

A Horse-Shoe Trail End-to-End Adventure



WE DID IT! Started section hiking 13-Aug & finished 23-Nov (Rob, James (9), Lucy (10) and friend, Alicia)

13-Aug-2022 (7.66mi) (Section 1: Valley Forge Park to Great Valley Nature Center)

Lucy (10) and James (9) have had a love for the outdoors since birth, but backpacking came just a few years ago when we moved to Lebanon County, one step closer to the Appalachian Trail. I grew up spending countless seasons at Blue Rocks Campground, by the foot of the AT where Pinnacle and Pulpit are located. After our move to Lebanon County, I quickly became a member of the KTA (Keystone Trail Association) and bought many books on PA trails. This is where I came across the Horse-Shoe Trail and my interest peaked. The Horse-Shoe Trail has given us a lot of great experiences here close to our home and continues to give back to us. This trail in its entirety from its start in Valley Forge National Park to the AT (just north of Harrisburg) is roughly 140 miles and for us to accomplish a feat of this magnitude from start to finish will be something words cannot describe for us. So, back story aside, here we go...



From the official maps and book on the Horse-Shoe Trail, we gained permission from some wonderful people at the Valley Forge Mountain Association (VFMA). They were quick to respond to our e-mail request to camp and park at the Sun Bowl before beginning our journey. As we prepped our bags with one final check, our excitement grew while we waited for the Uber to take us to the Washington Headquarters where we would start our hike. As we left our Uber at Washington's Headquarters, we crossed route 23 to take our picture with the Horse-Shoe Trail Eastern Terminus plaque. This was such a great feeling, knowing we were starting this trail, at the beginning, and we wouldn't see the same section again as we followed the yellow blazes, crossing over Valley Creek, and into the woods. This nice ascent took us past the Colonial Spring Bottling Plant, where we could see the ruins of the once established business and what is the spring flowing through the building's foundation. It was remarkable to see up close. Not long after reaching a summit, we saw a sign telling us we were officially leaving the Valley Forge National Park and beginning our way through a narrow path of what seemed to be people's backyards. It is amazing to think that the Horse-Shoe Trail manages to weave its way through PA, through private property and other areas that allow hikers and horses to go through with their consent. We are very thankful to these landowners for their hospitality.

We continued to weave our way through neighborhood streets and backyards until we came upon the Sun Bowl, seeing our car in the distance, knowing we would be back later to camp out for the night. We walked further past the Sun Bowl, to the Wharton Esherick Museum and quickly gained some knowledge of this gentleman and the artistic impact he had. As we made our way down the street, we could feel the hard asphalt below our feet and the sun on our backs... wishing for the forest...to be back under the canopy of the trees and softer ground under our feet. Howell Road seemed like the longest stretch of the trail in the first section that was absolutely a giant hill of a climb on a major road. As we came to the intersection ahead on Rees Road, we finally saw a yellow blaze taking us right into the woods. This was a welcome sign for us four to get off the road and back into the safety and solace of the woods. We rejoiced! We stayed on-trail following Rees Road, but quickly had to leave the comfort of the woods once again to walk alongside a beautiful farm. As we approached Route 29, we were taken left on Aldham Road, where we eventually stopped at a car pull off. Here we decided to call it a day after little feet were becoming weary. We again took an Uber back to our car at the VFMA, had our dinner, and fell fast asleep in our tents.



20-21-Aug-2022 (13.92mi) Section #2 (Aldham Rd. to Rt 113 to Jaine Lane)

Prior to our next adventure, we contacted Sharon Davis to make camping arrangements. Not only was she and her daughter, Susie accommodating, they also made us feel right at home. From the minute we arrived early Saturday morning and were greeted by Mazie, her affectionate and friendly rescue dog, Susie, and Sharon were wonderful. We shared small talk as Lucy, James, Rob, and I double and triple checked our packs and generously applied bug spray. Susie was kind enough to give us a ride to the intersection of Aldham and Route 29 to pick up where we left off... Knowing it was going to be a muggy, hot day, we decided to take our time and break as much as we needed to. We walked down the road and eventually made our way into the woods. Winding in and out of the tall grass where a small deer statuette hiding in the bushes gave us all a little scare and a little laugh.

