I

The First Step

(The Coast to Katahdin)

When a man decides to walk from the Atlantic to the Pacific it is no sudden thing. The cards of his life fall just so, and like a gambler drawing into a winning hand, he works his way up to it. Take me for instance, since this is my instance! I've always been one to look for things that were a little different, a might strange, or harder, or, as in this case, longer. My ramblings over the past several years have led me in many directions, and in 1974 I spent more than six months walking from Georgia to Maine on the Appalachian Trail. The experience was one which bears repeating, but it was also the siren which lured me on to more hiking.

What first triggered the idea of an ocean to ocean walk, I don't even recall. I suppose it had a lot to do with the fact that I'd never seen the Pacific or hiked in the western mountains. For a guy raised on National Geographic, the West was a magnetic force which gripped thoughts and molded dreams.

Somewhere along the Appalachian Trail I suddenly found myself thinking of various routes I could take, asking if it could actually be done. There were many questions. Where do I start? Or finish? When would I start? Where would that put me come winter? Skis or snowshoes? What about money? Food? How long would I give myself? All the questions but one had reasonably sane answers. Why not?

By the time I completed the A.T. there was no doubt in my mind as to what would come next. I began gathering information from various hiking

organizations, government agencies, parks, and towns along my intended route. My winter quarters, the living room of my brother's house, was soon buried under a carpet of pamphlets and maps.

Maps have always held a romantic appeal for me. I spent hours, as a kid, dreaming over road maps of far off states and traveling in my imaginary roadster through the Danvilles and Smith Cities of America. Once again I lost myself in a world of maps. As I studied the contours and lines of my incoming maps, I'd find myself transported along bubbling creeks, through deep canyons, and over open mountains that I had yet to lay eyes on. The trip had begun and not a step had been taken.

By the time Spring rolled around I was rarin' to go. Though still far from having the necessary financing, some of the winter gear, and even a few of the maps, I was overpowered by the excitement which had been building with my plans. It was as if the trip had a mind of its own. It overruled all else. I couldn't hold back. With a firm belief that everything would work out, I left for Maine.

It was important for me to have an impressive start and finish. My end points had to be special in order to flow with the rest of the trip. The beginning must set the pace and the mood, while the ending must bring it all to a just and rewarding climax.

For my jump off point I chose West Quoddy Head, a point of land jutting out into the Atlantic near Lubec, Maine. The Head has the distinction of being the most eastern point of the United States. Since I planned to end in Washington, I was pleased to learn that the wild stretch of beach at Cape Alava was the westernmost point of the contiguous states. Both points were significant not only as extremes in geography, but as points of outstanding natural beauty as well.

May 1, 1975 saw me walking the last half mile out to West Quoddy Head. I had sensed the presence of the sea all day as I'd thumbed up the coast, but as I slowly tramped out from the shelter of trees and was welcomed with the sight of the calm, cold-blue waters of the Atlantic, my head was flooded with the perfume of salt water, that curious blend of dead fish, seaweed, and sunshine. The day was made to order. The ocean lay sprawled and tired under a sky clear of clouds, and a sun that warmed, not only with its rays, but its very presence.

I found myself standing next to the Quoddy Head Lighthouse and was startled to hear the sound of the sea cracked with a blast of rock 'n roll, followed by the appearance of a young man. He introduced himself as Nelson Geel of the U.S. Coast Guard and we were soon chatting in the dining room over a cold beer. I had noticed a fresh grave outside and I asked Nelson about it.

"Oh, that's ol' Hopely Yeaton. He was the first commissioned officer of the Revenue Marines, the forerunners of the Coast Guard. Hopely served at this light and was buried over there in Lubec. Seems they wanted to make this into a tourist stop so they dug him up and brought him over here the other day in a big glad bag. But the thing is, lots of folks claim that's not him. Say it's his wife. Seems they were buried together."

Later we went back outside, and as I clambered over the farthermost rocks, the feeling of where I was hit me hard and strong. I was suddenly aware of the power and the immensity of the land behind me. Miles upon miles of forest, mountains, and plains lay there waiting. Like a weight I was attempting to carry, the distance staggered me. There was little doubt in my mind that I would make it. Yet, that old fear of the unknown came racing at

me, digging its heels in and sending a chorus of chills up and down my spine. But here I was, about to set off on the adventure of a lifetime, to fulfill the plans of the past several months, to see the sights that few men ever see. My heart was drumming, pounding wild and strong as I scrambled back over the rocks to Nelson, anxious to be on my way.

The last vibrations of the huge fog bell were dying across the water when I lifted my pack onto my shoulders and bid farewell to Nelson. I set off along a gentle, winding path, hugging the coast and passing little cascades and steplike cliffs. The sea lapped tamely over the rocks, and seagulls cried in the distance.

I felt myself as such a gull, a bird set free. To move, to actually be walking again was total release. I felt as if I'd been straining for months, moving my legs but getting nowhere, and suddenly someone had removed the barriers. I was floating. The freedom of the wanderer, the song of the traveler, swelled in my bosom. Surely this must be how a gull feels when he stretches his wings and takes off to swoop and soar.

It had been midafternoon when I'd left the light. I was in no hurry and moved slowly, stopping often to soak it all in. Somewhere in the first quarter mile I picked up a piece of driftwood. It was light, but strong, bleached dry under a Spring sun, and worn smooth with the rolling of endless waves. In the days to come it would become an extension of myself: my alpenstock, my weapon, my security blanket -- my walking stick.

After little more than a mile, I decided to make camp atop a grassy bank at the water's edge. Being the sole member and leader of The Atlantic to Pacific, 1975-1976, North Country Expedition, I had no complaints from the ranks, and set about with almost religious solemnity the task of pitching my tent.

My little tent was a do-or-die purchase from Weaser, N.C. the year before. I'd grabbed it up for thirty bucks after spending a night huddled under an improvised shelter and being blasted by tornado force wind and rain. Though not enough for winter use, it has seen me through many rolling thunder revues.

After setting up the tent the next order of business was to satisfy the fierce complaints coming from my stomach. I decided to start off with my old standby, macaroni and cheese, but soon discovered that I'd forgotten to include a salt shaker in my gear. One thought led to another and I found myself looking down at the incoming waves. Ah-ha! Pre-salted water! In no time I had a pot of sea water boiling and a short while later my evening meal was ready. I dug in with gusto, only to have my taste buds shocked with the saltiest dish of my life! Sea-side hikers beware.

I was up with the sun the next morning and finished skirting the Head. The day was cool and clear, and I whistled and sang my way down a narrow road that couldn't seem to make up its mind whether to be asphalt or dirt. The vast bogs and heaths gave birth in places to huge rocks that broke abruptly from the earth like monuments to some forgotten age. It was a hard, wild country, but that morning the stark appeal of its ruggedness was like a welcoming friend.

In planning the trip I had attempted to route my trail as far from people as possible. It was to be a backcountry trek. I didn't want to have to bother myself with humans and their hang-ups. But in doing this, I'd completely overlooked the social experience I'd had on my previous long walk. People, those interesting, varied creatures of comedy are what make a land what it is. It was very appropriate that on my first full day of walking I was to have my eyes opened to this fact.

I had just passed a flock of sheep when I was hailed from behind. I turned to meet a wide, grinning face, and was soon sharing tea and toast with Crister Rinkvist and his wife, Regina. The Rinkvists, like many young, city-bred folks, have become today's homesteaders, returning to the land to live a more natural existence in a world that is increasingly more unearthly. We talked for about an hour on subjects ranging from gardening to raccoons to solar energy. When I headed down the road I wore a smile that wouldn't quit. My already soaring spirits seemed even higher, having touched their peaceful world.

I began passing more little farms, and soon came to the quiet hamlet of Bailey's Mistake. It was the typical Maine fishing village with neat houses and cottages scattered over the side of the hills in haphazard fashion around the cove. Old ladies toiled in their flower gardens, dogs dozed by the side of the road, dusty and tired, and somewhere the sound of pounding hammers drifted over the water to intercept the cry of the gulls.

Moving on, my senses seemed strained to the full. Every smell, sound, color, every step, was a journey in itself. I collected each sensation, held it, studied it, and released it for another. So engrossed was I in my new awareness, I missed my turn and walked a few miles beyond before realizing my mistake.

Now, I'm the first to admit that I'm a rather lazy fellow. As much as I love to walk, I don't enjoy backtracking over miles I just saw. And in such a situation as this I will usually elect to go forward by some new route rather than do an "about-face!" It's sheer stubbornness, I know, but it does make for some interesting and always exciting times.

I soon found a faded jeep trail leading into the woods in a northerly direction. That was the way I wanted to go, but in missing my turn I had walked off my maps. I couldn't be sure where this trail would lead. All I could do

was try. I set off along the winding track, always taking the northbound fork when it split, and watched as the trail grew fainter. After a couple of hours of nice hiking through mixed woods, the trail entered an alder swamp. I suddenly found myself sinking in muck with no trace of my trail. Definitely time for a break.

It was a simple matter to take a compass bearing, but to follow it, to actually make ground, was another episode entirely. It was necessary to battle my way through dense patches of saplings and briars, and when I stumbled out of the grasp of one would-be captor, it was into the scathing hold of another. After half an hour and a hard won hundred yards, I forded a stream and picked up a deer trail (a very dear trail) which eventually led me to another northbound logging track.

The next morning found me poking along a jeep trail in the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge. It was evident by the abundance of moose and bear sign that this was a wild region. The day was perfect, as was the setting, but I was beginning to feel uneasy. Coming up was a long stretch of bushwhacking, walking through trackless country. If the going was as difficult as yesterday's, it may take days to get through. To add to my apprehension was my own lack of experience with the compass. I knew the theory behind orienteering, but the theory and practice are two different things. I would either sink or swim, win or lose. As I passed the bleached bones of a deceased deer, I knew I'd better win.

The trail made a sharp turn back to the east and I knew it was time. Taking a bearing on my compass, I stepped off the beaten path into a dense spruce forest. Occasional patches of hip-deep snow still lay in cool strongholds of the retreating winter. The going was hard. Branches lashed at my

face and pulled at my big pack. But it wasn't quite so insane as my short bushwhacking stint the day before. I soon broke through the forest edge, coming out onto a vast everglades, an immense bog stretching out on both sides of Hobart Stream.

It's funny how some scenes in your life are never forgotten. The moment strikes like a bat over the head, and the resulting stars mingle with memory, and if not fading, grow sharper over the years. Such was the view that met me when I stepped out of the woods. The bog, big, brown, and desolate, was locked in by a barrier of seemingly impassable forest. It was undoubtably beautiful, but the world appeared abnormally huge. I felt myself shrink. I felt swallowed by this vast, wild land. Panic threatened to invade my senses.

Hell, Jim. Get a hold on yourself. You've got a supply of food, a map and compass. You know how to use them. That's a heck of a lot more than those ol' woods runners had. This must be how those first men saw it. It's real. This is how it ought to be. No fences. No roads. No signs. Just you and the trees, water, earth, and God. Feel it, Jim. He's here; in all of this. It's real. You are. This is what you're looking for.

"God -- this is beautiful!" My voice sounded foreign and out of place. A lump swelled in my throat. My eyes brimmed over. Total awe and exhilaration swept through me. The wild places had welcomed me.

I made my way across the bog, and made camp that night near Hobart Lake. The next day I resumed my bushwhacking, and after a couple miles climbed to the top of an open hill. Below me, a bayou-like creek flowed sluggishly through a ribbon of marsh. The forest rolled endlessly into the distance.

It had rained that morning. The sky was a veil of grey. As I watched, the grim curtain fluttered open, and a patch of blue winked and grew larger. I mused over my good fortune like a miser looking over his pile of hidden gold.

But wilderness is worth much more than mere gold. It's one of those rare things that cannot be packaged or priced. And it is necessary, though there are some who would have you believe otherwise. Man must have a sanctuary from this increasingly technical world; a place to be real, to find himself as a human, a place where he can gain perspective as to where he actually stands in relation to his planet and fellow creatures, a place where he can feel the power, and the glory, and the love of Creation. Such a place is the wilderness. If the sad day ever comes when there are no longer any wild places to retreat to, Man will have lost the grass roots of his soul.

After ten days of walking I crossed the mighty Penobscott River, and reached my first mail-drop and resupply point, Howland, Maine. All mail stops had been planned during the winter. Then about a month prior to my arrival in a certain town, I'd notify the postmaster. They would hold any mail until I arrived. Any mail that came afterwards was sent on to my next stop. The system worked great, and I was nearly always welcomed with letters from family and friends upon arriving in town.

My next stop, after the post office, was generally the grocery store. Since expense and taste of the freeze-dried backpacking food was prohibitive for such a long trip, I found I could go just as light, and eat as well, by buying items I would find in any food store along the way. I made use of rice, noodles, cheese, oatmeal, granola, dried soups, dried fruit, nuts, instant pudding, powdered milk, and all kinds of candybars. In my suppers I used a

textured vegetable protein product called Protein-ettes. The Creamette Company had kindly donated a generous supply at my request, and I had it sent to me at my various mail stops.

The people in the Howland post office were friendly, and I spent an hour or two reading mail and buying a few supplies in the grocery next door. My next stop was only a few days away so I was able to go quite light. With directions from veteran Maine guide, John York, I kept to little used roads and jeep trails going north towards Millinocket. For two days I didn't see a soul.

Maine is definitely moose country, the "moosiest" I've ever been in. However, the previous fall I'd walked across the state on the Appalachian Trail and hadn't spotted one. I was anxiously awaiting my first moose sighting on this trip, but when I rounded a sharp bend in the trail one morning I suddenly found my enthusiasm lacking. Before me, about 15 yards away, a cow moose chewed lazily at her breakfast. An adult moose will eat from 40 to 60 pounds of browse a day, and it shows. She was a tank! I was amazed at her size, and could see the power that lay beneath her calm, tea-party look. She seemed totally oblivious to my presence. It was all right by me.

I studied her for what seemed like an hour. My first impression had been one of size. Then, I thought how awkward and clumsy looking she was. But after a time I came to see a certain majestic air about her, a certain grace that comes with nobility. There was no doubt in my mind who was king of the north woods.

