



## **Springer Mountain, Georgia to central Virginia**

### **March 24, 1994 – May 19, 1994**

#### **March 24, 1994**

My journey is about to begin! As I look out of the train window, I must admit that I feel a strange mix of emotions. On one hand, I am excited by the prospects of my journey, while on the other, I am apprehensive of what lies in store for me. Additionally, I feel regret that the ones that I love most cannot participate in my adventure.

I've begun reading an entertaining book on Chinese philosophy (Taoism), and I'm struck by how well this book describes my attitude toward this trip. As the Taoists teach simplicity above all else, I am embarking on this voyage of sorts in an attempt to refocus my life on the important things—me, Jackie, and our dogs. In the big picture, nothing else is even close to the simple things in importance.

Tomorrow will arrive all too soon, and with it the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

#### **March 25, 1994**

At 10:04 this morning, I embarked on what may be the most important journey in my life. After arriving at Amicalola Falls State Park following a very interesting trip by train and taxi, I started hiking on the approach trail to Springer Mountain. I met a charming couple (Eric and Lorraine—the “Odd Couple”) and had a very enjoyable hike with them for most of the way. I made it all the way



to the Springer Mountain shelter, and settled in with eight other hikers - most of them novice thru-hikers like me.

So far, everything is just as I had expected—the going can get rough at times, but it's worth it nevertheless. The only potential problem right now is my mileage expectation. I may be a bit too optimistic in my daily mileage schedule.

It's almost 7:00 pm, and almost bedtime, so this is all for now.

### March 26, 1994

Hiked to Hawk Mountain shelter today. Along the way, I stopped to see a *spectacular* waterfall. (I even remembered to take pictures!) The same crew even showed up at the shelter! I think that we will probably stick together for at least the next few days. We've been running into a lot of other hikers (day hikers, Boy Scouts, and even a southbounder—"Wolf"), and expect even more as the temperatures increase.

Looks like rain is going to move in this evening, so I'm going to find out soon whether my rain gear works or not. I hope that this storm passes over quickly, but you never know about storms in Georgia in the springtime.

I wonder if the Army Rangers will storm the shelter tonight? We may be in for a very noisy evening if they do. We're headed to Gooch Gap tomorrow, so it's time to get some rest now.

### March 27, 1994

What a day! No Rangers at Hawk Mountain last night, but we did get rain. And how! The morning hike was foggy with light drizzle, and at lunchtime the sky even cleared up for a while. However, around 2:00 pm, the rain started falling again, quickly escalating into thunder storms. By the time we reached the shelter, it was pouring! After being turned away from the shelter, we set up camp amidst hail the size of golf balls. We were so miserable that we just laughed and laughed.



The "shelter incident" kind of added a bad touch to an otherwise fun day. When we (Dave

“Thunderchicken” and I) got to the shelter, a group of non-hikers were hogging up the entire shelter. I didn’t mind that the shelter might be full, but it wasn’t, and they were RUDE!



A very strange thing happened today. While I was purifying some water, my PUR filter became very difficult to pump. When I opened it up, I discovered that the filter had somehow been shredded. I think that I will push through to Neels Gap tomorrow to buy a replacement.

The rain has stopped for the moment, and I am actually dry and cozy inside my tent. I even managed to cook up *two* dinners. Boy, was I hungry! Looks like tonight will be another early night (we’ve already been joking about “lights out” at 7:30 each night) because I’ve got a lot of ground to cover tomorrow.

### March 28, 1994

Everything is in working order again. This morning I got up early and hit the trail at 8:00 am. Dave (the “Bohemian”) and I hiked together until lunchtime, when he started to fade. I pushed onward, and made Neels Gap (the Walasi-Yi Center) by 3:45.



I was able to purchase a PUR cartridge, so my purifier is now as good as new. I also picked up three extra pairs of liner socks and two new stuff sacks (the old ones leaked really bad!). Between all of that, some groceries, and dinner, I spent almost \$150.

It’s wonderful to get a shower after being in the woods for so long—I’d started to forget what “clean” feels like. I even washed laundry and started to dry my stuff out.

I can’t believe how much food I’m eating! For breakfast, I ate about ½ lb of M&Ms, for lunch I had more M&Ms and some oatmeal (dry), and for dinner I ate a ham and cheese sandwich, a pizza, a pint of Ben & Jerrie’s ice cream, ½ bag of Combos, and some popcorn! How’s that for an interesting diet?

I’m up past my bedtime (it’s 9:00), so this is all until tomorrow.

**March 29, 1994**

I stayed over another day at Walasi-Yi (at the invitation of Jeff and Dorothy) in order to let the rest of our group catch up. Our group—Eric and Lorraine (the Odd Couple), Anne and Adrienne (Peanut and Cashew), Dave (the Bohemian), Dave (Thunderchicken), and Scott and Melissa—have been

named “Uncle Bob’s Lonesome Traveling Circus” by the staff at Walasi-Yi.



I’m glad I’m leaving tomorrow before I go broke! This morning, I decided to pick up some new equipment and replace some existing stuff, so I spent another \$300. (I guess I kind of got carried away.) So now, I have a new sleeping bag, fleece jacket, gaiters, and yet another stuff sack. I sent home my old sleeping bag, stuff sacks, rain pants, wool sweater, and some other junk—in all, about nine pounds worth. The new stuff is warmer, lighter, and just plain newer.

Tomorrow, we are going to head for the Low Gap shelter (about ten miles). I hope that I can keep convincing the group to follow along in my wake.

**March 30, 1994**

This evening has been somewhat difficult for me. Although I’ve known all along that our group would eventually disband, I don’t know how I might have prepared for the emotional letdown that would accompany it. A strange tension hangs over the shelter as we all discuss our plans for the next few days. Bohemian’s knees are really bothering him, so I think he’s going to start slowing down. Eric and Lorraine are just trying to take it easy, so they don’t want to take on high mileage days. Peanut and Cashew are just taking their time; anyway, they are so disorganized that they never get out of camp early enough to make any mileage.

Last night, I had a *terrible* bout of “the blues”—I really miss Alexander! Even this morning, I had the urge to try and make up the mileage in order to pick up Alex early. I’ve been hiking strong, without injuries, so I am healthy enough to try.

I’ve heard that last year’s thru-hikers are going to serve up hot dogs and hamburgers at the Deep Gap shelter this weekend. What a nice touch for all of us on our northbound pilgrimage!



Tomorrow, I'm headed through Unicoi Gap toward Tray Mountain. I'm not sure where I'll wind up, or who will be with me when I get there. Well, it's getting dark, so I'll end here. I'm curious to see how my movie turns out!

### March 31, 1994

Well, I'm on my own again (actually, for the first time since I started hiking). Today, I hiked to the Tray Mountain shelter. The hike was long, and a bit difficult, but I managed to get through anyhow.

I think that, with a little luck and a lot of hiking, I can make Davenport Gap (the far side of Great Smokey Mountains National Park) by April 9th. I have 108.2 miles to go to reach Fontana Dam, and another 72.9 miles to get out of the park and to the I-40 crossing at Davenport Gap. At nine days of hiking, that's about 20 miles per day for the next few days. As much as I've been trying to avoid schedules, here's a tentative agenda:

4/1	Bly Gap (tenting)	19.6 mi
4/2	Big Spring shelter	22.1 mi
4/3	Rainbow Spring Campground	9.1 mi
4/4	A. Rufus Morgan shelter	30.4 mi
4/5	Cable Gap shelter	24.2 mi
4/6	Spence Field shelter	22.2 mi
4/7	Mt. Collins shelter	19.8 mi
4/8	Tri-Corner Knob shelter	20.1 mi
4/9	meet Jackie at Davenport Gap	

I got a couple of blisters today—one on the outside of each heel. My feet started to get sore, but I didn't want to stop. I guess it's my fault.

It's time for bed, and my thoughts of Alex and our imminent reunion will make me sleep soundly. I really can't wait to see him again!

### April 1, 1994

A big mileage day—hiked 21.8 miles to the Muskrat Creek shelter. Not a bad hike, except for the last three miles (they were really hard!). Looks like I can make Rainbow Springs Campground by tomorrow night.

I've been thinking a lot about Jackie, me, and the dogs. I'm pretty sure now that I am going to sell my motorcycle and retire from racing. I am not sure exactly what's going on with me, but I'm fast losing my enthusiasm for road racing. I think that this may be the hiker effect — after realizing how enjoyable and exciting hiking can be, I don't really need to go racing to feel important.

My blisters are still here—the left foot is a little worse today, but the right one looks somewhat better. I'll have to keep an eye on them nevertheless.

I wonder how “the group” is doing? I’m afraid that I’m so far ahead of them already that they’ll never catch up. I already miss them—each individual personality. I think that I’ll leave them a message in the shelter register.

On that note, I’ll end here. Tomorrow will be another *long* hiking day!

### April 2, 1994

Hiked 25.4 miles today! I’m actually *ahead* of my recently imposed schedule. I hiked from the Muskrat Creek shelter to Rainbow Springs Campground. I got a shower and my laundry is clean, so I am really excited!

My boots are really starting to fall apart—the stitching on the left one is beginning to pull apart. My feet aren’t getting any worse, but they could be a *lot* better. I bought some Spenco 2nd skin—let’s see if this helps at all.



I got to call home today—it was really great to hear from mom and Jennifer. We talked for a while—they still want to pick me up at the end of my trip. I talked to Jackie’s mom—she was taking care of the dogs while Jackie was out.

I hope that my old hiking partners—Bohemian, Peanut, Cashew, and the Odd Couple, are faring well. I didn’t mean to break away from the so abruptly, but I do need to pick up Alex. I left a note at the Muskrat Creek shelter for them to send postcards to me at home. I guess the trail is filled with these bittersweet memories.

Tomorrow will be a shorter day (10 - 15 miles). I’m looking forward to a late start and an early finish.

### April 3, 1994

A really short hiking day today (only 6.8 miles). I left Rainbow Springs at about 10:00 (we switched to daylight savings time last night) and hiked until about 1:30, when the rain started. The forecast calls for some rain this afternoon and tonight, but clearing tomorrow and through the week.

