

Ho & Hum's Long Trail Journal
Bennington/Route 9 to Mad Tom Notch (August 2-6, 2010)
Mt. Abraham & Lincoln Peak (August 8, 2010)

Prologue

My brother Hum (Bob Ash, trail name Hum) and I (Jerry Ash, trail name Ho) began planning our 2010 Long Trail (LT) hike immediately following our grand 2009 LT adventure in August 2009. Together we identify ourselves as "geezer hikers Ho & Hum", because we are just that: I'm 68 and Hum's 70, that is, geezers, and indeed we are quite Ho-Hum.

Over the intervening year between hikes we both added to our equipment store. I bought a Therm-a-Rest ProLite sleeping pad and a Katadin Hiker Pro water filter from Amazon.com, both of which I had borrowed from my son-in-law Tim Chew for our 2009 hike. I also bought a Coleman Exponent PowerBoost stove from the Coleman store. Hum bought a new Cuscus backpack, identical to mine except in color, which was badly needed to replace his Civil War era frame pack that proved to be dangerously unstable in scaling the high peaks in 2009. Hum also bought a Jetboil from his son Keith, which he had borrowed in 2009 but subsequently damaged and had to buy his son a new replacement. He also added a sleeping bag fashioned out of blankets by wife Pat.

In the spring and early summer, we both do a number of training hikes. Hum climbs Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Rag_Mountain), and a local peak in the Rochester, NY area with his son Keith, where the latter hike included a harrowing bush-wack decent down a near-cliff-like face of the peak. He also does several local hikes around his neighborhood carrying nearly his full pack weight. I do 83 miles in 9 training hikes, including 39 miles on the LT (from Brandon Gap to Lincoln Gap and Big Branch/USFS 10 to Mad Tom Notch), carrying about 30 pounds on my back (I wrote a separate journal on these training hikes).

However, partly negating all my extensive preparation, only one week before departing on our LT hike, my wife Lyn and I return from a fabulous two-week trip to Russia, celebrating our 45th wedding anniversary. This magnificent trip includes a river cruise between Moscow and St. Petersburg on the Moscow and Volga Rivers (<http://www.gct.com/Trips/2011/Russia-Revealed-Moscow-to-St-Petersburg-2011/Itinerary/Moscow-to-St-Petersburg.aspx>). There is only one big problem with the timing of that trip: as could be expected, I gain a large amount of weight – 15+ pounds – and fall miserably out of shape. To compensate, I take 3 of the 9 training hikes the final week before our grand trek. It helps but I'm still not back to tip-top condition before the start of our adventure.

Hum arrives in Vermont at precisely 2:01 PM on Sunday, August 1, only one minute past his predicted arrival time. Hum would prove to be uncannily accurate in predicting arrival times on the trail as well. This is the day before our LT hike begins and also my 68th birthday. We spend several hours in final checks of equipment and weighing our full packs: we both weigh in at close to 35 pounds each with 5 days of food packed away.

I enjoy a wonderful birthday celebration orchestrated by my dear wife Lysie, and savor a delicious barbecued lamb shish kabob dinner, my very favorite meal, chosen by me on all such occasions even though I have do the barbecuing. This is a wonderful start to a fabulous week of hiking and sharing with brother Hum and many folks along the trail

Bennington/Route 9 to Goddard.Shelter – 8/2/10

Start Time: 7:00 AM, route 9, Bennington
End Time: 1:30 PM, Goddard Shelter
Total Miles: 11.3 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 3040' gain/1185' loss

Distances:

Route 9 to Melville Nauheim Shelter: 1.6 miles; 940' gain/0' loss

Melville Nauheim Shelter to Goddard Shelter: 8.5 miles; 2100' gain/1185' loss
Goddard Shelter to Glastenbury Mountain fire tower and return (2 times): 1.2 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 34,218

Calories: 900

Steps/minute: 102

MPH: 2.90

Timer: 5 hours, 35 minutes, 05 seconds

Miles: 16.2 miles (11.3 actual miles)

As per our plan, we arise at 4:30 AM on Monday, August 2. And as is usual before these hikes, I do not sleep well this night, probably reflecting some apprehension about what lay ahead in the morning, although I gained enough LT hiking experience from the previous year that the unknowns and possible dangers ahead do not loom quite as large as they did in 2009.

After breakfast and last minute checks we're on the road by 5:30 AM. Along the way I tell Hum the strange and disturbing story of Paula Welden, a Bennington College sophomore who set out on the Long Trail on December 1, 1946, from the same starting point and in the same direction that we would soon set out from ourselves, and was never heard from or seen again. She apparently hiked at least as far as the Glastenbury Mountain fire tower, where we would also hike this day, and perhaps beyond. As told in the book *Vintage Vermont Villainies: True Tales of Murder & Mystery from the 19th and 20th Centuries* (<http://www.amazon.com/Vintage-Vermont-Villainies-Mystery-Centuries/dp/0881507490/>):

"About 2:30 that Sunday afternoon (12/1/46), Paula (Welden) announced to (her roommate) Elizabeth (Johnson) that she wanted to take a hike before resuming her studies. Elizabeth thought nothing of her announcement; she knew Paula was an experienced, enthusiastic hiker, and the two of them had recently endured a rain-soaked night out camping in the Manchester area... Minutes later, Paula left Dewey Hall forever. Although it was chilly, with a possibility of snow forecast for the higher elevations, Paula was lightly dressed for her expedition. Clad in a red parka with a fur-trimmed hood, she was wearing blue jeans and heavy-soled Top-Sider sneakers...she was carrying little if any cash..."

"It would seem that Paula Welden made her way successfully to the Long Trail, for there were quite a number of witnesses who later stated that they had seen a striking-looking blonde of her description pass that way...including Stearns Rice, Miss Mary F. Rice, and Lyman Royce, who saw a girl matching Paula's description as she entered the Long Trail and began walking north toward Glastenbury Mountain... It was gloomy – just starting to snow... By Monday morning that area of the Long Trail was covered by three inches of snow over a bed of ice."

"Paula Welden did not return to her room in Dewey Hall that Sunday night. When she didn't show up for her Monday morning classes, ... the search for her began immediately... the hunt for Paula Welden soon did encompass much of the mountainous and even desolate terrain of the Long Trail area between Glastenbury and Bald Mountains. By Wednesday, December 4, there were as many as five hundred searchers looking for Paula along the Long Trail, some of them assisted by experienced woodsmen and accompanied by bloodhounds. Not a single significant clue was found."

I suggest to Hum that wouldn't it be astonishing if we were to uncover some evidence along the LT to solve this 64 year old mystery – hey, you never know. But not surprisingly, we find no such evidence to help solve this longstanding vintage Vermont villainy.

Strangely, there is an oddly similar missing person event and mystery unfolding at the same time as our hike begins, which could also involve the geezer hikers' help in solving as well. Danny Goldstein (33) of North Main Street, Rutland, Vermont, left all his possessions, except the clothes he was wearing, and disappeared after having last been seen leaving his home on July 25. This new mystery is first brought to our attention by numerous "missing person" posters identifying Danny posted at the August 7 Long Trail Festival we attend. At the time there is some suspicion that he might be hiking somewhere on the LT and that hikers, like us, attending the festival might actually remember seeing Danny. In fact, an August 14 article in the *Rutland Herald* states that hikers had possibly seen Goldstein on the LT south of Route 9 in Bennington and that dogs had picked up Goldstein's scent at the Route 140 LT trailhead. The timing of these 'sightings' is such that had Goldstein actually been hiking the LT during this time, going south on the LT from the Rutland section to the Bennington section, it is very likely that we would have met him along the way on our hike going north from the Bennington/Route 9 area. But we encountered no such person and realize that we could help negate the theory that Danny Goldstein was hiking south during this time on the LT. But our witness proves to be unnecessary, for sadly, Danny's body is found on September 4 in a nearby Rutland woods, less than two miles from his home. The cause and manner of

his death is still pending and it may be some time before that is determined (<http://projectjason.org/forums/index.php?topic=9234.15>).

It takes us about 1 ½ hours to reach the LT parking area on Route 9 in Bennington, after one slight mishap where I overshot the destination by a few miles on the first pass (there is apparently no familiar “hiker” sign marking the trail and parking lot going East on Route 9, as there is going West, which we easily find when we double back after recognizing the mistake). Along the way there is a bit of rain and gloomy weather, which dampens our spirits just a bit; the forecast is for showers and thunder showers each afternoon through Wednesday, and then clearing on Thursday and Friday. We arrive at the parking lot at about 7:00 AM and after a few photos and goodbyes to Lyn we’re off into the woods on our grand 2010 backpacking adventure.



Ho & Hum Start LT Hike at Bennington/Route 9 Trailhead

We reach Melville Nauheim shelter, 1.6 miles up the trail with an elevation gain of 1000', by 8:00 AM, after only one hour of hiking. It is already clear that our pace will be much faster than in 2009, where we averaged one mph or less on most sections, especially on the sections going uphill.

We encounter 3 young hikers going north on the AT at the stream just north of the spur junction to the shelter. We briefly chat and tell them they will likely pass us going north, since we geezers are really very slow hikers, but alas, we never see this threesome again. Another unsolved mystery.

We pass LT landmarks in quick succession: the power line on Maple Hill (2.1 miles) at 8:15 AM, Hell Hollow Brook (3.2 miles) at 8:50 AM, and Porcupine Lookout (4.4 miles) at 9:30 AM. We get several decent views along the way, particularly of Bennington in the valley below, but the air is heavy and quite hazy today. At Porcupine Lookout we meet a Dad and his two young sons, who tent-camped here last night at a nice tenting site. We find that this is one major distinguishing aspect of the Glastenbury Wilderness section of the LT; there are several very nice tent campsites along the way, large flat clearings, most with established fire pits, but some without any nearby water sources. Dad tells us their farthest point north was Goddard Shelter, where they also tented, and they also camped at several other of these campsites in the Glastenbury Wilderness. Now, he tells us, they must decide whether to go visit grandma or go home – a dilemma for which we will not know the answer.

We lose track of our location for some time after this encounter with Dad and sons, until we reach a sign marking the boundary of Glastenbury Wilderness, which also has a map showing us that we're less than one mile from Goddard Shelter. This stretch of the LT has few obvious topological features to help us locate ourselves on the map. These features are usually up and down "bumps" that we can identify on the trail to coincide with features shown in the LT Guidebook. But this section has few such features to help us locate ourselves and alas our primary navigation system, AKA *Hum's Spot-On Navigation Service*, has been foiled

After this experience of getting somewhat 'lost', *Hum's Spot-On Navigation Service* adopts a new policy of relying primarily on hiking time to estimate our current location and arrival time at our next destination. Of course, the new methodology still involves constant obsessive/compulsive "check-the-map" steps, but from this time forward *Hum's Spot-On Navigation Service* is done with uncanny accuracy. As a side note, it is widely known, especially in Ash family circles, that Hum provides a host of valuable services he has developed over the years, including *Hum's Money-Saving Tips Service*, *Hum's Friendly Escort Service*, *Hum's Tennis-Star Incubation Service*, *Hum's Emergency Tax Filing Service*, *Hum's Expert Home Improvement Service*, *Hum's Dog & Cat Training Service*, and many more. But *Hum's Spot-On Navigation Service* is not so well known, so Hum hereby announces this new service for anyone, anywhere, to hire, for a (somewhat inflated) fee.



"Hum's Spot-On Navigation Service" Gets Underway on our 2010 LT Hike
An Obsessive/Compulsive "Check-the-Map" Step is Shown in Progress

After lunch by the Glastenbury Wilderness boundary sign, we embark on the final one mile stretch to Goddard Shelter. Along the way young Funk passes us as if we are standing still. Funk is a Georgia to Maine AT thru hiker, who today is slack packing up to meet his Dad at the Long Trail Inn in Killington, Vermont (<http://www.innatlongtrail.com/Home.html>). He plans to do some hikes around the area together with his Dad and friends, after which he'll pick up his hiking stuff and continue on to Maine. Funk has done the AT before and knows Mt. Washington and the Whites well. We will meet Funk again at Goddard Shelter as well as Stratton Pond Shelter in two more days.

We reach Goddard Shelter (10.1 miles) at 1:30 PM, after about 5 1/2 hours of actual hiking, when we adjust for the time taken for our rest stops and lunch. That means that so far we're doing about 1.8+ mph, and that with more than a 3000' of total elevation gain. Geezers Ho and Hum have suddenly become much faster! In 2009, we averaged less than 1 mph, and were much slower on the climbs, but this year Hum's pace and stamina, especially on the climbs, are clearly much greater. Our hiking time to

Goddard Shelter is a little more than half of our original estimate of 10.1 hours. And this faster pace will dramatically reduce our actual hiking times relative to our estimates on all sections in the coming days. This is really nice, we find, because this allows us to have a really good rest and more time to enjoy conversing with the other hikers we meet at the shelters.

At the shelter we meet Zhivago, who is just preparing his lunch, and Funk, who has stopped briefly for a rest. Immediately upon arriving, there suddenly are strange noises coming from behind the shelter that to me sound like a porcupine (porcupine sounds recorded at <http://www.junglewalk.com/popup.asp?type=a&AnimalAudioID=10999>), and I ask Zhivago if he hears the porcupine too? This elicits no reply, but he does look at me as if I'm some kind of nut. When I go behind the shelter to investigate, I discover that the noise must have somehow come from Funk, who is there gathering his stuff. This gives an amusing start to our Zhivago encounter.

