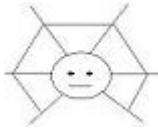


Georgia to Maine By Foot



An Account of an Appalachian Trail Thru-hike
By Robert B. Ewing



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Forward

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I winced but did not cry aloud.
Under the bludgeoning of fate
My head is bloody but unbowed."

- Rudyard Kipling

My wife left me. My business collapsed. I lost my home. The bank repo'd my truck. My dog had died. I was living all the elements of a country and western song except for becoming a drunk. It was, I suppose, not surprising that I was somewhat depressed. In the fall of 1990 I had reached such depths. At times I wished I could go off somewhere and lie down and die. But that's hard to do when your health is good. Besides, I still could get a good laugh from the funny pages and even "The Born Loser" and "Ziggy" seemed to be coping with life. And, actually, Gladys, my dog, had died many years earlier.

At the same time I realized that for the first time since high school graduation, I could go on with my life in any direction I alone chose. And in facing the future, I also realized that I had rushed every major decision I had made in my past. The only time I'm not guilty of procrastination is when I jump to conclusions.

It was at this time that the story of Bill Irwin had made the network news. Bill, a blind man, with his dog "Orient" had hiked the entire Appalachian Trail in 8-1/2 months, a remarkable feat. The A.T. had fascinated me since the early seventies when I learned the Trail went right by my new sister-in-law's front porch in Damascus, Virginia. I had even day-hiked 14 miles from Damascus to Shady Valley, Tennessee in 1975. The more I heard of the over 2,140 mile path, the more I daydreamed of some day walking from Georgia to Maine - but the possibility of actually doing that had remained just a fantasy.

Conceived in the early 1920's by Benton MacKaye and created by the Appalachian Trail Conference and 31

volunteer trail maintaining clubs under the leadership of persons like Myron Avery, the longest continuously marked hiking trail in the world was completed in 1937. In 1948, Earl V. Shaffer, a young Army veteran, became the first to hike the entire trail, going from Georgia to Maine in one season. This made him the first thru-hiker. (This is the currently accepted spelling of the term.)

By 1991, the A.T. Conference had added to its archives the names of just over 2200 people who had completed the trail. Only a fraction of these had done it in one year as thru-hikers. The rest became 2000 milers by completing the A.T. in sections over a period of years. One hiker just recently finished doing segments stretched over 45 years.

Designed as much as possible to follow the crest of the Appalachian range providing a wilderness greenway, the trail still included in the early years many miles of road walking. Since then, however, much of the road walking has been eliminated by relocations.

The A.T. is not an easy walk in the park. There is a constant battle being fought by volunteers to keep the pathway open due to the ravages of nature such as windfall trees and water erosion. It crosses over more than 200 mountains and despite the efforts of the maintainers; the path is narrow with rocks, roots, briars, nettles, streams, bogs, and cow pies to be dealt with.

When I saw that newscast about Bill Irwin it occurred to me that if a blind man could do it, I should be able to do it too. I didn't know if my 55-year-old body would survive a 2000-mile walk, but in my state of mind at the time, dropping dead climbing a mountain didn't seem so bad a resolution to my problems. And if I survived the first mountains but then had to quit somewhere along the way, what was one more failure?

An additional benefit of the attempt was that it would free my mind of the past and give me time to decide -- where do I go from here in my life?

When I got the brainstorm to hike the Trail, I knew very little about it other than it snaked it's way somehow from Georgia to Maine. I didn't know, for example, that the first 14 miles I had walked in 1975 was the first really flat section in the first 400 miles.

Also, I hadn't done any backpacking in my life except for some marches to Army bivouac some 35 years before. I hadn't slept out, prepared a meal outside, nor did I have any of the equipment needed for a long wilderness trek. I did know that I had been working on my feet all of my life and really felt I could walk anywhere, no matter how far, if I did it slow enough.

My first act to learn more was to head for the public library. There, I found only one book on the A.T. and a thru-hiking couple had written it almost 23 years before. It was an account of a trip aided by many journalism friends and was more of a travelogue of the cultural attractions along the way than an actual description of the feat. Not much of the book seemed helpful except the recommendation that one should first become a member of the Appalachian Trail Conference. From the ATC, I acquired the A.T. Data Book, a ready reference listing the major features of the Trail and the mileage between them. Included were the shelters, camping areas, water sources and roads it crossed. It proved to be invaluable and I relied on it every day to plan each day's walk and where I would spend the next night.

The ATC also encouraged hikers to purchase separately the Appalachian Trail Guide for each state they plan to hike. The guidebooks contain detailed descriptions of Trail sections along with sets of maps for the section described. These 14 guidebooks would have cost over \$200 and were entirely beyond my means. I was to later say that if they had been printed on edible paper I might have considered carrying them.

Therefore, I decided to depend on the little Data Book and the two by six rectangular white blazes painted on trees and rocks to find my way.

One of the mistaken impressions I got from the library book on thru hiking was that 150 days was the usual time taken to complete the trip. As a result, I figured that April 15 was a proper date to begin. I didn't realize that in 1991 the A.T. was longer and had more mountains to climb because of relocations than it did 20 years earlier. Most thru-hikers start around April 1 and many start early in March.

When the fifteenth arrived, I was still heavily involved in freeing myself of my business and personal obligations. As a result, it was April 28 before two of my sons, Bob and Bill, would deliver me to the base of Springer Mountain, Georgia for the start of the journey.

Bob and Bill would later tell me they secretly had a bet between them on how far I would go before I quit.

GEORGIA

... after the first 30 minutes of today's hike,
I found a 3-inch sapling down across the trail.
I was tempted to say, "Well, the trail's blocked.
I might as well go home."
But I stepped over and went on.
"Web Breaker"
A.T. Journal - 1991

My sons weren't alone in wondering how far I would be able to go. I had plenty of doubts myself. I wondered if my body would hold together. Would my very limited finances see me to the end? Would I, with such a late start, make it to Main before the snows?

I knew it would be no disgrace to quit. More than 1,200 hikers start north from Springer Mt. each year and only about 200 go the whole way. Some quit on the approach trail up Springer, an 8.3-mile climb, before they have even started the real trail.

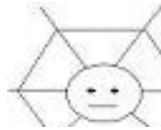
A photo that Bill took of me at the base of Springer shows me fresh and clean. A photo taken later on the top of the mountain shows me sweat-soaked and with a decided wilted look, but still on my feet. I hadn't dropped dead. The last quarter mile of the climb seemed to be almost straight up, what I later would call a "toes touch the shin climb". Sprawled all around the summit when I reached it was a group of detainees from a juvenile detention center near Atlanta. The teenage boys had elected to go on a 30-day wilderness adventure in order to shorten their sentences. They looked worse than I felt and I found that encouraging. Most of them appeared to have had a harder time getting up the mountain than I did even though they were very much younger. They did seem to be carrying way too much weight, a common novice hiker mistake.

People have asked me how I got in shape for a thru-hike. The truth is I didn't and I don't think anyone really can. Certainly a marathon runner or otherwise conditioned athlete

has an advantage over the average person. However, nothing prepares one for the up and down, over mountain after mountain, day after day, 10 to 20 miles each day with a 40 to 50 pound pack on one's back. Nobody trains that hard.

As for myself, I did try to get in shape ... hiking cross country through the woods at home with a backpack full of books, rowing a machine, marching up and down a couple stair flights, doing these things as much as possible in the few months before I set out.

I had figured that to do the Trail in 5 months I would have to average about 15 miles a day, but I quickly found that no way was that going to be possible for a while. The problem wasn't so much my legs or my wind but the dreadful weight I was carrying on my back. I was no different from other rookies ... I was toting too many pounds. Too much weight in a thoroughly ill fitting pack ... which brings me to the problem of equipment.



I noted earlier that I didn't know much about backpacking, and northern Ohio is definitely not a hotbed for the activity. I didn't even know where to go to buy gear or that mail-order stores like Campmor and REI existed. Somehow, though, I learned of an outfitter near Lake Erie and after making the long drive up there, I bought my first piece of gear, a pair of sale priced light hiking boots. Today, hiking boots are a trendy thing and can be found in every discount store shoe department, but just five years ago, this wasn't so.

A couple of weeks later I made a wrong turn off the expressway in Canton and stumbled upon another outfitter. It was there I got most of the rest of my equipment. When the owner of that shop asked what boots I was going with, I pointed to the One Sport brand part nylon boots I was

wearing and he said, "You're not going to try to do the A.T. in those are you?" The general feeling at the time and still the belief of many now is that you need a traditional heavy all leather boots because of the rocks on the trail and the heavy pack you must carry.

So ... who's right? The outfitters would like every hiker to be decked out in the latest state of the art gear. On the other hand, Emma "Grandma" Gatewood, the first woman thru-hiker did it back in 1955 in tennis shoes and with a shower curtain for weather protection. Earl Shaffer did it with heavy Army surplus equipment. And I did it with two pairs of light hikers and I'm still wearing the somewhat dilapidated second pair. I do know that I had only two small blisters on the entire trail. I also know that many of the traditional hiking boot wearers had enough blisters to keep the moleskin suppliers busy. All leather boot wearers who had to put on new boots after their old ones wore out midway into the thru-hike suffered greatly, even though their feet had been toughened by over 1000 miles of walking.

There is a recurring phrase you hear on the A.T. - "hike your own hike". There are no hard and fast rules. Whatever works for you, do it. However, in my mind, there are some definite don'ts and some personal preferences. In cold weather "cotton kills" and in the wet and/or sweaty conditions on the A.T., your cotton wear never really dries. If you see a hiker wearing blue jeans, you know he's not a thru-hiker. Most people who die from hypothermia are wearing blue jeans and cotton sweatshirts. Wool, of course, has been keeping people warm even when wet from the time of the taming of the first sheep. However, for the hiker, it is heavy and slow to dry. Modern fabrics such as nylon, thermax, gore-tex, and polar-tec have been a blessing for present day hikers.

I went with cotton twill cargo pants and a long sleeve chambray farmer's shirt ... not good choices although the pants dried faster than denim and protected me well from briars. As the weather warmed, the pants became shorts and the shirt became sleeveless with the help of my pocketknife.

For rain protection all I could afford was an extra long nylon poncho designed to cover both my pack and me. When the first rain came I promptly learned I couldn't get the thing over my pack by myself and I doubt it would have stayed there in a wind anyway. It too fell victim to my knife, losing three feet of useless weight.

I bought my pack from the same fellow who raised his eyebrows at my boots and he was wrong about the pack, too. The external frame was big enough for extended trip as he said. The problem was that it was too big for my body. I'm six feet tall with long legs but a short torso. The frame of the pack was too big and even with professional help at a trail town; I could never get it adjusted correctly. The weight of a pack should mostly rest on your hips by means of a wide, padded hip belt. The shoulder straps should support relatively little of the weight. Oh, I wish I had tried it on at the shop with a full 40 or 50 pounds in it. We would have realized then that the hip belt, instead of riding flat against me, would flare out like a wraparound wing. A common saying on the A.T. is that it takes about a week for your pack to "set" and feel comfortable. Mine never did.

To tent or not to tent ... that's another question for thru-hikers. Earl Shaffer had an Army poncho. Grandma Gatewood had a shower curtain. Since their time, some 200 shelters have been built along the A.T., usually three-sided lean-tos. The shelters supposedly are spaced a days walk apart. This is not always so - the main siting factor being a water source. Some are too close together and some too far apart. Also, some are filled with boy scouts when you arrive. As a result, there are times when it is necessary to camp.

Most people do carry tents, especially couples. They offer privacy and refuge from the mosquitoes, mice, wood rats, and skunks that also find the shelters habitable.

Tents vary in price from the \$21 Wal-Mart version that I started with to some priced in the hundreds. The more expensive ones are weather-tight but extremely light in weight.

I used my tent only four times before I sent it home from Fontana village in North Carolina. My tent with its single wall and no rain fly demonstrated with the first rain why people spend large amounts for tents. It leaked.

Also, rolling up and stuffing the sopping thing into a bag and then carrying it all day with its accumulated load of mud, leaves and twigs didn't make it seem any lighter. I didn't know what the tent actually weighed out of the box because manufacturers of cheap tents don't tell you.

My decision to part with my personal shelter was finalized with my experience on Standing Indian Mt. When I got to the shelter at the base of the mountain, I found it full of vacationers. Choosing not to tent there, I climbed to the summit and set up camp. The weather was dry but a cold stiff wind was blowing. There, I learned the value of good ventilation in the tent. Because of the cold I closed up the tent door and window.

At one in the morning I woke up to discover everything in the tent was soaked from condensation, including me. I didn't have any choice but to open the tent flaps even though the wind was still blowing very cold. I had a very uncomfortable rest of the night. The tent was dry when I packed up the next morning, but I carried a very damp sleeping bag that day.

After that night, the estrangement between that tent and me was complete. I wanted nothing more to do with it even though like most break-ups, I wasn't being totally rational. I decided that I would stay only in shelters the rest of the way. This decision would color my hike from then on. An over-riding concern became part of my psyche ... get to the shelter before it filled up.

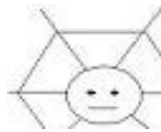
By the time I got halfway through Great Smokey Mountains National Park, I realized that there were going to be times when staying in a shelter wouldn't always be possible. Double Springs Shelter was over-filled by horse people soon after I arrived. If I had been a half hour later, I would have been stuck out in the rain. Also at Double Springs, there was a weighted down novice hiker trying to get

rid of some of his gear and I was able to buy a poly tarp from him for two dollars. I was to rely on it the rest of the trip. It was heavy but was better than nothing.

I also wasn't too satisfied with my stove, and MSR WhisperLite. It was light in weight, but needed a lot of maintenance and I witnessed some gas leak flare-ups from a couple of other hiker's WhisperLites that I thought would burn down the shelters.

My sleeping bag was adequate for its price but heavier than today's models. However, after some cold nights in New England, my son, Bob, suggested by phone that maybe the twenty degree rating of the bag meant that one doesn't freeze to death at that rating.

Summing up this discussion of equipment, I would have to say that though I wasn't very happy with it, my gear served its purpose. It was also the best I could do with my lack of experience and money.



On April 29, 1991, I took my first steps north on the Appalachian Trail. The 8.3 miles up Springer doesn't count. Mt. Katahdin, the northern terminus of the A.T. was 2,144 miles away.

I had to spend the first night in the shelter alone. In fact, I was to spend the next six nights alone before I would share a lean-to with someone. The juvenile detainees had gone on ahead to camp. They, whom another hiker later called "Hoods in the Woods", would leap frog with me for the next couple of days before I left them behind.

The Georgia portion of the A.T. is a sudden introduction to real wilderness. For 75.4 miles the A.T. traverses one of its most rugged sections. The views are limited and those few were there only because the trees had yet to leaf out.

Sixteen of the mountains you climb in Georgia have names but there are 33 named gaps which means you go up and down many more hills, knobs, stamps, and tops before you reach North Carolina.

In the spring of the year with all the rain, the mountains are usually clouded with mist and fog, so much of the time the visibility is down to about 50 feet ... 50 feet of seemingly almost straight up walking.

I learned later with the first bald mountains in North Carolina and then those above the tree line in New England, that a beautiful view makes climbing much easier. With just a 50 to 100 foot green tunnel ahead of you through the forest and fog, a climb can seem endless. Although my knee joints had yet to begin to suffer from pounding descents, it didn't take long for the realization to sink in ... in this territory, every time you make a descent, you soon have to climb up again.

In Georgia the trail makers didn't waste much time or effort on switchbacks, the zigzag ascents that make a climb more gradual. They took the direct route straight up and down the slopes.

It was several years later that I finally learned that the best way up a difficult climb is a slow - very slow if necessary - pace. In 1991, I would charge up the slope until I had to stop and rest, totally exhausted.

A large part of my attention was directed on finding a rock or log I could rest on. It was too hard to get up again with the heavy pack if I sat on the ground. I often would just lean back against a tree and let the tree support part of the weight.

Obviously, much of my memory of Georgia consists of the pure physical effort the A.T. demanded. But I also remember the beautiful and pristine wilderness. There were days when I would see hardly anything man-made except perhaps a road crossing. I was fascinated by the new to me wildflowers such as the miniature irises and the various ground covers.

I would meet only five would-be thru-hikers. This meant that there were probably over a thousand ahead of me.

There were a number of day and vacation hikers of course. Each year over 5 million people walk some part of the A.T. The first vacationers I met were three fellows from Florida that best exemplified how hikers can weigh themselves down with too much gear. Besides a large steel-handled hatchet for chopping firewood, one guy was carrying a bundle of kindling tied to his backpack.

A group of day-hikers from the Atlanta suburb of Decatur gave me one of my best memories of Georgia. Without realizing it, I practiced the "trail art" of yogi-ing.

The A.T. passes through no towns in its 75 miles in Georgia and the stores off the trail are several miles away from the road crossings, making hitching necessary. The only exception is the Walasi-Yi Center, a beautiful stone building at Neels Gap, on the north side of Blood Mountain, the highest peak on the A.T. in the state.

Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression, the center is now a hiker hostel and backpacking store operated by Jeff and Dorothy Hansen. Dorothy, a 1979 thru-hiker herself, provides a gigantic and delicious spaghetti dinner and full breakfast the next morning, plus a shower and bunk at a reasonable price.

A unique feature of the center is that it is the sole place where the A.T. is under roof as it passes through a breezeway between the store and the hostel. The only problem there for me was that I had no appetite whatsoever. I've since learned that loss of appetite is a symptom of over-training, and I was certainly feeling over-trained at the time.

The result was when I left Neels Gap in the morning; I gave replenishing my food bag no thought at all. A few days later the legendary hiker's appetite set in and I realized I was going to be seriously short of food before I reached Rainbow Springs Campground, my next supply point still at least four days away in North Carolina.

As I neared Addis Gap Shelter, wet and cold after walking all day in a steady rain, I was shocked to find the lean-to full of people.

My dismay quickly turned to elation when the people from Decatur squeezed together and allowed me to get in the dry, treating me like an honored guest. And there I had my first experience a yogi-ing, the ability to look in need of a handout without actually asking for one.

The people, of various ages, were visiting a fish hatchery on a nearby forest service road and had stopped at the shelter for a birthday party for one of their group.

They proceeded to press upon me three beers, cartons of apple juice, three pieces of birthday cake, potato chips and other snacks.

Without this food I would have been very hungry when I got to Rainbow Springs. As it was, my breakfast before I got to the campground consisted of some whole barley and raisins that I cooked together. I had thought that the barley would be a good trail food but it turned out that it took too long to cook and always went down crunchy and gritty.

On May 6, I climbed a steep slope and passed a small sign that said North Carolina line. I had left one state behind and had 13 to go.

By the end of the day I had totaled 85 miles on the A.T., and average of 11.7 miles a day, considerably below my goal of fifteen.

NORTH CAROLINA

"... after a mile, I was bestrung and on my way to becoming cocooned."

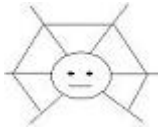
William Least Heat Moon
The Prairie Erth

By the time I reached North Carolina I was beginning to believe I could do this hiking thing. Although I still suffered greatly on the climbs and I was sore and tired at the end of each day, I was encouraged that each morning when I crawled out of my bag, I was refreshed and ready for another day.

I was growing concerned about my daily mileage though, knowing I had to do better if I was going to make it to Maine before winter. So my mind was eased somewhat at the Standing Indian Mountain Shelter when a southbound through-hiker, completing his hike from the previous year, assured me that I didn't need to worry about short days now because I would be able to do plenty of 20 miles days in the middle states.

North Carolina was somewhat confusing because much of the time I was never sure if I was there or not ... meaning that the A.T. follows the border with Tennessee for over 217 miles, beginning at Fontana Dam, the entrance to Great Smoky National Park, crossing back and forth.

It was also in North Carolina that I acquired a new identity with a trail name.



"We are family". That 1970's phrase from pop music and the Pittsburgh Pirates can easily be applied to each year's crop of would-be 2000 milers.

Thru-hikers come from many walks of life ... no pun intended. They come from all parts of the nation and many nations of the world. They are young, just starting life after school. They are relatively old after completing their lifework. Some are affluent with no shortage of cash or credit cards. Some are existing on a shoe string. In face, a few must take time off and find odd jobs along the way in order to keep going.

Many are refugees from failed relationships or failures in the business world. Exhibit ... me.

Some couples are just beginning a relationship, their thru-hike serving as an extended honeymoon. Several have just begun a relationship as a couple, having met somewhere along the way. And then there are a few most fortunate pairs that after spending many years of living, working, and procreating together, have embarked on a great adventure.

All these assorted souls soon find the A.T. to be an equalizing experience. They discover that no one really places much importance on one's status in the "real world".

What is important is their shared goal, Mount Katahdin, the end of the trail. They talk about food, their gear, the trail behind, the trail ahead, and what they're going to do when they get into the next town.

Much of what they are feeling they jot down in the shelter registers. The registers are usually spiral type notebooks provided by a shelter caretaker, a volunteer who pops in from time to time checking for needed maintenance.

One of the first things a thru-hiker does when he or she arrives at a shelter is check the register to see who has been there. Before leaving the next morning, the hiker has added his or her own entry.

Many people won't bypass a shelter in the middle of the day without stopping to read the register, even though the shelter may be several hundred yards down a side trail. The register has become an important part of the "grapevine" that unites the thru-hiking family. Backpackers move at their own pace, some doing short days, some doing incredibly long days. Many of those who do long days, however, take more

rest days on which they don't walk at all. Some take off for a week or two and go home for various reasons.

As a result, someone who has become your friend for a day or two, may go ahead and leave you behind. Friendships are formed more quickly on the Trail because, I believe, people are more open to each other there than anyplace else. You can follow their progress ahead of you, however, in the shelter registers and they might even leave messages just for you. One day you can arrive at a shelter and there that person will be - even after you have been separated for weeks. I can remember one person that I got to know in North Carolina and then meeting again in Tennessee, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and New Hampshire, with many days and whole states between encounters.

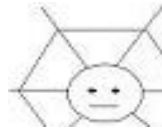
All of this has been a roundabout way to get to the subject of trail names. Because the thru-hiker becomes part of a new life, separate from the "real world", with each person equal in status despite differences in age, gender, or hiking ability, it has become a tradition to take a trail name. This name may have special meaning to the hiker, have special meaning to someone who bestowed the name, or simply be the humorous invention of someone's imagination.

