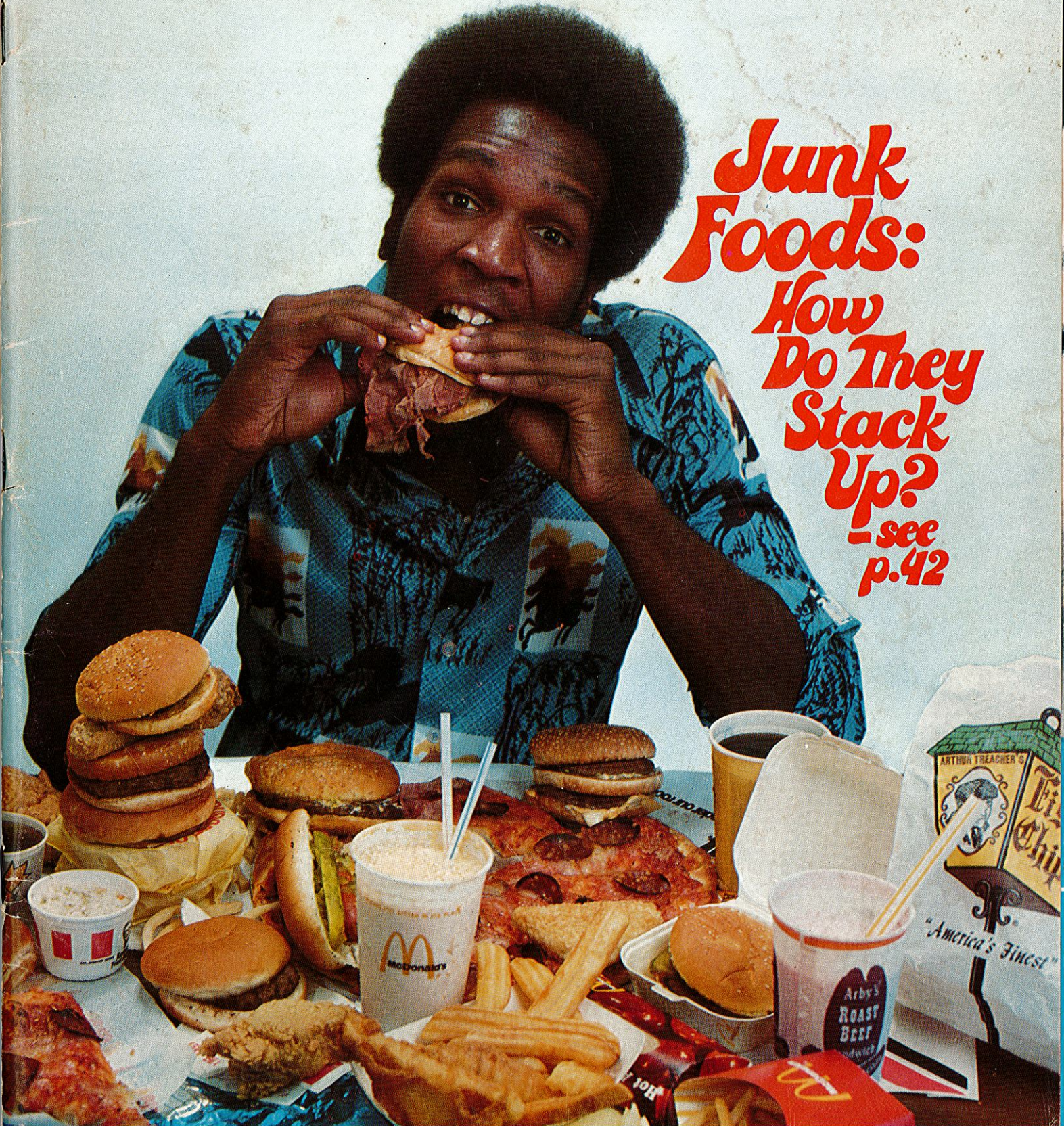


Campus Life

August/September 1976

*Junk
Foods:
How
Do They
Stack
Up?
- see
p.42*





Mt. Katahdin, Maine, and Springer Mountain, Georgia, are tied by a 2,045-mile wilderness trail. My walk made quite a graduation present.

Why drive when you can walk?



“Where are ya headin’?” a sandaled tourist asked me. I had just walked down a mountain path to a small country store in Virginia.

“Georgia,” I said, brushing the dust off my tattered blue-jean shorts.

“Oh, really?” the tourist exclaimed. “And where did you hike from?”

