

Childhood friends see Vermont one town at a time

Haley Dover, Free Press Staff Writer 11:50 a.m. EDT March 12, 2015



(Photo: COURTESY)

121 CONNECT [7 TWEETLINKEDIN](#) 1 COMMENTEMAILMORE

Two childhood pals are exploring Vermont — all 251 towns.

Erin Murray and Anna Brouillette kicked off their journey in a town that neither of them had heard of. In June 2014, the pair piled into Brouillette's Subaru and hit the road to Goshen, population 164.

A photo on Instagram shows the duo in front of the Town Hall, the only landmark they could find to document their trip to the small, Central Vermont town. The photo and video sharing app has become their primary way of logging their travels.



Instagram | [@fortheLoveofVermont](https://www.instagram.com/fortheLoveofVermont)

Our first stop on our quest to visit every town in Vermont! Goshen, VT. One down, two hundred and fifty to go!

Now their Instagram has 43 photos — and more than 1,400 followers — taken throughout the Green Mountain State as part of the pair's social media conquest, aptly named "For the Love of Vermont."

Murray and Brouillette grew up in Essex, and they have been best friend since kindergarten. When college took them out-of-state, the pair looked for a way to reconnect with their home state from more than 1,000 miles apart.

"We really love the state of Vermont and going away for college showed us how weird Vermont is, in a good way of course," said Murray, a sophomore at the College of Charleston in South Carolina.

Brouillette, a sophomore at St. Lawrence University in upstate New York, was introduced to the idea by her father. He told her about the 251 Club of Vermont — denoting the number of Vermont cities, towns and shires.

The club began in 1954, the result of interest generated by Vermont Life Magazine writer Dr. Arthur W. Peach, who suggested forming such a group. Now in its 61st year, the club has close to 5,000 members, both old and young, who have either visited all 251 communities or are doing so, said Executive Director Sandy Levesque of Randolph.

To join, there is a \$10 membership fee, and it is \$8 to renew annually. New members get a starter package that includes a checklist, a map and a travel journal to document their journey.

There are no rules and no requirements. Members can go at their own pace and are not asked to take photographs or document their travels in any way, Levesque said.

"It's a total honor system, but many people like to keep photo albums or write in their travel journal," she said. "You can make it as complicated, customized or personalized as you want."

Murray and Brouillette have not joined the 251 club. Both said they just haven't filled out the paperwork but also prefer to focus on their project.

They say their quest goes one step further with social media use.

The duo tries to experience each spot as a local would by popping into small businesses, stopping at roadside attractions or hiking up a mountain to see a town from a new angle. At every stop, they take a photograph, usually with the help of a tripod.



Anna Brouillette and Erin Murray stopped at the Suicide Six Ski Resort in Pomfret, as part of their trip through Vermont's 251 towns. The pair is documenting their journey on their Instagram account "For the Love of Vermont." (Photo: COURTESY)

Most of their photos feature dark, curly-haired Brouillette giving a thumbs up, and Murray flashing a peace sign. The hand gestures started as a way to link all of their photos together, but turned into something more meaningful, Murray said.

"Vermont is all about being peaceful and having good vibes, so it seemed appropriate for what we were doing," she said.

Usually the girls stand in front of a noteworthy landmark or a favorite local spot in town. Most of the time, that means asking a local for help.

"People spend a lot of money on extravagant vacations," Murray said. "It doesn't always have to be that difficult to escape and find something to do, especially in Vermont."

Many places across the state are kept a secret, she said.



Anna Brouillette and Erin Murray visited a lighthouse in Isle La Motte. The town was their 38th stop through Vermont's 251 towns. They are documenting their journey on their Instagram account "For the Love of Vermont." (Photo: COURTESY)

"Some of our favorite places are when we just go there and have no idea what to expect," Murray said.

In the year since they began, the duo has made day trips to closer destinations, or stayed at Brouillette's family camp on Echo Lake. Most of their trips have been to Central Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom to keep it easy, Brouillette said.

One trip that stood out to the pair was a stop in Calais, the pair's fifth town. They stumbled upon a gas station and general store where a young girl was working at the counter and asked her what there was to see in town.

"It was really old fashioned, with penny candy jars and booths to sit in — just very classic Vermont," Murray said.

An older man who was sitting at a nearby table joined in on the conversation, and told Murray and Brouillette the story of how he came to Calais to purchase a plot of land and start his life there. He could have his own space, Murray said.



Instagram | [@fortheloveofvermont](https://www.instagram.com/fortheloveofvermont)

Today we checked out Calais, VT and the Robinson Sawmill, built in 1803. 5/251 towns completed!
#vermont #vermontbyvermonters #vermontshots #802 #ilovermont #calaisvt

"It's hard to find that in other parts of the country," she said. "It was a reminder of how special Vermont is."

Since that first trip to Goshen, the duo has traveled to 68 of Vermont's towns while on breaks from school. They have decided to share their photos over the course of the semester so followers on Instagram will stay interested in the account, Murray said.

The most recent post on the app is a "Way Back Wednesday," a photo of their visit to Kirby last summer. The shot of Kirby Mountain was their way to wish Vermont a happy birthday on March 4.



Instagram | [@fortheloveofvermont](#)

Way Back Wednesday — our visit to Kirby, VT (in much warmer days). We thought this classic vista of Kirby Mountain was the perfect way to wish Vermont a happy birthday! On this day in 1791, Vermont became the 14th state. We couldn't be luckier to call it our home!

Murray and Brouillette plan to start traveling again when they return to the Green Mountain State in May and to spend time in the southern portion of the state — unexplored territory for the pair.

People come from out-of-state to go to Church Street, ski resorts and Ben & Jerry's, but tourists often overlook the rural parts where a majority of Vermonters live, Brouillette said.

"Vermont is a good place to escape to the wild or to find something wacky," Murray echoed. "We want to show people how to take advantage of that."

Contact Haley Dover at 660-1850 or hdover@freepressmedia.com.

Follow Haley on Twitter at www.twitter.com/HaleyRDover.