I finally talked to Jackie last night, and she is going to bring Alex to Davenport Gap next Saturday. I asked her to bring along some stuff, like my extra boots and socks. I am not sure, but I think that she misses me (her phone demeanor seemed to suggest so).

The short hiking day should help me to heal my heel blisters. I put on some Spenco 2nd skin, and it really works! I am hoping that my boots stay together until I get to Davenport Gap.

I really noticed the difference in the weight of my pack since I resupplied at Rainbow Springs. I picked up canned sardines, squeeze margarine, bagels, bread, cheese, and some other stuff to carry me to Fontana Dam. Funny how just a few pounds can make such a big difference in the comfort of a backpack. No matter, the food will be gone soon, and the pack will lighten back up again.

### April 4, 1994

Boy, am I tired! Today, I hiked from the Siler Bald shelter to the Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC), and then beyond. (I think that I put on about 26.7 miles.) This morning, I felt good, so I decided to hike to the NOC to pick up some Coleman fuel and possibly get some replacement parts for my stove. When I got there, everything was closed for the day, and there was no space available at the hostel. Oh well.

The day wasn't a waste, though. Along the way, I took some great pictures from the balds. I even did some nude sunbathing on top of Wesser bald!

My feet are holding up well enough—now my knees are giving me a bit of trouble. The hike to the NOC had *lots* of steep downhill trail—the kind that my knees hate! Tomorrow shouldn't be too bad, it's uphill all morning! Speaking of tomorrow, I'm only about 27 miles from Fontana Dam—maybe I'll be there by evening. We'll have to see how my legs feel in the morning.

### April 5, 1994

Are we having fun yet?! Today has been the absolute worst day so far! (Really, all the others were pretty good, and only this one sucks.) My feet are acting up again, thanks to my dead boots, and my knees did not enjoy the miles and miles of steep descents. To top it off, it rained—not enough to really cool things off, but enough to make the going really treacherous. By the time I reached Fontana Dam, I was almost crying.

On a more positive note, I met a couple from Jessup (of all places) who had hiked up from Springer Mountain. What a small world!

One advantage of my rather quick pace is that I spend most of the day alone, with lots of time to think. I have been working through a lot of pent-up anger about work, and I am starting to feel a little better. I have also spent a lot of time thinking about



Jackie—her eyes, her smile, the way she talks, stuff like that. I am looking forward to seeing her at Davenport Gap this weekend.

Tomorrow morning, I am going to walk into Fontana Village and run a few errands, like washing clothes, picking up my mail, and buying a few things. I got to take a shower tonight at the dam, so I don't think I'll stink anyone out tomorrow.



### April 6, 1994

A well-deserved short day! I took care of business in Fontana Village this morning, then hiked to the Birch Spring Gap shelter in GSMNP.

There was a lot of hubbub in Fontana Village; apparently a movie called "Nell" and starring Jodie Foster is set to begin filming on Monday.



My maildrop was waiting for me at the Post Office—what a great feeling to get a package from home, even if I did mail it to myself. I even had some letters waiting for me! Randy Hall sent me a letter, Brian Holian sent me a postcard, and Ed Collier sent me a nice card.

I'm about 70 miles from Davenport Gap, so I'm staying approximately on schedule. The next few days will be pretty high mileage ones—20 to 25 miles per day. My pack is *really* heavy since I picked up my maildrop,

so I was glad not to have to do big mileage today. I've eaten at least a pound of food, so my pack should lighten up quickly.

### April 7, 1994

Hiked 21.5 miles today to the Siler's Bald shelter. I am actually kind of proud that I was able to pull that kind of mileage through the more difficult section of the Smokies. I'm hoping to make the Tri-Corner Knob shelter tomorrow (about 28 miles). After that, it's a short hop to Davenport Gap and my meeting with Jackie, Alex, and Arthur.

What a strange day! Last night, it rained a bit, and then turned *cold*! This morning, the fog was really thick, and the temperature was only about 35°F. The temperature never got much above 40°F, and the fog didn't lift until about 1:00. But when the fog lifted, the views were *spectacular*! I was climbing Rocky Top Mountain when the sun and blue sky burst through. I must have taken at least



a half dozen pictures, the sky was so beautiful. Now, I can finally see why people are willing to sing about that mountain.



I wish that I could spend more time here, but, unfortunately, my schedule just won't allow for it. Maybe I'll come back some day to just mosey through and enjoy the views.

My feet are actually feeling a little better now that my blisters are turning into cal-louses. My knees also feel pretty good, although my right one got twisted during one of my many near-miss slips in the mud. I think that all I need to get back into tip-top shape is a *day off*.

### April 8, 1994

Today was such an unusual day that I'm having some difficulty in deciding exactly what to write down. Yesterday, I had twisted my knee when I slipped in some mud. This morning, it started to hurt so badly that I almost cried as I climbed up to Clingman's Dome. After I climbed over Clingman's Dome, my knee became increasingly stiff and almost buckled when I put weight on it. Needless to say, I was terribly depressed at the thought of missing my rendezvous with Jackie, and I decided that I was going to go to Newfound Gap and then hitchhike to Gatlinburg, TN, and from there to Davenport Gap. As I was walking along the road from Clingman's Dome to Newfound Gap (two things to explain here: (1) the AT passed very close to the road, so I got off of the trail, and (2) I was too damned stubborn to hitch a ride until I had reached the gap), I got a strange thought that I should somehow rewrap my knee with my ace bandage. I did, and the pain mysteriously subsided. Not only that, but I made *fantastic* time hiking along the road to Newfound Gap.

When I got to the gap, I realized that my knee had almost stopped hurting and that I could actually make up some distance during the remaining daylight (it was about 1:30). So, I tightened up my pack straps and made it all the way to the Tri-Corner Knob shelter (28.1 miles from where I started).

I know that I'm not particularly religious, but somehow I think that the Big Guy wanted me to continue with my journey. Whether or not that's true, I still feel quite inspired to continue with my trek. Today has been such an intense day, with my emotions ranging from utter despair to absolute elation, that I am sure to remember it for a long time to come.

### April 9, 1994

This is an unusual entry—I'm writing in the middle of the afternoon! First, I want to mention a few details that I had forgotten last night. Tri-Corner Knob shelter is at an elevation of about 5900 feet, so cooking can be a bit interesting. (Exactly what temperature does water boil at when you're at high altitude?) I stuck my finger into water that was boiling away on my stove, and it was, well,

warm. I was eating freeze-dried food, so there was no way that the food was going to rehydrate correctly, but it was good anyway.

I met a group of Boy Scouts at the shelter who were finishing a four day tour of some of the AT shelters in the park. These guys were doing a great job of cleaning up after the other campers. I was pleased to see these young volunteers at work.

Ok, with that out of the way, let's move on to today's events (so far). I'm sitting at the bottom of the exit ramp off of eastbound I-40 for Waterville, NC. I'm early, so I don't think that I've missed Jackie. Actually, I don't expect her for another few hours. My only concern at the moment is that she is able to follow my directions without getting lost.

After my "nine days from hell" to get caught back up to my original schedule, I'm having some great difficulty in sorting out my feelings. I've been pushing myself very hard for the last 1 1/2 weeks, and now that it's over, I feel relieved and very tired. Because of my injuries (feet, knees, and a previously unmentioned chafing problem), I need to take at least a few days off to heal. I am tempted to go home for a week or so, and then pick back up on the trail, but I'm afraid that I may not want to come back after I leave the trail (it's kind of like admitting defeat). I'm also concerned that I'll become bored if I slow down. My biggest fear of all is that I'm leaving Jackie without the support she needs from me.

Speaking of Jackie (and the dogs, too!), I had forgotten how much I miss her, even when we're only apart for a few weeks. Maybe I'm just too used to having her around, because even though I love her very much, there isn't any urgency to let her know—I feel like I've got all the time in the world to tell her.

How about some hiking statistics for today? So far I've hiked 17.5 trail miles (not counting a 2 1/2 mile lunch detour) from the Tri-Corner Knob shelter to the I-40 crossing. I passed near the summit of Mount Guyot (6621 feet), which had a much more impressive view than Clingman's Dome (although I didn't take pictures because of the fog and haze). I even stopped at Mountain Moma's for a cheeseburger, fries and a Coke. What a glorious day!

### **April 10, 1994**

In all of the confusion last night, I didn't make last night's entry. I'll make up for that today.

OH, CRUEL AND HEARTLESS MOUNTAINS,  
SMUG BENEATH YOUR GREEN BOUQUET,  
I COME TO YOU SEEKING KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM,  
BUT YOU JUST TURN ME AWAY - FEELING SMALL AND AFRAID

Well, Jackie arrived at about 6:00, picked me up, and we drove to a motel in Sevierville, TN. I got reacquainted with Alex and Arthur on the way to the motel. Jackie told me that everything is going well at home—the fish are happy, the freezers are full, and the bills are paid. We had dinner, and

then we went to Wal-Mart and a grocery store to resupply.

Now the bad part. Although I have a million things to tell her, I couldn't find anything meaningful to say to her all night. Sure, we made small talk, but that was about as far as it would go. Why do we feel so awkward toward each other?

This morning, she dropped Alex and me off, and then she headed back home with Arthur. Although I was well-fed, well-equipped, and had Alex by my side, I felt more unprepared to go on than I have felt since I started on this crazy adventure. Alex has sensed it, too, and has been doing his best to cheer me up.

We hiked from the I-40 crossing to the Groundhog Creek shelter today (about 7.8 miles). I don't want to push Alex too far, and I am trying to recover from my stint in the Smokies. My new boots feel infinitely better than the dead pair that I threw away at the motel.



At the shelter, I got into a philosophical discussion with Paula (Lobo) and Bill (Wild Bill) regarding an individual's motivation for hiking the trail. We didn't really come to any conclusions, but just agreed that it was a very personal thing for each individual.

It is raining, and Alex is sitting with me, barking at the thunder. It's not particularly late, but I'm feeling a bit tired, so I think that I'll read for a while and then go to sleep.

