

POSTED Mar 23, 2009 11:49 PM

Blog: conditioning

This lazy biking while absorbing some tivo'd TVLand will have to do for conditioning. Coordinates still 12203 if you know what I mean..

UPDATED Mar 27, 2009 5:21 PM

POSTED Mar 25, 2009 11:56 PM

Blog: How and Why.

Just a few words on these popular pre-hike topics.

Why:

Talking with people since this was a glimmer of a serious idea, I must've been asked 10 times if I have cancer or another terminal disease. Been there, done that with the cancer, 16 years ago in June. I don't think that I felt much like hiking at the time either.

Midlife crisis? No, not old enough. I may be heading one off though, no regrets you see.

The two biggest catalysts in terms of motivation on this trip that I am aware of are:

1- I quit drinking a few years ago and since require much more mental stimulation & physical activity and..

2 - The vacation I was forced to take last year at work when the vacation carryover limit changed helped me to realize that there is more to life than working a million hours a week in a place with no windows. I really do like my job but I need to do other things too from time to time. ("work-life balance"?)

How:

And yes, I did just recently have the most ridiculous "hiking accident" ever, wandering around in some weeds outside of work, splitting my hand open to the point of surgery. But don't forget you've first got to leave your windowless office to have an outdoor accident. I may come off as completely incompetent or accident prone (or both) but I really have done some similar but smaller hikes successfully for example 100 miles solo on the Long Trail last August. I've survived midnight bear visits in the Adirondacks and lunch-hour tick bites in the parking lot at work.

I'm not guaranteeing success or completion but I am going to try to complete this and will be happy with myself if I go 500 miles. Let's see what happens.

POSTED Mar 27, 2009 1:25 PM

Blog: A map is up of my progress...

A map is up of my progress, see left hand side "Archie on the AT". I agree that this important status indicator should be posted next to the CICS/IMS transaction monitors and consoles on the display in the Operations room. haha..

UPDATED Mar 28, 2009 10:53 PM

POSTED Mar 28, 2009 4:19 PM

Blog: Conditioning part 2

In order to fund this all I've sold my house... Also, no mortgage payment now. (woohoo.) This is all insanely depressing though in a way.. Moving this all to mom's only to move it again in a few months. Arg. Thanks x 100 my loyal moving pals!

POSTED Apr 1, 2009 2:58 PM

Blog: All but in the woods

Were in ATL on the train.. Coonskin cap and pickup truck guy picks me up at the last stop.

Tale of the tape:

Self:
5' 10

195lbs
20lbs gear
8lbs food (4 days)
4 days stubble on the face (head start on the trail beard/ lost my razor in the move)

Core Gear:

Enclosed hammock
Down sleeping bag
Clothes im wearing
Xtra longjohns and knit cap
Brasslite alcohol stove
.7 L titanium pot
1 Leatherman
Also- 1 "Light weight titanium skunk stabber flip open self defense blade"
Way too heavy civil war book
90 gigs of oggs and mp3s
Razor sharp witts

To be continued...

POSTED Apr 3, 2009 2:52 PM

Blog: A walk in the woods

Climbed Springer yesterday, freezing rain and howling wind all day and night. Met my first few supposed fellow thru-hikers and they must've been Katz and the crazy Florida girl out of the Bryson book (see subj.; also Bills driver in the book's wife was my coonskinned cap shoffer, no actual cap it turned out..) So the Katzy guy showed up with *93lbs* in his bag... He dragged it around like a wheeled suitcase and did indeed jettison 20lbs before we even launched. He made it a quarter mile with me before I left him behind, perhaps never to see him again.

Another humorous parallel for this phase of the trip-- its like the opening shows of American Idol with the certified lunatics singing like they're being beaten over the head and then the British guy says, "What were you thinking?" in his snottiest tone. Half of these people are really just bonkers and perhaps a bit out of their league.. So far some great people too though and excellent forests. Having a blast. (picture: across valley from our camp at Hawk mtn in Cherokee National Forest)
adm

POSTED Apr 4, 2009 7:57 PM

Blog: Getting there

Minor update... Great hiking day, at Gooch Gap, headed towards dreaded Blood Mtn tomorrow, which dwarves Springer. Hopefully the gang can press on..

POSTED Apr 5, 2009 5:34 PM

Blog: Solar Man is now Pirate Paul

Cranked out another 8 mi today, 24 total now, a few thousand to go. Holed up just below Blood Mtn, will summit tomorrow and then wreak havoc on our first resupply town, Neels Gap. Might even do a little karaoke if we can.

So companion Solar Man lost a tooth in his partials while refueling on a Snickers and so he's now Pirate Paul. Or maybe the super glue field repair will hold and he will again be Solar Man (who coincidentally has a solar phone charger that can't seem to charge a thing). On the topic of trail names, I'm very close to talking Florida girl (actually of Western NY) to go with Bird Brain. Its got my vote anyway. Alright, Scarecrow signing off.

POSTED Apr 6, 2009 4:05 PM

Blog: Trail Magic

We are now in a \$60/4 cabin in Neels Gap for the night, Solar Man, Sailor, The Bird (thats Bird Brain's nickname) and I. Moments after reaching the highway heading here a lady ran over to announce that there was all you can eat free burgers. It was Trail Magic perhaps, or in other words an inspirational handout on the AT. More often TM is a mysterious cooler of cold Cokes in the woods with a little sign-in book next to it. But anyway, we all ate at least two burgers apiece cooked by a local church group and chatted a bit with the cooks. I over heard the guy in the outfitter nextdoor saying he was ready to grab his Jesus Burger too.

After lunch we all dropped at least \$100 on equipment that we should have had in the first place. On a day like today, with flurries and a *freezing* gusty cold front on us, those guys must make a mint. Bought groceries and fuel too.

Last night a crazy bear ate everyone's food atop of Blood Mtn. Glad we stayed a little below there.

ps- "93" (93 lbs pack guy) as he's now known is infamous in our little nitch of the trail and even claims to be hiking towards us. Last we heard he was spending a second night at a hostel. Will believe he's really hiking it when I see it.

(picture of center- Mental Sean, right-Sailor and other hikers looking off Mountain Crossings deck, waiting for burgers)

POSTED Apr 7, 2009 9:21 PM

Blog: Hike like you mean it

This morn we woke up in the cabin to a snow covered outside. My wife had sent a txt over night including the inspirational words "Hike like you mean it" and everyone dug that. And so we did, hiked like we meant it over 11 freezing, blowing, snow-pelting miles. At times I felt like I was in a Mountain Dew commercial, running the ridges like a pro with a snowy, 20 degree backdrop and a rock'n'roll sound track.

It was all pretty wild, especially rolling into camp at the head of the pack. Double Ramen dinner with a side of Skittles.

Solar Man's blisters have taken over for a time and so he'll be taking a break to recover. Presently I suspect he qualifies as a cyborg with the amount of duct tape blister protection he's sporting. We'll meet up again a few days up the trail.

Bird, Sailor and I proceed tomorrow on the (hopefully warmer) Crazy Train.

UPDATED Apr 18, 2009 12:55 AM

POSTED Apr 8, 2009 9:37 PM

Blog: Trail magic magic

Last night was a rough night for many camping at Low Gap. Between the 20deg sleepless night and the 3 former US Marines quarreling amongst themselves and intimidating most everyone else it was rough. They left a big bag of trash in the woods too- way out of line.

13 miles, woah.... Two mtns, total exhaustion like not felt before this trip. We were shooting for Cheese Factory, a camp site in the middle of nowhere that a guy in a pickup recommended without any other details a few days ago.

Holy wow. On my last shred of energy I pulled in, Sailor was pitching his tent, told me I'd better talk to the strangers a few feet beyond. In the middle of nowhere we are and the lady says, "hey, we're cooking

dinner, buggers and dogs, beer and soda." I said, "like for me?" she says, "yeah that'd be some trail magic if we ate and let you sit there with your little dehydrated rice!" Hillarious. At least 10 hikers dined with the four active and retired doctors (all former thru-hikers of couse).

As Sailor said, "keep the TM coming and we'll be in Maine in no time" Other updates, Bird is in Unicoi Gap or Rocky Mtn (2 tiny miles from this crazy trail magic) and Solar is on the DL in Hiawasi, Ga.

Its a great, great day. (ps: TM eggs and danishes they said for morning!?!)

POSTED Apr 10, 2009 10:47 PM

Blog: No service...

Lost service for a day in the Chatahoochee Nat. Forest, another day, 9 miles, camped with the Train + Kiwi Maddog, Salty Pepperjohn and and Rusty.

