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NARRATIVE PASSAGES: 8 LITERATURE-INSPIRED HIKES

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August 25, 2017



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A literature-inspired hike at Rachel Carson Salt Pond Preserve combines a wooded trail with a beach walk.

The Northeastern landscape has inspired poets, journalists, and novelists for centuries. Their words have, in turn, awed, informed, entertained, and even terrified generations of readers. The eight hikes below are set in locations that influenced some of our greatest literary giants. Get details, grab their books, and get out there.

1. RACHEL CARSON SALT POND PRESERVE

New Harbor, Maine

A modest quarter-acre salt pond on the shore of Muscongus Bay inspired the environmentalist Rachel Carson's lyrical book *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), about the life that thrives where ocean meets land. To experience it yourself, park on the shoulder of Route 32, on the coast between New Harbor and Chamberlain, Maine. Stone steps descend to the rocky beach on one side of the road, while a trail leads into the forest on the other. Follow the trail out to a small upland pond then return the way you came and follow the stairs to the shore. Carson's salt pond, actually a tidal pool, emerges between the beach and a sandbar when the ocean recedes. Roll up your pant legs and wade in to look for crabs, periwinkles, starfish, and sea urchins.

DISTANCE: 1.1 miles round trip

INFO: [The Nature Conservancy](#)

2. GRAFTON NOTCH STATE PARK

Newry, Maine

Stephen King's 1999 *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* takes place in a fictionalized wilderness surrounding a section of Appalachian Trail near the Maine–New Hampshire border. King's protagonist, 9-year-old Trisha McFarland, isn't on the trail long before getting lost in the forest. While

her story unfolds with a dramatic bushwhack, staying on the trail should provide plenty of adventure for you. From the parking area on Route 26 in Grafton Notch State Park, follow the AT/Old Speck Trail west. The trail climbs to the summit of 4,170-foot Old Speck Mountain, where the view stretches deep into the wilderness that sparked King's imagination.

DISTANCE: 7.6 miles round trip

INFO: [White Mountain Guide, 30th ed. \(AMC Books\)](#)

3. MOUNT ABRAHAM

Lincoln, Vt.

Bill McKibben's best-known writings focus on the environment, but his 2005 book *Wandering Home* connects with the landscape in a more personal way. Over 16 days, McKibben trekked from Mount Abraham, near his home in Vermont, to Crane Mountain in New York, where he previously had lived. To visit his starting point, begin your ascent of Mount Abraham on the north side of Lincoln Gap Road in Lincoln, Vt. Follow the Long Trail's white blazes through forest and bog on the way up the 4,006-foot mountain. Enjoy 360-degree views from the summit—and survey the full extent of McKibben's journey into neighboring New York—before returning via the same route.

DISTANCE: 5.2 miles round trip

INFO: [The Long Trail: Green Mountain National Forest: AMC's Best Day Hikes in Vermont \(AMC Books\)](#)

4. LONG POINT

Provincetown, Mass.

By the late 1840s, Henry David Thoreau was an experienced explorer of New England's mountains but had not yet explored the Massachusetts coast. In October 1849, he hiked 30 miles from Eastham to Provincetown, a journey he chronicled in his 1865 book, *Cape Cod*. To hike the last stretch of Thoreau's traverse, park at the west end of Commercial Street in Provincetown. The trail begins along the rock dike south of the traffic circle. Hike across the rocks 1 mile toward the Wood End lighthouse. Once you reach the sand, continue east along the shore to the Long Point lighthouse at the tip of the Cape. "A man may stand there and put all America behind him," Thoreau wrote of this spot. Be careful to check a tide chart and plan accordingly; the dike is not crossable at high tide.

DISTANCE: 5 miles round trip

INFO: [Cape Cod National Seashore: Discover Cape Cod \(AMC Books\)](#)

5. W.E.B. DU BOIS RIVER WALK

Great Barrington, Mass.

Although many people remember him for writing 1903's *The Souls of Black Folk* and for cofounding the NAACP, W.E.B. Du Bois was also a passionate conservationist. Born in Great Barrington, Mass., Du Bois had a fondness for the Housatonic River and worked to protect it from industrial pollution. To enjoy the Housatonic today, park at the Bridge Street trailhead. Stroll upstream 0.1 mile to the W.E.B. Du Bois River Park, where interpretive signs detail his life. Continue 0.12 mile north to the end of the trail then retrace your steps. To savor more of the River Walk, explore a second trailhead on Dresser Avenue, six blocks north.

DISTANCE: 0.4 mile round trip

INFO: [Great Barrington's Housatonic River Walk](#)

6. WALT WHITMAN TRAIL

Melville, N.Y.

Growing up on Long Island, Walt Whitman, the poet and journalist best known for his 1855 anthology *Leaves of Grass*, took frequent walks in a nearby forest, known today as West Hills County Park. Pick up the white blazes at the end of Reservoir Road and head northwest. The trail climbs 401-foot Jayne's Hill, the highest point on Long Island. At the top, read "Paumanok," Whitman's ode to Long Island, on a plaque and enjoy the views that inspired the poem. Descend to the south and loop back to Reservoir Road. Whitman's birthplace, in nearby Huntington Station, N.Y., is now a museum.

DISTANCE: 4-mile loop

INFO: [West Hills County Park: AMC's Best Day Hikes Near New York City \(AMC Books\)](#)

7. GLIMMERGLASS STATE PARK

Cooperstown, N.Y.

In his series of novels known as the Leatherstocking Tales (which includes 1826's *The Last of the Mohicans*), James Fenimore Cooper called Cooperstown's Otsego Lake "Glimmerglass," and it stuck. Glimmerglass State Park now spans the northern end of the lake, opposite the town that James's father founded. Pick up Sleeping Lion Trail on the park's Hyde Hall entrance road. This hike circles 1,827-foot Mount Wellington in a counterclockwise direction, offering views through the trees of Otsego Lake's glimmering waters. When the trail ends near the shore, turn left onto the woods road and follow it back to Hyde Hall.

DISTANCE: 2.5-mile loop

INFO: [Glimmerglass State Park](#)

8. TINKER CREEK GREENWAY TRAIL

Roanoke, Va.

When Annie Dillard won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1974 book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she showed that women, too, could brave the wilds alone and write tales about it. Explore the setting of her memoir on the Tinker Creek Greenway Trail. Park at the Hollins Trailhead on Plantation Road, purchase a Carvins Cove Pass (\$2 per person), and follow the trail northeast 1 mile to the nature reserve. Enjoy views of the reservoir and the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains as you continue to the boat dock. Here you can rent a paddleboat or kayak before retracing your steps to the parking lot.

DISTANCE: 4.4 miles round trip

INFO: [Roanoke County Parks](#)

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AMC Outdoors, the magazine of the Appalachian Mountain Club, inspires readers to get outside and get engaged. [Learn more.](#)

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