

Monday, April 26, 2004—1,300 Miles Later...

Morning weather: Rany and cool

Afternoon weather: Steady rain all day

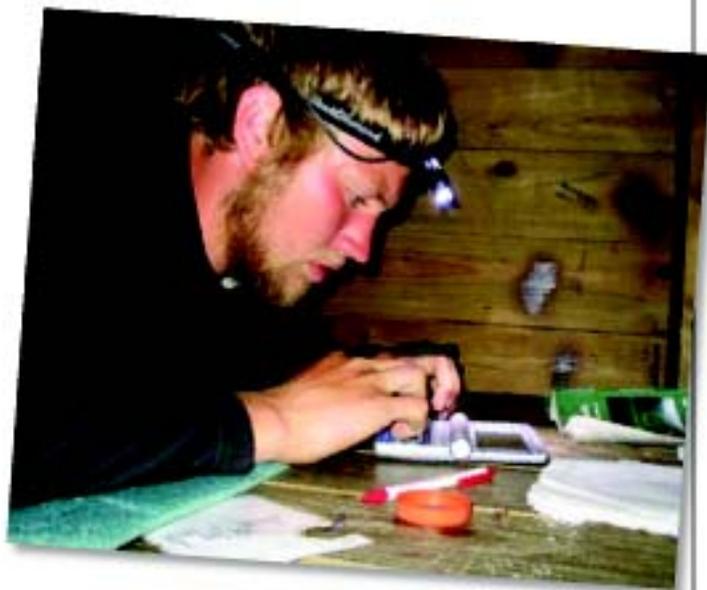
Evening weather: Rain stopped I think

Breakfast: Chocolate cupcakes

Lunch: Ham buns and a Boston creme pie

Dinner: Hamburger Helper potato stroganoff

Trail description: The climb out of the gap was short and steep and once the ridgewalk began the rocks became present once again. They were tough again today. The worst ones were the big boulder hopping stretches where the rocks were very slick. They really slowed me down. The rocks continued up into New Jersey. I have heard from several sources that the first 40 miles of NJ are tough. Only 30 more to go!



Animals: Deer and lots of squirrels

Money spent: \$4.95 for the creme pie and \$12 for the bunk room

Biggest complaints: After about 20 miles my feet are totally busted big time.

Thoughts: I had everything packed up when I went to bed except for breakfast and my toothbrush. Efficiency is one of my biggest liabilities. It bugs me that after 3 months on the Trail it still takes about 45 minutes to pack up in the morning. I was hoping to whittle that to like 20 minutes but I have only attained that goal a couple of times. Always room for improvement.

The rocks were bad again today but I closed out PA and only have 30 miles left until the meadows start again. I had my first and only fall in PA. I sat stunned for a second and hauled myself up to find myself alright. The scary thing was that I was moving slow and taking my time. It just goes to show you that the rocks are unforgiving.

I picked up a package at the Post Office in Delaware Water Gap. I got my fleece top back and I sent my windproof home, should save about 5 ounces. I have yet to need the windproof asset. I also got a new t-shirt to replace my blue one which I wore the back out of. My mom tossed in some drawings from my nieces. I headed back out of town and across the bridge into New Jersey.

The NJ rocks were just as bad as the worst of PA. This in addition to passing the 20 mile mark for the day started my feet hurting. There is something painful about hiking 20 miles every day.

The road leading to the Mohican Outdoor Center was a welcome sight. I took a nice long shower then went over my food drop. After making sure I had adequate supplies I made dinner in the kitchen. I went with Hamburger Helper because it is the hardest to clean up after on the trail and I might as well take advantage of the sink and soap.

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

Morning weather: Sunny, breezy, warm

Afternoon weather: Mostly sunny, warm

Evening weather: Cloud cover, 42 deg

Breakfast: Vanilla CIB, OCP, Falcone "cookies" with honey

Lunch: Candy bars, ritz crackers and peanut butter

Dinner: Cheddar potato soup with Ritz crackers, cookies and cream pudding, lemonade

Trail description: The rock density was about average, the climbs mild, descents uneventful, views much the same.

