Trail Tested: Our First Appalachian Trail Hike and Lessons in Marriage & Adventure Transcript

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Show Introduction and Guest Welcome

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Coopersmith, a doctorate prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy, and balanced life.

I'm very excited to welcome back today's guest, Jerry Coopersmith. As you all may remember, Jerry is my husband, and I had you on the show a few months ago, and we talked about preparing to day hike the Appalachian Trail.

Right. I was concerned. So you had some concerns. We talked about it. We talked about how we were going to prepare and do a trial run just to kind of test things out.

And we did it. So in September, we went to certain parts of Georgia and we did a few day hikes. How did you feel things went? It was good. Actually, I had a nice time.

I'm glad I got to spend some time with my wife. So you were saying you were forced into it before, but since that time you've said that you're very thankful.

I've actually been hiking almost daily in Grand Swamp. Yeah. So to prepare and we'll get to that, what we can do or what we did right and what we did wrong to prepare for these hikes.

Right. So just to review day hiking, the way we're doing it is we're starting at one point and basically we hired a shuttle service. And so our guide met us where we wanted to end for the day.

We left our car there and we got a ride to our beginning point and then we walked to our car. Good man. What was his name again? His name was Tom. Tom, he's got a good service.

It was like the first service in a guidebook. Yes. So as part of our preparation, we read the AT guide the 2025 edition with all these updates and talked about the.

the trail courses and things like that, and it had recommended shuttle drivers. So that's how we found our guide. And he was very knowledgeable about the route, about what we wanted to do, and he had some advice.

Planning the Appalachian Trail Day Hikes

So we really appreciated him. One of the biggest things was that don't try to drive to certain areas if you're not used to mountain driving. You know, it's good to take someone like him who knows who can say, hey, you know, you go to that trailhead, it's difficult to get to or it's not.

And you need four-wheel drive to get to certain places. So part of my preparation checklist to make sure that the route I chose was proper was terminated by somebody who knew.

And I appreciated him. So on day one, we hiked from Three Forks in Georgia to Cooper Gap. Now, the reason we chose Three Forks Some of you may or may not know the Appalachian Trail Trail starts at Springer Mountain in Georgia.

On some of our visits in the past, we had hiked that little section from Springer Mountain to Three Forks. So we decided to kind of pick up where we left off.

So what did you feel about that day? Do you remember? I don't remember much, but. I took a navigation device, I don't know if you remember, two actually, I did, what were they called?

Garmin. Garmin, and there's the little one which is the, oh gosh. That was a Garmin also. No, it's a Garmin, but there's two different types. One has like supposedly a GPS style map on it, it's the more expensive one.

and it let me down terribly. I'm sure if anyone from Garmin is out there that- They need to make amends. Yeah, if a normal person were using it and studying it, then probably they could use it well.

So far, the only value I see in the Garmin device is there's an emergency button on there that let's say if you get lost terribly, you can hit it and they can hone in on your location almost anywhere.

So that device, I think the intent, what we were hoping, is you can download your maps onto it of the route you plan to go. And it would have, had it worked properly, alerted us if we went off trail.

So before we even got lost, it would say, hey, what are you doing? In this case, it wasn't functioning properly, which I'm sure was user error. I felt like it cost a lot more confusion than help on our trip.

It did. It congratulated us like when we got to the end of three forks or something like that, congratulated us for getting, oh, of Koopa Gap. It congratulated us for reaching Springer Mountain or something like that.

And there were a couple of times where you thought we were going the wrong way because of the map. So once you put it away, then we enjoyed the journey a little more.

Because the markers, the blazes are actually pretty good. There was one area we went into where it was overgrown and they were not as frequent as you would have liked them.

Blazes, do you know what a blaze is? I know what a blaze is. Well, do they know what a blaze is? So all on the Appalachian Trail, it's basically like a rectangle of paint.

on the tree, and they're white, like it's a white rectangle. There are other trails that have different symbols, and some of them will intersect with the Appalachian Trail, so it's important to know not to follow the wrong type of blaze.

But that helps just let you know that you're going in the right direction. You say, oh, there's a blaze. And they do say if you go more than 15 minutes without seeing one that you might want to turn around.

So yeah, I didn't know that you didn't tell me that. Well, luckily, we didn't go more than 15 minutes. Can you imagine what would have happened if you if you gave me that information?

Yeah. So on day one, it rained. Yeah. Yeah. Now I remember that was terrible. So the first night we're in this cabin, right?

Day One: Three Forks to Cooper Gap

Beautiful cabin on top of a mountain. Yeah. Really nice cabin and all. And it just came down. She goes right to sleep and I'm hearing this like torrential rain and lightning and thunder and all this kind of stuff.

