

AT from Rockfish Gap to Linden, VA

5/28/2000- (7/7) Foggy, slight drizzle starting out. Trail leaves the Skyline Dr., ascending gradually. Had to sit down at large set of boulder flow in-order to process forward. Sky overcast all down the trail, clearing slightly in the afternoon. Trees are our umbrella, leaking in a breeze, yesterday rain dropping from the leaves.

*At right, View of Blackrock Mountain, VA.
By Mike Calabrese*



Buttercups line the trail, mixed with clover. After crossing road at McCormicks Gap, steep climb for less than a mile. Wild strawberries along the trail. Crossing Skyline Dr. again at Beagles Gap we enter a large field, then steep climb. Notice low vegetation on both sides of McCormick and Calf Mtn., reminding me of Dolly Sod. Pass several large Ant hills. The thru hikers breeze by us. They sure are a determined and hardy bunch. Arrived at Calf Mtn Hut at 3pm, joining 5 through hikers and a dog named Lucy. Birds singing in the trees.

--Charlie J

5/29/2000- Woke up to loud rain at Calf Mountain Hut around 6am. However, it became just drizzle when we left at 8:30. The weather then alternated between clouds and sun, windy and calm, cool and warm. The sun finally managed to stick around by mid afternoon. We did 13 miles between Calf Mountain Hut and Blackrock Hut. We saw various deer, Mountain Laurel in bloom and ferns. We had the usual ups and downs, but the trail was well graded and maintained. Charlie said the burned areas adjacent to the trail were the result of a forest fire. I said that they were the result of a controlled burn. We'll have to find out who's correct. Tomorrow it's on to Loft Mountain with showers, laundry, campstore and cooked food! --Mike C

5/30/2000- (13.2-33.2) Overcast. Had some trouble getting to sleep last night at Blackrock Hut. A whippowill decided to post guard above our tents and serenaded it's mate further down the hollow. Woke to find 6 souls in slumber at the hut. Steep climb leaving the hut. Notice extensive gypsy moth damage down in the hillside valley as we began a new day. Mountain Laurel blossoms are just spectacular. They form a wall on both sides of the trail. Deer are very near, showing little concern as you pass by them on the trail. No bear yet.

Another steep climb after Brown Gap. Trail following along the ridge, nearing Skyline Drive at times, crossing 6 times during the day. Great camp store at Loft Mountain campground. Washing clothes and ourselves. Five minute showers, 4 quarters. Hot food at the roadside wayside. We decide to go further. Downhill takes us past a stream, then a couple of climbs to Pinefield Hut. Joined by 2 retired gentlemen, thru hikers. Temperature drops. Cold night. Butterflies in the tall grass. --Charlie J

5/31/2000- Last day of the month! We only did 8.2 miles today but there were some big ups. So we got to Hightop Hut early (around 2:30pm) and just chilled the rest of the day. Water availability was a problem on this stretch. The campsites at this shelter were very nice. Tomorrow it's either Lewis Mountain Campground or Bearfence Hut, whichever we feel like. We'll also be half way through SNP some time tomorrow. --Mike C

6/1/2000- (12.4/53.8) Warmest day yet. Joined by 2 others last night in tents and shelter had 6 souls. Ascended the remaining 1/3 of Hightop Mountain. Lots of Bear scat. Good views to the west, seeing US33 cutting through the mountain pass. Cross Skyline Drive at 2 miles before climbing hill and then descending to US33. Next hill steep, although a well graded long climb, until we arrive at noon break at the South River trailhead. Bear scat (fresh) increasing, deposited right on the trail. Next ascent also long one. Keeping well hydrated, stopping once to pump water at Pocosin Cabin. One last gradual uphill into Lewis Campground. Washer not working. Showers only.

*At right, a deer at Loft Mountain camp store.
By Mike Calabrese*



Played telephone tag as each of us ate a quart of ice cream. Leave AT 5:45pm for last mile to Bearfence Hut.

