

# *Getting Back On The Trail*

*Tuesday, August 22, 2017*



## *Trail Snail and me in Duncannon, PA*

I will be getting back on the trail at Harpers Ferry on Thursday and hiking south with Trail Snail (TS). TS is a hiker from Germany that I hiked with for a while in April. She made it to Maine and has spent the week with us getting some rest and relaxation before heading south to Georgia. My primary goal is to complete the section through Shenandoah National Park, a little over 160 miles. If everything feels good and I am enjoying it, I'll keep going! Like last time, I will try to update the journal whenever my phone has data. Photos will be uploaded when I get wi-fi. So if you see a photo in a recent entry, you may want to look at earlier entries or click the photo link. There may be more photos on Instagram since that is a little easier. Just search for "alstoffa". I do enjoy your comments and will try to respond. Wish me luck!

Happy Feet

"You're off to Great Places!

Today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting,

So... get on your way!"

-Dr. Seuss

## *Getting Ready*

*Wednesday, August 23, 2017*

Getting excited about heading out on the trail tomorrow. The weather looks to be a little cooler with a drop in humidity. I will probably spend today packing and repacking. Tomorrow morning, Dolora will drop Trail Snail and me off in Harpers Ferry. I'll be heading south this time and starting off with a section of the trail I haven't hiked before. Dolora will be meeting us in Front Royal on Monday for a late lunch/early dinner and some resupply. Then it is into Shenandoah National Park (SNP) where we can eat at a wayside, sort of a camp/park store, and resupply almost everyday. About eight days later, Dolora will again meet us as we leave SNP. It will be nice to start off with a pack that is not too heavy and reasonable mileage. Hope my feet hold up better than April!

## *Back On The Trail*

*Thursday, August 24, 2017*

**Destination:** [David Lesser Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** [8.70](#)

**Start Location:** [Harper's Ferry Appalachian Trail Conservancy](#)

**Trip Miles:** [8.70](#)



*Back On The Trail*

Drove to the Appalachian Trail Conference Headquarters in Harpers Ferry. There was some discussion about a new trail name with Dolora and Trail Snail (TS) since "You Can Call Me Al" gets shortened to Al and that's not a real trail name. I said Happy Feet would be good if my feet were okay this time. Dolora and TS liked that trail name. While walking, TS and I decided that Happy Feet would also work if I had foot problems as an ironic trail name. I still need to think about it for a day or two. Trail Snail had another photo taken and met another hiker from Germany at the AT HQ. We took the side trail to the AT and headed south this time. Dolora hiked with us across the 340 bridge. Said our goodbyes, until Monday, and headed from West Virginia to Virginia. Beautiful hiking weather for Virginia in August, less than 80 degrees and low humidity. About 9 miles today to David Lesser shelter. Beautiful shelter with a deck and swing in the cooking shelter. Level tent sites have benches and a picnic table. The spring is a little far away down a steep trail but running well with nice cold water. A bunch of hikers stopped by for water and some ate but it looks like we may be the only two here tonight. The forecast is for no rain. If that holds, I'll already have as many days with no rain as my April hike! Feet are happy so far.

## *The Rollercoaster*

*Friday, August 25, 2017*

**Destination:** 1002.7 mile Campsite  
**Today's Miles:** 11.70  
**Start Location:** David Lesser Shelter  
**Trip Miles:** 20.40



**Campsite**



There were a few raindrops last night but the tent was dry in the morning. I'll count that as no rain. Already as many rain free days as the last hike! One more hiker came in last night. There was another food bag hanging on the bear pole when we left. Maybe in the shelter. After about seven miles, we hit the "Rollercoaster". It lasts for thirteen miles and is mostly up and down with few views. Ran into quite a few section hikers there. My pack is only 26.5 pounds since I've dropped a few items and we plan frequent resupply stops. Since we were replying at Bears Den Hostel and it didn't open until five, there was a short side trip to the Horseshoe Curve Restaurant for a late lunch, early dinner of a cheeseburger and fries. There are some advantages of the AT crossing so many roads. From there it was a short trip to Bears Den and off to our campsite. One other hiker here tonight and another dry night forecast. My feet are still happy today. If they are happy tomorrow evening, perhaps a new trail name. 11.7 miles today plus one mile of side trails.

## *The Roller Coaster*

*Saturday, August 26, 2017*

**Destination:** 991.7 mile [Campsite](#)

**Today's Miles:** 11

**Start Location:**

**Trip Miles:** 31.40



***Only 1,000 miles left for Trail Snail.***

Saw three deer, or at least tails in the first half hour of hiking today. After 2.7 miles this morning, Trail Snail (TS) celebrated having only 1,000 more miles to complete the Appalachian Trail. She's counting down miles now instead of up. Lots of section and day hikers out for the weekend. It's easy to tell by looking at backpacks. Day hikers have small packs like the kids use for school. Section hikers have big, heavy packs. Thru and long distance hikers have the packs in the middle and everything looks more used. "Wizard", who summited in Maine with TS passed by today. The "Roller Coaster" consisted of eight climbs without a view. Checked out Rod Hollow Shelter where we planned to stay but it was early so we headed down the trail to camp besides a stream and avoid the crowds at the shelters on weekends. Probably only room for one more tent but no-one else here yet. Another dry day, twice as many as last trip! Next week doesn't look as dry. Let's hope the forecast is wrong. Did eleven miles and finished the "Roller Coaster" today, plus about 0.2 miles of side trails.

Feet are fine today. I think the change in trail names is good to go. I will be changing to Happy Feet as soon as I figure out how...

## *Beautiful Weather*

*Sunday, August 27, 2017*

**Destination:** [Jim and Molly Denton Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** 16.80

**Start Location:** [991.7 mile Campsite](#)

**Trip Miles:** 48.20



***Sky Meadows State Park***

I forgot to introduce another hiker term yesterday. It's PUDS, Pointless Ups and DownS. The hike thru the Roller Coaster yesterday was full of PUDS. No views all day.

The weather today was as good as it gets in Virginia during August. Low humidity with a high around seventy. The lack of continuous ups and downs made it better. The trail goes through Sky Meadows State Park. It was nice to have some open fields for a bit instead of the usual "Green Tunnel". We stopped at Manassas Gap Shelter for lunch but since the weather was great and the trail easier than yesterday, decided to head for Jim and Molly Denton Shelter. This is one of the nicest shelters I've stayed at. The shelter has a nice deck with an Adirondack bench, separate cooking shelter and a solar (cough, cough) shower if you don't mind cold spring water and no door. Still nice to get the grime off. This is our most crowded camping so far, three other people here tonight. Saw one more deer today. Got a better glimpse of this one, probably born this spring. Did 16.8 miles today. I'll see how I feel in the morning!

Tomorrow, after a short five miles, we meet Dolara for lunch and resupply in Front Royal. Trail Snail needs to visit an outfitter looking for new insoles, her feet are still bothering her. Then it's in to Shenandoah National Park in search of a bear photo.

At the bench in the photo, we met a couple out on a day hike. He had a pretty bad blister on his heel. Using some of our foot aid supplies, we fixed him up hopefully making the trip back to their car a little less painful.

## *Mountain Home Cabbin*

*Monday, August 28, 2017*

**Destination:** [Mountain Home Cabbin - Front Royal](#)

**Today's Miles:** [5.20](#)

**Start Location:** [Jim and Molly Denton Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** [53.40](#)





### ***Mountain Home Cabbin***

Easy 5.2 miles this morning. To US522 in Front Royal, where Dolora met us with food for the next section. After finding out the barbeque place we wanted to eat at was closed on Mondays, we went to lunch at the Knotty Pine Restaurant. Everyone had an excellent breakfast for lunch. Found the local Wal-Mart and some insoles for Trail Snail. Then off for ice cream. During our travels, we also picked up some dinner for later. Dolora dropped us off at the Mountain House Cabbin (that's how it's spelt). Spending the night here with Trail Snail, O Man and Flower Child. Nice little hostel that was originally a log cabin and slave quarters. Will probably zero tomorrow and stay here another night. Calling for pretty good rain tomorrow and we need to stay in a campground on Sunday night during Labor Day weekend. Adding one day let's us get into the campground.

There are some advantages and disadvantages to hiking the next 103 miles through Shenandoah National Park (SNP). The advantages are fairly easy terrain and frequent "Waysides". Wayside is the park term for a sort of convenience store for visitors. We can resupply every day or two and have a meal at the wayside. This helps keep pack weight down. The disadvantages include crowds and bears. The crowds largely disappear during the week and will pretty much be gone after Labor Day. While it is a highlight to see a bear, since they are not hunted in the park, they are accustomed to people. Most of the shelters on the AT have either bear boxes or bear hooks to keep your food out of their reach. You can hang your food from a tree when you camp but the bear boxes and hooks give you a much better feeling of security. So while hiking SNP, we'll be tenting near shelters. This pretty much sets mileage for each day. We are planning to be out of SNP in 11 days.

