

Around mid-June, 2007 I plan to start a 2100 mile backpacking trip from Maine to Georgia along the Appalachian Trail (AT). Some of you might have read books about the AT, some of you might have hiked parts of it, but some of you might be completely in the dark.

And so I've put this pamphlet together to help you understand what it is I am undertaking and answer some common questions - the **who/what/when/where** (I'll leave out the "why" as a teaser).

## A Brief History

Benton MacKaye wrote about his vision in 1921 - a trail system along the East Coast of the U.S. acting as an escape from city life. In 1927 Myron Avery lead the development and by 1937 it was completed, making Avery the first to "section hike" the AT. It was believed to be impossible to hike continuously from one end to the other but in 1948 and 124 days Earl Shaffer proved them wrong.

From 1936 to 1969 only 61 people reported hiking all 2000 miles. In the 1970's alone there were 745! That doubled for the '80s with 1,407 and again with 3,272 in the '90s.

Five years in to the current decade the number was already at 3,997. The success rate each year up to 1990 was 10% but it began a gradual rise such that in 2004 and 2005 the rates were 25% - I suspect most of this is due to the availability of information these days.

The trail is currently owned by the government but managed by the AT Conservancy and maintained entirely by volunteers. There are lean-tos, free hostels, cheap lodges, and even expensive cabins and restaurants.

## W, W, W, W (but now W)

**Who:** My friend Adam plans to join me at the starting line for Maine's 100 Mile Wilderness, the most remote stretch of the AT with no towns or roads for, you guessed it, 100 miles. The remaining 2000 miles I will technically be alone but of course will often find myself with other thru-hikers and the occasional vacationer. Rest assured I will have a Pez Dispenser with me!

**What:** I will be known as a SOBO or MEGA. SOBO for SouthBound and MEGA for Maine to Georgia. I will experience hordes of biting mosquitos and black flies from Maine to Vermont, slowly dissipating as I continue into MA, CT and NY.

To put it in perspective many authors like to point out that Don Desrosiers calculated in 1993 that the AT thru-hiker will climb 471,151 feet over 270 mountains (sea-level to Everest 16 times).

My feet will hate me, my knees will rebel, my clothing and backpack will chafe me everywhere. After 2-4 weeks my muscles should be conditioned to the stress of carrying a 25-40 pound backpack up and down mountains but they'll forget how to run or play sports.

People wearing heavy boots usually go through 1-2 pair; hiking shoes will be replaced 3-6 times, and sneakers 5-10 times. I plan to wear trail runners and reckon they will last at least 600 miles. I bought them 1/2 size too big since my feet can grow up to 2 1/2 sizes by the end!

Right now the plan for Maine to Mass is to wear pants, a long sleeve shirt, a bug net, and a pair of socks. In my backpack will be a pair of shorts, a short sleeve shirt, and 2 extra pairs of socks. Less clothing saves weight - just wear the same thing over and over and live with the smell. (I'm hoping to wear a kilt for the mid-Atlantic!)

Towns are, on average, 3-5 days apart and any additional supplies, clothes, food, or laundry will have to be acquired then. In two places the towns are 6-7 days apart. Weather permitting.

As for food, plan on 2-2.5 pounds per day. Focus on complex carbs, protein (preferably

complete proteins), and avoid lots of sugar. For the warm summer months I will not rely on a stove (but I will have one anyway) and will focus on ready-to-eat items like tuna, peanut butter, trail mix, etc. Weight loss can vary and depends on ones diet and physical makeup. I suspect I'll lose 10-15 pounds. Water sources are common on the trail and I will bring my filter along to make it potable (iodine as a backup).

Maps are optional but recommended in some of the more remote states or if you are the type to enjoy scenic detours. I will most likely get one for Maine and NH to start and buy more as I see fit. On the other hand, there are a variety of AT data guides that should definitely be carried - they provide mileage tables and important info like where's the grocery store!

**When:** It's an exercise in futility to plan a precise itinerary on the AT. With that in mind, here is what I'm thinking:

**Fri June 15:** Arrive at Baxter State Park, spend the night at Katahdin Stream Campground

**Sat June 16:** 10 mile round-trip hike to the top of Katahdin, Maine's highest mountain

**Sun June 17:** Start walking to Georgia

**Wed Aug 1:** Somehow get to Rochester, NY for my good friend's wedding

**Mon Aug 6:** Somehow get back to the AT

**Nov 15-30:** Complete the AT and find some southern barbecue!

**Where:** The AT is constantly changing, but it's around 2100-2200 miles and passes through the states listed below (approximate mileage). By the way, driving from Baxter State Park to Springer Mountain would be only 1400 miles.

