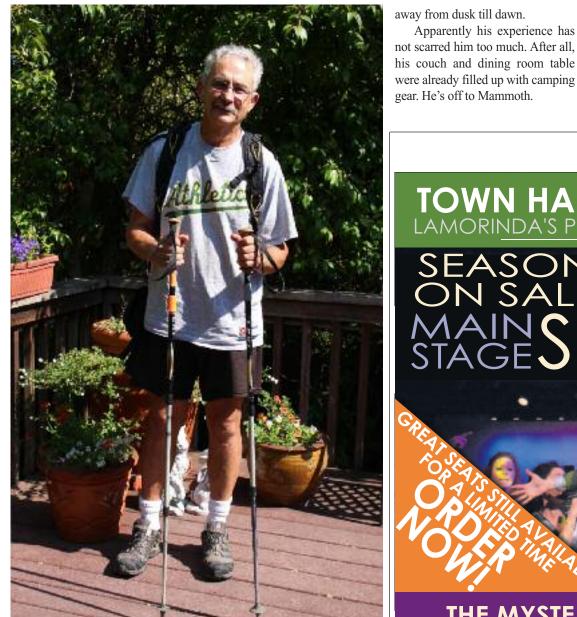
Apparently his experience has not scarred him too much. After all,

were already filled up with camping gear. He's off to Mammoth.

A Walk in the Woods, The Long Trail Up

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Orinda man completes the Appalachian Trail By Chris Lavin



After almost dying on his first attempt in 2014, Richard Birss of Orinda completed hiking the Appalachian Trail this summer.

your burgers for you.

Now an Orindan has success- overcrowded with hikers. fully traversed the trail, and he's 67 years old.

"There were times when I questioned my motivation," said Richard Birss modestly, sitting at a table loaded with instant bags of food that can cook quick, near a couch full of backpacking equipment. He just got back in July, but that's not quite enough for one summer. He's leaving now for Mammoth in order to for 50 years.

job as a probation officer for Contra are not trails. They are not nature Costa County, Birss can continue to check off the long list of trails he has wanted to conquer. His first attempt on the A.T. began in March 2014. It through boulders. One must remove didn't turn out well. About 400 miles in, he suffered horrific indigestion. He couldn't even stand. He lay down in the middle of the trail. Fortunately a "kid" from one of the established lean-to shelters where he had stayed the night before came along, and asked if he should call 911. Birss said yes immediately.

It took search and rescue crews three hours to get there. They hung an IV bag from a tree branch strapped to an ATV, tied him on, and began the long road back to civilization, where Birss would find that a hole in his intestine was leaking water (and other stuff) into his abdomen. He went in for emergency trail where the next step is a piece surgery the next morning. "The doc- of granite three or four feet in the tors said I could die if I didn't get air, with no steps. Some days he surgery right away."

That little episode ended that mere 10 miles. trip. He decided to try again this

vironmentalists and more than 30 or-

certain ethos exists among the through Maine. It traverses 2,000 people who torture themselves miles and goes through 14 states. by hiking long, excruciating dis- (That is not a typo.) Birss went tances. "Oh, he's done the whole through four pairs of shoes. And his PCT (Pacific Crest Trail)," is some- return comes at an important mothing that might be said while burg- ment in A.T. history: Robert Reders are being flipped among ford's movie, "A Walk in The backpacking friends. Yet the Ap- Woods," based on Bill Bryson's palachian Trail remains among the book by the same name about his big mammas, one of the triumvirate. own trip on the trail, debuts on Labor If you do them along with the Conti- Day weekend. Birss is worried that nental Divide Trail, well, people get the movie is going to be so popular that the A.T. will become severely

> "There just isn't the infrastructure to support that kind of traffic," he said. Yet one of the reasons the A.T. is so popular is that resources are relatively easy to find. The trail goes through, or near, a lot of towns where hikers can resupply, or rest up under a real roof. Many hitch into a town, then back. But the going is

Something that people who have hike to Yosemite. He's been hiking lived and hiked only in California do not realize is that hiking on the East Now that he is retired from his Coast is different. Most of the trails paths. You cannot skip. There is no skipping. At times you must turn sideways to wedge your way one's pack at such times, drag it through the slot, then haul it back on and climb through mud another 500 feet in elevation within the span of a football field. Birss' pack was 35 pounds, most of the time, thanks to regular resupply stops. A hiker often loses sight of the white spray-painted splotches on trees that mark the trail. Panic may sometimes ensue.

> Therefore much of it is not fun. "It's really, really hard," Birss said. "People don't realize that there are huge boulders to get over. There's not a real trail. You have to hold onto trees sometimes to pull yourself up." You reach a place in the would hike 14 hours and traverse a

On the other hand there were his favorite, the moose, which he loved The Appalachian Trail started to to watch. The occasional bear. The get put down and marked in the porcupines at night drove him nuts 1920s, when engineers and then-en- as they chewed the wood on the shelters to get at the salt left by sweaty ganizations worked together to build hikers resting their hands on the tima trail from Georgia all the way up ber. Some nights he had to shoo them





