The Sacred Journal

An Appalachian Trail Adventure

The Sacred Journal- An Appalachian Trail Adventure

By: Spiritwalker

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www.authorspiritwalker.com

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughter and my sons. May your lives be filled with peace, love, happiness, good fortune, and great health. Never forget the lessons I taught you growing up, using meditation and the Zen path as your foundation. When you have children of your own, teach them to follow the path and reap the rewards of great parenting. When all else fails, hit the trail to find your answers!

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Acknowledgments

I give all credit to those hikers that came before me, to all the ATC workers and all the states' trail maintenance groups! Thank you to my mother for never turning your back on me, for praying for me when I was on the trail and in the woods and throughout all my adventures in this life. Thank you to my daughter, who is my reason to continue living today and for walking beside me on the trails of this great country and being right beside me for all the mountains we summited and will summit together.

About the Author



The Author on the peak of Mt. Humpfry, highest point in Arizona

Author Spiritwalker has been writing about how he lives and living what he writes for more than 30 years. He and his family lived off the grid, in the southern Missouri Ozark forest where they raised, hunted, grew, and foraged almost all the food they consumed for a decade. During that time, he wrote a very popular off the grid column for "The

Houston Herald" newspaper of Texas County Missouri, from 2017-2018. He and his family went back to the land. Spirit says, *"Back to my roots, and back to when life made since, had more meaning, and was less hectic, less stressful and way healthier."* His writing is a way of practicing a self-sufficient way of life as well as informing others of how they, too, can live a simpler way of life, how to live a life more sustainable, self-sufficient, and meaningful.

He is a published author, with over forty books published, as of 2024. His books can be found online, wherever books are sold and are both enlightening and informative. He is also a renowned Herbalist, Native American Medicine Man, Medical Specialist, Spiritual Wellness Coach, and natural health guru.

He can use the land to heal himself and others and knows what the land can provide physically in the form of food or medicine. He can trace his heritage back to his Cherokee and Black Foot Native American ancestors and so keeps the old ways alive throughout his life in many aspects. He

enjoys researching online, to further his self-sufficient knowledge and spending time traveling the country, living in the forest, writing, articles, books, and blogs that are meant to teach and awaken others and working directly with nature as a steward of the land. He has written for many high-profile places online, as a freelance Journalist, Alternative Media writer, ghost writer and Freelance Writer for many years.

Places such as Examiner.com, CBS News Local, Yahoo! Contributors, Truth News, and Natures News and worked as a natural living and herbal medicine expert at liveperson.com. He has had numerous pieces published in high profile magazines such as American Survival Guide, Backwoodsman, Self-Reliance, and American Frontiersman magazines.

Spiritwalker has an uncanny since of survival and has had many years of survival training in both the USA and USAF working in the Military Intelligence field doing secret and top-secret operations state-side and (worldwide through computer operations), in his younger years. He

also worked as a Combat Paramedic in the USA as a second MOS after training as a Medical Specialist/Paramedic. Now in his prime, he has devoted his life to living off the grid, wherever his heart may take him on the road and showing others how they too can obtain true freedom and a since of satisfaction with life and living in general.

To date, he has hiked the Georgia portion of the Appalachian Trail 3 times, logging over 1300 hours, along with other sections of the trail numerous times. He has also been documented on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) the Arizona Trail (AZT) and numerous other long trails around the United States.

To contact him via email: spiritwalker@spiritwalker.com

You can follow him online at:

Starseed Psychics

(www.starseedpsychics.com/blog)

(www.authorspiritwalker.com)

Preface

In 2005 a now ex-wife of mine and myself embarked on the journey of a lifetime. We chose the famous Appalachian Trail (AT) as our destination to make personal history. Being novice hikers, as we were, we were ill-prepared for the hike ahead...but we had no idea since this would be the first time, we had stepped foot on the Appalachian Trail.

For those of you that do not know, this is a wilderness footpath that begins in the north Georgia mountains and extends through 16 states into the deep wilderness areas and ends at Baxter State Park in northern Maine. The AT, as most people call it, runs an astonishing 2,185.3 miles. This amounts to approximately 5,000,000 steps from end to end.

In a sense, I was following an internal guide, one that led me to this trail with a sense of a spiritual journey or a homage of a sort. No doubt the hike would be grueling and even more so for a couple that was not prepared nor had any long-

distance hiking experience. We had no idea what we were getting. The trail is an unforgiving place. Some days are easy, some are hard, but every day will present a new challenge to you in a unique way and most people will never be prepared for what this sacred trail has in store for them. While we were on the trail, I kept detailed journal entries even starting the days before the actual hike on the trail, some would call prep days.

Sixteen years later, those journal entries are still with me, holding all the memories of those fated 30 days of agony and spiritual awakening we spent on the Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail. I decided to take the exact journal entries, as they were written then, and turn them into a book where I would tell ALL my hidden thoughts and experiences that never made it into the journal.

While expanding on the original entry, create a story that draws you in and keeps you from beginning to end! Mainly because the AT for me, is a sacred place. It seemingly walks you through portals, into another dimension on earth where life slows down, takes a pause and your mind can relax

and work better, and spiritual evolution can flourish. This is not an AT book on an exciting and adventurous hike down a lonely footpath that mimics every other AT book out there. Instead, it is a book that will challenge your mind to see this impressive wilderness trail in a whole other light. One that most will agree with, but few will ever mention.

Mainly because they do not understand what they feel or what happened to them on the trail, although they know that they are not the same person that stepped onto the trail some 6-9 months before. For me, it was a turning point in my life that brought me to the AT, but it was the alluring spiritual energy of that trail that kept me there for thirty complete days.

During the winter, in the mountains of north Georgia, 30 days in the wilderness, minimally prepared to survive the blizzards we walked through and the encounters we endured...life got interesting! But whoever said that spiritually evolving had anything to do with comfort? In fact, one has to leave their comfort zone in order to

actually experience spiritual evolution. So, if you have ever hiked the AT and know what I am talking about, read on and enjoy my Sacred Journey on the Appalachian Trail which began February 13th, 2005, the dead of winter in the north Georgia mountains.

Introduction



The Appalachian Trail Plaque showing the entire trail length

The Appalachian Trail (AT) is a long-distance footpath that begins in the north Georgia mountains and goes north through fourteen states eventually ending on the top of Mount Katahdin Maine, walking northbound. There is a part of the trail that runs through a place called "the 100-mile wilderness" which is exactly as it sounds, to give you a bit of a perspective on the trail's remote location...most of the time. There are mountains, large ones, and small ones, hills, plains, fields, forests...even

towns, this trail runs through. Many have hiked this trail end to end, called a thru-hike, and hundreds attempt it each year, usually beginning about March 14th. According to statistics, as small as 10% are left at the end, the rest will get off the trail, ending their attempted "thru-hike" for all sorts of reasons.

According to statistics, the main reason will be injuries. Those that remain and walk this trail from end to end successfully will have a very interesting story to tell of their walk through the wilderness, of over 2000 miles and 6-9 months. There are thru-hikers and then there are section hikers. Section-hikers may complete the entire trail, but in sections and over the course of years.

Although not considered through-hikers, section hikers make up the larger population on the AT. All walks of life will be seen on the trail. Every nationality, all genders, and even every age group. In fact, it was this 2005 hike that you will discover the author's first interaction with an AT hiker was an 80-year-old man who was hiking, alone. The Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC)

oversees all aspects of the AT and then along the trail each state has its own conference that oversees its section of the trail. These groups are responsible for maintaining the trail and all aspects of the trail's future and existence today. Volunteers mainly make up the conferences and those that call themselves veterans of the trail are among those, as well. Another term you will encounter dealing with the AT is "trail angels."

Trail angels are those individuals and groups that take it upon themselves to support the trail and the hikers through donations and good Samaritan deeds. As a result of this, unofficial program, hikers may find bags of non-perishable food, medical supplies, gear, and the likes near AT shelters with a sign saying free to hikers. Also, church groups and such, may set up large tents near, AT crossings, called gaps.

Then they cook bypassing hikers their first backyard style hamburger in weeks, all while not charging the hikers a single cent. There is no limit to what a trail angel can and will do. March 14th is the official unofficial start time for the years

through-hikers and during this time is when the trail usually sees the biggest influx of hikers all year. Ideally, a hiker will complete a thru-trek of the AT within 6-9 months, but some may take a bit longer and many will complete their journey in a much shorter period. Hiking the trail can be a rewarding experience and challenging one but there are also areas of the trail, usually close to road crossings, where there is parking for those that wish to venture out for a much shorter...easier hike.

Families, as well as children, can be seen on the trail and there are AT shelters that have been built all along the trail every so many miles, where hikers can rest for the day or night, free of charge. Over 2000 miles long, the AT is one of the nation's longest wilderness hikes and takes the hiker through a wide array of geographical areas. From steep mountain grades to quiet meadows and fords of creeks, rivers, and through dense forests the trail runs.

At some locations, the trail runs through small towns, called trail towns, where the hospitality is

unmatched for the AT hikers. It may be free to hike this American icon, but thru-hikers have reported spending upwards of $3000 to prepare and hike the AT from end to end. *"The Sacred Journal- An Appalachian Trail Adventure"* is a book written from the author's perspective and tells a heralding story of a married man and woman couple who spent a grueling 30 days on the 72 mile stretch of the Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail.

All while hiking in the middle of winter (February), using only the minimal gear and funds to support their lives and with no knowledge of the AT beforehand except for some simple internet research. From adventure to spiritual awakening, from injury to emotional breakdown, and from near misses with legal ramifications to near misses with death...it's all here. Now let the journey begin!

Chapter 1: Let The Adventure Begin



Campers in Amicalola Falls state park (not my tent)

Day 1- Amicalola Falls State Park

2-13-05

About 38-40 degrees last night, slept off and on. One thing we did was get really close for body heat, use 2 blankets and one under us while wearing 2 pairs of socks, sweatpants under baggy jeans, t-shirt under flannel shirt under a fleece jacket, and a toboggan hat. That is about as warm as you can expect to be here in the mountains in February. We did not sleep a wink,

so cold last night and it started raining, it is about 9 am and it is still raining. We entered Amicalola Falls state park last night around 1am, thanks dad! And set up our camp in the dark, with no problems there. I gathered some wood and started a fire to keep us warm, but it did not last long. I guess the wood was a little wet. This state park is big, and the Approach trail starts here at the base of Springer Mtn.

So, all we are doing is trying to stay warm, in the tent and get our packs packed for the long haul ahead of us and getting some food to eat. It is good to eat when you have not slept any. I wish it would just stop raining for a few days so we could get a good start.

We had been at a motel in the downtown Atlanta area for a few days. There were three of us and we had just gotten off a three-day greyhound bus trip which began in Tucson, Arizona. It was my wife, myself, and my 4-year-old daughter. So, we were not about to take our 4-year-old on the

AT in the dead of winter. We had arranged for her to stay with family for the duration of our journey, without knowing just how long that could be. So, we had to wait for a few days to make sure all the arrangements were in place. We needed a ride from the motel to Amicalola Falls State Park, where the Appalachian Trail (AT) southern terminus is located. After all the proper arrangements were made, we were picked up by my father and sister and driven the two hours to the park in the north Georgia mountains.

At the end of the day, and by 2 am, we were camped in the Amicalola State Park campground in the tent that would be our only source of personal shelter for the next thirty-plus days. The park was closed when we arrived somewhere about 2 am. We made our way to the lodge at the top of the falls and upon entry to the massive, open fire-warmed, lodge we were met with silence.

A lone sign propped on the customer service counter read, "please ring bell for service if checking in after-hours." So, we rang the bell and

were met with a half-awake host who was happy to take our money for a night in the campground. We had planned to sleep until checkout time, leaving and simply beginning our hike up the 8.25-mile access trail to the AT to begin our journey, so we paid for a single night in the campground. The host wrote 1 day on the back of a white scrap piece of paper and told us to hang this on a marker pole at the camp, so we did. That night it did nothing but rain, and I mean not a simple sprinkle but a downpour that was relentless. In fact, it rained from the moment we left Atlanta, the entire time.

Some may say, but rain on a tent is soothing and I would not complain...yes, I agree, however, when it is a relentless downpour with wind, thunder, and lightning things are a bit different when it comes to comfort. We did not sleep a wink. In fact, we had a small break in the rain, before turning in, which we had decided to gather some moderately dry wood, some dry trash from our things, and a bit of cotton soak in a petroleum-based skin protectant. It worked, and we were able

to just feel the warmth begin to soak into our cold bodies when the rain began again and put the fire out for good. So, I remember dipping into the trail food that we had packed for days like this. We ate what we needed and decided to give up for the night and try and get some rest for the morning hike. It was cold, February 13th in the north Georgia mountains is cold, rainy, and windy and this was an average year. We did not have sleeping bags; we did not have backpacks that were made for long-distance hiking.

We did not have rain gear past a single wet weather poncho each of us had. Not much warm clothing except the basics and cheap at that. Think the cheap white long thermal underwear, wool socks, simple sneakers purchased at the local "Wally world" and the remainder of our warm weather gear was meant for fall more than a cold dark winter in the mountains.

Although, we had fleece and fleece clothing does well for keeping the comfort and cold level all where each needs to be. What we had going for

us was, we had multiple fleece tops, long handle underwear, gloves, warm beanie caps, and even a few extra pieces of each. So, we were able to bundle up and make what we had seem warmer than it was meant to be. To top it off, our sneakers were not even new. We spent a whopping $300 on our gear the same night we drove into Dawsonville, Georgia. A small town just outside the borders of the state park and the last place where anything remotely resembling a department store could be found.

Most thru-hikers spend upwards of $3000 on their gear and food, but that was the extent of our funds and just so you know, our actual plan did not involve an end date or mileage plan. So, we believed we could make an endless journey of 6-9 months on $300 and a food stamp card, which was the only way we were going to be able to purchase food along the trail.

We had researched and learned that during the opening months of the AT that a hiker could possibly live on what was referred to as "hiker

boxes" and "trail magic" which are boxes and free items placed at strategic points along the trail. Places such as hostels, AT shelters, and hotels had these boxes. Hikers and trail angels (trail magic) would place items in these boxes, including copious amounts of extra food, that they no longer wanted to carry in their packs. This food was readily available to anyone who needed it. So, we knew we could resupply using hiker boxes most of the trip. You can occasionally find medical supplies and more so, gear in these boxes as well.



Amicalola Falls approach trail Shelter #1

Day 3- Amicalola Falls State Park

2-14-05

It is still raining and has not even taken a break yet. Last night we stayed at the beginning of the access trail in our first AT Shelter. (Appalachian Trail). Nice shelter, it would be warm if the front wall and door was not all screens. The bedding is military style bunks, 6 in a row then 6 in a row on top in bunk bed fashion. Since the rain, no one can build a fire to warm us.

Miserable, but I must keep strong, I can do anything if I put my mind to it, used the Kuji-In last

night to fall asleep a few times, used fire to warm my body and visualize my Ki consuming my body to stay warm.

Technique: Touch fire finger with void finger on both hands.

thumb: void

pointer finger: earth

index finger: wind

third finger: water

pinky finger: fire

NOTE: Day 2 was skipped because of no entry. But in this entry, I do mention that we slept in the approach trail shelter on night 2, behind the visitor center. I do remember that it rained all day on day 2, and we spent the day doing the same things as was entered in day 3's entry.

Many people will wonder "what in the world is he talking about here"? Well, for almost all my life I have been practicing the ancient art of the Ninja. In Ninjutsu training there is a technique that

is taught to advanced students that allows you to access supernatural abilities such as using your body's natural Ki/Chi to stay warmer. The Ninja's Kuji-In is a system of a type of ancient magic, so that is what I was referring to. Yes, it is mostly mental, but it worked and has always worked when I needed it to. Anyway, that shelter was the most uncomfortable thing I had ever slept in, in my entire life! The place where you lay was made from a chain-link fence, nailed in place on the framing.

I guess if we would have had proper gear, such as a nice, padded sleeping bag and a sleeping bag mat, it would have been much better...but we did not. It rained all night, again. In fact, at some point in the night, we just got tired of it all, got up, walked to the visitor center outdoor bathrooms, and went in there for warmth and comfort. They were impressively clean, not that at this point we really cared, but they were.

There were heaters on the walls turned on, the doors were closed, and you could lock them

from the inside. We decided we would spend the remainder of the night in the bathrooms and knew what time the park opened and had planned on being out of there before then. We just sat on the floor, propped up against the cement walls, and slept. We were so tired, it really worked. This day all it did was rain, non-stop. So, we hung out in the park buildings trying to blend in and seem like we were day users and tourists at the park. We were aware that some employees were beginning to notice we were there, I guess, more than most people usually are, unless they were paying customers in the lodge.

At some point in the day, we asked nicely if there was some work, we could do to gain a simple meal at the lodge. We were trying not to eat up our hiking food and were growing weary of the type of cold food we had with us anyhow. It had been a few days since we were able to enjoy a warm meal and really needed some comfort food. We were told no, and it seemed people were taking mental

note of us going about asking questions that probably tagged us as homeless.



The overlook from the park lodge

This night the rain had stopped, and it had warmed up enough that we could sleep in the shelter (again) all night and it seemed that we were able to get better sleep than we had been getting. I remember we also took most of our clothing and made the chain link bedding more comfortable. The next morning, I remember 1-2 other hikers were there and looked to have gotten there right before sun-up, mostly to check their packs one last time or to finish some last-minute needs before

starting their hike. We did the same, prepared our packs, organized, and were happy to be somewhat rested, warmer, and dry. We ate some more of our food not realizing that we were eating into the supply we had planned for on the trail. The fact is, from Amicalola state park to the first resupply point, up the trail, it is about 5 days.

We were carrying probably more than that, but still, it was day two in the park where we had eaten what was supposed to be for the journey. I am sure you can see the issue on which we were spacing. Not long after waking the rain began again. Since it continued to rain all day, and I mean storming and just pouring, we decided to spend the day in the park...again, and just wait out the rain until the next day.

Yes, that was a bad mistake but again, we did not have any rain gear nor experience with long-distance hiking, so we were really showing that now. The problem was, the rangers there at the park had seen us from day one, going on and out of the visitor center, the lodge at the falls top, and

other places around the park. We did not look the AT hiker part and our gear told the rest of the story. Now I can see clearly just what we looked like to many in the park. So, talking between the authorities there began. They seem to frown on those that come into the park and hang around when they are supposed to be either paying to park or walking on up the trail.

We had advanced the issue by talking to some of the rangers and employees in the park and making it known that we were waiting for the rain to stop and staying in the shelter or campground. They naturally began wondering if we were paying to stay, which we did but that did not stop them from forming their own opinions about us and not accepting our story.

Eventually, our presence became suspicious, and they even mentioned that they believed we had camped in the park for free and asked to see our camp paper. We showed them and to our surprise, they told us there was no record of our paying for a camp. We decided it was time to leave and felt as

if we were no longer welcome, so we decided to check our supplies before heading up the trail. This was when we had learned that our time in the park, eating our hiking food, had caused us a problem. Now we realized that we did not have enough food to make it to our first resupply point, which we thought was Neel's Gap where we could catch a lift into Dahlonega and resupply at many stores.