In Hiawasee today, picked up Solar & Trampoline Sean. Five of us in the Honeymoon suite @ the motel (with hot tub!). Phone service is pretty rough here too. Tomorrow if plans hold we'll enter NC. Special thanks to the AYCE Chinese Buffet.

POSTED Apr 11, 2009 10:15 PM

Blog: One more hike detail

Also, we entered NC the day before Easter. Most if not all of the sizable group today found this to be an exciting accomplishment & milestone. Shoutout to the people working the Easter holiday at Met!!

(apologies should I find signal after the holiday's gone)

POSTED Apr 11, 2009 10:16 PM

Blog: 11 more miles, mild sprain

Left the lovely Inn thus morning. Hiked 11 mi on a mild sprain obtained on the wet lawn outside the

Inn. Its cold up here! Thankfully Mom over-nighted me some cold weather gear Friday. Keeping this short due to more phone signal issues.

UPDATED Apr 18, 2009 12:55 AM

POSTED Apr 12, 2009 8:02 PM

Blog: 12 miles, 5500ft peak

Another fantastic day on the Trail, just as Salty Pepperjohn predicted at 8am. (btw it was around 20f at the time) We climbed the rather large Standing Indian and eventually reached Carter Shelter.

I feel like someone pummeled the soles of my feet. I think the ankle is healing but its hard to say. It's all good though.

Photo: off Standing Indian mtn NC. Maxwell in forefront, Crickey, Father Time and Martin behind.

POSTED Apr 12, 2009 8:03 PM

Blog: Easter egg

Oh yes, there was Easter for us on the trail. Being Easter I knew something unusual was to happen. The Omelet Angels were making what I think were 6-egg omelets, home made bread + a bag lunch for later!?! Did I mention the chair message? (not kidding.... Wow!) Annual event hosted by '79 thru-hiker Tarhill. Thanks for the much needed calories and protein man!

POSTED Apr 13, 2009 7:30 PM

Blog: Cold wet day

See picture, 40ish all day with constant rain. On the upside we crossed mile 100 (or mile 108 including the appriach trail which most of us hiked). Bad signal, getting rained in, short update. Bye for now.

POSTED Apr 15, 2009 10:47 PM

Blog: Hikers 1, Serial Killers 0

We're in the mountains over Franklin, NC now and its around 20f with wind-chill. Around 130mi total. I'm in my sleepbag with face mask. We resupplied yesterday and are now good 'til Bryson City/Wesson.

So I finally got a chance to test out the thumbs heading in to Franklin yesterday, otherwise dormant for years. I got all five of us a ride in the back of a truck and won a \$5 bet that I couldn't in less than twenty minutes. We sped off down the highway with mountains flying by and wind roaring over wet rain gear.

More rides followed as the terrific people of Franklin picked us up even when we weren't trying for a ride. Bird helped a lot here as having a girl in your party when looking for a hitch is an atom bomb of a weapon and we may just change her name to RideBait. Per this post's subject, no hikers were harmed in the making of this paragraph.

So back on the Trail and 12mi from todays entry point, here I am hanging in my hammock at 5000 ft, freezing and feeling rather pummeled from a hefty days hiking. But I couldn't be much happier.

Picture: lunch before Siler Bald.

POSTED Apr 16, 2009 8:03 PM

Blog: A Trail Miracle (sort of)

Warmed up today, hiked strong all day. The big Trail news today is that at the shelter before Licklog Gap where we tented last night there was a family of mice that moved into Checkpoint Charlie's backpack and gave birth to a new litter too. A miracle perhaps but not to Checkpoint.

The photo is of Fontana Lake, gateway to the Smokies as taken atop a mountain past Tellico Gap earlier today. That's where we're headed next week. Brrr.

POSTED Apr 17, 2009 8:44 PM

Blog: Not bored yet

I talked to a few people prior to launch on this trip discussing "getting board of hiking all day." I'm glad to say it hasn't happened yet. I've been meeting 10 new people a day and constantly seeing new places. Crossed our first river (by bridge) today and train tracks too. Still working towards Fontana Dam.

Enjoy this attempt at a flower picture.

POSTED Apr 18, 2009 6:56 PM

Blog: Mountain Love

Today: 10mi, 3500ft climb in the first half & it was absolutely grueling. Although it's been freezing at night it must have went over 70 today with sunburn strength sun. A few of us, myself included, are getting red faces and forearms. To max out things in the drama department there was some sort of forest fire a ridgeline below us. We're hoping it was a controlled burn but if I miss my post tomorrow you'll know what happened to me. (Mom: I'll be fine, relax- I'm just building suspense here for the other readers)

At this juncture I'll tell you about Mountain Love a.k.a. Yune who blew by us a few days ago. Yune is a 50 y/o man from South Korea who saved his money for three years to come here to hike the AT. He's a nice guy, almost zero English (saw him pour Epson? salt in his coffee back in Hiawassi as he recognized the carton but not the words!?) and hikes like a champ. One final note on Yune, back on Easter the masseuse lady gave him her ball cap as he had no hat. He burst into tears. I almost did the same just watching.

Alright.. Time for a few pages of my paperback.

POSTED Apr 19, 2009 1:32 AM

Blog: Character Development

(as transcribed by loving wife)

Sailor J: Met him at Amicalola State Park on day 1. From Baltimore, works on boats i.e. boat "Pride of Baltimore" and also does some bartending. Is extremely excited to be on the trail. Hikes fast uphill, slow going down.

Bird: Met her a few hours after Sailor, came in late and had forgotten how to light her own stove at dinner. Studies birds and/or general ecology. Hometown: Rochester, NY.

Solar Man: Started with us atop Springer, which is 8 miles from the park yet is technically the trail terminus. That was the afternoon of our first hiking day. Solar lives in Hawaii in a solar powered house with his wife and children when he isn't playing in the woods. Back home he does social work but was laid off.

Scarecrow: (thats me) An IT manager whose currently taking a break in order to pursue an important life goal i.e. hiking this here long, long trail. As was said elsewhere home is Albany, NY and back there he has a wife, a daughter (7 y/o), daughter's mother, his own mother, and other super-supportive, excellent & loved people. He hikes anxiously at times, other times fast and other times in soreness and discomfort. But he's loving every bit. Last night he had a dream that he'd went crazy and left his life and job to hike the trail. HA HA HA!!

POSTED Apr 19, 2009 7:35 PM

Blog: Smokey mountains

We did 18mi today, most I've done all trip. And in the cold rain too. We pushed in order to get to the base of the Smokies But that's not what the picture is. That's just some NC mountains... Of course there's really no difference between these mountains and the Smokies other than the law that designates some into a national park.

On other notes the Crazy Train is fragmented, camping all over this part of the state. Some went ahead, some stayed back. We'll meet up on Wednesday to tackle the Smokies. Ps- blog on hold til then I think.

POSTED Apr 21, 2009 3:51 PM

Blog: Rigors of the Trail

As you may be aware we're letting our blisters heal here at the Fontana Resort. I took a dip today in that there pool and the water was so cold that my skin tingled for 10 minutes after. Another difficult twist on this otherwise great setup is that there are five of us in a little double room to save money.

And so that brings us to the latest addition to the Crazy Train, member #5, Trampoline who's been on board since GA but was neglected in the Pulitzer winning Character Development post last week. Trampo is most recently out of MD but originally from CT and I still am not sure what he does for work. He does seem a bit accident prone though and has 20-something years of scars to prove it. He

was originally hiking with the high-miles/high-tech Hazmat Team but almost lost both legs in the process and dropped smoothly into the Train.

On the Trail for sure tomorrow morning.

POSTED Apr 25, 2009 10:48 AM

Blog: On top of the world (4/24)

Your charming narrator is currently atop Clingmans Dome, elevation 6643ft, highest point of the AT and third highest peak in the Eastern US. We've also broken into 1990s (miles) and so in other words now have less than 2000 to go. Woo hoo.

A few weeks ago a guy passed us in his pickup at a road crossing. He yelled out, "On top of the world!" He really captured that moment and this one too.

(on another note, sorry for any posting backlog.... Smokies are not cell phone equipped except on the highest peak- expect more of the same for the next 3-5 days)

POSTED Apr 25, 2009 10:48 AM

Blog: All Aboard the Crazy Train to Maine (4/22)

We're finally back on track, 11 hard miles into the GSMNP (is the abbreviation I think). We're as healed-up as we're gonna get. On the way we walked over the largest dam this side of the Mississippi.

There was a crazy, tall windy tower on the first mountain. Around our third mile we saw our first black bear. He or she was scared of us which is very good as far as I am concerned. I snapped a picture but with the trees in the way it would hurt my story more than it would help. Hence this lovely photo of mountain flowers.

