

## **“To Conquer Myself”: The New Strenuosity and the Emergence of “Thru-hiking” on the Appalachian Trail in the 1970s**

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### **Abstract:**

In the early 1970s hundreds of hikers began to traverse all 2,000-plus miles of the Appalachian Trail in a single effort. Spanning from Maine to Georgia, today over 14,000 have trekked across the entirety of the famed “wilderness footpath.” A particular mentality, characterized by perceptions of asocial self-discovery gained through physical activity and “wilderness” recreation led to the initial 1970s “thru-hiker” surge. This sense of autonomous self-discovery, however, was connected to a certain social and cultural context. Indeed, it could be argued that thru-hikers embraced a certain brand of individualism that should be read as a manifestation of a privileged social position as much as the achievement of personal authenticity.

**Keywords:** 1970s | individualism | new strenuosity | backpacking | hiking | Wilderness

### **Article:**

Americans have had faith in the civic value of physical recreation since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. This creed has a familiar resonance. Strenuous activity builds character. Physical recreation teaches cooperation, hard work, and honesty. Competitive sport, in particular, reveals how to contribute to one’s community and at the same time achieve one’s utmost potential.<sup>1</sup> While similarities persisted, this was not precisely what ultra-long-distance hiker Warren Doyle had in mind when he undertook what he called a “character-confirmation experiment” in the summer of 1973. Doyle did not wish to find his role within an advancing civilization nor did he aim to measure his merit against dominant cultural standards. He saw physical activity as the means to an honorable end, but pure and autonomous self-discovery achieved outside society’s ideals was what motivated him. “I wanted to know,” Doyle explained, “just who I thought I was.” Thus, Doyle trudged across all 2,000-plus miles of the eastern United States’ Appalachian Trail. For over fifteen hours a day, covering more than thirty miles daily, for sixty-six-and-a-half days, he hiked at a record-setting pace. Yet Doyle “did not conquer” the famed “wilderness footpath.” As he put it, “I utilized the AT to conquer myself.”<sup>2</sup>

In the north, the Appalachian Trail, or “AT,” as hikers call it, comes to an end atop Mount Katahdin of Maine. To the south, the trail’s opposing terminus reaches onto the summit of

Springer Mountain in Georgia. Permitted only to those traveling by foot, hikers encounter tough switchbacks and steep scrambles. Running along the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, the route reaches some of the highest elevations of the Smokey Mountains. In the White Mountains of New Hampshire, hikers climb above the tree line. Yet most of the AT is surrounded by woods. Indeed, the trail is nicknamed “the green tunnel.” Trail blazers deliberately avoided developed areas whenever possible. The AT’s northernmost section, running through Maine’s “hundred-mile wilderness,” is probably the most remote area of the eastern United States. Nonetheless, much of the trail is never more than a day or two away from a warm hotel bed. Millions live within driving distance of the AT. At one juncture, on a clear day, New York City is viewable in the distance.<sup>3</sup>

The idea expressed by Doyle, that traversing the AT might bring forth personal insights about one’s self, was not a novel concept. Most famously, in Concord, Massachusetts, more than 120 years earlier, Henry David Thoreau preached that “I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely freed from all worldly engagement.”<sup>4</sup> Thoreau sought to get in touch with his truest and fullest “spirits.” Like Doyle and other AT “thru-hikers” of future generations, Thoreau believed walking through an untamed world for an extended period of time would bring internal clarity.

This obvious connection between trekkers such as Doyle and wilderness advocates such as Thoreau gives rise to a proactive question that underlies the present inquiry. How “authentic” was Doyle’s existential sojourn? Was Doyle’s sense of authenticity really his own, or was it something taught to him. Was it something, perhaps, to which he conformed? Was Doyle really learning about himself outside the confines of society’s values? Or, was his conquest scripted—a path narrated to him by his culture and its history?

The specific moment in history that Doyle inhabited seems to have wielded an influence over him. In the first thirty-three years of the AT’s existence, between 1937 and 1969, only fifty-nine people hiked the trail in its entirety. Then, during the beginning of the 1970s, the number of AT thru-hikers surged. The Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC), the organization charged with maintaining the AT, reports that hundreds began to complete the ultra-long traverse on an annual basis. In total, the seventies saw at least 764 hikers walk every step of the AT.<sup>5</sup> It has been estimated that during that decade ten times that many started an AT “thru-hike” but failed to complete it.<sup>6</sup> AT thru-hikes take around four to six months to achieve. And most successful thru-hikers complete their journey in one prolonged march. It is almost always a solitary and arduous venture. No single explanation could possibly explain why everyone who has attempted the task chose to do so. Still, the burst of backpackers attempting a 2,000-mile hike begs the question. What was it about the 1970s in particular that led to the thru-hiker surge? Why was this moment in American history witness to such quests?

This essay argues that 1970s AT thru-hikers were motivated by desires for personal authenticity, meant to be developed apart from society’s tenets and restraints. However, the desire for self-discovery that drove these wilderness adventures was far from self-discovered. What is more, the ideas behind the spread of thru-hiking were shaped by more than just antecedents and forbears, such as Thoreau. Thru-hikers of the 1970s were embedded in what social commentator Tom

Wolfe called the “Me Generation” and personified what sport historian Benjamin Rader has identified as the “new strenuousness.”<sup>7</sup> Thru-hikers placed physical demands upon themselves with the hope that doing so would enable them to spurn society’s principles and discover their own. Yet this intended break from society was paradoxically the product of a culturally shaped and socially situated mentality. A distinct white, middle and upper-class ethos that employed entrenched ideas about nature, emergent notions about physical fitness, the persistent logic of post-World War II consumer culture, and most important of all, fashionable beliefs about what being a genuine individual actually meant underpinned the rapid growth in the popularity of thru-hiking. It turns out that instead of overcoming the enculturation of society, 1970s thru-hikers exemplified a particular and privileged location within it.

### The Origins of the Appalachian Trail

A prolonged departure from the norms of everyday life has been a common trope across cultures and certainly within American literature.<sup>8</sup> The idea that physical toughness and perseverance are virtues to be prized, especially within men, has also been common knowledge for Americans for centuries.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as a refuge from civilization built within, and by, a technology-obsessed society, the AT itself speaks to the durability and dynamism of the idea of wilderness in American minds. Most Americans have had few qualms with wilderness’s constant proximity to civilized life.<sup>10</sup>

These factors should not be forgotten for they were, even if tacitly, implicated in the ideas permeating middle and upper-class America during the period of the AT’s genesis. In the 1920s, hiking enthusiasts built the AT in the midst of the second wave of industrialization. Along with the urban vices of the Roaring Twenties, overcrowded tenements, congested traffic, smoke-filled skies and lungs, waste-filled streets, polluted water, and rumbling factory noise all appeared to be the price of progress.<sup>11</sup> In response, many social planners throughout the United States argued that the promotion of outdoor athletics represented the best way to check the negative side-effects wrought by modern prosperity.<sup>12</sup>

