

Contact: Paul Kiczek, Walking Advocate
Cell Phone: 973-214-1811
Email: 50milekennedywalk@gmail.com

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A Reprise of Historic 50-Mile Kennedy Walk Planned for 2013

GREAT FALLS, VA - On Saturday, February 9, 2013, Paul Kiczek, of Morris Township, New Jersey and fellow walking advocate, Ray Smith of Great Falls, Virginia, plan to travel 50 miles by foot in one day from the Great Falls area in Potomac, Maryland to Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, along the C&O Canal towpath. They expect many others will join them in the challenging walk that will relive an historic walk that occurred 50 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. Teddy, a renowned walker and naturalist, had issued the original directive to his troops, allowing for up to three days to complete the task.

But, in the "can-do" age of the 60's, the bar was publicly raised to a 20-hour feat. And JFK made it known that his White House staff should lead by example. The 50-mile walk suddenly seemed to perfectly reflect a nation seeking challenge and displaying a growing interest in physical fitness. And, a short-lived long distance walking fad was born that swept the nation for at least half that year, with thousands walking extreme distances to prove something to themselves and others.

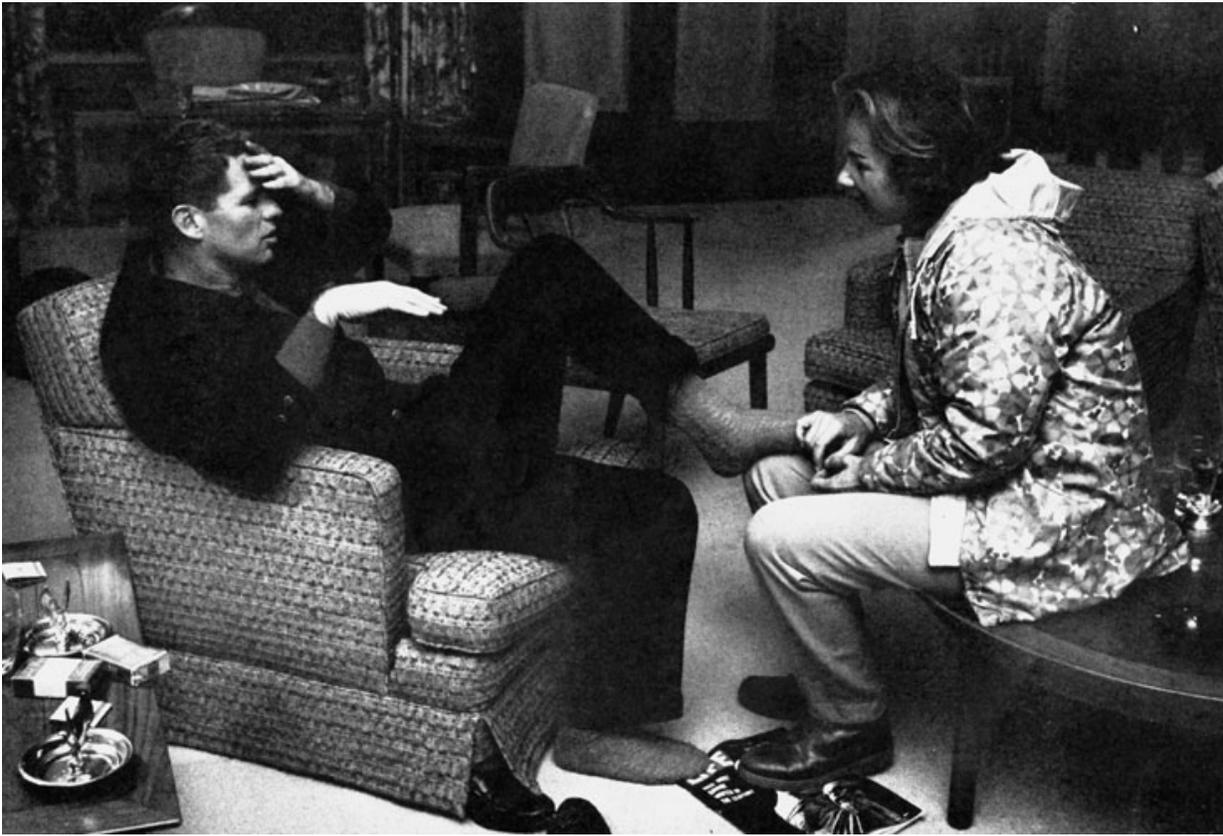
JFK's brother, Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, was never one to turn down a good challenge. On February 9, 1963, a mere three days after the military order was issued, he became one of the first of thousands to walk 50 miles. His feat was all the more special having trekked for 17 hours and 50 minutes in a pair of dress shoes, facing cold winter weather, and without training. He would outlast four staffers, his dog, and several not-so-intrepid reporters.

Kiczek, 15 years old at the time, was among the many Americans that took up the challenge later that year with three of his friends, walking from Roselle to Netcong, New Jersey finishing at 38 miles – just 12 miles short of his goal. A few years ago he began researching the period and exploring long distance walking. Soon, he created FreeWalkers.org, a social network that organizes long challenging walks.

Kiczek senses many parallels between that watershed year of 1963 and our present challenges. "The American public had military threats, a recession, racial challenges and a health crisis present at that time too. Yet, the attitude was forward-thinking, mostly embodied by a young and dynamic President," said Kiczek.

Smith, is a walking enthusiast retired from a military career. He has extensive experience leading walking groups in the Washington, D.C. area and has participated in many large-scale, communal walking events in Europe. He feels that the same interest can happen here. Smith says, "Walking has a special significance in most of the European countries as they have long coveted the challenge and social experience of walking with hundreds of people in an organized, enjoyable sporting event."

Kiczek and Smith are now seeking others who appreciate that time and have an interest in walking 50-miles, or part of it. You can learn more about the planned event and the history of the 50-Mile Hike at <http://50milekennedywalk.drupalgardens.com>. All are welcome to join them as they walk the same 50-mile path as RFK in a new effort to channel the memory and experience of a grand physical challenge.



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



Hikers from Redwood High School at Larspur, CA, near end of 50-mile trek. "Walking Craze: It was Fun While It Lasted", NY Times 4/1/63