

500 MILES ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL 2018



I've been slowly section hiking the Appalachian Trail a 100 miles at a time, for the last 10 years. The trail, which runs from Georgia to Maine is 2181 miles long. At the rate I've been hiking, I doubt if I'd ever finish. So I decided to take 6 weeks off this past summer and see if I could walk 500 miles.

I started where I had previously left off, about 10 miles south of Harper's Ferry, WV. I ended in Great Barrington, MA. I hiked 490 miles. I only have about 650 miles to go!



Harper's Ferry is where the Civil War nearly began. John Brown and a group of slaves attacked the local arsenal in an effort to secure weapons and start an armed slave revolt. Several people died, the raid failed, and Brown was eventually captured and hanged. The diminutive, well-preserved town is now a National Historical Park. It sits at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers.



The trail leaves Harper's Ferry on the Baltimore & Ohio train trestle. Then it follows the towpath of the now empty Chesapeake & Ohio canal for a few miles. Finished in 1833, the canal linked Harper's Ferry with Washington DC, one year before train service through the town began.



The trail then climbs a 70 mile long ridge known as South Mountain, which runs due north, through Maryland. Numerous Civil War skirmishes (that were a prelude to the battle of Antietam) occurred on this mountain, included one which claimed the life of the first Union General killed in battle (Jesse Reno), who's grave marker is seen here, along the AT. Reno, NV was named in his honor.



Every 10-15 miles along the AT there is a shelter with accompanying campsites for tents. The shelters are three sided wooden structures which can sleep 6-15 hikers. They are a welcome site when it's pouring rain. A water source is always near each shelter. This spring is bubbling right up out of the ground. Water was always filtered.



View from graffiti covered boulders at High Rock Ledge. Panoramic view of farmland in Maryland's Cumberland valley. I'm leaving South Mountain and crossing into Pennsylvania at the Mason Dixon line.



Thur-hikers are trekkers who hike the entire trail in one season. It usually takes 5-6 months. Most are 20-30 years old. There are just as many gals as guys. For some it's a rite of passage after school and before starting that first real job. But just as many are unemployed and have no idea of what they'll do next when they finish. There are not many thru-hikers between the ages of 30-

55. But the number increases again as people approach retirement and want to do something like this to add to their 'bucket list.'



Hikers are known by their 'trail names.' Rarely are real names used. In the previous picture meet "Train wreck." The tall skinny kid was "Bloom." Named after Orlando Bloom because of his hair. The older guy is "Compass." He was always getting lost. My trail name was "Bird Man." Not just because I am a bird vet, but because I liked to wear feathers in my cap. Hikers also usually don't disclose what they do in real life.



Some hikers bring their dogs. This beagle is wearing his own backpack. There are trail romances. Meet "Cheeks" who was from Indiana. The girl's name was "Trouble" and she was from England. They were trying to make the summer last as long as possible!



This is "Plugger." He was 69 years old. He was a slow walker and said he just "plugs" along. He was section hiking like me and was out for a few months. Aside from him, I only met one other person older than myself (I'm 67) who was long-distance hiking. There was talk of an 84 year old man hiking the whole trail but I never met him.



Every 3-5 days the AT either passes through, or very near a town. This is Smithsburg, MD It was 1.6 miles off the trail. I walked there and hitchhiked back. Some places have shuttle services available for a small fee. Smithsburg had a nice cafe where I ate a hearty breakfast, a Laundromat

where I cleaned my smelly clothes, and a Dollar General where I resupplied food and other items. Some towns also have places to stay overnight such as hostels, B&B's, or motels. A day off to relax and recharge, a shower (or two), and restaurant food were a luxury (for some) but are also a necessity from time to time.



Pretty pictures of the trail in the woods and passing beneath of grove of Rhododendrons. Sign designating the Half-Way point on the AT...1090.5 miles either north or south. A general store just past this sign offers the half-gallon ice cream challenge to thru-hikers. Twenty mile section in central PA where the trail passes through farmland.



I started my trek wearing hiking boots. They were fine until it started raining. Then they were wet all the time, smelled, shrunk, and caused blisters. So I got shuttled into a town where I was taken to a shoe store and was able to purchase a pair of trail runners...which is what most of the thru-hikers wear anyway. Some hikers like to wear 'dirty-girl' gators that they put over the top of the shoes and ankles to prevent pebbles and twigs from getting into them. They are stylish! This is how I looked after 2 weeks on the trail...trail runners with thin, short socks, short pants, synthetic short-sleeve shirt, cap, walking poles, and my backpack, which weighed about 28 lbs when full.



