

Ho & Hum's Long Trail Journal
LT Hike: Journey's End to Johnson, VT/Rt. 15 (August 7-13, 2011)
LT/AT Hike: Bennington, VT/Rt. 9 to Cheshire, MA/Rt. 8 (August 16-19, 2011)

Prologue – 8/7/11

My brother Hum (Bob Ash, trail name Hum) and I (Jerry Ash, trail name Ho) identify ourselves as “geezer hikers Ho & Hum”, because we are just that: Hum’s 71 and I’m 69, that is, geezers, and indeed we are quite Ho-Hum. A primary goal for me this year is to complete the Long Trail (LT), which requires hiking 53.7 miles from the Canadian Border to Johnson/Route 15, hiking 14 miles from Bennington/Route 9 to the VT/MA border, plus completing two short road walks (1.2 miles on West Settlement Road south of Johnson, VT, and 3.2 miles on Duxbury Road from the Duxbury road LT parking lot to Jonesville, VT).

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), completes a 14-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail (AT) near Harrisburg, PA, and takes several local hikes around his neighborhood carrying nearly his full pack weight. I do 86 miles in 13 training hikes, carrying about 35 pounds (I wrote a separate journal on these training hikes). I scope out places to stay in North Troy, because that will be a 3 hour drive and too far to make on the same day as a long hike on the LT. Jennifer Donley of the Green Mountain Club kindly provides several suggestions and I zero in on a good B&B, the North Troy Inn (<http://northtroyinn.com/>), and John Selmer (802-744-6319) who shuttles hikers in the area.

Hum and his wife Pat arrive in Vermont at about 12 noon, as always very near Hum’s predicted arrival time (Hum is uncannily accurate in predicting arrival times on the trail as well). Pat is going to spend the coming week visiting my wife Lyn while Hum and I hike. We have lunch, do last minute preparations (e.g., make PB&J sandwiches for lunch), make final checks on all our equipment, and weigh our full packs: we both weigh in at about 35 pounds each with 6 days of food packed away.

Hum and I leave at 1:30 PM for North Troy, VT, with a plan to stop in Johnson, VT, for me to complete the first 1.2-mile road walk on West Settlement Road.



Ho (Left) & Hum Ready to Leave for North Troy, VT to Begin 6-Day LT Hike

We arrive at the West Settlement Road parking lot at 3:45 PM and Hum drives to the Lamoille River suspension bridge parking lot while I complete the 1.2 mile road walk by 4:10 PM:

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 2,948

Calories: 77

Steps/minute: 103

MPH: 2.92 (2.52 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 28 minutes, 43 seconds

Miles: 1.39 miles (1.2 actual miles)

We continue on to North Troy and arrive at the North Troy Inn at 5:00 PM, one hour earlier than I had predicted. We meet Sam Leary, the proprietor, and also Ferguson T. Cat, the resident cat, and find the accommodations very satisfactory. Sam's husband Norm is mowing their very large 2 acre lawn at the moment (with a hand mower). Norm works in Williston as a graphic artist and has a 1.5 hour commute each way. There is no one else staying at the B&B at the moment, and for only \$32.70 per person we find this a more than wonderful beginning to our journey.

We discuss the schedule for the next day with Sam; I was of the impression after our phone conversation that she could provide breakfast and drive us to the Journey's End trailhead by 7:00 AM. However, I soon realize that this is clearly not the case: Sam states flatly that she is "not a morning person" and after some discussion we agree to have breakfast starting at 7:00 AM and have her drive us to the trailhead as soon after that as we could.

We walk around North Adams a bit, a typical small Vermont town (1 store, 1 restaurant, 1 gas station), and, back in our room, then partake of a couple of beers and delicious submarine sandwiches that Lyn has kindly provided. We watch 60 minutes and retire early in anticipation of the first big day of hiking ahead of us the next day.



North Troy Inn B&B

Journey's End Trailhead to Laura Woodward Shelter – 8/8/11

Start Time: 8:20 AM, Journey's End trailhead, North Adams

End Time: 4:30 PM, Laura Woodward Shelter

Total Miles: 10.2 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2660' gain/1950' loss

Distances:

Journey's End Road trailhead to Journey's End II Camp: 0.8 miles;

Journey's End II Camp to Shooting Star Shelter: 5.2 miles; 1540' gain/830' loss;

Shooting Star Shelter to Laura Woodward Shelter: 4.3 miles, 1120' gain/580' loss

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 37,414

Calories: 984

Steps/minute: 98

MPH: 2.78 (1.62 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 6 hours, 21 minutes, 49 seconds

Miles: 17.71 miles (10.3 actual miles)

As per our plan, we arise at 6:00 AM and sit down to breakfast at 7:00 AM in the beautiful Victorian dining room at the North Troy Inn. Sam Leary has prepared a delicious repast including eggs, breakfast meats, and trimmings; an assortment of muffins (including blueberry muffins), yogurt with cranberry (yummy), oranges and apples, coffee, and OJ. We have a nice conversation with Sam, who is an excellent Inn Keeper. Sam drives us to the Journey's End trailhead by 8:20 AM; she actually drives us further along the crude, narrow, bumpy, dirt access road than she usually does, as she says, "for young guys", since she obviously has observed that we are indeed not young guys at all but geezer hikers without a doubt.



Beginning our 6-Day LT Hike at Journey's End Trailhead

The trail rises gradually from the parking lot (1350', 0.0 miles) to Journey's End Camp (1720', 0.8 miles), which we pass just before 9:00 AM, and arrive at the LT trailhead (2100', 1.3 miles), Northern Terminus of the Long Trail, on the US-Canadian border, at about 9:15 AM.



Northern Terminus of the Long Trail at the US-Canadian Border

The climbs to the summits of Carleton Mt. (2670', 2.7 miles) and then Burnt Mt. (2608', 4.1 miles) are not too arduous, however, after summiting Burnt Mt. we're quite happy to hike downhill for a while to Shooting

Star Shelter (2260', 6.7 miles), arriving there just after 12 Noon, where we take a short 15-minute break for lunch. We try to find the water source at the shelter, which the Long Trail Guide describes as "a shallow well with a hand pump, located on a short spur leading west off the LT." We find the spur, but after walking in quite a distance on the spur we find no hand pump and give up. We later learn that there is no hand pump; rather there is a rather deep well where no water currently can be obtained due to lack of rain. Indeed, we find that water on this section of the LT is nonexistent.

We spend no further time at Shooting Star Shelter knowing that we have a 2.4 mile, 1200' climb to the summit of Doll Peak ahead of us. Indeed, Doll Peak is a bear of a climb: it is extremely steep in many places (i.e., straight up), and incredibly rugged, representing, in my opinion, some of the hardest hiking on the LT. This would be just the beginning of many such incredibly difficult peaks, all rating at least a 15 out of 10 in difficulty, over the next 6 days. Reaching the Doll Peak summit (3409', 9.1 miles) by 3:50 PM, after a 3 ½ hour climb, leaves us both exhausted and somewhat dehydrated, especially Hum:



Hum is Pooped after Summiting Doll Peak

After summiting Doll Peak, we're happy again that we have another rare descent (for this mostly uphill day anyway) as the final leg of today's journey to Laura Woodward Shelter (2800', 10.3 miles), arriving at 4:40 PM. Initially we find ourselves alone in the shelter after having met no one this day on the LT. There is a good spring near the shelter where we are delighted to wash up and have a really good drink, after having essentially no available water the whole day. This is a big problem: we both suffer a bit of dehydration on this part of the LT, and this would especially take a toll on Hum's stamina in coming days.

We just relax until dinner and read the shelter's journal, where Hum makes the first entry for the geezer hikers on this adventure:

"8/8/11: The hiking geezers are on the trail again, watch out!!! Ho (age 69) and Hum (age 71) started our 3rd year of hiking the Long Trail. Started at Journey's End this morning and will finish in Johnson on Saturday. Plan to do the southern end of the LT next week."

As is our custom, we wait until 6:00 PM to have our dinner: indeed this is one of the highlights of the day, that is, the opening of "Chez Humberto's Gourmet Restaurant". Hum splurges by consuming one of his very favorite Mountain House meals, which, according to the label "serves two", but Hum ignores that advice and consumes the entire package, as he does every night in fact. I warn Hum that such hoggerly is running up his hiking tab, but Hum retorts that daughter Laurie came to the rescue and generously

funded these meals when Hum's miserly side first rejected their purchase. I have tuna and pasta, which is one of my favorite meals as well.



Laura Woodward Shelter Hum Prepares to Open “Chez Humberto’s Gourmet Restaurant”

At around 6:15 PM, while we’re still finishing dinner, a father, Rich Maynes (56), and his two sons, Jeff Maynes (28) and Matt Maynes (25), arrive and immediately seek out a tent site, leaving us still as the only ones residing in the shelter. They are exhausted and happy to rest, as are we, and immediately comment on what an incredibly arduous climb it was up Doll Peak. We agree that no truer words were ever spoken. Rich is carrying a really heavily loaded pack, maybe 50+ pounds; he says that his tent alone weights 6 pounds, and he’s carrying all manner of pots, pans, Coleman stove, and other equipment.

Rich (“Unity Man”) is from Unity, NH; he works for Ing and recently retired from Hartford Insurance after a long career. He graduated from the University of Connecticut and maintains a strong interest in the NCAA basketball tournament each year, especially when UConn wins. Jeff (“Baltimore Phil”, <http://www.jeffmaynes.com/>) is married and lives in Sparks, MD, not far from Timonium, MD where Hum lives. He is completing his PhD in Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University and is also an instructor at Gettysburg College (from which he received his BA), where he teaches Logic, Ethics, Critical Thinking, and Contemporary Issues (<http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/philosophy/faculty/>). Matt (“Radio”) graduated from Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY, with a degree in Communications. He works in theater arts and also leads a rock band called “Johnny Mainstream” (<http://johnnymainstream.com/>). He writes original music, plays lead guitar and is lead singer; he and his band have produced MP3 Media available for sale on his website and on Amazon.com. Matt is planning to thru hike the whole LT whereas Rich and Jeff will return home after 5 days of hiking.

We have an excellent conversation with these guys; they share their experiences on many previous outings together such as a kayak trip down the Connecticut River, where Rich relates an interesting and amusing story of losing his camera on the Connecticut River jaunt when they dared to go over a waterfall in their kayaks. I’m very interested in their stories of hiking in the North Cascades, WA, especially since I’m planning to also hike in the Cascades on Lyn’s and my forthcoming RV trip to the west coast in the fall. Happily it looks like we’ll be staying at the same shelters with these guys in the coming days: good company.



L. to R.: “Baltimore Phil”, “Radio”, “Unity Man” (Jeff, Matt, & Rich Maynes)

The three-some pitch their tents and soon set out to enjoy an elaborate dinner. They bring their own freeze dried food for the main dinner, and then enjoy hot tea and cider. After dinner they have an organized dishwashing ‘assembly line’ routine, where each person knows exactly what to do, and they get all the work done very efficiently.