Animals: A snake. At first I thought maybe a timber rattler in the yellow phase but the tail showed no signs of a rattle. Even if immature the tail would at least be off color. I have never seen a copperhead but this seemed too yellow. It eventually grew tired of being looked at and semi-coiled up. Then it puffed out its head and neck cobra style and made a loud hissing noise. I figure that will give it away to someone.

Thoughts: Besides the snake, today was uneventful. The weather was perfect. The sun bright and the wind just strong enough to keep the sweat off you. The only real issue today was that my heart wasn't in my hike. Today it was work. Even though the terrain was rocky but overall favorable, it wasn't fun like it has been.

Part of it was missing contact with friends. It isn't that I'm lonely, just the day-to-day monotony is getting to me. It would be nice to have someone around who is going through the same thing.

When I look and see that I have already done 1300 miles, I can't believe it. It seems like yesterday I left Springer. 860 miles to go, that seems like such a small number, but to my busted feet it might as well be a thousand mile bed of nails.

What really eats at me is the fact that today I quit 5.8 miles short of my goal. I wanted to push onto Mashipacong shelter but my feet would have none of it. I am a goal oriented, achievement seeking type of person. Even though I had no reason to make it there other than because I said so, I still feel like I failed today. I take my goals so seriously.

Thoughts of Ben's A.T. Journal

What were some of Ben's challenges and/or sacrifices?

What were some unexpected or special moments for him?

What would you miss the most if you hiked the A.T.?

Sunday June 20, 2004—That's All She Wrote...

Weather: Clear in the morning, clouds rolled in but were high, so the views were never obstructed. It stayed right at 40 degrees the entire day. Strong, stiff winds, not enough to knock you down but sufficient to shift your balance and suck energy out of you.

Breakfast: Poptarts, granola bars

Lunch: granola bars

Dinner: 1 large bacon double cheese burger pizza from Dominos

Trail Description: Up and up, all the way. Although it wasn't the hardest climb for me on the trip, it was the steepest, longest climb on my hike. The first 2 miles aren't so bad. Then the boulders and drops get bigger. Once the trees disappear it gets sic. Basically a boulder scramble for the next 1.5 miles or so until you reach the Table land, where it is rocky but relatively flat. The final 1.5 miles are nothing.

People: Michael, Gina, and Dad.

Biggest Complaint: I was sleepy tired a lot of the day. Also very hungry later in the day. Which was satisfied by Krispie Kremes and Dominos Pizza.

It still didn't feel like it was my last day on the Trail, but I was happy to know that for the foreseeable future I would be back in a controlled environment.

I was surprised that it wasn't harder for me, emotionally. It didn't seem like the end of the journey. Just another day. My sister caught the last 10 minutes or so of my hike on video. I had my composure until my dad came over and shook my hand. Then it was Feb 1 all over again. But the wind dried tears quickly. Or just plum blew them right off, hard to tell.

It was a little eerie, the feelings moving through me as we headed down the hill. It just didn't feel like I had done anything special. Maybe it will set in soon.

We got back to the van about 12 hours after we left. I polished off a half dozen Krispie Kremes and then signed the log book at the Ranger station. I simply scribed, "That's all she wrote."

You can read more of Ben's journal at: <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=51047>

2006 update: Ben graduated from Grand Valley State University, and the Police Academy. He is now a Police Officer in Holland, Michigan.



More Thoughts of the Trail

Now that you have read sections of Ben's journal, has your answer to the question of whether you would consider hiking the trail changed? Yes No

If so, what changed your mind?

If not, was anything confirmed for you?

What would your trail name be?

Do you think people need the Appalachian Trail as a national resource? Yes No
Why?

Congratulations!

You are now an Appalachian Trail Jr. Ranger.

Show your completed guide to a Ranger at the Kittatinny Point Visitor Center and get your Appalachian Trail Jr. Ranger patch.