Zhivago is a lone southbound hiker doing the entire AT. We find he is a very quiet and introverted, and that conversation has to more or less be dragged out of him, which is rather unusual among the hikers we meet along the way. He has recently sold his house and retired after working 35 years as an electrical engineer out of Rochester, NH, where he worked for "many companies" but didn't identify any in particular. Mentioning that I worked as an electrical engineer for Bell Labs for 35 years and Hum worked as a nuclear engineer for Baltimore Gas & Electric for his whole career sparked no interest on Zhivago's part. I later tell Hum that Zhivago reminds me of "Mr. Peepers," a role played by Wally Cox in a 50-year-old TV show about a teacher with a similar very withdrawn, introverted personality.

Zhivago grew up in New Rochelle NY, where Hum recalls our Aunt Maybelle and Uncle Billy also lived (I thought they lived in Pelham, NY, but then again these two towns are right next to each other). Strangely, I mentioned going to a fancy restaurant in the area, "Patricia Murphy's", ages ago, with our parents and aunt and uncle, and Zhivago knew it as well; he says it closed 50 years ago. He also lived in W Palm Beach FL and his mother now lives nearby in Jupiter Beach, FL; he hopes to surprise his mother for Thanksgiving after finishing his AT hike. When Hum brings up scouting and his experience as a scout master, Zhivago proudly announces "I'm an Eagle Scout", the only gratuitous comment he offers to us the whole time we talk.



Goddard Shelter; Zhivago Preparing His Lunch

Zhivago says he is hiking southbound rather than northbound in order to "follow the weather"; he averages about 10 miles/day and carries 32 pounds maximum. He last resupplied in N. Clarendon, but

couldn't recall where. This I found rather strange because I live in N. Clarendon and there are virtually no stores to be found there (he probably resupplied in Rutland, just a little farther north). He ate at the Whistle Stop Café on Route 103 near Clarendon Gorge, a favorite stop for AT/LT hikers, and asserted that "all AT hikers should stop there". He uses bleach to purify water (1 drop/pint), a method I had previously not heard about, and is very exact in distinguishing purifying versus filtering water (he filters his water with coffee filters). He is also a bit pedantic when he tells us his trail name, where he wants to know "have you read the book or seen the movie". I tell him I saw the movie and particularly remember the boring parts with the long train rides through Siberia. He is clearly unimpressed with my comment and doesn't respond; *Dr. Zhivago* must be a great favorite novel for some reason, a reason that will also remain unknown. When I asked about hiking alone and if he tried to get someone to hike with him, he said flatly that he "didn't want to hike with anyone"; aha, case closed.

Hum and I decide to make our way up to the Glastenbury Mountain fire tower, which Zhivago estimates is 0.2 miles up the trail (actually its 0.3 miles). We expect that Zhivago will have left Goddard Shelter heading south for Melville Nauheim Shelter by the time we return, so we bid him farewell to which he makes no reply...

We reach the fire tower in short order and get a good if somewhat hazy 360-degree view from the top; Somerset Reservoir is clearly in view to the east and the Taconic Mountains, Stratton Mountain, and Mt. Equinox are visible to the west.



Glastenbury Mountain Fire Tower & Hum Descending Tower

When we return I meet a woman, Zephyr (Janet Robbins, 53), who has just arrived at the shelter and is hiking alone with her dog Ashby. Ashby is a nice looking dog with reddish hair, a mixed breed and a bit smaller than a lab. Zephyr informs me that Ashby is her protector and will attack me if I approach, so she advises me to please keep my distance. Of course I oblige this warning not only on this first meeting but on all subsequent meetings to come over the next four days. But Ashby never once growls or barks at me the whole time we are hiking together with Zephyr, who will become a good friend over the coming days.

Surprisingly, Zhivago is still finishing up his lunch when we return from the fire tower but soon leaves for Melville Nauheim shelter. As he departs he asks us to tell "Cool Shoes" that he has moved on when she arrives. This time we say nothing as he leaves and all he says in parting is that he can "see the sun" but no goodbyes or anything normal like that.

Cool Shoes (Sharon Malone) arrives at about 3:30 PM, and is obviously very disappointed that Zhivago has moved on to Melville Nauheim shelter. She immediately and emphatically blurts out "Cool Shoes not going to Melville with Zhivago!" Cool Shoes is a very outgoing, middle age black woman, with an infectious and explosive laugh that rivals Hum's trademark explosive laugh. She is also hiking alone and Hum and I think it a bit unusual to meet two women hiking alone in quick succession.

Cool Shoes is an unmarried school teacher from Greenville NC who grew up in Baltimore MD, where her mother and brother still live. She teaches "special education" to students who are actually juvenile delinquents; Cool Shoes says they will go to jail if they make a single infraction of the rules. To Hum and me it sounds like a tough job. Her mother lives on Oliver Street in downtown Baltimore, which Hum says is a very bad section of town, and Cool Shoes agrees. So bad in fact that her mother was assaulted and raped there when she was 70 years old; Cool Shoes wants her mom to move but is glad that her brother lives with her now to provide protection. Two other brothers are dead (perhaps murdered, Hum speculates, but Cool Shoes doesn't say); she also has one sister.

Cool Shoes tells us an interesting story about meeting up with Warren Doyle on the trail in the Manchester area a couple of days ago. Warren Doyle (<http://www.aldha.org/doyle.htm>, <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1006961/index.htm>) is something of a legend on the AT, having hiked it 10 times or more, perhaps more times than anyone else. Warren Doyle, who Cool Shoes says has a white beard, white hair, and a hat like mine, is leading a hike with about 20 followers. She speaks of him a little irreverently, sort of as if he may be something of a hustler in what he might be (over)charging these followers of his. Cool Shoes says that when he saw her on the trail he just looked strangely at her, as if, she interprets, "he had never seen a lone black woman hiking the AT", she says with her trademark booming laugh. To me this is really a telling story about Cool Shoes. Coincidentally, when Cool Shoes hitched a ride into Manchester to resupply, she got a ride from Warren Doyle's resupply person, who is also from NC.

Cool Shoes tells us how she got her trail name. It seems that she crossed one of the many deep water crossings up in Maine, and, as is often the case, became immersed up to her waist. When she emerged from the frigid water with dripping hiking shoes, socks, and clothes, one hiking companion exclaimed "hey, there's cool shoes!", and her trail name was hatched. Actually, Cool Shoes' trail name was given to her the way a trail name is supposed to be given, that is, by her fellow hikers on the trail. I later learn this fact about trail names by reading the trail journal of the Canadian Geese (Richard and Carol Robinson), whom we later meet at Stratton Pond Shelter (see their journal at <http://trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=264780>). I suspect that this is not usually the case, however, and that most trail names are self inflicted, as in the case of Ho and Hum.

Cool Shoes speaks with a little trepidation about crossing Maine's "100 mile wilderness" just south of Mt. Katahdin, where hikers are advised to carry at least 10-days of food and supplies; there is no resupply available along that stretch. She tells us she bought expensive Keen hiking shoes in Manchester, and after only 3 day's use they are now falling apart; she plans to complain. In coming days we will hear at least 3 other such reports from hikers with similar problems with Keen shoes. She will be ending this year's hike in two days at North Adams, MA, to return to Greenville and her job. She has trouble pronouncing some of the proper nouns, such as the shelter names and "Zhivago" in particular, which comes out sounding a little different every time, usually something like "zavana". She readily admits she can't pronounce his trail name, once again with one of her big booming laughs. We laugh too. Zhivago and Cool Shoes are polar opposites, but are clearly good friends and to me that's a redeeming fact in Zhivago's favor.

Zephyr is from Henryville in the Poconos, which is very near to Pocono Pines where Hum and Pat own a vacation home. Hum and Zephyr therefore have much in common to discuss: it turns out that she teaches child development and food courses at a high school that Hum passes all the time. Even though she teaches food, she says she's not really into cooking. Ed, her husband of 31 years, works for the

Department of Defense in a classified assignment that takes him to either Afghanistan or Iraq for a 6-month tour every year (Zephyr does not even get to know where Ed is exactly on these tours). Stateside Ed works at Tobyhanna Army Depot (<http://www.tobyhanna.army.mil/index.html>), which is also familiar: Hum and I have often hiked the trails in adjacent Tobyhanna State Park (<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/parks/tobyhanna.aspx>) and always pass the army depot en route to the park and often wonder 'what do they do at Tobyhanna Army Depot?' Janet and Ed have three grown children; their older daughter (28) is enrolled in Navy Warrant Officer Training and is going through the same extremely rugged training given to Navy Seals. Older daughter and son (23, who she also describes as "rugged") have hiked extensively with Zephyr on the AT (all states except TN), but younger daughter likes hiking less, she says. She spoke of how difficult the AT is in Georgia, constantly up and down, up and down, ...

Zephyr says she needs to get her AT hiking "fix" this year and has plans for a one or possibly two-week excursion on the Vermont AT. Husband Ed doesn't want to hike "this year", but they have hiked together on other occasions. She started yesterday (Sunday) on Route 9, the same place we started this morning, and stayed last night at Melville Nauheim shelter. She plans a "very slow schedule", which overlaps with our (slow) schedule so we realize we will likely meet up each night, and we do. Husband Ed is meeting her on Friday wherever she is. At that point either a) they shuttle cars so Zephyr can continue hiking to Rutland next week, b) they shuttle cars for a Rutland continuation hike and Ed takes dog Ashby home, or c) all go home and Zephyr ends her AT hike.

Dog Ashby is Zephyr's protector, and was found on the AT between Ashby Hollow (<http://www.hikingupward.com/OVH/AshbyHollow/>) and Ashby Gap (<http://www.hikingupward.com/OVH/AshbyGap/>), in Virginia, hence Ashby's name. She was one of 5 pups in a litter Zephyr and her son found on the trail. Apparently Ashby followed them for 40 miles on the AT, and also right into their hearts, and thereupon they decided to adopt her.

Zephyr and Ashby stay every night in the tent site at each shelter. Because Ashby will be aggressive to anyone approaching Zephyr: she stays at the furthest point away from all other tenters, so that no one will have to cross paths with Ashby, who may in fact bite them if they cross paths. Zephyr tells us that Ashby has in fact bitten people on the trail.

I tell Hum that Zephyr reminds me a lot of his daughter Laurie, both in her hair color and facial features. Hum disagrees but the following Saturday my wife Lyn, with no prompting from me, makes the same comment to Hum when she meets Zephyr, but Hum still remains unconvinced.

Two others are tenting right beside the shelter; one of them is Runner (Sam Merriman), who at just 14 years old and is doing a thru hike on the LT, supported by his parents. He says that his folks will be meeting him on Route 11/30 out of Manchester on Friday. He is, in fact, the son of Charles Merriman, an attorney who is at the time a candidate for Vermont Secretary of State on the Democratic ticket (<http://merrimanforvt.com/>), but later we learn that Merriman loses the August 24 primary election. Runner has done a lot of hiking and outdoor stuff with his dad, including climbing 14,000' mountains and paddling the Green River in Colorado, hiking in Canada's Algonquin Provincial Park (<http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/>), and running up 6288' Mt. Washington in the Mt. Washington Road Race (<http://www.mountwashingtonroadrace.com/>). It's the latter accomplishment that gives Runner his trail name. At first Sam says he had no trail name, but then Zephyr encourages him to choose one, so he chooses "Runner" because that's what one of his hiking companions called him on learning of his feat on Mt. Washington. So once again this is a proper trail name, given to Runner by someone else. After that Zephyr makes it a point to address him frequently as Runner, so he gets used to the trail name idea. Runner is a well spoken, well rounded, and quite mature 14 year old, but as with any teen, obviously prefers to talk to folks his age rather than old geezers like Ho and Hum. We will meet him several more times going north on the LT, and that too will lead to one more mystery, yet to come.

Zephyr tries to call her husband, but none of us can get cell service at the shelter. She suggests that we try the fire tower for a better shot, so once again we hike the 0.3 miles up to the tower. We find the views are good but still a bit hazy, but alas there is no cell service for Zephyr or me. Hum manages to leave a "we got here and all is OK" message for Pat, although he's unsure if it took or not (it did, he finds out days

later). Zephyr and I also notice that the power bars on our phones are unexplainably down 50%, even though we both have our phones turned off the whole time.

Dinner time, dinner time, the time finally arrives for that most favorite time of a hiking day. I try out my new Coleman lightweight stove and it works great. It heats two cups of water very rapidly, only problem being that the pot handle gets too hot to pick up with my fingers and even burns a cloth I try to use as a potholder. Hum has a handy pot lifter that he loans me and that does the trick. Only other problem is that my pot is a bit small and I often spill water, especially in the first few days before I get the knack. Hum is relentless in pointing out that my boiling pot is too small! Dinner is really good, pasta and tuna for me, my favorite dinner planned for first and last dinners; Hum has Mountain House lasagna with meat sauce, which he says is delicious. Actually Hum eats two dinners each night, according to the Mountain House package it is enough food for two people, and I warn Hum that consuming two dinners is driving up his hiking expense. This gets a good booming laugh from Hum, which warms the dinnertime fun.

We turn into our sleeping bags at dusk (8:00 PM or so), as per usual. As the sun sets, I tell Cool Shoes about the beautiful Native American Indian flute music that Windtaker (Randy Motz) played each night at sunset on our last year's LT hike. This triggers Cool Shoes to recall how she has heard many other hikers provide gratuitous free concerts with their ukuleles, harmonicas, etc., and said she even heard of a hiker who played the tuba (if one can believe that anyone carries a tuba on the trail :-). I also relate how Funk, apparently, was able to sound like, or perhaps purposely imitate, a porcupine earlier in the day, and how I mystified Zhivago with my pointing out the 'porcupine sounds' coming from behind the shelter. I comment that "some hikers play their ukuleles, and other hikers make sounds like porcupines". This gets one of Cool Shoes bursting laughs. Cool Shoes has to be one of the more fun people we've ever met on the trail.

