

Re-Supply Information---2007
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Introduction:

A few comments about the information provided below: The purpose of this articles is to provide some suggestions and possibilities for prospective Appalachian Trail thru or long-distance hikers, and to provide advice on such things as Re-Supply of food and equipment; information on mileage and distances, and how long particular stretches of the Trail will take to hike; some lodging information, and some other suggestions, tips, and other ideas that hikers might find useful.

This is NOT intended to be a blue-print, framework, or manual for anyone to plan their hike by. There is no one "right" way to hike the A.T.; no one "right" way to plan your schedule or hiking itinerary; no one "right" way to re-supply yourself. Something like 9,500 men and women have hiked the A.T. in its entirety, and no two have done it the same way. It'd be presumptuous in the extreme for any one to claim that's there only one correct way to plan or execute your hike. There isn't.

So this isn't a blueprint, and shouldn't be treated as one. It isn't meant to be rigidly adhered to, and nobody is suggesting that deviating from these ideas or suggestions would be a mistake. On the contrary, people have to find out works for THEM, and the information contained here is merely what I discovered over the years what worked for ME, based on my own experiences, and conversations with, or observations of thousands of other hikers.

Nearly all of the businesses or hiker service providers that are named here are known to me personally: I've either visited them, patronized them, or both, and usually, on several occasions at least. Of the places or locations that I have NOT personally visited or experienced, but merely know what I've heard from others, I will always make this clear. But by and large, these are places, businesses, and facilities that I know well.

In NO cases have I been compensated or paid for providing favorable commentary about any business or service; on the very rare occasions where I choose to omit mentioning or discussing a service provider, or fail to provide a positive reference or recommendation, this is based on my own feelings and experience. Different people have different perceptions of different places. Over the years, I've always tried to keep an open mind, and I advise others to do likewise. Also, if I fail to mention a particular place, this absolutely does not mean that there's anything wrong with it. There are hundreds of businesses and services that cater to A.T. hikers, or that hikers can avail themselves of, and there are new ones every year. And there are plenty of older ones that I've never seen or somehow managed to miss. It is inevitable, then, that there will be some places and businesses that will be left out of this article, and it should not be inferred that my doing so is necessarily deliberate, or intended to steer hikers away from anywhere.

Listing every single facility or business on or near the A.T. would be impossible.

The information below is being published in February 2007. Many of the 2007 hikers will be hiking until October of that year, and even later if they are hiking Southbound. This means that some of the information here will be close to a year old by the time hikers reach certain locations and encounter certain businesses and service providers.

Hikers should be aware that in the course of a calendar year, there are always changes on the A.T. New places open with little fanfare or announcement. Places that have taken care of hikers for years suddenly decide to close. Owners change, as well as management policies. Places that catered to hikers for years might decide they wish to go after a different clientele. Prices for goods and services change frequently, and they very seldom go down. Hikers that use the information below when planning their trip need to be aware of all this, so prepare for the unexpected.

This article is as accurate as I could make it as of its writing and publication, but neither the author nor any website that re-prints any or all of this information can be held responsible if businesses or service providers aren't what you expect them to be when you arrive there. The Trail is always changing, and the prudent hiker knows this, and is always capable of keeping some flexibility, and will change their plans or itinerary based on what circumstances demand.

Hikers planning to re-supply in whole or in part by mail need to do careful research: If a published guidebook tells you that a particular place receives and holds hiker mail, or is open thru a particular date in the year, then this information is probably reliable. But if one has any doubts, especially as regarding whether or not a place accepts hiker mail and packages, or if you expect to be hiking very early or very late in the hiking season, it would be wise to contact these places BEFORE your mail is sent. A few phone calls or E-Mails ahead of time can save a lot of grief later on.

It is suggested that people use the most current guidebooks available when doing their planning. A book just a few years old will omit many things, and may well contain errors. There is some excellent information available in the "Articles" section of www.whiteblaze.net that gives all sorts of suggestions on how to send and receive mail while hiking: There is information on labeling and addressing; information on the best way to ship things; suggestions on how certain items should be mailed, etc.

