

Stowe Guide & Magazine Summer/Fall 2020

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COOL THINGS

GREEN MOUNTAIN BYWAYS Clockwise from top left: Creamery Bridge in Montgomery. The Old Round Church, Richmond. Dr. Janes House, Waterbury. The Old Red Mill, Jericho. Famous floating bridge, Sunset Lake, Brookfield. Waterbury train depot. Village of Johnson.



KEVIN WALSH; WALSH; GLENN CALLAHAN; CALLAHAN; WALSH; CALLAHAN; CALLAHAN

ROADS LESS TRAVELED Join the 251 Club and discover Vermont

Some people seek out Vermont's covered bridges, others search for the state's unique round churches and barns, while still others set a goal of dipping a paddle in every pond. But if you really want to get to know Vermont, join the 251 Club!

Now in its 66th year, members of the 251 Club of Vermont dedicate themselves to visiting all of the state's 251 cities and towns. Dr. Arthur W. Peach, a poet, professor, writer, and historian introduced the idea in the summer 1954 issue of Vermont Life, where he served on the magazine's advisory board. The concept of visiting the 251 towns was a response to one of the magazine's most frequently asked questions: "How can I come to know the real Vermont?"

STORY / KATE CARTER

CROSSROADS Stowe's famous main intersection, with historic Bentley building in the background.



back roads, mainly to calm them down. Then I started branching out to other towns."

In 2014, Baraw's partner, Bill, was struggling with cancer, and the one thing he could do comfortably was take 2-hour car rides, so that's what the couple did. They visited many of the towns in the Champlain Valley. Bill died in 2016, and on her way home from the funeral, Baraw decided to take a different route, one that she'd never seen before.

Peach's idea was to take roads less traveled, because every corner of Vermont has attractions, beauty, history, traditions, and people of interest. At the time, Vermont Life was found on many a coffee table, and the response was immediate. A new batch of Vermont maps had to be printed to meet the growing demand, while letters from prospective club members rolled in.

As of 2020, the club has over 6,000 members, one of whom resides in Stowe. Barb Baraw has been emotionally involved in the 251 Club since 1975, and active since 2016.

"I've always loved to travel and have had the fortune of stepping a foot on all seven continents," Baraw said. "I love driving, too, and when my kids were little, after dinner I'd take them for drives all over Stowe's

"That was when I decided that in honor of Bill and all the traveling we did, I would visit all 251 towns in Vermont." But it took a nudge from a friend, Jack Carter of Waterbury Center, to get her started. They were standing side by side at the 2016 Vermont Expo, watching an exhibit by a couple who had done the 251 challenge, but with twist. They put their canoe in a river or pond in every town. "Jack and I were watching their slide show and my conversation with Jack made me re-commit.

Baraw did 60 towns in the first 3 months and found the experience cathartic. "My self-commitment was to get photos in every town. I wanted documentation, not just recollection, and I have two gazetteers full of markings on the maps."

Baraw would spend an average of 20 minutes in each town, or whatever her mood dictated. "It was a goal in a time of my life when I wasn't completing very much, and it was an accomplishment that helped me get through a down period."

Her favorite town? Each month, as she reflected, she'd say, "Oh, that's my favorite." But her instant response now is Sutton. "I was fascinated with their 19th century school, which had been visibly added on to over time. The town also had a big Baptist church similar the Stowe Community Church. I looked in a window and next to the altar was a 60-inch TV screen. It personified the old and the new."

Everyone has their own personal methods and reasons for visiting all of Vermont's cities and towns. It's a challenge, and like any challenge, takes commitment and determination. The 251 Club is open to anyone, and charges its members with visiting—not simply driving through—each town. Members can document their adventures through photos and notes and earn the "plus" membership when they've toured them all. ■

ESSENTIALS: Membership in the 251 Club of Vermont is \$18 annually. vt251.com.