

Appalachian National Scenic Trail
Georgia to Maine

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Adventure Guide

For Teens

The Appalachian Trail Along Blue Ridge Parkway



Explore, Learn, Protect

Contents

Activity 1	Getting Started Learn about the history and management of the Appalachian Trail from the Appalachian Trail map/brochure	3
Activity 2	Map it	4
Activity 3	Take a Hike A Trail Assessment	7
Activity 4	A Thru-Hikers Journey Read a real A.T. thru-hiker’s journal and answer questions	9

Ready. Set. Hike...



Created in partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy with support from Unilever, National Park Foundation, and the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.

Special thanks to Leigh Jenkins, Science Teacher, Berkley Springs High School, and Graduate Student, Curriculum Development, Shepherd University.



Getting Started

Use the Appalachian Trail brochure to answer the following questions about the Appalachian Trail—commonly referred to as simply the A.T.

Who was the planner to formally propose the construction of the Appalachian Trail?

Who combined forces to open a continuous trail by 1937?

How is the A.T. marked?

How are connecting side trails marked?

Who manages the Trail’s day-to-day operations and who do they work with?

Which local Trail club maintains the Trail along the Blue Ridge Parkway?

How many states will you pass through on a “thru-hike”?

Map it

Hikers will use maps and guidebooks to plan their hike. They will need to decide where they will park, how far they can go, whether they can hike a loop trail or go up and back along the same route, the difficulty of the hike, how long it will take them, and what to pack.

On the next two pages you will find a guidebook description of the A.T. along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and a map.

Answer the questions and plan your hike.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy produces the *Appalachian Trail Guide to Central Virginia*. The following is an adapted description for the Trail along the northern section of the Blue Ridge Parkway leading to the Paul C Wolf Shelter. (bold numbers display the mileage for each section):

Detailed Trail Data — South to North:

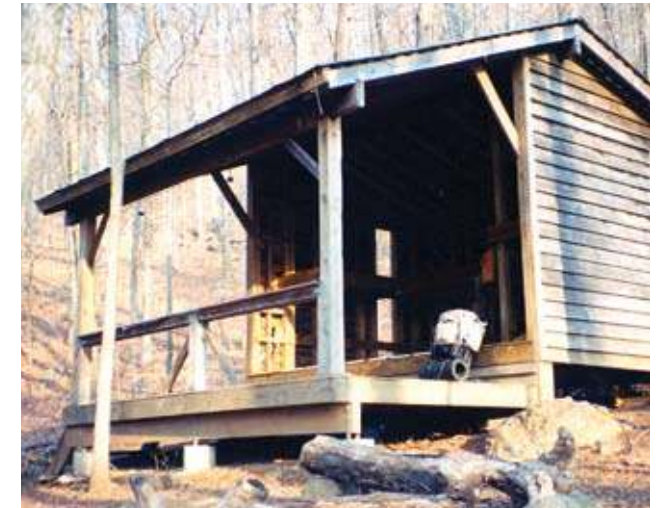
From the Humpback Gap Parking Area — mile post 6.1 (just south of the Humpback Rocks Visitor Center):

- 0.0** Hike 1 mile up side trail to meet the Appalachian Trail. Turn left, heading north.
- 1.6** Reach woods road with blue-blazed side trail coming from the left. A.T. turns sharply right and, in 300 feet, turns sharply left onto a graded trail before descending gradually over a series of switchbacks.

Leave No Trace Principles

1. **Know Before You Go** — Be Prepared.
 2. **Choose the Right Path** — Stay on the Trail.
 3. **Trash Your Trash** — Pack it in. Pack it out.
 4. **Leave What You Find** — As you found it
 5. **Be Careful With Fire** — Use a camp stove.
 6. **Respect Wildlife** — Never approach, feed, or follow
 7. **Be Kind to Other Visitors** — Listen to nature and avoid loud noises.
- Care for Special Places
Visit Leave No Trace, Inc.
www.lnt.org
for more information

- 1.9** Trail passes overlook with views to the north and east.
- 2.5** Cross Mill Creek, and reach old road. A.T. continues straight ahead and ascends Elk Mountain.
- 2.6** Paul C. Wolfe Shelter.



