

LONG TRAIL, 2004: Williamstown to Jonesville John B. Egger

The path wound along the high ridge, among spruce whose needles padded it and lichen-speckled boulders of gray and white and black. It was nearly level, and a stiff wind from the west cooled and dried and brought the faint scent of fir. When the ridge was narrow a slight turn of the head to the left offered a sweeping view of Lake Champlain and its valley, and to the right farms, roads, towns, and light blue mountains to the east. At other points the trail paralleled the ridge along its western slope, and only the view to the east was missing.

These sections of the Long Trail seemed to immerse me deep within the essence of the northern forest and were by far my favorites. Although I wished to capture and savor their ambiance forever, my hiking always felt especially smooth and strong there, as if I could walk forever. Summit views, like those from Bromley and Burnt Rock Mountains, were nice—fog enshrouded my visits to Stratton, Abraham, and Camel’s Hump, and that’s as far north as I got—but the fondest memories are of the level and smooth wind-whipped high ridge trail.

My three weeks in the summer of 2004, June 19 (Saturday) to July 9 (Friday), took me about 185 miles, from Williamstown to Jonesville, where I realized the time to finish was lacking and pulled out. The adventure began with a four hour drive Thursday (June 17) to the North Troy Inn, where proprietor Russ Plourde immediately made me feel welcome. I highly recommend his place: a rambling old Vermont farmhouse, immaculately clean, very reasonably priced, with no charge for my parking or the drive to Newport early the following morning. Friday’s sequence of bus rides began about 7:15 AM and would have included a three-hour wait in the dreary Pittsfield station but for a kind fellow passenger and the friend picking her up, who drove me directly to Williamstown’s Pine Cobble Trail.



1: Russ Plourde, North Troy Inn, June 19, 2004, 6:45 AM

I began my walk there at 6:30 PM, shouldering the heavy old Kelty Super Tioga for the first time in almost a year. (Obviously this wasn’t wise, but preparation time was limited and experience made me pretty sure of what it would feel like.) After the anxiety of uncertain bus connections it was a huge relief to be on the trail, climbing gently past the upscale neighborhood. Two modest concerns were a lack of water, for I’d planned to stock up on the walk through town but didn’t want to impose such a stop on my benefactors, and an immediate realization that my three-year-old plan to reach the Seth Warner Shelter that night was not feasible. But I had a few extra days available, and one long day could make up those few miles anyway. Choosing an 8:00 PM stop, I set up the Eureka Zephyr at trailside, and, disappointed to have found this trail utterly dry, picked up a little liquid from apples remaining from my bus food.

The hike began in earnest on Saturday June 19, with a 6:45 AM breaking of this camp. The Appalachian Trail came along within five minutes, and the southern terminus of the Long Trail (the Massachusetts-Vermont line) at 7:30 AM. Half an hour later a brook ended my need to draw water from slices of apple. Refreshed after drinking two liters and now carrying three, I depacked at Seth Warner at 10:10 AM and spent over two hours eating, drying, drinking, stretching (a twenty-minute routine, normally twice a day, trying to keep an old back injury at bay) and exploring my first Vermont shelter. Just a little stiff at the 12:30 PM departure, I found the slow uphill and comfortable walking pace on the trail’s smooth park-like sections enjoyable enough to sing a simple ditty, to “Three Blind Mice,” about “hiking in Vermont.” With my 45-minute miles, the Congdon Shelter’s 7.3 miles from Seth suggested an estimated time of arrival of 5:30 PM. My slow climb over Consultation Peak concluded at 3:35 PM. After a few pack problems I located and remembered the function of its “load lifter” straps and that handled the side-to-side flopping. (Other problems had different solutions, and some never were resolved.) I pulled in to Congdon at 5:23 PM, finding a young man preparing dinner; an AT hiker trail-named “Sam,” he’d passed me half an hour earlier, carrying a pack barely larger than my normal daypack and moving at my dayhiking pace. When three perky and high-spirited young women (also AT through-hikers) trail-named “The Devas” arrived also carrying internal-frame packs loaded to about half the weight of mine, I began to suspect there was something to learn from these experienced long-distance hikers. Hefting my 18-days food bag, one of the Devas said it weighed nearly as much as her entire pack.

Both Sam and the Devas were out well before my 7:40 AM departure the next morning (in part attributable to my back stretches), but the pack felt good: the hip belt was high and tight, and the load-lifter straps snubbed down.

Feeling refreshed and strong, I enjoyed the walk over Harmon Hill and its clear windswept overlook of Bennington, then began the knee-beating descent to Route 9, grateful for the double poles that allowed the transfer of impact to my arms. (I use Cascade Designs “Trek’R’3” poles, usually with their removable rubber tips.) Square in the center of the bottom rock step, reached at 10:15 AM after a 4.3-mile morning walk, was a can of Diet Pepsi Twist, presumably a gift to me from the Devas! Savoring it with a brief stop, I crossed the road to enter the Green Mountain National Forest at 10:27 AM, noting with satisfaction that “Division One” of the Long Trail was now completed. Climbing out of the first of many Vermont “gaps,” I reached the Melville Nauheim Shelter at 11:45 AM for lunch, a break that ended (because another stretching routine seemed advisable) at 1:10 PM. My afternoon goal was Goddard Shelter, an 8.6-mile trip that I estimated completing at 6:30 PM.



2: The Devas, Congdon Shelter, 7:30 AM June 20, 2004

The trail was not particularly demanding, but only the first hour of the afternoon was truly pleasant. By 2:30 PM I was already muttering “only four hours to go,” and on subsequent days’ walks occasionally used this afternoon as a kind of standard: “Only two more hours... it’s as if it were 4:30 PM on that day I got to Goddard.” At 5:00 PM a group of hikers headed south told me it was two more miles (there’s 6:30 again, at my 45-minute-mile pace) with some steep uphill; I came to welcome climbs as perhaps culminating in the shelter. Eventually one did: My second day, a trek of 14.4 miles, ended at 6:22 PM when I arrived at the large, clean, and attractive Goddard Shelter. A middle-aged man and three teenaged boys were there, and another solo hiker arrived a few minutes after me. He was 61, one year older than me; we’d gone to similar colleges and swapped stories about our brief careers as oarsmen on our schools’ crews. (The boys were amused to hear that mine ended after first-semester grades came out.) Reflecting on my first two days on the trail, they seemed too long and hard; I promised myself a rest day tomorrow.

