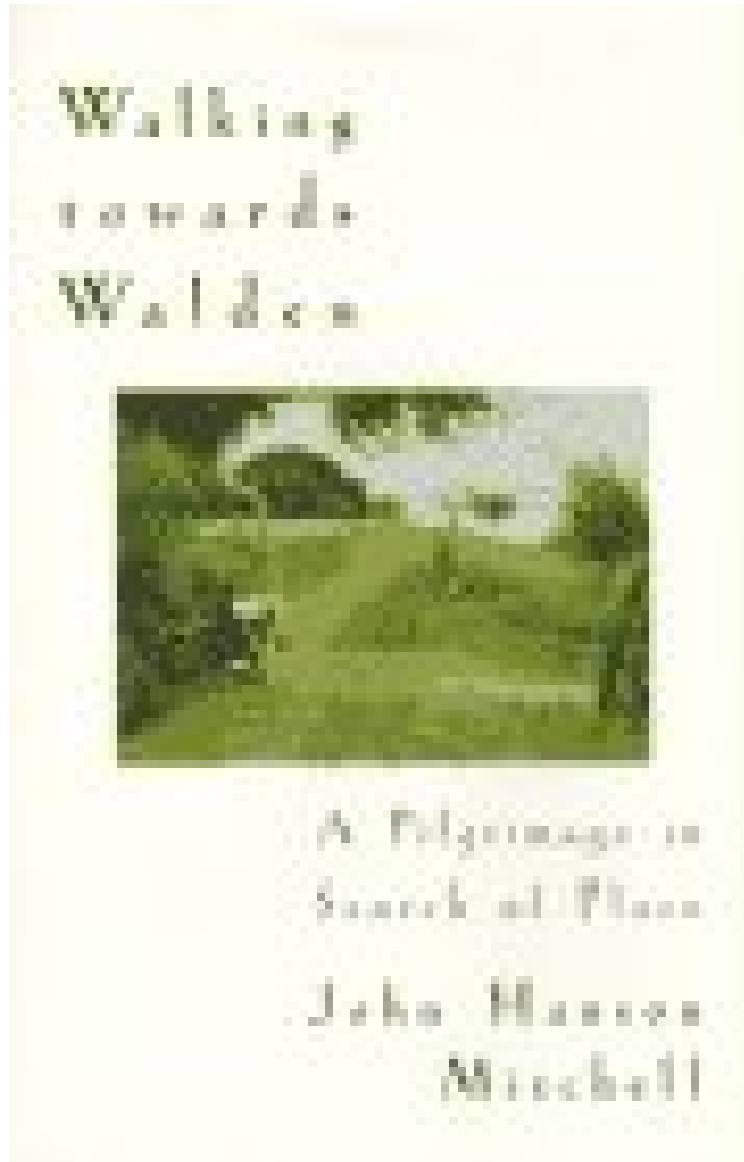


(Download pdf) Walking Towards Walden: A Pilgrimage in Search of Place

## Walking Towards Walden: A Pilgrimage in Search of Place

*John Hanson Mitchell*

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**John Hanson Mitchell : Walking Towards Walden: A Pilgrimage in Search of Place** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Walking Towards Walden: A Pilgrimage in Search of Place:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Walking towards Walden By A Customer The readers join Mitchell and his friends as they walk through an historical and artistic region of our nation. We discuss the history, nature, the people and the sights as we meet others along the walk. We walk along with Thoreau as well as Mitchell's fascinating

