landscape such as this, as had been the case for many Scots inclined to the natural sciences, helped him to see the scale of the geologic history along his path. In the course of their wandering, Muir and his companion might try to walk up a hill in order to find a farmhouse where they might obtain food, but if the hill was high and the view engaging, “perhaps [their] eyes rest upon the outcrops of a neighboring hill and [they] think of the earth’s long history.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Muir to Sarah and David Galloway 1863, July, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Also available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/18526/rec/1>

<sup>55</sup> John Muir to Daniel Muir, December 20, 1863, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Also available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/18526/rec/1> .,

Walking opened them up to these experiences and gave them the time and freedom to follow their whims.

Even when they found a house instead of a particularly inspiring outcrop, Muir and his companions still learned what he called important human lessons. When a meal could no longer wait, the young men showed up at houses, often filthy and bedraggled, but were often met with kindness and hospitality. It seemed to Muir that there was something of providence at work when in search of food. He learned to trust that when you truly needed it, “your bread shall be given you.”<sup>56</sup> The unique mixture of freedom and dependence that comes with a walk of this kind elicited such thoughts. Muir found himself as vulnerable and exposed to the judgments of others as he was to the weather. In both cases, he began to learn to accept what was placed before him. “We often proved,” he later wrote to his brother, “with philosophic shepherd that the property of rain was to wet, yet we never caught cold.”<sup>57</sup>

The coming of fall found Muir neither entering medical school in Ann Arbor nor enrolling fulltime in the University of the Wilderness. After spending the winter in Wisconsin, Muir once again set out the following summer, picking up where the previous summer’s walk left off. Alone this time, he wandered through the summer and early fall around the Great Lakes region, crossing the border into Canada to avoid the draft into the Civil War. On this walk he further immersed himself into botany, reveling in the new plants he found growing in the empty fields of Ontario. In the fall, he joined his brother who was living with a family, the Trouts, near the town of Meaford, Ontario. The Trout family ran a mill near their home, manufacturing handles for rakes and brooms. Muir worked for them until the mill burned down, and then set out

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2

once again, this time traveling to Indianapolis, where he found work in a factory making wagon wheels.<sup>58</sup>

Through his travels, Muir carried his different potential identities with him. His life still could have gone in any number of directions. He was called to nature, but he also continued returning to the mechanical world when he needed money. Neither had he discounted further education. Through his regular letter writing to Jeanne Carr, he remained connected with the academic world at the University of Wisconsin and had the option of returning there to study. Many of his correspondents seemed to be under the impression that he was always on the verge of entering medical school in Ann Arbor. He kept this quiver of possible futures right up to his accident that March of 1867. After he healed, Muir went back up to Wisconsin to visit friends and family and to begin to reacquaint himself with wildlife. At the end of August, he took a train back down through Indiana and began walking at Louisville, Kentucky on September 1, 1867, finally making real what been a calling “for many a year...towards the Lord’s tropic gardens of the South.”<sup>59</sup>

His desire to walk through the American South and continue on to South America was due in large part to his admiration for the European explorer, Alexander Von Humbolt, the foremost explorer and naturalist of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, who not only made his mark through his vigorous exploration but also presented the world with a fundamentally new way to understand nature. Drawing upon Enlightenment thought, the philosophical thinking of Emmanuel Kant concerning the importance of human’s perception of their surroundings, and his own scientific research and observation, Humbolt found a world that was much more connected

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<sup>58</sup> Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 92-117 for a summary of events immediately preceding his walk in 1867.

<sup>59</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The “thousand mile walk” from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 2.



than people had previously believed. Witnessing the similarities between the changes in flora as he gained elevation in the Andes and those as he gained latitude in Europe, Humbolt came to believe that the entire earth was part of one vast, unified system. Together with his new found belief in the importance of subjective feeling and imagination along with objective, rational observation, he arrived at the view of nature in which humans were very much a part. As a devotee of Humbolt, Muir would certainly have encountered this thinking before setting out.<sup>60</sup>

Muir hurried through the city of Louisville and began his mission “simply to push on in a general southward direction by the wildest, leafiest, least trodden way [he] could find promising the greatest extent of virgin forest.”<sup>61</sup> He felt a mixture of excitement and loneliness as he shouldered his small pack and plant press and walked south amidst the most beautiful examples of oak trees, in full leaf on that early fall day. His first day out, he covered twenty miles and found lodging that night in a decrepit tavern. As would become characteristic on his trip, the shabbiness of this tavern, and later, other manmade structures, would pale in comparison with the fresh, clean, beautiful nature that he encountered. On September fifth, when Muir awoke to find, “no bird or flower or friendly tree above [him]...only a squalid garret and rubbish and dust,” he did what he would increasingly do and “escaped to the woods.”<sup>62</sup> Also characteristically, Muir would find himself motivated by both the joy of being in nature, which he describes as carrying him south as though floating on a river of plants, and the challenge of covering a lot of miles quickly. This was a plant-centered spiritual pilgrimage, but it was also a way for Muir to test himself physically and to bring to bear to his experience of the natural world the same vigor and efficiency that he did to his industrial work.

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<sup>60</sup> Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 34-36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Throughout Kentucky, Muir regularly came into contact with people, rich and poor, black and white. These encounters he seemed to find neutral at best. As he was preparing to cross a river, a young African American boy came up and told him he could not possibly ford the river and refused to listen to Muir when he insisted that he could. The boy ran off to get a horse to carry him across, a nice gesture but one that slowed him. He passed others who viewed him with skepticism and curiosity, as few people traveled long distances by foot for leisure or science in the post-Civil War South.<sup>63</sup>

Even those who seemed like they were trying to be helpful could be a legitimate threat to him as a vulnerable lone walker, and so inspired wariness. One man passing on horseback offered to carry Muir's pack and finally talked Muir into handing it over. It quickly became clear that the man's actual goal was to ride ahead and away with the pack. Muir, however, "was too good a walker and runner for this," (once again being proud of his physical capabilities) and stayed with him, thereby keeping safe his humble belongings.<sup>64</sup> Another man who was actually friendly towards Muir was no less of a potential barrier. Near Mammoth Cave, Muir spent time talking with a man who was so impressed with him that he tried to get Muir to stay there. He assured him that he could get a teaching job and lead a comfortable, pleasant life there in Kentucky.<sup>65</sup> Part of Muir, a young man who was trying to find his place in the world, and who often suffered from feelings of fear and loneliness along his difficult, solitary path, must have been attracted to this idea. Still, giving in to this comfort would have meant sacrificing what increasingly seemed to him like his calling.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 9.

Muir's descriptions of these incidents are reminiscent of those experienced by Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Like Muir, Christian felt a discontent with his established life and circumstances that was difficult to define. Both Muir and the fictional Christian tried to alleviate this feeling by taking walks around the landscape surrounding their homes, but both ultimately found these did not go far enough. He also felt called to some compelling, but nebulous other, more eternal life. He too met with pitfalls and delays, some clearly dangerous, others hidden behind appealing facades. From the start Christian would struggle through swamps (as Muir later would) and fall victim to the aggression of others. He too would be tempted by pleasant distractions, as when he encountered Worldly Wisdom, who offers him what at first seems like a comfortable life in a town that later changes before his eyes. Muir framed his trip through the lens of the kinds of trials Christian encountered on his pilgrimage. In doing this, walking played a crucial role. This was the only form of transportation that exposed him to the kinds of dangers that could end a trip if he was not careful. It was also the only form of transportation through which he could truly be led astray. A train would not leave the tracks, at least not through any actions of Muir, and a river was set in its course.

With few exceptions, as Muir walked – and because Muir walked – he increasingly found himself at odds with the people he met in how he related to nature. When he passed through the village of Mumfordsville, Kentucky, Muir met Mr. Mumford himself. When Mumford learned of the purpose of Muir's walk, he invited him inside to show him his natural history collection. He then “complacently covered the table with bits of rocks, plants, etc., things new and old, supposed to be full of scientific interest, which he had gathered in his surveying walks.”<sup>66</sup> As he continued, he passed another small village, located ten miles away from Mammoth Cave. Near

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

this village was a smaller cave called Horseshoe Cave. A local man took Muir to see this cave and told him that “he had never been to Mammoth cave – that it was not worth going ten miles to see, as it was nothing but a hole-in-the-ground.” Muir found “that his was no rare case.”<sup>67</sup>

In both of these cases, the initial overlap in interest in the natural world between Muir and these two men ultimately served to highlight their differences. In the case of Mumford, his walking and collecting was done in the name of surveying and development. The collection that this produced was sterile and disjointed. Muir seemed to find these pieces essentially useless and uninspiring as a result. As for the man who would not travel a few hours by foot to reach Mammoth cave, one of the natural wonders of the region, Muir seems disgusted by his parochialism. This man appreciated only the cool breezes that caves provided during the summer. This sort of narrow view would keep a person from gaining a deeper insight to and appreciation of the natural world. What separated Muir from both of these men was the broader context that he gained, in large part from walking through the landscape. In traveling in such a way, Muir could get to know the botanical and geographic features of the land at a deeper level and appreciate their uniqueness. He could see the pieces as part of a larger whole, and in doing so, could keep them from becoming lifeless specimens.

Muir walked through the mountains of eastern Kentucky, carried along by a wave of plants and trees. The oaks, hemlocks, and pines found in the heights of the Southern Appalachians joined in an unbroken chain with the trees he knew at higher latitudes, connecting him with his home and with his past. As he walked, he “knew his direction, but could not keep it

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8.

on account of the brambles...[his] path ...strewn with flowers, but as thorny, alas, as a moral ever trod.”<sup>68</sup> The flora was indeed leading him along his journey.

Crossing the state line into Tennessee, an old mountaineer put Muir up for the night and invited him to stay for a day or two so he could show him around the area. The old man showed him the valleys and the ridges, from which Muir could see into North Carolina. He showed him the mining operations and mill houses, where the mountain people still worked in the most primitive conditions, eschewing any steps towards the modern, industrial efficiency that Muir still valued so much. Where humans had made improvements, Muir found the area to be far behind the “most hidden places of Wisconsin.” But where nature prevailed, particularly in the rivers and unfolding expanse of mountains, he found the landscape to be “immeasurably grander than any [he] had ever seen before.”<sup>69</sup> His description of a place the man called “Track Gap”, where there were “bird traks, ‘bar’ tracks, ‘hoss’ tracks, men’s tracks, all in the solid rock as if it had been mud” is mocking and derisive.<sup>70</sup> Where men mingle with nature, where they live close to it and are tied to it through their labor, they experience it in a lesser form. To truly appreciate the transcendent aspects of nature, one must be close to it, but free enough of it to have the proper perspective. This point of view will set Muir apart from other walkers who come to value the human use of the land on their trips. Through his walking, Muir had that closeness. Industrial efficiency for human needs provided the freedom for appreciation.

Despite being enamored with their scenery, Muir made his way across the remaining mountains quickly. Coming out of them on the eastern side in northern Georgia, he began following the Chattahoochee River. He soaked in the “massy, bossy, dark green water oaks

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 17.

and...the dense impenetrable muscadine grape vines.”<sup>71</sup> He spent the night with a Mr. Prather, whom he knew from Indiana and then went out with him sailing on the river, collecting muscadines where they fell into the still water along the edges. From here he continued to make his way downstream, toward the town of Athens, Georgia. He got lost amid the vines and brambles and missed the ford that he was seeking. Muir decided instead to just wade in the water where he was and swim across the Chattahoochee, “careless of wetting, knowing that [he] would soon dry in the hot sun.”<sup>72</sup> Having gone through many cycles of getting wet and drying off along his walk, he had faith in future dryness that let him accept present wetness. Sure enough, he was swept downstream and had to grasp for rocks and pull himself to the shore where he dried himself and his belongings in the sun.

Muir was so taken in by the Chattahoochee that he considered briefly abandoning his walk, building a boat, and sailing down to Savannah. He was “intoxicated with the beauty of these glorious river banks, which [he] thought would increase in grandeur as [he] approached the Gulf.” Certainly the prospect of getting off of his feet and letting the river do the work must have been appealing as well. This mode of travel would have afforded him a similar kind of intimacy with the natural world as walking did. He would be traveling slowly and independently. In fact, one could argue that floating down a river could allow a greater level of observation as the traveler would not be distracted by watching where he put his feet. Ultimately, though, Muir decided that “such a pleasure sail would be less profitable than a walk, and so sauntered on southward.”<sup>73</sup> The work and freedom of walking was too important to Muir to give it up.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 21.

A short time later, Muir reached the university town of Athens. He was far more impressed with this town, with its large homes and well-kept streets and public spaces, than any other he had encountered in the South. He was also impressed with the flora in the surrounding area, which was finally becoming distinct from what he knew in the north. On a “long zigzag walk amid old plantations,” Muir discovered “a fine southern fern and some new grasses.” He was so taken with these plants, which were gathered around a cool, fresh spring, that he took the time to draw the scene in detail, and wrote that he “thought [he] must have been directed here by Providence...[as] it is not often hereabouts that the joys of cool water, cool shade, and rare plants are so delightfully combined.”<sup>74</sup> Moments like this proved to Muir that walking was far more profitable than any other form of transportation. Only walking would allow Providence with such a random, zigzag route. Walking let in chance and required faith. Trusting his feet and the plants to guide him, he sometimes found himself in these rarified places that, because of his deep connection to flora, were other-worldly to him.

Being out of the mountains and heading ever further south, the plant life began to change dramatically for the first time on his trip. He encountered tall grasses, some well over his head, and the trees became dominated by the long leaf pine, which he fell in love with. The welcoming scenery and lack of hospitality that he found let him make good time, and he hurried along to the port city of Savannah. In a single day, as he was unable to find lodging for the night and so kept pushing on, he covered forty miles, and then had to go to bed without any food.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps inspired by hunger, Muir took increasing note of edible plants. He commented repeatedly on the presence of muscadines, which were everywhere, as well as on the sweet fruit of the apricot vines.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 26.

It was in the Southern lowlands that Muir's appreciation of the natural ascended to the sublime. In the eighteenth century, people began to understand interactions with the landscape and natural world in a deeper, more emotional way, rather than simply being spectators or observers. The first attempt to thoroughly explain the *sublime* as it related to beauty and nature came from Edmund Burke with his work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757. Burke's goal with this work was to identify the innate characteristics that informed people's sense of the beautiful, and to explain the role of feeling and emotion involved in aesthetics. "The Passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*," he wrote, "is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."<sup>76</sup> There were, in Burke's view, many different ways that the natural world could inspire the necessary horror to reach this heightened, unconscious emotional state that would allow for the intimate connection with one's surroundings. Among them were terror, darkness, power, obscurity, and privation. Running low on money, passing through gloomy swamps, alone and vulnerable on foot, John Muir had ample opportunity to experience all of these.

While initially buoyed by the novelty and the excitement of all of the new plants, Muir entered into a period of semi-despair as he moved closer to the coast and into the unfamiliar. Like Bunyan's Christian, he became increasingly wary of his surroundings. About his trip through the bottomlands along the Savannah River, he wrote:

*"Am in a strange land. I know hardly any of the plants and cannot see the country for the solemn, dark, mysterious cypress forest. I know but few of the birds, and the winds are full of strange sounds – feel far from the people and plants and fields of home. Night is coming on and I am beset with indescribable loneliness. Felt feverish;*

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<sup>76</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1990), 53.



*bathed in a black silent stream, nervously watchful for alligators...Long walk in the dark.*"<sup>77</sup>

The closeness he felt with the landscape and the vulnerability he felt as a walker combined to have an increasingly powerful effect on his mood and emotions.

Muir's tribulations shifted, but persisted when he reached Savannah. He had written to his brother weeks earlier to send a portion of his savings to the post office there as he was nearly out of the money he had carried with him. When he arrived and went to retrieve the letter and money, he found it had not yet arrived. He spent his first night in town in a hotel and then went back the next day looking for word from his brother. Still nothing. Muir realized that with no idea when the letter would arrive he would quickly exhaust his remaining funds if he stayed in town, so he set off to look for an out-of-the-way place he could camp. He headed out of town toward the Bonaventure cemetery.

Park-like cemeteries on the outskirts of cities, like Bonaventure outside Savannah, were relatively new phenomena in 1860s America. The first of these, Mount Auburn, was built six miles outside of Boston in 1831. Just a generation before Muir got there, Bonaventure had been a large estate. Writing of these early cemeteries, historian Aaron Sachs describes places that were intended to be places of repose for not just the dead, but for the living as well. Repose, Sachs writes, was increasingly important in the tumultuous world of antebellum America. These cemeteries gave people a nearby place to find temporary respite from the often conflicting, confusing demands of modern life. Like the use of the landscape in *Pilgrims Progress*, the pastoral cemetery was an important stepping-stone to making the land itself sacred once again. Sachs writes, "But at the precise moment when Western society seemed to focus itself most

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<sup>77</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The "thousand mile walk" from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 28.

powerfully on the death denying conquest and harnessing of nature, some members of society were using landscapes of death to preach humble acknowledgement of natural limitations.”<sup>78</sup> In a deep way, John Muir would find that sacredness, connection, and humility in the cemetery.

While not the end of his journey, Muir’s time in Bonaventure seems to have been, in many ways, a fulfillment of his pilgrimage. As he left Savannah to walk the three or four miles to the cemetery, he was at the lowest point of his trip. While he had just started encountering new and wonderful plants in the swamps west of the city, his travel through them also left him depressed and lonely. He had almost no money and could find no mills that were willing or able to take him on. He started making plans to forage food from the fields and orchards surrounding Savannah if his money did not arrive. On top of all of that, he had the beginnings of a fever.

The stretch of road between Savannah proper and Bonaventure matched his mood. There were “ragged, desolate fields on both sides of the road [that were] overrun coarse rank weeds and show[ed] scarce signs of cultivation.”<sup>79</sup> When he came upon the cemetery, however, all of that changed. There he found “one of the most impressive assemblages of animal and plant creatures [he] ever met.” There were birds singing in giant live oaks, butterflies flitting from one flower to another, and any number of spectacular examples of other interesting flora and fauna. “The whole place,” Muir wrote, “seems like the centre of life. The dead do not ‘reign there alone’”<sup>80</sup>.

Coming upon this scene as he did, raw with fatigue and fear, open and vulnerable from being alone, on foot, and almost broke, Muir had a revelation. He wrote:

*I gazed awe-stricken as one new born, new arrived from another world. Without past or future. Alive only to the presence of the most adorned and most living of all the*

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<sup>78</sup> Aaron Sachs, *Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 22-23.

<sup>79</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The “thousand mile walk” from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

*tree companies I have ever beheld. Bonaventure is called a graveyard – a town of the dead, but the few accidents of graves are powerless in such a depth of life.*<sup>81</sup>

From the pits of despair, headed to a place of death, Muir found life. Weighed down by temporal concerns, he discovered the eternal. He was primed for this experience by both his perspective and his mode of travel. He was deliberately seeking something more, and was filtering his experiences towards that end. That he was walking connected him to the landscape through his physical activity but did not lead him to view the nature through which he passed in purely utilitarian terms. This combination of connection and freedom let him find the sublime in the insects and oaks of Bonaventure.

The visible presence of life and death through the live oaks and tombstones of Bonaventure, combined with the added insecurity of his financial straits at the time, heightened Muir's experience in and around Savannah. The low-grade but constant physical and emotional discomfort that he experienced as a result of walking, with its mix of weariness and loneliness, made this sublime view of his surroundings possible at any time, whether he was walking through the mountains, the swamps, or a college town, he was often tired and lonely. The act of walking stood in for the feeling of exhilarated terror a tourist in the Alps might gain by edging up to a cliff and looking over. For Muir the walker, wherever he was could be a wilderness infused with the anxiety and beauty of the sublime.

His experience in Bonaventure cemetery seems also to have shifted his perspective on the natural world. The search for the everlasting and eternal that he somewhat fulfilled in Bonaventure had long been on Muir's mind. This idea dominated his correspondence as a younger man. At that time, the object of the eternal was typically his religion, and particularly

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 32.

his relationship with Jesus Christ. Muir seems to have believed that eternal life would come through Him. The way he thought about this, however, was very much in terms of the religious pilgrimage. In a lengthy letter Muir wrote on the subject in 1856 when he was just eighteen, he gave an elaborate description of the struggle towards salvation that very closely resembled his later walk.

Muir wrote this letter to his friend, Bradley Brown, about how, believing that Jesus was his savior, he should have a continued relationship with him. In it he asked Brown to imagine that he was “a traveler; You have long been wandering here and there in rough thorny places homeless and friendless.”<sup>82</sup> He goes on to describe the way in which the traveler would be tossed in a violent storm through “gloomy woods” and lost in the darkness and covered in mud. At that moment, the traveler sees a well-lighted mansion, goes up to the house, and is invited inside and cared for by the owner. “Would,” Muir asks after, “joy or grief, hope or fear, bright prosperity or gloomy adversity, friends old or new, or time itself ever push him or blot him out of your heart?” He then suggests that this should be even more true when it came to Jesus, who took much greater measures to save the lost soul than did the man who simply opened his door.

Muir had been living out this Bunyan-esque metaphor of the lost traveler, wandering among the thorns and the dark woods leading up to his visit to Bonaventure. The cemetery was itself until a few years before the site of a mansion, and the monuments in it were themselves small-scale mansions. When he arrived there, however, the eternal salvation he found was not the person of Jesus but the most inspiring collection of nature he had ever seen. Here he found a direct replacement for Christian notions of death and salvation. He rejected mainstream ideas on

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<sup>82</sup> John Muir to A. Bradley Brown, 1856, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/17998/rec/1>

death, where death is to be feared above all else. “But let a child walk with Nature,” he wrote, “let him behold the beautiful blendings and communions of life and death, their joyous inseparable unity as taught in the woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and he will learn that death is stingless indeed and as beautiful as life.”<sup>83</sup> Nature was his salvation in his despair in the wilderness. Just as he had told his friend a decade before that the traveler would never forget the man who allowed him into his mansion, so would Muir take with him this lesson from Bonaventure.

After several days of walking back and forth from Bonaventure to Savannah, the money from Muir’s brother finally arrived. At first the worker at the post office did not believe he was who he said he was, and, having no form of identification, Muir was initially at a loss to prove it. He finally hit upon the idea of discoursing on botany, thus proving he was the botanical travel mentioned in the letter. His identity of himself as a botanist was gaining strength and clarity.<sup>84</sup> When Muir got the money, he immediately splurged on food, and then bought a ticket aboard a ship to take him around the coastal swamps, down into Florida, where he could resume his walk from the Atlantic to the Gulf Coast.

It was on Florida that Muir had placed his hopes of achieving the true fulfillment of his transformation. Along the entire walk, he had traced his external and internal journey with the plant life he observed and catalogued. He paid special attention to that which was new and would carry him out of his old identity and into his new, botanical self. “Since the commencement of my floral pilgrimage,” he wrote upon continuing his walk in Florida, “I have seen much that is

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<sup>83</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The “thousand mile walk” from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

not only new, but that is altogether unallied, unacquainted with the plant of my former life.”<sup>85</sup> Of all of those plants – the magnolias, long leaf pines, the variety of oaks, the palmettos – nothing would affect him like the flora of Florida. Everything was new, and he, after his revelation in Bonaventure, was seeing it all with new eyes. The going was not easy. Just as Bunyan’s Christian had to once again make his way through the Slough of Despond, so did Muir once again have to cope with the swamps (and possible swamp creatures) and loneliness of walking in a strange sub-tropical land. Nevertheless, the novelty was now welcome again.

It was while making his way through one of these swamps, enjoying the new flowers it contained despite the mud sucking at his boots, that he made his greatest discovery of the trip. In that swamp he came upon his first true Palm tree, which had been the object of the entire trip. This tree “was indescribably impressive and told [him] grander things than [he] ever got from human priest.”<sup>86</sup> This variety of tree, which Muir had dreamed about when planning his trip, was the climax of his walk. That he walked to this tree rather than taking a train or boat (with the one brief exception) made the encounter far more meaningful. Like all pilgrims, he walked carrying a burden. His burden was his possible selves and the expectation of others upon him. Now he could begin to put his burden down. As he walked, connecting with the plants as he did, he gradually formed a new self; one that was made up of these cumulative experiences. Traveling by other means, the change would have been too abrupt. Even at a fast pace, walking was slow enough that he could truly see his surroundings, experience their power, and connect intimately with them. He could ease himself into his new self.

After finding this Holy Grail, Muir still had plenty of walking left to do. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Florida was a challenging place to travel around, especially by foot. The entire state was like a

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 49.

giant slough of despond. If one stepped into the woods, he was typically at least ankle deep in mud and muck. Muir walked on the beds of the railroads that were just starting to enter the state. Most of the people he met, he disliked or felt frightened of. Most of the towns and dwellings, he thought deplorable and destitute.<sup>87</sup> Still he went on, soldiering through the muck and mosquitoes to find flowers and fruit amidst the swamps. The closer he got to the end of his walk, the harder it seemed to remain on the straight and narrow. Pushing to make to a point of rest, Muir “struggled hard but kept [his] course” to make it only a few miles over terrain that “a traveler in the vineless North can form no idea of [ with] crooked, strange difficulty of pathless locomotion in...thorny watery tangles.”<sup>88</sup>

Despite the difficulties of travel, Muir viewed his challenges in a different light than prior to his brush with life and death at Bonaventure. Approaching Savannah, Muir had often felt lonely and isolated when amidst unfamiliar flora in an unfamiliar land. The gloominess of the swamps seeped into his soul. In Florida, while he occasionally felt lost and lonesome, his underlying feelings were of joy and communion. After looking at the surrounding landscape, which shared nothing with the upper Midwest, Muir wrote, “though lonely in this multitude of strange plants, strange winds blowing gently, whispering, cooing in a language I never learned, and strange birds – everything solid or spiritual full of influences that I never before felt”.<sup>89</sup> The land, rather than inspiring feelings of fear and isolation due to its strangeness, now inspired awe and wonder.

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<sup>87</sup> The one exception was the town of Gainesville, which he found a step above the rest and more like towns up north than like its surrounding villages.

<sup>88</sup> John Muir, *July 1867-February 1868, The “thousand mile walk” from Kentucky to Florida and Cuba*, 67.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

To express his feelings about land, plants, and animals, Muir turned to subtle religious imagery in his journal. Describing what he saw looking up at the sunlight pouring through the palm fronds, Muir wrote, “The leaves are channeled like half open fans, and are highly polished, so that they reflect the sunlight like glass... forming a noble crown over which tropic light is poured and reflected from its slanting mirrors in sparks and splinters and long-rayed stars.”<sup>90</sup> The palm tree, which had been his ultimate botanical destination all along, seemed much like stained glass in a cathedral to Muir.

With these revelations and realizations, Muir felt as though he had arrived at the object of his pilgrimage, his promised land. “Well, I am now in the hot gardens of the sun where grows the Palm, longed and prayed for and often visited in dreams,” he wrote, and “I thank the lord for granting me admittance to this magnificent realm.”<sup>91</sup> For much of his walk, he had been gently ushered out of his old life, gaining elevation as he lost latitude so his home plants more or less stayed with him and kept him company. As he descended from the uplands, he found himself far from home, both geographically and botanically. The experience in the cemetery, his temporary poverty, the boat ride out of Savannah: these provided a clean break. He was now in a new place. It was a strange place, but one that, when he allowed himself to fully experience it by intimately traveling across it on foot, was magnificent and full of awe.

The newness of this realm and the closeness that he was able to feel with his surroundings, due in large part to what had been simply fear, forced an evolution in Muir’s view of nature. No one thing was more terrifying in Muir’s imagination as he walked south as the alligator. He heard tales of giant beasts, killing men and dogs. They must have been consistently on his mind as he walked through the endless stretches of murky water, looking for dry land. The

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



more he thought about them, however, the more accepting he became of their presence, and he outright rejected the common fears of them, writing:

*Although many people believe that alligators were created by the devil...doubtless these alligators are happy and fill the place assigned them by the Great Creator of us all. Hideous and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God, and are his children and he cares for them tenderly, hears their cries, and provides their daily bread....They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen and undepraved and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love, as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth....I have better thoughts of those alligator fellows now that I have seen them at home.<sup>92</sup>*

Here, Muir exhibits a deep connection to and acceptance of the natural world, even when in the form of the frightening alligator. In viewing the alligator in this way, Muir places it, and, by extension himself (being potential alligator food) firmly within cyclical nature. The magnificent realm is not a beneficent one when seen in small pieces, but the whole is sublime. What allowed Muir to see the “alligator fellows” at home was the closeness and vulnerability he found through walking.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, after fifty-three days of walking (excluding his rest days), Muir reached the sea. Rather than seeing this as an ending, Muir wished he could keep walking, heading to Cuba, then South America as did Humbolt before him. This would have to wait, however. First, he discovered ships did not come to the port, Cedar Keys, as often as he had expected. Then he was

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 7-10 Shepard, professor of natural philosophy and human ecology writes about the move away from humans viewing themselves as part of cyclical nature in his book *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. He attributes this shift to the ancient Hebrews, who in distinguishing themselves from their tribal neighbors, adopted a linear, historical view of human events. This perspective created a “dichotomy that divides experience into good and evil, eternal and temporal”, and separates subject from object in a way that had never occurred before. In Muir’s meditation on the alligator, he seems to be demonstrating a return to a prehistorical way of thinking (complete with a desire to retreat to the trees to escape the potential predators), where time is cyclical and subject and object are part of the same whole.

beset with fever that left him once again vulnerable and in the care of strangers. When he recovered and a ship arrived, he did indeed continue to head south, but after a brief excursion to Cuba, he found passage not to South America, but to California. It was in California that he went on to reveal to the nation and the world the identity he had forged during those fifty-three days.

John Muir would never again go on a walk quite like the one he undertook in the fall of 1867. He certainly traveled extensively by foot, but his trips, while perhaps more ambitious, were also more limited in geographic and temporal scope. In California, he found a means of getting into the High Sierra by accompanying a herd of sheep up from the lowlands for summer grazing. This experience just confirmed his earlier notions of how walking and labor keeps one from fully appreciating the sublimity of Nature (as well as gave him a lasting disdain for sheep). What he found when he went into the high Sierra was a connection in his isolation similar to what he discovered on his walk. In his account of his first months there, he wrote of a remote alpine meadow, "It is so calm and withdrawn while open to the universe in full communion with everything good."<sup>94</sup> His arduous, solitary travel that took him away from familiar people and places ultimately brought him into a deeper connection with them through this communion to the universe of which everything is a part. While his subsequent forays were more in the category of mountaineering or glacial exploration than of cross-country touring. These reflected his burgeoning interests in geology in addition to his earlier botany. But he would not have scaled those mountains or traversed those glaciers had he not first walked away from his machine shop in Indianapolis (and his farm in Wisconsin and medical school in his plans).

Over time, he would form new associations and pick up new burdens. He married, had children, and took over the management of his father-in-law's ranch and orchard. As he became

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<sup>94</sup> John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 275.

well known in the burgeoning environmental movement in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, he was both given more opportunities to travel and had less freedom in how he did it. Rather than walk alone, he might find himself on a millionaire's cruise ship.

In 1903, he took a several month's tour around the world.<sup>95</sup> He was no longer young or in prime physical shape, but Muir tried to get out and walk when he could, especially when he parted ways with his companion and continued on alone. Writing to his sister from India, he told of cool air in the mountains above 7000 feet, and how, "though not used to walking these days [he] walked 6 miles around a wooded hill without fatigue."<sup>96</sup> While he enjoyed the fresh air and wished he could see more of the mountains, there were other places he wanted to get to in Asia and the Middle East. It would not be easy to get everywhere he wanted to. He wrote, "I hate train travel & hotel – restaurant life in general, but I suppose there are a few more places I should see before I die."<sup>97</sup>

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From the time he was a young child, Muir had been drawn to nature – particularly the plant life around him. Exploring the margins of the farm he grew up on helped him to feel rooted. Drawings and descriptions of far of tropical plants fueled his desire to explore. All through his life, he read about plants. He collected them. He categorized them. It wasn't until his walk to the Gulf, however, that he truly began to connect with nature.

What allowed him to break from his life tied to industry and factories, and make the deep connections that he did was the act of walking itself. He felt the push of the stones under his feet

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<sup>95</sup> This was the trip that Worster was referring to when he suggested that it would have been more fruitful had Muir walked.

<sup>96</sup> John Muir to Louie [Strentsell Muir] October 18, 1903, Holt-Atherton Collection, University of the Pacific. Also Available online at <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/16626/rec/2>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 3.

in the mountains in Tennessee and the pull of the mud in the swamps in Florida. He felt the tearing of the brambles as he fought his way through the underbrush and tasted the sweetness of the apricots that he gathered when he could find no board. The natural features he encountered walking through the landscape guided him physically, showing him where he could and could not go, and also shaped the story of his journey as he struggled against the obstacles and embraced the gifts that came his way.

Ultimately, the connection that he gained through walking became greater than the sum of its parts. In seeing himself as part of nature, he came to see all things as part of a universal force. His trip opened him to pain and loneliness, but at the same time allowed him to experience beauty and wonder. When the bad combined with the good, it created the transcendent and sublime. In the years after the Civil War, the modern, industrial world had developed to such a point that it was increasingly separate from the natural world. Muir had a foot in both worlds before his walk. With his walk, he chose the natural world. With his deep, spiritual connection to nature that he gained on his walk, he would go on to advocate for a type of conservation that was less utilitarian and more focused on keeping the natural world untouched than was common at the time. Muir would carry that feeling along with him after his walk was through, and would share it with the world through his writing and preservation.

### **Following Footsteps: Charles Fletcher Lummis and His Walk West**

Charles Fletcher Lummis was an indifferent student while attending college at Harvard, being much more interested in athletics and practical jokes than in his course work. His love of physical activity and hijinks intersected over the Thanksgiving Holiday of his sophomore year. Embarking on what he would later refer to as his “Thanksgiving Tramp,” Lummis and a friend donned the ragged clothes of vagrants and set out to beg their way from Harvard Yard to Nashua, New Hampshire. They traveled on foot and with no money, and hoped to spend at least one night in jail to get what they thought would be the full vagrant experience. They walked through the cold, wearing the clothes they had cut up and mixed and matched to attempt to look indigent. When they reached Nashua, they got themselves thrown in jail for vagrancy, until the judge “accused [them] of being Harvard students”<sup>98</sup>, and sent them back into the cold, to trudge back to school.

The initial purpose of the practical joke is unclear. Lummis and his friend seemed to find humor in slumming. Despite this, he could not help but learn actual lessons from his walk. Looking back at this trip from old age, he remembered, “People were very good to us. In those days it was all old New England farmers, not the aliens that now possess New England; and while they looked rather scandalized at our appearance, nobody refused us a handout and several gave us good warm meals in the kitchen.”<sup>99</sup> Because he was walking and therefore necessarily vulnerable and open to experience, Lummis ended up finding common ground with those who were, in some regards, the object of his joke. His trek forced him to rely on the people he encountered, and they in turn gave willingly, despite the seeming class divide. Although a

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Lummis “As I Remember” quoted in *Charles Lummis: The Man and His West* by Turbese Lummis Fiske and Keith Lummis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 8

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

stranger, Lummis and his companion found themselves a part of the communities that they briefly passed through. That feeling stayed with him for decades.

This early walk through New England was a much smaller version of what would come later in his 1884 walk from Ohio to California that Lummis would write about, and which would be the starting point for his vocation as an advocate for the indigenous people and history of the Southwest. The lessons he learned on his later, longer walk would be similar to those he learned on his Thanksgiving tramp, as well. On his trip across the continent, Lummis gained a new and unique perspective about the land through which he passed and of the people he encountered. This perspective was a direct result of his means of transportation –exclusively walking – the slowness of which forced him to notice things that he would have missed on a train. He gained an appreciation for the land and the settlers who came before him to carve out livings on it. Most importantly, however, the act of walking across the country threw him into contact with people and cultures he would not have met by other means, and about whom he previously held negative stereotypes. The suffering and difficulty he encountered gave him, he thought, insight into the suffering and difficulty experienced by the indigenous people of the Southwest. Just as in New England in college, Lummis was moving slowly enough that he was essentially at home wherever he happened to be. He became part of the communities he passed through, and in doing so, he rid himself of many of his negative views. Ultimately, Lummis would connect his changing views of various people, particularly Native Americans, with his experience walking. The changes he underwent would shape his work on Indian education and general Indian policy, as it would his work with others who would take up these issues after him.

These trends were most true for Lummis's relationship with the Native Americans of the Pueblos of New Mexico and Arizona. For the rest of his life after his walk, Lummis frequently

returned to this area, and always kept an eye on the fortunes of the Pueblo people in relation to encroaching, mainstream American culture. While not a perfect relationship, there was a mutual respect between Lummis and the Native Americans of the Southwest, and the foundations for this came from his walk. For his part, Lummis's slow passage through their communities allowed him to see them for the three-dimensional people that they were. His mode of travel also predisposed them to greater trust towards him, as he was less threatening, but also because the Native Americans of the Southwest had a history of reverence for long-distance foot travel going back to their earliest cultural memories, and continuing up to the present.

Lummis tapped into this same tradition as he walked through the Southwest in 1884, and this would have a lasting effect on the work of his life from that point on. Much of that work was related to shaping Indian policy in the desert Southwest. He did this with his writing, through the formation of organizations, and through his relationships with officials like Theodore Roosevelt and John Collier. His emphasis on the importance of place and the preservation of intact native culture, as well as the relative receptiveness of his ideas on the part of the Pueblo peoples, stems directly from the common ground forged by his walk.

The seeds of Lummis's walk across the continent were planted when he was a boy. He was born in March 1, 1859 in Bristol, New Hampshire, a "dear typical New Hampshire village with perhaps 400 people."<sup>100</sup>, which was a model of strong communal life surrounded by ready access to nature in the surrounding fields and woods. He displayed a love of this nature, taking frequent trips into the environs near town. He also displayed an unconventionality that would characterize much of his life and give him the drive to do something as outside of the boundaries of normal as to walk several thousand miles. From a young age, Lummis eschewed traditional

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 7.

education, choosing instead largely self-directed study. He had no real desire to continue his formal education, but went to Harvard “because it was the cultural convention of New England.”<sup>101</sup> At Harvard, he would devote effort and attention only to what interested him. This led to him falling just two classes short of graduation. Rather than make the courses up, a task that would not have been too difficult, Lummis simply left without a degree. Formal study was less important to him than experience, both physical and mental.