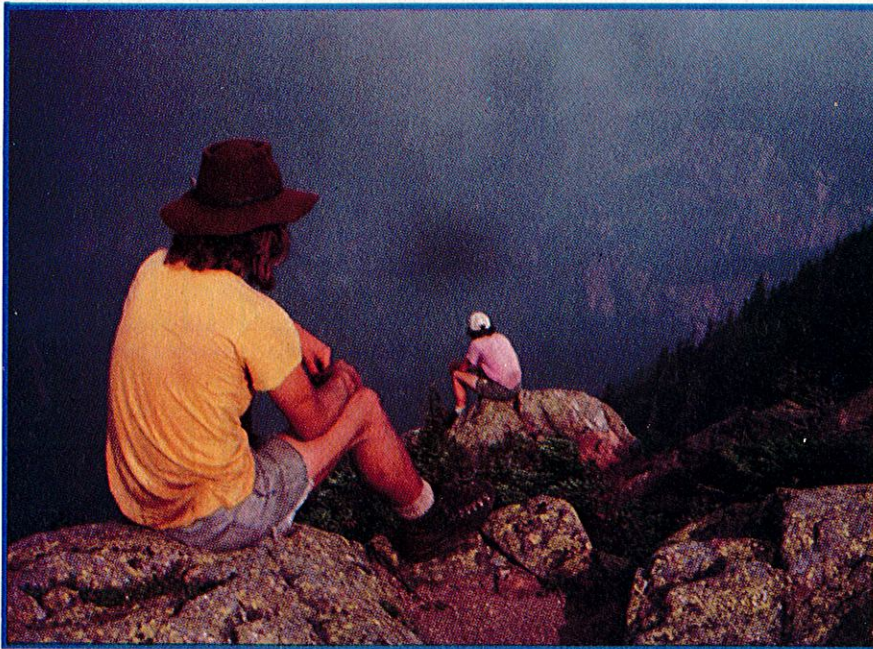
“Maine.”

“Oh, did you hitchhike down?”

“No, I walked. I’ve been on the Appalachian Trail for 120 days now, just seeing the country one day at a time.”

“Huh,” the tourist finally replied, puffing on a cigarette and adjusting the camera that hung from his neck. “That’s quite a feat, but I just can’t see doing something like that. Why walk when you can just drive? I see lots of mountains and stuff from the road.”

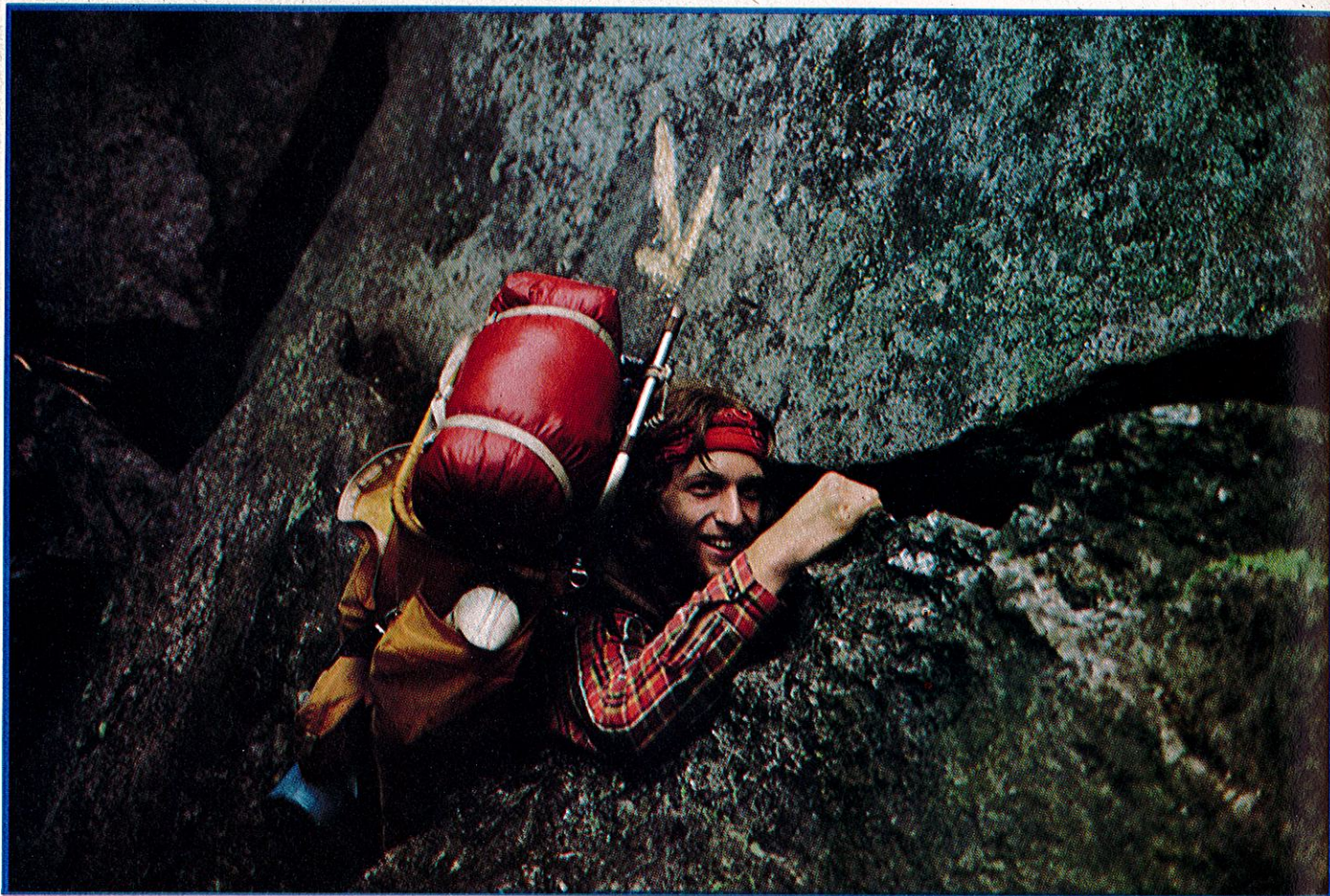
I assured him hiking was the only way to go, but I doubt I