Paul C. Wolfe Shelter

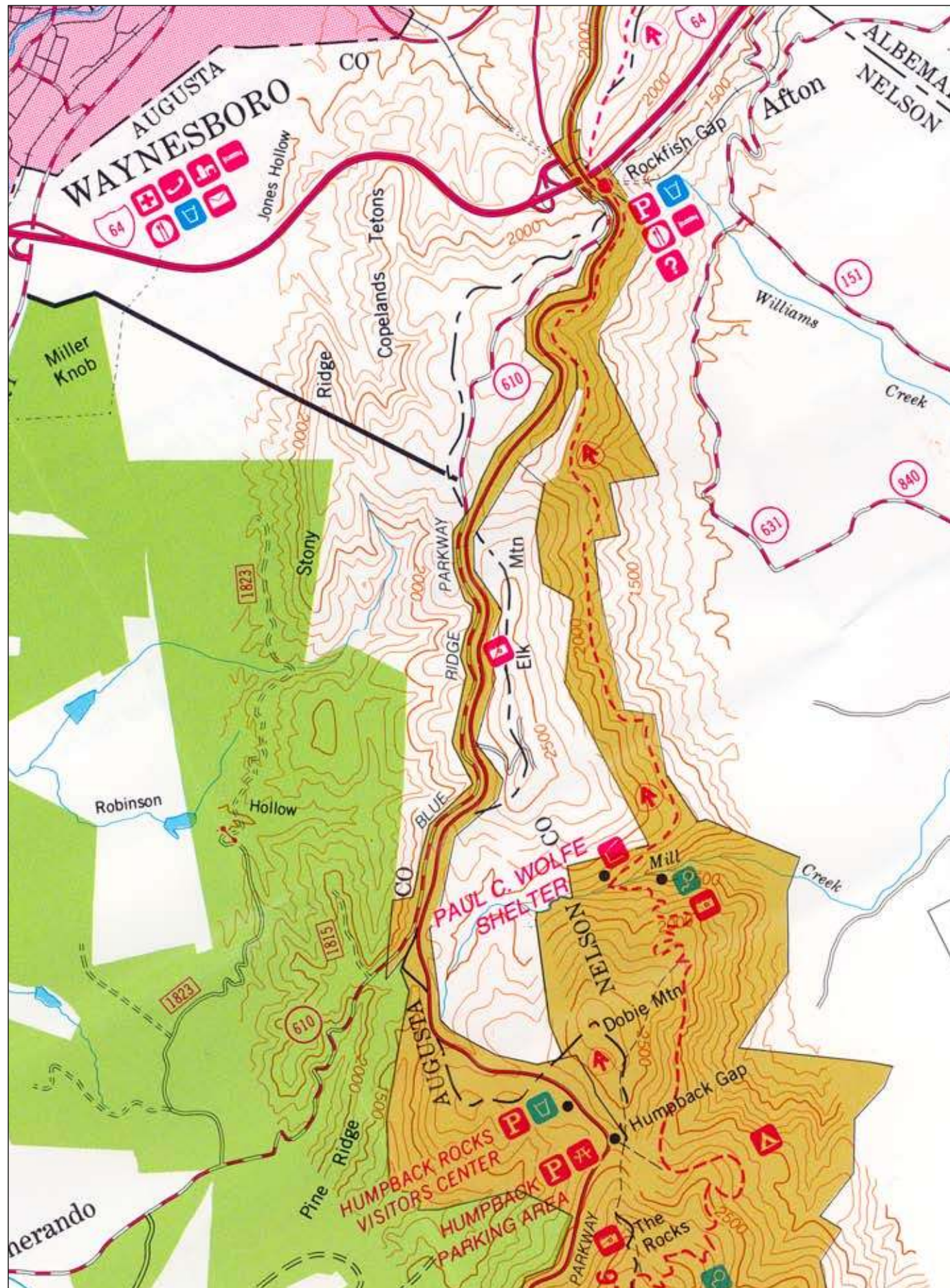
Questions

Based on the information above and the weather today, what would you pack for a hike?

Using the map key on the next page identify the Appalachian Trail—it is marked by a dashed line (-----) and an AT logo. The map scale is 1 inch = 1 mile.

Plan a hike to the Paul C. Wolfe Shelter or another location such as Humpback Rocks. What is the estimated roundtrip mileage of your planned hike?

How long do you think it would take you to hike your planned route?



Take a Hike

But Wait...

First, we want you to know a little bit about trail management. Many people think the Appalachian Trail is an “old Indian trail” or connected using old animal trails. Actually the Trail was constructed through the efforts of thousands of volunteers. Today more than 5,000 volunteers continue to maintain the Trail from Georgia to Maine.

The Appalachian Trail is primarily a backcountry or primitive trail to provide a wilderness experience. We also want to protect the surrounding natural and cultural resources, so we design and construct the Trail with these values in mind.

Trail construction and maintenance involves the building of rock steps, bridges, and placing the path on the landscape so that it is not eroded by water. In some places water bars (logs or rocks placed in the Trail) divert water off of the Trail surface. Vegetation needs to be trimmed back from the Trail edges. Trail blazes and signs need to be placed appropriately so hikers can find their way.