We call Lyn and Pat after dinner; for once the cell service is good here. I ask Lyn “what happened in the stock market today?”: it is down more than 500 points after the downgrade of the US credit rating. Everyone in camp seems to overhear that discussion and all groan loudly, wishing I hadn’t asked... To my chagrin, I found today that I still have the room key to the North Troy Inn, and ask Lyn to call Sam Leary to let her know I’ll return it on Saturday.

We retire as usual at dusk (around 8:30 PM), while Rich, Jeff, and Matt enjoy a unique and sometimes uproarious card game (forgot the name of the game) in the light of their tent. All is quiet by about 9:10 PM.

Laura Woodward Shelter to Hazen’s Notch Camp – 8/9/11

Start Time: 6:40 AM, Laura Woodward Shelter
End Time: 4:00 PM, Hazen’s Notch Camp
Total Miles: 9.6 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2970’ gain/3730’ loss

Distances:

Laura Woodward Shelter to Jay Camp: 3.1 miles; 1060’ gain/1620’ loss
Jay Camp to Hazen’s Notch Camp: 5.4 miles; 1910’ gain/2110’ loss
Spur to Hazen’s Notch Camp: 0.1 mile
Hike to water source on LT and return: 1.0 mile

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 41,911

Calories: 1102

Steps/minute: 95

MPH: 2.69 (1.30 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 7 hours, 21 minutes, 08 seconds

Miles: 19.84 miles (9.6 actual miles)

We arise at first light, about 5:00 AM, as is our custom on these backpacking hikes. We are reasonably efficient in making breakfast, packing up, and getting off on the day's adventure by 6:40 AM. We're not enthusiastic about the immediate horrendous climb we face: 1000+ feet straight up over 1.5 miles to the summit of Jay Peak, and oddly this type of right-out-of-the-box big climb will happen several times again in coming days. It takes a little while for our bodies to warm up and adjust to the huge physical stress this engenders, but soon the heart is racing, the lungs are panting, and the blood is flowing hotly, and we're fully in gear...

We get glimpses of the Jay Peak summit as we climb – there is a large building with antennas on top – and sometimes the trail is a bit hard to follow, especially when it crosses and/or follows the ski trails. Reference to the Long Trail Guide is most helpful in making the correct turns and helps keep us on track on the LT with nary a wrong turn.



Climbing Jay Peak with Summit in View

We stop frequently on the ascent, observing our normal protocol of stopping every half hour for a water break and brief rest. It is a gorgeous day for hiking, with nice temperatures, dry weather, and very clear views. However, we are definitely feeling the aftermath of yesterday's extremely tough hike and the partial dehydration we suffered from lack of water along the way. This is especially being felt by Hum. The final push to the summit is on a really steep ski trail; just take a look at Hum making this final push to feel how arduous this is:



Hum Makes Final Push to the Summit of Jay Peak

We reach the summit of Jay Peak (3858', 1.5 miles) just after 8:00 AM. It is really beautiful on top and given the early hour, we have the summit entirely to ourselves (we will learn on our decent that many day hikers are on their way up Jay Peak but we are ahead of them). The summit is interesting to explore, and we spend some time taking in the excellent views: Mt. Mansfield and Camel's Hump are readily visible to the south, as is Lake Champlain to the west and the White Mountains to the east in New Hampshire. We take several pictures and note the gravesite of Alan Jones and the memorial bench dedicated to Dick Meunier, both on the summit ridge of Jay Peak.



On the Summit of Jay Peak



**Looking South from the Summit of Jay Peak
Mt. Mansfield (Left) & Camel's Hump (Center) in View on the Distant Horizon**

We begin our descent off Jay Peak at about 8:30 AM and right away we lose the trail. We immediately realize this when we come to a sheer cliff, clearly with no way down. Quick reference to the Long Trail Guide gets us back on track, as we then realize that we missed a right turn about 50 feet north of the cliff. On rocky summits, such as on Jay Peak, the white blazes painted on the rocks are sometimes hard to spot, since they are sometimes worn and faded after years of severe weather wearing them down.

We're soon back on our way down off the Jay Peak summit ridge, below which we cross a ski trail and then on the other side of the ski trail negotiate our way over some rather formidable water pipes that supply the Jay Peak snow making machines. The trail down is rocky and we take it slow, always stepping very carefully to avoid any mishaps for one false step can end the hike for good, as, sadly, many an LT hiker has found out. Along the way we meet about 20 day hikers making their way up to Jay Peak. This seems like a rather large number of day hikers, but on this beautiful day to scale this summit it is quite understandable.

As we press on, Hum is becoming more and more pooped and his pace slows way down, even though we are on a down slope, where we usually make faster progress than on the up slope. I have longer and longer waits for Hum to catch up, and I'm getting increasingly concerned for Hum's physical condition. Then Hum pretty much completely "poops out" at Jay Pass, where the LT crosses VT Route 242, 1.7 miles down from Jay Peak, and he says his legs are "failing" him and he feels excessively tired and "completely out of gas". On our rest at Jay Pass I tell Hum that we're going to have to consider aborting our hike: there are bad signs now regarding his health and risking one's health definitely isn't worth it. I say we could abort the hike now since we're currently at a road crossing where we can hitchhike back to North Troy and won't have another such opportunity for two more days. Hum says that he wants to go on for now, but we'll have to reevaluate when get to VT Route 58 at Hazen's North, which we will reach in two days.

We attribute Hum's physical condition to the dehydration we suffered on the previous day. Dehydration can be very debilitating physically, causing exhaustion, cramps, and all kinds of other physical problems. If taken to the extreme, of course, it can even be deadly. Today matters will get even worse regarding

lack of water along the route and as a result we'll suffer even worse dehydration. Unfortunately, on our way down from Jay Peak to Jay Pass, we skip the Jay Loop trail to Jay Camp, and in retrospect this is a big mistake because water is available there for us to refill our water bottles. Our rationale for skipping Jay Camp is that it is still early in the day and we have not yet drank that much water and assume, very mistakenly, that there will be other opportunities to refill our water bottles before we reach our destination at Hazen's Notch Camp. Wrong: there are not any other opportunities. Jay Camp is the only such opportunity, and in this most northern region of the LT, there appears to be a significant drought at this time and no water available anywhere along the LT.

To make matters worse on the dehydration front, after we cross Jay Pass, we meet several thru hikers who advise us that there is no water before reaching Hazen's Notch Camp. Furthermore, they say that the "spring" at Hazen's Notch Camp – the normal water source -- is dry, but that there is a small source of water about 0.2 miles (10 minutes) south of the Hazen's Notch Camp spur trail. This turns out to be good information. We have learned to always ask other hikers about the availability of water.

This experience with dehydration over the past two days teaches us a good lesson and makes us much more cautious in the future about taking advantage of available water to refill our water bottles. While it takes a lot of time, effort, and delay to drop our packs, get out the water filter, and pump for quite a few minutes to refill our bottles, it is far, far better to have ample water available on such an exhausting hike than to risk dehydration ever again. It is much better to err on the side of stopping perhaps too many times for water than to run out.

I note from the Long Trail Guide that we'll be passing "Chet's Lookout" along the 5.3 mile section from Jay Pass to Hazen's Notch Camp, and I advise Hum that we definitely don't want to miss it! I remind him that we have missed some pretty great lookouts and views in the past – perhaps the worst of which was missing Prospect Rock overlooking the town of Manchester, which is reportedly a really great view, on last year's LT hike.

Maybe I've become a bit obsessed with beautiful views on our hike now, but to me these are some of the big rewards of hiking and for sure I don't want to miss any more views. Hum kids me a little about this obsession for views: he likes the views, too, but maybe not with quite as much enthusiasm as I've developed for them. Surprisingly, and perhaps it's a big "ha ha" for Hum, the view from "Chet's Lookout" is non-existent. It seems that over the years the trees have grown up to completely obscure any view that surely existed in the past. On hearing this news, Hum passes on climbing the short ladder to ascend to "Chet's Lookout", and chuckles under his breath I suspect.



"Chet's Lookout" and "View" from the Top

The ascents up Gilpin Mt. (2920', 4.0 miles), Domey's Dome (2880', 5.0 miles), and finally Buchanan Mt. (2940', 6.2 miles) are increasingly difficult with rugged Buchanan Mt., again rating a 15 out of 10 in difficulty, leaving us both exhausted, especially Hum.

We arrive at Hazen's Notch Camp (2040', 8.6 miles) at 4:00 PM, very happy to finally have a good rest. The "spring" on the spur to the camp is indeed dry, as reported by the other hikers we met earlier in the day. We poke around camp for quite some time, snacking a bit, enjoying the long range views from the shelter, and reading the journal, and then make our way back to the LT and head south in search of the water source reported by the other hikers. We find some pretty dismal puddles that might suffice in a bind, but I continue on to find what is probably the "stream" reported by the other hikers earlier in the day. I walk back to Hum's location, report my findings, and we both return to the pretty good water source to refill our water bottles.



Hazen's Notch Camp & Hum Contemplating the Exhausting Hike Today

On our return to the shelter we find Baltimore Phil, who had arrived along with Unity Man and Radio at about 5:45 PM; he is filling their water bottles from one of the lesser sources we passed up. We tell him about our discovery further south but he is content with the water source he has already found.

Unity Man, Baltimore Phil, and Radio again opt to pitch their tents rather than stay in the shelter tonight. They tell us that they got a rather late start from Laura Woodward shelter at about 9:15 AM and apparently veered off the LT going up Jay Peak; instead they followed the Jay Peak ski trails to the summit. I recall, when crossing the ski trails earlier today, that it is rather easy to miss one of the re-entry's of the LT back into the woods. That's apparently what happened to them and it almost happened to us as well, until we consulted the trusty Long Trail Guide to find our way and stay on the LT. Radio, however, is a bit concerned that he didn't completely follow the LT up Jay Peak, which may be necessary to receive recognition from the Green Mountain Club for completing the LT end-to-end.

We enjoy our dinner, again starting promptly at 6:00 PM, and enjoy a good conversation with our 3 hiking companions after dinner. There is no cell service from here, which we find to be the norm on the LT, so the girls will have to wait to hear from us.

This time I make our daily entry into the journal:

"8/9/11 Brothers Ho & Hum 'geezer hikers' (69, 71 resp.) checking in for the night after arduous 10 hr. hike from Laura Woodward shelter. We're pretty slow, but steady, haven't won any races yet but happy with our lot. Very happy for pretty good water source in stream about 10 min. walk south on LT. Tillotson Camp tomorrow. Nice visit with Unity Man, Baltimore Phil and Radio.

*Peace, Ho & Hum
(We are quite Ho-Hum)*

P.S. Jay Peak spectacular this morning, 360° views to ∞."

