

*Working title:*

**And I Thought, “Oh Shit, A Bear”**

*The Thoughts and Notes of an AT Hiker*

**Written by**

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## Pine Cobble

At this point in time I'd been backpacking the AT every time I had two free days. My starting point was Under Mountain Trail in Salisbury, Ct. I hiked both north and south, eventually reaching as far north as Peru, Vermont and south to the Hudson River.

On this occasion I had already gone as far north as North Adams, so Pat drove me there and left me off on Main Street. The Trail comes down from Greylock Mtn., crosses Main Street and the river, through a side yard and up along Sherman Brook. The yards were very pretty with lots of flowers and the beginning of the trail was lined with wild flowers. The trail ascends very slowly along Sherman brook growing more wooded as it rises and is easy hiking. The approach to Pine Cobble is basically scree of all sizes and fairly steep. It was fun picking my way through the stones. Arriving at the top I found myself in an open area of scrub and low bush blueberries. There are a couple good viewing spots that I enjoyed.

As I was heading away from this open area I heard what sounded like a tree falling through the branches of other trees. Not hearing a chainsaw this seemed strange, but I kept plodding along for another five hundred feet, and there it was again, a tree falling through the branches of other trees. As I left the scrub area and entered the heavily wooded area to my right, 75 feet away pushing on a large dead tree was an even **wider** Black bear. My exact thought was "Oh Shit, a bear and I'm all alone in the woods." I froze in my tracks. My eyes riveted on the bear. Not able to push over this tree, it dropped on all fours and ambled slowly parallel to the trail I'd just come up. As the distance between us grew I took a step, my pack creaked, and the bear in three bounds was gone. If it had come in my direction I wouldn't have made it six feet. I thought how stupid of me not to have known it was a bear. I'd read about bears pushing down dead trees for grubs and rodents inside. In my defense, bears were almost non-existent in Massachusetts then.

The experience pumped me up and I was soon at the Mass. / Vermont border and this along with the bear experience seemed to lighten my pack and put spring in my step. Not stopping to eat, I just munched on an apple and a couple of granola bars. By the time I reached Harmon Hill my legs were weakening and the pack straps were digging into my shoulders. I saw some nice open spots to set up my tent, but didn't have enough water. I'd already hiked further than I planned, but I kept going down the mountain side (Harmon Hill) to Rte 9, and best of all a large stream running along the far side of the highway. My feet, shoulders and back were sore, I was dog tired, and it was already starting to get dark but there was an hour or so to set up the tent on a flat spot between the highway and stream and take a long relaxing dip in the stream. The stream was strewn with large boulders and the current very strong with deep eddys behind the boulders. In spite of it being quite cold I loved it and stayed in a long time, then climbed up on a large flat boulder and air dried. Even though it was getting dark, it was so pleasant I didn't want to go to the tent but then came the mosquitoes. In the tent I put on my sweatshirt, made a pillow out of my shoes and extra t-shirt and zonked out.

My sleep was pretty decent although I woke up a few times trying to find a body part that wasn't sore to sleep on. I woke as usual around five a.m., stretched achy body parts, found a comfortable position and waited for it to lighten up. At around six I checked out my map and found if I headed north I wouldn't be able to come out on a road for around sixteen miles. I went outside, looked at the steep trail, assessed my condition and thought I'd be better off going back the way I came. It would be over 18 miles, plenty for the day and half left and would get me to a telephone to call Pat at the latest noon. I felt a little wimpy about not going into the unknown but I didn't want to overdo it for me or for Pat driving to get me.

I packed up, ate an apple and a trail bar while sitting on a boulder in the middle of the stream enjoying the view. Once you get over the steep climb up from Rte 9, the terrain gets better and after a mile or so most of my achiness went. By noon I was at Congdon Camp. It was too early to stop for the day but I rested and ate. I arrived at Seth Warner Shelter around three. By the time I got water, laid out my sleeping, washed up and snacked it was probably around four. I jumped into my sleeping bag, resting and soon dozed off. During the night I awoke to the sound of flying squirrels flitting around in the tree tops and an owl hooting in the distance.

As usual I woke first light but after relieving myself, jumped back in my warm sleeping bag and lazed there until seven and time to pack up and hit the trail. I took it real easy since I had only seven miles to go. I didn't think about the bear until I got to the Vermont/ Mass. line. From that point on I was very cautious, especially when I got to the bushy area with the low bush blueberries.

Eventually I wove my way down the side of Pine Cobble and soon I was walking alongside Sherman brook and on into North Adams. Next stop a phone booth to call Pat and a diner on Main Street for some real food.

## Winter 1985

In late winter of 1985 I became very ill with Pneumonia and at the time they thought cancer. I had been working long hours on snow removal, sanding etc. for O&G industries. This was with snow blowers, shoveling and spreading sand by hand for the various factories, businesses, and also all of O&G buildings and a half dozen of the houses. There were other duties that were more or less suspended during snow storms. It was an extremely snowy winter which made it necessary to work a lot of overtime, sometimes sleeping four hours and going right out again. I'm pretty strong and never noticed any ill effects. During this time Pat and I went to a Rock and Roll Oldies event at a local bar. I was a little tired before we went but I love Rock and Roll and knew we'd enjoy it. The music was deafening and the place was way overcrowded but we hung in there and danced a lot. The music was good even if it was too loud. We stayed past midnight so I didn't think it strange to be fatigued. I ended up working that Saturday and had to really push myself. I was coughing a little but then I had been in a smoke filled room the night before. I had the day off Sunday for a change and thought the rest would get me back on track. I had a nice Sunday dinner and had a nice restful Sunday afternoon, watched a little TV and went to bed early. Monday I was the same, I didn't feel bad but didn't have my usual get up and go. By Tuesday Pat took charge and said you're going to the doctors. By this time I had a dull ache on the left side of my chest. The doctor looked me over for a minute or so and told Pat to get me to the hospital. I still didn't feel all that bad but saw the look on his face and knew I had a problem. At the hospital I eventually ended up in what looked to me like a large waiting room. While sitting there I just happened to look across the room to an x-ray hanging on the far wall. Even at this distance I could see a large black area on the left lung just where my pain was. I knew it was mine.

It wasn't too long afterward that I was told I had pneumonia and possibly cancer. Instead of being alarmed I felt a calm come over me and I started to think about all the winning and losing battles I had in forty eight years and thought I'd had a hell of a run at life and probably lived more in those forty eight than most sixty five year olds. I was hooked up to an IV bottle even when I went for what would now be called Cat Scans. The stuff in the IV's burned and I used to get annoyed when they'd wake me up to give me a shot to make me sleep. It just didn't make much sense to me but I was in no shape to argue. I wasn't too crazy about them waking me up to get a rectal temperature either. Other than these things I was pretty comfortable. I waited about a week for the results of the Cat Scans and was finally told I didn't have cancer after all. The spot on my lung finally cleared up and I could go home under Pat's care.

### **31 March 1985 – The First Official Step of Many**

March 31<sup>st</sup> arrived at Amicola Falls State Park just before noon, a little uncertain of myself, overweight from rehab from my pneumonia but at the same time believing I could do the whole trail. At this time I didn't realize I had prepared much better than most, only that the failure rate was very high. The first part of the approach trail is very steep and in spite of knowing better I had packed a little heavy. It was fairly cool and damp but I was sweating profusely as I labored up the side of the falls. After a bit the terrain eased a little and I did better, eventually reaching Springer Shelter in a light rain. It had been a hectic few days with the bus trip and all so it was nice to get water, a bite to eat and set up in the shelter. By 6 pm I rested my body but my mind raced. It was generally a good night with the exception of wind-blown rain in the shelter but I slept well. We woke to a light frost, just about what I expected. I was away by eight, a little stiff and sore but in high spirits. I met quite a few people on the trail but the best was yet to come. A young man from Lewiston, Maine Paul - and another from Hershey, PA Ken and I set up our tents near Blackwell Creek (14.4 miles). We were soon joined by John Harper (Atlanta), Jim Wilhem (Maryland), and a group of four, called the Geritol Trio and One, all from Georgia and right around my age. After setting up and having a bite we built a fire and had a wonderful Oldie sing along. Everybody participating, young and old. I think we stayed up past ten and had a great time.

