



Aug 29 , 1983 Monday (289.3 mtg)

Got up early and departed before any of the others were ready to go. The first two miles took me up to the summit of Mt. Success. I do not know why this mountain is named "Success," unless it has something to do with its proximity to the border of the last state the Appalachian Trail goes through. Within two miles, anyone having hiked from Georgia would soon be successful at having hiked from Georgia to Maine. I reached the New Hampshire/Maine border at 8:47 am this morning and set up the self timer on my camera to record the event. This was the last stretch of the trail, I had been through thirteen states, and this would be the last. It had been a long, grueling trip, and the reality of having come this far was hard to comprehend. My goal was not completed however, and many things could happen before I completed the remaining 279 miles.



Mount Success.

I encountered some hikers on Goose Eye Mountain after some climbs up vertical rock faces. The trail in Maine did not get any less strenuous than in New Hampshire it seemed. Coming off of Goose Eye North peak, I stopped at Full Goose Shelter only to find two slumbering hikers curled up tightly in their sleeping bags. I could not make out who they were, but while I sat and ate my lunch, one of them awoke and I immediately recognized her as Sally, a girl I had met in the Great Smoky Mountains. It is amazing how people I met long ago keep showing up now and then. She was traveling with Marty, "the Mad Pollock," who I

had also met earlier in the season. Apparently they had skipped up to the Maine section and enjoyed it so much they were traveling back and forth, over and over again. Then I met the guy who let me in to the Post Office at Mt Washington the other day. Then I met others I had not met yet, the caretaker of the campsite at Speck Pond, and a former thru-hiker.

I left the shelter with an immediate climb up the side of Fulling Mill Mountain. The trail did not go to the summit, but around the west side and down to the entrance of Mahoosuc Notch, the most famous Notch along the trail. The trail travels through the notch for about a mile. Not far, but considered the toughest mile on the Appalachian Trail. Boulders from the side of Fulling Mill Mountain and Mahoosuc Mountain had broken off and collected in the notch between them. The boulders ranged in size from as large as Volkswagens to the size of houses! For one mile the trail goes over,



Maine State line. Thirteen states down, one to go.



Descending Gooseeye Mountain. '89

under and between the rocks in this rubblefield. It is said that snow accumulations from the previous winter have remained deep within the crevices well into July as the notch is so deep the sun never gets in to melt the buildup. Arrows painted on the rocks are used in this section to help navigate through the rough terrain, and at times you must take off your pack and either push it through ahead of you, or pull it through afterwards as you go through the cracks between touching boulders. It is the home of the legendary "Notch Monster," the monster that can emerge and break your legs as you make your way through.

I felt confident as I hopped from rock to rock, going as fast as I could through the notch as if I had some record to set. I stopped for a drink from the icy cold waters running beneath the rocks in the small stream that is heard more than seen. I blasted right through with only one encounter with the Notch Monster that almost broke my leg in a cave-in. Instead of camping at the far end of the notch as I had thought about earlier, I decided to go up Mahoosuc Arm

and down to Speck Pond Shelter "cause I knew that it was going to rain." The climb up the arm was a killer. The monster would not let anyone go without a fight up as the trail led practically straight up for a couple of miles before dipping down to the shore of Speck Pond. Upon arriving, I spotted "Lan A.T. Hiker", went to get some water, and stepped into the shelter just as the rain began to fall by the bucketful! Lan had been at the shelter all day. Not feeling well, she decided not to hike today. Two other hikers were there too, Rob and Butch. The view of the Pond toward the outlet and into infinity was particularly beautiful, and calming.



Beginning of "the Notch".



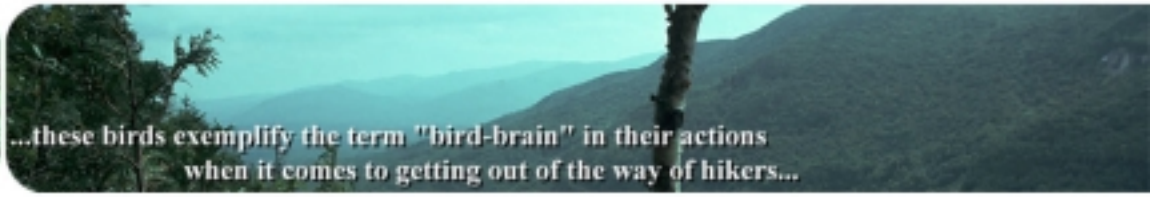
Steep mountainsides where all the boulders originated.



One mile of this kind of trail!



*Looking back at the Notch and the Arm from just before
Speck Pond.*



Aug 30 , 1983 Tuesday (274.9 mtg)

This morning the surroundings were kind of misty after last night's rain. I departed the shelter and began the two miles of gradual uphill to the summit of Old Speck Mountain, but the firetower yielded no views. Three miles of downhill on a trail that was wet and slippery took me past several day-hikers on their way up to the summit. We greeted each other and continued our separate ways, for me - down to the road crossing at Maine route 26 through Grafton Notch. There was a parking area for the trailhead where I stopped to leave a congratulatory note for John Smart and Smokie, who would complete their thru-hike at this spot. I tucked it under the bark of a nearby White Birch tree. I found Roger Brichner at the parking lot in search of the trail. He and Mike Patch were hiking sections together. Roger would leave Mike off at one road crossing, drive to another crossing and leave the car. When they met each other along the trail, he would then give Mike the keys so he could retrieve the car and drive to pick Roger up. I wondered what they would do if they should happen to pass without seeing each other. I set Roger straight as to where the trail went. Consistency gained from hiking in one direction, in my opinion, is the best way to go.

I crossed the highway and hiked the short distance of less than a mile to Grafton Notch Lean-to, where I intended to eat lunch and contemplate where to stay this evening. At the shelter, I met a couple of hikers, and a ranger that I had seen at the parking area earlier. Nice setting for a shelter. A nearby stream contained a waterfall that produced a soothing sound, and although the lean-to was very close to the road, the minimal traffic that goes down that road could not be heard. Warnings from "the Maximus" about mighty mouse who ruled the shelter convinced me that this was not the place to spend the night. Besides, I had only traveled six miles so far today.

Ever since entering the Whites, and now while I was in the Mahoosucs, I had been observing the presence and behavior of a certain wild bird known as the Spruce Grouse. These birds exemplify the term "bird brain" in their actions when it comes to getting out of a hiker's way. They seemed to pay little attention to the presence of humans, or when they did fly away, it was only for a short distance. I encountered the birds quite often in the Mahoosucs. I began to think about my Upland Game Birds class from college and knew that these birds were considered birds for hunting. My mouth began to water.

The climb up Baldpate Mountain proved to be another triumph of Maine Appalachian Trail Club's (MATC) trail building prowess. The trail went up very steeply straight through a "drainage ditch" that was full of small boulders. Perhaps the ditch had formed from hikers eroding the trail, I don't know. Water from last night's rain was flowing between the rocks as if it were a stream. My feet were soaked and mud caked on the gaiters that covered my calf muscles as my boots picked up the muck and deposited it on the side of my legs as the boots passed by. Gaiters are practically essential in this northern climate, they help keep debris from falling down into your boots as well as help shed water off of them. While climbing the vertical river up West Baldpate, I passed Lan A.T. Hiker, who had not stopped to take a break at the shelter as I had. From the summit of West Baldpate, the trail dipped quickly and then shot up quickly to the summit of East Baldpate. I was impressed with the dome shaped summit that was virtually treeless, and it reminded me of a bald head of sorts. Too hazy for any pictures.

On the way down East Baldpate my curiosity and image of being a mountain man lead me to attempt to

catch a grouse for supper. I stopped and selected a few choice rocks for the hunt, and scouted out the prey ahead of me. My first attempt failed as the rock wizzed past the first grouse and caused it to fly to the safety of a tree somewhere off the trail. The second bird remained on the ground as if nothing had happened, until a second projectile slammed into it. The bird fluttered down the side of the mountain with me in hot pursuit as if chasing a chicken down on the farm. I managed to grab the bird and rejoiced that I would be eating a nice supper this evening! The bird was the size of a chicken, enough for two, so I left a note for Lan to meet me at Frye Notch Shelter for a "special" supper, and continued on to the shelter.

Frye Notch Lean-to was a building in progress. When I arrived, I found workers just finishing what they were doing for the day, and then departing. The shelter was just a shell, the log walls were up, but there was no platform or more importantly, no roof. I set up my tarp utilizing two of the walls as part of my shelter, and began to prepare for the night. I had a feeling that it would rain. The workers had a nice fire going in the fire pit. After they were out of sight, I began to undress the bird in the manner that I had learned to prepare a bird skin for stuffing that I had been taught in my Ornithology class. I removed the feathers and skin all in one piece. Lan arrived soon after and was intrigued by my offer, not knowing what was in store. Even though she had been a vegetarian for six years now, she was eager to sample the bird after we sprinkled it with salt, pepper, and other spices provided by some short term hikers also staying at the site. I grilled it over the open fire just like the mountain men in the movies did - with a stick through the body and suspended over the flames. That was one of the best meals that I had ever prepared on the trail! Very tasty! Lan agreed, and did not even think twice about digging in. She did not seem to be adversely affected by her sudden change away from vegetarianism.



Descending into Grafton Notch.



Aug 31 , 1983 Wednesday (264.6 mtg)

I woke this morning to a large bulge suspended over me, but thankfully contained by my waterproof tarp. The rain had come last night as I had suspected it would, and continued to fall softly around the woods. The water had pooled in the tarp above me and provided the bulge (get your mind out of the gutter). Lan was up and moving about and preparing to leave even before I began to emerge from my blue Cat's Meow mummy style sleeping bag. I was sluggish this morning as I knew I would have the unenviable task of packing up in the rain. From my shelter under the tarp, I told her I would see her later, and off she went. I ate my breakfast and then packed up what I could under the protection of the tarp before shedding the gallon or more of collected rain from the tarp. As the drizzle continued to fall, there was nothing more to do but roll the tarp up wet, and hope to dry it out later, so I shook off as much moisture as I could and stuffed it into my pack.

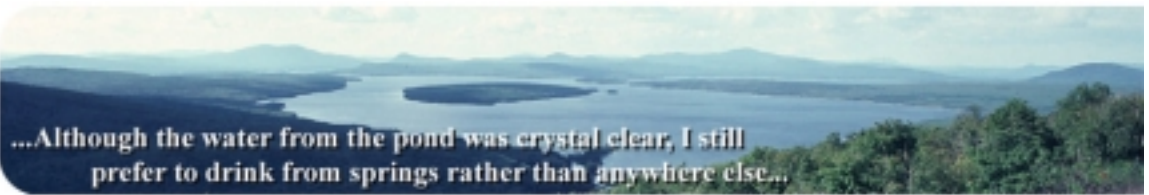
Aided by the added moisture on the trail, I followed - sort of - the tracks produced by Lan as she slopped down the trail until I reached Dunn Notch Falls four miles later. The stream was overflowing due to the additional rain, and I had to be ingenious and skillful to find a way to cross the West Branch of the Ellis River. Although not really what you would call a large river, the flow was quite wide. I hopped from exposed rock to exposed rock and landed on the other side without incident. Near the falls I discovered a pair of socks and underwear hanging to dry. I looked around and saw no one. As I continued on, I noticed the "tracks" I had been following disappeared beyond the side trail to the falls. That must have been Lan's underwear! Was I missing something? Should I go back?

I continued on and began an ascent that would lead me to Surplus Pond, and then on to Hall Mountain Lean-to. The trail from Surplus Pond to Hall Mountain Lean-to involved an ascent of Wyman Mountain before dropping down to the shelter on the adjacent mountain. At the shelter, I found "the Maximus," Butch and Rob. I told them about Lan, and they said that they had not seen her. I guess those were her underwear! We waited and finally she arrived at the shelter. She had gone down to the base of the falls as I was crossing near the top. She did not say if she was naked or not. Max recounted his story of how last night he had stayed at Surplus Pond on the porch of a small cabin along the shore. In the morning he had just built a small fire on the ground out front to burn his trash when a car drove by and spotted his fire. The guy stopped and yelled at him for starting the fire. Max explained to him about burning rather than polluting, (or carrying extra weight) and the guy understood, but requested that he leave anyway.