Shortly after leaving Harvard, already married, Lummis made his way west to Chillicothe, Ohio, where he proceeded to build upon a fledgling career as a writer, taking a job as a reporter. He lived there for four years, but his attention was drawn even further west by his interest in adventure and his need for a healthier climate (he suffered bouts of malaria from the lowlands of Chillicothe). He got a job as a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* and planned to move to Southern California. Partly as a publicity stunt, but mostly due to his wanderlust, Lummis decided to walk to Los Angeles. He planned to file reports to both his old and new newspapers along the way.<sup>102</sup>

On September 12, 1884, Lummis set off on his 3,507-mile (by his reckoning) walk from Chillicothe, Ohio to Los Angeles, California. During the initial part of his walk his goal was to make miles, following the roads and railroads for as straight a shot as he could across Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and eastern Kansas. As the landscape became what he considered to be more western, he let it guide him. He continued on to Denver, where he took a couple of days off, eating, resting, and visiting with family and friends, then he continued southwest. Once in the Rockies, he took a more circuitous route, climbing Pikes Peak, and wandering off to try to find

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Mark Thompson, *American Character: The Curious Life of Charles Fletcher Lummis and the Rediscovery of the Southwest* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2007) for general biographical information.



other natural features that interested him. Gradually, he made his way into New Mexico, where he walked through Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and various other pueblos before entering Arizona. California and the deadline to start his job were calling, so Lummis moved more quickly across Arizona and eastern California, arriving in Los Angeles on February 2, 1885. He began work the following day.

Two main sources survive of his walk to California: the letters and articles that he sent to both his former and future newspapers, and the book-length account that he published in 1892, eight years after his walk. His book, *A Tramp Across the Continent*, is significantly different in tone and content from his letters and articles. The letters and articles deal with more mundane logistics of travel, politics of the towns through which he passed, and economic and geographic minutia of his surroundings. The book's main focus is on the heroics of Charles Fletcher Lummis, who never misses a shot and always responds to danger with fortitude and wit. As such, his articles are accepted as the truer of the accounts, and for day-to-day details, they are. But looking past the braggadocio, and accepting that Lummis most likely stretches the truth to near breaking point, his exaggerated version contains larger truths and thoughts about his experience that he would only have been able to see in hindsight.

He began his walk over land that at least looked familiar, crossing Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri before entering what seemed to him to be new territory in Kansas. Along this first stretch, Lummis regularly passed through towns and cities, in many of which he had friends and acquaintances. One would be hard pressed to identify a difference between any random scene in the middle of Ohio, or Missouri, or eastern Massachusetts. As such, Lummis focused in his letters less on the land than on the people – particularly their politics – and about the act of

walking itself. In his later book-length account, he glossed over this part of the trip almost entirely.

One insight that he was able to draw from this otherwise unimpressive (to him) part of the walk concerned the fundamental difference in traveling at three to six miles an hour of a fit walker as compared to speed of a train. Lummis wrote, “But railroads and Pullmans were invented to help us hurry through life and miss most of the pleasure of it – and most of the profit, too, except of that jingling, only half-satisfying sort which can footed up in the ledger.”<sup>103</sup> For much of his walk, he followed the rails. This provided him simultaneously with an efficient means of travel, route finding, and amenities, as well as a clear point of contrast. Lummis recognized that traveling by train, the land and people outside became a blur through which the passenger traveled. Walking, on the other hand, kept the traveler from being a mere tourist, and rooted him in place with every step that he took.

This rootedness led to a heightened experience for the walker. “I was after neither time nor money,” Lummis wrote, “but life – not in the pathetic meaning of the poor health-seeker...but in the truer, broader, sweeter sense, the exhilarant joy of living outside the sorry fences of society, living with a perfect body and wakened mind, a life where brain and brawn and leg and lung all rejoice and grow alert together.”<sup>104</sup> Like Thoreau stated at the beginning of *Walden*, Lummis was seeking to live deliberately. He believed that he became more aware of his surroundings as he walked. This awareness was not just mental, but also physical. He believed that truly being in a place like the Great Plains created an evolutionary change, even improving his eyesight with its vast views. Lummis applied this mental and physical awareness the people

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<sup>103</sup> Charles F. Lummis, *A Tramp Across the Continent* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982) 1.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

and places he encountered while walking, and this led him to feel a connection with his surroundings that united time, space, and circumstance.

Upon entering Colorado, Lummis felt like he was beginning to enter a new environment. He looked forward with great anticipation to arriving at the station house at First View, Colorado, as that was where he understood he would catch his first glimpses of the Rockies. He was disappointed that what he saw looked to be little more than a cloud in the distance, but it was not long after, in late October of 1884, that he arrived in Denver, and could take in the vista to the west that “For three hundred miles, you may trace...from giant Pike on the south to the long and fading line lesser giants that lie to the north of Long’s Peak.”<sup>105</sup> While he had dutifully filed reports to his newspaper up while traversing the eastern states of his walk, this first encounter with the Rockies marked a clear dividing line in his personal experience of the trip. Crossing into such a distinct environment by unbroken foot travel contributed greatly to the epic feeling of the endeavor. When he revisited his walk to write his published account, it is with encounter with the Rockies that he saw his story beginning.<sup>106</sup>

Due to his fascination with the region, once in the Rockies, Lummis began to pay closer attention to all facets of the environs through which he passed. Through his letters, Lummis meditated on those who had traveled west before him. As he was wandering through the mountains near Pike’s Peak, he wrote, “How that heterogeneous mass of humanity, akin only in the one absorbing passion, battled with cold and hunger, with disease and death, with beasts thirsty for blood and desperate men still thirstier for gold – ah, my friends, it is the greatest,

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<sup>105</sup> Charles Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest, September 20 1884 to March 14 1885/ Charles Lummis*, James W. Byrkit, ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 39

<sup>106</sup> Lummis covers the miles from Chilicothe, Ohio to Denver, Colorado in just thirty pages, a clear indication that the landscape of the mountain west left a far greater impression on him than did the Great Plains.

longest, strangest tragedy the world has ever known.”<sup>107</sup> Although Lummis was exaggerating the real dangers of westward travel and playing up popular stereotypes of those earlier journeys, traveling on foot as he is allowed him to share a visceral experience with previous travelers. For both men and animals, he understood their physical feelings, and this provided him with insights into the depths of their motivations. The pull west and the accompanying suffering that was common for previous generations, as it was in 1884 for Lummis, is part of what united this otherwise diverse group. The shared experiences were something that got lost with train travel.

This visceral - in every sense of the word - connection to his surroundings extended to encounters with fauna as well. After describing a (highly unlikely) hand-to-paw fight with a wildcat outside of Pueblo, Colorado, in which Lummis killed the animal by cracking its skull with the butt of his revolver, he went on to bond with the animal in death through an appreciation for its body. “I weighed nearly three times as much as he did, and my arm is not badly developed, but the great knots of his biceps and triceps measured an inch over mine.”<sup>108</sup>. Lummis’s most likely motive in fabricating this encounter was to present himself as more daring and heroic to the reader. But the details of the account are useful to show what Lummis thought were the characteristics of the ideal Western hero.

Dating back to his college days, Lummis had been interested in building his body and sculpting his muscles. This was perhaps more popular at Harvard than anywhere else in the late nineteenth century. This was a way to further the development of his muscles, which he so loved. Lummis seems to have found the shaping of the physical body as a way to relate to, and try to understand this animal. He noted on other occasions the physical prowess of the animals that he

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<sup>107</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 79.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Lummis’s biographers seem to either accept his fabulous accounts at face value, or to chalk them up to his Mayne Reid-inspired Western romance without any further analysis.

wished to kill. Being on foot and having to put effort into stalking what he wished to kill made him appreciate and identify with the animals of the plains and mountains.

The experience of walking united Lummis with even the most inanimate of objects that he encountered. As he wended his way down the Front Range, he came out of the mountains briefly at Pueblo, Colorado. His travel shaped his perspective on the very rocks that made up the landscape. Observing the soil along a creek near town, Lummis described pebbles of quartz he found as “emigrant. It is not native here at all – you will not find a vein of it in all the mountains”<sup>109</sup>. Like him, even something so seemingly stable as the land was emigrant. The west as a place was a mixture of transience and permanence.

While interested in the wildlife and the natural scenery, Lummis was also drawn in by the human industry of the West, his view of which was also colored by his walk. After killing the wildcat, he came upon the town of Bessemer, Colorado. As the name implies, Bessemer was a Rocky Mountain center of the steel industry. Lummis walked around the town and was impressed with the works, which were “mammoth in extent, and look bustling enough with their swarms of grimy workmen, their great blast pipes spitting white smoke, and their vast hills of ore. An infernally sore heel, however, detracted much from my appreciation of this industry. Did you ever hear of feet getting so tough that the toughness made them sore?”<sup>110</sup> He seemed to see the steel works as part of the landscape and described it in the same terms that he does natural topography and fauna. He was not just processing with his brain and eyes, though. His whole

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 93. The injury Lummis is describing is a cracked heel. For many who have not experienced a long walk, or some similar activity, the biggest imagined injury would come from blisters. The hardening of the feet seems like a uniform good. Somewhat surprisingly, feet can get too hard, and when they do, they crack, reaching down through the callus to live part of the foot and causing immense pain.

body effects his interpretation of the scene. He was thinking and feeling - physically and emotionally - with his feet.

Lummis walked through the valleys, taking occasional side trips into the higher mountains through the Sangre de Christo Mountains and San Luis valley of southern Colorado. He then turned straight south to go into New Mexico, heading for Santa Fe. The further south he went, the more Mexican and Indian influences broke up the dominance of American culture. It wasn't long before white Americans showed up predominantly just as tourists with the railroads. Lummis believed that, due to his mode of transportation, he was different from the regular tourists who passed through the American West. Of the other Easterners, Lummis wrote, "Well, there are fools and fools. The venerable proverb says 'there's no fool like an old fool.' Western sufferers would amend this to 'there's no fool like an Eastern tourist' – and they are about right."<sup>111</sup>. He saw his place as being in between the Westerner and Eastern tourist, but on that spectrum, he would place himself closer to the Westerner than the tourist. Tourists, particularly in the southwest, were characterized by their fleeting connection with the land and people of the region. As they passed through, they seldom strayed further from the train than was necessary to obtain an Indian relic as proof of their travels. The Indians themselves came to be seen by tourists as "living ruins," remote in both time and space, to be the subject of gawking from afar<sup>112</sup>. Although Lummis was also just passing through this region, the speed at which he did so placed him in much more intimate contact with its people. As he saw their real lives and lived, however briefly in their homes, Lummis saw the people of the southwest as more than simply sellers of trinkets or extensions of the ancient ruins.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>112</sup> Leah Dilworth, *Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey's Southwest, in Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 143.

The tourist mentality, in his eyes, led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the region as well as an objectification of the people of the west. Lummis found this to be most true with regards to stereotypes of the various peoples of the West. He admitted in his account of his trip that he harbored stereotypes about those in the Southwest of Mexican and Indian descent. His walk freed him of those stereotypes as necessity forced him into close quarters with the locals. Because he was on foot, he was not able to be picky about where he slept and ate, as it might take him a day or two to get to a different town. What he found when he stayed with these people he had previously looked down upon was that they were generous and kind and lived in homes that were kept up better than those of the white Americans he met.

Tourists, traveling rapidly by train from town to town, were deprived of this opportunity to rid themselves of these stereotypes. “All my life, Lummis wrote, “I have been finding clever, warm-hearted, and hospitable people, and not least on this trip – which affords the best chances of learning what men are made of.”<sup>113</sup> This was particularly true for view on Native Americans. Lummis wrote, “Right on the streets of Santa Fe intelligent and refined looking ladies have been seen to stop in front of a half-dressed Indian buck, gape at him, talk about him, and even pinch him to see if he was honest flesh – unmindful of the spectators who looked on in contemptuous wonder.”<sup>114</sup> The superficial relationship of the tourists to the Native Americans as described here show an extreme level of objectification on their part. They treated the “Indian buck” as though he was not really there. Lummis clearly disapproved of this. As a walker, he was more intimately connected with the locals, whatever their backgrounds, than was the typical tourist. In many ways, though, he was also better suited to get an accurate view of the different groups of people in the Southwest than were the locals. Locals, while intimately connected with other groups in

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<sup>113</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 123.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

their region, often carry baggage and their own stereotypes about those groups. Lummis was well suited get an accurate view on the people he met, and what he saw, particularly of the Indians he met as he entered New Mexico. The people he met there and the culture that he witnessed won him over and blended seamlessly into his walk.

While Lummis's mode of travel gave him unique insights, he was not the only person was interested in the remnants of the ancient cultures of the Southwest in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. This area was formative for the burgeoning field of anthropology. The earliest cultural explorations were those of Frank Cushing. Cushing, whom Lummis saw speak while still at Harvard, embedded himself with the Zuni people to study and record their culture. Cushing helped to fuel Lummis's interest in the region and its people. There was widespread interest in him and the image of Zunis that he presented. According to the anthropologist and historian Eliza McFeely, the civilizations of the Southwest became so popular in the late nineteenth century because of modern America's own uncertainty with industrialization. She wrote that the "Zuni served both the anthropologists and their audiences...[by] supplying these inhabitants of an industrial world with a stage against which to play out their fantasies of pre-industrial wholeness and cultural superiority."<sup>115</sup> These civilizations were city-based, but maintained a closeness to nature and a strong sense of community in a way that modern cities, and modern life in general, did not. Lummis tapped into these same notions on his walk.

Throughout his walk, Lummis blended the civilized and the wild, the industrial and natural. These seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum met with each step he took. Lummis walked the majority of the way on railroad tracks. These tracks, an apex of industrialization and

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<sup>115</sup> Eliza McFeely, *The Zuni and the American Imagination* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 12-13.



symbol of modern life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, brought him through some of the wildest, least settled regions in the west. Walking on the tracks, one could be literally on top of the latest technology had to offer, while also being isolated, far from any useful form of civilization or settlement. The act of walking, the slowest, oldest form of transformation, was sped up by the generally smooth, if awkward surface on which he traveled. The presence of the tracks also added a level of standardization to his walking. When Lummis reached Santa Fe, he noted that he had walked 7,219,800 railroad ties to get there. He was attuned to how many ties and miles he was ticking off each day. The communion with his surroundings was important to Lummis, but so was his sense of himself as a modern walking machine.

By using the standard, conventional measurements of the railroad, but doing so in an unconventional way, Lummis blended the human with the industrial, the local with the general. In some ways, he was subject to the local conditional. He was slowed by snow and felt a shortness of breath when at high elevation. He was less affected by terrain and landscape. Whether walking on the plains, in the mountains, or across the desert, Lummis's feet touched the same gravel and railroad ties.<sup>116</sup> No matter how steep the mountains around him, unless he chose otherwise, Lummis was able to ascend and descend the Rockies with a gentle railroad grade. Even as he ventured into unsettled parts of the country, and as he considered himself entering into a wilder, freer, and more primitive way of life, the modern world still guided his feet and his mind.

No matter how one travels, the spaces in Southwest are invariably vast. This is evident whether flying over it an airplane or driving across it today. The traveler is able to look out across a valley and see a long freight train in its entirety in a way that is impossible further east,

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<sup>116</sup> This presents its own challenges, as railroad ties seem to be almost deliberately spaced in a way that makes walking on the tracks difficult.

traveling at what seems like a jogging pace. The distances seem especially vast when traveling by more human modes of transportation. On a bicycle, a clump of trees visible in the distance marking a town might take an hour or two to reach. On foot, a person can walk all day and the scenery seems to barely move.

The vast spaces of the Southwest, particularly the distances between towns and cities, further highlighted both aspects of civilization and nature for Lummis. When he reached Santa Fe, he wrote, “This flat little town of dry mud looked as handsome as the New Jerusalem, when I crawled over the sandhills into view of it. And I may as well make the most of it, too, for it will be a long day before I see anything as civilized as even Santa Fe.”<sup>117</sup> What Lummis, a near graduate of Harvard who traveled widely in the eastern United States, might have written off had he traveled quickly by train by even such a city as Denver in the 1880s, seemed rather grand after walking there. The simplest dwellings and plainest food would seem much better than the ground and nothing. His days of walking primed him to notice and soak up every bit of civilization Santa Fe had to offer.

This was not just true of Santa Fe, but of every bit of comfort Lummis encountered along the way. The contrast between what he experienced walking and what he experienced when on breaks from his walk was stark. He wrote,

*Well anyhow, I am just beginning to appreciate the true gilt-edged and aesthetic beauty of a fire, and the man who doesn't know how to appreciate that blessing has only half lived. To wade through the snow and mud all day, and at night snuggle up beside a roaring fireplace or red-hot stove – that is genuine bliss. Fire means nothing to a man who has never been half frozen, not food to him who has never been half-starved. So the situation is by no means entirely desperate as long as there are two perpetual sources of enjoyment left. I reckon I shall survive and keep cheerful if I manage to find two feet of bare ground between here and Los Angeles.*<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 108.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

Those elemental features of modern life were by the 1880s taken for granted by most Americans. The walk snapped Lummis out of this oblivion and made him conscious of these basics.

The conditions of his walk and his experiences during it left Lummis uniquely open to the different people and cultures he encountered as he ventured west. On a personal level, he found he was, to his pleasant surprise, continuously divested of previously held negative stereotypes. Looking back on his trip while writing his book-length account of it, Lummis saw that previously, he “had very silly and ignorant notions in those days about Mexicans, as most of us are taught by superficial travellers [sic] who do not know one of the kindest races in the world.”<sup>119</sup> The superficiality of the way people traveled then, he believed, was responsible for these stereotypes. The implication for Lummis was that by traveling deeply, one could divest himself of these negative preconceived notions.

The act of walking was for him both a figurative and literal way for him to learn about and engage with the indigenous cultures of the Southwest. His walker’s perspective that highlighted the common features of seemingly disparate aspects of landscape and culture also prepared him to view the culture of the Pueblo Indians in the best possible light. Lummis walk, which blended the industrial with the natural, the civilized with the wild, and the modern with the ancient was reflected in the native cultures of the southwest. To Americans in the late nineteenth century, these too inhabited this overlapping space. The civilizations were simultaneously advanced and ancient, familiar and mysterious, savage and settled.

On a practical level, Lummis believed that walking was the best way to learn about places and people. His walk provided him with a thorough introduction to the region, and he

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<sup>119</sup> Lummis, *A Tramp Across the Continent*, 137.

carried the lessons he learned back with him on subsequent trips. His experience bound him to the land, and also to those he met with shared perspectives. When back in New Mexico in 1888 studying ruins, Lummis's attention was drawn to a sun-tanned man wearing glasses and carrying a heavy pack. This man, who had just hiked a difficult sixty miles to arrive at the camp, was a German scholar and explorer named Adolph Bandelier. Lummis and Bandelier shared an interest in the Pueblo people and culture, but what bound them together until Bandelier's death in 1914 was that both felt they could not learn about the land and its people unless they walked over it.

After Bandelier died, Lummis wrote a tribute to him in the introduction to Bandelier's novel about the Pueblos of the Southwest, *The Delight Makers*. In it, Lummis described what drew him to Bandelier. More space is devoted to Bandelier's abilities to traverse difficult terrain on foot in service of his scholarship than to any other topic. He could even keep up with Lummis, even though, as Lummis freely pointed out, Bandelier was not an athlete or nearly as muscular as he was.. With "his tens of thousands of miles of tramping, exploring, measuring, describing, in the Southwest; his year afoot and alone in Northern Mexico, with no more weapon than a pen-knife, on the trails of raiding Apaches," Lummis believed Bandelier was able to truly get to know his subject and subjects. The resulting work was far superior to that of "'scientific expeditions' ten years later, when the Apache was eliminated, needed armed convoys and pack-trains enough for a punitive expedition, and wrote pretentious books about what every scholar has known for three hundred years."<sup>120</sup> Lummis clearly believed here that the method of travel and the way Bandelier encountered the Indians shaped his view of them and gave a more accurate and intimate picture of their lives and cultures.

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<sup>120</sup> Charles Fletcher Lummis introduction in *The Delight Makers* by Adolph Bandelier (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 13-14. Also Available Online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18310/18310-h/18310-h.htm>

Lummis contrasted the knowledge that one could gain from traveling by foot with that gained through other means of travel. Writing about misconceptions that previous historians, scientists, and anthropologists held about the Southwest and its people, Lummis claimed that their mistakes were “shibboleths of an ignorance which was too lazy to or too lame to walk and see.” The inaccuracies and misunderstanding were rather from “the unconscious humorists who study ethnology from a flying Pullman or an Eastern closet.”<sup>121</sup> When people were physically removed from the land, either by distance or speed, they could not, in Lummis’s view, have any chance of understanding the people who lived there.

What Lummis attributed this fairer treatment of Indians to was the way the missionaries immersed themselves in Indian cultures. “The Catholic missionaries to Spanish America,” he said, “found in this New World not merely a conqueror’s territory. They studied, they traveled, they investigated, they wrote, they translated.”<sup>122</sup> As opposed to the conquistadores of the Spanish colonies, the English along the east coast of what would be North America, and even the French, Lummis believed that the Franciscan missionaries attempted to learn about and understand the lives of the Indians in Spanish-held territories. Despite clashing both culturally and physically, Lummis deemed these missionaries to be successful, as Indian communities were Catholic in his own time.

This success, according to Lummis, came directly from the fact that the missionaries traveled on foot. In doing so, they were left entirely vulnerable, and therefore open, to the Indians. Lummis asked his audience to, “If you will imagine yourselves setting out and walking from here to Kansas City, and then being thrown off into the middle of the Sahara, we will say, with a

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<sup>121</sup> Charles Fletcher Lummis, *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1952) 23-24.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

cannibal tribe thrown in! Where are you going to sleep? What are you going to eat? How are you to ask for what you want ” <sup>123</sup> These conditions forced the missionaries to learn about the Indians and to adapt to their ways. They did not have the protection of the armor and numbers.

These positive views of the missionaries were part of an overall fondness that Lummis had for the Spanish influence in the Southwest. He believed too that the Spanish had a special relationship with this region that the United States, and “Saxons” in general, failed to achieve. In his first history of the region, which he published a few years after his walk in 1893, Lummis wrote that the Spanish were able to conquer the strong, independent civilizations of the Pueblos only with “The most superhuman marches, the most awful privations, the most devoted heroism, the most unsleeping vigilance.” <sup>124</sup> And once it conquered the region and brought it briefly into the wider world, it “went to sleep.”<sup>125</sup> Lummis was willing to gloss over much of the strife and complexity of early Spanish-Pueblo relations because he believed the Spanish purchased some legitimacy through their heroic physical efforts. Further, he believed that once they took over, life essentially reverted back to how it had always been, with a series of strong, independent, mini-Republics in the desert.

Lummis vastly preferred this to the more superficial yet more destructive incursion of American-what he calls the “Saxon”- influence. “The Saxon invasion,” he wrote, “which came with the railroad has reacted almost to syncope.”<sup>126</sup> As with the physical state of syncope, with the railroads and the incidental, fleeting nature of personal contact that came with it, there was, he suggested, a loss of consciousness of self and surroundings at the societal level. On foot, the traveler couldn't help but be aware of every step and every encounter. On a train, the opposite

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 7.

was true. With its trains, tourists, and general fast-pace, the American incursion was, in Lummis' view, fundamentally different than anything that came before it.

Hard physical travel, especially walking, created what Lummis thought was a bond that could bridge even conquest and war. This was especially true for those walking missionaries who became part of the Pueblo communities. Lummis believed himself to be heir to their legacy. For both himself and the early missionaries, this mode of travel gave them, Lummis thought, a more accurate view of the Indians ways of life, and, therefore, more say in the policies that should be made regarding them. Lummis said, "I walked from the East out to New Mexico and do not intend ever to walk back. The walking was not good. If there is a man who will walk it today, I will say he has a right to criticize the old-time Franciscan missionary; but until he does walk, I will not concede that right."<sup>127</sup> Walking, Lummis believed, especially if doing so from very far away, enabled to outsider to truly understand the lives of those he encounters, and so bought him the right to somewhat control the trajectory of those lives.

It was in the realm of Native American education that Lummis began to act on his new insights gained by walking. He had undergone a transformation in his opinion on this topic on his tramp across the continent. When he began, it is safe to assume he had put little original thought into the matter. He first encountered Native Americans at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. Lummis was impressed with what he saw there, witnessing the "intent attention of the children of the forest," in neat, American dress, sitting in new, orderly classrooms that even "Caucasian children [would be pleased to] get their knowledge boxes"

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

filled in.<sup>128</sup> When Lummis saw this, he thought that this manner of education, which was modeled of the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania, was the solution to the “Indian problem”.<sup>129</sup>

He maintained this view even early on in his walk through New Mexico. Of the various educational options of Indians in northern New Mexico, Lummis writes, “Many...are at the Carlisle School in Carlisle, Pa., and more at the 3-year-old training school in Albuquerque. There are also seven social schools, scattered among the Pueblos. The latter are hardly successful, however, for the people do better when entirely removed from the home influence and customs.”<sup>130</sup> While he had rid himself of many of the personal stereotypes he had about Native Americans, he clearly believed that the culture had a negative influence on its people and their ability to function in the modern world.

It was shortly after making this observation that his position begins to change. The Rio Grande was a significant boundary for him. When he crossed it, the focus of his walk seems to have shifted.<sup>131</sup> Still roughly following the railroad tracks, Lummis nevertheless delved deeper into the indigenous culture than he previously had. The pueblos, even if near the tracks, were often difficult to access from them. He found himself spending more time then away from the rails, eating and sleeping with local residents rather than with other transients at station houses.

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<sup>128</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 19-20.

<sup>129</sup> In his later version of his walk across Kansas in *A Tramp Across the Continent*, Lummis only briefly mentions the fact that he visited the Indian school in Lawrence, and he makes no judgments, either positive or negative, about it.

<sup>130</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 132.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas H. Wilson and Cherie Falkenstein-Doyle, “Charles Fletcher Lummis and the Origins of the Southwest Museum” in *Collecting Native America, 1870-1960*, Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail, ed. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1999) He seems to have been aware of the fact that the Rio Grande not just a geographic threshold, but also an emotional one, and called the chapter in which he recounts his visits to the Pueblos, “Across the Rio Grande”. Thomas H. Wilson and Cheri Falkenstein-Doyle also point to this part of his walk that most contribute to “his rapid transformation from a somewhat arrogant Eastern visitor, uncomfortable at the prospect of dealing with the Mexican and Indian residents of the towns through which he traveled, to an ardent admirer and advocate for Western ways of life”.



Where in the Rockies, Lummis made special side trips to see natural features, in the western pueblos, he was more likely to make these same sorts of trips to see the communities.

As he went further into New Mexico, Lummis became immersed in the culture of the Pueblos. He felt particularly drawn to the more isolated Pueblos of Western New Mexico and Arizona, where more of the traditional culture had survived than in the Pueblos of the Rio Grande valley. Using the survival of traditional architecture as evidence, these societies, he would later write, “remain intact only in the remoter pueblos-those along the Rio Grande have been largely Mexicanized into one-storied tameness.”<sup>132</sup> The pueblos that were easily accessible to anyone who could buy a train ticket were already gone culturally. It was in the more isolated communities that he began to see that his walking gave him special access to the communities through which he passed.

The Pueblo people west of the Rio Grande were predisposed towards someone traveling as Lummis was through centuries of holding foot travel in high esteem. Anthropologist Peter Nabokov documented this history of foot travel among the cultures of the Southwest in his book, *Indian Running*. The central event of the book is a commemoration of the 1680 Pueblo revolts with a relay race that goes from pueblo to pueblo, as the messengers had to spread word of the uprising. Nabokov writes, “Before the coming of the white man Indians ran to communicate, fight, and hunt. But...they also ran to enact their myths and to create a bridge between themselves and the forces of the universe.”<sup>133</sup> Traveling over the land by foot was a way for the Indians of this region to stay connected with their environment, with each other, and with their past.

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<sup>132</sup> Lummis, *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Nabokov, *Indian Running* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1987), 9.

Lummis himself demonstrated this in many of the traditional Pueblo stories he recorded. In the story of the *Antelope Boy*, Lummis tells of a baby from the Pueblo of Isleta who ends up being raised by antelopes before returning years later to his mother and community. Antelope boy has learned the fleetness of foot of the antelope, which comes in handy when it is time to race a member of an opposing pueblo. At stake in this race was “all the property and lives of all [the village’s] people”<sup>134</sup>. The other runner used witchcraft to turn himself into a hawk to fly past Antelope Boy. Antelope Boy, however, had the natural elements on his side, which created periodic storms that wet the hawk’s feathers and allow him to win. In doing so, he defeated the neighboring witches and saved the community’s livelihood.

In the story of another race, Lummis recorded a tortoise-and-hare style story. In “The Race of the Tails”, a rabbit challenged a coyote. Once again, the stakes were high. The loser will be killed. The coyote ran for days and days across the ground. The rabbit chose instead to run underground, and dove into its hole. While the coyote labored away, the rabbit used trickery, sending up relatives out of other holes who looked identical and made it appear as though he was defeating the coyote. The coyote ultimately believed he lost, but he ran away before he could be killed.

In his notes to “The Race of the Tails”, Lummis wrote, “A challenge of this sort, with life as the stake, was very common among all Indians; and it was impossible for the challenged to decline.”<sup>135</sup> These stories show the central role of foot travel in the Pueblo traditions. The high-stakes wagers in these mythical accounts stand in for the real life and death issues associated with foot travel. The Native Americans of the Southwest depended upon foot travel for their very

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<sup>134</sup> Lummis, Charles Fletcher, “The Antelope Boy” in *Pueblo Indian Folk Stories*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 17.

<sup>135</sup> Lummis, “The Race of the Tails”, in *Pueblo Folk Stories*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 100.

existence. In the earliest times, they relied on it for persistence hunting. The ability to chase down food was critical to survival.<sup>136</sup> One of the major difficulties, as biologists and anthropologists who currently study this form of hunting, was making sure you were tracking the correct animal. If a herd of antelope scattered and the hunter began following a new one than he had been, then the hunter would tire well before he was able to exhaust an antelope. The story of the rabbits' trickery reflects this difficulty.

As these groups became more settled, they used long distance foot travel to trade, communicate with other groups, and to travel to far-flung fields in the region surrounding a central settlement. Even into the period of European colonization, the Native Americans of New Mexico and Arizona relied on foot travel coordinated events, notably the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, which is still commemorated through long-distance foot races. Given the importance of foot travel for the Pueblo peoples, Lummis's mode of travel would have held special significance for them, and in them, Lummis would have met people who appreciated his ability to travel long distances by foot as much as he did himself.

This first occurred at the Laguna Pueblo, a community that sat on top of a steep, rocky mesa a long day's walk west of Albuquerque. The railroad took passengers right up to the base of the mesa, but to get to the pueblo itself, one had to walk up a difficult climb. Lummis, who was briefly walking with a companion at this point in his trip, "hastened up the sloping hill by one of the strange footpaths which the patient feet of two centuries [had] worn eight inches deep in the solid rock, and entered the plaza."<sup>137</sup> The footsteps of generations had literally created the infrastructure of the community. Lummis is connected with people of Laguna Pueblo, both past and present, through their footsteps, which are enshrined in the rock.

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<sup>136</sup> Scott Carrier, *Running After Antelope* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002).

<sup>137</sup> Lummis, *A Tramp Across the Continent*, 162.

What he found in the plaza made and even greater impression on him than did his trip to it. Going on when he arrived was some sort of ceremony, in which dressed up Indian spectators were gathered watching an elaborate ceremonial dance. Lummis paid close attention to the dancers' movements, as they wheeled and leapt together, "no matter how high jumped, they all came down in unison."<sup>138</sup> As he watched them, so did they take note of him. "My nondescript appearance...was too much for them," he wrote.

*The sombrero, with its snake-skin band; the knife and two six-shooters in my belt; the bulging duck coat and long-fringed snowy leggins [sic]; the skunk-skin dangling from my blanket roll; and last, but not least, the stuffed coyote over my shoulders, looking natural as life, made up a picture I sure they never saw before and probably will never see again. They must have thought me a Pa-puk-ke-wis, the wild man of the plains.*"<sup>139</sup>

In a sort of role-reversal, Lummis was the savage and the Indians civilized. He noticed their order, and they his wildness. The west was civilized; the plains in the east unsettled. But while this was a reversal of roles, his presumed role – that of *Pa-puk-ke-wis*, was one that existed in their culture. What led him to assume that role was his walking, which stripped him of eastern ways and outfitted him in blankets and skins.

Lummis's transformation continued at his next stop in the pueblo of Acoma. He once again noticed the interplay of humans, civilization, and nature, commenting on a " 'street' paved with the eternal rock of the mesa." Nature created the infrastructure of complex civilization here. On that "street" he witnessed children who were "as bright, clean-faced, sharp-eyed, and active as you find in an American schoolyard at recess," playing pleasantly, and "never saw them fighting".<sup>140</sup> His close contact with the locals showed him the positive influence of the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 167.

community on the children. That community, which its streets and plaza literally made out the slick rock of the mesa, was inextricably tied to the land and to that specific place.

He further noted how the people of Acoma had transformed their environment gradually and organically with their feet. Similar to Laguna, he found “a dizzy ‘stone ladder’ where the patient moccasins of untold generations have worn their imprint six inches deep in the rock.”<sup>141</sup> This method of creating a society, by gradually wearing away the native stone with the act of walking, created for Lummis an impression that the pueblo communities were natural, lasting, and belonged where they were. The millions of steps he had taken to reach that point focused his attention on what would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Lummis would make a similar observation a few days later as he was approaching Gallup, New Mexico when he came across a feature that he and others referred to as “Church Rock.” Of this rock he writes, “peculiar twin pinnacles, rising above an intervening ridge. As one walks on down the track from the station, the baffling ridge slowly fades away, and soon one stands in wonder before that strange piece of nature’s architecture – ‘the Navajo Church.’”<sup>142</sup> While many other travelers and locals in the region recognized the similarity between this geologic feature and a European-style cathedral, much of the reverence that Lummis felt for it came not just from its appearance, but from the way it was slowly revealed, rising up from the earth almost as a living thing, as he walked along the railroad. This gradual revelation that would be lost if speeding along on a train, fostered in him an increased sense of awe and majesty. His simple, human mode of travel magnified the scale and awesomeness of the landscape of the Southwest.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>142</sup> Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 226.

While in Acoma, Lummis also witnessed an event that symbolically defined life for the people of the pueblos and that provided a link for him as a fellow foot-traveler. The day he arrived in Acoma, there was a running race between residents of Acoma and residents of Laguna. The “clean faced athletes” set out on a twenty-five mile course, kicking a small stick, about the size of a pencil the entire way. Despite going up and over many surrounding hills and mesas, the winners of race, Lummis recorded, completed the race in 2:31. For Lummis, who frequently tested and then bragged about his own endurance on his walk, was impressed with this time.<sup>143</sup> The mutual understanding of and respect for this sort of feat created an affinity in Lummis for the Pueblo Indians.

The deadline to start his new job in Los Angeles, and his own relentless desire to tick off miles, kept Lummis moving across Arizona before one fast and furious push across eastern California. While his time among the pueblos of New Mexico and Arizona was relatively brief, it was intense. Lummis would return to this region, physically and mentally, for the remainder of his life. Intimate encounters through walking shaped the way that Lummis began to work on behalf of the Indians of California and the Southwest in the decades after his walk. While not always successful, and not always viewed positively by the groups that he wanted to help, he interjected himself on behalf of the Indians of the southwest on a variety of topics. The earliest matter of Indian policy that he began to write about extensively and take action on was that of Indian education. By the end of the 1880s, Lummis had become a vocal opponent of the type of education modeled by the Carlisle school, in which Native American children were removed from their communities in order to be educated in the modern ways of white America.

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<sup>143</sup> As he should have been. Assuming the distance and time were accurate, the runners covered the course at a 6:02 mile pace, all the while kicking a stick.

For a model of successful Indian education, Lummis looked to the missionaries of the early Spanish empire in North America. While he may have had a somewhat idealized view of the Spanish colonies, he was able to find methods of interacting with the indigenous population that were more egalitarian than what he saw going on in nineteenth century America. In a speech he gave in 1900 that was later printed and circulated in pamphlet form, Lummis spoke of early attempts by the Spanish to educate Indians in technical schools and ways to incorporate them into society. While admittedly not perfect, he believed that, “There was present in those days the feeling that the poor devils of human beings that lived here had some rights; and that religion was real.”

Ultimately, what Lummis took away from the Pueblo Indians on his walk was the importance of place and continuity. His problem with the state of Indian education was that it ignored both of these. The Indian children, he said, were uprooted, placed on trains, and whisked thousands of miles away from their homes and families. They were forced to rid themselves of their traditional clothing, their religion, even their hair. In exchange they received a basic education in mechanical skills and simple arithmetic and literacy. Lummis believed that this left them ill-suited for both the modern American world, as well as the communities from which they were taken. “When they are sent back,” he said, “almost without exception, the boys and girls are ruined for life. They have been taught that their parents are ignorant, bigoted, superstitious savages; taught what no Indian boy or girl ever thought of, —impudence.”<sup>144</sup>

Lummis believed that this educational policy simply asked Indians to travel too far – both literally and figuratively - and at an inhuman rate. As a white American, he said, it “ has taken us

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<sup>144</sup> Charles F. Lummis “Lummis on Indian Education” in *The Sacred Heart Review*, No. 19, May 6 1905. Also available online at <http://newspapers.bc.edu/cgi-bin/bostonsh?a=d&d=BOSTONSH19050506-01.2.23>

a thousand years and more to rise from savagery. Our forbears had not fire. They were raw-meat-eating, cave-dwelling savages. We did not change, and could not change, in a day—but that is what we require of the Indians."<sup>145</sup> Just as the trains sped these western Indians east across space, so did the policies of schools like Carlisle speed them across time. In doing so they lost both the sense of place and historical continuity that Lummis's walk had taught him were so important.

