

Sept. 17,

19.3 mi

Slept ok in the bunk upstairs. Up around 7:45am, on the trail by 9:42. Took an hour to get there from the hostel. My longest day on the trail—19.3 mi. Arrived @ Pine Swamp Branch Shelter @ 8:30p by headlamp. The water source by here is better @ least.

This year's hike seems harder for me, not necessarily physically, but emotionally & spiritually. My body seems to be healing & stronger, but today's climb out of P-burg was tough. Again I felt nauseous & had a headache—could be just my allergies. I miss Beth, & find myself wanting to go home. I didn't feel like this last year after 2 weeks on the trail. That could also be the smaller # of ppl out here @ this time—lack of friendships.

Jeremy & Kyra (Swotch & Capri) were doing some slackpacking over the next few days & I was picking on them about it. They're good ppl—Jeremy turned 33 the other day, older than I thought—got a b-day package @ the post office in P-burg.

Beth is leaving for NH tomorrow morning—she & some friends are hiking up to Lonesome Lake. Hope they're safe & have fun.

Four more deer today (30). Will try for 18.5 mi to Laurel Creek Shelter.

Sept. 18,

13 mi.

Today was another late start, 9:25am, & a shorter mileage day. The hike from Pine Swamp was slow going—made just 3 mi to the Bailey Gap Shelter in about 2 hrs. Uphill & rocks.

Met Superwasp, an older Brit, Aussie or New Zealander—can't tell them apart yet. He was out for a section hike; started in Front Royal, VA but didn't say where he was headed.

Poncho & Lefty (Sally), a Sobo thru-hiker & his dog passed by—he seemed like a nice guy; Sally was a good & friendly dog w/ her own pack bags. Met 2 more Sobos late yesterday afternoon, didn't stop to chat. Talked w/ Poohbear & his girlfriend. Poohbear was thru-hiking, his girlfriend met him for a few days on the trail. Nice ppl.

Four more deer today (34). The last was a buck, tall & strong-looking. His snorting alerted my downward glance, in time to see him burst through the woods w/ power & grace. Several other noises I heard could also have been deer, the most common large animal I've seen.

While I was putting on my pack to leave Bailey Gap Shelter, up strolled Swotch & Capri for lunch. They were also moving slow—about 3 mi in 3 hrs. They were slackpacking back to P-burg & noted how rocky & slippery it was north of the shelter. They weren't kidding. Another reason I only mustered 13 mi today. They camped @ Wind Rock last night, which looked like a nice site when I passed it later. When they stopped @ War Spur Shelter earlier, a raccoon charged them 3 times. Apart from rabies, the other reason I could think why it would do that was because it had young—they're very protective of their babies, & can be extremely aggressive toward ppl.

I'm somewhere between War Spur Shelter & USFS 156/632—Johns Creek Valley. It seemed like a good stopping place. I'll head for Niday Shelter tomorrow, almost 18 mi away. Kelly Knob looks like maybe the highest point, a good climb after crossing the road.

Stony Creek Bridge, which I crossed today, is a fairly new bridge, a wooden l-shaped structure. I believe this was the bridge that was built last year, while the AT was temporarily rerouted.

I was wondering the other day & again today—w/ all the fallen trees & temporary reroutes & detours each year on the trail—has anyone ever hiked the AT (thru-hiked) the path that was laid out that year exactly? Not even a little place where the path goes around a tree. Even Earl Shaffer was off the trail many times, due to getting lost & having to bushwhack his way back to the trail. Funny to think, even though Shaffer walked from GA-ME in 1948, he didn't actually stay on the trail every step of the way. Did the AT's first thru-hiker really thru-hike? Bet the purists like to ramble on about that.

Sept. 19,

17.9 mi

Slept well @ my campsite; glad I backtracked that last .3 mi to set up here. Good site, water running nearby. On trail by 8:50am, reached Niday Shelter by 7 pm. There are 2 Sobos here & 2 older men going north, getting off the trail tomorrow. One of the Sobos warned me not to go into Glasgow, but rather Buena Vista for a reup & eat.

The climb up to Kelly Knob was tough first thing in the morning. The 2nd hard climb was to Braisers Knob in the afternoon. Talked to Beth shortly before reaching Sarver Hollow Shelter. She was almost home from her hike in NH w/ the girls. They were safe & had fun!

On getting to Sarver Hollow, my water was almost gone, so I dropped my pack on the trail side & headed down the side trail. The sign ways ¼ mi to the shelter, .3 mi to water. My book states .4 mi, which I agree w/. On reaching the “water supply,” I was very angry to find a puddle a few inches deep, no flow, no gradual running trickle. After wasting nearly 20 mins going down & up, I threw on my pack & hiked onward in a tiff.

On the way down that side trail, I came across a funny, little guy. He was maybe 5'4”, real skinny, wore a long sleeve shirt & khaki pants w/ work boots. He also wore small framed glasses in red, over which was a set of safety goggles. He seemed to be mentally handicapped & harmless. He spoke w/ a high pitched voice. I startled him coming down the trail, but didn't speak w/ him for long—I apologized for startling him, shook his hand & went on. On the way back up, he asked if the water source was piped, to which I replied “no, just a nasty puddle.” I wasn't trying to be rude, but simply felt rushed to get to the next water source. Later I would come to learn his name, Quidam.

Less than an hour after leaving Sarver Hollow, I ran into another Sobo named Lost Rob. We talked about 10 mins & I gave him a pre-congratulatory spiel, as I've done w/ most of the Sobos I've met this year. I mentioned the hiker I met at Sarver Hollow. Rob had heard of him but not met him. I told him that the hiker seemed harmless.