I was off early, my lung still sore, my pack still too heavy but my spirits definitely higher. I met Paul and Ken at the base of Ram Rock Mountain, Paul's feet were a mess and needed attention. I had A&D ointment and some nice big pads so I doctored him up a little and we went into Suches together to the post office to ship home whatever we didn't absolutely need. It was great leaving there seven pounds lighter.

Because of Paul's feet, he and Ken decided to camp a mile or so out of Suches, I said my goodbyes and was on to Blood Mountain shelter. It was a long day for me with the walk into Suches-- it was over seventeen miles. The shelter was full but large enough to accommodate all of us. It was a nice group and there were lively discussions. One of the topics was the shelter Rats which people would catch in their flashlight beams. The group joked around for an hour or so and I dozed off happy.

When people started stirring in the morning I quickly packed up and headed down the trail stopping to sit at an overlook and munch on a trail bar. Neels Gap, showers, and good food were less than two miles away. When I arrived there I got the bad news the lodge had problems with its well and couldn't take in any hikers, but the good news was that there were cabins a half mile down the road for rent at \$35.00 a day. I took off like a shot and quickly rented one, then back to the lodge and found six people to share the rent at \$5.00 a head. I replenished my food bag and we headed back to the cabin. After showering, writing out letters and post cards and socializing with my new roommates I decided to make up a batch of chocolate pudding for everybody. While I was doing this I recognized the odor of Marijuana smoke (I had worked at a girls school where I encountered it in the commons rooms). I thought if my bosses could see me with this going on around me they wouldn't believe it. Anyway, it didn't bother me and they seemed to be enjoying themselves so what the hell? I must admit I was just a little nervous about it. By 10 p.m. I was so exhausted I jumped into a bed and went right to sleep, oblivious to any noise. First light I was up as usual. Since I had already packed up most of my stuff the night before, I quietly left before the others woke. The terrain was mixed and my resupplied pack a little heavy but there was a little flat ground in between the small mountains. Since I'd had a little rest at Neels gap I wasn't sore as usual and had a little extra energy. Though there were no spectacular views, there were some pretty areas plus it was interesting to see a controlled burn on one of the mountain sides by the forest service. I ended up at Rocky Knob Shelter at around 3:30 PM, whipped as usual but happy there was a lot of room left. The weather had been nice all day, forties in the morning and up to sixty later on.

#### April 5<sup>th</sup> hiking pretty well.

Pack weight down a little more from eaten food. Blue, Rocky and Tray Mountains all pretty big, in fact it was sopping wet on the tops even though it wasn't actually raining. The trees dripped heavily, we were actually in the clouds, this was the first time I encountered this phenomena. Even though it was too foggy for views, I was awed by being in the clouds. When I reached Addis Gap Shelter there already were four hikers there and very soon four more and it was starting to rain. This being a small shelter, (4 person), we hung our packs from the rafters and made room. It wasn't long before a young couple came and even though it was already very crowded we squeezed them in. It was so tight we all had to lay on our sides. When you got up to pee your slot would fill up and you had to wedge yourself in. It was a good group of hikers and while I'm sure nobody got a full night's sleep and we all awoke early, everybody was up-beat. I made the comment to the one woman among us that she could go back to the office and boast that she slept with ten men in one night. It got a big laugh but I don't think she laughed too much.

#### April 6<sup>th</sup>

Every day to this point I had felt the rasping in my chest when I breathed hard. All signs of my pneumonia were gone now and one more thing I didn't have were a lot of aches and pains. I cruised along and enjoyed the numerous rills crossing the trail. Today I would enter the rhododendrons as I neared Muskrat Creek Shelter. They envelop the trail and are beautiful even

when not in bloom. Muskrat Creek Shelter is a large A-Frame, quite unusual for a shelter. I met *Raven* and *Sunshine* there (Ernest & Phyllis Bamfield, Detroit, Michigan) and "*The Cheshire Cat*" (Peter Van Why, Norfolk, Ct.). *Raven* and *Sunshine* kept in touch with me for a few years after. My stay at Muskrat Creek Shelter was really enjoyable. There were eight of us (plenty of room) and all close in age so we had lots to talk about.

#### April 7<sup>th</sup>

By this time I was fairly strong and I found a way to ease some of the pack weight on my shoulder even though my pack was made for somebody much smaller. Also I hadn't resupplied since Neels Gap, and had very little food making my burden less. I was really stepping out and then as I approached Albert Mountain the snow started. It came down in large flakes blinding me and making a tough climb even more difficult. I was rewarded with a climb up to the tower which was occupied by two rangers. I couldn't see much because of the snow but it was nice to just get out of the cold for a few minutes. Big Spring Shelter was only a few tenths away from the tower and I got in there and grabbed a corner for myself, and was later joined by four other thru hikers. The snow had stopped but the wind and cold got worse. We used all our gear (tents, tarps, ground cloths, etc...) to seal off the shelter but it was still damn cold, going down to the single digits. With all my clothes on, in my big sleeping bag, I was pretty comfortable but kept everything covered except my mouth and nose. There was some shivering around me but everybody survived.

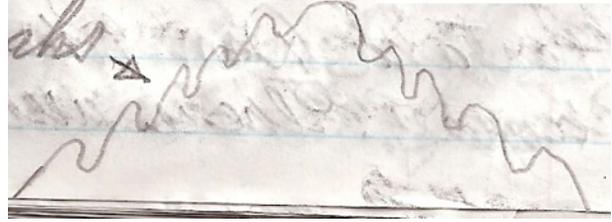
#### April 8<sup>th</sup>

It was too cold to hang around the shelter in the morning. I was packed up and gone by 6:30. Just a swig of water and later as I walked along a trail bar, but it still was too cold to stop. By the time I had hiked across old U.S. 64 it had warmed up. I met Ann and Casey from Lakeville, Conn and it was kind of nice meeting someone from home. I was starved so I stopped about a mile past Rte 64 and made some pea soups (two packages) made thick to fill my belly. Refreshed and finally really warm, I slogged on up one bald, down into the gap then up the next bald. I know at least one of them was a 5,000 footer. Anyway, I ended up at Cold Spring Shelter pretty early in the day considering it was over 25 miles. The same crew from the night before came trickling in a couple hours later. In spite of the name Cold Spring Shelter, it was a little warmer with a lot less wind but it still went down in the teens. My food bag was down to oatmeal and a couple of vegetable soups which I boiled up before I went to sleep and dreamed of hamburgers in Wesser, 12 miles away.

#### April 9<sup>th</sup>

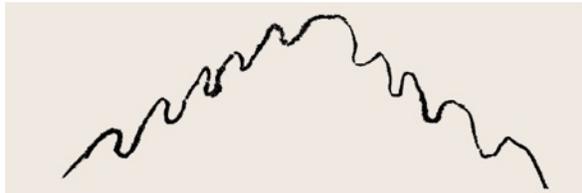
I was packed and off first light and flew down the trail and the miles zipped by until I started going down Wesser Bald. Knowing there was only a few miles left and being very hungry and the mountain being very steep and typically 400 feet down, then 200 feet up, 350 down, 200 feet up, 300 feet down, 150 up and on and on this way until finally Wesser and the Nantahala River and best of all a restaurant, a hostel and a store to resupply. I arrived in Wesser around ten AM and immediately went to the store to resupply and munch on a couple of chocolate bars to hold me over to lunch, then to the hostel and a quick shower. By this time it was time for wonderful

lunch at a table overlooking the Nantahala River. It was very exciting watching the kayaks doing rollovers just outside the window. It felt so great to be clean and well fed it was indescribable. As I was leaving the restaurant I spotted the crew from the shelter just getting here. They were limping and complaining about their knees. I started to feel very good about myself, I had made the ten and a half miles three hours ahead of them with relative ease. I knew now I had prepared well for my thru hike and my confidence soared. I spent the afternoon at the hostel writing letters and post cards. One of my hostel mates was Dixie Lee Harris, a retired school teacher. She was sixty-ish, a little on the chunky side with mud spattered clothes from her hike but she literally beamed and said she had a great day. I could tell she was genuine. She was going to stay and do a few day-hikes. Around five I went back to the restaurant for a burger. When I got back I straightened out my gear, put my food into zip locks and my food bag, jumped into my bunk and conked out.