After a few weeks on the Trail, I found that I too wanted a trail name of my own. However, no inspiration was coming to me. Nothing I thought of seemed to fit. I considered "Buckeye Bob" but that seemed ordinary and probably had already been used.

At this time I had spent a couple of nights with a trio of guys from Toronto, Ohio and whose hiking routine was quite different from mine. They liked to hike late into the evening, and the sleep late in the morning. After getting an early start as usual that day, I stopped to clean the spider webs off my face and teeth. Every morning the Trail would be criss-crossed with the work of a multitude of spiders. It occurred to me that I was providing a real service for those late sleepers, still in their bags back at the shelter.

Also I remembered that one of the main purposes of this trek was to clear some of the webs from my mind that

recent events had spun there. It was at this time then, that I decided to identify myself in the registers as "Web Breaker".



While Georgia is remembered as a green tunnel up and down over a succession of mountains, North Carolina was the introduction to the many contrasts found on the A.T. Carolina has its dense forests and stiff climbs too, but among other features, the first balds, the first national park, and the first real trail town.

As I learned more about the A.T. while still at home, a number of difficult sections were mentioned often enough to cause a feeling of dread before I reached them. Two of these were in NC. The first was Albert Mountain and it's .2-mile rock scramble to its summit that seems to go almost straight up. Although I had to use hands and knees, pulling myself up by rhododendron bushes, I made it without disaster. In this case, the dread beforehand was worse than the doing.

The other dreaded section, the terribly steep climb out of Wesser, a popular river-rafting village, to the top of Stecoah Ridge, lived up to its billing. This was a continuous ascent of several miles with no flats or downhills to catch your breath. This was the first time I used a technique of counting 50 steps before I allowed myself a rest and repeating the process over and over again until I reached the top. In addition, every time I came to a rock or log for a sit-down break, I took it. I've since heard that the trail people have put in some switchbacks to ease the Stecoah somewhat.

I have mentioned earlier my meager breakfast before I got to Rainbow Springs, a commercial campground just a mile off the A.T. I had spent the night at the Big Spring Shelter with the first backpacking couple I was to meet. The Willock's, a banker and his wife from Bowling Green, KY

were on vacation and proved to be very good company. I had found it somewhat strange to bed down for the night beside a woman who wasn't my wife. However, I found that hikers adapt very well to the lack of privacy on the trail.

Roland and Mary Francis apparently noticed what I was having for breakfast. Later that evening at the campground, where they had left their car and had rented a cabin, Roland stopped me and said they had brought way too much food and handed me a bag full. Having already been to the camp store for resupplying, I was really loaded down when I set off the next morning.

My experience with the Great Smokey National Park was different from the millions who visit by car. The A.T. traverses the high country and misses the popular tourist areas. Still, I found the trail heavily used by vacation backpackers and poorly maintained. It was severely eroded and if you stayed in the middle like you should, so as not to widen the trail, you walked in a trench up to two feet deep much of the time. Except for a spectacular place called Charlie's Bunion, I wasted no time pushing through the Smokies.

My spirits had been somewhat dampened by the national park but less than 20 miles further north they soared again when I came to a most beautiful place, Max Patch, a high grassy bald. I had begun to fall in love with southern balds earlier below Wesser when I crossed Siler and Wayah (pronounced "Waryuh"). No one knows for sure why southern balds, treeless summits below treeline, exist. Some ideas are fires ignited by Indians and/or lightning, over-grazing by settler's livestock, or too much wind and thin soil over bedrock.

On top of Max Patch I felt like I should break out in a song from "The Sound of Music". The views were great in all directions but it was the vastness of the open grassy area that gave me a feeling that this was a special place.

By this time I was beginning to feel confident in my ability to do the long days necessary. I had done my first 20-mile day leaving the Smokies. The first fifteen miles that day

were mostly downhill to the last shelter, a mile up from Davenport Gap, and the northern entrance to the park.

The shelter was dingy and dark and soon after I got there with the intention of spending the night, two vacationers showed up. They were medical doctors who had come up from the gap. About all they could talk about was how tough that mile of hiking had been and I began to feel a little of that snobbery that thru-hikers are sometimes accused of having. I decided that I didn't want to stay there and so put on my pack and set off again. After another four tough and tiring miles up from the gap, I found a place to camp under my tarp and had done my first twenty miler.

After 40 miles of walking from the Smokies through a very nice section of the Pisgah National Forest, including Max Patch, I came to my first real "trail town", Hot Springs.

Known for its therapeutic mineral springs since the 1800's, the old town is the first of several along the length of the A.T. that the Trail goes right through. And like the other Trail towns, the people are friendly to hikers, providing them places to rest and resupplying.

Hot Springs has two hostels, one sponsored by Jesuit fathers. For a requested \$9 donation, you get a bunk with mattress, hot shower, clean towel, kitchen privileges, and a lounge.

The other hostel, The Inn at Hot Springs, is a commercial enterprise, operated by Elmer Hall. Elmer's is legendary for the fine vegetarian meals at reasonable prices. The Inn is the "in" place for most hikers and was full when I got there. So I stayed at the Jesuit hostel and enjoyed their hospitality.

Part of my time at the hostel was spent in good conversation with a medical doctor staying there and fulfilling his residency by making house calls on the mountain people in the surrounding area. He had some interesting stories to tell.

Much of the rest of the time on my rest day I spent doing what was to become a custom for me in each trail town ... walking around town.

TENNESSEE

"... have been times that were mud-smeared,
insect-bitten misery,
but always it has been for me a time of especially
rich awareness, of being particularly alive."

Warren Page

ONE MAN'S WILDERNESS

As mentioned before, it's impossible to separate the A.T. experience for much of the way through North Carolina and Tennessee because the Trail follows the border. I do know that I was in Tennessee when I climbed Clingman's Dome, the highest mountain in that state and on the A.T. Topped by a modernistic concrete observation tower, I got no view of the surrounding Smokies because of heavy fog and clouds.

Unfortunately, this was to be true on many of the view points offered by the A.T. when I came to them. Fortunately, it gives me an excuse to return and try again for a sunny day.

Also, what was not true was the often-heard remark in the Clingman area that it was down hill the rest of the way on the Trail.

I was continuing to acquire a sense of belonging on the A.T. at this time. I had always enjoyed being in the woods at home on the farm, hunting and trapping when young, searching for mushrooms every spring, or just exploring.

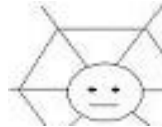
As a child, I acquired a life-long fascination with tales of survival. I read Robinson Crusoe seven times and Swiss Family Robinson five. I combed the library for other books of the same kind. I admired the ability of others to "make-do".

The avocation of backpacking has a lot to do with surviving with what you can carry on your back. This simplicity has a great appeal. You have left the complexities of the so-called "real world" and often have only two

decisions to make each morning; "How far will I walk today?" and "What will I fix for supper?"

Backpacking also builds a feeling of self-reliance. I would say that over 90% of the time, I was walking alone and that there were many nights that I was by myself. However, although I was often alone, I was never lonely.

For it seemed I had a constant companion, a wood thrush who was asking me over and over with an unfailing concern in its beautiful trill: "Are you all right? Are you all right?"



There are, of course, other creatures in the woods besides those with huge packs on their backs. Wildlife adds to the fascination of the trail.

In Georgia, I kept hearing a sound like someone was having trouble keeping some kind of engine running. It would start with a rumble and then quit, over and over. Later I was to find out that it was a male ruffed grouse drumming his mating call with his wings.

In North Carolina, I met Mrs. Ruffed Grouse. I heard a whimpering noise off the trail in some underbrush and saw an animal crawling away from me. I saw some spots on it and thought it was a spotted skunk. When I didn't move, it changed to another tactic, coming straight at me, hissing like a cat. I thought I was going to be sprayed for sure when I realized that it was just Mother Grouse protecting her nest.

In the Smokies there is a battle going on between the Park rangers and an animal I fortunately never saw. In the last century, wild boars from Russia were brought here by a wealthy sportsman for hunting. Some of them escaped and joined with domestic hogs that were allowed to run free. The wild hogs have thrived and are a threat to the native habitat in the Park where no hunting is allowed. The hogs can be

dangerous to humans and cause a lot of destruction. I saw no hogs, probably because they are largely nocturnal, but I saw large areas that had been rooted up. The rangers are trying to control them by live trapping and by shooting. At Ice Water Springs Shelter, a ranger with an infrared sight on his rifle came by on his way to an all night hunting stand.

The animal of real concern for hikers in the Smokies is the black bear. They are ordinarily not dangerous unless provoked, but they do have a great fondness for the food you have in your pack. All the shelters in the Park have chain-link fence across the front. As a result, you eat and sleep in a cage and the bears if present, look in.

Elsewhere along the trail it is recommended that you hang your food bag high in a tree. In the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, they provide steel poles at the shelters from which to hang your food.

Although bears are quit numerous in both Parks, I never saw one. I thought I was going to do the whole Trail without a sighting until in eastern Pennsylvania I heard something crashing through the woods and there, running away from me, was my first bear. Bears are hunted in Pennsylvania and are quite wary and so it is rare to see one there. Since 1991, in New Jersey where they are protected, bears have become a real problem for backpackers.

Hikers are advised to be on the lookout for rattlesnakes and copperheads. Early in the trip I was particularly careful to probe under all logs and rocks with my walking stick before I stepped over or sat on them. By the time I got to Virginia I was becoming somewhat relaxed about the danger of venomous snakes although I had seen a number of garter and black snakes. I had never heard a rattlesnake in my life and I mistook insect noises such as those made by cicadas as rattles a number of times. I was going to Glade Mountain in southwestern Virginia one day when I heard a noise that I knew without a doubt was the real thing. The Trail had been cleared of nettles by maintainers to about a five foot strip and in the fringe of weeds was a huge, angry, sinister looking rattler. I don't know how long it was

because it was coiled, but its head was at least a foot and a half off the ground and the body looked to be about three inches thick. It was definitely making clear that I was trespassing on its turf and I wasn't about to argue. Keeping my stick between us, I gave it plenty of room and moved on.

About three weeks later on a blistering hot day, I was making the wickedly steep climb up Bald Knob just below Waynesboro. The Knob wasn't bald and had no view or other redeeming features and so I wasn't in the best of moods when I had my second encounter with a rattlesnake.

This one was a small one about three feet long, but was just as angry as the other. It was coiled right in the middle of the trail and saw me before I heard it.

I thought I would try to make it move because a friend I was hiking with at the time was coming along behind me. I threw some sticks and stones, but it refused to budge. I then tried tapping it on the head as it struck at my stick. It still didn't move so I say, "Okay, you win." and made a new trail through the underbrush hoping the rattler didn't have any pals nearby.

I never did see any copperheads or smell their cucumber-like odor, but someone in Damascus said they probably saw me.

Probably the most detested animal on the A.T. is the common mouse. Many of the shelters are infested with them. If you hope to sleep, you have to make yourself oblivious to the constant rustle they make during the night. In areas where bears are not a big problem you can hang your food bag in the shelter, but the cord had better have a tin can lid on it to tip off the mouse as it comes down the cord. Also, it is a good idea to have all the zippers on your pack open giving the mice free run or they will chew their own way in.

One animal I very much wanted to see was a moose. I had heard that they were quite common in Maine, but I got an early sighting of a large cow feeding in Ethan Pond in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. It turned out that I never did see one on the A.T. in Maine. I saw a number of the places where they had bedded down in their "yards" and I

saw enough droppings to make thousands of ear rings, a cottage industry in Maine. The only moose I saw in Maine was from the back of a pick-up truck as I was leaving Baxter State Park at the end of the trip.

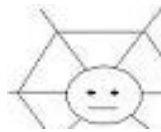
Some of the other wildlife seen on the Trail are deer, turkeys, spotted skunks, centipedes, and newts. The deer in the National Parks are very tame and much smaller than our well-fed ones in Ohio.

A flock of wild turkeys can be quite startling when they suddenly take flight from out of the brush.

Spotted skunks are frequent visitors to several of the shelters during the night. They check for any spilled food and then quietly leave.

Black centipedes with yellow stripes and day-glow orange newts are common on the Trail in the south. At that stage of their life, the little salamanders are very inactive and when I spotted my first one, I thought it was an artificial fishing lure.

All of these animals provide visual entertainment on the A.T. while the songbirds provide the music. I felt a real sense of loss when I got to Vermont and realized the forest was silent. This was probably because of the lateness of the season and the birds had migrated before the arrival of the cold. Or perhaps my wood thrush felt because I had come so far without mishap, I could go the rest of the way on my own.



The Tennessee portion of the A.T. was more of the same up and down. The descent to the Nolichucky River was particularly rugged with sudden drop-offs that you had to scramble down. I remarked in my journal that Bill Irwin, the blind man, must have had a very tough time in that section.

Before the Nolichucky descent, the trail followed the side of a ridge and had not been cut into the bank. As a

result, I had to keep my uphill foot turned sideways to keep from sliding off the path. When that day was over, my ankle was very sore after over five continuous miles of that kind of walking.

The Nolichucky River was the third river-rafting center along the A.T. The second had been the French Broad River in Hot Springs. On the Nolichucky, near the town of Erwin, is a hostel for both hikers and rafters and is a party scene. This would have been a good place to tent on the lawn next to the river because I was kept awake most of the night by a sick drunk and his dog that slept with him.

North of the Nolichucky is a beautiful bald called Beauty Spot. After a grueling nine-mile climb up, I was surprised to find some hikers I had met at the river the night before already there. And it was then that I learned of the Trail expedient of "slackpacking", finding some way to put in the miles without carrying the pack. There is a road to the top of Beauty Spot and these hikers had gotten someone to drive them up so they could walk back and party another night. The next morning they would get another ride back and continue their thru-hike north.

I was somewhat upset by this after my struggle up the mountain. It just didn't seem fair. However, I was later to accept this as part of "hiking your own hike" and later jumped at the chance a couple times to do my own "slackpacking".

The next day I learned to never again climb the south side of Roan Mountain at the end of a 14-mile day. A popular tourist attraction on the TENN-NC border and the former site of a hotel, the over 6,000 foot peak can be reached by car and is at its resplendent best in June when its rhododendron gardens are in full bloom.

Walking up the mountain was the hardest climb yet. It has several false peaks and each time I thought I was to the top, I soon discovered it was only a flat and there was still more mountain. Coming at the end of a long day only made it worse.

I spent the night at the Roan High Knob Shelter, at 6,285 feet - the highest shelter on the A.T. Because of the fog and trees the views from Roan were not that great. The great views were to come the next day.

North of Roan Mountain is a section called the Roan Highlands, an eight-mile section that ranks as one of my favorites on the entire A.T. A series of balds all over 5,000 feet culminating with Big Hump Mountain, this has to be one of the most under-appreciated hikes in the country.

On Big Hump, not a majestic name, you get a truly majestic panoramic vista of Roan Mountain to the south, Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina to the east, Mt. Rogers and the Virginia Highlands to the north, and an awe-inspiring view of the Doe Valley of Tennessee to the west.

Well, after the sublime comes the ridiculous. After coming down from Big Hump, the next fourteen miles was a totally unrewarding grind through an up and down rhododendron slick. Perhaps this section is nice when the flowers are blooming but there wasn't a flower in sight when I passed by. This day's hike gets voted number two on my worst list; I'll have something to say later about when I waved the big number one finger.

Also the talk was rampant on the Trail about how someone had strung fishhooks across the Trail at eye level the year before.

There were supposedly some hard feelings among the locals because the A.T. was routed through that section. Vandals had burned the Don Nelan Shelter there in 1990 and the ATC advised that no one camp between U.S. 19E and the Moreland Gap Shelter. They also suggested hikers go through in groups.

I had no difficulty from anything, however, except for the terribly monotonous strenuous hiking and a cow pie in a pasture field at the start of the day.

The next day included another A.T. highpoint, the Laurel Gorge Falls. I agree it is a "magic place". It can be visited easily via a one-mile blue-blazed trail from Highway U.S. 321.

Next came the Watauga Dam and a chance for resupplying in nearby Hampton. On top of the mountain above the dam, I learned what people meant when they say a thunderstorm can be exciting in the mountains. I had been out in a lot of rain so far, but never had a storm directly over me.

When the storm hit, I quickly dropped my meta-framed pack and moved a considerable distance away and cowered under a short pine tree as the lightning bolts resounded about me. It was definitely exciting.

At the end of the day I got drenched again. I saw the storm coming and dropped my pack to get my poncho. I had waited as long as I could because I knew I should be coming to a shelter soon. Before I got the poncho out and on, however, I was soaked for the second time that day. I put on my pack, walked around a bend in the trail and there was Double Springs Shelter, my destination for the day - less than 100 feet away. I would have been in the dry if I hadn't stopped. Oh, well ... I've since seen a bumper sticker that says, "NO RAIN - NO PAIN - NO MAINE".

The next day I had 18 relatively flat, easy miles across the Virginia line and into Damascus.

VIRGINIA

"... when it looks like all is up,
Keep a -goin!
Drain the sweetness from the cup,
Keep a -goin!
See the wild birds on the wing
Hear the bells that sweetly ring,
When you feel like sighin', sing-
Keep a -goin!

Frank L. Stanton
KEEP A-GOIN!

The trail in Virginia is almost a thru-hike in itself. From the southwestern corner of the state, the A.T. stretches over 540 miles until it exits just a few miles from the Potomac River. Virginia is where the casualties begin to mount up. After breezing through the first three states, the daily grind of this long state as the weather heats up, knowing there's 10 states yet to come, takes a toll and more and more hikers drop out.

This is not the fault, however, of the "friendliest town on the Trail". The A.T. goes right down the main street of Damascus and from early on, the residents have accepted and made welcome the dirty, smelly, unkempt hikers that pass through. An old house behind the Methodist Church is made available as a hostel for thru-hikers and also for bikers who come through town on the Transcontinental Bike Trail. "The Place" as it is called, has bunks, showers, and a place to rest for only a two-dollar donation.

Many small towns in this nation have their annual festivals, either homecomings or are linked to some feature or product of the area, but there are none as novel as that of Damascus. Around the middle of May for the last ten years, "Appalachian Trail Days" has been growing in popularity. In addition to the usual festival standbys of food concessions, craft booths and other commercial exhibits, the town presents programs connected to the A.T. all week. The

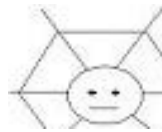
highlight of "Trail Days", however, is the hiker's parade on Saturday. Along with the traditional ingredients of bands, fire engines and horses, hundreds of current and former thru-hikers parade through town to the delight of townspeople and all. In recent years, more and more water balloon battles have added to the fun.

A great number of form 2000 milers come to Damascus to see old acquaintances and many current thru-hikers, if not in town at the time of the festival, hitchhike either back or ahead to be there for the excitement.

So, although many thru-hikers will quit in Virginia, it is not the fault of the good people of Damascus. When they hit the trail again headed north, they are definitely in high spirits.

In 1991 I was still far down in the Smokies during "Trail Days" and so missed out on the good times. However, I enjoyed extra special hospitality when I got to town on the fifth of June. I was taken in and treated generously by my sister-in-law, Jackie.

My appearance was somewhat a shock to those who remembered me from before. By this time, I had lost at least 30 pounds of the weight I was to loss. Never were good home-cooked meals consumed more eagerly than when I was at Jackie's. And this brings me to one of the most asked questions about thru hiking; "What do you do for food?"



Dan "Wingfoot" Bruce says in his The Thru-Hiker's Handbook, a much, annually updated, guide for end-to-enders, that "a hiker who burns 4,000 calories a day (and many thru-hikers burn considerably more) is expending an amount of energy equivalent to running two 26-mile marathons. For a five month hike, that's the same as 300 marathons."

He further states that "Each mile of the A.T. has an average elevation gain of 217 feet, which means that a thru-hiker will climb and descend a total of 88.3 miles between Springer and Katahdin. That's the equivalent of going from sea level to the summit of Mt. Everest and back more than sixteen times.

Robin T. Dake writes in the Appalachian Trailway News of "The A.T. Diet", a diet guaranteed to help one lose weight. The regimen begins with "a stack of pancakes topped with real butter and doused with a good cup-and-a-half of maple syrup". The diet continues with all the high-fat high-calorie food you can stuff in.

Larry Luxenberg in his book Walking the Appalachian Trail writes of a thru-hiker: "Several weeks after completing his hike, he was still suffering from fatigue. A doctor diagnosed his problem as a rare, fatal genetic disease, called PFK, which causes muscles to degenerate. For nearly two months at age twenty-five, he believed he had a terminal illness that would kill him within two years. It was not until seven months after his initial complaint that he learned the truth: He had simply been undernourished during his trip."

The problem of food on the Trail is an important and complex one. And one that I didn't have a solution for. You can't carry enough food to provide the necessary calories, especially for those stretches that are a week or more between easy supply points. These are sections where the stores are several miles away from the trailhead making it necessary to hitchhike. This is easier it seems, for couples, but it is hard for old men to catch a ride. Also, it may be dangerous, particularly for single women and there have been cases where a hiker has thrown his pack into a pick-up bed only to have the truck drive off and leave him standing.

If you have unlimited finances and can rely totally on commercial freeze-dried trail foods, you can dine on meals such as Thai Chicken or Beef Stroganoff every evening. For the "100 mile wilderness walk" in Maine, it's recommended you carry a ten-day supply. I saw a hiker spread out his mail delivery of freeze-dried food in Monson and it probably cost

as much as what I had spent the previous two months. If compared to upscale restaurant prices, freeze-dried trail dinners are no more expensive. However, people with limited means can't afford to eat every meal in a restaurant back home for five or six months.

One very good idea for a long distance hiker who takes time to prepare for the trip is to buy a food dehydrator and dry his or her own meals.

I met a few people who had done that with success. One fellow offered me a bowlful of his dried homemade chili one evening in the Shenandoah. I had just come from the Panorama Restaurant a mile back at Thornton Gap where I had stuffed myself on an all-you-can-eat salad bar and spaghetti dinner. Although only 30 minutes had passed, the chili went down very easily and was delicious. Of course, I never met a food I didn't like on the A.T.

Other home dried foods I was given along the way were tuna and black beans. The beans were a little like soaking up ashes by themselves, but mixed in something, they were okay.

