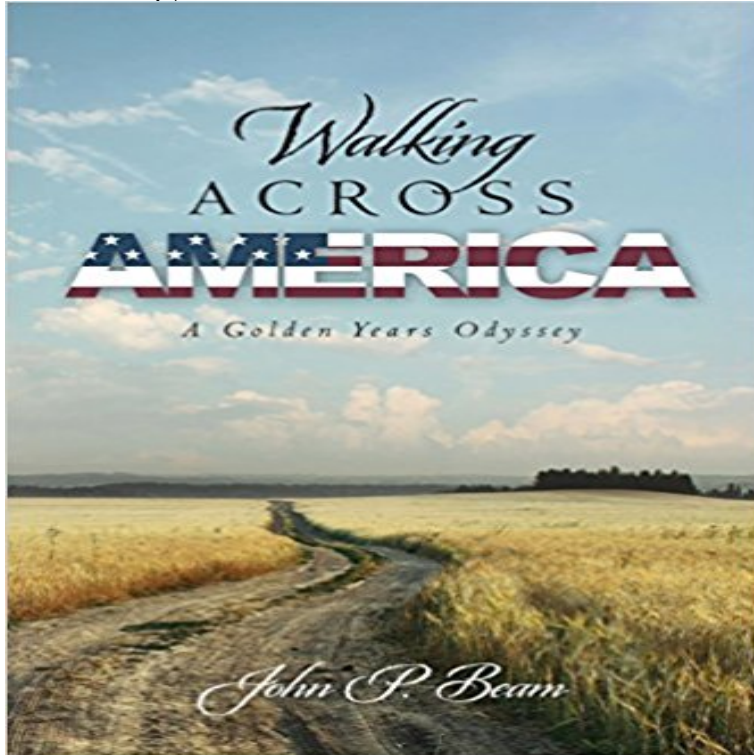


Walking Across America: A Golden Years Odyssey



Walking Across America is the story of John and Helen Beams long trek across the country. They didn't walk the walk because they were disillusioned with society or stifled in their jobs, or because they needed to find themselves or plumb their relationships to nature. They'd led blessed lives and carried no such romantic baggage. They were retired, in their late sixties, had always known who they were, were veterans of very successful careers, and were adequately affluent. They were, however, tired of touristy foreign travel, of cruise ship trips to nowhere, and of most other activities generally regarded as sweet plums of the Golden Years. In truth they were a bit bored when they conceived the idea of walking America on the evening of October 10, 1998. Consistent with their just-do-it natures, they began the following morning and completed the trip in the fall of 2000. The Beams original intent was to walk the great walk together, and they did well until reaching the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. There, for health reasons, Helen had to give it up. After that she would drop John off with the car at the end of the previous days walk; he would walk by myself throughout the day, and she would pick him up in late afternoon. Then they would return to their motor home, which they leapfrogged along as the walk progressed. The walk was accomplished in five sections. Section I, fall of 1998, was from their home in Lebanon, Connecticut, to the Hudson River at Rhinebeck, New York. Section II, spring of 1999, was from the Hudson River to El Paso, Illinois. Section III, summer of 1999, was from El Paso to Hastings, Nebraska. Section IV, spring of 2000, Hastings to Teton Hole, Wyoming. Section V, summer of 2000, Teton Hole to the Pacific Ocean at Newport, Oregon. Walking Across America is both narrative and dialogue as it takes the reader through the industrial towns of Connecticut, across the

Appalachians, across the Midlands, across the Rockies, and finally to the Oregon coast. It is a story of sun and sky and endless miles, of chance-met strangers with fascinating stories. It is also a vehicle for a series of short essays on history, science, philosophy, and psychology. Combining humor with the perspective of nearly eight decades, Walking portrays the great walk as a defining feature of the couples retirement years, a couple chronologically old yet determinedly young in outlook. This book can be read in leisurely sessions of a few chapters at a time, or in longer sessions according to a readers time and inclination. Chapter titles, perhaps most suggestive of page-to-page content, include the follows: Section I: First Day on the Road, A Thumbnail Sketch of Our Lives, The Issue of Carrying a Gun. Section II: Muscle Aches and Horse Liniment, An Uncommonly Courageous Person, Listening While an Egotist Paints a Tractor, Our Morning Household Routine. Section III: Returning to Illinois, I Acquire a Bicycling Buddy, Two Very Different Brothers, The Dangers of Blasphemy, The Transient Iowa Indians; Zigzags, Dust, and a Grim River Floodplain; The Vietnam Vet. Section IV: A Roadside Crematorium, Likeable Do-Gooders and Welders Art, A Too Professional Young Cop, Was the Old Rancher Lying? A Doomed Communication Tower, Brave Casper Collins and Poison Spider Road, Lonely Teton Hole. Section V: Entering Idaho, A Submarine in the Desert?; Play Dumb, the Good Sheriff Advised; The Indian Fisherman, Walking in Western Oregon, We Reach the Pacific. When John and Helen returned from Newport, Oregon, upon reaching the Pacific, there remained some fifty unwalked miles from the Atlantic Coast to their home in Lebanon. The completion of those last fifty miles is covered in the books final chapter: But There Was a Little More Walking to Do. The walk track of the Great Beam Odyssey is unbroken there are no gaps from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

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