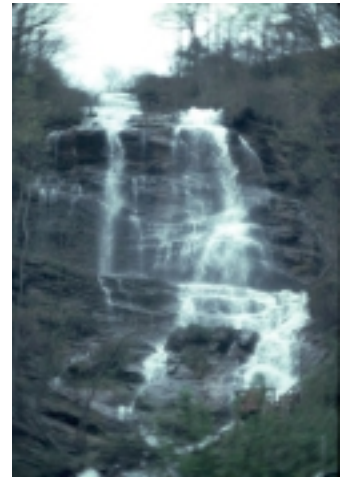




May 15, 1983 Sunday

2138 miles to go!

Although the distance is just a fraction of what is to come, in order to hike the Appalachian Trail from South to North, one must hike 8.7 miles to the trailhead in order to begin the arduous 2100 plus miles along the longest continuously marked foot-path in the world. But, since the trail begins on the top of Springer Mountain that is exactly what must be done. Springer Mountain, Georgia is where the trail begins, and Jim and I had been driven to Georgia by my brother Carl and his wife Cheryl, so that we could attempt to hike every last one of those miles, through fourteen states, to the Northern Terminus in Maine - Mount Katahdin. They took the time to begin the approach trail to the trailhead with me and my hiking partner Jim Triplett, my roommate from college. Although Carl and Cheryl did not hike the entire eight miles to the summit of Springer Mountain with us, they did hike to the head of Amicalola Falls located in the state park where the approach trail begins. Eating the last of a fresh banana, the last of just about any fresh fruit that we would have for some time, we said our goodbyes and headed for the beginning of our trail adventure. I had been in this spot before. I was somewhat aware of what I was getting into, but I don't think that Jim realized what was in store for him. He was like me two years ago when I attempted my first thru hike - my first ever backpacking trip. He was perhaps lucky in that he had a "seasoned" veteran along. But then again, that may have put him at a disadvantage because I was ready to get up and go.



Amicalola Falls



Jim, Carl & Cheryl near the top of Amicalola Falls

Both Jim and I bought heavy duty Vasque hiking boots in Carbondale several months earlier; however, I had tried my boots out on a training hike that followed part of the route as the "Hike across America" trail used a few years earlier by a hiking group. Starting at the site of the Grand Tower Ferry, I had hiked only two days and made my way to Giant City State Park before calling it quits for the remainder of spring break due to an extremely sore Achilles tendon brought about by the stiffness of the new boots. With less than two months to go before actually setting out on the Appalachian Trail, I was beginning to wonder if I would even get to go since the injury plagued me for a few weeks afterwards. I took the boots to the local cobbler who allowed me to use his bunion stretcher to expand critical areas in the heel area of the boots. I gave him the boots and had the $\frac{3}{4}$ length steal shank in the soles of the boots removed for a little bit more flexibility. They were really mountaineering boots, not hiking boots.



Jim near Frosty Mountain, Ga.

Having done all this, I chose to begin my hike with my old boots, the ones I used on my first trip, with the theory that I knew where blisters would form based on past experience. So, I was ready. I applied moleskin this morning over the spots where previous blisters had long since vanished and set out with confidence - and a pair of boots that were already broken in with 700 miles behind them. I felt great; I knew I could make it! Jim, on the other hand, had not broken his boots in, with the exception of wearing them around the campus. He did not take my advice from the beginning

about putting moleskin on his feet to help prevent blisters from forming. By the time we arrived on Frosty Mountain he had his boots off and began the daily ritual of applying the material around his already forming blisters. Moleskin is a felt-like material with an adhesive on one side that is applied to areas where rubbing is occurring, or around an area where a blister has already formed to help protect the area from further rubbing. Few hikers begin the trip without any blisters at all, so I felt lucky.

We only met a couple of other hikers on our way to Springer Mountain, the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, and signed the register that was enclosed in a traditional mailbox attached to a large oak tree on the summit. I dedicated my entry to Dave Giger, my best friend from high school, and gave a long, extremely loud war cry proclaiming that "Gonzo!" was back on the trail. Gonzo! became my trail name two years ago when I decided the spirit of the word suited the expedition. The name came about as a result of an expedition that Dave and I made to



Tom Tillman & Cathy Parr

Chester, Illinois to locate fossilized ripple marks along the banks of the Mississippi River. Dave climbed above me on the bluff to look, while I searched below. While looking for the fossils, a bunch of prickly pear cactus came flying out of nowhere as I heard a loud "Gonzo!" being yelled from the adjacent cliff. In that spirit I chose "Gonzo!" as my trail name - going for it.... No holds barred! Whether self named or coined by someone else as a result of something typical about the hiker, everyone usually ends up with a trail name for use in the trail registers located at the shelters. Jim became known as the "Orange Crush" due to his bright orange t-shirt advertising Orange Crush soda. Together we chose to be called the "Biumvirate Pedestrian League" or BPL for short.

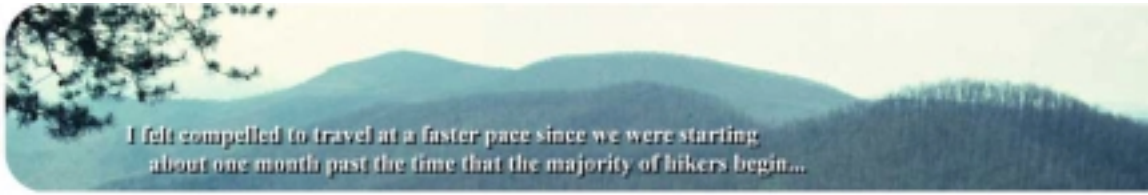
On the summit of Springer Mountain, we met Rich Newday, another prospective thru hiker (one who hikes the trail in one season) and my

head expanded since he was impressed with my knowledge of the trail, all the knowledge gained by having been on this first section before. We expected to find Rich at Cross Trails Shelter, our first nights lodging just over a mile past the summit, but I guess he decided to hike a little farther. However, the shelter was not empty when we arrived. We met Tommy Tillman, and his girlfriend Kathy Parr, who were out for a short hike. Tom wet our appetites to reach the end of the trail by telling us about some of the good things that we would find in Maine if we made it that far, but was soon off to get his Volkswagen and drive to a spot close enough for Kathy to walk to and be picked up. I guess she did not enjoy hiking as much as Tom did. We had a great conversation with Kathy while Tom went for the car. It was then that I learned that there was a way to come within two miles of the summit of Springer by car, thus cutting the eight miles of the approach trail down to two. I don't think you would want to take a nice car on that road, however.

The temperature at about 2:15 pm when we reached the shelter after traveling a mere 1.2 miles of the official Appalachian Trail was between 56 to 60 degrees, and I had to wear my sweat pants to keep myself comfortable. Traveling the 10 miles from Amicalola Falls headquarters to Cross Trails lean-to had taken us five hours, approximately two miles per hour. Not bad for our first day. We took a few pictures and then sat around and listened to rock and roll music coming out of Jim's miniature radio. Boy are we roughing it now!



Jim & I at Cross Trails Shelter, where we would spend our first night on the trail.



Monday May 16, 1983 (2136.8 miles to go)

Rained last night, but there was a time during the night when there was no sound... no rain... just the picturesque sounds of a Barred Owl hooting nearby. It wasn't that the owl kept me up, but I did not sleep much. I wasn't restless, and probably got more sleep than I thought. Perhaps it was the excitement of our first day on the trail. I don't know, but I got up at 6:50 am after realizing that my wrist alarm had not gone off, or perhaps the sound was muffled under the sleeping bag that kept me nice and toasty. Why would anyone want to get up any earlier than that anyway? Had a nice breakfast consisting of my last whole banana to help rid my pack of extra weight, and soon was off on our quest for Maine once again.

Today we were slated to go over Sassafras Mountain, a climb that I remembered from two years ago that left an impression in my mind as being a "ball breaker". It probably wasn't that bad, but being one of the first mountains of my backpacking career, I made a mental note of it. For a while I thought that maybe the trail had changed and Sassafras was no longer part of the AT since I didn't see it mentioned in the data book. Well it was still on the AT, and although Jim was already suffering from a partially immobilized leg, and big blisters on his feet, we made it over that mountain and then Justice Mountain as well. While on Justice Mtn., we heard the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse, the farthest south I remember hearing one. We were blessed to see a type of orchid today that sported small flowers - pink and white - I believe it to be called a Showy Orchid. We rolled into Gooch Gap shelter after a 15.6 mile day. A big mile day by most standards on the Appalachian

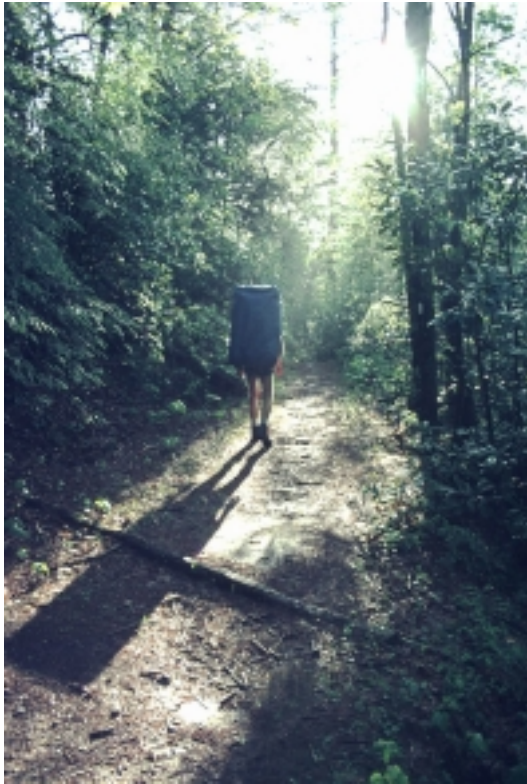


Long Creek Falls

Trail. Most people who thru hike the trail do so in the direction that Jim and I were traveling - South to North; however, most people try to average about 14 miles per day or so. I felt compelled to travel at a faster pace since we were starting about one month past the time that the majority of hikers begin, and I did not want to encounter any snow in Maine, or worry that the Northern terminus on Katahdin was closed as it usually is after October 14. Regardless, the distance of our first full day was a bit much, but Jim and I had figured we



View from Hawk Mountain



Jim with pack cover to protect against water.

would travel at roughly 18 miles per day with no problem. Then reality set in for Jim. Most thru hikers begin around the first weeks in April, although many begin in March. Jim and I began as soon as we could after completing our semester at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. At least we were fairly sure that we would not get caught in any snowfall, and there was no race for a space in the shelter each night. Spring was well on its way and there was greenery everywhere. Some of the mountaintop trees at higher elevations were just beginning to leaf out.

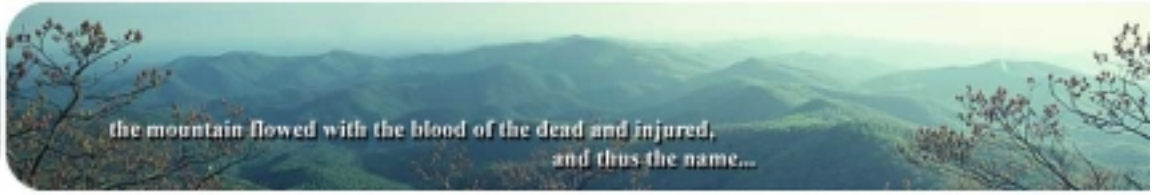
I remembered Gooch Gap shelter from my first trip as being the first place that I became "homesick" and felt as though I was ill prepared for the trip in the food quantity department. In 1981 Gooch Gap shelter was reached on my third day, and I had serious doubts about my trip in general having huge blisters and a feeling of imminent food rationing before my next resupply point. Another hiker and I made our first off-trail resupply journey into the town of Suches, Georgia, which as I recall was no more than a general store. I remember how good it felt to talk with my mother on the payphone outside the store, and how I felt that I had been on the trail forever! Time does strange things during the first few days of

one's trail adventure. A few days seems like a few weeks, and there is a discontinuity with real time.

We stayed at Gooch Gap Shelter and chose not to go to Suches on this trip, there was no need, we had "plenty" of food, and our next resupply point was only two days away at Neels Gap. Rich came struggling in later in the day and needed some help. Wade, another prospective thru-hiker staying at the shelter, gave him some soup to help him out. Later, Rich gave Jim some medication for his blisters. Charity in the hiking community is wonderful. Everyone seems to want the others to make it.



Jim takes a much needed break



May 17, 1983 Tuesday

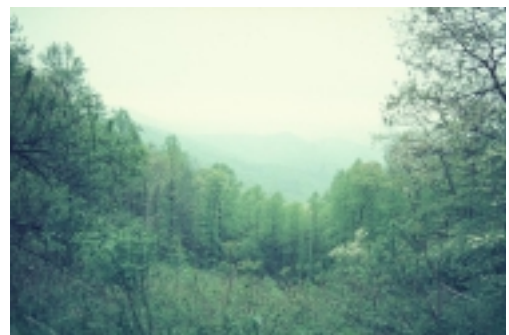
Slept well last night, perhaps the fatigue of an almost 16 mile day had caught up to me. This time the alarm woke me up at 6:30 am. Today was the beginning of the typical breakfast on the AT - oatmeal. Instant oatmeal that is, and surely not the plain flavor! Brown sugar, apples and cinnamon, or anything other than plain. Even for the calorie starved hungry hiker, plain oatmeal can hardly be stomachd unless doctored up in some way with loads of sugar, or mixing in a bag of some flavored variety. Instant oatmeal is light, and has somewhat of a "stick to the ribs" desireability, is readily available along the trail side stores, and is therefore a staple breakfast.



Rich Newday takes a break at Woody Gap.

We covered four miles rather quickly to Woody Gap with Jim leading the pack, followed by Rich, and me bringing up the rear. The rest of the day seemed rather slow. We stopped quite often even though Jim's blisters and his leg seemed to be doing somewhat better. Although the weather was somewhat overcast in the morning, the remainder of the day was pleasant, and we had good views from the ridge on Ramrock Mtn, and Big Cedar Mountain. Lunch consisted of Cheese and Sardines. Boy, Jim and I must have been packing heavy with all that solid food.

