

# Vermont's 251 Club

by Stewart Holbrook

IT ALL BEGAN TWO years ago when Arthur W. Peach, writing his regular column in *Vermont Life*, the Green Mountain State's handsome official magazine, sought to reply to the seemingly endless queries he had been receiving. They were all much alike: "How can I come to know the *real* Vermont?"

In what turned out to be a moment of inspiration, Columnist Peach, doubtless recalling Henry Thoreau's famous remark—"I have travelled far in Concord," then and there suggested an informal group to be known as the 251 Club of Vermont. Let prospective members plan their weekends and vacations to visit the Vermont towns in which they had never been. The figure refers to the 246 organized and five unorganized towns in the state. (Excluded are five smaller tracts of land known as gores or grants.)

"Driving straight through a town doesn't count," Peach warned. "One should loiter long enough to take snapshots or to stay overnight—or at least to visit some local spot of historical or scenic interest."

Peach went on to say that anyone, anywhere, could join the club simply by asking him for a map showing all the towns. Then, with a route map, he might journey about, whether in one summer or many, and check off the towns as visited.

The response was prompt—perhaps sensational is the word. Letters flooded in. They came from state senators and representatives, from former governors, from many natives, and from scores of summer residents and visitors. Very few had visited all of the 251 towns. Several had been in 250 but still had to alight within the borders of Lewis, an unorganized town. George N. Dale, who lives in Chicago but is a native of and still votes in Island Pond, reported that he "made" Lewis by "the pleasant route of catching a few trout in McConnell Pond, Brighton, then walked through the woods to the North Branch of the Nulhegan and up that stream into Lewis, where no man has lived since records were kept."

A new batch of Vermont maps had to be run off to meet the growing demand, and letters from prospective 251-clubbers continued to roll in. By early summer of 1955 it was obvious that a means of communication was needed. So Volume I, Number 1 of *The Wayfarer* appeared. Printed on the staunch mimeograph of the Vermont Historical Society, of which Peach is director, this first issue was filled with enthusiastic comments from charter members (all 251 visited) and acolytes at various stages on their way upward to the 251 goal. One had been entranced at Thompson's Point "to watch the moon come up over Lincoln Mountain and see its shimmering in the ripples of Champlain." Another discovered "the wonder of Bald Mountain seen from Echo Lake in Charleston, and Camel's Hump from almost anywhere in Grand Isle County."

George Dale proposed a sort of elite complement to the 251 Club. This, he said, might be called the End-of-the-Roads Club, meaning that the traveler had driven, or walked, to the end of every road in a given town or even county.

At a first meeting of the 251-ers, held in Montpelier, Peach reported that Grangers, 4-H groups, Boy Scouts, and town fathers were taking to the idea. Several towns had issued maps marked to indicate unusual drives and historic sites, and many towns had noticed increased travel in their communities.

So far as this writer knows, the 251 Club of Vermont is unique. It has caught on as nothing else in Vermont since the founding of the Republican Party. I shall be surprised if the idea is not quickly adopted by other states.

Last summer I rose to the 251 bait and resumed cruising in Vermont, with happy results. In Plainfield I discovered what may well be the shortest covered bridge anywhere. Then, I got a new view of magnificent Monadnock from Todd Hill in Canaan. And in Sherburne and Bridgewater a lump came suddenly into my throat as I stopped to contemplate this lovely and forgotten mountain valley. It was an experience I shall long cherish. Even native Vermonters are getting to "know the *real* Vermont." This should gratify founder Arthur Peach, a native of Pawlet, a graduate of Middlebury, who for thirty-eight years was a professor at Norwich University, and long since qualified for the new club.

All one needs to do to join the 251 Club of Vermont is drop a line and say so to Dr. Arthur W. Peach, in care of the Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier. No dues, no obligations, save a will to persevere until those 251 towns are in your bag. ■