

AstroGuy

Appalachian Trail Journal



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Guy Gardner

Introduction

On April 17, 2014, I started hiking from Springer Mountain in Georgia to thru hike the Appalachian Trail. On September 30, 2014, I summited Mt. Katahdin in Maine!

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy gave the official length of the trail that year as 2185.3 miles.

This is a copy of the journal I kept online during my adventure:

www.trailjournals.com/guy

I used the PreHike entries to discuss my preparation for the hike and to practice posting my entries to the Trail Journals website.

I used the PostHike entries to not only summarize my hike, including final gear discussion and tips, but also to practice my writing by sharing some of the thoughts I had during my hike that I didn't take the time to mention in my posts on the trail.

Most of the days I typed my journal on my cell phone while lying in my tent before going to sleep at night. I uplinked my journal and any accompanying pictures

to the website whenever I had data coverage on my phone. As you might imagine there were quite a few typing errors! I hope I have found and corrected most of them for this printing... but I suspect there are still a few left!

I've also modified some of the entries to account for the fact that you're not reading this on a computer - you can't click on web links or view videos. So I've simply listed the links for you to view separately on a computer/smartphone/etc.

The online journal also provided the opportunity for readers to post comments in a Guest Book section. These are all copied in the back of this book.

I've included my "About" page from the Trail Journals website on the last page of this book. It includes the origin of my trail name and links to interactive trail maps.

Enjoy!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

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PreHike

Saturday, March 15, 2014 (Pre Hike 1)

Cool Kids



On the AT with Awesome GKs

I'll write later about why I'm planning to thru hike the AT this year and why I decided to post a journal, but for now I thought I'd get started with a picture of some really cool kids on the AT. (Aaawww!)

Whilst driving our daughter and our grandkids from our home in Virginia to visit the "other grandparents" in Georgia, we stopped for lunch at the trailhead in Daleville. The grandkids and I hiked a ways north and back on the AT and took the picture along the way.

I had planned to start my thru hike on this trip to Georgia and to have them all see me off at Amicalola Falls. However, I've delayed starting until April 17 due to some commitments in early April. Plus it'll be warmer in the Smokies... I hope! :-)

Actually, my original original plan was to start in January, but with this brutal winter, I'm kinda glad I had to delay. Maybe I'll do the winter backpacking next winter... or maybe not...

Excited about getting started!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, March 25, 2014 (Pre Hike 2)

Testing... Testing...

Since I've delayed my start 'til mid-April, I won't have to carry as much cold weather gear as I originally planned. However, I still risk some possible snow and below freezing temps until I

get past the Smokies. So before I head out, I wanted to test out my revised gear list along with my new SoLong 6 tent in cold temps and snow.

Yesterday's forecast for last night and today was perfect - temps in the 20's during the night and 2 to 4 inches of snow today. So I set up my tent and spent the night sleeping in it. The gear worked well and I had a good night's sleep with the temp in the mid to upper 20's all night.

This morning I came inside and left the tent up outside to see how it handled the snow, which then soon began.

Initially, as the snow built up a little, it would slide right off. As the temps warmed up into the 30's, the snow got wetter and didn't slide off any more. The first picture shows the tent starting to

sag just a little from the weight of the snow.



Snow Starting to Stick

The next time I checked, the tent was really sagging! The trekking pole on the awning side of the tent had slipped a few inches from the weight of the snow, causing the awning to gather even more snow and the awning pole to bend a little.



Yikes!

So I climbed inside, knocked the snow off the tent walls, reset the trekking pole and put the tent in "storm mode" by lowering the awning.

It works and looks great!



Snug as a Bug in a Rug!

Then the snow turned to a very light rain, then stopped, and the snow continued to melt...

A successful test! I know I'm gonna enjoy my gear and my new tent! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, March 26, 2014 (Pre Hike 3)

Federal Line Trail

We live near numerous Civil War battlefield areas, many of which have good hiking trails. One of the trails I enjoy is called the Federal Line Trail. Part of the trail follows alongside the remains of the Federal forces entrenchment during the Battle of the Wilderness. In the video, you can see the entrenchment along the right side of the trail. The Union soldiers were facing their Confederate foes further off to the right.

Federal Line Trail video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdv1h0_m0q0

Mostly when I'm hiking these trails, I'm simply enjoying hiking out in the woods. My thoughts range over many topics. Sometimes, though, I'm a bit overwhelmed thinking about all the men who fought and died in these same woods 150 years ago... Humbling.

But it's cool to realize that none of the trees are 150 years old. The woods are completely renewed. As am I when I'm out hiking!

I chose this particular section of the trail to also show my appreciation to all the trail maintainers who keep the trails in condition for us to enjoy. There's another stretch along this trail where the fallen trees stack up as high as my head, and the maintainers have cleared a path. Thanks Trail Maintainers everywhere!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, April 04, 2014 (Pre Hike 4)

Old Rag

I used my computer to post the previous entries so I could practice journaling and uploading pictures and videos. Now it's time to practice using my phone!

Last Monday, Linda and our daughter Sarah joined me for a hike up Old Rag - a popular hike a few miles west of the AT in the Shenandoah

Mountains. It has a 2500 foot elevation gain starting with a nice trail through the woods with switchbacks, then turning into a good rock scramble at the top. You can sorta make out the rocky top in the photo.



Old Rag

We enjoyed gorgeous views along the way up and in all directions at the top. To the west we could see sections where Skyline Drive cut through the trees near the ridge. Fun to think about the AT being there and me hiking along it in a few months!

Continuing down the back side is a less steep but rocky trail that joins a fire road that then completes the 8.9 mile loop - a little over 9 miles for us due to missing a turn. :-)

The rock scramble was a lot of fun and quite challenging at times. It even had a couple of places where we got to go through natural tunnels in the rocks

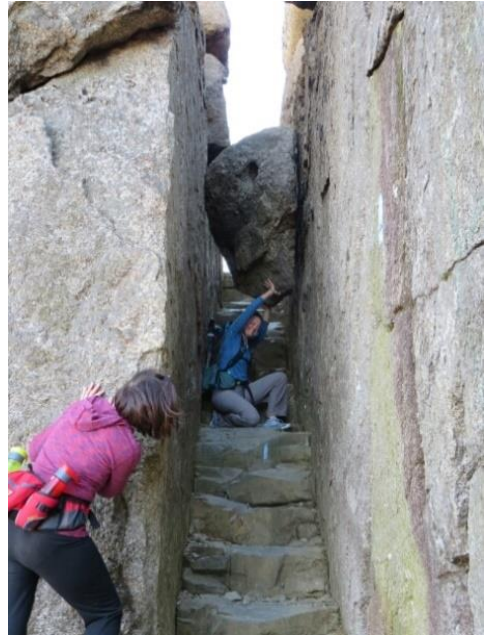


Not That Way!

- the video shows us exiting one of them. I got some good practice for my thru hike, including rocky Pennsylvania and an intro to Mahoosuc Notch!

Old Rag End of Tunnel video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMLDPwJqFIs>

Once again I was impressed with all the work the trail builders and maintainers have done to provide for such an enjoyable experience for so many of us. I always marvel at steps cut into rock along with boulders moved, cut and placed to make the journey easier, or even doable. Thank you!



This Way!

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, April 12, 2014 (Pre Hike 5)

Gear

I've had some requests to post my gear list, so here are the major items.

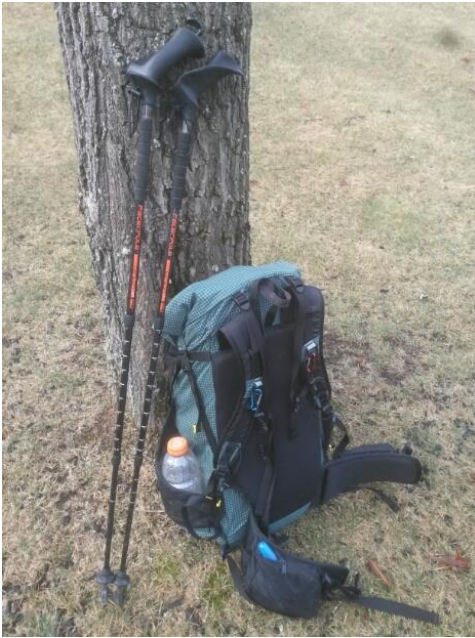
I upgraded my "big three" back in early 2009 when we were living in Gainesville, Georgia. After deciding on my backpack and sleeping bag choices, I discovered they were carried by Mountain Crossings just up the road at Neel's Gap. I bought them there so I could avail myself of their expertise. I'll be using the same pack and bag for this trip.

Backpack: ULA Circuit. I've used this for all my overnight hiking the past 5 years, even though I don't need all the space for summer trips. I bought the lighter and smaller Ohm a few years ago and it worked great as a large daypack when we hiked with a group around Mont Blanc a couple of years ago. However, when I tried it with my max AT thru hike load, it was uncomfortable on my hips. (I see the newer Ohm2 has a redesigned hip belt.) Comfort is worth the extra pound!

Sleeping bag: Western Mountaineering Summerlite 6'6" (32deg). When I was getting this at Mountain Crossings, I asked Winton if I was making



Lunch Time!



All Packed Up!

a good choice. He laughed. It's the best! (WM has a few additional high quality competitors today.)

With the WM bag I've added a Cocoon silk liner that I bought for our Mont Blanc trip. Some of the refuges (hostels) required a liner to sleep in the bunks. I've also got an Exped pillow. I include a Planter's Peanuts jar in case I have to go in the middle of the night. The peanut jar is a different shape than my water bottles - don't want to confuse them! ;-)

Ground pad: REI Flash pad. I've used a variety of pads over the years, and decided to upgrade since there have been a lot of new models developed recently. I was trying to decide between the Neo Air and the Exped at REI when I discovered their Flash. I decided to take the few extra ounces for a quieter and cheaper pad, whose tapered shape makes it easier to fit two of them in my SoLong 6. I don't require much width for my sleeping style, but other folks may prefer a wider pad. I also like the Exped style inflation and deflation valves.

Tent: Lightheart Gear SoLong 6. When I was upgrading my backpack and sleeping bag in 2009, I hadn't decided on my tent. The new Hubba NT was a contender, but I didn't want to spend that much moolah. Mountain Crossings had a prototype version that was greatly discounted, so I couldn't pass it up! It has served me well for my 2 to 5 day trips these past years, but my 6'2" body fills it up and I wanted more room (and lighter weight) for a thru hike. I first heard about Judy's SoLong 6 in Stumpknocker's 2013 Florida Trail

journal. I've only tried it out in the backyard, but I think I'm gonna really enjoy it!

Trekking poles: Pacerpoles. I'd never used poles before 2008. Doing my research, I learned poles would help my older knees, hips and spine plus allow me to do more miles per day. I still wasn't sure until I asked one of the young guys at Mountain Crossings if he used poles... he did. My research led me to PacerPoles and I love 'em! I've never used any other poles, so I can't compare. I had a friend who had stopped hiking due to knee problems try my poles - he's now hiking again!

Cooking system: No cook. I'm just not interested in spending the time when I'm backpacking. Car camping is another thing, though. ;-) I'll try to talk about specific food when I'm journaling. I'm using zPacks' bear bag gear with a LiteTrail liner for storing my food. I'm trying out something new in taking a little screw top plastic container to rehydrate dried lentils or other beans while hiking. I tried it at home and it works with cold water, but they're pretty bland tasting. I'll play around with it some.

Electronics: Samsung Galaxy S4 Active (AT&T), Verizon LG tablet, Canon Elph 330 point-and-shoot (upgraded to Elph 340). I used iPhones the last four years at work and enjoyed them. When I retired from that job last summer and was planning to thru hike, I got the S4 Active because I could carry spare batteries, use a 64Gig data card, and it's water resistant. In retrospect, I might have selected the regular S4 for the better camera in lieu of the water resistance. On the other hand, I've been a lot more comfortable taking the Active with me kayaking!

I was originally planning to take my Kindle with me, and not a tablet. Reading trail journals and Whiteblaze, I've heard that Verizon has much better coverage than AT&T on the trail. Since my phone is on a 2 year plan with AT&T, the cheapest way to add Verizon was to get a tablet with a no contract data plan. I can use Skype or Viber to talk with Linda. I was going to stay with just my S4, but Linda said she wanted me to get the additional coverage - I just got the tablet yesterday. As a self-described geek-wannabee, I love my new toys! :-)

I decided to get a small and relatively cheap point-and-shoot camera that has slightly better specs than my phone, can be turned on quickly and will save phone battery time. Linda and I enjoy photography and we have a nice big digital SLR, but I'll be taking pictures and video on the trail primarily to reminisce and to share with others on the web, and not to produce a coffee table book. I learned in my last post it's a little tricky transferring the QuickTime (mov) videos of my Canon to my Android device and converting them to

mp4 to edit and post, but I finally figured it out. For this task an iPhone, which uses the QuickTime format, would have been much easier. UPDATE: I decided the mov to mp4 conversion was too much trouble, and learned the Elph 340 records in mp4. So I moved up to the 340.

Methinks this post is long enough!
Less than a week to go. I'm excited!!!!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, April 14, 2014 (Pre Hike 6)

Gear update

I decided that converting QuickTime (.mov) video to mp4 was just too much trouble. So I'm replacing my camera with the next one up - a Canon Elph 340. It records video in mp4, plus has better specs.

Got our reservations for Wed night at Hiker Hostel today! Linda and our daughter Sarah will be driving me down there Wednesday, and will be hiking with me for four or five days. What a great way to start out!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, April 16, 2014 (Pre Hike 7)

Back in Georgia!

We're in Georgia!

Linda, Sarah and I are on the road, headed to the Hiker Hostel where we'll meet a bunch of other hikers and spend the night. Tomorrow morning they'll drop us off at the Springer Mountain parking lot where we'll hike the one mile to the top, take pictures, and head north.

I discovered and enjoyed the following winning video by Hector Reyes Miller for the 2012 ATC contest. Good motivation for my start! Hope you enjoy it, too!

Why I Love the Appalachian Trail video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9mSopRM98U>

Looking forward to meeting other hikers and to begin this adventure!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Hike

Thursday, April 17, 2014

And We're Off!!!

Destination: Justus Creek
Starting Location: Springer Mountain
Today's Miles: 14.40
Trip Miles: 14.40



First White Blaze

We're off!

The good folks at Hiker Hostel dropped the three of us off on the AT 0.9 miles from the top of Springer. The only other person dropped off with us was Val, from Germany. Val took three months off from work just to hike the AT as far as he gets, with no specific goal other than to enjoy the experience. Pretty cool!

We all hiked the 0.9 miles south to reach the summit, where we took a bunch of photos and I signed the register kept in a little box in the side of a rock. In the picture I'm holding a sign commemorating the 125th anniversary of Williamson - the incredible junior college trade school where Linda and I most recently served. Just before leaving home I grabbed the Purdue hat to bring for the photo op, but I couldn't find my USAFA '69 hat I had hoped to bring. (I'm still looking for other things in hiding from our recent move, too!)

About a half mile from Springer, Sarah was surprised when the big rock next to her started moving.

Big Rock Waving in the Wind video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QKZh2eXy2Q>

Our plans for the next few days are tricky since Linda will be day hiking and Sarah and I will be sleeping in my tent. So we have to coordinate shuttle pick up

points and times at road crossings for Linda with campsites for Sarah and me. Today we hiked together to Horse gap at the 10.5 mile point, where Linda met her shuttle back to the Hiker Hostel at 4:30 (total of 11.4 miles hiking). Sarah and I continued on another 4 miles to Justus Creek where we set up our tent in a nice flat spot at the top of the bank.

We saw lots of folks along the way. Some thru hiking, some day hiking, and some out for a few days. We leap frogged with Val throughout the day - I suspect he could have left us in the dust, but he was also meeting the shuttle at Horse Gap at 4:30. In his excitement of getting started this morning, he had left his trekking poles on the van. They were bringing them back to him when they picked up Linda.

A couple of hours into our hike, a young woman came up from behind whom I recognized. "Wired!" I had checked Trail Journals a while ago to see who was also starting out today and recognized her name. I had seen her blog when she hiked the PCT (Pacific Crest Trail) 4 years ago. She did the CDT last year, so this will complete her "triple crown." Wired slowed down

a little to hike with us for a while and we all enjoyed getting to know each other a bit. When we reached a ridge and got cell coverage, Wired stopped for a break to send her blog update and we pressed on after calling the hostel to confirm Linda's pick up. Later on, Wired and a young guy who had blown by us earlier caught up with us. Harley hikes fast but likes to take afternoon naps. We had unknowingly passed him when he was taking a nap break in a sunny spot off the side of the trail. After a short chat, they took off down the trail ahead of us, perhaps never to be seen again???

After seeing Linda off, Sarah and I had a couple of small mountains to hike over before the next water source at Justus Creek. We had thought about making it to the Gooch Mtn Shelter 1.6 miles further where there's water AND a privy, but it was getting close to sunset and we were tired.

While Sarah made soup (she brought my Jetboil) I hiked up the ridge to see if I could get cell coverage to call Linda. I took both my AT&T cell phone and my Verizon tablet. There were 3 or 4 tents already set up above us. As I continued on the trail to go around the tents, one of campers starting waving her arms at me. It was Wired! She introduced me to two of the other campers, both young men thru hiking, but unfortunately I don't remember their names. All three

had Verizon phones and were getting at least one bar at their tents or slightly uphill. I had nothing. On either device. So I climbed up to the top of the ridge. Still nothing. On either device. As I came down, Wired offered to let me use her phone, so I just had her send Linda a text for me. I'm really enjoying the good folks I'm meeting on the trail! :-)

Sarah and I set up the tent with the awning facing the creek for a beautiful view. And we slept well with the sounds of the babbling brook singing us lullabies.

A great first day on the trail! I was indescribably blessed to be able to share it with my amazing bride and our wonderful daughter!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, April 18, 2014

Having a Blast!

Destination: Neel Gap
Starting Location: Justus Creek
Today's Miles: 17.30
Trip Miles: 31.70

Sarah and I slept well. I didn't do my usual stretches before getting into my sleeping bag, and an hour after saying good night, I discovered some new muscles in my left thigh who wanted to get attention by tightening up. Some stretching and Vitamin I (trail lingo for Ibuprofen), and I was fine. It's a close fit in the tent for both of us and our gear - next time I'll leave at least one of the backpacks outside under the awning.

By the time we hit the trail about 8:30, Wired and the other folks tenting above us had already left. When we got to the Gooch Gap shelter we were glad we didn't make it there last night - the area was packed with people and tents! Sarah estimated at least 40 folks, and some had probably already left. We had to stand in line to use the privy!

Linda, Sarah and I knew we'd have to be flexible in our planning to keep our adventure fun. We had already modified the optimistic version in that Linda was taking today off rather than meeting us at Woody Gap and "slack packing" (hiking with just a day pack) the 10.7 miles over Blood Mountain to Neel Gap. (There was a forecast of rain this afternoon plus she didn't bring her trail runners better suited to hiking on mountain trails.)

After Sarah and I had hiked a few miles with our full packs, we realized it would NOT be fun to hike all the way to Neel Gap that way that day! There's also a

restriction on camping along the Blood Mountain section without a bear canister for your food - which we didn't have - so we couldn't stop short of Neel if we got too tired. So, I texted Linda to meet us at Woody Gap, which she gladly did. After hiking the 6.6 miles to there from our camp site, the muscles around my left hip were whining fiercely! As we ate lunch together, we discussed what to do, and decided Sarah would join Linda in looking for shoes, and I would slack pack from there to Neel Gap, where we had a cabin reserved. Linda and Sarah have been to the top of Blood Mountain before, having day hiked there several years ago on a nicer day than today.



Chloe and David

I now felt like I was flying down the trail! My hip muscles were happy. I soon met up with Chloe and David, a young couple from the Finger Lakes region of NY. We found that their pace with full packs meshed with my pace with just water, snacks and rain gear. We had a great time getting to know each other and discussing all sorts of topics. David is a machinist, and that's one of the trades taught at Williamson. Chloe has a degree in visual journalism, and our son in law is a screen writer and director. Lots of good topics to discuss including personality/learning/communication types as well as life experiences! I had estimated to Linda that I'd get to Neel Gap by 5:00, which we would have easily made at that pace. However, we got there an hour later due mostly to extended breaks talking with each other and other folks we'd meet.

Just before we headed up the final stretch to the top of Blood Mountain, we met Greg, a young man who, after working 5 years, had just finished paying off his college loans and was taking a break. Greg hiked and chatted with us the rest of the way to Neel Gap.

Despite the misty rainy afternoon, the view from the top was still grand. There were a few folks at the shelter planning to spend the night. It's a pretty cool

building with a front and back room and stone walls. The door and windows are all open, so the rain and wind can blow through, which is what is forecast for tonight. Hope they stayed dry and warm.

When I got to the cabin, Linda and Sarah went out in the rain and got me pizza while I got a nice hot shower. I love those women!!! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, April 19, 2014

A Day with Sarah

Destination: Unicoi Gap
Starting Location: Hogpen Gap
Today's Miles: 14.30
Trip Miles: 46.00

Last night we discussed how to spend Linda's and Sarah's last two days with me. The next two sections between gaps are Neel to Hogpen (6.9 mi) and Hogpen to Unicoi (14.3 mi). It's forecast to be a bit rainy the first day (today) and a beautiful day tomorrow for Easter. So, we decided that Sarah and I would slack pack the 14.3 miles from Hogpen to Unicoi today, with Linda dropping us off and picking us up. Tomorrow we'll all three get a ride to Hogpen Gap and hike back to Neel Gap. Then on Monday they'll drop me at Unicoi Gap and head home. :-)



Sarah in Mountain Laurel Tunnel

It was a misty rainy day and we met very few folks on the trail, but we had a great hike. Sarah joked about all the wildlife we've seen so far. Let's see... several birds, two large slugs, a small snail shell (which may or may not have been occupied) and a dead millipede.

When we stopped in the last shelter before Unicoi Gap, we saw a full backpack and no one around. On the way down to the gap, we met a trail runner hiking up the trail. He said that was his pack and they were rescuing a woman who had some medical problem at the shelter. Apparently they were transporting her down by some small 4 wheel vehicles by some back roads. There were an ambulance and an EMT vehicle at the gap when we met Linda. Just before we left, they showed up with the woman, who looked OK at that point. I'm impressed with the good folks who rescue people in any circumstances, but especially in the wilderness.

We're spending the night in the Blood Mountain Cabins again, as we will again tomorrow night. I'm spoiled! Especially spoiled having Linda and Sarah join me for the start of this adventure!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, April 20, 2014

Happy Easter

Destination: Neel Gap
Starting Location: Hogpen
Today's Miles: 6.90
Trip Miles: 52.90

Happy Easter!

This morning we got a ride to Hogpen Gap from Sallie. We heard about the Joyce and Sallie shuttle service when Linda dropped Sarah and me off at Hogpen Gap yesterday and Joyce was dropping another hiker and his son off there. Good folks!

This is a special section of the trail to me, so it was good to share it on my thru hike with Linda and Sarah. When we first moved to Gainesville several years ago, I was doing a dayhike out of Hogpen Gap. On my way back from Tesnatee Gap I met and walked with a thru hiker named The Band Aid Kid. He introduced me to Trail Journals and I followed his all the way to Maine. I think he knew every plant and animal; even recognized birds by their sound. It was also along this section of trail that I rode out a thunderstorm one night in my tent when I backpacked all of Georgia in sections. That was an exciting night!

But today it was a gorgeous Easter day. We stopped at Cowrock for a photo op and met Billy Goat, who took



Cowrock

the picture. I had already heard of him - from Wired, I think. There was a tall thin hiker from Iowa there, too, who said his wife was reading my journal. I didn't get his name, but thanks wife-in-Iowa for following!

In the picture above, the ridge in the background on the left is the AT between Hogpen and Tesnatee. The side trail to the shelter follows the ridge to the right. The AT drops down the backside of the ridge to Hogpen just behind us.

We met lots of hikers out on this fine day. It was a wonderful last day on the trail for Linda and Sarah.

After getting cleaned up, we drove into Helen for dinner at a good cafe right on the river. Their Reuben was delicious - good thing I'm burning all those calories hiking! After dinner we returned to the cabin to listen to a podcast of last year's Easter message at National Community Church (this year's wasn't posted yet). We then got ready to leave in the morning. Tomorrow the family vacation is over and I'll be hiking on my own... but with dozens of other hikers!

What can I say? I'm a blessed man! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, April 21, 2014

On My Own

Destination: Dicks Creek Gap

Starting Location: Unicoi Gap

Today's Miles: 16.70

Trip Miles: 69.60

A sad but exciting start to my hike today. Linda and Sarah drove me to Unicoi Gap where we said our good byes and they headed off into the sunrise. I'll miss them!

Today was another beautiful day for hiking. The views along the AT are so much better in the winter before the leaves come out. The past two days the trail followed the ridge a lot, which provides spectacular views to both sides. The ground plants are starting to come out, with several different delicate flowers blooming along the path. The AT is nicknamed the long green tunnel, which is what it will be when the trees leaf out in a few weeks. The periodic side trails to scenic views will make more sense then!

The views to the sides are broken up periodically with walks through mountain laurel tunnels. The evergreen has really cool twisted trunks that give the groves a magical look. I'm looking forward to when their flowers start to bloom.



Seeing Me Off

I didn't meet very many folks on the trail today. It's a Monday and I guess most hikers are thru hiking north at about the same pace. I got to Dicks Creek Gap about 4:15 and hiked the half mile down the road to the Top of Georgia hostel. Bob, the owner, said that about 20 to 25 percent of thru hiker starters have quit the trail by this point. There are only about 6 or 8 other hikers here tonight, some thru and some section hikers. No young folks.

Spent most of my time using their wifi to catch up on my journals. Also stuffed myself with spaghetti and meat sauce, salad, bread with cheese and a big piece of cake! (For lunch on the trail I had a big slice of leftover pizza and a fresh pear.) Won't be eating like that for a while!

I don't know what the reception will be like on the next section of trail. I sent my tablet home with Linda - it just didn't get reception as well as the Verizon phones and my AT&T phone did just as well or better.

Miss my bride but having a great time!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

That's One Down!

Destination: Beech Gap

Starting Location: Dicks Creek Gap

Today's Miles: 21.10

Trip Miles: 90.70

Well..... that's one down!

When Linda and I go on driving trips, we have a tradition when we cross a state border to say "Well, that's one (two, three...) down!" With the "well" drawn out and it all timed so that we say the number just as we cross the border. Today as I approached the GA/NC border, I planned to do the same and got my camera ready to video my crossing. I noticed about six guys taking a lunch break at the sign so I asked them to say it with me.



Well... That's One Down!

Three of them were guys I played leapfrog with all day - Bart, John and Chosen One. I passed them 4 miles into my day when they were just breaking camp. They'd pass me on the uphill, I'd keep up with them on the level and downhills and they'd take longer breaks. In the picture, Bart and John are on the left and Chosen One is second from the right (with the dreds).

I felt really good all day. I didn't set a particular goal on how far to go; I'm trying to just let my body tell me when it's time to stop. It surprised me with how far it went! As I approached the end of the day, I was thinking about tenting at the top of the mountain a mile or so before Beech Gap. It didn't have water on top, so I

filled up a bottle at the last stream before climbing up. When I was almost at the top, I reached back for my bottle and it wasn't there! I had filled it up, treated it, set it on the trail, put on my pack, picked up my poles and headed up the trail, leaving the bottle behind. I carry two water bottles for longer distances between sources, but usually fill up my body and only one bottle when I stop for water. One bottle will do me fine until I get to the NOC (Nantahala Outdoor Center) a few days up the trail. But I'd better not lose that bottle!

So I continued on down the mountain to Beech Gap. A Rhododendron tunnel trail led me about 1/4 mile to a little clearing with a stream nearby. A delightful spot to set up my tent! This is first time since camping with Sarah on the first night of this adventure. I crawled into my sleeping bag tired but feeling good.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, April 23, 2014

100 Miles!

Destination: Silar Bald Shelter

Starting Location: Beech Gap

Today's Miles: 23.30

Trip Miles: 114.00

100 Miles!

Crossed the 100 mile point today at the top of Mt. Albert. There's a fire tower on top that is closed at its top, but I could climb up the stairs for an awesome 360 view. I'm taking some videos, but having trouble uploading to YouTube. Later, perhaps.

Once I got up the first mountain in NC yesterday, the trail has been much easier to hike, with a lot fewer rocks and roots and generally less steep climbs and descents. The other difference I've noticed is that in GA the Mountain Laurel is much more prevalent than its cousin Rhododendron. It's the opposite in NC so far.

Didn't see the three guys I leapfrogged with yesterday - I suspect they camped beyond me and are way ahead of me now. Instead I leapfrogged with Andy and Dan. Andy is thru hiking but had some knee concerns. So he's taking it slow on the downhills until it fully recovers. He got off at Winding Stair Gap to resupply in Franklin. Ben is from Seattle and is section hiking from Springer to Fontana Dam. He has also section hiked the north end of the trail from Katahdin. It's interesting that the AT has such an allure to folks out west, with all the great trails nearer to them.

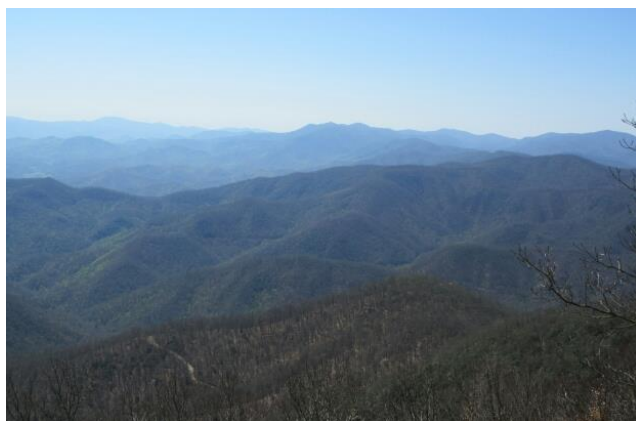
My body surprised me again today and went all the way to Silar Bald Shelter, thanks in part to the nicer-on-the-body NC trail. When I got there, Ben was setting up in the shelter. I set up my tent nearby with a beautiful view over the valley to the east. A nice older couple was also in the shelter, and there were about five other tents set up in the area. It seems that most folks like to stop for the night at shelters but prefer to sleep in their tents.

We had some good conversation while eating dinner, then I turned in as it was a long day and getting dark. I'm finding that at the end of the day I'm too tired to journal. I wrote yesterday's and today's from my bunk room at the NOC, which you'll read about soon!



Sunrise from My Tent

did awake to a beautiful sunrise, though, and had more of the same'o same'o awesome views!



One of Many Awesome Views!

A HUGE thank you to all who have posted entries on my guest book. Although for now I'm finding it hard to respond right away, I do hope to get my journaling act together as soon as I refine my hiking act! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, April 24, 2014

Lessons Learned

Destination: Cold Spring Shelter
Starting Location: Silar Bald Shelter
Today's Miles: 11.60
Trip Miles: 125.60

Lessons Learned

Well, today my body was telling me I wasn't taking care of it like I should. I didn't sleep well last night, and at one point, got a huge cramp in my left hamstring. I

I started out dragging and just couldn't muster the usual bounce to my step. I had originally thought I might do about 17 miles or so today and have a short hike into the NOC tomorrow. I soon realized that was not going to happen. After about 7 or 8 miles my Achilles tendon started complaining, too, and I certainly don't want that to get bad. I go through foot and knee problems, but never any trouble with my Achilles.

It finally began to dawn on me that I have been focused on staying hydrated and drinking LOTS of water, but haven't been replacing the electrolytes - despite the fact that Linda and Sarah sent me off with three different kinds of supplements... which I had in the bottom of my food bag...

So I stopped and added several to my water and drank it. I still moved relatively slowly to my revised destination of Silar Bald Shelter, but started to feel noticeably better. The shorter destination also allowed me to feel good about taking my time and not injuring my Achilles. The next place with water was nearly 6 miles further and no way was I going to try to make it.

I found another good tentsite on the ridge above the shelter, with a similar view into the valley as I had last night. There were still a few hours of daylight left, but after setting up camp and eating dinner I was too tired to journal and went to bed with the sun still up. I had good cell phone reception, so I got to talk some with Linda - which of course made me feel even better! :-)

Didn't see many people on the trail today. Ben passed me early and was headed all the way to the NOC.

As I'm writing this a day later, I'm pretty sure I had another lesson learned this day that I planned to share, but I can't remember it. So I reckon maybe I didn't really learn it...

I still had a smile on my face all day! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, April 25, 2014

Into the NOC

Destination: NOC

Starting Location: Cold Spring Shelter

Today's Miles: 11.70

Trip Miles: 137.30

Good day into the NOC!

I had a very good night's sleep and awoke refreshed and ready to hike. It rained briefly during the night, but it wasn't wet this morning so getting packed up and having a bite of breakfast went relatively quickly. I was back in my stride with no complaints from my Achilles. :-) There was a lot more downhill than up and I got into the NOC about 12:30, having hit the trail about 7:30.

On the way down I caught up with two young women on the trail who were section hiking from Winding Stair Gap to the NOC. They were from Wisconsin and I later wondered why they had picked this section of the AT for their hike. I moved on ahead and they caught up with me as I was taking a break to video a 360 panorama of the wonderful views to both sides of the trail. So I included them in the scene, having them say their names. They asked me if this section was representative of the whole AT and I told them it was much less rocky and more gradual than much of Georgia.

As I headed off ahead of them, the trail almost immediately became steep and rocky - just like Georgia!

I also passed Dandelion, who I had passed once yesterday and who later passed me when I was taking my lunch and electrolyte break. She's hiking with her all white Alaskan husky/German shepherd mix dog. A beautiful dog! I don't try to talk much with solo young women since I want to respect the concerns some may have with a scraggly old man approaching them - even one as friendly and with as noble intent as I. :-)

When I got to the NOC, I got a bed in the bunkhouse. This place is teeming with people! Most are here for the kayaking. First on the agenda for me was a hot shower followed by a trip to the laundry machines, where I started working on four days of journals. Then I went to the restaurant!

As the hostess was taking me to a table, there sat Bart and Chosen One! They were just finishing but stayed

and chatted with me until past when I had finished my lunch: the Mile 137.7 Hiker Special - a large open face double hamburger smothered with chili and a large side of fries. I didn't think I could eat that much... but finished it with no problem. :-0

They're friends from Salt Lake City. The third guy, John, is from PA and had met them on the trail. He left them a couple days ago to go into Franklin for some gear changes, but will probably catch up. Chosen One hiked the PCT (Pacific Crest Trail) last year and has friends who are making a documentary film of his journey. They're trying to get it into the Toronto film festival this fall. (Search Facebook for One Single Step.) That, of course, led me into talking about our son-in-law Scott's journey in the film making world.

They're hiking on north this evening for a few miles, but I'll catch up with them at Fontana Dam. They have to wait there to pick up a package Mon or Tue.

I also briefly saw the young women I'd met earlier and met several new hikers. I've got two bunkroom mates, Alex and Mason, who are here for different courses pertaining to white water rescue. Of course I spent a lot of time chatting with them, too. So much for finishing my journals and getting to bed early! That's OK, the restaurant doesn't open 'til 8:00 tomorrow morning!

The best part of the day was having a long chat on the phone with my Sweetie! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, April 26, 2014

Climbing Out of the NOC

Destination: Brown Fork Gap Shelter

Starting Location: NOC

Today's Miles: 15.80

Trip Miles: 153.10

Despite staying up 'til after midnight last night, I woke up with the sun a little before seven feeling rested. Mason got up and headed out to get some kayaking in before his classes start at noon. They're apparently releasing water out of a dam upstream which will make the cascades a lot more fun to kayak than usual. He gave me his number and told me to call if I need anything when I get in the Lynchburg area. Alex was sleeping in, but said goodbye when I left.

I got down to the restaurant at 7:30 but it opens at 8, so I sat outside getting a start on my journal! Today started out at 1749 feet elevation at NOC and climbs up to 4710 in 3.6 miles, dips down 300 feet then up to



Alex and Mason

5062 a couple miles later. I need a good breakfast for that!!

I forgot to mention yesterday that as I descended into the NOC I entered spring! Suddenly the trees had leaves on them and the ground cover was growing. There were many more small wild flowers in bloom along the sides of the trail and the dogwoods were in bloom. Today as I climbed out of the valley, spring disappeared! But it will be coming soon to the higher elevations, too.

Sure enough, as I climbed up in elevation, spring disappeared. The climb wasn't bad for the first few miles, not exceedingly steep and a good path without many rocks and roots. I passed Bart and Chosen One once again as they were breaking camp a couple miles up.

As I entered a particularly cool looking rhododendron tunnel, I stopped to take a picture and around the corner behind me came Bart and Chosen One getting their cameras out to take



Climbing Out of the NOC



Chosen One, Bart and Me

pictures. So we posed for selfies. As they headed up ahead of me, I commented on how the trail hadn't been too hard so far... then added that I probably shouldn't have said that.

As I exited the Rhodie tunnel, the trail went across a very rocky section for a while then turned and became much steeper with rocks and roots, and stayed pretty much that way to the top! But one step at a time gets you there.

The trail had its usual ups and downs after that until just before my destination when it went up "Jacob's Ladder." Although very steep, the path was smooth dirt without many rocks so I could just plod on up with small steps the half mile or so to the top. The tougher climbs and descents

are when rock or wooden steps force me to make large steps up or down.

When I pulled into the Brown Fork Gap shelter area, there were a number of folks there already, including Dandelion and a young couple I had spoken briefly to a couple of times but didn't get their names. There were no good tent sites, but a few folks had found spots that would do for the night. I picked a spot that had a great view to the west, although it wasn't quite as level as I'd have liked. A little later Eric came in - he had gone into Franklin a couple days ago and had now caught up. I chatted with the folks around the shelter for a while before hitting the sack. No dogs are allowed on the trail in Smokey Mountain Park, so Dandelion is paying someone \$300 to pick up Zodiac at Fontana dam, board him for the 5 or so days she's hiking through the park, and deliver him to her on the other side at



Wish My Camera Took Better Sunset Shots!

I-40. A fair price for the service provided methinks, but a lot of bucks for some of these young folks hiking on a budget.

It's only 28 miles from the NOC to Fontana Dam, so I'll have a shorter day tomorrow and it's more downhill than up. I may take a zero (no trail miles hiked) on Monday to get ready for the Smokies!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, April 27, 2014

Fontana Dam

Destination: Fontana Dam
Starting Location: Brown Fork Gap Shelter
Today's Miles: 13.00
Trip Miles: 166.10

I woke up about 5:45, packed up as quietly as I could, and started hiking at 6:30. No one else had even started getting up. I reckon we old folks don't need as much sleep! :-)

A little ways down the trail I found a nice spot to sit and grab a bite to eat while I looked back and watched

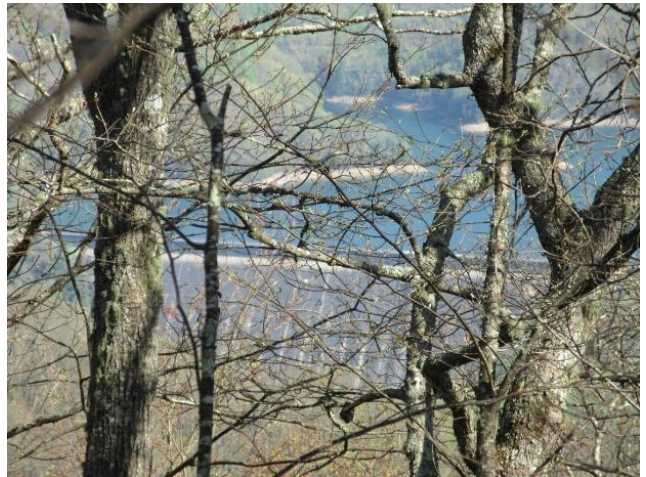


Breakfast View

the sun finish coming up behind the ridge. I then passed Celeste, whom I had met yesterday, as she was breaking camp on a great tent site on a small knoll with a view both east and west. It reminded me that I want to use the shelters for the privy and water source, but not for camping. I'll have to wait until after the Smokies, since there everyone is required to stay in shelters or tent next to one if it's full.

About 8:00, I passed Bart and Chosen One at their campsite, getting ready to start their morning campfire. They were in no hurry and didn't catch up with me before I got to Fontana.

After minor ups and downs, it was a long descent down, mostly on good trail. Nearly two hours away I could periodically see the lake below me through the trees. For these two days, I've been going in and out of early spring as the trail descends and



Fontana Dam

ascends. Coming down this last descent I started hearing a lot more birds - it's definitely spring here! I got to the Rt 28 crossing about noon where there's a restroom building with a phone I could use to dial 0 to get a shuttle into the village for 3 bucks. My AT Guide said I could also get the shuttle from the shelter a mile further along the trail. I wanted to check out the shelter, nicknamed the Fontana Hilton, so I pressed on. When I got to the shelter, there's a sign with a phone number to call for the shuttle, but no phone. There's also no cell phone coverage anywhere in the area!

So I continued on another quarter mile to the visitors' center next to the dam, although the center is not scheduled to open 'til next week. As I approached the parking lot, an older couple was coming toward me after walking out over the

dam and back. Turns out their daughter is thru hiking the AT with her boyfriend and stayed at the same shelter as I last night - they're the couple I mentioned in yesterday's post! The dad then drove me down to the Fontana Lodge, waited for me to check in, then drove me to the general store further down the hill. Cool! Good folks who retired recently and travel around the country buying and selling antiques as an avocation. They planned to camp in the campground tonight with their daughter and her boyfriend. My first "trail angels" not counting fellow hikers and, of course, my wonderful trail angels Linda and Sarah. :-)

After checking out the store and buying an apple and banana, I hiked halfway back up the hill to the grill where I had a grilled chicken sandwich with fries. Then back up to the lodge to see if my room was ready. Walking into the lobby, I'm greeted by Bart!

He and Chosen One were picking up food packages they had mailed to themselves at the lodge. So I sat on the veranda with them while they sorted through it all and loaded it into their packs. They have a LOT of food! They laughed that they had way more than they needed to get through the Smokies, but they packed it all in anyway. Ah, the strength of youth! I'd be crawling... They're staying in the campground tonight.

The complex has wifi but no cell coverage, so I talked with Linda and my brother using Viber. I did decide to take a zero tomorrow to both rest and catch up a bit with some things I meant to do before I left home - like telling some old friends I'm doing this!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, April 28, 2014

Why Journal

Destination: Fontana Dam

Starting Location: Fontana Dam

Today's Miles: 0.00

Trip Miles: 166.10

I'm taking a zero today, so I thought I'd try to put down in words why I'm writing this journal.

The main reason is to take the opportunity for my kids and grandkids to know me better - much better than I knew my dad or granddads. Next, perhaps, is so Linda and our family and friends can follow along on my adventure if they're interested. I elected to do it in this public setting because I've certainly enjoyed reading the trail journals of many other hikers over the years who have inspired, entertained and informed me and who don't know me at all (thank you, journalers!). So it's also for you folks out there who I haven't met.

16

Being public will also make it easier for me to not succumb to temptations of quitting. :-)

I don't think it's for a memoir for me. I've tried to journal for my own benefit a couple of times over the years and couldn't finish the first day's entry. I guess I'm not interested in recounting the day's experiences and/or thoughts to myself on paper. They've grown me I know, but I'm more interested in the future... and am learning to spend more time in the present. I may enjoy going back over this journal when it's over, but I kinda hope I'll be focused on whatever's next instead! Don't know if all that's a good thing or not...

But I love to share tales of the past and thoughts and ideas with other folks! That's what I hope to include in this journal for my kids and grandkids and whomever else is interested.

My dad married my mom during WW2 when he was 33 and died after a long bout with emphysema when he was 61 and I was 24. He was a good dad with whom I had a very good relationship, but he was a quiet introvert who spoke little. I realized several years ago that although I knew he loved me and I learned some good life's lessons from him, I knew very little about his life before he married my mom and little about his thoughts and opinions outside our relationship. His Dad, my namesake, died before I was born and his Mom shortly after I was born.

So I hope to use this opportunity to not only share my adventure but to share some of my past experiences and my thoughts with my kids and grandkids. The rest of you are welcome to come along! Warning - some of my thoughts can get pretty wacky! ;-)

I'm hoping to get my journal organized similar to my friend Tic's 09-10 journal. I'll include updates/corrections to previous days, talk about my day, respond to any questions/comments in the guest book and then talk about thoughts of the day. Hiking in the woods, one has a lot of time for thinking and reflecting! I may also mix in my thoughts with the others as appropriate.

Thanks for all your prayers and encouragement. I'm truly a blessed man to have such good family and friends!

Into the Smokies tomorrow! I may be out of contact for a few days.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

Into the Smokies

Destination: Spence Field Shelter
Starting Location: Fontana Dam
Today's Miles: 16.40
Trip Miles: 182.50

The big storm went thru last night while I was snug in my room in the lodge. Most of the folks I've met on the trail were out in shelters. I caught the shuttle back to the trail as soon as it started running this morning at 8:30, which is later than I like to get started. However, with the rain this morning I didn't mind a bit. :-)

The shuttle costs 3 bucks, but I gave the driver 4 so I wouldn't have to carry that extra weight through the Smokies. :-) He dropped me off at the visitors' center and I hiked across the dam and into the woods. It rained lightly the first hour or so, then turned into a great day for hiking. - cool and cloudy with a nice breeze. I eventually walked out of spring again, but even at the upper elevations it's beginning. There were several sections with wildflowers forming a carpet deep into the woods instead of just along the side of the trail.



Spence Farm

As I approached the shelter, I was going through what looked like an old apple orchard and the trees were just starting to bloom. I pulled into the Spence Farm shelter a little after 5, and Little Foot and Fiful were already here, along with Jake and Ranger. It was Little Foot's parents I had met at the dam Sunday. I told her what great parents she had. She and Fiful both agreed!

A little later Mad Max and Sage pulled in. They all seemed to know each other. Ranger had a fire started. I guessed he had been an Army Ranger, and he said yes, retired. When I told him I was retired Air Force, he recounted a story of his helicopter going down near enemy forces and the Air Force jets keeping the enemy at bay until he and his men could be rescued. I think it was in Iraq.

Also had a good time talking with Fiful and Little Foot. Mid to late 20s. Cool couple. I think they'll do well together in life.

I helped Max set up his hammock in the shelter, then we all turned in after another good day on the AT. Kinda cool that I stayed in a shelter named after my brother! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

200 Miles!

Destination: Mt. Collins Shelter
Starting Location: Spence Field Shelter
Today's Miles: 19.80
Trip Miles: 202.30

When the AT enters the Smokies, it goes right up to the NC/TN border and travels along the border for the length of the park. Since the border is a ridge line of mountains, it's been pretty much up and down on somewhat rocky paths and muddy due to all the recent rain. I had to use my ear plugs last night due to the strong winds making a ruckus with the tarps that hang down in front of our shelter, and those strong winds continued today.

I hiked above the clouds for most of the day, with occasional great views of the mountains behind me from whence I'd come. As the ups and downs got gradually higher, I could see the clouds enveloping the peaks ahead. Before I got to Clingman's Dome, the highest point on the AT at 6655 ft, I was in the clouds with on and off drizzle. Folks can drive up to Clingman's Dome where it has a cool observation tower, but I just took a picture of it and didn't go up. I wonder why I didn't see any tourists there today?



Clingman's Dome Tower - Nice View!

Almost immediately after I arrived at Mt. Collins Shelter, the rain poured down. The shelter was packed, but had a slot for me and Jake, a young man who had caught up with me just before I arrived. I chatted with a couple of folks, including a ridge runner who was there to ensure everyone was doing OK.

I turned in and slept with my ear plugs again, this time due to the loud rain on the roof. Despite, or perhaps due to, the rough hiking conditions, I enjoyed the day!

Tunes in My Head:

When I'm hiking by myself I subconsciously sound little tunes with my breath. I don't intentionally pick a tune, but will suddenly notice I'm "breathing" a tune. Most often it's just a 2 to 4 bar refrain in step with my steps, but sometimes it's a song that I don't know how it got into my brain at that time.

Today I noticed three tunes during the day. The first was "Happy Trails to You" by Roy Rogers. I think someone had earlier wished me "Happy Trails." It reminded me of the time I met Roy Rogers back on July 4, 1982. Jerry Ross and I had just finished chasing the 4th Space Shuttle landing into Edwards AFB. After the landing, we gathered with a bunch of visitors to see President Reagan congratulate the crew. Roy was sitting near us, and one of our NASA photographer friends had us pose for a picture with Roy. After we got back to Houston, Jerry sent copies to Roy and he signed them for us. Really good guy. Dale wasn't with him that day.

The third tune was "This Land is Your Land." That popped into my head as I climbed higher and pine trees began to dominate the surrounding vegetation.

I don't know where the second tune came from. It was "The Ballad of Astro 1" composed by my crewmates and myself on STS-35 and sung to the tune of "The House of the Rising Sun." The last week before launch the crew goes into quarantine in Houston. 3 or 4 days before launch we fly down in T-38's to the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. Our families also fly down and stay in Cocoa Beach while we're in quarantine at KSC. Our mission had many last minute delays causing us to go through this routine many times between our first launch attempt in May and finally blasting off in Dec. Even before that the mission had been delayed for several years. Here are all the words I can remember now. Special remembrances to Mike Lounge and Ron Parise who are no longer with us. Mike was the chief author and the main guitar player. (He also taught me the chords to accompany him, although I always had trouble with the 6 string F chord!)

This is the story of seven brave men
And the mission called Astro 1
It's been the ruin of many astronomer
Thank God, it's almost done

We've been to the Cape at least five times
We can't stand many more
------(I forget)

The kids have fun down at the beach
Eatin' pizza by the pool
They're catching rays and riding waves
But they're flunking out of school!

The food is great in quarantine
------(something about gaining weight, I think)

So astronomers, tell your children
Not to do what we have done
Don't spend your lives in pain and misery
On the mission of Astro 1.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, May 01, 2014

More Magnificent Views

Destination: Tri-corner Knob Shelter
Starting Location: Mt. Collins Shelter
Today's Miles: 20.10
Trip Miles: 222.40

I was up at 6 and on the trail at 6:30, before anyone else was up. I descended into Newfound Gap, which is the only paved road crossing the park. It has tourist facilities including a large parking lot and flush toilets! I sat on a low wall to fix a brunch and talked with another thru hiker Poppy. She had been off trail for a week due to twisting her knee and had just been dropped off to resume her hike. When she mentioned putting on sun block, I reached for my bandana on my pack (I wear it on the back of my head under my cap to protect my ears and neck - hey this is no fashion event!). My bandana was gone! Poppy said she had two, and gave me one of hers. I keep meeting super nice people on the trail - thanks Poppy!

The trail was more impressive in the northern part of the park. It would go along narrow ridges sometimes not much wider than its narrow path. The slope down the Tennessee side was sometimes vertical with the slope to the NC side 70 deg. Very cool! Initially the clouds were hanging around on the TN side with magnificent views on only the NC side, but soon both sides were clear. Had to watch that I didn't fall down a cliff while enjoying the views! :-)



Walking the Border

Later on when I was filling up my water supply, Eric caught up with me. He had gone into Gatlinburg to pick up some new shoes. As he came up to me he pointed out a white tailed deer about 20 feet away in the woods. She didn't seem too concerned about us and didn't run off like I'm used to seeing deer do.

I also passed over a couple of stiles like I'd never seen before. They were part of a fenced off area to protect the beech trees from hogs. See the pictures below for details.

The shelter was full again with lots of folks camping nearby. I had fun chatting with Learnin' and his wife, whose name I forget. Learnin' is short for Learnin' a Lot. I told him about my old VA vanity license plate: LRN LOTS. We hit it off well! Also chatted with another young couple Phoenix and Johnny Appleseed. We were all lined up in our sleeping bags on the second level of the shelter. Eric had a spot beyond Johnny.

I had seen a mouse scurry into the shelter earlier but didn't say anything. As it got dark and we were settling in, there was a "snap" in the back corner of our tier.



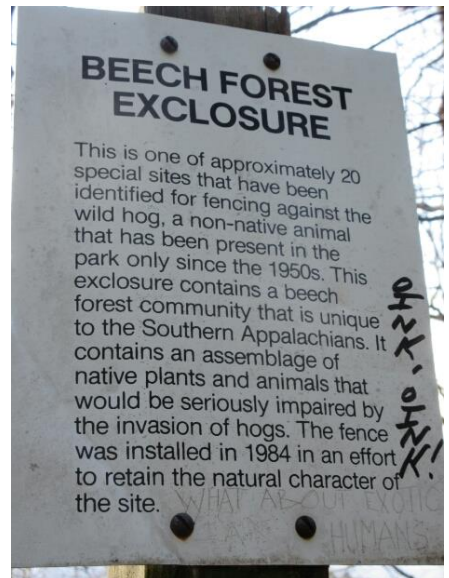
Hog Stile

Learnin' had set a mouse trap and caught one! He had found the trap earlier in the hike and kept it. He disposed of the dead mouse and reset the trap.

Very soon "snap!" Learnin' disposed of that one, but the peanut butter was now gone and we had all already hung our food bags on the bear cables. Apparently mice follow the same routes, so Learnin' set the empty trap along the side wall near the entrance. "Snap!" Three dead mice. I commented he might have figured out what line of work to pursue after the trail. Turns out that's what he just quit to hike the trail. There may have been another snap in the night, but I had my earplugs in to block the racket the frogs were making.



Another Magnificent View!



Save the Beech!

Today's Tunes: Started with the original House of the Rising Sun tune and lyrics, but tried to erase it when I noticed it. Not a particularly good hiking tune! Later on I noticed I was doing "Hallelujah" from the Shrek soundtrack, including the verses even though I don't remember the words. Very appropriate, I thought! I've been taught the word is ancient Hebrew for Praise God (hallelu = praise, jah = short for Yahweh = God). Today was another good day to praise Him for the scenery around me and all the good people I met! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, May 02, 2014

Out of the Smokies

Destination: Standing Bear Farm

Starting Location: Tri-corner Knob Shelter

Today's Miles: 18.40

Trip Miles: 240.80



Yay, Trail Maintainers!

Coldest morning yet - about 38 deg. I was up and hiking early again for my descent out of the Smokies. I didn't see any other hikers for quite awhile until I caught up with Celeste and a new guy to me named Grant taking a break. They had stayed at the same shelter as I last night, but came in after dark and were still in their bags when I left, so I didn't know they were there. Apparently they passed me while I was getting some water off trail.

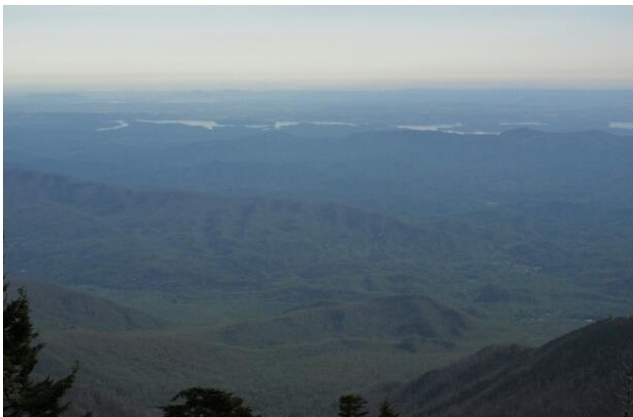
I hiked with Celeste for a while and managed to keep up since it was mostly downhill, plus I can feel my legs getting stronger. She graduated from Berea College in Kentucky, a school I'm familiar with due to its similarities with Williamson. Although it's a four year degree school, it's also a "work school" (Celeste's term) and has free tuition. We had a good time chatting about the need for trade education schools in our country.

Celeste stopped for a break and I pressed on, having just taken one when we met. I finally got to the bottom of the long descent, exiting the Smokies and crossing under I-40. Then uphill a short ways to the Standing Bear Farm hostel, where I tented.

The hostel is a quaint, laid back place consisting of several small, old buildings with chickens wandering all around. Once again, nice friendly folks. They have a pretty good resupply store and a kitchen area where you can fix your own food. I met thru hikers Momma Bear - an older woman hiking solo - and Bible Packer - a young man who just finished high school as a home schooler. I had a good time chatting with them and other hikers and hostel workers.



Sunrise



Tennessee River in the Distance



I-40 Upper Right in Picture

I had the best night's sleep in a while! The wooden shelter floors aren't as comfortable as the ground and I didn't have to worry about disturbing others as I turn over or get up in the night. The Smokies were magnificent, but I'm ready to move on!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, May 03, 2014

Max Patch Bald

Destination: Unnamed Gap @Mile 262.9

Starting Location: Standing Bear Farm

Today's Miles: 22.10

Trip Miles: 262.90

I left Standing Bear feeling refreshed and ready to tackle the uphill climb. After a couple of miles I passed Eric just starting to break camp at a tent site. More beautiful scenery, but now filled with much more green and flowers as spring has arrived everywhere.



Scarlet Tanager?

About 2 in the afternoon I descended into a gap with a dirt road crossing. There were three cars there just packing up after doing trail magic for hikers. They had been cooking hot dogs and hamburgers, but I missed it! So they gave me some homemade cookies, the last cupcake, some Gatorade, water and lastly a couple of candy bars for the road. The two women were Mother Goose and Mother Theresa and had thru hiked last year. I didn't get the man's name and forgot to take pictures. My first trail magic food! I had just missed some at I-40 yesterday.

I continued up to Max Patch Bald where Linda and I had visited by car five years ago. A large bald with a beautiful 360 panoramic view of the surrounding mountains on a clear and windy day.

The grass had been recently mowed and there were lots of day visitors having picnics, flying kites and just enjoying the view. I spent about 20 minutes with a small group of folks answering questions about my hike. It was fun talking with them.



Eric/Ajax, My Time and Mrs. My Time

Eric caught up with me and we hiked together to the next shelter where we had both thought about spending the night. There we met My Time and his wife out section hiking. My Time had retired a couple of years ago and now it was "my time." He had served in Viet Nam as a platoon leader in '68 and again as a Chinook helicopter pilot in '72, the same year I was in the war. Eric had to listen to us share war stories for a little while, then he and I continued on since it was only 5:30.

A couple of miles later we stopped at what the guide listed as an unnamed gap. There were several other folks camped there and plenty of good spots to set up my tent. An older woman and three men were sitting around a campfire area eating dinner, so Eric and I joined them.

Honey Bear is thru hiking and her husband and two friends are doing some sections with her. They started a fire and we chatted 'til the sun started to set. We decided to name the gap Virgil's Gap after one of the guys there.

During a break today Eric mentioned he was wrestling with what his trail name should be. Since he is hiking more miles each day than most folks, he hasn't stayed long enough with one group to get one. Apparently a few have been suggested and the one he likes best is Action Jackson. A well-known and admired older hiker, Normally Hobs (hiking or biking) called him that. I think Hobs called him that because Eric lives in Jackson WY, but I thought it was a good name for him since he hikes fast and far. Plus, Action was the role I played once in college in West Side Story. (The part was combined with another of Tony's lieutenants for the movie version.) Keep in mind that I went to the Air Force Academy and there weren't any drama students to compete with for parts. :-) I think Eric will stick with Action.

Today's Tune: "Close to You" by the Carpenters. Don't know how it got into my head, but it was a good tune for hiking. So today is dedicated to Linda, one bodacious woman I'd like to be physically as well as spiritually close to!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, May 04, 2014

Hot Springs

Destination: Hot Springs

Starting Location: Unnamed Gap @Mile 262.9

Today's Miles: 10.60

Trip Miles: 273.50

Got up early and hiked on down to Hot Springs. A few miles down the trail, I passed a road crossing and there was trail magic! A group of men had a homemade trailer rigged up to cook meals and were serving breakfast! I had a couple of pancakes, a biscuit, some Gatorade, and the best part - fresh strawberries (huge ones), fresh pineapple, and a banana. Fresh fruit is a special treat on the trail. They're from SC and call themselves The B Team because they drive around supporting a friend who's hiking the trail.

I've been enjoying the wild flowers all along the trail, but the past two days have had lots of Trillium of many different colors, mostly white and varying shades of purple. I don't remember if I've ever seen it in the wild,



Trail Angels "The B Team"

but I've known the name Trillium for a long time - it's the name of the main female character in the Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy science fiction book series I enjoyed many, many years ago.