In its original incarnations, however, backcountry hiking stood as a distinctly upper-class solution to modern dilemmas. After the Civil War, businessmen, ministers, and scholars began to travel to upscale hotels and resorts to tramp through the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Not long after, long distance treks became popular at New England’s elite colleges. Closer to the cities pedestrianism emerged as a favored pastime as well, often leading recreational walkers into nearby hills for refreshment. Nonetheless, working-class pedestrians usually had financial incentives in mind when they walked. Moreover, progressive social planners, who intended to provide working-class city dwellers relief, promoted what sport historian Mark Dyreson has termed “nature by design.” Refreshment would be provided at newly furnished urban parks and playgrounds, not a preserved and unadulterated “natural” world. Thus, in contrast to pedestrianism and the playground movement, the roots of backpacking were dug much more deeply in the ethos of upper-class Anglo-American leisure and amateurism.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time changing middle and upper-class models of masculinity undergirded the emergence of wilderness recreation. With the rise of industry, skilled labor had begun to dissolve. Meanwhile, around the turn of the century, women and immigrants gained greater

access to America's political sphere. The apparent loss of independence and power led a number of intellectuals to become obsessed with the notion that boys and men had become "over-civilized," "soft," and "effeminate." As gender historian Gail Bederman argues, scholars and politicians re-conceptualized masculinity by urging white males to seek out vigorous physical challenges. These strenuous trials were deemed suitable only for the "stronger" sex and essential for cultivating the qualities necessary for leadership.<sup>14</sup> In an era of gender upheaval, mostly white male social reformers reified white male dominance. Notably, in America's wealthier quarters, these anxieties were dealt with in ways that foreshadowed the path 1970s thru-hikers would travel. In light of the impersonal corporate structure overtaking the country, many upper-class citizens sought out exotic experiences in distant lands, either in their own nation or beyond its borders. Advocates of these unique encounters insisted that they would foster a sense of personal fulfillment and self-sufficiency that could no longer be found nearer to home.<sup>15</sup>

Within this milieu, the idea of creating a 2,000-mile long recreational hiking trail became a legitimate possibility. In 1921, a forester with ardent Socialist commitments named Benton MacKaye proposed blazing an "Appalachian Trail." The New Englander presented his idea with the support of a cohort of progressive, communitarian-minded "regional planners."<sup>16</sup> According to these activists, the AT would not only provide healthy retreats from urban life but would reshape American society toward more cooperative ends. The original AT blueprint included shelters, camps, and full-blown communities devised to be, as MacKaye put it, a permanent "sanctuary and a refuge from the scramble of [the] ever-day world [of] commercial life."<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the "sanctuary" was not to be. By 1937 a "footpath for hikers in the Appalachian Mountains" extended "from Maine to Georgia." But it was only a footpath and not the communitarian nexus the MacKaye had envisioned.<sup>18</sup> Affluent lawyers, scholars, editors, architects, and scientists, connected to Northeastern hiking clubs, enthusiastically appropriated MacKaye's plan and built the trail. They created a site for short-term recreation. Yet, it was a hiatus from, rather than an overt challenge to, industrial capitalism. As a sight merely for leisure and refreshment, MacKaye's deeper intentions had been placed aside.<sup>19</sup>

MacKaye and those that reframed his vision had one thing in common, however. Their ideas had been built upon what frontier historian Fredrick Jackson Turner and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt championed as an essential linkage between the challenges of wilderness survival and the moral development of America's citizenry. For MacKaye, Roosevelt, and Turner, along with self-realization, broader social advancement represented a key component to successful wilderness ventures. "Free lands . . . served to reinforce the democratic influences" of the once-new nation, Turner had claimed, for "the very fact of wilderness appealed to man's struggle for a higher type of society."<sup>20</sup> Although they may have disagreed on what an ideal society looked like, all three of these bold thinkers agreed that civic virtue depended on encounters with more natural environs.

In the eyes of early AT thru-hikers, personal development through contact with undisturbed nature would be comparatively vital. Yet many of the 1970s trekkers would have recoiled at the notion that backpacking was a "social technology" designed to improve and Americanize the citizenry at large.<sup>21</sup> The shift in focus from civic to personal virtue does not represent a total rejection of the inheritance of American ideas about the power of outdoor recreation, but it was a

partial departure. Compared to the dogmas of MacKaye, Turner, or Roosevelt, early AT thru-hikers developed a more self-centered philosophy.

### The Me Decade, the New Strenuousness, and Wilderness

Significantly, thru-hikers were not the only ones to choose this path. In the 1970s the civic potential of sports, outdoor recreation, and other mechanisms of social capital were called into question.<sup>22</sup> The previous decade had been tumultuous. Civil rights protests, anti-war demonstrations, and calls for women's liberation represented various and overlapping incarnations of the 1960s counterculture. These "movements" challenged government policies and social hierarchies but nevertheless seemed to wane without offering practical new directions to take. Amidst oil embargos and an economic downturn in the 1970s, doubts concerning the future of American "civilization" fermented. As 1970s historian Bruce Schulman claims, many Americans concluded that their expectations for a profoundly revived United States, which arose after World War II, had fallen short. In turn, notions of social solidarity and conceptions of a national community diminished.<sup>23</sup>

A distrust and loss of faith in larger social causes led many Americans to do as many thru-hikers counseled, to turn inward. As Robert Pirsig's narrator in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), one of the eras most celebrated self-help travel logs, advised, "[t]he place to improve the world [was] one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there."<sup>24</sup> Christening the 1970s the "Me Decade," social commentator and popular writer Tom Wolfe described the effect of this ideological transformation. Americans were "breaking off from society," Wolfe wrote, with the intent of "changing one's personality—remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very *self*."<sup>25</sup> In his social critique of the era, *The Culture of Narcissism*, critic and historian Christopher Lasch likewise posited that an emphasis on the present and a loss of historical continuity had led Americans to carry "the logic of individualism to the extreme."<sup>26</sup> As yet another contemporary scholar, Peter Clecak, put it, "the seventies were an apolitical, devitalized decade of intense, morally debilitating, preoccupation with the self."<sup>27</sup>

The movement from an emphasis on social progress to autonomous self-development was, of course, not all-encompassing. For African Americans, the Civil Rights struggle continued. In opposition to impeding desegregation, working-class whites from the Carolinas to Massachusetts ardently protested cross-town busing. Hundreds of thousands marched and protested on behalf of the emergent Gay Liberation Movement. Meanwhile, the second wave of feminism reached its zenith. In the heart of the Me Decade, Americans involved in these movements continued to engage with broader social causes, contradicting the perhaps over-simplistic portraits painted by Wolfe and others.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding, especially within economically comfortable sectors of society, Wolfe described "[o]rdinary people" disregarding "family, neighborhood, and community, and created worlds of their own."<sup>29</sup>

On the AT, the dynamics of the "Me Generation" manifested into what Benjamin Rader has called the "new strenuousness." Unlike Rooseveltian recreation devised for the sake of the nation's future, young upwardly mobile Americans, or "yuppies" as they were labeled, flocked to individualistic physically-based recreational practices where they could find intrinsic fulfillment.

