

## Walking on the Wild Side: Long-Distance Hiking on the Appalachian Trail

Kristi M. Fondren



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Walking on the Wild Side: Long-Distance Hiking on the Appalachian Trail Kristi M. Fondren The most famous long-distance hiking trail in North America, the 2,181-mile Appalachian Trail—the longest hiking-only footpath in the world—runs along the Appalachian mountain range from Georgia to Maine. Every year about 2,000 individuals attempt to "thru-hike" the entire trail, a feat equivalent to hiking Mount Everest sixteen times. In *Walking on the Wild Side*, sociologist Kristi M. Fondren traces the stories of fortysix men and women who, for their own personal reasons, set out to conquer America's most well known, and arguably most social, long-distance hiking trail.

In this fascinating in-depth study, Fondren shows how, once out on the trail, this unique subculture of hikers lives mostly in isolation, with their own way of acting, talking, and thinking; their own vocabulary; their own activities and interests; and their own conception of what is significant in life. They tend to be self-disciplined, have an unwavering trust in complete strangers, embrace a life of poverty, and reject modern-day institutions. The volume illuminates the intense social intimacy and bonding that forms among long-distance hikers as they collectively construct a long-distance hiker identity. Fondren describes how long-distance hikers develop a trail persona, underscoring how important a sense of place can be to our identity, and to our sense of who we are. Indeed, the author adds a new dimension to our understanding of the nature of identity in general.

Anyone who has hiked—or has ever dreamed of hiking—the Appalachian Trail will find this volume fascinating. *Walking on the Wild Side* captures a community for whom the trail is a sacred place, a place to which they have become attached, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

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