

The following journal was downloaded from the internet site
Trailplace.com. Photos were added later.

Before My Hike

January 4 ~ Introduction

Hello guests,

My name is John Wolf (trail name Lobo) and I am a semi-retired high school biology teacher. I retired this past June after 30 years of service in the same school district. I had a rewarding career, taught many memorable students, and occasionally I even miss my old job (not too often, just once in awhile). I am planning to inform my former school's newspaper about my thru-hike along with the Trailplace address so that my students can follow my progress.

I say semi-retired because I have kept the part time job that I have held for 17 years at a local college as an instructor of human biology. I have taken off the spring semester to hike my hike, and must return to Pennsylvania by the end of August for the beginning of the fall semester. It makes me happy that many of my college students have shown interest in following my walk on Trailplace.

The hike will begin in Georgia on February 27, 2000 which is my 53rd birthday. What a great birthday present, a six month walk in the woods! All my gear is ready (see list below) and I am now planning my mail drops and beginning to dehydrate food for meals. I will begin the trip alone (without a gun!), but know that I will find other hikers who walk my pace, have a positive attitude, and are fun to be with. I have an anticipated schedule typed out, but have no intention of following it to the letter. The advanced schedule was helpful for planning mail drops, but does not take into account the reality of weather conditions, trail conditions, my mental and physical health, and longer than expected stays in towns. I am planning to do a three day shakedown hike on the AT in early February in southern Pennsylvania to test my equipment and prepare myself mentally for the hike. When I reach this section in the spring, I will leave the trail for a few days to visit with my first grandchild (to be born in April) near Philadelphia and will then skip the section that I covered in February.

My wife of 31 years, Sue, has agreed to transcribe my journal and to send packages to the mail drops. Without her help and encouragement this trip would not be possible. My 23-year-old daughter and 30-year-old son have also been supportive of this trip and I wish that all of them could come along with me. Perhaps they will join me for short sections when I reach Pennsylvania.

After my hike is over I hope to find time to work for the organizations I belong to, repairing streams for TU (Trout Unlimited), and helping to maintain trails for the AMC (Appalachian Mountain Club) and the ATC (Appalachian Trail Conference).

January 4 ~ Starting gear list

{General Equipment}

REI Wonderland external frame pack and rain cover
Sierra Designs Clip Flashlight tent
Thin plastic ground cloth
Photon II flashlights(red and turquoise)
Olympus LT Zoom camera and extra film
Journal and 2 pens
Trail guide and maps for current state

Thru-hikers companion
Aluminum pot with lid
Pot gripper and pot scrubber
Plastic spoon
MSR WhisperLite stove, wind screen and repair kit
MSR 22 oz. fuel bottle
REI insulated mug
Stuff sack for food
50 ft. utility cord
Butane lighter and waterproof stick matches
PUR Voyageur water purifier
2 one-liter Nalgene wide mouth bottles
96 oz. Nalgene cantene
The Northface Nova Polargard sleeping bag
Silk mummy liner
Ridgerest sleeping pad

{Stuff to Wear}

Vasque Sundowner boots
Thorlo socks
EMS liner socks
The Northface nylon shirt and pants
EMS Bergelene briefs
Cotton baseball hat
Sunglasses
Watch
Swiss army knife
OR low gaiters
Ankle support
Tracks hiking pole

{Packed Clothing}

Patagonia hat
Balaclava
2 bandannas
Fleece gloves
Liner gloves
Lightweight long underwear tops and bottoms
2 pair Thorlo socks
2 pair EMS liner socks
Wickers tee shirt
2 pair EMS Bergelene briefs
Patagonia fleece jacket
EMS fleece pants
The Northface Mountain jacket
Nylon wind pants
Teva sandals

{Personal Items}

Glasses
Contact lens container and disinfectant solution
Extra lenses and mirror
Toothpaste and brush

Dental floss
Mountain Suds soap and 1/2 pack towel
1/4 roll TP and plastic trowel
Cash, credit card, ATM card, driver's license, traveler's checks
First aid kit
compass/thermometer
Whistle

{Food}

Food for 4-5 days

I think all this stuff will weigh about 42 pounds. As the weather warms I will send home my winter clothing and have summer gear sent to my mail drops.

February 12 ~ Little Buddies!

Yesterday I had the pleasure of visiting my wife's classroom at Seiler Elementary School in Mount Joy, PA. I took along my full pack ready for a six day winter trip on the AT, and then emptied it slowly in front of them while explaining the purpose of each piece of equipment. The one dozen students peppered me with thoughtful questions for one and a half hours. They especially enjoyed peeking into the set-up tent and all wanted to have their picture taken wearing a full pack (imagine a 70 lb. student wearing a 45 lb. pack!!) I left behind a six foot long map of the AT that I printed from the internet. I am pleased to have a dozen new little buddies back home following my journey. Greetings to Heather, Sabrina, Justin, Matthew, Ben, David, Adam, Josh, Danny, Brandon and the others who dropped in.

February 21 ~ Mail drops

For those wishing to send me mail, I have listed below my planned mail drop sites and expected arrival dates. The arrival dates will be adjusted as the journey progresses. Any package should be sent Priority Mail, for the post office will forward it should I miss it. Also the post office will not accept Fed Ex or UPS.

Address to: John Wolf
c/o General Delivery
Town, State, Zip Code

Write in the lower left corner of the box or letter:
"Please Hold For AT Hiker"
Expected Arrival Dates -

March 11.....Fontana Dam NC 28733
April 2.....Damascus VA 24236
April 13.....Pearisberg VA 24134
April 26.....Waynesboro VA 22980
May 3.....Harpers Ferry WV 25425
May 25.....Delaware Water Gap PA 18327
June 6.....Kent CT 06757
June 13.....Cheshire MA 01225
July 12.....Gorham NH 03581
July 28.....Monson ME 04464

February 25 ~Thank you and goodbye!

Tomorrow I'm on my way!! The flight leaves Baltimore at 9 AM for warm, sunny Georgia (I still will be packing fleece-top to bottom). Before departing, I would like to thank all the folks who have signed my guestbook, sent email & cards, and called on the phone with words of wisdom. Your response to my hike was very encouraging. It also still boggles my mind that total strangers over

the internet have requested to meet me along the trail to hike a short section together, or to drive me from the trail to stay overnight at their house! I guess this is the stuff they call "Trail Magic".

This evening I will be boxing up my 45 lb. pack for tomorrow's flight, and I'm fairly certain I have everything I need for a safe trip, thanks to the forum at Trailplace. The information at this site was invaluable for planning the journey and upgrading my 27 year old equipment. Thank you!

Along with the 45 lb. load on my back, I have to admit to be carrying a full load of excitement, a little anxiety, and a small amount of guilt. I hope to carry the excitement for the entire trip, and shed the anxiety and guilt along the first few ascents in the steep mountains of Georgia.

Thanks for visiting my journal page and I hope you will stop by often to check in on my journey.

Happy Trails...Lobo

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Georgia-North Carolina

February 26 ~ Stover Creek Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 2.5 north, 1 days since start of hike, averaging 2.5 miles per day, 2.5 miles hiked today

Strange days! Today was certainly a strange day. I woke up at home, drove to Baltimore with my wife, daughter and her friend, and met my son and daughter-in-law at BWI airport. Got a 9 am flight to Atlanta where I met Pete, a hiker whose name I got from Trailplace. Pete drove me to the junction of RT 42 and the AT, and I was off to the summit of Springer (thanks for the ride Pete! I owe you one when you come through PA in 2003).

The Trail to Springer sparkled in the sunlight due to small pieces of mica from the breakdown of mica schist rock that lined the trail. At the summit I signed the log book, took several photos of the vistas, and had my picture taken next to the bronze plaque by some day hikers. Now I felt like an official thru-hiker! I came back down the same Trail, right past the Springer Mt. Shelter due to the amount of adrenaline cruising through my arteries, and continued on to Stover.

Along the way I met Snappy, a photographer from Cockysville, MD who is also a thru-hiker and stayed at the shelter with me. An hour before sunset Carrie, an elementary special-ed teacher from Williamsburg, VA, joined our group and tented next to the shelter. Clouds rolled in as the evening progressed. Tomorrow a rainstorm is predicted. The joys of today will carry me through the rains of tomorrow. The wind is whispering through the tops of the hemlocks and two Barred Owls hoot in the distance. Its 8:00 and time for bed, Nite!



Springer Mountain Plaque

February 27 ~ Hawk Mountain Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 7.7 north, 2 days since start of hike, averaging 3.9 miles per day, 5.2 miles hiked today

Last night the mice were active, with one running across my legs and another sitting on my pillow! As long as they don't touch my face or bite me, they can have the run of the shelter for all I care. I won't kill them because I heard there is another hiker that will start in a week or so who enjoys eating them. Bon Appetite!

The rattling of a can outside the shelter at 2:00 woke me up, and shining the light in that direction, I was surprised to see a Spotted Skunk. This is a different species (and genus) than our local Striped Skunk. He took off quickly when I blinked my turquoise photon light in his eyes. Bye-bye, Pepe le Pew!

The rain started about 7AM and since I only had to hike 5 miles to the next shelter, I waited until it stopped and started hiking at 10:30. Along the way I met up with Eric, a microbiology professor at Reading Area Community College in PA. We hiked together through thick blankets of fog with occasional drizzle on our way to Hawk Mt. Shelter. All the twigs were covered with gleaming water droplets! Why are the bottoms of each droplet always transparent and their tops black?

We got to the shelter and eventually ended up with 7 in this fairly new double-decker shelter. Carrie, Snappy, Josh (a fellow journalist on Trailplace) and two college students from Indiana rounded out the 7 hikers. We stayed up late looking at the stars (8:30).

February 28 ~ Campsite at Jacobs Knob ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 21.0 north, 3 days since start of hike, averaging 7.0 miles per day, 13.3 miles hiked today

Attacked!!! The mouse attack began about 15 minutes after the lights went out. The enemy could be heard running along a 2x4 at the back of the shelter, squeaking and fighting all the time. When they would crawl onto our sleeping bags we would lift them off quickly with a squeak onto the next person. It reminded me of a horse shaking its skin to remove flies. The main assault stopped shortly after midnight. No food in our shelter.

The sun rose brightly without a cloud in the sky. Chickadees and a Titmouse were working the tops of the trees looking for insects while singing their spring songs. I left the shelter alone at 8:30 but ended up hiking with Eric, from Kutztown PA., to Gooch Gap Shelter. We arrived at the shelter at 1:00 where we met up with Marc who is from Quebec City and just finished his MBA in finance. We decided the day was too young and too beautiful to sit at the shelter, so we hiked past Woody Gap, up one more hill to Jacobs Knob where we will tent for the night. There is a spectacular panoramic view to the east, and we enjoyed it while eating our dinners. With no trees obstructing 3/4 of the sky, we plan to do some stargazing, if we can stay awake.

OH! Signs of spring - heard Spring Peeper Frogs and a Phoebe today and also saw a Morning Cloak Butterfly.

February 29 ~ Rock Spring Top Campsite ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 33.5 north, 4 days since start of hike, averaging 8.4 miles per day, 12.5 miles hiked today

Last night's campsite had a 120 degree unobstructed view of the eastern sky. My favorite constellation, Orion the Hunter was high in the sky fighting Taurus the Bull, just like he has for thousands of years. We could have used him at Hawk Mt. Shelter to scare off the pesky vermin while we tried to sleep!

The temperature at night has been in the low 30s and the daytime temps have been in the low 60s. I wore shorts and tee shirt the past two days and have been very comfortable, as comfortable as one can be hauling 45 lbs. up and down mountains.

Today we reached the summit of Blood Mountain, which at 4,461 feet is the highest peak on the trail in Georgia. Blood Mountain gets its name from Indian legend in which the Creek and Cherokee tribes battled and left so many wounded that the mountain ran red with their blood. The trip up and down this mountain was not as difficult as I had expected, thanks to Georgia trail crews who installed steps and switchbacks. Thank you GATC and Konnarock Trail Crew!

Eric, Marc and I have again decided to camp in the middle of nowhere, but with a spring nearby.

We have been managing with only one liter of water, and when we are nearly empty, we stop at a spring, filter a liter of water and drink it on the spot, and then filter another one and we are on our way.

The stars are the brightest I've seen them in many years tonight. I guess we are far from any towns. My eyes are drooping at 8:00 after a long day's hike. Its time to hit the sack...Nite!

March 1 ~ Blue Mountain Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 48.5 north, 5 days since start of hike, averaging 9.7 miles per day, 15.0 miles hiked today

The wind woke me up at 5:30. It was roaring through the treetops and occasionally swirling around between the tent and the fly making a loud flapping sound. I tried to ignore it as long as possible, but eventually got up to start my day at 6:30.

I heard many Phoebe's singing today. These small gray flycatchers like to sit on exposed branches and sing their name repeatedly throughout the day – Phoe-be...Phoe-be. Every now and then they will fly out from their perch, catch a bug, and return to the same branch.

I ate lunch at Low Gap Shelter with Erin and Greg and their dog Lance. This recently married couple has taken pledges of \$1,000 from friends to finish the trail, the money to be sent to the ATC for trail improvement. Way to go!



Georgia Mountains

I hiked by myself for most of the afternoon, stopping for food and water when I wished and pausing to admire the scenery. I am in a wilderness area with few towns nearby and with row after row of mountains. The nearest mountains are green, and the rows beyond are each a lighter tone of blue until the most distant ones almost fade into the horizon.

At Blue Mountain we all tented close to the shelter because we observed the ceiling of the shelter was loaded with mouse nests! Only Terry, a section hiker stayed inside the shelter. Also camping near the shelter were Mike and Keith from Roscommon, Michigan. Mike runs a canoe & kayak rental business on the AuSable River.

It was 70 degrees today and I think I am tan (or could it be 5 days of sweat?) Its time for bed.

March 2 ~ Sassafras Gap Campsite ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 60.7 north, 6 days since start of hike, averaging 10.1 miles per day, 12.2 miles hiked today

Oy Vey! Today I felt like a yo-yo. From Blue Mt. (4,025 ft.) down to Unicorn Gap (2,949), then back up to Rocky Mt.(4,017) and down to Indian Grove Gap (3,113), up to Tray Mt. (4,430) and down to Sassafras Gap(3,500). I hope we find some level walking soon!

Saw lots of bear scat today on the Trail. I poked into a few of them and didn't find any buttons or zippers. I am feeling a little more confident about walking alone through the wilderness. One question though.....with about a bizillion acres of woodland to poop in, why do bears have to take a dump right in on the trail?

I had my first Trail Magic today at Tray Mt. Shelter. Someone let a netted bag of oranges hanging from the roof. Thanks! That orange really hit the spot.

I will be tenting tonight with Eric, Lance (the dog), Erin and Greg. We must hang the food bags because bear signs are all around us. Marc stayed at Tray Mt. Shelter.

March 3 ~ Dicks Creek Gap ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 66.8 north, 7 days since start of hike, averaging 9.5 miles per day, 6.1 miles hiked today

Lots of animal activity last night. At around 11:30 the coyotes started barking and howling about 100 yards from our camp. They kept up the racket for at least a half-hour. Shortly after that I heard several deer snorting after hearing our guard dog, Lance, growling. Later on a Barred Owl started hooting for about 10 minutes to another owl that was a distance away. Finally they all shut up and I was able to get some sleep.

Today Eric and I hiked down to Dick's Creek Gap and said good-bye to Erin, Greg, and Lance. I enjoyed hiking and camping with them over the past few days and hope we will meet up with them again somewhere along the trail. We got a ride to Blueberry Patch Hostel from Bert, who was dropping off a thru-hiker and was going our way. Bert is planning a flip-flop hike this year starting in March.

At the Blueberry Patch we met Bruce, a retired teacher from California, who was in the area scouting the AT for a future hike. He kindly drove us to Hiawasse to a food store where we bought supplies for 6 days. We also stopped and got large Subway sandwiches which we ate on the grass, in the hot sunlight, looking up at the mountains across the farmlands of the valley. It only took 5 minutes to eat that sub! The three of us will spend the night at the bunkhouse

March 4 ~ Muskrat Creek Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 78.4 north, 8 days since start of hike, averaging 9.8 miles per day, 11.6 miles hiked today

I had breakfast at Blueberry Patch with Bruce and Eric. We had two sausage patties, coffee, orange juice, cheese biscuits and pancakes with homemade blueberry sauce. Yum! For \$17 you get your breakfast, laundry washed, dried and folded and put in a basket, a bunk in the bunkhouse, a hot shower in a bathroom that has a flush toilet, electricity, a big sink to wash your equipment, and a ride back to the AT. The shower felt great. I am planning on another one next week! The Poteats are extremely nice people and I would definitely stop there if I were hiking again.



Lobo at the Georgia/North Carolina Border

I am now hiking in North Carolina, but would like to thank the GATC for making and maintaining the trail. In the northern section the white and blue blazes were freshly painted and easy to locate.

About a quarter mile from Muskrat Creek Shelter, I noticed that on both sides of the Trail some sort of animal had torn up the soil and rooted through the leaves. I believe that this is the work of wild boars that are found in this region. I will not think of them while I am sleeping in my tent tonight.

Before turning in I want to mention we had the steepest climb of the trip today. Sharp Top with its twin peaks can trick you, after you conquer the first one and find a nice level stretch you come to the even steeper second peak. Eric and I are tenting again tonight. Happy from Wisconsin and Bill from Maryland are staying in the shelter.

March 5 ~ Betty Creek Gap ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 94.6 north, 9 days since start of hike, averaging 10.5 miles per day, 16.2 miles hiked today

Woke up to a frosty morning, 28 degrees F. After a quick breakfast of hot cereal and coffee we were on our way. Today we heard Juncos singing all morning. This sparrow sized gray bird with a white chest has a song that is a three second trill. We also heard Ruffed Grouse drumming. The male flaps his wings so rapidly that they beat the air. There weren't many vistas today, but there were areas where the AT went through hundreds of yards of Rhododendron tunnels. They were always dark and cool with patterns of dark and light on the ground. We also passed a spot where the ground was covered with the reddish-purplish leaves of a wildflower called Galax. Whenever the trail passes through a patch of this plant there seems to be a skunky odor present. Perhaps I am loosing my mind.



Rhododendron Tunnel

Tonight we are again tenting in the middle of nowhere. Happy joined us and now there are three Clip Flashlight tents here. Happy says hello to Tom. The owls are hooting again tonight.

March 6 ~ Swinging Lick Gap ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 107.9 north, 10 days since start of hike, averaging 10.8 miles per day, 13.3 miles hiked today

An even colder start today - 25 degrees! My canteen was like a slushy. We had a tough climb 1/2 hour into the hike, the almost straight up 500 feet to the top of Albert Mt. At times it was like rock climbing, using both hands and feet to get to the summit. The reward was a fire tower that when climbed afforded a panoramic view in all directions!

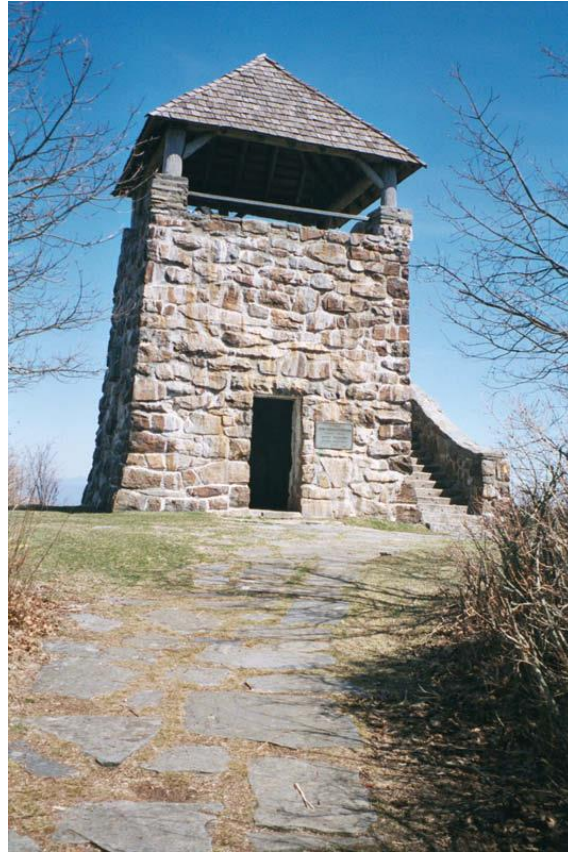
On the way down to Rainbow Springs Campground for lunch we saw our first snake, a one and a half foot Garter Snake. It saw us first and slithered off under a log. We had pizza and soda at the campground and met up with Greg, Erin and Lance (the dog). They will be staying at the campground and so is Happy.

We hiked four more miles to a spring. On our way to our campsite it sounded like there were raindrops on the leaves alongside the Trail. Looking closely I saw loads of 1/8 inch grasshoppers, jumping out of our way. Is this a sign of spring?

That's all for tonight.

March 7 ~ Cold Springs Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 122.6 north, 11 days since start of hike, averaging 11.1 miles per day, 14.7 miles hiked today

Today we climbed over three balds. A bald is a natural area on top of a mountain that always remains grass-covered without any trees. On top of Wayah Bald there is a stone observation tower with extensive views in all directions. Eric and I ate lunch there along with Karen from Florida, who has a teaching degree in math, but teaches outdoor education.



Wayah Bald Tower

I have been looking for wildflowers along the trail, but haven't seen any in bloom yet. I have seen the leaves of Trailing Arbutus, Rattlesnake Plantain (a small orchid), Partridgeberry, and Spotted Wintergreen.

When we got to the shelter there weren't any level spots so Eric and I tented on the ridge above. I wasn't going to sleep in a shelter that has mouse traps and a mouse exercise wheel on the shelf! White Wolf was at the shelter when we arrived. He is a retired body piercer, tattoo artist from Georgia who at one time owned businesses in Florida and Georgia. As you can imagine he had many interesting work related stories to tell after dinner. Also joining us was the Cruzin' Canuck, a university student from Toronto.

When we got back to our tents on the ridge, we were surprised to see there was a town with all the lights on and even a small airport.

March 8 ~ Nantahala River ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 134.1 north, 12 days since start of hike, averaging 11.2 miles per day, 11.5 miles hiked today

Opened my tent fly this morning to find a red sun just peeking above a distant mountain range. I just had to sit there for several minutes to watch the entire ball emerge. Sometimes little things like this will start a memorable day.

Today was a down day. I mean really down!! We went from our camp on the ridge at 5,000 feet down to NOC (Nantahala Outdoor Center) at 1,700 feet. We stopped at the fire tower on Wesser Bald where there are superb views of mountain ranges in all directions.

Once we got to NOC we were in culture shock. From the quiet of the woods, with everything brown or green, we emerged onto a busy highway with trucks, cars, and motorcycles. Canoes and kayaks of all colors were for sale or for rent. People were in bathing suits (80 degree temps) after completing an eight mile rafting trip down the river. At NOC we were met by the parents of Eric's neighbor, the Parks. They took us to their house (20 minutes away) and allowed us to wash our clothes and shower, then fed us dinner. After dinner they showed us a very informative video about the Nantahala region.

The next day they made us breakfast, gave us cookies and banana bread and returned us to the trail. This was "Trail Magic" at its best! Thank you Bob and Jean!

March 9 ~ Brown Fork Gap Shelter ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)

at milepoint 150.1 north, 13 days since start of hike, averaging 11.5 miles per day, 16.0 miles hiked today

Today was an up day. From 1,700 back up to 5,000 feet. Most of the day I was in the clouds with no views except swirling mist blowing up from the valley. I am really surprised that I was able to walk this far after a 3,300 foot climb. I think I am getting stronger. Also I have lost 7 pounds so far and boxed up 4 pounds of stuff that I didn't need and sent it home from NOC. That makes 11 pounds that I do not have to carry!

Tonight I tented outside the shelter with Eric, Drummer and Louie P. The privy has a strange construction!



Privy at Brown Fork Gap Shelter

March 10 ~ Fontana Dam (Fontana Village) ... in Georgia-North Carolina - [map](#)
at milepoint 162.8 north, 14 days since start of hike, averaging 11.6 miles per day, 12.7 miles hiked today

Today was the toughest day yet! The Trail to Fontana took us straight up and down ridge after ridge and across rock slides with unstable boulders, all within sight of the lake behind the dam. Even though it was only about a 12 mile hike with a descent of 3,000 feet the soles of my feet were throbbing and tender after we finally reached the bottom.

At the bottom there was a phone that connected to the Fontana Village for a \$1 shuttle. We took it to the Fontana Post Office for our first mail drop of food and maps. Oh boy, 10 more pounds to add to my pack!

After repacking our stuff, and mailing maps and guides back home, we hiked up to the Village where we split a room for \$30 (normally \$79 in season). An all you can eat buffet dinner was \$9 each, they lost money on these two hungry hikers!

I finally saw a few flowering wild flowers today. I spotted several Yellow Violets, one Purple Violet, a small patch of Trailing Arbutus, one Spring Beauty, and loads of spotted-leaved Trillium that were just about ready to open their purple blossoms.

