A walk back in time

Two men come together to produce a book that tells how walking's benefits extend far beyond physical fitness.

By FRED ROSEN
Correspondent

It was a chance meeting between two guys who shared a similar passion for walking that proceed to make local literary history that may very well peak for the hikers — no pun intended — to the national level.

Though I'd met countless hikers in the Catskills and the Adirondacks, I'd never met anyone like Michael, a man who really had taken his own path in life. "Who is this guy?" I thought. "And how do I get to walk with him?"

By Wednesday...
Walking was very popular in 19th century

In Italy, we find day after day telegrams announcing that of a pedestrian walking so many miles a day for so many thousand dollars.

Edward Payson Weston was a champion walker of the 1830s through the 1890s, when walking was a sport you could make money on. He celebrated his 70th birthday in 1909 by walking 2,000 miles between New York and San Francisco in 160 days. That averages out to walking 30 miles a day.

For Perkins and Nixon, hiking the woods is like stepping outside of human time, from the fast-paced world of change we live in, back in time to Weston's historic and storied past, still to be seen in the prairies even today. Civilization, however, does occasionally intrude. Behind one of the author's homes is an historic road and a brand new house situated right in the middle ofRead.

Perkins' family hails from Kentucky, though he grew up in southern Ohio, in a small town called Woodsmith. He left as soon as he could and went to the Big Apple, where he attended New School and City College. Then he traveled, to Europe and to Woodstock in 1972, where he fell in love with the area and settled. Since 1972, he's lived on Otayo Mountain Road in Glenford.

"In Ohio," he said, "walking in Ohio, people might shoot you if you walk anywhere on their property. People are jealous of their property. People in the United States have a different sense of their community than Europe. They have a more organic sense of community and are more likely to share."

Of course, part of that jealousy stems from simple economics. If a New Yorker comes north for a weekend or holiday, they want to get away from it all at their second home. The last thing they want to see is somebody disturbing their privacy by hiking on their property. And even the recession has affected the Woodstock hiking experience. "It is not as popular as it was a few years ago," said the owner of the细菌 and hament of Woodstock.

Perkins' said, "So many stores empty and for rent. So many businesses that have started up and failed. And the eviction signs." But despite all that, "A famous designer said that was the most beautiful landscape he had ever seen. The landscape is riveting. There are so many stories of people who left the mountains who had only come back. But, for many, the town is no longer as affordable as it was in the 70s.

REGARDLESS OF the economics, the hiking experience itself doesn't change. Perkins has some very specific advice for what to wear, carry and pack during a hike, especially the more challenging ones.

"Wear a hat and sturdy boots. I prefer carrying a stick. It gives you good balance up and down hills. You should carry a bottle of water and snacks. It's also nice to have a companion. Realize you are walking to mostly have a sense of being out, enjoying your freedom for an hour or so. Don't think it's going to be a drag. No matter the weather, put your pedal to the metal as you look for a chance to be free."

For Nixon, hiking Woodstock continues to be an adventurous experience. "Within one year, 1996, I hiked the 50 highest peaks in the Catskills to become a member of the 5K Club," he said. "That is very well known to hikers. To me, the discovery and pleasure of this book was getting into the low peaks, the hills of Woodstock. While some are substantial hikes and climb, their elevation doesn't put them among the highest. But it got me to go exploring off the beaten path and go up hills. I wouldn't bother with, to find nooks and crannies in Woodstock, to be reminded how much wild land still exists. It is not easily forgotten, once you walk into that very wild place."

Added Perkins, "There is an unknown quality to it, like just around the next corner you might see something you have never seen before and may never again."

Upcoming events for the authors include a book signing at the Barnes & Noble, 1777 Ulster Ave., in the town of Ulster on June 3 at 7 p.m., in advance of National Trails Day on June 5. In addition, the Woodstock Land Conservancy has invited Perkins and Nixon for a book signing and a walk through the Comeau property on June 12 at 2 p.m.