I got into town shortly after noon and checked into the Laughing Heart Hostel for one main reason - the caretakers this season are Chuck Norris and Tigger. Not the actor Chuck Norris nor Pooh's friend Tigger, of course. That's their trail names. I've been reading their trail journals off and on for a number of years, including their hiking the trail that runs the length of Israel. Chuck met me as I walked up to the hostel and we chatted several times during my stay, but Tigger wasn't there at the time. Chuck had a heart attack a couple of years ago and couldn't hike for a while. They're friends of the owner who asked them to run the hostel in the meantime. Chuck said he'll be back hiking in a few months, after the thru hiker season is over. Incidentally, the owner also owns the very nice B&B in town where Linda and I stayed once a few years ago for a mini-vacation.

Baltimore Jack was cooking some vittles for lunch and offered them to those of us standing around. I then walked into the center of town to resupply at the outfitter and get dinner at the diner - a big salad and a veggie sub to go. When I got back, Baltimore had cooked up some more food for dinner for everyone. He had some food for breakfast for us in the morning, too. No extra charge. I can't remember what it all was, but it was good! :-)

No AT&T cell service in town, but I got to talk to Linda using Viber over wifi. WooHoo!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, May 05, 2014

Out of Hot Springs

Destination: Allen Gap
Starting Location: Hot Springs
Today's Miles: 15.00
Trip Miles: 288.50

Got a late start out of Hot Springs because I had to wait for the Post Office to open at 9. I mailed home an extra top I carried for the cold nights in the Smokies and some small gear I wasn't using. I also mailed home my SteriPen, which was my primary water treatment device that used ultra violet light to kill any bacteria or viruses. It had been acting up, so I went with my backup - a Sawyer mini squeeze and bought some Aqua Mira as a backup to that.

As I went past the outfitter on my way out of town, I saw Eric in there buying something. He had stayed at Elmer's hostel last night, which he said he enjoyed. That was my second option.

I was having to take the downhills slow due to the front of my lower shin hurting on down hills especially and being a little swollen. I think I smacked it on a rock climbing up some steep rock steps yesterday or the day before. We'll see how it does. Eric caught up with me later on and we leapfrogged, along with Tim and Jim. I had met Jim at the Top of Georgia hostel at Dicks Creek Gap many days ago and hadn't really seen him since then. Also leapfrogged with a couple of new guys I met, Casper and a retired Air Force guy, both older guys.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



Celeste/Acorn

his tent set up and was turning in for the night. After setting up my tent, I joined the three around the camp fire chatting before turning in myself.



Celeste, Eric and Jim

Tuesday, May 06, 2014

300 Miles!

Destination: Rector Laurel Rd tentsite
Starting Location: Allen Gap
Today's Miles: 21.00
Trip Miles: 309.50

Another 20+ mile day! Great views into Tennessee today. Although it's still a bit swollen, my shin held up fine. I just need to take it slowly relative to my bouncing along pace.

I leapfrogged again with Tim, Eric, Celeste and Jim. Tonight we all ended up together at the same campsite just beyond Rector Laurel Rd. I got there with Eric and Celeste, and Jim already had a fire going and Tim had

I'm finding it very difficult to write up my journal entry at the end of the day, especially if I have the opportunity to chat with new friends. I guess I should change that to very difficult to impossible. I'm having to rethink the purpose of the journal - perhaps it will be simply to keep family and friends informed and able to share in the adventure.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, May 07, 2014

Destination: Tentsite @ Mile 327.4
Starting Location: Rector Laurel Rd tentsite
Today's Miles: 17.90
Trip Miles: 327.40



Climbing One of Many Balds

I lost my notes for today, but it was a beautiful day hiking over several balds. I've talked to other hikers about how much we enjoy the hiking over the balds, but that if we mostly hiked out in the open, we probably talk about how much we enjoyed occasionally hiking in the trees!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, May 08, 2014

Down into Erwin

Destination: Erwin, TN

Starting Location: Tentsite @ Mile 327.4

Today's Miles: 14.10

Trip Miles: 341.50

The trail deviated from the NC/TN border for a moment to descend into the Tennessee town of Erwin. The trail crosses the river a couple of miles south of



Find the Lizard!

town and heads back up into the mountains. Uncle Johnny's hostel is right next to the AT where it crosses the river, so it's the only place to stay without hiking or hitching an extra couple of miles. So I stayed at Uncle Johnny's, arriving midafternoon.

He runs a free shuttle service into town at 5:00 for dinner at a restaurant and shopping at a super Walmart for food resupply. Tim was staying there, too, so he and I ate together at a Mexican restaurant - I got a big taco salad. Gotta get my greens somewhere!

There were tons of hikers at the hostel! Ace, an older guy I leapfrogged with all day, and I arrived at the same time, so we split the 5 bucks for laundry, planning to do ours together and getting one serving of laundry soap. Turns out there's only one washer and one dryer and they're only open to hikers from 4 PM to 7 AM and we'd have to wait 'til we got back from the dinner/resupply trip to start ours - along with a bunch of other hikers. When we got back at about 7:30, we were second in line for the washer, so we both ended up hand washing our laundry and hanging it up to dry. When I got up about 1:30 in the morning, I threw it in the dryer!

I also had trouble falling asleep. Many of the younger hikers were either taking a zero the next day or slackpacking. (In this case hiking with just a day pack and paying Uncle Johnny to deliver their packs 20 miles down trail - but you gotta be sure you're going the full 20 miles!) So they were up late talking just outside my bunkhouse, but my earplugs drowned them out. Then I remembered I had a coke with dinner and the waitress kept filling it up before it was half empty. Don't know how much I drank! I've been off caffeine for a year, so that's what was keeping me awake!

Also had good cell reception, so I got to talk with my sweetie!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, May 09, 2014

Hiking with Tim

Destination: Old Apple Orchard, Mile 363.4

Starting Location: Erwin, TN

Today's Miles: 21.90

Trip Miles: 363.40

Left Uncle Johnny's early and climbed out of Erwin. Jim was going to take a zero there today. Tim left a little earlier than I, and I caught up with him a few miles up the trail. We had never

hiked together before - Tim generally hikes slower but starts earlier and hikes longer so we often end up together at the end of the day. The rest of today, we hiked together and got to know each other better as we chatted and the miles seemed to fly by.

This is Tim's 7th hike of the AT (previously 4 thru hikes, and 2 done over 2 yrs each), and he's also hiked the PCT once. His career has been in furniture manufacturing, including running a plant in the Czech Republic. Then he worked for Habitat for Humanity before deciding to thru hike the AT his first time (2002, I think). Now he does restorative carpentry, including repairing and making old tools that he sells at antique shows when he's not hiking the AT. His wife is a teacher of gifted students. He was diagnosed with stage 2 diabetes a few years ago, so he controls it by losing some weight and keeping in shape at home by walking to and from breakfast 6 days a week - 6 miles each way!

Tim and I leap frogged off and on during the day with Celeste. She had tented along the river just past Erwin. She's really interested in learning all the many wild flowers along the trail, and Tim is pretty knowledgeable about them. Wish I could remember them all! We didn't see Eric until he caught up with us late in the afternoon when we stopped for water, at which time he and Celeste zoomed off ahead of us. Tim knew a good tent site in an old apple orchard coming up, so he and I camped there. Just before we arrived it started to rain lightly, so we set up our tents in the rain and crawled in for the night.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, May 10, 2014

Thunderstorm, Wind and Balds

Destination: Just past Little Hump Mountain
Starting Location: Old Apple Orchard, Mile 363.4
Today's Miles: 22.20
Trip Miles: 385.60

Today I woke up before it got light and started packing up. I noticed a light in Tim's tent and he was doing the same. I started hiking a little before Tim was ready, figuring I'd see him at the end of the day, if not sooner.

I didn't see many folks on the trail all morning. It was cloudy and cool - a good day for hiking. My plan was to summit Roan Mountain, above 6000 feet for the last time down south, about midday. There's a road that goes to the top where there's a parking lot with toilets and trash cans, and I was hoping for picnic tables, too. I

planned to have a nice lunch there and use the facilities. As I went up and down over smaller peaks, I could see Roan in the distance.

As I started up Roan, lower clouds moved in and as I approached the top it started to rain hard. As I got to the top the wind was blowing hard and I heard some thunder - how far away I don't know. When I got to the side trail to the parking lot on my right, I couldn't turn that direction due to the wind blowing the rain right in my face. I did not want to be on the top of the highest peak around with a thunderstorm overhead! So I hustled on down the back side of the mountain in the wind and pouring rain. As soon as I got down a ways, the rain stopped!



Clouds Finally Clearing

After Roan, the clouds cleared and the wind blew hard as I went over a series of grassy balds. That was really cool! As I reached back to the side of my pack to get my water bottle, I noticed my pack cover (which I put on it when it's raining) was missing - apparently it had blown off without me noticing when I was walking directly into the wind when climbing the first bald.

I was leap frogging with three young guys and their dog while going over the balds. When they stopped ahead of me at the top of one of the balds, they got up on some rocks to enjoy the view. The contrast of one of them in his orange shirt against the bright blue sky with white puffy clouds was a great photo op!

I ended up camping with them in a nice little site in the trees just down the side of Little Hump Mountain bald. After we set up our tents, they started a fire and we chatted for a short while until it started to sprinkle, and I called it a day. They were only out for three days, but one had thru hiked the AT a few years ago. Two of them had gone to Virginia Tech, and one had grown up in my hometown of Alexandria, VA. Wish I could remember their names! Arrgh!



Great Views!



Who Dat?

I never saw Tim, Celeste or Alec today. I hiked a few more miles than Tim usually does, so he's probably behind me a short ways.

Got some cell coverage just before the campsite, so I got to talk to my sweetie this evening! :-) An exciting, beautiful and awesome day on the AT!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, May 11, 2014

Happy Mothers' Day!

Destination: Vango/Abby Memorial Hostel
Starting Location: Just past Little Hump Mtn
Today's Miles: 19.40
Trip Miles: 405.00

Well... That's two down! And over 400 miles, too!

I left early once again, before the guys were up, and hiked most of the day by myself. It was

mostly downhill for the first part of the day, then moderate ups and downs. I've been going back and forth into TN and NC since just after entering the Smokies ages ago, as the trail roughly follows the state border. At mile 389.6 after crossing a small field there's a small sign that reads "Leaving NC" and my guide book indicates that's the last step in NC. However, the map on my AT Hiker app on my phone indicates that the trail just barely pokes back into NC on a switch back around mile 398.5. No signs or anything there. So, just to be sure, I took a video of me saying "Well... that's two down!" at both places! :-)

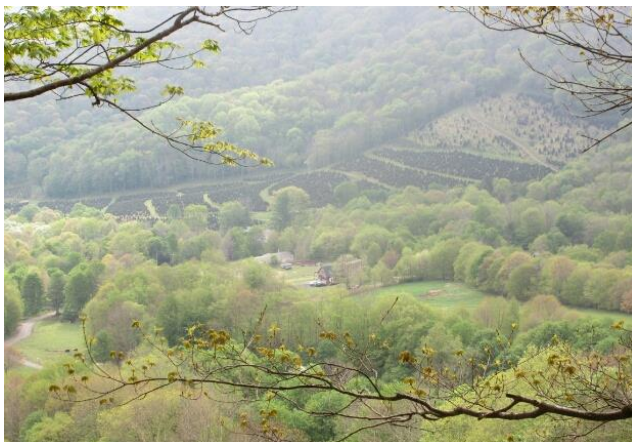
I stopped and had a nice picnic lunch at the best waterfall I've seen on the trail so far, down a short side trail just before the second spot leaving NC.

I was trying to decide where to stop for the night. I'll need some minor food resupply between here and Damascus and there's a highly touted hostel at mile 417, the Kincora Hostel. However, that's way too far for today and too short for tomorrow. There's also a hostel mentioned in the guide book at mile 405, but I haven't heard anyone talk about it. It was either that or a campsite a little beyond it. I haven't had any cell service, and it would be nice to get wifi so I can call Linda on Mothers' Day using Viber.

As I was about 3 miles from the hostel, I caught up with Celeste, who was at a nice campsite resting her feet and trying to decide whether to stop there or press on further. She told me Tim and asked her to pass on to me that his blood sugar was a little off yesterday morning, so he had gone to a hostel down one of the road crossings a little further down the trail from where



Happy Mothers' Day!



Farm Below

we camped. She also said Eric was behind us somewhere.

We talked about the hostel, but it's cash only and she didn't have any cash. But she noted the hostel also had Ben & Jerry's ice cream, and she'd really like to have some. So I told her I'd treat her to ice cream if she wanted to go there, and I headed off not knowing what she would decide to do.

A mile later Celeste caught up with me and we hiked to the hostel. It was good she was with me, because I would probably have missed the small sign pointing up an obscure side trail just before the AT crossed over a large stream. The hostel is a small house with a back porch and two outbuildings - a small older one which holds two people and a newer one with a bunk room on the first floor and a single room on the second floor with double bed, computer and nice deck. That's where I am now, typing this! :-)

Here's how that came about. When we approached the house, there was an older couple sitting at a picnic table on the porch along with the owner Scotty and another guy cooking hamburgers on a grill. They were just friends of Scotty's, visiting for the day. The only other hiker there was up in the bunk house. They invited us to have a hamburger - best one ever! (My opinion perhaps slightly affected by my eating mostly peanut butter on tortillas, dried fruit and nuts, cheese crackers and Clif bars the past several days!) Then he cooked up some hot dogs and gave us each one. Along with a soda, of course! :-)

Scotty had gone inside to put up his heel he had injured earlier in the day, when I went in to get some ice cream out of the freezer. I stayed in there and talked with him awhile, mostly about backpacking since he has hiked the AT several times. I noticed an old polo shirt with NASA on the front lying on the back of a chair, and

asked about it. Turns out he was an engineer with a contractor that worked for NASA at the Kennedy Space Center and then at Marshall Space Flight Center in AL. I mentioned I had worked for NASA and flew two space shuttle missions. He could hardly believe me. Turns out, he's pretty sure he watched STS-35's launch. So, we also had a good time talking about the future of human space flight. He also decided that I should stay in this room, and wasn't going to charge either of us for anything and I'll send him an autographed picture. The hostel is donation based, so I'll still leave some bucks for him in the morning. Good place, good folks!

Best part of the day was I also got to talk to Linda and wish her a Happy Mothers' Day as well as our daughter Jen. I tried calling Linda's mom, but they were out.

Happy Mothers' Day to all you Mom's out there! Thanks!

NOTE: I've just updated all my journals from May 4 'til now and uploaded pictures, so check them out. Some are a little sketchier than others because I didn't take good notes, and my memory... It's nearly 2 AM now, so I don't have time to thank you individually for your guest book entries, but I do appreciate them - thanks!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Vango/Abby Hostel

Monday, May 12, 2014

More Beautiful Scenery and People

Destination: Tentsite Overlooking Watauga Lake
 Starting Location: Vango/Abby Memorial Hostel
 Today's Miles: 22.80
 Trip Miles: 427.80



Laurel Falls



Flint & Gunpowder

I slept until 7, got ready to go, and stopped by the main house to top off my food supply so I can make it to Damascus. Scotty and his two friends were up and that meant some more good conversation, so I didn't get on the trail 'til 9:00. 'Twas a great place to stop! :-)

After I hiked a couple of hours, a young couple, Flint (the husband) and Gunpowder (the wife), caught up with me. They are thru hiking and are also part of a group of young folks from SC associated with YWAM (Youth With a Mission) who are out on the trail to support other hikers where they can. They plan to arrive in Damascus for Trail Days and help out there. I'm not sure, but I don't think the whole group is thru hiking. Anyway, we had good conversation for a short while and then they headed off ahead of me.

I hiked on by myself to the next major road crossing, where Flint and Gunpowder said they were meeting some of their support group. They were there finishing lunch, and I got to chat with a couple of their friends before heading on up the trail.

A little while later, Flint and Gunpowder caught up with me again and we chatted and hiked together for quite awhile until we got to Watauga Lake (it was mostly downhill!). They are planning to go to China after their hike, I think with YWAM. Flint has already spent a couple of years there teaching English. Good folks!

When we got to the recreation area at the lake they went over to join a large group of younger folks having a good time at the lake. Since it was getting late, I continued to follow the trail around the lake a couple of miles 'til I found a nice spot to set up my tent and go to sleep. It started raining as I was crawling into my bag. Another good day on the AT! zzzzzzzz

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, May 13, 2014

Rain and Trail Magic

Destination: Campsite just before US 421
Starting Location: Tentsite at Watauga Lake
Today's Miles: 24.40
Trip Miles: 452.20

I got started early and hiked over the Lake Watauga dam where I took the next picture. Then it was a long steep climb up to the top of a ridge. On



Watauga Lake from the Dam

the way up I passed an older guy who was just breaking camp. He reminded me of Jimmy Carter, and when we briefly chatted, he sounded just like Jimmy Carter. We leapfrogged a couple of times when I stopped for water, then I left him behind. I don't think he was the real Jimmy Carter though!

About midafternoon, it rained lightly as I caught the edge of a thunderstorm that passed ahead of me. Then, as I was approaching a road crossing, I came across some trail magic left in the woods by a local church.



Church Trail Magic

I had a soda and a couple of Little Debbie cakes! Shortly afterwards, I came to the road and I could see someone across the parking lot had just finished packing up from doing some trail magic - barbecuing I later learned. After I crossed the road I entered a park like setting, and there were a couple of awnings set up right on the trail with several tents set up nearby. More trail magic! This was a group of former thru hikers, called Riff Raff, who set up just before trail days each year to serve trail magic and support hikers by driving them to/from trailheads so they can slackpack some of the sections before Damascus. They then relocate to Damascus for Trail Days.

Sitting under one of the awnings was Acorn! She had left the hostel early yesterday and hiked 27 miles, plus a side trip to check out the Kincora hostel. She had stopped at the Riff Raff awning to get out of that



Riff Raff Trail Magic

thunderstorm that just missed me but went right over the Riff Raff site.

I got some cookies and topped off my water and after a brief chat hiked on. There was another thunderstorm coming and I wanted to get ahead of it before it passed through.

I misjudged that! I got rained on hard and long! After about an hour of hiking in the rain, I came to a shelter where I stopped in to wait out the rest of it. The shelter was packed with folks doing the same thing. Had some fun conversation and I briefly met Sixty and Ready, a mother daughter pair from France. Grant from Philly, whom I had met with Acorn a week or so ago, was there, too.

Shortly the rain stopped and I left with a hearty farewell to my shelter rat mates who waited to make sure it wasn't going to start again. A few minutes later it did start again! This time it was light and didn't bother me after what I'd been through earlier. The rain stopped and I came to a tent site marked in my guide where I planned to stop, but it was small and a couple of women were already there setting up. So I hiked on another mile or so and found a very nice unoccupied spot with room for several tents. It also had a fire ring where someone had left a container of starter fluid for me! So I set up my tent and started a fire. With all the wet wood, I don't think I'd have been successful without the fluid! Thank you unknown trail angel! As I was starting the fire, Sixty and Ready came in and helped as they also set up their tent and hammock. Then Acorn joined us and then Grant, too. We had a cozy time around the fire chatting and eating.

Ready is thru hiking and her mom Sixty is heading back to France after Damascus. Sixty's husband, Ready's dad, is American and they all live in France.

Then it started to sprinkle and we retreated to our tents for the night.

The miles I've done the past two days will make for an easy hike into Damascus tomorrow. :-)

That's my tent and Grant's in the background.



Grant, Sixty, Ready and Acorn

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

Well... That's Three Down!

Destination: Hikers Inn, Damascus

Starting Location: Campsite just before US 421

Today's Miles: 15.40

Trip Miles: 467.60

I got up early, but before I left everyone else was up. Acorn was in no hurry as she was waiting for some friends to catch up. I think they'll spend at least one day at Trail Days, and I plan to get through Damascus before it starts.

I started slow to make sure all my body parts were warmed up and Grant soon caught up with me. We hiked together into Damascus - stopping briefly at the VA border to film him and two other hikers and me going Well... that's 3 down! - and we got bunks at the Hiker's Inn hostel. Paul and Lee are super nice and had scrubs for us to wear while they did our laundry.

Grant and I hiked back down Main St in our scrubs for a late lunch at the Blue Blaze Cafe about 3:00. The owner is from Philly and specialized in Philly cheese steaks, even flying in the rolls from Philly. Grant being from Philly, and I having recently lived there, each had to order one. It was huge and delicious! However, after eating it, I felt like my body immediately absorbed it and my stomach was still empty. So I ordered a big salad with chicken, too! Yum!

I then resupplied at Dollar General which was well stocked with hiker food, and bought a replacement pack cover at the outfitter, before walking back to the hostel for my clothes. About 7:00 Grant and I went to Hey Joe's, where I had the two salmon taco dinner, supplemented with a single fish taco. They had an older guitar player/singer playing and a bunch of young hikers filling up the small place. After dinner I stopped by one large group and told them how good it made an old man feel to see them having so much fun together. :-)

Grant started hiking the trail on his 40th birthday, the day before I started. He is a lawyer who quit his job to hike the trail and figure out what to do next. His passion is to train and coach rowers, but he's also got some lawyering options available when he gets back. (I read between the lines he was very good at what he did.) I shared with him my Chariots of Fire inspiration, and encouraged him to also consider looking at options on how he might apply his passion for teaching and coaching in the lawyer world as well as in crew.



Grant and Me in Damascus

Chariots of Fire Inspiration: A couple of months before I started I was thinking about the line in the movie Chariots of Fire where Eric Liddell is explaining to his sister why running in the Olympics is important for him to do before they head off to China as missionaries. His line is "The Lord made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure." I realized that's a great

line to use when considering what I should be doing: The Lord made me _____ and when I _____ I feel his pleasure. For me, for now, the blanks were "a hiker" and "hike". I'll know how to fill in the blanks for after this hike later!

Tomorrow's supposed to be a rainy day, but I'll be hiking out of town to hopefully get ahead of the bunches of hikers coming in from places north and south on the trail for Trail Days. Tomorrow the vendors start setting up with the main events Friday thru Sunday. Should be fun but I'd rather take my days off further north with my Sweetie! :-)

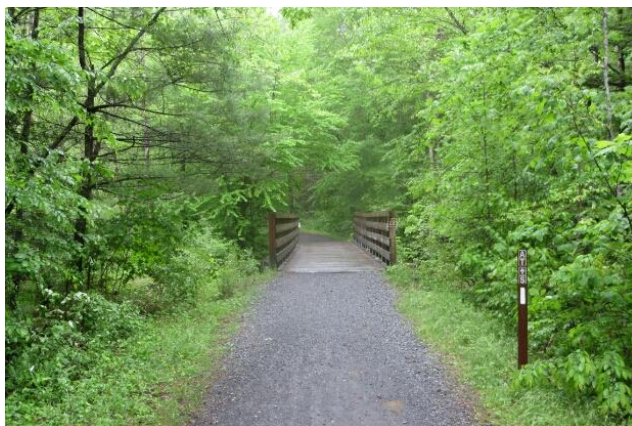
~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, May 15, 2014

Out of Damascus

Destination: Campsite past Whitetop Mtn Rd
Starting Location: Hikers Inn, Damascus
Today's Miles: 21.20
Trip Miles: 488.80

NOTE: "Today's Miles" posted at the top of each journal page is simply the difference between the mile post numbers of the spots on the AT where I ended the day and where I started the day according to the 2014 version of AWOL's AT Guide. It tells you how much of the 2085.3 miles (the official 2014 distance - it changes year to year) of the AT I've covered. It does not include extra distances hiked for going off trail to shelters, to get water, zig-zagging on the trail to avoid obstacles or to reduce the size of a step up or down, etc. or distances hiked in town for resupply, eating, etc. By taking the slightly shorter distance of the Virginia Creeper Trail, today I probably walked a little less rather than more total miles for a change.



Virginia Creeper Trail

It was supposed to rain today but the heavier storms passed through before I got up. I took my time waiting for stores to open. It was clear when I walked down the street to get breakfast (egg sub sandwich and three big blueberry pancakes) and mail a letter at the post office. I packed up and started out of town, stopping by Subway for a bacon, egg and cheese sub, which I saved half for later!

The AT out of Damascus starts by following the Virginia Creeper Trail, an old train track converted to a hike/bike trail that follows a large creek up into the mountains. It's named for the train that "crept" up the hill, not for the vine. The AT leaves this trail just out of town, but rejoins it a couple of times before heading off in a different direction about 11 miles out of town. I had read in a couple of journals how nice an alternative the Creeper Trail was so I decided to hike it.

I soon remembered that the hikers whose journals I had read recommending it were southbounders (Sobos), and hiked the Creeper Trail downhill for 11 miles. I enjoyed the trail, but found the constant uphill slope perhaps more tiring than the ups and downs of the AT where different muscles get used. But I'm glad I experienced it!

After getting back on the AT I continued uphill on a somewhat rocky path in the rain. The rain stopped, I went over another mountain top (Whitetop) in the clouds, and found a nice camping spot to crawl into my tent before the rain started again. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, May 16, 2014

Wild Ponies!

Destination: Tentsite @ Mile 514.6
Starting Location: Campsite past Whitetop Mtn Rd
Today's Miles: 25.80
Trip Miles: 514.60

One of the things I was most looking forward to seeing on my hike was the wild ponies in the Grayson Highlands. The AT passes through Grayson Highlands State Park, and I had annotated on my AT guide when I would enter and when I would leave the park. I knew the ponies roamed outside the park, too, but that's where I expected my best chance of seeing them to be.

I started the day with a good pace. Then the rocks started and they continued as I climbed uphill for a loooong time! It was really wearing



Wild Ponies



Cute!

me down! I was working hard to "consider it pure joy" but I gotta admit I was struggling to do so. I was still about two miles from the state park when I climbed through the saddle of a very large rock formation and there right in front of me were about a dozen wild ponies lazing about! (The photo at the top is looking back after I had passed through the ponies. In the upper left you can see the saddle in the rock formation over which I climbed and first spotted the ponies.) I forgot about all the rocks for a while as I just enjoyed watching the ponies for a while. There were several



More Ponies!

younguns, including one very small one. Made my day! :-)

The rocks began again until I reached the state park, when the trail became more comfortable and I could pick up the pace again. All the way through the park I saw no ponies! Then, about two miles beyond the park boundary, I came across a mom and a dad pony with their offspring. Very cool!

After a long day, I found a nice spot to set up my tent and went to bed tired but happy and content. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, May 17, 2014

Marathon Day!

Destination: Relax Inn, Atkins

Starting Location: Tentsite @ Mile 514.6

Today's Miles: 28.10

Trip Miles: 542.70

I completed my first marathon today! I'm guessing I did the first 26.2 miles in about 11 hours - not exactly qualifying for the Boston marathon, but pretty good going up and down mountains with a backpack. I also had a pretty cool inspirational moment that I'll describe in "Head Tunes" below.

With "Trail Days" going on in Damascus, I haven't seen many thru hikers on the trail the past couple of days. Today, I didn't see anyone until just as I started descending into Atkins when I met a local guy hiking back from the truck stop in Atkins to a road I had crossed earlier - don't know if he was going home or what. Just before I got to Atkins, I met another young man fishing in a creek just off the AT. That was it for the day until I got to the motel. I did get some trail magic left by some local church folks who had set up a nice spot to rest a bit.

The "town" of Atkins is basically a small truck stop gas station with a food mart, a small restaurant and an old motel just off I-81. The Relax Inn is in need of some serious touch up, but the room was clean and it had a nice hot shower! In the room next to me were thru hikers Scout and Chinook, who had just hitched a ride back from Trail Days. They had tented on the trail just before Atkins last night, then came in early this morning and got a ride down to Damascus just for the day. We went over to the restaurant together for some dinner and had a



Trail Magic!

good time chatting. They were buddies in high school and one of them had just graduated from college in December while the other had been working after trying college for a year or two. I told them I'd expected the thru hikers to be mostly old retired folks like me and young folks just out of college, but most were in between and he was the first recent college grad I had met.



Rhododendrons in Bloom!

Head Tunes: About midday today I started thinking about what additional Head Tunes I've had since my last update in Trail Journals. These three came to mind:
-- Catch a Falling Star - Perry Como
-- The Great Adventure - Steven Curtis Chapman
-- In Wonder - Newsboys

Catch a Falling Star popped into my brain on a rainy day ("...save it for a rainy day"), The Great Adventure kinda speaks for itself with respect to the adventure I'm on, and In Wonder popped in when I was enjoying the world around me while hiking.

I certainly can't say that Perry Como's songs have been a significant inspiration for me in my life, but songs by Steven Curtis Chapman and the Newsboys have been (as well as songs by other contemporary artists and some older hymns). So I decided to think of what song or songs have been the most inspirational to me over the years so I could purposely add it/them to my head tunes repertoire. The song that immediately came to mind was When God Ran by Benny Hester.

About 30 years ago I had somewhat of a personal spiritual reawakening. Very shortly after that I first heard the song When God Ran on the radio while driving my car. It's taken from the parable in Luke 15 often referred to as the Prodigal Son. Although the parable is also about the older son as well as the father and the younger son, this song focuses on the love of the father - the father who, although the all mighty, powerful, omnipotent God of the universe, still runs to welcome one of his lost children home. When I first heard the song back then, and even when I think about it now, tears well up in my eyes.

Of course, Linda knows the song's specialness to me, and being the artist in the family, purchased a print of Rembrandt's painting of The Return of the Prodigal Son. We have it hanging in our house and I really like it. However, it is not the picture my mind generates when I think of the father in the parable. We each make different mental pictures when we read/hear a story, depending on who we are at the time and how it speaks to us individually. I think Rembrandt does a good job capturing the love and forgiveness of the father, the repentance of the younger son and the resentfulness of the older son. However, his painting doesn't reflect to me the joy of the father that I perceive when I hear the story.

My mind paints a very different picture. I see the humbled, repentant son walking up a path through a grassy field going up a hill to the father's home at the top of the hill - very similar to the paths I've recently hiked on the balds in these mountains. And while the son is still a ways down the hill, I see the father running full speed down the path with his robe flying around him, his long hair and beard flying in the wind and a smiling, almost laughing, face beaming with incredible joy. Until today, my picture ended with the father grabbing the son in his arms and hugging him tightly while rejoicing mightily.

Today, I wasn't sure the song would be a good hiking-up-the-mountain song since it starts slowly. But I tried it. And it worked great. And after 30 years the picture in my mind continued just a little further. Now, the

father not only grabs the son in a big hug but he picks him (me) up off the ground and starts to spin around and around with the son's feet flying out in the air in big circles around the father - just like a father might do with his young son or daughter. And the joy in both their hearts is unmeasurable.

Must have been quite a sight today. A smelly, scruffy old man hiking furiously up the trail with a big joyous smile on his face and tears running down his cheeks. Good thing the other hikers were at Trail Days! :-)

Benny Hester - When God Ran video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asU6FXnHWus>

BTW, 30 years ago I hadn't gone off to wild living and feeding pigs like the son in the story. ... I had simply moved down the lane a bit. ... It's good to be home.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, May 18, 2014

Alma Mater Trail Magic

Destination: Tentsite @ Mile 561.6
Starting Location: Relax Inn, Atkins
Today's Miles: 18.90
Trip Miles: 561.60

When I got up, I went over to the gas station and got a premade egg biscuit and two egg sausage biscuits for breakfast. That was not a good idea. After I went back to the motel, packed up and started hiking, those biscuits just sat in my stomach. Ugh!

But it was a beautiful day and the trail started out fairly easy through woods and meadows. After a few miles,



Trail Angels from Purdue

trail magic! The parents of a thru hiker, Bud, I think, drove down from Indiana to see their son and do a little trail magic. They were both decked out in Purdue clothing, so I told them about getting a degree there and later on working there. I had some fruit, a soda and some homemade oatmeal raisin cookies - yum! She put 4 more cookies in a ziplock bag for me to take with me! Good folks.



Through a Meadow on a Beautiful Day

After crossing the last meadow and starting uphill into the woods, there was some more trail magic! A cooler full of Dr Thunder sodas left by a previous thru hiker. So I had one of those. I normally try to avoid caffeine since it's a diuretic, but trail magic is trail magic! So my diet for the first half of the day was stale egg biscuits and sugar - took me the afternoon to recover, but I did! :-)

Later in the day as I was crossing a nicely built footbridge over a large stream, I saw a 40ish man and woman standing with their dachshund at the large campsite on the other side of the stream. I made what I thought was a humorous comment about the dog probably not doing big miles with his short legs, and the man started talking about how dogs shouldn't do more than 6 or 7 miles a day and these young folks making their dogs hike 15 and 20 mile days are wearing out the dogs' paws and the dogs have to be euthanized when they get to Pennsylvania. He then asked me if I knew if there were any camp sites at the road crossing in a couple of miles - where I was planning to camp if there were - and I told him I didn't know, but that this looked like a great camp site! I then hiked on.

When I got to the road, there were no campsites and a lot of trash where a full garbage bag had been ripped open. So I hiked on up the next mountain a ways and found a good spot to set up my tent and settle in just before it got dark.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, May 19, 2014

Another Beautiful Day!

Destination: Tentsite @ Mile 584.7
Starting Location: Tentsite @ Mile 561.6
Today's Miles: 23.10
Trip Miles: 584.70

I got up to another beautiful day and started hiking on up the mountain. I felt like a slug at first, probably due to yesterday's diet. It was a four mile hike up to the top of Chestnut Knob, but I was rewarded with a different kind of shelter sitting on the side of the bald at the top. It was a fully enclosed concrete block building with a door, two levels of nicely built bunks, and the picnic table was inside, too. I stopped for brunch.

I didn't see any other people today until about 14 miles into my day when I stopped at Jenkins Shelter for a late lunch at 3:00. There was a couple still in their sleeping bags in the shelter, so I stayed at a distance. He was sleeping and she sat up and talked with me briefly, telling me that he was feeling sick and had slept all day. She lay back down while he continued to snore softly. I used the privy and headed on, not seeing another person all day. The privy was interesting - up the hill behind the shelter, hidden from the shelter by a small grove of rhododendron, and without any walls - just the stool part sitting on a platform. Nice and airy, though!

I then hiked up and down a couple more ridges before settling in at a very nice spot on the top of a ridge with a fantastic view to the west just before the trail heads down to cross I-77. The past few days have covered an interesting part of the trail as it heads generally northwest, cutting across the ridges of mountains that lie in a northeast/southwest direction. Lots of ups and downs!

I've also been noticing that the northwest sides of the ridges are often quite steeper than the southeast sides, just like in the Smokies. It's as if the mountain ridges are waves coming in from the Atlantic and are just about to break before hitting the shore. I remember learning that the Appalachian Mountains are old, worn down mountains, but I wonder if there's any such thing as mountain waves in their geologic formation process?

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

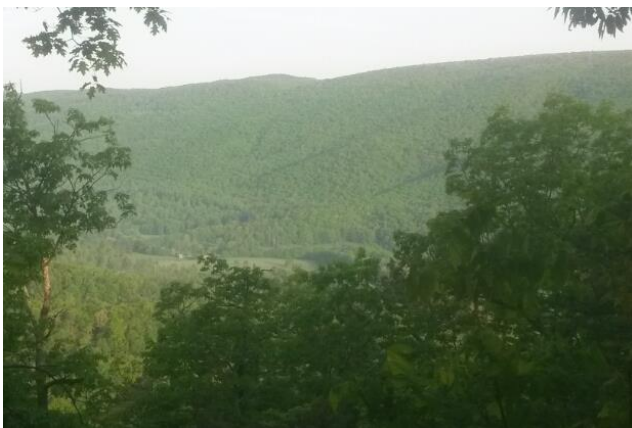


Great Place to End the Day

Tuesday, May 20, 2014

Another Young Hiking Inspirer!

Destination: Wapiti Shelter
Starting Location: Tentsite @ Mile 584.7
Today's Miles: 29.00
Trip Miles: 613.70



Breakfast View

Another beautiful day to go for a hike and I felt good! I wanted to cover a lot of miles today so I wouldn't have too long a day tomorrow heading into Pearisburg. I wanted to get there early enough to get a motel room and do some resupply shopping. But I wasn't really shooting for 29 miles!

I hiked the three miles on down the ridge and did some road walking to get across I-77, followed by a little more road walking before reentering the woods. Just before going into the woods, I met a couple of guys sitting by a fire on the side of the road and several more folks still in their sleeping bags nearby. They had all hitched into Damascus a few days ago for Trail Days,

and had been dropped back off here last night. As I entered the woods, there were several camp sites along a stream and several tents set up. Much to my surprise, the last camp site was occupied by the couple with the dachshund I had met nearly 30 miles back the evening before last. We chatted briefly; she remembered me, I'm not sure he did. I wondered how they got here - I'm pretty sure they didn't pass me on the trail, and that would have been a lot more than 6 or 7 miles per day for the dog!

As evening approached, the trail went through a lot of rhododendron tunnels in a relatively low area following a stream nearby. Although the sun was still up, it was already behind a ridge and it was dark along the trail and I was tired and I couldn't find a good camp site like I had hoped to find. Then along came Moka Pot, a tall twenty something young man to inspire me like so many other young hikers have done before. I fell in behind him and we briskly hiked the remaining couple of miles to Wapiti Shelter.

When we got there, several others were already there with their tents set up and fixing dinner at the picnic table. I set up my tent and then joined them. Pockets is a young woman from Zurich, Switzerland. She started out without trekking poles and hiked with her hands in her pockets. She thereby avoided the trail name given every other young woman thru hiker from Switzerland - Swiss Miss. Hansel and Gretel were a brother and sister duo who had graduated from Virginia Tech a few years ago. I had heard about them from some Tech section hikers I had met a few days ago. I also met Stevie Wander, who had stopped by for dinner, but was going to get a couple more miles in before stopping. Two others were there whose names I don't remember. They all knew each other from previous encounters on the trail. Good folks, all.

While we were eating and talking, another young couple showed up who everyone seemed to know. They were tired and excited about just doing a 24 mile day, their longest yet. I didn't want to mention my 29 mile day and spoil their excitement, but someone else at the table did, and it did put a damper on it a bit. But we all had fun and then turned in for the night!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, May 21, 2014

Super Duper Trail Angels!

Destination: Pearisburg

Starting Location: Wapiti Shelter

Today's Miles: 17.60

Trip Miles: 631.30

I got up early and had breakfast. Having slept in the shelter, Pockets was the only other one up, and left before I did. When I got to the top of the ridge, I had good cell reception and gave Linda a call. She told me that she had talked to Flynn and Gloria last night and that they were planning to pick me up in Pearisburg this afternoon! Super duper trail magic! Flynn had sent me an email which I hadn't received yet due to no data coverage.

So I called Flynn and made arrangements for meeting them. Flynn is a graduate and a trustee of Williamson and is a semi-retired professor at Virginia Tech, doing an online course each semester. He would stay with us in our Williamson home whenever he came up for a board meeting or other event, and Gloria would sometimes come with him. They were happy to reciprocate the hospitality!

That gave me even more energy and I hustled down the trail. About 10 miles before Pearisburg, the trail crosses a dirt road that leads a half mile to the well-known and well respected Woods Hole Hostel. Like the Kinkora Hostel in NC, the distance timing wasn't right for me to stay there. As I got to the road, there were two young guys standing there looking at their AT Guide. They had spent the night at the hostel and were planning their stop in Pearisburg. We chatted briefly and I started up the trail uphill. Pretty soon they passed me and I fell in behind, once more being inspired to pick up my pace by some young folks. I told them about their being my inspirers and we chatted some while hiking. However, the trail soon got rocky and they seemed to pick up the pace even more as we bouldered on up to the top of the ridge. Conversation stopped! I was really having fun but was getting worn out and about to fall back when we reached the top and they stopped to check out the scenic view. I thanked them for a fun work out and



Obstacle - I Went around This One!

headed on while they lay out in the sun on the rocks enjoying the view some more.

Flynn and Gloria had a little trouble finding me, but we soon connected and they drove me to their lovely home outside of Blacksburg about an hour's drive away. Flynn designed the home years ago based on Gloria's wish list and did a wonderful job. I'm spoiled! I took a hot shower while Gloria threw my dirty clothes in the washer and then fixed a scrumptious dinner. We sat out on the back deck looking down on the valley below while eating appetizers (what are those things - oh yeah, fresh vegetables!), salad, shish kabobs from the grill, oven roasted potatoes,... and all the while enjoying good conversation and fellowship.

Then off to sleep in a cozy bed!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, May 22, 2014

May Apple Blossoms

Destination: Pine Swamp Branch Shelter

Starting Location: Pearisburg

Today's Miles: 19.30

Trip Miles: 650.60

When I got up, Gloria fixed a wonderful breakfast for us and then they took me back to the trail. We stopped by the grocery store on the way so I could resupply and at a deli where I got a big sub sandwich for the trail. It was hard heading up the trail after being pampered so nicely. Thanks Flynn and Gloria! Good friends and good folks!

After going over the river and through the woods for a couple of miles, I stopped to eat half of my sub. Then I headed uphill once again to get to the top of a ridge. I



Inspires from Texas

was struggling to keep a good pace going uphill when four young guys passed me and inspired me once again. This time I couldn't quite keep up their pace, but was still rejuvenated as they moved on ahead of me. I caught up with them when they stopped at the stream crossing just before the top of the ridge. They were all from Texas State University in San Marcos and were out for a section hike. We chatted some more while filling up on water, and I pressed on up to the top of the ridge.

Most of the day was hiking along this ridge, so water was scarce. The West Virginia border comes down to follow along the ridge about the point where I got on top. So I hiked in and out of the two states until I descended off the ridge and back fully in Virginia on my way to the shelter, where I set up my tent and went to bed tired but feeling good.



May Apple Blossoms

I saw more may apples in bloom today. I've enjoyed seeing this plant since the beginning of my hike. It was one of the early plants to grow alongside the trail, and sometimes covered large areas off the trail, providing a leaf canopy 8 to 10 inches above the ground. I could just imagine wee leprechauns and fairies having dances and celebrating under the may flower canopy! The flower comes out on the stem below the leaves as you can see in the picture. (Early on, there were no other plants below the may apple leaves to interfere with the dance floor.) When the flowers started to bloom, I could then imagine the wee folk turning them on as lanterns and celebrating throughout the night!

Head Tunes: California Here I Come got me up the ridge today. Guess I was thinking about Sarah's upcoming move!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, May 23, 2014

Rocky Day

Destination: Laurel Creek Shelter
Starting Location: Pine Swamp Branch Shelter
Today's Miles: 18.50
Trip Miles: 669.10

It was tough hiking today - lots of rocky trail which is much more tiring and tougher on the feet and knees, plus a couple of big climbs. I leapfrogged with several guys who had tented at the same shelter last night and I hiked some with AZ Cruiser whom I met today and has a similar pace. He is a younger old guy who lives in Arizona. He has his own small business and can let his son run the day to day business while he thru hikes the AT. He started from Springer just three days ahead of me, so he's been making good time, too.



Lost My Pack?!

Saturday, May 24, 2014

Meadows and Mountains

Destination: Dragon's Tooth
Starting Location: Laurel Creek Shelter
Today's Miles: 26.70
Trip Miles: 695.80

I hiked a lot today off and on with AZ Cruiser and we got to know each other better. I really enjoyed our conversations. He's keeping a journal, too, and is also keeping a separate blog to raise money for a couple of charities back in Phoenix. We also hiked a little with Three Way, a young guy out for a one week section hike. He takes this week off each year to hike a section of the AT, starting a Springer a few years ago. He's called Three Way because he also takes a few days off each year to hike a section of the PCT, and a few days off to hike a section of the CDT. I wonder which one he'll finish first.



Laurel Creek Shelter

I was initially hoping to make it further today so I could get to Daleville Sunday evening, but had to listen to my body, especially my legs, and decided to stop about 4:30 to let them rest. There were already several folks set up at the shelter when I arrived and AZ came in right after me.

I set up my tent and had dinner with several hikers and enjoyed the conversation. Then I followed the example of a father and young adult son team there, Bear Man and Skins, and went down to the stream and soaked my feet in the cold mountain water. Oooh! My feet are now happy! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Climb That Ridge!



Stile

The day started off hiking across the valley through meadows and then climbing up the ridge on the other side of the valley. Along the ridge and then down across another valley to climb another ridge. I was hiking by myself along one of these ridges when I noticed large piles of rocks, obviously piled by man and not nature, occurring very frequently as I went along the trail. I passed a couple of Sobo hikers who were also wondering why the piles were there, several dozen of them. The ground around the area was still somewhat rocky, so it didn't seem to be because a farmer had cleared the ground to plant crops. Another AT curiosity!



Wonder Who Piled Up These Rocks?

AZ and I both stopped for lunch at the Niday Shelter. There were several young hikers fixing lunch at the picnic table and I joined them, while AZ sat on the edge of the shelter nearby. Stevie Wander was one of them and I met The Pope, Nora V and a couple others. When Nora asked me my name, she immediately recognized that I must be the astronaut. I guess my rep is getting around. Nora said she was given her name because when she started out, her group thought she

violated every rule for not contacting the norovirus.

The Pope was trying to cook a birthday cake to celebrate Nora's birthday today! He came up with some chocolaty sludge onto which they added some canned frosting and some fresh strawberries. The strawberries were good; the rest was pretty much just sugar.



Happy Birthday Nora V!



Audie Murphy Monument

Also passed by the Audie Murphy monument today. He was the most decorated American in WWII and died in a plane crash near here in 1971.

I had planned to find a nice tent site early along the last ridge of the day, a ridge that curved around in a large arc and ended with a climb up to Cove Mountain and a large rock formation called the Dragon's Tooth. But I didn't find any sites I liked and ended up hiking all the way to the Dragon's Tooth. There was a large camping

area there and three folks had already set up their tents: thru hiker and Virginia Tech grad Lop Sang and two of her Virginia Tech friends up just for the night, Dan and Paul. Apparently, the Dragon's Tooth is a popular day hike for Tech students. While we were chatting, Stevie Wander showed up and chatted for a while. He was headed for the hostel a couple of miles down the mountain, and headed off when it started to get dark.

Lop Sang said her trail name comes from some TV show's counselor character, and I guess folks were seeking her for advice when they started out. She, Dan and Paul were expecting some more friends to join them, but they didn't arrive. I climbed up on the rocks to see the view; the sun was setting through the trees to the west. I then came down and set up my tent while they built a fire and we chatted and ate in the fading light before I finally got in my tent and crawled into my sleeping bag. About 10:00 more of their friends finally arrived and set up their tents and chatted. I didn't mind; they were having fun seeing each other and I drifted off to sleep.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, May 25, 2014

Rocks, Views and Trail Magic

Destination: Daleville

Starting Location: Dragon's Tooth

Today's Miles: 28.20

Trip Miles: 724.00



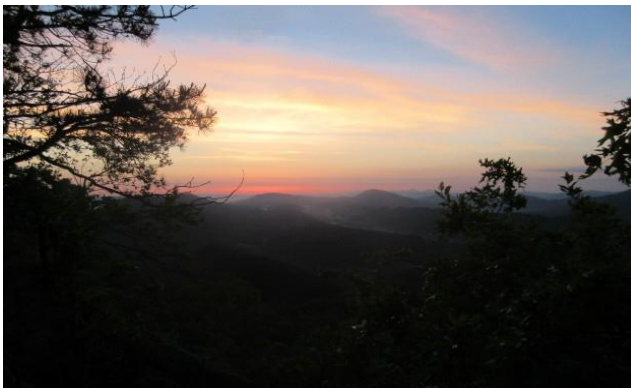
Looking Back at Dragon's Tooth Ridge

With such an early start, I thought I might make it the 28 miles to Daleville today, but realized I would probably stop sooner due to the long day yesterday, so I wasn't pressing it. The first mile coming down from the Dragon's Tooth was quite rocky and tough. Fun, but my feet don't like that so much! When it leveled out some, I passed Bear Juice who had camped there and was just packing up. After 2.5 miles I came to a road where I left the trail to hike down the road 0.4 miles to a grocery store to resupply and have a second breakfast! Bear Juice joined me there (and we leapfrogged each other all day). I then hiked back to the trail, passing Stevie Wander headed for the grocery before hitching a ride to somewhere he was going to play golf. His family has a golf outing this day every year, and since Stevie can't be there, he's playing golf here! He made it down to the hostel OK last night, getting thru the rocky section just before dark.

The major climb for the day was up to McAfee Knob, probably the most photographed site on the AT. As I was coming down the ridge prior to that I could see through the trees a large parking lot with lots of cars in it - Memorial Day weekend Sunday! Lots of day hikers out to enjoy the beautiful day by climbing up the 3.9 miles from the parking lot to McAfee.

Just as the trail entered the parking lot - trail angels! Time for a third breakfast of an apple and an egg and bacon burrito! They also did some juggling for us - very cool! I also thought I'd been transported back to the early 70's!

Going up the mountain, I chatted with day hikers Dan and Nahni for a while. I stopped for a water refill and they pressed on with Bear Juice who had just caught up. On the way up I passed lots of day hikers on their way down, and chatted briefly with a few. When I got to the top, I chatted with Dan and Nahni some more, as well as some of the many others there. Dan also gave me an apple and a protein bar -



Sunrise from Dragon's Tooth

I packed up and left the campsite at the Dragon's Tooth at 6:00, trying not to wake anyone else. A short ways down the trail, I found a nice spot to sit and watch the sun rise while I ate breakfast. Gorgeous!



Trail Magic and Juggling, too!



Dan & Nahni Enjoying McAfee Knob

more trail magic! Bear Juice and I each had our pictures taken in the classic McAfee Knob position.

You can see in the picture on the next page that McAfee Knob isn't quite the isolated hiker place that the classic picture might lead you to believe!

I hiked on, the next major point being where the trail goes right along the edge of the top of Tinker Cliffs - more awesome views! I chatted with a group of three young thru hikers eating dinner on the rock outcropping for a while. In the picture on the right, McAfee Knob is the tall, dark mountain in the upper right, and you can see the green ridge line coming along the left where I hiked the five and a half miles of AT from the knob to Tinker Cliffs.

Watch quickly in the video below, and you can see the AT white blaze in the first half second as I walk along the edge of the cliffs!

Hiking Along Tinker Cliffs video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhnSu4zLvgl>

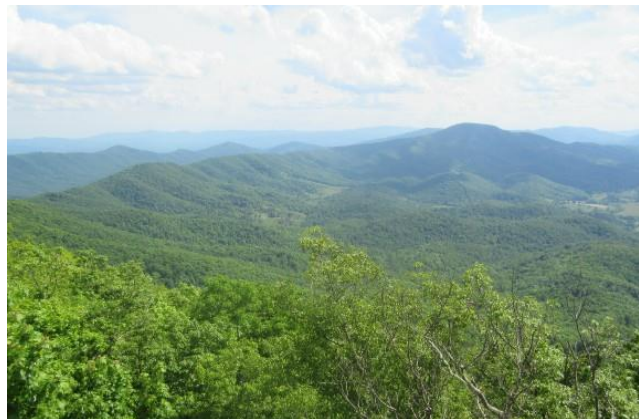
With the rocky start, the grocery run, the trail magic and all the conversations, I had pretty



Classic McAfee Knob Picture

much decided to stop at the next shelter after a 19 mile day. When I got there and refilled my water, I didn't have cell coverage to call Linda, so I decided to press on 'til the trail got back on the ridge. Bear Juice camped at a really nice spot just past the shelter. As I started hiking again, I felt a burst of energy and decided to do the remaining 9 miles, watching the sun set before arriving at 9:00 for a hot shower after a 15 hour day of rocks, great views, trail magic and meeting lots of nice people. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



McAfee Knob from Tinker Cliffs



McAfee Knob with Other Hikers

Monday, May 26, 2014

Morning in Daleville

Destination: Wilson Creek Shelter
Starting Location: Daleville
Today's Miles: 11.20
Trip Miles: 735.20

Although I got to sleep late and didn't plan to hit the trail 'til early afternoon, I was awake early. Since the HoJo breakfast started at 6:00, I went on down at about 6:30. Stevie Wander was there! After I passed him on the road yesterday he had gotten breakfast at the same grocery and went to play golf. He finished the game, but was feeling worse and worse, suspecting food poisoning from his breakfast. So he got a ride to Daleville and stayed at HoJo's. He felt good this morning but needed to get a ride back to where he left the trail yesterday. I didn't ask him how his golf game went. :-)

I then went to the gas station next door for laundry soap and quarters since HoJo's didn't have either. Since there was only one working washer, which was in use, and two dryers, I washed my dirty clothes in the tub. I prewash my socks in the sink before putting them in with my other clothes - man, can they hold a lot of dirt!

I then took my wet clothes to the dryer and stopped in for a second breakfast while my clothes dried! Then back to the room for a short nap.

I checked out about 11 and walked down the road to resupply at Krogers, then stopped into Wendy's for way too much lunch before hiking back to the trail. This is the section of the AT where I hiked a short distance with our grandkids back in March - where I took the

selfie used for my "About" photo in this journal. That was a long time ago!

The 5 miles to the first shelter were very tough for me - my Wendy's lunch just sat in my stomach and tried to use all my blood for digestion so my muscles had to fight for its share. As I approached the first shelter, Scout caught up with me and we took a break there and chatted for a bit. This is a different Scout than I met before and he said there are two women named Scout hiking the trail, too.

The break did me well and the 5 miles to the next shelter were uneventful. When I got there, Terry and Jay were already settled in. Terry is thru hiking and just celebrated his 60th birthday last week. (I think he could easily pass for being under 50. 'Course I think most anyone under 70 looks young these days!) He's from Tennessee, so his wife joined him for his birthday, and she



Mountain Laurel

supported him often as he went thru NC and TN. Jay is a young man from Southern CA who is on his first day of a section hike from Daleville to Harpers Ferry. Last year he section hiked from Springer to Daleville. I asked him why he was hiking the AT, and he said he accidentally clicked a YouTube link to a video about the AT and was hooked. I thoroughly enjoyed them both - good folks.

I had good cell coverage for a change, so I got to talk to Linda for a bit before heading to dreamland. zzzzzzz

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

Blooming Rhodie Tunnels

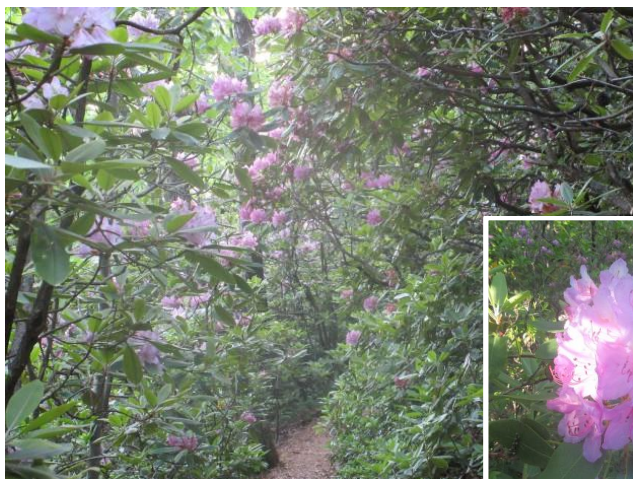
Destination: Bryant Ridge Shelter
Starting Location: Wilson Creek Shelter
Today's Miles: 20.80
Trip Miles: 756.00

When I got up, Terry and Jay were also up, so I had some breakfast at the shelter before leaving. Jay left a little before I did, and I was on the trail by 6:30. Terry was still enjoying his coffee, and I don't think he planned to go as far as I today. I'll probably see him again after my time off trail.

Today was the day for blooming Rhodie tunnels. Really gorgeous! I've seen Rhododendrons blooming for a number of days now, but only the single bushes with space around them. Now the big clumps of big bushes were blooming, at least along this section of the trail.



Let's Go for a Swim! Aaahhhh!



Rhodie Tunnel

The Mountain Laurel were also blooming, but I didn't go by any large groups of them like I did the Rhodies. There were also numerous scenic views, especially when the trail crossed the Blue Ridge Pkwy and along quite a long section where there had been a fire some years ago. Cool to see all the new growth slowly overtaking the burned out trees. Even some small blooming Mountain Laurel bushes taking hold.

Jay and I leapfrogged all day. I passed him fairly early (he's still getting his trail legs back) and he passed me when I went down a steep side trail for water. I caught up at the following shelter for a lunch break and surprised him since he didn't know he had passed me. I left ahead of him, then he caught up when we both stopped for a swim in a creek - brrrrr cold, but super refreshing!

Right after I left the creek, it started to rain

lightly. I just put my pack cover on since I was already wet from the swim. Although I could hear thunder west of me, the rain never got heavy and soon stopped. I hustled on to the shelter and arrived just as Jay did about 4:15. We both thought about moving on to the next shelter 5 miles further, but the thunder was still booming in the distance and it's mostly uphill to the next shelter. This shelter is fairly new and quite large with an upper level, so I decided to sleep in the shelter. Mother Earth, a young woman, is here tonight and two other men whose names I forgot.

After I had settled in and ate dinner, Bear Juice walked in about 6:00. He had passed thru Daleville yesterday and stayed



Croak!



Bryant Ridge Shelter

at the shelter before mine last night. He had talked to Terry at the shelter where I got water earlier and knew I was ahead of him. He decided to press on for the next shelter.

Tomorrow I finally get to see my sweetie! The plan is for me to hike 10 miles in the morning while she and Sarah drive down and meet me about noon at one of the places where the AT crosses the Blue Ridge Pkwy.

I'm excited!!! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, May 28, 2014

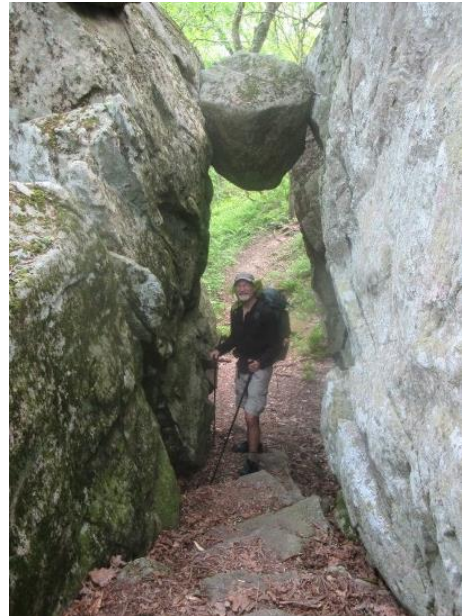
Hugs All Around

Destination: James River, US 501
 Starting Location: Bryant Ridge Shelter
 Today's Miles: 24.80
 Trip Miles: 780.80

All the guys got up early, and Mother Earth slept in. I waited to eat breakfast before departing and all the guys left ahead of me. A while later I passed Jay when he stopped for breakfast.

Linda and I had originally planned to meet where the AT crosses the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP) at trail mile 765.9, just before Thunder Hill Shelter. However, I got there well ahead of them, so we moved our meeting point up the trail to where the trail just brushes the BRP parking lot at Thunder Ridge Overlook at mile 767.6. I still had to wait a while so I worked on my journal some until YAAAAAAYYYYYY! They showed up!!! Hug, hug, hug!!!

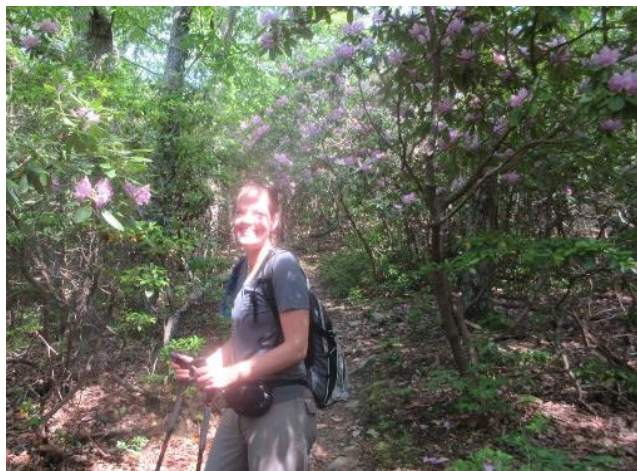
The next two road crossings were Petites Gap, 3.3 miles down the trail, and US 501 at the



The Guillotine

James River, 9.3 miles beyond that. So after we had lunch together, Linda and I hiked the first section while Sarah drove the car to meet us, then Sarah and I hiked the second section while Linda drove the car to check out the hostel and then meet us at the James River.