Tomorrow we will eat breakfast here, catch the shuttle back to the AT, and begin our hike through the Great Smoky Mountains.

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## **North Carolina-Tennessee** *previous section*

**March 11 ~ Mollies Ridge Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 173.8 north, 15 days since start of hike, averaging 11.6 miles per day, 11.0 miles hiked today*



**Mollies Ridge Shelter**

Today it rained almost all day! It was a torrential rainfall that made all the uphill and downhill Trails instant streams. One section about 2 1/2 miles from the shelter was especially treacherous because the mud was as slippery as grease. Wherever you would plant your foot, it would slide 2 to 3 feet. One time my feet went in one direction, my body in another and my pack slid in a third direction. I don't know how I avoided falling. Just lucky I guess.

Before we started our day's hiking we met up again with Erin, Greg and Lance. Someone is meeting them to care for Lance because no dogs are allowed in the Park. Erin and Greg plan to rest two days to allow Erin's knee to heal. Also at the dam we met Rodger (Many Sleeps- class of 98) who now works for NPS as an AT volunteer. He provided valuable information about the shelters and the weather.

Tonight, at the shelter, we are joined by Beetle from York PA, the Four Horsemen - college students from Tennessee and three women whose names I have not learned yet. Wet clothes are hanging everywhere and it smells like a locker room. At dusk visibility is only 15 feet, as we are socked in by low clouds.

**March 12 ~ Derrik Knob Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 185.2 north, 16 days since start of hike, averaging 11.6 miles per day, 11.4 miles hiked today*

Rain overnight turned to sleet that we could hear bouncing off the corrugated metal roof. When I woke up and looked outside I was amazed to see about 3/4 inch of snow covering the ground, trees and shrubs! The snow on the branches was wind-blown and was jutting out about an inch from the wind direction. While walking on the Trail I noticed three inch delicate crystals of ice on both sides of the Trail. I tried to pick one up but it broke apart and melted in my hand. I think the crystals are caused by something called frost heaving. The temperature started out today at 20 degrees F and never rose above freezing, so everything remained covered with snow the entire day.

Tonight it is expected to be even colder. We (Eric and I) are joined by Beetle, AuSable Mike, Medicine Man (Keith), Dan and Steve.



**Winter Wonderland**



**March 13 ~ Mt. Collins Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)

*at milepoint 198.7 north, 17 days since start of hike, averaging 11.7 miles per day, 13.5 miles hiked today*

After a cold start again today we hit the Trail to find it ice and snow covered in the shade, and soft and slippery in the sun. Sometimes we had to slow down and take baby steps to avoid falling. Speaking of falling, all day long large chunks of snow would fall from the trees and land on our heads. Even worse was when it went down our backs and melted!

The high point of the day (6,643 feet) was Clingman's Dome, the highest elevation on the AT. There were outstanding views in all directions from the top of the observation tower.

Tonight Eric, Beetle and I are sleeping in our tents behind the shelter because it is full. We hope to start early and have a big day tomorrow.

**March 14 ~ Peck's Corner Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)

*at milepoint 213.6 north, 18 days since start of hike, averaging 11.9 miles per day, 14.9 miles hiked today*

The Trail again today was icy and made us slow down to a crawl at times. One nice thing was the smell of the firs that we brushed up against as we moved along northward. Also for the past several days I have noticed that the trees are covered with crusty and hairy looking green lichens. A lichen is a combination of an algae and a fungus living together. The alga makes the food and the fungus absorbs the water and nutrients.

Today we went past what I considered to be the most spectacular view of the entire trip so far, Charlie's Bunion. It is a knob of rock that sticks out from a cliff with extreme drops in all directions. Photos could not do this area justice.

Eric and Beetle moved on five miles to the next shelter because they must get to Hot Springs post office by 12:00 Saturday before it closes. They also must do another 20 mile and 17 mile day to reach their goal. I will probably meet them along the Trail in a week or two.

At the shelter tonight are Dan and Steve, two nurses Sherri and Peggy and a section hiker. Sherri and Peggy are from Tennessee and are excellent fire starters. I enjoyed going to bed with the orange glow and crackling sound of a fire in the fireplace.



**Lobo on Charlie's Bunion**

**March 15 ~ Cosby Knob** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
at milepoint 226.5 north, 19 days since start of hike, averaging 11.9 miles per day, 12.9 miles hiked today

Today was the first day out of the past several days that I put my boots on and they weren't frozen. Whenever anyone went to the bathroom during the night they would throw some wood on the red coals in the fireplace to start the fire again. I think that helped a lot.

Today the Trail was not ice covered or muddy for the most part. After an hour and a half of climbing in the beginning of the day, the Trail leveled out or descended the rest of the afternoon.

At present I am the only one in camp and I am making plans for the next four days.

The Monroes (Dad, Mom, 2 sons) stopped in for a quick dinner. They are from Oklahoma City and are doing a short section hike. The Dad was hoping to do the entire AT someday and had many questions. I hope I helped him out. Before they left they gave me an extra freeze dried dinner. Thanks!

Louie, a law student from Maryland, is the only other camper, so far, in the shelter tonight.

**March 16 ~ Mountain Momma's Kountry Kitchen& Hostel** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
at milepoint 234.5 north, 20 days since start of hike, averaging 11.7 miles per day, 8 miles hiked today

This morning Louie and I hiked the eight miles out of Smoky Mountains National Park, got in his RV and had lunch at Mountain Momma's. When you enter the store it is like entering a time warp. The wood floors, food on open metal shelving, and old signs on the walls make it seem like you are back in the 50's.



**The Hilton at Mountain Mamma's**

After lunch Louie drove back north to DC to visit friends and I paid my \$10 for a bunk and a shower. I also bought enough food and fuel for a two day hike to Hot Springs. Tomorrow I will have breakfast here and then catch the shuttle back to the trail.

The Cruzin' Canuck arrived later this afternoon and will share a small bunkhouse - Mountain

Momma's Hilton - with me. I don't see how they could fit six hikers and their gear in this small shed. Mouse droppings are everywhere, so that means hang your food.

**March 17 ~ Max Patch Summit campsite** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 250.5 north, 21 days since start of hike, averaging 11.9 miles per day, 16.0 miles hiked today*

The rain started around midnight. Usually the sound of rain is pleasant music and makes me go to sleep, but not when it is pounding on a metal roof 6 feet above my head. It sounded like I was inside a drum! Occasionally a Sweetgum ball would fall from the nearby tree and bounce off the roof to produce an extra loud "bonk". After two hours the rain finally stopped and I got back to sleep.

Today Cruzin' Canuck and I had planned to hike 12 miles to the next site where there would be water, but when we arrived there at 2:00 we decided to move on to this spot. Max Patch (4,629) is a grassy bald with magnificent views of Mt. Mitchell in the Blacks and many peaks in the Smokies. We pitched our tents on the summit and were treated to a 360 degree unobstructed view of the mountains. The sunset was awesome, and with our tents facing east, we hope to catch an impressive sunrise. We had to carry extra water about 1/2 mile, since there is none available on top of this bald. It is very windy and cold here but I am still planning to pull my sleeping bag and pad up into the open vestibule of my tent to watch the show from the heavens for as long as I can stay awake. It is so beautiful at this spot that I feel like I am living in someone's picture post card.



**Max Patch Campsite**

**March 18 ~ Deer Park Mt. Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 267.1 north, 22 days since start of hike, averaging 12.1 miles per day, 16.6 miles hiked today*

Woke up this morning at 6:30 and opened my tent fly to look out at an unobstructed view of an orange horizon behind dark and distant mountains. I was able to capture on film the very moment that the sun popped up. The temperature was in the mid 20's with about a 40 mile per hour wind, so I watched from the comfort of my sleeping bag. It was a tough job breaking camp with all that blowing.

I walked by myself all day and only saw two section hikers.

For the past two days the mountains have been smaller than the last two weeks and there are also fewer vistas. I am looking forward to seeing masses of spring flowers and birds in the woods.

Cruzin' Canuck and I will leave here early tomorrow morning and cruise into Hot Springs (only three miles away!) for a shower, good meals, laundry and restock food for several days. It looks like it might rain tonight and that's bad when your shelter has a metal roof!

**March 19 ~ Hot Springs** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 270.3 north, 23 days since start of hike, averaging 11.8 miles per day, 3.2 miles hiked today*

Got a room with Cruzin' Canuck at the Sunnybank Inn (Elmer's), an 1840 Victorian Bed and Breakfast. There are 7 bedrooms upstairs with high ceilings and antique furniture and three bathrooms. Thru-hikers pay \$12 a night for a shower and a room, meals are extra.

We restocked for a four day hike to Erwin at the local outfitters. I also got a grommet repaired on my pack.

Also staying tonight at the Inn are Old Spice from Cincinnati, Happy, SEM from Texas, and the Four Horsemen. I also met up with Greg, Erin and Lance at the local diner. Erin reports that her knee is feeling better and that they will be spending a zero day here in town (population 600).

**March 20 ~ Spring Mountain Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 281.5 north, 24 days since start of hike, averaging 11.7 miles per day, 11.2 miles hiked today*

Last evening before bedtime Elmer brought out a pan of brownies with fudge icing for us (11 thru-hikers). What a great treat! Breakfast was all you could eat waffles, orange juice, coffee, cut-up apples with cinnamon sugar, and grains and nuts cereal. I am surprised about how much town food I have eaten in the last 24 hours. Now it is back to hiker food.

Stopped at the post office on the way out of town for my bounce box of food from Fontana, took out what I wanted and gave the rest to Erin and another hiker. I also stopped at the outfitter to weigh my pack with food for four days and topped off water and fuel containers. Back up to 50 pounds!

Cruzin' Canuck and I both tented tonight while Rushmore and Fenway, from Atlanta, stayed at the shelter. They started their hike Feb. 17th. Later on Camel, who started with Mr. D on Feb. 7, came into the shelter.

**March 21 ~ Flint Mountain Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 302.5 north, 25 days since start of hike, averaging 12.1 miles per day, 21.0 miles hiked today!*

After checking the trail guide, data book, elevation profile on the map, and calendar date, I decided today would be the day that I would spring for my first 20 mile day. I actually did 21 miles and I have to admit I do feel a little tired. I walked from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm including breaks and lunch. I hope to do 18 miles tomorrow and 16 miles on Thursday into Erwin TN for a motel stay.

**March 22 ~ Bald Mountain Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 321.3 north, 26 days since start of hike, averaging 12.4 miles per day, 18.8 miles hiked today*

Walked alone all day today but did pass 3 pairs of section hikers moving south. While on the Trail I smelled a sweet fragrance (no shower for 3 days, it wasn't me!) and stopped to find both sides of the path lined with Trailing Arbutus in bloom. It is a vine-like plant that grows close to the ground and has oval evergreen leaves. The flowers are pinkish in color and are tube shaped.

Today I walked across another bald at an elevation of 5,516 feet. It was so windy and cold when I stopped that I had to put on a shirt. I wonder if balds are always windy?



Tonight will be the first night since leaving Springer Mountain on Feb.2 that I will be camping alone. It is part of the trail experience that I have been looking forward to. As I watch the western sky slide through many shades of orange, I realize how fortunate I am to be living the life of an AT thru-hiker.

Tomorrow I hope to be on the Trail by 7 am to hike the 16 miles to the Nolichucky Hostel and Erwin to re-supply.

**March 23 ~ Nolichucky River (Erwin TN)** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 338.1 north, 27 days since start of hike, averaging 12.5 miles per day, 16.8 miles hiked today*

The Trail was hiker friendly today - dirt and level or downhill for most of the day. Another good feature was the aroma from the pines that lined the trail and the pine needles on the ground.

Tonight I am staying at Uncle Johnny's Nolichucky Hostel which is located right next to the AT. Johnny and Miss Janet go out of their way to make sure your stay at Erwin is a memorable one. I can see why many of the folks I have met on the trail recommended that I stay here.



**Lobo, AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, & Cruizin' Canuck at Uncle Johnny's**

Tonight at the Hostel I am joined by Cruizin' Canuck, Nelse, Shake Down and Shaman. In a private room are Medicine Man and AuSable Mike.

Hello to my little buddies and young readers at Seiler Elementary School back in PA!

Tomorrow Miss Janet will take us into town for breakfast and then back to the trail.

**March 24 ~ Cherry Gap Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 354.5 north, 28 days since start of hike, averaging 12.7 miles per day, 16.4 miles hiked today*

On Hostels.

When I was in the early planning stages of my hike I thought that after a week on the trail, when I went into town for a re-supply, laundry and shower I would want to stay in a motel where I would have TV and some privacy away from the AT. My first hostel stay at Blueberry Patch changed

that notion. I was treated so nicely there that I made it a point to stay at Elmer's Hostel and Uncle Johnny's Hostel. I wasn't disappointed. All three of these places treated me almost as if I were family and Miss Janet at Uncle Johnny's hostel even sent me an e-mail before my trip saying that she was looking forward to meeting me. Hostels are on my list for future town visits.

Today's hike was a lot more difficult than what was pictured on the elevation profile section of my map. I also must remember that my pack will always be heaviest when leaving town and lightest when entering.

Tonight I am tenting near the shelter along with AuSable Mike, Medicine Man and the Cruzin' Canuck. In the shelter are the Frog Princess and Cosmic Zionist.

Tomorrow we will head for the highest shelter on the AT, Roan High Knob at 6,285 feet.

**March 25 ~ Roan High Knob Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 369.6 north, 29 days since start of hike, averaging 12.7 miles per day, 15.1 miles hiked today*

The first 13 miles of today's hike weren't too bad, a few 500 foot ups and downs. The last 3 miles were the real killers because of the 2,300 foot ascent in elevation. The first section was a steep climb up a dirt path that was at least kind to the feet. The second half was very rocky with some boulder climbing included. We (Mike & Keith) took our time and took a breather-break about every five minutes. Unlike yesterday, we knew we had plenty of daylight left to reach our destination.



**Roan High Knob Shelter**

The shelter sleeps 15 and was originally a fire warden's cabin that was renovated in 1980. At the shelter tonight are AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, Cedar Tree, Shake Down and Shaman.

I am tenting with Cruzin' Canuck, Eric, Steve and Dan. As I write this I can hear raindrops on my tent fly. I hope I made the right choice - tenting over the cabin.



**March 26 ~ Apple House Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)

*at milepoint 383.8 north, 30 days since start of hike, averaging 12.8 miles per day, 14.2 miles hiked today*

Today the Trail followed several balds. Some say they are caused by harsh weather conditions, others claim Indians cleared them, or it was over grazed by animals or the work of spacemen. Whatever the reason, the many hours that I spent walking up and down them today offered superb views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. On one rocky outcropping we spent a half hour eating lunch and taking in the scenery.



#### **Duck X-ing & AuSable Mike on Big Bald**

After the balds the trail followed an old road through the woods. Both sides of the path were covered by Spring Beauties, Hepatica, Bloodroot, Yellow and Purple Violets and Cut-leaved Toothwort. A totally beautiful day!

As of today I have been on the Trail for one month. I have met many wonderful and interesting people - both town folks and fellow hikers. I only met one negative man so far and I only spent five minutes near him! I am glad that I am keeping this journal because the days seem to be harder and harder to remember as time goes on.

Tonight AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, Eric and I are tenting near the shelter while Shaman, Shakedown, Nelse and Youngblood are inside. Shaman and Shakedown are taking donations for the American Cancer Society. Their website is [www.members.tripod.com/bdistelberg](http://www.members.tripod.com/bdistelberg)

**March 27 ~ Laurel Creek Lodge ( Dennis Cove )** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)

*at milepoint 403.7 north, 31 days since start of hike, averaging 13.0 miles per day, 19.9 miles hiked today*

At 5:50 A.M. nature's alarm clock went off. Two Carolina Wrens nearby were calling for mates and a Rufus-sided Towhee made its song that sounds like "Drink your Teeee". I also heard a Phoebe, Crow, Cardinal and a Carolina Chickadee. They were so loud that I decided it was time to get up.

After breakfast we took off for either a 14 or 20 mile day. At the 14 mile mark we stopped at a shelter and made tea and soup to warm up (it was chilly and raining all day). We figured we had time to do the 20. Am I glad we did! This lodge is another quality hostel that should be on any thru-hiker's list. Dennis and Mary Hutchins went out of their way to make us feel at home. We got in at 6:00 and Mary made us spaghetti and meat sauce, salad and garlic bread. For dessert, we had a huge chocolate sundae. Do I really want to go back to the Trail?



**Duck X-ing, Lobo, Mary, Dennis, Au Sable Mike, Medicine Man, & Cedar Tree**

Also staying in paradise with me are Eric, AuSable Mike, Medicine Man and Cedar Tree. Cedar Tree is a professor at Mississippi University for Women. He teaches folks how to use computers. He would like to say, "Hi, Mom!"

Tomorrow's climb looks like a butte that you would see out west with steep sides and a flat top.

**March 28 ~ Watauga Lake Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 414.3 north, 32 days since start of hike, averaging 12.9 miles per day, 10.6 miles hiked today*

Today after a hearty 3-3-3 breakfast ( 3 eggs, 3 slices of bacon, and 3 pancakes for \$3 ) and a shuttle back to the Trail we entered the wild and rugged gorge of Laurel Fork for 2.7 miles. Laurel Fork twists its way down a narrow passage between two mountains with many rapids and waterfalls, the largest being 40 foot Laurel Falls. From there the Trail climbs steeply for 2.5 miles to a one mile flat section called Pond Flats. This was followed by a 2,000 foot descent and then on to the shelter. Watauga Lake is 16.3 miles long and covers over 6,000 acres. From the top of Pond Flats the waters of the lake appear to be turquoise in color.

Sleeping inside the shelter tonight are AuSable Mike and Medicine Man. Baggins and I are tenting near the shelter. Baggins is a former Peace Corps worker who is finishing up a short section of the trail that he was unable to complete during his thru-hike last year.



**Laurel Creek Falls**

**March 29 ~ Iron Mountain Shelter** ... in North Carolina-Tennessee - [map](#)  
at milepoint 428.0 north, 33 days since start of hike, averaging 13.0 miles per day, 13.7 miles hiked today

The hike today was an easy one with little change in elevation and fine views of Watauga Lake from the ridge crest. I enjoy hiking alone because I can go at my own pace and stop whenever I like to examine wildflowers, scoop out salamander eggs from a temporary pool on a mud road or peel bark of dead trees to look for bark beetles. Other hikers might not want to do these things. I force myself to take off my pack for 5 minutes every hour to eat a candy bar, some jerky and take a drink of water. I drink at least 4 liters of water each day. I have lost 20 pounds so far on this trip and I think I will lose about 5 more.

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Southwest Virginia

[previous section](#)

March 30 ~ Damascus Va ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)
at milepoint 454.3 north, 34 days since start of hike, averaging 13.4 miles per day, 26.3 miles hiked today!

Woke up in my tent with a light drizzle dripping on the fly. It is nice to listen to, but it is no fun to pack up a wet tent.

The four of us ate a hot breakfast in the shelter and joked that Damascus was ONLY 26 miles away. At 7:45 we started out and decided we would meet for a break at the first shelter, 8 miles away. It only took us three hours. We had some hot tea and soup then agreed to meet again at the next shelter, another 8 miles. We all arrived in about three hours. ONLY ten miles now to Damascus and it was 2:30 in the afternoon. Let's go for it!

We finally arrived in town at 5:30, sore, hungry, but happy to be at our destination. A pizza and two beers made me feel almost back to normal. I don't think I will do that many miles again for quite awhile.

I am staying at the hostel called "The Place" along with the famous "leave you in the dust" Cruzin Canuk, Old Spice, Steve & Dan, Young Blood, and Nelse. Ridge, a student at Mississippi State came in later in the evening. Ridge says, "Hi Mom!"



"The Place" Hostel

March 31 ~ Damascus VA ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)
at milepoint 454.3 north, 35 days since start of hike, averaging 13.0 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today

Today was my first zero day of the trip. I ate a good breakfast, washed up my clothes, picked up my mail-drop, stopped in the outfitters and bought a tarp, ate lunch, seam sealed the tarp, packaged 7 pounds of stuff to send home (including my tent), mailed the package back at the post office, checked and responded to email and guestbook at the town hall, waterproofed my boots, experimented setting up the new tarp, ate dinner, and planned for the next five days. It's called a zero day but I think I got lots done.

Tomorrow it's back to the Trail.

April 1 ~ Lost Mountain Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)
at milepoint 470.1 north, 36 days since start of hike, averaging 13.1 miles per day, 15.7 miles hiked today

Today was a beautiful day for hiking with sunny skies, warm temperatures, and plenty of wildflowers. The AT shared a short section with the Virginia Creeper Trail, which stretches 33 miles along an old railroad bed from Abingdon to the NC state line. It began as a Native American footpath and was later used by pioneers, including Daniel Boone!

Today we went past people on foot, mountain bike, and horseback. There were also several fishermen working the Whitetop Laurel Creek, a crystal clear mountain stream that follows the Creeper Trail. At one point the trail crossed a 540 foot long trestle high above the creek below. Local folks are lucky to have such a wonderful area to use close to home.

Tonight in the shelter with me are Old Spice, Cruzin' Canuck, Ridge, and Gapper, a section hiker. AuSable Mike and Medicine Man must have stopped one shelter back because they got a late start.

April 2 ~ Wise Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 487.5 north, 37 days since start of hike, averaging 13.2 miles per day, 17.4 miles hiked today

Today the Trail traversed a patchwork of fields, forests, high open meadows, rocky peaks and cliffs. Unfortunately the weather was rainy, windy and chilly with fog and clouds blowing horizontally. Still it was a good day for hiking. Without the rain the springs will go dry.

The main attraction was the almost three miles of the AT that went through the boundaries of Grayson Highlands State Park. This Park includes more than 4,700 acres high in the mountains and is fenced in certain sections to contain the wild ponies. We saw about 20 today. They are semi-tame and will allow close approach for photos. I'm a bit disappointed that the weather isn't better for this beautiful area.



Grayson Highlands Ponies

In the shelter tonight are the same folks as last night plus Cedar Tree. Tonight we have an extra hour of daylight so I will be staying up until 8:30!

April 3 ~ Trimpi Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 507.5 north, 38 days since start of hike, averaging 13.4 miles per day, 20.0 miles hiked today

The day started off foggy and drizzly, at midday it cleared and was sunny and now, at 6:30 after dinner, it is raining again. I am really happy after a 20 mile day to be under a dry roof with a belly full of warm food.

One section of the Trail today went through a meadow and I passed four more feral ponies roaming the area. One was a mare tending her young foal. Whenever I would approach to take a photo, she would position herself between me and her baby. Finally after several minutes the little one moved from behind her and I snapped the picture.

In the shelter tonight are Cruzin' Canuck, Ridge, Old Spice and me. Several Spring Peepers (small tree frogs) are calling from a swampy area below the shelter.

April 4 ~ Partnership Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 518.5 north, 39 days since start of hike, averaging 13.3 miles per day, 11.0 miles hiked today

Woke up from a sound sleep at 11:30 PM with water dripping on my eyes. The drizzle at dusk turned into heavy rain that lasted all night. Several small holes in the roof made us scramble for dry sleeping spots.

We started our morning hike in a light rain that lasted all morning. When we (Old Spice and I) reached the top of a ridge, the sky turned dark gray, then black, and it started to sleet. The wind was howling through the treetops and the sleet was whipping horizontally against my legs (I had shorts on). The windward sides of both legs were bright red. After sleeting for about a half hour it began to snow large heavy flakes. As long as we kept moving we were able to stay warm. The snow changed to small flakes for about an hour before we reached the shelter where we planned to take a break. Canuck had already been there and left a note telling us to stay put, lunch was already ordered. About 100 yards away there is a National Recreation Visitors Center with a phone to order pizza. Thanks Canuck!

After eating pizza and reading the weather report, snow with temperatures in the upper 20s, we decided to stay put. There are seven of us in the upper deck, including Canuck, Old Spice, AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, Ridge and Gapper. We will order more pizza and food before 4:30 when the visitor's center closes.

April 5 ~ Crawfish Vally Camp Site ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 535 north, 40 days since start of hike, averaging 13.4 miles per day, 16.5 miles hiked today

We came down from the loft, which was completely closed-in and out of the wind, to find a dusting to 1/4 inch of fresh snow. The wind was blowing and the temperature was 28 degrees. I started off with wind pants, a long underwear top underneath my fleece jacket, and a fleece hat and thin gloves. I was comfortable in these clothes for several hours. By noon I was down to shorts and a tee shirt. The Trail took us past a truck stop and a Dairy Queen where we were able to get a hot lunch and re-supply for several days. We had pizza for dinner last night and a double cheeseburger for lunch today. Ah, life is good.

Canuck, Old Spice and I are using our tarps tonight for the first time and AuSable Mike and Medicine Man are tenting. Ridge moved on farther up the Trail and Gapper stayed at a motel at the truck stop. Tomorrow I will pass the 1/4 mile mark for my journey. A single coyote is howling close by on the ridge.

