NEAR-IDEAL EIGHT-LETTER WORD LADDERS

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As we move from 9- to 8-letter words, the number of neighbours per word increases by one-third, so the number of ideal ladders (those which change every letter in the minimum number of steps) jumps from about 50 to a few thousand. The percentage of heterograms doubles to a significant 20 per cent, so that the number of ladders between heterograms (with just one unchanged letter in the eight steps) explodes to over six thousand. Combining these facts, for the first time we find ideal ladders between heterograms, thus fulfilling the first three conditions for the elusive Connoisseur's Ladder. The few previously-published 8-letter ladders (see Long Examples in "Snakes and Ladders" in the May 1998 Word Ways) contain a number of ideal examples, but the terminal words are not both heterograms, nor especially related.

Another advantage of 8-letter ladders is that words become more familiar and ladders become more numerous, so that a selection can be made on the basis of familiarity and aptness of the words, paying little head to technicalities such as hyphenation, as done below (but hyphens are indicated) You may like DARLYNGE CRUDITIES, or SPHEROID COLANDER, or FISH CAKE DUMPLING. By the way, fish cake (which seems to be two words) is defined in Webster 3 as a flattened fish ball! If you do find an apt pairing, then perhaps the only element lacking for a Connoisseur's Ladder is sequential replacement of letters. Among the ladders with non-heterogrammatic terminal words, we find PERSONAL BATTERER (a personal trainer?), STELLATE BLINKING, STELLATE CHARTING, GLUTTONY CHARGERS (chocolate shop), and others. Some of the pairings chosen are a little surreal, such as the YODELING SANDPIKE.

Ideal Ladders between heterograms (selection of about 15% of those found)

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Ideal Ladders (selection of about 1% of those found)

BANTERER—PANTERER—PANTENER—PARTENER (v.i.)—PARENER—PARSONER—PERSONER (v.f.)—PERSONAR—PERSONAL

BATTERER or NATTERER—PATTERER—PATTENER then as above to PERSONAL

BLABBING—SLABBING—STABBING—STABLING—STALLING— STELLING— STELLITE (Web2)— STELLATE

BLINKING—SLINKING—STINKING—STILKING—STILLING then as above to STELLATE

CHARTING—CHARLING (v.f.)—SHARLING—STARLING then as above to STELLATE

BLUBBERY—BLABBERS—CLABBERS—CLAMBERS—CLAMPERS—CRAMPERS—CRAMPETS—CRAMPITS (OED under crampets, part of a scabbard)

CABALIZE—CANALIZE— CANALINE (Sted)—CANALING (OSPD)—CANGLING—DANGLING—DINGLING—

DINGDING—DINGDONG. Also—CINGLING—SINGLING—SINGSING—SINGSONG

CAMPNESS (Ch)—CAMPLESS—COMPLIES—COMPLIES—COMPLIER—COMELIER (OSPD)— HOMELIER

CANKERED—CANTERED—CANTERER—PANTERER— PASTERER—PASTELER—PISTENER (v.i)—PISTELIER—

PISTOLAR (a coin)

CARVINGS—CARLINGS—CURLINGS—CUTLINGS (Pull)—CUTLINES (OSPD)—OUTLINES—OUTLINED—OUTLIVED—

OUTLOVED (= surpassed in loving)

CHARGERS (or CHARMERS)—CHARTERS—CHATTERS—CLATTERS—CLUTTERS—CLUTTERY—GLITTENY—GLITTENY

CLAMPING—CRAMPING—CRIMPING—CRISPING—CRISPIN (Web2)—CRISPITE—CRISPATE—CRISTATE—TRISTATE

CLANGLOR—CLANGOUS—CLANGORS—CLANGERS—CHANGERS—CHANTERS—CHATTERS—SHATTERS—SHUTTERS

CRAPPOES (Web3, at first)—CRAPPIES—CRAPPINS (Web3)—CRAPPING—CHAPPING—CHIPPING—SHIPPING—

SHIPLING—SHILLING

DEFINING—DEFILING—DEVILING—DEVELING—LEVELING—LOVELING—LOVING—LOVE-LIKE—LOVE-LAKE (= love-sport)