A few quick suggestions of my own:

*Whenever possible, try and send mail/parcels to NON Post Office locations, such as motels, hiker hostels, Outfitters, etc. These places are open 7 days a week, including holidays, so you'll have easier access to your mail, and less chance of arriving in a town and finding the P.O. closed.

*Make sure you carry a list of all the places you expect to receive mail, so you won't overlook any, nor will you go into town thinking you have mail there, when in fact, you don't.

*If a particular box contains something vital, such as a new credit card, eyeglasses, medications, maps, etc., make sure you know which parcel this is. Hikers frequently skip mailstops, or have stuff "bumped" ahead from one location to another; before doing this, you'll want to know exactly what's in each box, so you don't skip a box that contains something important.

*Make sure your "basecamp" person at home has their own copy of the Companion or Handbook, as it'll contain all sorts of information on where you'll be staying; where one can send you mail; phone numbers and contact info on all sorts of businesses, facilities, gear manufacturers, etc. It'll make it easier for folks to keep track of your progress, in case they need to find you, meet up with you somewhere on or near the Trail, etc.

Because I assume that virtually 100% of people will be using one of the principal A.T. guidebooks such as the Thru-Hiker's Companion or Thru Hikers Handbook both before and during their hikes, in

almost every case, I have NOT provided detailed information on the places I mention, such as addresses, telephone numbers, etc. All of this sort of information is available in these guidebooks.

If the information provided below proves useful to anyone hiking in 2007, I'd be delighted to hear about it. Likewise, if anyone feels that there are significant mistakes or omissions here, I'd like to hear about that, too, so these lapses and errors can be noted, in order to improve future versions of this article.

Finally, distances and hiking times between Re-Supply points are based on my own personal experiences as well as observation of other hikers. Most of my hikes lasted approximately 180 days. Hikers planning longer or shorter trips will need to adjust their

scheduling and re-supply planning accordingly. A few weeks into the trip, hikers will have a fairly good idea of how long it'll take them to cover a particular stretch of Trail, and will develop a good feeling about how much food is required, but it's always a good idea to carry a little extra, especially early in the trip, in case a section of the Trail, for whatever reason, takes longer to cover than you'd planned.

PART ONE: SPRINGER MT. TO DAMASCUS,VA.

*One should plan to arrive at Amicalola Falls State Park fully supplied and ready to hike. The park visitor center has very limited hiker supplies, and little food other than drinks and snacks.

*I generally leave Springer with 3-4 days worth of food/supplies, which is sufficient to get from there to Neels Gap, which is presently 30.5 miles from the summit of Springer.

If you are planning to hike from Amicalola Falls State Park to the summit of Springer, and spend your first night on or near the summit, you'll need to bring a day's extra. Likewise, if you anticipate a really slow start, i.e. less than 6-8 miles day, you may wish to bring a bit extra. But in most cases, 3-4 days should be sufficient; resist the temptation to start with too much stuff.

*It is possible to go into the town of Suches from Woody Gap (19.9 miles from Springer) and re-supply overnight there, but this is unnecessary for most folks. Mountain Crossings/The Walasi-Yi Center at Neels Gap is a great facility run by wonderful folks. You can send a maildrop here if you wish (there's a small fee if you do so), or you can buy what you need from their excellent food selection, which is geared towards backpackers. This is also a great place to field-strip your pack and go thru your stuff in case you've discovered items you want to send ahead, or more likely, home. If you think you've made mistakes with some of your gear or clothing, and think you want to change or re-place some things, talk to the staff, who are experts at helping hikers determine what they really need, or more often, what they DON'T really need. The Outfitter shop here is excellent, and the staff is superb. There is also lodging available here, and if you need to get to a real town, you can get a shuttle to Blairsville, Dahlonega, or Hiawasee.

Neels Gap to Dick's Creek Gap/US 76 is 36.5 miles. You'll need 3-4 days worth of food to get there, depending mainly on what time of day you leave Neels Gap, and how far you get on the first day. Note: Hikers that plan on Re-supplying in Helen GA (20.0 miles past Neels) can obviously bring less food with them. A few hikers plan on hiking from Neels to Franklin without re-supplying; this is inadvisable, as it's so easy to get in and out of Hiawasee, but if you DO decide to do this, it's just over 76 miles between Neels and Franklin and will take most folks just under a week.