All the while I'd been standing like a snowman, frozen to the earth, motionless and silent. It was with surprise that I felt the pack on my back

and noticed the growing stiffness. It was time to move on. She stood, head bent, munching her cud, big as a brick wall across the trail. What do you say to a thousand pound moose to get it to move? I'd had no experience with the problem. Pause for thought. Sucking in a deep breath, and with my most authoritative tone, I said, "All right, Move on now, --- Please?" Apparently she hadn't heard me clear enough. For she raised her mighty head and ambled towards me. Being lost for more words, I thought it best to back up. Like a bat out of Hell, I retreated!

Later, as I told this story to some experienced Maine natives, it raised a few chuckles. They told me the chances were good that she hadn't even seen me. Moose have very poor eyesight. (Now they tell me!) At the sound of my noisy retreat she had realized something was amiss and had taken off through the woods. Her exit was much more elegant than mine. For such a giant, accidental-looking creature, she raced through the thick spruce forest with only the slightest of sound and the grace of Fred Astaire. Ginger Rogers, eat your heart out!

That same day, as I was passing through Millinocket, I was struck by the contrasts in the little town. It was a neat, friendly place, surrounded by the Maine woods, with a view from downtown of one of the prettiest mountains in the world. Mount Katahdin dominates the skyline to the north, touching the town with its glory from twenty miles away. But on the south side of town the sight of spewing smoke affirms the smell in the air and gives notice to the presence of the pulp mills. A glimpse of Hell to the south, Heaven to the north.

Heaven has always had more appeal to me, and as I left town, it was north, towards Katahdin. The friendly folks at the grocery had told me of a short cut, a private road owned by a big paper company. The Golden Road, they called it.

Why? (They grinned like satisfied gators.) The company had planned on building the road at a minimum of cost, but due to the wild terrain and harsh climate, the cost had skyrocketed. Hence, the local joke, The Golden Road.

I found the entrance and walked boldly past the offices and unignorable signs which proclaimed, "PRIVATE ROAD," "NO TRESPASSING," and "DO NOT ENTER, STRICTLY ENFORCED". None of the workers seemed to pay any attention to me, and I soon found myself walking in silence along the Golden Road. Walking through mile upon mile of stacked logs lining each side, I realized there was another reason for such a title. Each stack of logs was a pile of money waiting to be spent. The year before there had been an estimated 130,000 cords of wood lining the non-descript road. That's a heck of a lot of baseball bats.

I left the piles of logs behind, and my sense of awe was replaced with one of growing excitement. I was approaching my old friend, the Appalachian Trail, and Mount Katahdin loomed before me in all its magnificance.

I recalled a day in Monson, eight months earlier. I was filling my pack with supplies to carry me over the last 120 miles of the A.T. to Mount Katahdin. An old lady happened by, and looking in the direction of Katahdin, asked if I was headed for "The Mountain," as if there were only one.

It impressed me. But Katahdin impresses everyone. To the Abnakis, the people who once roamed this area, Katahdin means "highest land", or "great mountain". The name fits. Its 5,267 feet lord over the relatively flat forest land of Maine. The Mountain is the northern end of the Appalachian Trail, and I had gone up it at the end of that long walk with another A.T. end-to-ender, Bruce Otto. We had waited a number of days for the weather to clear and finally had ascended through a blasting, freezing wind and four inches of snow. But

the sky was clear, and when we did reach the summit we had thumped each other on the back and sat back to enjoy a view and a feeling that was worth all of 2,000 miles of walking.

My original plan was to go over Katahdin again, but due to a severe winter storm the trails were closed. I knew I wouldn't be given a crack at the Mountain on this trip, so I contented myself with memories and heartfelt gazes that lifted my spirits to the very summit. There would be another time.

It was morning. The Golden Road stretched northward, looking like a great crack in the smooth, endlessness of the forest. I walked its yellow ribbon of mud, thinking of the two moose I'd just seen. One had crossed the road far ahead. The other had been standing in a pond, grazing on underwater plants. I'd read somewhere that some moose had been known to dive to depths of 15 feet to get at their tasty treats growing on the bottoms of ponds and lakes. But the moose, and the Golden Road itself, were quickly lost from thought as I approached Abol Bridge on the Penobscot River. This was a place I knew. After two weeks of walking, I was on the Appalachian Trail.

II

Along The Appalachian Trail
(Maine)

The Appalachian Trail is one of the Seven Wonders of the Hiking World. The brainchild of backpacking elder, Benton MacKaye, it was laid out and constructed in the 1930's, largely by volunteer effort. Its 2,000 miles, from Georgia to Maine, follow the main ridges of the Appalachian Mountains thru some of the most scenic country of the U.S.

I can't say enough about my trek up the A. T. in 1974. The experience was one which I would wish on anyone. Not only was it interesting in the scenic sense, but the social amiability of the trail was alone worth the existence of such phenomena in today's world.

In retracing the trail thru Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, I was reliving many of the experiences of that prior walk. So clear were the memories of that trek, that I elected to discard the guidebooks. No need. Each stream, mountain, and shelter was right where I pictured it.

In stepping off the road and onto the trail near Abol Bridge, I felt as if I'd come home. This was known territory. It was comfortable, relaxed; like kicking off your shoes after a hard day's work. Yes, it was good to be back following those little white blazes, the trail markers that run for over 2,000 miles.

But what is this? My beloved trail was suddenly lost under a jungle of fallen trees. It was as if some giant hand had made a sweep at the forest. Trees were down everywhere, fallen haphazardly across each other forming an impassable labyrinth.

The storm that had wiped out some of the trails on Katahdin hadn't stopped there. In the little store at Abol Bridge, the proprietor had told

me there had been only one hiker thru before me. He had turned back due to blowdowns and deep snow. I hadn't paid too much attention then, but my mind worked overtime now. Just how extensive was the destruction?

The trail was gone. No path. No white blazes. Wait. There is one, way over there. I walked on tree trunks, from one to another, sometimes ten feet off the ground. I crawled under and over, scrambling around and pressing forward. From one blaze to another, or where I thought one should be, I made my way and eventually reached the edge of the disaster zone. It was like emerging from a hard swim across a treacherous river. I stepped into a patch of heath, and there was the trail. I didn't even bother to look back and set off along the winding path.

Bushwhacking is definitely the biggest challenge for a hiker. Walking along a jeep trail or logging road is always fun too. But to have a foot path stretching out before you, thru the woods for untold miles, that is magic. The ol' legs fall into a rhythm of their own. The senses seem ignorant of any exertion. The soul lifts, and you find yourself singing, or listening to the song of the trail, the gentle fall of one foot, then another, all adding into miles.

The first leg of the trip had seemed like a breakdown cruise. Now, as I walked the trail, I felt the trip come into full swing. Though the day was warm, snow still lay in deep pockets in the forest depths. I walked in cut-offs, enjoying the light, strong feeling of my legs set free from their confines in the long jeans. I felt like a hiker again. I smiled at a Canadian Jay, chattered with a squirrel, and laughed at myself. How ironic that I should be hiking over snow with short pants on. But then again, I failed to see the humor in it when I sank into the white stuff up to my bare knees!

I hit more blowdowns when I reached the southern end of Rainbow Lake, and by the time I reached the shelter on Rainbow Stream my legs were laced with scratches and gashes. It had been a perfect day though, and I was content to call a halt after 11 beautiful miles.

It was at this shelter that I was officially greeted and inspected by the head residents of the trail system. I refer to those cute little bastards that like to chew through packs, boots, and food -- mice! I had learned to hang up my pack whenever I stayed in a lean-to, and I soon fell back into the habit. But even with this precaution, I discovered some of my precious food had been pilfered during the night.

I accepted the loss as a welcome of sorts, and thought of my friends, Bruce and Benny, who wouldn't have taken the attack so lightly. They were A.T. end-to-enders the same year as I, and called themselves "The Mouseketeers". Both carried a couple mouse traps as standard gear in their packs, and upon arrival at a shelter they would routinely set out the little neck snappers. I don't know what their record was, but if they had put an X in their staffs for each mouse bagged in their march north, I doubt if they would have had much of a stick left at the end!

The next day passed in a wave of Spring Fever. Names like Wadleigh Pond, Nantahmoka Lake, and Potaywadjo Spring rolled off the tip of my tongue and splattered on my boots. All about me flowers were exploding out of the ground. I was never very good with names, and I cared little for nomenclature as I soaked up the new faces and waves of incense thrown at me as I walked along.

Leaving the bubbling pool of Potaywadjo Spring one morning, I could feel the rain hanging in the baggy flannel-suit clouds overhead. It was three

easy miles to the Old Antlers Camp on Jo-Mary Pond, where amidst the abandoned ruined cabins was one that hikers were allowed to use. I was bound and determined that I'd make it before the rains came. The first drops, the scouts dressed in camouflaged splashes, began to fall when I was still a mile away from the cabin. They were almost shy at first, but got bolder in their numbers and soon were dripping down my arms and doing swan dives off the brim of my nose.

By the time I reached the line of dilapidated old cabins, I was half soaked. There were two cabins still in good shape. One was locked and used by the owner of the property, the other was kept open and used often by hikers. I'd spent a night here before, and saw the little cabin on the point as a varitable palace. It had two bunks with mattresses, a good roof, table, rocking chair and a woodstove.

I soon had the stove burning and a cup of hot tea in my hands. The steady drum of rain on the roof joined with the creaking of the rocker to form a soothing, dreamy kind of song. I'd slipped into dry clothes and was feeling as secure as a baby nuzzled against its mother's breast. The surface of the pond steamed. Ghostly shapes raced and writhed as sheets of water fell from the skies. My thoughts ricochetted from drop to drop, totally under the influence of a spell only Spring rains can weave.

I always carried more food than necessary, and was ready to stay in the cabin until the showers lifted; however, that night the skies cleared, and the stars filled the heavens over the pond. Morning came, crisp and cold, and I marched on.

Many of the streams which I'd been able to cross high and dry in the Fall, now required a brisk wading. In the frosty mornings especially, this was done with utmost speed. The water was so cold in one stream that I had to

spend several minutes afterwards rubbing the circulation back into my numb feet.

I was contemplating one such cold fording, when a squirrel emerged from the brush opposite me and began to survey the situation similarly from his side. There were two large rocks in the water on his side, and he jumped out on the first, then the second. His little head bobbed up and down, back and forth, as he looked in vain for a way across. When he turned back, I thought him defeated. But no, he leaped once again to the rocky isles.

The stream was a swift one with white water above and below the ford. I was shocked when I saw the squirrel dive in. With my mouth dropped wide open, I remember thinking "so long little fella." My surprise was just beginning though. I soon learned that not only can squirrels swim, but they're as strong and fast as dapper ducks! Doing his version of the Australian crawl, he made a beeline across the rushing water much faster than I ever could. When he climbed out of the stream a few feet from my stunned soul and shook himself dry like some homely dog, it was more than I could take. My explosions of laughter sent the squirrelian Johnny Weismiller running for cover.

The day passed like a dream of paradise, and that night I slept in one of my favorite shelters on the banks of the East Branch of the Pleasant River. Next morning I planned to zip off the eight miles to the base of White Cap Mountain, spending the rest of the day going up and over the first real mountain on my route. However, my plans to "zip" were thwarted by a series of natural obstacles.

First, I found the trail under several inches of water due to snow melt. This set me to rock hopping until I ran into snow. Lots of it. I

slogged through the deep stuff until I hit the beaver bogs, and I got my first "mucksoaker" of the trip.

Let me pause here for a definition for those of you not fortunate enough to have experienced a mucksoaker. Basically, it is just what its name implies, soaked with muck. In this particular instance we're referring to the feet, but on occasion I've dealt with other parts of the anatomy, much to my discomfort. Mucksoakers generally occur when the unsuspecting hiker is attempting to traverse a swamp or bog, or some other muck infested place. One misplaced step is all that is needed. The foot disappears in the black ooze and may threaten to continue its descent, but eventually stops a foot or two below the fetid surface. After looking first stupidly, then accusingly, at the guilty foot, then often with the aid of a few choice curses, the foot is lifted from its bath of debatable value. Quite often, more than one try is needed in lifting the foot from its murky trap. But the persistent hiker is always rewarded with the most enjoyable of wilderness sounds, the "slurp" of his foot breaking the confines of its mucky vacuum.

Having thus extracted myself, I continued on. It was a perfect hiking day as far as the weather went, and as I began the ascent of White Cap Mountain I had visions of lunching on the summit after an uneventful climb.

I hadn't gone half a mile up the trail, when I began to notice patches of snow. The path itself was a rushing torrent of runoff. This wasn't bad, I was just telling myself, when before me rose a bank of snow four feet high, blanketing the mountain upwards as far as I could see. I kicked in my first step, Here goes!

My second step didn't stop. I sank into the cold slush up to my crotch. I was setting a precedent. I'd go a few steps, sink, sometimes fall, struggle out, catch my breath, walk a few more steps, and start the whole cycle again. Luckily the blazes were still visible. That fact and the weather were on my side.

There were only a handful of times when I ever let the thought of giving up come into my thoughts. This was the first. If by some miracle I could have been lifted off the side of that snowy mountain and set down in a place called home, I'd have gone for it. As it was, much to my good fortune, this never happened. I soon got the hang of kicking my steps in and cut down my sinkings to once every dozen paces or so. With my staggered walking, much cursing, and Ol' Big Eye shining me on, I eventually reached the summit more than ready for a good lunch.

The fire tower on White Cap gives the impression of having been abandoned for years. The guide lines are loose, the windows out, the entire structure rocking with the blasts of wind that are always visiting. I climbed up into the rather shakey remnant and fixed myself a hot cup of soup while gazing out over the surrounding country. White Cap is only 3,707 feet high, but looming out of the low forest of Maine, its effect is that of any locale calling itself a mountain. The wind in my ears, the sights feeding my eyes, and the very fact that I had made it there to that snow-packed hunk of earth, all served to lift my spirits from the pits of the deep snows which they had mired in but minutes before.

When I climbed down the derelict tower to stand in the snow once again, an intense zest for life bubbled within me. Each cell of my body seemed pumped near to bursting with the clear mountain air. Each ounce of tissue

lay ready for whatever come next. I felt a deep love for the universe about me and the God who created it. I screamed out my passion in a few choice phrases. The words seemed to dive into the snow and hide. I started the descent.

