

Appalachian Trail Hike - Jim Highsaw
Springer Mt. to Kent, CT March 20 to July 30, 1974
Kent, CT to Mt. Katahdin June 4 to August 6, 1975

I did about two-thirds of the Trail in 1974 and the remainder in 1975. The following is an account of my 1974 hike, which includes hiking and interacting with a number of the through-hikers, people who did part of the Trail and then went home, and people on shorter hikes.

On March 18, 1974 I flew from Washington, DC to Atlanta, took a Trailways bus to Ellijay (about 20 miles west of Amicalola Falls State Park), and caught a ride with some high school students to the Park. A Ranger told me I could camp in the picnic area above the Falls, so I walked up a park road to reach the picnic area and camped alone in the quiet, deserted area. On March 19 I had a long, hard day on the Springer Mt. Approach Trail. I found a place to camp close to the top and walked to the shelter to get water, where I met 5 hikers headed for Maine. Only one, Rick Brannan from Kentucky, made it to Mt. Katahdin.

Springer Mt. to Franklin, NC March 20 - April 1

For the first 4 days I hiked with Bill, a former soldier from Florida. We had the coldest night of my hike - 22 degrees at Hawk Mt. shelter. Bill left the Trail at Woody Gap. The next day I met Joe Head from Connecticut and spent 9 days with him. For 5 of those days we shared shelters with Rick and Louise Brannan from Kentucky. Highlights of this first section included a pleasant walk along streams and through rhododendron groves from Big Stamp shelter to Hawk Mt. shelter on March 21, my first 11-mile day to reach Tes-natee shelter on March 25, my first 14-mile day to reach Addis Gap shelter on March 27, a very pleasant evening around the campfire at Addis Gap with the Brannans and Joe Head, seeing the first Spring Beauties of the hike north of Bly Gap on March 29, a most enjoyable lunch at the viewpoint on Standing Indian followed by a very nice afternoon walk to reach Carter Gap shelter, and a most welcome rest day in Franklin, NC on April 1.

Franklin, NC to Hot Springs, NC April 2 - 18

After hitching back to the Trail from Franklin, Joe Head and I walked 6 miles to Siler Bald Shelter. After dinner Joe told me he needed to start doing longer days and was going to leave early and do 18 miles. I never saw him again, but he did finish the Trail in September. Highlights of this section included staying at 2 shelters with Dana Totman (from Maine), sleeping in the open under a bright moon in Stekoah Gap, meeting a family at Fontana Dam who took my picture and mailed it to my parents, staying at shelters with 2 guys (Joe and Barry) who had just gotten out of the Army and were hiking to Damascus, Virginia, finding a nice place to camp by a stream about 3 miles north of the Great Smoky Mountains, and meeting a young fellow from Florida (Rocky) and his Pointer, Butch, at Walnut Mt. shelter.

Hot Springs, NC to Damascus, Virginia April 19 - May 6

I began this section by walking 6 miles to Spring Mt. shelter with Rocky, then 14 miles the next day to a campsite south of Jerrys Cabin shelter. Highlights of this section included crossing Big Bald, camping for 2 nights with Paul Caldwell (from Davidson College), waking up one morning to 3 Barred Owls at my campsite, a pleasant lunch with a picnic group on top of Roan Mt.,

seeing the Laurel Fork Gorge and Waterfall, staying at several shelters with the ex-Army guys, and doing a 22-mile day to reach Damascus.

Damascus, Virginia to Pearisburg, Virginia May 7 - May 19

I left Damascus about 1:00 and walked about 7 miles to a nice campsite in the woods. Highlights of this section included the hike over Mt. Rogers, seeing a Scarlet Tanager near Teas, an ice cream stop on Walker Mt., an 18-mile day to reach Turkey Gap shelter, and a pleasant afternoon with Larry Dorr at Miss Finley's boarding house.