While you are hiking, take note of the condition of the Trail.

Field Notes

Is it in good condition?

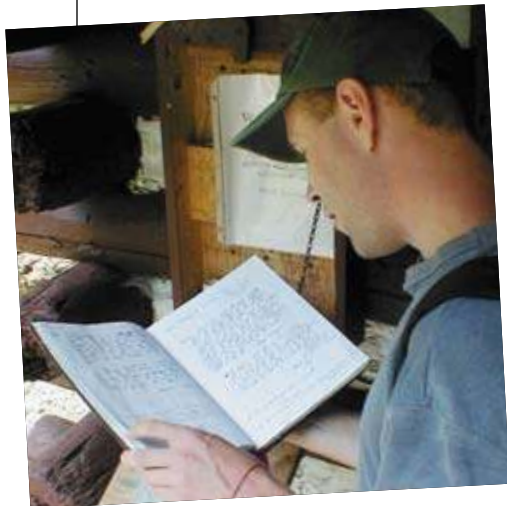
Was it easy to find your way?

Are there improvements you would suggest?

What was your favorite section of Trail?



Proud trail builders



There are approximately 240 shelters along the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine, each about a days hike apart. Each shelter is unique. However, the one thing they all have in common is they provide a register for hikers (day hikers, weekend backpackers and thru-hikers) to write their thoughts, draw pictures, and leave messages for future hikers.

If you hiked to the Paul C. Wolfe shelter or another shelter along the Blue Ridge Parkway, write an entry in the register including thoughts of your hike and the Appalachian Trail.

If you hiked to Humpback Rocks or another location on the Appalachian Trail, write your register entry and/or pictures here:

ACTIVITY
4

A Thru-Hiker’s Journey

Read the following journal entries and answer questions.

.....

Mark Hughes, A.T. Thru-Hiker, 2004
& 2006

Trail Name: Postcard

January 23, 2006 — Pure Fun

To understand all that a thru-hike is before you hike is practically impossible. And yet, many of us set out on this adventure without experience. One of the greatest aspects of the A.T. is that anyone can attempt it. Packs are hoisted on brave shoulders. Then everyone gets a simple lesson in gravity. It’s no secret that more hikers fail to finish their thru-hikes than those who pose next to a weather-beaten sign at Katahdin. The reasons they start are as varied as the hikers themselves. To no fault of their own, many will face physical and emotional adversaries they couldn’t possibly have foreseen. A surprising amount of insecurities that have lay dormant, will bubble up—the silence of the woods is a powerful trigger. Working 9 to 5 does little to prepare us for a thru-hike; fortunately it doesn’t limit our imagination to what might be over the horizon.

Armed with only my enthusiasm, I was one of those naïve dreamers in 2002. Carrying too much gear, maildrops spaced too far apart and a mountainous foe I was completely unfamiliar with, I came off the Trail. I wanted my journey to be one of joy not drudgery. One of escape not burden. I vowed to learn a better, more joyful way to thru-hike.

In 2004, a photo was taken of me standing beneath the Approach Trail arch. Filled with jitters I put my foot on the Trail and started up Springer Mountain that terribly rainy morning. What happened next included months of smiles and laughter. No wonder thru-hiking leaves such an amazing mark on us. It is the kind of experience we all seek and need.

Since one can never have too many smiles or too much joy in their life, I’ve decided to stop and smell the evergreen and thru-hike the Appalachian Trail. Again.



Thoughts of Mark’s Journal Entries...

Mark attempted the Appalachian Trail three times—two successful. Is there a challenge in your life that may not have worked out the first time, but you took it on again?

Would you consider thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail or taking it on in sections? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

April 6, 2006—Approach Trail

Despite a small warning of rain from The Weather Channel, I arrived at the visitor center at Amicalola Falls State Park to morning sunshine. The promise of a beautiful day was in the air.

The trees are emerging from their long winter’s sleep. The red buds and dogwoods are in full bloom. I pointed myself north and took my first step toward Springer Mountain.

Although I was solo, the Approach was filled with families hiking thanks to Spring break. And joining me on my attempted journey to the Katahdin Sign in Maine were about ten thru-hikers. Some had Trail names like “Greenbow”, “Long Toe” and “Sees Bears Everywhere”, others were nameless and waiting to see how the A.T. and its hikers, would name them.

