

Verandah Porche Poet, Mentor, Scribe



On weekends my partner and I wander the countryside, following thrown-up roads and old logging traces. Richard has a knack for finding ruins in the woods. He collects old topographic maps pinpointing the location of homesteads. By comparing these with the new maps, he notes which houses are gone. On the loose, we admire stone foundations, shards and lilacs, and forage for edible fungus: chanterelles, chicken-of-the-woods, oysters, and the autumnal aborted entoloma. These passions, however, involve trespassing, the possibility of getting lost or dying in the kitchen.

For a legal high, I recommend Mt. Wantastiquet, a trusted destination, across the river in New Hampshire. Even Walmart squatting at the foot can't detract from its power. A lower path ambles beside the river. In summer, friends' dogs like a swim in the pool under the waterfall. If endorphins are no concern, that trail is fine. I prefer to climb the mountain, alone or in the company of my women friends. The 4.4 mile round trip takes speed-hikers an hour and a half and others, up to two. More, if you dawdle with a picnic at the top. Kindergartners can make it up if their companions know how to bribe them. Though the mountain is a popular destination, there is always privacy for conversation. Side paths thread away and back to the main trail. Wildflowers track the season: trailing arbutus, tiny blossoms with a scent of raspberry and cinnamon, sexy lady slippers, honeysuckle and geometric mountain laurel. Brackets of sulphur-orange chicken-of-the-woods occasionally jut from a fallen tree or stump. I've seen garter snakes asleep on a rock. To my knowledge, no one has been reported encountering rattlesnakes on the mountain since 1883.

In the fall and winter, oak leaves underfoot may be quite slippery. And, of course, there is ice. Use crampons. Good treads and a stick or ski poles will keep you steady. After a rain or snow, streams cross the switchbacks. No boots have kept my feet dry, but the school trick of sandwich bags over socks suffices. In winter, wear layers.

From the summit, sky permitting, you gaze down at the toy town of Brattleboro, rooftops and steeples, bridges, byways, and at the wide expanse of hills beyond. Gulls fly below you over the river. You can sun yourself on the rocks. Wind mops your sweat.

One October, for a best friend's birthday, we climbed in vintage evening gowns, some salvaged from the trunk under my guest bed for this final promenade. What would my late mother say? "Oy vay!" It was magical to be decked out in perishable finery like the the mountain at peak foliage. At the top, we tossed off our wraps to pose.

Verandah Porche

Look for *Come Over*, a forthcoming CD of original songs by Verandah Porche and Patty Carpenter, performed by the Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band. In addition to the new CD, you may watch the DVD and listen to one of Patty Carpenter's and Verandah's songs, "Alibi Lullaby" at [youtube.com/watch?v=uaTKBPvU9k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTKBPvU9k). Verandah is currently working on a new edition of *Kitchen Talks with Guilford Elders*, a series of interviews with venerable locals. Read her poems and learn more about her at verandahporche.com. A new collection is in the works.



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Guilford

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SUDDEN EDEN, 1968

For that pinkish haze
across the orchard,
ten thousand blossoms
on a widow's peak,
we forsook The Revolution
and bought the farm.

He bought the farm
means kicked the bucket,
croaks Maynard,
our helpful neighbor,
who did
decades later never owning
what he woke to milk...

September 15th,
sun is a blanched peach,
our possession.

In the kitchen, I have heard
the mermaids singing,
Hale and Elberta, Hallelujah,
Do you dare to eat?

The wood stove hums
Home Comfort.

Leave half-an-inch
of headspace,
tips the manual.

Cool, pare, half-stoned,
we slip our hearts
into wide-mouth
winter.



from FLIGHT SONG

...Just then the geese cross
with their rusty cry
of reeled in wash—
the effort that it takes
to keep from flight.

My heart is turned out
like a pocket: lint, pen, paper-
clip, a little change.

Suddenly the hills are bleachers.
With their pompoms
the trees spell out:

Resist Migration.