Hazen's Notch Camp to Tillotson Camp – 8/10/11

Start Time: 7:15 AM, Hazen's Notch Camp
End Time: 3:00 PM, Tillotson Camp
Total Miles: 6.5 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2100' gain/1580' loss

Distances:

Hazen's Notch Camp to Tillotson Camp: 6.1 miles; 2100' gain/1580' loss

Spur to Haystack Mt. summit & return: 0.4 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 29,556

Calories: 777

Steps/minute: 88

MPH: 2.51 (1.17 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 5 hours, 33 minutes, 41 seconds

Miles: 13.99 miles (6.5 actual miles)

We're up again at 5:00 AM, first light, as usual, after a heavy rain pounded the shelter overnight. All is well with the 3 guys in tents; their tents hold up just fine in the downpour. The rain continues while we eat breakfast and pack, but, no problem, there is a table and plenty of room inside the shelter to finish our early morning chores and stay dry. We're off at 7:15 AM when, luckily, the rain stops.

We find that the heavy overnight rain has now filled the stream/spring on the spur to the camp, so we opt to fill our water bottles there rather than at the small stream we used the night before.

When we reach unpaved VT Route 58 at Hazen's Notch (1780', 1.5 miles), after a mostly downhill hike this morning, I again raise the issue of whether or not we should abort the hike and hitchhike back to North Troy. Hum won't hear of it; he says he's feeling a lot better and more energetic after rehydrating somewhat and a good rest last night. We press on.

I am deeply chagrined to find out that my camera batteries and 2 sets of backups are all, apparently, dead! Bummer! After much trying I can't get my camera back on-line, so Hum kindly offers to let me use his camera as the primary.

The climb up Haystack Mt. is, once again, extremely arduous – another 15 out of 10 in difficulty. I take the short 0.2 mile spur to the summit to snap a few pictures, where the long distance views are clear and beautiful this morning. Mt. Mansfield and Camel's Hump are clear on the horizon and Belvidere fire tower, which we'll climb tomorrow, also comes into view in the distance. The cell service is OK from here and we call the girls to report our status and to check in on their activities.

The hike down Haystack Mt. is treacherous, very slippery, and even with the normal great care on my footing, which is always the case; I slip and fall 3 times, one time bruising my shin. Hum, on the other hand, loses his footing on a slippery ledge, slides down the ledge and by some miracle gets caught by a log on the edge. Had the log not been there, Hum would have fallen another 30 feet or more over the edge. Providence.

The hike up and over Tillotson Peak (2980', 5.5 miles) is extremely steep – in fact, the steepest climb so far – and on the way down we also encounter our longest wet slippery ledge (actually a cliff), which we negotiate mostly on our bottoms.



**View from the Summit of Haystack Mountain
Mt. Mansfield (Left) and Camel's Hump (Center) Visible on the Horizon**

We arrive at Tillotson Camp at about 3:00 PM, where we find a very nice shelter with a great 'picture window' out the front that affords really pretty, long range views. It is a really beautiful, clear day and there are even some huge wind turbines visible on the distant ridge. It is too soon for the Lowell wind turbines to be up and running, so I'm wondering where these wind turbines are located?



Tillotson Camp & Beautiful View out the "Picture Window"

Our 3 hiking friends arrive at 4:00 PM, and this time they decide to stay in the shelter rather than tent tonight. There is room for 8 in the shelter: Unity Man (Rich) takes the double bunk above Hum (he doesn't want to sleep next to anyone), while Baltimore Phil (Jeff) and Radio (Matt) will sleep in the double bunk above me. Accordingly, they move their gear into the shelter, and all is fine.

That is, all is fine with that plan until, not long after, a woman and her 14-year-old daughter poke their heads into the shelter. 'Uh oh', I think to myself. Right away the woman, whose voice sounds amazingly like Donald Duck (hence we assign her "Ms. DD" as her trail name), inquires, in perfect duck speak, "how many spaces are there?" and then quickly concludes "oh, there's room for three", in effect announcing to the 5 of us already in the shelter that 'we are now going to disrupt everything!'

Right after that, Ms. DD's husband arrives with their 10-year-old daughter, and, realizing that there is only space for 3 of them in the shelter, he immediately announces "I'll sleep on the floor!" So, we realize, this family of 4 is going to occupy the 3 sleeping spaces remaining in the shelter and, even worse, he plans to sleep on the floor, when there is clearly no room for anyone to sleep on the floor without completely blocking the door and disrupting/jeopardizing everyone else. Hum immediately pushes back hard on Mr. Obnoxious Jackass (hence we assign him "Mr. OJ" as his trail name, for we 5 already know he's a complete OJ) and says "There's no room to sleep on the floor. We're all going to have to trip over you in the dark? No way, that's a little much!" But Mr. OJ is not about to give in and shoots back "it's done all the time".

Obviously this family, after arriving last with not enough room in the shelter to accommodate them, should pitch their tent. First come, first served, is the rule on the LT and hiking trails everywhere, and virtually all hikers observe that rule. But that's not what Mr. OJ and Ms. DD are going to do: they are going to be extremely rude and obnoxious. They are going to disrupt everyone else who has arrived there ahead of them. This kind of behavior, thank goodness, is unknown to us in our experience on the LT. In fact, in 3 years of hiking on the LT, we have never encountered such rude and thoroughly despicable behavior.

Given the new situation, Rich has already decided he's not sleeping next to anyone and quickly concludes the three of them will have to tent this night after all. So they now have to remove all their gear from their already established sleeping quarters in the shelter, pitch their tents, and then move all their gear into their tents. For all this disruption, neither Mr. OJ nor Ms. DD utters a word of thanks. They merely take up the two top double bunks above Hum and me. Unbelievable! As we will find out in the morning, Mr. OJ is not done with his obnoxious behavior.

Tillotson Camp to Spruce Ledge Camp – 8/11/11

Start Time: 6:15 AM, Tillotson Camp
End Time: 1:30 PM, Spruce Ledge Camp
Total Miles: 9.2 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1080' gain/2125' loss

Distances:

Tillotson Camp to Spruce Ledge Camp: 8.4 miles; 1080' gain/2125' loss
Spur to Belvidere Mt. Fire Tower & Return: 0.4 miles
Spur to Tillotson Camp: 0.2 miles
Spur to Spruce Ledge Camp: 0.2 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 32,034
Calories: 843
Steps/minute: 89
MPH: 2.53 (1.54 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 5 hours, 59 minutes, 39 seconds
Miles: 15.16 miles (9.2 actual miles)

We arise again at 5:00 AM and are extremely quiet in getting our breakfast and packing up, for Mr. OJ and family are still sound asleep in the upper bunks. This is usually the scene at the shelter in the early morning: we are getting ready to move out as others are still sleeping, we are quiet, no problem. But just as we are about to leave, at 6:15 AM, Mr. OJ appears outside and Hum relates the usual line that we hope we did not disturb them. This always bounces off normal hikers, but Mr. OJ says "most hikers take it outside". Right, we're going to take everything outside the shelter, where there is no picnic table to eat at or pack up on, and have breakfast and drag our gear all over the ground on the rocks and dirt. Certainly this is reasonable in Mr. OJ's opinion. What a complete and utter OJ! Unbelievable.

We pass a nice beaver dam, house, and pond early on and have a pretty easy climb to the Belvidere Mt. summit (3360', 3.0 miles), which is 0.2 miles off the LT on the Forester's Trail, and arrive there at about

8:30 AM. There is a fire tower on the summit affording a beautiful 360° view, with Mt. Mansfield and Camel's Hump clearly in the view.

There is an old abandoned asbestos mine on Belvidere Mt., and a huge pile of asbestos dregs from the mine is prominent on the slope of the mountain. This aspect of Belvidere Mt. is of constant concern to the residents in the area, a fact that is often quoted in news stories in the Rutland Herald. There is a fierce wind that adds a bit of bitterness to the already cold morning air; a rain cloud is moving in quickly and it will soon rain. We call the girls but the cell service is not reliable and we are cut off after a bit and can't reconnect.



**Forester's Trail to Belvidere Mt. Summit; View from the Summit;
Belvidere Mt. Fire Tower; Radio & Baltimore Phil Enjoy the View from Top of Tower**

After about 30 minutes on the summit we begin our descent. The Forester's Trail back down to the LT seems longer than on the way up, and we briefly think we may be off track: luckily we are not. It starts to rain on our way down Belvidere Mt. and we meet an 'older' woman day hiker making her way up to the fire tower; we chat for a bit and she inquires as to the view and weather on the summit. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black; I imagine that the 'older' woman day hiker wrote in her journal:

"Met two geezer hikers coming down from Belvidere Mt. summit; they reported great views from the top. Felt a bit sorry for them, so wrinkled and gnarled they were, hobbling along so slow, my they were old."

The bottom of Belvidere Mt. is very easy hiking: mostly on an old road; it's flat and fast all the way to VT Route 118 at Eden Crossing (1320', 5.4 miles). We recall an entry in the journal last night at Hazen's Notch Camp that humorously referred to Mt. Belvidere as "Mt. TRex" and its "reputation as the worst hike on the LT." Not to us: we agree that Doll Peak, Jay Peak, Haystack Mt., and Tillotson Peak are all much harder, all a 15 out of 10 in difficulty.

We meet a thru hiker (no trail name) as we cross VT Route 118, who advises us that Spruce Ledge Camp is a really nice shelter with a great view and a fine water source. Good news! He also advises us that there is another thru hiker taking a zero day at the camp.

As we hike past Route 118 toward Rittenhouse Lookout, we pass 3 women day hikers who look like they're out for a stroll in the park rather than taking a hike on the LT. They carry no backpacks and have no trail map, but say they're going to Devil's Gulch, a 2.6 mile hike from Route 118. They inquire as to where the trail went, and when we say it goes all the way to Massachusetts they look shocked! They inquire about the distance to Devil's Gulch and how we would suggest that they return to Route 118 after exploring Devil's Gulch? Hum checks his map, gives them the distance to Devil's Gulch, and advises them that they could return to Route 118 on the "Big Muddy Trail" rather than the LT, but he actually means the "Babcock Trail", which passes by "Big Muddy" Pond. As we pass them by, we wish them well and hope all will be OK for them, especially regarding the navigation.

Our next brief stop is Rittenhouse Lookout (1300', 7.1 miles), a rocky cliff that affords a nice view of Rittenhouse Pond and the valley to the south. After descending a long set of stone stairs down from the lookout, we meet a bearded thru hiker and chat a bit. He advises that Corliss Shelter is a "super shelter" and we should go there today if we can (not possible, too far). When I ask his trail name he says an unusual name: I hear "In and Out", Hum hears "On and Off". We ask him to repeat that a couple of times, but give up after not getting it. We later read his entries in trail journals that his trail name is "Annunak". Regarding the meaning and origin of his trail name, he says "it's a long story". We speculate from his looks and behavior that he is a modern day hippie: seeing his "Peace & Love" journal entries later on tends to prove us right. A search on-line gives no insight into what "Annunak" might actually mean.

