

Appalachian Trail 1988 Trip Journal

6/3 Fri-- (Atlanta GA)

Last day of class

6/5 Sun

Up until 4AM bagging food, and still not through! Woke up naturally at 9AM and finished the job, then finished packing and cleaning apartment. Out (finally!) at 6:30PM to Kentucky, with car filled with 20 food boxes and stuff.

While cleaning, Sushi (*my feline overlord*) slipped through the window with a live bird in his mouth. He took it over the the corner and played and nudged it, then dozed with one paw on bird. Occasionally bird would revive and whimper, which would get the cat's attention.



Sushi

Just as we left the house, Sushi jumped through the open sun roof. Nearly lost him when he bolted.

Coming up to parents' house.

6/6 Mon-- Springer Mountain Shelter 0.2 (*numbers in heading are miles from Springer Mountain*)

Dad suggested we leave today since he would have difficulty leaving tomorrow (I gave them the option.) On road by 8:30AM, to Atlanta apartment to pick up pack and leave key, and get more boxes, then to Nimbelwell Gap. Dirt road was rugged but not too bad, and we saw a doe.

The trail was alive with grasshoppers! 75 degrees F at start at Nimblewell.



Pinch test at start of trip

Maybe tonight I can catch up on sleep lost during past two days.

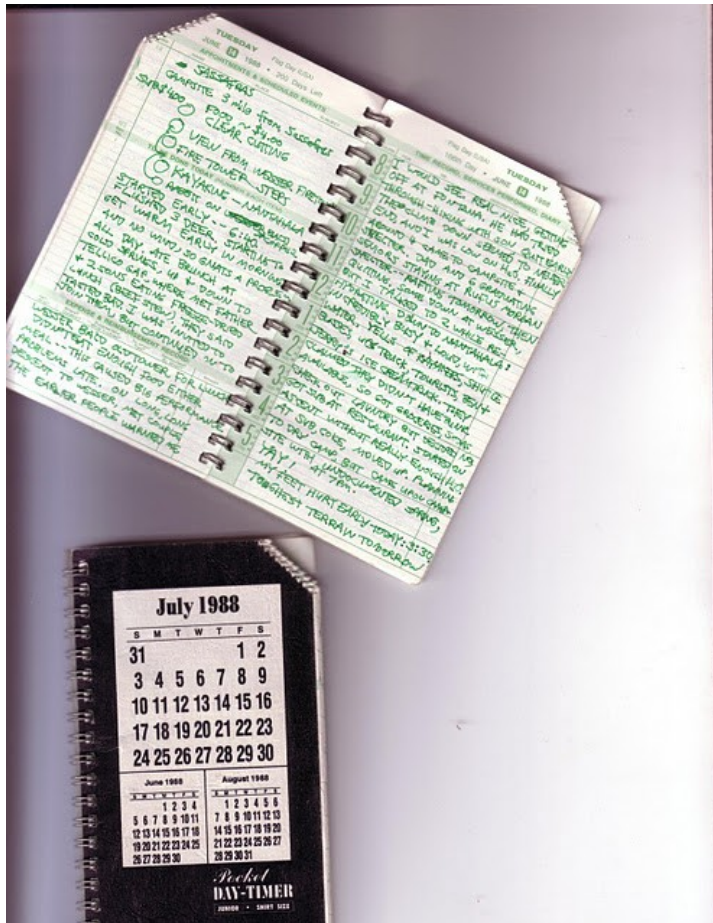
Can I really be attempting this thing?

All the annoying bugs and dense undergrowth sure make the trail seem unfamiliar. I am used to Spring conditions. *(ed note: I had previously done this section of the trail during Spring Break as a training hike.)*

(ed note: Trip journal entries, for reasons of portability and weight, are written in Day-Timers Junior with two small pages per day, and require tiny writing, abbreviations, and copious sentence fragments in place of formal prose. Rather than long philosophical discussions, text tends toward more prosaic matters: "Boots are soaked again!" We choose to reproduce entries with only minor edits.

Entry headings are the final arrival location for that day.

Later explanatory notes are in italics.)



Trip journal

6/7 Tues-- Gooch Gap Shelter 16.7

Spent night in solitude at Springer, having seen no one on trail.

Kept seeing one couple several times today, we kept similar pace, and kept passing each other. They may have stopped at creek instead of coming here.



Long Creek Falls

Steve Johnson, of Philosopher Guide fame, came up to talk, and see if any hiker was up here needing his services. He spends his days shuttling hikers to Suches, etc. Real nice guy, mellow, with beard. Blood pressure problems prevent him from hiking trail any more.

Saw 5 deer today, more than number of humans.

No rangers on trail today.

Will my bod make it to Neels tomorrow?

\$15 groceries \$3.60 send package home

6/8 Wed-- Neels Gap Shelter 31.6

No visitors, skunks, etc, last night.

Saw a wild turkey just past Gooch Gap!



View at Ramrock Mountain

Steve Johnson was waiting for customers at Woody Gap. He got to talking about lots of things; showed me some arrowheads.

Really glided up the first mountain. Blood was harder.



Blossoms on Blood Mountain

Ate lunch walking to make Neel's Gap in time for dinner. Good view on top of Blood-- lots of rocks and mountain laurel, blooming azaleas(?), stone shelter, descent very steep and rocky and hard on the feet. Hostel was closed! Aargh, argh, gack! The normal couple was on vacation. Visions of spaghetti were getting me across those mountains. Acute disappointment. Got some groceries and coke and retired to grounds behind the hostel with a nice couple my age. Peter, getting his PhD in English, and Joy starting her Masters in Public Relations, from Louisiana. They are going slow, plan to get to Damascus. Water turned off at hostel fountain, but employee came out and gave me water.

6/9 Thu-- Rocky Knob Shelter 49.4

Waited for Neels to open at 8 and got some more groceries, just in case. Send spare shorts home and tried to call home.

Hit the trail after 8:30, eventually caught up with Peter and Joy, and gave him a knife he accidentally left at a spring, and her a coke I promised to bring her. Left them around 10:30, 11, continued on mostly level trails most of day, ridge-lines and old logging roads. Breeze kept most of the gnats grounded-- yeah(!), but not grasshoppers. Clouds started moving in, temperature eventually starts declining, thundershowers possible. Stopped by Low Gap Shelter, met Trail Rat relaxing in a hammock, out for a short excursion. He talked about huge egos in Smokies, warned me about two people in next shelter, packing a gun. After a long walk, finally crawled to Rocky Knob, joined two people: Bus, mentioned by Peter and Joy, and Harold(Spuds), from Harrisburg PA.

Oh yes, I'm pretty sure i saw a bear way down from the top of a ridge, moving at impressive speed away from me!

6/10 Fri-- Addis Gap Shelter 63.4

Harold (Spuds) left early, then me at 7:15. Bus caught up with me shortly, but lagged behind for breaks. Two big climbs and descents. Cool morning, no insects. Caught up with Harold at Moniray. spent hour there for lunch. Joined shortly by Bus. Nice grassy area to catch rays. Next part of trail had gradual up and down, with lots of grass and fern as undergrowth. Saw group of grouse, lone birch tree a few maple trees now appearing.



View from Tray Mountain

Got in to camp at Addis early enough to clean everything, including myself.



Spuds and Bus at Addis Gap

From the shelter register: "6 orgasms in one night on the picnic table. Candy & Lance 6/4/88"
We spent time laughing over bits in movies, like "Animal House", "Monty Python", etc.

6/11 Sat-- Muskrat Creek Shelter NC 80.7

Left earliest today, but was noon passed by Spuds. First part of trail was brisk climbs and descents. Caught up to Spuds talking to a couple. She was tiny, but had a pack like mine. he was an army captain-- had one lung removed due to a training accident, but after therapy he could do marathons and hikes. Spuds told me later the captain's pack was HEAVY, around eighty pounds. After a Very long descent at Dickie Creek, Spuds and i parted company. He was quitting trail because of equipment dissatisfaction. (His feet were heavily blistered.) He planned to do trail in sections. Didn't see Bus, but he had a stash buried at Dick's Creek and would probably be moving slower. Met a couple hiking my direction with a dog (Alaskan type), going around 10 miles a day. They were quitting at Winding Gap. He had a pistol. She was from Damascus, and told me about their nice hostel.

Met two day hikers going in opposite direction, said trail was easy. HA! After some gradual ups and downs (a couple of patches of pines)(didn't see much wildlife-- lost in thought) came to climb at Courthouse, Bald Gap, and hardest section of trail so far. Really dragging by arrival at shelter at 6:30. OK after bath and food.

