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 CRUDITÉS, 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-grammatical 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)

BEATING—BEATLING—TEATLING—TRATLING(vf)—TRATLINE—TRAPLINE(Web3)—TRIP—LINE—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE
BUCKWASH(Web2)—BACKWASH(Web2)—BACKLASH(Web3)—BACKLASS(UK place)—BACKLESS—BANKLESS—
BANDLESS—HANDLESS—HANDLERS
CLAMPING—CRAMPING—TRAMPING—TRAPPING—TRIPPING—TRIPLING—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE
CLANGORS—CLANGERS—CLINGERS—SLINGERS—SLINKERS—SLICKERS—SNICKERS—SNICKETY
COLANDER—SOLANDER—SPLENDER—SPLENDIR—SPLENDID—SPLENOID—SPLHENOID—SPHEROID
COURTAIN(vf)—COURTEN—COUERCE—COURTERS—COUTERS—CHUNTERS—CHANTERS—CHANGERS—WHANGERS
CRUDITÉS—CAUDITÉS(Tert F)—CARDITÉS(Tert F)—CARDINES—CARLINES—CARLINGS—DARLINGS—
DARLINGE(vf)—DARLYNGE(vf)
DUMPLING—DIMPLING—DISPLING—DISHLING—FISHLING—FISHLINE(OSPD)—FISHLIKE(Web2)—FISHLAKE(Sth Yorks)—FISH CAKE
PEDALING—PEDDLING—PADDLING—SADDLING—SANDLING—SANDLIKE(Web2)—SAND—PIKE—SAND—POKE
PLUMBATE—PLUMBITE—PLUMBINE—PLUMBING—PLUMMING(OED plum vb, in text)—SLUMMING—STUMMING—
STEMMING—STEAMING
SAND—POKE—SAND—PIKE—SANDLIKE(Web2)—WANDLIKE(Web2)—WARDLIKE(Web2)—WORDLIKE(Web2)—
WORMLIKE(Web2)—WORMLINE—WORMLING
SWELTING—SWELLING—SWILLING—TWILLING—TRILLING—TRIPLING—TRIP—LINE—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE

and many ladders with terminal words CLANGORS and CLANGOUS.

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

BANTERER — PANTERER — PANTENER — PARTENER (vf) — PARSENER — PARSONER — PERSONER (vf) — PERSONAR — PERSONAL
BATTERER or NATTERER — PATTERER — PATTENER then as above to PERSONAL
BLABBING — SLABBING — STABBING — STALLING — STELLING — STELLINE — STELLITE (Web2) — STELLATE
BLINKING — SLINKING — STINKING — STILKING — STILLING then as above to STELLATE
CHARTING — CHARLING (vf) — 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 — DINDING — DINDONG. Also — CINGLING — SINGLING — SINGSING — SINGSONG
CAMPINESS (Ch) — CAMPLESS — COMPLIES — COMPLIER — COMELIER (OSPD) — HOMELIER (OSPD) — HOTELIER
CANKERED — CANTERED — PANTERER — PASTERER — PASTELER — PISTLER — PERSONAR (vf) — PERSONER (vf) — PERSONAL
CARVINOS — CARLINGS — CURLINGS — CUTLINGS (Pull) — OUTLINES (OSPD) — OUTLINES — OUTLIVED — OUTLOVED (surpassed in loving)
CHARGERS (or CHARMERS) — CHARTERS — CHATTERS — CLATTERS — CLUTTERS — CLUSTERED — CLUTTERED
CLAMPING — CRAMPING — CRIMPING — CRISPING — CRISPINE (Web2) — CRISPITE — CRISPATE — CRISTATE — CRISTATE
CLANGLayer — CLANGULARS — CLANGORS — CHANGERS — CHATTERS — SHATTERS — SHUTTERS
CRAPOES (Web3, stilted) — CRAPPIES — CRAPPING — CHAPPING — CHIPPING — SHIPPING — SHIPPLING — SHILLING
DEFINING — DEFILING — DELIVERING — DELIVERING — DELIVERING — DELIVERING — DELIVERING
CRAPPOES (Web3, atristic) — CRAPPIES — CRAPPING — CHAPPING — CHIPPING — SHIPPING — SHIPPLING — SHILLING
GAMES — GAMELANS — GAMELANG (Web2) — GAMELING — GAVELING (OSPD) — RAVELING — REVELING — REVILING — REVISING
GLUTTONY — GLUTENNY — GLUTTERY — GLITTERY — GLITTERS — SLITTERS — SLINTERS — SLINGERS — SWINGERS
IMPOSTER — IMPORTER — IMPORTED — IMPARTED — IMPARKED — UNPARKED (Web2) — UNMARKED INCENSOR — INCENSER — INCENSED — INTENSED — INTENTED — UNINTED — UNTINTED — UNTILTED (Web2) — UPTILTED
MISTRUST — MISTREST — MISTRESS (vf) — MASTLESS — TALELESS — TACKLESS — TACKLERS
MUTTERER — PUTTERER — PATTENER — PARTENER (vf) — PARDENER (vf) — 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) — WINGLIKE (Web2)
PLUMBATE — PLUMBITE — PLUMBINE — PLUMBING — PLUMPING — SLUMPING — SLIPPING — SLIPPING
and many ladders having terminal words BUTLERED, CARBOYED, CHANCILY, CORDATE, CRISPERS, EXTENDOR, PLANKAGE, PLUMBATE, and STELLATE.

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

GAMES — GAMELANS — GAMELANG (Web2) — GAMELING — GAVELING (OSPD) — RAVELING — REVELING — REVILING — REVISING — GLUTTONY — GLUTENNY — GLUTTERY — GLITTERY — GLITTERS — SLITTERS — SLINTERS — SLINGERS — SWINGERS
IMPOSTER — IMPORTER — IMPORTED — IMPARTED — IMPARKED — UNPARKED (Web2) — UNMARKED INCENSOR — INCENSER — INCENSED — INTENSED — INTENTED — UNINTED — UNTINTED — UNTILTED (Web2) — UPTILTED
MISTRUST — MISTREST — MISTRESS (vf) — MASTLESS — TALELESS — TACKLESS — TACKLERS
MUTTERER — PUTTERER — PATTENER — PARTENER (vf) — PARDENER (vf) — 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) — WINGLIKE (Web2)
PLUMBATE — PLUMBITE — PLUMBINE — PLUMBING — PLUMPING — SLUMPING — SLIPPING — SLIPPING
and many ladders having terminal words BUTLERED, CARBOYED, CHANCILY, CORDATE, CRISPERS, EXTENDOR, PLANKAGE, PLUMBATE, and STELLATE.
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.