For many hikers, this is their first resupply point. But we could simply resupply in Suches, Georgia, if we knew then, which also requires a lift into town at the small convenience store from Woody Gap. But since we had no map, no knowledge of the trail, and not even the Databook nor phone app., then we had no idea about Woody gap.

We had learned what we knew from reading thru hikers' blogs that had experience and did not have to resupply until Neels gap. Well, once we learned we needed to resupply before even beginning our walk we needed a ride to the nearest resupply store. Of course, we had no vehicle so we

decided to ask the "nice" rangers if they could assist us and ride us to the closest convenience store which was approximately five miles up the road. We were not only met with stern looks and verbal "no's," but we were told to leave the park and not return under penalty of trespassing charges. You would think these rangers were there to help and would have seen that we were simply in need of such help and possibly have some compassion.

But we did not find that in them and were made to walk the eight miles (yes it was eight and not 5) miles to this convenience store. Of course, we were there to hike and so with that in mind we began to walk and the rain...stopped. We road walked for miles into the late evening, stopping only to ask a nice old couple sitting on their front porch if we could fill up our water bottles, at about the halfway point.

No one drove by us the whole way, so no hope of a thumbed ride for us. The nice older couple asked if we were all right, we explained

what we were doing, filled our bottles, and off we went, not knowing what the future had in store for us after meeting those nice people. At the store, we nearly made the closing time, but the clerk sensing our situation told us he would not close on us and to take our time. We spent close to $50 at this store for resupply, again, not really understanding what we needed and overestimating the amount of food we should carry.

We were beat. We had walked all day in the park, had little sleep the last two nights, and just had road walked eight miles carrying lousy packs and walking in cheap shoes. I decided we should spend the night in a camp and proceeded to ask the nice clerk if he would allow us to camp, for the night, behind his store.

He agreed with a smile on his face, and it was right then that I noticed another man had entered the store and was sitting chatting with the clerk. This man, we learned, was the son of the nice older couple where we had stopped for water. The lady felt sorry for us and had called her son to

see if we would accept a ride back to the park instead of walking back. It was a good plan. We could go ahead and head up the trail tonight (it was already getting dark) instead of having to waste another day of road hiking back to the park, where we were not welcome anyhow. We could camp for the night, on the approach trail, wake up in the morning and walk on up the trail...at least that was the plan.

As we were dropped off by this nice man, waved our goodbyes, and said our thanks, the park was dark and quiet. It was approximately 9 pm and so everything was closed tight for the night. We knew we were not welcome in the park now and did not know if there would be security driving around. So, we hurried up the approach trail and decided to hike a bit up the trail before making a camp for the night.

Our plan was to get out of the park and out of sight so that we did not ruffle any more feathers. We walked up the trail a bit to a level area and decided this was a good place to put all the new

groceries into our packs. As we were finishing, behind us in the dark I began to hear dogs barking and seeing red lights coming up the trail. At that point, fear stepped in. We decided that we had been seen reentering the park and that these were rangers with bloodhounds coming after us. Of course, we had no idea, and it could have simply been night hunters or hikers as well.

Well, we quickly grabbed our gear and began to run up this trail, in the dark, with full packs on our backs. My wife was in the lead and the moon was full. We ran for a bit and then had to slow down to a fast walk to catch our breath. It was that first shot of adrenaline that we were working from, but now it was spent, and we were sucking air, big time!

The dogs and lights were still coming but we had managed to put some distance between us and them. We stopped a few times but only for a few seconds to catch our breath. Eventually, we found a false top and a sign that read, "closed area for regrowth" or something like that. It was in our best

interest to try and use this area to hide way off the trail and hope that they would pass us by and think they had lost two hikers up the approach trail. Well, it worked, or at least the men and dogs never made it to the false top or where we hid. We decided it was safe, and without knowing anything about the area we were in we decided to just quickly throw down our tarp, lay on that, and cover ourselves with a blanket or two for the night.

We stayed mildly warm and dry, and I remember sleeping quite well for a quick power nap, which was all we had planned it to be. Somewhere around 5 am we woke, packed everything, and set on up the trail...it was still dark, and we had to hike with our headlamps on. There was no rain this night and we were eternally grateful for that!

We walked a mile up the trail and found a bend where there was a nice grassy place on the right near a small babbling brook. It was perfect! With the moon all bright and the night sounds still in full effect, the temperature had really warmed

up and the rain was gone...we decided this would become our first real camp on the trail. We popped up our tent, got ourselves all warm and cozy inside, and fell back to sleep, this time confident our adventure had finally begun.



The Approach Trail

Day 4-Camp to camp

2-15-05

This morning, we noticed no camping signs when we came from inside our tent! So, we packed up quickly after coffee and oatmeal and headed up the trail. About a mile or 2 and found a AT camp area on top of the mountain. Here we are set up camp again with no rain till tomorrow night. Hopefully, the sun dried out the wood enough to make fire tonight. We did equip. maintenance, eat again and just are relaxing till around 10 am

tomorrow morning where we will head on up the trail to Springer Mtn. Been out here 3 days now and still not at the beginning of the AT! But 2 days of rain and an unexpected 7 miler has taken a toll on our bodies, we will remain here to rest. Remember that every mission changes even in the middle of it. Always be ready for anything and prepare for the unexpected and when it comes to hiding be far when they think your near and be near when they think you are far!

P.S. I was really impressed with Jenchol last night, navigating an area unknown perfectly while being blinded. That is harmony with the universe, and direction of energy in use.

Sleep was good I remember, the first great rest we had in three days. That morning the "no camping" sign was clear as day and to top that off we were still in the boundaries of the state park, but did not know it, and camped right beside a service road. So, we wasted no time, not wanting to cause any more issues with the people in the

park. We used a campfire, where there was already a campfire pit made (apparently this was a popular camp even though the sign was there) and heated some water for morning coffee and oatmeal. We quickly ate and drank, washed up in the stream, packed up everything, and in about an hour we were walking on up the trail. At this time, we did not know the approach trail was part of the park system, so we had no idea we were still inside the state park.

A ranger's truck did happen by as we were packing up, but all the man did was wave and drive on. I remember this area because for the first time in days we felt as if we were where we were supposed to be, on the trail. Even though, the approach trail is not the AT. The ground was covered in green although it was February, there was plenty of sunshine this morning and it was a lot warmer now that the rain had stopped, the sun was out, and the wind had died down.

We decided to hike and because we still had not had a full night's sleep without issues, we

decided not to go extremely far, yet. About a mile up the trail we came across a camp on the right, today this camp is still there, and it is even placed on the Gut Hooks AT phone app. We decided this was a proper camp, no signs, no buildings, no people, just a few miles up the approach trail and a designated camp, so we stopped to rest and eat some lunch.

The camp was back off the trail, in the trees, and had a nice fire pit with a couple down trees that had been used as sitting logs, placed neatly close to the firepit. We could see the trail from the camp and only two hikers came by in the hours we sat there. I remember their names today but will not mention them without permission. Let us just say this couple was the first people we had met on the trail and felt like we could talk to them for hours about hiking and such.

They walked by, noticed us and we noticed them. That was enough for them to come over and introduce themselves. We invited them to sit awhile and rest on the logs, we were in the middle

of drying out everything on lines, cooking some food, and just doing gear maintenance and organization. This was the place where we learned critical information about the AT that allowed the remainder of our journey to flourish. The man had the AT Databook with him. He told us that he and his wife were on a day trip and that he was going to Springer as his destination.

He had recent knee surgery and was out using the trail as therapy. They were nice people and we ended up exchanging contact information. When they learned we were newbies and did not even have the AT Databook, and obviously did not know what we were doing, they kindly gave us their book.

He stated he did not need it anymore and would need a new one when he returned to the trail in the future. I was in awe, this book contained every piece of information a long-distance hiker on the AT would ever need to stay alive, well, and be successful. This book even told where every water point was! From that day on, the data book became

my "AT Bible." We eventually decided to spend a zero-day or two here at the camp and allow everything to dry and allow ourselves to heal from all the trauma we had endured in the past three days. We really needed to just sit and be still and feel safe, warm, and secure in our surroundings before that mental state would set in that every long-distance hiker needs.

That night, we had a nice campfire and the weather cooperated perfectly. Sometime later that night I remember seeing our first glimpse of wildlife on the trail. In the shadow a couple of deer appeared across the trail from our camp just standing and staring...and then they were gone.



Black Gap shelter on the Approach trail

Day 5-Camp to Black Gap shelter

2-16-05

Today we woke up around 7:30 AM from a good warm night's sleep. Fog is everywhere, cannot even see 100 feet in front of me. But from the fire, I was able to start last night, I was able to restart the fire for this morning from just hot coals, some leaves, kindling and some wind. Even though it rained on and off all night, this tent we have covered with the tarp is warm inside. For breakfast, 1 small can of beef stew, and 1 small can of chicken and dumplings, where they nipped

me of dumplings! We packed up and moved out about 9:20 AM, met our goal of black gap shelter by 3:20 pm. Just 1 older man in the shelter tonight. Out here it takes us 1 hour to do 1 mile and we did six miles today, and theses packs are so heavy! Supposed to be below freezing tonight and its always very windy.

We are beginning to realize a few discouraging facts, 1- we do not have proper equipment to do this hike, we need boots, and 0 degree sleeping bags. And 2- our way of getting food supplies probably is not going to be suffice most of the way, we would have to get into better bigger towns, off the AT, by hiking every time we needed food or thumbing it. Most of the supply points only accept cash or credit cards.

Hiked all day, well it seemed like it. Six miles, six hours, which is how it was on the trail…that unforgiving approach trail, I wondered if the AT was just as hard…or harder. The couple we talked to yesterday told us it was easier, but

easier for who, everyone or those that are experienced AT hikers? I was beginning to feel like an AT hiker, we had done our first 6-mile day and we were feeling very worn out but equally satisfied with our hike on this day. Black Gap shelter, a shelter not like the one we had experience in the park, but a real AT shelter although we were still on the Approach trail.

It was all wooden, no beds, just a three-sided place with a nice overhanging roof and room for a good many hikers to lay out their bags and sleep the days weariness away. I could imagine how crowded that shelter could get during rain like we had seen the last few days. As I mentioned, there was just us and one older man when we arrived.

He was setting up to sleep in the shelter and cooking some food for the night. He said that he would be staying the night and setting out early the next morning. I remember his name, he called himself, “Just an echo.” This is where we learned about the term, “trail name” and that all AT hikers will earn their trail name in time. He said he was a

veteran of the trail and once a year he needed to see his cardiologist and instead of driving to see the doctor, which was in Hiawassee GA., that he would rather hike the trail all the way there. I was extremely impressed with this man and even today, he has left an impression on me that has earned my respect and has brought me back to the AT many times (as of 2021).

He talked about things we never heard of, kept our attention well and we were just sponges soaking up the information of the AT. He said he was 85 or 86 years old! Never in my life did I ever expect to see people, that age, on a trail, such as the AT. I know today that this was just part of my limited knowledge of the trail because there are many age groups on the trail and there is not one group that I have not seen on the trail, as of 2021.

He turned in early, I remember. We set up our place in the shelter and prepared for a long, very cold, night. Now the hike from our last camp up to Black Gap shelter was interesting. We learned that although the AT Data book says there

is a water source 1.3 miles up the trail, does not always mean you will find water. We went through about two places before the third water point was actually usable. So, much of this day's hike was on an extremely limited supply of water. I remember when we left the camp, we had decided that water was just about two miles and so we could use most of our water for morning cooking and such and be safe. Again, the Data book is not always right.

Because of this we had to come up with a few ways of getting the water we needed so that we would not dehydrate too much. At one point it started raining so we decided to use our ponchos to gather water as we walked. It was not much rain, but over time it did pool some on our ponchos and was clean enough to drink. Jenchol would see a leaf full of water as we walked by trees and shrubs and would suck the water off the leaves too.

It was interesting to feel so in tuned with nature that we were not really worried and knew we would be fine with what we were doing. So, almost five miles later we found a water source

and took advantage of that. At Black gap shelter we found another water source which is across the trail from the shelter. It is a challenging walk down the hill to the source, but it was the walk back up that got me thinking, “I do not want to do that walk again while here at the shelter.” We did not see any more hikers until the following morning and not until after the morning rain had stopped.

We watched as Echo left and listened as he wished us a good hike and to this day…never saw the man again. I feel like we slept better at the camp the previous night and day, but because the wind was so fierce at blackcap and because it was so cold, we did not get good rest, so we took another zero day there at black gap shelter.



Part of the Appalachian Trail, road walking

Day 6-Zero day at Black Gap shelter

2-17-05

Well, we probably barely survived last night, slept in the open shelter with wooden floors, just us 2 and the 1 older man here tonight. 28 degrees or lower and the wind blew like a freight train up here all night! The best way to explain the sound of the wind up here is set on a runway as a 747 flies in right over your head and a freight train passes by you on a track, and you got some idea of the sound and power of the wind up here.

We are 1 mile from the top of Springer Mnt today and rested here at black gap shelter, about 3

pm seen a young girl named Selina come off the trail tonight. We plan to set up the tent just up the hill from the shelter at a camp and trying for a fire if the wind calms. Like I said before- last night we were so cold, and the tent is more private and a little warmer since you are out of the wind. Gathered wood a lot today and just rested. Also, I started writing a daily plan about 2-3 days out. Tomorrow we do 4 miles- 4 hours and stop at Stover Creek for camp and water refill.

So, we did take a zero-day there at Black gap shelter and zero days on the trail means you simply do not log any miles that day. Zero days are common, but it is not common to take a handful of zero-days as that will surely cut into the time you need to make it to Mt. Katahdin before their winter. We sat the tent just up the hill from the shelter, still in the camping area of the shelter though.

Walked to the water source...again. Gathered firewood, in case we could have a campfire that

night and never got even a friendly jester from that girl. She looked to be on a mission and seemed rather sad, but also it was evident she was not here for friends, so we stayed our distance. It taught us another fact, many AT hikers are out there in a serious state of mind and do not want to be bothered. This is evidence of a spiritual journey, so possibly she had already learned this about the trail and knew in time that we would too.

The rain and wind did hold off and we were able to cook over a fire and enjoy it some. However, about 9 pm we decided the previous nights had weighed on us a good bit and turned in for the night. A good thing too because I remember about midnight getting woken up with that same crazy wind that seems to always be there at that shelter, even to this day. In fact, I was just at Black gap shelter this year, March 2021, and camped there overnight and I can tell you...it's not changed.

It's amazing the peace and quiet you can find when the weather cooperates and when there are quiet hikers or none at all out on the trail. The

silence is deafening and can be rather bothersome when you are not used to it. But this I remember, and I remember it was part of the evolution that was taking place within me. The silence was teaching me something. It was making me look at my life and see it as it really was and also making me think of the simplicity that it could be about, which at that time...seemed well worth it.



A portion of the trail on the Georgia section

Day 7- Black Gap Shelter- Stover Creek Shelter 2-18-05

Stayed in the tent at BGS [black gap shelter], was able to make a fire but went to bed around 9 pm so worn out, and to get warm. Wind was serious all night! loud enough to keep you awake, didn't sleep a wink all damn night! Woke up to a ground covered with ice. My entire body is hurting but I try ignoring the pain, to move on. Been telling myself over and over that I must build up my endurance and stamina to deal better with

the pains and the AT. Packed up and moved out @ 11:40 am, 31 degrees, did 4 miles to Stover Creek Shelter, where we met up with "Just An Echo" trail name, again. I think it's a good idea to befriend him, he's a trail veteran and I believe there's much to learn from him and about him. Today we hit the beginning of the AT on the top of Springer Mnt.

Trail to Stover Creek was icy and icicles hang from the large rocks out here. Still no cell phone to call home with, 3 days to Suches, GA. and I need a mail drop of medical supplies and warm clothes. Will tent tonight at SCS [stover creek shelter] with our new friend Echo.

So, we woke that morning and to our surprise, the ground was covered in ice. Not only the ground but I remember the water bottles were frozen. There was condensation in the tent, from our warm breath, and that was frozen! In fact, everything was frozen, and that meant no fire for morning coffee or breakfast...at least not a hot breakfast. We did eat but it included granola bars,

fruit cups, and possibly some peanut butter. It was enough to get a few miles into a place where we might have been able to make a fire and warm a more suitable breakfast for the occasion...and don't forget the coffee! We didn't sleep well, the wind was drastic, from about midnight on. It shook that tent like it was a rag doll and we could see, feel, and hear it all night.

It was at this place that we learned another lesson of the AT. Not all of its terrain will challenge you. There are some stretches where a seasoned hiker could put in twenty or more miles in a day. The fact is, from Black Gap shelter up to the peak of Springer is one mile and it is not that bad of a hike if you are rested overnight or if the day is still early for you.

You do make a nice elevation change thought. However, the hike from the peak of Springer all the way to "Three Forks" area is very easy and even a novice hike wouldn't complain about it. Today, when I go to this section, I hike from black gap shelter all the way to three forks in

a day. It's about four miles between Black Gap and Stover Creek shelters, and then an additional easy 3-mile hike to "Three Forks" area. Another thing about this particular section of the hike, we were certainly not hurting for water. The entire hike, once you leave the Springer Mountain area, you hike right alongside a creek the whole way to Long Creek Falls.

Long creek falls is a visual destination on the AT that is all about an impressive waterfall. It is one mile from three forks area. We decided to stop at Stover Creek shelter because one, we did not know the trail and so we had no idea we could have put in more miles and without hardly any exertion. And two, we were tired because we did not sleep, again, the last night.

Even though it was freezing outside and in wintertime, the water was flowing. We decided it was best that we use the shelter again at Stover Creek for sleeping and I remember it was a lot better than Black gap shelter. Even though the floor seemed the same, it felt a bit different. We

were learning how to make our sleeping arrangement on the shelter floors better, obviously, but you can only make an oak board so soft! Even though it was cold and winter, mice came into the shelter that night. I remember hearing them scurry about and try and take people's food from their packs. Most hikers didn't hang their packs on the "bear lines" because the freezing fog and morning dew played havoc on them.

So, the mice were trying really hard. I remember slapping the pack, I was using as a pillow, a few times that night to scare them out and away. We sat around a fire at Stover Creek shelter because someone had started one and there was a good bit of people at this shelter to keep it going. In fact, stover creek shelter has a big community fire pit that was quite useful for talking with other hikers and getting warm!



Hawk Mountain Shelter on the AT

Day 8- Stover Creek Shelter-Hawk Mtn. Shelter 2-19-05

Tented overnight and actually slept off and on, 2nd night out of 6 we were able to sleep. The radio says 31 degrees for the night low, but it waited to almost dawn to get that low. Sat out by a nice hot fire talking about the journey, will now be traveling with Echo. So tired, so sore. we woke at 8:40 am and after an oatmeal and coffee breakfast we packed up and moved out, destination Hawk Mtn. Shelter. Echo, so slow and so old, left about an hour before we did, and we actually met him 2

miles in at a foot bridge over Stover Creek. So, the 3 of us made the 5-mile journey to the shelter camping area around 5 pm. There are about 12 girl scouts, 3 south bound section hikers, 2 strange dudes who say they live on the trail, and 2 north bounders, not including the 3 of us, camping here tonight.