I have mentioned earlier my failed experiment with the barley. At home while making plans, it seemed that a mixture of lentil beans and barley would be a perfect trail food, all the essential proteins. However, I didn't allow for the long cooking time required. My stove and fuel bottle were very light in weight, but unfortunately the fuel isn't. Also, white gas isn't always easily available. Therefore, I had to be concerned with stove burning time. One of the most used dry mixes on the A.T. is the Lipton Noodle or Rice and Sauce Dinner, reasonable in price and readily available. I found, though, that the ten-minute cooking time for the rice was too long when compared to the four minutes for the noodles.

Almost all backpackers rely on Ramen noodles as part of their diet. They cook in tow minutes and can be used as a base for the addition of many other things. In Massachusetts I bought some eggs at a nearby farm and cooked them in my noodles. I learned that using dried potato flakes as a thickening makes a filling meal with little effort. Potato flakes

can be used to bulk up anything including the Lipton Dinners.

I learned of a new, to me, food from a southbound hiker in Maine, couscous. A North African pasta that is very light but is pre-cooked and bulks up when boiling water is added, it can be combined with a Lipton Cup-a-Soup packed to make a satisfying dish.

Macaroni and Cheese Dinners are perhaps the most used food on the Trail. However, the macaroni is heavy and takes over seven minutes to cook. I would now leave the macaroni at home and take only the cheese sauce packet to mix with couscous.

The breakfast staple on the Trail is instant oatmeal with dried milk and the lunch standby is peanut butter. Lunch was always a problem for me because I didn't want to take time to cook and you need something to spread the peanut butter on. Crackers crumble and bread is heavy and bulky. I learned along the way that you can eat Raman noodles uncooked and with peanut butter spread on them, not bad.

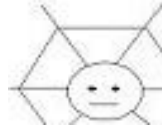
Another thing I learned is that it is hard to live off the land in the mountains. Not many edible foods are growing there. I did enjoy wild berries very much, but was too late in the season for the wild strawberries as I moved north. Blueberries were plentiful much of the way, but the very dry summer caused them to shrivel up early.

One fellow I hiked with for a while, tried cooking young nettles, and also a fungus on logs called tree oyster. I had read about eating white tree oysters, but these were orange and as he was consuming them, I told him I would try some the next day. I didn't try them even though he was still among the living.

One of the contributing factors to my weight loss was that I passed up a number of nearby restaurants because I was broke at the time. If I ever to the A.T. again, I would hope to have the finances to never pass by a chance to eat, no matter what the time of day. When I did have the money, I certainly enjoyed the all-you-can-eat bars. At a Western

Sizzler in Waynesboro, VA, I used eight different plates and a bowl.

I also have to confess that I was hungry enough to raid a couple trashcans in some Maine parks. I found some good potato chips and doughnuts there. They were still in their original package and looked okay...



When I entered Virginia, I had been on the Trail 33 days and had left three states behind. It was another 43 days before I left Virginia behind with ten states to go.

To cover the hiking experience in Virginia in detail would require a description book-length in itself. Space allows only the briefest sketch of the outstanding features.

One soon learns that the Virginia A.T. is a more civilized wilderness. Towns and stores are more accessible and many of the views include farm fields and communities. A great number of the most beautiful places can be visited in a car by the non-walker.

However, there is true wilderness in the State. There were many places the thought occurred to me that only by foot or perhaps, helicopter could I have come to this spot and enjoyed this magnificent scene.

Leaving Damascus, the A.T. coincided in places with the Virginia Creeper Trail, a Rails-to-Trails project, a third trail through the town that goes 35 miles from Abingdon, VA into North Carolina. Enjoyed by many bikers and walkers, the Creeper shares with the A.T. a couple of the former railroad trestles over deep ravines.

After a hard climb north, I reached the summit Whitetop, second highest peak in the State. I had been there before by car but hadn't fully appreciated the vista, maybe because I was preoccupied by the winding steep road I had just driven and yet to go down.

A few miles further on is Mt. Rogers, the highest mountain in Virginia. There is no view from the spruce-clad top, but the summit is adjacent to the glorious Grayson Highlands State Park. The grassy balds and rock outcrops cause this area to be called "the Montana of the East". The region is particularly splendid during rhododendron season and the wild ponies that live there add to the attraction.

Before leaving the Mt. Rogers area, I passed by Comer Falls, a pristine spot just recently saved by friends of the A.T. from destruction by a proposed super-highway. The A.T. Conference has been constantly battling over the years to preserve the greenway corridor from developers.

Just south of Bastian, VA, at the Knot Maul Shelter, I had my first encounter with a Whip-poor-Will. I had just bedded down for the night when this bird began its incessant call. After about 30 loud "whip-poor-wills", I started actually counting and reached number 146 before my patience ended and I used my flashlight to drive it away (by flashing the light, not by throwing it). Fortunately, it didn't bother me the rest of the night but did begin its racket again at dawn.

By the time I got to the point where the Trail passes above Bastian, one of my toes had become infected because my feet had swelled earlier and jammed my toes against the front of my boots.

In Bastian, Levi and Jan Long provided a free hostel in an old house across from their diner. I decided to take a day off there and dose my toe with hydrogen peroxide.

If it had been a Sunday afternoon, I could have enjoyed a free concert of bluegrass music by players from the area that dropped in each week to jam with Levi and his fiddle. As it was, I enjoyed some good food at the diner and watched the daily afternoon domino game played by local elders. "Mama Kate", Jan Long's 86-year-old mother, offered to teach me the game if I would play for money.

Since that time I've learned that the Longs have closed the hostel, and that "Mama Kate" has passed away. My good memories remain, though.

The weather at this point had really begun to get hot and dry. South of Pearisburg at Dismal Creek Falls, a pretty place belying its name, not only did I relish a cooling dip in the pool below the falls, I also was invited to share a somewhat soft gallon of ice cream that a hiker had packed from a store three miles back. It was there I was informed of the "necessity" of going into Pearisburg for pizza and a pitcher of beer at the Pizza Hut.

I hadn't intended to go into Pearisburg because money was beginning to be a serious concern. Also, although the Catholic Church provided a hostel, it was on the other side of the drawn-out town, a two-and-a-half mile walk from the Trail. But the thought of that pizza wouldn't leave my head and because there was no shelter near there, I convinced myself that it was a "necessity". In fact, the pizza and beer was so good, I took another day off to return to the Hut.

The water heater at the hostel wasn't working and the shower was cold. There had been no running water at the old house in Bastian and so when I got where the A.T. intersects with I-81 freeway, one of the several times the A.T. and I-81 intersect along the way, I was ready for a hot shower at a motel. My last hot bath had been in Damascus eighteen days earlier.

I was really looking forward to that motel room as I neared the end of an over seventeen-mile day. I could see the interchange area from the heights above it and it seemed like it was taking forever to get there with the pack getting heavier by the minute and something dragging out the tracks behind me. I knew the motel was going to cost me more than I could afford, but I didn't care. I hoped to get another hiker to share the cost of a room, but had no luck. When I got to the motel I found it had changed ownership and was now charging \$20 more than the price quoted in "The Thru-Hikers Handbook".

This left me with enough for a combo meal at the Burger King and five dollars for groceries from the Winn-Dixie for the next 100 miles. I had to do some very careful shopping and that was the last of the \$400 in traveler's checks that I set out with in Georgia.

Money was to remain a major concern for the rest of the trip. The usual advice is that you should expect to spend a dollar a mile for expenses, a total of about \$2,200. It is said that many spend \$3,000 to \$5,000. I kept no accurate financial accounting, but I would estimate I spent no more than \$1,200.

My main problem, however, was not my limited resources at home, but the difficulty in transferring funds. I had called home to my son for some money and then discovered in Waynesboro that no one wanted to cash a convenience store money order. I was turned down at the Kroger store and at one bank before I found another bank whose manager reluctantly agreed to cash the order. In Adams, Massachusetts a supermarket even refused to cash a postal money order. Fortunately the Post Office had enough cash on hand to cash it. In small towns they don't always have it.

I don't want to give the impression that the money problem lessened the over-all enjoyment of the journey any more than did the aches and pains that seemed to move from joint to joint and muscle to muscle, a new place each day.

A pain in my left knee that had begun near Damascus persisted through until I was halfway through Virginia. I could walk on it, but the pain got worse and worse and I seemed to be going slower and slower with more hours needed to cover the miles. North of Waynesboro a hiker gave me some Advil tablets and miraculously it seemed to me, for I had never used ibuprofen before, the knee stopped hurting and never bothered me the rest of the way.

Another problem for the hiker in Virginia is the large areas of trees denuded of their foliage by the gypsy moth larvae. This allows the hot sun to beat down on the already physically stressed walker.

These problems were just small distractions, however, from the beautiful trail in central and northern Virginia. The view from McAfee Knob is grand. This is that most photographed place where the hiker is shown sitting on a jutting point of rock with his legs hanging down over a

beautiful valley hundreds of feet below. Being afraid of heights, I couldn't force myself to within ten feet of the edge.

The A.T. shares the high ground with the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Skyline Drive a good part of the way, giving the backpacker many of the same beautiful vistas as the motorists.

In the Shenandoah National Park, you again encounter crowds of people but the coin-operated showers at the Park campgrounds are much appreciated.

After leaving the Park I had only 52 miles to the West Virginia line. I have said earlier that I had endured number two on my worst hike du jour list and that number one was yet to come.

I met a father and daughter going south at Dick's Dome Shelter on the way to Rod Hollow Shelter for the night. They guy said that the section from Rod Hollow to Bears Den Rocks was tough with 4 or 5 steep climbs.

I learned the next day not to place much stock in another hiker's description of the trail ahead. As I started on that short 10-mile section, I made the mistake of counting climbs as I moved along in the 95-degree heat. My mind grew more and more befuddled as I reached climb number 5, thinking, "hey, I'm making good time". Later I went beyond ridge number 10 and was to total 17 ascents before I got to Bears Den on what was to remain my worst day.

Just off the A.T. at ears Den Rocks is an American Youth Hostel in a beautiful old stone mansion. It was a wonderful place to clean up and get a good night's sleep before leaving Virginia the next day.

WEST VIRGINIA

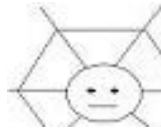
"Trahit sua quemque voluptas."
(His own liking leads each on.)
Virgil

West Virginia claims the shortest stretch of the A.T., only a little over seven miles., but lacks no significance in the feelings of the thru-hiker. Looking down from Loudon Heights where the imprints of Union and Confederate gun emplacements can still be found, you see the joining of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers and the historic town of Harpers Ferry, the home of the A.T. Conference headquarters.

Thought of as the sentimental halfway point of the Trail, it is there that many hikers "flip-flop". Believing that they can't get to Maine before the weather turns bad, they skip ahead to Katahdin by bus or other means and then hike back to Harpers Ferry.

When I stopped in at the headquarters I was welcomed by Jean Cashin, the A.T. information specialist who is everybody's "Trail Mother".

Jean took my picture for the Class of '91 photo album of thru-hikers. One of my regrets after returning home was that though I had some nice pictures of scenery, I didn't have enough photos of the many people I met. And so it was especially pleasing when I returned to Harpers Ferry on vacation in 1993, that that photo album of my friends was there.



My recollection of my hiking friends come back to me in no particular order and no particular significance

should be attached to the order in which I mention them here. That is, with the possible exception of the first.

"Bull Moose": I first encountered Tom at Rusty's "hard times hollow". Since 1982, Rusty, a laid-back southern mountain man has welcomed thru-hikers to his farm near the Blue Ridge Parkway south of Waynesboro, VA. The place has no electricity or indoor plumbing but has become a traditional stop-over for hundreds on their way north. A constant party atmosphere exists there, and "Bull", in his early twenties, became an enthusiastic participant.

As for me, tired and feeling the stress of not knowing if I could finish the Trail, I was not overly impressed by his enthusiasm.

After a woeful night's sleep and a trip in a crowded van to Waynesboro for supplies, both for the Trail and the 4th of July party the next day, I decided the revelry at Rusty's was not for me and so I went back to a shelter on the Trail at 6:30 in the evening for a good night's sleep. I continued north on the holiday. The party was pretty much rained out anyway, I heard. Fireworks and a steady downpour aren't very compatible.

That was the last I saw of "Bull Moose" until he caught up with me in Pennsylvania. We pretty much stayed together across the State although Tom, a big rangy guy with a long loping stride, seemed to just eat up the miles. By the time we got to his home State of New Jersey, we had become well acquainted and I began to appreciate his wry humor, generosity, his sincere concern for other's welfare, and what I think of as his Jersey drawl.

In New Jersey Tom invited two others and me to stop off at his home in Sussex County, only a mile away from the Trail. We all had some equipment problems and Tom offered to drive us to the Campmor store in Paramus. I needed new boots badly and this was my best opportunity to get some I could afford.

Tom had hiked long section of the A.T. north of his home in previous years so we parted company at this point while he took a week off to fly to Houston to see his

girlfriend. Thirty-three days later he popped back into my life when I got to the shelter on Kinsman Mt. in New Hampshire. We stayed together again through the Presidential range as far as Pinkham Notch and then I left him behind again. He finished the A.T. eleven days behind me.

"Bad Dog". With "Bull Moose" at the Kinsman Mt. Shelter was one of the two other hikers that had enjoyed the hospitality at Tom's home. Brian and I had leap-frogged each other all the way from Virginia where we met in the Shenandoah. "Bad Dog" was not at all representative of his trail name as is often the case, except perhaps only to that person. He had no visible canine qualities and certainly wasn't "bad". He had quit his job as a reporter for a Richmond newspaper. One of the better equipped thru-hikers, he seemed to have more than his share of muscle pulls, upset stomachs, and blisters, not withstanding his stretching exercises, water filter, and expensive Danner boots.

"Taro": For some reason, Taro, a first generation Japanese-American, felt no pressing need for a trail name, going by his real first name. When I first saw his name in a shelter register, I thought he was calling himself "Toro" which is the Japanese word for attack. "Bad Dog" insisted that he have a trail name and began calling him "Ruthless Cur". (Due to a pooch fixation, apparently). To appease "Bad Dog", "Taro" began to use it some but I don't think it stuck.

"Taro", whose father is a distinguished professor at Northwestern University and does summer research at Woodhole School of Oceanography on Cape Cod, was one of those unsettled souls who can't break away from the Trail, returning year after year.

A product of an exclusive private secondary school in North Carolina and with a college degree in chemical engineering, he had work experience as a pizza deliveryman, a job that ended when he got mugged.

In a previous year he had met an Irish girl on a thru-hike and they were married. Early in 1991 she had returned to England to visit her family and Taro was expecting here to join him on the Trail. I later learned she never did come back.

Taro was the third hiker with us at "Bull's". He and I parted company when I went into New York City for a couple of days to visit my son, Jim. I got to see him again the next year at the Damascus "Trail Days" festival and he was back on the AT. The last I heard of him was that he was working in some capacity on the Pacific Crest Trail in California.

"Lone Wolf": I didn't meet David until I got to the crowded shelter on Kinsman Mt. (It was crowded because there were six thru-hikers and ten Harvard students on an outing squeezed into the lean-to.) I never got to know him well but I mention him because he was a true free spirit. Having hiked the A.T. several times before 1991, he has been on the Trail every year since but has never once finished by doing Maine. He quit in 1991 when he reached Goham, New Hampshire, because he said he had to go home to northern Vermont to help a friend harvest his corn. During the winter he works at a ski resort operating a snow maker. I have a suspicion that the real reason he never finishes a thru-hike is that if he does, he won't have a reason to go again the next year.

The last time I saw him was at the 1995 "Trail Days" when he was cruising the streets of Damascus in an open Jeep drive-by shooting people with a water blaster.

"Hippie-chick" and "Sleepwalker": Also in that Kinsman shelter was one of several couples I met. Barb and Joe took a break from their lives in Norristown near Philadelphia to thru-hike, she is a beautician and he a carpenter. They were a very friendly working class pair whose minds are open to the world.

"Highlander": I met Carl in the hostel in Pearisburg, VA and noticed right away how he was different from the usual hiker. His right leg from the knee down was missing. He had thru-hiked in 1988 and a year later lost his leg to cancer. This hike was an effort to show how determination can overcome disability.

The second day out of Pearisburg the Trail was very rocky requiring a lot of boulder hopping and I wondered how

Carl could manage it. But a couple hours after I reached the Warspur Shelter, in walked "Highlander" on his artificial leg.

Later on up the Trail the story was passed along how a hiker "Hike-aholic" who was shuttling his van, came across Carl sitting alongside a road at a trailhead.

Carl asked Dennis if he could act as an emergency squad because he had broken his foot.

Dennis, who didn't know Carl, asked with concern: "Are you in pain?"

Carl picked up his prosthesis and shook it and replied: "Not really".

"Highlander's" trip was delayed by this mishap and I later heard that he had flip-flopped. His name was in the Appalachian Trailway News for having completed the Trail.

"Hike-aholic": Dennis was another repeat thru-hiker. This time he had his van with him to shuttle from one road trailhead to the next. He gathered a group of six to eight guys to travel with him. One of them would drive the van ahead to a road where they planned to end the day's hike. The driver would then walk back to the day's starting point to be picked up by the group after they reached the van. The group slack-packed this way all the way from Rusty's in Virginia to Vermont.

I met one of the slack-packers the next year at "Trail Days". He was thru-hiking again but this time carrying his pack. He wanted what he felt was a true thru-hiking experience.

"Elvis": I met Brian or B.P. as he was usually called at Hampton, Tennessee, and we spent much time together until we got to Rusty's where he joined "Hike-aholic's" group.

He chose "Elvis" as his trail name for an obvious reason. His hometown was Memphis. Brian was the hiker I referred to earlier who tried the nettles and tree oysters as supplement to his diet. I never asked him if he liked peanut butter and banana sandwiches.

He had a good sense of humor and seemed to enjoy needling me. I think he was the first to call me an "old geezer". I was having a bad day on my sore knee below

Cloverdale, VA and was expressing my discomfort when he told me to quit my complaining. Then and there, I made a vow never to complain again and I have kept the vow ever since. Of course, I've had a few grumbles, whines, nags, protests, moans, bellyaches, beefs, and a raised a few fusses, but I've never complained.

I last saw B.P., at the Congdon Camp Shelter in Vermont as he was passing through on his slackpack. He was getting off the trail that evening for a couple days' rest and he said, "I'll probably catch up with you. You're kinda slow."

I haven't seen him since.

"Little Carl": "Little Carl" was sitting on a large rock near the peak of Hump Mt. in North Carolina enjoying the beautiful view when I first came across him. From Quebec, but most assuredly not a French-Canadian, he was waiting for two insecure older hikers who had a deal with him. They would pay for a night's stay in an Elk Park motel if he would wait and walk with them through the troubled section south of Moreland Gap because of all the talk of the fishhooks strung across the Trail.

Carl was a gentle and generous person who left a brick-laying job to ease along the trail and through life. He was the one who carried the ice cream to Dismal Falls to share with Taro and me.

"Little Carl" had also joined the "Hike-aholic" slackpackers and I last saw him in Massachusetts. The next year I heard he was backpacking across Europe.

"Walking Home": I had thought I was going to be alone when I bedded down for the night in the Knot Maul Shelter in Virginia. I was twice mistaken. Once because of the unwelcome visit and serenade by the earlier mentioned whip-poor-will. After that episode, I had gone into a deep sleep until I was suddenly awakened by a light flashing around the shelter. This is how I met Bill from Standish, Maine... "Walking Home".

Bill, in his thirties, was a strong hiker and had put in a very long day. He had had his supper at a park pavilion in the last gap and decided to come on to the shelter even though it

was almost dark. The two mile climb up the mountain took longer than he thought and it was pitch black when he arrived.

We got better acquainted at the next shelter the following night and we agreed after walking along some precipitous cliffs that day that night hiking is definitely not safe although some do it and like it.

Bill was a burned out computer specialist who took a leave from his career to do the A.T., one of several ex-computer people I was to meet. He proved to be a very good-hearted friendly person. When he heard I didn't have a tent he offered to sell me one at a very reasonable price he had back home and said I could send him the money after the thru-hike. He felt I needed a tent for the cold in Maine. As it turned out, UPS lost the tent before it got to my son's in NYC where Bill had arranged for his fiancée to send it. Bill was right - I really could have used some protection from the cold.

Bill left me behind at Bastian but because he took some time off at times, I saw him again at Harpers Ferry and Maryland, and then again in Pennsylvania.

"Captain Kirk": Of course, like any place in society there are always some bad apples. On the Trail, however, you usually pick up and walk away from them or let them walk away from you.

In the case of "Captain Kirk", though, it seemed for a day anyway that he was stuck to me. He was at Hightop Hut in the Shenandoah when I got there and it didn't take long for me to realize that this was not a guy I wanted to spend any time with. Overbearing and extremely critical, he seemed to watch every move I made and then make a sarcastic remark. Not really a thru-hiker, he was a diabetic, and I was to learn he violated just about all the self-care precautions one should take.

The next day I thought I would leave him behind when he had to go someplace off the Trail. Where he had to go was to buy some dope. I found that out that evening at the Bearfence Mountain Hut when sometime after dark we heard

this loud shouting and singing on the approach path to the shelter. It was the "Captain" both drunk on beer and stoned from what he was smoking. Another annoying evening until he passed out. He had caught up with us by "yellow blazing" (hitch-hiking).

The next day I took advantage of a slackpacking offer from a visiting friend of "Bad Dog's" and was able to do a 26.5-mile day and so finally got out of range of "Kirk's" star ship.

"The April Fools": I caught up with Randy and Michelle from Boston at Frye Notch Lean-to in Maine after trailing them all the way from Georgia. They were married at the base of Springer Mt. on April 1st, hence their trail name. They were a pleasant couple and were part of the fine group that climbed Mt. Katahdin my last day. I joked with them on whether they would have a divorce lawyer waiting on top of the mountain.

"The Okie Dokies": Denny and Jill came into the Kays Woods Shelter in Massachusetts while I was waiting for Hurricane Bob to blow through. As their name implied they were from Oklahoma and were also honeymooners. I spent considerable time with them the next day in Cheshire, and when we got a ride to North Adams to shop. They were probably supported the best by their home folks of any hikers I met. I helped carry one of the three huge mail drop boxes they picked up at the Post Office. Because they had way too much to carry in their packs, they shared a number of Snicker Bars and other goodies with me. After I left Cheshire I wouldn't see them again.