Sometimes the AT travels on paved roads...as here where the trail passes over I-81 north of Harrisburg, PA. We are heading toward the ridgeline far in the distance, which once climbed had a beautiful view and overlook into Duncannon, where the trail passes directly through.



In the town of Duncannon, the trail goes right by "The Doyle," a 100+ year old hotel, at one time owned by Budweiser. It had a bar and grill. A beer never tasted so good! Rooms were \$25 a night. I stayed over. The place was a dump and probably not remodeled for decades. Only one bathroom (toilet and shower) per floor. Duncannon is situated on the banks of the Susquehanna river. The trail crosses the river alongside the highway in a designated pedestrian/bike lane.



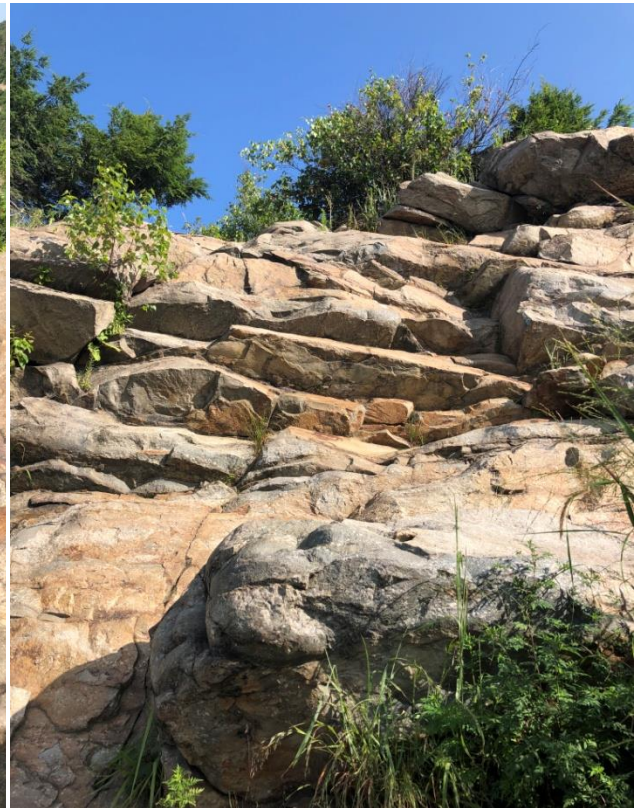
The rains began in Pennsylvania and didn't let up for the rest of my hike. It was one of the wettest summers on record in the Eastern US. I had a raincoat with hood, pack cover, and rain pants, which I later abandoned because it was so hot and humid. Trails became creeks and lowland areas were prone to flooding. At times I was walking in water over my knees. My feet were always wet. The constant rain and drizzle caused foggy conditions which created spooky wooded landscapes.



The damp conditions brought out the black snakes and the occasional box turtle. I never did see a rattlesnake. Or a bear!



The trail in Pennsylvania is anything but smooth and gentle. It was constantly up and down one ridge after another and rocky beyond imagination. You always had to keep your eyes looking down to keep from stumbling on rocks or roots. Sometimes the trail crossed over boulder fields. Not fun when they are wet. I hated these!



Other times during ascents or descents, you had to rock scramble on all fours. This was actually fun.



The AT ends in Pennsylvania at Delaware Gap. The trail crosses the Delaware river in the pedestrian lane alongside I-80. Half way across you encounter this sign indicating you are now entering New Jersey. Only 895 miles to the end. Notice that my two week old shoes are duct taped at the toe because they are coming apart from all the rocks. New Jersey wasn't as

densely wooded or as rocky as Pennsylvania, but you were still up on ridgelines with pretty views.





The Secret Shelter. A really cool place on private land just off the trail in NJ. The owner keeps the large field mowed and encourages hikers to camp here. That's my purple, one-man tent above. My hiking clothes are hanging out in an attempt to dry. The structure in the first picture is a solar, outdoor shower. There's a spigot with potable water. The hiker is trying to cool down a swollen, aching foot. There's a privy and the other structure is actually an old ice house. It can sleep 4-6 on the floor.



The forested land in upper NJ and SE NY was clear-cut and homesteaded in the 1700's and 1800's. Most of the farms in the mountainous areas failed and the forest reclaimed the land. But many stone walls, like this one, remain, and can be seen along the trail. Northern NJ also has a lot of swamps and marshes. This is Wallkill Wildlife Refuge. The AT skirts its edges. The Pochuck boardwalk (right) is almost 1 mile long.