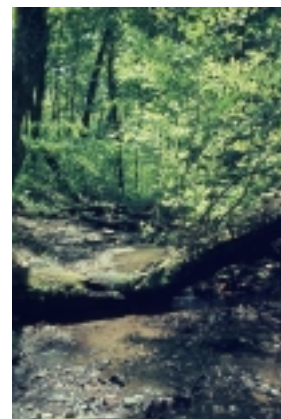
This was a luxury that was soon to come to an end. The last part of the day was a long, but not necessarily steep ascent to the summit of Blood Mountain, named by the Cherokee Indians. The Cherokee legend states that in a particularly bloody battle fought on the mountain, the mountain flowed with the blood of the dead and injured, and thus the name. Tonight's entrée became one of our staples and consisted of a Lipton's Noodles and Sauce dinner of Sour Cream and Chives flavor. We tried a sugar free lemonade mix today that we found quite agreeable when added to our water. Typically we did not treat our water in any way. Although I may have carried some iodine tablets, I felt confident that the water was safe. If attention is paid to the surroundings, and there is nothing above the source such as farmland or settlements of any kind, and water is taken directly as it comes out of the ground as a spring, I have not had any problems.



View from Woody Gap.



A break on Big Cedar Mountain.



Headwaters of Slaughter Creek.



Blood Mountain Shelter.

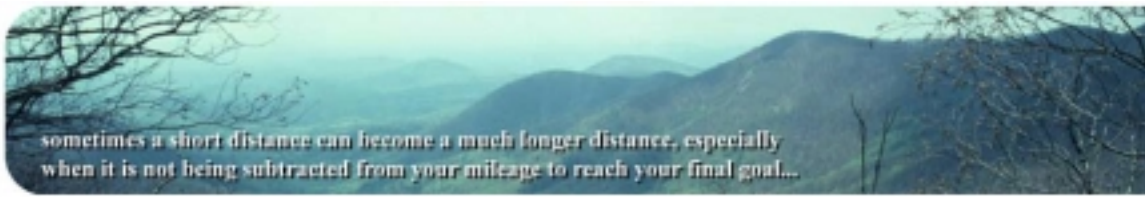
Blood Mountain Shelter was an excellent place to end the day. From a nearby rock one can see almost 360 degrees. The sunset from our vantage point was but a haze. The disadvantage of staying at the shelter is that there is no water there; water must be carried from the last water source about a mile to the south, a place called Slaughter Gap. We carried enough for the night, and breakfast in the morning. The interior of the shelter is rather dark, but provides shelter from the elements. My little thermometer indicated temperatures in the sixties during the day, with 45 degrees on Big Cedar Mountain. Windy and cool at night. 12.7 miles for the day.



Panoramic view from Blood Mountain.



Sunset as seen from Blood Mountain.



May 18, 1983 Wednesday (2109 miles to go)

A big mile day today.

A couple of miles after leaving the summit of Blood Mountain this morning we arrived at Neel's Gap, where US route 19/129 passes through the low area between Blood and Levelland Mountains. Located at this road crossing is the first potential trail resupply point directly on the trail. The trail actually passes through an archway on the grounds of the Walasii Inn, a building built during the depression era by the CCC. Although I don't have it recorded, we probably stopped and had a coke and some other treats before beginning the ascent of Levelland Mountain. I do remember purchasing two or three freeze dried dinners as emergency backup food - just in case we ran out of other food. This stuff is easy to fix - just add boiling water, wait a few minutes and then eat.



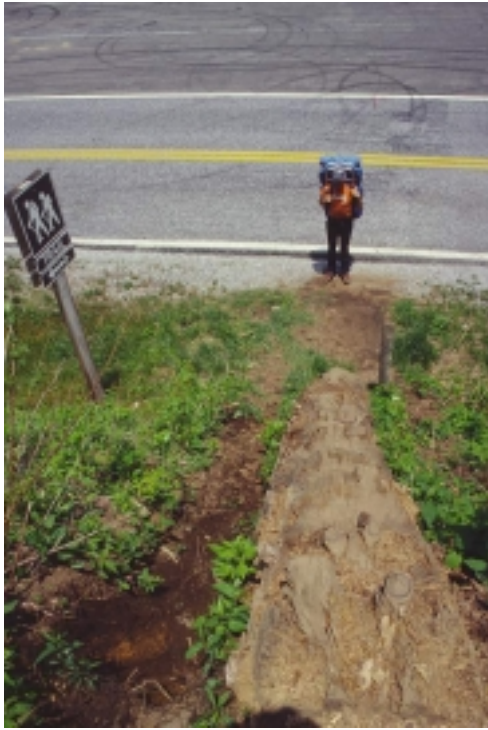
Early morning from Blood Mountain.



Walasii Inn

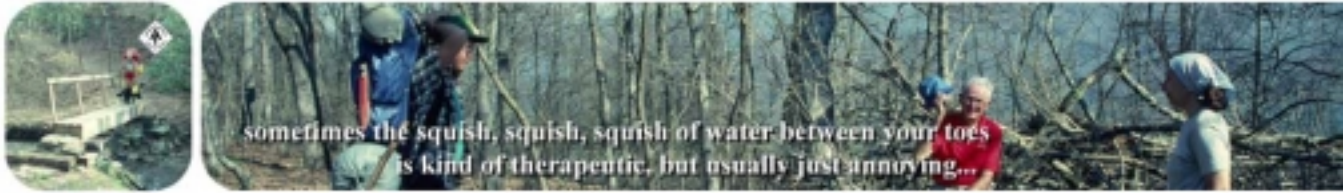
After ascending out of Neel's Gap and choosing to not stop for water at one of the shelters since it was one half mile off the trail, we were in need of water by the time we arrived at Tesnatee Gap, after traveling 5.7 miles. I have a vague recollection of sending Jim down to get water (it was his turn) when we arrived at the highway running through the gap. There was a sign there that said spring $\frac{1}{4}$ mile down the mountainside. Sometimes a short distance can become a much longer distance, especially when it is not being subtracted from your mileage to reach your final goal. This was one of those cases. I waited and waited and Jim finally came back and was

exhausted and drenched in sweat. Apparently the water was "straight down" the mountain which meant straight back up to get back. A tough and frustrating additional few tenths of a mile for him. Put in 19.8 miles today before pulling into Rocky Knob lean-to.



Jim contemplates the Log Steps out of Unicoi Gap.





May 19, 1983 - Thursday (2089 miles to go)

I guess as far as keeping the rain out, Rocky Knob shelter did a formidable job last night, but my day began as I awoke to the splattering of water droplets upon my glasses. After evaluating the situation, I discovered that this was the only location that a leak had occurred, and just my luck it functioned as the morning alarm clock. Getting up to a potential day of walking in the rain is one of the toughest challenges in the southern Appalachians, where if you get caught in the wrong weather patterns, you can be walking in the rain for days on end. It takes a lot of discipline to get your butt up to begin the daily walk knowing that your feet will be soaked in a few minutes, and your body may become chilled in the early spring breeze. Out comes the pack cover, the rain jacket, and the cover for the baseball cap that keeps the sun out of your eyes and now the rain off your glasses. I started out with my bright orange sweat pants to keep me warmer, yet rolled up as if they were knickers in order to prevent them from becoming too wet and mud covered. My feet became soaked soon after departing, but didn't feel too bad. Sometimes the squish, squish, squish of the water between your toes is kind of therapeutic, but usually just annoying.

A fierce cold wind was blowing as we ascended Tray mountain, and I soon lowered my sweats to protect my wind chilled, cold legs as I began to fear the possibility of hypothermia. That felt a lot better. We stopped in at Montray shelter for a little lunch, and although I am sure that we would liked to have stayed there due to the weather, we decided to move on to Addis Gap shelter instead, another 5.3 miles. After a long haul we arrived at Addis Gap shelter only to find it full of children. Such is life on the trail, especially when the weather is rainy and nasty! It is on days like this that some hikers decide not to move at all and upset the balance of shelter population distribution. On the bright side, it may also allow for chance meetings of hikers that you may never quite catch up to if going at the same pace. This was not one of those rare occasions. Not wanting to spend the night with, or next to a bunch of young kids, Jim and I chose to keep on hiking. The time was 3:40 pm, not enough time to cover the eleven miles to Plumb Orchard Gap shelter. If we could have stayed at Addis Gap shelter, the day would have been bearable after a mere 14 mile day in the rain. It would have been a nice break after the almost twenty mile day yesterday, and factoring in the weather, it would have been just about right.

We moved on After the longest 5.4 miles that we had walked to this point, we arrived at Dick's Creek Gap, which was located next to US highway 76 leading downhill 11 miles to the town of Hiawassee. There was a vehicle parked in the Georgia State Highway Dept. parking area near the road with a license plate indicating it was registered in Michigan. Next to the lot, a little farther from the road, was a level section that seemed like a good place to erect our two-man tent. Apparently the lot was for day hikers or short-term hikers to park as they found access to the trailhead. The temptation to try to hitch into town for the night pulled at us, but we wanted to be real mountain men - we pitched our tent in the dripping rain and crawled into the sack. I suppose that the decision to not go into town, at least for me, was affected by the experience on my previous thru hike attempt in which I and a couple of others decided to hitch off the trail and ended up skipping small sections of the trail. This eventually brought about the demise of my journey when I realized that I would not be able to say that I had walked the entire trail. 19.4 miles for the day - Rained most of the day.



View from Tray Mountain.



Rhododendron Tunnel.



We ate lunch at the state line in Bly Gap next to a knarly old tree that marked the boundary and the conquest of the first state completed.

May 20, 1983 - Friday

Up at six o'clock this morning. The morning was damp from the rain. Some truckers rolled in just as we were getting up and about. I guess that after a long serious climb in a big rig, the lot is a great place to give the engine a rest and see what excitement they can find before they begin the break burning descent into the valley below. A gap, such as Dick's Creek Gap, is a southern term used to indicate a low spot between two mountains. Out west it may be known as a pass. They asked us if we were from Michigan since there was a car in the lot that had Michigan plates. Well I guess if we were from Michigan we probably would have spent the night in our car, or driven down to the closest town to escape the nasty dampness that filled the air last night. But we were just two guys, the Biumvirate Pedestrian League, on a leisurely stroll from Georgia to Maine via the Appalachian Trail.

It took us about an hour and a half to get rolling this morning. This I have found to be the direct result of having to tent in the rain. It is so much easier to get up and get going when starting from a trail shelter than from a wet tent. Not only that, but your pack weight goes up due to having to roll up your tent with added water weight. We set out on the trail and within a couple of hours passed by Plumb Orchard Gap and the side trail that led down to Plumb Orchard Shelter to our right. I remember the last time I stayed at Plumb Orchard Gap Shelter and met a man named John Smart. He told me that during the night he had awoke and looked out the front of the shelter and saw a procession of glow worms working their way from one place to another. It must have been quite a sight. We took a break at the junction that led to the right - down to the shelter. I ventured down to the shelter to relive the old memory of spending the night listening to harmonica and flute music provided by the talented Pennsylvanian.

Later, Jim and I moved on towards the first milestone on our trip to Maine, the state line between Georgia and North Carolina. We ate lunch at the state line in Bly Gap next to a knarly old tree that marked the boundary and the conquest of the first state completed. Only thirteen more states and many more miles to go! We met a fellow hiker from Texas while we took our lunch break. Lunch was a welcome relief, having come 8.7 miles from Dick's Creek Gap in about five hours.



A knarly old tree in Bly Gap marks the boundary between Georgia and North Carolina.

After lunch we traveled on toward Standing Indian Lean-to. Along the way we passed by an interesting shelter different from any other shelter on the trail so far. It was an "A" frame shelter situated in a nice rhododendron thicket. We passed right on by and did not check the place out. We arrived at Standing Indian Shelter about 5:15 pm. This area of the trail has some of the more interesting names for side trails and nearby mountains and gaps such as "The Chunky Gal trail leading to

Chunky Gal Mountain, Pickin's Nose (a nearby mountain) or Low Gap and Deep Gap - of which there are several.

Tom, another hiker from New York, pulled in a little after we had arrived. He figured that we must have passed him at Muskrat Creek Shelter while he caught a few Z's. For supper this evening we had mushroom soup and instant pistachio pudding for dessert. Tom donated four packs of instant oatmeal to our food supply because he said he would never eat it - it was regular flavor. The only way I could eat it is to combine it with one of our special flavored packs, so we accepted the extra food. Food is food out here after a while for most hikers, and I am one of them. We spent the remainder of the evening listening to tunes and talking with our new friend Tom.



May 21, 1983 - Saturday

Once again the alarm either did not go off, was muffled, or we were just too tired to wake at its beckoning call. Probably the sound was drowned out by the sound of rain battering the corrugated tin roof of the shelter as we woke up to a downpour. The time was 6:58 and it was time to get moving. We ate breakfast and began to pack up. By the time we were finished eating, the rain had mostly stopped, although it is difficult to tell as the drippings from trees over the shelter continue long after the rain has stopped. The day began with a climb of a couple of miles to the summit of Standing Indian Mountain and then downhill for a few miles. Strange how once you go up hill there is always a downhill. All in all - nice trail. Rhododendron tunnels abound, and the luscious green growth of spring appeared all around. We did cross several water flows, some undoubtedly due to the morning's heavy rain. As we crossed one of the more substantial flows, some hikers traveling in the southbound direction stopped to take pictures of Jim and me as we crossed the stream. Haven't they ever seen anyone cross a stream?

We leaned our packs up against the trail sign at Betty's Creek Gap and had a lunch that consisted of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. This became my usual trail lunch. Only during my days on the trail do I buy "gourmet" bread. I like to find a bread that is advertised as "Italian". Not real Italian Bread, but good non the less. I also like to have red raspberry preserves along with the peanut butter - crunchy of course. Sometimes the meal is topped off with a Snickers bar for dessert. While eating lunch we met some hikers from Florida. Seems as though there are people from all over the country on this trail.

