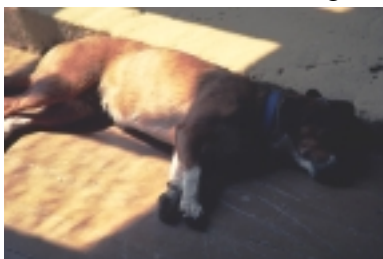


## Virginia

June 11, 1983 Saturday(1692.4 mtg)

The room we had chosen was on the second floor of "the Place" and came complete with one old mattress and a couple of three-inch thick foam pads. I don't remember exactly what we paid to stay there, but I am sure it was somewhere around five to seven dollars at most. It also had a kitchen and refrigerator that could be used by all, so if you kept anything in the refrigerator, you had better mark it with your name. I had turned off the alarm and slept in this morning. I awoke naturally at six-thirty, got up and ate the second half of a box of Life cereal that I had started last night before going to bed. I love cold cereal and milk when I get into town! Wrote a letter to a friend, and around ten o'clock I placed a call to my Uncle Delray. Told him to tell my sister in law to send a package to Afton, Virginia and to fill up the fluids in my MGB which had a slow leak. After that I went to the pharmacy and bought a sympathy card to send to the Grotefendt's, and a sample of a muscle relaxant named Percagesic that someone had told me about along the trail during the last few days. Bopped over to the post office and sent all the post cards and letters, and on the way back to "The Place" I stopped to see if my boots were ready. The cobbler said no, but that they would be ready at noon. Back at the hostel, I talked with a couple of people from Holland who were just out hitchin' around. Studying the data book for a while, I decided that we should pass up stopping at the post office in Atkins, so about eleven o'clock I made another trip to the post office to send a letter to the post master in Atkins telling him to please forward to Bland, Va any mail I received there. Stopped and picked up my boots, packed up my stuff, and tried out the new foam insoles that I had gotten from Dennis the day before, and headed out of town.

There were two long climbs, one just out of Damascus up Feathercamp Ridge, and the other, a 1000 foot ascent in 1.5 miles up Straight Mountain. Jim really got pissed at his pack today because of a rash that was developing on his hips. We made the 11.8 miles to the edge of a man-made pond in an "open" field listed in the guidebook as a good campsite. I had planned on eating some of the bullfrogs that were bellowing at the ponds edge, but some weekenders with their kids decided to camp nearby on the ponds shoreline. These people were from Ohio. Took a little dip upon arriving at the pond, and set up for the night. Brian, Kay, Graham and Molly kept us company with their many questions about the strange bearded hikers that they found beside them. We began telling our stories and hoped to become masters at weaving the trail story necessary to entertain and persuade folks to exchange this entertainment for part of their meal. In this case we were treated to hot dogs, orange juice and pickles. We settled in



*Taz, the Beagle.*

and dozed off as the bullfrogs serenaded us with great vigor for the remainder of the evening as if they had sensed their lives were spared by the party from Ohio.



*Dennis, aka "Hikaholic"*



June 12, 1983 Sunday (1680.6 mtg)

Broke camp this morning and headed off figuring on camping again tonight after about 18.4 miles. Sometimes the spacing of the shelters does not give much of a choice as to where to stay. It is either a short day, or an extremely long day, or camp. The distance to the next shelter was just over 14.6 miles. For the typical hiker, that would have been a good average day. But for me, a man with a mission to get to Katahdin before it snowed, it was not far enough to go for this day. Especially after coming off of a short day the day before. We took a break after about six miles, and then began to pass through a pasture that seemed like private property. We eventually passed within a few yards of a rural residence and began a long switchback up the side of Beech Mountain. Nearing the top the forest became more of an overgrown field and finally a bald-like area with a large rock outcrop known as Buzzard Rock that provided great views to the south and west. In the Whitetop mountain area just beyond Buzzard Rock, I



*From Buzzard Rocks, we could see that parts of Virginia were made up of long parallel ridges.*

remembered having gotten a little mixed up when making my way through this section in '81. We paid special attention this time and still got a little mixed up as the trail turned off of a gravel road and entered a wooded area. The marking could have been more pronounced. Took lunch at Deep Gap Shelter after 14.6 miles. Met many hikers today. Several were at the shelter and seemed to be staying. We were getting close to Grayson Highlands State Park and Mt. Rogers Recreation Area and began encountering weekend use of these areas. Pushed on after lunch expecting to camp in about six or seven miles. I located and photographed a scenic spot just before rhododendron Gap that I had been impressed with

the last time I was through the area. Looking back now, it is still very nice, but I guess it just reminds me of a Hotel art scene now with its picturesque open country bisected by a rustic old fence row descending down the hillside. From there we continued to Rhododendron Gap. A little less than two miles later we crossed the rail fence into what is known as Grayson Highlands State Park, a nice open area where one can occasionally catch views of the wild horses that inhabit the area. The trail took us over open balds, some with a few trees, and a lot of exposed rocks. It was a beautiful area. A few miles after that we crossed Quebec Branch, where we had intended to make camp, but decided that this was not the place to camp. This meant today would be a big mile day. The next shelter was Old



*Another view from Buzzard Roacks.*



Orchard Shelter. The time was already six o'clock, and we had 6.6 miles to go! We must have been clipping off three miles per hour to make the shelter at 8 pm. Just before arriving, I was beginning to wonder if we would even make it there before dark. We hurriedly whipped up a batch of Mac and Cheese, and butterscotch pudding for supper and immediately went to bed. Later a couple other hikers arrived at the shelter by flashlight, but decided to camp farther down the way a bit rather than fully wake everyone up. Twenty-seven point six miles for the day! A new record for us!



*Whitetop*



*Mt. Rodgers, the tallest mountain in Virginia, in the distance.*



*A hotel painting?*



*Rhododendron Gap area.*



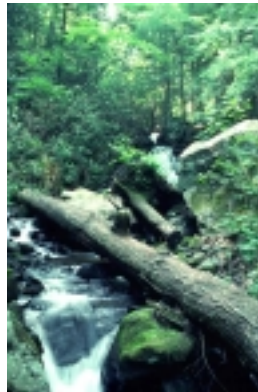
June 13, 1983 Monday (1653 mtg)

Slow getting up this morning, but that was fine, we were now ahead of schedule after such a long day yesterday. There was no hurry today, only about 14.2 miles total. Not a whole lot exciting today. Took a break at another one of my favorite places - Comer's Creek Falls. Climbed past the side trail to Raccoon Branch Shelter, but proceeded on the extra couple of miles to Trimpi Shelter. Arrived at the shelter at about 1:00 pm, and began to prepare lunch. Imagine that, finished hiking for the day even before eating lunch. Now what? I decided to eat a freeze dried lasagna dinner as my lunch after Jim decided that it was



*Comer's Creek Falls.*

necessary to start up the stove so he could boil water for a cup-o-lunch that he had. Spent the remainder of the afternoon lazing around, feeling like I should be hiking, and feeling generally on edge. To keep myself occupied, I greased my boots with sno-seal water repellent. This not only helps keep the leather waterproof, but helps keep the leather soft and pliable, and prevents cracking as a result. I noticed an Eastern Phoebe has a nest in the rafters of the shelter and flies in and out caring for its young. I watched this for a while. I spotted a deer down by the spring. I then spent some time contemplating what would be the result of moving on, and found that there would be no advantage, we would have to camp once again, and would not help our arrival at the next supply point. So I just sat there with nothing to do! Boring! Finally it became time to go to bed.



*Another view along Comer's Creek.*



*Pink Rhododendron in full bloom.*

*Jim takes advantage of the afternoon off  
at the shelter.*







June 14, 1983 Tuesday (1638.8 mtg)

Oatmeal for breakfast and off we go, the highlight of the day was the blossoming of the Rhododendron. The trail generally left no impressions on me. Or is the drudgery of the trip beginning to set in? Ate lunch at the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area Visitors Center near the road crossing at Va 16. Somehow, probably by consulting the Philosophers Guide to the AT, we became aware of the fact that there was supposedly an all you can eat salad bar at the Motel on the road to Atkins, Virginia. That was all it took for Jim to decide that he wanted to be there tonight for a feast. So much for our short day today. We left the visitors center and after a short descent, we began our ascent of Brushy Mountain. About four miles past Brushy Mountain, we stopped at Glade Mountain Shelter for a short break. This shelter had a nice little stream running out in front of the shelter, and would have been our destination for the night had our stomachs not taken over the planning of the trip.

As we approached US 11, the road crossing near Atkins, Virginia, we began to pass through pastureland and encountered a few cows now and then. It is in this type of country that purification of water is important. Although I never treated my water, I was very careful to be aware of where I was taking it from, and what was around the source. I did not draw water from areas where cows were present. I just drank what I had or remained thirsty until I left the bovine area.



*Mt. Rogers Visitor Center*

About a half mile before arriving at the Motel, it began to rain. It only rained for a little while, just enough to annoy us.

We took a room at the Motel for \$22.88, cleaned up and headed for the restaurant. I had a dinner of hamburger steak, french fries, roll, of course the salad bar, and blueberry cobbler and a scoop of ice cream - all for \$6.34. After that, I tried to call Cheryl, my sister-in-law, but got a bad connection. In our



*Motel near Atkins, Virginia.*

room we did something that we had not done for some time: we watched television. We watched a rerun of "Big Valley", and episodes of the hit series "the A-Team," "Remington Steel," and "St. Elsewhere." Later I called my brother Carl, and his wife Cheryl again, got a better connection and even got to talk with my two year old niece Erin for a little bit. All calls made during this trip were made using a credit card number that applied the bill to my mothers phone bill. Topped the night off with a Dr. Pepper and a few crackers I snagged from the restaurant.



still hungry, I scavanged a piece of toast off an adjacent table  
when it's occupants returned to their trucks...

June 15, 1983 Wednesday (1617.5 mtg)

Set the alarm to go off at 6 am allowing us to enjoy the comfort of the real beds for an extra ten minutes this morning, and used the snooze button when it went off to soak up that comfortable feeling even more. We continued our short stay in luxury by deciding to eat breakfast at the restaurant. I ordered three pancakes for \$1.35, and a glass of orange juice (\$1.00). Good pancakes, but I could have used a little bit more syrup. Apparently I was still hungry, I scavanged a slice of toast off of an adjacent table when its' occupants returned to their trucks. The draw of civilization could keep us there no longer, and we finally managed to break away at about 7:30 am. Hiking through the next section of trail proved fairly easy and we traveled the following seven or so miles fairly quickly. Some of the trail took us on roads and through farmers yards and pastures. Sometimes I wondered what these people thought about having the trail encroaching on their privacy. We passed up a pair of female thru hikers known as the "Go Go Girls" within a couple of miles. Once more we set foot upon part of Brushy Mountain. We crossed interstate 81, which we would run into again later in the trip. One of our longer road walks ended as the trail took a turn into a picnic area complete with Pavilion situated on the side of the road. It was named the Olistery Community Picnic Area. A note posted on one of the uprights supporting the pavilion indicated that the resident adjacent to the property was kind enough to allow hikers to fill their water bottles at his hose outlet. We took advantage of his offer. The pavilion was a welcome sight as the skies looked as if it were getting ready to rain. While at the pavilion, a local man showed up and inquired if we had seen some particular hiker that he was worried about. We had not seen anyone other than the Go Go Girls, who arrived at the picnic area shortly afterwards. We ate lunch at the pavilion after having traveled twelve miles.

We pressed on after lunch and within a mile of leaving the safety of the roof, the rain began to fall. Fortunately the rain only lasted for about two miles and then the sun came out for the rest of the day.



*Spring-fed pond near Walnut Mountain Hut.*

Basically there were three climbs today, the last one taking us past a spring fed pond, where we filled up our canteens and large two gallon water bag for tonights dry shelter on the top of Chestnut Knob. We carried the 8 pounds per gallon 1.7 miles to an old rock hut situated in a grassy field near the summit. The hut was our palace for the night, but was not very inviting on the inside. The openness of the field allowed viewing the hazy sunset that evening. Today marked our one month anniversary on the trail. With that in mind, I felt like a king as I sat on the throne out back and surveyed the surrounding countryside, as if I were the ruler of the ever changing

landscape. This shelter was not officially listed anywhere in the guides yet, and perhaps that is why it was not very appealing - the place was not ready for occupancy. Inside, the hut had a rock floor as well, and a couple of picnic tables that Jim and I decided would make better sleeping platforms than lying directly on the uneven rock floor. Our hopes were that we could avoid mouse activity as well. Totally

enclosed shelters such as this tend to be dark and dreary on the inside. Even though this one had windows, there were not enough to light the whole inside sufficiently.