Devil's Gulch (1260', 8.0 miles) has very interesting geology, with very high vertical walls on either side of the gulch and an amazingly challenging rock scramble up through the bottom. It is also somewhat dangerous as one can easily slip off some of the high boulders and fall a long way down onto more jagged rocks. Ominously, Hum's pack at this point is totally out of adjustment and, in spite of repeated urging on my part, he rather adamantly refuses to adjust it for now, but, fortunately, he gets it properly adjusted days later (but not now). His pack swings around wildly as he scales the big boulders, and this swinging weight on his back nearly catapults him off the top of several of the high boulders, very much like what happened when he scaled the Mt. Mansfield high cliffs two years ago with a much older (Civil War era :-)) pack that also swung around wildly.



**Devil's Gulch: Entrance; Rock Scramble; Natural Tunnel;
Negotiating the Rocks; High Steep Walls**

We arrive at Spruce Ledge Camp at 1:30 PM: again we're the first to arrive and are delighted with the facilities in the camp. It is a large, enclosed, shelter; there is a separate outside, covered, picnic table; and the awesome view from Devil's Perch Outlook encompasses Rittenhouse Pond, Belvidere Mountain, and the huge 'mini-mountain' of asbestos mine dregs. I quickly discover that Devil's Perch Outlook sits atop a dramatic vertical cliff, which surrounds 3 sides of the outlook. There is no protection and no warning signs, and the edge of the cliff is disguised, in fact, by weeds that an unaware person could inadvertently step on and fall off the cliff! It is dangerous I think and feel I need to warn others of that fact. So I warn Hum and everyone else as they arrive: "watch out for the hidden edge to the cliff on the lookout over there".



**Devil's Perch Outlook with Cliff on 3 Sides
Cliff Edge at Weeds Growing In Front of & Behind Bench
'Is There Rock Underneath the Dirt' We Wonder?**



**View From Devil's Perch Outlook:
Rittenhouse Pond Bottom Right; Belvidere Mt. & (White) Asbestos Dregs Pile on Horizon**

Before others arrive, two day hikers wander by. We chat awhile and one of them comments that "I've not been here since I was 8 years old." They head over toward the Devil's Perch Outlook (I warn them about the cliff) but then we never see them again. This is strange because there really is no way back to the LT where we won't see them pass by again. Where the day hikers disappeared to is a big mystery.

Ms. DD and their 14-year-old daughter arrive at 3:00 PM, Rich, Jeff, and Matt arrive at 3:30 PM, but Mr. OJ and their 10-year-old daughter don't arrive until 5:30 PM. Given that long delay, Ms. DD gets worried so she and the older daughter go back in search of the other two. It seems that the 10-year-old had a lot of trouble getting over the rock scramble in Devil's Gulch. This is not at all surprising: some of the boulders in Devil's Gulch are much bigger than she is, so she would have to be lifted and carried over them. Fortunately she makes it OK.



**Spruce Ledge Camp
Hum, with Food-Bag in Hand, Prepares to Open
“Chez Humberto Restaurant” at the Covered Picnic Table**

We visit with Ted (no trail name) who is the thru hiker taking a zero day; he has his tent pitched not far from the covered picnic table. He is from Poughkeepsie, NY, and is thru hiking the LT southbound and continuing on the AT into New York State. As I usually do, I inquire about how he likes his tent, how waterproof it is, etc. He gives a glowing recommendation for the [“Sierra Designs Clip Flashlight 2”](#), says it's very lightweight (about 2.8 pounds) and completely waterproof, which is my primary requirement given the very bad experience I had with my badly leaking Wenzel tent on last year's LT backpacking trip. (I subsequently buy the Sierra Designs tent and suggest that Lyn give it to me for Christmas :-)

We and our 3 hiking friends sit down for dinner at the covered picnic table. Mr. OJ is unwelcome and he knows it, besides, there is no room for 4 more at the picnic table so they eat at the table inside the shelter. Perhaps as a peace offering, Mr. OJ offers some soup with meat in it, and Matt takes him up on his offer. Mr. OJ says he's a vegetarian and therefore doesn't want the soup; quite why he brought the soup in the first place is a mystery. We hope that Ted joins us, but he doesn't: strangely, he spends almost his whole time at Spruce Ledge Camp inside his very small tent, which couldn't be all that comfortable; very odd.

Unity Man, Baltimore Phil, and Radio take up residence again in their tents, while Mr. OJ and family take the top bunks in the shelter. A bearded hiker, who sleeps only under a tarp, joins the Spruce Ledge Camp crowd as well.

Spruce Peak Camp to Corliss Camp – 8/12/11

Start Time: 7:05 AM, Spruce Peak Camp
End Time: 12:30 PM, Corliss Camp
Total Miles: 6.8 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1600' gain/1215'

Distances:

Spruce Ledge Camp to Corliss Camp: 6.6 miles; 1600' gain/1215' loss
Spur to Spruce Ledge Camp: 0.2 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 26,941
Calories: 708
Steps/minute: 97
MPH: 2.77 (1.48 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 4 hours, 35 minutes, 35 seconds
Miles: 12.75 miles (6.8 actual miles)

We're up at 5:30 AM, having overslept after tossing and turning all night. But after 4 days of practice, we're getting the knack of eating breakfast and packing up quickly and get off just a little after 7:00 AM, which is about our usual departure time. The bearded hiker who slept only under a tarp is off by 6:30 AM. He says it's a 'late start' for him and has 'no particular destination'; he speeds away, a fast hiker it appears.

Once again, the very first thing we face in the morning is an immediate steep climb, 700', up Bowen Mt. (2290', 2.6 miles), but after our bodies get 'warmed up', it's not all that bad compared to the horrendous climbs we conquered over the past 4 days. After Bowen we face an additional 500' climb to the summit of Butternut Mt, (2715', 5.6 miles). Hum scales these like a mountain goat and is feeling a lot more agile now after a tough first 2 days of hiking and dehydration.



**Hum the Mountain Goat, Feeling a Lot More Agile & Energetic,
Summits Bowen Mountain (2290') & Then Butternut Mountain (2715')**

In between the two peaks I suddenly encounter a bear right on the LT; it's only about 20 feet in front of me when it finally hears me and runs madly into the bush, then stops, and does a low growl for quite some time. It is still growling by the time Hum catches up to me and Hum agrees that this is indeed a bear growl.

Along the way we meet some other hikers. First we meet Justin (23, no trail name) from Colchester, VT, who is hiking from Johnson, Route 15, to Route 118, about 21 miles. Last night he was alone at Corliss Camp, says it's a really nice shelter and advises us that there is a good water source (a spring). I inquire about the damage to the Burlington bike path from the severe spring flooding of Lake Champlain. The bike path runs through Colchester and onto a multi-mile causeway into Lake Champlain; it's a great bike ride that I've done many times. Sadly, Justin reports that the flood destroyed the bike path and causeway, but it's gradually coming back to health.

Next we meet "Flyboy", who is thru hiking the LT, but needs to finish by Sunday. To us this seems almost impossible: 40+ miles of extremely tough hiking in less than 3 days? Whew! We tell him how hard we think the hiking is going north, "the hardest hiking on the LT" we tell him. He says the hiking going south over Laraway Mt. is easier. Flyboy works for IBM in Raleigh/Durham, NC, and holds a degree in Computer Science from Rochester Institute of Technology ("RIT", which he wears on his shirt). Hum, I believe, somehow mistakes "RIT" for "RPI" (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), which Hum attended back in the 60's, and starts to tell Flyboy all about his experiences at RPI, Navy Scholarship, etc., the whole story. But Flyboy, given the distance he still needs to cover in way too little time to finish his hike, politely excuses himself and moves on, quickly.

We make it to Corliss Camp (1600', 6.8 miles) by 12:30 PM, which is a good hour ahead of Hum's estimated arrival of 1:30 PM. Such inaccuracy is very unusual for 'Hum's Navigation Service', which is usually spot on with ETA's, but we probably erred by not correcting for Hum's extra energy and speed of late. A man and woman day hikers come by, hiking south, and we chat for a bit. They warn us of a big poison ivy patch that is overrunning the LT between the Lamoille River suspension bridge and Route 15: "wear long pants" they advise (we always do).

Corliss Camp is really nice; it has a large shelter with bunks for 8 and an upstairs 'attic' area that can sleep 8 or more. It has a nice porch area and both an inside table and an outside table. But in spite of all these pluses and contrary to Annunak's opinion we heard yesterday, we feel that Spruce Ledge Camp is just as nice as Corliss Camp, if not better, especially given the covered picnic table and great view off Devil's Perch Outlook.



Corliss Camp

We peruse the shelter journal as we always do, and find Annunak's entry:

*"8/10/11 Spent the night alone here – never slept so good! Picture perfect.
Peace and Holy Love!
Annunak"*

Yes, we confirm, this bearded young man is a modern day flower child... I also note several entries from folks we met two years ago on our 2009 LT hike over Mt. Mansfield.

We met "Norway" on the way up Whiteface Mt.; he writes:

"8/12/09 Spent the nite. Almost to Canada. Strange animal noise in the nite, about 10 PM and 4 AM, could be moose... spooky

-- Norway"

We met "Downhill" at Taft Lodge on Mt. Mansfield; he writes:

"8/17/09 Downhill heading to Canada. 5 guys in the loft."

We met "Nips" and "Shoop", who are real characters and loads of fun, at Taylor Lodge on Mt. Mansfield; Nips writes:

"8/16/09 Nips & Shoop here – in for the night. Had a fire all night while I waited for the boyfriend and some friends. So, so happy to see them, even though they didn't arrive until around 3 AM. Took a well-needed relaxing day, moving now to Spruce Ledge. Hope we get there before dark.

-- Nips

Nips Tips

*- always give yourself one more day to rally your spirits – that might be all you need
- have sex in the woods at least twice"*

Rich, Jeff, and Matt are next to arrive, and, given that the attic space is available for Mr. OJ and family, they decide there is room for everyone and take the upper bunks this night. As usual, the family of 4 arrives last and indeed the girls are happy, in fact excited, to take the attic area; this is probably something of an adventure for the girls I surmise. A young lady southbound hiker, "Tree Hugger", arrives later yet and, given the full shelter, decides to set up her tent. We'll see more of Tree Hugger on our hike tomorrow.

Hum and I and our 3 hiking companions have dinner at the inside table, while the family of 4 uses the picnic table just outside the shelter. Tonight Rich has some trouble getting his Coleman white-gas stove to work; it's dated and maybe has a stoppage in one of the lines. He fiddles with it for quite some time, but can't get it to work. His sons, however, carry a more up-to-date butane stove and that serves them all just fine.

After dinner Hum and I watch the 3 of them play their own unique card game they play every night. They teach us the rules and as always have great fun in a very spirited game that has lots of strategy. Rich is triumphant as the overall winner of the 5 days running competition; one can tell that this is a very competitive family and they poke constant fun and jabs at each other. They're having enormous fun and enjoyment in their family. After the game we bid them all farewell: tomorrow Rich and Jeff will hike out the Davis Neighborhood Trail to Cross Road, where Rich's wife will meet them, while Matt will continue on to thru hike the LT.