I reached the beginning plaque around 1:15 and found out from a Ridgerunner working for the ATC, that I was the 610th thru-hiker to begin this season. Two years ago I was in the neighborhood of number 1500. To add a touch of deja vu to my start, Mother Nature released a small sprinkling of rain as I selected a small stone to carry to Katahdin.

Anyway, I’ve begun and my nighttime home is on a mountain at the Southern end of the greatest trail in the world.

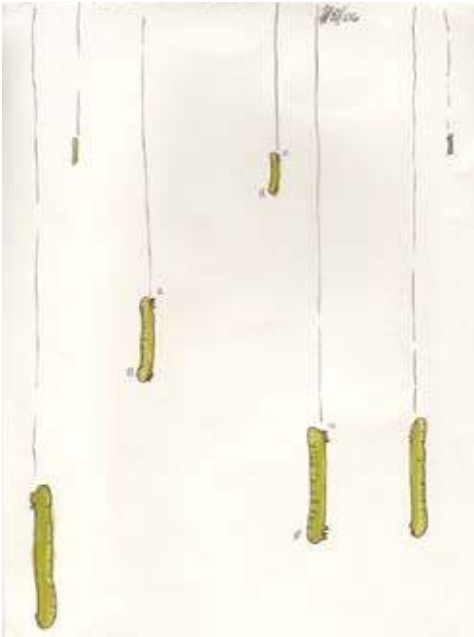
Mark’s Trail name is Postcard, and he mentions several others with Trail names starting the hike. What would your Trail name be?

May 25—756.9 Miles Later, Near the Blue Ridge Parkway

Finally I’m not cold. The temps have edged up towards 80, and although quite blustery, it’s still just a hiking shirt and nothing else. Oh, and pants of course.

Emerging with the heat are the thousands of tiny, inch-long green leaf-munchers. However, they seem to be more interest-ed in hitchhiking than leaf munching. They silently lower them-selves by the thinnest of silken thread and then perform a Cirque de Sole’ maneuver to grab onto a hat, or shoulder, or my hair.

Tomorrow, an even bigger mileage day involving yet another large ascent, but it wouldn’t be the A.T. if we weren’t going up or down.



May 26

At 1:30 a.m. I could see lightning flashes all over the southwest.

By pack up this morning, the winds were gusty and the clouds were dark, heavy with moisture. But as I left a shelter of sleeping hikers at 6:15 a.m., no rain was falling.

The miles came fast thanks to the long descent off Thunder Hill Mountain. Once I crossed the James River footbridge, I was greeted by Ken from The Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club. “Would you like a soda?” he asked. “Would I!” He pulled out not a can of Dr. Pepper, but a thru-hiker size 20 oz. bottle, ice cold. That first swallow was bliss. “Have some candy too. And throw any trash you want in here” he added. Wow!

Tonight, here at Punchbowl Shelter is a pond. Surrounding the pond are creeks. Living here are about 100,000 frogs. Bulls, Leopards and Tree frogs are making such a loud racket that it’s almost impossible to believe. A siren of a fire truck would have a run for its money down here in this hollow. Good night all ... so much for the peace and quiet of the woods!

May 27

The past two days have offered up some nice animal sightings. Five whitetail Deer have either run across the trail or have been at the side—I’m now up to 21 Deer for the journey. Two Box Turtles (not together) were out walking northbound, and making pretty good time. Each time I just sat down on the trail next to them to have a conversation. I did most of the talking.



The rain also brought out the Millipedes. Millipedes are dull burgundy in color, long caterpillar-like bodies from 3 to 6 inches with about 150 legs. Buying hiking shoes for a Millipede is a very expensive event. And with the heat now, the Snakes are coming out too. So I'm keeping a good eye on the Trail.

May 28

The day was to be flawless. Bright blue with a slight breeze and once over the big first climb, nothing but small ups and downs on a ridge for 20 miles.

Up on Cold Mountain, I ran into Boy Scout Troup 94 out for a weekend—there must have been

twenty of them. After my quick break there, Troop 94 sang a chorus of “The hills are alive with The Sound of Music “ as I disappeared over the summit ridge. It was a special moment to receive such a nice serenade.

I finally reached Priest Mountain Shelter. I'm tenting here to avoid the explosion of flying pests. Welcome to Summer.

May 29

Today's entry must start out with what maybe the toughest mountain I climb from here to Georgia. Its name is Three Ridges Mountain and it's only a few feet short of a 3000-foot ascent. The climb begins at the Tye River; I decided at the onset that I was going to try to do all 6.5 miles of the 3000-foot climb without stopping.

Three Ridges is a monster broken into three big sections that have almost no rest plateaus. I stayed patient early on—not to press too hard too soon. Throughout the up, Black-Throated Blue Warblers were singing their unique birdsong.