Today we saw two wild turkeys along the roadwalk, and also some pink Flame Azaleas.



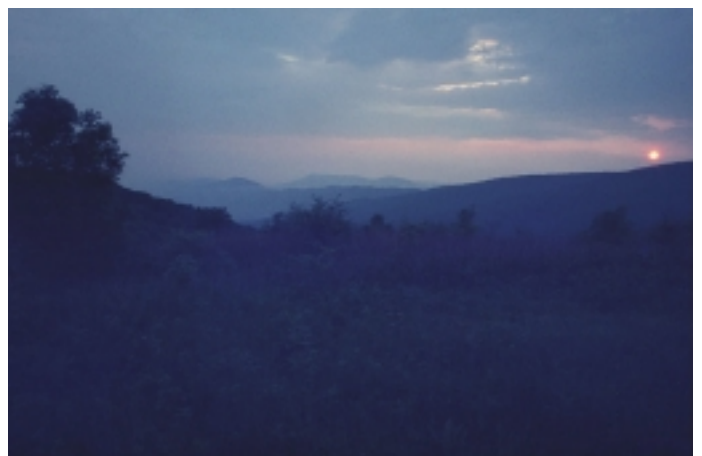
*View from Walnut Mountain to the south.*



*Walnut Mountain Hut.*

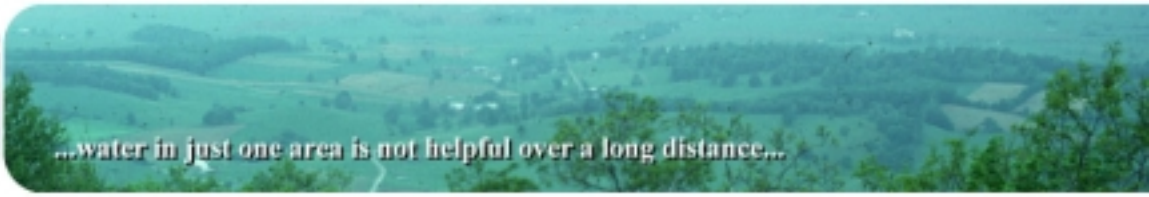


*Bridge over Lick Creek..*



*Sunset from Walnut Mountain.*





June 16, 1983 Thursday (1593.9 mtg)

Caught part of the sunrise this morning, but the sun came up before I knew it. Chestnut knob is a place for sunsets, but not sunrises. Too much of the eastern sky is obscured by the adjacent hillside. The day consisted of a lot of ridgewalking. As a result this section of trail is quite dry. Springs rarely emerge from the top of a mountain, they are usually somewhere down the side. Had lunch at Jenkins Shelter and while we rested we thought about where to spend the night. The decision seemed to be hinging on the availability of water. We could go another ten miles and camp, with the last five miles carrying water for the evening and next mornings, or we could dry camp. Apparently this was not a very popular idea. I suddenly came up with the idea of going all the way to Bland, Virginia, where I was sure that we could get some water from some resident, and a place to plop could be found somewhere. We set out with that in mind and soon found ourselves walking along some nice cliffs with view off to the left into an area known as Burckes Gardens Valley. We passed through an interesting section of tall ferns that were somewhere in the neighborhood of waist height. We crossed the same stream over ten times, but the stream was not in the right location for us to stop and camp, we needed more miles. Water in just one area is not helpful over a long distance.

Part of the trail once again went along the ridge of Brushy Mountain. We finally emerged from the woods at the road crossing of US 21 & 52 and began our walk to the right to the town of Bland, Virginia. We finally secured a ride down the mountain after walking about a mile. A local named Ron was nice enough to pick us up in his black pickup and transport us to the town where he proceeded to show us the location of the post office as well as a possible place to camp near the town park. He suggested we also inquire at the local grocery store about a place to stay. We had reached the town at about 5 pm. The Post office had closed, but luckily the store stayed open later.

We took our gear down to an area next to the baseball diamonds that seemed somewhat "concealed" by bushes. The vegetation surrounded a couple of picnic tables where we stashed our gear while we went to see the town. We were allowed to fill up our water bottles at the store, and I bought myself a pint of chocolate chip ice cream for \$.89 and began to eat. Jim got angry because he thought we were buying a half gallon. This made me upset so I gave him some money and said "go buy one!" I helped him eat part of that too. To cap off the evening, I bought a Dr. Pepper and headed down to the baseball fields, where all the locals were involved in a hot game of softball. I only watched part of the game before returning to our secluded hideaway nearby in the bushes. Rather than set up our tent, we chose to sleep on the top of the picnic tables that were provided. This was the second night in a row that we slept on an elevated wooden platform provided by a picnic table. We seemed sure it would not rain. I did not get to sleep until after the activities at the ballpark came to an end.







June 17, 1983 Friday (1571.4 mtg)



The local post office in Bland opened in the morning at 7:30 am, so there was no need to get up too early this morning. We woke up at 6:45, ate breakfast and headed to the post office. I received a package, and letter containing \$5.00 from Grandma. We returned to the store to purchase a few items for the road including fresh bread, peanut butter and jelly, and three nectarines. We cornered the bread deliveryman into giving us a ride back to the trail junction, and I began to wonder where he was taking us as he wound around here and there, not following the road that we had come in from at all. He assured us that he would get us back to where we wanted to go. Suddenly we were there, but my senses were turned around as a result of the alternate route. Jim and I argued about which way to go. I started hiking up a hill and then realized I was heading south. I turned around and resumed my hike in the proper direction rationalizing that I had actually not been on that very small portion

of the trail anyway, so no harm done. Shortly after resuming our hike, we crossed Kimberling Creek on an interesting log bridge. On the other side of the creek was a very nice camping spot that could have been our lodgings last night, but we had to go into town for mail. I made a mental note of the spot for future use.

Continuing on, we encountered Brushy Mountain again! We must have gone up to the ridge and crested out four or five times, in the last thirty miles, but finally after ten miles of hiking this morning the guide book indicated that we had actually reached the summit of Brushy Mountain! To celebrate, we ate lunch there and took a break.

It began to sprinkle just after lunch, and then increased in intensity a few miles farther down the trail in Licksillet Hollow. A great uphill section brought us up Brushy Mountain again, and then down the other side toward Dismal Creek Falls.

Dismal Creek Falls is a nice area with the possibility of swimming, although I am not much of a fan of swimming. Besides, I was already wet from the continuing rain. I just enjoyed the view from as many different angles as I could secure access to, and just took in the beauty and serenity provided as the waters flowed over the rock ledges. We pitched our tent at about six-thirty while there was a lull in the rain, and threw everything inside before it got any



wetter. Nothing to do for the remainder of the evening other than lay around. Most people would be happy to just lay around, but I always felt like I needed to be on the move. Even though there were at least two shelters between our present location and the next resupply point and trail town, Pearisburg, Virginia, I thought that tomorrow I was going to blast to Pearisburg unless it quit raining. It is 22 miles to Pearisburg from Dismal Creek Falls. Tomorrow is Saturday, if we don't get there by the time the post office closes, we will be stuck in P'burg until Monday. If we take our time to get there, we still won't leave P'burg until Monday. What a dilemma.

As I lay in the tent the rain subsided. Since there was still light, I emerged from my chrysalis to explore the falls once again, this time with a camera. I walked barefoot over the falls to reach a point where the magnitude of the falls could really be appreciated. All this physical activity made me hungry, so I fixed supper, ate, and went to bed.



*View of Pearisburg possibly from Angels Rest..*



*Church run hostel in Pearisburg.*





...provides such pleasures and vices  
that the tempted never want to leave...

June 18, 1983 Saturday (1552.2 mtg)

The rain seemed to have subsided (at least for the morning), and Jim began to boil water for himself as I went to relieve myself in the woods. This morning the trail entered into an area where a couple of hikers had been murdered two years ago. I had heard about this when I was on the trail in "81." At that time we all heard that the killer was still on the loose and heading south. That meant we could run into him at any time! We were all scared and some hikers even decided to buy knives or pistols. This section of trail was kind of "quarantined" when I came through the last time, so I had not been on this particular section before. The pine boards of the shelter where the murder had been committed have been replaced, and there is no longer any sign of blood, or the fact that something as gruesome as that had even occurred in the area. There still seemed to me to be a chill in the air since I was aware of the events that had taken place in "81, and we passed by the Wapitti Shelters while the weather was nice, continuing to our lunch stop at Docs Knob Shelter. This put us eight miles away from our goal.

The rhododendron were spectacular at this time of year in this area, particularly on the descent towards the New River Valley and the city of Pearisburg. We encountered a pretty good rainstorm during the descent, and Jim took a class 10 wipe out face first as he lost footing on the steep descent. That brought the full load of his pack right down on his head when he hit the ground. Not a fun thing. Luckily, he was not injured, and we continued down to the civilization below. Pearisburg is one of the largest of the trail towns, and even though it is technically right on the trail, the blue-blazed side trail to the Holy Family Hospice is about two miles long and up a steep road at the very end. The post office happens to be before the hospice, but we had not made it there in time, mail would have to wait until Monday.

Upon arrival, we found the place packed to the gills. I was not expecting that. Judging by the registers, there were not many people directly ahead of us. That means one or two days ahead. Apparently many were hanging around waiting for the rain to stop. There is also that unseen magnetic pull that sucks hikers into hostiles and just never lets go. It provides such pleasures and vices that the tempted never want to leave. Some hang around for weeks on end drinking beer, gouging themselves with food and having the time of their lives. I talked with several of them before showering and then running down to the store for supplies. There is a small store not too far away from the hospice where I picked up a gallon of milk, a box of raisin bran, and five bananas - most of which I ate for supper. I felt uneasy in the crowded upper bunk area of the barn-shaped structure, so Jim and I decided to spend the night out in the fresh air underneath the cone shaped roof of the gazebo pavilion just out back. The bunkhouse provided a stuffy, noisy atmosphere that I did not want to deal with, the pavilion offered a nice cool breeze, and for some reason there were no mosquitoes. It rained occasionally, but we managed to keep dry. Tomorrow would be a free day since we did not get to the post office.

I hope some of the residents leave tomorrow morning.



*Pink Rhododendron*



June 19, 1983 Sunday (1530.3 mtg)

Ate the remainder of my box of raisin bran for breakfast this morning. Today is Fathers day, and it is also Sunday. Since we were staying at the Holy Family Hospice, it only seemed right that we attend the church service right next door. The service included communion, which I took part in. I was surprised that actual wine, rather than grape juice, was used in the ceremony. Afterwards it was announced that there were cookies and other treats that the members had brought in, and we were all invited to have some. I ate a lot of cookies and a couple of cupcakes. Afterwards I called my parents and talked with my father for a long time. I felt guilty that I had been running up the phone bill, but I don't think that they cared. I think, well at least I hoped, that the trip was as exciting for them as it was for me. Back at the hospice, I fried up some steak-ums that were left by a hiker named George who had left earlier in the morning, and made myself a sandwich. I had never heard of steak-ums, but whatever they really were, I enjoyed them immensely. Had I not heard him say he was leaving them for anyone who wanted them, I would not have eaten them. Sometimes unidentified food can sit in the fridge for too long before someone decides to toss it.

