

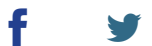
Pikesville High grad defers start of college to hike Appalachian Trail



Pikesville High graduate Leah Rubin hiked the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, delaying college by one semester and hiking through 14 states from Maine through Georgia in a period of about five months, finishing late in 2016.

By **Jeff Seidel**
Community Times

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Students often try to take a special trip after graduating from high school or college. But Leah Rubin went on a journey that most high school graduates wouldn't think of undertaking after finishing Pikesville High last spring.

A few weeks before her 18th birthday, Rubin started a long hike on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The teenager loves the outdoors and came up with the idea during her junior year, spent several months trying to convince her parents and eventually hiked from the trail. She delayed starting college by one semester and hiked through 14 states from Maine through Georgia in a period of about five months, finishing late in 2016.

Rubin was scheduled to start college this past fall. Instead, she's going to begin her college education this spring at CCBC-Catonsville after completing the hike of approximately 2,180 miles. She walked from June 26 to Dec. 7 with a pair of short breaks.

The Pikesville resident completed what's called a flip-flop hike, walking from New York to Maine first and then taking a bus back to New York before heading south to the trail's end in Georgia.

Even though it may seem a bit unusual for someone who just graduated high school to undertake a hike like this, Rubin felt it was the right time.

"I didn't know if I'd be able to do it after college," she said. "I thought it was the perfect opportunity where I'm not really obligated to anything at the moment."

Rubin hiked between eight and 14 hours a day, saying she morphed into better shape as time went on. Most nights, she slept in shelters (three-walled and roofed with wooden lean-tos) on the trail. Sometimes, Rubin would set up a tent, while other times, she simply slept under the stars.

Her supplies proved pretty basic, including a backpack, tent, sleeping bag, some clothes, a GPS and extra socks. For sustenance, Rubin ate a lot of snack foods during the day. At night, she'd make ramen products or mashed potatoes — foods that were filled with starch and light in weight to carry.

One of Rubin's toughest tasks was convincing her parents to basically let her hike by herself up and down the East Coast. They eventually agreed and she wound up connecting and walking with different people each week when she wasn't hiking alone.

Rubin estimated that she met hundreds of people on the trip.

"I will remember the challenges I faced and the people I met, for sure," she said. "The people really made the trip. I made some friends for life."

Ronit Rubin, Leah's mother, said she and her husband, Neil Rubin, preferred initially that their daughter go with a group or even try to earn upcoming college credits. However, everything worked out fine in the end.

"I thought it was a wonderful experience for Leah, and I'm so glad she was able to do it," Ronit Rubin said. "She's got a lot perseverance, and I'm excited about the fact that she was able to meet so many different people and to deal with all different types of challenges."

Todd Remaley, the chief law enforcement ranger with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, said he's not surprised to see someone who just finished high school do the hike, although it was a bit unusual.

"There's people who do it at all phases of their life," Remaley said. "The trail can be a great place for folks in transition."

Rubin plans to attend CCBC-Catonsville for two years before transferring to a four-year college. She's thinking about majoring in environmental sciences and most likely won't spend her professional career sitting behind a desk.

However, there's likely some more hiking in her future, possibly during another time of transition.

Rubin said she's thinking about trying to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, which, according to its website is 2,650 miles long and goes from Mexico to Canada through California, Oregon and Washington. She said that hike would probably take about five months and is something that could be done after she finishes her associate of arts degree.

In addition, Rubin might try another shorter hike during this summer. She's now might be starting college life, but Rubin loves how the hiking often kept her mind free.

"It was physically tough, but mentally there wasn't a lot to worry about," Rubin said. "It was just how many miles should you walk, where are you going to stay for the night, and what food do you want to eat."

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