It was sooooo great to hike with each of them! We talked most of the way, plus the Rhodies cooperated and both sections had good displays for them. When Sarah and I were finally crossing the James River Foot Bridge, there were some high school kids there thinking about jumping off the bridge into the water below. One of them finally did. We learned later it's illegal to do so. We also learned that although the



The Sarah Flower amidst the Rhodie Flowers!

Thursday, May 29, 2014

Trail Magicians

Destination: BRP crossing, mile 791.7
Starting Location: James River, US 501
Today's Miles: 10.90
Trip Miles: 791.70

My sister Faith and her friend Laurel are coming to meet us today! Linda arranged to meet them where the AT crosses the BRP 10.9 miles further up the AT from the James River, where they'll do trail magic while Sarah and I hike the AT.

We got to chat with Twist some this morning until Oma and Marcia called us to a wonderful breakfast. Twist had been picked up by Oma at Rt 60 yesterday and Oma was taking her back there this morning to slack pack the 6 miles to Hog Camp Gap, where Oma or Marcia would meet her with her pack. Three Springs Hostel is right on the edge of the national forest down the road from Hog Camp Gap. Oma just bought the property last year and has turned it into a very nice hostel. We're sure many hikers will enjoy it in the years to come! :-)

After breakfast Linda drove Sarah and me back to the James River trail head and headed off to meet Faith and Laurel who were driving from Durham. Sarah and I started hiking up the mountain - it's nearly always uphill at the start! Pretty soon a young man named Canon caught up with us. We hiked and talked with him for a while, even staying with him on the long uphill climb until we needed a break and he pressed on. Later on, we leapfrogged a couple of times with two older women who are thru hiking, one named I Believe. I don't remember the other woman's name.

When Sarah and I finally arrived at the BRP, Linda, Faith and Laurel had quite a set up going! They had an awning set up with folding chairs and a folding table under it. On the table were homemade chocolate chip cookies, brownies and pumpkin muffins. Also available were fresh apples and pears, peanut M&M's and other cookies and muffins. Sodas in the cooler and water was available, too. Canon was there along with three German hikers. Bear Juice had been through earlier and had stayed quite a while to chat - Linda really liked meeting him. The husband of one of the two women Sarah and I had leapfrogged with was also there, and pretty soon they both hiked in. They were going to a motel in Buena Vista that night and I think were planning on staying at Three Springs Hostel the



Sunset from James River Foot Bridge



A Thorn between Two Roses!

bridge is the longest foot traffic bridge on the AT, it's named after Bill Foot, who was a big supporter of the AT and instrumental in getting the bridge funded.

It was late when we all finally got to the Three Springs Hostel - what a nice place with nice people! It just opened this year so it's not in the guide books, but will be next year. Oma had waited to fix dinner for the three of us and it was delicious! The only other hiker there was a young woman named Twist and her dog Oliver (get it?), and she was already asleep in her bunk. After dinner and showers, we turned in, too.

So good to be with my sweetie and our daughter! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Newt

following night. Pretty soon Jay also hiked in, so all my support team got to meet him, too.

Then we packed up and headed back to Three Springs Hostel for another of Oma's great dinners. On the way back we checked out a gravel/dirt road to a road crossing we were thinking of using tomorrow for the shorter mileage hikers. But it is going to rain tonight and we're concerned it may be too muddy tomorrow.

At dinner, we made our plans for tomorrow. I plan to hike the 10.9 trail miles to get to Rt 60. There are two road crossings in the middle, but both by gravel/dirt roads, the second one being the one we checked out earlier. Since Oma said the road to the first one is better, we decided to use that one. All five of us will drive to where we left off yesterday and start hiking north to the first crossing at Reservoir Rd, 4.1 miles up the trail. Laurel has had some leg issues lately, and although much better, won't try to go any further than that. Oma will meet us there and pick up Laurel and whomever else doesn't want to hike the additional 5.8 miles to Rt 60. Laurel and whoever gets off trail with her will pick up the rest of us there and we'll all head to our home.

The five of us had the hostel to ourselves tonight. 'Twas so good to be together today!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, May 30, 2014

Family Hiking

Destination: US 60, then Home
Starting Location: BRP crossing, mile 791.7
Today's Miles: 10.90
Trip Miles: 802.60

Oma fixed another great breakfast, then we all packed up, drove to the trail in Linda's car, and started hiking.

Pretty soon I Believe and her friend caught up with us and hiked on. I was pleased that on today's section, the Mountain Laurel were putting on a grand display for everyone!

We had arranged for Oma to meet us at Reservoir Rd at 10:00, but due to a slightly later than planned start, and a slower than anticipated pace, we managed to call her and shift out meeting to 11:00. The first two miles were short ups and downs, and Laurel's knee started bothering her on the steeper downhill. The last two miles were going to be all downhill.

We were all having fun hiking together, but after we started down the last long downhill, we were getting really concerned about Laurel's knee. Checking the AT Hiker app on my phone, I noticed that at three miles an old road crossed the AT and had a short distance to a Forest Service road that connected with the road Oma would be on. So Linda and I sped ahead to that road. After walking down it a short distance to confirm it was the right one, I continued on down the AT to meet Oma while Linda waited there to stop the rest of the gang when they caught up.



My Support Team!

I met Oma right on time and we drove to the end of the road where Linda was waiting - that road was gated so Oma couldn't drive up it, plus there was a fast running wide creek to ford even if the gate were open. There were rocks across the creek that I could have used to keep my feet dry, but they were mossy and slick looking, so I just waded across. Now was not a good time to injure myself slipping on a rock. I hiked up the short distance on that road to where everyone was waiting for me. Laurel had had a short break and hiked to Oma's car fine along with the rest of us. Faith and I helped Laurel wade across the creek while Linda and

Sarah tried to rock hop across. Sarah was the only one to make it with dry shoes!

Oma drove us back to the point I met her. Linda and Faith would have liked to continue on with me, but since it was now later than we had planned, only Sarah joined me for a power hike the remaining 6.8 miles. Oma took Linda, Faith and Laurel back to the hostel where they picked up Faith's car, then drove down to pick up Linda's car, then to US 60 to meet Sarah and me. Sarah and I made great time covering the 6.8 miles in a little over two and a half hours. The last three miles or so were a gradual climb following along the Brown Mountain Creek. I have not seen the trail follow a creek so closely for such a distance before. There were historical markers telling of this valley being farmed by freed slaves after the civil war until around 1920, when it was no longer viable and the land was sold to the Forest Service.

We all piled into the cars and drove to our house, stopping enroute to buy some fresh strawberries! After dinner, Sarah continued on to her apartment to get ready for tomorrow.

Head Tunes: Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet - Twila Paris. When Sarah and I were hiking together, somehow the conversation went from Sarah recounting taking her ear rings out and pinning them to her PJs collar after getting in bed last night to joking about getting a lamp tattoo on one's foot to reference the scripture about Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. Shortly afterwards, and independently, Sarah and I both were singing that song in our heads. Not a bad hiking song!

Another fun family vacation day! Zeros tomorrow and Sunday to help Sarah get ready to move. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, May 31, 2014

Packing Trailer

Destination: Home
Starting Location: Home
Today's Miles: 0.00
Trip Miles: 802.60

Linda, Faith, Laurel and I drove up to Sarah's today to help her finish packing and load her U-Haul trailer. We stopped by REI on the way so I could get a regular Sawyer Squeeze water filter. The word is out on the trail that the regular one has a much higher flow rate than the Mini, so all the places along the trail are sold out of the regular one. I had pretty much stopped using

my Mini, relying almost solely on my Aqua Mira drops.

A fun, but very tiring day. We finally got the trailer fully loaded - not another cubic inch available! Good teamwork! We'll pack her things going to our house in our car tomorrow. Sarah treated to dinner at a great place in Falls Church, the Dogwood Tavern. We all slept in Sarah's apartment - Linda on the couch, Faith and Laurel on a blow up mattress and Sarah and I on the floor. I had my pad and sleeping bag, just as if I were in a shelter somewhere on the AT!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, June 01, 2014

Home

Destination: Home
Starting Location: Home
Today's Miles: 0.00
Trip Miles: 802.60

Loaded up our car and Faith's car and said our good-byes to Sarah. I'm hoping to see her later this week while I'm in the Shenandoah, but if not, in August when I go to CA. Faith and Laurel followed us to our house, unloaded Sarah's stuff from her car, and headed home. Spent the rest of the day shopping with Linda, doing some work around the house and getting ready to get back on the trail tomorrow. Had hoped to work on journals and email, but ran out of time!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, June 02, 2014

Back on the Trail

Destination: Hog Camp Gap
Starting Location: Home
Today's Miles: 6.30
Trip Miles: 808.90

I had hoped to leave home mid-morning but didn't get my act together until mid-afternoon when Linda drove me back to the trail. We arrived at 6:00 pm and chatted briefly with an older guy who was waiting to shuttle a hiker to town. It was hard to say goodbye to Linda, but I did and then watched her drive away before I turned and headed up the trail.

It was uphill for the first 2.8 miles, but my body felt strong and I headed up easily. I soon noticed that the trail maintainers had been out recently, probably over the weekend. The new spring undergrowth crowds the

trail and they had cut it back one to three feet on each side of the trail. Made it much easier to walk down the trail, especially with poles. Thanks again, trail maintainers!

My goal was to get to Hog Camp Gap before 9:00 when it gets dark. Going up the second mountain there were a couple of views where I stopped briefly to see the sun getting low over the mountain ridges in the distance. I was making good time and figured I would get to the camp site before 8:45, when I ran into Lop Sang (met her at the Dragon's Tooth), Crusoe and Britta. Crusoe had heard about me and was happy to meet me. I was happy to meet him, too! He's from Connecticut, as is Britta. Britta is just out for several weeks and will head home soon. They were all sitting on a rock formation in the middle of the bald at the top of the mountain, watching the sun go down. They had brought up a whole watermelon as well as a dozen eggs and some bacon for breakfast tomorrow! We chatted for a while and then they decided to stay and watch the full sunset. So I stayed with them! It was beautiful!

Tuesday, June 03, 2014

Another Marathon Day

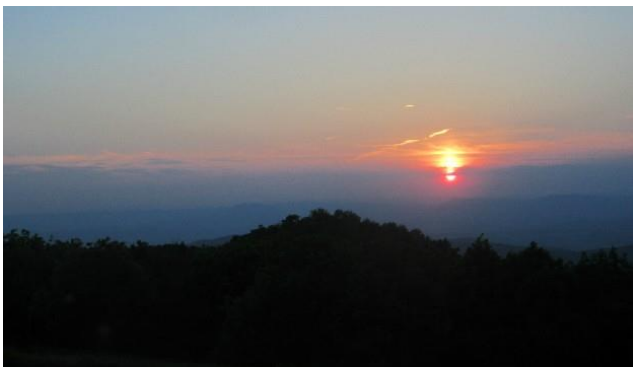
Destination: Maupin Field Shelter
Starting Location: Hog Camp Gap
Today's Miles: 28.10
Trip Miles: 837.00



Hog Camp Gap Camp

I was packed up and hiking about 6:15 this morning, while everyone else was still in their tents. Lop Sang, Crusoe and Britta had arrived after I set up my tent last night and camped with another group of tents further down the meadow where their closer friends were. There was also a large swing there - in the tree on the left in the photo. (The orange color in the trees is from the sunrise behind me.) They had invited me to a bacon and eggs breakfast, but I didn't want to wait around that long. I'm sure it was good!

The trail was good and I was making excellent time. More evidence of recent trail maintenance along this section, too!



Sunset from Cold Mountain

Then I headed on down the mountain in the semi-dark, using my headlamp when I entered the trees. I arrived about 9:30 and met some more hikers around a campfire - as happens too often, I can't remember all their names! :-)

This gap is a large grassy area with lots of space to set up a tent, so I chatted a while then set up my tent in the dark and turned in.

I surely had a good time with my support team the past few days, but it's time to get hiking again. I'll get to see Linda again in a few days before she heads to CA with Sarah. Looking forward to that! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Thank You, Trail Maintainers!

Wednesday, June 04, 2014

Into Shenandoah National Park

Destination: Calf Mountain Shelter
Starting Location: Maupin Field Shelter
Today's Miles: 28.50
Trip Miles: 865.50



Before Trail Maintainers

Before long I started thinking that this might be my first 30+ mile day, and started planning for it. Unfortunately, that's not conducive to actually enjoying the trail! It puts me under pressure to not linger anywhere. Also, when I hit a rocky section of trail, rather than enjoying the challenge of "bouldering" along it, I resent it slowing me down. And in the late afternoon, I ran into lots of rocky sections!

Fortunately, I was already re-evaluating my stopping point when I pulled into the Maupin Field Shelter in the evening for water and to eat dinner after 28 trail miles. I knew I could go another 2 miles before dark, but my body was tired and I'd be finding a tent site without water nearby just to make some relatively meaningless goal. I had dinner at the shelter picnic table with Pockets, Flower Child, L Dog, Rod&Reel, and Bandana Bill and thoroughly enjoyed chatting with them. That settled it! I stayed and continued to enjoy their company until it got dark, then I just slept in the shelter. L Dog was a photographer with the Navy, so we had some good yarns to share!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



Rocky Trail

All four of us in the shelter - Pockets, Flower Child and Rod&Reel and I - were up early, so I didn't have to worry about making too much noise packing up. After yesterday, it was a great feeling to not have any specific mileage goal or destination as I hiked down the trail. I leapfrogged with Pockets, Rod&Reel and Bandana Bill (who had tented nearby) all day as each of us had different but similar paces, and stopped for water or food at different times.



Ski Area

I enjoyed the views along the way. In the photo above, the gray arc just below the top of the mountain on the right is not a line of rocks, they are condos! I also stopped to help Bandana Bill with one of his trekking poles that he couldn't get to lock. I got it to lock, but I don't know if he'll ever get it unlocked again! :-)

When I got to the Paul Wolfe Shelter, I met a Sobo section hiker who had just started out from I-64 that morning. He said although it was early, it was supposed to rain later, so he was going to stay there and enjoy the day. He said the rain was supposed to start about 8:00. There was a fairly large mountain stream next to the shelter, so I took a short dip to cool off some. C-c-cooold water!

One of the cool things about hiking in the mountains is seeing signs of folks who lived here many years ago and wondering why they chose these places to settle and what life was like for them. I really can't relate to it very well today.



Wonder Who Lived Here...

Rod&Reel and Bandana Bill were planning to make it to I-64 and go into Waynesboro to resupply. When Linda dropped me off two days ago, I only had food to make it to I-64 where I'd either resupply on my own or have Linda meet me. Yesterday, we decided to wait until Thursday for Linda to meet me and that I'd go on into Shenandoah National Park (SNP) however far I make it, and she'd meet me there in the afternoon.

The AT Guide lists a "King's Kettle Corn" eating establishment being at the I-64 gap, so I figured I could resupply enough there to make it one more day. I didn't pay attention to the fact that it mentioned they had hot dogs, ice cream, sodas and popcorn. I discovered that's ALL they have! So I loaded up on three giant hot dogs and a couple of Gator Aids before heading into the SNP. I still had some food left, although not really enough for a full day tomorrow. Since the next water was at the Calf Mountain Shelter 7.6 miles north and I was feeling good and had plenty of daylight left, that became my goal for the day. I also thought a shelter would be nice since it was supposed to rain tonight, and I could easily get there before 8:00. :-)

I had been to this shelter before when I did a day hike last winter to check out my winter gear, so I was familiar with where it was and the two small mountains before it. As I approached the top of the first mountain, I could hear the thunderstorms to the west. I hoped they would slide by north of me, but as I came down that mountain, a thunderstorm came right over me. Hey, it's not 8:00 yet! Since the gap ahead of me had a large open field, I waited in the woods for the storm to pass before venturing into the open area. Going up the last mountain I got good cell reception, so I called and chatted with Linda a while. There was an open field area at the top with a great view now that the storm had gone through. I knew the shelter was a short distance down the other side, so I stopped for a while and tried

to email Linda an attachment (which didn't work since it was too big). Then it started to get dark so I headed down the other side of the mountain... except the trail kept going up! I wasn't at the top yet! When I finally got to the top and started down the other side it was dark and I had to use my headlamp to get to the shelter.

There were numerous tents about and a group of young folks gathered around the shelter picnic table. They had all arrived before the rain and sat it out in the shelter. Mother Earth was the only one I'd met before, but Sherlock and Hemlock were two of the others. An older guy, Uncle Buck, was also there, so I asked him if they were all his nieces and nephews. :-)) There were only two sleeping bags on the lower level and Uncle Buck was on the upper level, so I decided to sleep in the shelter again. It started to rain, so everyone else dispersed to their tents and I discovered the two sleeping bags already had folks sleeping in them while I was joking around with the group - oops!

More thunderstorms started coming through so I got out my ear plugs and went to sleep! Slightly more miles than yesterday, and I wasn't even trying!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, June 05, 2014

With Linda Again!

Destination: Doyles River Trail/Big Meadows Lodge

Starting Location: Calf Mountain Shelter

Today's Miles: 18.20

Trip Miles: 883.70

All four of us in the shelter were up early, so I got to meet the two occupants of the sleeping bags near me - two very delightful older women! (NOTE: When I say older, I simply mean beyond the twenty-something to mid-thirties group. I'm not a very good judge of age beyond that! :-)) One of them had thru hiked last year with her husband. This summer, she invited her neighbor to go with her for a few weeks section hike.

The AT in SNP runs on or close to the ridge, so water sources are far apart, especially in the southern part before the camp stores and waysides start. Today, there was a stream about a mile from my starting shelter and no more water until the next shelter, Blackrock Hut, 12 miles later. So my focus was on managing my water and limited food resources, which worked out fine. Of course, my focus was also on meeting my sweetie this

afternoon! Other than that the hike was pretty uneventful.

I haven't mentioned the birds much since I'm not good at identifying them. But I enjoy their singing along the trail. Today there was one that sounded like a mezzo-soprano gargling.

I got to our meeting place at Doyles River Trail and Skyline Drive about 3:30 and Linda showed up soon thereafter. She had made me a wonderful sub sandwich which I devoured quickly! We drove to Big Meadows Lodge, about 30 miles north on Skyline Drive, where Linda had made reservations. Our room was in a separate building - basically a two level motel building with the doors on the parking lot side and patios/balconies on the back side. But it's right on the ridge, so our balcony had a majestic view of the mountains to the west!



Sunset from Balcony

After settling in, we had dinner in the lodge and then drove over to the camp store and wayside dining area to check them out since there are several I'll be passing as I work my way through the park. The camp store has a good hiker resupply and the wayside is an informal dining area where one can get basic diner food service.

We then returned to our room in time to sit out on the balcony and enjoy a relaxing time watching a beautiful sunset!

Head Tunes: Some new ones mixed in with old ones - Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man Who Stills the Waters, Good King Wenceslas (?!), California Here I Come, Thy Word is a Lamp unto My Feet, I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



Black Rocks

Friday, June 06, 2014

Bear and Barf

Destination: Hightop Hut

Starting Location: Doyles River Trail/Big Meadows Lodge

Today's Miles: 16.20

Trip Miles: 899.90

After Linda and I had breakfast in the lodge, I packed up my new Hyperlite backpack Linda had brought me. Less room than my Circuit, but I think I'm going to like it for the summer. Then we stopped by the camp store for a couple of things and she drove me back to where she picked me up yesterday. It was hard saying goodbye as she and Sarah will be driving to CA on Sunday - a Great Adventure for them, too!

Since I'm now getting into the more touristy areas of the park, I saw many Sobo hikers today, most of them appearing to be day hikers. A couple of miles into my hike I caught up with two Nobo women - I Believe and her friend! Hadn't seen them since hiking with Sarah a week ago. They were going into the Loft Mtn Campground camp store and wayside, so I didn't see them again today.

As I approached Ivy Creek a few miles later, there was Pockets taking a break! She had taken a short day when we were leap frogging a few days ago and made it up with a long day. She said she had seen four bears yesterday - a Momma and two cubs and a single one. I told her I hadn't seen any on this trip and it was OK if I didn't see any! (Sarah and I saw some in the Shenandoah years ago and I've seen them

numerous times on the trail in GA and out west.) Pockets said she was planning on staying at the Hightop Hut tonight, then hike the three miles to US 33 in the morning where she is getting picked up by friends of her Aunt for the weekend. She also offered me her last tuna packet since she was tired of them. I declined since Linda had brought me several.

I refilled my water and hiked on. As I was approaching a right bend in the trail I saw a large bear about 20 feet to my left, who turned and looked at me. Since I wasn't sure if it was a Momma whose cubs might be just around the bend, I turned around and walked back down the trail while getting out my camera - don't want to get between a Momma and her cubs! I cautiously walked back to get some pictures and the bear slowly wandered over to the trail where it went around the bend, casually munching on leaves and not seeming to care much about me being there. Just then Pockets caught up with me and we took pictures while we

waited for the bear to finally wander away from the trail. I'm guessing it was a male since it was large and there were no cubs around, but what do I know about bears?!

Shenandoah Bear video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ltWZjC8kk>

Pockets and I leap frogged a bit. I decided to shoot for the Hightop Hut for the night also. The shelters (called huts in SNP) are relatively far apart and have the best campsites, plus a water source and a privy. (Not counting the campsites in the park you pay to stay in.) I took my time and enjoyed the views since I wasn't in a hurry. When I got to the shelter, section hikers Gloria and Tom were fixing dinner at the table and Pockets was just finishing setting up her tent. Another guy was in his tent already and I never saw him. Gloria and Tom had already set up their tent, so no one was planning to stay in the shelter. There were still some good tent sites, but I decided to be lazy and sleep in the shelter tonight.

While I fixed dinner - tuna on a tortilla - Gloria and Tom decided to gather wood for a fire. The shelter had an awesome fire pit, so all the nearby wood was already burned. Pretty soon Gloria and Tom came back with a bunch of wood. They had gone up somewhere beyond the privy, and Gloria had a bunch of sticks in her hands and Tom was dragging a long old moldy semi-rotted tree trunk. Tom had broken his log in half by using the fork in a tree, but couldn't break it up any further. I went over to help him, and broke it into smaller sections by grabbing an end and swinging it over my head and down on a large log on the ground. You can see some of my log sections on the edge of the fire pit behind the flame in the close-up photo.

Shortly after finishing my tuna burrito, I commented to Pockets that it didn't sit well in my stomach. It was funny since we had earlier talked about not being fans of the tuna packets. I then had some ramen noodles (without the flavor packet) that I had soaked in cold water, although they didn't sit well either.

We continued to have a good time chatting and were joined by thru hiker Flash, who came in late and set up in the shelter next to me. The fire died down and Pockets, Gloria and Tom returned to their tents. After Flash finished his dinner, we turned in fairly early, too.

When I lay down, I knew it might be a bad night! At 9:00 (or was it 8:00?) I had to get up, go out into the woods and barf up all the ramen noodles.



Ain't He Cute?!



Pockets Taking Picture of the Bear



Gloria and Tom



Close-up of Logs behind the Fire

An hour later, up came the rest of the tuna burrito. An hour later, any residuals. An hour later, dry heaves. An hour later, more dry heaves. Interestingly, it was every hour, within 10 minutes of being on the hour. Must be the school teacher in me! :-)

Boy, was I struggling to consider it pure joy! On the first dry heave, I started praying that He'd end it, then realized that a more appropriate prayer was that He'd get me through it. Which, of course, He did.

At midnight or 1:00, I had to hike up to the privy to empty the other end. Approaching it, the privy odor induced a minor dry heave, but no big deal since there was nothing to come out! I repeated this an hour later, then rested until the morning.

At first I wanted to blame it on food poisoning from the tuna. But as I thought back on the circumstances, I remembered that I was in the middle of eating my burrito when I broke up the log. I vaguely remember that I actually held the half eaten burrito in my mouth while I swung the log, and finished eating it in between swings!

Could have been the norovirus - I think the symptoms are pretty much the same - or it might have been something else. Given the timing and sudden onset, I'd

put a little more probability on it being "food" poisoning from something I "ate" from that log. Whatever it was, I decided that I'd call Linda when I got service in the morning and ask her to come rescue me.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, June 07, 2014

Linda to the Rescue!

Destination: Skyline Drive crossing, mile 902
Starting Location: Hightop Hut
Today's Miles: 2.10
Trip Miles: 902.00

I slept later than usual and Flash was already getting up. I apologized for the noise I had to have been making last night, but he was sympathetic. I tried a few sips of water and it stayed down, so I continued to take some sips as I packed up. I took my phone out of Airplane mode but still had no signal. Soon Pockets, Gloria and Tom came by and I told them about my night. Flash and Pockets left while Gloria and Tom stayed to fix their breakfast. I headed up to the privy and started getting text messages bleeping in my pocket - there was signal up there! So I texted Linda to come get me before heading back down to the shelter to finish packing. Before leaving, I suddenly had the urge to throw up again, but only made it to the edge of the clearing before throwing up the water I had drunk. I apologized to Gloria and Tom for throwing up in their dining room!

I had to hike about 0.7 mile up to the top of the mountain, then another 1.4 miles down to the next road crossing. When I got to the top I had good signal and called Linda. She was already on the road to come get me! I was obviously dehydrated and out of energy and took it slowly. I even had to stop frequently to rest while coming down the mountain! It was a pretty view at the top, though.

Before long Linda drove up. That was really easy to consider pure joy!

I took some sips of water on the way home, and it stayed down for good. Now it's just a matter of resting and recovering my energy.

Update: I recovered in a couple of days, but still went to the doc on Monday in case it was something besides poisoning or norovirus. (My sister made me promise I'd go see the doc!) He put me on drugs in case it was something else, but we'll never know for sure. Linda and Sarah delayed their departure for CA until Tuesday to make sure I recovered OK - I'm a blessed man!

Thanks for all your prayers!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, June 21, 2014

Update

Destination: Home

Starting Location: Home

Today's Miles: 0.00

Trip Miles: 902.00

Although I've been feeling great, I decided to not get back on the trail until next Wednesday, June 25, after Linda returns from CA. I wanted to be by a phone while they were towing a U-Haul across country, plus I wanted to attend AFI Docs Wednesday. I also decided I didn't want to do the trail in short spurts, but to wait until I can keep going uninterrupted.

I'll still be getting off the trail the last half of August for a couple of weeks of family get-together time. I had toyed with the idea of flipping up to Katahdin and hiking south in order to be closer to home when I get off in August, but decided against it for a variety of reasons.

I'm all caught up on my journal. Last week I:

-- Uploaded pictures and a couple of videos from May 21-June 7

-- Entered posts for May 16-24.

-- Updated posts for May 25-June 1 with pictures and video

-- Entered posts for June 2-7.

In the meantime, I've been doing some hiking and kayaking locally. I also had a great time at the opening gala of AFI Docs - the American Film Institute's international documentary film festival. The opening night feature film was "Holbrook/Twain: An American Odyssey" - a documentary our son-in-law made about Hal Holbrook and his Mark Twain shows spanning 60+ years. It's awesome! Check it out on Facebook. Of course, the best part of the evening was seeing Jen and Scott and several of their film industry friends we've known, Scott's folks, and my sister Faith and Laurel.

Thanks for all your prayers!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, June 25, 2014

Back on the Trail!

Destination: Hazeltop Mountain

Starting Location: Skyline Drive crossing, mile 902

Today's Miles: 13.80

Trip Miles: 915.80

Back on the Trail!

Linda dropped me off a little after noon at the same spot where she picked me up two and a half weeks ago. It was hard saying goodbye again, but after some big hugs, she headed off down the road and I headed up into the woods.

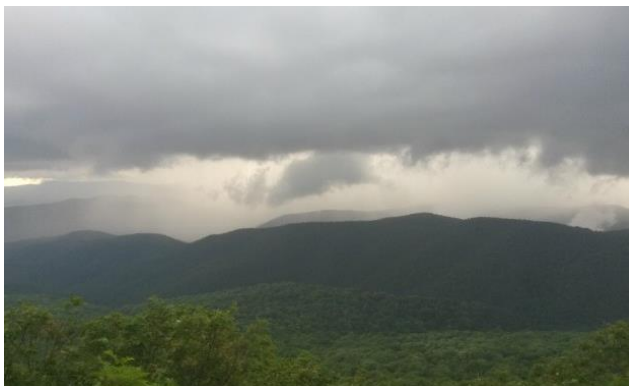
The trail itself was uneventful - mostly smooth path with a few rocky parts and although constantly up and down, not very steep. It was good for breaking in my body parts after being off trail so long!

But I did get to greet lots of people, mostly day or section hikers headed southbound, but a few thru hikers, too. A dad and his middle school aged son out to do just the park, a group of about 8 teenage boys doing 50 miles, and others.

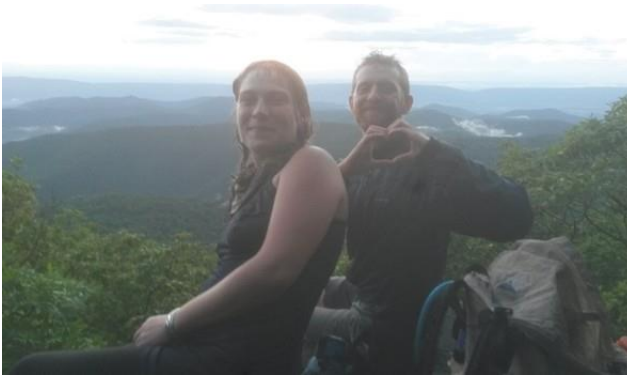
About 4:00, I stopped at a campground camp store for an ice cream bar and a quart of Gator Ade. I sat next to 5 thru hikers avidly discussing the difference between norovirus and food poisoning. Apparently there have been numerous incidences of norovirus on the trail well south of here sometime after I had passed through there. Several of these guys had had something. At any rate, everyone agreed that neither is much fun!

As I was getting ready to leave, I chatted with Glitter Feet and Gary, a nice young couple from Oregon. Glitter Feet, the guy, grew up in Maine, so they were hiking to see his folks. :-)

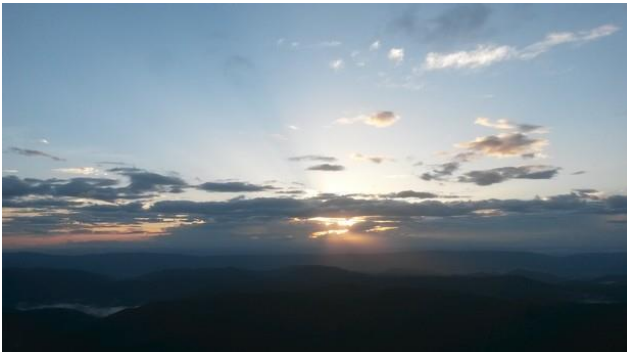
I headed off, not sure how far I'd go. A little while later I started hearing thunder off to the west. I decided that when I reached the top of Hazeltop I'd call Linda if I had a good signal, then start looking for a campsite. I even had data so I could check the weather radar - a series of storms were headed my way.



Storm Moving In



Gary and Sparkle Feet



Sunset

As I hiked on, I couldn't see any good places to pitch my tent at first, then I saw a small trail headed off to the left. A short distance down it passed several good sites, then ended at a rock outcropping with a great view to the west. The storms were coming! I quickly pitched my tent and dove in just as it started to pour.

After an hour or so the rain stopped and I crawled out to eat dinner on the rocks and watch the sun getting low above the distant mountains. A little while later, Gary (she) and Sparkle Feet (he) stopped by and we watched the sunset while they ate dinner. They hiked on to do some night hiking and I turned in - tired but feeling good on my first day back!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, June 26, 2014

World Cup!

Destination: Pass Mountain Hut
Starting Location: Hazeltop Mountain
Today's Miles: 23.30
Trip Miles: 939.10

Soon after going to sleep last night, I woke up to noises nearby and wondered what kind of animal it was. Then I heard voices and realized it was some hikers setting up their tent in the dark. When I left this morning at 6:30, they were still sleeping.

I just had a snack to start my day because I was planning on breakfast at Big Meadow. I passed the trail to the Wayside diner about 7:30 and knew they didn't open until 8, so I pressed on to the lodge, where Linda and I had breakfast three weeks ago. I had the same thing - 3 egg omelet with the fixins. Even had the same waiter. Before I went in the dining room, I stopped in the bathroom and changed into my clean backup shirt! :-)

Now it was off to Skyland for lunch! On the way there I saw my second bear in the park. He was about 15 feet away through the underbrush with his back to me and his paws up on a tree. I think he had just climbed down, because when he saw me he ran away deeper into the woods as I was scooting on down the trail!

As I approached Skyland I discovered the 2 AT Guide pages for today's hike were missing from my pocket. I backtracked a bit, but no sign of them. I went on in to the dining facility knowing I had a pdf copy on my phone. They had a snack counter where I got a premade turkey sandwich, some yogurt and an orange soda. I didn't want to go into the restaurant area. As I was eating I realized there was also a more casual dining area behind me with a bar and TVs. As I was leaving about noon I could hear a soccer match starting on the TV, but I was thinking the US was playing this evening, so I headed on out.



Rocky Trail



Taking a Break to Watch the World Cup

Just as I was leaving the area, a young couple, Tinder and ?, with whom I'd been leapfrogging all morning, arrived and shouted to me. They had found my AT Guide pages! They asked if there was a TV in the restaurant and let me know the U.S. was playing at noon! So I went back and spent a couple of hours watching the U.S. team lose a close match to Germany, but still qualify for the next stage. I also had a soda and a plate of French fries! So Tinder and ? saved me twice!

This morning's section of trail passed to the west of Old Rag Mountain, where Linda, Sarah and I hiked April 4th (see Prehike 4 entry). I hoped to get a picture of it from the AT. However, the trail followed along the west side of the ridge, with several good views into the Shenandoah Valley to the west and no views to the east. I even took some side trails, including up to the top of Stony Man Mountain, to no avail. I had given up getting a picture when several miles north I was going up a set of

switchbacks. At one turn, there was a rock outcropping with a view to the southeast. Old Rag was peeking out from behind the next ridge!

The rest of the day was uneventful. I leapfrogged with Blackbeard, a thru hiker from Florida. At a shelter stop for dinner, he was sitting with Six Slash, who was stopping for the evening. Six Slash's name represents the six brain surgeries he's had in life! I finished eating and hiked on before Blackbeard left.

I was pretty tired and slogging along climbing up the last section of trail to the shelter, when Blackbeard caught up with me and inspired me to pick up the pace. I really appreciate all the young folks who have served as inspirers for me!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Black Beard and Six Slash

Friday, June 27, 2014

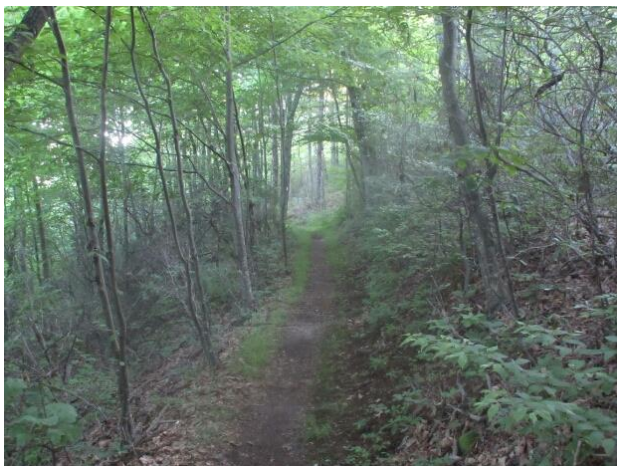
Leaving Shenandoah

Destination: Mountain Home Cabin
Starting Location: Pass Mountain Hut
Today's Miles: 26.70
Trip Miles: 965.80

I pitched my tent with several other tenting hikers nearby while Blackbeard slept in the shelter last night with a few other nice folks. When I left this morning, everyone else was still sleeping except Blackbeard who was fixing his breakfast. I didn't have much to eat since I was planning to get breakfast at the Elkwallow Wayside 7 miles down the trail - my last meal stop in the Shenandoah!



Old Rag from the AT



Easy Trail

I arrived there about 5 minutes before it opened at 9:00. There were several other thru hikers outside, so I chatted with them until the Wayside opened. I got a breakfast tortilla and a bagel with cream cheese! It's tough eating out here in the woods! Blackbeard showed up and he and some others were talking about hiking down Skyline drive rather than the trail in order to get to Front Royal today. The AT crosses back and forth across the Skyline Drive, and from here until it leaves it for good is about two miles longer and goes up and down more. But it's also in the shade and the trail is softer on my feet than the pavement!

I headed down the trail and as I approached the next road crossing I saw two hikers hiking down the road where it crossed the trail in front of me. I waved, and when I got to the road I could see about 6 or 8 other hikers hiking down the road ahead of them! I thought about joining them, but I like the shade and my feet like the dirt path! :-)

As I hiked along I was debating about whether to stop in the Front Royal Hostel about half a mile down a side trail at what would be 22.7 trail miles for me today, or hike a little further to a shelter at 23.6 miles. A shower and bed sounded good, but I really didn't want to hike the extra mile off trail and back in the morning. When I got to the side trail I decided to press on to the shelter. On the way there, I met two guys slackpacking southbound back to the hostel. They mentioned seeing a sign on a bench down by US-522 about a hostel nearby there. My legs were telling me they'd like to stay at the shelter rather than hike the additional three miles today!

When I got to the shelter, no one else was there, so I ate some food while resting and checking out my AT Guide about the hostel. It's an old

brick barn that Scott and Lisa just renovated this past year as a hostel for thru hikers. Scott thru hiked the AT in 2012 and they bought this place last year. After resting, my legs agreed that three more miles downhill was doable, especially with a hot shower waiting, so off we went ("we" being my various body parts).

Sassafras was the only other hiker there along with Lisa. I got a fresh banana and cooked a frozen pizza for dinner and had a good time chatting with Lisa and Sassafras. The barn belongs to an old house that Scott and Lisa plan to spend the next five years renovating into a B&B, keeping the barn as a hiker hostel. They still live primarily in their home in northern Virginia and have day jobs there.

Another good day on the trail hiking and meeting good folks!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, June 28, 2014

Grampa-for-the-day

Destination: Ashby Gap/US-50
Starting Location: Mountain Home Cabin, US 522
Today's Miles: 19.80
Trip Miles: 985.60

Lisa had breakfast ready for Sassafras and me at 6:30 as planned. Bagel w/cream cheese, yogurt with fresh blueberries and an apple I took with me to eat later. Since I wouldn't have wifi for a while, I stayed to finish and post my entry for two days ago. With that and chatting for a while, I didn't get hiking until 8:45!



Nice Trail

This was a section of trail Sarah and I hiked years ago on a one night trip, so it was good to reminisce. I was making good time and thinking about how soon I might get to points further down the trail. Then, as I was approaching a wide stream, I saw a woman who looked familiar sitting on the near side. As I got closer, I saw a familiar man on the other side getting water, and behind him were three older kids. Rene! Damien! It was the Tougas family from Canada!

They are hiking the trail as a family and home schooling on the trail. They had a Kickstarter project to raise funds to film their adventure and make videos which they post online. Linda and I had supported their project and I had exchanged some emails with them before they started their hike.



The Tougas Family

Blackbeard came along then, we all chatted some more, then Blackbeard and I headed off. He had stayed in Front Royal last night. When we got to the top of the hill there was a bench in the sun so Blackbeard stopped to have lunch. The bench was on the edge of a clearing that I remembered from Sarah's and my hike to be an old farm. I pressed on another mile or so to the parking area at I-66, where I found a picnic table in the shade where I stopped for lunch. I had been thinking that I wished I had spent more time with the Tougas family to get to know them better before racing off. I also forgot to get a picture of them.

While I was eating lunch, Blackbeard came by and hiked on. We were both planning on spending the night at a shelter about 23 miles from where we started. Then the Tougas family came by! So I got their picture before they headed off, and I knew I'd catch up with them again. They hike a similar pace that I do, but stop after every hour of hiking for a 10 to 20 minute break.

I caught up with the Tougas family on their next break and then hiked with them for the next hour. We had such a good time chatting that I decided to just hike with them the rest of the day. Our order of hiking varied throughout the day, so I had the opportunity to chat with each of them, including Celine, Laurent and Brienne - all good folks! They were planning to just find a camping spot about 5 miles before the shelter where I had planned to stop, a 17 mile day for them. Since I'm meeting Linda Sunday at Rt 7 at about 1:00, I figured I could camp with them and still meet Linda on time.

As we were approaching their intended stopping mileage, we entered a state park with a sign saying overnight camping was prohibited between there and

US-50, another 2.8 miles away! So they decided to press on to US-50.

When we got there, there were no places to camp! Damien went up to a house with a big side lawn just down the road and asked if we could camp on their lawn. Yes!



Camping with the Tougas Family

I had a great day hiking and being an adopted Grampa-for-the-day. Plus I ended at a great camp site with good cell coverage so I could talk to my Sweetie! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, June 29, 2014

Roller Coaster

Destination: Blackburn AT Center
Starting Location: Ashby Gap/US-50
Today's Miles: 21.50
Trip Miles: 1007.10

I got up early and was gone before anyone else was up. Today I entered a 13 mile section of trail known as the "Roller Coaster." Looking at my AT Guide, I saw the trail just goes up and down about 500 feet at a fairly steep pitch, without much level ground. Not too bad, I thought, the trail's gone steeply up and down a lot before but with a couple thousand feet elevation change.

What I can't tell from the guide is the trail condition. Lots of rocks! It wasn't particularly hard to hike, but it wore me out! I got a break about 10 miles into it when the trail crossed VA-7 and Linda was waiting for me with lunch! A huge turkey sub she had made, blueberries, strawberries, chips... Plus she brought some resupply goodies for me and a new pouch for my shoulder strap I had ordered. She also made me a second big sub sandwich to take with me! She had gone to church this morning and stopped by to see me on her way to NY to see her family in Albany and go to a wedding in Buffalo on Friday. After our picnic lunch, we stopped by the little Pub nearby for some sodas before she headed north. Mike and Natalie (from Alexandria, VA, where I grew up), were there eating lunch with three other thru hikers I'd been leapfrogging with this morning.

I'll get to see Linda again on Saturday when she's driving back home from Buffalo! :-)

My goal for today was the Blackburn AT Center, a nice house with outbuildings that the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club renovated years ago for thru hikers during the season and to rent out the rest of the year. They keep a full-time caretaker there year round. As I was approaching the side trail to it, an older looking guy came racing up from behind. Rowdy was heading for the same place, so we hiked down the side trail together. Carol and her husband Chris are the caretakers and immediately offered us sodas, showed us where we could sleep on the wide wrap around screened in porch or go up to the bunkhouse, then asked if we wanted any spaghetti! Yes! Yes! After a big plate of spaghetti with a side salad, out came the blackberry pie with vanilla ice cream! Want a second piece of pie? Sure! There was no charge for anything, but a box on the wall for donations.

Rowdy and I were the only hikers there, so we had a good time chatting. He's the Academic Dean at a Christian K-12 school in Dayton, Ohio. He's still working there, but was given time off to hike the trail. Pretty cool! Carol and Chris hiked the AT after

graduating from college a couple of years ago and are working on their certificates to teach high school - ESL for her and Earth Science for him. They majored in Anthropology but figured out they didn't want to work in that field. They are certainly great hosts!

As it started to get dark, several more hikers came in and got the leftovers. We all ended up sleeping on the porch, either on the floor or on benches. I highly recommend the Blackburn AT Center as a place to stop for the night. I also highly recommend Linda's sub sandwiches!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, June 30, 2014

That's 4 Down! That's 5 Down!

Destination: Rocky Run Shelter
Starting Location: Blackburn AT Center
Today's Miles: 27.90
Trip Miles: 1035.00

Had to tiptoe around all the bodies sleeping on the porch this morning to get out! As is often the case, everyone else was still asleep when I left.

The trail had calmed down from the Roller Coaster this morning, so I made pretty good time. It follows along the Virginia/West Virginia border then finally turns left and leaves Virginia for good as it heads into Harpers Ferry. There's a border sign when I first entered WV, but there's not one when I last left VA, so I just guessed the spot and videoed myself saying "Well... that's four down!" No one else was around to help me. I didn't see anyone else for the 12 miles into Harpers Ferry - then there were lots of people!

Most thru hikers take the side trip in Harpers Ferry to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to sign in and get their picture taken. I was going to do that, but decided I was too sweaty and scroungy and opted to forgo that side trip in order to get to a toilet downtown and hop in the river further on.

The trail crosses the Potomac River on a sidewalk alongside the railroad bridge. It's popular for the tourists to walk back and forth across the bridge, so when I started across, I got a few of them to help me with "Well... that's five down!"

After crossing the river, the trail follows along the old C&O Canal tow path between the old canal and the Potomac River for about two and a half miles. That was a nice walk with a few other day hikers and several folks on bicycles. Just before heading up into the woods again, I took a short side trail down to the river



Looking Back at Harper's Ferry – That's 5 Down!

and immersed myself in the water to rinse off my sweaty body and clothes, including my shoes and socks! Aaahhhhh! Then I sat under a tree and had lunch before hiking on.

At the turn off from the tow path I met a thru hiker who had come by there last night and missed the turn. He said he continued on for another 5 miles and camped, then continued in the wrong direction for an additional 5 miles this morning before realizing his mistake! He was just getting back to the spot, but was going to stop at a convenience store nearby.

Before getting to the top of the ridge, another thru hiker caught up with me and we hiked on together. Dos Lekis is in his early 40's and his bosses let him take time off from his job to hike the trail. Nice bosses! Very interesting guy who has moved around quite a bit working in the financial world and other areas. He's one of the survivors of the World Trade Center attack on 9/11. He had just got back on the trail after staying in DC for a couple of days.

I was planning to stop at the Crampton Gap shelter for a 22.9 mile day, but Dos Lekis and I were having such a good time chatting and hiking we blew right by it and continued on another five miles to Rocky Run Shelter. Thru hiker brothers Ghost and Baloo were there with Baloo's dog Mogli. Section hiking with them for a few days were Ghost's girlfriend and her sister and mom. I thought that was pretty cool. We all had a great time chatting and eating dinner together. Well, I know I did, and I think they did, too. :-). Pretty soon thru hiker Survivor showed up with his dad who is hiking with him for three days.

The Ghost/Baloo brothers gang headed off to their tents, and since it was a very nice, fairly new, shelter

for 16, I decided to be lazy and sleep in the shelter with the other three guys.

I can tell we're closer to civilization because although the shelter is below the ridge line on all sides, I still had good cell coverage so I got to talk with Linda before going to bed. An interesting day with the first half all alone and the second half talking a lot with folks.

Head Tunes: I haven't mentioned this lately so here are some of the additional tunes that have been running in the background since my last update: Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man Who Stills the Waters, I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover, This is the Day that the Lord Hath Made, Good King Wenceslas (where did That come from?!), I Can Do All Things, California Here I Come (I may have already mentioned that one), a variety of tunes the words of which I don't remember, and some other tunes I can't recall right now.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, July 01, 2014

Lots of Kids Hiking!

Destination: MD-17, Free States Hostel
Starting Location: Rocky Run Shelter
Today's Miles: 15.50
Trip Miles: 1050.50

I was up first, but Survivor's dad was up right after me and Dos Lekis got up shortly after that. So I had breakfast before heading out. Survivor was still sleeping then and Dos Lekis had gone back to sleep!

I was still a bit tired from the long day yesterday. Although the elevation gains were minimal, there were some pretty rocky sections of trail and I was pretty tired by early afternoon. I had planned to do a 22 mile day yesterday, leaving a 20 mile day today to get into the Free State Hostel in time to see the World Cup match today at 4:00. Fortunately, yesterday's longer than planned day left me with only about 15 miles to do today. I arrived at the hostel about 2:15 with plenty of time to see the match.

I met lots of kids hiker groups today. Must be a good week for summer camp. Boy Scouts and other camp groups. Most seemed to be having fun; some looked like backpacking was definitely not their thing!

It was hot and I was constantly soaked with sweat but I drank a lot of water. The trail went through several parks where I could get water, so I only had to filter it



The First Washington Monument

out of streams a few times. When I got to the Washington Monument (not the one in DC), the ranger was just opening it so I got to chat with her a bit and tell her how nice the parks were.

There were two guys southbound and a young couple northbound at the hostel when I arrived, but they were all just picking up mail drops, getting a shower, and moving on. There was no TV, as I suspected, but there is a laptop, so I kept up with the soccer match on it. Seemed like the U.S. put up a good fight against a better team, and we lost in overtime. I made up for it by ordering a large pizza and a grilled chicken sub, delivered from the nearby town. Ate half the pizza tonight, will have the other half for breakfast, and carry the sub with me for lunch tomorrow! :-)

It's been great having a laptop to catch up on my journaling. I had hoped to catch up on my email, too, but it's late and I'm off to bed.

Thanks again to everyone for all your prayers and support!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, July 02, 2014

Well... That's Six Down!

Destination: Rocky Mountain Shelter
Starting Location: MD-17, Free States Hostel
Today's Miles: 24.90
Trip Miles: 1075.40

Finished off the second half of the pizza for breakfast - urp! But it was good fuel for the rocky trail I hiked all morning up and down and along a ridge. The final descent into Pen Mar Park was really rocky and I realized I had two choices: moan and groan about the wear and tear on my legs or look at it as a fun adventure in bouldering/rock hopping. I chose the latter.

The trail goes right through Pen Mar Park on the MD/PA border. I had planned to eat my grilled chicken and cheese sub there for lunch and use the facilities. As I got to the first set of picnic tables - Trail Magic! Two women from a local Methodist Church had homemade deli cuts on hamburger bun sandwiches, big thick brownies, cupcakes, bananas, apples and mineral water. There were a few other hikers there, too. Yum! Thank you Trail Angels! :-)



Trail Angels (in Purple and Orange Tops)

Turned out I was the only other hiker continuing on. One was getting off trail for her knees and then flipping to Katahdin, and the married couple was going into town for resupply. So off I went.

The trail was much nicer in the afternoon. Mid-afternoon I stopped in a shelter to take a break from the heat and start on the sub sandwich before it spoiled. There were three young guys there - Tim, James and Guppy. So I shared the sub with them and we chatted for nearly an hour. They each started separately, but met in the first and second day out of Springer and had been together since. They're enjoying the trail; even have their fishing poles with them.

In the usual trail conversation format, we asked each other where we were from. Tim was from Philly, so I said we just moved from there. What part? West of Philly in Media. I went to Delaware County Community College. Well, you must know about



Tim, Some Old Guy, Guppy and James

Williamson, where I was. Certainly, my brother goes to Williamson!

Tim's brother was a freshman our last year there. It's a three year program, so he's a rising Senior. (We call them freshmen, juniors, and seniors. That way I didn't have to deal with any sophomoric behavior! :-)) Tim texted his brother who then texted Tim back that I was an astronaut, so we spent some time talking about that, too. I had a good time with them.

The guys were spending the night there, so I started to press on. Just then Mountain Momma and her sister Sarah stopped by and took our picture. The three of us then headed off together. Mountain Momma had messed up her back and got off trail for a while. When the doc cleared her to return, Sarah and her husband drove from Kansas to slack pack her for a week just to be sure her back was OK. Pretty cool!

When they got to the next park where Sarah's husband was meeting them, I pressed on. I had been soaking wet from sweat all day and was whupped when I got to the shelter. A few other guys were there, but it was late so we didn't talk much and I set up my tent and crawled in.

Head Tunes: I forgot to mention yesterday that when I left Harpers Ferry and entered Maryland, the state song "Maryland, my Maryland" started playing in my head. Most folks know the tune as "Oh Christmas Tree" and it's also the tune to the Alma Mater of Williamson.

This morning, my last day in Maryland, the tune started playing again. Since I don't know the words to the Maryland song, I used the words to the Williamson Alma Mater. Interesting that I would meet the brother of a Williamson Man later in the day!

As I headed off after enjoying the folks and the trail magic at Pen Mar Park, the Mickey Mouse Club song popped started playing in my head! It started with "So come along and have some fun and join our family, M I C K E Y..." I think the words may be off a little, but it fit the occasion. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, July 03, 2014

Halfway!

Destination: Ironmaster Mansion Hostel

Starting Location: Rocky Mountain Shelter

Today's Miles: 22.50

Trip Miles: 1097.90

Three miles into my hike this morning I reached Caledonia State Park. I remember coming here at least once when I was a kid. My Aunt and Uncle lived in Chambersburg, where my Dad grew up, and we would visit them once or twice a year. The only details I remember about the park are the big swimming pool and that the Appalachian Trail passed through the west side of the park. My folks let me go over to the trail and walk down it a short ways.

When I got to the park I immediately hiked over to the pool. It looked like I remembered it. It was still early so nothing was open. I took some pictures, refilled my water bottles, and hiked on. Fun memories! :-)



Caledonia State Park Pool

My goal for the day was the Ironmaster Mansion Hostel right on the trail in the Pinegrove Furnace State Park. Built in the early 1800's, it was refurbished about three years ago as a hostel and special events venue.

Mid-afternoon I heard thunder and it started to sprinkle lightly. I figured I'd get soaked soon, but the rain stopped for a while. When I got to Toms Run Shelter, it started to rain again, so I sat in the shelter and it poured - good timing! Sarah and I camped in the park a few years ago and day hiked here. There were two small shelters here then, but one of them burned down a year ago. No sign of it now, so the trail maintainers did a good job cleaning up the debris.

A short distance later is a big sign marking the halfway point a few years ago. I had already passed this year's halfway point and there's no marker there so I took a picture of this one. Sarah and I took a picture of it when we were here before.



Former Half-Way Point

Roger and Kathy are the hostel's caretakers, and do a wonderful job making guests feel welcome. Good conversation, too! There's a small store next door where I got a pint of ice cream and some snacks just before they closed. Roger and Kathy had a pizza waiting for me, so I didn't even consider the traditional half gallon challenge (eating a half gallon of ice cream) at the store. Plus there weren't any other hikers around to have fun with it.

MacGyver and a couple of Canadian young men showed up later, so there were just 4 of us in the bunk room. I wonder what it's like when all 16 bunk beds are occupied! The Canadians are on a road trip around the US, starting with Chicago, Kentucky, Nashville and

some other points. Going to Gettysburg tomorrow, then home.

There is a computer I could use so I spent a little time updating my journal. So much easier with a keyboard and big monitor! I slept under an open window and thoroughly enjoyed the cool night air - had to pull the blanket over me! Nice change. Looking forward to cooler temps the next few days!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, July 04, 2014

Happy Independence Day!

Destination: PA-641 Trindle Rd
Starting Location: Ironmaster Mansion Hostel
Today's Miles: 23.70
Trip Miles: 1121.60

Roger and Kathy had breakfast ready for me at 6:30 - two frozen waffles that I put in the toaster and had with cream cheese. Not elegant, but it came with the room. Had some more good conversation, then I made some journal updates and headed out.

The first few miles of the trail Sarah and I had covered on a day hike, using a blue blazed trail to make a loop out of it. I'm slowly connecting all the pieces of the AT I've hiked before. Later, after about 9 miles, I came to a road crossing with the Green Mountain Store about a quarter mile down the road. I didn't need to resupply since I'd be in Boiling Springs later in the day. As I was taking a break by the side of the road, trying to decide whether or not to make the road walk, Ken and his sons Landon and Evan came up to me. They were waiting to meet thru hiker Kolton who was coming behind me. When Kolton came along, they took me with them in their car to the store and bought my sub sandwich and Gator Aides! Nice!

We ate lunch outside the store (I went back in for an ice cream sandwich!) Then Ken drove us back to the trail. Ken and his family are church friends with Kolton's family back near Columbus, Ohio. They drove out so that Landon, a 16 year old rising junior, could hike with Kolton for the long weekend. They were slackpacking from there to north of Boiling Springs and staying at the Hampton Inn in Carlisle. They invited me to slackpack with them!

I accepted! There's no camping along the 14 mile stretch of crossing farmland north of Boiling Springs, so I thought I'd have to camp short of there. This means I'll get further north tomorrow before Linda picks me up.

We had a fun time hiking and chatting. Landon did really well, even on the rocky parts, but said he was whupped at the end of the day. The trail goes right through the middle of Boiling Springs - a cute little town - then heads out between, and sometimes thru, farm fields. We found lots of berry bushes - Kolton called them blackberries, but someone else calls them blackcaps and said they were a type of raspberry. At any rate, some were ripe and we had fun picking and eating them.



Kolton Can't Pass Up Fresh Berries!

Kolton just graduated from college and started at Springer, on May 15 - he's moving! He starts his new job on Sep 2nd, so he's trying to finish in 90 days or so. He slowed down a bit for Landon today, which meant I could keep up, too! He also had to keep stopping to eat berries along the way!

Ken picked us up and took us to the hotel. They were going out to eat and then watch the fireworks. I stayed back and soaked in the hot tub! Aaaaahhhhhh! I couldn't talk on the phone with Linda since she was still having fun at the wedding reception in Buffalo. So here I am in a nice comfy bed after setting out this morning thinking I'd be in my tent on the edge of town. Cool!

Head tunes: This morning it was the chorus from "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)." Linda's picking me up tomorrow on her way home from Buffalo, so that, along with where I am on the trail, make the words seem appropriate: "And I would walk 500 miles, and I would walk 500 more just to be the man who walked a thousand miles to fall down at your door." In this case that's her car door. :-)

This afternoon as I was walking pretty much in step behind Landon, "Surry with the Fringe on Top" popped into my head. Don't know where that came from except it fit well with the pace we were doing.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, July 05, 2014

With My Sweetie!

Destination: Millers Gap Rd
Starting Location: PA-641 Trindle Rd
Today's Miles: 12.10
Trip Miles: 1133.70

I went down to the lobby early and stuffed myself at the hotel breakfast bar. I knew Ken would be a little later since they were out last night. As I headed back up to my room and the elevator doors were closing I heard someone call my name from the lobby. After a nice ride up to the 3rd floor and back down, I discovered it was Mountain Momma! They were using this hotel for this phase of her slack packing.

After a while Ken, Kolton, and Landon came down and I had second breakfasts with them. Then Ken drove us back to where he had picked us up. Thanks, Ken, for your prayers! Landon is going to spend the night on the trail with Kolton and I'll be getting picked up by Linda, so we all had full packs. I hiked twelve miles with them to where Linda was waiting for me and we said our goodbyes and they hiked on. Ken will be picking up Landon tomorrow and heading back to Ohio, and Kolton will resume his high mileage days.



Evan, Kolton, Landon and Ken

Due to our late start, it was now after 3:30 and Linda and I were both tired. My plans were to get a room at the Allenberry Resort back in Boiling Springs, walk around town, have dinner and go to the musical playing at the resort - 42nd Street. Of course, the room and show tickets would be at their thru hiker rate!

When we finally got to the resort, we decided to just get a room, go to dinner and spend the remaining evening talking with each other rather than staying up late watching the show. The thru hiker rate room turned out to not be exactly "resort" quality. I'd have done better to have just kept my room at the Hampton Inn. But we had a very good meal at the local tavern, resupplied at the grocery store, drove around town, and enjoyed each other's company.

Linda had said earlier in my hike that she liked my beard, so I had been waiting to see her again before shaving it off. She agreed with me it was time to get rid of it. It takes a while to shave a beard off with a comb, a pair of tiny scissors and a throw away razor! I did keep my moustache though!

Note: A couple of days later, Hob shared with me his experience at the resort on July 3 and 4. They mistakenly gave him a two day reservation although the building with thru hiker rooms was totally reserved by a family for a reunion on the 4th. So, they put him up in a different building for the 4th, which he said was very nice. He also enjoyed the show.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, July 06, 2014

Through Duncannon

Destination: Tenting, mile 1149.6
Starting Location: Millers Gap Rd
Today's Miles: 15.90
Trip Miles: 1149.60

Linda and I drove around a bit looking for a place to get breakfast on a Sunday morning on 4th of July weekend. Giving up we stopped at a Sheetz where I got some breakfast burritos. Then enroute to the trail, we passed a diner!

Linda dropped me off at the trail and I had one ridge to hike up, along and down to get into Duncannon. The AT Guide had a note about how rocky it would be. With those expectations, I found it to be not too bad. Lots of day hikers out. A dad and his young son were hiking southbound and gave me a Tasty Cake when they found out I was a thru hiker. Good to be in PA! On



Duncannon

the way down into Duncannon, I came up on Mountain Momma and Sarah taking a break. This was her last section of slack packing. I hiked with them into town where we met Sarah's husband Jeff who hiked with us to their car.

