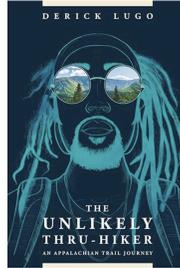


Your Kindle Notes For:



The Unlikely Thru-Hiker: An Appalachian Trail Journey

74 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Location: 153

at the Amicalola Falls State Park visitor center.

Location: 154

stone arch, our gateway to the approach trail, which in turn will lead me to the start of the Appalachian Trail.

Location: 190

At Neels Gap you can get some help deciding what you can do without."

Location: 191

He explains that an outfitter, Mountain Crossing at Neels Gap, here in Georgia, employs experienced and knowledgeable staff members who can go through my heavy pack and tell me

Location: 204

DIFFICULTY . . . STRENUOUS 175 STEPS . . . then another one that read: DIFFICULTY . . . STRENUOUS 425 STEPS

Location: 236

"The AT doesn't start until we reach Springer Mountain anyway," Josh says.

Location: 270

them all the way to Katahdin. For a while, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy gave out gifts to thru-hikers who presented the matches after finishing their hikes. I'm not sure how it works now, but take them with you all the way, and you may be surprised."

Blue highlight | Location: 284

Josh must have seen me struggling, because he strolls over with a rock and hammers down all of my stakes with a "that's how you do it" look. I stand there in awe of his genius.

Location: 293

the long logs, talking and going over their Awol guides. There are various types of AT guides, but The A.T. Guide—also known as the Awol guide, by David "Awol" Miller—is the one most thru-hikers use.

Location: 314

As I remove the Katadyn water-filtration pump from its carrying case,

Location: 317

Water treatment tablets are another option, but they leave an iodine aftertaste. Water treatment drops, such as Aquamira, kill bacteria in water using chlorine dioxide; after half an hour, the water is safe to drink and has no iodine aftertaste.

Blue highlight | Location: 333

"Stretch your arm out with your palm facing you and your fingers horizontal. Now, with the top of your hand right under the sun, count how many fingers it takes to get to the horizon. I count six. Each finger represents fifteen minutes, so that's an hour and a half, more or less, when the sun will set."

Location: 348

I'm eager to try out my new mini Trangia stove. Looking to minimize weight, I originally thought I'd skip the stove, but then I considered my coffee addiction.

Location: 351

The mini stove I'm using comes with a 0.8-liter aluminum pot, a nonstick pan that also serves as a lid, an alcohol burner, a wind shield, and a pot lifter that looks like large tweezers. The stove is compact; all the parts can be stored in the pot, and the lid snaps shut to secure everything in place.

Location: 431

I noticed that the guys were sealing their trash in ziplock bags.

Location: 455

white blazes that will start the first official day of my Appalachian Trail journey. The blazes are long, white, 4-by-6-inch rectangles painted on trees, large rocks, logs, bridges, or any visible object. Their purpose is to guide hikers along the Appalachian Trail.

Location: 464

but of course there is no bathroom out here. A privy—that's what it's called. I follow blue blazes down a side trail that leads me to Stover Creek Shelter.

Location: 466

I set my bag on a picnic table and follow the sign to the privy. I find it but then realize I forgot my toilet paper and hand sanitizer, so I rush back to retrieve them.

Location: 482

As I set out for Hawk Mountain Shelter, I'm imagining that the approach trail will make the rest of my hike seem easy by comparison.

Location: 486

The plan was to average 8 miles on my first few days. I'm not yet sure what I'm able to do, and I don't want to push myself to the point of injury. I'm

Blue highlight | Location: 492

White blazes aren't the only markers to follow . . . there are blue ones too. They lead to privies and water sources. Stick to these markers! Aimlessly wandering into unmarked woods is a thick-headed move.

Blue highlight | Location: 494

Dude, just follow the blazes!

Blue highlight | Location: 509

"Nah, we stayed at a campsite near Three Forks, about 4 miles south of here. We just stopped in for a break."

Location: 524

I'm not the lone drifter of yesterday. In fact, by the time I reach Gooch Mountain Shelter, at around 2 o'clock, I have passed nineteen hikers.

Location: 630

I smell like roadkill that was taken out of a dumpster and left in the back of a busted refrigerator.

Location: 644

grab my Dr. Bronner's all-purpose, environmentally friendly camp soap. I use this soap to bathe, to wash my clothes, to clean my gear, and—if necessary—to brush my teeth.