We continued on until we reached Charlestown Elementary School where we offloaded our packs and took a break in the shade. After much needed snacks and rehydrating, we moved on. Past Blackberry Lane, back and forth between the road and the woods, we walked onto the mowed path around Brightside Farm until we came to the small parking area and stopped for lunch. We took our time and gave our bellies and feet a chance to rest before pushing forward. We eventually made our way to Montgomery School's baseball field. The kids had done great and with the oppressing heat we decided to call it a day. Once again Susie Davis graciously picked us up and after a quick detour and history lesson, we arrived back at the Davis Farm to camp for the night. In between setting up our tents and preparing dinner, we all enjoyed the company of Gideon, the beautiful bay Arabian horse, Maize, and Hughie, the cat with the "funny ears". Lucy loved petting the horses and James became quick friends with Hughie. Not long after dinner, exhausted from the miles and the heat, we went to bed listening to the sound of crickets and horses grazing in the pasture. We woke bright and early the next morning and began making breakfast and preparing for the days hike. Once again, for which we are beyond grateful, Susie packed us all in her truck and returned us to the baseball field to begin our hike and finish our first section of the Horseshoe Trail. We walked past big houses and beautiful horse farms before going back into the woods, past the pipeline, and eventually coming out onto the gravel road that would lead us back to the Davis' Farm and our car. It was a couple of hours to finish up the first section. We packed the car and headed home tired and excited to return to see Sharon and Susie the next weekend to start Map #2.

27-Aug-2022 12.19mi (Section 3: Jaine In to St. Peter's Village)

Once again, we began our hike at Sharon Davis's who we now gratefully consider a friend. As we unloaded and did a once over on our packs for the day, we talked to Sharon about the trail to come, along with where she would graciously pick us up at the end of the day. We felt very lucky to have left the asphalt for the comfort of the dirt and grass. In this section, we encountered several mountain bikes on the trail and even a group of horses. It appears these sections of the trail are not heavily used and the amount of high grass we trudged through was itchy on our legs and made us wish for a lawnmower!

Crossing route 100 was not for the faint of heart. We had two decent ascents during this section of the trail, which really got our trail legs activated and made us feel fortunate to have carried in so much water. We took a small detour off trail in Welkinweir Nature Preserve to enjoy the beautiful view of the pond from a small bridge. We made our way through another section of woods, up and over, anticipating a long and much needed lunch break at the French Creek Elementary School. We found a giant tree that provided plenty of shade for us to lunch under. During our lunch, we quickly came to realize how much water we had actually gone through for drinking and making our meals. We consumed over 8 liters! Thankfully, due to the kindness of The WindRuff Kennels owners, we were able to refill our water supply and continue onward with confidence of staying hydrated.

As we continued into the woods past the kennel, we quickly became excited about our first substantial water crossing. The South Branch French Creek was running extremely low, and we were able to safely rock-hop across it. We could all feel the excitement coming over us knowing we only had a few miles left in our day as we approached Warwick Park. Crossing the historic Fink truss bridge was a neat experience for all of us. By this point, the kids could not stop thinking about the swimming opportunities that lay ahead in French Creek. We decided to stop at French Creek before the swimming hole to wade into the water and cool our bodies down. The water felt wonderful on our feet after all those long miles. After hearing all the screams of enjoyment further upstream at the swimming hole, we decided to make our way further up the trail. Unfortunately, at this point in our hike, we were met with a lot of graffiti and blue blazes that led nowhere. We eventually found our way to the swimming hole where a small crowd of people were enjoying the water. We could see St Peter's Village up on the hill and instantly felt our stomachs growling for dinner! We made our way over the rocks, despite a few challenges, and up the steps to the Inn for a much-needed relaxing dinner as we waited for Sharon to come take us back.

03-Sep-2022 8.61mi Section 4: St. Peter's Village to French Creek State Park.

Picking up in St Peter's Village, we decided to make a quick detour into town to visit the local bakery, with not a single complaint from the kids. Knowing our packs were already almost full, we decided to leave with a little less than we all wanted and settled on a baguette loaf. From the parking lot, we quickly found the trailhead that would lead back into the woods and to the Horse-Shoe Trail. Less than a mile into the woods, we found our yellow blazes that welcomed us back with open arms and a nice climb to start our morning. We were very excited about this section as we knew it would keep us under the canopy of the trees for the majority of the day, leading us into French Creek State Park. We eventually came to a road crossing where we were greeted by a group of off-road cyclists. They were very interested in our gear and our section hiking the Horse-Shoe Trail. Shortly after our conversation with them, we stopped in an old camp area to have our lunch. We loved this flat section as we could easily walk side by side with rocks and tree roots under our feet. We had one good climb during this section that led us down into the old town of Hopewell Furnace. We toured the old buildings and small furnace village. It took us a few attempts to follow the horseshoes, but we were finally led in the direction we needed to go. As we came closer to French Creek State Park, we were greeted with a nice gravel road that led us back into the woods as we entered into the Park. We could hear people on the nearby lake in their boats having a great time. We did enjoy the passing day hikers and people hiking the other trails that overlap the Horse-Shoe Trail in this section. We initially decided that we were going to stay the night in the State Park and had reserved a tent site. Because the pool was shut down and the camp sites were very full, we took a vote and decided to go home for the evening and pick up our hike through the State Park next weekend.

