Hiking the Appalachian Trail in Damascus Part 2: Trail Towns, Local Culture and Scenic Views Transcript

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Intro and Trip Recap

Hey, everybody. It's Amy and Jerry. So we're back off the trail. We finished our Virginia first trip to Damascus. You can tell this isn't the trail. This is our backyard.

And we're here. All right. So when we left you, we talked about the first half of the trip. Then we were at the beginning of our rest day, where we explored the local towns.

And a big part of how we're doing this is we want to see the different trail towns. So we went to Bristol, Bristol, Tennessee. So where we were, Damascus is on the west south part of Virginia.

So it borders on Tennessee. So we found Bristol. Bristol's nice. Yes. So we actually, the first day we got into town, we went over to Bristol because I saw online that they were having a jamboree, a bluegrass jamboree.

And Jerry has been studying bluegrass. So we thought we were going to go observe this jamboree. We didn't really know what it was. Jerry got to play in the jamboree.

You got to know the songs. I had some knowledge of some of the songs, but I watched the guy to the left of me, what he was playing, and I just kind of copied him.

Yeah, but you said that was one of the best moments of your life. Yeah, yeah, that was that was really nice playing with real players and people who really knew what they were doing with bluegrass.

It's there. They were very impressive.

Bristol Bluegrass and Twin Cities

It was in the. Birthplace of country music, birthplace of country music, which Congress has designated Bristol as the birthplace of country music, so that's a big part of their tourism.

So not Nashville, but Bristol, birthplace of country music. So we did not know that before this trip. And Bristol is half in Tennessee and half in Virginia.

Sort of. So they have twin cities. So there's a Bristol, Tennessee and a Bristol, Virginia. So they're separate legal entities, but they're like one side of the street, you're in Tennessee, the other side you're in Virginia.

So it's pretty cool. So then we went back to Bristol we really liked it. And so we found a cavern, so they have natural caverns in many parts of the United States, and they're just these cave formations that over hundreds of thousands of years, the minerals and water that drip down into the cave, make these, what's stalagmites, or what do they call those?

Stalactites. Stalactites. One comes up, the other one goes down. But really, really cool looking if you've never seen one. So we went and there are a lot of children there, but very well behaved children, I must say.

So, but we had a good time. We were glad we did that. Then we went back to downtown Bristol and we had lunch at, what was it called? Bistro on six. So I was really wanting some vegetables at this point because we had had a bit of pub food.

So I had a really nice salad there and Jerry had. A hamburger. A hamburger again. Because you've decided that.

While eating hamburgers from now on it's a new diet that we'll be putting out a book on.

The hamburger diet. Yeah. One hamburger a day. If you eat just one hamburger a day and nothing else you will lose weight. and probably a bit of muscle mass and have some nutrient deficiency.

So don't do that. But that's, you like hamburgers and that's what you ate when we went out. So that's fine. So we walked around Bristol and we also found a bakery, which is not on part of the health and wellness plan.

But Thanksgiving was coming up and our driver actually had recommended the Blackbird Bakery. downtown Bristol and that's where all the people were. It's kind of their off season in late November so the streets weren't really very busy and we were wondering where all the people were.

Well they were at the Blackbird Bakery. It's odd because you would think it's got to be a college town because you know there's so much to do there.

Caverns, Lunch, and Blackbird Bakery

There's literally like you know a lot of clubs and things like that And, uh, but it's not, it's not a big college. The closest of Boone has a big college.

Uh, but the others, you know, it's kind of smaller colleges around in the area. It's just this place because of its designation is the birthplace of country music by Congress.

That's it's big tourist thing. And then it's right on the border of the two states. And so that's what they're living on. Yeah, but really, really nice little town.

I recommend visiting in the bakery was good. Almost too good though. Like I couldn't eat very much of it. It was good. It was good. So then we went back down to downtown Damascus and because it was their off season.

So Damascus is a trial town. So not just the Appalachian Trail, but the Virginia Creeper Trail. And they have lots of biking, but this was just their off season.

So there wasn't a whole lot going on. We did go into the Damascus Outfitters, which is for hikers. So if you were through hiking and needed to resupply, that would be a really good place to do it.

I was looking for kind of a heavier layer to wear underneath my jacket. So I found one there. They have food too, you know, the stuff, MRE type stuff.

Yeah, but we didn't need that because of the type of hiking we were doing. But if you're through hiking, that's the stuff you would need. So then they also have a distillery in Damascus where they make all their own spirits.

And I tried their vodka. And what was different about their vodka is they make it with red grapes, which I had never heard of before. So it was actually really nice.

So what qualifies as a vodka? I don't remember. If it's made out of grapes. I thought wine was made out of grapes. What makes a vodka? Does anyone out there know what a vodka is?