What is happening to my miles now? I stop after just 10.7 miles and spend the rest of the day just lounging. I suppose it is because the next shelter is nine miles farther along with a couple of real nasty climbs in between. Winston had warned me about Moody Mountain back when I spent some time with him at Lake of the Clouds. Of course he had gone down what I would be going up, but he said it was a killer. Life is good, what is the hurry? That afternoon I took a blue blazed side trail from the shelter to a look out, but saw nothing but the fog. No views today. I listened to the birds, and looked for small mushrooms just popping up. I intended to watch one for a while as it expanded and grew. I never found any small enough, and the ones already up were just that - already up. I did see many birds though.



Surplus Pond.



...Although the water from the pond was crystal clear, I still prefer to drink from springs rather than anywhere else...

Sept 1 , 1983 Thursday (253.9 mtg)

Very wet trail conditions this morning. Muddy and slippery over the rocks on the descent from Hall Mountain into Sawyer Notch. The treachery of the descent only worsened as I crossed over Sawyer Brook and began the ascent up Moody Mountain. The climb was less than a mile, but the freshly cut trail that had been rained on the past couple of days proved a worthy adversary in slowing my progress. The slope was slick as snot, and I was reminded of the Lynyrd Skynyrd song called "One Step Forward and Two Steps Back." Moody Mountain remains on my list as one of the worst climbs on the Appalachian Trail. All the way up with virtually no views, and then when there might have been a view, I could barely see through the fog. Even though no rain was falling as I went over the mountain, I was totally soaked by the time I left.

Following Moody was a two and a half mile climb out of Black Brook Notch toward the summit of Old Blue Mountain. Old Blue rewarded me with a cool, wet, foggy, Christmas tree forest toward the top, and the skies remained obscured by the clouds as I passed over with still no views other than a grayish white fog. Three miles past the summit I stopped at Elephant Mountain Lean-to for a quick read of the register. I gleaned the entries and found out that I was just behind another hiker that I had not met yet named Tom. Determined to catch up with him, I set out from the shelter with an excitement that lead me in the wrong direction. I quickly realized my mistake, turned around and went back before continuing on toward the ascent of Bemis Mountain. The Appalachian Trail traveled over an area of lush moss-covered tree roots, boggy surroundings and amazingly similar in nature to the rest of the forest surrounding the area. I found difficulty in following the trail during this section. I managed to navigate my way through the area and proceeded over the many peaks of the Bemis Range. By this time the skies had cleared considerably, and the grandeur of the Maine countryside and Lake Mooselookmeguntic revealed itself in the valley.

Five miles of trail over four peaks of the Bemis Range deposited me at the banks of Bemis Stream, where no bridge was located to aid the hiker in his crossing. Directly after skillfully rock hopping to the other side without falling in even once, I noticed a huge hornets nest in a nearby tree and buzzed right on by up the embankment to Maine highway 17. A turnout near the trail crossing provided a great view of Lake Mooselookmeguntic. Now my goal was Sabbath Day Pond where I was sure that I would be able to hear Loons during the evening.



Mooselookmeguntic Lake from Bemis Mountain.

After four miles of comparatively easy hiking leading me past a larger pond named Long Pond, I arrived at Sabbath Day Pond Shelter and began to set up camp. Within minutes of my arrival a couple of southbound hikers rolled in. One had participated in a good chunk of the "Hike A Nation" trip from

Colorado to the east coast. He had also hiked other trails. Both of the hikers were carrying mega food as they had just left the town of Rangely and were fully supplied. They suggested that I stop at the youth hostel for the night. We talked for some time and then I walked back ¼ mile south to a spring that I had seen as I searched for the shelter. I had not filled up at first pass because I did not know how far it was to the shelter, and did not want to carry any farther than I had too. Although the water from the pond was crystal clear, I still prefer to drink from springs rather than anything else. No loons were heard that night, and I did not catch up to the hiker I was trying to catch. Twenty-one miles for the day. That is more respectable.



Bemis Mountain provided excellent views and probably the best blueberries on the trail.



Mooselookmeguntic Lake from the road crossing before Sabbath Day Pond.



Elephant Mountain.



Sept 2 , 1983 Friday (232.9 mtg)

This morning I left the shelter before anyone else, and within a quarter of a mile froze in my tracks alongside the pond when I heard some noise just offshore in the shallows. I focused in on where the noise had come, while a young bull moose looked at me and waded in the shallows of Sabbath Day Pond. Apparently my stealth hiking tactics had allowed me to come within 15 yards of the animal before either one of us had realized it. I slowly put down my pack and removed my camera from the upper pocket of my pack and set up to photograph the first wild moose that I had encountered on this trip. The backlit conditions presented a problem, but I snapped off a few shots before going back to the shelter to tell the rest about the nearby wildlife. The younger guy, filled with excitement, returned with me to photograph the moose. I later learned from someone he had told, that he thought I was a real neat guy for having come back and telling him about the moose. Moose are quite abundant in Maine, yet some hikers travel all the way through and never get to see one. I felt lucky.

Four miles later after traveling through some general forest areas, I approached Little Swift Pond and the campsite located there. As the campsite came into view I noticed a female hiker with her back to me just slipping her t-shirt over her head and onto her torso. Late again I thought. All because of that moose. Once she was within range of my voice I said hello, and just then her boyfriend stepped out from the woods, apparently having just finished his morning duty. I said a few words before continuing on to my first goal of the day - Maine highway 4 that leads to Rangely for lunch. I did not really want to



My first Moose spotted along the shore of Sabbath Day Pond.

stay in Rangely, just pick up a few supplies and then move on. Rangely is nine miles off the trail and I did not like the thought of having to hike back to the trail if I could not secure a ride. Five miles later I stepped out onto the road and the first vehicle that went by was a UPS truck. I thought I might have a chance at a ride, but no luck. Immediately after this vehicle followed a small car that quickly stopped to pick me up. This is too easy. What is going on here? The driver was a young lady named Lois who was staying in her parents cabin on Rangely Lake with her five year old daughter Sarah, and son Jeffrey, who was still in diapers. I crawled in the back and we were soon on our way to Rangely. Along the way I had a conversation about my hiking adventure and then was invited to have a fresh vegetable meal with them that evening and then spend the night. I was not much of a real vegetarian, but it sounded wonderful to me.

It was interesting when Lois stopped at a store, said she would be back in a minute, and left me in the back seat with four little eyes just staring at me from the front seat. The kids seemed mesmerized by me. They were not scared, but curious I suppose. The young girl asked me all sorts of questions. We moved

on to the grocery store and I was able to get all my munchy supplies refreshed. We drove out of Rangely and farther down the road from the trail to a back road that led to a cabin named "Tamarack." The cabin was directly beside the shore of Rangely Lake, and had a beautiful view of Elephant Mountain across the lake. Once there, I was offered some fresh veggies and tuna salad for lunch. Later that afternoon, her husband, David Lipton, came home. Other company came too, someone named Paul and another female. This was their weekend retreat, and I was lucky enough to have been in the right place at the right time for the "trail magic" of super hospitality to befall upon me. I had recently mentioned to someone on the trail that I had not had any "magic" like that happen to me so far. David invited me to take a canoe ride on the lake in their wooden canoe. The canoe was a slick looking naturally red wood Old Town canoe that was stored under the cabin. Fearing that I would capsize the boat and lose my camera, I chose not to take it along, but later regretted not having it as we watched one of the most beautiful sunsets that I had seen along the trail. We heard an occasional loon laughing on the lake and headed back to port before the darkness totally set in.

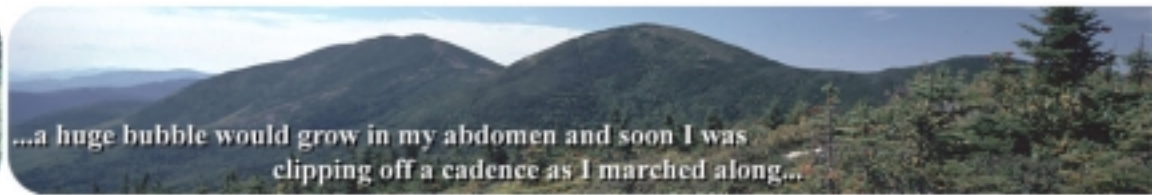
We ate stir-fried veggies for supper, and I could not get enough. I gorged myself on the healthy food, and later on some ice cream with the company. Lois was so curious that she insisted on weighing my pack. I knew it was heavy, but did not want her to tell me what it weighed. At that point it probably weighed fifty pounds. More than enough, but after virtually 2000 miles, I could handle it. The Lipton's were devout vegetarians, and attempted to live an organic life as much as possible. They also made their own bread - which was the best! They invited me to visit them after I had completed the trail at their home in Coopers Mills, Maine, and to go to the Common Grounds Organic Fair if I was finished by the 23rd of September. I said I would think about it if I had finished by then. I signed their guest book praising their hospitality and kindness.



The Ellenwood's had the perfect spot on Rangely Lake.

Little Jeffrey sips a drink while coming down to the lake.



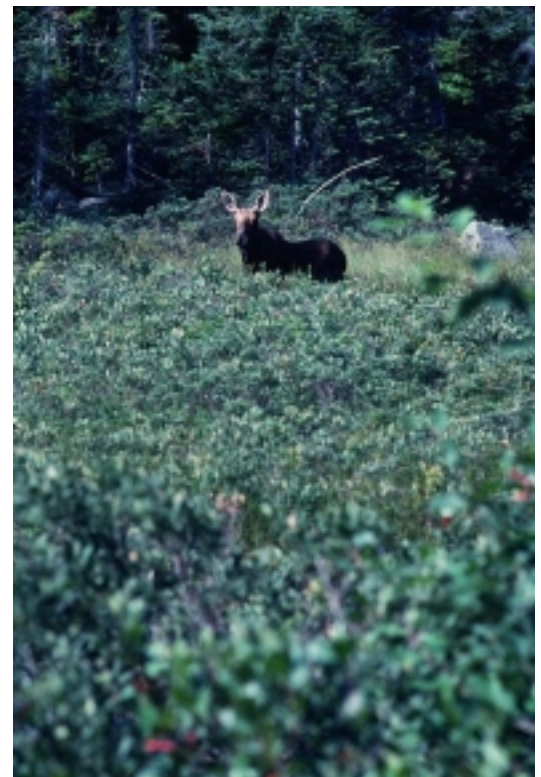


Sept 3 , 1983 Saturday (223.7 mtg)

Got a ride back to the trail this morning from Paul, who had also stayed at Tamarack last night. From the road, it was only 1.2 miles or so to Piazza Rock Shelter where I found Lan and Tom. I had finally caught up to Tom. After talking with him we discovered that he had been dating his entries a day late and when I thought he was just in front of me, he was actually two days ahead. Lan had spent the night at Sabbath Day Pond. Tom at either Piazza Rock shelter or Rangely. I could not mess around with reunions, it was early in the day and there were miles to travel. I left the shelter and headed toward a group of ponds. The first pond I skirted near the shore was named Ethel Pond. I could see moose tracks of the impression kind, as well as the solid kind following the trail I was on. There were certainly moose in the vicinity. I followed a stream for a while and then made my way around the base of a small hill to the next pond called Eddy Pond. Across the pond near the opposite shore stood a moose, doing what moose do naturally - eating. It lifted its' head and I could tell it was a female. I got out my camera and shot a picture. The moose seemed more interested in eating, so I moved on after watching it for a while.

