

Ho & Hum's Long Trail Journal
Johnson/Route 15 to Lincoln Gap
August 10-21, 2009

Prologue

Hum (Bob Ash) and I (Jerry Ash) begin to seriously plan for our Long Trail (LT) hike starting in February, when Bob, Pat, their son Keith's family, and our daughter Debbie's family spend a week skiing in Killington and come to our house one night for dinner. We have a good old Ash family reunion that night, with lots of guffawing, as usual, and Hum and I begin to map out our August LT hiking adventure. We look over the [Long Trail waterproof map](http://www.greenmountainclub.org/product_detail.php?sku=2216) (http://www.greenmountainclub.org/product_detail.php?sku=2216) and [Long Trail Guide](http://www.greenmountainclub.org/product_detail.php?sku=2200) (http://www.greenmountainclub.org/product_detail.php?sku=2200) I purchased from the Green Mountain Club (GMC), and I loan him my DVD [Vermont's Hiking Trail - The Long Trail: A Footpath in the Wilderness](http://www.longtrailhike.com/) (<http://www.longtrailhike.com/>), which provides a nice overview of an end-to-end hike on the LT.

In the coming months we both do a considerable amount of preparation in researching equipment and training for the hike. In March Hum puts together an equipment list for our hike and I seek out the GMC's 'mentor' program. The GMC puts me in touch with 2 excellent mentors, 'Rough' and 'Tumble', who provide great, detailed help, including

1. a detailed, day-by-day journal of their 2003 LT end-to-end thru-hike, which answers many of our initial questions (<http://www.trailjournals.com/roughandtumble>)
2. podcasts on a) end-to-end planning and through hiking, and b) preparing trail meals (<http://www.longtrailpodcast.com/>)
3. equipment suggestions (<http://www.trailjournals.com/gear.cfm?trailname=1561>)

Rough and Tumble also give us immediate detailed answers to our many specific questions. Overall, a great program from the GMC.

A visit to Katy & Tim Chew's in April (on the occasion of the Baptism of Lea and Jarrod on Easter Eve) gives me a chance to discuss and learn about backpacking from Tim, who is a very experienced hiker and who once climbed Mt. Mansfield. Tim also kindly loans me many items from his backpacking gear, which include a self inflating Thermarest sleeping pad and a Minipro water filter, both of which I use extensively on our LT thru-hike.

In the spring and early summer, we both do a number of training hikes. Hum takes a 4-mile hike every other day, around his neighborhood, with 25 pounds on his back. I do 79 miles in 8 training hikes (16.7 miles, 14.8 miles, 16.2 miles, 11.7 miles, 4.8 miles, 4.8 miles, 4.2 miles, and 6.0 miles, respectively), including 53 miles on the LT (from Brandon Gap to Big Branch/USFS 10), initially carrying 25 pounds and later 30 pounds on my back (I wrote a separate journal on these training hikes).

Hum arrives in Vermont at about 3 PM on Sunday, August 9, the day before the hike begins, while I'm finishing up mowing and weed-whacking the lawn. We spend several hours checking equipment and weighing everything the night before. Hum has about 45 pounds total with much extra weight in miscellaneous odds and ends and extra food weight. I encourage him several times to shed some of the 'extras' and kid him about bringing 'extravagant extras' like his butane lighter 'match', but Hum at first does not shed any of the items. But shortly after saying goodnight, Hum has second thoughts and comes back downstairs and reevaluates his cargo. Fortunately, he removes almost 10 pounds of extra stuff and food weight, bringing his total weight down to about 36 pounds. My total weight is 33 pounds, about 3 pounds more than the maximum 30 pounds I trained with. This makes me a bit more apprehensive about carrying that much weight. Will I be able to do it, I worry to myself?

We agree that our trail names will be Ho and Hum, and together we'll be Ho-Hum. My nickname derives from the fact that I've always liked to sound off with a lot of 'ho-ho-ho's' through an empty Christmas wrap tube at Christmas time, and Hum, well, has always been known as 'Hum' for most of his life. Hum's nickname derives from being called 'Roberto Humberto', or the 'humble one', from way back when during our summers in Awosting on Greenwood Lake, New Jersey. People we met along the long trail were sometimes amused by our choice of trail names.



**The Famed Ho-Hum Motel
Named After the World-Renowned Hiker-Mountaineer-Adventurers**

Johnson/Route 15 to Sterling Pond Shelter – 8/10/09

Start Time: 7:30 AM, gate at West Settlement Road off Route 15

End Time: 6:45 PM, Sterling Pond Shelter

Total Miles: 9.3 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2850' gain/2240' loss

Distances:

Johnson/Route 15 to Bear Hollow Shelter; 3.9 miles; 880' gain/0' loss

(1.7 mile drive on West Settlement Road to reach parking area and gate across trail)

Bear Hollow Shelter to Whiteface Shelter: 3.6 miles; 880' gain/1150' loss

Whiteface Shelter to Sterling Pond Shelter: 3.5 miles; 1090' gain/1210' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 39,409

Calories: 1037

Steps/minute: 87

MPH: 2.48

Timer: 7 hours, 30 minutes, 58 seconds

Miles: 18.66 miles (9.3 actual miles)

As per our plan, we arise at 4:00 AM on Monday, August 10. I did not sleep well this night, probably reflecting my apprehension about what lay ahead in the morning: a lot of unknowns and the possible dangers I've already heard about on the trail ahead.

After breakfast and last minute checks we're on the road by 5:00 AM. It takes 2 ½ hours to reach Johnson, and along the way there is quite a bit of rain and gloomy weather. The forecast is for showers and thunder showers for just about every day throughout the week. Our spirits are subdued by the bad weather and our apprehension grows as to what to expect on our very first thru-hike. Neither of us has carried a heavy pack for so many days on a rugged trail like the LT. We had both done a lot of overnight camping throughout our lives, in boy scouts and on family camping trips, but not the thru-hiking we are about to undertake.

By following the good description in the [Long Trail Guide](#), we have no trouble finding our way to Johnson and West Settlement Road and the head of the LT going south. We arrive at the parking lot and starting gate at about 7:30 AM and after a few photos and goodbyes to Lysie Pie, we're off into the woods on our grand thru-hiking adventure.



Ho & Hum Start LT Thru-Hike Just South of Johnson

Not more than 5 or 10 minutes into our hike, Hum spots a bear crossing the trail (which is still a 10' wide road). I too see the bear but it quickly disappears into the woods before any pictures can be taken. We regard this as a very good omen, because seeing a bear in Vermont is quite rare.

We reach Bear Hollow Shelter by 9 AM, after passing 2 hikers from Florida shortly before reaching the shelter; they are bound for Johnson. The pace to Bear Hollow is rapid, although the trail to this point is not particularly difficult, with only 2.2 miles of hiking and a gradual 800' elevation gain. We immediately, incorrectly, assume that our pace will be much faster than our recent estimate of 1.5 mph average – 2.5

mph in fact. Our error is because we calculated the 2.5 mph average based on a 3.7 mile hike rather than the actual 2.2 miles from the gate.

After a brief rest at Bear Hollow Shelter, we set off up Whiteface Mountain, which quickly turns into a very rugged and steep and extremely difficult trail. We meet 'Norway' on the upslope, who advises us that there are several steep ledges to climb ahead. We learn that Norway carries about 40 pounds with a full load of food, which makes us feel a bit better because we are carrying less.

We soon find that Norway is quite right about the ledges, there are many long slippery rock faces that we often need to crawl up, and down, to avoid slipping on the rocks. It is on these rock slides, both here on Whiteface Mt. and many other places on our thru-hike, where we both manage to rip the back of our pants. While Hum's pants eventually get to a 'beyond repair' status, mine are badly ripped but miraculously healed later on (that's a story I'll tell you later).

It is on this arduous and difficult climb up Whiteface Mountain that Hum experiences a significant shortness of breath. Hum relates that this extreme shortness of breath has happened to him on only one previous hike up Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. He also speculates that his condition of chronic untreatable anemia is also contributing to his problem. This shortness of breath causes Hum's pace on the uphill hiking segments to slow dramatically from then on, but that of course is the only way to deal with the issue. My concern for my brother's well being is immediately raised to a high level.

A little further up the Whiteface Mountain climb, we're passed by '[Windtalker; \(Randy Motz\)](http://www.rmghadventures.com/Windtalker.htm)' (biography at <http://www.rmghadventures.com/Windtalker.htm>) and '[Mom' \(Georgia Harris\)](http://www.rmghadventures.com/Mom.htm)' (biography at <http://www.rmghadventures.com/Mom.htm>) who are also headed south on the LT. Randy and Georgia had given a seminar 2 days earlier entitled '[Care and Feeding of the Long Distance Hiker](http://www.rmghadventures.com/pages/presentations/care.html)' (<http://www.rmghadventures.com/pages/presentations/care.html>) at the [Rutland Long Trail Festival](http://www.longtrailfestivalvt.com/) (<http://www.longtrailfestivalvt.com/>), and both Lyn and I attended their seminar. It was an excellent seminar covering a wide range of topics, including preparation, health, foot care, rest, nutrition, stoves, and food. In the discussion with them after the seminar I learned of their plan to hike south on the LT starting in Johnson the following Monday, just as Hum and I had planned. I told them that was our plan as well and that we would very possibly meet them on the trail. And so now we did.

As they approach us coming up the trail, I immediately recognized them and mistakenly blurt out to Georgia, who is always in the lead for the pair, "I know you, you're Anita." I had erroneously assumed that Georgia's name was Anita, since she had talked about and handed out the recipe for 'Anita's Power Cookies' and sample packages of the cookies at the seminar (and I in fact had several of these cookies in my food pack). Georgia replies that her name isn't Anita, but adds that her mother is named Anita, so I then realize that in fact the power cookies are her mother's recipe. We chat briefly to learn their trail names and that they had started at about 8:30 AM after a night's stay at a Johnson motel. Indeed, it is immediately obvious that Randy and Georgia are much faster hikers than we are, but somehow we will be able to reach the same 4 daily destination shelters as they do in coming days. This is extremely fortunate for Hum and I, and tremendously enhances the enjoyment of our first week's hike on the LT.

A little further up the Whiteface Mountain climb we meet a father and daughter hiking with virtually no provisions or packs bound for Johnson. They are day hiking from Smugglers' Notch to Johnson, an extremely difficult 15 mile hike. They advise us that the Whiteface Mountain peak is shrouded in fog, so there would be no view when we finally reach the summit. Before we confirm that these folks are indeed a father and daughter, Hum speculates (with his sometimes lack of PC awareness) that this man is robbing the cradle with a much younger girlfriend.

We reach Whiteface Mountain peak at about 12:50 PM and it is indeed all socked in – no view. We rest and snack for about 15 minutes so Hum can recover his normal breathing. This also includes a map and trail guide check; in fact our stops ALWAYS include map checks, and on a few occasions when Hum misplaces his map in his pack, or momentarily can't find it, he goes into an immediate panic and declares with great alarm that he has 'lost his map'. It is always a tremendous relief when, by digging a little deeper in his pack, he finds his map and is happy again.

We then hike on down Whiteface Mountain over the very steep and dangerous decent on slippery rocks and rugged trail, although we are occasionally rewarded with some beautiful views across to Madonna Peak along the way.

We reach Whiteface Shelter at about 1:45 PM, to find Randy and Georgia just finishing up their lunchtime break. As we spy the Madonna Peak ski area across the valley, Georgia advises us that the LT hike ahead includes some of the Madonna Peak ski trails now visible across the valley. We also discuss meeting the father /daughter along the way. But before Georgia confirms that the girl is in fact the man's daughter (she had heard the girl address him as 'dad' and saw their entry in the shelter log confirming they were father and daughter), Hum again blurts out his un-PC theory that the man is robbing the cradle with an inappropriately too-young girlfriend.



Hum & Randy Do Lunch at Whiteface Shelter

At this point we are undecided as to whether we will go on to Sterling Pond and do not make that decision until after Randy and Georgia depart. We had not read the [Long Trail Guide](#) carefully enough to learn that there is a water source very near the Whiteface Shelter, so we incorrectly assume that there is no water there and unfortunately do not refill our water bottles. This proves to be a big mistake and, worse, the perceived lack of water at the Whiteface Shelter is in part a reason to proceed on to Sterling Pond Shelter. Hum for some other reason – perhaps because it was still too early in the day to stop -- is also keen on going on, so we do. We speculate that we will find streams in the valleys ahead between Whiteface Mountain and Madonna Peak. But once again, this assumption proves to be wrong; there are often no streams or water available at such high elevations. I estimate that at the rate we are going, it is not at all guaranteed that we will reach Sterling Pond Shelter by dark. So our tentative plan is to tent along the way, if necessary, assuming that we will find water en route (which we don't).