Set up tents and attempt culinary delights. Raman Noodles, with Peanut Butter and Jelly spread on top. Don't try this at home. Cold beer complements of a thru hiker. Deer walk a circle around our tent site. Flowering plants lining the trail. --Charlie J

6/2/2000- Woke up at Bearfence Mountain Hut to 2 young deer, a doe and a buck. They could not have been more than a year old. They kept circling our camp very curiously. They probably wanted a handout. The temperatures were the hottest yet- mid to upper 80's. Did 8.2 miles over Bearfence, Hazel and Big Meadows Mountains. Again, we had the luxury of showers, clean clothes and a

good meal. Bill Isham is supposed to be joining us tonight and spend a few days with us on the trail. Also, Charlie saw his first bear today on top of Hazel Mountain. --Mike C

6/3/2000- (12.4/74.1) Good hiking weather. Mild. Bill and Chris discover us at the Big Meadows tap room, perched over a beer. Bill is going to continue the journey with us. Log fire and tents at the Big Meadows campground area. Parting picture starts us on our way at the usual 8:30am. Long up hill, good trail, although there are more rockbase to manuver. Making excellent time, arriving at Skyland for lunch at 12:45pm. Thanks Mike. The AT starts out as a posted nature trail. Spot bear foraging in the brush. Slowly the bear moves forward towards the trail, as we quietly, but hastily prepared to take pictures. Moments are spent watching the bear as he again enters the underbrush. Bill sees a black dot on his digital camera. Bear was nice enough to allow us plenty of viewing time. We push on for parts unknown, hiking for 3 more hours until 5pm. Arrive at Pinacles Picnic Area for a dinner break, and a lesson in Arab customs. Mecca pointing that way. We decide to move further down the trail until we can locate a suitable campsite. Set up on grassy slope above Skyline Drive. Windy all night. Woke up to a shroud of mist. Breakfast setup on the trail. Mountain mist blankets the views in the distance. --Charlie J

6/4/2000- We woke up just north of the Pinacles picnic area to a cool, windy morning. We ate, packed up our tents, then hiked over the Pinacles Mountain and Marys Rock. After a 3 mile down, we ate a great lunch at Panorama. Then we started a big up over Pass Mountain and Jeremy's Mountain. We met alot of people today, including some Russian hikers, a nice couple that were the PATC trail patrol and a very lovely lady that I'll call "Darling Dolly". 12.8 miles hiked today, 86.8 total miles hiked and 30.8 miles to go. --Mike C

6/5/2000- (10.3/97.1) Cool and windy, no rain. Descend mountain for 2 miles to Elkwallow Wayside, passing through open forest and running streams. Two egg sandwiches (with meat) each. Phone to arrange pickup for Wednesday. Steep climb, passing deer and grouse. Cross Skyline Drive 4 times before passing Gravel Springs Hut

*At right, group picture at Big Meadows Campground.
By Bill Isham*



side trail. Real good overlooks at each climb. Decide to look for spring after crossing over North Marshall

Mountain. Get our first look at a view of our ultimate destination, as the mountain range pans to our northwest. You can just see part of Front Royal at the edge of the last mountain. Found Hogwallow Spring, with good primitive camping sites located further behind. Bill gets a fire going at a still warm fire ring. Set up tents as the wind picks up. Mist sets in as storm approaches. Hard rain all through the night. Trail swept clean by water, leaving small puddles behind. --Charlie J

6/6/00- "The Longest Day". It rained all night and we woke up to light rain at our campsite near Hogback Spring. It was a warm rain so we didn't mind hiking in it. We climbed Jenkins and Compton Peaks, then started started our decent out of SNP in the rain. We got to Floyd Wayside at 11:30am and ate lunch. We met some northbounders and southbounders there including a pretty lady named "Thirsty Boots". We kept guessing when she would pass us on the way to the next Shelter, the Denton Shelter. We finished our decent at US522 at around 1pm, then started the killer ascent up the mountain towards Linden. We were going to stay at either Mosby's Campsite 5 miles up the mountain or Denton Shelter 2 miles beyond. We got to Mosby's at 4pm and decided to push onto Denton. It then started raining like cats and dogs.

We got to Denton Shelter around 5pm. I was ready to settle in for the night but Bill "Freight Train" (his trail name in reference to his snoring) wanted to hike the final 3 miles and get home. "Dialtone" Charlie wanted to stay also. I said let's eat something and then decide. So we ate something and decided to do the last 3 miles to Linden. We gave our left over food to some destitute New Yorkers. We left at 6pm. As we were leaving the rain started up again and "Thirsty Boots" was just coming into the shelter. So we must have made very good time between this shelter and the last. Oh well... So we did the last 3 miles, which had some "blips" but were mostly down, got to VA55, and hiked to where we finished our January hike so that we could call ourselves "purists". We then hiked back to VA55, did the final 1 mile to the general store in Linden and called it quits around 8pm. We did a record 19.2 miles today, 117 miles total. This was a great trip through a national treasure, Shenandoah National Park. --Mike C

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