These beliefs went beyond just education policy. In 1902 Lummis and the Sequoia League, the organization that he formed to address Indian issues in the southwest, took up the cause of the Warner Ranch Indians. Due to the spread of white settlement in Southern California, this group was being forced off of their lands near a series of hot springs on the ranch. A government agent proposed that they be moved to the nearby Monserrate Ranch, which the government could purchase for \$70,000. Lummis objected to the sale and the move. After a quick wagon trip around the ranch, he determined that the owners greatly exaggerated the amount of water available at the site, and accordingly were asking the government to pay more than double what the property was actually worth. The preference of Lummis and the league would be to find a way for the Warner Ranch Indians to stay in the "ancient home to which they are so pathetically attached."<sup>146</sup> Failing that, he wanted to find land for them that would allow them to make a living through farming and ranching, but also to maintain their traditional ways of life to the greatest extent possible.

Lummis took his case to Theodore Roosevelt. He wrote to Roosevelt telling him that the government would be making "almost an incredible blunder on the recommendation of a good,

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Charles F. Lummis quoted in *American Character*, 225.



but ‘Tenderfoot’ Inspector.”<sup>147</sup> While Lummis had not walked the land, as he was getting old, was very busy and so had limited time, and was traveling with a large group, so he went on a lengthy tour of the region partially by train, but mostly by wagon. He believed he had superior knowledge of the land and people, and therefore of the issue, than did the tenderfoot. In this issue, place really mattered, and Lummis thought and talked about it using the language of walking. Ultimately Lummis had no choice but to support the move of the Warner Ranch Indians to a 3,428 acre site in the Pala Valley that had water for farming as well as available native food and materials for traditional basket making.<sup>148</sup> Lummis was blamed by some for ultimate expulsion of the Warner Ranch Indians from their lands, and while he was involved, he was doing what he thought would be best for them to maintain their way of life. Chief among his concerns were issues of place and continuity.

Transportation and its effects on life remained central to Lummis’s thinking into the twentieth century. He was well positioned to make observations on this topic, as few times and places have witnessed such drastic changes in transportation and how it shaped all aspects of life than did Southern California in the first decades of the twentieth century, and his walk decades before shaped Lummis’s view on his world. In an article that Lummis wrote for McClure’s magazine that he later republished as a book chapter, Lummis chronicles the history of transportation in what would be the United States. In it, he paints a picture of walking as the perfect form of transportation. “Man invented legs a long time ago,” he writes, “and for a long time, they sufficed him. Until he had contracted the progressive disease of civilization, the

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<sup>147</sup> Charles F. Lummis to Theodore Roosevelt, August 5, 1902. Available online at <http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record/ImageViewer.aspx?libID=o38678&imageNo=1>

<sup>148</sup> Thompson, *American Character*, 227. Warner Ranch saga is described here, 218-243.

problems of transit touched him not at all.”<sup>149</sup> He saw walking as perfect as it afforded complete freedom. The walker could go anywhere at any time without being dependent upon anyone else.

The continued developments in transportation, then, amounted to a fall from grace. “For every subsequent invention in land transit – with the sole exception of the horse, which made him a master and left him no less a man,” Lummis suggested, “he has had to pay more than the thing was worth.”<sup>150</sup> Having walked as he did, Lummis saw himself forever rooted in the walkers’ mentality. He also saw himself as being tied to the walkers and vigorous travels who came before him, noting that his own walk paled in comparison with that of people like Cabeza de Vaca, who covered 10,000 miles, and Andres Docampo, a conquistador hopeful who walked, Lummis claims, 20,000 miles over nine years.

What made this kind of travel so special in Lummis’s eyes was the rigor of it, which tied a person to others and to the land with the struggle. What he valued in walking becomes evident in his discussions of what he found lacking in railroad travel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote that “in its pioneer days the railroad was still human.” The freight crews still underwent hardship and privation despite being on a machine that did the moving for them. They went without food and rest to cover vast distances. The railroad was, however, “the death-knell of travel (which was travail enough to be manful), and the journey (which had its day-by-day)” With ease, travel lost its interest and real investment. “From being joy on legs, it has become a stuffy bore, upholstered with modern inconveniences. Romance and curiosity alike are fled from our transit of the land.”<sup>151</sup> The struggle made the journey significant. The challenge of pre-industrial travel infused what the traveler saw with meaning.

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<sup>149</sup> Charles F. Lummis, *Flowers of Our Lost Romance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), 1.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 49.

Apart from Indian policy, Lummis's experience of walking turned him into a booster of both the desert Southwest and southern California. Of the Southwest, he wrote in part to encourage people to go there and experience up close and intimately for themselves. In doing so, they too could shed their old beliefs and stereotypes.<sup>152</sup> In southern California, he employed his romantic view of the Spanish lifestyle to, as historian Richard White wrote, present "southern California as a pastoral Hispanic paradise."<sup>153</sup> In both areas, his intimate connection with the land and people would shape his later work.

While harder to gauge, Lummis's work as a regional booster was probably more successful than his work as an Indian advocate. His influence on Indian policy was, much to his dismay, never as formal and institutional as he would have liked. As he got older, less vigorous, and more financially unstable, his lack of an official position in the government or a university became more evident. His contributions to issues in the country, particularly those concerning Indians in the Southwest, came from his writing, the organizations he took it upon himself to form, and the nagging of his powerful friends. It was largely through his personal relationship with one man, John Collier, that the impact of walker's perspective on Indian policy came into its full force.

Collier was born in 1884, the year that Lummis set out on his walk across the continent. Like Lummis, Collier was a walker. A native of Georgia, he escaped the mental and emotional turmoil of family tragedy as a young man by talking long walks through the Southern Appalachians, where he became intimately connected with people who lived a very different

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<sup>152</sup> Hal K. Rothman *The Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 53.

<sup>153</sup> Richard White "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 425.

kind of life than he, the son of a banker did.<sup>154</sup> He gradually made his way west, and on a vacation with his wife and children, stumbled upon the Pueblo culture of New Mexico. Like Lummis, he was drawn in by it and devoted the rest of his professional life to issues of Indian policy. When he inevitably met up with Lummis, whose reach it was difficult to escape if dealing with Native Americans in the Southwest, he took to him. The pair worked together, lobbying for and writing about Indian rights until Lummis's death in 1928.

Collier went on to remain active in Indian affairs. Through his work with the American Indian Defense Association, a group which he helped to form, and later as the commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, Collier is credited with changing the government's official policy from that of assimilation to one of pluralism. From the Dawes Act, which was passed in 1888, goal of Indian policy was essentially to eradicate the Indian ways of life. Because of the work of Lummis and his protégé and fellow walker, John Collier, this changed. Unique and distinct Indian cultures were to be, at some level, preserved. As they were in the eyes of the 25 year-old Charles Fletcher Lummis, the various peoples of the Southwest were to be viewed as distinct, yet joined to the larger society.

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Nowhere in the United States is the passage of time as visible as the desert Southwest. Evidence of past flash floods and slow erosion show themselves on the bare stone of cliff faces and in the small creeks that suddenly open up into giant canyons. Elsewhere in the country, these

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<sup>154</sup> Lummis's biographer, Mark Thompson, briefly draws a connection between Collier's and Lummis's walking, writing, "Collier dealt with his personal grief in the same ways that Lummis had, by taking long hikes – in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, in Collier's case – and by writing poetry." (303) He does not connect any subsequent views on Indian policy with his earlier walking, but neither does he ascribe those views to anything else or try to determine what about the walking was therapeutic.

signs are hidden among the trees and soil. The difference is striking for the Easterner when he first encounters this landscape.

When Charles Fletcher Lummis walked through this area for the first time, he was taken in not just by the evidence of the geologic history, but of the human history as well. He saw the remains of Spanish missions that had been made from the native stone, and the manmade stones of the adobe structures of the pueblos. He saw the footprints that the people of the region had worn into the slabs of rock covering the ground through millennia of steps. He connected to the people –Both past and present - and the land through his own steps, which allowed him this up-close view.

Lummis also saw the trains that were making their way into the Southwest, and he saw the tourists they carried. He knew that the view of the tourist from the train blurred the land and its people in their vision and reduced the ancient cultures he was coming to love to souvenirs and trinkets. He knew that with more and faster trains, the land and its people would ultimately disappear from sight. The trains and the people they brought- first to visit, then to stay – would ultimately erase the older cultures not just from sight, but from existence. His walk showed him both the richness of this region and the threats to it. When he reached the western edge of the desert, he emerged with a newfound sense of place and respect for the importance of traditional culture that he would work to preserve for the rest of his career and life through his writing, collecting, and advocacy.

## **Walking Machines: Edward Payson Weston and the Industrialization of Walking**

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century saw drastic changes in the way Americans traveled. As Lummis had encountered on his walk west, railroads drastically expanded their track mileage, culminating in the transcontinental boom of the 1870s and 1880s, but other forms of transportation also felt the hand of industrialization. With the development of new alloys to allow for flexible chains, bicycles became lower to the ground, safer, and much more widely used. These allowed for door-to-door personal travel and led Americans to form societies to organize for the improvement of roads and travel infrastructure in general.<sup>155</sup> Inventors began to tinker with devices that would evolve into the automobile, constructing a range of prototypes in bicycle shops, carriage houses, and barns around the country. Innovations in travel reached down to a more personal level as well. New technology in ball-bearings and oil lubrication led to a smoother-riding roller skate on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>156</sup> Seventeen additional patents for improvements on the roller skate followed in the 1870s alone. Those not content with rolling turned to the skies, dreaming up an array of personal flying devices that typically involved various kinds of lighter-than-air models, feathered designs, or some combination thereof.<sup>157</sup>

Slower to come about were new developments to the most fundamental form of transportation: walking. While ubiquitous, the act of walking was and is so basic and

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<sup>155</sup>Pete Davies, *American Road: The Story of an Epic Transcontinental Journey at the Dawn of the Motor Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), 11-14; Wayne Miller *Car Crazy: The Battle for Supremacy Between Ford and Olds and the Dawn of the Automobile Age* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), xv, 55.

<sup>156</sup>W.S. Harmon. 1885. Anti-Friction Bearing for Roller Skates. Patent 320,554, filed January 15, 1855 and issued June 23, 1885. Also available online at [https://www.google.com/patents/US320554?dq=roller+skates&hl=en&sa=X&ei=e\\_i6U8fJNMqtYATnglGoCg&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA](https://www.google.com/patents/US320554?dq=roller+skates&hl=en&sa=X&ei=e_i6U8fJNMqtYATnglGoCg&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA)

<sup>157</sup>R. R. J. Spaulding. 1888. Flying Machine. Patent 398,984, filed September 1, 1888, and issued March 5, 1889. Also available online at <https://www.google.com/patents/US420179?dq=yagn&hl=en&sa=X&ei=rdtNVJDyNOx8AGc04DICA&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAQ>

fundamental that it seemed beyond the realm of technology and invention for most of human history, but this began to change in the post-Civil War years. Inventors filed patents for various improvements to the shoe to lift the heels, keep the foot from sliding forward when walking downhill, and get a tighter tie with the laces. Nicolas Yagn, a Russian-born tinkerer, created a plan for a wearable mechanical device that in its various iterations employed springs, compressed air, and the wearer's own body weight to transfer energy to flexible metal springs, enabling him to walk, run, and jump more efficiently<sup>158</sup> In 1882, long before Nike put air bags in their shoes, George Butterfield of Stoneham, Massachusetts developed a pair with an open pocket within the rubber of the heel that he claimed would benefit people "in walking, so that long distances can be traveled with less fatigue than is usual, [and that] the yielding of any particular part of the sole to irregularities of surface adapting my shoe especially for mountain climbing without fear of slipping."<sup>159</sup> To go farther faster and over a more varied terrain, Americans of the post Civil War years were turning to technology, from rails to foot travel.

It was amidst this technological development that some of the greatest changes came to human locomotion through the sport of pedestrianism, in which competitors tried to out-walk each other on tracks or cross country for distances up to thousands of miles. A spectator sport, either in person or through newspaper accounts, pedestrianism became one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the United States and England in the decades after the Civil War. The most famous of the pedestrians was an American, Edward Payson Weston, whose career began in 1861 and ended in 1913, although he remained a public figure until his death in 1929. Weston

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<sup>158</sup> Nicholas Yagn. 1890. Apparatus for Facilitate Walking, Running, and Jumping. Patent 420,179 filed July 25 1889 and issued January 28, 1890. Also available online at <https://www.google.com/patents/US420179?dq=walking&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi9v4fp m6nJAhUBYSYKHWixDk8Q6AEIHTAA>

<sup>159</sup> George Butterfield. 1897. Sole and Heel for Boots and Shoes. Patent 652,888, filed July 1, 1897, and issued July 3, 1900.

walked thousands of miles across the United States, circumambulated England, and took part regular track races that involved up to six days of nearly constant walking<sup>160</sup>.

The sport of pedestrianism was both an antidote to the rapid industrialization of the late nineteenth century and a product of it. More so than any patented invention of the time, this activity created an avenue for the industrialization, commercialization, and commoditization of one of the most elemental human physical activities. Professional walkers churned out uniform miles around carefully measured tracks with factory-like efficiency. Pedestrian enthusiasts were eager to learn what their favorite walkers ate and wore, so that they too could buy those same foods and clothes and improve their stamina. Competitors advertised their own particular diets and modes of living with their athletic successes. Through these means, just as Yagn created an overtly mechanical walker with the human body wrapped in hoses and steel, pedestrianism blended industry and commerce with the body, although a bit more subtly. In doing so, this sport moved Americans closer to define themselves by their material, consumer goods. But walking also provided an outlet for the pent-up frustrations of the industrial age, and a way to connect to something human and natural. Consumers used factory-made material goods as a way to live a life that felt more authentic and meaningful to them.

Humans have walked since they became humans, but the act took on a new meaning as a result of the industrial revolution. For most of history, people walked because that was the only way to get around. When not walking, except for short bursts of a horse galloping, they were traveling at walking pace<sup>161</sup>. While horses are clearly faster sprinters, over long distances, horses

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<sup>160</sup> Nick Harris, *A Man in a Hurry: The extraordinary Life and Times of Edward Payson Weston* (London: deCoubertin Books, 2012).

<sup>161</sup> In my experience both in casually noting distances people travel by horse in historical works and in foot ultramarathon races that have both foot and horse divisions, over any relatively long



and people will travel at roughly the same pace, and tend to have similar ranges for how many miles they can cover in a day. With the advent of mechanized transportation in the early decades of the nineteenth century, walking began to take on a new meaning. Walking began to seem slow when compared to the thirty or forty miles an hour one might expect to travel on a train. While many Americans walked as a means of practical transportation, new modes of travel began to push walking towards a more recreational role.

It was not just speed of travel that changed views on walking, however. The industrial age increased the geographic range of life for the average person. In settled, agricultural society, most people rarely ventured more than a few hours' walk from home through their entire lives. City dwellers could meet their needs within their neighborhoods. Those in rural areas walked to the nearest marketplace, which was typically in easy reach. After the advent of the industrial revolution, though, people found themselves connected to a much wider world. Even, perhaps especially, those in the countryside, began to travel further afield to a larger marketplace. Kenneth T. Jackson describes this process in the chapter "The Transportation Revolution and the Erosion of the Walking City", in *Crabgrass Frontier*<sup>162</sup>. Jackson shows that new technologies like steam ferries and omnibuses allowed people to commute longer distances within a city, while railroads made it possible to easily connect up what had been disparate urban centers. What had been villages in which a person's entire life was contained, now became suburbs where that person lived while he worked in another town or city miles away. Rapid and inexpensive transportation made this fundamental change possible.

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distance on varied terrain, factoring in more frequent necessary stops for horses, people and horses travel at about the same speed.

<sup>162</sup> Jackson, Kenneth, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 20-44.

In the 1820s and 1830s, it became increasingly common for citizens of the new states in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys to ship their goods downstream to New Orleans. The cheapest way to make this trip was by flatboat. These boats were powered only by the current, with the boatmen steering. As they were unable to travel upstream, the boatmen sold their boats in New Orleans and walked back the thousand or so miles to their towns and farms so as not to cut into profits with steamboat fare. The walks through Louisiana and Mississippi, sometimes within site of the current carrying other boats downstream, would have taken on new meaning. The contrast between walking and steamboats, railroads, or even flatboats would have highlighted its arduous nature. As Americans found themselves traveling long distances in new and faster ways, what had previously seemed normal would become exceptional, as well as slow and difficult in comparison.

New modes of transportation boomed in the antebellum years, but it was during the Civil War that regular long distance travel became a regular part of life for millions of Americans. While Americans moved much more frequently throughout the entire nineteenth century than did their European counterparts, that movement occurred in bursts. A family might move from a tight knit New England community in which the members remained within a short radius of the village to an equally tight-knit Ohio community with the same tight radius. With the exception of the time it took to make the move, people still lived stable, stationary lives. Especially in rural areas, older, animal/ human-based forms of transportation dominate. There was, therefore, little opportunity for people to travel with anything approaching modern ideas on the frequency.<sup>163</sup>

Soldiers in the Civil War experienced something very different. When they left home, it was not to just move to another home but to be truly on the move. Soldiers traveled by any

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<sup>163</sup> Thomas J. Schlereith, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 20-22.

means available, including by horse, boat, or train, but much of it was travel by foot, in what were often long, grueling marches. This marching involved walking that was different from what humans had done for thousands of years. The movements of the soldiers were regimented and ordered. This was in a sense more industrial in kind, in that individuals were subsumed into a mass experience. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane described the lines of soldiers on the move “like two serpents crawling from the cavern of night...[and] crawl[ing] slowly from hill to hill.”<sup>164</sup> The lines of marchers became creature-like. The feet of the soldiers propelled this marching creature as an engine’s wheel help to move an entire train.

While not all soldiers experienced battle, virtually all shared in the painful experience of the march. Of marching, Civil War veteran John William DeForest wrote, “Oh, the horrors of marching on blistered feet! It is an incessant bastinado applied by one's own self, from morning to night... Heat, hunger, thirst, and fatigue are nothing compared with this torment...In the morning the whole regiment starts limping, and by noon the best soldiers become nearly mutinous with suffering... Fevered with fatigue and pain, they are actually not themselves.”<sup>165</sup> This long, harsh forced walking was fundamentally different from the typical human activity. It happened on a scale that seemed to make the walkers something other than themselves. It turned them into walking machines. Walking became “a fight against nature” as DeForest described it.

Benjamin W. Baker of the 25<sup>th</sup> Illinois also came see walking in a different light than he had before due to his extensive wartime marching. Baker enlisted for the Union at the start of the war and was sent immediately to St. Louis. From there, he marched down through Missouri and into Arkansas. Even when railroads were nearby, they were not reliable. Traveling near Sedalia,

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<sup>164</sup> Stephen Crane, *Red Badge of Courage* (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 27-28.

<sup>165</sup> John William DeForest, *A Volunteer's Adventures*. Available online at <http://civilwartalk.com/threads/forced-marches.1475/>

Missouri, Baker wrote, “We came upon the [railroad] cars, but had to walk & push a good part of the way.”<sup>166</sup> Despite difficulties like this, and the challenges of weather and distance, Baker wrote home with a tone of excitement. He claimed that he was having fun marching through the rain, and seemed to be looking forward to entering Arkansas, which would be a new state for him. He had a sense of adventure and novelty that came with traveling for the first time in his life.

The journey through the Ozark Mountains in the winter over primitive roads was almost prohibitively difficult. To complete it, the soldiers had to pare down their belongings to the most basic necessities. Despite the minimal supplies and the conditions – the mud sucked at the soldiers’ shoes until the soles ripped off the uppers – Webb maintained his enthusiasm. Upon reaching Arkansas, he engaged in his first real fighting at the battle of Pea Ridge. Reflecting upon his early experience in the war, Webb was proud of his role in the fighting, but the walking equally affected him. In a letter to his cousin, he wrote, “after the hardship of a winter campaign, covering a thousand miles march, in the midst of winter’s exposures, over the rocks & hills of Mo. and Ark. After having been shut out from society & deprived of its luxuries...it makes a fellow feel well.”<sup>167</sup> Marching would play less of a central role in Webb’s letters as the war went on and it became less of a novelty, but at the start, the act of walking, which was of a different form than it had ever taken for him, brought with it pride, meaning, and a new identity that would not have been there otherwise.

Similar to DeForest, Webb also viewed the landscape and nature as a personal challenge, and as something to contend with on par with the enemy. To aid in this fight against nature,

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<sup>166</sup> Benjamin W. Baker, quoted in Benson Bobrick, *Testament: A Soldier’s Story of the Civil War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 42.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

shoes took on a new importance, of which there was a constant shortage.<sup>168</sup> The role of shoes has become a prominent part of the popular Civil War memory. In the 1989 film, *Glory*, Morgan Freeman defends Denzell Washington, who was whipped for desertion by saying, “Shoes sir. The boy was looking for shoes.” Gettysburg, the best-known battle of the war, famously happened where it did as Lee was in town looking for a supply of shoes for his army that he believed to be there. The quality of shoes took on a new importance during the war, literally becoming a life and death matter. Whereas in the decades leading up the war, people both North and South might have had handmade shoes from a local artisan, with the majority of shoes being made by hand in the home until the 1850s, production during the war brought many more people to factory made, standardized footwear.<sup>169</sup>

Between 1840 and 1860, new machinery was gradually developed that made the factory production of shoes possible. These machines made the separate pieces of the shoes, which were then sewn together, first by hand, and then after 1846, by sewing machine. It wasn’t until the eve of the Civil War, however, that mass production of shoes truly occurred. In 1859, Lyman Reed Blake developed a machine that would stitch the leather shoe uppers to the sole, thereby allowing for a complete mechanization of the shoemaking process.<sup>170</sup> While this technology largely existed before the Civil War, it only found limited use. The shoe factories tended to be small in size, semi-rural in setting, and employed only around thirty-four people each. Most the industrially produced shoes and boots in the United States were made and sold in Massachusetts.

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<sup>168</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 88.

<sup>169</sup> Charles W. Carey, *American Inventors, Entrepreneurs, and Business Visionaries* (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2002), 26.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

It was not until after the war that these technologies became widespread throughout the country.<sup>171</sup>

Overall, the extensive marching of Civil War armies exposed millions of young men to a wide range for factory-made good, and forced them to carefully examine what role those goods played in their lives. In his history of the common soldier, Bell Irvin Wiley listed the items that were issued to Union soldiers, and then described the paring down of that equipment in preparation for a life on foot. “[T]he process of becoming a veteran,” he wrote, “was in large measure one of shedding.”<sup>172</sup> They left behind mess kits, tents, and overcoats. They lightened their loads to the bare necessities and in so doing, truly lived on foot, defined by the things they carried.

The Civil War-influx of factory-made goods was combined with a new boom in advertising. This boom began with the sale of bonds to fund the war – a practice that allowed several individuals to make huge fortunes – and continued after the war. Businesses, governments, and manufacturers that see an increase in business during a war tend to do everything they can to keep that going after the war. The industrially produced food, clothes, and shoes that had gone toward the war effort were now foisted upon the general public. The war-driven consumerism created for many both a belief in the importance of footwear (as well as other gear), and the notion that one could –or needed to – purchase a product to become a better walker. The combination of the new role that walking played in a post-Civil War world, along with the heightened consciousness of the impact of shoes on walking and shoe technology in

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<sup>171</sup> Victor S. Clark, *A History of Manufactures in the United States* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1929), 444-445. For a description of the industry in general in the South after the Civil War, see Harold Wilson’s *Confederate Industry, Manufacturers and Quartermasters in the Civil War*, pages 273-288.

<sup>172</sup> Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 64.

general, created a way for consumerism to work its way into what, after perhaps breathing, was the most fundamental human activity.<sup>173</sup>

Even in the midst of this suffering, though, a new kind of emotion arose from the long, painful walks. DeForest recorded the ups and downs of his long march into Alexandria, Virginia in 1863. The overwhelming sentiment in the moment was of the pain that accompanied the marching. But afterwards, positive feelings crept in. “After two or three days’ repose,” he wrote, “we were excessively proud of our thirty-four miles in a day, and were ready to march with any other brigade in the army for a wager.”<sup>174</sup> In addition to pain and suffering, with this new, large scale walking, came pride and a sense of competition.

This carried over after the war. The author of an editorial in the New York Times who was providing the readers with walking tips for the sport of pedestrianism in 1876 drew on his Civil War experience. He theorized that the best walkers were of medium builds, weighing between 125 and 135 pounds. He based this on his service in the war, during which he marched to the sea with Sherman. The small and medium sized men handled the march well, while “the large men had fallen out by the way. They broke down; could not stand the work as did those of more compact build. I do not know that they suffered any more severely in battle than the others.”<sup>175</sup> Not only does this place wartime walking on par with the actual fighting, but the long miles of marching made the author take close of note of the act of walking. A competitiveness set in during the marching that carried over to after the war and was transferred to the sport of pedestrianism. Millions of Americans, both North and South, would have been exposed to this

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<sup>173</sup> Julian Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1998), 24-26.

<sup>174</sup> DeForest.

<sup>175</sup> “Short Walking Trips”, *New York Times*, July 3, 1876

shift away from natural walking to a more industrial, commercial walking either by taking part in the marching directly, or through the descriptions of friends and family.

The mass experiences of marching during the Civil War likely primed the country for the explosion in popularity of the sport of pedestrianism. The first and longest-lasting popular figure in this sport was Edward Payson Weston. Weston was born in 1839 in Providence, Rhode Island. This was a time and place where he would have been surrounded by the rapid changes in industry and transportation that were sweeping much of the nation. He took his first long walk in 1861, after he lost a bet about the outcome of the election of 1860. Weston supported Stephen A. Douglas, and his friend supported Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's victory meant that Weston had to walk from Boston to Washington in just ten days, hopefully arriving in time for Lincoln's inauguration.

The nature of this walk necessarily brought it into the commercial realm. Weston had never been wealthy, and he found himself owing relatively small debts to various creditors around New England. As such, there was a financial component to everything that he did, especially something that would take ten precious days. As he went on practice walks throughout the winter of 1860-1861, he handed out pamphlets advertising books that his father was involved in printing, as well as for other local businesses. He found that his walk provided an effective means of getting these advertisements into the hands of potential consumers. The interest that people had in a long-distance walker combined with the logistical ease of face-to-face interactions that came with this slow, personal form of travel, made walking potentially lucrative.



Weston set out from the state house in Boston on February 22, 1861. He left town armed with leaflets for his major sponsor, Grover and Baker Sewing Machine Co.<sup>176</sup> He also carried circulars for the Rubber Clothing Co., which “through the kindness of their agent, F.M. Shepard, Esq., also furnished me with an entire rubber suit of the best quality, for which I had occasion to be very thankful on the third day of my journey.”<sup>177</sup> Weston wore the rubber suit, which was meant for rain, only once in inclement weather, and proclaimed in what was essentially a plug for his sponsor in his later account, that he was very satisfied with his importance. The use of the rubber suit suggests how walking was beginning to assume aspects of industrialism and commercialism. While one only needs two feet to walk, purchasing a factory-made rubber suit can make that walk faster and more comfortable. The walker’s body is good for getting the job done, but the body combined with the best products of American industry is better.

Along his walk, Weston received enthusiastic, if mixed reactions, as he walked through the towns and cities of Massachusetts and Connecticut. He was greeted sometimes by cheering throngs and brass bands, and sometimes by creditors trying to have him arrested for unpaid debts. He made good time down the coast, pausing to be resupplied with leaflets along the way. It seemed as though he would reach Washington within the allotted time and make it to the inauguration, but in the final miles, he was delayed by a problem with the horses pulling his support carriage, and he got into the city just four hours beyond the ten-day deadline. Weston

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<sup>176</sup> Weston claimed in his account of his walk that, with the help of his support crew, he handed out 100,000 of these pamphlets, and thousands more from other, minor sponsors.

<sup>177</sup> Edward Payson Weston, *Notes From the Pedestrian: Being a Correct Account of Incidents From a Walk From Boston to Washington D.C.* . (New York: Printed for Edward Payson Weston, 1862). Available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=tfEtAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=edward+payson+weston+an+account+1862&source=bl&ots=t5NHiz4c3n&sig=dYvdWqzMdAtZfxKYE2frCVfpOII&hl=en&sa=X&ei=6MvSU9T6POih8gGWnIG4Ag&ved=0CFEQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=edward%20payson%20weston%20an%20account%201862&f=false> (9)

hoped to make another attempt at the trip after allowing for a short recovery period, but the Civil War intervened, and he never attempted that route in earnest again.<sup>178</sup>

Although he ultimately failed in his walk, Weston learned important lessons from it. He learned first that he was a much better than average walker. He could maintain a fast pace, day in and day out, and he could recover from extreme efforts faster than most. He also learned that, more than anything else he had attempted in life, walking had the potential to be lucrative for him. Long distance walks such as these, and later his walks on the track, provided a unique circumstance in which Weston could have seemingly intimate interactions with large numbers of people. His abilities made people interested in him as well, and not just in his story, but in what he wore and what he ate that allowed him to do what he did. As such, Weston and other long-distance walkers would become for Americans of the Civil War and post-Civil War years both connections to, and antidotes for the complex, modern, industrial world.

By 1867, once more thousands of dollars in debt, Weston took to the roads again. This time he undertook a challenge to walk from Portland, Maine to Chicago, Illinois, a distance of 1,000 miles, in just 30 days. On the line were thousands of dollars, and even more if he managed to complete 100 miles in 24 hours while en route. Weston completed the overall walk in the allotted time, but failed to walk 100 miles in a single day. In 1869, Weston took the challenge of another pedestrian, Dan Rice, to complete 5,000 miles in 100 consecutive days. If he completed this feat, he would win \$20,000. He embarked on this journey, which would take him from

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<sup>178</sup> Harris, *Man in a Hurry*, 24-41 for An in-depth description of his walk can be found both in Weston's autobiography.

Bangor, Maine, throughout the Great Lakes region, Iowa, Missouri, then back to New York.<sup>179</sup>

At 1,100 miles he ran out of money and quit this attempt.<sup>180</sup>

After this failure on the roads, Weston turned his focus to the track, where it would remain for the next decade. Track walking events, usually held indoors, grew in popularity with the development of roller skating rinks. Despite the potential boredom a walker walking thousands of laps around a loop roughly an eighth of a mile long, these offered several advantages over walking long distance on the road. Track events were much more spectator - friendly. This benefitted everyone: the promoters and competitors could make more money through ticket sales, the competitors were never away from crowds who could offer them moral support and encouragement, and the distances and methods could be verified to avoid concerns about cheating, inaccuracy, or corruption. This allowed the sport to grow to one of the most popular spectator activities in the nineteenth century and interjected new aspects into the realm of walking.

For Weston, and by extension for walking, perhaps the most important change came with new standards for authenticity and certainty. In November of 1870, Weston set out to walk four hundred miles in five days at the Empire Rink in New York City. The New York Times claimed he was walking “ ‘For the benefit of science’ and a purse of \$5,000. The track was carefully measured and found by the city surveyor to be 735 feet and 84.1 inches around the inside and exact calculations for distances, including the 24 feet to his rest station, were made.”<sup>181</sup> A long list of professors and medical doctors were also brought in to study Weston as he walked. They measured every bit of food and liquid he ingested during the five days. They also took blood

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<sup>180</sup> Harris, *Man in a Hurry*, 67.

<sup>181</sup> “Weston’s Little Walk – Measuring the Track”, *New York Times*, November 18, 1870.

samples and conducted other tests to try to determine the physiological effect the extreme exercise would have on Weston. Weston came up short of his goal, walking only 274 miles in the allotted time, but he was still widely praised for his contributions to science. Through episodes like this, Weston provided a bridge between the technological, industrial age, and the physical body. His activity and the scientific examination of it treated the human body like a machine in a factory, for which a very specific, alcohol-free fuel would make it run most efficiently.

Throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s, Weston continued racing on the tracks of the cities of the United States and England. He competed in distances anywhere between fifty miles, which he would cover in about half a day, and the six-day event, which was the longest one could compete without running into the Sabbath. His opponents came and went. His major competition came from an Irish-American, Daniel O'Leary. This rivalry was viewed as not just being between two men, but between ideologies, ethnicities, and social codes.

O'Leary, who repeatedly bested Weston on the track, represented the lower, immigrant classes. For those opposed to him, he represented the threats of the new kind of person entering this country. He was less polished, and very much not a part of Weston's temperance tradition, often drinking beer and champagne for sustenance during multiday walking events. On his tour of England, Weston had walked explicitly to promote the cause of temperance. For his supporters, O'Leary demonstrated the upward mobility that was possible for anyone in the United States. Nearly everyone could walk at least a couple of miles with relative ease, and it was (and is) difficult to accurately imagine how much different the 400<sup>th</sup> mile feels from the 4<sup>th</sup> mile. This made walking seem accessible. If a poor immigrant could reach the highest levels of

fame, and slightly lower levels of fortune just by walking, then the same could seem possible for anyone.

Competitors like O’Leary also made it possible for doctors, scientists, and regular spectators to further assess and compare the relative merits of various food, drink, and substances on the human body. Under the headline, “The Natural Man Was Fourth,” there is a description of a race in England in 1893 in which a man who called himself “The Natural Man” and “trie[d] to live up to that designation as near as the rules of civilized society will permit... [He] walked barefoot the whole distance, subsisting on the way on herbs and nuts.”<sup>182</sup> That the focus of the article was on the fourth place finisher highlights the true interest in modes of living, even over the final results. These competitions were more than foot races, but were showcases for foods, philosophies, and products that would create the fittest human. Competitive walking provided a forum for both the participants and spectators to try to connect to a deeper, more primitive past. They did so, however, through fundamentally modern, industrial, and commercial means.

This was part of a larger trend in which the physical, mental, moral, and commercial were all blended in Gilded Age America. As the United States modernized, more people moved away from the physically vigorous sort of labor that had provided them with more than ample opportunity to keep in good shape. Farm work and manual labor declined while machine and desk jobs increased. This had an impact not just on people’s bodies, but also on their minds. Jackson Lears writes of this phenomenon in *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. He writes, “But for most Americans, fitness was not merely a matter of physical strength...Body and soul would be saved together.”<sup>183</sup> More and more Americans were

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<sup>182</sup> “The Natural Man Was Fourth”, *New York Times*, June 6, 1893.

<sup>183</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of A Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 28.

turning to physical fitness endeavors to combat the nervous disease of the modern age. The antidote for a disease of the mind was often thought to be activity of the body. This took the form of exercise, but that was also tied with what people put into their bodies. Various diets, like that promoted by the followers of Sylvester Graham – most notably James Harvey Kellogg – held out the promise of physical, mental, and moral improvement through eating foods and buying products. A related area was that of patent medicines, which Lears says often claimed to be able to cure deep issues like “boredom, lassitude, apathy, and overwhelming depression.” These issues had typically fallen in the scope of religion, but “in patent medicine literature, the root of this soul-sickness was physical, and so was its remedy.”<sup>184</sup>

Weston’s career reached a low point in England in the early and mid-1880s. He had to withdraw from the annual Astley Belt six-day competition, which had become a de facto championship for the sport. Illness on the first day had him well behind an inferior competitor, and it was clear the gap was insurmountable. He conceded on the third day after having walked only 201 miles. He stayed in England and undertook a five thousand mile walk around the country. He was to complete three thousand miles complete on the road from destination to destination, and then the additional 2,000 on skating rinks in various towns and cities en route. While he completed this, some were suspect of the actual mileage, or whether or not he had unfair assistance. Other found it gimmicky even if he had done it all. But what really came to plague him were accusations of inappropriate use of stimulants.<sup>185</sup>

Spectators claimed to have seen Weston chewing on something mysterious as he walked in certain competitions, and then spitting excessively. Weston admitted that he had, on occasion,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>185</sup> Jim Reisler *Walk of Ages: Edward Payson Weston’s Extraordinary 1909 Trek Across America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 140-143.

chewed on coca leaves. This was not universally frowned upon at the time. Prior to knowledge of physiological damage and addiction with various substances, the benefit of a food or substance was largely judged on how it made one feel. Cocaine gave bursts of energy and made the user feel great. This made it, in the view of some, a kind of health food. Still, for Weston, who promoted himself as using no stimulants, but thriving instead on temperate, sedate living, his use of coca leaves gave him a bit of a black eye in the court of public opinion.

By the mid-1880s, public opinion had shifted dramatically to O’Leary’s favor. This happened not just because of how far he walked in comparison to Weston, but in the way he walked. Upon Weston’s return from his five thousand mile trip around England, he engaged O’Leary in a 2,500-mile walking match. This competition was to begin in Newark, New Jersey, and then migrate around cities in New York, where the pair would walk laps in roller rinks for a week at a time in each, while skaters skated around the inside. Because of Weston’s age, his gait, and the mild scandal in England, the papers favored O’Leary at the start. *The New York Times* described O’Leary as looking dapper in his “light-laced shoes, white tights, and a close-buttoned Winter sack coat,” and said he “moved like a piece of machinery at the rate of five miles an hour.”<sup>186</sup> Weston, on the other hand, “trailed behind smiling and trying to catch the crowd by his grotesque, ungainly, clumsy style of movement and pleasant indifference to what his opponent might do at the outset.” While Weston had in earlier years been judged a walking machine because of his industrial-scale output, even when he fell short of his goals, that title now belonged to O’Leary. Efficiency and competitiveness was even more important than they had been even a few years before.

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<sup>186</sup> “Weston and O’Leary Walking.” Beginning a Walk of 2,500 Miles in a Newark Ring”, *New York Times*, December 8, 1885.

O'Leary's title turned out to be short-lived, however.<sup>187</sup> While he leapt out to a fast start, this was to be an almost two-month long competition, and after forty-four days, O'Leary failed to show up to the track. Weston went on to finish the 2,500 miles and collect the \$2,000 purse. Weston attributed O'Leary's failure to what he was putting into his body. "About a week before we finished the contest," he told a reporter, "Dan commenced to take stimulants pretty freely...He was so exhausted that whiskey was the only thing which would keep him up."<sup>188</sup> The human machine needed the right fuel.