We all soon drop off to sleep, and the sleeping is very cool this night, with temperature probably dropping into the 40's. Hum's blanket sleeping bag is not warm enough for such nights, he says in the morning. Tonight will not be at all peaceful or restful, however. For one thing, the usual 'extreme night sounds' (AKA loud snoring) are emanating from a certain person beside me, who just might be my brother; these emanations have enough force to launch the shelter roof into outer space. Next, the mouse brigade is out in force tonight at Goddard Shelter. Every few seconds one of the little critters scampers loudly along the 'mouse freeway' right above our heads. This, to say the least, is disconcerting as one never knows when one of these devilish foragers might wind up in ones sleeping bag.

Then, on top of all this mayhem, a nighttime drama is about to unfold. Sometime around midnight, I wake up to Hum holding his flashlight and madly flailing his arms at his food bag, which as usual is hung on one of the 'mouse hooks' in the shelter. Mouse hooks are lines hung from the shelter ceiling that have a little baffle (usually a tin can) to thwart a mouse from getting access to your food bag. But evidently the mouse hook that Hum has chosen is too close to the side of the shelter, thus allowing a rogue mouse to leap over the baffle directly onto his food bag and then proceed to attack his food bag. I see Hum battling the rogue mouse that has actually already eaten into his M&M bag and consumed M&M's before Hum could swat the mouse and knock it to the ground. I imagine that in taking on the mouse in hand-to-mouse combat Hum valiantly exclaims "take that you pusillanimous, thieving, freeloader mouse!" After the food bag attack, Hum rises many more times to very noisily defend his backpack, which is hung on a pack hook above his head, all the time shining his flashlight, flailing his arms, beating his backpack, and vigorously defending against further mouse attacks on food items in his backpack.

Hum says in the morning that he didn't get a good sleep; no wonder after all the mouse encounters. I suggest one additional factor to explain Hum's sleeplessness: that his continuous 'extreme night sounds' might also have disturbed his own peaceful beauty sleep in between the mouse drag races and hand-to-mouse combat forays.

Goddard Shelter to Story Spring Shelter – 8/3/10

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Goddard Shelter
End Time: 1:15 PM, Story Spring Shelter
Total Miles: 10.9 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1010' gain/810' loss

Distances:

Goddard Shelter to Kid Gore Shelter: 4.1 miles; 190' gain/950' loss
Kid Gore Shelter to Story Spring Shelter: 4.8 miles; 610' gain/600' loss
Spur to Kid Gore Shelter & return: 0.2 miles
Story Spring Shelter to Beaver Pond & return: 1.8 miles; 210' gain/210' loss

Pedometer readings (excludes hike to beaver pond):

Steps: 33,003
Calories: 868
Steps/minute: 96
MPH: 2.73 (1.59 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 5 hours, 42 minutes, 24 seconds
Miles: 15.62 miles (9.1 actual miles)

The geezers arise at 6:30 AM, which is a bit late for us, and, as always, we try to be silent so as not to awake others. But alas, we wake up Cool Shoes, who immediately signals “you guys are up early”.

We're getting quite efficient with our breakfast and packing routine, so we're ready to be off at 7:30 AM. We say our goodbyes to Cool Shoes and “see you later” to Zephyr, but as we depart, there is a slight mishap as Hum's backpack sideswipes and knocks over Zephyr's cook stove on the shelter's outer ledge and immediately starts a conflagration. Luckily, Hum instantly reacts and bravely picks up the stove with his bare hands, snuffs the flames, and saves the day.

Compulsively perhaps, we stop once more, a third time now, to climb the Glastenbury Mountain Fire Tower. This morning, however, the view is completely socked in, but we still enjoy the invigorating climb to the top, view or no view.

Another mishap soon befalls us, as I trip and fall and cut my left shin on a rock, which then bleeds profusely. I apply Neosporin and a band aid from my first aid kit, but the band aid soon falls off. I then apply a heartier bandage consisting of gauze held on by a lot of duck tape, but that also soon falls off. It seems that my leg is too wet from sweat for these bandages to hold, so Hum suggests that I wrap adhesive totally around my leg. That works and the bandage holds for the rest of the hike.



Hum Does Lunch & “Checks the Map” at Kid Gore Shelter

We do lunch at Kid Gore shelter (4.2 miles), taking in the nice view recommended to us by Cool Shoes. At this point Hum and I are contemplating going beyond Story Spring Shelter, because we know that we'll arrive there quite early, and tent near Kelley Stand Road, picking up on the advice from Cool Shoes that there are good tenting sites by Kelley Stand Road.

As we get underway again, we meet a teacher going Southbound. He is from Richmond, Vermont and is doing the entire LT in 15 days, which is a pretty fast pace. He reports the sighting of 2 moose near Kelley Stand Road. We ask him also about tenting in that area, but he responds vaguely and suggests that we "can be creative around the beaver ponds" but offers nothing specific about possible tent sites he might have seen.

Soon after, we pass Poiboy, whom I had met on Bear Mountain (about 50 miles to the north) 4 days earlier (July 29) on one of my training hikes. He immediately remembers me and I him and we chat for a few minutes. He suggests that we are "about 1 mile south of Story Spring shelter, but actually we are still about 2-3 miles south and it takes us another 2 hours to reach the shelter. Hum notes that Poiboy is a little 'different', as I had also noted in my training hikes journal: "a bit flighty red head, but very enthusiastic and nice."

The 4.8 miles from Kid Gore Shelter to Story Spring Shelter seems long, and along the way we pass two picturesque beaver ponds with nice beaver lodges but alas, no beavers are in sight. We finally arrive at about 1:15 PM after 6 hours of hiking including stops, maintaining our 1.5+ MPH average speed. There we find Runner (Sam Merriman) already settled in the shelter having arrived considerably earlier than the geezer hikers. He tells us that his Dad is resupplying him in a couple of days on Route 11/30, so he needs to slow his pace to properly time the planned rendezvous.



A Fine Beaver Residence Just South of Story Spring Shelter

White Fox stops by for a rest on his northbound trek to Mt. Katahdin. He took a six-month leave-of-absence to do his AT thru hike from a wastewater design job near Manassas, VA, and holds a civil engineering degree from MIT (he was accepted from MIT's wait list, which is quite rare). His wife hiked the first 400 miles with him but was forced to quit after suffering a hairline fracture in her ankle. As had Cool Shoes the day before, White Fox complained about his new Keen shoes; in his case he paid \$125 for them and the sole detached after only 70 miles of hiking; he will complain.



Hum & Runner Settle in at Story Spring Shelter

Since I had attended Caltech, I am well aware of the rivalry between Caltech and MIT and of the numerous Caltech “pranks” that are often directed against MIT as the butt of a new joke. So I raised one recent prank that occurred in 2009, while White Fox was still attending MIT, where Caltech staged an elaborate and pretty hilarious prank that MIT had actually been “sold” to Caltech, and as a result MIT would be converted from an engineering school into a humanities school and that all of MIT’s majors would be remapped to new majors (e.g., Physics majors would be remapped to Women’s Studies), (see <http://east.caltech.edu/>, especially the “newspaper”; http://pr.caltech.edu/periodicals/EandS/articles/LXXIII1/2010_Winter_MITSold.html). However, White Fox was unaware of the Caltech prank, but muttered something about MIT superiority. He departed for Kelley Stand Road and planned to tent there tonight and resupply tomorrow in Manchester.

Zephyr and Ashby show up at around 3:30 PM, and quickly seek out a tent site. Stump passes en route to Goddard shelter and is in a huge hurry, saying that he needs to get to a wedding in Massachusetts in 2 days time. To do so he is hiking 30 miles/day and travelling at night. To top it off he takes off running southbound to Goddard Shelter.

A young couple from Washington DC, Mt. Pleasant area, (I’ll refer to them as “DC”) arrive next and settle into the shelter. He works for USAID on Africa consultancy issues and she is a teacher in the DC area. At this point Runner decides to move out of the shelter and pitch his tent nearby the shelter; this move apparently in consideration for making room for adults in the shelter. Another southbound AT thru hiker arrives and takes his place in the shelter. He reports seeing a moose just north of the shelter, and came within 15’ of the moose before it bolted (apparently the moose did not hear him coming and was surprised; fortunately the moose did not bolt in his direction, which is a distinct possibility). He says he is not enjoying his AT hike as much as expected, but will still finish. Oddly, he is also having trouble with his Keen shoes, just like White Fox and Cool Shoes, and will also complain.

Attention Keen shoes Quality Assurance: this third report of major Keen shoe problems in less than one day is disturbing. It also ensures that I will not buy that brand when replacing my hiking boots.

Bleemus (he says his name refers to a rock song) and his white lab Bongo arrive. He lives on Mad Tom Road in East Dorset, VT, and is doing a few days section hike on the LT. He sets up an elaborate hammock with a huge rain fly, and this proves to be extremely robust in the incredibly violent storm soon to come.

I set up my tent about 100 yards from the shelter with the intent that I'll try tenting on the LT for the first time if it doesn't start to rain before it's time to hit the hay. It takes me a while to find a level spot and set up the tent because I hadn't done so for about a year (when I tried it out in our back yard one night soon after it arrived from Amazon). The tent is really small and only about 3 feet high at the tallest point, which makes it necessary to crawl into the tent and impossible to stand let alone even to sit up. And on top of that, I mistakenly set up the tent with the rear of the tent going uphill, which means that my head will also need to be toward the rear of the tent to be in the uphill direction. Because the rear is considerably smaller than the front, my 'rolling around space' will be completely inadequate. Even so, Bleemus admires my little Wenzel one-person pup tent, which is set up not far from his hammock.

After dinner Zephyr invites Hum and me to hike about 1 mile down to the beaver pond we passed on our way to Story Spring Shelter in search of moose and beaver. It is a nice walk but unfortunately we see no moose, beaver, or any wildlife at all for that matter.



Zephyr at the Beaver Pond in Search of Moose & Other Critters

Rain has not started by dusk, so at about 8:30 PM I make the fateful decision to use the tent and take my sleeping bag and pillow there for the night. BIG MISTAKE. Very soon after I settle into the tent, however, light rain starts. I figure that it will be a lot of trouble to move now, so I just stay put. Besides, I rationalize that the rain will probably die down soon. WRONG. Also, I'm very uncomfortable with my head confined in the rear of the tent, because as I mentioned the space at the rear is so confined. So I turn myself and sleeping bag around: this is really difficult in this extremely small tent, but I manage somehow. The problem then becomes that my head is downhill and is now lower than my body: VERY

UNCOMFORTABLE. I 'solve' that problem somewhat by propping my head up under my hiking shoes, which I place under my sleeping pad.

But it's not long before the wind begins to pick up and then more rain comes, and then still more wind comes, and still heavier rain. This acceleration of the storm happened several times and each time I rationalize that it would soon be over. NOT. The wind becomes such a gale, howling through the trees in such huge gusts that I imagine a tree falling on the tent and crushing me. This is a fierce storm. Worse yet, the tent is leaking everywhere, not just on the seams but dripping from every part of the fabric! Little did I suspect that the tent would leak: after all, what is the main purpose of a tent if not to keep you dry? I tried to solve the leaking problem by wiping down the inside of the tent with my washcloth, and then squeezing it out through a small opening in the door to the outside of the tent. But soon the water begins to seriously puddle on the floor of the tent.

The raging storm keeps building and building, I'm getting soaked and so is my sleeping bag. I finally realize that I must do something drastic to escape my untenable place in this completely inadequate tent. At about 11 PM, after having braved the storm for more than 2 hours, I decide to escape back to the shelter and abandon the tent. I fold up my sleeping bag, pick up my hiking shoes and pillow, and crawl out of the tent into the teeming rain and hurricane force wind. This is really hard to do with no room to maneuver, and I get muddy and soaked as I crawl onto the ground outside the tent I have just escaped.

I put the sleeping pad over my head to try to keep the rain at bay, but still get very wet en route to the shelter. I'm barefoot and just squish and splash through the deep puddles and extensive flooding on my way to the shelter. As I pass Bleemus' hammock, Bongo growls at me from his comfy fleece bed under the hammock; I hear Bleemus tell Bongo to quiet down as I keep on going toward the shelter. When I reach the shelter I'm glad to find that there is still an empty sleeping space next to Hum (the one I had given up earlier when I moved to my tent). But as soon as I climb into the shelter I accidentally drop my soaking sleeping pad right on Hum's head; he awakens in a start with water dosing him all over from my sleeping pad and my flashlight shining directly into his eyes. His now wide open eyes show complete surprise, deep puzzlement, and a bit of anxiety by this rude awakening. I imagine in reading his facial expression that he envisions a mouse – this time a GIANT mouse -- is attacking his M&M's, just like the attack of the rogue mouse last night at the Goddard Shelter.

I also slightly disturb DC's wife, who stirs briefly but goes right back to sleep. I'm quite soaked after this ordeal and use my washcloth to wipe off the major water on my sleeping pad, but my clothes and sleeping bag are wet and remain so throughout the night. A little while later I see that Runner has a light on in his tent, so I suspect that something is also amiss in Runner's abode. The raging storm continues thru the night, with the raging wind and drenching rain pounding the metal roof of the shelter. I'm glad now to be inside and protected by the shelter and to have made my escape from possible disaster in the tent. But with the wet clothes and noisy night sounds in the shelter, I get very little sleep this night. Story Spring shelter will remain as a lifelong memory of one of the most horrific, scary, wet, traumatic, but also laughable nights (given the attack of the GIANT mouse on Hum's beauty sleep) so far on the LT.

