

The Road Less Traveled

UNH Junior Hikes the Appalachian Trail for CHaD

Monday, December 21, 2015

•
•
•



UNH JUNIOR JESSE ROSS TOOK A SEMESTER OFF TO HIKE THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL, RAISING FUNDS FOR AN ORGANIZATION NEAR AND DEAR TO HIS HEART.

It is often said that life is a climb. We conquer our challenges as we would conquer mountains, one step at a time, never stopping until we reach the summit.

Some take this idea literally.

Meet Jesse Ross '17, an engineering major who was born with persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn and spent the first several weeks of his life at the Children's Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock (CHaD), where he was successfully treated. Twenty years later, he is a healthy young adult with a passion for hiking.

Ross, a New Hampshire native, credits spending time in the White Mountains while growing up with sparking his love of the outdoors. Recently, he completed the journey of a lifetime: a hike along the Appalachian Trail, raising money for CHaD with each mile conquered.

“Working with CHaD was special,” Ross says. “It was extremely humbling to meet the people who have devoted their lives to the kids and the hospital.”

He also collaborated with Positive Tracks, a nonprofit organization that works to incentivize youth fundraising by doubling the dollars raised by those under the age of 23.

“Twenty years old is an interesting time to look at life, and not many of us do,” Ross says. “School forces us to think day to day and forget about who we are becoming from class to class.”

This, he notes, is what inspired him to take the spring 2015 semester off from school to hike the 2,189 -mile trail.

“I really wanted to do something valuable as a checkpoint of who I was becoming. I tried to plan the hike to happen over the summer, but I realized it should be more about quality than chasing miles on a timeline,” he says.

On March 2, Ross began his hike at Springer Mountain, Georgia, with only the bare necessities and 14 states ahead of him. He spent the next five months on the trail, exploring the mountains and working toward his end goal — the summit of Mt. Katahdin in Maine.

“There was a point early on where Maine stopped mattering — the goal becomes the next town or state line.”

“There was a point early on where Maine stopped mattering — the goal becomes the next town or state line.” Every hike comes with its own set of hardships, and this one was no exception. For Ross, the most difficult part was the wet weather. “Rain has an overpowering way of getting to you after a few days of living in it,” he says.

Also difficult was coming to terms with the magnitude of the hike.

“There was a point early on where Maine stopped mattering — the goal becomes the next town or state line. This was difficult to really integrate into my mental philosophy, but it changed my hike as soon as I did,” Ross says.

Despite tiring days, run-ins with bad weather and other complications, Ross reached his final destination on July 17.

He raised a total of \$17,000 for CHaD, with the help of Positive Tracks, and that money will be used to enhance the experiences of CHaD patients and their families.

“The rewards come in perspective and humility, not in strength or confidence,” Ross says. “Back on campus, I am definitely able to bring this back. Walking to class in the rain doesn’t seem so bad anymore. I know I can endure a lot with the help of the people around me.”

So with this major milestone behind him, what’s ahead for Ross? First, he’ll finish school. But he says there are more hikes in his future.

“I would be open to hiking another long trail but would be more likely to travel somewhere new,” he says. “The Pacific Crest Trail and shorter trails around the world keep me daydreaming.”

- WRITTEN BY:

[Katy Gioeli '18](#) | Communications and Public Affairs

SUCCESS



University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.

The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234

Copyright © 2022 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)

[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)