The snow on the south side of the mountain wasn't nearly as deep, but was slushy as a year old apple. I made the downhill run in record time as I slid through the mushy ice and joined the mini-streams in their race down the mountain. At one point I was surprised to come across the tracks of two other hikers. Defeat was written in their tracks where they had turned about.

At last the snow was left behind and I came to the White Brook Shelter. Here I met the owners of the tracks I'd seen, Chris Records and Pat Linnekan from Falmouth, Maine. They were the first hikers I'd met on the walk, and the first people I'd seen in five days. Being alone is always something I've valued so I hadn't missed the company of people. At least I didn't realize it. Having such good company for a night was a fitting close to such an adventurous day, but my tongue just wouldn't stop wagging! It seemed to be catching up on much needed exercise.

Setting out the next morning, I found it necessary to ford a few more streams. At one such place I found a log over the creek. The acrobat in me rose to the occasion. I started across as graceful and at home as a cat -- in water! My teetering and tottering was bad, to be sure, but I still think I would have made it across if that ol' log hadn't broke. The stream was only a few feet deep, and I guess it was just my luck that the log chose to break when I was over the most of those few feet. Down I went. My boots were seldom dry while I was in Maine.

I ran into more blowdowns as I approached Chairback Ridge and began to wonder about snow. Any worries I had were quickly disspelled when I reached the crest of the ridge and found only small patches of the white stuff. I did pass through another area where the storm had carved its name in the mountain, but was delighted to find that someone had been out doing trail maintenance. The blowdowns had been cleared. The trail was alive and well.

The A.T. is maintained mostly through volunteer effort by various hiking clubs and individuals. Each is responsible for a different stretch of trail. The Colby Outing Club, from Colby College in Maine, was watchdog for the damaged bit of trail on the ridge. My thanks to the COC.

Two mornings later, I was on my way into Monson, Maine. Mail, food, and contact with people awaited me. I was anxious. The seven miles into town from the Nine Points Cabin were bound to seem much longer. When the trail passed through the cut of a power line I made a quick reconnaissance. Recalling that the trail crossed the power line again in a couple miles, and that the next couple miles of trail were muck city, I decided to take the straighter route of the power line.

I soon found that straighter doesn't always mean faster. The giant wires went up and over every geographic barrier that blocked their way. I really didn't mind, until a mean looking cloud, looking like a leftover from Hurricane Alice, started hurrying me along. I was more than mildly annoyed when I topped a crest and found below, directly in my path, a small lake. When I got down to the shore I saw to my great disappointment that the entire surrounding area was thick with dead and fallen spruce trees laced among the living. It would take at least an hour and lots of scratches to skirt the pond through that jungle. If I could only walk across the lake like Jesus on the Galilee. And then I noticed all the dead trees again.

A raft?

I pulled four of the most likely to float logs down to the water's edge and found that their limbs would link together like arms. No need for rope. I laid my pack across, put all my clothes atop it, and pushed the makeshift craft out into the water, swimming along behind it. Ah ha, this ain't so bad. I felt like a hero overcoming the wilderness. My euphoria was shortlived. When I got to the middle of the lake my logs started separating. My pack was getting wet. My boots, the uppermost story of gear on the luckless craft, started to topple. The guy with a scar across his sole did a belly-smacker and floated off before I grabbed him and returned him to his mate. I was trying to stay afloat, hold the raft together, and keep things dry, all at the same time. By the time I reached the opposite shore I was a nervous wreck. My short-cut was a flop.

Two days later, having passed through Monson and resupplying, I reached Moxie Bald Mountain where I met Richard and Pat Tompkins, and their three month old son, Kineo. Richard worked for the Maine Forest Service and manned the fire lookout on the top of the mountain. An artist of some renown, he spent much of his free time in the tower with brush in hand. I spent the afternoon talking with Richard in the tower, and that night spent a song filled evening with the three of them around a glowing wood stove. The peace and great joy of their life stayed with me for many days. Indeed, to this very day.

Caratunk is not a new brand of axil grease, nor is it some mutant form of animal life native to the woods of Maine. Rather, Caratunk is a town. The little village lies on the banks of the Kennebec River and boasts a Forest Service station and a combination post office - general store. It's a quaint, warm place, and the Appalachian Trail runs right through it.

I stopped at the P.O. early one morning to mail a few letters and found Howard Mitchell, the friendly proprietor, an interesting sort. Several of the local old-timers had gathered to collect their mail. Sitting on some crate or leaning against the counter, they talked of a range of things. They all agreed that the reason the fish weren't biting was because they were "so hungry they couldn't move!" I chuckled over that for days.

As I walked off the short distance to the Kennebec I contemplated the eccentricities of our language. Rivers are usually referred to in the male gender, their masculinity errupting through the themes of Ol' Man River. Yet, I tend to see more of a feminine character in the rolling waters. Could it be the combination of beauty and danger, shyness and unpredictability, meekness and strength? I suppose that it's a rather chauvinistic view to say that a river is like a woman due to its wild, erratic temperment, but let's leave it at that anyway.

The Kennebec would have to be rated as a Big Mama. She rolls and twists her way through the woods of Maine, and has a rough, no-sass look about her. I stood in the cool morning, watching the ripples and eddies, not looking forward to the fording of such a wide river. Still, it didn't appear to be any deeper than last year. Let's do it.

I stripped off my boots, socks, and trousers, draping them over my neck and pulling my pack on. Picking my way across the rocky shore, I planted a foot in the icy water. I jumped back and nearly fell over. Chiding myself on, and with renewed determination, I stepped once more into the cold waters and began to wade across.

I've put these two ol' dogs of mine through an incredible amount of hardship the past several years, but in that crossing I was ashamed of the

torture they had to endure. Not only was the temperature numbing, but I was constantly jamming my feet into unwelcome and uncomfortable roosts, the bottom of the river being strewn with rocks of all shapes and sizes. Most were coated with a sure-slip coating of slime. My walking stick proved invaluable, and saved me from an unwelcome dunking many times during the crossing. Still, the pain, the inconvenience, the nerve-wracking minutes, all seemed worthwhile when my feet stomped out the other side of the river and turned to look back across. I don't remember what I said, maybe it wasn't even words, but I shouted and whooped my exultation to the rolling waters and the sunny skies. I'd done it. It felt good. I stretched out to watch the Kennebec roll by feeling like a lover laying back after a good time.

It was three and a half easy miles to the Pierce Pond shelter. By the time I got to the picture-post-card pond I still had most of the day to while away. Lounging about in the sun, I enjoyed a lazy spring day. It turned out to be the calm before the storm.

I rose with the sun the next morning. In no time it seemed, I'd hiked the eight miles to East Carry Pond and found myself looking at the Bigelow Range across the choppy, azure waters. It was an inspiring view, with images of my prior trip over the ridge adding fuel to my fire of excitement. By the time I got to the Jerome Brook lean-to, a few miles from the top of Little Bigelow Mountain, it was late afternoon. The view of the Bigelows was still with me, a source of strength in the ever lengthening day. I decided to push on and try to get as far up Little Bigelow as I could before darkness fell. The chance to catch a sunset was lure enough to set me off again.

As I began the ascent, I started meeting all kinds of hikers coming down the mountain. After not seeing anyone all day it was a bit of a surprise, but not after someone explained that it was a holiday weekend. Memorial Day, of course. I continued upwards under the extra load of three quarts of water which I carried for the evening's supper and tomorrow's breakfast. I was perhaps halfway up the mountain, and was just starting to look for a place to camp, when I saw a hiker hurrying down the trail.

"Howdy," I said. "How's it goin'?"

I noticed his hurried manner. He was a young guy, about 16 or so, and at first I wrote him off as another one of those record breakers. But there was a worried look about him too.

"How far down to the road?" he spat out in answer to my greeting.

"Well, I'd guess about a mile and a half, but that's just a pot shot of a guess."

"I've got to get down there. My buddy is sick on top. You know where I can get some help?"

The situation had suddenly changed. My long, but leisurely day had become an urgent, pressing one. My fatigue was gone, washed away by the tingle of danger in my blood. I would have to go on. It would take hours to get help, and by then anything could happen to the poor guy on top.

After a brief conversation, he continued down the trail as I made my way up the mountain. The guy was sick he had said, but how sick? How would I find him? My mind raced. Legs pounded away at the earth. I found myself oblivious to the things about me. All conscious effort was going into my pumping legs. Like the arms of some old steam engine, they worked away like the machines they are. I found myself feeling a vain pride in their sleek strength.

When I found myself on the summit, it was a surprise. The wide panorama below, forced me to a momentary halt. I caught my breath. But where was the hiker? There was no sign of anyone. Then I recalled that the trail over Little Bdgelow took its way over a series of viewpoints, traversing the entire ridge. Being a wooded ridge, there was no way I could tell where the sick backpacker was. I continued on, shouting out every once in a while, until at last my calls were answered.

Phil Abbott, a high school junior from Auburn, Maine, had been hiking with his friend, Brian (the fellow I met going for help) when he'd fallen ill. Heaving steadily, and too weak to continue, Phil had stayed behind as Brian went on for help. He was stretched out on a huge rock when I found him, and though the view was great, he was in no condition to enjoy it.

My medical supplies were limited. I gave him my last two Tums and helped him down a cup of hot chocolate. After helping him into some warmer clothes, I searched out a spot for my tent and put it up. It was going to be a long night.

Phil went through stages of rest and turmoil, but there was little I could do. About midnight I was startled out of my light drowse by the sound of trampling on the trail. My first thought was "moose". I'd seen a lot of signs high up on the mountain, but this wasn't the case. It turned out to be a team of rescuers. I gave a shout and discovered it was Brian, returned with a paramedic, Ron Morin, of the Sugarloaf Rescue Team. Coming up far behind, were three others with a stretcher. Ron gave Phil an injection before sending the others back down the mountain and crawling into the tent with Phil and I. I have to hand it to those unnamed men of the rescue team. They'd come up a steep, winding trail in the blackest of nights, lugging a

stretcher, and turned and left as soon as they appeared.

Ron and I had talked a bit before dozing off. It was still dark when I heard the approach of the helicopter. How strange that these two are going to be whisked away, plucked off the top of the mountain, returned to that other world in a matter of minutes. It's getting a bit closer now. Gee, I guess we should be up there. Yeh. Hey, Ron, wake up!

I gave Ron a shake, and he scrambled for his boots. By the time he got up and out, the chopper had passed us. Ron explained that it was just a fly-over. They'd be back in fifteen minutes. While he searched out a good pick-up point, I helped Phil get himself together. In a matter of minutes we were atop an open ledge, strapping Phil into the stretcher. Then we waited.

The heavens hung like a wet paper bag in the morning. The scant light crept slowly, cold and grey, through pregnant clouds. All was silent, or nearly so. Only the wind thought fit to tease us with a song. Then the distant beat of machinery was growing in our ears. Ron lit the flare. The dark dawn was shattered and split. The flash of orange was like the rising sun, drawing my gaze and holding it prisoner. The sound came on.

We could see the helicopter now. Ron cursed. Wrong chopper! They wouldn't be able to hoist up the stretcher. The rotors were pounding over our heads now, the machine hovering above a neighboring outcrop of rock. We undid Phil from the stretcher and helped him up. The chopper door opened. Hands reached out. Phil was in; then his pack; then Ron. I waved goodbye as the chopper shrunk to a flyspeck, and the wind rushed over the ridge to reclaim its domain. I was alone again. A sigh escaped my breast as I walked back down to my tent. It was time for breakfast.

The day was huddling into a cloak of grey as I descended into the gap between Little Bigelow and its larger sibling, Avery Peak. I stripped off my shirt, in expectation of rain, and began the ascent. By the time I reached the fire lookout on the 4,088 foot summit, an icy wind was blasting the black clouds about like kites. I slipped into some warm clothes, and after a few pictures, descended rapidly into Avery Col, between Avery and West Peaks. Here I came to the Myron Avery Memorial Lean-to just as it began to rain. A group of five, from Amhearst, Mass. were just leaving, so I made myself cozy in the shelter and was soon fast asleep. Later, two other hikers from Amhearst, Rick and Mike happened by. I welcomed the company and conversation as the rain pounded down about us.

The next day brought more of the same cold rain. Mike and Rick left, but I decided to sit out the day. Lying comfortably in my bag, I dug into a Jimmy Breslin novel, enjoying the sound of the wind and rain, but escaping their wrath. After a few hours, I got up and ambled over to the nearby firewarden's cabin. I'd met Lee Hedelmen, the firewatcher, briefly the day before, and thought to ask about his enviable life on the mountain. Lee invited me in, and we had a most enjoyable day talking about everything from women and wine, to Mozart and mountains. Not only did he prove himself a fountain of interesting conversation, but I soon learned that he was something of a master at cooking. Lee spent several hours rustling up a gourmet's delight, a meal of salad, cooked carrots, and stuffed crepes. All was topped off with a bit of cognac. It was such a hard life!

The next morning brought more of the same, wet weather. I rolled over and went back to sleep, only to be awakened later by the warmth of the sun streaming into the shelter. In ten minutes I was packed up, and on my way up West Peak, Avery's slightly higher brother. I was soon on the summit, and

although the skies were sunny, an arctic wind chilled me down to the ya-yas. I found a rock ledge to block the wind, and set myself down to gaze across the beautiful miles of Maine, below.

Bigelow. Somewhere, back in the few short hundreds of years that the white man has frequented these wild places, someone put a name to this piece of earth. This particular story I knew, but most of the names I could only speculate on, dreaming up little tales of my own fancy. Bigelow goes back to the days of the American Revolution when General Benedict Arnold led an expedition north, thru Maine, to capture the city of Quebec from the British. So lost was the army, that Arnold sent his subordinate, a Colonel Bigelow, up to the top of the Mountain to see if he could sight the projected target. Of course, he was more than slightly off in his geography, but in being so, he had named a mountain.