*Some hikers go into Helen from Unicoi Gap (20 miles from Neels); I seldom do as I don't much care for the town; if you must get off the Trail here for supplies, bad weather, or anything else, I think it's better to go into Hiawasee instead.

*From Dick's Creek Gap/76 it's easy to get into Hiawasee; hitching is fairly easy here.

Don't get pressured into paying for a ride: Every year there seem to be a few shifty locals who hang out here and only tell you AFTER you're in their car that they expect to be paid for the ride!

Hiawasee is a pretty good Trail town, tho it is spread out a bit; there are all sorts of services for different budgets (motels, etc). Most of the hotels accept hiker mail, but you might want to check first.

In addition to motels in town, there are several hostels nearby. The Blueberry Patch has been taking care of hikers for years, and the new place, Cloud 9, got raves from hikers in 2006. (I have not been to Cloud 9 yet, but have heard nothing but great things. Staying at a working Trout farm and catching your own dinner is pretty cool).

Leaving Hiawasee, it's 40 miles to Winding Stair Gap/US 64, the road crossing for Franklin. I'd bring 3-4 days of supplies from Hiawasee; those planning to skip Franklin and continue on the Nantahala Outdoor Center/US 19 should bring 2-3 days more.

*Most hikers will want to go into Franklin, which has excellent services for hikers. Local business owner, and a great friend of the Trail, Ron Haven, offers a free shuttle between Winding Stair Gap and town, and he doesn't care whether you stay at his motels or not (tho you should!). He also is available for town shuttles, which is good, as Franklin is pretty good sized.

Note: Hikers using older guidebooks should be aware that Rainbow Springs Campground, where hikers re-supplied for years, is now closed. Most hikers will probably want to go into Franklin.

Your next Re-supply point will likely be the Nantahala Outdoor center; it's less than 30 miles from Franklin; I'd bring 2-3 days worth of food.

*The Nantahala Outdoor Center, universally known to hikers as the NOC, is directly on the A.T. Lodging and laundry services are available, as are several restaurants. There is limited re-supply here, and a small food maildrop might not be a bad idea, as the food selection here is not great and tends to be over-priced. Remember not to send or purchase too much, tho, as the next main re-supply point, Fontana Dam, is only 28 miles further North. Hikers needing more services than what the NOC offers can hitch or get a ride into Bryson City.

*Fontana Dam, NC is one of the handful of places where it makes sense to send yourself a food maildrop. You'll absolutely need some sort of major Re-Supply here before entering Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and while there is a small market in Fontana Village, the selection is lousy, overpriced, and unreliable, especially if you arrive late in the afternoon and discover that the 15 hikers just ahead of you pillaged the place. A short walk from the market is the Village's Outfitter, which also has a small food selection. In all likelihood, tho, you'll want to get food sent here; how much you send depends whether or not you plan to hike all the way thru the National Park, or re-supply in Gatlinburg. If you plan to hike straight thru, you'll need 6-7 days worth of food; if you're going to

Gatlinburg, bring 3-4. If you're hiking earlier in the season and will be more likely to encounter rough weather, delays, and slower mileage, you might want to bring a bit extra.

Another alternative is stay with the very nice folks at the nearby Hike Inn Motel, who will shuttle you to Robbinsville where there is a real market.

Note: Keep in mind that the P.O. in Fontana Dam closes at noon on Saturday and doesn't re-open til 8:30 on Monday morning; depending on what day or what time of day you leave the NOC, make sure the Fontana P.O. will be open when you get there! If it looks like you'll NOT going to make it to Fontana by noon on Saturday, you're probably better off staying over a little longer at the NOC, rather than cooling your heels in Fontana til Monday morning; there's a lot more to do at the NOC.