# Zero Day

Tuesday, August 29, 2017

**Destination:** [Mountain Home Cabbin - Front Royal](#)

**Today's Miles:** 0

**Start Location:** [Mountain Home Cabbin - Front Royal](#)

**Trip Miles:** 53.40



## *Mountain Home Cabbin Breakfast*

Well the decision to zero today is looking pretty good. Rain started before it got light. At ten am, it is 57 degrees with a steady rain. Up to 59 degrees at 6 pm. Scott, our host made a wonderful breakfast for Trail Snail, Flower Child, O Man and myself at eight. We all slept in since everyone is staying a second night. Scott filled us in on the history of Mountain Home at breakfast. It's has a historical designation. The main house built in 1847 will open as a bed and breakfast next June. Trail Snail had hiked with O Man in New Jersey and New York so they did some catching up last night. O Man is retired from Corning and lives in Corning, NY. He is a flip flopper like Trail Snail. We had a nice conversation after breakfast about work, retirement and children. His oldest son is in medical school and doing a residency in Charlottesville where Greg went to school. O Man is planning to meet him in Charlottesville.



The hostel is filling up tonight with three additional hikers since there was a steady rain all day. Getting a little cozy. I'm ready to get back hiking. Additional hikers are Princess Bubblegum, a maybe 20 something gal, and Hippo, an older German man, both flip floppers. Hippo is chatting it up with Trail Snail in German. Also in is Flash, an 18 year old male south bounder doing 20 mile days.

I have had very limited cell service in my previous treks through Shenandoah National Park . So I'm not sure how frequent my updates will be. Going for dry weather tomorrow.

## *Gravel Springs Hut*

*Wednesday, August 30, 2017*

**Destination:** [Gravel Springs Hut](#)

**Today's Miles:** 13.80

**Start Location:** [Mountain Home Cabbin - Front Royal](#)

**Trip Miles:** 67.20



*Trail dinner.*

After breakfast at Mountain Home Cabbin, Trail Snail and I headed out. The rain had finally stopped. Everyone at the hostel was heading in different directions. Flower Child and Flash are hammocking here tonight plus another tent. O Man was planning to visit Urgent Care to have an ankle checked out. Princess was planning to hike along Skyline Drive instead of the trail. Hippo was planning on a zero, another day at the hostel. We entered Shenandoah National Park (SNP) after about 4 miles. We'll be in SNP for about 10 days. Hiking is really pretty nice, not a lot of rocky stretches and the climbs aren't too steep. Today's animals included a deer, a hummingbird and a squirrel. We only passed a few day hikers. We're tenting as usual and there are two other hikers in the shelter.

Trail Snail (TS) went to the spring to get water. I heard a bunch of shouting and whistles blowing. Since SNP is known for its bears, I figured someone on the trail to the shelter saw a bear. When TS returned, she said she was filling her water bag and turned around to find a bear about ten feet behind her. She yelled to the guys in the shelter and blew her whistle. The bear was not aggressive and ran away. Unfortunately, no photos.

While we were eating dinner at the table in front of the shelter, Moving Target came by for water. TS hiked for a couple of weeks with him through New Hampshire and Maine. They summited Kahatdin together but they didn't plan to hike south together.

Looking forward to breakfast and maybe lunch tomorrow at the wayside. That's where I'll resupply with food.

## *Byrds Nest #3 Hut*

*Thursday, August 31, 2017*

**Destination:** [Byrds Nest #3 Hut](#)

**Today's Miles:** 17.50

**Start Location:** [Gravel Springs Hut](#)

**Trip Miles:** 84.70



***View in SNP.***

Got on the trail about 7:45. When I got to Elkwallow Wayside around eleven, Trail Snail (TS) was chatting with Moving Target. Had an egg, cheese and ham muffin and a cup of coffee. Picked up a couple of items for a short resupply. Ramen and Spam for dinner. While we were packing up, Flower Child and Flash came in. TS and I looked at the weather forecast with heavy rain Friday night and Saturday. We altered our plans a bit to do more miles today so we could resupply and get to a shelter earlier tomorrow. Seemed like a good idea but that added an 1,100 foot climb at the end of the day when we were already tired, making a 17.5 mile day.

Got into Byrds Nest #3 Hut after five. There's a group of about a dozen hikers, maybe a college group, loud. About 5 hikers in the shelter. Flash is hammocking here as well. A nice six or eight point buck came into our camp while setting up. Looking forward to another good breakfast or lunch tomorrow. Six miles to the restaurant and result.

Feet are still doing well and the weather has been great for August in Virginia.



# *Trail Magic*

*Friday, September 01, 2017*

**Destination:** [Rock Spring Hut](#)

**Today's Miles:** 10.90

**Start Location:** [Byrds Nest #3 Hut](#)

**Trip Miles:** 95.60



## *Trail Magic*

Left Byrds Nest #3 Hut about 7:30 to head to Skyland Resort and Restaurant for some food and resupply. Since there is a chance heavy rain tomorrow, we needed an extra days food in case we stay in the shelter. Although the resupply options were pretty poor, we ran into some trail magic. Trail Snail (TS) hiked with Aleve in New England. Aleve is a retired air traffic controller. He got off the trail because of knee problems and lives near the trail here. Aleve and TS had been texting so he knew her approximate whereabouts. When we got to the restaurant, the hostess told us that someone was waiting for us at a table. It was Aleve and another hiker, Smokey Bear. We all enjoyed a wonderful breakfast and Aleve treated. He also gave us money for our next cheeseburger. And to top it off, he gave us a half dozen glazed donuts. Flash was also at the restaurant. The trail magic makes up for the poor resupply options.

Just as we headed out, it started to rain. The cool temperatures and rain are making it a little chilly but the rain had been light so far. We got into Rock Spring Hut as the train picked up. A short while later, four hikers from Michigan came in. They're out for a week. Possibly a pair of father and sons. Everyone is in

the shelter tonight. Hope there are no mice. Guessing we'll see some more hikers as it gets later. Glad we got here early.

If the rain stays hard tomorrow, we will stay here but the plan is to just get up late morning stop at Big Meadows Wayside for lunch and continue to Bearfence Mountain Hut. An easy 11.5 mile day without any really hard climbs.

Kind of cool now so nestled in my quilt although I do have to get out to make dinner!

## *100 Miles*

*Saturday, September 02, 2017*

**Destination:** [Bearfence Mountain Hut](#)

**Today's Miles:** [11.50](#)

**Start Location:** [Rock Spring Hut](#)

**Trip Miles:** [107.10](#)



***Deer in SNP.***

After 5:30, three more young guys came in. Two off then hammocked and one, Yogi, slept in the shelter, making seven of us in the shelter and perhaps another dozen tenting nearby. There was lots of

commotion in the shelter after it got dark. The two younger guys from Michigan were sleeping on the top deck. There was a mouse running around up there and they weren't too happy. Along with snoring, another reason to avoid shelters.

It was really cool and windy and rained pretty good most of the night. We waited until the others hikers left the shelter before packing up. The weather forecast was for light rain, so we decided to head out to Big Meadows Wayside for lunch and resupply. The wayside is up over 3,300 feet. When we hit the road, the wind was blowing the rain in your face. It was cold. After some coffee, a cheeseburger and side salad, we resupplied. Not much since we hit a camp store after 0.7 miles tomorrow. We walked the seven miles to Bearfence Mountain Hut in a light rain but it was a little warmer. Shortly after leaving the wayside, we saw a couple of doe and fawns eating along the trail. I got several photos since they weren't skittish at all. The Michigan crew from last night and Yogi are in the shelter. We're tenting nearby. I didn't see anyone else. Right now there is a heavy rain but I'm warm and dry in my tent. Supposed to be dry and much warmer tomorrow.

Hiked 11.5 miles today, getting me over 100 miles for this trip. About 60 left to get through Shenandoah National Park. Then maybe another week and 55 more miles for a total of about 200. Feet are holding up well this time!

## *20 Mile Day*

*Sunday, September 03, 2017*

**Destination:** [Pinefield Hut](#)

**Today's Miles:** [20.60](#)

**Start Location:** [Bearfence Mountain Hut](#)

**Trip Miles:** [127.70](#)





### ***View in SNP.***

After an all night rain, we were slow to pack up wet tents and get going. We planned on a twelve mile day to the next shelter. Passed another tent on the way out. The rain had stopped but it was pretty misty. After a little bit the sun came in and out. Moving Target and another hiker passed. We caught them stopped watching a nice buck right next to the trail. I think I have some nice photos. Finally, with a nice day on Labor Day weekend, we saw lots of day hikers and some section hikers. The trail was nice with only one 1,000+ foot climb.

