

October 16-19, 2008 • Chuck Wilson Memorial Backpack for BENCHMARK Fall Funding Hike • 41.9 miles - Indian Grave Gap to Campbell's Hollow Rd

I have an affinity for the Appalachian Trail... the 2175-mile National Scenic Trail stretching from Georgia to Maine. Having hiked 25% of it and several sections multiple times, I have grown in my appreciation of its beauty, character, and challenge.

For 14 years BENCHMARK has planned a fall funding hike. Thirteen of these hikes have been on the A.T. So why the A.T.? It changes. Color. Temperature. Visibility. Difficulty. Even location. Sometimes it gets relocated. It's different depending on how you approach it. Trail north or trail south, neither is 'easy'.

This year my wife Barbara and I backpacked the Chuck Wilson Memorial. Demanding hike for only 42 miles. Wet and cloudy on Friday. Windy and foggy on Saturday. Down right cold on Saturday night. A chilly, sunny Sunday.

She gained nearly \$2200 in much needed pledges. Kinley Winchester, a 10-year hiker, drove us and even hiked a few miles himself. With the exception of my not being where I needed to be to find the car at the end of the trip, things went smoothly. Even that will be a "you-remember-when" memory,...in time.

BENCHMARK exists because people are involved. Often through that involvement our own lives grow richer. From generous and faithful contributors, to leaders who have allowed us to partner with them for spiritual growth and leadership development, to numerous instructors-- all make BENCHMARK possible.

Yet, none have invested more or as deeply as my wife Barbara. After 20 years of marriage and 15 years of BENCHMARK, I look around, and she is still with me. And in those years, perhaps I have grown in my appreciation of the beauty, character, and challenge of both.

Thank you for praying for this work and ministry. Thank you for being willing to partner with us and give us opportunities to serve. Thank you for your donations that fund this work. BENCHMARK would not exist without financial contributions, opportunities to serve, and His grace.

Note: This year only two hikers. Last year on this very wilderness trip / funding hike there were nine. Two are back in Tibet where they teach English with English Language Institute China. Two friends from Colorado couldn't make the trip this year. Two of our participants from last year have had recent surgery. Another hiker just returned from her second missions trip this year to Iraq.



Barbara Crossing Unaka Mountain



On This Journey, Together



Frosty Sunday Morning



Fall Friday