

The Long Distance Hiker



Special Edition for the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association

Vol. 37, No. 2

'ALDHA News That Fits We Print Since 1983'

April 2026

OUR EVENING PRESENTERS



Triple-crowner Derick Lugo to start things off on Friday

One of the most well-known long-distance hikers in the recent crop of triple-crowners will attend his first ALDHA Gathering this year to deliver the opening night presentation on Oct. 9. Derick Lugo thru-hiked the Pacific Crest Trail last year after having thru-hiked the Continental Divide and Appalachian trails. When he hit the AT, he was a newbie in every sense of the word, and although he didn't know it at the time, he would become a trailblazer of sorts. He has since written two books, each about his first two thru-hikes, and is working on a third.

After his opening night talk, Derick has agreed to participate in an afternoon forum with J.R. Harris, our Saturday night presenter, to talk about the issue of minorities being under-represented in the thru-hiking world.



World explorer J.R. Harris will regale us Saturday night

In the pantheon of exploration, there are numerous stories of the first fantastic feats of endurance in the world's remotest corners, but you don't have to be an Edmund Hillary or Tenzing Norgay to become an explorer in your own right. J.R. Harris is one of those people, and he will share stories of his world adventures — some of them quite harrowing — when he addresses the Gathering as our keynote speaker on Oct. 10.

J.R. has attended our fall meetings before but this will be the first time he will deliver an evening presentation. He'll show a video that will give his biographical background and some of his stories, then he'll add more stories along with slides from his global travels. His book is a must-read if you think exploring is a lost pastime. **(See more in the next edition.)**



An entertaining trip back to the old AT

During last year's Gathering, longtime ALDHA member Leonard Adkins gave another of his history-laden slide shows, and it was so good we had to have him come back this year to present it to the whole group. But this year we hope to add a new twist, one that will be a surprise to those who attended his slide show last year, so we hope you stick around the evening of Oct. 11

to find out exactly what we have in store for you.

Leonard attended the very first Gathering in 1982 and has been involved in ALDHA ever since... So much so that we made him and his wife Laurie honorary life members of ALDHA several years ago. Leonard has churned out quite a few books with archive photos of the AT, and he will have them available again this fall at the hiker fair.

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This special edition of *The Long Distance Hiker* is published by ALDHA, the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association, a 501(c)(3) registered in New Hampshire at 10 Benning St., PMB 224, West Lebanon, NH 03784, for the express purpose of publicizing ALDHA's 44th Gathering, set for Oct. 9-12, 2026, in Gettysburg, Pa.

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2026 GATHERING TEAM

Program: Bill O'Brien, Brian O'Malley and Penny Vann

Registration desk: Brian O'Malley

Meal ticket managers:

Mike and Martha Wingart

Campsite coordinator: Mark Hudson

Hiker Fair director: Tom Jenkins

Post-Gathering work trip coordinators:

Jim Foster and Vera Hurst

Earl Shaffer Memorial Photo Contest:

Sanne Larsen and Mary Lou Lester

Sunrise Service: Kip Redick

Official photographer: H. Dean Clark

Gathering games: John Jordan

Signature banner: Ann Gerckens

Friday night orientation: Joe Gleason

Membership in ALDHA is open to all. To sign up, go online to aldha.org.

To register for the 2026 Gathering and purchase meal tickets online, go to aldha.org/the-gathering

Email us at gathering@aldha.org if you have questions about the Gathering.

Who's who behind the scenes for the 44th annual Gathering

Planning group formed soon after site was set

After three straight years of having the Gathering in Abingdon, Va., it was time to move it back north somewhere, but where? Several folks have been trying to find a location for the past several years but to no avail.

Bill O'Brien tapped into our past locations and started lobbying Gettysburg College to host us once again. We held our 26th Gathering there in 2007, and our 28th Gathering in 2009. Having coordinated that '09 event, Bill had a solid background in what that college had to offer in facilities. People who attended those Gatherings have fond memories of the venue.

Efforts started soon after last year's Gathering, and it took about four months and a lot of luck to get us back there. Students are on fall break during the Columbus Day weekend, our traditional meeting time, but a student group had reserved the only space big enough for our evening meetings. Luckily for us, that group ultimately decided to cancel its program.

We got the call telling us the news Feb. 4, and soon thereafter, a planning committee was formed to start organizing this Gathering. Coordinator **Joe Gleason** appointed three people to a team headed by Bill to put together the program, with other folks being named to take ownership of various other aspects of the weekend, such as the campsite, the Monday work trip, hiker fair and so on.

The program team has been meeting since February and it consists of assistant coordinator **Penny Vann** and membership secretary **Brian O'Malley**. Email us at gathering@aldha.org if you have any suggestions for the program. We've nailed down the evening presentations (see Page 1) but we are looking for more workshops, forums and other dayside sessions for both Saturday and Sunday.