April 6 ~ Chestnut Knob Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 552.9 north, 41 days since start of hike, averaging 13.5 miles per day, 17.9 miles hiked

This shelter is an abandoned fire warden's cabin rehabilitated in 1994 and sleeps six. It is completely enclosed with a door and Plexiglas windows. Spending the night with me are AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, Old Spice, Canuck, and Gabriel. Gabriel is a 70 year old thru-hiker who was in the service for 45 years, a Korean and Viet Nam Vet. Thank you Gabe for your sacrifice!

Today I passed the 1/4 mark of my thru-hike. The weather, rain, sleet, snow, and sunny 80 degree days has met my expectations. The terrain, with the rugged mountains in Georgia and North Carolina and the rolling hills and pastures of Virginia were also expected. What I didn't plan on were the trail friends that I have met along the way and look forward to seeing every night. We are all independent hikers carrying our own tents, clothes, and food but we enjoy meeting in the shelters in the evenings to complain about the ups and downs, discuss the vistas that we saw that day, and to make plans for the next few days. I am also humbled by the help given to me by total strangers in towns and on the trail. I have been adopted by two folks that I have never met, and they sent me a package at my mail drop (they are called Trail Angels). It gives me strength to know that so many folks are thinking of me and keeping me in their prayers.

Physically I am in good shape (lost 20 pounds) although I have to admit I am sore and tired when I arrive at camp after long hikes. I have often gone beyond what I thought was my limit of endurance. All I had to do was take off my pack for five minutes, take a drink of water, stretch, and then move on some more. I am looking forward to the adventures and new folks to be met in the remaining 75% of the hike.



Sunset from Chest Knob Shelter

April 7 ~ VA 615, Laurel Creek Camp Site ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)
at milepoint 567.8 north, 42 days since start of hike, averaging 13.5 miles per day, 14.9 miles hiked today

The sunset and sunrise from Chestnut Knob shelter were outstanding! I hope that I didn't take too many photos. Also from the shelter were excellent views of Burk's Garden, a five mile by ten mile valley surrounded on all sides by mountains. The garden is named after James Burke, who was on a surveying crew in the area in 1748. One evening he buried potato scraps in a hole and when he returned the following spring he found a fine crop of potato plants. His friends jokingly called it Burke's Garden and the name stuck. About 280 people live in this lush valley.

The sun was hot and the temperature was near 80 degrees while hiking this afternoon in the valley along Wolf Creek. In two miles we had to cross the creek twelve times. At the last crossing there was a waist deep hole that was irresistible to five thru-hikers who had not had a shower since last Friday. Off came the boots and socks, in went the hikers. Into a cold mountain stream, only for a few seconds but long enough to wash off. It felt great!

When we arrived at our camp site a woman walking her two dogs along the AT asked if we were thru hikers. When we replied "Yes", she offered to drive us to the Dairy Queen in Bland! Trail Magic!

Medicine Man offered to stay with our gear while Murray Ann Ziegenfoss drove the four of us three miles to town. She told us her husband, George, was a thru-hiker in 1989 and they enjoyed helping hikers. George gave us a ride back to the trail and gave us oranges, bananas, homemade cookies, and a chocolate Easter Bunny to share. It is people like Murray Ann and George, who are willing to help total strangers that make the Trail a special place for hikers. Thank you.

Tonight we are tarping and tenting along Laurel Creek. Gabriel stayed back at the last shelter. George warned us not to camp near the gravel road because of weekend parties and recommended a spot .2 of a mile north of the road.

April 8 ~ Jenny Knob Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 586.8 north, 43 days since start of hike, averaging 13.6 miles per day, 19.0 miles hiked today

It was 8:45 PM when we saw a light coming up the trail toward our camp site. Was it the locals ready to cause problems? No, it was George and he said, "I thought you guys might like some dessert". He brought us a large thermos of coffee and warm brownies! Unreal! More Trail Magic. Thank you George!

Today was a fairly level hike with an elevation change of only about 400 feet. We hiked 19 miles in about seven hours. After 7 miles into the day's hike I came down to a gravel road to US 21/52 and who did I find waiting for me in his truck but George, with breakfast! Another thermos of coffee and biscuits filled with a slice of ham, scrambled eggs and cheese! I hope other hikers get to experience some of George's Trail Magic.

We are all in our sleeping bags at 4:00 P.M. with sleet and light snow coming down. We have a large tarp over the open end of the shelter to keep out the wind. Tonight promises to be a cold one.

April 9 ~ Doc's Knob Shelter ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 608.8 north, 44 days since start of hike, averaging 13.8 miles per day, 22.0 miles hiked today

When I woke up this morning it was 28 degrees and my boots, water, and water filter were frozen. Outside the shelter the ground was covered with snow and the wind was howling. By noon I was in shorts. The Trail this morning followed the ridge crest with excellent views of the lush green farmlands on both sides. Where I was walking the brown leaves were covered with snow. It is amazing what the difference of 1,000 feet in elevation can make.

After the first seven miles we reached VA 606 where we knew that to the left, in about 1/2 mile, was a store where they made pizza. We spent 1 1/2 hours there filling our bellies. We followed a blue blaze, later on the Trail, that led to the Dismal Creek Falls. What a great place to camp and to take a dip in the deep pool below the falls. If only we would have found this place two days ago when the temperatures were in the 80's.

It was a tough 22 miles today but it will be worth it to get to town, pick up mail drops, shower, eat and do laundry. We set a record - 10 days without doing laundry and taking a shower. AuSable Mike won the big stink contest and will use the shower first. There will be five of us in one rented room.

April 10 ~ Pearisburg Plaza Motel ... in Southwest Virginia - [map](#)

at milepoint 616.6 north, 45 days since start of hike, averaging 13.7 miles per day, 7.8 miles hiked today

"What would you see if you saw yourself walking your way?" Chester Davidson

I heard the alarm go off at 5:00 A.M. but I ignored it. At 5:30 two hikers got up, ate, packed up their gear and put on their headlamps. They got an Alpine start on the trek to town for a breakfast at Dairy Queen. After Old Spice and Medicine Man left, AuSable Mike, Cruzin' Canuck and I looked out from our sleeping bags at the dark and said, "We'll wait until it's light." We left one hour later.

In town we met at the DQ, ate breakfast and found the Plaza Motel. The five of us decided to rent one room and squeeze in for \$67. The first order of business was laundry. The odor from the dirty

clothes of five hikers, in a small enclosed room was horrendous. We had to open the door quickly because of the fumes. What a sight we were, five dirty, bearded hikers in wind pants, raincoats and boots with no socks carrying plastic bags filled with laundry walking, down the street to the laundromat.

After doing our laundry we picked up our mail drops and went shopping for the rest of our supplies. For dinner we ate at a Chinese Restaurant along with Shaman and Shakedown.

We are still awake at 10:00 watching MTV and the weather channel. Tomorrow will be another difficult out of town hike with a full load in our backpacks and an uphill climb.

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## **Central Virginia**

[previous section](#)

### **April 11 ~ Pine Swamp Branch Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 636.3 north, 46 days since start of hike, averaging 13.8 miles per day, 19.7 miles hiked today*

The forest in the lowlands today were abloom with purple violets. Whenever I see purple violets on the Trail I feel a deep sadness because they were the favorite flower of my mother, who passed away several years ago. Then I think about how as a pre-schooler I would pick a bunch of purple violets for my mother from a nearby field and how she would give me a hug and make me a quart of eggnog or a batch of lemon butter. How lucky I was to grow up in the 1950s and have a caring mother at home all day to make me eggnog. Its strange how a small purple flower can bring on such sudden sad and happy memories.

Some other flowers that I saw today were Cut-Leaved Toothwort, Bluets and Squaw Root (Cancer Root). Squaw Root is a parasite upon the roots of trees, especially oaks. The flowers and stems are yellowish brown because they have no green chlorophyll.

Tonight the five of us are all inside the shelter because it might rain.

### **April 12 ~ Laurel Creek Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 654.4 north, 47 days since start of hike, averaging 13.9 miles per day, 18.1 miles hiked today*

Much of the day today we were socked in a thick fog that limited visibility to about 20 yards. No overlooks, no wildflowers, no birds to report...just a full day of heavy duty hiking. The sun did come out for a short time during our lunch break and we stayed there for about an hour and a half. After the break we hit a long section where the Trail followed the ridgeline that was covered with large rocks. This is always an area where extreme caution is necessary because of the danger of twisting an ankle or worse. Five of us are in the shelter tonight.

### **April 13 ~ Pickle Branch Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 676.6 north, 48 days since start of hike, averaging 14.1 miles per day, 22.2 miles hiked today*

Another cold (35 degrees at 8:00) overcast day for hiking. It didn't start to rain until after lunch. The Trail went through open pasture land, through hardwood forests, and along the ridge tops. When crossing one of the ridge tops 3 feral goats came running towards me. I was on an angled slab of smooth rock and prepared to push them away with my hiking stick. Billy, the male, came up to me and started licking the salt off my legs. I didn't mind the goat spit on my body but when he tried to chew on my gloves, I had to chase them away.

Along the Trail today I saw Dogwood, Redbud, Wild Azalea, Bird-Foot Violets, a small Iris (4 inches tall) and Winged Polygalia, all in bloom.



### Feral Goats on Sinking Creek Mountain

I have hiked about 60 miles in the last three days and my body is telling me to slow down. I think I will try to limit myself to about fifteen miles per day.

There are five of us again in the shelter tonight.

**April 14 ~ Catawba Mountain Shelter** ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 690.5 north, 49 days since start of hike, averaging 14.1 miles per day, 13.9 miles hiked today*

Another day socked in the cold fog, but only a fifteen mile trek to the next shelter. Much of the time we were on a thin ridge crest that culminated in the spectacular monolith of Dragon's Tooth (3,050 feet) which probably offers splendid views on clear days but today's visibility was only about 50 yards. The Trail down from Dragon's Tooth was the most dangerous section to date. In two places the local Trail Club drilled holes into the rock and inserted metal steps for safety. One mistake in this area could end your hike or worse.

Fifteen minutes later down the Trail we found a cooler with soda, pj sandwiches, candy bars and apples provided by Jeff Williams of Catawba. Thank you Jeff! When we reached Route 311, Mike hitched into Catawba to the post office.

While Medicine Man and I were waiting at the Trailhead for him to return, a car pulled up and the driver asked if we were thru hikers and did we pass the cooler today on the Trail? It was Jeff Williams! We must have talked about the Trail for at least an hour. I believe that I have had more than my share of Trail Magic and I hope that others behind me on the Trail get to experience it. There are only three of us at the shelter tonight because Canuck and Old Spice went on to try for a Saturday morning mail drop in Troutville.

**April 15 ~ Lamberts Meadow Shelter** ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 698.7 north, 50 days since start of hike, averaging 14.0 miles per day, 8.2 miles hiked today*

It rained lightly all night and is still drizzling and overcast as we are preparing a hot lunch at the shelter. We (the three of us) have decided that we will stay here tonight rather than hike eight

more miles and set up our tarps close to the interchange and stoves in the rain and wetness. Old Spice and Canuck stayed here last night and reported in the register that there are critters under the shelter at night. Sounds like fun.

**April 16 ~ US 220 Daleville ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 708.1 north, 51 days since start of hike, averaging 13.9 miles per day, 9.4 miles hiked today*

We made a bad decision. The critters under the shelter turned out to be rats! At dusk we could hear gnawing noises and the squeaks of babies from under the floor boards. Then we heard dry leaves rustling as animals were moving about below us. Finally when it was dark they began to stick their heads up through the cracks between the rock wall and the floor. We tried but were unsuccessful at smashing them on the head with our hiking sticks and a broom whenever they emerged. It reminded me of the game on the boardwalk at the Delaware shore with the large rubber hammer and the gophers. We got to play our version for several hours for free. We did see several running and jumping within the shelter and they had a body length of over eight inches and a light belly. We hope to get a good sleep tonight at Econo Lodge.

We just ate to the edge of exploding at a buffet at Western Sizzling and are now doing our laundry. After showers we will re-supply for the next five days. Today we had the first sunny day in five days but rain is predicted for Monday and Tuesday.

**April 17 ~ Bobblets Gap Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 726.6 north, 52 days since start of hike, averaging 14.0 miles per day, 18.5 miles hiked today*

"The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do." Walter Bagehot

We ate breakfast at the Western Sizzlin', waiting out in the rain again.

Last night we heard several waves of thunderstorms passing by and more is forecast for today. Oh well, the hike must go on! I called my wife last night to report on my location. This morning she called me back to tell me that our daughter-in-law was in the hospital and ready to deliver our first grandchild!! I don't have a phone and won't be near one until Friday. The suspense is killing me!! I hope everything is OK (10 fingers, 10 toes)

The sun did come out for several hours this afternoon and I saw Buttercups and flowers of Wild Strawberry plants in a meadow. Also saw Bellwort, Spiderwort and Wild Geranium along the Blue Ridge Parkway. As I walked along the Trail today I flushed a turkey, two grouse and a few deer. I have not seen a bear yet.

It is very foggy at the shelter tonight with a light rain on the roof. A thunderstorm went by about a half-hour ago. Joining the three of us tonight are two south bounders, Bear Charmer, who did the hike in '95 and Penguin, from South Africa. We are all hoping for clear skies tomorrow. A Whip-Poor-Will is singing as I get ready to go to sleep.





### Spring in the Valley

**April 18 ~ Cornelius Creek Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 744.2 north, 53 days since start of hike, averaging 14.0 miles per day, 17.6 miles hiked today*

The sound of the rain on the roof (no leaks) put us all to sleep except when a lightening bolt followed one second later by the crack of thunder woke us all up. The sound vibrated through the valleys and mountains for about 15 - 20 seconds. Sometime during the night the rain stopped but started up again just when I started hiking at 8:00. I lost count of the number of rainy days in a row, but I think it must be six or seven.

I ate lunch today at Bryant Ridge Shelter, which was completed in 1992. It is a tri-level, which easily sleeps 20.

Tonight Medicine Man, AuSable Mike and I are the only hikers using this shelter. Wait, not true! Eric came in right at dusk. We are all happy that he is able to join us again.

**April 19 ~ Matts Creek Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 761.9 north, 54 days since start of hike, averaging 14.1 miles per day, 17.7 miles hiked today*

When we woke up this morning not only was it not raining but the skies were clear! What a great day to take a hike. Some interesting things I passed today were: The Guillotine, a large boulder suspended directly over the trail in a narrow rock cleft, and an FAA air-traffic radar dome at the top of Apple Orchard Mountain (4,225 feet). When I passed by the radar dome it was humming and was surrounded by a foggy low cloud. It looked like a Martian Spaceship.

Walking through Thunder Ridge Wilderness was like walking in a wildflower garden. Pink flowered Trillium and May Apples were common along with purple, yellow and white Violets, white flowered Chickweed, Dwarf Iris and Bellwort.

Some animals that I saw today were several deer, a few Five-lined-Skinks (lizards) and a four-foot long Black Rat Snake that was under the shelter when I arrived. I accidentally hit the shelter with my stick while trying to swat carpenter bees and the snake came scooting out. I also saw five species of Swallowtail butterflies, - Tiger, Zebra, Black, Spicebush, and Pipeline and metallic green Tiger Beetles on sunny pathways. When I arrived at the shelter I found a note that said



AuSable Mike and Medicine Man moved on five more miles to meet Mike's wife in Harper's Ferry by May 1 (233 miles in 11 days). Good luck, guys!

**April 20 ~ Little Irish Creek Campsite ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**  
*at milepoint 780.2 north, 55 days since start of hike, averaging 14.2 miles per day, 18.3 miles hiked today*

Today I crossed the Snowden Bridge over the James River, which is Virginia's largest waterway. It flows from the Allegheny Mountains 450 miles to the Chesapeake Bay. The River was high and brown due to the rainfall this past week (don't I know it!).

I was happy to again find clear skies with sun all day and a steady cool breeze. Eric and I ate lunch at Big Rocky Row, a mountain (3,000 feet) with an excellent view of the James River. Later we summited Bluff Mountain (3,372 feet) where there is a memorial to Ottie Cline Powell. One afternoon in November 1891, Ottie (5 years old) left his school with several other boys to collect wood for the stove. It was a cold day and Ottie did not return. Hundreds of people looked for him for several weeks, but his body was not found until five months later by hunters (3.5 miles from school).



**Ottie Cline Powell Memorial**

This is the second night that we have stayed near a good-sized stream. The sound of the water makes me have to go to the bathroom! I drink about a gallon of water each day.

The last hour on the trail and at our campsite I have noticed a spicy, floral aroma in the air. I am certain it is not me. And I will try to find what it is.

I found it- Russian Olive. Ticks, black flies and mosquitoes are out and hungry!

**April 21 ~ Seely-Woodworth Shelter ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)**  
*at milepoint 800.2 north, 56 days since start of hike, averaging 14.3 miles per day, 20.0 miles hiked today*

The plan was that Duck X-ing (AKA Eric) would wait at U.S. 60, at the picnic area, with the packs

while I would walk to Hamm's to re-supply dinners, snacks, fuel and make a phone call. I asked a family from New York if they knew which way the store was and they said to the west and offered to give me a ride. When we got there the store was closed (Good Friday). They gave me a ride back and also a pasta dinner, two pieces of fruit, salted nuts and animal crackers. Thank you for the Trail Magic!

Later on at Hog Camp Gap we were deciding if we really wanted to hike down 1/2 mile to get water when two women parked nearby asked if we were thru-hikers and were we on the internet. I replied "Yes" and they gave us water. Katie-Can-Do said she was reading my journal on the internet. Thanks for the Trail Magic!

When we got to the shelter a section hiker, Jim Brackens, gave us spaghetti sauce, water, let us use his stove (we were low on gas) and made us coffee. Thanks for the Trail Magic!

Five college students, from UVA (University of Virginia) came in at dusk. All of us packed into the shelter like sardines.

**April 22 ~ Harpers Creek Shelter** ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)

*at milepoint 814.5 north, 57 days since start of hike, averaging 14.3 miles per day, 14.3 miles hiked today*

As we were preparing to leave the shelter the students gave us granola bars and two MREs (Meals Ready to Eat). They were in the ROTC program at the college and had packs supplied by Uncle Sam. I now have enough essential food to make it to Waynesboro. Thank you!

Today the Trail took us to the top of Priest Mountain (4,063 feet) with spectacular views of the valley below, and then a descent of 3,100 feet with 37 switchbacks to the Tye River below. The hike down took an hour and a half. At the road, VA 56, I had to choose between walking 1.4 miles east to get to a phone or 1.1 miles west. I still didn't know the details about my grandchild!

The Thru-hiker's Companion description sounded like east was my best choice, so off I went.

A woman in Jeep picked me up five minutes into my trek. Thanks!

After buying \$15 worth of goods (including B&J's Ice Cream) I asked the lady who was running the store if there was a phone available and explained what I needed it for. She said that she had a phone (I knew that because she was talking on it while playing cards with another lady) but it was for private use only and that there was a public phone another mile down the road.

Off I went again and was picked up by four college students who drove me three miles down the road - no phone - and then back to the trail head.

I ate half the ice cream and started walking in the other direction. A young couple, Gabe and Lisa picked me up. They drove me down the road and back again until we found the other store which was out of business and the pay phone removed from the outside of the building.

So here I sit tonight still not knowing the news from back home. It was very frustrating being three feet away from a phone and not being able to use it. The walk to the shelter was at a slow pace, with a heavy heart.

**April 23 ~ Paul Wolfe Shelter** ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)

*at milepoint 835.9 north, 58 days since start of hike, averaging 14.4 miles per day, 21.4 miles hiked today*

I don't know exactly how many miles I walked today. I had planned to do 19.4 according to the map, data book and trail guide but came upon a trail relocation that was either an extra two or three miles. Nobody seems to know for sure.

The hike up to the top of Three Ridges was a tough start to the day with its moderate to steep trail. It seemed I was either crossing over rockslides or just rocks on the Trail for the rest of the day. My feet are really sore. The only long smooth section was the relocated Trail.

One interesting thing I did see was two snakes in the middle of the trail. They were twisted together like a braided ponytail and one was biting the other on the neck. I watched and photographed them for several minutes until they uncoiled and moved side-by-side up a log. They were both four feet long. I think they were Black Racers.



**Mating Black Racer Snakes**

When I got to the shelter I was surprised to find Cruzin' Canuck there after his visit with his parents.

I was amazed to read in the register that I am a grandfather. Apparently my wife emailed Beetle's mother and she told him to write the news in the shelter register.

(Note from home: Taylor Smith, Beetle's dad is responsible for the note in the register. He joined Beetle on Thursday for a few days of hiking and saw to it that the message was delivered. Thank you! Sue)

Tomorrow I will make phone calls home from town. Also in the shelter along with Duck X-ing, Canuck and me is Freely, a section hiker. The new companion says it was two extra miles on the smooth relocation.

(More notes from home: Thanks to Roger Clifton and the ODATC for the smooth relocation and Paul Wolfe Memorial Shelter, dedicated in '91. sue)

**April 24 ~ Waynesboro VA Comfort Inn** ... in Central Virginia - [map](#)  
at milepoint 840.8 north, 59 days since start of hike, averaging 14.3 miles per day, 4.9 miles hiked today

After the beating that my feet took from the trail yesterday, I was glad to find a mostly level dirt Trail from the shelter to the highway today. Duck X-ing and I hiked out with Freely, the section hiker from Ohio and he gave us a ride in his car to the outfitter and then into town.

In town I was finally able to get to a phone to call my wife about our new grandchild. His name is Andrew Arthur Wolf and is 8 lb. 6 Oz. I can hardly wait to meet him when I leave the trail for a few days on Mother's Day weekend!! Retired, a thru-hiker, and a grandfather all in one year - life is good!

After showers we did our laundry and ate lunch. On our way back to the motel a car salesman came out and asked if we were thru-hikers. When we said "Yes", he offered to give us a ride back to the Trail tomorrow (4 miles). Trail Magic!

I picked up my mail-drop at the PO and sent back my winter sleeping bag, film and journal pages. I bought a small AM-FM radio (3 inches x 1 1/2 inches) at Radio Shack to listen to for weather reports and music before going to bed. I also had new grommets installed on my pack at Graham's Shoe Store, which has a good reputation for helping out hikers. We had really good pizza from the pizza shop across the street from the motel.

Tomorrow after breakfast we will begin our trek through Shenandoah National Park. The forecast is for rain so I guess I had better waterproof my boots tonight. The hike must go on!

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N.Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland

[previous section](#)

April 25 ~ Blackrock Hut ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 861.0 north, 60 days since start of hike, averaging 14.3 miles per day, 20.2 miles hiked today

After we ate our continental breakfast (cereal, juice, muffins and coffee) we called Dave Berry, the used car salesman. He picked us up at our motel and delivered us back to the trailhead, saving us a 3.8 mile walk uphill from town.

Even though I walked 20 miles yesterday my body is not sore and my feet are not burning on the bottoms. The Trail today was almost all dirt with very few rocky places, and up hills and down hills were less than 1,000 with switchbacks.

It rained almost all day, not pouring rain, but enough to warrant a raincoat and rain cover on my pack. I listened to my new radio for several hours to help pass the time. NPR came in clearly on the ridge and the 3 B's (Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms) certainly helped smooth out the miles. Speaking of miles, tomorrow looks like another 20.

April 26 ~ Hightop Hut ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 882.3 north, 61 days since start of hike, averaging 14.5 miles per day, 21.3 miles hiked today

I got an early start this morning (8:00) on what turned out to be another cool overcast day with threats of rain. The Trail was mostly dirt, which made it easy on the feet and also allowed me to look around without always worrying about tripping over rocks. The only problem was that for most of the day when on the ridge top I was walking in the clouds and there wasn't much to see. I was glad to have my radio to listen to. Before my hike I never thought I would own a tarp or a trail radio. It's funny how attitudes can change.

Nine miles into the hike we decided to blue blaze down to Loft Mountain Restaurant on the Skyline Drive, a distance of about 1/4 mile and 400 feet down. When we got there it was closed and the candy machine ate my \$.50. At least the pay phone worked.

There were more ups and downs than yesterday so we arrived at the shelter after 6:15 P.M. Two section hikers, going south, were already there when we came in so there will be four of us tonight.

I saw about 8 semi-tame deer today at close range. There is no hunting allowed in the park and they are accustomed to humans feeding them. I don't expect to see any mice in the shelter tonight because AuSable Mike killed 28 of them in his two traps the night before. He left them in a pile in front of the shelter and a woman south bounder buried each one of them under rocks!

April 27 ~ Rock Spring Hut ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 906.2 north, ,62 days since start of hike, averaging 14.6 miles per day, 23.9 miles hiked today

Started hiking today at 7:45 under clearing skies. It was nice to hike on a sunny day again. I noticed walking along the Trail that the wildflowers seem to be about 2 weeks behind those I had seen farther south. Could I be walking faster than the speed of spring or is there some geographic or climatic reason for my observation?

I know why people cruise through Shenandoah National Park. The Trail is mostly dirt and the ascents and descents have switchbacks. When we got near Big Meadows we stopped at the Wayside and had sandwiches, fries, a beer, pie a la mode and coffee. It was tough walking 4 more miles to the shelter with a full belly. I arrived at 7:30.