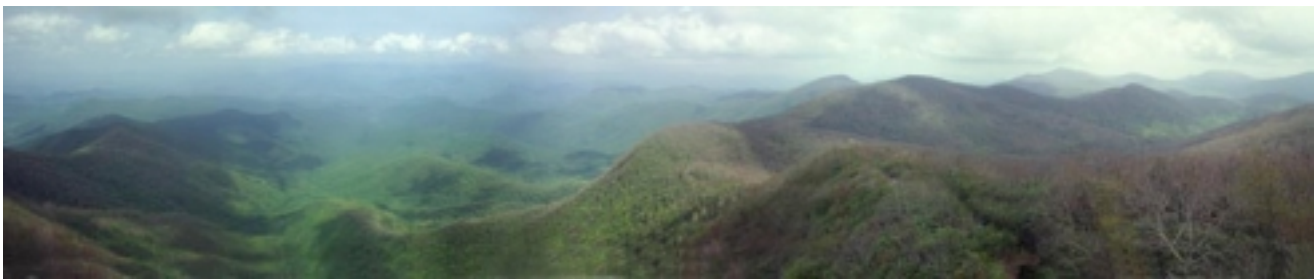
After lunch we had a tough climb up Albert Mountain, especially the last quarter to half a mile. This was practically a rock climb up a steep rock slope before topping out below the Forest service fire tower. The climb to the top of the tower was well worth the effort. The views of the surrounding southern Appalachian Mountains were spectacular on such a fine day as it had turned out to be.



From the summit of Albert Mtn., we descended a short distance to stop in and check out Big Springs Shelter and to get some water at the spring. Someone had left a package of freeze dried maple syrup at the shelter which I immediately snapped up to add to our recently acquired regular flavor instant oatmeal packets. Hey, at least the package was unopened. We pushed on to Rock Spring Shelter for the night. At the end of our first twenty-mile day, and after such a tough climb up Albert Mtn, the shelter was a welcome sight. Today we also heard ruffed grouse drumming and witnessed our first snake along the trail. Whether it was having to endure twenty miles for the entire day or what, the balls of my feet got a little sore by the end of the day.



Albert Mountain Firetower.



Panoramic view from Albert Mountain Firetower.



Rhododendron Tunnel.



it rained on and off all day long, sometimes coming down hard enough to soak a person to the bone in just a few seconds...

May 22, Sunday (2032 miles to go)

Today we set a new record. We were up at 5:51 am! Why, I don't know. Perhaps it was because it is natural to get up at that time on the trail, or perhaps it was because our beds leave a little to be desired. I had learned from my first trip that sleeping on an ensolite pad that measured in with a thickness of less than one half of an inch provided only minimal comfort. On this trip I had upgraded to a custom designed backpacking pad that I had designed out of a high density, two inch thick open cell foam pad covered with waterproof nylon sewn to just fit the foam inside. It provided the ultimate in trail comfort, but being only three quarter length and only padded the area from my head down to my rear end, was not exactly like sleeping at the Hilton. But for the comfort it provided I was thankful. I found that no matter what I used, I still usually woke up many times during the night shifting from one side to the other, as my lower back or either hipbone would become sore. I finally concluded that the biggest problem was that I was too flat. After realizing this, I began using my extra clothes and boots to construct a makeshift "ramp" or slight incline that gave me a little bit more relief. I also carried a contoured pillow that I had made out of the same coated nylon material as the pad that featured a slight depression in the middle to cradle my head and neck. It was stuffed with lightweight Dacron as the padding.

At least this morning it was not raining.....yet. We left Tom while he slept, and headed down the mountain. I knew we had a long day planned for today, but did not realize just how long. In general, it rained on and off all day long, sometimes coming down hard enough to soak a person through to the bone in just a few seconds.

We crossed Us 64 in Wallace gap where many hikers have chosen to hitch into the town of Franklin, North Carolina. I still have not been to Franklin, I have never seen the need to attempt the long hitch to a town so far off the trail. Starve a little, or bring more food, but don't take the time to go that far out of your way I say. If the town is more than a couple of miles off the trail, I usually pass it up.

It was a long climb up Siler Bald, a 5,216 feet tall mountain named for William Siler, whose great-grandson, the Reverend A. Rufus Morgan, helped establish the A.T. in North Carolina. We stopped for lunch around 1:30 pm at Wayah Gap after about ten miles. Seems as though we can only manage to clip off a pace of around two miles per hour or less in these southern Appalachians. On the way up Wine Spring Bald, we encountered a father and son hunting for something on the side of the mountain just off the trail. I figured it was either mushrooms or ramps. I stopped to talk with them and found out that they were in search of ramps, that traditional spring delight that is popular enough to have one town that hosts a Ramp Festival. A ramp is a relative of the garlic plant, and grows wild in the southern mountains. The man showed me what one looks like and I found about three of them that I packed away for consumption with tonight's dinner. By the time we topped out on the summit of Wayah Bald, the time was already 4:30 pm and we still had six miles to go to our day's destination, Cold Springs Shelter. We took a short breather at the observation pavilion on the summit that reminded me of a castle, having been built mainly out of stone. A sense of urgency to get moving came over us. We started truckin' and so did the rain! The trail ran like a stream on the way down the mountain as we trudged through the muck and mire created by so much water. As we crossed a number of streams and descended through ferns and rhododendron to Burningtown Gap, we paused to consult the guide and found that we had another mile to go to the shelter. It seems as though the more you want to get to a destination, the longer it takes to arrive. We thought we should have been there by now, and grudgingly set out for the last mile and three tenths

to the shelter in the rain. It was 7:30 by the time we arrived at Cold Springs Shelter, a rustic log cabin looking shelter that even had a picnic table out front.

First thing on the agenda was making supper, which consisted of Sour Cream and Chives flavored noodles and sauce, helped out by the three ramp bulbs added to the mixture. Supposedly ramps are similar to garlic in that the consumer exudes a garlicky odor from their pores the next day as they sweat. I did not know if the three that we ate between us would be enough for a change in our body odor, which by now must have been quite ripe already since we have not bathed in a week! Dinner was topped off with strawberry pudding.

I saw one of those bright red newts along the trail today. I guess it was damp enough for the amphibian to be out and about. At the shelter there were signs of wildlife also. There was a small hole in the floor just beside my pillow that had evidence of a mouse. I stuffed some trash into the hole to keep the critter from emerging during the night, but that was a mistake. During the night they proceeded to chew on the trash and that annoyed me. I hate that chewing sound! Besides the aches and pains of sleeping on a pine board floor, the sound of mice chewing on anything is one thing that will keep me from sleeping. So I threw out the trash that I had stuffed into the hole and poured some of our valuable white gas for our SVEA 123 stove around the hole hoping the odor would keep them away. It seemed to work and I got a little sleep. 20.1 miles for the day.



Cold Spring Shelter.



May 23, Monday (2012 mtg)

Slept well in spite of the mouse running over my head as I slept with my mummy bag drawn over my head with just my face exposed. Whipped up some good oatmeal this morning with the help of the dried maple syrup that we picked up at Big Spring Shelter. Put on my old boots, packed up and headed toward Wesser and Wesserburgers! (I had been carrying an extra pair of lightweight hiking boots with me just in case I had trouble with my old boots. I had switched over to the lightweight pair after the incident where the balls of my feet began to hurt.)



Jim on his way down to Wesser, North Carolina.

The southern Nantahalas presented the best of its rugged terrain especially after Tellico Gap. After the Gap, the trail was a roller coaster of up and down. The burned up fire tower on Wesser Bald provided nice views of the surrounding Nantahala Mountains. From there it was two miles of steep down, down, down hill toward the Town of Wesser, North Carolina. There were many fine views on the descent to the Nantahala River Valley.

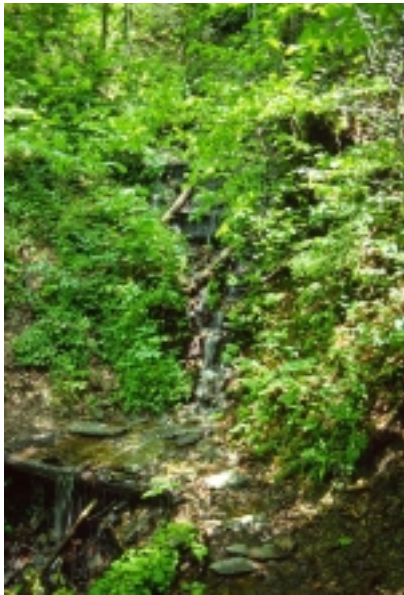
Ruffed grouse serenaded us today, and we saw wildlife such as a toad, a snake, and many different wildflowers.

At the Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC), a center for whitewater kayaking and rafting, we signed into a room with three double beds since there was only one room left in the hostel bunkhouse. One bed

for me, one for Jim, and one for the backpacks - all for just thirty-three dollars. One of the best aspects of the room was the fact that we had our own shower! I hopped in and took a good shower, but still could not get all the smell off. Later, we had dinner of all you can eat salad bar, bread and cheese at the restaurant. I topped that off with two scoops of ice cream for dessert. The restaurant is an interesting place being situated right at the river's edge and providing a view of the kayaking gates that the kayaks race through down the river. It is a rustic kind of place that caters to people of the outdoor variety. Later on back at our room, the power went out so with nothing better to do I went back to the restaurant and had another two scoops of chocolate chip ice cream. What better way to top off the day. Total miles for the day - 11.6



The Southern Nantahalas as we approach Wesser.



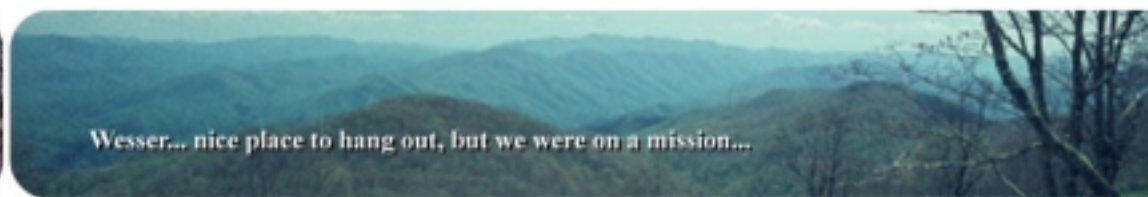
Typical Spring Flow, possible water source.



Nantahala Outdoor Center, near the cabins looking toward the restaurant and supply store.

Nantahala Outdoor Center, NOC, registration center.





May 24, Tuesday (2000 miles to go)

Got up, took another shower, and went to the restaurant for 2 eggs, 2 pancakes, and 2 sausage patties. Probably could have eaten twice that much, it tasted so good. Packed up and left Wesser. Nice place to hang out, but we were on a mission. A mission that did not allow for any slackers. Today we were headed for somewhere along the trail near Stekoa Gap. The first shelter out of Wesser was Sassafras Gap Shelter, only 6.8 miles out. Not hardly enough miles for the day. The next shelter after Sassafras Gap was Cable Gap shelter. This shelter was 21.5 miles out of Wesser. Considering we had just dropped down, down, down, out of the Nantahalas to the river below, it was now time to climb up, up, up to the mountains ahead. Cable Gap Shelter was too far out for today.

Sassafras Gap shelter would have been a good place to stay considering the effort needed to do all that uphill climbing, but we elected to move on to Cheoah Bald for lunch in order to take in the view while we ate and rested. The view was terrific. The weather today had turned out to be wonderful, mostly clear and pleasant. After lounging in the warm sun for a while we pushed on toward Stekoa Gap, or somewhere in the vicinity for camp tonight. Knowing that the climb up out of Stekoa Gap was also a good climb, and the guide mentioned nothing about water on the ridge, we picked up some water for the night while in Stekoa Gap found in a ravine to the left down an old fire road. We headed on up the ridge not knowing where we would camp, or how much farther we could travel before pooping out. We ascended the ridge for about three quarters of a mile, and then descended a half mile into Sweetwater Gap. On the climb again Jim began to get tired and we found a spot along the crest where we pitched our tents right in the middle of the trail. The footpath was the only "level" spot along the narrow ridge. We prepared our supper of Mac & Cheese and Raspberry yogurt pudding, cookies and koolaid. Could not exactly see the sunset, but it was beautiful, especially after setting - orange sky and purple mountains. Now I



Gonzo! takes in the view somewhere near Cheoah Bald.



know where the song gets the lyrics "purple mountains majesty." Temperature in the fifties at sunset with a clear sky, hopefully it will stay that way. Started seeing Yellow Trilliums today. On to Fontana Dam tomorrow.

View from Cheoah Bald.



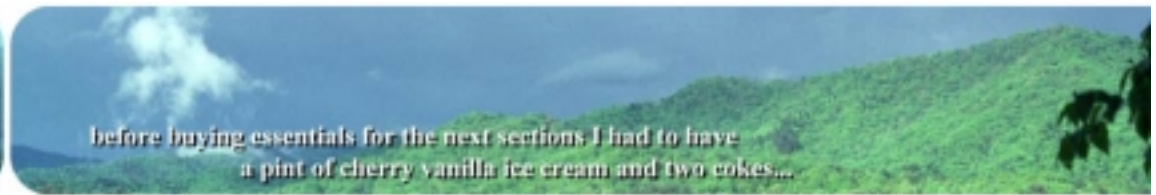
We could not believe that we had traveled over the mountains that we could see from Cheoah Bald.



Meadow somewhere along Stekoah Ridge.



From the Stekoah Ridge, we could see a distant town that we believed was the town of Stekoah.



May 25, Wednesday (1986 miles to go)

Beautiful this morning, no rain last night. We stopped almost immediately after beginning our hike today to take pictures of the accumulation of clouds that had all sunk into the valleys around the Snowbird Mountains during the night and had yet to burn off. Today would be another fairly short day of about 14 miles to our next resupply point at Fontana Village before entering the Smoky Mountains. The trail seemed to be a little long right before Yellow Creek Road, and then again before Highway 28 before heading into Fontana Village.



Early morning view from Sweetwater Cliffs.

The Village is not directly on the trail. It is located two miles down the road. We began hiking along the road and had gone at least half way before we secured a ride from a guy and his two beagles in a green pickup. He dropped us off at the entrance to the village, but wouldn't you know there were two entrances, and we got off at the wrong one. It took a little bit to find the Post Office and store as a result. I received a lot of goodies from my mother and a letter from my friend Dave Szabo. Good to know that someone is thinking about you. Sent off the two rolls of film that I had shot, and then went next door to the small store to resupply for the next leg of our journey. Of course before buying essentials for the next section, I had to have a pint of Cherry Vanilla ice cream and two cokes.