convinced him. He got into his silver Mercury and drove off, leaving a cloud of dust.

He had a good question. Why walk from Maine to Georgia, over a period of five months, when one can drive the distance in a couple days? But backpacking is not merely getting from one place to another. It's learning all the lessons that go along with taking the slowest form of transportation: your legs. For me, it was the best experience of my life — 2,045 miles of it.

My journey began June 16, 1975, when I jetted from my home in Tallahassee, Florida, to Bangor, Maine, a five-hour flight, but a five-month walk back home. My partner was Eric Heinrich, from Clermont, Florida, the friend who



"You've got to be kidding!" laughs Tim Keller as he attempts to squeeze through a cracked boulder in Mahoosuc Notch, Maine, one of the roughest sections of the trail. The white arrow painted on the rock is the only indication of where the trail passes. Above: Author Doug Alderson and Eric Heinrich scan gloomy expanses of the Great Gulf Wilderness in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Although Doug and Eric started the hike together, disagreements separated them. Doug finished most of the hike with Tim Keller, one of many hikers he became friends with on the trail.

first lit the spark in me about hiking the Appalachian Trail.

I had just graduated from high school. I had many questions. My goals in life? My future? Was there a God? I thought the answers might lie in the beautiful wilderness ahead. There had to be more to life than money, TV, parties and getting high. In a sense, my hike

was a search for inner peace, a journey to find myself.

The Beginning of a New Life

As I gazed upon Mt. Katahdin (5,264 feet) for the first time, I wondered if I was ready to take on such a challenge. I was a greenhorn. My only previous hike was a five-day excursion in the North Georgia mountains. Was I prepared for a five-month hike?

The climb up Katahdin made me wonder. It was the steepest and roughest ascent we were to encounter on the whole trail. We climbed hand over hand, in some instances holding onto metal spikes driven into huge boulders. The weather-beaten sign at the top read "Katahdin . . . Northern Terminus of the Appalachian Trail."

The view was breathtaking. Other rocky mountains and ridges were scattered below, and shimmering lakes in the valleys were like mirrors, reflecting the sun when it eased out from behind the clouds. A surge of wind rose from the west, blowing an eerie white mist over a sheer rock cliff called "The Knife Edge." Two hawks soared from their nests in the barren rocks below. I sat taking it all in while resting my weary muscles and nursing four golf-ball-sized blisters on my heels.

As my eyes scanned the dark green wilderness, a surge of confidence rose in me. I had climbed the massive mountain I had gazed upon with awe only the day before. My confidence continued to grow. "I can make today" was a saying we lived by. We had to get our heads out of tomorrow so we could live and enjoy each day.

The first section in Maine was the longest portion of the trail free of man-made interference — nine days of total wilderness. I saw beauty I had seen only in movies and pictures. My childhood dreams of walking the mountains and forests as the early pioneers and Indians had were coming true.

