

Sept. 3, '09

Finally arrived in Damascus, VA @ 1:30 pm, following 10+ hrs on a Greyhound, which followed a train ride just under 8 hrs from Boston to D.C. A train destination closer to Damascus with a shorter bus ride, or even no bus ride at all, would've been easier to endure.

John from MRO (Mt Rogers Outfitters) picked me up in a company van at Marion bus station @ 1 pm. Now I sit across the street from MRO @ Dave's Place, a hostel run by MRO. I took a shower, bought some trail food & hit the post office to send back a book, "Eiger Dreams" by John Krakauer, a good read, my wallet, flask & the straps from my hiking poles.

I figure my pack, with food & water, tips the scale around 25 lbs. That's about what it was when I left here last year, the last stop on the trail. If it was 22 lbs I'd be happier, but still, it's less than most ppl hiking the AT.

The cell signal isn't the greatest here, so hopefully, I'll get to talk with Beth at some point tonight. It'll be good to relax here for the night, catch up on some lost sleep over the last 32 hrs. It's just about 5 pm now, I'm anxious about hitting the trail tomorrow morning. I'm wondering how my legs will fair over the next few days, and am debating on whether to cook or buy breakfast tomorrow.

Sept. 4. '09

9.4 miles

Well, I opted for a late breakfast/early lunch @ Fattie's. I hit the trail @ 11:48 am and reached Saunders Shelter, 9.4 mi @ 4:30 pm. The last hour I was pushing, so I was feeling it. I'm glad I chose this plan today, as it was suggested by Beth. She & I spoke on the phone a bit before I got in the tent.

My legs felt pretty good today, feet started burning @ about 3 pm, 6 mi into the hike. The poles helped I think with the inclines. Tomorrow I'll go to Whitetop Mtn, 11.9 mi away. I think to ease back into the trail is how I should take the first several days, building up to longer mileage days.

Had a dream last night about Skippy getting hurt. It woke me up, worrying about my little buddy. Beth said he was up last night, keeping her from getting much sleep. He's probably missing me, too. His birthday is on the 9th, & will be the first one I've missed since he's been with me. I hope he'll get better with me away more with each day.

There were 4 guys with me @ Dave's last night, all from Florida. They're friends who took a few days to do some hiking, one hurting his leg & going to the dr's for x-rays. Nothing broken, just some soreness which he got some meds for. I was asleep before they returned from dinner, and they were out this morning before I awoke. I was able to get between 10 & 11 hrs of sleep, which I sorely needed from the long trip to get here. Hope tonight is a good rest, too. The fire I built after dinner is dying down, I can smell the wood still smoldering. Will read a bit & get some sleep.

Sept. 5, '09

11.9 mi

Didn't have a great night's sleep, off & on. The bugs & frogs were noisy all night, heard some small animals creeping around. Hopefully better tonight.

Camping just below Whitetop Mtn Rd. it was tough going the last 1 ½ hrs; the mountain was kicking my tail. It's like last year all over again, first week was hard. I'm hoping I'm better conditioned a week or so from now. My feet are sore & legs are tight. Put some moleskin on a couple spots on each foot for preventive reasons. Will do 12 or more miles tomorrow. Looking forward to a shower @ Grayson Highlands SP.

One snake spotted on trail yesterday, 3 deer today. It's 8:28 pm now, coyotes, dogs & owls are heard in the distance.

One thing I was thinking of while waiting @ DC Amtrak station, killing the time till bus left; when we step out of our personal comfort zone, other ppl & things are viewed with a different perspective. To

me, I watch others do their jobs: sweeping floors, restaurant workers, bus drivers, etc, & I imagine myself doing their jobs. What would I think of this guy going to hike, leaving family to do this? What do they think of while they work, look forward to? What are the things they plan for on the weekends? I think of the importance of their job & those to whom they must answer. The bills which are paid for from this job's earnings, & how they need to budget for their personal expenses.

These things run through my mind, as well as what else they'd rather be doing at the moment. What job would they rather be working? What are they working toward? Where else do they want to be?

I'm away from home, from those I love & the job I do. Though I love to hike, backpack from place to place, town to town, it's not the normal everyday life for me. My plans are different, what I eat isn't the same, the physical exertions are more intense. It's only natural that my thoughts will vary from the normal confines of my regular life.

Sept. 6, '09

11.8 mi

Had a pretty good night's sleep, no bear problems, as one couple who reached the spring shortly after me last night, were concerned about. Blueberry bushes were all around my tentsite, & this couple thought maybe bears would eat the berries. There weren't many trees around that were suitable for bear-bagging. The woman had asked me what I do in areas like this to secure my food. I didn't really have an answer for her. But I did find a tree about 45 yards up the hill, where I just reached as high as I could & wedged the bag between some branches. No problems.

Didn't get on trail till about 10 am. A gentleman I spoke with the day before was tenting nearby the parking lot by Whitetop Mtn Rd. He suggested the tentsite where I camped. It was a great spot; maybe 100 yds below the road, kind of like a cul-de-sac, with bushes wrapping around my site, acting like a border for the fantastic view of the mountains I had. The spring was about 20 ft away.

Saw another deer & at least 15 wild ponies in Grayson Highlands SP. The trail was tough much of the way here, lots of rocks, exacerbating my sore feet. The last 2 ponies were on the trail less than a mile from Wise Shelter, my stopping point for the night. There's no tenting near shelters in GHSP, which is fine with me. It rained a bit last night, but rained harder already tonight, off & on. The man on Whitetop said the forecast over the next few days was overcast with showers now & then.