#### APR 10

Stayed in the sack till around seven then hit the trail munching on some gorp that I had bought.



I felt wonderful, clean, well fed and strong. The ascents now were similar to my descent down to the Nantahala. Every time I got to the top of a steep climb it would drop off sharply a couple hundred feet then up again repeating the up after over and over until you finally got to the real peak.

The patterns down the other sides were the same reversed, I was in the Stecoahs.

This was knocking the hell out of me. I started using a walking stick to ease the weight on my knees on the down sides then two sticks both on the up and downs. It worked like a charm and I was able to absorb my pack weight (which was pretty heavy with resupply) with the sticks. Things went a lot better from then on. I was able to make Cable Gap (21.6 miles) and happy to be there, that is until I looked into the shelter. The bunks looked like old mattress springs without any covering. Actually I didn't know what they were (or started out to be). I found a fairly level spot a hundred yards away and set up my tent. A couple hikers from Connecticut came, one from Granby, the other from New Britain and it was nice to talk with somebody from home. After talking for awhile I went back to my little area, cooked up some macaroni and cheese with a couple snickers for dessert, brushed my teeth and crawled into my sleeping bag.

#### April 11<sup>th</sup>

I was excited because Fontana Dam was just over five miles away. There were free showers, soda and candy machines and a pay phone at the dam. It was also a defining point on the trail. Once you got past the dam you're in the Smokies. The dam is a very impressive TVA Project,

and I thought the whole area was very beautiful, especially the huge chasm behind the dam. Anyway, I got my shower, called home, had a soda and couple packages of crackers and headed across the long flat expanse of the dam, then up a steep roadway where the trail veered off into the woods. The trail was not very steep, a nice change from the Stekoahs. I had planned to stop at Mollies Ridge Shelter. I looked down into the open area where it was about a quarter of a mile down a muddy path and thought I'd rather do an extra 3.3 miles and stay at Russell Field Shelter. The hiking was so easy here and a I came upon a group of wild boars that they'd imported for hunting in 1914. The sighting pumped me up so much I decided not to stop at Russell Shelter. It was still early in the day and I knew I could make it to the next shelter before dark. So much of the trail was open on both sides and so much easier than the Stekoahs. As fatigue set in I began to question my decision to go by Mollie and Russell but I made it to Derrick Knob Shelter with plenty of light left. I was one tired puppy but very pleased I had done 27.6 miles and still excited about the wild boars. I had munched on goodies while I walked along and was too tired to cook so I just filled up my water bottles, sponged myself off with cold water and was ready for the sleeping bag. There were six of us there and we had a lively discussion about the wild boars and the trail. That's all I remember before drifting off to sleep.

#### April 12<sup>th</sup>

Off early as usual. While the balds are high, the gaps aren't all that deep and most of the hiking fairly easy. I really enjoyed Clingmans Dome, the beautiful firs along the trail, and especially a five foot drift of snow across the trail in one spot. I arrived at Ice Water Spring around four. There was a lively group on a company outing that had come in on a side trail already there, but still plenty of room. They were a great group and kind of adopted the rest of us hikers into their group. One of their group (a somewhat portly middle aged man), was asleep on his back snoring up a storm. The group posed him with folded hands with flowers (corpse like) and proceeded to take pictures of him. After that the resident skunk paid us a visit. One of the group tied a hot dog on a string and tried to lure him out of the shelter but every time it got to the gate, it would turn around and head back into the shelter. The hyjinks continued into the dark when I drifted off.

#### April 13<sup>th</sup>

Hiking a little tougher today but very scenic and exciting. Steep drop next to trail. Walked with two pilots from Ohio. They were quite funny and I enjoyed their company. 20 miles today I have Cosby Knob Shelter all to myself. It's kind of nice for a change.

#### April 14<sup>th</sup>

At the road crossing at Davenport Gap there's a visitor center with bathrooms and also a Coke machine. I took a sponge bath and had a couple Cokes. It's like a zoo there with lots of cars stopped for the view. I had planned to stop at Groundhog Creek Shelter but when I saw the side trail in the rain, steep and muddy, my aversion for Shelters in holes showed up. I think it was a good move. As I went up Max Patch Mountain it started snowing huge snowflakes and as I looked below there were patches of sunlight dappled here and there. The wind was behind me and literally lifted me up the steepest part of Max Patch. I turned and gazed at the eerie scene below, patches of sunlit land in a dark landscape; all this with large snowflakes falling. There

wasn't much time to hang around if I was to reach the next shelter by dark. As I hiked along, the sky in front of me was blackening. I was starting to question my decision to pass Groundhog Creek Shelter. I could have been in a nice warm sleeping bag, all fed and cleaned up, instead I was heading down Max Patch Mountain in ever worsening weather. The snow had stopped before I got off Max Patch, all of it melting on the ground but now I could hear rumbling in the distance. I was almost in a panic for a few minutes but then thought hell, I could set up the tent anywhere if need be. Just before Lemon Gap (NC1182) the skies opened up. I could barely see anything much less white blazes, and the trail was pretty rutted and deep and I knew I had a half mile or less. It seemed an eternity but I know it was a fast trip to the shelter. It was so wonderful to get into this shabby, tin roofed shelter. With this kind of rain it had at least twenty leaks, but I found a dry spot big enough for my sleeping bag and then filled my water bottles from water coming off the roof. My shoes and clothes had soaked up enough water to become a sodden mess. I wrung things out and tried to find unleaking areas to hang them. It took the whole shelter but fortunately no one else came. The rain stopped just before sunset and the day went out in a blaze of glory. I had a dry t-shirt, shorts and one dry pair of sox to sleep in. I know I have to put on damp clothes tomorrow but for now I'm warm and dry. I have come 28 miles in some pretty tough terrain and weather. Heated myself up a couple pkgs. of pea soup then some cocoa, brushed my teeth and drifted off.

#### April 15<sup>th</sup>

Since I'm alone here, I ate the last of my oatmeal here in the shelter. I'm very sore and stiff from yesterday's mileage, but very excited, Hot Springs is only 12½ miles. Looking forward to town food and a hot shower and bed at the hostel. My stiffness went away after a couple of miles. All I could think of were hamburgers, French fries, doughnuts, etc... I know I was making good time but the miles seemed to drag by. Finally the church where the hostel was came into view. I got myself signed in at the hostel, took a shower, ran and hung a load of wash, then walked into town. It was only a couple blocks to the center. By now it was noon and time for a great meal. To a hiker almost all town food is great and my meal was no exception. There are two grocery stores in a four block area for basically the whole town-- one that seems to stock as little as possible and one that is actually pretty decent. I bought food to restock my food bag and also bananas, apples and other treats I could eat at the hostel. I ran into other hikers but none that I knew. I brought my stuff back to the hostel, packed it away then went back into town to get postcards and stamps. That's when I was approached by a writer from the Greenville Sun. He asked if I'd do an interview with him, I agreed and we set up a time and place to do it the next day. I hung around town for a couple hours buying and eating snacks. Time goes by so quickly when you're in to town and it was soon time to hit the sack at the hostel.

#### April 16<sup>th</sup>

I Had agreed to meet writer at Allen gap at noon so I made sure I was hiking by 6:30 am. Though there were some steep climbs the terrain wasn't too bad so I made Allen Gap about 20 minutes early. Since the reporter wasn't there yet I went into the Store/Gas Station. It was unbelievable, the shelves looked like they'd been stocked a hundred years ago with items in dusty yellowed packages. In a dusty showcase there was Redmans Chewing Tobacco, among

other products of yore. Sitting in a corner was a very frail thin woman that looked like she'd been scraped off that famous Woods painting or come straight from Deliverance. I bought a couple bags of peanuts that didn't look over ten years old and walked outside. The reporter was there by then. He interviewed me and then posed me with the very strange (store) dog, (Rastus whom I'd been petting.) The article made it to Greenville Sun and they sent three copies home for me. With all the hoopla I didn't make a lot of miles and I ended up at Little Laurel Shelter. Shortly after I arrived a young man on a dirt bike showed up. He was amiable enough but I was very apprehensive about leaving my gear at the shelter while I went to get water. I knew he could take off with anything on that dirt bike and there wouldn't be a thing I could do. He kept hanging around and talking. I snuck my wallet out of my pack and took it with me while getting my water bottles filled 200 yards away. It was all for nothing, he was still there when I returned from the spring. I guess he just liked to talk.