Story Spring Shelter to Stratton Pond Shelter – 8/4/10

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Story Spring Shelter
End Time: 3:00 PM, Stratton Pond Shelter
Total Miles: 13.5 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2050' gain/2240' loss

Distances:

Story Spring Shelter to Stratton Pond Shelter: 10.5 miles; 2050' gain/2240' loss
Hike around Stratton Pond: 3.0 miles

Pedometer readings (includes 1.8 miles hike to beaver pond on 8/3/10 and 3.0 mile hike around Stratton Pond):

Steps: 45,942
Calories: 1209
Steps/minute: 95

MPH: 2.72 (1.91 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 7 hours, 58 minutes, 59 seconds

Miles: 21.75 miles (15.3 actual miles, including beaver pond & Stratton Pond hikes)

I arise at 5:30 AM, a bit before Hum, and right away make my way back over to my tent to dry it off as much as possible (inside and outside) and pack it up. By the time I return Hum is up and fixing breakfast. Zephyr soon appears looking a bit shell shocked and relates a little forlornly that "Ashby got soaked" in the storm and that all her stuff is soaking wet as well. Runner reports that water flooded into his tent (that's when I saw the light go on in his tent last night) but he was able to move his sleeping bag to a dry side and avoid catastrophe. Very impressively, Bleemus managed to stay completely dry in his hammock through this incredible storm, but his trusty lab Bongo's fleece got wet as the dog slept under his hammock. Bleemus and Bongo get off first at about 7 AM, heading north.

We're off at 7:30 AM and keep a good pace, reaching USFS 71 (1.6 miles) after 40 minutes and Kelley Stand Road (3.6 miles) after 1 hour 40 minutes. We pass two large open tent sites along the way, which are also near streams, just as Cool Shoes had told us two days ago.

As we ascend Stratton Mountain – a 1700' climb that we do rather handily for two geezer hikers -- Runner passes us at a near running pace, reminding us that we're still relatively slow, but definitely much faster than we were last year. We also meet southbound hikers Wasabi and a young couple (Coyote and Hobbit), who tell us about finding running water in the open ski facilities at the top of Stratton Mountain.

We reach the summit of Stratton Mountain (7.4 miles) at about noon and find DC and Runner near the base of the Stratton Mountain Fire Tower. It is extremely windy on the summit and blowing with gale force on top of the fire tower. I put the chin strap on my hat so as not to have it blow off as I ascend the tower; a note in the log by Wasabi says that his hat did blow off when climbing the tower, couldn't find it, and anyone who does find it is welcome to it. The view is clouded over at first but the winds are such that the view periodically clears and becomes perfect now and then, revealing Stratton Pond to the west and Somerset Reservoir to the south in a beautiful view.

We have lunch on the summit and Hum and DC engage in an extensive discussion of many ski areas they both have skied, covering a host of ski area from west coast to east coast. Indeed, this is one of Hum's two favorite discussions (the other being anything related to scouting). DC is from Idaho and went to school at UC Santa Barbara and Washington University and says that his wife opted to rest at the campsite we passed near Kelley Stand Road rather than hiking with him to the summit.



Stratton Mountain Fire Tower; Looking Down on DC & Hum

It is here in 1909 that James Taylor conceived the idea of the Long Trail that eventually led to its creation. Amazingly, Benton MacKaye, who was responsible for the creation of the Appalachian Trail, said the idea to create the AT also was born one day in 1921 while sitting in a tree atop Stratton Mountain. See the picture below showing the plaque beside the fire tower commemorating Taylor's and MacKaye's visions:



Stratton Mountain Commemorative Plaque

It is also here that the "three musketeers" (see their picture below) passed in 1927 putting the LT into the national limelight. As related in Vermont Public Radio (http://www.vpr.net/news_detail/88487/):

All of the founders and most of the leaders of the Green Mountain Club in its earliest days were men. But it took three young women to make the club and The Long Trail nationally famous. Their names were Hilda Kurth, Catherine Robbins, and Kathleen Norris, and their nickname, "The Three Musketeers," stuck because their adventure -- hiking the entire route of The Long Trail, from Massachusetts to Canada - was bold, daring -- and completely unheard of for women in the 1920s. It was the era of the Charleston, the flapper, and bathtub gin.

Ms. Norris, 18 years old, had just graduated from high school. Ms. Kurth and Ms. Robbins were both 25 and schoolteachers. Catherine Robbins remembered the trip years later for the Vermont Historical Society. Their hike took a little over three weeks in the late summer of 1927 and they became an immediate sensation. Newspapers throughout the country pounced on their story and ran photos of the three togged out in knee-high boots, knickers, bandannas, --and winsome smiles.

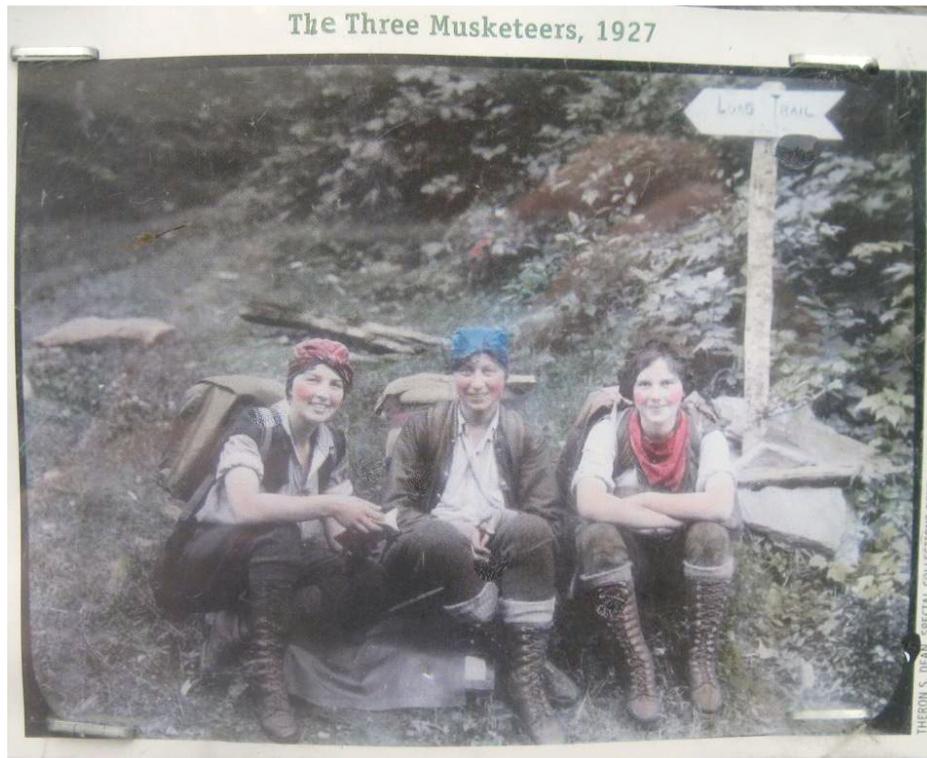
The Musketeers quickly became media darlings: It was national news! It was a big deal that these three young ladies were out there, hiking the entire Long Trail, unaccompanied, that is to say, without male companionship. And that was thought to be quite a daring, flapperish thing for young ladies to do at the time. Part of their appeal, obviously, was that they were the epitome of the young, liberated women who were at that very moment in history shedding the confines of Victorian clothing and manners, striking out on their own and proclaiming their rights and their individuality. The Musketeers were obviously bright young women with minds of their own and plenty of spunk. They were also the first women to hike the entire length of the trail. And they were young and pretty.

The press loved them. There was media coverage of the hike as they walked north. A clipping from The New York Times, September 4, 1927, shows the three musketeers and says that they're the only three women to have hiked the famous path over the Vermont hills. The story was very quickly splashed across front pages all across the United States. In bold type, The San Francisco Examiner's headline gasped, "They Carried No Firearms and Had No Male Escort!" And other newspapers were similarly incredulous.

They kept their packs to 25 pounds apiece and somehow managed to avoid blisters. But their hike did not start auspiciously. On their first day, the trio got lost and had to find their way by luck and by compass into Bennington. Part of the problem was that southern sections of the brand-new Long Trail were poorly cleared and even more poorly marked. But the Musketeers were not about to let a little thing like a sketchy trail deter them. They pushed through the underbrush, found a blaze here and there, and made their way northward. Ms. Kurth had packed along a 4 oz ukulele, and when the trio got tired, they would plunk themselves down at trailside and sing what one newspaper described as "the peppiest songs they could think of." Then, refreshed, they would walk some more. Near Bourn Pond, they found their path blocked by a rain-swollen trout stream. They forded it by inching across a crumbling railroad trestle, packs on their backs and 60 feet above the rushing water.

But they encountered their share of trail magic, too. Approaching Hazen's Notch, near the end of their trip, they looked over a cliff and saw a man far below in white slacks and a white jacket. In an interview years later, Catherine Robbins Clifford remembered what happened next: "And he says, "I'm looking for the three musketeers." I said, "Oh, you are? Well, here we are." The others were behind me. "Well, come on down, I have a gallon of ice cream for you." Boy, did I go down that mountain fast. And sure enough they had a whole gallon of ice cream, and did we sit down and eat it. We all shared it, 'til we ate it all up, you know. It was terrific."

The Long Trail was not even blazed north of Jay Peak, so the three walked the final miles to the Canadian border on dirt roads and ended their historic hike on Sept 4, 1927. Catherine Robbins summed up their adventure: "I just loved it. Being away from the mob. You know, a chance to be alone. A chance to do some thinkin'." The three women had become celebrities, but even more important, they had triumphed over their adversities and had turned the attention of the nation to the Long Trail and the mountains of Vermont.



Runner makes his way to ski slope and back before we leave and says that he'll "hang out" on the summit for a while before heading down to the Stratton Pond camping area. However, he didn't show up there, leading to a third mystery on this LT geezer hike, this time as to where Runner went (more on this later).

Just as we're leaving Zephyr and Ashby arrive on the summit. Zephyr decides to forego climbing the tower because of the fog and reluctance to leave Ashby unattended in view of his 'attack dog' role. After a brief visit we bid her farewell and 'see you later at Stratton Pond'.

On the way down to Stratton Pond the clasp on my belt gives out suddenly and for no apparent reason: I immediately realize that a crisis has arisen, my belt is broken! Under normal circumstances this would not be serious, just replace the belt, but on the trail, without a backup belt, it is a show stopper: it would be impossible to hike without a belt. An on-site repair is essential. Hum lends me his pliers but I'm unable to bend the clasp back into position with the pliers. I need something more formidable for the on-site repair so I grab a rather large rock and use it as a hammer to bend the clasp back into position. Fortunately this works and the belt is repaired and remains so throughout the hike. In the meantime Hum fashions a backup belt made from rope; this is a great idea but now unnecessary, thank goodness.

Runner soon passes us again going very fast, something like the Road Runner, and as he zooms by I comment to him that perhaps he'd rather be known as 'Road Runner'. He quickly disses that idea as he zooms by without stopping. We assume that he's going to Stratton Pond shelter or tenting area, based on what he told us on the summit. But we later learn that Zephyr had a conversation with Runner after we left the summit where Zephyr tells him about the \$5 charge for staying at Stratton; Runner responds

that he's 'not going to pay that', but it remains unclear where he goes instead. This is the last we see Runner.



Zephyr & Ashby on the Summit of Stratton Mountain

We arrive at Stratton Pond Shelter (10.5 miles) at 3:00 PM. No one is there yet so we have our choice of any bunk in the shelter. According to the *Long Trail Guide*, this shelter has the heaviest overnight use of any shelter on the LT: there is room for 20 people and later there will be 14 people staying the night, a pretty full house.

Funk (who we first met at Goddard Shelter) passes by a bit later with a buddy. They're on their way south on the Stratton Pond Trail to Kelley Stand Road and then plan to hike back north again on the LT over Stratton Mountain (Funk had told us earlier that he planned to do some hiking locally before resuming his AT thru hike to Maine).

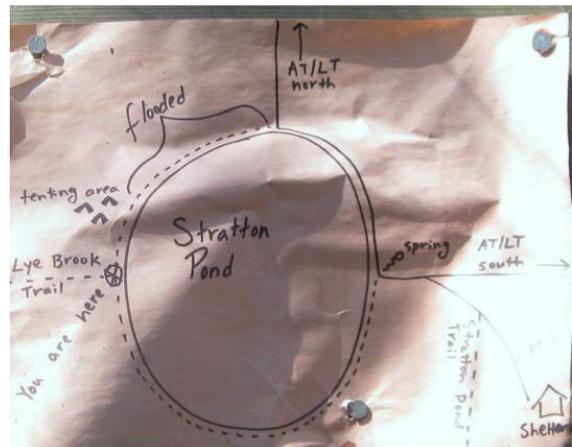
Ninja, the Stratton Pond Shelter caretaker, from York, PA, shows up next, apparently doing some brush cutting on the Stratton Pond Trail. She doesn't seem especially friendly at first, or very talkative, but she warms up and gets much friendlier later on when she comes back to collect \$5 from everyone staying the night. She also hikes to the tent camp every night to collect \$5 from tenters. I ask her if there are GMC member discounts on the overnight fee, which I thought someone told me were available, but she says there are no discounts; Hum generously pays for me later. She says the caretaker job is "OK" but is clearly not overly enthusiastic.

