

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 9<sup>th</sup>, & 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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

either side. I debated over whether to set up the Big Agnes Seedhouse on one of the lower platforms & build a fire inside, or just tent out & build a fire near the tent. I did the latter, as I wouldn't want some potential hikers to come in late & see my tent taking up more space than a single hiker should. So, I'm away from the shelter, my food bag is on the shelter roof. No good hanging spots around. Just as well I tent out, Daks told me last night Trimpi had bats inside when they stayed 2 nights ago. The frogs & bugs are loud again tonight, so I hope I can still sleep well enough. The leaves have recently begun to turn red/orange. Seems I'm "walking with fall." Chatfield tomorrow.

Sept 9, '09

10.6 mi

Had a decent night's sleep, up by 7:30, out by 9. The plan was to reach Chatfield Shelter by day's end, with a brief stop @ Partnership.

When I left Trimpi, it was warm & the sun was shining; looked to be a promising day to hike. Spoke w/ Beth @ 11am while taking a water break. Noontime, it started to rain a bit, so I ducked under some trees for a little protection, put on my rain jacket, hat & packcover & was going to wait it out. The rain came down heavier & heavier, then hail. It was cold, I was shivering, the thunder & lightning was concerning. I hoped it would pass as quickly as it came.

Around 1pm I decided that I needed to get moving, though it was still raining. My legs were cold, my core temp felt lower than normal & my hands were growing numb. If I didn't get moving quickly, hypothermia could've easily started taking over.

It seemed like I was about 4 mi from Partnership Shelter, so that's where I'd stop & shower to get warm. I arrived just a few mins before 2:30pm, dropped my pack at the shelter & walked to the Mt. Rogers NRA Visitor Center. Got a couple disposable towels for a shower & a Mountain Dew from the vending machine inside. NOTE: App Pages lists the vending machines outside the building, but they're inside.

Shortly after I walked through the VC door, another skinny, worn-looking hiker walked in, focused on the soda machine. He turned & walked out the door before getting something from the machine. Later he told me that his hands were so cold, he couldn't maneuver them to put money into the machine. His name is Chipmunk, out for a section hike, though I don't think he has a definite destination. He's already completed the entire AT.

Chipmunk & I each ordered a pizza from Pizza Hut, ham & cheese. It tastes good, but its greasiness has driven me to the bathroom twice. I have 3 pieces left for tomorrow. We had a good talk, shared stories & laughs. He's a fast-talker, bouncing all over the place & doesn't retain much what I've told him. I probably had to say 5 or 6 times I was heading to Harper's Ferry. He's a funny character, 54 yrs old, little guy w/ long dirty-blond hair & gray beard. A lot of funny things came out of Chipmunk's mouth, but my favorite was: "I was married once to the same girl twice."

This shelter is nice, two levels w/ a shower & sink. Chipmunk took the downstairs, so I'm up top, each of us in his respective tent. There are bats that fly in & out of the shelter, & I didn't want to deal w/ them or mice getting near me.

No signal, couldn't talk to Beth. I love & miss her. The forecast is for rain off & on until Saturday. My plan is for 13.3 mi to David Path Campsite. This will give me 78 mi for my 1<sup>st</sup> week/20.3 mi behind where I wanted to be. If it wasn't for the rain, I would've been @ Chatfield Shelter tonight, & have completed close to the same number of mi on my trip last year in the 1<sup>st</sup> week. I'm sure the rain was needed, & maybe it was another reminder not to complain about being in the woods so long w/o feeling the sun. I'm worried I may not have enough money to last me 5 weeks. It's kinda like just living on faith out here.

Saw another deer. W/in the last 2-3 days, saw what I think was a mink, slinking up a hill to the right of the trail. It ducked under a flat stone; there was an entry way on the side facing the trail, so probably another one on the opposite side, too, where I lost sight of it.

Sept. 10, '09

17.9 mi (1<sup>st</sup> wk=81.6 mi/11.657 per day)

Up @ 7:30am, out by 9:15. Slept pretty well; the bat noise wasn't too bad. Didn't hear any mice, & I was warmer inside the tent than if I didn't set it up. It grew colder during the night, raining some more. Chipmunk was going into towns on either side, or direction, from the MRNRA VC; he needed supplies & money. He packed up his stuff & headed down the road, planning to zero a couple days @ Partnership.

Took a break @ Chatfield; this shelter needs an overhaul; in the least, a facelift. This section of the AT hasn't had much maintenance over the years. Trail itself seems fine, but it lacks signs, compared to the sections south of here. The existing signs look @ least 20+ yrs old, rotting, bullet holes through some, & most are hard to read. I know it takes a lot of money to keep the AT in shape, & tons of work. But I feel I'm just stating point of fact things.

Reached Atkins, VA shortly 3pm. Got a couple Mtn. Dews, 3 candybars & 3 pre-made sandwiches. Turkey & swiss was for dinner, plus last piece of pizza. Crossing the rr tracks before Atkins, as Chipmunk said I would, saw remains of a dead bear; meat gone, including skin, picked clean. Just bones & some fur remained. 3 guys from Nashville, TN were collecting some bones, one cutting off the claws. They also took some teeth; mementos of their AT journey. Jonathan, Casey & Dan are young guys, look like they're just out of h.s., but seem like good kids. They're headed north for a section hike. Just a bit before 7pm, I reached Crawfish Valley, making it a 17.9 mi day, longest of the week. Mike, aka, "Doc," was there tending his pack. He's also sectioning, south, from Pearisburg to Damascus. Doc's in his fifties, former Coast Guard Corpsman. He looked @ my right foot when we camped in a spot a little north from CV. The little toe was hurting most of the day, some torn skin. But there was blood on my sock, coming from between the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> toes. Seems the toe nail on the 4<sup>th</sup> toe was cutting into the 3<sup>rd</sup> toe. It's been cleaned & bandaged, as well as the little toe.