When I arose at 6:00 AM on Monday, June 21, though, it looked like a nice day and I felt rested, so after a relaxed breakfast I departed at 8:45 AM to bright sun with beautiful spruce woods and a smooth trail. Enjoying lunch (and another stretch) at Kid Gore Shelter from 11:32 AM to 12:43 PM, I climbed to a nice west-facing view by 1:45 PM and continued a gradual ascent for much of the afternoon. Atop one grade I found Story Spring Shelter, my stop for the day, at 4:10 PM. A bit concerned about my back, for I’d experienced some sharp lower-back pains when bending to pull on and lace my boots, I was tackling my third stretching routine of the day when a man crested the rise and, panting, flopped his pack on the shelter floor. He introduced himself, a retired 62-year-old from Tokyo. He’d come from a resupply in Bennington today: 19.2 miles of trail! On a ninety-day tourist visa that he was using to complete the northern half of the AT, he was friendly but businesslike and efficient, and after a brief chat turned to his trail journal and then, early, to bed. (He’d smoked several cigarettes in these few hours, one of a surprising number of smoking hikers I met on this trip.) While sympathizing with my questionable back, he said he uses an oriental medicine (like a stick of chewing gum) that subdues muscle pain so that, despite his age and pace, he never experiences it. Joking that I hoped I’d be that strong a hiker when I reached his age, I stayed up a bit longer, evaluating my progress: The fourth night should have found me at Vondell (this shelter no longer exists, but my plan was based on the 1999 trail guide; Stratton Pond is a close substitute), so I was already one full day behind. Clearly the itinerary I’d devised in 2001 wouldn’t work.

On Tuesday, June 22, my companion arose to his 5:00 AM alarm and, following his schedule, was out, in a light rain, at 6:30 AM. My mention of a possible rest day (for the lower-back twinges continued) provoked a subdued chuckle; his schedule would not permit such a thing. As I was deciding what to do, an athletic mid-30s man arrived for a snack. His trail name was “Happy,” and he’d already put in several miles that morning. He was heading for a Manchester Center resupply and said he’d be glad to telephone a message to my wife (at our home, five hundred miles to the south), so I quickly scrawled one — too quickly, it developed, for I gave Happy the wrong phone number and no information that would have allowed him to find the correct one. Another friendly but efficient and serious AT through-hiker, he was soon gone. And after a bit of pain-free walking around the site, at 9:10 AM so was I. The trail was wet but the rain had stopped, and it was a pleasant walk to Black Brook (11:12 AM) and then to Arlington Road, where I enjoyed lunch on the bridge from 11:50 AM to 12:20 PM. (For the rest of the hike I skipped lunch stretches and tried to hold the stop to half an hour.) Never considering the direct shortcut to Stratton Pond, I

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headed up the wide and heavily used trail to Stratton Mountain, passed almost immediately by several strong young hikers, cordial but fast-moving.

Sensitive to the dangers of hiking alone and carrying no electronic communication devices, I tried to make my top priority the avoiding of injury, with covering ground (especially at any particular rate) a distant second. When a move looked awkward—more often descents than ascents—with the potential for injury, I'd sometimes study it for a couple of minutes before choosing boot and pole placements. After the successful move I'd joke with myself that ten feet in two minutes wasn't very good (lightly loaded teenagers, like some I met, would have leaped it in three seconds) ... but I was still uninjured and moving ahead, and that's what mattered. The Stratton Mountain ascent called for some steep rock-and-root climbing, but I suddenly came upon the Green Mountain Club's white shed and the fire tower on the summit at 3:10 PM. Shucking my pack for a dart up the tower (and pleased that I had the energy and will to do it!), I snapped a photo of the only object not enshrouded in fog—the GMC shed—and, at 3:24 PM, began the descent. The attractive new Stratton Pond shelter arrived at 5:22 PM; welcoming me were the five young hikers who'd swept past on the other side of the mountain. (Two of them, we learned, attend my daughter's alma mater in Maryland.) The group thought my food strategy was unwise and recommended carrying, as they did, at most five days' worth. But their hiking philosophy differs from mine. While they all hated to hike alone and welcomed the frequent return to civilization (often complete with pizza and ice cream) their resupply stops offer, I relish my hikes' solitude and try to minimize the contact with modern society involved in resupplying.

Still toying with the idea of a rest day but again rejecting it, I left the Stratton Pond shelter at 9:40 AM; the weather looked perfect and I felt good. Lunch was a trailside affair near the spur to the William B. Douglas Shelter, from 12:35 to 1:05 PM, and I rolled into the beautiful and empty Spruce Peak Lodge, complete with its sheet-iron stove, glass windows, and a sliding door, at 3:05 PM, nearly an hour ahead of my ETA. It had been a pleasant hiking day, with beautiful largely deciduous woods and frequent fern gardens. Just after my lunch a grouse, chirping away, crossed the trail ahead and trotted along parallel to the trail, about twenty feet off into the ferns, making noise until I moved out of her range. With plenty of sunshine left, I rinsed my hiking clothes and hung them to dry; I tried always to hike in the same shirt and pants, reserving the other set for dry, in-camp, use only. Still struggling with the Super Tioga, I tried shortening the frame one notch, and—uncharacteristically reading its instructions, after years of owning it—discovered “belt stabilizer straps” that I hadn't known existed. There was a little traffic noise at Spruce Peak, perhaps from Manchester Center. It was a comfortable, warm night in the enclosed shelter that I had all to myself.

Thursday, June 24, began with my 5:00 AM arising at Spruce Peak. My usual morning routine, and some additional adjustments to the pack, resulted in a 7:40 AM departure; I chose an ETA at Bromley for lunch of 12:00 noon. Crossing Route 11 two hours later, I passed a telephone message (with accurate numbers, this time) for my wife to two friendly hikers headed for town, emerged onto one of Bromley's ski runs at 11:45, and depacked for lunch on its delightful wooden observation deck ten minutes later. Never having visited the uphill end of a major ski tow, I browsed around a bit as clothes dried in the sun and wind, and departed shortly before 1:00 PM, using my 42-minute-mile pace to estimate a 5:45 PM arrival at the Peru Peak Shelter. The relentless climb from Mad Tom Notch up Styles Mountain began at 2:30 and took nearly an hour and a half; I had to remind myself that, just as pure logic, no trail can rise forever. After Styles I barely noticed the rise over Peru Peak, but three circumstances called for special caution on the long rocky and rooty afternoon descent: fatigue, dehydration, and eagerness to reach the day's destination. Forcing a cautious, deliberate pace, I arrived at the shelter at 5:47 PM, welcomed by a pleasant group from a small Vermont school.