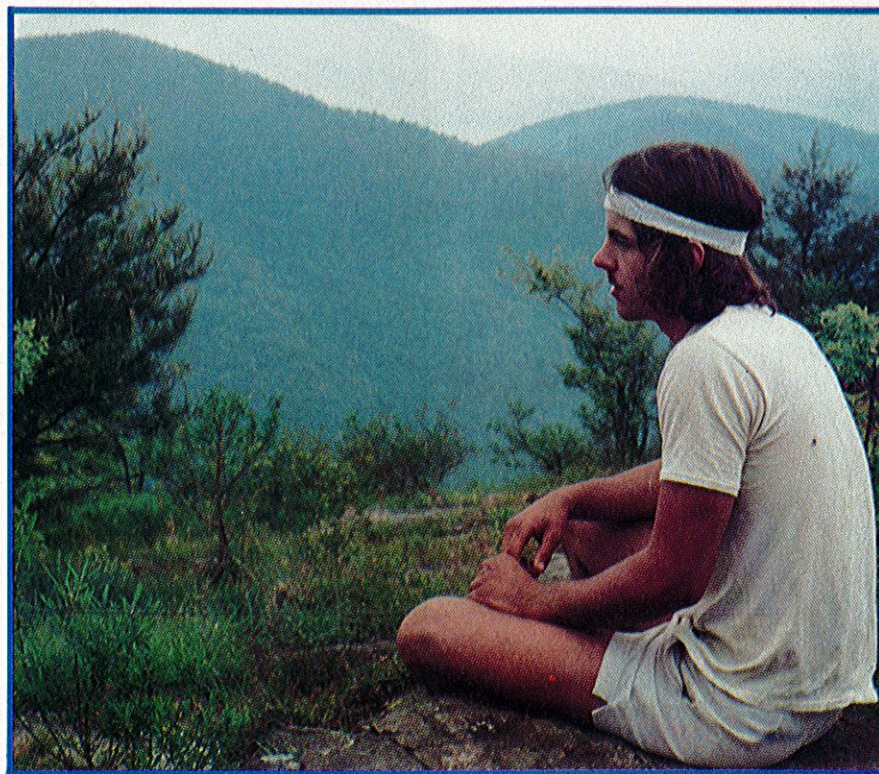
A beautiful feeling was growing inside, something I had never experienced before. It was like being in love, not with one person but with nature: the birds, trees, clouds, lakes, deer, mountains. I soon became aware of a force much greater than that of man, for there were natural creations all around

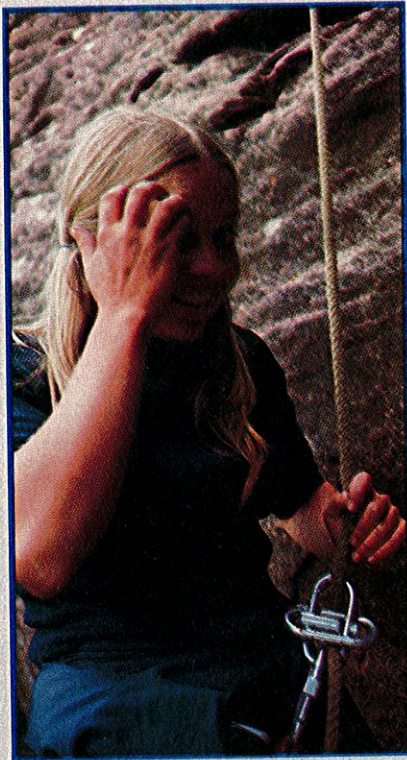
me from the ground to the sky. I was in a world only God could create. The mountains were my skyscrapers; trees replaced houses. I had a forest floor instead of concrete, millions of animals substituted for people, pure mountain streams cut out the kitchen sink and sounds of birds and waterfalls replaced honking horns, TV and radio.

Ahhh! No-see-ums!