Fontana Lake and Dam from along Yellow Creek Mountain Ridge.

To help prepare for the next section I consulted the data book to determine how many days worth of food I would need to reach the next resupply point in Hot Springs, North Carolina. The data book has all the major points along the trail listed with the distance traveled accumulating from one point to the next. It is helpful for getting a general idea of where you are, how much farther you have to travel, where the shelters and campsites are, where the groceries are and how far off the trail you must travel to get them. I figure how many breakfasts, lunches and dinners are needed and then subtract

any food that I already have left over from the previous section, or from either packages sent to me.



Fontana Dam

Usually there is no left over food since hikers tend to eat any extra the last day or so before getting to town.

After buying your supplies, the ritual of paring down the extra unnecessary weight of packaging begins. Peanut butter is taken out of the glass jar and put into a plastic container; all the oatmeal packets are taken out of the box and put into the food bag. All items packaged in cardboard are taken out and the cardboard is discarded.

Sometimes the cardboard is used to make a hitching sign to get you back to the trail. I made a sign that read "DAM" and stood out by the entrance to the village beside the road leading back to the trail near the Fontana Dam Shelter. We were automatically picked up by a gift store employee and driven the two miles back to the shelter.

The Fontana Dam Shelter also known as the "Fontana Hilton," is located about a quarter mile from the Dam that serves as the Tennessee Valley Authority's pride and joy and produces electricity for a large area. At the dam there is a visitors center, public restrooms, and phone. The best part is that the restrooms have free heated showers! Jim and I walked down the road to the complex and alternated using the phone and taking a good lonnnnnng shower. I called home and had a Mountain Dew from the pop machine nearby. On our trip back to the shelter, we noticed that "Ford", the automobile company, was filming some footage for a commercial for the '84 LTD on the road between the shelter and the visitor complex. They kept driving back and forth in an attempt to get it "just right." Ate Sweet Sue chicken and dumplings from a

can for supper, and brownies for dessert. The meals immediately after resupply are always the best as they can be just about anything rather than dehydrated or "just add water" type meals. Even though this meal came from a can it was delicious. With numerous trash cans nearby, the refuse can also be discarded rather than being carried around for days.



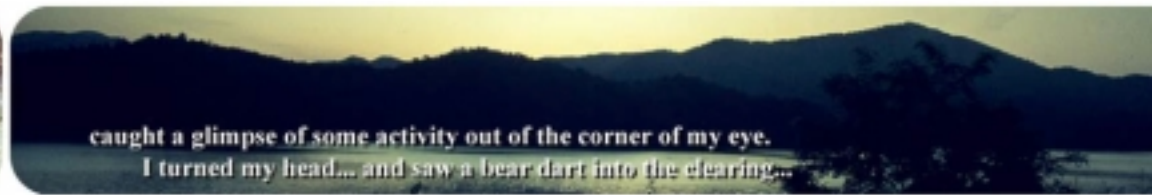
Yellow Creek Gap.



Fontana Post Office & General Store.



Fontana "Hilton" Shelter.



May 26, Thursday

Why I do this I do not know, but we were up at 5:50 am this morning just so we could go to the dam, or somewhere in order to view the sunrise.

Sure enough it came up, but by the time it came up over the mountains it was too high in the sky, yet the yellowish glow that it produced over the mountains and reflecting in Fontana Lake was a beautiful sight.

Returning for breakfast, I had a nice hardy meal of 20 ounces of pineapple rings straight from the can! One has to do what they can out here to prevent becoming a pirate and developing scurvy.



Sunrise over Fontana Lake.

After breakfast we went back to the dam to meet the ranger who gives out the permits for travel in the park. He did not arrive until 9 am. Hiking through the Smoky Mountains

National Park requires a permit. For thru-hikers this is especially needed for reserving a space in the shelters. Even though these shelters are somewhat larger than the average shelter, they have a limited number of bunks, usually eight or ten, that are a little different than the usual. The bunk space is made in two levels. The ground level is just a foot or so off the dirt floor. There is a log frame structure that divides the bunks, and the area where the hiker sleeps is made of a 1.5 x 3 inch opening wire mesh stretched between the logs of the frame. After years of use the wire breaks in places and a new mesh is applied over the old. Watch out for the ends of the wires! Occasionally they catch on your clothes or sleeping gear and can ruin a sleeping bag in a matter of seconds. The most dangerous areas are right at the front edge of the upper platform which is about four feet above the ground and requires a leap up to get into bed. Along that edge is where many shorts and shirts are torn during the attempt to reach a restful state. There are several other qualities about the shelters in the smokies that make them different

than other shelters. These shelters are made out of rock, and usually have their own fireplaces built into one wall. These are a welcome source of warmth during the cool, usually rainy early spring months. This area is technically considered a temperate rainforest considering all the rainfall that is received. Park shelters also sport a wire hurricane fence across the front with a wire gate for access. The shelters are equipped with these attributes due to the fact that there is a population of wild black bears in the park, many of which have discovered that there is a source of food inside.



Visitor Center and location of free hot showers..



Bluets

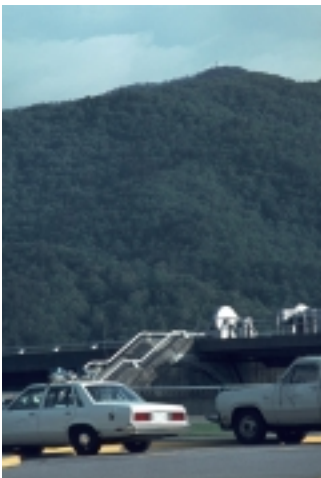
I believe that thru-hikers are allowed six days and five nights to get from one end of the park to the other. That includes over 100 miles of hiking. We secured our permit from the ranger at the dam and began our long climb up to the ridge of the Smoky Mountains. We began slowly at first, getting used to the weight of our full packs, but were soon cruising at full speed up toward the firetower on Shuckstack Mountain. We met some "weekenders" from Rock Park, Illinois on their way down from the mountain during our ascent. They were heading for the big round dance festival at the Fontana Village this coming weekend. Sprinkles began to fall from the sky as we rounded the bend and began topping out at the junction to the firetower so we decided to push on rather than check out the view - if there even was one. On our first day into the park we wanted to make as many miles as possible. The first five and a half flew by, but then the miles ticked off much more slowly.

Being one of the nations more popular parks, we saw many other hikers today, all going the opposite direction. I saw two ruffed grouse today. One flushed in a flurry right beside us, the other dared stay around a little bit before darting away. Farther on down the trail we came across two men standing still in the middle of the trail holding a carrot out in an attempt to coax a young deer with antlers in velvet to eat out of their hands. No wonder the animals are so unafraid around here. There is always someone feeding them. They had succeeded in getting the deer to within four feet of them when we came by and spoiled their fun. We kept on going after a short stop to view the deer. We opted for the second of the shelters in the park at Spence Field. A total of 14.4 miles for the day. A good distance in this terrain with a full supply of groceries in our packs. We surveyed the bunks available, selected the ones deemed most comfortable and with fewest indications of having a leak in the roof above, and claimed our space by spreading out our pad and sleeping bags. The temperature was 55 degrees at six o'clock in the evening.

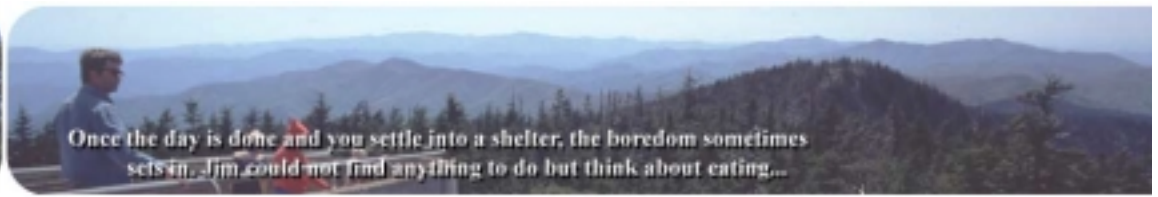


Spence Field Shelter.

After finishing our evening meal, I went outside to do the dishes when the fun began. Due to the rainforest climate, it is typical to have a drying line outside the shelter with wet articles of clothing placed in a vain attempt to dry, or at least remove some moisture before getting wet the next day. While I swirled the cup of water around in my pan and used my finger to dislodge the solid bits of my meal from the side of my aluminum quart pot, I caught a glimpse of some activity nearby out of the corner of my eye. I turned my head toward the activity and saw a mama bear dart into the clearing, grab something blue, and begin to run off with someone's poncho. I soon notice two bear cubs nearby. I calmly walked back to the shelter and said "there is a bear out there stealing someone's poncho." Soon the apparent owner was running after the bear, which dropped the poncho and ran into the woods. Apparently the smell of someone cooking with canned shrimp had drawn the bear in. Soon the bear came back for an assault from the side of the shelter. We made a bunch of noise and the bear ran down toward the spring where I knew someone had gone to get water earlier. Oblivious to this fact, the person later said they had not seen any bears. After that excitement, the numerous deer we saw in the meadow that evening were somehow not as exciting.

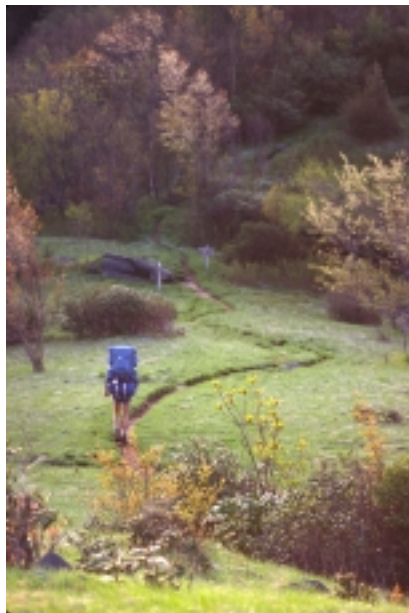


Shuckstack Mountain.



May 27, Friday

This morning we were up at 5:50 again in search of a spectacular sunrise. I thought it would be great to watch the sunrise from the Balds near Rocky Top a few miles farther up the trail. Ate a Kit Kat candy bar for breakfast this morning so I would not have to wake all the rest with my supersonic jet engine Svea 123 stove used to boil water and cook most of our meals. This stove is very reliable, somewhat heavy, being made out of solid brass, and makes a loud blast furnace sound when burning at full throttle. It is really nothing more than a pressurized Bunsen burner. At that time of the morning it would have very rudely awakened every hiker in the park and put more fear in their minds than the bear from the previous night.



Jim in Sag Before Rockytop.

The sun was mostly up when we topped out on the mountain nearest the shelter; however, the views from around the Rocky Top and Thunderhead area that morning were numerous and spectacular in the morning light. There were no clouds in the sky, what clouds there were filled the valleys below giving us that "on top of the world" feel as we traversed the ridge high above the rest of the world. It was a bit chilly at 40 degrees this morning at six o'clock, but later warmed up. Spotted another deer in velvet along the trail.

After twelve miles of hiking, we stopped at Siler's Bald shelter for lunch, then moved on toward Clingman's Dome. The weather held, and we had many fine views on the trail as we marched toward the highest point on the Appalachian Trail on Clingman's Dome. Clingman's Dome is almost the highest point in the Smokies, but at 6630 feet above sea level, is beat out by Mt. Mitchell, supposedly a few feet taller. There is a futuristic observation tower on the top of Clingman's Dome that has a spiraling concrete walkway that takes you to the top for a true 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains.

There are plaques facing each of the cardinal points and those in between with pictures of the mountains with each mountain peak labeled for your convenience. The view was grand, but in some ways not as impressive as others. There were good views from the top, but I felt somewhat of a letdown. Other views we have had were better, this was just a 360 degree panorama. Sure you might be able to see farther, but the mountains don't look as cool as other places. I think it has to do with the fact that the mountains appear smaller from so high up.

We pushed on past the summit to Mount Collins Shelter for the night. This shelter is between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ miles off the Appalachian Trail, but the location is remote, with a feeling of wilderness and the smell of Christmas from the numerous Balsam Fir trees that grow in the area.



Early morning view from Rockytop.

We met a thru-hiker at the shelter named Wade, who had begun hiking again at Clingman's Dome after an off-trail stay somewhere. There is public access by car to Clingman's Dome for those not willing to hike the thousands of feet up to see the view. There were many little red squirrels around the shelter darting here and there looking for food and a chance to steal yours. Once the day is done and you settle into a shelter, the boredom sometimes sets in. Jim could not find anything to do but think about eating. I suggested he build a fire since it was cold and he did not want to go to bed yet. If thru-hikers would hike during the time that they get bored sitting around doing nothing, their adventure would surely take a lot less time. The day usually seems to be rush to the shelter and then sit and be bored. A strange life. The draw of a shelter can be a powerful addiction.



View from Rockytop.



Clingman's Dome



Clingman's Dome Tower.



View from Clingman's Dome Tower.



Squirrel at Mt. Collins Shelter.



May 28, Saturday

A beautiful orange and purple sunrise developed this morning through the evergreens surrounding the shelter. Up at 5:50 am once again. Trucked on down to Newfound Gap, the only place in the park where a road cuts through the park from one side to the other. It is here that the access for public vehicles to Clingman's Dome begins. We took in the view and soon found ourselves face to face with a park service ranger who asked how we were doing, and other chit chat before getting to his actual duty of the day - inquiring to see our permit. I knew all along that that was the only reason he was talking with us, he just wanted to be Joe Cool and ease his way into asking without us noticing his change to law enforcement ranger.



Early morning sunrise from Mount Collins Shelter.

From the Newfound Gap parking area which came complete with toilet facilities and trash cans, both of which we utilized, the trail was well graded, smooth, and wide for about a mile or so. I guess that is the distance most tourists will walk out from the parking lot into the "wilds" before turning back to the comfort of their vehicles, or continuing to the next stop on their trip. For some reason this section also has a lack of trail blazing to keep you on the right track. It seemed as though one popped up every half mile or so. Are they trying to get those same travelers lost? The trail then became rocky with small 8 - 10 inch slabs covering the footpath.