Finally, I took my rest day on Friday, June 25. After the school group left in mid-morning I rinsed my clothes and, using aluminum pans and my water sack, enjoyed a “shower” at the wash pit, just finishing dressing as a couple of hikers stopped for a break. During the afternoon several others, staying that night, arrived: Ken and Warren, strong and friendly men whose path crossed mine later; an older man and his adult daughter, who erected their tent on the adjacent platform (he'd met Happy farther north and passed along the message that he'd been unable



3: Lunch at Bromley, Noon Thursday June 24, 2004

to reach my wife); and Chris and Emma, a man not quite my age and his teenaged daughter, who had started at Williamstown one day after me. Rain spattered the low roof of Peru Peak that night, but the five of us in the shelter enjoyed a cordial and pleasant evening. It had been my seventh day on the Long Trail.

Saturday morning (June 26) I departed at 8:10 AM, facing wet trailside foliage but no rain, and arrived at the Baker Peak sign (“0.1 mi.”) about ten o’clock. Its wet and steep striated rock slabs offered no handholds or footings for my rubber-tipped poles, but bare Adirondack summits had taught me to trust my boot friction so I just bent forward a bit and strode up, following the white paint blazes. (Later that morning Cave Dog Keizer, headed south on his attempt to break the Long Trail record, must have passed me with his small entourage of handlers, but I have no recollection of it.) Approaching my Long Pond Shelter lunch stop, I met two of the Stratton Pond group; the woman, in her early twenties, had fallen while descending Peru Peak yesterday with an audible snap from an ankle. Chris, already lunching at Lost Pond, provided an Ace bandage; she bound her ankle and moved faster that afternoon, to Danby Road and a hitch to medical attention, than I did with no injury. (I met them there about 2:00 PM.) This sad end to the couple’s long-planned Appalachian Trail hike, she admitted, arose simply from a moment of inattention on the Peru descent’s roots and rocks. Across the road, the trail rose gradually and soon paralleled Little Black Brook, a small stream rushing between moss-covered rocks to drop six or eight inches into a deep clear pool, then broadening out to perhaps six feet before resuming its narrow, one-foot-wide, gurgling rush through narrow channels. The sounds and sight of this delightful brook—eliciting memories of the Vermont brook beside which, as a young boy, I’d often camped—was the highlight of the afternoon, but only an hour past Danby Road I encountered the Lula Tye Shelter sign and saw Chris and Warren waving to me. I depacked there, ending the day early, at 3:05 PM. We five had shared Peru Peak too, and had another cordial night; Ken’s mythical tale of woods terrorized by a flock of crazed Vermont chickens had us all roaring with laughter.



4: Emma, Chris, Ken, Warren at Lula Tye, June 26, 2004

Perhaps my favorite day of hiking began the following morning. I left Lula Tye at 8:15 AM, after my four shelter-mates. The trail climbed until 10:00 AM, and for the rest of the morning I hugely enjoyed the relatively level high-ridge trail covered with dry spruce needles, its occasional smooth rock surfaces offering sidewalk-like footing. Gray clouds emerged briefly, but the sky was generally blue; hiking alone, at a comfortable cruising pace, in the brisk wind through the tall spruce was absolutely delightful. Beginning to descend about an hour later, I was surprised to overtake Ken and Warren; my deliberate pace makes catching up with other people quite rare. I was sorry to learn the reason: Warren had injured his knee, and he and Ken (both knowledgeable at first aid and apparently coping with the injury) would be pulling out short of their Appalachian Gap goal. The joyous trail continued, though, throughout the morning, and I savored the windswept, duff-covered high ridge path with its wide western vistas appearing briefly between spruce branches, thrilled to be cruising comfortably, confident, smooth, and strong. The sense of joy occasionally reached an intensity of euphoria, a sweeping wave of emotion that this was life at its finest, and a desperate wish that there were some way to experience it permanently. Following Ken’s advice, I enjoyed lunch—with sun, wind, and spectacular view—at White Rock Cliff, in solitude until briefly before departing at 12:30 PM. Crossing Route 140 into the Killington Region about 2:00, I climbed the superbly constructed trail up Bear Mountain and rolled into the Minerva Hinckley Shelter at 4:00 PM. Chris and Emma were there, and some lawn chairs! They’d reserved the aluminum web one for me, and what a delight it was to sit with back support. We agreed that this was the finest hiking day yet, with the morning’s trail to White Rock Cliff epitomizing the northern forest that we all love.

My Pur Hiker water filter had become increasingly difficult to pump, so I hoped to buy a new element at the outdoor shop Oasis, a short walk down Route 103 in Clarendon, the following morning. Sometime in the night I’d become convinced that because 103 was only a half-mile north along the Trail, and Oasis only a half-mile along the road, I could leave my pack at Minerva, hop into town for the filter, and be back in, oh, say, two hours. Excited at how neatly this problem of poor preparation (two brand-new elements sat at home, but I’d decided the old one still had life) could be resolved, I arose early, tucked my backpack into a corner, and prepared to depart. Fortunately,

Chris arose, and when I told him of my clever plan he corrected me: my half-mile of trail to Route 103 was actually 2.7. (I'd confused two distances from the guidebook.) Disappointed but hugely grateful for the rescue, I donned the pack and headed out at 7:35 AM, soon encountering a beautiful large black porcupine that crossed the trail just before I reached a clear overlook of the Clarendon valley, and stepped out onto the highway at 9:10 AM. By 9:30 I was enjoying doughnuts and milk at Clarendon's General Store (Oasis had moved to Rutland, so no water filter element today); after telephoning my wife for our first actual conversation in ten days I joined an AT through-hiker for an early lunch at the Whistle Stop and was back on the trail, climbing the north side of the gap, by 12:15 PM. The afternoon passed pleasantly, highlighted by the Green Mountain Club's cache of stream-chilled soft drinks and, around 4:00 PM, a short section of attractive ridge trail high above the Cold River. I rolled into the Governor Clement Shelter exactly at my ETA of 5:30 PM, finding — as I'd been told — that the physically appealing low stone structure had been rendered virtually uninhabitable by ATV riders lacking any wilderness ethic. In the shelter habit I began setting up on its lower bunk anyway, but Chris popped his head around the corner and I accepted his invitation to join him and Emma tenting nearby. Staying in the Gov, we decided, was like enjoying crisp mountain air all day and then, to sleep, crawling into a garbage can. There was a little rain that night, but the little red Zephyr kept me warm and dry.