So off we go on the remaining 3.3 miles to Sterling Pond Shelter. We reach Hagerman Overlook at about 3:30 PM and Madonna Peak (3668') at about 5:30 PM, after the almost straight-up final ascent along the Madonna Peak ski trails, as Georgia had advised earlier. However, upon reaching the summit, Hum is exhausted and declares that he is 'completely out of gas'.



Hum Ascends Madonna Peak on the Almost Straight-Up Ski Trails

Hum is always honest and open and hides nothing, so my concerns only grow more intense with his declaration and I begin to think that we will have to reevaluate our whole plan at the next opportunity, which will be Route 108, Smugglers Notch (we will reach Smugglers Notch sometime tomorrow).

There are beautiful views from the top of Madonna Peak, which includes clear views of Mt. Mansfield across Smugglers' Notch. In addition to the ski lift, there are also warming huts at the summit, which are open for use by hikers. We don't consider staying on Madonna Peak because we now know we will likely reach Sterling Pond Shelter before dark, which is now only 1.2 miles down the other side of Madonna Mountain. After a good rest and taking time for Hum's pack adjustment, we are off down the mountain after a brief search to verify the LT routing on the downhill ski trail. It will still take us well over an hour to reach the shelter – it is still very rough going, and dangerous, especially on the downhill stretches.

We finally reach Sterling Pond Shelter at about 7 PM, happy to find Randy and Georgia, who had arrived there hours earlier. There is also a family of 3 from Dallas – father, mother, and daughter Ripley, age 12. The family has hiked up to the shelter via the Sterling Pond Trail from Smugglers Notch, which they describe as a pretty easy ascent. The caretaker has taken leave of the shelter for the evening, so there is just enough room for the 7 of us to fit our sleeping bags and pads across the narrow shelter, stacked closely together like sardines in a can. Georgia suggests that it will be refreshing for us to wash off in Sterling pond below the shelter, where of course we can also find water. We are pretty much out of water, not having filled our water bottles all day. This is a dramatic lesson to both of us: take every opportunity to fill up on water, wherever possible, and carefully read the [Long Trail Guide](#) as to where water is available. On the trail, water is by far the most important item to have, at all times.

I take off my hiking shoes and socks and put on my new crocs, which were given to me by Debbie for my birthday a week earlier. Boy does that ever feel good! Georgia and Randy suggest hanging our packs, poles, and hiking shoes on the available hooks in the shelter. This is to protect from any invasion from porcupines, who love to gnaw on anything that has human salt imbedded in it. There is some evidence of porcupine damage in the shelter, and the caretaker's spot has a pile of rocks, presumably to throw at invading porcupines to send them back into the woods.

After setting up our sleeping bags and pads in our designated spots in the row of sardines, we quickly make our way down to Sterling Pond for water. It is a beautiful, rather large pond, with brownish colored water from the tannin in the pond. Hum uses his new Katadyn Pro filter and I use my borrowed (from Tim Chew) Katadyn Minipro filter, and both work great. The water is delicious; in fact, all the lake and stream water we filter and drink along the way is delicious, never having any tang or unusual taste whatsoever. I

carry iodine pills as a backup (with extra pills to kill the iodine taste), but we never need to use them. Since Hum's filter pumps water really fast, we tend to use that one the most.



Hum Washes Up & Filters Water at Sterling Pond

Upon returning to the shelter, I find Hum in the midst of a cell phone call to Pat, right in the middle of the shelter with everyone there listening. He keeps the call brief, but when I later remind him that the [Long Trail Guide](#) suggests that other hikers prefer cell phone calls to be made out of earshot, Hum takes the advice immediately to heart and HUMbly confesses his transgression and assures everyone it'll never happen again. That is vintage, good hearted Hum.

We make our dinner by boiling water in Hum's jet-boil (which he borrowed from son Keith). Hum has rigged a clever way to set a pot on top of the jet-boil, by placing 4 short copper supports around the flame and resting the pot on top of them. Randy is impressed with Hum's invention, and I suggest that Hum can make his next fortune by patenting and selling his cooking breakthrough product.

Randy advises us on how to set up a bear-proof sling to hang our food bags: 12' off the ground and 6' out from any tree trunk. We soon launch our rope tied to a rock over a nearby tree limb, and hang our food bags as Randy advised.

This first day has been amazing and beautiful. We had an arduous hike over several very difficult mountain peaks on an extremely primitive and rugged trail. We learned that we could carry 35 pounds this far, although not without getting very tired and winded. There was fog, but also a lot of sunshine and beautiful long range views. We saw Mt. Mansfield majestically looming before us, to the south, and in the direction we are hiking the next day. Ho and Hum have already learned much about thru-hiking, the LT, and, most of all, about ourselves and what we are capable of.

It is soon dusk and at sunset another amazing event is about to unfold before us. Randy it turns out is an accomplished musician, we learn, and he has brought his Native American flute with him to play each night at sunset. He has no set music, he makes up the melodies as he goes along. The sounds are like heaven out in the wilderness - haunting flute music, mountains, stars, and all that silence.

We all turn in at about 8:30 PM, when it became dark, all voices are now silent, there are only night noises – some of them human night noises (e.g., Hum's snoring) -- breaking the silence. The row of 7 sardines often roll over to kick a neighbor, but all manage to sleep pretty well after a tiring day. The

wooden floors are hard, but the sleeping pad I borrowed from Tim Chew and my warm sleeping bag (good down to 25 degrees) make me quite comfy.

Sterling.Pond.Shelter to Taft Lodge – 8/11/09

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Sterling Pond Shelter
End Time: 4:00 PM, Taft Lodge
Total Miles: 5.7 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2070' gain/1450' loss

Distances:

Sterling Pond Shelter to Taft Lodge: 5.5 miles; 1850' gain/1230' loss
Elephant Head Cliff Spur Trail: 0.2 miles; 220' gain/220' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 29,322
Calories: 771
Steps/minute: 92
MPH: 2.63
Timer: 5 hours, 15 minutes, 39 seconds
Miles: 13.88 miles (5.7 actual miles)

Randy is up at about 5:30 AM, daybreak, and Georgia, Hum, and I soon follow. The family of 3 lingers a bit longer in their sleeping bags, but are soon up and out as well. Hum gets the jet-boil going for our morning coffee, and we both partake of dry food for breakfast (breakfast bars for me, of which I will soon tire).

I chat a bit with the family from Dallas and learn that the father is a business consultant and is aware of Id Software where Stephen works. Daughter Ripley, now 12, has been taking ballet lessons since she was 2 (and of course doesn't remember lessons back that far), and was in Johnson earlier for a ballet workshop or competition of some sort.

We're all packed up and depart the shelter by 7:30 AM, which is fairly efficient progress for our first morning departure. The trail out of Sterling Pond over Spruce Peak down to Smugglers Notch is steep and wet and treacherous in places. At one point Hum has a close call where he slips on a ledge but fortunately has a firm handhold on a tree atop the ledge. Had he not had that firm grip he would have fallen straight back and hit the rock ledge on his head, probably severely injuring himself.

A little over a mile from the shelter we accidentally go straight ahead onto the blue-blazed Elephant's Head Cliff Trail, rather than turning sharp left onto the LT. The turn is poorly marked, especially in the southbound direction we are going. The Elephant's Head Cliff Trail descends 220' down from the LT to a magnificent view of Smugglers Notch. We only realize our mistake when reaching the Elephant's Head Cliff, where it is pretty obvious that the trail goes no further (it is straight down 100's of feet off Elephant's Head Cliff). Although we are upset for having ventured onto the wrong trail, causing extra hiking distance and climbing, the reward of the stunning view of Smugglers Notch is breathtaking.

We reach Smugglers Notch at about noon and fill our water bottles in Notch Brook, just below the Smugglers Notch Picnic Area.

I now bring up my concerns for Hum's well being and my feeling that, given Hum's extreme fatigue and shortness of breath on the hike so far, that it would be wise to go to Stowe and reevaluate our plan for more hiking. Hum is adamant that he will hear nothing of the sort. He declares several times that he is 'not a quitter' and has 'never quit at anything'. I know my brother well, of course, and know that to be true for his whole life. Hum says that he has come on this adventure to summit Mt. Mansfield and hike onward, just as we had originally planned. And that's exactly what he is going to do, no matter what. He emphasizes that we should continue to take it very slowly on the upcoming 2050' climb up Mt. Mansfield

and also plan to have Lyn pick us up in Jonesville (Route 2), rather than Appalachian Gap (Route 17), for our rest and resupply ('zero day') in North Clarendon.

And so it is decided: onward. There is a brief thunderstorm in Smugglers Notch and luckily we are able to take shelter on the porch of the rest room building in the picnic area for the brunt of the storm. After about 15 minutes the storm subsides so we don our ponchos for the first time and head south on the LT for the next 1.7 mile, 2050' climb to Taft Lodge, which is still 750' below the summit of Mt. Mansfield. We take the arduous climb very slowly, stopping every half hour or so for a 5-10 minute rest.



Climbing the First 2000' of Mt. Mansfield En Route to Taft Lodge

On this day, as throughout the entire 2-weeks of hiking, Hum and I talk about just about everything under the sun as we mosey along the LT: lots of personal stuff, our families, politics, books, movies, songs, the trail and hike (of course), scouting, skiing, how much we love our wives, on and on. Naturally there are many and sometimes long periods of silence, but I learn a lot of new things about my brother. Yes I've known him all my life, and it's hard to know anybody better than that, but new things – yes I learned new things. Like how great he is at navigation, how completely he thinks things through before deciding anything, like how completely honest he is with himself and others.

In the silences there is lots of time to think and reflect and for the mind to wander all over the place, and it always does. Sometimes the reflections can be sort of like prayer, like good thoughts of loved ones here and gone before, counting life's blessings, visualizing the better person I want to be, and unbounded thanks for the love in my life. These conversations and thoughts are time-shared and intermingled with the constant mental gyrations of planning your next steps. Together they are like parallel paths --spiritual and physical paths – being traced out together through the woods.

Along this arduous climb up Mt. Mansfield we meet many day hikers who were making the trek to the summit and back in a single day. We also meet many thru-hikers, with whom we usually stop and chat for a few minutes. Among these thru-hikers are 'Cascade' from the Pacific Northwest, who warns us against carrying our heavy packs up to the summit, but rather advises us to leave our packs at the base and hike up without them (we do not do this). We meet Jaffa, who is hiking the entire LT and is anticipating getting to Whiteface Shelter or Bear Hollow Shelter by nightfall (she is young and fast, and will probably easily make it that far). Several people advise us that they are '45 minutes' from Taft Lodge, although at widely dispersed points along the way, which is a bit discouraging. I also chat with a young man with a 'Princeton Geology' shirt both on his way up and his way back from the summit. I suggest on the way up that this is a good chance to study the geology of Mt. Mansfield, and on the way down I ask

whether he knows my Computer Science Professor friend, Jennifer Rexford, formerly of AT&T Labs (he doesn't).

Not too far below Taft Lodge, Hum slips and falls on one of the uncountable steep slippery rock ledges, and lands sprawled directly across the ledge pretty much blocking the LT at that point. He is unhurt but extremely tired and professes that he just wants to 'rest for a bit' before getting back up. Coincidentally at the very same time a large number of day hikers (10 or more) are making their way down the mountain and come upon Hum sprawled out across the trail, in their way, blocking their path. Each one of them asks in turn and in a very concerned voice 'are you SURE that you're all right?' So now there is a large audience gathered waiting for Hum to get up and prove that indeed he is all right. Finally one young woman says 'we'd all feel much better if you'd get up'. So tired Hum reluctantly picks himself up off the trail, whereupon another young man in the audience quips 'look at all those footprints on your back'. Everyone has a good chuckle over Hum's supposed trampling by day hikers.

At around 4 PM, just as we reach Taft Lodge, Randy and Georgia catch up to us. They have spent much time in mid-day shuttling their 2 cars (one a rental) to their next destination in Jonesville, and also resupplying themselves in Stowe.