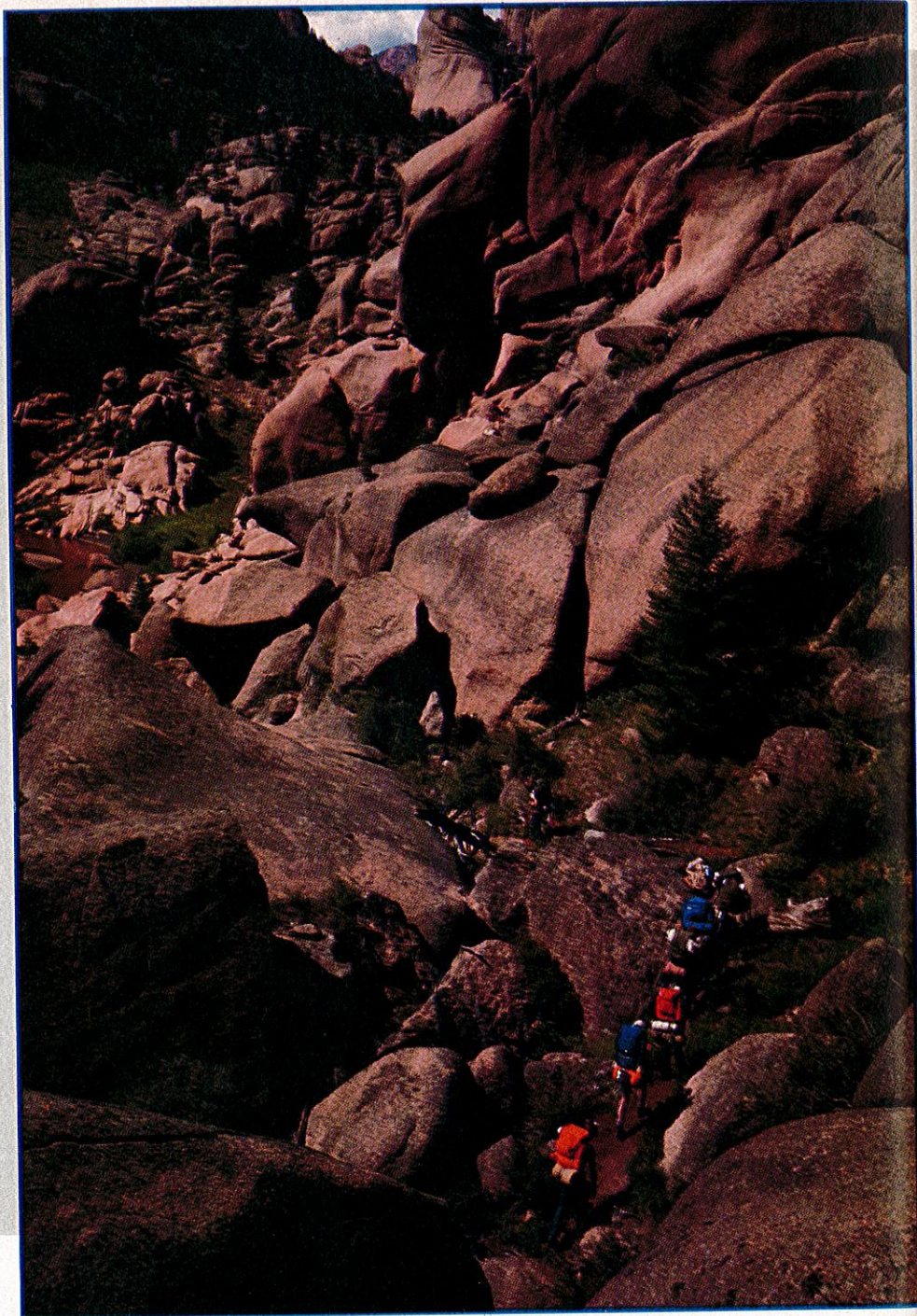
One place in Maine will always haunt my mind. Mahar Landing is about 40 miles from Katahdin. Eric and I fell in with a group from Wilmington, Delaware: Bill Theis, 34, his son Brian, 15, and Burley Melton, 14. We set up camp for the night on a lovely clear-blue lake surrounded by white birch

The greatest enemy of the long distance hiker? "Loneliness and mental fatigue," Doug Alderson says. But Tennessee sunsets like the one above, glimpsed through trees already leaflessly ready for winter, never failed to lift his spirits.





Can a novice survive in the wilderness? After her first rappel in the Colorado Rockies, this one wonders. Going with experienced hikers helps.



and fir trees. During the warm humid day mosquitos and black flies had been unmerciful, but we thought the worst would be over after dark.

Bill and I settled in one tent and Burley, Brian and Eric in the other. Then Bill and I, just getting comfortable, began to slap ourselves. We felt burning sensations, but couldn't see any bugs. We thought we had a serious case of slapitis, due to the millions of bugs we had swatted at during the day. The invisible bites continued, and we started to scream in agony. From the other tent we could hear only laughter.

"No-see-ums!!" we both cried out as we finally figured out the new menace — bugs so small they're virtually invisible. "Hey,

you guys have room for two more?" we yelled to the other tent. We knew Burley's tent had a finer mosquito net to keep out the no-see-ums.

It was very uncomfortable sleeping five people in a two-man tent, with legs over legs, body odor, humidity, snoring and suffocation. We started walking at four a.m. the next morning and literally ran 11 miles to Cooper Falls lean-to, mainly because the black flies and mosquitos wake up around five a.m.