5: Looking back at Clarendon, 1:00 PM June 28, 2004

On Tuesday morning, June 29, we three were eagerly anticipating that night at Killington's Inn at Long Trail, which several experienced hikers had urged us not to miss. My friends left at the start of my back stretches, but I hit the trail at 8:35 AM for a slow climb that at times called upon hands and knees, a sunny and pleasant morning with the warm and humid hardwood forest changing to cool, breezy spruce as the trail rose. My lunch stop, windswept west-facing Cooper Lodge (the highest-elevation shelter on the Trail), arrived at 11:55 AM. Chris and Emma were just finishing and soon departed, so I hung my wet shirts to dry and enjoyed the meal in solitude. The early afternoon found another of my favorite trails, a duff-covered path paralleling the ridge on its west with a moderate breeze through tall spruce. A mirror image of the morning, lower elevation brought back the deciduous woods, humidity, and still air. Relying on my 1999 Guidebook to plan a midafternoon rest at Pico Camp, I ignored a "Sherburne Trail" sign (where Pico now lies) and marched down the realigned Long Trail. In frustration I finally stopped waiting for Pico and took my break at trailside; I didn't know what happened to Pico, but at least I was moving closer to luxurious accommodations for that night. Again counting on my 1999 book's assurance that the Inn was right on the trail, when a couple of parked cars appeared through the trees I was certain they were in the Inn's lot. To huge disappointment and frustration, though, my emergence onto Route 4 at 4:37 PM revealed only another trailhead parking lot: No Inn! Oh no, I despaired... Oasis again? Where did it go? After glancing around for signs of an old foundation, I headed west to the nearest house, where a cordial resident directed me back east. A roadside stop to check my more current (2001... and yes, I know it's now 2004) End-to-End'ers guide located the Inn a mile up the road; I arrived there at 5:10 PM, delighted to hear Emma's cheery greeting as I backpacked up the stairs to my room. (She and her dad had taken the old Long Trail, now the Sherburne Trail, that does indeed emerge at the Inn.) Downstairs again, clad completely in GoreTex because every other article of clothing was headed for the Inn's washing machine, I found Chris in the lobby and was delighted to meet his wife. (Apparently he'd gone through a similar act, about an hour earlier, with his clothes.) Up (for a shower), down (to fetch the laundry), up (to dress), and —finally—down for a Long Trail Ale and delightful dinner in the Pub and relaxed study of maps and writing in my trail journal, then telephone calls to my wife and kids... what a pleasant and satisfying evening. Back at the room, a food inventory revealed that seven breakfasts, eight lunches, eight days of trail snacks, and nine dinners remained in the bag.

Wednesday morning, June 30, was dominated by my quest for a water-filter element. Breakfast was delicious, but I had to wolf it to catch the 8:10 bus to Rutland. Its friendly driver didn't know Oasis but, about 8:40, dropped me at the door of a large outfitter that opened at nine. Timing was critical, because the first return bus to the Inn passed about twenty minutes later and the next not for another three hours. Fetching some coffee, I walked past yet another outfitter, but it opened at 9:30, and I fervently hoped that by then I'd be on the bus with a firm grip on one or

two new Hiker elements. The big store opened promptly at 9:00, but the elements were out of stock. My heart sank: three more hours in Rutland. Oasis wasn't far, I learned, so I headed for it at a rapid walk, but it opened at 10:00. Remembering that Voyageur elements fit the Hiker, I rapidly hoofed back to ask about them... sorry, no Pur/Katadyn elements at all. Out of ideas and time, I waved the bus on by (its driver had, kindly, been looking for me) and returned to the store to do some planning. At 9:30, though, its manager telephoned the nearby competitor and found my element available. With my profuse thanks, I began the short walk along Route 4, thinking now about the next three Rutland hours, when a horn tooted from the adjacent parking lot: It was Chris and his family, offering a ride back to the Inn after a few quick errands! At Mountain Travelers, Ken, a friendly long-distance hiker himself, pulled an element from a display Hiker and installed it in mine. We chatted a bit, then I went out to sit in the sun near the road, working on my journal and waiting for my ride. The kindness and generosity of the people who'd helped me that morning, culminating in the ride back to Killington, was heartwarming. By 11:10 AM I was walking west on Route 4, and at 11:35 entered the woods on the north, learning from the trail register that the Tokyo retiree with whom I'd shared Story Spring had been here four days ago and Sam, a first-night (Congdon) shelter-mate, five days ago.



6: Green Road camp; July 1, 2004 6:45 AM

These AT hikers and we LT folks parted ways at Maine Junction, a milestone I reached at 12:15 PM just before lunch at the Tucker-Johnson Shelter, where Emma and Chris paused briefly. I rolled into the site of the burned Rolston Rest Shelter, a stop on both of our itineraries, at 3:10 PM, and found they'd decided to tent there that night. After a half-hour stop for Gorp and water, though, I still felt strong, and since we all planned to spend tomorrow night at Sunrise and I didn't relish another 14.5 mile day, I left my friends and moved along. That late-afternoon walk was a delight. Feeling smooth and strong and delighted to be hiking alone in Vermont, I moved north along the ridge with the beautiful Chittenden Reservoir to my west. A good jump-start on Sunrise, I'd decided, would be the Green Road, a Revolutionary-War era trail now used as a snowmobile route, and I located a level tent site on it at 6:50 PM.