Bob Jewett, a section hiker, was already at the shelter and asked if I was Lobo. He said that he had been reading my journal and has enjoyed it. Oh no! Tonight I will have to write the truth about what happens!

I have been on the Trail for two months and have not once thought about quitting and going home. Bob is good with figures (he works with the census bureau) and determined my daily average at 15 miles! Not bad for a 53 year old grandfather carrying a 40 pound external frame pack! It is not the physique or the equipment that gets one to Mount Katahdin, but what is in one's heart and mind.

As I sit here in the shelter in the dark I can look down into the valley and see the lights of the town, Stanley. The tree branches are blowing in the wind and it looks like the lights are blinking on and off.

April 28 ~ Pass Mountain Hut ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 921.3 north, ,63 days since start of hike, averaging 14.6 miles per day, 15.1 miles hiked today

The day started off clear and sunny but ended being another walk in the clouds. Besides cutting down on visibility, walking in a cloud is uncomfortable because it is cold and wet.

Tomorrow the weatherman is calling for overcast skies and afternoon storms. I hope when I am out of the park there will be better weather.

My feet are sore from walking on 15 miles of rocks. I guess after two days of walking on dirt I was bound to find rocks sooner or later.

I saw my first bear today within sight of the Panorama Restaurant. It was about 25 yards off the Trail and when it saw me it ran off in the opposite direction, knocking down any small saplings in its way. This is the backpacker's favorite view of a bear – its black, hairy butt moving away at full speed! At the shelter tonight are Duck X-ing, Thumper a section hiker, and me.

April 29 ~ Tom Floyd Wayside Shelter ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 944.8 north, 64 days since start of hike, averaging 14.8 miles per day, 23.5 miles hiked today

Tonight I'm in a shelter just outside the park boundaries with Duck X-ing and Old Smoky, a section hiker moving south.



Old Smoky & Duck X-ing at Tom Floyd Wayside Shelter

I hiked the 104 miles in five days and saw dozens of deer, one bear, several turkeys, grouse, rabbits and chipmunks, but not as many wildflowers as I expected to see. Overall the Trail through the park was dirt with only one day of rocks. If someone wanted to do a one week section of the Trail, this would be the place to go.

I can look from the shelter down into the valley and see the lights of Front Royal.

April 30 ~ Dick's Dome Shelter ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 962.8 north, 65 days since start of hike, averaging 14.8 miles per day, 18.0 miles hiked today

The shelter where I spent last night was one of the best shelters of the trip to date because it had a skylight, a small deck with built-in benches, and a good view of the valley below. It would have been easy to spend a zero at the shelter, in fact Old Smoky was planning on doing just that. Eight miles north was an even nicer shelter with a huge deck, wooden porch furniture, a solar shower, a pavilion, and a picnic table near a large fire place, but we still had 10 miles to go. We spent ½ hour there for a lunch break. In a stream near route VA 55 we found a dozen grape sodas and we each had one. Thanks for the Trail Magic!

The next shelter had a beer in the spring! Yes!

After the Manassas Shelter we walked several miles of the Trail through the most massive display of wildflowers that I have ever seen. The ground on both sides of the Trail, as far as one could see, was carpeted with large flowered Trillium with white and pinkish blossoms. Interspersed were purple and yellow Violets, lavender Wild Geraniums. Jack-in-the-Pulpits, white flowered Rue Anemone, Mountain Chickweed and May Apples. About two dozen nature lovers were also enjoying the beauty of this great spring day, 70 degrees and full sun!

When I arrived at the shelter, I met a section hiker who was out collecting mushrooms and had found over a dozen morels. When I told him that I knew that books had described them as edible and choice and had eaten them before, he gave me two of them for dinner. Duck X-ing and I added them to our Lipton noodles and found them to have a nutty flavor. The morel is one of the four safe mushrooms that cannot be confused with poisonous species (I hope).

May 1 ~ Bears Den Hostel ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 981.7 north, ,66 days since start of hike, averaging 14.9 miles per day, 18.9 miles hiked today

There were two parts of the hike today. The first section from the shelter to Rod Hollow Shelter was a dirt Trail through grassy areas under a leafy canopy. This was the second day we've been hiking in full spring vegetation.

From Rod Hollow north the Trail is known as the roller coaster because of the eight ups and downs over ten miles. Besides the changes in elevation, the Trail was so rocky you had to watch your balance and step.

This hostel was built in the 30's by a wealthy Washington gentleman as a country retreat and is now owned and run by the ATC.

Along with Duck X-ing, Crruzin' Canuck, and Take-a-Break, I am joined by four section hikers.

Tomorrow we will head to Harpers Ferry and will have a home stay a Nina DiPintos, a friend of Duck X-ings.

May 2 ~ Harpers Ferry ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 1002.0 north, ,67 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 20.3 miles hiked today

The man could snore! About five minutes after section hiker Lone Eagle close his eyes, he started with some short snorts that went up the musical scale and were capped off with an extremely loud snork that woke him up and the seven other guys in the men's bunkhouse. He went back to sleep and began growling like a bear and snarling like Cujo. The noises that he was making made me laugh to myself, but after an hour of this, I realized that if I was to get any sleep that night, I would have to go somewhere else. I went out to the living room to find that Duck X-ing and a section hiker had already taken the choice long sofas, leaving me a shorter version near the piano. (You can tune a piano but you can't tuna fish!)

I did get enough sleep last night so I was able to do the 20 miles here to town in time to get ice cream at a shop that closes at 5:00. The Trail was fairly easy. We are now waiting outside the outfitters for our ride to Duck X-ing's friend's house.

Many folks ask me about the meaning of the logo, LIVE, on my hat. LIVE is a rock band whose four members were students of mine while I was a high school biology teacher. Two of them were also members of the ski club, which I assisted. On one ski trip, when the two were seniors, they asked my advice while we were riding the lift. What should we do – go to college or try to become rock stars?" I knew that the chances of any band becoming famous was very slim, so I told them to go to college first, and then become rock stars. They didn't take my advice and decided to struggle with part-time jobs and give the rock star life a few years. Today they have toured several countries, have an international following, produced four CD's and are millionaires! I wear the hat to remind me that the odds are also against me (only about 15% finish the hike) and to continue to endure the difficult times that lie ahead.

May 3 ~ Rocky Run Shelter ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 1017.4 north,,68 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 15.4 miles hiked today

Jim and Nina took the three of us to a Pizzeria Uno last night and treated us to all the pizza we could eat, then took us home and let us sleep on a soft carpeted floor in their basement. It was the best night's sleep I've had for quite awhile. In the morning Nina drove us to a Food Lion and then back to Harper's Ferry to the Post Office for our mail drops. We also went to the Appalachian Trail Conference Headquarters to register and have our photos taken. I was the 19th north-bounder for this year. Thank you Jim and Nina for your hospitality!

We made a final stop at the outfitters and then left town shortly after noon. A footbridge crossed the Potomac River and followed the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal towpath for about three miles. I could hear several Baltimore Orioles in the trees near the River and at one spot I counted 34 Painted Turtles basking on logs in the sunlight in the Canal. They ranged in size from adults that were larger than a dinner plate down to 2 inch long yearlings.



Byron Memorial Footbridge across the Potomac River

Farther along the Trail I caught up to and met Annie (Marmout) and Louie (El Wolf), two other journalists on Trailplace, from Quebec. Tomorrow I will probably be hiking with them because I have to slow down in order to arrive in Duncannon on the 11th. Duck X-ing and Canuck will be moving at a faster pace and doing more mileage.

May 4 ~ Ensign Cowell Shelter ... in N. Virginia-W.Va.-Maryland - [map](#)
at milepoint 1033.3 north,,69 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 15.9 miles hiked today

I hiked alone today at a slow pace because I knew that only had to cover 15 miles. The only really interesting feature of the journey was passing the first Monument ever erected to George Washington in 1827. It was restored by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) in 1934.

The Trail was fairly easy today except for an extremely rocky section that ran for a mile along the crest of South Mountain. The shelter that we (Annie, Louie, and I) are staying in tonight is only one year old, and is large with lots of light coming in from a window at each end.

Tomorrow I will enter good old Pennsylvania.


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## **Pennsylvania**

[previous section](#)

### **May 5 ~ Tumbling Run Shelters ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1050.9 north, 70 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 17.6 miles hiked today*

Annie and Louie got up early this morning (6:00) to get to Penn Mar so that Annie could get a ride to Harrisburg to get a train to New York and then to Montreal. Her grandmother is gravely ill and Annie is worried about her.

One last bit of Trail Magic from Fanny-Pack, a cooler with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, tootsie rolls, cookies and about two dozen grape sodas in the cool mountain stream. How can we ever thank you enough?

Today I entered PA and traveled on part of the Trail that I had already covered last fall. I caught up with AuSable Mike, Medicine Man, Mike's wife Debbie, Cuzin' Canuk and El Wolf. All will stay in the Shelter tonight.

### **May 6 ~ Quarry Gap Shelters ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1068.2 north, 71 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 17.3 miles hiked today*

I was still hiking familiar territory today. I covered Pen Mar to Pine Grove Furnace in the fall. Canuck and El Wolf forged ahead to try to join the half-gallon club at Pine Grove while Mike, Keith, Debbie and I hiked into South Mountain PA for their mail drop.

While we ate breakfast Debbie announced that the blisters on her feet were so bad, and the sun so hot that she was ready to take a Greyhound back home. She and Mike got a ride to Fayetteville where they made connections to get her home.

There are twin shelters here tonight with a covered breezeway in between and a picnic table underneath. Mike, Keith and I are in one shelter and Take-A-Break, Swami and a section hiker are in the other. A small, clear mountain stream runs 30 feet in front of the shelters. A Whip-Poor-Will is calling very loudly outside the shelter and will have to be chased if we are to get any sleep.

### **May 7 ~ Pine Grove Furnace State Park ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1080.5 north, 72 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 12.3 miles hiked today*

Many miles were spent today on my favorite type of trail - old country dirt roads with little change in elevation. I was glad to see so many campers and hikers using the AT this weekend. There are sunny skies and warm weather. There were three groups of scouts, several section hikers, and two Trailplace fans. It took seven hours to hike the 17 miles from the last shelter to where we are staying, the Iron Masters Mansion AYH. The 1827 mansion was once used as a stop on the Underground Railroad and now offers bunk space, shower, laundry and kitchen privileges. Directly next door is the general store where one goes to join the half-gallon club by eating a half-gallon of ice cream to mark the halfway point of your thru-hike. My half-gallon was mint chocolate chip. I was awarded a wooden ice cream spoon stamped with "member of half gallon club" when I completed the task.

Tomorrow we will pass the remains of an iron furnace that produced firearms used in the Revolutionary War and stopped operating on the 1800's. We will also pass the wooden sign that marks the midpoint of the Trail. Staying with me tonight are, AuSable Mile, Medicine Man, Take a Break, and Swamie. Tomorrow we head on to Boiling Springs.



### Iron Masters Mansion Hostel

**May 8 ~ Boiling Springs ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**  
*at milepoint 1099.3 north, 73 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 18.8 miles hiked today*

The first section of today's hike was again an old dirt road through the woods but this time with annoying black flies. Millions of other folks were busy at work today while I was in the forest swatting flies. I'll take the latter for 2 1/2 more months! The second section involved rock scrambling and climbing over house sized boulders using hands and feet to push and pull your self up. This was an area where you had to be careful not to sprain or break something.

The last two miles involved walking through farmland to avoid the old infamous 16-mile road walk. While walking on the Trail through a field of winter wheat, I noticed two day hikers approaching from the opposite direction. The man kept his hat down over his face and started a bit of conversation. Then he turned and I saw his tee shirt. It had "York High" printed on it. I was surprised to see the man's face! I realized it was my former principal, Bob Zarfoss (retired 7 years) and his wife Pat (also retired from teaching)! He has been emailing my wife about my location and decided to try for a rendezvous.

After a short walk into town they treated Medicine Man, AuSable Mike and me to stromboli at a local Italian restaurant. Thank you very much for the Trail Magic! It was a nice surprise to find that a former boss is interested in reading about my hike on the internet.

Tonight Mike, Medicine Man and I are staying at the Garmanhaus Bed and Breakfast located facing the lake at Boiling Springs. There are also three section hikers staying here.

Tomorrow I expect to walk 15 miles to the next shelter along hedgerows and farmland under a summer like 90 degree sun. It's going to be a hot one.

**May 9 ~ Darlington Shelter ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**  
*at milepoint 1114.2 north, 74 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 14.9 miles hiked today*

When we got up in the morning (5:30 at the Garmanhaus) and walked out into the dinning room we were surprised to find the table already set for breakfast with cloth napkins, real china, silver forks, knives and spoons and wine glasses for our orange juice. There was a pot of coffee brewing to go along with cereal and whole milk, muffins, bananas, OJ, and cut strawberries and

cantaloupe with cream to pour on them. This is not your typical thru-hiker breakfast!

While eating I was looking out the window and recognized the truck of my fishing buddy (also a retired teacher), David Kilgore drive by. He was alerted by my wife of my location and decided to stop by with his two daughters since he lives nearby. Thanks for stopping by!

When we were leaving Mike, one of the section hikers gave me a good cigar, which I am smoking as I write this entry. Thank you.

The Trail today continued through wood lots, hedgerows, and farmlands for about ten miles before climbing Blue Mountain where this shelter is located. At one break I picked six ticks off my legs.

When we arrived at US 11/ Carlisle, we yellow blazed .3 of a mile to a diner for something to eat and plenty of ice water and ice tea. Hiking in hot humid weather required plenty of fluids.

Medicine Man and AuSable Mike will be moving on to the next shelter (7 miles) and will begin to do long days. They want to get as far north before leaving the trail during July and August to go back to Michigan and work the busy season at Mike's canoe livery. They will finish their hike in September. I have enjoyed their company over the last few months and will miss them. Happy trails to you!

At the shelter with me tonight are Take-A- Break and the Honeymooners, a pair of section hikers.

**May 10 ~ Duncannon** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1125.6 north, 75 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 11.4 miles hiked today*

I woke up at first light to the sound of several Wood Thrushes singing nearby with sun on my face and was confused, for a moment, as to why I was sleeping on top of a picnic table. One of the hazards of sleeping in shelters, besides leaking roofs, mice and rats, is snoring humans. Last night I found myself between two of them and my choice was either listen to the stereo or leave. This was not the first time I woke up on a table and I am sure it won't be the last.

On my way to town I stopped at an overlook called Hawk Rock that has a nice view of the town of Duncannon and the Susquehanna River. I was not able to linger there because of the darkening skies and nearby thunder.

I took shelter from the storm in town at the 100 year old Doyle Hotel. It is under new ownership and the kitchen and bar area has been completely renovated. Plans are being made to clean up and paint the rooms on the upper floors which will make it more attractive to hikers and other guests.

While I was eating my large club sandwich with a cool brew, the sky became black, the winds picked up, and it started to hail! What a nice way to watch a storm.

At 5:00 I had a happy reunion with my wife who drove one hour after school to pick me up. I will be leaving the Trail for several days and will spend time visiting our baby grandson, Andrew, his parents, and daughter Sarah, who is driving in from Michigan. I also will go through my mail and plan for the second half of my journey.

**May 11 ~ Duncannon (Lancaster)** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1125.0 north, 76 days since start of hike, averaging 14.8 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today*

Several folks wanted to know why I switched from a tent to a tarp and how it is working out. The tarp I am using is 8 x 10 and is made from silicon impregnated parachute cloth with five grommets on each edge. The tarp weighs 13 ounces compared to my four pound tent. I have

used it both in rainy and windy conditions and my pack and I remained dry. The only possible problem I foresee is that I won't be able to keep out bugs like I would in a tent. I also carry a plastic ground cloth that fits inside the tarp.

**May 12 ~ Duncannon (Lancaster)** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1125.6 north, 77 days since start of hike, averaging 14.6 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today*

Today I went back to visit my little buddies at Seiler Elementary School. I took my tarp, small radio, and explained how the elevation profile works on my maps. They had a lot of good questions to ask. I enjoyed the visit and might stop by to see them again next fall, after I finish my hike.

**May 13 ~ Duncannon (Lancaster)** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1125.6 north, 78 days since start of hike, averaging 14.4 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today*

Mother's Day, a day early.

**May 14 ~ Clark's Ferry Shelter** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1130.1 north, 79 days since start of hike, averaging 14.3 miles per day, 4.5 miles hiked today*

This afternoon my wife delivered me back to the Doyle Hotel after a four day stay at home in Lancaster. We walked together through the town of Duncannon following the Trail along High Street and across the bridges over the Juniata and Susquehanna Rivers where we said our good-byes. I was very sad as I waved back to her as I climbed the switchback up the side of Peter's Mountain, knowing that I wouldn't see her again until August. Part of me wanted to turn around and go back home and another part wanted to continue to follow the white blazes northward. The white blazes won out, I am at the shelter smoking a cigar while an almost full moon rises in the east and a Great Horned Owl hoots in the distance.

I am very happy to have been able to spend the four days at home with my friends and family and will now try to refocus my energy and mind on the difficult path I have chosen - on to Maine and Mount Katahdin!

Tonight I am alone at the shelter and I can hear the trains and automobiles from nearby Duncannon. I can also hear several small night creatures moving around in the dry leaves close by the shelter.

**May 15 ~ Rausch Gap Shelter** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1154.4 north, 80 days since start of hike, averaging 14.4 miles per day, 24.3 miles hiked today*

Today I walked along the ridge line of Peter's Mountain for about 13 miles on a Trails that was for the most part level and dirt covered. Occasionally the Trail would go up a rocky out crop where you could get a good view of the valley. There was a warning in the trail guide to watch out for rattlesnakes! I think it was too cool for snakes when I passed by in the morning (60 degrees). I then had an 800 foot drop down to Clarks Creek using switchbacks and a 1000 foot climb up to the top of Sharp Mountain on an old rocky woods road. It seems as though the entire 11 miles on Sharp Mountain Ridge Road were rocky.

I did see a 5 foot long Black Rat Snake lying across the Trail which I photographed and then touched with my hiking stick. It coiled into a striking position and I took another photo and then tried to make it move from the Trail. It refused to move - I hope someone doesn't kill it.

When I arrived at the shelter a southbound section hiker from Canada, Two Speeds, was already



cooking his dinner. As we talked someone rode up on a mountain bike and called out to me, "Here's the takeout you ordered!" It was my fraternity brother, Kent Stapleton. He brought two subs and four beers which Two Speeds and I ate while Kent and I reminisced about the good old days. Thanks for the Trail Magic, Kent!

When it was dusk Kent peddled the four miles back to his car over a flat road. After 24 miles and two beers, I was asleep within seconds after closing my eyes at 9:00.



**Rausch Gap Shelter**

**May 16 ~ 501 Shelter** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1171.8 north, 81 days since start of hike, averaging 14.5 miles per day, 17.4 miles hiked today*

A loud gnawing sound woke me up at around 3 A.M. I switched on my light in the direction of the noise and surprised a large Wood Rat about one foot away from my face, chewing on the web strap of my hiking pole. It ran out of the shelter and never came back.

Much of the Trail today was on the rocky ridge top and I was on constant alert for rattlesnakes and copperheads out sunning themselves but I didn't see any. The last four miles today were on old dirt and grass covered roads that were pleasing to my feet.

The 501 shelter is fully enclosed with a sky light and offers bunk space for 12, a solar shower and a portable toilet. The year round caretaker lives in a house about 50 yards away and sells sodas and Klondike Bars for \$.50. I am here alone and it feels strange for one person to be using such a large shelter.

I used the extra time I had to plan the next several days to get to my mail drop at the Delaware Water Gap and also read a paperback. Tomorrow is another long hike (23 miles) into Port Clinton. I hope that there aren't any rats or mice to wake me up tonight.

Tasty Beverage came in at 8:00. He lives in Lancaster, is a recent graduate of Millersville University and wants to be a teacher. He is also a LIVE fan.

**May 17 ~ Port Clinton ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1195.5 north, 82 days since start of hike, averaging 14.6 miles per day, 23.7 miles hiked today*

If you were to look at the elevation profile for the section I hiked today, you would believe that I had an easy day walking, with little change in elevation. What the profile doesn't show are all the rocks that you have to dodge and hop over - just what Pennsylvania is famous for. By the end of the day my feet were throbbing. The last mile was a 1,000 foot drop down a very steep slope that was covered with slippery leaves. I was amazed at how far back I had to lean to avoid being pulled down faster than I wanted to go.

When I got to Port Clinton I went to the Hotel where I ordered a meatball sandwich, a beer and called Duck X-ing. He lives about 20 minutes away in Kutztown and offered me a home stay and ride back to the trail tomorrow. I will slack pack from Port Clinton to Eckville, stay at the shelter then skip further north on Friday to catch up with friends. We will finish the skipped section later in August.

**May 18 ~ Eckville Shelter ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1210.7 north, 83 days since start of hike, averaging 14.6 miles per day, 15.2 miles hiked today*

Duck X-ing delivered me back to the spot where I left the Trail yesterday but with only a daypack instead of my backpack. I was glad to find the ascent back to the top of the ridge was very gradual compared to the descent yesterday.

At the first shelter, which was Windsor Furnace, I met Dr. Chaos and Mare again. While talking with them, Tasty Beverage came in. Tasty Beverage and I hiked on and enjoyed the view from Pulpit Rock. When we arrived at the Pinnacle we found Shaman and Shakedown with two of their section hiking friends.

Most of the Trail today was on recently graded roads with little change in elevation for several miles at a time. It was probably the longest section of easy woodland hiking that I have had the entire trip. I saw plenty of wildlife today - a Red-Eft Salamander, a male Scarlet Tanager with a damaged wing, a female brown-eyed Box Turtle, strings of toad eggs in a roadside puddle, a Garter Snake and the tail end of a bear (bear #2) about a mile from the shelter.

The shelter tonight is completely enclosed, sleeps six and has electricity!

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New Jersey-New York

[previous section](#)

May 19 ~ Camp Road Mohican Outdoor Center ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1282.3 north, 84 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 10.3 miles hiked today

Duck X-ing picked me up in his car at 7:30 at the shelter, drove me to his parents where we changed vehicles, drove to town for breakfast and supplies, then drove to Delaware Water Gap. We each have backpacked Eckville to the Delaware Water Gap before, but will do it again, on the way back from Katahdin so that we can be called "thru-hikers".

We crossed a long bridge over the Delaware River and entered Washington State Forest, which was a welcome relief from the heavy, speeding traffic on the bridge. Farther on we passed Sunfish Pond, the southernmost glacial pond on the AT. Unfortunately it was so misty and cloudy

that we were unable to see from one side of the Pond to the other.

It was a slow go today because the lichen-covered rocks were as slippery as if they were covered with oil in some spots.

The Mohican Outdoor center is run by the Appalachian Mountain Club and thru-hikers can stay overnight in a cabin with a bunk, shower, and towel for \$7. Our cabin has a wood stove, a kitchen area with a microwave, stove, sink and refrigerator.

In this room tonight are Take-A-Break, Duck X-ing, Southern Comfort and Old Spice.

May 20 ~ Gren Anderson Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)
at milepoint 1303.3 north, 85 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 21.0 miles hiked today

Never a dull moment! At 2:30 in the morning all the folks in my cabin, cabin #2, were suddenly awake after one guy started yelling obscenities at the top of his lungs while having a nightmare. I wanted to ask him what his dream was about to cause such an outburst, but he was bigger and younger than I, so I went back to sleep.

It was another foggy, rainy day today with few chances to see overlooks and a constant watch for slippery rocks. I was glad to see so many people in the woods today. At both shelters there were groups of Boy Scouts camping nearby, also saw a man walking two large dogs, two women enjoying a foggy view from a mountain top, and two Trailplace readers who have been following my journal.

When we reached US 206, Duck X-ing and I left the Trail and stopped at Gyp's Tavern for cheeseburgers, onion rings, and beers. On the way back to the Trail we stopped for jelly donuts.

At the shelter tonight are Duck X-ing, Old Spice, Southern Comfort, Take-A-Break and Lone Star, a 74 year old hiker from Texas.



Lone Star, Old Spice, & Lobo at Gren Anderson Shelter

At dusk a Park Ranger and his assistant brought in six large coffees from the nearby road. They

had stopped by the shelter earlier in the day after three of our group members arrived here, cold and wet, and told them three more would be coming in later. Thank you for the Trail Magic!

May 21 ~ High Point Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1316.3 north, 86 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 13.0 miles hiked

We got a late start today because it was raining and we only had a short distance to go. On the way we passed 40 high school students in 5 groups that were on a five-day hike to the Delaware Water Gap. I hope that they were able to keep warm in this nasty weather we have had the past few days.

At the High Point State Park Office I used the pay phone to call home to re-route my next mail drop at Kent CN. Our advance plans put us there next Sunday or Monday, Memorial Day, when the post office is closed so I had it sent to an outfitter in town. We all hate to race to town to pick up a mail drop before the Post Office closes on Saturday afternoon.