Through choosing to confront physical tests, yuppies saw themselves as superseding social constraints and achieving individual sufficiency and improvements that they failed to attain in the workplace. As Rader contends, novel aerobics classes, individualized fitness regimes, the sudden popularity of long-distance-running, and the proliferation of health clubs all oriented people's attention "to the self, upon the individual rather than upon society or community."<sup>30</sup>

The 1970s marathon fad mirrored this development. As marathon historian Pamela Cooper argues, in the 1970s upwardly mobile and mostly white middle-class Americans reframed distance-running. It had long been seen by the mainstream as a "strange" pastime associated with fringe ethnic groups. In the 1970s, it became a middle-class mechanism for self-fulfillment, not to mention a serious money-making enterprise.<sup>31</sup> The best-selling author of *The Complete Book of Running* (1977), Jim Fixx, testified on behalf of the new strenuousness. "Having lost faith in much of society, government, business, marriage, the church and so on, we seemed to have turned to ourselves, putting what faith we can muster in our own minds and bodies," Fixx announced.<sup>32</sup> Like Wolfe's prototype of Me Decade individuals, runners spurned conventions and searched for independence. Like Rader's model of the new strenuousness, they achieved such self-sufficiency and meaning through laborious physical activity.

A solo 2,000-plus mile trek where all that is seemingly needed is physical ability, determination, and a few implements that one can carry on one's back aligned with this spirit of arduous middle and upper-class individualism. As one 1970s thru-hiker described it, traveling the AT from end-to-end entailed significant physical and psychological challenges:

Rain, mud, wet feet, blisters, wind-swept ridges, swollen tendons, pack straps digging into my shoulder; out of food, money, water; diarrhea, getting lost, taking wrong trail; discouraging people, dogs, fever, mental fatigue; always hungry, always thirsty, Trail always going over the toughest part, rattlesnakes, copperheads, rocks of Pennsylvania, bad water of New York, New Jersey, bad Trail markings of southwestern Virginia, floods of Vermont, White Mountain day hikers and their remarks; gnats on top of mountains, blackflies halfway down and mosquitoes at the bottom, shelters taken down because of vandalism, raccoons and porcupines trying to get into the pack. . . . The trail was certainly not a picnic.<sup>33</sup>

But a picnic was not what yuppies wanted. Rather, a combination of physical stress, mental exhaustion, and hard-earned self-sufficiency represented precisely the type recreation for which many middle and upper-class Americans pined.

Combined with the intense physical demands of long-distance hiking, the AT had an additional appeal. The idea of "wilderness" has been historically situated as, in the words of wilderness historian Roderick Nash, the "antipode of civilization." Like many social constructions, it is defined by its opposite. And after "the political crusades of the 1960s had apparently given way," Nash claims, "wilderness seemed to many a necessary ingredient."<sup>34</sup> Although wilderness had once been something to be feared, conquered, and tamed, by the Me Decade, as environmental scholar William Cronon further explains, wilderness had come to epitomize "a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves . . . lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial

lives.”<sup>35</sup> In the 1970s, for those looking to separate themselves from the manipulations of civilized life, immersion in the “wild” was an ideal solution.<sup>36</sup>

AT enthusiasts Ann Sutton and Myron Sutton spoke to these sentimentalities. As they wrote in their 1967 promotional, *The Appalachian Trail: Wilderness on the Doorstep* (1966), “[t]he Appalachian Trail is one of the last strongholds of peace in a congested and largely urban world.” The Suttons explained that “for many, the idea of hiking, indeed the principle on which the Appalachian Trail was founded, is to get away from the cares of civilization.” On the AT, they proclaimed, “the hiker in effect flees from protocol” and is thus “emancipated.” Indeed, “[w]hatever regimentation the hiker has suffered, at work or at home, his aversions to it vanish or are subdued in the wilderness”<sup>37</sup> A number of social and cultural forces had coalesced. For upwardly mobile Americans of the early 1970s, dissatisfied with “work or home” and dispassionate toward social issues, the desire for a new form of individualism arose. This new model of independence was to be forged apart from society’s normal day-to-day operations and, for many, through autonomous corporeal accomplishments. The inherent physical challenges of the AT and transcendental conceptions of “wilderness” made the “wilderness path” a superlative remedy. The AT could provide what work, home, and society failed to supply.

### Consuming the “Boom”

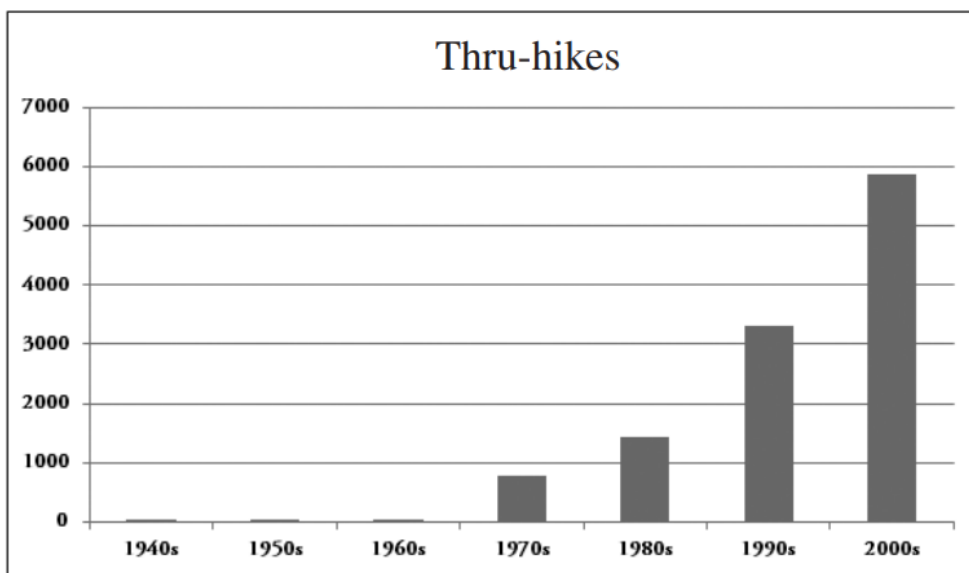
The effect of this type of thinking was far reaching. As the *New York Times* reported in 1971, an overall “backpacking boom revolutionized American outdoor life.”<sup>38</sup> However, as environmental historian James Turner claims, this “revolution” was predicated on a consumer culture. By the 1970s the very idea of wilderness became entwined with consumerism. Going “back-to-nature” still entailed personal revitalization as it had before World War II, but to stem the damage wrought by overuse, by the late 1960s recreation advocates also pragmatically promoted what they called “minimalist” camping. Open fires, hunting, axes, and log cabins gave way to a cluster of new gadgets and technologies that allowed backpackers to “leave no trace” within wilderness preserves. With the time and money to purchase portable stoves, lightweight sleeping bags, nylon tents, and other high-tech devices, hikers could now pass through the wild without causing significant ecological harm, even if they held little knowledge of ecology. Thus technical innovations and a flourishing marketplace made wilderness adventures possible for inexperienced but well-off adventurers.<sup>39</sup>

While numbers released by backpacking manufacturers offer insight into the extent of the “boom,” they also indicate the importance of consumer culture and capitalism to wilderness experiences. Camp Trail, the largest backpacking equipment manufacturer in the United States at the time, reported a 500 percent increase in sales between 1966 and 1971. Retailers such as Kelty, Colorado Outdoor, and Trailwise saw sales double between 1969 and 1971. In that brief time span, more than sixty million Americans reported taking a stab at camping. As one Recreation Equipment Inc. general manager noted, his store experienced an *increase* in sales from 1970 to 1971 greater than its *total* sales in 1967.<sup>40</sup> As New York City Marathon promoter Fred Lebow notoriously realized around the same time, affluent Americans would pay for vigorous physical challenges. The result was an entire industry devoted to creating and selling innovative running shoes, shorts, and other essentials. The same pattern is found in backpacking.<sup>41</sup>