Thursday morning, July 1, began with breakfast cooked and enjoyed while sitting in my Amazonas hammock; the ability to sit comfortably while engaged in various camp tasks was invaluable. Finding my Sony digital recorder's "play" function working, I transcribed some notes into my pocket notebook; this and normal morning tasks led to an 8:00 AM departure. With David Logan 3.8 miles ahead, I formed a 10:40 AM ETA, a good day promised by the bright sun and the appealing Chittenden Reservoir way down to my left. After a pleasant morning, despite brushing against some stinging trailside nettles, I rolled into the David Logan Shelter at 10:45, delighting in its piped spring and having an early lunch there. Pulling out at 11:35 AM, I anticipated Sunrise Shelter at 4:35 PM.

Wetmore Gap (ele. 2600') arrived at 12:30 PM. The short climb out of it was a little rugged but produced a nice eastern view in fifteen minutes. I met my first "nude" hiker, headed south, actually wearing some kind of thong (and hiking boots). In general, though, the afternoon was not the most pleasant. Paralleling the ridge but down about a hundred feet on the east, the trail offered no breeze to ameliorate the heat and humidity, and it was often a narrow dirt path overgrown with low broadleaf plants. I trudged along, spirits buoyed by the reminder that this was, after all, a normal workday (Thursday) yet I was hiking in the sun in the woods of Vermont. That thought made up for a lot of humidity, hills, and roots.

After Bloodroot Gap, at 2:25 PM, the trail began to follow an old road and became so much easier and smoother that I arrived at Sunrise Shelter at 4:10 PM, well ahead of my estimated arrival time. A largely full jar of peanut butter, marked "fresh 6/27," sat there, and I slathered a good portion of it onto slices of my remaining Cabot cheese. About 6:20 PM I heard voices, and—amazingly—Emma and Chris rolled in, all the way from their Rolston Rest tent site. That night I began to consider bailing at Jonesville. Despite the threat to my machismo it would seem to solve several problems. Chris suggested his friends might be able to get me to Burlington, where I expected to be able to make bus connections.

Friday, July 2, began with an 8:35 AM departure after heavy rain during the night. Crossing Route 73 at Brandon Gap at 9:10 AM, I took a twenty-minute break to enjoy the Great Cliffs overlook, finding the ability to walk right up

to such a sheer drop a little frightening but thrilled that the freedom and opportunity to do such a thing is still available. Returning to the Long Trail and continuing to climb to Mount Horrid, I found the trail very lightly blazed. Talking to myself, I pleaded for more sympathy from trail maintainers for us first-timers, and of course a white blaze eventually did appear. The day's humidity had my clothes completely soaked, and while there were pleasant stretches with pine-cushioned trail and sweeping western views, much of the path reminded me of that between Wetmore Gap and Logan: a narrow path overgrown with low broadleaf plants and tall grasses, all soaking wet, that obscured roots and rocks and demanded careful attention. That path seemed like a never-ending narrow tunnel under its canopy of wet greenery. Planning a short day to Sucker Brook



7: John, Chris, Emma: Middlebury Gap, 11:30AM 7/3/04

Shelter, I'd decided to postpone lunch until then, but it seemed never to arrive. Romance Mountain came along at 12:55 PM, and, finally at 1:50 PM, Sucker Brook. Chris and Emma, who had also postponed lunch, arrived starving about 45 minutes later. I spent the rest of the afternoon bringing my trail journal up to date and enjoying a nice rest.

I left Sucker Brook Shelter at 7:35 AM on Saturday, July 3, exactly two weeks since encountering the southern terminus of the Long Trail at the Massachusetts border. Chris and Emma, anticipating family and resupply at Middlebury Gap (Route 125), soon flashed past. Emerging onto trails of the Middlebury Snow Bowl about 10:00 AM, then atop a ski lift where other visitors snapped two photos of me at 10:40 AM, I pulled out onto Route 125 at 10:50 AM, delighted to meet more of Chris and Emma's family. At their urging I stuffed myself with their fresh fruit, cookies, and Clif bars; it was wonderful to see their warm family reunion and I tried, even while wolfing down their treats, not to intrude.

Despite the treats I had my usual lunch, along the trail climbing out of Middlebury Gap, about 12:10 PM, and paused at 1:45 PM for Gorp at the Boyce Shelter, the half-way mark along the Long Trail. It was only 3:20 PM when I arrived at my day's destination, the pleasant Skyline Lodge, where a \$6 fee was collected by caretaker Jen. I'd stayed at several "caretaker" shelters, but apparently they only assumed their duties on July 2 so this was my first payment. Emma and Chris arrived soon after I did.

As we sat on the porch, looking over the attractive Skyline Pond, a tall, slender man arrived with a woman and dog, introducing himself as Bill McKibben. I told him I'd heard his lecture at the Newcomb Visitors' Interpretive Center. He was familiar with Goodnow Flow, and we shared a couple of Adirondack stories. He said he moved from North River to Ripton VT to obtain better schooling for their children, and Middlebury College provided him with office space. That evening I worked alone on trip planning, but at dusk joined the rest of the Lodge group at "The Rocks," a high cliff facing west, to hunt for Fourth-of-July fireworks displays. The view was spectacular, including my first sight on this hike of Lake Champlain. As the sky darkened we began to see tiny sparkling pinwheels and hear faint booms, tiny and faint only at this distance, from several Vermont towns and Ticonderoga, across the lake in New York. It was a delightful evening, with perhaps eight of us perched on the rocks, but eventually we picked our way, by headlamp, back to the shelter. I shared the lower platform with three other men; Chris and Emma and caretaker Jen occupied the upper platform.

July 4, Sunday, I left Skyline Lodge after breakfast on the porch, at 7:42 AM, planning a 7.5 mile trip to Cooley Glen Shelter. With a cool breeze through the spruce and duff-covered footing, the early-morning trail was delightful, and I took a short spur at 8:45 for a pleasant Lake Champlain overlook and photo. The Emily Proctor Shelter arrived at 9:22 AM; feeling good and cruising along, I breezily asked a small group there if "this was the trail," accepted their "yes," and moved swiftly along, downhill to the left.