Since this is our last night out, I sum up our experience in our journal entry:

"8/12/11 Last night out for Geezer Hikers Ho (69) and Hum (71). 6 days hike from Journey's End to Route 15. Some amazing, incredibly difficult hiking on these sections; we think hardest of whole LT with super rewards along the way (Jay Peak, Belvidere Mt. fire tower, Devil's Gulch) + great company with Unity Man, Baltimore Phil, & Radio each night, same shelter. Fun times.

Ho & Hum signing off"

Corliss Camp to Route 15/Johnson – 8/13/11

Start Time: 6:00 AM, Corliss Camp

End Time: 3:45 PM, Route 15/Johnson

Total Miles: 11.4 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 1990' gain/3390' loss

Distances:

Corliss Camp to Roundtop Shelter: 8.1 miles; 1990' gain/2240' loss

Roundtop Shelter to Lamoille River: 2.9 miles; /1150' loss

Lamoille River to Route 15 Parking Lot: 0.4 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 39,332

Calories: 1035

Steps/minute: 98

MPH: 2.81 (1.72 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 6 hours, 37 minutes, 37 seconds

Miles: 18.62 miles (11.4 actual miles)

We're up at 5 AM, but this time Hum has to wake me. Neither of us wants to cook; I'm very tired of my ramen noodle breakfasts, they don't taste good anymore, so I just have some nuts and a few cookies. We're off at 6 AM and pack up outside on the picnic table so as to not disturb our 3 hiking buddies, who are still sound asleep in the upper bunks.

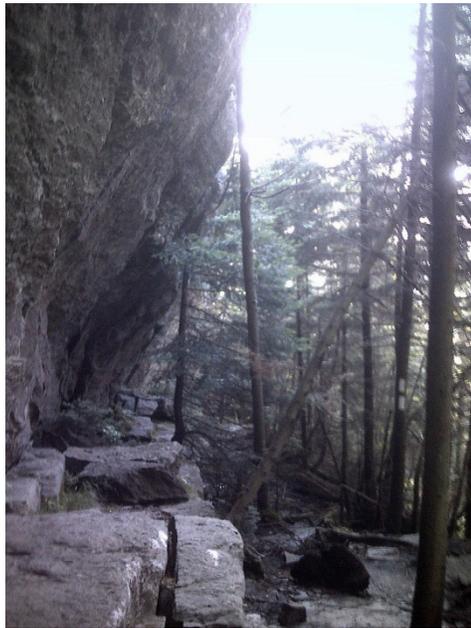
Once again, our very first hiking task of the day is a 900', 3 mile climb to the summit of Laraway Mt. This has been the case almost every day: on day 1 (Northern Terminus of LT), day 2 (Jay Peak), day 4 (Belvidere Mt.), and day 5 (Bowen Mt.). It's kind of hard to take every morning, but once your body warms up and gets into the zone, you can do your thing: climb! The trail is extremely steep for the first hour – at times straight up – but then becomes more gradual. We reach the summit of Laraway Mt. (2790', 2.7 miles) by 8:30 AM, which is good time for us, and a short distance beyond the summit is an expansive ledge, Laraway Lookout, which affords some of the most spectacular views on the LT.



**Beautiful Sweeping View from Laraway Lookout
Note the Unusual “Double Hump” View of Mt. Mansfield on the Horizon**

The day is crystal clear, and there are sweeping panoramic views of the valley below, Mt. Mansfield, and the Green Mountains. The view of Mt. Mansfield is from a unique angle, where the mountain appears to have two equal humps.

The descent off Laraway Mt. is very steep and rocky, and as always we take it very slow and careful: no room for any mistakes or dangerous falls. There is most interesting geology on this mountain: we pass by a huge cliff area, with giant rock walls that go on and on.



Interesting Geology Descending Laraway Mountain Giant Rock Walls Go On and On

After exiting the giant rock wall area, the trail becomes much easier, until we cross Coddling Hollow Road. Beyond Coddling Hollow Road we encounter a large marshy area where there are lots of ducks and many other birds. Ho and Hum try out their large repertoire of bird calls and get many different responses. It's very interesting! We're not sure what we said in duck-speak, but we certainly hope it's something nice.

We meet John (60) and his bearded hiking companion (65) (no trail names), who are hiking from Smuggler's Notch to Coddington Hollow. Last night they stayed at Roundtop Shelter and had it all to themselves. They tell us the water source at the shelter is a 450' climb down a muddy slope, and that John slipped in the mud and got hurt. They also say there is "no other water" in this section.

That is a great warning for us to be extra vigilant for any possible water source and not long after meeting John we find a small water source and fill our water bottles. This is good because other than the water source at Roundtop Shelter, which John says is hard to access, there is no other water source today until we reach the Lamoille River at the end of our hike.

After hiking over 2 more, rather hard, 500+ foot 'hill' climbs, and crossing Plot Road in between hills, we reach Roundtop Shelter (1650', 8.1 miles) at around noon. Roundtop Shelter has a rather unique log construction, with a completely open front; there are no bunks, rather, there is a rather large open floor space with room for 10, according to the Long Trail Guide. There is a great view from the overlook behind the shelter, where there is also a bench to sit on and enjoy the view.

I call John Selmer, who I had arranged to pick us up at the Route 15 parking lot in Johnson, and tell him that I estimate we'll be there by 3:45 PM or so. It turns out to be an accurate prediction.

While we're having lunch at the picnic table, a woman day hiker from Hyde Park, VT, arrives with her son, 2 daughters, and dog. She is very chatty regarding all things hiking and is very interested in our hikes, both our current hike and all the others in the past. She has an extensive knowledge of the LT, and has done all the hikes in these northern sections many times.

Then Tree Hugger (Holly) arrives: she is the one we met briefly last evening at Corliss Camp, where she tented for the night. She is a young, rather cute, vet assistant from Massachusetts; she started 3 days ago (i.e., going twice as fast as us) to thru hike the LT in 16 days (very fast), and is headed to Bear Hollow Shelter tonight. Hum immediately goes into his full flirtation mode and pulls out all the stops: bragging about his hiking prowess and navigation skills; offering valuable tips from his extensive knowledge base; and showing his muscles and vast brain power. Tree Hugger stops for lunch and we move on, but we'll see her again later on at Prospect Rock and the Lamoille River suspension bridge.

Prospect Rock (1040', 10.0 miles) affords beautiful views of the Lamoille River Valley, especially on this wonderfully clear sunny day.



Prospect Rock & Sweeping Views of Lamoille River Valley

We've been extremely lucky with weather on this hike; almost all the rain we've had has been at night, and almost every day has been sunny and crystal clear, allowing us to enjoy the many excellent views on this section of the LT. We meet a retired couple from Wallingford, VT, who are originally from Fairlawn, NJ, the next town over from Glen Rock, NJ, where Hum and I grew up. I call John Selmer again to confirm our 3:45 PM arrival time at the Route 15 parking lot.

Tree Hugger arrives, enjoys the view from Prospect Rock, albeit briefly, and helps us locate the LT heading south, which we've been looking for over the past several minutes. Hum goes into his flirtation mode again and we hike and chat with her for a while until we stop for a water break and she goes on ahead. The hike down to the Lamoille River suspension bridge (500', 11.0 miles) is easy, although Hum is moving a little slower after the long and strenuous hike today.

Once again we meet Tree Hugger at the Lamoille River suspension bridge, where she is setting her camera to do a self portrait on the bridge. We offer to take her picture, and we do, and she kindly offers to snap our picture, and she does. Hum goes into flirtation mode again as he chats with her a bit beyond the bridge; I pass on the warning about the poison ivy beyond the suspension bridge, which we learned about yesterday from the day hikers we met at Corliss Camp.



**Lamoille River Suspension Bridge
Ho & Hum Complete 6-Day Backpacking Hike
From Northern Terminus of the LT to Route 15/Johnson, VT**

Tree Hugger passes us again and disappears as we stop briefly to examine an usual rock formation. A fork in the trail is unmarked and we make the wrong choice, briefly going off the LT.

We arrive at the Route 15 parking lot at 3:45 PM, just as we had told John Selmer we would. John is there already, chatting with Tree Hugger, who has advised him that we are close behind her. We bid Tree Hugger farewell and depart in John's well worn Honda Accord stick shift, which he proudly tells us has 170,000 miles on it.

John is very chatty and entertains us with his stories all the way back to North Troy, about an hour's drive. He is a photographer, and has an absolutely top-of-the-line Nikon digital camera in the front seat; he says he's taken over 30,000 pictures with it. One of his most famous, he says, is a picture looking straight up a waterfall, which he had to walk to for a long way up the stream. He says he wants to publish a book of pictures of waterfalls, and knows of many 'secret' waterfalls that no one else knows about. He shows us one picture he took of a restaurant; the picture along with an advertisement for the restaurant is mounted on the side of a truck beside the road we are driving on. John says this is a way around Vermont's 'no billboards' law, since this is a privately owner truck and apparently this isn't illegal, at least not so far. John in the past was an avid hiker along with his beloved dog, but now his legs don't allow him to do any more serious hiking.

John tells us his first wife "left me for another woman" after 20 years. When he met his second wife, who is from New Hampshire, he says that he knew within 5 minutes that he would marry her. On their first date to the movies, he proposed and John said "she thought I was crazy" but told her "to think about it; we'll eventually get married", and they did. They've been together for 30 years and are very happy.

Sam Leary is waiting for us at the door to the North Troy Inn, and the first thing she says is "you have a key for me?" I give her the wayward room key and she gives me back my car keys. Then she asks "how do you like my new haircut (she has gotten it cut shorter)?" I compliment her on that and again rave about our wonderful stay at the North Troy Inn; I tell her we'll recommend her place whenever we can. Hum gives John Selmer \$60 for the ride, including tip, after John asks for \$50, even though he had quoted me \$45 over the phone. All the same, we feel it's very reasonable and great service from John Selmer.

The ride down to Waterbury is very slow. It seems that there is an antique car show in Stowe this weekend; consequently Route 100 is one big jam and Stowe is mobbed. We see 100's of antique cars along the way; it is really a very big event!

We arrive at the Duxbury Road LT parking lot a little after 6:00 PM, after taking longer than expected to get there and Hum warns, several times, that "we missed it", but we hadn't. I hike the 3.2 miles to Jonesville in one hour, which is slower than I hoped. There are lots of up's and down's on the road, and one group even offers me a ride, which of course I refuse.

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 7,136

Calories: 187

Steps/minute: 98

MPH: 3.34 (3.17 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 1 hours, 00 minutes, 33 seconds

Miles: 3.37 miles (3.2 actual miles)

We arrive back in North Clarendon by 8:45 PM, and we're so happy to kiss and hug out wives. They're surprised that we're so late; we had neglected to inform them about the extra road walk to Jonesville, which wasn't planned until after we started our hike 6 days ago.