Our original plan was to head for Loft Mountain campground on Monday and stay Tuesday for some showers and laundry since it's getting close to a week! But the weather forecast would have is taking a nice day off and hiking in the rain. I had my first fall today, tripped on a root. Only injured my pride and got some mud on my knee and elbow. Instead, we did 20 miles today to get into the next shelter, Pinefield Hut. This way we can get into the campground by noon tomorrow, eat hamburgers for lunch and dinner, get laundry done, take a shower and leave the next day. We will probably end up hiking in the rain on Wednesday, but Dolora is picking us up and taking us to Waynesboro. Since we know we have a warm, dry hotel waiting, it should be bearable.

The shelter here is full tonight. There are a couple of tents behind the shelter next to the bear poles. We're in the tenting area nearby. It's a nice evening. A doe and her fawn have been wandering around our campsite. Really looking forward to a shower tomorrow.

# *Shower and Laundry*

*Monday, September 04, 2017*

**Destination:** [Loft Mountain Campground](#)

**Today's Miles:** 6.50

**Start Location:** [Pinefield Hut](#)

**Trip Miles:** [134.20](#)



***900 more miles to go for Trail Snail.***

Today was a short trail day only 6.5 trail miles but a bunch of side trail miles to the wayside for lunch, the camp store, campsite registration and back to the camp store for laundry, shower and resupply.

Left camp around eight, since we wanted lunch instead of breakfast at the wayside. Trail Snail celebrated only having 900 miles of trail left. Saw a few day hikers and section hikers on the last day of the long weekend. We arrived at the Loft Mountain Wayside around 10:45. The guy at the counter let us know that lunch didn't start until 11:00. After enjoying a cheeseburger and fries and chicken Caesar wrap, it was on to the camp store to check out resupply options. That's where the showers and laundry are located. From there it was off to the campground. Spoke with a nice couple who told us we were supposed to pick a site and then go register. Found a flat, grassy site got two tents across from the camp hosts and bathrooms. As usual, deer are wandering around. Usually, a doe with a fawn. I headed 0.3 miles (even though they don't count) to the camp store to do laundry and shower while Trail Snail sealed the seams on her tent. Ran into Moving Target and another hiker at the store. When I got back, we decided not to walk the mile down and mile back for dinner. Trail Snail went for her shower and brought back tuna salad and crackers and M&M peanut for my dinner. I added some Corn Nuts from my pack to round it out. We hung our food from a tree, bear bagging, since we don't have a car to lock the food in. There's a sign in the bathroom that says "Do Not Throw Food Trash in This Garbage, Bears will enter and be trapped in the rest room." That would wake you up in ghee morning!

Nice to be in the tent, showered with clean clothes. We plan to be hiking by seven tomorrow so we can get some miles in before a late afternoon rain. Planning on another twenty mile day. Then a short day to a warm dry hotel.

## *Thunderstorm*

*Tuesday, September 05, 2017*

**Destination:** [Calf Mountain Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** [19.70](#)

**Start Location:** [Loft Mountain Campground](#)

**Trip Miles:** [153.90](#)





### ***View in the south end of Shenandoah National Park***

It got really windy last night at the campground. No rain, but it kept me from a sound sleep. Since it was supposed to rain late today and tomorrow, we planned another twenty mile day so we would have a short day in the rain to meet Dolora in Waynesboro. We were out by seven. The trail was relatively easy today with no long climbs. Saw a few more deer. As I was sitting on a stone fence along Skyline Drive reading the guide, a fellow drove by in a pickup, stopped and backed up. He asked me if I was ok. Guess I'm not looking too well. We stopped for lunch near a parking area for a cross trail. Shoes usually come off for our lunch breaks. A couple came by and asked Trail Snail if she was alright. The woman asked if she would like some ice and gave Trail Snail an ice pack to use. TS put the ice pack by their car with a flower as a thank you. Little pieces of trail magic.

Late in the afternoon, it looked like rain a couple of times. But it held out until we were about a mile from the shelter. It rained and thundered and lightnined for our last thirty minutes to the shelter, even a little hail for good measure. The shelter was 0.3 miles off the trail, with the spring 0.1 mile before the shelter. Since we were already soaked, we filtered water before hitting the shelter so we didn't have to go back. No leaks in the shelter. It was nice to get into warm, dry clothes.

Two more hikers have come into the shelter, Switchback and Wizard. Both with stories about the lightning.

Plan is to meet Dolora around noon tomorrow. We'll go into Waynesboro for resupply and take a zero day on Thursday. Then back hiking for about another week. Hoping for cooler, dry weather.

# Waynesboro, Virginia

Wednesday, September 06, 2017

**Destination:** [Waynesboro, Virginia](#)

**Today's Miles:** 7.70

**Start Location:** [Calf Mountain Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** 161.60



*Hiking in the rain.*

Staying in a shelter is never as restful as your tent. One of the hikers who came in last night, tossed and turned more than I do. The newer, warm sleeping pads are noisy, that woke me a few times. But no mice that I was aware of! Switchback, one of the hikers who came in last night, is from Georgia and had done a little over 26 miles yesterday. A little long for me.

After getting caught in the thunderstorm yesterday on our last mile to the shelter, it stopped raining after about an hour in the shelter. Of course it did not rain all night. Since we were meeting Dolora at 12:30, we needed to leave the shelter at nine. It started to rain right before we left. We hiked the seven and a half miles, three and a half hours in a steady rain. It was a little chilly when we stopped but made bearable by knowing I would be spending the night in a Hampton Inn and Trail Snail in a nearby hostel.

So after a big lunch at a local Italian restaurant, it was off the the outfitter and Walmart for resupply. Trail Snail found some shoe insoles that she said felt wonderful. Hopefully, it will reduce or eliminate her foot pain. We resupplied with six days food since there are no resupply options on the next stretch. Our packs will be heavy after getting used to only carrying two days food through Shenandoah National Park. We went to the hotel and exploded our packs in the room to reorganize and pack food. Dropped Trail Snail off at the hostel and went for some dinner with Dolora. We had a couple of good sandwiches at a local pub and headed back to the room. I still have some things to dry out after today's rain.

We had originally planned to take a zero day (not hike) tomorrow but since the weather will be nice for the next couple of days and who knows how and when the hurricane may affect things, we decided to head out again tomorrow morning. Dolora will drop us off back on the trail after breakfast tomorrow. Plan for me is to be out for six more days and about 55 more miles.

## *LASH*

*Thursday, September 07, 2017*

**Destination:** 849.6 Campsite - Humpback Mountain

**Today's Miles:** 12.30

**Start Location:** Waynesboro, Virginia

**Trip Miles:** 173.90





*Cabin ruins.*

I forgot to mention a bit of trail magic we ran into yesterday. While hiking in the downpour, Trail Snail (TS) came across a folded red bandanna next to the trail. Her yellow one was looking more like a rag than a bandanna, so she got an upgrade.

I had breakfast with Dolora and then picked up Trail Snail. We were back on the trail by ten after saying goodbye to Dolora and the brownies and bagels she brought. Both northbound and southbound, as you get to the highway that heads into Waynesboro, there is a list of trail angels that provide free rides to hikers. Yesterday, while waiting to meet Dolora, Wizard was met by one of the drivers.

As soon as we got back on the trail, we meet Wizard and Switchback again. The trail angel who have Wizard a ride came back for Switchback and let them stay at his house for free. Understand, these were smelly hikers who had been hiking for hours in a downpour. There still are good people out there (besides Dolora for supporting my adventures).

While hiking, we passed an older couple who had spent the night at the hostel with TS. The trail was pretty nice today and it was perfect weather for hiking, about sixty degrees in the woods, sunny, with a breeze. This morning, we came across the ruins of an old cabin. You could see the stone foundation and the fireplace was largely intact. We had originally planned on a town day today but couldn't pass up this weather, especially since there is rain in the forecast for the middle of the week and we don't know Hurricane Irma's plans yet. We are in a campsite on Humpback Mountain with a beautiful view to the west. It's a little cool so I may skip the sunset photo op.

So a little hiker terminology. Thru hikers are hikers who plan on hiking all 2,200 miles off the Appalachian Trail (AT) in a season. Section hikers are hikers out for two weeks or less to hike sections of the AT. Day hikers are hikers who do not stay overnight. There's sometimes another category, a LASH hiker. LASH is short for Long A\$\$ Section Hiker. I guess I'm now officially a LASH. Now over two weeks and plan to finish with about 200 miles for this hike.

