

2010 Long Trail Unsupported Speed Hike

It was September 4, 2010, and I was in Orford, New Hampshire, attending the wedding of Andrew Thompson – Appalachian Trail record holder – and Bethany Charron. It was a beautiful wedding and the experience left me overflowing with emotion.

I would begin my pursuit of an unsupported record on the Long Trail – a 272.7 mile long distance hiking trail in Vermont – several days later and needed all the motivation possible.

On Sunday, September 5, several of the Thompsons' friends and family stayed for games, food, and fun. Later in the evening I went over my strategy with Andrew and Jonathan Basham. Basham set the supported Long Trail record the preceding year and I was part of his crew. Andrew and Jonathan have years of speed hiking experience (both have finished the grueling Barkley Marathons along with many other achievements) so I wanted their input.

We decided it was not a good idea to divide the hike into seven hiking days – my original plan – at an average 39 miles per day. Given the demands of this hike they thought I should go for an eight day hike and average 34.5 miles per day.

Each day would not be exactly 34.5 since I would be relying on shelters rather than carrying a tent. After dividing the Long Trail into eight days, as even as possible according to shelters, we calculated my last day at 29 miles.

With an 8 a.m. start on Tuesday, September 7, this would leave me an option, if my body allowed, of pushing through the night of Monday, September 13, and finishing before 8 a.m. on Tuesday, September 14. If I was able to do this, the hike would take less than seven full days.

The unsupported Long Trail record was held by Demetri Coupounas and stood at 12 days, 19 hours, and 53 minutes. By all indications he was the first person to hike the entire trail completely unsupported. Coupounas set the record on August 18-31, 2004.

The strict rules of an unsupported hike mean I had to carry all my supplies – including food, clothes, headlamp, camera, phone, etc. – from the beginning of the trail to the end of the trail without obtaining additional supplies from an outside source along the way. The exception was water, which I could drink at water sources on or near the trail.

My goal was to lower the record significantly.

The strategy change left my mind racing, but I knew it was my best for a record. After a night with very little sleep, I said good-bye to my wife and closest friends in the morning. The next time I would see any of these people would be at the end of the Long Trail. I wasn't scared, but, given my experience pacing Jonathan to the supported record last year, I knew what this hike was going to take and it was quickly becoming very real.

Kyle Klingman, a friend attending the wedding, drove me up to the northern terminus. Nothing could happen fast enough during the drive. All I wanted was to get to the border and to start my hike.

Kyle did a great job of pre-hike coaching and, if he had not stalled on the way up to the terminus by dragging me into book stores, and, at one point an antique store, I would have missed a last minute text from my wife reminding me to pick up plastic baggies and hot cocoa.

During a stop at a gas station I explained to Kyle that I only had four dollars and that was all the money I planned to carry on the hike. I didn't want to talk about quitting but the four dollars was for a phone call and a possible cup of coffee while waiting for someone to pick me up if things didn't work out. I didn't have a back up plan so Kyle purchased the hot cocoa for me.

The hot cocoa would play a crucial role later in the hike.

We arrived at Journey's End trail at 5 p.m. on Monday, September 6. I prepared everything I would take on the hike to the sound of Public Enemy's "He Got Game." I signed the Journey's End register and left for the shelter.

I would be wearing a Suunto T6 watch with foot pod on the hike, so when I finished the .8 mile hike to Journey's End Shelter I was excited to see that my watch said exactly .8 miles. After some last minute preparations I fell asleep around 7:30 p.m. I slept fairly well, but when it began to rain I became concerned about the condition of the trail.

I woke up around 6 a.m. on Tuesday, September 7. After some breakfast, additional packing, and a hike to the northern terminus, I still had time for a few pictures. At 7:59 a.m. I snapped a picture of my watch next to the northern terminus sign.