Hum is famished so he has dinner immediately, before even taking off his dirty clothes: delicious BBQ pork sandwiches that Lyn has made. I instead shower, shave, change into clean clothes, have a couple of beers, and then have the delicious dinner Lyn has prepared. We all chat for quite a while about our great hike, and tell all the war stories contained herein.

We're all in bed by 11:00 PM. I have a great sleep after such a remarkable 6 days.

Summary statistics for the 6-day hike (not including 2 road walks):

Total Miles: 53.7 miles

Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 12,400' gain/13,990' loss

Total Steps: 207,188

Total Calories: 5449

Zero Days in North Clarendon – 8/14-15/2011

Sunday is a day of resting up and hanging around and enjoying the swimming pool. We also go shopping at EMS for AT maps, but postpone purchasing any until the following Saturday.

While we were hiking this week, Lyn and Pat visited the Poultney, VT Historical Society in East Poultney, where they were displaying the purple wedding dress of Lyn's great grandmother, Hattie Burdick Rogers. Lyn had years ago tried on this wedding gown, and it fit quite well. Lyn's father took movies of the event, but unfortunately the movies are double exposed. Lyn has an on-going communication with Andrea Mott, the director of the Poultney Historical Society, and Andrea advised Lyn that the dress would be displayed

this week. Evidently people were waiting for Lyn's arrival at the historical society, having learned that she is the great granddaughter of Hattie Rogers.



**Lyn Standing beside Hattie Burdick Rogers' Purple Wedding Dress
at the Poultney, VT Historical Society
(Lyn Had Once Tried on this Dress; it Fit Perfectly)**

On Monday morning Pat takes a small single-prop plane on Cape Air from Rutland Regional Airport (in N. Clarendon, VT) to Boston's Logan Airport, where she will board another flight to return home to Timonium, MD. She asks for and gets to ride in the co-pilot seat of the single-prop plane, and expresses great excitement about that ride on her call to Hum from Logan Airport.

Later in the day on Monday Hum and I square away our equipment and get ready for next 4 days hike.

Bennington/Route 9 to Seth Warner Shelter – 8/16/11

Start Time: 6:45 AM, Bennington/Route 9
End Time: 1:45 PM, Seth Warner Shelter
Total Miles: 11.7 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss: 2195' gain/1355' loss

Distances:
Bennington/Route 9 to Congdon Shelter: 4.3 miles; 965' gain/245' loss
Congdon Shelter to Seth Warner Shelter: 7.2 miles; 1230' gain/1110' loss
Spur to Seth Warner Shelter: 0.2 miles

Pedometer readings:
Steps: 37,469

Calories: 993
Steps/minute: 99
MPH: 2.83 (1.82 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 6 hours, 18 minutes, 07 seconds
Miles: 17.88 miles (11.7 actual miles)

We're up at 4:30 AM. It is a rainy, dreary day and the forecast is for all-day rain, but given the great weather we had last week we can't complain too much. Lyn drives us to the Bennington/Route 9 LT parking lot and we're off by 6:45 AM. There's been a lot of rain yesterday and overnight – a deluge in this area -- and the river ("City Stream") just north of the parking lot is running ferociously: we hope there are no torrential rapids to cross going southbound. We bid Lyn goodbye and quickly don our ponchos, it's raining and will be doing so most of the day.



Ho & Hum Start 4-Day LT/AT Hike at Bennington/Route 9

Strangely enough, we are once again faced with a huge climb as our first challenge of the morning, a 1000' climb, up the so-called "thousand steps", to the summit of Harmon Hill. "Sunset" is also getting ready to hike south at the same time. He's from Sunset, SC, near Clemson University, and is quite a fascinating guy. He has hiked the "triple crown", that is, he hiked the AT (3 times, AT trail journal at <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?trailname=1904>), the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT, trail journal at <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=132490>), and the Continental Divide Trail (CDT, trail journal at <http://trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=219397>). He started his LT thru hike on July 13 and says his wife had to quit because of physical issues; yesterday he hiked 3 miles but quit the trail after a deluge hit the area. We chat on the way up the thousand steps but near the top Sunset excuses himself – today he is finishing the LT, almost 18 miles to go -- and leaves us in the dust hiking southbound at a very fast pace.

The "thousand steps" is an exceptionally long rock staircase; however, I didn't count the steps to check the accuracy. We reach the top of Harmon Hill (2325', 1.8 miles) just after 8:00 AM, where because of the dreary fog there is no view. At Congdon Shelter (2080', 4.3 miles) we find a teenage boy, "Speedy", who has taken over the entire shelter with tarps draped in front to prevent the heavy rain from pouring into the shelter. He says he's waiting for the rain to stop and gives Hum a message to deliver to his mother ("going to town"), who Speedy says is somewhere further south.

With the heavy rain continually pounding us, we're completely soaked and dirty; the LT is like a river and mud is everywhere. It's really cold and we have 'mud feet' through and through.



It's a Rainy/Foggy/Muddy/Dreary Day

A little after 11 AM we reach the summit of Consultation Peak (2810', 7.3 miles), and there we meet Speedy's mother, "Lion Queen", and his younger brother. She had stopped and tented there yesterday after the torrential rain set in, but she managed to keep a fire going in spite of the weather. Everything is wet, she says, and wished that Speedy "could help carry the wet stuff down"; quite how he could do that is far from clear. After Consultation Peak we meet a hiker with a pacemaker, who advises us that he left Seth Warner shelter about 4 hours earlier: we make the shelter about one hour faster than Pacemaker's time.

We arrive at Seth Warner shelter (2200', 11.7 miles) at about 1:45 PM; we've made excellent time and averaged almost 2 miles per hour, very fast for Ho & Hum. This is a minimal shelter facility: there is no table or mouse hooks, but there is one very surprising, totally unusual and unexpected item right there in the shelter: a full, unopened bottle of "Bacardi 151" Rum, trail magic left there by some fabulous trail angel named "Spearman". Resourceful Hum gins up a mouse hook using his own rope and the plastic cup left with the Bacardi 151 Rum; very clever.

We are not about to consume any Bacardi 151 rum, at least not yet. But soon a trio of southbound AT thru hikers arrives: Bullwinkle, Japhy, and Avalanche. We suggest that we have no interest in the 151 rum so they are welcome to it, and they immediately, happily, agree. Bullwinkle is just out of high school, not 21 yet, but says – after a joking comment from Hum that he's 'too young to drink' – that he's 'old enough to die for my country' and therefore old enough to drink the Bacardi 151. Japhy, from Atlanta, who seems like the natural leader of the trio, says that after their dinner break the group should continue on a night hike to the summit of Mt. Greylock and consume the Bacardi 151 there. All seem to agree with the plan. While they eat, Hum engages them in a discussion of scouting, after Japhy mentions that he is an Eagle Scout (and so is Avalanche).

While we chat with the trio of hikers, a father and his son Alex (15), from Philadelphia, arrive going northbound. Regarding Japhy's plan to hike at night, the father warns the trio about a long and difficult rock scramble that would be dangerous to negotiate in the dark. This does not phase the threesome, who depart south according to the plan. As they depart, Avalanche hands Bullwinkle the bottle of Bacardi 151 for him to carry.



Seth Warner Shelter; Bottle of Bacardi 151 Rum Left by Trail Angel Named "Spearman"



Resourceful Hum Fashions a Clever Mouse Hook Using his Rope & the Bacardi 151 Plastic Cup

In the next 2 days we'll piece together from journal entries the saga of their night hiking and consumption of the Bacardi 151 Rum:

It seems that the trio split up, presumably after consuming most of the bottle of Bacardi 151 in the vicinity of Wilbur's Clearing Shelter (we found about 1/3 of the bottle left for others to consume near Wilbur's Clearing Shelter). Wilbur's Clearing Shelter is another 9.6 miles from the Seth Warner Shelter. An entry from Japhy at the Wilbur's Clearing Shelter suggests he tented this night near the shelter:

*"8/17 Stayed at the clearing just North of here last night after a late-start 21 mile day out of Bennington. Night-hiking + Bacardi 151 + Greylock = fun? Dalton today!
Japhy SOBO '11"*

However, an entry from Avalanche at Mark Noepel Shelter suggests that he made it all the way to the summit of Mt. Greylock this same night (a hike of 12.7 miles from Seth Warner Shelter) and slept on the couch at Bascom Lodge on the summit:

*"8/18 Very lazy day after drunk night hiking. The summit is great, the couch in the lodge is too!
Avalanche SOBO '11"*

There are no entries from Bullwinkle so his whereabouts on this drunken night are a mystery.

There is an Appalachian Mountain Club map of the AT section through Massachusetts that someone has left in the shelter. Since we have no detailed map of the Massachusetts AT, we are tempted to just acquire the map, but resist that rather dark temptation. Rather, I photograph the section we are about to do over Mt. Greylock, and these photos serve us well for the next 3 days of navigation. Hum is at a complete loss having no maps to do his very frequent, and somewhat compulsive, 'map check' anytime we stop.

The father and son Alex are a bit agitated that the bear box near the shelter is actually locked and a note on the box says it is locked because hikers have been using it to discard trash. A number of entries in the shelter's trail journal purport to give the combination to the lock on the box, but none seems to work. Father and son decide to pitch their tent rather than sleep in the shelter after learning that Hum snores and also because of a concern, the father says, about bugs in the shelter. But at about 9 PM, the father comes crashing loudly back into the shelter, disrupting everything, and his son joins him in the shelter a little later. Father says he got claustrophobic in the tent, but this sounds strange because they are presumably experienced hikers who have tented before. Furthermore, the father is an extremely restless sleeper, constantly tossing and turning all night, very noisy. His frequent turning on his headlamp is also disruptive. Not a great night's sleep this night.

Seth Warner Shelter to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter – 8/17/11

Start Time: 6:30 AM, Seth Warner Shelter
End Time: 2:00 PM, Wilbur's Clearing Shelter
Total Miles: 10.3 miles

Distances:

Seth Warner Shelter to MA-VT State Line: 2.8 miles; 130' gain
MA-VT State Line to MA2 North Adams, MA: 3.8 miles; 1670' loss
MA2 North Adams, MA to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter: 3.0 miles
Spur to Seth Warner Shelter: 0.2 miles
Spur to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter: 0.3 miles
Spur to Sherman Brook Campsite & Return: 0.2 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 36,998
Calories: 972
Steps/minute: 97
MPH: 2.76 (1.62 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 6 hours, 19 minutes, 53 seconds
Miles: 17.49 miles (10.3 actual miles)

We're up at 5:15 AM, first light. Father and son are totally in the way – they are sleeping in the middle of the shelter and we have to step over them many times to gather all our stuff and pack up. We skip making coffee to speed things up; just eat a cupcake and are off by 6:30 AM. Hum is rather slow this morning; says his legs are not good – "normal for my legs" he says – as opposed to yesterday's burst of energy and record speed of almost 2 miles per hour.