*Thru-hikers seem to have a love-hate relationship with Gatlinburg, TN. It is indeed a pretty tacky place, but I've always found the year-rounders to be quite friendly. The folks at the Outfitter are great and there are a ton of cheap places to stay. Over the years, the preferred motel for hikers seems to be the Grand Prix, a short walk from the Outfitter's. There is a cheap shuttle bus that will take you all over town, or you can just walk and people watch which is both entertaining and horrifying at the same time.

Leaving Gatlinburg, I'd bring 3-4 days worth of supplies; with a few extra if you're planning to hike all the way to Hot Springs without stopping.

*Just outside the National Park, some hikers re-supply or stay over at Mountain Moma's.

As an alternative, I strongly suggest you stay on the Trail for a few more miles and visit Standing Bear Farm, a unique and wonderful place. They have limited, but perfectly adequate re-supply available there, or they can shuttle you to a nearby small market. Also, they accept maildrops. Just remember, you won't need much as it's only just over 30 miles from there to Hot Springs.

Note: As of this writing, Mountain Moma's is reportedly up for sale, and may or may not be open for hikers when you arrive. I strongly suggest contacting them ahead of time if you plan to send mail there.

*Hot Springs is one of the great trail towns, and a great place to take some time off; many hikers take their first complete "zero day" (meaning a day that one hikes zero miles!) here. It is also the first place where the Trail leaves the woods and goes directly thru a community.

There are all sorts of places to stay; Elmer's is the most popular; I usually stay with Brian and Frank at the beautiful Duckett House Inn. Either one is wonderful. There are other lodging options available, including motels, cabins, even a campground. There are NOT a lot of services here, but the small town has everything you'll likely need: restaurants, a pub, a public library, two small markets, a Dollar Store, and one of Trail's best Outfitters, Bluff Mountain.

As far as food re-supply, definitely stop at the Outfitters first, as they have the best selection of hiker-oriented foods, including natural and organic products. You can supplement this at the small markets or Dollar Store, but in all likelihood, you'll find everything you need at Bluff Mt. They also have the town's one ATM and offer limited Internet service. This is the last good Outfitter you'll likely see til you get to Virginia (unless you get a ride into Johnson City TN) so if you have gear or footwear issues, you might want to resolve them here. If possible, try and get help from co-owner Wayne, who is the

best packfitter I know, and is also great with shoes and boots. He can be particularly helpful if you decide you want to switch to a different, and more likely smaller, backpack.

If you need to get to a larger market, or larger town such as Asheville, talk to Wayne's partner Dan, who handles shuttles.

Your next stop will be Erwin, TN, just under 70 miles away. Most people get there mid-day of their fifth day out from Hot Springs. There is a new hostel about 16 miles North of Hot Springs, Hemlock Hollow Farm, which allegedly has limited re-supplies. I've never been there. There might also be a new hostel of some sort near Sam's Gap. In all likelihood, tho, you'll be going from Hot Springs to Erwin without re-supplying, so plan accordingly. And speaking of Sam's Gap, it is not advisable to try to get to Erwin from there, as hitching is illegal.

*Erwin TN, tho long and spread out, has become a great hiker town in recent years. There are all sorts of places to stay including hostels and motels, and dozens of good places to eat.

In recent years, most hikers have elected to stay at Miss Janet's House, a hostel in the center of town. Her hospitality is legendary. It's also conveniently close to downtown, so the Post Office, Library, supermarket, many restaurants, and even a movie theater are within walking distance.

Important note: While Miss Janet provides rides to and from the Trail, other shuttle rides are NOT free. One of her greatest annual expenses is keeping her van running, so if she takes you around town, or takes you to the Outfitter in Johnson City or to Wal-Mart, if you stay a few days and do some slackpacking, and especially, if you are not one of her houseguests, make sure you contribute to the fuel/van fund, and make sure everyone in your group does likewise. If you see someone NOT paying, call them on it.