Suddenly Danny, a postal employee showed up with a mailbag full of mail. Somehow, someone had talked the post office employee to bring the mail to the hospice this afternoon! He apparently had enough authority to go into the post office and bring up the mail to the hikers. There were a lot of hikers here, and perhaps that had something to do with it. I thought, "great, now we can move on today, or at least get an early start tomorrow." How wrong I was. Everyone got their mail except Jim. His mail had been sent insured and therefore was locked up at the post office waiting for him to sign for it. We were stuck here for the duration. How does the post office know the mail is for the hikers? Most hikers have mail sent in their name, in care of the postmaster. The outside is usually marked "Hold for AT Hiker." That seems to tip them off. I received a couple of letters and a package from Mom. After evaluating the goodies in the package, figuring out how many breakfasts, lunches, and suppers I would need for the next couple of days, I made a trip down to the Kroger store and bought \$14.00 worth of groceries. The remainder of the afternoon was taken up by talking and playing games with the other hikers. I met a lot of new people today including Pearl and Al, Jim and Inez, George, Peter from Quebec and another friend of his that I don't remember his name, Tim and Maynard, Gary and Tom. Another couple named Dave and Beth that we had met in Hot Springs somehow got here before we did. Upon inquiring, they admitted that they had taken a lot of short cuts. Peter left with his partner after eating lunch, to hitch up to Vermont. I guess they liked the Northern climate better than this rainy weather down in lower Virginia.

Later in the afternoon I made up a rice-a-roni stroganoff with fresh hamburger mixed in that I had purchased from Kroger. I did not want to eat it all. I actually gave some of it away! There is always someone ready to eat any leftovers. I wanted to leave room for cereal a little later.

Around 7:30 pm some of the guys decided to go to Kroger. I decided to stop at the little store closer to the hospice first to check for A & W Rootbeer, which Kroger did not have. The little store had it, so I bought some and then purchased some vanilla ice cream at Kroger. I loaded up my cook pot with ice cream and poured on the rootbeer. Figuring that would be enough for me I then offered the rest of the ice cream to anyone, and there was no trouble getting rid of the remainder. A little later I ate about a half a box of Honey Nut Cheerios, talked until about ten p.m. and then headed off to bed with a full stomach.





June 20, 1983 Monday (1530.3 mtg)

I polished off the remainder of the Honey Nut Cheerios cereal and milk for breakfast this morning before heading back down the blue-blazed side trail that took us back toward the trail. We planned a stop at the post office first to collect Jim's mail. Sent some stuff off, probably exposed film for Mom to have developed, wrote about seven post cards, and sent them off too. Suddenly, Jim discovered that he did not have his pack cover in the spot that he normally keeps it. Had he left it back at the hospice? Out of desperation, he hurried back to the hospice to check there. Time went by as I waited for his return. While I waited the postmaster came to the window and said that Jim was on the phone and wanted me to look in the lower compartment of his pack. I did, and sure enough it was there. He had gone all the way back for no reason. I am sure he was relieved, yet embarrassed and pissed at the same time.

Upon his return, he finished mailing out his letters. Amazingly enough after all that we were finally heading back to the trail, but with one of our latest starts. Late, but not as bad as I thought it would be. We headed out at 9:30 am. The walk out of Pearisburg kind of sucked. All the roadwalk just to get where we had left the trail, and then a little more crossing the Senator Shumate Bridge over the New River before dipping back into the woods for a climb up Peters Mountain. The trail followed the crest of Peters Mountain for a large piece of the afternoon it seemed, and later a slick, rocky descent following Pine Swamp Branch near the edge of Pine Swamp brought us to Pine Swamp Branch Shelter. Many stinging nettles thrived in the area. The moist, swampy surroundings were prime habitat for the plant. Luckily there were also numerous Jewel Weed plants growing nearby for those who might need a little medication. I felt a sense of frustration and discontentness in the air today. It may have seemed like it started with the packcover incident, but I think that it had been brewing long before this. Very little was said that night, and I could tell Jim was having a tough time. I was not good at dealing with him, my goal was to reach Katahdin. I wanted to have him along, but if I had to continue on by myself, so be it. I had failed once, but not this time. For Jim, I don't think it was that big of a deal. He was just here to have some fun, which he was not. At least not enough. Many people think that the biggest challenge of the trail would be the physical aspect of the trail, and that might be what takes people out at the very beginning. But farther down the trail it becomes more of a mental game. Can I keep going with what seems to be the same thing every day - walking, walking, and more walking. It can get rather boring. Sometimes when you are at your very lowest, and ready to quit, you just have to go on for another week and many times your mood will change. I mentioned this to Jim. The trail can do strange things to your mind. I have at times come up with thoughts of all kinds of things that I can do once I return from the trail. Of course, if I had not been on the trail, I would probably never have thought of these things. Once, since food is such a major concern on the trail, I had decided that I would become a chef when I returned since I had a newfound interest in eating. Of course out on the trail everything tastes good. I have had dreams of doing other things while on the trail, but none have been pursued with as much enthusiasm as the enthusiasm for the dreams when the dreams were made.

For our first day out of Pearisburg, 18.8 miles was probably too much, and contributed to Jims waning enthusiasm for continuing with the hike. It was a long day. We had gotten started late, and now we were ending late. We arrived at the shelter between seven and eight o'clock that evening. Fixed supper after having some problems making a mutual decision about what to eat, and then went to bed. Dave and Beth, whom we had passed earlier, rolled in after dark. Today I saw some of those red newts and a whitetail deer along the trail.



June 21, 1983 Tuesday (1551.5 mtg)

Today was a day with little to remember; especially when one figures that one of the highlights was left covered up in the ground several yards off the trail in the woods as the result of all of the eating I had done back in Pearisburg. I did see two deer today. We ate lunch at War Spur Shelter after about twelve miles, where we met a fellow hiker using the trailname "Trick-knee". Obviously, he had some problem with his knee.

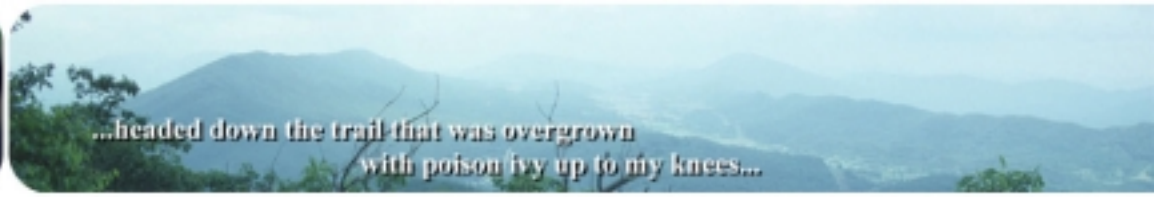
During the day Jim and I had an irritating squabble about whether it was time to take a break or not. I am the kind of guy who just keeps on going with little time for breaks. Jim seemed to want more breaks. I got disgusted and said, "OK. Let's take a break." This got a break for Jim, but I think the manner in which I accepted it was not appropriate. Once more, I think that we should have traveled a little bit more independently. (A note of interest, six years later the same type of situation evolved when my fiancée and I attempted to hike the Appalachian Trail together, but that is another story.)

The trail was rocky up towards Pond Mountain Lean-to. We had carried water all the way from War Spur Shelter, which is where the last good spring was located. The area since Pearisburg has been kind of dry compared to farther south. To conserve water, we ate a cold, dry supper. Good thing that Mom and Dad had sent us a roll of summer sausage. We had to save our water for drinking.

Neil "Ironman" and Oreo, his dog were at Big Pond Shelter when we arrived. He had just finished his laundry and I think I offended him when I made a comment about his dingy grey underwear that he had out on the line to dry. I said something to the effect of "nobody wears underwear out here because they get like that. Get some shorts with the built in mesh panties." Although my statement may have been true, I guess I did not say it tactfully enough, it was supposed to be a joke. I checked out the pond near the shelter and found it to contain an interesting community of sphagnum moss. There was no open water in the pond, it was overgrown with sphagnum and other plant life.







June 22, 1983 Wednesday (1495.2 mtg)

Today we found that the trail had been relocated around Newport, Virginia. I was scheduled to pick up a package at the post office there, so now the next post office that I come across I will have to send a letter to the post master at Newport and have them forward the package to a destination farther on. The relocation took about 10 miles off of the original trail so we arrived at Niday Shelter at the middle of the day rather than ending our day there. For several miles before we reached Niday Shelter, the path followed a treacherous ridgeline over Sinking Creek Mountain. At the peak of the miles long ridge were huge flat slabs of rock tilted at about a 45 degree angle that the trail passed over forcing us to be careful as we traversed or we would end up at the bottom of the slabs - undoubtedly covered with scratches. To top it off, there were rumblings in the not to distant skies as the afternoon heat began to produce the possibility of rain. The slabs would be murder in the rain. Although it did rain during part of the traverse, we successfully navigated the remaining sloping rocks and headed down on a trail that was overgrown with poison ivy up to my knees. There was no avoiding it, so I plowed right on through. I don't know if it was because the leaves were wet from rain, or the fact that I washed as soon afterwards as I could, but I managed to not have a reaction to it. Usually I am highly allergic to it.

At Niday, we met a couple of thru hikers, who were actually a couple, known as Ma & Pa Cretin, one of the best trail names I had heard so far. I liked the sound of it. We took a break there while I washed in the stream nearby.

Not long after leaving Niday Shelter we encountered one of the areas that is forever etched into my memory as one of the most "boring" sections. The area in itself is rather interesting, but the amount of it is a little too much. The description in the guide says "for the next six miles, with little change in elevation, the trail traces a snaking course along the western slope of Brushy Mountain, crossing successive ridges and gullies with intermittent streams." There is little change in elevation, and each turn is so much like the last that it becomes annoying after a while. The weather was somewhat rainy and foggy.

After this section, we stopped for a long break at Trout Creek before putting in the last mile to the blue-blazed side trail to Pickle Branch Shelter. I was leary of going the half mile down to Pickle Branch shelter since the last time I was here there were reports of having to walk through tall grass that contained hoards of ticks ready to be brushed off onto your passing legs. This I did not want to experience. This year was different, and there were no problems with voracious ticks. We checked ourselves nonetheless. We met George at the shelter. George Steffanos was one of the hikers we had caught up to at Pearisburg, but left the morning after our first night there. I had been following George through the registers at the shelters for some time because I was entertained by his humorous writings. He had written hilarious songs, and little stories about the backpacker with no name modeled after the character in some of the spaghetti westerns starring Clint Eastwood. It was a thrill finally getting to meet him and talk with him. We had briefly met in Pearisburg, but not enough to get to know him. I read about his death defying rush to Pearisburg to escape the lightning and hail on the mountains that dropped down to the New River, and actually was only a day or two behind him at the time. We had not encountered the hail like he had. I also had read about the shin splints that he developed as a result. Now with shin splints, and shoes that were falling apart, we were able to catch up with him.



June 23, 1983 Thursday (1463.4 mtg)

Jim informed me this morning that he was thinking about quitting.

That was something I really did not want to have him do, yet I felt it might be a good thing. I wanted someone to be able to reminisce with when it was all over and done. It's great to tell your stories to someone who was not with you and is interested, but only those who have actually gone through it all will ever really feel what it was like. We had a good friendship up to this point, and if having him continue would erode this, then I wanted him to go.

For a while we traveled around the ridge similar to the six mile section of yesterday and then seemed to come to some areas where views could be had. There were low hanging clouds obscuring most of the terrain. The area seemed to be a very dry ecosystem, an area with pine trees and soil that was quite sandy and dry. There were many rock outcroppings in the area. Three miles past the shelter trail, we encountered one of the more interesting outcrops known as the "Dragon's Tooth." I had a yearning to attempt to climb to the top and see what the view was like, but I did not want to end my hike here as a result of a climbing accident. The stone monolith leaned impressively at a slight angle, and access to the top was via a crack in the side. From the dragons tooth the trail descended toward the Catawba Valley with a couple of sections involving navigation over other rocky outcrops with names like Devils Seat, Viewpoint Rock, and Rawies Rest before coming to the road crossing at VA 311 next to the Catawba Grocery. I had been at the Catawba Grocery before. It was here in 1981, that I had decided to end my first thru-hike attempt. I had come to this spot, phoned my parents and set up a rendezvous in Cloverdale, twenty-five miles down the trail as a pickup spot.

Summer was beginning to heat up, and so Jim and I split a quart of ice cream as we rested. During the ice cream break, Jim informed me that he really wanted to go home. I had talked with my mother on the phone back in Pearisburg about the possibility of meeting us somewhere along the trail around the 4th of July, so I called her and asked if they wanted to meet us in Afton. She said they could. I asked Jim if he would continue until then, and afterwards if he still wanted to quit, they could take him home. Jim said "This" was where he was going to quit. He would arrange for his parents to pick him up at this spot. He wanted to go no further. He said that he had some things at home that he wanted to do.