So, Echo, and the 2 of us, set up camp back in the trees and built a nice hot cedar fire. I got a girl scout to let us use her cell phone. Thank God for that, talked to Rendo, my dad, and my daughter, and all's fine. Stacy [daughter] fell tonight and hurt her face some but is ok. Now we have a mail drop coming to Suches of 2 shirts, 1 beanie cap, 1 heavy blanket, 2 medic packs, 1 long handle shirt, my buck knife, my red and black gloves, and maybe some money.

So, we have 4-5 days to get to Suches, which is only 3 days away. So, we are chilling for the night and staying here tomorrow, camping to rest also.

All right, so Stover Creek wasn't that comfortable, and we decided our nights of sleeping in AT shelters were over. There is more privacy in a tent, no mice to worry about and it blocks you from the wind and rain and it even keeps the cold at bay, somewhat. Besides that, the ground seems a lot softer and heck, if you are going to carry a tent, you might as well use it!

So, because we slept in the tent, we actually got some decent rest. I do not recall having an issue with the wind at this shelter. I believe stover creek shelter is in a very nice location that is mostly blocked from prevailing winds. We met some pretty interesting people at the shelter and had some great conversations about the trip.

We mostly avoided talking about our gear since we had already figured out how pitiful it was compared to most AT hikers. Just An Echo, I miss that man, he was such as inspiration to us, we picked his brain for all the wisdom we could, about the trail and trail life in general...shoot, we did that with every hiker we met. We got our coffee, got a

warm breakfast, and were off on the hike. It was a pretty easy hike from stover creek to hawk mountain shelter and, again, today, I hike a lot further knowing what the terrain is like now. The walk to Hawk mountain shelter involved passing through three forks, this is an area that has to be the most beautiful on the GA AT. Today, I love to camp there.

It has an easily accessible road, plenty of flat lands, and an abundance of water. It is one mile from three forks to long creek falls, which is worth stopping and seeing when you are passing through on the way to Hawk Mountain shelter. It seems like hawk mountain shelter is a long way from the trail and it is, but it is probably due to the terrain. Today, there is a new area a half-mile, or so, from the shelter area.

It is called Hawk Mountain camp and is a series of about thirteen or more campsites that the ATC has built as overflow from the shelter or for those that prefer more solitude when they are camping overnight. In my opinion, the campsite is

not worth stopping at and for that matter, ever camping at, unless you are hammock camping and if you do not plan on chilling for a few days to take in the beauty. It is probably best to walk the additional short distance to the shelter to end your day. The shelter is large, a double-decker, and is very sturdy. There is ample camping all around the shelter and if you go in March, you will likely meet a ridge runner or two at this shelter, and all shelters for that matter...I did during my 2021 hike of the GA section.

Chapter 2: The Adventure Continues



A privy [primitive bathroom] on the Ga AT section

Day 9- Zero day at Hawk Mountain shelter

2-20-05

Nice day other than it was so damn cold, around 31 degrees with a lot of wind. We are here at Hawk Mtn Shelter area with Echo and one other

mountain man called Randy (no longer some strange dude, ha-ha) he sort of looks like Eric Rudolph! Well, turns out he is a serious computer hacker and so I talked to him and learned a lot. He gave me an Ethernet Killer schematic, which was hand drawn. We made a fire and cooked some food and just hung around camp really doing nothing. Trying a different sleep technique tonight hoping we stay warmer.

Doubling the sleeping bag, for padding, taking one fleece each and using rope to tie the sleeves so we can put our feet and legs in the arms to act like the lower part of a fleece sleeping bag. Also, wearing our other fleece jackets to simulate the upper part of a fleece sleeping bag, then covering up with the two blankets. We have run out of cooking fuel and all we have left to eat is food that needs cooking.

Although the oatmeal we have can be eaten dry. Well, it's not supposed to be cold tonight, but rain is supposed to show up.

That is right, a man on the AT hand drew a schematic to create what he called an "ethernet killer" and shared it with me. Ha-ha, well my past experiences and training in military intelligence were the pushing point for my interest! But he turned out to be a man full of survival information and I just love all things to do with survival.

I remember he had this huge pack, but it did not have an internal frame, and this is where we learned that not all backpacks are made the same. Some have the frames on the outside and the pack is strapped to that. Some have frames built inside. He talked about how he wants this outfit that is camouflage, but the print and the makeup are unable to be detected from infrared cameras.

He said they employ the cameras on choppers to locate individuals in the woods for whom they are searching. I got the idea about this guy that he did not like the government. He probably didn’t trust it and was simply living his life, in the woods, as peaceful and alone as possible because that is where he found his happiness. We spent the day at

this shelter and watched as hikers came and went. We had our tent set up in a pretty decent place and it was secluded, and we were able to have a small campfire outside the tent for cooking and comfort even though at the shelter there is the usual community firepit. We tried to have a fire every chance we got because we knew cooking over a fire as opposed to using the gas, we carried, would save money.

We carried the gas for times when we needed to cook but could not use a campfire. It was a relaxing zero-day, as I recall. The water at Hawk Mountain shelter is easy to access and clean and runs well so we were able to use plenty of water here. We were beginning to learn sleeping techniques with what gear we had, and it was working!

Adapting and overcoming were a major part of our journey, and we became masters! So, I want to expand a bit on this sleeping arrangement we came up with. We did not bring actual winter coats on the trail. No down jackets or vests either, all we

had when we left Arizona was fleece jackets. In Tucson, Arizona it does not get cold enough to own a winter coat, ever. So, we had four fleece pullovers. We each had two. If you have ever checked out enough sleeping bags you would have, no doubt, run across a fleece-lined sleeping bag or two. Well, that was my inspiration when I came up with this wonderful idea!

The fleece we owned were nice, long sleeves and just a small zip-on for the neck. Picture this, using rope, tie both sleeves shut. Now put your feet into the sleeves, as if they were arms, and pull the fleece up around your waist. Just high enough so the bottom was at your waistline and these fleeces had bottom drawstrings to tighten the air out.

Now, tighten that bottom string around your waist and Walla, the bottom of a fleece-lined sleeping bag. Paired with the second fleece over the top of us, as you are meant to wear it, and tighten the bottom string again, you have a heck of a setup for staying warm. Now, with warm

clothing on and a nice base layer, you are set up! On our underside, we simply folded the sleeping bag we had in half so that our sleeping space was smaller but more padded. We knew sleeping closer was a plus as well. Now, for the final addition we simply covered up with the blankets we had, and wow was it a warm night! In fact, I remember getting too hot.

This would become our sleeping arrangement for just about the rest of our journey on the AT. You read that we ran out of cooking fuel, which was thanks to all the windy days and nights we had been through. We had oatmeal, we had peanut butter and we had spoons! If you dip the spoon in the peanut butter, then dip that into a bag of instant oatmeal you actually have an interesting snack that is packed full of protein.

So, that was breakfast for a few mornings until we restocked the gas, and it wasn't entirely bad.



Hawk Mountain Shelter on the Georgia AT

Day 10- Zero day #2 at Hawk Mountain Shelter 2-21-05

WOW! One hell of a storm, wind, hard rain, loud thunder and lightning all night, someone said there was even a tornado and we camped right through it, it lasted through the morning. The new sleep technique worked like a charm, we actually slept well and warm. I was so warm, I had to unzip my top fleece. Woke to some of the hardest rain we've seen yet. So of course, we didn't go anywhere today either. Today is President's day

and I cannot remember if the Post offices are closed today or not, our mail drop will be in Suches either Wednesday or Thursday. So, we will stay here today and night to wait out the rain. Echo and Randy left in the storm, hope to see them up the trail later. All we've done all day is sit in the tent and play cards, listening to the radio.

We did get a chance to cook on a fire a big pot of Ramen, and go to the creek to gather some water, was the only break the rain gave. Temperature today got up in the low 60's which was a welcome change. Right now, we have another storm moving in which sucks, but tomorrow is supposed to be dry and warmer than today was.

Tomorrow we have to move on down the trail to get to our mail drop point, they only hold general delivery for 10 days. And also, we need to buy some fuel for cooking and a grocery resupply. Temperatures overnight aren't supposed to be bad, so we hope. So, the night was warmer because the rain moved in. But I remember waking up to the

sun barely peeking through the clouds and few people left around camp. In fact, we had slept in, and I am sure we would have missed Randy and Echo if it were any other day and we had slept in that long. I am sure they waited a long while to see if the rain would let up, but it only lessened here and there and never really stopped.

However, later on, I mentioned it let up and we were able to come outside, make a small fire with wood we had gathered the night before, and cook some noodles and make some tea. The real issue we were having, at this time, was that we had taken too long to get to where we were, and it was still a good distance to where we would be able to resupply again.

We needed gas for cooking. Most of what we had left was food that had to be cooked and with the rain and cloudy days, the wood stayed wet most of the time. We carried both types of food, but today I understand that it would have been smarter if we planned our meals better. The days when we absolutely had no choice but to cook in

the tent because of the weather should be the days that we ate only food that did not need to be cooked. That should be the plan until we are out of food that needs cooking. Then on days where we could cook outdoors, we should eat food that needed cooking but cook over a wood fire. That way on days when you are holed up in your tent, you are not stuck with only food that needs cooking and no gas.

Everyone has their own plan when it comes to cooking gas and food preservation, on the trail. A lot of planning goes into this when you are standing in the grocery store trying to make sure you do it right! We slept well this night at Hawk Mountain shelter. What with all the rain sounds on the tent, and the warmer temperature, and that new sleeping technique that was simply amazing.

It just felt different at Hawk Mountain. It felt like we were part of a community there. Everyone was so nice, friendly, and helpful. And honestly, it was nice being in the company of some other people after not seeing anyone for long stretches

on the trail. We had been on the trail for a while now and had already endured many things, we were integrating with trail life and learning that we can effectively make the best of it and also that over time, you will get used to anything if you try. When Echo and Randy took off on up the trail, Echo made sure to tell us goodbye and that he would probably see us up the trail.

I unzipped the tent just enough as not to be rude and said my goodbyes. Right then he tossed me an under t-shirt, one that was made for wicking and as a base layer. He said he had no more need for it and maybe I would find some use in it. He had no idea just how amazing that was for me. It fit perfectly, and I had plenty of use for it, taking into consideration that all the clothing we had was the wrong type.

I will tell you what, when you are between a rock and a hard spot you can really come up with some stuff to make life a bit easier. Because we were out of cooking gas and it was raining outside, all the wood was wet and we had eaten all the food

that did not need cooking, well we were getting hungry. If you have never eaten ramen noodles dry before, you are really missing an experience, let me tell you! We crushed the Ramen noodles in the bag it came in, added the seasoning packet, and simply ate that with a spoon. Once it makes it to your stomach it does the same thing as it would in a bowl of hot water.

Another trick we employed was taking peanut butter on a spoon, dipping that spoon into a packet of dry oatmeal, and eating it. It was a lot like eating soft granola but tasted a lot better! So that was our zero-day, this time. Listening to the wind-up radio we had, we learned we were all very lucky to have been excluded from that tornado that touched down on the top of Springer Mountain.



Justus Creek on the Georgia AT

Day 11- Hawk Mountain shelter to camp on Justus Mountain

2-22-05

Well, today was good, no rain so we had a nice campfire tonight. Hiked to the top of Justus Mnt, around 5 miles, lots of hills, and a very tiring hike. We are running out of food and if it rains we cannot eat because all we have left is 4 small packs of mac and cheese, 4 medium packs of spaghetti, 2 packs of ramen, and 2 packs of oatmeal.

So tonight, we ate 2 packs of ramen. Before leaving Hawk Mnt Shelter area we were given about 2 lbs. of cooked cheese tortellini in marinara

sauce and a small sandwich bag of dried apples by a couple of hikers, so that was our breakfast and lunch. Went to sleep tonight at 9 pm and woke about 4 am cold and hungry. So, I went and re-started the hot ashes into a big fire and watched the sunrise over the Mnt. and the moon sat over mountains in the west at the same time. We packed up after a breakfast of 2 packs of watered-down oatmeal and no water to drink for the hike. No problem as water is supposed to be 2 miles away.

On day eleven, we were back on the trail. Taking too many zero days makes you weak and weary and spoils a person to a nice, relaxed state. Also, we needed to get to a resupply point as quick as our feet could take us, but we were nowhere near that. I remember the hike on this day. I was well-rested. Someone had just handed us a large container of cooked cheese tortellini and sauce and a sandwich bag of dried apples.

I was stoked! I tell you what, on the trail, when you have not had comfort foods for so long and

then get some, it is like a little piece of heaven! It was an enjoyable day; the sun was out, and it was shining bright. The wind had picked up behind the storms that came through but were not as cold as previous days. When you have been exposed to the weather for so many days you will get used to what you have to deal with. Because of that we were well prepared for this day's hike. I remember starting out and it was a good hike, hills, lots of hills after Hawk Mountain Shelter.

We had a plan to hike five miles to the next place where we would spend the night. Our destination was on the top of Justus Mountain. It was a very weary hike; we were beaten by the time we set up camp that night. The wind howled that evening as we were used to hearing it. It got cold but we were well insulated as usual. The rain took the warmer temperatures with it when it left, as I figured it would.

So, we were back to the same ole game, trying to survive freezing days, windy days, snowy days, and even colder and windier nights and sometimes

more snow overnight. I remember waking to a tent covered in snow a few times. Sometimes it was tough trying to get out of the tent if it had been covered with condensation on the inside and that froze and then a layer of snow on the tent outside pushing down on us. All that and then trying to open the door after a snowdrift was set against it. It seems that this journal entry was written the next morning instead of that night, at the end of the day's hike.

Most likely that was due to how tired I was. I know that this day was a very trying hike. If you are not in great shape, the five miles from Hawk Mountain shelter to the top of Justus mountain is a workout! We had hiked five hours, resupplied water, and used that too and was on top of a mountain where there was no water to be found. By our calculations, we would have a bit more water to use for that night and the morning after, for coffee and a warm breakfast.

But we drank more water than usual and so we were a bit lower than we should have been. How-

ever, there was water just two miles down the other side of the mountain. We had planned to fill up this morning just at the base of the mountain, which would have been just fine. We also were getting closer to our food resupply point, and we could tell because we were low on food, lower than what is necessary and what is comfortable but at least we had some left. You can read that I mentioned watered-down oatmeal.

That was mainly because we didn't have a lot of water that morning for coffee and oatmeal. So, we just used a small amount of oatmeal to go with the small amount of water and that was what happened. If there is one thing that is necessary for on the trail, you have to eat a lot of calories and when you don't your body will react in ways that is uncomfortable.

That was why I was unable to sleep past 4 am and woke very hungry. My body was starving, I was losing weight and the previous day's hike up the mountain was hard. I obviously did not consume enough calories in the last twenty-four hours.

This also brings up a nice technique for those of you that love survival stuff. When you put out a campfire before the coals burn completely up use the ash in the pit to cover the coals. This is called banking the coals. Hours later, sometimes even a day later, you can simply uncover the coals, find a live one and toss on some easily lit stuff and you will have a fire again. I employed that technique many times while hiking because it is a wonderful way of making the lighters and matches last a long time.



Ramrock Mountain on the GA. AT

Day 12- Camp on Justus Mtn. to Camp on Ramrock Mtn.

2-23-05

Woke and packed, around 9am stepped off. Tonight, we sit dry, comfortable except for the bruises on my lower back and both shoulders from the heavy pack. Wish it had a kidney strap and pad. No rain, temps around 70 degrees but seems to be dropping now, around 5pm, to the 40's. Rain is supposed to move in by morning, but I hope not.

From where I camp we can see miles of the Mtn. and see small towns starting to light up.

Today was such an easy trail that after we arrived at our destination we realized that it was only 1 something and that we had just done 4.5 miles in 3 hours! So, we ate a spaghetti lunch and rested at Gooch Mtn. shelter for an hour, talking to 3 other hikers, and then knocked out 2 more miles to where we sit camped now on top of Ramrock mtn. We did 6 miles total in 4.5 hours.

No showers now for 10 days! It has a way of humbling you! Have to change out socks now so write more tomorrow after we hike into Suches then back into camp.

Camping on top of Ramrock Mountain...boy I sure miss those nights. Justus Mountain, Ramrock Mountain, Poor Man Mountain, Preacher Rock, Cheese Factory, those are some of the best places in the universe to camp! From Georgia to Tennessee, the southern portion of the AT is glorious! I remember this walk, on this day because I have done it so many times as of today. I still can be found back at the AT from time to

time, walking this stretch of the trail because it brings back so many memories. Almost 5 miles in less than 4 hours, which is really good for some newbies on the trail! In fact, I can still remember just how impressed we were and shocked, mind you, when we happened upon Gooch Mountain shelter all of a sudden.

We were so into our walk that we had no idea where we were, for a moment. We didn't expect it to be so easy and take such a short amount of time. The sun was out, the wind was mostly still, the cold was there but we couldn't tell on this day. It was like our feet had hitched a ride on a vehicle and we were just being pulled along a track all the way to the shelter. It was that easy.

No water was not two miles down the trail, as it was supposed to be, but some of the snow had begun to melt in places and so we had many opportunities to gather water. Just gathering the clean snow in a bottle and placing that bottle hanging on your pack in the warm sun was enough that we were able to have plenty to drink. We did

find a good spring source a bit further down the trail, but then how much water would we need to get to Gooch Mountain shelter? Each shelter was built near a natural spring. As we sat at the shelter we realized we had built up some stamina. The stamina that we did not have was ours as a reward for all the days of challenging work we had endured.

We sat long enough to eat a nice lunch and we talked about moving on. Both of us agreed that we felt pretty darn good and that we could probably knock out a few more miles. Since we didn't really care where we were each night for a camp, then it didn't matter to us if we were able to make it to the next shelter or not, that night.

So, we walked and ended up camped in the trees on a ridge where I remember what it looked like. Dahlonega, the small city, and all the smaller towns near that one was lighting up and we could see those lights because we were so high on the mountain. It was a clear night; the stars were amazing, and it was quiet. The wind had died, and

we were experiencing our first night on the trail where we actually were very happy to be there. We had finally found peace. Peace in knowing that we could do this, and we could enjoy it too! I will tell you this, there is something about being just a mile or so, from your resupply point and knowing that you can eat all you want and do not have to be careful anymore, the night before!

So, I did, I ate all I wanted and felt full and relaxed and knew that resupply was imminent, and tomorrow would feel like a fresh start, like that breath of fresh air after not being able to breathe. I wondered if I would dream of walking into Suches to resupply, ha-ha!



The sign at Woody Gap at the AT

Day 13- Camp on Ramrock to Woody Gap

2-24-05

Hiked to Woody Gap today, the area to get into Suches, Ga. Got a hitch on our first wave, and 2 miles into town, this lady took us. But when we arrived there was no mail for us, and the grocery store didn't take food stamps. So, we were stuck with no food, our supply completely diminished.

Then as we sat thinking what to do next here comes this man into the store advertising his new AT shuttle service, and so when I asked for a ride to the next town 17 miles away he took us for free! Then he invited us to his home for a homecooked

meal, and our first shower in 12 days! Oh God, this is so nice, his wife let us wash our clothes also. So here we sit warm and waiting for our clothes to get dry. Also, we got to resupply our groceries and check our email here at his home. Now one thing I forgot to mention was sitting at the store thinking of our next move, this old man came walking up into the store and greeted us.