My geography was right on. I was exactly where I wanted to be. The wind sang as it raced over the bare rocks and tussled with the cranberry and mountain heath. The sky was a bucket of blue, with sharp, blooming clouds sliding ever southward. It was a day custom made for sitting at the top of a mountain, finding stories in the wings of heaven. The clouds were swans upon a lake. But then came a screaming warrior, and there a sleeping bear, a soaring hawk, and there, a ship of the line. The twisting bits of vapor wove their pictures for me until I realized I was numb with cold. Time to move on.

I rose and started down the other side of the peak, fighting a wind that buffeted me about like a mere blade of grass. And then it came. Not just another gust, but a granddad of a gale, a descendent of some long expired hurricane. It caught me in stride, and lifted me neatly off the ground, setting me down in a heap of stunted spruce. I was terrified. For that

fraction of time I felt my life in the hands of someone bigger than Life itself. But then it was past. The split second dropped me by the way. My terror was replaced with awe. What strength! What force! I'd rubbed shoulders, shaken hands, with the greatest of sculptors, the wildest of racers, the strongest of singers. But once was enough. I hurried down the mountain.

I continued along the ridge to South Horn and eventually arrived at Horn Pond where there were two shelters. The area was depressingly overused, the trees scarred and the earth trampled. I was disgusted to think that people who call themselves backpackers had contributed to the destruction of such a beautiful spot.

This brings up a problem that is now facing many popular backcountry areas, one of overuse. As more and more folks discover the joys of hiking, the wild places are receiving more and more visitors, not all of them respectful of nature's ways. Education seems to hold the salvation for the future of the wild places. It may seem strange to have to teach people to pick up after themselves, but in many cases that is what is required. The old ways of wilderness camping are no longer practical. Cutting wood for fires, and boughs for beds, is out of the question in high use areas. Camp stoves must replace campfires, and ensolite pads take the place of pine boughs.

At Horn Pond I left the A.T. for the old route. I descended the ridge and slept that night in the remains of a trail shelter at the base of Maine's second highest mountain, Sugarloaf.

The next day was one of the longest of the trip. Not in terms of miles covered, though eighteen was a good chunk, but in exertion, and gain loss of altitude. I got an early start and ascended a ski trail up the side of Sugarloaf, picking a bagfull of morrel mushrooms along the way. The day was perfect, the views from the summit were outstanding. Mount Washington in

distant New Hampshire waved me on, and I descended to rejoin the A.T. before going up and over, snowy, Spaulding Mountain. The trail to Orbiton Stream was snowy and sloppy. I sloshed along reciting a line from Robert Service over and over: "the trail was bad and I felt half mad, but I swore I wouldn't give in . . . ."

Eventually I crossed Orbiton Stream and began the ascent up Poplar Ridge with more inspiring views. By the time I reached the trail shelter it was late afternoon, the usual time for me to halt for the day. But my blood was flowing with the power of a tank. Just ahead was the Saddleback Ridge. The year before I had gone up Saddleback Mountain in a fog, staying in the abandoned firewarden's cabin for two days waiting for it to clear. It did to a certain degree, but I never saw the sights I knew were there. This day was clear as could be. Why not push on?

I ended up going over Saddleback Jr., The Horn, and lastly Saddleback itself. It was all worth any extra effort on my part. The Rangely Lakes dotted the plains below to the west, and the forests of Maine stretched like a shag carpet, clinging to the hills and peaks all about me. Cranberries were blooming, their delicate, white flowers covering the open tops of the mountains.

In the old cabin near the summit, I cooked up a dinner of macaroni and cheese, ham, and mushrooms. The resulting hodgepodge was a feast. As I wolfed it down, the sun set in a blaze of glory, seeming to top off the day. But there was more to come.

I woke up in the middle of the night feeling like a fire hose with a knot in it. I stumbled sleepily out of the cabin to water the stars. The moon was out in full force, painting the world in its silvery light. The air was still. The lights of Rangely, my next resupply point, shimmered below. I walked across the mountain, picking my way in bare feet, feeling

the night air brisk and invigorating against my bare body.

I don't know how long I roamed the top of the mountain that night. I guess it doesn't matter. But that feeling, standing alone high above the world, in the light of the full moon, as naked as the day I was born, was a magical one. If I had to describe it with one word I'd say -- peace. You laugh? The price of peace is the stripping of clothes in the light of the moon? Maybe. Give it a try.

Saddleback still wasn't finished with me. It was as if the mountain was trying to outdo itself to make up for the fog of last year. In the darkness of morning I moved my bag outside to watch the sun come up. "Sun come up" is a master understatement for the events of the dawn of that day. The skies to the east, the entire horizon, was a show of reds and pinks, a shifting and merging of hues and shades. When I finally packed up and left the top of Saddleback, I carried with me a feeling of great intimacy. I'd gone to the mountain like some young scamp going to a harlot. I'd come away with a view of a side that some men will never see. When bland, sulky clouds started floating in a short while after I left the summit, all I could do was smile.

Several days later I was ascending East Baldpate Mountain. It was morning, but from the inside of a cloud it was hard to tell. It could have been mid-afternoon in the insides of a whale for all I could see. When at last I stumbled up to the summit marker, at 3,820 feet, the wind was starting to bully me about. I had little desire to sit and wait for it to clear. Instead, I comforted my numb soul with the fact that last time I'd passed that way, I'd spent hours lounging in the September sun, gazing out over crystal clear views. I pushed on, hoping for some protection from the gusting gale.

It was my fourth day out of Rangely, where I'd resupplied for this last leg of Maine. Rain had followed me steadily, but I'd kept moving in order to keep a rendevous with a friend in Gorham. My knee had given me a little trouble for a day or two, but I'd walked the pain out of it and was feeling stronger than ever. That is, when the wind wasn't playing with me.

As I descended into the col between East and West Balpates, I found myself in a natural wind tunnel. The already strong winds became more violent. Bent double, and jogging forward between gusts, I pushed on, and soon gained the sister peak. The sky opened.

When I reached Grafton Notch, I again had a choice of trails I could take. The newer trail up Old Speck Mountain, the one I'd taken the year before, was longer and more gradual. The older trail was known for its steepness. I'd decided I'd try the tough one, and began the 1.65 miles that would lift me 2,600 feet. It was hard, but so are some of the best things in life. It was definitely worth any huffing and puffing on my part to stand at the top of the summit's observation tower and look into the eyes of the White Mountains, the Carter Range, and the Presidential Range.

The trail shelters sometimes offer more than a dry place to stay. At the Speck Pond shelter I found a real treasure, a can of beef stew! Not just any can, but 2 pounds and 8 ounces worth of the stuff! I ate the whole thing (belch), and had to stop and wonder at my near insane preoccupation with food, My appetite had grown enormous, sometimes embarrassingly so. Looking back I think it must have had its roots in my own insecurities over the continuance of the walk. I was stretching my dollars pretty far, but I knew I still didn't have the entire necessary financing. Still, I was happy. I'd often sign the trail register as the Happy Hungry Hiker.

The next morning found me able to move, and I descended into one of the wonders of the Appalachian Trail. Mahoosuc Notch is just that, a giant notch in the chain of mountains. It's floor is strewn with boulders, some the size of houses, covered with moss and ferns and trees. One gets a feeling of enchantment, like a visit into the world of Tolkien, as the trail twists its way around, over, and under the huge rocks.

The mile through the Notch is one that requires time and a good sense of humor. The many boulder caves the trail passes through are obstacles of hours of fun, especially when a hiker gets stuck in one. The previous year, fellow end-to-ender, Bob Cooke and I spent half a day making our way through the notch. Ours was a bizarre hike that day. We foolishly vowed not to remove our packs for the caves. The result was a hilarious series of situations where one or both of us were stuck. I sorely missed the company this time through. Snow still filled many of the caves, but I found no trouble in going around.

By the time I began climbing out of the notch, the sky was in a threatening mood, and I hurried to the Full Goose Lean-to. I had this large shelter all to myself for two nights as it rained and stormed. When I did move on, I thought the sky had cleared. It was blue all right, but it turned out that it was just over my mountain. In no time I was walking in the breath of clouds, a fine mist that haunted the open bogs.

I was in the woods again when I came to the sign announcing my departure from the land of Maine. It was a moment that was repeated at every border with additional intensity. I'd come over four hundred miles. I was healthy and happy. I'd seen some beautiful sights, met some wonderful people, and had come out on top of some rough situations. I paused for a word of thanks, and then stepped into New Hampshire.

III

The White Mountains

Years before New Hampshire ground was ever turned by the pioneer's plow, early mariners along that coast reported the existence of a distant range of snow-capped mountains rising out of the heart of the new land. The range was soon appearing on maps as the White Mountains, and most hikers will agree that here is where the Mountain Gods of New England call home.

They welcomed me with buffeting winds and clearing skies as I reached the top of Mount Success. The Presidential Range, only a hop, skip, and a jump across the valley, wasn't showing itself. But I knew it was there, behind a bank of clouds pulled down snugly about its lofty head like some old grey flannel hat, fitting perhaps a bit too tight. Its presence in this part of the country, even when not visible, is always known. It comes with the wisp of the mountain air, the smell of the misty pines, a feeling of power in the earth itself. Yes, it was there. Now, if I could only manage to get a few clear days atop the open ridge. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's talk about birthdays, instead! As a matter of fact, if you want to sing Happy Birthday to me, go right ahead.

O.K.? You finished? Thanks. That wasn't too bad. You see, birthdays are kind of special to me. They're like New Year's Eve, April Fools Day, Fourth of July, Ground Hog Day (?), all little bits of history, rolled into one celebration of life. On June 8th I found to my joy, that I'd spent 22 years on this ol' planet, a split-hair-of-time for sure, but reason to give thanks.

I'd spent the night before at the Rattle River Shelter with my friend, Bob Cooke, a fellow A.T. end-to-ender, who'd met me at my mail stop in Gorham. Bob had brought along a huge bucket of homemade stew, and we had spent the evening

talking and eating, talking and eating, and more eating. It was all a long distance hiker, with his perpetual hollow leg, could ask for.

On the morning of the 8th I bid farewell to Bob and headed up the mountain in the swirling mists and drizzle. By the time I got to the Imp Shelter, a mere six miles up the trail, I was ready to call a halt. After all, why hike in the rain when you can wait a day or two and have sunny skies? (I hope.) I made myself at home in the comfortable cabin and satisfied my urge to celebrate by making up an instant chocolate creme pie, then eating it while the valley below alternately appeared and vanished in the racing clouds. The wind sang my song that year, and the lights of Gorham twinkled like candles beside the best birthday cake a man could ask for, the White Mountains.

The next morning crawled in slowly with a veil of mist that soon broke in places to let the sun shine through. As I went up North Carter Mountain, the entire ridge seemed to be dressed in its finest. A layer of frost coated every wind-stunted tree, and patches of snow were the rule rather than the exception. Across the valley, Mount Washington winked thru the clouds, some white and friendly, others menacingly dark. During the course of the day, occasional snow flakes were squeezed from those pregnant posses of precipitation, resulting in more than a few startled words on my part.

Having traversed the Carter Range in fine order, and with near constant views, I arrived at Pinkham Notch late in the day. This is the Appalachian Mountain Club's center of activity here in the Whites, and it is from here they maintain a system of trails, nature programs, and a chain of mountain "huts" which feed and shelter many of the hikers. The Pinkham Notch Hut is the only one located on a road, and is more like a motel than a mountain hostel. Marc

Groff, a friend from last year whom I'd bumped into again just north of Gorham, had managed to get me special rates as his guest. I stayed two nights, catching up on showers and great meals, and enjoying the company of some of the friendly AMC folk.

Mount Washington is New Hampshire's highest, most renown mountain. Called "Agiochook" by the local Indians, the name meant "mountain of the snowy forehead." It's an appropriate title. Snow is found on the summit throughout the year, and with it comes the reputation of being a killer mountain. Many a hiker has lost his life in the frothy brew that is the mountain's weather. Storms blow out of nowhere, and blow they do! Back in 1934 the highest wind velocity ever recorded in the world swept over the mountain at 231 miles per hour.

As I neared the summit after a beautiful hike up the spectacular Lions Head Trail, I was reminded again how civilized the Whites can be. Notice, I didn't say tame. Nothing could tame the icy claws of the tempests which claim these realms. That will always bring a challenge to the traveller of this high country. But the walk along the Presidential Ridge cannot help but be tarnished as the hiker approaches the reaches of Washington's summit. The sound of some sputtering car chugs up the road to the parking lot just off the summit. A carload of tourists arrive via the cog railway. Crowds throng the souvenir stand in the Summit House. The TV and weather station stand anchored into the mountain like barnacles clinging to the rough skin of some giant whale.

Actually, when I reached the top there wasn't all that many people around. The previous fall it had been like Disneyland. Compared to that, today was quiet. As I looked out over the Carter Range,I couldn't help but think of

the first white man ever to reach this lofty nest. His name was Darby Field, and with two Indian guides he made his way up here in 1642, returning with tales of a summit covered with diamonds. I guess ol' Darby wasn't much of a geologist, because the only treasure here is the one that comes when you gaze out across the miles and miles of green, rolling New England.

The Appalachian Trail follows the Presidential Ridge above treeline for approximately 13 miles. In coming up the Lions Head Trail I had cut this in half. Now I descended Mount Washington towards Lake of the Clouds where another AMC Hut was located. I couldn't help but congratulate myself on the good weather. The wind that is nearly always haunting these highlands was but a wisp of a breeze. The sky was like some painting, almost too perfect. I made my way over Mts. Monroe, Franklin, Pleasant, and Clinton before arriving at the Mizpah Hut where I pitched my tent.

For the next several days I followed the A.T. through the Whites, experiencing both the best, and the worst of weather conditions. Rain blew in blast-like waves as I descended Jackson Peak and hiked to the Ethan Pond shelter. And yet it was clear as a bell when I hiked over Guyot and South Twin. The next day fog moved in again for a misty traverse of Garfield and Lafayette.

If someone was to ask me what my favorite mountain was, I would be unable to answer. But if someone asked what my favorite New Hampshire mountain was, there could be only one answer — Mount Moosilauke. A week had passed since I'd left Pinkham Notch and I was on my way up the Beaver Brook Trail to Moosilauke's summit. The trail wound its way steeply up the side of the brook amid the roar of cascades and the lush moss-covered rocks and logs.