So just like everyone has told us for weeks, it's windy and freezing cold up here. But as always, quite fun too.

POSTED Apr 25, 2009 10:54 AM

Blog: Thunderhead Mountain (4/23)

Today was hard.... Maybe harder than yesterday's ascent with 6-days food. 11 miles, sun-burned ears, gnats and more. The hikers two miles past us had a bear and three cubs at their site, no attack thankfully for them.

There was one truly pleasant section today, as featured in the photo- a grassy orchard area, complete with one large male resident turkey. I'll now turn my focus to my dehydrated Santa Fe Chicken

POSTED Apr 26, 2009 1:27 PM

Blog: Smokies Day 4

Today was perhaps the most scenic hiking of the park (see picture) and not the persistent climbing we've done the past few days. I'm still a physical wreck though, putting in 15 miles on top of two strenuous 10+ miles day. Rereading the symptoms I feel that I may have even had a touch of heat stroke the other day.

To complicate things, last night my sleep was wrecked by three local guys hooting around a camp fire. One of them I'm sure was the basis for the character Boomhower (?) on King of the Hill- couldn't understand a word he said and he continued mumbling in his sleep, after he'd went to bed in the shelter. Now as of only 7pm I'm exhausted and am ready for bed.

Tomorrow's looking less difficult (thankfully) and we'll at last have a half a rest day at a hostel at the edge of the park on Monday before beginning Operation Hotfoot. Details on that to come. Agent Scarecrow signing off.

UPDATED Apr 30, 2009 4:34 AM

POSTED Apr 27, 2009 2:28 PM

Blog: G'bye Smokies (4/28)

We left the park around 9am today. It's shower & laundry time after 5-6 showerless hot hiking days. We're at the coolest hostel on Earth perhaps, Standing Bear Farm on an old tobacco farm in TN. Old galvanized metal sinks, DIY washboard/air dry laundry and a fridge full of \$.75 soda. A reward in a way.

UPDATED Apr 30, 2009 4:34 AM

POSTED Apr 27, 2009 2:34 PM

Blog: Saw the sunrise (4/26)

Woke up at 5am and saw the sunrise over the Smokies. Hiked like mad all day with Solar Man, fortunately a good chunk was early, before the mountains turned into a gigantic stone oven.

It looks like Operation Hotfoot kicked in a few days early when we cranked out 20 miles for our current trip record. Now we have another 200+ miles to go in about two weeks to complete this objective: to reach the Trail Days hiker festival in Damascus by 5/15. There will be several more high miles days to come.

POSTED Apr 29, 2009 5:03 PM

Blog: Classic Rock

Did the Snowbird Mountain-Max Patch thing today (Jr. left & Solar right on Max P. in photo) and another 20 miles!?! I hope that I'm not overdoing it. I'm hanging in my jungle hammock in bear alley at the moment. This morning Sailor and Solar saw a mom with two dangerous cubs on the trail. They waited for the bears to cross, of course.

Last night was a blast at the hostel. Sailor J buzzed my head during the afternoon and that evening I asked Classic Rock if he wanted a haircut too. He said buzz cuts never gained the attention he expected so I suggested a Mohawk.

Minutes later I was buzzing a Mohawk into this poor guy until the clippers jammed. It took three more barbers and the scissors on a Swiss Army knife to finish the job. He looked pretty good all in all. And it, of course, was a laugh riot.

Tomorrow we may just hit Hot Springs, NC. It's one of three or four towns through which the AT passes directly. Should be super cool.

POSTED Apr 30, 2009 7:44 AM

Blog: Hot, hot. Hot!

It's actually a little cool in Hot Springs this morning... Picked up some groceries and finally a touch of soy icecream. (1st since Albany)

Piled on another 13 miles before lunch yesterday to get here, walked by many wild flowers as you can see.

Oh yes-- should mention for the record that 4 of my toes lost sensation last night from 4pm to 9pm. Fortunately, they tell me this is "normal" for a thru-hiker. ????????

POSTED Apr 30, 2009 10:44 PM

Blog: On the Greyhound

Hot Springs is but a faint memory now... Here's to a town that puts the 'Bumble' in Bumbleville, whatever that means. Not even 1 traffic light but most hikers agree that they felt like they could stay forever.

On other notes, my toes are back to normal, even after 5 miles of uphill hiking today. Also, today not one but two would-be thru-hikers in my tiny section of the 2000 mile trail crossed their last white blaze for the time being. The first I barely knew but I helped razz him for misspelling Asheville (Ashvill or similar) on his cardboard sign that he was to sport next to his thumb on the way to the bus station. (told him he should add "Univercity" to the sign)

The second was closer to home. Not that I've seen the guy since day two of the trip but 93 (93 lbs. pack guy from a very early post) texted today to say that he may have been activated for Guard duty, was likely off to Middle East etc., and was on the bus home. You can each decide for yourself if 93's story adds up or if it's an elaborate way to save face in the midst of personal defeat. The gang here seems to think the story is a bit phony. On the other hand, Mr. 93 if you're out there defending our right to eat Freedom Fries and to watch high budget ultra-violent action movies, we thank you sincerely.

And who's next to leave the island on this reality show of sorts? We shall see.

For kicks:

'09 Greyhound List

(that I know of, including injured hikers, girlfriends revoking their bail and so on)

93

Matt

Broken

NoNo Joe

Mental Sean

Fist Pancake

Ithai

Elmer

Cimmeron (88 y/o, going for age record but injured last week)

Possum

And eventually 90% of the 2000+ would-be 2009 thru-hikers. Statistically that's 3/4's+ of the Crazy Train!!?!

POSTED May 2, 2009 11:12 AM

Blog: Still standing

Hiked in the rain yesterday, freezing, foggy. Met some cool and/or eccentric people too. A guy with a terrible body-length sunburn, a girl "Hiking to Maine For the Brain". She has 6 friends with brain tumors. A third guy taught me how to make Cowboy Coffee.

Feet are now a real wild card- only 10 miles until they told me to stop yesterday. Today I should go light too I feel... More later.

POSTED May 3, 2009 9:06 AM

Blog: One month on the Trail (5/2)

Today made thirty hiking days minus a few town/hostel days. I'm two miles short of 300 miles total here at Jerry's Cabin Shelter.

I'm hoping for a miraculous over night recovery for my feet and a 15 mile day tomorrow. Regardless, this 6 lost miles is a serious risk to Operation Hotfoot. It may be time to engage Operation Hotfoot Plan B..

POSTED May 3, 2009 8:13 PM

Blog: Not a vacation

Today was cold and pouring rain again, all day. The only difference from the last two days is that I've begun wearing my warmest shirt to get wet hiking in (to prevent some pain) and then keeping my thinner shirt for night time.

Injuries are at bay for now. Tomorrow is going to be 18 or 21 miles- guaranteed to be a challenge for this tired hiker.

POSTED May 5, 2009 10:42 AM

Blog: No Rain, No Maine

It rained again today. That makes rain every day between Hot Springs and Erwin, TN. People are getting completely soaked and proportionally cranky. Everyone that is except Crocodile Hunter in the picture, stretching a bit atop Big Bald. It really was a great view but frustrating as we could see the next storm off a ways, on the way to trounce us.

So, with cranky feet, Crocodile Hunter, Reverend Bearslayer, Tweak and I pulled 21 miles out of our wet shoes making it all of our personal highest mile day I believe. That leaves only a handful of miles to Erwin tomorrow and its legendary all you can eat pizza joint. (of course I'll be hoping that pizza is not the only thing available there, but I digress..)

By the way, to you I say "Thanks for reading this!!" I checked the hit counter back in Hot Springs and you've visited this blog a total of almost 8000 times! That's more hits than all of my other previous, miserable web pages together then times ten I suspect. I really hope you're still enjoying this and perhaps are considering your own hike. (a lot of AT hikers first got hooked on another's thru-hike story)

Bye for now.

POSTED May 6, 2009 11:05 AM

Blog: A break in the rain

Stayed at the hostel last night, caught a ride to Wal-Mart with a guy named Damascus and his two giant dogs in his convertible. We listened to Lynard Skynard rather loud and drove with the top down. On the way back we picked up two more hikers who sat on the top of the back seats like we were riding in a

parade. A cop saw us, we all gasped. He must have thought he was hallucinating and just let us cruise by.

Everyone is staying at the hostel again tonight. It's raining so hard at times you can barely see twenty feet out.