After a long descent with a few awkward drops down rock slabs, sparse blue blazes suggested something was wrong. At 10:40 AM a map check showed I was descending the Emily Proctor Trail to a trailhead parking lot. Dismissing a backtrack as too long, steep, and frustrating, I dashed into the parking lot at 11:22 AM, located the trailhead for the Cooley Glen Trail, and immediately headed up it. It was rather nice to see the cars and a few other human beings, but being charged twice from the rear by a pair of unleashed snarling boxer dogs, and twice hearing their owner's version of "Aw, he don't bite," reminded me of the pleasure of hiking alone. The trail climbed steadily, but I was happy to be hiking in Vermont and to be headed back toward the Long Trail, and after a 12:30 to 1:00 PM

trailside lunch arrived at the Cooley Glen Shelter at 1:50 PM, about a hundred feet east of the Long Trail junction. I looked wistfully at the sign pointing back to Emily Proctor, knowing that I'd have to return some time in the future to complete that five-mile section of the Long Trail.

The group I'd met at Emily Proctor arrived around dinnertime, and we were joined later by one or two end-to-end'ers. The shelters' proximity to trailhead parking attracted (as it always does) some casual campers, one of whom proudly built a large fire, but the group shared some of their food with me and we enjoyed pleasant conversation. I formulated a plan to stay at Battell Monday, then Glen Ellen, Cowles Cove, and Bamforth Ridge, arriving in Jonesville on Friday.

Monday morning, July 5, I found that "Earley Bird," who'd started at Williamstown a couple of days behind me and had been following my register entries, had arrived late in the evening and was rolled up beside me in the shelter. Like most end-to-end'ers, he was a strong, smooth, and serious hiker, and I liked him. I pulled out at 8:20 AM, leaving a written message for my wife with one of the Emily Proctor group. I wore my rain parka, but my pants and boots were immediately soaked from trailside foliage. The trail up Mount Grant was taken slowly, about one step per second, but my goal of "Number One Priority: No Injuries!" was achieved and, after meeting a pleasant young family, southbound on a day hike (Dayhikers always look so clean!), descended to Lincoln Gap for lunch at 12:10 PM. Enjoying my few hundred calories in the trailhead parking lot, I began the climb out of the Gap at 12:40 PM and arrived at the Battell Shelter at 2:12 PM. Earley Bird (age 24) had just arrived and was chatting with caretaker Lindsey (age 23), but finally decided to hit the trail again, about 4:30 PM. Around dinnertime a young woman (early 20s) and her mother arrived: Goldilocks and Mom, who also had been trailing me and reading my register notes. They were, again, lightly packed, frequent-resupply, fast travelers, and pleasant companions at the shelter that night. We were joined by a heavyset man who had taken 4 hours to cover the 1.7 miles from Lincoln Gap; a severe snoring affliction led him to a tent site away from others.

On Tuesday, July 6, I left Battell with some trepidation, for I'd heard that the rocky climb up Mount Abraham was slippery when wet, and it had rained during the night. I removed my poles' rubber feet, hoping the carbide tips would prove superior, but replaced the rubber soon. I encountered a few steep sections, dragging the poles and relying on boot friction, and a couple requiring handholds; I slipped twice but didn't fall, and reached Abraham's summit at 8:55 AM. About 9:30 AM I reached Little Abe, and depacked for a snack and photo on a wooden observation deck, though the only scene to be observed was fog. It was a delightful stop, with a stiff wind and the sun popping out occasionally, and I reveled in the solitude. The morning trail tracked the ridge that seemed, at points, only perhaps a hundred yards wide, and turning my head to the left offered a view of Lake Champlain and to the right a green valley with farms, roads, and buildings. This was absolutely stunning hiking, immensely enjoyable. I reached the Castlerock chairlift hut at 10:45 AM and at 12:00 noon began a delightful lunch stop on a Sugarbush North chairlift seat, with its cushioned backrest, thoughtfully parked at the upper platform. The bright sun and the wind dried my clothes as I enjoyed the view straight down to the foot of the lift.

Coming down off the ridge to the west, the Champlain views were so stunning that it was hard to keep my eyes on the steeply descending rocky trail, but at 2:00 PM the Jerusalem Trail intersection arrived, followed immediately by a spur to Glen Ellen Lodge. But it was 0.3 miles, and Theron Dean Shelter was only 1.6 miles, so I moved along, finding the continuing descent even more difficult, with the pack dragging on some rock slabs as I slid down them on my seat. I moved very slowly, pausing to reason out potentially risky moves, and emerged onto the Mad River Glen ski run at Stark's Nest, a large warming hut, at 2:55 PM; a carpenter working there kindly snapped my photo. At 3:35 PM, I depacked at the cute little Theron Dean Shelter, which reminded me much more of Adirondack lean-tos than anything I'd yet encountered in Vermont. Anticipating the difficulty of the rest of the drop down into Appalachian Gap, and the rise out of it, I scratched both my Cowles Cove and Birch Glen plans, and set up for the evening. The view from my hammock, down to the Mad River Glen headquarters buildings and, in the distance across the high way Camel's Hump, was spectacular.

I was soon joined, briefly, by two men with a group of young children, day hiking from their



8: Lunch at Sugarbush North, Noon, July 6, 2004

home nearby. They had an oversupply of snacks, and gave me eight packages of Lance's Peanut Butter Crackers and other goodies. Immediately after they headed for home, two hikers appeared, tired and hungry, to spend the night. Harry and Dana had come south, all the way from Montclair Glen Lodge today. They gave me a large sack of almonds, some Pop-Tarts, and hot-chocolate mixes, and advised me to use the "bad weather bypass" on Camel's Hump if it was at all rainy or wet when I arrived there. They were serious, businesslike, hikers, and I greatly enjoyed their company.

On the morning of Wednesday, July 7, I finally decided to dress like nearly everyone else I'd met on the trail by wearing shorts. I left Theron Dean shortly after Dana and Harry, at 7:55 AM, and traversed the very steep and rocky descent to Appalachian Gap's broad parking lot and overlook. I arrived there at 9:22 AM, and asked a motorcyclist to take my photo, then headed into Camel's Hump State Forest at 9:30 AM, finding that Goldilocks and her Mom (back from a civilized night at a nearby inn) had signed the register just before me and that Earley Bird had registered this morning too, just before them. But everyone was so much faster than me that I assumed I'd never see them again.