We (Duck X-ing, Old Spice, Southern Comfort and Lone Star) are relaxing in the shelter, in our sleeping bags and cooking hot meals at 4:00 while rain is dripping off the roof. We are glad to be warm and dry. Take-A-Break went on to the next shelter. Two young thru-hikers from Connecticut, Yogi and Skywalker came into the shelter at 8:00. They began their hike on Feb.28.

May 22 ~ Vernon NJ (Appalachian Motel) ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1336.0 north, 87 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 19.7 miles hiked

Woke up in the middle of the night after something knocked my pocket-knife off my cooking pot. When I aimed my flashlight in that direction, I saw three mice licking peanut butter from between the cracks separating the blades with their tiny pink tongues. I let them finish because they do a much better job than I can do with a small twig.

The Trail today went through a variety of environments - wood lots, winter wheat fields, the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge, a two mile road walk, and along puncheons over swampy areas. A puncheon is a boardwalk made of two 2"x 6" boards nailed to short sections of telephone poles. Today they were dark from being covered with algae and were extremely slippery. At one section I slid out of control and landed with my knees on the boards and my hands and arms on either side in the swamp! I was almost head-first into the muck.

I have fallen a total of five times to date, most of the time getting scrapes and brush burns on my knees and ankles. One time I fell backwards onto my pack and was stuck like a turtle on my back unable to get up. I'm glad no one had a camera ready!

When we arrived at NJ 94 we stopped at Heaven Hill Farm for soda, pastries and ice cream. Old Spice called the motel and arranged for a ride for the three of us, himself, Southern Comfort and me. Duck X-ing, Yogi and Skywalker will move on to the next shelter. Lone Star got off at an earlier road crossing.

After showers we hitched to the nearest laundromat, we had no idea where it was. Our ride left us there, three miles from the motel. We ate dinner at a nearby deli while our laundry was in the washer, returned and threw it in the drier, packed everything up and then tried to hitch a ride back to the motel in the rain.

After 15 unsuccessful minutes, Old spice went back to use the phone and got us a ride from someone working there. Thanks for the ride!

We washed our bodies and our clothes, filled our bellies, have a warm, dry place to sleep- and will be ready to hike tomorrow.

May 23 ~ Wildcat Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1353.4 north, 88 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 17.4 miles hiked

We hitched the 1.5 miles back to the Trail and then had a steep 900 foot climb up Wawayana Mountain. What a way to start the day!

The last two days I have been having trouble with a swollen tendon on my right tibialis anterior (shin). At the end of the day it is swollen and tender. I have been putting a bag of cold water on it and keeping it elevated when I reach the shelter. I will continue to hike because it hurts only half the time...whenever I use my right leg.

We had some tough climbs over huge boulders that were very slippery with wet lichens. I'm glad that I knew how to ski and maintain my balance. My rock climbing experience was also useful.

Two miles from the shelter we crossed a road and hitched down to the general store/post office where Old Spice had a mail drop and I had a Boar's Head ham sandwich, a soda, and two cups of coffee. Fred, a retired gentleman with whom we talked for an hour, agreed to give us a ride to the Trail in the back of his pickup truck. Thanks!

At the shelter with me are Old Spice, Southern Comfort and Lone Star (he hiked 19 miles today!). I saw over two dozen Red Eft Salamanders today (orange with red spots).

May 24 ~ William Brien Memorial Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1373.0 north, 89 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 19.6 miles hiked today

The Trail was very difficult today with plenty of ups and downs over rocky terrain. At one point we were doing more rock climbing than backpacking.

At our lunch break the sun came out and to celebrate the occasion we took a 1/2 hour nap, lying on a rocky ridge.

We also passed through the Lemon Squeezer today. It is a narrow passage between two huge slabs of rock that runs for about 30 feet. It was so narrow that I had to take my pack off and slide it though sideways.

When we were five miles from the shelter, the clouds started to build, we picked up our pace because we heard on the radio that thunderstorms were forecast. One mile from the shelter the sky was very, very dark, the wind picked up and large drops began to fall. We stopped and covered our packs with our pack covers, and raced to the shelter. The storm passed by us and by the time we reached the shelter the sun was out with blue skies.

After dinner Old Spice and Southern Comfort laid down on their bunks and were asleep by 7:30. Tomorrow we will be hiking a shorter distance.

May 25 ~ Old West Road, Graymoor Friary ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1388.4 north, 90 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 15.4 miles hiked today

Today we had lots of ups and downs again but not as much rock climbing. On the summit of Bear Mountain there was a beautiful stone tower that we wanted to climb but it was closed for the day. For lunch we stopped at the classy Bear Mountain Inn and had sandwiches, fries and beers. I am trying to gain weight.

The Trail then passed through a zoo, which contained many native species, including Black Bears. There was no charge for thru-hikers. We then crossed over the Hudson River by way of the Bear Mountain Bridge. Those who fear heights would have trouble with this section.



Hudson River view from Bear Mountain Bridge

Tonight we are staying at a ball field shelter at the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center. The Franciscan Friars at Graymoor have worked for nearly a century in the spirit of Saint Francis, taking vows of poverty and serving others in need. The shelter has water and a privy.

At the Shelter with me are Old Spice, Southern Comfort, Duck X-ing, and Bert the Bavarian. Bert started in Troutville, is going north, and will flip flop after reaching Katahdin. He gave Duck X-ing and I a ride to the Blueberry Patch back in Georgia on March 3rd. Burt has been trying to prevent losing body weight by drinking olive oil straight from the bottle! Yuck!!



Lobo, Old Spice, & Duck X-ing at Graymoor Friary ball field shelter

May 26 ~ RPH Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1407.2 north, 91 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 18.8 miles hiked today

The Trail was fairly easy today with no rock climbing and not as many ups and downs. We had great weather, temperatures in the 60's, sunny and a nice breeze all day long to keep the bugs off. I saw two snakes today, one Ribbon Snake, which resembles a Garter Snake and one Black Racer.

When I was about three miles from the shelter I heard voices behind me, I turned around and was amazed to see Canuck and El Wolf. Yesterday they took a zero day, traveled by train into New York City and spent 14 hours there. I had thought they were a day or two ahead of me.

The shelter is a former cabin that has one end open and a front porch. Water that is stained orange from iron is available from a hand pump. There are four thru-hikers in the shelter and three section hikers camping on the grass. Canuck and El Wolf moved on to the next shelter.

May 27 ~ Telephone Pioneers Shelter ... in New Jersey-New York - [map](#)

at milepoint 1424.0 north, 92 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 16.8 miles hiked today

I got an early start today because Southern Comfort got cold at 5:00, got up and started cooking. Duck X-ing was still in his sleeping bag after the three of us left. We were in a hurry to get to the Elite Dog hot dog stand on NY 55, a 12 mile hike.

We arrived at the stand at 11:30 and spent two hours there. We ate until we couldn't move. I had four sodas, a foot long kielbasa sandwich covered with mustard sauce and sauerkraut, a hot dog with sauerkraut, a large order of fries and an ice cream sandwich.



Elite Hot Dog Stand on NY 55

After a short nap in the nearby grass we continued on to the next shelter, a distance of five miles. On the way to the shelter I saw a beaver hauling vegetation on the surface of the pond toward its lodge. I also heard about half a dozen Gray Tree Frogs singing in a swampy area.

At the shelter with the four of us tonight are Leonard, David and Mark, section hikers moving north from Pittsburgh, PA. Two rock climbers, Hugh and Halsey took Southern Comfort and Duck

X-ing into town in their car to get some beer. They brought back 2 twelve packs which we drank while sitting around a blazing fire. Thanks for the beer Mark.

Connecticut-Massachusetts

[previous section](#)

May 28 ~ Mt. Algo Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1445.7 north, 93 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 21.4 miles hiked today

The first 13 miles of today's hike were fairly easy through open woodlands on a dirt Trail, over boardwalks in swampy areas, and through winter wheat fields where I flushed a Bob-O-Link.

The remainder of the trip, which started at 5:00 pm, consisted of mainly of steep climbs up and down hills on a mostly dirt covered Trail. I saw two pink Lady's- Slipper Orchids in bloom on this section.

The four of us have the shelter, which is located near a tumbling stream, to ourselves tonight. Tomorrow we have a .7 mile hike into the town of Kent. We are all very tired.

May 29 ~ Stewart Holow Brook Lean -to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1452.7 north, 94 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 7.3 miles hiked today

Got up at 7:00 this morning. We took a late start because we knew that we only had a .7 to the road and .8 into town. We had a LARGE breakfast at The Villager and were treated to a wonderful Memorial Day parade! The local Kent school band, veterans, costumed early 1900's fireman pulling a fire hose on wheels, boy and girl scouts, and a 1920's fire truck as well as modern fire trucks all made a nice appearance in the parade. You could see the pride beaming in the faces of the large crowd lining the parade route. I was really glad to be in town for this event rather than in the woods.

After visiting the outfitter, laundromat, grocery store and a late lunch at the pizza shop we finally hit the road back to the AT. At the trailhead we ran into some trail magic provided by Mardi Gras, a thru-hiker from '99. The fruit, brownies, cookies and beverages really hit the spot! Thank you!

We had an easy ascent to the top of the ridge and then a strenuous 500 foot drop through steep granite cliffs. The final two miles of the day followed an old dirt road through the woods along the Housatonic River. We are tenting and tarping tonight near the shelter because there are three weekend hikers already there. My right shin doesn't hurt any more.

May 30 ~ Belter Campsite ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1467.9 north, 95 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 15.2 miles hiked today

I woke up at 5:30 to the sound of geese honking as they flew along the Housatonic River. After a lazy breakfast we started our hike by continuing along the old dirt road near the river. In open areas there were Buttercups and Purple Clover and in the woodlands the air was scented by white, violet and purple flowers of Dame's Rocket.

After leaving the river the Trail offered us a series of bumps for 12 miles, only three of them were 500 footers. We had a view from Hang Glider Point where you can see a piece of Lime Rock Park, where Paul Newman and other celebrities have sped their cars around a classic 1.53 mile race course.

May 31 ~ Brassie Brook Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)

at milepoint 1483.7 north, 96 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 15.8 miles hiked today

It was another perfect day for hiking here in New England. We had blue skies with temperatures in the 60's and low 70's with a cool breeze. The Trail also was easy with only two short climbs and no rocky areas. From a spot called Rand's View we had a vista of the Taconic Range where we will be hiking tomorrow including Mt. Everett, Bear Mt. and Jug End.

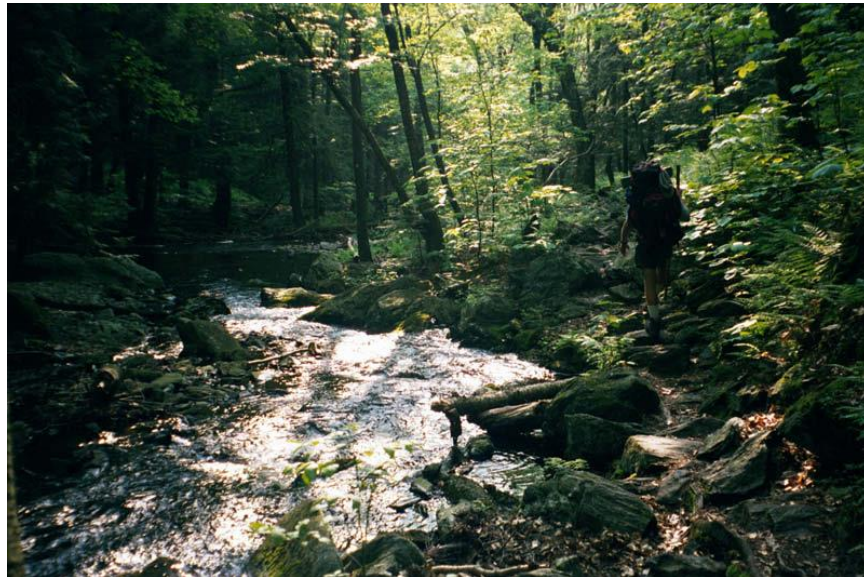
Much of the day was spent in Salisbury where we re-supplied with food for four days, ate a large lunch, visited the post office and outfitters then finished with ice cream. On the way out of town we all stopped for refreshments at the White Hart Inn, which was only a short distance from the Trail.

Duck X-ing and Old Spice stayed at the shelter. Southern comfort and I moved on one more mile to this one because Riga Shelter was full.

June 1 ~ Hemlocks Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)

at milepoint 1492.5 north, 97 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 8.8 miles hiked today

It was a short hike today but the Trail was varied and interesting. After leaving camp we walked for about two miles on a narrow path through dense thickets of Mountain Laurel interspersed with pink Wild Azalea known as Pixter flowers. Their blooms gave a spicy scent to the air on this early June morning. Next we climbed Bear Mountain (2,316 feet) and rested on top of the 36 foot high pile of rocks monument built in 1885. It was a nice viewpoint, but the valley and distant hills were hazy from humid air. Less than a mile later we crossed an invisible line and moved from Connecticut into Massachusetts. Another state bites the dust!



Southern Comfort hiking in Sages Ravine

Massachusetts welcomed us with the beautiful Sages Ravine. Here the Trail passes by large trees and waterfalls, interspersed by quiet pools for about a mile. Next was a gentle, two mile climb to the summit of Race Mountain. The AT along the top of the precipice of the Race Mountain escarpment had magnificent views in all directions. Finally we moved on to the rocky

and steep ascent to Mount Everett. The fire tower was closed and there were no views so we moved on and arrived at this new shelter. I ate a leisurely lunch, washed my hair and the rest of my body, and then put Shoe Goo on the rubber on the front of my boots so this second pair will make it to Maine.

June 2 ~ Mt. Wilcox South Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)

at milepoint 1512.2 north, 98 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 19.7 miles hiked today

Woke up this morning at 5:15 and found a blazing orange glow in the shelter from the rising sun. After breakfast of two packs of oatmeal and a cup of hot chocolate I started my northward trek. At the end of the Taconic Ridge I reached Jug End, where from a rocky outcropping I had extensive views of the north and east, including Mt. Graylock. Then I descended to the valley below and crossed a series of bog bridges over a swampy area. The mosquitoes in this section were swarming around me, with sometimes 5 or 6 on each arm. When I reached the highway I put on some DEET for any future bog walking.

I walked .2 of a mile on the road to the Corncrib, a farm stand that offers juice, fruit and fudge for sale to thru-hikers. The lady there also gave us a gallon of spring water - thank you! She warned us of thunderstorms.

About six more miles down the Trail we heard thunder and ducked into Tom Leonard Lean-to just in time to beat the storm. When the rain stopped Old Spice decided to move on to this shelter and the rest of us, Duck-Xing, Old Spice and Southern Comfort and me, wanted to wait and see. The sun came out and we voted to go for it. We got about two miles from the shelter and the heavens let loose again with winds, heavy rain and thunder. As long as the lightening stayed a decent distance away I didn't mind the downpour because I have not had a shower since New Jersey!

At the shelter the floor boards had serious gnaw marks at the ends where hikers sit (porcupines like the salt), porcupine quills and scat about the size of vitamin pills were on the floor. Tonight should be interesting!

June 3 ~ Upper Goose Pond Cabin ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)

at milepoint 1528.0 north, 99 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 15.8 miles hiked today

Mr. Porcupine arrived at about 1:00 in the morning and made an appetizer out of the broom handle outside near a tree before coming up to the shelter to gnaw on boards soaked with hiker sweat. Apparently he was either shy or didn't like our photon flashlights. After three attempts he decided to move on to easier pickings. Another pest we had to deal with last night was the no-see-ums. These small flies can easily fit through mosquito netting and their bite feels like a pin stick to the skin. During the night the wind picked up as a cold front passed through and blew them away.

Today was a perfect day for hiking - temperatures in the low 60's with good breezes to blow the bugs off and low humidity. There were also great views of distant hills, mountains and blue skies with puffy white clouds. It was the kind of day that would make you forget about hiking in yesterday's thunderstorms.

At one point the Trail followed bog bridges around wet fields near Hop Brook. The fields were filled with huge patches of yellow Buttercups, bands of purple Iris and smaller patches of a pink frilled flower. Bob-o-Links and Red-winged Blackbirds were flying about and singing their mating songs. I had to stand there for several minutes to take in the sights and sounds around me. Life is good!

The remainder of today's hike was through woodlands and over some swampy areas. This cabin is run by the AMC and has a seasonal caretaker on duty. This week's duty falls on Pat Fletcher, who was kind enough to share his dinner (mac & cheese with fried spam...gourmet!) because he had too much. Thank you!



Upper Goose Pond Cabin

June 4 ~ Kay Wood Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1545.6 north, 100 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 17.6 miles hiked today

Thanks again to Pat and the AMC for the wonderful hospitality for thru-hikers. It is one of those spots that should be on every hiker's schedule.

The Trail today took us through mature hardwood forests with a ground cover of pale green Hay-scented Ferns with darker patches of Interrupted Ferns, and through swampy lowlands with black mud several inches thick. Along the way through the swampy area we passed three women day hikers whose white running shoes were still impossibly clean. Were they walking on their hands?

In the shelter tonight with our foursome is Steve, a south bounder section hiker out for ten days. Tomorrow is a two-town day, Dalton and Cheshire. We will eat our way thru both!

June 5 ~ Mark Noepel Lean-to ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1564.3 north, 101 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 16.7 miles hiked today

Today was cloudy and cool, a good day for hiking. We reached our first town, Dalton, early in the morning and stopped at a convenience store for coffee, donuts and orange juice. Nine miles later we were in Cheshire for our mail drops and sent home: film, old maps and trail guides.

On the way out of town the Trail passed near another convenience store where we ate hot dogs, sodas and Ben and Jerry's ice cream. We have been trying to eat as much town food as possible to avoid any more weight loss.

A gradual 2,000 foot ascent over four miles brought us to the shelter where we found the bunks chewed up by gnawing porcupines. I hope they go elsewhere tonight. Duck X-ing just spotted one

in a small 10 foot tree just 20 feet from the shelter. We all took several photographs; I hope some of them come out.

Then I shook the sapling that the porcupine was in and all his quills stood straight up on end making him look like a large pin-cushion. The other guys moved away quickly because they thought Porky was going to fly out of the tree and hit them! Porky came down later and Duck X-ing chased him into the woods trying to photograph him. I'll bet he won't be back to bother us tonight!



Porcupine at Mark Noepel Lean-to

Tomorrow morning we will arrive at Mt. Graylock where you can get a shower with soap and a towel for \$1.50 at Bascom Lodge. I am rather excited about the prospect of a shower since the last one I had was in Vernon NJ on May 22.

Today is the 100th day that we have been hiking the Trail. I have no doubt in my mind that we will finish the journey at Mt. Katadin as a foursome barring injury or some problem at home. We all started on the same day, didn't know each other, but it seems that we have known each other for a long time. We enjoy making jokes about our selves and each other...this makes us laugh and makes the day easier. I don't see how some hikers can go for long periods of time alone, without the company of others for support.

June 6 ~ Mt. Graylock, Bascom Lodge ... in Connecticut-Massachusetts - [map](#)
at milepoint 1565.6 north, 102 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 3.3 miles hiked today

When we woke up this morning it was cold enough to see our breath, about 40 degrees. We sent our winter gear weeks ago. In order to stay warm enough at night in our thin sleeping bags it is necessary to sleep in our clothes. After a quick breakfast we were off on a short walk to Mt. Graylock and Bascom Lodge for breakfast and the long awaited shower. Shortly after arriving at the lodge the winds picked up, it started to rain heavily and we were socked in thick fog.

We had coffee, pancakes, orange juice and bananas for breakfast and then a hot shower.

A school group from Adams Memorial Middle School came in from a collecting trip at a nearby

beaver pond. I spoke to them about backpacking for about a half hour. They seemed interested in my experiences on the Trail and asked many outstanding questions.

The manager of the lodge said another school group was coming in later in the day. He also said all the beds in the lodge were taken but we could sleep on the enclosed porch, on the floor, if we wished and could set up and clean up after dinner to pay for our dinner and breakfast. Thank you John Brenneman!! The wind pelted the windows driven by 40 mph winds as we sat near the fire place drinking warm coffee. Not a good day for hiking!

I also talked to a small group of folks from an Elder Hostel that was meeting at the Lodge. They copied the web address down and said they would follow my progress.



Dinning room at Bascom Lodge

We had an all you can eat dinner with corn bread, baked beans, soup, coleslaw potato salad, ribs, chicken and sausage. We ate until we were uncomfortable. That's what hikers do best.

After dinner I emptied my pack and answered questions about my hike for 20 students and 6 adults from Cambridge Port Elementary School. They peppered me with questions for about 45 minutes. I enjoy talking with young folks because they are the hikers and Trail maintainers of the future. I hope that I was able to stir interest in at least a few of the students I spoke to today.

Tomorrow we will eat breakfast here and then start hiking again. We will look in our Trail Companions for more AMC Lodges like this.

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## **Vermont-New Hampshire**

[previous section](#)

**June 7 ~ Seth Werner Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
at milepoint 1578.8 north, 103 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 13.2 miles hiked today

After an all you can eat breakfast of bacon, pancakes, coffee, orange juice and muffins we

managed to pull ourselves away from the lodge. The rain had stopped early in the morning but the winds were still blowing strongly and we were socked in by heavy fog. Once we got into the laurel thickets the winds died down. After 5 inches of rainfall the trail was exactly as we expected it to be - boggy at best and a three inch deep stream at its worst. After a mile or two I didn't even try to avoid the water. We all had wet boots at the shelter.

As soon as we reached the state line for Vermont, we noticed an increase in the numbers of Black flies. Old Spice and I purchased head nets at the lodge and Duck X-ing and Southern Comfort already had them. We are now writing in our journals and cooking dinner wearing them as is Ted, a section hiker. Two female section hikers, Katydid and Simmer came in at 6:00.



**Ready for Black Flies at Seth Warner Shelter**

**June 8 ~ Goddard Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
at milepoint 1600.4 north, 104 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 21.6 miles hiked today

When you were a little kid you got in trouble if you came home with wet shoes after stomping through mud puddles, but for the past several days I have been doing exactly that. Sometimes the Trail is a streambed and other times mud 4 inches deep. The deep mud makes an interesting sound when you yank your boot out of it. Then you have to shake your foot vigorously to fling off gobs of mud.

We had one very steep descent on rock steps to VT 9 Bennington and a steep ascent up the other side.

The shelter we are staying at is a log lean-to built to accommodate 12. In addition to the four of us we are joined by two southbound section hikers and by a northbound section hiker Mrs. Gorp.

Some of the new flowers I saw today are Bluebead Lily, Canada Mayflower, Goldthread, Bunchberry, and Starflower.

**June 9 ~ Stratton Pond Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1619.8 north, 105 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 19.4 miles hiked today*

We woke up to a nice view of the southern horizon and after breakfast hiked .3 mile to the top of Glastenbury Mt. and climbed the fire tower at the top. The wind was blowing strongly and we swayed back and forth while viewing the terrain that we would cover today.

The Trail stayed closer to the ridge top so we had a more or less level walk with fewer boggy areas. When we were about 5 miles from the shelter we heard rumbles in the distance and began to pick up the pace. It turned out to be like a race and we lost ... soaking wet again!

The shelter is fairly new and sleeps 12. Our foursome is joined by Mrs. Gorp, four other section hikers and two dogs. Tomorrow we go to town to re-supply, eat, shower and do laundry.

**June 10 ~ Manchester Center VT** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1630.4 north, 106 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 10.6 miles hiked today*

Black flies and mosquitoes were bad again last night, we had to wear our head nets while preparing dinner then retreated to our sleeping bags by 7:00 to escape the attack. We also wore our head nets to bed. The caretaker for the shelter came in before dusk and had each person sign his register and collected \$5.00 each. There is a fee to stay at several shelters here in Vermont.

On our way to town we passed the beautiful Stratton Pond and saw two loons. The remainder of the Trail was fairly level and we made good time.

In Manchester we did our laundry and got subs, chips and sodas from the nearby deli, found a room at Sutton Place, and then visited the two outfitters. I bought mid-weight long underwear in preparation for sleeping in the Whites and new Leki poles.

At Sutton Place we met Trucker, a long distance north bound hiker and her dog, Baily. The five of us had a huge dinner and then returned to the backyard at Sutton Place for a few beers and cigars. Do we really want to go back to Black flies, Mosquitoes and swampy trails? Yes!

**June 11 ~ Big Branch Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1646.4 north, 107 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 16.0 miles hiked today*

After breakfast at McDonalds, Southern Comfort and I went to Mailboxes where I mailed home my walking stick and S.C. mailed home his old pack. Frank, the owner of Sutton Place gave the five of us and Bailey a ride back to the AT.

We started off with a 1500 foot climb over three miles to the top of Bromley Mt, a ski slope. While we were at the top of an observation tower, Yogi and Skywalker caught up to us. Now we are a pod of seven hikers and one dog.

When we got to Peru Peak the Black flies became so thick that I had to put on my long-sleeved shirt and head net. They would attack in waves - sometimes there would only be a dozen and at other times there would be a hundred.

After a step rocky scramble up to Baker Peak the final four miles to the shelter was an easy downhill with no swampy spots.

We are now in the shelter watching a nice bonfire with very few bugs. The Big Branch Creek is roaring in the background.