Weston attempted to ride this victory right out of competitive pedestrianism, and announced that he would be retiring shortly after he defeated O'Leary. While he planned to no longer compete, he would continue to walk. Weston made arrangements in 1886 to oversee physical tests for the United States Army on Glen Island in Long Island Sound. He was to "superintend" nine weeks of "tests of physical endurance", which included a six-day walking competition in which soldiers would walk with packs for twelve hours a day around a 600 foot track. At the beginning, "Mr. Weston was in high spirits and a gray suit,... [and] was prepared at a moment's notice to reveal to the gaze of the curious a pair of shoes in which he walked 5,000 miles in England."<sup>189</sup> Weston's walking had made him enough of an expert in physical fitness in the eyes of the general public that he was made at least partially responsible for the fitness of American soldiers. Once again, in addition to being interested in his physical feats, the public was interested in the gear that allowed him to achieve those physical feats.

Weston's friend and lender of legitimacy, Professor R. Ogden Doremus, who was a medical doctor and commercial chemist in New York, was on hand to give an introduction, and

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<sup>187</sup> At least by the standards of Weston, who competed at high levels for decades upon decades.

<sup>188</sup> *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, February 7, 1885.

<sup>189</sup> "To Walk Twelve Hours a day.: Beginning the Tests of Physical Endurance at Glen Island." *New York Times*, June 22, 1886.



as usual, Doremus invoked the ancient Greeks to tie Weston into a deep, classical tradition. By his account, Weston might have been the healthiest man in the history of the world. “I have positively been asked to make a chemical analysis of [Weston]” Doremus proclaimed to the audience, “...and he was the healthiest man I have ever examined. I would advise all, if they desire good health, to sweat daily as a result of physical exercise...I look upon this camp as the initiative step toward splendid results in our country.”<sup>190</sup> The reporter covering this speech for the *New York Times* claimed that during the introduction, Weston got up and began walking back and forth off to the side, “either to show that he still retained the art of pedestrianism or to reveal his brand-new trousers.” The implicit message in Weston’s actions and Doremus’s words at Glen Island was that that if more persons did what Edward Payson Weston did and wore what he wore, it would lead to a stronger citizenry and a stronger America.

By the 1890s, Weston's proclivity for movement and constant need for money drove him back to walking. Track races had begun to wane in popularity with the rise of baseball and moral objections from Christian voices that felt the sport of pedestrianism, in addition to being wasteful and boring, led to pride, inappropriate ambition, and gambling. Weston made his return, therefore, on the roads. He continued with his desire to walk to bring attention to a larger cause. This time it was to promote a healthy, affordable, workingman’s diet. In December of 1893, in the midst of the worst depression the nation had yet seen, Weston walked the 150 miles from New York to Albany in 60 hours. He made sure to let those keeping track of him know that he was doing this with no alcohol or other stimulants, and also with no meat, subsisting instead on a “farinaceous” diet of different grain products.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> “To Walk Twelve Hours a day.: Beginning the Tests of Physical Endurance at Glen Island.” *New York Times*, June 22, 1886.

<sup>191</sup> Reisler, *Walk of Ages*, 145-146.

Not just any grains would do, however. Weston walked the entire way eating nothing but H-O brand oatmeal and crackers. He was quoted in an advertisement underneath his name spelled out in large letters saying that he “personally selected H-O Oatmeal [and crackers] because of its nutritious and digestible qualities.” Around the edges of the advertisement were further selling points about how H-O oatmeal and crackers were cheaper than other muscle builders like meat and bread, “H-O creates and sustains energy as no other food does,” and H-O was the “richest food in the world in force producing element.”<sup>192</sup> While Weston and other walkers had often implicitly used their feats to promote a certain type of clothing or nutrition regimen, Weston took a further step by promoting a specific brand. To walk like Weston, it is not enough to cut back on meat and stimulants and add more grain, but one must buy H-O grains in particular.

Weston completed some shorter walks around the Northeast, and then in November of 1907, he set out to reset his own record walking from Portland, Maine to Chicago. He planned to complete the twelve-hundred mile walk in no more than 26 days. He had set his previous record forty years earlier, at the age of 29. Now 69 years old, Weston’s major motivation behind this endeavor was to show that people considered old by society were still useful and capable of great things.

The walk began from city hall in Portland. A large crowd came to send him off, and similar throngs would appear along the route, particularly in cities. Many of the middle-aged people who lined the roads along his trip had seen him walk through on his first trip as children. For his part, Weston was pleased to encounter these crowds along the roads after decades of ticking off endless loops on tracks around the United States and England. “I was again made to

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<sup>192</sup> December 22, 1893, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Also available online at <http://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/50365456/?terms=Edward+Payson+Weston+H-O+Crackers>

realize,” he telegraphed to the *New York Times* in the midst of his walk, “what a glorious country we live in – one that furnished good and noble people.”<sup>193</sup> Even though he was walking rapidly for the purpose of ticking off as many miles as possible as quickly as he could, Weston experienced some of the same feelings of connection with the people and surroundings he encountered as had other walkers who traveled for less competitive reasons.

Despite the positive feelings and warm receptions, Weston was struggling to keep up with his schedule. To his dismay, he found the roads to be in no better condition than they had been in 1867. The weather was equally atrocious. He often found himself walking into blowing snow, in ankle-deep mud, trying to slog his way to the next town. Conditions were particularly difficult at night. Describing an attempt at a 90-mile push, he wrote, “I had not gone three miles from the city line of Syracuse before I encountered muddy roads, which are hard enough to get over in the day time, but even more so at night.”<sup>194</sup> Weston attempted to light his way with a hand-held lantern, but this did little to speed up his progress as he still had to squint through the dim light to find safe footing.

His other major problem came from the crowds in the cities. Beginning in western New York and continuing through Ohio, the crowds became so great that it was difficult for him to make his way through. Weston once twisted an ankle when a young spectator ran to greet him, got under foot, and caused him to trip. In Cleveland, the crowds became so enthusiastic that the police could not control them and Weston feared for his safety. Between the roads, the weather, the long, dark nights, and the crowds, Weston had concerns about failing to break his record.

The solution to several of Weston’s walking problems came in a surprising form: the automobile. Later in life, Weston would become decidedly anti-automobile, but here it proved

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<sup>193</sup> *New York Times*, November 15, 1907.

<sup>194</sup> “Weston’s 90 Miles in 27-Hour Tramp”, *New York Times*, November 12, 1907.

his savior. Walking in western New York, he wrote, “The lights from the automobiles that followed me ... illuminated the road so that it was almost as easy as walking in daylight. Ordinarily I cannot make as good time at night as I do in the day on account of not being able to see the road well enough and therefore have to pick my way.”<sup>195</sup> This strategy became formalized in Ohio when some of his friends met him with an automobile for the purpose of following him at night to light his way. “With the machine behind me and the light thrown ahead,” he telegraphed to the *New York Times*, “I have no trouble in seeing the road. Their lights showed me the good spots in the mud to here.”<sup>196</sup> With the help of the trailing automobiles, Weston was able to largely erase the distinction between night and day.

The presence of the automobile further helped him to eat on the walk, rather than pausing to dine, and allowed him to have provisions he could not have otherwise. Weston claimed that he missed warm drinks while on one of his long walks. The automobile made it possible to get these by hanging pails of coffee or tea by wire between the exhaust pipes of his support car. The heat from the pipes heated the liquid, making it possible to have a hot drink while he walked and the car drove along side of him.<sup>197</sup> While not, perhaps, a deciding factor in whether or not he finished, this was significant as it buoyed Weston’s spirits and allowed him the necessary nutrition without stopping at all. The automobiles were also not widespread enough for Weston to see them as a threat.

Finally, the automobile helped with crowd control. As, according to Weston, the crowds gathered in the cities, he was able to keep them at bay by tying ropes, about twenty feet long to either fender, while police officers held the front. Weston then walked behind the police officers

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<sup>195</sup> “Weston is Strong after a Hard Day”. *New York Times*, November 12, 1907.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> “Weston in Chicago, Ends his Walk Today”, *New York Times*, November 27, 1907.

and in front of the car. The ropes created at least a visual barrier through which the crowds did not cross. The use of the automobile created a buffer between Weston and the overly enthusiastic spectators.<sup>198</sup>

In each case Weston was aided by the automobile. The problems the car solved were some of the greater ones that he encountered on his trip. The use of the light from the cars not only allowed Weston to see at night as though it were day, but it also let him schedule his walking without regards to night or day, but just according to how he felt. The automobile as crowd control saved him a little time here and there, but was more important to protect him from the injury that had earlier result from accidents with spectators. In every instance, Weston was aided by technology. The automobile could, at this point early in the new century, fit in with his walking. It also, however, pushed his walking further into the realm of the industrial, erasing the distinction between night and day, allowing him to never stop. While a large part of what allowed Weston to break his record as an old man was that he had kept himself fit, technology in the form of the automobile also played a role. Any slowing down that came with age was offset by the employment of modern technology. In a way, the car was as instrumental as his own legs to his successful completion of the walk, which blended his body with the technology.

This blend of body and technology is further evident in the constant descriptions of Weston's gait. For his entire career, observers noted the way he walked in great detail. They critiqued his wobbly hips, debated the merits of his heel strike versus a hypothetical forefoot strike, and measured his stride length. The results of the observations were alternately used to praise him or denigrate him, based on his latest result. Even with the variation in opinions, the scrutiny was consistent, and it fits in with a larger pattern in the late nineteenth century of

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<sup>198</sup> "Weston Makes 43 Miles Though Ill", *New York Times*, November 22, 1907.

viewing the human body as an industrial machine. The photographer Eadwaerd Muybridge helped to spread this notion with his stop motion photographic series, which often featured a human striding. The attention to human body as a machine was brought to its fullest expression in the early twentieth century with Frederick Winslow Taylor's principles of scientific management. He used close, photographic observations to make the workplace more efficient. These men saw the body as a complex machine. In *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, Tim Armstrong writes, "The nineteenth century reconceptualized the body as a motor rather than simply a machine...[and the] studies of motion and performance by Muybridge, Marey, Taylor, and others were carried out within this paradigm, equalizing the energies of the body in relation to industrial apparatus."<sup>199</sup> Weston's walking placed him firmly within this trend.<sup>200</sup>

Weston continued to use automobiles as integral parts of his subsequent walking. In 1909, now age seventy-one, he undertook two separate attempts at a trans-continental walk. "Lost," read an article telegraphed by Weston to the New York Times, "One automobile, one chauffeur, and one trained nurse; incidentally several suits of underclothes, three pairs of boots, dozens of pairs of socks."<sup>201</sup> Particularly in the vast spaces of the western United States, spaces that Weston had never before attempted to traverse on foot, the automobile was essential for his success and survival. It would not have been possible to walk across these sparsely settled regions unencumbered by baggage without the help of an automobile.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78.

<sup>200</sup> Robert Kanigel, *One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency* (New York: Viking, 1997), 215-220 for a description of the formation of Taylor's ideas of efficiency as applied to humans.

<sup>201</sup> "Weston's Auto Lost, Needs His Supplies", *New York Times*, April 3, 1909.

<sup>202</sup> Wayne Curtis, *The Last Great Walk: The True Story of a 1909 Walk from New York to San Francisco and Why it matters* (New York: Rodale Press, 2014) In his book-length account of this walk, Curtis suggests that this trip across the country was a last hurrah for an age of walking as it

The automobile helped Weston in a different way on his 1,500 mile 1913 walk from New York City to Minneapolis, MN. His sponsor on this was the Hudson Motor Car Company. Along the way, the company sold ten-cent souvenir programs that advertised the Hudson cars as being able to travel “300 miles a day and no fatigue.”<sup>203</sup> In the back and forth between walker and car, the car is imbued with the trustworthiness of the figure of Weston, who kept moving steadily for decades. Weston, on the other hand, was given the machine-like characteristics of the automobile, by association. There is too a connection made between the purchase of a Hudson motorcar and the ability to travel great distances as Weston did. Once again the walker was melded with the industrial product.<sup>204</sup>

For all that Weston came to rely on automobiles in his later walking, he grew wary of them as his feats of walking slowed. His later life, from his last real walking in 1913 to his death in 1929, was full of instability and scandal. He kept questionable relationships with vastly younger women; his health began to falter; typically he found himself struggling just to pay his basic bills. Towards the end, his mind began to go. When it did, his legs took over and he was frequently found wandering throughout New York City, miles from home. On one of these walks in the spring of 1927, he was struck by a car. This accident further precipitated his decline in health and he died in May of 1929 at the age of ninety.<sup>205</sup>

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was being replaced by the automobile. I believe that this is much closer to the beginning of a time of this sort of walking than it is to an end. The presence of alternative forms of transportation created this kind of walk. Curtis’s descriptions of the road previously being full of walkers does not take into account the kind of walking they were doing(which was not typically long distance, but local). Transportation like the automobile distinguished walking from other forms of transportation and turned it into a conscious, sometimes competitive, sometimes recreational activity.

<sup>203</sup> Matthew Algeo, *Pedestrianism: When Watching People Walk was America’s Favorite Spectator Sport* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 237.

<sup>204</sup> Reisler, *Walk of Ages*, 171-174 for more details about the 1913 walk.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

Throughout the entire span of his public life, however, from his first walk to Lincoln's inauguration in 1861 to his death in 1929, Weston's walking had a broad appeal and impact on the American populace. Weston's success on the track set him up as an example that others aspired to in their everyday lives. While very few could walk over 100 miles in under 24 hours, everyone could incorporate more walking into their days. The modern industrial city, with its conveyances, made walking less necessary in moving around, yet, according to some, more necessary than ever for personal well being, as "there is no more healthful exercise than walking, and there is none which is more neglected in our great cities. The example of WESTON induce our young men to use their legs rather than the street cars, to the great benefit of their health, and the much-needed relief of the public conveyances..."<sup>206</sup> The walking that Weston inspired was beneficial not just for the health of individuals but also for the functioning of cities. If walking became an ideal of modern society, the infrastructure of the cities could change to reflect it. His influence, in a sense, dug in to the slippery slope of progress, in which everything moved faster, and allowed for a more organic kind of growth to a small degree.

Not everyone was impressed with the example of Weston and the other pedestrians. Articles mocking the sport also appeared in the papers. Some people questioned "what particular gratification [fans] derive from the spectacle of a usually unattractive-looking person in tights, doing only to excess what each of them is in the habit of doing in moderation every day of his life."<sup>207</sup> It would make as much sense to pay to watch someone sleep.

Others found pedestrianism to be more actively inane and devious than simply boring. These observers mocked the gimmicks that pedestrians came up with to draw a crowd, imagining

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<sup>206</sup> "Pedestrianism" *New York Times*, May 13, 1874.

<sup>207</sup> "Walking as a Vocation", *New York Times*, September 24, 1870.



a competitor trying to drum up attention by walking 5,000 half miles in 5,000 half hours.<sup>208</sup>

Further discussion in this article suggested what might be the real motivation behind these feats. It imagines an advertisement for “John Chain Level, City Surveyor. Unusual facilities for measuring and laying out pedestrian tracks. No extra charge for certificate.” This takes the ideas of standardization, certainty, and fairness that pedestrianism tried to project, and turns them around. The reversal of the façade of standards only deepens the deception. “There are more notices;,” the article goes on, jokingly. “ ‘McSwingem, champion pedestrian shoemaker. The following famous pedestrians have been shod by me for great walking contests.’ Here follows a long list of names that are entered in the records of fame.” This aspect of the deception is tied to the consumerist side of the sport. There is a suggestion of awareness here that pedestrianism was used for consumer purposes, with manufacturers of goods advertising that their product would lead to exceptional physical performances.

Despite some mocking cynicism, others found real and lasting inspiration from pedestrianism. Long, cross country walking trips planted seeds for new ideas on travel. One article, inspired by the sport, touted the benefits of spending a vacation on a pedestrian tour, as “There is an infinity of things, amusing or instructive, to be seen by the loungeer afoot which must perforce escape the eyes that seek them through the flying windows of a railway-car, it is a most delightful way of sight-seeing.”<sup>209</sup> Long, fast pedestrian trips, which had in part been inspired by far-reaching train travel, also came to be seen as a beneficial alternative to it. Even

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<sup>208</sup> “Pedestrianism Gone Mad: Men and Women Walking Away for Glory and Cash Date”, *New York Times*, February 14, 1879. One pedestrian completed a walk even more gimmicky and more painful, walking 4,000 quarter miles in 4,000 consecutive ten-minute blocks of time. That comes out to 1,000 miles in just under 28 days with no more than twelve consecutive minutes of rest at any time.

<sup>209</sup> “Pedestrianism” *New York Times*, May 13, 1874

though the goal of the pedestrians was not primarily to see the countryside more intimately, that was a positive effect that some took away from it.

The same article goes on to suggest how a walking trip might shape our view of the landscape and steer people in the direction of one kind of terrain over another. “Naturally, too, it is in the mountains that the benefit of such impression is to be most fully derived. The steadfastness and majesty of the ‘everlasting hills’ are a perpetual rebuke to human littleness. Walking on the level, moreover, is apt to be a trifle monotonous and tame.”<sup>210</sup> According to this, there is an inherent good to walking through mountains, as it inspires feelings of humility in the walker due to his comparative size. There is also, however, a relative good, as walking across flat surfaces is physically boring. A walker, it suggests, is likely to find the plains far more monotonous than a train travel.

Among those who actually took up the challenge of taking pedestrian tours, there are many areas of overlap with the competitors in the sport of pedestrianism. A banker suffering from what would fall in the category of “nervous disease”, a widely used diagnoses to encompass a general dis-ease with the modern conditions of post Civil War America, wrote a newspaper account about trying to cure himself. He first moved west to Portland, OR, continuing to work in a bank. The change in latitude and climate did not alleviate his condition, though, so he prescribed himself a lengthy walk. He and a physician friend undertook a one thousand mile walk down the coast to San Francisco. Along the way he stopped to do manual labor at a farm. This kind of physical labor (in combination with the physical work of walking), was viewed as an antidote for mental disease. For food, he ate nothing but fruit and Graham crackers.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

By the time he reached San Francisco, he had put on fifteen pounds (a good thing), was sleeping well, and considered himself cured. Just as with the pedestrian competitors, this walker paid attention to the specific kind of cracker he consumed along the way. All of this was supposed to lead to a specific outcome. There is a sense of this trip being a proscribed formula, almost a package deal. Pedestrianism, in and of itself, was a product for consumption<sup>211</sup>.

In 1895, a mother-daughter duo, Helga and Clara Estby, set out to walk from Washington state to New York City in what was essentially a three thousand-mile long advertisement. The pair had many motivations behind their walk, chief among which was financial need. In order to save their farm, they accepted the challenge of a company that manufactured bloomers to walk across the country in exchange for a sum of money that would pay the mortgage. As Linda Lawrence Hunt writes in her account of this walk, “The sponsors could benefit from the attention that Helga and Clara’s audacious venture would surely generate, ...but [they] also wanted this cross-continent achievement to prove the endurance of women.”<sup>212</sup> In this case as in others, walking blended the deep, meaningful biological or emotional issues with the purposes of selling products.

While it was itself an act of consumption, walkers and observers, both past and present, have hoped it is a more beneficial one than other activities of the time. Tom Lutz, author of *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America*, places late nineteenth-century American walkers in a longer tradition of “saunterers”. These saunterers, because of their slow modes of travel, are not just physically fitter, but mentally and emotionally fitter as well. The walker was able to move slowly through his world and carefully process what

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<sup>211</sup> “Experience of a Pedestrian in the Pacific States”, *New York Times*, November 2, 1872.

<sup>212</sup> Linda Lawrence Hunt, *Bold Spirit: Helga Estby’s Forgotten Walk Across Victorian America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 85-86.

he saw, not just buying an object in a shop window, but thinking about “what kind of factory made it, what kind of raw materials went into it, where they came from.”<sup>213</sup> He became an excellent consumer. This is part of what made walking so popular in the late nineteenth century. Walking was restful, but also beneficial. Walking was productive leisure. The fast-paced modern life around the turn of the turn of the twentieth century both demanded industriousness, but also created a yearning for rest and recreation. pedestrianism alternately struck that balance or embodied that contradiction.

The intersection of pedestrianism, nature, health, and consumerism had a lasting presence, and this was fueled by the long and popular career of Edward Payson Weston. Because of his success in a variety of walk-related forums, and his longevity, people turned to Weston as a example for all things walking well past his prime. A writer for the *Fayetteville Daily Democrat* in 1922 urged his readers to follow Weston’s example and take to the woods and go hiking. He included encouraging words about the ability of anyone to push through initial pain and discomfort to find a walking flow, which would lead them to life-long health and wellness. “Any young man or woman who cares to undertake such a novel pastime,” the reporter wrote, “may find with surprise that feet are just as good for walking as they are for pressing automobile pedals or sliding over a ball-room floor.”<sup>214</sup> Anyone could look to Weston and use that influence to let his two feet carry him out into nature. The article goes on, though, to suggest what should be covering those two feet.

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<sup>213</sup> Lutz, Tom, *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America* (New York: Strauss, Farrar, and Giroux, 2007), 153.

<sup>214</sup> “Walking Becoming Popular” *Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, October 12, 1922. Also Available online at <http://access.newspaperarchive.com/fayetteville-daily-democrat/1922-10-12/page-2?tag=Edward+Weston+pedestrianism&rtserp=tags/pedestrianism?ndt=bd&py=1851&pey=1930&pf=edward&pl=weston&psb=relavance>

*There is one final thing about the walking habit that any prospective candidate should consider before committing himself and especially herself. It is likely, if generally adopted, to create a demand for shoes that conform to the shape and size of the human foot instead of conforming to conventional beauty standards. Anyone who cannot accept the strange doctrine of pedestrians that shoes be made for feet instead of feet for shoes, should never take the first step.*"<sup>215</sup>

While the writer suggests that anyone can walk, and walk great distances, the deciding factor in that walker's comfort and success is his footwear. While the doctrine of the pedestrians was that the shoe be a more natural one, there still remained a doctrine of the pedestrians about shoes. Shoes became the keys to nature. Walking was a way to get out of town and connect to nature, but to do so properly, one must purchase the right kind of shoe. Just as shoes were becoming specialized for the activity, so was the type of walking being specialized and compartmentalized.

Beginning with the new developments in transportation, going through the Civil War and the pedestrian movement, and then ending up with hiking in the early twentieth century, the basic act of walking took on new meaning. What had been a conscious act, akin to breathing, became something that was a choice, a sport, and ultimately a way to consciously connect to the nature and deeper humanity. In trying to deliberately recapture something that was once natural and easy, the efforts fell short, as is often the case. Attempts to reconnect with the human and natural through walking were tainted by the industrial changes that inspired them. Pedestrianism was a new form of the most ancient human activity. In it is a bundle of contradiction and inconsistency, but by embodying these, it is simply reflecting those of the changing world around it.

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

The walking of the pedestrians, particularly that of Edward Payson Weston, showed both the impact of walking on the modern world and of the modern world on walking. This act, which had been something that just happened in the course of a person's day, was on the retreat. It was increasingly easier to hop on the streetcar than stroll down the street. Walking – especially for long distances – became something out of the ordinary. It was no longer just about putting one foot in front of another, but was a form of entertainment, a way to escape the city, and a means to improve ravaged health. It went from being an activity so normal that it was not often noted, to being the subject of great intrigue and excitement.

In the person of Weston, these trends converged and mixed in with the commercial. He provided a way for thousands of people to vicariously escape the modern, industrial world by witnessing his extraordinary ability at this ordinary human act. At the same time, however, he reinforced what people were trying to escape by bringing the industrial into the body itself. He ticked off carefully measured miles with scientific precision, consumed expert-approved foods, and had his way lit by the headlights of cars. He taught the public that the body was a machine that, if filled with the right fuel and covered in the proper garb, could function properly almost indefinitely. He, and other pedestrians, taught the public too, that the key to unlock this power and function, was the money to buy that food and garb. Pedestrianism helped to bring walking into the public consciousness, but in so doing, it helped to fundamentally alter what had been a basic human act. People like Weston, the pedestrians, and the crowds who watched them, were driven to the sport of long-distance walking because they felt lost in the modern industrial world. Modern transportation, and industry and technology in general, were taking away individual agency. Walking provided them with a way to connect to deeper, more human past. It also, however, served to reinforce and perpetuate the very world from which they were fleeing.

### **The Poet Errant: Vachel Lindsay, Walking, and Antimodernism**

On a Sunday morning in March, 1906, Vachel Lindsay happily handed over his last five cents to buy a sack of peanuts. Along with the peanuts, he carried a few letters of introduction, a clean shirt, and a spare collar (for use in emergencies).<sup>216</sup> Everything else, his words would provide. Rather than carry food to eat or money to purchase lodging, the fledgling poet and wanderer would find a farm at the end of his day's walk, knock on the door, and tell whoever answered, "I am the peddler of dreams. I am the sole active member of the ancient brotherhood of the troubadours. It is against the rules of our order to receive money. We have the habit of asking a night's lodging in exchange for repeating verses and fairy tales."<sup>217</sup> Hopefully the sharecropper would have more food than fairy tales, and so would make the trade. He quickly forgot his speech when he entered the yard of the house and was accosted by squawking turkeys and barking dogs. Lindsay recovered and approached the house. Regaining his composure and once again viewing the world through a romantic lens, he managed to successfully make his case to "the proud old lady crowned with a lace cap and enthroned in the porch rocker."<sup>218</sup>

By choosing to present himself as a medieval troubadour, and in filtering everything and everyone he saw through the same Romantic lens, Vachel Lindsay was participating in, and contributing to a strong strain of antimodernism that manifested itself in many forms in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. In response to the rapid rate of change that came with late nineteenth century industrialization, many Americans, knowingly or not, cast their minds and the actions towards what seemed like earlier, simpler, nobler times. For some this took the form of attempting to return to simplicity through artisanal work and recreation. For

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<sup>216</sup> Vachel Lindsay to Susan Wilcox, February 28, 1906, *The Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, Ed. Marc Chenetier (New York: B. Franklin, 1979), 19.

<sup>217</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *A Handy Guide for Beggars* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1916), 5

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

others, it came out in channeling chivalric power through militarism and rampant, modern expansion and colonialism. In Lindsay's troubadour-style walking journeys he believed he merged both of these strains. Walking both allowed him to return to simplicity and connect with the world in a more authentic way as well as tap into the perceived power of a courtly culture. By taking that beauty, simplicity, and power that he found on his walks back to the village setting, Lindsay believed this activity offered an alternate, more human and humane way for the country grow as it rapidly developed.

The antimodernist impulse in turn of the twentieth century United States has been most thoroughly described by historian T.J. Jackson Lears in his work, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Lears places the roots of this multifaceted mentality in the general discomfort Americans felt with the rapid rate of industrialization. New, mechanized ways of working alienated workers from their labor and took away the physical activity that had previously been a regular part of life. A world connected by telegraph and telephone wires in which information traveled thousands of miles instantaneously, landing on office desks and kitchen tables in the form of morning and evening editions of newspapers, distracted and confused American brains. Populations flocked to cities from the countryside, replacing traditional ways with rampant consumerism. In place of the clarity and satisfaction that came from a world that was close and made by hand came dislocation and isolation. Weakened in body and spirit, the American of this time period suffered from new mental disorders, grouped under the name "neurasthenia", which, it was believed, led to a wide range of symptoms like depression, fatigue, and listlessness. To combat these changes, many



people turned the past, to what seemed to them to be a simpler, more connected, more easily graspable time.<sup>219</sup>

The problems that Lears writes about were varied and spanned a relatively long time period. The ways that people tried to cope with these problems would necessarily be varied and expansive as well. They were also often contradictory. One response that he suggests was through what became known as the Arts and Crafts movement. If the modern workplace suffered from over-civilization and disconnection, then the antidote would be not more leisure and less work, but the right kind of work. Modern workers turned back to the ideal of the medieval craftsman, whose work was “necessary and demanding; it was rooted in a genuine community; it was a model of hardness and wholeness.”<sup>220</sup> Writers and thinkers like Great Britain’s John Ruskin (whose ideas Lindsay accepted wholesale) and America’s Charles Eliot Norton promoted an idealization of manual labor and simple living. Whether by changing jobs or picking up new hobbies, modern “brain workers” could counteract the detrimental effects of their anxious inactivity by getting their hands dirty on some kind of project. The ideal was that these new aesthetics would shape public life more widely and create fundamentally new (or old) ways a structuring society. Lears suggests that rather than make these changes, the Arts and Crafts movement served instead to vilify industrial labor, create a safety valve for the managers who had workshops in their garages and basements, and relegate the simple life to the cottages, camps, and cabins that the middle and upper classes used for vacation homes. Whatever the

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<sup>219</sup>Jackson T.J. Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 60.

problems with it, there was an ideal of simplicity firmly established by the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>221</sup>

A second powerful manifestation of antimodernism at this time came through a revitalization of the martial ideal. Another perceived consequence of modern life and over-civilization was that individuals were getting physically, morally, and emotionally weak. The world was convincing itself that maybe, at least in the civilized parts, war - at least the important, heroic kind - was a thing of the past. The American frontier was declared closed in 1890. To counter the softness and selfishness that came from peaceful consumerism, the country needed war, or at least something close to it. "To those who craved authentic selfhood," Lears writes, "the warrior's life personified wholeness of purpose and intensity of experience. War promised both social and personal regeneration."<sup>222</sup> The United States, at the behest of the mascot for the martial tradition, Theodore Roosevelt, rushed into war when it saw the slightest chance. For those unfortunate enough not to have the opportunity to go to war, there were sports like football and boxing, and any number of outdoor pursuits, which were growing in popularity. Like the Arts and Crafts movement, the antimodern modern martial tradition was laden with contradiction. While it looked back to a noble, selfless past, war and conquest, whether at home, abroad, or on the football field, ultimately reinforced industrial greed and consumerism.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Lears, *No Place for Grace*, 91-96 for his critique of fate of the craft ideal.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>223</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170-215, for further discussion of Roosevelt and the masculine ideal; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87-114 for a discussion of the role of recreational activities in reasserting manhood in an increasingly industrialized world around the turn of the twentieth century; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 3-20 for a definition and description of the masculine ideal in Modern America.

Yet another strain of antimodernism had to do with changes in aesthetic appreciation, what Lears refers to as the “The Religion of Beauty.” Americans, particularly in the middle and upper classes, began to admire and collect the religious and cultural artifacts of the medieval age, particularly those of the Catholic Church. At the core of many strains of American Protestantism was a desire to move away from the material trappings of Catholicism. The elaborate cathedrals and statues, they believed, distracted worshippers and created barriers between them and God. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in response to the ugliness of the industrial landscape, this began to change. A range of Protestant churches began to incorporate cathedral designs, and the church members began to collect Catholic-style art.<sup>224</sup> The aesthetic craving of the modern age was strong enough to override the puritanical theology of colonial and early America. Modern Americans began to look past that founding to a medieval age, where, they believed, beauty was uplifting rather than oppressive. This, however, proved a fine line to walk. On one side, the beauty was to inspire something greater than the course materialism of the industrial age. On the other, the emphasis on art acquisition and building more elaborate churches reinforced turn of the century conspicuous consumption.<sup>225</sup>

It was in this ambivalent world that Vachel Lindsay lived nearly his entire life. Taken separately, each of the strains of antimodernism did as much to reinforce the modern world as it did to change it. Lindsay thought that through what he learned and experienced, particularly through his walking, it was possible to iron out the inconsistencies. In so doing, the

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<sup>224</sup> ; David Weir *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the American Grain, 1890-1926* (SUNY Series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51-53 for specific examples of how Catholic symbols appeared in Protestant American life.

<sup>225</sup> Lears, *No Place for Grace*, 184-192.

contradictions he saw could be resolved. Simplicity, nobility, power, and beauty could be joined. The trajectory of the country could be changed.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay was born on November 10, 1879 in Springfield, Illinois. The two dominant strains of his lineage were both Scottish, both Presbyterian (with some Campbellite influence), and both had roots in Kentucky. Among the farmers and local physicians who made up his grandparents' and parents' generations, there were frequent fluctuations between affluence and poverty. His paternal grandfather, Nicholas Lindsay, made enough money to live comfortably, but he was too generous to those around him, and then was wrecked by the Civil War. His father, a doctor, who, like Abraham Lincoln, one of the heroes of the younger Vachel, relocated from Kentucky to Springfield, was similarly strapped for cash. His father was better at treating patients than at collecting fees. His mother had attended college in Kentucky and worked as an assistant to the president of the school upon graduating and before marrying. The family that Vachel was born into was thus a mixture. In some ways solidly middle class, but never quite achieving internal stability; the kind of existence that can make one feel that the good times of the past are always just about to return.<sup>226</sup>

Whatever Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay had (plus a little more), they made sure went to the development of Vachel and his younger sister, Olive. Despite some day-to-day austerity, Vachel grew up in a supportive household. There were always books – poetry, classical literature,

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<sup>226</sup> General biographical information on the early years of Vachel Lindsay's life can be found in his biographies. Eleanor Ruggles *The West Going Heart: A Life of Vachel Lindsay* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1959) is the most recent full length account of his life. Others include Edgar Lee Masters's *Vachel Lindsay: The Life of a Poet* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), Anna Mass *Vachel Lindsay: Field Worker for the American Dream* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), and the unfinished work, Dennis Camp, *Uncle Boy: A Biography of Vachel Lindsay*, (available only online at <http://www.vachellindsay.org/resource.html>) While they vary in the specific details they include, they all paint a picture of a fairly comfortably childhood, where Vachel, if physically frail, was well-supported in his interests, particularly in the areas of education and the arts.

ancient history texts – on hand, and he was afforded the time to read them. His literary interests were reinforced by the local school teacher, Susan Wilcox, who was well educated and supported him both emotionally and editorially as he wrote his first poems. In addition to what he learned from books, Vachel absorbed influences from his surroundings. Growing up near the state capital and the former home of Lincoln, he felt drawn to what he saw as a sort of frontier democracy. This culminated with a speech given by William Jennings Bryan when he passed through while campaigning for the Populists when Vachel was a teenager<sup>227</sup>.

After high school, Vachel and his sister both went off to the small, Presbyterian Hiram College in Ohio. Even though his father had sacrificed to pay his tuition, Vachel left without taking a degree and moved to Chicago, and then New York to study the visual arts. He continued in this way, studying drawing, entirely supported by his father until he was in his mid-20s. Then, after years of artistic, financial, and romantic failure, he gradually began to give up the dream of being an artist, and focused instead on his writing.<sup>228</sup>

After almost 27 years of living off of the generosity of his father, Vachel was finally ready to try to make his own way. He and a friend, Edward Broderick, sailed from New York to Florida, planning to walk from Jacksonville up to Philadelphia, where he would meet up with his parents at the end of June as they departed for a trip to Europe. While Broderick gave up early on the walk and sailed back to New York, Vachel continued on. He ultimately would travel about 600 miles from Florida to Kentucky. After he passed through Georgia, he decided to be less strict

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<sup>227</sup> Ruggles, *The West Going Heart*, 45-49.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-61.

about only walking, and would hop on a streetcar to get through a city, or even travel some distance by train, but he continued to view it all as part of the same “tramp”.<sup>229</sup>

From the planning stages, Lindsay had a literary focus for this trip. It was both inspired by literature, and, he hoped, would be a launching pad for his own literary career as it could provide him with the material for poetry and prose. He wrote to his former teacher, Susan Wilcox, near the beginning of his trip to send her drafts of walking-inspired poems he had been working on<sup>230</sup>. In his letter he asks her to read the poems, but acknowledging that they were derivative of literature he has been immersed in of late. The poems are all about wandering and pilgrimage (often by foot), about leaving behind burdens and finding one’s way through a journey.<sup>231</sup>

Separated out and above the others, in Lindsay’s view, was Walt Whitman, who wrote most directly about walking in his “Song of the Open Road”. Whitman begins: “Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,/ Healthy, free, the world before me,/ The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose./” Walking set the tone of the journey. He described encounters among the bustle of the nineteenth century highway and felt connections with the lowliest people he meets. He also felt connection with the surroundings: the buildings, the farms, the trees, the constellations. Travel with him, he writes, and “you find what never tires.” Walking drew the

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<sup>229</sup> The most comprehensive account of this first walk comes in Dennis Camp’s *Uncle Boy*, chapter 17. In it, Camp combines the narratives from Lindsay’s published accounts with lengthy passages from the notebooks that he carried along the walk with him and used as a journal.

<sup>230</sup> Vachel Lindsay to Susan Wilcox, April 2, 1906, *The Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, 20-21.

<sup>231</sup> The poems he lists are: Bliss Carman’s “Songs from Vagabondia”, Anne Hempstead Branch’s “The Heart of the Road” and “The Keeper of the Half-Way House”, and Rudyard Kipling’s “For to Enjoy”.

subject of Whitman's poem out of his own narrow life and sent him into the flow of the wider world. Lindsay hoped it would do the same for him.<sup>232</sup>

Among his own works that he took with him to perform and recite along his walk was the poem "The Tree of the Laughing Bell; or The Wings of the Morning", which follows some sort of mystical, airborne journey – at times seeming as though the subject is a man, at others as though it is a seed caught upon a breeze. While not directly about a walking trip, this work hints at what Lindsay's general view of the course of a journey may have been. He describes the planning and readying for the trip, the swift beginning, the achievement of the goal, and finally the return back home, to which it returned "By Faith that is blind," and having quenched "all memory-/ All hope - / All borrowed sorrow/ I had no thirst for yesterday/ No thought of tomorrow."<sup>233</sup> With this trip, he hoped to cast himself into the wind. He had faith – or at least wanted to have faith – that if he did so, and if he remained in the sliver between the past and the future, he would find something out there, and then return back home changed for the better.