The ascent of Saddleback Mountain was next on the agenda. Almost two miles of climbing put me on top of the 4116 foot tall mountain that was the center of controversy between ski developers and the wilderness trail corridor of the Appalachian Trail. A developer wanted to expand the ski area, and noted that it would not interfere with the trail, but the view would have been sacrificed. And a grand view it was from the round top of Saddleback to the surrounding peaks of "The Horn" and "Saddleback Jr." I ate lunch on "The Horn" before continuing on toward "Jr." When I arrived at Poplar Ridge Lean-to I had traveled ten miles from highway 4 since beginning this morning. I figured there would be a large number of hikers staying at the shelter tonight. Poplar ridge shelter was one of the infamous baseball bat shelters - shelters with the sleeping platform constructed out of two to three inch thick pine logs placed side by side. As the philosopher's Guide states, "some hikers swear by them, others swear at them." If you find just the right groove for your back they can be comfortable. Years ago, the idea was that hikers would bring in cut pine boughs and build up a layer of "soft" leafy material as a cushion. This was no longer done or encouraged, so the uneven platform was always uncovered. This shelter's platform was old and knarly, and I could not manage to pick up a National Public Radio station from the place, so I decided to move on. Tonight was Saturday evening, and A Prairie Home Companion was on....if I could find a station.

I had to travel seven miles to the next shelter on the side of Spaulding Mountain. Soon after departing from Poplar Ridge and dropping down to cross Orbeton Stream, I began to not feel very well. At the time I had no idea what the problem was, but I began to produce large amounts of flatulence as I hiked along. A huge bubble would grow in my abdomen and soon I was clipping off a cadence as I marched along. I kind



Moose in Eddy Pond.

of laughed as I grimaced from the pain as I imagined getting to the shelter in record time due to the jet action that sped me along. The five mile climb up the side of Spaulding Mountain was easy and I reached Spaulding Mountain Lean-to after eighteen miles before darkness set in. I found some short term hikers at the shelter along with a couple of south bound hikers who signed the register with a little stick figure drawing of two hikers with packs on and the words "thru-hiker position" written next to them. Down south I had seen their entries often, but somewhere along the line had passed them. They must have flip flopped later, and now recognized my name, "Gonzo!" having read my entries after I had passed them. Unfortunately there was no reception at Spaulding Mountain Lean-to either, so there was no Prairie Home Companion tonight. During the night I woke up with a bulging abdomen. The gas had built up and could not escape. I could not release it as I lay there so I got up, followed the side trail to the latrine with the aid of my small flashlight and sat for a while and let it all out. I eventually began to feel a little better. (On a hike years later, I had the same thing happen to me after eating stir-fry. I have concluded that after a diet of mostly pasta for such a long time, a meal rich in oil and harder to digest plant cellulose had caused the problem. I vowed never to eat that again during future hikes.)



Approaching Saddleback summit.

Looking at the Horn from Saddleback Summit.

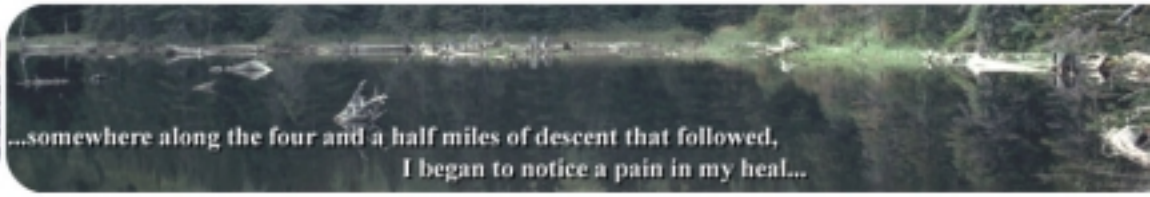




Looking back at Saddleback from the Horn.



Saddleback and the Horn.



Sept 4 , 1983 Sunday (206.4 mtg)

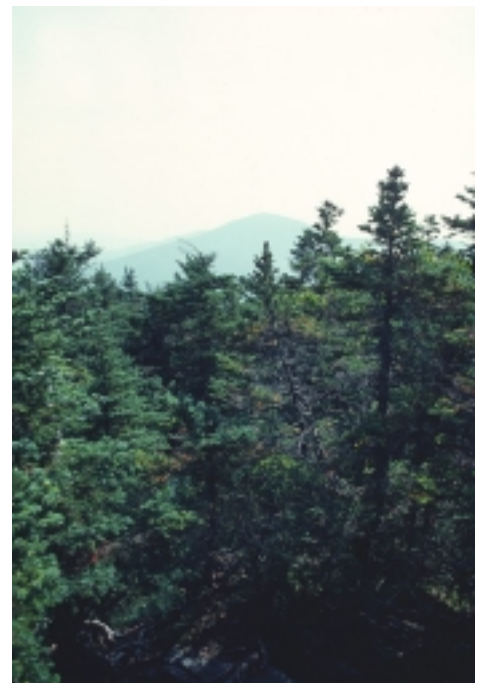
Everything seemed to have calmed down by this morning when I left the shelter and began the final mile of trail toward the summit of Spaulding Mountain. A short side trail could have taken me to the summit had I chosen to go, but I did not. I began the descent toward Mount Sugarloaf. The trail used to go up and over Sugarloaf, but ski development has caused a relocation around the mountain so once again the summit is reached only by side trail. This time I did follow the side trail to the view from the summit where the ski lift station and snack bar are located. The view was magnificent! I could see the Crockers that I was about to traverse, and the Bigelow Range that I would climb the following day.



The trail dipped into the valley after Sugarloaf, and then began the climb up the Crockers.

A trail crew continued the construction of a bridge across the South Branch of the Carrabasset River near where the trail crossed. It was not finished yet so I had to rock hop across to the opposite shore from one partially submerged boulder to the next. As I came upon a segment of the crew cutting trees to be used on the project, I noticed that two of them were members of the crew that were building the shelter at Frye Notch. I stopped a little farther on at the Crocker Cirque Campsite to read the register and take a break. The lake was beautiful and would

have been a nice place to stay. I moved on to the summit of South Crocker and took the short side trail to the view. I could just barely see Sugarloaf across the valley. From there the trail dipped and then went back up to the North Summit where I found a family of Spruce Grouse in a clearing near the top. I observed them for a while and decided I did not need to eat them - although they were tempting. Somewhere along the four and a half miles of descent that followed, I began to notice a pain in my heel. Apparently I had bruised it during the steep downhill from Sugarloaf, but did not notice it until now. The descent was painful, but I was determined to make the miles to the road crossing where I could hitch into the town of Stratton, Maine, where I knew I had a place to stay, resupply, and rest if the need arrived. I met weekend hikers on their way up to the Crockers. I could not understand why, the Crockers were not that impressive to me, with the exception of the campsite. Along the descent I also caught up with a lady going the same direction as I. Before I got to a distance where I could talk with her, she noticed me and



Sugarloaf in the haze seen from the Crockers.

ran down the trail as if to escape from the monster that was approaching. Eventually I caught up with her again, but this time she had caught up with an older guy, her father I guess. I inquired as to how far the highway was from this point, and of course they really had no clue - they had just come from there, why would they know?

Once at the highway I stuck out my thumb at all passing vehicles. It took a while, but I finally got a ride from a couple of guys who dropped me off in Stratton right in front of "The Widows Walk." This fancy Victorian home was a bed and breakfast for the elite ski crowd in the winter, and the dirty smelly hikers in the summer just like Mountain Meadows near Sherburn Pass in Vermont. There were three southbounders already there. I selected a room and got myself cleaned up. Later that day "the Maximus" showed up and checked in. Then Lan and Tom came by, but lacking the funds, they decided to go down to the campground down the road to do laundry, and then returned to camp out across the street in the back yard of the museum or church. The four of us went to "Cathie's Place" to have dinner that night. Most of us opted for the all you can eat salad bar.



Crocker Cirque.



Spruce Grouse.



Sept 5 , 1983 Monday (188.5 mtg)

Today, being Labor Day Holiday, the post office was closed and we could not get our mail, although Lan and Tom had just happened to run into the postmaster and gotten their mail. They were free to take off, and they did. Speaking of taking off, that is just what I decided to do. Take the day off and let my heal recouperate. Breakfast this morning, included with the price of the stay, consisted of two eggs, bacon, toast, and juice.

Ron, Nick, and Cathy arrived after hitching into town and stopping at the diner for breakfast. Max decided to take the day off too and spent the majority of the day hitching back to Rangely to buy souvenirs. Later when he returned he told stories about how he had been in a weird bar where everyone was buying him beer after finding out what he had been doing all summer long.

Another southbound hiker named Gurdie, a female from Canada came in. I enlisted her company as I went back to Cathie's for a burger. She ordered coffee. She had not been on the trail long enough to develop that thru-hiker appetite that I had honed over the past 2000 miles.

I returned for a third time that evening for supper with Cathy and Max after we solved the big dilemma of the day - eat at Cathie's again or go for the Chinese restaurant that was rumored to be down the road. We went for the sure thing.





Sept 6 , 1983 Tuesday (188.5 mtg)

Breakfast at the Widow's Walk was nice with all the hikers sitting at the table, talking and having fun. Once we were finished we all headed down to the post office to check for mail. I had none. I could have moved on yesterday, but I believe setting the day out helped my heal and was a good idea. The others decided to wait for the mail to be sorted this morning while I packed up and headed for the road to get a ride. They were going to hike out of town on the old AT which now was called the Bigelow Range Trail. I snagged a ride from a woman in a green barracuda with a passenger seat that refused to fold forward to allow easy access to the rear seat for me to put my pack. I crawled in and stuffed my pack in front of me with little room to spare between me and the dashboard. The ride was not long, and I was soon back on the trail with only two more mail stops between me and my goal - Katahdin. I discovered that my heal still hurt somewhat, but was much better.

The biggest part of the day would be spent ascending the Bigelow Mountain Range and then traversing the ridge over the various peaks along that mountain. Once upon the ridge, the trail turned right and continued on to Horn's Pond. Another solar toilet was located at this shelter similar to the one at Gentian Pond in New Hampshire. I read the register at the shelter and then set out for the climb up to the South Peak just a mile away. Looking back while on the ascent I could see Horn's Pond below, a beautiful mountain tarn. The trail dipped down, went over a series of up and down bumps and then ascended the West Peak. From there I descended only



Horn's Pond nestled in the Bigelow Range just North of Stratton, Maine.



Avery Peak with Flagstaff Lake.

about a quarter of a mile to my destination - the Myron Avery Memorial Lean-to. I was immediately greeted by a fairly large group of Harvard Orientation students, including one who was wearing a "Powder Milk Biscuit" t-shirt popularized as a sponsor of the Prairie Home Companion Show. At first I thought that they might be the group that I had heard about that had monopolized a shelter and caused "Cruel Shoes" to have to spend the night out in the rain some time back. I was wrong, and these guys were nice enough to even offer me cheese and crackers. They told me about the spring that was just a hundred

yards or so further north on the trail before they left for Horn's Pond Shelter or somewhere farther on for the night. Later another guy came by on his way to climb Avery Peak rising up beyond the shelter. The rest of the crew from Stratton did not show up that night. I spent the cool, windy night alone and had a good peaceful time.



Solar One-Holer, the ultimate in trail waste disposal.



Avery Peak.



Avery Lean-to with West Peak behind.



Sept 7 , 1983 Wednesday (180.2 mtg)

Avery Peak provided the first climb of the morning, and took only minutes to reach the summit. I picked up water at the spring on the way up. Although the summit was treeless, the view was hazy and I could not see much. The firewardens cabin at the top was supposedly locked, and that is why I did not spend the night there. Upon investigation I discovered that the bar with a lock on it across the door did not lock the door - the door swung open to the inside! I noted this for future reference. I descended toward Little Bigalow.

From Little Bigalow Mountain I could just barely make out Flagstaff Lake. I ate lunch on Little Bigalow, and then descended down to the lowlands near Bog Brook Road near the lake. I passed up some fungi growing on a tree that was probably edible, one of the white "hairy" ones, but different in some ways than the ones I had eaten before. Up over a little no name bump brought me to Long Falls Dam Road and within a few feet, the Jerome Brook Lean-to. It was obvious that this shelter was too close to the road.