## *Another Perfect Hiking Day*

*Friday, September 08, 2017*

**Destination:** [Harpers Creek Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** [14.70](#)

**Start Location:** [849.6 Campsite - Humpback Mountain](#)

**Trip Miles:** [188.60](#)



***Another beautiful view.***

Almost forgot, yesterday we stopped at Paul C. Wolfe Shelter for lunch. It was a nice shelter with windows in the sides and it was brighter than most. It also had a tin roof. We were sitting, reading the shelter register (All shelters usually have a notebook where hikers leave some notes.) when we heard a bang as loud as a gunshot. We looked to see if a limb had fallen on the shelter. After hearing one or two more, we figured out it was acorns falling on the tin roof from the towering oaks. I don't think I would get much sleep there. We could still hear the bangs from half a mile away.

No one else stayed at the campsite last night. We did see a few hikers go by after we were set up. I sleep well even though it was a little windy. It was chilly in the morning, probably close to 40 degrees since we were above 3,500 feet.

The trail has been rockier since we left Shenandoah National Park, but nowhere close to Pennsylvania. That and some ups and downs have made our pace a little slower. We had planned on staying at Maupi Field Shelter but got there around noon and decided to go to the next shelter, Harpers Creek Shelter. We got in about four and were glad to find water since some of the springs and streams listed were dry. It was another wonderful day to hike, a little warmer than yesterday but certainly not hot. Not too many hikers out today but it seems like weekenders are coming in late. We're tenting and with weekend hikers, it looks like there are at least five in the shelter. Should be warmer tonight since we are only at 1,900 feet.

Tomorrow is going to be a short day with 7.6 miles planned. But there is a 4.8 mile stretch with a 3,000 climb. Hope it's cool and not too busy. Should be camping at over 3,800 feet tomorrow night.



Shelter registers serve a couple of purposes. Sometimes it's just a short note but if someone was trying to find you, the register lets them know what day you were at the shelter. Sometimes when hikers separate, they let their friends know their plans if they are trying to meet up. Since hikers are going in both directions, they can let the folks heading in the other direction know about things like water supplies or good hostels. It's sometimes fun just to read them.

## *The Priest and 200 Miles*

*Saturday, September 09, 2017*

**Destination:** 821.8 Rock Spring Campsite

**Today's Miles:** 13.10

**Start Location:** Harpers Creek Shelter

**Trip Miles:** 201.70



*Leaving The Priest wilderness area.*

Two additional tents and a hammock showed up after I crawled into my tent last night. Along with the full shelter, you can tell it's the weekend. Last night was much warmer at the lower elevation.

Trail Snail (TS) and I left the shelter at eight. There was a short up and down. Then at 9:30, we crossed a suspension bridge over the Tye River. That was the start of a 4.3 mile climb gaining 3,100 feet in elevation climbing The Priest mountain. Fortunately, the trail was in great shape including lots of switchbacks. We were at The Priest Shelter, a half mile past the peak by one. Since I was still breathing, we took a long lunch. TS even cooked some mac and cheese. This was our planned camp for the night, but since it was early, we decided to go another five and a half miles without huge elevation changes. Today puts me just over 200 miles for this hike so far. We got into Rock Spring campsite a little after four. Slow water flow but we were able to scoop water to filter. Looks like we may be the only two tents here tonight.

The shelters get pretty crowded on weekends so it's nice to avoid all the commotion and get a better nights sleep. Hikers going longer distances usually don't build fires and are asleep at "hiker midnight" which is when it gets dark. Weekenders usually build fires and are up later. Already feels colder than last night

The Priest Shelter register has an Appalachian Trail tradition. Many hikers confess their "sins" in the register. This makes for some entertaining reading. Some of the sins are little things like putting non-compostable wipes in the privy as well as more serious things. Mostly, it is just fun.

As much of our daily planning revolves around water as it does campsites. Water is heavy, two pounds per liter or quart. We try not to carry too much water, especially with long accents. The trail guide lists water locations and identifies if the water is seasonal. Many of the springs listed as seasonal have been dry. Fortunately, the weather has been cool and when we've really needed water, we have at least found a trickle. We filter all the water before we drink, even the water we cook with. Shelters usually have a pretty good water supply nearby.

Tomorrow should be a relatively easy day and then Dolora picks us up on Monday. That ends my adventure but TS will still have about 800 miles to go to get to Springer Mountain in Georgia. I will finish just over 200 miles this trip.

## *Chilly Night*

*Sunday, September 10, 2017*

**Destination:** [Cow Camp Gap Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** 11.30

**Start Location:** [821.8 Rock Spring Campsite](#)

**Trip Miles:** 213





### ***Cole Mountain view.***

We woke up to a cold morning. My phone showed forty degrees in the closest town. Since we were camped at 3,500 feet, it was probably more like the mid thirties. That had us moving quickly once out of the tents. It, or we, soon warmed up.

We planned to stop at Seely-Woodworth Shelter, about a mile away, for coffee and a second breakfast. We met a retired hiker from Michigan, Chipmunk. He gave up his apartment and is living on the trail and using Amtrak. Heading south as the weather gets colder. We swapped a Snickers for a teabag, since Trail Snail doesn't drink coffee.

Today had no big ups or downs. It did have a wonderful change in scenery. Many of the ridges were open fields. As we stopped for one of our lunches (long distance hiking requires you eat a lot and often :-), an older couple stopped and chatted. They had been trail maintainers at one time. Different sections of the Appalachian Trail are maintained by hiking clubs. Unpaid volunteers make sure the trail is marked, trim weeds, build steps and maintain the shelter and privys. We are sure to thank them whenever we can.

A little later, we came to Cole Mountain. There was a large open field with incredible views to both sides. There were quite a few people enjoying the views. We are near Lynchburg, it seemed like there were some college groups enjoying the beautiful day.

We're tenting tonight at Cow Camp Gap Shelter. The shelter is 0.6 miles off the trail. That's a long walk but really our only option with water. Chipmunk is nearby and there is another hiker on the shelter. Seems like it will be a little warmer tonight.

Tomorrow, it's about four and a half miles to the highway where Dolora will meet us. That will be the end of this hike for me but Trail Snail is only planning on one day off and then back for her last 800 miles.

## *End of This Adventure*

*Monday, September 11, 2017*

**Destination:** [US60 - Buena Vista, Virginia](#)

**Today's Miles:** [3.80](#)

**Start Location:** [Cow Camp Gap Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** [216.80](#)



***End of the adventure.***

Woke up to a much warmer morning than yesterday. We needed to be hiking by 7:30 so we could meet Dolora at 10:00. This would be the last day of my hike. Since Chipmunk was tenting nearby, I offered him a ride into Buena Vista. He said he was in no hurry and if he was there, great, but not to wait for him. After my usual breakfast of a Clif bar, we headed out. The hiker in the shelter was still asleep when we

passed. He seemed a little out of place from the usual hikers, maybe he was staying there long term. He didn't speak to Trail Snail or myself at all yesterday after walking by him twice and saying hello. Hardly acknowledged us.

The sun never really came out and since we had one short climb over 4,000 feet, it was a little cool. Finally, we had a 2,000 foot descent to the highway. Like most of the trail in Virginia, it was switchbacks. It's hard to understand, but after a couple of weeks, the downhills are slower going than the uphill. You could feel it getting warmer as we got closer to the highway for our pickup. Amazingly, for a weekday, we passed a half dozen or so day and section hikers. This surprised me a little since it is supposed to rain most of the day tomorrow. That's one of the reasons we hiked a couple of longer days so we could be out of the woods on Tuesday.

We reached the parking area on the highway a few minutes before ten. It was a bittersweet feeling. Nice to know I would be sleeping in a bed and enjoy a beach vacation, sad to know the journey was over and miss hiking with Trail Snail. We took a couple of photos and Dolora showed up a few minutes later!

From there, it was a stop at Waffle House for a big breakfast on the way back to Manassas. Trail Snail needs to reseal the seams on her tent and will take the opportunity to change some items in her pack for the cooler fall weather expected. Probably will be returning her to the trail on Wednesday. She has just over 800 miles remaining to complete the Appalachian Trail in Georgia at Springer Mountain. I wish her well!

My feet held up for this hike and the weather has been great for the most part.

Now that I am home, I will go back through and correct any grammar or autocorrect errors in the earlier entries. I probably will add photos to Facebook instead of here since that seems to be easier and work better. In a day or two, I'll do my last entry summarizing the hike. Thanks for following!

## *Trip Summary*

*Wednesday, September 13, 2017*





### ***Trail Snail back on the Trail.***

Just a quick summary of my hike.