After settling in we decide to hike around Stratton pond. I take a minimum pack, Hum carries nothing but his poles. On the way out we meet Ottawa Lou, who plans to stay the night and says that he expects several young hikers he passed earlier to be at shelter since they took the shorter and easier Stratton Pond Trail rather than going over Stratton Mountain; he is surprised to find out that they are not there at the shelter.

Soon we arrive at a large clearing by the pond (Willis Ross Clearing on the Lye Brook Trail). We check out Bigelow Spring, the water source nearby the clearing, and see that someone has left four Long Trail beers there to cool in the spring. In the clearing we meet a very friendly and knowledgeable former forest

service person, who is resting in a lounge chair, sunning himself, and busily writing (a book perhaps?). We later learn that he is also a Trail Angel, because it becomes pretty obvious that he is one who left the beers in Bigelow Spring, not for himself, but rather for the enjoyment of hikers passing by Stratton Pond. We ask Trail Angel about loons, because that is of special interest to us based on reports we heard from Downhill at Taft Lodge on last year's LT hike over Mt. Mansfield. Trail Angel advises us that there is one family of loons living at the pond, and tells us where there are other families of loons and other wildlife around the pond. He advises us that the last 25% or so of the trail circumventing the pond is impassable, but that he has managed to do it; I later find this astonishing – seemingly impossible -- because that portion of the trail is completely impassable.

Soon after resuming our hike around the pond, Hum quits the trek, saying he's too tired and going back to the shelter. Hum talks to Trail Angel further after he quits the hike and I continue on, finding it a very pretty walk around Stratton Pond. The weather has completely cleared, so Stratton Mountain and the fire tower are now in clear view. I pass by the tenting area and do a quick search around thinking I might see Zephyr, but to no avail. I continue on in hopes of completing the full loop trail around the pond rather than turning back on the same, much longer, trail that I just did. I recall that Trail Angel said he managed to get through the 'flooded section' (see the map below), in spite of his dire warnings about this section. So, I figure, if Trail Angel can do it then surely Ho can do it, too. NOT SO. I find this final section of the loop trail to be extremely muddy, wet, and precarious as I continue on, and it just keeps getting worse and worse. I hope to hike out of this mess but it's not going to happen. I finally reach a point – probably about 90% of the way around the loop trail -- where it is simply a deep lake of nothing but mud and swamp in every direction: there is zero chance of crossing this swamp so I have to turn back. I don't see how Trail Angel possibly made it around. I later advise other hikers in the shelter log that the last 25% of the lake trail is impassable, don't even bother to try it. So I did the full loop trail hike almost 2 times.



Stratton Pond Hike: Stratton Mt. View & Walkway across Swamp Area, West Side; Beaver House, North Side; Map Showing Impassable Flooded Area

I hear loons at this furthest point around, which gives my spirits a bit of a boost at what is otherwise a low point in having to give up and turn back. I wonder if Hum can hear them from the shelter (I later learn he did hear them). On the way back I meet Zephyr and Ashby heading to the tenting area. She has also tried to negotiate the other (shorter) way around to the tenting area, through the flooded area, but also found it impossible, and is now a little upset that she needs to hike the long way -- one full mile -- to get to the tenting area. As I reach the clearing once again, where Hum and I first met Trail Angel, who is no longer there, I'm told by a girl standing there with several guys that some folks are skinny dipping in the pond and in fact one man is hiding behind the bushes, naked. She warns me that 'naked men are in the vicinity' and I posit that I'm 'not interested in seeing any naked men', which evokes some laughter in response, and move on to nearby Bigelow Spring to fill my water bottles. Later on I meet some of these same folks back at the shelter.

Back at the shelter Hum introduces me to Richard and Carol Robinson, the Canadian Geese, from Charlotte, NC, and Ottawa Lou, from Ottawa, Quebec, Canada. They are all evidently taken by our trail names and right away Ottawa Lou comments that they all thought "Ho" meant the derogatory slang term (for "whore"). At first I'm a bit taken aback by this, no one has ever interpreted my trail name as such, but I just let it bounce off.

The Canada Geese, two seniors, like us, but a bit younger than us, are doing the whole AT and today are celebrating their 31st anniversary. They say their children are a little worried about their major AT undertaking, so they're keeping an on-line journal (<http://trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?trailname=8813>) to keep everyone posted on their progress; they update their blog every time they get into a town for rest and resupply and can find Internet access (usually at a library). Their journal is interesting and highly readable; the daily entries are short and to the point and give a good sense of what it's like to thru hike the AT. They start their trek on March 17 and finish on October 5.



**The Canadian Geese (Richard and Carol Robinson)
Celebrating Their 31st Anniversary at Stratton Pond Shelter
(Picture from Their Trail Journal <http://trailjournals.com/photos.cfm?id=571306>)**

Both are originally Canadian (Richard also has Australia connections), but became US citizens long ago. Richard is 65 and Carol 66. Both are pretty thin, and speak of their significant weight loss from hiking in their journal. Richard has scruffy long hair and beard, also par for being on the trail for months and

months. As noted in their journal, apparently he agrees about the scruffiness, and gets a “makeover” haircut and beard trim when they stop in mid August to visit their daughter Andrea in Hanover, NH. Both are recently retired nurses. Richard says he changed jobs “in crisis” from community planner to nurse; I’m not sure what that meant but don’t pursue it.

They tell us of record snow in the Smoky Mountains and how they had to post hole through the snow on Clingman’s Dome (4/9); many hikers got stranded and had to be rescued. They encounter extremely difficult hiking over all the incredibly arduous ‘rock trails’ in PA. They speak of all the endless up and down boulder climbs in Harriman Park, NY, the “lousy” NY shelters, and recall the stairs descending Bear Mountain, NY (we also recall these same stairs alongside Bear Mountain’s ski jump area on family trips ages ago).

Carol says she is a bit apprehensive about what is to come; I assume her concerns relate to the White Mountain sections and perhaps other sections in Maine. Their journal entries bear this out: White Mountains (8/24 → 9/3); Muhoosuc Notch (9/7); Mt. Katahdin (10/5). “We were told the toughest hiking would be in Maine and that is true”, 9/17 journal entry.

They are strong hikers, especially considering their ages, and on many days do 20 miles or more and even 25+ miles on some days. Richard admires Carol’s abilities in this 10/3 journal entry:

“Hiking the A.T. is supposed to be a life changing event through personal growth and introspection. I can’t really see this in myself but I sure can in Carol. She started out the hike being afraid of crossing a stream on a 8 inch wide board when the board was 6 feet long and the stream was 18 inches deep. Eventually she was free climbing 35 to 50 foot high rock walls at Webster cliffs and other places. If she had fallen she would have been seriously injured or worse. In the Wilderness she was fording some deep streams despite being afraid of water because she does not swim well. She never complained about any obstacle we had to face.”

Their prowess is even more amazing given that Richard has a left knee and hip replacement, which keeps him in constant pain and need of medication, and thwarts his ability to climb and descend mountains; a real handicap on the AT for sure, as captured in this 10/5 journal entry:

“Again my knees were absolutely aching and as I watched others take giant steps up to the next location on the rock, I always had to figure an alternative way. I usually could throw my straight leg out and pull myself up with my arms. Sometimes I could brace one leg on a rock and with the other leg elevate my body. The problem with this is that it is a much more tiring way to hike as it uses total body strength. I have been hiking this way for much of the hike and knew I would become very tired by the time we finished going up.”

They fight the psychological fight to maintain their determination to finish their quest, in spite of all that confronts them:

“We got up early and silently got ready to hike. We have a set routine now but today was different. Carol finally asked if something was wrong. I finally told her I was feeling depressed. It is not unusual for hikers on the trail to feel this way according to many of the journals I have read. It usually happens in Virginia because there are so many miles in the state. I was feeling it now and Carol confessed she was also feeling down.” (7/9)

“Carol and I have decided the hike is not fun anymore. Somewhere between the 1000 mile mark and now the fun disappeared. It may come back in retrospect; we will wait and see. It probably disappeared in the heat and humidity. “The hike now is a quest. This quest we will see to the end, or as long as our bodies take us. We carry with us a mineral marble given to us by Anne,(a professor at Radbun University). This marble, she told us, would give us strength on our quest. We also have a small piece of Katahdin in a small metal cylinder. This was given to us by former thru hiker Rainbow when he met us in Port Clinton PA. This serves as inspiration. The cylinder is kept in the top pocket of my pack and I hear the small chip of rock rattle at times. This reminds me to keep plugging.” (7/30)

“We have 220 miles left to hike and each day it is a real struggle. I seem to be getting weaker, Carol seems to be about the same. We both agree that we are very tired most of the time.” (9/12)

But in the end they celebrate their triumph after summiting Mt. Katahdin, completing their great quest:

“We have been asked what part of the hike we enjoyed the most and we both agree. It was the people we met. The trail angels that helped us out and the other hikers we met.

“We particularly want to thank Ann and Rainbow (thru hiker 1988). Ann gave us a mineral marble when we met her on the Blue Ridge Parkway at the hiker feed. She said that the marble would give us power and strength when we needed it. Rainbow met us in Port Clinton and gave us a small piece of Katahdin in a metal cylinder for inspiration. Carol and I put this in the top of our packs and during tough times we could hear it rattling in the cylinder. It really helped. Both the mineral marble and the piece of Katahtin were carried up the mountain and will remain with us.” (10/5)

Ottawa Lou is a Canadian government employee and is thru hiking the whole LT. He tells me that this is his second try: he tried last year but stopped in Stowe to see his wife and wound up staying there 4 days. This was not according to plan and the hike was over after that. So this year he's trying again, but this time with no stop in Stowe to visit his wife. He's planning to stay at the Long Trail Inn in Killington in a couple of days and go there by way of the Sherburne Pass Trail; says he doesn't like the LT reroute. I tell him about the LT Festival to be held in Rutland this coming Saturday 8/7 (http://www.nvnohi.com/ltf/Rutland_Long_Trail_Festival/Home.html): he displays a bit of interest but says he probably won't go.

I mention that years ago Lyn and I camped in Gatineau Park just north of Ottawa (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gatineau_Park) and were so enthralled with the loon calls we heard that it inspired us to buy a tape with music set to loon calls in the background. Ottawa Lou's response is that he doesn't like the sound of loons anymore; "too much too often". But he does like skating on Ottawa's Rideau Canal during their annual Winterlude Festival (<http://www.ottawa-information-guide.com/2011-winterlude-activities.html>), which Lyn and I also enjoyed a few years ago while on a skiing trip to Canada's Calabogie Peaks.

According to Ottawa Lou, the US is "invading" the Canadian homeland under the Arctic Ocean; he concludes that Canada needs to build nuclear subs to enable them to go under the ice in order to thwart the Americans. Is Ottawa Lou suggesting that Canada should start a nuclear war against the US, Hum and I wonder?

One of the guys I met earlier in the clearing by Stratton Pond -- a big man I call Hurly Burly -- retrieves the 3 beers from Bigelow Spring I had seen earlier. He concludes the beers are Trail Magic, and I'm pretty sure they were left by Trail Angel (the Forest Service guy Hum and I also met in the clearing). Richard has one on the beers and says he will pack out the empty bottle, Hurly Burly has the second, and the third is offered to Ninja, who is there collecting \$5 from everyone staying the night at the shelter. Ninja says that she has to "think it over", but apparently decides against it (some unknown person consumes it). Hurly Burly also smokes, I suspect marijuana but it isn't.

Interestingly, Ninja reports that Runner's mother came to Stratton Pond shelter looking for him yesterday, apparently not knowing he was at Story Spring shelter and about to endure the horrendous storm that struck there last night. Perhaps she heard that this terrible storm was on its way and was worried (for good reason). We mention that we last saw Runner "running" past us on the decent to Stratton Pond, about 2:00 in the afternoon, and thought he was heading to the Stratton Pond camping area. However he didn't show up there according to Ninja, and we later learn from Zephyr that the reason is that he didn't want to pay the \$5 fee. So this becomes yet another LT geezer hike mystery: where oh where did Runner go??

The Canadian Geese, Ottawa Lou and others all going to Manchester tomorrow to resupply (there is an EMS store there) and all are staying at the Green Mountain House hostel (<http://trailplace.com/forums/showthread.php?p=6026>), a private residence with room for four hikers; \$15/night; free pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream; free sodas; free shuttles to and from the trail; owned by Jeff and Regina Taussig, AKA Flashback, who did the AT in 2001 and 2006; reservations 802-768-8088). I mention the Northshire bookstore as a good stop, some are interested. Everyone is in bed and quiet by 8:45 PM, good hiking decorum this night. Richard has long coughing spells during the night, he attributes it to allergies but it sounds worse than that to me.

Stratton Pond Shelter to Spruce Peak Shelter – 8/5/10

Start Time: 7:15 AM, Stratton Pond Shelter
End Time: 12 Noon, Spruce Peak Shelter
Total Miles: 7.9 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 155' gain/445' loss

Distances:

Stratton Pond Shelter to William B. Douglas Shelter: 4.8 miles; 105' gain/445' loss

William B. Douglas Shelter to Spruce Peak Shelter: 3.0 miles; 50' gain/130' loss
Spur to Spruce Peak Shelter: 0.1 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 24,115

Calories: 634

Steps/minute: 97

MPH: 2.75 (1.91 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 4 hours, 08 minutes, 24 seconds

Miles: 11.41 miles (7.9 actual miles)

Most everyone is up at 6:30 AM and quickly organized as is usually the case with very experienced hikers. Ottawa Lou takes off first, and that's the last we see of him. We depart at about 7:15 AM. We're anticipating a very easy hike today, with only about 8 miles and virtually no climbing to do. We tentatively plan to proceed beyond Spruce Peak Shelter to Bromley Shelter, which would add about 5 more miles to our hike today.