Higher and higher I climbed, eventually leaving the hardwoods for scrubbier firs. I walked into the clouds. The air was cold and damp. The higher I got, the thicker the cloak of grey was drawn about me, the harder the wind blew. I knew there was an emergency cabin below the summit, and the extra spring in my step drew me closer to it by the minute. The trail left the scrub growth and was wide open to the blasts of wind. Marked by cairns with orange and black blazes, the trail soon led me to the derelict shelter. Though partially open to the elements it afforded some protection. I was determined to catch a view off the top, so making myself at home, I crawled into my bag, pulled out a book, and waited for the sun.

It was a few hours before sunset when I noticed the few stray rays of sun floating through the breaking cloud cover. In a flash I had my boots on and was racing to the top of the mountain. Oh Moosilauke! What magic you hold for those who wait! Big, billowy white clouds floated overhead, as the distant mountains all around me suddenly came into view. The broad, grassy summit was clear, and all mine. I ran across the open field, the wind blowing warm and strong in my face. The sun winked its way through the massive tufts of white. Its rays, the heaven sent gifts of life they are, warmed me to the soul. I felt a surge of joy, a rush of energy, a passionate love of life that seemed too much for one body to hold. I shouted and jumped, and danced a crazy dance that I've never since been able to duplicate.

You know, folks, I think I just hit on one of the answers to why I walk. I mean, how often can a guy like me act like I did on Moosilauke and not get put away? The wild places, those only reached on foot, offer a place where a body can let out all the feelings that don't get loose back in "the world".

Much later, I sat amid the ruins of the old stone hotel built on the top in the 1800's. I tried to imagine the day of the grand opening. It's said that over a thousand people made their way up to the bald top and were entertained by a brass marching band! I found it very hard to imagine such goings on.

The sun was starting to set. The moon was rising, and hung in the blue sky like some frozen gull. Jack rabbits hopped around the cabin below, and a young doe walked lazily across the mountain nearby. The sun had turned a bright red, shooting arrows of yellow through the clouds lounging on the horizon. The clouds were thick in that direction, and instead of setting them aglow, the burning log of a sun slipped into its fold and faded quickly away. I watched the red ember disappear and stood watching the western horizon for some time, lost to all but unconscious thoughts. Much later, by the light of the moon, I made my way back down to the cabin.

Two days later I left the top of Mount Moosilauke and continued along the A.T., passing thru Glendive and then through alternating forests and farmland the rest of the way across New Hampshire. Mount Cube with its open ledges and fine vistas kept me occupied for one morning, and I spent two days in an abandoned fire tower atop Smarts Mountain. Here I met Cesar Munoz, from Dartmouth College, and a few members of the college outing club. Cesar invited me to stay with him when I got to Hanover, my next resupply point. I readily agreed.

My time on Smarts Mountain was a peaceful one, spent gazing out over the countryside and floating off in dreams. The morning I left was hot, and for the first time mosquitoes attacked me in force as I descended the mountain. I was soon out of their range though, and a few miles later was sweating my

way up the trail to Holts Ledges. I set a huff-puff pace and realized with somewhat of a start, that I enjoyed the feel of my body pounding away like some steam engine, the perspiration dripping from my brow. The exertion was part of the love I felt for backpacking and I don't think I'd realized it until that moment.

On Holts Ledges I had another discovery. It was summer. It had only taken me until June 23 to realize it! I guess the thing that did it was the strawberries. With their sweet taste on my lips, the smell of fields full of wild flowers saturating my senses, and the day's heat zapping me dry of water, I couldn't help but admit, Summer was here.

Upon arriving in Hanover the next day, I looked up Cesar and was promptly welcomed into the social sphere of Dartmouth life. I stayed for three days, and each of those days I was a dinner guest in different peoples' homes. Cesar and I became fast friends, and when at last I moved on it was with a feeling of great warmth, for him and all of Hanover. I felt their spiritual support, and as I moved west, the smiles, the handshakes, the "good lucks", all helped lift me over the barriers I encountered.

IV

Green Mountain Fever

It's funny how each state has its own particular feeling, its own characteristics and quirks. States are like personalities of people. Even in a crowd they still remain as different as they are alike. When I finished my walk, a common question was "which state did you find the most interesting?" So different were the areas I traversed, both in mood and geography, that I found this impossible to answer. It would be like trying to compare a folk song to a disco tune; you just can't do it.

Still, when I crossed the Connecticut River at Hanover into Vermont, I automatically felt a change in mood. I have spent a good deal of time in the state at various times, so this might have affected my outlook. But all in all I felt very down-home, very slowed down, and very "country" in the sense of farming and community.

Several times during the first few days in Vermont I found myself walking through scenes that belonged to any scrapbook on the state. I passed through groves of maple and beech, over hilly meadows and pastures exploding with summer wildflowers, past old stone walls and aging barns, and along bubbling streams that sang a never-ending song. I wondered if any place in the world could be so peaceful, and I wasn't alone.

Hikers were out in full force, and I enjoyed the trailside conversations I shared and the occasional company at night in the trail shelters. I met several Appalachian Trail end-to-enders, and couldn't help but chuckle over their intended pilgrimage to Dartmouth's cafeteria. Dan and Rick, two such Georgia to Mainers, boasted T-shirts with the bold letters: Hungry Mothers Hiking Club.

Any essay about hiking in Vermont is not complete until we get around to mentioning Ol' Porky. Porcupines are probably the most commonly observed animals along the Vermont trails, and I think this has a lot to do with the fact they like to eat the trail shelters! They're masters of smell, and anything with salt in it will attract them. Some unfortunate hikers have waken up to find their $65 hiking boots becoming a free meal for an overweight little man in a quill-covered coat. They're capable of a variety of sounds, their voices ranging from a mad screeching to a low, sing-song murmer. Many times I've been awakened by what sounded like a mumbling human, only to roll over and find a porky humming away as he chewed on the shelter floor.

Porcupines are unpredictable. You never know what kind of personality they have. One may take flight and run wobbling off at the first sight of an enemy. Others may go straight to their defensive position, back to the approaching trouble, tail and quills at the ready. Still others may take a ho-hum attitude about the whole thing and continue with whatever they're doing, even if it's chewing up your prized walking stick! Whatever their reaction, I've always enjoyed watching them. I bet they feel the same way about us.

Killington Peak is Vermont's second highest mountain. It is also probably one of the most accessible. Ski trails scar the eastern slopes, and summer tourists can ride the lifts almost to the very top. Armed with this knowledge, and being averse to crowds, I decided I'd try to beat the traffic jam. Leaving the cabin on the side of Pico Peak early one morning, I wisked off the few miles to Killington in no time.

By the time I scrambled over the open rock slabs on the summit the sun was well up into the cloudless sky, and it seemed that all of New England was visible. There was a lady manning the fire lookout and she pointed out distant Mount Washington

and Moosilauke in New Hampshire, Mount Marcy in New York, and Vermont's own Burke, Mansfield, and Camel's Hump, the prize of the Green Mountains.

The views of the distant peaks were inspiring, but Killington itself, with its own rolling kingdom at its feet, held its own magic. For the longest time I felt content to sit on the bare rock of the mountain's top,warmed by the sun, gazing out over the green waves that rolled north. Every peak, every valley, every field, had its place, fitting perfectly together like some giant puzzle that was Vermont. I longed to jump into that picture, floating down into a place where I too would belong.

In like fashion,I dreamed the morning away until the ski-lifts started bringing up loads of people. In the first batch was a lady who just couldn't let her son enjoy himself. "Billy, where are you going?" "Billy, stay with me." "Billy, don't climb on that rock!" Poor Billy just couldn't do anything right. I headed down the mountain trail in silence and left Billy's Mom behind.

The next morning, after hiking several easy miles, I crossed the Mill River where it rushes its way through Clarendon Gorge. A new footbridge had been constructed the year before in memory of a young hiker who had lost his life while trying to ford the swollen stream. A short ways beyond the river, the trail crossed a dirt track and drew me to a halt. For the past four hundred miles or so, I'd been following the Appalachian Trail in a westerly direction. But now it bent southward in its march to Georgia. It was time for me to leave the familiarity and security of its white blazes and keep heading west across what remained of Vermont and into New York.

With a farewell nod to the A. T., I headed down the twisting jeep trail and soon recrossed the river, this time in typical Vermont fashion, on a covered bridge. I took to the roads for the next several miles, alternating

between dirt and paved ones that rolled their way through the countryside. What people I did see were friendly sorts, and a few stopped to offer rides. The exchange was to be repeated with a hundred different actors over the next year.

"Hey there, you want a lift?"

"No thanks. I'm walkin' it."

"You don't want a ride?!!"

"No, you see I'm walking from coast to coast, and . . ."

"You're walkin' from where to where?"

Of course by then they were hooked. They'd stop and pull off to the side of the road and plug me full of questions, and more than once offer me a cold beer, or a sandwich or something.

With occasional vistas of now distant Killington, I walked the afternoon away and passed through the little villages of Clarendon, Chippenhook, and Ira. It was late afternoon when I finally left the dirt road I was on and took a jeep trail up the side of Herrick Mountain. The higher I got, the fainter the trail grew, until at last I found myself fighting upward through dense underbrush. My cutoffs were quickly replaced with a pair of jeans, but not before my legs bore the brand of the local briars. When I finally topped out on the wooded ridge between Herrick Mountain and Spruce Knob, I was wet with sweat, covered with scratches, and pretty well exhausted. But it all seemed worth it. A mountain had stood in my way and I had surmounted it without the aid of a trail.

The descent was steep, but I found the western side free of dense secondary growth. It proved much easier traveling. The trees formed a canopy overhead, blocking out much of the light, making it seem cool and very quiet here on this side of the ridge. Treading thru the litter of last year's leaves on the forest

floor, I made enough racket to wake the dead in all Vermont. Apparently a deer thought so too. She trotted off as I approached, but turned to look at me in disgust before resuming her quest for more peaceful climes.

I camped that night in the stillness of a mature sugar bush (a maple grove), and the next morning struck a jeep trail which led me to a gravel road. A few hours later I was leaving Poultney, Vermont with a handful of mail, and crossing into New York.

V

New York

New York is a rather homely name for a state. There just isn't any romance or music to the sound of it. But don't let that fool you. Most westerners I've run into, refer to the entire east coast as if it's one big New York City. It just ain't so. New York has more than its share of beautiful farm country and wilderness. In fact, the Adirondack Forest Preserve covers more than two million acres, making it the largest state park in the entire country.

I was anxious to get into the Adirondack Mountains, but by the time I got out of Poultney and into New York, the day was almost over. I kept to a little road for a few miles, passing houses and farms here and there, until I stopped at the Frank Kestler farm and asked permission to camp on his land. After chatting a while about The Walk, I followed a brook up into the forest and pitched my tent.

It was the Fourth of July when I woke up. And rounding the hill that morning it was brought back to me what a holiday weekend can be. Hundreds of campers sprawled over a trampled meadow. It looked like a rock festival without the music. I scurried round the bend and back into relative solitude.

I was walking by one pasture when I noticed, far across the field, a herd of about twenty herefords. As soon as I came into view, they came rushing across the pasture like I was their long lost mother. I egged them on. "Come on you little doggies!" At last they stood before me, lined up against the fence, facing me like school children waiting for their lesson. But I had no words of wisdom for them that morning. I chuckled down the road as they started bawling like a bunch of heart-broken babies.

After passing through Whitehall and crossing the South Bay of Lake Champlain, I continued on roads throughout the day and entered the Adirondack Forest Preserve. The road followed Pike Brook, a bit of paradise from the world of Tolkien. Here the brook slipped through dark hollows, between huge boulders, along the base of sharp walls, and fell into deep pools and rushing cascades. I took a dip in one of the pools, and later made camp in a stand of hemlocks by the brook's edge where it skimmed gently over flat ledges of shale.

Early the next morning, I picked up a trail which led me to the top of Black Mountain. Mr. and Mrs. Harold Osgood were just coming out of the fire warden's cabin. They lived just two miles down the mountain, and Harold manned the observation tower for the forest service, a job his father had held for twelve years. I spent a good part of the day with the two of them, sharing lunch and their interesting company with the views of the Adirondacks. Directly below to the west, lay big blue Lake George, more than 20 miles long with its many islands. I was hoping to get a ride across to Bolton Landing, my next mail stop, by some kind boater. (I already had the good Samaritan pictured in my mind. She would be tall, thin, a natural blond, and very . . . well, ah, endearing. So much for my fantasies!)

I left the Osgoods and descended to the shores of the lake. I planned on a couple nights by the water, some swimming, and then on Monday finding my phantom boater and crossing the lake. Never have I been so surprised, so ill-prepared, as I was for the sight that greeted me as I approached Lake George. It seemed as if New York City had moved here for the weekend! Every twenty feet along the water's edge, a boat was moored and a tent was set. I couldn't believe it. I hiked the shore trail until I found a brook running down the

mountain and followed it up. Higher and higher I went until the sounds of the crowd faded, and the song of the mountain replaced it. I pitched my tent in a peaceful glade surrounded by birch and elm trees, and spent the two nights there talking to squirrels, listening to birds, and generally just taking it easy.

When Monday morning rolled around I packed up and beat my way down the mountain, anxious to get across the lake. I found most of the boats gone. What campers were left were still sleeping. I walked along the lake a few miles until I was across from the ranger station on one of the islands. I figured if I could get out to the island I wouldn't have any trouble bumming a ride over to Bolton Landing. But how do I get over? A few boats were out on the lake and as I watched and waited, a few ran between me and the island. With arms a-waving, and not just calmly, I tried my best to get a boat to stop.

An hour passed, and two boats, and I was still on the east side of the lake. Another boat came by. I waved again, but no use. No, wait. They turned! Now what am I going to tell them when they get over here? I was a bit embarrassed, feeling kind of silly, but I explained my problem to the three fishermen in the boat, and in no time found myself on the island. I immediately approached Sue Franz and her sister, Winnen, and got myself a ride right to the dock at Bolton Landing. The first ride of my trip was over, and I hit the P.O. for my mail.