And I said, Oh no, this is not good. This is, this is bad. And, uh, so you were concerned about starting our hike on a day when it was raining. On the weather report, we could tell it was going to stop and it wasn't a cold rain, so I was less concerned about it.

The scariest part to me of that whole trip was driving down the mountain from our cabin to the road. Yeah, that was scary. That was scary too, but I'll tell you, not one person, and if there's anyone out there who can write in and tell us what to do, any of you hikers, you big shots out there, right?

What do you do with lightning? Nobody has told me what to do. That's not true. Remember, we asked our guide. Yeah, that wasn't a good answer. He said, find a rock.

Find a rock? Okay. Put your head under it. No. He said, just kind of make yourself as small as possible if you can't get to a shelter. No, I heard that there's actually a lightning position that you can get into where you're supposed to crouch down and you put, I'm sorry for that, for the microphone, and put your hands over your ears.

And to me, it's like the same thing. You know, it's because you're closer that you can kiss you. You know what? Goodbye. I mean, I don't, I don't, I don't understand, uh, the value of it and I'm not going to stay there.

How long can a thunderstorm last? Like to stay in that position. That's worse than being a catcher in a baseball team. Yeah. I don't know about that, but really avoid it if you can and then get shelter.

Try not to be out. And there are shelters along the way. There are shelters, but you'll never make it. Like if you're caught up in a lightning thunder and lightning storm, you're not going to, you know, Oh, there's a shelter four miles away.

By the time I get there, you know, I'm either struck by lightning or. So we never did find out the stats of how many lightning strikes there are on the trail.

I don't find that out. I don't think there are that many. Um, so anyway, the first day I think we just had, it was more nerves and anxiety of not knowing what to expect.

we did have some elevation, some challenging elevation that day. Um, so, and I, we didn't learn until the next day we went up some called something called Sassafras mountain and the locals call it kick your ass mountain.

So then I didn't feel so bad cause it was hard and I was winded going up the mountain and later when I heard that I'm like, Oh, everybody finds that challenging that particular section.

So how do you train for something like this? Cause you're going up, you're going uphill for an extended period of time. It's not just like I was doing the stairs over on the beach.

No, that's for a few minutes where you're going up. This is an extended period of time where your, your, your elevation, you know, just keeps, keeps going up and up and up.

So, so training, any type of training you do, like I would think one of those stair walker machine things, what are those called? A stair master. That would be good.

Or walking on a treadmill with an incline, right? Yeah, walking on an incline. Anything that you're doing for an extended period of time. I think those things can be helpful.

What I think helped me, because of course I'm analyzing as I'm walking, like what helped me prepare for this? And one of the things we do in CrossFit involves stepping on boxes, like a 20-inch box, and you step up and you step down.

And I felt that really helped with the balance of a lot of the steps we had to take because a lot of the terrain was pretty uneven. So it wasn't like you're on a paved road, just on an incline.

It was rocky. And so your foot wasn't always on a flat surface. And so you really did need a certain amount of balance to do that safely. Now for somebody who's got bad breathing and bad balance, the stick was very helpful.

A walking stick with a compass on the top is what I use. And plus you can use it in the event of animal attacks. That's true. And like, I know you're joking, but actually our guide was telling us about that, about maybe dogs on the trail that aren't friendly or, um, I wouldn't try it against a bear.

I don't think that would go very well, but I have, when you would get to that section, I have something for a bear attack now. I now know what to do in the event of if you're being mauled by a bear, I can, I can assist.

So what do you do? Um, there's a thing called bear spray. Okay. It is so powerful. It's capsaicin, but so powerful that the bear skin will literally slough off its body.

Now I know that all of you animal lovers out there may say that that's horrible. That's awful. Actually, what really probably does it, you go to spray this stuff and it's so powerful that it nebulizes in the air and comes back on you.

And the pain that you feel, even though you're aiming it at the bear, the pain that you feel probably will cause you to fall on the ground and scream and scare the bear away.

So we didn't actually use the bear spray. In fact, you bought some, but it stayed on the kitchen counter. By the small thing that can go on your belt loop.

I bought a really big one because I was anticipating like a polar bear or something like that would attack. But we didn't use it. We didn't see any bear.

The only wildlife we saw on that particular route was some squirrels and some birds. It was nice. There was more wildlife here in Palm Coast. Palm Coast is more dangerous than the Avalachian Trail.

More ways than one. Okay, so day one, we got through it. It took us longer than we thought it would. I think we were stopping a lot. We were questioning ourselves a lot.