DAY 1 Canadian Border - Spruce Ledge Shelter – Tuesday, September 7, 2010
31.7 miles Elevation Gain 10,597 Loss 10,577

I began my record attempt on Tuesday, September, 2010, at 8 a.m. One year prior, to the day, I began this section of trail as a pacer for Jonathan Basham's supported Long Trail record attempt. I felt very content as the first couple miles passed. The trail was better than expected after rain the night before.

The sun popped out shortly after crossing Route 105. When I went to pull my sunglasses down from my forehead I realized they were not there. I debated turning back and getting them but they were at least 40 minutes back. I quickly remembered this was a speed hike and that backtracking was not an option. After dwelling on it for about 10 minutes I remembered something JB (Jonathan Basham's nickname) said on his Long Trail hike: "If it is not positive it's negative. If you want to finish the Long Trail in record time, it all has to be positive."

I would repeat this to myself many more times during the hike.

Shortly before Shooting Star Shelter I hiked up on a girl who appeared to be in her twenties. She was completing her thru-hike but was taking her time in doing so. She had already hiked the southern sections and informed me they were a lot easier than the north. She also asked me if I was with the two guys who flew past her earlier at what she perceived to be a running pace. I explained I was hiking alone and did not know of any other hikers.

As I was climbing up Jay Peak I came across a Northbound thru hiker. I told him he would be finding my sunglasses. After he did not pick up on my subtle hint to write down my address and mail them to me, I told him to enjoy the sunglasses.

"Can't," he said, "I wear prescriptions. The trail always claims something."

I finished the climb up Jay Peak and found a couple carpenters building stairs to the summit. My profession is building so I was curious to check out their work. At this point, with the clear skies and great views, the hiking looked a lot more appetizing than the building.

On the descent down Jay Peak, I caught the two guys I had been told about earlier and I noticed they were carrying some pretty big packs. After some small talk they informed me they were from Wyoming and Florida. They were both attempting to hike the trail in an unsupported fashion and would be camping seven miles further south than I would be that night. As I climbed away from them I couldn't help wondering if they were going for the same record I was.

After a steep ascent up Gilpin Mountain and Domey's Dome I was being barked at by a yellow lab. Her master was a northbound thru hiker checking out Chet's lookout. I decided to give one more effort at getting my glasses back. I told him the story and he wrote down my address. He said the trail had been really good to him and he would make an attempt to get them back to me.

The day became pretty warm and I was stopping for water at every opportunity. It wasn't until the summit of Haystack that I felt like eating something. I had stored some extra food for later since I had covered 21.9 miles without eating.

Around 7:20 p.m., shortly after crossing Route 118, I began using my headlamp. I was moving fairly quickly in the dark until I reached Devil's Gulch. After a tricky scramble through the gulch in the dark I arrived at Spruce Ledge Shelter. I cooked my dinner by the stream and, after cleaning up and filling my bottles with water, I made my way up to the shelter to find two guys were staying there. One was a marketing representative for Thule and the other was a retired auto mechanic who had completed a northbound thru hike with his wife. He was now doing a YO-YO hike and heading back to Massachusetts. I told them what I was doing and apologized for waking them but they were very understanding.

DAY 2 Spruce Ledge - Smugglers Notch – Wednesday, September 8, 2010 **32.6 miles Elevation Gain 9,475 ft Loss 9,488 ft**

I awoke at 3:20 a.m., 10 minutes before my alarm was set to go off. With some oatmeal and coffee in my belly, I hit the trail at 4:10 a.m. Due to the rain and fog the trail was tricky to

navigate through this section but it was really well blazed. Around 5 a.m. I passed a tent with a headlamp on inside. My guess was that it was the two guys from Wyoming and Florida. I would never see them again.

I sent a text update to my wife at the top of Laraway Mountain and descended down to Coddling Hollow Rd. On the way up to Roundtop Shelter I crossed paths with a northbound thru hiker who asked if I was going for the unsupported speed record. I told him I was, and asked him how he knew. He told me he had run into Jeff List – another hiker going for the same record – a couple days earlier. Jeff told him he would be running into me in a few days. Knowing there was another guy on the trail in front, and possibly two guys a couple miles back, all going for the unsupported record, motivated me.