The shelter was occupied by a couple of southbound week hikers, and the space was limited as some of the straighter base ball bats had been broken and replaced with some not so straight limbs just to fill the gaps. No way anyone could sleep on that. Luckily it was only on one side of the platform. Not long after I ducked into the shelter a light rain shower began, but quickly subsided. Following that we looked up at the sky as the clouds flew by quickly. Later, Nick, Ron and Cathy, and Max showed up and pitched their tents in the clearing behind the shelter. Another hiker named Tim stopped by as well and chose to sleep in the small area below the roof overhang at the front of the shelter to escape the torture of the uneven bats. We all gathered wood for a fire and spent the evening telling stories and laughing. We were all amazed at how Cathy could laugh and laugh and laugh all the time.

The outhouse was particularly memorable. The walls were slanting, and the platform was only a foot or so off the ground, and quite air conditioned! From the looks of the ground around the baseball bat outhouse, few people had chosen to utilize it lately.



Dri-Ki along the shore of Flagstaff Lake Near Jerome Brook Lean-to.



Dilapidated baseball bat outhouse next to Jerome Brook Lean-to.



Sept 8 , 1983 Thursday (169.6 mtg)

Today's hike was very relaxing and pleasant. Only one real mountain, Roundtop, presented any level of difficulty, and it was right at the beginning of the day, immediately beyond the shelter. The remainder of the walk was amongst the Carry Ponds, very picturesque ponds with rocks and dri-ki (driftwood) along the shore. East Carry Pond also had a nice sandy beach that looked inviting, but the guide's description warning to "watch for big mother leeches" kind of made it less inviting. I did not stop for a swim. The air



One of the many Carry Ponds along the trail, I believe this is West Carry Pond.

was rather cool as the fall season was knocking at the door. I saw what I thought was a loon on the pond, but turned out to be a duck of unknown species. The trail passed through a forest made up of birch trees with an understory of ferns. Much different than the typical mountain vegetation that we had been receiving. A low spot in Bates Ridge allowed passage over the ridge without much change in elevation and soon I found myself at Pierce Pond Lean-to where I had to make a major decision. I was three and a half miles from the Kennebec River Crossing, and had to decide if I would spend the night at the shelter and hike there in the

morning, or continue on and camp at the river for a crossing early in the morning. Rumor has it that you should cross before 9:00 since at that time the flood gates up stream are released for hydroelectric power, and the river rises quickly downstream. As I contemplated the decision, Roger Brichner and Mike Patch showed up heading south after crossing the Kennebec. Their clothes and packs were totally soaked, and they said that they had crossed in water over their wai stes at 10 am this morning.

I decided to stay at the shelter since it was such a nice place. I read some of the magazines that were provided at the shelter and then decided to do a little exploring. I followed the blue-blazed side trail to "The Carry Place" where hikers can have a nice pancake breakfast before heading to the river. I met the owner, who asked if I knew Ron and Cathy. I told him that they would probably be at Pierce Pond tonight. He asked me to tell them to come to the Carry Place for a surprise. Someone had paid for them both to have a free breakfast.

When everyone finally showed up we went about the business of making supper, and I shared some of the puffballs that I had



Large boulder along the shore of West Carry Pond.

found while exploring. Nick made a new trail delight from virtually all the remaining food that he had and dubbed it "Schmitts' Shit." Apparently tomorrow was mail drop time in Carratunk, just across the river. Max broke out a portable fishing pole and proceeded to try to catch some trout, but was unsuccessful.

The day was beautiful, and we all sat on the rocks while gazing out over the lake for hours. We all decided that we would go for the pancake breakfast tomorrow morning and then cross the river. Trouble was that he did not serve until 7:30 am. That would not give us much time to reach the river by 9:00 am. A nice purple and orange glow formed as we watched the sun set behind the low-lying hills beyond the pond. The loons serenaded us to sleep.



View from the shelter at Pierce Pond.



The Maximus tries his luck angling for trout in Pierce Pond.



Sunset from the shore near Pierce Pond Shelter.



Sept 9 , 1983 Friday (156.6 mtg)

No hurry getting up this morning since breakfast wasn't until 7:30 am. We packed up and went a little early, hoping to induce the owner into serving a little earlier - no luck. We all sat down to eat and had some juice to occupy us while they made the pancakes. Some hikers ordered eggs as well. I ordered six pancakes, while others went for the stack of fifteen. With the pancakes that the others did not seem to be able to get down, I ended up eating sixteen pancakes. While we were eating, the owner had gotten on the ham radio that he had in the dining room and contacted someone he knew down by the Kennebec River. The volume was turned up intentionally so we could hear the response. He asked how the river was this morning. He told the unknown man that he had five people eating and were wondering about the river conditions for crossing. I believe that this was a game between the two men and us, the hikers, as the reply came back stating, " The dams are open, and the river is rising....but I think they can make it." Well, the clock showed almost nine already, and we still had just under four miles to get to the Kennebec! The adrenalin began to flow as we departed from the camp and rushed down the trail. I was in such a hurry that I seemed to have to pull the others along as they struggled to keep up with my blistering pace. I did not want to cross alone.



Falls along Pierce Pond Stream.

Along the way I began searching for a pole to brace myself against the current and give me extra stability during the crossing. I selected a nice seven or eight feet long tree limb, actually the whole trunk of a straight pine tree, and began breaking off the extraneous limbs in an effort to produce the perfect pole to assist me if needed. I worked on the tree as I continued to hike toward the river. Some of the others followed my lead and selected their own poles. Eventually we rounded a bend to the left and the river came into view. Wow! We have to cross that? This is a real river - with no bridge! Wilderness and adventure are what Maine is all about. I was psyched, and ready to cross. As soon as I reached the riverbank, I sat down and took off my boots, and put on my spare pair that I carried just for this occasion. Once the boots were switched,

I decided that this was not really the

place to cross, and moved upstream a hundred yards or so to the area where three gravel bars could be seen. I remembered hearing somewhere that the shallowest crossing was in the area where the three sandbars are located. If you could not see three sandbars, DO NOT CROSS! The others followed me, almost



The Kennebec River.



If you cannot see the Sandbars - DO NOT CROSS!

cheering me on to be the first to test the waters for them. The river was 150 - 200 yards wide and the entire bottom was covered with softball sized and larger rocks that were rounded and slick from years of erosion and water-flow over them. I stepped in and held my pole so the end was lodged in the stones downstream and then took a few steps as the cold water rushed around my calf muscles. I moved the pole forward for the next set of steps and continued this process with what seemed to be no problem. I reached the first gravelbar and turned around to watch the others as they began their crossing. I set out for the second gravelbar

and the water began to get deeper. At times the water was rushing past with such force that without the pole, I surely would have gone down. With a full pack, the results could definitely be disastrous. I began the crossing by unlatching my waist strap, thinking that if I did fall in I could get out of my pack a lot easier. Suddenly my foot slipped off one of the submerged rocks and I almost fell to my knees. The water rushed around me, but with the pole that I had lodged downstream and the force of the current behind me, I immediately popped back up. I would have been a "goner" had it not been for the pole. Behind me I heard Nick shout "Go back in! I gotta get a picture." I just laughed and continued on to the other side. Upon reaching the safety of the other bank I dropped my pack, extracted my camera from its pouch and turned to record the group during this historic event. Nick was traveling with his camera in his hands! I could see the water rise around the thighs of the hikers in the deeper sections. I did not notice the amount of time that it took to cross, but it was the most exciting event on the trail so far. Once on the other side, "the Maximus" knelt down and kissed the ground. He was so happy to have made it across.

I replaced my soaked boots with the dry ones and walked up the stony bank to highway US 201 just beyond. The trail followed the road for a short distance then turned left onto another side road which lead to the town of Caratunk just a quarter mile down the road. I stole a couple of green apples from a tree just by the side of the road and munched the small, tart fruit down. Not quite ripe yet. At the post office, I received my old boots, the ones I had started with. Mom had them resoled and now they were back to finish the trip. I also received some slide film.

Suddenly we saw Lan walking up the street and were surprised. She had not crossed the river with us, where did she come from? She relayed the story of how she had attempted to cross the river yesterday, had



Ron thought hiking upstream would make the crossing easier than going straight across.

fallen in, gotten soaked, and was hauled to Monson to dry out and recuperate. Mr. Shaw had driven her back this morning to restart her journey this morning. There was a long roadwalk out of Caratunk, the relocation taking the trail off of the roads was not quite finished yet, even though the guide and maps showed the trail in the new location. I enjoyed the country road none-the-less as it led us past the west shore of Pleasant Pond and some cottages that were located there. The trail followed a gravel road leading to the right off of the main road, which had become a gravel road itself. This side road brought us right to Pleasant Pond Shelter situated directly beside the road. As a matter of fact, the road ran directly in front of the shelter. Pleasant Pond could not be seen from the shelter, but was within a few hundred yards. We followed a path down to the shore and explored the area. We left a note on a nearby car asking if they could take someone to town, but later when the owner came by, he said he could not oblige us. Later that evening we entertained ourselves at the pond by watching the waves. The wind produced nice waves as it blew directly toward us. We threw a branch into the pond and each person predicted where the floating branch would ground on shore. We also watched a water bug in a struggle for survival as it ran from the shore to the water and was pushed back again by the waves, only to try once again, over and over again.

Ron and Cathy, Nick, Max and I all stayed at the shelter that night, but Lan was in a hurry to finish her trip and decided to push on for a few more miles that afternoon. Less than nine miles today. We are turning into softies.



Everyone used a pole of some sort to brace themselves against the strong current of the Kennebec.



Sept 10 , 1983 Saturday (147.4 mtg)

This morning we faced an immediate climb up Pleasant Pond Mountain. Not a particularly tall mountain at just under 2500 feet, but the climb was formidable, but only about a mile long. I did not take the side trail to the top as I did not think there would be a view since the sky was mostly hazy. On the descent, the



Moxie Bald rising over Moxie Pond seen from the old road walk.

guide mentioned to look for glacial striations on a boulder along the trail. I found what I thought to be the scratches they were talking about and left a note on the trail informing the others to look at the remnants from the last ice age. Personally I thought they looked like a hiker had slid down and the frame of their pack had gouged the rock. Not particularly impressive. As I continued, a light sprinkle fell here and there. It looked like rain was on the way. Near the shore of Moxie Pond, the trail turned right and followed the Scott Paper Company road while the rain quickened. Regardless, the lake

provided a nice backdrop in the fog and rain. Not far down the road, I ran into Lan, who had just gotten prepared to depart for the day. She said she had been ill, and asked if I had any aspirin. I gave her some. She began to relay to me her story about a weird guy she had seen last night who claimed to have been hiking since Pennsylvania, was fat, and wore strange clothes. She was afraid that he would camp with her last night, but she had avoided that. Not long after leaving Lan, I ran into the stranger, who looked as she had described, but I also noted that he wore sandals and a long black overcoat. He carried no backpack, only a satchel and a huge beard. Strange fellow. I tried to start up a conversation with him, but got little to no response. Even though the conversation was terribly thrilling, as you can imagine, I just said good-bye and hiked past him while I continued toward my rest stop at Joe's Hole Lean-to. Near the end of Moxie Pond, Baker Brook supplies water to the pond. The Trail presents two ways of getting over this brook: the first one encountered is the two cable suspension crossing, the second is a rock hop if the water is not too high, or a ford if the water covers the boulders. I chose the rock hop, but the



The optional wirewalk over the Baker Brook mouth into Moxie Pond.

distance between some of the boulders made it more than a hop from one to the next. I crossed without getting wet feet, which I was happy about since I had crossed the Kennebec and still had dry shoes.