6/12 Sun-- Big Spring Shelter 100.4

Good news: did 20 miles for first time today.

Bad news; Behind schedule for first time today. For some dumb reason I had twenty-four-plus miles scheduled. Between Wesser and Fontana I should fall further behind. Make it up in Smokies. (Ace the final.)

Tried, but couldn't get out of camp before 7:40. Mostly flat or gentle trail until Albert Mountain, but laurel so thick I couldn't see anything, including wildlife, so just walked. Passed three at Standing Indian Shelter going my way, but they still hadn't finished packing. Saw man with two

dogs, and a biker. no one else. Trail not as well maintained as in Georgia: overgrown trail, etc. Morning cool, a few gnats, and first mosquitoes sighted in afternoon. No clouds. No grasshoppers for first time all day. Albert Mountain tough climb, but fun. Surprise at top: fire tower! Very rickety. Tip top closed.



Fire tower at Albert Mountain



View down from fire tower



View from fire tower

Got into camp around six, not quite enough time for next shelter. May detour into Rainbow Springs Campground tomorrow to call folks and get more grub.

A youth group of about thirteen teens set up camp just out of sight of the shelter shortly before dark. Nice quiet bunch, ask questions to-and-from watering hole.

6/13 Mon-- Wine Spring campsite 117.9

(Wrote KK, Steve, Faye, Tony, Diane. \$21 food, gas, H2O tabs, cinnamon roll, cokes)

Broke camp at 6:45, a record. Youth Group still unconscious. Another group at Rock Gap Shelter also out. Tried walking into Rainbow Springs Campground only to discover I had started from Rock Gap instead of Wallace Gap. The gaps are just fifteen minutes apart, and Rock Gap has no identifying sign, like so much of Nantahala. Went to Wallace Gap and one mile down to Rainbow Springs Campground. A real Mom-and-Pop operation. No other visitors visible; dogs warned of my presence. Surprised Mom and Dad with early phone call, told of my progress. Boxes on way; Sushi fine. KK letter in Box 3. Aarghh! Lady in store real nice, came out to greet me. Small selection of groceries, but just exactly the things needed by hikers, even Scorpion (*ed note: name of my model backpacking stove*) butane! I was getting really low due to planning oversight. Got cinnamon roll to eat while writing a half-dozen postcards outside on picnic table. Back to trail, surprised grouse at five places on trail-- what a humorous act they put on! Trail more challenging than yesterday, but I was really moving. Oh yes, twice groups stopped and asked me about my trip. Toward end of day, really low on water, with steep climb finally found Wine Spring. (Appropriate name to me!) And decided not to go on two miles to next campsite. Challenging terrain tomorrow.

6/14 Tue-- Campsite three miles from Sassafras Gap Shelter 141

(sub \$4.00, food ~\$4.00)

Started early-- 6:40. Flushed three deer. Starting to get warm early in morning and no wind, so gnats a problem all day. Ate brunch at Cold Springs, up and down to Tellico Gap, where met father and two sons eating freeze-dried lunch (beef stew). They said tasted bad. I was invited to join them but continued on to Wesser Bald old tower for lunch.



Wesser fire tower steps!



View from Wesser fire tower

Didn't eat enough food either meal-- this caused big problems later. On long, long descent to Wesser, met couple the earlier people warned me I would see. Real nice, getting off at Fontana. He had tried through-hiking with son, quit early.

The climb down seemed to never end and I was low on water. Finally around 4 came to campsite and shelter. Dad and six graduating senior staying at Rufus Morgan Shelter-- rafting tomorrow, then quitting. Some down at Wesser. But I talked to two while re-hydrating. Down to Nantahala: incredibly busy and loud, with water, yells of kayakers, shuttle buses, UPS truck, tourists, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream truck.



Kayaking at Nantahala

They claimed they didn't have bunk available, so got groceries, sodas, checked out laundry but decided no, got sub at restaurant. Started on ascent without really enough water. Ate sub, coke, moved up. Planning to dry camp, but came upon campsite with undocumented spring (Yay!) at 7PM.

My feet hurt early today: 3:30 PM. Toughest terrain tomorrow.

6/15 Wed-- Cable Gap Shelter 158.9

Last night fireflies came out around 10 and gave a little magic show. A few buzzed around all night. Then some birds sang out. Late at night heard a nerve-rattling "AAOAR! AAOAR! AAOAR!" then squeaking, then the same call further away. I figure it was some type of owl out hunting.

Next day: up and down, up and down, very steep, hard on knee. Both knees complaining for first time on trip because of long descent yesterday. Saw three out with butterfly net, met Scout troop and through-hiker laying on trail after Stecoah Gap. I went on.

Very very very steep climb now. Through-hiker, Aussie caught up with me during 3PM foot-break. Rob, great guy, 70 pound pack! Really in shape. He joined me rest of day-- me slow on downhill, knee painful now, and him slow on uphill due to pack. I estimated we would get to shelter by 6; we got there at 7, absolutely exhausted. Scouts must have mis-estimated distance and had to dry camp. This was the hardest day physically on trip. From map, Smokies don't look so easy. May need to spend R&R day.

Hard to sleep; my tossing and turning must have annoyed Rob.

Rob, 45, sleeveless shirt, used to work in outback. We came across huge fat black snake in middle of trail. I jumped over it. "You're game, aren't you?" He wouldn't jump. In Australia, any color snake can kill you.

6/16 Thu-- Fontana Dam Shelter 165.7

(Arlette letter)

Left earlier than Rob. Chanced badly marked trail, which was a mistake. After hitting road, guessed at wrong direction, lost the hour I would have saved. Finally “discovered” the village, got mail-drop (*Box 1*), chocolate shake (at a weak moment), laundry, packed, found Rob on porch, got groceries, ½ gallon orange juice after shake (not a good idea!), hamburgers afterward. Worse idea. Uurgh.

Hitched a ride to dam area, walked to nice shelter, inhabited by nekkid Spacey Steve, “Mickey Mouse Cowboy” (southbound from New Jersey), Jay and two Scouts, who I passed yesterday made it in later. Taking rest of day off for knee. Found phone, called Mom, got some bad news. Found sink and shaved, free hot shower, great! After dinner called Karen-- so wonderful to hear from her. By the time I got back to shelter it was dark, everyone asleep. Fellow next to me made noise all night, making it difficult to sleep.



Fontana Shelter



View from Fontana Shelter



Fontana Dam

Out of self-registration permits, so will have to do that tomorrow. *(ed note: Access to Smokies controlled, reservations at shelters due to bear issues. Most shelters with chain-link fencing, secured at night, hopefully ursis-resistant.)*

Will Smokies be hard or easy? What about my knee?

I had to act as interpreter between Rob (Aussie) and Steve (NYC).

Solar hot water for showers right next to hydroelectric dam!

6/17 Fri-- Russell Field Shelter TN 176.4

Rob and I got to the dam at 7:15 and called the rangers to get entry permits. He said 40 minutes. Upset, we waited 50 minutes and called again. Finally he came at 9, gave one permit for both of us, gave lame excuses. Across the dam, into the Smokies. Rob and I had to specify shelters so we played it safe and did 12,15,15,15 miles. Tough climb. Met group who said no water at Russell. Passed Jay, who already had permit. A day for a lot of sweat. Stopped at Mollies Ridge to get water for Russell. Just a trickle at that shelter, so after ½ hour someone comes by who says Russell has plenty of water.

Several people at shelter. Rob got caught in brief rain shower. Jay came rambling in. Couple from Tennessee, dad and son from 'Bama, two quiet bookworms, three guys from Michigan State. Lots of good conversation.

Beds awfully squeaky at night.

6/18 Sat-- Silers Bald Shelter 190.2

Rob started ahead of me. Mild up and down in morning. Only caught up to Rob while he was talking to couple-- she with headphones and gaiters, he called "Feather Pack" because his pack was so light. Rob had caught a brief glimpse of a bear around Spence Field. Great view on Rocky Top. Stopped at Derrick Knob for lunch. Rob started on ahead.

Something I ate must have disagreed with me, because I kept making side trips into the woods. Not making good time. Kept thundering for a couple of hours, finally started raining. Jacket worked OK, but inside of Gore-tex boots kept getting soaked. Why? Finally made it to Silers Bald Shelter and found Rob, who declared this to be our home for night.