On top of innovative equipment, transportation and the spread of information played roles in the backpacking boom. New highways and air travel made wilderness areas hundreds and thousands of miles away reachable. Magazines and guide books allowed backpackers to plan trips from the comfort of their homes.<sup>42</sup> In parallel to Jim Fixx's *Complete Book of Running*, for instance, Collin Fletcher's 1970 "how-to" backpack text *The Compete Walker* sold over half a million copies.<sup>43</sup>

Then, in the middle of these changes, a text meant to guide AT thru-hikers became available for the first time. Fifty-five-year-old former ACT secretary and volunteer Edward Garvey became one of five successful continuous thru-hikers in 1970.<sup>44</sup> In *Appalachian Hiker: The Adventure of a Lifetime*, published a year later, Garvey provided a day-by-day account of his trek. However, first he used the opening 160 pages of his text to discuss proper clothing, footwear, and food for the long journey. He gave a detailed description of how he picked equipment. As a smart consumer, he even discussed potential options he chose to go without. Followers of the "new strenuousness" looking for prolonged authentic experiences in the wilderness now had a detailed outline for how to proceed.<sup>45</sup>

After only five people including Garvey thru-hiked the AT continuously in 1970, in 1971 a record twenty-three people reported finishing the whole traverse. All but one hiked continuously, and the lone anomaly made the journey in two 1,000-mile sections (in 1969 and 1971, respectively).<sup>46</sup> In 1972, as an early ATC tally shows, at least thirty-five people covered the entire trail.<sup>47</sup> Dubbed by one long-distance-trekker "the year of the thru-hiker," 1973 stands as the tipping-point.<sup>48</sup> That year, at least ninety-three people successful traversed the whole AT.<sup>49</sup> As one 1973 thru-hiker recalled, "with so many young determined hikers just zipping along, the first few days on the trail seemed like a cross country track meet."<sup>50</sup> At the ATC's headquarters in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, there is a single box with information on thru-hikers labeled "1948-1972." From 1973 to the present each annual class of thru-hikers garners its own box or ever larger *boxes*. By 2014, the ATC has recognized 14,000 individuals as "2,000-milers."



Source: ATC's website [www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/2000-milers](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/2000-milers).



## 1970s Thru-Hikers

Given the context of the early 1970s, the original surge in thru-hiking begins to make sense. The historical conception of “wilderness” as a site of self-actualization, a burgeoning consumer culture, the development of new technologies, the popular ideology of the “new strenuousness,” and the spread of information, specifically the publication of *Appalachian Hiker*, provided the crucial woodwork. Thru-hikers then responded to and in turn signaled through their actions deep cultural forces infused especially within middle and upper-class American life. To the “Me Generation” thru-hiking offered a way to leave a troubled society at least temporarily behind and experience bona fide self-discovery.

Take Garvey as a first instance. He was a white, middle-class male, retired from work, now able to fulfill “a long held dream.” His age and devotion to a social cause (the AT itself) set him apart from those who would heed his call.<sup>51</sup> Still, in other ways he championed certain aspects of the Me Decade model. “No one, unless he be a total recluse, can live his life exactly as he pleases. Each day of a man’s life is a series of compromises and accommodations, with members of his family, his co-workers, his boss, his neighbors, and others,” Garvey lamented. The identification with the “struggles” of family obligations, one’s job and neighborhood, and not one’s race, class, or gender signified Garvey’s privileged social position as a white, middle-class man. This sort of identification represents a recurrent theme found in subsequent thru-hiker writings. It would not be in the public or political sphere that Garvey gained freedom. Rather, it was on the AT that Garvey found “days in which all the options” were his to choose. It was within himself, by selecting “the time of arising and the time of going to bed, the choice of food to be eaten at each meal, the speed at which to hike, and the side trails chosen to explore,” that Garvey found an authentic sense of achievement.<sup>52</sup>

In 1969 another middle-aged white male from New York named Bill O’Brien took to the AT. He was not yet ready for retirement. Nevertheless, he took a leave of absence from work without pay to complete his thru-hike. “The Trail,” O’Brien wrote, “means the awareness of never fearing anything in nature at any hour and a feeling of being more aware of Manitou, as I call my God, than ever before.” O’Brien claimed not only that he gained a higher level of awareness and meaning through his experience but that thru-hiking helped him find his very own “new age” religion!<sup>53</sup>

Other thru-hikers spoke longingly about their departures from society and their entrance into a more genuine mode of being. As potential 1971 thru-hiker Jack Pettrey wrote to the ATC, “in effect, I hope to just drop out of this rat race of life for a summer before I start work and am sucked in it for good.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, successful 1972 thru-hiker James Rutter of Massachusetts admitted, “I was an ‘escapist,’ [but] not in the sense of fleeing from work rather than in gaining relief from our largely unreal life.” Typifying the desire to live purely in the present, observed by both Wolfe and Lasch, on the AT Rutter claimed, “I *was* living a real life—here ‘real’ being synonymous with ‘direct.’” In fact, to leave the trail, Rutter asserted, was “to come back to our largely second hand manner of experience.” Leaving the AT—not going to it—was, in his estimation, “to embark on a trip away from the real.”<sup>55</sup>

A notable member of 1973's record-breaking class of thru-hikers was Warren Doyle. A true "individualist," Doyle exemplified the overall mind-set that led to the thru-hiker surge. At the age of twenty-three, Doyle decided he wanted to do "something that had no material reward, no trophy, no cheerleaders, nothing like that."<sup>56</sup> He wanted to spurn the things an estranged society valued and took to the AT to form a set of standards of his own. He believed "nature . . . was created to assist man in fulfilling his wants . . . satisfying his needs." A young, upwardly-mobile white male, like so many of the "Me Generation," he wanted to get in touch with his truest self. "Nature," he claimed, "was to serve as a vehicle for self-education; the AT would be 'required reading' under the topic heading 'Personal Growth.' I was going to learn," he avowed, "just who I thought I was." Hiking the entire AT in a record sixty-six-and-a-half days, Doyle found what he was seeking. Afterward he explained, "I see more about what is and what isn't important. I see more trivialities around me." Thus Doyle "did not conquer the Trail," for, as he averred, "man can never conquer nature. I utilized the AT to conquer myself."<sup>57</sup>

The same year Doyle completed his trek, Steven Sherman and Julia Older of New Hampshire thru-hiked the AT together. Even for this couple, however, it was a quest for individual meaning that drove them. Both aspiring writers felt personally alienated by the work society provided, and they both sensed they needed to focus on their personal development. "We had gone the nine-to-five route like everyone else," the dual authors wrote, but "had each reached the same conclusion individually: Time is only of consequence when you are pursuing your own disciplines and beliefs." Sherman and Older persevered and gained the experiences and insights for which they aimed. "We walked through the extremes," the couple declared, "both in nature and ourselves." Of one especially poignant experience they wrote, "[W]e let ourselves be enmeshed with where we were, briefly losing our identity to the vastness—and gaining more of ourselves in return." They both marveled at the knowledge and fulfillment they gained for themselves on the AT.<sup>58</sup>

Cindy Ross expressed comparable thoughts about her 1977 attempted thru-hike. Before her trek Ross had been working toward an advanced art degree but confessed to "slipping," being "out of touch," and quite literally "losing the meaning of life." From her Philadelphia apartment she "looked down eighteen stories to diseased oaks, diseased pigeons, confused humans running in a maze." Ross's sense of alienation was palpable. By the time she attempted her trek, the surge in thru-hikers had overtaken the AT. Ross hiked along with "bankers, chefs, attorneys, graduate students . . . men with families . . . single women . . . escapists, searchers, the carefree, and the intense." But much like other thru-hikers before her, on the AT she found self-transformation. Ross claimed her "relationship with the mountains" became "sacred." As she traversed them she was "born again." After Ross's traveling partner hiked ahead of her because Ross had been unwilling to continue a twenty-mile per day pace, Ross suffered intense loneliness and fatigue. She took a break from her hike after she developed a stress fracture in her foot. When she rejoined the AT weeks later her hopes for traveling the entire trail in one season had vanished. Still, the experience of being able to "live how you feel," to "be 100% real," had been too much for Ross to give up. She returned the following summer and completed her hike, where she once more seemed "to function on a higher plane."<sup>59</sup> Ross too found meaning and independence through a strenuous physical challenge amidst the wilderness.