POSTED May 7, 2009 2:13 PM

Blog: Day on the trail (As transcribed by Mrs Scarecrow)

In order to round out the reader's experience, here's a typical AT day

6am Awake to your farting and snoring neighbors. One particularly cruel lady may hum Sound of Music riffs. Yesterday's injuries begin to come back to life as you eat a mangled pop-tart and re-pack everything you own by way of cramming it into an undersized, dirty backpack.

7am You have "Morning Meeting" (accompanied by the bluesy "It's Morning Meeting" theme) at which all the fanfare and theme song results in a designated lunch spot. Perhaps there is a shred of extra time so you play "throw rocks into your cook-pot" for ten minutes. Everyone loves that game.

7:45am Hiking commences and that's when yesterday's injuries really kick-in. If your name is Scarecrow, you set out daily with a cup of terrible, nasty, bitter instant coffee which you spill all over yourself. Hike for four hours, rain, fog stifling heat and/or bugs.

12:52pm You find the lunch spot, a bit late as usual. There are swarms of gnats now flavoring your summer sausage on a bagel. You meet a guy doing the trail with a WW2 army poncho tent, a giant metal oil lantern, and a 5lb bag of roll-your-own tobacco and he says he's making a documentary on edible plants and wilderness survival. This guy is certifiable - he thinks the us government created earthquakes. You also accidentally eat half of your dinner because you're starving and in a feeding frenzy.

1pm You resume hiking only to notice that your duct tape bandage is falling off your hamburger meat heel so you adjust and hike on. You see a bird, a slug, a chipmunk, a snake. Occasionally you sip some greenish water that you pulled out of an old dammed-in pond in which curiously you'd found a dead turtle. You wonder if you will die from that or from the sudden cold rain. You wonder if you're getting tendinitis on you're sprained ankle that you've been hiking on all month. So you quit whining and take a fist full of Ibuprofens (also known as Vitamin I to hikers).

3pm You cross an old dirt road and take a break on a log. A minute later another hiker comes through and does the same. A third shows up and says, "Look what I have" and he throws to the ground out of a bandanna wrapping, an 8", 4.5 lbs brass statue shaped and molded like a wizard known as "The Bad Wizard". He also calls him "Elrod the Merriless". He says that the Bad Wizard hiked the 2600 mile PCT last year by way of a game -- Whoever touched him first had to carry him until the next hiker was

tricked into touching him. By the way, 4.5 lbs is a lot in a thru-hiker's pack. That's a sleeping bag and tent both! Wisely, you do not touch the Wizard and hike on.

5pm You reach your final destination, a trail shelter full of mice and cobwebs. You throw down your sleep gear and fire up your alcohol stove. Mmm...Chicken Teriaki again. You eat, joke about how you'd put trail mix on your PB&J at lunch and then eat your buddy's half eaten mashed potatoes right out of his pot, on his used spoon.

Maybe you build a campfire, a tradition which some frown upon now in this era of shrinking & over-used forests. Someone tells a story about their friend back home that had fallen down a flight of stairs, at a party, knocking out his teeth, getting partials at age 25.

Eventually everyone turns in for the night. The mice start racing around the shelter, looking for your favorite fleece to chew through. The snoring & farting resumes.

POSTED May 8, 2009 8:46 AM

Blog: The 6 Flags of TN

Looks like I'm putting out tomorrow but not without having lived one of Erwin's best adventures. So I've been drying out, resting and regaining sensation in my feet to some success. On the way to the breakfast bar this morning Junior noticed that the Nolichucky River was raging with rain water and thought some rafting was in order. White water rafting not being a threat to my feet, I signed on as well and the white water sequence to this home-made Into the Wild went down as follows.

My first real class 3 & 4 was incredible, especially considering that it turns out that you sit on top of the raft more than in it, wedging your slick, wet feet into crevices to lock in. We were fully perpendicular to the river several times, facing both down and up depending on the wave or hole. I got water smashed in my face, nose and ears. And all at the thru-hiker, cash/no-tax discount rate. There were no capsizings or men overboard. Finally rafting thoughts: Wow.

Yeah... Lets hope these feet hold. I saw a girl with similar symptoms today- she's got two weeks off because of it. Lets hope that Operation Hotfoot Plan B can still work. Other updates: some of the gang is ahead now. Also Sailor J got crazy sick upon docking in Erwin. 24 hours of food poisoning nightmare for him (and his cabin mates). He is better now though and will also proceed with Plan B in the morn.

Pps- last minute update from the front line: Bird fell into a lake or river or something. She was dried by campfire and is now at full strength, or so the 4th hand account went.

POSTED May 8, 2009 10:25 PM

Blog: Back at 3500'

We set out this morning around 9am in the face of a thunder storm, rather impressing the other hikers still at Uncle Johnny's Hostel, and put in an honest day's hike. It cleared up by 1pm and we dried. There was a lot of charred forest today-- it's scary if it catches your imagination right and you realize that there was an enormous fire at some point covering *miles* of forest, perhaps trapping any number of unfortunate hikers.

Alright... Going to save some battery for tomorrow.

POSTED May 11, 2009 7:08 PM

Blog: Happy Mothers Day (5/10)

Hiked what seemed like forever today. (I think the distortion in time may be due to forgetting my afternoon Advil) Now we're at Overmountain Shelter. Google that you history buffs- there's a story about how this barn turned trail shelter is built on a route used in the Revolutionary War. Amazing shelter (sleeps at least 30) and *amazing* view from it, down into a gorgeous valley.

Shout out to all you Moms out there, on the Trail and at home.

POSTED May 11, 2009 7:08 PM

Blog: Damage Report (5/9)

This report is coming out of the leaky-roofed Clyde Smith Shelter NC. (or is it TN? You hop back and forth for 180 miles...) Your field correspondent & quarter master is in sleeping bag, under a roof but with his ground cloth over him repelling leaked water from the bag.

As of 5/9, 38 days damage report:

-370 mi down

-1800 mi to go

-5'9"

-192 lbs. or less

-even better looking than last reported

-Pack without food: 14 lbs. (hot! Having a lighter pack is like having a faster CPU in your PC, a faster car, a wider TV or some other such analogy)

- Sleepbag swapped from 15f to 30f in Hot Springs
- Winter clothes sent home two days ago
- 1 Shoe Goo shoe repair successful
- 1 Shoe Goo repair needed on my left gaiter (waterproof sock cover)
- hammock straps are worn with only 10 nights logged. Will contact manufacturer.
- knees ache
- feet achy, numb and blistered off and on, sometimes all three together
- everything I own, myself included, is soaked and smells terrible

And of course it's all a ball. Tomorrow is a 6000 ft'er so don't leave the edge of your seat.

Photo: cool Hemlocks atop Unaka Mtn. Around 9 a.m.

POSTED May 11, 2009 7:08 PM

Blog: Hump Mtn. (5/11)

Humped over Hump Mt.. today in white-out fog conditions. I took my glasses off after a while as they were only fogging over Apparently there was a bull or cow up there but I never saw it.

It's now the final phases of Operation Hotfoot. We're about 80 miles from Damascus. It's going to be two more days on the trail, a ride for the last miles to the Trail Days hiker festival and a ride back after to hike where I leave off. Can't wait.

POSTED May 14, 2009 3:35 PM

Blog: Man vs. Nature Parts 1 & 2

1 - Three nights ago I slept in a barn converted to a bunkroom, \$18/night, clean, many VHS cassettes-- a fequent hostel theme we've enjoyed. (also, this barn not to be confused with Overmountain Shelter) At 12:20 AM a giant hornet thing swooped down from a crack in the ceiling and stung my neck for no good reason. I cursed and went back to sleep. At 3 AM he returned and like a true Tennessee ninja I lept into action from a dead sleep and caught it under my bed sheet. In the process I awoke 3 other hikers who then watched me snap its neck with the pliers on my Leatherman. I took a picture for you but... Man wins.

2 - Next day I covered some magical old farms and forests. There was still tobacco growing and old home foundations. I had lunch at Jones Falls where I snapped another nice picture. I watched Night Blind attempt a wreckless, ropeless rock climb up the 50' falls. He lost his footing and slid about 15' down a slick wet rock on his stomach and face. He brushed off and complained that he was wearing

the wrong shoes. And at that juncture I believe that Nature took back the match and swallowed up my cell phone, perhaps into the gorgeous Jones Falls which drained into the equally attractive Elk Creek River. I looked for hours up and down the trail but she was gone. (take note friends and coworkers who may have recieved prank calls from my # yesterday or the day before)

And then 2009 kicked in and my phone insurer overnighted me a brand new phone to Hampton, TN. Amazing... So here I am at mile 415. Trail Days is tomorrow and my wife will pick myself and a few other dudes up at the hostel tonight and we'll all go to Damascus. Operation Hotfoot concludes successfull as we join the worlds largest group of hikers and backpackers at Tent City. Will update this soon and resume at mile 415 accompanied by wife on Monday. ps- I really need these days off from hiking!!

