

# ON THE TRAIL

## INTRO TO WALKING: FORMERLY DESKBOUND N.C. MAN TACKLES AT NORTH-TO-SOUTH

By Gary Dutton  
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**NORWICH** — Charlie Keefer passed through Norwich Sunday, July 18, just before noon. He was destined for his Holly Springs, N.C., home, where he hopes to arrive in time for Thanksgiving dinner.

Keefer, 60, is walking the north-to-south route of the Appalachian Trail alone, although he briefly had a partner. "It's quite an adventure," he said, adding that "it's quite also quite an ordeal."

An unlikely distance hiker, Keefer is a recent retiree from the position of director of product registration at the BASF Corporation, a job that kept him behind a desk when not on an airplane between North Carolina and Washington, D.C. He was never, never, a walker, he says, but a friend talked him into it.

But, as fate would have it, his partner's knee gave out shortly after they'd begun their trek from Mt. Katahdin in Maine. "I knew then that I had two simple choices I could make," Keefer — trail name "Charlie The Tuna" — said matter-of-factly. "I could either pack up an head home, or continue on."

Sunday, 49 days into his six-month walk, he cut across the Upper Valley, thinner than when he'd begun his journey, but completely dedicated to finishing what he'd begun. "I don't think I'd do it again," he said, a wide grin sweep-

ing across his face, "but I'd gotten myself all prepared for it this time, so why not?"

Keefer was chipper as he walked along Main Street in Norwich Sunday. After almost two months of walking 10 miles a day across all kinds of terrain, he had taken the night off, actually sleeping in a bed at the Super 8 in White River Junction.

His 45-pound bag — containing six gallons of water and up to four days worth of food — is still also filled with heavy, cold weather clothing — something he won't need on the rest of his journey to Spring Mountain in Georgia. He'd planned to get rid of the sweaters and such in Hanover Saturday, but things didn't work out.

Keefer had planned to meet his wife in Hanover, where they'd spend a day together, a "zero time" day on the trail, before he headed back out on his journey, and she back to the Carolinas with his cold weather garb. Instead, she stayed home with her sick sister, and he took a cab from the Hanover Inn to the Super 8 to rest his weary bones for eight hours.

Because of more favorable weather conditions, most Appalachian Trail hikers start the long hike in Georgia and make their way north. Keefer, though, following his friend's lead, is part of the 10 percent who do it the hard way, starting on the still-icy terrain of Mt.

Katahdin and walking into the southern heat.

Of his first 49 days of walking, "The Tuna" said he'd covered probably 10 percent of the distance, but had already expended 50 percent of the work it will require him to complete the arduous trip. Those stats, he said, are from a guide published by the Appalachian Trail Conference.

Until he makes it across the Green Mountains in Vermont by mid-week, Keefer said he's averaged about 10 miles a day, not bad for somebody who never walked in his life, except to get to his car. Once on the other side of Vermont, the more relaxed terrain will allow him to up that average to 15 miles daily.

Foodstuffs and other essentials are picked up at stores along the trail, he said, and at various post offices, where his wife mails "drops" for him. "They," he said, speaking of the trail conference, "put out a pretty good book of what's available for resources along the way. It makes life fairly easy."

Still, resource availability aside, it's a long walk over hill and dale from Maine to Georgia; especially if you're doing it for the first time, especially if you're doing it alone.

Charlie Keefer stays focused on his goal as he soldiers across northern New England. It may still be early summer, but his Thanksgiving turkey is sounding better every day.



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Charlie Keefer, known on the trail as "Charlie The Tuna," pauses in Norwich July 18, 49 days after beginning his north-to-south trek of the Appalachian Trail in Maine. Of his first distance hike ever, Keefer said he'd already observed that "it's a great way to lose weight." He plans to reach his Georgia destination by Thanksgiving.