10-Sep-2022 (7.26mi) Section 5 (French Creek to Scott's Run Lake)

Arriving back at the office of French Creek State Park, we without a second thought, once again parked with our letter in the window telling the Park Rangers we were hiking and would return for our car that afternoon. We reviewed our packs, settled our trekking poles to the necessary lengths, tightened our sneakers, and off we went up the road to where the Horse-Shoe Trail intersects the main park road. As we made a left into the woods, we were very excited to have a nice cool morning and the canopy of trees above us. We knew we would be spending the majority of our hike in the woods, and we couldn't be happier. We quickly were met with mountain bicycles, one after another. This section of the trail was very busy to our surprise, but we made the best of it to get off the trail when we could to avoid any disruption to everyone's experience. As we approached our halfway point around William's Hill, we decided to take the Ridge Trail up to the abandoned fire tower at the top. This trail gave us a nice change in elevation to our trail experience so far that day and we welcomed the climb, knowing that lunch was just a few short miles ahead. As we arrived at the road where the fire tower stood, we made our way to the not so well-maintained picnic area. We stopped along the Trail to view nature at its finest as we found the most abundant display of Hen-of-the-wood mushrooms growing on a fallen tree. We made our way down off the Ridge Trail and quickly continued west along the Horse-Shoe Trail to finish out our time around William's Hill. As we approached Scotts Run Lake, we could see the water through the trees and knew that our hike for the day was coming to an end. We came out of the clearing next to the dam and made our way across, but not before taking a beautiful picture of the lake.

As we sat on the picnic bench, taking in the view, and enjoying a snack, we realized that we didn't have any reception to call for a shuttle (Uber). We very quickly realized that a majority of the visitors to the lake had pickup trucks and we decided we were going to ask for a hitch back to the Park Office and our car. To our surprise the first couple we asked were delighted to give us a lift back to the Park Office. We had to sit low in the bed of the pickup truck, but the free ride was worth the bumps and bruises.



17-Sep-2022 (12.87mi) Section 6: French Creek State Park (Scott's Run Lake) to Rt 10

We continued our journey finishing up Map 3 and entering into Map 4. After double checking with a friendly local Policeman who was sitting in the parking area we read about in the Horse-Shoe Trail handbook, where we were leaving the car for the day, we left our car at Plow Farms, unloaded our packs, and took an Uber back to Scott's Run Lake in French Creek State Park. We took one last minute before we began and watched as an owl flew from one tree branch above us to another and swiveled his head back over his wings to take a look at us. Was a treat!

We crossed over the last few roads in French Creek State Park before leaving it behind through beautiful woods enjoying the scenery around us. Our enjoyment was temporarily put on hold as we heard James, who was bringing up the rear of our foursome, begin to yell. After a few seconds, we realized we had stumbled into a bee's nest in the ground, and he had been stung twice. We almost ran, for a bit to get some distance between us and the nest, before stopping to make sure everyone was ok. Lucy and Alicia managed to get away unscathed, but both James and Rob had been stung. We decided to quickly make our way out to Mullen Hollow Road to take a much-needed break and have some lunch and look over the bee stings. Despite this being his first bee sting and having some pain and a definite scare, James was a trooper and kept on going. Thankfully, both Rob and James' bee stings had begun to feel better. We rested our bodies and filled our bellies before taking a vote to see if we should press on or call it a day. James was eager to keep going and we decided to push through to where we had left the car a few more miles ahead down trail. Soon after leaving our lunch spot, we came upon the Foreman pony truss bridge where we stopped for a few pictures. Hard to believe that a bridge built in 1881 was sitting in place! We made our way through a bunch of houses along a dirt road on a farmstead where we encountered a very friendly cat and a dog. We came out at the intersection of Hay Creek Road and Furnace Road. It was here we got a little turned around due to reroute of this portion of the trail, but after a few minutes, we were back on track and ready for the long steep climb ahead. We slowly made our way up the over 500 feet of elevation before beginning our slow descent down the logging trail. This elevation took a toll on us and we could feel our trail legs tiring with each additional step. We wove our way through beautiful William Penn State Forest finally reaching Buck Hollow Road. From here on out we knew we would be walking the road, which didn't exactly thrill us. The road was narrow and the sun was hot which allowed us to we took a few extra water breaks on our way to the car. We took a few minutes to catch our breaths and stretch our bodies before we decided to head home... but not before a much needed and deserved stop for some ice cream (Scoupe DeVille Ice Cream Parlor RT 724).

25-Sep-2022 (4.86 mi) Section 7: Rt 10 to Maple Grove Rd.