From a gear summary, I changed out some heavier fleece for a lighter down puffy jacket. Not only did I save weight, but it was warmer. Especially nice on the 35 degree morning that you don't expect during early September in Virginia. Trail Snail repeated reminded me that it was cooler at 3,000-4,000 feet than in town. True. It seems a pair of La Sportiva shoes and Drymax socks cured my blister problems. A vast improvement over my April trip. I also carried a little less water and up until the last section, much less food, since resupply was frequent. The reduction in weight and foot cure made the trip much more enjoyable.

From a trail point of view, the West Virginia/Virginia trail is like walking on a carpet compared to the trail as you head north into Pennsylvania. Virginia has many more switchbacks and way less rocks. Harpers Ferry, WV to Buena Vista, VA is a great section to hike. Some climbs but great trail. Not surprisingly, the climbs were a lot easier after two weeks than at the start.

Trail Snail was a great hiking partner. When we left Harpers Ferry, she already had nearly 1,200 miles of the Appalachian Trail completed. We had hiked together for the second week of my April hike. Her experience was helpful. She showed me proper bear bagging technique. It is one thing to watch a video and another to have it demonstrated. I learned a lot about planning. We revised our plan each evening

based on where we finished, resupply, water availability, trail altitude changes and weather forecasts. We also revised our plan if we got to a shelter early. We were pretty compatible in hiking speed and styles. Hiking with someone else makes the rainy days a little easier. Misery loves company! I dropped Snail Trail back off in Buena Vista this morning to complete her last 800 miles.

Dolora provided incredible trail and moral support to me. She tolerates and supports my adventures. She met us in Front Royal and Waynesboro for resupply. She picked us up in Buena Vista for the end of my hike. I wouldn't be able to do it without her.

Not sure when the next hike will be but there are 300 miles of the Appalachian Trail left in Virginia that I haven't seen. Until next time...

## *Back Again!*

*Monday, September 25, 2017*

Looks like I will head out tomorrow. Plan is to hike south from Pearisburg to Damascus with Trail Snail again. Should be around two weeks and 165 miles.

Happy Feet

## *Angels Rest Hikers Haven*

*Tuesday, September 26, 2017*

**Destination:** [Angels Rest Hikers Haven - Pearisburg, VA](#)

**Today's Miles:** 0

**Start Location:**

**Trip Miles:** [216.80](#)



### ***Angels Rest Hikers Haven***

Dolora and I met Trail Snail and O Man at Angels Rest Hikers Haven around noon. After lunch at the local Mexican restaurant, it was off to Wal-Mart for supplies. I said my goodbyes to Dolora and thanked her for shuttling me and she headed back to Manassas. Relaxed for a while watching a movie. Trail Snail, O Man and I headed over to the Chinese all you can eat buffet and then Dairy Queen. Eight sets of bunk beds in the hostel, probably about half full tonight. Wizard showed up late tonight. Plan is to get the shuttle to the trail at eight and hike eleven miles to Woods Hole Hostel tomorrow. This is a well known AT hostel in a log cabin with organic food. Tomorrow is predicted to be the last hot day for a while. There is no rain in the forecast and most of the hikers are worried about dry springs. We'll see.

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*Wednesday, September 27, 2017*

**Destination:** [Woods Hole Hostel](#)

**Today's Miles:** 10.60

**Start Location:** [Angels Rest Hikers Haven - Pearisburg, VA](#)

**Trip Miles:** 227.40





### ***Woods Hole Hostel***

Snoring, snoring, snoring. One of the problems with staying in a hostel or shelter is snoring. Put ten people in a twenty by twenty room and one of them is bound to snore. About midnight, someone was really snoring loudly. It woke me up and I took the opportunity to put in earplugs and go to the bathroom. Several other hikers were up as well. I finally got back to sleep. Otherwise, Angels Rest Hikers Haven was nice.

Trail Snail (TS), O Man, another hiker and myself took the eight o'clock shuttle to the trail. The morning started with a 1,700 foot climb. After that, things were much more level. A good portion of the day was through rhododendron thickets which made the trail dark and cool. Today is supposed to be the last hot day for a while. I stopped for lunch at Docs Knob Shelter. TS came in a bit after me. There was a trail maintenance crew taking down some trees so a deck can be added to the shelter. Homer, 75 years young, and another volunteer were wielding the chain saw. Homer had given TS a ride to the post office earlier. The trail wouldn't exist without the volunteers.

After a discussion about the snoring last night, TS and I decided we'd tent at the hostel instead of taking our chances with more snoring in the bunk house. There's no rain in the forecast so that should let me get a better night's sleep. We got to the famous Woods Hole Hostel around three only to find out there is no dinner being offered tonight. There is going to be salad and homemade bread though. I'm looking forward to that. There was a hot shower though! The house is an old log cabin and the farm is all organic. It's a neat place.

# *Woods Hole Hostel*

*Thursday, September 28, 2017*

**Destination:** 610.6 Dismal Creek Campsite

**Today's Miles:** 12.60

**Start Location:** Woods Hole Hostel

**Trip Miles:** 240



***View from inside my tent.***

Incredible dinner at Woods Hole Hostel. Although I was initially disappointed that there was no formal dinner offered, only salad and homemade bread, I shouldn't have been. Woods Hole is run by Neville and Michael. Neville had a yoga class before dinner, which I missed. The communal dinner is prepared with hikers. After a moment of silence, everyone introduced themselves and said something they were grateful for. Dinner was salad, homemade bread, pimento cheese, egg salad, homemade pickles, guacomole, homemade dressings and more. Everyone chipped in to clean up and we had homemade ice cream while Neville talked about meditation and some of her philosophy. The hostel doesn't turn anyone away who can't pay. Really an interesting place and some super nice hosts. There were about a dozen hikers for dinner including Wizard whom we had met several times before. We signed up for breakfast!

Tenting at the hostel was the right choice. I had a great night's sleep since no one was snoring. I plan to avoid the shelters and buck rooms when I can.

Breakfast was as enjoyable as dinner. Neville, Trail Snail, O Man, a girl from Austria and a guy from New Zealand, Rolling Thunder, had breakfast at eight. Again, we introduced ourselves and mentioned something we were grateful for. Neville has one of those calming, peaceful auras that rubs off on everyone around her. She makes an effort to remember everyone's hiker name. She entertained us with stories of hikers who had stayed there in the past, from wanted bank robbers to homeless hikers that were provided charity. Instead of a tip jar, there's a jar for donations to hikers who are short on cash. Everyone agreed that Woods Hole Hostel was really relaxing. Breakfast included coffee, orange juice, eggs, sausage, hash browns and homemade bread. Another excellent meal. Hard to believe you lose weight while hiking.

The trail had some rocks in the morning but the afternoon was better and included lots of rhododendron thickets. Some of them were really tight and dark. Overall, an enjoyable day hiking. Water is a little scarce with only two water sources of the dozen listed in the guide having water. Tomorrow looks worse. After thirteen miles, we got to a campsite along Dismal Creek. The campsite is nice, there's water to filter and some pools to clean off in. Had an early dinner and climbed in the tent to put my notes together and look at upcoming days. It will get dark early and the campsite is in the rhododendrons.

Tomorrow, it's two miles to Trent's Grocery which serves breakfast and then about another thirteen miles probably without water sources so my pack will be a little heavier with extra water.

## *Finally saw a bear!*

*Friday, September 29, 2017*

**Destination:** [596.4 Campsite](#)

**Today's Miles:** [14.20](#)

**Start Location:** [610.6 Dismal Creek Campsite](#)

**Trip Miles:** [254.20](#)





*600 miles left for Trail Snail.*

Leaves are falling. There are many more than last time I was out, especially at the higher elevations. It gets a little tricky on the downhills where there are loose rocks under the leaves.

It cooled off nice last night, good sleeping weather. We were hiking by 7:30 and only had two miles to Trent's Grocery. It was a little country store with a bunch of locals having coffee. Trail Snail (TS) and I had a BLT with egg. It was a different breakfast sandwich but tasty. TS went back for a second one. Rolling Thunder and four other hikers we meet at Woods Hole Hostel came in. Everyone was getting some food and filling up with water. Today was a dry day, no running water sources. There were water jugs at two road crossings. I got a little at the first one and the second one was empty. I stopped for lunch at Jenny Knob Shelter. There were three weekenders there. TS and another hiker also came in. Trail Snail passed the 600 miles left to go point a little before arriving at camp. I'm good after about another 130. We got to our planned campsite about 3:30. We are camped on a ridge, it should stay light later than the rhododendron thicket last night. It's kind of breezy and I expect it will get light earlier as well. After setting up our tents, the crew we had breakfast with passed by. It seems we get started earlier and finish earlier than the other, mostly younger, hikers.