A bridge was out so the trail had a little detour on the edge of town before we got to their car. I said goodbye and hiked on through town. I had wanted to stop in and check out the Doyle - a hiker-famous old run down hotel - but soon realized I had already passed it on our detour. I hiked to the other side of town and made a little side trip to the Pilot truck stop where I got some resupply and a big Subway sandwich - half for now and half for dinner later. I sat there in air conditioned comfort for an hour or so updating my journal.

Approaching the top of the next ridge, I came up to Naturally Hob! We last saw each other in the Smokies! We hiked on together for a while and found a good place to pitch our tents. The trail had its rocky ups and downs today, but the only hard part was saying goodbye to my sweetie again!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, July 07, 2014

Hiking All Day with Hob

Destination: Campsite, Mile 1172.1
Starting Location: Tenting, mile 1149.6
Today's Miles: 22.50
Trip Miles: 1172.10

Today I decided to hike with Hob all day. He hikes a little slower than I, but my feet were enjoying the slower pace over the rocks and I was enjoying the conversation. He also likes to get up early and hike all day.

Tuesday, July 08, 2014

Along the Ridge

Destination: Hertline Campsite
Starting Location: Campsite, Mile 1172.1
Today's Miles: 23.10
Trip Miles: 1195.20

Shortly after starting out, Hob and I passed a sign saying this was an old coal mining town and railroad train repair facility. That explains the odd looking terrain!

After 6 miles, we passed the road leading to Lickdale and Hob had already planned to hitch into town to eat. He's got his miles planned between here and Delaware Water Gap, and after yesterday, he's ahead of schedule. We said goodbye and I hiked on. Hope I see him and his wife Deb later.

I leapfrogged some more with both Marathon and Sloth. I also met Magic Hat at a shelter where we had stopped for a break. I was also leapfrogging with a



Naturally Hob and Happy Hiker

Hob and his wife are retired school teachers and love to hike and bike. They hiked the AT 24 years ago and have hiked and biked thousands of miles along many trails around the world. Fun to hear about their adventures! Deb will be joining Hob at Dalaware Water Gap and finish the trail with him.

Hob told me that Tim had hiked quite a ways since I last saw him, but gotten off the trail, I think for some medical issue. Sorry I didn't get to see him, too!

About lunch time we came to a road crossing. Trail Magic! Webclearer (or something like that) and Linda each had tables set up. They normally do separate days of the week, but were both here today! I got deviled eggs, canned peaches, salami sandwich, Tasty Cake, Gator Ade and even some black jelly bellies. Yum! Thank you trail angels!!!

In the afternoon we leapfrogged with both Marathon and Sloth, two hikers Hob already knew. We chatted a bit with them during a break about some religious cult they had met in Harpers Ferry. Lots of red flags for me, but they seemed to be wary also and asking good questions.

As we started looking for a campsite, we entered an area that felt strangely odd. The terrain around us, although forested, just didn't seem natural. We then passed a spring that had orange water - not gonna drink that! Opposite the side trail to a shelter we found a nice campsite next to a stream where we pitched our tents for the night.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Hob Crossing Stream



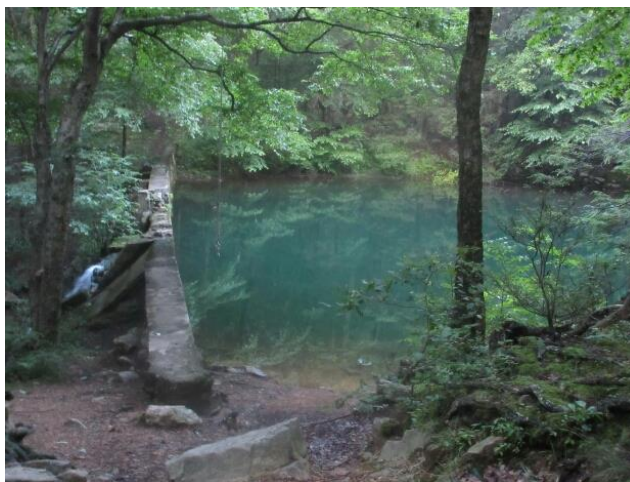
Yum!



Watch Your Step!

couple of women whose names I initially didn't get. When I passed them again a little before the 501 shelter, I realized they were the pair Hob had been talking highly about - Hobo Nobo and Caddy Shack. They were planning to stay at the 501 shelter. I told them how much Hob had praised them and that he was planning to spend the night there, too. I stopped in to check it out - fully enclosed with bunk beds and a caretaker next door!

I hiked on with the Hertline campsite my destination. The trail was especially rough those six miles and my feet were happy to finally get there. I ended up camping with Magic Hat down a side trail at a site with a picnic table next to a pond. While setting up my tent, I heard Magic Hat holler as he swung from a rope into the pond. He didn't stay in long. I went in after



C-c-c-cold Swimmin' Hole

setting up, but eased myself into the water - it was c-c-c-cold! But it felt great, especially for my feet! :-)

I had dinner and crawled into my tent just before a thunderstorm came through. Good timing!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, July 09, 2014

Port Clinton

Destination: Port Clinton
Starting Location: Hertline Campsite
Today's Miles: 18.50
Trip Miles: 1213.70

Magic Hat hadn't stirred when I left a little after 6:00. I didn't see any one on the trail until I stopped for water 9 miles later. Thru hikers Why Wait and Rob Stable were just finishing getting water. An older couple from the Sacramento, CA area.



Oh, My Aching Feet!

The rocks were pretty rough today. The picture above doesn't fully convey the sharp edges and points we have to walk on. The best way I've thought of to describe them is imagine a lot of books of all different sizes from paperbacks to big dictionaries. Now make them out of rock. Bury them about half way to two thirds into the ground with a corner pointing up. You might want to sharpen the edges, too! There are sometimes fields of large boulders. Those are fun to hop across, but tiring.

I don't think I mentioned the cool experiences I've had with butterflies along the trail, mostly in the early days hiking through NC. Several times I'd be hiking along by myself, getting tired and slowing down, when a butterfly would appear in the middle of the trail about four or five feet in



Little Friend

front of me and three or four feet off the ground. It would then fly down the trail ahead of me for several feet, then stop and fly back toward me a short distance. Then it would fly down the trail ahead and back again, repeating this several times before flying off – sometimes replaced by another butterfly doing the same thing. It was as if it were encouraging me to keep going down the trail. “C’mon Guy, you can do it! C’mon!” I decided it was the Holy Spirit encouraging me!

About noon I was getting tired so I stopped for a lunch break amid a pile of rocks where the trail was going uphill. A butterfly joined me; I suppose to perk me up. It fluttered around me quite close and landed on my pack shoulder strap right next to me. It would flutter around some more and land back on my pack. When I stood up and put my pack on to hike on up the trail, it landed on my shoe until I started walking. Pretty cool!

When I got to the top of the ridge, Why Wait and Rob Steady were sitting under a tree having a lunch break. We chatted a bit more before I moved on. Seem like good folks!

I headed on down to Port Clinton and checked into the hotel. Just a few rooms over the restaurant/bar. I got a shower, did laundry, got some trail mix at the candy store (not a very good resupply!) And then went to the bar for a Philly cheese steak and a Pepsi. Not a

particularly good cheese steak, but large and filling - and that's what counts for a thru hiker! :-)

Also chatted at the bar with a section hiker from Chambersburg PA, where my Dad grew up. Nice guy, as I reckon everyone from Chambersburg is. :-) There was a German thru hiker there, too, who just discovered Germany beat Brazil yesterday - he was happy!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, July 10, 2014

Pulpit Rock and the Pinnacle

Destination: Allentown Shelter

Starting Location: Port Clinton

Today's Miles: 22.20

Trip Miles: 1235.90

Today was a tough day for my feet! Rocks! Rocks! Rocks! I started hiking at 6:00 and stopped a little after 5. I had wanted to go a little further but my feet had had enough. So I'm snug in my tent at 6:30 and my feet are happy now! Way earlier than I usually settle down. Several other folks here, including Magic Hat.

Five miles into the hike I passed Reservoir Road. This is where Linda, Sarah and I parked and day hiked up to Pulpit Rock a few years ago. Later, Linda and I did a loop hike to the Pinnacle. The AT goes east from Reservoir Rd to Pulpit Rock and the Pinnacle then heads back west passing just 1.5 miles north of here. There's a blue blazed trail connecting here with there. I suspect some thru hikers just take the blue blazed trail and cut off about 5 miles, but they miss Pulpit Rock, the Pinnacle, and 5 miles of the AT!



Misty Morning in the Woods



The CRU Crew!



The Pinnacle (middle of photo) from Pulpit Rock

Approaching the Pinnacle, I met a group of 5 college students hiking back down. Smiling, joyful faces and personalities. They're from WI and MN and are on a summer project for Campus Crusade for Christ. They hiked up very early this morning and watched the sunrise from Pulpit Rock. Good folk!



Hawk Flying at the Pinnacle



***Huge Cairn at the Pinnacle
(Note hiking poles in front.)***

This afternoon a southbounder stopped and recognized me but couldn't remember my name nor I his. Brian attends the same church where Linda and I worshipped when we lived in PA. He's on a short section hike with his son Jake. He had heard from someone at church that I was out hiking the AT.

Lots of butterflies flying around me today. Made up for the rocks!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, July 11, 2014

More Rock Hopping

Destination: Campsite, Mile 1263.4

Starting Location: Allentown Shelter

Today's Miles: 27.50

Trip Miles: 1263.40

It's hard to believe all I did today was just today! Shortly after leaving the shelter, the trail followed an old dirt/gravel road for about 6 miles and I made excellent time. Then it came to huge boulder fields and I slowed way down! For a while it followed along about 20 yards below the ridge, which I could see was all big rocks. Then the trail went up along the ridge! They call it the Knife Edge. It was fun, but there were a few spots where I thought it was a bit precarious for someone with a big pack on their back. Fortunately, I have a smaller pack! :-)

The rest of the morning and early afternoon was a mixture of pointy rock trail and boulder fields with a few short sections of comparatively easier trail. After 17 miles I loaded up on water at the shelter before descending into the Lehigh River gap and climbing up to the ridge south of Palmerton. Palmerton was a big zinc processing



Trail Along Rocky Ridge

town years ago and the side of the ridge facing town was devoid of any life. They've worked hard in recent years to reforest it, but there are no good water sources for many miles.

The climb up the ridge was grueling in the hot sun. I had to use my hands to climb up the rocks in places and took several rest stops.



Climbing out of Lehigh Valley (The AT crosses the bridge.)

Once I finally got to the top, what a difference! For a couple of miles it was the most enjoyable section of trail so far. They've done a great job bringing this section back to life! The trail is soft and grassy with lots of wildflowers blooming along the sides. The view on the left is open, looking north across the valley. There was even a small thunderstorm on the south side of the ridge providing shade from the sun and a cool breeze, but no rain on me except an occasional drop or two.



Nice Trail above Palmerton

Then the trail turned back up to the ridge and it was more rocks which continued for the rest of the day. I camped at a campsite which the guide said had an unreliable spring 0.4 miles down a steep trail. Someone had put a note on the side trail sign that it was dry. I have enough water to make it to the next source tomorrow, although I'll be a little dehydrated. Several other hikers came in and set up their tents, including Cat, an older guy who borrowed my lighter to start his stove. One of the younger guys went down to check out the spring - yep, still dry.

Hard to believe I hiked so far today in such conditions. I must be getting into shape! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, July 12, 2014

Last Day in PA

Destination: Delaware Water Gap
Starting Location: Campsite, Mile 1263.4

Today's Miles: 26.20

Trip Miles: 1289.60

A fairly uneventful day hiking into the Delaware Water Gap. The trail was rocky as usual, but had some milder sections and a very nice section along an old dirt road, so I made good time - left at 5:30 and got here at 5:30.

I came across Frankenstein when he was taking a break. He recognized me from back in NC at the shelter where Mokapot had "inspired" me to pick up the pace

and make it there. He told me Mokapot was off trail, having injured himself at the Pinnacle. He apparently decided to do some free climbing on the cliff about 8:30 one evening and fell off. It was 2:30 am when the rescuers finally got him air lifted out. Concussion, 6 broken ribs, 3 fractured vertebrae, lacerated spleen - lucky he wasn't killed. Was in the hospital for three days, but is now recovering.

Lots of Rhodies in full bloom coming down off the ridge. They're white up north rather than the soft purple color down south.

I'm staying at the Church of the Mountain Hostel - an old church building that a local church has set up for thru hikers. Lots of folks here, so I'm in my tent out back on the grass lawn. Rod&Reel is here and Frankenstein came in after me. Rod&Reel should be way ahead of me now, but some leg/knee problems slowed him down.

I hiked down to the outfitters but they were closed so I continued on to a bakery which also serves meals. The chicken pot pie and ice cream sundae on a big warm brownie were delicious! :-)

Got a nice shower and rinsed my hiking clothes. Spending some time working on my journal before I go to sleep. I'll continue to work on it some more in the morning before the bakery opens for breakfast at 8:00! Then on to New Jersey!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, July 13, 2014

Well... That's Seven Down!

Destination: Campsite, Mile 1306.2
Starting Location: Delaware Water Gap
Today's Miles: 16.60
Trip Miles: 1306.20

Well... that's seven down!!

I woke up really early so I worked on my journals until I got caught up. I still need to post pictures from the last few days. Then I hiked back down the hill to get a small resupply for the next section. Mostly snacks since I'll have several deli opportunities! Then I stopped by the bakery for a couple of egg and cheese on big rolls and a blueberry tart. Yum! Medic was there so I chatted with him a bit. I had heard of him but hadn't met him yet.

When I got back to the church, worshippers were



Crossing the Delaware River

starting to arrive for the 10:00 service. I wasn't sure if they used this building for services, but now I figured out they do. They just have the bottom level set up for hikers.

I packed up and hit the trail just before 10:00. The trail crosses over the Delaware River on a sidewalk area on the side of the interstate bridge, separated from the traffic by a low concrete wall (to answer my brother's question). It says for pedestrians only and bikers must walk their bikes across. (My brother's a biker.)

There are nice parking areas on the Jersey side with several trails leading out of them. I picked the one with the white blazes. :-)

The trail continued to be rocky, but often it was on wider trails following old road beds, giving one more options on where to place your feet. In thinking about



Frankenstein at the Mohican Outdoor Center

how to describe it, I thought of rough and rocky road, which led to a new head tune.

Lots of day hikers, especially closer to the trail heads. I stopped to talk with many of them. Some knew about thru hiking and some were amazed by the idea. I had fun. I also met trail runner "Grasshopper" who thru hiked a couple of years ago.

After 10 miles I hiked a little off trail to the Mohican Outdoor Center where I got a nice sandwich and a Gator Ade and a Sprite. While I was eating at the picnic table outside, Frankenstein walked up and joined me. I left ahead of him a little later.

Climbing up to the top of the next hill, I met day hikers Mitch and Paula. They were coming back from a section of trail with lots of Rhododendrons in full bloom. Mitch explained that the white ones I've been seeing lately are a different species than the purple ones I saw further south, and that they bloom later. When I got to the bottom of the hill the trail joined an old dirt

road with the Rhodies in full bloom on both sides of the road. Very pretty!

At 5:50 I came to a lookout spot along a ridge looking down into the valley to the east. I stopped and heard bugle music. It was Retreat followed by To the Colors, which are played when lowering the flag at the end of the day. It was neat to unexpectedly stand at attention and render respect to our flag while out in the "wilderness"! Turns out there is a boy scout camp right below where I was.

I was aiming for a campsite listed at mile 1306.3 in the guide, but came to a nice empty one a tenth of a mile earlier according to my AT app. Frankenstein caught up just then and waited there while I hiked another tenth of a mile to check it out. There was indeed another campsite there but it had a large group of what I suspected were overnight campers. So I went back and Frankenstein and I camped at the first one, which we had to ourselves.

After I had dinner and settled in my tent, a storm came through, but I was snug in my tent and slept well.

Head Tunes: Blessed Be the Name by Matt Redmon has been running through my head a lot in the past few days. Seems very fitting and inspiring. The rough and rocky road I mentioned above injected the song A Beautiful Place by Wayne Watson into my head, which was fun to sing as I hiked along it. When I started climbing up the hill leaving the Mohican Outdoor Center, the Air Force Song started playing in my head - off we go into the wild blue yonder... Quite interesting that just a little later I'd hear the bugle calls!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, July 14, 2014

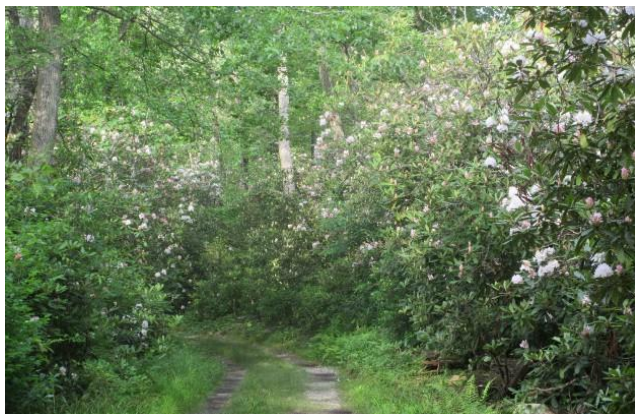
Wet All Day

Destination: Mashipacong Shelter
Starting Location: Campsite, Mile 1306.2
Today's Miles: 20.60
Trip Miles: 1326.80

All the vegetation was still wet from last night's rain, so it wasn't long before my feet were soaked from the grass and low bushes. The bushes along parts of the trail hung out into the trail, so my shorts and shirt sleeves were also soaked. Although it was cloudy all day, the humidity was high, so the rest of me was soon soaked with sweat, too. Of course, when the sun's out and the



Rhodie Fans Mitch and Paula



Rhodies Galore!!



Newt (Called an Eft at This Stage)

vegetation is dry, I'm soon soaked with sweat anyway!
:-)

At Culver Gap there's a little deli called Joe's To Go. It's had a reputation for a gruff proprietor but there's a rumor he sold it. Anyway, the guy was nice to me and made two huge turkey subs for me - one for now and one for later! I also had a pint of chocolate milk and a pint of V-8 juice. He's got a nice bench around on the side of the store and signs for hikers to set their packs and their rears there.

Sunrise Mountain has a large pavilion on top built with stones. Pretty cool! Just a few yards on my way down I met a family of day hikers on their way up. The four kids were from Iowa visiting the adults - aunt and uncle perhaps. None had heard of the AT, so we had fun chatting. Very enthusiastic group! As I hiked on, I discovered there was a parking lot just a short distance beyond, so they weren't "hiking" very far. I could now better understand their

amazement that this access trail to the pavilion from the parking lot went all the way to Georgia and Maine.

Later in the afternoon it started raining, then a storm came through as I came to Mashipacong shelter so I stopped in to get out of the rain. A young couple was there waiting out the rain, so we chatted a while then she took a nap while he worked on his paper journal. I ate my other sub while waiting for the rain to stop! I had cell signal and checked the weather radar - it looked like another line of storms was headed our way, so I decided to call it a day.

When the rain stopped I set up my tent and crawled in before the next line of storms came through. My intent was to work on my journal some, but ended up taking a nap. When I awoke from my nap, I went back to sleep for the night!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."



Day Hikers Going to the Pavilion



Stone Pavilion on Sunrise Mountain

Tuesday, July 15, 2014

Vernon, NY

Destination: CR-517, Vernon NY
Starting Location: Mashipacong Shelter
Today's Miles: 23.80
Trip Miles: 1350.60

When I got up, I saw that the couple had hiked on yesterday after I got in my tent. Just one guy had spent the night in the shelter, Fire, I think, and he was up so I had breakfast at the picnic table there before hiking out.

After five plus miles I came to the High Point State Park HQ building and stopped to use the

bathroom (flush toilets are simply amazing!) and refill my water bottles. A young woman hiker stopped by and we recognized each other but couldn't remember names. She was Nora V, whom I had met back on May 24 when AZ Cruiser and I stopped by the shelter for lunch and a group of hikers were celebrating her birthday. I've met lots of joyful hikers on the trail, but she probably radiates it the most!

We hiked on together and had similar paces (the young folks keep me from slowing down too much on the uphill), and ended up hiking together the rest of the day. She's just out of college, having finished a semester early in December. Her dad worked for an international company and she grew up in Austria until high school. Her family then moved to Charlotte, NC. Sounds like she's got a really neat family!

A little after noon we hiked the 0.4 miles off trail into Unionville, NY for lunch at a deli/grocery store. I had another sub sandwich and a pint of ice cream! I also got an extra sub to save for dinner. :-) There were several other young hikers there whom Nora V knew but I just met - Moses, Slayer, Bobcat and Not Yet. Bobcat had a couple of slices of pizza left over from the pizza place next door, so I ate one of those, too!

Nora V and I hiked on ahead of this group, but were soon joined by Simple, who hiked with us for a while. He's on the older side of the young hikers I've met and lives in Atlanta. An entrepreneurial type person, he does some work in the film/TV world, so we chatted about that some. We all planned to go into Vernon NJ that evening and stay at a church which opens up its basement as a hiker hostel.

The AT crosses two roads that go into Vernon, 517 and 94. 94 is a little over 2 miles further down the trail, but is a direct hitch into town with more traffic, so that was our goal. My feet were really bothering me from being wet and I started thinking about stopping and just tenting for the night. Just after Nora V and I crossed 517, southbound day hiker Bill and his dog stopped to chat with us. They were headed back to his car at 517. He seemed really nice and mentioned having given rides to hikers going from the church hostel to the trail that morning. After he headed on, Nora V and I looked at each other and realized he would probably give us a ride into town if we asked. So she ran back to ask him while I walked - my feet were getting some good sore spots. Bill gladly gave us a ride right to the church!

We met a couple of really nice women at the door who were decorating for Vacation Bible School coming up soon. They told us we were at the wrong church, but directed us to the right

church across the lot. They also invited us to the town pot luck dinner tomorrow night! When we got to the correct church, there was an AA meeting going on downstairs and nobody else around so we waited outside until it was over. Simple soon joined us - he wasn't with us when we met Bill and he had hiked on to 94 and hitched in. When we finally went downstairs, we discovered there was an alternate entrance around back we had missed, and several other hikers were already there.

I got a nice shower and did laundry, sharing a load with Simple. My feet were now happy! I also set my shoes in front of a dehumidifier so they dried out, too! Some more hikers came in later, with at least 10 or more of us spread around on the floor. They were all new to me, although Simple and Nora V knew most of them.

A nice dry night with clean clothes! Aaahhh, the simple pleasures of life!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, July 16, 2014

Short Miles Having Fun with the Gang

Destination: Warwick Turnpike
Starting Location: CR-517, Vernon NY
Today's Miles: 7.80
Trip Miles: 1358.40

The forecast for this morning was 50% rain showers tapering off by noon. Since my feet took a beating yesterday being wet and since I now had dry socks and shoes to go with my now dry feet, I decided to sleep late and not leave until the skies cleared and the grass and bushes along the trail had had time to dry.



The Gang – Moses, Slayer, Not Yet, Bobcat and Nora V

I taped up the sore spots on my feet, and then several of us went to a breakfast place nearby. It didn't rain at all this morning and the sun was out midmorning. About six of us set out to hitch a ride back to the trail, but everyone but Nora V and I were going back to the road crossing further down the trail. They got a ride in less than a minute. The road we were hitching on had less traffic and nobody was stopping for us. Nora V started putting her thumb out to cars going in the opposite direction and someone pulled over! The woman had her laundry in the front seat and her big dog in the back but we squeezed in with the dog. She turned around and took us to the trail, then turned back around and continued on to wherever she was going. Very nice! :-)

Within a mile we came upon Moses, Slayer, Bobcat and Not Yet taking a break. Nora V and I joined them hiking. They had plans for a short day and going into Warwick to the drive-in movie. As a result, they were in no hurry. Although they hiked fast (huff and puff, pant pant pant for me), they take frequent and long breaks, enjoying the conversation. I decided this was good for me and stayed with them. Nora V and I both decided to join them in Warwick, although this will mean more miles for her tomorrow and Friday to make her planned meeting with "the cookie lady" at the monastery on Friday. I'll just be looking for a good spot for Linda to pick me up and take me to Albany for a family event on Saturday.

This was a fun group to be with! Moses and Slayer are a young couple from Ohio (lots of folks from Ohio on the trail), Bobcat is a young man from Israel, and Not Yet is a young woman from Asheville NC who is section hiking from NJ to Maine. She just joined the group a few days ago. At one of our stops we were taking group photos when a dayhiker came by and took shots of all of us. Just as he finished, two other day



The Gang with a Couple of Day Hikers



Not Yet Teaching Me How to Groom a Horse

hikers came by and we had one of them take photos of us including the both the other day hikers. We could see this escalating, but no more hikers came by. At our lunch stop we also had rock throwing and knife throwing competitions.

When we got to the Warwick Turnpike, Not Yet called Dorothy, who runs the Meadowlark Farm B&B where we can tent for 15 bucks. She also came to get us. Turns out the B&B is outside town and far from the drive-in. So we ended up just eating our hiker food and chilling out in a little cabin where we're tenting. Dorothy had a horse in the barn next to where we were camping, and Not Yet volunteered to groom him. I took advantage of the opportunity to learn something new to me.

It's been a very different day on the trail but a good day! And only a day and a half 'til I see my sweetie again!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, July 17, 2014

Well... That's Eight Down

Destination: Tenting, Mile 1376.2
Starting Location: Warwick Turnpike
Today's Miles: 17.80
Trip Miles: 1376.20

Dorothy had breakfast scheduled for us at 7:00 -



Moses Leading the Gang through the Wilderness



A Little Help from a Ladder



Ripe Wild Blueberries!



Bobcat and I Each Got a Handful!

eggs, fruit and muffins - and we sat out on the patio together to eat it. Yum! Then she took us back to the trail in two loads for a relatively late start to hiking.

We've been following along the NY/NJ border, passing in and out of each state. Three and a half miles into the hike we came to the last spot we'd be in NJ. Usually, I hold the camera and video my crossing the state line saying "Well... that's one [two, three...] down!" If there are other people around, I get them to join in on saying the words. This time someone else held the camera and videoed me and the others crossing the border. One of these days, probably when I'm finished, I'll post the videos.

After about 9 miles we came to Rt 17A, perfect timing for some lunch. Just up the road a short hike was a hot dog stand where I got the special - two dogs with sauerkraut and mustard, a root beer, and chips that I gave to the others. Then we hiked just a little further to the Creamery! Great banana splits! I can't remember the three types of ice cream I had on it nor all the toppings, but it was good! :-)

Moses and Slayer hitched into the town of Glenwood Lake to pick up a package at the post office. Bobcat went with them for resupply. Nora V, Not Yet and I hiked on. The plan was for Not Yet to go to the next shelter two miles down the trail and wait for the others, while Nora V and I hiked on so she could meet her friends further down the trail tomorrow.

We left Not Yet at the shelter and hiked on. A mile and a half later we came to Lakes Rd which also goes to



Banana Split – Yum!

Glenwood Lake. Moses, Slayer and Bobcat were there! They had hitched a ride out of town and were dropped off on the wrong road! Just then the guy who gave them a ride came back to ask if it were the right place. Since Not Yet was waiting for them at the shelter, they had to go back and get her. So the driver took Moses and Bobcat with him back to Rt 17A, and Slayer decided to hike on with Nora V and me.

About 6:45 we started looking for a place to camp. We passed Preacher Man and his wife Naptime all set up for the night and fixing dinner. He didn't give details, but I think he is a real preacher. They are on some sort of a two year ministry hiking along the trails of our country. Wish I had had more time to chat with them, but we needed to find a camp site, too.

A little further down the trail we found a nice grassy area among the trees where we could set up our tents. Slayer gathered some large stones



***Tent Site w/Nora V and Slayer
(The bear was up the hill to the right.)***

and made a fire ring and we all gathered wood and started a campfire. While we were sitting around the fire just before it got dark, Nora V spotted a bear walking along the ridge about 40 yards to our west. His shape was silhouetted against the fading sunset. We all made noises and he wandered off down the other side of the ridge. I hung our bear bags nice and high tonight!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, July 18, 2014

Fallen Rock Zone!

Destination: Bear Mountain Bridge
Starting Location: Tenting, Mile 1376.2
Today's Miles: 23.50
Trip Miles: 1399.70



***Crossing the NY Thruway
(Note the yellow sign across the road.)***

Since Nora V wanted to get to the Ft Montgomery post office before it closed at 5:00, and I wanted to get there before Linda would come to pick me up, we started hiking at 6:25 and kept up a good pace all day. Slayer woke up to say goodbye, but went back to sleep.

Nora V can set a mean pace! It was good for me to be pushed. I'd usually fall behind a little bit on the uphill and then catch up when it leveled out. She didn't say anything, but I suspect she slowed down a bit at the top until I caught up! :-)

About four miles later we crossed over the New York Thruway on a road that Linda and I have driven under many, many times over the years on our way to/from Albany to visit her family.

When I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy, it was all male and we had a term for a cadet who was free from all female entanglements - a Rock. I was a Rock and proud of it! Then I met Linda the beginning of my senior year. That Christmas, I drove up to Albany from Virginia to meet her



Bear Mountain Coming Up!

astronaut. I told him he was only the second person to ask me that and Nora V was the first, two months ago! Nora V set a blistering pace up the mountain and we all struggled to keep up. I was just about to cry uncle and drop back when my phone rang - Linda saved the day!

I got to stop to coordinate where we'd meet. They all waited for me and we continued up the mountain and down the other side.

Just before getting to the bridge going over the Hudson, the trail goes through a small zoo. Linda arrived just after we entered, so I hustled on through to coordinate our meeting place while the others enjoyed the zoo.

With all the traffic, there wasn't a good spot for Linda to pick us up, so I finally had her park in an "Official Vehicles Only" side road by the bridge toll booths. The other hikers joined us,



Fallen Rock Zone!



Linda, Sarah and I Hiked Here a Few Years Ago

family. That yellow sign is what greeted me when I got onto the New York Thruway!

Linda, Sarah and I once stopped here and hiked a mile or so up the AT before getting back into the car and driving on. The hike from here to Bear Mountain through Harriman State Park is gorgeous - open spaces under the trees without much undergrowth interspersed with fun rock climbs. We passed the trail that goes south all the way to the George Washington Bridge into NYC, and I noticed on the sign that it also goes north past Altamont, NY, where Linda's brother used to live. Maybe someday Linda and I will hike from NYC to see her family in Albany!

When we got to the road before Bear Mountain, we met up with three guys Nora V knew - Achilles, Muffin Man and True Story. When I introduced myself, Achilles asked if I was the



Nora V, Muffin Man, True Story and Achilles at the Top of Bear Mountain



Walt Whitman in the Zoo

including Simple. Linda had bananas and treats for everyone. I was figuring out how to get everyone and their packs into Linda's car to take them to the post office when another car pulled up. Stan is a photographer who is trying to do a photo book of thru hikers and wanted to take pictures of whoever was willing at his studio. So he took four to the post office and his studio, the others hiked on, and Linda and I headed on up to Albany for the family event tomorrow.

Linda will drop me back on the trail Sunday, and I'll resume my journal then.

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, July 20, 2014

Across the Hudson



Crossing the Hudson

Destination: Tenting, Mile 1412.0
 Starting Location: Bear Mountain Bridge
 Today's Miles: 12.30
 Trip Miles: 1412.00

We had a great time with family and friends in Albany yesterday. I ate and ate and ate! This morning, Linda drove me back to the trail on her way back to VA, stopping by Stan's on the way to have our pictures taken. Stan's hoping to do a photo book of thru hikers this year or next.

When we got to Stan's, Magic Hat and Medic were there getting their pictures taken. Stan feeds the hikers chili to thank them for helping, but I passed due to the large breakfast I had eaten. We learned that Nora V, Achilles, Muffin Man and True Story ended up spending Friday night at Stan's, entertaining him and his wife with their stories and pictures.

Linda dropped me off at the trail a little before one and drove off and I started hiking over the Hudson River. After five miles I came to the Appalachian Market at Rt 9. I got a turkey sub, Dove ice cream bar and grape soda. Yum! I'm eating well! Or at least mass quantities. :-)

I ate my late lunch with Chop Sticks at the picnic tables outside the market. He had hiked over Bear Mountain that morning. We met Toes and ?, a young couple who are the first southbound (Sobo) thru hikers I've met. They started at Katahdin the end of May. Chop Sticks was planning to tent at the Franciscan monastery just a few miles down the trail and was in no hurry, so I hiked on.

A few miles later I caught up with Moses and Slater. Our plans were the same - to hike 'til it started getting dark and find a tent site. So we hiked together and are camping together.

Although it looks like we're in the woods in the middle of nowhere, we're sitting around a campfire listening to a bluegrass concert going on not very far away through the woods!

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, July 21, 2014

Lots of Good Miles

Destination: Telephone Pioneers Shelter
 Starting Location: Tenting, Mile 1412.0
 Today's Miles: 29.70
 Trip Miles: 1441.70

Moses and Slayer were still asleep when I left. Pretty soon I came upon Frankenstein breaking camp. He's from CT and told me his parents are meeting him at mile 1489 and they're having a big hiker feed there on Friday. I'll probably pass through there on Thursday and will miss it.

I took the side trail to the Fahnstock State Park for brunch - a bacon, egg and cheese sandwich. Frankenstein came in as I was finishing. You can also take a shower there, so he was headed for one when I pressed on. I'd already had one in the past week! :-)

I leapfrogged with Ghost and Weatherman today. Both young guys with beards - like most of the hikers out here! I stopped at the Morgan Lewis shelter for a food break and met four older guys there. Old Man was one of them; I forgot the other names. Weatherman stopped in, too. Had good conversation and pressed on.



*It says "Maine" on the Back of the Chair
(Another chair facing it said "Georgia")*

Destination: Kent CT - The Kent School
Starting Location: Telephone Pioneers Shelter
Today's Miles: 21.50
Trip Miles: 1463.20

Well... that's nine down!

Conner and I were up really early this morning - a little after 4! I had not slept well, I always sleep better in my tent. I got packed up, ate breakfast and did some planning, then finally hit the trail at 5:15 with my headlamp on. Less than a mile later I had descended down out of the woods and started crossing a series of farm fields. With the open skies and the predawn sunlight, I could put away my headlamp.

Today's hiking was rather uneventful except that I felt fatigued most of the day. I reckon it was the long day yesterday and the poor sleep last night. I hiked by myself all day, slooowly on the uphills!



Weatherman Enjoying the View

I had planned to tent somewhere shorter today, but Weatherman caught up and we hiked on together to the Telephone Pioneers shelter, arriving just before dark. Several hikers were there, but only Conner was staying in the shelter so I stayed there, too. He's a young guy recently out of the Marines and is hiking Sobo. Almost a 30 trail mile day, and over that in actual miles hiked - I must be getting in shape!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, July 22, 2014

Well... That's 9 Down!



AT Railroad Stop

I saw a few other hikers, but none whom I knew from before. I passed into CT, back into NY, and finally back into CT where I videoed my leaving NY for the last time. Nobody with me to help with it for this crossing.



Well... That's Nine Down!

I kept in touch with Judy at the Kent School. She's a friend of a friend at Williamson, and she had offered to pick me up and let me get a shower and some food at the school when I got here. The Kent School is a private boarding/day high school about a half mile from the trail.

I was really tired when Judy and her four year old granddaughter Bailey picked me up about four. Boy, was it good to see them! They first took me to the gym to get a shower. Guess I smelled bad. :-)

Then Judy gave me a driving tour of the campus before taking me to the dining hall for some supper. It was open to feed the kids staying here for a variety of summer camps. I met her grandson who is here for a camp where he's building robots. Judy then took me to the IGA for a small resupply. I had originally intended that she would take me back to the trail after that, but I didn't feel like hiking anymore and looking for a tent site. I asked Judy if there was a place in town I could stay. She drove around to check out a couple of folks who rent rooms but no one was home. After asking around some more, she said she would check to see if I could stay in one of the dorms.

I could! So I'm now in my own dorm room getting ready for a good night's sleep. Thanks Judy! She was awesome - showing me around, waiting for me at each stop to shower, eat and shop, finding me a nice room to sleep in, and being good company all the while. Thank you!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, July 23, 2014

Don't Forget to Eat!

Destination: Sharon Mountain Campsite

Starting Location: Kent CT

Today's Miles: 19.40

Trip Miles: 1482.60

I slept great last night! For over nine hours, which is unusual for me. I ate some breakfast in my room, then hiked back to the trail. The first several miles today were tough, rocky ups and downs. Ghost passed me, although we walked together for a short while. I found out he had hiked with Kolton for 5 days back in PA.

Then after a particularly steep rocky descent, the trail was nearly level as it followed alongside a river. I stopped in at a shelter along here for lunch and saw Muffin Man who was just finishing.

After the river walk, it was back into the hills, although not as tough as this morning. After fording a large stream, I met Wiki, who I had heard about. He was there with Achilles, Muffin Man and True Story.

I hiked with Achilles for a while. He's got a very joyful demeanor. He's a young entrepreneur, and we ended up talking about personality types, including Myers Briggs and the designer-developer-manager scale - he's on the designer end.

I'd been having a good time with the river walk and chatting with Achilles and hadn't been paying attention to my food intake today. I always have to force myself to eat more than my hunger senses. Near the top of a hill I "hit the wall" and didn't have energy for another step. I sat down and had some bars, drank the rest of



Trail Crossing an Old Stone Fence

my water, and chilled out while waiting for the sugar to get in my bloodstream. A short distance later I stopped by a stream, got more water and ate a little more. I walked to the next shelter a mile or so further. Achilles, Muffin Man, True Story were there along with Blue and Longhorn whom I met for the first time. Longhorn didn't go to UT but is from Texas. I ate some more while I chatted and rested.

When I left to hike the 2.4 miles to the Sharon Mountain Campsite, I felt great! I covered the miles quickly and set up my tent and settled in just before a couple of big thunderstorms came through. It was quite a show, with lightening flashes and loud thunder directly overhead!

Head Tunes: 3 new ones today, starting early with Pollywolly Doodle All Day - I have no idea! Then the Army Song as I was climbing the rocks. When I got to the flat stretch along the river it was Proud Mary (rollin' down the river)!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, July 24, 2014

1500 Miles!

Destination: Brassie Brook Shelter
Starting Location: Sharon Mountain Campsite
Today's Miles: 17.70
Trip Miles: 1500.30

I slept later to ensure my energy was back up and got off about 7:20. It was a very pleasant day and I pretty much hiked by myself all day.

I stopped for an early lunch/second breakfast at a nice park along the Housatonic River. Frankenstein will be



Waterfall on Housatonic River

doing trail magic somewhere around there tomorrow. After hiking a little ways further, I came across Blue, Daytripper and Rocksloth taking a lunch break on the side of the trail with a great view across a field and into the valley below. All three are young men with beards. We joke about how difficult it is to describe one hiker to another since most are young men with beards. I was somewhat distinct as an old man with a grey beard. :-)



Blue, Daytripper and Rock Sloth

I road walked into Salisbury for resupply. I started at the bakery by eating a couple of scones and another treat. I then went to the market which is very nice with a large deli. I got a grinder to eat there and one to go. I bought too much food, but it'll get eaten - I just have to carry it!

I sat at a nice table in a park like setting outside the market. Pretty soon Achilles joined me for lunch, and then another hiker whose name I forgot. I ended up spending over two hours in Salisbury - nice town!

I got to Brassie Brook shelter about 5:30 and decided to call it a day. There were two section hikers in the shelter just getting packed up to leave. They had been soaked arriving there the night before and spent the day drying out. Their packs were Huge! I couldn't see the actual packs as they had all sorts of stuff bungee-corded all around it - one had a regular size guitar on top that was barely wider than the other stuff on the pack. One of them said his weighed 100 pounds! Wish I'd taken a picture. They were only going a couple of miles to the next shelter, and seemed cheery.

Sobo (southbound from Maine to Georgia) hiker Grizzly Grouse stopped in just before the two guys left. He had started in Georgia in May and even hiked a good bit with Kolton. Then he flipped up to Katahdin to hike with a buddy who wanted to hike for two months but wanted to see the northern part of the trail. His buddy had to

get off after a few days due to foot problems! So Grizzly Grouse will continue south and finish somewhere in NC or TN where he got off to hike with his buddy. Grizzly Grouse slept in the shelter and I retired to my tent.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, July 25, 2014

Well... That's 10 Down!

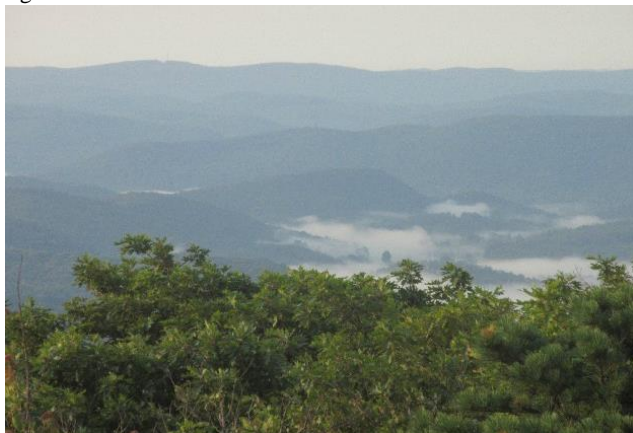
Destination: Tom Leonard Shelter
Starting Location: Brassie Brook Shelter
Today's Miles: 23.20
Trip Miles: 1523.50

Well... that's 10 down!

Grizzly Grouse was up when I was eating breakfast, so I got to chat with him some more before I left at 6:15.



Trail with a Great View!



Clouds in the Valley Below



Interesting Bog Boards



Oh... I Thought the Guide Said I Was Climbing Mt. Everest!

Two miles later I crossed into MA according to my guide and GPS, but there are no signs there. Nearly a mile later there are signs indicating the border is there. I took a That's 10 Down video at both places. :-)

The first 12 miles were tough! Up and down with lots of rocks! Not the pointy PA/NJ type of rocks, but they were often wet and slippery. The few patches of dirt trail were usually mud. If the rocks weren't wet, the bottoms of my shoes were. I slipped a number of times, but was being cautious and usually easily recovered. Twice I fell when I thought I was on an easy stretch and had let my mind wander - the first I just landed

on my bum going down a sloped rock. If I had a video of the second time, it would probably be a contender for Funniest Home Videos. I was on level ground, crossing an area of mostly rocks with puddles of water between the rocks. First my right pole slipped on a rock throwing me a little off balance, usually not a big deal. Reaching out with my right foot to regain balance, it also slipped on a wet rock. I then proceeded into a series of slippery steps, slowly falling forward until I was laying on my side in a depression in the rock filled with a few inches of water, soaking my right side from shoulder to foot. No injuries and I dried out soon - consider it pure joy!

By the last big descent at 12 miles, my knees were pretty tired. Then the trail wound its way across a valley for 5 miles of pleasant, fast hiking. My legs enjoyed being able to stretch out and my knees recovered nicely. Then back into the hills, but the trail was nice and dry with not so many rocks, so I could keep up a good pace.

At a rock outcropping with a nice view I met and chatted with Long Bow, Little Spoon, Squanto and Canon. The first three were slack packing for the day. Canon and I remembered each other from when he hiked with Sarah and me for a while near the James River in VA. He and I then hiked together the rest of the way to the shelter. He then pressed on and I called it a day.



Squanto, Little Spoon, Long Bow and Canon

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, July 26, 2014

30 Miles?!

Destination: Cookie Lady's, Mile 1555.7
Starting Location: Tom Leonard Shelter
Today's Miles: 32.20
Trip Miles: 1555.70

I left early, but before I got from the shelter to the AT, I passed a bunch of young women hiking into the shelter.

They must have started really early! I soon passed a road with a sign advertising a hiker feed later that day put on by the small town down the road. Unfortunately, I was miles down the trail by the time it was supposed to start.

I didn't start out particularly fast and passed a lot of day hikers going the opposite direction. I also leapfrogged some with thru hikers Fuji, Cozy, Spike and Rare Breed. They were planning to stay at the Upper Goose Pond Cabin, which was also my tentative destination for the day. It's an enclosed shelter on a lake where one can borrow canoes to go out on the lake. There's also a caretaker who provides pancakes for breakfast!

I got to the side trail leading a half mile to the cabin by midafternoon. Since I was feeling good and it seemed so many were planning to stay there, I decided to press on to the Cookie Lady's. Tic had mentioned that was a good place to stay. She and her husband allow hikers to tent on their lawn and she usually gives out cookies to hikers.

Something I don't think I've mentioned is all the old stone walls I pass by in the woods. I assume these were



*Canon, Long Bow, Squanto and Little Spoon
Enjoying the View*

At the shelter was Shellback, a former Navy guy I had met way back in NC. I also met AB there, but he was just leaving. Shellback and I were soon joined by Opus, a retired Army guy who graduated from West Point in 78. We all had a good time chatting during dinner, then we all retired to our tents.

built many many years ago when farmers cleared the land and built the walls on the edges of their fields. Now it's all forest. I always wonder what it was like to live here back then.

Enroute to the Cookie Lady's I stopped briefly at the October Mountain Shelter, where I met a dad and his 12 year old twin sons. They were out for a short section hike. I had a good time chatting with the boys - good to see them out backpacking. I think the grampa was getting water at the stream nearby. Cool!

When I got to the Cookie Lady's, Sobos Hungarian Revolution and [I forgot his name] were already set up and getting ready to turn in. I checked in with the Cookie Lady and set up my tent. She had a hose outside for me to get water and the trash cans were in the garage. There was a picnic table in the yard, but the mosquitoes were so bad I moved from the picnic table to my tent to eat dinner - I don't like to eat in my tent, but the bugs chased me in there!

Hungarian Revolution had put his backpack and food in the garage for the night, so I put my food bag in there also. I don't think there was any risk of bears, but I thought it was a small precaution to take. Then I sacked out for the night, after my longest day on the trail and still feeling good. :-)

Head Tunes: Early on the song "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?" popped into my head. I suspect it came from my hiking days earlier with Nora V when we were talking about Musicals. She had asked me my favorite movie, and when I replied "Mary Poppins" that got us started on talking about musicals. For a 22 year old, she certainly knew a lot of the songs from the old musicals. She does a great faux operatic rendition of "Climb Every Mountain!"

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, July 27, 2014

Dalton, MA

Destination: Dalton MA
Starting Location: Cookie Lady's, Mile 1555.7
Today's Miles: 9.50
Trip Miles: 1565.20

I woke up a little after 5:00 and packed up the inside of my tent. Luckily, before taking down my tent, I went to get my food bag out of the garage and found the door locked! Didn't think about that possibility last night!

Since the mosquitoes were bad I just hung out in my tent and worked on my journal until the Cookie Lady

got up and unlocked the garage. She also brought me a few cookies! I ate breakfast and left about 7:20.

It was forecast to have scattered thunderstorms all day and I soon started hearing thunder. I only got some sprinkles from the edge of the first storm but the second one got me just before I got to the Kay Wood Shelter 6.5 miles into my hike. Although I'm fine with walking in the rain, the trail through here gets muddy and very slippery. While I waited for the storm to pass through, I replanned my day.

I decided to get a motel room in Dalton and spend the rest of the day planning my next two weeks and catching up on my journal, including getting some pictures posted. I'm way behind in that! There's a nice motel close to the trail that even has a computer I could use to make it easier.

When I got to the motel, Salty Hat, his dad No Name, and Flinch and her husband Carl were standing outside the office. No Vacancy!

I'd met Flinch and her hiking partner I Believe on the trail before, but didn't get Flinch's name. Carl is here supporting them for a few days. They had a room since they got here yesterday, and offered to drive the three of us a couple of miles to Pittsfield to get a room at the Quality Inn, which we accepted. Enroute we saw I Believe on her way back to the motel.

Flinch asked me when I started my hike (a common question among thru hikers). When I told her April 17, she was surprised how quickly I had hiked this far. (I didn't tell her I've also taken a total of three weeks off!) She then asked how old I was. Guess I'm doing pretty good for an old guy. :-)

I spent the afternoon planning, shopping, doing laundry and eating. I got a few days posted on my journal but didn't get to the pictures. One of these days! But I feel much better about knowing what's ahead and how I want to accomplish it. I'm also clean! :-)

PS it didn't rain again until the evening when another good thunderstorm passed over.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, July 28, 2014

Wet and Slippery Day

Destination: Bascom Lodge, Mt. Greylock
Starting Location: Dalton MA
Today's Miles: 17.20
Trip Miles: 1582.40



Kristi, Pam , Glenn, Me and Claire at Mt. Greylock Lodge

It was scheduled to rain off and on all day, so I slept a little later, waiting for the first thunder storm to pass through. I ate breakfast out of my food supply, supplemented by a bagel and juice at the hotel breakfast bar. Then I took the bus back to the AT and started hiking north.

Due to the forecast I suppose, I didn't meet many hikers on the trail today. Another thunderstorm came through later that morning, but it cooled me off and I was dry by the time I got to Cheshire. (In the summer, I don't carry rain gear - I just get wet. Wearing rain gear in the summer usually just makes you sweat so much you get just as wet plus you're hot.) I stopped in at Diane's Twist, a small little ice cream place that also serves sandwiches. I got both a sandwich and a big ice cream cone! Diane was a very nice older woman who apparently runs it by herself. I also met Sky Chickens there, a very cheerful Sobo woman.

Another thunderstorm came through early afternoon, which was also refreshing. However, the one that came through late afternoon, when I was at higher altitude going up Mt. Greylock, left me quite chilly when the wind started blowing on my soaking wet body. When I get to Manchester Center, I'm going to look into getting some sort of windbreaker. I hadn't planned to add that gear to my pack until after my break from the trail in mid-August.

After the last thunderstorm passed, I let my mind wander a bit and stopped focusing as much as I should have on my footing. I repeated my mistake from near the beginning of my hike and stepped on a wet log sloping down to the right. Down I went on my left side, but this time my left thigh hit hard against the end of a large log.

Ouch! It really hurt initially but as I started walking the pain subsided. Only then did I notice that my left rib cage also hurt when I took a deep breath. I think I'll be OK with my leg, but the ribs will take a few days to heal.

When I got to the lodge at the top of Mt. Greylock, there was a local group of artists giving a presentation on the art facilities in North Adams. By the time I showered (a very welcome HOT shower!) and cleaned up, the presentation was over and it was time for dinner. It turned out that I was the only thru hiker and had the bunk room to myself. I ate with the four other people who were spending the night: Glenn and Pam who were out hiking in the area, and Khristi and Claire, a mother daughter pair out on a road trip before Claire heads off to college. The rest of the folks at dinner were locals just up for the presentation.

I had a great time chatting with my four compatriots at dinner until nearly 9:00, then went off to bed for a good night's sleep.

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, July 29, 2014

Well... That's 11 Down!

Destination: Seth Warner Shelter
 Starting Location: Bascom Lodge, Mt. Greylock
 Today's Miles: 13.20
 Trip Miles: 1595.60

Well, that's 11 down!



Civilization Down Below

I slept in to give my injuries a chance to heal and left a little before 8. My thigh seemed fine and my ribs only hurt if I took a deep breath or coughed. I did similar damage to my ribs years ago when I was leading a church youth group of sixth grade boys and we were playing tackle football in the snow. Don't know if it's a cracked or bruised rib or something less, but the treatment is the same - nothing. Just takes time to heal.

The trail was wet and muddy and my left knee started complaining so I decided to keep the pace relatively slow, especially downhill. I was thinking the knee problem may be due to my walking a little differently after hurting my thigh. I only chatted with two day hikers today, but passed several Sobos headed the opposite direction. One was Soggy, out for a section hike, and we chatted a while. It was a soggy day, and folks were focused on their steps and not so much on meeting people.



Soggy on Mt. Williams

When I got to MA-2, I took a left toward Williamstown and hiked a half mile down the road to a Stop&Shop to resupply. I got lots of food - more than enough to last the two day to my next stop plus a bunch to eat right outside the store. I'm trying to eat, eat, eat!

A few miles later I crossed the border into Vermont! Yay! There was no one else around so I videoed the crossing by myself.

When I got to the Seth Warner Shelter, Princess North Star was there and had his hammock set up. We chatted for quite a while while eating supper. He got the North Star part of his name because he's from Minnesota, and the Princess part was added after he had a cartwheel contest with a young girl hiking with her family. She made some remark about him looking like a girl doing



Well... That's Eleven Down!

cartwheels, and his buddies added the Princess part. He's a young guy with his own company doing web development: Action Upload. Seems very very sharp.

Served in the Army in Iraq before finishing college. We talked about personalities, and I mentioned it would be good if Achilles met him and they talked. When he found out I was an astronaut, he was really excited. I told him I think someday not too far off, he'll be able to buy a ride to space - even if it's still expensive! :-)

A while later, Kansas Express and Ben joined us. They met on the bus to Williamstown, and have both just started hiking. Kansas Express thru hiked the AT two years ago after college and is hiking the Long Trail this summer during his time off as a middle school geography/history teacher. Ben is section hiking south, but came north to the shelter just to set foot in Vermont before going south. They both planned to sleep in the shelter, and I headed off to my tent for the night.

Trail Conversations and Thoughts: I haven't written much about what I think about when hiking nor what I talk about with others on the trail. There's so much that I can't really express it all - or remember it all! :-)

I'll try to do better. For example, while hiking with the gang through NJ/NY, Slayer and I somehow started talking about the speed of light and the effect on mass and time when traveling at speeds in that realm. Bobcat was having trouble understanding it - like most folks do, including me!

That led me to having fun introducing them to the book "Flatland" by A. Square (Edwin Abbott), written in the late 1800's. It's a great start to understanding what 4 dimensional space might be like, and I may get around

to describing some of my thoughts on it later. I highly recommend it - you can get it free online or for a buck or two on Amazon. It also includes some social satire on the culture in England during that time that I don't fully appreciate. You can also skip over the explanation of why people in Flatland can see, and not miss any of the story.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, July 30, 2014

Food Talk

Destination: Goddard Shelter

Starting Location: Seth Warner Shelter

Today's Miles: 21.60

Trip Miles: 1617.20



***Yummy Lunch Burrito –
PB, Cheddar Cheese & Baby Spinach!***

After settling in my tent last night, I heard some more folks come into the shelter and thought I might have heard Achilles name. Sure enough, when I got up this morning Achilles was there. Princess North Star was still in his hammock, so I told Achilles he ought to talk with him if he gets the chance.

I got on the trail about 7:30. My shoes and socks were still wet and I hiked fairly slowly. Kansas Express soon passed me, but was planning to hitch into Bennington at VT-9 to get some Aqua Mira water purifier since his had leaked out on his bus ride to the trail. So I'll probably see him again.

My left knee started aching going downhill to VT-9, but felt better going up the other side. That's usually the case - knees and feet prefer going uphill, heart and lungs prefer going downhill. :-)

Sure enough, Kansas Express passed me again going uphill from VT-9. They don't have an outfitter type

store in Bennington, so he got some iodine drops at Walmart. Aqua Mira is preferred because it doesn't leave the nasty taste of iodine or chlorine. I caught up with Kansas Express at the side trail junction to the Melville Nauheim shelter where he was taking a break - 13 miles into my day at that point. I stopped and we chatted for a while and I called Linda, got water and rested a bit. After the break, I felt much better (probably from talking with Linda!) and the rest of the day went well. It was a beautiful day for hiking - in the 70s with no rain!

I got to the Goddard Shelter about 7 o'clock. (I doubt it is named after Robert Goddard, the famous pioneer in liquid fueled rocketry in the 30's.) At the shelter were two section hikers doing the Long Trail, a Sobo hiker and Calves. I chatted a bit, then set up my tent and called it a day. 'Twas good to finish the day's hike on a stronger note than I started it!

Food! In the Guest Book, Tic asked me to talk about what food I'm eating. Since I don't carry a stove, it limits my options somewhat. My basic staple is the same thing I love to eat at home: tortillas with peanut butter and Cliff bars! Although I've experimented over the years with many additions to the peanut butter on the tortillas, I got some new ideas from other hikers: add raisins to get a PB&J taste, or add nuts or any kind of trail mix items. Sometimes on the first day or two after resupply I'll add some cheddar cheese. At my last resupply, I bought some baby spinach which lasted a few days (see picture on the left). At home I like to add Romaine lettuce. (A great snack at home I like is just spreading peanut butter on Romaine lettuce leaves!) I've also used tuna and salmon that come in the foil packs on my tortillas, but I tired of that. When I can't get tortillas, I've used rye bread, bagels, and other breads.

I supplement that with other kinds of bars, cheese crackers, all sorts of trail mix and dried fruit. Pop Tarts are popular on the trail due to lots of calories per ounce of weight and cost. I've eaten them just to get the calories, but they certainly don't fit into the nutritious food category! I've also carried a container of olive oil (high calories per ounce of weight) but found I didn't use it that much. I've seen other hikers use it and/or a container of honey. I'll often pack out an apple and/or a sandwich to eat on the first day out of town.

The main objective for me is somewhat nutritious calories per ounce of weight. Hikers on a more constrained budget will also consider price - I've seen some buy Snickers bars rather than Cliff Bars in trail towns because they have the same calories at half the price.

I doubt that going no-cook saves much weight. I'm guessing the water content of the foods I take vs. dehydrated cooked foods make up for the weight of a stove. I just like not fussing with cooking while I'm out hiking. Camping with family and friends is another story.

Later addendum: See August 8. Swede shared his warm Mountain House meal with me for dinner on a chilly evening. Nice! I'm now considering taking a stove with me when I finish the trail in Maine in September!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Soggy Side Trail

Destination: William B Douglas Shelter
Starting Location: Goddard Shelter
Today's Miles: 24.20
Trip Miles: 1641.40

I got an early start at about 6:15, but started out pretty slow. After a while Kansas Express caught up and about the same time we passed some young Sobos who were enjoying their hikes, including Prancer. Although going the opposite direction, they got me energized and I picked up my pace. Kansas Express headed on, but said he'd probably meet me at the top of Stratton Mountain where he planned to take a break.

As I hiked up Stratton Mountain, I could hear a thunderstorm growing to the west. I hustled on up, hoping to get over the top before it hit me. When I got to the top, Kansas X was there along with Tobasco, an older thru hiker I met for the first time. I headed on down the other side of the mountain and the hail started

about 10 minutes later. Since the trees slow down the hail and hard rain, it was kinda fun watching it bounce around as it hit me and the ground. As the storm passed through Kansas X caught up and we hiked together down the wet muddy trail to Stratton Pond. He was in the lead and I could keep up with him on the downhill/level wet trail.

As we were going around the trail, we started walking



Kansas Express at Stratton Pond

on bog boards that were under more than one foot of water. We thought it might be due to the recent rain. In a little while, however, it got ridiculous. I remembered seeing a map of the area posted on a tree next to the turnoff for the shelter, and it showed the old trail around the north side of the lake was closed. Then Kansas X saw a blue blaze - not a good sign! Sure enough we had missed the spot where the AT turns away from the lake and we were hiking on the closed trail. We found out later that beavers had raised the level of the lake a couple of feet, and that's why that section of trail was closed. Since we were soaked from the thunderstorm anyway, it was actually fun! On the way out on the closed trail, Kansas X stepped one foot between the ends of the bog boards and sank down, but got himself back up. After we turned around to get back to the AT, I did the same, with my right leg going down underwater several more feet until my rear end was resting on my left heel. I couldn't get up! Kansas came behind me and pulled me up by my backpack!

After getting back on the AT, we continued on to the side trail to the William B Douglas Shelter. Kansas X pressed on to get to the next shelter. Since I already had a short day planned for tomorrow, I called it a day and hiked the half mile down to that shelter. I really enjoyed my time talking with Kansas Express!



Beaver Construction!



Cute, but I Think I'll Sleep in My Tent!

There were two guys staying in the shelter, already in their sleeping bags - one reading and one sleeping. The mouse running around in the daylight while I was trying to eat some dinner there really convinced me to pitch my tent. Nubbins, an older woman hiker that I had briefly met earlier showed up and pitched her tent, too.

