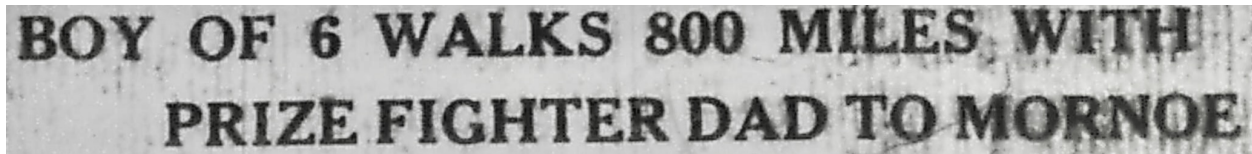


Walkers in the 1920s

When I am out walking in my neighborhood, I see many others out walking as well. I am out there to get my heart rate up, but I see youngsters walking to or from school, people walking to or from work, and others who I am guessing are walking for the exercise. I usually only walk a mile or two a day, so what you are reading today astonished me. More than a century ago people were walking some major distances. What they shared as walking long distances included some hitchhiking, which doesn't happen as much these days.



This is one of the headlines from the August 28, 1922 issue of the Monroe Evening Times.

Howard Holloway and his 6-year-old son, Willis, arrived here in August 1922 after walking from Wichita, Kansas to visit his parents, Percy and Mary (Shank) Holloway. The father and son travelled at least 800 miles on foot to visit the family in Washington Township for a few months. They did catch a few rides; the trip from here to Wichita by train would have been 1,000 miles then.

Mr. Holloway was a professional prize fighter known as the "Fighting Doctor" and "Kid Howard." He undertook this walk to maintain his physical fitness. Willis was "extremely anxious to make the trip with him and finally gained consent." Willis "stood the trip even better than his daddy, who had extremely sore feet and many calluses upon arriving here." The son did not complain at all, but remarked, "I'm not going to walk back," when he greeted his grandparents.

Another person had walked a long distance to visit Monroe in 1922. Otto Steinman arrived in Monroe on Thursday, September 7 and left the next day to visit his mother, Mrs. Jacob Steinman, who lived in the country. He had been traveling the western part of the country for the previous five years where he did a great deal of hiking. He wore "a suit of khaki" and carried a knapsack and other supplies on his back. He had spent much time in Montana and Idaho, hiking back to Wisconsin most of the way from there. He had "many experiences with which to entertain his friends."

The rest of the walkers in this column did not record hundreds of miles, but did do much walking. Five or six young men who wanted to see a basketball game in Monroe in March 1923 were not deterred by the bad roads as they walked four miles of the way from Juda. Another group of eight young men were reported to have used the railroad track "speeder" to "negotiate the distance from Browntown" to Monroe. That article shared that the main contest was held at the armory where "the North Side team defeated the South Side 29 to 27 in an overtime period."

There were some young men who wanted to watch the state track meet in Madison on May 26, 1923 where Smith, Ellis, Howe, and German were taken by Coach C. T. Byrnes to participate. [Those men were probably Jack Smith, Chester Ellis, and John Germann, who graduated from Monroe High School in 1923, and Ray C. Howe, who graduated in 1924.] The weather was favorable and "records were expected to be shattered."

At least five young men left on foot the day before to watch the meet. Alfred Stauffer and John Dreier, both freshmen, left early in the afternoon. They were evidently "lucky in picking up lifts along the way" as they sent word back that they had reached Madison by 6:00. Edward Drier was part of another group that had left at 9:00 the evening before.

Results of the track meet were shared on Monday, May 28. "Pitted against the state's best track talent from much larger schools and fated to poor luck in drawings, Monroe High School in Class A succeeded in landing only one place Saturday in the state track and field meet in Madison. Ellis saved the locals from complete defeat by winning fourth place in the half mile run."

Like now, it was not only the males who did the walking. It was reported that four Monroe girls, Edna and Clara Theiler and Kathryn and Marie Greenwald, left at 6:00 a.m. on August 1, 1923 to "hike to the Dells," as the headline mentioned. Some girls had previously roller skated to Monticello. The Monroe Evening Times called this "the latest stunt." The four girls expected to reach Madison before the end of the day. They would "then push on to Devil's Lake and the Dells when they felt inclined."

“The bets were that a number of pick up rides would be found along the way to help shorten the distance.” The girls had been hiking short distances in the country for some time and felt that they were “in trim for a longer jump this time.”

An update the next day listed Carrie Ruehle instead of Kathryn Greenwald and changed the spelling of Marie’s last name to Gruenewald. The girls were able to reach Baraboo by noon, only 3 miles from Devils Lake. The girls challenged “any other Monroevites who feel the call of the wanderlust to compete with their speed.” Luck seemed to have favored the girls side as they “traversed no more than 3 miles of the distance.” They were given a “lift” and received rides all the way to Baraboo. They, however, did not expect to be so fortunate on the return trip. They felt that the purchase of the “most durable hiking outfits” was not in vain.

They arrived back in Monroe on the evening of August 7 “in tip-top condition.” They shared that they did walk some of the way on their return. Their names were given again in this article and were the same as the second day, with the exception that Marie's last name was written as “Greenwald” again.

Traffic wasn’t nearly as fast then nor were the roads nearly as wide and smooth as they are now.