After hiking several paved miles out of Bolton Landing, I turned off the road onto an old jeep trail. A mile later I came to the remains of an abandoned homestead. The fields were overgrown, the orchard's trees gnarled and bent with age, and the house was totally collapsed. The barn was the thing

that stood out. And oh, it must have been a fine one. It was still standing, though the sides were gone as were bits of the roof. Bushes were starting to send their tendrils in to reclaim their lost ground, and the loft was full of nests and no telling what else. It attracted me, this old shell of a barn, and I crossed through the weeds and walked in, if "in" is what you'd call it. I poked around, feeling like some scavenger picking the bones of an ill-fated giant, but my curiousity overruled any guilt.

I decided to stay and made myself at home on the floor, the opposite end of the barn from where I'd seen a snake! (Oh, yes, a big one too!) Darkness came on rather slowly, and the crickets filled the night air with their top forty. I eventually crawled into my bag and was just dozing off when the rafters above me exploded with a flurry of noise. Nearly jumping out from under my beard, I was reassured to find it was only a squirrel. Once again I closed my eyes, and once again I was dozing off. Thunk!! Some "thing" pounced on my chest and then off again! Almost afraid to open my eyes, I did, but nothing was around, and everything was quiet (except those crickets). I nervously laid back down. A few minutes later the rush of feet and something bounding over me had me up again. I rolled over and looked into the face of a big rabbit. As I watched, another one ran by, and the first one took off after it. All night they ran over and around me in their game of tag. The peace of my tent was sorely missed.

After a sporadic night's sleep, I struck out early, following a series of jeep trails and back roads, with a bit of compass work thrown in to boot. I crossed the Hudson River and walked up Glen Creek on a dusty little road. The day was still, and the heat hung in the air like the dust clouds of an occasional passing car. It was well into the day before I turned off onto a

State trail and began making my way up the steep sides of Crane Mountain. Ladders on the trail made the ascent an easy one. The views from the summit were well worth the sweat involved.

I was rewarded with a slight breeze as I descended to Crane Mountain Pond. Tucked high in a saddle of the mountain, this pristine, princess of a pond was surrounded by bare ledges of rock that sloped into the dark waters. I could see the pond's inviting waters from quite a ways off and as I walked toward it my pace quickened. My body had one purpose, to submerge its tired, hot, dirt-streaked bones in that cool sanctuary. I was a man possessed. The water's edge ran to meet me. My pack was off. My boots were thrown clear. My clothes dropped on the run. At last I dove into the refreshing embrace of the mountain's cool water.

The following day, and miles away, I was hiking up the East Branch of the Sacandaga River. The air was hot and steamy. The dense growth along the river smelled ripe and full, and I could have been in the Amazon. Then, it started to rain. For days it had hung there, letting the sun shine, soaking the heat with its damp calling card. Now it fell in big, go-get-'em drops. I'd been hiking in my loincloth, a pair of cut-offs, since Maine. Removing my shirt, and slipping the raincover over my pack, I let the rain fall where it may. Not exactly the best way to get a shower, but sure saves on the water bills!

It rained all that day and night, and when the next day broke, the skies were clear. From Siamese Ponds, where I ran into a herd of Boy Scouts (the Eastern Yeller-Throated variety), I bushwhacked my way around the north end of County Line Mountain and then through the gap between it and Horseshoe Mountain, passing in the shadows of huge hemlocks and birch trees. I stopped for lunch in a marshy clearing with the Kunjamuk River trickling through, only

a few feet wide. A red-tailed hawk floated over. All was quiet but for the whine of the flies.

July in the Adirondacks is not the best season to go. Oh, it's very beautiful, and the rain isn't that bad. The heat can be lived through. The problem is the lack of blood in a human's body! I mean, we only have something like 4 or 5 quarts, and when you've got a hundred mosquitoes, two dozen black flies, three no-see-ems, and a deer fly (in a pear tree) all drawing from your personal account, it makes things a bit unbearable. The stuff I used for repellant only seemed to succeed in making me uncomfortable. I don't like the smell. But I found after a few days of heavy bugs I got used to it, and it didn't seem to bother me much. My legs and arms were covered with red blotches, but I only noticed it when a newcomer got carried away.

I continued on, skirting the base of Big Range Mountain, and that night, camped in a quiet glen. Birds sang their evening songs, the brook bubbled a chorus, and the breeze kissed the leaves overhead in a gentle rustle. Then came a shot like a cannon. Crack! Crack! And then a mighty crash! A tree falls nearby; a tree that has likely stood there a few hundred years, and has waited for this instant to fall. I felt like I was a guest being honored by witnessing the event. The end of an era but the start of another, as this tree falls to the earth to become the nourishment for the next generation. And who will hear these new trees fall? Will they feel as I? Will they even hear?

In the morning, a few miles of bushwhacking got me to a trail near Whitaker Lake which soon faded into a nice hiking trail along the Miami River. At day's end, Pillsbury Mountain offered fine views from the lookout, and I met firewatcher, Holland Smith. From Pillsbury, I used the radio and talked

to Harold Osgood back on Black Mountain. Harold was more than surprised to hear my voice coming over his radio, and I brought him up to date on my trip.

I passed about ten lakes the next day, through the Canada Lakes region, and found the trails easy, though at places rather wet. I saw a handful of other hikers in the area, but not as many as I had anticipated. By the day's end I had struck another dirt road and ran into two geology students from Colgate University, David Muller and Bruce Douglas. The two of them were spending the summer recording the geological lay of the land. I camped with them that evening, the company and good times preparing me for the hard day ahead.

I don't like to walk in the rain, that's all there is to it. But the next day when the rains came, I just wasn't in a spot I could pitch my tent. It was dense forest on the south side of the Moose River at the base of Stink Lake Mountain. The rain started falling, and I figured it would be just a passing shower. I scrunched into the shelter of a thick pine and waited. The rain pounded down harder by the minute. In a short time I was soaked, and the rain beat down like it was the big flood all over again. I headed for the river, oblivious to keeping dry, and finally reached the marshy bank. It was stillwater and I crossed the forty yards of shallows with no trouble, boots and all. Climbing out on the other side, my shoes squished and squeaked with every step. You know the sound. The feeling of wet, sloshy boots, no matter how many times I've had them, is a feeling I'll never be able to stand.

It was still pouring cats and dogs (and a few possums, too) when an Adirondack Mountain Club cabin welcomed me, and there I spent the night warm and dry.

Two days later I was picking up mail and food in Old Forge, New York. I didn't really gain any profound impressions about the place. It was a typical tourist town and the folks were friendly and helpful. I had lunch with Dick Wormwood and his wife, Mich, before heading up the trail to Moose River Mountain. I spent two days camped at the base of the old fire lookout there, and while it wasn't the best view I've ever had, it was a peaceful place and my last camp within the boundaries of the forest preserve.

I kept to the trails the following day, passing Middle Branch Lake, Middle Settlement Lake, and later Copper Lake. It was all woods-walking with occasional deer and squirrels for company. I remember one spot where someone had made a sign advertising a bird's nest in the middle of the brushy trail and asking hikers to watch their step. By the end of the day I was camped on Pine Creek near Moose River.

The next few days I was a walker of little used country roads that laced across the farmland and woodlots which typified that part of New York. The days were hot, but the going was easy and pleasant, and I often found myself singing to the open road before me. It was a free, comfortable feeling, this life I was leading, and it was no wonder that most of the people I spoke to carried a bit of envy in their conversation.

America is a land of travelers. We have a history of being footloose. If we weren't, America would still be 13 little states on the Atlantic Coast. I think this urge to move, to see other places, is an inherent characteristic of Americans, but tends to be suppressed in this modern world by age, family, or debt! "You know, that's something I've always wanted to do. Just take off! But now that . . . ." It was repeated a hundred times over. The words came from an old farmer in Vermont, a young storekeeper in New York, a ranch hand in

Montana, a waitress in Minnesota, from today's America itself. In living my own dreams I was in part fulfilling their's too. I began to feel some purpose beside my own pleasure. Americans needed to be told they can still take off and not be mugged by outlaws or police. They needed to be told there really was an America out there.

Thus, road walking brought out the social animal in me. And I tramped along with the sky, the fields, the land itself, and also with the people. And I wondered about the names of the places and the fate of the faces. My mind got as much exercise as these ol' legs of mine as I marched across my maps through the towns that were there and some that existed in name only. Port Leyden, Constableville, Byron Corners, Fish Creek, Osceola, Redfield, Little America, Stillwater, Chateaugay, and Orwell rolled by in a span of a few days. They're romantic sounding aren't they? I love the sound of names. They're the honey or our language, and I licked it up.

I spent a night camped on the shore of the Salmon River Reservoir, and early the next morning walked into Orwell to get mail. I'm afraid when I arrived I must have looked like the wet dog that had followed me for a ways. A shower had passed thru, staying just long enough to drench me. But on mail day nothing could dampen my spirits. I stepped into the P.O.

Carl and Betty Potter greeted me warmly, and I was soon chatting comfortably over a cup of coffee. I must say that postmasters were some of the friendliest folks I met, but the Potters were the greatest. They invited me to stay, and after an interview with the Pulaski newspaper, Carl took me for a quick auto tour of the area. Salmon River Falls was spectacular. I slept that night with a roof over my head, and when I left in the morning I wore clean clothes and a shorter head of hair, compliments of Betty.

A few miles west of Orwell I hit the railroad tracks. For three miles I tried to adjust my stride accordingly. There is a trick to hitting the ties just right, and I finally got it down pat. The rails forked near Pulaski, and the way I was going was deserted. The ties and steel had been pulled up, and all that remained was a perfectly graded hiking trail through the countryside. I crossed a number of creeks, went through a few wood lots, and roamed through the open fields on this exciting piece of trail. The last few miles of the day were back on the road, and I camped in a forested area near a branch of Butterfly Creek, west of Mexico, New York.

The roads held me most of the next day as I passed Butterfly Corners, North Volney, South Scriba, and crossed the Oswego River at Minetto. As I hiked along that day, I was reminded once again of one of the most insistent dangers to the cross-country walker. Many people have asked me about this. "Well, did you have any trouble with wild animals?" I can honestly say that the most unpredictable, dangerous run-ins I had, were with those listed as Man's best friend. Of course, I'm talking about dogs.

Now all you dog owners are saying, "Oh, he wouldn't have any trouble with Bowser". And chances are I wouldn't. But there was something about me that seemed to bring the worst out in a lot of dogs. Maybe it was this big thing I carried on my back, or my walking stick, or my ripe smell! I don't know. But time after time I turned to meet a dog that came snarling after me. Usually I just stuck out my stick, and for most dogs that was enough to change their direction if not their intent. Only a couple times did a dog try to get around the stick for a piece of leg. One of those occured on the day about which I'm speaking.

I was walking by a house when this ol' bulldog came running out. OK, nothing wrong with that. Then he started growling and getting too close. Better put out the stick. Why that little *CENSORED*!!! I slapped him with my stick as he went for lunch (Me!).

"Oh, he won't hurt you," the voice came from what was obviously the dog's master. "Snapper doesn't bite."

Snapper wasn't going to get another chance! I headed down the road.

Later that day, at Furniss, I returned to the tracks where I camped that night in a proud stand of hemlocks just off the tracks. I'd come an estimated 29 miles that day. During the course of the entire trip I kept a daily journal. With each day's entry I entered my mileage for the day and an estimated total. On most of the state trails the mileages were posted; otherwise I'd estimate my progress on my topographical maps. These are very detailed, and I think any judgements I made were fairly accurate.

I hit the roads again in the morning, and for the next fifty miles followed them through rather boring country full of interesting people. It became a social trip for those three days, as I brushed lives with a married couple in Red Creek that did construction work together, a friendly gas station attendant in Wolcott, a hot-dog vendor and his family on Sodus Bay, a black migrant worker in Sodus, a group of social workers in Williamson, an ice-cream vendor in Ontario, and a fireman at Union Hill.

A couple miles outside of Webster I stayed with an inter-faith Christian group called the Salt Mine. The atmosphere here was one of love, and though I don't consider myself a Christian, I enjoyed the brotherhood and belief in God that we all shared. The wave of goodwill I rode when I left the Salt Mine carried me many miles.

The day I left the Salt Mine I passed through the northern edge of Rochester, along the shore of Lake Ontario. As I crossed the Genesee River into Greece, New York, the drawbridge opened to let a large yacht through. I stood watching the many boats in the crowded river as the traffic backed up on the road. A horn honked as the cars started moving again, and a man waved me over to his open window. I walked over and was pleasingly surprised when he handed me two humungous peaches, and then drove off. A short time later I was back on the tracks, and alone.

Railroad tracks. Does that bring a picture to your mind's eye or doesn't it? To yesterday's traveler, a train is the dying symbol of what a rambler used to be. The train was the fastest, cheapest way to get around. The sound of a train rounding a distant bend was the call for the drowsing hoboes to ready themselves to board her as she slowed briefly in passing their port of call.

But the whistle doesn't blow much anymore. The tracks I followed for three days were overgrown with weeds, and there was nary a hobo in sight. The local folks had a joke about their railroad. They called it "the tri-weekly". Once a week it came through, and then "tried" to make it back! If a train had come by while I was walking, I would have been surprised. As it was, I spent the time in peace and quiet.

It was hot, and the heat shimmered and waved down the rails in front of me. But it was a dry heat and I thought it felt good rather than oppressive. I was heading straight as an arrow west, and felt like I was just zipping off the whole continent. I passed through little towns, their names like songs: Hilton, Hamlin, Morton, Carlton, Kendall, Kent, Waterton, Ashtonville and Appleton. Sometimes I'd balance on the rail, and walk for a mile or more

like some tight rope artist, dying each time I fell. And the orchards! Why, I never knew there could be so many apples and cherries in the world, let alone in a state with a homely name like New York. The orchards stretched for miles, and corn and wheat fields, too. Taking a break, I'd set my pack up against the base of a big cherry tree, and prop myself beside it. All about me, the fruit-laden limbs hung down. By the time I moved on, I was about as full as one of Grandma's ol' cherry pies! And the blackberries! Why, I've never seen wild berries so big as along that track. Yes, I enjoyed those three days. And as I passed the rails, and they passed me, I thought how right it would be to take all these abandoned railroad tracks and turn them into hiking trails, Once again, they could carry the ramblers and travelers of the day.