Deer at Silers Bald

Three guys from Devry Institute in Illinois came in, on a thirteen day eating expedition. Made a big production of dinner.

Knee still bothering me today. What to do?

6/19 Sun-- Ice Water Springs Shelter 205.1

Now I see why the grass at Siler's Bald Shelter is cut: three deer stay there-- buck, doe, yearling buck. The young one was quite unafraid, and could he snarf that grass!

Big gradual climb to Clingman. Ran into tourist road to top. Could NOT find trail back down, after careful looking. Much of Smokies so far very poor with white blazes. Reluctantly, we knew road would run into trail, if map was right. On road a ranger stopped to check on us-- the same knuckle-head who gave such poor service at Fontana. Finally, after infinite dodging of cars, we reach trail. (Ranger's directions were wrong.) Next section many trees blown down with huge shallow root structures. Trail construction here extensive, but not subtle. After huge tourist parking lot, big climb on wide trail. Passed hill that appeared to have lots of lightning hits. Easily made shelter before 5. Fairly full shelter. Finally rained.

In shelter: couple of teachers from Georgia, southbounder from New York, three guys in high school, and more.

The three guys came in at 1AM. Grrr.

Skunk came back for seconds and thirds. Some idiot left garbage sack on floor.

6/20 Mon-- Cosby Knob Shelter 225.1

(ed note: No pictures for a while, because out of film.)

In the morning around Paul's Bunion, best views so far. Walking along very narrow ridge, we could see both directions at some unusually rugged and picturesque hills. In some places a number of trees dead. One guy said rangers are saying acid rain.

My feet are in agony from wet shoes again. Bottom of feet look serious. Perhaps high wet grass too much for Gore-tex? May need gaiters. Wouldn't hurt to seam-seal and slightly wax boots. Improvising with cheese wax little effect. (ed note: wax skin used to package cheese)

No water source for a long time. Finally got to Tri-Corners for late lunch. Some already in shelter-- three from Louisville. Left around 2PM as several arrived at shelter for evening. Storm building all afternoon. We stayed at very edge of storm: left OK, right rain. Got to Cosby earlier than expected, around 6. A group of three already there, sitting in camp chairs! Out for yearly cruise through Smokies: Newfound Gap to Davenport Gap (mostly downhill). Dubbed the "Fast Hikers" because they kept getting passed (probably during frequent breaks). Three all a bit overweight, claim they GAIN weight during trip! (Mostly good freeze dried: Mountain Home.) This group likes to cut up a lot, seemed good at having fun. Talked with Rob and me a good deal (after our baths), made us feel part of team. Broke out some Jack Daniels and offered-- Rob had some, one of them had a lot. They talked about their hunting and fishing clubs, where they do the same stuff-- with pros.

6/21 Tue-- Groundhog Creek Shelter 242.7 (*out of Smokies*)

Slept in late because Fast Hikers offered us ride and back to grocery store near Davenport-- where we all planned to get chili-dogs. "Chili dog, chili dog" became the chant as we walked together, mostly downhill. Surprisingly, the group had a pretty fast pace. Finally to truck in parking lot, near ranger station, to grocery. Selection: mostly cigarettes. Service; poor. Food: good! Each of us had three chili-dogs with onions, mustard, ketchup, plus several drinks. The Fast Hikers treated! Rob and I got groceries, and they took me back to AT at I-40. They took Rob on to Gatlinburg where they left a car. He wanted to get gas at hiking store there, and maybe maps, more food. Would have to hitch back. I told him I was planning to R&R a day at Groundhog, if he wanted to get there and join. He needed at least two days off toe, which was hurt early in trip. ("Up-hill Toe.") I hadn't planned on getting all the way to shelter this evening, but chili-dogs got me way up the hill.

Out of film so couldn't get the group. (No film at grocery.) Keet, Russ, ?. Most years two more, one new one this year. New one investment banker in Atlanta: citrus grower in Florida: sells windows in Florida. They were planning to celebrate with trout dinner-- didn't pick restaurant yet. Grocery clerk asked Rob if he was a yankee, because of his pronunciation of rice: "ross".

6/22 Wed-- Groundhog Creek Shelter 242.7

Stayed here for a Rest and Relaxation day, repairing equipment: heat sealing pack fabric edges, trying to fix faulty pack strap, waxing boots, etc. Seeing if Rob would show up, writing long Karen letter, napping. CMC volunteer came around noon, checking trail and latrine, stayed to talk while waiting for friends to show. Eventually gave up waiting, went to look for friends, said he would be back. If he did come back, I was asleep.

Mike, southbound through-hiker, came in afternoon. He talked of Mickey Mouse Cowboy, Duffel-Bag Tim, Indian somebody, Damascus. Started in Pennsylvania (?), may finish northern part next year. Will look for job in Tennessee. New Jersey accent, knew Jim (New Yorker southbounder I met in Smokies).

Mike had a LOT of

6/23 Thu-- Deer Park Mountain Shelter 265.1

Mike said he could sleep in until 3 and still do ten miles.

Walked for over an hour before I knew for sure I was going in right direction-- agonizing.

Reached Max Patch, which is old farm pasture, with 360 degree view. Crickets chirping in the morning. Does my nose deceive me? No! Wild strawberries all over the place, all just at right stage of eating. Oh! So flavorful!

Later in day flushed the smallest deer I have seen. Looked like it might have come to my knee. Got to shelter at 6, decided to go into Hot Springs for munchies without pack. Trail down VERY long, grocery stores all closed, only got a warm soda from machine, LONG way back up. Shelter full with youth group, so I camp near water. Lightning for a very long time, finally a light rain.

6/24 Fri-- Little Laurel Shelter 287.6

(\$8.50 film, food, \$2.25 ice cream, sodas. Letter Mom, KK)

Descended into Hot Springs, stopped at hostel to look at map, got mail (*Box 2*) and groceries. Passed by whitewater place on way back. VERY steep, unlike well-graded trail in. Met members of Kennerac Mountain Club, working on grading the trail. They go out and work five days at a time! All over south. VERY hot day.

Ate lunch late at Spring Mountain Shelter. When finally arrived flies bad. Met couple from Florida, him an engineer, doing trail in sections. We discussed possibility of reaching Alan Gap Grocery by closing time. Munchie craving already! Leave at 4, get to store by 5:50, doesn't close until

7! Get pint neopolitan ice cream, peach Nehi (!?) and Pepsi. Eat outside next to store. Walk while storm building. Stop to eat dinner just in case. Decide to keep walking until dark or find water. Dinner helped. Finally made Little Laurel Shelter at 9:15, just about too dark. Shelter filled with YMCA youth group. I sleep behind shelter. Distant lightning, light rain at night.

Summer growth a real problem in places. No views. Real hot.

Couple told me that gnats hate Avon's Skin-So-Soft.

6/25 Sat-- Hogback Ridge Shelter 308.4

Rain from night before on plants. Early on ran into worst summer growth of trail so far, which drenched my shoes. Took whole day to dry-- agony. Stayed at Jerry's Cabin extra to try to dry shoes in sun, with little apparent effect. Did not feel like walking much from long day yesterday. Worst single ascent of whole trip coming out of Devil Fork Gap, though Nantahala had more. When you think you are about done, just got worse. Planned to call it a day at next campsite, Big Flat, but could not find it. Had to press on to Hogback Ridge. Two people there already

asleep at 9 when I arrive, so I camp in back. Water source very far. Had to eat in dark. Still did spit bath.

Trail markings in this section are poor. Blazes okay, summer growth spotty. Grades spotty.

6/26 Sun-- No Business Knob Shelter 326.4

Slept in. Didn't leave until around 8:30.

Ascended to Big Bald through some ex-fields. Blackberries ripe but abundant. To high open area, just after several minutes of steep rocks. Looked for and found wild strawberries.

Wonderful, some quite large. Showed person from shelter the night before the berries, walked on and met the other guy waiting at top, who missed the berries.

Walked on, planned to have late lunch at Bald Mountain Shelter-- couldn't find shelter! had to press on very far to get water. Whistling Gap spring stagnant. Finally got water at Spivey Gap.

Raining some, drizzle mostly. Tough time deciding whether to make camp or press on, but gnats decided for me: go on. Made No Business Knob Shelter in time to eat, wash without a flashlight. No other people at this shelter. No drinkable water at spring, but did use to bathe.

Fortunately I arrived with a full quart.