### April 11, 1994

Alex and I had a pretty good day today. Last night, we shared the shelter with two people—Bill and Paula. I got the impression that Alex got on Bill's nerves, with his muddy paws and nighttime barking. At about midnight, a mouse ran into Alex while he was sleeping. The mouse let out a squeal and ran the other way, and Alex jumped up and started barking. However, today Bill insisted that Alex and I meet him at the shelter when we were done hiking for the day.



Today, Alex and I hiked 13.1 miles to the Walnut Mountain shelter. Poor Alex is a bit out of shape for this kind of hiking—I had to carry his puppy pack for part of the way! Actually, I think that he is used to getting a lot more sleep during the day. Whatever the reason, I'm not worried about my little tough guy.

The hike over Max Patch Mountain was strange but beautiful. The top of the mountain has no trees—only grass. With the wind, the clouds and the generally gloomy atmosphere up there, I was reminded of Kerouac's *Desolation Angels*. I took a few pictures to remember the mountain.

Tomorrow, we're heading into Hot Springs to pick up mail, do laundry, buy groceries, eat, and then relax. I will be glad to get there and take a few hours off with Alexander.

This was the second day in a row that I didn't encounter another hiker all day. I guess that the northbound thru-hikers (the ones that are left) are starting to form groups. Maybe I'll run into a few in Hot Springs.

### April 12, 1994

We made it to Hot Springs! Alex and I left the shelter at about 7:30, and made it to the Trailside Cafe in downtown Hot Springs before 1:00. We had a couple of cheeseburgers (after Alex caused a big fuss when I had to leave him outside the cafe to order lunch) and they were *good!* We got many things done today—washed laundry, picked up mail, mailed some stuff home, and even called Randy at work.

Speaking of mail, what was I thinking when I packed this maildrop!?! The box must have weighed at least 10 pounds, with tuna, Vienna sausages, and even deviled ham packed inside. I'm definitely not looking forward to the first few days out of town.

I decided to mail back Alex's pack because it was causing too many problems. First, Alex couldn't seem to get used to carrying too much stuff on his back. Second, every time the pack got wet (which has been constantly), it seemed to cause Alex a lot of discomfort. Third, it was not practical for carrying food because Alex's short and jumpy stride shakes the pack so violently that it pulverizes all of his food and vitamins.



We're staying at the Jesuit hostel on the edge of town. Dogs aren't supposed to be let inside, so we may just sleep on the porch if the weather is nice, or I may sneak him inside if it rains too hard.

I'm hoping for a good night's sleep tonight. I haven't slept well for the last two nights



because I've been worried about Alexander. But tonight I think that he'll be safe, and I'll finally get a good night's rest.

### April 13, 1994

*Oh cursed pack upon my back,  
why do you weigh so much?  
You hold tent, food and clothes,  
not lead and bricks and such.*

Today turned out to be a rather nice hiking day, despite my seriously overweight pack. Not only did I receive a *large* maildrop yesterday, but this morning I had to buy Alex a five pound bag of puppy food to tide him over for the next few days. We hiked out of Hot Springs to the Spring Mountain shelter (about 11 miles).

Hiking with Alex has been a bit more work than I had expected it to be. He has been an angel – he's so well behaved, but he's still one more thing that I have to take care of. He has his moods, and when he doesn't want to move quickly he can really slow me down.

I'm still hiking with Wild Bill, but Lobo decided to spend an extra day in Hot Springs. I'm not sure that I'll see her again.

I made a big dinner this evening (Jello, chili mac, rice, and a peaches and cream pie), and Alex has been eating his puppy food, so my pack should be appreciably lighter tomorrow. I think that we will try to hike about 15 miles tomorrow—I think that Alex will be up for it. Based on how much he played once we got to the shelter, he's doing fine.



### April 14, 1994

Stopped for lunch at the Little Laurel shelter. Alex is sleeping, so I took care of a few small chores. I fixed the bypass valve on my PUR water filter (a piece of the old filter was lodged inside, making the valve leak), and the frayed cord on Alex's leash.

**Appalachia, so strong and tall,  
I have heard your timeless call.  
Bathe me in your floral wonder;  
protect me from the fiercesome thunder.  
As I journey very far, and  
take my rest beneath the stars.**

We made it all the way to the Jerry Cabin shelter (about 15.3 miles for the day). Alex and I shared some turkey tetrazzini, but he wasn't too fond of my pasta with herbs or my miso soup. He seems to be eating enough, between his puppy food and the things I share, to keep his energy level up. All in all, I think that he's happy, although I still don't think that he's figured out what we're doing out here. Neither have I.

At this rate, we should hit Damascus, VA sometime next weekend. I am really looking forward to a day (or two?) off when we get there. Wow, halfway home, and I'll still be (almost) on schedule. Wild Bill is still with me, and it looks like we may be together for at least a week more.

### April 15, 1994

**One by one and two by two, the pilgrims march along the trail. Young and old they come, many knowing not what to expect. Some come for truth, others for inner peace; still others cannot explain why they make the journey.**

**March on, mountain pilgrims! Think with your hearts and cleanse your minds. The time of your enlightenment is near.**

Today was a mixed day for us. This morning, we got up early, and made great time. However, the rain started this afternoon, slowing us down, and making both Alex and I a bit uncomfortable. When we got to the Hogback Ridge shelter, some hikers were already using it, so I set up my tent nearby. Alex and I had dinner (mac and cheese) and then I cleaned up and set in for the evening. I'm not sure why, but Alex is being very cranky and disobedient. I sure hope that he gets over this behavior soon.

Tomorrow looks like a much easier day than today—weather should be better and terrain will be easier. I think that we'll go 15-16 miles in order to put us in range of Erwin, TN on Sunday. My current plan is to buy enough groceries to reach Damascus, and to forward my Elk Park, NC maildrop to Damascus also.

### April 16, 1994

Boy, did it rain last night! Alex and I huddled in our tent all night (we stayed warm and dry) hiding from the thunder and lightning. Alex slept all night! This morning we both woke up refreshed from a very peaceful night of sleep.

This morning, the rain had stopped, but the ground was soaked. I put the tent away wet, and hung wet clothes (I had left them out all night) on my pack to dry. That wet stuff really got heavy.





While I was packing my tent, the fly fell into a briar patch, so it may have a few small holes in it now. I need to get some water-proofing to stop any leaks that might develop.

I've noticed that Alex takes a little time each day before he settles into his comfortable hiking groove. Until he settles in, he is just too hyper! But after he is in his groove, we are able to click off miles with ease.

Today, we only hiked about 10 miles to the Bald Mountain shelter. On the way, I took lots of pictures from the balds that we crossed. I had wanted to spend more time on them, but it was cold (less than 50°F) all day with gusty winds. We are staying in the shelter with Wild Bill, Mary (Meandering Duck), and Cindy and Jim (Max Patch and the Apothecary). Alex is very popular around here (especially with women!).

We're starting to run out of food, so Alex and I must travel to the Nolichucky Gorge Campground hostel tomorrow to resupply. I don't know if Bill will go that far, but we will wait for him to catch up. On Monday, I'm going to call PUR and Coleman to see if I can get replacement parts sent to Damascus.

### April 17, 1994

Alex and I hiked into Erwin, TN today to buy groceries, and to get lunch. We wolfed down two hot dogs, a rib sandwich, some beef jerky, and a Klondike before we went grocery shopping. While I was in the store, the manager brought Alex some fresh meat to make him feel better until I came outside. The people in this town have been *very* friendly to both me and Alex.

I bought lots of snacks and groceries for Alex and myself, to tide us over until we pick up our maildrop in Elk Park, NC. We have deviled ham, crackers, cheese, Gatorade, dinners, granola bars, candy bars, and even puppy treats! Alex and I should be set for the next few days.

We are staying at the NGC hostel with Wild Bill (he hitchhiked into town from Spivy Gap). We will probably stay over for another night to rest and take care of some errands tomorrow.

I talked to Jackie—she told me that everything is going well at home, and more importantly, she actually sounded glad to hear from me! She will mail the next three maildrop packages (Damascus, Bastian, and Pearisburg) tomorrow. She sounds like she is enjoying her independence—she's getting involved in hobbies and is doing some traveling. I'm now pretty sure that things will be different (meaning *better*) when I return.

We're having pizza for dinner tonight! Oh, the wonders of modern society.

**April 18, 1994**

Spent my second day in Erwin taking care of many errands. I was able to call Jansport (they are sending a 28" hipbelt to Mt. Rogers Outfitters in Damascus), Coleman (they are sending a new pump and fuel bottle to the P.O. in Damascus), and PUR (they are sending a new pump assembly to the P.O. in Damascus). Rick from PUR told me that the fine silt along the AT has been causing some problems with the filters, and that putting a coffee filter over the prefilter screen would help a lot. I was pleasantly surprised by the great service that I have received from the customer service representatives.

I also washed my clothes (yea!), bought a few more groceries, and gave Alex a bath. After all of this, I am just about caught up with my town chores. Tomorrow, we will move along, and I am already a little restless. I am looking forward to our arrival in Damascus next week.

Two showers in as many nights—I'm one clean hiker! I'm not sure how I'm going to react when I'm back out in the woods with no showers again. And to top it off, we (Alex and I) ordered a salad and a sub to split. I'm really getting spoiled.

Oh, by the way, Lobo showed up again at the hostel, accompanied by Max Patch and the Apothecary, Slick, and Sweet Goat.

**April 19, 1994**

Sure is nice to be back on the trail! Alex and I left the hostel at about 8:00 this morning, and stopped briefly at the Curley Maple Gap shelter on our way up the trail. We're taking a little break right now, so I thought that I could jot down a few things while Alex takes a nap.



I can feel the beginnings of our inevitable push toward Damascus—my mind has been occupied with elaborate daily mileage plans to coordinate our travels with my waiting maildrop in Elk Park. I've also been working on my "to do" list of items to take care of once I reach Damascus. As of now, I think that we will reach Elk Park on Thursday or Friday, and Damascus on Monday or Tuesday.