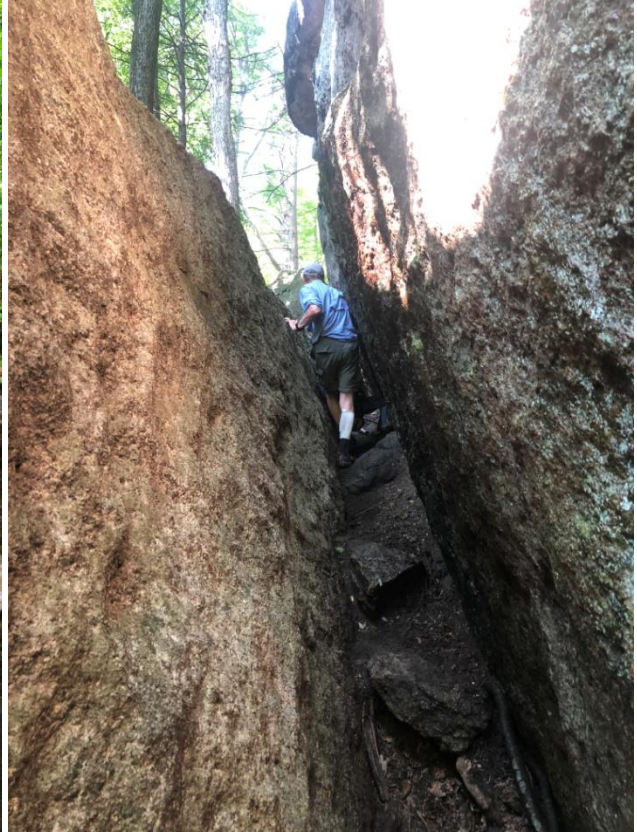
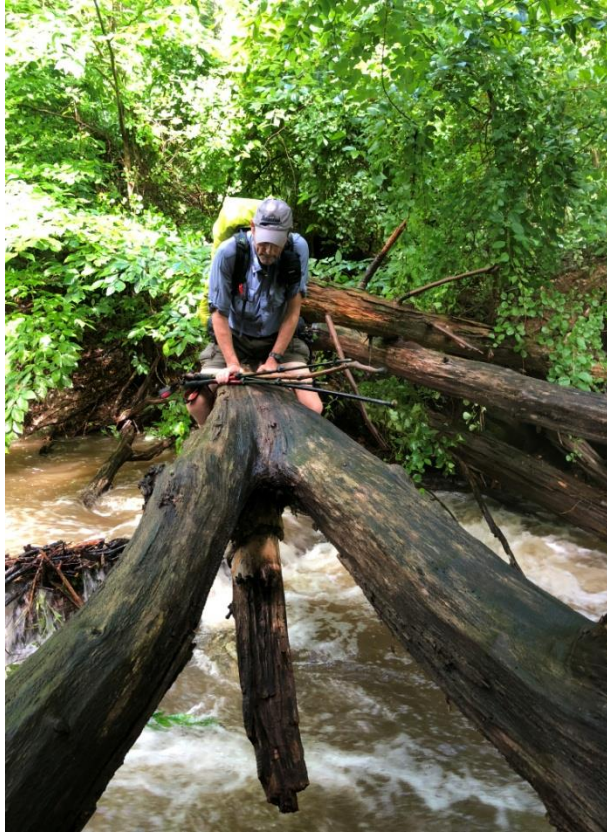




Another state...New York. A half mile beyond the state line is Prospect Rock, the highest point in NY along the AT. From the rocky open crags, the skyline of New York City is just visible in the distance. Notice the stone walkway next to the waterfall. Another pretty view.