*The Dragon's Tooth.*

While we were at the grocery store, George and his failing boots stopped in for a break. I gave him a roll of fiber reinforced packaging tape to wrap around the boot to hold it together and prevent rocks from entering. After the quart of ice cream, and saying goodbye to my partner, and co-member of the Biumvirate Pedestrian League, I continued up the switchbacks that lead to the crest of North Mountain, which the trail followed for the next nine miles or so until it dropped down into Scorched Earth Gap.



*Jim & George at the Catawba Grocery Store.*

I caught up with George and hiked with him for a while until just before the gap. Although the place got its name as a result of some trail maintainer traveling at a very rapid pace through the area, I had a different experience of the place in '81, when I experienced such hot weather there and nearly passed out. The heat was not as intense as two years ago, but still warm enough to live up to my recollections. Near the gap, I took a blue-blazed side trail off to see the view from Big Tinker Cliffs. It was a tough little climb that did not reward me as much as I had expected based on the guide description, but perhaps I had not gone far enough to find the overhanging cliffs. I should have gone

farther. The shelter was less than a mile from the gap, so I could easily have continued along the side trail a little farther without my pack.

I arrived at the Lamberts Meadow shelter and looked for the large wild black cherries on the tree overhanging the back of the shelter that I had discovered two years ago. I ate a few that I found. Later, George arrived at the shelter and I was glad that I would not have to spend the night alone now that Jim was officially a hiker that was "through." Later on near dark, a strange little short guy named John came into the shelter. He asked if either of us was Alan, and I said "I was." He then informed me that Jim had gotten in touch with his Father and arranged for him to come out and pick him up in a few days. I was happy to hear the news, yet sad that Jim was no longer on the trail. John was very strange, sort of hyper active, and had been off the trail for some time and lost contact with his friends that he had been hiking with. He was all revved up and intended to hike twenty-five mile days for as long as it took to catch up with them. When he was not in earshot, George and I just cracked up and thought this guy must be nuts, there is no way he can keep up a pace like that! He spent the night with us and amused us with his exploits and attempts to show his machismo.

Ate Fettuccini for supper.



*Ledges along Tinker Cliffs.*



*View from Tinker Cliffs.*





June 24, 1983 Friday (1443.7 mtg)

Today George and I would tackle the Tinker Ridge. For the next seven miles or so the trail followed the almost knife edged crest of Tinker Mountain before dropping off the left side. My pace seemed to be quicker than George's and I was soon ahead of him. This may have been partly due to his boot problems, which had been solved only temporarily by the tape addition. This morning we reinforced the fiber tape with some thin nylon rope that I spared from my supply for hanging my pack. This held the boot fairly well, but if it didn't hold until Cloverdale with this patch he was in trouble. I took a break at Hay Rock, a massive slab of uptilted sandstone that is part of the backbone of the Tinker Ridge. The climb up to the tip of this monolith, which was much wider than the Dragon's Tooth, provided a great view of Carvins Creek Reservoir, the valley surrounding it, and of course our favorite - Brushy Mountain. While I was on the rock, George showed up and joined me for a drink of the view. His boots were hanging in there, but just barely. George was very much into photography. I do not know how many pictures he took of during his trip, but I figure it was more than I did.

This was another mostly dry ridge, so the water that I carried was what I drank as I enjoyed the view. The remainder would have to last me the next five miles to the road crossing near Cloverdale. The day was hot and dry as we traveled the ridge and began our descent along a gravel road for a short distance. We began seeing ripe raspberries along the way, which I stopped and picked for later. While on the road we met some locals and George inquired about a place that he could buy some cheap boots to hold him over until his mail drop farther up the trail. They told us about an outlet near Roanoke, just past Cloverdale. This was good news for George. Soon afterwards we came to a busy section of the trail, a place where many roads come together and business was booming. The area seemed to be becoming the truckstop capital of the world with Interstate 81 nearby. I talked George into eating with me at the Country Cookin' restaurant, one of those all you can eat salad and desert bar places that hikers dream about. All you had to do to get the all you can eat bars was to order one of the several entrees and the rest was included. They were not expecting what was about to hit their restaurant. I ordered a beef and cheese sandwich with fries, and began my trips to the bar. I consumed a huge salad for the roughage, and then the sandwich and fries they brought out to me. We sat at a small table for two, which ended up almost too small after we started to eat dessert. Between us we consumed thirteen of their various puddings, fruit cups, and other choices. It was a sight to see, most unimaginable to our waitress, who could not believe our accomplishment. I was rather stuffed and amazed myself at eating six desserts after such a huge meal with salad. They made no money on us that day.

George's account of the feast describes it better than I ever could: "They had an all-you-can-eat salad, fruit, vegetable, and dessert bar. Heh, heh, heh -- the fools! They must have loved us. First of all, we went in there dirty. Very dirty. Clothes and bodies virtually unwashed since Pearisburg. Then, we began to eat.

We ordered the steak sandwich lunch special, which came with the bar. I started with a huge salad, a pile of rolls, and a dish of fruit. These are items which I just do not get on the trail. I was most of the way through this course, my appetizer, when the sandwiches arrived.

The finale was where we achieved greatness. Desserts came in little tin cups, which we stacked on our table as we emptied them. Our waitress kept giggling "Oh, my God!" and "That's incredible!" every time she walked past -- I thought my fly was open. Our final tally was thirteen dead soldiers. I killed seven of

them: three custards, two strawberry shortcakes, and two chocolate puddings. My stomach felt like a sharecropper who had just won the lottery.

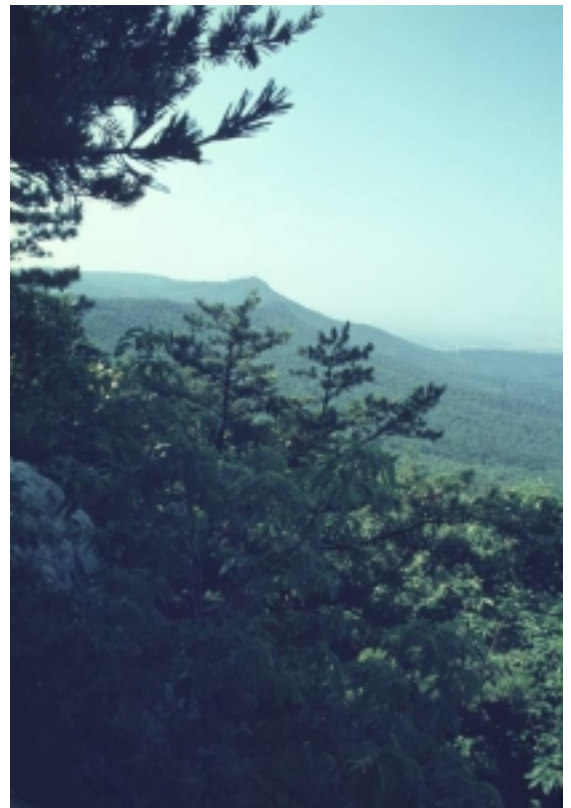
When we left, the restaurant manager was crying and pounding the floor with his fists and his feet. I guess that our eating prowess was so impressive he was overcome with emotion. I waved to the man tacking the Chapter 11 notice on the door as we headed down US 11 towards Cloverdale."

From George's online journal at <http://www.skwc.com/exile/Hail-nf.html>

We had a difficult time walking the mile along US 11 with bulging bellies to the Motel Hollins where I suggested we stay the night. It was the same motel that I had spent my last night on the trail two years ago. We took a room for two that set us back twenty dollars and settled in. From there I went to the Post Office, which was a little difficult to find. I think it was one of those located in a mobile home trailer, I remember some like that - particularly the one in Newport where I had not stopped this time. I remember it was a mobile home painted with red, white, and blue stripes with just a little room for you to come in and do your postal activities. Whatever the one in Cloverdale was like, it was not on the main drag of the town. I received a package from Glen Stolar and Margaret Porter. Friends are wonderful! It is nice to know you are being thought of.

Before returning to the motel, I stopped at the Green-way grocery store, a hole in the wall tiny grocery store, probably family owned for many years, which was now on the way out as a result of all the expansion and "progress" taking place around the area. Apparently some of their goods had been on the shelf for decades as I found mealy worms in a box of pop tarts, and instant oatmeal that I purchased and opened later in the motel. One of my fond memories from two years ago was of frozen, day old donuts that they sold at a much reduced price. This year they had none. I was very disappointed. I called and talked with mom for a while before heading to the pool for an afternoon swim. George was busy on an adventure to obtain some makeshift boots so he could continue on his journey, so I had the afternoon to myself. I decided to take the buggy groceries back to the store and get some others. Upon opening the new pop tart box, I noticed there were a lesser amount of holes in the packaging, so I accepted the extra protein, and decided to chance it.

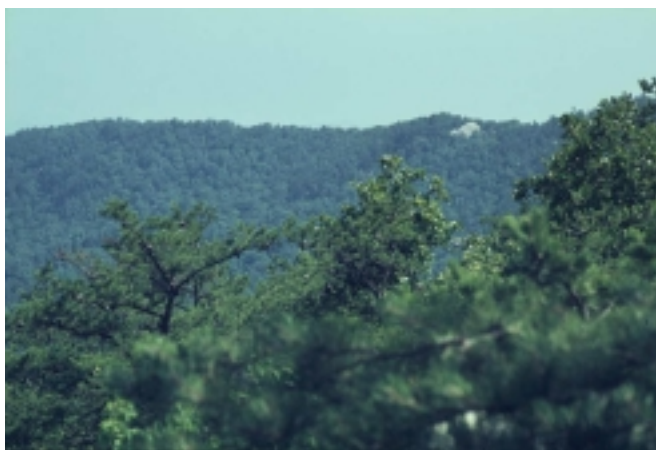
Watched "Eibeshide", on the color TV that was available in our room, and later went for a wade in the pool and in the process was able to rinse my shorts out once again. Felt very refreshing. Watched Johnny Carson and rinsed out my t-shirt in the sink with soap and water. Rinse, rinse, rinse, and the dirt still keeps coming out. But there is the satisfaction of knowing that it has to be cleaner than when you started. Off to bed.



*Surveying the trail along the ridge  
to come.*



*George climbs to the tip of Hay Rock.*



*Hay Rock seen from miles away.*



*Roadwalk out of town toward  
Fulhard Knob.*





June 25, 1983 Saturday (1433.9 mtg) From Gonzo's Appalachian Trail journal

Decided last night to allow myself to enjoy the novelty of the motel bed a little longer this morning since it was comfortable, and I was paying for it. I also did not want to force George to get up any earlier than he wanted to. I woke up at 6:30 am and ate the raspberries I had picked yesterday along with a jelly sandwich for breakfast. Brushed my teeth, got things packed back into my backpack, said "see ya later at Bobblets Gap Lean-to", and headed down to the Greenway for one last stop to pick up a couple of those 15 cent ice cream bars that they carried in the freezer. The bars went down good as I walked and ate. A short distance after the turnoff leading to the post office, I started hitching and secured a ride to the trail intersection. Must have started walking between 7:30 and 8:00 am and the heat was already becoming intense. My boots stuck to the black tar road as I walked the road out of the area. Bootprints could be seen as I pulled each step away from the pavement with some effort. Along the way I noticed a 1 ½ foot long rattlesnake that was more than just stuck to the tar, but had been embedded by couple of passing tires. Apparently someone must have stopped to check it out and removed the rattles, there were none. I looked out over a cornfield alongside of the road and noticed that the peaks of only two mountains could be seen rising above the cornstalks. The only thing I could think of was how much it reminded me of a pair of breasts - as if a giant woman were laying somewhere beyond the cornfield. The heat was that intense! I was glad when the roadwalk ended.

It was a nice, sweaty, graded climb up Fulhard's Knob to the shelter located there. I stopped at the shelter for a slight break. While at Fulhard's Knob Shelter, John, Mr. Machismo came strolling in from the north. Apparently, he had lost his motivation and the twenty-five miles per day were just too much for him. He was thinking about calling it quits. I ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, my most common trail lunch, and split. The area traversed in the last few days is one of the toughest to overcome as far as mental conditioning is concerned. If you can make it past this hurdle, your chances of becoming one of the few to complete the whole trail are pretty good.