Saw 3 more deer (37). No signal here; hopefully I'll talk w/ Beth sometime tomorrow. Don't think I'll reach Catawba tomorrow, may Monday am.

Sept. 20,

17.4 mi

Woke up at least ½ dozen times, turnovers & such. Heard the older hikers scuffling about @ 6am. They'd said they wanted to be out by 7 am & they were. One thing about the older generations, apart from the endless stories, is they usually get up when they say. Aboman is like that. I agree w/ it, & will incorporate it into my hikes more frequently. Right now, I figure my body needs rest, & will wake when it should. I was out at 9:25am. The 2 Sobos left around 9am.

Stopped by the Audie Murphy Memorial, about 5 mi into the day. I took a short moment to thank God for him & all service ppl, asking Him to keep them safe & give them the courage needed to do their jobs.

Saw no deer today—only the 4th day of this trip in which I haven't seen one. The Dragon's Tooth was a cool place, & if I wasn't pressed for time, would've enjoyed hanging out & maybe even climbed to the top. The descent of the north side is precarious, even dangerous in some spots. On the way down, I kept thinking, even spoke out loud, “A blind man did this?” Kudos to him & his dog & all dogs who've done the climb! The trek down felt like it would never end. For several mins, I strapped the poles to my pack, as it was easier to use both hands frequently.

I reached Newport Road (VA 624) around 7pm, took a left & headed for the convenience store. Bought a 20 oz water, 1 ltr of Diet Dew & 2 hot dogs. By the time I'd stop for the night, I figured that I wouldn't want to cook, so this was dinner. I just finished the Dew while I sit here writing. Diet Dew tastes so much better to me than the regular stuff.

After reaching the trail again, I strapped on the headlamp & started another climb. My book mentions a

stream another .9 mi from the road, but I stopped @ 8pm, maybe a couple tenths short of the stream. I was tired & had decided when I started the climb, to stop @ the 1st flat spot I found. Seems others have camped here, too—an old pair of socks hangs from the tree I tied my food bag line to. There's a firepit close by.

Hard to decide where I'll stop tomorrow. Less than 6 mi to the Catawba Valley General Store, then another 10.4 to Lambert's Meadow Shelter. We'll see how it goes. I need a shower & to charge my phone.

Sept. 21,

15.7 mi

Slept good @ my site last night; out on trail by 9am. Stopped @ Catawba General Store for a turkey & cheese sub, Mountain Dew, water, ice cream & a couple dinners to last until I reach Daleville.

Passed one slackpacking Sobo yesterday—a woman, maybe late 40s or so. She didn't even have a water bottle I don't think. Two teenage guys were coming up the trail from the north as I was descending Dragon's Tooth.

Saw a few dayhikers today, 4 Sobos w/ 2 dogs, a husky & a boxer. As I was returning from Catawba, they were crossing the street near the parking lot. Saw 6 deer (43), after not seeing any for almost 2 days. I'm @ the Lambert's Meadow Shelter tonight w/ 2 older men, Laverne & James. No signal, but I spoke w/ Beth around 1:30pm right after meeting Frank, a RATC volunteer maintainer. We talked a bit & he gave me a small yellow delicious apple. Beth was home w/ Breelan who was sick from school. I'm sure Skippy enjoyed the company today.

Laverne & James are out for a week's section hike, heading south. They're Southern Baptists. We had a good talk tonight.

I need to do some 20 + mi days, in order to make it possible to be @ Harper's Ferry by Oct. 9th. A stop in Daleville @ almost mid-pt tomorrow will slow me a little. But I'll push for Wilson Creek Shelter, 20.6 mi from here. Met Slowpoke @ Campbell Shelter. Sure glad I wasn't staying there. That dude is fried!

Sept. 22,

20.6 mi

Up by 7:15am, but didn't reach the trail till 8:55. They guys @ the shelter were nice guys, & we informed each other what lay in store for one another. They're headed south, me north.

Arrived @ Daleville by 1:30pm, got a Mtn Dew & Milky Way bar @ a gas station. Then headed for Kroger Supermarket, loaded up for 5-6 days of food. Pack is heavy. Stopped @ Wendy's for some lunch & reached the trail again by 3pm. 11.2 mi left to hike.

Saw no deer today, 1 snake (3) & some toads. Met Sobo hiker Fiddler, then later Greg & Oliver Twist, his dog, a Beagle, Jack Russell & Brittany Spaniel mix. Henry, aka Jeremiah, whom I met @ Elmer's last year in Hot Springs, NC, was @ Fullhardt Knob Shelter. I stopped by around 5:45p for a break & to check the water source. There's a cistern behind the shelter which collects rainwater. A pipe w/ an add handle is what opens the spout—nothing came out. I would have liked to stay & talk w/ Henry some more, but I was off to Wilson Creek Shelter, where I'm now tenting to the side of the shelter.

Three hikers are spread out inside the shelter. At 8:35p when I arrived, they were already asleep.

It's to Jennings Creek tomorrow, Middle Creek Campground, where hopefully I can do some laundry & get a shower. Not sure if I'll reach Bryant Ridge Shelter by night. It's raining now, & I don't want to hike @ night again in the rain. Spoke w/ Beth twice today, I love her. She's made her train reservation, & I'll be seeing her sometime on Oct. 9th. We're not sure yet about getting home, but it'll work out.

James told me this morning that Harrison Ford plans to do another Indy movie—not sure if I believe it yet. The last one took a long time to reach the screen. But if another one is made, I'll go see it. Read in a shelter register a couple days back, Patrick Swayze died on Sept. 14th. I'll always love Roadhouse.