Ate lunch somewhere before Peck's Knob, a place perhaps called Bradley's View. Took pictures of a four petalled trillium, a rare find - genetic mutation - considering the name trillium is based on the prefix "tri" meaning three. It seemed to take a long time to cover the distance from Peck's Knob to Tricorners.

Arrived a little before 5 pm with 19.6 miles for the day, but hey, it is all down hill from the highest point

on the AT right? Had chicken noodle soup with extra noodles and rice added otherwise it would have been all broth. There were several other men at the shelter with us, and we all sat around and listened as one of them told of his adventures with a bear in the park. We all laughed at his description and gestures describing how the bear ran after someone. Cool again at this altitude.



View from Newfound Gap to the Northeast.



Four Petalled Trillium.



Bradley's View.



May 29, Sunday (1919.4 mtg)

Up at 5:50 am. Cool and overcast. Started hiking and then it started sprinkling. Soon it was raining. After about four hours the rain subsided. We took a break at Cosby Knob Shelter. There was a female ranger there who inquired about whether we had seen any bears, or how we thought the trash along the trail situation was. We also met several other hikers and learned of their plans to stay at Davenport Gap shelter tonight - A destination that seemed too popular as far as I was concerned since that was our chosen shelter for the evening. It would be a race to get there to secure a spot. Regardless of the race, we took the side trail to Mt. Cammerer Firetower as it looked as though the clouds might be clearing enough to get a view, but upon arrival our hopes were crushed as the clouds continued to hug the slopes. The firetower itself was pretty cool; however, it was similar to a castle turret - round with a pointed roof. It was eerie walking along the ridge to and from the firetower with the clouds wisping over the near knife edge ridge where the trail lead. From the side trail to Davenport Gap shelter was about five miles of just down, down, down off of the ridge of the Smoky Mountains. The back of my left foot began to hurt a little, actually just a little discomfort. We arrived at the shelter a little after one p.m. and had a cheese omelette and chocolate pudding as a snack. I can't say for sure, but considering the time of day, we may have made the trip down a nearby road to a known grocery store for a little resupply and telephone usage; however, it was Sunday and maybe we figured it was closed. Then again, maybe that is where the eggs for the omelette came from. The rain returned at 4:30 pm, but we were already at

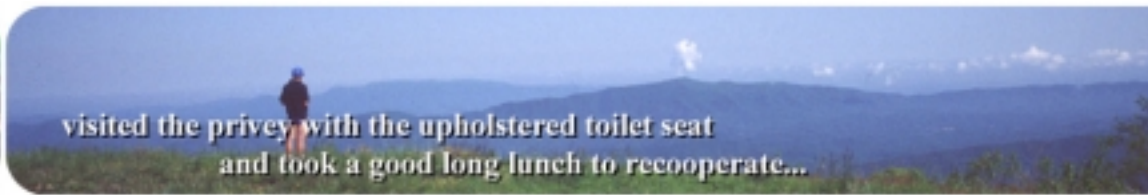


Jim on sidetrail to Cammerer firetower.



Sidetrail to Cammerer firetower.

the shelter. There were six others that joined us at Davenport Gap that night. We gathered firewood to pass the time, and left some for the next inhabitants. Fifteen miles or so for today - 22 big ones planned for tomorrow to put us 12 miles out of Hot Springs, NC. Began a list of things to get in Hot Springs.



May 30, Monday (1904.7 mtg)

Tried to be quiet this morning, but what the heck - let the jet engine roar! It is time for some hot breakfast after our usual 5:50 am wake up call. Packed up and headed out for more downhill toward the Big Pigeon River. Followed a nice cascading stream down to the river, I remembered the stream to be somewhat prettier the first time I journeyed over this section of trail and was a little disappointed at the lack of awe it provided me this time around. Had the trail route changed?

We passed under Interstate 40 at a point where there were on and off ramps and a road under the interstate, and began our climb out of the valley to the summit of Snowbird Mountain. Nearing the top of the



View from the summit of Snowbird Mountain.

mountain, I remembered that there was an observation tower, and some FAA equipment on the summit as they came into view. We took some photos from this vantage point and then moved on toward Groundhog Creek Shelter for lunch. Saw a lone Grouse with chicks before

arriving at the shelter at 11 am after about 12 miles. This left only 10 miles remaining for the afternoon hike. I visited the privy with the upholstered toilet seat and took a long lunch to recuperate from the long morning hike.

After lunch we began climbing again, but were treated to the sight of a snake, and many wildflowers, including a rarely seen Showy Orchid. We stopped for some pictures along the roadwalk that skirted Max Patch Mountain, and then had to stop once again on the same roadwalk a few yards farther along as my pack suddenly lunged to one side after the shoulder strap came undone at its attachment point near the bottom of the pack. One of the rings holding the clevis pin in place had somehow worked itself off sometime earlier, and finally the pin holding it all together came out allowing



Jim on Snowbird Mountain summit.



Max Patch Roadwalk.

everything to give way. Worried for a while, I surveyed the damage and found the problem, located the pin in the gravel along the road, and put it back together with the help of a small piece of wire taken from the small spiral bound pocket notepad I was carrying that I haphazardly recorded the pictures I had taken. I uncoiled the wire a little, then bent it back and forth many times until it broke. I then secured the pin with the wire by fastening it into a circular shape similar to the original. Then we were off again. Of all the things one learns along the trail, the ability to make due with what is provided is one of the greatest chal-

lenges, and sources of satisfaction through accomplishment that one can get along the way.

We arrived at our destination at about 4:30 pm. Walnut Mountain shelter was full! Not only that - it was full of emotionally disturbed children with their counselors! Now I know why I usually try to get to shelters early. Chief Dave and Chief Joel were in charge, and they offered us some of their supper. This made the experience a bit better, as we used the additional food along with our own to refuel after such a long hard day. The back of my left foot was sore again. The majority of the day was nice and sunny. We stoked up the fire with the wood gathering ability of the children, and enjoyed the occasionally windy, and mostly cool evening.



Jim prepares to take a photo of Max Patch Mountain.



May 31, Tuesday (1883.4 mtg)

Up at our usual time to begin our trek to Hot Springs for resupply and part of a day in town. We said goodbye to the kids and their counselors and headed off. The wildlife encountered on this stretch of trail became the highlights for this morning. We saw a skunk pass across the trail a little ways ahead of us on the trail, and later encountered a wounded groundhog that would not let us pass. It would not get out of the way for anything! We poked and prodded it with a long stick, but it just bit the stick in anger. Finally we decided to climb around the beast on the side of the hill above the trail.

We made good time this morning and dropped into Hot Springs at about 11 am. As the Catholic Hostel is basically the first thing we encountered upon entering town, we checked it out first. For six dollars you could have a shower and a spot in the bunkroom along with kitchen privileges. It is a nice place, but I had stayed there before, and there was a new place in town that opened up it's doors to hikers. An old house converted by a former hiker was now just down the street and offered a private room and shower for eight dollars. An additional five dollars got you a wonderful vegetarian dinner. We chose the inn for thirteen dollars. We picked up our mail at the post office, went back to the hostel to leave a note for the Chiefs who would be coming in later that evening. A sight to behold was provided at the local laundry facility as we shed virtually everything that we had and took the opportunity to freshen up our shorts, shirt and socks. Near the laundry I gouged myself on some real protein on a genuine "trail burger" for only \$1.95 along with a side of fries. Of course that was appetizing, but not nearly enough, so we bought a half gallon of butter pecan ice cream and other groceries for the next leg of our journey, and headed back to our room at the inn for dessert. Jim and I each consumed one quart of the ice cream as we lounged on the porch while rocking and relaxing in the rocking chairs that provided an old time atmosphere.



The Catholic Hostel in Hot Springs, North Carolina.

Supper was excellent! It all started with creamed asparagus soup, then salad, brown rice, mixed vegetables, and peppermint tea. That was topped off with homemade Gingerbread cake. I was stuffed! We sat around the table after supper and yapped with Beth and Dave (other thru-hikers), a guy from England,

Hot Springs, North Carolina.



Tom and Mary, and the Owners Elmer and Gary. Later I ate a can of mixed fruit, and headed off to bed. This was my second time in Hot Springs and I still could not get up the nerve to visit the condemned Hot Springs Spa on the outskirts of town. Illegal entry during the night into the rundown buildings was the only way to sample the hot springs. I guess I did not want to stay up late enough to give it a go. This resort town of the past was supposedly used to house German prisoners of war during World War II. I heard they did not want to leave after they were released.



...taken on a musty, grungy odor and appearance that did not deter Jim from wanting to use it's added padding to comfort his body...

June 1, Wednesday

Up at 6:01 and headed straight for the bathroom. Too much to eat the night before... Then it was half a box of Fruit Loops cereal with milk, and four raspberry rolls we picked up at the store yesterday. The beds provided a restful nights sleep - a change from the early morning pain of sleeping too long on one part of your back and shifting to another every now and then. Bought two canned sodas before leaving Hot Springs and packed them for the rest of the day instead of water in my water bottle.



Hot Springs laundromat.

In Hurricane Gap, a short distance out of Hot Springs, we came across a white cross on the side of the trail with an inscription stating " Rex Pulford, April 12, 1983" on it. Apparently Rex had died here. Later on at Little Laurel Shelter we found out that he was a 72 year old thru-hiker who had died of a cerebral hemorrhage while attempting to hike the Appalachian Trail. He was known as "the Tortoise" while on the trail.

We stopped for lunch at Spring Mountain Shelter, and later for ice cream at Allen's Gap, where a small gas station with minimal supplies could be found next to the trail. Jim and I each had a pint of ice cream and then bought a can of beef stew for tonight's meal. Along with the soda carried out of Hot Springs, the stew would provided another enjoyable meal. We reached Little Laurel Shelter before 4 pm, and discovered that this shelter came with an old used mattress. Even if the shelter roof did not leak, the mattress seemed to have taken on a musty, grungy odor and appearance that did not deter Jim from wanting to use it's added padding to comfort his body for the night.

It rained on and off this morning, but was sunny after lunch. This happens quite often. Cool and breezy this evening.



French Broad River looking toward Lover's Leap.



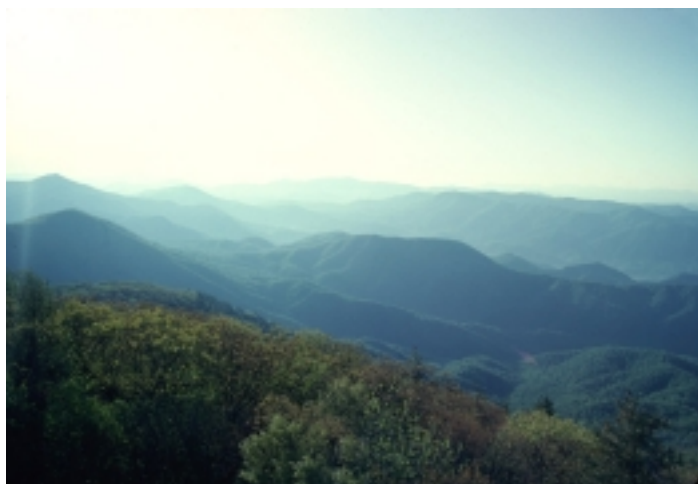
Hot Springs from Lover's Leap.



on the way up Big Butt... so heavily eroded... I began to wonder whether we were travelling up the "crack"...

June 2, 1983 Thursday (1851.4 mtg)

Highlights along the trail today included the view from the firetower on Camp Creek Bald, and the climb up a mountain named "Big Butt." On the way up Big Butt the trail follows an old Jeep road that could be tough even for an experienced off road driver. This section of trail was so heavily eroded that the gulleys



View from Camp Creek Bald.

carved out of the roadway could have practically swallowed a jeep. I began to wonder whether we were actually traveling up the "Crack" of the Big Butt. Soon after our journey through the "Crack," we passed through an area known as the "Ball Ground." Don't ask, I have no idea. Around lunch time, just after the Ball Ground, we encountered a set of gravestones along the trail. I prefer to stop at easily identifiable locations, or places with a view as spots for breaks and lunches. From these gravestones, which were erected in 1915 to mark the graves of two brothers who were killed during the civil war, we could pinpoint the distance that we need to travel to our next stop. We had roughly

ten more miles to reach camp. We set out today with an expectation of putting in 19.5 miles or so, but after arriving at an area known as "Big Flat," the spot where a campsite and water was supposed to be - but was not, we moved on to Sam's Gap, an additional 4.4 miles.

At the gap, we were expecting to find an abandoned building we could use as a shelter and a grocery store two tenths of a mile down the road from the road crossing. The building was there, but the draw of possible food and beverages pulled us like a magnet as we followed the road down the mountain and found the store to be something more like two miles down the road! After what seemed forever, we found an Exxon gas station with a Soda machine and some groceries. I bought a can of pineapples, two Snickers bars, and one half gallon of Neopolitan ice cream. We hung around the gas station and split the ice cream between us while we contemplated the long uphill roadwalk back to the trail in Sam's Gap. This was some of that extra mileage that neither one of us wanted to tack on to our total. After all, when everything is done, off-trail mileage is not really included in the tally from Georgia to Maine. It is purely extra and counts for nothing. But it did give me a chance to have a quart of ice cream.

I bought two sodas for the road and persuaded a local man who had a bad case of emphysema to give us a ride back to the trail in his car. I guess he could relate to the amount of huffing and puffing that we would have had to endure to hike our way back to the Gap.



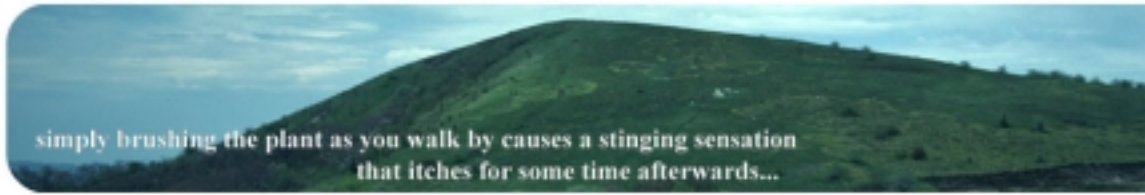
View from Camp Creek Bald.