He asked if we were at the AT and we said yes and explained our situation, then out of the blue he offered to buy us both lunch and so we took the offer. He got us a roast beef and cheese sandwich, orange juice, and a bag of Doritos. Jenchol got the same except chose a ham and cheese sandwich instead. The whole time we were in Suches GA. there at the store, the clerk let us use the phone to make all the calls we wanted.

The man now called Richard Mann and his wife Barbara cooked a huge lasagna made with sausage, a large chef salad, and garlic bread. Then for dessert, we were given a homemade strawberry shortcake! Then when our clothes were

dry Richard carried us back to the AT and Woody gap, this was around 9 pm. So, we are going to sleep clean. Temperatures for the next week are supposed to be in the low 30's at night in the low 50's during the day.

This was one of those days when everything just seems to fall right into place so perfectly and at the end of the day, you are left very satisfied. At the end of the day, even though we did the hike, had all the stress and riding around and excitement, we felt rejuvenated. It was also one of those moments when you realize that things will be all right, and things will get better as you learn the ropes.

I knew that if this were how it was meant to be all the way up the trail that it could only get better.... but it didn't start that way. I believe we were pretty close to Woody gap when we started hiking that morning, and if you have ever hiked this part down to Woody gap from the south, you would know that it wasn't the hardest part of the

AT. I believe, in fact, it was mostly downhill. In fact, the last few hundred yards to Woody Gap are actually very much downhill and a bit steep if you ask me. Woody gap is usually one of the most crowded places on the AT. So, if you ever want to use this gap to park and hike some, do yourself a favor and come very early to get a parking spot.

You will notice that I mentioned how easy it was to get a ride at this gap. My ex-wife and I simply stood near the road with our packs at our feet and thumbed a ride into town. These days we know about Neel's Gap, which is much closer than the town of Suches. Neel's Gap is, for most hikers, the first real good resupply point on the AT and it sports a large fireplace, outfitter store, resupply food of all types, gear, and even a place to have your gear repaired.

You can get mail sent to Neel's Gap and pick it up when you get there. You can wash clothes, shave, and get a real shower as well as grab a bunk in the hostel for the night...or two. There is a TV room, movies to watch, a kitchen with all the latest

gadgets, and a hiker's box where you can drop off things you do not need as well as trade or pick up items you do need. There is always a lot of food left in this box. Later I learned the reason why our mail drop was never there, and it was due to a lazy family member I had trusted to take care of what we needed. However, the universe saw fit to take care of us anyhow.

I remember this day, even though it has been 16 years ago as if it just happened last year. The man at the gas station was much older than us, he would have made a fine grandfather and I could tell he was either a veteran of the trail or the USA or both. Eating lunch, sitting there waiting for an idea of what we should do next, we mulled over the idea of just walking back to the gap or hitching back to the gap and setting up a camp near the gap and waiting a few days to see if the package came.

It would have been filled with some much-needed supplies that any AT hiker would like to have at that point. It would have raised our spirits which every hiker needs at times, as well. In

mentioning Pittsburg and his wife, this was the nicest couple we had met in a very long time. He told us how he was a trail veteran. His trail name was Pittsburg and now had become a trail angel to give back what the community had done for him when he was hiking. Richard also ran an online store where he sold items that most AT hikers would find quite interesting or useful even.

The shower was so warm, the home so inviting and peaceful and it was like an oasis from the bewildering wilderness that we had known for almost two straight weeks. Homecooked food never tasted so good, and I was eternally grateful for it all. On the way back to the gap, that night, his wife handed us a large portion of the remaining strawberry shortcake and the lasagna and some garlic bread.

I remember that would become our breakfast, the following morning.



The parking lot where we thumbed a ride, from Woody Gap

Day 14- Camp at Woody Gap

2-25-05

Today we woke to a very cold morning near 31 degrees, ground all frozen and icicles hung from the large rocks and tree limbs. We left camp about 9:15 am to walk the quarter mile back to Woody gap where at 10 am Richard was there to give us a ride into Suches, Ga. post office to check for the maildrop again, and of course, it's not there.

So, we decided to just have the nice lady forward the mail to the next post office spot which

is Neels gap about 10.7 miles north of here. It may take 5-7 days to arrive here we were told. That track will take us 2-3 days to hike. However, we have planned on moving our camp a few 100 feet north to a better location and staying here for a few relaxing days. So, we may be in Neels gap, which is Blairsville Ga, in 3-5 days. Well, I have started getting some problems with my heels, we really don't have proper footwear for the trail.

But I may have developed stress fractures in my heels, the left one is worse than the right heel. So here I sit foot propped off the ground writing and relaxing for the day and probably tomorrow also. Jenchol is gathering wood for the fire pit I built earlier using an old Cherokee fire pit design, she says it keeps her busy and not bored. The nice people last night gave us 2 new t-shirts, some homemade pumpkin bread, and a carryout of that awesome lasagna.

For lunch today we ate spam, cheese, and mustard on tortillas, sunflower seed kernels, dried apples, and a bottle of green apple Smirnoff that

someone left there at the campsite we just left. Out here on the trail, you find so much of that, stuff people leave behind, due to limited weight and space in their packs. With Retsu I know how to use our space like there is no limit, so now our packs probably weigh about 50lbs all ready to be hiked. For breakfast we ate the pumpkin bread and some granola bars, then the lasagna a few hours later.

We've been out on the AT now for 13 days and I have already lost 12lbs, Jenchol lost 10 and I've lost an inch on my waistline. Being out here makes you so humble and appreciative of life and nature and teaches you to respect nature and life. Just a few nights ago there was a tornado a few miles from us, but we didn't see it.

We haven't seen Echo anymore and there aren't many people on the trail yet. But this next week officially starts the AT season where 100's of people will be coming through the trail and also trail magic will begin. Trail magic is where people in nearby towns or just veteran hikers pack into locations along the trail party supplies and invite

anyone who passes through- hotdogs, beer, music, snacks cold drinks, and some gear or just lots of relaxing time and fun. You may stop at a gap or shelter and a person called a trail angel has left food and sodas or candy for the hikers. So here we sit relaxing and meditating on the fresh clean air, sunshine, and total peace.

I recall finding a bottle of Green Apple flavored Smirnoff just lying in the woods where we chose to make camp, which was right before the gap parking lot. Someone had been there the night before, it seems, and dropped that bottle because the cap was still sealed and not rusted. My wife and I drank that on this day, and I am sure it would not have tasted that good off the trail!

Zero days are rare on the trail for most people because they came to hike and there is a destination and a timeframe that they are trying to stay within. However, we watched as some folks simply ran through the trail, per se, and didn't even take the time to stop and realize just what nature

can do for them. However, on this day we knew that the maildrop wasn't going to be there, intuition is one of my strong points and I knew, but I had to go and do the check anyway, it was just that important to us. It was cold, I remember a cold start to the day which ended in cold but for the most part, the day was easily adaptable. We built a campfire anyhow and made it last all day and into the night.

Wood is one of those things that you will never have a problem finding on the trail, that's for sure. We had good food to eat, thanks to Richard and his wife, the great home cooking woman. We got to the post office, thanks to Richard, shortly after they opened and back to the gap where we decided to simply rest for a few days. I was complaining about my feet.

You see, we had old worn-out shoes that were nothing more than everyday wear shoes. So, I mentioned in the entry that I felt as if my heels had stress fractures to them. That could be, but more so, as I sit and think about it these days, it was

probably more like bruised heels. What I needed was a good herbal foot soak, but of course, that was not available on the trail. So, I just sit in camp, thinking, resting, eating, chatting with Jenchol, and planning the next few days hike as well as writing in my journal. If there was one thing that you learn to do on the trial it is entertaining yourself and with that data book, I never got tired of simply reading it.

Jenchol liked to gather firewood and tend to the fire and so I let her, besides, she could walk better than I could at that time. In this entry, I also mentioned the weight of the packs we had, after they were restocked with way too much food. Fifty pounds sounds like a whole lot, and I am sure they were not that heavy, but I was guessing and if I had to re-guess today, I would probably say possible close to fifty, somewhere about 45 pounds.

In other words, they were way too heavy for any hike, let alone a section or thru-hike of a long-distance trail such as the Appalachian Trail. In

2021 when I thru-hiked the Georgia section again, I spend over $100 on a great pair of hiking boots and did not have one issue with my feet. You should never go cheap on your boots.



The camp at Woody Gap, on the Appalachian Trail

Day 15- Camp at Woody Gap #2

2-26-05

Sat around all day enjoying warmer temps and no rain. I was attacked by this psycho bird last night; we have no idea what kind of bird it was but both nights we stayed here in this camp this bird, acting like a "kamikaze bird," comes swooping at us just before dusk. Kept a nice warm fire burning from last night and cooked campfire tacos made with pita bread, a pack of taco flavored rice, and some pre-cooked hamburger meat.

I added a shot of real hot tabasco sauce I found in an army MRE at Hawk Mnt shelter. We

gathered wood, water and relaxed all day. Slept really well last night, rare and precious is good sleep out here. Tomorrow we move out to Burnett Field Mtn. and set up camp again, some 5 miles away. Supposed to rain tomorrow, maybe we will be lucky and get skipped.

Kamikaze bird! That was the closest word I could find to describe this experience. Never in my life have I ever been attacked by a bird; it was strange, to say the least. All I can figure now is that this bird had a nest nearby and was not used to people camping where we were. It looked like someone had camped there before and many times, although it was a hidden location off the trail a bit.

I am still not sure what type of bird it was, but I know it should have been sleeping when it was swooping on me constantly. It got to where I felt like I needed to prepare to defend myself from this onslaught that this bird was continuing. So, I grabbed a large club made of down wood and placed it nearby in case things got a bit more

dramatic, it never did. Eventually, the bird went to sleep, but I am sure it was plotting its next night of attacks in its dreams! Sitting around the fire was surreal this night. We had been here for two nights now, and I was quite comfortable. We had plenty of firewood, it was grassy all in the camp, the weather had warmed nicely to where it was actually comfortable if you were bundled up loosely and at night, sleep was good.

The ground was so soft there. We had plenty of new supplies to go through and so meals were once again, heavenly. I was happy to be eating all those meals because I was thinking we got too much food and the packs were way to heavy and these meals would just lower the weight a lot. We gathered water from a point down the trail towards Woody Gap and it is a great water source that is still there today.

The very same place I hiked through in 2010 and came across the largest black bear I had ever seen in my entire life! It was barreling out of sight as we rounded the corner, on the trail. It must have

been foraging near the trail and we scared the bejesus out of her as we came around that corner. Luckily, she was more scared of us than we were of her, and it was summer, she was certainly consumed in her foraging, preparing for the winter. You read what we made for lunch on this day, yes you read that right. We found a way of having tacos on the trail!

I called them Trail Tacos and I came up with this at Woody Gap, this was the first time trying it. Used too, in grocery stores, you could purchase freeze-dried, foil-sealed pre-cooked hamburger meat. It was great to take on a hike. To this day I have not been able to find that item in any store nationwide, so I guess it has just been banned from sale.

When it was available it was highly convenient since carrying raw meat on the trail would always be ill-advised due to the nature of the aroma. Bears would go wild over that stuff and smell it miles off! But grab you some pre-cut half pita shells. We liked the white over the

wholewheat. Get a block of your favorite cheese. You see block cheese keeps really well on the trail and so we usually had some with it. We liked the sharp cheddar style. You will need a pack of that Lipton or other brand "taco," "Spanish" or "dirty rice" mix, and some great taco sauce. I had Tabasco because I said I found it in an abandoned MRE I located at Hawk Mountain shelter.

That's the interesting thing, you will always find MRE's in the AT shelters because folks come out there thinking they are in the woods and so they must act like some soldier or something. They get these MRE's from a second-hand military store and head out, thinking they got their meals covered! The problem there is, these things are heavy!

So, yes, there are usually scraps left in shelters and one of those bags happened to have a small bottle of Tabasco and I was glad I kept that! So, first make the dirty, Spanish or taco rice. Set that aside and heat up the hamburger and when it is nice and warm throw in the rice and mix well.

Now, stuff those Pita shells with that mix and jam some slices of your block cheese down in the sides, and finally, add the taco sauce or hot sauce. What you have there is a genuine trail taco!



Burnett Field Mountain on the Georgia Appalachian Trail

Day 16- Camp at Woody Gap to Burnett Mtn. Summit

2-27-05

Well, we moved out around 11am and it was bitter cold! I mean cold and windy! We gathered water, ate breakfast of a brownie and granola bar, and made a bag each of trail mix to eat while we hiked. We hiked in the bitter cold and strong winds over to Burnett Field mtn, it took us 5 hours and these packs are so heavy as they have ever been. But it seems like I am building up to hike it easier but building slowly. My feet are still causing a

problem, which may be bruised heels, but I am determined to go on. No rain till about 6pm thank God but it seemed to get colder as we walked, passed by a large bear cave and numerous underground springs where we get all our water from out here. As we get to Burnett Field mtn. it started to snow, then sleet, then rain. So, we set up camp in the snow and gathered wood for a fire.

Now we sit in the tent as it rains and with full bellies of Trail Tacos and ravioli. It's cold and will probably be very cold tonight, my whole entire body hurts from the pack, and those mtns. we hiked over today. You just cannot imagine what hiking 5 miles with a real heavy pack on your back feels like or even how hard it is until you do it yourself.

When I wrote this entry I had walked 5 miles in sleet, snow, rain, and wind during the month of February IN the Appalachian Mountains. If that wasn't enough, I was wearing a very heavy pack without any waist straps for support and very thin shoulder straps. I was not in a good mood, to say

the least. We had walked up the mountains, over the mountains, and up Bernett Field mountain and set up a camp on top, in a snowstorm. I knew it was going to be a rough night. We obviously planned to cook over a fire and use the heat to warm our tent and ourselves, before turning in because I remember collecting that firewood. We had to search under the snow, but I know it would be dry enough to burn if I needed it.

However, it goes on to say the rain began and so we were holed up inside the tent with no campfire. Ravioli for dinner, you see we had cans of ravioli...cans. Today, I won't get caught carrying one can on any trail! Cans are simply too heavy and bulky and create trash. It has to be washed and if you don't at least seal it in a bag so bears will have a harder time smelling that yummy, dirty can.

But I know it was good. If you have ever had to simply pop open a can of Chef Ravioli and eat it right from the can, you know how good it can be. We had some of the Trail Tacos leftovers and we ate the rest of it too. If there is one thing that

stands out in my mind about this day, even 16 years later, it would have to be that time where we were walking across Bernett Field mountain and right over the top of a bear's cave. It was an actual bear's cave that the trail was built right over. I noticed it because of a hole in the trail. It meant that there had to be something on the other side. So, I decided to take a break here and explore. We first looked into the hole with lights, it was 100% a bear in that cave lying there sleeping.

It looked like an old bear with a face that looked like it was gray and brown. I do believe that bear may have been awake too, just lying there, because I remember its eyes opening and looking up at me. I am sure it heard us but wasn't coming out in that snowstorm for anything. Of course, the curiosity killed the cat, and it got the best of me that day too.

So, I decided if the bear were so lethargic and set to stay for the winter in that cave that I could walk down and around to the cave's entrance and see that bear from a better angle. I did and with no

ill effects! The problem was a lot of tree limbs had fallen in front of the cave entrance, blocking the bear in there and I wasn't about to start moving all that just to see a bear! So, we moved on. If you have ever tried to place tent stakes in a frozen ground then you know what it must have been like. We had to use rocks to get the stakes in and with the wind blowing as it was, you wanted to get those stakes in good.

It was loud in the tent, cold and we were tired and sore. I wrote that entry and settled in for a long winter's night trying my best to stay warm. I figure hiking up Bernett Field mountain must not usually be such a grueling hike. As I have done it a few more times these days, I know it would have been much better with better gear and a better time of the year. I remember a lot of downed trees, in fact, it looked like tornado damage.

It is possible that today, the trail has been rerouted from this area due to that bear and possible because of all the debris, but I am not sure. I want to touch on something here. In this

entry, I mention that I felt as if I was beginning to see improved stamina and endurance. If there is one thing you can be sure of, it is the health benefits of hiking this trail with a pack on your back. Earlier I mentioned I had lost a lot of weight and even an inch on my waistline as well as Jenchol. Well, that was somewhere around just ten days.

Now it has been two weeks and it never fells, every time I hit the AT I am not happy with my weight or health, although I am usually in pretty decent shape. Within two weeks of hiking on the AT I always lose a lot of weight and an inch or so on my waist. One other thing I have noticed, as a constant, is that about the fourteen-day mark, every time, stamina, and endurance always improve.

Chapter 3: Finding Our Way



Woods Hole Shelter on the Georgia AT

Day 17- Camp on Burnett Mtn. to Woods Hole Shelter

2-28-05

Well, we hiked to Woods hole shelter area today, a cold wet snowy day. Snow and sleet all day, temperatures in the low 30's, 4.5 miles, then we camped and met Lisa and Kurt....thru hikers heading north. We are miserable and our morale is down, but we must go on. Tomorrow we tackle Blood Mnt. and try to get into Neels gap. Rumors

say Blood Mtn. is a hike you don't want to do in winter, we'll see.

I will forever remember this night. If there was a night on the trail where I was worried about survival, this was it. I remember it dropping to 17 degrees overnight. It says we did not sleep because we chose not to. But we did get a little sleep anyhow. We decided to sleep in shifts to protect one another. One would sleep and one would lay there and wake the other person after a few hours and then we would switch.

The idea was to weather the situation as best we could and we both were afraid we would go to sleep and not wake up, basically freezing to death in the night. It was that cold and we had really done ourselves in on this day, it was a hard day, I vividly remember. The wind was blowing like never before, it was a struggle to hike those mountains and the snow was pretty much blowing all day.

It was blowing so hard that, at times, I had to walk with my head turned sideways to protect my

face. There was not much conversation on this day between her and I and for good reason. She was in front, I was in the rear, but we couldn't hold a conversation due to the wind, it was so loud. We hurt so much and our faces, lips, eyes, all frozen. I remember hiking straight through this day, not much stopping. We wanted to get that tent up and just get inside.

Once we made it to Woods Hole shelter, there were two people there. A young man and woman in a tent and they had set their tent up in the shelter, what an idea! I mean set your tent in the shelter, take it all up so that no other hikers would be able to shelter from the snowstorm and freezing temperatures, how genius!

So, Jenchol and I began to set up the tent immediately, well since we didn't have any other shelter to get into. The wind was ferocious. We were having the time of our lives trying to get this tent up. Fingers, hands, face frozen…literally. Conversation non-existent, wind and snow and what felt like wet slush blowing right at us. I mean,

it was blowing sideways! After a few minutes of struggling, the boy at the shelter got tired of simply watching us and decided to come into the storm and help us. Nothing was said, he ran into the storm, wearing hardly anything and with some Crocs on his feet is all. As it goes on the trail, hikers take care of each other and possibly this couple felt no one was as stupid as they were to come hiking in this storm and so decided to take the shelter for themselves.

Then in seeing they were wrong, felt bad and made it better by at least giving up their comfort and helping with that tent. It was because of this boy that I was able to get that tent secured in that storm and hurry to get inside. There wasn't even time to say thanks, and so it went without saying on this evening.