One mile past Baker Brook is Joe's Hole Brook Lean-to. I felt the name was appropriate. It was a hole. Another aging baseball bat shelter with a mud hole as its water supply. I stopped at the shelter for a break and to read the register. Recently I began reading about the southbounders' descriptions of a place in Monson, Maine just up the trail, where hikers could get an all you could eat meal really cheap, and truly supplied all you could eat. My mouth watered and I could not wait to get there. Lan arrived at the shelter not long after, and I was happy she made it past the stranger. We talked for a while and then I moved on up the trail toward Moxie Bald Mountain. Moxie Bald had a firetower and good views, and I looked for Katahdin, but could not see it. I did not really know what I was looking for anyway, but the sky was a bit hazy and the end was still over 100 miles away by trail. Right around Joe's Hole Lean-to I became an official 2000 miler! At that point I had about 138 miles to go. Since the length of the trail this year was said to be 2138, that meant I had already done 2000 miles. A Great accomplishment even if I happened to fall to my death right now and not finish the final leg to Katahdin. I met two members of the MATC while on Moxie Bald. I continued down the other side of the mountain and stopped at Moxie Bald Lean-to for another break. Breaks seem to be coming more regularly now, there seems to be no urgency to finish as the end draws near. Now that we have come this far it seems almost certain that we will make it, and the thought of going back to regular life begins to cause a slowdown - to keep the dream going.

I was just getting ready to depart from the shelter when the MATC volunteers arrived. If I had known what was in store for me, I would have discussed the matter with the maintainers concerning the blazing for the next section. The fact was, there was very little blazing. For the next five miles to Breakneck Ridge Lean-to, I was not sure whether I was going the down the trail or not. Not enough blazing! However, there were no turnoffs, so I figured I must be on the right track. The trail was well worn, but according to the guide book, was supposed to be a tote road.

Upon finally reaching the shelter, I took off my pack, set it aside, and then backtracked a short distance on the trail to the last decent water source I had encountered. Knowing the shelter was near, and that there was no water at the shelter itself, I made it a habit of mentally noting water supplies as I approached a shelter. I left a note for the others at the spot where I drew water so they could pick up water on their way rather than backtrack like I had.

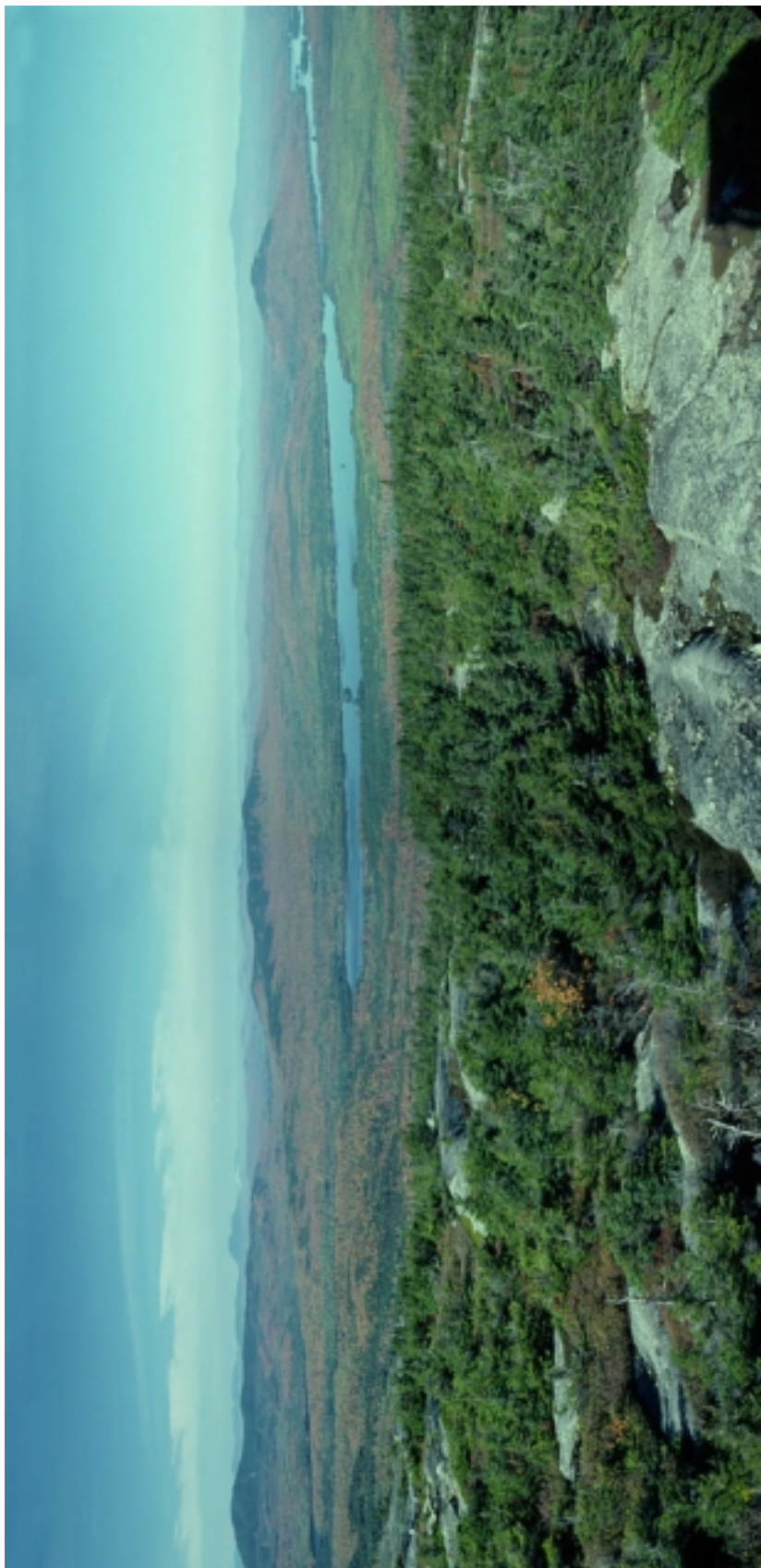


As I sat alone at the shelter I heard some commotion up in the trees, then suddenly not 20 yards away, a Coopers Hawk swooped to the ground with a sparrow in its talons! I sat motionless as the hawk looked around while it gripped its prey until all motion stopped, then just as quickly flew away. Quite exciting! The wilds of Maine are wonderful.

Max, Ron and Cathy, and Nick all showed up later and were happy that I had left the note at the water supply. Lan did not show up, and we were all a bit concerned. Nick said that he had eaten lunch with her for a couple of hours on Moxi Bald, so he figured that she would get to the shelter. Probably she stayed at Moxie Bald Shelter next to Bald Mountain.

Twenty miles from Pleasant Pond to Breakneck Ridge Lean-to. Mostly nice walking.

Baseball bat shelter at Joe's Hole Lean-to.



Moxie Pond seen from Moxie Bald. ('85)



Sept 11 , 1983 Sunday (127.4 mtg)

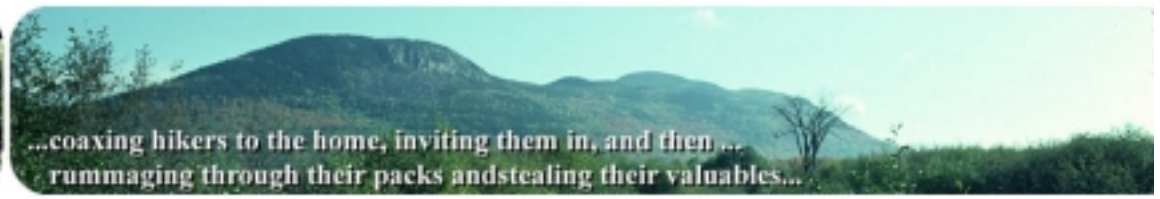
Only about nine miles this morning to my final maildrop in Monson, Maine, home of Shaw's Boarding House, and the start of the 100 mile wilderness section leading to the culmination of my hike at the summit of Mt. Katahdin in Baxter State Park. Two and a half miles of woods walking brought us to the road leading to Blanchard, Maine. Along that section I passed an extremely old and picturesque cemetery on the right side of the road. At the intersection of roads in the center of Blanchard, the trail supposedly was relocated off the road and around Lake Hebron on its' Western shore. I am still unsure whether the trail relo had been open or not, but I walked the road all the way from Blanchard to Monson, a total of about five miles or so. The road went around Lake Hebron on the East side. Rain fell most of the time during the walk. I passed the fire station at Monson and made my first stop at a small café for breakfast. Monson was the end of the trail for Ron and Cathy, who had already done the final section to Katahdin. In a town the size of Monson, I did not have to look far to find Shaw's Boarding House, where I found Mr. Shaw and his wife eager to help hikers in any way they could. Mr. Shaw was a horseshoe pitching fanatic and continually tried to convince each hiker to throw a game with him. Apparently he was quite the expert on his home pit. Everyone laughed as Mr. Shaw repeatedly called Ron by another name that he thought was his real name. He called Ron "Hog." Just like that was a normal name. How he ever got Hog from Ron, I will never know, but it sure was funny. Ron never corrected him, just laughed along with the rest of us with a big question mark surrounding where he got the idea his name was "Hog".

I went to the grocery store nearby, more of a small general store, but had everything that anyone would need, including A & W Rootbeer. I bought one to drink on the spot, and then purchased one for the road. Could I manage to carry it all 118 miles to Katahdin without being tempted to drink it? I had heard of hikers climbing Katahdin in a tuxedo and celebrating with a bottle of champagne, but I would be the first to toast my accomplishment with an A & W Rootbeer. I gathered all the other necessary items for the last leg of the journey, wrote a few post cards, dropped them off at the post office, and headed back to Shaw's for the big pigout.

Lan and Nick finally rolled in just in time for Dinner. Nick had waited for Lan back at Breakneck Ridge Lean-to and then walked to town with her. Dinner was fried chicken, along with beets and potatoes...and loads of it! Mr. Shaw's job seemed to be convincing the guests to eat more, even after they were stuffed. I did not record how much I ate, but judging from other food stories I have recalled, I imaging this one would top them as the food was so good.



Shaw's Boarding house, the last civilized place to stay before entering the 100 mile wilderness.



Sept 12 , 1983 Monday (118.4 mtg)

Although all the rest of the crew decided to hold up for a day in Monson, I chose to pull out. The draw of Katahdin was intense. I felt the need for completion. As if 118 miles was "a long way," I loaded up all of my food bag, and my extra food bag, and hid my Rootbeer at the bottom of my pack. I said my good byes, and headed out. It proved to be the last time I would see the hikers I had just left, a group I had come to consider friends. Although I had shared only days with some of them, their spirit and my memory of them will remain forever.

Although the trail went out of Monson following a road, the road dwindled off into an unused road in about two miles. Along those two miles, I had the privilege of passing, once again, the sandal shod stranger who spoke no words. I passed him and said good morning, but got very little response so I continued on. I followed a set of powerlines for a while. About a mile after the road became mostly unused, the map showed the trail going off to the right toward Bell pond. This was a new relocation that was not in place yet. I continued on the old AT straight ahead past the site of the Old Stage Road Lean-to. From there the trail made a sweeping turn to the right and made its way toward Little Wilson Falls. The falls were nice, but I could not find a good vantage point for a photo. I found Tim, of the Tim and Maynard team at the falls. He was now traveling with a Canadian and hiking south. Unfortunately, his partner, Maynard, had developed giardia back in Connecticut, and was forced to quit. Giardia is that dreaded disease caused by drinking water containing cysts of the Giardia Lamb organism that in susceptible individuals will cause explosive diarrhea. I ate lunch with them and then moved on. Since the trail relocation was not in effect yet, the trail made its way back to the road near a crossing of the Big Wilson Stream, crossed the stream on the bridge and proceeded to cross the Canadian Pacific Rail Road one half of a mile farther on. I stopped at the tracks and placed my ear on the rail to listen for the next train. I had heard that this train goes all the way across Canada to the Pacific. I dreamed that sometime I would ride from one end to the other and see the wilderness of Canada as it went by.

From this point, to the next shelter, the trail followed the road through what was known as the infamous Bodfish Intervale, where the Bodfish farm was located. The trail was being relocated around this area in part because there had been reports of the inhabitants coaxing hikers to the home, inviting them in, and then while they were not looking, rummaging through their packs and stealing valuables. Other than cash and food, I don't know what that would be, but I kept an eye out as I went past the area. I did not encounter any suspicious characters - or any characters at all, for that matter. The main road eventually decayed to just a gravel logging road and turned left to follow Long Pond Stream through the lowlands. The gravel road began a gradual ascent and eventually went off to the left as the trail left the road and proceeded into the woods to Long Pond Stream. The ford of the stream was another rock hop. Then to get to the Long Pond Stream Shelter, the stream had to be crossed again. I was visited that afternoon by a couple of hikers, but spent the night by myself. I kept a close watch as I thought about the possibility of the cretins from the Bodfish intervale coming up the road and raiding me during the night.