"The Gore-Tex Otter": I never got to know Deborah. I met her at Lost Pond Shelter in Vermont and talked briefly before she set up her tent and retired for the night. I only mention her here because she had the nicest pair of legs on the whole Trail.

"Wild Bill": I was going up a mountain south of the Kid Gore Shelter in Vermont, watching carefully where I put my feet down because of treacherous footing. I looked up and there was "Wild Bill". It was another hot day and he was

only wearing what to me looked like a pair of leopard skin bikini briefs. He had them rolled down and the "moon" was in its fullest phase.

A repeat thru-hiker, I last saw him in Hanover, New Hampshire.

"Broof": I met "Broof" at Rusty's and hiked several days with him from northern Virginia to Pennsylvania. He was a restaurant owner from Cincinnati. His trail name came from the way a very young relative of his pronounced his real name, Bruce. He was one of several vegetarians I met who seemed to be thriving.

"Seeker of True Names": Ross was hiking with his girlfriend "Baby Steps" when I met them in North Carolina, but she had to quit in Virginia because of personal problems at home. I understood Rhonda's trail name but was unclear about the meaning of his. Ross and I kept encountering each other all the way to New Hampshire. There, in his home state, he took me to the Lost River Reservation, a popular tourist attraction in Kinsman Notch just off the Trail. Ross used to work there, a unique gorge carved out of granite by the Ice Age and water and ice since.

Ross left the A.T. at the time for a few days at home and I never saw him after that.

"Sojourner": I met "Sojourner" as he was coming down the Horn of the Bigelow Mountains in Maine and we talked only briefly. I learned that he was a recent fellow graduate of Ohio State and that he had flip-flopped down south after following me up the Trail. He remembered my entries in the shelter registers.

As I got farther north, I discovered that most of the shelters had privies near by. This wasn't true in the south and I disliked having to go off into the woods with my trowel to dig a hole. It was particularly unpleasant in the Smokies where hikers were restricted by the rangers to designated toilet areas. Not everybody was hardworking at their digging.

So I was pleased to find that from Virginia on north, almost every shelter had an outhouse. They varied greatly in

design and in such features as ventilation but they were all appreciated. As a lark, I began to rate the privies with the four star system in the shelter registers. I never rated any with just one star because even the worst was better than a cathole. Even the ones in New Hampshire that were just a throne on a platform with neither walls or roof.

As I talked with "Sojourner" he exclaimed "you're the guy that rates the privies". My claim to fame.

"Swiss Kriss": I didn't meet Robert until I got to the Caratunk General Store in Maine with less than two weeks to go on the Trail. He was from Switzerland, the product of a Swiss father and an American mother.

He proved to have a great sense of humor and was hiking slower and slower because he didn't want the trek to end. He decided to do a very short day two days before the end and so I left him behind.

He had joked about meeting the "girl of his dreams", and on that day I passed a very pretty solo vacation hiker, and I wondered if Robert missed his chance.

"Javaman" and "Downhill Donna": Rick was on top of Saddleback Mountain in Maine enjoying the view when I caught up with him. Donna was on ahead at the time. Like many of the couples they didn't always walk together. They each moved at their desired pace for the day and the one ahead would then wait for the other.

I had been reading Rick and Donna's entries in the registers all the way from Georgia. A California married couple, Rick was a brewed coffee addict and his percolator was a vital part of his gear.

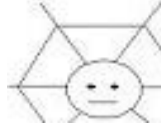
We leap frogged each other the rest of the way and they were part of the fine group that I climbed Katahdin with.

"Jimmy No-Stop": I met Jimmy at the hostel in Gorham, New Hampshire only because he had gotten sick, perhaps with giardia, and had to take time off to be treated.

After meeting we seemed to unintentionally hike together much of the way through Maine, and he also climbed Katahdin with me.

Although there was over 25 years difference in our ages, we were very compatible in many ways. Jimmy was also a displaced person due to a failed marriage.

Jimmy got this Trail name in Georgia. "Bull Moose" and "Lone Wolf" were resting at a roadside when Jimmy, a strong hiker, hurried by without stopping and "Lone Wolf" quipped "There goes Jimmy No-Stop" and it stuck.



Of course, I met many other people, all of whom hold a valued place in my memory. People such as "the Crafter", "Mountain Goat", "Gandolf", "Carolina Charlie", "Golden Thumb", "the Weather Carrot", "Trail Dog", "Toxic Shuga Butt", and others.

As I set out across the bridge over the Potomac River and down the short stretch of the C&O Canal towpath that doubles as the A.T. out of Harpers Ferry, I also had a renewed appreciation from my visit to the Conference headquarters of all the friends of the Trail that had made this great experience possible.

MARYLAND

"A hiker by the name of Bob Ewing,
out in the woods, a trail he was doing;
a step he did miss,
a stump he did kiss,
By luck, he avoided a skewering."

Michael O'Brien

It was another short visit. I spent only two nights in Maryland - the trail covering only a little over 40 miles of rather gentle hiking. In fact, when I got to Pennsylvania I had set foot in four states in only four days.

The A.T. across Maryland lacks perhaps the grandeur of most of the others but still has some notable features. After a rocky climb up from the Towpath, a short side trail takes you to the Weverton Cliffs for a beautiful view of Harpers Ferry and the Potomac.

The trail passes mostly through State parks, one of which is Washington Monument State Park. Maryland's monument to the founding father predates the better known one in the District of Columbia, but isn't quite as impressive. It is said that it looks like a giant stone crock.

Also, one of my memories of Maryland is the Devil's Racecourse Shelter which you reach by climbing a mountain to a side trail that takes you back down the mountain to the shelter.

Another memory is the only near serious injury that I suffered on the thru-hike.



One of the questions most asked of me after the thru-hike was "Weren't you afraid going alone?" And, in fact, the ATC recommends that you not hike by yourself. However, if

that's your situation you don't have much choice. Many of the end-to-enders are solo hikers but do become part of the thru-hiking family with a real concern for each other's welfare.

There are hazards on the Trail and each hiker does his or her best to avoid them. However, as in anyplace in life, accidents happen. Probably more people have their treks come to a premature end because of falls than any other mishap. Much of the Trail is rough walking with roots, rocks, and slippery footing. I fell down in every state I was in except West Virginia where there's only seven miles of Trail.

In Tennessee one day, looking up the Trail, I noticed a bunch of smashed nettles, thinking "someone took a tumble there" and then tripped over the same rock probably and went down in the same place.

In Virginia, I had to cross Wolf Creek on a large slanted flat stone that the water was running over. I carefully anchored my right foot in a crack and stepped on the stone with my left. My foot quickly slipped sideways, my pack bore me down and there I was, my forehead against the rock and doing a split I would never have thought possible for me. I was sore for a couple days.

By the time I got to New Hampshire, I was learning how to fall. I fell into a pile of sharp pointed dead sticks descending Mount Madison but was able to twist and fall on my pack. As a result, I got only a couple of scratches.

In Maine, I fell off a bog log (logs put down by maintainers in swampy places). There I was, in the mud like a turtle on its back, with no idea why I fell. I unbuckled the pack, got up, put the pack back on, stepped on the log and almost fell again. The logs were new and had not been staked down yet and had rolled on me.

It was in Maryland that I had the fall that could have ended my thru-hike. After leaving the Devil's Racecourse Shelter, feeling rested and strong, I was walking fast through a newly relocated section. Suddenly, I tripped over something and with the weight of the pack, I was face-first on the ground in an instant. My upper lip came down on a six-inch sapling stump.

I was cut and because I didn't have a mirror, I didn't know how bad. There were a couple of college girls I had shared the shelter with up ahead so I hurried to catch them to see if I needed stitches. They didn't think I did and the bleeding soon stopped. I was left with a scar, but I still think of how much worse it could have been had I come down on an eye.

A fall did end the hike of a woman I knew only as Jennifer when she broke her leg in North Carolina. Another woman whom I never met, with a trail name similar to mine, "Web Gatherer", had to quit because of leg injuries. I learned this through the Trail "grapevine".

As I neared the end, I began to concentrate more and more on where I placed my feet because I was determined not to let an accident stop me when my goal was so close.

Water, that essential of life, can be hazardous to your health on the A.T. There are only a few places where you can draw good water from a tap, as is the custom at home. Instead, hikers must rely on springs, streams, and ponds. Very often the water contains organisms such as Giardia that can make you deathly sick.

There are three methods of water purification for backpackers - boiling, filtering and treating with chemicals. Boiling is pretty much out of the question for long distance hikers because you can't carry enough stove fuel.

In 1991, there were only two makes of mechanical filtering pumps available. One, from Switzerland, cost over \$240 and was of course beyond my means. The other cost only about \$40 but after a couple week's use would clog up making pumping very hard. As they couldn't be cleaned on the trail, most users of this type ended up sending them home.

Chemical treatment, then, was the most relied on method of purification, usually iodine tablets. These were effective apparently as I never got sick even though I'm sure there were many times I didn't wait the required minutes for the tablets to work.

The iodine did leave a foul taste in your mouth that took some getting used to. If the water source was a piped spring, I usually didn't bother treating the water.

In North Carolina at the Flint Mountain Shelter, the spring was piped but not directly from the ground. Water seeped from the bank into a little pool and the pipe came from that. Therefore, I decided to treat my water that I drew just before dark to be used the next morning. I used the water for my breakfast and then as I was brushing my teeth, I noticed something in the bottom of the bottle. Looking more closely, I discovered a dead lizard. The iodine must have worked. I didn't lose my breakfast either.

"Elvis" was one of the few hikers that carried a small bottle of household bleach, treating his water with a few drops each time. I thought that method was kind of imprecise and no better tasting.

Not enough water can be a real hazard for the physically stressed and over-heated hiker. Dehydration and hyperthermia (heat exhaustion and heat stroke) are undeniable dangers.

The summer of 1991 was very hot and dry. The further north I got, water became harder and harder to find. And there were times that I passed up poor quality stream or pond water that would have been all right pumped through a filter but I couldn't bring myself to drink it even with iodine in it.

Also I was guilty many times of not forcing down as much water as I could before I started out in the morning, being too anxious to get out there, breaking webs I guess. The result was that there were times that I was seriously dehydrated. Dehydration can be a cause of swelling of arms and legs. In Virginia one day my right arm became so swollen that it looked like the skin would burst and little aliens would come crawling out. Taro was really concerned when he saw it and thought I should get to a doctor somehow. However, the next day the swelling went down and I was never troubled that way again.

Hiking the A.T. end-to-end can be a four-season experience. Whether you start early or late, it is almost certain you will experience at least a few days of winter weather either in Georgia or Maine. Therefore, hypothermia (when your core temperature drops below 95° and the body is unable to generate its own warmth) is another genuine hazard. Hypothermia is the single greatest cause of death in the wilderness. It's not only a winter occurrence. Unprepared or novice hikers have died in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the middle of summer.

Starting in late April, cold was not a problem for me in Georgia. Too, I had a pretty good layer of body fat on me then. By the time I got to Maine I had lost the fat and cold was a real concern.

Other hazards on the Trail are insect and snakebites, stream crossing and lightning.

Some insects were just irritating, not dangerous, of course. Mosquitoes were not bad that year because of the dry weather. Gnats were particularly annoying in Virginia. They seemed to like to hover right in front of your face as you were walking. "Broof" said to stare them in the eye and they would leave. It didn't work for me, though.

Ticks are the main concern, however, both the larger ones and the very small deer ticks. Some places in Virginia are infested with the big ones. I once discovered a host of them crawling up my legs. Only once did I have one get his head in, fortunately in my arm where i could see it and easily remove it. A tick needs to be imbedded for a few hours before there's a real danger of disease being transmitted.

The minuscule deer tick is the carrier of Lyme disease, a serious illness if not treated early. I never saw a deer tick and that's part of the problem. They are so small you don't know you've been bitten until a circular rash appears.

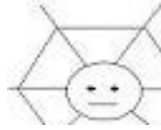
Bee stings can be a hazard and hikers try to warn those following of nests by leaving notes. Unfortunately some people don't know the difference between hornets and yellow jackets.

Once I saw a note that said "hornets nest 50 feet ahead!" Moving carefully I watched for the familiar paper-like nest attached to a bush or tree limb, proceeding to step right on a yellow jacket nest in the ground. Luckily I was stung only twice before I got away.

I've mentioned my experience with snakes earlier. They're not a major danger if you use good sense and stay alert. One hiker in a previous year was bitten by a copperhead as he slept under a bridge. Not a good choice of shelter.

In early years there have been drownings at stream crossings. Two of the worst fords have been eliminated by a bridge and a canoe ferry. There are still a number of crossings in Maine that could be dangerous if care is not taken. My own experience during the thunderstorm in Tennessee was enough to remind me of the danger of lightning. It didn't strike close to me, but it did to a hiker in the Smokies. Close enough to make his hair stand up, resulting in his trail name, "Lightning Rod".

Backpackers need to be aware of the metal they're carrying. They should never walk on exposed ridges or summits during thunderstorms. Crouching on the ground, on your sleeping pad if possible, is the safest policy.



So after my short stay, I left Maryland passing through the Pen-Mar County Park, a beautiful well-maintained place with a great view north in Pennsylvania. I used the clean park restroom with its running water to clean up my face and get a good look at my cut upper lip. Not only did I have the cut but apparently while my face was bouncing on the stump, I had scratched a perfect question mark on my cheek and chin.

But I left Maryland thankful I could keep on going north.

PENNSYLVANIA

For I was hungry, and
you gave me something to eat;
I was thirsty, and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger, and you invited me in.
Matthew 25:35

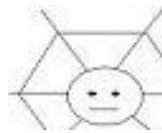
I met a south bounder down south and he said "the only good thing about Pennsylvania is the 50-cent draught beer".

To be sure, Pennsylvania lacks the high peaks of some of the others. The Trail follows long ridges that stretch west to east. Water is often hard to come by; the springs are a long way down the sides of the ridges. And there are those infamous Pennsylvania rocks, big and small. The small ones are the worst. The soil has been eroded from the trail, leaving sharp little pointy rocks as a walking surface. This is true most of the way from the Harrisburg area to the New Jersey line. Much of the way the rocks are hidden under grass so you can't see where you are placing your foot.

There are almost 230 miles of the A.T. in Pennsylvania, third in length behind Virginia and Maine. When I got there I found the price of beer had gone up.

However, I also found that the varied Trail, not far from civilization at any point, had many features to its credit. Not only are there great vistas of beautiful farm land from the ridges, you actually walk the edges of some of these farm fields in Cumberland County. You also walk by the ruins of old iron furnaces and other relics of Pennsylvania's storied history.

Also, I remember Pennsylvania for my repeated encounters with "Trail Angels".



"Trail Angels" have become a legendary part of the A.T. experience. They are a large part of "trail magic", unexpected good things that happen to thru-hikers.

On the roads crossed by the A.T. and in the towns that hikers enter, not everyone the backpacker meets is kindly disposed. Some locals resent the Trail Conference's land acquisition program. Someone whose nose is to the grindstone may resent the free lifestyle of the hiker. The question may be asked, "Why are you wasting your time doing this?"

I mentioned earlier the fish hooks across the trail incident in Carter County in Tennessee. On two occasions shelters have mysteriously burned. I was in a Roan Mountain, TN restaurant when I heard a guy with a reddish tint reflecting above his shirt collar loudly bemoaning not being able to hunt on Trail and National Forest lands.

However, in spite of a few bad experiences, the thru-hiker will probably much longer remember the many times he was graced by "trail magic".

Some of the "Angels" may be former thru-hikers who have returned to help the current year's crop in whatever way they can. They may, for example, set up a barbecue grill at a road trailhead and offer hamburgers to every walker that comes along. Or they may drive the highways offering lifts to hikers hitching into town for resupplying.

The "Angels" most remembered though are the townspeople and other residents near the Trail that go out of their way to help the end-to-ender. They do this, perhaps, because they enjoy meeting and talking with the hikers from all over the country and in some cases, the world. They know enough about the A.T. to appreciate the effort required to be a thru-hiker and also the adventure of the endeavor.

In addition, many walkers are the beneficiaries of simple random acts of kindness like when a tourist lady at an overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway came over to sweaty, grungy, me as I sat on a stone wall wilting in the 90° heat, with a cup of ice water.

I remember the fore-mentioned people from Decatur who made me part of their birthday party at Addis Gap and, of course, the Willocks who brought me the bag of supposedly surplus food at Rainbow Springs.

At the Catawba Grocery just off the A.T. on Route 311 in Virginia, I had taken advantage of the storeowner's offer of camping space next to an adjoining pond. The next morning, I had intended to go north on the Trail to a point where the Trail crosses 311 again only a mile from the village of Catawba. I had a mail drop there at the Post Office. As I was packing up, it occurred to me that it was Saturday and as I would have to go six miles before I got to the next trailhead, I probably wouldn't make it before the Post Office closed. I realized that I would have to go into town from where I was, a three mile walk one way unless I could hitch a ride. Since it's easier to get a ride if you are carrying your pack, I stopped into the store to ask if I could leave some of my heavier things there. The young woman clerk said sure, no problem. After I went back out to get my gear, the young woman came out holding a set of keys and said, "Why don't you just take my car?" Well, I did, but couldn't but marvel all the way to town and back on how the lady had placed such trust in a stranger.

When I got to Caledonia State Park in Pennsylvania, I took time to go a mile down U.S. 30 to a grocery. When I got back to the Trail as it winds through the Park, I heard someone call to me. It was "Broof" who I was hiking with at the time. He was seated at a picnic table with a group of senior citizens on an outing. There were six couples who took part on a regular basis in Saturday morning drives to interesting places and invited "Broof" to join their breakfast. I received the same invitation and shared their delicious donuts, fruit salad, coffee and juice. All for a little conversation. I didn't tell them I had just consumed six sandwiches made from some sliced turkey and bread bought at the grocery.

At Port Clinton in eastern Pennsylvania, I was planning to sleep in the town park pavilion but had gone to

the bar of the Port Clinton Hotel, a legendary hiker stop for a "world's largest cheeseburger" prepared by Helen Carbaugh, the gruff but friendly proprietor.

Helen mentioned to the group of six of us there that we had just missed by a day the slackpacking service provided by "\$2 Bill", a local resident. For a thirty-day period each summer, he hauls thru-hikers' packs from the hotel ahead to the hostel at the base of Hawk Mountain, sixteen Trail miles ahead. A retired military man, he does this for no charge.

Helen suggested that we call him anyway and because I was the oldest in the group, I got elected. It was somewhat awkward for me to phone this complete stranger but after some hesitation, "\$2 Bill" consented to make one more trip. We left our packs outside the hotel in the morning and they were waiting for us at the hostel. I never learned Bill's real name or got to meet him face to face.

In Delaware Water Gap, the town you pass through crossing the river into New Jersey, the Presbyterian Church of the Mountain provides a comfortable hostel for thru-hikers in the church basement for only a three-dollar donation.

On Thursday evenings the members of the church put on a covered dish cookout for the hikers there at the time. Unfortunately, I was there on a Monday but I had a very pleasant rest there.

I have mentioned my two-day stay at "Bull Moose's" home in Sussex County, NJ. I list Bull's mother, Peg, as one of my "Trail Angels". She took us three strangers into her home and could not have treated us better.

In New York State the A.T. passes by the Graymoor Monastery, home of the Franciscan Friars of Atonement. In the tradition of aiding travelers, the friars have been taking thru-hikers in for an overnight stay for years. I heard about the place down the Trail and pictured in my mind a dark and dreary cubicle with gruel for meals.

When I got there, Brother Jerry showed me to a small but comfortable room and informed me the first order of business for a thru-hiker is a hot shower. That evening we

had a delicious all-you-can-eat salad bar and cheeseburger and French fry dinner followed by relaxation in their well-stocked library. In the morning, before moving on, we were fed a sumptuous AYCE breakfast. With food like that, I briefly considered staying and becoming a monk. All this hospitality for a small donation and I never saw any gruel.

In Massachusetts, I stopped off to see the "Pittsfield Cookie Lady". Marilyn Wiley and her husband have a blueberry farm just a tenth mile off the A.T. and invite hikers to use the faucet at the front of their house for water. Marilyn often meets the hiker with a couple home baked cookies. In addition to the free cookies, I also was able to buy four eggs fresh from her hen house.

In Cheshire, Massachusetts, Father Tom of the St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church makes the parish hall available as a hostel. Father Tom, a hiker himself who has walked 1600 miles of the A.T. goes out of his way to aid you. He drove the "Okie Dokies" and me to North Adams for groceries, laundry, and Big Macs, instructing us on how to use the inter-urban bus system to return to Cheshire.

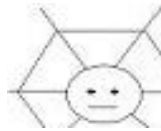
In Vermont, while ascending Baker Peak, I encountered a group of mentally handicapped young people I had met earlier at the Upper Goose Cabin Shelter in Massachusetts. They were on an outing under the guidance of two counselors, a young woman and man. The woman, who had thru-hiked before explained the group had leap-frogged by van up the Green Mountains. She then asked me if I would like an apple and this was the signal for the whole group to crowd around me with an outpouring of whatever snacks they had left from their lunches.

It may seem that most of my "Trail Angel" experiences had to do with receiving gifts of food but perhaps these gifts were mainly the result of me beginning to look like a war refugee. It is true that the tortellini and beer given me by a young couple and their two male friends at Calf Mountain Hut in Virginia is still implanted in my memory. The group arrived at the shelter after I had settled in and at first looked a little upset that I was there. They explained that

they had just come from Richmond for a weekend outing and planned to party into the night. They said they would look for a place to camp so as not to disturb me. I assured them that it wasn't necessary as I was tired enough to sleep through anything.

As it turned out, I didn't get to sleep until 2:30 in the morning but I thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the discussions of political and social issues that became quite lively at times.

That evening was just one of the many instances of true friendliness towards a thru-hiker. Although the good food I was given along the A.T. was greatly appreciated, I was touched much more by the concern for my welfare that I encountered so often.



On July 17 I entered Pennsylvania in the midst of a very hot and dry summer. The drought was not to ease until I was most of the way across the state, too late to help the slow flowing springs. The heat was not to ease until I got to New Hampshire and in Pennsylvania there were days when the temperature neared 100°.