POSTED May 14, 2009 8:03 PM

Blog: Testing...123

First post from phone #2...

POSTED May 16, 2009 9:29 PM

Blog: Trail Days Parade

Today many of this year's thru-hikers as well as "classes" from prior years paraded down the main street of Damascus. We carried water guns and water balloons as did many of the parade watchers. Perhaps the worlds largest water fight, it was a laugh riot. Needless to say I was soaked by the end.

On another note I saw a physician at the free hiker clinic at the church. She confirmed that many long distance hikers have this numb toes affliction and it's pretty much WYSIWYG. She gave me a new foot stretch to do and told me that thru-hikers are somewhat bad to their bodies.

Tomorrow this all ends and the real trail resumes. Wife and I will try to grab a ride back to Hampton with a cardboard sign. We'll hike from there back to here, past a bit and then hitch one final ride back to the car in Damascus. That's the latest plan.

POSTED May 16, 2009 10:05 PM

Blog: Green Light at Tent City

Hmm... Post from Friday evening disappeared... Twas this pic with a few words about TD. By the way this view alone of tents probably tripled by today's peak. And there were acres and acres of sets like this, in fields and in treed areas. Insane. There was a drum circle complete with thunderous chants going well past 2AM.. Fun fun.

POSTED May 17, 2009 7:31 PM

Blog: How many hikers does it take..

I spent a bit of time to make a nice cardboard "Hampton, TN" sign to catch our ride out of Damascus this morning. Well, we'd barely parked the car when I scored a ride (with a catch) on my second proposition. The guy (name: Just Fine, thru-hiked last year) had a flat on his touring van. My wife Fancy (a self-inflicted trail name) and I jacked up the van while Just went off looking for a loaner lug wrench. Then three more guys, two Brits and a NY'er, parked their bio-diesel monster nearby and began the same process we had intended, them hitching to Hot Springs and walking back to their truck.

First I gave them our no-longer-needed sign so they could use the back side. And then thinking more clearly I talked Just into driving them too. He was going to Knoxville and it wasn't really too outrageous to drop first through Hampton, then Hot Springs and finally due west to Knoxville.

So no one got to use the sign and Waterproof Ninja (guess which one he is in the picture) saved the day himself with his bio-diesel tools which removed a rusted lug nut. The Yanks, Just Fine, Hendrix and Collin (not a trail name I reckon) rode off, navigating by an ultra-trimmed east coast road map I'd stowed in my wallet.

We had a great chat in the van and Fancy and I got dropped off in front of the Ice House Saloon which Solar Man, Night Blind and I had visited last Wednesday for Chicken Nugget Sandwiches. We hiked a bit and stuck camp. Back in the woods.

POSTED May 18, 2009 6:05 PM

Blog: Alone at Watauga Lake

We covered just a few miles today but Fancy is still getting her trail legs and I'm trying to ease out of whatever aches and pains I've accumulated thus far. I did the stretches prescribed by the free doctor

from Birmingham, Alabama and so far I'm feeling alright. I'll update again on that after a heavier trail day. I'm guessing enough repetitive trauma will override any stretches.

At the moment Fancy and I are the only occupants of Watauga Lake Shelter and are listening to a nightmarish 80's mix on a tiny speaker I've brought for our hike together. Another luxury item we are carrying for this section is a titanium French press so to have some decent coffee. Up until now I've alternated between instant coffee and Foldger's singles bags. Neither unfortunately is up to par for my "Coffee Snob" taste and to complicate things the coffee in the trail-side towns isn't often any better. It's all good though. And going forward I'll be doing "cowboy coffee" made with real grinds mail dropped from home...

It's almost time for dehydrated dinner.

POSTED May 19, 2009 6:40 PM

Blog: Fancy's Big Day

Today was Fancy's longest ever backpacking day at 13 mi. She seems to be in good condition after and is working on cooking scrambled eggs and "wild forest mushroom" cous cous. I'm having rice and chicken.

We met a few people today on our way around Watauga Lake including Hardcore (a girl who's name speaks to her "no frills" back country hygiene), Fish (a south bound guy with terrible foot odor) and Break A Leg (a girl also going south for a section, thru-hiked 1100 miles in '05 until she mangled her foot-- reminding the reader that there's still time for my trail friends or I to get a show-stopping injury).

Tomorrow will be a hike of just mile less than today and then we'll have a triumphant return to Damascus on Wednesday afternoon. Sailor and other will perhaps leave from there tonight. Maybe I'll catch them early next week

POSTED May 21, 2009 3:32 PM

Blog: Fancy's Bigger Day (5/20)

We really covered a bit of ground today at 16 miles. It was Fancy's first 16 mile day and to put it in perspective I was on the Trail at least two weeks before attempting that sort of day. Well, perhaps there wasn't a good alternative. With our big day we're now positioned to hit Damascus (again) for lunch at a restaurant and otherwise we'd be eating powdered humus and hot sauce packets.

We're at Abingdon Shelter now, the scene of some crazy stuff last week. They'd said a toothless bear

cub wandered in and it appeared to be helpless. The hikers fed it and tried to get a ranger on site but the cub wandered off before it could be put into a rescue situation. Its mom, the story goes, was shot by a farmer recently. We're all hoping it comes back tonight. What a hot-cold relationship there is with bears and hikers????

Picture is a very nice, very old farm which the trail passes through. I'd guess it went out of service 50 years ago.

POSTED May 21, 2009 6:32 PM

Blog: Techincal Difficulties

Hey. Sorry about the 15 identical posts today and yesterday. For the geeks amongst you, I believe it is tied to switching from Verizon's EV to 1X during email transmission. When that happens I can't send that email until I reboot and do a voodoo dance. But once in a blue moon (i.e. yesterday) it does send but doesn't indicate that it did.

Another tech thing I meant to throw in earlier, you may notice that my position on the map isn't moving. If you noticed and hadn't figured out why that is, its because Fancy is the map updater.

So per photo we entered VA and left TN today. That's GA, NC, TN down, 10 states to go. And about 1715 mi.

POSTED May 23, 2009 1:01 PM

Blog: Loose 15lbs Eating Fried Oreos and Snickers!

Loose 15lbs Eating Fried Oreos and Snickers!!.... Well, at least I have. I thought the dieters and healthy eaters out there would enjoy knowing that thru-hikers eat Texas Honey Buns for breakfast (700 calorie fried, glazed monstrosities), 3 or 4 Snickers bars throughout the day, anything not nailed down for dinner and half gallons of ice cream in a sitting when in town. Or in my case substitute ice cream for an entire fried dough and a 6 pack of fried Oreos. Ask my wife, I almost had to be restrained when all of that sugar kicked in. And I just weighed in down 15lbs total.

But back to the hiking, Fancy did not out do herself numerically today at 13 miles. It was rough though, going over Straight Mtn. in the hot Virginia sun.

A foot update: doctor's stretches seem to have relieved some pain and numbness in my feet. I'm still at

a 3 out of 10 for foot comfort though and so I just replaced my hiking shoes at 450 miles. So next update will be regarding the new shoes and their impact.

As this day ends Fancy and I are tented in the middle of at least 5 giant, dead pine trees. If this turns out to be my final transmission, it's truly been a blast. Tune in tomorrow to find out how we slept tonight.

POSTED May 23, 2009 10:08 PM

Blog: Not a photographer..

Here's a look off of a memorial bridge on the AT. Actually, for about half a mile in that area the AT coincides with the Virginia Creeper Bike Path there in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The gravel bike path connects Damascus and Abingdon, VA and starts just south at the NC border. It is 30+ forested and country-side miles mostly following an old railroad bed. It appears to lend itself to bike-camping and fishing if biking isn't enough. I'm a biker too and I'd say this trail is definitely worth checking out if you're looking for some nature biking.

Today was Fancy's last day on the trail and in conclusion for the week, she really did great. We're spending our last few hours together now, her drinking some Rouge Ale and me drinking an NA brew. She'll have a long drive tomorrow and I'll have a long hike.

POSTED May 25, 2009 5:17 PM

Blog: OMG Ponies! (5/24)

Fancy went home today after dropping me off one last time in the woods. I look forward to seeing her next in perhaps PA. So I drowned my lonesomeness in spring water and walked it off properly. I did my longest day in over a week at 18 miles including 6 of those in a downpour. The culmination of all this: ponies.