A pretty good rain came down as I crossed Prospect Rock but the sun showed itself as I did the road walk up to Bear Hollow shelter. I fueled up for the ascent at the stream before the shelter because I knew I was getting ready for a big climb. I had paced JB on this section the year before, but it was 3 a.m. and dark then.

Whiteface and Madonna were even more brutal than I had remembered. I ate the last of my day's budgeted food at the top of Madonna and was starting to bonk before Sterling Pond Shelter. I cooked a Lipton dinner at the shelter, using the calories to get the rest of my miles done instead of eating dinner and just going to bed. While eating my dinner I talked to the caretaker about future trail conditions. The descent down to Smuggler's Notch felt great with the help of a belly full of alfredo noodles.

I reached the stream before Smuggler's with enough daylight to have a 10 minute soak in the stream and set up camp under the covered porch in front of the restrooms.

DAY 3 Smuggler's Notch - Montclair Glen Shelter – Thursday, September 9, 2010
34.9 miles Elevation Gain 11,946 ft Loss 10, 892 ft

I woke up before my alarm went off because the rain. My first thought was whether I should cross Mount Mansfield (Vermont's highest point) in this kind of a storm. I went through the normal morning routine and charged into the rain at 4:10 a.m. I started climbing and decided to make a judgment call just below tree line. I learned quickly that I should have found the trailhead the night before because it was not apparent in these conditions.

I found the trailhead on the south side of Route 108 at 4:34 a.m. The climb up Mansfield was a river bed. Just below tree line the rain let up but the wind grew stronger. I made the decision to go for it since there was no sign of lightning. My rain gear was no longer keeping me dry but the cold weather kept me moving. I put my headlight away just below the summit.

The next three miles over The Nose, Forehead, and through the Needle's Eye were extremely technical. I was reminded how quickly my hike could be over when I stepped down on an angled wet rock, slipped, and fell straight down. I then remembered something long distance running

legend David Horton said: "It never always gets worse." He was right. Sometimes it gets better. Better in this case was dropping down to a lower elevation and a little bit easier terrain.

Once I descended to lower elevations I made better time. I didn't see many hikers until shortly after I passed Taylor Lodge. I met a northbound hiker with a big brown beard and eye glasses. After a little small talk I discovered he had been hiking the Appalachian Trail up to Vermont with his dad. When his dad had to get off trail he decided to go up the Long Trail and finish the Appalachian Trail when his dad would be able to as well.

As we were talking I noticed he had on Gore-Tex rain gear. I asked him if he was dry and he replied that he was and that he only had wet feet. As we went opposite directions I couldn't help wondering what it would be like hiking in this rain and not be wet. I would have definitely chosen Gore-Tex rain gear over the lighter weight rain gear that I had.

On the climb up to Puffer Shelter I heard something that sounded like a tug boat horn. I figured it must be from a town or logging operation. At 10:40 a.m. I stepped out of the rain at Puffer Shelter just long enough to grab a bar and check the map. When I heard the tug boat sound again on top of Bolton Mountain I determined it was probably a moose.

The descent down to Bolton Notch Rd. really drug on. The trail was like a river bed but once I reached the road the rain had subsided. I was running low on the day's budgeted food so I decided I would cook a Lipton dinner once I reached Duxbury Rd. I felt it was the best use of the calories to get over Camel's Hump but to go to bed hungry once I had reached the shelter.

I could boil two cups of water, throw in the noodles, put the stove away, and be hiking while eating in less than seven minutes. It was most convenient if the hiking was flat. I inhaled the noodles and still had more road hiking so I took the opportunity to hike and text an update to my wife.

