Yogi-ing purists, trail magic, and men in skirts: An analysis of Appalachian Trail culture

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Abstract
This thesis explores the motivations and experiences of those thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail in the 20th and 21st Century. A detailed analysis examines the influence of conservationism, urban development, and collective American values on trail culture. The analysis uses Susan Fast's methodology from her 2000 article, "Rethinking Issues of Gender and Sexuality in Led Zeppelin: A Woman's view of Pleasure and Power in Hard Rock," as a model. Personal experiences from hiking the A.T. in 2003 are analyzed in juxtaposition with other hiker's written accounts. The bulk of these journals come from the website TrailJournals.com. The Appalachian Trail extends over 2,100 miles from Georgia to Maine. The A.T. was initiated based on the ideas of Benton MacKaye. The trail was completed in 1937 and is now used by three to four million people per year. The popularity of hiking the trail has increased with time, in part due to people's perceived ideas of what nature holds for them. The study explores various accounts of those who found themselves in transition, such as retiring, graduating from school, or experiencing a divorce. These individuals looked to hiking the Appalachian Trail as an enriching experience before going back to normalcy in everyday society. This particular form of outdoor recreation is contingent upon the individual's experience living in an urban/suburban environment. Hikers escape from and yet long for connectivity to civilization. The Appalachian Trail is therefore an environment that not only reveals Americans' ideal of nature but what Americans value. This study looks at the unique outdoors experience hikers face and the emergence of their transformative selves that result from such an adventure. It reveals common trends in hiker motivations over the years, and contrasts thru-hiking culture with collective values promoted by modern American society.

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The Appalachian Trail (the AT) is a hiking trail in the eastern United States. The majority of the trail is in forest or wild lands, although some portions run through towns, roads and farms. It is claimed that the Appalachian Trail is the longest hiking-only trail in the world. Some people try to walk the entire 2,174 mile trail over several months. Others simply enjoy day-trips to parts of the AT. Vocabulary SB. page 48. Animals SB. page 48. Throughout its length, the AT is marked by white paint blazes that follow each other at certain distances and mark the direction of the trail.