Location: 687

Funny how you don't really appreciate something until it disappears from your life.

Location: 691

All of the tentsites at Lance Creek are taken, so I have no choice but to claim a less favorable spot mere inches from the trail.

Location: 830

for it. I don a rain jacket that has a hood large enough to cover my long hair. I also have a rain cover for my backpack and gaiters to prevent my socks from getting wet. But the most essential tool that I have is acceptance. Rain will be part of my thru-hike, no matter what. I will have to trek through areas that may have significant snowfall early in spring

Location: 862

she's only hiking to Harpers Ferry, the psychological halfway point of the AT. The actual halfway point is about 100 miles farther north, but I'm told that Harpers Ferry is a significant benchmark for thru-hikers and a great place to rest and prepare for the second half of an AT adventure.

Location: 867

I go straight to Mountain Crossings outfitter, housed in an old stone interpretive center known as Walasi-Yi. There Big Foot asks one of the employees, an AT thru-hiker from a few years back, to sort through his backpack. The contents of his bag are spread out on the floor in a corner of the store. Big Foot sits cross-legged as he watches the staff member go over his pack with a masterful touch. As the man removes items, he explains why they're not needed. With the patience of a monk, he shows us how to get the optimum usage out of Big Foot's remaining gear. I'm impressed.

Location: 954

know that a zero is a day off from hiking—zero miles for that day. But when Overdrive mentioned a zero to the closest trailhead, where Big Foot's dad awaits to drive us 11 miles to Hiawassee, the nearest town, I have to ask. "It's a short hiking day," says my all-knowing hiking partner, Overdrive. "Ah, a combination of near and zero," I say, feeling foolish that I didn't figure it out sooner.

Location: 961

He's our first trail angel—someone, Overdrive has explained, who provides assistance or food to thru-hikers. We wave goodbye and start hiking in single file toward our first state line crossing.

Location: 1,015

But Overdrive's nonstop talk of the Smokies has me excited about this section of the AT, the 71 miles from Fontana Dam to Davenport Gap. It has to be something special if it left such a powerful impact on Overdrive. Because of that, for the first time, I believe this will be a day with no surprises, just a majestic hike waiting for me.

Blue highlight | Location: 1,021

At one point, I hike under a dead tree. Its bare branches, several yards long, are shaped like the skeleton of a prehistoric beast. There's a poetic beauty in fallen trees. When these great perennial plants die, they nurture the ground they fall on and give life to other plants. Where else is the end of life so impactful, or so graceful in appearance?

Blue highlight | Location: 1,053

The ground is dotted with piles of exposed toilet paper, marking barely covered turds. And there's your cotton field.

Location: 1,112

I begin my trek up Snowbird Mountain. The elevation at the summit is 4,263 feet, which seems extreme, especially in my condition, but that doesn't register in my euphoric state. My only objective is to trek up and over this mountain to Groundhog Creek Shelter, where my group will probably be asleep before I arrive.

Location: 1,131

on our way up to Clingmans Dome, an older-looking southbound hiker approaches Overdrive and me. He stops in front of us with purpose. "You know, I've been hiking the trails of the Smokies for over fourteen years, and you are," he says, turning to me, "only the seventh black thru-hiker I have ever seen."

Location: 1,173

Overdrive, the Kid, and I hike 13 miles in less than four hours to a tiny town called Hot Springs, in North Carolina.

Location: 1,176

By noon we're eating two servings of everything and anything that Spring Creek Tavern has to offer.

Location: 1,177

On our way back to Laughing Heart Lodge, the hostel where we're staying for the night,

Location: 1,297

My plan for the day is to reach Overmountain Shelter, a large red barn that was used as the filming location for the horror movie *The People Under the Stairs* and has been converted into a hiker shelter. Being the movie buff that I am, I'm eager to see the set. I also want to pass the Moving Village while they sleep, get to Overmountain Shelter, and surprise them with my presence when they arrive.

Location: 1,376

Overdrive's declaration, "Warmth cometh with hiking," does not sound as ridiculous as it once did.

Location: 1,379

step out onto a bald, treeless summit called Little Hump Mountain.

Location: 1,457

extra night at Kincora Hostel

Location: 1,461

I'm not a proponent of slackpacking, which means hiking without your backpack while someone transports it to your next stop. It just doesn't coincide with my idea of a thru-hike. For me, this journey is not about the miles, but the act of moving forward while carrying everything I need to live on. It's not about getting to the end but the process it takes to get there. It's the sense of strength, endurance, and accomplishment that makes this experience worthwhile.