Hum Crossing Winhall River Bridge (2.0 Miles)

The hiking indeed is easy and we maintain a fast pace to Spruce Peak Shelter, almost 2 MPH. We quickly reach the Winhall River bridge, pass the Branch Pond Trail to William B. Douglass Shelter, and set a brisk pace along Old Rootville Road for about a mile to where the LT leaves the road opposite the spur to Prospect Rock. Unfortunately, we miss the turn off to Prospect Rock, which is one of the nice vistas along this section that overlooks Manchester and Mt. Equinox; I plan to do this section again next summer on one of my training hikes and will make sure not to miss Prospect Rock.



Hum on Old Rootville Road near Prospect Rock Spur (Which We Missed)

Further along we pass a young couple Annie, Matt and dog Kaya; they had just bought new hiking poles in Manchester at the EMS store and are very pleased with their purchase.

Believe it or not, we spot an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus, right on the LT; how it got there is yet another deep, deep mystery and anyone's guess:



Ho & Hum Discover King Tut's Sarcophagus (Found Mummy Inside!)

As we get close to Spruce Peak Shelter we hear thunder rumbling in the distance, and soon the brewing thunderstorm is upon us. We decide to don our ponchos at about 11:50 AM and with rare supreme luck arrive at the shelter only 5 minutes later, avoiding a 3 hour torrential downpour in the comfort and safety of a large dry shelter. In spite of the storm, we still contemplate going on the additional 4.8 miles to

Bromley Shelter, but decide after about 2 hours of rain that it is now better to stay put at Spruce Peak Shelter.

There are some hiking magazines to keep us amused and the shelter log is quite interesting. There are many accounts of winter snowshoe hikes to the shelter. This is quite practical because the shelter is less than 3 miles from the Route 11/30 parking lot, and there is a pot belly stove here that provides heat for a comfortable winter stay: many hikers have taken advantage of that.



Spruce Peak Shelter, After the Three-Hour Rainstorm

I take time to plan our 2011 hike from the Canadian border down to Johnson/Route 15. We plan a 6 day hike that anticipates taking it quite easy because this section is reputed to be pretty rough, as confirmed by various trail journals I've read. We also plan to do the southern-most section of the LT, from the Massachusetts border north to Route 9, probably as a two day hike starting somewhere in Massachusetts on the AT.

Soon after the rain lets up, Hopscotch and Hubert Cumberland stop by for lunch. They are northbound LT thru hikers who stayed with us at Stratton Pond Shelter last night, but for whatever reason get a very late start this morning on today's hike. "Hubert Cumberland" is a really unusual trail name that certainly wasn't invented by someone else. The name refers to one of the finger puppet friends of the "Salad Fingers", (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salad_Fingers); quite why he chose this trail name is anyone's guess.

Hopscotch sets right to work to start a fire to make some tea, but starting a fire is now quite impossible given that everything is soaking wet after the driving rain. After trying for quite a long time, they finally give up on starting a fire. This is my cue to give it a try. I stick with it for an even longer time, being a very persistent sole and not one who gives up easily on anything, but I'm also having very little success. 'Bummer!' to my way of thinking, because I want to be a hero and think it would be nice to have a fire in camp one night. So now Hum comes forward to the fire starting mission and brings decades of scoutmaster prowess to such matters. He shaves some wood from larger logs and finds small sticks to build a starter teepee; he sets it afire and blows heavily. This very nearly works and it appears that a fire will indeed be had at last. But noooo, not to happen, it falters and dies out and again no fire. By this time

Hopscotch and Hubert Cumberlande have had their tea after resorting to their more conventional propane stove.

Next on the task list is to fix the zipper on my sleeping bag, which came apart the previous night. I try to fix it but can't; Hopscotch says he's 'good with zippers' and tries for a while, but he can't fix it either. Finally Hum goes after it and succeeds; good ole' big brother Hum can fix almost anything.

Zephyr and Ashby arrive at about 3:00 PM. As she steps onto the porch to hang her wet things, Zephyr exhorts Ashby 'you know these guys now so don't attack them OK?' But Ashby is still clearly not comfortable with Ho and Hum so we maintain our distance and make no attempt to pet Ashby or anything like that. Zephyr tells a tale of taking shelter under a large rock for 3 hours to get out of the rain

After their lengthy break, Hopscotch and Hubert Cumberlande set out heading north for Bromley Shelter and the rest of us start the happy task of making dinner.

This is our final dinner night and for the second time I'm having my favorite dish of angel hair pasta and tuna: yum, yum. When Hum brags about how he's economizing and 'saving money on the trail', presumably because there are no lodging fees, or any other fees for that matter, to pay along the way, I remind him about how much money he's losing by eating the entire Mountain House dinner every night, which is intended to 'serve 2'. This gets Hum's uproarious laughter going really good, heard I'm sure all the way over to Zephyr's tent site, and she soon joins us for dinner.

Over dinner we have a good wide-ranging discussion with Zephyr about everything under the sun. She has decided to end her hike tomorrow and will meet husband Ed at the Route 11/30 crossing and stay in Rutland over the weekend. I mention the Long Trail Festival on Saturday and Zephyr says that she might come. We also invite her to join us on our 2011 hike; she is possibly interested so we exchange email addresses and promise to be in touch next year as the hike approaches. She advises us that one constraint is that she needs to get back home by August 17 for her mother's birthday.

We keep expecting more folks to arrive at Spruce Peak Shelter for the night, but hope that no one else comes, because it's nice sometimes to have a shelter to ourselves once in a while. No one arrives, we have it to ourselves; we're in bed by dusk, a little after 8 PM or so, and soon to sleep.

Spruce Peak Shelter to Mad Tom Notch – 8/6/10

Start Time: 7:30 AM, Spruce Peak Shelter

End Time: 2:00 PM, Mad Tom Notch

Total Miles: 8.4 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1760' gain/1014' loss

Distances:

Spruce Peak Shelter to Bromley Shelter: 4.8 miles; 700' gain/400' loss

Bromley Shelter to Mad Tom Notch: 3.5 miles; 1060' gain/614' loss

Spur to Spruce Peak Shelter: 0.1 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 31,196

Calories: 820

Steps/minute: 93

MPH: 2.66 (1.51 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 5 hours, 32 minutes, 47 seconds

Miles: 14.77 miles (8.4 actual miles)

After bidding farewell to Zephyr and Ashby, with hopes of seeing them tomorrow at the Long Trail Festival in Rutland, we're off at about 7:45 AM. We soon stop for some views off of Spruce Peak at 8:00 AM (0.5 miles). There is some momentary trouble finding the blue-blazed trail to the peak -- the blue blazes on the rocks are severely worn -- but soon find our way to the top. There's still a bit of early morning haze in the air but otherwise there are pretty clear views of Manchester and Mt. Equinox across the valley below.



Ho Enjoys Nice View of Manchester & Mt. Equinox from Spruce Peak

From Spruce Peak it is an easy 2.4 mile descent to Route 11/30. Along the way we meet Yoyo, who is somewhat of a character and is thru hiking the AT southbound from ME going to GA. He tells us he restocked in Manchester, as do, it seems, almost all thru hikers we meet. He got a ride into town from a young man with “similar interests”, he tells us, but we can only guess what these similar interests might be... The young man carts Yoyo all around town and allows him to take a shower in his house. Yoyo speaks a bit obscurely about some “naked men running around in a store” they were in, but didn’t say why or what they were doing running around naked, but again one could only surmise... Not too surprisingly, he tops it off by telling us he even bought marijuana from the young man.

This final comment leads to an extensive discussion with Hum about Vermont’s lax laws and seemingly letting its criminals get off scot free. I tell him of a quite recent example of this: the rape and murder of 12 year old Brooke Bennett by a known, convicted pedophile, Michael Jacques (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0.2933.380541.00.html>). Jacques, 42, served more than four years in prison and was then supervised for eight years for kidnapping and sexually assaulting an 18-year-old woman in 1992. But despite his criminal track record, the Vermont Department of Corrections released Jacques from probation in 2004 on the recommendation of probation officer Richard Kearney. Vermont Governor Jim Douglas said that the Corrections Department’s recommendation was a mistake and that the state needed to reevaluate its procedures. Quite so: a huge, state-wide public outcry soon led to the Vermont legislature passing Jessica’s Law, which as is typical of Vermont was one of the few states that had failed to adopt the law previously. Rutland, I further point out in my little diatribe, has a huge problem with New York drug dealers coming to Vermont to sell their wares, knowing of the lax laws and lack of penalties and making it the best possible place to do their business. There have been recent drug-related murders and shootings, and constant widespread drug dealing in Rutland. Vermont’s extremely liberal, left-leaning ‘protect our criminals’ mentality, and the resulting lack of strong enough laws and enforcement, give us this unfortunate mess, I sum up to Hum.

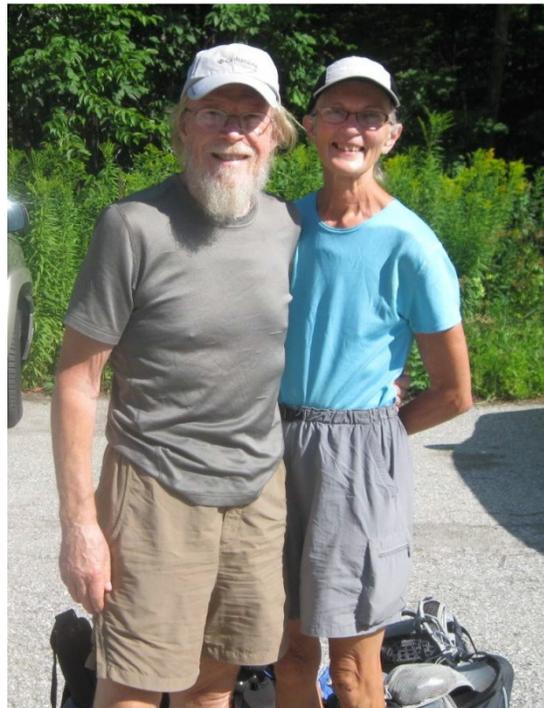
We discuss Vermont’s nuclear reactor, Vermont Yankee, which these same liberal folks in charge of crime prevention want to shut down in 2012. My frustration, I tell Hum, is that there is no basis to shut down this multi-billion dollar asset; its closing is driven by activists and liberal politicians citing dangers that simply don’t exist. Wimps I say they are, fearing a nuclear disaster around every corner, and Hum agrees with all this: after all, he’s an expert on this topic, having spent his career as a nuclear engineer for Baltimore Gas & Electric (now Constellation Energy Group). He was even involved in evaluating the possible purchase of Vermont Yankee by Constellation, so he knows the plant well.

Ho and Hum have continuing discussions on just about every conceivable topic: we agree on just about everything and rarely disagree on anything. We have similar viewpoints, politics, philosophies, and beliefs. We are talking most of the time, even going up the mountains, and that can be a little difficult.

Constant talking requires a lot of wind power and so does climbing mountains – it keeps you thoroughly winded and constantly out of breath – so therein lies a serious conflict but we talk while we climb anyway.

There are also long silences allowing for deep contemplation: to listen and think big thoughts. There is no better place or more abundant time for contemplation than walking all day through beautiful forests and astonishing nature. I think about a problem in cosmology I'm working on – why are galaxies accelerating outward and the universe forever expanding rather than galaxies slowing down and the universe eventually collapsing – and recalling memories about people I love and those who have gone before. I also speculate on what Hum might be contemplating: while I can't be sure I suspect that Hum is devoting his contemplation time to what his next new service might be, and how much money that might put in his pocket. I imagine that new service might well be 'Hum's Rogue Mouse Protection Service' to be offered to fellow hikers at each shelter along the trail, for a (perhaps exorbitant) fee, where he capitalizes on the expertise he's gained in defending against (sometimes giant) mouse attacks on his M&M's. But this is only speculation; I can't be sure what big thoughts Hum is contemplating.

We cross Route 11/30 (2.9 miles) at about 9:30 AM and spot the Canadian Geese (Richard and Carol Robinson) in the AT/LT parking lot on the north side. Carol immediately recognizes us and enthusiastically shouts out "Hi Ho and Hum!" They seem in great spirits after their zero day in Manchester and really good stay at the Green Mountain House hostel. They enthusiastically tell us about the very nice rooms, free ice cream, free sodas, and free shuttle service: in fact, they have just been delivered there by the hostel owner, Jeff Taussig, whose license plate reads "HIKER1". Jeff is extremely nice and asks us about our hike. We tell him we're headed to Mad Tom Notch and right away he offers to pick us up at the end of our hike and take us wherever we need to go, but we tell him we're already set with Lysie picking us up there. We snap a picture of the Canadian Geese (see below) and get on our way up the 3 mile 1500' climb to the peak of Bromley mountain, assuming these two will pass us on the way up (they're going to Peru shelter tonight), and indeed they do.



**Canadian Geese (Richard & Carol Robinson) at Route 11/30 Parking Lot
Relaxed & Refreshed After Restful Zero Day at Green Mountain House in Manchester**

We arrive at the spur to Bromley Shelter (4.9 miles) a little before 11 AM. At the junction we meet Hopscotch and Hubert Cumberland who are just getting started for their day's hike. This is another very

late start for them, just like at the Stratton Mountain shelter. Such late starts for thru hikers are unusual, but it seems they hike fast enough to still make adequate headway each day.