Climbing steeply out of this Gap for half an hour, the trail descended sharply for a short distance and resumed its climb, until an hour had passed. A backward view showed the Mad River Glen runs clearly, across Appalachian Gap. Three teenaged boys flew past me, sporting inexpensive gear and youthful enthusiasm, jumping down slabs it took me three minutes to reason an injury-free technique for descent. They were resting as I passed at Molly Stark's Balcony, a nice east-facing overlook, at 10:55 AM, and they rolled into my lunch stop, Birch Glen Camp, shortly after my 11:42 AM arrival. Unsure of my evening stop, for Cowles Cove (2.9 miles) seemed too close and Montclair Glen Camp (8.0 miles) too far, I headed out at 12:22 PM. It was only 2:20 PM when I arrived at Cowles Cove Shelter, shortly after the three Rutland teenagers; I depacked, drank and snacked, and tried to decide what to do.

With a strong desire (verging on need) to spend Thursday night at Bamforth, hours of daylight remaining, and several peaks yet ahead (Ira and Ethan Allen, and Camel's Hump), I had incentive to move along. The final argument was the boys' lighting up their cigarettes and pulling out a boom box and large set of rock or rap CDs, played at high volume with no consideration for me or the small Farm and Wilderness group tenting nearby. (One even noted that their last shelter also cleared out after they cranked up their tunes.) By 2:40 PM I was on the trail again, happy to be knocking off distance toward Montclair though I expected to be tenting short of that goal that evening.

The trail was generally ascending, but I was moving comfortably and smoothly, though with my usual caution. After the Hedgehog Brook Trail intersection, achieved at 3:28 PM (sign: Camel's Hump 6.1 mi), the trail did, as the guidebook said, become steeper and more difficult. Although I was feeling energized, almost supercharged, as I had on my late-afternoon trek from Rolston Rest to the Green Road, I was a bit anxious about the risk of injury on this lonely path late in the day. In many places the path narrowed to perhaps twelve inches, with a steep sloping dropoff down to the right, and many awkward moves around small trees and boulders intruding into the trail and angled toward the dropoff were required. On occasion a sideways move between boulders was required, with my pack scraping one and my nose (nearly) the other. Nonetheless, it was a huge thrill to be out there alone, hiking in the Green Mountains of Vermont. At 4:10 PM I snapped a shot of Champlain from the Burnt Rock Mountain summit.

Continuing north, I descended an aluminum ladder into the "Paris Skidway" at 4:35 PM and continued to scan around for tent sites. More pressing was my lack of water, and I hadn't seen a stream in quite a while. Finally I found a small clean-looking pool at the root of a tree. Pumped through my Hiker, its tannin still left it looking like weak tea, but I drank a liter, put another on my hose, and the third in my pack, still anticipating a (probably illegal, above 2500' elevation) night's camping. Meanwhile, I was becoming increasingly frustrated with my progress: Where the devil was Ira Allen? Only 3.0 miles from Cowles, I should have reached it unless I was moving far slower than I'd hoped. In frustration and despair, I finally checked the guidebook at 6:20 PM and learned that the trail passes to the east of the summit, not over it, and that I'd passed that point some time ago. My spirits soared, and I began seriously to anticipate spending that night at Montclair.

Cresting the south summit of Ethan Allen and reveling in the level, duff-covered and wind-whipped trail to its north summit, I found myself beside the "Mt. Ethan Allen, Elevation 3680" sign at 6:50 PM, with Montclair Glen Camp only 1.0 miles ahead; I projected an ETA of 7:40 PM... and after a customarily cautious descent depacked at



9: "App Gap," 9:25AM 7/2/04

the fully enclosed cabin at 7:37 PM. What an afternoon! I immediately exchanged my perspiration-soaked clothes for my dry “camp” outfit.

It was great to find Goldilocks and her Mom there, and they seemed suitable impressed with my day from Theron Dean, but apart from them and a couple of other hikers the camp was stuffed with a private-school group whose leader reluctantly allowed that they might find room for me on the floor. (We eventually had fifteen, I think, in the “twelve-person” camp.) I'd just finished my dinner when two college friends of Goldilocks, hearing of her schedule, arrived from a nearby trailhead... with several liters of Ben and Jerry's ice cream, kept cold in newspapers. The school group was having some kind of assembly behind the building, so we individual hikers were invited to dig in. What a treat! That night I slept under the table, inadvertently kicking another floor person a couple of times, but the next morning he kindly averred not to have noticed.



10: Alone on summit of Camel's Hump, 11:00 AM July 8, 2004

Thursday, July 8, began heavily overcast following heavy rain during the night. Waiting a bit for weather to clear, I left at 8:44 AM (after eating the last of my prepackaged breakfasts), heading up Camel's Hump. The trail rose so steeply in places that, seeing the white blaze high up on what seemed like a vertical wall in front of me, I spoke to myself, “Oh come on, you can't be serious!” But slowly and carefully, sometimes using knees and handholds, I ascended, and at 10:40 AM reached the Bad Weather Bypass that Harry and Dana had advised. Everything was wet, but it wasn't raining and the wind wasn't severe, so I didn't seriously consider it, but shortly after the summit route emerged onto bare rock I found the move Harry had warned of. Traversing a south-oriented face, my right foot was secure on a flat 8”-wide shelf and, reaching ahead with my face to the slope, a 6”-wide flat shelf awaited my left foot. But the rock face projected between them, requiring the hiker to rely a bit on handholds above (they were fine) and to lean back a bit, with his pack out over empty space. I found it rather exciting, but it's clear why Harry advised against it in truly bad weather. The rest of the climb was simply bending forward, dragging my poles, and relying on boot friction as I followed the white paint blazes up the rock faces in dense fog; the bronze surveyor's bolt was attained at 10:56 AM. With clothes soaked with perspiration, the stiff wind at my water-and-gorp break was welcome, and I snapped a photo of my pack at the bolt. Though fog obscured what I've read is a spectacular view, I again felt the exhilaration of being alone, strong and healthy, in the cool whipping wind of this Vermont mountain summit. These surges of elation, perhaps the “runner's high” endorphin phenomenon, were brief and rare, but it was nice to share one with the summit of Camel's Hump.