I continued on along a ridgecrest after my break. For five or six miles the trail was mostly on the ridge, dropping down to Wilson Creek before a steady climb back toward the ridge at Blackhorse Gap. A mile or so past the gap I saw the road crossing at Taylor's Mountain overlook. In hopes of trading stories for food, I talked some folks who had driven to the overlook to check out the view. We talked for a little while before moving on to the next overlook. It is customary around this area, all through the area that the trail parallels skyline drive and all of it's overlooks, to take on the persona of "Yogi the Bear" and see what you can scavenge from the public. My first attempt was unsuccessful. I soon emerged from the woods at Montvail Overlook to find a family eating a picnic there. I put on the charm and was offered a piece of fried chicken and an ice cold coke! Such a deal! From there it was only a couple of miles to Bobblets Gap Lean-to where I met Scott, a southbound hiker, eating lunch. We swapped info about what was in store for each other in their prospective directions. He almost had me convinced to move on today for another six miles to Cove Mountain Lean-to. It was only three-thirty. I could have made it easy, but I had told George I would meet him at Bobblets Gap Shelter. Much later he finally arrived and I was glad to have the company. Seventeen miles was enough today.

Success rate today for my "yogi-ing" skill - 50%.



June 26, 1983 Sunday (1416.6 mtg)

A short distance from Bobblets Gap shelter I ran across a rather large rattlesnake sitting in the middle of the trail. I sat down my pack to observe the reptile for a while. Whether it was the adventure in dining on something exotic I had never before tasted, or a craving for protein I was lacking, I killed the rattlesnake using a stick with the intention of eating it. I had heard stories about how the snakes will bite themselves thus injecting themselves with toxin so the meat would be inedible. I thought that was a load of crap, but it lingered in the back of my mind as I removed my trusty scissors from my first aid kit to cut off it's head and prepare the snake for eating. I slid the scissors down its ventral side and inserting my finger into the body cavity, disemboweled the snake with ease. I then just as easily peeled off the skin being careful to keep the 12 rattles attached to the skin. I put both skin and meat in separate plastic bags, left George a note indicating that I had killed a rattler, and was going to prepare it at Jenkins Creek. If he would supply the squeeze Parkay that I knew he carried, I would share the delicacy with him.

Upon reaching the creek, I also ran into some local folks. I asked if they happened to have some butter or margarine that I could use to fry up my freshly killed snake. When they learned that I would share the meat with them their curiosity was peaked. Even though they had lived in snake country for years, most went out of their way to not make contact with the beasts. They did have some margarine, so I washed the meat in the creek and began stove preparations to fry it up. The two foot long snake was cut into many smaller pieces in order to fit it into the top of my cook kit, which serves as a fry pan as well as lid. Each of us was able to sample some of the meat and most commented that it was "kind of like chicken." I agree, the texture was much like chicken, but the taste was much like the margarine that it was swimming in as it fried. There was not much meat on the many bones, only the area near the spine contained any amount worth while. They supplied a quart of milk as a refreshing drink to go along with the snake. George finally did arrive, but unfortunately the snake had been consumed by the curious crowd. I spent the remainder of my break with George, and then continued up the trail. I would need the energy provided by the snake to traverse the next bit of trail, during the next twelve miles the trail was mainly



*View possibly from Peaks of Otter Overlook.*



*Hangin Tree*

uphill with an overall rise of about 3,000 feet.

I moved on toward Cornelius Creek Lean-to. I arrived there after seventeen miles and made a fateful decision to continue on even farther to Thunder Hill Lean-to, another five miles down the trail. The miles were whizzing by today for some reason. At the shelter I met a man from Missouri, but even the temptation to spend the night with someone from basically the same geographical area as I was not enough to keep me there for the night. At this point I decided to move on even further, perhaps another six miles since I had plenty of light left now that the long days of summer had arrived. This decision meant that I probably would not be spending the night with George tonight. Unfortunately, it meant that I would never see him during the rest of the journey.

I traveled about a mile and a half before arriving at Thunder Hill Overlook situated next to a pull-off along the skyline drive. There was a nice breeze blowing, and the area seemed appealing so I decided to make camp here for the night. Somewhere near 7:30 pm, a group pulled into the parking area and set up a picnic close to where I was intending on staying. At a public place like this I would not set up my

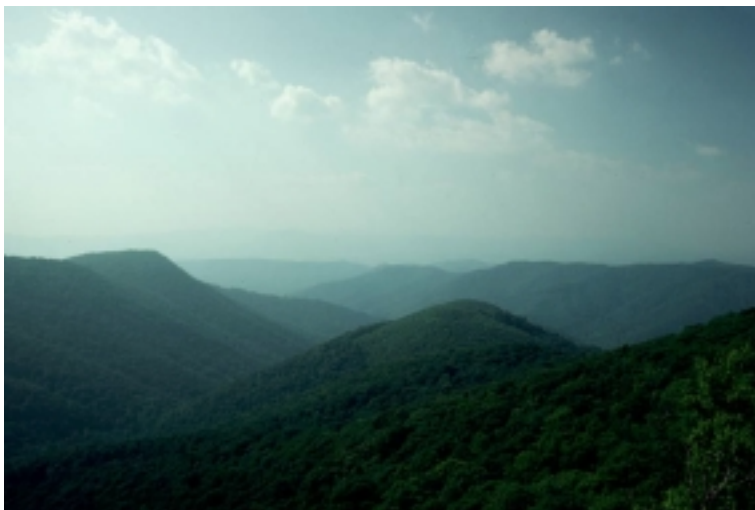
sleeping arrangements until dark in hopes that no one would bother me after that. I struck up a conversation with one of the guys and managed to get myself invited to their bar-b-que. They packed plenty of food, and I ate three grilled cheeseburgers, potato salad, ambrosia, noodle salad, and Dr. Pepper. They were all very nice people, as most I have met have been. After they had all driven away, another guy named Geoff drove up and decided to spend the night with me at the overlook. That suited me fine, I was not looking forward to spending the night alone. He was on his way down to Hendersonville. We enjoyed the cool breeze, and watched the red sunset from the overlook before camping out without setting up a tent. The breeze was not enough to keep all the bugs at bay, but that's life on the trail at this time of year.

Sixty-six percent today (2 for 3) for Yogi.



*Bear Wallow Gap, Va. 695*





*Unknown viewpoint after Bear Wallow Gap.*



*Ribbon Snake near Thunder Hill Overlook..*



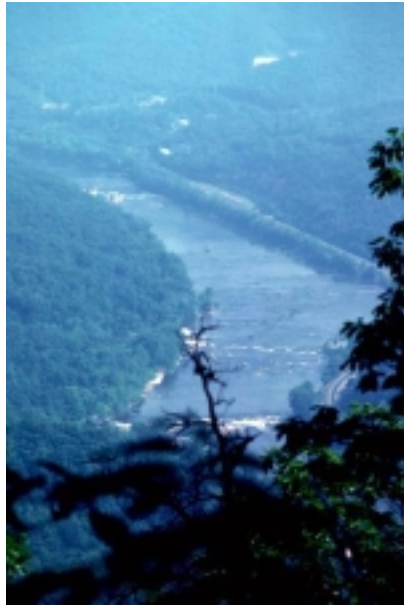
*Tourist named Geoff.*



*Thunder Hill Overlook Campsite*



June 27, 1983 Monday (1395.1 mtg)



*James River.*

Had leftovers this morning! This is quite unusual. The group last night had so much food that they left me with the remaining potato and macaroni salad. Good solid food. Life is good! The day started out with some downhill, but soon went uphill to Thunder Ridge. I felt lucky that we managed to spend the night without getting rained on in an area with so many places named "Thunder something." Two miles of downhill brought me to Petites Gap, where the trail began a mile and a quarter of uphill to Highcock Knob. From there, with the exception of a couple of very short uphill sections, the trail began a descent to the James River almost nine miles away. Within a mile of beginning the downhill from Highcock Knob, I noticed that there were no longer white blazes on the trees, but blazes that were painted brown over the white. This indicated to me that I was no longer on the current Appalachian Trail, but had somehow followed the old route. The trail was clear just like a normal trail, but I had not found Marble Springs as I had expected, so I backtracked until I found a familiar white blaze, looked around until I spotted another, and found my way back to the

trail. Somehow I had missed the turnoff while I wasn't paying enough attention. Back on track, I continued downhill toward the James River.

About four miles farther down the trail I noticed a disturbance off to the left. Looking toward the sound, I noticed a black bear as it began running parallel to the trail down the mountain. I dropped my pack and attempted to get my camera out before the bear disappeared. The bear was no longer in my site by that time, so I put my pack back on and walked with camera in hand, halfway hoping that it would appear again, yet fearing that I would get attacked. I had no intention of playing Daniel Boone and whooping this bear, skinning it and eating it for supper - This was a wild bear! Not like those "wild" bears in the Smokies that are used to human contact. I felt privileged to have seen it. I walked for sometime but never heard nor caught a glimpse of the bear. I did find a viewpoint soon afterwards where I could see the James River Gorge in the valley below and since I already had my camera out...

A couple of miles farther along I came across Matts Creek Lean-to located on the other side of a ravine with Matts Creek running between the trail and the shelter. I found a woman named Pat on my side of the ravine picking blueberries near the trail. Although the shelter had a picturesque setting and a very tempting "swimming hole" enlarged near the shelter, I moved on toward the James River.

The trail crosses the James River on US 511 on Snowden Bridge via a narrow sidewalk on the side of the roadbed. The Virginia Electric Power Company and Dam is located just upstream from the crossing, and the bridge provides a great view of the facility and the falls that were created as a result of the dam. The trail climbs away from the river as it parallels Cashewa Creek for a couple of miles to John's Hollow Shelter, where I met Jody, a fellow hiker from Maine. He was traveling along the Appalachian Trail and at the same time traveling home. I was impressed by this. He reminded me of the servant in the movie "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" with his long blond hair and facial features, and seemed as alien to me

as the servant in the movie turned out to be after hearing his thick "Down East" accent. He was funny and I enjoyed his company. We took a skinny dip in Cashewa Creek near the shelter to cool us down in the afternoon heat before I set out for the toughest part of the day - the seven and one half miles of mostly climbing up the area known as "Rocky Row." The gain in elevation topped out at almost two and a half thousand feet over seven and a half miles with only one mile being "level", and maybe two miles of "downhill." It was known to be tough, but with this heat it would prove unbearable.

The first part of the climb up Rocky Row was about two and a half miles with a gain of roughly 1500 feet. It had become my habit to blow out the uphill climbs with no stop if possible, and rest once at the top. That way the climb was done and I could rest for whatever was to come after. I blasted up this particular climb with determination like I never had before. Why? I don't really know. Perhaps it was because I had heard how tough it was and I was going to prove I could do it. I certainly had my blood pumping as the climb went on and on. Sweat was pouring out of my body like gang busters. This ascent forced me to breath harder than any climb to this point. By the time I reached the end of this part of the ascent I was so exhausted that I just took off my pack, lay down on the trail, and sprawled out spread eagle while laying on my back. The heat of the day was tremendous. I probably had picked the hottest portion of the day to do this climb, but hey, I am in the greatest shape of my life at this time. I am twenty-three years old and have covered over seven hundred miles of tough up and down trail to get me to this point. I did it. I rested for only a few minutes. Of course the entire climb was not over.

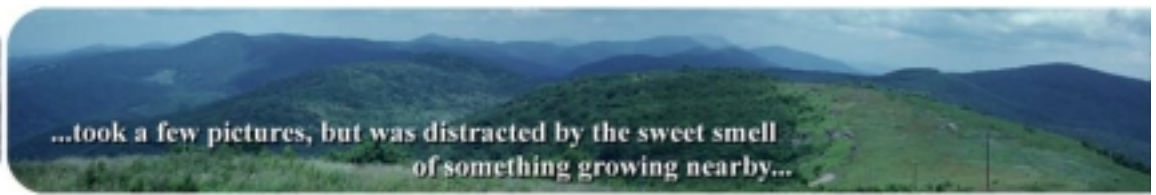
From this point the trail dips just a bit and then begins the ascent again toward the high point on Big Rocky Row about a mile away, an increase in elevation of about 600 feet. This section turned out to be not too bad, and I was soon up and over and headed down a bit toward Saddle Gap. The trail was mostly level for a mile past Saddle Gap until I arrived at Saltlog Gap for a good break before the final ascent up Bluff Mountain. For the next mile and a half the trail ascended until I reached the wooded summit of Bluff Mountain where I stopped and sighed, having completed the toughest section of the trail up to this point. Or was it just the heat that made the climb so strenuous? Whatever it was, it took the energy right out of me. Luckily it was all downhill for less than one and a half miles to Punchbowl Shelter.