At the Gap there was an old building that the "Philosophers Guide" had stated was a possible shelter. "No Trespassing" and "Keep Out" signs decorated the run down building. From the road the building appeared to be inaccessible with each of the windows boarded up. We circled the building, disregarded the warning signs, and searched for an access. We found one spot which allowed entry and quickly ducked inside. Shortly afterwards, a man came and unlocked the building's door and came inside. We froze in the shadows while he did his duty and then left locking the door behind him. Later a younger guy came by and discovered us. We asked him if it was all right for us to spend the night in the building. He did not know, and suggested that we ask the old guy if it was OK. Upon asking, the old man suggested that we stay in an abandoned house just down the road. He said there was a nice spring there as well. We grabbed our gear and set out down the road in the opposite direction from the way we had gone to the gas station. Was this perhaps the abandoned building the guide was referring to? Within a few hundred yards around a bend in the road was a great spring and a long abandoned house with rubble, fallen tree limbs and miscellaneous garbage scattered over the floor. All the windows were broken out and sky could be seen through parts of the roof. It appeared that that the place had been like this for quite a while. We assessed the situation, were not really happy with the condition, but cleaned a spot large enough to sleep on and prayed that there would be no rain during the night. Later on we were joined by another group of five hikers known as the "C Company." The extra company gave us someone to talk to, and provided a diversion from the cars that went by on the road that was situated much too close to the front of our "home." For supper Jim and I had Spaghetti and Meatballs that we had purchased from the store down the other side of the mountain.

Today, at least the later part of the day, I developed a tightness in the tendon and muscle of my lower right calf muscle. I attributed this to the rush to get to Sam's Gap along with the fact that there was a particularly bad section of ups and downs between Devils Gap and Sam's Gap. Sections of the trail today near Big Butt and the Ball Ground bordered what was marked as a bear sanctuary; however, no bears were spotted.



Trailside Civil War Grave.



June 3, 1983 Friday (1812.2 mtg)

All that long mileage yesterday must have tired us out somewhat enough to cause us to sleep in a bit. We got up this morning at 6:30 am. I ate the 20 ounce can of pineapples bought at the Exxon station for

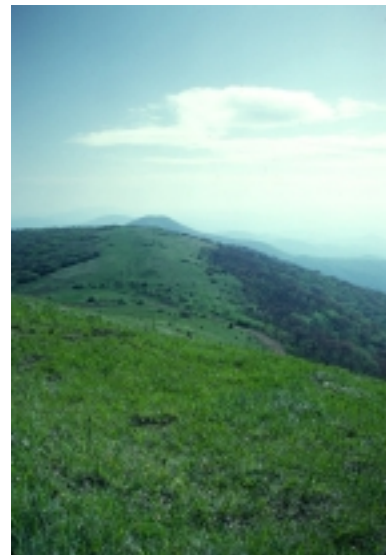


View from Big Bald to the South..

breakfast and continued on up the trail with sore leg and all. The pain was not all that bad going uphill, but sore on the way down. The climb up Big Bald was kind of tough, but the rewards of the view from the top made the effort worthwhile. Luckily we did not have to take the side trail that bypasses the summit. This trail is available for use during extremely foggy and rainy weather, as the trail guide recommends its use during this type of weather because extensive open areas such as over the bald cannot be fully marked. The broad, totally treeless, grassy, open summit afforded panoramic, 360 degrees of fantastic view. We propped our packs upon the summit marker and began taking photos.

From our vantage point we could see the magnificent country, including Little Bald, that we would be traveling over as soon as we finished our break on Big Bald. We had only gone about six miles by the time we arrived on Big Bald, so lunch would have to wait for a few more miles. We chose not to see what lies at the end of the side trail to High Rocks, probably deciding this after reading in the guide about it "leading right steeply."

After descending into Spivey Gap and the roadcrossing at US 19, we temporarily lost the trail. After an exhausting search of probably less than a couple of minutes, we decided to see if the occupants in a travel trailer nearby had any idea where the trail was. We woke up a young man who was taking a siesta inside. He did not have a clue where the trail was any more than we did so we continued our search. Soon we were back on the trail and slopping our way up the ravine that the trail shared with a stream called Oglesby Branch named after the first Tennessee Eastman Hiking Club member to have fallen into it. This hiking club is one of the many that are caretakers of the trail. Each club maintains a portion of the trail including clearing blowdowns, building new sections, and keeping the trail open. Some clubs work harder than others. The Tennessee Eastman Hiking Club has the tough job of controlling the dreaded stinging nettle populations along the trail. This is quite a job in North Carolina and Tennessee where there is a large population of these plants. Stinging nettles are a menace to the hiker in shorts. Simply brushing the plants as you walk by causes a stinging sensation that itches for some time afterwards. In the past the club has gained the reputation of not clearing these plants from the trail and became known as the Tennessee Eastman S & M hiking club as a result. Luckily, in this area the conditions are just right for the growth of another plant known as Jewel Weed that can be crushed and rubbed on



View from Big Bald to Little Bald..

the stinging area of your body and somewhat counteracts the itching caused by the nettles.

We arrived at No Business Knob Shelter about four miles later and had to walk back 400 yards to the spring beside the trail. Had we known the shelter was just around the bend, we would have filled up before getting to the lean-to. I decided to take a few minutes to soak my leg in the cool water of the spring before returning to begin the ritual of making supper. We traveled 17 miles today, a long way since we traveled so far the day before. Saw a deer near the shelter.



Jim on Big Bald..



Looking back at Big Bald.



June 4, 1983 Saturday (1812.2mtg)



Woke up in the middle of the night and scrambled to put my pack cover over my pack after heavy thunder and lightening rudely interrupted my slumber. I decided to cover my pack to keep any rain from soaking the pack hanging from one of the main beams like a decoration of some sort. With the large populations of mice that inhabit the shelters, most hikers hang their food bags from the beams with some sort of string to deter the mice from getting into their valuable cargo. The methods of determent are as numerous as the stars, but none are as effective as the one that I employ.

Probably the most common method is stringing a cord over a beam and suspending the sack from it. Unfortunately there are mice that could outperform any circus high wire act, and the mice have learned to follow the cord down to the food sack.

Other mice like the commacazi method.

With this method, the mice follow the cord down to the side of the beam and then drop onto the bag for lunch. I carry a small screw-in cup hook that I screw into the underside of a main beam and suspend my entire pack from the hook by a thin nylon cord. With this method, the mice have no way of telling that there is anything hanging from the beam to follow or drop down upon.

I also hang the pack as low as I can without leaving it accessible to larger rodents from the ground level. Works like a charm. Just as a precaution, I always leave all the zippers open in my pack



View from Beauty Spot.

so any mouse lucky enough to find my pack won't have to chew through the fabric to get at the food. They only eat a little bit anyway. It is the sound of the chewing that really gets to me. That gnawing sound will keep me from sleeping just as if I had drank loads of a caffeinated beverage. I think what really bothers me about it is wondering if they are destroying my pack ... are they inside mine, or are they in someone else's? Occasionally, before I learned about the screw hook method, I would get up in the dark, listen close to my pack to determine where the noise was coming from, and then prepare for the attack. As I quickly turned the flashlight on, the mouse scurried out of the pack into my waiting hand poised there to grab it, squeeze it, and throw it to the ground before it knew what had happened and had a chance to bite me. If that didn't kill it, it sure would give 'em a good warning not to mess with the backpacker with no name.



Bridge over the Nolichucky River near Erwin, Tennessee.

The sky did open up last night and the rain came in torrents. Perhaps that is why we did not wake until 6:30 having missed the alarm once again. The beep, beep, beep of my wrist watch alarm was not very loud even when uncovered, so if my wrist were inside my sleeping bag I think it usually muffled it to undetectable levels, especially during a rainstorm playing a tune on the corrugated tin roof covering most of the shelters. One way to make up for lost time was to eat a cold breakfast. Not having to start up the stove can shave lots of time off your morning ritual.



Erwin, Tennessee.

In this case we ate our instant oatmeal with cold water. It really gives the gruel a different flavor - in some ways better than when it is hot. So we were packed up and on the trail by 7:05 am.

The morning hike started off with a few nice sprinkles, but soon ended. The beginning of the day featured a descent into the Nolichucky River valley near Erwin, Tennessee. There were some good views of Erwin and the river on the way down, but the dampness of the foliage and the occasional drizzle made it too wet and too much of a hassle to get the camera out.

The trail crosses the river via a highway bridge and turns right along a gravel road that leads to Nolichucky Expeditions, a whitewater rafting and canoeing outfitter on the banks of the Nolichucky River. From the bridge, it is about 2.3 miles of walk or hitch into the town of Erwin, Tennessee. Erwin is the resupply point before the next trail town 114 miles down the trail in Damascus, Virginia. I called home from the Nolichucky Expeditions payphone. I noticed there was a new building at the business since the last time I was there two years earlier.

Erwin has the unique distinction of being the only place in the world that has ever hung an elephant. Many years ago when there was a traveling circus passing through and while stopping for a performance, something startled the large elephant and caused it to trample a young boy. As a result the town lynched the pachyderm with a good stout rope, and considered this justice. Fearing for our lives, we moved on to Curly Maple Shelter, about three miles up the trail. Part of the trail out of the river valley follows a smaller creek or stream bed called Jones Branch, which due to the night's heavy precipitation, was somewhat swollen from runoff. The trail crossed back and forth over the stream several times on the climb out of the valley. In the process we managed to get our boots totally soaked. About seven miles beyond the shelter we traversed the open grassy summit of Beauty Spot. It is a natural bald, but the clouds hung low in the sky. Although the sky was filled with ominous reminders of rain, the mountains were not covered and provided very nice views.

After dipping down into one of the many "Low Gaps" along the trail, we ascended Unaka Mountain. Unaka Mountain has a wooded summit as opposed to the natural bald that exists on Beauty Spot. The ascent was slow and we took a breather in the coniferous forest that existed at the top. We descended through mud and muck, ascended and descended, and ascended and finally descended into the shelter at Cherry Gap. Three other hikers were there already: the Mad Pollock, Greg, and another girl. We had arrived between five and six in the evening, one of the later arrivals that we had up to this time. The clouds obscured the sun until this time of the day, but magically appeared when we arrived at the shelter.

Cherry Gap Lean-to had a very nice spring about 250 feet down a side trail. We gathered water, cooked our supper and relaxed as I wrote in my journal for a while. It had been a long day - 22 miles. We made good use of the partial tube of "Deep Heating Rub" that we found at Curley maple Gap shelter 12 miles back. It is amazing what can sometimes be found along the trail.... and what hikers will do with it once it is found. We met a guy from the Tennessee Eastman Hiking Club somewhere along the trail today clearing trail today. There are volunteers out there, even though sometimes it seems as if there are sections that seem to go unnoticed.



The Story of Mary

Taken from an article by JOAN VANNORSALL SCHROEDER in the Blue Ridge Country Magazine.

No one denies that Mary killed Eldridge in Kingsport, Tenn. on September 12, 1916. The details of why and how it happened, gathered from oral-history tapes from the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University, vary so wildly that they should be read with skepticism, and no small dose of chagrin.

Version I. After the Kingsport performance, Red Eldridge was assigned to ride Mary to a pond, where she could drink and splash with the other elephants. According to W.H. Coleman, who at the tender age of 19 witnessed the "murder":

There was a big ditch at that time, run up through Center Street, ...And they'd sent these boys to ride the elephants... There was, oh, I don't know now, seven or eight elephants... and they went down to water them and on the way back each boy had a little stick-like, that was a spear or a hook in the end of it... And this big old elephant reach over to get her a watermelon rind, about half a watermelon somebody eat and just laid it down there; 'n he did, the boy give him a jerk. He pulled him away from 'em, and he just blowed real big, and when he did, he took him right around the waist... and threw him against the side of the drink stand and he just knocked the whole side out of it. I guess it killed him, but when he hit the ground the elephant just walked over and set his foot on his head... and blood and brains and stuff just squirted all over the street.

Version II. As reported in the September 13, 1916 issue of the Johnson City Staff, Mary "collided its trunk vice-like [sic] about [Eldridge's] body, lifted him 10 feet in the air, then dashed him with fury to the ground... and with the full force of her biestly [sic] fury is said to have sunk her giant tusks entirely through his body. The animal then trampled the dying form of Eldridge as if seeking a murderous triumph, then with a sudden... swing of her massive foot hurled his body into the crowd."

Version III. Maybe Mary was simply bored, as a staff writer for the Johnson City Press-Chronicle suggested in 1936. "The elephant's keeper, while in the act of feeding her, walked unsuspectingly between her and the tent wall. For no reason that could be ascertained, Mary became angry and, with a vicious swish of her trunk, landed a fatal blow on his head."

Version IV. Or did Mary kill Red Eldridge because she was in pain? Erwin legend has it that Mary had two abscessed teeth, which caused her such agony that she went berserk when Eldridge tapped her with his elephant stick. The infections were, of course, discovered only after Mary was killed.

Regardless of the details, the end was the same -- a man dead. Justice to be served. And besides, Charlie Sparks was no fool: no town in Tennessee would invite his circus to perform with a certifiably rogue elephant. Johnson City, where performances were scheduled for September 26, had already passed a privilege-tax ordinance restricting carnivals' operations within city limits, in order to protect its citizens from wholesale fleeing; it was common knowledge that Johnson City officials were looking for an excuse to ban all traveling shows. As valuable as Mary was, she had to go. The problem was, how?

Guns, of course, were the first course of action. Just after Eldridge's death, blacksmith Hench Cox fired his 32-20 five times at Mary; the story goes that the bullets hardly phased her. "Kill the elephant. Let's kill him," the crowd began chanting. Later, Sheriff Gallahan "knocked chips out of her hide a little" with his .45, according to witness Bud Jones. But the circus manager stated, "There ain't gun enough in this country that he could be killed"; another approach would have to be attempted.

