

Julianna Doherty Fund Hike on the Appalachian Trail - 2003

Start: Springer Mountain, GA End: Dick's Creek Gap, GA. (66.8 Trail Miles in 2003)

Appalachian Trip Overview

On the first leg of this 2,100 mile journey, I was joined by three very dear friends - Murph Barton, Jeff Price and Dave Guyer. The collective goal for our trip was to hike 100 miles and to raise awareness and money for Julianna's Fund. My personal goal for this trip was to insure that Julianna's spirit of loving was continued. I have included a brief description of our adventure below.

We began late Sunday afternoon on August 17, 2003. After the first 1.5 miles, straight up hill and not yet at the official start of the Appalachian Trail, we quickly recognized that our 100 mile goal was something four overweight and inexperienced hikers would accomplish only in our dreams. On the first day our simple goal was 8.8 miles. However, as we started late in the day and one of the hikers was focused on preparing a gourmet meal with the entire kitchen set he brought in his backpack, we made only 2.6 miles. At this moment, I believed we could make up the shortfall the following day. This was a big mistake. We started late (due to oversleeping, tired bodies and clumsy repacking) and we became further behind my unrealistic schedule.

As we started our first full day on Monday, we were happy and eager, (It helped that we slept until 9:00 am and the initial stretch of trail was an easy 3 mile 5 degree descent). We started this and each day with a prayer asking God and Julianna for strength, guidance and most importantly for me peace. Early in this day, we were excited by a 6 ft. snake resting on the trail and refreshed as we splashed in a giant waterfall. At this point, we were looking forward to this journey and the challenges of spending a week in the woods, with only the food and clothes on our backs.

This happy feeling came to a quick end as the never ending mountains approached. In the fourth mile - the real hike began - **Straight up, straight down, straight up, straight down.** We were completely exhausted before 10 miles of trail. In retrospect, this exhaustion was understandable as we were all over packed and under conditioned. In preparation of this trip the four hikers all had their unique training styles. Some of us actually hiked w/ backpacks a few times in preparation; Some of us walked around their house in hiking boots to break them in as training; While some nameless person got on a tread mill once (for 30 seconds) a few weeks prior to the hike and said "Screw it- it is too late to get into shape anyway". We also prepared for this hike by reading many books. However, there is no correlation between reading about hiking and actually doing it. On paper a 4,300 ft elevation seemed rather easy. On foot and with a 40 lb. Backpack the slopes became our enemy. One of our experienced hikers continually said "If I have to walk up one more damn mountain I am going to puke". I thought he was bluffing to slow the pace, but he puked after the second day.

The Georgia air was hot and sticky and the terrain was more rugged than we envisioned. Each day of this excursion became progressively tougher as we tended our blisters, searched for water and generally struggled. Not to mention we all stunk. In all, it was a very difficult and challenging journey, but we endured and laughed at ourselves quite a bit. It is an Appalachian Trail tradition for each hiker to take on a trail name. At week's end, our names were established - "Jules", "Giggles", "Streek" and "Barfy".

In the end, we pushed ourselves to our physical limits and on four different days completed more than 12 miles of hiking. Considering what physical assets we were working with, this was an admirable feat. We completed our initial hike on August 23, 2003 finishing 66.8 miles.