The next morning our water bottles were frozen, condensation was frozen to the tent walls and the couple in the shelter had gone up Blood Mountain. The snowstorm had stopped, leaving us under a blanket of several inches of snow and the

sun was seemingly trying to make the day better. However, we had a radio, and we knew what was in store for this day. There was another snowstorm coming, and we wanted to be up and over Blood Mountain before that snowstorm set in and buried us alive! To make the situation even more desperate was my own intuition that was already telling me, *"you dummy, you slept to late and now that couple is already gone because that storm is on your heels!"* We knew we had to hurry, and that we did.



Where the trail goes through Neels Gap on the Georgia AT

Day 18- Woods Hole Shelter to Neels Gap

3-1-05

Woke up to 2 inches of snow on the ground, yes another crazy day! With temps in the 20's. We didn't sleep at all last night, was too cold. We try day to day to remain strong and stay warm, to avoid hypothermia, but it's very hard on days like this and nights like the last.

We made it into Neel's Gap, and here we stay at a Hikers Hostel for 15 dollars a night, and you get a warm bed hot shower and get to do laundry. Also, they have internet access here. Not to

mention its 18 degrees outside right now with six inches of snow on the ground! We had no money, so we worked for our stay here. Talked to Rendo tonight and we have to wait here for the mail we've been chasing. May be here for a while as it's so nice, and the weather so bad. We were 3 miles into our hike today in the blowing snow and 20-degree wind when we lost site of the trail due to 6 inches of snow.

At this time, we were at the top of Blood Mnt. seven thousand feet and we run into Blood Mnt. shelter unknowing, now this shelter is an old solid rock home with the windows and doors all missing. So, we decided to try and get warm by making a fire inside and covering the windows with something. We went into survival mode, knowing we could be stranded here for days.

About an hour later this day hiker came from North bound to take a picture of the shelter.....hmm can you say ANGEL! So, we followed his tracks out and down the Mnt. to Neel's Gap, about 1.5 miles down. The snow and ice got

so bad we hardly had any footing all the way to the bottom, but with the motivation of a warm bed and hot shower for the night we pushed on. Putting the pain and fatigue behind us.

I was impressed by the storm that moved in on us today. As we began hiking up Blood mountain it seemed like we would do just fine. Yes, the snow seemed deeper as we climbed but that was to be expected. Because Kurt and Lisa had went on ahead before us and probably a few other hikers too, we just followed their tracks. The AT is marked with white blazes.

These blazes are placed wherever they can get them. Sometimes on trees and sometimes on rocks, but always near the trail. The problem with that is snow is white too! And because the snow was very sticky it was sticking to the sides of the trees covering the blazes as well as the rocks and even the signs. We literally had no trail to follow, at least not an official one. We knew this hike was supposed to take up straight up to the top of Blood

Mountain and knew that at the top was Blood Mountain shelter. So, we hiked on, following the trail made by those hikers that had gone on before us. Sometime in the middle of that hike that snowstorm moved in, and it came in quick and mean. We knew we were in for it and so we hiked non-stop to the top as quickly as we could. Our packs were not that heavy because we were very near time for resupply and had planned to resupply once we got to Neels Gap.

We had been told that we could catch a ride into Dahlonega to get supplies and it was not a problem. In fact, there is a shuttle that takes hikers from the gap to the stores in town every day and then back to the hostel there. The snow was blowing sideways the entire way up that behemoth of a mountain! Blood Mountain, the highest point on the Georgia AT and the steepest hike we had done up to this point.

Because we had been on the trail now for a few weeks, lost weight, got in shape, got over much of our complaining (well it didn't do anything

anyhow) and had packs that were mostly empty, that climb was not bad. In fact, if it were not for that crazy storm, I may have truly enjoyed hiking up Blood mountain. As we neared the summit that snowstorm got worse and by the time we had summited it had gotten so bad that we had lost sight of any sort of trail at all.

All of a sudden we stopped and looked at each other and felt like we were about to be stranded on the top of a mountain, in a snowstorm, lost and no way to survive. This was a moment that jolted me, and I realized just how bad the situation was becoming. The snow was so deep now, we were dragging our feet through at least 12 inches.

We could hardly speak, we were frozen, it was loud, and the snow was stinging our face and blinding our vision. We had no snow glasses and at this point, it was necessary. No markings could be seen, no train, no steps, nothing. The snow had blown so deep that all tracks were gone. We took a quick shelter under a large evergreen tree and pulled out the Databook. According to that book

we were practically overlooking that shelter. We brushed off a sign, the years had worn off the mileage markings leaving us still blind. We decided to carefully walk around and search for the trail, being careful not to stray too far from our current location in case we were not too far off course.

Nothing, we found absolutely nothing. So, we decided to walk a bit further and right there literally around a bend of trees was this massive, heavy rock house! It was the Blood Mountain shelter and that meant we were not only right on the trail but at the summit. We only had a slight idea where we were, but it was enough. Quickly we made our way inside to get out of that crazy blizzard.

The winds were so fierce by now and the snow was very deep. It was obvious that the summit had been covered with snow way before this new snow fell. The shelter was made of solid rock, I mean the entire thing. It was a two-room house that had a large fireplace in the main room, which was just

inside the door. The windows and door coverings were gone, snow was blowing in the main room. The second room was a small room with a raised platform made of solid stone. We looked around trying to locate something to cover the windows and door with but found nothing. We had a feeling that we may be stranded here for a few days until that storm runs out.

So, we decided, once we warmed up that we would need a fire in that fireplace. It was snowing but under the snow you can always find good wood to burn, especially if it was a dry sticky snow. We decided we shouldn't try to find our way down the mountain until the storm was over. It could be days. We would need water, snow melt warmed over a fire would have to suffice.

We should have enough food and so we began to collect firewood and bring it in to protect it. I am not sure how long we had been doing that, but it had to have been at least an hour when I noticed him. A man was simply standing in the snow, staring up at the shelter taking a picture of the

shelter sign. He looked like a hiker, well enough, but how did he get through that snowstorm, make his way up the other side of that mountain with nothing but a day pack on? I mean he was not there one moment, I looked back and there he was. I was actually taken by surprise! I looked at Jenchol and said, *"there is a man out there."* You can imagine the look on her face, she had to get up and see him for herself.

I asked the man how he got up here, he casually said he walked up the northside and had been there many times. He said he had just come to take a picture of the shelter and was on the way back down before more weather set in and then said, *"you guys should just follow my tracks down."* Then he was off, just as fast has he was there! So, we hurried and packed up our things and tried to follow him down.

But it was treacherous, and it seemed like the guy had tracks on his feet, I mean he was flying down that mountain. We saw him start off and then he was gone. In fact, we never saw that man again.

What we did see was drawings in the snow, and tracks. However, halfway down the mountain the snow and wind picked back up and began to cover the tracks. He was drawing arrows in the snow, pointing us to safety! Developing a sense of urgency, we picked up our pace. I did not want to get caught again in a snowstorm. I figured the drawings were not going to last long.

Believe it or not, those arrows led us to the bottom and then were gone and so were his tracks. The trail down the north side of the mountain intersects the main road down at the gap, cross that road and you are in the Walasi-Yi, or what is called Mountain Crossings Outfitters and hostel. So, we made it. I remember the feeling; it was intense, and I believe I may have been emotional.

It was an experience I do not care to live through again.



The inside of Mountain Outfitters at Neels Gap on the GA AT

Day 19- Zero Day at Neel's Gap #1

3-2-05

We stayed on at Neel's Gap today and now we plan on staying here working for our stay daily doing housekeeping, until it warms up some or until we feel like continuing. Gotta recuperate! We are enjoying ourselves with a warm shower, bed, and covers. Internet access and nice people also.

There's been a few females come through the hostel and even fewer couples, mostly guys, old and young from all walks of life. Some people come here sick of dehydration and hypothermia.

As a medic I offer our training, Jenchol helps. This one guy came in and was dehydrated and hypothermic and we directed him to his zero-degree sleeping bag and lots of Gatorade. Two days later he's still here and now he has a stomach virus from eating the snow on Blood Mnt., trying not to die. NEVER do that!

We also met the owner of Neel's Gap (Mountain Crossing Outfitters) area today called Winton, we told the front office we would stay here till they got rid of us, ha! Temps. were 15 degrees tonight and 30 degrees for today's high!

So, there we were, all tuckered out, beat up, cold and so fed up with how we were feeling and how the trip seemed to be going. We had tasted the first night of comfort. The first night in almost a month on the trail, and it was nice. A warm shower does extraordinary things for the mind, soul, and body. Warm food cooked properly over a stove without having to worry about the weather or temperatures or animals nearby was so comforting.

A warm, soft bed every night and all we had to do was a bit of housekeeping in the hiker's hostel. It was a nice setup but destined to be only a little while as we will see. Movies every night in a comfortable setting around other people just like you, it was great. Soft furniture to set on daily and nightly, a store just a short walk away from the hostel and shuttles to and from town every day, except Sunday.

Staying and working at Mountain Crossings was more than a break, it was spoiling us! All this comfort, it weighs on your mind and takes the heart from the hiker for when you return to the trail it always makes day one, hardest. Mountain Crossings Outfitters, a great bunch of guys there and great gear and such.

However, I will warn you, it is more than pricey, and they only used to have high end stuff, and the food resupply is pricey and without a big selection. Hikers come here for the hostel mostly, take a break and resupply in the nearest town, which is Dahlonega, using a hiker's shuttle. Now a

word about coming over Blood Mountain in a snowstorm, or for that matter, anywhere in a snowstorm. You should never eat the snow but if you do make sure it is as clean as possible. Its water, you know, so it will hydrate you, but the temperature is a lot colder than water in its liquid state so it will make hypothermia quicker. The man in the hostel became hypothermic because he was eating snow.

This dropped his internal temperature and then the outside air was dropping his temperature from the outside, which was a recipe for destruction. In his personal defense, he stated that he knew he would be in a hostel that night and be able to stave off death from hypothermia but never expected to come down with a stomach virus because of some dirty snow, which did happen.

In fact, if you are hiking the AT in winter, and you happen to notice you are becoming hypothermic, it is best if you use the zero-degree bag, many carry, and get in as soon as possible. You will also want to get something warm into

your stomach as soon as possible, even if it is nothing more than warm water. Now, you read earlier that I no longer carry a sleeping bag on the trails, well I don't but those light weight down quilts will work just as well. You just want that air space around you and against you so your body heat can be collected as opposed to losing it into the air.



Stairs to Mountain Crossings at Neels Gap on the Georgia AT

Day 20- Zero Day at Neels Gap #2

3-3-05

We woke to an empty Hostel today all but us and Richard, the hypothermia guy. We cleaned last night, went to bed around 10 pm. Found about 10 lbs. of trail mix outside boxed up by the fountain and took it into the Hostel to bag up and give to the hikers. Temperatures in the low 30's and low 20's at night, no rain last 2 days and not supposed to be till Saturday. heard Mon and Tue it is supposed to be bad winter weather again. Nothing to write about.

That first night at the hostel, it was simply amazing! It was like we had been rescued or something like that. It was a very cold 15, or so, degrees outside and the snow was relentless. Hikers were coming in from the snow and cold left and right. The store at the outfitters there had a very large and hot fireplace burning and it reminded us of the one in the rock house at the top of Blood.

The people around north Georgia like their stones and their fireplace and know how to stay warm. The store was outfitted with all the top brands and popular stuff hikers wanted. It was very expensive, and we simply couldn't afford one thing. In fact, you read we couldn't even afford to stay in the hostel, take a shower or wash laundry without working for the owner.

But the people were nice, and took our labor for a warm bed, hot shower, laundry use and internet use. I remember cooking a pan of instant mashed potatoes and thinking that they tasted like heaven! It's true, everything tastes much better on the trail than anyplace else. There is a TV room at

the hostel and so we were able to sit comfortably and watch movies as well. A nice stock of DVD's sat on a shelf nearby. Hikers scrambled all over and chatter was at a minimum but still audible everywhere, but it was very comfortable. You will read about a man called Richard who came into the hostel and seemed quite ill. Some people put him into his sleeping bag and helped him get to a bunk for the night.

He had become hypothermic on the trail, in that snowstorm. There were rumors that he ran out of water and began to eat the snow. Of course, that drops your core body temperature and only causes hypothermia to hasten. Because I was a medic in the USA, I gave advice and helped watch the man and determine if he was safe or not noticing all this symptoms.

But the next day, most all the hikers had left the hostel and ventured on down the trail. He was the only person left that morning except for the two of us. We chatted but he didn't seem to be the type to do well with my personality so with the hostel si-

lent we relaxed and wrote in journals and updated online journal sites for friends and family. Jenchol and I had chores. We had agreed to clean the bathrooms, the hostel and keep the place tidy for a bed for a few nights and days of rest. Mostly we just hung around chatting with hikers and walking around the area checking out all the historical references, which Neels Gap is well known for.

We found about 10 lbs. of trail mix at a signpost out by the hostel. So, we brought that inside, bagged it up in sandwich bags and set it available to all hikers. We were very much enjoying some time off the trail and especially out of the bad weather when we noticed the owner of the place was walking about. We introduced ourselves and thanked him for letting us stay over for working and ensured him we would not overstay our welcome.

We had planned on taking back to the trail within about two days but depending on the weather.



Rock Springs Crossing on the Georgia AT

Day 21-Neels Gap to Rock Springs Crossings

3-4-05

Well, we woke today and decided to move on, so we packed up told everyone goodbye and headed on north about 1:15 pm. Did 5 miles today to a camp site just past Rock Spring Creek. Around 7 pm I started feeling sick to my stomach and about 8 pm started throwing up. So, I am going to bed now.

And that was how it was! So here is the backstory and you can be the judge and decide just

what happened to me. I became very ill and knew that the last thing I needed was to dehydrate on the trail after being out there already during winter and very ill prepared for the hike and the weather. But ill I was and when I say I was vomiting, that lasted a long time.

In fact, most of the night I was up handling that business, it seemed like it was just every hour on the dot. Before leaving the hostel this lady came in. She was known on the AT as “Little Bear” and had apparently survived a run in with a bear in her younger years while hiking near Neels Gap on the Georgia AT. That earned her the name Little Bear. She said she was there waiting for a friend to come through the area.

Her girlfriend was hiking the AT and heading north, like us and was supposed to be through Neels Gap on this day. She lived in a converted van and parked it wherever she needed. She had messed up her knee on the trail during the bear attack and so that ended her hiking career. In fact, Mountain Crossings still displays her bear ridden

pack outside the front of the building as you come down the AT into the store. That bear had a field day, and she ran and survived to hike another day. She had with her some interesting food. Burgers! She had small slider style burgers that all you did was pop in a microwave and eat up. We were very interested, of course! What hiker isn't? So, I was offered two and ate up.

Shortly after Jenchol and I decided to head on up the trail. It was then that I began to feel sick. After about half the distance we usually hike on a good sunny day, as it was, I began vomiting and cramping badly. I continued thinking that if I was going to stop I needed to at least stop at water. It was a few miles away still. I figured I could go another mile but ended up almost on the ground in pain and fatigue.

So, we stopped at a large camp near Rock Springs creek and set up camp for the night. It was about time to do so anyhow, with the day coming to a close. What a way to re-start the hike.



Baggs Creek Gap on the Georgia AT

Day 22- Rock Creek Camp to Baggs Gap

3-5-05

Woke today still very sick threw up all night about every 2-3 hours. Then about 5 am it stopped, so I decided to move camp a mile up the trail to a water source, since I have completely no energy to haul this heavy pack with. I will use this zero day to calm and recover myself. We set up camp at Baggs gap (We think) and I am going to sleep now

it's about 4 pm, must recover before the snow-storm moves in on Tuesday.

That morning we decided to move camp. I knew I was not able to go far so we literally only walked about a mile. We were very lucky that this part of the trail is flat and easy. We ended up at Baggs Gap, or close to it. I could go no further and knew I needed to set up camp, water was nearby, or supposed to be. Jenchol went to fetch water and I went into the tent and fell asleep.

When I woke she had a fire going, water fetched and was looking over me and the camp. It was late in the afternoon, and I had been asleep for hours. However, I was getting better and just needed to recover, rehydrate, and get my energy back by eating. We decided not to move for the rest of the day and do what I needed to get better.

As the night trotted on I got better and better and figured I would be well enough to make a few miles in the morning. I believe I may have had a bout with food poison, or maybe my body reacted

to greasy, unhealthy food which had been avoided for three weeks now. Whatever it was, it made me not want to touch another burger the rest of my journey. If that was not bad enough because we had just resupplied at Neels Gap, our packs were full and I had no energy to carry that pack, it just made me feel even worse. But after resting the whole day, bathing in the warm sun, and enjoying the fact that we must have had a warm front come in, I was regaining my happiness.



Poor Man Mountain on the Georgia AT

Day 23- Baggs Gap to Poor Man Mountain

3-6-05

Woke this morning after a long dark windy and very uncomfortable night. But I am feeling almost 100 percent. So, we packed up and felt so good about the 60 degrees and sunshine that we plan to do 6 miles today. But we ended up here at the base of Poor Mountain. 2.5 miles from low gap shelter. Our packs need to be upgraded to better packs with waist belts and wider shoulder straps to make more miles.

It's just too much on our shoulders. Today, I

actually was able to hike in 1 pair of socks, shorts, and a t-shirt. We pasted a lot of day hikers and some NOBO"S (North bounders). Well, it's about 4:50 pm and we are hungry. Tonight, its ramen! Advice: Start this hike about the 3rd week of March, northbound and bring a small tent or a 20-degree sleeping bag-synthetic, or even both.

The shelters are very open, windy, and cold, so we chose to stay in a tent instead with 2 blankets, and now some foam sleeping pads. Don't buy goose down bags, they cannot be washed without messing them up and rendering them ineffective in cold weather, try to bring at least 1 person with you to allow more equipment to be carried easier.

We hiked well today mostly because the trail wasn't all that strenuous. But when you have been hiking in weather that is threatening for so long and then get a day where things are flipped, it is so nice. It was 60 degrees on this day! The sun was out, the hike was easy, and I was recovered to a point where my energy was restored. However, our

packs were newly packed with fresh supplies, and I was still weak. But I am a hardheaded man and so when I woke up this morning all I thought about was putting in a lot of miles. It had been a windy night and I mean I remember how loud it was. But you know when you are so tired that nothing can prevent you from resting? Well, that was me.

An entire day and night of vomiting and illness took a major toll on me, I was worn out. So, I slept well, rested well, and remember the ground seemed softer than usual. It was the area because of the creek nearby and we were in somewhat of a valley as opposed to all those hard mountains. The warm front that came in rejuvenated me. It was cool at night but not cold and so our sleeping set up was incredible.

It was probably some of the best rest I got on the trail. Too bad few of those nights was recorded, there just wasn't many to record. We always made a plan the night before, using the Databook. We had planned on hiking six miles on this day. We knew that Poor Man Mountain was up ahead,

and we knew there was a snowstorm coming in, in a few days. However, we only made about half of the trip on this day because those packs were murder on me and even more so because I was still weaker than usual. Instead of climbing Poor Man Mountain, we camped at the base of it. A smart thing if you know what is up ahead and also know if you can handle it, at that time, or not.