6/27 Mon-- Beauty Spot

Since no drinkable water at shelter, decided to break camp without breakfast and eat at water source along trail. No water until Nolichucky River! Trading post at Nolichucky Expeditions closed, but did get pepsi at machine, call Mom. Ate lunch at stream just past N.E., long break at Curly Maple (spring almost stagnant). Did not plan to stick to schedule today, since tired from previous long days, and could make up time with short day ahead.

Some nice flat walking for a bit, then up to Beauty Spot (bald, good views) for early dinner. Went down to campsite-- water bad, naturally. Made early camp, back up to watch sun set. Couple up taking photos, fooling around-- did not talk, spent a long time calling for dog. After sun set back to camp, where dog appeared. Returned it up to owners (temporary, it seems).

Could see we are now in for cooler weather-- cirrus clouds, good visibility, cold front must have moved in. Ate a second half-dinner and got a good night of sleep. Previous night not very restful for some reason.

Got bad news from Mom. (*ed note: phone call earlier in day*) May need to end hike early.



Beauty Spot



Beauty Spot

6/28 Tue-- Clyde Smith Shelter

Broke camp without much breakfast due to no water. Stopped at next spring to drink. Decided to do somewhat short day-- still inefficient.

At Iron Mountain Gap walked 0.5 mile to grocery store. Got 3 sodas, pen, butter brickle pint. Jason, 6, showed me faucet, trash-talked with me while I ate. He talks with all the hikers that come there.

After back on the trail, passed by dune buggy, obviously a bit confused. Passed me again, talked, offered a beer.

Went on auto-pilot for three hours, made camp by 6. Didn't have to swat my first gnat until 1:15PM-- wonderful, fairly cool from cold front moving in, thinking a lot today about home situation. Maybe week off at Damascus might work. Decision point: Damascus. In camp, uncle and two worn nephews already in. Extra long bath necessary. While eating, in walks two women who say, "Is one of you Jungle Jim?" !! Ann and Andi, after all these miles. Real REAL nice, lots in common. Tried drying beans, gave me sample packet of Skin-So-Soft, and I will get to see them cook dinner, a religious experience... Because of upset stomach, they make mashed potatoes, period! They say I will meet others of group tomorrow.

6/29 Wed-- Apple House Shelter 377.2

Left while Gun Sisters still in tent, with vague sounds emerging. Windy, cool during climb, some rocks before top. Finally, top of Roan (Groan) Mountain, arguably one of the prettiest spots on the trail. High grasslands ecology with many blooming shrubs and wildflowers.



Wildflowers on Roan Mountain

Saw several lilies. Passed one group of about twenty, told me of a rare lily, which I later photographed.



Rare lily on Roan Mountain

Springs at campsites and shelters dried up. Wasted lots of time looking for water. Finally groaned down mountain, found water at Doll Flats, descended to Apple House-- unusual structure. Met two couples who hike trail a piece a year. "It'll take us two years to get to Damascus!" They gave me food left over from BBQ place up the road. Went out late to call Mom, tried KK, back by flashlight past 10.

6/30 Thu-- Morland Gap Shelter 391.3

Rained last night. Went in to Elk Park, got food (*Box 3*), groceries, lost three quarters in nearest coke machine. Rained some on trek. Trying out improvised gaiters out of plastic bags. Had to return to Apple-- left sweat pants. Seem to be forgetful, distracted by outside events. (ed note: illness in family) Said goodbye to two couples from Florida again, preparing to head to next shelter, and started. Some say this is one of the ugliest parts of trail. Obstacle course through cow field woods, zig zagging past vicious dog I might have bopped but owner probably enjoyed show through screen door of mobile home. Did pass nice cherry tree with ripe fruit, some good sour apples. With the field and poor plant control, boots soaked again. This is upsetting. These boots cost a lot. In solo to Morgan Gap.

7/1 Fri-- Near Watauga Lake Shelter 409.3

Did not start off a good day. Hiked several miles, then met a guy I already passed. I somehow started off the morning hiking the wrong direction and did not recognize any of the trail from yesterday. Some major things were on my mind and, quite honestly, after so many miles the trail looked pretty similar. U-turned, had lunch at Morland. Concerned that I might get to Damascus late since already behind, but managed to stay calm. Motivated to hike fast. Dinner at Laurel Falls Shelter. That part of trail looked like it had undergone a lot of work. Nice shelter on the cliffs. Bypassed the falls because of time. Shortly after falls, took blue-blazed trail to highway, hiked to Watauga Lake, short-cutting a section of trail. Got to lake by 9, found trail, hiked with flashlight for a long way. Batteries finally gave out, so made camp just off trail in woods, in the dark.

7/2 Sat-- Double Springs Shelter 430.3

Broke camp without breaking fast, hiked a mile or two to Watauga Shelter. Spring dry, but ate there anyway. Hiked to earth-and-rock dam, crossed and started climb.



Watauga Lake



On Watauga Dam

Once on ridge, got good view of lake valley below. Reasonably flat ridge-- able to "get down" and hike. Had not had such easy walking since Georgia. Stopped at Vandeventer for lunch. Had water earlier, so skipped 0.3 mile descent to H2O. Wrote in shelter, asking if anyone actually made 0.6 mile trip not knowing if spring was dry or not. Later learned spring was indeed dry. Start of ridge, lots of summer growth. Concerned that it might keep going and spoil the fun, but finally got on road and really had a nice hike. Lots of vistas to valley below before lunch. Kept walking, stopped and got water just past highway-- relief after dry spell. Good pipe spring. Hiked until 6:30 and ate at a flat spot on trail, continued on and made Double Springs Shelter by 8. Took welcome bath and laundry up the trail, came back and chatted with four other shelter inhabitants: two out for weekend, and the "Grueling Honeymooners", real nice. She from Vermont, he losing weight on trail. After two more weeks they are going up to Vermont to hike.

7/3 Sun-- Damascus VA 448.3 (and then to Aunt Zay's in Council VA)

Left at 7:30. Ate in sleeping bag, trying not to wake folks. Bid goodbye to Grueling Honeymooners, who would also try for Damascus. Must have not recovered from previous day since even slight uphill grades were tres difficult. Stopped at Abingdon Gap for lunch. Grueling Honeymooners caught up with me, seemed to be hiking a good bit faster than I was poling along. Low on rations, I was forced to cook for lunch. Still held lunch to 40 minutes, and gave spare water to couple, since source was a long distance. Back on trail, still seemed too uphill, but soon mostly all downhill. Nice long descent. After border, trail nicely maintained into town. Nice peaceful evening... everyone out on porch. Got to "The Place" behind Methodist Church. Met "International Brigade", but Joanie & crew out grazing. a Southbounder, and "Marathon Grandma". Went to Dairy King and ate and called Aunt Zay and Uncle Dave. Ate some more, came back and explored. Finally met Joanie etc after they returned from Abingdon excursion. Zay, Dave, cousin Jason pulled up in van at 7:30. They took me to Bonanza for fine meal, then to their place for night. Called Mom, talked to Zay and Dave a long time about trip and Scouting.

7/4 Mon-- (Elizabethtown Kentucky)

Zay and Dave took me to Grandparents in Bee Virginia for breakfast, dropped off Jason there for fishing, then on to my parents place in Kentucky. Zay and Dave return to their place the next day.

7/5 Tue (Call KK.)

7/9 Sat (Bee, Virginia)

Parents drive me to Powers place (grandparents). Brother Steve stays home to work on experiment.



Pa, Grandma, Mom, and Dad at Bee, VA

Also there are Dave, Zay, and Jason. Dave and Jason are about to leave for Scout camp: Camp Davy Crockett.

7/10 Sun-- The Place, Damascus 448.3

Mom and Dad drive me to Damascus, and I give them a quick tour of the shelter.



The Place

Also there are the Gun Sisters (!!!), Pat (still?), Tarbaby, "The Refugee", and Greg (Lazybut). The Gum Sisters are working on a basket as a gift, using kudzu as a weaving material.



Kudzu baskets

I go for a food run and write for a while. Eventually did 12 page long-delayed KK letter. People were surprised to see me writing all evening long.

Andi is an RN working in chemotherapy two years, the typical burn-out period. Discussed Dad's therapy, family adjustments. Ann is also RN, just got medical education degree. Considering working with aids patients after trip, or perhaps teaching in a school system. Apparently not really sisters.

In their honor, I had mashed potatoes and gravy for dinner. They unsuccessfully tried sourdough pancakes for dessert.