18.7 miles I had come from Monson.



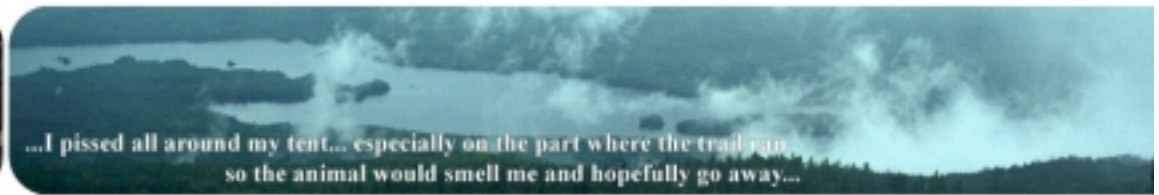
An old cemetery along the roadwalk to Monson.



Monson slate pit. Just about the only industry in town for many years.



Just past the threat of bandits was a great view of Barren-Chairback Mountains from the area known as the Bodfish Intervale.



Sept 13 , 1983 Tuesday (99.7 mtg)

From Long Pond Stream Lean-to it is right at 100 miles to the summit of Katahdin. Today I would traverse one of the last two remaining mountains before crossing the "flat plains" between them and Katahdin, which stands virtually alone and claims the title of Maine's tallest mountain. The two mountains were The Barren Chairback Range, and Whitecap.

This morning after crossing Long Pond Stream, the climb up Barren Mountain began. The trail followed what seemed to be a very round about way to climb, but within two miles I had emerged onto an open ledge where a barking dog and a weather radio playing at full volume filled the environment with sound. Soon the master appeared and I checked out the view from the Barren Ledges while I talked with him for a while and listened to the forecast blaring from the radio. I began to pick up strange vibes from the guy so I left for the remaining ascent up Barren Mountain. I reached the summit at 2660 feet and began the descent. I passed the side trail to Cloud Pond Lean-to and continued to the sag between Barren and Fourth Mountain. In this damp and boggy area there is an interesting community of flesh eating plants growing beside the bog bridges that cross through the sphagnum moss. I stopped to see, for the first time in my life, a pitcher plant growing in the wild. Don't fall off that bridge, you might sink to your knees in the soft surrounding bog community.

I traveled over Fourth Mountain, then Third Mountain, and then Columbus Mountain before arriving at Chairback Gap Lean-to. I wondered what happened to Second and First Mountain. I stopped at the lean-to to look at the guide and decide where I would spend the night. I had traveled almost eleven miles so far, but was not really ready to call it a day. I read the register and found that Tom, "the Rock Hopper" was just ahead of me. Rather than eating lunch at the shelter, I decided to climb to the summit of Chairback Mountain where there would be a nice view, possibly of Katahdin. As I relaxed and ate, a guy came up the mountain from the north, and I recognized him as the man back at Greylock who had been doing trail maintenance there.

We chatted for a while and tried to figure out which mountain was Katahdin. We decided that we could not see it after all, but he said that he had seen Tom, who I was determined to catch for a possible ride once the trip was over. He told me where he thought Tom would be staying.

I scrambled down the rocky slopes of Chairback Mountain and eventually hit the lowlands and the West Branch of the Pleasant River. Not as wide or as deep as the Kennebec, but a good sized ford none-the-less, I



Long Pond as seen from the Barren-Chairback range.

managed to rock hop that stream with only a little water in one boot as it plopped in the water during a jump. Once on the other shore, I thought about camping there, but then moved on through the area known as the Hermitage, an area containing some of the last remaining large virgin trees, and stopped to fix supper beside the trickling waters of the Gulf Hagas Brook. From that point, a side trail leading into the area known as Gulf Hagas veered off from the Appalachian Trail. I figured that if I ate now, I could continue hiking and possibly catch up to Tom. My meal consisted of Mac and Cheese.

Loaded with mighty carbohydrates, I took off for a camp that was five miles up the trail in an unspecified spot. I met some weekenders who confirmed that Tom was indeed camping along the stream, and that he was hours away. I knew I could catch him now, since weekenders have no concept of how long distances are, or how long the journey might be. Before long, the light began to fade, and I rounded a bend near the stream and spotted a tent along the shore. I knew it had to be Tom's.

I set up my tent quickly right in the middle of the trail as the light diminished and told Tom how I had spent the afternoon trying to catch him. He shared some of his soup with me out of sympathy I suppose. There was a possibility of rain tonight according to the forecast, but the stars were shining bright when I woke up in the middle of the night after hearing a grunting sound and some breaking twigs by the stream. I could not figure out if it was a bear or a moose. I hoped it was a moose since I was very close to the noise, but then became concerned that the moose would try to use the trail as a path to get to his next destination and run right into my tent in the middle of the trail. I decided to get up, go outside, and mark my territory no matter what kind of animal was out there. I pissed all around my tent, as if marking my territory, especially on the part where the trail ran so the animal would smell me and hopefully go away. A few minutes later it went crashing through the trees nearby and was gone, unknown as to what it was.



Pitcher plants growing in a bog near Chairback Mountain.



Last of the Bunchberrys of the season.



Sept 14 , 1983 Wednesday (82.1 mtg)

I was curious since last night just how far I was from what was named Sydney Tappan Campsite. I wondered whether Tom and I had camped at the site last night, or if I had not yet reached it. I had a feeling that it was still to come. I left this morning with that question in my mind, and within a couple of miles, I got my answer. I passed through the campsite, which was no more than a clearing in the small trees that surrounded the area. I had spent the night last night at the crossing of the Gulf Hags Brook, just before the climb up Gulf Hags Mountain. As small as the trees were in the area of Sydney Tappan Campsite, I wondered if there had been a fire, or clear cut done in the area recently. The blazing in the area was poor, made particularly worse by the fact that there were many "trails" leading here and there through the brush. I followed the one that began to climb and sure enough that was the correct one. I ascended West Peak, and then Hay Mountain, each taking up roughly one mile each. I found small, dwarfed blossoms on bunch berry plants even this late in the season growing along the trail.

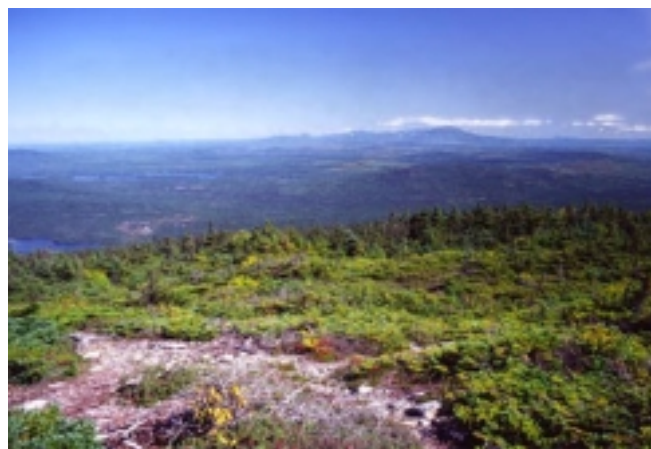
Somewhere in this area I passed Butch and Rob, and then they caught up with me as I read the register and signed in at the registration box in the saddle before climbing White Cap. Soon I was on my way up the last big mountain before Katahdin: White Cap Mountain, at just below 3500 feet. There would be nothing over 2000 feet until Katahdin.



View from WhiteCap looking toward Barren-Chairback

White Cap summit was gained via a steep rocky path similar to those in the Whites, and opened up to a spectacular view of the surrounding area. I could see back to the Barren Chairback Range. We passed to the other side of the microwave and radar installation and was astounded to see our first verifiable view of Katahdin, the last mountain on the trail, still 74 miles by trail farther on! What a majestic mountain standing solitary among the plains of the north woods - the remains of a mountain that when it was young, was probably taller than Mount Everest. Lakes and "flat territory" lie below in the area between. I began to

feel as though the trip was almost over. Elated that I had been fortunate enough to have come this far, yet sad that the end was near, I began the descent on a freshly cut trail of soft organic material that cushioned my footsteps, yet hid the tree roots ready to trip you if you were not careful. One mile past the summit, I stopped at the new Logan Brook Lean-to for lunch. I caught up with Butch and Rob there once again. The shelter was only weeks old and was therefore in excellent shape except for the "lawn" out front. The entire ground had no vegetation and was one big mud slick. A nice



My first view of Katahdin from Whitecap Mountain.

stream rushed from the upper reaches of White Cap Mountain past the shelter just a few yards from the lean-to opening. I filled up my bottles with the ice cold, refreshing liquid. I found a piece of a moose antler that someone had left at the shelter. Not a large piece, but recognizable as a moose rather than a deer. There were telltale indications that the rest had been eaten by rodents. Little grooves cut by sharp teeth reminded me of all the nights that I had been awakened by the sound of mice gnawing on something that I hoped was not mine.

On the way down the mountain I ran into a couple of local fishermen out to their secret fishing hole to catch some lunker trout. We talked for a while and I gleaned some information about an upcoming shelter from them. They told me a story about how some hikers had found it accidentally when taking a different route than the AT. I figured it must have been the old AT they were following. I recorded the information for later use if needed.

Four miles later after reaching the "lowlands," I found the East Branch of the Pleasant River. The ford was not particularly difficult, but the scenery in the area took my breath away! Wilderness at its finest was the feeling that came over me as I snapped a picture.

Somewhere on the way up Little Boardman Mountain I came across some vacationers from Illinois who thought that they had reached the summit. I told them that I did not think so, and within a few hundred yards I saw a sign indicating a side trail to the summit with views of Katahdin. The trail descended toward a body of water below. I skirted the edge of Crawford Pond and then crossed a bridge of fallen timber over the outlet of the pond. From there the trail followed Cooper Brook, the flow leaving



Crawford Pond, for two miles over easy grade mostly through Birch forest on the way to Cooper Brook Lean-to located just beside the Brook. This was some of the easiest and most relaxing walking that I had done on the entire journey. Almost like following an old railroad bed.

At the shelter I met Ed Powers, who had been ahead of me in the registers for the entire trip. At this point he had begun to slow down and was going to spend a night in each one of the shelters located in the 100 mile wilderness. The shelter was another one of those irregular floored baseball bat shelters, but the setting made up for it. Cooper Brook Falls could be seen and heard just outside the shelter, and the baseball bat platform even added to the wilderness feel. A nice pool of water swirled after the falls directly in front of the shelter. Cooper Brook Lean-to remains near the top of my list of places to stay along the Appalachian Trail. I drifted off to a peaceful nights sleep to the sounds of water rushing over the falls. A sound that I realized was virtually the same as rain, or sometimes wind blowing through the trees. In a way, I would miss those sounds soon.

East Branch of the Pleasant River.



Barred owl in the wilderness.



Cooper Brook Falls - right next to the shelter! The sounds of the waterlull hikers to sleep at night.



Sept 15 , 1983 Thursday (59 mtg)

Most hikers faced a tough decision in the next few miles: to stay at Old Antlers Camp, or four miles past at Potawadjo Spring Lean-to. Old Antlers Camp is located less than eight miles from Cooper Brook Lean-to, and is just a grouping of run down cabins from an old sporting camp situated on the banks of Lower Jo-Mary Lake. The air of wilderness filled the senses at this location even though the cabins were very run down and falling apart from years of non-use and severe winters. Stories of the sounds of loons at night were very attractive. Potawadjo Spring Lean-to happened to be just four miles farther down the trail, was on a mile long section of trail maintained by L.L. Bean volunteers, and sported the biggest and best spring on the Appalachian Trail. The spring is round, over six yards wide, clear as a bell, and cold as hell - definitely some of the finest water around. It has a shelter located there as opposed to dilapidated cabins, but "oh, that spring!" Still, Potawadjo was a mere ten miles from Cooper Brook Lean-to. Katahdin Fever had struck me and I chose to visit both and stay at neither.