Bottom line, I was very happy to have that Databook. These days, when I head out onto the trails I have an app that works whether you have internet service or not. The app is called Gut hook's, and you can download the entire AT map, in sections or all of it. Either way, I do not suggest you hike the AT without one or the other. Now a word about the advice I give in this 16-year-old journal entry.

I was inexperienced, I was learning through first had experience but still not fit to be giving novice hikers any advice. So, here is the updated version, hah! These days I do not pack a sleeping bag. I do not pack tents either. In fact, I am a

hammock camper now and pack a sleeping arrangement that is well documented as the best. Number one, pack a nice double nest hammock, a nice lightweight but roomy tarp, a down over quilt and a down under quilt. Those can all be purchased separately or all together, and you can match up all those to one company or multiple.

I personally like the Emo, set-up these days and have all I need to sleep well and protected in rain, snow, cold, fall temperatures and late spring temperatures. Summer is no different, I just leave the warming stuff at home and head out with my tarp and hammock and over quilt. There are also ways to clean your down gear, but it does have to be done a specific way.

Low heat, it takes a long time and if you have one, toss in a tennis ball which helps to balance the down when it is drying. You will need to manually fluff the gear pieces every so often as well. But it does get dry and does not render it ineffective, if done properly.



Sunset at Low Gap shelter on Poor Man Mountain on the Georgia AT

Day 24- Poor Man mountain to Low Gap Shelter 3-7-05

Woke this morning from a very uncomfortable sleepless night. NEVER camp with your tent on a slope, if it means an extra painful mile then I suggest you suck it up and do it. Out here on the AT there are more than enough camping spots for tents, and they are not too far apart either.

Our tent is holding up well, the tarp is essential to block out the wind and rain that these Mnts. bring you every 2 days or more. It's probably

around 1 am. I am awake listening to the rain hit the tarp and staying unusually warm. Jenchol is asleep for once in 4 days, the terrain is a nice flat surface and the area we are camping in tonight is somewhere between Cold Springs Gap and Low Gap Shelter area. We are thinking in a day or two trying to find work in Helen, Georgia.

When we get to Unicoi Gap we will be ten miles from there, which is the nearest town before another 4-6 days hike from Hiawassee. We are in need of new footwear as Jenchol's is busting at the seams, and mine is starting too also. Also, we need new packs as ours don't have a waist support and to do this hike with the weight you need. Our shoulders are developing knots on the bones of the collar.

So, a good hiker pack is what we need and last we want two synthetic sleeping bags with 1 full size air mattress (self-inflating), but the mattress is seriously not a practical thing to get, so probably not. But sleep must be obtained, and then we can get rid of the red and black blanket, which is not

big enough for two people, and is very heavy. At the Neels Gap hostel we got a queen size green valor blanket and upgraded from our cotton quilt, and it is so nice! Advice: NEVER bring cotton anything to the trail if you can help it, cotton kills in the cold, it sends you into hypothermia if it gets wet, without you knowing! Also, the two foam rolls we found there are heaven sent!

We want the sleeping arrangement to be- a warm bag each, maybe a full-size air mat, and one valor blanket for both. Less weight with the bags but it evens out to about the same with the air mat. The hiking boots we want cost around $100 each, the bags around $120 each, the air mat around $40 and the packs about $150 each, so we need about $850 total to continue on the homage.

But even obtaining the money for the cause is part of the humbling experience. I will do about anything for the cash at this point. We will try on doing five or more miles tomorrow morning. It looks like a place called Blue Mountain shelter at six miles, if the rain doesn't last all day. If it does,

we won't move at all, because we have no rain gear! Make sure you are better prepared than we came, if you ever do this, the easier you make it on yourself will be more rewarding with your time. Money is no object out here, and its reverend when you are not geared up as we aren't. If you want to contribute to our cause, then send money to us in cash by way of envelope with a tracking number for about .37 cent extra.

Send to a town near our most recent stop or pass through but email me first to alert me to be on the lookout for it. Also, send your equipment donations to a same location, same method...but UPS is more reliable and faster. We never received the mail drop Rendo sent us to Suches, GA. Send all mail c/o Retsuzen or c/o Jenchol AT Hikers. But emailing us first is very important. Goodnight again!

Now before you begin making assumptions as to who I was talking to in that journal entry, you need to understand a few things. During this time

in my life, I was heavy into the martial arts and as such, I am the founder of an art that is officially listed in the United Combat Martial Arts Union Association (UCMAUA) as Shikata Ryu Ninjutsu. You can search this online and find all sorts of information these days, but anyway, there was a following of my personal students. Jenchol and I had online AT journals at a site that is built for that.

All my students had access to that online journal as well as all my family. Every chance we got we would use the internet, such as the spot at the hostel at Neel's Gap. We would then upload our journal entries and our friends and family would be able to see them. I was also taking personal notes. So that is who I was mentioning all that too.

You see we had been hiking with substandard gear for so long that it was not only beginning to tear up, but we were used to it and knew exactly what it was missing in its quality. We had also had more than three weeks to speak with experienced and not, AT hikers and ask their opinions. So, we did know what we needed at this point. No longer

were we lost and ignorant about the trail, we were experienced and had learned a whole lot. You can read that it had been four days since my ex-wife had any sleep and on this particular night she was actually sleeping well. The truth is, you will fall asleep when you are tired enough, you cannot fight that, but I was referring to good sleep. Being so cold, it is very hard to sleep.

Many of the nights on the trail we endured very cold and very powerful winds, that seemingly never ended. Usually at night, when the moon came up, the winds would too. When the sun came back up, unless there was a storm, the winds died back some. We also all know that usually rains will bring in warmer temperatures and on this particular night it did.

In fact, it seemed like a warm front was moving through the area, and probably was. Being the end of February now, March right around the corner, I can understand that we would be having increasingly raining and warmer nights as opposed to the opposite. Never put your tent on a slope. We

would not have done that except that should tell you just how many options we had…none. I mean, who in their right minds would sleep on a hillside, but that just goes to show how crazy the terrain was in that area. We had been hiking our usual 5-6 miles a day, this day was no different and I remember how I felt. My shoulders and feet and legs and back hurt so bad and I was thinking how awesome it was that we had finally came to our daily resting point but then no place flat.

So, as usual, we walked on some, looking for the best spot. We found nothing, no flat terrain and I remember walking an extra mile or so. So, we decided to make the best of it and at least try and level the ground with pine needles and sleep feet first downhill. It didn't matter. It was a terrible night, warm but uncomfortable for me and she was just so tired she didn't care.

The rain on the tent tarp was soothing, it always is when it is constant and not so loud. You can also see that we had made our daily plan for the following day as I mentioned six miles to the next point

on the next day. It was a routine and gave me something to do. I felt that it was quite important. It is also important to know how far it would be to the next water source because each and most every morning our water was low and because we did not usually camp in shelter areas, we were farther from water. We cooked with water both at the end of the day and beginning of the day.

One of the things that I carried on the trail in 2005 was a hand crocheted red and black blanket. It was about the size of a twin blanket, maybe a bit wider, but my ex-wife had made that. It was my favorite blanket and the first one anyone had ever made for me, and I truly loved it. However, it was heavy and no one in their right mind would carry a blanket on the trail, but then again, most that go to the trail has some experience and knows better.

I would roll that up each and every morning and carry it on the top of my pack. Because it was so heavy, Jenchol carried the tent, and I would carry the tarp and she would carry the mattress pad. We took turns caring certain things to keep it fair.

We knew it was too heavy, but it was made from yarn and not cotton yarn, so that made it trail worthy…at least in that sense. Then at Neel's Gap hostel we found the hiker's box and shelf. On that shelf were old blankets that folks could use in the hostel. No doubt some of those blankets were donated when hikers figured things out better, as we were doing.

But there was this very lightweight, green valor made blanket and it was larger than the red and black one. We asked and was told we could trade blanket for blanket and that is exactly what we did. Now that blanket was a life saver, let me tell you! It was soft, would not retain water and weighted hardly anything. Being larger it allowed for better sleep because we were insulated better.

After that there was no more fighting over who carried the tent or the blanket because it was welcomed on our packs. I remember Jenchol found a roll of duct tape in one of the shelters we came across and just in time. You will read that our shoes were beginning to come apart and they were.

They were losing their soles. She took that tape and wrapped it around the shoe like saran wrap and it held! We had also tried to super glue the sole back in place, but that failed miserably. It is imperative that you have quality footwear when you hike this trail.

Chapter 4: Planning For The Future



Low Gap shelter on the Georgia AT

Day 25- Zero Day At Low Gap shelter 3-8-05

My Birthday is in 23 days, I want some nice hiking boots!! Size 8 1/2 or just send about 100 dollars and I will get them from an outfitters. We woke today to about 3 inches of snow on the ground and freezing temps. Even the condensation on the inside of the tent was frozen! So, it snowed all day and got only about 30 degrees for the high, We didn't move. Zero days

are rest days for us and today was right on time. We are about 8-9 miles from Unicoi Gap and Helen, GA. We plan on hiking into there on Thursday and hiking into town where we will search for a shower, warm spot to stay and work for a while. Helen is just 45 minutes from Rendo (my sister), my daughter, and my father. Maybe we could get some help there from them IF it's meant to be. We plan on staying off the AT till we get better gear, and it gets warmer.

Probably near March 30 or April sometime. There is an outfitters in Helen along with a lot of hotels and restaurants. I've found out that I must have poor circulation in my feet as we cannot seem to ever get them warm. We found a way to use our little folding camp stove with our fire sticks to cook inside the tent, warm mashed potatoes for dinner with some lemon tea sure boosts your morale a lot out here!

Tonight, it's going to get about 18 degrees and so we decided to open the sleeping bag up that we've been sleeping on as padding and use is as a

third blanket for tonight. We still will be laying on the foam mats. Also, you take the fire sticks and light 1 or 2 in a large pan and set it in the tent and you create a heater for about 10 minutes, add more for more heat. 1 takes about 5 minutes to burn up completely. You do learn so much out here, just from experimenting when you're in a situation. We sit all day watching it snow and listening to the incredibly strong winds blow.

Radio said they were 40 MPH but up high on the mountain here we got about 60 MPH gusts and 40 MPH continuous. We had to find large rocks to place on the tarp stakes to hold them down. It's about 6:40 pm now and getting dark so I will stop writing.

This was one of those days where you just want to snuggle up in a warm bed or on a warm sofa, put on a pot of hot water for warm tea or coffee and watch your favorite shows all day. Snow, lots of it and windy as it could be. We decided we were close enough to a very good

stopping point that we could just relax for the day as opposed to walking in another snowstorm. We were a day's walk from Unicoi gap on this particular day and if you have ever hiked into Unicoi gap on the Georgia AT you will know how popular this gap is and why. As you begin hiking from the south, heading north, you will come into Unicoi gap in about a week, usually. Notice how long it took us.

Helen, Georgia is the first real nice place you will come into contact with, and Unicoi gap is the place where you have to get off the trail. It is an old German style town, Swiss Bavarian style buildings, nice culture-based restaurants, and party central for those who love a good culture-based brew. Since we were thinking of taking a break from the trail, Unicoi gap is where we would get off, hitch a ride into Helen, Georgia and see about finding some temporary work.

Because we were used to camping and living outdoors, we thought we could just set up a camp nearby and access town and work for as long as we

needed. Save up enough money to get ourselves into a temporary place and upgrade our gear was the plan. Then head on back to the trail and continue on. At this time, we had gotten very used to living on the trail and so we had come to the decision to continue on up the trail. The night before we had camped at Low Gap shelter in our tent. I remember it got so cold that even the condensation froze inside the tent.

There was a thin layer of ice on the inside of the tent pretty much all over. We had our water bottles in the tent but even they had frozen. We were tired of being cold and sleeping like garbage and we knew that Helen, Georgia was our saving grace. A location that made our blood pressure rise and adrenaline rush just at the mere thought of it.

We knew that the hike from Low Gap shelter to Unicoi gap was going to be a long and hard hike, but I also knew that every step would be taking me closer to my destination. It would certainly be enough, for me, to spur my steps onward and get me there in record time. The “fire

sticks" that I was talking about here are those fire starters that you can purchase in a pack of about eight at most outdoor stores. We had those because it seemed that the wood and kindling was always wet on the trail. Even when it wasn't raining or snowing the place stayed damp. This is why one of the most important pieces of advice from the AT is never carry anything that is made of mostly cotton.

Cotton material has a way of staying wet and becoming wetter than most materials in weather that is just damp. It takes forever to dry and actually may never fully dry as long as you are on the trail. Then when you wear it, the material will pull heat from your body forcing hypothermia quicker.

I had picked up a metal pot at the hostel in Neel's Gap and carried that on the outside of my backpack. I figured it would come in handy sometimes and it did. On this particular night I decided I had enough of the cold and waking up and so I simply found a way to create heat. Since we had a small folding stove, I decided to set it in

the pan so the tent floor wouldn't melt. I did that for cooking in the tent. In order to create the heat, I simply burned a fire starter stick in the pan and it was fine since it doesn't give off smoke. It would burn and create some nice heat and the pan would heat up some but not enough to be dangerous. I just sat there and kept the heat going, cooked some warm food and a warm beverage and then went back to sleep.

It was supposed to be very cold this night, 18 degrees, as I recorded, so we decided to be warmer on this night. We had done some things along the way that resulted in a much better set up for sleeping. One of the things we carried was one of those OD green sleeping bags with a lining that looked plead. It was one bag but was big enough to open up and use as an additional blanket for two people and it really worked well.

Lying on the foam mats was enough to keep the cold from coming up from the ground and with those two blankets on us, all dressed in our fleece, it was actually a warmer night than you would

think. I don't guess I remember to many hikers on this day, especially coming into Low Gap shelter and this shelter isn't the greatest place on the AT, it is very old and ran down. So, I imagine most hikers just keep on hiking when they get this far. The entire section of the Georgia section is about 78 miles. Most hikers, these days, take about 8-9 days to finish, it has taken us almost a month.

I said that so that you understand just how slow we hiked and at 5 miles a day, most days. Our shoes, hurt our feet. We could feel every stone, every step. Our packs hurt our shoulders, put knots on the bones actually. It hurt our backs and hurt our knees and legs too. We carried to much weight, making the hike more grueling and it was very cold most days and nights.

We were hiking on little sleep because it was too cold and/or windy to sleep. We were using more calories than we were consuming because when it is cold out you burn more calories just shivering alone. Hiking and shivering, no sleep to talk about, your meals are not balanced on the

trail…there was many opportunities to have the worst time of our lives. However, for me, I found out who I was and found out what I could and could not do. I have said it many times, the AT is a portal into an alternate reality. You feel different on the trail, life is different and the people there are different. Your mind becomes quiet, your days become all about living and your nights all about reflection which can bring on spiritual awakening.

For me, this was a spiritual journey, and I would not take it back for anything in the world. If more people understood this and accepted the challenge that lies in wait there on the AT, there would be more people in the world that would be spiritually awakened. There would be more people that cared about others and less people that do not care for the environment and those around them.

For me, the AT is a place of teaching, and we can all use more of that. You will be tested, challenged and you will face your fears and if you survive, you will come off the trail a better person.



Mainstreet in Helen Georgia

Day 26- Low Gap Shelter to Unicoi Gap

3-9-05

Well, here we sit at the Huddle House in Helen, GA. We made it to Unicoi Gap about 3 pm in 5 hours and 15 minutes. We did our first "8 miler" today and got here a day earlier. Temps in the high 30's and some snow flurries towards the end of Blue Mountain, but we are so beat up, from the improper footwear and our packs without the support of a waist belt.

Today I seen my footwear is beginning to tear up at the seams. Last night we did manage to

stay warm with the three blankets although the temps did get down to 18 degrees. I called Rendo and have to call her back in a few hours and see if my dad can help us get a room for the night, or two so we can rest, heal, shower and warm up. We just learned that a small-town grocery store here takes food stamps, so we may resupply here. Rendo also said our package, we been chasing all over the place, came back to her.

So, we are trying to get her to bring it to us, also when we got a hitch into Helen from Unicoi Gap it was about 3 or 4 cars that passed us, then a nice older man stopped. We got to the Huddle House, and we had just 4 dollars to our names, so we changed our socks and shirts and washed our hands, used the bathroom, and sat at a table to drink some .99 cent coffee and then all of a sudden we were served some homemade vegetable soup and crackers.

The waitress told us about the older lady, over a few tables over, bought it for us. Thank God for Angels. If we have to sit here all night, resting

and drinking water and coffee, then at least we will be warm and dry for the night. Theres a church just a few hundred feet from us (across the street), we are thinking about seeing if there's a person to put us up for a night or 2 and get us a shower. Churches also have food banks and clothing banks, so we will try that too.

Well, here it is 8:42 pm and a lot has happened, the waitress in the Huddle House just comes over and asks where we are staying for the night, and we say don't know yet. She hands us $50 and says go get yourselves a room! So, we are here in a Super 8 Motel with an indoor heated pool, expanded cable, coffee maker, fridge, and microwave.

I took a shower and a bath, and we had extra money to buy a cheeseburger deluxe and fries! Man, I mean they hit the spot, so now I am off to rest on my king size bed, ha-ha.

So, this was the truth, I was in heaven, so to speak. After almost a month on the trail it was so

nice to be able to experience all these things. It is just very hard to explain so you can understand just how much respect you gain for small things such as a cheeseburger, or a cup of coffee brewed in a machine or even a bathtub when you do without it for a long time. We had really been comfortable in that restaurant.

Everyone that I know understands just how good their coffee and homecooked food is. I guess the only place I prefer more, these days, is a good southern Waffle House. But we were blessed to be here. We had hiked 8 miles into Unicoi Gap which was way more than we usually did in a day. We had expected this to be a two-day hike, from Low Gap to Unicoi Gap, but was met with a whole day's hike that was mostly downhill.

As you leave Low Gap shelter you will climb up and over Blue Mountain. Now Blue Mountain isn't a real easy hike but from that point on, the trail just keeps going downhill all the way to Unicoi Gap. It was a cloudy day, it was not raining, no snow other than flurries every now and

again, and the wind was not overly crazy. In other words, it was a good day to hike. It was the usual cold day, and the rocks were slippery, very slippery actually, all the way to the bottom of Blue Mountain and Rocky Mountain. You will descend Rocky Mountain as you come into Unicoi Gap. You will understand why it's called Rocky Mountain by the end of your day's hike there.

I remember my hike here in 2010 when there was an older couple in front of me and my daughter as we descended. Every 100 feet or so the lady had to stop and sit on a rock. The footing was treacherous, to say the least, nothing but rocks for a ground and those were wet and slippery. If that isn't enough, the walk down is steep and that does a number on your knees, even worse when you're caring a heavy pack.

It was rather easy to get a hitch into town, it usually is from this gap. The towns around the AT are very friendly to hikers and most of the time people will stop and give hikers a ride. I want to talk to you about this person in the Huddle House

who decided to help us on this peaceful night. We had been sitting in the restaurant for some time before anything happened. But what did happen was true southern hospitality. This older lady was sitting at a table a few away from us with a lady friend. They were eating and talking, and I was sitting so I could see her face and she could see me. I kept noticing her noticing us a lot.