#### April 17<sup>th</sup>

Nice day but a little on the warm side. Met *SourDough* and *Rose* at Rice Gap, Rose & Bob Goss. He had retired from a utility company. We hiked a short way together and took a break and chatted awhile. Camped on a high spot north of Rice Gap (20 Mile day).

#### April 18<sup>th</sup>

Looking forward to getting to the Nolichucky River and Erwin, Tenn. I was tempted to try to make it in one day but realized I'd get there too late to go into town anyway so I settled for No Business Knob Shelter.

#### April 19<sup>th</sup>

Only a hop skip and a jump got me to Erwin, around 6 miles. I was lucky enough to get a ride to the laundromat, restaurants, and grocery stores and then also a ride out again. I was able to get to the Curly Maple Gap Shelter. Got resupplied, clothes washed, a good meal and still got two miles.

#### April 20<sup>th</sup>

I had planned to stop at Clyde Smith Shelter, was hiking fast and enjoying myself and thought I'd take a shot at Roan High Knob Shelter but the steepness of Roan took its toll so I camped at a flat wooded spot around a mile and a half before the peak.

#### April 21<sup>st</sup>

The trail down from Roan High Bluff follows what appears to be an old logging road, its edges mossy and very beautiful. Trees shade the whole trail, keeping it nice and cool.

Roan Mountain has been such a pleasant experience, I'm walking on air.

Long day today, 28 miles, but it seems like much less, probably because I was still pumped up about Roan. I'm here at Moreland Gap Shelter witnessing a real phenomena. Shortly after I arrived, a Winnebago Indian named Harry Thomas arrived. After he stowed his gear and introduced himself, he went into the woods, found some pretty fair-sized dead logs, bashed them over a large stone until they were cord wood. Soon he had a large pile next to the fire ring. Next

he pulls a bag of flour out of his pack and soon had the most beautiful, what looked to me like sweet rolls. He called them hoe cakes. They were gorgeous, almost white with blushes of brown. This whole operation took under a half hour, including gathering the logs. The hoe cakes looked delicious and my mouth watered, but it was not to be. I had to settle for the old stand-by, mac and cheese. He was however, very friendly, and told us he received a stipend from the government and spent a lot of time on various trails. In one of his stories, he was in Vermont looking through a restaurant window at people eating pancakes but was stone broke. The Spunks and I were spell-bound.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

After a day of fairly steep climbs, the last few miles weren't so bad, I was happy to stop at eighteen miles. It's nice having shelter to myself (Watauga Dam Shelter).

April 23<sup>rd</sup>

Hiking a little easier today. Got a kick out of Nick Grindstaff Monument. (Lived alone, suffered alone, died alone). Stayed at Double Springs Shelter; only 18 more miles to Damascus.

April 24<sup>th</sup>

Saw my first bears on the trail today, a small mother with 3 cubs. I thought it very strange that a small bear like that would have 3 cubs. (She looked to be around 150 pounds) Most of the trail was easy hiking today, but I was so eager to get to Damascus the eighteen miles seemed to take forever. I arrived before noon at "The Place", stowed my gear and claimed a bed, then walked around town eating hot dogs and hamburgs while I shopped for groceries, post cards, etc... The Place is a bit of a zoo with a percentage of pseudo-hikers but very comfortable after being out on the trail. I had to stay an extra day while my shoes were being repaired. The guy did a helluva job, especially since they were light duty hikers. Staying the extra day is fine since I was a little tired. It also gives me time to catch up on my correspondence.

April 27<sup>th</sup>

Camped near Buzzard Rock on White Top (18 mi). It rained during the day so it was nice airing out things way up here. Good views and a good stiff mountain breeze. Nice after that steep climb.

April 28<sup>th</sup>

Very Exciting Today. The wild horses were great. I watched a stallion repeatedly try to mount one of the mares but she would kick at him wildly every time he got close. How he avoided those kicks I'll never know but he did. I moved on. It was wonderful watching the herd move so freely in such a large area. Stayed at Old Orchard Shelter with the *Spunks* and a little stray puppy that was at the shelter. Couldn't help feeding puppy, she was starving.

April 29<sup>th</sup>

I tried to sneak out early without the puppy but I'd fed her and she was mine for now. No matter how steep or rough the trail became she was right there on my heels. Camped just north of VA 16, a half mile from the road. Looking forward to Atkins tomorrow.

#### April 30th

The little mutt is still on my heels, I guess I'll ask Pat if we can keep her. Terrain not too bad, arrived in Atkins before noon. Got motel room and called Pat. No dice on keeping dog, had to call the pound in hopes somebody would want her. Somehow I feel guilty as hell. Anyway it's nice to eat in a restaurant and stay in a motel tonight. *Spunks* here too.

#### May 1st

I got on the trail by 8:30 after breakfast at the restaurant. The trail today is through open fields and eventually a road walk in the open. I stopped in a pavilion just before the trail went back into the woods. As I sat there sweaty and somewhat dispirited with the heat and having given the puppy to the pound, a very attractive young woman who was picnicking nearby walked over to me and asked if I would like a daiquiri. I was stunned, but not too stunned to say yes. She walked back to her group (two guys, two girls, two motorcycles) and came back with the daiquiri complete with shaved ice and all). I thanked her, my spirits now soaring and slowly sipped my daiquiri forgetting it was one hundred degrees out. Finally I threw on my pack, waved goodbye and attacked the very steep trail towards Knot Hole Shelter.

#### May 2nd

I'm still hyped up by yesterday's good fortune. Good thing because the climbs are steep and long. There have been a couple streams to dip in. Stayed at Jenkins Shelter.

#### May 3rd

Thought about going to Levi Long Diner but I have enough food and I don't want to waste miles. Ended up at Jenny Knob Shelter 23.7 miles not bad considering the steep climbs and I wasn't wiped out.

#### May 4th

Whoever named Dismal Creek must have never been here. Its gorgeous, butterflies everywhere and trout jumping up at bugs in the stream. Just starting to rain lightly but I don't want to move because it's so beautiful. Oh well, on to Wapiti Shelter. This is where a young couple was murdered a few years ago. Took a dip in a large pond that evidently was dug quite recently. The bottom is only four feet deep and covered in yellow silt. It stirs up so easily I come out almost as dirty as I went in, but it was refreshing and I rinsed off in the tiny brook near Wapiti. Pleasant stay here at Wapiti. Easy 23 miles and I'm clean and refreshed, looking forward to Pearisburg and the hostel there.

#### May 5th

I finally got a ride into the hostel. It was tricky getting here. Luckily there are a couple of small stores about eight blocks from here. I have to pick up beer for an old timer who's supposed to be

hiking but spends most of his time in hostels. Were in one of the church's buildings so I don't like bringing the beer in, but the old Timer was the one who gave me directions to the store. I'm a little concerned about finding my way out of town and back to the trail.

#### May 6th

I was able to find my way through the streets and then hitchhike back to the trail fairly easily. I was glad to be back on the trail and out of the city. The hike here to Pine Swamp was very calming, I wasn't crazy about the big city and highways I had to deal with. I got to see my first live woodcock today. There were three and I could see why they're endangered. Non elusive.

#### May 7th

I got tangled up in some laurel roots just before War Spur Shelter. My knee ached like hell and I thought I might have to stay there. I stayed for twenty minutes with visions of being laid up for days. I didn't like the thought so I got up and limped off. The pain was bad but no worse then when I was sitting. After one mile I told myself I was feeling a little better. After two it did actually loosen up a little. I was mentally so buoyed up and able to walk with just a slight limp. I ended up walking all the way to Niday Shelter. I made the 31 miles now with no limp and feeling on top of the world. I know that if I had stopped at War Spur my knee would have seized up and I'd have been miserable.