But we did get off the trail.

Recovery, Blue Ridge, and Rest Day

We were staying about an hour and a half away from the trailhead. So we drove back and we went to town before we went back up that mountain road. So we went to go to dinner first.

And we got out of the car and our legs were so sore from the hike and then sitting that we were walking funny. It was a little embarrassing. It was. So you look like hell, you probably smell the same way, and then you're walking like you got off a horse.

And you go have a nice meal. So we were in Blue Ridge, which we had been to before, but we This restaurant somehow evaded us. Our host of the Airbnb had recommended this restaurant called Chester's.

So we went to Blue Ridge and we really liked it. Chester's was really good. Really good burgers. Well, I was going to ask you what your favorite burger was in town, because that's all I had were burgers.

But you didn't have burgers the whole time. I did not. But everything I had there I enjoyed. Everything is good at Chester's. And I liked the burgers is what I was going to get at.

Yeah, so it was great. So we did that. Now, day two, I felt day two went better than the first day. On day two, we went from Cooper Gap to Woody Gap. So that was 8.3 miles, and that was actually the longest we had gone.

But the elevation changes weren't as bad on day two, I thought. All right. So here's the thing. Here's the thing when you're hiking with somebody, when you're hiking with another person, never trust the mileage.

If they say it's four miles. Okay. Is it four miles uphill? That's something that you need to know. So when you're plotting out your, your path, yeah.

Mileage is important, but also look at that elevation and the terrain. You can get an idea, uh, to know exactly how much effort you're going to be putting out on that day and how much time to a lot.

part of learning to read the map was learning what the elevation changes mean. Don't worry. So that was part of the whole thing. That's why we did this.

That's why we didn't do really amazing distances. We just did enough just to kind of get our feet wet, so to speak, and see what we need to do for next time.

So I want to mention, we mentioned our stiff legs. One recovery tip that I really felt was awesome, we got an Airbnb with a hot tub. Yeah, that was fun.

So soaking in the hot tub after the long hikes, I felt like the next day I felt a lot better, a lot less stiff. Yeah, me too. All right, so we're gonna pause for a break from our sponsor.

You're listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. Don't go anywhere, we'll be right back. Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy.

I'm Dr. Amy Coopersmith, and my guest today is Jerry Coopersmith. Before the break, we were talking about the Appalachian Trail and how we did a test run and learned a lot on the way.

So the way we did it, we hiked for two days, and then we took a rest day, which I think is awesome. Work a little bit, play a little bit. Yeah. So we were in Blue Ridge.

Blue Ridge is just beautiful if you all haven't been there. It's becoming very popular among Floridians, so a lot of people are familiar with it. So we decided to just kind of take it easy.

We started the day off slow, and then we went downtown to Blue Ridge where we had been before, but we found this whole line of shops that I hadn't seen before, so we started there.

Unfortunately, it rained a little bit again, but it was just enough to be annoying, not really to stop us from doing anything. Right. If you're in a rainstorm in a convertible, make sure to put the top on.

Well, that wasn't us, but we did see a bystander who had his top down. I guess he didn't know. What do you do in that situation? You're sitting there, a guy's got a nice car, you know, and you're just sitting there and you're staring and all of a sudden it starts raining and you could do something.

You could intervene if you wanted to, but you don't because if you touch the guy's car, Yeah, in the world we live in if we were to damage the car or something just you can't unfortunately So so everyone watched but he did come take care of his own car So in Blue Ridge, they have a winery called the bear claw winery and they have others but that's where we went a Lot of the wineries in this area and there are quite a few wineries in Georgia Which they grow their own grapes.

They're really a lot of fun, but they all have live music and I some of the best live music I've ever heard. Really good, really good musicians come through there.

Yep. So we watched a guy play and he had a really neat guitar that You know, for those of you who don't know, Jerry likes to make guitars. So he was kind of drooling over that.

And the guy was really nice. He let you come up and take a real close look at it. Yeah. I guess I was looking a little too close and he goes, do you want to come up here and see what I'm doing?

And I said, oh, okay. No, he was very friendly. Yeah, he was a Stevie Ray kind of guy. Stevie Ray Vaughn kind of a bluesy fella from, uh, I wish I knew his name.

I would plug him, but, uh, Um, but, uh, from, uh, he's Nashville, right? Yes. So I guess a lot of the local ish musicians will come, you know, to the wineries and, and do these gigs.

Day Three: Rocky Terrain and Trail Navigation

So that was fun. So we had a nice restful day, had another nice meal, and then it was back on the trail. And on this day, we went from Neil Gap to Hogpen.