The Canadian Geese also pass us at the junction to Bromley Shelter. As we expected, they are strong hikers and making good time, having already caught up to us on this rather big uphill climb. They are headed to Peru shelter for the night, another 8.1 miles, and tell us where to find their trail journal on the Internet. We bid them farewell and wish them a great AT thru hike.

We take a break at Bromley Shelter, have a snack, and sign the log:

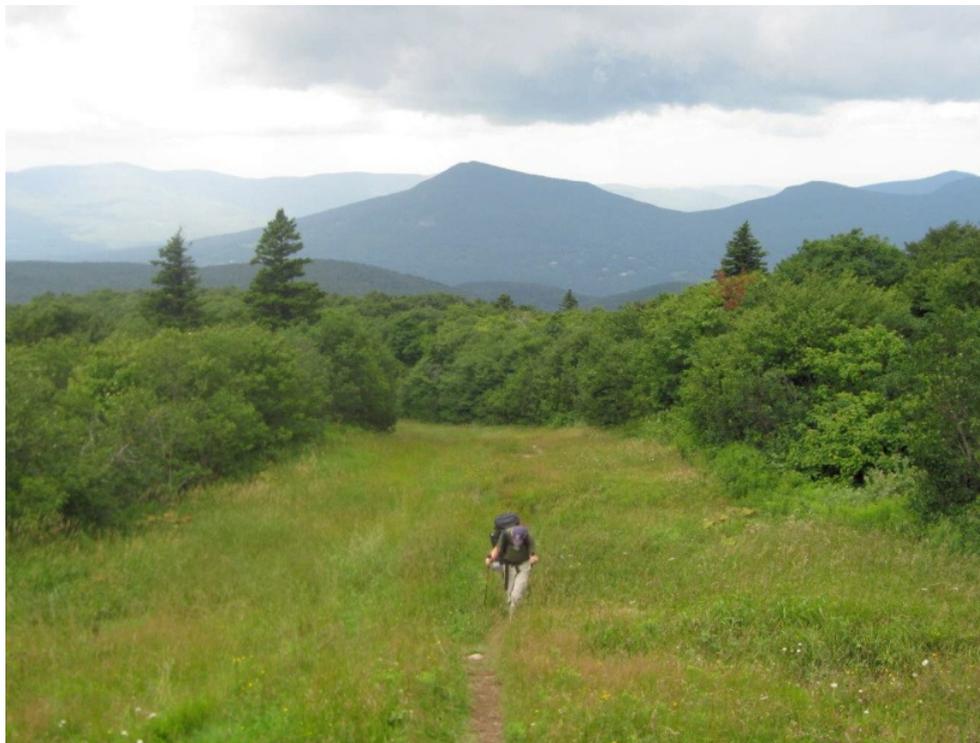
"8/6

Ho & Hum Geezer hikers (68, 70, respectively) in for a break. Last mountain on a 5-day NOBO trek from Bennington/Route 9. Met great folks along the way, some signing in above. Onward, upward, & slow going for us with walkers & all.

*Peace,
Ho & Hum"*

We see from the log that Bleemus and dog Bongo also stayed the night, joining Hopscotch and Hubert Cumberdate.

The rest of the climb to the Bromley Mountain summit (5.9 miles) is not too bad, although the last bit of hiking up the ski trail is pretty steep. We arrive at 11:45 AM. Views are beautiful – the best we've had so far – and the wind is blowing at gale force. As opposed to the weather forecast we have heard from other hikers, some dark storm clouds are rolling in and rain seems imminent, but luckily it doesn't rain.



**Hum Makes Final Push to the Bromley Mountain Summit (Stratton Mountain in View)
Wind Blowing Hard, Storm Clouds Gathering, But It Doesn't Rain**

As usual, upon reaching the summit I immediately climb the Bromley Mountain observation tower, now the third observation tower on our backpacking hike this week (Glastenbury Mountain Fire Tower and Stratton Mountain Fire Tower being the other two). As I ascend the tower the wind picks up to brutal force: hold onto your hat! But the long range views are clear and beautiful, in spite of the storm clouds.



Ho & Hum On Top of Very Windy Bromley Mountain Observation Tower Bromley Mountain Ski Lift & Warming Hut

We have our lunch in the warming hut with about five other hikers, among them are the brothers we met at Stratton. A group of southbound AT thru hikers, Black Eagle and others, reflect on their experiences so far on the trail. They say their favorite section so far was Mahoosuc Notch (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahoosuc_Notch) on the Maine/New Hampshire border, where they had to negotiate some intensely difficult boulder climbs. They decided to go southbound rather than northbound to get less congested shelters and hostels. They tell us a funny story about a hiker they met with a 70 pound pack; he had everything including axes, saws, assorted tools, etc. etc. As is typical, they like the social interactions a lot, but say they met some 'bad' northbound hikers without saying exactly what was bad about them. We would meet one of the lunchtime hikers – who is wearing a tie dye shirt – another three times before our hike ends, including our next snack place, rest place, and Mad Tom Notch, our final destination.

I call Lysie and ask her to meet us at 2:00 PM, which turns out to be a perfect forecast of our arrival time at Mad Tom Notch. I remind her that the road up to the parking area is very rough and to take it really easy.

We set out again at about 12:45 PM expecting an all downhill easy hike from here on in, but are soon climbing again, several hundred feet up to Bromley Mountain north peak. We take a brief rest on a perfectly formed natural rock bench.

We descend 600' and 2.5 miles down to Mad Tom Notch (8.4 miles) and arrive at just about 2 PM. Lyn arrives at about the exact same time. The road it turns out has just been re-graveled and all the ruts and bad sections are now smoothed over.



Heading North Down Bromley Mountain to the North Peak



Hum Takes a Rest on Natural Rock Bench – Summit of Bromley Mountain North Peak

We take pictures of course to mark our achievement. Hum needs to make several iterations with his camera to get a shot, since his camera makes no sounds nor gives any indication of when a picture has been taken. I comment yet again (way too often, should keep my mouth shut on this) about the 'really poor human factors' on Hum's camera. Hum, rightfully so, is tired of me saying this, and gets more than slightly irritated, and always rises to strongly defend his camera, as he does again on this occasion. Eventually Hum's picture gets taken (I guess :-)



Ho & Hum Finish LT Hike at Mad Tom Notch

On the way home we make stops at D. Lasser pottery (<http://lasserceramics.com/>) and the Whistle Stop Café for some ice cream. The Whistle Stop is famous with hikers and is practically a must stop for anyone hiking the LT or AT. I had mentioned it to the Canadian Geese at Stratton Pond Shelter, and they stopped there on August 8, as recorded in their journal (<http://trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=324794>):

"We hiked off the trail half a mile to go to The Whistle Stop Cafe. There we devoured a massive (an Australian term meaning large) amount of food. It was delicious. We rested about an hour and then yogied a ride back to the trail by another patron of the café."

After a very welcome shower, shave, and sprucing up we have a very relaxing and enjoyable evening. I enjoy a manhattan before dinner (Hum says he'll wait to enjoy his manhattan tomorrow night); we savor Lysie's (as always) delicious dinner; and enjoy some of my old LPs on the stereo.

I also play Windtalker's (Randy Motz's) CD for Hum: [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/>). We hiked with Windtalker and his wife Mom/Georgia Harris last summer on the Johnson to Jonesville Section of the LT. Windtalker brought along his Native American Flute, which he played for us each night at sunset. These wonderful concerts imprinted beautiful musical memories of that fantastic hike (see our 2009 LT journal at <http://www.longtrailhiking.info/webboard/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=167>), and Windtalker's CD serves as a vivid reminder. Hum loves it and vows to purchase the CD when we visit Windtalker and Mom tomorrow at the Long Trail Festival.

Zero Day in North Clarendon & Rutland Long Trail Festival – 8/7/2010

We spend the morning at the farmer's market, held each Saturday during the summer at Depot Park in downtown Rutland, and then make our way to the fairgrounds for the Long Trail Festival (http://www.nvnohi.com/ltf/Rutland_Long_Trail_Festival/Home.html). There are interesting audio-visual presentations, including a set of old slides taken in the early days of the LT (1920's vintage). Hum and I could recognize many of the sites and scenes – very enjoyable. There is also a Q&A panel discussion with 4 expert hikers answering questions and giving advice.

It is wonderful to reconnect with Windtalker and Mom, who are running a booth at the festival. They have just finished a hike from Duxbury Road to Appalachian Gap, which for them completes their quest, begun in 2007, to hike the LT end-to-end (see their trail journal of this year's hike at <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?trailname=11105>). We enjoy exchanging trail stories of our respective LT hikes from this year. Windtalker also presents a fantastic Native American Flute concert in

which he combines background synthesizer music: the extremely relaxing, ethereal sounds are like those found on his CD, thoroughly enjoyable. Hum promptly buys the CD.



**Windtalker Plays His Native American Flute
Sunset on Porch of Taft Lodge on Mt. Mansfield
(2009 LT Hike from Johnson to Jonesville)**

I purchase their recently completed book *The Walk: Reflections on Life and Faith from the Appalachian Trail* (<http://www.amazon.com/Walk-Reflections-Faith-Appalachian-Trail/dp/1449940773/>). This is an excellent read and totally inspirational book based on Windtalker and Mom's AT thru hiking experiences in 2006. They relate pathways through life to learning's and concepts acquired in thru hiking the AT, and tell many wonderful stories from the trail -- parables that make their book come alive -- especially their personal stories stemming from the trail *Family* they meet along the way. They speak vividly about *The Path*, how the trail's path twists, turns, challenges, confuses, frightens, and exhilarates, just as does life's path, and show the many parallels based on their hiking experiences. Regarding *Prayer* they make the analogy that the trail can be like a cathedral, where within its marvelous natural beauty one is inspired during periods of silence to think, reflect, and pray: pray good thoughts of loved ones here and gone before, count life's blessings, visualize the better person one wants to be, and give thanks for the love in our lives. Such reflections intermingled with the constant mental gyrations of planning next steps are again like parallel paths -- spiritual and physical paths -- being traced out together through the woods. They show us how wonderful is the *Simplicity* of the trail; the peace of being away from the daily harangue of (often bad) news inundating us each day; and how better to illustrate *Perseverance* than with hiking 2175 miles to conquer the AT. Their discussion of *Family and Community* kindly mentions meeting Ho and Hum:

"Even to this day, as we hike other trails, our trail family continues to grow. In 2009, as we hiked from Smugglers Notch to Jeffersonville on Vermont's Long Trail, we spent several wonderful days traveling with two brothers, "Ho" and "Hum." Thrown into each other's company by time, the weather, and a mutual passion to conquer the ruggedness of this oldest of long-distance trails, we shared each other's lives, assisted each other up steep and dangerously slippery precipices, and grew to become friends."

During that 5-day LT hike in August 2009, we learn that Windtalker and Mom are wonderful people who are especially great to hike with, as we recount in our trail journal (<http://www.longtrailhiking.info/webboard/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=167>; their trail journal at <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=319145>). They are mentors, teachers, helpers, and friends; they are clearly religious and spiritual people, with an infectious zest for life. Windtalker has Native

American roots and is an accomplished musician on the Native American flute, which we hear him play each night at sunset -- haunting flute music sounding like heaven in the wilderness, piercing the mountains, stars, and all that silence. This kind of mood is created in their book, which is liberally sprinkled with passages from the bible, from Native American wisdom, and from the pages of their AT journal.

It's getting late and we've pretty much decided that Zephyr, for whatever reason, couldn't make it to the festival, but just as we're about to leave, Zephyr and husband Ed show up. It turns out that they've enjoyed a full day of touring in the surrounding area and visited the Maple Museum in Pittsford. We have a great conversation; Ed is a really nice and very big guy. We talk again about next year's LT hike: maybe Zephyr will join us, maybe Ed will join us. But that's all left TBD and to be coordinated in future e-mail exchanges we'll have during 2011. We bid them farewell and head back to North Clarendon.

In the evening Hum enjoys his manhattan postponed from last night, and I feel compelled to join him as it's not nice to let someone drink a manhattan alone. Hey, what a guy I am, anything for my brother! We enjoy Lysie's delicious dinner, play some more of our favorite LP's from days long gone by, and plan our next day's hike to the summit of Mt. Abraham. The weather forecast is for perfect weather tomorrow, so we're enthusiastic about repeating this hike, which, last year, was a total wipe-out weather-wise: last year Mt. Abraham was completely socked in with fog and we endured severe thunder storms in the late afternoon.