I found an interesting side trail leading one mile to the top of Potawadjo Ridge between the two locations that sported an interesting sign. The sign read: "Extraordinary View 1 mile." I read that and wondered, do I want to go two miles out of the way just for a view? Particularly when I began to break the words apart. Did it suggest that after one mile I would get just another extra-ordinary view? I did not think so. I moved on without even stopping for a swim at any of the sandy beaches along Lower Jo-Mary Lake. The weather was sunny and bright, but the water was cold, and there was a chill in the air probably due to cooler temps as well as lack of humidity.

From Potawadjo Spring, the trail touched the receding lakeshore of Pemadumcook Lake. This area provided a particularly striking view across the partially dry lake with Katahdin looming in the background, and I thought this would be a great place to camp some day, but not today, I was headed to the next shelter. Moving on past the lake, the trail began to follow the river that fed Pemadumcook Lake. This section had recently been worked on and was similar to the new trail on the descent from White



Katahdin across the waters of Pemadumcook Lake, just north of Potawadjo Spring.

Cap - soft, spongy, and muddy. I followed for what seemed an eternity, but was in reality only about five miles. Part of the problem was that the trail was located on a slope running perpendicular to the path, which caused the hiker to keep sliding down the side due to the slippery conditions. A slight rise brought me to a view of Nahmakanta Lake, which was the source of the water flowing in the stream toward Pemadumcook Lake. Had it not been for the view over the lake, I would have been mad that the trail had suddenly risen.

I followed near the shore to the left of Nahmakanta for the next two miles to a sand beach before hiking the last bit to Wadleigh Stream Lean-to. At the lean-to I took off my pack and made myself at home. I had traveled 21.3 miles, the last ten seemed that long by itself. I was in need of water, and found that the shelter name was in fact a misnomer - there was no water in the stream at Wadleigh Stream Lean-to. Inspired by this, I searched for and found a large shelf fungi that was over one foot wide on a nearby tree that was fresh enough to allow me to use as a pallet for drawing. The white underside of these fungi can be "drawn" on with a stick or other object. Just the act of touching it causes the white to darken. I crafted a "Home Sweet Home" type of sign with the new name of the shelter engraved upon it: "Wadleigh No-Stream Lean-to." I placed the decoration on a shelf in the Lean-to. After that, I went back to the sand beach close to the shelter where there was a nice spring flowing into the lake and gathered my water there.

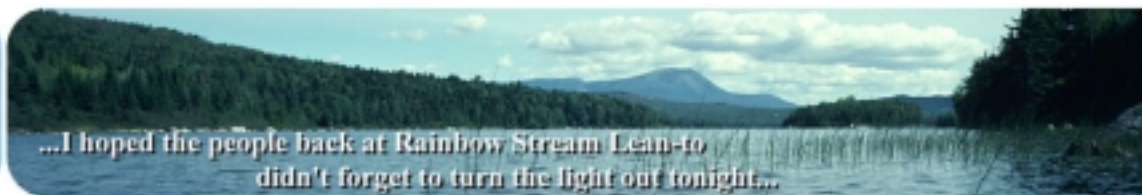
Butch and Rob were thankful for the note to pick up water at the spring that I left on the trail, and we all laughed and joked about the new shelter decoration. They agreed that the last ten miles was quite long and endless.



Katahdin across the waters of Pemidumcook Lake, just north of Potawadjo Spring.



Namakanta Lake from an unknown hill that if it had not had a view, I would have been quite irritated to have to climb it.



Sept 16 , 1983 Friday (37.7 mtg)

This morning I found out that I did not snore. Butch and Rob said that they did not mind sleeping in the same shelter with me since I did not snore - unlike countless other hikers who could see a whole forest down in one night. The conversations were light hearted and jovial as we all began to realize that we were soon to become members of an "elite few" who had successfully traveled the entire distance over the Appalachian Trail in one season. From Wadleigh No-Stream Lean-to we had just 37.7 miles to the Summit of Katahdin! We could actually finish in two days!



From Nesuntabunt, on the other side of Namakahnta Lake I could see the mills of Millinocket spewing forth smoke.

Directly beyond the shelter, the trail began an ascent up Nesuntabunt Mountain that really got my blood flowing. I thought there were no mountains in this area. We had started at such a low elevation, that even though the mountain was just over 1500 feet tall, the climb was more of a climb than I would have thought. I stopped for a break near the summit as I traveled the 250 yards to the overlook where the lakes below and Katahdin could be seen. I could see the smoke coming from the stacks of the paper mill in Millinocket many miles away. The

rest of the day would be a breeze compared to the first couple of miles.

The big debate today became whether to hike to Crescent Pond and parallel Pollywog stream, or take a shortcut on a logging road that was shown on the map. Not a big difference in mileage, and I don't even know why we would have considered it. I suppose because of the poor trail conditions over the last ten miles, we feared that the same conditions might reveal themselves to us along Pollywog Stream as we had read in the registers that the trail was new. I chose not to stray from the white blazes, and found the area to be quite nice even though



Katahdin from a viewpoint on Nesuntabunt.

the trail was new and in poor shape. Bad trail at the beginning of a day is never quite as bad as bad trail at the end of a twenty-mile day.

I ran into Roger Brickner near Crescent Pond, and stopped to chat with him for a while. He and Mike were still doing the key exchange thing, and he asked if I had seen him. I was ahead of Mike apparently, and said I had not seen or read any entries in any of the registers. I said goodbye to Roger, and headed down to Pollywog

Stream, turned right and began to follow the flow down to where it merged with Bean Brook Stream. The cascading Pollywog provided interesting scenes along the way before its intersection with the larger stream in the lowlands. I crossed the now fairly large stream on a logging road bridge and began a gradual ascent along Rainbow Stream on the way to Rainbow Stream Lean-to. I followed Rainbow Stream gradually uphill catching astounding views into little gorges as the water roared with gushes of swirling water that forced its way between rocks forming channels that meandered here and there. After two miles of paralleling the stream, I arrived at Rainbow Stream Lean-to, situated right next to the ten-yard wide stream. I stopped to check the place out. While sitting on the platform and reading the register, I casually looked up and noticed a tree beside the shelter that had a light switch mounted on the trunk. A strange sight out in the wilds of Maine. What did it control?

The bridge over the stream, if there ever was one, was gone so a ford was in order. There were no rocks projecting to allow a rock hop. I bare footed it through the rapids to the opposite side, put my shoes and socks back on, and followed Rainbow Stream and its deadwaters for another two miles to Rainbow Lake Dam at the end of Rainbow Lake where the water had originated. Katahdin could be seen across the



Water-level view of Katahdin.



Katahdin from the South end of Rainbow Lake with only 18 miles to go!

Lake, it looked different from this angle, beautiful, but not as ominous. I continued on, following the shoreline to the site of another large spring similar to the one at Potawadjo, where I stopped for lunch.

The trail followed the shore of Rainbow Lake for yet another three and a half miles. The walk was nice, the weather was nice, and the scenery just as nice. I came upon a couple of southbounders who were stopped along the trail attempting to repair their dogs' backpack that had fallen apart. We introduced



Somewhere along the shore of Rainbow

ourselves, and they recognized the name Gonzo!, but I did not recognize them. Perhaps they had begun after I did, and decided to flip flop in order to finish on time. As I ascended the smooth rocky ledges over Rainbow Ledges, I detected a haze building in the sky and had a feeling that now that I was within twenty miles of Katahdin, the weather was going to deteriorate. I was amazed with the stretch of good weather that I had had during the past week or so, and felt lucky to have had that. Whatever weather I received during my climb up Katahdin would just be a part of the trip. It was the culmination of the

climb that defined the event, not the weather.

A couple of miles of downhill trail brought me to my destination for the night. Hurd Brook Lean-to was the last of the regular shelters before entering Baxter State Park and the last few miles of the trail. There was no spring at Hurd Brook, and water flowed from a pond upstream. I had read rumors about the sickness that the water had caused, so I decided to treat the water I was about to use. I was not about to get sick on the last days of my hike! I had carried a tiny bottle of Iodine tablets in my pack the whole trip. I treated my drinking water with a tablet, let it dissolve, and then let the water flow partially out into the grooves of the cap to zap any microbes there. Rather than using this water to cook with, I boiled the water in my pot sufficiently before putting the pasta in.

Butch and Rob arrived later, and even later the infamous Phil Goad arrived on his southbound section of his "Springer to Springer" in one year hike. He had just turned around after taking a break following his northbound journey, and



View from Rainbow Ledges area.



View from Rainbow Ledges area.

was now heading back south. He had a scarf tied around his head and the image he projected resembled a pirate in my imagination. He felt it necessary to tell us what really happened to him in Rangely when he spent the night at Viola's boarding house. Apparently rumor said that he had spent the night there and then refused to pay the next morning and walked out. Apparently, according to him, this was partly true, but the reason he did not pay was that he had spent the night on the floor, because no one was there to check him in. He seemed like an alright guy, even

though I did not appreciate seeing "Phil Goad - Springer to Springer" stickers stuck on registers, trees, and even a box turtle once as he attempted to make history and himself a legend.

I returned to finish the cleanup of supper that consisted of some macaroni noodles of some kind. The most memorable part of the meal came about as I began to clean the pot that I had cooked in. Using some of the water that I had treated with Iodine, I poured a bit into the pot and began to swirl it around. Immediately the water turned purple! My eyes popped out in amazement and bewilderment until I remembered what I had learned in science class - adding Iodine to starch will produce a purple color. I showed the others, laughed, and finished cleaning.

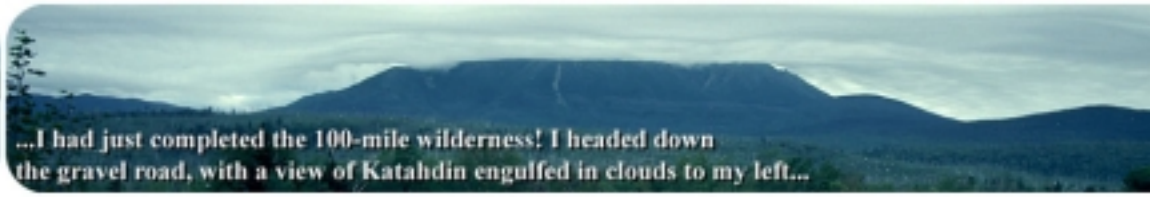
This shelter had a baseball bat outhouse as well, and even more curious was the light bulb suspended under the eave of the overhang from a wire.... I hoped the people back at Rainbow Stream Lean-to didn't forget to turn the light out tonight. A cute idea.



Water-level view of Katahdin. from Rainbow Ledges.



Katahdin!



Sept 17 , 1983 Saturday (18 mtg)

According to the Data Book for 1983, the distance to the summit of Katahdin from Hurd Brook Lean-to was 18 miles. I could do that distance in one day, I had proven that many times, but my goal was to get as close to Katahdin as I could for a final ascent the following day. Remember, after the five mile climb to the summit, there is a five mile return to the base. I did not want to have to rush twenty-three miles today. Besides, traveling away from Hurd Brook this morning, I became aware of the fact that it probably would be raining this afternoon. I just hoped I could reach either Katahdin Springs Campground, or Daicey Pond Campground before the rain fell. I soon stepped out onto a tote road that lead to the right toward Abol Bridge. Facing in the opposite direction for those entering the woods was a sign warning of the lack of roads for the next 40 miles, and no resupply points until the next town in Monson, Maine. I had completed the 100-mile wilderness! I headed down the gravel road with a view of Katahdin engulfed in clouds to my left. I climbed a large rock pile along the road and photographed Katahdin as the clouds enveloped its summit in a swirl that if viewed upside down looked like a vortex produced in a bathroom sink as the water went down the drain.