Then all of a sudden the waitress brings us this food and tells us that the nice older lady at the table down there paid for it. We didn't have much money and could afford two coffees. We were quite thankful and let the lady know. That was the first thing that took place. After sitting there for some more time, we got to talking with the waitresses and they thought it was cool to speak to us about our adventure on the trail.

There was this real nice waitress that came to us and asked us where we were staying for the night. I bet they felt we had no place because of how long we were there drinking coffee. I am sure it was obvious. We told her we did not know and

had planned to just sit there till sunrise. That is when she handed us a wad of cash, it was $50, and it was all the tips she had made that night. We were very thankful, and she pointed out the window to the Motel next to the restaurant and said go there and get yourselves a nice comfortable room for the night.

So, we did. We ran into a lot of great people while hiking on the trail. We were told about trail angels and told they were all over and plentiful and we found that to be true. I will tell you that in 2010 when I hiked this entire portion again we were finding bags of food left by the angels at the shelters. It's a tradition that is still very much alive.

We were trying to get a foothold there in Helen, Georgia because we had enough of the abuse we were putting ourselves on the trail. We knew what we needed by now and we were in the right mind to do what it would take to make it happen. I wanted to go back to the trail, once I was better prepared, but I am sure my partner, at the

time, had different ideas about it. We had some money that we carried up the trail from day one. This was the first place where we knew we wanted to spend it. We had our dinner that night taken care of by angels, and our room paid for but now we needed a way to eat that following morning and knew that we would need that bit of cash to buy something to eat later on that night and that is what we did.

We ate good, decided we needed to get back into some sort of lifestyle that we knew and had plans to walk around the next day and look for some local work. So, we simply relaxed, cleaned ourselves up and took some much-needed downtime that night in the motel.



The Chalet Christy Motel in Helen, Georgia

Day 27- Zero Day in Helen Georgia #1

3-10-05

Today I woke so refreshed and clean and happy, it is very hard to leave back to the AT, but that's the reason we are here. We are sitting in a place tonight called the Chalet Kristy Motel on the river, not too bad. We managed to wash our clothes today with the remnants of the money we got last night from the waitress.

While we were in the laundry mat, I just asked the first man I seen if he could spare a dollar so we could get some lunch to eat and when

he asked how much we needed, I said "Well maybe just 5 dollars". So, we ate breakfast/lunch at Wendy's again, ha-ha. Then after that we walked the town going to all the hotels here and asking if anyone had any work to stay we could do. Our 5th place told us yes, so we spent about 3 hours cleaning the man's newly bought piece or property next to the hotel.

3 hours of collecting firewood and piling it up.....huh, we wouldn't know how to do that job would we? About 7 pm we walked back to the center of town and picked up our packs that one of the waitresses was holding for us, then walked to the edge of town about 4 blocks to a grocery store, bought us some dinner with our food stamps and finally back to our room here to shower, relax, eat, and sleep.

Will leave from here in the morning and hitch a ride back into Unicoi Gap to hike 2-3 days into Hiawassee, GA our grocery resupply point, here is way too expensive.

So, there we were, walking about all over town after leaving our heavy packs with a nice waitress at the Huddle House. We were looking for a place that wanted some top-notch workers. We were ready to work and make some money and spend that money at a nearby outfitters, we were ready for the gear we needed. Problem is, no one wanted to hire us.

We were not asking to be employees by anyone, we were asking for anyone who wanted some honest work for honest pay, under the table. You would think most places would jump at the chance to not have to pay taxes on a new worker. Problem is that wasn't the case. We were even telling folks they didn't have to pay us in cash, we would settle for a place to stay, maybe a nice meal.

We figured if we could get our feet in the door that they would learn how good of a deal we had for them, we were great workers. I have always had a great sense of work ethics and I am a hard worker, even today. I simply do not believe in doing what is called a "half-ass" job at anything.

We eventually found one man, the owner of the Chalet Christy motel down by the river that runs through the town. He told us a story where they had a flood back in the summer, that river had deposited a large amount of debris on the land around the Christy and the land next door. He had also recently purchased the land next door to the motel and was going to build cabins there.

He wanted us to walk around and clean up all that debris and would give us a room for the night. All the debris was mostly sticks and pine needle piles, but we were definitely used to collecting firewood, so to speak. It took a few hours and afterwards we were told we could relax for the night in the room, and he wanted to see us about 8 am to talk about possible long-term work.

In all actuality I was glad to have helped the man and glad for the earned room. However, my intuition was waving a very red flag and I felt that what he had in store for us was probably a bit over use. We had already made up our minds that we would be heading back to the trail the next

morning. So, for the remainder of the night, we gathered our bags, repacked them to make more sense and relaxed. We had used some extra money to get some dinner at the local Wendy's restaurant with what we had left over from the handful of cash the waitress gave us. We had washed up all our dirty clothing, as well and so we were more than ready to head on up the trail.

I had mentioned earlier that we had gotten pretty used to hiking and living out there and that now, when we came into resupply towns, we always felt strange. We couldn't wait to get back on the trail. Once again, this place was mostly for tourists as it is a Swiss style town, so although the local grocery store would take our food card, we decided it was so expensive that it was still not worth it.

Besides, we still had plenty of food that would take us on up the trail a few more days. We had done the planning and the math and knew that in a few days we would be able to hitch hike into Hiawassee, Georgia to resupply at a larger grocery

store. The small-town grocery store that is in Helen, Georgia is very small and very local. They have some interesting things but looks like they cater mostly to tourists. Helen, Georgia is a very beautiful place. If you are ever hiking the AT through Georgia, you have to make this one of your stops. In fact, I don't know of any hikers that do not stop when hiking through there.

If you have ever seen one of those small German town's that looks like it just right out of a Swiss Alpine magazine, complete with all sorts of eaters and small shops that all complete the culture scene, this is it. If there is one place I would relish to take a mature date, it's there at Alpine Helen Georgia.

Romance and good times are easy to find in Helen, Georgia and if you are all about the night scene, well, they have that too. Around Christmas time is one of the best times to visit with all the lights and decorations all over the town. Hikers take zero days here all the time. All the businesses

here are into the hikers too, they simply love the trail hikers.



The Cheesecake Factory site on the Georgia, AT.

Day 28- Unicoi Gap to Cheesecake Factory site 3-11-05

Woke up at 6 am this morning and quickly left to avoid any more stupid work, ha! We slept very good and warm. Not supposed to rain till next Thursday according to the weather channel. But here we sit high in the mnts. watching it snow off and on, the wind is about 30-40 mph and it's probably in the mid 30's because it is cold.

We will be in Hiawassee, GA in 2-3 days now, and we can resupply groceries at a good store called Ingles. We have been through so much and now I am ready for a break probably for at

least till next spring. So, we are staying at the Blueberry Patch hiker hostel near Hiawassee when we get there. We could have hitched into the place today, but I couldn't pass up a section of this trail for some reason. So, our hitch was a cold ride in the back of a pickup truck this morning. When we got to Unicoi Gap again, there was these people from a church in Helen doing trail magic.

They had this 80 thousand BTU propane heater, chairs, food, and equipment. They told us to help ourselves, so I did...we got 2 small new knives, grandma's cookies, pudding. brownies, chips, just all kinds of stuff. So, we are camped at a place called the Cheese Factory site. It seems this guy in the mid 1800's built and operated a cheese factory right here where our tent sits now.

Well, gotta get warm, only did 3.7 miles today, SO beat up from the trail.

If there is one thing that I will never forget, it is the feeling that I always felt after being off the trail for a few days and then coming back. It simply

always sucks, and I will tell you why. First, you are used to work, hiking and backpacking is work and when you go into a town you lay your pack by itself and walk around without that on. Do that for a few days and your body adjusts. Put that pack back on and come back to the trail and hit that terrain again and your body has to get used to all that again.

Same with eating. You eat one certain way on the trail, usually small amounts and simply meals but they are actually healthier that way. Then you go back into society, eat all that unhealthy food and many hikers' pig out, then they go back to the trail and try to eat simple again. Your body adjusts to all you do and when you ask it to readjust it is never a good thing.

In fact, many hikers will tell you, when they go to any town they hold back on certain foods, because they know their body will revolt. So, when we came back to Unicoi Gap and then tried to eat that night, we were feeling pretty ill. It didn't last long, and we quickly readjusted but it wasn't

comfortable. In addition to that, as soon as you come back to Unicoi Gap you have a very steep hike immediately. I believe the mountain is Tray Mountain and it ascends steeply from Unicoi Gap to the Cheesecake Factory site. Many hikers choose this area to take a lunch break, which you will need after hiking up that mountain. The Cheesecake Factory is simply a clearing on top of a mountain today.

There was a cheesecake factory on the mountain in the 1800's. It's a very nice place to camp and we chose this area to put up our tent for the night. We had thought we would do about 5 or more miles after leaving Unicoi Gap, but again, after being in town becoming soft to the trail…we were put into our place quickly. Now a bit about the trail magic that we encountered on the trail at Unicoi Gap on this day.

It was awesome! It was a cold day, no rain but cloudy, the huge heaters they had were set up so that there in the tent, when close to the heaters, you actually were able to get warmer. They had

camp chairs set up so that we could warm our feet. Boxes of food, fit for the trail, water bottles, fresh cooked hotdogs and hamburgers and boxes and boxes of gear, medical supplies, and miscellaneous items. They, of course, would talk to you about ole Jesus too, but we didn't care to listen. We did, however, sit down and rest a spell in a comfortable chair and took the time to look through all the free stuff they had.

We found some things that come in handy such as those small folding knives and conveniently packed food items. Items such as those individual Grandmas cookies come in real handy on the trail. Packs of sardines and packs of pita bread over regular bread, this is all great stuff for hikers to stash in a backpack. We grabbed a few things we needed to improve our medical kit as well.

To this day, I still carry that small folding knife I grabbed from the hiker box at that church's trail magic day. We said "no" to the hamburger and hotdog offers, especially after being off the

trail for a few days eating all that junk already. I remember what it looked like as we began to climb that mountain out of Unicoi Gap. It looked like every hiker before us had spent a week off the trail in comfort! Every hiker before us was staggered all up the trail as that trail reached towards the summit of Tray Mountain and it was incredible and very intimidating to me.

Switchback after switchback that trail winds to the top of Tray Mountain and it is steep, so steep we were walking only about 10 feet at a time, heavy packs, and lousy footwear. Our bodies trashed from abuse, we creeped up that mountain and so did every hiker that was there.



A hiker moving through the "Rhododendron Tunnel," Georgia AT

Day 29- Cheesecake factory site to Camp

3-12-05

Thank God, the snow didn't accumulate and today was like 72 degrees and sunny all day. But the wind kept us up all night and it never stopped all day. The radio man said the wind is 30 MPH, but up here in the mnts. its more. We woke to find six tents camped where we were. So, we ate some high energy food and moved out about 9:30 am.

We did about five miles today into a place north of Tray Mountain, the mountain we climbed over today. The AT is beginning to get busy with NOBO'S now and we haven't seen any SOBO's or day hikers. My feet are swollen at the heels and ankles are reddened, my shoulders are too but I go on knowing that every step I take gets me closer to the Blueberry Patch and Hiawassee, GA.

We are going to call my mother in Illinois when we get to that hostel which will be on Monday, two more days away. We will do five miles tomorrow and Monday morning, do 2.2 miles into Dicks Creek gap and then get a hitch into the hostel probably by 11 am. The hostel accepts donations as pay for your stay. But we will offer to work for our stay as we did at Neel's Gap hostel.

I'm going to try to get my mother to Western Union me some bus ticket money so we can take a bus into Ill. with her, and we will stay with her or my grandmother there working to get some money for better gear. Once we do get better gear and a

food reserve fund in place, we will return to the trail to continue on. However, that will most likely be next spring/summertime. If there is any member that wishes to meet up with us and do the AT with us they are more than welcome, but the member must provide his/her own tent, gear, money, and food otherwise. Just email me for details of where we (can) all meet at and start.

So, there wasn't much to this day in terms of happenings from the usual walk five miles over the course of five hours, but that is trail life. We woke up to snow everywhere. It had snowed through the night, but I was quite warm and resting very well. Probably one of the best places on the Georgia AT to tent is the Cheesecake Factory site. There was actual grass there, it was level, soft and there are trees, it's very nice.

However, because it is on top of a mountain, it is very windy and that night I knew it was snowing because the wind howled all night blowing the snow against the tent making noise.

However, we were quite warm. We had found ways to make it all work, found ways to adapt and had gotten used to most of the challenges the trail brought. We were actually no longer dealing with feelings of quitting early or daily arguments about doing this thing at all, which my ex was good at starting!

I personally loved this experience and would do it again, if I were much younger and I would probably have more in the way of protection from the elements too. But don't get me wrong, this was a spiritual journey, and I found the sacred aspects in all of it. Today, I know that the AT is a sacred place and may actually be seen as a portal into another dimension and I would agree.

As you can see in the journal entry above, we were still very much thinking of getting off the trail in Hiawassee, GA. And looking for work, upgrading gear and such and coming on back to the trail after it warmed. What we did not think about was that the end of the Georgia section was just after Hiawasee, if we hiked one more day after

that town we could say we had completed the Georgia section and survived some pretty harsh conditions, but again, we were new to trail life and didn't know much about it. However, as we all know plans change and you have all witnessed the changes in our plans all up this trail, according to the original journal entries. Well, this plan wasn't any different!

It had really warmed up because I remember hiking in shorts about this time. Not every day, but here and there the weather was reminding us that the days where growing longer and the warmer seasons getting closer and closer. The Appalachian Mountains can still get snow and ice and very cold temperatures in March and sometimes even April, but it is rare.

I mentioned that the trail was beginning to get busy not with those hiking north and that we had not seen many south bound hikers. This is because about March 14th, each year, is the official start season for those wanting to try to thru hike the trail. South bounders would not start their hike

until well after the north bound hikers start due to the differences in weather up north. But those that we were running into had only been on the trail about a week and were already passing us by. I have said this many times while on the trail, but I will say it again here. The trail is not a competition, and those that go there and practically run through the trail are missing the whole idea.

We watched as hikers practically blew us off the trail. They were doing nothing but looking down at the trail as they were scurrying by, didn't even look up to see anything in the area. When I go out into nature and even if I am hiking a long-distance trail with a destination, I take the time to stop and look around and take in all that nature has to offer.

I never let my ego try and prove I am the fastest hiker or most efficient hiker etc.; this is just ridiculous. I have mentioned the Blueberry Path hostel at least two times by now. The Blueberry Patch was a private residence hostel that used to operate just off the trail and was accessible from

Dick's Creek gap. The owners were two older people who were probably the nicest people I had ever met. The man of the family would be at Dicks Creek gap during the season to give hikers rides into the hostel. The hostel operated off of hiker's donations and was a very well kept up place. The name, the Blueberry Patch was the name of the private property because that is exactly what they grew there, blueberries, and a lot of them too.



The trail up Tray Mountain on the Georgia AT

Day30- Wilderness camp to McClure gap

3-13-05

Woke today a few hours late because last night was so warm and sleeping was awesome. I actually slept with no hat, t-shirt, and had to take off my fleece sleeping bag bottom cause I started sweating. It was the warmest night yet. Tonight, is supposed to be very similar. Hiked 4.8 miles today into McClure gap, just 2.2 miles from Dicks Creek gap where we can get to the Blueberry Patch.

I hiked in T-shirt and shorts today because the temp was almost 80 degrees. No wind and

nothing but blue skies. We were able to cook on a campfire last night and for lunch! Here in a few minutes am going to cook red beans and rice for dinner, on a fire. Mosquitoes are coming out now so make sure you bring bug spray, don't get Cutter, it doesn't last even 1 hour out here. Well, gotta go eat!

It was a very nice day for hiking. Although one might argue that it was actually to hot! You read that right, the temperature had really warmed up and it was so warm that we had started having to spray ourselves with bug spray to ward off the mosquitoes. Again, I give some advice here, the brand Cutter is what we used, well first used, and it just did not work at all.

However, we found this stuff that was made with more natural ingredients, to include essential oils. Lemongrass and peppermint are two of the ingredients in the Deet-free product by Deep Woods company. It is also in a nice strong bottle and has a spray set up as opposed to an aerosol. It

works quite well and in fact, I still use it today every time I head into the woods. We were being pulled now towards Dicks Creek gap and the Blueberry Patch hostel. I remember making plans about what we wanted to do once we got there. We had planned on offering to work at the hostel instead of offering a donation, we didn't carry any cash and we did not have funds in a bank somewhere.

We wanted to contact my mother whom we thought was the best option for getting some assistance with money for bus tickets from Georgia to Illinois where she resided. We had planned on just getting off the trail, working a 9-5 until the weather turned warmer and then getting back to the trail better equipped. I am sure that most people would have made today's hike a bit longer in order to get to that shower at the hostel sooner.

We were ready to shower, sleep in a warm bed, eat some good food and relax for the night but we were also not going to hike 13 miles into

McClure gap in order to make it happen. I remember just what we did to make the timing just right too. The fact was, if you missed the ride to the Blueberry Patch, you had to hitch hike or take a taxi from the gap. The owner of the hostel would only wait there at the gap between certain hours. So, we timed out hike the two days before getting to the gap so that we would be there at the right timeframe which was early morning.

We still hiked our usual five miles, five hours, or close to it. But no matter what, the remaining few miles we had to hike tomorrow was well worth getting closer for. We had met a few hikers who were also talking about stopping at the hostel who had been there before and there was nothing but great reviews for the place. Today, the Blueberry patch hostel is no longer in operation.

The owners retired and decided it was in their best interest to close the hostel down as well.



The Blueberry Patch Hostel on the Georgia AT 2005

Day 31- McClure Gap to Dicks Creek Gap

3-14-05

We are at the Hiker Hostel called the Blueberry Patch, about eight miles from the town of Hiawassee, GA. We got up about 7 am and moved out around 8:30 am. If you don't get here early enough, (you may not get in) there's only seven bunks and people try hard to get one. At Dicks Creek Gap, where we caught a ride from the owner of this Hostel, Gary Poteat, some church people were doing trail magic again.

They were handing out snacks, food, and drinks and offering up prayers. We are at the

hostel, eating fried chicken and mashed potatoes, warm and comfortable for this night and probably tomorrow night as well. We are in contact with my mom and trying to find out if we can hitch hike to there to have a place to stay. We will work to make money to upgrade our gear for continuance of the trail, probably about this time next year.

If she won't be able to help, then we are just going to hitch hike to a random location, we choose, to do the best we can on our own. We are thinking about Fl. So, stay tuned to see.

So, we had only hiked a bit over 2 miles into Dicks Creek gap today. Because most gaps, at a trail crossing anywhere, is at the bottom of a mountain most of the walk today was practically completely downhill. However, when you are carrying a heavy pack, which is not built to be carried over long distance, and sporting broken tennis shoes as hiking boots, as well as walking in constant pain…that two miles can be rough. I wrote this entry that evening when we had already

been at the hostel most of the day. Once we hiked into Dicks Creek Gap we were met with trail magic. Another church had set up a camp and was giving out all sorts of food and water, gear, and supplies to all the hikers coming through. Mr. Gary Poteat was there, he used to be the owner/operator of the Blueberry Patch hostel.

He gave us a ride into the hostel and was very happy to make conversation about all the stories we had from being on the trail almost a month. In fact, I remember how surprised he seemed when he learned just how long it had taken us to get there. He was a very friendly man, well dressed for country folk and delighted to take us to the hostel.