Someone suggested electrocution: "They tried to electrocute her in Kingsport -- they put 44,000 volts to her and she just danced a little bit," railroader Mont Lilly claimed. Others report that electrocution was never an option, because there wasn't enough power running in the railroad yards to affect Mary. (Since most American railroads continued to use steam locomotives until the 1930s, it's curious that railroad electrocution was even a possibility.)

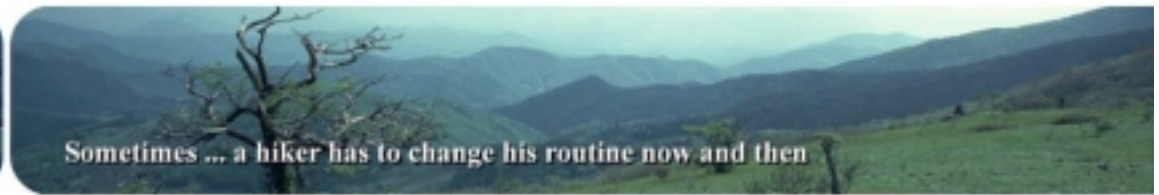
Other reports suggest a third execution method: hooking Mary to two opposing engines and dismembering her, or crushing her between two facing engines. Both were dismissed as too cruel.

And so it was decided, instead, that Murderous Mary would be hung by the neck from a derrick car the next day.

The Execution

Mary didn't perform for the matinee performance the day she died. She was chained outside the circus tent, and folks say she spent the entire performance time swaying nervously. The crowd's dissatisfaction with her absence was mollified by the announcement that Mary would be hung in the Clinchfield Railyards later in the afternoon -- with no additional charge for admission.

More than 2,500 people gathered to watch Mary swing near the turn-table and powerhouse on that drizzly afternoon; perhaps the number of eyewitnesses, as well as the unforgettable, sad spectacle of the event, explains the consensus on this part of the story.



June 5, 1983 Sunday (1790 mtg)

My wrist alarm worked this morning, a morning that would have been nice to have slept in a bit considering the 22 miles that we racked up yesterday. Sometimes on the trail a hiker has to change his routine now and then. I guess today was a good day to try something different, so instead of our usual instant oatmeal for breakfast, we whipped up a sample of freeze dried beef and rice, with some granola on the side. Even though this was one of two emergency meals we had purchased way back in Georgia at Neel's Gap, it seemed like the right thing to do to help us recuperate from the long miles we had gone yesterday. Regardless of having such a seemingly excellent breakfast, we still had a slow start. It was difficult to move very fast. We had only traveled nine and a half miles to the viewpoint on Little Rock Knob by the time lunch rolled around. Took a few pictures of the valley below as we ate, and rested for a while. A rest is what was needed for the upcoming trail.



View from Little Rock Knob.

A few miles later we descended into Hughes Gap where the start of one of the toughest climbs that I remembered from my first trip on the trail in '81. It is the climb up Beartown Mountain - one and a half miles that seemed practically straight up! Jim and I set out on the "dick in the face" ascent of the mountain, a term coined by a fellow hiker from the past. A short easy section was followed by the final ascent up Roan High Knob, another difficult climb. Near the summit I met two ladies from California, professors from a college out there who were visiting the area hoping to see the rhododendrons famous in the area around Roan Mountain. How did these ladies get to the top of the mountain? This is another area where man has decided to bring a road up to the top to the rhododendron gardens. I found the water fountain nearby, but it was not turned on. Where's a person supposed to get a drink around here? I managed to finagle a soda, a pint of milk, and some ice to fill our canteens from out of their cooler. Just so happens that there was a spring near the old firewarden's cabin at the summit, so at least we were able to fill our canteens as well after such a difficult climb. We contemplated staying at the cabin, which had been designated as a trail shelter, but we had only traveled 14 miles.



View from summit of Roan High Knob.

The trail descended to Carver's Gap with Tennessee highway 143 running through it. We worked our way past the parking lot and log barriers surrounding the lot, and ran into



The professors.

a couple of thru hikers hanging out there - Ron and Cathy, and Dennis and his amazing beagle "Taz" who fetches large sticks much larger than his own body. Not lingering long, we crossed the highway and began our ascent up Round Bald over the long series of log steps that lead toward the summit. Near the summit there was an experimental planting of spruce trees to see whether the trees would grow on the natural bald area. Apparently they are growing, at least when we went through. The trail passed to the left of the bald summit and descended into Engine Gap where the views in all directions of the balds in the area were spectacular. From there it was uphill to Jane Bald, and then over to Grassy Ridge. This area has been one of the most scenic areas along the trail up to now, the balds providing uninterrupted views and the weather cooperating enough to allow those views to be seen with nice blue skies above.

We ended our 18.3 mile day at Roan Highlands Shelter. The sound of thunder began to be heard around 6 pm, but the rain did not arrive until after six thirty or later. Made a hefty meal out of two boxes of Mac and Cheese, and a bag of Ramen noodles. That meant about three cups of food for both Jim and myself! The feast was topped off with Pistachio instant pudding. I believe that it was at this shelter that we were introduced to the "hiker with no name". George Steffanos, another thru hiker, began writing stories modeled after the Clint Eastwood figure made famous in movies like "Fistful of Dollars". They were quite humorous, and I began to follow his writings, as well as reading the comic strip by Fuzzy Jim called "Anglehead" about a hiker who had no good luck at all. Without TV, movies, and other entertainment available, the shelter registers are our source of entertainment.



The climb out of Hugh's Gap.



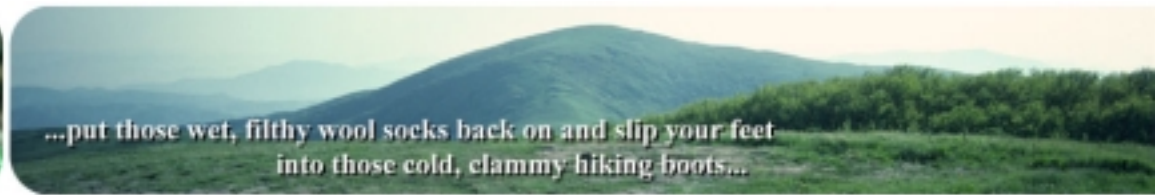
Engine Gap



Jim looks forward to the climb up Grassy Ridge.



Jane Bald from Grassy Ridge.



June 6, 1983 Monday (1771.7 mtg)

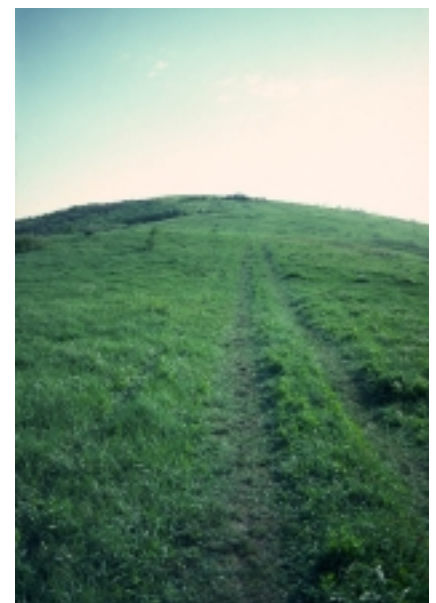
Today was a very strange day for culinary delights along the trail. Once again, we started the day off with a freeze dried dinner. This time the entree was chicken-a-la-king along with some gorp. Gorp is the hikers best friend and supplies many of the calories that the hiker needs for the grueling day after day of hiking. It is made of good wholesome foods starting off with Granola, Raisins, and Peanuts, and finishes with as much M&Ms, and candy as you can stand. After a while my gorp became just M&M's (plain and peanut), and Reese's Pieces. Who needs all that healthy stuff?



It was a beautiful day as we continued on over the bald country. A shroud of clouds hung in the valleys as we marched over the open grassy terrain up one mountain and then descending, and then up to the summit of Little Hump Mountain. After Little Hump came Hump Mountain, one of the nicest balds in the area - one big grass covered mountain. In this particular area of the trail the footway occasionally follows what appear to be jeep tracks, or at least the leftovers of old roads mostly grown over by grass, but still evident with the remnants of two depressions about as wide as a vehicle. Upon reaching Doll Flats, a major relocation began that would prove to be difficult to travel on due to its fresh installation, and

recent rain. The guidebook indicated a grocery store at the next road crossing where US 19 crosses the trail. The one good thing about the relocation seemed to be that it brought us closer to the store than if we had taken the previous route. We had only to walk about a mile to the store rather than the 2.4 miles before the relocation had gone into effect. We stepped out onto the shoulder of the road and began our trek to our resupply point in Elk Park, North Carolina. We of course stuck our thumbs out at every potential ride that happened to be going in our direction, but had no luck until just as we caught sight of the store. At that time someone pulled over to offer us a ride, but we declined since the store was just a few yards away. We bought \$45.00 worth of groceries between us (my portion coming to \$21.00) Along with the groceries we discovered that the store also carried A & W Rootbeer in cans. Well, that was all the tempting we needed to convince us to buy three cans and a half gallon of vanilla ice cream for rootbeer floats! We opened up the cook kit got out the pots and mixed up mammoth floats the likes of which have probably never been seen there since - one quart of ice cream and 18 ounces (three cans) of rootbeer each!

It began to rain as we were enjoying our folly at the store, and just as it quit we were offered a ride back to the trailhead by someone going that way. Jim had been on the phone talking to his parents, so I told him, "let's go, we got a ride" and off we went.



Trail up Little Hump Mountain.



Hump Mountain.

Still part of the relocation, the next few miles of the trail were some of the nastiest trail I have ever been on. Initially as we entered onto the trail just past the road, I lost my footing perhaps due to the extra weight that we were now carrying. The trailside conditions were also responsible since the rain had softened and lubricated the earth. I took a tumble and came out of it with a scraped right knee. Having survived that fall, we continued on the relocation that took us through muck and mire that at time could be as deep as eight inches! There was a time when I thought we had gotten lost and somehow were on our way back toward US 19, but continuing

on, we eventually made it to Don Nelan shelter sometime before four pm. Dennis, Ron, and Cathy were there before us and had successfully kept other hikers from occupying the shelter so we would have a place for the night. Good thing too, since the weather seemed threatening. I washed up my knee in the ice cold stream nearby, and then relaxed for a while before beginning with the evenings ritual of supper preparation. With only five miles between the road and its grocery store, it is my feeling that this should be taken advantage of, so tonight Jim and I fried up the pound of bacon and one dozen eggs that we carried with us to the shelter - and we still had a pound of pork sausage for the morning! Life can be good on the trail at times.

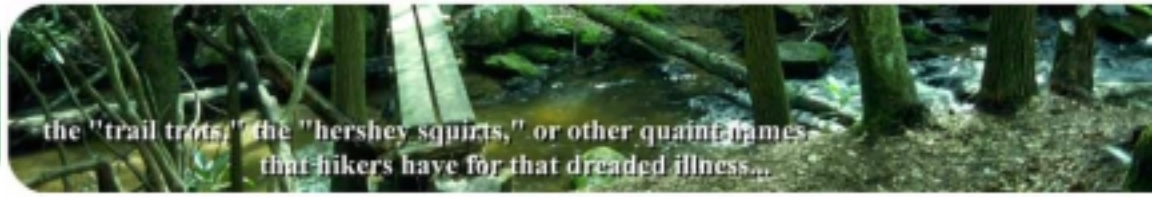
The shelter was crowded that evening as even more hikers showed up. A man named Bill Wiggins stayed there also. I don't recall how many actually stayed in the shelter, but most shelters hold from eight to ten people, but larger numbers have been known to sandwich themselves in, especially on a cold rainy evening. We had arrived at the shelter mostly dry except for the swamp muck that covered our lower legs. Soon after we arrived we experienced a nice little shower. The whole night was kind of damp, the kind of weather where nothing dries, and you have to get up the next morning and put those wet, filthy wool socks back on and slip your feet into those cold clammy hiking boots the next morning. Sometimes, particularly in the Smokies, we used to try to dry our socks out by setting them next to the fire, if someone had built one. I don't think this was the best thing for the socks, but at least your feet felt a little dry for the first few minutes of the hike that day. It does not have to be raining the day after to totally soak your feet once again. A heavy dew does just as good a job, sometimes better.



Hump Mountain.

For the twenty one dollars I spent at the store I also came back with Mac & Cheese, two Lipton's Noodles and Sauce dinners, peanut butter and jelly, four candy bars, cookies, a box of pop tarts, peaches, M& M's, two instant puddings, milk, oatmeal cakes, instant oatmeal, bread, pancakes and syrup, along with the ice cream and sodas, bacon and eggs, and pork sausage.
Nice temperature, Not too cool.



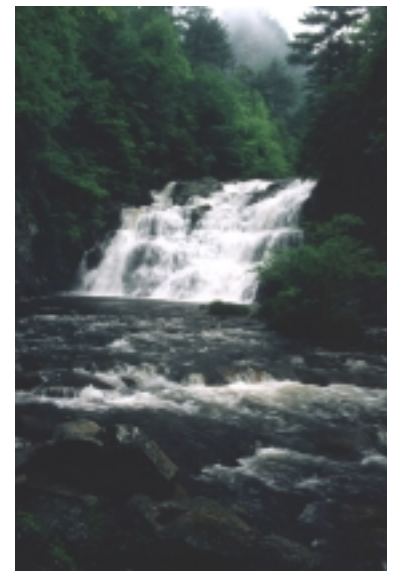


June 7, 1983 Tuesday (1757.2 mtg)

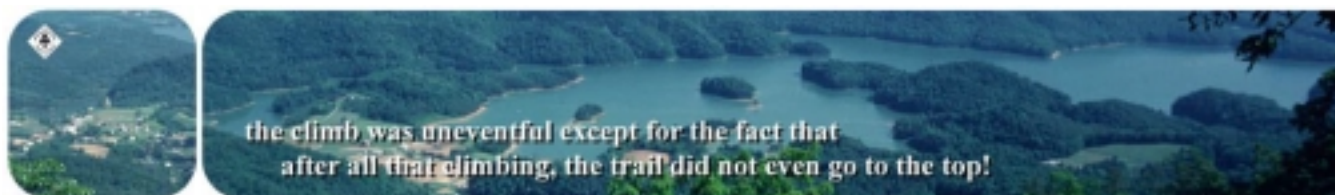
Fried up our pound of pork sausage this morning for breakfast. For some reason Jim began to come down with a slight case of diarrhea, the "trail trots," the "Hershey squirts," or other quaint names that hikers have for that dreaded illness. The trail presented itself a little better this morning, however our progress was slow. I had no water at all from breakfast time up until lunch time at Moreland Gap shelter. I think it was because I was leary about getting water in this area since most of it was in lower country with water in streams that the guide recommended be purified. No really good springs. Sometimes cattle country. Upon reaching the shelter I tanked up on water, and filled the waterbottle for the afternoon. Some of the other hikers that had stayed at the shelter last night arrived at the shelter and began having their lunch while we neared finishing ours. In situations like this, it pays to get on the ball. It will most likely be a race to the shelter for the night. Even though most hikers carry a tent, as we did, no one really wants to have to set it up, and particularly take it down and pack it up the next morning if it happened to rain that night. Jim and I pushed on before the rest had finished their lunch, and just as Bill Wiggins arrived and reported that he had lost his glasses.