At two hours and thirty minutes I reached the wooded summit and found a flat spot in the shade to spread out my tyvek ground sheet—then I collapsed!

The rest of the day was spent closing in on Waynesboro, the town at the start of The Shenandoah's. With the last two shelters over 16 miles apart, and having already done 13 miles, when reaching the first, I'm tenting by myself here in the woods.



The tent is on a nice flat spot; I'm up high on Humpback Mountain so what little breeze there was today may have a chance of finding me tonight. My food is hung in a tree and a small fire is making tonight's stop a bit more homey.

Overall, it was a nice day of hard hiking and serious lounging in between, all with blue skies.

Tomorrow it's a quick, downhill 11.3 miles into Waynesboro. The sun has fallen below the horizon now; the breeze is vibrating the leaves and branches. A Barred Owl is calling out to my south and a Woodpecker keeps cackling. There's plenty of water to drink in my hiking bladder (probably drank six liters today.)

Like every journey, there will be good days and bad days. Mark mentions feeling cold and wet. Later in his hike, while just entering Maine, Mark fell, broke his wrist, and had to get off of the Trail for almost a month.

What health concerns or potential injuries might you encounter during a long-distance hike, and how might you prevent them?

Mark was thrilled to be handed a soda. Soda is heavy to carry in a back pack. Hikers rely on water, and lots of it—at one point Mark drank six liters in one day. Remember, water from natural sources along the Trail needs to be treated or filtered before drinking.

What one favorite food would you just have to have that you could easily pack and carry?



September 27—Katahdin

Five months ago I walked through the arch of the Springer Mountain Approach Trail, picked up a tiny stone and pocketed it, ever guarding it so I might place it on a summit cairn over two thousand miles from its home. That Georgia morning back in April shared a cold chill with this one here in Maine. The skies are clear blue and there is a hint of frost in the air. I woke to an overwhelming antsy feeling. Katahdin was clear, quiet, a wash of cold blue-grey color where its granite rises thousands of feet above the treeline. Red, yellow and orange leaves meant it was getting late in the season.

By eight my gear was packed and strapped to my back, my abbreviated load consisted of all my clothes, lunch and first aid bag. Two other hikers and I made our way up the A.T. to the register sign-in post. I scribed “9-27-06... Postcard...8:16 a.m.” We shook hands and I said “See you at the top.”

My enthusiasm propelled me northward one last time. My exceptional footwork that had gone missing after a bad fall had fully returned to me a week ago, I was in top form again. Two splints still graced my right wrist, but even it was near 80 percent again.

I tried to measure my pace, this would be a long, upward ramp until it hit the area known as the Gateway—a mess of boulders requiring scrambling more than hiking. It is an unnerving section that is the farthest thing from anyone’s idea of a trail. Exposed to high winds, this area tests your skills, courage and resolve. It’s not for those afraid of heights since the mountain uses this area to guard its summit.

It’s nearly impossible not to keep glancing up, watching the summit inch ever closer. At a half-mile, the sign and its “A” frame shape emerge. The winds are increasing, the temperatures are dropping, but now

nothing will stop me. My pace quickens. Not a person is in sight. A hundred feet remaining ... Fifty... Five ... I embrace the sign, hugging it while resting my face upon its weather beaten surface. A flood of warmth fills me.

I reached into my pocket and produced my tiny stone and placed it on the summit cairn, “There, its complete” I whisper to myself. 2,174.6 miles on foot. A true life adventure.

I wanted this thru-hike to be different from the first and indeed it was. Yes, this hike was different. In Virginia I came close to stopping. In Maine a broken wrist tested my will again. Rain, cold days and humidity so nasty that water poured from me, all asked if I really wanted to endure this again.

A thru-hike agrees with me—both times it has turned me into a climbing, walking athlete. I’m fit, slim and dare I say a tad more handsome?

Maine remains my favorite state, its thousands of lakes and ponds please my eye and its countless evergreens touch my heart. Sleeping in fresh air for months has a rare wonderful effect on me; a thru-hike makes me less selfish about the world, that its not just mine but I share it with the animals and other critters. The world is a vivid, full texture experience and thru-hiking makes the mini dramas of others inconsequential.

This journey may be over, the memories in the wilderness of awes will go on and on. Four small words say it all—I did it...again.

Now that you have finished reading Mark’s journal, what stood out for you the most?

Why?

Congratulations!

You are now an Appalachian Trail Jr. Ranger.

Show your completed guide to a Ranger at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center, James River Visitor Center or Humpback Rocks Visitor Center and get your Appalachian Trail Jr. Ranger patch.