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1906, armed with letters of introduction to help him find people to let him give lectures on poetry and art, a couple of extra clean collars, and some of his own poetry to hand out, Lindsay and Broderick set out from Jacksonville. They walked to the town of Winter Park, where they spoke to the president of Rollins College and arranged to give a lecture. Broderick was wary of both handing out announcements to advertise the lecture, and at the passing of the hat after the lecture. These both seemed too close to begging to him. But Lindsay persuaded him. The first lecture, covering Poe and Burns, drew an audience of only seven people. The pair continued on to Tampa, but then took a train back to the start of their walk in

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<sup>232</sup> Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road" in *Leaves of Grass in The Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 178 Also available online at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178711>

<sup>233</sup> Vachel Lindsay *Collected Poems* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 217.

Jacksonville, where Broderick gave up and took a boat back to New York. With Broderick went most of the money. It was at that point that Lindsay spent his last money on peanuts and set off once again, this time embracing the tramp identity.<sup>234</sup>

On March 20, Lindsay decided it made more sense to travel a bit by train, and bought a ticket into Georgia. His plan was to sleep through his official destination and ride on to Macon. The conductor woke him up, and he found himself walking instead through the Okefenokee Swamp for 16 miles. A combination of walking, trains, and the kindness of others brought him to Macon. He remained there with a friend from college for several days, which he spent writing letters and organizing the notebook full of notes he had already taken. All along, he had viewed his experiences through the lens of future publication. Still, he seems to have experienced some genuine feelings. He wrote to Susan Wilcox from Macon:

*I have had several impressions that need only the great antiseptic, style, to make them imperishably beautiful. I have encountered acts of such unexpected moral beauty that all the cynic was swept out of me as by a great sea-breeze. One man, who had nothing, gave me half of it, with such abundance that we both had everything.*<sup>235</sup>

The vulnerability he found being a penniless, (largely) foot traveler opened him to beauty that one could find in his surroundings and in his fellow human.

Leaving Macon, Lindsay set his sights on the next one hundred mile stretch, which would take him to Atlanta. Trading excitement for security, he was able to arrange intermediate rest stops in between through friends of friends, so he often knew in advance where he would sleep. Still, that he was meeting people while walking shaped the way

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<sup>234</sup> Camp, *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 17, 11-13. Available online at: [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_17.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_17.pdf)

<sup>235</sup> Vachel Lindsay to Susan Wilcox, March 22, 1906. Full letter reprinted in *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 17, 16. Available online at: [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_17.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_17.pdf)



that he saw them. He wrote to Susan Wilcox that “I do not stay in any one place long enough for the people to lose the glamor of Romance.”<sup>236</sup> The temporary-but-deep encounter so common on a long, solo walking trip fed his chivalric fantasies and allowed him to see what he thought of as the nobility in the people he met, although he recognized these views as romantic.

When Lindsay arrived in Atlanta, he felt homeless in a way he hadn’t yet before. Any attempts to raise money through his lectures were failing, and he struggled to sell his booklets of poetry. He resorted to “borrowing” money from people he barely knew, which felt too close to panhandling for his comfort. When he realized he couldn’t pay bill at the cheap hotel he was staying in, he moved on to spending as much time as possible in hotel lobbies and the waiting room of the train station.<sup>237</sup>

It was a meeting with another sometimes-walker that saved him from his plight. Through acquaintances at the newspaper, Lindsay met the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Julian Harris. Harris then introduced him to his brother-in-law, John Collier. Collier, who was from a prominent but troubled family, had often dealt with his grief by heading on long walks into the Southern Appalachians to the north of Atlanta.<sup>238</sup> Collier arranged for Lindsay to give a lecture at a private home. Although Lindsay didn’t think much of his own lecture, the hostess paid him ten dollars. Though ashamed, as he realized he was overpaid out of charity, the money allowed him

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<sup>236</sup> Vachel Lindsay to Susan Wilcox, April 2, 1906, *Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, 21

<sup>237</sup> Camp, *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 17, 22-23. Available online at:  
[http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_17.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_17.pdf)

<sup>238</sup> Kenneth R. Philp *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 5-6. Philp comments on both the restorative effect of these walks on Collier and the long-term impact. He writes, “Collier’s interest in native folk cultures began during such camping trips to the Appalachian Mountains.” In the footnote on page 5.

to pay off the debts he had begun to accumulate and live in relative stability, if not luxury, for the remainder of his stay in the city.<sup>239</sup>

On April 16, 1906, Lindsay left his remaining five dollars with Collier to send him at a later date and headed north. Some walking with a few streetcar and stagecoach rides soon took him to the start of the mountains. Here, his focus shifted somewhat. Out of both interest and necessity, he began to make note of natural features in a way he had not before, taken in first by Tallulah Falls, the gateway to the Southern Appalachians.<sup>240</sup> Writing about the falls later, he relied heavily the phrase, “the pipes of Pan” to describe his attraction to them. Despite his over-dramatizing of the experience, he did have a real affinity for the place, especially due to his difficult travel to get there. It should be, he wrote, a balm for the footsore, “to those crushed by the inventions of cities, wounded by evil men, it will be a washing away of tears and blood.”<sup>241</sup>

As he went deeper into the mountains through northern Georgia and into North Carolina, he found what he saw as an ideal blend of the civilized and natural worlds. He stayed for a few days with a friend of John Collier who lived in a picturesque cottage in North Carolina and had worked on improving the education and healthcare in the region. Lindsay compared the cottage of this man and of many others he encountered to the tents and camps he found in Colorado that “seemed to grow up out of the ground.”<sup>242</sup> He ended up spending a night with a family in one such cottage. They lived a hard but virtuous life and shared what they had willingly. One of the family members talked with Lindsay about the route from there to Asheville, and said that he himself was setting out for the same destination. Lindsay invited him along for the walk, but the

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<sup>239</sup> Camp, *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 17, 24-25. Available online at [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_17.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_17.pdf)

<sup>240</sup> This would soon become the original southern terminus for the Appalachian Trail before it was moved to the current one at Springer Mountain.

<sup>241</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *A Handy Guide for Beggars*, 45.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

man replied that he had to ride his horse, and then take the train, as he needed to get there quickly to serve as a witness in a trial of a bootlegger. He said this, Lindsay noted, “like a Spanish Protestant called before the inquisition.”<sup>243</sup> The outside world, whether in the form of the railroad or the internal revenue service, disrupted the beauty and simplicity of the mountains that he found on foot.

Lindsay enjoyed the rest of his walk into Asheville and his stay there. Leaving the town, the end seemed in sight, and it was hard not to rush. He traveled, he estimated, two hundred miles in seven days, which was a week’s record for him. His experiences on this leg of the journey were more mixed than they had been on previous ones. He blamed any inhospitality he encountered on the current dominant mode of travel: “Hospitality is as sacred an obligation to the guest as to the host. Man is naturally hospitable. Guests along the railroad have not considered this sacredness. Therefore hospitality has waned. It is the travellers’ grievous fault. Oh my wandering brothers—you have done a wrong.”<sup>244</sup> People had for too long moved too fast and in too impersonal a way. The result was a lack of connection between the traveler and those he encountered.

As he walked from there into Tennessee, he wrote, he was followed by seven suspicious persons. This was moonshiner country, and they did not trust outsiders. Ultimately, he would find people he connected with. That he was on foot also allowed him to connect to the land, for better and for worse. It was a region where the common mode of transportation was horseback or foot. He saw up close the rough log bridges over the creeks. The heavy chains that lashed them together, Lindsay found “primeval”. The road he walked on did not climb any of the hills and

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>244</sup> Vachel Lindsay, Notebook #3 quoted in Camp, Chapter 18, 12. Available online at: [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_18.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_18.pdf)

mountains around him, rather it “writhed like a snake.”<sup>245</sup> His mood picked up as the friendliness of the scenery improved. He felt more at ease when passing through the well-kept hometown of Andrew Johnson, but as he walked, his vulnerable, open state made him feel his surroundings emotionally.

The walk officially ended on May 22, 1906 at his aunt’s home in Jett, Kentucky. Lindsay had traveled 900 miles. Of those he had walked 702 on foot.<sup>246</sup> Along the way he experienced highs and lows. His early failures in Florida and Georgia made him wary of relying on lecturing about literary topics to pay his way. Even when those worked out, they led to uncomfortable interactions about money. Better, he would soon decide, to try to avoid the use of money altogether. As he went on and got into more natural surroundings, his outlook improved, although the length of the trip and desire to have it over began to wear at him. Ultimately though, the greatest change he experienced was in his shifting perspective, both about himself and the people and surroundings he encountered. Walking created a Romantic glow over all he encountered. The very ordinary house of a lower class Florida family became an important refuge for him. The remote cabin in the mountains of North Carolina seemed all the more isolated because of the length and difficulty of his trip to it. The joys were more joyful, the dangers more treacherous. As Lindsay walked through the land in his heightened state, he began to see himself as the hero of his own life. However limited and arbitrary it was, when he was walking, Lindsay had direction and purpose in what had been an often scattered existence.

He rested with his relatives for a week and then made his way to Philadelphia where he met up with his parents to sail for Europe. He was soon back in New York City, trying to cobble

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<sup>245</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *A Handy Guide for Beggars*, pages 96-98.

<sup>246</sup> Camp, *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 18, 15. Available online at [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_18.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_18.pdf)

together an existence as a writer, poet, and lecturer. He wrote up several stories and sold two of them to the *Outlook*. He gave lectures about his travels, as he had planned to do all along his walk. He once again enrolled as an art student. Despite his varied efforts, nothing he did would provide a sustainable existence for him, so in the spring of 1908, he once again took to the road. He did so in part to create more interesting experiences that he could write about, but also because he had few other options.

This walk, which was to take him from New York back to Springfield, was different from his first one two years before from the outset. Walking through the relatively wealthy and developed northeast, he encountered new attitudes, and gained new insights<sup>247</sup>.

On his first day of this walk, April 28, 1908, he walked only five miles from Manhattan to Newark, New Jersey. In Newark, he found the Salvation Army and tried to rent a bed for the night. Instead of accepting his money, the worker there told him he would have to chop kindling for two hours to earn his keep. Lindsay gladly agreed, excited at the chance to exchange his manual labor for accommodations. He approached his task through a Romantic lens. “[T]he mission was like one of those beautiful resting-places in *Pilgrim’s Progress*,” he wrote. “It became my religion just to split kindling.”<sup>248</sup> Like John Muir, Lindsay used the influence of works like *Pilgrim’s Progress* to create meaning in, and shape the narrative of his walk, giving a greater depth to the most ordinary acts.

While he enjoyed his chopping, he found himself at odds with his fellow choppers. One major difference between this walk and his first was that he was far more often around other “tramps”. These tramps by necessity challenged his view of himself, a tramp by choice. They

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<sup>247</sup> Eleanor Ruggles *The West Going Heart*, pages 130-133; and Dennis Camp’s *Uncle Boy*, chapter 20. For summaries of this walk. Lindsay’s own account of it (or at least sketches from it) make up the second book of his *A Handy Guide for Beggars*, 111-204.

<sup>248</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *A Handy Guide for Beggars*, 119.

forced him to further try to distinguish himself from them, while simultaneously being one of them. The other choppers, who were all “boxcar tramps”, advised not to chop too fast. The people in charge just wanted to see that they were willing to work, so there was no point in exhausting yourself. This caused Lindsay to chop that much faster.<sup>249</sup>

The real difference that he saw between himself and the other so called tramps had to do with their mode of transportation. He wrote,

*The modern tramp is not a tramp, he is a speed-maniac. Being unable to afford luxuries, he must still be near something mechanical and hasty, so he uses a dirty boxcar to whirl from one railroad yard to another. He has no destination but the cinder-pile by the water-tank. The landscape hurrying by in one indistinguishable mass and the roaring of the car-wheels in his ears are the end of life to him. He is no back-to-nature crank.*<sup>250</sup>

Traveling as quickly as they did changed the way they saw the land and the people in it. Place ceased to matter. They were at odds with their fellow humans, whether they be the conductors of the trains or their boxcar companions.

He left Newark early the next morning and continued on to Morristown, which, he wrote, was thought to be the wealthiest town in the area. As such, there was no salvation army. He went instead to the Presbyterian Church where he and a boxcar tramp were made to strip so their clothes could be fumigated before they were allowed to stay. From here he crossed into Pennsylvania. The Poconos provided a brief respite from the dense settlement of the Northeastern flatlands. When he descended from the plateau, he found himself right back in the midst of it.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 127-130.

His way out of the Poconos was an unavoidable automobile highway. Keeping in mind his Pilgrim's Progress, he named this road Giant Despair, reminiscent of the slough of despond that threatened to trap Christian as he journeyed toward the celestial city. The landscape that Giant Despair led him through was ravaged. Everywhere he looked were coal pits and slag heaps. "King Coal," he wrote, "is a boaster...he furnishes steam for all the engines of the earth. He says he is the maker of steam. He says steam is the twentieth century."<sup>252</sup> This landscape both dragged him down and moved him along. Even on foot, Lindsay felt the push of coal power.

From eastern coal country in the Wilkesbarre area, he picked up the Susquehanna River. This he followed for the next five days, winding along its banks. The weather was miserable and it rained nearly every day. In Pennsylvania in early spring the gray can be all encompassing. The gray sky meets the expanses of gray rock exposed by the decades of mining and logging. The low hills, with their constant ups and downs, make it impossible to find a rhythm when traveling by human power. The difficulties were more than balanced out by the support he found from people along the way. Once again showing the influence of *Pilgrim's Progress* (which in turn showed that he increasingly thought of these walks as distinct, purposeful events) he gave those who helped him names like "Mr. Humankindness" when he wrote about them later. He found Pennsylvanians to be very receptive of his poetry as currency, and he was able to secure adequate lodging most nights without feeling like a leech on society. Eventually, the rain stopped, and, as "it is always upon the road. Neither rain nor misfortune nor misunderstanding last too long. The road is a place of singing." His walk was teaching him that even if you get wet,

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 138-139.

you will soon be dry. Change is inevitable and the past and the future are contained in the present.<sup>253</sup>

The second half of this walk proved less eventful than the first. He had some more pleasant experiences in the countryside of Pennsylvania and Ohio, where boxcar tramps were a rarity. When he reached Hiram, Ohio, the site of his almost-alma mater, he rested with old acquaintances. From there, supposedly spurred on by excitement about future writing projects, he took the train the rest of the way back home to Springfield. While this was the shortest walk, and, once again, was cut short, Lindsay began to view his travels more purposefully. He began to see himself, like Christian in a *Pilgrim's Progress*, as walking toward something specific. He also began to consciously define what it meant to him to be a “tramp”. He would refine these ideas into specific rules and agendas that he would take with him from the outset of his next walk, four years later.

In the interim, Lindsay continued to write about his walks, both directly in prose, and indirectly in verse. More than just fodder for stories, though, his experience walking continued to shape his view of the world and the events around him. In August, 1908, shortly after he returned home, racial violence broke out in Springfield. Two African Americans were lynched. Lindsay spoke out against these acts in his YMCA lectures and in his writing. In a letter to the editor of Scribners, R.W. Gilder, he described riots, and identified himself as being against acts such as these and for the causes of the common people. What gave him this experience were the various manual labor jobs he had held in his life, but also his extensive walks. These walks gave him “perfect confidence in the Generosity of North and South”, and convinced him that if he started

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<sup>253</sup> Vachel Lindsay, “Snared by the Susquehanna”, Abraham Lincoln Library, but reprinted in full in Camp, *Uncle Boy*, Chapter 20, 7-8. Available online at [http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle\\_boy\\_20.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/UncleBoy/uncle_boy_20.pdf)



“out tonight ...[to] make for San Francisco afoot, without a cent – in the rain – [he could] get there with more pleasure than pain.”<sup>254</sup> His walks, especially that in the South where he had intimate experience both with African Americans, and with whites who held biases against them, allowed him to identify with a wider range of people than he would have otherwise. It gave him a general faith in the goodness of his fellow man.

His time in Springfield from the end of one walk in 1908 to the start of his next in 1912 was seen by many around him (and somewhat by himself) as idle, lost time. He was in his early thirties and was still financially supported by his father. He brought in some money by traveling around the region lecturing for the Anti-Saloon League of Illinois, but any money he made from this he spent self-publishing his poetry. In the relatively small town of Springfield, opinions of Lindsay ranged from quirky to spoiled.<sup>255</sup>

While the merits of his activities were debated and debatable, he was certainly not just frittering his time away during these years. He was always writing, submitting, and thinking. Lindsay used this interlude to begin to formulate and solidify his ideology surrounding his walking and writing. He provided R.W. Gilder with a general outline of his plans in 1908. Invoking the strains of anti-modernism that idealized both the medieval and the Catholic, he wrote that he wanted to form a new order of Franciscans who embraced poverty, and “Sir Galahads” who promoted high culture. They were to find their full expression “on the high roads of America, [where they would] preach the hatred of money, and the gospel of poverty, and beauty, and the free gifts of the sun and rain, to every hamlet in the land.”<sup>256</sup> His ideal was the

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<sup>254</sup> Vachel Lindsay to R.W. Gilder, November 29, 1908 *Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, 34.

<sup>255</sup> Eleanor Ruggles, *The West Going Heart: A Life of Vachel Lindsay* 139-143 for a summary of his years in Springfield.

<sup>256</sup> Vachel Lindsay to R.W. Gilder, November 29, 1908, *Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, 34.

wandering, noble, knight-mendicant. The best way to achieve this was to set out on foot, which he did once again in the spring of 1912.

For his third and final walking trip, Lindsay embarked with a more clearly defined purpose than he had before. His prior walks were vague in their motivations. This one was purposeful. Writing about it years later he said that when he “broke loose, and went on the road, in the spring after a winter of Art lecturing, it was definitely an act of protest against the United States commercial standard, a protest against the type of life set forth for all time two books of Sinclair Lewis: *Babbitt* and *Main Street*.”<sup>257</sup> Like Lewis’s socialist handyman, Miles Bjornstam, Lindsay walked to comment on the world he saw around him.

This walk was also to be more ambitious than his previous trips. His plan was to walk from Springfield all the way to California. The purpose of the walk was also more clearly defined. He set out not just with printed poems to exchange for food and lodging, but with a clear set of rules to follow for himself, and a specific message to spread to those he encountered along the way. Lindsay had a vague sense of guidelines on his previous walks, but it was only with the third one that he narrowed them down definitively.<sup>258</sup> His eight rules were:

1. *Keep away from the cities;*
2. *Keep away from the railroads;*
3. *Have nothing to do with money and carry no baggage;*
4. *Ask for dinner about quarter after eleven;*
5. *Ask for supper, lodging and breakfast about quarter of five;*
6. *Travel alone;*
7. *Be neat, deliberate, chaste, and civil;*
8. *Preach the Gospel of Beauty.*<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Collected Poems* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1925), 19.

<sup>258</sup> In his published, book-length account of his first two walks, he includes the rules, but this was printed years after the completion of his third walk. He makes no mention of the rules in the accounts he recorded while taking the first two walks.

<sup>259</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Handy Guide for Beggars*, viii.

These rules were a mixture of the practical and the philosophical. They were to both allow him to meet his daily needs, and to keep the proper openness and focus that would hopefully result in the richest experience possible. Based on his accounts of his prior walks, this list of rules seems to be made up of lessons that he learned. He often had bad experiences when traveling through cities – particularly Atlanta and the towns and cities of New Jersey, where interactions were more formal and monetized. When relying on money, there was never enough, and so it became a source of stress and dependence; better to disregard it entirely. Walking with a companion also led to compromises about where exactly to go and how fast they would travel. These rules were partly there to ensure smooth logistics for the walk, but mostly would maximize Lindsay's freedom and independence as he traveled.

Rule number three was apparently not strict enough to forbid all baggage. He carried a pamphlet of poetry and prose that he called *Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread*. In this were brief descriptions of his overall philosophy and agenda. It began with "The Gospel of Beauty", a "little one page formula for making America more lovely". The "vain and foolish mendicant Nicholas Vachel Lindsay" wrote, "I come to you penniless and afoot, to bring a message."<sup>260</sup> This message was that all should find ways to open themselves to the beauty that was around them.

The next segment of his pamphlet was called "The New Localism". He handed out a short version of what he would expand upon in lecture form after his walk. The New Localism was built around a focus on home. The best setting for a person to act, Lindsay believed, was in his own home or neighborhood. There was no one way to do this, but people should apply their own unique skills and talents to making their local surroundings more positive, beautiful places.

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<sup>260</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Adventures, Rhymes and Designs* (New York: Eakins Press, 1968), 51.

“They should,” he wrote, “if led by the spirit, wander over the whole nation in search of the secret of democratic beauty with their hearts at the same time filled to overflowing with the righteousness of God.” Once they had gone out and soaked in what the wider world had to offer, “they should come back to their own hearth and neighborhood...and strive to make the neighborhood and home more beautiful and democratic with their special art.”<sup>261</sup> He acknowledged that it was odd to suggest that the reform of the home should begin by setting out from that home (ideally on foot). In his account of the journey, he wrote, “There is something essentially humorous about a man walking rapidly away from his home to tell all men they should go back to their birthplaces.”<sup>262</sup> Still, he believed that the best sort of reform was local, that the best way to shape the local was through travel, and that the best way to travel was by walking. Walking in the world would lead to strong, stable, and beautiful villages. A network of these villages would create a strong nation.

What Lindsay handed out in his pamphlets while he walked was based on a larger theory of “New Localism” that he outlined in an essay of that name in the months before he walked. The starting point for his “New Localism” came as a response to Theodore Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism”, which he outlined in a speech he gave on August 31, 1910 in Osawatomie, Kansas. Roosevelt’s New Nationalism, in Lindsay’s view, was a call for centralization. Although the goal was to help government and business function to serve the common welfare, he was wary of a plan that called for a strong centralized government and the centralization of corporate power. He feared that this would lead to a flood of vitality from the villages and small cities to the metropolis. Artists and others interested in beauty would feel compelled to travel to centers like New York and Chicago, but would inevitably be drowned out in the mass there. Villages and

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 48.

small cities (those with populations up to 50,000) were, according to “New Localism” the places where American art and craft could thrive. The major cities would provide nothing more than poor approximations of European art, but in the hinterlands, the pioneer-style ingenuity would continue to create valuable American work.<sup>263</sup>

Lindsay was certainly not alone in his concern about the growing centralization of power and culture in the United States at this time. It was the era of the metropolitan sprawl that was creeping across the eastern landscape that inspired to Benton MacKaye to draw up his plans for the Appalachian Trail in 1920. Lindsay’s brief companion, John Collier, also shared similar concerns. By 1912, Collier was married and had a family. He no longer took long, solitary treks into the mountains, but continued to spend time in the woods with his children, particularly the Southern Appalachians. It was there, observing the interaction of the traditional culture and nature that was coming into conflict with logging interests that he began to appreciate the “noble folk life” and to fear the growth of “business enterprises encircling the earth.”<sup>264</sup> These concerns would lead Collier to champion the cultures of Indian peoples, in particular the Pueblos of the Southwest who had also drawn the admiration of Charles Lummis. These three walkers, among many others, shared a vision of the country in which smaller scale towns and regions flourished as independent but connected entities.

Where and how one traveled was a crucial piece of Lindsay’s burgeoning philosophy. “In our most awakened regions,” he wrote, “travel from township to township will be something more than moving from one parallelogram to another. It will be as patriotic a pleasure as travel in

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<sup>263</sup> Vachel Lindsay, “New Localism” in *Vision: A Quarterly Journal of Aesthetic Appreciation of Life* 4 (April 1912): 3-18. Also Available online at:

[http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/the\\_new\\_localism\\_\\_1912\\_.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/the_new_localism__1912_.pdf)

<sup>264</sup> John Collier quoted in *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954*, by Kenneth Philip, 18-19.

Old Japan was said to be during the Tokugawa Shogunate. Every other township will be rest for the eyes, every alternate village, leaven for the spirit.”<sup>265</sup> Modern travel was meaningless. It involved traveling vast distances quickly and blindly from one interchangeable location to the next. The further one went, the better. Lindsay was advocating a slower, older, and closer way to travel. Doing this, place matters. This landscape of beauty was determined in large part by how one moved across it. For Lindsay, the most democratic, beauty-inspiring way to travel was on foot.

These ideas are reflected in the actual rhymes that he hoped to trade for his bread. His poetry that he handed out and recited was very much informed by his experiences on his previous walks. In the verse prologue to the work, he wrote of his previous experience as a wandering troubadour, encountering all different kinds of people, and meeting with the same reception from all.

The rich said “You are welcome.”  
Yea, even the rich were good.  
How strange that in their feasting  
His songs were understood!  
The doors of the poor were open,  
The poor who had wandered too,  
Who slept with never a roof-tree  
Under the wind and dew.  
The minds of the poor were open,  
There dark mistrust was dead:  
They loved his wizard stories,  
They bought his rhymes with bread.

Those were his days of glory,  
Of faith in his fellow-men.  
Therefore, today the singer  
Turns beggar once again.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>266</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Collected Poems*, 294-295.

Like those who walked before him, Lindsay found a connection among people of all backgrounds.

When Lindsay set out from his home on May 29, 1912, he looked just like anyone else walking through town. He wore his regular clothes, and there was nothing particular about what he carried that suggested he was doing anything out of the ordinary. He walked through town, and when he got to the western edge, he kept going. He walked through the fields, across the Mississippi River into Missouri. He crossed that state and went to the next. The rolling hills flattened, and then mountains rose. The mountains gave way to desert. After Jefferson City, Missouri, he avoided all cities until Denver. “It was nothing but villages and farms.”<sup>267</sup>

Early on, the walking was fairly simple. Throughout Illinois, he passed through towns and villages at regular intervals. It was easy then to follow his rules about asking for dinner around a quarter after eleven, and supper, lodging and dinner about a quarter after five. This time around, he more fully embraced his role as a beggar. He had come to see this as a somewhat necessary state as he belonged to the “leisure class, that of the rhymers...[and] in order to belong to any leisure class, one must be a thief or a beggar.”<sup>268</sup> All of his “adventures” from the beginning days of his walk have to do with acquiring (or failing to acquire) food and lodging.

Through the simple acts of seeking food and lodging, Lindsay believed he was spreading his Gospel and tapping into the tradition of St. Francis, which he so admired. He spent one night in Illinois with an old couple who maintained a stationary engine house. This small house was near both the railroad and an automobile road. The main room of the house was almost entirely filled with the engine, which was used to pump water for the passing trains. In a lean-to built to the side was a small, filthy kitchen and a cot. The only other furniture consisted of gunny sacks

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<sup>267</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Adventures, Rhymes, and Designs*, 50.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

piled on the ground on either side of the engine. The old woman handed Lindsay “a fuzzy, unwashed spoon and said with a note of real kindness, ‘Eat your supper young man.’” He found the food he was given inedible, and so he snuck off to the pond to feed it to the ducks. When it was time to sleep, he ended up sleeping on a pile of sacks on one side of the engine while the old woman slept on a pile of sacks on the other side.<sup>269</sup>

Lindsay viewed this pair sympathetically, as victims of modernity. “Poor things!”, he wrote. “Just like all the citizens of the twentieth century, petting and grooming machinery three times as smart as they are themselves.” They had to serve the machinery rather than the machinery serving them. The old woman was losing her mind. Her husband was losing his body. Although they were as destitute and marginalized as one could find on the Illinois prairie, they nevertheless shared what they did have freely with Lindsay. Traveling on foot and without money allowed him to see the collateral damage of the industrial age. It also allowed him to see that he and everyone else shared in the blame for people living as this couple did. He wrote, “If they are supremely absurd, so are all of us. We must include ourselves in the farce.” By walking, he was able to understand the connected system that both the winners and losers of society were a part of.<sup>270</sup>

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, Lindsay crossed the Mississippi into Missouri at Hannibal. He walked south, marveling at the good quality of the road, which reminded him of the turnpikes of Kentucky. After a while, he caught a ride into the town of New London. There he found a Catholic shrine that filled him with awe and thoughts of St. Francis, whom he wished would return to “preach voluntary poverty to all the middle-class and wealthy folk of this land.”<sup>271</sup> A few days later near

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 62-67.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 67-69.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 77.



Fulton, Missouri, he was caught in a rainstorm and so sought the nearest shelter he could. The cabin he found belonged to an African American. Lindsay was impressed with both the state of the cabin and with the food and company he found there. Later he wrote, "I hope to be rained on again if it brings me communion bread like that I ate with my black host."<sup>272</sup> Once again, the conditions of his walk and the state of mind it put him in opened Lindsay to people and experiences he would not have otherwise encountered had he been traveling by modern means.

Occasionally Lindsay had to break his rules as he walked. The one he broke most frequently was number two: keep away from the railroads. He preferred to stay on the highways. Those were somewhat built with humans in mind, and so contact with others was easier. It was impossible to avoid the railroads entirely, however. Sometimes a more direct route along the tracks was too tempting to pass up. More likely, if it rained, many of the roads became practically impassable with mud. These two reasons combined as Lindsay was leaving the town of Clarksburg, Missouri on his way to Tipton. It was far quicker to take the tracks, and recent rain made them the only viable option. As he walked, he was pleasantly surprised. He strolled along, buoyed by the bounty of wildflowers that lined the route. The tracks here provided a close look at the natural world.

What he saw of the natural world could not hide the intrusion of the industrial world through his actual footsteps. Walking along a railroad track is convenient in many ways. The grades are gradual thanks to the cuts and bridges. There are no thorns, poison ivy, or spider webs to contend with. What ruins it is the spacing of the ties. They are too close together to comfortably step on every one, but they are too far apart to comfortably hit every other one. There is no way to walk on tracks with a normal gait, and the walker ends up shifting around

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 79.

constantly. Lindsay thought about this problem as he walked. He pondered running for president and knew that if he did, he would certainly get the tramp vote. His “platform was to be that railroad ties should be just close enough to walk on them in natural steps.”<sup>273</sup> This problem of spacing could seem small to someone traveling a short distance. But for the walker traveling for days and days on the tracks, it would be significant. The implicit message here for Lindsay was that the tracks were not designed for men, but for machines. Modern infrastructure forced men to limp along, never able to fall into a rhythm.

This disruption was so concerning for Lindsay because of how connected he started to consciously feel during his walk. “[The walker] feels himself so much a part of the soil and the sun and ploughed acres”, he wrote about his time in Missouri. He continued on, “I feel that in a certain mystical sense I have made myself part of the hundreds and hundreds of farms that lie between me and machine-made America.”<sup>274</sup> The rural landscape and the life of the farm and village was the buffer between the ills of the industrial age and people. Walking was how to become part of them.

As Lindsay neared Kansas, he grew increasingly excited. Kansas signified a new stage of his trip. Where Missouri had been like a combination of Illinois and Kentucky to him, Kansas was something new. It was western. He was in love with the state the moment his feet touched its soil. His account of the Kansas leg of this journey is filled with superlatives. “Kansas, the Ideal American Community!” “The Newest New England!” “State of tremendous crops and hardy, devout, natural men!” What allowed to see these wonderful things amidst the landscape that had been frustrating travelers since Coronado first attempted to cross it was the connection he felt to the land from walking. He went on, “Travelers who go through in cars with roofs know

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 88.

little of this state.” To truly know Kansas, one must, he thought, experience the sun, the stars, and the vast distances.<sup>275</sup>

His first few days in the state were rain soaked. The mud once again forced him onto the tracks. The sodden cold forced him to seek shelter wherever he could. His exposure, poverty, and speed compelled him to seek out accommodations with sorts of people he was unaccustomed to. He found himself huddled in a crowded railroad shack with Mexican laborers who fed him heartily and sent him off with a thermos of coffee to help keep the chill off. Despite the initial weather, he found the landscape of Kansas to be more welcoming. Where farmers had ploughed earlier and then let the land lay fallow, there were now endless wild berries growing. The people too, he found much friendlier than they had been elsewhere along his walk.<sup>276</sup>

The rural areas of Kansas in the middle of summer were busy. As Lindsay walked, freight trains passed at regular intervals. Itinerant Mexicans passed by in wagons, either following the harvest or working on the railroad. Also, automobiles with canvas campers heading for summer vacations in the Rockies mingled with local car traffic. Lindsay was opposed to the idea of the car as it isolated a person from his surroundings, but he could not pass up the temptation of a ride. He was often offered one around five o’clock as locals were heading home for the evening, and he enjoyed wrapping up a hard day of walking with a quick five additional miles in a car. In defense of himself, he wrote, “I still maintain that the auto is a carnal institution, to be shunned by the truly spiritual, but there are times when I, for one, get tired of being spiritual.”<sup>277</sup> Automobile travel was carnal in that it only met the needs of the body. It provided a way to get from point-A to point-B, allowing one to meet basic needs quickly. Oddly,

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 54-56.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 121.

the walker must ignore his body – his aching feet, his rumbling stomach – which is telling him to sit down and take a ride to the next town. It was only when his spirit failed him that Lindsay gave into the carnal car. To him, modern transportation was morally dubious, but was useful to help with human weakness.

One major change that Kansas brought was in Lindsay's attitude toward work. His chosen persona of Romantic, troubadour-style beggar did not leave much space for labor. He worked when his poetry recitations weren't seen as quite enough to earn him a dinner, but it was not his first choice. As he went on, perhaps because of guilt, he began to crave work. Walking somewhat fulfilled that desire. As he neared Kansas, he wrote, "By walking I get as tired as any and imagine I work too."<sup>278</sup> Passing through the plains in the height of summer, he changed his mind about work and actively and willingly sought out the harvest.

On July 1, Lindsay worked his first day on the harvest and made \$1.75, which he promptly spent on a new walking outfit. He was once again broke, but happy that he was "now in real walking attire."<sup>279</sup> The work was hard, the days long and hot. Lindsay enjoyed himself, though. His vagrancy made him appreciate the respite of stability. Along with his wages, he received three meals a day and nice room to stay in. What was more, that he had traveled so long to get there and had heard about the harvest the entire way placed this menial work in a broader and nobler context. "We poor tramps," he wrote, "are helping to garner that which reestablishes the nations."<sup>280</sup> The smallest task in the most remote locale performed by the least among us, he could see, was crucial to the functioning of the world.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 153.

Partaking in the Kansas harvest also helped Lindsay to further develop his ideas of the New Localism. He wrote, “Whole villages that are dead any other season blossom.”<sup>281</sup> Witnessing this further convinced him of the potential vibrancy of village life, which was to be the centerpiece of his ideal version of twentieth century America.

The harvest also showed him what he saw as the benefits of purposeful movement and return. He was enriched by the work he did, and by the act of arduous travel to a destination that he could then take meaningful part in. In a short bit of verse he wrote after his walk, he commanded, “Go to the fields, O city laborers, till your wounds are healed.”<sup>282</sup> The cities, which had been his desired locale as an art student, had become to him a source of physical and psychological illness. He recommended here a cycle of leaving and returning, a round trip for regeneration.

For most of the month of July, Lindsay made his way across Kansas, some days walking, some days harvesting. In August he reached the western edge of the plains and first encountered the Rocky Mountains. Where many people throughout history have rushed through Kansas to get to this destination, Lindsay saw this as the beginning of the end of his trip. While he had deeply enjoyed the Kansas harvest, he began to feel as though he had swung too far into the practical, and resolved to turn down any further extended periods of work so that he might focus on the spiritual and poetic aspects of his journey.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 190-214. Lindsay’s account of his walk is almost the exact opposite of Charles Fletcher Lummis’s account of his own walk from Ohio to California in 1883. Lummis devoted only the first few pages to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas. Lindsay spends only the last few on the Rockies in Colorado and the desert in New Mexico. The chapter covering this section of his walk is called “The End of the Road” (in *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*, pages 190-214, and much of this consists of him reminiscing about Kansas.

As the spaces between villages lengthened, Lindsay's resolve to continue on diminished. For some unexplained reason, he abruptly ended his trip in Wagon Mound, New Mexico. He would later regret his decision to stop short of his goal of California, but once the idea gets into a walker's head that he can hop on a train, or in a car, it can be difficult to get it out. Lindsay took the train the rest of the way to California and ended up in Berkeley that fall, where he continued to spread his gospel and lecture to English classes. He sent a brief summary of his trip in a letter to the *Illinois State Register*, but promised fuller accounts of the true meaning of this experiment in the years to come. On October 23, Lindsay boarded a train and went back to Springfield.<sup>284</sup>

True to his word, much of the lecturing and writing in years to come would attempt to explain the significance of his walking. He would remain a walker for the rest of his life. In a given day he would walk often several hours for mental rejuvenation and physical exercise. He would take some slightly extended trips, notably a tramp around Glacier National Park with the British writer Stephen Graham. He would never again, though, continue this pattern of write/work in the winter, and then walk across a large swath of country in the spring/ summer as he had at fairly regular intervals between 1906 and 1912.

Upon his return to Springfield, Lindsay set about turning his experiences into words, both in the form of prose and poetry. Works such as "The Santa Fe Trail" are clearly borne of his walking. In "The Santa Fe Trail", Lindsay ponders the landscape of the plains and how it changes depending upon how one travels across it. He describes seeing the automobile come flying out of the east like a monster. "Its eyes are lamps like the eyes of dragons./ It drinks gasoline from big red flagons." The car passes by free, but too quickly to see the world around it. The train speeds along and also is tied to the tracks. Just the tramp travels freely and at a human

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<sup>284</sup> "Vachel Lindsay on His Way Home", *Illinois State Register*. Also available online at [http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/vachel\\_lindsay\\_on\\_his\\_way\\_home\\_\\_1912\\_.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/vachel_lindsay_on_his_way_home__1912_.pdf)

speed. He can sit “And look at the sky/ While I watch the clouds in amazing grandeur/ Roll their legions without rain/ Over the blistering Kansas plain - / While [he] sit[s] by the milestone/ And watch the sky,/ The United States/ Goes by.” The pace and tone of the verse builds and becomes more frantic. There is violence to the machinery passing through and drowning out the landscape. The tramp on foot is the counterpoint to that violence.<sup>285</sup>

The violence and terror of modern transportation in this picture is one that is directed outward. It is not the passenger on the train or the automobile that feels afraid, but the person whom the vehicle passes. He is the one who feels the mounting dread as he hears the engines and horns in the distance and is left choking in the dust after it passes. Those responsible for the creation of the dread are part of it, and so do not feel it. The opposite is true for the traveler on foot. He is vulnerable and exposed to the negative aspects of his surroundings. He is the recipient of the aggressions of others, but he also is open to the goodness and beauty that he encounters in a way those traveling at rapid speeds are not. Walking long distances in the early twentieth century was an act that allowed Lindsay to feel both the difficulty and wonder of his surroundings.