The lean-to, one of over 300 three-sided cabins built along the Appalachian Trail, was located at the foot of a tumbling 60-foot

waterfall, and was — amazingly — free of bugs. It was like walking from hell to heaven in one day.

Mental Stress

"The first 400 miles of the Appalachian Trail is physical. Then 99 per cent of the rest is mental," commented a hiker who nicknamed himself "Lightning Dave." Lightning started the trail in Georgia. We met him in Vermont, when he strolled into camp at 10 p.m. guided by his trusty flashlight. "I'm warning you guys, the mental part will get to ya," he drawled.

I found out that his warning was all too true. As the trail started

Summer Dreaming

■ Even if backpacking is just beginning to tempt you, you can take up the least strenuous part: dreaming. What do backpackers do all winter? If they're not cross-country skiing, they're holed up with maps, books and catalogs dreaming about where they'll go next summer. Anticipation is half the fun.

Where? Best known and biggest backpacking areas are the Sierra Nevada in California, the Cascades and Olympics in Washington, the Rockies in Colorado and the Appalachian Trail. Pick your trail from any one of many guidebooks. Once you know where you want to go, you can groove on a "topo" — the incredibly detailed maps put out by the National Geological Survey. If there isn't a backpacking store nearby to sell them, for states east of the Mississippi write to: Map Distribution Branch, U.S. Geological Survey, 1200 S. Eads St., Arlington, Virginia 22202. For states west of the Mississippi, including Alaska and Hawaii, write to: Map Distribution Center, U.S. Geological Survey, Box 25286, Denver Federal Center, Denver, Colorado 80225. These two places will supply you with free topographic index maps of the states you're interested in, from which

you can order more detailed maps at \$1.25 each.

Equipment: Many backpackers are catalog junkies, spending hours pouring over the latest mail-order equipment. For a sampling:

Recreational Equipment Co-op, P.O. Box 22090, Seattle, Washington 98122.

The North Face, 1234 Fifth St., Berkeley, California 94710.

Frostline Kits, 452 Burbank, Broomfield, Colorado 80020.

Co-op Wilderness Supply, 1432 University Ave., Berkeley, California 94702.

Eastern Mountain Sports, Box 178, 1047 Comm Ave., Boston, Massachusetts 02215 (send \$1).

How-to: The library should offer several books — and now that backpacking is booming, so is the backpacking book business. There is also a magazine, *Backpacker*. Write for information at 65 Adams St., Bedford Hills, New York 10507.

Can a novice survive? Yes, if he has proper equipment (most backpacking stores rent it) and a strong sense of his own limits. Most essential: learn how to stay warm and dry in a storm, and be very cautious about crossing streams or climbing rocks. But best is to begin hiking with someone experienced. ■

flattening out south of New Hampshire, the mental stress started bringing me down. I was getting very homesick and restless. I began to think about the mileage too much.

Eric and I only averaged around 10 miles a day through rugged Maine and New Hampshire. Now I wanted to increase our average drastically. Eric and I disagreed and finally split up at the 500-mile point in Vermont. It is hard to hike with one person day and night without getting tired of him and disagreeing on a few things. It is as hard as a marriage. I set out alone and became very depressed. But Mother Nature does not like to be ignored. The pleasant, green, rolling mountains of Vermont, some tranquilizing swims in the

cool ponds during blistering hot July days and some wonderful people along the trail lifted my spirits once again towards the sky and the mountains.

People come from all over the country to hike the trail: all ages, backgrounds and occupations. Most of those I met had very little money or food, but they shared what they had, including their true selves. Nobody cared whether someone made \$500 or \$50,000 a year — here there were no big houses or cars to set us apart.

Older people were no exception. I will always remember the 86-year-old man I met in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. He was hiking from Georgia to Maine and it had taken him two years already, averaging around

four or five miles a day. "I'm planning on setting a record for the slowest time anyone has ever walked the trail," he chuckled.

Sheer determination was what made 62-year-old Stan Rokus put one foot in front of the other for 2,500 miles. Starting his long trudge from Pensacola, Florida, because he "didn't know where the trail started," Stan walked on highways to Springer Mountain, Georgia, where he started the Appalachian Trail. When we met in Connecticut he looked very old and tired, leaning on his two walking sticks, wiping the sweat off his wrinkled and gray-bearded face. But he talked as if he were young again.

He told me he had black lung disease, an affliction he received from working many years in a Mildred, Pennsylvania, coal mine. "I want to hike the entire trail, to see the country and talk to the people before I die," he said, with a dreamy look in his eyes. "I didn't know a thing about the trail before I started, but I made it this far and I know I'll make it all the way to Katahdin." Four months after our meeting in Connecticut Stan did make it all the way to Mt. Katahdin and climbed the last mountain of his journey, but with some help; he started going blind on the way up.