Lincoln Gap to Mt. Abraham & Lincoln Peak – 8/8/10

Start Time: 9:00 AM, Lincoln Gap
End Time: 2:30 PM, Lincoln
Total Miles: 6.8 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1582' gain/1582' loss

Distances:
Lincoln Gap to Battell Shelter: 1.8 miles; 816' gain/0' loss
Battell Shelter to Mt. Abraham: 0.8 miles; 766' gain
Mt. Abraham to Lincoln Peak: 0.8 miles;

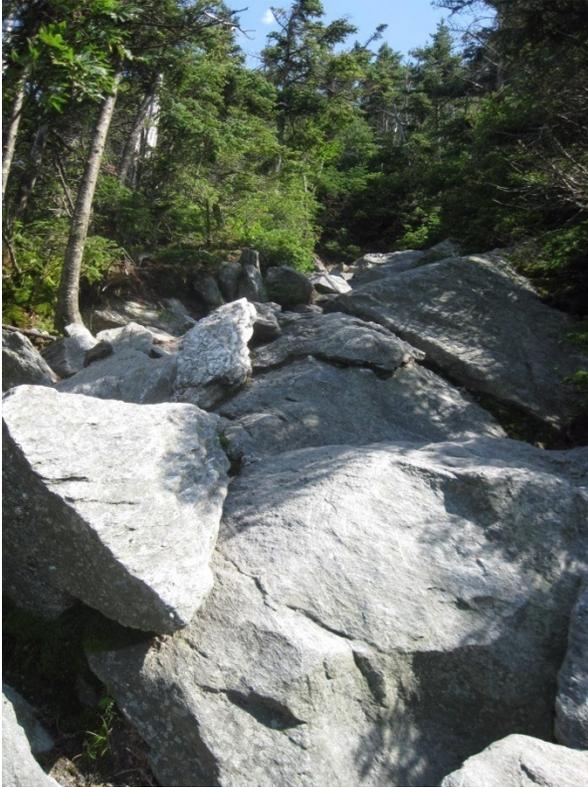
Pedometer readings:
Steps: 32,984
Calories: 869
Steps/minute: 101
MPH: 2.86 (1.25 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 5 hours, 26 minutes, 37 seconds
Miles: 15.61 miles (6.8 actual miles)

Up at 6 AM, we take off in Hum's car at 7 AM, and arrive at Lincoln Gap at about 9 AM. In the parking lot a lady in a car with Florida license plates pokes her head out of the window and asks if this is the trail head for Mt. Abraham, and we confirm that it is. We'll see her again, several times today..

We keep a really fast pace – almost 2 MPH -- up to Battell Shelter (1.8 miles) arriving at about 9:50 AM. It's an even faster pace than on the previous five days' hike, because of our lighter packs: Hum is carrying a really light day pack and I'm carrying my regular pack, but with many items removed that are not needed for a day hike, such as my tent, sleeping pad, etc. This is a mistake on my part, because even with these items removed, my pack is considerably heavier than need be, and it shows. On the way up to Battell Shelter, Hum is outpacing me and practically walking on my heels; I'm unable to stay comfortably ahead of him as I usually am.

We take a short rest at Battell Shelter and while there are passed by a couple of fast moving day hikers. We'll see a large number of day hikers today: this is a relatively short, highly rewarding day hike and extremely popular, especially on weekends during the summer when the weather is warm and clear, just like today.

It takes us about a half hour to climb the remaining 0.8 mile, 766' to the summit of Mt. Abraham (2.6 miles), arriving at about 10:30 AM. Somehow the climb seems longer than last year's ascent: false memories, last year the climb was slippery and treacherous, this year it is dry and safer. On the way up the views are spectacular; this is especially rewarding given last year's total wipe out weather-wise: no views whatsoever as the summit was completely shrouded in fog.



Ascending Mt. Abraham with Spectacular Views to the South

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. GMC's [Long Trail Guide](#) states that Mt. Abraham 'offers one of the best panoramas on the entire Long Trail' and today it certainly lives up to this accolade. From the summit the views are stunning in all directions, it is almost totally clear although haze is starting to creep in and gale force winds are starting to blow: Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks are in clear view to the West.

As we reach the summit we see a couple hugging, who, as it turns out, are celebrating their 23rd anniversary. They are from Middlebury and left their teenage children at home while they did their celebratory hike.

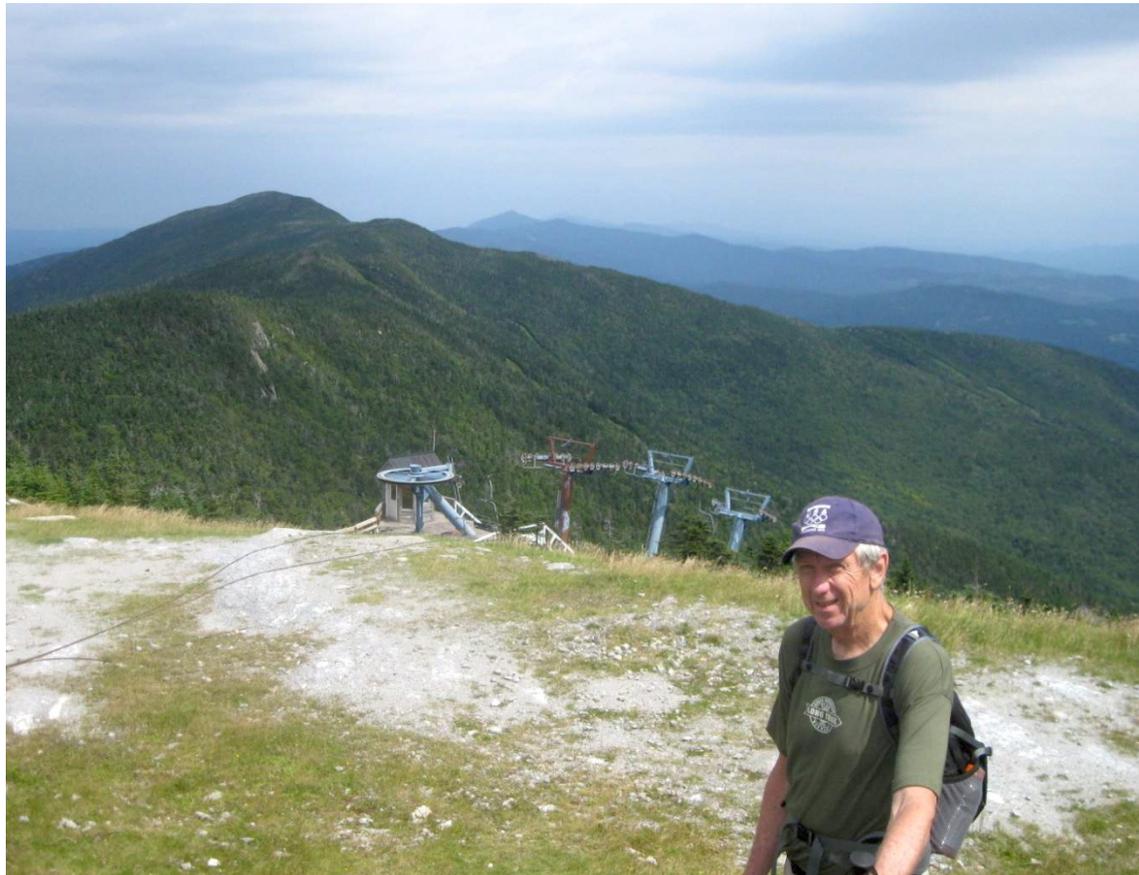
Florida girl, who we met in the parking lot, arrives next. She is hiking with a young India guy, who we presume she just met along the way. Florida girl lives part time near Hanover, NH, perhaps, I speculate, she's a Dartmouth professor. She kayaks in the Florida everglades and comments that the alligators and crocs stick more to the surface now, rather than swimming mostly underwater as in the past; she finds that much more scary. India guy is from Seattle, working for Microsoft perhaps; he's on the phone constantly, speaking Hindi with someone, a strange way to hike. They inquire about what lies beyond Mt. Abraham and decide they too will hike on to Lincoln Peak.



**Above the Tree-line on the Summit of Mt. Abraham (4006')
Stunning Views to the South, North, & West**

We reach Lincoln Peak (3.6 miles) at 11:30 AM, where we have our lunch. Lincoln Peak is one of the two mountains at the Sugarbush Ski Resort, the other being Mt. Ellen, also on the LT, which we hiked over last year. Florida girl and India guy are right behind us. A Sugarbush maintenance man arrives next, riding to the top on the Sugarbush chairlift. He grooms the Sugarbush trails in winter and maintains the chairlifts and other equipment the year round. He says this Lincoln Peak chairlift is their original, oldest chairlift from the late 1950s. He tells us that Mad River Glen is famous for their lack of grooming and really difficult moguls; they only groom one green trail from the summit.

It's very windy and cold on Lincoln Peak. I put on my sweatshirt, however, Hum has no room in his day pack for his coat or fleece, so he's very cold and takes shelter in the small hut at the top of the chairlift where we have our lunch.



**Summit of Lincoln Peak (3975') & Sugarbush Ski Resort
Views to the North of Mt. Ellen and Camel's Hump in Far Distance**

Understandably, Hum is anxious to start back. On the way we meet two cute kids and their shirtless dad on the Lincoln Peak viewing platform. Dad is ordering them, quite harshly and on the verge of being belligerent, to climb up some rafters above the railing and benches on the platform, and to hang there, so he can take their picture. It is so windy on the summit that the kids are really scared of being blown off, and they plead with their Dad to let them get down. But he -- a scrawny, shirtless, and ill kempt looking doofus -- orders them around like a drill sergeant and insists they stay up on their perch for a rather long time while he snaps several shots until, finally, he deems one of them a "keeper" and allows them to come down. It is still really cold and I kid shirtless doofus that without his shirt he must be really cold; to which he replies, 'who me, I'm just out of shape', acting like he's really tough: not.



**Lincoln Peak Viewing Platform on Very Windy Day
Against Vigorous Protests, the Two Young Kids are Forced by Drill Sergeant Dad
to Stand on Rafters on the Right for a Long Photo Session**

We pause once again on Mt. Abraham to behold the view and take a brief rest before our descent. On the way down we meet a huge number, perhaps more than 100, day hikers and find the parking lot overflowing at Lincoln Gap. This particular hike is very popular and on a clear, dry, weekend day such as today attracts hordes of day hikers. It detracts from the peacefulness of the day and the hike; there is just too much traffic. Fortunately we had a very peaceful and uncrowded hike in the morning on our ascent of this glorious mountain paradise.



**Pausing on Mt. Abraham on Return Hike
Lincoln Gap Parking Lot Jammed with Day Hikers' Cars**

We arrive back at the parking lot (6.8 miles) at about 2:30 PM and in North Clarendon before 4:00 PM. We enjoy a leisurely evening of swimming, guffawing, imbibing, and savoring Lynsie's delicious dinner.

Epilogue

Summary statistics for the 6-day hike:
Total Miles: 58.8 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 9,597' gain/7,276' loss
Total Steps: 201,458
Total Calories: 5300

Over breakfast on Monday we recount and reminisce on our epic journey and phenomenal life experience. Once again we were awestruck by another gorgeous stretch of the Long Trail that took us through peaceful forests and over the magnificent summits of Glastenbury, Stratton, Bromley, and Abraham mountains. We felt great satisfaction in overcoming and ultimately conquering the enormous physical challenges we encountered.

We were stupefied by several mysteries on the jaunt:

- Unsolved: what became of the Bennington co-ed, Paula Welden, who disappeared more than 60 years ago on the LT section we just hiked?
- Sad ending: what became of the young man, Danny Goldstein, who wandered off from Rutland, and was rumored to have hiked south at the same time and on the same LT section we just hiked north?
- Unsolved: where oh where did Runner (Sam Merriman) go after we last saw him descending Stratton Mountain presumably headed to Stratton Shelter?
- Unsolved: how did King Tut's 3000 year old sarcophagus and mummy make it onto the LT atop the north summit of Bromley Mountain?

We relished the brotherly banter, sharing, bonding and boisterous guffawing that broke the silence of the trail. We especially savored the company of the diverse, interesting, and friendly people we met along the way. We'll never forget the vivid interactions with Zhivago, Funk, Cool Shoes, Zephyr, Runner, DC, Bleemus, Canadian Geese, Ottawa Lou, PoiBoy, Black Eagle, and the whole gang, for their priceless individuality.

Many hikers have commented that life on the trail is a microcosm of 'real life', where the people you meet become your family. In their recently completed book, *The Walk: Reflections on Life and Faith from the Appalachian Trail* (<http://www.amazon.com/Walk-Reflections-Faith-Appalachian-Trail/dp/1449940773/>), Windtalker and Mom comment on that topic:

"We all began this miraculous journey as strangers, each one striving to make sense of the personal reason that brought each of us to this point in our lives. The enthusiasm for the adventure we shared was contagious and the adventure became the common ground on which relationships quickly grew. In a spiritual sense, we were all foreigners – struggling to get the lay of the land, to understand the language, to fit into the culture without losing our own sense of identity and to become productive members of the community. We soon learned that being a part of the trail family of thru-hikers was not only enjoyable, providing an added dimension to the adventure, but was essential in guaranteeing safety and success. Our communally shared dream of conquering the Appalachian Trail and standing triumphantly atop Mt. Katahdin was the glue that bound all of us together. Our mutual mission and vision overshadowed our differences in age, background, personality, ethnicity, education, financial status and marital status. We were all on the same path, following the same guidebook and with the same goal in mind."

Many hikers believe, as do we, that communing with this 'trail family' is the best part of the whole experience. Upon reaching the summit of Mt. Katahdin and completing 2,175 miles of the AT, as told in their trail journal (<http://trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=331195>), the Canadian Geese comment:

"We have been asked what part of the hike we enjoyed the most and we both agree. It was the people we met. The trail angels that helped us out and the other hikers we met."

We make plans for another Ho-Hum LT hike in August 2011, this time on the most northern section from the Canadian border south to Johnson and the most southern section from the Massachusetts border north to Bennington.

After breakfast we give Hum a big hug goodbye and bid our brother farewell. Our wonderful saga has come to an end, but what still remains -- our takeaways -- are the unbelievable Ho-Hum memories of this astonishing adventure. These we both take with us and happily keep.