After hiking through Shenandoah National Park and not seeing a bear, I finally saw one today. Or at least a bear butt and back legs. I was hiking along and heard some noise, looked over and a bear fell out of a tree and ran away. It's legs looked more cinnamon colored than black. It wasn't too big. You can bet my food is bear bagged (hanging in a tree) tonight. There were also dozens of chipmunks and squirrels and even a toad.

Plans for tomorrow have changed. The hostel we were going to stay at is closed, so no showers or laundry. We do need to get into town to resupply with food. There's a store near the road crossing that we can check out for resupply and have lunch. We can call a shuttle or hitch a ride to the grocery and back. Then it looks like about three miles to another dry campsite. We'll see how it works out.

## *Water, more precious than gold.*

*Saturday, September 30, 2017*

**Destination:** Jenkins Shelter

**Today's Miles:** 17.60

**Start Location:** 596.4 Campsite

**Trip Miles:** 271.80





***SOBO, Knights of the Round Table. Rolling Thunder, Siracha, Sweet Blood, Dirt and Two AM.***

Water, more precious than gold. Water is essential to life. Water is also heavy. Southern Virginia is pretty dry this time of year. Most of the water sources identified in the AT guide have been dry. There was a stretch yesterday that listed eleven water sources, two were running, the rest were dry. There are five SOBOs (Southbound hikers) that are in our bubble. They've got a network and have been providing accurate water info. Thank goodness for them. Rolling Thunder paid one of the hostel owners ten dollars to drop off ten gallons of water. We should get there after about four miles. Otherwise we would have a sixteen mile stretch without water. Our campsites are determined by where there is water. We did nearly eighteen miles today so we would have water at the end of the day for cooking and to clean up. Think of the value of water the next time you turn on the faucet.

This morning, we got inn the trail and had about six miles to a little store. About a mile and a half before the store, the trail came to a road. It was a little unclear where the trail continued. A followed a path into the woods twice, but it ended. I came out the second time and Trail Snail came to the crossing. We looked at the guide and a trail app and figured out that we had a road walk to the store. Already at the store were Rolling Thunder and the two other couples that we've been seeing since Woods Hole. It was about 10:30. I had a cheeseburger and a chili dog for a late breakfast/early lunch. We were planning on trying to get a ride into Bland, VA for resupply but we were able to manage a resupply there. I had mashed potatoes with tuna tonight and have Spam and ramen for another night. Yum!

After leaving the store, one of the young guys passed me. We agreed it was a beautiful day. He said this is what everyone thinks it's like when you tell them you hiked the Appalachian Trail. Today the trail was nice, the sun shining, temperature cool, with a little breeze. It was prefect. The same gang stooped for



lunch where there was water again. We are tenting at Jenkins Shelter tonight. Rolling Thunder stopped by and gold is there would possibly be some trail magic tomorrow about ten miles down the trail at one. Hamburgers, that set our schedule for tomorrow.

I saw my first deer since leaving Shenandoah National Park. A doe and her fawn were alongside the trail. They ran off as soon as I opened the Velcro on my phone case so no pictures. Looking forward to another cool, sunny day tomorrow.

## *Missed Trail Magic*

*Sunday, October 01, 2017*

**Destination:** [Lick Creek](#)

**Today's Miles:** [16.40](#)

**Start Location:** [Jenkins Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** [288.20](#)



### *Chestnut Knob Shelter*

One other hiker came in last night just before dark. Woke up to a temperature of about 40 degrees. Fortunately, a climb of 1,400 feet warmed us up. About ten we crossed the road where there was the water cache. The gang of SOBOs we've been running into were still in their tents there. Rolling Thunder came over with some bad news, the trail magic was going to be here at one. Since still had twelve miles

to go if we wanted to camp with water we couldn't stay. That does mean we should see them again. The good news was that there was another 800 foot climb from where the trail magic had originally been planned which would have really hard after a couple of cheeseburger and sodas.

That climb took us to Chestnut Knob Shelter which was a stone fully enclosed shelter with a door. It was really nice, unfortunately, no water for a couple miles. The top of the mountain was fields with some great views. From there it was five and a half miles to Lick Creek, our home for the night. As we neared, we crossed and followed lots of dry creeks. Both Trail Snail and I were a little nervous. We considered going back away to a road crossing with a parked car and waiting for the owner and asking him to take us to water. Fortunately, we saw the bridge and the creek was flowing! Our tents are pitched on the bank. Water is supposed to be better for a while. Saw only two day hikers and a couple of campers today. Weather was perfect again after it warmed up.

## *Privies*

*Monday, October 02, 2017*

**Destination:** [Crawfish Trail Campsite](#)

**Today's Miles:** 11.70

**Start Location:** [Lick Creek](#)

**Trip Miles:** 299.90



*Trail View*

It was another cool morning. I think that is the usual from now on. Something was splashing in the creek last night, maybe a duck? I was too lazy to get out of my tent to check. As usual, a climb first thing in the morning to warm up. After about three and a half miles, I came to Knot Maul Branch Shelter. I was looking to use the privy. I promise this will be my only post to mention privies.

Nearly every shelter has a privy. Privy is just another name for an outhouse. Some of the old privies are just pits dug into the ground. They are smelly. The newer privies are moldering privies. These sit three or four feet above the ground. There is a screened box under the privy. You do your business and then drop in a handful of wood shavings. Worms and bacteria do their thing and make compost. The moldering privies have little odor. The trail maintainers spread the compost in the woods.

The alternative to a privy is to dig a cat hole. You use a trowel or tent stake to dig a hole six inches deep. It needs to be a distance from water sources and the trail. After doing your business, you cover it and your toilet paper with the dirt. A few leaves over the top and you're all done.

I stopped for water at Holston River Bridge and met Trail Snail (TS) lunch. The trail out of there followed a dirt road. I lost the trail following the road and did meet a nice big black cow. I probably wasted about a half hour. TS who thought I was in front passed me. It was nice trail through some fields. Hay was being cut so the trail wasn't very clear. For some reason, I turned around and saw the white blaze, saving me from going off trail a second time. Passed a few hikers and found out TS was about a half mile ahead.

I got to Crawfish Trail, where we had agreed to meet since there was water and TS was nowhere to be seen. I sat down and contemplated what to do because she thought I was in front. After about five minutes, she came back up the trail. Relief! We set up tents and filtered water. While we were eating dinner the regular gang, Rolling Thunder, Siracha, Two AM, Sweet Blood and Dirt came in for water and camped just down the trail. Something was making noise by the water before it got dark. I didn't see anything when I finally got up to look. With water so scarce, animals are probably after the same sources we are. Get to sleep in tomorrow since we only have about six miles to a restaurant that opens at eleven and a motel for showers and laundry.

## *Relaxing in Atkins*

*Tuesday, October 03, 2017*

**Destination:** [Atkins, VA](#)

**Today's Miles:** [6.70](#)

**Start Location:** [Crawfish Trail Campsite](#)

**Trip Miles:** [306.60](#)





### ***Chilly morning.***

Woke up to another cool morning, a little warmer than yesterday, but probably still in the forties. Trail Snail heard some more noise by the water during the night. I slept through it. We slept in a little today since our goal for the day was a Mexican restaurant that opened at eleven and we only had six miles to get there. The SOBO crew was camped just down the trail. We said hello as we went by. Soon Sweet Blood and Siracha passed us on the usual climb out of camp. We took a short break at Davis Path campsite. There were the remains of an old shelter there along with a picnic table. There have been a bunch of stiles the last few days. These are sort of like two ladders leaned against each other over a barbed wire fence. Kind of interesting to climb up and down with a pack on. It's also fun dodging the cow pies in the fields. Rolling Thunder passed us later.

We arrived at the Mexican restaurant attached to a Exxon station a little after eleven but the restaurant wasn't open. The SOBO crew was met by Siracha's mother and father and grandmother. After lunch, their plan was to slack pack to Partnership Shelter in Marion where you can have pizza delivered. His parents would deliver the packs to the shelter. The restaurant opened in a bit and we asked if there was a hiker special. We had a really good steak, chicken and shrimp burrito.

Then it was a short walk to the motel where we did laundry and had our first shower in a week. After taking advantage of the cell service, electricity and Wi-Fi, it was back to the Mexican restaurant for dinner.

The plan is to leave early tomorrow, since it will be warm in the room. We have about twelve miles to Marion where we need to resupply. Plan is to stay in Marion and leave early the next morning. We're trying to outrun some rain in the forecast.

Slack packing is when you carry only food and water for the day. You get someone to transport your tent sleeping bag, etc. for you. This makes it easier to do big miles.