Appleton, my next mail stop, consisted of a small post office, a store, and a few houses. Back a few years, this was a thriving community, shipping out tons of fruit from their five R.R. sidings. The P.O. was closed for lunch when I got there. I walked into the grocery and bought a half gallon of chocolate ice cream. Sitting down on the shady steps I set out to devour the contents. It was not the first time, so I was used to a few stares. The fact is I <u>love</u> ice-cream. When my appetite booms and my taste buds crave, I can eat a whole half gallon in one sitting. In this way I met Rob Strong, the Appleton poet. Seeing a guy eat that much ice-cream got his curiousity up, and we struck up a conversation. Rob had published a book of his poetry and photos, and he presented me with a copy. <u>Soul Strength</u>, kept me company for a couple months and is definitely what it's name implies.

Back at the post office, postmaster, Bruce Zunner, handed over a pile of mail and arranged an interview with Mrs. Marie Detschner of the Lockport, Union Sun and Journal before I moved on. Rob had told me of a good place to camp, and I pitched my tent that night on the edge of a cliff, overlooking

Lake Ontario.

Two days later I was being greeted by my parents in Lewiston, New York. Mom and Dad were my home support team, sending pre-packaged map and food packages when and where I needed them. They had driven over from Royal Oak, Michigan to spend a day with me, take me out to dinner, and see how I was doing. Niagara Falls was only a short ways away, and we drove down to take a look during our short reunion. It was my first visit to the falls, and I was impressed with the sight, but had expected the sound to be much louder. I thought I'd be able to hear the roar from a few miles away!

If the sound of Niagara disappointed me, the people of Lewiston did just the opposite. It seemed like the farther I went, the warmer the reception I received. The morning my folks left, Lewiston postmaster, Tom Napier, deputy major, Sam Gagen, and others, presented me with some historical pamphlets, a Bicentennial coin, and a can of foot powder! With heartfelt thanks to all of them, I headed for the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge and my route into Canada.

VI

The Bruce Trail

It was hot, 105 degrees worth of muggy, sticky kind of heat. A breeze set the two countries' flags to waving, but carried with it another blast of humid, stale air. Far below me the waters of the Niagara River churned through the sheer-sided gorge. Everything was in a grand scale: the river, the cliffs, the powerplants, the bridge. I was standing on the international boundary at the middle of the Lewiston-Queenston bridge and feeling very small.

It looked like a playground for giants. And it was. The two playmates, Canada and the United States, rubbed shoulders here. Millions of citizens from both countries visit the area each year to gaze into the gorge or gawk at the rainbows hovering over the mighty falls. And could anyone blame them? After all, I was here, not the typical tourist, but taking pictures like crazy.

My main reason for coming this way was to trek across part of Canada, mostly on established trail, thereby cutting out a lot of road walking through heavily populated areas of the midwest. I would reenter the States at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and then proceed across what are mostly, fairly unspoiled lands until I struck the praire.

I walked into Customs and was ushered into a room for an interview with an immigration officer. After explaining my trip and assuring the man that I would not work or hitchhike while I was in his country, I was given a two month permit to stay in Canada. It was August first.

A few hundred feet from the customs office I entered Queenston Heights Park and picked up the 433 mile long Bruce Trail. The heat was overpowering, and I welcomed the chance to sit down in the shade of Brocks Monument. Canada and the U.S. weren't always on as good of terms as they are now-a-days.

During the war of 1812 the Americans crossed the river from Lewiston and met the Canadians at Queenston Heights, taking the position after heavy fighting. General Brock was killed leading a charge to retake the position. Eventually the Americans were defeated and the British regained control of the area. Brock was martyrized.

The monument built in his honor had been visible from across the river and drew me to it as I left Customs. I spent a few hours sitting out the hottest part of the day and chatting with the two guides assigned to the monument, Wayne Dunnet and Marge Newfeld. I've always been a history buff and I delved into the history surrounding this historic spot. It seems that the monument was first built in 1824 over Brock's grave, but was torn down and rebuilt when it was learned that a radical had put one of his papers in the cornerstone. In 1836 a "crazy American" by the name of Finian blew it up, and it was rebuilt to stay in 1856. 215 steps up the monument's spiral staircase took me to a hazy but inspiring view of Lewiston, the river, and Lake Ontario.

As the day wore on, I left the park and hiked a short way into a hardwood forest. I was impressed by the steep cliff that was the Niagara Escarpment and camped near the yawning edge. The escarpment was formed from layers of sediment laid down by drying oceans which covered this area at various times millions of years ago. Most of the rock has eroded away in the eons since, but this southwest corner of Ontario remained, and along the eastern edge a sharp, vertical face was formed. This edge, or escarpment, runs for several hundred miles and is the basis of a number of waterfalls, Niagara among them, and the foundation of the Bruce Trail. The trail follows the escarpment through layers of time, and geological wonders lay around every bend in its sweep north.

The heat wave continued into my first few days in Canada, making walking a perpetual experience of perspiration. I sweated enough buckets to float a boat! But the trail was interesting. I alternated between pathway and roads through parks, fields, woods and even some residential districts the first day. The Welland Canal, part of the Saint Lawrence Seaway was passed in an unusual way. I went through a tunnel underneath it! The sounds of ships from all around the world were present for several miles each side of the canal.

Many of the falls were dry this time of year, and the next day I was disappointed to find Rockway Falls, all 130 feet of it, dry as a Mohave martini. The gorge itself was impressive. The layers of limestone and shale read like months in the calender of Time. I hung to the edge as I looked over and down, clinging to a tree like a magnet. Still, I felt dizzied by the sheerness of the drop.

Five miles later I found a thin trickle of water tripping over Balls Falls (don't laugh). These were named after the Ball family who operated a gristmill here for nearly a hundred years. I spent the better part of the day poking around the historical village at the top of the falls.

As I walked along the Trail through beautiful stands of hardwood above the steep drop that was the escarpment, through orchards and fields, I couldn't help but feel as at home as a walker could be. The Bruce Trail was in many ways like the Appalachian Trail. Being marked with white blazes and maintained by volunteers through a network of hiking clubs, it was an interesting trail. Most amazing and unusual of all though, was the section through Hamilton, Ontario, one of Canada's large industrial cities. Here the trail wound through the city on a green belt hugging the Escarpment, and keeping its quiet flavor while looking out over the rugged beauty of industrial power.

I camped on the trail one night within the city limits, and as morning broke, the heavens sent relief to the heat in the form of a steady rain. I walked along the side of the escarpment through a pleasant forest with occasional glimpses of the city below. My camera had been giving me trouble in the way of ruined film, so I decided to descend into the city to get it fixed. A man I'd met at Ball's Falls had given me the location of a camera repair shop and when I came to a street leading down into the town, I stepped off the trail and into the civilized world.

It was still very early, and I stopped in a laundermat until the rain stopped. Walking the streets, I soon found the shop and in a matter of minutes, had a recuperating camera. I wanted to stop at the post office to mail a few things and this took me into the heart of the city. Walking along with my huge pack, walking staff, and loincloth, I looked as weathered as the escarpment itself, and out of place as a sheik in Lincoln, Nebraska. But if I drew stares from men dressed in business suits, the city itself drew the same from me. It was an interesting contrast to what I had been used to, and views of ladies in tight fitting get-ups were much more welcome than my almost daily sighting of deer.

By the time I regained the trail and came out on top of the escarpment, the day had turned chilly and the skies still hung in a menacing mood. Looking back out over Hamilton and nearby Burlington, I realized there was indeed, an industrial beauty to all this. The factories and mills, the ships in the harbor, Lake Ontario stretching off for miles, the city's streets cutting their own pattern, and the dark clouds blending perfectly in coordinating color all blended to form one huge master painting.

After following an unused radial line and passing under a super highway through a culvert, I passed Sherman Falls and camped nearby. I was out of the

city now, and the next morning I continued through the woods a couple miles until coming out on a road near a place called the "Hermitage", a park run by the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority. (By the way, when Canadians say conservation they mean saving, not only the environment,but historical points as well.) No one was around. I walked the narrow lane back to the ruins of what was once a large mansion. The day was clear and sunny, but so early in the morning the sun still hadn't gotten over the thick growth of trees. It was a beautiful setting, but I couldn't help but feel a little spooky. Someone was watching me. I hurried back to the trail, now following Sulphur Springs road, and soon came to the Sulphur Springs. The water bubbled out of a handsome stone trough, and had the distinctive odor of sulphur. They say it's invigorating to drink, but I think you have to hold your nose as you do it.

As I was sitting by the fountain, watching honey bees swarming around the water (maybe it's invigorating for bees), two men from the Hydro-electric company stopped and talked for awhile. After digging around on the floor of the littered truck, one of them handed me a pamphlet about the Hermitage and Springs. They drove off, and I sat down to read.

The fountain was built in 1850 and was used by a hotel that advertised the medicinal properties of the spring. Any thoughts of feeling silly concerning the haunted Hermitage were quickly disspelled when I found that there were indeed ghosts in the history of the area. Before the mansion was built in 1855, the owner of the property was a wealthy English Colonel who had married a Greek beauty and come to Canada with her and her niece. The Colonel's coachman fell in love with the niece, and when rejected as a suitor by the Colonel, quickly hung himself. Victims of suicide were not buried in the cemetery, so his remains were buried at the crossroads. On moonlit nights people sometimes hear him crying for his lost love.

The rest of the morning was spent crossing the Dundas Valley over rolling fields and through wooded bottoms. Around noon I came to the base of Webster Falls. Spencer Creek still flowed strong enough to give a good show of itself, and as I sat in the sun I was surprised to meet 12 year olds, Scott Fraser and Raymond Gubbins. These two vivacious lads soon had me talked into coming home with them for lunch, so off we went. After an exceptional luncheon prepared by Mrs. Fraser, I continued on, passing Tews Falls, Soers Falls, and walking along the very edge of the escarpment through what was listed in my guidebook as the Royal Botanical Gardens. The views of Burlington and Hamilton, now to the south of me, were clear. I camped with such a view, and awoke to the sun coming up over Lake Ontario in the morning. Through forest and fields, over stiles and roads, I continued to the top of Mount Nemo and was greeted with stunning views of the flatlands and distant Toronto.

As I looked down on a herd of cattle grazing peacefully on what looked like a golf green, an old woman emerged from a barn. Wagging along at her side was a big collie. With a motion of her hand, the dog set out like a dart across the pasture. In no time, the cows were being driven into the barn with all the professionalism of a seasoned cowhand. Deep fissures in the rock yawned along the top of the mountain and made for interesting conjecture as to how long before some of these pieces fall to the ever advancing flatlands. Geological time is beyond the grasp of most minds. Of course, change never stops on the earth's face. To think of seas covering this area was almost unbelievable but for the clear evidence of the cliffs themselves.

I camped at the base of Mount Nemo in a wooded campsite on the edge of open pastures. In the half-light of morning I heard the pound of hooves. A dozen horses galloped freely across the fields. They turned and jumped. They

ran this way and that in the cool morning air, their vigoration rubbing off on me as I hoisted my pack and set off.

I was usually up and walking before the sun had cleared the tops of the trees. Most miles were put in before noon, and by mid-afternoon I had called a halt to the day's hike. Summer along the Bruce trail is not the peak hiking season. Fall and Spring tend to see heavier use. I met very few hikers. The people I did meet were folks like Barb Durnan and Bill Rankin who I met at Rattlesnake Point one day. They were local people, out to enjoy the day in the country, and shared their lunch and conversation with me for a few hours. The trail ran through, or near, many parks, and at times utilized roads in its journey north. I never really had time to get lonely. The trail offered its solitude and quiet, and at the same time a chance to really see and meet the people who lived in the area. I couldn't have asked for a better way to cross southern Ontario.

One night I camped with a group of Girl Guides at a campsite overlooking a corn field. The next morning I reached my first Canadian mail stop in the tiny town of Limehouse. Mr. and Mrs. Stevens ran the combination general store and post office, and as I read over my mail they fixed me up a cup of tea. A care package from home had all kinds of goodies: crabmeat, dried fruit, and brownies made by my sister, Lisa. Mail call was never so delicious.

The farther north I went, the more rolling and beautiful the country got. In many respects it reminded me of New England with its little farms tucked in the hills, the open, rolling pastures, the old stone buildings, and the warmness of the people themselves. Deer were a common sight, as were porcupines, rabbits, and many hawks. My greatest love though, was walking the pastures, the open, high, hilly ones that drew a hiker to them like a fly to . . . well, you know. When I hiked over the open hills I felt like I was soaring, totally free. Gone

were the trees to shut off the wide sweeping views, gone were the confines of the path itself. Only the grass with its roots seemed to hold me to the earth, and then, it was a mere formality.

After one day of pasture plodding, I camped in an old orchard. The trees were old and twisted with age, but they still produced a few lonely bits of fruit. The air had a wonderful smell. The scent of rotting fruit and old cow manure blended in the evening air to form its own particular perfume. I could get addicted to the stuff. I'm sure you've experienced smells that take you back to some place you've been, some good time in your life. Just as seasons have their own smells, so do places. Each time I catch a whiff of apples rolled with the scent of old cow pies, I think with fondness of that quiet orchard in Ontario.

In a wooded trough between two hills near Mono Centre I came down to a small pond, its dark, glasslike waters half-covered with a vibrant green coat of algae. Surrounded by mature maples and birches, the place was shaded and quiet but for the occasional croak of a frog. A maple tree slanted out over the waters at one point and turned out to be the perfect roost from which to watch frogs. I spent most of the day thus occupied and camped in the sanctuary that night.

Two days later I got my first view of big ol' Georgian Bay from a point south of Ostler Bluffs. It was a major landmark I'd been striving for. Its presence would be with me for more than two weeks as I walked its western shore.

The afternoon I hiked over Blue Mountain was a day of clear blue skies, and I nearly flew along on my high spirits. The trail hit a dirt road, and as I rounded a bend I noticed two people walking toward me. I shrugged it off as two hikers, and as I got closer it looked like a guy and a girl. As I got even closer the one

I thought looked like a guy started running towards me. I was puzzled, and then realized it wasn't a guy at all. It was a girl. In fact, it was my sister Susie! What is she doing out here?

