

Larry conceived of an A.T. Museum for which he developed what became the Appalachian Trail Museum Society. In 2009, Larry received an honorary lifetime membership with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) for his extensive volunteer service and contributions, particularly in bringing the A.T. Museum concept to life.

When and why did you decide to thru-hike the Trail?

In the late summer of 1979 I was browsing in a bookstore near Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and I picked up *Appalachian Odyssey*, by Steve Sherman and Julia Older. I was quickly captivated and decided to do a thru-hike the next spring.

What year did you complete your thru-hike?

I thru-hiked in 1980. It was the biggest year for thru-hiking up to that point and a lot of people from that year have made significant contributions to the A.T. community. Before I climbed the approach trail to Springer Mountain, I'd never had on a fully loaded backpack and didn't know much about backpacking. I was one of those people for whom an A.T. thru-hike is the adventure of a lifetime.



Did the inspiration for your book *Walking the Appalachian Trail* come to you during your hike or after? How long did it take to complete the book?

I was a daily newspaper reporter before my thru-hike and I thought about doing a book, and kept a journal, but didn't pursue it for many years. In 1992, Stackpole Books got a list of thru-hikers who had offered to give advice to aspiring hikers. They asked everyone to submit an A.T. story. About 10 months after the deadline, I asked if they still were interested in looking at stories. Instead they suggested I put together a book proposal. The following year they accepted my idea. I started doing interviews in February 1993 and submitted the final manuscript that November after talking to 200 thru-hikers, Trail angels, and others involved in building and maintaining the Trail.

What, for you, is at the core of the book?

I set out to describe the Trail experience. I wanted to write a book that hikers could hand to their family and friends to give them a sense of what it was like to thru-hike the Trail. In retrospect, the questions that I've found most intriguing are why so many people are so devoted to the A.T. and how much it has affected [their] lives.

Creating an A.T. Museum is quite an undertaking. When and how did you come up with the idea and how did you decide where to begin?

When I was researching my book, I spent a few days in the archives at ATC, the Maine State Library, and elsewhere. I realized that no one was collecting and preserving the history of the Trail community. After interviewing some of the pioneer hikers, I realized that much of their equipment and memorabilia would soon be lost and I felt an urgency to get started. In 1998, Bill O'Brien came up with the idea of celebrating the 50th anniversary of Earl Shaffer's thru-hike at the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association (ALDHA) Gathering. As part of that celebration, we decided to invite all of the early hikers to the Gathering. I thought that would be a great time to start this preservation effort. At the ALDHA spring steering committee meeting in March 1998, I mentioned my idea to ATC information services manager Laurie Potteiger and then announced to the group the idea for an A.T. Museum; I received an immediate positive response.

Now that the museum is about to open, do you favor a particular story or item that it highlights?

What fascinates me about the A.T. is how many interesting people it attracts and how strong the bonds are in the A.T. community. It's that diversity and variety of stories rather than any one special story that I'd like to get across. Thru-hikers always seem to get the most attention and [I want] to make sure that the stories of others involved with the Trail get across.

How many years have you put into the museum?

We've been working on [it] for more than 12 years, and hundreds of people have helped in one way or another. Five of us have stayed involved from the very first: Laurie Potteiger, Bill O'Brien, Noel DeCavalcante Jr., J.R. Tate, and myself.

What did you find particularly difficult about creating the museum?

The hardest part of establishing the museum was finding and settling on a location. I have also been struck by the breadth of subjects with which we've had to deal. As an almost entirely volunteer effort, many times we've had to work in areas where we had no expertise. Capturing the spirit of the Trail community in the museum is a unique challenge.

What is your hope for the museum's future?

For many people getting involved with the A.T. is a life changing experience, and I hope we can introduce them to the love of nature and the fun of outdoor adventure.

What are some personal plans for the future?

There's still a lot to do for the museum and I'm hoping to participate in the work for quite some time. I'm also hoping to do a follow up book on how the A.T. has changed people's lives. In my case, I met my wife, Frieda, on a day hike, got married at Bear Mountain, New York, on the original stretch of the A.T., and most of my friends are part of the Trail community. The impact on me has been profound. All three of my children have been involved in the museum and hiking. As a result of meeting so many adventurers at a young age, my children are all more open to adventure.

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