Beautiful Taft Lodge is like a little paradise, with a very comfortable enclosed cabin, a good nearby water source, and a gorgeous view to the East, off its front porch, down the valley to Stowe and beyond to New Hampshire and the White Mountains. While in the other direction there is the dramatic summit of Mt. Mansfield looming majestically 750' above the shelter to the west. The porch has benches facing the valley and gorgeous views up and down Mt. Mansfield.



**Taft Lodge with Mt. Mansfield Summit Looming in the Background
Hum & Randy Working on Hum's Pack, Georgia Going Down the Steps**

Caretaker Jenny Poland ('Peanut') soon arrives, as does David ('Downhill'), who started in Middlebury Gap and is headed to Canada, for a total of 6 people in the lodge that night (it has room for 24, so it is mostly empty). As it turns out, 5 of the 6 people there that night are from Maryland: Hum from Timonium, Randy and Georgia from Germantown, and Jenny and David from Baltimore.

Jenny gets a good chuckle out of our trail names, and usually addresses us as Ho and Hum rather than by our real names. We learn that Jenny treks up to the summit every morning before 9 AM, and does the climb in about 30 minutes (about half the time it takes the rest of us). One of her duties is to count people who make it to the summit. Today 77 people had made it up, and on some weekends 500-700 people

summit Mt. Mansfield. She is a fifth grade teacher and will be returning to Maryland the coming weekend to continue her teaching duties.

David advises us of his struggle to get past a very tight squeeze on the Forehead cliffs of Mt. Mansfield. He also had to divert and take shelter during the brief thunderstorm. It is extremely dangerous to be on the summit of any mountain – especially one as high as Mt Mansfield – during a thunder and lightning storm.

Hum's pack is proving to be a problem: too loose, swinging around on his back, and heavy. I had kidded him about his "World War II vintage pack" on the way up the mountain, somewhat in retribution to much kidding he is constantly heaping on his little brother. Hum, however, proved to be a little sensitive about this and quite defensive of his pack. Hum enlists Randy's assistance to help adjust his pack, and together they spend quite a bit of time doing that.

Randy and I get to discussing his and Georgia's book *Solemates: Lessons on Life, Love & Marriage from the Appalachian Trail*, (<http://www.amazon.com/Solemates-Lessons-Marriage-Appalachian-Trail/dp/1440453659/>), which I had learned about from their seminar in Rutland the previous weekend. He coincidentally has self published the book on [CreateSpace](https://wwwcreatespace.com/) (<https://wwwcreatespace.com/>), as have I in publishing *Katy's Astonishing Adventures with Tortulus T. Turtle* (<http://www.amazon.com/Katys-Astonishing-Adventures-Tortulus-T-Turtle/dp/1442103930/>). Randy has also done a great job in promoting his book, and managed to get several publications to review the book and even landed a [TV interview](#) (<http://picasaweb.google.com/GeorgiaLHarris/KarenAllynForwardMotion#5341595405546248994>) to discuss the book. He says that as a result of his promotions and advertizing that the book is doing quite well. This is good food for thought in promoting the Tortulus book.

I call Lyn soon after we get to Taft Lodge to give her an update and to advise her that our progress is much slower than anticipated and that we will likely plan to be picked up in Jonesville rather than Appalachian Gap. We are unsure at this point when we will reach Jonesville, but will advise her of that as our hike progresses.

Dinner is especially good tonight; I have my spaghetti and tuna, quite delicious. Other favorite dinners of mine are black beans and rice (Fantastic Foods, suggested in Tumble's podcast), chili and rice (Fantastic Foods, suggested in Tumble's podcast), and red beans and rice (backpacker's trail meal). All my meals are dehydrated and only require adding boiling water. They are very easy to prepare and, best of all, are very lightweight; I tried all meals in advance of the hike to make sure I liked them, and they taste even better on the trail.

David has an old fashioned white gas stove, and manages to set the table ablaze with some spilled fuel. At that point Jenny comments that she normally asks for food preparation to be done outside, but we had already started before she noticed so she let it go. Randy and Georgia kid Hum about bringing along a butane fire starter to light the jet-boil (I had also kidded Hum about this extravagance before we embarked on our hike). Hum's consistent answer to this kidding is always 'it only weighs one ounce'; we'll take his word for it, but it still seems a little much and begs for some kidding, which we are all happy to dish out.

There is much discussion among Jenny, Randy, and Georgia about people they met on their AT end-to-end thru-hikes. One character is 'Babu Simba', apparently an elderly gentleman (like geezers Ho and Hum) who is featured in a National Geographic documentary about the AT. At one point Babu Simba is shown summiting Mt. Katahdin, which had to be reshot many times to get it right, unfortunately for Babu Simba who had to do a lot more finishes to his AT thru-hike than are normal. We'll have to keep an eye out for this movie, which is being released in the fall.

There are cute mice scampering about foraging for little morsels of food. Unfortunately for them Georgia finds and sets some traps, but the little mouse deftly eats the cheese off the trap with nary a scratch to his little body. I could hardly watch the poor little mouse take the bait, though, and definitely did not want to see a live execution of this adorable little creature. So I didn't watch; however, after retiring to our

sleeping bags a loud 'snap' rang out in the darkness scoring 'one for the hikers versus zero for the mice' as Georgia puts it.

There is a brief rain shower that places a beautiful double rainbow above the valley to complete the gorgeous picture we all marvel at from the porch. At sunset Randy again plays his haunting music creations on his Native American flute. What a fabulous setting this is for his music: a perfect combination of beauty in sight and sound that cannot be and probably will never be matched again in my journey. Our spirits are vastly lifted.



Randy Plays His Native American Flute at Sunset on the Porch of Taft Lodge

Taft Lodge to Taylor Lodge – 8/12/09

Start Time: 7:00 AM, Sterling Pond Shelter
End Time: 5:30 PM, Taylor Lodge
Total Miles: 6.9 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1100' gain/2900' loss

Distances:

Taft Lodge to Butler Lodge: 3.5 miles; 900' gain/1450' loss
Butler Lodge to Taylor Lodge: 3.3 miles; 200' gain/1450' loss
Spur trail to Taylor Lodge: 0.1 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 36,126
Calories: 950
Steps/minute: 88
MPH: 2.52
Timer: 6 hours, 46 minutes, 48 seconds
Miles: 17.10 miles (6.8 actual miles)

We arise again at 5:30 AM to a beautiful morning on Mt. Mansfield. The valley now has a low lying cloud cover and the air is brisk. We are more efficient on this our second morning with eating, packing, filling out water bottles, and getting under way. We are off at 7 AM on our 750' climb to the summit and are the

first to leave the shelter. We soon pass the 'Profanity Trail', which is the bad weather bypass of the summit. Fortunately there is no need to take the bypass this morning.

The climb is vertical in many places and often downright dangerous for those carrying a full backpack (as Cascade had warned). Fortunately for us, Randy and Georgia soon pass us, having gotten a slightly later start than we did. On many of the vertical ascents where one had to find the right handholds in the rocks – sometimes minimal and slippery – Randy is there above us to coach us and sometimes take our packs and walking sticks so we can more easily climb the rocks without them.

On this ascent the real problem with Hum's pack shows up clearly. On several of the vertical rock climbs his pack swings wildly back and forth and could have too easily, it seems, catapulted him right off the cliff! Randy and I will both later say that Hum's pack 'freaked me out!' I would never again kid Hum about his pack, only encourage him that should we do this again he should get a new and better pack.



Randy & Hum Climb Mt. Mansfield Cliffs to Reach the Summit

The 4 of us, Randy, Georgia, Hum, and I, all reach the Mt. Mansfield summit (4393'), otherwise known as the 'Chin' (of the man's profile), at about 8 AM. The views are truly spectacular in all directions, with multiple layers of clouds and some occasional mist from passing clouds at the summit. Interesting shadow patterns appear on the lower layer clouds making for good photography. After snapping a few pictures, Randy and Georgia continue on while we rest and snack a bit.

Although there is weak cell service on the summit, I successfully call Lysie at 8:12 AM and excitedly report our ascent of Mt. Mansfield, the beautiful views we have, and what a glorious start it is to our day. She is happy that we're having a great adventure. Unfortunately, neither Hum nor I could reach Pat from the summit (Hum later calls her from the visitor center).

Jenny arrives at about 8:30 AM, having made the trek from the shelter in about 30 minutes, as advertised. She comments right away on the cloud and shadow patterns and how unusual that is. We snap more pictures of each other and chat about the trail ahead. We have been warned repeatedly about the difficulty of the Forehead stretch of Mt. Mansfield. Some hikers have implied that the going is dangerous and the rock climbing almost technical. Jenny, however, did not go that far, and only advised us that in some places we should take our packs off to more easily negotiate the rocks.

On the summit there are some rare wild flowers growing, including Mountain Sandwort. I point these out to Hum and note that they are especially rare and grow only at high elevations (I had remembered this from hikes years ago with our friend Bill Roach in the Blue Ridge Mountains).



Ho & Hum on Summit of Mt. Mansfield Highest Point in Vermont (4393')

The walk along the Mt. Mansfield ridge line is beautiful on a gorgeous sunny day, with continuous views in all directions. It is also relatively easy hiking since it is fairly flat. There are many glacial erratics and cairns (Hum calls them 'trols') along the way, one marking the spot where a hiker was killed by lightning years ago. We can see down to ski lifts as well as the visitor center, and across to the antennas atop the Mt. Mansfield nose, which for now is closed to hiking (because of antenna radiation level being too high).

We meet 'Halt Measure', a Brit, who is bound for Canada and ask him about the hike up the Forehead. His comment is something like 'there is one place where if you slip you're going to die'. That gives us pause; one of my continuing dark visions is one of us falling off Mt. Mansfield or some other cliff along the LT, and his comment doesn't help allay that fear.

We descend to the visitor center and arrive there at about 10:15 AM. We take a relatively long break to chat with the 2 caretakers, partake of some candy they hand out only to thru-hikers, and peruse the exhibits inside the visitor center. The caretakers already knew that we were coming, having learned from Randy and Georgia, who had passed by earlier, about the 5 out of 6 hikers being from Maryland at Taft Lodge the night before (one of the visitor center caretakers is also from Baltimore). Hum also chats at length with some day hikers who are avid skiers, as is Hum, who loves to chat about skiing and different ski places he has been. We are amused by the caretakers suggesting to one woman, who is going to climb to the summit (still a good hike from the visitor center) in flip-flops: 'you really need to have better hiking shoes'.

The caretakers bid us farewell and 'be careful on the Forehead' and off we go, only to return 5 minutes later to ask directions. We had come to the 'TV road' where it is not marked as to which direction to head on the LT (although it is clear in the [Long Trail Guide](#)).

By 11 AM we reach the Forehead summit (3940') and begin our treacherous, precarious decent.



Hum on Forehead Summit (3940') About to Begin the Perilous Climb Down the Forehead Cliffs

There are a series of 3 ladders, one of which you have to reach by crawling more than a short distance across a slippery cliff edge to the top of the ladder: scary!



Hum Descends Ladder on Forehead Cliffs After Negotiating Slippery Cliff Edge to Reach Top of Ladder

Just above the Needle's Eye (an opening created by two large boulders at the base of the Forehead) is a straight-down squeeze between rocks on several layers, too tight to fit through with your pack on (this is

the place Jenny had warned us about). So off come our packs after which I negotiate the squeeze through the rocks and Hum then hands down our packs and poles; then Hum follows by making his tight squeeze through the rocks. There are 2 levels to negotiate and on the second level I leap – blindly -- over a large rock holding onto a root. I can't see on the other side of the rock and consequently fall into a crevasse; had I not held onto the root I would have slipped through the crevasse with a very long way to the ground.

We finally reach the lower end of the Forehead bypass trail and the Needle's Eye, which thankfully marks the end of the Forehead descent. There we meet 'Legal Beagle', a trail name I suggest since he has just completed his bar exam and is taking a celebratory hike.

A little further on I had just taken a picture and am putting the camera back into my pocket when I slip on a rock, fall backward, and hit the camera very hard on another rock. I am OK but the camera is badly scraped up and I fear that it is now broken: it hit the rock really hard! On a trip to Ireland years ago I had experienced dropping my digital camera on the pavement whereupon it ceased to work – what a bummer that was. Fortunately, my Canon PowerShot A1000 continues to operate perfectly after this very hard bang on the rocks.

