

Getting Ready

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

I've thought about hiking the whole Appalachian Trail since I first hiked a part of the trail as 12-13 year old Boy Scout in Pennsylvania. One of my college classmates planned to hike the entire trail after graduation in 1979. I envied him. Finally, after my retirement last year after 37 years with IBM, Loral, Lockheed Martin, I've got the opportunity.

"You Can Call Me Al"

"You're off to Great Places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting,
So... get on your way!"
-Dr. Seuss

Hiking Plan

Saturday, April 08, 2017

My plan is to head north from Harper's Ferry on Wednesday, 19 April. After getting to the end of the trail in Maine, I plan to go to Georgia and head north again, finishing at Harper's Ferry. After finishing Maine, I am considering doing Georgia to Harper's Ferry next year since I am not a fan of hiking in the heat. I'll be supported by my wife, Dolora, meeting up about every two weeks.

I've been running four miles about five-six times a week to be in shape. For the last couple of months, my right knee has been bothering me. I've stopped running and been walking so it seems to be a lot better. I will be hiking as long as my knee holds up and I'm still having fun!

Getting Gear Together

Thursday, April 13, 2017

I've taken over the living room. Gear is spread out everywhere. I've been sorting it into a couple of piles - goes in my pack, leave behind, maybe and a box that I will ask Dolora to bring along when we meet up every two weeks or so. Weight is adding up pretty quickly but I am hoping to be around 20 pounds before food and water. The hard part is trading off weight for comfort. I've got a rough plan for the first month. I will be starting slow and hopefully increasing my daily mileage as I leave Pennsylvania.

My original backpacking experience was with a friend, Bob, back in high school and college. We would plan a week long trip at the end of summer before heading back to school. Trips that stand out were the Black Forest Trail in central Pennsylvania and the Northville Placid Trail in the Adirondacks. I weighed about 50 pounds less and probably carried a 50 pound pack. Now I plan to carry about 30 pounds. Gear has really changed in 40 years. Since some friends and family with little or no backpacking experience will be following my adventure, I plan to try to answer trail questions and describe gear choices as I start my hike. Let me know if you have any questions.

My complete gear list can be found at the link below. I will be updating it until I leave.

[Full Gear List](#)

What is the Appalachian Trail?

Monday, April 17, 2017

What is the Appalachian Trail, AT for short? The Appalachian Trail is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, running through 14 states from Georgia to Maine. The AT starts at Springer Mountain in Georgia and finishes at Mount Katahdin in Maine. This year it is 2,189.8 miles long. Trail length varies from year to year because of trail relocations and land acquisitions.

The AT was first envisioned by Benton MacKaye in October 1921. In August 1937, a footpath was completed from Georgia to Maine. In 1968, the AT became a national scenic trail under federal protection. Much of the trail was on private land, and some continues to be so today. The National Trails System Act allowed for the acquisition of a corridor for the trail.

There are more than 250 shelters located along the AT. Shelters are typically three sided buildings, usually with water and a privy, AT talk for outhouse, close by. Most shelters also have tent sites nearby. Shelters are a good place to meet up with fellow hikers and provide some protection in really wet weather, if you don't mind the mice.

Most parts of the AT are from three to six days between towns. This allows for frequent resupply and carrying less food weight. If a 2,200 mile hike seems ominous, thinking of it as 50 three to six days hikes makes it seem much more achievable.

[Appalachian Trail Map](#)

Unconventional Flip Flop

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

Hikers attempting to complete the entire Appalachian Trail in one season generally have three choices. A limiting factor can be severe weather at the northern terminus of the trail in Maine. Because of its northern latitude and altitude (5,267 feet), access to Mount Katahdin is only available to hikers from 1 June through 15 October.

Northbound

The vast majority of hikers start at Springer Mountain in Georgia and head north. Early shelters and campsites can be overcrowded because of the number of hikers. A start in March or April almost guarantees snow while hiking the Smokies. Northbound hikers should be in Harpers Ferry by 4 July or they risk not making it to Maine before Baxter State Park closes.

Southbound

Southbound hikers generally cannot start their hike before 1 June because of weather in Maine. There are fewer hikers heading south and hikers generally finish at Georgia in the late fall or early winter.

Flip Flop

A flip flop hike starts somewhere in the middle of the trail. Harpers Ferry is one of the more popular starting points. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy headquarters is located there. The ATC hosts a Flip Flop Festival in April. A conventional flip flop could start in Harpers Ferry and head north. After reaching the terminus in Maine, the hiker returns to Harpers Ferry and heads south to the southern terminus in Georgia. A flip flop avoids crowds and probably provides the most favorable weather conditions. The trail is a little flatter at the start, allowing the hiker to get conditioned.