I began the eight mile section to Montclair Glen Shelter at 5:00 p.m. I started the section hiking aggressively so I could beat the storm coming. When I reached Bamforth Ridge Shelter I was still feeling good from the noodles and it was just beginning to mist. The rain and fog came in strong and I was running scared along the ridge. I started to bonk below the summit so I ate my last bar for the day. I also had to stop, take off my pack, grab my headlamp, and put my rain jacket on. The rain was really coming down and I got so cold so fast that I could not afford to stop again. When I crested the summit the wind blew my hood off. It almost blew my visor and headlamp off as well. I put the visor away and cinched my headlamp tighter. I did not want to think about the consequences of a broken headlamp.

The conditions improved slightly once I was under tree line. It was warmer without the wind but I was at a snail's pace trying to navigate through the rain, fog, and slippery terrain.

When I reached Montclair Glen Shelter at 9 p.m., I felt fortunate to have made it over Mansfield and Camel's Hump in that kind of weather. I was over the highest peaks and it comforted me to know I would not have to go through conditions like that again.

As I walked to the shelter I could see people staying there. Two guys from Boston were still up and awake. I explained what I was doing and apologized for coming in so late and leaving so early. I finished the day with a wet sleeping bag. A small grocery sack would have prevented this. This would be the second thing that I would have carried extra.

DAY 4 Montclair Glen - Emily Proctor 32.6 miles – Friday, September 10, 2010
Elevation Gain 10,259 ft Loss 9,744

This was the most difficult morning of the entire hike. I awoke before my alarm again. This time because I was lying in a wet sleeping bag with the wind slicing through holes in the shelter wall. I climbed out of my bag and off the bunk quietly. I immediately boiled water and got some oatmeal going. As the water boiled I could not stop shivering. I am certain my teeth chattering woke everyone up. After devouring my oatmeal I threw on my wet shorts, shirt, and shoes. There was no time to waste: I had to get hiking to warm up my body.

For the third morning in a row I tried to be on the trail by 4 a.m. but I did not get started until 4:10 am. The guys in the shelter said it was supposed to clear up this day. I was staying optimistic and was content since it was not raining anymore.

I made it to Cowles Cove at 7 a.m. I stopped briefly to put my headlamp away and had a brief chat with a hiker who had stayed there the night before. He told me the trail from there to Birch Glen was going to be a lot easier and I would be able to make good time.

It turned out he was right. The trail was a bit easier but I found I would get sleepy on the less technical sections, especially right after the sun would come up.

Crossing Appalachian Gap was a huge relief. It really felt good to know I was leaving the bigger northern mountains behind me. My food supply was beginning to be my primary concern.

I could no longer eat an entire bar all at once. I had to stay just above going hungry. I would allow myself a little bite every mile. This is where my Suunto watch played a key role. It told me my distance to the hundredth of a mile. As soon as I clicked over another mile I would take a bite of a bar.

It is a pretty good climb out of Appalachian Gap, but once you are up on the ridge there is not much elevation change. I was hoping to make good time here but the footing was too difficult.

Right around Glen Ellen Shelter I came across four retired gentlemen out for a day hike. They let me pass but stuck to me like glue. I conversed with one of them and we had a lot in common. He was a ski instructor for the disabled and, since we both telemark ski, we talked about skis, bindings, and other backcountry gear. He was pointing out all the good ski runs they would go down in the winter. It was good to have people to talk to. The miles always go faster when you are having a conversation. The four gentlemen turned off the Long Trail on top of Mt. Ellen.

I made my biggest navigational error on top of Lincoln Peak. There are no blazes showing the trail descending off the west side of the mountain so I descended down the ski run. After 12 minutes of descending without a blaze I turned around and climbed back to the top. This was the only time on the hike I was angry. After scouting around I found the trail. It took me until Mt. Abraham to shake that mistake.

I was going to cook some noodles at Battell but chose to push on to Lincoln Gap and make up some time.

