

# A MAN IN A HURRY...

by P. S. Marshall



*Edward Payson Weston..*

The greatest walker of all time, **Edward Payson Weston**, was 72 years old when he marched triumphantly into New York, having just completed the 3,500-mile coast-to-coast journey from Santa Monica, between the 1<sup>st</sup> of February and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1910 — in an incredible 77 days!

***“Five hundred thousand people crammed New York’s greatest thoroughfare to see one white-haired man march through the cheering lines. The man was Edward P. Weston, and the ovation which he received was the greatest ever accorded to any man not connected with public life.”*** — *Portsmouth Daily Herald*, New Hampshire, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1910.

New York was well prepared for his arrival, and the expectation was that the “*Wily Wobbler*” would be given his accustomed rapturous welcome from his adoring admirers, many of which just couldn’t believe that a man of his age could achieve what he had. Indeed, on the day before his 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday, the great man had walked 72 miles just to celebrate it!

E. P. Weston was well-known one hundred years ago – really, really well-known. His name was up in lights. He was very, very famous, not just in North America, but in the United Kingdom as well, where between 1876 and 1879, he performed in front of millions of people on sawdust and grass tracks, and on the road where he was mobbed wherever he went.

So who was Edward Payson Weston? Where did he come from and what exactly did he achieve during his long career as the “*walking sensation*” of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?

Described as the “*purest walker of all time*”, Weston was born in Providence, Rhode Island on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 1859.

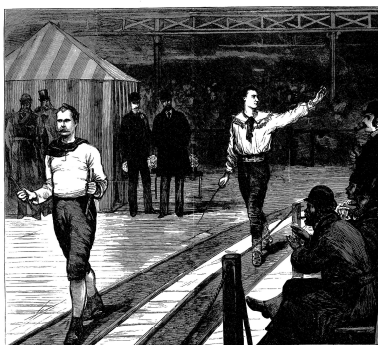
In 1860, “E. P.” made a bet that he could walk from Boston, Massachusetts, to Washington, D.C. in 10 days – a journey of 478 miles in time for the inauguration of President Lincoln – the prize – a jar of peanuts! Setting off in 1861, Weston managed to cover 510 miles in the allotted time.

Then in 1867 Weston made a bet that he could hike from Portland to Chicago in 26 days - a distance of 1,226 miles. Despite failing to walk 100 miles in a day, which was part of the agreement he had entered into, he nevertheless made it in time and when he got to the windy city, he received a reception fit for a king! Thousands upon thousands turned up to cheer the sensation of the day through the streets. The heaving crowds presence was nothing new to him – he was used to their adoration.

The “peoples” interest in him was phenomenal. They loved him! He was good looking, intelligent, articulate and well mannered – an enigmatic character who everyone just had to see, or even better meet! Dressed in the most remarkable costumes he would walk at a rapid pace in front of the carriage chased by hundreds of well-wishers:

Weston would never walk on a Sunday; his day of rest would normally be spent lying in bed attending to correspondence, or meeting the many admirers who wanted to speak to him — and the great man had many of them — many of whom were famous, including presidents of the United States!

In January of 1869, he failed in his ambition to hike 5,000 miles in 100 days giving up the attempt on the 36<sup>th</sup> day.



THE GREAT SIX DAYS' WALKING MATCH

As previously mentioned, Weston travelled over to England, where he became an instant sensation as he “wowed” the crowds who flocked to see the “*human locomotive*” in action.

Appearing at various locations “against time”, he then prepared himself for a second 6-day on-track encounter with Daniel O’Leary, of Chicago, at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, London, in March of 1877 – watched by as many as 30,000 people in one day!

**Weston (hat) is shown waving to the crowd as he performed at the “Aggie” (left).**

In early 1879, he made an attempt to hike 2,000 miles in 1,000 hours around the shires of England. Again, he was mobbed wherever he went and he blamed the people's enthusiasm to see him for his failure in scoring the required amount by 23 miles!

He then went on to surprise everybody by taking the international version of the Astley Belt back to the United States in June of the same year with a new world record of 550 miles in six days! The established long-distance walker changed tactics to beat Henry "Blower" Brown of Fulham; he ran all the way — not bad for a 40-year-old man!

His legs were his fortune. He loved walking. He loved it so much that he gave lectures about it, urging those who listened to him to use their legs more. These talks were usually given after a gruelling day on the road, outside hotels, or in pre-booked halls.

Weston then went on to hike 50 miles a day to score 5,000 miles in 100 days between November, of 1883, and March, of 1884. Two thousand of those miles were performed in buildings, but the rest were made on the roads of England. Again, the people went crazy for him...