Encounters between automobiles and walkers were still developing in 1912. Especially in the rural West, where the bulk of Lindsay’s final walk took place, cars were fairly rare. Rarer still was any of the infrastructure needed to make them useful outside of towns and cities. Paved roads outside city limits were virtually non-existent, and there were few predictable sources of fuel when traveling widely. There were no streetlights, and most headlights were insufficient for meaningful travel at night. Cars and trucks were seen more as tools for specific uses rather than appendages or forms of self-expression. Even several years after Lindsay’s walk in 1919, an

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<sup>285</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *Collected Poems*, 153-157.

army convoy traveling coast-to-coast as a military exercise and automobile-travel promotion trip managed to average only 6 miles per hour.<sup>286</sup> Walking and car travel, both being forms of auto-mobility, therefore had much in common at the dawn of the car and truck age. Both involved free, yet arduous individual travel. Despite their commonalities, Lindsay still saw differences between them. Even if cars had total averages just slightly faster than walking, that average was made up of periods of relatively extreme speed, when the car was functioning and the roads good, along with times when the mud slowed travel to crawl, or when mechanical issues stopped the vehicle entirely. Walking, on the other hand, was slow, but steady. The focus was also always on the person in his surroundings. Driving, one either sped through the countryside, or focused on the machine, trying to figure out how to feed the dragon so it kept going.

Lindsay's clearest summary of his ideas about the role of walking in American life came in a book review he wrote in 1914 of the novel *The Friendly Road*, by David Grayson.<sup>287</sup> "David Grayson" was the pseudonym used by the muckraking journalist Ray Stannard Baker when he wanted to change personas and write gentler fiction. Lindsay began his review with a critique of a Grayson-Baker ally, Theodore "the good king" Roosevelt. Lindsay wrote of what he saw an inconsistency in Roosevelt's thinking. On the one hand, Roosevelt wrote encouraging what he called *The Strenuous Life*. Whatever a person did, whether politics, sports, or business, Roosevelt believed tasks should be approached with manly vigor. For Lindsay, this energy on its own seemed to be a driving force behind the rampant modernism and industrialization that people like Roosevelt were inspiring around the globe. Roosevelt also promoted the ideal of "The Simple

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<sup>286</sup> Pete Davies, *American Road: The Story of an Epic Transcontinental Journey at the Dawn the Motor Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), 9-15 for a description of the early road conditions, numbers of vehicles, and details of the 1919 transcontinental convoy.

<sup>287</sup> David Grayson, *The Friendly Road: New Adventures in Contentment* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1913).



Life”, which Lindsay saw in his idealization of the way of life in the west. Lindsay found these two strains, when separated and compartmentalized as they were for Roosevelt, to be contradictory. Under Roosevelt’s way of thinking, the rampant, unseemly growth would continue unabated. When the pressures of that world became too great, one would take the pill of temporary simplicity. With the integration that Lindsay found through walking, however, the individual and the nation could restrain growth while maintaining vigor.<sup>288</sup>

He found a similar if less intense contradiction in the split personalities of Grayson-Baker. Baker was the muckraking journalist. Grayson was the sanguine novelist. Baker got his real start as both journalist and a walker at the same time. As a young Chicago reporter, he was sent to cover a gathering of unemployed men in Massillon, Ohio in March of 1894 who were going to march to Washington DC under the leadership of Jacob Coxey and Carl Browne. This group, which became known as Coxey’s Army, intended to deliver a “petition in boots” to the federal government. They were trying to call attention to the dire financial straits of many people who had been hit by the Panic of 1893. Coxey devised a plan in which the government would provide massive federal aid putting the jobless to work improving the country’s roads, which were in wretched condition. The march would make the cause visible to those in government, as well as to the people in the towns and cities through which the army passed. The mud on their boots would be testament to the necessity of road improvement.

Baker and other observers reacted to this march with a mixture of scorn and intrigue. Newspapers frequently referred to Coxey as Don Quixote, and Browne as Sancho Panza. The cause was potentially noble, but most likely futile. Baker, however, changed his mind as he travelled along with them. Every day he walked at least a few miles with the men. It was this that

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<sup>288</sup> Ray Stanard Baker, *American Chronicle: The Autobiography of Ray Stanard Baker* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1945), 17.

let him get to know the marchers as people, and also changed his mind about their cause. “I liked walking,” he wrote. “I liked country roads and country scenes...I rested with them at roadsides...I began to know some as Joe and Bill and George. I soon had them talking about their homes...and the real problems they had to meet.”<sup>289</sup> Walking with these men let Baker into the hardships they suffered, allowed him to better tell their story, and set him on the path towards a career writing about social issues.

It was this socially conscious, realistic view of the world that the walker is apt to gain that Lindsay felt was missing from *The Friendly Road*. He found Grayson’s general descriptions walking to be accurate in his story about a farmer who leaves for a three week walk during the busy harvest season in order to reconnect with his surroundings and self, but felt that he only told part of the story. What he missed according to Lindsay, were the less pleasant aspects. He ignored the vermin-filled mattresses, the barking dogs, the angry stares, the general fear and insecurity, the “very real rigors of the Franciscan life.” In these omissions, Lindsay felt he only portrayed about one-third of the walker’s experience. Leaving out the potentially negative created a more approachable and sanitized view of what it meant to travel in this way. Without the fear, poverty, and insecurity, Lindsay wrote that this book would “enter our office buildings without a jolt.”<sup>290</sup> Walks like this would become larks for businessmen, and release valves to ensure the continuation of the modern industrial world with all its ills. Lindsay, too, was guilty of idealizing his experience walking, but his version of idealization was to romanticize the hardship, not omit it. By romanticizing hardship, he was embracing it. Walking became a way

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>290</sup> Vachel Lindsay, “Ik Marvel Afoot”, *Chicago Evening Post Friday Literary Review*, January 13, 1914. Also available online at [http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/ik\\_marvel\\_afoot\\_\\_1914\\_.pdf](http://www.vachellindsay.org/EssaysandStories/ik_marvel_afoot__1914_.pdf)

back into the realities of life that the industrial covered. By omitting any mention of hardship, Grayson turned walking merely into a form of escape from that modern world.

Lindsay concluded his review by stating his hope for Grayson/ Baker, for “The Good King” Roosevelt, and for the country in general. He hoped that Grayson/ Baker would cease to split his personalities and would put both names on the title of his next book. Writing in the voice of both, the reader would get the good and the bad, the joys and the hardships, the beauty and the reform. The reader could “love the road, even when its greatest crookedness is made plain.”<sup>291</sup>

In creating this complete picture, it would mend a rift that was represented by the views of Roosevelt. On one hand, Roosevelt wanted to move forward vigorously. On the other, Roosevelt wanted to return to the simplicity of an earlier time. Roosevelt seemed to be rushing back and forth between these two poles, the strenuous life and the simple life being mutually exclusive choices. The strenuous life belonged to the city. The simple life belonged to the country. The strenuous life was part of the future. The simple life was part of the past. Lindsay believed otherwise. Through the act of walking, one lives in contradiction. A long walk is vigorous idleness. The walker hurries slowly and finds a sense place while on the move. He embraces the Romantic in the mundane. He moves forward by looking back. These contradictions made sense to Lindsay because of his walking. He felt it was so important to tell the whole story of the walk, “For when the ultimate veracity is achieved the strenuous life and the simple life are one—”<sup>292</sup>

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Vachel Lindsay’s life was characterized by transition, both in place and act. His recent ancestors straddled the border between north and south, as well as east and west. His status in

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

society was in flux from his youngest days as he went back and forth between the respectability that came from being the son of a doctor, and the insecurity that resulted from nevertheless being constantly cash poor. Leaving college as he did just before graduating left his education open-ended. During the best times, this kept alive his intellectual and artistic curiosity. For much of his life, however, it contributed to an underlying sense of instability. After college he bounced from potential calling to potential calling; sometimes going to school for art, sometimes working as a practical store clerk, sometimes turning back to his writing. He lived in between the old time and the modern age. The years he walked were those when the automobile was in transition, moving from being a luxury to a necessity. The world he saw as a child still traveled slowly in everyday life. By the time of his suicide in 1931, much of the modern industrial world had made its way to the individual through an array of consumer products.

Being personally on the fringes of respectability, Lindsay felt increasingly uneasy in regulated, institutional world of the Progressive era. He was un-credentialed in an age when credentials were coming into importance. He was desperately seeking a place to belong when the ethos of the time was beginning to destroy the very notion of a strong sense of place through the development of rapid transit and giant metropolis. This changed when he walked. His ability to cover distance was all the credential he needed. The difficulty and slowness of his travel made every place meaningful.

Walking helped Lindsay navigate the constant change around him. It gave him a way to keep pace with the change, but not be swept along by it. It gave focus and fuel to his personal and professional life without projecting him past the person he wanted to be. It allowed him to combine progressive strength with traditional simplicity. It combined his appreciation of the practical and ordinary rooted in his Midwestern upbringing with his desire for the abstract,

ethereal, and urbane of his art school days. In those first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, long distance walking blended the freedom of the future with the stability of the past, and pointed Lindsay towards a world that could move forward while preserving the romance and nobility of an earlier time.

## **Preservation of the World: Walking, Wildness, and Wilderness on the Appalachian Trail**

The majority of the 2,186-mile Appalachian Trail is made of dirt and rocks, but it is far from uniform. At times the feet of the walker will touch boardwalks spanning swamps in New Jersey, a narrow suspension foot bridge over the James River in Virginia, and a concrete sidewalk on the Bear Mountain Bridge over the Hudson. At times they will trod upon highway overpasses, cow paddies in farmers' fields, the main streets of towns, steps over barbed wire fences, iron rungs hammered into the sides of cliffs, and countless bits of asphalt at road crossings. At least every few miles the walker encounters the manmade infrastructure of the trail. Even the dirt and rocks are often far from natural. Trail builders have cleared rocks and limbs, built stone stairs, and dug drainage ditches. Millions of footsteps have trampled a long, narrow strip of vegetation and compressed soil, changing the chemistry of the topsoil and fueling erosion.<sup>293</sup> The variety of the make-up of the footing reflects the broader context of the trail. This path joins together a wide range of landscapes, some of it mountainous and wild, some of it rural, some of it suburban sprawl. What connects it all is not the land but the feet walking over it.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> David N Cole. "Impacts of Hiking and Camping on Soils and Vegetation: a Review" *Environmental impacts of Ecotourism*. CAB International: Wallingford UK, Buckley, Ralf (ed.): 2004, 41-60., Available online at <http://www.leopold.wilderness.net/research/fprojects/docs12/ecotourism.pdf>. Cole provides a survey of the research and writing about the ecological impact of walking and camping on set trails and in established campsites over periods of time.

<sup>294</sup> There is a lengthy literature around the Appalachian Trail. Many books fall into the categories of field guide or personal memoir. Of these Earl Shaffer *Walking with Spring* (Arlington, VA: Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 2004) stands out as a source for the early years of the Trail. See Ian Marshall *Story Line : Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail (Under the Sign of Nature)* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) for an examination of the way the landscape and nature of the Appalachians along the what would be the Trail from colonial times to the present. The best and most up to date history of the Appalachian Trail is Sarah Mittlefehdt *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2013), which updates Robert Browne *The Appalachian Trail: History, Humanity, and Ecology* (Winston-Salem: Library Partners Press, 2015).

What stands out in the popular and historical imagination about the Appalachian Trail, however, is its wilderness. It is and has been viewed primarily as a way to escape from the confines of civilization and get back to nature. In his history of wilderness in America, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash wrote of the Appalachian Trail as “providing many Americans with the chance to hike in wild country close to home.”<sup>295</sup> As Nash briefly described it, the purpose of the trail is to provide quick access for the masses to get away for a day or weekend in the wilderness. Wilderness, by the mid twentieth century when the trail was completed, was increasingly seen at best as a place where people could get away and commune with pristine nature, and at worst a place of superficial recreation. The Appalachian Trail was and is often seen as just a long, thin example of both.

The reality of the Appalachian Trail, both in its original intent and in the role it has played in American life, is very different than just a long string of weekend escapes within reach of the major population centers of the east coast. The trail’s founder, Benton MacKaye, conceived of it not as a place of temporary escape, but one of permanent sustenance, where people could go to live in a fundamentally different, more egalitarian way. He did not initially intend for the Appalachian Trail to be a place that enshrined some idealized nature for the purpose of temporary visits, but one that meaningfully incorporated nature into people’s lives through use and labor. In formulating his idea on the trail, MacKaye drew heavily the works of Henry David Thoreau, who, like MacKaye, believed that the natural world should not be isolated from the human. A well-integrated natural world for both Thoreau and MacKaye provided vital social and economic functions and was essential for a healthy civilization. Like MacKaye and the Appalachian Trail, Thoreau’s legacy has also become one of escaping into a remote,

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<sup>295</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 190.

idealized, and pristine nature. A close examination of the ideas behind the Appalachian Trail, emphasizing those of Thoreau, will show how the social and economic functions of wilderness and nature continue through to the present in the form of the trail and in the act of walking.

The variety of opinions over the role of the Appalachian Trail is just one chapter in a larger debate about wilderness and its place in the United States and in the world. Many environmentalists today see the sanctity of wilderness under threat. Writing in *Outside Magazine* to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Wilderness Act under President Lyndon Johnson, Kenneth Brower (the son of the first executive director of the Sierra Club, David Brower) suggested that wilderness is under threat both from industrial interests whose actions will destroy the physical landscape, and from writers and thinkers who attack the very notion of wilderness.<sup>296</sup>

Brower referred back to Dave Foreman, the co-founder of the radical wilderness protection group, Earth First!. Foreman viewed the world as being divided into two kinds of people, the Cannots and the Cans. The inspiration for these terms come from the opening line Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*, which says, "There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot."<sup>297</sup> Foreman and Brower are both in the "Cannot" category, meaning they both need wild things, specifically wilderness, in their lives. Central to the beliefs of Foreman and Brower is the idea that there are pristine landscapes that have existed and continue to exist in a state of nature, largely untouched by human hand, and that these spaces need to be preserved in their uncorrupted form.

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<sup>296</sup> David Brower, "Leave Wilderness Alone", *Outside Magazine*, October 13, 2014. Available online at <http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/nature/Leave-Wilderness-Alone.html>

<sup>297</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 6.



Chief among the “Cans,” Brower believes, are environmental historians who have essentially mentally and philosophically clear cut this primordial landscape with deconstructionist ideas that suggest that the idea of wilderness is itself a construct of human civilization. “Deconstructionist theory,” wrote Brower, “now divides the movement itself, separating wilderness preservationists from newer breeds of environmentalists, like the foodies and smart-agriculture faction, whose hearts are in managed landscape (not in wild and unmanaged country), and from some environmental-justice advocates, who, in their focus on the disproportionate suffering of the poor from pollution and environmental degradation, sometimes view wilderness as an elitist concern.”<sup>298</sup> Brower traced this divide back to the original sin of historian William Cronon in his essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.”

Originally published in the New York Times, Cronon’s essay began in earnest this debate over the reality of wilderness. In the essay, Cronon also presented two views towards wilderness. One view was that of the majority, who view wilderness as “the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet.” One of the earliest and most important proponents of this perspective came from Henry David Thoreau, whose declaration, “In Wildness is the preservation of the World,” Cronon includes to illuminate this majority view<sup>299</sup>.

Cronon spent the rest of the essay constructing another view of wilderness. “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity,” Cronon wrote, “it is quite profoundly a human creation...It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an

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<sup>298</sup> Brower, *Leave Wilderness Alone*.

<sup>299</sup> William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1995), 69-90. Also Available online at [http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble\\_with\\_Wilderness\\_Main.html](http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html)

untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can...be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization.”<sup>300</sup> He argued that the kind “wilderness” we try to preserve never really existed, at least since the earliest human societies. For as long as humans have been around, we have shaped the environment. What early Europeans in the Americas and interpreted as pristine was actually substantially shaped by Native Americans. Humans have often been blind to their true impact. Even if the land was untouched, though, Cronon argued that this was not viewed until recently as a good thing. Our very notion of wilderness and positive attitude towards it, along with the state of the land itself, is also a human construction. Wilderness had, for most of the history of civilization, been thought of as a place of danger that inspired fear and uncertainty in he who found himself there. It was only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that people began to view these pristine landscapes as beautiful and sublime.<sup>301</sup>

Interpretations like that of Brower create a dualistic view of the world divided into the natural and the human. On one side are those who believe that there is a primeval natural world that is older and bigger than human influence. On the other are those who see humans as a part of nature, and that in the very act of defining space as wild, we are adding our human influence.. Brower thinks that untouched wilderness is real and plays a crucial in the ecological health of the planet and in the physical and psychological health of people. Cronon thinks that trying to go back or to preserve untouched wilderness is impossible, and that in trying to place humans and human civilization outside of nature we inevitably work to the detriment of both. There seems to be little room for compromise between the two perspectives. Whether they see the divide in

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Cronon provides many examples of this in the first several pages of his essay. See also Roderick Nash *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 8-23 for pre-modern ideas of wilderness. Also see Max Oeschlaeger *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), chapters 1 and 2.

positive or negative lights, both end up with a current wilderness ideal as something that is very much tied to space, and this space is often separate from human civilization.

Both also cited earlier wilderness thinkers and activists as being central to the formation of the dualistic view of wilderness and human civilization. For Brower (via Foreman), it was Aldo Leopold's statement about not being able to live without wildness. Leopold was a pioneer of modern conservation techniques, professor of conservation at University of Wisconsin, and a founder of the Wilderness Society in 1935. Wildness was indeed central to his life and livelihood. Cronon went back even further to Henry David Thoreau and his belief that wildness is essential for the preservation of existence. Thoreau is often held up as the founder of modern attitudes towards the environment. With his seeming retreat from the world to Walden, his canoe and hiking trips in the wilds of New England, and his nature-focused writings, Cronon and others place him at the forefront of the idea that the world needs "wildness" because wilderness is "an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn from our own too-muchness."<sup>302</sup>

Wildness was certainly important for both Leopold and Thoreau, as was the natural flora and fauna that made up the landscapes they often sought. The problem in applying these ideas to the current wilderness debate comes, though, in using the terms "wildness" and "wilderness" interchangeably. The wildness that Leopold writes about in *A Sand County Almanac* hardly came from venturing into an untouched landscape, devoid of human impact. His observations of nature were made on an old farm that he and his family used as a weekend retreat and natural preservation laboratory. One lesson that he learned there was that "There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the

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<sup>302</sup> Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 69.

grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.”<sup>303</sup> He went on to describe the richness of the experience of cutting and splitting the wood used to heat one’s home. His interaction with nature was not abstract or sublime. He was not a passive or philosophical observer of the wild, but he engaged with it and through his actions, intimately incorporated it into his vital necessities.

Neither was Thoreau referring to a removed, escapist wilderness landscape when he wrote that “in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” He also found wildness not just in the land itself, but in his intimate interaction with it. This interaction came for him in many different ways. When at Walden, he found wildness through hewing the lumber from pines on site to build his house, from planting his beans, and hauling water from the pond. The specific wildness to which he is referring in this quotation, though, came from the act of walking.

Thoreau arrived at his conclusion that wildness served to preserve the world in his meditative essay, *Walking*. Wildness, he continued, is something that all living things crave. He wrote that, “every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plow and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind.”<sup>304</sup> Wildness, he explained serves an important function for human civilization by connecting people with the vital forces that spiritually nourish and foster creativity. Therefore, “a town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it.”<sup>305</sup> Both of these statements show that Thoreau believed wildness to be something different than wilderness. Wildness was more of frame of mind. It could include wilderness, but it was not just wilderness. Wildness came in the connection between the natural

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<sup>303</sup> Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 6.

<sup>304</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 20.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

and civilized worlds. It was not as much a refuge from society as an influence on society.

Wildness preserved the world not by providing humanity with a place to escape from the world it created, but through bringing those forces into the civilized and settled.

What he saw as true for communities and civilizations, Thoreau also found to be true for himself as an individual. His main source of contact with wildness and wilderness came through his daily walks. On these walks, Thoreau sought out what he thought of natural spaces, but this was not pristine wilderness. “When we walk,” he wrote, “we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or mall?”<sup>306</sup> A walker would certainly find a kind of nature in a garden; maybe even many of the same plants and animals that he would encounter in the woods. The decorative garden and the mall, however, were places that were set aside purely for leisure. Fields, on the other hand, were clearly the products of human labor, but were places where people interacted with nature. In the woods too Thoreau often encountered laborers at work, blending with the landscape and sustaining themselves through their labor in the in nature.

There was certainly an element of escapism in Thoreau’s view of nature as presented in walking. He wrote at one point, “In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to society. But it happens sometimes that I cannot easily shake off the village.”<sup>307</sup> Here, he partly wanted to get away from society, but it is not to simply enter another, natural, non-human world. He engaged on his walk with the human – farmhouses, people, trains – just as he did the natural world. His walks less allowed him to escape than they allowed him to be fully present. He went on to write, “The thought of some work will run in my

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 9.

head and I am not where my body is – I am out of my senses.”<sup>308</sup> Walking and the resulting wildness was less about escaping from the civilized world into nature than it was about achieving a higher consciousness and awareness of the present and fullness of the entire world around him.

Being in the present forced Thoreau to see his surroundings differently. He wrote, “The walker in the familiar fields which stretch around my native town sometimes finds himself in another land than is described in their owners deeds.”<sup>309</sup> He described a walk he took where this kind of transportation took place. He was walking on the farm of a man named Spaulding when he caught sight of the sun shining on a stand of pine trees across the farmer’s cranberry meadow. The sun’s “golden rays straggled into the aisles of the wood as into some noble hall. I was impressed as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there...unknown to me.”<sup>310</sup> The act of walking transformed the landscape for the walker. What was settled and familiar became wild and new to the person who walked deliberately through it.

In joining his mind and body through the act of walking, Thoreau also gained a heightened awareness of the connection between what might have otherwise seemed like disparate landscapes and the way humans –himself included- actually fit into it. First of all, his walks all began and ended at home. He wrote, “I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my own door without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the fox and mink do.”<sup>311</sup> He clearly reveled in the lack of development of the land surrounding him and how walking through it allowed him to act as “the fox and the mink,” but what he most appreciated was his place in it. He lived in the midst of this nature. It was not removed, either geographically or emotionally, but blended seamlessly into his daily life.

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 12.

The perspective that he gained on these walks, he believed, also allowed him to more accurately see the role of other people in nature. He wrote,

*From many a hill I can see civilization and the abodes of man afar. The farmers and their works are scarcely more obvious than woodchucks and their burrows. Man and his church and state and school, trade and commerce, and manufactures and agriculture, even politics, the most alarming of them all – I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape. Politics is but a narrow field, and that still narrower highway yonder leads to it...for it, too, has its place merely, and does not occupy all space. I pass from it as from a bean field into a forest, and it is forgotten.<sup>312</sup>*

One could read this passage as part of the escapist ideal that has grown up around Thoreau.

Passing from a bean field into a forest might, at first glance, seem to denigrate the bean field in favor of the forest. But Thoreau loved his bean field and wrote about it in *Walden* as a site for his observation of nature. Another and, in the context of walking, more accurate way to read this is as Thoreau firmly embedding the infrastructure of civilization into nature. His walking literally provided him with a vantage from which to see how the parts fit together. The role of something like politics might be small, but it is real and a part of the landscape.<sup>313</sup>

The act of walking through nature became for Thoreau a social, political, and economic one as a result of the merging he found between human institutions and the natural world. One of his clearest statements on what he saw as the broader implications of walking as a form of travel comes from *Walden*. Thoreau wrote:

*One says to me, "I wonder that you do not lay up money; you love to travel; you might take the cars and go to Fitchburg today and see the country." But I am wiser than that. I have learned that the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot. I say to my friend, Suppose we try who will get there first. The distance is thirty miles; the fare ninety cents. That is almost a day's wages. I remember when wages*

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>313</sup> Thoreau might also seem to be minimizing the work of farmers or the role politics by comparing them to woodchucks and bean fields respectively. Woodchucks and bean fields, however, play a large part in his time at Walden. He devotes a section of *Walden* to his bean field, and does battle with a woodchuck who was eating the young shoots of the bean plants.

*were sixty cents a day for laborers on this very road. Well, I start now on foot, and get there before night; I have travelled at that rate by the week together. You will in the meanwhile have earned your fare, and arrive there some time tomorrow, or possibly this evening, if you are lucky enough to get a job in season. Instead of going to Fitchburg, you will be working here the greater part of the day. And so, if the railroad reached round the world, I think that I should keep ahead of you; and as for seeing the country and getting experience of that kind, I should have to cut your acquaintance altogether.*<sup>314</sup>

In this passage, walking provided a way around the illogic of the modern, capitalist world. A society in which people were bound to work to money which is then exchanged for goods isolates them from their surroundings and from each other.

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Benton MacKaye, the creator of the Appalachian Trail, felt similarly about the social and economic function of walking and nature. He quoted Thoreau when speaking about the significance of transportation in his 1928 book, *The New Exploration*. MacKaye quoted his passage, “We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us...what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man...the rails are laid on them.”<sup>315</sup> Just as Thoreau believed, MacKaye too thought that how one chose to get around had broader implications. In part because of how they both got around in their respective Massachusetts towns, and in part because of the power of Thoreau’s writings, MacKaye was deeply affected by his predecessor’s views on nature, wilderness, walking, and the social and economic functions these played and should play in human life.

MacKaye was born thirteen years after Thoreau’s death and grew up just twenty-three miles to the northwest of Concord. As a child and young man, MacKaye had many similar

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<sup>314</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Modern Books, 1937), 47.

<sup>315</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, quoted in *The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional Planning* by Benton MacKaye (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1928), 17.



experiences to Thoreau, especially those that involved walking through the surrounding countryside. MacKaye's village, Shirley Center, was smaller than Concord, but was a quintessential New England village. The New England village in general became for MacKaye, "The community par excellence." His own town specifically represented this ideal well, "with its seventy-one souls in the 1880s. A meeting house, a red brick schoolhouse, a store, farmhouse, wheelwright shop and town hall. – seats respectively of religion, education, commerce, agriculture, industry, and government – the basic elements of civilization."<sup>316</sup> Contained within in a small area was a wide range of services. Fields and farms surrounded the town center, and further beyond those fields lay the wooded hills of central Massachusetts.

From a young age, MacKaye began joining these landscapes together on walking trips that, like those of Thoreau, whom he read and admired, began and ended at his door. His interest in his surroundings were coupled with an intense, self-directed study of physical geography. From around twelve years old, MacKaye began to study zoology, drawing, history, natural history, and geography. He used what he learned to help him view the landscape with a thoughtful, critical eye from the time he was a boy.<sup>317</sup>

MacKaye called the walks that took him out into the landscape his "explorations." From his base in north-central Massachusetts, he roamed through the low hills around Shirley Center. He ventured as far away as Mt. Monadnock in southern New Hampshire. At 3,166 feet, Mt. Monadnock towered over the surrounding areas and was popular with earlier walkers, like Ralph

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<sup>316</sup> Benton MacKaye. "Description of Shirley Center". Available online at [http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/massachusetts\\_conservation/shirley\\_center.html](http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/massachusetts_conservation/shirley_center.html)

<sup>317</sup> Larry Anderson, *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and the Creator of the Appalachian Trail* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

Waldo Emerson and Thoreau. As MacKaye pointed out, its summit was the only place where, if weather conditions were just right, one could see all of the New England states at once.<sup>318</sup>

It was on his ninth expedition at the age of fourteen that MacKaye truly began to assess the landscape and the human role in it. He found much of the human influence to be too overbearing and destructive of nature. In a notebook that he kept of his explorations that he called “The Geographical Handbook”, MacKaye wrote, “As I sit here, taking in the glory of Nature, the wind blowing through the trees, the cows bellowing now and then, I wish only that man was as peaceful as Nature.”<sup>319</sup> He went on to bemoan the sound of a train in the distance, but, as evidenced by including the domesticated cow as part of nature, he clearly was not in search of a pristine wilderness. Certain kinds of human activity could blend in seamlessly with the natural world, just as the bellowing of cow did with the blowing of the breeze.

MacKaye left Shirley Center to get a degree in forestry at Harvard and went to work in for the United States Department of Forestry in its early, progressive days under the leadership of Gifford Pinchot. As a forester and a progressive, MacKaye was not interested solely in resource preservation, but also in making sure those resources served what he saw as meaningful social functions for American citizens. As he traveled around the nation’s forests, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, he became concerned with the plight of the forest laborer. Lumberjacks and others who worked in the woods were essentially itinerant. MacKaye believed that these workers were denied the basics of community and family life because of this work. In his 1919 report for the Departments of Agriculture and Labor, he proposed a dramatic reorganization of public lands based around communities not unlike Shirley Center. These communities would be surrounded by a ring of farmland, which would provide some food sources for the communities, and beyond

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<sup>318</sup> Benton MacKaye, *New Explorations*, page 48.

<sup>319</sup> Benton MacKaye, “The Geographical Handbook,” MacKaye family archives, Dartmouth.

that would be the forests. Workers would harvest the trees in these forests in a large circle around the community, replanting as they went. There would be enough forest within a one-day radius of the community to keep the lumberjacks working until the replanted trees were grown again. In this way, MacKaye envisioned forest laborers logging sustainably and while also returning to their homes, families, and communities at the end of each day.<sup>320</sup>

Far from suggesting any sort of wilderness preservation through his forestry-based work, MacKaye aggressively argued for the colonization of public land. Taking not a grudging, or even neutral stance toward the necessity of colonization, MacKaye was enthusiastic about it. In one section of his report titled “The ‘Highest Use’ of Land”, he wrote, “A piece of land should be put to that use which will, consistently with the interest of the public as a whole, provide the most ‘profitable employment’ to the worker.”<sup>321</sup> Land, according to MacKaye in 1919, was meant to be used, not simply preserved for sentimental or recreational purposes. According to his colonization plans, the natural landscape was there to sustain the communities in an ongoing fashion, and really was inextricably tied to and necessary for a healthy community. What was crucial was the interplay between the town, farms, and forests.

While many in government found MacKaye’s report to be interesting, it was also considered to be a combination of too extreme and too impractical. Nothing materialized from his colonization plans. MacKaye was sidelined shortly after this report by the personal tragedy of the suicide of his wife, Betty in April of 1921. After this, he retreated to a friend’s farm in New

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<sup>320</sup> Anderson, *Benton Mackaye*, 102-123 for a summary of MacKaye’s report and context in which he wrote it.

<sup>321</sup> Benton MacKaye, *Employment and Natural Resources*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919,) 63 . Also available online at <https://archive.org/details/employmentandna01servgoog> . MacKaye did recognize the importance of recreation on public lands. In an article in the *Milwaukie Leader* from December of 1920, MacKaye wrote, “In the public forest, as well as in the parks, recreation should be recognized as a primary ‘utility’”. Quoted in Anderson, page 132.

Jersey where he could mourn, think, and begin to write again.<sup>322</sup> His thoughts and writing returned to ideas he had been formulating prior to Betty's death about a series of hiking trails and planned communities spanning the Appalachian ridge from Georgia to Maine. It was in this direction that MacKaye began to transfer the lessons that he learned through his report on the colonization of public lands. These trails, which would become one continuous trail, and the communities he hoped they would join, became his new focus for how to best use the land as a tool for the social, economic, and cultural benefit of the citizens of the eastern United States.

In October of 1921, MacKaye published a short article called "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning" in *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*.<sup>323</sup> In it, he begins with the recreational uses of the natural landscape but went on to describe how these uses can blossom in much more meaningful social and economic ways. MacKaye acknowledged the importance of communing with nature and cited the recent success that the scouting movement had at doing so in the early twentieth century. While he saw scouting as offering benefits to individuals and to society, he did not think it went far enough. "The ability to sleep and cook in the open is a good step forward," he wrote, but people "should seek the ability not only to cook food but to raise food with less aid – and less hindrance – from the complexities of commerce."<sup>324</sup> While taking a break from life to head out to the woods for a weekend, or even a week, is good, what would be far better still would be to have your life integrated into those woods. MacKaye set his plan up to suggest a way that people can live a life that is truly and consistently sustained by nature, not one in which nature is simply a break or escape.

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<sup>322</sup> Anderson, *Benton MacKaye*, 132-142 for a description of this time period.

<sup>323</sup> Benton MacKaye, "An Appalachian Trail." Reprinted in full in Anderson, *Benton MacKaye*, 371.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

The problem at the center of modern life that MacKaye hoped to address with his trail was that of labor and leisure. He wrote: “‘Let us wait,’ we are told, ‘till we solve this cursed labor problem. Then we’ll have the leisure to do great things.’”<sup>325</sup> MacKaye suggested instead that we solve the problem of leisure. He wanted to provide Americans with meaningful leisure activities that were genuinely enriching and fulfilling. To do so, MacKaye proposed creating outdoor recreational communities along the ridges of the Appalachians. These, he thought, would serve a population on the east coast that could not afford to purchase a train ticket and take the time off from work to go see the national parks and other bits of nature in the country’s west. Developing the spine of the Appalachians, he rightly surmised, would place the mountains within an easy trip of the largest population centers in the country. He hoped that people would come to these communities connected by an Appalachian Trail and enjoy themselves so thoroughly that they would not return to the cities in the lowlands, but stay to make new lives in the mountains.

MacKaye envisioned three types of communities along the Appalachian Trail. The simplest would be the Shelter Camps, modeled off Swiss chalets. These would be located roughly a day’s walk along the trail, and would provide food and lodging for those walking along the trail. It was crucial that these be manned by volunteers as “The enterprise should, of course, be conducted without profit...[and] well guarded-against the yes-man, and the profiteer.”<sup>326</sup> The Shelter Camps would be small, but would provide not only a logistical function, but economic and social ones as well. They would help to turn the Appalachians into a barrier against what MacKaye saw as the rampant and destructive unbridled capitalism of the eastern metropolis.

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 372.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 373.

Growing “naturally” out of the shelter camps would be the community camps. These would be self-owning (not for-profit real estate ventures) and semi-communal. MacKaye hoped that there would be limits on the size of these, as if they got too big, access to the surroundings would become more difficult and they would become like the metropolises he hoped to combat. Instead of getting larger, settlers would just start new communities. The basis of these would be non-industrial activities, like recreation, education, and science. MacKaye further planned that food and farm camps would grow up to support the permanent community camps, which would in turn be supported by sustainable lumber industry activity in the surrounding forests. The dream of these communities brought together MacKaye’s decades-long dream of recreating Shirley Center on a larger scale. They would, if implemented, join his social conscience with his love of nature in the form of physical infrastructure. They would realize his vision of the natural landscape as an essential social and economic tool. The result of this effort to join these communities together to make them viable and vital in their connection to the lands around them would be the Appalachian Trail.<sup>327</sup>

In addition to planning the early stages of the Appalachian Trail construction, MacKaye spent the 1920s consolidating his ideas into his first book, *The New Exploration*. In this work, he fleshes out the ideas that lay the foundation for the trail. Wilderness was a focus, but he used the term not to describe the “natural” world, but as a way to illustrate what he saw as the condition of post-Industrial Revolution modern life. He wrote:

*“The exploration of the outstanding wilderness of nature has now gone into history. The unveiling of its guiding law, from Archimedes to Newton, from Aristotle to Darwin, and its revelation as fact, from Marco Polo to Peary and Amundsen, have now taken their permanent places in the world’s accomplishments. Nature’s mystery has in good part been penetrated – and her domain conquered. But alas! The very conquering of one wilderness has been the*

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 377-379.

*weaving of another. Mankind has cleared the jungle and replaced it by a labyrinth. Through the sudden potent operation of the industrial revolution a maze of iron bands has now been spun around the earth; this forms the modern labyrinth of 'industrial civilization.' And the unraveling of this tangled web is the problem of our day.*"<sup>328</sup>

In the philosophical construction of the Appalachian Trail, MacKaye's use of the term "wilderness" was broad. The trail was intended less as a way to preserve physical nature, than as a way to navigate the wilds of modern life. The way to do this, he believed, was through real, human connection between various landscapes. And that would come with walking.

MacKaye liked to use natural metaphors to describe the human-made world around him. In his introduction to *The New Exploration*, he imagined looking down upon the world from the top of the tallest buildings in Times Square. What he described was a movement of people and goods like the flow of water throughout a landscape. This flow reached ever more broadly with the industrial age and ultimately swallowed people up and destroyed anything it touched with the spread of the "metropolitan," which he believed to be the greatest threat to his "indigenous" landscapes (urban, rural, and primeval). He then imagined the isolated hill-dweller, just fifty miles from Times Square who lived in another world. These were the worlds he wanted to connect. MacKaye wanted to create a way for the rural and primeval to touch the urban, and vice-versa, in which each could maintain its unique character while sharing the best of itself with the others. The other option, he believed, was for all to be lost in the amorphous blob of the metropolitan (what we might today call suburban sprawl).<sup>329</sup>

The way people connected was intimately tied to how they got around. Within the transportation system was both the cause of, and solution to the problems that MacKaye saw. He described this paradox in his chapter, "The Wilderness of Civilization" in which he recounted a

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<sup>328</sup> MacKaye, *The New Exploration*, 5.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

conversation that he overheard on the train out of Hoboken, New Jersey, just across the Hudson from Manhattan. The man and woman in front of him, who were headed to go for a day of hiking, were discussing what best characterized modern civilization. The man suggested that trains such as the one they were on were best representative of it. The woman countered that it was not any material artifact like a train, but our cultural or mental achievements. The man agreed and they turned to discussing what was wrong with developments such as the “steam engine.” Upon listening to this discussion, MacKaye concluded, “Obviously they were using the steam engines, and – as obviously – they were bent on avoiding them. Indeed the very reason they were using them seemed to be in order to get as far away from them as possible.”<sup>330</sup> The trains and the life that created them, and that they in turn created, both made it possible to escape to hills for a day of walking through the woods and created the need to do so.