A large section of the Trail passed through lands that had been burned off in earlier years and was largely brush with no tall trees for shade. However, even with the heat, shortage of water, and the physical and mental stress of having trekked over a thousand miles, I was continuing to put in long days, pushing my daily overall average toward the fifteen miles I felt I needed. During one five day period in Pennsylvania I averaged over twenty-two.

My spirits were on somewhat of a roller coaster ride at the time. When I crossed U.S. Route 30 at Caledonia State Park, I thought of how easy it would be to stick out my thumb and hitch west to home.

Also after hiking with "Broof" much of the way since the Shenandoah, he left me in Boiling Springs to take a bus to New York City to meet a friend. Near Pine Grove State Park "Broof" and I took each other's picture standing along side the half way marker on the A.T.

On the up side, I linked up again with "Bull Moose" and "Taro" and was with them most of the way across the state.

The A.T. leaves the high ground at Boiling Springs and crosses the Cumberland Valley along the edge of farm fields for a distance of about 10 miles. This is actually an improvement over the past when most of this stretch was road walking. Still, with the temperatures in the high nineties, those farm fields in the hot sun were not pleasant.

When I got to a road at Conodoguinet Creek, I saw in my handbook that there was a store 0.3 miles west. I couldn't bear the thought of going back to the mountains without something wet and cold first so I decided to take time for a refreshment stop. Just off the Trail I noticed some people repairing the porch of a farmhouse and taking a chance on their honesty, stopped in to ask if I could leave my pack there until I got back.

It turned out that this was a place used by local Trail maintenance volunteers for over-night stays. Although hikers are normally not permitted to stay there, Joe Baker, the caretaker invited me to stay the night if I helped with the porch renovation. He explained that he felt he could bend the rules because of the drought and dry springs between there and Duncannon. As he lived there alone, I felt that he, a 1980 thru-hiker, also liked to have company. He proved to be a gracious host and fixed a delicious breakfast the next morning. Because of my layover there, "Bull Moose" caught up with me and also spent the night. It was at this time that I got to know what he was really like away from the party atmosphere of Rusty's. Also there, was Bill "Walking Home" West, the last time I saw him.

The next forenoon halfway up Blue Mountain I came upon "Taro" filtering water at a spring. I hadn't seen him since Rusty's either.

That night "Taro" and I shared the Thelma Marks Shelter four miles south of Duncannon. This was the shelter where a southbound couple, Geoff Hood and Mollie LaRue, were murdered the previous September. Many hikers would not stay at Thelma Marks because of the murders but I felt it just added to the tragedy if the actions of a subhuman outcast should spoil any part of the A.T.

The next day it was into Duncannon, which the Trail passes through to cross the bridge over the Susquehanna River. After picking up my mail drop at the Post Office it was almost mandatory that I stop at the Doyle Hotel restaurant and bar, a hiker tradition. There I had a fine breakfast with "Bull" and "Taro" and joined them for a few of those famous, now 55-cent, beers. I was soon in no mood for any more hiking that day and so I checked into the hotel, \$10.60 a night, shared bathroom with the whole floor. "Bull" and "Taro" staggered out of town at four that afternoon to stay at the Clarks Ferry Shelter 4.5 miles out of town.

I woke up early the next morning feeling guilty for the short day before and was hiking by 5:30. I caught up with "Bull" and "Taro" at the shelter. I told them I was going to go as far as I could that day and then camp because the Rausch Gap Shelter was now too far away for one day's walk.

Later that afternoon as I neared the top of Stony Mountain a cold front blew through and thus refreshed, I realized I had just enough daylight hours left to reach Rausch Gap. At eight o'clock I got to the shelter knowing what footsore meant. I had walked fourteen and a half hours covering 29.8 miles, my longest day of the whole trip.

Included in this day was the long rocky climb down off Peters Mountain to get water at mid-day. In The Thru-Hiker's Handbook, a hiker says the water from this spring is so cold because it's in Canada.

Prior to reaching Stony Mountain, the effects of the drought were at their worst. The small saplings in the forest

looked dead and the leaves from the tall trees were falling like it was October instead of July. After Stony Mountain the forest was greener perhaps because I had entered a climate zone influenced by the ocean not so far away now. Water was still hard to find, though. At the Leroy A. Smith Shelter I had to go far down off the ridge passing two dry springs with signs pointing further down until I finally found water almost a mile from the shelter. It was near the Smith shelter that I saw my first bear.

The night before this I had spent in jail. Actually the town of Palmerton makes the basement recreation room of the borough hall and jail available free to thru-hikers, including a shower.

Palmerton is in the Lehigh Valley and was the home of a zinc smelter that polluted the ridge above with its emissions. All of the vegetation had been killed and for about five miles it was like walking on the moon. Fortunately, I made the rock scramble up out of Lehigh Gap in the early morning. They say the bare rocks in the afternoon sun make it seem like a scene from Dante's Inferno.

My last night in the Keystone State was my stay at the Church of the Mountain hostel. I got there early in the day and had a restful afternoon in that most beautiful place. I had made it across the infamous Pennsylvania rocks with my feet and ankles intact.

NEW JERSEY

"He resembles a man who was
hanged and cut down by mistake
when the job was only half done."

Robert Moss

FIRE ALONG THE SKY

When I got to "Bull Moose's" home in northern New Jersey, I was definitely not a pretty sight. I was to learn later that Tom's mother was really concerned about my thinness. Also my clothes were worn out. One thing I forgot when packing my mail drops was to put in some new clothes. Although I was carrying a pair of pants and shirt for town wear, my trail clothes were shot. My long pants had become cut-offs with a broken zipper. Luckily my shirttail was long enough in front to keep me decent. I wished I had put in a mail drop box the perfectly good hiking shorts I had back home. They were too tight when I left, but would have fit fine now.

My boots were held together with duct tape. My Army style haircut had grown long and shaggy.

In spite of how I looked, I felt great.

I hadn't expected much when I got to New Jersey, my attitude influenced by all the bad publicity the state gets. The Trail, however, follows the ridge of the Kittatinny Mountain along the east side of the Delaware River and is in sharp contrast with the congested industrial cities to the east.

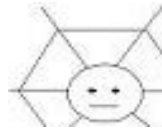
Climbing out of the Water Gap you are immediately exposed to the beauty of Dunnfield Ravine spoiled only slightly by the heavy use the Trail gets there. Further up you come to Sunfish Pond, the first glacial pond encountered going north on the A.T. Only public outcry saved it from becoming a power company cooling pond years ago. Today it is a beauty spot.

The Trail meanders along the Kittatinny ridge offering alternate views to the west and the Poconos and to the east and New Jersey lakes and farmland. The vista is

particularly fine from Mt. Sunrise. After you reach High Point State Park, so called of course because it's the highest point in New Jersey, the A.T. nears and parallels the New York state line. At Lott Road it is less than a half-mile to Unionville, NY. A mile to the east is "Bull Moose's" home where the environs reminded me very much of Ohio.

From High Point to New York, about 30 miles, you go through a diverse region with boardwalked swamps, pastures, road walks through suburbs, and around the edge of a huge sod farm in the Walkkill River Valley.

This diversity of landscape kept my mind alert and from wandering. This had not been true in some sections to the south, particularly in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Often I was doing what I came to call "deja vu" hiking - haven't I been through here before? At these times I began playing mind games such as making a list of unanswerable Trail questions:



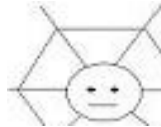
1. Why when going up a mountain breathing hard, did it seem like I was breathing through my ears?
2. Why did my knees begin hurting for the first time only after the owner of the Walasi-Yi Center asked me if they were hurting?
3. Why do people take the time to travel to places of natural beauty and then trash it with their litter?
4. Why was it easier to make a climb on a bald or above the tree line than through a green tunnel?
5. Why did I ever complain about the routing of a Trail section built at great effort by volunteers and on which I was walking at no charge?
6. Is shooting a sign as much fun as shooting a sitting duck?

7. Are there other towns like Tyro, VA where both city limit signs are mounted on the same post?

8. Why does the Yankee Supermarket in Adams, Massachusetts cash personal checks but not U.S. Postal money orders?

9. Why are most of the solar showers provided on the A.T. placed in the shade?

10. Does the last question count as a complaint? I ask this question because of the vow I made to "Elvis" down in Virginia that I'd never complain again.



And so in five days I completed the delightful New Jersey Trail and entered the Empire State.

NEW YORK

"Years ago, scientists were predicting the evolution of a race of men without legs, thanks to the automobile. Nowadays we know they were wrong. It is not our legs we are losing. It is our minds."

Sussman and Goode
THE MAGIC OF WALKING

Culture shock! By 10:30 in the morning on August 6 I had laid eyes on a total of two other people. This was after spending the night alone at the William Brien Memorial Shelter. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon I was hanging from a rail in a packed subway car in New York City, armpit to armpit.

My son Jim, who lived at the time in Astoria, Queens, had picked me up at the Bear Mountain Inn where the A.T. crosses the Hudson River just north of the city. The two days off there were refreshing and interesting, as it was my first visit. At the same time it became evident to me that the past three months on the Trail with my only necessities those that I carried on my back, had made me a different person from those teeming around me.

I wondered at the values and the pace of life in a place where my son said the ideal car, if he could afford it, would be an old Checker cab with a railroad tie as a bumper. (Might makes the right-away.)

I did like the back to the 50's or earlier feel of the business districts in Queens with specialty stores like meat markets, green grocers, small clothing shops, and hundreds of ethnic restaurants.

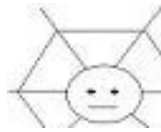
I didn't like that it cost four dollars just to cross a bridge.

I did like that it cost only 50 cents to cross the bay, passing by the Statue of Liberty on the Staten Island ferry.

I didn't like that the only time I was ever seriously lost in my trek from Georgia to Maine was on the streets of

Astoria. Continuing with my habit on my rest days of going for a walk, I had toured the nearby business district while Jim was at work, including passing by the Bill Cosby studios. When I decided to return to the apartment, I realized I couldn't remember the confusing street number. After wandering through the look-alike neighborhoods for about an hour, it came to me that if I found a subway station I could find my way from there and I could find the station by listening for the train. The idea worked, but I also found myself longing for the white blazes.

So, after a couple of days and a couple of fine dinners, one at a Thai restaurant and one home cooked at a friend of Jim's in Flushing Meadows, it was time to hit the Trail again. Spoiling myself with fine accommodations, I made that first day back a short one to stay at the fore-mentioned Graymoor Monastery.



One of the often asked questions by people unfamiliar with the A.T. is "Where do you sleep at night?" The quick answer is: "Anyplace that gets you out of the rain."

I have mentioned that there are about 200 shelters spaced at intervals along the Trail. Most of these are traditional "Adirondack style" three-sided lean-tos. They don't lean against anything though, being freestanding. Most of them are largely constructed of native materials, that is, logs. This is especially so in areas inaccessible by roads as in Maine. Any sawn lumber or roofing materials must be carried in at great effort. In some places, materials had to be brought in by Helicopter at great expense.

The shelters do vary in design, however, a result of the whims of the volunteers that build them. There are A-frames like Muskrat Creek in Georgia and the Fontana "Hilton" in North Carolina. There is a dome, Dick's Dome

Shelter in Virginia and a six-sided version, Hexacuba Shelter in New Hampshire.

Some shelters are quite new and well built such as the Jim and Molly Denton Shelter in northern Virginia, a veritable palace with sleeping decks, lounge benches, and a separate cooking pavilion. The stone and timber Trimpi and Pine Swamp Branch Shelters of like design in southwestern Virginia are quite nice. A lot of the shelters are very utilitarian in design, such as the Roan Highlands Shelter, likened to a bus stop.

Many shelters are old and dilapidated. Those in the Smokies have fireplaces and are coated with black soot. This is true of most of the lean-tos where fire pits are permitted. In some places existing buildings are used such as the four-sided structure on the summit of Blood Mountain in Georgia. It was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's. On Roan mountain the Roan High Knob Shelter is an old fire warden's stone cabin and it shows its age. The oldest shelter on the A.T. is the Happy Hill Cabin in Vermont, a place where you want to look above you for daylight before laying out your sleeping bag.

There are other four-sided cabins on the Trail such as the 501 Shelter in Pennsylvania and the Congdon Camp and Spruce Peak Shelters on the Long Trail in Vermont. Because there is a lot of winter hiking on the Long Trail where the A.T. is routed for about 100 miles, these latter shelters have wood stoves and Spruce Park is fairly new and pleasant.

In Shenandoah National Park the shelters are called huts even though they are the familiar lean-tos. These huts should not be confused with the hut system in New Hampshire. In each Shenandoah Hut there is a pipe safe for the requested three-dollar donation. All the other shelters are free except for some on the Long Trail and in the White Mountains of New Hampshire where there are permanent caretakers. These caretakers are necessary because of the heavy use these areas get.

No matter how dingy, decrepit, and overrun with mice some of these shelters were, after a long day's walk in the rain or snow, they were home when you got there.

Also along the way there were hostels made available to hikers, some maintained for a profit and some provided free simply because the providers were much supportive and interested in the hiker lifestyle. In addition there are the American Youth Hostels at Bears Den Rocks in Virginia, Sandy Hook in Maryland, and Pine Grove Furnace State Park in Pennsylvania.

Usually hostels provide dormitory rooms and lounge rooms. AYH hostels have kitchen privileges. In the case of Levi Long's in Bastian, VA, it was simply a vacant house with no bathroom. The Gorham House provides a sleeping loft in a barn attached to the Bed and Breakfast. The Nantahala Outdoor Center in Wesser, North Carolina provides a bunkroom in a motel that caters to river rafters and kayakers.

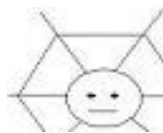
Religious organizations in the tradition of aiding wayfarers play the largest part in providing hostels. I have mentioned the Jesuit hostel in Hot Springs, the "Place" in Damascus, the Holy Family Hospice in Pearisburg, the Presbyterian Church of the Mountain in Delaware Water Gap, Graymoor Monastery near Peekskill, NY and the St. Mary of Assumption Catholic Church in Cheshire, Massachusetts.

There are other hostels along the way where for one reason or another I didn't stop; Tillie Wood's Woodshole near Ferrisburg, the Mt. Cube Sugar House operated by a former first lady of New Hampshire, and Rogers' House of Weather near Glencliff, NH.

I have also mentioned the Doyle and Port Clinton Hotels in Pennsylvania. Both were lodging places of former better days and to some might be in a class slightly above "flop house". However, they were cheap, clean, the water hot, and hikers felt most welcome there.

All in all, what hikers most want is a roof over their heads. Many thru-hikers use their tents almost exclusively, either for privacy or because they can't take the mice and in

some cases, skunks. After giving up on my tent after just four uses, I was to camp under my tarp only five times. I appreciated every shelter I stayed in, even the "baseball bat" shelter in Maine. These were old lean-tos where no sawn lumber was used. Instead of floorboards, you slept on three-inch saplings laid side-by-side.



I had spent only two nights on the Trail in New York before I went into the city. After crossing the state line I passed through an area called Sterling Forest, a section of high ridges overlooking Greenwood Lake. I think now of how beautiful it would be to hike there in the fall after the leaves had turned. It was beautiful in early August also, but the Trail crosses high rocky outcrops and with the 90° heat and the sun beating down, I wasn't very appreciative of the scenery. I had to camp under the tarp at the designated camping area the first night where the Wildcat Shelter is now located. I had just got set up when a thunderstorm hit. It wasn't enough to break the heat or drought but I think it did lessen the fire danger. I had heard that the rangers might close the trails in the upcoming Harriman State Park; making necessary long road walks around the park, not a happy prospect.

Harriman, New York's second largest park, was where the first work on the A.T. was begun in 1922. The Trail is a series of strenuous up and downs and passes through the Lemon Squeezer, an opening through a rock outcropping so narrow I had to remove my pack to get through. It is said that a number of famous people have squeezed through over the years, including Marilyn Monroe.

The day before going into New York City was still pretty much a wilderness walk although I was finding more and more evidence the metropolis was just 35 miles away.

The Fingerboard Shelter area was crowded with a youth group camping there and as there was no water at the Brien Shelter, I had to go down off the ridge to Lake Tiorati where there is a swimming beach. I was able to shower there and prepare my supper at a picnic table. At the pop machine I found that the same can of Coke that was 35¢ 5n North Carolina was no \$1.50.

The next morning about 7 o'clock as I was crossing Black Mountain, I looked to the south and there was the skyline of the city, Empire State Building and all. There was a long hanging mist in the city and with the bright sun shining on the buildings; it looked like a magical city in the clouds.

Upon returning to the Trail at Bear Mountain after my rest days, I crossed the Hudson River Bridge and had only 6.6 miles to go to Graymoor. I made up for it the next day doing 19.4 miles to the RPH Cabin, an old house that served as a shelter. It had been tough carrying the pack that day after the time off.

My last full day in New York I did 16 miles of varied hiking of wilderness trail, road walks by country estates, a somewhat perilous crossing of the busy Taconic Parkway, and along a corn field to cross over the Harlem Railway line where the A.T. has its own train stop for those wishing to go into the city, only on weekends though. The next morning it was on to my tenth state, Connecticut. I now had only about 728 miles to go, two thirds of my journey completed.

CONNECTICUT

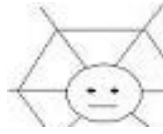
In a wild place, lost from the mean streets,
we can find ourselves, our best selves.
A place that is peaceful, for prayer and
contemplation, is good; a place that is wild,
for challenge and confrontation, is better;
and a place that is both peaceful and wild,
for the love of life and the lust of living, is best.

John McKinney
A WALK ALONG LAND'S END

The A.T. flirts with the New York-Connecticut line for about seven miles before leaving New York for good in southwestern Connecticut on Schaghticoke Mountain, easier to climb than to say, someone quipped. None of the mountains in Connecticut were very high, but there were a lot of climbs.

The first night in the state I spent at the Algo lean-to just outside of Kent. I had to go to the Post Office there for a mail drop the next morning.

Kent was the first archetypal New England town I was to enter. An upscale village, you pass by the Kent School, private and preppy. I needed stove fuel and discovered the outdoor store didn't open until 10 and so I sat down on a bench beside a pond outside the IGA store to wait. After a few minutes a well-dressed lady who I noticed sitting in a car in the parking lot drinking a cup of something, got out and came over to me with a large cup of coffee. She asked if I wanted it but had an angry expression on her face. I took it, of course, but couldn't help but wonder who had stood her up. Maybe she had thought that if he didn't want it, she would give it to that homeless bum over there. As for me, I had to go back in the store and get a couple of donuts to go with it.



Recalling this small incident got me to thinking about some of the other interesting people I had met as a result of my thru-hike.

Just after I had set up my tent on Wine Bald in North Carolina, I heard some shouting below on the mountain. Soon two guys without packs came in sight at almost a run. One of them called to me asking if I had lost a windbreaker and passed it to me as he rushed by. I realized that it was mine and I apparently had lost it off the back of my pack. I didn't find out who the guys were until I got to Rainbow Springs. They were speed hikers attempting to set a record for hiking the A.T.

They had covered the same miles that I did in eleven days, in three. Of course, they had the benefit of a support team that would meet them at a trailhead at the end of the day with a hot meal and a van for sleeping. They called themselves "Maineak" and "Gator ". The latter was to drop out early because of a bad case of blisters, but "Maineak" finished the A.T. in 53 days. However, he did not set a record because that same year, another runner, David Horton, had finished a day ahead of him. He broke the record of less than 61 days set by Ward Leonard in an earlier year.

The Appalachian Trail Conference discourages "speed hiking" and does not recognize such records. Such efforts seem not to be in the true spirit of the A.T. because after all, it is not an athletic event.

I hesitate to write anything derogatory about anyone I met on the A.T., especially when most of what I know was gained by hearsay. My personal experience was limited to a brief instant.

Ward Leonard, the previous speed hike record holder, has become somewhat of a pariah on the A.T. He is a thru-hiking repeater, walking the Trail every year. He makes his

dislike of other hikers very clear, being particularly disdainful of those of less ability or experience.

It seemed that just about every hostel keeper along the Trail had an unpleasant story about Leonard and he has become persona non grata in many of them.

My own encounter occurred in Vermont. My watch had stopped the day before and I depended on knowing the time to keep track of my progress for the day. I saw this hiker with a foreign legion style "kepi" hat coming towards me. I said hello and asked if he had the time. At first, I thought he smiled at me but later realized it was a grimace. He responded with a curt and loud "no" and went on. Later, talking with another hiker, I concluded that I had finally met the notorious "weird" Leonard.

I actually never met the next two persons I note here. I only saw their graves on the A.T. north of Allen Gap, North Carolina. The Sheltons, uncle and nephew, from Tennessee were Union soldiers who were returning home to see their family when they were killed by Confederates, victims of a conflict between loyalty to the Union and loyalty to their family. Markers were placed at the spot in 1915 in their honor.

When I got to the Keys Gap Shelter just south of Harpers Ferry, I found there was a woman already settled in. She was forty-ish in age and I could tell right off she wasn't a thru-hiker. It turned out that she was from Chicago and had told her husband she wanted to hike some of the A.T. even though she had never backpacked before. He had absolutely forbidden her to do it. When her daughter-in-law decided to go to Maryland to see her family, the woman came along without telling her husband she planned this side trip up a mountain.

She had only made a mile before she gave out the first day and had spent the night in a hammock she was carrying. Her second day she had made it to Keys Gap, a distance of 5.6 miles. She wasn't sure how much further southbound she would go before calling her daughter-in-law. "Broof" and I did our best to convince her not to go beyond the hostel at

Bears Den Rocks. I still wonder if she ventured on into that section of many ridges below the Rocks that I had suffered through.

I had heard about "Harry the Indian" in 1991, but didn't have a chance to meet him until three years later. By that time, he and his wife, Jeanne, were the caretakers at the Sandy Hook Youth Hostel where I stayed two nights while on vacation. Harry is a full-blooded Winnebago Indian and spent 23 years living on the A.T. most of the time. He spent some winters on the Trail in Vermont and Maine surviving the cold and snows that covered the blazes on the trees.

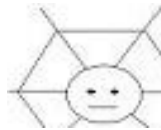
He left the Trail for short periods to earn money for supplies doing odd jobs. He also used the skills of his heritage to partly live off the land, killing squirrels with a sling shot for example.