Looking forward to getting into town tomorrow and drying out!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, August 01, 2014

Manchester Center

Destination: Manchester Center VT
Starting Location: William B Douglas Shelter
Today's Miles: 5.80
Trip Miles: 1647.20

I had less than 6 miles to hike today, so I wasn't in any rush to get up early or to hike fast. I started hiking about 7:20 and got to Rt 11/30 a little before 10:00. About a mile from the road I stopped at a large stream to rinse the mud off my legs, shoes and gaiters, and tried to avoid the mud the rest of the way so I wouldn't trash whatever car picked me up.

I quickly got a hitch into Manchester Center from two guys who have done some section hiking of the AT. They took me right to the grocery store next to Eastern Mountain Sports. There's a picnic table between the two where several hikers were gathered, having bought food at Price Chopper and waiting for EMS to open.

First I went across the street to The Works bakery for a breakfast wrap and a bagel with cream cheese. Then

back to EMS to buy a light windbreaker and a new shirt - my main shirt has served me well, but it's time for it to retire. Sad... I hadn't planned on needing a windbreaker until I came back from our family get together in a few weeks, but I'm finding that I get chilly after late afternoon thunder showers. And the Whites may be colder.

Then to Price Chopper for resupply food and fresh food to eat now! I sat at the picnic table to repack and eat while talking with Owl, a Sobo from CT who's getting off trail for a couple of weeks. His mom Wendy drove up and sat with us for a while. Sobos ? And ? then joined us and went grocery shopping. They're also staying at the Green Mountain Hostel tonight and had called the owner Jeff for a pickup. Jeff arrived and Wendy took a picture of all of us, then we all headed off.



Three Sobos, Jeff and Me at Price Chopper

Green Mountain Hostel is awesome! Jeff is a former thru hiker and knows how to do a hostel well. It's a house with an outbuilding, but the hikers stay in the house and Jeff lives in the outbuilding - a least during hiker season. \$25 includes shower, laundry, bed, pint of Ben&Jerrys, and breakfast foods to fix your own. TV and computer in the living area. He'll also drive us back to the trail in the morning.

There were three other Sobos here when we arrived. Later, Nobos Not Worthy and T-Bird arrived. They were the two guys in the shelter last night who I didn't meet because T-Bird was sleeping. I told Not Worthy he must not be my mom since she was Worthy. He also must not be our granddaughter since she's Worthy. :-)

I got a hot shower and did all my laundry. Another nice thing Jeff does is have spare shirts and shorts for hikers to wear while we're cleaning our own clothes. I used the computer for a while to catch up some on my journal, then hit the sack - clean, dry and well fed! Aaahhhh! Zzzzzzzz...

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, August 02, 2014

To the Rescue!

Destination: Little Rock Pond Shelter
Starting Location: Manchester Center VT
Today's Miles: 19.80
Trip Miles: 1667.00

Although Jeff had eggs and pancake mix available for us to fix for breakfast, everyone opted for cold cereal with milk. I had four bowls full! Jeff shuttled the first group of six of us back to the trail a little after 7:00. There was a guy with a small camper at the parking lot who said he'd see us later on up the trail. Some of the hikers seemed to have met him before, but I hadn't. I was the only Nobo and started hiking about 7:30.

My hike started by climbing up Bromley Mountain. Not quite to the top, I came upon a gondola serving the ski area down the east side of the mountain. Calves was there, having spent the night in the little shack next to the gondola. As I took a break, Tobasco also passed by me with Flash, who I hadn't met before. We all leapfrogged each other the rest of the day. I also met a father/daughter duo at the big slab of rock formation at top of Baker Peak. They were day hiking while chipping away at doing the whole Long Trail.



Gondola and Calves

I caught up with a group of young boys and their college aged leader out backpacking for a few days. They are part of a group from a Farm and Wilderness Camp somewhere in the area. I had a good time talking with the boys and spent more time chatting when I took a break at one of the shelters and they came in to spend the night there. Later on I met another, larger, group of



Farm and Wilderness Camp Kids

them hiking the trail with two leaders. Seems like a great opportunity for the boys.

A short while later I stopped at a stream to get a drink and fill up my water bottle. A woman and her young son came by hiking Sobo and a little frantically asked me where she was. Turns out they had taken a wrong trail at the top of the mountain I had just come down. They and the dad had parked on VT-7 and she had taken a longer trail up to Baker Peak that approached it from the south. She had planned to then hike down the trail that went directly to the parking lot. Instead, she had hiked north on the AT for a couple of miles down the mountain when she saw a sign that said Long Trail. She then knew she was on the wrong trail and had just turned around when I met them.



Lost Mom and Son after Being Watered, Fed and Redirected

She had called her husband from the top of the mountain, but hadn't had cell coverage since. All she had with them was an empty 20oz water bottle. I calmed her down, filled their water bottle with filtered water from the stream, made them drink as much as they could, refilled the water bottle, and showed them on my phone app where they had to go. I also gave the son some pretzel M&Ms to eat and some to take with him! I told them about the Farm and Wilderness Camp group that she'd run into on her way back up, and that they'd have a detailed map that would show her the trail she wanted. It was rewarding for me to have the opportunity to help them out.



Suspension Bridge on the AT

I then hiked on. I stopped at the Big Branch Shelter for a food break and Tobasco caught up with me. We were both aiming for the Little Rock Pond Shelter for the night, so I decided to hike and chat with him the rest of the way. He's a retired Superintendent of Schools in Asheville, NC but wears a Marines ball cap. Turns out we both graduated from high school in 1965, but he went into the Marines and served in Viet Nam at the beginning of the war before going to college, while I went to the Air Force Academy and served in the Viet Nam war near the end of the war. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know him some - like I have most of the folks on the trail. :-)

We came to a dirt road and there was the guy I saw at the parking lot first thing this morning with his camper. He had a small grill going and cooked each of us a hamburger. He also had containers of different salads to go with it. I opted for the macaroni salad - yum! Of course everything tastes good to a thru hiker! :-) When I asked him his name he said Onisimus. I recognized the name, but was thinking at first it was someone in Greek or Roman mythology that I couldn't quite place. [Linda later reminded me that Onisimus is the slave

Paul mentions in his letter to Philemon in the New Testament. A cool name for a trail angel!!] Apparently there was also some sort of hippy gathering going on further up the road, and we saw some interesting looking folks drive by while we were eating and talking with Onisimus.

When we got to Little Rock Pond, the shelter was really nice and most of the tent sites were taken, so we decided to stay in the shelter. Section hiker Leslie was staying there along with Jennifer, a young woman out for her first overnight backpacking trip with her aunt, whose name I forgot. The aunt slept in her tent, while the four of us each had a queen sized bunk bed platform to himself/herself to sleep on in the roomy shelter.

I also chatted with Turtle, the caretaker of the area, who lives in a nice large tent nearby. Interestingly, he first introduced himself to me as James, then later said everyone calls him Turtle. Maybe my mature, wise, father-looking figure caused him to revert to his real name. Or not...

Turtle also knew Julie, the caretaker of a campsite I passed sometime in the past couple of days but forgot to mention. As I was hiking down the trail past a camping area, I saw a couple of folks at a large tent a short distance down a side trail. Suddenly one of them shouted "Are you a thru hiker?" It was Julie. When I said yes, she invited me over for some cheese and pepperoni. That's when I learned about the caretakers that the Green Mountain Club provides to take care of

the various camp sites and shelters along the Long Trail. Very nice.

There was an old foam coated aluminum canoe tied up on the lake that hikers could use. It had one old beat up paddle, and only leaked a little bit. I couldn't resist taking it for a ride across the lake, especially since I missed the opportunity at Upper Goose Pond in MA. By far not the easiest to paddle, but I had fun!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, August 03, 2014

Cairns, Cairns, Cairns

Destination: Cooper Lodge Shelter
Starting Location: Little Rock Pond Shelter
Today's Miles: 23.70
Trip Miles: 1690.70

Everyone in the shelter got up early, so I didn't have to worry too much about making noise as I packed up. I started hiking about 6:30. The trail continued around

Little Rock Pond to the north end before heading up into the forest, where I took a picture looking back to where I had canoed yesterday.



Little Rock Pond



Cairns, Cairns, Cairns!

I felt good all day today. About four miles into the day I came to an area called White Rocks and discovered two separate areas on the trail with dozens of cairns, some even built up in the forks of trees. Very cool!

Just before getting to VT-103 I went over the Clarendon Gorge suspension foot bridge. Sarah and I had stopped here several years ago on our way back from Franconia Notch just to hike across the bridge. Now the only parts left of the AT that I've hiked before are the two day hikes Sarah and I did out of Franconia Notch on that trip.

At VT-103 I turned left and hiked the half mile down the road to the Whistle Stop. It's a little diner with a caboose next to it from which they serve ice cream. I asked the waitress what she

recommended for a hungry hiker and she pointed to the menu item entitled "Hungry Hiker." I don't remember the details, but it was a huge breakfast! Then I had them make a turkey sandwich to take with me. After that I went next door to the caboose and got a huge chocolate ice cream cone. Of course the best part was having phone service and getting to talk with my sweetie during lunch! :-)

For a change of pace, I decided to walk along the train tracks for the half mile back up the hill to the trail. Easier on my feet than the road surface and less stressful without all the cars. I guess it would have been more stressful if a train had come down the tracks...

I did have to do more road walking in for a two mile detour around a section of the trail where they were apparently rebuilding a bridge that had washed out. Shortly after that I met ridge runner Lunch Box at the Gov Clement shelter. I didn't stay long because I wanted to get to the next shelter before dark. Tic introduced me via email to some friends of his in Norwich who have invited me to stay at their house when I pass through, and I told them I'd be there Tuesday evening. So, I need to do 20+ miles each day 'til then.

There was no one at the Cooper Lodge Shelter when I arrived a little after 8:00. I had just enough time to set up my tent, use the privy and eat some supper before it got dark. The tent site uses wooden platforms, so this was my first chance to test setting up my tent using some screw hooks I brought for this purpose. Worked great! The bright spots you see in the picture on the next page are reflections of the camera flash on the reflective cord and tie downs of my tent.



Suspension Foot Bridge Sarah and I Crossed Years Ago



Tent Set Up on Wooden Platform

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, August 04, 2014

Meeting Miss Janet

Destination: Winturri Shelter

Starting Location: Cooper Lodge Shelter

Today's Miles: 26.20

Trip Miles: 1716.90

There's a trail that leads from my tent site up to the top of Killington Mountain, but it was too late last night and this morning started in the fog. So I just hiked on down the AT.

When I got to the intersection with the Sherburne Trail a couple of miles later, I was faced with a dilemma. The Sherburne Trail goes by the Pico Camp/Cabin and the Inn at Long Trail and rejoins the AT after it splits off from the Long Trail. I had heard from several folks about the Inn at Long Trail and wanted to see it, but it's about two miles shorter than taking the AT and I'd miss Maine Junction where the Long Trail continues north and the AT heads east. Since I was under a little pressure to get to Norwich by Tuesday, I didn't want to add the extra mile to take the AT around and hike down to the Inn from the other direction. I started down the Sherburne Trail a short distance at first, then turned around and continued on the AT. I had only gone a short distance when I decided that it was more important to add some variety to my hike, so I turned around again and went back and turned down the Sherburne Trail. To help my decision, it's the way an earlier version of the

AT was routed. (HYOH is a term often used by thru hikers and stands for Hike Your Own Hike.)

I enjoyed seeing the old Pico Camp Cabin as I went by it. It was cool seeing the Inn at Long Trail, but since it was still very early in the morning, I didn't stop in. I thought I might get breakfast there, but it didn't look like anything was happening there. Nothing exciting, but no regrets on taking the "short cut!"

Shortly after I rejoined the AT, Crusoe caught up with me and we hiked together to the Mountain Meadows Lodge, where I stopped and he hiked on. (Crusoe is the guy I met at the top of the mountain in middle VA with Lop Sang when they talked me into staying and watching the sunset before night hiking to the camp site. He was also carrying a watermelon to the camp site!)

I thought I had read in my guide that the lodge served breakfast and lunch, and I had planned my food supply to eat there. I got there at 9:45 to find out they stopped serving breakfast at 9:30 and that they didn't serve lunch! I haven't got a lot of food left, but will have a couple of options tomorrow to get something to eat and resupply. While at the lodge, I met Uphill and Roots who had spent the night there. They are a young married couple who were both thru hiking until Roots injured her knee. Now she drives a car and supports Uphill as he continues to hike.

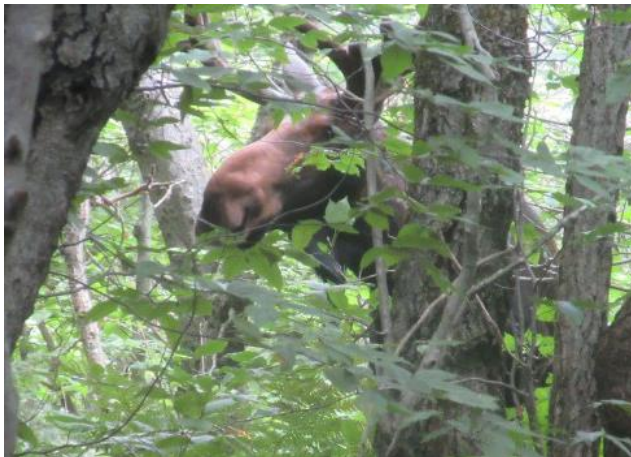
I caught up with Crusoe at a road crossing where he was talking with a woman in a large van. It's Miss Janet! Miss Janet is famous among AT thru hikers for the hostel she used to operate in Erwin, TN. She closed it a few years ago and now follows the northbound bubble of hikers doing trail magic. I've met many hikers along the way this year who had benefitted from her kindness, but I hadn't met her yet. It was good to finally meet her! I also got a couple of sodas from her. :-)



Miss Janet and Crusoe

I hiked uphill with Crusoe for a while then stopped to take a break. He was in a hurry to catch up with Lop Sang who had left before him from the shelter where they stayed last night. As I was eating, checking email and making some calls, up the hill comes Lop Sang! Apparently Crusoe had passed her when she took a wrong turn earlier in the day. She continued on up the hill.

A little while later I passed a Sobo who told me there was a moose just off the trail at the top of the next hill. Sure enough, there he was, about 25 feet away in a thicket of trees! Not a great photo op, but hopefully you can make out his head in the photo.



Looking for Rocky the Flying Squirrel, Perhaps?

I caught up with Lop Sang on one of the downhills and we hiked together for a while until we caught Crusoe taking a break at a road crossing. He had a fire going! Lop Sang cooked some black beans and shared them with me for my tortillas. Then Miss Janet drove up and I got another soda. I was a little concerned about not having enough food to make it to my next food sources



Great Views from the Top of Lookout Cabin

tomorrow afternoon before getting to Norwich.

I pressed on by myself. I stopped at the Lookout Cabin shelter to check out the view from a platform built on the top of the shelter above the tops of the trees. Pretty Awesome! I met Late Start and Snickers up there and we chatted a while. Late Start is a young man from NJ who works with teenagers who have psychiatric issues. Very noble mission.

They left and I chatted with Linda on the phone until two women section hikers climbed up. They were staying at the shelter that night. I needed to get going, so I didn't talk with them very much, but climbed on down and got hiking again. I got to the Winturri Shelter about 7:00. Sobo section hikers Goat and Jet Lag were there. They're doing Vermont on this trip. Spencer was also there, headed for the Long Trail. I ate most of the rest of my food, then set up my tent and went to bed.

The trail conditions have been much nicer since the AT left the Long Trail and headed east to NH. I suspect it's due both to the nature of the mountains the Long Trail follows and its age. Someone told me the Long Trail was established in 1920, so it's had many years of erosion and hiker usage.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, August 05, 2014

Lookin' for Food in All the Wrong Places

Destination: Elm St, Norwich VT
Starting Location: Winturri Shelter
Today's Miles: 23.80
Trip Miles: 1740.70

I had three options for getting more food today. The first was the On the Edge Farm about three miles down the trail, but I knew they wouldn't be open yet when I went by. The second was the Cloudland Market a quarter mile down a road about nine miles into my day. It's part of a family farm that my AT Guide said is closed on Sunday and Monday, but today's Tuesday! The third was the West Hartford Village Store, which includes a deli and the town post office about 16 miles into my day.

As I approached the road to the Cloudland Market about noon, I met Martha and her dog Tippy who were on a day hike. We chatted a bit, then she continued on her hike while I headed up to the market. It was a warm sunny hike uphill on a paved road, but I was rewarded at the top by



Cows on the Trail

the farm being closed with no one around! There had been a sign at the trail head about their being open and having sandwiches on Saturday afternoon, so I guess they don't have regular hours. I had a couple of bars left in my pack and some trail magic of some cookies and an orange soda, so that will have to get me to West Hartford.

I soon caught up with Martha and we hiked and chatted together to the next road crossing where she was going to turn around and return to her car. She asked where I was staying tonight and she knows Short 'n Sweet and Greybeard. Her daughter Helen was a good high school friend of their son The Brain. When we got to the road crossing, Roots was there with her car supporting Uphill. Another thru hiker was taking a zero with Roots while she waited for some new shoes to arrive. I can't remember her name, so I'll call her Smiles 'cause she seemed very upbeat and always had a great smile. I got their picture, a bottle of water and a small bag of chips!



Martha, Uphill, Smiles and Roots

As I finally approached West Hartford, I passed several Sobos who all told me about the major trail magic going on in West Hartford. When I got to the town, I met Uphill, Roots and Smiles by their car in front of the village store, where Uphill was ending his day. The store was closed for the year! Not to worry though, there was major trail magic just a few houses further up the street.

As they drove off, I hiked on up the street - nobody at that house, or that house, or that house... Apparently the trail magic had closed down just before I got there! Further up the street I did chat with an older guy outside his house that was an old school house built in the 1800s. He had converted it into to his home over the past 40 years. Very nice guy, but no food!

So, off to Norwich! I did come across a few more cookies left on the trail as trail magic to keep me going. I also checked email and saw one from Short 'n Sweet warning me that the store in West Hartford was closed this year!

Short 'n Sweet and Greybeard live right on the AT as it enters Norwich. Their son, The Brain, thru hiked the AT several years ago. While in the Smokies, a blister on his foot got infected and some day hikers took him into their home for several days while he recovered. Short 'n Sweet and Greybeard were moved to "pay it forward" and started opening up their home to thru hikers. I don't know how hikers get connected with them, Tic was my connection, but I think they said they housed about 170 hikers last year. Talk about paying it forward! They also leave a cooler with trail magic outside on the road for passing hikers.

I was the first hiker to arrive, and Short 'n Sweet directed me immediately to the shower to get cleaned up. Since I hadn't eaten she invited me to have dinner with them. Later, Sobos Goosechase and Apple Pie arrived and Nobo Packrat. They had already eaten dinner so after their showers they went down to the basement and watched movies while I enjoyed a wonderful dinner and conversation with Short 'n Sweet, Greybeard, their just-out-of-college daughter Mox and her friend Will. Good folks, all! :-)

After dinner I joined the other hikers in the basement where Greybeard had set up blow-up mattresses. Short 'n Sweet told us all the story of the folks in NC helping their son, and encouraged us all to pay it forward, too. A very nice ending to a hungry day!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, August 06, 2014

Well... That's 12 Down!

Destination: Trapper John Shelter
Starting Location: Elm St, Norwich VT
Today's Miles: 19.10
Trip Miles: 1759.80

Well... That's 12 down!

Short 'n Sweet had the day off and left early for a yoga class at 6:00. I thought I'd see her when she got back, but she wasn't home by 7:30 when Greybeard was leaving for work. The other hikers had already hiked the road between their house and Hanover, so Greybeard drove them into Hanover for resupply on his way to work, and I hiked on down the road. On the way down the hill I met Short 'n Sweet on her way home, so I did get to say goodbye and to thank her again.

The AT follows a three mile road walk through Norwich and Hanover before re-entering the woods on the east side of Hanover. It crosses the river between the two towns where I entered New Hampshire, my 13th state! On Greybeard's recommendation, I stopped at Lou's Restaurant for breakfast. Great recommendation! As a thru hiker, I started off with a free cruller and ordered the Big Green - two eggs, two pieces of bacon, a large piece of sausage, home fries and my choice of French toast. Per Greybeard's suggestion again, I chose the cruller version of the French toast. Pretty awesome! I was full again!

I then stopped by the post office to mail a couple of items home and ran into Goosechase and Apple Pie who had just picked up their resupply packages. They had more food than would fit in their packs, so they gave me a couple of bars.

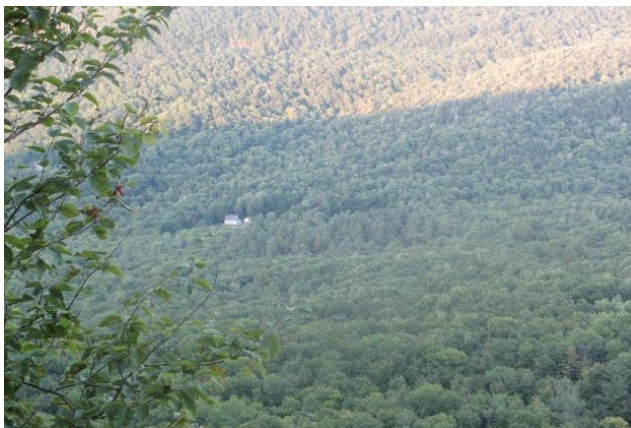
Then I hiked over to the Co-op on the east side of town for some resupply and eat-now shopping. I got enough food to fill my food bag plus stuff my stomach then. I normally wouldn't need that much to make it to Franconia Notch, but I had some calorie catching up to do! It was after 11:00 when I finally entered the woods. I had a sluggish start, with a full pack on my back and my digestive system and my legs battling each other for my blood supply. I kept on stuffing my face with food as I hiked, so the battle continued. Finally, about 3:00, I felt like my old hiking self.

I have been emailing with our friend Swede who we met three years ago on our Alpine hike. He and Nancy live in CT, and Swede wanted to hike with me in the Whites for a couple of days. He hikes there a lot, even leading groups from his church each year. Last winter he did some frozen waterfall climbing there! I had planned to get to Glencliff, on the south side of Mt. Mooselauke, tomorrow night, so Swede is planning to park his truck at Franconia Notch and hitch and hike to the north side of Mt. Mooselauke tomorrow. Then we'll meet at the top of Mooselauke Friday morning and hike north together.



Followed This Old Stone Wall for a Ways

So I wanted to get in a little over 20 miles today, but the late start out of Hanover cut that short a little. Stopping and chatting with other hikers along the way slowed me down some, too, but I enjoyed that! Just after leaving Hanover I met Big Foot, whom I'd heard about way back on the trail. I stopped by the Moose Mountain Shelter and met Nobo Sparrow and Sobo Fis, who were planning to stop there for the night. Right after that I met a large group of Boy Scouts on a dinner break who were planning to camp at that shelter - it



House in the Woods

will be crowded there tonight! Then, as I came up on a beaver pond, I met Sobo This Is It from Australia. He was trying to see the beaver after hearing it slapping his tail on the water. We waited a while and chatted some, but never saw the beaver.

It was 8:00 when I finally reached the Trapper John Shelter for a 19 mile day. There were several folks set up in their tents and I picked a nice spot near Joe, from Germany, who was fixing his dinner. He came over and chatted while I set up. He started from Springer on April 5, but had a rough first five weeks due to blisters on his feet. He finally got a size larger shoe which seemed to do the trick. I told him I wear a size 12 street shoe, a size 13 running shoe (even though I don't run any more), and size 14 trail runners. He's figured out he has to do the same thing, although about 4 sizes smaller than I in each category.

A quick bite of supper then off to bed! 27 more miles to Glencliff with rain in the forecast for tomorrow, so we'll see how far I make it.

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, August 07, 2014

Fun Old Fire Tower

Destination: Ore Hill Brook, Mile 1782.0

Starting Location: Trapper John Shelter

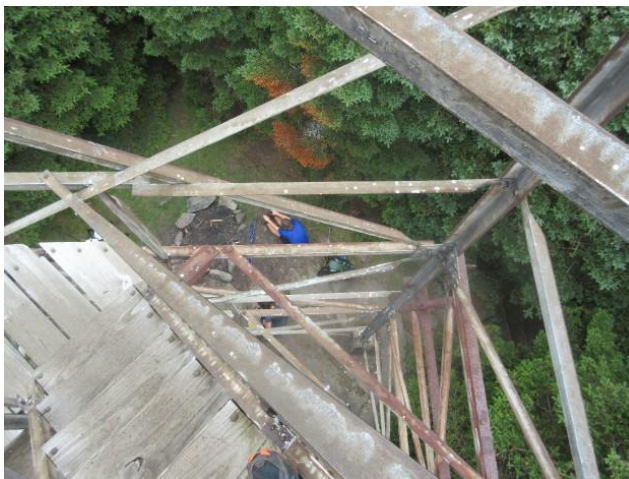
Today's Miles: 22.20

Trip Miles: 1782.00

I got a 6:40 start, hoping for a 27 mile day, but the forecast rain made it doubtful. As the day progressed, the rocky trail combined with the rain made it impossible!



From the Fire Tower on Smarts Mountain



Coming Down the Fire Tower



Can You See the Fire Tower on Top of Smarts Mountain?

I started out on some fairly easy trail before heading up a steep rocky trail to Smarts Mountain. Half way up it levels off for a while at Lamberts Ridge where I took the photo of Smarts Mountain with the top covered by a cloud. There's an old fire tower on the top and when I got there the clouds had cleared for a bit and I got some great views. Four Nobo thru hikers were there who had spent the night, two of them in the fire tower! We chatted some, but I forgot their names - an unfortunately common occurrence for me. I need to remember to record names on my phone's voice recorder right after I meet folks.

Light rain began to fall off and on. When I started going up Mt. Cube, a thunderstorm rolled through. The steep rocky climb was tough enough, but the rain made it really slow going.

Fortunately, the rain had cleared when I got near the top and I had some great views approaching the summit. But it took some careful climbing over the wet rocks, and my feet were not particularly happy despite the views! :-)

After 22 miles I crossed Lake Tarleton Rd at about 6:45 and was trying to decide how much further to go. My feet had had it with being wet and climbing rocks all day. As I entered the woods I saw a beautiful spot for a tent on soft pine needle covered ground under the pine trees next to a stream. This is it!

Unfortunately, I didn't have cell coverage so I couldn't let Swede know that I'd be a little late for our rendezvous tomorrow. I'll text him as soon as I get coverage tomorrow. For now, it's time to dry off and rest my weary feet with a good night's sleep for a big day tomorrow! The weather's supposed to be great for the next several days!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, August 08, 2014

Hiking with Swede

Destination: Eliza Brook Shelter
Starting Location: Ore Hill Brook
Today's Miles: 21.40
Trip Miles: 1803.40

Being five and a half miles behind schedule for meeting Swede, I got up early and was hiking at 5:40. When I got to Glenclyff, there really isn't any town at all where the AT goes, just a few road crossings in the woods. And no cell phone coverage!

So I proceeded to start climbing up Mt. Mooselauke. It's about a 3500 foot climb over about five miles, not as steep as the descent down the north side will be. I met Spoonfoot when I stopped at a stream for water, and he and I leapfrogged with each other the rest of the day.

Still no reception. I knew Swede would be looking for me at the top by now. I had originally told him I'd be at the top by 9 or 10, but after that I told him I planned to camp at the bottom of the mountain, thinking I might be earlier. He said if he didn't see me at the top, he'd continue on to the South Peak and wait for me there. It was looking like I might get to South Peak a little after 10.

As I continued to climb, I met young Sobos Holly and Straight Up who had spent the night



South Peak of Mt. Mooselauke – Swede's Not Here!

with Swede on the other side of the mountain. He had told them about me, and they wanted to ask me about flying in space so I spent some time chatting with them. As I continued on I met three more Sobos who had talked to Swede and knew he was looking for me. They said he had taken the side trail to South Peak, but it was too cold and windy, so he was waiting for me at the side trail junction with the AT.

I got to the junction about 10:30. Swede wasn't there, so I hiked up the side trail to South Peak. On the way I finally got reception and a couple of texts from Swede asking where I was. I texted back that I was on the trail to South Peak. When I got there, Swede wasn't there either. It was cold, windy and covered in clouds. As I hiked back to the AT I got another text from Swede that he had gone back to the main peak, so I headed that way. We finally met each other half way there as he was walking back towards me. Turns out he left the junction at about 10:15, so I told him that if he hadn't told all the Sobos about me, I would have been there by then!



Mt. Mooselauke with Swede

We hiked back up to the main peak, took a quick picture in the clouds, and headed down the other side to get out of the cold wind before taking a lunch break. The trail down the mountain was beautiful as it followed Beaver Brook which was a continuous series of cascades and waterfalls. However, it was also steep, rocky and wet which made for slow, cautious going. There were numerous places where the trail maintainers had bolted blocks of wood and metal handholds into the rocks just to make it possible to get up and down the rocks. Thanks Trail Maintainers! :-)

Getting over Mt. Wolf, the next mountain was tougher than Mt. Mooselauke although it isn't nearly as high. The trail was wet and rocky, and in many cases I had to carry my poles in one hand and use the other to help climb up the rocks. A couple of times on the way down I just threw my poles down below the rocks so I could use both hands climbing down.



Nicer View from Mt. Wolf with Swede

We finally got to Eliza Brook Shelter about 6:45 and it was full of mostly Nobo hikers, both the shelter and the tent sites. I was beat after the tough twenty one mile day following a series of tough days. Swede got the last spot in the shelter and I got the last tent site. After setting up my tent, I returned to the shelter to have dinner with Swede. He cooked a double serving Mountain House meal and shared it with me. I was chilly and tired and it hit the spot! I'll have to think some more about carrying a stove with me when I come back to finish the trail in September!

My original plan was to get nearer Franconia Notch today so Swede and I would hike up onto Franconia Ridge tomorrow. Swede would break off at some point to return to his truck while I continued on for a couple of days before getting off the trail for our family reunion. The weather is forecast to be perfect for the

next couple of days, so I'd like to do as much of the Whites while I know the weather will be good. We could still do that, but I'm fatigued. I decided to see how I felt in the morning and adjust plans accordingly.

Note that I led all day today with Swede. I started at a pretty good pace but started lagging as the trail got rougher and I got more tired. Swede stayed with me the whole way. Although he said he was tired, too, he looked a lot less tired than I felt!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, August 09, 2014

Decision Day

Destination: Franconia Notch

Starting Location: Eliza Brook Shelter

Today's Miles: 8.80

Trip Miles: 1812.20

I woke up in the night thinking about what I was going to do, so I got out my guide and did some planning. I knew that if I still felt fatigued, I should take a zero/nero day to recover before I went much further. If I did that and continued on, I'd have trouble getting to a road crossing where I could get back home easily in time for our son's arrival. On the other hand, I could simply go home with Swede to CT tomorrow - he and Nancy have invited me to spend the night there. Linda's in Albany with her family and could just pick me up at Swede and Nancy's.

I decided that I'd go home with Swede tomorrow. Depending on how strong I felt, we'd either stop at Franconia Notch or hike up onto the ridge beyond before returning to his truck. I feel good, but fatigued.

I got up early and packed up and walked down to the shelter from my tent site. Swede was up and had eaten breakfast. The shelter was full of mostly older guys so they were all up by then. I got my food out of the bear box next to the shelter and had some breakfast before we started hiking.

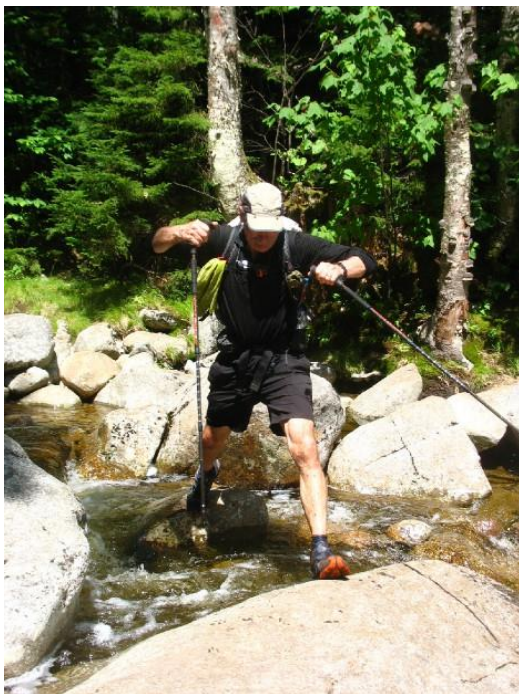
It was another beautiful day. We started out by climbing the steep rocky trail up Kinsman Mountain. It didn't take me long to figure out that I wasn't at my normal energy level. I soon decided that I'd save Franconia Ridge for my return in September. That took a load off my mind, and I enjoyed today's hike, albeit at a slower pace than normal.

We stopped at Lonesome Lake Hut on the way down to check it out. The Whites have a series of "huts" along



Franconia Ridge from Lonesome Lake Hut

the trail where one can sleep and be served dinner and breakfast, but for a price. A few thru hikers can also "work for stay" at them, where they get the left overs, sleep in the dining area, and help with chores but don't have to pay. When Swede and I got to the hut, there were still some left over pancakes set out for anyone to eat, so I ate a bunch! I also bought a cinnamon roll to complement the pancakes. Since we were not in a hurry, Swede and I relaxed a bit and enjoyed the view and chatting with other hikers and the caretakers.



Cross That Creek!

I may have mentioned this before, but last Christmas Sarah gave me one of the wall posters of the AT - a long skinny poster showing a map of the AT as it progresses through 14 states up the east coast. She wanted me to mark the sections of the AT I have hiked, thinking it would cover a bunch of the trail. Since I knew I'd only covered a couple hundred miles or so, I knew it wouldn't be much! When finished, it looked like a bunch of dots and a few dashes highlighted along the trail!

So this year I've been connecting the dots. As Swede and I left the hut and headed down the trail, I was connecting the next to last dot. Several years ago Sarah and I camped in Franconia Notch and hiked the blue blazed trail from the campsite up to Lonesome Lake Hut, then hiked down the AT to another blue blazed trail that took us back to the campsite. Swede and I covered that dot today. The following day Sarah and I hiked a blue blazed trail from the campsite up to Haystack Mountain on Franconia Ridge, where we hiked on the AT along the ridge to Mt. Lafayette and then descended down another blue blazed trail to Greenleaf Hut and then back to our campsite. I'll connect that last dot when I come back in September!

Swede and I continued on down the rocky trail to the bottom, crossed under I-93, and took the side trail one mile to the parking lot where he had his truck. There was a nice section of trail near the bottom where I could open it up and stretch my legs. I could reach my faster hiking pace, but could tell I wouldn't be able to keep it up for long. It was time for a rest. But it was great to hike fast for a bit before getting off the trail! :-)

Guess I've come to an interesting place when I consider hiking 8.8 miles in the mountains while carrying a backpack as doing a short day because I'm fatigued!

The best part of my decision to get off the trail today was that I got to spend time with Nancy again and to meet their son Owen. Tomorrow, when Linda comes to pick me up, she'll get to see both Swede and Nancy! Good times!

I don't know how much I'll be journaling over the next few weeks, but may have occasional updates. Linda and I have all sorts of family activities for the next several weeks in VA, CA and Zion NP. I'll be flying up to CT on Sep 4 and Swede will join me for a couple more days as we get back on the trail on Sep 5. In the meantime, be blessed and consider it pure joy! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, August 22, 2014

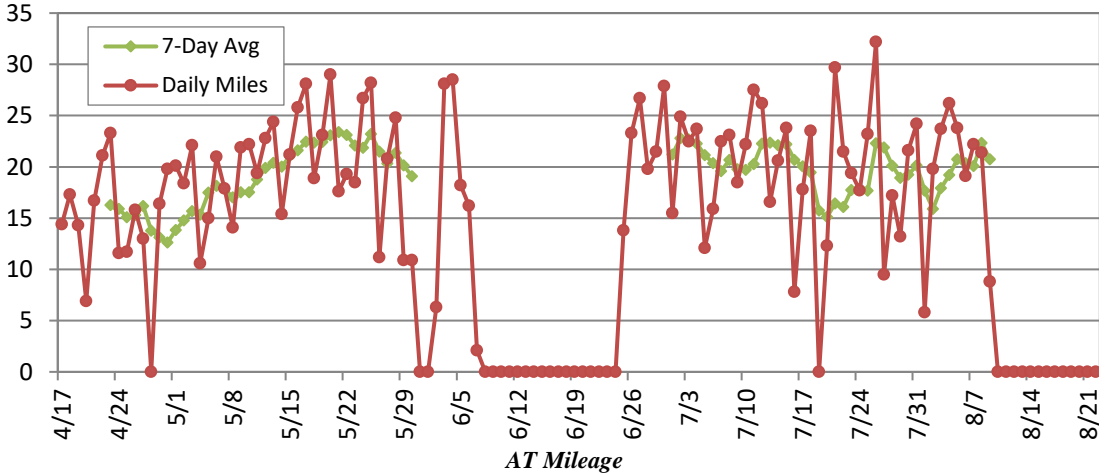
Family Time

Destination: California
Starting Location: Franconia Notch
Today's Miles: 0.00
Trip Miles: 1812.20

Enjoying my time with family, and considering it pure joy!

Being a bit of a spreadsheet geek, I couldn't resist making a spreadsheet of my daily mileage. The below chart shows my daily miles so far and the 7-day average mileage for each day including the previous 6 days. I didn't realize it until now, but 13 of the days I walked at least a marathon!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



Monday, August 25, 2014

Lots of New Friends!

Destination: California
Starting Location: California
Today's Miles: 0.00
Trip Miles: 1812.20

Linda and I went with our daughter's family to their church here in CA Sat evening. After the service, I was talking with the pastor who gave the sermon (excellent, by the way), and she asked me about my hike. She's a hiker, too. She asked me what was the most beautiful thing I'd seen on my hike, and I had to respond "people." She understood.

So I went through my journal posts and copied the names of all the people I was with on the trail whose names I included in my posts.

241 people!

241 good folks!

And there are many more than that whom I met but whose names I either didn't get or I forgot!

Linda, Sarah, Val, Wired, Harley, Chloe, David, Greg, Billy Goat, Bart, John, Chosen One, Andy, Dan, Ben,

Dandelion, Alex, Mason, Eric/Ajax, Celeste/Acorn, Little Foot, Fiful, Mad Max, Sage, Ranger, Jake, Poppy, Learnin', Grant/Lucky B, Momma Bear, Bible Packer, Mother Goose, Mother Theresa, My Time, Mrs. My Time, Honey Bear, Virgil, Normally Hob, B Team, Chuck Norris, Baltimore Jack, Tim, Jim, Casper, Ace, Scotty, Flint, Gunpowder, Jimmy Carter, Sixty, Ready, Paul, Lee, Scout, Chinook, Bud, Moka Pot, Pockets, Hansel, Gretel, Flynn, Gloria, AZ Cruiser, Bear Man, Skins, Three Way, Stevie Wander, The Pope, Nora V, Lop Sang, Dan, Paul, Bear Juice, Dan, Nahni, Scout, Terry, Jay, Mother Earth, Oma, Twist, Canon, I Believe, Faith, Laurel, Crusoe, Britta, Flower Child, L Dog, Rod&Reel, Bandana Bill, Sherlock, Hemlock, Uncle Buck, Gloria, Tom, Flash, Glitter Feet, Gary, Tinder, Blackbeard, Six Slash, Sassafras, Lisa, Rene, Damien, Celine, Laurent, Brienne, Mike, Natalie, Rowdy, Carol, Chris, Dos Lekis, Ghost, Baloo, Survivor, Tim, James, Guppy, Mountain Mamma, Sarah, Roger, Kathy, MacGyver, Ken, Landon, Evan, Kolton/Koltrain, Jeff, Happy Hiker, Webclearer, Linda, Marathon, Sloth, Magic Hat, Hobo Nobo, Caddy Shack, Why Wait, Rob Stable, Sarah (one of 5 Cru crew), Cat, Frankenstein, Medic, Grasshopper, Mitch, Paula, Fire, Moses, Slayer, Bobcat, Not Yet, Simple, Bill, Dorothy, Preacher Man, Naptime, Achilles,

Muffin Man, True Story, Stan, Chop Sticks, Toes, Weatherman, Old Man, Conner, Judy, Bailey, Wiki, Blue, Longhorn, Daytripper, Rockslotch, Grizzly Grouse, Long Bow, Little Spoon, Squanto, Shellback, AB, Opus, Fuji, Cozy, Spike, Rare Breed, Cookie Lady, Hungarian Revolution, Salty Hat, No Name, Flinch, Carl, Diane, Sky Chickens, Glenn, Pam, Kristi, Claire, Soggy, Princess North Star, Kansas Express, Ben, Calves, Prancer, Tobasco, Nubbins, Owl, Wendy, Jeff, Not Worthy, T-Bird, Flash, Onisimus, Leslie, Jennifer, Turtle/James, Julie, Lunch Box, Uphill, Roots, Miss Janet, Late Start, Snickers, Goat, Jet Lag, Spencer, Martha, Smiles, Short 'n Sweet, Greybeard, Goosechase, Apple Pie, Packrat, Mox, Will, Big Foot, Sparrow, Fis, This Is It, Joe, Spoonfoot, Swede

Looking forward to meeting some more good folks in September!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, August 31, 2014

Guest Book

Destination: California

Starting Location: California

Today's Miles: 0.00

Trip Miles: 1812.20

Just spent several fun, wonderful days camping and hiking in Zion National Park with kids, grandkids and two other families. Pretty awesome! Waterpark tomorrow for a granddaughter and grandson birthday party! :-)

Guest Book

Thank you to everyone who has left comments in the Guest Book - I certainly enjoy reading them! :-)

Each time someone posts an entry, Trailjournals sends me an email with the comment and their email address if they've included it. (Their email address doesn't show up on the website.) So I get the comments whenever I'm in a place where I can check email - I don't have to go to the website to see them.

I haven't done a particularly good job of acknowledging or responding to all the Guest Book posts, especially when no return email address is included. I've listed the contributors below in an effort both to thank them for their encouragement and to let others learn just a little bit about some of the folks who have meant a lot to Linda and me over the years.

I'll go in roughly chronological order of their posts:

Ellie Baughman/Hummingbird - to my knowledge, I never met Ellie on the trail, but she kept a journal and had to get off after 600 miles due to a leg injury. Hope you recover well, Hummingbird!

Hppyhkr - don't know who she is, but appreciate her comment about Worthy!

Stargazer - very nice guy I met on one of my hiking trails near home.

Tic/Bruce - I've talked about Tic in my "About" section. He originated the nickname AstroGuy in his trail journal during his AT hike a few years ago. We communicate outside of the Guest Book, so many of his posts are there to help other readers be aware of information resources, and to remind me to post helpful information!

Joe Lynch - I never met Joe, but appreciate his comment!

Bob Foerster - longtime friend. Bob was one of the 12 Teacher in Space finalists and a Purdue alum. He was instrumental in connecting me with the folks who brought me back to Purdue to work in '04-'06. I also use him as an example to folks getting knee replacements - after retiring as a school principal, he had both knees replaced at the same time and went hiking with me in the GA mountains just a few months later! (Bob, I'll be doing a complete gear review in a post-hike journal post.)

Bill Fairback aka many other entry names - longtime friend with a great sense of humor. Although I have no proof, I'm certain he's the one making the entries as historical figures associated with my various locations on the trail. He and Citty serve by supporting/encouraging folks in Washington, DC. Thanks for your encouragement and your history lessons, Bill!

Patti and Dave Leestma - dear friends in my Astronaut class of 1980. I like to point out how well they home-school educated their six kids as demonstrated by all three of their boys graduating from the Air Force Academy, even though Dave is a Navy guy who graduated from Annapolis - so the boys must be smarter than their dad! All three girls graduated from Texas A&M. Wonderful family!

Robyn/Deja - never met Robyn, but appreciate her comments!

Faith - my dear, wonderful sister! Thanks for your support and coming to hike with me!

Sarah Gardner - one of our wonderful daughters and my hiking companion on many of the AT sections I've hiked before as well as on several sections of this hike.

Stu & Debbe Johnson – longtime dear friends. Stu and I were classmates at USAFA, and teased each other about not being rocks anymore and becoming more like butter puddles - due to Linda and Debbe. (See July 18 post for explanation of a rock.) They always have good counsel when we're seeking the Lord's will in our decision making.

Marilyn and Rich Moore – good friends from our time in Georgia at Riverside. I would not have been able to lead the folks there without Rich's wise advice.

Bob and Lyn Watson – good friends, the first folks I got to know at our church in West Lafayette, IN. I emailed Bob that I'll have to pass on his marching orders since I'm still working on following the higher marching order of loving my neighbor! Thanks Bob and Lyn for your love and support!

Laurel – Had a lot of fun with Laurel and Faith when they came out to support me in VA. It was even fun for me to "rescue" Laurel when her knee started hurting on our hike together – not sure how much fun it was for Laurel, though! Thanks for your support and coming out to hike, too!

Linda – My amazing, awesome wife of nearly 45 years! Thanks for supporting me in this endeavor, too!

Greg Lindemuth – Williamson's CFO/business manager/IT manager/many-other-hats when I was president there. I depended on Greg a lot for knowledge and counsel! Greg has hiked about half the AT... still time to do the rest, Greg!

Frank and Ellen – wonderful new friends of ours. Part of a church home group in our new neighborhood, helping look after Linda while I'm gone!

Ron Pomeroy, Ann & Rick Couch, Jeff and Anne, Mike Marks, Roberto Chiasserini – all very good friends from our Test Pilot School Class 75A. Jeff and I were classmates at USAFA, but didn't know each other until TPS. They were also stationed in the Philippines with us and we've become very good friends over the years. In November, they're setting sail on a two and a half year journey around the world in their sailboat. We often greet each other with Groucho glasses and the expression "It's time to have fun!"

Gale Brown – our daughter Sarah's best friend from elementary and middle school. Still best friends!

Jerry Ross – I thought of Jerry on the trail whenever I ate pretzel m&m's. They taste a lot like malted milk balls and Jerry always had malted milk balls on his shuttle flights. Jerry was in the TPS class behind me and we ended up in the same Astronaut group in 1980. We were scheduled to fly together on the first space shuttle mission out of Vandenberg AFB, CA, going

into a polar orbit. After the Challenger explosion in 1986, space shuttle flights out of Vandenberg were cancelled, and Jerry and I flew on space shuttle mission STS-27 together. Jerry was the first person to fly seven times in space. He just came out with an autobiography, which also has a children's version.

Brett Watterson – Brett was assigned to fly on the Vandenberg space shuttle mission with us as one of the military payload specialists trained to fly on the shuttle with military payloads. After the cancellation of shuttle flights out of Vandenberg, the military payloads were shifted back to unmanned rockets and the military payload specialist program was cancelled. Brett, a VMI graduate, had planned to fly a set of Gen George Marshall's stars on the flight, so we flew them for him on STS-27. I had the honor of presenting them to the George Marshall Museum for Brett after our flight. Thanks for your encouragement, Brett and Ruth!

Jen/Jennifer Teems – our other wonderful daughter and the mother of our grandkids!

Jack Kunz – another of our TPS class good friends. I hadn't heard about the Buckeye trail, but it sounds like a cool goal to finish it off, Jack! Interestingly, I've met lots of Ohio folks on the AT.

Andrew Wilkinson – never met Andrew, but appreciate your encouragement!

Spence Gardner – me awesome brudder! Been praying extra for him as he goes through some medical issues. (The trail is a good place to pray for folks!) Thanks, Bro!

Emily Dalton – one of Dave and Patti's six wonderful kids. She and Joe and their kids hosted Linda and me last year at the Christian camp on Lake Tahoe where they live and work. Thanks, Emily!

Mike Mullane – Mike was in the astronaut group two years ahead of me and we were scheduled for the Vandenberg mission together with Jerry and Brett. Mike, Jerry and I later flew together on STS-27 with Hoot and Shep. 'Twas a great crew – full of expertise yet full of fun, including teasing anyone who showed any signs of an inflated ego! Years later, Mike introduced me to the company that hired me to speak to school kids around the country for a year.

Tom Jones – a younger astronaut with whom I overlapped in the astronaut office for a couple of years. Tom now lives in the DC area and likes to visit Civil War battlefields. We recently hiked some of the trails near our house together.

James Jones – another reader I haven't met, but appreciate his encouragement!

Crip – Crip was assigned as my commander on the first shuttle flight out of Vandenberg AFB, where I was scheduled to be the pilot. What a great mentor! Crip was the pilot on the first space shuttle flight, STS-1, and went on to command three other missions before being assigned to the Vandenberg mission. No one knew more about how the space shuttle worked and its operational procedures than Crip! He also had a good sense of humor and the ability to look at issues from a broad perspective rather than a narrow astronaut-office-only perspective. I learned a lot from Crip! Wish I could have flown with him, too. After the Challenger accident, Crip went on to various leadership roles to help get the program back on track. Thanks, Crip!

Wayne and Marie Watson – wonderful folks! Wayne was my boss - the chairman of the board - at Williamson. Wayne is a Williamson alumnus who went on to Penn State for an engineering degree. Marie was the daughter of the Williamson carpentry shop instructor and grew up on campus. They both are incredibly dedicated to Williamson. Wayne knows all about the “Pennsylvania rocks” having led Boy Scout hikes along the AT in PA.

Linda Bierly – trail angel in PA! Thanks Linda!

Soggy – section hiker I met on Mt. Williams. Good conversation!

Mark Franson/Swede – good friend I hiked with my last two days into Franconia Notch. We’ll hike together through the rest of the Whites when I get back on trail in September.

Short ‘n Sweet and Greybeard – wonderful hosts in Norwich! Thank you!

Texas Tornado – we never met on the trail. Texas, I’ll have some thoughts, hopefully words of wisdom, for future hikers in my “post flight report” after I finish the trail.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, September 05, 2014

On the Trail Again!

Destination: Galehead Hut
Starting Location: Franconia Notch
Today's Miles: 13.00
Trip Miles: 1825.20

Linda dropped me off at Reagan National and Swede picked me up at Hartford Airport yesterday evening and I enjoyed a Venison Pie dinner with Nancy, him and their son Owen in



Linda Dropping Me Off

their home. Yum! Swede and I left their house at 1:30 this morning to drive up to North Woodstock for breakfast at Peg's when they opened at 5:30. We then headed up to the parking lot south of Franconia Notch and started hiking about 6:20. We hiked the 0.8 mile trail from the parking lot to the AT where we got off the trail nearly four weeks ago.

'Twas good to get back on the AT! I started out pretty strong despite my hiatus. The trail climbing up to Franconia Ridge soon turned rocky, and I discovered my ability to climb up rocks had definitely taken a set back! I had done some hiking while in CA, including some steep trails, but no bouldering. My knees began to



Mt Lafayette behind Swede and Me



Swede Getting Ready to Fly

complain and I had to slow down - for both my knees and my cardiovascular system! Most folks plan for fewer miles per day going thru the Whites, and I now agree! I'm glad Swede suggested the schedule we're on instead of a more aggressive one that I might have designed. :-)

When we got up on the open ridge, the view was awesome! The stretch from Little Haystack Mt. to Mt. Lafayette is what Sarah and I hiked together several years ago, and is the last part of the AT going northbound that I have hiked before. I've now connected all the dots! All new trail for me from here to Katahdin.

The trail was a lot of rock hopping and by the time we got to Galehead Hut, I was pretty tired. At one point during the day I was going down a wet slopping slab of rock when my feet slipped out ahead of me causing me to sit down abruptly on the rock as I slid down it. This has happened before and is usually no big deal. However, this time my right pole somehow got tangled with my legs such that I sat on it, snapping the middle section in half. Down to one hiking pole for the Whites!

The weather was great and there were a lot of other hikers out on the trail. The only other thru hikers we chatted with were Five Hour and Fifty, two young men who blew past us hiking up the mountain. We saw them again later at our lunch break on the top of Lafayette. We also passed a couple of groups of Dartmouth students doing section hikes as part of freshman orientation.

We got to Galehead Hut in plenty of time for dinner at 6:00. We were welcomed by the Hut Crew of Jess, Will And Ace. There were only 8 other guests there, so Swede and I had one of the four bunk rooms to ourselves. Over a great



Hiking up the Rocks



Dartmouth Freshmen Orientation Group



Sunset from Galehead Hut

dinner, we had good conversation with several of the other guests. I got the names of only Kevin and Kathy, a young married couple, and Christine, a young woman who used to live in Arlington, VA near where Linda and I once lived. I was the only thru hiker there, the others being out for just a few days.

It was a beautiful, enjoyable, tiring day on the AT!

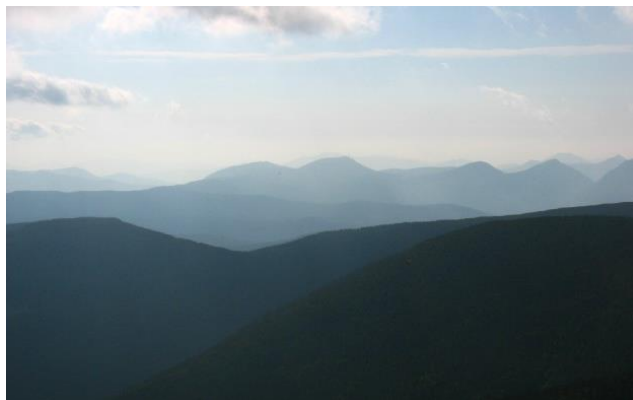
~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, September 06, 2014

Great Day, Rainy Evening

Destination: Ethan Pond Campsite
Starting Location: Galehead Hut
Today's Miles: 11.80
Trip Miles: 1837.00

At the huts, the crew wakes everyone up at 6:30 and breakfast is served at 7:00 sharp. Swede and I were up



How Many Shades of Grey?

earlier since we wanted to start hiking as soon as breakfast is over. Today is the shortest and should be the easiest... er... I mean, least difficult hiking of our four planned days from Franconia Notch to Pinkham Notch. It's also the only day with rain in the forecast and the day with the fewest majestic views. The original forecast of chance of rain throughout the day changed to thunderstorms late in the day. We're blessed!



Galehead Hut Crew

We stopped at Zealand Falls Hut for lunch and picked a scenic spot out on the rocky slope that comprise the falls. The weather cooperated all day and we only had a couple of drip-drops until we got to the Ethan Pond Campsite. Although the trail difficulty was less, it was still tough, with a lot of downhill, so I was whopped, especially my feet and knees when we got there.

We were planning to sleep in the shelter there, Swede didn't even bring a tent, but the shelter was full of a group of boys from a private school plus Kinder, an older woman who had squeezed herself in amongst them. One of the reasons I got my SoLong6 tent was that I could squeeze two people in it if necessary, as Sarah and I did on my first night out from Springer. So we set up my tent on one of the tent platforms, using one of Swede's hiking poles in place of my broken one.



Breakfast at Galehead Hut

As we started to fix dinner the rain started. So we went to the shelter and ate under the overhang, thus getting to meet some of the folks. Kinder and I had a great time talking. She's a former teacher, who spent her life teaching in American Schools in South and Central America, as well as her last assignment in Africa. She had a stroke that affected her ability to talk (Expressive Aphasia), which is what Linda's Mom had a year ago. Kinder has regained most of her speaking ability, only occasionally pausing briefly to find



Good Spot for Lunch!



Making My Bed!



Having Fun Being Exhausted!



Balancing Act!

the right word. She had to retire from teaching and has spent the last few years section hiking the AT, starting with "the most difficult parts first" of GA, ME and now NH. I had a great time talking about teaching and Aphasia with her, and got some ideas to pass on to Linda's mom. I also chatted some with John, one of the adult leaders of the group. Interestingly, he's the CFO of the school and likes to spend time outdoors, just like Greg, the CFO at Williamson. The boys were great, too, having fun and being polite to us old folks.

During the day I discovered that I left my spoon at home along with my small pocket knife. So I borrowed Swede's knife to fashion a stick to hold the two sections of broken pole together in case I needed to pitch my tent before I get to the White Mountains Hostel, where Linda is sending a replacement section. I'll get a replacement spoon when I get to Pinkham Notch.

The rain stopped and Swede and I squeezed into my tent for the night. Since the tent is longer than one person, it worked well with our heads at opposite ends of the tent so our shoulders were overlapping with the other's feet. The two doors were great so either of us could exit during the night without disturbing the other.

Another wonderful, tiring day on the AT in the Whites! :-)



John, Kinder and Me at Shelter

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, September 07, 2014

Beautiful Day in the Whites

Destination: Lakes of the Clouds Hut
 Starting Location: Ethan Pond Campsite
 Today's Miles: 14.10
 Trip Miles: 1851.10

It didn't rain any during the night and Swede and I slept well despite the tight quarters. We got an early start and headed on down to Crawford Notch. I was feeling well and we made good time - which was good since the climb out was steep and rocky. I still felt good, but the climb, although fun, slowed me down quite a bit in places.

On the way up we leapfrogged some with thru hiker Lately and her dog Early. She has a fear of heights, so



Early and Lately

this stretch really tested her! We also met thru hiker Rodent and lots of weekend section hikers. The rain had really cleared out the air and the views were spectacular.

We got to Mizpah Spring Hut about lunch time and stopped in for a bit, but didn't eat lunch there. Swede knew there was a great spot just a little further down the trail and he was right. We had a great view of Mount Washington and the trail ahead of us!

We got to Lakes of the Clouds Hut about 3:30 and I was tired. I think it's the largest hut, able to house 90 guests. There were about 40 guests spending the night plus several "work for stay" thru hikers. Although it was less than half full, it still seemed like a lot of people to me!

Dinner was great, including an awesome sunset. Swede and I sat with a nice group of folks who were just up for a couple of days, but I didn't get their names.

There are several three-high bunks in our room tonight, so Swede and I are sharing the room with several other hiker guests. I'm sure I'll sleep soundly after a great, tiring day!

~~AstroGuy~~
 "Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, September 08, 2014

Last Day with Swede



Lakes of the Clouds Crew Skit!



Looking Back at Lakes of the Clouds Hut



On Top of Mt. Washington!



Heading to Mt. Jefferson, Adams and Madison

Destination: Pinkham Notch
Starting Location: Lakes of the Clouds Hut
Today's Miles: 14.80
Trip Miles: 1865.90

We had a relatively long day today to make it to Joe Dodge Lodge in time for dinner, so Swede and I were up and packed before breakfast began at 7:00 so we could hit the trail immediately after eating. An apparent tradition at the huts is for the crew to make up skits to remind us of three things in a humorous manner: take out all your trash, fold the blankets on your bunk once lengthwise then twice, and tip the crew. The skit this morning was totally different from the one at Galehead, so I don't know how much coordination they do. I suspect they have a list of different skits that have been made up over the years.

The first task was a 1.3 mile climb up to the top of Mount Washington. I was a little disappointed when we got to the top, because the exact peak is surrounded by buildings and antennas which spoil the view a bit. What was nice is that there were only a few other hikers there, and I've heard it can get very crowded. The peak is serviced by both an auto road and a cog railroad train, which apparently weren't open yet.

We didn't stay long, and started down the trail. As soon as we got below the buildings, the view



Mt. Washington in the Rear View Mirror!



Hiking Along!



Madison Hut and Mt. Madison



Madison Hut Crew Emily and Ethan

is awesome looking down the ridge at Mounts Jefferson, Adams and Madison, where it stays mostly in the open until after descending a ways from Mt. Madison over 6 miles away. Consistent great views! Consistent rock hopping! Tired feet and knees!

The AT goes around Mt. Jefferson and Mt. Adams, bypassing the peaks a little bit. Since Swede had to slow down to stay with me and since he had never hiked over those two peaks, he elected to take the trails over the tops of the peaks. I felt very good about giving him the opportunity to hike at his faster pace plus bag a couple of peaks he hadn't done before. We decided to meet at Madison Spring Hut between Mt. Adams and Mt. Madison. Of course, since Swede had to hike further than I as well as doing more altitude gain and loss, he still got to the hut ahead of me! :-)

There were only two crew at Madison Spring Hut when we got there - Emily and Ethan. We chatted with them while we ate our lunches from our packs. Emily is a Nurse Practitioner who fell in love with the Whites a year or so ago, and is using all her vacation time to serve as a fall hut crew member. Ethan has a degree in political science but has served as a cook at several places the past couple of years. He's figuring out where he wants to/can serve to help solve/alleviate some of our world's people problems.