#### May 8th

No ill effects from yesterdays knee problem. Looking forward to store near Catawba. Just basics at the store but I can make do. Stayed in an old pig house near store. It's fairly clean but leaves a lot to be desired. Still, it's a roof over my head and I don't have to set up my tent.

#### May 9th

Plenty of streams along the way today. Tinker Cliffs spectacular. It was great jumping over gaps. Exciting!! Whole day was great, very picturesque (19M). Cloverdale is just what I need. Walked through Best Westerns back yard from the trail. Groceries, restaurants, all walking distance from here but someone gave me a ride back from groceries  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile. Rinsed out some things here at the motel. Nice to be in a motel, clean and rested.

#### May 10th

The Blue Ridges are pretty easy hiking with lots of beautiful overlooks, benches and tables to sit at. The trail often parallels the highway and often meets or crosses it at the overlooks. It's a bitch getting water at Cove Mt. lean-to but I was able to get some going straight down the mountainside  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile thanks to tip in the trail register.

#### May 11th

Some easy hiking and overlooks today. Very pretty and grades gentle. Stayed at John Hollow Lean-to with the *Spunks* and the *Great Appalachian Athlete*. I always enjoy the *Spunks* and the *Great Appalachian* is very interesting. He's very well educated and witty and also the first black hiker I've ever met. He gave me some letters to mail for him. I think he's afraid of rednecks in

these small towns near here. I walked into Big Island for groceries on my way here and even though it's a tiny place, I met other black people living there so I doubt if he'd have any problem but what the hell I'll bring his letters into Glasgow when I hitchhike in.

May 12<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>

It was only 8 miles to the road crossing for Glasgow and I was able to hitch in pretty quickly. I called Pat first thing and she's headed here. Its over 600 miles so it'll be a while but I have gear to straighten out, shopping to do, and a haircut to get so I won't get too antsy.

While Pat and I were staying at the motel there was a pretty severe wind and rain storm so the trail now has a few blow downs making it a little difficult at times. Loved the tall stand of yellow poplars before Peddler Dam. Also liked horses at dam and dam area itself. The lake is actually a reservoir and the trail around it and up Brown Mtn. Creek is very nice. Just *Farmboy* and I at Shelter.

May 18<sup>th</sup>

Nice easy walking on Hatchery Rd. Ended up at the Priest Lean-to.

May 19<sup>th</sup>

Hike down the Priest very steep the suspension bridge over the Tye River very long and exciting to cross. Both sides of this valley are steep I don't know how they get enough sun to grow corn. While this side of the Tye isn't as steep as the Priest, it's still a tough climb and it seemed to take forever to get to Chimney Rocks. Got easier after that. Found a good spot to tent near Humpback Rocks parking area(24 Miles).

May 20<sup>th</sup>

Walked most of the way into Waynesboro. I'm tenting at the fire house. Since I have time I washed my sleeping bag and my dirty clothes at the laundromat, great machines. Enjoyed my restaurant meals. By the way, this town has a 50's type car cruise with horns and all. Brought back memories.

May 21<sup>st</sup>

Got a ride most of the way back to the trail. The Park is a great place to hike. By the time I got to Calf Mountain it was extremely foggy and I was worried I'd miss the trail on its grassy area but made it fine. It's so quiet with the dampness on the trail. I met a small deer with her head sticking out on the trail watching me. She seemed unafraid and very curious. Stayed at Black Rock hut.

May 22<sup>rd</sup>

The Hiking is so easy here with picnic tables and benches at all the overlooks. Maybe this where "a walk in a park" comes from. High Top Hut.

May 23rd

I saw my friends the *Spunks* eating with some picnickers at Lewis Mt. campground. I think they are the most accomplished beggars on the trail. Trail the same today, easy and scenic; 24m to Rock Spring hut. Nice views from cabin. I'd sleep on the porch if no one was here

May 24<sup>th</sup>

Stopped at Skyland and ate two breakfasts. Ran into a mother bear and three cubs. Mother and two cubs walked by on the trail ahead. I waited for a while then took a step when the third cub appeared on the trail ahead. I almost got myself in a fix. I really got pumped up between the bears, good food, great vistas. The miles fly by and there's no fatigue. I end up with 28 miles. It seems like magic and I'm here at Gravel Spring Hut.

May 25<sup>th</sup>

I was almost sad this morning, knowing I had only 13 more miles in The Park. When I got to the miles of fence for the National Zoological Park I perked right up. Although I didn't see anything close up, I was able to see what appeared to be some kind of buffalo and an exotic goat. This pumped me up a little but by this time I was busy picking ticks off me. The last large field before the road to Front Royal had waist-high grass to wade through, after which I picked off 7 ticks, bringing the total to twelve for the morning. I toyed with the idea of going into Front Royal but thought better of it. Instead I came here to Manassas Gap Shelter after a quick trip to Linden to resupply. The store there was small but well stocked. I was able to get both apples and a few oranges. I struggled with the extra weight on my way up here but they're worth it. 24 miles + 2 in and out of Linden.

May 26<sup>th</sup>

Hiking a little more challenging today. I miss the picnic tables and benches every few miles. I'm tenting between Sand Spring and Devils Race-Course. It's a nice spot but a rotten log to sit on is not as good as a bench and picnic table. (18 miles)

May 27<sup>th</sup>

It was a big day today, getting to Harpers Ferry and the ATC Center. I'm staying with Clara Cassidy who rents rooms to recommended hikers. The ATC screens to root out the rowdies. I got into town before noon (17 miles) so I'd had plenty of time to eat at restaurants and walk into the center and sight see. I think it's worth staying tomorrow to rest and enjoy town.

May 29<sup>th</sup>

Stopped at the little grocery in Sandy Hook for Hersheys Ice Cream. Also enjoyed looking at the trains in the yard nearby. Pine Knob Shelter is bad because it's too close to roads. I found a nice spot to tent on the trail to Annapolis Rocks. Guy and Ian were tenting near me and invited me for hamburgers and hot dogs. I'd already eaten mac and cheese but was still hungry. We can see lights from Hagerstown from here (24 miles)

May 30<sup>th</sup>

Hiking here really easy. Crossed Mason Dixon line. The restaurant/bar is so near Mackie Run Shelter that I spent had supper at the bar and called Pat from there. She decided to come and pick me up so I got my stuff from the shelter and waited at the bar until closing and then outside until she arrived. While I was waiting at the bar I put up two signs for the owner.

June 3<sup>rd</sup>

Arrived here at Mackie Run Shelter with Pat after going home for Tim's birthday I'm getting spoiled sleeping in a bed and eating at home.

June 4<sup>th</sup>

Ran into Tom Leonard and *Dandy Don* today and we're hiking together for now. We stopped for a swim at a little beach in Caledonia State Park. Lots of shelters here at Birch Run. 24 miles

June 5<sup>th</sup>

We stopped at Pine Grove and attempted to eat ½ gallon ice cream each. *Dandy Don* and Tom failed but I did it. I knew I'd really have to walk it off so I kept going past Whiskey Spring and found a spot to tent. 24 miles

June 6<sup>th</sup>

Got into Duncannon for lunch so we have plenty of time to get groceries, straighten out our gear and later have a couple beers to celebrate my birthday. I took my pack off its frame to replace a broken rib with an oak sapling. Tom saw the frame with fiberglass from a broken fishing pole and one oak sapling replacing the ribs and said my pack was the most prehistoric thing he had ever seen. *Don* slipped in the bathtub and the lady who runs the place wanted to throw him out but I talked her out of it by telling her I would keep an eye on him. Anyway, we had a good time and I'm ready to sleep by 9pm. 12 miles

June 7<sup>th</sup>

Headed out early to get some mileage. Long walk across the Sasquehanna. Met a fisherman with a side arm at a creek near Clarks Valley. He told me it's legal here in PA (strange).

All alone here at Rauch Gap Shelter. I enjoyed my time with Don and Tom but I hike better alone. (27 miles)

June 8<sup>th</sup>

Pretty easy hiking today. Some of it on old wood roads. Found nice spot to tent near Shuberts Gap.