Unconventional Flip Flop

I plan to start my hike at Harpers Ferry and head north. After reaching Maine, I would head to Georgia and head north again, finishing at Harpers Ferry. Since I live a little over an hour from Harpers Ferry, I would be finishing heading towards home! There's always the possibility that I would save the second half for next year and avoid the heat of summer in the south but I won't worry about that until I reach Maine.

Great Start

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

Destination: [Ed Garvey Shelter](#)

Today's Miles: 6.90

Start Location: [Appalachian Trail Conservancy Headquarters](#)

Trip Miles: 6.90



19 April - First white blaze.

Dolora made me a wonderful dinner last night. This morning we drove to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy headquarters in Harpers Ferry. I had my picture taken and then we took the 0.2 mile side trail to the AT. Dolora walked with me up to the bridge over the Potomac into Maryland. For the next two miles, the trail was flat and followed the C&O Canal. The day didn't stay flat. Got into Ed Garvey Shelter in the early afternoon. There is a north bounder here who started in Georgia on 1 January. Looks like there are two ladies staying in the shelter tonight. One from Wisconsin set her tent up inside. The other from Maryland is hanging a hammock from the shelter and sleeps with her dog in the hammock. Windy, cool and overcast this evening but no rain.

Day Two

Thursday, April 20, 2017

Destination: [Rocky Run Shelters](#)

Today's Miles: [9.10](#)

Start Location: [Ed Garvey Shelter](#)

Trip Miles: [16](#)



20 April - Rocky Run Shelter

Eric and Tim, section hikers from PA came in and tented last night. Woke to rain at sunrise. Rain ended about eight. After some coffee, packed up a wet tent and headed out. Passed a few south bound hikers. At Gapland State Park, took the opportunity to rinse some clothes, dry the tent and fill up with water. Sunny and warm until a short shower this evening. 9.1 miles brought me to Rocky Run Shelters. Two shelters and lots of tent sites. A couple of other flip floppers as well as the lady from Wisconsin. The other woman with the dog came in after dark. At least four other section hikers as well. Expecting more tonight. Looking forward to a hot shower 1.8 miles down the trail tomorrow morning. Saw a turkey on the trail this morning. Trees are starting to leaf out. Been great so far. Knees and feet are fine! I'll add photos when I have Wi-Fi.

Reptile Day

Friday, April 21, 2017

Destination: [Pogo Memorial Campsites](#)

Today's Miles: 10.70

Start Location: [Rocky Run Shelters](#)

Trip Miles: 26.70



21 April - Turtle

It rained overnight, so I had the opportunity to practice packing a wet tent again. Today was warm and sunny. Tonight is supposed to be dry for a change. After hiking two miles this morning, a hot shower and some laundry at a backpacker campground. Hiking really makes you appreciate a hot shower. Saw a turtle, garter snake, and about a five foot black snake while hiking. Pics will go on Instagram when I have Wi-Fi. At Pogo Memorial Campsite tonight, no shelter but a great spring nearby. Here with Hands and Mouth, another flip flopper who hiked the trail in 2015. Three section hikers and a couple came in later. Not eating as much as planned, I may skip my first planned resupply. Not looking forward to a big up to start the morning.

Wet Rock = Slippery Rock

Saturday, April 22, 2017

Destination: [Raven Rock Shelter](#)

Today's Miles: 9.90

Start Location: [Pogo Memorial Campsites](#)

Trip Miles: 36.60



22 April - Rocks

A gang came in last night after dark. Not sure how many since I left before they were up. Well, today's rain started about 5 a.m. and continued all day. The rocks are normally slick, the rain makes them even more slippery. Mud where there aren't rocks. A couple of slips. Temperature in mid 40's, nice on the uphill, ok on the level but cool on the downhill. Thought Hands and Mouth would be going to town for resupply but he was at the shelter when I got here. Trying the shelter tonight since it is still raining. Shelter will probably be full. There are a couple of Boy Scout troops here. Saw several more on the trail today. Had my first trail magic today. Someone left four gallons of water along the trail.

Trail Magic

Trail magic is the hiker term for trail generosity by people, **trail angels**, who expect nothing in return. It might be a ride into town, a hot dog, soda or even a place to stay. There are some famous trail angels, sometimes former hikers.