## *Marion, VA*

*Wednesday, October 04, 2017*

**Destination:** [Marion, VA](#)

**Today's Miles:** [11.40](#)

**Start Location:** [Atkins, VA](#)

**Trip Miles:** [318](#)



*A stile.*

Apologies in advance, I have some more privy notes. I usually record my journal updates on my phone using Google Keep and then copy them to Trail Journals when I have cell service. Keep crashed and I lost my original update concerning privies. Here's some of what I think I forgot, sometimes you think of odd things while hiking!

Some privies have no walls. Some have three walls and no door. Most have three walls and a door. Sometimes the walls are only half high, so you can enjoy the view while seated. A couple of privies have two seats. One with two seats has a cribbage board between the seats. The trail maintainers have some fun with the privies. One is named Taj Mahal. I promise that's it for privies.

The motel was pretty worn, okay for hikers. The shower had good pressure and there was a laundry. Woke up to a temperature of forty one degrees. The motel was comfortable but it was another cool start. After three miles, I came to the Settlers Museum. The one room 1894 schoolhouse was open. Hikers are allowed to stay there. Today was a 1,700 foot climb. About a third of the way up was Chatfield Shelter. I stopped and Trail Snail soon arrived. We hiked to the Mount Rogers Visitor Center together. About forty five minutes after arriving, we caught the bus to Marion for resupply. Since we couldn't make the bus back, we are in a motel tonight. The bus will take us back to the Visitor Center at eight thirty tomorrow. Another shower and warm bed to spoil me. After checking in, it was a trip to Ingles supermarket for resupply and a stop for a cheese steak. Another night with Wi-Fi and electricity. Plan (it is updated every evening) is for three more days of hiking before the next resupply. We plan to stay at the Grayson Highlands General Store and Inn to resupply and for a zero day to avoid some rain in the forecast.

## *Bobby's Trail Campsite*

*Thursday, October 05, 2017*

**Destination:** [Bobby's Trail Campsite](#)

**Today's Miles:** [12.50](#)

**Start Location:** [Marion, VA](#)

**Trip Miles:** [330.50](#)





### ***Hiking through a meadow.***

Woke up in a warm bed. Had some yoghurt for breakfast since the room had a refrigerator. I called to make sure the bus would be there to take us back to the trail. We had about a ten minute walk to Wal-Mart where we were picked up. For fifty cents, the bus takes you the six miles to the Mount Rogers Visitor Center. It's hard to beat that. It was only Trail Snail (TS) and myself on the bus. The bus runs three times a day, but only if you call.

The trail was mostly easy going today. We saw what looked like a father and son heading north. TS said the son didn't look too happy. We got into Trimpi Shelter which was our planned destination about two. Since it was early, we decided to go another two and a half miles which shortens tomorrow's mileage and let's us sleep a little later if it's cold in the morning. We didn't know if we would have water at our campsite so we filled up at the spring by the shelter. It was just a trickle and took almost an hour for us to filter two liters each.

There were three hikers setting up tents. They were from Florida heading north. They have been doing sections starting in Georgia, two weeks or so each year.

Leaving the shelter, we had a 700 foot climb. It was pretty warm and sunny today. Keeping up with TS was quite the challenge. We got to the trail to the campsite around four. It is the site of an old shelter. There's a picnic table and a privy but no shelter. Made dinner, hung bear bags and climbed into my tent to relax and update the journal.

Plan for about ten miles tomorrow. We're getting near the Grayson Highlands where there are wild ponies. Looking forward to that.

## *Columbus Day Weekend*

*Friday, October 06, 2017*

**Destination:** [Old Orchard Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** 10.90

**Start Location:** [Bobby's Trail Campsite](#)

**Trip Miles:** 341.40



*Cascades along the trail.*

Last night was the warmest night in a while. I think it stayed in the fifties. A had a great night's sleep. The sky was clear and it was a full moon. It never got completely dark. This morning started without a climb since we finished with a climb yesterday. Hiking was nice but a bit rocky in places. Later in the morning, there was a climb to Hurricane Mountain Shelter. The shelter was on one side of the trail and water on the other side. There were a couple of section hikers by the stream. While filling my water, they left. There was a nice big rock in the sunshine. Since we didn't have big miles today, I took the opportunity to have a long lunch and stretch out on the rock. Trail Snail (TS) went by. A little later, I passed her eating her lunch. The climb ended and I started my decent. I caught a root with my toe and took a tumble, landing on my right knee and elbow. After the initial "Darn", it becomes sort of funny. You wiggle a little and realize that you can't move unless you take your pack off. After unbuckling, you can get up and then put your pack back on. Makes you able to relate with turtles. No damage to the elbow, only a nice scrape on the knee. I stopped at a creek to clean it up and wipe up with some alcohol.

I got into Old Orchard Shelter early and set up my tent in a nice grassy field near a fire ring. TS came in a little later and decided to set her tent up behind the shelter in the trees. She thought I set up where a group might camp. There are always more folks out on weekends. We met at the picnic table by the shelter for dinner. While we were eating, two guys from NC State came in. They asked us if we passed the group from Georgia. It turns out a group of about fifteen hikers was coming to camp here. TS smiled and told me there were still some flat spots up in the woods. I finished my dinner (mashed potatoes and Mediterranean tuna!) and then quickly packed up my stuff and moved it. The college group came in and set up their tents in the grass. They'll be up late tonight so I'm glad I moved my tent.

The plan for tomorrow is to hike eight miles to Massie Gap. We enter Grayson Highlands State Park where there are wild ponies. We'll get picked up and spend a couple nights at Grayson Highlands General Store and Inn. Sunday and Monday are expected to have heavy rain and the next section of the trail takes us above 5,000 feet. We had earlier planned a zero (rest day) in Marion that we skipped based on the weather forecast. This will be the first rest day after ten days of hiking. I hope they have good Wi-Fi and food.

## *Ponies*

*Saturday, October 07, 2017*

**Destination:** [Massie Gap](#)

**Today's Miles:** [8.10](#)

**Start Location:** [Old Orchard Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** [349.50](#)





***Wild pony at Grayson Highlands State Park.***

The two guys from NC State hammocked near us. They had flashlights going before dawn and were gone when I got up. Two ladies who came in last night also hammocked nearby. Finally, there was a tent with two more hikers. It didn't look like anyone stayed in the shelter. It's usually busy on weekends and with the Columbus Day weekend and ponies nearby, it seemed especially crowded.

After another warm night, we took our time leaving this morning and passed lots of weekend and day hikers. We climbed above 5,000 feet. A lot more trees have changed colors up high. Part of the Grayson Highlands are on balds. The wind was cool in the open. When we stopped for a break at Wise Shelter, there was another college group out. As we neared the end of our day at Massie Gap, we finally saw ponies after dodging pony droppings all morning. There were crowds of people petting and photographing the ponies. We called for our shuttle to the Grayson Highlands General Store and Inn. The parking lot was full and cars were parked along the road as far as you could see. Our shuttle showed up and took us to the inn. It turns out the owner, Dennis, used to work at IBM Manassas, where I worked. He left a few months before I moved to Manassas. The rooms at inn are nice. The general store has an eclectic selection.

The weather forecast is for more than two inches of rain tomorrow and Monday. Rather than chance hiking above 5,000 feet in that weather, we plan to stay here for a couple of days. There is a small restaurant with pizza and burgers that it's only open weekends. Had a burger for lunch. Tomorrow, I'll try the pizza.

## *Waiting out the rain.*

*Sunday, October 08, 2017*

**Destination:** [Massie Gap](#)

**Today's Miles:** 0

**Start Location:** [Massie Gap](#)

**Trip Miles:** 349.50



## *Waiting out the rain.*

Well, really nothing today. Tropical storm Nate showed up this afternoon with heavy rain and winds. Spent the day warm and dry at Grayson Highlands General Store and Inn. Had a nice barbeque chicken sandwich for lunch. Took advantage of electricity and Wi-Fi to keep from going stir crazy. But it's still better than being in a tent or shelter during the storm at 5,000 feet. Another zero tomorrow, then back on the trail to Damascus on Wednesday.



# Another Zero Day

Monday, October 09, 2017

Destination: [Massie Gap](#)

Today's Miles: 0

Start Location: [Massie Gap](#)

Trip Miles: [349.50](#)



***View from the deck at Grayson Highlands General Store and Inn.***

Well it poured overnight and the wind really blew. Glad to be out of tropical storm Nate. When we woke up the power in the room was out. The general store has backup generators, so Wi-Fi still worked. Trail Snail (TS) spent the better part of the morning on the phone trying to change her flight back to Germany. Dealing with phone menus and being on hold had her frustrated. At one point, she was on with a call center in India who had trouble with her accent. After she was all done, she said she had almost been ready to just fly back next week. It's kind of ironic that after six months on the trail, her hardest days have been dealing with civilization. TS gives the impression that it is much easier to get a real person on the phone for help in Germany.