June 9<sup>th</sup>

Loved old trains at Port Clinton and the climb out of town too. I have Windsor Furnace Shelter all to myself.

June 10<sup>th</sup>

It's starting to get pretty stony now, lots of scrubby trees, even the pinnacle didn't impress me very much. Gypsy moth caterpillars everywhere, even in the springs and all over the walls of the shelter. A plane flew over spraying for them. Probably not too healthy for me. Bake Oven Knob (29 Miles).

June 11<sup>th</sup>

Very excited about going into Palmerton and being able to stay in the Police Dept. I have to be in by 5 pm before they lock up. Lots of places to eat and resupply. Its only 3pm but I'm comfortable here and have everything I need. Don't want to take a chance of getting locked out. There's candy and soda machines and also a deep sink so I can rinse out some stuff. It's very comfortable here in the basement. 8½ miles

June 12<sup>th</sup>

Climbing the rocks out of Palmerton is an experience. There isn't one living thing on the whole mountain side and the plateau on top. The acid is so strong it burns your eyes. I don't know when they stopped smelting zinc here but it looks like a long time before the pollution goes away. In spite of this I feel great and flew up the mountain. No water at Leroy Smith Shelter. Followed the spring down over ½ mile. No water. My last drink was before Leroy Smith shelter so I walked into Wind Gap to get water and had a soda. Bought a half gallon of ice cream. I ate most of it walking back to the trail, then going up Wolf Rocks I couldn't finish it so I left the last quarter by the side of the trail. The rocks here are the worst I've encountered. You can't put your foot down on anything but rock. I don't know how the vegetation exists here, there's no soil visible anywhere. I'm trying to catch up to the *Spunks* so I'm going to keep going but there wouldn't be anyplace to tent in the godforsaken sections anyway. Made it to Kirkridge Shelter just before dusk but it's all filled up with Boy Scouts. I'll go on a mile or so more and tent it. (Miles today 40 including a walk in and out of Wind Gap).

June 13<sup>th</sup>

Feet a little sore and whole body a little stiff but I feel pretty good. Eating all that ice cream caught up with me today. It felt like I was passing the whole half gallon still in the box. Hike over bridge exciting and hike up from the river spectacular. Took a quick dip in Sunfish Pond. Tenting near Buttermilk Falls Trail. 25 Miles

June 14<sup>th</sup>

Pretty easy hiking today but feet still a little sore from my 40 mile day in the rocks. I'm glad that stretch from Palmerton to Kirkridge Shelter is behind me. High Point area very nice but dirt floor in shelter sucks. 23 miles

June 15<sup>th</sup>

I was able to call Pat from Pochuck's fruit stand and she's picking me up here at Liberty Corners Rd. Nice place to wait. Mr Pochuck very friendly. Home for a few days.

June 18<sup>th</sup>

Back on trail. I forgot my tent but found scrap piece of canvas. Made it all the way to little Dam Lake (29 miles). It's starting to rain so I rigged up my scrap of canvas. It's barely big enough but it'll do. This lake very scenic but access road is a dumping ground.

June 19<sup>th</sup>

Stayed reasonably dry and comfortable under scrap of canvas. Hairy descent from Arden Mountain down to thruway; also tough getting across thruway. Lemon Squeezer full of mosquitoes and stupid. Quite a few deer today. Nice view of Hudson River here at West Mtn. Shelter. I can see lights from NYC and boats and even some ships. I like this stone shelter and its location (mtn. top) 27½ miles.

June 20<sup>th</sup>

Exciting going through Trailside Zoo and then across Bear Mtn. Bridge. Ran into Military Maneuvers near Anthony's Nose. Blank ammunition, blackened faces and all. I was going to stop at Graymoor but I'm almost to familiar ground so I kept going to Sunk Mine Road and home ground. From there on it was so easy to put on miles. I ended up Ralph's Peak Hikers Cabin, 29 miles. Water from well is terrible but there are beds and a bicycle to go to the store a mile away. The Store is small and limited but since I'm almost out of food I found some stuff to get me through. Pretty comfortable here.

June 21<sup>st</sup>

I'm so excited to be near home again; the miles melt away. I walked into Holmes to get a grinder and got an extra one to have for supper. Wiley Shelter 27 Miles. Connecticut is one mile away.

June 22<sup>nd</sup>

My Pack is nice and light, just enough for lunch and no tent so it's easy hiking. Getting off at Cornwall Rte 4 (23 miles). Pat's picking me up. Home for tonight.

June 24<sup>th</sup>

It's very comfortable for me on this section since I've hiked it several times before. The Wilderness School Group (teens from the inner cities) are camped near me. While the kids do a lot of bitching, they're really a great bunch and are getting a lot out of their experience. Their faces and hands are stained from eating blueberries on Bear Mountain. Since I seem to have a good rapport with them and their leaders, I spent almost an hour with them. I'm tenting here at Limestone Springs.

June 25<sup>th</sup>

Really enjoying these familiar sections. The views from Everett and Race are always spectacular. I stopped at Shea's on Route 7 and he says I can stay in his gazebo. 25 mi.

June 26<sup>th</sup>

Mt. Wilcox area a little boring and mosquito laden. Enjoyed the road walks going to Upper Goose but some idiot parked right in front of the blaze going to the pond so I walked 5 poles past and then back for nothing. It's so nice being here at the cabin and getting a swim in. I grabbed an upper bunk on the second floor right next to the window so I'll have lots of air. 21.7 miles.

June 27<sup>th</sup>

I ate and resupplied in Cheshire. I found a nice spot to camp by a swamp with wild cranberries growing in it. What a treat. It's a little buggy here but I'm whipped and staying in the tent anyway. 13.2 miles today.

June 28<sup>th</sup>

I was very watchful for bear today from Pine Cobble on. This is where I saw my first bear. A neighbor on the trail coming out of North Adams said he'd had one in his yard last week. It's bad here at Seth Warner Shelter. It's full of vacationers who have a big fire and the smoke is going right into the shelter. I should have gone onto Congdon Camp. 16 miles

June 29<sup>th</sup>

Glastenbury Mtn. brings back memories of tenting within 500 feet of a spring but not knowing it was there, out of water all night and finding out about the near-by spring when I started hiking next day. That was one tough night. Caughnawaga Shelter is pretty ugly but the little brook is great. I climbed the tower at Glastenbury. Shelter there was loaded when I came by. I'm alone here at Caughnawaga. 31 Miles

June 30<sup>th</sup>

Memories of hikes past at Stratton Pond. Lots of easy hiking on bog bridges. Inn near VT 11 & 30 not serving until after noon but they had a candy machine and a coke machine which I used. Nice views from Bromley Mtn. and here at Mad Tom Shelter. No water in spring here, luckily I filled up on my way up Bromley and there's enough for tonight. 24 Miles

July 1<sup>st</sup>

Pump not working at USFS 21 so I hiked dry for a while until Peru Peak Shelter. I had nice swim in Griffith Lake. I found the rocks on Baker Peak ruggedly beautiful. It's kind of buggy here at Minerva Hinchey Shelter but nice hikers here too. 25 miles.

July 2<sup>nd</sup>

Walked into the general store on VT103 and it's well stocked. They also had hot dogs and sandwiches. This has all been new trail to me since USFS 21 just past Mad Tom Shelter so it's a little more exciting. Clarendon Gorge was awesome. The climb up here to Cooper Lodge was steep and rough and I loved it. 24 Miles

July 3<sup>rd</sup>

After Sherburne Pass the trail gets tame again but very beautiful, some of it so that it almost seems unreal. Mauri Wintturi Shelter 21 Miles.

July 4<sup>th</sup>

Got a few things at the grocery but not much because I'll be able to shop in West Hartford later. It turns out the store in West Hartford is even better with hot dogs and lots of sandwiches on the menu. I got a grinder to take with me too. Happy Hill Cabin pretty ugly but after such a good day. Who cares. 23 Miles.

