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Cross country coach hikes Appalachian Trail



Photo Provided
Camdenton cross country coach Gary Thompson has spent the last five months hiking the Appalachian Trail.

By A Staff Reporter
lakenewsonline.com
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Camdenton, Mo. — Camdenton High School cross country coach Gary Thompson is counting down and trekking down the last few miles of nature's most intimidating course, the Appalachian Trail. In early April, Thompson began his five-month thru-hike across our nation's longest marked footpath. The Appalachian Trail spans 14 states from Georgia to Maine and covers over 2,180 miles. Each year, nearly 2,000 hikers attempt an end-to-end journey with an estimated 200 actually completing the task. Thompson has passed the 1,929-mile marker and plans on reaching the northern terminus, the summit of Katahdin, by August 19. The trail is a diverse route with a few weeks of gradual grades and many weeks of steep ascents and descents peppered with piles of boulders larger than automobiles. It is not uncommon to climb 2,000 to 3,000 vertical feet per day. This year's contribution of excessive rain supplied additional weeks of wet clothes, wet feet, and mud baths. The demands of such an expedition can be quite daunting; endurance, perseverance, strength, and mental acuteness all come into play. But through it all, Thompson has kept going with a smile on his face. So much so, that his trail name (a tradition of assigning aliases to thru-hikers) is "Happy." Thompson hikes with a 45-pound backpack loaded with survival necessities. While on the trail he sleeps in shelters, hostels or "tents out" for the night. Finding water sources is the single most pressing issue he faces each day, so route planning becomes very meticulous. Such an undertaking requires a support team, or in

Thompson's case, a support wife. Ellen Thompson ensures that her husband is equipped with food, money, clothing, and other items required to complete the hike. She prepares packages and mails them to post offices near the trail where they are held for thru-hikers. "In addition to normal supplies, we have had to address a broken backpack frame, broken trekking poles, torn rain gear, and 4 pairs of worn out shoes," she said. Mrs. Thompson maintains a Web site detailing her husband's status and adventures at www.gthike.com. With the summer months coming to a close and cross country season starting up again, coach Thompson will be heading down that Maine mountaintop looking forward to a new season. A new season indeed. The finish line of the Appalachian Trail is patiently waiting to be crossed and forever changing the lives of mankind, one "Happy" hiker at a time. *Provided by Ellen Thompson*

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