The weather cleared around noon, but it was too late to get started. We have to hike ten miles above 5,000 feet. We had pizzas for a late lunch and made plans for Dennis, the owner, to drop us off on the trail tomorrow at 7:30. Plan for tomorrow is to hike sixteen miles to the next shelter below 5,000 feet. That will be a long day. I expect a good portion of it to be on balds, open areas on top of the mountain. I hope



two zero (rest) days make it easier. The weather forecast for tomorrow keeps bouncing around. Hopefully, the thunderstorms will stay away or at least wait until late in the day.

## *More Ponies*

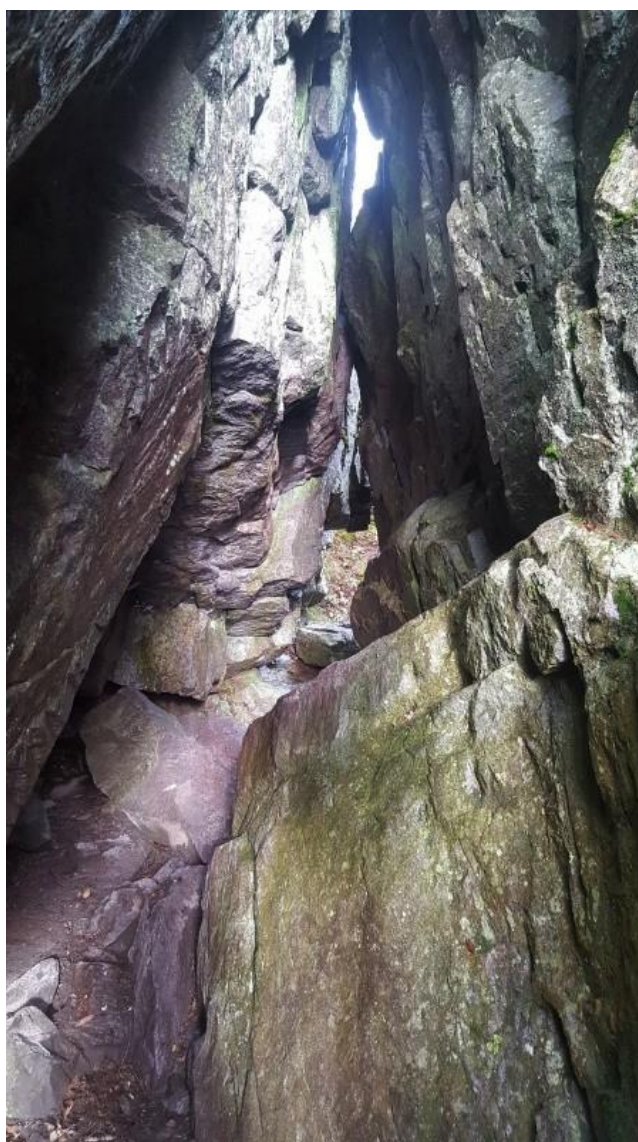
*Tuesday, October 10, 2017*

**Destination:** [Lost Mountain Shelter](#)

**Today's Miles:** [16.10](#)

**Start Location:** [Massie Gap](#)

**Trip Miles:** [365.60](#)



***Fat Man Squeeze***

We met Dennis at 7:30 for a ride back to the trail. The trail from the parking lot to the Appalachian Trail was 0.6 miles, and it doesn't count as AT miles. The ponies were out at Grayson Highlands again, without the crowds. It was peaceful and serene in the morning. We were as high as 5,400 feet and it was still warm and muggy. The balds, clearings on the tops of mountains, were quite the change in scenery. You could see for miles. The day kept going between sunny and cloudy. We were concerned about being caught on a bald in a thunderstorm but made it through.

We stopped at Thomas Knob Shelter for a break and met a hiker, Scare Bear . His name is because his snoring can scare a bear. We're camped behind Lost Mountain Shelter, 3,400 feet, and Scare Bear came in as we were eating dinner (lasagna tonight!) and set up his tent not too far away. Hopefully, he isn't really that loud. In any case, we're on a mild thunderstorm so all you can hear is rain on the tent.

This is my last night on the trail, bittersweet. Tomorrow it's about another sixteen miles into Damascus and a night in a hostel. Dolora picks me up on Thursday. I've enjoyed hiking with Trail Snail but she still has about 500 miles to go and expects to finish in the end of November. I'm ready to head home and catch up on the things that I've put off to hike. On the trail, you miss home. At home, you miss the trail.

## *Damascus*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

**Destination:** [Damascus](#)

**Today's Miles:** 16.30

**Start Location:** [Lost Mountain Shelter](#)

**Trip Miles:** 381.90



## ***Damascus, VA***

Well fittingly it rained all night. I started this hiking season on the AT in April with rain. I'll finish in October with rain although the last couple of weeks have been dry except for the tropical storm, when we zeroed and last night.

Wizard came in last night and tented nearby along with a hiker from North Carolina and Bear Scare. There was a family in the shelter, mother and father, soon and daughter, about eight or nine, and possibly an older sister, high school or college age. They were up by dawn, making a bunch of noise and left early.

We were on the trail around eight. It was slippery because of the wet leaves. The morning was misty with a few short drizzles, making it warm and humid. We caught up the family after about four miles. They were taking a break at a pound. Even the children were carrying backpacks.

We crossed over a mountain around noon and it was much drier on that side. Still hot and humid. We hiked on and near the Virginia Creeper Trail where we saw lots of bikes. The Creeper Trail is one of the rails to trails projects. Someone told Trail Snail that you can get a shuttle and ride your bike seventeen miles downhill. Too bad that wasn't seventeen miles of the AT! There was a short AT detour back on the Creeper Trail where a bridge was out. I don't think that shortened our day. It still left us with a 700 foot climb which wasn't too bad except for the temperature and humidity. Surprisingly, we saw a lot of hikers out today. We got into Damascus around four. The trail goes right through town. We were looking for someplace to eat and stopped at the three outfitters along the trail. Trail Snail needs new shoes. The place where we planned to eat was out of business. By then we were nearly at the Woodchuck hostel. Woodchuck, the owner, showed us around. The hostel is highly rated and full tonight. We decided that showers and laundry would wait, dinner was more important. The place everyone recommended for dinner is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The closest place was a Mexican restaurant called Hey Joe's, so Mexican it was. We stopped to pick up ice cream for tonight.

Back to the hostel, laundry and showers, then ice cream. Should sleep good after back to back sixteen mile days. Looking forward to waffles for breakfast in the morning.

Tomorrow, Trail Snail needs to get new shoes. Dolora should arrive around noon. We'll resupply Trail Snail and I'll head back home while she finishes her last 470 miles.

## ***Newfound Gap to Clingmans Dome - Smokey Mountain National Park***

*Sunday, November 05, 2017*

**Destination:** [Clingmans Dome](#)



Today's Miles: 0

Start Location: [Newfound Gap](#)

Trip Miles: [381.90](#)



***Newfound Gap, Smoky Mountain National Park***

Dolora and I met Trail Snail on Friday at Newfound Gap in Smoky Mountain National Park. It was foggy and drizzling at altitude. Trail Snail was happy to see us and have a couple of days to relax. We had

rented a cabin in Pigeon Forge (Near Dollyland!) for a couple of days. After a zero for Trail Snail on Saturday, she wanted to know if I wanted to slack pack from Newfound Gap to Clingmans Dome on Sunday. We convinced Dolara to be our shuttle. Since I was not prepared to do any hiking, I wore my running shoes and didn't have my hiking poles. The trail was in nice condition but wet since most of the hike was in a heavy fog. I missed hiking poles on the downhill but since Clingmans Dome is the highest point on the trail at over 6,000 feet, there weren't lots of downhill.

Hiking took about four hours and then we met Dolara. The park has been incredibly crowded for the weekend. Then it was off to Gatlinburg for lunch. Gatlinburg was even more crowded. Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge are really commercial. Think of the Ocean City boardwalk and multiply it by at least ten times.

Trail Snail has "only" two hundred miles left to complete the trail at Springer Mountain in Georgia. She plans to take her time and finish at the end of the month as long as the weather doesn't get too cold. It was good to see her and we plan to head to Georgia and meet her again when she finishes.

If you click on photos on the left, I've added a photo of Trail Snail celebrating 200 miles left and the view from Clingmans Dome.

Trail Snail keeps a blog. It's in German but the Google Chrome browser seems to translate it for me. You can find it at:

<https://nic-unterwegs.tumblr.c...>