We reach the Vermont-Massachusetts border (2330', 3.0 miles) at a little after 8:00 AM. I am ecstatic and triumphant, because this crossing now completes all sections of his LT hike over the past 3 years. Ho & Hum exchange high 5's and Hum snaps a few pictures of me raising my hiking poles in triumph beside the sign:

“WELCOME TO VERMONT
THE LONG TRAIL
A FOOTPATH IN THE WILDERNESS”



Triumphant Ho Ecstatic Upon Completing the Long Trail End-to-End After 3 Years of Section Hiking

A bit further on we reach “Eph’s Lookout” (2330', 3.8 miles), but there is nothing to see, the view is blocked by trees.

I reach the Pine Cobble trailhead (2010', 4.2 miles) a few minutes ahead of Hum and find 2 or 3 woman hikers either camping there or perhaps resting. One lady seems to reposition herself behind a bush so that she is out of my view; I’m not sure whether this is intentional (hiding) or happenstance, but she quickly emerges from behind the bush perhaps after realizing that I have already seen her. I surmise that perhaps she was hiding because there now commences a strange conversation. I’m interested in finding out about Wilbur’s Clearing Shelter, and especially about the availability of water at the shelter. So I first ask about her route to figure out if she passed the shelter; i.e., whether she was following the AT or Pine Cobble trail, but she responds vaguely “do you want directions”, and doesn’t really answer the question. I get the impression that she doesn’t want to reveal her route; quite why, who knows. But I persist and tell her that I’m interested in the availability of water at Wilbur’s Clearing Shelter, but again she doesn’t tell me whether or not she was at the shelter but again deflects the question and says “these are very popular with hikers.” What she meant by that, again who knows, so I then give up on this inquiry, shrug my shoulders, and say “OK, never mind”. Very strange.

A bit later we negotiate the rock slide that the father from Philadelphia had warned the Bacardi 151 crew to not try to negotiate in the dark; he was right, it is very rough going, and one has to be very careful to skip from rock to rock and not to twist ankles, even in broad daylight.

Hum’s backpack fails after the Velcro on his pack height adjustment pulls off completely. We stop at Sherman Brook Primitive Campsite (1300', 5.5 miles) for a repair, where Hum ties the height adjustment with rope and that resolves the problem. Hum is great with creative field repairs.



Hum Negotiates Rock Slide, Using Caution Not to Twist Ankles or Fall off Rocks

We reach North Adams, MA (600', 7.2 miles) around noon; it is hot but a beautiful clear day. The hike through North Adams is interesting; at one point the AT actually follows a private home owner's driveway onto the city streets. Mt. Greylock looms very prominently to the south: it looks massive and high. We actually miss one turn on the North Adams street walk, but pick up the white AT blazes again a little further on where the (wrong) road dead-ends. Problem is that we get going the wrong way on the AT, i.e., north, but soon realize our mistake when the trail goes downhill rather than going uphill, since we are now climbing Mt. Greylock. We are sorry to lose some ground, that's always a bummer when you have to re-climb a section.



Following the AT through North Adams, MA; Mt. Greylock Looms in the Background

Mt. Greylock is actually a 15-mile long conglomerate of a number of other smaller mountains; the first one we scale is Mt. Prospect, a full 2000' climb from North Adams. The trail is extremely steep much of the way; it goes on and on and on and is extremely tiring. At one point we encounter an AMC trail

maintenance crew who are rerouting the AT to a less steep but longer route “to make it easier” they say. They tell me “you are the last person to follow the old trail” because soon afterward they close that section for good and enable the reroute. To Hum and me this seems a bit futile given the extremely steep climb most of the way up Mt. Prospect.

At last we reach the summit of Mt. Prospect (2500', 9.5 miles) where we get a sweeping view of the valley below and Taconic mountains in the distance to the west.



Sweeping View from Mt. Prospect; Taconic Mountains in the Distance to the West

We reach Wilbur's Clearing Shelter at 2:00 PM (2300', 10.3 miles), exactly on Hum's projected arrival time. Along the way Hum asks me to check the pictures of the AMC map of the MA AT; this in part feeds his obsession to “check the map” and, along with other data he collects (e.g., signs), Hum is able to make his very accurate ETA predictions.

On the 0.3 mile spur to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter we find, to our great surprise, the bottle of Bacardi 151 rum, now 1/3 full. The trio of southbound thru hikers (Bullwinkle, Japhy, and Avalanche) we met at Seth Warner Shelter did not consume the entire bottle of Bacardi 151 but rather left it as a Trail Magic kindness or perhaps wanted to avoid carrying out the empty bottle, or, most likely, for both reasons. Anyway, this find is very timely, because I especially am in a celebrating mood, just having completed the LT end-to-end this very morning.

Before dinner we each consume several swigs of the Bacardi 151 and toast Ho's completion of the LT; the rum definitely gives a hot burning feeling going down but we both agree it is actually pretty tasty and gives a nice buzz. We don't finish it up, however, but leave a few shots for the next lucky hikers.

We are the only ones in the shelter tonight, although there are about 12 young (< 20 years old) volunteers camped nearby, who are maintaining the AT over a 3-week period. We again meet the guy and girl who we met earlier on the Mt. Prospect upslope (who were rerouting the AT). Actually they pass by the shelter on their way to get water and we chat a bit. The guy is the group leader and says volunteers get paid \$600 for the 3 weeks of work; the rest of the cost is covered by donations. One rather cute female volunteer catches Hum's eye on her way to get water, whereupon Hum prepares a flirtation plan to impress her on her return with his hiking expertise and muscle flexing, although he worries that his grubby Grandpa appearance may not make a great impression. In any case, his plan is thwarted when she returns to the tenting among a whole group of volunteers.

A northbound thru hiker arrives at about 8 PM, but decides to tent behind the shelter. He is very quiet and says he is behind schedule because he got hurt and that slowed him down. On the other hand, the young volunteers in the tenting area get very noisy until about 8:30 PM or so; we suspect underage drinking.

Ho makes this day's entry in the journal:

*"8/17 Weary geezers Ho & Hum happy to reach shelter & rest after 7 hrs. trek from Seth Warner + arduous 2000' climb up Mt. Prospect. Ho completed LT this AM after 3 yrs. Section hiking. Will celebrate with shot of 151 tonight. Greylock our last summit tomorrow to wrap up our 10-day LT/AT fun hike.
Enjoy, Ho & Hum"*



Bacardi 151 Rum on Spur Trail to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter



Wilbur's Clearing Shelter

Wilbur's Clearing Shelter to Mark Noepel Shelter – 8/18/11

Start Time: 7:00 AM, Wilbur's Clearing Shelter
End Time: 12:15 PM, Mark Noepel Shelter
Total Miles: 6.9 miles

Distances:

Wilbur's Clearing Shelter to Mark-Noepel Shelter = 6.6 miles

Spur to Wilbur's Clearing Shelter: 0.3 miles

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 24,966

Calories: 657

Steps/minute: 90

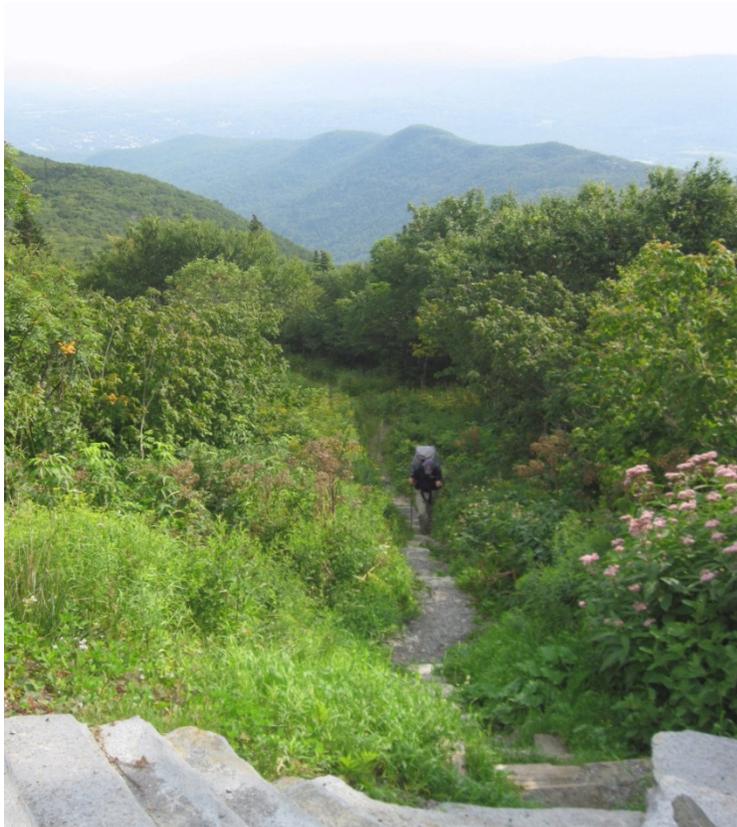
MPH: 2.58 (1.51 adjusted for actual miles)

Timer: 4 hours, 34 minutes, 39 seconds

Miles: 11.82 miles (6.9 actual miles)

We're up at 6 AM after a good night's sleep, and off by 7 AM. We reach the summit of Mt. Williams (2951', 0.8 miles) at about 8:00 AM after a 650' climb, but the climb doesn't seem so arduous. There is a limited view; it's a bit hazy this morning. We momentarily lose the AT shortly beyond the summit, but after running into a sheer cliff we realize our mistake and quickly find the AT again. At the summit, the AT makes a sharp right turn to follow the long ridge toward Mt. Greylock.

There is a rather long ridge hike to the summit of Mt. Greylock (3491', 3.4 miles), but the 500' additional climb to the summit is not too bad either; it didn't really feel like 500'. The final push is up the Thunderbolt Ski Trail, and we make it to the top by 9:30 AM.



Hum Makes Final Push to Mt. Greylock Summit; Mt. Greylock Summit Observation Tower

The first buildings we see on the summit are the impressive 92' tall summit observation tower and the rather large Thunderbolt Ski Trail warming hut (the hut can only be used by hikers in emergencies). There is a plaque on the front of the warming hut that reveals the story of the Thunderbolt Ski Trail:

"In the 1930s, skiing meant trudging uphill for two hours carrying equipment, all for the thrill of a two minute run. Still, the new sport quickly gained popularity, and in 1932, after studying all the hills in the area, local skiers chose this spot

for an expert ski trail. Thirty men from the Civilian Conservation Corps, armed with 300 pounds of dynamite, cleared the trail and built this warming hut in 1934.

The trail's maximum gradient is 35 degrees, with a vertical descent of 2,175 feet. The course winds across three bridges, many bumps and turns, and the harrowing "Needle's Eye." Orin McCarty of the Mt. Greylock Ski Club chose the name "Thunderbolt" because the thrill of the ride reminded him of another – the Thunderbolt roller coaster at Boston's Revere Beach."