What the definition is of a vodka? Let us know, because we don't. We'll have to look that up. I didn't really think about that. I just thought, oh, this is good.

I like this. OK, so then we went. We had an early night and we went back on the trail. So our third hiking day, we actually did 10.5 miles. That was our longest day.

We again went back to Massey Gap, which is inside of The State Park. Grayson Highlands State Park. And the cool thing about that park is there were lots of trails, not just the Appalachian Trail, but there were people who go

there and they hike up to Mount Rogers, which is the highest highest point in Virginia.

Damascus Outfitters and Distillery Stop

Now we went around Mount Rogers because we had a lot to do that day. But this time we started at Massagap and we went north to Box Creek and it started out the same.

We had to go up like a little side trail and then we went on to the Appalachian Trail. They had a lot of like man-made bridges in walkways and there were about 18 inches wide.

Some of them had handles to hold on to, some didn't. And it kind of reminded me of being like in a You know, one of those zipline parks where you have to walk over the bridges.

So it was kind of fun. So that's State Park. Let's go back to that for a second. Great place. There are little ponies running around who I guess can bite you or whatever or kick you.

Only if you mess with them. But so you leave them alone. They'll feed them or anything, but they're they're they're wild and they're maintained. So a lot on the trail of what you have, you have a lot of things that they can't get through.

And it says close the gate and you got to make sure to close the gates and all that stuff. I find a lot of people are either going to Mount Rogers or there's extremely nice views from the state park.

There's a rock formation that you have to get over. And it's I think when you get to the top of that, you can really see a lot. So even if you're not thinking about hiking or anything like that, still that state park.

What's the name of that state park again? Grayston Highlands State Park. Is worth going if you just want some really pretty views. Yeah. So it was good.

So this day, it wasn't too bad when we started out.

Grayson Highlands Hike to Box Creek

It was just a long day. There were some parts in the middle that got a little technical. Lots of rocks, again, that we had to climb over. And the challenge there is not so much the elevation, but your foot's unsteady.

So there's not a flat surface for your foot. I did fall this day. We had stopped to just check our direction. I was on a large rock that was covered with moss.

And so it was fine when I was standing there. But when I went to move again, my foot just kind of slid out. And it was one of those slow falls. Like, you know, you're going to fall and there's nothing you can do.

And I wasn't hurt or anything. I asked her if she wanted to spit and hit the rock, but she really didn't. It was fine. Still a little bruise about the size of a quarter where my butt hit.

Yeah. And, uh, yeah. So a lot of it was grueling, as you know, I've said before, I hate up, but down was kind of fun on this day. Down was good because you got, you know, you'd kind of zigged and zagged.

And so you, you could pick up some speed and we did pick up speed because we thought we were going to be home late and we were concerned about the sun going behind the mountains and then we wouldn't be able to see the trail.

So I got into the afternoon, and we still had a few miles to go, and the sun wasn't going to set until about 5, 5.30, but I didn't know what was going to happen when the sun went behind the mountain.

So I really wanted to be off the trail by four, so we had to kind of pick up the pace. And we did, and we would have been fine if we weren't off by four, but better to be safe, because you don't want to be on the trail in dark.

That would have been really challenging. It would have been because in addition to crazy amounts of rocks, I don't know if that's just part of Virginia, but stone, uh, there's also a lot of roots.

I don't know what a Virginia creeper actually is. I thought it was, you know, somebody you got to stay away from on the internet, but it's, um, I guess a tree or a plant.

Do you know what a Virginia creeper is? No, no, we should look that up since it's a whole trail named after it. I don't know. Yeah. But people were being mean to me.

I thought I was the Virginia creeper. No. But there were a lot of routes, you're right. And you've seen that in trails here, where the route from the tree comes up.

But it was pretty extreme on this particular path. So we got off the trail in time. And we decided to stop for dinner on the way home. And we went to the Damascus Diner, because we hadn't tried that yet.

And they did offer all kinds of diner food. I had a hillbilly Reuben, which, again, not healthy. One thing about when it took us six hours to do this particular hike, so you get kind of hungry.

So the hillbilly Reuben was pulled pork and greens and some bacon jam. It was really good. I had a hamburger. Yeah. Yeah. So we did that again and then went, you know, kind of hit the cabin early.

So the last day a cold front came in, like it was going to be in the 20s and 30s. And I wasn't quite sure how we were going to do in that we had our layers, but I really didn't.

I was a little unsure. So we were scheduled to do a 10 mile hike on the last day. And I said, you know what? I think we should do something shorter. So when we were in downtown Damascus, we noticed that the trail actually went on the sidewalk of downtown.