So what we did is we skipped a little section on the Georgia route. And we did that because. It was wicked scary. And we're going to go back into it another time.

But there was a section with Blood Mountain in it. And Blood Mountain is a pretty, they all say it's a pretty challenging hike. And the section we have to do when we do it, it's going to be about 11 miles.

So it said though, initially you thought 10 miles and the guide was real good where you said, no, that's actually 11 miles and it's uphill. Yep. So we will do it.

We just want it to be a little better prepared. And we figured for our first little time out there, we didn't want to do something that strenuous. So we skipped over that.

And then we did this other section that was 6.7 miles. So we're like, okay, less distance, even better, but This day, the terrain was the most challenging.

That was the day where it was really rocky and there was a lot of unsteady footing. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So OK, so I thought I really like down.

I hate up. I really hate up. Up, I hate. I like down. I can take any type of down. But then along came this day and it showed me I don't like down very much either because you go down for an extended period of time and the rocks can be very, very slippy.

Slippery. So you need shoes. Super important with a nice grip, nice tread. So we mentioned shoes in our preparation episode. It probably is the most important piece of equipment that you can get because you want your feet to be comfortable.

I fell a couple of times and I hit the rock and I spat upon it. I got angry. And I may have laughed when I saw you weren't hurt. So on day three on this section that we did, it was, I think, not a very popular section among locals because it was really overgrown.

A lot of the blazes were kind of faded. And a couple of times we did start to wander off the trail a little bit, but The great thing about this is by that day, we had a really good feel for it.

So when we weren't on the trail anymore, we could tell. We didn't get all that nervous about it. Yeah, we were much more comfortable. And so I was surprised we acclimated that quickly.

And what's a trip, what's a real trip is your phone, your cell phone, if you don't use up the battery, it actually knows as well as a garment Uh, the Appalachian trail and it can tell you, oh, you got two miles until the next trailhead and all that.

It did a very good job. Now I doubt the whole Appalachian trail that your cell phone is going to work, but it did, it did a pretty good job actually. And there are different apps you can do to download trail maps and things.

And so I'm going to play with that a little bit, but I did have a good old fashioned paper map, which helped us. There was one spot on the first day where we weren't sure which there was the trail.

It just wasn't marked and. there was a trail to the right that could have been the trail and a trail to the left. And it ended up being the one to the left, but we, we got hung up there a little bit.

And finally I took out the map and we could see where the road was. We could see that the trail was perpendicular

to it. And we're like, okay, this is it.

Like just now we're both a little bit directionally challenged. So, so that was a little, it was a little scary, but we did it. We did not get lost. Reminded me of being back in the army again.

I was having PTSD Yeah, but it wasn't that bad So so that day was good. Then the last day we just had a short little hike We just we went from tray gap to unicorn gap and that was just four point four miles And we skipped a section again to avoid a longer hike.

I want to go back to the other day Raven what is it called Raven cliff? Ravencliff so the the prettiest yeah part actually was Ravencliff so if you get a chance to see it Ravencliff is very very nice but now the last mile between that and hogpen gap i can't remember the name of the gap before hogpen but but it's a mile straight up yeah and so if you don't like up very much that's it's a challenge And so one thing about going uphill, it's very taxing on your cardio system.

So in that feeling takes some getting used to. So when you go up and incline your heart rate, it's naturally going to go up and it's supposed to. That's what it does.

But if you're not familiar with that, it can, it can be uncomfortable. So doing your, a good amount of cardio before you start on a hike. I think it's a good idea.

And then, you know, you get a little out of breath going up and then you stop, catch your breath. It's okay. And then you keep going. Every few feet. And then you mentioned going down.

I find like going up is hard on the cardio, but going down I feel like my knees really have to be steady and it just takes a lot more, um, muscle work from the legs.

See, I felt that that's one, one advantage I had with the stick because I was able to balance with my stick and, and, uh, and, and, and so, so I think I recommend a stick, especially again, if your balance is good, that's wonderful, you know, and you can do without it.

That's great. But if you don't have such good balance, that stick really does help a lot. And so you used kind of an old-fashioned walking stick like a wooden stick, but it got a little heavy right on your wrist sometimes Yeah, yeah, I have problems anyway So there's that a lot of people have like the aluminum lightweight hiking poles.

Yeah, I didn't use any poles this time I don't know if I will in the future, but I felt okay without them Okay, so then the last day so the last day was the only day we did kind of in reversed every day We went what's considered south to north, we started at the southern point and went north.

The last day we went the opposite because our guide said, you know, Tray Gap is really tricky to get to with a car. And he said, you don't wanna drive there.