<b>Maine</b> (281)	<b>Pennsylvania</b> (229)
<b>New Hampshire</b> (161)	<b>Maryland</b> (41)
<b>Vermont</b> (150)	<b>West Virginia</b> (4)
<b>Massachusettes</b> (90)	<b>Virginia</b> (550)
<b>Connecticut</b> (52)	<b>Tennessee</b> (293)
<b>New York</b> (88)	<b>North Carolina</b> (88)
<b>New Jersey</b> (72)	<b>Georgia</b> (75)

## General Thoughts:

- Andrea is glad NOT to be joining me, especially during mosquito season! The only planned rendezvous will be for that wedding in August.
- Many people use mail drops to provide supplies. Packages can be sent to post offices or certain businesses in town and as long as the package says it's for a thru-hiker they will hold it for up to 30 days. **I will NOT** be re-supplying this way. I will, however, use this system on an as-needed basis - for example I will write ahead to Base Camp to request an item be sent ahead, such as a warmer sleeping bag.
- If you need to get something to me, it's best to check with my Base Camp or my website first (see appendix) otherwise I might never get it.
- I will sporadically provide status updates to my Base Camp. Through them my approximate progress will be tracked via a website and in some circumstances email (see appendix).
- A lot of people wonder about the financial aspect, so let me enumerate. 1. I will be quitting my job completely; 2. Transport, supplies, and occasional lodging will cost me somewhere between \$2k-\$4k; 3. No, money is not a concern.
- The dropout rate is very high for the AT primarily for mental reasons, not physical. While I do fit the profile of a successful thru-hiker (introverted, like solitude, like spending time with myself, strong-willed) I know it's no guarantee. I'm happy just to get the chance to attempt this adventure.
- Using a nickname is a good way to remain anonymous and stay safe - you never know who you'll meet. I'd like to use "Pez", but since I plan to carry some of my holiday booze cakes with me I just might end up as "Fruit Cake"! hahaha
- I'll put my final packing list on the website for anyone curious, but also to help my Base Camp to remember what I'm carrying in case I need replacements.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

**Why SOBO?** Starting in Georgia as a NOBO is certainly appealing, and it's what most people do (especially first-timers). I like being different! Well, mostly it's because my schedule couldn't accommodate leaving in March or April, the best time for me was June, which meant I had to be a SOBO.

### Why does schedule dictate direction?

Winter can start in October in New England, and Baxter State Park in Maine (the terminus) closes October 15. Planning backwards, you'd have to leave by April to make it in time. Starting from Maine you just have to wait for the park to open on June 1. Springer Mtn in Georgia has no such schedule.

**What is a hammock tent?** My good friend Adam gave me a Hennessy Hammock as a gift, and it just so happens to be a very popular concept on the AT (somehow he knew!). As long as you have two trees you have a campsite. It's a hammock made of tent material, screened in, with a detachable rain-fly, and surprisingly comfortable.



**What about animals?** Black bears, moose, beavers, porcupines, bobcat, coyote, snakes, and my personal favorite "feral ponies"! I'm sure I'll see most of these except bobcat. The only real danger comes from being near moose during mating season (when I'll be long gone anyway).

**How much did you plan?** Apart from figuring out what to carry and buying some gear, the planning is pretty basic. Reserve a campsite near Katahdin, figure out how to get to Maine,

then just start walking! There will be lots of time to contemplate how to get back from Georgia. Additionally, lots of reading ahead of time, learn what to expect, and carry the trail guide.

**What if you get hurt?** I will not have a cell phone, it's not worth it. If I'm immobile, eventually someone will come along and go for help. And besides, I'm a Boy Scout, First Aid certified and will have duct tape (plus I'm very stubborn!).

**Will you bring a camera/journal?** Of course! I will have my pocket sized digital camera with me and will also take notes of my journey! Knowing me, you can expect the story and the pictures to be made public at some point! I will have enough memory cards to last the trip and will recharge batteries in town.

**What next?** Presumably I'll return to employment (wherever that may be), but I do still have my eye on cycling across the US, the Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide!

## Appendix

### What I've Read (see website for my reviews)

*Walking the Appalachian Trail*, Larry Luxenberg, 1995.

*Long Distance Hiking: Lessons from the Appalachian Trail*, Roland Mueser, 1998.

*A Walk in the Woods*, Bill Bryson, 1999.

*The Appalachian Trail: How to Prepare For & Hike It*, Jan D. Curran, 2002.

*Guide to the Appalachian Trail*, Jim Chase, 2005

*Appalachian Trail Thru-Hikers' Companion*, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 2007.

### Official Sponsor, Online Status and Story:

<http://SuicidalSlinky.com/sobomega/>

### Internet Resources

<http://whiteblaze.net/>

<http://www.appalachiantrail.org>

### Base Camp

Andrea/Adam/Sara: [sobomega@sarzynski.com](mailto:sobomega@sarzynski.com)  
Call or email for address information