I arrived at Punchbowl Shelter to find Pat, the lady I had seen picking blueberries along the trail earlier near Matts Creek. Somehow she had gotten ahead of me and arrived at the shelter showing no signs of fatigue, just a nice chipper attitude. Of course she had not done the climb that I had just gone over, she had gotten a ride along the parkway and totally skipped the climb. Some hikers are like that. First thing I did after taking off my backpack was to jump into the punchbowl! Next to the shelter there is a nice round pond that was just what I needed after extruding practically every bit of water from my body on the climb to get here. It felt reeeaaalll goooood! I had traveled twenty-six miles of trail today, but actually hiked twenty-seven with the little episode of lost trail adventure earlier. Later Jody and another hiker named Curt showed up. Ate cheese noodles and pudding for supper. Slept outside my sleeping bag at least for a while since Pat had set up a fire and was smoking out the mosquitoes and other insects. Pat made what she called "pan bread," to eat. She carried flour, and some other ingredients that when mixed together made a dough that she "baked" in her pan somehow. Smelled really good whatever it was.



*James River crossing.*





June 28, 1983 Tuesday (1373.6 mtg)

Today the trail leaves the Punchbowl in a general downhill direction for about five miles with a few short climbs in between, notably a half mile climb up Rice Mountain before continuing down to Pedlar Dam, the reservoir for the city of Lynchburg, Virginia. The trail passes below the Dam, and then climbs beside it allowing a decent view of the lake below. For the next four miles the trail has ups and downs, but little change in elevation as it makes its way to Brown Mountain Creek Lean-to. Had the distance been right, this shelter would have been an ideal place to stay. The shelter came complete with two springs, an outhouse, and a great stream to cool yourself off in just out front. If I remember correctly, this was the place where there was a hollowed out spot in the stream that produced a nice deep pool for swimming. A choice shelter, but not located at the end of my day.



I began the big climb of the day from Brown Mountain Creek Lean-to expecting to gain two thousand five hundred feet once again, but this time in four and a half miles or so. The goal: Bald Knob summit. The beginning was more gradual, and I may have stopped for lunch at US 60, where the trail began a more vigorous climb. From there for 2.8 miles the climb was more intense. Yesterdays' climb felt tougher, although the profile on the map for today looked worse. Perhaps stopping for a break part way up helped ease the pain, or maybe I was just getting used to

tough climbs. Bald Knob at this time is a misnomer as the summit is wooded. No doubt it was a tough climb. The mountain presented some problems for an aviator in the past and the remnants of his plane could be seen strewn in an area near the summit. The trail dipped down to Cow Camp Gap before ascending again to the bald summit of Cole Mountain. On Cole mountain there is a microwave repeater station and of course a view. I took a few pictures, but was distracted from that by the sweet smell of something growing nearby. I put my pack down and wandered out into the surrounding field to find numerous tiny wild strawberries growing in the sunshine. I began to collect what I considered to be enough, while eating a few in the process. Most were no larger than one's thumbnail, and it took quite a while to get a pint into my empty Nalgene bottle. I carefully stowed them in my pack for dessert later and moved on in search of the turnoff to Whiggins Spring Shelter about a mile and a half farther down the trail. Sixteen point six miles for the day today, considerably less than yesterday. Maybe that was why the day seemed somewhat tamer. Yesterday I finished the climb during the last six miles of a 25 mile day, whereas today I was climbing much earlier, and after fewer miles traveled.



*Lynchburg reservoir.*

Whiggins Spring Lean-to was located one half mile off of the trail. The idea of having to cover this distance was not appealing to me one bit, but upon arriving I discovered that the spring at the shelter was excellent, which made up for the extra effort needed to get there. Although I would have liked to have spent more time at the strawberry fields, I am glad that I did not. Today was one of the times that it paid to arrive at the shelter somewhat earlier. The first reason for this is that soon after my arrival, the rain began to come down. Second, the population grew to almost twenty-five campers by nightfall, but only enough room for about eight to ten in the shelter. Most of the crowd was from one group of Wilderness Correctional Students and their counselors. They pitched tents in the rain and made the best of it. Probably a good experience for them. The other thru-hikers spending the evening were Curt, Tracy, Pat and Jody. The latter two had arrived later during the rain, and you could tell that Pat was really pissed off, not only because of the rain, but she claimed that Jody had given her some directions that had caused her to walk five miles out of her way! Poor girl, she already skipped the tough climb yesterday. After she calmed down, I talked her into making some pan bread for me. I withheld the information of why I wanted her to do that, because I did not want to share my berries! Although it was not exactly like shortbread, it served well in a pinch as I poured the strawberries in a heap over the bread and dug in. Great dessert to top off the day!

*View from Cole Mountain.*



*Equipment on Cole Mountain.*

*Mushrooms at Whiggins Spring Shelter.*







*View from Cole Mountain.*



June 29, 1983 Wednesday (1357 mtg)

I was up early today in order to make the twenty-three miles to my next destination at Maupin Field Lean-to. Fairly nice walking most of the way, at least until the summit of The Priest, but no great views to be had from Spy Rock or The Priest. Mostly overcast and rainy, but met a lot of hikers today for the first time. There was Dick and Peg from Wisconsin at The Priest Lean-to, and a group of trail maintainers working just before the lean-to. I Ate my lunch at the shelter as I visited with Dick and Peg, and watched comfortably from the shelter as the rain fell outside. The rain subsided as I finished off my lunch so I set off for the second half of the day's hike. The downhill from the summit of the Priest was known to be a killer, dropping three thousand feet in just over four miles. I took off down The Priest as fast as I could go, slipping and sliding here and there in the muddy trail made that way by the recent afternoon rain. I was careful; however, since the trail was rocky and slippery in places. The descent brought me down to the Tye River, where the trail crossed the river by utilizing an interesting suspension bridge, one of those kind that you can get really undulating if you set up a good rhythm as you march across. A few miles past the river I chose to take the blue-blazed Mahar Trail which leads left about 1.5 miles to a 40 foot waterfall, and then that same distance to hook up with the Appalachian Trail near Maupin Field Lean-to. I believe that at one time this side trail was the official AT. The Appalachian Trail continued straight ahead up and over an area known as "Three Ridges." This was an area that I had heard horror stories about. It was known to be very tough. Maybe that is why I bypassed it. I wanted to see the falls. The entire area was foggy and a continuous mist hung in the air as I passed by the falls which were not as spectacular as I had hoped, but then again I was rushing through trying to get to the shelter before



the rain really started to fall. Which it did. Rain falling out of the sky can take the grandeur out of just about any waterfall. The fog was so thick that I had difficulty seeing the blue blazes.

I ran into Pat at the side trail to the Maupin Field shelter just standing there waiting. I believe she was just waiting for one of the people she stayed with the night before to come by and be amazed that she was there before them. I acted indifferent to somewhat disgusted. The blue-blazed alternative to the Appalachian Trail was rough and rocky, and I knew she had not taken that trail. I seriously doubted that she had taken the actual AT either. She probably used her thumb again on the Blue Ridge Parkway, which the trail parallels for many miles in Virginia. At one time the route that the road follows was actually the route that the trail was to follow, but the road lobby won, and the trail had to be relocated. I quickly ducked into the shelter to claim a spot, and found it to be occupied already, but there was room for more. I met Gene from Florida, who tried my pack on for size. The rain fell again after I settled in. Today was one of the more nasty days out on the trail. Dick and Peg arrived a little later on. Around 11.30 pm, after everyone was settled in, had their supper, and were sleeping for the night, we were rudely awakened by Jody as he pulled into the shelter. I don't know how he could have traveled that section of trail in the dark and in the rain as he had just done. It was an amazing feat! He was happy to have arrived, but not happy with the circumstances.



*Swinging bridge over Tye River.*



*View from either Humpback Rock or Spy Rocks.*



*Rusty's Hard Time Hollow.*



June 30, 1983 Thursday (1329.8 mtg)

Judging by the standards of the last few days of trail, today's section was a piece of cake. There were no long up or downhill sections. The only real problem was tall grass. The problem with tall grass is interesting. After a rain, and particularly after a heavy morning dew, tall grass will get your feet more wet than if you had just been hiking in the rain. Even if it is raining and you walk through the grass you don't seem to get as wet as the next morning. Whatever the mechanism, my feet got SOAKED this morning as I passed through the tall grass covering parts of the trail. I, and possibly Jody, were the only ones to actually hike the trail today. The rest chose to follow the parkway to Rockfish Gap. I debated whether I should take the parkway, but luckily I decided against it and remained a "purist."

Some sections of the trail provided very slippery rocks that were difficult to navigate due to the rain, but before I knew it I was at Rockfish Gap wondering which road to take to find the town of Afton, where my next mail drop was. I had picked Afton over Waynesboro thinking that Waynesboro would be too big and spread out to find anything. Afton looked like a small town, and was just off the trail. Suddenly a guy in an International Harvester Truck pulled up and asked if I was a North or South Bounder, and wondered if I needed a ride down the mountain. I replied that I was in search of the Afton post office. I looked past the driver and noticed another hiker sitting in the passenger seat. "What is this all about?" I thought. He said "hop in and I will take you there" and that was all I needed to hear. I threw my pack into the back and crawled into the cab next to the other hiker whose name was Tom Carmichael. I was taken to the post office where I picked up my mail, and then driven to the Waynesboro Fire Station. The driver dropped us off there and said that we were welcome to spend the night at his place. The driver turned out to be Rusty, the guy who was trying to set up a new hostel at his residence near the A.T. around Maupin Field. He told me he would return at around 8.00 pm and take us to his place. Sounded good to me. Got groceries at Kroger, called and talked with my mother, and put the snakeskin I was carrying into some alcohol for preservation. Although I bought supplies for the week, I packed up all that I would need for two days and asked the Fire Warden if I could leave the rest at the station for a couple of days and pick it up on Sunday. I only needed to carry two days until I was to rendezvous with my parents over the Fourth of July holiday. At 8.00 pm, just as he promised, Rusty showed up and picked me up. He stopped at Krogers grocery store and picked up some hot dogs, buns, fresh peaches, and charcoal before driving along the parkway to pick up Tom. He left me at the ranger's station at the entrance to the Shenandoah National Park to get my permit so I would not have to do that the next morning, and went to find Tom.

I stayed at the entry hut with the ranger and talked until Rusty finally returned with Tom in the truck. By that time the fog had begun to thicken as we made our way to his home. It was so thick we could barely see the road. We drove for what seemed many miles before exiting the good road onto a rough gravel drive that lead to his place in the hollow. He named the place "Hard Time Hollow." Rusty was a welder who had developed a passion for hikers and was trying to establish a haven for hikers to stay. I had read about the hostel, but knew very little about the place. I think Tom and I were two of the first hikers to stay at with Rusty. He had no electricity or running water. Refrigeration was provided by a cool spring near the cabin. We roasted the dogs, and talked into the night. The meal was topped off with A&W RootBeer, and fresh peaches. Later, we pulled in a couple of mattresses and went to sleep full and happy. Saw a wild turkey today.