Location: 1,479

It's a rainy morning at Chestnut Knob Shelter.

Location: 1,524

stays at Woods Hole Hostel.

Location: 1,527

garage hostel called Four Pines,

Location: 1,532

We join Peach and a couple of other hikers for the ride back to Damascus, Virginia, where we will attend a weekend-long hiker festival called Trail Days.

Location: 1,551

Damascus is known as Trail Town USA because of all the trails that run through it, including the Appalachian Trail, the Iron Mountain Trail, the Virginia Creeper Trail, and US Bicycle Route 76.

Location: 1,561

Free food and showers is definitely the way to a thru-hiker's heart.

Location: 1,607

Jennifer Pharr Davis, the newly crowned fastest Appalachian Trail thru-hiker, give a presentation about her feat and her book. She thru-hiked the AT in 46 days, 11 hours, and 20 minutes. Ouch! The thought alone gives me cramps.

Location: 1,670

I might not know where I am . . . but I ain't lost!!, says a bumper sticker on the Four Pines Hostel bulletin board.

Location: 1,673

This goes right along with the motto I use when I go astray, not just out here but in life generally: I'm not lost . . . I'm just misplaced. It's a somewhat comforting perspective that I take, knowing that I will eventually correct my course whenever I temporarily lose my way.

Location: 1,893

The allure of the Dutch Haus cabin, a bed and breakfast that caters to hikers during hiking season, in Montebello, Virginia, is too much for me to resist. While our laundry is being done, we hikers are given thick white robes to wear.

Location: 1,939

Three Ridges Mountain. I

Location: 1,945

When I reach Maupin Field Shelter for a quick break,

Location: 2,059

This scenic section of the Shenandoah Valley is a favorite to hike, but some

Location: 2,066

Front Royal, Virginia, I

Location: 2,072

in town and are headed to Jim and Molly Denton Shelter. There's

Blue highlight | Location: 2,221

He's in charge of caring for the section of the trail from the southern end of "the Roller Coaster" (an up-and-down hilly hike that may have been the culprit for my fatigue, along with a lack of snacks) to this hostel. He's also responsible for Blackburn Trail Center and the hiker hostel a few yards behind it. Caretakers like Chris and his girlfriend, Carol, help care for the hostel and hiker needs.

Blue highlight | Location: 2,287

Impulse is known for yellow blazing—when hikers "cheat" by obtaining rides farther up or down the trail—and for getting into some strange situations. I have an inkling that his company is going to make this challenge an unorthodox endeavor for both of us.

Blue highlight | Location: 2,376

Pine Grove General Store. Host to the far more pleasant half-gallon ice cream challenge, the store is just past the actual halfway point of my thru-hike.

Location: 2,380

Deer Lick Shelters. I

Location: 2,473

Darlington Shelter. I'm on the Pennsylvania section of the Appalachian Trail, and although it's infamous for being a rough and rocky state, locals tell me that for the next few days, I can look forward to flat terrain. This will give me the opportunity to make up some miles.

Location: 2,610

The lessons from that encounter now race through my brain: • Don't sneak up on a bear while it's eating. • Make your appearance larger than the bear's. • Make loud noises to scare it off. • Don't run. • And lastly, just avoid them.

Location: 2,852

Glastenbury Mountain with Shanti not far behind. We approach a piped spring just 50 yards from Goddard Shelter.

Location: 2,937

a 50-mile stretch of the White Mountains, eight lodges, called High Huts, are strategically placed 6 to 8 miles apart. These huts, owned and maintained by the Appalachian Mountain Club, are not your average makeshift huts.

Location: 3,035

Mount Success. It's

Location: 3,046

through Mahoosuc Notch. The notch is a rock scramble that my guidebook describes as: Most difficult or fun mile of the AT. Make way through jumbled pit of boulders.

Location: 3,131

Thursday, Shanti and I arrive in Millinocket, the last town on the AT for northbounders. Ole Man, the owner of the Appalachian Trail Lodge, picks us up at the Abol Bridge Campground store. The store is a few steps from the trailhead but 19 miles from town.

Location: 3,172

"If you want to sound wise, go to school. If you want to be wise, go to nature."

Location: 3,316

Well, my belief that a determined mind can accomplish much was reinforced. Also, a compassion for the wild bloomed in me, when prior to the AT all I knew was city sidewalks.