We stuck around the trail magic for a short while and then rode back to the hostel. There were no other hikers in the vehicle with us. When we pulled into the property Gary showed us into the hostel where there were no other hikers. He said that it wouldn't be long before it filled up and we might want to quickly choose a bunk and get

settled in. Then he tossed in a few logs into the wood burning stove and told us there was plenty of food and supplies in the kitchen to help ourselves because that is what it was for. However, after we grabbed our bunks and settled in we decided we wanted to get into town and grab some fresh food and some resupplies.

So, Gary told us where to stand and how to go about grabbing a ride. He told us that the people in the areas was very aware of the hostel and the trail, and we shouldn't have any trouble getting a ride. He also told us if we did have trouble to let him know and he would give us a ride later. We were able to grab a ride pretty quick. So, we went into Hiawasee, Georgia and was dropped at the local grocery store called Ingles.

Today Ingles is a struggling grocery chain in the state of Georgia, solely. I mentioned, in the journal entry, that we were eating fried chicken and mashed potatoes while I was writing in the journal. I remember we had chosen to eat this for lunch while we were at the store. We got our

grocery resupply and sat on the grass near the store eating our lunch. Then we walked about the town and decided to head back to the hostel after a few hours. We had used the telephone at the hostel to speak with my mother on this day as well. We were waiting for a call back from her that evening with information that would decide our next move.

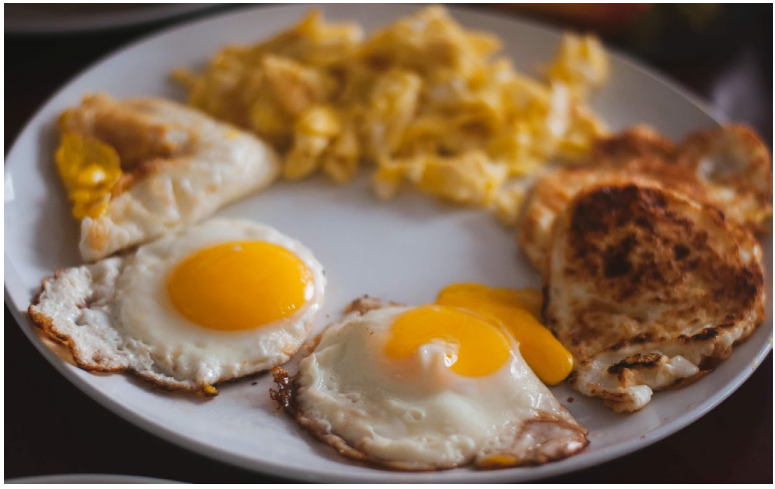
We did offer the hostel our work in exchange for staying but the owners declined and said that it was donations only and that we did not need to pay anything if we didn't have it. They talked about how the hostel is part of their religious ministry and that we only needed to relax and enjoy our stay. They did say we would need to head back to the trail after only a few days though.

This is to discourage people from giving up, I am sure and to be fair to those that need the hostel that did not yet have a chance to get a bunk. While we were there it did fill up pretty fast. In fact, we watched a few hikers come in pretty late that had to go back to the trail because there was just no more space. I remember how comfortable it was.

The smell of wood smoke, the sound of the wood burner all night, that little white noise…click, click, click, as it heats up or cools down. The soft sounds of hikers snoring. The beds were very soft, bunk style and we all had individual bunks. My ex and I grabbed a bunk set so we could chat while at our bunks.

This is where I learned about the healing power of Tea Tree Oil. My toes had begun to itch, burn and peel, it was athletes' foot and I had nothing to treat it with. A hiker in the bunk room saw me messing with my feet and offered a bottle for trial, it was amazing and in three days had cured my problem. After that we carried Tea Tree Oil with us every time we were on the trail.

Early that morning I heard Gary come in and throw some logs on the fire. We had been told that in the morning the main house was a gathering place for breakfast. We were told to be awake by 7 am and listen for the "breakfast bell". Wow, breakfast in the country, I couldn't wait.



Awesome country breakfast

Day 32- Zero day at the Blueberry Patch hostel 3-15-05

We woke today around 7:30 am and waited till the breakfast bell rang up at the owner's house. We were served a very nice breakfast, were talking Denny's style breakfast! Scrambled eggs, sausage, cheese biscuits, pancakes with homemade blueberry syrup, coffee, and orange juice. While we ate breakfast it snowed like an inch and the snowflakes were the biggest I've ever seen!

Then it warmed up real fast and all the snow melted really fast. We went into town again, hitching a ride with this lady and we enjoyed a few

hours on the internet. Then we walked over to Ingle's grocery (store) and ate a nice lunch of baked beans potato salad and Bar BQ sandwiches. Then we hitch hiked back to the hostel to find a totally empty hostel, no one came in till about 5:30 pm, then one girl showed up, (she was) from Florida. So, we are three people here comfortable in a hostel, alone.

Talked to my mother tonight and we are trying to get a place to stay where she is in Illinois. If not then we will just start a new venture to see each and every member of the clan in person. We have no transportation, so we will be getting around by hitch hiking.

It was a morning to remember. 16 years has gone by, and I can still feel the experience of sitting in that sunroom, transformed into a mass dining room. Fireplace burning nearby, it was cold outside but inside was a long family table full of warm homecooked food. It was set up in a converted sunroom. You know, one of those rooms

that is well insulated, warmed by a large crackling fireplace, with one whole wall and part of the ceiling solid glass. The floors were carpeted, warmly, and there was enough place settings and chairs around that big table to make you realize there was about to be a feast. The owners had gotten up early, apparently they always did, prepared a huge breakfast that was meant to feed a hostel of hikers and themselves.

There was orange juice, coffee, and milk to drink. There was sausage and homemade biscuits and gravy and scrambled eggs galore! It smelled so good, like walking into grandma's kitchen in the morning. We all congregated at the table, then we all sat down. The looks on the smiling faces of the hikers was enough to tell, we were all surprised, pleased and blessed. It was simply amazing!

It was the most amazing thing that happened to us since stepping foot on the trail and venturing into the wild some thirty plus days ago. It felt like home and felt like a family. We all shared and passed the bowls around the table. Mr. Gary Poteat

sat nearby enjoying a cup of coffee and Mrs. Poteat went to and from, filling cups and refilling mugs. Someone asked them if they were going to join us and eat. They said, no, that it was for the hikers that they had already eaten. You could feel the care, the love, it was wonderful. Then Gary had us all bow our heads in a downhome southern style prayer before eating and we all bowed our heads.

He prayed and prayed for each and every one to be safe on their journeys. As we lifted our heads to begin eating someone facing the wall of windows pointed and gasped, *"Look, it's snowing"!* We all turned to see the first flakes beginning to fall of what became a winter wonderland style moment all during that wonderful breakfast.

Because we were in a sunroom, you can imagine the view we had of the falling snow. Now I am not talking about a few flurries, but a snow fall rose up that simply put the cap on the most beautiful and wonderful moment we had on the Appalachian Trail in 2005! Ooos and ahhs could

be heard as everyone seemed to feel the moment of peace and love and country charm in that little room of trail family. Now the bunks in that hostel were warm, soft, and very comfortable. It was the best sleep we had had in weeks. We were waiting to hear from my mother, so we had planned a zero day here at the hostel.

We made it alright with the owners and then we hitched a ride into town, again. We figured we could use the internet at the local library and grocery store to improve a day of just sitting around an empty hostel, so that is what we did. Getting into contact with my mother, who lived in Illinois, some eight hours west, was easy, using the internet.

We used the grocery store to supply some great food for lunch, you know, the kind of meal you can expect a hiker to grab for once off the trail. BBQ, baked beans, and potato salad, it just doesn't get any more comfortable than that, it all hit the spot! We enjoyed the day for a few hours and set back towards the hostel, hitching a ride

back, once again. We arrived late in the afternoon and found the hostel completely empty. As you would expect on the trail, all the hikers had taken advantage of the day, a day to remember, a warm belly of great food and hiked on. We were trying to secure some cash for bus tickets so that we could make our way back to family. I had the feeling that things were not going to pan out as we wanted.

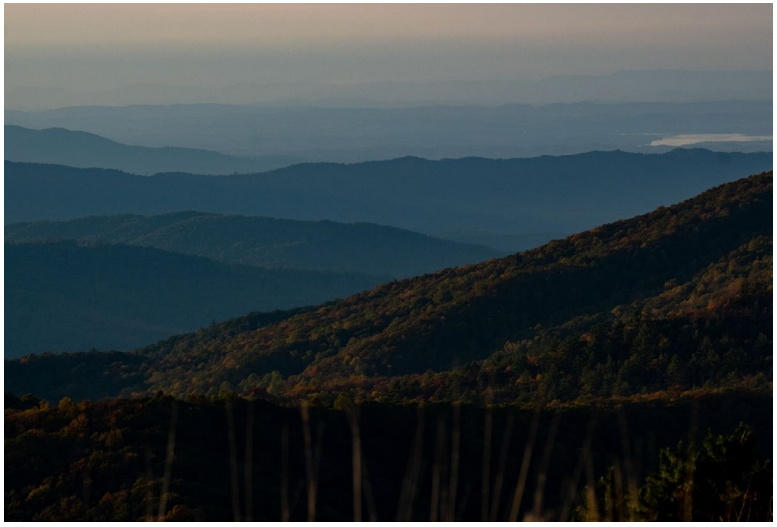
That evening we got word, I was right. My mother had not been able to help, this time and we were again, on our own with no plan and nothing to do but hike on. We decided to spend the night again at the hostel and use the new day tomorrow to get a good start on our hike. For the remainder of the evening, up till bedtime, we conversated with the Blueberry Patch owners.

We found that they also had a closet that was just slam packed with gear and everything a hiker could want. It was loaded with things that were left behind by hikers who had stayed at the hostel over the years, and they used it to supply other hikers

that needed things. Things such as a new pair of slightly used wool socks and slightly worn boots or a long sleeve base layer. They had everything from gear to clothing to medical supplies, even a food box. So, they offered us the go at it, and we took the offer. We grabbed a few things that we felt would benefit us as we had planned to hike on with no destination in mind.

That evening we sat around the table in the hostel and saw one other hiker come in off the trail. It was a young, single, girl from Florida. I thought that funny since one of the options we were mulling over was actually hiking all the way from Hiawassee, Georgia. To Clearwater, Florida. So, we chatted among ourselves, my ex-wife and me. We had decided that we were going on up the trail to the end of the Georgia section.

We had come to hike and that is just what we were doing. It just seemed that something wanted us to stay on the trail. Changing plans was not working, we had really gotten used to trail life and it seemed like something did not want me to quit.



Mountain View From North Georgia AT section

Day 33- Blueberry Path Hostel to Hiawassee GA. 3-16-05

Another night in the hostel, so warm, comfortable, peaceful…it was the best relaxation I recall in a whole month. Gary and his wife let us take what we wanted from the hiker stash they had and so now we had new socks, better base layers and even a coat each!

We felt we were slowly gathering better gear and things we needed to make the journey better and without working for one cent. The community on the Appalachian Trail is a true family and

hikers do take care of each other. Gary, in fact, is a retired hiker of the AT himself…I was not surprised because it seemed every trail angel we were meeting had that same ole story. We got up the usual 9 am, ate a breakfast that we prepared ourselves, no community breakfast was served, well there was just three of us. But we ate well, drank coffee and Gary gave us all a ride back to McClure gap where we could re-access the trail.

We dawned those heavy, garbage packs once again and with heads held high, we venture on. Our destination was Hiawassee hostel. I hostel that was ran out of a local small motel and very close to the border crossing of the AT into North Carolina. We had done the homework and found that if we walked to the border on the trail that we would have to turn around, hike back that whole day, back to Hiawasee.

We were not planning on continuing on into North Carolina right now, for sure. So, destination today, the hostel here, was the most northern point we will go. From here, we plan on trying to talk

with the managers and getting some sort of work in this small town. Again, with the plan, but if that does not work, we may actually begin hiking south, destination Clearwater, Florida. For now, we sit in the hostel, a warm, dry place but set up like some sort of homeless shelter or emergency response shelter. All the beds in one large room, all roll out beds and lined up like you would see in a FEMA camp.

We will sleep here tonight, but the eerie feeling we have with this place as well as the managers here, is strange enough that we will not sleep here again. A warm belly of mashed potatoes and tea tonight and very happy that this crowded room is mostly empty, just one other hiker here and he is practically gone constantly. Good night.

So, there we were, the most northern point we could walk to without being in the middle of the wilderness when we finished. Because, to some people, this may seem hard to understand, let me try and clear it up. We had hiked five miles on this

day, from McClure gap into Hiawassee, GA. Now you have to get a hitch into Hiawasee town from the trail and at this point trail hikers usually either use the Blueberry Path OR the Hiawassee hostel, not both, they are only five hours hike apart. So, most use the better option, the Blueberry Patch hostel, then they are taken back to McClure gap the next morning and released.

They then hike into Hiawassee on the trail and continue on the short distance to the border of the state. However, this location is in the middle of the wilderness, and I mean, deep. If someone had planned to get off the trail at the border they would need to get off the trail in Hiawasee to prevent hiking to the border and then turning around to backtrack all the way back to the town to access an AT shuttle or hitch to wherever they would go after hiking the trail.

Because at this point we had determined 100% that we would not cross into the Smokies of North Carolina, and end our trail journey at the border, we opted to get off in Hiawassee. The

remainder of the trail is only a few miles to the border. So, that is why we did it this way. If you have ever hiked to the border of GA/NC on the AT you will see that it is so remote that the hikers register, which you will see at every crossing and shelter, hostel etc., is literally built onto the side of a tree! Once you cross that border you would have been hiking a few miles in deep wilderness and would continue even deeper into the Smokies.

The hike to Hiawassee was easy and it took us a lot sooner to complete the walk today than usual. So much, in fact, that we had most of the later afternoon and all the evening to rest and explore or prepare for the next leg of our journey. We immediately knew that we did not like this place. I explained in the entry above how the place seemed, and it was dead on.

Even the people in charge of that hostel, which is not there today, seemed strange to us. So, we kept to ourselves, settled in for the night on our little personal bed and made a bite to eat. Some warm mashed potatoes always hit the spot when

we were on the trail, and it still does today. To end the day with a warm cup of decaf coffee or tea is also still my favorite way to do it. Because this was the end of our time on the Appalachian Trail I will simply lead this text into the next day and what took place. There was no journal entry for the following day because in our minds, we were finished with the trail, and we were either going to stick around town and work till spring or hitch hike on south to Florida.



The Great Smokies near Hiawassee, GA on the AT

3-17-05

Sleeping in the hostel at Hiawassee was strange. It was quiet but it was strange. I didn't sleep that well mostly because I found the bed way too soft. After sleeping on the ground for over a month, your body gets used to that stability and you have to have it in order to get good sleep, from then on. We woke at 9 am, the hostel was empty except for the two of us.

We packed our things and decided to speak with the owners and tell them we were seeking to

get off the trail and find work in the town for a while and asked if there was some way to pay for a motel room with work. That way we could have a place to stay, not in that hostel, while we stayed around there and worked in town. He didn't say no, in fact, he was sort of interested but needed to make a few calls, talk to a few contacts, etc.

So, we used the day to take a zero day here in Hiawassee and used the local library as a source for the internet. It was a great addition to trying to locate a job through the locals. Shortly before the end of the business day, we had a conversation with the owners of the Hiawassee Inn, the motel where the hostel used to be.

We didn't like the terms stated in the conversation, so we decided that it was time to move on. So, we threw our packs on and started walking in a general direction, due south. We were going to simply hike as far as we could and set up camp for the night. We were still pretty much in the country so that would not have been a problem. We would

certainly be looking to hitchhike all the way to Florida after getting more into a populated area, rather than camping each night. However, after only about twenty minutes of walking the country roads heading south, along comes a white passenger van and pulls up next to us.

Low and behold, guess who it was? Mr. Richard Mann, the trail angel that was there for us back in Suches, Georgia. He and his wife had taken us in and cooked us a nice dinner, let us use the shower, internet, and wash laundry. He recognized us, greeted us, and asked us where we were headed. We simply told him we were off the trail and headed south as far as we could get, destination Clearwater.

He asked us if we had planned to walk all the way there, we said we would if we had to and planned to try and hitch rides when we could. Then he told us he wanted to give us a ride as far south as he could. We informed him we had no funds and he said that he had a full van of hikers that had

already paid and that no funds were necessary. So, we got in. We agreed to ride around with him until all the hikers were dropped at their locations and then be taken as far as he could and be dropped off. After about an hour all the hikers were gone and only the two of us and Richard were left in the van. He took us as far as he could and set us at a gas station where he said we should have no trouble hitching a ride south there.

As soon as we were left at the gas station, said our goodbyes, we started walking around asking folks if anyone had room for us and were headed south. The first man I walked up to happened to be a trail runner at the Appalachian Trail. He was leaving the area, headed south for some vacation time. He had no problem giving us a ride out of the area.

So, it began, the second leg of our journey. We were taken about thirty minutes further south and released. We made our way to a service road that paralleled the interstate and began walking

south. Because it is illegal to walk and hitchhike on the interstate, we decided to walk side roads that paralleled the interstate all the way south. So, there it was, the adventure of a lifetime and we survived and became stronger and wiser because of it. Epic adventures like this one don't come about all the time and some people may never get the chance to really have an adventure like ours.

However, if you put your mind to it, you can alter your life so that you can make room for more adventure, all it takes is a will and there will be a way. Many of you may be asking, well what happened after that. We made it all the way to Florida, hitchhiking only had to be accepted three or four times in total and we found ourselves on the border of Tarpon Springs, Florida, which is a city next to Clearwater.

Eventually, we found our way to Clearwater. The Sacred Journal- An Appalachian Trail Adventure may have ended here, but another adventure had begun. Not on a trail but in the state of Florida,

and that is another story, maybe another book! But those nights and days on the AT will never be forgotten and the wisdom and spiritual awakening that came as a result of this epic adventure will go with me forever.

Appendix

Other works by this author include, but are not limited to: www.forgottenwisdom.etsy.com

- Preparing For The Collapse: How To Live Off The Grid
- An advanced look at Shikatakai martial arts
- An introduction to Shikatakai martial arts
- Basic meditations for beginners
- Jesus and Buddha two masters one path
- The Art Of Reading People
- A beginner's guide to the Martial Arts-White belt
- Using herbal remedies
- The Homesteading Children: An Abandoned Cabin
- Shikatakai martial arts training manual
- Understanding anxiety and depression
- Preparing for the collapse: Food production basics
- Recipes, Tips and Tricks for Vegetarians
- Preparing For The Collapse: Growing, foraging & making natural medicine

- The Magical Blue Butterfly
- The Mystery Of The Red Door
- Return To The AT- An Appalachian Trail Adventure
- Daddy-Daughter Bonding
- The Magical Golden Owl
- The Healing Puppy
- Preparing For The Collapse: Self Protection, Intuition & Survival
- Eyes Of The Autumn Moon
- Love's Unlikely Alliance-Embracing The Enemy Within
- Recipes From The Homestead
- Seed Saving 101
- The Unique eBook On How To Cook And Enjoy Wild Meats