"Slackpackers" left. Greg and "Refugee" on trail in evening. "Grindstaff" came by for a while, remembered me. Pat picked lots of cherries.



Picking cherries at The Place



Picking higher cherries

Called KK, had a nice talk. Sisters finally return and we have a terrific dessert at 11PM: chocolate ice cream (my contribution), cherries, whipped cream, and chocolate sauce. Awesome.



Dessert at The Place with Gum Sisters

It's been a real good day.

7/11 Mon-- Whitetop Mountain campsite 468.3

Only one person stirring during breakfast. Pick up mail drop (*Box 4*), on trail by 8:30. First climb really nice, but lots of gnats. Saw plenty of possum grapes, many creeks and streams. Remembered many switchbacks of Straight Mountain, but stream below much quieter now. (*ed note: My brother and I had hiked on AT for several days starting in Damascus a few years earlier.*) Brand new shelter, very nice, stopped for extra long (1.5hour) lunch break. Saw another hiker who had been trailing me for a mile, passed by at this point. Light shower. Finally, 2:30, started again. Section of Virginia Creeper Trail beautiful, needs to be hiked. Rail ties removed by now-- much easier.



Bridge on Virginia Creeper Trail

Lost Mountain took some energy. At Highway 58 downpour started, lasted 30 minutes. Decided to go on. Passed hiker in Clip Flashlight tent. Got to Vagol, didn't see good water source. Did not really believe I had reached correct road. Passed group in two large tents cooking dinner in pine trees. Should have stopped near here. Low on water, decided to camp on some flat spot on Whitetop. Stop and eat dinner at 8. Walk some more. Find a small site around 9. Boots kept feet dry-- but no brush yet.

That night it rained. I figured for a shower, but it kept raining all night. Woke up, zipped up, for breathing had to unzip a breathing hole. (ed note: bivy sack) Water somehow got in, made feet and hood of bag damp. Uh oh. By morning really damp. Sigh.

7/12 Tue-- Deep Gap Shelter 474.7

Dressed, broke camp in rain by 7. Ate dry lunch food while hiking for breakfast, since no water source. Started running into lot of brush during climb; feet stayed dry one hour, then damp, then wet. Socks might have helped some. Not inspired to hike very fast. Bald on Whitetop very foggy. Some rain showers in the middle of the cloud... felt strange. Would have been pretty in sunny dry weather. Plodded downward to road, crossed to highlands terrain with crickets, cows. Entered woods, climbed to Deep Gap Shelter. Too long to next shelter, and needed to dry out stuff, so decided to stay even though only 11. Ate, napped. Hiker caught up with me, also decided to stay. Deer came by, not shy. Fog rolled in dozens of time... strange. Youth group came in with 9 tents, including several Clip Lights. Started sprinkling. Leader came by, asked to use shelter if there is a downpour. I say OK. Sure enough, downpour. Over 15 youths troop in. Just as they leave, starts again. Turns out these kids are juvenile offenders. Really. Some hang around shelter until 9, even though Bob and I turn in early. Finally I have to chase them off. Can hear noise until 4AM. Night cold, sleep with raincoat even in damp bag, stay warm enough. It rained off and on all night. None of my things dried out in shelter. (ed note: Painful later to see how grumpy I was when writing this. Probably not very pleasant company.)

7/13 Wed-- Trimpi Shelter 501.9

Leave around 7:30, thinking about just staying at Old Orchard since anything beyond is too far to hike. Brief showers to keep my on my toes. Highland area nifty, but I long to see it in dry weather to really see typical highland conditions. At Rhododendron Gap, discover blazed shortcut which bypasses Grayson Highlands. Later learn from Greg and Bill that Grayson worth seeing, but I'll wait. Hope to get to Raccoon Shelter.

Blackberry vines in highlands quite short. Lunch at Old Orchard Shelter-- no sign of orchard. Iron Mountain not too difficult. Decide to have half-dinner after Hurricane side trail intersection. Climb starting to get hard. Have mashed potatoes. Climb to Raccoon Shelter. Met "Lone Hiker" and large young female youth group. Had enough of youths for a while, so press on to Trimpi, see Greg ("Lazybut") and Bill ("Tarbaby Refugee"), last seen at Damascus. Bath welcome, since had to miss for two days. Some good conversation with Greg and Bill, liberal arts types, recently graduated from Stetson. Bill hailed from Stone Mountain, Georgia. Bill was extremely loud snorer, kept me up at night, did no good to wake him. Greg was only one with dry boots. He treated and sealed his goretex-leather boots when gore-tex failed.

7/14 Thu-- Chatfield Shelter 519.2 (Glade Mountain)

Greg and Bill out of fuel, alcohol for homemade tuna can stove. I boil them some water for breakfast. Leave at 8, and they follow later. Find black raspberries and blackberries ripe at several places along trail.. Bill passes me quickly (long legs!), and Greg does before long, but I manage to keep up with him for a while. Extremely fast hiking at 2.5 or 3 miles/hour seem effortless for them Both are tall with long legs.

Get desperately hungry by 10, forced to stop and eat lunch. Food consumption seems to increase, maybe due to cold. Wet weather terrain most of day had lots of level places. Pass Greg stopping for lunch on trail, and press on to Mount Rogers Visitors Center. Very nice place, good staff, professional exhibits.



Mount Rogers Visitors Center

Bill, already there, adopts stray dog. Greg joins us soon afterward.



Greg, Bill, and Ranger the Wonder Dog

Very sunny in front of center, so we dry out gear on wall. Pepsi machine VERY cold, I treat, we stay around two hours until 2:30. They will go on for Atkins to get fuel and supplies. I stay at Chatfield Shelter. I get to shelter just as they leave, then converse with slightly obnoxious short-term hiker who leaves soon. In by 6, unusually early for me, for peaceful solitude. After Mount Rogers inside of boots stay dry, and outside begins to dry. But rain is forecast until Saturday. Could hear freeway late at night.

7/15 Fri-- Knot Mole Branch Shelter 538

Left at 7, down to places I remember from a previous trip with my brother: buzzing power lines over cow pasture, farms with several lightning rods on each building, brick works. Near I-81 junction purchased food at Texaco mini-mart, very high prices, poor hiker selection. Not sure if will last 5 days to Pearisburg, but grocery stores along the way.

Called Mom, received bad news about Dad. His cancer is in the bones, will be painful.

Obstacle course leaving civilization, several gates and fence crossing. Ate lunch at Davis Path Shelter, climbed mountain to rolling path, down to Dry Reed Creek, tough struggle up Big Walker Mountain, surprised that passed the mountain so quick. Long walk on road past picturesque farmlands under hot sun. Finally got water at warden's house and talked with nice woman there. On to nifty picnic shelter, met John planning to settle there for night. Up steep hill with four quarts of water, over some undocumented climbs, into Knot Mole Branch Shelter with dry spring at surprisingly early 5:15. Bathed, washed shirt even though low on water. Gnats bad today in spite of breeze. Mostly hot and muggy.

7/16 Sat-- Jenkins Shelter 557.7

Out by 7:30, on first climb discovered one of those undocumented mountains John mentioned. It was evident this section of trail still dry, hadn't gotten as much rain as my boots did, just as warden's wife mentioned. Blackberries green or dry. Saw chestnut trees-- survivors? Stopped for pre-brunch at 10. One mile before Chestnut Shelter saw man who pointed out stream, fitted description of "Dufflebag Tim". Encountered large number of flies at spring, by pond. Ran into a contributing reason-- about twenty horse riders going the other way. It was hard to smile at them, knowing what I would have to walk through. Got to shelter, and found inside unusable, with too many flies. Lunch in sun. Next spring nice. Almost no vistas along Burke's Garden Trail. Started to get rocky, tough going. Very hot. Gnats and flies worst I could remember. Insects more tolerable off the ridge at around 4:30. Into shelter at 6:30.

7/17 Sun-- Jenny Knob Shelter 581.6

Started just a little late again. After climb, descended into Wolf Creek area, numerous little creeks and ponds that would be creeks when the water was higher. Many minnows. Onto Brushy Mountain Ridge for some good walking. Cool, breezy sunny, level roadbed and gentle ridge. Pine needles along path. Could put your bod in cruise control and let your mind wander wherever. Down to cross interstate at impressive cut. Into woods again, found bathtub with water channeled into it, and crawdads and dead mouse in the tub.