He met Jeanne on Blood Mountain while she was attempting a thru-hike and they were married in 1988. They hiked together for several years until health problems forced him to find a more permanent residence.

One of the more famous stories about Harry is when he tied a rattlesnake to a tree to guard his pack on Humpback Mountain in Virginia while he went into town.

And then there was the would-be thru-hiker of about my age who is memorable because he caused a sleepless night I would like to forget.

The noise a sleeping bag zipper makes on a quiet night in a crowded shelter can be surprisingly loud and irritating. Well, this fellow had a very restless night at the Moreland Gap Shelter in Tennessee, constantly zipping his bag up and down. When he did go to sleep he rattled the floorboards with his snores. Added to his cacophony was the sound of periodic passage of gas.



The owner of the outdoor store in Kent where I waited to get fuel was late for work and it was almost eleven o'clock before I got back on the Trail. It proved to be a very hard 17.6-mile day before I got to Pine Swamp Brook Shelter, not to be confused with the Pine Swamp Branch Shelter in Virginia. They have relocated a lot of the Connecticut trail off of roads and over many hills and ridges. This is the reason why any sort of record in time and distance is meaningless because the A.T. is never the same from one year to the next. The Trail that Earl Shaffer walked back in 1948 was vastly different from today's.

If it hadn't been for the fast pace I was able to set on a level five-mile stretch along the Housatonic River, I probably wouldn't have made the lean-to before dark. This section should really be covered in a slow, leisurely stroll because it is so beautiful. The river of sparkling clear water over a rock bed is a favorite of canoers and kayakers with some white water rapids.

The next day had to be a short one because it was a Sunday and I had a mail drop in Salisbury, another quaint town right on the Trail. This was a problem with mail drops - hitting the towns when the post office was open. I got to the Limestone Springs Shelter early in the afternoon and was refreshed by the gushing cold spring there.

I also enjoyed three ears of corn I bought at a roadside market. It was a slow process though because I could only cook half an ear at a time in my small pot.

During the day I was able to look down on the Lime Rock Race Track from the top of Sharon Mountain. On a road walk section I also passed by what I heard was a fine restaurant just 0.2 miles off the Trail. I was nearly broke again.

The next day after getting the mail I left Connecticut, one more state under my belt - my pack waist belt that is.

MASSACHUSETTS

... also seem to be moving in a vacuum. All of my favorite hikers are up ahead or have flip-flopped. This will be my second night in a row alone. Taro is only one day ahead and is asking in the register, "Where is Web Breaker?"
"Web Breaker"
A.T. JOURNAL - 1991

My two days off in New York City had a lot to do with my being in a vacuum. It had put me behind. This was a contributor to the depression I was beginning to feel as I entered Massachusetts. Some of the hikers had written about a 1,500 mile "wall" that we hit like marathoners at 20 miles. This was not a wall as a result of physical stress, however, but the result of mental strain.

In my case, I know I was suffering from the heat and humidity, the shortage of good water, and the fact that Connecticut and Massachusetts were much tougher than I expected.

Also, in the first month of my journey my first goal was to get to Damascus and see some familiar faces. After that my goal became New York to see my son. Now my goal was the ultimate one, Mt. Katahdin. To be sure, that was exciting but the uncertainty of the future was that much closer. And in spite of all the creature discomforts, I really liked it out there.

Nevertheless, at this point in my trek, I was definitely committed to completing the Trail end-to-end. When I was down in Virginia, I thought I might have to flip-flop because of my late start, low miles per day average, and aching knees. I hated the thought. Before I got to New York, I considered taking a train or bus to Vermont and then returning to finish Massachusetts and Connecticut where the weather might be better. I really didn't care for that idea either.

Despite my low spirits, I kept pushing with an over seventeen mile day into Massachusetts, taking little time to enjoy Sages Ravine, a beautiful area of trees and waterfall where the Trail enters the state. I crossed four mountains that day including Race Mountain with a splendid exposed cliffside trail over the valley below.

My second day took me over 18 miles to the Mount Wilcox (south) lean-to where again I was alone. It was a good thing because there wasn't enough water to share. The spring was very slow and I had to wait a couple of minutes for each small cupful to seep into a little depression.

I did nearly 16 miles the next day to the Upper Goose Pond Cabin, and old cottage with bunks, propane stove for cooking, and lounge room. Although the lake was there for bathing, drinking water had to be brought in jugs across the lake by canoe by the caretaker. It was an easier day with road walks and gentle walking, around ponds.

After the fourth day in Massachusetts (another near 18 miles that ended at the Kay Woods Shelter near Dalton) my progress came to a screeching halt. All that day I had been listening to reports on my Walkman of an approaching hurricane, appropriately named Bob.

A few miles short of the shelter I was caught by a tremendous thunderstorm, a vanguard of the weather to come. I stayed mostly dry by crouching under the overhang of a large rock until it let up and then hurried on to the shelter. I got settled in and then the weather really hit with high winds and rain. With me that night was a schoolteacher from Princeton, New Jersey on a vacation hike and he proved to be good company. The worst was forecast to come the next day, flash floods and dangerous winds. I decided not to hike and spent the day at the shelter.

During that day Denny and Jill, "the Okie Dokies", came in and told me Jill had been almost hit by a falling tree. This made me feel I had made a wise decision not to hike.

However, I didn't realize I was only about a half hour from Dalton and could have used the excellent inter-city bus service in Berkshire County to jump ahead to Cheshire and

spend the day at St. Mary of Assumption Church with Taro and other hiking friends. As it was I spent a long day watching the swaying trees and the sheets of horizontal rain, wishing I had more to eat.

The next day I caught up on my food consumption somewhat with, first, bacon and eggs at a restaurant in Dalton, and then, a fast nine-mile walk to Cheshire and the Snickers bars from the "Okie Dokies". That afternoon we made the trip to Adams for "Big Macs". I remarked to Denny and Jill that I had just gone the longest period without entering a McDonalds since 1959, 114 days.

The next two days were more wet-foot hiking, because of continuing rain and run-off from the hurricane which made the trail a running stream, ankle deep in many places.

The first day out of Cheshire I climbed Mt. Greylock, the highest mountain in Massachusetts but with the clouds and mist I had no view. Going up Greylock I get drenched by a thunderstorm but on the summit there is the state-owned, Appalachian Mountain Club operated, Bascom Lodge for hikers. There I was able to take a hot shower and eat lunch and while doing so, the rain let up. The ATC is one of the oldest hiking clubs, divided into chapters, one responsible for Connecticut and Massachusetts and one for New Hampshire.

After a night alone at the Wilbur Clearing Lean-to, the next day I left my eleventh state behind and crossed into Vermont.

VERMONT

It's a little I care what path I take,
And where it leads it's little I care...
I wish I could walk for a day and a night,
and find me at dawn in a desolate place
With never the rut of a road in sight,
Nor the roof of a house, nor eyes of a face.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

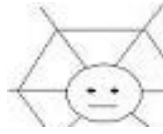
DEPARTURE

Well, I still wasn't a believer in night hiking and I didn't mind seeing the eyes of a face. However, I was still thriving on desolate places. This was true in Vermont in spite of some disappointment the first couple of days in the state. The A.T. follows the Long Trail for about 100 miles in Vermont before it turns east towards New Hampshire and Maine. The Long Trail, the nation's first long-distance trail, extends north from the Massachusetts line to the Canadian border. It was mostly completed by 1921 when the A.T. was first proposed. It is managed by the Green Mountain Club.

Because of its long history, I expected a better-groomed trail and found it not to be so. Also, except for a power line cut above Bennington, it was all green tunnel walking until I got to Glastenbury Mountain late the second day. Because of the heavy lumbering these hills had received, the trees were all small regrowth, not at all like our forest giants back in Ohio. Last of all, there was that silence of the birds.

When I got to the Goddard Shelter on Glastenbury, however, the vistas improved. It was too early in the afternoon for me to stay the night but the sunsets must be terrific there. Also a piped spring was gushing clear sweet water, one of the better water sources on the A.T.

Later, thinking about this place, I realized there was almost a lifetime of vacations possible for me, returning to favorite scenes.



Of course, for most people who enjoy the A.T. experience, short vacation hikes are the way they have to do it. The main problem is if you go from point A to point B, you have to get back to point A where you left your car. In the two national parks and the White Mountains of New Hampshire there are many side trails, which make loop routes possible. The drawback is, however, although beautiful and sometimes breathtakingly so, these areas are overcrowded with people.

If you can't devise a loop hike, there are ways to walk a section without backtracking. You can team up with someone with another car and park one car at your destination and drive the other to the starting point, retrieving it after the hike. Or like two fellows I met in Virginia, walk in opposite directions, exchanging car keys when you meet the other driver.

Another option is hiring a shuttle. There is a growing number of people who provide this service for a modest fee, providing transportation to or from the trailhead.

I have been fortunate enough to return on vacation each year since my thru-hike to some of my favorite places. In 1992 while at Damascus "Trail Days", I dropped down to Watauga Lake near Hampton, Tennessee and left my car at the Rat Branch Store. The store charged me a couple of dollars to leave my car there overnight. This was a solution to one major problem for vacation hikers - where to park the car and have it safe from vandals. The Rat Branch Store has since closed, but I believe I could have parked at the nearby Shook Branch Picnic Area at the lake on US 321.

I recommend this loop only if you are able to stand some strenuous exercise going southbound over Pond Mountain. This brings you to Laurel Fork Gorge and the awesome Laurel Falls. After a night at the Laurel Fort Shelter,

you can return to 321 and thus to your starting point on the virtually level blue-blazed trail along the fork.

In 1993 I enjoyed a 44-mile hike from High Point, New Jersey to Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. I hiked south because it's mostly downhill that way. This section has all the wilderness diversity you might want including for me, a close encounter with a black bear at the Gren Anderson Shelter. I spent one night at the shelter and camped in a tent above Fairview Lake the second night I was out.

I had an advantage of leaving my car at "Bull Moose's" and getting a ride from him to High Point. My son, Jim came out from New York City and gave me a ride back to my car.

In 1994, I hiked from the Sandy Hook hostel through Harpers Ferry and on south to Bears Den Rocks, a 21-mile trip. I stayed out one night at the Blackburn A.T. Center on the Trail. The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club provides a hostel there. I was able to arrange to have my car driven to the Bears Den hostel and have it there waiting for me.

In 1995, after leaving my car at the motel in Roan Mountain, Tennessee, I hiked up Big Hump Mountain from US Rt. 19E on a glorious sunny day. I was pleased that the Trail had been greatly improved since my tricky, steep, muddy, descent northbound in 1991. This time I went south over the beautiful Hump Mountains to the shelter in Yellow Mountain Gap to spend the night. The next morning I took the Overmountain Victory Trail down to Tennessee Rt. 143 and roadwalked a few easy miles back to my car.

The only troublesome thing about this loop was that the Overmountain Victory Trail, besides not being well maintained, ends in a privately owned pasture field and barnyard with a couple of gates to go through. I was hesitant about passing through without permission but I was not inclined to climb back up the mountain. I didn't see anyone at the farmhouse so I went on. If I were going to use this route again I would contact the residents in advance to make sure everything was okay.

Also in 1995, I made a two-night out hike starting from Massie Gap in Virginia's Grayson Highlands State Park. There you pay a dollar a night parking fee for a relatively secure place to leave your car. Because you drive most of the way up, most of this high altitude hike requires limited climbing.

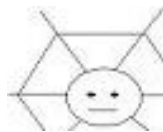
From the gap I went south through Rhododendron Gap to the Thomas Knob Shelter for the first night, bagging Virginia's highest peak, Mt. Rogers by taking the side trail just beyond the shelter. The next morning I backtracked to Rhododendron Gap and by way of the Pine Mt., Cliffside, Lewis Fork, and Old Orchard Trails, I reached the Old Orchard Shelter in only a little over two hours. Following the A.T. north it would have been an eleven-mile hike. I didn't do it this trip but there was plenty of time left in the day to go on to beautiful Comer Falls and then back to the shelter for additional A.T. mileage.

On the third day I looped back to Massie Gap on the A.T. enjoying the majestic Grayson Highlands.

Of the many other short A.T. vacation hikes possible, there are two in particular I hope to do. One begins at VA Rt. 624 near US Rt. 311 in central Virginia and follows the A.T. north past the noted photo opportunity, McAfee Knob. About five miles further north, you skirt the impressive Tinker's Cliffs. There are two shelters you can choose from at the end of the first day and the second night you can stay at the Lamberts Meadow Shelter, completing 16 miles on the A.T. A half-mile south of the shelter, you pass the junction with the North Mountain Trail. You can return to this trail the next day and take it back to your starting point on VA 624.

The other walk I intend to do is the section from Hot Springs, NC to Davenport Gap at the northern entrance to the Great Smokey Mountain Park. This is a particularly pleasing stretch of about forty miles through the Pisgah National Forest and over Max Patch with its magnificent views. There are people at both ends of this section who will provide shuttle service.

Again, this is just a sampling of the possibilities for great hiking on the A.T.



After Glastenbury Mountain, the views got much better as I summited the ski mountains of Stratton and Bromley. Stratton is supposed to be the birthplace of the A.T. for it was on it that Benton Mackaye first conceived the idea of the Trail. On Bromley the hiker actually marches up the grassy ski slope. I got my first magnificent view from the rocky summit of Baker Peak after emerging from the forest near the top, one of the finest vistas thus far on the Trail. In between these mountains the Trail follows shores of beautiful lakes, called ponds in New England.

At the Spruce Peak Shelter, a fairly new enclosed cabin, I spent the night with a couple of volunteer maintainers who shared their good conversation and iced cocktails with me.

Just south of the splendid Clarendon Gorge I caught up with two friendly thru-hikers, "Carolina Charlie", a 62-year-old physician and "Gandolf" a 51-year-old Scot who had lived the previous fourteen years in Montreal.

After crossing the swinging bridge over the gorge where a hiker had drowned in 1969 before the bridge was built, "Gandolf" and I walked a mile down Vermont highway 103 to a store while Charlie watched our packs. (We called this kind of walking "moon-walking" because you feel like you're floating without the weight of the pack.) We stopped about halfway at a concession trailer at an outdoor flea market for cheeseburgers. There were probably quite ordinary, but to me they tasted like the finest gourmet treat.

After spending the night at the Clarendon Shelter, I left Charlie and Bill, "Gandolf", behind and was not to see

them again. I later learned that Charlie quit soon after because of bad knees but Bill was to finish a few days behind me.

That day I climbed the famed Killington Peak and then, turning east, left the Long Trail towards New Hampshire at Sherburne Pass. That night I stayed at the Mountain Meadow Lodge, a cross-country ski resort in season and year-around B&B. The owners maintain a room for four thru-hikers on a first come basis at a reduced rate. The next morning they served a sumptuous breakfast that was out of this world.

Two more nights and I left my twelfth state behind on August 30th with over 1700 miles completed. I averaged over 18.5 miles a day in the seven it took me to traverse Vermont.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

"The pulse of life is the response within us to challenge. The life force we contain gains in strength as it rises in us to meet cold and rain and all inclemency, miles to be covered, burdens to be shouldered and the myriad natural demands on our energies and endurance to be proved equal to."

Charlton Ogburn

THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS
- A WILDERNESS QUEST

Well, I was in the northern Appalachians now and I had what was said to be the greatest two challenges ahead of me, New Hampshire and Maine. However, I felt I had finally reached my "fighting weight", over 45 pounds less than when I had set out. Although I was hungry all the time, I had never felt better. My chronic bronchitis had disappeared and my legs were strong. The pack was still heavy though and I was soon to learn of another problem, no body fat to protect me from the cold.

It wasn't the cold that was bothering me when I crossed the bridge over the Connecticut River into Hanover, New Hampshire. The ninety-degree heat of the summer was to remain one more day.

Hanover, home of Dartmouth University, is a hiker friendly town. The Dartmouth Outing Club maintains 75 miles of the Trail through there and provides its club office in Robinson Hall as a safe place to drop your pack while in town. The town had about everything you might need including a unique cooperative supermarket. Some of the university fraternities put up hikers overnight, but I was there between terms and the houses were closed. After a pleasant day in the town and pizza at the Everything But Anchovies restaurant, I climbed the mountain out of town to spend the night at the Velvet Rocks Shelter. A thunderstorm struck

during the night as a cold front came through and broke the summer's heat.

The first 45 miles in New Hampshire were rather gentle, not at all suggestive of the rugged hiking I had been warned of by so many people down the Trail. My thoughts were largely geared to preparing for the White Mountains. I had been told that I could experience life-threatening cold above the timberline. I had been told that I would have trouble finding a place to stay at night. Because of the heavy use and fragile environment in the Whites, the Appalachian Mountain Club restricted where we could camp. The AMC is one of the maintaining clubs that make up the ATC and actually predates the larger organization by many years. The AMC is responsible for the trails and provides two alternatives for over-night stay, huts and campsites.

The campsites may be either lean-to shelters or tent platforms. Seven of the thirteen campsites are free, but the others have caretakers and charge four dollars a night. They are spaced so that you can't avoid staying at some of these. Some hikers do camp at unauthorized places, but the trails are patrolled and you can be subject to a heavy fine.

The other alternative is staying in one of the huts. The huts are actually lodges with dinner and breakfast provided for a charge of, in 1991, \$47. They are each run by a "croc", mostly collegians, and all the supplies are backpacked up the mountains by them. Thru-hikers can often trade work for lodging and meals at the Huts, depending on the needs of the crews. In theory, it is possible to travel through the Whites, staying at the Huts without spending any money, just time. I hoped to take advantage of this.

Even so, all the dire warnings I had heard about the Whites had filled me with dread for a section that would prove to be one of the best of the A.T.

Dan Bruce in his "Thru-Hikers Handbook", had advised having your cold weather gear mailed to Glencliff at the foot of Mt. Moosilauke, the first of the above the timberline peaks in the Whites. Because of a misunderstanding at home that Glencliff was too close to Hanover for another

mail-drop, my box with my winter jacket was mailed to the Mt. Washington post office at the top of the mountain where the highest wind speed on earth ever was recorded (231 MPH) was once clocked.

My second night in New Hampshire at the Trapper John Shelter the temperature dropped into the forties. The shelter was at a low elevation and protected from the north wind and so I got through the night without any discomfort. The next night, however, at the Hexacuba Shelter on Mt. Cube was a different story. the shelter was high and windy and even though I rigged up my tarp as a windbreak, I spent a cold, restless night as the temperature dropped toward the thirties.

Another concern I had at this time was to arrive at the Post Office when it was open. I had to shorten my hiking days because of the Labor Day holiday even though the cooler weather made walking great. As it was, I had to stay at the Jeffers Brook Shelter on the other side of Glenciff and then walk back to pick up a priority mail letter from my son, Jim, with some money for the Whites.

Glenciff is just a little village with no stores and as I needed some breakfast and lunch food, I decided to try to hitch into Warren five miles away. A Mr. Jack Hollinrake, who had provided shuttles to the store in previous years, had died climbing Mt. Moosilauke the year before. The Post Mistress said that Mrs. Hollinrake who lived across the street had continued the service occasionally in 1991 and that I might get a ride if I asked.

I didn't want to bother her so I tried thumbing, but after no takers in 30 minutes, I decided to knock on Mrs. Hollinrake's door. Although she explained to me that she had sold her home and was in the process of packing to move down state, she still graciously agreed to give me a lift. I also soon discovered that I had been trying to hitch the wrong direction.

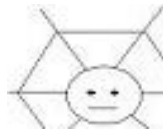
As a result of this delay, Ross, "Seeker of True Names", caught up with me as I was going out of town to climb Moosilauke. He said that I should wait for him at the

Beaver Brook Shelter on the other side of the mountain and that he would take me to the Lost River Reservation just three quarters of a mile off the Trail. The Reservation is maintained by the Society of the Protection of New Hampshire's Forests because it is a unique and beautiful river gorge carved out of granite by the Ice Age and water and ice since. The visitor goes through passages and crevices with rushing water in close proximity sometimes on hands and knees. Ross had a job there before the thru-hike and got me a free admission. That was the last time I saw Ross as he got off the Trail there for a home visit.

I reached the top of Moosilauke (4802 ft.) on a perfectly clear day with a view of five states around me and Franconia Ridge directly before me. The climb down was treacherously steep over solid rock much of the way, made only somewhat easier by log steps pinned into the rock. I remember wondering if the pinning would hold. I was distracted from the pounding descent somewhat, however, by the beautiful cascading Beaver Brook that the Trail follows for more than a half mile.

When I got to the Beaver Brook Shelter in Kinsman Notch, it was empty. When I got back from Lost River, however, it was packed full of Harvard students on an outing and so this was one of the nights I slept under the tarp. It was a dry night, fortunately.

It was threatening rain though when I climbed out of the Notch the next morning, still feeling some dread as I headed up into the much talked about Presidential Range of the Whites.



Looking back at that time, my tour through the Presidentials is high on the list of a number of things I would want to change if I ever thru-hiked again.

The dread I felt for the Whites was the result of warnings I had received from others. Many of my difficulties, real or imagined, were caused by my asking, "How's the trail up ahead?" The answer I got and my own actual experience were often quite different. Too, anguish beforehand is no way to make the Stekoah, the Mahoosu Notch, or crossing the Kennebec River any easier or harder. Also the few times I sneaked a peek at someone's profile map and saw a relatively flat line, I enthused over the easy hiking ahead only to find the successive little ups and downs were not reflected on the map.

Although I think I proved that you can hike the A.T. end-to-end on a very limited budget and still enjoy the life-changing experience, if I were to thru-hike again, I would make every effort to have adequate funds the second time around.

I would also start at an earlier date so as to have plenty of time without being worried about severe winter weather. How much earlier I haven't fully decided yet. Many hikers start as early as March 1, but I think this is too early. I certainly wouldn't want to get to Maine before September and the beauty of autumn.

I have thought that April 1 would be about right, but this would put me in the heaviest wave of people with more and more starting out every year. Friend of mine recently day-hiked six miles southbound north of Neels Gap and met at least forty would-be 2000 milers.

There, I think starting April 15 would put the bulk of the crowd ahead of me. This additional two weeks would give me enough time to "stop and smell the roses". Sorry, cliché attack!