**June 12 ~ Clarendon Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
at milepoint 1663.4 north, 108 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 17.0 miles hiked today

It rained for most of the night. The brand new roof on the shelter kept us warm and dry. Southern Comfort, Old Spice and I got an early start at 6:45 while the other four were either still in the sack or just getting up.

The Trail was easy today until we reached the relocation that took us 1500 feet steeply down to a road and then back up to the top of the ridge to Bear Mountain. When we reached Rt. 103 all seven of us walked 1/2 mile down the road to the Whistle Stop Restaurant where most of us had the large turkey dinner platter and milkshakes. I had two shakes.

After dinner we walked back to the AT and had a steep 1 mile uphill climb to the shelter. We have another fire going tonight. We also lugged up a couple of beers each and put them in the stream to keep them cool.



**Clarendon Shelter**

**June 13 ~ US 4 Killington** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
at milepoint 1680.1 north, 109 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 16.7 miles hiked today

Trucker and Baily got an early start today at 5:30 in order to get a mail drop at Killington. Southern Comfort, Old Spice and I left about an hour later and immediately began the first steep climb of the day, up Beacon Hill. What a way to start the day! The major climb was yet to begin - the 2,500 ascent over 6 miles to the top of Killington Peak (4,235 feet). We were running short on food and according to the thru-hiker's companion there was a snack bar at the summit, open 9 to 4. We (four of us) climbed up a steep .2 mile rocky side trail to find the snack bar closed. The companion also reports there are views of the White Mountains and the Adirondacks on a clear day, but today we were socked in by clouds. We descended and began our walk towards US 4 to hitch into Killington Corners to buy enough food to last to Hanover, which we expect to reach by Friday.

Duck X-ing didn't need any food so he climbed into his sleeping bag at Cooper Lodge, located at the junction of the side trail, to wait for Skywalker and Yogi.

Southern Comfort, Old Spice and I took the Killington/ Pico Relocation to Route US 4. The Trail



here is only one year old for about 4 miles and it is easy to see how much work it took to build a pathway through the woods. Thank you GMC for such a beautiful walk in the woods.

When I reached US 4 Southern Comfort had already walked about 1/4 mile toward town and Old spice was still in the woods. It had just started to drizzle and I put on my raincoat and pack cover when a Blazer pulled up and the couple inside asked, "Do you need anything?"

I said, "Yes, could you give three hikers a ride to town?"

They replied, "No problem" After we loaded our gear they explained that they had section hiked from Springer to Damascus and their trail names were Trudge and Smudge.

Then "The Dream" began!

Trudge said, "I own a bed and breakfast and you guys are going to stay overnight for free, we will feed you dinner and breakfast and deliver you back to the trail tomorrow".

We were silent, in shock, for a few seconds, then thanked them vigorously and pinched ourselves to make sure it wasn't a dream. At the B&B they showed us where our rooms and the shower were and then said, "after you get settled in let's meet downstairs at the bar". Trudge had several local micro brews on tap and explained that he would draw our first beer and after that we were to help ourselves. Were we in heaven? After dinner we went to Trudge's computer room and checked several hikers on Trailplace. By 9:30 we were ready for bed.

**June 14 ~ Wintturi Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)

*at milepoint 1698.9 north, 110 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 18.8 miles hiked today*

After a continental breakfast Trudge stopped at the Deli where we re-supplied for two days and bought a Vermont Wrap for lunch. A wrapper is a tortilla filled with meat, cheese and other good stuff that tasted wonderful at break. We thanked Trudge again after he delivered us back to the Trail and we were on our way again.

There were lots of ups and downs today with no views from the overlooks because of low clouds. The temperature never got out of the 50's with a good breeze...a perfect day for hiking as long as you kept moving.

At the shelter tonight are the seven of us from two nights ago, plus three northbound section hikers and two dogs for a total of ten hikers and three dogs. Quite a crowd!

**June 15 ~ Happy Hill Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)

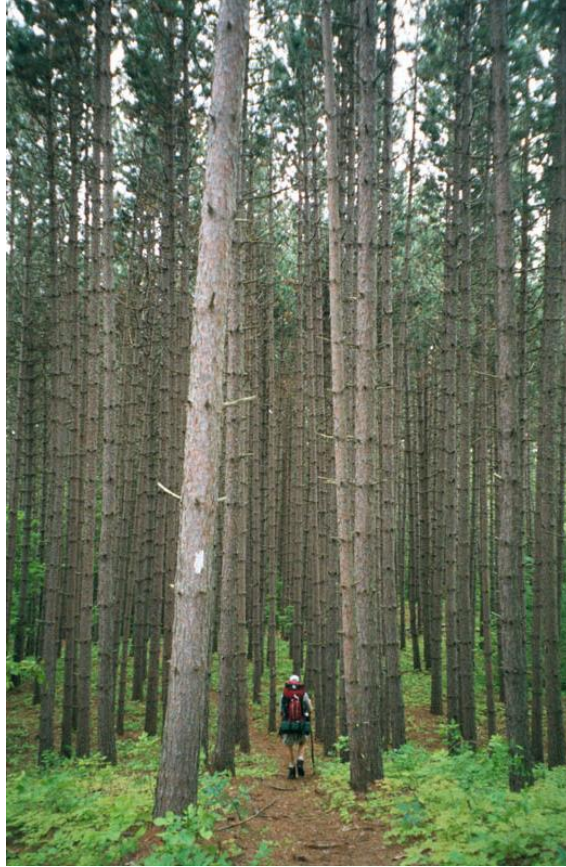
*at milepoint 1719.4 north, 111 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 20.5 miles hiked today*

Old Spice, Southern Comfort and I got another early start today beating all but one of the hikers out of the shelter. We took several breaks today because we knew we had a long day ahead of us. There were lots of ups and downs but none of them were very long or steep. The three of us agreed that today was one of our most beautiful days in Vermont: one - because the weather had cleared up and we had blue skies and, two - the Trail went through a variety of habitats.

One of two favorites was the Red Pine Plantation where the trees were evenly spaced out, very tall and straight with no branches except near the top. The structure and arrangement of the trees allowed light to enter and bounce off the reddish bark of the trees giving the area a pinkish glow.

The other impressive section today had wildflowers in the fields. There were both yellow and orange flowered Hawkweed, white and purple flowered pea plant, white flowers on Blackberry Bushes and the white flowers of Wild Strawberries close to the ground. I found and ate about a handful of strawberries today. We also saw more evidence of moose, footprints and feces along the Trail but have yet to see one.

Tomorrow we have a short 5.8 trip into Hanover, which is supposed to be a great trail town. As I get ready for bed (9:00) I can hear several owls calling nearby.



### Red Pine Plantation

**June 16 ~ Moose Mountain Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
 at milepoint 1736.0 north, 112 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 16.6 miles hiked

Old Spice, Southern Comfort, Marlboro Man, a north bound section hiker, and I got up early, ate a light breakfast and made a bee line for Hanover, New Hampshire, home of Dartmouth College, 442.4 miles from Katahdin. The Trail between the shelter and town was very easy, like a gentle walk in the woods, and we made great time. After a short road walk we crossed a bridge over the Connecticut River, left Vermont and entered New Hampshire. Another state bites the dust.

We didn't stay at the Hanover Inn at \$237 per night, but did spend about six hours in town taking care of business. Our first stop was at a stand set up outside a bakery where we bought pastries and hot coffee, what a treat! The sales girl was amazed at how I could eat four large pastries and a large coffee. I was still hungry.

Then we walked down to the post office to pick up our mail drops. I had only expected to find a single package but ended up with three packages and three letters. The other packages were from a frat brother and a retired teacher friend. Thank you for the unexpected treats! I shared with my two hiking friends.

We then made phone calls home, visited the outfitter and camera shop for batteries. It was suddenly time for PIZZA!

After lunch we stopped at a grocery store for a few supplies then headed out of town for a 10 mile walk to the shelter.

Tonight there are only three people at the shelter, Old Spice, Southern Comfort and I plus lots of mosquitoes and black flies. We built a fire again tonight, to try to keep the bugs off.

Oh, I met Albatross in town. He left Springer on Jan. 1 with 14 other hikers and he is the only one left. I wish that he had time to go to dinner with us because this is his third thru-hike and he is older than I am. I'm sure he is full of stories and valuable information.

**June 17 ~ Hexacuba Shelter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1753.9 north, 113 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 17.9 miles hiked today*

Today was a tough day because we had three climbs, 1,000 ft, 2,300 ft and 800 ft, and a thunderstorm.

The first climb was straight up to Holts Ledge where Peregrine Falcons nest. The AT stays away from the nesting sites.

The next climb, the hardest of the three, was up 2,300 ft. over three miles. There were numerous ledge outcrops with the Trail moving in and out of the woods. It was in this section that I first heard thunder in the distance. I knew that I would lose this race to the cabin at the top so I didn't even bother to pick up my pace. Before it even started raining I had on my rain parka and pack cover. As I continued the slow uphill trek it began raining hard with claps of thunder.

When I reached the fire warden's cabin at the top of Smarts Mountain I was surprised to find it filled with dads and their young daughters and section hikers. At first I had difficulty finding a place to sit.

It was noticeably warmer inside the hut because of all the bodies and the air was scented with the odor of sweaty wet clothing and boots covered with swamp mud. One girl requested that the door remain open to allow fresh air to come in.

Twin girls, JoAnna and Melodie, were kind enough to share some of their fruit with Southern Comfort and me. They will be beginning college this year as freshman. I wish them luck.

After the storm passed the sun came out and we made our way down the mountain and up to the shelter. Even though it was only an 800 foot ascent, because it was at the end of the day, it wore me out. At the shelter with the three of us are two week enders who are hiking north.

We also saw an old friend from down south, Cedar Tree, who had hurt his feet and had to spend some time recuperating and get new shoes. He has a friend who lives near the Trail and is transporting him every few days to a new area. He is about one week behind us and I wish him the best of luck in finishing his hike.

**June 18 ~ NH 25, Glenclyff** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1768.6 north, 114 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 14.7 miles hiked today*

Had a nice hike first thing this morning from camp up to the summit of Mt. Cube, 2,800 ft. I enjoy climbing up long slanted slabs of rock using the friction of your boots on rock, leaning your body forward, and finding cracks for your poles. At the summit I had to take off my pack for awhile and enjoy the view even though I had only been hiking an hour.

Then I started the 2,000 foot drop toward NH 25A. The descent was fairly easy and we reached the road in good time. When Southern Comfort and I got there Old Spice and the two section hikers that we had camped with were drinking ice tea and eating bananas provided by Mother Hen and Kemo Sabe from their station wagon.

Mother Hen had been e-mailing my wife since the beginning of my hike and wanted to take me to her home overnight when I reached her area. Key-mho-saw-bee had some trail maintenance to do and said we should continue hiking north and they would pick us up 10 miles later at NH 25. About 4 miles into the hike we found Kemo Sabe cutting through a blow down that was blocking the trail. We took off our packs and gave him a hand clearing the Trail.

We then continued our hike and met Mother Hen and Kemo Sabe at Glencliff where the three of us loaded our packs into their vehicle and were off to Lincoln where Old Spice bought a new one man tent at the outfitters. They then drove us to their home, showed us where to shower, do our laundry and check our e-mail. Dinner was steak, potatoes and salad. What a welcome relief from trail food! Thank you! Dessert was apple pie, ice cream and strawberries. Does it get any better than this?

After dinner we sat around and talked about the AT and by 9:00 it was time for bed.

**June 19 ~ Gordon Pond Campsite** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1781.4 north, 115 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 12.8 miles hiked today*



**Lobo, Kemo Sabe, Mother Hen, & Southern Comfort**

In the morning we loaded our packs in the car, drove into town and treated our hosts to breakfast. Then on the way back to the Trail we stopped by the post office so that Old Spice could mail home his tarp and I could check on my pack straps from REI, they did not arrive.

Our hosts then drove us back to NH 25 where we thanked them again for their wonderful hospitality and began our trek into the White Mountains!

Our hike started through pastureland, the last we will see on the AT, and then began to climb. We started at 1,140 ft and ended at 4,802 ft - 3,662 ft ascent in 2 1/2 hours.

After the pastureland the Trail followed an old woods road through conifers and hard woods, then began to ascend steeply. As I climbed I began to sweat, soaking my shirt and drops dripping off my nose like a leaky faucet. My ears even popped a few times.



I heard an unusual bird calling near the top, a Boreal Chickadee, which I had only encountered once before. I have heard three species of Chickadees on this trip.

A mile from the top the Trail followed a Carriage Road passing above tree line. It was marked by piles of rocks called cairns. At the summit of Mt. Moosilauke there was the ruin of a small hotel that burned down in 1942. The views from the top were outstanding! We ate lunch there and wrote in our journals.



### Lobo on Mt. Moosilauke

Our descent began, stopping at Beaver Brook Shelter for a break. Then the Trail began to steepen, descending over wooded steps with hand rungs. Along side the Trail Beaver Brook also descended with many cascades and waterfalls. This section of our hike was very beautiful and somewhat dangerous.

When we reached the bottom we began another steep ascent of 800 feet, then followed the blazes 3 1/2 miles to Gordon Pond Trail. At this Point Old Spice decided to hike four more miles to Eliza Brook Shelter. He is anxious to finish his hike and return home. I am sorry he has to rush through the most beautiful section of the hike, and wish him luck.

Southern Comfort arrived at our campsite quite awhile before I did and was lucky enough to see a moose feeding in the pond. A section hiker, Jens, also saw the moose. When I arrived, the dominant wildlife were the dozens of Spring Peeper Frogs that were crying out with loud "peeps". They continued their serenade throughout most of the night and their calls put me to sleep by 9:00.

When I awoke at 1:00 for a bathroom call, they were still singing in the bright moonlight that filtered through the Balsam trees. A cool wind was blowing and there were no mosquitoes. This was a great place to camp.

**June 20 ~ Franconia Notch, North Woodstock ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)**  
*at milepoint 1794.4 north, 116 days since start of hike, averaging 15.5 miles per day, 13.0 miles hiked today*

Today began with an immediate ascent of 800 feet up Mt. Wolf. The Trail was a series of short ups and downs over boulders, up rock slabs using our feet to push and our hands to pull, and

over a blanket of tree roots. It was difficult to achieve a hiking rhythm and was very tiring. There were no views from the top and after descending we stopped at Eliza Brook Shelter for a break.

We then began the major climb of the day, 2,000 feet up to the top of the twin peaks of Kinsman Mountain. Again we had to push and pull our bodies up and over a continuous series of obstacles, until we reached the summit of South Kinsman Mountain, where we took off our packs and had a snack.

It was clear, sunny day with many white puffy clouds that cast shadows on the ridges and valleys to the east. A mile further on the Trail we reached the summit of North Kinsman Mountain where we had outstanding views of what was to be climbed in the next few days...the Franconia Ridge including Little Haystack Mountain, Mt. Lincoln and Mt. Lafayette. To my left I was able to see the observation tower and the gondola on the top of Cannon Mt. In the far distance over the Franconia Ridge I think I saw Mt. Washington, the tallest peak in the White Mountains.



### **White Mountains over Lonesome Lake**

We then began our descent toward Franconia Notch and stopped at Lonesome Lake Hut on the way. The AMC maintains seven huts, which are enclosed structures that sleep from 36 to 90 people. A crew of college students staffs the facilities. For \$58 a thru-hiker gets bunk space, pillow, blanket, bathroom privileges (no showers) dinner and breakfast. At Lonesome Lake Hut we had the \$1.00 thru-hiker special of all you can eat left-overs which was soup and calzones.

Nourished and rested we then descended to US 3, the Franconia Notch, and hitched back to North Woodstock, where I had to pick up my shoulder straps at the post office. They didn't arrive yet. After calling REI to check on when they were mailed, we decided to stay at the Cascades Lodge B&B for the night. We did a small load of laundry across the street from the B&B. While waiting we had a few brews on the outside patio of a brew pub across from the Laundromat.

We then went down the block for a \$9.95 lobster dinner. I wonder what the other thru-hikers are having for dinner tonight?

Tomorrow we will have breakfast at the B&B and check again at the post office for my straps.

**June 21 ~ Galehead Hut ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1807.4 north, 117 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 13.0 miles hiked today*

Because we only paid the hiker price at the B&B we had to walk down the block for a bacon, eggs, home fries, toast and coffee breakfast. Good fuel for a backpacker! Then it was up to the post office to check for my straps at 8:30. The postmaster informed me that the truck broke down and wouldn't arrive until 9:30 so we sat outside and waited. The truck arrived and 10 minutes later I had my new straps.

Bill, the owner of the B&B then gave us a ride back to the Trail for \$3 a head. By 10:30 we were on our way.

The first major ascent was from US 3, Franconia Notch at 1,450 feet to Mt. Lafayette at 5,249 feet over a distance of 6 miles. The first 3 miles of our trek was very steep but involved no bouldering.

The Trail then leveled out for about a mile and then ascended steeply over rough ledges until we reached Little Haystack Mountain. The footpath for the next two miles was narrow and above tree line.

When we reached this point the wind picked up and it began to spit from the heavens. By the time we reached Mount Lincoln we were socked in thick gray clouds that along with the raindrops were now blowing by horizontally. We replaced our long sleeved shirts with our rain parkas. On the way to Mt. Lafayette we had a very difficult time walking in a straight line because of the gusting wind. Occasionally I had to stop trying to walk and just turned my back to the wind and lean into it while supporting myself with my poles in order to avoid being blown over. Every now and then the wind would slow down and we would be able to quickly gain some ground. I could hear Southern Comfort shout above the wind "I think we made a mistake. We won't see any naked hikers today!" Some folks hike naked on the first day of summer!

Gradually the clouds began to thin out and I could see that the sun was shining in the valley below. Eventually the sun reached through to the tops of the ridge and the winds began to diminish, making it a perfect day for hiking with great views in all directions. I guess the old saying about mountain weather is true, "If you don't like the weather now, just wait a few minutes. It will change."

After we climbed Mt. Garfield we thought we would have a level 3 mile walk to the Hut, according to the elevation profile. Actually the Trail descended steeply in several places through narrow ravines and over jumbled rocks, which slowed our progress.

When we arrived at the Hut everyone (30 hikers) was seated at the tables waiting for dinner. The Hut master said that she had 2 spaces open for thru-hikers and that we could stay for free if we would do 2 hours of work tomorrow morning. We agreed and ate dinner with the Hut crew after all the other hikers finished eating.

I agreed to talk to the group of people staying at the Hut about being a thru-hiker at 8:00 and spent about one hour emptying my pack, explaining what each item was and answering questions. Then it was time for bed.

It began to rain again and I could hear it blowing against the windows and tin roof. I'm glad I am not tenting tonight!

**June 22 ~ Crawford Notch Hostel ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1822.1 north, 118 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 14.7 miles hiked today*

After breakfast this morning we helped to clear the tables and swept the floors, along with the

backpacking lecture I had given the night before we put in enough time to pay for our room and board. This was a nice hut to stay in because it was brand new this season.

The day started off with a steep climb up South Twin Mountain. After the summit the Trail followed up and down bumps for 6 miles. At one point we were brought to a spectacular overlook east at the edge of Zeacliff. From there the Trail descended steeply to Zealand Falls Hut where we stopped and had lunch.

Along this section I spotted a Spruce Grouse walking along the Trail. It seemed to be very tame and allowed me to take its picture. Yesterday I saw a Snowshoe Hare which was also very tame.

From Zealand Hut the walking was very easy because the trail was level. A steep 1 1/2 mile downhill brought us to the road where we met a lady section hiker who agreed to give us a ride to the hostel. We are staying in one of three bunkhouses that sleeps 12 persons each. In another building there is a kitchen we can use and a library.

**June 23 ~ Lake of The Clouds Hut ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)**

*at milepoint 1833.3 north, 119 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 11.2 miles hiked today*

We were lucky enough to get a ride back to the trailhead this morning after breakfast from the guy who drives the AMC shuttle van. Riding the shuttle van with us was Gandolf, a southbounder, who started at Katahdin in Maine.

The first south-bounder I met was Red Dog, followed by Peter Pan and Tinkerbelle, then Garbage Man and some other dude.

We started the day with a steep 2,000 foot ascent over 2 miles with great views into Crawford Notch from the Webster Cliffs at the top. The Trail then descended over ledges, through several bogs where wildflowers were in full bloom. I took several photos at this spot.

We stopped for lunch at Mizpah Spring Hut and made arrangements to stay at the Lakes of the Clouds Hut for the night in a small room below the hut called the Dungeon. For \$6 the hiker gets a bunk and access to the hut restrooms and the common area. The dungeon is dark, damp and has a heavy metal door.

Within a mile after leaving Mizpah we were above tree-line and continued that way for the next 12.7 miles. At this elevation (4,200 feet) only Krummholz (stunted spruce) can survive the severe weather. The vegetation is extremely vulnerable to damage by foot traffic and therefore it is important to always stay on the Trail.

I wonder where you go to take a dump?

Today the skies were clear and the views outstanding in all directions. We weren't in any rush because we knew that we had a place to stay when we got to the Hut. The slow pace was our "payback" for all the long mileage days done in VA and PA.

The Lake of The Clouds Hut is the largest (sleeps 90), the highest (5,950) and most popular of the huts. When we arrived the Hut master, Mike, said since we were thru-hikers, we didn't have to stay in the dungeon and could work for our stay then sleep on the dining room tables after lights out at 9:30. This was indeed good news!

I mentioned to the hut master that I was willing to give a talk about being a thru-hiker and he said I could start at 8:30. Southern Comfort and I helped set the tables for dinner and after everyone was done eating and all the dishes were washed we ate with the "cros" (work staff). At 8:20 we were treated to a wonderful sunset with amazingly clear skies for Mt. Washington. At 8:30 I began my talk to a full house plus 10 boy scouts (who also were to sleep on the tables) and fielded many questions. One young hiker, Kyle, was especially interested in my hike and I enjoyed



talking with him after the lecture. I hope that someday he will also fulfill his dream and hike the entire AT.

I must have mentioned that I had lost weight during my talk because a woman began giving me cans of tuna and candy bars. Just as we were about to go to bed after lights out, the "croo" found two empty bunks for Southern Comfort and I.

Today was a great day!



**Lakes of the Clouds Hut**

**June 24 ~ Osgood Tentsite** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1843.3 north, 120 days since start of hike, averaging 15.4 miles per day, 10.0 miles hiked today*

Again we set the tables in the dinning room and after breakfast and clean up we ate with the crew. After sweeping the dining room floor we were free to go.

The skies were clear today and I put sunscreen on my ears and nose because I expected to be above tree-line for the entire day. My ears and the ears of many other hikers became burnt and scabbed early in our hike in Georgia since there were no leaves on the trees, I didn't want to repeat the experience.

We covered the steep 1 1/2 mile climb to the top of Mt. Washington in 40 minutes. Mt. Washington is the highest peak (6,288 feet) in the northeast and is 332 miles from Katahdin. It is accessible by foot, auto road and Cog Railroad. At the summit is a building that houses a weather observatory, Mt. Washington Museum, snack bar, post office and pay phone. There is a camera on the observation deck that feeds live pictures to the Mt. Washington weather site on the internet. I waved to my wife for several minutes. Was she watching?

On April 12, 1934 the on-land wind speed of 231 mph was recorded on Mt. Washington. It still stands as the world's record.

After Southern Comfort picked up his mail drop at the post office we began our difficult trek toward the next hut, Madison Spring, over 7 miles of rocky Gulfside Trail (AT). If you wanted to look at the scenery you had to stop because when you were walking you had to totally concentrate on where your next foot step would go on the rocky terrain.



### Songbird & Journeyman on the Gulfside Trail (AT)

When we finally arrived at the Hut we got the bad news that the Hut was full, there were already two thru-hikers working for stay and that we would have to move on.

We filled our water bottles and ascended the rocky and steep Mt. Madison (5,363 feet) and then descended 2 1/2 miles over rocky trail to our campsite.

We only hiked 10 miles today but it was an extremely rocky 10 miles. It is only 5 more miles down to Pinkham Notch where we could get a room, shower and hot food but neither of us had 5 more miles to give.

After dinner we went to bed. Two other north bounders who started in Harper's Ferry camped nearby. Songbird and Journeyman also stayed at the site last night.

**June 25 ~ Carter Notch Hut** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1854.0 north, 121 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 10.7 miles hiked today*

We left our campsite hoping that we could get to Pinkham Notch Lodge in time for breakfast but we missed it by 1/2 hour. We were also too late to catch the 8:00 radio call to the next Hut to make reservations for the evening, however we did find out that there were 6 open spaces.

We took a short break at the Lodge and then began our 6 mile hike to the Hut. The first mile to Lost Pond was rather easy and then the steep ascent began to the five peaks of Wildcat Mountain. At several places we had to friction climb over the smooth slanted rocks. We passed three ledges where we had fine views of the Notch but Mt. Washington and the other high peaks were obscured by clouds. Today is the Mt. Washington Auto Race, the oldest auto race in the US, begun in 1904.