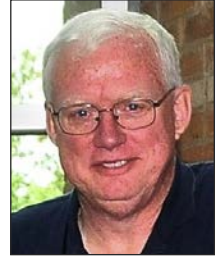
Newcomers, veterans taking on other tasks

Mark Hudson, a former ALDHA coordinator and a perennial helper at Gatherings, will again take charge of our campsite. He will need a lot of volunteers to help set up parking and tenting areas with yellow tape. There will be several port-a-johns on site, and we'll have the traditional campfire available each evening.

Speaking of the campfire, we still need one or more people to make sure the fire is lit and later put out in time for quiet hours that start at midnight. The wood will be provided by the



Joe Gleason



Bill O'Brien



Penny Vann



Brian O'Malley

owners of the field. (It's the same site we had for our two previous Gatherings at Gettysburg. See maps on Page 7.)

For the hiker fair, **Tom Jenkins** will organize it this year, with help from last year's facilitator, Brian O'Malley. Tom is a member of the ALDHA board and this will be his first official role at a Gathering. He is looking forward to hearing from clubs, vendors and others who wish to set up at the fair. Our space will be smaller than in Abingdon, so we're limiting presenters to one table. (The ALDHA store will be the exception.) There's an online form you can fill out at aldha.org/the-gathering.

On the Monday work trip, **Jim Foster** will be the chief coordinator of our work at Ironmasters Mansion Hostel, a half-hour drive from the college. Volunteers will be allowed to spend the night for free in exchange for the work they'll be doing (namely, a lot of painting). Jim is on the AT Museum board and helps to look after the physical needs of the mansion.

Vera Hurst, a longtime former ALDHA board member and past Gathering coordinator, will oversee our community meals at the hostel on Monday afternoon and evening. (That, too, will be free, but bring your own soft drinks.)

Trail artist **Ann Gerckens**, aka "SPLAT!," will create the giant sheet we'll use for Gathering attendees to sign their names and trail names. It will feature scenes from the college, the nearby battlefield and ALDHA. Ann is a longtime ALDHA member and AT section-hiker who lives in Ohio. Her artwork adorned the cover of the 2013 membership directory.



BULLET POINTS

WHEN AND WHERE

- Oct. 9-12 — Columbus Day holiday weekend
- Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pa.
- ET500 workshops, Page 6
- Directions on Page 7

REGISTRATION FEE

- Before May 31: \$30
- June 1 onward: \$40

MEAL TICKETS

- Breakfast \$11, 7:30-10 a.m.
- Lunch: \$16, 11:30-1:30
- Dinner: \$17, 5-7:30 p.m.
- Deadline: Sept. 28.

SIGN UP ONLINE AT
aldha.org/the-gathering
 or scan the code at right.

FOLLOW THE NEWS

■ Check in at the Gathering page on ALDHA's website at aldha.org/the-gathering as well as The Blaze and our Facebook pages for updates.



Word to the wise: Book a hotel room right now

Gathering Planning Committee

If you're planning to attend the Gathering at Gettysburg College this fall, and if you don't want to tent it for free at our campsite nearby, you need to make reservations at one of the many area hotels — and you need to do it right now.

Gettysburg, Pa., is a hot tourist attraction in the fall, and it will be especially crowded on the Columbus Day holiday weekend, Oct. 9-12, when the ALDHA Gathering will be held.

Between leaf-peepers and, yes, ghost-hunters (!), area hotels at one of the most hallowed sites in American history fill up fast, and they charge top dollar for weekend stays.

Thanks to Vera Hurst, we were able to arrange one group rate, but if you search any of the usual travel search engines, like Trivago, Expedia or Booking.com, you might be able to find a reasonably priced room at a medium-quality hotel or motel — but again, only if you act now. But expect to see prices at \$100 and more per night, higher on weekends.

The same goes for RV parks if you're looking for an electrical and water hookup for your vehicle. (Neither of those amenities is available at the campsite.)

The hotel where a group rate is available offers the following info:

Quality Inn Gettysburg Battlefield
 380 Steinwehr Ave., Gettysburg, Pa.

Weekend nights: (Friday & Saturday, and they must be booked together)
 1st floor \$185 per night plus tax;
 2nd floor \$175 per night plus tax.

Sunday night: 1st floor \$160 per night plus tax; 2nd floor \$150 per night plus tax.

Weekday nights (for early arrivals the weekdays prior to the Gathering):
 1st floor \$140 per night plus tax; 2nd floor \$130 per night plus tax.

Contact info: Call 717-334-1103*1 to make and pay for your reservation. (Note: Be sure to tell them you are with ALDHA).

Camping nearby is available for free

Remember, camping is included with your Gathering registration, which is \$30 for the entire 4-day weekend if you register by May 31, and \$40 from June 1 onward. The tentsite is 3.5 miles from campus. (See map on Page 7.)

There will be port-a-johns set up for our use, but no other amenities. Bring your own water. And you need to pack out what you bring in because there will be no trash receptacles.

The evening campfire will be set up away from the quiet tenting area, with firewood provided by the field's owners. Sunday morning's sunrise service will be led by Kip Redick at the barn.

Speaking of sleeping arrangements, for those who prefer to sleep in a hammock, there are virtually no trees on the field where we'll be camping, so you should bring your own frame if you have one.