Picking up in Plowville, we continued across route 10 (Morgantown Rd), down Alleghenyville Rd, crossing route 176 before going right across some private property into the woods. We welcomed the wide trail ahead and the historic signs speaking about the charcoal platform and history of the area. Crossing over Sleepy Hollow Run, we came out of the woods into the Sleepy Hollow Athletic Club. It gave off a haunting sense as it was closed down. We continued on through another road and back into the woods, we made our way steeply up through an old Christmas tree plantation, along a jeep trail. This part of the trail was beautifully entangled with patches of berry plants along the trail, but nothing was fruiting at this time of year. About this time, we started to see the weather change much quicker than we anticipated. We picked up our pace a bit to stay ahead of the changing forecast. Walking through some farmland was welcoming for the kids as we did run into many animals snacking on the corn in front of us. To our surprise, we saw a rafter of turkey. As we came out of the woods, knowing could lunch at Maple Grove Road, we were suddenly met with changing weather yet again. We luckily had some tree cover next to us up the trail, and our hot water in our meals before the weather turned nasty. We called an Uber to take us out and back to the car - just in the nick of time as the weather turned sour just as we were getting in the car.



08-09-Oct-2022 (13.09) Section 8: Maple Grove Rd to Dutch Cousins Campground

We picked up this hike where the weather had halted us the week before, at Maple Grove Road. We started off uphill, this time with beautiful weather, albeit slightly on the chilly side. We wove in and out of the woods paralleling the power lines until crossing Schlouch road beginning our trek up the 330 feet climb. The kids felt it took forever before we finally crested the saddle and began our descent to Pinnacle Drive. Once we found our way to the gravel road, we picked a nice sunny spot to stop for lunch. After a nice break and some warm food in our bellies, we continued our way down the gravel road past houses and cabins and a few kids having fun on their four wheelers. We reached the crossing at New Holland Road and called it a day. Although the mileage was short and we had plenty of sunlight left, we stopped early so Lucy could enjoy a birthday party with her friends. After the party, we drove to Dutch Cousins campground where we would camp for the night. When dinner was over and our fire had died down we hit the tents for a chilly night. We had the pleasure of hearing an owl and a fox for a good portion of the night. The next morning, we woke up, had breakfast, packed up our tents and picked up the trail where we stopped the day before. We once again were walking with the power lines and after 2 nice climbs and finally getting to sign another Register box, we arrived at the busy intersection of US-222. We veered steeply uphill on Old Lancaster Pike, up the stone steps, and onto Kendall Lane where we stopped for lunch while taking in a view of the power lines we had just crossed. We traveled between woods and back roads until we arrived back at Dutch Cousins where we camped the previous night. We sat along the road in a sunny grassy spot relaxing until our Uber came to take us back to where we had left the car that morning.

22-Oct-2022 (9.42mi) Section 9 Dutch Cousins Campground to Girl Scout Rd.

Picking up at the entrance to Dutch Cousins Campground, we made our way through the campground in a quiet manner, as it was still early enough that we might wake some full-time residents. We did not have the opportunity to see the resident ducks this time around, but we were very eager to get going. As we crossed into private property, out of the campground, we were immediately met with some people leaving their home, very nicely telling us they hope we have a great hike. It was nice to have that initial motivation to the miles ahead of us. As we made our way into the woods, the instant connection to the wilderness around us filled us completely; like it was a void in us since our last hike. As we crossed under the power line, we stopped for a moment to take in the views of Reinholds from above. There is something terrifying crossing under these massive power lines, but there is also something magical by the views these necessary evils of power provide as they cut through the mountainsides. As we continue onward we notice a large structure hidden in the trees ahead of us, and quickly realize it is a water storage tank. We continued downhill to the bottom of the water tank and continued to keep our heads down as the rocks were everywhere on this trail in this section. We were all super grateful for our trekking poles through this portion of the trail as every step seemed calculated. We did run into some new construction near Little Girls Dream Photography on the trail where some blazed trees were taken down and we ran into some confusion, but after several minutes were able to find out where the trail continued. Hopefully this section of the trail can be blazed again for future travelers. Crossing one creek (Swamp Creek) after another (Cocalico Creek) we knew our car was coming up soon. We stopped at the car for lunch in the cul-de-sac before continuing on for a few more miles. As we crossed Wollups Hill Road into the woods, we immediately were met with knee high grass and such where we wished for a lawnmower, but it was a short section before the trail opened again into a rocky trail. In the woods near Mountain Road, we did encounter some massive down trees, but were able to climb over them to continue, but felt that horses might struggle getting through here. We did experience more down trees in Schoeneck on-trail that could use some cutting up and removal. The bamboo path through some private property in West Cocalico Township was something unexpected and so neat to experience with the kids. It was something out of a dream for us to go through. As we made our way down to Girl Scout Road on a very long road walk, we decided to throw in the towel for the day, and pick up next weekend here. *(Editor's note: trees have been removed and trail cut back.)*



29-30-Oct-2022 (14.9mi) Section 10: Girl Scout Rd to Fire Station Rd.