MacKaye went on to discuss further paradoxes associated with the train and modern life in general. He referred back to Thoreau’s musings on the social costs of the railroad, which, he said, rides on people more than they ride on it, and fostered greed and inequity in society. MacKaye agreed that the modern industrial world created a good deal of progress and efficiency, but he thought that the efficiency of the larger world swallowed up the usefulness of individual people. People spent their lives in essentially meaningless, if efficient, pursuits. Still, MacKaye did not wish to throw out the modern world simply because it was paradoxical. He wrote, “to see this paradox is not to decry engines or machines, for these are part of nature. ‘The machine,’ says Mr. J.K. Hart, ‘is nature dressed up in modern clothes.’”<sup>331</sup> MacKaye was not out to reject the modern world, but to reshape it. He saw the works of twentieth-century humans as a further development in nature, not as something apart from it. With his plan for the Appalachian Trail,

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 18.



he wanted to improve the way people lived and moved about through the world, to tame the wilderness of the sprawling metropolis. He wanted to take what he saw as the barren chaos around him and turn it into a fertile garden.

MacKaye's hope was to use landscape architecture in the broad form of regional planning to bring about fundamental social change to the United States. His focus was on the Appalachians. The need was greatest there because it was most threatened by metropolitan spread. The mountains were also, he thought, a natural and logical barrier to that spread. By providing the tools for a more authentic and deliberate way of living in this region, central among which was the Appalachian Trail, MacKaye hoped to fill a gap that he saw. He wrote, "Environment, or the *space* in which to live, is as humanly fundamental as leisure, or the *time* in which to live; but the struggle being made for "space" is as sickly and puny as the struggle made for "time" is as vigorous and violent."<sup>332</sup> With his planning of the landscape, he hoped to do for space what the labor movement had done for time.

The first step to reorganization and reform was getting to know the land at a deep level. MacKaye quoted his former housekeeper, who said, "Before you can properly remodel a house you must first live in it." He then expanded this idea to include the broader landscape, which, "as with a house, so with the other types of 'habitat' – the community, the countryside, or any particular environment – we must live in it, or attempt anyhow the activity of living, before we can design or reveal its innate possibilities."<sup>333</sup> One must become truly aware of his surroundings in a way that was essentially impossible with the unconscious, thoughtless development of the metropolitan world.

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 203.

The way to become conscious of the land, thought MacKaye, involved wilderness. He turned to the thinking of Aldo Leopold, who would co-found the Wilderness Society with MacKaye and others. MacKaye paraphrased Leopold about the idea of wilderness as a form of land use, writing:

*“ ‘ The first idea is that wilderness is a resource...a distinctive element which may, if rightly used, yield certain social values. ’ The wilderness is the environment of the American pioneers, something which ‘had values of its own and was not merely a punishment which they (the pioneer) endured in order that we might ride in motors. ’ ”*<sup>334</sup>

Leopold believed that the proper way to use wilderness was through sport. MacKaye used that as a foundation for his own interpretation, suggesting that rather than mere sport, people should interact with nature through the art of living in the open. Whether through work or some other form of meaningful physical activity, people needed to actively engage with the land to understand it. Building a trail would provide a source of this meaningful activity, not just through walking, but through the construction of the trail as well.

Various individuals and groups around the eastern United States latched on to the idea of a trans-Appalachian trail, and so construction began quickly. All the way through, the construction was piecemeal and involved a dynamic mix of private individuals, hiking clubs, and government agencies through its completion, which effectively occurred in 1937.<sup>335</sup> The focus of the early construction was on connecting up existing trail, most of which was in the northeast.

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> While the trail was declared completed in 1937, there had been no coherent, overarching plan, and so it quickly slid into a state of semi-neglect during World War II. After the war, volunteers found that much of the trail had been destroyed by rough weather or been swallowed up by construction. A bill was introduced to put the trail under federal protection in 1945, but this failed to pass. It would eventually pass in 1968 as “The National Trails System Act” (available online at <http://www.nps.gov/nts/legislation.html>), which established the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail as the basis for a system of National Scenic Trails crisscrossing the country. See Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots*, 68-77 for an overview of the context of the legislation.

Regional hiking clubs took the lead on this stage with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) in New England, and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) in the Mid-Atlantic regions. Individuals from these groups worked with local representatives from the government and local landowners to get permission for the trail to cross private and public lands.

Throughout this process, MacKaye removed himself from much of the day-to-day concerns of construction. The person who stepped in to fill his role at the center of it was the Harvard-trained lawyer and president of the PATC, Myron Avery. Avery personally undertook much of the physical construction himself, and built and hiked more miles of trail than anyone else in the 1920s and 1930s. His primary goal was not on maintaining any kind of purity of landscape or wilderness ideal, but on making sure an unbroken footpath from Georgia to Maine was completed. To achieve this, Avery was willing to make aesthetic and philosophical compromises that MacKaye was unwilling to make.

This came to a head during the construction of the trail through the newly formed Shenandoah National Park in northern Virginia, which took place in 1934. The federal government wanted to build a road, Skyline Drive, on top of the ridge that ran the hundred-mile length of the park. MacKaye had long advocated reserving the Appalachian ridgelines for trails, with carefully planned auto roads occupying the valleys. He did what he could to keep roads off the ridges so they would not disrupt the course of the Appalachian Trail. This battle, if fully undertaken, would be a long, difficult, and, in the eyes of many, futile one. Myron Avery, for one, believed that it would be better to work with the government and accept the road. That it would compromise the pristine nature of the trail in that region was not a large enough concern to be a barrier for Avery. Putting both the Trail and the road on the ridge would ensure the trail

was built more quickly by avoiding debate. It would also bring in the massive resources of the federal government in constructing the trail.<sup>336</sup>

The two exchanged heated letters around the issue of skyline drive, with Avery wanting to compromise and put in a trail along the road, and MacKaye wanting to fight for a wilderness route. In arguing his side, Avery was actually closer to MacKaye's original idea than MacKaye himself was in 1935. Avery pointed this out to MacKaye, writing, "You seem to have drifted from the original concept of what would be 'an endless pathway leading ever onward in the wilderness.'" What was important in MacKaye's original plan, and continued to be of supreme importance for Avery was the continuous nature of the path, not so much that it pass through pristine wilderness. Avery went on to suggest that this new wilderness ideal of MacKaye's was fundamentally flawed. He wrote that "everyone who has traversed the ranges from Maine to Georgia knows that the term 'wilderness' is comparative, that in the East there is no true wilderness, no primeval environment."<sup>337</sup> Avery knew that what Mackaye was now fighting for was a different sort of thing than he had called for in 1921. In pushing forward against MacKaye's wishes, he ultimately helped to preserve the original intention of the trail to a much greater degree than would have been the case if they had made a stand against the auto road.

And indeed, in the few years leading up to the Skyline debate, MacKaye's views on the purpose of the trail, its relationship to wilderness, and the function of wilderness in the United States had been evolving. He increasingly became a proponent of preserving untouched, pristine wilderness and would in 1935 become a founding member of the Wilderness Society. The rapid encroachment of the modern world forced MacKaye to rethink his previous models for forest and

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<sup>336</sup> Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 183-189.

<sup>337</sup> Myron Avery to Benton MacKaye, December 19, 1935. MacKaye Family Papers, Dartmouth.

other natural landscapes that involved an integration of urban, rural, and primeval zones. With the spread of the car and roads for cars, he came to think that the only way to preserve nature in any form was to isolate it. Historian Paul Sutter in *Driven Wild* wrote of how about how modern concepts of wilderness were in many ways responses to the automobile: “By 1935, after more than a decade of trying to plan the automobile into the landscape, MacKaye came to advocate wilderness as a refuge from new and troubling machines in the garden.”<sup>338</sup> Any social function of what MacKaye hoped would become a vibrant and authentic outdoor culture was being swallowed up by a more superficial form of tourism. MacKaye essentially wrote this off as somewhat of a losing battle and “retreated to higher ground in a defense of wilderness.”<sup>339</sup>

In this burgeoning wilderness movement that MacKaye was helping to create, nature played a much different role than it had in his view prior to the 1930s. One of the central founding documents of the movement was an article written by forester and Wilderness Society cofounder Bob Marshall, “The Problem of Wilderness”, which he published in *Scientific Monthly* in 1930. In it, Marshall redefined wilderness as something positive rather than as a frightening, barren, desolate place. He wrote that he would use the word *wilderness* “to denote a region which contains no permanent inhabitants, possesses no possibility of conveyance by any mechanical means and is sufficiently spacious that a person in crossing it must have the experience of sleeping out.”<sup>340</sup> This kind of nature was vastly different from how MacKaye saw it as a forester early in his career, or how he incorporated it into his original writings on the Appalachian Trail, in which wilderness was to be a wellspring of community and regional development.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>340</sup> Bob Marshall, “The Problem of Wilderness”, *Scientific Monthly*, February, 1930, 85. Also available online at <http://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/rm240/marshall.pdf>

Marshall went on to suggest what he believed to be the benefits of wilderness. These, he wrote, “can be separated into three broad divisions: the physical, the mental, and the esthetic.”<sup>341</sup> The physical not only was good for the body, but also fostered a sense of adventure. The mental benefit came with the relaxation provided, but also with a deeper sense of repose and renewal such as that experienced by men like Henry David Thoreau, Louis Agassiz, Herman Melville, and John Muir, who upon withdrawing “from the contaminating notions of their neighbors...have been able to meditate, unprejudiced by the immuring civilization.”<sup>342</sup> Of the esthetic, Marshall argued for the sublime, as “only natural phenomena like the wilderness are detached from all temporal relationship.”<sup>343</sup> This view of nature and wilderness that MacKaye was adopting in the mid 1930s served a very different purpose than what it previously had for him. Absent among the benefits of nature as listed by Marshall is the social, which had been central in MacKaye’s earlier thinking. The benefits were to the individual, not to society as a whole (except in the sense that society is made up of individuals). Rather than integrating nature into human development, wilderness – by definition – stood apart in both time and space. Instead of using the natural world to fundamentally restructure American development as MacKaye initially suggested with his 1921 trail proposal, wilderness would become more of a safety valve to release the pressures of modern society without changing the underlying framework.

Despite the growing push for wilderness and MacKaye’s desire to move the Appalachian Trail in that direction, Myron Avery and the federal government won out when it came to the trail through Shenandoah National Park. The result was something that did not at all fit in with Marshall’s portrait of wilderness. To date, this section of trail remains one of the more scenic,

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 90.

but least isolated stretches along its 2,168-mile stretch. The trail is thoroughly interwoven with road, crossing it sometimes several times in a single mile. A hiker on this section, if he times it right, can eat three meals a day in restaurants and sleep in a private room at night. Still, this proved to be one of the last barriers in the first stage of construction, and, although reroutes and new construction would remain a constant feature of the life of the trail, by 1937, its creators could claim successful completion of an unbroken footpath from Georgia to Maine.

Although even MacKaye himself turned toward favoring a more isolated wilderness, recreational view of the function of the Appalachian Trail, the original intent to integrate nature to the civilized world nevertheless remained; as did even some of his intended social and economic function. As Sarah Mittlefehldt showed in her environmental history of the trail, because of the necessity of working with a patchwork of organizations and the need to cross an array of land that was, and would remain, private, there was not a major “dispossession of land or dramatic changes in land use.”<sup>344</sup> This is evident in the experiences of later trail users, particularly those who have traveled vast distances along it. Earl Shaffer was the first person to walk the entirety of the trail. Through the lens of Shaffer’s experience<sup>345</sup> walking continuously throughout a variety of landscapes and communities, the original intentions of MacKaye shine through in a way that they would not for someone who was out for a day hike or weekend trip in a single location.

Shaffer decided to walk, or thru-hike as it would come to be known, the Appalachian Trail for more than just recreational reasons in 1948. He had recently served with his best friend in the Pacific in World War II. The two had planned to undertake many adventures once the war ended, but his friend was killed in action. Shaffer decided to pursue the adventures anyway as a way

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<sup>344</sup> Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots*, 42.

<sup>345</sup> Earl Shaffer, *Walking With Spring* (Harpers Ferry: Appalachian Trail Conference, 2001).

both to honor his friend and to help him readjust to civilian life. He wrote in his later memoir of his trip, “Suddenly the old dream came alive. Why not walk the army out of my system, both mentally and physically, take pictures and notes along the way, make a regular expedition out of it? The Trail would benefit at a time when it was a low ebb.”<sup>346</sup> It was not so much the being in nature that he was seeking, but the moving through a vast territory. He was seeking renewal not in escaping to the wilderness, but in the act of walking.

From the beginning of his journey from Mt. Oglethorpe in Georgia to Mt. Katadhin in Maine in the spring and summer of 1948, Shaffer connected far more with the manmade, human-influenced aspects of the walk than with some kind of communion with nature, or at least that is what stuck out in his memory when he later recorded the memoir of the trip. This began with the equipment he took with him, military gear from his recent war experiences. Repurposing military gear was, perhaps, a way for him to begin to “walk the army out of his system”. He wore the same kind of boots that he had worn in the Pacific, but now he was using them to hike up hills and cross streams rather than to wade ashore during invasions and fight his way across jungle-covered islands.

The walking also connected Shaffer with other people. As was the case with other walkers, Shaffer felt a particular kinship with those who had walked in similar ways and in the same places in the past. He particularly latched onto what he saw as his connection with Native Americans. Suffering from blisters early in his trip, Shaffer decided to turn to what he believed would simulate an Indian practice to cure his feet. To toughen his feet and prevent further blisters, Shaffer removed his socks and put sand in his combat boots. The Indians, he thought, would have probably just gone barefoot, but it was too cold in the early spring as he was setting

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 8.



out. “Naturally,” he wrote, “I do not expect this to be believed or adopted by others. But the Indian ways are usually the best in the woods.”<sup>347</sup> He felt solidarity with Native Americans of the past because he was traveling in a primitive way (on foot), and he was walking through lands through which many Indians also passed. In particular, he mentioned the plight of the Cherokees, who, despite making accommodation after accommodation to European/ American style of life were still driven from their land through forced marches in the late 1820s and 1830s. Again, walking the trail presented Shaffer with temporal connections to people in the past, rather than just physical connections to the plant and animal life around him.

That Shaffer was walking the entirety of the trail also allowed him to connect with people currently residing along the trail in a way that was in line with MacKaye’s original social focus. Shaffer walked into the town of Damascus, Virginia in a downpour. Damascus lies just across the North Carolina state line about 500 miles (by Shaffer’s counting) from the southern end of the trail. In Damascus, the white blazes that mark the Appalachian are painted on telephone poles along the main street of the town. The town itself, then, is the trail. Shaffer ducked into a store to get out of the rain and described the following scene: “The storekeeper said he was closing, but I could be out of the wet at his place across the street while deciding what to do. He then insisted on providing supper, consisting of ham, spoon gravy, and other leftovers, which tasted mighty good to a famished hiker.”<sup>348</sup> MacKaye envisioned communities growing up along the Appalachian Trail that would span the urban and “primeval” landscapes. While those did not develop, through the person of the walkers like Shaffer that interaction did occur. It happened in simple, often repeated exchanges like this, when the walker relied on the care of the townspeople in meaningful, intimate ways.

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 55.

The person of the thru-hiker not only brought the wild into the settled, but also blended the settled into the wild. The storekeeper in Damascus directed Shaffer to a nearby home where he could spend the night out of the rain. This was his “first night spent indoors since the Moore home at Waterville and marked my first month of hiking, and also a distance of about 500 miles, the right progress for a trip all-the-way.”<sup>349</sup> That this was his first night indoors since briefly exiting the Smokey Mountains in Waterville, North Carolina, weeks before makes it seem as though he had been traversing a wilderness and was just then returning to civilization. In reality, while Shaffer had spent few nights indoors, he also spent few in what would be considered wilderness. He spent most nights sleeping in the shelters which are spaced roughly a day’s worth of easy walking, or on picnic tables and pavilions at recreational area. The shelters, while not exactly indoors, were typically lean-tos with three walls, a roof, and a raised wooden floor. While not identical to MacKaye’s originally proposed “Shelter Camp” communities, these shelters reflect the spirit of the concept as they create temporary communities for those traveling and working on the trail. The wildness came not so much from the depth of the wilderness as from the breadth of the experience. His occasional fear, loneliness, dirtiness, feral-ness, all created wildness.

The hybrid of wild and civilization that characterizes the bulk of the Appalachian Trail experience caused Shaffer to view those spaces that did seem like true wilderness with trepidation. Early in his hike, as he was approaching Blood Mountain in Georgia, he felt fear and foreboding. Blood Mountain is the highest point along the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and is the first real-feeling mountain along the trail headed north. For thru-hikers starting in Georgia in early spring, Blood Mountain is likely to be cold, wind-swept, and leafless. Shaffer was staring

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

up at the mountain from the store near dusk and contemplating pushing to the top to spend the night at the stone Civilian Conservation Corps shelter. The store owner, an old woman, recommended that he not do it as, “It’s too wild and lonesome up thar”.<sup>350</sup> Shaffer agreed with her, but ultimately ignored her warning and his ambivalent, lonely feeling (which can easily creep in when traveling alone at dusk), and, as a result, passed a cold, lonesome night at the summit. Despite the shelter, for the long-distance walker the barren, rocky mountain top provided a more authentic experience of wilderness, but one that was terrifying in the same way that, as Roderick Nash describes, the pre-industrial, modern wilderness environment was seen “at best indifferent, frequently dangerous, and always beyond control.”<sup>351</sup>

Shaffer’s focus on the manmade over wilderness is clear throughout his account of his first thru-hike. Only nineteen of the sixty-one pictures that he included in his book about the trip are absent some glaring manmade feature. He preferred instead to show old waterwheels, cabins, graveyards, bridges, and roadbeds. Even the controversial Skyline Drive through Shenandoah National Park did not seem to detract from his experience. Instead of being upset by this road, which competed for space along the same narrow ridge as the Appalachian Trail and crisscrossed it for the hundred-mile length of the park, Shaffer praised it: “The Skyline drive allows thousands of people to visit the Park as motorists, but a network of trails also allows backpackers and afternoon hikers to reach the backcountry.”<sup>352</sup> It also provided him with vantage points from which he could see farms spread out through the countryside (some of whose inhabitants had been removed to make for the park). For someone who was experiencing the wild through his

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>351</sup> Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 9.

<sup>352</sup> Shaffer, *Walking With Spring*, 69.

personal action rather than in a particular place, the marks upon the land became something that added to the scenery and to his experience, rather than something that detracted from it.

Overall, the length of his walk let Shaffer see the landscape in a different way. Signs of civilization were welcome to him as they provided respite and comfort. He, in turn, brought the wilderness with him. By feeding him, giving him rides, providing him with a place to sleep, or even just seeing him, Shaffer became to local residents a reminder of the nature that surrounded their towns. While the Appalachian Trail did not produce the planned communities that MacKaye called for in his 1921 proposal, it did develop an organic community based around the thru-hikers (and long-distance hikers in general), which served a similar purpose of connection between the different indigenous landscapes.

More recent hikers have had similar experiences and perspectives to those of Shaffer. The most popular account of an attempted thru-hike came in Bill Bryson's book, *A Walk in the Woods*. Bryson became interested in the Appalachian Trail when he moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, a town that the trail passes directly through. While Bryson expressed a desire to "experience this singular wilderness", which he feared was threatened by modern forces such as climate change, what really drew him in was the connection of that wilderness to the settled. When he "happened upon a path that vanished into a wood on the edge of town," he felt "an urge, as the naturalist John Muir once put it, to 'throw a loaf of bread and a pound of tea in an old sack and jump over the back fence.'" He goes on to write that "it seemed like such an extraordinary notion – that I could set off from home and walk 1,800 miles through woods to Georgia, or turn the other way and clamber over the rough and stony White Mountains to the fabled prow of Mount Katahdin, floating in forest 450 miles to the north in a wilderness few

have seen.”<sup>353</sup> What drew him in was not just the wilderness, but the fact that wilderness was connected to settled life through the structure of the Appalachian Trail and the act of walking over it.

In fact, when he did find himself walking on the trail on its southern end, he was dismayed and bored to find how much “wilderness” there actually was. Bryson and a friend began their walk in Georgia in early March with the intention of traveling the length of the trail. He found the woods that he encountered at the beginning of his trip often to be frightening. “Woods...,” he wrote, “make you feel small and confused and vulnerable...[They] are spooky.”<sup>354</sup> This was true not just for him, he said, but for historic outdoorsman such as Daniel Boone and Thoreau. When immersed in wilderness, either in the past or in the current age, it can often be terrifying. A long walk such as one would undertake on a Thru-hike of the Appalachian, is one of the comparatively fewer ways to feel immersed in it nowadays.

After a rough, slow start, capped off by constant rain and crowds in the Smokies, Bryson and his friend gave up that idea and skipped ahead to Virginia. In Virginia, they found the weather to be better, the crowds to be nonexistent, and the landscape more amenable. Bryson writes:

*Best of all there were views, luscious and golden, to left and right...here each time we hauled ourselves to a mountaintop and stepped onto a rocky overlook, instead of seeing nothing but endless tufted green mountains stretching to the horizon, we got airy views of a real, lived-in world: sunny farms, clustered hamlets, clumps of woodland, and winding highways, all made exquisitely picturesque by distance. Even an interstate highway, with its cloverleaf interchanges and parallel roadways, looked benign and thoughtful, like the illustrations you used to get in children's books in my boyhood, showing an America that was busy and on the move but not too busy to be attractive.*<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Bill Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 3-4.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

When actually on his walk, the desire for pristine wilderness was replaced by an appreciation for how humans fit into the natural landscape. The perspective both from the mountain top, and created by the act of walking, allowed him to see how the human and the wild were part of the same.

Even people who have experienced the Appalachian Trail in drastically different ways share some things in common with the more recreational walkers like Bryson. One of the more extreme trips on it came from a North Carolinian named Eustace Conway in 1981. After graduating from high school in 1978, Conway worked some odd jobs, but spent most of his time honing his primitive skills while living in a handmade teepee in the mountains outside of Boone, North Carolina. When his friend, Frank, who had similar interests in the natural world and who was at loose ends asked him to hike the Trail, he readily agreed. Conway and his friend set an arduous pace – 25 to 30 miles a day – which was made even more difficult by their lack of food. When they began, they only had a bit of oatmeal with them. Conway tried to make up the difference by hunting small game and dumpster diving as he went. While successful in both areas, it was nearly impossible to find enough game to support those miles, and they rarely passed by dumpsters.<sup>356</sup>

Despite the hardship (and perhaps because of it), the trip turned out to be exceptionally formative for Conway. Along the way he learned more than just how to travel quickly on foot using his primitive skills. His biographer, Elizabeth Gilbert, wrote, “Frank and Eustace found all this heightened communication with each other... They were on the same page about nature and what was wrong with America, and they were both heavily into Native American lore and

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<sup>356</sup> Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Last American Man* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 50-64 for a full account of his trip

teachings.”<sup>357</sup> The Trail became a place for the pair to connect with the natural world, to gain perspective on the broader culture in which they lived, and to tap into deeper historical and spiritual traditions. Gilbert also suggested that this experience of basically living as a nomadic hunter gatherer on the Trail provided Conway with a firm foundation on which he could build the rest of his life in a way that made sense to him. It was a way for him to rid himself of all of the trappings of society so that he could deliberately bring back in only that which seemed good and important to him. After his walk he constructed a teepee out of the skins of animals that he killed, then slowly saved money and purchased land over the years so he could create his own homestead in the mountains. He continues to live there where he farms, hunts, and conducts live-in seminars in primitive skills.

Thousands of other’s have felt similar to people like Bryson or Conway in their own walks along the trail. Certainly there is natural beauty to be found in abundance along its path, but the moments of interest and excitement, the ones walkers remember and write about, more often blend the human with the natural, indeed making the human part of the natural. Excepting bear sightings, the most notable wildlife is not very wild at all. These include a pack of feral goats that escaped from a farm years ago in Virginia, the “wild” horses of Grayson Highlands near Mt. Rogers, and the countless mice that are a constant concern in every shelter along the trail. Even those most wild black bears are most commonly seen in the least wild state: New Jersey, where habitat is limited and trashcans are abundant. Most of the adventures for Bryson and many other long distance walkers on the trail come not from grappling with the terrain or animals, but from stealth-camping in a town or hitching a ride with interesting (if mildly scary) characters. All the while, even in the most remote portions of the trail, the Appalachian Trail

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 5.

walker seldom has the sense of being disconnected from society. Still, the Appalachian Trail is perceived on the outside as having the characteristics of a wilderness experience. Rather, hiking the Trail expands the notion of wilderness, making a wilderness out of the woods, the towns, the motels. As MacKaye wrote, it creates, “The Wilderness of Civilization”, where a wilderness is created not by any inherent characteristics of the place, but by how people explore it, plumb its depths, and try to make sense of it.<sup>358</sup>

The Trail draws in people who feel the pull of the natural world, who have spent weekends and weeks seeking nature in ever-expanding circles near their homes. What they find on the trail is a string of their weekend wildernesses connected to each other, to towns, to highways, to commuter rail lines, by their continuous plodding. The walking creates the wild and then spreads it from the wilderness to the various landscapes. Even if MacKaye’s original vision of formal, planned, permanent communities spanning his “indigenous” landscapes did not come to pass, a large piece of the essence of plan, and the hoped-for creation of community and authenticity, has remained through the journeys of those who still walk the trail.

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The National Park Service’s map of the National Scenic Trails shows what looks like a sparser, more circuitous version of a map of the interstate system. Apart from the glaring blank spaces of the southern and central Great Plains, the United States is increasingly connected by these long distance footpaths. A person can walk from the southern tip of Florida, along the gulf coast, to the Appalachians, almost exclusively on dirt paths through the woods. He can travel along the eastern spine of the continent, taking side trips into the country’s largest cities on the

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<sup>358</sup> MacKaye, *The New Exploration*, 16-25.



same. When he gets to New England, he can head west, across New York State, through the Great Lakes region, and across the northern Plains, only hitting pavement again in western North Dakota. From Glacier National Park, he can either head down the Continental Divide for 3,000 miles, or travel across Idaho and Washington to the coast, before turning south for the journey to Mexico through the Cascade and Sierra Nevada Mountains. In between these trails lie many others – some officially designated National Scenic Trails, others under state or local control – with many more being under construction or in the planning stages.

This entire system grew from the seed of Appalachian Trail, which in turn grew from the experience of Benton MacKaye walking through the Massachusetts countryside as a boy. As he looked down from a hill near his village and saw the landscape unified before him. As he grew up, he saw that unity disappear in the face of geographic expansion, demographic explosion, and transportation revolution. Whether it was itinerant loggers in Washington state at the turn of the twentieth century who were isolated and rootless in the expansive forests, or commuting office workers who were isolated and disconnected in their growing suburban sprawl in the middle of the century, MacKaye saw a world in which his ideal New England village was vanishing. In different times and in different ways, MacKaye saw a country that was becoming compartmentalized.

Walking was his answer to that problem. Through action and infrastructure, he believed he could create a bulwark against the troubling developments he saw around him. While his vision and its implementation changed over time, the spirit of it remains. It is now possible to see the country unified – in however limited a way - through these trails. As people walk the trails, they meet engage with each other and with the land. The trail system is a monument to his walks. This foot-based infrastructure will remain a bulwark against the rampant growth and

excess speed of the modern world. The system will continue to provide a piece of the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century New England village –with its human connection and interaction - wherever it expands, thereby helping to preserve the society as it grows.

## **A Small Step for Man: Walking Since World War II**

As I continued my post-college walk south from New York City, I encountered obstacles. The obstacles did not come in the form of wild animals, or harsh terrain, or frightening people. It came from something much more insidious: the suburbs. The Appalachian Trail, which I took through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, successfully threads its way through the sprawl. The C & O Towpath provides a pleasant, traffic-free greenway along the Potomac and into Washington D.C.. Once there, though, there is no way out (short of retracing your steps) except to fight through the incredibly expansive metropolitan area.

It took two full days to escape the grasp of Washington. My march into Northern Virginia to Manassass nearly turned into a rout. Traffic was heavy. Sidewalks and shoulders were scarce. Several among the concentric rings of four-lane highway around the city proved nearly uncrossable. Among the tracts of houses whose inhabitants were shut firmly inside, in the absence of fields or undeveloped riverbanks, finding a place to sleep also was challenging. The suburbs force the walker into questionable accommodations in swampy day use areas, dugouts of baseball fields, and among the weeds under buzzing powerlines.

While the Washington area was the worst I encountered, it was not the only sprawl. This process repeated itself walking west out of Charleston, West Virginia, then again in the horse country north of Lexington, Kentucky, where what had been the country roads had not caught up with the metropolitan growth there. Days later, I passed a sign that said I was entering Louisville just as a massive storm was rolling in. I felt relieved as I was planning to rest for several days there at a friend's house. My relief turned to frustration when I looked at my map and saw I still had twelve miles or so to get to Louisville proper; four more hours of walking. The sprawl, which was convenient for cars, I suppose, was a no-man's land for the traveler on foot. I had

walked enough to know that this landscape was connected to the others, but actually being in it was more than I could face that day. For the first time in nearly 1,500 miles, I rode. I first tried public transportation. I sat in a covered bus stop to get out of the rain, but no one really rides the bus in the suburbs, so they rarely come. After about 45 minutes, a man in a red convertible corvette pulled up and offered me a ride, which I accepted.

The landscape that made me take a ride for those few miles that day is the same one that has led me to walk thousands more in my life. Growing up in a suburb in an expansive metropolitan area, I frequently wandered the cul-du-sacs trying to find a vantage point from which I could see where it all ended. When you are in the middle of it, however, you cannot see the edges or the connections. The topography is lost under the subdivisions. The wildlife is scared away or hit by the cars. People stay inside.

The modern iteration of the suburb is a product of the post-World War II world, where Americans began to enjoy unprecedented material wealth.<sup>359</sup> While the war did not fully create the conditions, it did provide a general surge in life. There was more money, more stuff, longer commutes, a greater potential for destruction. Old communities disintegrated. Many of the long walks that would come in the wake of the war were in response to this atmosphere of unbridled growth. Walking could serve either as a way to reject the ills of the modern world, or as a way to try to cure them. Where earlier walking had largely been about trying build (reputations, trails,

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<sup>359</sup> Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13-19 for transformation of the walking city. There were certainly suburbs before, but these were often based around rail lines rather than automobiles, and they were not as densely packed as post-war suburbs would be. In earlier suburbs, there were still town centers as well as spaces between them; James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Manmade Landscape* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 9-17 for a discussion of the emptiness and isolation of suburban landscapes.

knowledge) and move forward, post-World War II walking was about deconstructing and moving back.

One of the first to lace up for long distances in the years after the war was a woman who was born Mildred Lisette Norman Ryder, but became known to the world as Peace Pilgrim. Mildred was born on a farm outside of Egg Harbor City, New Jersey, where she grew up poor. She led a normal life with her close-knit family, but was also guided through conversation to consider the social issues of the day. After graduating from high school and taking some business courses, Mildred worked through her twenties as a secretary. Like her coworkers, she socialized, went to parties, and bought whatever was in fashion. She married a businessman in 1932, and realized that, even in the depths of the depression, it was easy to make money. Money acquisition, however, increasingly seemed like a hollow pursuit to her. Her growing desire for a simpler spiritual life (a realization she came to while walking and praying one night) was at odds with the boozy materialism of her husband. When he went to war despite her protests, the split was complete. They divorced in 1946.<sup>360</sup> She worked briefly for Scott Nearing, who preached the simple life with his back-to-the-land ethos, but also began walking. Her walks in the woods gradually lengthened until by 1952 she became the first woman to walk the length of the Appalachian Trail in one season.<sup>361</sup>

Long distance walking seamlessly moved Mildred along on her spiritual journey. It was impossible to carry much on a walking trip, and the walker feels the literal burden of any

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<sup>360</sup> <http://www.peacepilgrim.org/htmlfiles/mdppbio.htm> for general biographical information for Peace Pilgrim.

<sup>361</sup> She and a male companion walked from Georgia to Pennsylvania, then took a bus to Maine and walked back south to Pennsylvania. Because she technically did not thru-hike, and because she was with a man, Emma Gatewood, the first woman to walk alone at a straight shot, is usually given credit as the first woman to walk the Appalachian Trail. Peace Pilgrim would probably be fine with that.

material object she chooses to carry, which often leads to feeling the figurative burden as well. Mildred set out on what she describes as a gradual, but very difficult path of relinquishment. Walking let her give up not only possessions but also meaningless pursuits. “It was an escape from the artificiality of illusion into the riches of reality” for her.<sup>362</sup>

Walking helped Mildred to pare down and escape the life she did not want, but it also allowed her build back a life that she did. One morning, while walking, she suddenly felt incredibly “uplifted”. This feeling was a moment of clarity and insight. She wrote, “I remember I knew *timelessness* and *spacelessness* and *lightness*.”<sup>363</sup> She was alone, but the plants, even the air, around her emanated light and connection. She felt a oneness with creation, with “the creatures that walk the earth and the growing things of the earth...*a oneness with that which permeates all and binds all together and gives life to all.*” She experienced a more intense version of what many walkers before had in smaller doses: traveling on foot intimately connected her with her surroundings and with the living things in them.

Soon after, her enlightenment transformed into a mission. Just as Benton MacKaye had decades before, she gained her specific drive while looking out the New England countryside from atop a mountain. It was there that she formulated her plan to embark upon a transcontinental pilgrimage for peace. She wrote, “I saw...myself walking along and wearing the garb of my mission...I saw, a map of the United States,...I knew what I was to do.” She would make her personal spiritual journey public by walking across the country, introducing herself from then on as Peace Pilgrim.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Peace Pilgrim, *Peace Pilgrim: Her life and Work in Her Own Words* (Santa Fe: Ocean Tree Books, 1992), 21.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 22.

Peace Pilgrim would walk from coast to coast in 1953, spreading a message of personal and political peace. That first walk never really ended, but morphed into other walks for the rest of her life. All the while she continued her process of simplification and connection, guided by the experience of putting one foot in front of the other. She carried no money, no food, and no water. Her only possessions were the clothes on her back, which she also worked to pare down, and a few leaflets describing her mission of peace. Even with these minimal possessions, she was continuously analyzing what was truly necessary. She wore a simple outfit of navy pants, a navy shirt, navy socks, and navy canvas shoes. When she began, she also had a scarf and a sweater, but she discarded those as unnecessary. She found instead that being in the weather and truly experiencing it meant she would ultimately adjust to either or cold, no matter her outfit. At the deepest levels, Peace Pilgrim's walking connected her to the world around her.<sup>365</sup>

Walking as Peace Pilgrim did it was the ultimate expression of faith. This was a religious faith, but also a generalized one. On the leaflet that she carried with her, it read, "I am a pilgrim, a wanderer. I shall remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace, walking until I am given shelter and fasting until I am given food."<sup>366</sup> Her faith was in some version of God, but was truly expressed in the connections her walk made possible. For her, this faith in uncertainty could be an antidote to the false sense of security and certainty that she saw in the materialism and nuclear threat facing the world. Rather than bury fear under more – more stuff, more consumption, more energy – she found connection through this universal human action. Ultimately, she would walk tens of thousands of miles (she stopped counting at 25,000). She died in a car accident while riding as a passenger in Indiana in 1981. While most people would be terrified by the prospect of shedding all possessions to walk alone for years, what turned out

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 51-58. Here she describes her ongoing process of simplification.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., introduction.

to be truly dangerous for Peace Pilgrim was riding in a car: an act which has perhaps replaced walking as the most mundane of human activities.

At the same time that Peace Pilgrim was zigzagging across the country on her first transcontinental walk, another woman, Emma Gatewood, was taking her first steps into long distance walking as well. In the early summer of 1954, 66 year-old Gatewood, mother of eleven, grandmother of twenty-three, and great-grandmother of two, took a bus out of her small Ohio town to Maine to begin a southward trek down the Appalachian Trail. Her children were grown and out of the house, her horribly abusive husband had left for good years before, and she had finally saved up enough money to try to realize the dream that began when she picked up a National Geographic at the doctor's office in 1946 and saw an article about the trail.<sup>367</sup>

Her trip that year ended after just a few days and thirty miles when she got lost, stepped on her glasses, and was flown out of the Maine woods by rangers, who then put her on the next train home. She was back in 1955. This time she began in the South. Information about the Trail in those days was sketchy. Many people who lived right along it had no idea what it was, and only a handful of people had walked its entire length. Still Gatewood, carrying only a small pack with a change of clothes and some food, and, wearing low top canvas shoes, she persisted. She had no tent and no sleeping bag. When she could find shelter in homes or in the lean-tos built along the trail, she took it. Otherwise she simply piled up leaves and hoped it wouldn't rain.