What a sight these ponies are, running wild in this part of VA's parks. People feed them carrots constantly and so they're actually a bit pushy, demanding more from every passerby. I passed them and the 100 campers camping in their midst as quickly as possible.

Feet/shoes, so far so good. Maybe I can keep this pace for a bit. I'm a wee bit off schedule and need to do some catching up.

POSTED May 25, 2009 5:34 PM

Blog: Quick update

Here in Troutdale, VA on wifi to my surprise... (no phone service though) Feeling a bit ill. Guts hurt, no appetite. Hostel is nearby, may be calling me in. Awesome rhododendron blooms today.

POSTED May 26, 2009 9:51 AM

Blog: Recovering at the Hostel

I'm back at Jerry's Restaurant in Troutdale. I figured I'd better put down this update since he has wifi and otherwise phone service appears to be nonexistent. I also thought you'd enjoy this photographic glimpse into the hostel experience.

Some nice hikers made me some Theraflu last night. That got me well enough to finally shower. The place was packed, likely due to the rain. People on the floor, yada yada. This morning I'm still a bit ill but I figured I'll get better rest hiking 14 miles than another night at the Troutdale Baptist Hostel. I may have service tonight so there may be part 3 to the tale of my terrible illness sometime this evening.

POSTED May 27, 2009 3:08 PM

Blog: Quick update

I'm 85 pct better after 14 miles of fair weather hiking. Blue skies and cool breezes helped me make the best of the day.

Tonight's destination is Partnership Shelter which is legendary on the trail for its propane powered hot shower and proximity to Marion, Va which allows for pizza delivery 1/10 of a mile down the trail. The shelter is by the Mt. Rogers park headquarters which I believe factors in to the perks.

Photo: I crossed a nice, out of service farm today. It was complete with an old school bus rotting on a hillside to top off its charm. (bus not shown) Enjoy.

POSTED May 28, 2009 10:33 AM

Blog: Illness resumes/worsens

I'm laying in a hostel bed, ready to run for the toilet at moments notice. The thing that tops this all off is being so far away from my family and out of touch as well. (My phone isn't transmitting at the moment, you'll get this delayed) I feel like a desperate, sobbing sick kid for the first time in 20 years. The other hikers here have offered help as has the hostel owner but there's nothing anyone can do. All I can do is rest and wait.

I still managed to hike 12 miles today. I walked past the Virginia Settlers Museum -free for hikers- and took a peak at the cool 1800's farm which was the museum. They had a school house as well, 1890, shown here for your viewing pleasure.

POSTED May 28, 2009 8:27 PM

Blog: Hope I wan't too dramatic...

Here's proof that I'm alive, shaggy and hiking again. I'm in front of the Davis Fancy Cemetery of late 1800s. That was when the long-gone settlement of Davis Fancy was also around. I'm still not right or strong and so I'm only about five miles out of town, hanging out under my tarp. Today is a nero. (that's "near zero miles" for you portmanteau/lexicon fans) Over and out.

POSTED May 29, 2009 5:53 PM

Blog: Back in town???

Stopped by the hospital today, got some tests and a script for giardia treatment. Wasn't tested for 'G' but with the circumstances treatment was prudent. Not sure when this hike will resume but rest assured that it will resume soon.

POSTED May 30, 2009 3:35 PM

Blog: Happy Hiker Hostel

I'm recovering at the hostel today. I've eaten well and am returning to my proper hydration level. It's now day two on the meds. I'm really hoping to hike tomorrow as Maine isn't getting any closer with me idle, lapping up Aqua and Rambunny's gigantic meals. Maybe I'll send another photo of the cemetery tomorrow when I hike by it for the third time.

POSTED Jun 1, 2009 12:52 PM

Blog: Wild Mountain Cows! (5/31)

We're back on the trail with a respectable 14 mile day. My guts all seemed ok as did my feet. The weather was great and the terrain wasn't too strenuous. There must have been 15 cow styles between Knot Maul Shelter, where I am now, and Atkins, where I left this morning. FYI a cow style is a thing that you can climb but a cow can't, used to allow hikers to cross fenced fields. Speaking of cows, there were a few cows wandering around in the woods today. I asked a farmer I passed about that and he said it was normal. Here is a picture of a wandering mountain cow for your enjoyment.

POSTED Jun 2, 2009 10:07 AM

Blog: 60 day anniversary (6/1)

Today is roughly the two month anniversary of this start of this crazy journey. I'm at mile 570ish so I'm past 25 pct. That's not quite consistent with a straight-line progress timetable for a six month hike but it's not unusual for the first 500 miles to take a bit longer.

So I capped off this fine day with a my first 20 mile day since perhaps 5/13. It felt good.

POSTED Jun 2, 2009 9:22 PM

Blog: Be nice to hitchhikers!!

I woke up extremely sore today, as you may have expected. I still managed to do 14 miles though, reaching Helveys Shelter. I'm happy about today's progress. Even the morning was hot except for the shady spot by the brook in the photo. I finally hit the turnoff for my resupply town except that I missed it and over-hiked at least a half mile down a steep hill. I hiked back up sweating my brains out, stuck out my thumb and the second car that passed picked me and brought me straight to Dairy Queen. I did my customary mouth-stuffing and then resumed the grocery mission. It required another hitch since I'd inadvertently overshot town by requesting a DQ drop-off.

So again I put out the thumb and that time I think it was about four cars and a lady stopped, offered to wait while I got my groceries and then brought me back to the Trail. I guess the point is that some of the people I've encountered are some of the nicest people you'll ever find. And I must remember to repay some of these favors to people I meet in the future.

POSTED Jun 3, 2009 4:40 PM

Blog: Kimberling Creek/Stream of Consciousness

At a country grocery/beer store across from a sawmill. 25 mi from Pearisburg. Camouflage hat, camouflage pants. He'll maybe kill me... Moving logs. Big sheath knife. Big logs. For furniture or houses? Dust? Saw a skinny turkey, met a guy named "I'll Try". Dirty store. Giardia. So so hot outside. The mill just changed shifts. They're lucky to have jobs so to buy camouflage pants and shirts and pickup trucks. Will Cheetos dust fry my phone? Lost a filling. Dr. Pepper is essential. Do I have heat exhaustion? Don't make me go back out in the woods!?!?

POSTED Jun 5, 2009 12:29 AM

Blog: Wild, wild day

Today was crazy from minute one. I overslept by two hours, actually getting the rest I needed. I made a spontaneous stop at Dismal Falls. As featured in today's distasteful image, we stopped at the shelter which was the backdrop for the '80s AT murders & '08 attempted murders. I ate dinner at 7pm and then hiked 7 miles in the dark in driving rain and fog, descending thousands of feet. (all so that I can *maybe* see a dentist tomorrow for a lost filling)

Summary: I made my new personal high miles today @ 24 and also I pushed myself to the limit in other ways as well. I will sleep like an angel tonight in this seedy motel.

POSTED Jun 9, 2009 9:22 AM

Blog: Trail Madness (6/8)

It seems like for over a week now I've been knocking out the miles without much thought or struggle. Today was around 15 miles including a 1700 foot climb at the end. Also typical of the past few weeks, the hike included miles of stretches of blooming mountain laurels making those parts of the day feel like a parade or an extravagant wedding.

On other interesting notes, I've gone from hiking with a hippie flight attendant manager on vacation to a "houseless" guy with dreadlocks and ripped clothes who appears to be off his meds. It's "houseless" he tells me since "homeless" is more like Superman who's home planet was destroyed but his still exists. Wrath is his name and he is sporting a different reason for hiking than most. Wrath is looking for a portal to one of the six other worlds. And of course, while he's on this world he's big on avenging, retribution, wrath and such. Don't worry, I've been careful to keep on his good side.

Until tomorrow.

POSTED Jun 9, 2009 9:22 AM

Blog: Another day done (6/7)

Not too much to say about today. I woke up late, still did my miles and now I'm in bed. The cold seems to be improving and for that I'm very thankful. Perhaps tomorrow I'll be free from problems for at least a day or two. Over and out.

POSTED Jun 10, 2009 1:55 PM

Blog: Hot hot hot! (6/9)

It was around 80 degrees today and humid. It was almost unbearable, especially on the steep and long climbs. I resupplied at Newport, VA this morning and on the return hitch met yet another acquaintance of the "Virginia Trail Murderer". This guy not only knew him but the med-flight group he worked for had flown the murderer to a hospital after his crash fleeing the 2008 crime scene.