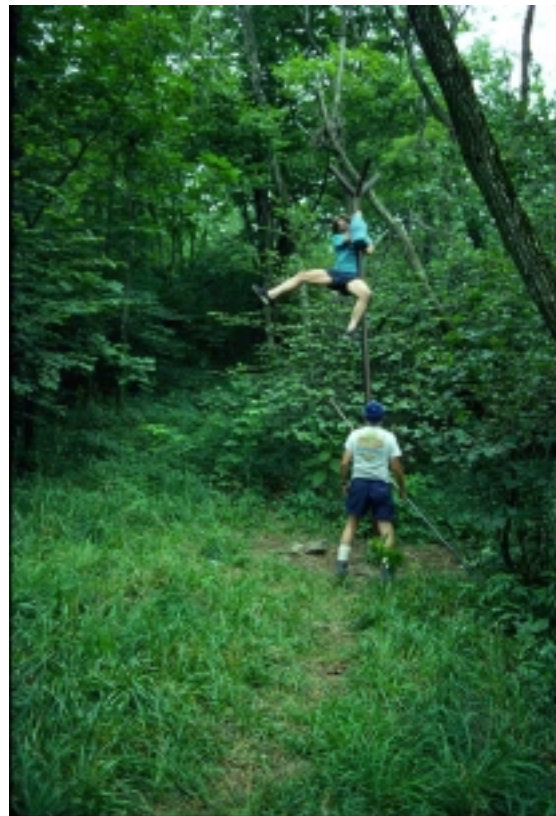


July 1, 1983 Friday (1312.8 mtg)

Got up a little later today following a good nights sleep on the mattresses that were available for our use. Ate a nectarine for breakfast and later engulfed a salad sandwich invented by Rusty. Rusty went out of his way to make us feel welcome. He gave me a ride out to the Ranger station at the entrance to the Shenandoah National Park where I got out to begin my day's hike. He continued on into the park to drop Tom off a little farther down the trail. A permit is required to journey through the park, but I had already secured one last night. I was all set to go. The trail began a tenth of a mile up a hill to the right.

The trail from there until Jarman Gap, about eight miles farther down the trail proved to be rough and rocky, and hard to follow. At Beagle Gap I met two men from Roanoke who gave me two breakfast bars. I must have looked like I was in need of food, as they gave me some peanut brittle a little farther on when I met them again.

I arrived at Blackrock Hut much sooner than I had expected. I guess with the late start, and having to cover almost nineteen miles, my pace was quickened and I had not realized it. The shelter was nice, with an extra shelf, in addition to the main platform, to hold four more bodies. The weather looked threatening and I had little to do, so I gathered some firewood before the big downpour set in. Sat around and ate cookies that I had packed and arranged all of my edible goods into one plastic bag. With all my goodies in the bag, I went out to the "bear pole" and shim-mied up the pole to hang them from the upper hooks. Here, as in the Smokies, there are bears, yet there are no fences in front of the shelters. Instead, the site is equipped with tall spiked poles as a place to store your food safely out of any bear's reach. If you are caught not hanging your food, you may get a fine. I started the fire just before darkness arrived. I had expected another hiker to stay at the shelter tonight, but that was not to happen, the night would be spent solo for the first time on the trip. I think that is why I started the fire. A little security and light to keep me company until I fell asleep. Saw another wild turkey today, this one was on Bear Den Mountain.



*Hanging foodbags in the Shenandoah's.  
(photo '89)*





July 2, 1983 Saturday (1293.3 mtg)

Today is a special day. It is the day that I will rendezvous with my parents somewhere along the Blue Ridge Parkway. They were going to drive all day to spend the following day with me, then drive back to Illinois on Monday in order to be back at work on Tuesday. They must really love me to come all that way to spend such a short period of time in my presence, especially when I exuded the odor of almost two months on the trail, and had a scraggly, long, bushy beard. I gave mom an idea of where I thought I would meet them the last time I talked with her two days ago. I arranged to be waiting at one of the overlooks at a certain mile along the parkway. That was about the best I could do without pinning me down to a particular spot. I noticed the trail in the Shenandoah's had become very nice. Nicely graded, sometimes four feet wide and practically paved. Not at all like other sections of the trail where vegetation encroaches the trail and at times practically hides it from view.

Another thing that is different about the park is the presence of campgrounds. There are campgrounds for "normal" camping situated throughout the park. These are places where people in RV's and some tent campers are congregated in one huge group. While I passed behind Loft Mountain Campground, I found a camera attachment that I thought would be a good addition to my camera gear. I picked it up, but only intended to carry it until I could send it back to Illinois with my folks. Having covered roughly twelve miles, I ate my lunch below the building housing a snack bar, and while eating, a couple of ladies that I had met yesterday dropped by. Although yesterday I acquired a Fig Newton from them, today all I received was conversation. But that was OK, I was all set with food. I drank a soda from the vending machine, and moved on. The excitement of seeing my parents was building and I did not want to miss their arrival. I quickened the pace. This morning I skirted Blackrock summit, climbed over Big Flat Mountain, and Loft Mountain. This afternoon I went over Weaver Mountain, Flattop Mountain, and Roundtop Mountain. The biggest climb of the day was from Powell Gap up to the summit of Hightop Mountain. The change in elevation was almost two thousand feet, but took three and a half miles to ascend. I really stepped up the cruise control on this climb and worked up a big sweat before I reached the spring one tenth of a mile from the summit. I guzzled some of its refreshing water and prepared for the final downhill section that would take me to the meeting spot in Swift Run Gap. When I arrived at the parkway I walked down the road a short distance to Swift Run Overlook where there was a pull-off and accompanying vista, but no parents waiting for me. I had arrived at 5.00 pm. Had they already been there? I

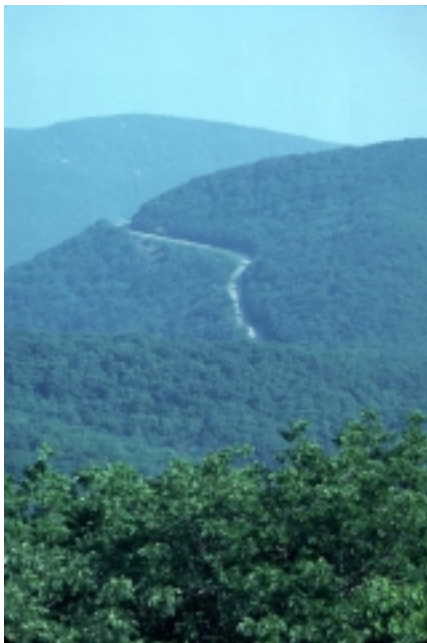
did not think so. They would not come all that way and then not wait for me. I sat there at the overlook for what seemed an eternity looking at the view and watching every passing vehicle in hopes it was my



*Blackrocks area.*

ride. Tourists passing by occasionally stopped, took in the view, and then went on. Some stayed longer and had picnics. I put on the charm of the lost soul and managed to net a piece of fried chicken, some nuts, and a couple of apples from a lady accompanied by a couple of kids. The sun was beginning to set and still no parents! I watched and photographed the sunset. It was one of those sunsets that you can actually stare at without hurting your eyes. The haze of thick humidity was what allowed this, and also what made me sweat so heavily on the way up Hightop Mountain.

Just as the light faded to practically no light at all, a car rolled into the overlook and I could tell it was them. Who else would pull into an overlook to see a view in the dark? My ride had arrived! It was good to see mom and dad. This time they were coming to visit, not to pick me up. I felt good about that, and knew that I could make the entire journey barring any unforeseen physical injury. It had been a long trip for them, and the last bit along the parkway over it's twisty windy road and numerous pullouts made travel slow. They had kept their eyes open for a hiker waiting as they passed each one. It was already between eight and eight-thirty by the time they arrived, so we headed for Harrisonburg and asked at two motels before getting probably the last room at the Belle Mead Motel. Ate supper there at about 10 pm.

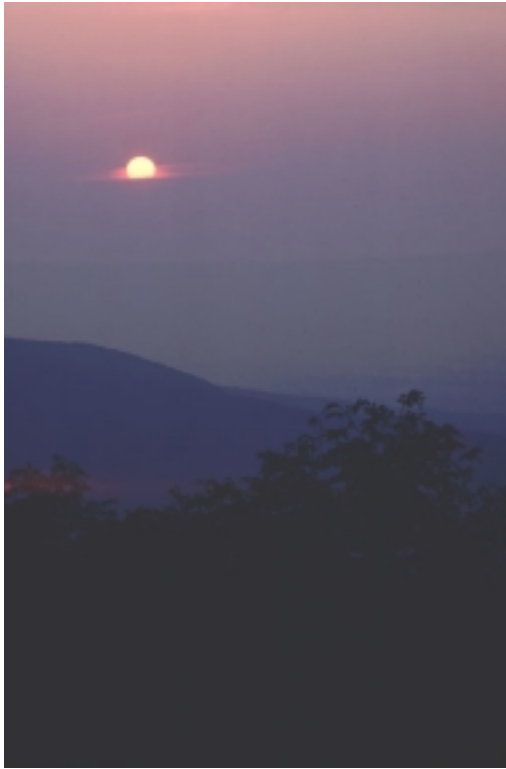


*Skyline Drive.*

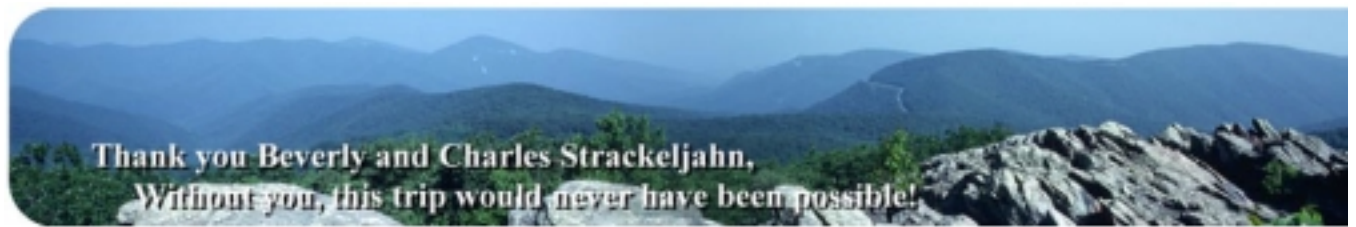
*View From Deadening Trail.*



*View From Deadening Trail.*



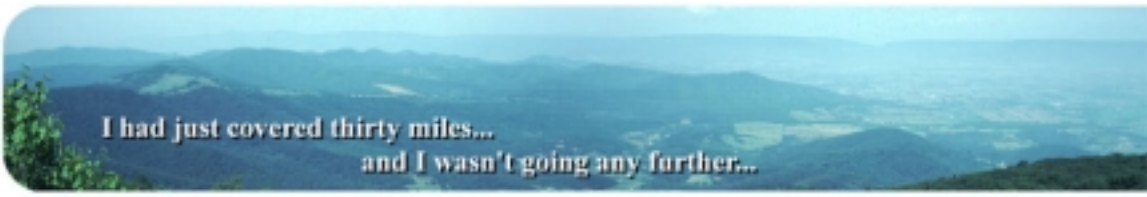
*I watched the sunset while waiting for my parents to arrive.*



July 3, 1983 Sunday (1293.3 mtg)

Spent the day with my parents. Part of the day was spent looking at the slides that I had shot so far and evaluating for exposure. Drove to Waynesboro and picked up my supplies that were left at the fire station. During the afternoon I selected a short trail accessible from Skyline Drive called the Deadening Trail that led to a nice rocky overlook, and we all hiked to the overlook for the view. Supper at the Elkton PizzaHut.





July 4, 1983 Sunday (1293.3 mtg)

In order for mom and dad to get back to Illinois in time to rest and be ready for work on Tuesday, it was necessary for them to leave very early this morning. That meant that we had to get up sometime around 2 am so we could drive back to Swift Run Gap overlook, where I had been picked up. I was dropped off at about 3:45 am and of course it was still dark. Too dark to travel. I used my flashlight to find the trail and headed into the woods just a few hundred yards at most and then shot off into the woods to find a spot to park until first light. I was never able to get back to sleep as I lay there listening to the silence of the woods and thinking any time now there would be a bear wandering by that would smell the food in my pack.

I was off and moving as soon as I could see where I was going. I just cruised! The trail must have been so well graded that the miles flew by quickly. Soon I had put in twenty miles before noon! Now what am I supposed to do? That was really a long days walk for the average hiker, but I had half the day left. The climb up Hazeltop turned out to be quite easy. I skirted Big Meadows campground as the trail passed directly behind the campsites located there. I stopped and had a conversation with Ben and John when they flagged me down and offered pancakes, eggs, and a couple of sodas. I spent about an hour there. I learned from them that the rangers were planning a party to celebrate the Fourth of July to be located somewhere near the Pinnacles. I immediately said that is where I should find myself tonight, and began the journey there. I met up with another hiker at Skyland, and hiked with him for a while. He gave me an ice cold apple and water. With all the mileage I was putting on I caught up with Tom Charmichael, and hiked with him to the Pinnacles picnic grounds.



