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BLOG: A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME THROUGH NH

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by GSA Marty Wagner, Comfort Inn Concord Class of 2011

It was a journey of a lifetime, but I'm proud to have finally reached my destination. I just finished visiting all 234 official cities and towns in the State of NH, after starting the excursion 65 years ago when I was born in Rochester NH. I received a certificate of accomplishment from The 234 Club of New Hampshire for my efforts, but my real prize was the awe-inspiring sights I found along the way in places like Pittsburg, Surrey, Sharon, Ashuelot, Fremont, Chester and Ellsworth to name a few.



Having lived here my whole life, I had visited lots of places in the state, first with my parents as a child and then as an adult, always finding new things in my NH back yard to entertain me. In 1991, I started a job which had the added bonus of having me travel to all 10 counties on a regular basis. A few years later, I read about an organization called The 234 Club of New Hampshire. It was started by a man who enjoyed traveling the state and discovering all it had to offer in its 234 towns and cities. For years, he has invited others to visit every corner of the state just as he did. (See <http://234club.blogspot.com/>)

I answered his invitation by immediately sending for the official list he provided, and I started checking off the places I had visited. At first, I checked off just the places that I happened to pass through while traveling on business or places I visited when I went away for a NH week-end. But as my check marks started to accumulate, I decided to make a concerted effort to visit out of the way places which I may never have reached in my usual travels.



I would plot courses for a Sunday ride, sometimes visiting 15 new towns in one trip. I went in all four seasons and often took friends along for several of my discovery missions. It truly was a case of the journey being the destination because I found numerous wonderful little towns, more lakes than I could count on back roads, beautiful farms and farmland, including many horse farms, incredible mountain views from unexpected spots, and many small restaurants and businesses which provided food, education and often plenty of entertainment for each trip. And along the way, I also started checking off covered bridges which also took me to some out-of-the way places.

More than once when I was in my car all alone, I'd come around a corner or come to the crest of a hill and just gasp at whatever wonderful thing was before me. I found the quintessential, postcard perfect NH towns, unexpected bustling towns and some very tiny, quiet ones, too. The smallest town I found had a main street about 2 blocks long with a dead end sign on each end of the street. It still seemed quite lively with people though who were enjoying their peaceful setting next to a river. Sometimes I wouldn't find a town center other than perhaps a church or an old town hall, showing once again how rural New Hampshire really is. I also enjoyed the larger towns and cities along the way, too, of course.

My efforts at completing the list ebbed a few times over the years, but since my retirement in 2011, I set a goal to complete the list. The last town I visited was Chatham which is no place I would have ever wandered through since it sits a bit by itself in the northeastern part of the state on the Maine border. As I searched for Chatham, often on unmarked roads, I meandered between NH and Maine, crossing the border a few times. For me, it was definitely the most difficult town to find. It was like the final test to finish my 234.

While I've completed my list, I certainly haven't completed my NH travels. I'm still discovering new back roads all the time with my trusty NH atlas, and also returning to some of my favorite spots. When volunteering as a GSA, I can only hope I'm helping some visitors start their own journey of a lifetime to visit all 234 NH cities and towns.....because it's a great trip.

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