When author David Brill embarked on the AT in 1979 hundreds of thru-hikers passing over the trail throughout the spring, summer, and fall had become expected. Few thru-hikers in 1979

likely experienced anything like what early hikers had when they traversed the trail in fifties and sixties. Although Brill claimed he wanted to do something different, the year he set out to conquer the AT about five hundred others attempted to do the same. In truth, Brill had a number of hiking partners, four of whom were with him most of his trip. He spent one night sharing a shelter with nineteen other hikers and when he summited Mount Katahdin to complete his journey, thirteen other thru-hikers made the climb with him.<sup>60</sup>

Yet Brill also claimed to gain the experience of being apart from society. He wrote of being “isolated from the world” and of visiting “outposts of civilization” only to resupply. He also reveled in self-sufficiency. As he wrote in his journal, “I can’t think of a single thing I really need that I can’t find within myself or within my pack.” Moreover, as others before him, the AT served as a vehicle for personal enlightenment. During a stop at Hot Springs, Virginia, Brill had an “awakening.” As he confessed, “[f]or the first time in my life I knew that God and all His goodness lurked in every rock, in every tree, in every blade of grass, and in me.”<sup>61</sup> Based on these testimonies, Tom Wolfe’s claim that a third great spiritual awakening had descended on at least certain quarters of America during the “Me Decade” appears to be no exaggeration.

### An Interpretation of Privilege

In their search for an authentic “self” almost none of these hikers dwelt on prominent social classifications. They did not wonder in depth about what it meant to be white, male or female, middle-class or upper-class U.S. citizens. And if they did, they often claimed that these things held minimal significance on the AT. Garvey alluded toward his understanding of gender. His disappointment with the rewards of a middle-class life parallel a reevaluation of masculinity, similar to what gender historian Michael Kimmel describes emerging in response to second-wave feminism. The role of “bread-winner” was no longer as satisfying as it had been in an earlier epoch.<sup>62</sup> Sherman, Older, and Doyle each considered what it meant to be Americans, each speaking briefly and disparagingly about the condition of the United States. Life on the trail is what gave them hope for the nation’s future.

Ross considered the impact of gender more directly. Ross originally titled her book *A Woman’s Journey on the Appalachian Trail* (1982), and she did not shy away from describing a woman’s physical challenges, such as traversing the Green Mountains of Vermont with pain from menstruation. Ross also portrayed herself, at times, in a conventionally feminine manner. She appeared more willing to express her emotions than the other hikers. Descriptions of her metaphorical “heart” are a recurrent theme of her book, whether it was burning or bursting, filling or melting, becoming heavy or light.<sup>63</sup> On multiple occasions Ross also describes openly breaking down in tears, something to which none of the other hikers admit. Furthermore, Ross traveled most of her journey with companions, and her friendships with them become central to the story she tells. “The real beauty of the Appalachian Trail is not just living in harmony with nature, but with each other,” she declared.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, if Ross conforms to certain feminine norms, she contested some traditional gender expectations as well. For instance, she buries any misguided notion about innate female frailty.<sup>65</sup> The hike “does a real job on our bodies,” Ross boasted; it “rips the Achilles tendon right away from the bone [and] utterly destroys the knees.” At one point she described her legs as “so scratched and bloody that they look as if they were beaten with whips.” Ross embraced all this as part of the process. “Testing our bodies is

important and seemingly necessary,” Ross explained; “no one makes us push so hard . . . we just do.”<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps most telling, however, while Ross admits her sex made her a minority on the AT she did not find this fact particularly important. As Ross told it, all the thru-hikers functioned on the same social plain. And this, for Ross, was evidence of the unique opportunity that the AT provided. As Ross put it, “[w]omen are scarce, but we certainly aren’t catered to. There is weakness and there is strength, but it is intermingled. Even that is shared.” Indeed, when Ross addressed gender, she claimed gender norms were “one very big thing that is missing in this type of society [on the AT]. No one is inflicting any standards, rules of behavior, or perverted conditioning on us, so we’re free to be ourselves.”<sup>67</sup> Ross’s perception of an apparent lack of gender expectations is part of what made her authentic experience possible.

Brill, in a less transparent manner, expressed a desire to fulfill masculine norms. After preparing to face conscription into the Vietnam War and then seeing the zeal of the sixties disappear, he felt “like a man who had spent years preparing—mentally, emotionally—for a test only to arrive a day late.” His solution was to find “something new and different” and so decided to “make the Appalachian Trail [his] quest,” but this is as far as his discussion went.<sup>68</sup> For the most part, Brill’s narrative concentrates on his inner journey, without any further allusions to the meaning of manhood.

As thru-hikers took to the AT, they thus embodied what may be termed a faith in asocial identity formation. That is, they insisted that who they were was not defined by socially ascribed meanings or their position within society but by what was authentically and autonomously within each of them. In the 1970s, women’s liberation, African-American civil rights, anti-war nationalism, and gay rights movements all gained force. Moreover, within the history of physical recreation in North America, race, class, gender, sex and sexuality, ethnicity, locality, and nationalism have each been distinctly entwined with notions of physical activity.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, as thru-hikers took to physical activity to construct and discover their genuine selves, they did not dwell on the particular social identities with which modern recreational practitioners or contemporary political struggles were so often associated. Yet, there were a number of socially and culturally contingent factors that thru-hikers had in common.

The 1970s trekkers likely came from similar social echelons. Thru-hikers sought an intense and personal trial, but they otherwise lived lives with at least a high probability of stability. Most (if not all) of them were racialized by their culture as “white.”<sup>70</sup> The majority also identified as men. Further, given the time (four to six months) and money (the cost of equipment and food) that a thru-hike required, it is fair to assume most thru-hikers came from middle and upper-class backgrounds, as did most “Me Generation” adherents.<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that they were wealthy, but thru-hikers did not put their livelihoods at risk by taking a months-long vacation. All of this together yields some important interpretive repercussions.