July 5<sup>th</sup>

The first mile in the woods after Hanover must be a mosquito paradise. I'd walked into Hanover Center for new boots and about a mile into the woods was a super large beaver dam. I tried going around, (no dice), and I finally waded across with my new boots in water up to my armpits. Oh well, my old cheap boots lasted from Springer Mountain to Hanover. These should last the last few hundred miles. Tented Moose Mtn. 17 miles

July 6<sup>th</sup>

Smarts Mtn. is one long climb. Mt. Cube rocks very nice (rectangular) Ex-governor of New Hampshire, Meldrin Thomson, is letting me stay in his barn loft. It's large, airy and very pleasant. It's also inhabited by barn swallows which are a pleasure to watch. I was able to wash up pretty good with a garden hose so I'm very refreshed. He even had me come in and talk with him in his den. He and his sons have a large Sugar Maple Operation here along with the farm.

July 7<sup>th</sup>

Moosiluake is really something. The trail up is super steep but surpassed by the trail down the other side where you can see over a half mile down in some spots. There are triangular blocks attached to the ledges along with iron rungs in some places to make the descent possible. It's the first White Mtn. I've done actually backpacking. (Some years ago Pat and I climbed Lafayette). I'm in seventh heaven. I absolutely love Moosilauke. Eliza Brook Shelter is nice. 30 miles Looking forward to Kinsman tomorrow.

July 8<sup>th</sup>

Very hot climbing today. On my way up Kinsman I crawled head first into every pool I found, keeping my feet dry and my body refreshed. I guess there was a time these mountains would have been extremely difficult but all this hiking has turned me into a super being. Right now I'm sure I'm physically superior to 95% of the population. (or more). The stream near Zealand Falls Hut is wonderful. Very swift and deep enough to immerse myself. Covered 30 Miles today.

July 9<sup>th</sup>

Saco River at the point where I crossed is crystal clear and dotted with trout. Enjoyed the climb up Mt. Franklin and the view from the cliff. I'm hiking so easily, the miles just melt away. Some of it is just so exciting I found the trip up from Saco River to the top of Mt Washington to be super easy. I ended up here at Madison Springs Hut. Over 25 miles. I also went for a nature hike with the group here. They couldn't believe I'd come all the way from Zealand Falls Hut.

July 10<sup>th</sup>

The hike down Madison through the scree was exciting. Wildcat Mtn. is a sleeper in that it's a much tougher climb than any of the Presidentials that I've climbed. Nice views from the ski lift platform. The 22 Miles here to Carter Notch was no cakewalk but I loved every minute of it. The charged up feeling inside of me is indescribable.

#### July 11<sup>th</sup>

Today was more of the same. A couple of climb downs were difficult even for me, but I passed this group of 12 to 14 year olds with their leader near the Imp. They amazed me being able to make it, especially for the shorter kids. One area was a ten foot drop with just one hand hold on top which left me, at 6ft tall, a three foot drop but these kids found a way to do it. I ended up walking into the Red Barn in Gorham but since I had only 14½ miles on the trail it was ok. Since it's with no pack, the walk to restaurants and grocery store weren't bad. The local kids directed me to a nice swimming hole.

#### July 12<sup>th</sup>

The hiking isn't nearly as dramatic today. It was interesting hiking by their generating plant on the Androscoggin River. They've raised the level of the dam using plywood backed with a wooden framework. I assume its temporary but it seems to be working well. They'd never allow that in Conn. I took a quick swim with the blood suckers here Gention Pond. I'm normally not too squeamish but there were so many bloodsuckers I cut my swim short. The shelter is taken over by Boy Scouts but I have a good tent site.

#### July 13<sup>th</sup>

I had all the challenges that I could handle today. Goose Eye was great. I enjoyed every bit of it and then on to Mahoosuc Notch which I'd been looking forward to. There was still ice and snow in the Notch. Great on a 90 degree day. It was everything I expected and more. The great stuff kept coming, I took a great swim in Speck Pond and thought of staying but it was so early and I was full of energy so I went on. Lots of hikers after Speck Pond and down in Grafton Notch. I'm so charged up it was another cake walk getting here to Frye Notch Lean-to. 25 miles of tough terrain with little fatigue.

#### July 14<sup>th</sup>

Dunn Falls awesome but the mosquitoes starting to get bad. It was hot as hell so when I saw Salvage Pond I thought I'd take a swim but then I saw all the blood suckers I thought better of it. A lot of the terrain today was relatively flat. Even the climb up here to Hall Mtn. lean-to was gradual. In spite of what should have been a fairly easy day I'm dog tired. I think it's the heat, bugs, and the 3 R's getting to me. (3rs are root, rock, rut). I'm feeling better now and I want to get away from the bugs so I'm going on. The climb down the north side of Hall Mtn. was steep and I'm really whipped. There's a group of French speaking young boys camped here next to the stream and South Arm Road. They found me a nice place to set up my tent. They're a great group and I'm enjoying watching them. The leader

keeps them very busy, right now the group is singing and it's beautiful. They've got my spirits up after a tough day. (14 miles)

July 15<sup>th</sup>

Pretty steep coming up from South Arm Road but old blue nice and gently rounded, easy hiking all the way to Bemis Ford where the water was up to my behind and very swift. It was nice to see sightseers at overlook near trail crossing ME17. I hadn't seen anyone since yesterday. It took an hour to get a ride into Rangeley. I was going to stay in Rangeley but it was quick and easy to get groceries and a bite to eat and I hitched back to the trailhead in two hours. It was only 1.4 miles from there to Piazza Rock Lean-to.

July 16<sup>th</sup>

Saddle Back, the Horn and Saddle Back Jr. fantastic with great views. I expected Saddle Back Jr. to be less of a climb but it actually was the hardest. The Ford of Orbeton Stream is knee high and very pretty with a steep climb up to a ridge with the trail right on the edge overlooking the stream, but around 300 feet high. I loved the butterflies it gave me. I have a great tent site on the Sugar Summit Side Trail. Great Sunset thru the trees. 20 miles

July 17<sup>th</sup>

No views from Crocker Mtn. (heavily wooded). Bigelow is one hell of a mountain and I love it at Avery Lean-to. I'm just below Avery Peak at what must be over 4,500 feet. The spring is on the trail north to Avery Peak a couple hundred yards from the shelter. It's absolutely ice cold so I expect there's ice somewhere under Avery Peak. There's a couple rabbits way up here hanging around the shelter. I'm sure I'm not the first one sharing my food with them because they're pretty tame. I love being this high, no bugs and its cool up here.

July 18<sup>th</sup>

It was a long way down from Avery Peak to the bottom of Little Bigelow with lots of good views. Everything very nice until West Carry Pond where I tried to stop and eat. The mosquitoes were so bad on the shore I jumped rock to rock and got about 20 feet out on the pond where there was a stiff breeze. I took off my t-shirt to cool off and soon noticed I was very itchy. It dawned on me that the no seeums can handle a breeze. I quickly covered up and got moving. The ponds are pretty but the rock, root and ruts are difficult. I'd much rather be climbing mountains where there's less mosquitoes and its cooler. Pierce Pond even nicer and I even got in a nice swim but the mosquitoes are still horrible. The only safe place is a sleeping bag with just your mouth in the opening and even then you're sucking them up when you inhale and it's so hot. I tried sleeping outside at the edge of the pond where there's a breeze but it started raining. After 24 miles of hard going I know I'll eventually go to sleep even under these conditions.