For those of you concerned about my hiking with the crazy guy, you'll be glad to know that I'm now hiking with a first grade teacher named Gutsy. (Gutsy because she sleeps with her food in her tent, no concern for animal attack. She's even guarding my food tonight too!?!)

POSTED Jun 10, 2009 5:46 PM

Blog: Brief update

Did Dragon's Tooth today, shown in photo. Amazing rock sticking out of a mountain side.

Hiked many miles, many miles to go.

Sitting in front of a gas station, .4 from the AT eating a frightening amount of gas station food. It's pouring out. I might be here a while.

Tomorrow: Daleville & a (dry) hotel room, I hope.

POSTED Jun 10, 2009 10:25 PM

Blog: Breaking news

Especially with such a brief entry earlier it seems appropriate to make this additional entry today. Well, with superhuman willpower, like a mother lifting a VW off of her crushed child, I gulped down the last of my gas station coffee and headed back out into the freezing rain. The rain softened, affirming my decision and a mile up the trail I saw "The Bomb" of AT wildlife sightings. (the Bomb as in both exciting and blood curdling) Coming around a bend in a very slight drizzle of rain there was a momma bear and two cubs just a few feet up the trail from me. To add to the excitement all three burst into motion, at first making me think mom was charging me. But instead, like little commandos each cub climbed thirty or forty feet up a tree, almost synchronized with each other and lightning fast. And mom actually did a single-motion 180 degree turn and ran away from the trail. I paused a minute and

then carefully proceeded bushwhacking twenty feet left of the trail to steer clear of the trees with the cubs. As I safely passed and it all sunk in I felt grateful to have witnessed the whole scene and also guilty that I would invoke such fear in such a powerful mammal. I suspect it had something to do with the popularity of bear hunting here in VA but it could also have all been rather natural. I saw a deer and two tortoises today as well, for what it's worth. I'm in the hammock up on a ridge, close enough to Cataba to hear traffic. Almost made my goal today of passing Cataba. Tomorrow will be a challenge as well.

POSTED Jun 12, 2009 12:17 PM

Blog: Another wet day

It rained on and off again today. I just went through a burst of weather in my hammock that was the worst I can remember. I was holding and fortifying the over-tarp with my arms so that it wouldn't rip the hammock off of its trees. Fortunately it was over in less than an hour and this new spinsil (sp?, sil-nylon successor material) tarp lived up to its reputation.

So today's journey's highlights were McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs which were in the top five most beautiful stops on the Trail thus far. Summary description: huge rocks jutting out of mountain/ridge tops overlooking forest and farm land. See the photo of Wahoo calling his mother while sitting inches away from death perched on a Tinker cliff.

Jumping around I will make a Crazy Train update here. I was three days behind Sailor, Solar and Bird until I got sick and it became more like a week behind. And then somehow Solar got behind me and we've still all been disjointed for quite a while. Has the CT taken its last ride?

And one last thing, while it's on my mind. Otherwise it would be more appropriate to mention tomorrow or when it's official. I broke 700 miles today and within a day or two I'll be at the 1/3 mark on this trek. I'm excited to be there since it means I'm almost 100 percent back on schedule.

Tomorrow: a nero in Daleville. It will be indescribably nice to dry out, shower, have clean laundry, a restaurant meal and cable TV. And the feet can rest too.

POSTED Jun 13, 2009 7:44 AM

Blog: Almost out of Daleville

The photo was yesterday's birds-eye view of Daleville as I entered from the mountains south and now I am leaving after checkout... Got my chores done, had Mexican food. Treated my clothes with pemetherin as we head into Lyme country. Shoe-goo'd my abused shoes. Ate some soy ice-cream (first

since HotSprings!) There are several sick hikers here, maybe with what I had, maybe it wasn't from the water? I'm going to slaughter that HoJos continental breakfast.

POSTED Jun 14, 2009 8:06 PM

Blog: Blue Ridge Parkway

Hey kids. Man I am tired. I awoke at Fullheardt Knob Shelter to a very cool morning and that enticed me onto the trail by 7:30 am. And so also I was motivated enough to start with the rule of thumb "10 miles by noon" and hit 20 miles just in time for dinner. I will turn in early, especially with more big miles planned for tomorrow.

Today was pretty flat, weaving over the Blue Ridge Parkway (scenic byway, see photo) five or so times. Today also began Operation French Fry. This Operation will conclude with me being temporarily reunited with my daughter and mother. Can't wait.

POSTED Jun 16, 2009 6:51 PM

Blog: Disappearing miles (6/15)

Today was another respectable day. I cranked out 17 including about 2500 feet vertical, (Floyd Mt.) climbing which felt as if it would never end. I saw a few deer, swam in Jennings Creek and hiked passed a crazy soccer ball looking FAA monitoring station atop Apple Orchard Mountain. But the photo of the day is of The Guillotine, a Trail icon. As you can see it's a giant rock pinned between other giant rocks, about to smash you to tiny bits should it somehow come loose as you follow the Trail under. FYI it shouldn't come loose any time soon.

POSTED Jun 16, 2009 6:51 PM

Blog: Flying (6/16)

I flew 15 miles, almost all down hill between 9am and 3pm today. It was raining, foggy, chilly, you name it. I passed a place called Archie's Notch-- awesome, wish I had been able to identify it as I went threw. But there was no sign or other identifiable quality there. I hitched into Glasgow, VA and bought groceries and fuel. I spent about an hour at the post office receiving packages, repackaging and then

re-mailing them. (e.g. my "bounce box" of extra Ibuprofen, coffee, TP plus a rain jacket that I sent home) I was going to perhaps split a motel room with a hiker to shower and all that but the Glasgow motel is out of business. That might not surprise you if you saw the place. Nice, friendly too but not "thriving" as is the case with many trail towns.

To cap this blurb off and to cap off my visit to Glasgow, I just talked the Bud Light delivery driver into dropping me off at the AT on his way out of town. He was stocking the gas station at which I'm loitering in front of to bring you this quality blog post. I should have been a drifter...

POSTED Jun 19, 2009 8:28 AM

Blog: (6/18) Almost a record

23 miles today, a mile short of my record plus I won't be zeroing tomorrow making it even more difficult of a day in that sense. Highlights today including much better weather, a mountain top bald (field) and miles of blooming mountain laurels. I'm telling you- marching through the endless laurel tunnel is an amazing feeling.

POSTED Jun 19, 2009 8:28 AM

Blog: (6/17) The wettest day

So rainy that I could barely get a picture without ruining my phone. FYI, the picture is the pond at Punch Bowl Shelter. I hiked 18 rainy miles including the site of the Brown Creek Settlement which was a freed slave settlement in Va until it was sold to the Forest Service in 1920. Google that.

POSTED Jun 21, 2009 10:45 PM

Blog: Hard times (6/19)

The day after the 23 miler was very tough. As mentioned I'd never done miles like that with a big day after. Well, my feet were burning and I was taking breaks constantly. I actually took a nap at lunch. I climbed Three Ridges which was a killer 3000 foot uninterrupted ascent. The only plus there was knowing it was the last such climb for hundreds of miles.

I ended the day at Rusty's Hard Time Hollow, a hostel with quite the rural, old timey feel. Despite the Stars and Bars and jug of moonshine on the sign it was very welcoming and alcohol-free. It was a working farm as well as a hostel though so it was loud, dusty and quirky. For example a rooster first awoke me at 4:30 a.m. and the Hollow employs a "West Virginia Can Crusher" which means you throw all of your tin cans in the driveway and Rusty backs over them with his van. I'd recommend stopping by if you're ever looking for a place to stay on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

POSTED Jun 21, 2009 10:45 PM

Blog: Cedar Cliffs (6/20)

After a giant stack of blueberry flap jacks that would cripple an around the block stroller, thru-hikers Floater and I (Floater a 66 y/o shrink from New Orleans) hit the trail with maximum vigor in each step. Originally I was going for a lazy day but at some point after the scenic Cedar Cliffs (outlook shown) I had gone too far to call it such and I became caught up in some sort of last minute marathon of a day. In that spirit I wrapped up 16 miles at 10 p.m., the last two of those miles stumbling around the trail by flashlight. Perhaps a subconscious motivator on the day's push, in the end I was within striking distance of a McDonald's breakfast for Sunday morning...

POSTED Jun 21, 2009 10:46 PM

Blog: A McGriddle on Hike Naked Day (6/21)

Don't worry, the summer solstice loving pagan in me didn't have what it takes to join in on Hike Naked Day nor did I notice anyone else indulging. It makes me wonder if that's just a big prank possibly resulting in a few hiker incarcerations each year.