Hikers that don't plan on overnighting at Janet's, or can't stay because it's full, can still leave their packs on the porch while they run their town errands. They're welcome to use house services, too (shower/phone/laundry/internet) but make sure you leave a small donation when you do so. Her operating costs are enormous, so every little bit helps. If she discovers that the hostel is full, she usually does a shuttle around dinnertime, and will take people anywhere else they want to go; those planning to take a "zero day" the next day can usually get a spot in the hostel by signing up for the next day, assuming that bunks are available. Lastly, while a lot of hikers have done a "work for stay" at Janet's, this is not always available, either because there's no work to be done, or more likely, the work slots are filled, so don't take the work/stay option for granted. You'll have a great time here, but do right by Miss Janet. Her place runs on love, but it doesn't run on air.

For most folks, I'd bring 5-6 days worth of supplies when leaving Erwin.

*There is a hostel, Greasy Creek Friendly, about 24 miles North of Erwin. It has limited re-supplies. This is also one of the places I've never seen or visited.

*Some folks re-supply in either Elk Park or Roan Mountain. I generally do neither, as this is a difficult place to hitch-hike. Close to the 19E road crossing, the nearby Mountain Harbor B&B has a great reputation, tho I've never stayed there; they accept maildrops and will also provide paid shuttles to a market.

*Instead of Re-Supplying in Elk Park or Roan Mountain, I generally continue hiking another 24 miles

to Dennis Cove, and stay at Kincora Hostel, one of the absolute best places on the whole A.T. Bob and Pat Peoples have been running Kincora for a decade and they are, without a doubt, two of the finest folks you'll meet on your whole trip. You can send mail here if you wish, but keep in mind that Bob runs a daily shuttle to a supermarket, where you can get everything you'll need for the easy 50-mile stretch to Damascus, VA.

If you stay at Kincora, and you'd be completely crazy not to, keep in mind that while the suggested "donation" is only \$4.00 (this hasn't changed since 1997!), you should try and leave more. First off, many folks leave nothing whatsoever, thinking that "donation" means "free." Secondly, what you get at Kincora is priceless; the services Bob and Pat provide would cost six or seven times as much anywhere else, so please, give what you can, and make sure your friends do likewise. Also, Bob is the Trail maintainer of this section of the A.T., and it's a tough one. He's always got some sort of work project going on, so if you want to help out, it's a lot of fun, Bob's great to work with, and it's a cool way to give something back to the Trail.

Note: There are two other hostels nearby, including a new one. Both offer light re-supply. I have never stayed at either place. For details, see your guidebooks.

*Good re-supply is available in Hampton TN, 9 miles past Dennis Cove. One can either get to town via a blue-blazed trail from the A.T., or from the road crossing at 321 near Watauga Lake. The Braemar Castle Hostel in the center of Hampton is also a very nice place to stay.

*The 50 miles from Dennis Cove to Damascus, except for a few bumps, is very easy. You'll need no more than 3 days worth of food; most people do two big, but very easy days the last two days getting into Virginia.

*When you get to Rt.421 near Shady Valley, it's possible to hitch 3 miles to several small markets; at this point you're less than 15 miles to Damascus, so most folks don't bother.

*Damascus, VA is one of the great Trail towns, so try and take some time off here. There are all sorts of lodging possibilities to fit every taste and budget, and several good places to eat. It's a great gear town, with several Outfitters, including the legendary Mt. Rogers Outfitter, which you'll walk right by as you enter town. Excellent re-supply is available at the big new Supermarket just outside of town; you'll also walk past two smaller markets as you hike thru the town.

Note: There isn't another good Outfitter for quite awhile after you leave Damascus; if you have gear issues of any sort, you should take care of them here. Many folks "switch out" their winter/cold weather gear and clothing here, and switch to lighter clothes, sleeping bags, etc. I VERY strongly suggest one resists the temptation to do so; I'd hold on to your warmer stuff until you reach Bland or maybe even Pearisburg. This is especially the case for early starters who get here in April or before. I have seen it snow several days North of Damascus on the 22nd of May, so be smart here, even if it means carrying a few extra pounds.

*In most cases, you'll want to take 5-7 days worth of supplies out of Damascus, less if you plan to re-supply in Troutdale, Marion, or Sugar Grove. Be aware that the up-coming section of the Trail is spectacular; for many people, this stretch is their favorite part of their hike, so you might want to slow down your pace a bit and enjoy it, meaning a bit of extra food might come in handy.