



## **A Weekend of Despair**

**Not to long ago in October, a friend and I planned a weekend hike for three days. We would start on Friday at New Found Gap heading North-East on the Appalachian Trail. Our Destination was intended to be the end of the park in an area known as Davenport Gap. The total trip would have totaled out at about 26.5 miles. That is not how it worked out.**

**For the record both he and I are experienced hikers and to make matters worse, only about 6 months earlier we had hiked a piece of this trail together, that is in fact where the trouble started.**

**We had gotten off to a great start moving at a relatively quick pace when we came to a trail junction nearly 3 miles in. Having recently been there, we discuss the fact that we were able to 'by-pass' a shelter that was on the trail. We had agreed that passing the shelter would likely slow us down for the fact that if people were there we would stop and socialize. So we chose the 'by-pass' route that would just take us around behind the shelter (Icewater Springs).**

**Having been making good time and recalling the previous hike, about an hour and a half into the 'by-pass' we started discussing the fact that we should have made it to a landmark known as 'Charlies Bunion' where we had planned on having lunch. Shortly following, some other hiker's came down the trail and we mentioned that we thought we had taken a wrong turn at the junction and that we thought we were on 'The Boulevard Trail.' They confirmed that to be the case. We were and hour and a half in the wrong direction. This left us with two choices: Continue along the current path and hope that the available shelter was not full so that we could avoid illegal camping or else abort the trip. Having invested the time in planning, packing and getting on our way, we decided to continue and risk not having a space to stay for the night.**

**Reaching the summit of LeConte via Boulevard Trail is a challenge. And to make matters worse, the sun was quickly setting. We were hiking in over drive! We did finally make it to the shelter to find that there were in fact two available spaces in the shelter to our relief.**

**After getting settled, we headed for 'Cliff Tops' to catch a wonderful sunset. We then returned to the shelter, had dinner and laid plans to fix our mistake or rather re work the trip to come out with a success story.**

**Essentially after checking our references (Book and map) we decided traversed Mt. LeConte completely and stay our second night at a place called Porter Creek (Campsite 31). This would give us about 11 miles the second day and would be a**



short hike out on the final day. We would then need to hitch a ride to Cell Service range and call our ride and divert them to the right location. It sounded easy enough as we discussed it. If only life weren't full of so many surprises.

We woke early enough on day 2 to make our way to 'Myrtle Point' to catch the sunrise which was an experience worth the effort. We had breakfast and made our way off the mountain. And from here I am really not certain what went wrong because time got away from us and we found ourselves once again fighting the sunset. Also, climbing to the campsite had been under estimated and was much more difficult than we anticipated. At the point where we had decided 5 more minutes and were bedding down, I ran out of water. Luckily that was the very moment that I came upon the site marker.

Feeling beaten and hungry, we did our best to get the tent up and our water filter before sunset. Dinner was prepared in mostly darkness. And the mice were fearlessly running about us.

Waking on day 3, we were looking forward to the short hike out. We were feeling like utter failures at this point. We broke camp and had breakfast and decided to take our sweet time getting going. Once we got going we found ourselves on a gravel drive in no time. Revisiting the book and map to get an Idea as to where we needed to go, we concluded that from the gravel parking area it couldn't be more than 2 miles to a main thorough fare.

In less than 200 yards, a grouse decided not to let us off easy and scared the crap out of my companion as it blasted off with the sound of a helicopter. I told him we must have looked like Shaggy and Scooby-Doo because I swear he nearly jumped into my arms.

This is the point where things started to look up because immediately, and SUV pulls up and was offering a ride. They gladly took us to 321 and then only a couple of miles out of there way to get us to a filling station that I was sure we would be able to get a bite to eat as we were waiting.

After expressing our gratitude we made our way into the convenient store and ordered food. Now that we were back into civilization, we were reminiscing on the comedy that had been unfolding the entire trip. A couple of guys at the next table over heard and wanted to hear the details. After narrating to them the events they said, 'Hell! We can get you as far as Gatlinburg.' We eagerly accepted the offer. They instead took us as far as Sugarlands Visitor Center.

No sooner than my bag hit the ground, my companion had run off. Looking around to find him, I notice he was hanging in the passenger window of a car talking to someone. Timing is everything because this person was a friend of his just stopping



**at Sugarlands to use the restrooms before she headed to New Found Gap where she was meeting up with some friends to hike LeConte. In the end, it all worked out!**