Thunderbolt Ski Trail Warming Hut

There are impressive views from the top of the observation tower, even though it is rather hazy this morning. In view are the Hudson River Valley, the Berkshires, the Taconics, the Catskills, the Adirondacks, and the Green Mountains. There is a spotlight at the top of the tower that can be seen for 70 miles. There is a memorial to Massachusetts war dead at the base of the tower.



Bascom Lodge from the Top of the Mt. Greylock Summit Tower

Outside we tower we chat with another hiker on a 2-day jaunt, who says he tried to find Bellows Pipe Shelter last night in the dark, but couldn't (the shelter is just south of the Mt. Greylock summit on the Bellows Pipe trail). So he tented instead. He advises us that the current weather forecast is for rain both this afternoon and tomorrow; fortunately, the forecast turns out to be wrong.

Next we visit Bascom Lodge, an impressive building with impressive stonework, sweeping views of its own, a porch picnic area, and large fireplaces in the lobby and dining room. It was also built by the CCC and is open to hikers, skiers, and sunset-seekers, and accommodates 34 overnight guests. We ask the proprietor about the Overlook Trail, but, strangely, he says the trail has no views; it is just up and down so we decide to skip it and move on. He also has no knowledge of the Mark Noepel Shelter and advises us to call the park service for info.

I call Lyn and suggest that she leaves for Cheshire, MA tomorrow morning at 8:30 AM. I also give her some detailed directions regarding the AT crossing on Route 8 in Cheshire, MA, where we will meet her.

On our way south once again, we meet 2 groups of northbound thru hikers but no one has knowledge regarding Mark Noepel water availability. We also encounter several day hikers, all of them coming in on Jones Nose Trail, which doesn't pass the shelter. We arrive at Mark Noepel Shelter at 12:15 PM in time to have our lunch; no other hikers are there yet, it is too early for that. We have a good, relaxed lunch; it is a nice roomy shelter with a loft, bunks, and picnic table. Hum takes the opportunity to enjoy a little nap time.



Mark Noepel Shelter; Roomy with a Loft for Additional Hikers

A father and his 15 year old daughter Valerie (trail name "Little Kitten") arrive and take up residence in the loft. They are from Ann Arbor, Michigan and are hiking from Dalton to North Adams, MA. They are meeting their wife/mother tomorrow for lunch at Bascom Lodge. These two are very quiet, however, and don't engage in much conversation, which is quite atypical for hikers in our experience.

Two brothers tent nearby the shelter; they are northbound AT thru hikers from near Tallahassee, FL. Brother #2 joined the hike after the buddy of brother #1 quit somewhere in PA. Brother #1 uses a hammock, and says he can hang it between poles or in a shelter. He also says he met "Cimarron", an 88 year old thru hiker. Cimarron has hiked the AT several times, and in 2011 tried to set the record as the oldest AT thru hiker; he didn't make it, but hiked over 1100 miles on the trail. His 2006 trail journal is at <http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?trailname=11864>, and the first entry says the following:

"Hi...I'm CIMARRON 83yr old pushing what comes after that. I started the AT in 03 and finish it in 04. They say I am the oldest guy to do it in 2 yrs and the second oldest to do the trail. I plan on doing it in one year. Wish me good luck and I pray I stay healthy this time. Will start at Springer on Mar 5/6 and leave the trail on Mar 19 and return on Mar 27 at Franklin. Please go by me slowly."

He didn't finish the whole AT in 2006, or on retries in 2007 and 2011, but this guy is to be greatly admired for his courage and stamina, especially at an advanced age (his 2011 trail journal is at

<http://www.trailjournals.com/entry.cfm?id=337584>). I guess Ho & Hum have a ways to go to set any records as oldest geezer hikers out there.

A retired couple who are southbound AT thru hikers arrive at about 7 PM. They started their hike in June and hope to finish before Thanksgiving. They also tent nearby.

We note a couple of entries in the shelter journal, one of them from "Cool Shoes" (Sharon Malone), who we met at Goddard Shelter on the LT/AT in 2010:

*"7/11 Sharon Malone trail name Cool Shoes headed to NYC. The Williamstown Motel is a great place to stay. If you call them they will pick you up and bring you back to the trail.
Cool Shoes"*

There is also an entry from "LadyPants", a lone woman thru hiker that I met on Killington Mountain a couple of weeks earlier:

*"7/28 In for water then north, north, north! Molehill & Stinkbug – can't wait to see you guys again soon!
LadyPants"*

Hum makes our final journal entry for this year:

*"8/18/11 Geezer hikers Ho (69) & Hum (71) are here for our last night on the trail this year. We have hiked 80+ miles in two sections – the AT here and the northern LT in Vermont in ten days. Met lots of thru hikers on both trails and had a great time. Only one morning of bad weather. We're off to 100 miles of the AT in NC next year. Take care and best of luck to all hikers in meeting their goals.
Ho & Hum"*

We fill up our water bottles before sack time to save time in the morning. Father and daughter retire in the loft quite early, about 7:30 PM. Hum and I talk quietly, trying not to disturb them. It is a colorful sunset tonight; I snap a few pictures. We retire a little after 8 PM, after the sun has nearly set. All is quiet, except for occasional snoring sounds from Hum's side of the shelter.

Mark Noepel Shelter to MA8 Cheshire, MA – 8/19/11

Start Time: 6:45 AM, Mark Noepel Shelter
End Time: 9:15 AM, MA8 Cheshire, MA
Total Miles: 4.4 miles

Distances:

Mark Noepel Shelter to MA8 Cheshire, MA = 4.4 miles
Lyn picks us up at MA8 and 9, Dalton, MA and drives back to North Clarendon

Pedometer readings:

Steps: 17,027
Calories: 448
Steps/minute: 88
MPH: 2.51 (1.37 adjusted for actual miles)
Timer: 3 hours, 12 minutes, 10 seconds
Miles: 8.06 miles (4.4 actual miles)

We're up at 5:30 AM and off by 6:45 AM. It's all downhill this morning except for a brief climb out of Mark Noepel Shelter. The morning mist creates an eerie foggy scene as we cut through it on our descent. We reach Reynolds Rock, a Hoodoo-like rock outcrop (perhaps 25' high) jutting up mysteriously out of a farm meadow area. We spend time climbing to the top and snapping a few pictures to record our conquest.

We meet one northbound hiker in the farm meadow shortly after Reynolds Rock, and after exiting the meadow there is a steep descent down to Route 8 in Cheshire, MA; we arrive there at 9:15 AM. We call Lyn, but she is not yet past the VT-MA line.



Conquering Reynolds Rock

In the meantime, while we are waiting for Lyn to arrive, Hum gives me the titanium hiking poles he has loaned me to try out on this second week of hiking; I have just loved using them and this is a great gift: THANK YOU HUM!!

The retired couple we met at Mark Noepel Shelter last night also pass by. We chat briefly but they are in a hurry to get to the Cheshire Post Office to claim their resupply package. They briefly lose the AT on the other side of Route 8, but with Hum's expert navigation assistance they are soon back on their way.

Lyn takes a bit longer than expected to arrive and finally gets to MA8/Cheshire at about 10:30 AM, after, we learn, she takes a wrong turn on MA Route 2 and goes about 10 miles west before turning around. As usual, Lyn takes great care of her hikers and gives us cold sodas and washcloths to get some of the dirt off. Lyn snaps some pictures by the hiker sign to document the completion of our 2011 LT/AT hike.

We get back home at 12:30 PM, where Lyn has put up a "Congratulations" sign to commemorate my completion of the LT. We enjoy swimming in the afternoon and "Chicken Weinerschnitzel" for dinner, which Hum is ecstatic about in recalling that this is his favorite in Austria. At cocktail time, when Hum and I enjoy our long awaited manhattans, we celebrate with champagne that Lyn has also provided to toast the occasion. What a sweetie!

Epilogue – 8/20/2011 – 8/21/2011

Summary statistics for the 4-day hike:

Total Miles: 33.3 miles

Total Steps: 116,460

Total Calories: 3070

Summary statistics for the 6-day hike (not including 2 road walks) and 4-day hike:

Total Miles: 87.0 miles

Total Steps: 323,648

Total Calories: 8519



**Ho & Hum Complete 2011 LT/AT Hike at MA 8, Cheshire, MA
Ho is Triumphant in Front of Congratulations Sign Provided by Lyn**

On Saturday morning we enjoy the Rutland Farmer's Market in downtown Rutland, VT. In the afternoon, we once again visit EMS where Hum purchases the North Carolina/Tennessee AT maps and also the southern Virginia AT maps. These will be essential for planning our 2012 and beyond hikes on the AT. In the evening Hum treats us to a delicious dinner at the Trak-In in Castleton, VT, where we also enjoy the company of Lyn's cousins Jolly and Roz Rogers, who own the Trak-In and who know just about everyone in Vermont and what they're up to lately.

On Sunday morning we reminisce about the third year of Ho and Hum's backpacking adventures on the LT/AT. For the "geezer hikers" it was a great success: 54 miles over 6 days from the Vermont-Canada border hiking south, climbing 7 mountains, including Jay Peak, for a cumulative elevation gain of over 12,000', over some of the most rugged, straight-up terrain on the LT. Then 33 miles over 4 days, hiking south from Bennington, VT, to complete the LT, and into Massachusetts on the AT over the enormous, 15-mile long Mt. Greylock.

This completes my 3-year quest to hike the entire 273-mile LT and receive the Green Mountain Club's 'end-to-end patch' and certificate. I reflect on what 3 years of backpacking the LT has meant and what lasting impressions it would leave. Surely this was an outstanding life experience. To me the LT had met and far surpassed all expectations. We were enchanted by this 'footpath in the wilderness', which brings Vermont's great beauty into perfect harmony with nature. We were awed by its stunning beauty, which in fact had great power – hypnotic power – that I could see again and again and not tire of its impact. The LT is where we had challenged great dangers – ventured into the true wilderness – and had been frightened by the unknowns and unexpecteds and the enormous physical and mental challenges. In conquering these wilderness adventures and challenges our spirits were lifted to heights not felt before, but in looking back can somehow be felt again. We relish our backpacking trips together, the brotherly banter, and the company of the diverse, interesting, and friendly people we meet along the way. To us, communing with this 'trail family' is the best part of the whole experience. This 3-year quest to conquer the LT was a milepost in destiny, one that marked a later passage, and now in all its splendor the milepost had been passed.

We plan yet another Ho-Hum backpacking adventure in August 2012; this time we're planning to hike about 125 miles on the AT in Tennessee/North Carolina, from Erwin, TN to Damascus, VA.

After breakfast we give Hum a big hug goodbye and bid our brother farewell. Our wonderful saga has ended but we take away the unbelievable Ho-Hum memories of this astonishing adventure.