Our goal for the night was Laurel Fork Shelter. I wanted to get there to take pictures of the nearby Laurel Falls and also to insure that we would have a space in the shelter. The trail descends into Laurel Gorge and passes directly beside the falls before continuing on for another half of a mile to the shelter. We viewed the falls, but rushed on to secure our spot in the shelter intending to return for pictures later. At the shelter I threw off my pack, grabbed my camera, and headed back to the falls for pictures. Got all set up to shoot a few shots and discovered that the battery had gone dead! Went back to the shelter to get extra batteries, not remembering that they were stored on the camera strap that I had with me the whole time.

There was evidence of other inhabitants at the shelter already when we had arrived. We met them when we backtracked to take pictures of the falls. Apparently there was more than one way to get to the falls, we had not seen them along the A.T. between the falls the first time. There was Wade, Bobby, and Rich, and three others (two of whom were from Switzerland). Wade and Bobby were just out of high school and were probably locals from somewhere nearby. While reading the shelter register, I read about the shelter's other resident, a large rat that supposedly came out at night. So far I had not seen anything like that at a shelter although I had read about rats at shelters in the Smokies. This shelter was close enough to the road and in a popular spot that could draw enough people who were not environmentally conscience enough to take care of their trash. This could support at least one rat I suppose. Going about our business, we cooked up some pancakes, and enjoyed two cans of chunky beef stew and a couple of peaches that were donated by Bobby. Not wanting to have any rat coming into the shelter after the cans left over from the stew, I tossed them out a few yards in front of the shelter so as not to draw the animals inside. During the night we heard something playing around with the cans, but never figured out what it was. I was visited and annoyed during the night by ants crawling over me now and then - I killed a few.



Laurel Falls.



June 8, 1983 Wednesday (1741.1 mtg)

Said goodbye to the boys, recorded their addresses, and took off this morning on the long uphill climb of Pond Mountain. The climb was uneventful except for the fact that after all that climbing the trail did not even go to the top! Fairly smooth sailing after the climb as we descended down to Watauga Lake. We expected to get a burger or something like that at the restaurant/gas station that we found situated near where the trail crossed US 321 near Rat branch recreation area, but when I cheerfully asked the guy working the store if anything was cookin' today, he said "no." What a letdown. So we split and wandered over to Shook Branch Recreation Beach Area nearby. There I took a little splash bath as I entered the lake up to my thighs. It was cool and refreshing. We took a considerable break at the beach while eating lunch and relaxing in the sun as its warm rays dried off my body.

From there the trail followed the shoreline with the lake to our right, and to our left, a housing development seemed to push the trail corridor close to the lake. We passed by Watauga lake shelter, also located very near the waterfront, choosing to continue on to Vandeventer Shelter, high above Watauga Lake on the crest of Iron Mountain. We found a little construction going on at the dam, probably repaving, as we crossed the dam and began our ascent toward the Iron Mountain ridge. Time seemed to be flying and we soon found ourselves five miles past the dam and secure in our new home for the night at Vandeventer Shelter.



Watauga Lake.

Supposedly at this shelter some years back there were a couple of hikers who were killed as a result of a lightening strike. If memory serves me, I believe that it was a couple who were on their honeymoon. From the looks of it, we would not have much of a lightening problem tonight, the skies were just gorgeous! And the view out the back of the shelter made the effort involved in getting there worthwhile. We could see the entire Watauga Lake and some of the mountains that we had just traversed on the opposite side of the lake. We gathered wood for a fire, having little else to do, fixed and ate supper, lit the fire in the firepit outside the shelter, and drifted off to sleep. With the exception of the climb up Pond Mountain, the day was fairly relaxing as we only logged a total of only 16 miles.



Dam crossing.



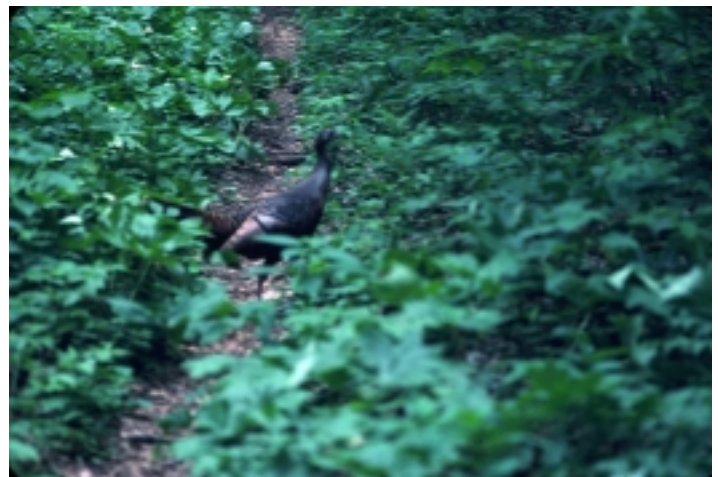
View from behind Vandeventer Shelter.



June 9, 1983 Thursday (1725.1 mtg) From Gonzo's Appalachian Trail journal

Today's objective was to move up the trail about 15 miles and put us within a half days walk to our next resupply point in Damascus, Virginia. We were up again at 5:50 am as usual, and the terrain this morning was quite nice. We were rapidly approaching the Virginia state line, and our one month anniversary of being on the trail. Jim and I had been roommates at college and had been roommates for a few years, but that did not prepare us for the stress created by living with a person 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In an effort to keep our pack weights to a minimum, and also avoid having to purchase and carry duplicates of equipment like our stove, fuel, and pots and pans, Jim and I had to stay together at least at breakfast and supper where the use of a stove to heat water in a pot was necessary. I had a set of guide books that I had left over from my previous journey that I had dismantled and rebound in order to keep us informed where the springs were, and help us when the trail markings were not adequate. The guides originally provided descriptions for traveling in both north to south, and from south to north directions. Since I had no intentions of backtracking, I decided to save as much weight as I could by removing the descriptions of the north to south direction. Since a set of guides costs over one hundred dollars, we chose to share the ones I had. Due to all this sharing and time spent together, Jim and I began to get on each other's nerves at times. In some ways I think that the problem of making decisions became the sand between the layers that began to irritate each of us. It seemed as though each of us wanted to please the other so we would let the decision up to the other guy. Of course the other guy did not want to make a decision that would be something that the companion would not like - hence a problem began. We were never much apart, everything he did, I did. Everything I did, he did. At the end of the day we had nothing to talk about since we had experienced the same thing. Jim seemed to like to take more breaks than I. I liked to be on the move. Occasionally he would ask if I wanted to take a break. Although I don't think I had any problem with taking breaks, I preferred to take breaks in areas that were scenic, or offered something out of the ordinary. I became irritated when he would ask about taking a break. I think I would have preferred for him to just say, "let's take a break now," or "I am taking a break now." On my first Appalachian trail hike I learned the dangers of traveling with a large group and losing your independence as the group tends to make decisions that you go along with due to peer pressure, and now it seems as though this type of thing can also affect you in a group of only two. Perhaps it is best to hike the trail by yourself - there will usually be someone around to keep you company.

Roughly seven miles down the trail we stopped for a break and a snack at Iron Mountain Shelter, and then stopped again just about a mile past the shelter where the Nick Grindstaff monument is located. I took pictures of the monument and of course Jim took pictures also. Perhaps the quote on the monument should have inspired us to somehow work on a solution to our problem. The inscription on the monument to the old hermit erected by some of his relatives read: "Lived Alone, Suffered Alone, Died Alone." From there we moved on along the crest of Iron Mountain. I developed a



tightness in my right calf after about eleven miles, but kept on going for another four miles before taking a break for lunch. We kicked up a grouse with a group of chicks, and then later a red fox. At about 12:15 pm we reached Double Springs Shelter, where we chose to have lunch. We had gone fifteen miles up to that point - a long time to travel before having lunch. From this shelter we had another seven miles of hiking to reach Abingdon Gap shelter, and put us within striking distance of Damascus, Virginia.

Today seemed to be the day for wildlife. All in all we saw three mama ruffed grouse, each with chicks, one fox, and one wild turkey that tried to distract us from its brood by acting injured and then acting aggressive toward us when it's first tactic failed. We arrived at Abingdon Gap shelter between four and four thirty in the afternoon. There was a nice cool breeze, and bright and sunny sky. The temperature, according to the thermometer was in the low sixties. I hobbled down to get water, which just kind of trickled out of the ground. Following the spring down just a short distance I found a stronger flow, but still no pipe or gutter to allow a "faucet" type flow. We ate a stew that we supplemented with a wild mushroom that I had found along the trail.



Grindstaff Monument.



June 10, 1983 Friday (1702.2 mtg) From Gonzo's Appalachian Trail journal

Up at 5:50. Rolled down the trail with the excitement of getting to town and also putting three of the fourteen states behind us. Within 6.5 miles we will have completed all of the trail in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Four hundred forty three miles of up and down in just under one month. Now we were preparing to enter our fourth state, a state that contains the most amount of mileage of any state along the trail. A state that has roughly one fourth of the trail within its' boundaries, and more than we had come so far. Virginia is supposed to be where hikers can really rack up big mile days. The states we had just gone through had rugged trail, but Virginia is supposed to be more mild, and have less difficult climbs. Time would tell. For today we would barely enter into Virginia, and rest for one half of a day at the trail town known as Damascus, Virginia. On the way out of Tennessee, I decided to stop one last time to water the vegetation along the trail, after all, I drank that water in Tennessee, I should give it back to Tennessee.



Entering Virginia, leaving Tennessee behind..

The trail goes right down the main street into the small town that is familiar with hikers and bikers. Many cross country cyclists stop at this town on their way across the country too. The first order of business in Damascus was to stop in at the post office to check for mail. Jim got a bundle of letters. I received three letters and a package with two Fitz's Rootbeer bottles packaged safely inside. I also received the next guide book that I had prepared for the following section. Like the town of Hot Springs, this town also has a church run hostel where hikers can "rent" a room for just a few dollars or work their stay off by doing odd chores around the place. The

hostle in this town was known as "The Place" and was used by hikers and bikers both, but it seemed as though there were more hikers at this time. We had all afternoon to do our chores which consisted of taking inventory of our food supplies, getting the next sections' food supply ready, doing laundry, mailing anything unnecessary back home, and in this particular instance I needed to procure the services of the local cobbler to fix my boots, as the sole near the toes was beginning to show signs of coming apart. I dropped them off for him to tack back together. I sent off some stuff, probably film to be developed, to my brother Carl so that he could feel he was a part of my adventure, and then got to the business of what town is all about - eating! Rustled up some free hot dogs, cookies and chips at the nearby 1st Baptist church after another hiker came by and mentioned that they were serving free food at the church.



Mountain Laurel.

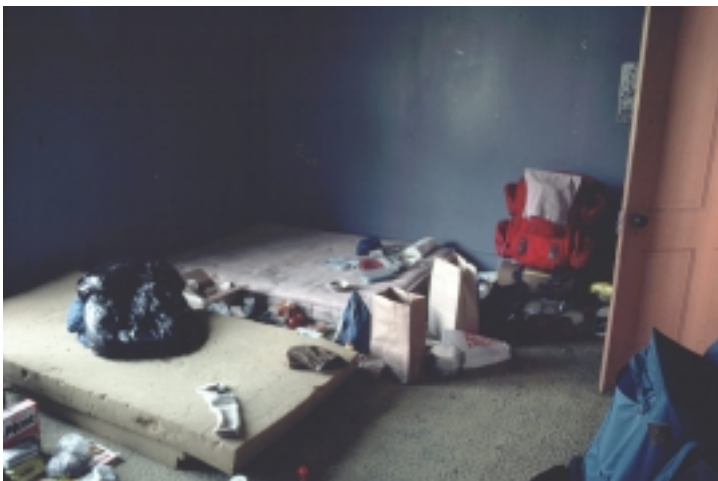
Most of the remainder of the afternoon was taken up by the other chores and writing postcards and letters to friends and families. I was surprised when Dennis and Taz, Ron and Cathy rolled into town after a 26 mile day having come all the way from Iron Mountain shelter. Up to that point, that was the most I had heard anyone having hiked in one day. We heard stories from them about how Taz, the beagle who would drive anyone crazy with its' insistence on playing fetch, would bring back large limbs and even rocks when cast into the forest. Dennis told of how it had even dove under water at Watauga Lake in search of a rock that his master had thrown into the depths to keep the dog occupied for a while. All those stories make a man hungry, so I stopped at the local Dairy King for a double cheeseburger, french fries, and rootbeer. Towards evening, I went to the payphone down the street and talked with Mom and Dad, and my Aunt Connie. I stood and talked at the payphone as the rain began to fall around me. While talking with my mother I learned that my cousin Gary Grotefendt had been killed in a farming accident. He had been driving a tractor along the side of the road and got over too far to allow someone to pass when suddenly the tractor flipped over and crushed him. A sad story, he was as old as I, just twenty-three years old. Afterwards I wrote a few more postcards, and of course ate one more time before going to bed.



Damascus Post Office.



The Place, Damascus, Virginia.



Our room at "The Place".