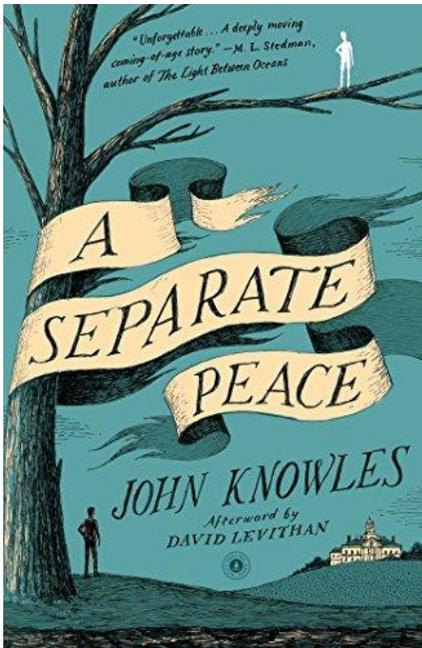


"A SEPARATE PEACE" TRAIL

ExeterLitFest.com



Intro: This classic Exeter book is set in the summer session of Devon Academy, which is Phillips Exeter Academy – author John Knowles alma mater. Immerse yourself in a story of two boys in 1942, just a year shy of draftable age. A film was shot on location in 1972.

Park on Front Street near Phillips Exeter Academy. The school is private, please do not enter any of the buildings. Tour begins on the oval path in front of the current brick four-story library, which was the site of the headmaster's house in 1942.

1. Headmaster's House. Gene and Phineas attend the Upper-Middler tea party at the headmaster's house, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Patch-Withers in the sun porch. Phineas slicks his hair back and wears a pink shirt and a Devon tie around his waist instead of a belt, as emblems in celebration of the bombing in Central Europe. He gets away with it.

Walk behind the library, past some dorm halls and cross Court St. toward the playing fields. The entrance to the grey building on the right is inscribed Thompson Gymnasium.

2. Gymnasium and Playing Fields. After leaving the tea, Phineas directs Gene past this gym and towards the river, suggesting they go jump out of the tree. Throughout their time at the school the boys have spent many long hours in the gym; Gene is on the wrestling team; Phineas has a few trophies with his name on it in the cases. The boys and their friends also play blitzball often on the sweep of the playing fields to the left.

The old pool is in the building just past and attached to Thompson Gymnasium. Glass cubes form a small wall.

3. Swimming pool. Here Gene uses a borrowed stopwatch to time Phineas in his impetuous attempt to break the 100 yards freestyle swimming record of A. Hopkins - Parker, which the boys see on a plaque on the wall. Phineas breaks the record on his first try, leaving Gene astounded and wondering why Phineas wants to keep it secret. The plot thickens.

Continue past the gym and fields forking left towards the river and woods. Come to an arched cement bridge over the Squamscott River, with a football stadium beyond.

4. 1914 Bridge. Looking up the "Naguamsett" River you can see parts of the path on the left-hand side which leads to the jumping tree. Gene describes the tree as "tremendous, an irate, steely black steeple beside the river." Phineas likes the tree because "what I like is that it's such a cinch!" The boys form a secret society and they would jump from the tree nightly that summer. Gene returns to this bridge 15 years later.

Continue over the bridge towards the football stadium.

5. Stadium. This is where Gene slept the night under a ramp, after Phineas' jounce-induced injury.

Return towards the bridge and turn right. Walk the dirt road towards the houses/planetarium, past the white gate. Stop on the paved sidewalk near the traffic light.

6. High Street. Looking up the hill you can see the route the two sixteen-year-old boys would have taken when they rode their bicycles ten hilly miles to the beach, and slept in the dunes overnight. Gene flunks his trigonometry test the following morning, and convinces himself that Phineas is in secret competition with him.

Turn left and head into town. Cross the street at the crosswalk at the grassy Founders' Park and walk onto Chestnut St. Go along the river, past the public library, and turn left on to String Bridge. Pause.

7. String Bridge. On his way to the crew house to become assistant manager, Gene pauses here to face upriver and imagine "Phineas in exultation, balancing on one foot on the prow of a canoe like a river god, his raised arms invoking the air to support him,...body a complex set of balances and compensations,... his whole body hanging between river and sky as though he had transcended gravity... and remain suspended in space, encompassing all the glory of the summer and offering it to the sky."

Continue across the bridge and turn right onto Water St. Walk past all the shops until you get to the boathouse on the corner of Swasey Parkway.

