

Running The 251, Rhode Island Man Jogs Through Every Vermont Town

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Dave DeVarney is nearing his goal of running through all 251 Vermont towns.

A Rhode Island man will complete his goal of running through all of Vermont's 251 towns this weekend in Winooski.

Dave DeVarney has wanted to visit all of Vermont's towns for years. It's a goal many have had and there's even a 251 Club. But he wanted to do it a bit differently, by running through the towns instead of just visiting.

DeVarney graduated from Winooski High School and left for a career in the Navy and then in the private sector in Rhode Island. After retiring, he wanted to finally take on a running challenge.

"Originally I was going to do a Forrest Gump and run across the United States last year. And financially, physically, I was just not ready. And of course my wife was not ready for it, so that's when I played my card and I said what about if I do this? She let me do it," he said.

DeVarney, 61, has been what he calls a yo-yo runner over the years, very on-again off-again. He said he was a very good runner in high school, but was in decline until five or six years ago. "I could not convince the doctor anymore that that high sugar content, the high blood pressure was a result of Halloween candy and Easter candy. So I got back into running," he said.

At the end of last April he ran the Maple Sap Run, and conquered his first three towns, Swanton, St. Albans Town and St. Albans City. Since then he's been coming to the state twice a month and running as many towns as possible in six days. Realizing he wasn't going to achieve his goal at that rate, he dusted off his bike.

"What I do now is usually I pre-stage my bike ahead unless I've got somebody that shuttling me around." That way he can bike back to his car after completing his run, allowing him to cover longer distances.

DeVarney says he hasn't let the weather slow him down. "You just go with it because as soon as you decide the weather is too bad you get a defeatist mentality. You have another excuse and you stop going out there. Yesterday I ran in the rain. I was frozen coming back on the bicycle. It's one thing to go downhill on the bike, it's another thing to do downhill and create your own wind chill," he said.

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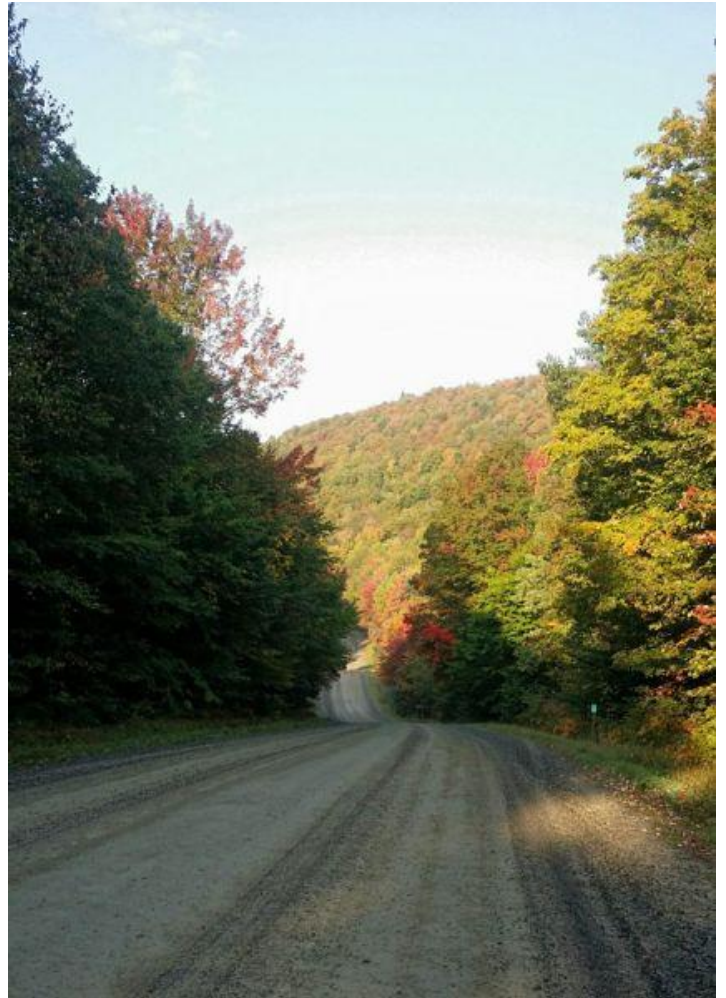
His shortest run was just .67 miles, and that was to fix an earlier mistake and finish a route.

"The longest was 19 miles. Going from Middlesex, Montpelier and Berlin and someplace else in there. And actually that was just a comedy of errors," he said. "I went three miles in the wrong direction for I realized it. There was really only one other time where I made one of those. I parked my car and instead of going right I went left and I was just in the zone. I was running, it was fine. Rain started picking up. I said 'jeez, I should have hit that town it was only two miles away. I'm at seven miles now.' And that's when I realized. But then again, I met this guy named Bill Campbell, the owner of a restaurant there because I was trying to get my bearings and he just took pity on my poor soul and drove me back to my starting point," he said.

A dirt road in Granby was one of the places where DeVarney ran on his journey.

His runs in the rural parts of the Northeast Kingdom were also memorable. Even though the gores aren't part of the 251, DeVarney decided to visit them anyway.

"Warner's Grant was an interesting event. The first time I planned on running into it, they had a guardrail set up because it was a logging road. Of course on Google Maps it looks like a perfect road till you get



there. So I couldn't pre-stage my bike. So I said OK I'll come back up another day. So I came up. I kind of jumped the fence. That's all I'll say. That's got to be the widest logging road I've ever seen. I was saying, 'this is great,' except I found a peat moss bog. And I was probably like seven or eight inches deep with my feet in this peat bog. And the worst part is I hadn't reached Warner's Grant yet. I've got to get another half mile. Oh, by the way I got to run back through this again," he said.

"I lived in Vermont, a good share of my growing up years hunting with my dad, never saw a bear and in this journey I've seen three." - Dave DeVarney, runner

He also saw plenty of wildlife in his journey.

"I was running into Granby. Some people know it's like the second to the last town in Vermont to ever receive electricity. Now I'm cresting the dirt road hill I see a bear waddling in front of me about 50-60 yards away. I normally carry a construction flag with me so people can see me coming around blind curves, and so I'm gripping this flag real hard, like it's really going to serve me, and I'm reaching for the pepper spray and I just stood in place and I let the bear wander across and I must have been standing there—I don't know—30 seconds, a minute, waiting for cubs to show up. I was probably petrified in place for 10 minutes in reality. Time stood still I guess. But yeah, the bear went into the woods, I went slowly running down the road saying 'hey bear,' just to let him know I was there," he said. "But I lived in Vermont, a good share of my growing up years hunting with my dad, never saw a bear and in this journey I've seen three. And I never saw turkeys before living in Vermont and now they're all over the place. So times have changed in 30-40 years."

The 251 Club is run on the honor system, and so we're taking DeVarney at face value that he's actually run instead of just visiting, but [he's been chronicling this journey on his Facebook page](#), and has pictures of himself in the towns. "There will be cases again like Glastonbury. There's no welcome to Glastonbury sign. So essentially what I do is I just do a snapshot of the maps function on my cell phone that says yeah I was here," he explained.

DeVarney will run through his final town, Winooski on Sunday as a sort of homecoming.

"Basically my home town. The park is literally park I used to play when we were kids. It's essentially a block away. My mom doesn't have to go too far," he said.