Goodbye Maryland

Sunday, April 23, 2017

Destination: [Tumbling Run Shelters](#)

Today's Miles: 13.20

Start Location: [Raven Rock Shelter](#)

Trip Miles: 49.80



23 April - Mason Dixon Line

Stepped into Pennsylvania today around noon, leaving Maryland behind. Maryland was kind enough to introduce me to lots of rocks before entering Rocksylvania. Sunny and perfect temperature for hiking today. Rain predicted for Monday and Tuesday. The shelter last night was crowded with several troops of Boy Scouts in tents nearby. Lots of snoring, glad I had ear plugs. Added an extra 0.6 miles this morning having to get water before getting started. Biggest day yet, 13.2 trail miles. Knees and legs feel good. Feet not so much. Dealing with a couple of blisters. Sleeping in the shelter again tonight, at Tumbling Run Shelters. Since there are two shelters, I have one to myself. There are three thru-hikers here, two brothers and a recent Marine. John a photographer for the York Dispatch came in late and is hammocking. He is section hiking. Will spend tomorrow night in a dry room with running water. Should have Wi-Fi to add photos.

Mud, Mud and Rocks

Monday, April 24, 2017

Destination: [Fayetteville, PA](#)

Today's Miles: [9.60](#)

Start Location: [Tumbling Run Shelters](#)

Trip Miles: [59.40](#)



24 April - Rocks

I woke up to rain this morning. So sleeping in the shelter paid off. Hiked most of the morning in the rain. Lots of rocks, there was mud when there were no rocks. Didn't see anyone hiking today. Did meet Jim at Rocky Mountain Shelters. He was staying there. An older retired guy, doing sections and hitchhiking the hard parts. Not thru hiking but doing sections. Quite a character. I'm in town tonight at a hotel for my zero. Doing my laundry and had a nice hot shower. It is supposed to rain all day tomorrow. I'll take the time to eat, rest and resupply.

Zero/Nero

A **Zero** is a day when you don't hike any trail miles. It's a rest day. You do get some non trail miles in by walking to breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as resupply.

A **Nero** is a near zero trail mileage day. You might hike only a mile or two into or out of town. Near Zero = Nero.

Zero Day

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

Destination: [Fayetteville, PA](#)

Today's Miles: 0

Start Location: [Fayetteville, PA](#)

Trip Miles: 59.40



Dinner on a zero day.

It rained on and off all day today. But this was a planned zero day. I was high and dry in a motel room. Spent the day roughing out the next couple of weeks. Was nice to have unlimited Wi-Fi and electricity yesterday so I could touch base back home and update pictures today. I've added some photos to my previous posts. Way too much food at the local diner and took the chance to get my resupply for next week. Tomorrow after breakfast I get a ride back to the trail. It looks like it will be warm and dry next couple of days. Today makes six of seven days with at least some rain. I'm looking forward to some nicer weather.

Back On The Trail

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

Destination: [Birch Run Shelter](#)

Today's Miles: 10

Start Location: [Fayetteville, PA](#)

Trip Miles: 69.40



The Green Tunnel

After a big breakfast at the diner, got a ride back to the trail. There's always a big climb coming out of town. Supposed to be sunny and warm. Ha! The drizzle started early and stayed until about noon. Saw a couple of section hikers and one thru.

Had lunch at a PATC cabin with Fjord, a female thru hiker who started in March. She was planning on a 30 mile day to try to catch up to some friends. Ten miles a day is enough for me.

A batch of people at the shelter, Neon, Mrs. Joy, two ladies section hiking together. Trail Snail, a gal from Germany, who is flip flopping. Skeptic, Sea Dog, Hot Pants, and Go. Nice group of folks. Got to the shelter early and decided to sleep in the shelter and try to get out early since tomorrow is supposed to be warm. Trying to get my miles in before it gets warm.

Hamburger Heaven

Thursday, April 27, 2017

Destination: [Campsite](#)

Today's Miles: [12.20](#)

Start Location: [Birch Run Shelter](#)

Trip Miles: [81.60](#)



The 2017 Halfway Point

Woke to a light drizzle. Drizzle through most of the morning. Glad all was dry in the shelter. Last one on the trail this morning. Planned to spend the night at a hiker hostel in Pine Grove State Park but it was closed for an event. We had heard the park general store wasn't open yet but what a pleasant surprise when it was. The crew from last night bunched up again there. A fabulous burger and a soda for lunch. Hiked a while with Skeptic. He is from Seattle and will be 70 next month. He completed the trail a couple of years ago. We parted when I stopped to camp. I've been trying to stay at about 10 miles a day and since the hostel wasn't open, already had 12 miles. Looks like I may be camping alone tonight. Several day hikers have been by since I set up camp. Planning on 13 miles tomorrow to get to a shelter.