I'm in the shelter with Anne & Bob, an older couple out hiking for a few days, real nice ppl. They gave me some leftovers from their dinner. After that, I made a ½ pot of rice & beans. Now I can have the rest of the mix for breakfast tomorrow, mixed with some tuna.

I never did get that shower @ the GHSP camp store, as it was just too much extra mileage for me. If I can get to Dickey Gap tomorrow or Tuesday morning, then I'll hitch in to Troutdale & shower & do laundry, as well as resupply. It's 16.1 mi to Dickey Gap, & my feet may not be ready for that yet. It's just about 11 mi to Hurricane Mtn Shelter & another 2.9 mi to Hurrican Campground, which has showers from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Tomorrow would be the last day for that, but I'm not worried. I plan to get a shower in Troutdale.

Some more hikers just got in, but they're tenting across from the shelter, I think 4 ppl & 2 dogs. Saw several dogs on the trail today & many ppl, being the holiday weekend, it's busy. I was happy to find only Anne & Bob here when I arrived.

No signal, couldn't call Beth. I did call her in the morning, just before hitting the trail. She was bike riding the Rail Trail on the Cape with Ellen & Marion. Hope she had fun & stayed safe. I miss her.

Add: A note on the water source @ Wise Shelter that's marked @ both the shelter and on Appalachian Pages: the blue-blazed trail leads to a stagnate-looking water hole. It isn't fit to drink. Bugs, floaties & algae aren't very appealing. Bob said he found a better source from the opposite side of the shelter, @ the end of a different trail. I don't know which one Awol refers to in App Pages.

I got water from a stream that's crossed 5 mins from the shelter heading north. I backtracked to that

source, once I realized the poor condition of the water on the blue-blazed trail.

Also met Dave Patrick from MRO on the trail. We chatted a bit about hiking, resupply points & his ongoing of the cabin he built some years back on Whitetop Mountain. He was out for a day hike.

Sept. 7, '09

10.9 mi

Ended up at Hurricane Mtn Shelter today; arrived before 3:45 pm, earliest stopping time yet. Slept pretty well last night. On trail by 9:45 am.

Saw 1 deer today. Passed a couple hikers for the 2nd time; saw them yesterday in GHSP, boy & girl. Met Good Times, a hiker in his 60s, out for an overnighter. We met in The Scales, where his truck was parked. He was going to pick some apples before heading home. He also gave me some tips on where to resupply.

At HMS tonight are 3 guys, friends of one another: Daks, Mash & Toe Gem. TG is in his fifties, the other two look like early 30s. All good guys. Daks' wife went to school @ B.U., he now lives in VA, though Daks is from South Dakota. TG & Mash are from Florida. We all had good stories to tell & Daks had a good fire going. They're all headed for Damascus, due on Thursday.

One thing I was thinking on shortly after leaving Wise Shelter this morning; how the ppl you meet on the trail help add depth to the hiking experience. After staying with Bob & Anne @ Wise, it felt a bit more like last year's hike. Everyone's hike is different, we all have unique perspectives on trail hiking & trail life. By sharing personal thoughts & experiences, depth is added to the hike. Whether we realize it or not, others are helping to fill tiny voids, small subconscious places within our own perspectives, seeping into the cracks of what we're viewing & gleaning from the trail: mentally, spiritually, physically & emotionally. That thought was bolstered quite a bit with my time with Daks, Mash & Toe Gem. Thanks guys.

Spoke with Beth a bit; got a signal up by the shelter. It was good to hear her sweet voice. She had fun on the bike trip; did about 25 mi & was safe. I need to call Aboman sometime tomorrow.

Sept. 8, '09

9.1 mi

Short day today, as I needed to reup in Troutdale. Was out by 9:30 am after breakfast up at the shelter. Mash was out before 8 & Daks shortly after, then Toe Gem & me last. Slept good down by the stream. Saw another deer today.

Walked the 2.6 mi to Troutdale. Not fun, as I don't enjoy road walking. Walked into Jerry's, leaving pack outside. Had a ½ lb jumbo cheeseburger, fries & two 20 oz Mountain Dew's; good stuff! Then walked a short distance to Troutdale Baptist Church for a shower & do some hand-washed laundry. There's a spigot by the bunkhouse, so I filled a small wastebasket that I borrowed from the shower room, & hand-washed my laundry. Maybe not laundromat-quality, but my stuff sure smells better. Another hiker, No Rush, was here @ the bunkhouse. This is a real good setup at the church. The bunkhouse has power, so I charged up my phone, which died this morning while talking with Beth @ HMS. There's 4 bunks in one room on the right, 2 I think in the left room, with a table holding some literature. A donation box to the table's left is for your donation; I left \$5.

There were slim pickins' @ Jerry's store, so I grabbed enough stuff for a couple days. It still cost over \$16, which really bothered me, because @ Walmart or a Dollar Store it would've been under \$10. I shouldn't complain really, as I needed food, & it'll get me by for a couple days. I'm glad it was there. Chet & Jerry gave me a ride back to Dickey Gap @ no charge; another reason not to complain. Chet appears to be in his 70s, while Jerry close to 50, with a hearing aid in his right ear & wearing glasses. Both nice men. I was at the trailhead by 4:30 pm, then beat feet to Trimpi Shelter by 6:30 pm. I set up my tent down below the shelter by the stream. The coyotes are howling now as I write this, now 9:19. The shelter looks good, has a fireplace in the center of the back wall, a lower & upper platform on