Decided not to go into Bland, passing up all-you-can-eat restaurant. Pearisbug looms near. Got water at creek since long walk off trail to next shelter. Ate two lunches, ridge-walked all afternoon. Did not see any hikers all day. One turkey ran away. Made Jenny Knob Shelter at 6:30 with mighty thirst. "Spring" one-quarter mile downhill. Not making the trip again, but still washed and did clothes. Will hit small store (Philosopher's Guide warns unfriendly to hikers) tomorrow.

Food held out okay. A little repetitious.

All in all, good walking day, big contrast to yesterday.

7/18 Mon-- Wapiti 2 Shelter 594.9

Went down, hiked on road alongside several farms, barked at by many dogs. Entered woods and did a short steep climb with no switchbacks, just straight up. Down to road, Dismal Creek and Lake. Looked like a nice shady fishing spot. Up Highway 606 to grocery store, across from sawmill. Shiny, new, now friendly to hikes, unlike Philosophers Guide 1987 warning. Climbed short distance and took side trail to Dismal Falls.



Dismal Falls

Would be nice swimming spot, but water was now low and a little dirty. Terraced stone steps of falls remind me of a fountain in Portland OR. Met "Sun of Billygoat", youthful guy, doing Trail from '84 to '88. Neat person, with similar equipment to mine. He is southbound, regrettably.



Virginia valley view

Lowlands flat pine-needled trail in afternoon for good walking. Met dad and son from Atlanta, southbound. Rainless thunder turned into sprinkle turned into drencher. With wet boots, decided to call it a day and slogged into Wapiti 2, where I discovered Kyle and Shirley "Grueling Honeymoon"! From registers expected to catch up with them later. Good conversation followed. Wapiti 2 has wonderful cedar privy, fitted log shelter in flat open woods.

Kyle and Shirley spend winter in Portland, practically broke. Finally got jobs, spent \$500 on a van which caught fire the day they purchased it-- total loss. Kyle is a guitar player, worked at several jobs-- cook, construction, etc. Shirley will go to school in Missoula Montana, get teaching certificate. Geography major. We all plan to hit hostel tomorrow and go to Pizza Hut.

7/19 Tue-- Hostel Hospice at Pearisburg

Left Gruelings stirring around a bit, did big climb, then mostly level with good walking. Stopped for lunch at Doc's Knob, stayed an hour but Gruelings did not show. After hiking a bit, it started raining, which meant Grueling Honeymoon had reached shelter, since they have good timing with that.

Trail started to get rocky. Angel's Rest is several tall rocks, over twenty feet high, on top of a ridge. Climbed to try to get view. Could hear Cellanese Plant from long way away. Long climb down filled with anticipation. Finally got to roads, but could not find blue blaze trail to hostel. Followed highway and finally picked up train. Nice guy in pickup offered a ride near post office. Got to hostel be 6:30, shortly met by Bill, the caretaker, retired with military bearing. Hostel is converted barn with kitchen, oven, shower, library, upstairs sleeping room-- excellent. After shower found book and went out to gazebo to wait for Kyle and Shirley. They arrive around 8:30, get cleaned up, and we walk down to Pizza Hut and order large mushroom 'za with salads and pitchers. A good time was had by all. Got back at 10:30, after curfew. Hard to sleep thinking about everything to be done the next day.

Note to myself: Kyle and Shirley Gross-Dickey.

Since Grueling Honeymoon were out of money and seemed uncomfortable with a loan I treated tonight and they would treat tomorrow.

We sat out on gazebo late and watched flashes of lightning from over the horizon.

7/20 Wed-- Hospice



"Grueling Honeymoon" at Hospice

Arose early, had fresh peaches, and read. Got mail drop (*Box 5*) around 9, then to store to search for gaiters. Got seam sealer, shoe goo, and munchies. Found laundry and did clothes wearing raincoat. Then proceeded to convenience store and hostel. Mostly sat around and read in back yard. Also seam-sealed bivy sack, sno-sealed boots in desperation, and sewed t-shirt. My friends money order did not come in, so no eating out tonight. They offered polenta, which

was okay, and I tried to fix some of their Alpine-Aire freeze dried brown rice. Vile. Too lazy to go back down to convenience store. Wind picked up later in afternoon, then shower. Saw rainbow.



Gazebo and rainbow at Hospice

In evening Bill came by to check on us with his two bull terriers. Talked at lot. Pleasant restful day.

7/21 Thu-- near Pine Swamp Shelter 629.8

Grueling Honeymoon hoped to get money order in, so offered to buy breakfast. We had fine meal at Virginia Cafe, and I didn't get started on Trail until 10. Crossed river right by Cellanese Plant. Annoying little hill could have been avoided, then long climb. Some nice meadows on ridge with blackberries and apples. Fortunately found water at spring just before ridge, not on map but in databook, or would have been a tough day. Started to rain, continued raining off and on rest of day and night. Feet gradually became damp-- sigh. Ate dinner 5.5 miles from Pine Swamp Shelter. At 6:30 met three guys on a hike from Harpers Ferry to Pearisbug, who told me about a trail crew at shelter. Headed for shelter, hoping I might just make it in the dark, but steep rocky climb down last mile thwarted my plan. Found a medium-sized rock along trail and made camp in the dark. Bivy sack held up fairly well. Rained most of night. Not a restful sleep.

7/22 Fri-- Laurel Creek Shelter 647.6

Another day with wet feet. Broke camp early and found Pine Swamp Shelter full with trail crew, so decided to press on to another spot for breakfast. Essentially ate while walking, climbed to Bailey Shelter and took a long break. Parts of this trail are rocky with poor grades. Am seeing complaints in the shelter register book. Reasonably easy going to Potts Mountain-- special scenic area with well maintained trail.

Tough painful climb down to War Spur Shelter, took another long break. Joined by two weekenders. Did not know that much beer could fit in one pack. Discovered next shelter had recently been moved north two miles to better water. Felt okay, so did good three hour march to

Laurel Creek Shelter, nibbling every thirty minutes. Arrived at 7:30, had nice bath. Shelter newly painted, good location. Nice job, Kanarock. Lots of wildlife, including owl. Slept soundly.

7/23 Sat-- Niday Shelter 660.2

Late start of 8:30 due to yesterday's travails. Left woods after a bit, crossed some farms and discovered a stand of ripe black cherry trees just as I re-entered the forest-- superb taste. Drizzling rain, which started almost when I did the morn. Now the rain got serious. Easy long climb on trail. Profile of trail on map did not seem so easy. As went along ridge, very heavy rain and temperature drop. My improvised spats overloaded, so dropped down to Sarver's Cabin, though actually not the main cabin. Took an hour to dry off where feasible, and then eat. Back up to ridge at 2 for three hour walk to Niday Shelter if wet feet could take it. Stopped raining and brief sun came out to dry rocks, which is lucky because I had to traverse lots of 30 to 45 degree rock slabs along this section of ridge. Good views to right-- thin strip of farmland in middle of long valley, surrounded by forest. Could not see much on left, but seemed to be more farmland on that side. Gradual easy-on-the-knees descent down to Niday at 5. Built fire, made plans.

7/24 Sun-- Catawba Shelter 685.6

After a nice beginning, came to section which even looked difficult on trail profile. Good bit of up and down with rocks. Then started "Dragon's Tooth", lots of bouldering, climbing up gray sandstone rocks and cliffs. Near top, noticed many tourists, including three and four-year-old kids who were going much faster than me-- must be all that climbing up to the cookie jar. The climb down was quite challenging, tough for southbounders. Got into grocery store at Catawba, met a nice group on climb up the ridge. Then called folks.

Went through some stunningly beautiful farmland. On Catawba Mountain were great views all along, lots of rock formations on top, but this time we go beside instead of over then as on Dragon's Tooth. Rolling good trail so one could get into a rhythm, then a tough section breaks you out of your daydreams. After getting to road, highway 311, estimated two hours to shelter. Hit an unmarked undocumented corrugated shelter early, then gambled and pressed on to the real Catawba Shelter, new and very tall. No clouds in sky today, feet finally dry. Very good section of trail.

Plan to try for Cloverdale tomorrow.

7/25 Mon-- Country Pride Motel, Troutville VA 699.4

Tough getting started due to long haul previous day. Luckily got water at Catawba Shelter, since campsite supply nearby was unusable. Got to MacAfee Knob-- Rocks really stick out, with fabulous views.



