



Sara Gray

Girls' Day Out

Freeport's famed shopping now comes with a touch of the wild.

by SALLY NOBLE

My daughter, Elizabeth, and I have always shared a profound interest in the fine art of shopping. Her keen eye and remarkable taste were evident from the time she coordinated bauble jewelry with patent leather party shoes and purple overalls. Now that she's a Bowdoin College student, we frequently meet to unwind by strolling the sidewalks of nearby Freeport—a wonderful place to practice the sport of handling fine mer-

chandise and hunting down bargains.

I wanted this most recent trip to be different, however—more than our usual whirlwind tour, blasting from J.Crew to J.L. Coombs, from Abercrombie & Fitch to Abacus Gallery, with an hour of intimate girl talk over chai latte at Starbucks somehow sandwiched in between. This trip we would try something bold and sporty—a 2½-hour Walk-On Adventure with the outdoor experts at L.L. Bean.

After the bustle of shopping in Freeport, Maine, head to the coast for a quieter kind of entertainment.

As no advance reservations are possible with this program—you have to show up to sign up—we knew to arrive in Freeport early. When we pulled into the L.L. Bean parking lot around 7:00 A.M. one sunny, Sunday-in-July morning, we parked within a few steps of the giant Bean Boot. The place was so quiet, the birds could be heard chirping by the pond near the tent displays. Inside the 24-hour flagship store, the dead-of-night staff was peeling off and the morning crowd taking over. The Walk-On Adventure desk opened promptly at 7:30 A.M., and within minutes nature guy Jerry had signed everyone up. Some wanted archery; others booked fly casting. Elizabeth and I put our names down for the 8:30 A.M. sea-kayaking lesson in the protected waters of the Harraseeket River.

No equipment? No problem. Jerry promised us “PFDs” (personal flotation devices, formerly called life jackets), shoes, paddles, sunscreen, bug spray, auxiliary tops, towels, and even portable potties. With an hour to go, we wandered around the store. I picked up the perfect pair of high-tech, windproof yet breathable nylon shorts. Elizabeth already wore the right clothes for the outing, and all she wanted was a fresh cranberry scone from the bakery. Then it was out to the parking lot to board the shiny green L.L. Bean Walk-On Adventure bus.

As we bounced along winding roads, past green fields and handsomely restored old farmhouses, we caught an occasional glimpse of blue water. Off the bus, we were greeted by Hilary and Chris under a tent. Shedding our personal belongings, we traded our sandals for Proton shoes. Chris passed out paddles while we slathered on the complimentary sunscreen. We marched through a field of peacefully grazing cows and stopped in a clearing for some stretching exercises and a few basic kayaking lessons.

When we reached the dock on the Harraseeket River, Chris held my fat, stable beginner boat as I climbed in. For the next hour, my daughter and I abandoned all thoughts of gear and fashion as we glided along the coastal waters of Freeport. Hilary pointed out

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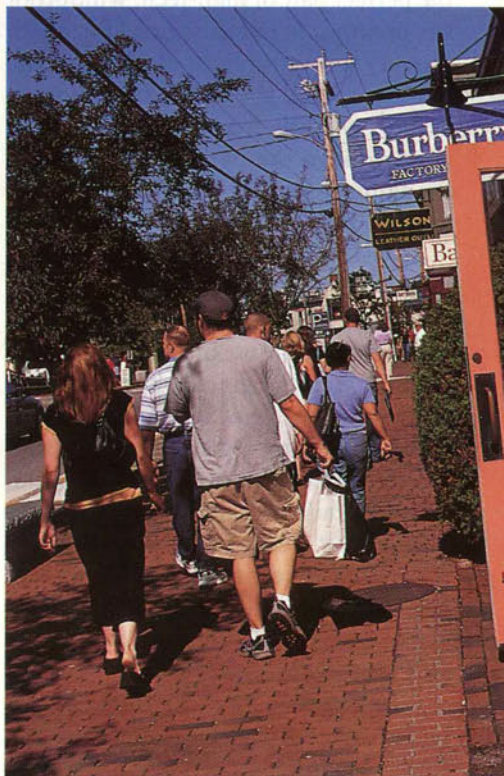
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an osprey's nest, and a great blue heron flew overhead. Everything seemed perfect.

After walking back through the cow pasture and shuffling into our own shoes, it was time for Elizabeth and me to honor tradition. When our L.L. Bean bus arrived back at the store at 11:00 A.M., the town was buzzing. Clearly we needed to pick up the pace, so we headed straight for double lattes at Starbucks.

We still had plenty of time to test the mascara at The Cosmetics Company Store, stock up on my favorite Gardeners Hand Therapy at Crabtree & Evelyn, and ogle a gorgeous, rose-colored cashmere sweater at Polo Ralph Lauren. Somewhere en route, we enjoyed a heated discussion about the plastic slides with the fuchsia trim at Nine West and debated the virtues of clogs versus flip-flops at J.L. Coombs.

We made our pilgrimage to Abercrombie & Fitch—a veritable stone fortress looming in the middle of all the Freeport frenzy. Black-and-white photos of sexy young people line the walls,



Strolling and shopping add up to a perfect day in Freeport, Maine.

and the loud, thumping, “I-want-you” music drove me to the leather-armchair oasis under the suspended canoe. The short, pale pink, ruffled skirt with the sparkly petals we purchased made Elizabeth very happy. In turn, she graciously accompanied me to Abacus Gallery, with its soothing jazz music and wood floors—just the place to find a pair of devastating silver earrings, an African board piano, or a treasure jar “for albino faerie winds.” This time we left with only a smooth glass stone for my pocket. Etched with the image of a dragonfly and the word “fearless,” it seemed the perfect souvenir of our morning kayaking adventure.

At this point, Elizabeth and I looked at each other and said, “Enough.” Exhausted but pleased, we navigated the heavy traffic and headed out of town. Our final destination was the Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster Co. for lobster rolls, fish cakes, and onion middles. Finding the restaurant requires a map and the patience to put up with getting lost once or twice, but never mind. When we walked down to the dock and put our tired feet in the water, we were glad, as always, to have spent such a fine day together.

Sally Noble is a freelance writer based in Portland, Maine. She frequently writes about travel, food, and, of course, shopping.

When You Go

Freeport Merchants Marketing Association, 800-865-1994, 207-865-1212. 23 Depot St., Freeport. Call or visit Web site for individual store hours or to request a visitors' guide. freeportusa.com

Walk-On Adventure, L.L. Bean Outdoor Discovery Schools, 888-552-3261. Main St., Freeport. Programs early June-Sept. Call or visit Web site for schedule. Tickets: \$12. lbean.com/ods

Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster Co., 207-865-4888. 36 Main St., South Freeport. Open May-Columbus Day for lunch and dinner daily. Entrées: \$3.75-\$24.







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