So we drove to the other end instead and he dropped us off at Tray Gap. It wasn't that bad. But, you know, cause they- Well, again, luck. It's another thing when you're at those trail heads.

He is an experienced hiker. And he didn't know where the trail starts. So he had to take a few minutes and kind of look around and then, but so take that time.

Don't automatically assume that, oh, I know where I'm going. Here's a trail.

Final Hike, Lessons Learned, and Trail Tips

Now look for that marker. There's going to be a marker somewhere near the, uh, the trailhead and look for that marker to be sure you're on the right trail.

Yeah. And it's important you're headed in the right direction, especially if you're hiking to your vehicle, because if you go the wrong way, you might be in a little bit of trouble.

Yeah. Yeah. So, so I mean, all in all, it was good. Um, we had talked during the preparation phase about, you know, we talked about physical preparation, but the, the mental part of it on the first day, cause it took us six hours that first day.

And I remember thinking, gosh, the longest I've ever exercised continuously was with a marathon. And that's for, for something, you know, four hours. It took us longer than a marathon.

Yeah. Um, but just to quiet my mind, like to do that, I like, wow, this, This is just a little bit challenging. But again, I feel like we got used to it as we went on.

I want to say something. Yeah. Peanut butter and what is it? Peanut butter and garlic. Peanut butter and garlic do not mix. Don't do it. It's bad. It's a bad idea.

So I have to own that one. So we were making our own peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the hike. I love peanut butter and jelly for hiking. It doesn't go bad.

It's easy. I got some bread from the bakery at the grocery store. And it looked like this nice Italian bread. And I said, oh, that's going to make a great sandwich.

What I didn't realize is that it was infused with garlic. It had little whole pieces of garlic in it and it was really bad. Now you may say, well, if you don't like the way she did it, why don't you make your own?

Well, I've got the solution for all of you. And that's uncrustables. Uncrustables are delicious. They have, I'm sure no real peanut butter or jelly, but it's just a whole bunch of it.

Yeah. And there's probably some preservative in there. So, so, you know, when we talk about, you know, having the healthiest diet possible, you don't want to do that every day, but for a hike like this, it's really convenient.

They're portable, healthy, smelly. I'm walking the trail. I did hear that they're starting to make some protein infused on crustables. And isn't that what peanut butter is for?

Well, I think more protein. But I think one important thing is whatever you're going to eat on the trail, make sure it's something you've eaten before, because you don't want something to upset your stomach when you're out there.

Right. Um, you know, there are, there are rules about where you can, can eliminate. Um, and you know, if you have an emergency, like, what are you going to do?

But it's better to, again, avoid certain things. And for all you guys with prostate problems, you can go anywhere. You don't need to compete wherever you want.

All right, so we're almost out of time, but if you were to suggest one thing for anyone planning a hike, whether it's the Appalachian Trail or elsewhere, what would that one thing be?

I think we've already tapped into a lot of it. And if you want to enjoy it, practice first. Make sure you're practicing like over here. Oh, by the way, there's a gigantic hog.

I don't want to start this with the last minute, but when you're going on Graham swamp, there are real hogs as one who's like between two and 300 pounds.

He leaves you alone, but know that I've seen more wildlife here in Palm coast than I've seen on the Appalachian trail. Yeah. So our favorite place to practice is a Graham swamp at the preserve.

And there are lots of elevation changes. It's not sustained like you have on the real trail, but you can get that, um, feeling of your footing, you can try out your shoes and your, even the clothes you're gonna wear, because you don't wanna end up with chafing and things like that.

So I think it's a good idea just to get out there and just try it out. Yeah, practice beforehand. All right, well I wanna thank you for joining me and sharing your experience with our listeners.

And to our listeners, do you have hiking tips for us? Because we're doing it again. We weren't even off the trail yet when I was planning the next little run.

So we're doing that very soon, actually. It'll be a little bit colder weather, so we've had to… do a little extra preparing, um, you know, because it's really, really important to have appropriate layers and things like that.

So we don't get too cold or too hot. So hikers with advice, right in, I was going to say call into the show, but I don't think you can do that. You can't do that, but you can send me an email at radiant podcast, 2025 at gmail.com.

And if there are other things you want to hear about, send me a message there as well. Check out our past episodes on Amethyst wellness YouTube. and we're now featured on Apple podcasts and all your favorite platforms, please subscribe and leave a five star review with a quick comment.

It really helps us reach more listeners like you. I'll be back next Saturday morning at 7.30 with more expert insights and practical strategies to help you live your healthiest, most energized life.

Until then, stay healthy and here's to your best life.