Nonetheless, I'd heard that the descent heading north was tough, so I wanted to confront it as soon as I could, and headed out at 11:06 AM, searching through the fog for the next paint blaze on the downsloping rock summit. But there were no long, bare, steep rock faces like those I'd ascended from the south, and, after reaching an old hotel site at 11:20, paused for a half-hour lunch stop at 12:10 PM: Harry's almonds and the kids' peanut-butter crackers... I'd had the last of my prepackaged lunches yesterday. I saw a highway about 60° ENE as the sun began to burn off the fog, and again felt the exhilaration of being here alone, feeling strong and confident, on this mountain. Continuing with the up-and-down descent brought I-89 into view at 1:50 PM, and I looked back at 2:20 PM to snap a photo of Camel's Hump, by then enshrouded in fog again. Although the trail seemed to seek out and climb every possible protrusion, I never did discover why the boys at Montclair had warned of difficulty, and at only 3:08 PM depacked at the nearly-new large Bamforth Ridge Shelter. I'd anticipated meeting Goldilocks and Mom, but they must have decided to move on. I knew I couldn't make Jonesville before the Post Office closed, so I stuck with my plan of reaching in tomorrow (Friday) morning.

Enjoying hot coffee in my hammock, I heard young excited voices and a couple of girls appeared, surprised to see me. After “hi”'s they disappeared. Hearing activity behind the huge shelter, I found them beginning to set up tarps and tents, not wanting to intrude on my privacy! At my urging they joined me in the shelter, another Farm and Wilderness group of pleasant, happy, and courteous young people. (I couldn't help but contrast them to the Rutland teenagers with the boom box at Cowles Cove.) There must have been nine or ten girls, but they packed in so tightly they didn't occupy more than half of the shelter. That left plenty of room for our next surprise arrivals: a totally drenched but cheery Emma and, less ebullient than usual, her dad Chris! I hadn't seen them since Skyline Lodge last

Sunday. Urged on by an Emma eager to reach Jonesville, they'd come all the way from Cowles Cove that wet day, over Burnt Rock, the Allens, and Camel's Hump (via the Bypass, since they've been on that summit many times); moving fast on wet rock, Chris had taken a fall and, at Bamforth, immediately began first-aid on himself. It was a pleasure to see them again, and Chris again said the party meeting him at Jonesville might be able to carry me to Burlington, if that would help. I had the last of my 19 prepacked trail dinners, and we had a nice evening, sharing the big shelter with the Farm and Wilderness girls.

Friday, July 9, I arose shortly before 6:00 AM and quietly went about my morning chores, pulling out at 8:00 AM and soon donning the GoreTex parka after the night's rain. I reached the trailhead parking lot at 10:05 AM and signed out for the last time this year, finding Earley Bird's two days earlier and Goldilocks and Mom yesterday. The easy 3.5 mile walk along Duxbury Road, with the powerful Winooski River across the road at the right, was wistfully pleasant: Again, it was great to be walking in Vermont, feeling strong and smooth, but this was the end for this year. Crossing the Winooski River Bridge, I reached the Jonesville Post Office at 11:20 AM and asked a young neighbor girl to snap my photo.

The young postmaster was very kind, producing my boxes and offering a ride to Richmond on his lunch hour if that would help me. By 11:45 AM I had depacked at the General Store and was furiously punching pay-phone buttons, 36 per call, using my calling card! Trying to reach Vermont Transit was hugely frustrating, with number after number being no good. Finally, a White River Junction number (800-552-8737) worked, and I discovered that a bus ran from Burlington to White River at 2:30 PM for a two-hour trip. RCT (802-334-0243), I learned, didn't run on Fridays, but Stagecoach (802-748-8170) did... though not on weekends! So this afternoon was my last chance, or I'd be stuck somewhere until Monday. I imagined camping behind a dumpster at the White River bus terminal... but Stagecoach, finally back from lunch, said they left White River for Newport at 4:30 PM, the same as the Vermont Transit Burlington bus's arrival time. Tight... but if I could get to Burlington by 2:30 or WRJ by 4:30, I'd be OK.

Meanwhile, amid this hectic and stressful process, I felt a tap on the shoulder, and was delighted to see Cindy, Chris's wife, with their younger daughter Evelyn. Chris had called, via cell phone, from Bamforth Ridge to let her know of his and Emma's schedule. They arrived soon afterwards, and assured me that Cindy and Evelyn could take me to White River Junction well before 4:30! What a relief! Finally able to relax, I enjoyed the traditional hiker's pint of Ben and Jerry's, shampooed my hair with Joy at the store's outside garden hose, and soaked up sun at the picnic table at the west end of the store while Chris and Emma enjoyed their family reunion in the parking lot at the east end.

A short time later Chris came over to the table and said he and Cindy thought they had an even better idea for me: She and Evelyn would drive me directly to North Troy and my vehicle! It was hard to contain my elation; this was the best possible outcome, and so generous of these friends who had already helped me so much. About 2:30 PM, after a fond farewell to Chris and Emma (heading back to the trail, and Duck Brook Shelter) and setting up Evelyn with her new DVD player and a movie in the back seat, Cindy began the drive to North Troy. It was a pleasant ride with good conversation, and almost before I knew it my little pickup came into sight, still in its spot at Russ Plourde's North Troy Inn. It was 4:00 PM when Russ came out to greet us. Cindy, declining my offer of a little gas money, departed a short time later, and after Russ and I chatted a bit we parted ways, about 4:30 PM, until next summer. (He selected a near-perfect Drury's brick for me, from his pile of them, after learning that I'd delivered papers to the Drurys in Essex Junction in the 1950s!)

Pausing at rural roadside to change into my clean, dry, cotton "car" clothes—at times I never thought I'd feel clean dry cotton again!—I headed west to Rouses Point, crossed into New York, and headed down the Northway, imagining that I could see Camel's Hump and its north ridge that I'd been on, in wind-whipped sweat-soaked hiking clothes, just hours ago. The sense of regret began to pass as I encountered my beloved Adirondacks, looming on the right, and after the familiar drive west from the Northway was back at our little camp at 8:20 PM, only twelve hours after leaving Bamforth Ridge Shelter. I telephoned my wife, ate a bit while the water heater did its thing, and enjoyed my first hot shower since Killington. This hike was over.



11: Jonesville... Hike over, Noon,
July 9, 2004