Pearisburg, Virginia to the James River May 20 - June 1

I left Pearisburg and walked 16 miles to Pine Swamp shelter, where I stayed with Larry Dorr. Highlights of this section included a very peaceful evening at War Branch shelter, meeting Jim Westenhoff on the way to Niday shelter, a very pleasant evening with Gloria Rapalee and Loren Ortman at Boblett's Gap shelter, soaking my feet in the cold stream at Matts Creek shelter, and meeting a friend at the James River for a week of hiking.

James River to north end of Shenandoah National Park June 2 - 17

To start this section, my friend Jack and I left Johns Hollow shelter and walked 10 miles to Punchbowl shelter. Highlights of this section included encountering a Timber Rattlesnake on Cove Mt., the view from Spy Rock, camping at Mill Creek, a most-welcome night at the Holiday Inn in Rockfish Gap, encountering a Timber Rattlesnake near Sawmill Run shelter, seeing a Bobcat in the central section of the Park, a very pleasant 2 nights at Big Meadows Lodge, and a 21-mile day to reach the north end of the Park.

North End of Shenandoah National Park to Duncannon, PA June 18 - July 1

At the beginning of this section I walked 15 miles to the Trico Firetower, where I camped with some Boy Scouts. Highlights of this section included the cold, refreshing water at Three Springs shelter, crossing the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry, sharing several shelters with Mike Martin, pleasant walking through the Michaux State Forest, a peaceful motel night after crossing the Cumberland Valley (mostly on roads), and crossing the Susquehanna River at Duncannon.

Duncannon, PA to Delaware Water Gap, PA July 2 - July 15

I left Shaffer shelter north of Duncannon and walked 13 miles to a campsite in the woods. Highlights of this section included a 2 1/2 day break at my sister's house in Doylestown, PA, a night at the picnic pavilion in Port Clinton, crossing the boulder fields, sharing Kirkridge shelter with Gloria Rapalee, and crossing the Delaware River into NJ. I also met Cindy from Iowa who had started 2 days before I did in Georgia.

Delaware Water Gap, PA to Kent, CT July 15 - July 30

After spending several hours in Delaware Water Gap I continued on to Sunfish Pond, where I camped in a designated area. Highlights of this section included a 20-mile day to reach Stokes shelter, a good lunch on a hot day outside the store in Unionville, NY, meeting some southbound hikers, having beer and hot dogs with Dave Rigg at Lake Tiorati Circle, and having 4 shelters to

myself. After a night at Torrey shelter I hitchhiked to Pawling, NY to get my food box, spent the night there with Dave Rigg and Cindy in the town park, then walked south to cover what I had skipped yesterday. The next day I hitched back to Pawling, then walked 10 miles to Webatuck shelter. On July 29 I reached Mt. Brook shelter, just north of Kent, CT. I was running out of food, so on July 30 I hitchhiked to Salisbury, CT, got my food box, and stayed at the Salisbury Inn. That night I decided to end my hike, but return the following summer with a decent tent and finish the Trail. I returned to Mt. Brook shelter on June 3, 1975 and on August 6 reached the summit of Mt. Katahdin on a lovely day.

Approach to Hike

I carried a Kelty BB5 frame pack, a plastic tube tent, a stove which used butane cartridges, and a 35mm camera with a 50mm lens and color slide film. I enjoyed using my camping skills, so I cooked about 40 percent of my dinners over wood fires and camped about 20 percent of the time. For the 1975 hike I replaced the tube tent with an LL Bean 2-person tent. I found that an old ski pole worked well as a walking stick, and I found a nice straw hat along a road in Virginia.

Other Hikers

Many thanks to the following hikers for companionship, encouragement, advice, trail information, interesting conversations, candy bars and water: Rick and Louise Brannan, Bill Dick, Joe Head, Dana Totman, Joe and Barry from Massachusetts, Rocky and his Pointer, Butch, from Florida, Paul Caldwell, Larry Dorr, Jim Westenhoff, Gloria Rapalee, Loren Ortman, Mike Martin, Jon Clement, Dave Rigg, and Cindy from Iowa.