And amazingly, shortly after that incident I have another fall, and again I'm unhurt, but somehow my camera, wrapped in a soft white sock, falls out of my pocket. Fortunately Hum sees the camera lying on the ground; otherwise I would have lost my camera and what a disaster that would have been! I'm very happy with my new camera: the pictures are excellent, it has a 4X optical zoom, it's easy to use, and best of all I purchased a 2 Gb chip which allows me to store an almost unlimited number of pictures on the camera.

We had originally thought we would stay at Butler Lodge this night, but somehow we miss the sign and later learn that Randy and Georgia also missed it (the sign only faces south so southbound hikers will likely miss the sign, as did we). Since we pass the Wallace Cutoff to Butler Lodge shortly after noon, it is unlikely that we would have stopped in any case.

En route to Taylor Lodge we encounter about 10 adventure hikers bound for the Twin Brooks Tenting Area and stop to chat. These young guys are happy to hear that the Forehead will present some difficult, if not almost technical, climbing and that there may be some dangerous ledges to negotiate on the descent from the Mt. Mansfield Chin. These guys are indeed looking for adventure. They also advise us that 'there is someone waiting for you at Taylor Lodge', and we immediately (but we later learn incorrectly) assume that message is from Randy and Georgia.

About a half hour before reaching Taylor Lodge, it begins to rain pretty hard, with thunder and lightning, and we again don our ponchos. While we get quite wet and muddy on our legs and feet, the ponchos work well in keeping our upper body and packs dry and it's not a problem to see my feet over the poncho as some folks have suggested it might be.

Fortunately we bypass the Clara Bow Trail to Taylor Lodge, which is marked 'rough trail'. We later learn from Randy and Georgia that it is a VERY rough trail, with ladders and technical climbing, and that's just what we didn't need at the end of this long day of hiking, especially in the rain. After some dead end trips down a wrong side trail, we finally find the Lake Mansfield Trail and arrive at Taylor Lodge at about 5:30 PM. We're very happy to see that Randy and Georgia are there as well. When we mention the 'message' from the adventure hikers, they profess to have not seen the adventure hikers at all, so it becomes a mystery as to whom this 'message' is from that 'someone is waiting for you at Taylor Lodge'??

We settle in and try to get comfortable after our drenching in the rain, which soon stops after we reach the shelter. We are both extremely dirty and our clothes soaking wet. After I change my shirt and socks, I raze Hum about his extremely dirty, used-to-be white shirt. Neither of us has clean dry pants to change into so we just tough it out.

A little while later 'Nips' and 'Shoop' arrive, 2 sisters from Plattsburgh, New York, who are hiking from Appalachian Gap (Route 17) to Canada. They come in drenched, apparently not having worn any rain gear in the rain, so they immediately change their shirts.



Hum & Nips & Shoop Settle in at Taylor Lodge

Unsure as to whether the girls will stay at Taylor Lodge or hike on, Hum suggests that he saw some 'cute boys' on their way to the Twin Brooks Tenting Area and wouldn't they like to go socialize with them, as if these boys are hot prospects. Apparently Hum realizes his mistake right away: these boys are probably more than 5 years younger than the girls and at these girls' ages (20-21), that many years younger is an insurmountable age difference, tantamount to suggesting the girls rob the cradle. Hum tries to change the subject and gloss over his PC error, but the girls fire back and say they already met these boys on the trail and how young they are. Case closed, the girls decide to stay at Taylor Lodge this night.

These girls are definitely interesting, as we will continue to find out over the course of several more days. A few notes on these two:

1. 'Nips', whose real name is Julie, is the older sister and says she takes her trail name from a propensity to walk around, on occasion, without her shirt (in private we presume). Nips has completed college and hopes to have a career in creative writing; she spends most of her time at the shelter either writing in her journal or in the shelter's log book.
2. 'Shoop', whose real name is Stephanie, says she takes her trail name from a rap song by the rap group Salt N Pepa. This is a rather risqué rap video that I later watch on YouTube ([Salt N Pepa – Shoop \(Classic\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKaVBVikysw)) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKaVBVikysw>). Shoop apparently likes to 'sing' the lyrics as the sisters hike along the trail. Shoop is still attending college.
3. Nips lights up a cigarette shortly after arriving at the shelter and we are all surprised and instantly engulfed in smoke. Randy immediately tells the 'girls, none of us in the shelter smokes, so please take it outside'. Right away and from then on Nips takes her smoking a good distance away from the shelter. She has no complaint about this, but we all wonder how someone can endure the tremendous physical exertion it takes to hike the LT and also smoke at the same time; not a good combination.
4. Before preparing their dinner, both girls finish up what's left of a 1 liter bottle of whiskey they have brought with them. They relate that they got their drinking inspiration for a little libation on the trail from their frequent family camping trips, upon which their father always brought and enjoyed his manhattans. We have a long discussion about how our dad's love of manhattans got us to also liking manhattans, and before long this whole discussion makes my mouth water for same, not having partaken of a manhattan in years. Oddly, neither of these girls has even tried a manhattan nor do

they even know what is in one, which Hum and I are glad to describe our own personal manhattan formulas.

5. They use an alcohol stove to cook their dinner, and spill quite a lot of alcohol on the table, which starts an inferno going all over the table when they light their stove. This is exactly what Randy described in his lecture at the Long Trail Festival in Rutland the previous weekend. I comment on this coincidence to Randy, and unfortunately this is exactly what burns down shelters.
6. We learn several more interesting tidbits about Nips and Shoop from reading the logs at the shelters in days ahead (more to come).

After dinner I break out the 2 Ice Cream Sandwiches Debbie has given Hum and me for our dessert. These of course are dehydrated and not cold, but otherwise taste exactly like an Ice Cream Sandwich. Yummy.

Randy once again plays his Native American flute at sunset, and it is a beautiful sunset behind Bolton Mountain, which rises majestically to the south directly opposite the front porch of Taylor Lodge. This, unfortunately, is the last time we'll hear Randy's beautiful music. We have a long discussion about Native American flutes, handmade and manufactured flutes; 5 hole flutes and 4 hole flutes; that Randy is self taught on the flute; that he might be part Cherokee (based on 'oral family history'); that he collaborated with a Native American man who plays the flute and several other instruments at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

His playing against the beautiful sunset is a perfect end to a truly magnificent day, hiking over Mt. Mansfield and all that this trek encompassed, on this glorious day.

Taylor Lodge to Buchanan Shelter – 8/13/09

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Taylor Lodge
End Time: 5:30 PM, Buchanan Shelter
Total Miles: 8.4 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1275' gain/1945' loss

Distances:

Lake Mansfield Trail to Taylor Lodge water source: 0.4 miles
Spur trail to Taylor Lodge: 0.1 mile
Taylor Lodge to Puffer Shelter: 3.4 miles; 1750' gain/400' loss
Puffer Shelter to Buchanan Shelter: 4.2 miles; 525' gain/1415' loss
Spur trail to Buchanan Shelter: 0.3 miles; 130' gain/130' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 42,538
Calories: 1119
Steps/minute: 96
MPH: 2.74
Timer: 7 hours, 19 minutes, 58 seconds
Miles: 20.14 miles (8.0 actual miles)

As usual, Randy, Georgia, Hum, and I are up at daybreak, 5:30 AM. Nips is up, and writing again, about 15 minutes later, but Shoop lingers in her sleeping bag for at least another half hour or more. For breakfast they prepare a full pot of coffee, in a regular size coffee pot, and add a bit of Bailey's Irish Cream for good measure

I discuss the trail ahead with Nips and Shoop, who inform us of a rather large beaver pond not very far south. We also ask them about the trek over Camels Hump, which we'll be doing next week. They say there is nothing particularly dangerous about the hike over the hump, and are rather indifferent as to

whether the north side or south side is more difficult. Later we will find that the south ascent of Camels Hump on the LT is far more difficult than the north.

After breakfast and packing up, Hum and I make our way 0.2 miles down Lake Mansfield Trail to get water, so this additional necessary jaunt delays our departure a bit to about 7:30 AM. By the time we get back to Taylor Lodge, Randy and Georgia have already left. It is unclear whether Randy and Georgia will be staying tonight at Buchanan Shelter, which is our plan, because they still are trying to reach Appalachian Gap by Tuesday, and that plan will require them to go much further today. Additionally, they have a standing rule, they say, to not hike more than a short way off the trail to reach a shelter, and Buchanan Shelter greatly exceeds that rule by being 0.3 miles off the LT on a spur trail. So sadly, we expect we'll not see them again, at least not on this hike.

After an easy first half hour of hiking, we reach the very large beaver pond and momentarily lose the trail. As usual, Hum's keen navigation skill gets us back on track. From then on, the trail goes back to its usual extremely difficult challenges: ladders, ledges, huge roots, and very slow going.



Hum Negotiates a Large Root on Rugged Trail Section En Route to Puffer Shelter

We climb Mt. Clark, Mt. Mayo, and finally reach Puffer Shelter a little after noon. We settle down for lunch and a good rest and enjoy the beautiful long range views before heading up another 525' to the summit of Bolton Mountain (3725'). The trail is indeed 'rugged', as accurately described in the [Long Trail Guide](#).



Rest & Obligatory Map Check on Bolton Mountain Summit (3725')

On the down slope of Bolton Mt. we meet Jrzy, from Poland, who is doing the entire LT and headed to Puffer Shelter tonight. He attended the University of Pennsylvania (but apparently didn't know Professor Keith Ross), and had worked briefly at Bell Labs on a research grant from Bell Labs, working on Ethernet adaptive routing. This sounded all too familiar so I asked him if he'd ever heard of DNHR, which he hadn't.

Along the way on this gorgeous day we get superb views to the south of Camels Hump and beyond. We pass side trails that led to the Trapp Family Lodge near Stowe, which Lyn and I have often visited and once even saw Maria von Trapp in the gift shop. By 4:30 we make it to Harrington's View, with its beautiful and perfectly clear views of Mt. Mansfield to the north and Bolton Valley ski area to the east.

Beyond Harrington's view I take 2 bad falls in quick succession. On the first I fall hard off the trail onto my back into a bush, almost stabbing myself in the juggler with a sharp branch. I'm not immediately sure I am OK, as I tell Hum when he asks. On the second fall I trip over a high rock in the middle of the trail, which somehow I don't see, and land flat on my face, scraping my forehead. Luckily there is no rock where I land and I only get a small bruise as a result. On one of these 2 falls I put a gash on my right shin, which I don't discover until much later. Hum declares all these falls are from being too tired and careless, and he's probably right on target with that observation.



At Harrington's View on a Crystal-Clear Day

Exhausted and finally on the spur trail to Buchanan Shelter, we cross a small brook just before reaching the shelter and I suggest that we fill up our water bottles. Instantly Hum declares 'nothing doing, you can fill yours if you want but I'm going on to the shelter!' Actually, Hum thinks that reaction is pretty amusing: he is really, really tired and just wants to get to the shelter where he can sit down, take off his pack, and rest. Good thing, because there is a good water source just 100' from the shelter.

We finally reach Buchanan Shelter by 5:30 PM, where Randy hears us coming and waves from the shelter door, giving us a hardy and happy welcome and yells out as we approach 'manhattans are ready!' We are really happy to see Randy and Georgia, especially since this is not expected and will be our last chance to enjoy their company. They decided to end their hike in Jonesville since they now feel it would be nearly impossible to reach Appalachian Gap by Monday – it is just too far at this point.

No one else shows up at Buchanan Shelter and we have a really nice evening and discussion with our good hiking friends. Randy brings some interesting entries to our attention from the shelter's log. In particular, Nips and Shoop had been there on August 10 and Nips put this entry in the log:

"Nips' Tips:

Mental weight is just as heavy as weight in your pack. If it ain't getting used, toss it."

We all think that entry is pretty astute, as did other hikers who commented in the log on "Nips' Tips". This will not be the first time we find various "Nips' Tips" in shelter logs – more to come along the way.

We all note that we have seen much moose evidence along the trail today, mostly between Bolton Mountain and the shelter, beside trees as if the moose's (meese?) are marking out their territory along the trail. Randy says that based on all this evidence he was sure he would see a moose on this leg, but sadly he didn't. We tell him that we hadn't seen a moose either, but did see that bear back on the very start of our hike; Randy is genuinely pretty excited about that, as, of course, were we.

Randy tells us of some of his wishes on his bucket list (e.g., an archeological dig) and some of the items already checked off the list. These included a Nascar training camp he attended in Atlanta, which was a present from Georgia, where he drove race cars that maxed out at 168 mph. At one point he rode the jump seat in the trainer's racecar full bore down the racetrack, where the trainers were racing each other

fender to fender full out. I tell him about Stephen's similar racecar training experience in California, which coincidentally was a present from his wife Kristin.