Moving along, I did however have a McGriddle, two hashbrowns and an OJ in an attempt to regain a few calories upon reaching Waynesboro, Va this morning. I bought some glue to repair my already-busted ukulele bridge and some protein powder to insure proper protein intake.

In line with the other holiday of the day, Father's Day, my daughter has joined me and we'll be doing a few fun, non-hiking activities over the next few days. I may or may not post prior but at the latest, see you Thursday night.

UPDATED Jun 24, 2009 4:20 PM

POSTED Jun 23, 2009 10:54 AM

Blog: Vacation day 1 (6/22)

Can you recognize which national heritage site/landmark we visited yesterday? Let me give you a hint, it was Monticello, former home of third US President Thomas Jefferson. That guy had 5000 acres and essentially an entire village on his plantation. We also ate some ice cream

POSTED Jun 24, 2009 8:11 AM

Blog: Vacation day 2 (6/23)

Drove some of Skyline Drive through the Shenandoah Mountains. Went to historic Charlottesville, Va. Spent money on small things to remind us of this place. Picked up a few things I'd mailed to Elkton, Va since the new Elkton ETA is a Sunday and the post office will be closed. We had ice cream and went swimming.

POSTED Jun 24, 2009 8:34 AM

Blog: A wild experiment in interactive media!!

To anyone reading this blog, unaware of my other email addresses and wishing to communicate with me, you can now contact me at:

walking_the_at@yahoo.com

As many have mentioned, the "comments" feature is not available on this blog. This is mainly due to the fact that there are young people that read this and I don't feel that I can adequately filter inappropriate comments which I assume are a given, no offense to those with good manners. So here's your chance to get my ear, should you care to. FYI, my heartfelt responses will mainly come from a Blackberry style device so they may be choppy and brief.

UPDATED Jun 25, 2009 4:38 AM
POSTED Jun 24, 2009 10:58 PM

Blog: Vacation day 3 (6/24)

Today was a nice blend of shopping and museums. Museum #1: Patricia Something Moss art gallery. Then a store or two. And the highlight, in my opinion, the Frontier Culture Museum. Not far from Waynesworld as the hikers call it, it's a museum of actual old farm buildings from US and Europe, moved to this site and rebuilt. Shown is the one that was the most striking to me. It was built and occupied in England in the 1600s. That farmer never could have guessed that someday in the distant future his house would be on the other side of the ocean being toured by hundreds of people a day.

One other thing to comment on as I get ready to return to the trail tomorrow, I can't help but notice that I'm still stiff and sore. It has improved since Sunday when I last hiked but I continue to wonder, what am I doing to myself? Back to mile 852 tomorrow. Something like only 1250 to go.

POSTED Jun 25, 2009 10:23 PM

Blog: Vacation is over

The family and I parted ways this morning in the parking lot of a boarded up restaurant and I then walked across the street and back into the woods. I hiked strong and far, even though I wasn't feeling 100 pct healed after three days off. So here I am now at Blackrock Hut, 20 miles into the Shenandoahs.

The most remarkable thing(s) happened on the trail today: Before lunch I saw a fury black bear run up a ridge to put space between us. And then in the afternoon another bear crossed the AT not far in front of me. I started counting in my mind how many bears total I'd seen since Georgia when a third bear slowly and carelessly crossed the trail and then followed me 100 feet up the trail. It was as if he was originally walking the same direction as me but was giving me the trail while he bushwhacked. At 100 feet he just sat, 20 feet from me, I believe waiting for me as I passed to make room for him to get back on the trail. FYI, there's no bear hunting here in the park, again a major factor in the bear-human relations.

POSTED Jun 27, 2009 12:11 PM

Blog: Damage report (6/26)

It was a decent day if a bit on the hot and muggy side. I pounded out 16 or 17 miles, just short of my 20

mile goal. No bear sightings today but I have spotted a lot of bear scat and was told I missed a mom and cubs by about 10 minutes at one point. There are also several coyotes howling a mile or two away from my tent. Considering wildlife it's a little bit more exciting than usual in here tonight. (update: I think there were wild hogs by me last night too and something tested my bear bag!!)

It's now the time of the month for me to list out a few injuries and gear failures. I think there's been a couple good ones lately so here goes.

Body issues:

- Feet hurt almost all of the time
- Chaffing on my back from backpack
- Giardia
- Tick on my head
- Fell on my face on the trail 3x
- Fell while not on the trail 1x
- lost a filling and can't find a dentist in the woods!

Stuff issues:

- Lost a pair of sunglasses and broke another one (now on #3)
- Headphones died (now on #2)
- Stove corroded and stopped working in Waynesboro (cooking out of a potted meat can crafted into a "Super Cat" by Leatherman)
- lost a hat (now on #2)
- lost a cell phone (now on #2)
- sewn my pants 5 different places
- knocked the bridge off of the ukulele, re-glued in Waynesboro.
- killed a pair of shoes (now on #2 and they're getting ready to cash in too)

I wonder if I'll be replacing all of these things (at least) once more since I'm not even half way.. Alright. More tomorrow.

POSTED Jun 28, 2009 9:14 AM

Blog: Yogi'ng (6/27)

Today was about 17 miles, from my little ridge top camp to Bearfence Mtn Hut. There were a few stops along the way though. First I stopped to dry my tent from the previous night's rain and I ran into Fatmandu. (picture right) We hiked together for a while and came to a picnic ground, expected being in the Shenandoah park. Fatman says, "Well lets go in there, I feel like having a picnic." We entered and asked the first guy we saw if there was a soda machine around. He said "No but there's some drinks up there, tell 'em your with Wayne." We had drinks and picnic lunch too courtesy of Wayne's church group. We met a dozen great people including an 87 year old guy who was in the park when FDR dedicated it in the '30s.

Around dinner time we hit a camp ground en route to the camp store to buy fuel and there we passed Michael (picture left) standing by his grill. I said "Dinner time?" and he said "Common over for some venison!" And we did. We had seconds and thirds too. Michael was a superb host and a great cook too. I didn't cook all day except breakfast... Thanks again Michael & family if you read this!!

POSTED Jun 29, 2009 8:51 AM

Blog: Wahoo hits the water

Another day on the trail has come and gone. We didn't yogi any leftovers but not for lack of shameless pitches targeted at weekender's grills. We did break up the day nicely, at first with a cell phone break hanging by the edge of a cliff with good reception. And then later we had an extended lunch at the "Skyway Caf?" or some such place where we ate country fried steak followed by large coffees on the patio overlooking the valley. I read Saturday's paper (didn't matter at all that it was a day old since it was all news to me) and we eventually serenaded a few tourists, me on uke and You on travel guitar.

After a few hours of very little activity, Phatmandu (misspelled Fatmandu yesterday) and I hiked until late to compensate, wrapping up just a half hour or so ago. We're perched now in tents on a ridge with a nice breeze of precious cool air.

For the record, most of the Trail is without so many restaurants and weekenders to beg food from. This though is the Shenandoahs and I'm still carrying the some of the same groceries for days since every time I turn around there's a meal ready for eating.

On a final note I'm a bit saddened to see Wahoo, a flight attendant manger from Florida, conclude his yearly section on the Trail. We'd met just past Bland, Va which feels like a lifetime ago and which was literally hundreds of miles ago.... It really is a ways back though! He's going off to Aquablaze before returning to work; translation: canoe the section of the Shenandoah River traditionally associated with the AT and sometimes used as a detour for those looking for a variety in their journey. Wahoo will canoe it *and* then re-hike it next outing as well to have a legitimate "complete hike". Outstanding integrity this man has. Farewell for now Wahoo!

POSTED Jun 30, 2009 1:52 PM

Blog: Operation US Blues (6/29)

I don't think I'm going to feel OK tomorrow. Phatman and I did at least 22 miles today, 8 of which were under race conditions trying to catch a grocery store before its 7pm closing time. As a matter of fact my feet hurt right now, an hour or two since hiking and I'm laying down in my tent.

Why would we do such a long day? So that we can make Harpers Ferry, West Virginia by 7/3 and then spend the 4th at a Washington Nationals game. (also coming up and worth pushing for: we're hitting mile 1000 and the statistical mile point past which odds strongly shift towards a hiker being successful!) Apparently there's a commuter train connecting DC and HF and what better way to spend the holiday when away from your friend's enchanting beer-drenched BBQ party. Also, in case you haven't caught on, when traveling 2000+ miles on foot it helps to have short term goals and incentives.

I should be in bed now. This two man Crazy Train leaves this ridge top station at 6:30am. Goodnight.

Note: exciting photo on a rocky Shenandoah ridge early today.