I arrived at Lincoln Gap at 4:30 p.m. I pulled out the map and was shocked to see I still had 14.4 miles left to get to Boyce Shelter where I was scheduled to end my day. I made good time up Mt. Grant but was disappointed in the blazing. I decided to cut my day short and stay at Emily Proctor Shelter. I would get up an hour earlier the next day and try to make up the distance. The woods over Mt. Wilson had an eerie presence to them. After descending from the summit I arrived to an empty shelter at 9 p.m. The stream was close to the shelter so I ate my dinner while soaking my legs.

DAY 5 Emily Proctor Shelter - Cooper Lodge 43 miles
Elevation Gain 10,207 Loss 10,000

I woke up this morning at 2:15 a.m. and I was on trail at 3 a.m. sharp. I had developed a dime sized blister on the top of my left big toe the day before. I taped it but quickly determined it felt better without the tape. I made good time in the dark and made it to Boyce Shelter by 4:30 a.m. I felt a lot better knowing I was back within 30 minutes of my original schedule, confident that I could make up the remaining time.

I was in the zone descending down to Middlebury Gap when I heard the weeds rustle and branches break from a massive animal coming right at me. I jumped off trail and hit the woods like someone just threw a grenade at me. After clicking my head lamp on high and pointing it where the noise came from, I saw it was a moose. Fortunately she decided to go the other way.

I crossed Route 125 at 6 a.m. On the climb up Mt. Worth I saw a beautiful sunrise on one of the ski runs. I took the moment to take a photo and send a text update.

The sun stayed out the rest of the miles over Gillespie Peak and Mt. Horrid. On the descent to Brandon Gap my feet became really hot. At the Great Cliffs I passed a group of college students. Their soaps, lotions, and colognes had a strong odor, like the laundry soap aisle in the grocery store. I am sure they could smell me just as well.

After I crossed Route 73 I cooked some noodles. While I waited for the noodles I starched my feet and changed my socks. I lost some time but I had to take care of my feet. The noodles, dry feet and change of socks made me feel like a new man.

Unfortunately, that feeling would only last to David Logan Shelter. I was stopping and adjusting my shoes, and my heels were developing hot spots. I had to avoid blisters in this particular spot at all cost. I tried everything: fresh socks, loosened laces, tightened laces, taped my heels, and eventually pulled my insoles out create some room.

After pulling the insoles I stood up and started in the direction I felt I should be going. I noticed I was on a slope dropping to my left but a minute prior it was sloping down to the right. It didn't feel right. I was so focused on my feet I became confused about the trail. I felt I was going in the wrong direction. I nervously pushed on until I arrived at Telephone Gap, confirming I was heading in the right direction.

Green Rd. was interesting because this is where we camped on Jonathan Basham's record the year before. I had never seen this place in the daylight. I crossed at 3:30 p.m. It was motivating to know that JB had hiked from this point all the way to Massachusetts with only a two hour nap.

Two girls with hyper dogs and a hiker named Mudman were hanging out at Rolston Rest as I passed. It looked so fun to hang out at a shelter. I stayed focused and pushed on. I was really looking forward to Maine Junction and being on the Appalachian Trail. I thru hiked the AT in 2000 and was looking forward to rehashing some old memories.

I was really pleased when I made it to Tucker Johnson Shelter at 6:45 p.m. I cooked some noodles while soaking my feet, and then pushed on to the next shelter. At the shelter was a couple who just hiked in from the road. They told me that it was supposed to storm the next day. This information made me think of climbing over Mansfield and Camel's Hump. Since the memory was still very clear, and I didn't want to climb a high peak in those conditions again, I decided to keep going and climb Killington that night and try to beat the storm.

The climb to Churchhill Scott Shelter went fast and I was there by 9 p.m. I went straight past the turn off to the shelter but slowed down considerably. The last miles to the summit felt like they would never end. I kept repeating another David Horton saying: This too shall pass. I arrived at a Cooper Lodge at 10:45 p.m. It was full of hikers but nobody was awake.