Georgia tells us a bit of her odyssey, which started in Germany and took her to many places in the U.S. including some dog sledding in Minnesota. She also tells us how she had once hit and killed a mooley (milk) cow – oh how sad for us mooley cow lovers. Georgia had also traveled the entire length of the Mississippi River in her family's houseboat, and along the way she gave her own personal name to every bend and special place on the river, kind of like a modern day Mark Twain. We talk about her job at NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology), where she works on 'metrology'. I had mistakenly thought she worked on weather (meteorology), but rather she works on measurement science.

Randy is too tired this evening to play his flute, one can't blame him for taking a rest from those wonderful concerts he imprinted beautifully into our memories on the 3 previous nights. How I wish I had recorded those sessions; his CD [Windtalker – Native SoundScapes](http://www.amazon.com/Windtalker-SoundScapes-Randy-Alan-Motz/dp/B000MXP9MO/) (<http://www.amazon.com/Windtalker-SoundScapes-Randy-Alan-Motz/dp/B000MXP9MO/>), however, will serve as a vivid reminder. We find out later that Randy and Georgia have their own web-site with lots of good information and useful links at <http://www.rmghadventures.com/index.htm> and have also published their trail journals at <http://www.trailjournals.com/windtalkerandmom>.

Buchanan Shelter to Jonesville – 8/14/09

Start Time: 7:00 AM, Buchanan Shelter
End Time: 3:45 PM, Jonesville Post Office
Total Miles: 7.6 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1100' gain/2654' loss

Distances:

Spur trail to Buchanan Shelter: 0.3 miles; 130' gain/130' loss
Buchanan Lodge to Duck Brook Shelter: 5.6 miles; 770' gain/2410' loss
Duck Brook Shelter to Jonesville: 1.7 miles; 200' gain/244' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 32,984
Calories: 869
Steps/minute: 101
MPH: 2.86
Timer: 5 hours, 26 minutes, 37 seconds
Miles: 15.61 miles (7.6 actual miles)

Up at the same time again, 5:30 AM, the crack of dawn, and Hum and I are now becoming pretty efficient at having breakfast, getting packed up, filling our water bottles, and setting off on the trail – old hands already. We say our goodbyes and sincere thanks to Randy and Georgia for having so tremendously increased the sheer enjoyment of our first thru-hike. Their company was truly fantastic and made our experience so much more memorable and fun. They set off shortly before we do, bound for Jonesville and planning to find a nice motel with a spa where they can relax and unwind before returning to Germantown, MD.

We're on our way by 7 AM. The trail on this stretch is still very rough and steep all the way to Duck Brook Shelter. Along the way we pass a picturesque beaver pond where we stop for water, snacks, and a rest before we make the steep climb to the top of Oxbow Ridge. Along the ridge line we get some spectacular views of Camels Hump to the south and snap a few pictures.



On Oxbow Ridge with Spectacular View of Camels Hump

Soon we meet a young couple bound for Smugglers Notch and we exchange respective impressions of the trail ahead. They advise that it's a 'good trail' ahead with a few up's and down's, but nothing major, and that there is a nice stream where we can get water just before reaching Duck Brook Shelter. They also tell us about their swimming experience at the base of the waterfall below Duck Brook Shelter, but warn us that the swimming hole and waterfall are far below the shelter and a big hike down.

We reach the stream by about 1:00 PM, fill our water bottles, and shortly thereafter we stop at Duck Brook Shelter for lunch and a rest. By now I'm completely sick of trail mix for snacks and lunch, and breakfast bars for breakfast. Ugh! Hum kindly gives me one of his pb&j sandwiches for lunch, and I find that to be simply delicious. Yum! So I immediately decide that's what I want for lunch next week.

We can hear but cannot see the waterfall, which, as advertized, is far, far below the shelter down a very steep embankment (essentially a cliff). We do not even consider hiking down to see it, although it does sound very inviting. We peruse the shelter's log, and find this rather interesting entry from Nips and Shoop, dated August 11:

"We noticed that no one was around so we discarded our human forms and allowed our true woodland goddess spirits to roam the forests and waterfalls for some time. Man it feels good to be naked."

'Hmmm' I think to myself.

We also leave our own entry in the log, to the effect that 'geezer brothers Ho and Hum (67 and 69, respectively) stopped by for lunch, and are only a short hike away from Jonesville and a zero-day rest before undertaking our second week of thru-hiking over Camels Hump. It's been a beautiful hike so far and a fantastic experience'.



Rest & Lunch at Duck Brook Shelter

I call Lyn and say that we will be in Jonesville sometime around 3:30 to 4:00 PM.

We leave the shelter at about 1:30 PM, and although we're expecting a small upward 'bump' (as we call the little up blips we see on the topo map), we immediately climb what is at least a 300' straight-up mini-mountain. This unexpected climb now leaves us both pretty exhausted, especially Hum, who will need one and a half full days of rest and recuperation before getting back to normal. We both agree that it's really important to anticipate the trail ahead, especially the climbs, because it's much better to be mentally prepared for what's ahead rather than being caught by surprise, as we are with this final blow before getting to Jonesville. So from then on, we read the topo maps and trail guide even more carefully to fully anticipate every little and big 'bump' ahead, so we'd be fully mentally prepared for what lay ahead.

After the exhausting climb, the trail does get dramatically better and is almost all downhill to Jonesville. In the final stages we hike through some tall weeds and thick poison ivy patches along the path of some power lines before reaching the Jonesville local roads. There we meet 3 French guys with very light packs who are probably bound of Duck Brook Shelter. They don't speak much English and one of them is taken by my description of the Mt. Mansfield climbs as 'hairy'. He has not heard the term before and says he would be sure to remember that one. He explains the word 'hairy' to his friends, in French.

We arrive at our meeting point, the Jonesville post office, at about 3:30 PM. Hum calls Pat to report our arrival and Lysie arrives about 15 minutes later. All is well now. Lyn immediately comments on how dirty we are and how much weight we have lost, and indeed, I'm now down to about 175 pounds, 30 pounds below my weight only a few weeks earlier. Lysie drives, I'm too tired and dirty, and Hum and I sit on old army blankets because we're so dirty.



Arriving at Jonesville Post Office & Ending Our First Week's Thru-Hike

A stop at nearby Ben & Jerry's is a bit disappointing: there are long lines for ice cream cones and they don't have my favorite flavor, coffee heath bar crunch. Bummer. Instead I have Ben & Jerry's version of mint chocolate chip and I don't like it very much (it's not even green). Hum is so tired that he rests on the lawn halfway up the small hill to the visitor center, for a long time, before climbing the whole way up to join Lyn and me. He is also too tired to eat ice cream.

A good hot shower, shave, and clean clothes feel SO good, and this is followed by a delicious manhattan that I fantasized about on the trail. Lysie fixes a yummy dinner of sloppy joes, fresh beans, and potatoes. Then early to bed in a comfy bed. Yes, Hum and I still very much enjoy our comforts.

Saturday and Sunday are spent going to the farmer's market and shopping for food and hiking items (e.g., a poncho for Hum) for the coming week. We had both ripped our pants during the first week and while in the EMS store I ask if there is any warrantee on the hiking pants I had bought the week before. I expect to hear 'no way' but instead I am advised to bring the pants in and talk to the manager. So I do, and lo and behold, the manager, pretty reluctantly ('just this one time'), replaces the pants. Hum thinks this is all so brash that it is very amusing. He promises that this will become 'jerry ash folklore' and fodder for much future kidding he will happily dish out. But Hum later sews up his own badly torn pants to provide me ammunition for the retort I'll happily dish out.

On Sunday Hum spends time making significant reductions in the equipment he plans to carry in the coming week and also making major adjustments to his pack. He takes off the upper bar on his pack and adjusts it so that it has much less side to side movement. He reduces his carry weight down to about 34 pounds, which is now about equal to my pack weight. He also tapes some sponges under his shoulder straps in an effort to stop them from bruising his shoulders (this works for a while but doesn't hold up for the whole second week).

Appalachian Gap/Route 17 to Cowles Cove Shelter – 8/17/09

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Appalachian Gap/Route 17

End Time: 12:30 PM, Cowles Cove Shelter

Total Miles: 5.9 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1095' gain/995' loss

Distances:

Route 17 to Birch Glen Camp: 3.0 miles; 595' gain/995' loss

Birch Glen Camp to Cowles Cove Shelter: 2.9 miles; 500' gain/0' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 24,807

Calories: 652

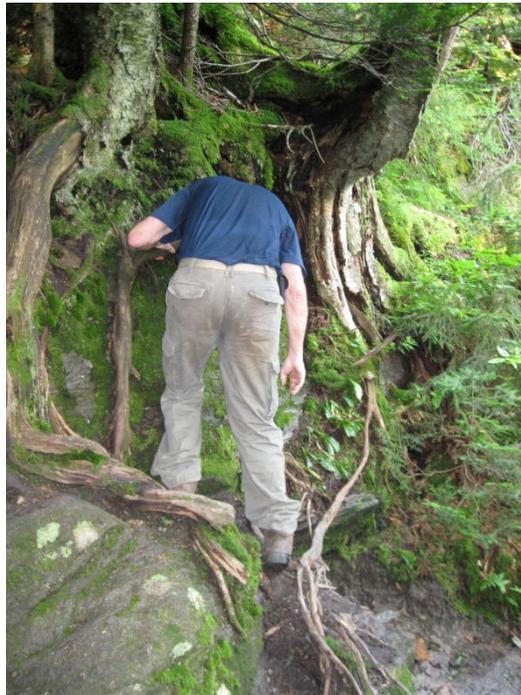
Steps/minute: 101

MPH: 2.61

Timer: 4 hours, 29 minutes, 27 seconds

Miles: 11.74 miles (5.9 actual miles)

We get up at 5 AM and are off by 6 AM and get to Appalachian Gap by 7:30 AM. As opposed to last week's gloomy start weather-wise, today it is clear and sunny, and good weather is predicted all the way through Thursday afternoon, when thunder showers are forecast. After a few pictures off we go. The LT rises steeply over Baby Stark Mountain, then down and back up to the summit of Molly Stark Mountain and Molly Stark's Balcony (2700'), where we get a (hazy) view of Camels Hump in the distance. Along the way we hike over some humungous tree roots, some of them taller than Hum.



Rugged Trail Over Huge Tree Roots Up to Birch Glen Camp

We reach Birch Glen Camp by 10 AM, far ahead of our expectation, and it is clear that we'll continue on to Cowles Cove Shelter. This is a very picturesque, rather old, shelter, built in 1930, that is fully enclosed with separate sleeping and porch areas. We take a half hour rest, snack, read and sign the shelter log book, and fill our water bottles in the nearby stream. An elderly day-hiker gentleman wanders by having come up to the shelter on the Beane Trail and is headed for Appalachian Gap. He seems quite tired and a bit disoriented and takes a long rest; he's still there when we depart for Cowles Cove Shelter.

The 2.9 miles to Cowles Cove Shelter is relatively 'level' and not especially difficult; we make good time and arrive at the shelter at about 12:30 PM. While this is the earliest we've ever arrived to a shelter we intend to stay, we judge that Montclair Glen Lodge, 5 miles away, is too far to reach today. So we stay, with more than 18 hours ahead of us to spend there before taking off on the next segment of our journey. But as we find out, there's plenty to amuse us this afternoon with the people we meet.

I enjoy a good lunch of a pb&j sandwich, Pringles, and cookies. This is a huge improvement on the trail-mix non-lunches I had last week.

The privy is unusual in this particular shelter area. The shelter area map labels it as a 'privy with a view'. Indeed, there were 2 privies, and neither has any enclosure whatsoever, just 2 toilet seats mounted on platforms out in the woods. Hum thought the 'view' would be a beautiful mountain view; it wasn't, I explained that the 'view' is a view of the woods, which is also a rather unusual view from any toilet one might encounter :-)



Two Privy's with a View at Cowles Cove Shelter

The shelter log contains another 'Nips' Tips' entry from their stop here on August 10. Its advice concerns Nips' advice on how to execute a perfect 'snot rocket' (plug up one nostril, don't miss and get it on your foot, etc.). Actually, this is the second time I've seen this particular 'Nips' Tips' entry in a shelter log; not one her more esthetic pieces of advice.