The stretch from Davis Path to Crawfish Valley was marked w/ several bear claw markings on trees. This is the most I've seen on any part of the AT so far, including last year.

Doc & I sat on a log by the fire ring, while I ate my slice of pizza & 1 ½ slices of a sandwich. The other half went to Doc, though he already ate. We then packed our food bags & went to look for a good tree to hang them, when a raccoon came into the camp, walking toward me when I was packing my bag. He wasn't too shy, & I talked to him a bit.

After about 15 mins of looking & finally hanging our bags, Doc & I returned to camp. I'd left my 2 Platypus 1 ltr containers, along w/ the 4 ltr container & Mtn Dew out in the open, a few feet from my tent. The bag containing my 1<sup>st</sup> aid items was laying by my tent door, along w/ my boots, pack & Aqua Mira inside a boot. The rain fly was left open, but the main door was closed. I noticed the Aqua Mira now lying a few ft from the tent and, when picking it up, realized a boot was missing. Seems Rocky tried to pull out the inner sole of my right boot, leaving it several more ft away from the Aqua Mira. He/she also chewed a hole in the 1<sup>st</sup> aid kit, but I don't know if anything was taken. Lastly, while I've been writing this, I noticed a hole in the mesh body of the tent, a few smaller holes around it, & two other punctures which look like claw marks. I think a piece of a claw was hanging from one of the puncture marks. The cute, little menace was trying to get into my tent! I wonder how many times he's done that, & how many other hikers have given him/her food. Just now, I hear the 2 Tennesseans screaming from their campsite @ CV. Chipmunk told me they were loud.

Met my first Sobo thru-hiker today, Long Gun 5, just a ways before reaching Chatfield. He started in late May, so will probably finish an another 5 wks or so. He looks like he's in his late 40s.

6 more deer today. That's 13 deer, 1 snake, 15 ponies, 1 raccoon & I think a mink.

No signal, can't call Beth tonight, but I spoke w/ her twice earlier. I missed Skippy's b-day, but Beth gave him a bath & a chewy afterward. My camera finally died today-that really stinks!

Sept. 11,

16.7 mi

Slept ok last night, up @ 7:40am, out by 9:15. Today dragged on, my body needed some cooked food last night, instead of a sandwich. Met Strider, another Sobo thru-hiker. Saw 2 deer (15), a toad (2) & a really big rat snake that's here @ Chestnut Knob Shelter. It's about 6 ft long.

Will probably stop @ Laurel Creek tomorrow, a 14.8 mi day. My feet & legs are sore & I need to do laundry, take a shower. In a couple days, I may try for a 20-miler, we'll see how I feel. Spoke w/ Beth this afternoon; she's working tonight, so I'll call her tomorrow morning.

Older couple tenting outside, 2 other guys in shelter w/ me, firemen. One snores like a boar.

Sept. 12,

10 mi.

The shelter last night was comfortable; no mouse problems, thanks to the rat snake that was inside the shelter when I arrived. He crawled out soon after.

The firemen both snored, but one was particularly loud. They both made a bunch of noise betting ready in the morning; rude, it seemed to me. My sleep was interrupted by their snoring all night, in addition to my allergies; eyes running, very itchy & swollen when I awoke.

Was up about 7:45am, on trail by 9:25. the couple outside, Pat & Doc, came in to cook breakfast. We had a nice talk. They're nice ppl, out for a couple days of backpacking.

I missed the stream @ Walker Gap, only 1.3 mi from the shelter. I heard the water as I was descending to the parking lot but, for some reason, I thought I'd cross the stream further on. It wasn't seen from the trail. So, I was out of water until Davis Farm Campsite, where water is 0.5 mi down the hill off the trail. It took 13 mins to reach the water, 7-8 mins to fill 2 ltrs, then 14 mins back up the hill. I was so thirsty. Called Beth during my rehydration break.

Davis Farm Campsite isn't too much of a campsite; not a place really to tent out. Rocks are everywhere, & don't think there's a spot even 5 sq ft to sit w/o sitting on rocks. Lots of fallen trees blocking the trail through this section. I don't know if PATH (Piedmont Appalachian Trail-Hikers Organization "maintains" this also, but given what I saw yesterday, it wouldn't surprise me.

Passed a couple hikers going south, doing day hikes I think. The last one wore a military pack w/ a canteen attached, carrying a real long hiking stick.

I stopped @ Jenkins Shelter, too tired & sore to hike further. Gary from TN is in the shelter tonight, I'm out in my tent. We had a good talk tonight. He's out for a few days alone, & plans a number of trips each year. He's headed south. I haven't passed too many Nobos this time of year.

I need to get into Bland tomorrow to reup, 11.7 mi away, then on to Helvey's Mill Shelter. That'll be a 14 mi day. Then I'll head to Trent's Grocery on Monday for a shower & laundry, 16.3 mi away. I'll feel better after that.

My time away from Beth this year is much harder for me than last year, evidence of how much more I love her. I hope I can talk to her tomorrow, as I have no signal now. She's working tonight, anyway. I look forward to doing more trips together; I love her.