Picking up at Girl Scout Road, we continued up and through the winding road walk along Furnace Hills Road before dodging cars into the woods. As we made our way through the woods and onto another road, we quickly knew we were coming up to a nice climb as we entered the woods into Middle Creek. This section of the hike was a very nice climb for us. We enjoyed the elevation gain and the views. We ran into a few day hikers sitting at the famous Horse-Shoe Trail bench, but continued uphill. We knew the Pretzel Hut was coming up shortly before our climb to Pumping Station Road. We enjoyed the woods through this section leading us through more state game land, beautiful trees and the mushroom-shaped rock along the trail; before reaching the Cannon Hill summit. The kids enjoyed the rock hop across water at Furnace Run. We all managed to stay dry as the day started cold, but got considerably warmer. We crossed RT 501 surprisingly fast as there was a huge delay in the traffic, which always seems present there. We enjoyed some mid-day ice cream and pretzels at the Pretzel Hut. After our snack, we checked out the animals at the zoo, as we made our way through the gate, and into the woods again. The kids were super excited about this section of the trail as we have done this section up to the boy scout camp in the dead of winter last year. This time, being warmer, and full of life, the trail was much different for us all, and we enjoyed the hike up to the camp. As we approached the boy scout camp, we veered left and quickly came to Eagle Rock where we stopped for a nice photograph. As we came to Picuda Trail, again the kids recognized this section of trail as we had come there from the Pumping Station Road side. We made our way down the trail carefully to Pumping Station Road and ended our first day; as we left our car back at Hickory Run Campground. We took an Uber to pick up a second car (as we will use our own car's to hop through the next sections) and used the car to get back to Hickory Run Campground. Back at Hickory Run Campground, we were presented with a huge drop in the temperature. We eagerly began setting up our tents, and getting dinner started. The electric hand warmers came out for the kids, along with our gloves, and wool hats. After dinner we quickly settled into our sleeping bags (and quilts) for a good night's rest. As morning approached, I recorded the outside temperature at its lowest of 31 degrees! Everyone slept very well through the night with the aid of technological advancements in sleeping systems for backpacking. None of us were cold at all. After our morning breakfast, we drove the car's to Pumping Station Road for the next section up to Fire Station Road. This was yet again another section we have done before, but this time it all felt different. The continued excitement of knowing we are closer to the end of the trail filled us all. The 3.3 miles we did to Fire Station Road felt quick. We had a quick lunch before wrapping up our day. We originally planned on another longer day, but due to some sore muscles on the kids, we decided to take the remainder of the day off to rest.

05-06-Nov-2022 (16.43mi) Section 11: Fire Tower Rd- Governor Dick – Mt Wilson Rd.

We began our hike Saturday morning at the hairpin curve at Fire Tower Road. We readied our packs and trekking poles for a long day's hike. We hiked uphill through the somewhat eerie fog until we reached the telephone relay towers and the old stone Rangers cabin. Lucy and James giggled as we passed the following eyes of the security cameras... At the gate, we went into the woods, signed the Register box which seemed very few and far between, made our way through Camp Rocky Creek (formerly Camp Shand), and under the long stretch of Power Line trail. Knowing it is hunting season, all of us donned our bright orange hats, and we rather quickly made our way through the wet and marshy power line trail. Finally, emerging into Spring Hill Acres, we found an off the road spot to take our lunch. *(Editor's Note: In general, register boxes are at the beginning of each county. Hikers are required to wear 250 square inches of orange & an orange hat during hinting season.)* After replenishing some much-needed calories, we made our way across busy Route 72 and after a short section of road, we were back in the woods. We made our way into Mount Gretna via Governor Dick Park trails where we ran into a group of young trail bikers who graciously directed us off trail to the Mount Gretna Hideaway for a quick snack and water refill. We backtracked to where we had left off and continued to the parking area at the Governor Dick monument where we decided to call it a day... Despite the early morning rain, we continued our hike Sunday morning. We passed the Environmental Center, crossed Pinch Road, and made quick work of the remaining few miles of map 7. We plan to pick up at Mt. Wilson Road and hopefully finish up the remaining 3 maps before the cold sets in.



11&13-Nov-2022 (18.6mi) Section 12: Mt Wilson Rd. - Church of the Nazarene -Boathouse Park