We reached our destination for the day (Beauty Spot Gap) at about 12:30, and have been enjoying a nice, lazy afternoon of warm sunshine and cool breezes. Alex has been napping on and off for a while, and I have been quietly contemplating how my life is quickly changing direction. Every new mountain that I climb, and every mile





that I travel, leave their impressions in me. I can't believe, even now, what an incredible experience this is. Hiking gets into my blood even more strongly than racing ever did.

Looks like Wild Bill made it up here—Alex just woke up and started barking at him. For some reason, Alex and Bill seem to get along very well; even better than either one with other hikers.



The longer he's been with me, the more I've become convinced that Alex is the ideal trail companion. He's small (relatively), cute, well-behaved, and has the sweetest disposition. And to top it off, he has *personality*. I've been amazed by the number of total strangers who have come up to us along the trail and in town. I'm really glad that Jackie "rescued" him from the pet store.

Tomorrow, I think that Alex and I will try to get up early and get hiking before 7:30, so that we can reach the Clyde Smith shelter (about 14.5 miles from here) before the afternoon heat really builds. Wild Bill and Meandering Duck are camping with us, and will probably join us at the shelter tomorrow. I've been looking at my original hiking schedule, and have decided that I'm actually doing fairly well. I may not be burning up the trail right now, but I expect somewhat higher daily mileage once I get into Virginia.

### April 20, 1994

Alex and I made it to the Clyde Smith shelter, despite a much harder day than the profile maps would have one believe. This section of trail was chock full of very steep climbs and descents. And at least one water source listed in the Data Book wasn't there.



Alex and I shared two dinners, a candy bar, and Alex ate some puppy food since we got to the shelter. Meandering Duck, Wild Bill, and Max Patch and the Apothecary have joined us for the evening. We're all full and happy, and almost ready for bed.

Tomorrow should be a tough day, even though we're only hiking about 11 miles. We have to get over Roan Mountain—a 2000+ foot climb over two to three miles. However, once we climb the mountain, the rest of the hike to the Overmountain shelter should be relatively easy.

**April 21, 1994**

What a nice day of hiking. The climb up Roan Mountain wasn't nearly as difficult as I had expected. Although the climb was long, it was not too steep, except for several very short segments. Alex has been very well behaved, although I've been yelling at him a lot lately. I'm not sure, but I think that I'm coming down with a cold or something like that. I've been tired and irritable lately, for no particular reason. Hope that whatever it is passes quickly.

Wild Bill's ankle is acting up again, so he stayed behind at the last shelter to rest it for a day or so. As a result, Alex and I are wandering the trail alone again. Meandering Duck came to the shelter with us, and is going to Elk Park tomorrow, but I think that she's more interested in hiking alone than in a group.

Tomorrow should be a nice eight mile hike to US 19E, then a short trip (maybe a ride?) into Elk Park to pick up my maildrop and buy a few groceries to get me into Damascus. the only problem may be the weather—I've heard some conflicting forecasts, but we may get some rain tomorrow. Oh well, wouldn't be the first time I've looked like a drowned rat.

**April 22, 1994**

Well, the rain held off long enough for Alex and I to get to Elk Park, pick up groceries, get our mail, and make it to the campground. I was happy to receive postcards from Randy Hall, Brian Holian, and Ed Collier. I have even taken a shower, so I don't smell nearly as offensive as I have recently.

I noticed today that the sole of my right boot is beginning to delaminate. I called Vasque, and they told me that I could exchange them at Mt. Rogers Outfitters in Damascus. I think that the boots will last until I get there.



Elk Park is ok, but is not the ideal town for a maildrop. Alex and I hiked about 1 ½ miles along the road toward town before we got a ride. The P.O. was in the center of town, but the campground is about 2 ½ miles beyond. Alex and I will have to walk almost five miles to get back to the trail tomorrow if we don't get a ride.

I'm a bit nervous today about spending money. I am down to my last \$2.00, and we need to get



some Coleman fuel tomorrow on the way back to the trail. I hope that I will find a cash machine in Damascus so that we can proceed with our trip. Fortunately, we have enough stuff to get to Damascus without too much trouble.

We haven't had much rain after all. The sky still looks a bit dreary, but not much else. Alex has been resting much of the afternoon—he'll need his strength tomorrow. I want to get, at least, to the Moreland Gap shelter. If the weather isn't bad, and we feel up to it, we may even push on to the Laurel Fork shelter.

### April 23, 1994

Today started early! At 5:20, Alex and I got up and packed our things. We were hiking up the road to town by 5:50. We made good time, and were back out at J's Market (about one mile from the trail) before 6:30. We picked up Coleman fuel, and got back onto the trail at 7:30.

The weather turned out to be *gorgeous*! Sunshine all day long, with temps in the 60's and 70's. Alex and I were able to make great time and distance today. We hiked to the Moreland Gap shelter for lunch and a nap, and then on to the Laurel Fork Gorge. The gorge was beautiful, with trees and rhododendron everywhere, topped with a spectacular waterfall.

Since the shelter was full, Alex and I wound up tenting along the creek. I had two dinners tonight (red beans and rice, and pasta and cheese with broccoli), plus a cup of soup, a cup of tea, and a cup of cider. Alex, on the other hand, didn't have too much. He didn't like anything I cooked, except some dehydrated beef I made for him. I ran out of puppy food today, and with no ATM to be found, we have no way to buy any more. Frankly, I'm a bit worried about Alex.

I've been thinking that we could do a bit of extra mileage tomorrow, and be in range of Damascus on Monday afternoon. If we can make town by the time the P.O. closes, I can take care of Alex (and myself) until we get some spending money. However, we are currently 47 miles from Damascus—we need a heroic hiking day tomorrow in order to make it by Monday afternoon. At least the profile map looks easy enough. We have to climb over (around?) Pond Mountain, descend and cross near the dam, then ascend to follow the ridge. Once we are on the ridge, I don't expect any big climbs or descents until we reach Damascus.

### April 24, 1994

Another early day for us. We hit the trail at 6:30, and stopped for breakfast at 9:00 on Watauga Lake. I made Alex some dehydrated chicken in a Lipton chicken noodle dinner. We then hiked on and stopped briefly at the Watauga Lake shelter at around 10:30. We climbed up to the ridge, and

had lunch at the Vandeventer shelter at about 1:00. For lunch, Alex had dehydrated turkey and crackers, while I ate dry oatmeal.

Since we hit the ridge, the hiking has been fairly easy. I've heard that it's a thru-hiker tradition to do this stretch in a continuous hike over 24 hours. I wonder if Alex would be up to the task? I'm actually feeling very good, and it would be nice to get to Damascus a little early. I think that I'll let Alex rest for a while and then ask him.

We made it to the Iron Mountain shelter at about 5:45. Our pace slowed somewhat because of the effect of the afternoon heat on Alex. We're going to have dinner here, then take a break before pushing on. As the air temperature becomes lower, our speed should increase somewhat.

Ok, so I decided not to hike all night! As we were approaching the Double Spring shelter, Alex started to look *very* tired. Anyway, even with the moon out, we weren't making great time. We arrived at the shelter at about 9:30. So, for the day, we hiked for 15 hours, and covered 29.5 miles. I can surely live with these statistics.

Some small animal just started up the hill toward the shelter and caught Alex's attention, not to mention the fury of his barking wrath. I hope that this animal doesn't get too close, because I know that Alex will think it's trying to get me, and he will attack it. I don't think that the poor animal would know what happened. I see this as an interesting dichotomy in Alex's personality. On one hand, he's *really* aggressive, while on the other, he just *loves* people and other animals. Most people don't believe how aggressive he can be—they should watch us playing sometime. Yep, he's the *perfect* trail dog.

It's getting late, so it's off to bed to rest up for another early morning and long (about 18 miles) hiking day.

### April 25, 1994

Another early day! This morning, Alex and I got up at 4:45, and hit the trail at 5:10. We made the Abingdon Gap shelter by 8:00, and were in Damascus at 11:30. We picked up our mail, including our maildrop and packages from Coleman and PUR, and promptly attacked the food in the maildrop. Alex ate about a pound of his puppy food, while I ate eight granola bars.

After I hit the food, we went to the outfitter and I picked up my hip belt and borrowed \$20 from Damascus Dave until I get cash tomorrow. He was really nice, and insisted that I take it.



Alex and I dropped our stuff at the hostel, then went to take care of laundry and buy a few supplies. We picked up dog food, some snacks, a pint of Coleman fuel, and some WD-40.

I am looking forward to lounging around town tomorrow while I wait for my money to be wired to the local bank for me. The people here are very nice, and have been very helpful. I may also give Alex a bath, although he does need a trim also. There is no groomer in this town, and the nearest one is 15 miles away.

I talked to Randy Hall for some length today. We talked about him, me, Z, and lots of other things. It seems that Wednesday 4/27 has been declared a federal holiday in mourning for the death of Richard Nixon.

I noticed that Alex is getting a bit sore, so I gave him an ibuprofen tablet with his spam. I also slipped in his monthly wormer pill. I want to keep my boy happy and healthy.

### April 26, 1994

Trail magic is wonderful. This morning, Alex and I hitchhiked into Abingdon, about 15 miles from Damascus. We got picked up by the owner of one of the local stores who happened to be on his way into town. He took us right where we needed to go, and then offered me the keys to his truck in case I needed to run any errands. I declined, but I was surprised and flattered that he would make such an offer.



I dropped Alex at the groomer (who was already very busy but agreed to trim Alex anyway), and took off to run a few errands. I had a big breakfast at Shoney's (which made me sick later), then went to Kmart to buy a new journal. After that, I hiked across town to Highland Ski and Outdoor. They weren't able to replace my boots (they didn't stock my model), but the guy who helped me (Charles White) was very friendly and helpful. I picked up a lightweight hat, lightbulbs for my flashlight, PUR cartridge and carbon filter (plus some free O-rings and silicone grease), barge cement, tent seam sealer, a hat, and a stylish new bandanna.

