



The stunning Delaware Water Gap on the Appalachian Trail.

By Beverly Mann

I felt minuscule as I stood among the trees lining a towering mountainside while down below the river snaked along endlessly, without a ripple. Inhaling the brisk autumn air, I felt a sense of accomplishment having just hiked seven miles of the 27-mile Appalachian Trail at Pennsylvania's wondrous Delaware Water Gap in the Pocono Mountains, located some 70 miles west of New York City.

I was on a special outdoor Road Scholar Tour with 24 avid hikers of ages 50-plus. Adventurous spirits all, we came for a six-day challenging trek in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey, with a stay at the scenic 105-year-old Shawnee Inn & Golf Resort. This historic hotel has been patronized by many famous politicians and celebrities over the years, including President Eisenhower, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jackie Gleason, and Olympic skier Jean Claude Keeley.

The entire Appalachian Trail stretches from Maine to Georgia, spanning 2,173 miles. It's one of the



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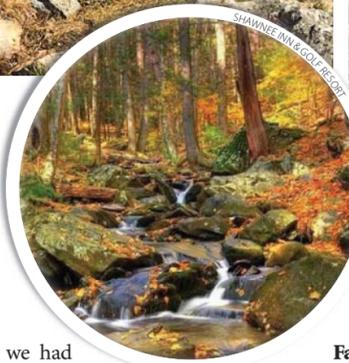
longest trails in the U.S., and can take as much as six months to complete. The six-day exposure of the Pennsylvania and New Jersey portion gave me a good taste of the magnificent, rugged terrain.

Each morning started with a hearty breakfast in the hotel's River Room. Afterward, we packed our own lunches from a wide choice of cold cuts, snacks, and fruit. Then off we went in a van to the head of our hiking trail after choosing from three groups: a moderate group that would hike three to four miles, a moderate-challenging group hiking six to seven miles, or a challenging group venturing eight to nine-plus miles a day.

#### Magical moments

My first day's hike in the moderate-challenging group was an introduction to the Appalachian Trail's scenic beauty and rocky terrain with a climb up Mount Minsi. We had been concentrating on the irregular stony path as we walked, so it was good to stop and absorb the scenery. Our hike leader, Sandy, pointed out the white marks on the trees that indicated the path of our trail, and the blue marks indicating a route outside the Appalachian Trail.

After returning to the hotel, Sandy gave us a gentle yoga class to stretch and relax our achy muscles in preparation for the adventures ahead. That evening



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we had a lecture on the history of the area, which connected me more to my surroundings.

On day two I chose the mid-range group again—a 6.5-mile hike to Raccoon Ridge for the 360-degree view of Delaware River Gap, Yards Creek, and beyond to the Pennsylvania and New Jersey landscapes. We started at Camp Mohican and trekked up and down the picturesque but rocky mountain range, passing through Kaiser Trail to Coppermine and Old Mine Road.

When we reached the top of the mountain for our lunch and a panoramic view, somehow the tiring hike was no longer a concern. The sun reflecting and illuminating the greenery surrounding us was magical. I took a few moments for meditation and gratitude to be able to have this lifetime experience.

I thoroughly enjoyed my buffet dinner that night: generous portions of



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(L) View of Yards Creek and Delaware River looking toward Pennsylvania.

(R) Navigating a trail across a waterway.

fresh sautéed and steamed vegetable dishes, baked salmon and chicken, quinoa, along with fresh fruit and an assortment of pies.

#### Farewell gift

On day three, all the groups were joined together in an informative three-mile nature hike with inspirational naturalist, photographer, and writer Rick Koval. He passionately spoke of the environment, plants, and local animals in the area and warned of the poisonous ivy and hairy vines to avoid.

"The Delaware River is a pathway of life and diversity, with fish migrating upward, and the high ridge acts as a migratory corridor for birds of prey—bald eagles, osprey, and other raptors," Koval said.

One fascinating encounter was the marbled orb-weaver spider clinging to its expansive web as we hiked around Lake Lenape into the town of Delaware Water Gap.

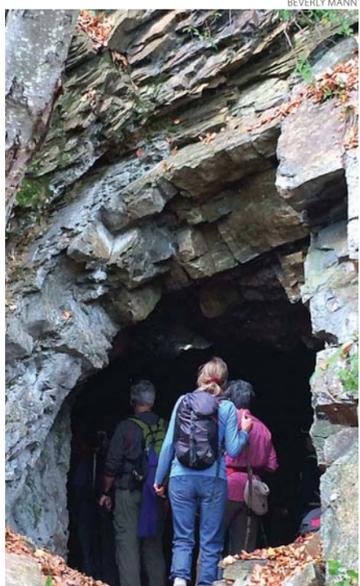
That evening, I treated myself to a heavenly massage by the magical hands of Igor, who has been with the hotel for 10 years. After a three-course dinner, Koval brought his

pets to share—from garter snakes, turtles, and frogs to venomous copperhead rattlesnakes.

Unfortunately, our final hiking day was rainy, but as the rain dissipated in the morning, many of us chose the moderate hike covering Dunnfield Trail and Worthington Forest to Dingman Falls in Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. This shorter hike became a farewell gift for me and others, as we passed dramatic waterfalls in a wild wilderness of sculptured trees, fields of ferns, and golden leaves.

At Dingman Falls we climbed a steep stairway to the top of the falls. From there, we could fully appreciate the expanse of the natural beauty of this remarkable landscape, an added plus to our memorable trek on the Appalachian Trail.

*Beverly Mann has been a feature, arts, and travel writer in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 30-plus years. She has received numerous accolades in various fields, including a Bay Area Travel Writers Award of Excellence in Newspaper Travel Writing.*



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Crossing a waterway on the trail.

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