The Appalachian Trail passes through many small towns. There were countless occasions when people put me up in their homes, fed me and let me wash off the trail dust. When I was living at home I never really appreciated a hot shower, home-cooked meals or a soft bed. Now just a friendly chat with someone as I passed through a town was enough to pick me up on lonely days. With each new person I met and talked to, I grew from the inside. I started becoming more of an extrovert and a caring person. I tried to share my few belongings freely with others and lend a helping hand if needed. I felt a great joy when I could help others because I knew what it was like to feel totally dependent on people, depressed and in need of help.

Rain, Aching Feet and Roads

In Pennsylvania I rested my sore feet for three days, and then
(continued on page 66)

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Why Drive When You Can Walk (continued from page 53)

went on again. By then it was after Labor Day and I could walk three or four days at a time without seeing a person. After a couple of days alone I started talking to the trees, deer and birds. When I finally did meet someone I would talk his ears off for a couple hours to see if I could still speak.

The long hours of solitude in the forest gave me time to really think back through my life and help plan the future. I got to know my inner self much better for there was no one to influence me. My parents and I became very close through letters. I started revealing more of myself to them, mainly because I was finding out more.

Even though I became very lonely at times, hiking alone was a good experience for me. However, I would hesitate to try it again. I found that much of the enjoyment of the trail came through sharing the experience with someone else. I became very homesick for my human friends, especially girls. To

keep from quitting I had to say to myself during down periods that "things will get better." They always did. If I had quit I would have missed out on many important lessons and experiences. Worse, I would have let myself down.

Hey! Who Stole My Lighter?

One night at Mosby Shelter in Northern Virginia, I awakened to find a big rat chewing on my hair. He proceeded to run off with my lighter. Five minutes later he returned and gave me a thermometer. Later I found out that this creature was a pack rat, Herman, who had been trading with hikers for years. Don Hornstein, another hiking friend, told me the same rat stole his \$100 watch and brought back a piece of orange yarn. I think I got the better deal.

There were plenty of animal encounters. A friend of mine awakened one night in Maine with a black bear licking his face. Tim Keller had his



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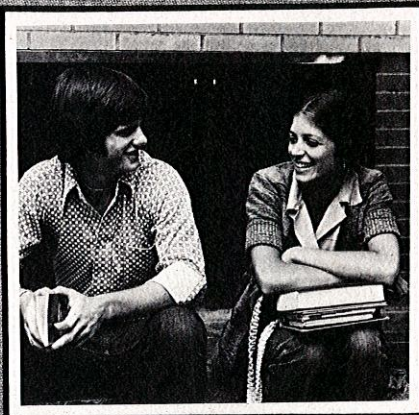
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pack chewed on by a bear in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, but when the bear bit into a tube of Ben-Gay, he ran away. Tim also found a rat sleeping in his hand one night. Once, while resting in the White Mountains, I felt something tickle my foot. When I looked, I found a big rabbit nibbling on my sock while I was still wearing it!

Misery Is: the Wrong Kind of Toilet Paper

The Shenandoah Mountains of Virginia were a welcome change. Once again the mountains exceeded 4,000 feet in elevation. The foliage was just starting to change colors — fall was coming. The beauty was somewhat counteracted by an accident with poison ivy. One night as I tramped through the woods for a call of nature, I found I had no toilet paper. Naturally, I used leaves as the early settlers and Indians once did. Obviously, to my dismay, I used the wrong kind of leaves and I suffered for two weeks.

"Rain" is a curse word that should never be spoken to hikers, and I hit five straight days of #&%* in the Blue Ridge. I found out later Hurricane Eloise was the culprit. Rain, Mother Nature's blood, flows over the land giving life to all living things, but

hiking in it for days on end makes one feel like giving up on life.

Tim, a new companion, and I were almost washed away trying to cross a river below the Lynchburg Dam. The bridge had washed out a half hour before. We slowly waded into the churning water. There was no seeing how deep it was, and I almost panicked as the strong current rose past my waist, almost lifting me off my feet. Our heavy backpacks were the only thing that held us down, but if we had fallen the weight would have surely dragged us to our death. Every second seemed like minutes as we inched our way to the other side. It was our closest call with death.

For three more days we climbed over steep mountains, finding only a view of white mist in every direction and a chilling rain hitting our face for our reward. The trail was muddy and our boots wet. I felt like quitting.