Afterward, Charlie took me to pick up Alex, and then brought me back to the hostel in Damascus. He wouldn't take any money—he just wants an occasional postcard. He is planning to thru-hike the AT next year, so we talked about it a lot.

This afternoon, I have been taking care of a lot of small chores—replacing the generator on my Coleman stove, rebuilding my PUR filter, replacing the strings on my tent, etc. While we were at it, Alex and I repaid our debt to Damascus Dave and bought a few small items at Mt. Rogers Outfitters. I also bought a cool t-shirt at the Post Office!

Alex looks great! His fur is clean and neatly clipped, and it makes a difference in his appearance. The people who thought he was cute before now think that he's *adorable*. And Alex, the little ham, just eats up the attention.

I hope that tomorrow will bring that long-awaited rest day – no major chores to do, and all day to do what little we have to.

I talked to Jackie last night. Not much is happening at home. She appears to be taking care of the house and our financial affairs well enough without me. As with the last time I called her, I sense that she is rediscovering herself through her independence. I also thought that she sounded very happy to hear from me. Maybe this trip will have more of an impact on our relationship than I had previously thought.

### **April 27, 1994**

The long-awaited rest day has arrived! I got a great night's sleep last night, and Alex and I both awoke feeling happy and refreshed. This morning, I went to Dot's restaurant with a bunch of other thru-hikers. The service was slow, and the food wasn't too good, but it was fun to get out anyway.

After breakfast, I finished up my grocery shopping and picked up another pint of Coleman fuel. Dave at MRO gave me some free Jansport tools that will let me disassemble and reassemble my pack frame if I have any problems. I replaced the hip belt on my pack and waterproofed my boots. This afternoon, I plan to do some more laundry (rewash my socks and wash my pile jacket before I send it home). I have a lot of stuff to send home before I leave town—my pile jacket, extra food, stove pump, PUR filter parts, old maps, film, and lots of other miscellaneous stuff.

Alex and I have really enjoyed our time in town—but tomorrow it will be time to leave. We've just about finished our business here, and we have 500 miles to go to get to Harpers Ferry (actually 542.8). Tomorrow, we will conclude our business, say our goodbyes, and hit the trail.

### **April 28, 1994**

Our last day in Damascus. Alex and I awoke at about 6:45 to a wonderful, sunny day. We went to the Post Office and mailed a box of stuff home, and a box of puppy food to Bastian, VA. Afterward, we had breakfast and packed our things.

My pack is so heavy! Between the extra pint of fuel, extra t-shirt and food, I totally negated any weight savings I would have seen from mailing home my fleece jacket. In fact, I think that my pack is the heaviest that it has been on the trail so far. My big consolation is that the majority of the weight increase is due to food, and that the pack will lighten up rather quickly.

We said our goodbyes, and left town at about 2:30. Meandering Duck told us that she was leaving tomorrow, and would catch up to us. When we left, there was still no sign of Wild Bill or Lobo. I expect to see Lobo again, but am not optimistic about a reunion with Wild Bill. His ankle injury appeared pretty serious when I left him last week. If I don't see him again, I am somewhat saddened

because I did not leave him with a proper farewell.

My immediate concern is for Alexander. I believe that we may need to change our hiking habits in order to help him to avoid the afternoon heat. I definitely don't want my little trooper to become ill. As I write this, Alex is lying beside me, napping.

I'm beginning to wonder whether I should return to Damascus for Trail Days. I would like to see many of the friends that I made on the trail. I've been told that getting a ride back to Damascus for Trail Days is much easier than I had thought.

We made it to the shelter at a little past 7:00. Alex seems ok, except for a slight limp—he is favoring his left forepaw just a bit. I don't think that it's anything serious; I examined both forelegs but couldn't find anything wrong. He seems, perhaps, to have pulled a muscle in his foreleg, because there is no swelling or broken skin. I'll keep an eye on it tomorrow.

About tomorrow—I'm not sure how far we will go. The next shelter is over 18 miles from here, although camping is available almost anywhere along the trail. We had a big dinner, but I don't know if that lightened up the pack enough to let me take on Mt. Rogers, which I would have to climb to reach the shelter.

### April 29, 1994

Alex and I woke up bright and early this morning, and were on the trail by 6:30. Alex's foreleg still hurts a little, so I gave him an ibuprofen tablet to help him get through today's hike. The weather today is very nice—sunny, but cool, at least so far this morning.

The forest has become so *alive* during the past few weeks! The trees are green, flowers and plants are popping up everywhere, and the birds are singing their hearts out. It's funny how such a big change can happen in such a short period of time.

My pack is a little bit lighter than it was yesterday, but it still needs to shed a lot of weight to be comfortable. I think that I will begin buying groceries more often, but in much smaller quantities.

Oh, I spoke too soon! As Alex and I crested White Top Mountain, the sky opened up, the lightning flashed, and the thunder crashed. Alex and I got soaked! At least the rain cooled us off. We made it to the Thomas Knob shelter just fine and dried off and warmed up. Alex bundled into my sleeping bag and is fast asleep as I write this.



A whole crowd is here—Vermonster, Noodle Man, Blue Sky, Mountain Jam, and Slick. Slick split up with his partner, Sweet Goat, over a hiking pace dispute. Seems that all of the sudden, Sweet Goat wants to finish his hike by the beginning of August, so he has to hike 20+ miles per day without any time off.

The rain stopped for a little while this evening, but has since resumed. It looks like this could continue through tomorrow, but I'm not sure what to expect. We are only hiking to the next shelter tomorrow, so I'm not too concerned about it.

### **April 30, 1994**

No rain this morning, just lots of fog (actually, we were just stuck in the clouds that had parked on the mountain). We slept in this morning, and got on the trail at about 8:30. We were in no hurry, today's hike was only about 11 miles. We had a little excitement early this morning when a herd of wild ponies wandered down to the shelter. Alex stayed pretty cool until one of the ponies stuck its head into the shelter, then he barked a few times to chase it away.

During our hike, Alex said "hi" to a few ponies that approached us. He was very curious, and sniffed at single horses that approached, but ran away from approaching groups. I don't think that Alex has decided whether he likes the ponies or not. I am glad to see that he has a healthy curiosity, and is not afraid to investigate.



We hiked all the way to the Old Orchard shelter. We got there early in the afternoon (around 1:30), so I took the opportunity to dry out clothes from yesterday, and to air out my sleeping bag. It's nice to have dry things to put on and to sleep in.

Alex has a small cut in one of the pads on his left forepaw. This may have been the cause of his limping since Thursday. It's very small and easy to miss. I put some Betadine ointment on it to try to prevent it from getting any worse.

Tomorrow's hike will be a little longer than today's was. We are hiking to the Trimpi shelter, and I want to stop in Troutdale along the way. The profile map indicates that this shouldn't be a bad day at all. Alex and I will be hiking with Slick—we've kind of taken him under our wing, at least for the immediate future. He's cool, and can really use the company.

### **May 1, 1994**

Woke up to rain, but by the time we got on the trail, the sky had cleared up, and then temperature



was nice. We made it all the way to the Trimpi shelter, after a brief detour to Troutdale to pick up some lunch and a 6-pack of beer. Those bottles were heavy!

Alexander's behavior is beginning to worry me. My normally friendly boy is suddenly very agitated, almost to the point of paranoia. He almost bit a kid this morning near the shelter just because the kid came running up. When we went to town, he grabbed a little girl's shirt sleeve when she came running up to him. I've never seen him act like this before.

I shared my 6-pack of beer with Slick, Blue Sky and Mountain Jam, who just happened to be at the shelter with me. A shared treat goes a long way toward a great trail experience. The only down side, if there was one, was that the beer was in bottles, so the empties were a little bit heavy. However, everybody chipped in to take the empties back out of the woods.

Tomorrow is pizza day! Slick and I are going to order pizza for delivery to the Mt. Rogers NRA Headquarters, which we will pass at around lunchtime. This will be a pleasant treat. I'll even share my pizza with Alex.

I'm starting to get a bit stinky, and there is no shower in sight! I was hoping to shower at the Hurricane Campground, but the Forest Service temporarily closed it until next month. The next shower doesn't look like it is coming up until we get to Pearisburg on Saturday. I should be pretty ripe by then.

Slick has been trying to convince me to go to Trail Days with him. He thinks that we can make the I-81 crossing near Cloverdale, then hitch back toward Damascus. I'm tempted, but we'll see how it works out.

The weather forecast for the next few days is good, and the trail looks pretty easy, so we should be in good shape, unless Alexander has problems. I'd hate to have to leave the trail, but I don't want to hurt him, or put others in danger because of him. If he isn't in better spirits by Pearisburg, I'm afraid that we'll have to leave the trail.

The temperature is supposed to drop into the 30's tonight, so I think that I'll grab Alex and pull him into my sleeping bag for the evening.

### **May 2, 1994**

Last night was a cold one. The temperature this morning was only in the mid 30's. Alex and I got up at about 6:30, goofed off for a while, and hit the trail at about 7:45. We made very good time, and made it to the Mt. Rogers NRA Headquarters by 11:30, even after taking a 20 minute stack break, and several short water and rest breaks.

We're waiting for Domino's to deliver our pizza. Alex is napping in the sun, and actually seems much happier than he has for a few days.

Well, the pizza was great. It is nice to have to chew your food once in a while. Even Alex is eating it! These are the small things that add to the trail experience.

We hiked to the Chatfield shelter (about 17 miles), and arrived at about 5:30, including a 2+ hour stop at the Mt. Rogers HQ, and a 1½ hour stop at the bottom of one of the mountains. I talked Slick into going *really* long tomorrow (about 28 miles!). Sometimes I feel as though I'll never get anywhere if I don't do big mileage.

Injury update: Alex's paw is still sore, although the cream I put on it seems to help a bit. He needs a few days of nice trail surface (mud, leaves, dirt) to let his pad heal. My heel blisters (remember the Smokies?) are still here, and looked like they may have been slightly infected. I've started taking very good care of them (washing, alcohol, betadine, dry socks, etc.) to try to get rid of them.