My feet and knees were really hurting when I got to the hut, but the break revived me and the climb up Mt. Madison went fine. I'd heard the climb down was very difficult, but it turned out to be a different kind of difficulty than I had imagined. I imagined hard hand climbing down sections of steep



Up Mt. Madison!



Down Mt. Madison! (and up and down and...)

cliffs, but that was not it. The difficulty was putting up with two and a half miles of constant downhill rock hopping (with a few uphill) which you think will never end. Torture for my feet and knees! Plus, it was starting to look tight for getting to Joe Dodge Lodge in Pinkham Notch in time for dinner at 6:00!

Fortunately, the last four and a half miles were less intense, with some sections where I could stretch out my stride and make good time. We actually got to the lodge about 5:15, in time to check in and get a shower before going to another great dinner with the other guests. Since Joe Dodge Lodge is on the road going thru the notch, it is a popular place for people to stay and use as either a base for day hikes or a starting/finishing point for section hikes. We met some more neat folks at dinner, including a couple from near Bear Mountain in New York.

Swede and I shared a room with two sets of bunks but no other guests. This is our last night together as he will be taking the shuttle back to his truck after breakfast in the morning. It's been a tough but awesome four days together, plus the two days before my break, and I can't express how much I appreciate him being with me as companion and guide plus shuttle driver and "B&B" host along with Nancy.

Thanks Swede and Nancy!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, September 09, 2014

Leaving the Whites

Destination: Imp Campsite
Starting Location: Pinkham Notch
Today's Miles: 13.10
Trip Miles: 1879.00

Joe Dodge Lodge has a buffet breakfast starting at 6:30, so for the first time in the Hut/Lodge system we didn't have to be there at an exact time. Of course we were there right at 6:30 since Swede had to catch the 7:30 shuttle!

One of the best breakfast buffets I've ever had! Just about everything was there and I stuffed myself. I said goodbye to Swede and went back to the room to figure out what I was doing next. It's 21 miles to my next planned stop at the White Mountain Lodge and Hostel at Rt 2, but the tough climbing and descending isn't over yet. My feet and knees were still pretty sore, so I decided to just see how far I'd get today, knowing I'd stop somewhere in between.

I've had very little cell coverage going thru the Whites, and none at Joe Dodge Lodge, but finally had wifi so I could check email and call Linda on Viber. So I called her one more time before hitting the trail at 8:30. She's pretty awesome putting up with my adventures!

I had about one mile of fairly level trail to get my joints warmed up before heading up Wildcat Mountain. Then it's two miles of steep rocky climbing. There are frequent places of exposed rock climbs where I had to use my hands to get up, but with great views back at Mt. Washington. I thought of Lately and her dog Early, and hoped she had boarded Early for this stretch as she was considering doing. I also thought of her apprehension with heights and knew this would put her to the test.



Looking across Pinkham Notch to the Presidents

After six miles of rough trail, I stopped in to Carter Notch Hut for lunch - the last hut in the Whites. Pete was the only crew member there at the time and I enjoyed chatting with him. He asked me how I got my trail name, and when I told him a fellow NASA guy gave it to me, he asked me where I worked at NASA. When I told him DC and Houston, he asked me what I did at the Johnson Space Center. Turns out, he grew up in Clear Lake City and went to the same high school as our oldest daughter. He's the "naturalist" member of the fall crew, who are there for only four weeks before they close the hut for the winter. He's planning on grad school in his specialty area of geology next year.

Shortly after getting there, Mailman and No Rush came in for lunch. I had seen them several times in the past few days, but hadn't really met them until now. They had been just behind me climbing up Wildcat, so I knew we had a similar pace. They're both older guys (not as old as I) who met in Duncannon and have been hiking together since then. I had decided by then to head on to the Imp Campsite another 7 miles down the trail for the night, and that was their destination, too.

I left ahead of them, and we leapfrogged each other as we headed for Imp. The trail was a mix of difficult rock hopping and easier, almost level trail. I caught up with them about a mile before the turnoff to Imp and we hiked together for that mile plus the half mile down the side trail to the shelter/campsite. Fortunately, we made better overall time for this section than the morning section and got there in time to settle into the shelter and eat dinner before it got dark.

The only other person in the shelter was Fisher King, a southbound section hiker who had thru hiked the AT eleven years ago. We had a good time chatting before turning in for the night. I am once again tired after a

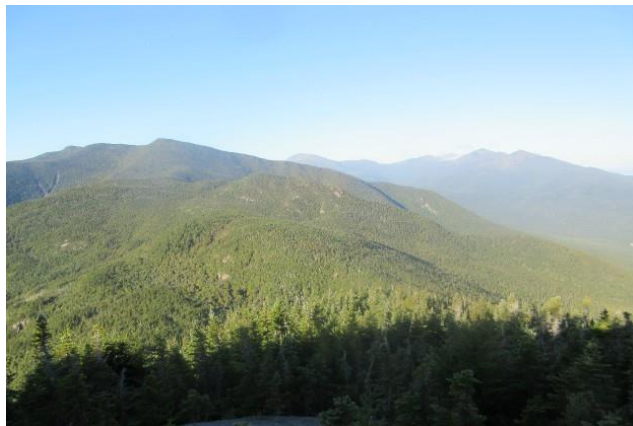
tough but good day, and am looking forward to an easier, shorter day tomorrow! My legs deserve a break!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, September 10, 2014

Less than 300 Miles to Go!

Destination: White Mountain Hostel, RT 2
Starting Location: Imp Campsite
Today's Miles: 8.10
Trip Miles: 1887.10



One Last Look Back at the Whites

Mailman, No Rush and I were up early while Fisher King slept in. We ate breakfast and I hit the trail ahead of them, expecting them to catch me after a bit.

The climb up and down Mt. Moriah was another rock hopping tough challenge, but I could tell it was getting easier than the past five days. Once down the back side after 4.5 miles I came to the Rattle River, which is really a large creek. The trail followed the river the next three and a half miles to Rt 2 - what a difference! The trail was mostly smooth dirt with a slight descent. I could finally get back to cruising speed for several miles. I made excellent time and arrived at the White Mountain Lodge and Hostel at 11:00.

Marni bought the hostel last August. She and her husband live in Minnesota, and she only keeps the hostel open from June to September. She keeps a crew of helpers, including her mom Molly, Eric, and Rabbit. Rabbit finished the AT a couple of weeks ago and came back to help out before going home. Wonderful folks who do a great job - I highly recommend this hostel!



Fisher King, No Rush and Mailman

Thursday, September 11, 2014

Zero Day!

Destination: White Mountain Hostel, RT 2
Starting Location: White Mountain Hostel, RT 2
Today's Miles: 0.00
Trip Miles: 1887.10

Since I was here so early, I've had the opportunity to meet and chat with lots of other hikers, mostly Nobos. I thought I had heard of Rabbit before, and discovered she had hiked with Nora V a few days before I did. Baltimore Jack was also here helping out - I met him back in Hot Springs, NC. Mama Bear was also here - we had dinner together back at the hostel (Bear Springs?) just north of the Smokies.

Molly drove Ski, Golden Goddess and me into Gorham for lunch at the allyoucaneat Chinese Buffet. I stuffed myself! Ski is from Colorado and is thru hiking. Golden Goddess joined him at some point on the trail and will continue on to Katahdin with him.

I also chatted with Sobo thru hikers Corn Bread and Fire Ball. I picked their brains a lot about what I'm going to encounter ahead of me, and passed on info on what's ahead of them. I also met Hustle and Flow, a young couple thru hiking Nobo, along with Wing It, a young woman who got her name because she doesn't/can't plan anything. Squatch is here, too. He's filming a documentary on AT hikers and hikes a section southbound, then drives back further north so he can hike southbound again and meet the same group of hikers headed north. He'll be going up to Stratton tomorrow and hiking south, so I may see him on the trail in the next few days.

At 6:00 Eric drove a group of us to Walmart to resupply. When I got back Miss Janet was here and introduced me to Hog Driver, who she had just helped slackpack the section north of us. She had mentioned him to me when I met her back in Vermont because he's a former Air Force pilot, too. He's currently a Delta pilot and is doing his thru hike on his time off between flights.

I also got the replacement section for my hiking pole today that Linda mailed me. Yee-Haw! Thank you, Sweetheart!! Hiking the Whites with only one pole has really been tough on me. My knees depend on my poles, especially on the rocky downhill trails.

The weather is supposed to be rainy all day tomorrow, and it's another tough section ahead of me, so I was strongly considering taking a zero tomorrow. Hog Driver, a few others and I stayed up until nearly 11:00 talking, so that sealed it - zero tomorrow! That will also give my legs time to recover a little more. The following four days are supposed to be good weather, so I'm really looking forward to getting rested and then hiking with both my poles!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

After a great breakfast Marni prepared for us, I spent the day catching up on my journal and just hanging out with other hikers. Early in the morning, Ronin came in. He's the former Air Force guy from Michigan that I leapfrogged some with early on in my hike. He was not having fun then, and I suspected that he wouldn't make it. He said he had a change of heart shortly after I last saw him, which allowed him to continue. He, Hog Driver and I had fun spinning Air Force yarns this morning! A little later in the morning, Sun Driver showed up, also a retired Air Force guy, and joined in the yarn spinning.



Rabbit, Molly and Marni – Great Hosts!

A number of folks took a zero here today due to the rain, and more folks came in, so we're full tonight with about 20 hikers. I was delighted to see Ajax arrive after dinner! He had taken six weeks off in PA to work as a counselor at a camp in WY, and got back on the trail last month. He said that Acorn had summited Katahdin before the end of August and had day hiked with him a couple of times when he was going thru her home state of Vermont. Grant/Lucky B had also summited the end of August after getting off for a short while in Maine due to some injury.

Rabbit said that Normally Hob and his wife came through about three days ago, so I may catch up with them in a week or so.

I know that reception in Maine will be terrible, so I don't know how well I'll be able to make posts to this journal. I will be stopping in hostels a few times and should be able to use wifi every few days. We'll see!

Looking forward to getting back on the trail tomorrow - rested, well fed, and with two hiking poles! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, September 12, 2014

Well... That's 13 Down!

Destination: Carlo Col Shelter
Starting Location: White Mountain Hostel,
RT 2
Today's Miles: 16.90
Trip Miles: 1904.00

After another delicious breakfast, I immediately left for the trail. Ronin was the only one who left ahead of me, by just a few minutes. Although there weren't any particularly big mountains to climb/descend today, the trail path was still tough and all the smaller ups and downs were quite tiring.

I was enjoying having both my hiking poles again! I passed Ronin fairly soon - he's still carrying a big back pack and moving a little slower on the uphill. A bit later I caught up with a hiker I hadn't seen since Vermont - Tabasco! He had stayed in Gorham last night and got on the trail ahead of me this morning. We hiked pretty much together the rest of the day. At some point early in the day, I managed to do some sort of tricky maneuver when my right pole tip caught and I broke my pole again!



Tabasco

I found a nice stick to use in place of my broken pole and continued on. Not nearly as good as my real pole, but better than no pole. When Tabasco and I approached the Maine border, he noticed a single hiking pole stuck in the ground right behind the sign. He helped me video "well... that's 13 down!" before checking out the pole. It was a cheap one, bent, and the handle didn't fit my hand well, but it's an improvement for sure! Thank you unknown trail angel!



Maine Border with Newfound Pole!

Tabasco and I were the first ones to the shelter. Ajax arrived soon after - I was surprised he hadn't caught up with us sooner. Then Ronin made it, followed soon by Mailman and No Rush. As it started to get dark, Giggles came in and we made room for him, too.

I felt stronger today, but am still both getting back in shape and recovering from the Whites. Tomorrow: Mahoosuc Notch - billed often as the toughest mile on the AT. I'm looking forward to have fun bouldering through it, no matter how long it takes. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, September 13, 2014

Mahoosuc Notch!

Destination: Baldpate Lean-to
Starting Location: Carlo Col Shelter
Today's Miles: 16.40
Trip Miles: 1920.40

I used my ear plugs last night, and woke up later than usual this morning, about 7:00. Tabasco, Ronin, Mailman and No Rush all left ahead of me, and I left ahead of Ajax and Giggles. We

were all looking forward to getting to Mahoosuc Notch 6 miles down the trail.

I caught up with the foursome after a few miles and hiked with them. Just before we got to the Full Goose Shelter, Ajax and Giggles caught up with us. We all stopped at the shelter for a break, but Ajax and I were the first to head out from there, both wanting to get ahead of the big group. As we approached the Notch 1.5 miles later, Giggles caught up with us.

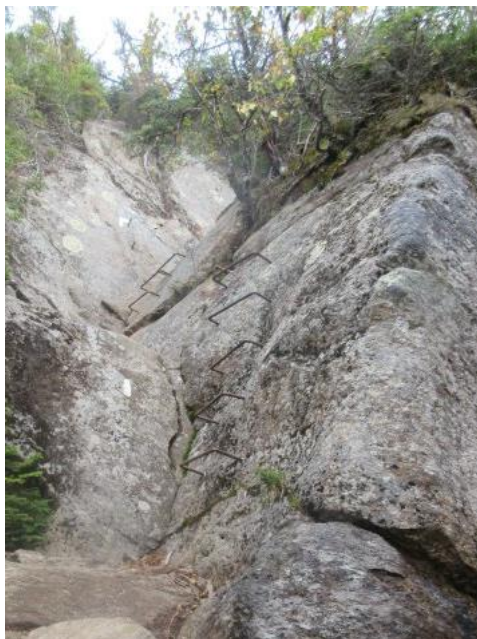
Ajax and I started into the Notch, which is about a mile long section of trail consisting of a jumble of large boulders that we have to navigate, including at least one point where you have to take off your pack to get through. I had mentally allowed myself two hours to get through, and was looking forward to having fun doing so.

Giggles took a break before going through and Ajax and I went through together. A short ways into the notch, we met Camo, a day hiker who sat in one spot and handed out Snickers to thru hikers. Trail Magic in the Notch! He also showed us a spot deep in the shadows where ice still lingered from last winter. Ajax and I continued on - we both had to take our packs off to slither through one tunnel. A little later, Ajax took a low path and I took a high path, and he had to take his pack off to slither through while I didn't. I must admit, that having long legs certainly helped, along with experience boulder hopping since a teenager.

After about 40 minutes we met a couple of day hikers going the opposite direction thru the Notch. I jokingly asked them if we were almost at the end, and they said yes, we were. I was expecting that answer as a joke, but as Ajax and I continued on we weren't sure if they were joking or not. Suddenly the boulders stopped and we were on dirt path in the woods! We thought maybe the boulders would start up again, but we then came to the tentsite and water source we knew were 1.2 miles from the start of the Notch and after the end of the boulders. We had gone through the Notch in 45 minutes and the 1.2 miles in 50 minutes! Fun! :-)

Giggles caught up with us when we took a break at the tentsite. Then it was a tough climb up Mahoosuc Arm (mountain). Ajax and Giggles left me in the dust going up, but I was energized from getting through the Notch so easily.

As I got to the top of the mountain I passed several day hikers coming in from a side trail and heading down the way I was going. Shortly after heading down, a group of four young day hikers caught up with me and I let them pass. Then I joined them in the back and kept pace with them.



Easy Part of Climb – Thanks Trail Crew!

More inspirers! We hiked together the several miles down to Grafton Notch, Rt 26, where they had parked their car. Sky, Sarah, Justin and James (twins) were from Portland and had driven the two hours up for a five or six hour day hike.

We had fun hiking and chatting down the mountain. When we got to the bottom, they refilled my water bottle with fresh water and gave me a peach, an apple and a couple of Cliff bars. Inspirers and Trail Angels combined! They talked about how nice everyone they meet on the trail seemed to be, and I agreed! :-)



Sky, Justin, Sarah and James

Being inspired, I hiked the additional 2.3 miles up the next mountain to Baldpate Lean-to. (Sometimes they call shelters lean-tos here, but they're pretty much the same.) Ajax and Giggles were already there, along with Sobo section hikers Switchback and Liz and another older guy whose name I didn't get. Switchback thru hiked a couple of years ago and was taking her friend Liz from Wilmington, NC out for a section hike.

The trail is starting to get more "normal" in terms of rocks and roots, and I'm getting more comfortable hiking. Getting through the Notch much quicker than expected was certainly a morale boost! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, September 14, 2014

Windy, Rainy Mountain Top

Destination: East B Hill Rd, Andover

Starting Location: Baldpate Lean-to

Today's Miles: 8.00

Trip Miles: 1928.40



Block and Tackle in the Trees

Chilly morning! The other older hiker and I were up a little after 6:00. I had breakfast, packed up and was hiking a little after 7. The Sobos warned us this was a tough section and they were right! When I got near the top of the mountain, I came out of the trees facing a climb up a broad open area of solid rock up to the top, with the trail marked simply by cairns. On a warm, dry, no wind day I think the climb would have been a fairly easy walk, although steep. Today it was cold, wet, in the clouds with the wind blowing 40 to 50 mph. (Some hikers later said they thought it might have been over 50.) It took me quite a while to negotiate my way up, sometimes crawling on my knees to insure my feet

didn't slip. In places, rime ice had formed on the scrub trees and on the signs at the top.

Crossing over the top, it was a lot more fun! The wind would sometimes blow me off course, and even blow my poles to the side of where I intended to place them. Going down the back side wasn't as steep and I was soon back in the trees and out of the cold wind.

I stopped at the Frye Notch Lean-to for an early lunch and to make plans for the rest of the day. I needed to go to Andover for resupply today. The first road crossing into Andover is at only 8 miles for the day, but the second one is 10 miles further. Based on my speed so far, it became obvious that I wouldn't make the second one before dark.

Ajax came by for a quick stop at the lean-to and headed on ahead of me. He planned to hitch into Andover at the first road crossing to resupply, but to hitch back out and continue on today. I may not catch up with him again. I then packed up and had an uneventful hike to the road.

I had a note in my AT Guide that I read somewhere that this was an easy hitch. I got to the road and wondered if any cars ever drove on it! After 15 minutes, a young couple in a jeep like car drove by but didn't stop. 15 minutes later, a couple of women in a mini-van that looked full of stuff in the back drove on by. 15 minutes after that a sedan came by and picked me up. It was a couple on vacation from Austin, TX! I tell folks that hitching on the AT is easy and safe because the locals know all about thru hikers and are eager to help them out. I never expected to get a ride from Texans on vacation in Maine!

When I got to the Pine Ellis hostel, Tabasco was here! He had stopped at an earlier shelter yesterday, and when he started out this morning he fell and bruised his thigh. He had somehow gotten a hitch into another town, then hitched here to rest up. Also already here was Other, a Nobo who had slackpacked a section I'll do in two days. About 3:00, Tabasco and I walked over to Mills Market where I had a cheeseburger and fries. Delicious!

A little later Mailman and No Rush came in, having stayed at the same shelter as Tabasco last night. We discussed our options for the next few days. Since it's supposed to start raining late tomorrow night thru midday Tuesday, Mailman, No Rush and I decided to slackpack the 10 miles between the roads and spend tomorrow night back here at the hostel. Since Tabasco is finishing the AT after having to get off trail last year,

he decided to start at the second road and head north, coming back to get this section later.

Tabasco and I went back to Mills Market for dinner. I had a large chef salad with chicken and salami on it - good to get some greens! Good to get some rest, too! Looking forward to an easier day tomorrow!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, September 15, 2014

Slackpacking with Mailman and No Rush

Destination: South Arm Rd, Andover
Starting Location: East B Hill Rd, Andover
Today's Miles: 10.10
Trip Miles: 1938.50

Mailman and No Rush had eaten dinner at the other option in town last night, the General Store, and enjoyed it. So this morning I went there for breakfast and to get snack foods for our hike today. Large stack of blueberry pancakes! Yum! Note that at home I usually eat my pancakes without anything else on them - I tend to like my starch straight up. On the trail, I add all the butter and syrup they will hold!

Our hostel hostess Naomi drove us back to the trail at 8:00 and we had a most enjoyable hike with light back packs up and down a couple of mountains on a beautiful day. We stopped for a food break at Hall Mountain Lean-to, where we met Hungry Horse and Poncho, two young Nobo thru hikers I hadn't met before.

When we got to the top of Moody Mountain, Mailman called the hostel so they could pick us up at the bottom of the mountain. Since I had good reception, I called our grandson to wish him a happy 11th birthday. It was cool to call him from a mountain top in Maine! :-)

We made great time down the mountain, and a few minutes later our hostel host David showed up and took us back. When we got there Blueberry Bear, Dos Equis and Lately were already there. Lately boarded her dog Early when she got to Pinkham Notch, and will pick him up tomorrow. I met Blueberry Bear briefly a day or two ago on the trail. This is the first time I've met Dos Equis; he's not the Dos Lekis I hiked with in MD!

I spent the afternoon planning the next few days with Mailman and No Rush, and working on my journal. We've decided to slackpack 13 miles tomorrow to Rt 17 and come back here again. Then on Wednesday, we'll slackpack the 13 miles from Rt 17 to Rt 4, where

David will drop our full packs at the Hiker Inn for us to pick up and continue our hike.

As I was leaving to go to dinner, Mad Max came in. I recognized him as the young guy who slept in his hammock inside the first shelter where I stayed in the Smokies. He's had a couple of illnesses that had taken him off trail a while.

I had a great Reuben sandwich with French fries and milk for dinner tonight. Yum! My grease low-level light is definitely extinguished! :-)



No Rush and Mailman at Dinner

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, September 16, 2014

Another Slackpacking Day!

Destination: ME 17
Starting Location: South Arm Rd, Andover
Today's Miles: 13.20
Trip Miles: 1951.70

I met Ethan last night just before going to bed. He's one of the last Sobo thru hikers. The good news is that of all the creek and river fords ahead of us listed in the guide, he had to actually ford only three of them. The water level for the rest has dropped such that he could rock hop across.

Mailman, No Rush and I were dropped off at the trail about 7:30 for another day of slackpacking. We had awoken to a light rain which was forecast to end about midday. However, to our good fortune it stopped as we got going and the rest of the day was cool and overcast - a great day for hiking!

The trail continued to ease up in difficulty, both in the footpath and steepness. The more difficult uphill



Trail Magic! Alas, It's Empty.



Scenic View (Note No Rush near the Bottom)

sections had metal steps and handrails drilled into the rock. The rock slopes were sometimes slippery so we had to slow down on those sections and we each took a minor spill once.

Mailman was really looking for a moose since tomorrow is his granddaughter's birthday and he promised her a picture of one. The closest we came was when we were passing a thicket of bushes we heard someone bellow "AstroGuy!" It was Ronin who had camped there last night and planned to zero there on this forecast rainy day.

Back at the hostel I met Giggles and One Step. One Step is an old trail friend of Mailman and No Rush, so he joined us for dinner at the General Store. Mad Max also showed up and we chatted some. We had spent the night together in the shelter on my first night in the Smokies.

Tomorrow we put on our full packs and continue to head north!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, September 17, 2014

Beautiful Lakes!

Destination: Piazza Rock Lean-to

Starting Location: ME 17

Today's Miles: 15.00

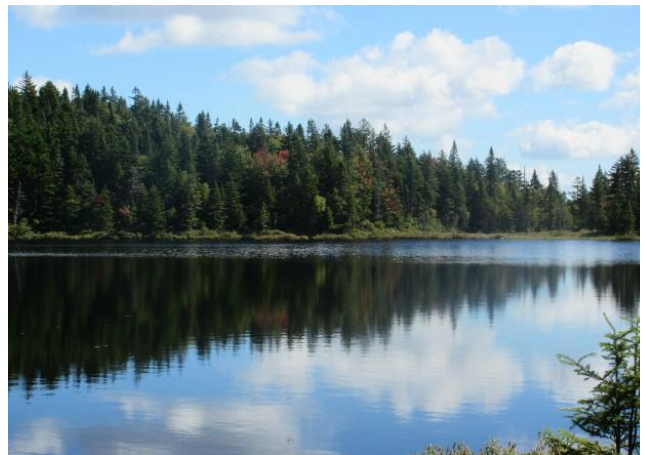
Trip Miles: 1966.70

Since David was taking us to the trail at 6:45, we got up early and had breakfast at the General Store at 6:00. Today was a semi-slackpack day. David was dropping us off where we left off yesterday and then taking whatever we wanted from our packs in plastic bags and dropping them off at the Hiker Hut 13 miles further up the trail. Since David had never been to the Hiker Hut and we hadn't coordinated with anyone there, I only offloaded stuff I could easily replace, like my sleeping bag and food.

We stopped for lunch at one of the lakes along the way. This lake had a few canoes on the bank for anyone to use. Apparently, canoes and small row boats are somehow brought up to many of the lakes, and the original owners leave them there to use when they hike in, but don't mind if others use them.

When we got to ME 4, we hiked the 0.3 miles down the road to stop by the Hiker Hut. No Rush and Mailman were both getting food packages there. I was hoping my package had made it from

Linda with the pole replacement section and my extra pair of bifocals. If not, I planned to spend the night there and get them tomorrow.



One of Many Scenic Lakes!



Canoe Ride Anyone?

Fortunately, all our packages were there along with the plastic bags with our stuff that David had dropped off! The Hiker Hut owners Steve and Kathy were very nice and didn't charge us anything for being a storage place for us!



No Rush and Kathy at the Hiker Hut

We continued on another two miles to the Piazza Rock Lean-to to spend the night. They have a two seat privy there with a cribbage board between the two seats. The sign on the privy is "Your Move"!

After settling in the shelter, we hiked uphill on a short side trail to where a huge boulder called Piazza Rock hangs out over the entrance to a boulder section of trail called the Caves. Since it was more uphill climbing, we didn't explore the Caves, but returned to the shelter and started a nice fire in the fire pit and fixed dinner.

Pretty soon Puzzle, Triple P, Cheekie Chee and Ravioli passed through on their southbound slackpack. Mailman had a canned ham in his Hiker Hut mail drop, and I had a full loaf of bread, so we did a little trail magic ourselves giving out ham sandwiches! Sockless and Blazer, a young couple who were tenting, joined us around the campfire, along with Sobo flipflop Worldstar and section hiker Chip, who both stayed in the shelter with Mailman, No Rush and me. I thoroughly enjoyed our time chatting around the campfire, before hitting the sack!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, September 18, 2014

More Windy, Cloudy Mountain Tops

Destination: Spaulding Mountain Lean-to

Starting Location: Piazza Rock Lean-to

Today's Miles: 16.90

Trip Miles: 1983.60

Mailman, No Rush and I started hiking about 7:00 this morning. We had several climbs above tree level ahead of us including Saddleback and the Horn. Although it was pleasant weather with no wind when we were in the trees, the bare rock tops of the mountains were in the clouds and cold and quite windy.

We leapfrogged with a number of other Nobos today. The AT Guide called for a ford at Orbeton Stream, but once again, the water was low enough that we could easily rock hop across. Worldstar told us last night that he only had to ford a couple of streams coming south from Katahdin.

We got to the shelter at 5:30 and City Slicka was



Beautiful Day on the Mountain!

there setting up his tent. It was getting cold and forecast to possibly go below freezing tonight, so I set up my tent behind the shelter while Mailman and No Rush settled in the shelter. We had dinner and turned in early! There were three other hikers in tents further behind the shelter - WiFi, Iron Cheeks and Bama - but I didn't interact with them much since we were all settling in early due to the cold.

Lithium batteries don't like below freezing temps, and a Sawyer Squeeze water filter will be ruined if the water in it freezes. So I got my phone, camera, extra batteries and filter and slept with them in my sleeping bag. I usually just put my sleeping bag opened up over me like a quilt, but tonight I zipped it up and used it mummy style. I kept the cold sensitive gear around my armpit area, and it didn't bother me during the night.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, September 19, 2014

Can't Find Mailman

Destination: ME 27, Stratton ME
Starting Location: Spaulding Mountain Lean-to
Today's Miles: 13.50
Trip Miles: 1997.10

This morning my watch temp showed it was about freezing in my tent. I packed up and went to the shelter where Mailman and No Rush were eating breakfast. While I was eating breakfast, Mailman headed out and said he was going to the privy and would walk slowly up Spaulding Mountain until we caught up.

A little later No Rush left and I left shortly after him. The shelter is slightly off the AT, with the privy at the

side trail leading to the shelter from the south. There's another side trail from the shelter to the AT slightly north of the privy trail. No Rush and I left by the north side trail, assuming Mailman had done his business and was well ahead of us.

I soon caught up with No Rush and he had me pass him since he likes to hike in the rear, well back if he wants some solitude. I scurried on up Spaulding Mountain to catch up with Mailman.

Just north of the top of Spaulding Mountain there's a rock with a plaque commemorating the last section of the AT to be completed in 1937 and honoring the Civilian Conservation Corps folks who worked hard during the Great Depression to build much of the trail. Thanks trail builders! :-)



Thanks Trail Builders!

After several miles, I started to wonder if I had somehow passed Mailman without knowing it. After 5 miles, I passed three hikers at a camp site and asked if they had seen him. They said he hadn't passed there in at least the past hour or so.



Frozen Footprints in the Mud!

I stopped by the Crocker Cirque Campsite to use the privy and found Sloth and Southbound there, getting ready to pack up. (A lot of hikers slept later this morning, waiting for it to warm up some!) I hadn't seen Sloth since I met her in PA. I hadn't met Southbound before; he got his name on a section hike a couple of years ago when he hiked 12 miles in the wrong direction!

As I approached the top of South Crocker Mountain, I started to notice some strange clusters of something on the ground that at first looked like thin shavings of birch bark. Then I realized there weren't any birch trees around. When I picked one up I saw they were thin flat ice crystals. They apparently grow out of the ground where the soil is wet and freezes. I only



Ice Crystals on the Ground

saw them near the tops of South and North Crocker Mountains.

On by way down North Crocker, a young hiker passed me and said that he had passed Mailman and No Rush a good ways back. Shortly after that, I took a break and checked my messages. Linda had texted Mailman who said he knew I was ahead of them. Turns out that Mailman was in the privy when No Rush and I left without going by it. Eventually he and No Rush texted each other and figured out what was going on!

Shortly before I reached ME 27, Southbound and Sloth passed me. They were still at the road trying to get a hitch when I got there, so I joined them. Very soon a minivan pulled over. The driver was from Portland. He said he never picks up hitchhikers, but a friend had just finished the AT and told him that he must pick up other hikers!

Not much later, Mailman and No Rush showed up and we checked into the Stratton Hotel/Hostel. Puzzles was there; Mailman and No Rush had known him for some time. He's a travel nurse and works in the ER. Then we all went to dinner before calling it a night.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, September 20, 2014

2000 Miles

Destination: East Flagstaff Rd
Starting Location: ME 27, Stratton ME
Today's Miles: 16.70
Trip Miles: 2013.80

2000 miles!!!

We decided to slackpack thru the Bigelow Mountains today. Sue drove seven of us up to East Flagstaff Rd and we hiked southbound the 16.7 miles back to ME 27 where we ended yesterday. Then we hitched a ride back into Stratton.

Hiking southbound, we met many thru hikers hiking northbound. Rocksloth and Marathon were two that I knew but hadn't seen since PA. The rest were folks I've seen the past couple of days or were folks I didn't know.

It was a fun but tiring hike. Even though we were slackpacking, the climbs up and down the mountains and the wind at the tops wore me out. It was fun seeing all the folks headed in the opposite direction - we probably spent an hour or more chatting along the way.



No Rush and Me



Just to be the Man Who Walked 2000 Miles...



High Winds on Mt. Avery!

It was also fun crossing the peaks of the mountains where the wind was blowing so hard, we looked like the weather reporters covering a hurricane. Some folks were guessing 60 to 70 mph. After crossing the last one, we met Drag'n Fly and Freckles heading northbound up the mountain. Drag'n Fly is a petite 74 year old, so we only half-joked about our concern she might get blown off the mountain top! When I got back to town, one of the locals said it was forecast to be 60 mph. At one point the wind blew my glasses off my face, but fortunately I could retrieve them.

A couple in a pickup truck gave the three of us plus Mad Max a ride back to town. We all rode in the bed of the truck. When we pulled in, there was Naturally Hob and his wife Chickadee! It was really good to see Hob again and to meet Chickadee. I knew they were ahead of me, but I apparently passed them when they went into Rangeley. I wouldn't have seen them if I hadn't slackpacked today!

Hob also had my glove I had lost a while back.



Hob and Chick-a-Dee!

Somehow Ajax had gotten it and had given it to Hob. Thought I'd never see that glove again!

We all had dinner together and caught up. Then we said our goodbyes and Mailman, No Rush and I did laundry at an apartment building laundry room before turning in.

Head Tunes: I haven't covered this lately since most have been replays of what I've mentioned before. This is the Day that the Lord Has Made gets the most airtime. There was an old Beetles tune playing in my head the other day, but I forgot which one.

Today I started out noticing I was playing an old soft rock tune that I can't now remember what it was. Sue had the radio tuned to a soft rock station when she dropped us off, so that's probably its

origin.

Later on Here We Go a Wassailing got some headtunes airtime, followed by Ain't No Mountain High Enough. I finished off with singing out loud: And I would walk 1000 miles, and I would walk 1000 more, just to be the man who walked 2000 miles to fall down at your door, Li-li-linda! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, September 21, 2014

Tent, Shelter or Cabin in the Rain?

Destination: Harrison's Pierce Pond Camp

Starting Location: East Flagstaff Rd

Today's Miles: 16.70

Trip Miles: 2030.50

Sue's shuttle back to the trail wasn't leaving until 8:00, so we had a great breakfast at the White Wolf Inn before leaving. On the way to the trail, we passed a rural mailbox that had been modified to look like the Space Shuttle. Mailman and No Rush made me get out for a picture beside it!

Today's trail had a couple of small up and downs near the beginning and then stayed pretty level as it wound its way from pond to pond. We made great time on the relatively easy trail - relative to what we've been hiking recently. Even the level trail has more rocks and roots than "the good old days" down south! Marathon joined us near the beginning and we all stopped for an early lunch break at the West Carry Pond Lean-to. Three young women we hadn't met before - Navigator, J-Rex and Toots stopped in shortly after us. Marathon knew them and stayed behind when



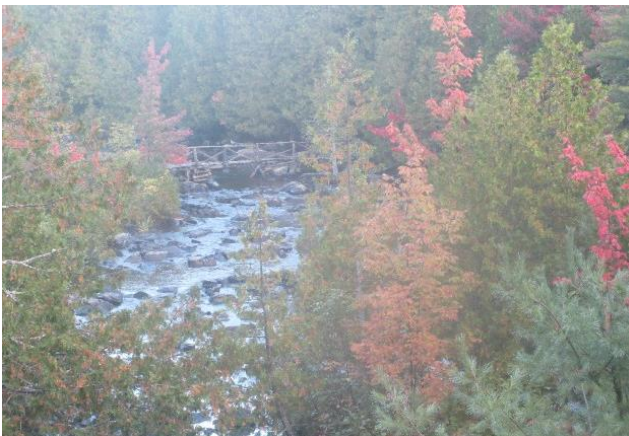
Space Shuttle Mailbox!

Mailman, No Rush and I left. We covered the 16.7 miles today in about 7 hours - much faster than I've done in a while!

Harrison's is a fishing camp near the Pierce Pond Lean-to where a hiker can stay or just stop by for a 12 pancake breakfast. We sat at the Lean-to a few minutes trying to decide where to stay, but the forecast for rain led us to staying in a cabin at the camp. The opportunity for a hot shower also helped! :-)

The three of us shared a small cabin that had a front porch overlooking the stream and the fall foliage. It was really nice to relax on the front porch eating dinner and enjoying the view, while it rained lightly off and on.

Tomorrow we'll be crossing the Kennebec River by ferry - which is a canoe. The ATC pays a person to ferry hikers across 2 at a time in a canoe. Should be fun!



View from Our Cabin

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, September 22, 2014

12 Pancake Breakfast!

Destination: Bald Mountain Brook Lean-to
Starting Location: Harrison's Pierce Pond Camp

Today's Miles: 18.30

Trip Miles: 2048.80

The famous 12 pancake breakfast was at 7:00 so we were up early and ready to go by then. JReX, Toots and Navigator were also there along with Hog Driver, so we had good conversation around some great food! 12 blueberry pancakes with strawberries and apples piled high on one plate along with another plate with eggs and sausage. Yum!



12 Pancake Breakfast at Harrison's

After hiking only a short distance up the trail, Mailman noticed some smoke rising in the woods about 30 feet off the trail. When we investigated, we found a campfire someone had started but not fully extinguished. There was a small ring of stones which they had apparently put in place for a fire ring, but the mossy, rooty ground outside the rocks had burned down a couple of inches into the ground and was smoldering with red embers in places, including up under the base of a dead tree a foot or so away. They had also placed some dry wood next to the fire ring which was really close to the burning embers.

We spent an hour or so moving the wood away from the embers and getting water from the nearby stream to cool it down some more. Chip



JRex, Toots and Navigator

came along and helped put water on the embers. Mailman talked about the squirrels chattering away at us as thanking us for saving their habitat rather than telling us to get away from it! :-)

We got to the Kennebec River in plenty of time for the ferry ride across. During this time of year it operates from 9-11 in the morning and 2-4 in the afternoon. Hillbilly Dave was the ferry pilot today and was on the other side when we got there. He came across in his canoe and ferried Mailman and No Rush across first since they had to hitch into the Sterling Inn to pick up a mail drop once they got to the road on the other side. Chip and I went next. When we got to the road, Mailman and No Rush were hiking down the road still trying to get a hitch.



Hillbilly Dave the Ferry Pilot

Chip and I headed to the Caratunk Post Office just down a separate road. I was just mailing a few things home and Chip was picking up a mail drop. About the only thing in Caratunk is the post office and a few houses. I chatted with the woman who's been running the post office and found out she's retiring next week and that the post office is cutting back to just two hours

a day starting next month. I also met the young woman who's taking her place. Nice folks!

There was a hiker box outside the post office. I looked inside and there was a container of fresh homemade cookies for hikers - trail magic! I ate a couple and then headed back to the trail while Chip went through his mail drop.

I stopped by the Pleasant Pond Lean-to for lunch and discovered Onisimus was there grilling chicken on a fire in the fire pit! More trail magic! I had first met him back in Vermont on Aug 2nd when I was hiking out of Manchester Center with Tabasco and he was grilling hamburgers for trail magic. Delaware, Sassafras and Engineer were also there having lunch. Engineer is a young man

with an engineering background who had been hoping to meet "the astronaut" hiking the trail, so we had some good conversation during lunch.

I guess I was making pretty good time in the afternoon. I was planning to stop at Bald Mountain Brook Lean-to for the night and figured out about what time I'd get to the side trail leading to it. It's on a loop trail, meaning there's another side trail coming from the other side of the shelter back to the trail further north. Fortunately for me, the AT Guide also mentions a road crossing just north of that second side trail. I was cruising along, not looking for the shelter side trail yet, when I came to the road crossing! Oops! I backtracked to the shelter! It was getting late, so I decided to spend the night in the shelter with Puzzles, Simba and Blueberry, who also showed up about the same time. Blueberry remembered meeting me back in Virginia - she was one of the ones around the campfire when I night hiked into the campground at Hog Camp Gap on June 2nd.

Mailman and No Rush didn't show up, so I suspect they had to stop someplace prior to here after going to the Sterling Inn for their mail drops. They were planning on another two days to Monson, and I hope to get there tomorrow.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, September 23, 2014

On to Monson!

Destination: ME 15, Monson ME
Starting Location: Bald Mountain Brook Lean-to
Today's Miles: 22.00
Trip Miles: 2070.80

It was chilly this morning, but warm enough for me to start hiking a little before 7 without a jacket. On colder



Rock Trail in Fragile Ecosystem



Pretty Stream Crossing!

mornings, I start out with either my down jacket or my rain jacket and 30 minutes later am heated up enough that I have to stop and take it off. It was a little windy and chilly near the top of Moxie Bald, but nothing close to what we experienced going over the Bigelows!

Once past Moxie Bald, the trail was fairly level and I made good time. With the nice weather we're having, most of the muddy places are dried up enough that they didn't slow me down much, although there were still places requiring a "mud dance" to the side of the trail and/or rock and log hopping to avoid muddy shoes. The trail still has roots and rocks but not severe. I covered the 22 miles in 9 hours, including a half hour stop for lunch at the Horseshoe Canyon Lean-to. Haven't been that speedy in a long while!

There were three streams in today's section that hikers usually have to ford, two of them have a rope or wire

strung across the stream for hikers to hold on to as they ford across. The water levels were low enough that I found places I could rock hop across without getting my feet wet. One of them might have been tough for someone with shorter legs! So far, I haven't had to ford any of the streams.

Dawn, from Shaw's, picked me up at the trailhead and drove me to an outfitter to buy new poles, then to the grocery store to resupply before taking me to the hostel. I broke a pole again yesterday, and I don't want to do the 100 mile wilderness with just one. Plus, I need two for my tent! I found some cheaper ones that have wrist straps - it'll do for the next six days.

At the hostel I met a couple of older guys who had just returned from slackpacking the next 15 miles. Took them 9 hours! Although there aren't any mountains to climb, it's a constant series of rocky, rooty small ups and downs. I decided to do the same tomorrow to give my knees a break rather than cover it with a heavy pack with 5+ days of food.

The fall colors have been starting to pop for the past several days. Might be at peak when I summit Katahdin next week. That will be awesome!

Speaking of awesome, Linda and Sarah are driving up next Monday to hike with me on Tuesday. Sarah has to fly back to CA on Wednesday, so I'm trying to make it so that Tuesday is summit Katahdin day! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, September 24, 2014

Less Than 100 Miles to Go!

Destination: Side Trail Junction, Mile 2086.1

Starting Location: ME 15, Monson ME

Today's Miles: 15.30

Trip Miles: 2086.10

Today I entered the fearsome 100 mile wilderness!

Not so fearsome, actually. There are lots of dirt road crossings; some folks even slackpack the entire section! You can also get someone to do a food drop for you halfway into the wilderness so you don't have to start out with food for the entire distance.

The two older guys I mentioned meeting last night, Old Blue and Catfish, talked me into slackpacking the first

15 miles like they did yesterday. I figured that would be one less day of food to carry and I'd heard the section was tough. No big mountains to climb, but lots of not-so-easy ups and downs. Plus, since they were getting dropped off at the same spot to continue their hike, I could share the shuttle fee with them.

Susan drove us to the trail head where we had to hike up a side trail for 0.8 miles to intersect the AT just north of the Long Pond Stream Lean-to. When we got to the AT, Old Blue and Catfish headed north while I headed south. They had full packs, but had arranged for a food drop at Jo Mary Road about halfway to Abol Bridge, so they only had to carry a couple of days of food.

It's a bit weird to slackpack southbound because you meet lots of other Nobos going in the proper direction - I passed over 45 hikers heading north today!



Trail along the Cliffs!

Early on I came across a group of six or seven hikers just breaking camp at an old overgrown forest road crossing. Nora V! I knew she was a little ahead of me based on shelter journals, but figured I wouldn't see her again. Willy Wonka was also there, a young woman I met way back at a shelter where I stopped in just for lunch. I remembered her unusual name and the conversation the group had at the time about whether they liked the Gene Wilder or the Johnny Depp version.

Later on I met Hey Y'all coming up the trail. I recognized him based on Old Blue's description, because Old Blue and Catfish had given me a package of coffee to give to Hey Y'all if I met him. He was most appreciative! I also chatted with lots of other north bound hikers, including Digeree Dude, a young man I hadn't met before.



First Ford – Big Wilson Stream!

The trail was certainly full of ups and downs, rocks and roots, but there were also smooth level sections where I could cruise. It included a stream that I finally had to ford, Big Wilson Stream. I just took my shoes, socks and gaiters off and walked across barefoot, using my poles for stability rather than the wire stretched across the stream. My feet loved the cold water and felt refreshed when I got to the other side! It made me realize that maybe I should ford more streams, even if I can rock hop across them!

Anyway, it was a beautiful day with gorgeous scenery and the trail was not as tough as I had thought it might be. I made fairly good time, especially considering all the time I spent stopping to talk with north bound hikers!

When I got back to the ME 15, Route Step was there and had already called Shaw's for a pick up. So I rode back with him when Dawn picked us up a few minutes later.

Back at Shaw's, Mailman and No Rush had arrived



Route Step, No Rush, Me, Miss Janet, Hog Driver and Mailman

early that morning along with Mailman's son who was going to hike the rest of the way with them. We all went to dinner together at the Lakeshore House hostel where Hog Driver, Miss Janet and Route Step joined us.

Less than 100 miles to go! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, September 25, 2014

Last Full Pack Load!

Destination: West Branch Pleasant River

Starting Location: Side Trail Junction

Today's Miles: 15.00

Trip Miles: 2101.10

The folks at Shaw's served up another great breakfast! Then I walked down to the Post Office to mail some things home, in order to both lighten my pack a little and to make more room for all the food I'm carrying today. The items included my phone chargers since this is my last section before I'm finished. That's a cool thought!

My food bag is full plus I'm carrying a little extra in another bag. I hope to make it to Abol Bridge in four more days, but have five plus days of food since that's what I bought when I resupplied Tuesday not knowing I was going to slackpack the first day. Plus, it gives me extra just in case. 13 pounds total to get me to Abol Bridge!

I said goodbye to Mailman, No Rush and Puzzles as I'm now a full day ahead of them and probably won't see them again. They're not slackpacking today, but are

making a food drop at Jo Mary Road halfway to Abol Bridge. Dawn then drove me to the place where Susan dropped me yesterday and I climbed the 0.8 miles up to the AT. This time I headed north with a full pack!

Along the way I met up with Sparklefeet and Gary. They are the couple I met one evening in the Shenandoah after I had pitched my tent at a lookout point just prior to a thunderstorm rolling through. They came by the lookout point to have dinner after having hiked through the storm. Today was a beautiful sunny day with gorgeous views, however!

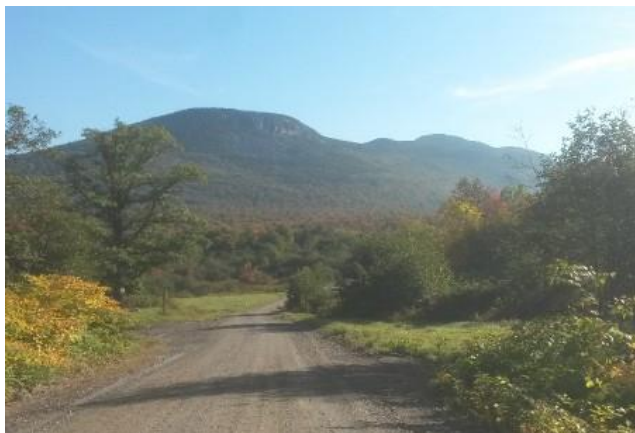


Gary, Sparkle Feet and Yeti Legs

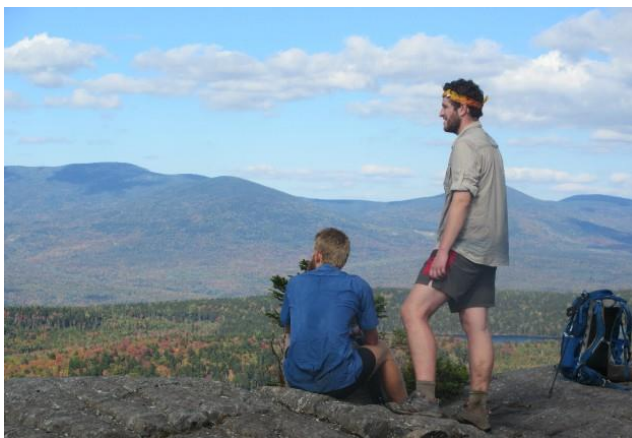
I also leapfrogged with Senator, Yeti Legs and Tumbles today. Yeti Legs is a 19 year old recently out of high school who got his name early on the trail after hiking through the snow with shorts on and getting ice on his legs. Senator and Tumbles are thirty-somethings - Senator worked in the Florida state senate and

Tumbles fell down a lot. The three of them have been hiking together for half the trail now. All four of us planned to camp near the West Branch of the Pleasant River tonight, hopefully on the far side since the AT Guide called for a ford there.

When I got to the river, Yeti Legs and Senator were on the other side and had set up camp a hundred yards down the trail along the river. I may have been able to rock hop across on some small rocks, but just decided to cool my feet after a long day and forded across barefoot. Aaahhh! When I got to the other side, Hey Y'all was also there filling up his water bottles. He said he was camping a little further up the trail along with Shoes, a 70 year old thru hiker I haven't met yet.



The Mountain Range I'm Climbing Today!



Yeti Legs and Senator Enjoying the View



Fall Colors!

I hiked on down the trail and set up my tent next to Senator and Yeti Legs. When I went back to the ford to fill up my water bottles, Tumbles was just coming across the river. He came down and camped with us, too. We all had dinner and good conversation together, and then I climbed into my tent for the night.

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, September 26, 2014

First Sight of Katahdin!

Destination: East Branch Lean-to
Starting Location: West Branch Pleasant River

Today's Miles: 16.40

Trip Miles: 2117.50

I had a good night's sleep and woke up early. It doesn't get light until nearly 6:00, so I was hiking about 6:45. The guys were just starting to roust

when I left. I leapfrogged with them all day and we stopped at the same shelter this evening.

It was a gradual long climb up to Gulf Hagas Mountain on a fairly nice trail. I passed the Carl Newhall Lean-to enroute and met John - an older hiker who knew Catfish and Old Blue. He had hiked the Gulf Hagas trail yesterday. It's a 5 mile side trail that's supposed to be quite beautiful. Although months ago at the beginning of my hike I had thought I might take the time to hike it, today I just wanted to use those 5 miles to get closer to Katahdin so Linda and Sarah and I can hike it Tuesday. :-)

Shortly after the shelter I found a knit hat on the trail, so I picked it up and carried it the rest of the day hoping to catch up with its owner. Since John had said Catfish had left earlier, I thought it might be his. I didn't catch up with anyone today, so I'll try again tomorrow.

After Gulf Hagas Mountain the trail continues up a series of peaks, finally topping out at White Cap Mountain. My AT Guide mentions a view spot one mile down the north side of White Cap as having a view of Katahdin, so I assumed the peaks were tree covered with no views to the north. The first three peaks were just that. The top of White Cap opened up, with an amazing view to the southeast along with a little bench to sit on to enjoy the view. Yeti Legs and Tumbles were there so I joined them.

I wanted to get to the view and stop for lunch, so I didn't stay long. I expected the trail to reenter the trees before getting around to the north side, but to my surprise and delight it stayed above tree line as it curved around to the north side. Suddenly, there it was - Katahdin! 73 trail miles away but probably only 40 direct miles away. It seemed even closer so I wasn't



Morning Sun in the Woods!

Saturday, September 27, 2014

Beautiful Fall Colors!

Destination: Wadleigh Stream Lean-to
Starting Location: East Branch Lean-to
Today's Miles: 29.60
Trip Miles: 2147.10



First Sight of Katahdin! (light grey in center on horizon)

certain it was Katahdin, although I knew there weren't any mountains like that between me and Katahdin. Just then a local day hiker passed me going the opposite direction, and confirmed it was Katahdin. It looked much clearer to the naked eye than it appears in the photos.

I sat down and had lunch while I soaked in the view. The land between me and Katahdin consisted of mostly flat land with a few hills all covered with green and orange and yellow trees with numerous sparkling lakes strewn about. Magnificent!

Pretty soon the three guys caught up and we all took pictures and soaked in the view. Tumbles had cell coverage and let me borrow his phone to call Linda.

The hike down the mountain was fairly easy as we all coasted to the shelter full of anticipation for the coming days. 68 miles to go!



Sparkle Feet and Gary Enjoying the View!

When I got to Jo Mary Rd, sure enough, the three guys were there. But, Turtle Trax, a previous thru hiker, was also there doing trail magic! He was cooking hot dogs on a small grill and had snacks and sodas. I availed myself of two of each! They said that Catfish had left just before I got there, so I was hoping to catch up with him today.

The guys lingered there and were still enjoying the lunch break when I hiked on. They weren't planning to go as far as I hoped to get, and I didn't see them the rest of the day. Before long I caught up with Catfish and discovered it was indeed his knit hat that I had found. Also, back when we had shared the shuttle ride from Shaw's, Dawn forgot to refund them the 10 bucks that was my share of the fee and which she had charged me. She only had 7 bucks cash when she dropped me off, so she asked me to give it to Old Blue and Catfish. Catfish happily took his hat back and two dollars, saying he owed me two and a half bucks for sharing a laundry load with me.



Senator, Yeti Legs and Tumbles Headed for Katahdin!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."



More Fall Colors!



Pretty Trail!

The trail was indeed fairly level and OK for making good time in most places. In the late afternoon, I caught up with Old Blue who was preparing to camp by Lake Nahmakanta. Although the AT Guide says no camping by the lake, there are no signs and some obvious tent sites around. I gave Old Blue the five bucks from Dawn, and although tempted to camp by the lake, too, I hiked on.

I wasn't sure if the East Branch Lean-to would have any good water source, so before the trail left the lake shore and headed up the hill, I walked down to the shore to get water. There on

the beach getting set up to cowgirl camp were Hobo Nobo and Caddy Shack! It looked like a beautiful setting and I was really tempted to camp there, too. However, when one of them mentioned the bugs were starting to gather, I decided to stick with my plans and headed up to the shelter and a little closer to Katahdin.

I got there at 6:30 and it was getting dark, so I first set up my tent behind the shelter. Then I went down to briefly meet the three Germans who were settling in there. There was a couple I couldn't recognize in the dark who were tenting a little ways from the front of the shelter, too. After saying Gute Nacht, I returned to my tent area for a quick dinner and then into the tent to sleep.

It felt really good to put in a long mileage day again! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Sunday, September 28, 2014

Through the 100 Mile Wilderness!

Destination: Abol Bridge

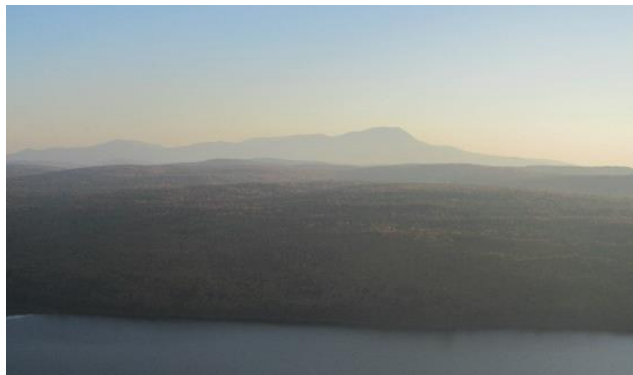
Starting Location: Wadleigh Stream Lean-to

Today's Miles: 23.10

Trip Miles: 2170.20

I wanted to finish the 100 mile wilderness today, which ends at Abol Bridge. And if the trail cooperated, I might even get the additional 10 miles to Katahdin Stream Campground for a 33 mile day. Then I would either have just 10 miles to do tomorrow and get to Millinocket early while Linda and Sarah drive up, or if I went 33 miles, be able to take a zero day in Millinocket.

So I got up early and starting hiking at 6:00 for some night hiking. Although the trail didn't cooperate on



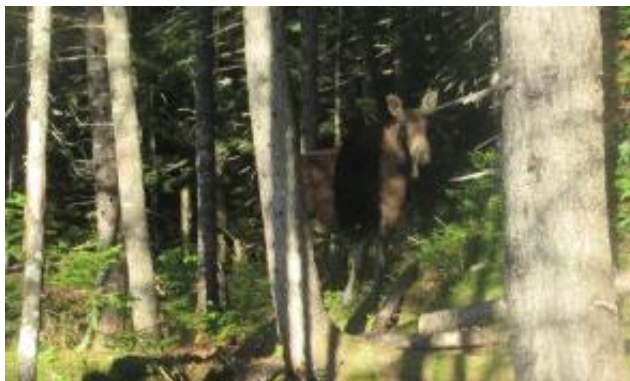
Getting Closer to Katahdin! (from Nesuntabunt Mountain)

getting more miles, it did provide me with beautiful views and encounters with four moose. It was slow going most of the day, with rocks and roots and mud puddles, so early on I knew it would be a good day just to get to Abol Bridge.

Early on, as I was climbing up Nesuntabunt Mountain, I heard a crashing sound on the trail ahead. A cow moose came across the trail just ahead of me and ran into the woods on my left. I was taking pictures of her when I heard another moose coming down the hill ahead and to the left. It was a bull moose coming to join his girlfriend! They then continued off further into the woods together.

When I started down the other side of the mountain I got another view of Katahdin. (See previous page.) It's getting closer!

After going down the backside of the mountain, I was hiking along the trail as it followed the shoreline of Crescent Pond. Suddenly, a big crashing sound as a cow moose came out of the lake about 15 feet to my left and ran across the trail in front of me



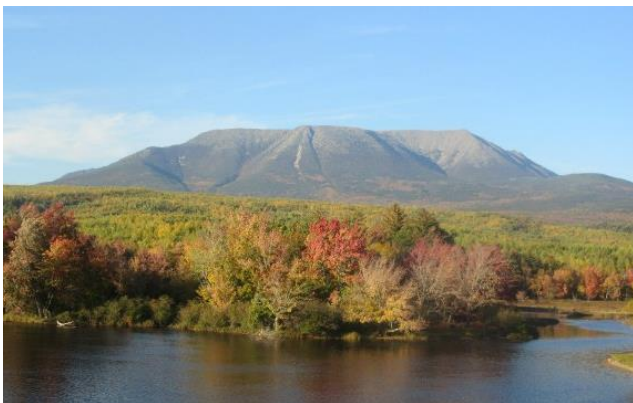
Mama Moose!

In late afternoon I made the short climb up Rainbow Ledges before my final descent into Abol Bridge. Just as I started down the backside, I got another view of Katahdin!



Closer Still! Katahdin from Rainbow Ledges

I finally got to Abol Bridge and had a great view of Katahdin from the middle of the bridge! From here, the middle section of the mountain looks a little higher than the level looking sections to its right and left, but it's not - it's just closer to us. The trail comes up from the left and goes along the plateau of the left section, where it's fairly level. It continues to a point further back on the middle section and then goes uphill to the left end of the right section, which is further back and higher. The actual peak is about a third of the way along the right section, higher than the peak to the right which is along the "knife edge" trail going back down the right side. You can see this in more distant views from higher elevations, like in the picture from Rainbow Ledges.



Katahdin from Abol Bridge!

I checked in at the camp store and got my tent site. I pitched my tent as it was getting dark and then got a shower. I headed back to the camp store before it closed and got a hamburger and fries in the little restaurant attached. I used their satellite phone to call Linda (\$1.00/min) and then headed back to my tent for the night.

Only 9.9 miles tomorrow, then to Millinocket to see Linda and Sarah. Tuesday we will climb Katahdin together! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Monday, September 29, 2014

Last Day by Myself

Destination: Katahdin Stream Campground
Starting Location: Abol Bridge
Today's Miles: 9.90
Trip Miles: 2180.10

Since I went to bed about 7:15 last night, I was rested and ready to get up well before sunrise. I was in no hurry today, so I just lay there resting and dozing until about 5:30, enjoying my last night in my tent on this adventure. :-)

I deflated my mattress and packed up my sleeping bag and tent one last time. After a lazy breakfast - I still had plenty of food - I started hiking about 6:40.



Entering Baxter State Park!

Since this section of trail mostly follows along the side of streams, I was expecting lots of roots and rocks, like yesterday. I was pleasantly surprised. Certainly it had its sections of them, but was an easy hiking trail for the most part. The weather was cool and mostly cloudy. (On my last view of Katahdin, the top was in the clouds.) There were plenty of colorful sections with the deciduous trees at or near their peak fall colors. Most of the way I had the sound of a gushing stream on my left, and a cow moose even made a guest appearance for me. (Actually, I suppose I was the guest, not the moose...) It was a wonderful way to finish off the trail prior to climbing Katahdin!

Other than a ranger at the Daicey Pond parking area, my moose friend, some squirrels and some ducks and other small birds, I didn't see anyone else until I got to the Katahdin Stream Campground about 10:30. There were several car

campers there, but I didn't interact with any of them other than to wave. I hiked on through the campground to the trailhead where hikers going up Katahdin must register. Hungry Hiker and Nora V had started up earlier this morning along with about a dozen others whose names I didn't recognize, some of them dayhikers I suspect.