Up to MacAfee Knob



View from MacAfee Knob

Walked along ridge and many many cliffs, went down to Lamberts Meadow Shelter for one hour lunch break. A stand of black cherry trees here, but very difficult to reach fruit. Ten miles left to Troutville. Wouldn't make Cloverdale post office mail-drop after all. Restricted campsites on this section. No shelters close to civilization, so decided to consider motel, even though it would hurt money reserves drastically. Back up and more walking on Tinker Ridge with cliffs, rocks, exercise going up and down, great views. Catawba/Tinker rivals Roan for favorite trail section. Could hear traffic, dogs, guns, sound carrying up the mountain.

At 3:30 started sprinkling, then died down, and reached civilization around 5, looking for motel. Price shopping difficult since all pay phones have book missing or motel pages ripped out. Finally settled on trucker place, still not cheap. Cleaned up for all-you-can-eat country cooking super salad bar. Got groceries for two extra days, since replacement package is only four days worth. Thunderstorm. Equipment repair. Called KK. Up late. KK got horse!

7/26 Tue-- Fullhardt Knob Shelter 703.3

Went to Cloverdale to get food drop (*Box 6*). Post office on back road, not well marked, but found it. No butane in box! Called Mom to rush butane in next drop, then went to hardware store and got alcohol. Not likely to find butane anywhere. Weather looking really bad like rain on way back. Stopped at Shoney's for amazingly good breakfast bar. Met two southbounders, "Boom-Boom" and "Giggles" ending at Damascus. Shared intelligence. They were in Room 1 of same motel, and also went to Cloverdale for mail. Stuffed, I waddled up trail, past Interstate, along an orchard with lots of blackberries I was too full to eat, along a country road into woods to do long climb up trail not broken up with switchbacks.

Arrived at Fullhardt at 1:30 for water break. Shelter roof feeds a cistern! Decided to stay a while when storm began. Could have already made shelter after rain, but already applied shoe goo to soles. Figured out how to convert my stove to burn alcohol using pate' container! Inefficient, slow, but will help me get to next box. Also warmed boots in evening sun and applied snow seal.

7/27 Wed-- Cove Mountain Shelter 722.6

Not quite back in the hiking groove, but covered more miles than yesterday. Six mile set to Wilson Creek Shelter for first lunch, then eight miles to just get in to Bobblet's Shelter before showers. Part of this trail was alongside Blue Ridge Parkway. Scenic overlooks fogged in. Trail rocky, not too steep.

Bobblet's taken care of by "Running Richard" (R'R'). Had a lawn chair, school desk, magazines, rules: Pet mice and woodchucks must be on leash. No TV after 10PM. Shower 50 cents, no Canadian quarters.) A southbounder told me previously that R'R' could talk your ear off, but he wasn't here today. Waited out two showers at shelter, eating lunch number two and reading Thor comic (!).

Finally left at 4:30 or so. Next part of trail had no big climbs, finally veered from Blue Ridge Parkway. Much of trail had moss along sides covering trail in places. Shower started, not too bad, boots only had damp toes when got to shelter. National Geographic and Smithsonian to read here. No water at shelter, sigh, except rain, rain, rain.

7/28 Thu-- Thunder Hill Shelter 738.5

Awoke to dark foggy morning, but sky cleared early for a sunny day with few clouds. Went to picnic area just off trail for well water from a hand pump, then chose to bypass small section of trail by continuing on to "Jellystone Park" to get munchies, chili-dog at very limited grocery store. Another short road hike brought me back to trail, beginning of very high climb by Virginia standards. After thirty minutes of preliminary climb, trail turned so I could see extent of Floyd

Mountain. "Gulp!" Worked up mountain, finally to Cornelius Creek Shelter to relax a bit, eat, read in register where many complained about the climb.

Expected next five miles to shelter to be cake, but lots of climbing and rocks. Passed a female camp group who also seemed to be heading to same shelter (seemed to be straining), talked with dayhiker for a while, decided to bypass 1.5 mile side trip to falls and come straight to shelter. Long 5 miles and hunger even after three lunches. Got to shelter and cleaned up in case of company. Nope, alone again tonight.

No blackberries up here. Altitude?

7/29 Fri-- Johns Hollow Shelter 755.8

Woke to clear skies and LOTS of flying insects. After two dry days they are a force to be reckoned with. Climb down from Thunder Hill steep, rocky. More brush along trail. Later trail register explained "Happy Feet" Maintenance Section ended near here. Another up-down with no ridges to enjoy as trail flattens. Have quick lunch number 1, then run into trail with lots of small pines on both sides of path, abrasive after a while. Some pleasant viewing here. After some nicely-graded descent met three weekenders going in other direction without a map who thought they were going north. One seemed to be carrying a cooler. They would have a long day to get to a shelter.

Made it to Matts Creek Shelter to eat and relax some at 2. Box 6, lost by post office, might have contained maps for George Washington National Forest. Oh well. Over a hump to James River hydroelectric dam project with lots of water spilling.



James River Hydro spillway

Finally a pleasant section through pine dominant woods to Johns Hollow by an early 5PM. Next shelter just too far, besides cannot get box at post office until Monday. Saw a snake in shelter, climbing up a pole, then up a wall. May not be a mice problem here.

7/30 Sat-- Brown Mountain Creek Shelter 773.3

Started off long climb with many switchbacks. Way up, rock climbing at end, to false summit where, gulp, one can see another big climb. Then ridges for a while to another climb with more rocks. One is up high enough for subtle differences in the forest.

Punchbowl Shelter is next to a pond, with a disappointing yuchhy spring below.

Second part of day had no long climbs, just short stuff and even some flat. Went up to look at Pedlar Lake and saw three people fishing-- probably illegally since they quit for a while when I arrived.



Pedlar Lake



Pedlar Dam



On Pedlar Dam

Some nice pine etc woods in afternoon. Passed by virgin forest with 300 year chestnut tree and many TALL trees. Got to shelter at 5:15, met Dave, Barbara, and son Mike in two miles for slackpacking weekend. Offered spring-cold coke, roasted marshmallows. Dave is civil engineer, former army, presently national guard. Mike will probably go into military. They had done lots of backpacking on this stretch. Dave may do whole thing someday. He used to run backpacking expeditions in these parts. Dave and Mike slept in jungle hammocks. Bats came in and out of shelter many times during the night.

Nice folks. First shelter company in a long time. Dave read aloud a short McManus story (Pigs). Lots of good talking.

7/31 Sun-- The Priest Shelter 795.3

Left family in bed but awake, started climbing before long, but eased by strong cool breeze. Wind strong enough to suggest weather change, but still clear. By time climbed up to Cole Mountain entire sky had changed to eminent rain, but didn't quite do it today. Saw falcon hacker, which is a special feeding box to introduce birds to the wild. Found some great red raspberries and large blackberries. Came across Kannerock Crew clearing a bald. One guy looked over 55. Said he was crazy, but kept coming back each summer. One young woman through-hiked five weeks, had read my entries, planned to section hike the rest. She recalled one particular entry, complaining of juvies at Old Orchard Shelter (ed note: not my finest hour) which seemed to upset Gum Sisters. UH OH.

The pleasure of that meeting gave me new strength, so I was able to push on for a good while. Finally make shelter around 3 for second lunch. Next part of trail no big climbs or falls, just go: positioning to get to Priest. Neat view from Spy Rock.



View from Spy Rock



View from Spy Rock



Top of Spy Rock

Found a bud there, removed for environmental reasons. Last little climb to shelter tough after long day, but got here 7:30. Nice to arrive. Several deer hanging around.

8/1 Mon-- near Humpback Ridge 820.9

Glad I was going down, not up, for first half of climb down was quite steep and rocky. Bottom half had lots of switchback. At road marched into Tyro, consisting of two buildings: post office-grocery-gas and apple warehouse. Passed lots of orchard trees on the way. TINY store had my food package (*Box 7*), butane, and gaiters (yeah!). Gave alcohol honorable retirement. Owner about talked my ear off while ic cream melting out by park-- nice folks. Met Paul and Alan back at trail, shuttling cars for hike to Priest. After climbing took Mar-Hali Trail, slightly shorter, much steeper, alongside long long cascade of short falls. Took cold cold bath at top of series of falls. up to Maupin Shelter for lunch.



Fall bath at Mau-Har

Saw Alan and Paul again. Poor water at shelter, so walked on. Next section not too bad. Decided to cook on trail, camp at dark to get close to Waynesboro for longer day in town tomorrow. Found water at Dripping Rock parking overlook, walked up to next spring for dinner at 8. In thirty minutes headed toward Humpback Ridge but would not get there, stopped on huge rock formation. First choice for bed just too bumpy, finally found better spot. Skeeters bad all night. Had to sweat and itch in bivy with bug screen. Not the best camping spot by far.