We're going to stop at a convenience store tomorrow to pick up a few supplies—mostly lunch items—to take us into Pearisburg on Friday. I don't want to get too many things, because I have two maildrops to pick up before Saturday.

I hope that my journal isn't becoming boring, but I don't seem to have any really profound thoughts to write down. Actually, this mundane crap, like where I am, what I'm doing, etc., is very interesting to me right now. What does that say about me?



### May 3, 1994

Well, we didn't do 28 miles after all, but we did manage to hike 19 miles to the Knot Maul shelter. At around 17 miles, Alex made it quite clear that *his* hiking day was coming to an end soon. I managed to coax him along for the last two miles to the shelter, but that was it. Anyway, as we were descending the mountain toward the shelter, my knees started to really hurt, and I almost tumbled the last half mile or so.

The day started out well, with Alex and I getting up just before 6:00, and hitting the trail at about 6:20. We made the I-81 crossing and truck stop at about 8:00. I bought a few groceries, a sausage biscuit for Alex, and a Coke for myself. With that taken care of, we hit the trail once more.

Alex had his first encounter with cows today. He thought the one we met this morning was ok, but the herd we met this afternoon overwhelmed him just a bit. He got a little frightened, but I think he handled the whole situation very well.

I was absolutely astounded by the damage caused to the trees on the mountains by this winter's ice

storms. I estimated that 1 in 20 trees that used to be growing on the mountains were still there. The absolute devastation was a real eye-opener.

We're piled into the shelter – Slick, Blue Sky, Mountain Jam, and two southbounders (Sod Buster and Sky King). Alex is napping, and I'm making dinner. It's raining outside, but who cares? Ugh, Slick's feet are really wretched! Sky King is playing his guitar and singing some really cool songs—some popular stuff and some originals.

The rain is supposed to continue through the night and into tomorrow morning, but then clearing and 70's for the rest of the week. I am glad that we've really had good weather, with only an occasional rainy day to wet down the forest and keep everything green.

I've decided that I really miss my music collection since I've been out here on the trail. I bought a cheap radio (\$12.99) in Damascus, and have been listening to it every night. I think that I'm going to get a portable car CD player—that will be a nice addition to my car stereo and a good replacement for my stolen walkman. The only down side is the cost (\$300) for a good one with a buffer memory. Oh well, what the hell.

My return to Damascus for Trail Days is really starting to look like it could happen. Slick, Blue Sky and Mountain Jam are constantly talking about it, and some previous thru-hikers told me that hitching down and back will be easy. We'll see.

Tomorrow looks like another 19 mile day for us—we're headed for the Jenkins shelter. I'm glad we didn't go further today, because Levi's hostel in Bastian is now closed, and we were going to stay there tomorrow night.

### **May 4, 1994**

What a long day! Between the wet, mossy rocks, the fallen trees all over the place, and the big holes left when the trees were uprooted, I didn't think that we'd ever make it. This morning, Alex and I hit the trail at about 7:20. The rain had stopped, but it was foggy and cold and damp anyway. We climbed a monster of a mountain, and made it to Chestnut Knob shelter, where I cooked up my last hot meal and tucked Alex into my sleeping bag to warm up and nap. He slept for over two hours!

We left Chestnut Knob a bit before 3:00, and walked for what seemed an eternity to get to Jenkins shelter. Only 19 miles, but it seemed like so many more. I made a fire (my first since hitting the trail), and used the last of my Coleman fuel to make not one, but two cups of piping hot tea. What the hell—why have fuel if you don't have anything to cook.

We have the shelter to ourselves tonight, because Slick didn't make it this far today. We probably won't see him again for a few days because the next few days are going to be big mileage days for us. We're going to go into Bastian tomorrow to pick up our maildrop and (hopefully) buy another pint of Coleman fuel to tide us over to Pearisburg. Our hike tomorrow will be about 24 miles—I'd like to make Jenny Knob shelter, in order to set us up to hit Woodshole on Friday and an easy 10

miler to Pearisburg on Saturday morning.

I don't know what to do with Alex. I'm not sure if he's having a good time or not. (Why can't he talk?) One moment he's happy and the next he's shivering and whimpering. I've been thinking about leaving the trail at Pearisburg, but I'm not sure. Oh well, just another thing to watch over.

### May 5, 1994

Major storm damage along the trail today! Alex and I hit the trail just before 7:00 am today. The rain is gone, but the weather is still cold and damp, with mist in the air once in a while. We took the AT north (instead of the high-water trail) because of info posted at the Mt. Rogers HQ, but we wound up crossing and recrossing a creek that was knee-high at times. I didn't expect that the little bit of rain we got the other day would swell the creek so badly. I wound up with *very* wet boots (they squeaked) as a result of this miscalculation.

When we got to Brushy Mountain, the fun really started. There were blowdowns everywhere, and it was clear that nobody had made any effort to clear the trail. I fell twice while trying to climb over fallen trees—once I put a huge scrape on my shin, the other I almost put a stick through my shoulder. Alex didn't fare too badly, with just a few sticks in his fur to show for it.

When we got out of the woods, I went into my pack to get Alex's leash, and noticed that my water purifier was gone! I knew that it had been on my pack when we stopped for a snack about four miles before, so we went back into the woods, I dropped my pack, and we went looking for it. Luckily, I found it about 2½ miles back up the trail, near the spot of my second fall of the day.

We then resumed our hike, got back out of the woods, and headed into Bastian. Along the way, we met Vermonster and Noodleman, who were headed out of town. I stopped at the Post Office (a real asshole was working) and picked up two packages (one from home, one from Damascus) and three postcards – one from Brian H. and two from John Z. I had forgotten to fill any postcards out last night, so I had nothing to send. After I loaded up my pack, we got ready to head out of town.

On my way out of town, I met Levi Long, who used to run a hostel in town for hikers. (Actually, I met him on my way to the P.O., but didn't know who he was.) He had a nice beagle puppy, so Alex played while I talked to him. When I asked him where I could buy some Coleman fuel, he gave me a pint. What a nice man!

Alex and I are at the Helvey's Mill shelter. We made a dinner of fried spam and some very bad pancakes, and Alex is now napping. I don't think that I've mentioned this, but Alex now sleeps *in* my sleeping bag with me every night. I unzip it so that it's like a blanket, and Alex just crawls right in. He even puts his head under the covers! I don't mind, because I know where Alex is through the night and I know that he's safe. He's also warm and soft—kind of like a teddy bear.

As much as I disliked today, Alex seemed to enjoy himself. He ran, jumped and played all day until I put him on his leash to go into Bastian. He was excited, and I may have been a bit too harsh with

him during our road walk into town, but I don't want him to get hit by a car. As for getting off of the trail, I still haven't made up my mind, but I'd like to stick it out a bit longer and see how Alex does.

Another empty shelter! I enjoy having lots of space, but miss the company. Where are all of the thru-hikers? I know that they're out here, but I haven't seen any (except Vermonster and Noodleman) for two days now. Maybe I'll catch up to one (or more) tomorrow. I am planning to go to the Wapiti shelter (maybe further) tomorrow. The sun even came out for a while this afternoon after we settled in for the day.

### May 6, 1994

A relatively nice hiking day today. This morning, Alex and I got up early and hit the trail at about 6:45 am. We hiked from the Helvey's Mill shelter to the Jenny Knob shelter, where we took a break and made an early lunch. (We had mac & cheese). The hike to Jenny Knob wasn't too bad, but we did come across a lot of blowdowns.

After lunch, we hit the trail again—only the trail was in much better shape than the section we had just completed. We made pretty good time, and even stopped at Trent's Grocery to call the office and check in. From Trent's, we hiked the AT to the Wapiti shelter, where I planned to have our second big break of the day. However, when we settled in, the rain started to fall—not a torrential rain, but enough to make the forest cool off noticeably. So, I guess we're here for the night. Alex is curled up in the corner, sleeping. He seems to do that a lot lately—is it because of the mileage? Today, we only hiked 22.8 miles; not a big mileage day by our standards.

Well, I'm getting better with my food estimates, but I'm not quite there yet. I ate my last package of grits for dinner, and I'm still hungry. We need to hit the P.O. in Pearisburg tomorrow before noon to get resupplied. Fortunately, I'm told that Pearisburg has a cash machine, because I am down to my last \$0.39. Alex, on the other hand, may have a little too much food left. I think that I'm carrying about four pounds or so of puppy food, and Alex only eats it whenever he can't mooch anything from me.



I'm looking forward to a day in town after being in the woods for 1 ½ weeks. The thoughts of clean clothes, clean me, dry sleeping bag, lots of food, and pizza will drive my every step tomorrow. I'm especially looking forward to the pizza—a large Pizza Hut meat lovers pan pizza! Alex and I are going to try to hit the trail tomorrow at 5:00 am, just to make sure we're at the P.O. by noon (it is another 17 miles from this shelter to the P.O.). After the P.O., we're off to the cash machine, and from there to Pizza Hut

and the hostel.

Less than 400 miles to go to Harpers Ferry! Tomorrow, I will mark my 600th trail mile—have I really gone that far? It seems like I started so long ago—up the stone steps into the Amicalola Falls Visitor Center, then out the back door to start up the approach trail to Springer Mountain. So many things I've done, yet so much to look forward to. I'm still amazed at how drastically different trail life is from anything I've ever done! I'm still hopeful to attend Trail Days, but I won't feel cheated if I can't get back down to Damascus.

### May 7, 1994

We made it! Alex and I had to get up at 4:40 am, but we got to the Post Office by 11:00. We hit the trail at 5:10 am, walked the first hour by flashlight, and made the climb up to the top of the ridge without any problems. We reached Doc's Knob shelter before 8:00, and were off the ridge and on the road into town by 10:30.

We got a ride from the P.O. to the hostel, unloaded our stuff, and headed back into town to get lunch and do laundry. Alex and I split a large pepperoni and sausage pizza, but even though we were really hungry, we couldn't finish it. I picked up Coleman fuel and some groceries, then we headed back to the hostel.

