

Day 86, Aug 6 - Greenleaf Hut, NH.

I cried this morning on top of South Kinsman Mountain. I cried because it was so damn beautiful: Layer upon layer of fading blue mountains, each ridge separated by white tissue-paper clouds in the valleys, the grey mackerel sky turning the light all silver. They stretched on into Canada, into infinity. I can only hold so much beauty before some of it has to spill out somehow. So I cried, utterly alone on the mountain top, where my own two legs had carried me.

That is all I have to say.

- Penny Whistle the Dweller

Day 89, Aug 9 - Madison Springs Hut, NH.

The White Mountains are awesome! Frequent summit views, ridge walks above treeline, and steep, rugged trails that are truly worthy of my thruhiker strength and stamina - I love it. But the Whites have teeth: we are having an unusual early-August cold snap, and I got caught in ~~sleet~~ sleet and pea-sized hail on Garfield Ridge a few days ago. Nighttime lows have been in the 40s + even 30s - my sleeping bag would probably keep me alive in those temperatures, but I would be too cold to sleep much. Thank goodness for the hut system! In addition to the usual selection of campsites and 3-sided shelters, the Appalachian Mountain Club runs 8 "huts": Fully enclosed alpine lodges with heat, bunk rooms, and full kitchens that serve delicious breakfasts and dinners. They charge \$80+ per night and cater to well-off families from Boston and Connecticut, but they let a limited number of thruhikers do

work-for-stay each night: eat as many ⁽²⁾ leftovers as you can stuff in your stomach and sleep on the ~~the~~ dining room floors. Work-for-stay is awesome! I've done it at 3 huts and hope to do it again at the Northernmost hut tonight. The hut crews are really nice and I can usually eat so many leftover pancakes that I don't need any lunch!

My mileage through the Whites has been erratic and mostly weather-dependent. The steep rocky trails are very treacherous when wet, so I slow down a lot in the rain. Mostly I've had good weather though - some of the first sunny days of the summer, I hear. Yesterday was gorgeous, a perfect day - clear, cool, and sunny. I hiked 19 miles to "Lakes of the Clouds" hut, got there at 6pm, and decided to push on over Mount Washington (the highest mountain in the Northeast, over 6,000 feet elev.) while the weather was still good. Mount Washington gets "the worst weather in America" and I didn't want to be delayed by the thunderstorms that were in the forecast for the next day. The evening views from the summit were lovely,

and as I continued north along the ⁽³⁾ presidential ridge - all above treeline - I got amazing views of the pink sunset in the west and the rising red moon in the east. I did the last 3 miles to Madison Springs Hut by headlamps. It was difficult to spot the cairns that led the way over the jumbled rock fields, but finally at 10:30pm I made it to the hut. That makes it a 26-mile day over Mount Washington!

The day after tomorrow I will cross into Maine! Its been 2 years since I've seen my beloved home state. The first 100 miles of Maine is supposed to be the hardest section of the whole Appalachian Trail. I think I'm ready. Unfortunately I will have to leave the trail from Aug 17-30 for a short job (income = good!) - I yearn to push straight on to Katahdin, but it will be there waiting for me in September.

Love to all,

Penny Whistle the
Dueler

Day 96, Aug 16th - Stratton, Maine

Maine has everything! It has the steep rocky climbs of New Hampshire, the mud of Vermont, the bugs of New York, the rocky trails of Pennsylvania, the constant rain of Georgia... Clearly I never needed to leave my home state to have a full Appalachian Trail experience. But although Maine does have the most rugged terrain on the whole trail, it also has views to rival Tennessee, lovely ponds with canoes left on the shore for anyone to use, and mossy boreal forests that look like an enchanted fairyland. Plus the torrential rains stopped the day after I crossed the state line, and the weather has been awesome.

In every state, the local people are a big part of the experience, and Maine is no exception. I think I have fallen in love with the women of Maine! They stand tall, look you in the eye, and carry themselves with strength + grace. They have

Neither the prissiness of women who ⁽²⁾
rely on their looks + seek the approval of
men, nor the awkwardness of female jocks
who perceive strength + femininity as
incompatible and reject the latter. The
women of maine manage to express
their whole selves without contradiction,
a balance I have been seeking my
whole life. Too often I have felt
that the Mary who waltzes across the
dance floor in long skirts and the
Mary who wield's sledgehammer +
chainsaw on trail crews are two
separate people. They have different
wardrobes, different vocabularies,
different mannerisms and priorities.
They politely ignore each other.

Maybe one of the reasons I came
out on the trail is to learn to
integrate all the parts of myself into
one cohesive being. Maybe I
will come home from the trail and
~~walk~~ see a poised, peaceful,
confident Woman of Maine looking
back at me from the bathroom
mirror.

Indeed, after walking 2000 miles

To get back to Maine after years of living out West, I find I am in no hurry to leave. A series of "trail magic" coincidences have led me to an opportunity, to be a dogsledding apprentice for the winter with Mahoosuc Guiding Services, near Bethel in Western Maine. I interviewed with the owners/guides, Polly and Kevin Mahoney, when I passed through the Mahoosuc range. I fell in love with their lodge (nestled in the quiet valley), their dogs (by far the best treated + smartest sled dogs I've seen), and the surfeit of both compassion and knowledge I perceived in Kevin + Polly themselves. I've accepted their invitation to be an apprentice this winter! It feels just right.

Here at Stratton I'll be taking 2 weeks off the trail to work a short job in Vermont (income = 😊). That leaves plenty of time for old friends to catch up to me. Only 10-12 days to Katahdin + the end of my journey. Or is it the beginning?

Lots of Love,
Penny Whistle the Dweller