July 19<sup>th</sup>

In spite of the bugs at Pierce pond I woke feeling refreshed and enjoyed the trail towards the Kennebec. As I neared the river the trail disappeared into a tangle of willows with a number of faint paths parallel to the river going both up and down stream. The river wasn't visible and

there were no blazes but I knew I was close, but which way to go? I finally picked one of the faint paths and made my way to the river bank and gazed across the river, no sign of the trail on either side. Finally after walking up and down the bank 3 or four times, I spotted a big white A on a boulder on the other side, but knew it was far too deep to ford in this area. I picked an area 200 yards downstream where it was much wider and I could see the waves from large boulders underneath the water. I didn't look safe to me but it resembled the picture I'd seen on the cover of AT magazine with hikers holding their packs over their heads while they crossed in knee deep water. I could see the water was much deeper now, and tougher to cross so I packed everything into plastic garbage bags. (I was out of food anyway and wouldn't need water anymore). Jammed the plastic bagfuls into the pack, strapped it on, grabbed a heavy walking stick and started to wade across. By the time I got a third of the way across the water was already over my waist and lapping up on my pack. The current just picked me up and carried me downstream until I lunged back towards shore and found foot holds in the boulder strewn bottom and was able to wade back to shore. I made another attempt with the same result, finally on the third try when the current grabbed me I just started swimming towards the far shore, eventually I was able to get a foothold and wade to the far shore almost a half-mile downstream. I hiked back up to where I would have been if I been able to walk straight across and there was the trail. I had crossed in the right place. As I hiked into Caratunk a mechanic at the local garage saw me and came out and asked me where I came from and when I told him, his exact words were, "you can't cross the river they've had three days of rain upstream." I told him my story but I don't think he believed me.

I was starved when I reached the general store so I grabbed an ice cream sandwich, two pies, hostess cupcakes and a soda. I took it all outside to eat where they had a trellis with pink flowers. It was loaded with hummingbirds and butterflies. There was a nice breeze, my belly was full, life is good. I know I have to get up soon, finish shopping and get back on the trail.

After I got back on the trail I felt pretty whipped after all the excitement of the day or maybe just lazy after just eating so I figured on staying at *Joe's Hole Lean-to* which would give me 13 miles for the day, but when I saw how ugly, buggy and swampy it was, I found lots of energy to get me here to *Moxy Bald Lean-to*. This is like the Hilton compared to *Joe's Hole*. (The name *Joe's hole* is very appropriate.)

#### July 20<sup>th</sup>

Surprise! Surprise! There's a couple of fords on the way that aren't in the Data Book. I was so excited about getting to Monson and Shaw's Boarding House. I can't wait for supper here at Shaws, I been hearing about the all you can eat meals. The grocery at the end of the street is fair size for Maine and has anything I want. I've been eating ice cream and drinking soda since I got here. It's so comfortable sitting outside at a table with an umbrella. It's 95 degrees in the sun and the walk to here on the blacktop was a little uncomfortable.

#### July 21<sup>st</sup>

All the good things about Shaw's meals were true. Supper yesterday was great and Keith put out a helluva spread for breakfast. He told me he used to cook for Pratt & Whitney's cafeteria. The Wilson Falls area is beautiful with its walls of slate. Its pools were so refreshing because it was hot as hell. There's been enough water sources all day to keep me comfortable in spite of the heat. It felt so strange to run into a railroad track in the middle of this wilderness, I can't help but wonder where it goes. Barren Mtn. had nice view of a lake or "pond" as they say in Maine. Found a nice spot to tent here on Monument Cliff. (Third Mtn.) The tent is tucked away in a little nook but I ate and rested here on the rocks and will go to the tent only if it rains. 27 miles.

#### July 22<sup>nd</sup>

This is some wild country. It's not so much that the mountains are high; it's just that everything is rugged. I wonder how Hay Mountain got its name although there is a grassy area. It's full of 15 to 25 foot conifers. Maybe it had some open fields 20 years ago. Felt good to get out on a wide open logging road for awhile. Kokadyo Pond had impressive cobbled steep shores. I took a quick dip and thought I'd like to come back and stay here for a few days. The skies opened up a few minutes before I reached Cooper Brook Falls Lean-to. The lean-to has an overhang of a couple feet so I was able to make a small fire near one corner. There also was a one-gallon coffee pot with a nice handle. I filled it with water from the brook and hung it over the fire to heat. When some hikers came in I greeted them with a cup of hot chocolate. It's nice having company on this very quiet night. (27 Miles)

#### July 23<sup>rd</sup>

This must be bug heaven. I had to take my extra t-shirt and put it over my head with my head in the neck hole. There are mosquitoes, deerfly, black flies and those damn gnats that fly around and into my eyeballs. If I had begun my hike at this end I don't know if I could have stood it. There was a perfectly gorgeous spot to tent on the banks of a stream, I stopped for two minutes and the drone of the deer flies was like a hive of bees. Even though every part of my body was covered except my face I was getting bitten. Here at Rainbow Stream Lean-to it's just mosquitoes and it's so pretty. It's also cooling off now so I'm quite comfortable. 20 Miles

#### July 24<sup>th</sup>

I'm so excited, I called Pat and she's coming from Connecticut to hike over Katahdin with me. She's going to meet me at Katahdin Stream Campground and we'll hike up tomorrow. Pat and Peter got here before dark and we're staying in the shelter tonight. Possibility of rain tomorrow so we're going to leave early.

#### July 25<sup>th</sup>

We left Campground about 8am and weather remaining clear for the first 3 miles. By the time we reached the plateau it was raining, foggy and cold (45 degrees). People were turning back and heading down the mountain. I was very concerned about Pat and Peter and thought of turning back also but with only a mile to go we kept going in spite of the wind and rain. As we neared the summit, a man and son, both in t-shirts strolled towards the summit from another trail. Here we were in layered clothing and rain gear and two Maine natives in t-shirts, just like it was

a normal summer day. I lost all my fear for Pat and Peter and the five of us hiked the last ¼ mile together. The father snapped some pictures of us for Pat at the summit and we talked for a few minutes then headed down the mountain. It was a nice feeling being the first thru-hiker this year. After we got down off the plateau it wasn't too bad. It was still raining and windy but not foggy and it was warmer as we lost elevation. I think Peter was charged up by the experience because he was jumping off big boulders coming down the mountain, some times over 6 feet which drove me crazy. I had visions of having to carry him with a broken leg the rest of the way down. By the time we reached the car it was pouring. When we got to Millinocket the whitecaps on the lake were 5 and 6 feet high. We wondered what it was like on the summit of Katahdin then. We drove straight thru to get home.

It was wonderful being home and sleeping on a real mattress and having wonderful home cooked meals. No more mac and cheese, ramen noodles, or freeze dried soups. I do still have to keep a water bottle near my bed like it was when I hiked.

(Transcriber working heading: *One Journeys End Begins Another*).

I've been home 5 days now and my rheumatoid arthritis has come back with a vengeance. This is very strange because I didn't have one sick day on the trail. Pat and I both have tied it to eating beef. We'd both independently read articles tying eating beef with rheumatoid attacks. I'm still doing projects around the house but I can't straighten up. If I try to stand the pain in my back is too intense. As strange as it may sound I've been mixing cement and mortar, digging and laying wire mesh from a sitting position. I'm now taking medication and should soon straighten out. While this project is going a little slower than normal I'm amazed at how well it's going. I guess that old adage (where there's a will there's a way) is right on.

Throughout the next months, I've receive letters and cards from people I hiked with, most of who have made it all the way to Katahdin, Paul Dosty from Lewiston, Maine. *Dandy Don* from Waterbury, Ct. as of his last letter was going to college in San Diego.

Tom Leonard who was going to attend the Audubon School corresponded with me for a while after completing the trail and then called me from a psychiatric hospital. He didn't elaborate on why he was there and I would never ask. Within a month his girlfriend called and told me Tom was dead. His parents also wrote and informed me. I have no idea what happened, just speculation. I can only think of the care free days hiking across Pennsylvania or when I met him in Glasgow, Virginia, and Pat and I giving him a ride back to the trail. The three of us Tom, *Dandy Don* and I got together on the trail just outside Blue Ridge Summit after Pat left me there when I came home for Tim's Birthday. We had a great time hiking together, swimming in Caledonia State Park and sharing a box of strawberries I'd bought at a roadside stand on our way into Duncannon. I left them at the Doyle there and that's the last time I saw them. There's a shelter in the Massachusetts section that was built in his name. I guess I'll spend the rest of my life wondering what happened.

*Rose* and *Sourdough*, who I'd met in Rice Gap, sent me a picture of them after they completed the trail. She was 30 pounds lighter and looked 30 years younger (Rose & Bob Goss who I met April 18<sup>th</sup>).

The *Spunks* all made Katahdin. I hope I run into at least one of them again.

*Raven* wrote me a year later of *Sunshine's* death from cancer and I cry inside for somebody I spent just a few hours with.