Alex is sleeping on the floor of the hostel. When we first got here, the caretaker told me that Alex would have to stay outside. Later, he came back and told me that Alex could come inside, but just couldn't sleep inside overnight. Finally, he came back again and told me that Alex was really cute, and could stay inside if he wanted. Once again, the rules are changed for my cute puppy!

Tomorrow, we need to complete our grocery shopping and head out of town. I'm not really feeling motivated, so I'm not sure how far out of town we'll go tomorrow. The next shelter is 19 miles out of town, and I'm going to have a heavy pack, so I doubt we'll make it all the way. As to where we end up, I'll leave that decision until we get there tomorrow.

I'm too tired to write much more right now, so I'll end now and add more tomorrow.

### May 8, 1994

On second thought, I guess we'll have to stay another night after all. The sky is still overcast, the wind is blustery, and the temperature is cold. I can find enough chores to make the day worthwhile—wash my sleeping bag, do some grocery shopping, and mail some more postcards.

I brought Alex to the laundromat while I washed my sleeping bag. He's always very well behaved in



public, and I enjoy letting him meet people. We stopped at the grocery store on the way, and, as usual, I had to leave him outside. I wonder what he thinks when I tie him outside—he always seems to panic, as though he thinks I’m leaving him forever. I wish that I could bring him inside with me, but I don’t want to break any laws and get him (or me) in trouble.

I weighed myself last night—149 pounds! Let’s see, the last time I weighed myself at work, I was 172 pounds, so I’ve lost a *lot* of weight. Alex, however, weighed in at 33 pounds, which is *exactly* what he weighed before. But he looks a lot thinner—must be all muscle now.

How’s this for improvisation? I washed my sleeping bag, but when I put it into the dryer, I realized that I didn’t have a tennis shoe to toss in to fluff up the down. Instead, I tossed in a couple of foil packages of rice. I hope that they don’t bust open in the dryer.

Some guy gave me a whole pizza—he just walked into the laundromat and said that he had an extra one. It was a *hot* pepperoni, sausage and olive pizza. Pretty tasty!

My sleeping bag is clean and dry (mostly). What a change from the usual way of the trail—wet and dirty. I wonder how long it can stay that way?

Slick showed up at the hostel today. He is going to head out tomorrow with the rest of us (Noodleman, Vermonster and me) and we will meet up with Blue Sky and Mountain Jam on the trail tomorrow. We’re all going to hike 19+ miles to get to the first shelter north of town.

### May 9, 1994

What a difficult day! A heavy pack, a rough trail, and *lots* of blowdowns added up to make one hell of a tough day. Alex and I are whipped!

Alex and I woke up at about 6:00 am, ate breakfast, and loaded the pack. Without water, it weighed in at 58 pounds! Fortunately, most of that weight is Coleman fuel and food, so the weight will decrease pretty quickly.

At about 8:00 am, we (Slick, Alex and I) got a ride to the Post Office so that we could pick up Slick’s ATC guidebook. While Alex and I waited, Slick ran to the grocery store and picked up his supplies.

We were lucky enough to get another ride to the trail, and our hiking day began.



The climb out of Pearisburg wasn’t bad, but as we reached the ridge, the blowdowns were everywhere! The pace was slow and very treacherous, although nobody got hurt. I ran out of water on the ridge, but was able to find a nice spring and refill.

We got to the Pine Swamp Branch shelter at about 6:30, and I made a big dinner for Alex and myself (have to get the pack weight down!).

My feet are killing me, and my knees hurt, too. I think that it is due to my heavy pack, the rocky terrain, and having to step over/around/through so many blowdowns. To top it off, my Vasque boots are now starting to blow out in the heel! (This is the same way my other pair failed.)

I think we're going to hike about 17 miles tomorrow, but we'll see how the terrain looks. Today, the trail was so badly blocked and poorly marked that we weren't even on it for much of the day—we just went in the same general direction. Two guys from the local trail club showed up at the shelter tonight and are going to spend the week trying to clear part of the ridge. I wish them luck!

I usually try to be a bit more descriptive in my entries, but I'm dead tired. Alex is already asleep for the night, and I intend to join him momentarily.

### May 10, 1994

A nice leisurely day of hiking. Alex and I awoke at about 7:00 am, after a night of peaceful sleep. After a quick breakfast, we hit the trail at around 8:00 am, and hiked four miles to the next shelter for a nice big meal of cheese, deviled ham and crackers. Alex and I stayed for about an hour at the shelter before moving on.

We reached the War Spur shelter at about 2:00 pm, just after the partial solar eclipse. I missed it! Weird clouds kept coming along and obscuring the sun from time to time—a couple even dropped rain on us! Oh well, it's not like the sky got very dark during the eclipse anyway.

This pair of boots is really starting to fall apart—stitching on both is popping pretty badly, and both soles are delaminating. I wonder what Vasque will do when I send them back with a strongly written letter stating my disappointment with these boots and the poor treatment I have received from Vasque.

At the moment, Alex is snoozing, and I am having a nice cup of tea. We're going to hang around this shelter for a few hours before we hike the last six miles of the day to get to the Laurel Creek shelter. We're in no hurry, the weather is great, and the scenery is wonderful.

We finally left the War Spur shelter and got underway. By the way, is the "War Spur" a Civil War name? I think it may be, because other features nearby are given names such as "Minie Ball Hill" and "Salt Peter Branch."





Alex and I got to the Laurel Creek shelter at about 6:30 pm.

Alex's left foreleg is sore again—it started to bother him after the steep descent going to the War Spur shelter. I think he'll be fine, but we may need to go a little easy for a while.

We're all crammed into the shelter—Slick, Blue Sky, Mountain Jam, Vermonster, Noodleman, and Arp (me and Alex too). I am really starting to like this bunch of misfits! I'm almost sad that I've become part of another group of hikers—invariably, we'll all split up and I'll get bummed out all over again. I guess I should stop worrying and enjoy the time we have together.

### May 11, 1994

A light day! This morning, Alex and I got up at around 6:30 am, after a restless night of listening to everyone snoring. We packed, hiked out to the road, and then walked to a store about 1½ miles from the trail. I bought lunch items, some snacks, a six-pack of beer, and a couple of sausage biscuits for our breakfast. We walked back to the trail, ate an early lunch, and then set out for the Niday shelter—our destination for the evening.

Along the way, we took a lot of rest stops, including an excursion off the AT to see the Sarver homestead, the remains of an 1800s farm. Life back then was much simpler than it is today, but it was also much harsher. Alex took a few short naps, and seemed to be pretty happy. (His left paw and forearm are a bit sore, so we decided to only go 12 miles, instead of the 22 miles we had originally planned.)



Only 332.2 miles to go to reach Harpers Ferry! If we work at it, Alex and I can reach our destination by the 29th—when we're supposed to be picked up by mom. The big question is—can we afford the time to go to Trail Days and still make it?

Alex and I have been seeing a lot of wildlife lately—deer, turkey, grouse, but no bear. I wonder if we're sneaking up on them because we don't smell like "people" anymore—we don't shower very often, and we don't use scented fabric softener and grooming products, either.

After making dinner, Alex and I played for a while, then I brushed his fur and put some creme onto his forepaws. I am hoping to reach Catawba tomorrow—I hope that Alex is up for the walk. It shouldn't be too bad of a hike (15 miles or so), so I think we'll be able to make it without too much trouble.

What to do about Trail Days? If we can get an easy ride from Catawba, then I think we'll go; other-

wise, we'll pass for this year. I still want to drive down next year to check out the festivities. I'd love to go this year, but just don't have time to cram all of these activities into my trip.

### May 12, 1994

An *outstanding* hiking day! Alex and I woke up at around 7:00 am, took our time packing, and hit the trail at around 8:15. We climbed over Brush Mountain, and had a nice lunch near Trout Creek. Alex had a great time, running and jumping and just tearing up the trail.

After lunch, we took on Dragon's Tooth, a 7+ mile section of very rugged trail, which includes some truly spectacular views of the mountains around Catawba. The trail is rugged because it is routed across the ridge of Cove Mountain, which is covered with *huge* boulders and slabs of rock. I struggled a bit in some of the sections, but Alex had no trouble flying across, up, and down the rocks. Watching Alex climbing rocks is like watching a skilled dancer execute difficult moves with ease.

We're at a small grocery store outside of Catawba. Matt (Sandman) told us that we could get a ride to Damascus with him tomorrow. We're going to Trail Days!

Now I'm camping near the small grocery store outside of Catawba. Sandman, Alex and I are supposed to get picked up at 9:00 am, and whisked away in comfort to Damascus. I'm actually looking forward to this weekend with some excitement. I'm hoping to see a lot of the people I've met along the trail, all in one great big party! Plus, the weekend will give Alex's sore paw and foreleg a chance to heal up a bit. I am aware that I may have some trouble reaching Harpers Ferry by the end of the month, but I'm willing to accept that consequence. I think that this weekend in Damascus will add more to my trail experience than just spending the time in the woods.

A little joke: What's the difference between a thru-hiker and a vagrant? Gore-tex!

### May 13, 1994

Well, for what it's worth, we're back in Damascus! This morning, we caught a ride with Sandman, his girlfriend, and a couple of his other friends. We got picked up in Catawba, made a short detour to Va Tech to get Sandman's tent, then cruised down I-81 to Damascus. We only took three hours in the car to undo almost two weeks of hiking.

Trail Days is intense! If I don't write lengthy entries for the next two days, it's because so much is going on, and I'm just too busy (or tired) to get around to writing. I'll try to fill in any gaps after I get back on the trail.

I have met so many old friends—the Odd Couple, Bohemian, Mariner, Sourball, and Biker Hiker, just to name a few. I can't walk 30 feet without running into somebody. And Alex is the happiest dog on the trail—he's famous! The only problem is that I've been spending so much time talking to folks that I have not yet attended one official Trail Days activity.

That's all for today—I'm off to drink a few beers and listen to some live guitar music.

