

Feature Story

HOW NOT TO HIKE THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL BY EVERGREEN MEMBER JUDE FENWICK

Hike the Appalachian Trail, at our age, with these knees or hips or heart? What were we thinking? It's on my sister's bucket list. That's why four old broads hit the trail annually to hike along the majestic, sometimes perilous path stretching from Georgia to Maine. Jane, whose quest we pursue, is 10 yrs older than me - I'm in my late 60's. We are joined by our baby sister, Joan, and our cousin, Mary, they are youngsters at 66. We made a pact to hike a portion of the AT in every state.

Jane picked to hike in Maryland and West Virginia. **We stayed with Evergreeners Fred & Millie Wells. They were gracious, knowledgeable, and gave helpful advice on how to get around. They were marvelous conversationalists and knew the best place for ice cream!**

As casual hikers, we aimed to do 2-5 miles both days. How far we really hiked is no one's business. Hiking the AT at all earns bragging rights.

We spent our first day in Harpers Ferry. We went to the Conservation Headquarters to meet some *through hikers*, our real heroes. At the AT Center, Joan quipped; "We should ask some through hikers if we can borrow their equipment and take a photo and post it on Facebook." I laughed at the idea, but within minutes four hikers stepped up, loaded us with their gear. Our new friends took our photo. It was posted the same day!

We began our trek on the bridge to Maryland. It was probably a quarter of a mile long. Twenty minutes later in Maryland, we had completed our mission. After conferencing together we returned to town to find restrooms and lunch.

After the restroom stop, Joan got directions to the *real* AT (apparently what little we hiked did not count as true AT hiking). Therefore, no lunch. She led us to the trail behind the St Peter Catholic Church up to Jefferson Rock, so named because Thomas Jefferson wrote that he could see a hundred miles from the plateau above the confluence of Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. It was a lovely view - after quite an uphill climb.

I was ready to go back to the car – but... "No." Joan insisted this was a shortcut to the car. I was okay when we were hiking asphalt, steel bridges and level land, but these were slippery rocks, lots of them. Some were boulders. We took a narrow pathway, littered with gravel and snow runoff from higher elevations. I felt certain my orthopedic doctor would not approve.

After an hour of climbing we were deep in the woods staggering over the boulders, slipping in wet gravel. At this juncture, we considered taking an Uber back to our car, but it was such a blow to our egos; we passed and tramped on.

Another 30 minutes and we reached a fork. There was a sign stating the parking lot with our car was 1.5 miles "that way". The other was a rocky, slippery, scary channel that led straight down the mountain to the parking lot. I hiked a stretch to scope it out and returned insisting no one in their right mind would dare hike that way.

We were tired, sweaty, thirsty and hungry. We didn't bother conferring at this point. Jane, with her titanium knees and newly opened arteries was determined to get down that hill. She pretty much said, "get out of my way" and despite objections, took the hazardous path. It took 20 minutes of crawling, straining, and cussing to navigate our way to the road. But soon, we were in the car driving to lunch discussing where to hike the next day. 🌲