Every hiker says I'm going lighter "next time" and I'm no different. My present clothing and gear weighs less and if I were to thru-hike again, I'm sure I could find ways to lessen the load. I look at new internal frame packs with their numerous pockets and compression straps and huge carrying capacity and drool until I note the weight of the pack itself. Pounds heavier than the old external I'm using now.

Another change I would make is fewer mail drops, at least to Post Offices. There are hostels and hiker-friendly businesses that will hold UPS packages making Saturday afternoon and Sunday pickups possible. Trying to pace your progress so as to get to a Post Office while it's open is a hassle. This is not to say that mail drops aren't useful, particularly for items of food, clothing, and personal things not readily available near the Trail.

Assuming that funds would not be a problem, there are several places where I would add stopovers at motels the next time. There were times when I really wanted some modern creature comfort and had to pass on by. For example, I would get a room in Bluff City, a part of Pearisburg near the A.T., rather than trudge the seemingly endless 2-1/2 miles through the hot streets of the town to the hostel.

Also, I would never walk by a restaurant without stopping for a meal, no matter what the time of day.

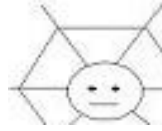
I would hope that by keeping myself better nourished, I would have the time and energy to stop and work with an ATC Konnarock crew. The Konnarock crews are volunteer trail builders and maintainers that work out of their base camp near Sugar Grove, VA. They have done a lot of the heavy work on trail relocations and bridge construction in recent years. In return for a day's work, the ATC will provide a tent site, shower, laundry, and meals to a thru-hiker. It gives a person a chance to play his part in the preservation of the A.T.

South of the Priest Mountain I came across a crew building a relocation. On a very hot afternoon they were laboring very hard and asked me if I wanted to help in return for a good meal that evening.

The offer of food was very enticing, but I was almost at the limit of my endurance at that moment and didn't feel I could do much work. Those five dollars worth of groceries I got back at the I-81 interchange was down to a package of Ramen noodles for supper and a package of oatmeal for breakfast before I got my mail drop at Tyro. I regretted my

refusal to help, but vowed that someday I would try to do my share.

Lastly, I would make every effort not to climb a steep mountain at the end of a long day.



The rain came with heavy force as I climbed out of Kinsman Notch, but fortunately I reached the Eliza Brook Shelter for lunch before the worst of it. I stayed at the shelter until the down pour let up, subsiding to just a thick mist. Setting out again it wasn't long until I reached the base of South Kinsman Mountain and wasn't prepared for what I was. The trail seemed to go straight up, disappearing in the fog.

I had had a lot of forewarning about the rock scramble up Albert Mountain in North Carolina, but had not been prepared for this hand over hand climb that made Albert seem like child's play. Making the going extra tricky were the slippery wet rocks. In this case, with my fear of heights, it may have been lucky that I couldn't see more than 30 feet in any direction. On a clear day the view is supposed to be beautiful.

The climb seemed to go on and on but I didn't get tired, perhaps because of the concentration necessary on where to find each hand hold and where to place each foot. I gained an appreciation for the sport of rock climbing that day even though the scrambling I was doing was not as strenuous or dangerous.

When I reached the top and crossed through the depression between the south and north peaks of Kinsman, the landscape was very strange with the fog and the rocks and the only vegetation being the stunted, under five foot, spruce trees.

When I got to the Kinsman Pond Shelter at about four in the afternoon and found it full of people so early in the day, I was somewhat taken aback. It looked like I was going to be campout out in that very wet place.

Most of the people turned out to be more Harvard students on an outing but happily, also there were "Bull Moose" and "Bad Dog". They introduced me to "Hippiechick" and "Sleepwalker" and "Lone Wolf". They all assured me they could squeeze together and find room for me. I caught up with them because they did only four miles that day and stopped when the rains came.

The next day I stayed with the group as we traversed Franconia Ridge on a gloriously splendid day. At the Garfield Ridge Shelter, I reluctantly handed over my four-dollar camping fee to the caretaker to stay in the same old kind of lean-to I'd been staying in all along. The AMC is often referred to as the "Appalachian Money Collectors", but in reality it was a small charge for the views I had enjoyed that day.

Later that evening a section hiker attempted to light his Whisperlite stove for the first time - in the shelter. The procedure is to open the fuel valve just long enough to allow a little gas to flow into the priming cup. This is then ignited to heat up the stove and thus vaporize the fuel. Well, he opened the valve fully until the gas overflowed the cup and started to spread out on the floor. He then lit it and we had a flash fire amongst us. The guy froze and the fire started to get big until I was able to reach his fuel valve and shut it down. Luckily the fire quickly burnt out without any damage.

The caretakers of the shelters and campsites are in touch with the Huts by radio and I asked the Garfield caretaker to call the hut at Zealand Falls and arrange for me to work there the next night, the customary procedure.

However, after another fine day, when I got to Zealand I was told that they didn't need me. Because it was after Labor Day, business at the Huts was slow. I had no choice then but to go another four miles to the Ethan Pond Shelter. My spirits were dampened somewhat but walking was

easy over those miles because the A.T. follows the railbed of an old logging train to the shelter where I had my first sighting of a moose in the pond.

While at the Zealand Falls Hut, I found that there would be no work at the Mizpah Hut for the following night, either. I would have to stay at the adjacent Nauman Tentsite. The head of the Zealand crew did radio the Lake of the Clouds Hut for me, asking for work for the following night and if not, reserving sleeping space in the "dungeon", a six dollar room reserved for thru-hikers. This would assure me a place for that night.

At the Nauman Tentsite I had to rig my tarp on a tent platform, something I had never done before. The platforms are used to protect the fragile alpine environment. Back at Joe Bakers' in Pennsylvania I had used his drill to bore a hole in the end of my hiking stick in case I had to use it as a tent pole by passing a line through it. It worked. fine.

I was blessed with another beautiful sunny day crossing over Mt. Webster (not all the mountains are named after Presidents) and Mt. Jackson. While enjoying the view on Mt. Jackson, along with a lot of day hikers, I experienced another instance of "trail magic". An older man came over to me and said he was out for the day with his three sons and asked if I was a thru-hiker. He then told me his nephew was thru-hiking and was just a couple of days up the Trail. When I asked who I learned it was Don "Lightning Rod" McDougall who I had met at the base of Springer Mountain. He started the Trail fifteen minutes ahead of me and I had trailed him the whole way without once catching him. After some further talk with the uncle, he asked me if I could use some food. He and his sons then showered me with a large piece of Vermont cheddar, summer sausage, six stacks of saltines, six candy bars, and ten granola bars. They just about solved my food problem until I got through the Whites.

The next day I reached the Lake of the Clouds Hut at the foot of Mt. Washington, really early in the morning even though I had to go over Mt. Clinton and Mt. Franklin in a very strong wind. At the Hut they keep a windspeed chart on

the wall and it showed winds of 30 to 50 mph on Mt. Washington.

It was only 10am and I was now at the base of the highest peak in New England and one that I had had so many warnings about. Although I was assured a place to sleep that night, I didn't like the idea of wasting the rest of the day at the Lake of the Clouds. I decided to put on all my clothes and climb the dreaded mountain.

In spite of the strong wind and the limited visibility because of the clouds blowing across the mountain, it seemed I reached the top in no time. Elated that I had conquered the mountain so easily, I was sobered somewhat by the listing that was posted in the summit house of all the people who have died in the Presidentials over the years. The summit house has a restaurant, backpacker room for storing gear, museum, and the post office. It was a Sunday so I had to ask the ranger to open the mailroom to get my package. While doing this the Postmaster walked in, and although it was his day off, when asked, said he could cash my money order. After a hot meal at the snack bar and with my winter coat in my pack and cash in my pocket, I set out for Madison Springs Hut six miles away.

Perhaps because of my concentration on the task at hand while coming up the switchbacks of Mt. Washington, I took little notice of the type of environment I was entering. But going down the other side and following the Trail across the ridges to Mt. Madison, I was quickly aware that things had gotten unworldly.

As I worked my way between the jumbled boulders barren of vegetation with the strong wind sweeping the mist and clouds by me, and the only sight of man were the rock cairns erected to mark the trail, I smelled the coal smoke from the train on the Cog Railway and wondered "Is that brimstone I smell?" and "What is this place I'm descending into?"

The footing was treacherous requiring careful placing of each step on or between the rocks. This went on for the

entire six miles with only the weathered signs of side trails for diversion. Signs like the cheery Thunderstorm Junction.

My options for a place to stay that night were limited. I hoped I could persuade the Madison Hut crew to let me stay there. If not, I wasn't sure what I could do besides pick a sheltered place behind a rock and curl up in my tarp. There had been a campsite about a half-mile down a side trail from Madison, but it was closed for the season. The next campsite on the A.T. was another three miles north, but it was getting late and I didn't relish the ideas of adding to the twelve miles I had already done that day.

Because I had left the Lake of the Clouds without thinking ahead, I had not asked anyone to contact Madison Springs for work and so I showed up unannounced. The head of the crew there quickly dismissed me when I approached him - saying they didn't need anyone because they had only a few paying guests for the night. I then gave my best "Yogi" impression saying they didn't have to feed me, just let me sleep inside. He relented and said I could have a bunk if I would sweep the place in the morning. This was great because the night was so cold in the unheated hut, I had to get up and put on my winter coat before morning. I didn't want to think about what it would have been like outside with the wind howling.

Madison Springs Hut is part way up the side of Mt. Madison and so the next morning I finished the climb to the top and then made the very steep descent to Pinkham Notch. It would have been a difficult three miles if I had been forced to go on to the Osgood tent site the evening before.

Pinkham Notch Camp, a full service lodge and the AMC's headquarters in the Whites, is at the base of the Mt. Washington summit road. I had made no advance arrangements there either, but when I got there an AMC work crew was in the process of tearing the shingles off the roof to be replaced. I was immediately enlisted to help and spent the next two hours in a dumpster leveling old shingles.

In return for this work I was allowed a free shower (ordinarily the showers are coin-operated), a terrific dinner,

and a bunk in the tent cabin for the night. The head of the kitchen said I could do some work in the kitchen in the morning for breakfast. The next morning the cook asked me how many eggs I wanted: "four, six, eight?" He was on to us thru-hikers. I had a wonderful breakfast and afterwards had washed only six pots when they said I could go on my way.

What followed was a very tough day over rugged terrain. First, a hard climb up Wildcat Mountain and then a tricky traverse of an area near the Carter Notch Hut where a landslide had taken away the Trail. It meant moving very carefully over the loose earth and hoping it wouldn't give away and take me down the slope.

After 12.4 miles that took me 9-1/2 hours, I crossed Carter Dome and arrived at the IMP Shelter just before a cold blowing rain hit. I considered it a good day when I averaged 2.3 miles an hour. A one and a quarter mile an hour was a bad day.

After dark a group of about ten teenagers on an outing crowded into the shelter and made for an uncomfortable night. Especially for me because the boy next to me kept having nightmares. The next morning I noticed they had left much of their gear out in the rain, including several pairs of boots.

I got into Gorham early and stayed at the Gorham House B&B where Ron and Maggie Orso make the loft of their adjoining barn available as a hostel for ten dollars. I had dinner that night with "Mississippi", a retired forest ranger, who was completing the third section of a thru-hiked divided over three years. He had his truck there and gave me a ride the next morning back to the Trail three miles out of town.

That day I reached the Carlo Col Shelter and the fourteenth state. Like many other thru-hikers, I had been using the logo GA->ME '91' after my name in the shelter registers. I hadn't climbed Mt. Katahdin yet, but I had crossed over the last of the Whites, Mt. Success, and succeeded in walking from Georgia to Maine.

MAINE

... "Frazzle" would have been a good trail name because I'm almost worn to one. "Fifty-five Alive" would have been a better one because I'm still 55 for a while and haven't been this alive in years."

"Web Breaker"

.A.T. JOURNAL 1991

There are about 275 miles of the Appalachian Trail in the state of Maine. Almost at the very beginning the hiker encounters the most difficult single mile of the entire Trail. Near the midpoint of the Maine AT, you must cross the longest unbridged river of the entire trail. And at the very end you make perhaps the toughest climb and, if you are unlucky, endure the worst weather while doing it.

In between these challenges the hiker makes his or her way through the most remote, untamed wilderness of the Trail. Maine is not the "civilized" wilderness of the middle states. But it was my favorite part of the A.T.

When I left Gorham my aim was to make it to the little town of Caratunk on the Kennebec River without resupplying, a distance of 143 miles. In this stretch only three roads leading to towns are crossed and the towns are all five to nine miles off the Trail. Because of my aversion to hitchhiking and the fact that I was almost broke again, I felt I had to do it this way. I figured it would take ten days, but it was twelve days later before I walked into Caratunk.

At the Carlo Col Shelter were "Jimmy No-Stop" and another hiker I hadn't met, "Steve the Otter" (no relation to the "Gore-Tex Otter"). That evening we discussed what lay ahead of us the next day, the infamous Mahoosuc Notch. In everything I had read or heard about the A.T., the mile-long notch had been mentioned, with dire warnings, just like Albert Mountain, the Stekoah, and the Whites.

The Mahoosuc Notch is a cleft between the walls of two granite mountains into which has fallen a jumble of boulders, many the size of a car. The notch is about a hundred yards wide and the Trail snakes its way over and under the boulders. Some places you can hear water rushing beneath you and at least one point you can look down between the rocks and see snow from the previous winter. Some people take as long as three hours to traverse that single mile and some had their treks come to an end with a fall and injury.

Steve, who had been through the notch before, said he was going to take most of the day and enjoy the uniqueness of the natural wonder. Today, as I look back, I understand his desire but when I got to the notch the next day, I pushed on as usual and reached the other side in an hour and forty-five minutes. Jimmy, who was with me, was still weakened from his illness and chose to camp there. I chose to continue and make the very difficult climb up the mountain called the Mahoosuc Arm. If I did it again, I would never do both the notch and the Arm on the same day. As it was it cost me six dollars at the Speck Pond Shelter, the last shelter with a caretaker's fee. Because I left Jimmy behind, I didn't see him again until nine days later.

The rugged hiking continued the next day over Old Speck Mountain and then the twin peaks of Baldpate Mountain. Once again above the timberline on Baldpate, I could look ahead on that perfectly clear day and see beautiful panoramas of Maine mountains and lakes and then look back at the White Mountains and Mt. Washington over seventy miles away. I only did ten miles that day because the previous day had taken a lot out of my legs. At the Frey Notch Lean-to I met Randy and Michelle, the "April Fools".

Because of shelter placement, I did only a ten-mile day to the Hall Mountain Lean-to the following day. I had no hard climbs and so my mind was free to roam as I strolled along. This was when I got to thinking about trail names instead of the usual topic, food. Although I knew I was going

to have to do longer days or run out of food before I got to Caratunk, I was glorying in the life force I felt within me.

The following short twelve-mile day was remarkable only because of the tough hiking over three mountains and that I met two flip-floppers that I had last seen in North Carolina. How strange it seemed after four months and almost 1700 miles to see a familiar face coming at you in the midst of the wilderness. Also I found a patch of blueberries, enough for a bowl with cookies and milk that evening. I had thought the season to be long over.

Pushing hard the next day, I did 19 miles but it took me ten and a half hours. It was September 17th and the daylight hours were getting shorter. I was no longer able to get early starts and it got dark shortly after I arrived at the shelter.

After spending the night at the Piazza Rock Lean-to where I didn't have the energy to climb the short side trail to see the rock, I crossed four mountains including the Saddlebacks, for a sixteen-mile day. The views were terrific and I could look down on the village of Stratton, the first human habitations I had seen, except for a few lake cottages, in the six days since entering Maine.

Also on Saddleback I met "Javaman" and his wife, "Downhill Donna". We stayed together that night in the Spaulding Mountain Lean-to.

I awoke to a really cold, steady rain. I had intended to go eighteen miles that day, as there was no shelter between Spaulding and the Horns Pond Lean-to. I had one other choice: stop at the summit house on Sugarloaf Mountain, a popular Ski resort. The ski slope owners make the large cabin available to hikers in the off season. It is unattended, but is weather tight with electricity and there is no charge.

The A.T. passes by a side trail to the summit, which is reached after about a half-mile climb. With the miserable conditions, I was uncertain if I could go the eighteen miles necessary to sleep under a roof.

Staying at Sugarloaf meant that I would advance only another 2.7 miles but the decision was made easier because

Rick and Donna had given me two macaroni and cheese dinners since they were going to a motel in Stratton that evening and said they didn't need them.

Another deciding factor was that there was a wood stove in the summit house, according to "The Thru-Hiker's Handbook". The prospect of a warm fire was too good to resist.

Halfway up I stopped at a spring for water as there is none on the summit. It was there I really began to recognize how vulnerable I was to cold. After being a meat cutter for much of my life, my hands were never much bothered by frigid conditions. I seldom wore gloves in the winter. However, when I tried to get the cap off my water bag, my fingers were so stiff I had to struggle several minutes to do it.

A strong wind was blowing mist and rain across the peak when I got to the cabin. Once inside I received another disappointment. There was a stove all right, but it was huge. Big enough to take six foot logs and there was no firewood except for twigs from the stunted spruce outside. No relaxing with my feet up to a hot stove for me.

On the brighter side, I was under a roof and when I checked the refrigerator in the kitchen I found a bag with six potatoes, part of a bag of flour, and a tub of margarine only slightly green around the edges. I assumed the food was abandoned and so I had no qualms of conscience as I spent the rest of the day in my bag eating boiled dough balls and potatoes. Fortunately I wasn't yet low on stove fuel.

It is said the views are terrific from Sugarloaf and that on a clear day you can see from Mt. Washington to Katahdin. There were no views for me, however.

I had a cool but bright sunny day as I moved on the next day, thankful I hadn't attempted this section the day before. In addition to having to ford the Carrabasset River, I had several hard climbs with the hardest at the end of the day - up the Horn of the Bigelows, the first of several peaks in the Bigelow Mountains. That night at the Horns Pond Shelter, the temperature dropped really low and I awoke to find everything coated with a heavy frost. I had endured a very

uncomfortable night with the wind blowing through the spaces between the logs in that otherwise nice shelter high up on the mountain.

The next day was a short 10.7 miles as I moved over the peaks of the Bigelows. On the West Peak I climbed through an icy driving snow and on the second, Avery Peak, the wind blew so hard, it made a sail of my pack. I could barely stand up and braced myself with my stick as I moved forward each step. The wind blew the clouds away though and I was rewarded with a splendid view of the large Flagstaff Lake and the mountains with their autumn colors all around. It was the first day of fall.

Arriving at the Little Bigelow Lean-to I found it in a beautiful setting with great views. I noted in my journal that it would be a great place to visit again, especially if you come from the north. The ascent is not steep from that direction and much of it is over solid bedrock.

Also, I had to give the privy my top rating. It was like a little home away from home. It was clean and odorless and painted a bright white inside with curtains on the windows. I said in my journal that a touch of civilization can be comforting sometimes. It was the warmest place I had been for several days. I was tempted to curl up and sleep there. Who said that happiness is a warm bathroom?

I knew I had to go nearly seventeen miles the following day to be in a position to negotiate the next dreaded obstacle on the A.T., crossing the Kennebec River. Because there is no bridge over the river for miles either way, hikers have been forced to ford the wide, swift barrier, until recent years. The depth of the river fluctuates because a dam upriver releases water periodically when power is needed. The water may be only knee deep in the channels between the sandbar and then suddenly rise with great force before you reach the other side. A hiker drowned in 1985 and since then the ATC has provided a free canoe ferry service. It only operates for two hours, 10am - noon, and so you must be in position to be there then or you have to wait another day.

For this reason I had to be at the Pierce Pond Shelter less than a mile from the Kennebec, to cross the following morning. It proved to be the easiest day I had had in weeks, a day with only one easy mountain to climb and wonderfully flat trail along a succession of lakes.

There were six of us crowded into the small Pierce Pond Shelter, two southbounders, myself, Rick and Donna, and a northbounder I caught up with for the first time, "Trail Dog". Jimmy came in late and had to tent. The main topic of conversation that evening was the breakfast they serve at the Harrison Camps, a tourist lodge and cabins just .4 miles away. A fabulous breakfast for under five dollars is available there for those who go over and make reservations the night before. The problem for me was that I was broke again. When I informed Rick of my condition, he offered to loan me the money so I could join the group.

The Pierce Pond Shelter faces out on the lake in a beautiful setting. Although it was still cold that night, the wind had died and the stars were bright in the north sky. With the visions of hotcakes in my mind and being serenaded by loons on the pond, I drifted off to a contented sleep.

In the morning, Jim, AKA "Trail Dog", Jimmy, Rick, Donna and I enjoyed together a great meal of twelve light fluffy pancakes each, sausages, and drink in a rustic dining room warmed by a wood fire. It doesn't get any better than that, to borrow a phrase.

Then, it was off to the Kennebec where I had a brief reunion with "Mountain Goat", an older hiker who I spent a couple nights with in Virginia. He had flip-flopped.

Rick and Jimmy intended to ford the river, being determined not to use any kind of conveyance in their thru-hikes in spite of the ATC's urging to use the ferry. While they were preparing to wade, Donna went across with the ferryman and their packs. The water was about knee deep when we arrived at the fording place. By the time the canoe got back, the ferryman said the water had risen to chest height. Rick and Jimmy wisely decided to take the canoe. When I went across, paddling as hard as we could, the

current still forced us about 200 feet below our intended landing place.

Once across the river it was just a third of a mile to the Caratunk General Store and Post Office for a mail drop, groceries, and money to repay Rick. In 1991 the storekeepers provided a hostel in an adjacent loft and after the long trek from Gorham, I decided to take the remainder of the day as a rest stop. Jimmy, Donna, and Rick decided to go on to the next shelter. After a hot shower I spent the day eating, causing my only case of indigestion on the entire trip.

The following day I became a 2000 miler when I crossed a particular logging road outside of Caratunk. After some carefree hiking with only one small mountain, I crowded into Joe's Hole Brook Shelter with some vacationers thinking life had gotten easy. The only hard part being the "baseball bat" floor of the lean-to.

The next day things changed. A cold rain began and continued throughout the day. When I stopped at the Moxie Bald Shelter for lunch, I could stay there only long enough to eat because I got very chilled. "Trail Dog" who was there with me, thought I was becoming hypothermic. I got warmed up again as I got moving along the flooded trail which was like a moving stream at times. In addition, I had to ford the west branch of the Piscataquis River, about 50 feet wide and over my knees with a strong current. The legs of my wind pants that my son Jim had bought for me in New Jersey filled up with water like balloons. It didn't matter because I couldn't get any wetter.