I've been surprised, and I've been Surprised! This was definitely one time with capitol letters. Sue and her friend, Sage, were on their way to Colorado, taking the long way around the Great Lakes. They had stopped at Limehouse and found I'd passed through several days ahead of them. Obtaining a map of the trail's route, they drove up to another point and met some Boy Scouts I had passed. Once again they had skipped ahead and started hiking south on the trail, appealing to luck in hoping that I wasn't still north of them.

Our reunion was a joyous one. We spent the day swimming in Georgian Bay and driving around, and camped that night on Blue Mountain overlooking the vast bay below. I took no rides in my actual progress up the trail, but the fact that I got to the bay before I actually walked there, left me with an anti-climatic feeling when I finally did reach the water's edge on foot. In the morning Sue and Sage climbed into their car and were gone. I spent the day crisscrossing the countryside on my way up the trail.

After a rainy night, the morning blew in cool and clear. The skies were full of high, billowy clouds that paraded across the horizon like clean laundry strung out to dry. I skirted the eastern edge of Beaver Valley high atop the escarpment. I could visualize the trail's path as it crossed at the head of the valley and then worked its way north along the western rim. What I didn't see until I got to it was a large section of closed trail. Barbed wire was stretched over the path and a big sign read, "Bruce Trail Closed Due to Abuse, No Trespassing."

I looked at the sign in silence for several minutes. Should I trespass? I was good at that by now. But that would just give Bruce Trail hikers a worse reputation if I was caught. Someone had obviously misused the privilege to walk here. It was a shame for the rest of us. Most of the land the Trail passes through is owned privately. It's only through the continued cooperation of the landowners that a trail like this can exist. The Appalachian Trail is in the same boat. I turned back and crossed the valley near Kimberly on a steep road, down one side and up the other.

Once I regained the escarpment on the western rim of the Valley I was exhilarated with the views of the day. Kimberly below, the very green Beaver Valley with its quiltwork of farmlands and roads, distant Georgian Bay, and Blue Mountain, all were topped off with troops of clouds marching across the sky. I met Albert Manger and his daughter, from the Beaver Valley Club, out working on their section of trail, and later ran into a young man from an official sounding organization called the Niagara Escarpment Commission. The Canadian government is taking action, trying to keep the escarpment undeveloped and finding a permanent route for the trail. The Canadians seem to be much more conscious of their environment than most Americans. If it wasn't for the high cost of ice cream, maybe I'd come here more often!

The fact that this trail was being preserved, that actual steps were being taken was heartening. And it seemed right that one of the greatest of America's naturalists and conservationists had walked much of what is now the Bruce Trail over a hundred years ago. John Muir had lived in nearby Meaford in the 1860's working in a rake factory. I could picture him walking these high ridges, exploring the caves and fissures in the escarpment's face, and forming his spiritual bond with nature's works that in future years would lead him into the heart of the West's mountain wildernesses with only a pocketful of dried bread

and tea leaves, a thin blanket, and the Bible for his comfort. Muir was a walker among walkers, hiking from the Ohio River to the Gulf of Mexico, and later over the high Sierra's vast reaches. John Muir's life was a model of inspiration to a wilderness traveler like me. With the knowledge that he had once rambled these hills, I seemed to take more notice of things, as if I were not only walking through a museum of the earth's history, but along the trail of a great philosophy as well.

There was one thing I came across in my hike of the escarpment that I doubt John Muir ever saw. It was a beautiful day west of Blantyre, and I was roaming the hilly pastureland on a wave of high energy. The trail breached the top of a hill and there in the grass before me lay a pair of entangled lovers. I could see right off they were enjoying the view. I did too, but decided against any pictures of these sights, and made a wide detour.

This brings up the question of sex and the long distance walker. See, you can't even read a book about walking now-a-days without hearing about sex. I've received mail from all over the Northern Hemisphere with questions about walking, but the most interesting question was from a young man down in Bermuda. He was planning a long trek and asked about sex. "Should I bring a woman with me or will I find all I need as I go?" he asked.

Let me say right now that the myth about the lone traveler finding a warm bed and willing body in every town is just that! Pure Myth. If this guy was going to depend on handouts he would likely starve. (If you get my drift.) Thus the lone hiker will begin to suffer from that age old malady, what explorers down through the ages have come to call horniness. Mountains will take the shape of fiery breasts, hills, the smooth rounded hips, and the gulches, well, use your imagination. I won't go into detail in this account, but on occasion, much too rare an occasion, some patriotic daughter of delight will

offer a temporary cure to the problem. On those few occasions the hiker will be able to boast of a country that truly took him to its bosom.

The next day I passed through Rockford and found myself along roads most of the day. My guide book showed Inglis Falls, but I didn't think much of it until I got there.

The Sydenham River flowed demurely to the edge of the escarpment and tumbled off where the rock formed a giant corner. The cliff's face resembled a quarry, the stone seemingly cut by masters into huge squares. The tops of the cliffs were covered with dense green foliage contrasting with the silvery-grey faces of stone. The water tumbled down, falling in symetrical rhythm on its way to Georgian Bay.

The next day I was back on the winding path. I still hadn't reached the waters of the bay, but north of Owen Sound the waters of Ontario reached me. The morning was threatening, and before I'd walked five miles the rain began to pound down onto the dusty trail. Each drop of water splattered a little cloud of dust as it hit. I hurried along and took refuge in a dense stand of maples. Soon, even that wasn't enough to keep me dry. I could see a farm a short ways ahead and raced across the field towards it. Bob Lundy met me at the barn door and welcomed me in, a freshly plucked chicken in one hand. No need to ask him what he was up to.

Late that afternoon I got to Wiarton. I was out on the Bruce Penninsula now, and following the trail, which was following the escarpment, which was following the eastern side of the Peninsula. Once past Wiarton the mood of the land changed. The terrain grew more rugged, and the land took on a wilder, less human atmosphere.

From Spirit Rock I looked out over Colpoy Bay and Wiarton. An Indian maiden was said to have jumped off this rock, and her ghost is still seen on occasion. But I felt no such presenee. The place was too beautiful, too open

to the wind and sun to be haunted.

It was windy and wet for two days as I made my way slowly northward. I met nice folks in Colpoy Village and at the Cape Crocker Indian Reservation, but didn't really grasp the whole spirit of Georgian Bay until I camped one sunny afternoon on Rush Cove. The water, that clear blue, clean water, drinkable straight from the bay, was at my doorstep. The rocky beach stretched for as far as I could see, just as natural as the day it was created. I dove into the icy waters and later stretched out in the sun to dry. I could have been in any of those tropical places. The water was Bahama Blue mixed with Tahiti turquoise.

In the morning I moved my camp about a mile up the Bay and spent my hours watching the rolling waves. Across Barrow Bay the white cliffs of the escarpment rose up out of the blue. I was laid back against a large, water-smoothed piece of driftwood, surveying my temporary kingdom when I noticed a birch tree. That wasn't unusual; the thing that shocked me was its leaves. They'd turned a bright yellow, the first sign of the approaching Fall. Could it be on its way already? It seemed like summer had just got here. I shivered at the thought of the cold.

North of Lion's Head, I began running into more hikers. Many hailed from Michigan and Ohio, and I learned that much of the land up here is owned by Americans. I camped near a group one night and pitched my tent right on the rocky beach. I was just dozing off to dream about some rare female hikers when someone gave a shout. Opening my eyes, Georgian Bay looked like some vast plain of rippled glass. Coming slowly over the horizon, rising from the waters and looking like an orange banana thrown into the sky, was the waning moon. I had to reassure myself that it was indeed real. I could just hear some-one up there having a good laugh, saying, "Wait 'til those crazies down there see this!" Yes, we were taken aback, but gradually the banana lost its luster,

and once again turned into a white, sliver of a moon,

Noting the increase of foot traffic on the trail, I was surprised to come across a small stump about five inches tall in the middle of the path. Growing out of the top was a small, picture-like mushroom. Here this delicate thing was, and no one had kicked it over or stepped on it. For some reason this little bit of mushroom survival intrigued me, and I stretched out on my belly for a closer look. No, I didn't see any little people, but it did seem enchanted. After a picture, I walked on, and have often wondered just how long it stood there before it fell.

Many people have asked me, "Have you ever been lost?" Well, like Daniel Boone said, "I was never lost, but I've been a might bewildered!" It's hard to get lost in today's world, even in the wilderness areas. If you follow a water course downhill you're bound to hit something eventually. While on the Bruce Trail I did lose it a couple times and the day of the mushroom was perhaps the most amusing account. I was in the area just south of Dyers Bay, and somewhere along the way I misplaced the trail. I found myself instead, on a jeep trail going the wrong way. The smart thing would have been to backtrack and find where I went wrong. But that's too easy.

I was soon heading dead north, following a compass heading through mixed hardwood. I knew I'd have to hit Dyer Bay in a matter of a mile or so. The thing is, I'd forgotten about the escarpment. I was on top and soon came to the abrupt edge. Too steep there. I moved along the edge until I found a spot to go down. The brush and trees here were very dense, the slope was steep. I had no way of knowing what I'd find once I started down. I plunged in and slid downward, branches scratching at me like cat claws.

The feeling of sliding turned to one of falling as I broke through the edge of the brush and over a cliff. For that first split second I thought with

horror that this was a silly way to die. But when my boots grounded after only several feet, I thought "no sweat".

"Where did you come from?" a voice from behind me asked. I bounced off the ground in surprise and turned to meet three equally startled ladies. They were out for a walk and had heard "something" in the brush above. They'd thought it was a deer, and for their silent attentiveness they were rewarded with the sight of myself, falling down the ridge. All in a day's work, Mam!

I was on the trail again (fell right over it) and passed thru the resort village of Dyers Bay. As I left, the sky turned ugly and I soon pitched my tent in a stand of cedar trees with just enough room for the tent. It proved to be a great spot for protection from the wind, as a fierce storm hit and blew for a day and a half. I found in my travels, that the rainstorm that lasts more than a few hours is a rare one. Most storms came at night and lasted til morning. Occasionally some would last a day or two. In knowing it wouldn't be too long before I could mosey on again, it was an easy matter to pitch the tent and wait for the rain to cease.

This time around was a long one. All of one solid day the rain kept falling. It didn't stop for breakfast, nor lunch, nor dinner. It didn't stop to read a book, it didn't stop to go to the boy's room, it didn't even stop to change the channel. It rained and rained. The sound of its drops wrote a continuous sonata on the fly of my little tent and sometimes I'd join in. Have you ever sang with the rain? (No, Mr. Kelly, not singin' <u>in</u> the rain!) The torrents come in waves. They pound one minute like kettle drums rolling, and the next they'll be tip-toeing like chipmunks trying to sneak right by. The rain lulls and excites, it soothes and inflames, it prepares for the silence to come.

After two nights and a day of listening to the mesmeric rhythm, the quiet was indeed a stranger. It crept in early with the morning and woke me out of a sound sleep. Awakened by silence? In the wilds, anything is possible. I headed up the trail and soon came out on the rocky beach. The sky still looked like wet flannel, wrinkled and grey, and the wind pushed the waves onto the shore in mad crashes. The remains of an old steamship told the story of other unlucky travelers caught in some long exspired storm.

As I moved along, the shore became a jumble of house-sized boulders. With the high surf, many of the rocks were covered with water or being swept off and on by the big waves. The rocks had obviously fallen from the escarpment and piled up in their haphazard fashion. The boulders a few yards inland were covered with a lush growth of mosses, ferns, and cedar trees. It was a magical world I walked through that morning, the waves sending their spray over the rocks,and me dodging, too often not successfully, the crashing splashes of the breakers. I found myself laughing at my efforts, each time my voice sounding foreign and out of place in the sounds about me. Then the trail would weave around a hugh monolith, and I'd find myself blocked from the wind, and the light. The smell of the Bay would be replaced with the fragrance of wet, dripping cedar.

I wound through the twists and turns, the clefts and cavities for a mile until the shoreline flattened out at Rockway Bay. Here I regained the top of the escarpment where I hiked the rest of the day. For miles I walked through birch and cedar bush high above Georgian Bay. Miles of secluded beaches (does this sound like one of those tourist commercials for Florida?) stretched below me, and the waters seemed to sparkle. The sun came out and the sky cleared. I wanted to hike forever.

I camped in a dump that night. Sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? Well, it wasn't. When this area was logged off, the logs were hauled to appointed areas along the shore and dumped over the cliffs, or slid down the hills, into the bay. Here they were rafted up and hauled away. Today there are places called Reeds Dump, Hemlock Dump, High Dump, and Halfway Dump along the trail. (How about Humpty Dump?) They look a lot better than their name implies. I camped the night at Halfway Dump and found it a bit of paradise, though a bit crowded with campers.

The next morning I was walking, as the sun came throwing light over the whitecaps topping the azure water. I took to the top of the escarpment again and soon reached Halfway Rock Point. The trail scrambled over open, rugged ledges, and I came to two large caves carved out of cliffs by the Bay's watery hand. The largest one could have housed a good sized yacht in its roomy inards. A mile later I reached Overhanging Point where my awe was doubled. Here a hole in the top of the escarpment the size of a manhole cover beckoned me. I climbed in and down, and came out under the overhang of the cliff. I couldn't believe it. I climbed up and down a few times to prove to myself it was real.

Later that day I was walking along the rocky trail when I heard what sounded like the whirring of my camera's timer. I froze in my tracks. I'd read the warnings in my guidebook concerning rattlesnakes. Somewhere, there was one on the trail. I studied the path, my eyes scanning several feet ahead and coming closer. There it is! It was a good three feet away, but still too close! The Massassauga is an Indian name. Kind of pretty sounding for a rattler, isn't it? They're small snakes and not very poisonous, but still, I tended to watch the trail too much the rest of the day!

In the morning I skirted Dunks Bay, then Little Dunks Bay on a rocky shore. I'd been on the Bruce Trail for more than a month, witnessing its many faces, its tame side, and wild. When I reached Tobermory on the northern end of the Bruce Peninsula, and posed for a picture next to the trail monument, I couldn't help but feel I'd gained something. Whether it was knowledge, flavor, or just a feeling, it didn't matter. I had followed another trail to its end, but my own trail's end still lay hundreds of miles to the west.