
Country Philosopher

The bear facts

The Appalachian Trail runs from Maine to Georgia. It covers 2,023 miles of the most beautiful scenery we have in America. I have wanted to hike this trail ever since I was a boy, and last week I got the chance. And the trip would have been completely satisfying and totally exhilarating except for one thing.

I took my wife along.

I tried to impress upon her the hardships we would encounter. The cold and rain, the heat and fog, the snakes and bears and spiders and mosquitos. I talked of landslides, earthquakes, monsoons, and the depraved, oversexed men who lurked behind every tree.

But nothing would discourage her.

We started our hike at Mt. Oglethorpe in Georgia and figured it would take us five months to reach Mt. Katahdin in Maine. We were traveling light because to be overburdened on such a long trip would have been disastrous. We carried a small tent, two sleeping bags and cooking gear that included two small kettles and a steel frying pan. Our food supply consisted of dried soups, potatoes, macaroni, peanut butter, evaporated milk, flour, and raisins.

We hadn't hiked three miles when my wife grabbed my arm, and said, "I want to go home."

"Why?"

"Because" moaned my wife, "This rain will never let up and I'm soaked to the skin. And besides...I have blisters on my feet as big as pumpkins.

With a vast amount of control, I said, "Honey, I told you hiking was a hard job. The rain will stop in a few minutes and we'll treat your blisters when we reach the first shelter."

For the next ten miles she did nothing but whimper and complain. It was too cold, the woods were too dark, and she wondered if there might not be hostile Indians on the trail. Her brassiere was too tight, the rain was washing off her lipstick, she had a headache, and her pack (according to her) now weighed over six hundred pounds.

I gritted my teeth and pushed on. Nothing was going to stop me from hiking the entire Appalachian Trail.

At five o'clock in the evening we camped beside a lovely pond. While I was setting up the tent my wife was supposed to be cooking supper. But when I had completed my job I noticed that my wife didn't even have the fire started. I said, very calmly, "WHAT IN THE HELL IS HOLDING UP MY SUPPER?"

My wife was kneeling beside a pile of kindling and she looked up, and

said, "I have been rubbing these two sticks together for an hour and the damn things just won't light."

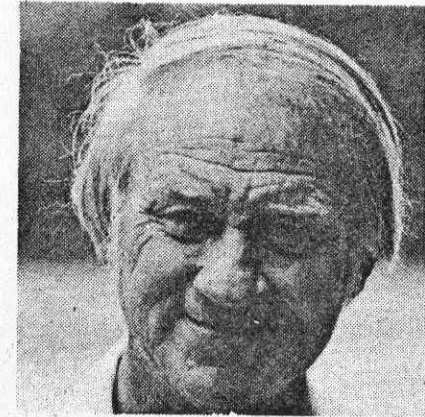
"Why not use matches?"

"I never thought of that" she replied.

I sent her off to gather some huckleberries that were not far from our campsite, and while she was gone a Forest Ranger came up to me, and said, "Sir, I must warn you that there is a man-eating bear that lives on this mountain. He will probably come by here tonight, but you will be all right if you stay in your tent. BUT WHATEVER YOU DO...DON'T GO OUTSIDE YOUR TENT AFTER DARK."

I thanked the gentleman for his advice and the Forest Ranger continued down the trail until he was out of sight. I had the fire started by this time and when my wife got back from berry picking I had supper all ready.

My wife's mouth never shut once through that entire meal. The potatoes were raw, the soup had a bug in it, and the bread was soggy from the rain.. She kept up this constant complaining until the sun went down and we entered our tent for the night. We snuggled into our sleeping bags and my wife said that she was freezing to death, that something slimey had just crawled over her face,



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and couldn't we please go home.

The night had grown very dark when I heard a faint noise outside the tent. I knew it was the man-eating bear. I distinctly remembered the warning given by the Forest Ranger, and I said to my wife, "Honey, would you please go outside and throw another log on the fire. It will warm you up and make you sleep better."

I heard my wife climbing out of her sleeping bag and I heard her leave the tent. The next thing I heard was a shrill scream, a menacing growl, and then silence.

Good Lord! Had the bear gotten my wife? Had he taken her away, and eaten her up? I must report his terrible tragedy first thing in the morning. I fluffed my pillow several times and went to sleep.

And I slept like a baby.