I stopped by the ranger station, but no one was there so I went back out to the road to see if I could hitch a ride to Millinocket this early. I knew there'd be plenty of opportunities later on when hikers came down from the mountain. Within a minute or two a pickup truck came by and gave me a lift. Gary was staying in a cabin further into the park and was going into town for ice.

He dropped me on the north side of town, and I decided to just walk the three quarter mile through town to my hostel on the south side - the Appalachian Trail Lodge. As I walked along, another pickup truck passed me with three hikers in the back who hollered at me - Senator, Tumbles and Yeti Legs! I saw Yeti Legs later at the hostel and he said they had hitched in from Abol Bridge.

I showered, did laundry, relaxed, showered again, shaved and started working on my journal while waiting for Linda and Sarah to get here. They drove up from VA and finally arrived about 7:45. It's so good to finally be with them! :-)

We unloaded the car, then walked over to the restaurant down the street for dinner. As I entered the restaurant, I noticed four hikers in the first booth and recognized Gary and Sparkle Feet. There was a young woman by herself in the second booth, and my mind immediately assumed she was a hiker, too. In a fraction of a second my mind went from trying to remember the trail name of this familiar looking hiker to realizing she was our other daughter, Jennifer! What a great surprise!



Daughter Surprise!

Unbeknownst to me, our son-in-law Scott had encouraged her to fly out when he heard that Sarah was going to climb Katahdin with Linda and me. So she flew into BWI on the redeye from CA this morning, and Linda and Sarah picked her up on their way north. They had dropped her off at the restaurant before coming to the hostel. They got me! :-)

Tomorrow Katahdin! Woo Hoo!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, September 30, 2014

Katahdin!

Destination: Mt. Katahdin

Starting Location: Katahdin Stream Campground

Today's Miles: 5.20

Trip Miles: 2185.30

Finis!

We got up at 6:00 and drove to the Katahdin Stream Campground, stopping by a gas station mart on the way to pick up some snacks. There were already several cars parked in the campground lot when we got there. I signed the four of us in and we started hiking!



Let's Go Climb Katahdin!



Starting at 7:50 am

The trail started out with a gentle climb and nice foot path. After a short while it added in some roots and increased the climb slightly. When we crossed Katahdin Stream and passed the last privy on the trail and the Katahdin Stream Falls, it started to get rocky and steeper, although not climb-with-your-hands steep.



Nice Trail Leaving Katahdin Stream Campground



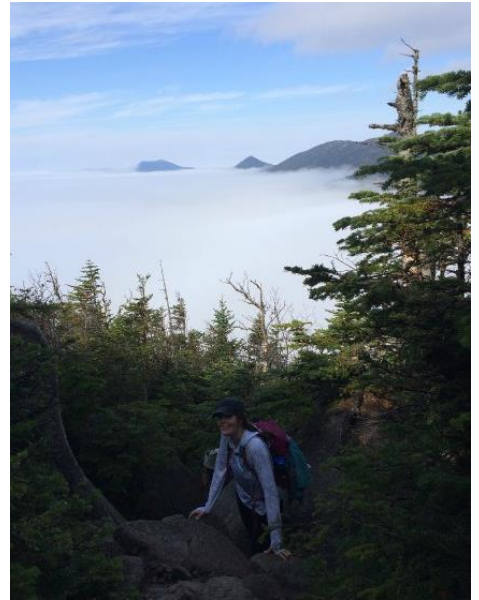
My Women across the Stream!

It was an overcast day, but a great day for climbing Katahdin. Initially, we could get a few views of the fall foliage covered woods below us with the clouds above us obscuring the mountain tops.

As we continued to climb, the clouds moved in and out around the mountain such that we never climbed through the clouds but suddenly found ourselves on top of them! The views now consisted of



Four of Us Selfie in Front of Falls



Sarah Climbing up the Trail

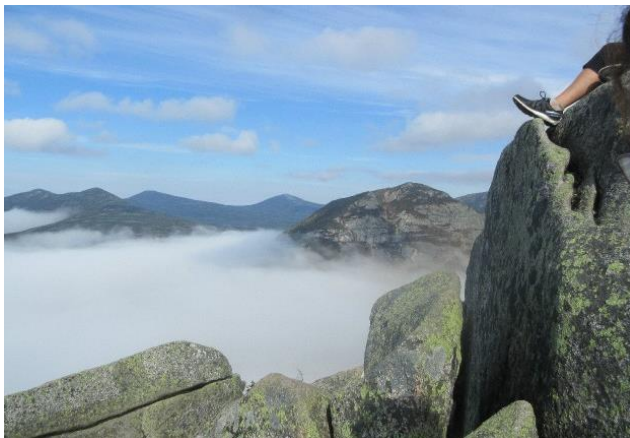


Cute Couple!

mountain tops above the clouds with occasional clearing in the valleys to see the beautiful fall colors below.



Jen Climbing up above the Clouds!



About Level with The Owl (mountain)

A young man caught up with us and hiked with us for a while. Brad and his wife were on vacation, and she was waiting patiently in the car while he did a three to four hour hike to get a taste of Katahdin. He had to turn around before we got above tree line, but enjoyed some great views with us before turning back. I think he hopes to hike the whole trail someday.



Lunch Break!



Climbing some More!



Continuing to Climb!

About halfway to the top mileage wise, we got above tree line and the trail got very steep. Climb-with-your-hands steep. How-do-they-expect-me-to-get-up-there steep. Thanks-for-putting-in-some-metal-rungs steep. We had fun figuring it out as Sarah and Jen usually led the way. Senator, Tumbles and Yeti Legs had passed us going up earlier in day, and passed us going back down during this part of our hike.



Did I Mention Climbing?!



Panorama



Almost There!

We finally reached “The Gateway” about a mile and a half from the top. There the trail levels out and crosses a level plateau for half a mile followed by a gradual climb on a rocky trail the rest of the way to

the top. Crossing the plateau, we passed Caddy Shack and Hobo Nobo and her husband on their way back down. Hobo Nobo’s husband had hiked the final day with her, just like Linda, Sarah and Jen were doing with me! :-)

As we got to the top just after 3:00, there were several other thru hikers still there, including Gary, Sparkle Feet and Grizzly. Before I got to the top, I gave Grizzly my camera to video us going “Well... that’s 14 down!” as I touched the Katahdin sign. After taking a bunch of pictures of me and my family, all the thru hikers got together for a group shot.

It was great to finally finish (although we still had to hike back down!), but it was made so much sweeter by having Linda and our daughters there with me. Wish our son and son-in-law could have been there, too.



On Top with My Women!



Yaaaaaayyyyyy!



Yee Haw!



Still in Love after 45 Years!



Linda on Top!



USAFA '69 Hat!



Purdue Hat!



Jen on Top!



Sarah on Top!



Williamson 125 Years Logo!

After taking pictures and just rejoicing with the other hikers, at 3:30 it was time to head back down. I knew we wouldn't get all the way back before dark, but I wanted to at least get below tree line and the tougher rock climbing while it was still light.

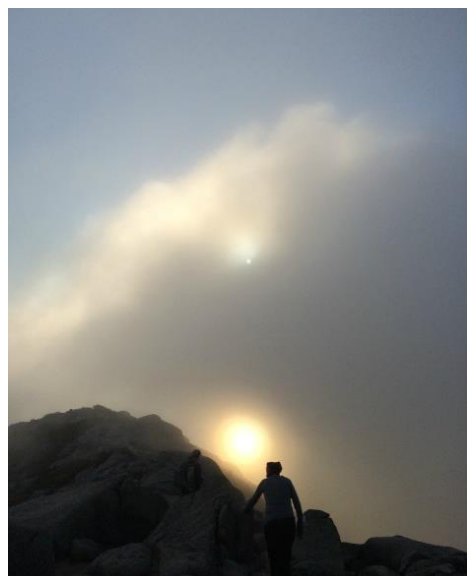
We descended with the sun getting lower in the sky directly in front of us. It made for great reflections on the lakes below. At one point as I was scrambling down some steep rocks, I got a weird sensation that the sun had suddenly set below the horizon, but was still brightly visible. A cloud had come between us and the sun, obscuring the actual sun, but the sun's reflection off a lake below was shining brightly. Then the cloud thinned a bit, and we could see the dim disk of the sun above the horizon and its bright reflection off the lake. Cool!



On Top with Other Thru Hikers!



Heading Back Down



Sun in Sky and Reflected on Lake

We got down to the trees well before dark, but still had some night hiking to do before getting back to the car. We could catch some glimpses of the sunset through the trees ahead of us as we descended, but no



Jen

clear views. We returned to the hostel exhausted but joyful, having had a great day together climbing Katahdin and finishing my thru hike!

I'm a blessed man! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

PostHike

Wednesday, October 01, 2014 (Post Hike 1)

Well... That's 14 Down!

That's 14 Down video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypc0eEoANKI>

- | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. GA | 5. WV | 9. NY | 13. NH |
| 2. NC | 6. MD | 10. CT | 14. ME |
| 3. TN | 7. PA | 11. MA | |
| 4. VA | 8. NJ | 12. VT | |

Linda and I have a tradition that when we're driving across numerous states, when we cross a border, we say "Well... that's one (two, three...) down!" The "Well..." is to get everyone's attention, and we try to say the number just as we cross the border.

During my hike, whenever I crossed a state border for the last time, I took a video of me doing the "Well... that's one (two, three...) down!" thing. If other folks were present, I asked them to join in with me. The video link above is a compilation of those border crossings, culminating in my finishing at the Katahdin sign with Linda and our daughters.

In several places, the AT goes along state borders, crossing back and forth between two states - NC/TN, VA/WV, NJ/NY and NY/CT. In each case, I tried to video the last crossing, when I left one of the states for good.

Leaving NC, there is a point mentioned in the AT Guide where there's a sign "Leaving NC". However, looking at my AT Hiker app and my GPS when hiking,

I think there's a later unmarked spot where the AT pokes briefly back into NC on a switchback. So I videoed both crossings and include them side-by-side!

Leaving CT, the AT Guide, the AT Hiker App, and my GPS show the same unmarked spot for the actual border crossing into MA. However, there's a spot further down the trail when it crosses a stream and there are signs indicating that spot is the border. So I videoed both places here, too!

Other unmarked crossings are the last VA/WV crossing, WV/MD (the WV shoreline of the Potomac River - I had some Harper's Ferry tourists help me here!), and VT/NH (the VT shoreline of the Connecticut River).

PS I thought it appropriate that the Welcome to Vermont sign is at a muddy section of the trail. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

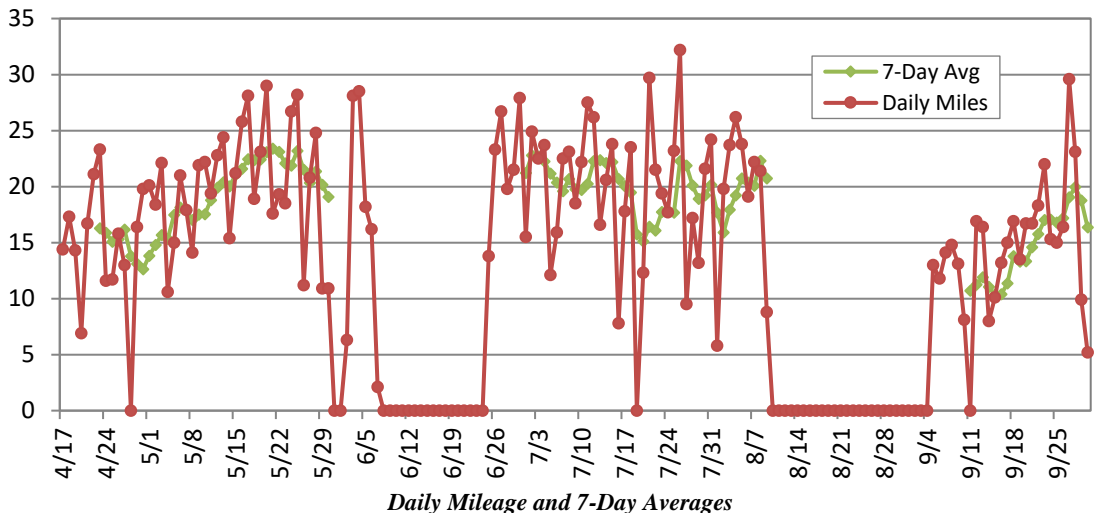
Thursday, October 02, 2014 (Post Hike 2)

Statistics

My math geekness shining through again! Here's a chart showing how many trail miles I hiked each day, along with the average daily trail miles hiked for the week:

Hiking Days: **119**

Average Trail Miles per Hiking Day: **18.4**



Zero Days on Trail: **2** (Fontana Dam and Gorham)
Average Trail Miles per Day on Trail: **18.1**

Zero Days off Trail: **46**
Total Days on and off Trail: **167**
Average Trail Miles per Total Days: **13.1**

Most Trail Miles in a Single Day: **32.2**
Fewest Trail Miles in a Single Day: **2.1**

Total Days \geq 26.2 Trail Miles (Marathon): **14**

Number of Days over 20 Miles: **49**
Number of Days between 15-20: **37**
Number of Days between 10-15: **22**
Number of Days between 5-10: **10**
Number of Days between 1-5: **1**

Number of nights in a Tent: **55**
Number of nights in a Shelter: **16**
Number of hiking nights in a Hostel: **32**
Number of hiking nights in a Motel/Hotel: **11**
Number of hiking nights in a Private Home: **5**

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, October 07, 2014 (Post Hike 3)

Finally Home!

I'm finally home today after Linda and I spent time with family up north. Here's a picture of me at breakfast the morning after summiting Katahdin. The AT Café in Millinocket asks thru hikers to sign ceiling tiles and then puts the tiles in the ceiling overhead when they're full!

Today I'm catching up on email and my journal, and preparing for my talk at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy event in Washington on Thursday evening. The folks there apparently heard about me somehow, and contacted me a month or so ago to ask me to speak. Good thing I finished!

<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/promo/2014-membership-drive---relive-the-legacy/tour-schedule>

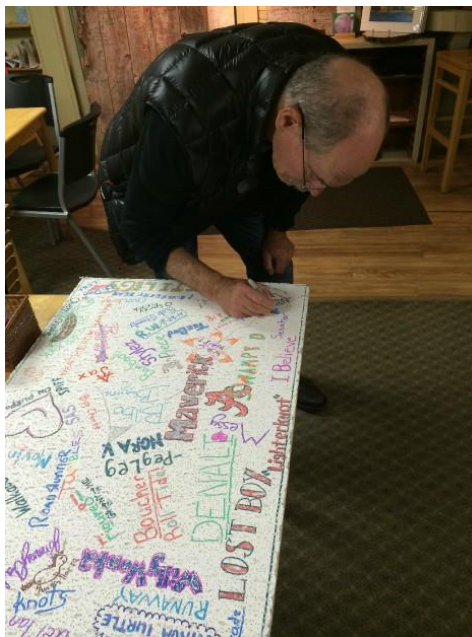
Note: If you click on the "Speakers" tab, you can see what I looked like 25 years ago!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, October 10, 2014 (Post Hike 4)

ATC Event

Linda and I had a good time at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy event last night in DC. I enjoyed talking



Signing Ceiling Tile at the AT Café!

with all the folks there, and Sam's movie on the AT and its history was quite entertaining as well as informative.

During my talk, I surprised Linda by introducing her to the audience by singing "And I would walk one thousand miles and I would walk one thousand more, just to be the man who walked two thousand miles to fall down at your door, Lil-Li-Linda, Lil-Li-Linda." She's put up with a lot being married to me for nearly 45 years! :-)

Now I'll get to work on getting my gear review, advice to thru hikers, and final thoughts written!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, October 13, 2014 (Post Hike 5)

Gear

I've been asked to post an updated/more comprehensive gear list. I'll start with my backpack, and then fill up the pack. The order of putting things in my pack was based on when I would want to get to an item on the trail and/or setting up camp. I reserved the outside pockets and hip belt pockets for items I'd use frequently while hiking or would want to get to quickly while hiking.

Total weight is very important! I've discovered that every additional pound of weight I'm carrying results in noticeably more effort required to carry it down the

trail. That means the lighter your total weight, the faster you can go, the longer you can go, the less wear and tear on your feet, knees, legs, hips and back, and the less overall fatigue you'll experience - and hence, the more you'll enjoy hiking. The older or more out of shape you are, the more important it is to get your pack weight down. My body notices the difference between empty and full water bottles. It knows how many days of food are left. It knows if I'm carrying a little extra gear for colder weather.

If you're just going out for a few overnight trips of short mileages each year, then weight is not as important. Take the extra stuff to make the experience more cushy if that's important to you. But if you're going for a thru hike, or a long section hike, then think twice (or thrice) about whether you really NEED that item. Invest in lighter weight gear if you can. Ask yourself if you're primarily going out to hike, or to camp?

I prefer to carry most of the weight on my hips. I also like to have the weight as close to my back as possible rather than hanging off the back of my pack or in the back pocket of the pack.

Lower weight and having it closer to your back also makes it easier to maintain your balance if you trip or slip or if you're climbing up/down steep rocky sections.

I was also told at Mountain Crossings several years ago that men should put the heavier items near the top of the pack, and women should put heavier items near the bottom. I don't know how important or accurate that is, and I didn't consider this when deciding how to pack my pack. It kinda makes sense since women's hips are designed to carry babies and men's shoulders are usually broader. However, it seems to me that if I've got the weight close to my back and on my hips, it wouldn't make much difference if it were high or low except perhaps for balance.

Backpack: I started with my 6 year old ULA Circuit. Worked well for my spring start, but I knew I'd want to downsize for the summer. In the Shenandoah I switched to a Hyperlite 2400 Windrider pack (40 liters). I had not heard about Hyperlite before getting on the trail, but saw several hikers with them. I figured out that I wanted to try a cuben pack and Hyperlite could ship me one the next day whereas zPacks had a 4 to 6 week delay. I love the fact it's waterproof and I don't need a pack cover. I don't like the small hip belt pockets. They don't hold as much as my Circuit, plus their shape and zipper placement make it more difficult to get things in and out. But overall, it's great!

First layer:

Sleeping Bag: This usually went in the bottom of my pack. Sometimes my tent would end up in the bottom if I stayed consecutive nights in shelters/hostels.

Spring/Summer - 6 year old Western Mountaineering Summerlite 6'6" (32deg). Probably not good to 32 deg by itself anymore due to wear and tear. In the spring, I supplemented it with an old silk sleep liner I had that I packed with it in the stuff sack. For waterproof redundancy, I initially packed it in an eVent stuff sack, but switched to a Hyperlite medium roll top cuben stuff sack when I got my Hyperlite pack.

Fall - 3 year old Western Mountaineering Versalite 6'6" (10deg). This was more than I needed, but I took the extra pound as insurance against getting surprised by a cold snap, and I didn't have a 20deg bag. I didn't have a waterproof stuff sack big enough for it, so I packed it in the stuff sack that came with it and then put that in a kitchen trash can bag. In the future, I'll spring for a larger cuben stuff sack.

Note: both bags were to cover the coldest temps I thought I'd encounter. Most nights were warmer and I used the bags unzipped, and laid over me like a quilt with my feet tucked in the bottom.

Second Layer:

Air mattress: I was looking at the Exped and NeoAir when I saw the REI Flash pad at REI. It's a little heavier but cheaper and the shape makes it easier to get two of them in my SoLong6 tent. I may look at the NeoAir again in the future.

Pee bottle: So I don't have to get out of my tent in the middle of the night! I used a Planters Peanut jar. Lightweight, but takes up volume.

Pillow: Small Exped inflatable pillow. I'm a side sleeper. Most of the time I could have used my clothing bag, but I wanted something consistent that would also be there if my clothing bag were empty due to cold temps or wet clothing.

Bear bag cord I used the bright colored 50' cord from zPacks. I ended up wrapping it around a stick when the cardboard gave out. I started with the zPacks kit, which included a rock bag with a carabiner on the end of the cord, but it tangled in the light branches too easily and I finally couldn't get it down. I still tied a small carabiner on the end using a bowline knot, for hooking to my bag. To throw the cord over a branch, I just used a clove hitch knot to tie a rock or a Cliff Bar on the end.

Third Layer:

Clothing Bag: In the summer I used a Hyperlite small roll top cuben bag to hold my spare shirt, shorts and socks and my head net. In the fall, I used the medium bag that I used for my sleeping bag in the summer.

Miscellaneous Bag: This usually overlapped with the Second and Third layers. A small stuff sack that contained my electronic, medical, repair and other hygiene stuff. I used a couple of snack zip lock bags to separate stuff into categories or for redundant waterproofness. Items included: band-aids, gauze, antiseptic ointment, cuben repair tape, air mattress repair patches, small scissors, small lightweight mirror I got when teaching symmetry in geometry, sewing kit, ear plugs, bic lighter, safety pins, bracelets that my granddaughter made me and my daughter gave me that took too much of a beating when I tried to wear them while hiking, extra phone and camera batteries, phone and camera battery chargers, small pocket knife with tweezers, etc. I also had a pencil where I stored duct tape and leukotape wrapped around it, which I stored either here or with the AT Guide.

Fourth Layer:

Tent: Lighthouse Gear SoLong 6 cuben tent. I had an old Hubba NT that I used on 2 to 5 day section hikes that was free standing and had a small footprint. But it was too small for me for four to six months. The SoLong 6 required more ground space and needed to be staked, but was a palace when I was by myself and snugly fit both Sarah and me on the first night out of Springer and Swede and me one night in the Whites. I used 6 titanium shepherd hook stakes and carried 6 small screw-in hooks for setting up on a wooden platform. Judy no longer makes it in cuben. I did not use a ground cloth, and got no holes in the bottom during my hike.

Note: If I was carrying a lot of food, there sometimes wasn't room in my Hyperlite pack for everything. In that case I'd put my tent outside on top of my pack until I ate enough food to get it back inside.

Fifth/Top Layer:

Food bag: zPacks cuben food bag with LiteTrail odor proof bag. I don't know if the odor proof bags are really odor proof for bears, but I figured they would at least reduce the risk of bears and rodents wanting to get into my food bag. At first I carried a spare odor proof bag in the bottom of the food bag in case I tore the primary odor proof bag. Then I realized that if I'm carrying it, I might as well use it, so I put the primary odor proof bag inside the backup bag inside the zPacks bag! I frequently slept with my food bag in my tent (I didn't eat in my tent.) and never had any problems. Of course, I don't know if that's simply because there were no bears around, but there certainly were at least mice nearby when I tented near a shelter. (If I carried a **stove**, I'd probably carry it here if it fit nicely. Otherwise, it might have to go with the second layer.)

Toothbrush Bag: A ziplock bag that I kept in the Food Bag that included a sawed off toothbrush, small

toothpaste tube, floss, disposable razor, and a smaller ziplock bag with vitamins.

Jacket/clothing layer: If it was cool enough that I started hiking with an additional layer of clothing, when I warmed up and took it off I'd simply pack it around or under the food bag. In the fall, when I took my lightweight down jacket, I packed it in my small cuben sack if it were looking like rain.

Back pocket of pack:

Sawyer Squeeze filter, bag and cleaner. (See Oct 30 entry for a discussion of water treatment options.)

Privy Bag: REI waterproof stuff sack with QiWiz Big Dig titanium trowel, toilet paper, wet wipes, small plastic bottle of Dr. Bonner's soap.

Rain Gear: Pack cover with ULA Circuit (nothing with cuben pack). Cheapest version of Frog Togs - I took the top as both rain protection and as a warmth layer in the spring and fall. In the spring I took a silnylon rain skirt that worked OK, but I decided wasn't worth the trouble. In the fall I took the Frog Tog pants for both rain protection and warmth. In the summer, I just got wet from the rain, figuring I'd either get wet from the rain or from my sweat if I wore rain gear. Later on I started packing my frog togs inside my pack if it didn't look like rain that day.

AT Guide: I got the loose leaf version and packed the future pages in a ziplock bag here. I also carried any other papers I wanted here.

Side Pockets of Pack:

Water Bottles: I used quart GatorAde bottles with my ULA Circuit. The pockets were short and big. I used SmartWater bottles with my Hyperlite. The pockets were tighter, especially when I had my 10deg sleeping bag stuffed in the bottom of the pack. I usually had a 1 liter bottle on one side and a 1 ½ liter bottle on the other.

Trekking Poles: When rock climbing, I'd collapse my poles and put them either here or in the back pocket.

Hip Belt Pockets:

AquaMira and Hand Sanitizer on the right side. I thought about having a second hand sanitizer kept with my Privy bag so I didn't have to take this one to the privy each time, but never got around to getting another one.

Head Lamp and Ibuprofen on the left side. the "Vitamin I" was in a small ziplock bag. I'd also put small temporary items in the left side.

Shoulder Strap Pocket:

Cuben, from zPacks. It had a draw string closure on the top which didn't keep out the rain. I'd have preferred one with a fold over flap on top to keep it waterproof. With the ULA pack, I carried these items in the larger hip belt pockets.

Camera, bug spray, sunblock Canon Elph 340 (see Pre Hike 5 and 6)

Pants Pockets:

(If I wore my REI pants w/four front pockets)

Phone: Samsung S4 Active (see journal Pre Hike 5)

Daily AT Guide pages - just the pages needed for that day, in thin weight ziplock bag. I discovered that even on dry days, my sweat would ruin the pages if not protected. I marked up the pages with daily mileages in bigger print so I could read them without my reading glasses.

Snacks: Usually three snacks or a bag of gorp.

Pen/Pencil.

Wallet Small ziplock bag. I carried two wallets, each with some cash, a credit card and some form of ID, and kept one in my pocket and one in my pack in case I lost one of them. One of them also had my ATM card.

Note 1: I usually carried the phone and AT Guide pages in my pants left top pocket, my snacks in my right top pocket, my wallet in my left bottom pocket with the velcro closure, and my pen/pencil and any trash from the snacks in my right bottom pocket with the velcro closure. I didn't carry anything in my back pants pockets. If I were wearing my other shorts, which had pockets I couldn't trust, I'd put my phone in the shoulder strap pocket with my camera, my AT Guide pages and my wallet in my hip belt pockets and the pen/pencil in the back pocket with my AT Guide. I'd put trash from my snacks in the side pack pocket with my water bottles.

Note 2: For future hikes, I plan to look into getting a larger, waterproof hipbelt pocket(s) so I can offload my pants pockets. I also plan to consider carrying my JetBoil and cooking some meals, especially if Linda goes with me!

Trekking Poles: Pacer Poles. Three section carbon fiber. I had never tried poles before I turned 60, but am a big believer in them now. If used properly, they offload some of the work from your legs in balancing, propulsion, and shock absorption - and your legs are usually the limiting factor in backpacking. I like the handle design of PacerPoles, which gives me the advantages of the straps on regular poles but without having to put my hands in straps. I had never tried regular trekking poles before, but used a couple of cheaper ones with and without a strap in NH and ME

when I broke one of my PacerPoles. I found using a strap is better than no strap, and that I missed the ease of putting my hand on and off my pole handle with a PacerPole. Disadvantage of the PacerPoles is they are only made in England. Fortunately, Linda had an identical pair which we used for parts when I broke mine.

CLOTHING

Note: I periodically treated all my clothing with permethrin to protect me better from ticks, but also to ward off mosquitos and other bugs.

Pants: REI zip off long pants, usually worn as shorts later in the hike. I liked having all the pockets, and these pants are baggier and more comfortable than a pair of similar Columbia pants I have. I started out wearing them as long pants, to protect me better from ticks. I discovered that the lighter and more free your pants are, the less effort it takes to move your legs and hike down the trail. There's a dramatic difference if your long pants are soaked with sweat vs. a pair of running/swim shorts. Once I got into higher lyme disease probability areas of northern Virginia and north, I started using deet on my legs when in shorts. Under these pants I wore synthetic material boxers. They didn't dry as fast as the commercials would have me believe, but they were comfortable.

Backup pants: old Target swim shorts with liner. Plus old silk long underwear bottom in spring/fall.

Shirt: Smartwool long sleeve shirt. Lightweight (150). I've had a melanoma removed from my right forearm and have had three friends die from skin cancer, the youngest in his forties. I decided on long sleeves to protect me better from both the sun and ticks. I found it just about as cool as a short sleeve shirt, and I could push up the sleeves if I wanted. I chose to splurge on wool vs. polyester for its ability to wash out the stink better than polyester, and it dries nearly as fast. It's not as durable, however, and I had to be careful about snagging it on tree branches.

Backup shirt: additional Smartwool lightweight long sleeve shirt. Plus old silk long underwear top in spring/fall.

Socks: REI merino wool and Darn Tough. The Darn Tough socks wear better since they have nylon in them with the wool, but the pure wool socks are a little more comfortable. I typically wore the Darn Tough while hiking, and had the REI merino wool pair for night and as a backup.

Shoes: Asics trail runners. I'm a neutral/under pronator who has had neuromas in both feet, so I like the neutral stability and the larger toe box. I went through three pair - the soles were still good, but the tops were taking

hits from the sticks and rocks. Note that shoes are a very, very personal matter!

Gaiters: Dirty Girl gaiters. I didn't need them with long pants.

Hat: OR ball cap that comes with a snap on neck protector. The hat was comfortable on my huge head, but I never used the neck protector - too tight (and a bit nerdy looking!). For bug and/or sun protection I would drape my permethrin treated bandana on top of my head such that it loosely protected my ears and neck, and put my hat on over it. I frequently did this in the early morning and early evening in the summer to keep the bugs away from my head while I was hiking. If it was hot, I would sometimes go bare-headed and use sun block if in the sun.

Bandana: I kept this in a carabiner on my right shoulder strap. Useful for a lot of things including neck protection (see Hat discussion above), towel, glasses cleaner, nose wiper and brushing off the bottom of my tent when packing it up.

Jacket: Spring and fall only - Sierra Designs lightweight down jacket. I got this a couple of years ago for regular use when they first came out with the water resistant down. I seldom wore it while actually hiking, and then usually only in the first half hour or so until I warmed up. But useful in camp on the cooler mornings and evenings. For colder conditions, supplemented with Frog Togs described in Rain Gear above.

Buff: I used a merino wool buff because it's a little bigger and stretchier than the polyester buff and thus fits my huge head better. Just wearing it around my neck helped me stay warmer. At night I would pull the buff up over my head and ears or just wear it as a beanie for warmth as needed.

Gloves: I have the cuben mittens and wool liners from zPacks but left the liners at home. I took the gloves mainly for hiking in cold rain, but used them a couple of times on cold mornings. Their main use was when I was hiking with the cheap trekking pole I found in Maine and I needed a glove to protect my hand from blisters since the handle didn't fit my hand. This wore out the palm of the glove pretty well after just a week or so, probably because I had to grip tightly on a handle that didn't fit my hand well. I'm hoping they'll last better if I were using them with my poles that fit my hands. I lost one of my gloves in Maine, and used my spare socks for gloves when hiking one chilly morning.

Head Net: petersheadnets.com. Only used it once when I was sleeping in a shelter on a buggy night. Bugs were gone by the time I got to Maine.

PS I like to think of myself as a lightweight backpacker, but I'm not an ultra-lightweight backpacker. I started out with a base weight (without food or water) around 17 or 18 pounds, and got it down to around 15 pounds in the summer. I don't know what it was in the fall. I'll be looking at how I might want to trim it down some more before I go out on another long hike!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, October 14, 2014 (Post Hike 6)

Advice for Future Thru Hikers

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Get in shape by hiking. Up and down hills if possible. With your backpack on, working up to your full load with food and water.

Test run all your gear individually. Practice with it enough that you're familiar with it, or even an expert at using it. In a variety of conditions.

Test run all your gear together, both hiking and camping. Take it out overnight, even if it's only in the back yard. Test it in the cold. Test it in the rain, and perhaps even in snow. Test it at night. Are there some things missing? Are there some things you can do without?

Practice on multi-night trips if possible. It's valuable to break camp and pack up knowing you're going to have to set up camp again later rather than knowing you're just going home. If necessary, you might even camp in the back yard and take your backpack to work during the day, returning to the back yard. But it's better to practice as much as possible under the actual conditions you'll encounter on the trail.

Get your pack weight down!!!!

Have fun! Both during practice and on the trail! Get to know other hikers! Accept them for who they are - after all, they're accepting you for who you are! Appreciate they're hiking their own hike while you're hiking your own hike.

Listen to your body. Don't try to do too much too soon.

Drink lots of water and eat enough food! You'll need more of both than you're used to drinking and eating. Keep your electrolytes up.

Maintain a sense of joy and wonder!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Wednesday, October 15, 2014 (Post Hike 7)

Final Thoughts

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!!!

Thanks to all of you for your prayers and your support during my adventure - family, friends, and even folks I haven't met! Thanks to the trail builders and maintainers! Thanks to my fellow hikers, and to the hostel, food and other store owners and workers, and to the ride givers, and to the many other trail angels seen and unseen! I've often said that the best part about my thru hike has been meeting so many wonderful people along the way.

Special thanks go of course to my wife Linda for not only her prayers and support for this adventure, but for her love and for putting up with me for the past 45 years!

Thank you Lord for your provision, protection, inspiration and fellowship!

I am indeed a blessed man. :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, October 30, 2014 (Post Hike 8)

Water Treatment and Falling

I just got an email from Laurie at ATC, who had received a request from Carol, who is planning a thru hike for next year. Carol had heard me speak at the ATC event a couple of weeks ago and wanted to know what I used for water treatment, and what I meant when I mentioned learning how to fall. Here's my response in case it's useful to others, too:

Hi Laurie and Carol!

First of all, keep in mind that I've read testimonies by several thru hikers who never treat their water, or only treat pond water, and never had any adverse consequences. I've also read of other thru hikers who treated all their water and still got giardia. If the water came from a clear spring near the top of a ridge line, I usually didn't treat it. The rest of the time I did. It's a risk management decision.

I started out using my old SteriPen to treat my water and had a new Sawyer Mini as my backup. Both of them allow you to treat/filter your water immediately at the source, so you can treat a bottle and drink it right away. That can save you 15 to 20 minutes of waiting time or a couple of pounds of water weight for the next 15 to 20 minutes of hiking. I like the SteriPen as it is quick and easy to use and kills everything; however it is a bit heavier and depends on lithium batteries. I've

used it successfully over the years on short section hikes.

Not long into my hike, my SteriPen was intermittently failing to work to the point it wasn't worth carrying for my thru hike. So I sent it home and used the Sawyer Mini as primary and Aqua Mira as backup. What I didn't like about the Sawyer Mini was the slow flow rate and how hard I had to squeeze the bag to get the water to flow. I later learned that the regular Sawyer Squeeze has a much faster flow rate [thanks AZ Cruiser!], and I switched to that. I think the faster flow rate is easily worth the slightly larger size and heavier weight. Toward the end of my hike I mostly used the Aqua Mira drops unless I wanted a drink right away, in which case I'd use the Sawyer Squeeze. Sometimes, to keep from standing around the 5 minutes for Parts A and B to mix together in the cap, I'd carry the cap in my hand along with that hand's hiking pole while hiking until the 5 minutes were up, and then add it to my water bottle.

An advantage of a filter vs. SteriPen/drops/tablets is that the latter ones don't treat the water around the outside of the top of the bottle, which has been exposed to the untreated water and which you put in your mouth to drink. I just wiped off the top of the bottle - don't know how effective that was. With a filter, the filtered water comes out the drinking end of the filter which has not been exposed to the untreated water.

I saw a lot of Sawyers on the trail. Several folks put them in line with tubes from their water bladders so they could just fill up their bladders and suck on the mouthpiece. I like to chug my water, so I prefer water bottles. I tried putting the Mini in line with the Sawyer bladder, but found I had to suck harder than I liked to get the water out. I suspect the regular Sawyer Squeeze would have worked better. I also saw a couple of hikers who just had the Sawyer screwed onto the top of a Smart Water bottle in their side pocket. They would simply drink straight out of the Sawyer.

As to falling safely, what I meant is to recognize early that you're about to fall and just sit down if you can. Most of my falls were due to my foot slipping out from under me on sloping wet rocks or wet wood. I think you're apt to injure yourself less if you can sit down or fall on your pack rather than falling forward. Regaining you balance with a backpack on is much more difficult to do than without a backpack. If you trip and are falling forward, then let go of your poles and try to use your hands and arms to absorb the shock.

Have a great hike, Carol!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, November 01, 2014 (Post Hike 9)

Thoughts

It's been a month since I finished my AT thru hike. I think I've finished tweaking my posts about the hike itself and thought I was done with this journal. Now I think this might be a good place to write down some of my current thoughts as they pop up since many are thoughts I pondered while hiking the AT. This might also help me better achieve my main reason for journaling in the first place! (See my April 18th post.) So, I may periodically add to this journal as I feel prompted. :-)

Today I went for a hike along one of the Civil War battlefield trails nearby. Hiking along the trail, I came upon a young couple taking pictures of their three young children posed very cutely on a fallen tree log. When I offered to take a picture of all five of them together, the Mom and Dad first declined, saying something about not wanting their picture taken. So I asked the kids: "Wouldn't it be great if Mom and Dad were in the picture, too?!" They of course agreed, so Mom and Dad posed with their kids, and I think I took some great family pictures! :-)

I quickly hiked on. After I left them, I realized that I could have also thanked the parents for getting their kids outside to explore nature and I could have encouraged them to continue to do so as the kids grow older. That led to having thoughts about the educational opportunity of this battlefield park, too. That led to thoughts about why the Civil War was fought, which led to thoughts about a book I just finished about the American Revolutionary War.

In his book "Revolutionary Summer - The Birth of American Independence," author Joseph Ellis covers the intertwining of the political and military events of the American Revolution between May and October, 1776. I've often thought that it is difficult for us to really understand the motivations and actions of people who lived, or live, in different cultures and social norms than our own. We need to be careful about judging them based on our current culture and social norms. Ellis brings up that point in trying to help us understand the historical figures in the book, in both their political and their military decisions.

One such glaring issue around America's fight for independence was slavery. How could they have been so devoted to freedom from British rule and ignore the lack of freedom for so many people in our own country-to-be? Women's rights and even the right to vote for all white males were other freedom issues along with slavery that were paid little attention, or at least put on the back burner. Ellis writes that those

issues were discussed at least privately, but not addressed in the Continental Congress because the leaders thought they could not reach any consensus on those issues and discussion would distract from the issue of independence from British rule.

But Ellis also points out, or at least I thought about it while reading his book, that many folks of that era who were ardent supporters for freedom were so steeped in their cultural norms of restricted freedom for women and slaves that they didn't consider their freedom at issue, or at least found it easy to push such thoughts into the background.

That got me thinking about today. What things in my life - thoughts, attitudes, behaviors - do I think or do simply because they are norms in the culture with which I'm familiar, but if put under a bright light of truth would show to be inappropriate? What things in my life that I don't even consciously think about would be revealed to be inappropriate? For what inappropriate things in our culture today will future historians try to partially excuse us because we just didn't know better? (Please note that I wasn't thinking about any one thing in particular. Until I investigate further, I don't even know what they all are!)

Are they restricting my ability to experience pure joy today? Are they hindering my ability to be a "good and faithful servant"?

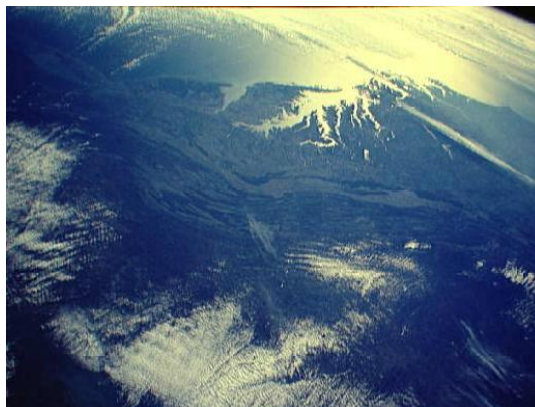
Do I have the courage to investigate? :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, November 25, 2014 (Post Hike 10)

Adding Multiple Photos, etc.



East Coast from STS-27

In the Guest Book, Drifter asked me to share how I post multiple pictures in one post.

A big thanks to Stumpknocker for sending me the basic entry for embedding a picture, along with the entry for putting a space between paragraphs. I recognized the entries as being in HTML code. Being a self-proclaimed geek-wannabe, that sent me on a trek to figure out even more options on formatting my entries.

You don't have to be a professional HTML programmer to do this! I'll give you some snippets of code that you can just copy and paste into your journal. Those of you with good memories for this sort of thing can probably memorize the entries. I'll also discuss some more elaborate options for those of you who want to get fancy!

First of all, HTML does not recognize carriage/line returns (hitting the Enter key). Programmers use the carriage return in their programs simply to help them better keep track of the program as they write or edit it.

On the Journal Entry page of Trailjournals, notice the options at the bottom of the page for HTML or Text format. The Text format option simply adds the HTML tag (code) for a line break (start a new line) in place of any carriage returns and then enters it as HTML code. (You may have noticed that many trail journals don't have any space between paragraphs. If you use the Text format, add two carriage returns between paragraphs to get one blank line between paragraphs.)

You'll want to select the "HTML format" option before you post your journal entry.

NOTE! HTML code uses the "less than" symbol and the "greater than" symbol to enclose tags like line break, new paragraph, insert picture, etc. If I used the actual "less than" and "greater than" symbols in my text below, they would be interpreted by the HTML program as tags rather than descriptive text and wouldn't show up. (There's a way around it that is too burdensome the way Trailjournals changes such text when I try to modify a page.)

IMPORTANT: When you see the bracket symbols "{" and "}" below, replace them with "less than" and "greater than" symbols!

Less Important: HTML tags don't differentiate between upper and lower case letters. {P} is the same as {p}.

To start a new paragraph: {p}

This will start a new paragraph with appropriate spacing between paragraphs.

Note: HTML not only ignores carriage returns, it ignores multiple spaces between words and multiple

paragraph tags. If you want more than the normal paragraph spacing, use multiple line break tags.

Example:

{p}{p}{p} gives the same spacing as a single {p}:

A line break: {br} gives this spacing:

{br}{br}{br} gives this spacing:

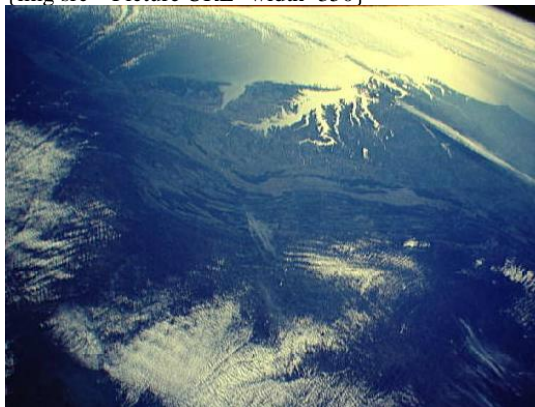
```
<b>To add a picture:</b>
<br>

<p>
The actual URL of the picture you want to insert is
typed between the quotation marks. (See the example
below for the actual URL I used. It's a picture I
posted in the Photo section of my journal.)
<br>
You can also change the width of the picture - I
typically used 350 for landscape orientations and 250
for portrait orientations.
<p>
Put line break or new paragraph tags before and after
the picture code, depending on what spacing you want.
<p>
<b>To add a picture with a title:</b>
<br>
 <br>
<b><i><font size="-1">
East Coast from SIS-27
</font></i></b>
<p>
```

HTML Code for the Following Text & Two Pictures

To add a picture:

{img src="Picture URL" width=350}



The actual URL of the picture you want to insert is typed between the quotation marks. (See the example above for the actual URL I used. It's a picture I posted in the Photo section of my journal.)

You can also change the width of the picture - I typically used 350 for landscape orientations and 250 for portrait orientations.

Put line break or new paragraph tags before and after the picture code, depending on what spacing you want.

To add a picture with a title:

```
{img src="
http://www.trailgallery.com/photos/16577/tj16577_020
999_024456_850025.jpg?20140622005726"
width=350}
{br}{b}{i}{font size="-1"}
East Coast from STS-27
{/font}{i}{/b}
```



East Coast from STS-27

I used the same title format that Trailjournals uses for the photo at the top of the page: br = go to next line, b = bold, I = italics, font size="-1" = reduce the font size by 1.

East Coast from STS-27: whatever title you want to use.

/font = go back to original font, /I = stop using italics, /b = stop using bold type.

You can simplify the code by deleting font options, with the simplest code for a title being just:

```
{br}Title
```

Which would add the title below the picture in the same font as the text - essentially just adding regular text.

To get the picture URL:

-- Post the picture somewhere on the web. I simply uploaded them to the Trailjournals site, but you could have them other places on the web.

-- Go to the web page displaying the picture.

-- In Internet Explorer: Right click on the picture; Select "Properties"; Select and copy the "Address (URL)"; Paste into code.

-- In Firefox: Right click on the picture; Click on "Copy Image Location"; Paste into code.

On my Android phone, I couldn't figure out an easy way to get the URL using its regular browser. I loaded Firefox onto my phone, and could get the URL using

the steps above. (Holding my finger on the photo takes the place of right clicking.)

To surround pictures with text:

If you want to surround pictures with text and/or put them on the right side or middle of the page, you can do that with tables. That's what Trailjournals does with the picture you can insert using the options on the Journal Entry page. I think this looks better and did it for many of my early posts. On the trail, I decided it was too much trouble, and reverted to the simpler method above.



Lunch Time!

I got the code by simply copying the code Trailjournals uses. It's easy to see the HTML code of a web page. What's more difficult is finding the bit of code you want in all that gobbledygook!

Simply right click on this web site page and select "View source" in Internet Explorer or "View Page Source" in Firefox. Scroll down through all the gobbledygook and you'll finally see the text I've written in black - about line 335 in the left column. Above that, about line 330, is the code for the picture table at the top of the page.

Here's a simpler version that deletes the hyperlink for clicking on the picture:

```
{table align="right" width="320"}{tr}{td}
{img src="PictureURL" width=320 align="middle"}
{br}{b}{I}{font size="-
1"}{center}TITLE{/font}{/I}{/b}
{/TD}{/TR}{/TABLE}
```

The Align="right" in the first line determines where the table goes. It can be "left", "right" or "center".

The Width in the first line is the width of the table. I always made that the same as the width of the picture in the second line.

The Align="Middle" in the second line is where the picture shows up in the table cell. Leave that as "Middle".

In the third line I added {center} before the TITLE. That centers the title below the picture. The last line gets you out of the table and back to regular text.

The actual code I used for the "Lunch Time!" photo above can be seen at about line 407 of the source code for this page.

If you have a question or want to get fancier - like multiple spaces or hyperlinks - simply google what you want and/or view the source code of a page that uses what you want. There are lots of HTML explanatory sites out there.

Have fun!

PS The East Coast picture is one I took from about 240 miles above Lake Erie during my first Space Shuttle flight. The picture has a big chunk of the AT in it!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, December 04, 2014 (Post Hike 11)

What Next?

What next?

A lot of hikers I met on the trail were at a transition point in their lives. Many of the younger hikers were leaving their previous jobs and using the opportunity to hike the AT before starting a new job. Many of those weren't quite sure what that new job was going to be, and they hoped the trail would help clarify what they wanted to do next.

I'm also at a transition point! When folks would ask me if I was retired, I responded that I didn't particularly like that descriptor, even if it's accurate. I prefer to say that currently no one is paying me to do anything! And, I don't intend to retire from life and be unproductive. :-)

A number of years ago, I developed the following definition of success:

First of all success is not fame or fortune or power. Success is taking the gifts and talents you've been given, growing and maturing them, and applying them to make the world a better place, to help other people.

For some folks, that may lead to fame, fortune and/or power. If so, that means they have greater opportunity, and hence greater responsibility, to help make the world a better place.

I've been fortunate in life to serve in a variety of positions with lots of successful people across all income levels - people helping make the world a better place and helping others.

I didn't expect to discover what's next for me during my hike. I simply expected to enjoy hiking the trail - which I did, especially the people I met along the way! But now that it's over, I need to discover what's next to keep me productively occupied. More time with family

and friends, for sure, but also time spent in service to others where I can both contribute and be challenged.

Don't know what it'll be yet, but based on my past experiences, the good Lord has something in store to surprise me with!

In the meantime, however long that is, I'm catching up on a long to-do list at home and am indeed spending more time with my family and friends! I've also decided to continue practicing writing, so I think I'll keep this blog going a bit longer to discuss some of the cool thoughts I pondered on the trail. Well... I think they're cool! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, December 12, 2014 (Post Hike 12)

Flatland Intro

Several occurrences have happened to me recently to inspire me to write about some of my thoughts on reality, especially understanding a four dimensional universe. Linda and I went to see "Interstellar" a few weeks ago. I had fun discussing the movie with our nephew and his wife over Thanksgiving and taking the thought process further. And some other occasion which I now can't recall!

So here we go! Hope you have fun with the ideas - I certainly do! :-)

Before I get into writing about 4 dimensional space, let me share with you some background on my interest in out-of-the-box thinking.

I don't remember when I first started thinking about these things. I do remember that as a boy I read a lot of science fiction (along with Freddy the Pig and Doctor Doolittle). I was good in math and science, and was also good at grammar. I loved to diagram sentences! Back then, we didn't have gifted or advanced placement classes, but schools did often assign students to classes based on how good their grades were. When I started high school, they put me in some advanced classes, including English.

When I was a sophomore, our English teacher told us we had learned grammar well enough and would not be covering that any more. Oh no! Instead we would focus on literature. Oh no! Here I was in a class with all these literature brainiacs and all I read was science fiction, and slowly at that!

One day our teacher gave us an assignment to give a speech on a topic of our choice. My topic was weird

concepts of reality. I remember listing several alternate concepts of reality such as:

--We're really just dreaming, perhaps we're even still in the womb.

--We're just part of someone else's dream.

--We're part of some behavioral scientist's experiment and there's no reality outside of our own perception. The other people we encounter are actors and the scenes we are in are just on a stage (I later saw a TV show, perhaps Twilight Zone, with this theme.)

--Our brains are just floating in a large beaker with wires hooked up to our nervous system. What we perceive as reality is just electrical signals being fed to our brains by a computer program that make us think we're seeing, touching, hearing, smelling and tasting some false reality. (The movie "Matrix" has this theme.)

After my talk, several of the well-read students said they enjoyed it and asked me where I had read about those ideas. I truthfully said I just thought them up, but I'm sure the background for my thoughts was all the science fiction I had read!

Now on to 4 dimensional space!

The way I like to think about 4 dimensional space is to first think about our 3 dimensional world as a 2 dimensional world. Then imagine what a 3 dimensional creature could do with our 2 dimensional world and try to correlate that with what a 4 dimensional creature could do with our 3 dimensional world. Say What?!

I mentioned in one of my earlier posts about using the book "Flatland" by A. Square (Edwin Abbott) as a good starting point. Flatland is a two dimensional world inhabited by people who are triangles, squares, circles, etc. who have no third dimension, and are not aware that a third dimension exists. You can download the pdf online from various sites. Here's one place you can read it free online: gutenberg.org/ebooks/201. You can also buy the book for a pittance - on Amazon, it's 3 bucks for a hardcopy or one buck for a Kindle edition.

Abbott published the book in 1884 and takes the opportunity to make his book a satire on society in Victorian England as well as a story about multi-dimensional space. Wikipedia does a good summary of it. If you're not interested in the satire or the background explanation on how two dimensional people can see, skip Part I and start with Part II which is the story line.

I also recommend "Flatland, the Movie." It's a 35 minute animated film that does a great job with the

storyline and eliminates the subservient role of women satirized in Abbott's book. Martin Sheen did A. Square's voice. I just noticed that Tony Hale did the voice of the King of Pointland - Tony is a good friend of our daughter and son-in-law. There's also a 1:40 animated movie "Flatland, the Film" that I haven't watched yet that's on YouTube.

I've put the book "Sphereland" and the movie "Flatland2: Sphereland" on my Christmas wish list!

We've got guests coming this afternoon for the weekend, so I'll develop my thoughts in my next post, hopefully early next week.

PS I did OK in my English classes, although for some reason they continued to put me in the advanced English classes with my literature brainiac friends. I struggled, but enjoyed learning from them as well as from the teachers. Since my teachers wouldn't let me do book reports on just science fiction books, I became pretty good at writing "B" book reports on books I hadn't fully read and giving "C" oral book reports. I think my overall grade each year was a "C" even though I got an "F" on the final my senior year! I did have a couple of poems I had to write published in our school literary magazine - they were, of course, on science fiction themes...

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Tuesday, December 16, 2014 (Post Hike 13)

2D and 3D and 4D, Oh My!

The following is not a description of what I think is reality. It is a description of some things I've thought about which demonstrate that I certainly don't know all there is to know about reality! It's actually a very simplified view of a possible four dimensional universe. Brainy physicists out there talk about string theory painting our universe as having 10 physical dimensions! Hopefully, this discussion will stimulate you to consider how little we really know about the universe in which we live and to consider the possibilities!

OK, imagine there's a two dimensional world called "Flatland" with two dimensional inhabitants who have no concept of a third dimension. For now, imagine it's a flat plane, like the top of a table near you but with no height dimension. Imagine we pass a three dimensional object through the plane of Flatland, and consider what the inhabitants of Flatland would see.

Let's start with a sphere. As the sphere first touches the plane of Flatland, the inhabitants first see a point

suddenly appear out of nowhere in their two-dimensional universe. As we continue to lower the sphere, the Flatlanders would see the point grow to a small circle, getting larger and larger. As the sphere goes halfway through the plane, the Flatlanders would see the circle reach the sphere's maximum diameter and then decrease in size. As the sphere passes completely through the plane of Flatland, the Flatlanders would see the circle diminish to a point and then magically disappear.

Now go ahead and jump through the plane of Flatland yourself! What would the Flatlanders see? Let's say you're wearing pants and a shirt and you jump through feet first with your arms hanging by your sides. The Flatlanders see two irregular blobs suddenly appear that are the cross sections of your feet or shoes. The blobs get smaller and more circular as your legs begin to pass through Flatland. Then two smaller blobs suddenly appear alongside the leg blobs as the tips of your hands start passing through Flatland. The two main blobs join together as one bigger blob as your hips go through, leaving a big central blob of your torso with two smaller blobs of your arms on each side. Then the two smaller blobs join the big blob as your shoulders enter Flatland. Suddenly the big blob shrinks to a much smaller and more circular blob, which then suddenly grows bigger and more oval as your neck and then your head pass through Flatland. Long hair might make it even more interesting! Finally the oval shrinks to a point and magically disappears as suddenly as it appeared!

The Flatlanders have seen somewhat circular blobs suddenly appear in their universe, change shapes, and suddenly disappear. Since they have no concept of a third physical dimension, they have no way to connect the varying shapes as being simply cross sections of a single three dimensional object. They can't picture in their minds what a three dimensional object would look like.

One more fun exercise: Imagine a pole 3 inches in diameter and six feet long, standing on end perpendicular to Flatland. Now tilt it over 30 degrees. Now cut off the top and bottom at a 30 degree angle so that the ends are flat ovals parallel to the plane of Flatland. Now move it straight down through Flatland, keeping the 30 degree tilt. What do the Flatlanders see? Suddenly a three inch wide oval appears out of nowhere in front of them. Then the oval moves across Flatland for about three feet. Then it suddenly disappears!

The Flatlanders have no concept of a pole. All they can experience is an oval suddenly appearing and moving "sideways" through their universe and then disappearing. We know there wasn't any sideways

movement of the pole. Instead, we know it moved only down, a direction the Flatlanders don't comprehend.

Note that I'm not considering Time like a physical dimension here. Time exists the same in Flatland as it does in our three dimensional universe. Flatlanders experience the same time for the oval to move sideways in Flatland as we experience for the pole to pass down through Flatland. I am using time in my examples to allow the Flatlanders to see multiple 2D cross sections of a 3D object, since they can't see it all at once.

So, what would it look like for a four dimensional creature to similarly tease us three dimensional creatures? If we saw a ball suddenly appear and zoom up into the sky, zip around, and disappear, might it simply be a four dimensional "pole" that a 4D creature is stirring around in our 3D universe? Of course we can't conceive of what a 4D pole looks like, just like the Flatlanders can't conceive what a 3D pole looks like.

If some part of a 4D object always intersected our 3D universe, then we wouldn't see it suddenly appear or disappear. There may be no "magical" appearance to it. Some 3D "cross section" of it would always be present. We can't tell if anything is a 3D or a 4D object.

Think about you. Perhaps you're a 4D object! But due to our 3D limitations, at any given time we can only experience your 3D cross section intersecting our universe at that given time.

When you jumped through Flatland, your 3D self was the compilation of all the 2D blobs that the Flatlanders saw over time. Perhaps your 4D self is the compilation of all the 3D persons you have been over time! Perhaps your total 4D self has always consisted of ALL the 3D slices of you since you were first conceived until you pass away - we just get to experience you one 3D slice at a time since we can't perceive the fourth dimension. Perhaps there's even more of you that never intersects our 3D space...

Fun!

Let's have more fun taking it a step further. The sperm and egg from which you were conceived came from your Dad and Mom and although separate from each of them in our 3D universe, they might still be part of them in the 4D universe - like all the separate blobs of you that the Flatlanders observed. That means that in the 4D universe, you might still be physically part of your Mom and Dad, and they became connected through you to each other when you were conceived! Take that several steps further and all mankind throughout all history are connected as one entity with several billion parts!

Ouch! My brain hurts!

Another fun aspect to consider: As we 3D creatures look down on the Flatlanders, we can see every molecule in their universe at once. We can see inside their houses and even inside their bodies. Surgery would be a lot easier for Flatland surgeons if they could go in from the 3rd dimension rather than having to stay in Flatland and cut through the outer part of the patient's body!

Likewise, 4D creatures looking down on our universe from a 4th dimension position "above" us can see every molecule in our universe at once. They can see the internal makeup of our planet and our sun. They can see the moldy leftovers in the plastic container hiding in the back of the fridge and where you hid the jewelry in the sock drawer. They can see every aspect of our internal organs, too. They'd be great surgeons for us!

Enough! At least for today... Next will be thoughts on what it might be like if Flatland were not perfectly flat!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, December 18, 2014 (Post Hike 14)

Curvy Flatland!

Since Flatlanders can't perceive the 3rd dimension, they can't tell if their universe is perfectly flat in three dimensional space or if it's curved in some way or another. It might be wavy like the surface of the ocean. It might be folded up like a blanket on the closet shelf. Or, it might be curved back onto itself, like the surface of a doughnut or the surface of a sphere.

The blanket analogy, by the way, is where the idea of wormholes is played out in the movie "Interstellar." Where one part of the blanket rests on another part, there might be a way for the Flatlanders to jump directly from one layer to the other using a wormhole to quickly transit in the 3rd dimension between the two layers. Otherwise, the Flatlanders would have to travel many, many light years staying in the blanket and going around the fold. (We would need a 4D wormhole to shortcut our 3D universe.)

Let's have some fun with the idea of Flatland being on the surface of a sphere. Keep in mind that Flatlanders can't detect the curvature of their universe. When they see the light coming from something in the distance, the light has traveled within Flatland along the surface of the sphere. They perceive it as coming in a straight line without any perception of the curvature in the 3rd dimension.

One fun aspect of this to consider is that if you're in this Flatland and look straight into the distance far enough, you'd look all the way around the surface of the sphere and see the back of your head! No matter what direction you looked!

Of course, the light from the back of your head takes time to go around the surface of the sphere. If the sphere were big enough, it might take millions or billions of years for the light to travel that far. So what you'd see is whatever was standing where you are so many years ago.

Let's throw in another thought. Our scientists have observed that our universe is expanding - all the galaxies are moving further apart from each other. Big Bang theories hypothesize that this expansion has been going on since the beginning of our universe. But expanding into what?

I used to picture an infinite-in-all-directions 3D space with all our galaxies in one particular area of that space, expanding out into the rest of the space that's already there. The corresponding analogy in 2D Flatland would be a flat plane extending infinitely in both directions off the table top, and all the Flatland galaxies contained in one area that is spreading out like liquid in a paper towel. In this case there would be a certain spot in the universe from where everything started moving out, and therefore one direction in which I should look back through the galaxies to see that spot. If I looked in the opposite direction, I would see the space into which we were expanding.

