

# Let's go gazetteering!

By Nicki Steel

Tami and I became friends almost 40 years ago when we were both working as waitresses at the Skyline Restaurant on Hogback, and I built a house just down the road from her house in Wilmington. Then things changed and she moved to Marlboro and started working in Brattleboro. We would go months without seeing each other so we started "gazetteering" twice a year. We jump in the car and explore the back roads of our lovely state.

In the beginning, we would have a destination but now we just pick an area and explore. As time went on we covered most of the roads in southern Vermont so we started going for two-, three-, and even four-day trips. In 2012 we decided to go to the Northeast Kingdom so we joined the 251 Club\* and started keeping track of the towns we've been to. Last year we finished going to all 251 towns in the state but since there may be just a few roads we haven't been on we have no intention of stopping our gazetteer trips.

There are a few common features of virtually every journey. We always stop for ice cream. Covering distance is not important - once it took us almost three hours to get to Putney. At least one time each trip we have to pull over because we are laughing so hard.

We check in on each other lives and take a break from the day-to-day and continue to be entranced by our beautiful and unusual state.

There is no way we could name a favorite place (and why do you need to?) although we have gone to the Peacham/Ryegate area and Addison County multiple times. You get to one of my favorite views by turning west in Felchville and heading over the spine of the Green Mountains toward Tyson until you get to the settlement of South Reading with its gorgeous stone buildings. Turn on Grasshopper Lane and head south ... well, you get the idea.

**Gazetteering:**  
Using the Vermont Atlas and Gazetteer to explore Vermont, an activity invented by Tami Berkley Purcell and Nicki Steel.

Rules:

1. Drive on as many unfamiliar roads as possible.
2. Drive on as many dirt roads as possible.
3. You are never lost; you just don't know where you are.
4. There is no shame in turning around. (Rule #4 was added after an attempt to go over Woodbury Mountain.)

Stopping at old cemeteries and historic markers gives us time to stretch our legs and also think about all those people who came before us, those early settlers who persevered and struggled to carve out a life in a sometimes harsh environment.

Lewis was by far the most difficult "town" for us to find. To be clear, there is no town of Lewis, only the Silvio Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge. There is only one road in. In fact, we finally offered a young man a beer if he would tell us where the road to Lewis was. Did I mention we were running out of gas? All part of the adventure!

Some people ask if we use a GPS. Well, no, and I don't think we ever will. We like not knowing exactly where we're going and having the freedom of saying, "That road looks interesting - let's do it!"

We have gone on roads which might not really be roads - they are more like jeep tracks... or paths... or "Oh, gosh, is there a place to turn around?" trails. Woodbury Mountain was our biggest challenge. There was just a short section of dotted line on the map over the top of the mountain so we thought we'd give it a try. Over the rocks and through the mud we went. I finally had to get out and scout each section and then walk ahead of the car while Tami drove right behind me. Eventually, there were only boulders ahead and, luckily, a small patch of grass where we could turn around. I expect one of these times we will get stuck - but it hasn't happened yet!

Vermont is the perfect state for gazetteering. It's small enough that even when you are going 30 mph you can cover a good section of the state. There are big views of mountains, farms, and lakes and small views of flowers and wildlife. Whether you like history, farming, architecture or nature there is something around every corner. Country stores abound, which means ice cream is never far away. People are generous and friendly. So, grab a gazetteer, jump in your car, and start to explore. Just don't try driving over Woodbury Mountain.

\*Wikipedia says, "The 251 Club of Vermont, established in 1954, is an organization of Vermont enthusiasts whose objective is to visit the 251 towns and cities in Vermont." There are no rules and you keep track of the towns you visit. You can join for a small fee and even get a decal! Find out more at vt251.com.



Above: Back road

Below: Stone sculpture in Bethel.

Bottom: Cambridge Junction covered bridge.



Albany post office.



Clockwise from right:

- 
- Population Center sign, near Prickly Mountain
- 
- Guildhall sign
- 
- Cow Palace, Derby
- 
- Devils Washbowl Road, Moretown
- 
- Jericho Mill
- 
- License plate house, Fletcher
- 

The author and Tami Berkley Purcell.