Now there are only three towns where the Appalachian Trail actually goes through the town, and Damascus is one of them. So we decided on our last day to do that part of the trail, and we went to Straight Branch.

Now, we didn't mention about two days before we came on this trip, we actually had a different route planned. And our guide let us know that they were doing maintenance on the trail.

So until when is that section closed? All year. And you can go online and find out the exact section that's closed in 2026. But what happened was during Hurricane Helene, that area got hit pretty hard.

And so a lot of trees were down. A lot of stuff happened on the trail that they need to clean up. So they closed it. And luckily, we found out and we adapted our route before we got there.

But the maintenance started at Straight Bridge, so we couldn't do that section, but we went from Damascus to Straight Bridge on the last day. So for you guys hiking right now or thinking about hiking that area soon, do plan because it would suck.

I would be like really ticked off if I was hiking and then all of a sudden there's a sign.

Dinner at Damascus Diner

And it says, hey, we're telling you that this section is closed and you can go get a shuttle or something like that. Well, there's a detour. There's another path that we saw that through hikers are going to be encouraged to go around.

Sometimes when that happens, there's a rule, you're still a through hiker, but you have to go back before the year is out and do that little section or something like that.

So if you're through hiking, look it up. It's a different story. But your section hiking like us, you can do that next time. I have no such rule. Which we'll do.

When we go back to that area, we'll do that little section that we missed. Um, so we ended up doing about five and a half miles on the last day and it was about 30 degrees when we started.

So we had our layers and I had a nice little inside layer and I was almost warm enough. I was warm enough for the amount of time we were out there, which was three hours.

If it had been another six hour day, I think I would have been cold. And so next time, if we're going to be in that type of temperature, I need a little bit more of layering, a little heavier.

And that's again where know your own body because I didn't feel that way. Like I was really, there was a point where actually in the mountains, not on the hike, but on the way home in Boone, it hit 19 degrees.

It was snowing. Yeah, it was snowing.

Cold-Weather Final Hike Through Damascus

And I was standing out there and I thought, well, this isn't that bad. Not for a couple of minutes, but. Well, no, I mean, you need to know your body because everyone else will tell you, oh, it's freezing.

It's freezing. Now you got to know what's right for you. I overheat, but I tolerate cold pretty well. So, so you got to, you got to know yourself. Yeah.

I just think when we do the longer distance, we have to take little breaks. And that's when I would get cold is when we stopped. So if we had had to take breaks and I just thought it would be cold.

So, but next time, you can sort of predict the weather. So if that happens again, I'll be better prepared for it. But all in all, I feel like this trip was a success.

AI is full of crap. Let me tell you something. Virginia's every bit as tough as Georgia. It says on there that Virginia's not bad, but no. I've gone through a bit of Georgia and a bit of Virginia, and I'd say they're both equally as grueling.

I think in Georgia, the elevation was more extreme, but shorter. Whereas in Virginia, it was probably the same amount of elevation over a longer period of time, but it was more technical, more rocky, more rooty.

So it's a little harder that way, but you know, nothing was awful. Yeah. We did not mention the best burger was from Wilson's. We mentioned in the last video, Wilson's had fine dining.

So I had something, not a burger, but it was the best burger you had during that trip. It was the best burger. It's actually the best burger I've had so far.

So that's a lot. So I take my hat off to Wilson's. Well, since… And we also stopped in at the Twisted… What is it? It's not Twisted Bear. What is the other one?

Tipsy Bear. That was day one. It's Tipsy Bear. You mentioned Tipsy Bear? I did in the first episode. All right. We mentioned the tipsy bear, which was, it was good.

Everything was good really. Yeah. And I gotta tell you something in Virginia, I hadn't even meet a single person there with a, with a mean bone in their body.

Super friendly people. Yeah. Yeah. So everyone was very nice in that area. And then when we got home, you may have noticed that our dogs are running in the background.

A couple episodes, we talked about wellness and animals. And when we got home, our dogs were so, so happy to see us. And that was just really nice. There was a lot of love going on there.

But anyway, so stay tuned. We'll be back with our next trip. We're already planning the next one. And we're learning and sharing as we go. And we can't wait to tell you all about it.

OK, so I'll say one more thing. I did not want to go on this. I don't know if any of you could tell at the beginning, but I've got to tell you something.

Trip Wrap-Up and Reflections

I feel a sense of accomplishment and I feel better, actually. knowing that it's out there and that we can do it. So even for somebody like me, even on just day hikes, I mean, it's rewarding.

So I will say to my wife once, and not any more than that, I will say thank you. Oh, you're welcome. So now it's on video, so I can play this back whenever I need to.

Well, you play it for yourself because I won't ever say it. Yes, you will. Anyway, all right, you guys will see you next time. Bye. Bye.