The Rock Maze

Friday, April 28, 2017

Destination: [Alec Kennedy Shelter](#)

Today's Miles: 13

Start Location: [Campsite](#)

Trip Miles: 94.60



The Rock Maze

Ended up camping alone last night. After it was dark, there was some thunder in the distance. Had a thunderstorm overnight but things were mostly dry in the morning. I was out early for a change with a long day planned. Stopped at the Hunters Run store and had half an Italian sub for lunch and saved the other half for dinner. Pennsylvania's rocks are back today. After lunch there was a 500 foot climb to the "Rock Maze". Exactly what it sounds like. I'll post photos when I have Wi-Fi. Got into Alec Kennedy Shelter. Greybeard is in the shelter with his big dog Maxx. I'm in my tent down by the spring with No Doubt, a section hiker and Paula, a flip flopper. Paula is a 65 year old woman from DC who has never been

backpacking. Her son gave her a backpack for Christmas and told her she should hike the Appalachian Trail and here she is. She has a great attitude. Nice bunch of folks. Planning to stay at a hotel in Carlisle tomorrow night so I should be able to update photos.

100 Miles Done

Saturday, April 29, 2017

Destination: [Carlisle](#)

Today's Miles: 11.90

Start Location: [Alec Kennedy Shelter](#)

Trip Miles: 106.50



100 Miles from Harpers Ferry

Continuing the theme of rain, last night shortly after dark, there was thunder in the distance. A few minutes later we had a thunderstorm with some lightning. Things were pretty much dry in the morning when I packed up. Got my usual late start and after a little while it began to drizzle. Rain stopped by ten and the day stayed overcast, warm, and humid. Shortly after starting, Trail Snail caught up to me and we spent the rest of the morning hiking together. After a few early ups and downs, most of the day was relatively flat. Got into Boiling Springs about 10:30, checked out the outfitter and had a breakfast sandwich and coffee at a cafe. No Doubt, Paula and Trail Snail came over as I was finishing so I hung out for a while longer. A local couple had lots of questions for us hikers. Headed towards Carlisle and a hotel for the night. Played leap frog with No Doubt, Paula and Trail Snail for the rest of the afternoon. No Doubt

and Paula got picked up by a shuttle at Carlisle. No Doubt is returning to Harpers Ferry. Paula will be getting a shuttle back to the trail in the morning. Splitting a room with Trail Snail here. We seem to be on the same pace, both with sore feet. Had dinner at the diner next to the hotel. Another excellent, big meal. Not looking forward to tomorrow. More hills and the trail guide warns about a six mile rocky section. If they are warning you, I'm sure it will be tough. I've added photos to the last week's entries and Instagram.

Trail Magic

Sunday, April 30, 2017

Destination: [Cove Mountain Shelter](#)

Today's Miles: 14.60

Start Location: [Carlisle](#)

Trip Miles: 121.10



Trail Magic

After breakfast at the Days Inn Carlisle, we were on the trail by 7:30. I was planning a long day, 14.6 miles, so I can get into Duncannon early tomorrow. My feet need a nero day followed by a zero day. There were only about ten minutes of rain this morning so we'll count this as a dry day if the regular evening thunderstorm stays away. The day was cool and overcast. The first four miles were flat, sometimes through the fields of the Cumberland Valley. We ran into Trail Magic twice today. On the trail at Sherwood Drive, there was a sign that there was soda, water and a trash bag in the parking lot. Only

cold water and some drink mix was left but what a nice treat. We stopped for a for break at Darlington Shelter and some lunch. There was a copy of AWOLs trail guide, the 2017 edition, left at the shelter. Trail Snail has been using a less popular guide. She swapped it out for her guide. We have been doing the same mileage, both with feet problems. She's faster on the climbs but I'm quicker on the flats. In the afternoon, after a nice climb, we hit the section of the trail listed as "trail very rocky". It didn't seem any worse than the rocks I've already seen. Just that it is a six mile stretch. Finished two and a half miles of the rocks today. Saving the rest for tomorrow morning. My toes aren't too fond of the rocks. There is a bees nest in the shelter, so in the tent tonight on the trail to the shelter. It looks like it can't decide whether to rain or not. We'll see.