After climbing the 5th peak on Wildcat Mt. we descended 1,000 feet to the Hut. The Hut master was out for the day so we found two empty bunks and claimed them with our packs. This Hut is self-service, meaning you can use the kitchen and common area but supply your own food. The Hut master arrived a short time later and we paid our \$18 each for the evening.

Tried to take a nap in my bunk before dinner but I was kept awake by a pounding thunderstorm with awesome lightening displays. Several strikes were within 1/10 of a mile of the Hut. I really

enjoy listening to the thunder reverberate through the mountains and valleys when I am under safe cover.

At dinner in the common area I watched weekend hikers prepare appetizers, salads, and involved dinners while they watched me prepare my Lipton noodles and a can of tuna. While I was eating, three soaking wet hikers came into the Hut. Duck X-ing, Yogi (Rat Funk), and Skywalker looked like drowned rats after being caught in the storm. They will spend the night at the Hut and hike on to Gorham tomorrow.

At 8:30 I gave another talk about being a thru-hiker and was helped out by my four northbound friends and two south-bounders. I hope that we were able to spark interest in hiking the AT in some of the teenagers who were present.

**June 26 ~ US 2 Gorham, Hiker's Paradise Hostel** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1869.2 north, 122 days since start of hike, averaging 15.3 miles per day, 15.2 miles hiked today*

As usual the day began with a steep ascent (1,500 feet) up to the top of Carter Dome. We took our packs off and spent some time viewing the Presidential Range under clear skies for the last time. Then it was off to the three humps of Carter Mountain and the long boardwalks in between.

I saw another Spruce Grouse on the Trail, this one was accompanied by three chicks. I was lucky enough to be able to approach within 3 feet to take her photo.

After summiting Mt. Moriah, the last mountain in the Whites, it was all down hill to the Rattle River Shelter where we planned to spend the night. When we arrived at the shelter, the road to Gorham was only 1.9 miles away down a flat, old logging road through the woods. The thoughts of pizza, showers and a bed began to pull on us. We changed our plan and bolted to the road while being attacked by swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes.

When we reached the road a cloud of black flies descended upon us biting our foreheads, arms and legs. We were lucky to get a hitch to town after walking only 1/4 of a mile and the ride in the back of an open pickup truck was windy enough to blow all the dead insect carcasses off our bodies.

We checked into the Hostel, bought a pint of Ben & Jerry's in the lobby, and were then shown where we would be staying.

After sitting in soft chairs and sofas for several minutes we (Duck X-ing, Southern Comfort and I) decided that our feet and knees had taken a beating in the Whites and deserved a zero. We did our laundry, took showers, ordered pizza to be delivered and then off to bed.

Tomorrow I will re-supply for the next section of the Trail, reassess all of my gear and send some home, go to the outfitters to buy another pair of boots and soak my feet in Epsom salts.

**June 27 ~ Gorham - Hikers Paradise Hostel** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1869.2 north, 123 days since start of hike, averaging 15.2 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today*

This morning the three of us ate a hearty breakfast here at the Colonial Comfort Inn / Hikers Paradise and then went upstairs to collect unnecessary materials to send home. Bruce, of Hikers Paradise, gave us a ride to the post office where I sent 5 pounds 9 ounces to Lancaster. Yes!

Then I stopped at the outfitters to check to see if they sold Sundowner boots and was told I would have to hitch 30 miles to the EMS at North Conway. It looks as if I will have to Shoe Goo my way through the remaining 297.9 miles of the hike. By this time we were hungry for lunch so it was off to Burger King for Whoppers.

As we finished the skies began to darken and we made a mad dash to the Rite Aide to purchase batteries and other supplies. We just made it before it began to pour. The storm ended in about a half hour and then we headed to the library to check our e-mail. With a 20 minute time limit and at least 3 people signed in behind me I was only able to respond to one teenager who heard me talk at the Lake of the Clouds Hut.

I then walked a mile back to the Hostel, gathered up the Maine Maps and Trail Guide that I had received in my mail drop, and a cigar, and went outside to make plans. Bruce was able to help us plan for a few days and while we were doing this Earl, the owner of The Cabin, a hostel in Andover, a 2 1/2 day walk from here happened to stop by. As a result we were able to make arrangements for him to pick us up at East B Hill road on 6/30 (Friday) and also sent extra food ahead with Earl so that we only had to carry food for 2 1/2 days. After dinner at a Chinese Restaurant we packed our gear and went to bed early to rest up for - back to the Trail tomorrow.

**June 28 ~ Gentian Pond helter** ... in Vermont-New Hampshire - [map](#)  
*at milepoint 1881.0 north, 124 days since start of hike, averaging 15.2 miles per day, 11.8 miles hiked today*

This morning after breakfast at the Inn/Hostel Bruce gave the three of us a ride back to the trailhead. We thanked him for his Trail advice and transportation then we were on our way.

After a 1/4 mile road walk we crossed the bridge over Androscoggin River and in another 1/4 mile entered the woods to begin the 1,500 ft. ascent up Mount Hayes. Southern Comfort and I stopped at the top for a break and a final panoramic view of the mountain peaks of the Presidential Range. We could even spot the black smoke from the cog railroad atop Mt. Washington.

After 4 more miles of gentle ups and downs we reached Page Pond, the first of three ponds we would pass today. It was 12:00 and we decided that it was the perfect lunch spot. The puffy white cumulus clouds were reflected in the still, dark water of the pond while hundreds on dragonflies navigated a foot or so above the water's surface capturing black flies and mosquitoes. Dozens of Green Frogs were calling from various locations along the edge of the pond and yellow flowered Bullhead Lilies added a splash of color. I took a photo but I think someone painting a picture of this view would have captured it much better. We spent almost an hour there and while leaving we passed several section hikers from the Lebanon Hiking club. Lebanon is located about an hour from Lancaster in Pennsylvania.



**Page Pond**



When we arrived at the shelter Duck X-ing was already there and was enjoying the view directly out front. The ridge of distant mountain peaks was framed, on both sides, by trees on slanting nearby ridges.

While my two hiking buddies napped I took a nature walk around the perimeter of Gentian Pond. Right outside the shelter I captured and released a 2 inch Fritillary butterfly that had silver spots on the undersides of the hind wings. Was it a Meadow Fritillary?

In the shallows of the pond I spotted several wiggling 3 inch long leeches making me glad that I had taken a shower this morning and wouldn't have to take a dip here. As I moved on I located a mat of freshly laid amphibian eggs encased in clear jelly. They were in a single layer with the black side of each ball pointing up toward the sun and the white side pointing down. The mat was about 1 foot from one edge to the other. Brownish water beetles were slowly swimming along the bottom above the mud.

Farther on I captured and released a 4 inch long Red-spotted Newt. The landform is the Red Eft, hundreds of which were on the Trail several weeks ago.

I heard several Green Frogs calling and took a photograph of a small one that had a bright yellow chin. My movement along the edge disturbed tadpoles resting on the bottom and they swam rapidly toward deeper water. Whirligig Beetles, floating on the water's surface, also sensed my presence and began to swim in circles. There were fewer lilies here and they were just beginning to bloom.

Dozens of black and gray bodied dragonflies flew about and when I sat still on a rock, they even landed on me. I don't fear them even though my mother called them "Devil's Darning Needles" and said if you told a lie they would sew your lips together. Everything I have written is the truth.

All along the edge of the pond was a thick layer of sphagnum moss, after closer examination I spotted several Round Leaved Sundew plants. They are carnivorous and will trap small insects with a sticky secretion. They then curl over the insect and digest it to obtain nitrogen, leaving an empty husk.

As I reached the distant end of the pond where inlet streams entered, the ground became very swampy and one step in ankle deep mud almost sucked off my Teva. An agitated sandpiper with a bobbing tail flitted from stick up to stick up, making me think I was near its nest.

When I spotted deer tracks in the mud I heard branches break and a loud snort coming from the woods beyond the edge of the swampy area. As I headed back toward the shelter on the distant edge of the pond I prepared myself to climb a tree if a moose approached. I didn't see any new or interesting specimens on the other side and rinsed my feet and Tevas off in the pond while keeping watch for leeches.

Lots of small, quick, aggressive mosquitoes have started to invade the shelter. Duck X-ing set up his tent inside the shelter, Southern Comfort laid his out and slipped inside, and I pulled down deep inside my sleeping bag.

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Maine

[previous section](#) **June 29 ~ Speck Pond Shelter** ... in Maine - [map](#)
at milepoint 1895.7 north, 125 days since start of hike, averaging 15.2 miles per day, 14.7 miles hiked today

"To those who would see the Maine wilderness, tramp day by day through a succession of ever delightful forest, past lake and stream, and over mountains, we would say: Follow the Appalachian Trail across Maine. It cannot be followed on horse or a wheel. Remote for

detachment, narrow for chosen company, winding for leisure, lonely for contemplation, it beckons not merely north and south but upward to the body, mind and soul of man."
Myron H. Avery

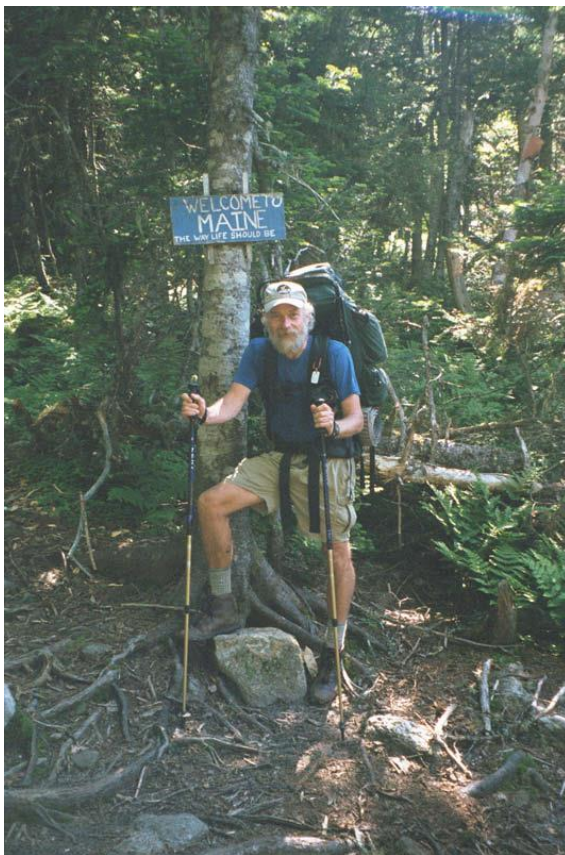
Today was an exciting day for us because we were about to enter our last state, but not before we climbed 1,200 feet up Mt. Success, the final New Hampshire mountain.

Our first Maine mountain, Mt. Carlo (3,565 feet) was followed by the West, East, and North Goose Eye Peaks (3,854, 3,794 and 3,675 feet) which offered panoramic views of the Presidential Range to the south and the mountains or western Maine to the north.

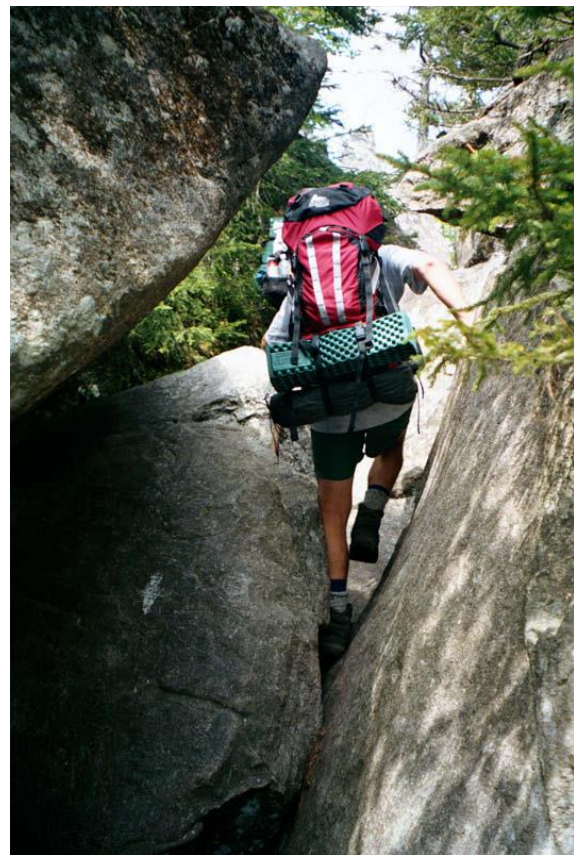
We ate lunch at the full Goose Shelter and rested for what many call the hardest mile on the Trail, Mahoosuc Notch. Here we found giant boulders from the sheer walls clogging the floor of the notch, and found ourselves clambering over, under, and around boulders for much of its one mile length. Snow and ice were under many of the larger boulders making our passage through the notch refrigerated. It took us 1 hour and 15 minutes to cover the one mile. Several times we even had to remove our packs to pass through narrow openings. I was able to call on past rock climbing and caving skills to make this section a game of "rock chess".

After the notch we had one more 1,500 foot climb up Mahoosuc Arm. By this time I was almost running on energy empty and the ascent seemed to go on-- and on---and on.

Speck Pond shelter at Speck Pond, a fine mountain tarn, is the highest pond in Maine (3,500). A large southbound hiker will also be staying in the shelter with us tonight and we have decided that he will be a snorer.



Welcome To Maine!



Southern Comfort in Mahoosuc Notch

June 30 ~ Grafton Notch , Maine 26 ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1900.3 north, 126 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 4.6 miles hiked today

We guessed correctly. He was a snorer, not on the same level as Lone Eagle at Bear's Den but probably on par with Thumper at Pass Mt. Hut at Shenandoah. We tried to wake him up several times, or to roll over, Southern Comfort nudging and hitting him with a broom, me pounding my heels on the floor boards, and Duck X-ing banging his fists on the walls all to no avail. He just kept snoring. And we had to pay \$6 each to "sleep" at this shelter!

After breakfast we had a short climb to the top of Old Speck and then downhill 2,500 feet to the road at Grafton Notch where we were to meet Earl, the owner of The Cabin Hostel. We arrived early so we opened our sleeping mats and slept in the sun.

Earl arrived at noon and after loading our packs in his truck we headed to Andover where we stopped at a small store to buy supplies.

The hostel at The Cabin is in the windowed basement, sleeps eight, and has a shower, TV and washer and drier. While our laundry was being done we took our showers, and then went upstairs to make pizzas for lunch.

After lunch Southern Comfort and I slept for awhile while Duck X-ing worked on a schedule for the rest of our trip. Then it was time for grilled chicken, potato salad, and fresh green salad with lettuce from their green house. After dinner we returned to the basement, spread out our food and made a list of what we would need for 5 days in the wilderness.

July 1 ~ Hall Mountain Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1916.9 north, 127 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 16.3 miles hiked today

Earl was up early and made muffins and bacon for us then allowed us to make our own omelet. He drove us back to the Trail for our first climb of the day, 2,250 feet up to the twin peaks of Baldpate Mt. Baldpate is above tree line and offers some of the best views of the mountain and lake country in western Maine.

After descending and then climbing Surplus Mt. the Trail followed a gentle downhill to Dunn Notch where the 60 foot high Dunn Falls is located and then a gradual climb up Wyman Mt. to the shelter.

A south-bounder, Spider (Dave Zdancewic) came into the shelter and after talking with him I found out he was a recent graduate and biology major at Millersville University. He mentioned that he knew my daughter and they took classes together. Another south-bounder, Fairweather, will be tenting with Spider behind the shelter.

July 2 ~ Bemis Mountain Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1929.7 north, 128 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 12.8 miles hiked today

We started the day with a steep descent down the north face of Wyman Mt. down to Sawyer Notch and then an immediate 1,500 foot ascent and 1,000 descent up and over Moody Mt. to Black Brook Notch where we rested before attempting the 2,000 foot climb up Old Blue. When we reached its summit (3,600 ft) we found it to be covered with scrub growth but offered outstanding views in all directions. We spent 1 1/2 hours on the top, 1/2 hour to eat and an hour to stretch out on flat rocks and bake in the sun.

Between Old Blue and Elephant Mountain we passed through an area noted for its "old growth" forest of Red Spruce trees. The maximum life expectancy for red spruce is approximately 400 years. Some of the trees in this stand have been dated back to the 1620's.

After descending Old Blue Mt., the Trail took us over Elephant and Bemis Mountains and then down hill to this lean-to.

There are three south-bounders and a section hiker sleeping in the shelter. Duck X-ing slept in his tent behind the shelter.

July 3 ~ Little Swift River Pond Campsite ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1942.3 north, 129 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 12.9 miles hiked today

Today's hike began with a nice walk over huge slabs of rock following a pathway through scrub Balsam trees. Wherever soil had accumulated over the rock, there was a thin crust coating covered by moss that was in turn covered by pale gray lichens. From the distance it appeared as if there was snow on the ground. Then we followed the Trail down a gradual descent to State Route 17 where we took a break while looking over Mooselookmeguntic Lake. From there the Trail passed Moxie Pond, Long Pond and Sabbath Day Pond, we ate lunch at a lean-to at the last pond. The day was warm so I stripped down to my underwear and went in to wash off while Southern Comfort went in with all his clothes on to get the sweat off them.

We then continued on the four miles to our campsite and about one mile from camp I finally saw my first Moose! Unfortunately it had been dead for quite a while and all that was left was bones and moose hair.

When we got to the campsite we used the two canoes that are always left there to take a tour of the small pond. Southern comfort tried to catch some fish but was unsuccessful.

Upon returning to shore we set up camp, started a fire and began to cook an early dinner. While we were eating two local fishermen came by the campsite. After talking with them awhile they offered to bring in three trout from the pond if they were biting. In about 1/2 hour they returned with three beautiful, brightly colored, native brook trout between 9 and 12 inches long. After gutting and cleaning them we stuck them on pointed sticks and slowly roasted them over the hot coals of the fire. The fish were delicious; the flesh was as orange as that of salmon. Thank you!

A former thru-hiker from '98, Gumby, was also sharing the fire with us and gave us cheese and crackers that hit the spot.

There are 5 other south-bounders camping nearby including Mother Goose who has hiked the Trail several times and was the first woman to yo-yo, turn around and walk the Trail back to the beginning.

July 4 ~ Poplar Ridge Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1957.8 north, 130 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 15.5 miles hiked today

It rained on and off during the night but my one pound tarp kept me dry and warm. Technology is great! I don't like to pack up a wet tarp and rain gear in the morning and showers made it even more difficult.

After about an hour on the Trail the sun eventually came out to stay. The first five miles of the hike were very easy because they were fairly level and dirt covered. We made it to State Route 4 in good time (2 hours) and after a short break moved to Piazza Rock Lean-to, 2 miles away. According to the Maine Trail Guide, the Trail between Route 4 and Route 27 (32 miles) are the most difficult in Maine with significant gain and loss of elevation and crosses six 4,000 foot peaks and three 3,000 foot peaks. It looks like the next 2 1/2 days will be challenging.

We took a short break in the new Piazza Rock Lean-to then began our climb up 2,000 feet to the summit of Saddleback Mt. (4,120 ft). At first the ascent was easy as we passed Ethel and Eddy Ponds and then the Trail got steeper and more difficult.

At 3,750 ft we reached tree-line, where trees were less than 8 feet tall and began to have great views. Saddleback is named for its saddle-like shape when viewed from the town of Rangeley. The wind-swept ridge is dominated by exposed bedrock on which scattered glacial erratics are perched (erratics are round boulders left by retreating glaciers). Plant communities include sedge meadows, dwarf heaths and krummholtz (crooked wood). We spent about two hours on the summit eating our lunch and basking in the bright sunshine. We also met another north-bounder, Buckeye Bob.

We then hiked down 500 feet and ascended another 4,000 footer, "The Horn". On the northern side of The Horn we dropped below tree-line and then leveled out for a mile to the base of our last climb, Saddleback Junior. It was a steep climb for the end of the day but the view from the summit was outstanding. On the way to the lean-to we came upon a very tame Spruce Grouse that was making a clucking noise. It came over to Duck X-ing and bit his wiggling fingers so Duck X-ing grabbed it with both hands. I took his photo with his "trail chick". When he released it, it flew away.

When we got to the lean-to we dried out our wet stuff, ate dinner and rested for another day of climbs tomorrow. This shelter is the first of the shelters in Maine with a "baseball bat" floor. It is made of 2 inch pine saplings instead of flat boards, with my skinny body I don't know how much sleep I will get tonight.



Duck X-ing and Spruce Grouse

July 5 ~ Rt.27 Straton (Straton Motel/Hostel) ... in Maine - [map](#)
at milepoint 1979.3 north, 131 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 21.5 miles hiked today

I had no problem sleeping on the "baseball bats" last night. We had a short thundershower pass through and I was glad that I was dry and under cover.

Southern Comfort and I got another early start while Duck X-ing was still asleep in his tent. The temperature was about 50 degrees with a stiff breeze, a perfect day for hiking, and that we did with few breaks.

There were 3 short steep ascent/descents and the remainder of the Trail was fairly level. The four mountains we went over, Lone, Spaulding, and Crocker South and North were all wooded and afforded no views, another reason to push on.

On the Trail close to Route 27 we came upon another Spruce Grouse that actually charged us while clucking loudly after pretending she had a broken wing to distract us from her chicks.

After reaching the highway it only took two minutes to get a hitch to the motel. We ate dinner across the street at the diner, came back and took a shower and then watched TV. Duck X-ing came in at 8:30.

July 6 ~ Avery Memorial Campsite, Bigelow Col ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 1987.3 north, 132 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 8.0 miles hiked today

We enjoyed our stay at Straton Motel and Hostel because everything we needed was close by - a diner, market and restaurant within a block and the Laundromat two blocks up the street. After a huge breakfast at the diner (I had a pint of Ben & Jerry's for dessert) we arranged for our free shuttle back to the Trail.

For the first two miles the Trail was level through hard wood forest and then got gradually steeper until we reached Horn's Lean-to where we had a short break.

Then we summited South Horn (3,805), walked a level mile through thick Balsam forest and began the climb up West Peak (4,145 feet). The top of this mountain is an above tree line, alpine area with plants similar to those found on Mt. Katahdin and Mt. Washington, both of which can be seen on the distant horizon in opposite directions. We ate our lunch on the top viewing Sugarloaf Mountain, a ski area.

We then had a short descent to Bigelow Col (4,000 feet) where we set up tents and my tarp. The Col is listed in the Thru-hiker Companion as a "beautiful, though often cold, place to spend the night". The Weather Channel predicted lows in the low 40's tonight and we are expecting temperatures to bottom out somewhere in the 30's. I hope that I will be warm enough.

July 7 ~ West Carry Pond Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2001.9 north, 133 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 14.6 miles hiked today

The temperature this morning was 40 degrees with a stiff wind but I wasn't cold in my tarp because I was able to completely cover the opening with my parka. I think that I will also use this setup if the bugs get bad.

I started hiking in long pants, a long sleeved shirt, fleece vest and hat and was glad I did when I reached Avery Peak (4,090 feet) where it was so cold and windy that my fingers were numb. Avery is above tree-line and is named after Myron H. Avery, the first "2000 miler" to walk the entire Trail.



Flagstaff Lake

I spent several minutes at the peak despite the cold conditions watching a beam of sunlight break through a hole in the leaden sky and trace a pathway across the whitecap surface of Flagstaff Lake. The lake is at least 22 miles long and did not have a boat on it yesterday or today. I wonder why?

The lake was formed in 1949 from a newly constructed dam and covers the former villages of Flagstaff and Dead River.

I then dropped down a steep 1,000 feet and stopped to strip down to shorts and tee-shirt. I continued hiking slowly through woodland until I reached Little Bigelow Lean-to. I was amazed that I had walked for four hours without taking a break.

At the lean-to I met up with Southern Comfort, who had started hiking about a half-hour before me this morning. Duck X-ing was still asleep when I left. From our lunch spot we began a leisurely pace to the next lean-to seven miles away.

When we arrived at the lean-to about a dozen girls from Quebec were already there with their tents set up in the woods, and a small group of Boy Scouts from Straton. The mom of one of the scouts gave me some leftover chicken, corn and potatoes. Thanks!

We met many hikers on the Trail today including south-bounders, section hikers and boy scouts out for the weekend. The unusual hiker award goes to two southbound girls walking barefoot. I offered them some money toward shoes but they said they had shoes and wore them in camp. I hope they watch out for sharp rocks and the abundant moose droppings.

Today when we crossed the Long Falls Dam Road we officially joined the 2,000 mile club. A large "2,000 miles" was painted in yellow on the center of the road.

Staying in the shelter tonight with Southern Comfort and me is Pilgrim Jack, a section hiker, heading south. Duck X-ing came in at 5:00 and set up his tent outside the shelter. He said that he is getting a cold.

At 9:00 the Boy Scouts and Canadian girls were outside the lean-to around the fire and were

noisy, so I grabbed my tarp and moved into the woods for a quiet nights sleep. Off on the lake I could hear several Loons calling as I drifted off.