Before long a troop of 5 boy scouts in their early teens and 2 adults arrive (the leader, also the scout Committee Chair, and another father of one of the boys). They've come from Hump Brook Tenting Area this morning and are on their way to Birch Glen Camp tonight. The leader arrives a little after the others, soaking wet, almost as if he'd been swimming somewhere – we could not figure out why he is so wet. Their arrival puts Hum in hog heaven, because he just loves to talk about scouting and we do that for more than an hour. These are really nice folks from the south of Boston, and we enjoy an interesting, wide-ranging conversation. Hum relates his long experience as scout master and philosophy on being a good scout leader. We hear that this is the second time these boys have hiked over Camels Hump and that they are now training to go to Philmont Scout Camp in New Mexico next summer.

The scout leader talks about the 'huge rock' scrambles ahead over Burnt Rock Mountain, both on the upslope and down slope. He also mentions how he suffered dehydration the previous day and had cramping as a result. This is the first I realize that the very unusual cramping I've had in my fingers and legs, especially at night, is probably the result of dehydration.

The scout leader tells us the amazing story of the B-24 plane crash site they saw on Camels Hump, and where the wreckage is located. This gets us very interested in making our way to the crash site.

The full story of this October 16, 1944 crash is given at www.waterburyvfire.com/wbrt/cap.doc (I find this link in the hiking blog at <http://fivebeforechaos.com/2008/10/13/camels-hump-weekend-08/>). The B-24J bomber with a crew of 10 was on a training mission out of Westover Field in Chicopee, Massachusetts. It was an extremely cold night and the pilot descended below 4000' to seek out warmer air: this was a big mistake. Here are excerpts from the full story of what happened next:

"The plane continued to cruise at approximately 215 mph as Camel's Hump rose to meet it. For several hundred feet it skimmed over the bare rock and scrub spruce trees. Seconds later, the plane struck the bare rock 100 feet below the summit. The left wing and belly scraped first. (PFC James) Wilson woke to the sound of searing, scraping metal. The crewmen, even at this point probably had no idea of what was happening.

The impact forced the right wing to dip. Immediately, the plane clipped off several small trees and struck again. This time the plane impacted on the right wing and nose at the same instant as it nose-dived against the mountain side. Wilson was knocked unconscious, the nose of the bomber disintegrated and the tail assembly was ripped for the plane and flung against a tree. Most of the crew were killed instantly. The instrument panel clock stopped. It was 1:58 a.m.

The plummeting plane bounded back into the air, parts scattering as the bomber disintegrated. One crewman was thrown clear and landed, curled in death, around the base of a small tree. Some of the bodies were thrown out of the plane where the nose and cockpit has once been. The plane then bounded and skidded over their remains, mutilating them. The plane crashed down again. Finally, the remains of the fuselage were catapulted into the air, falling back to the ground and skidding several yards to a stop at the bottom of a steep embankment. Still inside, was the unconscious top turret gunner Wilson."

"Due to the extraordinary efforts of the CAP under Wing commander William Mason, PFC Wilson was saved from a certain death in the freezing mountain air. Although his injuries in the crash were minor, he received severe frostbite which required the amputation of most of both arms and legs. He was the first of two soldiers in World War II to undergo such radical surgery. Four years after the crash, he returned to Vermont to thank his CAP rescuers personally. He was a practicing lawyer, retired in 1989, and lived in Florida (until his recent death)."

The scout leader says that he read that PFC James Wilson had recently died, but I could find no record of this on the Internet. Most of the plane was salvaged and removed; portions of the wreckage (principally a wing section) still remain on the Alpine Trail. After hearing this story, Hum and I definitely plan to visit the crash site on our forthcoming hike over Camels Hump.

After the scouts depart, Ryan and Collin ('Tuna') arrive next. Ryan is in the Air Force National Guard, Collin attends the University of Rhode Island as a history major; both are from Rhode Island. They are very nice guys doing the whole LT and have already done 20 miles today, including a resupply stop in Waitsfield. They've been on the trail for 13 days and plan to be picked up at Journey's End (Vermont/Canada border) on August 25, 8 days from now. They are quite interested in our saga as well, amused by our trail names and by our plans to start the 'LT Geezers Hiking Club'. They advise us that a group of 6 'kids', 4 guys and 2 girls, are right behind them, and sure enough, this large group soon passes by, say brief hellos and move on (fortunately, because this is a pretty small shelter). Ryan and Collin depart for Montclair Glen Lodge, another very difficult 5.1 mile hike, at 5 PM. That they will get there before dark is pretty amazing; these are robust hikers!

We have our supper around 6 PM, and this is becoming a special happy time of our day where, in preparation, and only when we're alone, we briefly sing 'suppertime, suppertime, suppertime, suppertime', and dance around a bit, copying Snoopy's happy dance at suppertime. Dinner tastes especially good tonight; I've packed chocolate chip cookies and Pringles for dessert and consume a good portion of those, sure to run out before the hike ends.



Suppertime, Suppertime, Suppertime, Suppertime

Two guys from Harrisburg, PA, arrive at about 6:30 PM. They started at Duxbury Road, Jonesville, and are headed to Route 4, Killington. One is outgoing, I call him 'Mr. Talker', who gratuitously tells us his brief life history, sort of like this: did some hiking, then got married, has a 2 ½ year old daughter, is now back to hiking, etc. The other is withdrawn, I call him 'Mr. Quiet'. Neither seems especially interested in learning about us, and go about their business of having dinner.

Two boys and their Dad arrive at around 7 PM, say a brief hello, and then go right to the tenting area. We can hear quite a lot of talking back and forth 'Dad, should we pitch our tent here'; 'Dad, should we hang the bear bag now'; 'Dad, should we ...' The discussion about hanging the bear bag goes on for a good half hour or so. Apparently it does not go smoothly, but is finally achieved. It is all quite amusing. But the tent area quiets down as dusk approaches.

As per usual Hum and I hit the sack at dusk, about 8:30 PM. But oddly, Mr. Talker and Mr. Quiet ignore the fact that we are now in the sack and are trying to go to sleep: they talk, and talk, rather loudly, only a few feet away from us. I keep thinking they will soon stop talking and hit the hay as well – surely they will be considerate of others in the shelter. All the hikers we have met before, or since, have been very considerate. But they are not considerate, they are rude, inconsiderate, and keep on talking, loud. I get increasingly frustrated and irritated. Finally, at around 9 PM, with no sign that they will stop talking, ever, I finally blurt out "Would you guys stop talking thanks."

They did stop talking, fortunately, with no response or apology, now or in the morning, when they did not talk to us at all.

I think to myself 'Where are you Randy and Georgia, we miss you!' I knew we would, more than ever now.

After the noise stops, the sleeping is good; the air is cool this night, perhaps in the low 50's or high 40's.

Cowles Cove Shelter to Montclair Glen Lodge – 8/18/09

Start Time: 6:45 AM, Cowles Cove Shelter

End Time: 2:00 PM, Montclair Glen Lodge
Total Miles: 5.1 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1520' gain/1370' loss

Distances:

Cowles Cove Shelter to Montclair Glen Lodge: 5.1 miles; 1520' gain/1370' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 25, 505

Calories: 671

Steps/minute: 83

MPH: 2.37

Timer: 5 hours, 5 minutes, 22 seconds

Miles: 12.07 miles (5.1 actual miles)

Up at 5:30 AM and per usual, we are quiet, no talking; the 2 noisemakers arise slightly after we do. I have hot beef noodles for breakfast, which are really good and a huge improvement over the breakfast bars.

We're off at 6:45 AM and the trail is rough going: huge roots and the 'huge rock scramble' up Burnt Rock Mountain is just as advertized but actually quite a bit of fun. Burnt Rock Mountain (3168') has magnificent 360 degree views, if a bit hazy, where in the far distance we see Camels Hump and Mt. Ethan Allen ahead of us to the north. There are several precipitous ledges we climb to the rather large summit area, where there are many other smaller 'peaks' we climb over on the trail. Hum tries to call Pat from the summit, as he has several times now for the past 2 days, once again without success: no cell service in this area so far.



Scaling the Cliffs of Burnt Rock Mountain



**On the Summit of Burnt Rock Mountain (3168')
'Tis a Beautiful Day with Gorgeous Views & Lots of Wind Up There**

The top of the ladder leading down into 'ladder ravine' is reached only by crossing over a slippery cliff edge, which is a bit daunting but we negotiate the maneuver without slipping off the cliff. A shelter log entry we read later at Montclair Glen Lodge tells of the owner of an 80 pound yellow Lab named Zoey, who somehow found a way to get his dog around the ladder down into the ravine. For sure, that is much easier than for Zoey to climb down the ladder.



Descending into Ladder Ravine After Traversing Slippery Slope to Reach Top of Ladder

We pass an older (like us), southbound couple coming from Canada bound for Maine junction (where the AT and LT diverge). They intend to head into Waitsfield to buy a fuel canister; theirs had broken the previous night.

We eat lunch at the summit of Mt. Ethan Allen (3680'), and this time we're able to call both Lyn and Pat. I ask Lyn to look up the current weather forecast for the area, which, she reports after searching the Internet, is still the same: good weather for tomorrow with thunderstorms predicted for Thursday afternoon.

In searching out the Camels Hump weather, however, Lyn also finds out that 6 people have been rescued so far this year hiking on Camels Hump (perhaps a cause for alarm). The latest rescue occurred only 3 days ago, on August 15, and is reported in the Burlington Free Press ("Sixth Camels Hump Rescue After Hiker Breaks Leg"):

"For the sixth time this summer, rescuers spent most of a night bringing an injured hiker to safety off the network of trails on Camels Hump. An experienced 65-year-old female hiker from Londonderry fractured her left femur in a fall Thursday afternoon about half a mile south of the Montclair Glen Lodge on the Long Trail and about 2 1/2 miles south of the peak's summit, according to a news release from Waterbury Backcountry Rescue.

Rescuers received a call for help at 5:30 p.m., and 30 rescuers from six agencies responded. The first EMTs reached the injured hiker just before 7 p.m. A temporary splint already had been applied with guidance from the hiker, who is a paramedic on a Vermont volunteer ambulance squad.

Working by headlamp in the darkness, rescuers from the Camels Hump Backcountry Rescue Team, Colchester Technical Rescue, Green Mountain Club, Mad River Valley Ambulance Service, Stowe Mountain Rescue and Waterbury Backcountry Rescue worked until nearly 1 a.m. to carry the hiker to safety.

A Richmond Rescue ambulance stationed at the trailhead transported the patient to Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington. The hiker's identity was not released."

I later learn that the unidentified hiker who broke her leg is none other than Marge Fish, the current president of the Green Mountain Club! She is also a registered nurse, an EMT paramedic, and secretary of the Londonderry Volunteer Rescue Squad. I found her description of the accident at [The New England Hiking Meetup \(http://www.meetup.com/New-England-Hiking-Meetup/calendar/11308909/?action=detail&eventId=11308909\)](http://www.meetup.com/New-England-Hiking-Meetup/calendar/11308909/?action=detail&eventId=11308909)

"i was backpacking up north, about 5 miles south of camel's hump i took a slip where one foot stuck and the other and the rest of me didn't and i broke my femur and had a full scale backcountry rescue and a plate and 11 screws and i am told i will be back to backpacking next summer - there was a lot of greasy rock all day and at least it was near a side trail so the carry out was just under 3 miles - could have been much longer and much worse. marge"

Still later, Marge Fish reports on her accident in the September issue of e-Blaze, GMC's online newsletter:

"Just a quick reminder of the importance of always having your safety gear with you when ever you go out on the trails, even for a quick leg stretcher. Even the most experienced hiker can have a mishap. The difference between an 'oh my gosh this is awful' and a 'life threatening' experience can be the safety gear you have with you.

The key things you should always have for the simplest hike in beautiful weather are: a whistle, a space blanket, an extra layer of clothing, a hat, food, water, a small first aid kit, a neckerchief, some cord. Depending on weather (current and forecast) and where you are going you will want to add map and compass and guidebook and more clothing, especially rain gear. I know from firsthand experience, having broken my leg in August just south of Montclair Glen cabin, that in the best circumstances back country rescue takes a long time and these items make a huge difference in survival. With my accident close to a shelter with a caretaker, who was available to get a 911 call placed once my partner had contacted her, and a side trail shortening the total distance to only just under 3 miles to get in to me and to get me out, and professional expert backcountry rescuers available, the terrain and number of people required to effect a safe rescue with a carry out still meant a 3 hour wait from time of accident to arrival of first responders and another 5 and 1/2 hours until I was out and in a front country ambulance. Having that survival gear was definitely critical.

