

Keep Calm and Hike On

Katherine Charles, Assistant Professor of 18th- and 19th-Century Literature, will carry on the Kiplin Hall program.



LEFT: Professor Rich Gillin's summer course on the English Romantic writers has been based at Kiplin Hall, the ancestral home of the Maryland Calvert family. ABOVE: Professor Gillin sets out on a hike through the English countryside with Cailey Hall and Assistant Professor Katie Charles.

LAST SPRING, WITH THE IMPENDING retirement of English Professor Rich Gillin and the declining health of his wife, Barbara, the fate of the popular Kiplin Hall Summer Program—which he and Barbara had directed for the past 20 years—hung in the balance. Luckily, another scholar of 18th- and 19th-century literature at Washington College also happens to be an avid walker.

Katie Charles, a huge fan of the Brontë sisters who trained to be an outdoor nature leader while an undergraduate at Princeton, traveled to the Lake District with the Gillins last summer, accompanying them on some of their favorite walks, including Dove Cottage and Michael's Sheepfold. Enlisting the help of a colleague from UCLA, Charles will be taking a group of students to the Lake District this June. In addition to experiencing that landscape and connecting specific hikes with specific poems, she hopes to include a visit to the Brontë parsonage in Haworth and a walk through the Peak District, the upland area where Elizabeth Bennett in "Pride and

Prejudice" engaged in what Charles calls radical female walking.

"Part of Elizabeth Bennett's resonance for modern readers is that she is so independent, and one of the ways she signals that is that she's a great walker," Charles says. "She feels completely competent and capable of walking on her own. Rich and Barbara have always followed this tradition of Romantic walking, with the idea that you're connecting your body to the landscape in a different way when you are putting one foot in front of the other out in the elements."

The Gillins shared logistical details, and introduced Charles and her colleague, Cailey Hall, to a number of hikes that could be accomplished between Grasmere and Ambleside. During the 10-day trip, participants will undertake the big Lake District hikes while reading literature that illuminates the connection between individuals and the natural world.

"For Cailey and me, we are both interested in environmental humanities and literature about nature," Charles says. "That was always

one of the throughlines of this course as the Gillins conceived it. Now, with many of our students double-majoring in English and environmental studies, there is this desire to find new narratives to tell about the ways we interact with the environment. This trip is one way we can help students merge those interests." ■

Rich Gillin, who concluded his 46-year teaching career at Washington College in early December, lost his wife just three weeks later. To honor their legacy, the family suggests donations to the Gillin Fund, which will support two annual scholarships—one to send a student with financial need to Kiplin Hall, and another to support an English/humanities major at WC. To give, please visit <https://washcoll.edu/giving/gillin-fund/>