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'Marathon's Walk' Shares Professor's Four-Month Stint on Appalachian Trail

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Quick Facts

- Seth Jenny spent four months on the trail in 2004.
- The Appalachian Trail Thru-Hike is the world's longest continuously marked foot path.



Seth Jenny

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — In 2004, Winthrop University **Assistant Professor of Physical Education, Sport and Human Performance Seth Jenny** spent four months and two days hiking the **Appalachian Trail**. The trail, considered the world's longest continuously marked footpath, takes hikers from George to Maine.

From a bear encounter to picking a "trail name," Jenny shares his once-in-a-lifetime adventure in his new book, **"Marathon's Walk in the Woods: An Appalachian Trail Thru-Hike,"** now available on Amazon as in eBook (\$2.99) and paperback (\$11.78) form.

"Marathon's Walk" is a humorous autobiographical account of Jenny's travels. Made up of 34 articles written for Jenny's hometown newspaper and hundreds of pictures, it's a must for outdoor enthusiasts and adventure-lovers.

Jenny includes several important tips for hikers.

"Probably my most important suggestions are: one, go ultra-light--i.e., carry as little as possible--; two, wear comfortable trail running shoes, not heavy hiking boots; and three, have a positive attitude," he said. "[Appalachian Trail] Thru-hikers enjoy the journey, but the destination is always on their mind as well, or they would never finish the whole thing."

Read a sample of Jenny's bear encounter:

I had heard from other hikers that there is an average of one black bear for every square mile of New Jersey. Because of this, the state legalized bear hunting in an effort to decrease the dense population while minimizing bear encounters in urban areas. My close encounter that evening certainly confirmed the NJ bear statistic.

It was 6:20 p.m. and I was still about five miles from the Brink Road Shelter. If I hiked quickly, I would narrowly finish the day just before darkness fell. I passed a hiker sitting along the trail, said, "Hello," and hurriedly continued around a long bend. Suddenly, straight ahead of me was a large black bear that appeared to be at least twice my size. The bear had heard my approach and looked directly at me. I immediately tried to recall what I had been advised to do in such situations.

At first, I backed away slowly, tried to avoid direct eye contact, and made noises in an effort to scare the bear away. The bear simply looked at me briefly and went back to feeding on berries along the trail. I continued to make noises to try and scare the bear, hoping not to cross that fine line that would either irritate or appear to be an aggressive act towards the bear. The bear's only reaction was to

continue feeding as he sauntered back and forth up the trail. I considered giving a wide berth around the bear while bushwhacking off the trail, but I figured I would get lost. Looking at my watch, I realized the bear had already cost me a good 20 minutes and I would never make it to the shelter before nightfall. So I turned around and headed back towards the hiker I had passed earlier on the trail.

I learned his name was Jordan, and that he was a northbound section hiker. I explained the bear dilemma and we decided to set up camp right there on the trail. We made sure our food was hung properly and fervently hoped that by morning the bear would disappear. While finishing my dinner, I watched Jordan set up his tent-like hammock by tying it to two trees along the trail. Within minutes of Jordan climbing inside his hammock to get some sleep, I heard a thundering crash. I whipped around to see a fallen tree with a hammock secured to it and Jordan frantically trying to get out of his collapsed hammock.

After making sure Jordan was okay, I laughed hysterically at the plummeted hammock scene. Actually, I think I did the laughing first. With a smile still on my face, I hung my food, set up my tent and fell fast sleep.

At 2:30 a.m., in the pitch black, I was awakened by screaming coming from the direction of Jordan's hammock. I didn't know if a bear had taken a bite out of him, another tree had busted, or if he was in the middle of passing a kidney stone. With a racing heart, I peered out of my tent to see his flashlight frantically moving about inside his hammock. I called out to him. Jordan replied that something had fallen and hit his hammock's guide rope. I guess he was attempting to ward off an aggressive falling branch.

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