Some people she met along the way were wary of a person walking around the mountains for no definitive reason, but most were open and kind. She, in turn, was open and kind to them. When walking through New York, she entered a shelter in the midst of powerful storm that was produced by a hurricane that was hitting the coast and found a group of nine young men, most of

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<sup>367</sup> Ben Montgomery, *Grandma Gatewood's Walk: The Inspiring Story of the Woman Who Saved the Appalachian Trail* (Chicago Review Press: Chicago, 2014).



whom were African American. She eyed the youths, who were leaders of rival gangs from Harlem on a church-lead reconciliation trip, suspiciously. They returned her suspicion. The circumstances of the storm and the walking after it would not sustain this suspicion. Decades later the leader of the group from Harlem, Rev. Dr. David Loomis, recorded his memory of meeting Grandma Gatewood during that storm. He wrote that when she first entered the shelter, she could not hide “her unease at living in close proximity to eight young black males, her distress leading all eight to bestow upon her their stoniest stares.” The conditions of the trail forced them all to spend the next several days together, though. They “took turns standing by the fire,” and when the rain let up and they could hike again, “Emma piggybacked on a variety of youthful backs as we forded swollen torrents that would have swept her downstream had she attempted them on her own.” The common experience of walking and the resultant sharing of space made it possible for the old woman and the young gang leaders to see the humanity in each other.<sup>368</sup>

Gatewood kept putting one Ked-clad foot in front of the other, and some five months after she set out in Georgia, she ascended the final climb up Mt. Katahdin in Maine. She briefly returned home, but returned again and again to the Appalachian Trail. She also logged thousands of miles in the woods near her home in Ohio and elsewhere around the country. The country had paid attention to her Appalachian walking, but she gained further notoriety with her 1959 walk of the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri to Portland, Oregon to commemorate the Oregon Centennial. She wanted to see more of the country, but also wanted to experience something of what it was like to travel as the Oregon settlers of the 1850s did. The media attention she

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 130, Full account of David Loomis is reprinted here.

received along the way and after her trip meant that thousands of Americans were vicariously experiencing a piece of this as well.<sup>369</sup>

Walking made headlines elsewhere in the country during the 1950s as well. In 1954, Supreme Court Justice and environmental advocate William O. Douglas read an editorial in the *Washington Post* calling for the construction of a parkway along the old C&O Canal towpath, which ran west from Washington DC 185 miles to Cumberland, Maryland. Douglas was accustomed to taking walks on the towpath, especially when he had a difficult decision he was contemplating. The path provided easy access to the natural world from the city, and the peace of the surroundings and pace of the walking helped him think. He responded to the parkway proposal with an editorial of his own in which he outlined the benefits of walking and described how they would be lost if construction began. He wrote:

*One who walked the canal its full length could plead that cause with the eloquence of a John Muir. He would get to know muskrats, badgers, and fox; he would hear the roar of wind in thickets; He would see strange islands and promontories through the fantasy of fog; he would discover the glory there is in the first flower of spring, the glory there is even in a blade of grass; the whistling wings of ducks would make silence have new values for him. Certain it is that he could never acquire that understanding going 60, or even 25, miles an hour.*<sup>370</sup>

All of this quiet and connection would be lost if a parkway appeared right next to the wilderness corridor.

Douglas then challenged the author of the initial editorial to walk the length of the towpath with him. “I wish the man who wrote your editorial of January 3, 1954, approving the parkway would take time off and come with me.”, He wrote. “We would go with packs on our backs and walk the 185 miles to Cumberland. I feel that if your editor did, he would return a new

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 219-225 for a description of her walk west.

<sup>370</sup> William O. Douglas, Washington Post editorial, January 19, 1954, reprinted in full at <http://www.nps.gov/choh/learn/historyculture/associatejusticewilliamodouglas.htm>

man and use the power of your great editorial page to help keep this sanctuary untouched.”<sup>371</sup>

Douglas believed that the editor would change his views if he just traveled the path at 3-4 miles an hour. If he then wrote about his experience, thousands more would change their minds because of his walk. This walk could potentially change the landscape.

Robert Estabrook, the chief of the editorial page at the *Washington Post*, accepted this challenge. They planned to start their walk in Cumberland on March 20, 1954. Some of the walkers would camp along the way, others would find lodging in nearby towns and farms. Forty people showed up to begin the hike, but the miles quickly whittled the group down to nine of the originals by the end. They averaged twenty-three miles a day, which, even with the trucks shuttling food and camping gear, and the extreme flatness (actually an imperceptible downhill all the way into Washington) is an impressive pace. Douglas, at age 55, stood out among the others for his walking prowess. Estabrook was so taken by the experience that he printed a retraction of his earlier advocacy of the parkway.<sup>372</sup>

The towpath was preserved, and provided the quickest way for Washingtonians to walk right from the middle of the city in woods for hundreds, even thousands (if they take the towpath to the Appalachian Trail), of miles. For Douglas, it remained a place for him to find regular regeneration and inspiration. Most Sundays he went on lengthy walks along the towpath with friends, during which he would talk incessantly, typically about environmental topics. His leadership in the preservation of the towpath with his long walk and his continued walks along it

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Bruce Allen Murphy, *Wild Bill: The Legend and Life of William O. Douglas* (New York,: Random House, 2003), 331-334 for description of the walk and statistics on mileage.

helped to make him one of the more powerful figures mid-twentieth century environmentalism.<sup>373</sup>

The walking-inspired landscape of the C&O towpath became the scene of the implementation of part of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier a few years after Douglas's walk. In a speech outlining The New Frontier, his overarching presidential vision, Kennedy spoke about a range of topics, among which were technology, transportation, health, and leisure. Suburban sprawl was eating up resources and isolating people. Automation was replacing men with machines in all realms of life. Modern transportation was freeing up leisure time, but there was nothing good that filling the void, and, with "more and more cars on more and more superhighways, requiring more and more parking places...parks and playgrounds and scenic routes" were disappearing.<sup>374</sup> This was a threat not just to our landscape, but to our safety. In December of 1960, Kennedy wrote an article for *Sports Illustrated* called "The Soft American." In it he warned that "in a very real and immediate sense, our growing softness, our increasing lack of physical fitness, is a menace to our security."<sup>375</sup>

One of the metrics that Kennedy decided upon to gauge the physical fitness of an individual – particularly a member of the military – was whether or not the person could travel 50 miles by foot in under 20 hours. This standard was set by Theodore Roosevelt in an 1908 executive order.<sup>376</sup> These fifty-mile challenges took places throughout the country. Even

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 335-336.

<sup>374</sup> John F. Kennedy, Excerpts from Speech by Senator John F. Kennedy, Valley Forge Country Club, Valley Forge, PA - (Advance Release Text), October 29, 1960, reprinted at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=74292>

<sup>375</sup> John F. Kennedy, "The Soft American", *Sports Illustrated*, December 26, 1960. Also available online at <http://armymedicine.mil/Documents/Panel%20C%20-%201960-Kennedy-Soft-American.pdf>

<sup>376</sup> "Let's Take an Old-Fashion Fifty Mile Walk", *Life Magazine*, February 22, 1963. Also available online at

Attorney-General Robert Kennedy completed the distance. The most significant “Kennedy Challenge”, however, took place on the towpath. On March 30, 1963, four men completed the full distance in a time of 13:10. (Nowadays there are often more than 1,000 finishers in a given year, and the fastest times are in 5:30-5:40 range.)<sup>377</sup> Walking long distances thus was part of a presidential call for American physical recommitment and, to the degree that such a commitment was part of maintaining a national standing, even a tool in the Cold War.

Earlier in the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, walking was also important in issues of race. Transportation was often at the heart of racial issues in the United States at this time, and various leaders in the Civil Rights movement employed both the imagery and act of walking to get their messages out. The first mass activity of the movement was the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which spanned 13 months from 1955 to 1957. African Americans in Montgomery boycotted the city busses to protest segregation and instead got around by foot when possible, but more often by carpool. In February of 1956, the state of Alabama declared that it was illegal to form carpools for the purpose of boycotting the bus system, and began arresting those who were offering and taking rides. Martin Luther King who was a key leader of the boycott was among those arrested. During a mass meeting about the arrests, another leader, Rev. Ralph Abernathy asked that “race-loving blacks ...not turn a key in the switch, nor touch the starter, nor take a cab, but would walk everywhere that Friday, so that those who walked would know

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<https://books.google.com/books?id=Nk8EAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA72&lpg=PA72&dq=teddy+roosevelt+1908+executive+order+walk+50+miles&source=bl&ots=fA5NOFw-ol&sig=g3O6o-8e2aRWbPqWoaQPiwlF90&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBWoVChMI1Zrt38GSyQIVRcljCh0uJAjL#v=onepage&q=teddy%20roosevelt%201908%20executive%20order%20walk%2050%20miles&f=false>

<sup>377</sup> JFK.org for full race results

that others walked with them.”<sup>378</sup> Walking brought the protestors together. Also, while the state could ban boycott-supporting ride sharing, they could do nothing about as fundamental an act as walking.

Walking was also central to one of the largest demonstrations of the civil rights movement, the March on Washington in 1963. The organizers drew on the legacy of Coxe’s Army in using a march as a form of protest, a “petition on boots.” Their focus was far more on the day of demonstration in Washington DC than it was on drumming up support by walking to the city itself. “Marchers” traveled to the city in huge numbers aboard buses, and once there, only marched the short distance from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. While far from a long distance walk, the imagery came from previous ones, and the symbolism was very similar.<sup>379</sup> Being on foot made the people, both as individuals and collectively, visible in a way it would not have been otherwise.

As the idea of the march as an effective tool of the Civil Rights movement grew, so did the distances walked. In March of 1965, Martin Luther King and others organized a multiday march from Selma, Alabama to the statehouse stairs in Montgomery to push for voter registration among African Americans in the region. The total distance of the proposed march would be 55 miles. George Wallace, the white, segregationist governor of Alabama, opposed the march and declared it illegal and a safety hazard. Hundreds of people walking down the highway, he claimed, would block traffic and potentially cause accidents. The walker, according to this, had no place on the roads. In addition to white supremacy, Wallace was choosing the

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<sup>378</sup> Ralph Abernathy, quoted in *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, ed. David J. Garrow (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 155.

<sup>379</sup> Also, while a short march (roughly a mile) if all of the over 250,000 participants walked the route, their mileage would add up to enough to make it over ten times around the earth.

supremacy of the machine over that of the man. Segregation divided not just whites and blacks, but drivers and walkers.

The marchers marched anyway and were turned back in one of the most violent episodes on the era. Police were waiting on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, just outside of the city limit of Selma. When the marchers crossed the bridge, the police descended upon them, seriously injuring over fifty in the ensuing melee. It took the rest of the month and intervention from Lyndon Johnson to get the assurances from Wallace and the state of Alabama that a similar incident would occur when the marchers tried again. On March 21, a group of around 300 set out again from Selma. This time, the police gathered on the Edmund Pettus Bridge just watched from the sides of the road as the marchers passed.

Traffic and the logistics of getting a large group of people to walk fifty miles were almost as much of a focus of the coverage as were the reasons behind the march. The newspapers frequently mentioned the disruptions to traffic caused by the marchers, the reporters following them, and the pro-segregation whites who drove out to protest. They included details about the pace of the marchers, as well as weather and road conditions. An article in the *Alabama Journal* written as the marchers passed the halfway mark described the road ahead in detail. “The path ahead for today along the two-lane highway includes deep water on both sides of the road... This is the Big Swamp,” it said. The article went on to describe the minimal shoulder, narrow bridges, and blind curves that the marchers would encounter.<sup>380</sup> The implicit message in the detailed descriptions of the dangers was to reinforce the supposed concerns of Wallace for the public safety, both of the drivers and the marchers. Walking in this case provided an extra layer to the struggle against segregation. The marchers’ presence on the highway became visible example

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<sup>380</sup> “Wet Marchers Pass Halfway Point”, *Alabama Journal*, March 23, 1965. Also available online at <http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/rights/lesson4/doc2.html>

of how they were perceived by the modern world as being where they were not supposed to be.

The longest march of the movement began as the smallest. On June 5, 1966, James Meredith and three companions left the sidewalk in front of Peabody Hotel in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, walked past the much less glamorous Lorraine Motel several blocks south, and then out the city, past the pastoral sprawl of Graceland. Meredith, who four years earlier had desegregated the University of Mississippi, was walking in part to register voters, but his primary purpose was to “challenge that all pervasive fear that dominates the day to day life of the Negro in the United States, especially in the South, and particularly in Mississippi.”<sup>381</sup> Growing up black in Mississippi, fear was ever-present. Any perceived social misstep among whites could have dire consequences. To fight this fear, Meredith would go alone, or nearly alone, at least. He did not want the individual man to get lost in the crowd. To meet and conquer the pervasive fear, he would have to be solo and on foot.<sup>382</sup>

Meredith and his three companions walked just a few miles that first day, and got an early start for their first full day of walking on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Things began as well as Meredith could have hoped. When he passed through towns, many of the African Americans citizens in them came out to witness his march. They stood there in spite of official requests that they disperse. Some told him that they planned were going to register. There were even moments of civility and connection between his small band of walkers and small groups of white onlookers. Towards the

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<sup>381</sup> James Meredith, quoted in *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear* by Aran Goudsouzian, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2014), 7.

<sup>382</sup> Roy Reed, “Meredith Begin Mississippi Walk to Combat Fear” *New York Times*, June 6, 1966. Also available online at <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimesindex/docview/116862286/4C61DFE965F84276PQ/485?accountid=8361>



end of the day, everything changed. A white man came walking down the street carrying a shotgun. He said he just wanted Meredith, not the others, then he shot him with heavy gauge birdshot from thirty feet away. He walked closer and shot again several more times. Meredith dragged himself across the highway, bleeding. The man was finally disarmed, but the damage was done. Meredith would survive the shooting, but would spend several days in the hospital and needed weeks to recover.<sup>383</sup>

In the wake of the shooting, leadership of various branches of the Civil Rights Movement came to Mississippi to continue the march. The walk from there was fraught with tension between conflicting visions for how to move forward. Was non-violence the best course, or did that produce no change? Meredith himself was torn by those decisions, and had debated whether to take a Bible or a gun with him. He went with the Bible, but after being shot, he regretted his decision.<sup>384</sup> Despite internal disagreements, the participants finished the march. Meredith himself was able to join in for the final miles into Jackson.

Walking seemed to bring out the tension that was found among the marchers in Mississippi. Historian Aram Goudsouzian wrote in his book length exploration of this walk that “a prolonged march through Mississippi, with a spirit both moral and martial, would keep aggravating segregationists, compelling press attention, and dramatizing the evils of racism.”<sup>385</sup> Just as it did for Vachel Lindsay with his antimodernist tendencies, walking contained and made sense of contradiction. It was peaceful, yet aggressive. A march like this was accessible and understandable due to the routine nature of the act, but it stuck out because of the context.

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<sup>383</sup> Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads*, 19-21

<sup>384</sup> Roy Reed, “Meredith Regrets He Was Not Armed”, *New York Times*, June 8, 1966. Also available at <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimesindex/docview/116858965/D8C5CB43046F4F71PQ/15?accountid=8361>

<sup>385</sup> Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads*, 30.

Goudsouzian ends his account of the march with the firsthand account of a woman who was along for the final miles into Jackson. L.C. Dorsey had been born and raised in the Delta and intimately knew the potential for danger and violence there. Still, she described that last day as being “like a spiritual experience. There was an energy that [she had] not felt before or since.”<sup>386</sup> She claimed she could hear the individual voices of the crowd of 15,000 marchers as they sang freedom songs. This heightened awareness was made possible by the fact that she feared she could die at any moment from some act of terror. The openness the walk inspired allowed the individual to join the collective without losing herself.

Walking remained a popular symbol throughout the rest of the 1960s and into the 1970s. In 1968, the first “walkathon” was held in Minneapolis. In the “International Walk for Development,” three thousand people walked thirty-three miles throughout the city to raise money to fight worldwide hunger.<sup>387</sup> One of the greatest moments for walking as a symbol came amidst perhaps the greatest technological achievement of the decade. On July 16, 1969, American astronauts landed on the moon. They traveled the quarter of a million miles to the moon fueled by the latest technology, the most powerful computers, and billions of dollars. This mission was undertaken with incredibly lofty goals. Their task on their brief stay would be chiefly to collect samples by digging up a bag full of moon dirt. The sentiment before the launch was a mixture of hopes and concerns tied to universal, technological, and potentially dehumanizing implications of this mission, it is significant that its enduring legacy came from the journey’s simplest act. The nation and the world latched on to the image of a footprint in moon dust coupled with Neil Armstrong’s words as he exited the landing craft: “That’s one

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>387</sup> <https://leonmedicalenglish.wordpress.com/2014/05/16/walkathon-history/>

small step for (a) man, one giant leap for mankind.”<sup>388</sup> Reports of the landing latched onto the footstep and step. We remember Armstrong not as the first man who flew to the moon, but as the first man to walk on the moon.<sup>389</sup> One analysis of the event declared that “a new chapter in man’s saga has now begun, and many human feet will on the moon, on the planets, and even perhaps other solar systems revolving about other stars in the centuries and millennia ahead.”<sup>390</sup> When it came to traveling potentially millions of miles, what captured the imagination was not the complex machines that would be required to get there, but the footsteps of the people once they arrived.

Walking also once again became a powerful symbol in the political realm. Just as Thomas Jefferson had walked to his inauguration in 1801, so Jimmy Carter walked from his in 1977. Carter decided to walk for reasons similar to those of Jefferson. He took office at a time of similar partisanship as had plagued the federal government in 1800 and during even greater mistrust of power. A senator suggested to Carter before the inauguration that he walk part of the

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<sup>388</sup> “Armstrong adds an ‘a’ to Historic Quotation” *New York Times*, July 20, 1969. Also available online at <http://0-search.proquest.com.library.uark.edu/hnpnewyorktimesindex/docview/118487796/72178FD1B6984039PQ/1?accountid=8361> This quotation has been remembered as “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” Armstrong insisted that his actual statement included the word “a” before “man, which further emphasizes the mundane nature of the act. Apparently this “a” was lost in transmission, and so the quotation is typically used with the more grandiose “man”, minus the “a”. From,

<sup>389</sup> In an essay about the nineteenth century walker, Leatherman in his book *Lives of the Poets*, E.L. Doctorow imagines a conversation between an astronaut who returned from space and is having trouble coping with life back on earth and his therapist. When the astronaut was in the ship, everything was fine. He did not feel isolated and alone. The astronaut says, “You just keep your nose to the panel. Make community with the switches, little lights. Everything around you is manmade. You have assurance.” Then he landed on the moon and walked. The therapists tries to gently suggest that this is when he felt distant and detached. The astronaut suspects that to be true, but has no memory of the walk. Nothing. E.L. Doctorow, *Lives of the Poets* (New York: Random House, 1984), 75-76

<sup>390</sup> “Return to Earth” *New York Times*, July 25, 1969. Also Available at <http://0-search.proquest.com.library.uark.edu/hnpnewyorktimesindex/docview/118659456/72178FD1B6984039PQ/2?accountid=8361>

way along what had become the traditional parade from the capitol to the White House to promote physical fitness. Carter initially dismissed the idea, but upon rethinking it, realized he could send an even greater message than one just about exercise. After his address, during which he, like Jefferson before him, emphasized unity and common bonds, Carter spontaneously had his bullet proof car stop and, along with his family, got out and proceeded to walk the mile and a half back to the White House. For forty minutes the first family walked, waved, tied their shoes, talked to their fellow citizens. The Carters walked past the government buildings where the scandals of the previous few years had unfolded. The crowd felt happy and at ease. It seemed to them at that moment that there was a shift in tone, that they could trust their new president who was willing to meet them face-to-face, on foot as they were. As *New York Times* reporter James Naughton wrote, “In a city where insecurity had bred extraordinary security precautions and where the commonplace had become uncommon...the amble down Pennsylvania Avenue by Mr. Carter [and his family] was both a rarity and a statement.”<sup>391</sup>

While Carter was walking to the White House, disillusioned recent college graduate Peter Jenkins was in the middle of his zigzagging transcontinental that he recounted in his best selling book *A Walk Across America*.<sup>392</sup> When Jenkins graduated from Alfred College in 1973, he was discouraged to realize that he hated his country. Between Vietnam, the high profile assassinations of the previous years, and a growing widespread distrust of the political system, he found it difficult to foster any positive feelings toward the United States. Rather than give in to those feelings, Jenkins set out with his dog to seek out something he could feel good about. The connections he made with a variety of Americans along the way changed his thinking. He spent

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<sup>391</sup> James M. Naughton “Crowd Delighted as Carters Shun Limosine and Walk to New Home”, *New York Times*, January 21, 1977.

<sup>392</sup> Peter Jenkins, *A Walk Across America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979); and Peter Jenkins, *The Walk West: A Walk Across America 2* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1981).

time with a hermit-like mountain man, lived in a trailer with a black family in North Carolina while he worked at a sawmill, and was disillusioned in the opposite direction on a hippie commune in Tennessee. In New Orleans, where his first book ends, he fell in with conservative Christians and stayed long enough to marry one of them. By the time he waded into the Pacific Ocean with his pregnant wife in 1979, he was a world away from the jaded twenty-two year-old who left New York six years earlier. While few people walk for years across a continent, many shared in Jenkins' trip. His first volume went through six editions the year it came out.

Another disillusioned twenty-something was wandering around the country during the 1970s as well. And the 1980s. And the start of the 1990s, Jon Francis, the son of West Indian immigrants, gave up motorized transportation in 1971 after witnessing the effects of an oil spill in the bay area in 1971. He would not use anything other than human-powered transportation for the next twenty-two years. While he occasionally biked and canoed, he preferred walking, as "moving slowly on the ground, feeling every rock and stone" rooted him more firmly to a place.<sup>393</sup> After he grew frustrated trying to explain this decision to people he met, he gave up speaking. Francis remained silent for seventeen years. During this time, he gradually made his way up the west coast, walking to foster peace and environmental concern. He took long breaks. He stopped in Ashland, Oregon and earned his BA from Southern Oregon University. Then he walked east, where he once again paused to earn a master from Montana State University. He continued on to Wisconsin, where he completed a PhD in land resources at the University of Wisconsin. His decades of walking interspersed with environmental study, Francis developed a keener awareness of the world around him and how humans and their technology fit into it.

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<sup>393</sup> John Francis, PhD. *Planet Walker: 22 Years of Walking. 17 Years of Silence*. (Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2005), 169.

For Doris Haddock (aka “Granny D”) walking gave her a way to reconnect with her 1960s activist past when in 1999, at the age of 90, she decided to embark on a 3,200 mile coast-to-coast walk to protest the corruption of democratic politics by big money. In the sixties, Haddock and her husband had traveled to Alaska to protest the potential testing of nuclear weapons there. Inspired in large part by Peace Pilgrim, Haddock wanted to continue her work advocating for humanity and operating at a human scale by walking later in life. After two years of practicing walking laps in a nearby park and sleeping on the ground, Haddock set out from California en route to the Capitol in Washington D.C.. She walked across the deserts of the Southwest, through Texas, and into Arkansas. Along the way she talked to people who felt similarly disconnected from the institutions that governed the country. Meeting her as she walked was a way for them to begin to reconnect. This was true for people around the country and around the world who learned of her journey through the media. They sent her notes as she went expressing their support. An arthritic seventy year-old from North Carolina wrote to tell her that she was “marching along with you,” and that she sent a note to her senator in support of campaign finance reform.<sup>394</sup> Her walk created connections and turned ideas in action.

As Granny D walked, she visited significant American historical sites. Of particular importance to her were the sites relating to the Civil Rights movement. When she passed through Little Rock, she stopped at Central High School, and then she gave a speech at the Missionary Baptist Church where Martin Luther King spoke decades earlier. In her speech she paid homage to the marches of King and Gandhi, and to their non-violent practices in general. She believed that her walk fit in to this non-violent tradition as it was an act that peaceful, yet powerful.

Granny D quoted a line from King’s “I Have A Dream” speech in which he told the audience

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<sup>394</sup> Doris Haddock with Dennis Burke, *Granny D: Walking Across America in my 90<sup>th</sup> Year*, (New York: Villard Press, 2001), 169.

that they “have been the victims of creative suffering.” King went on to say that this suffering has a purpose and they should “continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.” Granny D latched onto this message. “Creative suffering,” she said, is something we all have the power to do. It happens to be the most powerful force for change in the world.” Her walk was, in her eyes, an act of creative suffering. In undertaking it, she would create on a small scale the close-knit, face-to-face, grass roots democracy she hoped to see nationwide. After fourteen months of walking, she arrived in Washington. Granny D spent the rest of her using the notoriety she gained on her walk to advocate for political reform in various forms.<sup>395</sup>

Long distance walking periodically made its way into the fringes of popular culture during the 1980s and 1990s. Oddly, Leatherman, the silent, leather-clad walker of loop after loop in New York and Connecticut during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, found his way back into public view. In 1984, the author E.L. Doctorow published an essay loosely based on him in his book *Lives of the Poets*. Doctorow tapped into the old rumors of Leatherman’s nobility, describing him as “a hulk, colossally dressed in layers of coats and shawls and pants, all topped with a stiff hand-fashioned leather outer armor, like a knight’s.”<sup>396</sup> The essay is a rambling meditation on the role of the outcast – be he tramp, protestor, artist – in society. He discusses people like Thoreau who willingly removed himself from mainstream society, and then moves on to those who for one reason or another did not fit in the towns of northern New Jersey, or modern Westchester County, New York (where Leatherman walk one hundred years earlier which was, by the 1980s, considered by many who lived there to be pinnacle of human civilization). In trying to understand an executive who left his New Rochelle home and wife to

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<sup>395</sup> Doris Haddock, speech given at Missionary Baptist Church in Little Rock, AR, September 22, 1999, reprinted in *Granny D.: Walking Across America in my 90<sup>th</sup> Year* (New York: Villard Press, 2001), 266-270.

<sup>396</sup> E.L. Doctorow, *Lives of the Poets* (New York, Random House, 1984), 74.

become a homeless peeping tom, Doctorow came back to Leatherman. “What is the essential act of Leather Man?” he asked.

*He makes the world foreign. He distances it. He is estranged. Our perceptions are sharpest when we're estranged. We can see the shape of things... Your feelings are broken down by plurality, you don't stop, you keep moving, it becomes your true life to keep moving, to keep moving emotionally, you find finally the emotion in movement. You are the Leather Man., totally estranged from your society, the prettiest women are rocks in the stream, flowers long the road, you have subverted your own life and live alone in the wild, your only companion your thoughts.*<sup>397</sup>

There is meaning in movement. Doctorow thought that with his endless walking, Leatherman removed himself from society, but was able to truly see society. He became simultaneously removed from and connected to the world around him, by tapping into wild nature – the force that flowed underneath, around, and through the civilized world.

Another, less eloquent, interpretation of Leatherman appeared in the form of a 1998 B-side by the band Pearl Jam. In him the singer/songwriter Eddie Vedder saw an ancestor to the modern rock star. Both he and Leatherman, after all, traveled frequently and wore lots of leather. More than that, he saw Leatherman as a natural man. The refrain imagines the people in the 1880s seeing him coming on his rounds and saying, “Here he comes, he’s a man of the land”.<sup>398</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, the person who had over one hundred years before often been viewed as nothing more than a tramp was now turned into someone who had some greater insight and connection to both the civilized and natural worlds.

Lately, long distance walking has made its way into more mainstream American popular culture in the movies. Bill Bryson’s *A Walk in the Woods* about the Appalachian Trail, and

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Eddie Vedder, *Leatherman* Lyrics, 1998

[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/p/pearl+jam/leatherman\\_20244685.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/p/pearl+jam/leatherman_20244685.html)



Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* have both been turned into big-budget feature films. The books on which these films were based were also both best sellers.<sup>399</sup> Strayed's 2012 book is an account of her 1995 walk along the Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from Mexico to Canada through the mountains of California, Oregon, and Washington. At the time of her walk, Strayed was 27 years old and had just gone through several traumatic years. When she was 22, her mother died suddenly of lung cancer. Shortly after that, her marriage fell apart, largely due to her drug use and other self-destructive behavior. When she felt she hit rock bottom and had nowhere else to go, she started walking. Once she started walking, she started thinking about why she was walking. This got her thinking about why others walked. She realized it ultimately was not about gear, or covering a certain number of miles. She wrote:

*It had only to do with how it felt to be in the wild. With what it was like to walk for miles for no reason other than to witness the accumulation of trees and meadows, mountains and deserts, streams and rocks, rivers and grasses, sunrises and sunsets. The experience was powerful and fundamental. It seemed to me that it had always felt like this to be a human in the wild, and as long as the wild existed, it would always feel this way.*<sup>400</sup>

For Strayed walking was at the base of everything. It was what allowed her to break through the loss, addiction, and rootlessness that clouded her vision and ultimately let her connect with nature and humanity, with the past and the present, once again.

Many modern long distance walkers are driven to walk by some sort of personal tragedy or dissatisfaction. A 2013 article cataloguing people who were then walking across the United States shows motivations including suicide of loved ones, lost jobs, failed marriages, obesity, and suicidal thoughts. Some were just out for adventure, but most had something negative

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<sup>399</sup> He came far short of his goal of walking the entire trail, instead hopping around from place to place, walking a few hundred miles instead of a couple of thousand.

<sup>400</sup> Cheryl Strayed, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 207.

driving them. What was even more common among these modern walkers was that they were almost all walking to raise money and/ or awareness for something. Sometimes those were connected to the issue that got them on the road in the first place, but it was just as often entirely disconnected. One of the 2013 walkers, Mike Ross, began his walk just looking for adventure and a way to see the country before he went off to the Marines. Midway through the walk, he and partner “decided their walk needed some higher purpose,” so they began using the walk as a way to raise money for the Livestrong Foundation to help fight cancer.<sup>401</sup>

Fundraising “good causes” has become a part of the majority of long walks. This is true of many endurance endeavors, and is perhaps most evident in the ubiquity of the fundraising races that are held every weekend in towns and cities throughout the country. While there is occasional criticism of and confusion about the reasons and merit behind this trend, there has been no systematic look into why we pair foot travel with charity so frequently.<sup>402</sup> It seems, however, that many of the trends found throughout the history of long distance walking might play a part. Walking certainly creates a visible platform potentially to call attention to a cause, and it invites human contact – both among participants, and between walkers and those they encounter. A desire for control also seems to be in play. Walking to raise money ostensibly helps a particular cause, but it also creates a sense of control for the walker. Walking across the country has become so common that there are published guidebooks to help people plan their walks. To the dismay of the author of *How to Walk Across America and Not be an A\*\*hole*,

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<sup>401</sup> Associated Press Reporter, “‘The World Needs People Who Come Alive’: Meet the Transcontinental Walkers Who Cross Countries in Grueling Conditions for a Good Cause”, *The Daily Mail*, December 21, 2013. Also available online at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2527714/The-world-needs-people-come-alive-Meet-transcontinental-walkers-cross-countries-grueling-conditions-good-cause.html>

<sup>402</sup> Ted Gup, “The Weirdness of Walking to Raise Money” *New York Times Editorial Page*, June 18, 2011. Also available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/19/opinion/19gup.html>

many of these books include advice about not just where to sleep and what to carry, but how to best market your walk.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Tyler Coulson, *How to Walk Across America and Not Be an A\*\*hole* (Chicago: The Walkout Syndicate, 2013).

## **Epilogue: Leave Only Footprints**

The most commonly asked question of the long-distance walker is: “Why?” The answers to this question range from the superficial to the deeply spiritual, and vary based on the time, place, and person. The meaning of a long walk can also change and shift as the miles pass. What begins as a search for adventure may turn into a fundraiser for Parkinson’s disease. Many of the reasons that people still set out on these long walks were true also for those who first set themselves apart from modern rapid transit in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While they emphasized different aspects of the developing modern world, all of these walkers were acting in response to it. Their motivations and journeys reflect certain aspects of the life and culture of the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, both in what they did and didn’t do. This was a world that increasingly relied on experts and professionals. One trait all of these walkers share was that they dwelt on the edge of institutional respectability. Muir, Lummis, and Lindsay all quit their formal educations so close to the completion of their degrees that it seems almost deliberate. While each – especially Muir – worked in the realm of their respective professions, they were never quite of them. Weston occasionally crossed over into professional respectability, being treated as somewhat of an expert on scientific health, those times were the exception. MacKaye had a formal degree and worked in government institutions, but he did so tenuously and sporadically, relying instead on the generosity of better established friends for his material survival. In a world that valued institutions and regulations, these men worked from the fringes. On their walks and in their work, they pushed and pulled from the outside.

The time of these walks was also an age of rapid technological and industrial change. The second Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth century brought humans more and more into

the industrial realm through the increasing number of factory and office jobs. The continued technological developments of the first few decades of the twentieth century brought that industrial world into homes and everyday lives of the American people in the form of consumer goods. With these changes came excitement and inspiration, but also uncertainty and dislocation. Americans were adrift professionally and culturally, with old jobs and ways of life disappearing. They were also threatened, however, at a deeper physical and biological level. Walking was replaced by sitting on streetcars and then automobiles. Lifting pitchforks full of hay and hauling water were replaced by pulling levers and pushing pens. The natural processes of food growing and animals dying were becoming more and more hidden from view. The modern American needed to carve out separate time and space to get exercise and connect with nature. These long-distance walkers were at times rejecting and fighting against the compartmentalization of the age, and at times the greatest representatives of it.

At the most superficial level, many of the walkers had some aspect of commercial self-promotion to their walking. Charles Lummis walked in part to give himself interesting newspaper articles to write. Vachel Lindsay similarly walked to call attention to his poetry and to seek out interesting experiences that he could then turn into magazine articles and books. Edward Payson Weston walked almost purely for commercial reasons. Sometimes he handed out advertisements while he walked. Other times he walked for cash prizes, or to promote some sort of diet or product that was supposed to make anyone into a great walker. The walker in industrialized America, especially when dressed in a specific walking costume as these three did, was rare enough to call attention to himself and stick out from those for whom the idea of traveling far by means other than train or automobile was increasingly unthinkable.

Even those who were not walking to create an image of themselves for monetary gain were consciously creating a narrative of the person they wanted to be. John Muir did this very clearly in his walk to the Gulf. Swept along by his connection to the flora of the Southern Appalachians and lowlands, he carried the visible symbols of the botanist and gave himself over to that identity. With each step he took he moved towards the natural world and away from the industrial. While he and the other walkers could not entirely control what happened to them, their mode of travel gave them greater freedom to go where they pleased –on or off roads – and to stop where they wanted and pay attention to what fit in to the narratives they were creating. By walking and recounting their journeys, they were editing the story of their lives.

What they noticed and how they shaped those stories also varied from walker to walker. Walking let Muir feel like he was a part of the landscape. He felt the wetness of the rivers he crossed and the sun that dried him. He felt the brambles tear at him as he pushed his way through the undergrowth. He felt the mud of the Florida swamps suck at his feet when he strayed off the bits of dry land. He felt the joy, terror, and awe that these inspired.

Lummis too felt some connection to the landscape as he walked, but he also felt a dominance of it. He was also attuned to how rapidly he traveled over the land, how big were the mountains he climbed, and how successfully he killed the animals he encountered. He felt a still stronger connection to people - both individuals and groups, both past and present - he encountered as he walked. As he was reliant on them for much of his trip and often shared close quarters with each, he largely rid himself of stereotypes he held about Mexicans and Indians. He came to appreciate them not just as individuals, but also for the civilizations from which they came. He marveled at the hilltop pueblos, accessible by paths worn into the cliffs by millennia of footsteps. He appreciated the scale of life there, which was determined by how far one could

travel by foot and still return home by evening. He idealized too the superior connection the early Spanish priests made with the indigenous people, and attributed this to the idea that the priest arrived there on foot. Lummis's focus on foot travel distinguished his journey from the more superficial ones of the tourists who were beginning to come into the region by train.

Weston's connection was less with others than with himself. Walking brought him and other Pedestrians fame and fitness. In the industrial world of the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, these two commodities were increasingly difficult to find. It was easy for the individual person to feel lost among the growing urban crowds, and with machines doing more and more of the heavy lifting, one had to actively strive for the physical fitness that used to come naturally with the necessities of life. By walking, he stood out and stayed healthy. While he countered the industrial with the most basic act of the body, he also made walking a part of the industrial system Pedestrianism grew in response to. Weston ambled back and forth across the line between asserting himself as an individual and turning himself into a billboard, between humanizing transportation and mechanizing walking.

For Vachel Lindsay, walking provided just the right amount of interaction to allow him to view the world through his romantic, anti-modernist lens. When he saw places and met people while traveling on foot, he engaged deeply, but fleetingly. Poverty, sometimes forced and sometimes voluntary, heightened both of these aspects. When he asked a family for lodging for the night in the countryside, he talked to them and listened because he was dependent upon them. He therefore connected with them more personally than he would if just passing by, or if he were paying for lodging. Because he was always on the move, however, he only had time to see the romantic ideal. The nobility of these regular people he encountered came before everything else. Had he traveled faster, he would have seen nothing. Had he remained longer in any one place, he

would have seen the common, ugly traits that all people have. Walking let Lindsay glorify the past and romanticize the present.

Benton MacKaye was far more practical in his walking-induced vision. His walks – particularly those from his Massachusetts village through the New England countryside – taught him about the different types of landscapes that existed and how they fit together to create a healthy society. The town/ urban, the farm/ rural, and the primeval/ wild landscapes that he saw when he looked down from the hills surrounding his home of Shirley Center came through the walker. When he walked through these zones, he found they were not clearly delineated, but one flowed into the next. The integration of the landscapes is lost when one essentially beams himself from one location to the next via train, car, or airplane. The landscape that faster travel creates consists of the amorphous blob of the modern metropolis with its compartmentalized wilderness located just a drive away.

MacKaye very clearly tried to take the world as he saw it on foot and create from that a physical, tangible product in the form of the Appalachian Trail. While the trail did not end up exactly how he planned, it did come into being, and it did inspire others to build similar trails. Now, thousands of miles of long distance, point-to-point trails crisscross the nation. MacKaye, however, was not the only one to put his walking insights into a more permanent form that would take the lesson of long distance walking to the broader population.

Lummis never walked long distances again, but his initial walk led him to become an advocate for both indigenous and Spanish-influenced southwestern cultures. Central to his advocacy was the importance of place. He first learned both the concern for these groups and the importance of rootedness on his walk. Muir too never again undertook a lengthy point-to-point walk as he did in 1867, but he did continue to hike avidly and spend as much time as possible in



nature. He institutionalized his connection to nature that he learned on his walk through his later conservation efforts. The lands he helped preserve would help countless others to find the sublimity of nature as he first did on his walk south. Weston's walking helped to create Pedestrianism, which was one of the most popular sports in the country for decades. Tens of thousands of spectators could vicariously share in a small piece of the human struggle he tapped into through his challenges. He also helped to create an industry in which people hoped to buy their way into the health and fitness of the walker. Lindsay walked all but a few of his miles alone, but the stories and poems that he wrote about them reached thousands.

For different reasons and with different results, each of these men stepped outside of mainstream society during the course of their walking. They slowed down speed and time when the rest of the country was barreling ahead. When they did, the world around each of them looked different than it had before. The walks always ended, however. Each man returned to the pace of the industrial United States, but each also brought back some insight that he gained when he stood apart. Each spent at least part of his life after that trying to articulate and systematize what he felt as he walked. In doing so, they, and other walkers, have helped to develop the nation at a human scale.

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