Flatland on a sphere gives another option to consider. What if Flatland began in 3D space as the surface a teeny tiny sphere so small it was a point, and then blew up to be the surface of a bigger sphere that continued to get bigger and bigger, like someone blowing up a balloon? As the balloon continues to get bigger, all the points on the surface of the balloon get further apart from each other. The galaxies in Flatland would be moving away from each other because the existing 2D space is stretching, not because they are moving out into some 2D space that already existed!

In this scenario, when you look into the distance on Flatland trying to see the back of your head, the further into the distance you look, the smaller Flatland was when the light left that object you're seeing. When observed from 3D land, the light would be following a spiral rather than a circle. (In either case, as a Flatlander, you would see the light as going in a straight line.)

If you looked far enough, the inward spiral of your sight would wind around until you saw the very beginning of Flatland as the surface of a teeny tiny

sphere or a point. And you would see this no matter in which direction you looked!

Depending on the relative speeds of the light you're seeing and the expansion rate of the sphere, you might see back to the beginning point before the light had traveled around the sphere once. Otherwise you might see your own galaxy in its earlier stages in between you and the beginning!

Let's take this analogy to our 3D universe! As telescopes become more and more capable, astronomers are able to detect light coming from objects further and further away, and hence, further and further back in time. And they see these objects no matter in which direction they look! Perhaps our 3D universe is the surface of a 4D sphere - whatever that is!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Friday, December 19, 2014 (Post Hike 15)

Merry Christmas!



Our Awesome Family!

This is the family picture we sent with our Christmas cards this year. We took it when we were all together in California this summer. OK, OK, a little Photoshop was involved to put the couch on the beach! I also admit I'm a little biased with the title. :-)

I thought you might also appreciate the new license plates I put on my truck this week!

All the multidimensional thoughts in my previous two posts bring up another interesting question to ponder as we approach Christmas: Where might a spiritual world fit into all this?



Georgia to Maine 2014!

Most of us sense there is something beyond the three dimensional physical space that we perceive. From where does self-awareness come? What are thoughts? What are emotions? How can we perceive the fact we have them? ...

I believe in a creator God who's involved in His universe. I believe He's way beyond our imagination in wisdom, power and love.

Sometimes I have fun imagining that He's a 6th grade student in a 20 dimensional universe and our universe is his science fair project.

I think He has fun with me imagining that.

I also think He loves the creatures in his creation much, much more than they can ever imagine or understand.

That's why we celebrate Christmas!

May you be truly blessed this Christmas and in the years to come!

May you experience pure joy! :-)

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Saturday, January 17, 2015 (Post Hike 16)

4D Update!

OK, OK, so I've spent enough time on 4D thinking already!

Our kids and grandkids gave me the animated movie "Flatland2: Sphereland" as a gift for my birthday and I just watched it this week. The film makers have done a

very good job illustrating some of the concepts I've mentioned in an entertaining adventure. While trying to save an ill-fated 2D rocket flight, the characters first discover that Lineland is curved into being a circle and then discover that Flatland is curved into being the surface of a sphere.

They add a twist I hadn't thought about where characters are taken out of their own 1, 2 or 3 dimensional world to a higher dimension world and then put back into their world "upside down" - where they discover left and right are now reversed for them. They also introduce us to someone from 4D land, which is hard to do on a 2D display in our 3D world! Of course, in 3D Land we only see his 3D cross section. The movie is entertaining and educational - well done!

I forgot to mention in my previous posts that you can look at Time as a dimension, too. Imagine that time is the third dimension perpendicular to the 2D world of Flatland instead of the "up" physical dimension in our 3D world. As time goes on, the plane of Flatland simply moves "up" along the time dimension. As time marches on, a stationary circle in Flatland would trace out the shape of a cylinder if you thought of time as a physical dimension. A smaller circle orbiting around the stationary circle would trace out a coil around the cylinder.

Now imagine a Flatlander who started life as a couple of side by side irregular blobs (similar to the cross section of the bottoms of your feet). Imagine that as the Flatlander "grows" the two blobs get smaller and more circular and then varying in size over time (like the cross sections of your legs). As time goes on, the blobs sprout two smaller blobs on each side, then the middle blobs join together, then all three join into one bigger blob. As the Flatlander becomes old, the big blob shrinks to a smaller circle then in a final burst of energy becomes a larger oval for a while, and then quickly shrinks to nothing as it dies.

If you look at time as a physical dimension, over its lifetime this Flatlander traces out the 3D you - like when I had you jump through Flatland in the earlier post!

For fun, now try to imagine what 4D shape your 3D body is tracing out over time!... Oh... I forgot... we can't imagine what 4D objects look like. ;-)

Have fun!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, March 12, 2015 (Post Hike 17)

Invisible Universe



At Honduran Orphanage

I had the opportunity to go to Honduras a couple of weeks ago and speak at several different venues. One of them was the National University where I was invited to speak on "The Visible and the Invisible Universe." I had fun preparing the talk and had a great time with the students and faculty when I gave the talk. Since I included some discussion on 4D thinking in this particular talk, I decided to journal about it here.

My goal for my talk was to inspire us all to look at the universe with an understanding that we understand only a small part of it, and to encourage us to be continuous learners. I divided my talk into three ways to look at the invisibility of our universe.

The first part was to look at the history of our knowledge of the three-physical-dimensions-plus-time universe we experience, and where we are today in our knowledge of it. I briefly covered the history of science starting when we first began thinking of all matter being made up of small, unique building blocks which we called atoms, and when we thought the Earth was at the center of our universe. As we developed better telescopes, microscopes and mathematics, we learned that there were many different types of atoms, that they were made up of a few different particles, then many more different particles, and that the Earth was not at the center of the universe after all. I took us through Newton and Einstein, from thinking we're in a steady state universe to the big bang theories, and on to today with some discussion on dark matter and dark energy.

My emphasis was on the fact that throughout history, when we thought we understood the universe, we later learned that our theories were either totally wrong or

that there were finer details that modified our theories. I suggested that the invisible universe is not only things like dark matter and dark energy, it is also those aspects of our universe that we haven't learned yet. Some of those things we know we don't know, like dark matter, but perhaps most of them we don't know that we don't know, like... I don't know!

Mentioning string theory's 10 dimensions at the big bang led me into the second way to look at the invisible part of our universe. Here I discussed the possibility of more than three physical dimensions, including the Flatland story and some of the other thoughts in my previous posts here.

For the third part, I mentioned that for thousands of years we have sensed an invisible part of our universe that we've referred to as the spiritual dimension or spiritual world. I didn't spend a lot of time discussing it, but did point out that of all the invisible aspects of the universe I mentioned, this is the one many of us throughout history have thought we felt or experienced.

I can't remember if I mentioned it during my talk or not, but my notes also include briefly asking where do self-awareness, thoughts, spirit, soul, etc. fit into the discussion of the invisible universe? I marvel at the amazing design of things around me, the human hand is a good example, but marvel even more at the idea that I can marvel! What's that all about?!

As I write this many AT thru hikers in the class of 2015 have already started out from Springer heading north. Many more will be starting soon. I wish you all a wonderful experience!

~~AstroGuy~~
"Consider it pure joy..."

Thursday, September 17, 2015 (Post Hike 18)

Final Final Thoughts

It's been almost a year since I climbed Katahdin and finished my thru hike. There are probably several folks climbing Katahdin today and finishing their thru hikes - congratulations!

I said in my first post that I'd write later on why I decided to thru hike the AT and why I decided to post a journal. The latter I covered in my April 28 post, but I never addressed why I was hiking the trail.

The thing I liked most about Boy Scouts was hiking and camping. I remember reading in Boys Life about a scout who hiked all of the Appalachian Trail - I don't remember if it was a thru hike or a series of section hikes. At any rate that inspired me to want to thru hike

the AT some day. As I went off to college and a busy life moving around a lot, that dream was always in the back of my mind, although I knew it would have to wait a while.

Linda and I have traveled around the country a lot, and whenever we would be driving down a road that crossed a part of the AT I hadn't hiked before, I would stop the car and walk a short distance down the trail. Then back to the car and drive on. When we lived in Northern Virginia in the late 90's/early 2000's, our daughter Sarah and I did a few short backpacking trips on the AT in Virginia and once in NH.

When we moved to Gainesville, GA, not far from Springer Mountain, that dream became more real as I did day hikes and short section hikes around and on the AT, completing all of the AT in Georgia. That's where I met thru hikers and started reading their journals, waiting for the time when I could do my own thru hike.

As that time approached, I wasn't sure I really wanted to do a thru hike. I'm not good at doing the same thing day after day... I can't even do the same job for more than a few years before needing to move on to newer challenges! I was concerned I'd get bored after a few weeks on the trail.

So, I gave myself a couple of learning objectives to keep me occupied.

One was to keep a journal. Although I'm very comfortable giving talks to folks, I haven't been writing a lot in recent years and wanted to improve my ability to write more easily. I discussed my reasons for writing a journal and making it public in my April 28 post. Although I didn't do a very good job at the primary objective of sharing my thoughts and history with our kids and grandkids, I have enjoyed all the comments and encouragement I've received through it and have also enjoyed using it to help me reminisce about my experience!

My second learning objective was to spend more time with people on the trail than I naturally might. Although I am a friendly sort of guy, my introvert, goal oriented personality would probably have led me to just put my head down and hike all day with just casual acknowledgement of folks along the way. Instead, I took the time to chat with and enjoy the folks I met. That turned out to be the best part of my hike!

Interestingly, I discovered my two learning objectives conflicted with each other. At the end of the day, I could either hang around the campsite/shelter enjoying other hikers' company, or I could retire to my tent and update my journal. Most of the time I did the former, and am glad I did!

As a result my journal posts weren't quite as detailed as I intended and were often posted several days later. But all the wonderful people I met certainly solved the boredom concern I had!

Speaking of the wonderful people I met - in my August 25th post, I listed all the 241 folks whose names I had mentioned in my posts up 'til then. Here are the additional 98 folks I spent some time with and whose names are first recorded in my posts since then:

Nancy, Owen, Five Hour, Fifty, Jess, Will, Ace, Kevin, Kathy, Christine, Kinder, John, Lately, Rodent, Emily, Ethan, Pete, Mailman, No Rush, Fisher King, Marni, Molly, Eric, Rabbit, Ski, Golden Goddess, Corn Bread, Fire Ball, Hustle, Flow, Wing It, Squatch, Hog Driver, Ronin, Sun Driver, Giggles, Camo, Sky, Sarah, Justin, James, Switchback, Liz, Other, Naomi, Hungry Horse, Poncho, David, Blueberry Bear, Dos Equis, Ethan, One Step, Steve, Kathy, Puzzles, Triple P, Cheekie Chee, Ravioli, Sockless, Blazer, Worldstar, Chip, City Slicka, WiFi, Iron Cheeks, Bama, Southbound, Sue, Drag'n Fly, Freckles, Chickadee, Navigator, J-Rex, Toots, Chip, Hillbilly Dave, Delaware, Sassafras, Engineer, Simba, Blueberry, Dawn, Old Blue, Catfish, Susan, Willy Wonka, Hey Y'All, Digeree Dude, Route Step, Senator, Yeti Legs, Tumbles, John, Turtle Trax, Gary, Jennifer, Brad, Grizzly.

That's 339 good folks I spent at least some time with on my adventure! And there were many more than that whom I met but whose names I either didn't get or I forgot.

Wonderful people! The best part of my adventure!

Some of my older relatives are not internet savvy and couldn't follow my adventure on line. So for them, and for anyone else who would want a hardcopy of my journal, I decided to copy all my posts into a word document and print it out.

I discovered it's much cheaper, especially for color copies, to print it through Amazon than through one of the office supply stores or printing services. So I've done that. I don't expect to sell any copies except to me to give away to friends and family.

The title is AstroGuy - Appalachian Trail Journal. Not very catchy, but that's what it is. :-)

Finally, finally: Thanks everyone! :-)

I am indeed a blessed man!

~~AstroGuy~~

"Consider it pure joy..."

Guest Book Entries

Name: Mark Franson Email Recorded
From: Mansfield Center
Message: Met a friend over lunch today. He "retires" in a few weeks. He is 70. He mentioned that he would like to section-hike the AT over a few years. I sent him your blog link. Told him you have the best gear review for the AT that I can imagine. I am booked to climb Mt. Rainier June 13 - 18 by the Fuhrer Finger route. 5 days living on a snow-covered glacier - should be fun! I know YOU would probably think so anyway. Mark
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 13 2015 4:51PM

Name: George Bondor Email Recorded
From: Sammamish, WA
Message: AstroGuy, I just finished reading your journal describing your 2014 Thru-hike of the AT. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Your approach and hiking style appears to be very similar to Rusty Bumper (At 2011 and 2012). This is the style I would adopt if I ever attempt a thru hike. Well done!
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Feb 7 2015 8:25PM

Name: Jeff Adams Email Recorded
From: Sumter, SC
Message: Thank you so much for logging your journey. I have taken the last week reading a few entries a day and I have really enjoyed them. Your journal has been an inspiration to me. I grew up in the woods (backpacking, camping, and fly fishing) but for last 4+ years have let myself get "too busy". You have motivated me to get back to the quiet and peaceful outdoors when I return home from this deployment. Thank you! -Jeff
Got Here: Just Luck
Date: Jan 9 2015 4:47AM

Name: Dave M. Email Recorded
From: NC
Message: Congratulations on completing your thru-hike. I enjoyed reading your journal, I found it both interesting and fun. Two quick questions: could you have used the hyperlite backpack from the start or would it have been too small? How do you think a hammock would work for a thru-hike? Thank you, Dave
Got Here: A Link
Date: Dec 31 2014 1:23PM

Name: Bruce Orr
From: Texas

Message: You have a nice looking family. I enjoyed reading your posts! Congratulations and Merry Christmas. Bumblebee and Queenbee 2015 SoBo
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 23 2014 10:26PM

Name: Jeff Cheesman Email Recorded
From: Iowa Park Texas
Message: Enjoyed reading about you from Mailman's journal. Its pretty neat that a space traveler would hike the AT. Great job!
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Dec 15 2014 3:46PM

Name: Email Recorded
Message: Jules Abramson Umatilla, Florida
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 14 2014 9:29AM

Name: Elijah Alexander Email Recorded
From: Montgomery P.A
Message: Hi this is Elijah Alexander from Montgomery 6th grade and I am writing this to tell you I did a project about people who hiked on the trail in library, and I had you for the project.it was a lot of fun doing a project about you. Congratulations for completing the trail.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 12 2014 9:11AM

Name: Swede
Message: I was wondering about this question just the other day and just today provided your journal link to Dave Schrader. I think Dave said he is planning an AT adventure for 2016 - might have the timing wrong. I just got caught up on your journal entries. Keep it up!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 10 2014 3:45PM

Name: Anthony Alvarez Email Recorded
From: Pa Montgomery
Message: I am Anthony, you are cool and lucky you get to go on the Appalachian Trail. I am righting to you because we are talking and learning about you in school. I go to Montgomery elementary school. I am in 6 th grade.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 9 2014 9:20AM

Name: Jaden Bressler Email Recorded
From: Montgomery pa

Message: Hey astro guy I hope you had fun hiking I'm a sixth grader and was learning about you in library class you did great on your trail and I hope you can hike again and post a lot I loved reading about your days on the trail I also did a presentation on you. Good luck with everything you do and have a great time.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Dec 9 2014 9:15AM

Name: Short n Sweet Email Recorded
From: Norwich, VT

Message: AstroGuy, Just wanted to say congrats and tell you what a pleasure it was to meet you when you stayed with us on your AT journey. I've sent you a separate email so check for that please. I know your "journey" in life is no where near at its completion and I'm sure you will find something interesting and productive as your next adventure. Please know you are always welcome at our home should you ever end up in our neck of the woods!

Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Dec 5 2014 9:45AM

Name: Mike Conn Email Recorded
From: Van Wert, Ohio

Message: Enjoyed reading your journal very much! Congrats. I hope to finish my 2000 mile section hike next summer. Enjoyed how you posted multiple pictures each entry. Would you mind sharing how you do that? Drifter - Mike

Reply: *Thanks Drifter! I just posted a tutorial. See Post Hike 10 (Nov 25). Looks like I was just a few days behind you during your Maine section. Have fun!*
AstroGuy

Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Nov 24 2014 11:17AM

Name: Tom Jones Email Recorded
From: Vienna VA

Message: Hi Guy! Congratulations on completing your hiking challenge--I'm envious and also impressed. I'm going to go back and read about how you wrapped up your hike. Now that you're back, let's get to some battlefields. I was at Gettysburg a month ago--superb as always. Happy Thanksgiving! Tom

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Nov 24 2014 10:47AM

Name: John Fleming Email Recorded
From: Stantonsburg

Message: Hey Everybody! Thanks again for the coffee. Finished on 10/01.

Got Here: Just Luck
Date: Nov 16 2014 12:13PM

Name: Miss Janet Email Recorded

From: TN
Message: It was nice to meet you this year! I look forward to reading your journal here!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Nov 10 2014 11:45PM

Name: Anthony Email Recorded
From: montgomery

Message: hi you are cool and good at the trail
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 16 2014 9:17AM

Name: Jaden
From: Montgomery elementary

Message: Congrats astro guy for making it to the top.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 16 2014 9:16AM

Name: Swede Email Recorded
From: Mansfield Center

Message: Great detail on your equipment and packing. Will be very helpful to others, I am sure. Your whole trip is well documented - great job!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 15 2014 9:31AM

Name: AZ Email Recorded
From: Phoenix, AZ

Message: Congratulations!! I enjoyed meeting you back in Virginia. Last weekend ABear, Slim and I had a little AT reunion and did a rim to rim hike at the Grand Canyon. What a great summer. Take Care, AZ
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 14 2014 3:49PM

Name: Tic
Message: Great Job Guy! I really like the story about Jen joining your summit. I also like the pictures and these brought back many fine memories, even recognizing many of the places. FYI: some of your pictures have overwritten portions of your journal entries

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 13 2014 9:03PM

Name: Laurel
Message: CONGRATS! Way to go, AstroGuy!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 13 2014 4:43PM

Name: Robyn Email Recorded
Message: Hi AstroGuy! I loved the video of crossing each state with a "WeeeIIIII....that's...!" Made me laugh and cry. So happy your family was a part of your big finish! (Also glad my post is the 49,000th on your

journal!) Thanks again for sharing your adventure!
Deja

Website:

<http://thisopenroad.wordpress.com/about/>

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 12 2014 10:12PM

Name: Vicki Email Recorded

Message: AstroGuy, it was great to talk with you at the ATC movie event in DC- and you really are an excellent speaker and super down-to-earth (no pun intended). You motivated many to want to hike the AT and enthralled others with stories of your adventures and camaraderie with your fellow thru-hikers. The love you displayed for your wife Linda and your family- and your appreciation of them summiting Katahdin with you- was quite heart warming. You are a great role model for so many people and are truly inspiring! And thank you for taking the time to write your journal consistently and share so much of your epic journey on the AT with all of us.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 10 2014 10:33PM

Name: Steven Clark Email Recorded

From: Springfield, VA

Message: Thank you so much for sharing your time and adventure with everyone here, and at the DC kickoff fund drive for the ATC. It was a pleasure to hear your tales and advice. I start my journey that has been in waiting for 30+ years on March 2, '15. I sincerely hope that you continue on with your next adventure. Best wishes to you and yours.

Website: <http://www.trailjournals.com/Tsquare>

Got Here: Trail Journals Link

Date: Oct 10 2014 6:50AM

Name: Erin/Wired Saver Email Recorded

From: Portland

Message: Hi Guy! Just had to send you a big CONGRATULATIONS! So happy for you:) Great that you are also speaking at the AT event in Washington. Wish I could see it. I have a picture of you I took that first day, so email me and I'll get it to you. Way to go!!!

Website: <http://www.walkingwithwired.com>

Got Here: A Web Search

Date: Oct 7 2014 1:24PM

Name: Brett

Message: astroGUY How exhilaratingly wonderful...You are, indeed, a blessed man

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 5 2014 11:51AM

Name: Jeff and Anne Posner

Message: CONGRATULATIONS, Guy, on another worthwhile accomplishment! Clearly the good Lord accompanied you all the way, and led you to new ways of experiencing His glory! We are also so happy that Linda, Jennifer and Sarah were able to finish the adventure with you by climbing Katahdin with you! What a loving family you are! We are looking forward to hearing more about the trek. We're proud of you! God bless you!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 5 2014 1:22AM

Name: Jack Kunz Email Recorded

From: Dayton, OH

Message: Guy, Congratulations! What an incredible journey. I really enjoyed "hiking" along with you. Looking forward to the updates and pictures.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 4 2014 1:21AM

Name: Robyn

Message: Congratulations! I've enjoyed following your journey. Thank you so much for sharing it with all of us! Enjoy the time off, Deja

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 3 2014 8:17PM

Name: andrew wilkinson Email Recorded

From: ashland city,tennessee

Message: Way to go. I have been following you from the beginning on your journey.Total randomly.Your journal brought me alot of joy.Congrats and good luck and health to you and I am glad you made it safe and sound to your family Enjoy..

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 3 2014 8:48AM

Name: Not Worthy Email Recorded

From: Ellicott City, MD

Message: Congrats on summiting, it's a wonderful feeling! We met at Green Mountain Hostel and we lost track of you after that, I was with T-Bird. He, Gear Dog and I summited on Sept 15th. I'll see you at the Washington Film showing. - Not Worthy

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 2 2014 2:07PM

Message: Congratulations AstroGuy. Good luck in Washington when you give your talk. Tabasco

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Oct 1 2014 8:03PM

Name: Spence

Message: "We're pilgrims on a journey...." Steve Green's Find Us Faithful. That's my head tune for you.

You continue to be an inspiration! Congratulations to all of you!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 1 2014 9:25AM

Name: St. Paul Email Recorded
From: Tarsus
Message: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
Got Here: Bumper Sticker
Date: Oct 1 2014 9:14AM

Name: Andrew Tarver Email Recorded
From: Baton Rouge, La
Message: Congratulations on making it to Katahdin. I really enjoyed following your journey through your journal. I hope to be able to say I did the same next year. Bean Counter '15
Website: <http://trailjournals.com/beancounter>
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Oct 1 2014 8:48AM

Name: Swede Email Recorded
From: Mansfield Center
Message: Great job Guy! I hope that the long miles, chance encounters, sweat, mud and blood of the AT provided some clarity as to the next great adventure in your life. Meanwhile, enjoy hot, running water! Keep in touch.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Oct 1 2014 6:44AM

Name: Bob Foerster Email Recorded
From: Lafayette, IN
Message: Congratulations! Victory in sight!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 30 2014 11:32AM

Name: Tic
Message: I think you need to stay on the trail another week or two to get 50K "views" on your journal, or else get the family working overtime padding their views. LOL ! Seriously, I'd appreciate your post-hike thoughts/assessment on taking breaks during a thru-hike.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 27 2014 1:42PM

Name: Jerry Ross Email Recorded
From: Freindswood, tX
Message: Congratulations Guy! You are almost there! We are just back from China and headed to Purdue tomorrow for Homecoming. God's blessings
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 25 2014 10:52AM

Message: Buck Buck Buck Buckkkkkkk! Good on ya Guy! You are doing so well hiking that wonderful trail! We are enjoying reading your comments and seeing the amazing photos! You write in such a way that we feel as if we are right there with you! We thank the Lord He is giving you His hedge of protection every day. We like the way you describe the people, plants, animals, mountains, you encounter, as well as your physical, mental, emotional and sometimes spiritual feelings! God bless you! Love, Anne and Jeff
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 25 2014 12:58AM

Name: Myron Wasiuta Email Recorded
From: Spotsylvania, Virginia
Message: AstroGuy, Its been awesome following your hiking journey-and now it's almost over! I can't imagine the feelings of pride, joy, and even some bittersweet pangs you must be feeling. I am feeling these emotions vicariously as well! Congrats-and looking forward to the pics from the summit of Katahdin!! You have been an inspiration. Myron "Stargazer " Wasiuta from the Federal Line Trail
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 24 2014 12:48PM

Name: L L Bean Email Recorded
From: Freeport, Maine
Message: Guy: A notice: Katahdin is only recommended for very experienced outdoorsmen. That's you, Guy. Monson- founded 1822- known for its slate- is the 'last stop' before the 100 mile wilderness trail. Be brave, and courageous... as you finish well. oh...and Beware of the moose rutting; or in this case, meese.
Got Here: Radio
Date: Sep 24 2014 8:57AM

Name: Swede Email Recorded
From: Mansfield Center
Message: Sounds like you are on the home stretch and soaking it all in. Finish strong!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Sep 23 2014 8:12AM

Name: Tic
Message: Almost there.... Don't let your guard down now that you're in the home stretch. Hot Wheels lost his partner due to backwards fall past Stratton, busted sternum, end of hike. Ned the Fed had a handhold boulder fail; he fell and required helicopter air-evac off Katahdin. I saw a float-plane med-evac in 100 mile wilderness, and then just saw pix of the place I fell and broke 2 ribs about 60 miles into wilderness. You're doing great, love following the journal
Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 22 2014 8:53PM

Name: Patti Leestma Email Recorded

From: Seabrook

Message: Way to Go Big Guy! We are praying and pulling for you and just trying to imagine what you are going through. LOVE the journal. We are heading to Vegas/Tahoe to help with Emily's #3 childbirth, but we will still follow you. XXOO

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 22 2014 11:12AM

Name: Cliff Dodson Email Recorded

From: Asheville, NC

Message: Forgot to mention. Wasn't it really cool to find the hiking pole you needed leaning against the Maine sign? Tabasco

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 21 2014 8:11PM

Name: Cliff Dodson Email Recorded

From: Asheville, NC

Message: AstroGuy, I love following you as you near the end. Walking with you was great. My knees are still very sore and I plan to go back up and finish next August. You are a great guy and deserve the best. Can't wait to say congratulations to you. Tabasco

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 21 2014 8:09PM

Name: Spence Gardner

From: Southlake, TX

Message: I hope pole #3, or is it 2A, can keep up with you! Sounds fantastic, even if perhaps a little tough. :0) All the best to and for you in these last days of a tremendous journey. Love ya, Bro.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 18 2014 1:12PM

Name: Linda Gardner

Message: You're welcome!!! Glad you got everything so now your ups and downs will be more fun!! Enjoying hearing about your busy days! Keep eating and hiking and writing!! Love the stories! Love you!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 15 2014 10:38PM

Name: Jen Teems

From: Los Angeles

Message: Looking great Dad! You are so close! We are all praying for you. xoxo

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 15 2014 12:57AM

Name: Bruce Luna Email Recorded

From: Dickinson

Message: AT: Almost There... FWIW: record your time for the Mahoosuc Mile. Lil Budda did it in 45 mins; took me over 3 hours. Tic

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 13 2014 2:06PM

Name: Sarah Gardner

From: LA

Message: Awesome Pops!! Less than 300 miles to Go... I remember taking a picture of you not too long ago when you crossed mile 1000!!! Way to go!! Xo

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 13 2014 3:48AM

Name: Swede Email Recorded

From: Mansfield, CT

Message: Great to catch up on your blog. I look forward to following you on my computer screen since I can't follow any more on the trail. I had a fantastic time hiking with you. Thanks for letting me tag along!

Got Here: Friend

Date: Sep 12 2014 6:59AM

Name: Swede Email Recorded

Message: Great weather and awesome terrain through the White Mountains. Glad I got a chance to bludgeon some trail with AstroGuy. Keep going strong!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 11 2014 8:07AM

Name: Patti Leestma Email Recorded

From: Seabrook

Message: What fun you are having! Thanks so much for sharing with all of us. You are just amazing!!! God has so blessed you, and who knows what He has for you when you return, other than a rock solid Wife! Enjoy the last of your trek. We are praying for you. XXOO

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 10 2014 10:02PM

Name: Jerry Ross Email Recorded

From: Friendswood

Message: Hope you make it to the Atlantis Day at KSC on October 9th!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Sep 4 2014 4:40PM

Name: mark fleetwood Email Recorded

From: moultrie ga

Message: Astroguy, this is old goat and ganny, we gave you a lift at Fontana Dam. Our daughter, little foot and boy friend fifol, are at the 1800 mile in N.H. They mentioned this morning that they had met you on the trail. Best of luck, Mark and Connie Fleetwood.

Got Here: A Link
Date: Sep 3 2014 9:30AM

Name: Tic
Message: Just saw your graph entry in journal. you are aware of the "stats" (blue link on left margin)trailjournals maintains on your entries?

Reply: *Yes, indeed! But thanks for mentioning it for other folks who might be interested! AG*

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 24 2014 3:18PM

Name: Sarah Gardner
Message: You ROCK!!!! So close to katadin!!! Excited about hearing more details and seeing pics! Enjoy the hike! Love you and see you soon!! Xoxo Sarah

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 8 2014 6:21PM

Name: Linda (Sweetie)
Message: Hi Sweetie!! Best part of my day too!!! Miss you but praying for you everyday and so proud of you!! XO

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 7 2014 10:10AM

Name: Rev Eleazor Wheelock Email Recorded
From: Hanover, NH
Message: Come see me on Dartmouth campus. I started it to train native Americans as missionaries to their tribes. Is it still going well? Did you know that the last of the local tribe of Mohicans is buried in a cemetary in Bethlehem, Pa? Really- he was a good Moravian believer.

Got Here: A Link
Date: Aug 6 2014 7:51AM

Name: Short 'n Sweet Email Recorded
From: Norwich, VT
Message: Astrogy, now that you've updated your Trailjournal I can see that you are quite close to Norwich/Hanover area! At the rate you are hiking I think we'll see you this week for sure! Please give me a shout and let me know if you'd like to stay with us (and get a shower, laundry, and maybe even dinner!). We are located right ON the AT! Enjoy Vermont!!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 3 2014 6:27AM

Name: Child of Abraham
From: Kings Highway, Promised land
Message: Mary Lincoln used to spend summers in Manchester. But who's Bill Douglas? Look for my friend Mad Tom. Maybe he's in Griffith Lake... If you see Bear Grylls, pass him quick and impress him. You

trek on like Jacob of old on the way home to Hebron after 21 years- 600 miles but with TWO wives, 30 camels, well, a big group. (may readings this week)

Got Here: Bumper Sticker
Date: Aug 2 2014 2:59PM

Name: Brett Watterson Email Recorded
From: California
Message: You Rock, Guy!! Ruth and I are cheering for you everyday.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 2 2014 8:45AM

Name: Texas Tornado
Message: Hi just want to say I'm so proud of you.....you have come so farI started in march 2014 only went 250 miles going to try again in 2015.....you got any words of wisdom for us future hikers... anyway I'm proud of all the 2014 class.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 1 2014 8:11PM

Name: tic
Message: Little bird told me you weren't enjoying Vermud too much. Remember: No pain! No rain! No Maine!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Aug 1 2014 5:49PM

Name: Short 'n Sweet Email Recorded
From: Norwich, VT
Message: Hi there Astrogy! I just got a call from a mutual friend, Bruce Luna (trail name of Tic). He stayed with us in 2009 when he did his thru hike. We live right on the AT in Norwich, VT. You are welcome to stay with us when you get to our neck of the woods! Please email me for details and house address. Also, it would be best to contact me when you are about 3 days south of us, around Killington. Have a great hike and we'll see you in a couple of weeks.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jul 31 2014 8:46PM

Name: Mark Franson Email Recorded
From: Mansfield, CT
Message: When will you be in the NH White Mtns? Maybe I could join you up there for a day - if I knew where to catch up with you. Swede
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Jul 31 2014 8:04AM

Message: Hey there Astrogy. It is Soggy from the Mt Williams break in the clouds. Great meeting you today. I have your pics on this trailjournals.com/soggybottom page and also on Facebook. I hope your hike continues well and you

make it up Katahdin. Keep in touch. Chris Vores / Soggy

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 29 2014 9:57PM

Message: Hey pops! Love your head tunes today! Polly wolly.... Wow! Haha! I love Tina turner so that's a great one! Glad you are hanging tough and having fun adventures and meeting tons of cool peeps! So fun to read about your days... Wish I could be hiking w you! Love you lots!!! Xoxo

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 29 2014 4:11AM

Message: Have you seen Bear Grylls or Zac Efron? NBC has started a new reality show (Mon at 1900 CDT) of these two on the AT: "Running Wild with Bear" Tic

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 28 2014 8:32PM

Name: Herman Melville Email Recorded

From: Lost-at-Sea, Mass.

Message: What are you looking for, Guy? Will it drive you mad, too, til you get it? I hope not. Captain Ahab Mount Greylock is located in the Berkshire Mountains, and is the highest mountain in Massachusetts. At 3,491 feet, Greylock wouldn't seem to be too remarkable, but this is actually one of the most scenic mountains in the Eastern United States. It is so inspirational that legend has it, Mount Greylock's long, saddle-like shape inspired Herman Melville to write "Moby Dick". He was known to have great fondness for the mountain, even setting up a special observation deck at his home (near Pittsfield) so he could view Greylock whenever he desired.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 28 2014 4:47PM

Message: AstroGuy - you're making great time and missing such a large number of the classic sites that I think you need to seriously consider a "yoyo". I bet you could be back at Springer before Thanksgiving. Tic

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 26 2014 7:03PM

Message: Guy, Mike Mullane here. Been watching your progress. What next...Seal Training? An extreme athlete event? Seriously, you are an inspiration for all of us. Not much longer! happy hiking. Mike

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 24 2014 6:14PM

Name: Franklin Roosevelt

From: Hyde Park, NY

Message: I did many a radio messages from Hyde Park. Heard about your visit nearby, Guy! Bill Fairback's mother's roots are all over your area-Dutchess County, Poughkeepsie... Bill was in Poughkeepsie 2 weeks ago, at a burial for his favorite Aunt. Has many stories of going up there as a kid. Don't forget that when you get into Connecticut, aunt is pronounced Ont, not Ant. Glad to reconnect with you after a long lapse.

Got Here: Radio

Date: Jul 23 2014 8:50AM

Name: Sarah Gardner

Message: Way to go pops! Loving reading your adventure...I get sucked in and feel like I am on the trail with you...wish I was ;)! Love you lots!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 22 2014 4:39AM

Message: Enjoy reading your journals, seems like you're doing very well. If I didn't overlook it, could you give a description of your typical trail food. Tic

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 18 2014 9:14PM

Name: Faith

From: Durham NC

Message: Wow, New Jersey! You are really making good time. I love reading your entries and hiking the trail with you vicariously! You really inspire me bro :) Love you tons on tons.

Got Here: Just Luck

Date: Jul 16 2014 9:20PM

Name: Linda

Message: Really enjoying your journal!! So glad that you are having such a great experience except for maybe the rocks! You're amazing!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 14 2014 10:33PM

Name: Spence

Message: Still reading from afar and caught up in your journey. thanks! "Technical" question. So, how does the trail run along the bridge over the Delaware River? Do they have walkway along side the highway. Pictures seem to look that way.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Jul 13 2014 1:36PM

Name: Jack Kunz

From: Dayton, OH

Message: Great going Guy. Thanks again for keeping the blog going. I'm having a great time "walking" along with you. Wish I was healthy enough to do it my self. I've walked over 25 marathons but

can't imagine doing it every day for weeks on end. Stay healthy and keep going.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jul 13 2014 11:29AM

Name: Linda Bierly Email Recorded
From: Lemoyne, pa
Message: I was a trail angel as you came off Peters Mt after Duncannon. I've seen every shuttle launch while living in Fla. Got a shuttle license plate. Wish I knew you worked for NASA as you were eating your sandwich/drink. felt so bad for the one that blew up, first night launch, Sally Ride, John Glenn's second was very exciting. Be safe.

Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Jul 11 2014 12:43PM

Name: Sarah Gardner
From: California
Message: Woo hoo!!! You are over half way there! So fun reading all your adventures! Love you
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jul 10 2014 5:59PM

Name: Wayne Watson Email Recorded
From: Ambler, PA
Message: Astro Guy, Enjoy following your trip notes. We have you in our prayers. What a fabulous experience. A WILLIAMSON student, how great is that!! Your Journal entries bring back memories when I hiked the same trail. (a much shorter hike than yours) Keep going & enjoy all you see and people you meet. We send our best wishes, Wayne & Marie
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Jul 8 2014 8:31PM

Name: Spence
Message: Keep on rockin! Sorry, just a little dad humor as the kids say. Thinking of you and looking forward to reading more. God Bless, Bro!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jul 6 2014 4:53PM

Name: Debbe Johnson Email Recorded
From: Spring, TX
Message: Guysie, glad to see you back on the trail! Love your musings. Praying strength and alertness for you as you share life & love with others you meet. Told Lippers & Andy about your adventure - impressed, Mr. Space Guy! Our love.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jul 2 2014 8:51PM

Name: Crip

Message: Guy, I've read your entire journal. Learned about trail magic and trail norovirus, one good, one bad. Quite an adventure. Have fun.

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jun 28 2014 12:23PM

Name: Robyn
Message: Great to see you back! Deja
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jun 26 2014 11:13AM

Name: James W. Jones Email Recorded
From: Southbridge, MA
Message: Hey Hiker! You've got a mighty cheery journal. Do you have any Cymri heritage? Courage, Patience and Strength are my wishes for you...
Website: <http://aldha.org>
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Jun 26 2014 7:09AM

Name: Jen Teems
From: Los Angeles
Message: Wow!! Nice Bear!!!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jun 14 2014 10:39PM

Name: Tom Jones Email Recorded
From: Vienna, VA
Message: Guy -- Hope the hike is going well. Might have missed you in VA. Call if you need a buddy after the 15th. Off to Vienna (Austria) for ASE now. Tom
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Jun 9 2014 3:18PM

Name: Spence
Message: Just got back to your journal and am once again inspired by my brother. :0) Thanks for letting us be a part of a special experience.Love ya Bro.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jun 6 2014 5:11PM

Name: Linda
Message: Oh, Yes it was!!! What an amazing day we had together!! Smiles and hugs and hiking and then a good night's sleep :-)
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Jun 2 2014 12:14PM

Message: Guy, I've been visiting your journal several times and enjoying reading about your quest. Well done! I envy you. I've often thought about through-hiking the Colorado Trail but have never blocked off the month or so that would be required. You are giving me inspiration! Continue to enjoy the beautiful sights. Be safe and all the best to you, Linda and the kids. Mike Mullane

Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 27 2014 7:41AM

Name: Emily Dalton Email Recorded
From: Zephyr Cove, NV
Message: I love reading the stories and daily activities and living vicariously through you Great Guy!!! Thanks for posting!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 26 2014 7:02PM

Name: Jennifer Teems
From: Los Angeles
Message: Hope your carpal tunnel is improving. I got your mileage update from Mom. Way to go!! You are awesome and making amazing time!!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 26 2014 12:18AM

Name: Sarah
Message: Those wild pony pictures are fantastic! Where were you? I want to go to there ;) XO Sarah
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 24 2014 12:23PM

Name: Sarah
Message: Hey Pops! Great to catch up on your adventures! Your pictures are so beautiful! Cool to add the Lizard to the list of 'wild life' you have seen. Looking forward to joining you for a few days next week!! WOO HOO!!! Love you lots and miss you!! Sarah
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 24 2014 12:22PM

Name: Linda
Message: An amazing hike today!! ??
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 23 2014 8:59PM

Name: Linda
Message: I'm sorry to hear about the carpal tunnel probs. must be from poles. Hope the pain subsides. Maybe I can find a soft support brace that would help. Love you!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 23 2014 8:57PM

Name: Linda
Message: Such a peaceful, beautiful site! Miss you!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 23 2014 6:41PM

Name: Linda
Message: This is awesome! Too bad you didn't have your Purdue ball cap on this day! Its a small world!

Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 23 2014 6:37PM

Name: Billy Fairback Email Recorded
From: Jeffersonton
Message: Had lunch with old friend yesterday who just co-wrote a book on Leadership co-authored with Jack Louwsma's brother. Bio below. Thought of you-rich, deep experiences of worth in so many areas of work. And now this... feeling His pleasure today, I hope, except in the tarpals. Jim Louwsma Education: B.A., Wheaton College; MBA, University of Utah Experience: Louwsma was a naval aviator for 13 years and then served in sales and marketing roles for Procter & Gamble, for nearly 30 years, retiring in 2004. Since then he has been teaching transformational leadership in the Bethel MBA program, as well as consulting through JMark Partners LLC, a company he helped start in 2005. In addition, he helped start an economic development company, AfricaWorks, in Mozambique, Africa in 2007.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 22 2014 9:46AM

Name: Laurel Email Recorded
From: Durham, NC
Message: Loving your trail stories and great pics! A vicarious adventure from my desk--thank you! Happy trails as you cross into VA (four down?).
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 21 2014 6:30AM

Name: Brett Watterson Email Recorded
From: Palos Verdes CA
Message: I just met a man and his wife who live in Lexington, VA, in southwest Virginia, very near the Appalachian trail. The gentleman, Tim Mcelhannon, just finished walking the entirety of the AT last year and has a lot of insight, pictures, and first-hand experiences to share with you...and Cathy has a homecooked meal and shower, and bed and both would love to meet you...and both have a strong attachment with "Trail Magic" I sent your contact info to Cathy and Tim, and their contact info to Linda via email. The section of the Appalachian trail nearest to where they live is called Buena Vista, VA and even closer yet, where Rt 60 crosses the trail. Tim routinely parks there and does day hikes along the AT.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 17 2014 10:40AM

Name: Jen Teems
From: Los Angeles
Message: Great Pics! But we need more selfies!! Miss you Dad!
Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 16 2014 9:34AM

Name: Spence Gardner Email Recorded
From: Southlake, TX
Message: Thinking of you. Wish I could be there, but of course at least on a mountain bike for the downhill. :0) God bless and take care. Love you Bro.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 15 2014 11:30PM

Name: Linda
Message: Sounds like a fun day! Glad to know you're having fun!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 14 2014 7:10AM

Name: andrew wilkinson Email Recorded
From: ashland city, tn.
Message: Don't know ya, never meet ya, hope to one day. one day. I happened upon your journal and have been following you. Really enjoying, almost like a Appalachian soap opera. Good luck and God bless safe journey and health. Will keep following you.
Got Here: Just Luck
Date: May 13 2014 5:10PM

Name: Jack Kunz Email Recorded
From: Day0
Message: Guy, I have finally caught up with you on the trail, vicariously, of course. It's great to hear your thoughts and see the AT through a friend's eyes. There is a trail that goes around Ohio called the Buckeye trail. It has been a goal of mine to complete it by doing section hikes. It's about 1400 miles long and your trek is inspiring me to get back to it. I look forward to following you all the way to Mount Katahdin. God speed.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 13 2014 11:14AM

Name: Jerry Ross Email Recorded
From: Friendswood
Message: Hi Guy! I am enjoying your trip (from the comfort of home!) I saw Brett Watterson and Randy Odle and his wife when I was in LA last week. We talked about you and raised a toast to Dale! God's blessings Jerry
Website: <http://www.jerryross.com>
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 12 2014 4:14PM

Name: Linda
Message: Keeping up with all your news and progress. Sooo good to talk yesterday! Hope we can talk tonight!! Love you!
Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 12 2014 3:53PM

Name: Robyn
Message: Hey AstroGuy - I've really enjoyed your posts! Very interested in your NASA history and looked up your Wikipedia page and website. Amazing! Soon you'll have to add 'AT thru-hiker' to your Awards section. :) Good luck as you continue your trek! Deja
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 12 2014 10:37AM

Name: Billy Elliot Email Recorded
From: Dance Hall, Pa
Message: Went with Critty and daughter Holly and her 4 for a Mother's Day picnic at Skymeadows Park north of 66. Just 10 minutes downhill from the AT. Their store is open daily from 11-5- I assume we will meet you when you come down from the High Places sometime this summer. Think about why godly connections happen so much in high places in the Bible, and outside the Bible.
Got Here: Bumper Sticker
Date: May 11 2014 6:56PM

Name: Jack Kunz Email Recorded
From: Dayton, OH
Message: Way to go Guy. I've read several books on hiking the AT and would love to do it also. Not sure my knees and hips could handle it now. I'll keep following and making a comment ever so often. Good luck on your trek.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 10 2014 1:35PM

Name: Tic Email Recorded
From: Dickinson
Message: AstroGuy - looks like you got your trail legs. I hope you future head tunes don't include "Ants Go Marching..." too much. When you get the opportunity, I'd like to hear your food/nutrition experiences. PS for Linda, please send your contact info to my e-mail address. Thx
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 10 2014 11:11AM

Message: Guy. Gee, 22 miles in mountainous territory since last entry? You are giving a new wonderful meaning to the term "old goat"!!, err, speaking of "old goat", Jerry, Randy, and I are getting together today in Pasadena....will try to send a note in later....be safe, brett
Got Here: A Friend
Date: May 8 2014 8:00AM

Name: Gale Brown Email Recorded
From: Austin, TX

Message: Ok, so I LOVE the trail journal!!! Magic trail food is free food from strangers?! I love all the lingo!! The songs you hum in your head and to your breath crack me up!! Close to you had me laughing out loud. Try "I like to move it move it" from Madagascar-the kids movie. A techno beat to keep you pumping!! Love to you and we REALLY need a beard update! Pronto!!! Love you!!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 7 2014 9:29PM

Name: Brett Watterson Email Recorded

From: PVE, CA

Message: hey, Guy...wow; I am having so much vicarious fun reading your exploits..geesh, there's a lot of fog..and 38 degrees?

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 7 2014 8:58AM

Name: Linda

Message: The Astro 1 song really brought back memories from the past!! Really enjoying the songs you are recalling. Sounds like another spectacular day!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 6 2014 10:49PM

Name: Linda

Message: The Smokies sound intriguing. Would love to see them from your vantage point. A great accomplishment to have completed the Smokies!! Great job!! You're amazing!! What does your beard look like? Our New York family has lots of questions about you and your travels.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 6 2014 7:30AM

Name: Linda

Message: Thank you for the dedication! You had a very fun-filled and interesting day! Fun to get in on "Trail Magic!" I miss you! But planning a trip VERY soon!!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 6 2014 5:54AM

Name: Jennifer Teems

From: Los Angeles

Message: Yes, a beard update and a skinny update. Are you shrinking!?!?

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 6 2014 12:00AM

Name: Sarah Gardner

From: Soon to be LA

Message: You are doing great Pops!! Your pictures are so beautiful! Love to hear all the songs playing in your head! What War stories did you share with the

friend you met this weekend? Oh I want a beard update picture too! Love you lots and keeping you in thoughts and prayers.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 5 2014 10:06AM

Name: Brett Watterson Email Recorded

From: Palos Verdes CA

Message: Guy..What a great adventure! I'm so glad to read your posts. I love that you are sharing this....and I look forward to reading more of the exploits of "Guy and family on AT"

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 2 2014 10:07AM

Name: Jen Teems

From: Los Angeles

Message: Dad! I'm such a nerd. I've been following your journal but just found the guestbook. Ha!! I love the updates and we are so excited for you and super impressed at the rate you have been hiking. I hope it has been peaceful and mindful through all your steps. xo

Got Here: A Friend

Date: May 2 2014 12:48AM

Name: Myron. Wasiuta Email Recorded

From: Spotsylvania, Virginia

Message: Hi AstroGuy Enjoying reading your journal! I imagine you are in the Smokies now perhaps near Shuckstack. If you get a chance would you please photograph any aircraft wreck fragments you see along the trail and make a note of their locations. I'm going to do a section hike in the Smokies with intention of documenting the crash sites as thoroughly as possible. My brother may be joining me and we both have an interest in aviation(he flew F111's). I know there are fragments of a crash near the summit of Guyot and F4 fragments just before the intersection of the AT and the Snake Den Ridge Trail. I don't want you to go out of your way but if you see anything I would love to see some photos! I'm the meantime we are following your journal! Myron

Website: <http://trailjournals.com/stargazer2014/>

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 30 2014 11:24PM

Name: Tic

Message: I'm in ATL and may be able to meet you Sat or Sun pm if your schedule supports. give me a call if you can

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 30 2014 4:34PM

Name: Sarah Gardner

From: Soon to be LA

Message: Hey pops! Keeping you in prayers as you put one foot in front of the other through the smokies!! Thanks for keeping a journal of your adventures, thoughts and your story. I love you tons and tons!!! Xoxoxo

Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 29 2014 11:08PM

Name: Bilbo Baggins Email Recorded
From: Jeffersonton VA
Message: There and back again... or in your case, just there. Hope you meet many kind creatures along the way. I waited to write my journal til after the adventure... Billbo
Got Here: Just Luck
Date: Apr 28 2014 6:41PM

Name: Jerry Ross Email Recorded
Message: Hi Guy! I am so glad that Linda told me about your adventure and your journal! I am sure you are going to have a wonderful time and I will continue to enjoy reading your entries. God's blessings Jerry
Website: <http://www.jerrylross.com>
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 28 2014 10:21AM

Name: Linda
Message: Hi Honey! The views must be beautiful! God is giving you amazing strength and stamina each day. It's so fun reading your entries each day! Praying for you! Love You Forever, Linda
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 27 2014 10:07AM

Name: Linda
Message: Hi Honey! What an amazing day!! I sure do miss you!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 27 2014 9:58AM

Name: Bob Foerster
From: Lafayette, IN
Message: Go Guy! Siler's Bald and Cold Springs were good memories. Thanks for reminding me! Sounds like you're on your way, all the way.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 27 2014 9:16AM

Name: Gale Brown Email Recorded
From: Austin, TX
Message: You are so inspiring!!! Love you! i am trying to keep up with reading all your journals! Such an exciting endeavor!!! Don't lose another water bottle!!!!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 26 2014 8:04PM

Name: Myron Wasiuta Email Recorded
From: Spotsylvania Virginia
Message: Astro guy, You're hiking very well and am enjoying keeping up with your journal posts! Just remember to take it one day at a time and keep listening to your body! I was on the AT on Easter Sunday. My two youngest children and I hiked up Mary's Rock. I thought about you during that hike and how you will be hiking along that same section of trail later this Spring! Maybe we can hike together for a while thru SNP. Myron "stargazer" Wasiuta
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 11:21PM

Name: Lyn Watson Email Recorded
From: West Lafayette
Message: Love following you on this and praying for your journey!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 7:20PM

Name: Roberto Chiasserini Email Recorded
From: Rome Italy
Message: whatever the reason, I'm with you!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 12:36PM

Name: Mike Marks Email Recorded
From: St. Louis
Message: Guy, I have read all of your journal entries to date with joy and amazement. I will keep you in my thoughts and take vicarious pleasure in what you share with us. Be safe. You are amazing. Mike
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 11:30AM

Name: Jeff and Anne
From: s/v Joyful of Aspen
Message: Congratulations, Guy, on this worthwhile endeavor! You have experienced God's creation of outer space, and now His magnificent mountains! Your AT hike will offer a lifetime of witnessing of God's glory! We are praying for you and love you!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 10:42AM

Name: Ann & Rick Couch Email Recorded
Message: Travel safe. Watch out for the bears - they are hungry this time of year.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 25 2014 10:27AM

Name: Ron Pomeroy Email Recorded
From: Oviedo Fl

Message: Thanks to Linda for sending the link. We look forward to following your adventure.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 25 2014 9:40AM

Name: Frank and Ellen Brauch Email Recorded

From: LOW

Message: We're thinking of you and keeping you in prayer! Looking forward to reading your updates...adventures/people along the way/God's awesome beauty! You're doing this for all of us I think! Enjoy and stay well!

Got Here: Trail Journals Link

Date: Apr 23 2014 6:25PM

Name: Greg Lindemuth Email Recorded

From: Media, PA

Message: Brings back many, many fond memories of the trail from 1980. Wonderful time in God's creation and wonderful people met along the trail. God speed my Friend. Greg

Got Here: Trail Journals Link

Date: Apr 23 2014 5:15PM

Name: Linda Gardner

Message: Hi Sweetie, That last entry was from me...oops!! I forgot my name! BW

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 23 2014 8:40AM

Message: Hi Sweetie! It sure was an amazing 4days of hiking, slack packing, mountain views and being together. Just being together with time to talk and listen and enjoy each other was a great gift in itself. There will always be great memories from those days! I miss you too. Love you bunches!! PS waiting to hear from you this morning ??

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 23 2014 8:37AM

Name: Laurel Email Recorded

Message: So excited for you! Can't wait to hear all your stories and see all your pics!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 22 2014 1:22PM

Name: Bob Watson Email Recorded

From: Lafayette, IN

Message: Ok, you are on your way, just like blast-off. Missed your visit, but glad Linda's mom is better. If you need help, my sister is in Knoxville. I wanted to see if you could spend the next five months putting together a response to Neil deGrasse Tyson's Cosmos program on Fox?! At one point he(paraphrased) says that belief in God was a big dead end in Isaac Newton's

time. So, you have your marching orders! Your friend, Bob

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 22 2014 12:33PM

Name: Richard Moore Email Recorded

From: Kabul, Afghanistan

Message: Guy, I'm so glad for you that you have embarked on your adventure! I'm also a little jealous that I'm not walking beside you. I look forward to reading your blog and sharing a little in the trek! Good luck and God bless you.

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 21 2014 10:18PM

Name: Marilyn Moore Email Recorded

From: Gainesville, Ga

Message: Enjoy your great adventure. We'll be checking in on you. Maybe we'll catch up with you sometime

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 21 2014 8:54PM

Name: Sarah Gardner

From: Soon to be LA

Message: Such a fun day hiking with you!! Even though it rained! Look forward to hearing more about the wildlife you will encounter.... Hopefully something beyond the insect family... Hehe!! Love you!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 21 2014 8:34PM

Name: Stu & Debbe Johnson Email Recorded

From: Spring, TX

Message: We are amazed at your convictions & courage! Proud of your challenge. Will follow your progress and pray for your trip! Stube & Debbododa

Got Here: A Link

Date: Apr 21 2014 1:16PM

Name: Sarah Gardner

From: DC (soon to be LA)

Message: Awesome day!!! So fun getting to start the journey with you! You go POP!!!

Got Here: A Friend

Date: Apr 20 2014 6:35PM

Name: Bill Fuufback Email Recorded

From: Harmony, Virginia

Message: At son Dave's for Easter- he's in Kansas and dreams at night (at work at the FAA) about hiking in the mountains. None nearby here. So live the dream...

Website: <http://PhillyGuy.pa>

Got Here: Radio

Date: Apr 18 2014 6:37PM

Name: Faith
From: Durham, NC
Message: You go bro! xxoo F&L
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 18 2014 8:37AM

Name: Bob Foerster Email Recorded
From: Lafayette, IN
Message: God Speed! Can't wait to follow your launch on this adventure. Bob
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 17 2014 4:15PM

Name: Robyn
Message: That is a nice video. Makes me want to be out there again! I look forward to following your journey. Good luck! Deja
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 17 2014 9:44AM

Name: Patti Leestma
From: Seabrook
Message: You go Guy! We are praying for you and can't wait to hear about your travels and what God will do with this! Love, Patti and David
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 17 2014 9:10AM

Message: Congratulations on the start of your grand adventure! I'll be looking forward to reading your posts. BTW enjoyed the video. It captures well why we hike the AT. There's just something magical about it. Myron "stargazer" Wasiuta
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 16 2014 8:35PM

Name: Bill Fairback Email Recorded
From: Jeffersonton
Message: And away we go. In solidarity with you, I am walking 10 cubits with a backpack today.
Website: <http://BigFanBill.CCC>
Got Here: Bumper Sticker
Date: Apr 16 2014 8:57AM

Name: Bob Foerster Email Recorded
From: Lafayette, IN
Message: I'll look forward to your progress once you start! If you have an equipment list, I'd love to see it, as well as your food choices. Are you going "ultralite," or conventional backpacking? Bob
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 10 2014 2:21PM

Name: Joe Lynch Email Recorded
From: Culpeper
Message: Good luck on your AT adventure! I'm section hiking south bound. I've made it from PA/MD line too just short of RT 33 in VA at the Mill prong trail in SNP. I'll probably see you out there somewhere on the AT.
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 8 2014 10:51AM

Name: BRUCE LUNA Email Recorded
From: DICKINSON
Message: Just back from ranch and was hoping to be first signer for your guest book. Oh well.... Wishing you a very safe journey and happy trail. Tic
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Apr 7 2014 9:55PM

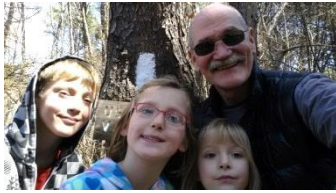
Message: Guy , I enjoyed our meeting on the Federal Line Trail today. Thanks for taking time to answer my questions. I especially enjoyed inspecting your tent. It's a really nice one and I'm sure it will serve you well on your journey. I will follow you via your journal and perhaps we'll meet again- maybe even on the AT this later this Spring or early Summer. Myron "Stargazer" Wasiuta
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Mar 28 2014 10:40PM

Name: Hppyhkr
Message: Astro, the little girl in the center of your profile photo reminds me of me at that age. (I'm well beyond that now.) I turned into a gorgeous intelligent woman, if I do say so myself, and she's well on her way. Cute!
Got Here: A Friend
Date: Mar 28 2014 5:26PM

Name: Ellie Baughman Email Recorded
From: Tujunga, CA
Message: Hello Astro Guy! Wow those snow pictures made me "Shiver".. ha. I'm happy to see that your tent passed the test! May it prove itself all the way to Katahdin! I will be leaving California on Monday and begin on April 1st. Hopefully, Mother Nature will be kind to me. The weather forecast looks good. We might pass somewhere along the way since I'm planning some "zero" days to check out places along the way. Good luck to you! Hummingbird
Got Here: Trail Journals Link
Date: Mar 28 2014 11:25AM

About

AstroGuy – Guy Gardner



Husband, Dad and Grampa. Former Air Force fighter pilot, test pilot, NASA astronaut, government executive, High

School math teacher, speaker, consultant, head of three very different schools, and a variety of other fun endeavors!

Note: I didn't include the info about my past careers above and at the end of this page until near the end of my hike. It's kind of a thru hiker tradition to not talk too much about one's past - but I also had the goal of using this journal for telling some stories of my past for my kids and grandkids. I've also found that conversations with new folks I meet are more interesting if we find out about each other through our conversation and it's fun to find commonalities! (I didn't meet any other astronauts on the trail, so I didn't talk much about that part of my past!)

To help you follow me, here are a couple of Interactive trail maps:

<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/hiking/find-a-hike/interactive-map>

You can show shelters and parking areas by clicking the Layers List icon in the upper right corner. Use the icon with four squares in the upper left group of icons to change the background map.

<http://postholer.com/gmap/gmap.php>

Use the first drop down box to select the AT, and the second drop down box to show shelters. Click the "Show distances" link just above the middle of the map to show mileages. The mileage of a point on the trail, along with altitude, only shows up when you zoom in and hover the mouse pointer just right over certain parts of the trail.

Why Journal? See Apr 28 entry.

Gear List: See Oct 13 (Post Hike 5). Additional info at Oct 30 (Post Hike 8) and Mar 25, Apr 12, Apr 14 (Pre Hike 2, 5, and 6).

Advice for Thru Hikers: See Oct 14 (Post Hike 6).

Origin of trail name:

I was originally thinking that I would wait and let "the trail" give me a trail name. However, I also wanted to let our family participate in my adventure.

So, I gave my wife Linda, our children (including son-in-law), and our grandchildren the opportunity to suggest trail names. I then added to their suggestions other nicknames I've had over the years.

They got a kick out of suggesting nicknames and in learning about some of the nicknames I've had that they hadn't heard before. One of the ones most of them hadn't heard before was "AstroGuy." I was originally dubbed "AstroGuy" by my friend "Tic" in his Trail Journal when he was hiking the AT in 2009-2010. Since Tic was the only person who ever referred to me that way, I wasn't even sure about adding it to the list.

After the list was compiled, I gave each of them 5 votes to spread around amongst the names as they chose - one vote to each of 5 names, five votes to a single name, three votes to one name and two to another, etc. I also reserved the option to wait until I got on the trail if there weren't a clear winner... or if I didn't like it! ;-)

"AstroGuy" definitely got the most votes. More importantly, it was my wife's favorite. Plus, it was originally given to me by someone on the trail, even if I wasn't thru hiking at the time.

AstroGuy it is!

PS Tic and I worked together at NASA headquarters in DC on the early stages of the Shuttle-Mir program in the early 90s. I assume his choice of the name refers to my flying the Space Shuttle as a pilot astronaut in '88 and '90.



