

Contact: Paul Kiczek, Founder & Director FreeWalkers, Inc.
Cell Phone: 973-214-1811
Email: pkiczek@FreeWalkers.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 22, 2017

FreeWalkers Bring Back the Kennedy 50-Mile Hike

POTOMAC, MD – At 4:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 10, 2018, a group of hearty long distance hikers known as FreeWalkers plan to travel 50 miles by foot in one day. They will walk from Old Anglers Inn in Potomac, Maryland to Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, along the banks of the Potomac River on the C&O Canal Towpath. Plans call for re-creating a famously long, one-day event that moved a nation 55 years ago.

In 1963, our President, John F. Kennedy, challenged his military leaders to march 50 miles to prove they were as fit as those that served in 1908 under President Theodore Roosevelt, who had originally issued a similar order. But, JFK also passed that challenge to others by making it known that his White House staff should lead by example. The idea of a 50-mile hike suddenly became a popular one-day endurance feat that swept the nation. It seemed to perfectly reflect a nation seeking challenge and displaying a growing interest in physical fitness.

JFK’s brother, Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, was never one to turn down a good challenge. Bobby became the first of thousands that were to walk 50 miles that year. His feat was all the more special as he trekked for 17 hours and 50 minutes in a pair of dress shoes on the C&O Canal towpath, facing a bitterly cold icy February. It would be a battle of determination over any training. He would outlast four staffers, his dog, and several not-so-intrepid reporters finishing the feat alone in the dark at Harpers Ferry.

Paul Kiczek, President of FreeWalkers, senses many parallels between that watershed year of 1963 and our present challenges in 2018. “At that time (1963) we had military threats, an uncertain economy, racial and religious tensions and public health and fitness issues too. Yet, we seemed to be able to take positive action toward solving those problems, led by a charismatic president that seemed to be able to overcome any obstacle.” said Kiczek.

Each year this challenge has captured the imagination of a growing group of intrepid walkers as they trek the same route along the Potomac. Everyone is welcome to participate in the event and learn more about its history at <http://kennedy50.org>. Join the FreeWalkers as they walk the same 50-mile path as RFK in an effort to channel the memory and experience of an ageless grand physical challenge.

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FreeWalkers, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization that offers events, information, & networking aimed at educating the public on the benefit of walking. Visit <http://freewalkers.org> for more information.



Robert F. Kennedy with wife Ethel applying a foot massage at Camp David. February 9, 1963, "The Big Walk," Life Magazine 2/22/63



Hearty hikers at Great Falls Tavern start of the 2013 50-Mile Kennedy Walk.