Let's set the stage here. It is mid-November, it is fall, and it should be cool here in Central Pennsylvania. With that being said, this Friday morning was unseasonably warm, and to boot, it was raining cats and dogs. So, we welcomed the warm weather on this rainy day as we arrived at the State Game Lands (SGL 145) entrance we left off last weekend. This was our first hike in the rain if that is hard to believe. The kids were excited to finally get to test out their rain gear (rain jacket and rain pants, along with waterproof gaiters). We are not using an umbrella as some hikers attest to and I am sure they work great, but we stick to the standards of rain gear when hiking. Along with that we also do not use pack covers for inclement weather. We use pack liners and waterproof internal bags to keep the important items free of water (sleep system, clothing, etc...). There is some good conversation about additional weight that the water adds to the pack when saturated, but with the materials these packs are made out of these days, the weight is trivial. With all that out of the way, off to why you are here reading; the hiking. The trail was really more like a walkable road through much of this first section which was really nice, given the weather we were dealing with. As we made our way to the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail, we stopped quickly to re-adjust some things in our packs before crossing the trail and forward to the wooden bridge on the trail. This led to a fork where we crossed the road, back into SGL 145. We had not seen any vehicles parked, and thought possibly that hunters might be taking the day off, until sunset, as the weather was not productive to roaming animals. Nonetheless, we were very much prepared with our bright orange hats on, and our cut-up orange reflective vest that we velcroed to the back and sides of our backpacks. We continued to make our way through the woods, we crossed some roads, and came up quickly to lunch time. We decided to use our tent groundsheet to tie off on three trees on the trail, making our own three-point tarp to keep us out of the rain while we fired up our stoves and made some hot meals and hot drinks. As we cleared some of the leaves away under the tarp, we realized the water was pooling and flowing much too hard for us to find refuge here. So, we packed up and moved further down the trail as we knew a road was upcoming. As we made our way up the side of some private property, we were met with a lull in the rain. We found a spot under a tree near the curb, and quickly began assembling our lunch and drinks. We didn't encounter much drizzle during this 30+ minute lunch which allowed us some time to take off some layers under our rain gear to allow proper maintaining of our body temperatures. After lunch we continued further down the road and as we came to our half-way point for the day in our mileage, we decided to make a sock change. We always pack two pairs of socks (wool) as we can always have a dry pair. This is especially good in situations like today. We replaced our soaked socks for dry ones, knowing they would be wet again in no time, but it allowed us the creature comforts of dry feet for a little bit of time. We hung our wet socks off the shock cord on the outside of our packs. We came out of the woods again and were met with a couple miles of road walking through farmland which was very nice. During this time, we made another stop in the rain. We kept an ear open though for any distant thunder rolling, but luckily were not met with any. Before entering another farmland crossing, we were ecstatic to see an original Lebanon/Dauphin County stone marker (we even took a picture!). Explaining to the kids that this is the last and final County we are walking through to get to the Western Terminus of the Horse-Shoe Trail brought joy and smiles to their faces. We made our way through the farm field and over the hill to see our vehicle parked at the church (Church of the Nazarene). This concluded our hike for the day as we planned to split Map #8 into two smaller parts this weekend. After a zero on Saturday, we picked up back at the church Sunday morning to finish out map #8. We were excited and ready to go! Knowing the rain was behind us, looking back at the farmland we came from, we could hear the splashing of our feet through the mud, the rain bouncing off of our heads and packs, along with the wrinkles in our hands from being wet. We headed out along route 322 instantly being met with wind that brought us back to what fall should feel like this time of year here in PA. Luckily for us we prepared well for it with our cold weather gear. Donning gloves, warmer base layers, and an outer shell to boot, we were at times too warm and had to strip a layer. As we made our way to the horse barn, and passed a few horses enjoying our breakfast, we quickly made a right off the busy road to a nice farm road. We knew where we were heading as earlier that morning we did park a car at the Boathouse Park at Swatara Creek. We could see the blue water tower off in the distance which we knew was close to the park. We use this blue water tower as our marker most of the day. As we made our way out of the farmland and to the road we stayed on the grass as it felt much better on our feet than the asphalt. We turned left at the T (Crest Lane). As we continued down this Lane, we had seen in the map notes that there should be a marked post to make a right into the next farm field, but we failed to see this marked post as it does not exist any longer.