When I reviewed the map before going to sleep on top of Killington, I decided I could make it to Bromley Shelter some time the next night. This would give me a chance to throw a 56 mile Hail Mary to the finish. This was the first time I had thoughts of the end of the trail. The thought of being done in two days really motivated me.

DAY 6 Cooper Lodge - Bromley Shelter 41.5 miles - September 12, 2010
Elevation Gain 8,589 ft Loss 9,925

Climbing to the top of Killington at the end of Day 5 was a gamble, and at 3 a.m., on the morning of Day 6, I climbed off the top bunk to see how much it was going cost me. I had sore legs and tender feet but everything was tolerable. I was packed and on trail at 3:39 a.m. with 97.8 miles between me and Massachusetts. As I descended Killington I kept telling myself, "Make it

to Bromley, 41.5 miles away, and you only have one more giant day. One more wake up, and the final push to the finish.”

The storm I was told about would not show up – and I was not disappointed. About an hour into my day I saw another moose. Getting startled like that gives you an energy boost. I wondered how many more times this was going to happen. At 6 a.m., at Upper Cold River Rd., I stopped to shed a layer of clothing and to put the headlamp away. I conversed with two local ladies enjoying an early morning walk as I packed.

As I descended to Clarendon Shelter I bumped in to a northbound AT hiker. You can always tell the difference between a Long Trail thru hiker and an Appalachian Trail thru hiker. The AT hikers have been at it a lot longer. We didn't speak long but he mentioned that I looked like I needed some sleep.

When I crossed the bridge after Route 103 I brushed my teeth and took a picture of myself to see how tired I looked.

Since my food supply was getting low, I set a goal to make it the next 6.3 miles to Route 140 eating only one Lara bar. When I reach a road crossing I get a little boost of excitement but when I reached Route 140 all I wanted was to be at USFS 10. The mid day miles always drag on the longest.

The 8.5 miles between 140 and USFS 10 are probably not that difficult under normal circumstances, but my mental and physical state made this section challenging. This section pounds your feet because there are no flat places to step. I also started seeing things in the woods that were not really there. I'm not sure if it was the lack of sleep, lack of food, or combination of both, but the hallucinations became really vivid. I would see signs, shelters, and people. But once I hiked closer there would be nothing.

I knew there was a nice stream at USFS 10 so I rewarded myself with noodles when I reached it. Shortly before the stream I could hear a generator with saws and hammering. When I got closer I could see they were building a new shelter. Building a shelter looked a lot more fun than the hiking.

When I finally reached the picnic area, eating Lipton noodles and soaking my feet were desperately needed. I also cut some new insoles out of my blue foam sleeping pad during the stop.

The food, the soak, and the new insoles made the climb up Baker Peak fairly smooth. I knew I had capitalized on the late night climb up Killington when I passed Peru Peak Shelter at 5 p.m. Peru Shelter was my scheduled end for Day 6.

During the rest of the day's miles over Peru and Style's Peaks my mind was going over strategy for the next day. I even cinched my pack tight and broke into a run, on the flat sections, so I could get to Bromley and to sleep earlier. I had reception on top of Bromley so I called JB to let him know my intentions for the next day on a voicemail. I also spoke with David Horton briefly

and he gave me words of encouragement.

I arrived at Bromley Shelter at 9 p.m. In the shelter was a retired engineer who was hiking the LT. I think he said his name was John. I cooked up a Lipton dinner but only ate half of it. I saved the other half for breakfast. That meant I could save the oatmeal for later in the day. I was now 56.4 miles from the end of the trail and my remaining food was four Lara bars, one Pro bar, three packages of oatmeal, two ramen noodle packages, and two packets of hot cocoa.

JB returned my phone call and I confirmed my intentions for the next day. I had a low battery so our conversation was brief. I let him know how much food I had and that I would be starting at 2 a.m. He told me he would be at the county road near the finish. I conversed with the engineer a bit more after the call and fell asleep around 9:40 p.m.