After miles years of hiking, carrying my pack with at least minimal survival gear and passing folks enjoying 'unencumbered' hiking, I am truly glad i have always followed the guidelines for minimal gear on even the simplest woods walk."

We arrive at Montclair Glen Lodge at about 2 PM, after a 7 hour hike from Cowles Cove Shelter. Montclair Glen Lodge is really nice, fully enclosed with room for 10, windows all around that open inward, and a nice picnic table eating area.

We peruse the shelter log and find one entry that reports 'last night there was a full house + 1'. That means that all 8 of the northbound people who passed us late in the day at Cowles Cove shelter, plus 3 others, packed Montclair Glen Lodge last night: crowded shelter! Several log entries speak of the 7 or 8 hours hike from Cowles Cove Shelter and the difficulty of the trail, so we're not alone in taking that long to hike this stretch. There is the entry about Zoey the yellow lab getting around the ladder at ladder ravine and also another of 'Nips' Tips' (from 8/10) with advice this time on hiking over slippery rocks, and that 'you're a human, not a mountain goat, so be careful!'

Soon caretaker Lila returns from her day on Camels Hump, pokes her head through the window by the picnic table, where Hum and I are sitting, and introduces herself. Strangely, Lila has no trail name, which we find more common with thru-hikers we meet in this latter part of our hike. Are trail names going out of fashion with younger thru-hikers, per chance? Lila then quickly disappears and does not return for a very long time: we wonder where she could have gone. The mystery is finally solved when we look carefully at the site map for Montclair Glen Lodge and see that caretaker Lila resides in a tent in the tenting area near the shelter.



Ho & Hum's Digs at Montclair Glen Lodge

Two brothers from Cleveland, Jesse and Daniel, who also have no trail names, arrive next. Jesse has sustained a bad cut on his right shin this day, and the brothers immediately tend to bandaging and treating his wound. They started in Massachusetts, the beginning of the LT, and are bound for Smugglers Notch. They want to make it there by Thursday, or Friday at the latest; it's a very long hike to do in 2 or even 3 days, but they move fast (maybe too fast, hence a bad injury today for Jesse).

The father and 2 boys we met at Cowles Cove Shelter last night arrive next, at about 5:30 PM. They head straight to the tenting area, as they did the previous night at Cowles Cove. I say hello to them through the window; the boys say that they got a late start that morning and the Dad says that they prefer the tenting area because he snores ('it's a public service' he says).

Two women and a very cute little 4 year old boy arrive next, having come to the lodge up the Forest City Trail, and intend to hike over Camels Hump the next day (a very tough hike for a 4 year old). The women say they wanted to stay in Gorham Lodge on the other side of Camels Hump, but that shelter had been torn down in 2001 to allow that alpine area to recover after overuse (actually the very out-of-date GMC guidebook in Montclair Glen Lodge still shows Gorham Lodge). The 3 of them also will tent this night, because that's what the 4 year old wants to do, they say.

Benny (no trail name either) arrives last. He owns a restaurant in Boston, [The Savant Project](http://www.thesavantproject.com/) (<http://www.thesavantproject.com/>). According to Benny, his restaurant serves 'Latin and Asian' food; all he mentions specifically is sushi. He says the restaurant is breaking even, which is probably OK in these hard times. Here's what it says about Benny on the web-site:

"Ben began his foray into entertainment and nightlife as a DJ while in college in Southern California. After graduating with a degree in Russian Literature, he soon understood the futility of a liberal arts education. He made the choice so many recent grads do which ends with the question, would you like curly or straight fries with that?"

While on a trip to Holland to visit a dear friend from hippy naked camp, he and his friend decided to get tattoos. She had a design, but Ben did not. He wanted a tattoo that represented not only who he was, but who he wanted to be. And that is how he ended up with a martini glass tattoo on his left forearm. Six years down the road, it seemed only natural to dedicate his life to building a lounge empire."

Benny seems far more conservative than one would surmise from this bio.

After dinner, Hum and I chat with caretaker Lila (Warren); she is quite interested in our adventure and enthusiastic about 2 brothers doing this adventure together. We find out that she climbs Camels Hump 3 times a week to record the number of people coming to the summit, and to advise people to walk on the

rocks and not on the fragile alpine areas, as did Jenny at Taft Lodge; the other 2 days she does trail maintenance. She will stay on at the shelter until October.

Lila graduated recently from the University of Virginia with majors in Environmental Science and Environmental Policy, and a minor in Urban Planning. She wants to get into environmental law and hopes to return to UVA to get a law degree. She is excited to learn that one of Hum's family members ('Jimbo') works in that field. Hum offers to send Lila's information to Jimbo to see if he has any advice or leads to suggest.

After dinner Benny and Lila play a few hands of rummy, while we try to answer Jesse's query as to what is the definition of a glen (prompted by 'Birch Glen Camp' and 'Montclair Glen Lodge'). I say I should know because I grew up in Glen Rock, but I'll have to wait until I return to see that a glen is defined as a 'mountain valley'.

Jesse and Daniel cook and burn popcorn after we retire to our sleeping bags. They are very quiet in this effort but afterwards it smells like the shelter is burning down. I don't know what this smell is until the morning when Hum clues me into the late night popcorn burning.

We're all in our sleeping bags by 8:30 PM... everyone is quiet, no rudeness tonight or any other night on the trail except last night. Good sleep again tonight.

Montclair Glen Lodge to Bamforth Ridge Shelter – 8/19/09

Start Time: 7:10 AM, Montclair Glen Lodge
End Time: 3:45 PM, Bamforth Ridge Shelter
Total Miles: 6.0 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1610' gain/2380' loss

Distances:

Montclair Glen Lodge to Bamforth Ridge Shelter: 5.4 miles; 1410' gain/2180' loss
Alpine Trail to B-24 bomber wreckage: 0.4 miles round trip; 200' gain/200' loss
Spur to Bamforth Ridge Shelter: 0.2 miles;

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 27,251
Calories: 717
Steps/minute: 79
MPH: 2.25
Timer: 5 hours, 43 minutes, 08 seconds
Miles: 12.9 miles (6.0 actual miles)

We're up again at 5:30 AM; Jesse, Daniel, and Benny arise at about 6:00 AM. We finish breakfast, water run, packing, and are out by 7:10 AM.

It's only 1.7 miles to the Alpine Trail turnoff, where we'll divert to search out the B-24 bomber wreckage. The morning is cool and misty, but the mist is lifting making for interesting light and cloud patterns. The trail ascends very steeply over 1100' before reaching the Alpine Trail turnoff.

Jesse and Daniel pass us at about 9:00 AM and Benny just a little while later, just before we reach the Alpine Trail turnoff. They are all traveling amazingly fast over this steep, relentless uphill climb; but then again, hey, that's what we expected to see from these strong young guys. As Jesse passes he responds to my 'be safe' comment that there have been a lot of rescues on Camels Hump this year and that 'even the president of the Green Mountain Club broke a femur just a few days ago' (perhaps he heard this from caretaker Lila?). This amazing piece of information inspires me to later verify that indeed GMC president Marge Fish broke her femur on Camels Hump.

We reach the Alpine Trail turnoff, where it will be down to the wreckage on the Alpine Trail and then back up to rejoin the LT. We decide to hide our packs rather than carry them on this jaunt, so Hum suggests hiding them a little way down the Alpine Trail. That way, he proposes, if someone steels them we can pounce on the heinous thieves as they pass us carrying our stuff. We pick a hiding place under a ledge just off the Alpine Trail and I cover the packs with a small bit of brush (Hum thinks this feeble camouflage attempt quite amusing since the packs are still easily visible).



B-24 Wreckage on Camels Hump from the October 16, 1944 Crash

We descend to the wreckage in about 20 minutes. Indeed the wing section is impressive, about 40 feet long with the landing gear mechanism still intact within the wing. The metal is ripped like paper where the wing once attached to the fuselage. One can imagine from this graphic display the horror that took place on that very cold October night almost 65 years ago.

We hike back up the Alpine Trail, recover our packs, rejoin the LT, and ascend the remaining 0.2 miles to the summit of Camels Hump. We skirt around the nearly vertical south wall of Camels Hump, which is a cliff with undulating rocks sticking out, almost as if a huge piece of the mountain broke off and left an enormous tear in the remaining cliff face. The trail ascends sharply over sheer cliff faces and we crawl a bit on these intimidating ledges.



Hum Climbs the Final 413' to the Camels Hump Summit

The 4083' summit is soon reached: the cloudy mist rises and falls in every direction allowing occasional glimpses of the beautiful views and affords unique lighting through multiple layers of clouds. The wind and cold are such that our warmer clothes are sought out and hat straps are battened down.



**Ho & Hum on Summit of Camels Hump (4083')
Windy & Cold on Top**

There are many day hikers on the summit, most coming up the Burrows Trail, which one hiker describes as an easy 2-mile hike from the parking area. I call Lysie a little before 11 AM to report on our thrilling conquest. Once again, Hum is unable to reach Pat. After snacking and chatting with other hikers we start down the LT on the north side of Camels Hump at about 11:30 AM having spent a little over an hour on the summit.

We hike down to the 'hut clearing', a large open area where there once stood a hotel that operated more than a century ago. One wonders how the guests got up to the hotel; perhaps on horseback as one person suggests, or maybe that's why it failed financially: guests can't get there from here.

The hike down Bamforth Ridge is beautiful but seemingly endless and extremely challenging. The weather has turned sunny and crystal clear and there are stunning views the whole way, both ahead to Mt. Mansfield and dramatic views looking back to Camels Hump. There are many straight ups and downs on the ridge with some rather dangerous places. One place in particular occurs on a split rock with no hand holds available and a 20-30' crevasse in the large split in the rock and a sheer cliff to the left. One could not sit without falling into the crevasse so 'tight rope walking' on the narrow inside ledge is all one could do. I declare this to be one of the scariest places so far on the LT; Hum later says that he didn't think this quite as scary as I did.



Hiking on Bamforth Ridge with Camels Hump in Background

After more than 4 hours of hiking down Bamforth Ridge, Hum and I are becoming increasingly concerned that we somehow missed the turnoff for Bamforth Ridge Shelter; it is taking much longer than expected to reach the spur trail. Besides that, we now hear thunder booming in the distance and want to reach the shelter before we get drenched. We consult our topo maps numerous times to try to infer our exact location by noting locations of ups, downs, and level sections and matching these to recent LT topography we've been over. This is far from an exact science, and sometimes falsely convinces us further that the turnoff was missing. But finally, to our great relief, we reach the turnoff to Bamforth Ridge Shelter at about 3:45 PM.

We pass a GMC caretaker on the spur trail, just before reaching the shelter. He is there planning a trail maintenance project for the coming weekend. We ask about the layout of the shelter area and the location of the parking area on Duxbury Road (so I can give Lyn more specific directions for tomorrow).

The shelter is relatively new (built in 2002) and very nice. We settle in and seek out the water source, which is quite a way downhill from the shelter, but hey, it's good delicious water. After a little 'supertime' happy dance, we have dinner at about 6 PM, as is now usual,

Kira Rashba (no trail name, <http://www.myspace.com/kirakr>) shows up at about 7 PM, very exhausted from the hike down Bamforth Ridge, coming all the way from Birch Glen Camp today. She speaks of how endlessly 'up and down' and 'up and down' the hike is going down the ridge, and how she was intimidated by the same split-rock crevasse that freaked me out (she says she crawled along the narrow part of the split rock).

Kira has previously hiked from Smugglers Notch to Canada and this time is doing the whole LT. Right away Hum notices a 6 inch hunting knife fastened to her belt, but doesn't mention it to Kira (we both speculate later that it might be for self defense, i.e., a woman hiking alone). She laments that no friends were available to hike with her this time, but has hiked with people she met on the trail, including Jesse and Danny for several days (she notes that she is now ½ day behind them).

Kira hails from Baltimore and works at Johns Hopkins Hospital as a chemo therapy oncology nurse specializing in leukemia. Hum and Kira discuss her nursing work in some detail because Pat also worked for many years as an oncology nurse in Baltimore. When Kira and I get to discussing food at the Long Trail Inn, it comes out that she is a long-time vegetarian. Hum immediately chimes in with his opinion -- a strongly worded denunciation of being a vegetarian -- and I chide him for using too strong words to

express what is only his opinion, and not fact. But Kira is unfazed by this and retorts that she doesn't plan to make any changes based on Hum's opinion.