End of the Adventure

Monday, May 01, 2017

Destination: [Duncannon, PA](#)

Today's Miles: 4

Start Location: [Cove Mountain Shelter](#)

Trip Miles: 125.10



The famous Doyle in Duncannon.

Well, today, sore feet ended the adventure. Seemed like there was a very light drizzle over night. Not even enough to wet the tent through the trees. Woke up to a light fog and took my time packing up since there were about three and a half miles of rocks to look forward to before the drop into Duncannon, PA. I had planned a zero day and a meet up with Dolora. My feet ached through the night and after two weeks were still getting worse rather than better. My blisters have blisters. Headed down to Duncannon with

Trail Snail. Arrived around 10:30. Passed a laundromat and Trail Snail needed to do some wash. While she was doing her laundry, I went for some coffee. Dolora arrived just as we were finishing at the laundromat. Took photos in front of the Doyle Hotel in Duncannon. Google "Duncannon Doyle", it's famous in the Appalachian Trail circle. We met Dolora at the local ice cream place which didn't open until 2??? Since I was getting off the trail, I went through my resupplies and let Trail Snail take whatever she could use. The three of us went to lunch. I must say that all the meals in small town diners have been great with incredible prices compared to the DC area. Since there was still time before we could check in, we took Snail Trail to the supermarket to finish her resupply. Dolora and I dropped Trail Snail off at the ice cream place, so she didn't miss any of the trail! She was staying at the Duncannon campground. It was a sad farewell. Since we've exchanged email addresses and phone numbers, we hope to meet her again, either when she does her flip or finishes the trail. I plan to let my feet heal for a while before planning my next trip. There are still 500 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Virginia, only about 50 miles of which I've hiked. Hope to get back out again but I think I'll leave thru hiking to the youngsters.

A Wonderful Two Weeks

Wednesday, May 03, 2017

I wanted to take a day or two to get my thoughts together.

The best part of the hike was the people. From the section hikers, to the flip floppers to the NOBOs (North bounders), everyone was great. I met hikers varying in age from eleven to seventy. I heard there was an eighty six year old on the trail. Some folks had completed the trail in previous seasons. One hiker had never backpacked before starting on a flip flop. There were hikers who went out with just some food and clothes and stayed in shelters. There were hikers who had thousands of dollars worth of the lightest gear. Some hiked and camped with their dogs. There were business owners, ex Marines, nurses, masseurs, newspaper photographers, recent college graduates, retired teachers, retired machiinists, and a hiker from Germany. At the end of each day, we all gathered at the shelter as a little new community. People offered to share water, food, first aid supplies. One hiker gave foot massages. No one expected anything in return. Advice was offered on blisters, gear, tent setups. Only once do I remember a brief political discussion. Like most communities, people came and went based on their pace and length of their journey. Phone numbers, email addresses and photos were exchanged allowing you to be able to follow fellow hikers blogs. I expect to be following the adventures of some of the folks I met through the summer and fall. If I'm lucky, I'll meet up with some of the flip floppers near Harpers Ferry and be able to provide a little of my own Trail Magic.

The trail is beautiful but not really what you expect. There are some days with no vistas. Some days, it's foggy when you get to the vista. You may spend hours only glancing up occasionally, but always looking down for the next footstep. That's when you listen to the birds and notice all the little flowers along the trail. When it's raining and overcast, the lichens on the rocks seem to be the brightest color on the trail, neon green. You walk through a field and the cows come over to check you out. The little things are

where the beauty is. The pictures you see are always taken on a clear, sunny day. There aren't a lot of those days when you are at the right spot at the right time.

Then there are the things that we take for granted everyday. Getting to a dry shelter or tent at the end of a rainy day. A beautiful flowing spring, close to the shelter. A delicious hamburger from the general store when the Southbounders were telling you the store wasn't open yet. Getting into town with a hot shower, unlimited electricity (for your phone), and WiFi. Maybe even the chance to read a newspaper or watch TV, not so much though.

I'll let my feet heal and get back out. Along with the physical aspect, there is also the mental. Physically, I felt good except for my feet. I was worried about legs and knees and they were fine. Mentally, I think my future plans will be for two to four weeks at a time. As enjoyable as the social interactions are on the trail, I missed the daily family and friend interactions back home. It's hard to make a call to family and say "This has to be short because it will be three days until I can charge my phone."

Until next time...