July 8 ~ Caratunk ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2015.9 north, 134 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 14.0 miles hiked today

We got an early start today so that we could reach the Kennebec River before 2:00. The Kennebec River is the most formidable water crossing on the Appalachian Trail. In 1985 a thru-hiker drowned trying to ford the river and many other hikers have had "near misses". The river bottom is covered with slippery rocks and has strong currents and most importantly, has unpredictable water rises due to several dams upstream. For these reasons the ATC and MATC have funded a free canoe ride across the river between 10:00 and 2:00 daily.

We hiked the first ten level miles in four hours without a break through mixed forests, over streams and across boardwalks in swamps.

At Pierce Pond Lean-to we took a break and then pushed on to cover the final three miles to the river where Steve gave us a ride across in the canoe. We then walked into downtown Caratunk, population 118, and made arrangements to stay at the Caratunk B&B. One of the owners of the B&B gave us a ride to the nearest town with a store. We re-supplied for our next leg of the journey to Monson, thirty miles away.

July 9 ~ Bald Mountain Brook Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2030.6 north, 135 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 14.7 miles hiked today

We had French toast, home fries coffee and orange juice for breakfast at the B&B and then walked a block back to the Trail.

The first six miles were easy through woodlands to Pleasant Pond Lean-to where we took a break. Then we had a 1,000 foot climb in one mile. At the top of Pleasant Pond Mt. we found a huge slab of rock with a great view so we stopped for lunch and a nap in the sun with a cool breeze going.

From there we had a seven mile descent to the shelter where we met two south-bounders. Another north-bonder, Journeyman, came in about an hour before dusk.

July 10 ~ Maine 15, Monson (Shaw's) ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2052.6 north, 136 days since start of hike, averaging 15.1 miles per day, 22.0 miles hiked today

It rained overnight for several hours and again I was glad to be dry in a lean-to. We had only one mountain to climb today, Moxie Bald (2,629 feet). From Moxie Bald, on a clear day, sweeping views are possible, from the coastal lowlands to the south, to White Cap Mountain, Katahdin, and Big Squaw Mountain to the north. Unfortunately, when we went across the only thing we saw was the inside of a cloud. The rain from last night and the high humidity this morning made walking very treacherous as every rock and root was very slippery. I almost fell several times.

After descending Moxie Bald we took a short break at Moxie Bald Lean-to then began the next nine mile, flatland hike to Horseshoe Canyon Lean-to. When we reached the west branch of the Piscataquis River we had to ford the river because in Maine there are no bridges on the AT over streams. I was lucky and was able to rock-hop across without water going over the tops of my boots. We then followed the river for five miles through a canyon with steep slate walls, falls and deep quiet pools.

At the lean-to we ate lunch and decided not to spend the night, but to push on nine more miles into town. The Trail went up and down little bumps through woodlands and around Lake Hebron. About an hour from the road it began to drizzle, then pour down and then lightening and thunder.

I was out of water and was licking rain drops off my arms.

At the road we were lucky enough to find a ride into town immediately! We had a huge all-you-can-eat dinner and a pint of Ben & Jerry's from the corner store. This is such a nice spot we've decided to take a zero here tomorrow.

July 11 ~ Maine 15, Monson ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2052.6 north, 137 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 0 miles hiked today

We started the day with a 3-3-3-3, 3 strips of bacon, 3 eggs, 3 sausages, 3 pancakes along with home fries, orange juice and coffee. I am glad I do not have to hike today! I dried my boots and repaired the soles with Freesole, which is a thicker, stickier material than Shoegoo. Tomorrow I will tape up the toes with some heavy-duty tape that I found in the hiker box. With only 115 miles to go I don't want to buy a new pair of shoes that I don't like. It looks like it is going to be a contest between my boots and the terrain. I hope that my boots win.

Today we rested up by reading, taking naps and checking to make sure we had enough supplies for the next several days.

Tomorrow we will enter the section that is known as "the 100 mile wilderness" mostly because of the scarcity of options to obtain supplies. Signs at each end warn the unprepared hiker to stay away, but after over 2,000 miles we are accustomed to planning for several days.

July 12 ~ Long Pond Stream Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2067.7 north, 138 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 15.1 miles hiked today

I had a 2-2-2-2 to start the day in anticipation of getting back on the Trail. We settled our bill with Mr. Shaw and he gave us a free ride back to the trailhead. Our zero day was restful to both the body and the mind. We now feel eager and ready to enter the 100 mile wilderness and our quest toward Katahdin.

This was an easy hiking day because there were no climbs up or down over 500 feet. The only thing that slowed us down was the many blow-downs that we had to climb over, under, and around. We went past four ponds and examined each carefully for moose along the perimeter, but again, no luck.

We passed Little Wilson Falls, which at 60 feet is one of the highest falls along the entire AT. When we reached Big Wilson Stream we searched up and down the shoreline for a pathway to rock hop across without getting our boots wet. We finally gave up, took off our boots, put on Tevas and waded across to the other side and had lunch.



Little Wilson Falls

There seems to be a soothing effect from the sight and sound of moving water similar to that of a bonfire, because soon after lunch we were quiet and napping.

We then moved on to the lean-to and met two women who flip-flopped and were moving south. Four more south bounders came in followed by a group of eight boys from a summer camp. What a crowd!

From this shelter it is only 99.4 miles to Mt. Katahdin.

July 13 ~ West Branch of Pleasant River Campsite ... in Maine - [map](#)
at milepoint 2083.0 north, 139 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 15.3 miles hiked today

We were the first ones up today along with the two ladies heading south and we were quiet as possible in spite of the few south bounders who partied around the fire in front of the lean-to until 11:00.

The day started with a 1,700 foot climb to the top of Barren Mountain where we had great views of the surrounding countryside from a fire warden's tower.

We then went past Cloud Pond, a tarn formed by the scouring action of a glacier. From there we descended into the Fourth Mountain Bog where we found Pitcher Plants in bloom. These insectivorous plants have 4" to 8" specialized leaves formed in the shape of a pitcher. Inside are hundreds of hairs pointing downward, helping to trap insects that fall into the water that collects in the bottom. Enzymes then "digest" the bugs. The rest of the Trail consisted of a series of significant gains and losses of elevation over rough footway.

Tonight we are camping along the Pleasant River to try to get a "wilderness" experience after last night's circus.

July 14 ~ East Branch Lean-to ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2099.3 north, 140 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 16.3 miles hiked today

The first order of business today was to ford the Pleasant River. We were camped close to the spot where hikers ford so we started hiking in Texas, crossed the river and then put our boots on when we reached the other side.

We then traveled through a stand of tall white pines called the Hermitage that is owned by the Nature Conservancy. From there the Trail followed the Gulf Hagas Brook for four miles to Carl A. Newhall Lean-to where we took a break before beginning the string of increasingly higher peaks, Gulf Hagas, West, Hay and White Cap.

The open summit on White Cap afforded outstanding views of Katahdin and the lake country to the north and the White Cap Range and Barren-Chairback Range to the south. We didn't dawdle or nap at the summit today because of the dark clouds on the horizon and instead made haste toward our lean-to.

It was all sunny when we arrived so we decided to do our laundry and take a dip in the river. It felt great to wash off three days of sweat, but I will start a new layer tomorrow.

After about an hour in camp the dark clouds came closer and closer until thunder and lightening made us scramble to collect our damp clothing and hang it inside the lean-to. It stormed for about three hours with thunder rumbling through the mountain valleys. The mosquitoes are plentiful here and I am sure we will be attacked tonight.

July 15 ~ Antlers Campsite ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2115.3 north, 141 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 16.0 miles hiked today

The mosquitoes arrived shortly after dark last night and kept trying to find bare flesh on my body until about midnight. They resumed at first light, 4:00. To begin the day I had to pull on damp shorts, tee shirt and underwear the make two short 500 foot climbs before an almost eight mile, level walk through the woods to Jo-Mary Road where we were scheduled to meet Eric's friends at 2:00.

Willy and Bob arrived at 2:45 from Millinocket where they left their car and brought food for us and themselves for several days. Then we pushed on four miles over level terrain to our campsite near the Lower Jo-Mary Lake.

July 16 ~ Nahmakanta Lake Campsite ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2128.5 north, 142 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 13.2 miles hiked today

Loons on the lake at 2:00 in the morning woke us all up with their loud calls, they even got the bullfrogs croaking along the shoreline.

We were in no hurry to start today because we only had a short distance to go and the Trail was level on the profile map. We even took breaks at convenient spots every three or four miles. The Trail passed by the Pemadumcook Lake, where a short side trail lead to an outstanding view of Katahdin. It was too cloudy and foggy to see our objective today. The Trail then paralleled the Nahmakanta Stream for nearly five miles, passing the Nahmakanta Stream campsite near the mid point. We stopped for lunch there.

We had planned to stay at a lean-to tonight, but when we stopped at a sandy beach, we explored a little and found a great shoreline campsite.



Nahmakante Lake Campsite

It is starting to sprinkle on my tarp.

I got into my sleeping bag at 8:30 to get out of the wind and was lulled into drowsiness by the splashing waves on the shoreline, the whispering of the pines and the flapping of the sides of my tarp.

July 17 ~ Rainbow Spring Campsite ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2140.8 north, 143 days since start of hike, averaging 15.0 miles per day, 11.9 miles hiked today

The wind died down over night and we awoke to an overcast, foggy morning. We began with a nice hike of 750 feet to the top of Nesuntabunt Mountain where on a clear day you get great views of Katahdin, but not today.

We then hiked on a nearby level Trail to Rainbow Stream Lean-to where we stopped for lunch. After eating we followed the Rainbow Stream for four miles and finally did get a view of Mt. Katahdin from Rainbow Lake Dam. We are about 14 air miles away and are impressed by the size of the mountain, even at this distance.

The five of us are camped along the Rainbow Lake away from the crowds found at the Lean-tos. When we arrived we set up camp and took a refreshing swim in the lake.

We have a small campfire going and expect it to get quite cool tonight. I hope the fire keeps the mosquitoes down.

A couple that flew in on a floatplane for their honeymoon, Du-ette, join us at our campfire.



Bob, Lobo, Duck X-ing, Southern Comfort, & Willie at Rainbow Spring

July 18 ~ Abol Bridge Campground ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2152.0 north, 144 days since start of hike, averaging 14.9 miles per day, 11.2 miles hiked today

Today's hike began through relatively flat lake country following the shore of Rainbow Lake for nearly three miles.

Then after a short climb we reached Rainbow Ledges with its excellent views of Katahdin. It was foggy and cloudy again so no views for us.

We lunched at Hurd Brook Lean-to and hurried down the Trail to the campground after crossing the West Branch of the Pendoscot River. We ate another lunch at the camp store and also had dinner there. A brief thunderstorm chased us into our tents and a fire started by the Du-etts took the chill off after the storm. The Du-etts camped near us again because they enjoyed talking to us about our thru-hike. What an unusual way to spend a honeymoon, talking to five hairy, smelly hikers! I wish them a happy life together.

We walked down the road from our campsite at sunset and finally got a great view of Katahdin. Tomorrow I will photograph it at sunrise, weather permitting.

July 19 ~ Daicey Pond Campground ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2159.5 north, 145 days since start of hike, averaging 14.9 miles per day, 7.5 miles hiked today

Today the Trail followed the West Branch of the Pendoscot River along a level pathway for about three miles. After crossing the Nesowadnehunk Stream we entered the official boundary of Baxter State Park. We followed the stream for two miles and enjoyed a series of scenic waterfalls and quiet pools.

At the campground Duck X-ing, Southern Comfort and I reserved a place at the lean-to for thru-hikers while Will and Bob made arrangements to stay in Millinocket because the campground is full, except for spaces reserved for thru-hikers.

After dinner I spent about an hour watching the reflection of Katahdin in Daicey Pond. Katahdin is an isolated, massive, gray granite monolith that was known to the Indians as "Kette-Adene"- the

greatest mountain. To the Indians it was sacred and they never dared venture too near to it. The weather for tomorrow for our summit attempt is predicted to be beautiful!



Mt. Katahdin over Daicey Pond

July 20 ~ Katahdin Terminus ... in Maine - [map](#)

at milepoint 2167.1 north, 146 days since start of hike, averaging 14.8 miles per day, 7.6 miles hiked today

I have to admit that I had a hard time sleeping last night anticipating today's climb. We ate a quick breakfast and broke camp at 5:45 to hurry up the Trail 2.4 miles to Katahdin Stream Campground (1,070 feet) at the base of the mountain.

At 7:00 the five of us began our trek 4,198 feet up to the top at 5,268 feet. At the start the Trail was wide and on level ground through hardwood forest paralleling the Katahdin Stream. After about a mile we crossed the stream on a narrow footbridge and then passed the Katahdin Stream Falls, a beautiful 50-foot cascade. At that point the Trail began to get steeper and the number of rock hops increased.

I was really pumped up and was walking as fast as I could, carrying only a backpack with water, food and warm clothing. My hiking partners asked me to slow down.

At tree line (3,500 feet) there were even larger boulders that required some rock climbing using metal hand holds that were permanently attached to the rock. By the time I reached "The Gateway" (4,600 feet), the edge of the plateau, I was hiking alone. Before me was a flat tundra area called "Table Land". The Trail twisted across the open landscape passing small boulders covered by green lichens and led to a short climb to the summit. As I began this section I realized that the number of white blazes ahead was decreasing and that I had to slow down.

I was glad I was alone because I had time to reflect on all the beautiful scenery I had seen, all the wonderful people, both on and off the Trail, I had met and how fortunate I was to have had the opportunity to hike my hike. It was a very emotional time for me. After scrambling up the final climb I could see the summit sign and began to slow down even more.

Finally I reached the sign at 9:30, put both hands on it, and closed my eyes for a few seconds, thankful that I was able to complete my adventure safely.



Lobo on Mt Katahdin!

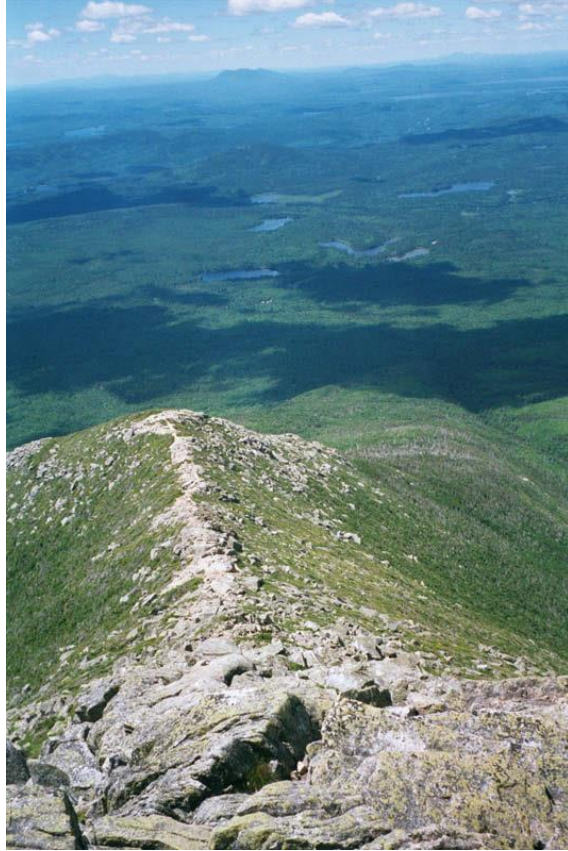
Looking over the sign I was able to observe the Great Basin encircled for three-fourths of its rim by the famous Knife Edge. In places its width is only a few feet, with precipitous slopes dropping 1,500 feet on each side. Connected to the Knife Edge is Mt. Pamola (4,902 feet) which can be reached from Katahdin by a blue blaze trail.

Behind me the land was covered by a blanket of dark green spruce and fir trees, broken only by the countless lakes that reflected the sun's light and appeared as gems. I then released into the wind the sacred tobacco that was given to me by AuSable Mike. Native Americans who live near Mike in Michigan said 100 prayers over the tobacco, it is said to bring good luck to the holder. I guess it worked for me.

Ten minutes later the other four hikers arrived and we congratulated each other and celebrated by drinking small bottles of grand Marnier that Southern Comfort and I carried in from Monson.

Two other thru-hikers arrived, Captain and Acrobat, and they graciously shared a bottle of champagne with us.

We remained at the summit for about two hours and had to wear warm clothing because of the stiff wind. By the time we left the top for our descent back down the Trail, about forty people were on the peak with more on the way up.



“The Gateway” down to Katahdin Stream Campground

The five of us met at the bottom and drove Willy's car to Millinocket where we spent the night at the Appalachian Trail Lodge.

Tomorrow we will drive to Medway to drop off Southern comfort at the bus stop for his ride back to Tennessee. Willy, Bob, Duck X-ing and I will then continue on to Boston, where we will spend the night, and the following morning drive Bob to the airport for his flight home to California. Willy will then return Duck X-ing and me to the Delaware Water Gap where we will begin our short southbound hike to Eckville, a section we skipped after home stays to catch up with our friends. We have both hiked this stretch before, but will do it again in order to meet the requirements of our personal definition of a thru-hike.

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**July 23 ~ Leroy A. Smith Shelter** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)  
 20.2 miles hiked today

After spending the night in Boston and saying farewell to Bob, he flew to California yesterday morning, Willy, Duck X-ing and I drove to the Delaware Water Gap, where Duck X-ing and I were to spend the night. My wife was already at the Hostel when we arrived and I was excited to see her. She jumped so high into the air I didn't know when she was going to come down.

After Willy left for home in Delaware, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Michael and Pam Shapiro, arrived and we all went out to dinner. I exchanged my large pack and worn out boots for a smaller pack and less worn out boots and made sure I had enough food for three days.

During the afternoon my wife and her brother shuttled five hikers to the movies and back. They

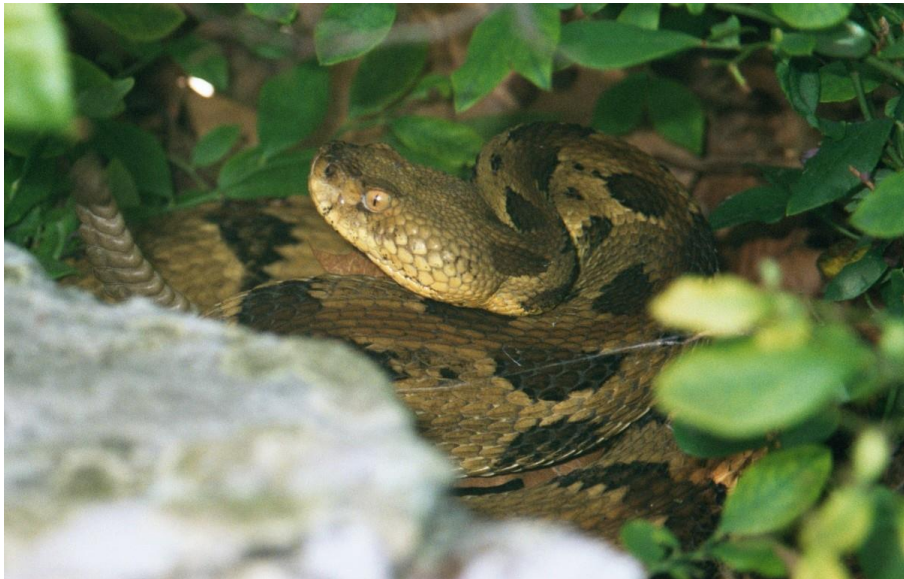


were happy to do it, and the hikers had a good time.

When my relatives left we spent some time talking to other thru-hikers and finally went to sleep in a partially constructed shelter, three walls and a floor, behind the Church of the Mountain. The hostel was full.

Today we started with an easy 1,000 foot climb to the top of Mount Minsi where we had fine views of the Delaware River and Mt. Tammany in New Jersey. The Trail then followed an old woods road for several miles to Kirkridge Shelter where we took a short break and made sure that we had enough water, 2 liters, for our trip to the next shelter.

Then we began to encounter the famous "Pennsylvania rocks" which slowed down our pace. After scrambling over a section called Wolf Rocks, we heard a loud buzzing sound and looked down to find an almost 4 foot long, light yellow and dark brown banded rattlesnake sunning itself on the Trail. It retreated to a protected spot under a bush near the side of the Trail where I was able to take several photos. Wolf Rocks is the approximate southern limit of glaciations to be found along the AT route left by the last ice age.



**PA Timber Rattlesnake**

We then moved on over eleven more miles of rocks on more or less level terrain until we reached the shelter.

While walking through the woods today I was acutely aware of the difference between our woods and the Maine woods I was in just three days ago. In Maine in the higher elevations the trees were mostly Balsam which emitted a scent like Christmas trees. When crossing over boggy areas the sphagnum moss and other decaying vegetation also produced a distinctive smell. The various kinds of ever present fungi along with the heaps of moose dung added more aromas to the Trail. The most common Maine song birds were the Winter Wren, White-throated Sparrow and the Dark-eyed Junco.

Back here in PA the forest is hardwood dominated by Oaks, Hickory and Maples with Red-eyed Vireos, Indigo Buntings and Towhees singing. I was unable to distinguish any obvious scents along the Trail.

**July 24 ~ Palmerton** ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)  
16.0 miles hiked today

The elevation profile on the map for today's hike was almost a straight line except for the two gaps we would encounter. What the map couldn't show was the long sections with small pointy rocks that felt like they were trying to come through the bottoms of my boots.

We walked the first eight miles without a break and then stopped at an overlook with views of farmland down in the valley. Along the way we flushed five grouse and several deer.

After passing through Little Gap, we noticed that the vegetation was getting shorter and seemed to be under stress. The closer we came to Palmerton the thinner the vegetation became and more dead trees could be seen until eventually there was no plant life or soil at all covering the naked rocks, only dead trees spread over them like pick-up-sticks. The cause for the lunar-like landscape was a zinc plant in town that operated for 82 years that spewed out noxious fumes. The area is on the EPA super fund list, and re-vegetation efforts are under way. The mountain is slowly coming back to life.



### **Duck X-ing on the AT near Palmerton**

From four miles out of Palmerton to the Lehigh Gap we had superior and continuous views of the valley below. The descent at the Gap was very steep over an open rocky area for almost a half-mile. I'm glad we weren't doing it during a thunderstorm!

When we reached the road we got a ride into town within five minutes and made arrangements to sleep in the basement of the borough hall. We had pizza for lunch and took showers back at borough hall.

After a large dinner at Palmerton Hotel (\$1.50 for a pint of Yuengling beer!) we each had a pint of ice cream and then turned in early for the long, last day of our hike. There were about a dozen hikers in the basement.

**July 25 ~ Eckville Shelter ... in Pennsylvania - [map](#)**  
24.9 miles hiked today

At 2:15 in the morning I was awakened by a stumbling man, trying to lift his pack off the top bunk. It fell onto the floor along with him and woke Duck X-ing up who asked the hiker, "What are you doing? Are you leaving?" The drunk replied that he was just coming back from the bar and was staying for the night. He managed to crawl into the bunk above me and we heard no more from him.

At 5:00 AM we gathered up our equipment and moved to another room to pack without waking the other hikers. By 5:30 we were at the bakery in town and had coffee and three donuts each. After hitching out of town we were back on the Trail by 6:30.

First we crossed a bridge over the Lehigh River and began a gradual ascent out of the Gap back to the ridge top where the Trail leveled out until our descent to the Eckville Shelter. The hiking was fast and easy and our pace was only slowed by the blueberries we collected and ate for several miles along the first section of our hike through open areas. On a sunny, rocky outcrop we found and photographed another rattlesnake. At Bake Oven Knob we took a break and had an exceptional 180 degree view to the south from the look out. People flock to this spot in the autumn during hawk migration. At Rt. 309 we stopped for a break.



**A Copperhead & two Rattlesnakes**

The Trail then followed an old woods road for several miles until the Allentown shelter where we took another short break. The pathway then became rocky and we had to be careful where we stepped while looking for snakes. When we reached a blue blaze trail to Balanced Rocks we took off our packs and searched for snakes that were seen in the area the day before. Duck X-ing spotted one between two rocks. I had hopped over that spot just minutes before. Upon closer examination we found four Timber Rattlesnakes and a Copperhead in a heap sunning themselves. We tried to get them to coil into a striking position for a photograph with our hiking sticks, but they were uncooperative and just buzzed and crawled under rocks.

We examined another rocky outcrop, after leaving Balanced Rocks, about 100 yards down the Trail. After I almost stepped on a large Copperhead we decided to get back on the Trail and finish our hike, alive.

When we arrived at the descent into Eckville we ran down the pathway where there were no rocks and emerged from the woods at Hawk Mountain Road an hour and a half early. Down at the shelter there were about ten north-bounders who congratulated us and the caretaker, Lazy, took our photograph. My wife and Duck X-ing's parents arrived shortly afterwards. While we were having a picnic lunch a reporter for a Reading newspaper and local radio station stopped by for an interview. After the interview and finishing our lunch we congratulated each other and headed for home.

I would like to thank the many people, relatives, friends and strangers, who offered support by signing my guest book, e-mailing and sending letters and packages. All offered encouragement and interest in my hike and helped to get me through. Thanks also to the folks at home who were helpful and generous to my wife and to Trailplace for posting my journal. I hope the story of my journey will be an inspiration to both young and old hikers.

Lobo  
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