I stopped at Abol Campground General store to pick up a few snacks just in case I had to wait a day or so to climb Katahdin. I checked on the price of Pop-Tarts there just to see if they were jacked-up. They were, going for over one dollar for a pack of six. I usually picked them up for .79 - .88 for a pack. I could feel a sense of victory as I strolled down the road and was asked by a guy in a truck where I had come from. I shouted out proudly, "Georgia!" He replied, "I guess there is no need to ask if you need a ride or not then, is there?" I said "No" and smiled the biggest grin I think I had ever grinned.

The rain began to fall as I had four miles left to Daicey Pond Campsite. I immersed my foot in a tributary of the Neowadnehunk Stream as I slipped on a rock hop crossing, and felt lost as I passed through an area where the trail passed through a swamp. Both feet got soaked to match the rest of my body, which



The clouds seemed to be swirling around Katahdin as I walked along Abol River.

had become wet from the rain that had begun not long before. The blazing was very poor through the swamp, and I felt lucky that I had instinctively chosen the correct path through the muck. It was a bad feeling to become soaked just before getting to Katahdin, especially when the last few days had been so clear and gorgeous.

I stopped and looked at Big Niagara Falls along Neowadnehunk Stream, but did not take the camera out into the elements. I soon found myself at Daisey Pond Campground, where

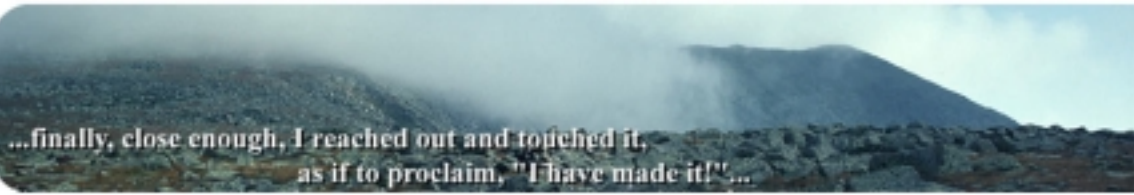
I inquired about the existence of a spot at Katahdin Stream Falls for the night. The shelters were all taken. I should not have been surprised since it was a Saturday night. I had the option of spending the night at the shelters nearby specifically reserved for thru-hikers, for only one night, or going out of the park. I chose to stay at one of the two Daisey pond shelters reserved for thru-hikers, but spent the majority of the afternoon in the library next to the fireplace attempting to dry my shoes, socks and other clothing for tomorrow's climb. I had company most of the afternoon as Rich, "the Rock Hopper" showed up as well. That afternoon, we also made reservations to spend Sunday night in the bunkhouse at Katahdin Stream campground when we returned from our final descent from the summit of Katahdin in victory. But for tonight, we slept in the traditional trail shelter that we had come to know so well over these many months, hoping that perhaps a moose would come by in the open field in front of our lodgings. We went to sleep early anticipating an early wake up to cover the two miles between campgrounds before signing in at the rangers station and making the final ascent.



Abol River.



As I moved on from Abol Bridge, the weather seemed to be deteriorating and I began to worry what the weather would be like for my final ascent tomorrow.



Sept 18 , 1983 Sunday (7.2 mtg)

Rich and I decided that if at all possible we would climb today - views or no views. If there were no views we could always climb again the next day. But climb today to finish.

We set off toward Katahdin Stream Campground following moose tracks in the moist trail as if the moose were going the same place that we were. We covered the two miles, partly on park road, to the ranger station very quickly, accelerated by our excitement to begin the ascent. At the rangers station we signed in and indicated our destination as Baxter Peak, unloaded our packs from our backs, and loaded our day packs. I had carried a day pack that was sent to me in Monson, while Rich borrowed one that had been left at the ranger's station. The ranger informed us that the day was categorized as a Class II day. He told us that it had snowed up on the summit last night, but had probably melted. Class two was better than I had expected, Class I being the ultimate day. The way the weather looked yesterday I expected worse. We noticed two other hikers had signed in before us, not necessarily thru-hikers.



Katahdin Falls.

The climb began. We reached Katahdin Stream Falls within a mile, stopped for a few photos, and were off again. I quickly outdistanced The Rock Hopper, and found myself alone during the final ascent. Being alone was sort of fitting, it had been a personal journey, and although I had begun as a member of a two-person team, the finish was all mine, the biggest thing that I had ever set out to do - and now seemed to be successful at accomplishing.

The climb steepened. Climbing 2000 feet in the next mile and a half through a succession of birch trees into evergreen forest, I emerged from treeline and could only see clouds before me - no summit. About a mile of regular rock scrambling similar to that in the White Mountains began. As I made my way up the slope, the windward side of the ridge seemed to clear, while the clouds seemed to be materializing from the sharp edge of the ridge on the opposite side. Perhaps when I reached the top there would be no clouds.

One mile beyond, I reached an area known as "The Gateway." The going got a little tricky at this point. The boulders became much larger, and in order to follow the

trail, iron handholds imbedded into the rocks had to be utilized to pull myself up and over the jumble of boulders. This area soon gave way to the "Tableland," a more level section, as the name implies, before the next mile of the trail, the ascent to Baxter Peak and the end of the Appalachian Trail. On the Tableland I could see no more than 15 yards into the thick cloud cover that hung in the air and my hopes of having a view began to dwindle.



The clouds seemed to be forming on the right side of the ridge, keeping the summit from view as I traveled up Hunt Spur.



Looking down Hunt Spur



The Gateway.



Looking down after climbing up The Gateway.



The Tablelands. My hopes for a clear summit were dwindling.

Suddenly a small hole appeared in the clouds before me and I saw a peak that I thought might be my destination. As quickly as it appeared, it disappeared, and the sky was full of grey again. The appearance of a hole in the blanket of gray provided some hope that I might get some views if I waited long enough. I knew I was getting close. Minutes later, I could just barely make out the summit marker as it grew more visible with every step that I took. The marker, weatherworn from exposure to the elements, became more visible as I approached. Finally, close enough, I reached out and touched it as if to proclaim "I have made it!" - I had hiked the Appalachian Trail - All In One Roll! - end to end in one season!



A clearing appeared.



The summit sign slowly came into view as I came within a few yards of the summit. Nothing else could be seen within those few yards except the rocks and fog surrounding the area.

I was at the top, by myself, in the fog.

The wind was strong, and the clouds continued to roll by. I got out a candy bar and began to wait for a clearing in the sky. I must have really blasted out in front of everyone that morning, as I sat on the summit by myself for almost forty-five minutes to an hour and still I was the only one there. I felt a sense of accomplishment, yet not as elated as one would expect. A lifestyle that I had grown to love, and a feeling of freedom that came along with it was about to come to an end. I had done something many people just dream about, yet now that I face the reality of becoming a regular member of society, the thought of having done the trail becomes a dream, a dream that was real, yet now in the past.

I was at the top, by myself, in the fog.



Forty-five minutes or so after reaching the summit, the clouds left the area leaving a clear view all around just for me!

dropoff produced by glacial action years ago. With the help of the self timer on the camera, I took pictures of myself while sitting near the sign indicating Springer Mountain to be 2100 miles south. I made a toast to myself with my congratulatory A & W Rootbeer that I carried 110 miles from Monson, Maine specifically for the occasion.

After about forty-five minutes, the clouds miraculously began to dissipate and an opening appeared. Immense! What Grandeur! The view was breathtaking! The view back toward the Tableland, and in the other direction....the KnifeEdge! A sharp



Victory after 125 days on the trail!



Celebrating with the A&W Rootbeer I carried 110 miles from Monson, Maine.

Suddenly other hikers began to arrive from many different trails. I asked one of them to take a photo with my camera of me standing proudly in victory at the summit. Later, Rich arrived, then mobs from other trails. I found it rather strange, but the first thing that they all did upon arriving was to stake out a spot and begin eating, just as I had. Butch and Rob eventually showed up with their one pack between the two and I congratulated them on their accomplishment as I had for Rich earlier. Butch and Rob had started one month before I had started in Georgia.

The sky remained clear for quite a while as everyone ate.



I sat in awe with the magnificent Knife Edge of Katahdin that had been produced by glacial action. I had finished the trail, but now had to hike five miles back down the mountain and find my way back home and resume a “normal” life - whatever that was.



Looking back toward the tableland as the clouds began to roll back in.

The clouds began to drift back in and I decided to go back down ... once again - by myself. I stood at the summit, turned around, and faced the white blaze that had once been the last blaze of my journey. Now it had been transformed into the first blaze continuing my journey through life.



The last Blaze, now the first blaze, lead down the mountain through the fog. Lucky for me the white rectangles had lead me safely to the summit, and now give me the strength to travel through life as well.

Epilogue

Once back at the ranger's station, I gathered up my backpack and walked to the entrance of the park to secure a ride to Millinocket, the closest town to the end of the trail. I had finished the trail in time to make my way to the town of Coopers Mills Maine, where the family who had wined and dined me so well with the vegetarian food back at Rangeley Lake called their home. Lois had invited me to come to the Maine Organic Farmer and Gardeners Fair if I had completed the trail before the third weekend of September. But for now, my goal was to get to Millinocket for a room and a shower.

I managed to get a ride into town and located the old white house where lodging was supposedly available to hikers. A room was offered by a little old lady I had read about in the Philosophers Guide to the Appalachian Trail. Only those who inquired and could pass her stringent test were allowed to stay. The test she used to weed out lodgers was performed at the door when she answered. Looking down at your footwear, she could determine if you were a true thru-hiker or not. Apparently I passed the test, and was offered a room. She was a nice old lady and did not intrude on my privacy very much. I don't remember what I did the rest of the day, but the next morning I remember looking out of the second story window from my room and seeing a pickup drive below with a huge bull moose lying in the bed of the truck. Apparently it was moose hunting season. As tame as the ones I had seen on the trail, I can't imagine that there was much sport in the hunt that morning. All the hunter needed to know was where the moose was.

I hitched a ride from Millinocket out to the interstate and then headed south toward Augusta, the capitol of Maine. What a town, compared to the ones that I had grown accustomed to along the trail. I think the first thing I did was stop at the Dunkin Donuts establishment and buy myself a half dozen various donuts, mostly Boston cream filled if memory serves me right. After scarfing them down and amazing the waitress and all the rest of the clients who had never seen anything like a bearded guy in shorts wearing hiking boots who smelled terrible even though he had showered, I walked to the other side of town to where there was a road leading to Coopers Mills. I secured a ride to the post office in Coopers Mills, a town that did not really look like a town, and asked the postmaster if he could help me with directions to Lois and David's house. They had a rural address. I set out to surprise them with my arrival. Lois had told me to call when I got to Augusta, but I thought it would be "cool" to just arrive and surprise them. They were not home when I got there, so the surprise was on me. They were surprised when they finally did show up and found me waiting. That weekend I was introduced to the alternative lifestyle fair hosted by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. All the "junk" food was all made with organically grown whole wheat flour ingredients and other natural ingredients. Basically it was a regular old time fair but everything was organically grown, solar powered etc. I had a blast.

I eventually had to head home, so I arranged to be taken by Greyhound from Augusta to New York City and then on to St. Louis, Missouri. To be able to catch the bus in the morning, I spent the night in a small overgrown section on the edge of the state sanitarium, where I just slept on my tarp amongst the brush. I woke in the morning to the sounds of a grounds maintenance worker walking into the brushy area, nearing my location while he looked around to see if anyone was watching, and then whipping it out and urinating. I remained unnoticed, and did not move until he had left. I wondered if he was one of the residents on a work detail or just a regular employee. After a quick zip, he wandered off to another location. I then packed up and headed for the bus station just a block or so away and boarded a bus to New York City.

The thought of being a hiker fresh off the trail in New York City scared me a bit, but I got off the bus in Grand Central Station anyway and had an hour or so to kill before leaving on the next bus to St. Louis. I found myself walking in hiker garb right down 42nd street like I knew what I was doing there. No one even seemed to notice that I was, at least in my mind, a lot different than they were. Obviously everyone is different there. That made me the same.

Within two days I was back in St. Louis, picked up by my sister-in-law and back in my old bed. Was that to be the end of my backpacking career? Well, so far I could say I did not hike much. I had backpacked twice in my life. I did not hike much, but when I did, I really hiked! During those two times I had covered 2800 miles.