DAY 7 Bromley Shelter - Massachusetts State Line. 56.4 miles – September 13, 2010
Elevation Gain 11,296 Loss 11,394

I did not wake up before the alarm. The heavy rain didn't even wake me up. Fortunately, my alarm did.

“Last morning,” I said to myself.

I ate the leftover noodles and sent one last text update. At 2:19 a.m. I descended down to Route 11/30 in the rain. I reached Rte 11/30 at 3 a.m.

As I began the 17.5 mile section I saw a missing persons sign. There was a photo of a guy who had been missing and this was the last place he had been seen. It also said he had a history of mental illness. This wasn't what I wanted to see in the middle rainstorm at 3 a.m. I told myself not to worry; the sun would be up in three hours, just walk.

The early miles went quickly and the rain stopped at about 5 a.m. My hallucinations, for the most part, were under control. I made it to Stratton Pond Shelter just after the sun came up.

I made great time climbing up the north side of Stratton, but the rain reappeared as I reached the summit. I saw a little white shelter, went inside, and put on my rain gear. A lady greeted me and explained that she and her husband were caretakers and they lived there.

They invited me in but the space in the shelter was limited so I sat on a chair in the middle of the room. They offered me food but I declined and told them what I was doing. I asked if they had seen or heard of any other unsupported hikers coming through. They informed me they had not. I apologized for not staying long and took off running down Stratton.

I made it to Kelley Strand Rd. at 9:45 a.m. I hiked to the next stream and cooked some oatmeal. I hoped this would fuel me over the next 10 miles to the top of Glastonbury Mountain. As I waited for the water to boil I noticed the stream sounded like a playground full of children. My mind was starting to play tricks on me again.

As I hiked I could hear something that sounded like a radio in the woods. It was always the same distance in the woods and stayed with me as I hiked south. I stopped at USFS 71 and starched my feet, changing my socks and insoles. It was 11 a.m. when I started the 20.6 mile section to Route 9.

I was just past Story Spring Shelter when I became very sleepy and started to do head nods. I would fall asleep occasionally but would get scared awake when I would trip. It wasn't until Lydia's Rest that I fully awoke. The trail started to look just like previous crossings and I thought I got turned around again and was heading the wrong way.

My mind was eased when I reached Kid Gore Shelter, confirming I was heading in the right direction. Kid Gore was also what I had on my 8 day schedule as the end of day 7. It was 1:30 p.m. Stopping was not an option.

Fifteen minutes later I bumped into a terrified hiker who told me about a momma bear and a cub he just saw. I spent the next 30 minutes wide awake, singing Waymore's Blues at the top of my lungs.

Just before I reached the summit of Glastenburry my sock filled with fluid after a blister on my pinky toe popped. My body, which had held up remarkably well up to this point, was falling apart fast.

I cooked up Ramen noodles at Goddard Shelter and taped my pinky toe. The pain was intense the first few steps out but it did subside.

I had two bars budgeted for the last 14.3 miles after Route 9 so the remaining dry Ramen noodles would have to get me the next 10 miles. I kept a close eye on my Suunto watch and would have a pinch of dry Ramen noodles every mile. Fortunately this section was mostly descending so I wasn't burning too many calories. The dry noodles got me through and I crossed Route 9 at 7 p.m. I had 30 minutes of daylight remaining.

I took a hard fall on the climb up to Harmon Hill and I could tell my motor skills were not sharp. Due to the thin trees on Harmon Hill I made it until 8 p.m. without my headlamp.

During all of my dreams about finishing the Long Trail I always pictured this last section would be a breeze, so I wasn't prepared mentally for how difficult the last 12 miles would be. I also made the mistake of eating an entire Lara bar here.