Nineteen-seventies thru-hikers thought of themselves as free and independent, enabled to define themselves without reference to the socially and culturally constructed “axes of power” such as race, class, and gender that everyone inevitably negotiates.<sup>72</sup> Yet, the fact that thru-hikers overlooked socially ascribed identity markers does not mean race, class, and gender and other

social processes were not essential to their experiences. Indeed, the perception of freedom to define oneself apart from social constructions underscores a privileged social status. As critical race theorists Jon Solomon and Les Black suggest, “race identities and ethnic categories are ideological entities that are made and remade through struggle.”<sup>73</sup> However, as sport sociologists Jonathan Long and Kevin Hylton note, “defining a white identity is rather different because of the dominance of whiteness in society.” Instead of being made and remade through (economic, social, political, and psychological) struggles, “whiteness is reinforced through a series of discursive techniques that includes the power not to be named.”<sup>74</sup> As the privileged norm, the hegemonic measure by which other marginalized groups are judged, whiteness, maleness, and wealth become obscured, particularly for those classified as members of these dominant groups. Kimmel describes this circumstance in regard to how men simultaneously perform hegemonic masculinity but lack awareness of gender. As he puts it, “the very processes that confer privilege to one group and not to another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred.”<sup>75</sup>

Like all historical subjects, thru-hikers could never function apart from the ideological constructions and processes that ordered the community in which they lived. Yet because they embodied hegemonic positions in that community it became easier for them not to see this and to thus imagine their identity formation as intrinsic to them—and to them alone. Thru-hikers believed they could find themselves apart from social forces, but those very forces turn out to be their mechanisms of departure. The ability to sense the existential opportunity to search for an autonomous “self,” which 1970s thru-hikers dutifully described, is largely owed to the cultural norms, social constructions, and socioeconomic statuses from which the hikers unknowingly or at least tacitly profited. Paradoxically, specific social arrangements made it possible for thru-hikers to imagine a world where society did not intervene.

As sport studies scholar Jaime Schultz attests, although historical sources perhaps cannot reveal “the verities of what ‘really’ happened,” the descriptions thru-hikers penned help to elucidate the “mentalities . . . that made events meaningful.”<sup>76</sup> Technological innovation, newly developed infrastructure, consumer culture, and the spread of information made ultra-long distance treks accessible to the affluent masses. Still, these factors only begin to explain why people bought and employed technological advancements specifically for backpacking, let alone for spending months at a time traversing the entire AT. In the 1970s, it was widespread and socially imbibed ideological changes, present within white middle- and upper-class physical culture, which combined to set the tone by which thru-hikers traveled. At the same instance, thru-hikers were only enabled to tread a seemingly asocial path because of the social capital they carried with them into woods.

### The Contingency of Individualism

From this perspective, rather than a form of authenticity, thru-hikers seem to characterize and highlight the inevitable social and intersubjective nature of identity. The very idea of what it means to be an individual appears to be necessarily contingent on social forces. Thru-hikers took to the AT in search of self-discovery just as a particular notion of self-discovery came into fashion within the sector of society that they inhabited. By leaving society for the so-called “wilderness,” in many ways they merely emulated the culture that surrounded them. The trekkers

aimed to spurn social conventions and sojourn in a more genuine world. They believed that by doing so they could autonomously discover and define who they were, but this was as much an autonomous venture as a reaction to a distinct historical context. During the Me Decade, with the help of consumer culture, followers of the “new strenuousness” found a home on a trail that ran the length of the Appalachian Mountains. Meanwhile, the very belief in social transcendence implicated the social position from which thru-hikers spoke.

Warren Doyle left a tribute to thru-hiking that underscores this pattern. As a doctoral candidate at the University of Connecticut, Doyle devised a class where he took groups of twenty or so college students on thru-hikes. As part of the class, before embarking on the venture, Doyle asked his students to explain why they had enrolled (that is, why they wanted to do a thru-hike). Their responses appear to reveal Doyle’s influence, if not the impact of 1970s culture generally. Recall Doyle’s previous quotation: “Nature was to serve as a vehicle for self-education; the AT would be ‘required reading’ under the topic heading ‘Personal Growth.’”<sup>77</sup> It is possible that Doyle’s students affected his own thinking. Nevertheless, Doyle and his students conformed in ways more akin to recitation than self-discovery.

As one of Doyle’s male sophomore students described, “most important, I’m curious about my own development and growth. . . . I hope to gain confidence in myself, but also more direction in my life.” Likewise, a female biology major observed, “what interests me the most about the hike is the opportunity it provides to learn more about myself, others, and nature.” A fellow biology major agreed, “I think that this type of experience would be a great opportunity to learn more about myself, to make some close friends, and to learn more about nature.” A senior in physical therapy opined, “I think that it offers an excellent opportunity for me to grow as a person. . . . It is a chance for me to get to know about myself.” A sophomore studying horticulture wanted to go on the hike because it would provide “an opportunity to really get to know myself. . . . [It] will be a physically and mentally awakening period.” Yet another student declared, “I’m looking for experiences that will help me to discover more about myself and allow me to grow.” These selections represent a larger collection of equivalent quotations.<sup>78</sup>

Ideas come in many forms, but even as historians chalk up ideological phenomena to cultural processes, at a root level what more are they doing than asserting that groups of people or even individuals have shaped the thinking of others? Doyle was probably influenced by the culture in which he grew up and then likely recapitulated its ideology to his students. In this way, even as they aimed to rely solely on themselves, in trying to supersede the standards handed to them by their culture, thru-hikers such as Doyle and his students did the opposite. They performed a version of individualism imparted to them, becoming dependent on the very thing they hoped to overcome.

In the 1970s thru-hiking’s popularity began to grow exponentially. The source of this growth was predicated on a number of social and cultural factors. Indeed, early AT thru-hikers trod a human-made trail and followed strategically placed markers in more ways than one. They carried innovative camping equipment, utilized well-researched guidebooks, searched out wilderness in part because of historically evolving ideas, and embraced self-sufficiency through physical fitness in the midst of fitness and backpacking booms. In an era when middle and upper-class Americans began to turn inward, thru-hikers likewise fell in line with the trend. What is more, by

drowning out culturally contingent and socially constructed meanings and classifications thru-hikers signified their privileged social status, the very status that made their existential sojourns into the wilderness seem possible in the first place. No matter how far into the woods they traveled, or how deeply they probed within, 1970s AT thru-hikers never left society entirely behind.

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#### Footnotes

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1. Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

2. Warren Doyle in Sherman and Older, *Appalachian Odyssey: Walking the Trail from Georgia to Maine* (Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Green Press, 1977), 229-230; the description “wilderness footpath” comes from *Appalachian Conference Member Handbook*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harpers Ferry, W.V.: Appalachian Trail Conference, 1978), 5. According to the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC), the AT presently is “roughly” 2,180 miles long; see <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail> [8 July 2013]. Here and in the following text, the AT is referred to as 2,000-plus miles or simply 2,000 miles. Because of relocations, the exact length has changed over the years. For more on the biophysical description of the AT see <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/terrain-by-state> [11 January 2013].

3. Many people who live near the AT are never moved or able to visit it. Many may not even know that the trail exists. From the rural areas of southern Appalachia to northern cities like New York and Boston, it is difficult to say how all the people who live in proximity to the trail understand it, if they think about it all. While the relationship between the AT and the diverse populations who live nearby it raises interesting and worthwhile questions, this topic is too large to be addressed in the present inquiry. Additionally, although Native Americans had long been removed by colonists and Anglo-American imperialists, it is worth acknowledging that the persistent notion that the lands the AT crosses were once “wild” and thus vacant of human life is inaccurate. Such an assumption reveals the power of American mythology to silence the histories of Native American cultures. Native Americans lived along North America’s eastern coast long before European colonization.

4. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Walden, Civil Disobedience and Other Writings*, ed. William Rossi (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2008), 260-287, 262 [QUOTATION]—many speculate this printed version is not an exact replication of Thoreau's 1851 lyceum lecture in Concord.
5. "2,000 Milers," <<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/2000-milers>> [8 July 2013]. Today the Appalachian Trail Conference is called the Appalachian Trail *Conservancy*. I called it the "Conference" because that was its title in the 1970s, the era with which this essay is concerned.
6. Since 2000 about 25 percent who attempt a thru-hike saw it to its end. However, Brian King, the ATC Director of Public Affairs, speculated in 1993 that the thru-hiker success rate "used to be closer to ten percent" (Ronland Muesser, *Long Distance Hiking: Lessons From the Appalachian Trail* [Camden, Maine: Ragged Mountain Press, 1998], 3). For further statistics see "2,000 Milers," <<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/2000-milers>> [8 July 2013]. Today the AT remains by far the most "thru-hiked" ultralong-distance trail in North America and the world. Over 14,000 people have traversed it from end-to-end.
7. Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade And the Third Great Awakening," *The Purple Decades* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982); Benjamin G. Rader, "The Quest for Self-Sufficiency and the New Strenuosity: Reflections on the Strenuous Life of the 1970s and the 1980s," *Journal of Sport History* 18 (1999): 255-266.
8. Along with Thoreau's *Walden*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) offer prime examples. Of course, the "hero's" departure, transformation, and then return remains a theme in various mythologies, see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2008).
9. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University Press, 1995).
10. For the most celebrated work on American wilderness see Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001). For the contingencies behind the emergence of the modern wilderness idea, also see Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). For an exemplary political and ideological history of wilderness since the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, see James Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012). For various and competing conceptions of "wilderness," see J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
11. Martin V. Melosi, "The Environmental Crises in the City: The Relationship between Industrialization and Urban Pollution," in *Pollution and Reform in American Cities, 1870-1930*, ed. Martin V. Melosi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 3-30; Ten Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), chap. 10.



12. Mark Dyreson, "Nature by Design: Modern American Ideas about Sport, Energy, Evolution, and Republics, 1856-1920," *Journal of Sport History* 26 (1999): 447-468.
13. Boston Laura and Guy Waterman, *The Forest and the Crag: A History of Hiking Trail Blazing, and Adventure in the Northeast Mountains* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 1989), 183-198. For the history of pedestrianism see Pamela Cooper, *The American Marathon* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1998), chap. 2; Ted Vincent, *Mudville's Revenge: The Rise and Fall of American Sport* (New York: Bison Books, 1994), chap. 2; Dyreson, "Nature by Design," 447-469.
14. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.
15. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880—1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982; reprint ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).
16. Clarence Stein and Harris Whitaker, and later, Lewis Mumford supported MacKaye's vision of the AT.
17. Benton MacKaye, "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning," *Journal of American Institute of Architects* 9 (1921): 325-330. For more on MacKaye's vision also see Benton MacKaye, "Great Appalachian Trail from New Hampshire to the Carolinas," *New York Times*, 18 February 1923, p. 15.
18. Myron H. Avery, "The Appalachian Trail," reprinted from *Mountain Magazine*, February 1930, p. 3.
19. Ronald Foresta, "Transformation of the Appalachian Trail," *Geographical Review* 77 (1987): 76-85; Paul Sutter, "'A Retreat from Profit': Colonization, The Appalachian Trail and the Social Roots of Benton MacKaye's Wilderness Advocacy," *Environmental History* 4 (1999): 553-577. For a fine biography of MacKaye see Larry Anderson, *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 2002). For the ATC's informative version of this story see Brian B. King, "Trail Years: A History of the Appalachian Trail Conference," *Appalachian Trailway News 57<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue*; cf. Gerald Lowery, Jr., "Benton MacKaye's Appalachian Trail as a Cultural Symbol" (doctoral dissertation, Emory University, 1981).
20. Fredrick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1921), 244-245 [1<sup>st</sup> quotation], 261 [2<sup>nd</sup> quotation]; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1900).
21. Dyreson, *Making the American Team*.

22. David Zang, *Sports Wars: Athletes in the Age of Aquarius* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001).
23. Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002). Also see David Frum *How We Got Here—The 70s: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life (For Better Or Worse)* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
24. Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (New York: William Morrow, 1974; new ed., New York: Harpers Collins, 2005), 304.
25. Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” 277.
26. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), xv.
27. Peter Clecak, *America’s Quest for the Ideal Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.
28. Stephen Tuck, “‘We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off’: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest during the 1970s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 637-654; Simon Hall, “Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 655-672; J. Zeitz, “Rejecting the Center: Radical Grassroots Politics in the 1970s—Second Wave Feminism As a Case Study,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 673-688.
29. Some examples Wolfe pointed to were retirees moving to Florida or traveling the nation as “trailer sailors,” youth embracing new age religions (i.e., Synanon, Arica, and Scientology) or moving to communes (there were approximately 2,000 communes in the U.S. by 1970), or adults choosing not to wed or welcoming divorce (the divorce rate rose above 50 percent for the first time). See Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” 277; also see Schulman, *The Seventies*, 78-101.
30. Rader, “The Quest for Self-Sufficiency and the New Strenuousness,” 256 [QUOTATION].
31. Pamela Cooper, “The ‘Visible Hand’ on the Footrace: Fred Lebow and the Marketing of the Marathon,” *Journal of Sport History* 19 (1992): 244-256; Pamela Cooper, *The American Marathon* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1998). Here statistics offer some insight. In 1970, twenty-six men had entered the New York Marathon. By the mid 1980s, organizers were forced to limit entries to 20,000. Between May of 1977 to May of 1978 paid-for-circulation of the jogger’s magazine *Runner’s World* increased from 76,000 to an astounding quarter-million. See Rinker Buck, “Reaping the Hidden Reward of Fitness,” *New York Magazine*, 29 May 1978, p. 4.
32. Quoted in John Van Droon, “An Intimidating New Class: The Physical Elite,” *New York Magazine*, 29 May 1978, p. 38. *The Complete Book of Running* sold over a million copies. Jogging guru George A. Sheehan’s similarly made plain what running was about. See George Sheehan, *Running and Being: The Total Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