But when the rain finally cleared, there were days I wished would never end. The weather was usually crisp and clear, people friendly. Sometimes my surroundings were so beautiful I would almost cry. I took hundreds of pictures but they never truly captured the feeling of looking out over hundreds of miles of wilderness, day-

dreaming while watching a hawk sail in the wind or the morning sun peek out over the treetops.

The Smell of Springer

The smell of Springer Mountain became stronger as we pushed ourselves for four consecutive 18-mile days. We really wanted to complete our hike; five months is a long time to be away from home, friends — and girls. Some nights we would sit up and yell out into the night just to hear the echo come back to us. At times I thought we were going a little wacky. We rarely saw anyone as the temperature dropped in late October and early November.

Due to the lack of hikers during the cold weather, the mice became extremely wicked. Our entertainment came every night as we watched the little acrobats swing from the rafters of the lean-tos and drop down on our packs to search for goodies. On many occasions we were awakened by a mouse or two crawling over our heads. Tim's loud snoring kept most of the other larger pests from coming too close to the lean-to.

A friend of mine from Tallahassee, Ken Mick, 46, came up to hike with me the last two days of my journey and to

take me home. We had to wait an extra day because I was violently sick with food poisoning. We finally got under way November 12 during a rainstorm.

That night at Hawk Mountain lean-to, the temperature dropped down to about 20 degrees. The next morning, November 13, the last day of my hike, everything was frozen solid — my clothes, still wet from the previous day's rain, canteens, boots — everything. It was the coldest day we experienced on the whole trail. On the way up Springer Mountain snow began to fall like confetti, seeming to congratulate us for reaching our long-awaited goal.

Climbing up that last mountain, I felt as if I were once again climbing Katahdin on the first day of my hike.

As I reached the sign on the summit that said "Springer Mountain, Southern Terminus of the Appalachian Trail" I felt a great sense of accomplishment. After all the yelling, shaking hands and picture-taking had died down, I remembered all the days when I thought I would never see the end. I would never trade the feeling of standing on top of Springer Mountain for any amount of money.

Civilization: the Changes

When I came home, it seemed very strange, a place so familiar, yet distant and alien. Even my own dog looked at me strangely, as if asking, "Where have you been? You look different."

Yet I had found what I searched for: peace from within and from God. Money didn't matter much. I was more my own person. I liked what I saw in myself. It was evident that many of my friends didn't like themselves.

It was hard to adjust to my old friends and their ways: a modern-day society, parties, dope, booze, materialism and boredom. Some of my friends were completely wasted, their minds blown away by drugs and booze. It made me sick. I wondered if I would have been like them if I had stayed home instead of living with nature.

It was hard to explain my journey to my friends. I'd show them my pictures and tell them a bit about the trip, but there was no way they could understand all the things I had experienced. A few did become very interested, though. They were frustrated with civilization and the hassles that go with it, and when I told them of my adventure I could see a glow in their eyes. After a lot of questions, they would say to me with a determined look on their face, "I'm going to do that someday." When they said that I almost became envious. I wished I were starting all over again on a 2,045-mile journey on the Appalachian Trail — searching for myself. ■

What to do when "everyone else is doing it."

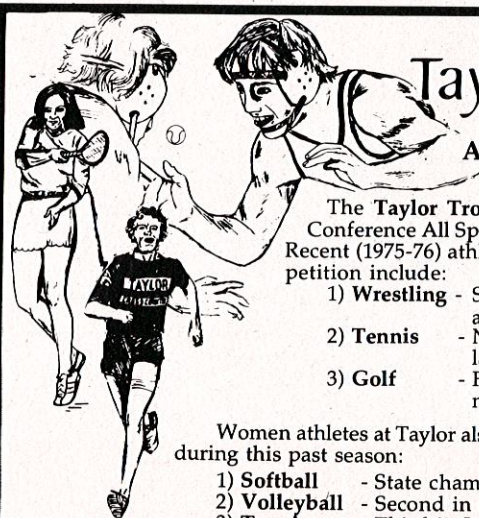
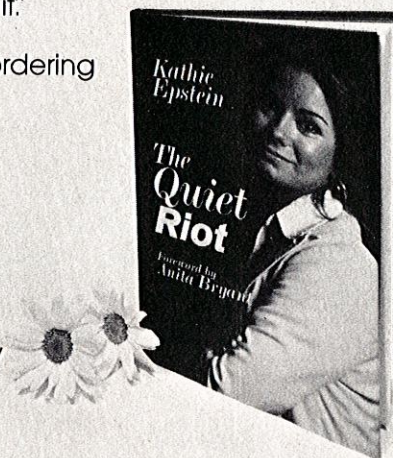
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