Another challenge against O'Leary in 1885 over 2,500 miles in the USA saw him beating his old foe — easily!

Other challenges were met after that, notably a repetition of his infamous 1867 walk from Portland, Maine, to Chicago, in 1907 — fifty years after the original event. He beat his own record, and in doing so, started to make the people of America sit up and notice him again.

Then, in 1909, he walked from New York to San Francisco, completing the 3,895-mile journey in 105 days. That upset him as he wanted to make it in less than a hundred...

Onwards to 1910 and Weston's original plan was to walk from Los Angeles to New York in 90 days. Setting off at 16:00 from Santa Monica, on Tuesday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, he would be followed along the tracks of the Santa Fe railroad by a car, the occupants of which would be his manager, Judges, and newspapermen who would respectively adjudicate and report on his performance as he sped along at 4 mph — and sometimes faster!

By Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, he had made 390 miles in the eleven "*walking days*" since the start.

The following Monday, he would walk a massive distance — 60 miles.

Between three, and five thousand people, gave Weston a memorable greeting when he arrived in Albuquerque, N. M., on Monday, the 28<sup>th</sup> of February. That day he went on to make yet another 60 miles

On Monday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, Weston left Ingalls, at 12:10 A. M., expecting to travel seventy-two miles before stopping that night. He did it! The news that a man of

his age had walked 72 miles in a day really set the imagination, and “*Public interest was high*” as 500 citizens of Kansas City, gathered to cheer the “*elderly athlete*” as he strode into the old Grand Avenue Station at 2 o’clock on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. On arrival, he was presented with a blue ribbon inscribed: “*The King of Pedestrians From the Woman’s Pedestrian Club. Kansas City. Mo.*”

The following Monday, he made 61 miles; the day after, Tuesday, 52 miles, and on Wednesday, 58 miles...

Chicago would be conquered in early April, and from there it would be a case of walking on the road until he reached New York.

Weston left the Hotel Columbia just after midnight on Monday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, and crossed the Buffalo city line at the Lackawanna steel plant shortly after 11 o’clock having tramped through, “*rain and mud as soft as sponge puddings.*”

Preceded by a brass band and accompanied by a squad of mounted police, which had met him at the Hamburg turnpike at noon, and representatives of athletic clubs and others, Weston strode down Main Street. “Chests out, eyes ahead, and breathe through your noses,” he shouted at his three young companions as they marched within the hollow square that the police had formed around them.

At Amsterdam, on the following Tuesday, an estimated 10,000 people waited to see him after his 43-mile trip from Little Falls. As he reached the city limits escorted by about 50 motor vehicles, amid the ringing of church bells, which clanged out a riotous greeting, and the tooting of horns, his path was lit by red fire. There was also a display of fireworks, which included skyrockets and Roman candles.

As he galloped towards Hudson, on Wednesday, he told a reporter: “I am going to make 69 or 70 miles today, and a make a big day tomorrow to show the world that in the concluding days of my walk across the continent my strength is unimpaired and that I am far from being all in. Saturday will be the end of just three months since I left Los Angeles, and I am going to finish my walk and go into City Hall no later than Saturday noon. I never felt better or stronger in my life, and I know I shall be able to do what I have promised.”

#### **WHAT NEW YORK WILL SEE TODAY.**



On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, Weston would embark on the final leg of his journey to New York. All of America was buzzing at the prospect of its national athletic hero reaching his goal. The *Boston Daily Globe* got in on the act by printing the cartoon on the left on its front page.

Five thousand people followed him as he passed by Columbia University, where showers of flowers were thrown on him by women and girls; the students shouting: “**Weston! Weston! Weston!**” As he passed them, he waved his stick at them and laughed.

Ten thousand people packed every available inch in Columbus Circle, where the police found great difficulty keeping the spectators under control.

In Times Square, an estimated 15,000 people stood as many as fifteen deep in front of the Hotel Astor.

The crowds increased as he made his way along Broadway and Greeley Square, to Madison Square.

Then finally, at ten past three, he walked up the steps of the city hall, where Mayor Gaynor embraced him and congratulated him on his unbelievable achievement. As the tears rolled down Weston's face, the thousands that had gathered to welcome him threw their hats in the air and cheered and cheered and cheered!

Edward Payson Weston, the "*World's Greatest Walker*" had just completed mission impossible. He would go on to walk massive distances well into his 80's

Time has been unkind to the great man, in that his remarkable efforts have been largely forgotten. However, this remarkable athlete's story, both personally and professionally, is about resurface — and what a story it is...

The early part of Weston's career from 1861 until 1886 is covered concisely in [\*King of the Peds\*](#) – a book about the history of the sport of professional pedestrianism which took the Victorian world by storm.