

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 heed 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-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)

BEATHING—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—TRIPLINE—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE
 CLANGORS—CLANGERS—CLINGERS—SLINGERS—SLINKERS—SLICKERS—SNICKERS—SNICKETS—SNICKETY
 COLANDER—SOLANDER—SOLENDER—SPLENDER—SPLENDIR—SPLENDID—SPLENOID—SPHENOID—SPHEROID
 COURTAIN(vf)—COURTEIN—COURTEIS—COURTERS—COUNTERS—CHUNTERS—CHANTERS—CHANGERS—WHANGERS
 CRUDITÉS—CAUDITES(Tert F)—CARDITES(Tert F)—CARDINES—CARLINES—CARLINGS—DARLINGS—DARLINGE
 (vf)—DARLYNGE(vf)
 DUMPLING—DIMPLING—DISPLING—DISHLING—FISHLING—FISHLINE(OSPD)—FISHLIKE(Web2)—FISHLAKE(Sth
 Yorks)—FISHCAKE
 PEDALING—PEDDLING—PADDLING—SADDLING—SANDLING—SAND-LINE—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—Twillling—TRILLING—TRIPLING—TRIP-LINE—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE
 and many ladders with terminal words CLANGORS and CLANGOUS.

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—STABLING—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—BLUBBERS—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—COMPLESS—COMPLISS—COMPLIES—COMPLIER—COMELIER (OSPD)—HOMELIER (OSPD)—HOTELIER
 CANKERED—CANTERED—CANTERER—PANTERER—PASTERER—PASTELER—PISTELER (vf)—PISTELAR—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—GLUTTERY—GLUTTENY—GLUTTONY
 CLAMPING—CRAMPING—CRIMPING—CRISPING—CRISPINE (Web2)—CRISPITE—CRISPATE—CRISTATE—TRISTATE
 CLANGOUR—CLANGOUS—CLANGORS—CLANGERS—CHANGERS—CHANTERS—CHATTERS—SHATTERS—SHUTTERS
 CRAPPOES (Web3, a tree)—CRAPPIES—CRAPPINS (Web3)—CRAPPING—CHAPPING—CHIPPING—SHIPPING—SHIPLING—SHILLING
 DEFINING—DEFILING—DEVILING—DEVELING—LEVELING—LOVELING—LOVE-LINE—LOVELIKE—LOVE-LAKE (= love-sport)
 GAMELAWS—GAMELANS—GAMELANG (Web2)—GAMELING—GAVELING (OSPD)—RAVELING—REVELING—REVILING—REVISING
 GLUTTONY—GLUTTENY—GLUTTERY—GLITTERY—GLITTERS—SLITTERS—SLINTERS—SLINGERS—SWINGERS
 IMPOSTOR—IMPOSTER—IMPORTER—IMPORTED—IMPARTED—IMPARKED—INPARKED—UNPARKED (Web2)—UNMARKED
 INCENSOR—INCENSER—INCENSED—INTENSED—INTENDED—UNTENDED—UNTINTED—UNTILTED (Web2)—UPTILTED
 MISTRUST—MISTREST—MISTRESS—MASTRESS (vf)—MASTLESS—TASTLESS (vf)—TACTLESS—TACKLESS—TACKLERS
 MUTTERER—PUTTERER—PATTERER—PATTENER—PARTENER (vf)—PARDENER (vf)—PARDONER—PARDONEE—PARDON ME (Ch)
 TITTERER—TATTERER then as above to PARDON ME
 PEPPERONI—PEPERONE (Ch)—PEPERINE—PIPERINE—PIPELINE—PIPELIKE (Web2)—PINELIKE (OSPD)—WINELIKE (Web2)—WINGLIKE (Web2)
 PLUMBATE—PLUMBITE—PLUMBINE—PLUMBING—PLUMPING—SLUMPING—SLUPPING—SLIPPING—SHIPPING
 and many ladders having terminal words BUTLERED, CARBOYED, CHANCILY, CORDATED, CRISPERS, EXTENDOR, PLANKAGE, PLUMBATE, and STELLATE.

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

Uppercase words in brackets indicate ladders which may be completed in seven steps.

BEACHING—BEATHING—BEATLING—TEATLING—TRATLING (vf)—TRATLINE—TRAP-LINE—TRIP-LINE—TRIPLANE
 BEATINGS—BETTINGS—BUTTINGS—CUTTINGS—CUTLINGS—CUTLINES (OSPD)—OUTLINES—OUTLIVES—OUTLIVED
 BOASTING—BRASTING (OED obs)—BRATTING—BRATLING—BRAWLING—CRAWLING—CROWLING—CROW-LINE—CROW-LIKE
 BOULDERS—BOUNDERS—BLUNDERS—(BLENDERS—)BLINDERS—BLINKERS—CLINKERS—CLINKERY—CLINKETY
 BRIGHTON (Sussex)—BRIGHTOR (UK place)—BRIGHTER—BLIGHTER—FLIGHTER—FLOGHTER (vf)—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—CROPLING—CROPPING—CLOPPING—FLOPPING—FLAPPING—FLAPWING (the swift)
 CRUMPETS—CRAMPETS—CRAMPERS—CLAMPERS—CLASPERS—CLASHERS—PLASHERS—PLASTERS—PLASTERY
 DROPLIKE (Web2)—DROPLINE (Pull)—DROPLING—CROPLING—CROPPING—CLOPPING—SLOPPING—SLUPPING—SLURPING
 FUNKIEST—HUNKIEST—HUSKIEST—MUSKIEST—MUSTIEST—MISTIEST—MISTREST—MISTREAT—MISTREAD
 HANDLERS—HANDLESS—BANDLESS—BANKLESS—BACKLESS—LACKLESS—LUCKLESS—LUCKLEST (vf)—LUCKIEST
 HARPLIKE (or WASPLIKE, both Web2)—WARPLIKE (Web2)—WARPLINE—WARPLING—WARTLING (in E Sussex)—WORTLING—PORTLING (UK place)—POETLING—POET-KING
 IMPACTOR—IMPACTER—IMPARTER—IMPARTED—IMPARKED—INPARKED—UNPARKED (Web2)—UNHARKED (Web2)—UNHARMED

IMPOSTER—IMPOSTED—IMPORTED—IMPARTED—IMPARKED—INPARKED—UNPARKED(Web2)—UNPACKED—UNSACKED
 INVESTOR—INVENTOR—INVENTER—INVENTED—UNVENTED—UNVETTED—UNVATTED(Web2)—UNBATTED
 (Web2)—UNBATHED
 ISLANDER—ISLANDED—INLANDED—UNLANDED—(UNLAUDED(Web2))—UNLARDED—UNLORDED—
 UNFORDED—UNFORCED
 LUCKIEST—LUCKLEST(vf)—LUCKLESS—LACKLESS—TACKLESS—TANKLESS—TANGLESS(Web2)—TANGLERS—
 WANGLERS
 MISTREAD—MISTREAT—MISTREST—MISTIEST—MUSTIEST—MUSKIEST—(MURKIEST—)MUCKIEST—YUCKIEST
 SAND-PIKE(=pike)—SANDPINE—SAND-LINE—SANDLING—DANDLING—DADDLING—DODDLING—YODDLING—
 YODELING
 TEACHING—TEACHINA—TRACHINA (Ch, low Latin for trachinus, a fish)—TRICHINA—TRICHINE(vf)—TRICLINE—TRIP-
 LINE—TRIPLANE—TRIPLAGE(=threefold)

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.