GAMELAWs—GAMELANS—GAMELANG (Web2)—GAMELING—GAVELING (OSPD)—RAVELING—REVELING—

REVILING—REVISING

GLUTTONY—GLUittenY—GLUTTERY—GLITTERY—GLITTERS—SLITTERS—SLINTERS—SINGERS

IMPOSTER—IMPORTER—IMPORTED—IMPARTED—UNPARKED—UNMARKED—INCENSE—INCENSEN—INTENSEN—INTENDED—UNTENTED—UNTILTED (Web2)—UPTILTED

MISTRUST—MISTREST—MISTRUST—MISTRESS (v.f.)—MISTLESS—TASTLESS (v.f.)—TACTLESS—TACKLESS—TACKLERS

MUTTERER—PUTTERER—PATTERER—PATTENER—PARTENER (v.f.)—PARDENER (v.f.)—PARDONER—PARDONEE—

PARDON ME (Ch)

TITTERER—TATTERER then as above to PARDON ME

PEPERONI—PEPERONE (Ch)—PEPERINE—PIPERINE—PIPELINE—PIPELIKE (Web2)—PINELIKE (OSPD)—WINELIKE

(Web2)— WINGLE (Web2)

PLUMBATE—PLUMITE—PLUMBINE—PLUMBING—PLUMPING—SLUMPING—SLIPPING—SHIPPING and many ladders having terminal words BUTLERED, CARBOYED, CHANCILY, CORDELAR, CRISPERS, EXTENDOR, PLANKAGE, PLUMBATE, and STELLATE.

Ladders between heterograms, one letter unchanged (selection of much less than 1% of those found)

Upper-case words in brackets indicate ladders which may be completed in seven steps.

BEACHING—BEATING—BEATLING—TRATLING—TRATLING (v.f.)—TRATLINE—TRAP—LINE—TRIP—LINE—TRIPLANE

BEATINGS—BETTINGS—CUTTINGS—CUTLINGS—CUTLINES (OSPD)—OUTLINES—OUTLIVES—OUTLIVED

BOASTING—BRONTING (OED obs)—BRONTING—BRATLING—BRAWLING—CRAWLING—CROWLING—CROW—

CROW—LIKE

BOULDER—BOUNDER—BLUNDER—(BLINDERS)—BLINDERS—BLINKERS—CLINKERS—CLINKERY—CLINKETY

BRIGHTON (Sussex)—BRIGHTOR (UK place)—BRIGHTER—BLIGHTER—FLIGHTER—FLOIGHTER (v.f.)—FLOGSTER—

FLOISTER—CLOISTER

BUSHWIFE (Web2)—BUSH—LIFE—BUSH—LINE—BUSHLING—BUSKLING—BUCKLING—RUCKLING—RECKLING—HECKLING

CARVINGS (CARDINGS)—CARLINGS—CURLINGS—CUTLINGS—CUTLINES (OSPD)—OUTLINES—OUTLIVES—OUTLIVED

CROW—LIKE—CROW—LINE—CROWLING—CROWLING—CROWLING—CROWLING—FLAPPING—

FLAPPING (the swift)

CROMPET—CRAMPET—CRAMPETS—CLASPER—CLASHER—PLASHER—PLASTERS—PLASTERY

DROPLINE (Web2)—DROPLINE (Pull)—DROPLING—CROPLING—CROPPING—SLIPPING—SHLIPPING—

SLURING FUNKTEST—HUNKIEST—HUSKIEST—MUSKIEST—MUSTIEST—MISTIEST—MISTREST—MISTREAD

HANDLERS—HANDLESS—BANKLESS—BACKLESS—LACKLESS—LUCKLESS—LUCKTEST (v.f.)—LUCKIEST

HARP (or WASPLIKE, both Web2)—WARPIKE (Web2)—WARPLINE—WARPLING—WARTLING (in E Sussex)—

WORTLING—PORTLING (UK place)—POETLING—POET—KING

IMPACTOR—IMPACTER—IMPARTED—IMPARKED—UNPARKED (Web2)—UNHARMED

(Web2)—UNHARMED
Words in the above lists are OED headwords or obvious derivations thereof unless marked otherwise. The first word in a ladder is earlier in the alphabet than the last. Ch denotes Chambers, Tert F denotes Tertiary Faunas, and vf is an OED variant form.

BOOKS FOR SALE

Dmitri Borgmann’s Language on Vacation (Scribner’s, 1965) is becoming increasingly hard to find in used bookstores. The editor has two hardcover copies (one with dust jacket) and two paperbacks available, and will sell the hardcovers for $13 apiece postpaid, or the paperbacks for $8 apiece.