

Out for a Walk
May/June 2026
By Mark Lorenzoni

Many folks find it hard to believe when I tell them that the fastest growing outdoor activity in our country is Walking. Yes, good old fashioned one-foot-in-front-of-the-other walking! Most guess that it's Pickleball and I don't blame them for thinking that...after all, it seems like everywhere you look, outdoor tennis and indoor basketball courts are being converted into venues to host this fun game...one that I personally enjoy playing too.

Maybe it's flying below the national radar because many of us walkers spend a lot of our time out of the public eye, hiking in the woods or on rural paths and quiet country roads...or maybe it's because it's not as glamorous, competitive or sexy like so many other high adrenaline activities. So, who knows why it hasn't gained the notoriety or reputation of other popular recreational sports like pickleball, golf, skiing and running...but, one thing is for sure: it is not only the fastest growing activity it's also quickly becoming one of the single most popular recreational activities in our country. And, in addition to being popular, it's also really good for your health, both physically and mentally, as all of the long term research is now touting walking as a safe and accessible path to longer, healthier and happier lives!

I now walk for exercise on a daily basis and with Cynthia fully retired and me working a lot less, we both have really been enjoying spending lots of time hiking together. Whether it's a long 15 mile/day "through hike", like the Coast to Coast Walk across England or the stunning West Highland Way in Scotland, or simply hiking right here at home in our beautiful county and state, we're having a blast spending time together, exploring on foot.

The Quest to Hike All 44 of Virginia's State Parks

And we're finding that you don't have to get on a plane or even drive across the State line to discover some really beautiful and cool new places for adventure on foot. At the beginning of the year, Cynthia and I made a pact that we were going to do our best to visit and explore all 44 of Virginia's State Parks.

It may not seem like the most adventurous quest, especially compared to the long distance British hikes we had done or completing the Holy Grail of American hikes, the herculean 2600 mile Appalachian Trail, which many of our high energy and younger customers have conquered.

After all, if eighty-four year old Graham Nash, who we recently saw perform at The Paramount, can still tour the country, energetically entertaining sold-out venues full of children of the 60's, with classics like "Our House", then doggone it, gray haired grandparents like Cynthia and I can certainly get our backsides out the door and hike Virginia's State Parks!

There were three main goals to this challenge:

1. Get us exploring, not only these beautiful parks but also all of the tucked away nooks and crannies of this magnificent state that we have never been to in our almost half century of living here.
2. Spending quality time together, much of it, due to the remoteness of the parks, without cell coverage, not only hiking but also in the car, “wowing” out loud while driving on scenic narrow backroads past stunning vistas and through charming hidden villages.
3. Staying in historic towns, like Abingdon, that had always been on our “list” but had, in our busy lives, never made it onto our radar.

One of the big surprise bonuses of all this Virginia exploring has been also getting to hike in National Forests and Reserves that have been close by to our State Park destinations. Spectacular hidden gems like the mysterious Utah like mountaintop labyrinth of The Channels and the mammoth beach like Sand Cave, which Barbara Kingsolver so beautifully described in the closing pages of her bestselling novel “Demon Copperhead”, hidden secretly behind a thick rhododendron shield at the top of a towering mountain in the southwest. Plus, other fun hiking treats like our first ever steps on to the legendary Virginia Creeper Trail that winds its way from Abingdon to Damascus.

In just a little over four months, we’ve now visited fifteen of the parks, which, at this rate, will have us well shy of our year end quest. To name just a few, we’ve been treated to the mighty river gorge scenery of the side by side New River Trail and historic Shot Tower parks, the magnificent bodies of crystal clear waters at Holliday Lakes and Hungry Mother parks, the breathtaking scenery of Breaks Interstate, the awesome Natural Tunnel, the meandering trails alongside the mighty Rappahannock at Belle Isle and the eerie swamps of First Landing tucked away within earshot of the Atlantic in Virginia Beach. And exploring all of these neat parks on foot!

But, to meet our forty four park goal, it looks like Cynthia and I will need to pick up our game. We next plan to check off eight more in a three day span as we explore the parks of the south central part of the state, including Twin Lakes, Occoneechee and High Bridge. Ah, the luxury of not having to work full time...this semi-retirement gig sure is fun, especially while out for a walk!

-Ragged Mountain hosts free quarterly group walks. Send your email address to audrey@raggedmountainrunning.com to get on our list.

-And the City of Charlottesville Parks and Rec. Department hosts monthly community walks. Go to the City’s website for more details.

Mark Lorenzoni, our Dad, who, along with our mom, co-founded Ragged Mountain, when not out walking, can be found coaching local runners or directing community races...or spending time hanging with his grandkids. He’s best reached by text at 434/962-1694.