33. Carl Windle in Sherman and Older, *Appalachian Odyssey*, 233.
34. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 254.
35. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 80.
36. It should be noted that wilderness may not have meant the same thing for everyone. I am viewing "wilderness" as a social construction, and many thru-hikers (and backpackers generally) conceived of a certain type of environment as "wilderness." However, this essay is focused on a select group of ultra-long distance hikers, who were radicalized as "white" and generally came from middle- or upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds. Frankly, what wilderness meant to other groups (if it meant anything at all) is an interesting question that this essay is not prepared to answer. For examples of the middle and upper-class ethos see Gilbert Stucker, "Youth, Rebellion, & the Environment," *National Parks & Conservation Magazine*, April 1971, pp. 6-9; Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1968), 37; Rene Dubos, *Whooping the Earth* (New York: Scribner, 1980); Terry and Renny Russell, *On the Loose* (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1967); Colin Fletcher, *The Man Who Walked through Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968); and Colin Fletcher, *The Complete Walker* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).
37. Ann Sutton and Myron Sutton, *The Appalachian Trail: Wilderness on the Doorstep* (Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott Company, 1966), 100, 102-103.
38. Susan Sands, "Backpacking: 'I Go to the Wilderness to Kick the Man-World Out of Me,'" *New York Times*, 9 May 1971, p. 1.
39. James Morton Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in the Twentieth-Century," *Environmental History* 7 (2002): 462-484.
40. Sands, "Backpacking."
41. Waterman, *The Forest and the Crag*, 567; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 317-319; for the plethora of backpacking products sold in the 1970s, see William Kemsley, ed., *Backpacking Equipment Buyer's Guide* (New York: Collier Books, 1977).
42. For examples of guide books see Dorothy Dee, ed., *Best Hiker Trails in the United States* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1977); and Thomas A. Henley and Neesa Sweet, *Hiking in the Northeast* (Matteson, Ill.: Greatlakes Living Press, 1976). For a guide on nutrition and long distance hiking see June Fleming, *The Well-Fed Backpacker* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976). For a list other popular guide books related to backpacking see *Backpacker*, spring 1973, p. 86.
43. Fletcher, *The Complete Walker*; Dennis Hevesi, "Colin Fletcher, 85, a Trailblazer of Modern Backpacking," *New York Times*, 19 July 2007, sec. B, p. 7.

44. "2,000 Milers of 1970," *Appalachian Trailway News*, January 1971, p. 11.
45. Edward Garvey, *Appalachian Hiker: Adventure of a Lifetime* (Oakton, Va.: Appalachian Books, 1971).
46. "Address of the 2,000 milers: complete as of 2/73," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1948—1972," 2,000 Miler Reports, Appalachian Trail Conservancy Archive, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter ATC Archive); also see 1971 "Hikers," *Appalachian Trailway News*, January 1972, p. 9. Charles Dawson hiked half the trail in 1969 and completed the second half in 1971.
47. "Thru Hikers Register—by the year 1 November 1980," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1948-1972," 2,000 Miler Reports, ATC Archives.
48. Letter, Richard Judy to Lester Holmes, c.1974, folder "Richard Judy," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1973," 2,000 Miler Reports, ATC Archives.
49. "Thru Hikers Register—by the year 1 November 1980," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1948-1972," 2,000 Miler Reports, ATC Archives; "1973: 2000 Milers," <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/about-the-trail/2000-milers/2000-milers-listing/1973> [12 March 2014].
50. Letter, Bill Rozanec to Lester Holmes, 20 February 1974, folder "Bill Rozanec," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1973," 2,000 Miler Reports, ATC Archives.
51. Another notable exception is Carle Windle, quoted above. Windle thru-hiked the AT to raise money for a charity. Cindy Ross, who will be discussed below, would also become a devotee of the AT.
52. Garvey, *Appalachian Hiker*, 18 [QUOTATIONS].
53. Bill O'brien, "The AT My Way," *Appalachian Trailway News*, January 1970, p. 6.
54. Letter, Jack Pettrey to the ATC, 9 May 1971, folder "Jack Pettrey," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1948—1972," 2,000 Milers Reports, ATC Archives.
55. James Rutter, "Back to Reality," *Appalachian Trailway News*, January 1972, pp. 11-13.
56. Warren Doyle as quoted in Tom Dunkle, "Star Trek: Hiker-philosopher Warren Doyle Jr. Is an Institution on the Appalachian Trail," *Sports Illustrated*, 21 April 1996, pp. 16-18.
57. Warren Doyle in Sherman and Older, *Appalachian Odyssey: Walking the Trail from Georgia to Maine* (Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Green Press, 1977), 229-230.
58. Sherman and Older, *Appalachian Odyssey*, xiv [1<sup>st</sup> QUOTATION], 50 [2<sup>nd</sup> QUOTATION], 49 [3<sup>rd</sup> QUOTATION].

59. Cindy Ross, *A Woman's Journey on the Appalachian Trail* (Charlotte, N.C.: Fast & McMillan, 1982), 5 [1<sup>st</sup> AND 2<sup>nd</sup> QUOTATIONS], 9 [3<sup>rd</sup> QUOTATION], 13 [4<sup>th</sup> AND 5<sup>th</sup> QUOTATIONS], 53 [6<sup>th</sup> QUOTATION], 104 [7<sup>th</sup> QUOTATION].

60. David Brill, *As Far As the Eye Can See: Reflections of an Appalachian Trail Hiker* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1990); for Brill's main hiking partners see 55-74, for the company Brill had throughout his hike see 75-88. According to Brill, 1979 thru-hikers became part of a "linear community," leaving messages for each other to find in trail registers. This explains why Brill finished his hike with so many other thru-hikers. He and the group he hiked with left messages for others telling them when they expected to finish, urging them to catch up by a certain date so that they could all finish the trek together.

61. *Ibid.*, 81 and 125 [1<sup>st</sup> AND 2<sup>nd</sup> QUOTATIONS], 113 [3<sup>rd</sup> QUOTATION], 146 [4<sup>th</sup> QUOTATION].

62. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, chap. 8.

63. Ross, *A Women's Journey*, 5, 71, 82, 83, 89, 122.

64. *Ibid.*, 119.

65. Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1990; reprint ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

66. Ross, *A Women's Journey* 9 [1<sup>st</sup> QUOTATION], 35 [2<sup>nd</sup> QUOTATION], 7 [3<sup>rd</sup> AND 4<sup>th</sup> QUOTATIONS] (ellipses in original).

67. *Ibid.*, 9 [1<sup>st</sup> QUOTATION], 54 [2<sup>nd</sup> QUOTATION].

68. Brill, *As Far As the Eye Can See*, 13-14 [QUOTATIONS].

69. Since the rise of social history, understanding social identities in sport has been, perhaps, the dominant theme of sport historiography. For a brief overview of this see Jeffery Hill, *Sport in History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), especially pp. 52 -74.

70. All of the thru-hikers quoted in this paper whose race I have identified were "white." On top this, at the ATC headquarters about a half-a-mile from the AT one can find photos of all the thru-hikers who visited, from 1979 to the present. There are thousands of pictured thru-hikers. Almost all are white. These photos have been digitized and can be found at <<http://www.athikerpictures.org>>. When I asked one ATC information director about the racial make-up of thru-hikers she remarked that there has never been racial diversity.

71. "First rate" equipment was said to add up to \$350 (approximately \$1,800 today), see Sands, "Backpacking."

72. Mary G. McDonald and Susan Birrell, "Reading Sport Critically: A Methodology for Interrogating Power," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16 (1999): 283-300, 284 [QUOTATION].
73. Jon Solomos and Les Black, *Racism and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press: 1996), xiv.
74. Jonathan Long and Kevin Hylton, "Shades of White: An Examination of Whiteness in Sport," *Leisure Studies* 21 (2002): 89.
75. Michael S. Kimmell, "Invisible Masculinity," *Society* 6 (1993): 30.
76. Jaime Schultz, "Sense & Sensibility: A Pragmatic Postmodernism for Sport History," in *Critical Sport Histories: Paradigms, Power and the Postmodern Turn*, eds. Richard Pringle and Murray Phillips (Morgantown, W.V.: Fitness Information Technology, 2013), 67.
77. Warren Doyle in Sherman and Older, *Appalachian Odyssey*, 230-231.
78. Folder "Warren Doyle," box "2,000 Miler Reports 1973," 2,000 Milers Reports, ATC Archives.