I had intended to go 14 miles and stop at a new shelter just two weeks old at Horseshoe Canyon. When I got to the area, I missed the sign to the shelter and kept blundering on in the rain. I didn't know for sure I had gone too far until I came to the next recognizable feature, the east branch of the Piscataquis River. I knew then by checking my data book that I had gone over two miles too far. I had a choice: go back and hunt for something I had already missed or go on over three miles to the town of Monson. I

determined that I had just enough daylight hours to get there. And so I stepped into the river and went on.

In Monson is another traditional hiker stopping place, Shaw's Boarding House. Owned and operated by Keith and Pat Shaw and their son, Keith, Jr., they had hosted over 12,000 hikers since opening in 1978. Providing lodging and family style meals at reasonable rates, Shaw's has become a warm, friendly home away from home. I knocked on their front door as the last light of the day was fading. Keith saw before him, someone who was soaked from head to toe and on his last legs after a near 20-mile day.

I was immediately welcomed in and told where I could get in a hot shower and that I was in time for dinner which turned out to be all-I-could-eat roast beef and mashed potatoes.

By doing the long day, I caught up again with "Jimmy No-Stop" and "Javaman" and "Downhill Donna". They were staying at Shaw's the next day for a rest day. When I opened my pack and found all my clothes and sleeping bag wet, I decided to take a day off, too. I would have had a miserable night back at Horseshoe Canyon.

"Trail Dog" came in the next day and appeared happy to see me. He explained that when he didn't find me at the shelter after I had said I was staying there, he became worried and went back down the Trail at least mile to look for me. I assured him that in the future if I dropped dead it would be right on the trail so he couldn't miss me. I saw Jim again the next year at Damascus Trail Days where he wanted to have his picture taken with me, explaining that I looked so much like his father.

The day I spent in Monson was a restful one, doing my laundry and then as usual, strolling around the village. That afternoon Keith gave Rick and I a ride to Dover-Foxcroft, the nearest town of any size. There I bought a throw away camera because my instamatic had broken. The first picture I took was of Keith standing at his front door.

Keith was a man in his seventies who had had some serious health problems, including a heart bypass, but didn't

let it slow him down. Somewhat of a curmudgeon and critical of the actions of some hikers, I think he truly enjoys meeting and providing hospitality to the many people that have passed through. Besides the boarding house, he is kept busy shuttling people to Baxter Park and Katahdin. Many vacationers leave their cars at Shaw's, get a ride to Baxter and then walk back to Monson, 115 miles away.

The first 100 miles out of Monson are called the "100-mile wilderness walk" because you cross no roads or pass near any man-made structures other than the Trail shelters. The only other signs of man are a few logging roads and the tracks of the Canadian Pacific branch line. This is unquestionably the most isolated part of the A.T. It is recommended that each hiker carry a 10-day supply of food. Although there is a camp store at a place called Abol Bridge on the edge of Baxter Park where limited resupplying is possible, thru-hikers must have enough food with them in case they have to wait to climb Katahdin because of bad weather. When storms make ascending the mountain unsafe, the park rangers close it. Some people have waited as long as five days.

But before I could climb Katahdin, I had to get there. I left Monson on the morning of September 27 and although the rains had stopped, it still was another wet day. The trail was soggy and I also had to ford three cold and swift streams, up to my thighs in some places. At the Little Wilson Falls, I lingered for a while with "Swiss Kriss" enjoying the rushing cascade with the sunlight filtering through the tress. I had to keep moving, however, to reach Long Pond Lean-to, chalking up another 18.6 miles.

Next came a discouraging day of only 10.9 miles over rocks, roots, water, and mud. This was the one day that all the dire warnings of the rough conditions in Maine came true. In all, I had to cross four mountains before I dragged myself up to the Chairback Gap Lean-to. To top off the day, the shelter was crowded with vacationers. it may have been the "Wilderness Walk", but not because of the lack of people.

This was the most popular time for tourists to come for the fall foliage and because the black fly season was over.

Then, the bad day was followed by a very good day, even though I had my first real taste of the fourth season at the end. This section of 16.3 miles, ending at the Logan Brook Lean-to, had a variety of the best of Maine's hiking in direct contrast to the previous day's worst.

After a steep descent of Chairback Mountain, I faced a fording of the gentle but wide, west branch of the Pleasant River. At the fords of the previous streams I had a choice of crossing with my boots on or changing to my camp shoes. On the wet days my feet were already soaked so I just waded in. At one stream I changed to my camp shoes and then later got my boots wet anyway so I had nothing dry at the shelter that evening. The bottoms of the rivers were too rocky and slippery to try in my bare feet.

The day, because I could clearly see the bottom of the river, I went across barefooted and had dry feet all day. Now when I backpack, I carry water sports shoes for camp shoes.

Just across the river I moved through an area called the "Hermitage" with spectacular virgin white pine trees protected by the Nature Conservancy. Although the next few miles were rugged but beautiful, I regret now that I didn't take time to take a side trail to Gulf Hagas, called by many the "Grand Canyon of the East". Not to be compared with the real Grand Canyon, it is still supposed to be spectacular.

I was tempted to stop that evening on the south side of White Cap Mountain when I came across another hiker I had met in Caratunk, "Tree Frog". He had already set up his tent in a splendid prairie-like area and was enjoying the sun. Wanting however to reach the shelter on the other side of the mountain, I also liked the idea of getting the last mountain before Katahdin out of the way. And I was glad I did. When I got to the exposed rocky summit, clouds moved in. On a clear day you are supposed to get a good view of Katahdin, 73 miles away. There was no view for me. Before I got off the broad peak, snow began to fall and as I worked my way down it got heavier and heavier. When I got to the packed

shelter, I was just able to crowd in. With the heavy snow, it was difficult to find a place to cook. As the heavy stuff continued to fall, I remembered the loud warnings of the caretaker of the RPH Cabin in New York of how it could snow a foot in Maine in September. He kept repeating: "You just can't walk in a foot of snow".

When I awoke the next morning I was pleased to see we had only two to three inches and as I moved on down to a lower elevation the snow disappeared entirely.

Because of shelter location, I did only 11.6 miles to the Cooper Brook Falls Lean-to. It proved to be an easy and sunny day, but I noted in my journal that my feet hurt and I just was not up to doing a 20-mile day. The shelter was located in a very nice place above the cascading falls. There was only one other person there, a vacationer, with "Jimmy No-Stop" and "Javaman" and "Downhill Donna" somewhere ahead of me.

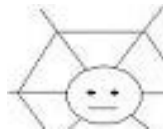
After saying in my journal that I wasn't up to doing a 20-mile day, I did 21.1 miles the next day. The trail was really flat along a river and lakesides. It was nearly dark though when I got to the Wadleigh Stream Lean-to. The long day did allow me to catch up with Jimmy, but because I was exhausted when I got there I have no recollection of the shelter or it's location. Because of the long day, however, I was able to hit my food bag a little heavier as I figured I had only three more days to go.

I followed my last 20-milers with a 19.1 mile day, my last long day because I had only 18 miles of the A.T. left after that. Again it was a day of mostly level walking along lakeshores and ending by crossing over the slightly elevated Rainbow Ledges, and area of solid granite with only thin soil in places that supported blueberry bushes. The leaves of the bushes were a brilliant and striking red.

When I arrived at the Hurd Brook Lean-to, I found four backpackers already settled in. Feeling again, perhaps, some of that thru-hiker snobbery we are sometimes accused of having, I referred to them as "yuppie" hikers in my journal. They were young doctors and lawyers from New Jersey who

had been flown by seaplane into one of the nearby lakes and were walking out to Katahdin. They had spread their state-of-the-art gear out in the shelter and seemed very reluctant to make room for me. When Jimmy got there, he had to tent. For some reason the next day, I couldn't conjure up any sympathy for the one suffering from a bad case of blisters as I passed him by.

On that next to last day, Jimmy and I stayed together as we virtually strolled into Baxter State Park. It was another sunny day over easy trail. Putting me especially in a good mood were the bakery fresh donuts I had at the Abol Bridge store early that morning. I remarked to Jimmy that it was like when I played golf. No matter how bad I played, I always seemed to have enough good shots on the last hole to bring me back another day. And no matter the miseries I had suffered getting to this point, this great hiking would be what I remembered.

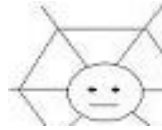


About five miles after you cross the Abol Bridge over the west branch of the Penobscot River you enter Baxter State Park. The Park exists solely because of the efforts of its namesake, the late governor Percival Baxter. As the forests of northern Maine were being carved up by the various logging companies, Baxter sought to preserve the pristine area around Mt. Katahdin. Unable to interest the legislature in preserving the area, the Governor personally purchased over two hundred thousand acres and gave it to the state with the stipulation that it remains "forever wild".

There are no paved roads, no stores, no telephones, and no electricity in the park. Camping is allowed only at designated camping areas and the campgrounds are undeveloped with no showers, only privies. There are cabins and lean-to shelters, but by reservation only. Reservations

usually must be made far in advance. The park closes officially on October 15, but thru-hikers may enter after that and climb the mountain if it has not been closed due to permanent hazardous conditions, meaning lasting winter-long. That usually doesn't occur until later October or early November but it has happened as early as September, which could severely disappoint some late arriving end-to-enders.

Also when the Park closes, it means that there is no traffic out to the nearest town of Millinocket, about 20 miles away. This makes hitching a ride impossible although I guess after walking over 2000 miles, a person could do another 20.



Shortly after crossing the Baxter Park boundary we came to the Big Niagara Falls, certainly a misnomer but still an impressive series of rapids over huge rocks. Jimmy and I stopped for a while to enjoy the very attractive scene and then went on to the Daicey Pond Campground where we expected to spend the night. As we were checking in with the park ranger, she told us that she thought there had been some cancellations at the Katahdin Stream Campground, another two and a half miles closer to the mountain. She radioed ahead and confirmed that there would be a shelter waiting for us alone. We were very pleased to hear this because not only would it make the climb the next day easier, it would allow us to join Rick and Donna for the evening. We were sure they were at Katahdin Stream.

Also, Jimmy had had a mail drop box sent to the ranger station so as to be sure he had plenty of food in case was delayed in climbing the mountain. As a result, he had much more than he needed. He shared some with me and between that and a few items from the hiker box at the ranger station, I was sure I was going to eat well that evening. Hiker boxes are maintained at hostels and other stop-overs for

people to leave excess food and other items for others on a first come, first serve basis.

In addition, at Daicey Pond I got my first clear view of the monolith that I was going to climb the next day. The guide book had pointed out several places miles back that you could get a sighting of Katahdin but I never did, either because of cloudiness or I just didn't know where to look.

Rick and Donna were there at Katahdin Stream and the four of us had a nice evening together, looking back over the last several months and looking forward to the next day when we would climb the last 5.2 miles of the A.T. to the top of Mt. Katahdin.

I did eat well and plenty that evening. I had two macaroni and cheese dinners, one with a can of deviled ham in it. Also I found some great apples from a tree in the campground. As a variety they were unfamiliar to me, the tree probably a survivor of some early settlers. I stewed them with some brown sugar someone gave me and they were delicious. I remember Rick asking me if I ever got filled up. Well, I was feeling pretty satisfied at the time but a little later I still had room for a wine and cheese party, courtesy of "Jimmy No-Stop" and his mail drop.

The next day dawned bright as we all got ready early for the final climb. Looking up at the mountain though, we saw that it was shrouded in clouds. We hoped that we would have a view.

The sunlight was still filtering through the golden autumn foliage the first mile of the climb as we approached the rushing waters of Katahdin Stream Falls. The four of us stopped briefly to rest in the beautiful setting next to the fall. From there it is another four miles until you reach Baxter Peak, the highest point on Katahdin at 5267 feet. To make the peak an even mile high, some people have piled up a 13-foot cairn out of rocks. To get there you make the biggest climb of the trip, an elevation change of 4000 feet.

Most thru-hikers make the climb easier by leaving their packs at the ranger station, taking only a fanny pack with their lunch and some emergency survival gear. Because I felt

that even though I hated this pack, it had come this far with me and had served its purpose so it might as well go the whole way.

When you leave the forest at the timberline, you are immediately challenged by a rock scramble that was the toughest I had faced yet. It is made only somewhat easier by the re-bar pegs that someone has driven into the rocks for handholds. At one point, however, somehow the re-bar had broken off (by whom, I can't imagine) and it was necessary to hoist myself over a boulder that was a high as my chest. After several attempts I thought at first I wasn't going to be able to do it. The others were up ahead of me at the time so I couldn't ask for a hand. Finally, by throwing my pack up ahead of me I was able to swing my leg up and pull myself on top of the rock. This rock scramble wasn't near as long as Kinsman Mt., but it was much more difficult.

About a mile from the summit you come to Thoreau Spring, named to commemorate Henry Thoreau's attempt to scale the mountain over 140 years ago. In his book "In the Maine Woods", Thoreau described Katahdin thus: "The mountain seemed a vast aggregation of loose rocks, as if some times it had rained rock, and they lay as they fell on the mountain sides, nowhere fairly at rest but leaning on each other..." Thoreau didn't reach the summit because he attempted a difficult route and a heavy fog forced him to give up.

Shortly after the spring, the Trail levels out over an almost mile long slightly inclined tableland. Much of it was unlike any table you ever saw. Mostly it was a knife-edge with a steep slope of rocks on both sides of the trail. However it was not as sharp as the Knife Edge Trail, another way to get to the peak.

Before we got to the spring, the visibility had begun to diminish as mist rolled in on very strong winds. I appeared that there was an endless supply of clouds coming out of Canada that the powerful winds could not blow away. I had always associated fog with stillness before and so, as on Mt. Washington, it was a new experience to have a fog sweeping

by on 40 MPH winds. And it seemed there would be no views from Katahdin that day.

When the tableland comes to an end, there is a short steep ascent and you are at the top where there is a weathered sign announcing the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail.

One of my recurring fears as I moved from Georgia was that when I got to the top of Katahdin, there would be no one there to take my picture. Well, I need not have worried for in addition to my three friends there were a number of day-hikers there also. Many people come to Baxter Park to climb Katahdin besides thru-hikers. As I've said before there are a number of ways of becoming a 2000 miler. There are vacation section hikers, southbound thru-hikers, and flip-floppers. Bill Irvin, the blind hiker, made a special trip to climb the mountain in good weather before returning to his thru-hike. "Mississippi" drove to Baxter, climbed the mountain and returned to Gorham where I met him. Again, there are many ways to "hike your own hike". But there is no match for what you feel when you have walked over 2100 miles from Georgia in one continuous trek and reach the end on top of what the Abenaki Indians called the "greatest mountain".

My first act on reaching the summit was to put on more clothes. I had climbed comfortably in my shorts and light windbreaker, but I quickly realized it was cold up there and needed my wind pants and winter coat. The cold could not lessen our exhilaration at completing our adventure, however. We were now entitled to add the 2000 miler rocker to our ATC patch. The date October 4, 1991 would have a special meaning for the rest of our lives.

After a period of cheers, hugs, handshakes, and backslapping, we settled down to take pictures of everyone standing behind the summit sign. We still had no view because of the clouds. We sat down for a short lunch and then started back down. The climb had taken three hours; the descent would go much quicker. Wonderfully, though, before we had gone more than 500 feet the clouds disappeared and

we had a splendid vista of miles of autumn forest, lakes, and surrounding smaller mountains. We had not been denied our view.

About halfway down we met the "April Fools" and "Tree Frog" on the way up. They had spent the night at Daicey Pond and we were very happy to see them. We assured them that we would wait for them at a park pavilion to celebrate together.

Our ride out of the Park had already been arranged. "Big Gar" whose real name was Gary and who was not very big, was there with his pick-up truck and had agreed to take Randy and Michelle, Rick and Donna, Jimmy and I to Millinocket and Medway. Gary had thru-hiked as far as his home state of Pennsylvania where he had gone back to work at his job. Wanting to be there when his friends finished the Trail, he had taken time off again to come to Maine and provide a shuttle service. I had met Gary for the first time back in Caratunk

When Randy and Michelle and Brad (AKA "Tree Frog") got back, we gathered around a table laden with the remains of everybody's food bags and mail drops for a last meal together. It was a time of high spirits but sadness too for our great adventure was over.

During the festivities, Brad held up a colorful strip map that none of the rest of us had seen. Wanting one like it, the rest of us thought he had got it at the Baxter ranger station. When he explained that he got it in Harpers Ferry a thousand miles back, we were loud in our disappointment. To which Brad replied, "What's the matter? It's within walking distance." (An account of this exchange, sent in by Jimmy, appeared in the "Life in These United States" feature in the October, 1992 Reader's Digest.)

Everything has to come to an end and so it came time to break up our party and bring an end to our thru-hike. "Javaman" and "Downhill Donna" and the "April Fools" went as far as Millinocket to spend the first night off the Trail at a boarding house that caters to hikers. Jimmy and I went on to Medway to share a room at Farley's Motel, which had

special rates for hikers. From there we had only a mile walk to the bus station and would travel as far as Boston together.

It had been a day that I could not have wished to be better and I thought I was so lucky to be able to share it with such good people.

AFTERWARD

"For people who stay at home the path is never so simple or so clear."

Loula Grace Erdman

IT'S TIME TO WRITE

When I came across Ms. Erdman's statement in her book I knew she was writing about soldiers returning from war, not thru hiking. However, I was struck with the apparent similarity in the feelings of homecoming veterans and 2000 miles. Although I had been trained for war, fortunately because of timing, too young for Korea and too old for Viet Nam, I never had to serve in wartime so I can't speak from personal experience.

Nevertheless, after Viet Nam I know there was much said about the flashbacks veterans kept having due to the intense emotional experience that they had had. And, in my case, when finally back at work at a monotonous job at home, I would find myself on the Trail in my mind walking a particular section. Each time I would flashback, the section would be different as a result of no evident stimulus. And that section might not even be particularly remarkable. Instead, for example, I might be pushing through a field of nettles crowding the trail on Floyd Mountain in Virginia. More often though, I would be transported to an especially splendid place. These mental episodes occurred with great frequency the first couple of years after returning home and still occasionally happen now.

The comparison between the war veteran and the returning thru-hiker can also be made in the reception he or she gets at home. You have just lived through this life-changing time and you realize that those you associate with back home have little or no idea what it was like. And one just can't know what it was like unless one has been there. I remember how it hurt when I told someone what I had done the last several months and they looked at me with a puzzled expression and said "Oh?" You begin to feel that you are

different now and you long for those people who shared your experiences.

This is one reason I believe there are veteran organizations like the American Legion and VFW. But while the veteran may be reluctant to talk about his experiences, the thru-hiker longs to relive his adventure every chance he gets. I remember seeing a cartoon in some forgotten publication showing two old guys in hiking clothes with packs on their backs standing in the midst of an elegant cocktail party with a fellow on the side saying, "They thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail 20 years ago and they never let you forget it."

This longing to be with your own kind is a compelling reason why there are so many repeat thru-hikers of the A.T. It also explains why so many return year after year on their vacations to hike or join trail maintenance crews. Many people have found jobs associated with the A.T. The Trail has become truly a part of their life.

In my own case, I have been back on vacation every year since 1991. There are other hiking trails elsewhere in the world I would like to find time for sometime, but if anyone could give me the smallest excuse to thru-hike again I would do it.

Of course, the 2000 miler remembers the good parts of his journey and tends to forget the misery he or she suffered from the physical stress, hunger, insects, heat, cold, wet conditions, and the occasional monotony. All of this is overshadowed in his or her memory by having joined an exclusive club, the less than 3000 people who have become 2000 milers in the 54 years of the Trail's existence.

Part of my own longing for the A.T. was also the result of some of the "magic" of the Trail seemed to quickly disappear when the hike was over. When on Springer Mt. I had followed thru-hiker tradition by picking up a small stone to carry with me to place on top of Mt. Katahdin. I faithfully carried it in a plastic bag with some other items all the way to Maine. When I took the bag out of my pack on the summit the stone was gone, lost somehow through a small hole in the bag. I was very disappointed at the loss.

I discovered a much larger loss when I arrived back home after a grueling and confining 32-hour bus trip. Greyhound had lost my backpack! My equipment I didn't miss because I wasn't happy with most of it anyway. The biggest blow was losing my last two rolls of film and the names and addresses of many of the people who were so kind to me on the Trail.

Fortunately I was able to contact "Javaman" and "Jimmy No-Stop" and they sent me a number of photos of the last days on the Trail including summit pictures of me on Katahdin. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to send a thank-you note to the Catawba grocery lady who had loaned me her car.

Also, in 1991, the job market was very tight and I had a hard time finding any kind of work. I experienced for the first time in my life the frustration of filling out application after application and never having the chance to talk to someone face to face. When I finally did find some regular work, my first concern, even more important than getting a better car, was to replace my backpacking equipment and then to save enough money so that I could thru-hike again if I chose. I then knew that the "Trail Magic" was still available for me anytime I wanted to return.

I began my trek feeling despair in my personal life, half wishing I would drop dead on that first mountain, but also I felt excitement at finally being able to try something I had wanted for years to do.

I ended the hike with a renewed certainty that life is an endless series of depths and heights. And no depth of circumstance would make me want to miss those heights that lie ahead of me. Too, with a strengthened appreciation for the beauty of pristine nature, I realized that my dead body would have been the worst kind of trail litter.

I know that there are other trails to walk and there are places like Clingman's Dome, Roan, and South Kinsman to try again to hit on a sunny day.

SOME TRIP STATISTICS

<u>Trip Length..... April 29 -- October 4</u>	<u>159 Days</u>
<u>Actual Walking Days</u>	<u>150 Days</u>
<u>Rest Days</u>	<u>9 Days</u>
<u>Daily Average Miles - Overall</u>	<u>13.4 Miles</u>
<u>Daily Average - Actual Walking Days</u>	<u>14.2 Miles</u>
<u>Number of Days 15-17.9 miles length</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>Number of Days 18-19.9 miles length</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>Number of Days 20-20.4 miles length</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Number of Days 25 - up</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Shortest Day</u>	<u>2.7 Miles</u>
<u>Longest Day</u>	<u>29.8 Miles</u>