On the descent off of Harmon Hill my pace was a crawl. I would find a white blaze and then stare at the ground making sure I didn't trip on the boulders. It was a descent down to a wet, dark, and muddy area of the trail. At one point I actually thought someone painted blazes on a different trail and that I was falling for a practical joke.

When I came to Congdon Shelter I knew I was on trail. I started eating my last bar. I had two bites of the bar remaining with 10 miles to go. I knelt down next to a stream for water and

noticed images in the leaves. I was seeing faces of people, cartoon characters, and photographs in the leaves and rocks. The radio that I thought I could hear in the woods played louder than ever. I started to bonk again on the way up Consolation Peak but I had to eat sparingly. I started to see objects shifting: a tree would be just in front of me and then quickly shift a foot in one direction.

This was when I became concerned. I was zoned out when I heard a holler that sounded like JB. I thought it was another trick of the mind but I heard it again and it was followed by his dog Diesel's bark. I looked up and saw a headlight coming at me. Seeing JB was like seeing an angel. He immediately started asking me questions. He also told me he thought I was going to be in a lot worse condition than what I was. I explained the strange things that had happened over the past seven miles.

We hiked for a couple minutes when I started to bonk again. I was saving the last bite of my bar for the last three mile section but I couldn't wait. I needed it now! It didn't seem to give me any energy though, and I was trying to think of any other calories I had in my pack. I was so hungry that I debated eating my toothpaste. After a final search I stuck my hand down in the side pocket and felt something: the last package of hot cocoa.

I let out a laugh but didn't have the energy to tell JB the story of how I almost forgot the hot cocoa and had to ask Kyle to buy it for me because I only had four dollars.

The hot chocolate turned out to be the last calories I would consume on the hike. I warmed up some water and drank the cocoa. JB took off to the County Rd. – which was three miles from the Massachusetts border – to get stuff ready to take to the southern terminus: my finish line. Before he left I explained that when I reached the last road crossing I had to go straight through it. Although I only had three miles remaining the urge to stop was strong.

Since the Massachusetts border is in the woods, I totally blocked out the thought of doing the three miles after the terminus to get back to the truck. I heard JB yell when I neared the County Rd.

"Is this it?" I asked.

"Yep" he replied.

A quote from Gary Cantrell, creator and race director of the brutal Barkley Marathons race, popped into my head:

"What we forget, or may not even realize, is that once we leave that quit point behind, that screaming agony will subside to a dull background noise once again." ... "Finishing a difficult ultra does not come down to mustering endless hours of superhuman willpower. It comes down to finding the strength to pass the quit points." -- Gary Cantrell

On the last three miles my Achilles tendon began to swell so I had to fold the back of my left shoe. I was feeling really bad about how much my condition had declined but felt better when JB put it in perspective. He said, "You know you put together a smart hike when you can go 272

miles hauling, and at the end, your feet, legs, and body all fall apart and you can barely cover the last mile. Then you know you gave the trail everything you had."

With a half mile to go he ran to the terminus and started howling so I knew how much farther I had to go.

On Tuesday September 14th at 1:25 a.m. – 6 days 17 hours and 25 minutes after I left the Canadian Border/Long Trail Northern Terminus – I reached the Massachusetts state line and the Southern Terminus of the Long Trail.

When I touched the tree that has the state line sign, it did not sink in that I was done. Once I sunk my teeth in to the pizza JB provided I knew I was no longer a slave to the miles or the strict rules of an unsupported hiker. My alarm went off 5 minutes later. I began my last day on the Long Trail exactly 24 hours earlier.

I carried all my supplies from the northern terminus to the southern terminus.

The pizza gave me the energy to do the three miles back to the truck. Thankfully, JB carried my pack. I was still hallucinating, so I enjoyed the faces in the leaves for another two hours.

At 4:30 a.m. I said, "Is that the truck? Am I done?"

"Yep." said JB. "It is. YOU ARE DONE!"

We sat down on a rock and celebrated by drinking a Long Trail Ale.