*Friends at Mountain Meadows Campground.*

In the Shenandoah park, the picnic grounds are not a "legal" place to camp. But I had just

covered thirty-one miles, my biggest mile day so far, and I wasn't going to go any further. The balls of my feet were beginning to feel hot, as if a huge blister covering the entire area was about to form. I hung out on a picnic bench under the pavilion and waited for the party to arrive. It became obvious that there was not going to be a party here tonight as darkness was only an hour or so away. While I waited a group of boy scouts came by and I talked with the counselors. I helped them adjust their backpacks. They asked if I thought they could spend the night nearby and I told them that it was really illegal, and recommended they park in the woods somewhere they could not be seen. They went to the edge of the woods and all filed into the greenery. If there was not a path to begin with, there was one now after all those kids

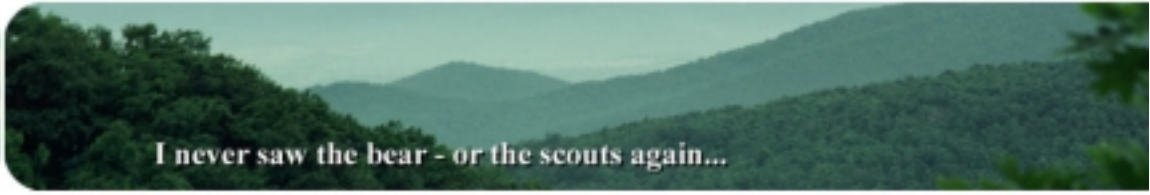
tramped through to their campsite. I set up my tent after dark as far from view as I could beside a picnic table for added camouflage, and waited for the party. By 11:30 I figured there would be no party here. What tipped me off was the absence of people and the fact that I could hear a party nearby somewhere. Apparently the party was at the Pinnacles Overlook, not the Pinnacles picnic area. I could see the lights twinkling in the valley to the west, but could hear fireworks to the east. The view in that direction was obscured by the trees. No fireworks were seen this year. Disappointed, I slowly drifted off to sleep.



*Somewhere between Swift Run Gap and Pinnacles Picnic Grounds*



*The natural atmospheric light display.*



July 5, 1983 Monday (1239.3 mtg)

Everything was calm this morning, even as I suddenly became aware of the presence of a bear at the edge of the woods. I watched as it made it's way over toward where the boy scouts had entered the woods. It quickly disappeared right down the path that the boys had made last night, and I waited for the commotion to begin. Obviously all the scouts were still sleeping, or were so scared they were unable to shout. Perhaps the bear did not follow all the way to the campsite. I never saw the bear - or the scouts again.

I took my time today, but still managed to put in twenty miles by 3:30 pm. Took a few pictures from Little Hogback Overlook. From there I could see what appeared to be a storm approaching, so I picked up the pace. I had three miles to go to Gravel Springs Hut where I planned to spend the night. As I swiftly moved along, the sky began to darken and the wind began to blow with more force. I knew it was going to rain, but would it hold off for just one more mile? With less than a mile to go the storm hit. The rain came down by the bucketful. I got totally soaked. Arriving at the shelter, I found Patty and Shaun, known as "the Fatheads", already in residence, along with another guy heading south. Later a man named Burt and his son came for the night. They were obviously short term campers. They carried steak with them. After fixing their own steaks, they had a good sized piece left over that they gave to me. What a treat! It must have been an inch thick. Used Shaun's already running stove to fry it up for my supper. Later on I ate some junk food.

Gravel Springs Hut was one of those split level shelters. Amazingly there were no bugs. I guess the rain had driven them off. No one seemed to know what to do with their food bags today. For some reason there was no bear pole to hang the food from. Should they keep them inside and risk getting a citation from the ranger, or put them outside for the bears. I strung up my entire pack outside. Wrote a couple of postcards to be mailed out when I reached the next maildrop. Tom arrived later and I was surprised. I thought he was ahead today and had gone farther up the trail. His stove did not work, so I let him borrow mine. He was using a Coleman stove. Watching others use this type of stove, I found them to be very touchy.







July 6, 1983 Wednesday (1219.7 mtg)

Last night would be my last night in the Shenandoah National Park. The trails were well maintained, and the miles went by quickly with little effort. I found it to be a pleasant experience. Just over eight miles of easy trail this morning and I would reach the northern end of the Shenandoah National Park. Soon I would be through the whole state of Virginia, all five hundred plus miles of it!

A little over a mile past the park boundary was the Tom Floyd Wayside, the only shelter with the term wayside applied instead of shelter or lean-to. Must be something special. I had to stop just to check it out. It had a patio, and it's own gold leafed, hard-bound shelter register. Fancy that. Took a short break at the wayside and spent time reading the register. Tom Carmichael was there also. As we both finished our breaks, I decided to hike in front of Tom, and soon found myself well out of sight of him. Off across a grassy field I saw a large swimming pool in an area known as Harmony Acres, a sub division of some kind. I thought it would be nice to have a swim about now.

Soon after, I hiked along the edge of the National Zoological Park and Conservation and Research Center. The sign on the fence was humorous: "Stay on Trail... Violators will be eaten!" I saw a few non-native animals off in the distance like gazelles or something from Africa as I made my way along the property, but no meat eaters to speak of. The biggest threat that the park imposed at the time was tall grass containing ticks. Although there were warnings as we approached the area written in shelters and on notes left tacked to trees in ziplock plastic bags, I did not have much of a problem with ticks, but did check myself thoroughly.

Went up and down a bit and then along the crest of what I named "forever ridge" after US 522. Entered onto a road that lead into the Small town of Linden, Virginia in Manassas Gap. For a one dog town, it had all that I needed, which included a post office, and a store to purchase a few groceries. I received a post card from Amy, a fellow zoology major from College. Wrote a few post cards and mailed them along with the few that I had written at Gravel Springs Hut. Cooled down in the afternoon heat with the help of a pint of butter pecan ice cream, and an orange soda, perhaps an Orange Crush in recognition of Jim's Appalachian Trail effort. Since the shelter that I intended to locate myself at this evening was only three and a half miles up the trail, I bought a few things for the evening including some cookies, and candy bars. I just about got lost on the way up to the shelter, but fortunately managed to find my way. I encountered about 7-8 PATC (Potomac Appalachian Trail Club) members checking out the trail in the area. Maybe they had similar reports of people getting lost in the area. Tom rolled in a couple of hours later and spent the night with me at Manassas Gap Shelter. Tonight my cuisine included Knorr Asparagus soup with some noodles thrown in to give it some texture, and some workout for my jaws. Ate half of an instant pudding for dessert and held back the other half for breakfast tomorrow morning.





July 7, 1983 Thursday (1196.7 mtg)

This morning the trail was just basic trail - get there from here kind of trail. Even the data book had only one thing listed for the ten miles between the shelter and Ashbey Gap. At Ashbey Gap, I found US 50 and turned onto the highway that led toward the small town of Paris, Virginia just up the road a bit. As I followed the road a short distance, I noticed a small restaurant situated along the road beckoning me to try its delicacies. It was the Paris Restaurant, so it had to be good. I stopped in for a hamburger and "French Fries," and met a southbounder named "Smitty." We probed each other for tidbits of information about the upcoming section of trail while we ate. I bought a few candy bars for the road. One was a Snickers bar, the number one favorite candy bar along the A.T. I liked to spread the top of them with peanut butter before eating. To me it not only tasted good, but seemed to be the best value as far as weight and calories for the money.

From the restaurant the trail followed route 601 for the next 12 miles. This road takes the hiker past the secret government facility at Mt Weather, where it is said that the president and his essential crew would come in case of nuclear attack. The entire facility was fenced in with cyclone fencing sporting razor bladed barbed wire wound around the top edge. I saw workers with weed whips out trimming the lawn and imagined that they converted into machine guns at the touch of a button when the situation called for it. The trail continued past the facility and eventually descended into Snickers Gap. At that point I dropped my pack and took out the Snickers bar that I had purchased while I was in Ashbey gap. Silly thing to do, but on a twelve mile road walk you have to have something other than secret government facilities to keep you occupied. The trail continued on up the road out of Snickers Gap for another few miles.

Before leaving the road walk, I stopped in at a residence with a mailbox for someone named Tony Carbone. I had found out earlier that this man welcomes hikers at his residence. There was a "hikers welcome" sign out front, so I stopped in and knocked on the door. He came to the door and welcomed us, but said he was busy at the time, but we were welcome to relax out in the back yard. The place was set up with an outside shower, and an outhouse. Later he came out and we talked about his invention that he was getting ready to send to the patent office. It was a computer scanner and printer that he claimed could send a faximile over the phone lines, but had better resolution than any that were being looked at right now. He was an interesting man. Later, "the "fatheads" drove up with their driver, a former 2000 miler named Tony. I guess they figured they could cover the roadwalk by car and still consider themselves to have covered the route. I chose to spend the night at Mr. Carbone's house, as did they. The weather looked non-threatening so I slept on top of my tarp rather than under it.



July 8, 1983 Friday (1173.6 mtg) From Gonzo's Appalachian Trail journal

From Tony's I only had to travel about a mile before I marked off another state in my fourteen state trek. Virginia and its five hundred plus miles were behind me. I had gotten up early and did not get a chance to see Tony before I left. At the very extreme southeast corner of West Virginia, the trail entered and went by an area known as Raven Rocks before running past an area known as "the Devils Racecourse." After that it followed the border between West Virginia and Virginia on the ridge of the Blue Ridge Mountains until Loudon Heights overlooking Harpers Ferry. I stopped at Key's Gap shelter, but did not take the one tenth of a mile side trail to the store nearby since I would be making Harpers Ferry tonight. While at the shelter, we all got excited when we read something in the register that talked about the KOA located near Harpers Ferry. Supposedly every Saturday there was an old fashioned ice cream social, and this particular KOA claimed to have a water slide located in the park. With the heat the way it has been lately, that was all it took to convince Tom and me that we should spend the night at the KOA. I chose to descend off the ridge into Harpers Ferry along the past Appalachian Trail, now a blue-blazed side trail called the Loudoun Heights Trail. The Post office was my first stop. I received a package from my mother and a letter from Dave Szabo. Next, I stopped at a local restaurant for a refreshing rootbeer float before continuing on to the Appalachian Trail Conference headquarters in downtown Harpers Ferry. There I met Jean Cashin, who takes care of all things at the headquarters. I bought a new version of the Philosopher's Guide, five postcards, and an updated version of the NY/NJ guidebook and maps. We talked Jean into giving us a ride to the KOA where we paid for the nights stay. After checking out the tentsites that were located on a hillside, and finding not a level spot in the place, we became irritated. When we found out that they really did not have an ice cream social or a water slide we really got ticked off. We went back to the entrance and demanded a refund. KOA's are not designed for AT hikers.

I caught a ride to the Sandy Hook Bridge over the Potomac River, and was dropped off such that I could walk across the bridge into Maryland. I had entered West Virginia today and now was leaving on the same day. Five states down - nine more to go. I talked with a fisherman who was fishing from the bridge high above the river. He was fishing for Channel Catfish. I imagined that it must be tough getting the fish out of the water and reeling it all the way up to the bridge platform. Probably exciting just to watch. At the far end of the bridge and up the road a piece, sat Cindy Dee's Restaurant. I stopped there for a meal and was disappointed to find that due to a fire in May, their cooking was all done with the microwave. Since I was already there I ordered one of their micro-wave items and found it to be good



*Looking across the river toward Harpers Ferry.*



anyway. Since I had not intended to go any farther today than I already had, I only continued the short distance necessary to reach the American Youth Hostel located near the trail just past the bridge, and paid the \$5.25 required to spend the night. From what I recall, the church run hostels beat the AYH by a mile as far as cleanliness and feeling of hospitality. I think maybe this was because the place was just getting started and was still under renovation.



*Crossing the bridge that leads to Harpers Ferry.*



*The ATC Headquarters.*



*Greg Gilbert, another thru hiker, at the ATC.*



*Jean Cashin, our taxi to the KOA campground.*



*Crossing into Maryland over the Potomac River.*