

Astonishing Exploits of a Resident of Webb's Mills, Me.

[Boston Globe.]

BRIDGTON, Me., Oct. 2.—Who is Edgar Welch?

That's what the honorable board of commissioners for Cumberland county wanted to know one fine day.

Well, Edgar B. Welch of the little village of Webb's Mills, town of Casco, in western Maine, is a remarkable character.

One warm, pleasant day in midsummer, the aforesaid honorable board saw a spook.

The scene was Mayberry Hill, situated in the towns of Casco and Otisfield, a little over 30 miles due north from Portland. The three commissioners, Chaplin, Prince and Nutter of Bridgton, Portland, and Cape Elizabeth, respectively, had come up from Portland to make an official inspection of the road down this same Mayberry Hill, on a vexed question of change of highway around the hill. Casco and Otisfield were having a big fight over the question, and either town was represented in this official visit by an attorney. This descent was about a mile long, and most of the way quite steep. The carriage in which the party were making the descent was a three-seated, side-spring covered mountain wagon, a rickety affair, drawn or rather held back by a pair of spirited horses, and which swayed and tipped to such a degree as to excite no little apprehension in the minds of the five passengers.

"Say, Call," suddenly exclaimed the attorney representing the remonstrants against the proposed change of location, addressing the Hon. C. A. Chaplin, lawyer for the petitioners, "hang me if I don't believe this is one of your shrewd games to get us into this confounded old rattletrap, and have Jim Tolman drive us at break-neck speed down this hill, so as to scare the commissioners into believing the road is unsafe to travel!"

There was a laugh all round. His brother lawyer made no response at that moment, but he shortly was enabled to turn the tables with interest upon his opponent, through the providential appearance at this very juncture of our "spook."

The apparition came from below, as bad spooks are supposed to come, flitted past them in a twinkling, and darted upward over the precipitous highway. It was in the form of a man, tall, well proportioned, and, if human, of form 160 to 180 pounds weight; had good features, short, dark brown hair, wore a blue woolen shirt, coarse brown trousers nearly threadbare from long use, and an old broken-brimmed straw hat from which floated the loose end of a faded silk ribbon; and his feet were covered—with dirt only.

This strange figure passed them at a double-quick, and when the team reached the base of the mountain, and the passengers, like Mr. Bellamy, looked backward, they saw the figure still running, and it kept running until it became a mere speck and disappeared over the far-off brow.

"I say, Libby," remarked "Call" Chaplin, the counsel for the petitioners, "this is one of your sharp tricks—hiring that man, or spirit, or whatever it is, to run at full speed all the way up this everlasting hill in the nick of time, so as to fool these gentlemen into the belief that the grade is so easy no change of road is needed!"

The retort was so pat that the commissioners laughed heartily and clapped their hands. Then one of them addressed the driver:

"For pity's sake, Tolman, do tell us who or what that ghost was?"

"No ghost at all, sir," replied Tolman, with a smile, "but my wonderful neighbor, known through this region as Edgar Welch, the runner."

Think of a man starting off across the country at a double quick for 30 miles without stopping, overtaking en route and leaving far in the rear, speedy horses, and yet doing all this with scarcely any weariness, and no injury whatever to his physical system.

And yet Edgar Welch is the being in human shape who, if his worthy acquaintances tell the whole truth, accomplishes this wonder. His feats at running distances have made him famous in his own immediate region.

Edgar B. Welch is a native and lifelong resident of Webb's Mill. He is 41 years old, a bachelor, has an aged mother and two sisters, but his father has been dead some years. He has no settled place of abode but makes his home with whomsoever he is temporarily working for; labors on the farm, in the mill, in the forest, and does odd jobs, having no fixed trade: is good-looking, has a keen eye, a soft, pleasant voice, and is a ready conversationalist. But he abounds in eccentricities, the chief of which is an oft-recurring mania for long-distance running.

In form and muscle he is an ideal athlete. With him running seems to be as natural as is walking to ordinary mortals. As he himself told the writer—and he is credited with being a truthful man—he is unfrequently makes a 20-mile run on a hot, sunny day in midsummer without perspiring.

"I was standing one afternoon at the corner of Congress and Green sts., opposite City Hall, Portland," said Capt. Abram Shaw of the steamer Hawthorne, the veteran navigator of the Sebago lake route waters, the other day. "when I heard a sudden shout down Green st. Looking in that direction, whom did I see approaching at a sharp trot but my eccentric neighbor, Edgar Welch. Behind him, at a distance of, say 15 rods, was a two-horse team, apparently in pursuit.

The next minute Edgar was at my side. He stopped, drew in a long breath, gave a generous puff, and was seemingly as fresh as a new-blown daisy.

"What's up now, Edgar?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," only I and Jepson are having a race."

"The next instant up drove Mr. Jepson, his two fine horses all a-foam and well nigh played out. He pulled up, and people gathered around us to learn what it all meant.

"Edgar had told the truth. He had raced with Mr. Jepson at a single stretch all the way from Raymond village, 20 miles, without a rest, and although the horses were smart ones, the great long-distance runner had won!"

Edgar is a creature of moods. He runs as the spirit moves him. He will work hard a few days, and then right in the midst of his labors, will take a notion to run to some distant village, mountain or city, and presto, down goes hoe, or axe, or spade, and off he sets. No matter what he has on, he pauses not to change his clothes or wash his face, but is off like a rocket.

He has run to Lewiston, Portland, Boston, the White Mountains, and other places "too numerous to mention."

One of his runs was from Webb's Mills to Boston, which round trip he made in nine days, total distance 280 miles, an average of 31 miles per day. And as the swift-footed, picturesque Down Easter dashed down Washington street, past the Globe office, bound for Winter street, the Common, Charles street and the Mill Dam, hence for the ideal land of sunrise, Mayor Hart and his city hall colleagues lost the opportunity of their lives in not slipping down Williams street at the supreme moment and thereby scoring a valuable object lesson in rapid transit!

A few years ago some sporting men induced him to run for them in Lancaster Hall, Portland. But Edgar was out of his element, and he only took the fourth money, covering in a 12-hour contest, 61 miles and 12 laps (25 laps to the mile). His competitors would crowd him one side, and he, "bound to have plenty of elbow room," would get outside of the track, thus materially enlarging his circle. And then, too, the shouts of the spectators confused and bothered him.

A winter or two ago Edgar took a notion to make a run to the White mountains, and at once set off in the night. His favorite dog "Jip," his usual companion, accompanied him. At Waterford he took the wrong road, necessitating a long and arduous tramp across lots, through the snow, which was four feet deep. "Jip" getting thoroughly exhausted his master carried him until morning, when both obtained a breakfast at a farmhouse. It is said the dog died the next day from exhaustion. At all events it was Jip's last journey.