8. Swasey Parkway. This is the scene of the Winter Olympics, where the gang competes while imbibing several jugs of very hard cider. A ski-jump and various snow sculptures are made. A large table is brought down from the school on which is displayed the prizes including: Finney's icebox, a Webster dictionary and a lock of hair cut from the head of Hazel Brewster, among other treasures.

9. Crew House. (This boathouse is new, the original one was set further back on Swasey.) This is the scene of the fight with the crew manager Cliff Quackenbush. Quackenbush tries to bully Gene and they clash, but Gene fights back and they both end up in the river. A dripping Gene then heads back to his dorm and encounters dorm head Mr. Lundsbury on the way, who tells him he has a long-distance telephone call. Take this drippy walk now.

Continue on Water St. past entrance to Swasey and take the second crosswalk on the left and walk up Spring St. Turn right onto a paved walkway between long brick dorm houses towards the Main Common. Ascend the third staircase. Stop near a brick dorm perpendicular to the others.

10. Peabody Hall Dorm Room. This Georgian building is the dorm house in which Phineas and Gene shared a room. Above Phineas' bed was taped a picture of several famous fat men having lunch and discussing fake war strategy, enabling Phineas to maintain his separate peace. Next door lived first Elwin "Leper" Lepellier, until the senior year when he was replaced by the brash and civic-minded Brinker Hadley (who was modeled on actual classmate Gore Vidal). The "butt" room was in the basement, through the small windows.

Turn around and walk to front of the large building with the cupola and ship weathervane.

11. Assembly Hall. Inscribed above the doorway on Latin was "You Come Here Boys That You May Be Made Men." (Updated in 1970 when school went co-ed.) Inside the marble foyer there is a white marble staircase, an exceptionally hard marble staircase with time-worn moons in the middle of each step. Phineas and his crutches fell loudly down them after Brinker's courtroom charade.

Turn left and walk to the stone Phillips Church on Tan Lane. (This church is conflated with the Assembly Hall for the fall term opening day chapel (book), and the courtroom scene (film).

12. Chapel. Gene and 700 other boys listen to Reverend Carhartt give the sermon "What We Owed Devon." The hymn sung that day was *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind Forgive our Foolish Ways*. Gene ponders this.

Walk downhill on Tan Lane, the infirmary is at the bottom of the hill behind the new science building. "Infirmary" is inscribed above the door.

13. Infirmary. It was here that Gene came at night and stood outside the window arguing with Phineas. The next day Gene brought Phineas' suitcase in to his room and they made up. Later that day, Dr Stanpole gave it "the old college try" to reset Phineas' leg for the second time.

Behind the infirmary take the small footpath to cut across what were once open fields (on the way to the Exeter train depot on Lincoln St.) Stop at the Robinson Seminary stones.

14. Snowfield. In the 1940's, students could cut across the rear of the infirmary through the woods to the train station. Gene and others were paid to shovel snow off the tracks after a big snowstorm, so carloads of young soldiers could pass. Upon Gene's return, he and his group ran into his odd friend "Leper" on cross country skis looking for beaver dams.

*Turn left and take the small gated road out to Front St. and stop #16 the Exeter Inn. ***Option: (Adds .5 miles) For a longer tour go to stop #15 the Exeter/Amtrak depot by walking through the elementary school property -if not in session- to Lincoln St. near Gerry's Variety store.****

[Optional 15. Train station. This train runs from Boston to Portland and various iterations have brought many a schoolboy to Exeter since the early 1800's. Gene uses the train as a leg to travel to and from his home in Virginia. Once stopping off at Phineas' home in Boston.]

16. Devon Inn. Many parents, like Brinker Hadley's father, stay here at the Devon inn while visiting their children. Gene also stays here when he returns to the academy 15 years after his graduation. In the misty fog, he walks down the "the best street in town" towards the school admiring all the fine old buildings. The past flows back into his mind, and he realizes the great fear that he lived in when he attended Devon.

Continue on Front St heading back to the academy. Turn right onto the small driveway past Elliot St., and walk past the library to the grassy common.

17. Far Common. In June of his final school year, Gene stood alone at the window of his dorm and looked out at Army Air Force troops moving into the Far Common area. It had been donated to the war effort and became a barracks and a parachute rigging operation. Troops were also in the locker room of the gym when Gene cleaned out his locker for the final time, leaving his childhood behind...

Return to Front St, and back to your vehicle.

Thanks for visiting!

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We celebrate local authors
the first weekend
of each April.



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