

# AT between Pinkham Notch and Madison Spring Hut, NH

This trip log is very difficult for me to write for a number of reasons: I'm doing this from memory; I had to get rescued on this trip; I realized that I'm probably not going to complete my goal of section hiking the Appalachian Trail. The goal was to hike from Pinkham Notch, NH to Franconia Notch, NH. This was a north to south 54 mile hike. Normally, this sounded doable in a 2 week period. But this was the White Mountains, where you have to double the amount of time it takes from point A to point B. I was apprehensive about this section, having read the book Not Without Peril, which chronicled the over 150 people that have died by various means in the White Mountains in the last 150 years.

Three months prior to this hike my wife and I had separated, I had not been working out and was eating poorly during this period, my job was very stressful the month or so before this trip and the person that I was supposed to hike this one with informed me that he was not going to be able to make it a few days before the hike. So I was not in the best frame of mind to do this hike. And since we were going to stage a vehicle at the halfway point with supplies I had to carry twice as much food as I originally intended.

Even with this 'baggage' I decided to do the hike anyway as I wanted to complete the AT as soon as possible. So I drove up to Pinkham Notch, NH and stayed at Joe Dodge Lodge the night before the hike. I slept well that night.

**06/02/2010-** That morning I ate a good breakfast at the lodge cafeteria. Then I walked outside and started up the trail. I only had 7.8 miles to do today. I thought that it shouldn't be that difficult. The sign on the trail just south of the lodge said that if you weren't in shape, had adequate food and clothing, that you should turn back. I didn't. The AT goes along trails with other names in the Whites. I believe I started on the Old Jackson RD trail. The trail had a lot of dips, rocks and uneven footing as it was going up. I crossed the auto road going to Mt Washington, then around Lowes Bald Spot. The AT then became Madison Gulf Trail. I went over a swinging bridge over the west branch of the Peabody River. I wanted to get water here but the river was swift moving and the river bed was steep and deep. So I kept going.



I next passed the Osgood Tentsite and turned left onto the Osgood Trail. I should have gotten water here but I didn't. I figured I had about 3 or 4 miles to go and I should be OK. The trail immediately started a very steep up which seemed to last forever. I was getting tired and was drinking a lot of water. The combination of the heavy pack, the steep up and me being out of shape was making me very tired. Looking at the map as I write this it looks like it was a 2200 foot elevation change in about 2 miles.

I endured this big up and my water was getting low. Then, when I thought I was on top of this mountain, I entered the area above treeline. It was nothing but massive boulder flow for the next mile and another 500 feet in elevation change. And since I was on top of the mountain the wind was blowing like crazy. I was getting weak now. I dropped my clip-ons between the boulders and did not bother to retrieve them. I ran out of water. I kept going for awhile but was getting weaker and weaker. I fell at one point and skinned my knees on the rocks. I tried calling the AMC for help but had no cell service. So I kept climbing.

I bummed water off of hikers coming the opposite way. At one point a hiker showed me where off in the distance that Madison Hut, my destination for the night, was. But I had to hike over this boulder flow and up over Mount Madison before I could get to the Hut. It was like a semi-circle on the way to Mount Washington. It was now 3:00 PM. I should have been at the shelter by now. I was worried about being out here at night. I tried the cell phone again and I got through to the AMC. I said that I had run out of water and was feeling disoriented. I asked if they could send someone out from the hut to get me. I just sat on a rock for awhile. A thru hiker that I met at the lodge the previous evening passed me. I told him to tell the lodge where I was. I tried continuing up the boulder flow mountain but was not making very much progress. About an hour later I got a call from the hut. They were sending 2 guys out to walk me to the hut. I got a call from them a half hour later verifying where I was. I then saw them in the distance. They got to me after 4:00 PM. Thank God that it was warm out and not raining.

When the two guys from the hut got to me they gave me some water. One of them took my pack and gave me his lighter pack to wear. They both encouraged me along the way. However, since I was tired. I went very slow. I knew that they were exasperated with me but I was going as fast as I could. When we got near the top of Mount Madison we took a short cut trail called the Parapet Trail. It was awful. I had to pull myself up over rocks and used the last



of my strength to do so. We had to take this awful trail around the peak, turn onto another trail whose name escapes me, pass a pond, then arrive at the Madison Hut.

While the two young guys from the hut were bringing me in the 2 way radios that they were wearing were chattering a lot. They recognized the voice of one of the people on the radio and commented that he didn't sound right. As we were listening in the base asked that person what was the status of the person that he was with. His response was: "I don't think that he is with us anymore." I asked my rescuers what was going on and they told me that someone had fallen down a waterfall. I was very upset then. I told them that if they hadn't showed up to rescue me, there may have been 2 fatalities in The Whites that day. They didn't respond to my comment.

We arrived around 8:00 PM at Madison Hut. It was after dinner. There were about 30-35 people in the hut. They had already eaten dinner. They clapped as my rescuers and I entered the hut. I was embarrassed. I thanked my rescuers numerous times as we ate dinner together. We all retired shortly thereafter for bed. I was dog tired and slept well.

**06/03/2010**-The next morning I asked one of my rescuers if he thought that I could make it to Mount Washington and the Lake of the Clouds hut from where we were. It was only 7.1 miles but there was another 1,500 to 2,000 foot elevation change involved. He looked me in the eye and said he didn't think so. Then I asked what was the shortest route off of the mountain. He recommended the Valley Way Trail, which led from the hut down to US2. It was 3,700 feet down over 3.5 miles. This was the route that the "croc" took to deliver supplies to the hut once a week.

So I took this trail down that morning. The weather was good. I was actually relieved that I would not have to endure another grueling day of ups. I passed numerous college students with big wooden packs on their back that were ascending the mountain to bring up supplies for the hut. They were not even breaking a sweat. I took plenty of breaks along the way and saw numerous birds and chipmonks. When I got down to the the bottom of the mountain and US2, I waited for a short time and an AMC shuttle came by. I took it back to Joe Dodge Lodge. At this point I'm not sure but I believe that I stayed at Joe Dodge Lodge again that night.

**06/04/2010**- I'm not certain what I did at this point but I believe that I spent



another night at a motel in North Conway, NH. I shopped, I drove the Kancamagus Highway and did a bunch of other stuff. I didn't want to drive home just yet. I had to process what had happened.

**06/05/2010-** I drove home to VA. I was devastated over what happened. Up until then I felt that I could conquer anything. I began to have self doubts about myself. I wasn't sure if my section hiking days were over or not. It would take me a couple of years before I got the courage to set foot on the AT in New Hampshire again.

Mike C



*Sign at Pinkham Notch, NH.  
By Mike Calabrese*



*Climbing Old Jackson RD Trail, NH.  
By Mike Calabrese*



*Rough Old Jackson RD Trail, NH.  
By Mike Calabrese*



*Trail intersection.  
By Mike Calabrese*



*Bridge over W Branch, Peabody River, NH.  
By Mike Calabrese*



*Old Madison Spring Hut, NH.  
By Mike Calabrese*

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