8/2 Tue-- Waynesboro firehouse 826

Postponed breakfast, on trail by 6:15. Eventually got to Humpback Ridge-- big rocks. Down, down to parking area for nice breakfast on picnic table with apples from tree. Talked with biker who hid bike on trail to see ridge. Going on to Waynesboro. Went down to visitors center to see recreation of pioneer farm...



Cabin at pioneer farm re-creation at Waynesboro visitor's center

Back to trail for mostly pointlessly difficult trail to Blue Ridge Parkway, then for reasonable path to Rockfish Gap. Could not get ride, so long hot walk to town. Stopped in backpacking store-- very well stocked. Purchased token sno-seal from nice female former civil engineer who tossed in complimentary freeze-dried pears packed in MRE style. Offered possible ride back up tomorrow, mentioned International Brigade. Was considering motel, but on her advice went to fire department 1.5 more miles for shower, then to laundry, then barbershop. Bugs REALLY bad today.

Bonanza Steak House disappointing-- mostly poor choice by me. Shoneys too far away for morning-- tragedy. On way back, stopped for a movie, "Bambi", somehow appropriate. That night everyone of high school age within miles around was cruising main street and hanging out at municipal parking lot, and I had a good vantage spot to see everything happening.



Fire station at Waynesboro

8/3 Wed-- Blackrock Hut 846.1

Left early and hiked out to Rockfish Outfitters. Thumbed a ride to Rockfish Gap. Driver had done southern half of AT, used to be on board of RATC, told me some about Catawba Incident. Thought PATC overdid stuff. Too bad ride was so short; could have talked lots more. Got breakfast and slow services at Howard Johnson. Stopped at information center, then back to trail where Rusty pulled up in a white VW with another guy. Told me "Bearman" was not to be trusted. "Int Brigade" was at Hard Times Hollow for several days. He transported packs while people slackpacked. Wish I had known that. Good guy.

Registered for Shenandoah Park. Over mountain with many blackberries. Into forest with fine trail. Met a group of eight: six girls and two parents, the "Six Ouchables". Mom told me parents were there temporarily. Kids had planned to do all of Virginia(!), but had to revise plans. Calf Shelter very good, with two translucent skylights and long front overhang.



Antenna on Cow Mountain

Trail well maintained, wide, without rocks. Long day, since only able to get on trail by 9, so ate dinner on trail and made it to hut by 8:30. Another good piped spring. No skylight, so hut seemed dark.

Brief shower one hour before hut. Rained hard 5AM next morning.

8/4 Thu-- Hightop Hut 867.5

Wet, foggy morning. Hard to get on trail by 8AM; brief showers. Experimented with gaiters: sweaty when not raining, slow to get on and off. Met a family and large scout troop. Saw five deer in a group, including a fawn. One deer followed for a while.

Three hour walk to camp store for ice cream and letter writing.



Overlook from Skyline Drive

Saw a bear in trail in front of me, not more than thirty feet away, who reared up, grunted, then ambled away. Whew! Later I saw a mama bear and two cubs on an intersecting course with me. I backed off to try and get a photo, but mama caught my scent and they backed off. Later I saw four bucks feeding near a creek. Saw more than twenty deer this day.



Bucks (sorry, camera has no zoom)

Stopped at Pinefield Hut to eat and rest poor feet. Counted "PATC" on signs at this hut over nine different places! Saw black snake climbing stone wall of the hut.



Snake climbing wall at Pinefield Hut

Next part of trail has three mountains, with Hightop the worst. Dragging getting to hut at Hightop at 8. Second night in a row with not enough time to clean and do laundry. This was the best day of the trip so far for spotting wildlife.

8/5 Fri-- Bearfence Mountain Hut 880

Hard to get started again in morning. One could tell a different trail maintainer was assigned to this section: more brush. Saw two hikers planning to 100 miles on their first backpacking trip, rearranging packs.

Planned easy day today and tomorrow for feet.

Pocassin Cabin was locked. Privy was locked, too. Front porch area was good spot for lunch. In another hour or so hit Lewis Campgrounds. Decided against \$.50 shower, but purchased around \$10 groceries, included dozen donuts, eaten while writing many postcards in picnic area.

(Wrote KK, Janet, Claasen, Ferer, Bennet, Morland, Slusher, Chadwells.)

On to Bear Fence Hut, later joined by two I met previously, who camped out of sight.

8/6 Sat-- Rock Spring Hut 891.4

Slept in late, then enjoyed trail under sunny sky with cool hiking temperature and a breeze.

Took path to Lewis Mountain Campgrounds and got groceries (again!) with chocolate ice cream and wrote more postcards.(Wrote Armin, Nelson, Marenka, Watkins, Grandpa.) Then bought a bucket of chicken and walked to picnic grounds for lunch.

Sky turned threatening, so headed out, and saw a bear who saw me first and scrambled up the hill. On way to hut, first an Oregon drizzle, then a drenching thunderstorm, like a Beethoven symphony: dramatic.

Hut was welcome sight at 5-ish. Got in to dry out. Peaceful after the storm. Could sit in hut and watch several deer moving about the hillside, feeding. Rain came and went several times, and the world turns...

8/7 Sun-- Pass Mountain Hut 906.4

Late start, again. After fog burned off, clear and cool for most of day. Typical easy PATC trail. Still too hazy for photos. Stopped at Skland for soda from an obnoxious talking vending machine, then to Pinnacle picnic grounds for pleasant lunch hour, watching Sunday picnickers, drying and sno-sealing shoes, answering a few questions from folks passing.

At Thornton Gap stepped into small store/restaurant and found horehound candy!

Then short distance to hut, later jointed by Mark, a Marine, and Prissy, his mom, a grandmother and whitewatering second grade teacher (neat person!). Both from Alabama.

Also arriving was Carol, a medical tech student from Florida, and Kris, a tall economics student from Florida. Both were on first backpacking trip. They set up a tent, because they didn't like mice and ticks in the hut. They as much as invited me to join them-- for warmth. Both were cold.

The rest of us were hot! At 9:30 they tried to hang packs on bear tree... with comical results.



Carol and Kris at Pass Mountain Hut

8/8 Mon-- Tom Floyd Wayside 926.6

Bid trail friends adieu, and started on time at 7! Okay walking to Gravel Springs Hut, though hot, but flies were so bad there that I did not want to stop for lunch: next to horse trail. Stopped at Skyline Drive to eat, though gnats and flies were bad. Up North Marshall Mountain to eat on rocks anyway. A northbound day-hiking woman passed me, but I caught up with her as she stopped for short fat rattlesnake to move off of trail. First wild one for both of us. Later, but too late, we both realized we should have taken photos.

At Compton Gap, met a group of young people from Maryland, just starting, still unloading van. They planned twenty days hiking, ten canoeing. Pumped me with questions.

Gnats were bad all day after Gravel Springs. From Compton Gap, followed grassy fire road, a favorite place for insects.

Hiked fast due to bugs, got into Wayside by 6 or 6:30. Built on mountain side with front deck, since no flat ground. Vince already there, an unsuccessful through-hiker in the seventies, who goes and hangs out on trail every few years. Viet Nam war vet in his thirties, a big, big talker!

8/9 Tue-- Manassas Gap Shelter 943.2

Hiking conditions poor. Gnats swarming all day. Rock trail hot. Linden now moved off trail one mile. No ride when getting mail-drop (*Box 8*). Called Mom, but poor connection. Met "Virginia Newt", a southbounder doing Pennsylvania to Georgia in '88, on way up to shelter. Got in by 4:30, found reading material, spent a pleasant evening relaxing and reading.



Zoological Park sign near Port Royal

(ed note: The final few journal entries, in a different physical journal book, are missing. I hope they will turn up after a thorough search. The following is an extrapolation based on my trip plan.)

8/10 Wed-- Rod Hollow Shelter 956.8

8/11 Thu-- Keys Gap Shelter 980.4



Sunset on the Trail

8/12 Fri-- Harpers Ferry WV 986.1



Historic Harpers Ferry



Arrival at Harpers Ferry Appalachian Trail Conference office

(ed note: Because of my concern about the illness of a close family member, as well as a few other issues, I decide to quit the trail here. I call Dad, and he and my brother come pick me up. On the way back home we visit my Aunt Frances, then living in West Virginia.)



Backpack with gear