### May 14, 1994

I forgot to mention yesterday that I had to buy a new pair of boots. My Vasque boots were so beat that I was sure they wouldn't make it to Waynesboro. So, when I got to town, I went to Mt. Rogers Outfitters and picked up a pair of Asolo AFX520 leather boots. The new boots are really well made, and even felt lighter than my old Vasques. I was going to mail my old boots back to Vasque, but decided to toss them in the dumpster instead.



I visited Mt. Rogers Outfitters again today to talk to the Gregory representative. We talked about internal frame packs, and my hiking habits. He measured me for pack fit, and helped me to choose a nice pack. I'm going to get a Gregory Robson pack (medium size), with a medium size harness and hip belt. The pack costs \$385, but I think that Dave will throw in a rain cover for free. I need to call him early next week to check on availability from the factory (he doesn't normally stock medium size packs).

The hikers parade was a riot! Hundreds of hikers walking down the street, with fire trucks, boy scouts, a marching band, and even Shriners in their little cars. This little town really likes to put on a show.



Alex and I spent much of the afternoon sitting in the grass outside Quincy's listening to the impromptu jam session put on by the thru-hikers. Country, bluegrass, contemporary, folk, and blues—they play it all. Eric, Lorraine and Dave were there with me, just like old times. Alex is still enjoying his fame in the hiking community.

I heard an interesting but accurate analogy about hiking: Scenery to a thru-hiker is like sex to a whore. How true!

Tonight will be a nice, quiet evening (I hope) for Alex and me. We're both anxious to get back on the trail tomorrow and get back underway. So far, Trail Days has been a lot of fun, and I expect that Alex and I will return next year to meet the thru-hikers before we head off on our big hike northward.

**May 15, 1994**

We're headed back to the trail today. I had breakfast with the Odd Couple and Bohemian this morning. We went to the ayce (all you can eat) pancake breakfast at the Dairy King (not bad for \$3), and Alex even snuck in and sat by the table.

Mountain Jam, Blue Sky and Slick are headed back to Catawba this morning. I'm hoping to meet up with them at the Catawba Mountain shelter this evening. I'm not sure what time we're leaving today, but we won't have a long hike to reach the shelter once we get back to Catawba. Noodleman and Vermonster are a few miles ahead of us, but we'll catch them within a day or two.



We got underway at around 1:00, and got back to Catawba at around 4:45. I must confess that I yellow-blazed a 5.9 mile section of trail near Catawba, from Route 624 to Route 311—but it wasn't my fault, Sandman wanted to do it. Actually, it was fortunate, because after I reached the Catawba Mountain shelter, a sudden downpour saturated the forest. If we had been hiking the other section of the trail, we wouldn't have had anywhere to hide.

We climbed over McAffee Knob, and stopped to enjoy the scenery and take some pictures. The view was great—even to a jaded long-distance hiker like me. At the summit, a huge rock formation juts out off the mountain, giving spectacular views of the valleys below. Tres cool!

Let's see, at the Campbell shelter we have: me, Alex, Sandman, Blue Sky, Mountain Jam, and Slick. The Meandering Duck passed us by over the weekend, so we have some catch-up to do. Tomorrow, we're going to stop in Troutville briefly before heading on to the Fullhardt Knob shelter for the night.

**May 16, 1994**

We got quite a thunderstorm overnight, but this morning the weather is sunny, about 65°F, and a bit windy. Alex and I awoke at about 7:00 am, and were on the trail just before 8:00. We hiked from the shelter to Tinker Cliffs, where we stopped at the overlook for a brief rest, water, and pictures. I'm not sure, but I may like this view even more than the view from McAffee Knob, of which I was quite fond.

A quick note about yesterday—when we got to the shelter, we were pleasantly surprised to find sodas and snacks waiting for us, courtesy of the Umbrella Lady and the Habitual Hiker. I don't know how I forgot to mention that, but I did.

The bugs are getting pretty bad here in the woods. Today is the first day I've had to use insect repellent. I'm glad that this stuff doesn't stink.

I'm back again. Alex and I are taking a break on top of Tinker Ridge, overlooking the water shed for Roanoke. We decided to rest up before we descend into the Troutville/Cloverdale area. We're really not in any hurry because we only have seven or eight miles to go to get to the shelter. Anyway, it's bright and sunny, with a nice cool breeze up here.

I think that we're going to be hiking with Slick for the next few days, at least until we get to Rusty's Hard Time Hollow. I don't know if we'll go there, although I have heard really good things about the place. As for hiking mileage, I don't think we'll be doing much more than 20 miles/day, which is good because I think that I've got stress fractures in two of the metatarsi in my left foot. The new boots fit well, and that helps ease the pain, but my foot swells up after a few miles nevertheless.



We made it to the I-81 interchange with no problem. The first place that you come to when the trail comes out of the woods is a bank—with a MOST machine! Now that's convenience! I picked up \$100 at the machine to get us to Waynesboro.

After buying groceries (including  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of steak for Alex), we headed up to the Fullhardt Knob shelter. The climb up was long, but not too steep. Both Alex and I were grateful to finally reach the shelter and get some water. I made dinner, and Alex went to sleep. Tomorrow looks a little easier (19 miles, with no big altitude changes), so we may get up a little later and take our time getting on the trail.

By the way, I passed the 700 mile mark today. Only 285.8 miles to go to get to Harpers Ferry, if we choose to go that far. Or else, it's only 232.1 miles to Front Royal, VA. I will decide our ultimate destination next week, after we get a bit further up the trail.

Our adventure is beginning to wind down as we get closer to the end of the trail (at least for now). Both Alex and I are going to go through a pretty serious withdrawal.

### May 17, 1994

Will we catch Meandering Duck today, or tomorrow? Slick may want to go a little further today than we had originally planned, but the hike looks pretty easy anyway. Alex and I woke up at about 6:45, and I actually took the time to make hot tea and oatmeal for my breakfast.

We hit the trail at around 8:30, and reached the Wilson Creek shelter at 11:00, after chatting for a while with some day hikers and a luckless thru-hiker whose fuel bottle had caught fire last night. We decided to have lunch, and I set up my tent to dry it out from Trail Days.

When Alex and I reached the Bobblet's Gap shelter, I decided to call it a day. My left foot was absolutely killing me, and my knees felt bad, too. Besides, the temperature had been steadily falling throughout the afternoon, and the winds have been heavy. I made some mashed potatoes for dinner, and Alex ate his puppy food and took a nap.

I've been working on our hiking agenda for the next few days, and have decided that, if we are ambitious, we can actually make Harpers Ferry by the 29th. We will have some long days, but I think we could actually do this! And even if we don't, it's not a big deal anyway.

### May 18, 1994

Strike everything I said about reaching Harpers Ferry! After what I went through today, I'll be happy to reach Waynesboro. My left foot is definitely broken, and has been extremely persistent in letting me know that.

Alex and I got up at 6:30, packed, and were on the trail by 7:15. Everything was going great so far. We stopped at the Cove Mountain shelter for a quick break and breakfast for Alex, and then moved on. We then took a short detour and went to the Jellystone Campground to buy some lunch and groceries, and to use the phone.

I talked to Damascus Dave, and he told me that Gregory would not be able to deliver my pack until late June, but that he would try to get one from another dealer. I ordered a pack, raincover, and a medium-sized sleeping bag compression sack. I also ordered a \$75 tarp. I wrote a check for \$200 (tarp price plus \$125 pack deposit), and will mail it as soon as I get to a mailbox or P.O.



On the way back to the trail, my left foot started to hurt *badly*! I think that my third metatarsal is fractured. I took eight ibuprofen tablets, but they didn't do anything for the pain. I was able to tape up my foot to help ease the pain, but it still hurt a lot.

Nevertheless, I was able to reach the Thunder Hill shelter, after a 3,000 foot climb up over Apple Orchard Mountain. Not much of a scenic view, but the rhododendron blossoms are beautiful. Alex had a wonderful time, running and playing as we hiked along.

As for tomorrow: I'm not sure how my foot will be feeling, but I'm tentatively planning a 17 mile day to the Johns Hollow shelter. I'm essentially conceding that Harpers Ferry is just too far to go in my present condition, and I'm going to just relax and have a good time. My alternative is to leave the trail on Friday or Saturday, and get picked up and taken home. We'll see how the next two days or so turn out.

### May 19, 1994

What an uneventful and unexpected end to my hike. Alex and I woke up at 7:00 this morning, and hobbled onto the trail by 8:00. Immediately, I knew that my foot was in trouble—even with the ibuprofen and tape my progress was extremely slow. We hiked about a mile from the shelter to the Blue Ridge Parkway, where I ran into a couple of park rangers. We talked for a few minutes, and I told them that I thought my foot may be fractured. They immediately offered me a ride to the ranger station to have it looked at. The ranger who looked at my foot said that it needed to be X-rayed, and that I needed to stay off of it for a while.

So, I got a ride to the Otter Creek Campground, and that's where I am right now. Mom and dad will be here to pick me up tomorrow and take me home to have my foot X-rayed. I'm saddened to be off of the trail, but I'm probably better off this way—if my foot is broken, I could seriously injure it by continuing, and I run a great risk of getting stranded in the backcountry.

Well, I hiked 744.5 trail miles from Springer Mountain to the point where I left the trail. Not bad for a guy on vacation with his dog. I see that I've got a lot of weekend hiking to do to finish up the remaining 239.5 miles that I haven't completed to Harpers Ferry. When I finish that, I'll have completed the entire AT from GA to the PA line.

Actually, since I'm going back to work a week early, I will still have enough vacation time left for another two week outing later this year, after my foot heals. I think that I would like to start here, and run up into PA for a few miles. I will have the experience of my mileage so far to guide me in lightening up my pack, so I should have an easier time. Also, I may leave Alex at home—although I do love him very much, he does slow me down a bit, especially when it's hot.

We never did catch Meandering Duck, like I had predicted only a few days ago. Also, I left the trail rather abruptly this morning, so I wonder what speculation will occur regarding my disappearance? I hope that Sandman figures it out and spreads the word for me.

Thus ends this chapter of my journal. I will think and dream about the day when I am once again able to freely wander the AT. Until then, I must remain content to wax nostalgically upon these days when I was known as the "Lonesome Traveler."