We turn in at the usual 8:30 dusking hour; Kira reads in her sleeping bag for a while and listens to her iPod (she also uses the iPod earplugs all night to dampen the snoring sounds :-)

Bamforth Ridge Shelter to Duxbury Road – 8/20/09

Start Time: 7:15 AM, Bamforth Ridge Shelter
End Time: 9:30 AM, Duxbury Road/Long Trail Parking Area
Total Miles: 2.9 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 0' gain/1574' loss

Distances:

Spur to Bamforth Ridge Shelter: 0.2 miles;
Bamforth Ridge Shelter to Duxbury Road: 2.7 miles; 0' gain/1574' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 12,390
Calories: 326
Steps/minute: 91
MPH: 2.6
Timer: 2 hours, 14 minutes, 49 seconds
Miles: 5.86 miles (2.9 actual miles)

I call Lyn at about 7 AM, just before we leave Bamforth Ridge Shelter, to alert her that we're leaving and that I'll call her again when I estimate she should leave to come pick us up. We start out with a near vertical drop over 'banister ledge', but after that the descent is more gradual and we make good time on this Bamforth Ridge section; it is far easier than the section south of the shelter that he hiked yesterday. Today it is crystal clear and there are outstanding views of Mt. Mansfield off to the west.



A Nearly Vertical Drop Over Banister Ledge With Huge Boulders at the Bottom

We reach 'Duxbury window' by 8:15 AM and I call Lyn to say she should leave now. We rest on the bench there that is dedicated to 'Nutsy' Notte, and take some pictures of the outstanding views through the 'window' into the valley below.

We arrive at the Long Trail parking lot at about 9:30 AM, much sooner than we expect, and have more than an hour wait for Lyn to arrive. I peruse the sign in/sign out log at the head of this LT section, and note that the scout troop of 7 we met at Cowles Cove Shelter, from Norwell, Massachusetts, signed in on 8/15 and Kira signed out this morning with a mysterious comment 'no hats anymore'.



Ho & Hum Complete the Birch Glen to Camels Hump to Duxbury Road Section of the LT

On the way home we stop at [Liberty Hill Farm](http://www.libertyhillfarm.com/) (<http://www.libertyhillfarm.com/>) to visit the cows and newborn calf's; it's Lyn's and my favorite farm visit and we stop there often. Today there are 20 or more calf's living in individual little shelters – all are very cute and we chat with each one using our finest moo talk.



Lynsie Chats with a Cute Newborn Mooley Cow at Liberty Hill Farm

Hum and I decide to do the Lincoln Gap to Appalachian Gap section either tomorrow or Saturday, depending on the weather. When we check it out, the forecast for neither day looks very good, so we decide that tomorrow we'll complete that unfinished business with a two-car day hike. Today is wonderfully warm, however, and we spend the afternoon in the pool and then putting together our day packs for tomorrow.

Lincoln Gap to Appalachian Gap/Route 17 – 8/21/09

Start Time: 7:00 AM, Lincoln Gap
End Time: 5:30 PM, Appalachian Gap/Route 17
Total Miles: 11.8 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2346' gain/2350' loss

Distances:

Lincoln Gap to Battell Shelter: 1.8 miles; 816' gain/0' loss
Battell Shelter to Glen Ellen Lodge: 6.4 miles; 1120' gain/930' loss
Spur to Glen Ellen Lodge: 0.6 miles; 180' gain/180' loss
Glen Ellen Lodge to Theron Dean Shelter: 1.6 miles; 230' gain/340' loss
Theron Dean Shelter to Route 17: 1.4 miles; 0' gain/900' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 44,553
Calories: 1172
Steps/minute: 91
MPH: 2.59
Timer: 8 hours, 8 minutes, 5 seconds
Miles: 21.09 miles (11.8 actual miles)

Up once again at 4 AM, we depart North Clarendon at 5 AM and encounter lots of morning fog on the trip north, but no rain. We park Hum's car at Appalachian Gap and my car at Lincoln Gap, and are on the trail at 7 AM – overall a very efficient start to the day.

The hike up to Battell Shelter is relatively easy and we do the 1.8 mile 816' climb in less than an hour and a half, arriving at the shelter a little before 8:30 AM. There we chat with a hiker from Hinesburg, Vermont, who stayed the night at Battell Shelter after somehow missing Cooley Glen Shelter more than 6 miles to the south. 'Battell' (as I'll refer to him) started in Brandon Gap en route to Canada and is carrying about 50 pounds of gear: this is Battell's first thru-hike and is overwhelmed by the weight of his pack. Hum relates his saga of reducing his pack weight and advises him to shed any unused gear at the first opportunity. We get a demonstration of Battell's ultraviolet water purifier, which seems pretty cool, but we realize that it's missing the pre-screening step to remove sediment, which could be substantial when scooping up a jug of water (especially from still water).

As we depart the shelter to continue our ascent of Mt. Abraham, we meet a day hiker who advises us that the rock ledges on the trail are wet and slippery (he has descended each ledge on all four's) and that the peak is totally socked in. What a bummer! The climb is indeed wet, slippery, and steep, but we make good time and summit Mt. Abraham (4006') a little after 9 AM.

Mt. Abraham is one of 3 Vermont peaks with alpine zones above the tree line, Mt. Mansfield and Camels Hump being the other two. The treeless summit area here is much smaller than the other two, however. As advertised, the peak is completely fogged in and we can see nothing. This is especially disappointing since the GMC [Long Trail Guide](#) states that Mt. Abraham 'offers one of the best panoramas on the entire Long Trail'. Oh well, this section will definitely have to be repeated in better weather. Two 'cute young girls' (as Hum describes) from Burlington arrive at about the same time and we snap each others' pictures in spite of the fog and lack of any view whatsoever.



**Ho & Hum on Summit of Mt. Abraham (4006')
Completely Socked In; No View Whatsoever; Bummer!**

We make the long slog over Little Abe (3900') and then to Lincoln Peak (3975'), where there is a viewing platform. But alas, once the thick fog sets in on Mt. Abraham it is practically unbroken for the whole rest of the day. There is no view from the platform and one can hardly see the antennas on the peak, which are only about 20 or 30 feet away from the platform.

We reach Mt. Ellen (4083') summit at about noon, where Sugarbush ski trails begin, and rain for us also begins, so we don our ponchos. While Mt. Ellen is the same altitude as Camels Hump, it is dramatically different: it is treed with a rather gradual summit that is not at all rocky like Camels Hump.



Hum Dons His Poncho on Mt. Ellen Summit (4083')

We descend the 0.3 mile spur on the Barton trail down to Glen Ellen Lodge because Hum needs to use the privy. This short descent is particularly rocky and slippery but Hum is wasting no time in doing this section and is practically running down the spur: he leaves me in the dust. It reminds me of the old saying '20 yards to the outhouse by Willie Make-it'. When Hum encounters a ladder at the very end of the spur, which he must negotiate to reach the lodge, he is very unhappy and loudly expresses his dissatisfaction forthwith with the difficulty of this part of the hike. We both finally make it OK to Glen Ellen Lodge, a charming 75-year-old rustic cabin built in 1933.

We take time for a good lunch and enjoy the view of the Mad River valley to the east after, thankfully, the fog clears briefly to present us with a beautiful view. I make a final entry in the log book, to the effect that 'the Ho-Hum geezers have enjoyed their lunch here at Glen Ellen shelter on a very foggy and rainy day on the LT; we will need to repeat this section in better weather sometime in the future; we have now come to the end of our fantastic thru hiking experience for this year and hopefully will be back for more next year.'



Hum Takes Care of Business & Does Lunch at Glen Ellen Lodge

As we ascend the Barton spur trail back to the LT we meet 'Battell' (our Battell Shelter friend), who is just starting to descend the spur to Glen Ellen Lodge for the night. He inquires about how far/difficult is the spur trail and quickly turns around when we tell him that the spur is 'way down', slippery, and even has a ladder on the way. Battell decides to hike on to Theron Dean Shelter when we tell him we saw a sign saying that the shelter will be open until August 29, after which it will be closed for a month of repairs. He is a fast hiker in spite of his heavy 50-pound load, and soon leaves us in the dust, but we meet him again a half hour later at the warming hut for the Mad River Glen ski area at Stark's Nest (3644') on General Stark Mt. Battell has kindly waited for us to show us the trail, since it gets a bit tricky to follow when crossing the ski trails.

The warming hut is large and Battell decides to stay there for the night since it is raining pretty hard and thunder is booming in the distance. Before we depart, Hum asks Battell about the relative difficulty of the Mad River Glen ski area and finds out it's one of the most difficult in the east: no grooming, super hard. With Hum's interest now greatly piqued, a much broader extended discussion of skiing ensues, but I cut it short because the thunder is now booming louder and closer. As we beat a hasty retreat, Battell speaks admiringly of the Ho-Hum brotherly hiking adventure and muses that he should hike with his brother too.

We don our ponchos and reenter the rain storm but fortunately encounter no thunder boomer lightning coming down right on top of us. We find out later that there are some very severe thunder storms in the area (this has Lyn worried but we don't know it yet).

Beyond the Stark's Nest the LT becomes extremely difficult with many very steep descents, some with 30-40' vertical drops and no ladder to help. On one of these cliffs Hum falls after stepping on a root that gives way (I had stepped on the same root but it held for me). He also sheds his poncho, in spite of the rain, because he says he can't see his feet on the descents and that makes hiking really dangerous (I didn't have that problem).

We finally make it to Theron Dean Shelter a little before 4 PM. Theron Dean is indeed falling apart and tilting badly to the right; it is the most crude and primitive shelter we've encountered so far on the LT. It's good that repairs are being made starting in only a few days. The fog has again lifted and there are impressive pretty views to the north from the 'Dean Panorama', a grand overlook right by the shelter. Below the shelter we explore 'Dean Cave', which is formed by several huge boulders.

The 1.8 mile slog from Theron Dean Shelter to Appalachian Gap takes us another hour and a half, with a brief stop at some more Mad River Glen ski huts. The weather is still clearing and there are excellent long range views down the valley. It's a relentlessly downhill and slippery trail to the end; we finally arrive at Appalachian Gap at 5:30 PM, after 10 hours of hiking.



**View of the Mad River Glen Ski Area
Thankfully the Weather Clears a Bit Toward the End of the Day**

We try to call Lyn from Appalachian Gap and Lincoln Gap but there is no cell service. Hum continues to try on the way south and is finally successful in the Pittsfield area. Lyn is relieved to know we are OK, she has been worried because there have been severe thunder storms throughout Vermont and in the area we are hiking and she has not heard from us all day. Rutland itself has been hit by an extremely severe storm that has flooded the downtown area.

Epilogue

Summary statistics for the 10-day thru-hike:

Total Miles: 69.6 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 14,966' gain/19,858' loss

Total Steps: 314,885

On the very warm Saturday following the completion of our 10 days of hiking, we enjoy the farmer's market in the morning and cooling off in the pool in the afternoon. And then in the evening Hum treats us to a delicious dinner at the Sirloin Saloon. But I have to note one classic Humberto moment that occurs on this outing. Upon receiving the bill, Hum shouts out in his trademark booming voice "this is highway robbery!!" This not only gets our attention but the attention of everyone else in the restaurant; folks at all the other tables turn their gaze upon us to see what can possibly be the matter. We soon find out that Hum actually is referring to the extra tourism tax that is levied on every restaurant bill in Rutland, which in his estimation is completely outrageous. We all get a good chuckle out of this classic Humberto moment.

Over breakfast on Sunday we recount and reminisce on all that has happened:

Truly this was an epic journey and phenomenal life experience. There is no way of knowing what it will be like other than to actually do it. So we did it. And now we know.

I count it as one of the greatest experiences of my life.

In this journey we savored an awesome and gorgeous stretch of our natural world, enjoyed the company of interesting and highly friendly people, tested ourselves to the limits of our endurance, overcame many dangers and 'impossible' challenges, increased even further the strong brotherly bond that already existed between us, and took away unbelievable memories of this astonishing adventure.

We make plans for another Ho-Hum thru-hike on the LT in August 2010

After breakfast we give Hum a big hug goodbye and bid our brother farewell; he departs taking all those amazing Ho-Hum memories with him.