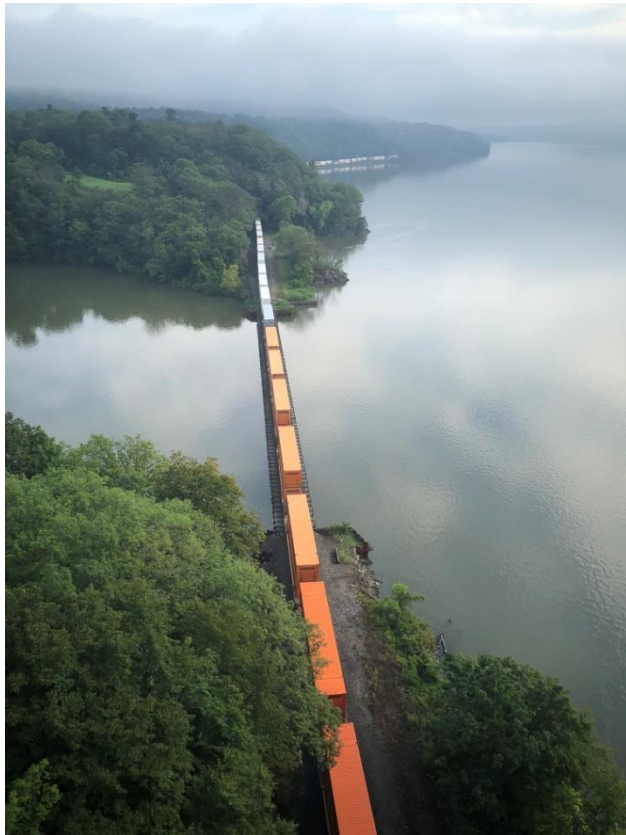


Trail magic! A local church group is cooking breakfast as I cross a road. People also put out water and food items at various places.



More rain and flooding in NY. The only way across this raging creek was to shimmy across a fallen tree. The interesting rock formation on the right is called the Lemon Squeezer. I never saw so many unusual mushrooms as I did on this trip due to the wet conditions.





A view of the Hudson river from atop Bear Mountain. The Bear Mountain Hudson River bridge is the lowest elevation on the entire AT (about 155 feet). I spent two nights at a small local motel in Fort Montgomery, NY, adjacent to the Bear Mt State Park. A lot of Revolutionary War history in this area. Beautiful early morning walk across the bridge.



Just north of Pawling, NY is the only train station directly on the AT. The station is a commuter rail stop on the Metro-North Harlem line, which serves hikers traveling to and from the NYC area.



I've now entered New England...Connecticut. The gateway town that the AT travels close to is Kent, CT. It's a very quaint little village. Kent has a Hiker Welcome Center with bathrooms that have showers! There's a manicured lawn to dry out tents and gear, a nearby Laundromat, and restaurants. I spent the night in a 200 year old B&B house nearby.

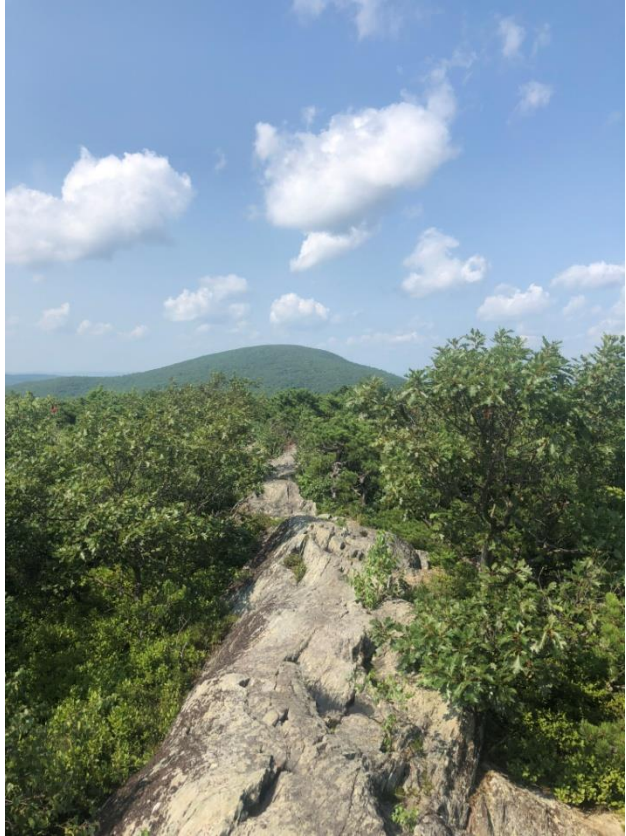


The rain didn't let up in CT either. Day after day of drizzle and fog. Sitting in a shelter and waiting out the storm.



The last state...Massachusetts. A view of the last mountain range I will have to climb and walk it's length. It has three peaks, Bear Mountain (another one), Mt Race, and Mt Everett....the highest elevation of this entire trip. Great Barrington lies just beyond.





The hiking up and down these three peaks was very difficult...steep and rocky. But the views were spectacular! The large picture is looking north from Mt Race into the area known as the Berkshires. The final peak...Mt Everett, with me at the summit! Then a motel, shower, dinner and beer, and the next day I started home. It was a great adventure! I went solo but made many friends along the way. I got stronger as I hiked but I'm not getting any younger...I had lots of aches and pains. BUT IT WAS WORTH IT!

Everyone who starts a thru-hike has the goal to stand by the final signpost on Mt Katahdin in Maine and celebrate what you've accomplished. These new friends of mine did just that!



TRAIN WRECK



CITIZEN



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