friends. There are few books that I've enjoyed as much as this friendly hike. Mitchell is one of the best of the current nature writers because he becomes a participant with the reader in enjoying nature and history. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *Rambling Ramble* By Customer This book chronicles a day-long walk Mitchell took with a pair of friends back in the early 1990s from Westford to Concord, MA. The starting point for the ramble was the burial site of Henry Sinclair, who, according to legend, carved an armorial in stone near the site some 100 years before the arrival of Columbus. The small group of travelers wanted to experience, as much as possible the kind of terrain and sights Sinclair might have encountered, so they chose a route that avoided roads and settlements as much as possible. On the map, it was 16 miles of woods, thickets, swamps and old fields. As it turned out, they ended up hiking considerably more than 16 miles as they got lost a few times and had to make some detours to cross rivers and streams. The journey brought them at last to the Colonial Inn in Concord for a fine meal and conversation before their return home. Throughout the journey, Mitchell ponders the meaning of pilgrimage, and how this jaunt might be construed as a spiritual journey. As they meander through points of interest, Mitchell considers variously how this walk traces the path of the Colonial forces heading to Lexington that fateful day in 1775, how his relationship with his friends has developed through shared journeys over the years, and how the people presently living along the route relate to their environment. Is it a book about Walden? About Thoreau, or Emerson? Well, not exactly. On the other hand, in form, the book could be compared somewhat to Thoreau's "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," with its wandering thoughts and erudite references. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. *Mitchell's Multi-layered Cultural History* By Robert G. Gard III These 300 pages describe both a physical journey, lasting but a day, overlaid with historical, architectural, artistic, anthropological, and literary musings of a richly cultivated mind. He writes, for example, upon viewing a stark landscape, "...I made the connection... This hollow... looks very much like the fourteenth-century Tuscan forest as envisioned by nineteenth-century French illustrator Gustave Dore." Making connections is Mitchell's forte. The narrative of a tramp through woods and sloughs brings to Mitchell's fertile imagination scenes enacted in the places they pass. He seamlessly inter-weaves the fascinating story of King Philip's War, described as "one of the first anti-imperialist efforts ... the first American revolution" alongside the war between the colonists and British regulars, "essentially a civil war." Rather than re-hash Thoreau's meditations in "Walden," Mitchell shares his own stream-of-consciousness, touching on "The Epic of Gilgamesh" and "The Wizard of Oz," "The Inferno" and some of Melville's "chief harpooners." Additionally, he offers an in-depth account of the way that nineteenth-century landscape painters changed the view of society toward their environment, suggesting that "It is doubtful that the preservation of a wilderness park would even have been considered if the painters hadn't been there first." Indeed, his descriptions are painterly, but he also succeeds in carefully bringing his companions and those they meet on the way to believable life. The book is divided into 18 chapters, fifteen of them given names of places traversed in each of the miles walked. These names, such as "Nonset Brook" and "Nagog" are less likely to register with the reader than the connections these places evoke in the mind of the author. Who can recall, for instance, that the etymology of "Key West" is to be found in "Mile 10: Thoreau Country?" Hopefully, an index in a later edition will make it easier for the reader to re-discover favorite passages.

One brilliant day in October, John Mitchell and two friends began a fifteen-mile walk to the tomb of Henry David Thoreau. Starting from an ancient burial site where, according to legend, a Scottish Earl became lost on a quest for the Holy Grail, they bushwhack through the landscape where our literature and history began: the woods favored by the Transcendentalists and the Great Road followed by the minutemen as they marched to the Old North Bridge. On each mile of this quintessentially American pilgrimage the author and his friends explore not only the natural landscape before them but also certain timeless themes: they wonder at the force that drew pilgrims to certain sacred sites, the sense of place that brings artists to Tuscany or Provence, and that deep abiding allegiance to place that binds each of us, if we are lucky, to a particular beloved spot.

From *Publishers Weekly* Observing that pilgrimage to spiritual centers is not Anglo-Saxon Protestant America's thing, Mitchell (*Ceremonial Time*) and his companions Kata Grant, a specialist in Native American basketry, and Barkley Mason, a birdwatcher and seeker, set off from their Massachusetts homes on Columbus Day 1994 on what they consider a sacred journey to Concord, ending in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, where Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and the Alcotts are buried. Their 15-mile walk to this perceived "centering place" took them along the overgrown paths of the Minutemen of 1775; as Mitchell reminds us, the point of a pilgrimage is hardship, endurance, cleansing. The friends exchange tedious talk of Odysseus, the Holy Grail, Native American folklore, Columbus "the oppressor," Ponce de Leon (whose Fountain of Youth the trio sought on an earlier expedition). Although there's a smugness about these folks in their certainty that Buddha and Krishna share their sensibility, Mitchell shows his acuity in his ruminations on "place," which he ultimately discerns is to be found in the exoticism of the familiar. Illustrations. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Mitchell, naturalist and author of *Living at the End of Time* (LJ 6/1/90), decided to hike to the grave of Thoreau from Concord, Massachusetts, burial site of a member of the party of Sir Henry Sinclair, a 16th-century Scottish explorer, in an attempt to learn more about that

famous landscape. Avoiding most roads and accompanied by two eccentric friends on the 15-mile walk, the author investigates a wide variety of related topics, including natural history of the area, mythology, and related literature. One of the most interesting aspects of this pilgrimage is the variety of personal histories related by local residents encountered on the trek. Recommended for local and larger natural history collections. Tim Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, Wash. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

John Mitchell and two companions decided to honor Concord and its famous inhabitants by hiking there on Columbus Day from the burial site of a Scottish seafarer who died in Westford, Massachusetts, during a search for the Holy Grail. Their 15-mile odyssey mirrored the precolonial route of the minutemen as they advanced toward revolution at the Old North Bridge. Viewing Concord as America's "metaphor for itself," Mitchell and his Chaucerian companions turned their pilgrimage into an exploration of *querencia*, the devotion people exhibit to a specific place. Like Thoreau, they sauntered and trespassed with nomadic determination, discussing the timeless attraction of spots as diverse as Oz and Provence, Que Lin and the Vienna Woods, debating geography's effect on creativity. Mitchell has produced a combination guidebook and memoir peppered with morsels of mythology, folklore, nature, literature, art, and history. This is a unique, fascinating approach to Concord--a marvelous miscellany, a paean to place. Patricia Hassler