Please make note of this for future hikers. (*Editor's note. Will do.*) There is zero marking of this right turn. There is a rock buried in the ground, but that is not visible from the road and is further up this farm road/tractor road. We did unfortunately walk all the way down to the Environment Center before turning around and walking up the tractor road and confirming with the ground marker further on the road that we were back on-track. Another suggestion we would like to make is that instead of suggesting if you walked down to the Environment Center, which is quite far past the tractor lane, maybe edit/update this map note to say if you walked past the maintenance barn on the right or Vista Dr on the left, you went too far. This would keep future hikers from going much further out of the way to back-track. Just a thought. (*Editor's note: Good idea. A new guidebook coming in 2023.*) We walked down the tractor lane to the farmhouse and immediately Lucy was ear-to-ear smiling as she knew where we were. In Palmdale Park was where she used to go to play Rugby a few years back. This made her so happy. We made our way out of the farmhouse driveway and into the neighborhood, walking through until we made our way to Derry Road. We decided that we would escape the wind, giving us some relief, at the golf course. We found a mound of sand near the sand silos and stopped here for lunch. This was the perfect barrier from the wind which allowed us to enjoy this break much more. After lunch we continued down another farm lane, skirting the golf course, and over the hill, we again recognized our surroundings, as we could see Lingle Ave and Hershey Park Dr. We cut right through the farm field and up to the road where we made a left and stayed in the farm field; as the traffic was very busy. We hurried our way over the railroad bridge, keeping as close to the guardrail as we could. The kids were not fond of this part, but we had to get through to get forward. After crossing Hershey Park Dr, we continued up the road a bit further to make a left back onto softer ground and away from the traffic. We stopped here for a quick snack before continuing following the fence line through the fields. We meandered through and made our way out to rt 743 where we made a left, again against traffic on a busy road with the cemetery to our right. We crossed the road and back into the woods for a short period of time before coming out at another entrance to the cemetery. We followed up the hill to make a right back along another wooded area and farm before dipping left into the woods. At this point we eventually reached a peak on this hill and could see through the fall battered trees, the mountain range in the distance. The Appalachian Trail was there somewhere quietly waiting for us at the end of this trail. I had to stop for a moment and hold back my tears. This was a big moment for me personally. As we made our way out of the woods at the top of the hill, we could see the Boathouse Park below us, welcoming us to come down from the hill. We made our way down and began our routine of shedding our backpacks, some layers, and into our stretching before getting into the car to go home. With 23.5 miles left in this journey, we are full of emotions at this point. We have come so far and the excitement of touching the western terminus sign on the AT for the HS-T we dream of! One last thing I want to point out and thank the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy for is taking the extra time and financial impact to making these maps water-resistant. This past weekend our map #8 was saturated and wet for two days, but dried out without any noticeable water damage.



19 & 20 Nov-2022 (12.77mi) Section 13: Boathouse Parking lot to Carlson Rd to Ft Indiantown Gap

We walked out of the Boathouse Parking lot, past the Hershey Sweet Lights sign, and turned onto Sand Beach Road as we continued our journey now so close to the end. We startled a young deer as we crossed over the Swatara and hugged the shoulder of the road till we left it for the field. We wove back and forth from the edges of fields to the woods while the kids sang the 12 Days of Christmas, and we had friendly arguments about the lyrics...this really helps pass the time. We crossed streamlet after streamlet and came out to a picnic area next to the beautiful Manada Creek where we took a short break. Continuing on past the Balsbaugh Cemetery, where we again stopped to examine the almost 300-hundred-year-old grave markings, we took note of the map's reroute due to hunting season and followed the red blazes along Devonshire Road and Douglas. Unfortunately, at one point we lost sight of the red blazes and proceeded back into the woods eventually coming out back on Douglas Road. It wasn't until we exited the woods that we realized we had missed the last bit of the reroute...Placing another sign at the Douglas Road crossing at mile 3.5 may be a good idea to avoid any future mishaps. Especially with the red blazes being faded and a darker color, we truly did not see any further red blazes, which is why we went back into the woods. (*Editor's note: We will correct this.*) On that note, we did scare quite a few deer out in this area that were sleeping. We ended our day at Carlson and South Mill Road...a short day so that Lucy could have time with a friend later that evening.

On Sunday, we picked up at the intersection and began our very chilly, mostly road walking day. We walked single file along the edges of the road to avoid the traffic as much as possible. We passed a few alpacas, a very friendly goat, and a group of cute fuzzy cats - all while making our way onto Furnace Road and finally into the woods. We bordered a trout stream while making our way through a beautiful trail in the woods down and out to RT 443. We carefully made our way to our car where we had left it earlier that morning at the boundary of Fort Indiantown Gap training area. While having a quick lunch before calling it a day, we finally realized how cold it actually was once our bodies had stopped moving. Our cold weather gear kept us warm and cozy as we saw the temperature, with the wind, was around 21 degrees F. We packed up and entered the warmth of the car knowing we only had 1 map left...We plan to complete map 10 on Tuesday, 22-Nov-2022.

22-Nov-2022 (5.18mi) Section 14 Ft Indiantown Gap to SGL Parking 211

Starting at the foot of the boundary of Fort Indiantown Gap training area, we made our way uphill along a closed road with U.S. Property signs skirting most of the trail for us for quite a few miles. Even as we ducked into the woods, we continued along the border of the military property. This section of trail was very rocky, giving us some great PA hiking at its finest; as PA is known for its rocky terrain (aka Rocksylvania). We made our way along past a motorcycle club in the woods, onto another dirt road, and back into the woods. Up and up we continued to the ridge where we came upon the register box and a nice flat rock. We decided here we would make an early lunch. Here we continued our ongoing conversation of wishing for a bear sighting and what we would need to do if one decided to explore the scent of our food in the wind passing by us. We still have yet to see a bear on-trail. We made our way after lunch downhill into a beautiful section where new tree growth could be seen and the ground was quite flat. This felt very nice on our feet. As we made our way to the T in the trail where the trail went right and to the left was the parking lot up the road where our car was. We went left and decided that we would finish out the trail the following day; giving us the much-needed break in a 17-mile hike to finish, but also to enjoy two beautiful fall days...



