

Free!

Volume 1
Number 1 *Free!*


Article 22

2-1973

Wilderness Classroom

Susan Seago
University of Northern Iowa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/free>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1973 Student Board of Publications, University of Northern Iowa

Recommended Citation

Seago, Susan (1973) "Wilderness Classroom," *Free!* Vol. 1: No. 1, Article 22.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/free/vol1/iss1/22>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Free! by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Wilderness Classroom

by
Susan Seago

Last summer, Rick LaRue, a UNI junior, strapped a 55 pound pack on his back and hiked into a wilderness classroom known as the Appalachian Trail. In five months, he covered over 2000 miles and earned nine hours of credit doing it. Of his trek, Rick says that "It was one way I was able to grow within myself—more than I could have grown in four years of college."

Last April 2, Rick started alone on his hike atop Springer Mountain, the southern terminus of the trail in northwest Georgia. Ahead of him was an experience that would lead him through 14 states and make him one of less than 100 persons who have hiked the entire trail since 1936. Rick hiked with the support of friends and family. He said, "A trip for five months takes a lot of just knowing people are behind you. It's impossible to sit down and say I did it all myself."

Back in Cedar Falls, a group of North Cedar fifth graders marked his progress on their classroom map as he walked. The class corresponded with Rick, and two weeks before his birthday, he found 30 letters waiting for him in Damascus, Va.

Rick hiked alone but the trail wasn't always lonely. He speaks with enthusiasm about the people he met. Some of his fellow hikers included a student in Barnum and Bailey's clown school, a 40 year old retired camera salesman, and a chemistry PhD. When walking 15 miles a day, any unnecessary weight in a pack is usually eliminated for comfort, but Rick carried an extra set of eating utensils and extra food in case someone dropped by to share a meal.

Approximately every six or seven days, Rick left the trail. He would hitch a ride or walk into a town, buy food and supplies, and maybe eat at a restaurant. "Sometimes someone would stop and ask me what I was doing and by the time we finished talking, my breakfast was paid for." Rick also designated certain towns along the way as places to receive mail, money orders, and film from home. When asked about the distance of the towns from the trail, Rick answered, "Being that the trail is on the east coast, you never really feel like you're too far away from civilization except occasionally in Maine and Georgia. There you find a lot of smaller back country towns."

The longest distance Rick walked in a single day was 25 miles. He usually averaged three miles an hour, starting his day around seven o'clock. Lunchtime was a rest period that lasted about an hour and a half. "I almost always had hot soup for lunch and I really enjoyed it." Rick usually stopped for the night at one of the lean-to shelters located about every nine miles along the trail. He seldom used his tent, so he sent that back home.



The best sections of the trail, in Rick's opinion, were located in the Smokies and in the Shenandoah Valley. During the first weeks of his hike, Rick said that it was surprisingly cold, but that "It was much more pleasant to walk when it was cold and you knew you could keep yourself warm by walking." A wet June brought 26 rainy days to the trail and wet clothing that never seemed to dry out. When Hurricane Agnes hit, Rick was walking the trail.

The trip's cost was approximately \$1,500. This included transportation to the trail, equipment and supplies. Rick earned 3 hours of Physical Education credit, and 6 hours of free electives under UNI's individual honors program. For honors credit, Rick is currently doing critical reading of material written about the Appalachian Trail and evaluating it. He also put together a slide show record of his 151 days on the trail.

When on August 31, Rick completed the trail on Mt. Katahdin in Maine, he had walked through three pair of boots, taken 30 rolls of film, and had an experience to share. "Like I told myself on the trail, unless I could come back and share this with people, this was an ego trip because everyone was giving everything to me. Unless I could come back and share my slides and tell people about it, it just wouldn't be what I wanted.

[Note: Rick's experiences described in the above report should be of particular interest to the student body because: 1) this type of independent study is available to all undergraduate students and 2) experiences like Rick's independent study are valuable experiences and after all, you are what you experience. —Robert N. Schlesinger and Susan Seago.]