23-Nov-2022 (13.81mi) Section 15: SGL 211 Parking to the END

From the parking lot area for the State Game Land 211, we made our way about a mile down the trail to where the trail continued straight ahead of us, just past the memorial sign for this section of the State Game Land. We started this day with our usual cold weather gear (gloves, hat, base layer top, mid-layer, and rain jacket). The trick here is that the rain jacket acts as a barrier to keep the body heat in (trapped), and this allows your body to stay warm; instead of wearing too many layers with the backpack. Thus, creating times to stop and take off and put on layers... As we started the climb up the side of the mountain, we could see in front of us that this climb was long and steady...what we didn't know just how much of a grade this climb was. We took many breaks, but finally made it to the top with such amazing views of the Appalachian Mountain range. We could see across the valley Kitner View and knew that the Appalachian Trail was tucked away in the mountain just ahead of us on this trail, waiting for us to explore. As we quickly descended out of the sun, we were met with snow on the side of the trail, and colder temperatures. We made our way to the bottom, entering the valley, and made a right. We knew this section of the Horse-Shoe Trail was going to be long and steady in elevation, but rewarding as the end was in our minds the whole time. The trail itself was very well maintained for being so remote and also quite large. We really enjoyed this aspect of the trail as it allowed us to cover more trail in a quicker time. We eventually made our way to the end of this straight trail that turned left and we stopped at the wooden bridge that crosses Stony Creek. We spent some time here resting our tired feet and ate some lunch. We knew we still had some miles ahead of us to the western terminus of the trail and we were also fully aware that we were running out of daylight. We didn't find this losing daylight as a real problem as we had a plan to walk out of the Appalachian Trail in the dark with the help of our headlamps. We would tackle that potential if we came to it while on-trail. As we packed up from lunch, we suddenly found some speed left in our step and covered some of the remaining flat ground on the gravel road. We believed at one point we managed to push out two miles in almost 32 minutes. We surprised ourselves. As we came to the bottom of Sharp Mountain we noticed seven bicycles off the trail into the woods. This caused us a bit of concern because we knew just how far out we were from any real roads or civilization. We never did see anyone around to claim those bicycles. This climb up the mountain was truly one of the most challenging sections of trail for us throughout the whole Horse-Shoe Trail. The steep ascent really challenged us all. When we did make it to the top we took a break that felt like heaven to us all. We could not believe the grade of the hill we just finished and hoped to not do that again! As we were still regaining some sense of feeling in our tired legs, we saw the biggest, cutest trash panda (raccoon) walking down the trail towards us. We managed to capture some of its movement on video before it finally saw us, just mere feet in front of us, and scooted into the woods. We made our way around the side of the mountain and stopped for a moment at the kabob hiking memorial. We knew at this point we had just a short additional climb left in front of us. We made our way right into the boulder field and climbed another steep climb. This climb had much needed meandering trails through it as we made our way to the last and final register box right before the western terminus of the Horse-Shoe Trail. Before we set up the mobile phone to take a few pictures of us, we cheered in celebration, hugged with tears in eyes, and relished in the excitement of this amazing journey we started just a few months ago. As we made our way down the southbound side of the AT, we continued to talk about some of our favorite parts of the Horse-Shoe Trail, along with our disbelief that it was finally over. No matter how much preparation we have done in the past few week's knowing we were going to be done with the trail, we could not believe we were there and done. Even while writing this, with sore feet and sore legs, I am fighting back tears, but smiling. We did make our way out to the Clarks Valley Road parking lot for the Appalachian Trail and just in time for us to only have had to walk in the dark of night on the AT for .7 miles. Luckily at that point in time the AT was not super rocky and our headlamps lighted up the world around us. This short time in the woods in the dark was great exposure for the kids to know what it is like to be on-trail in the dark. It is an experience they will not forget and use later in life.

Our time on-trail, on this journey, on the Horse-Shoe Trail brought us through the heat of summer, the cool temperatures in the fall, and even a few nights in our tents in the low 30s. The trail brought us to an end with challenge and happiness. It was an ending to a new beginning for us all. We will continue to grow from this experience, continue to buy and test new gear, and have already been planning our next trip for the past several weeks. We plan to hike the 229 miles of the AT from the Mason Dixon Line to the Delaware Water Gap.

We want to close this out with a big thank you to the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy for their efforts and continuous work on keeping the trail alive and accessible. Along with this, we would like to thank the people like Sharon that keep their property open to people passing through the trail. Her willingness to help and assist is saint-like. We set out on this journey from East to West on the Horse-Shoe Trail not knowing what we would encounter from week to week, but the memories we have made throughout the time on-trail we will carry with us for a lifetime.

Happy Trails and keep on keeping on.

Rob - I cannot believe it is over. It is bittersweet, but humbling and so rewarding!