Another reminder: Save \$10 til May 31

You should sign up for this Gathering as soon as possible because if you register by May 31, it'll cost you only \$30 for the whole weekend (meals are extra). That's only \$5 more than last year's Gathering. From June 1 on, the fee will rise a ten-spot, to \$40.

Be part of the magic
HEAD TO THE GATHERING

For 2026 thru-hikers, there's no entry fee!

Columbus Day weekend
Oct. 9-12, 2026
 Gettysburg College, Pa.
gathering@aldha.org

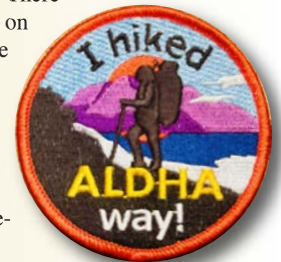


PRINT OUT THE POSTER ON THE BACK PAGE AND HELP US PUBLICIZE THIS GATHERING.

Use 8½ by 11-inch brightly colored, heavy paper. *But DO NOT post a copy on any trail or in a shelter!*

AT Class of 2026 can attend event for free!

For the first time, anyone who has hiked the whole AT during the course of the current calendar year is entitled to attend the Gathering for free. There you will not only be called up on stage on Friday night to receive special recognition on your achievement but you will also receive the "I Hiked ALDHA Way" patch seen at right. Then, after we get your address, we'll mail you a completion certificate.



During the Gathering you'll be able to reunite with fellow 2026 hikers, and attend numerous workshops about how to hike other long-distance trails in case you're itching to get back out there again.

We also offer a workshop for folks who are dreaming about thru-hiking the AT. Remember what that was like? Well, here's your chance to give them the advice you might never have gotten yourself. During this session, you can help answer all the questions they have. You'll be the newest AT experts, so please pass along your expertise.

Gettysburg College *and* our tentsite for the 44th GATHERING

Oct. 9-12, 2026



PHOTOS BY BILL O'BRIEN

A mix of old and new architecture surrounded by tree-lined walkways dominates the campus where ALDHA will have its 2026 Gathering.



A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE FIELD WHERE WE'LL BE TENTING FOR THE WEEKEND:





The College Union Building, above, is named for the past college president, Janet Riggs. Her husband, Ed, is an AT 2,000-miler who hiked from 2013-14.



Above, a view of the main lobby in the CUB, where part of the hiker fair will be set up.



Sculptures dot the campus.



This Gathering will be geared to help you earn a new award

Gathering Planning Committee

Next year will mark the 90th anniversary of the completion of building the Appalachian Trail, which occurred on Sugarloaf Mountain in Maine on Aug. 14, 1937.

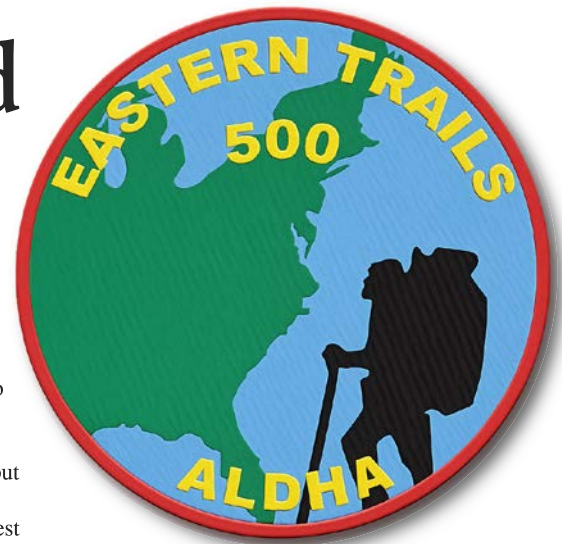
Now 88, our old AT has been showing its age in places, which has not been helped by overuse brought on by its worldwide popularity. Nearly 25 years ago, ALDHA launched its first attempt to lure people to other footpaths, publishing a list of 25 trails all around the country — as well as a couple around the world — to steer foot traffic elsewhere. The page on our original website featured descriptions, trail lengths and other info on things like permits, resupply, maps and guidebooks, links to overseeing organizations and the names of fellow ALDHA members who had hiked these trails in the past.

ALDHA has launched a new campaign, creating what it now calls the Eastern Trails 500 award. It will go to anyone who completes 500

miles on the trails of your choice in the eastern United States, other than the AT. Those who rack up the miles will get a certificate and a patch (see draft at right). Rockers for 1,000 and 2,000 miles will be available for those who keep on trekking these alternative trails.

This year's ALDHA Gathering is seeking to highlight some of these trails with workshops put on by fellow hikers who've done these trails in the past five years or so. (Popular trails out West will still be covered, FYI.) Among the trails we are hoping to offer in workshops are:

The Allegheny Trail	International AT
Bartram Trail	Long Path
Benton MacKaye Trail	Long Trail
Buckeye Trail	Mid State Trail
Duncan Ridge Trail	Mountains to Sea Trail
Florida Trail	New England Trail
Foothills Trail	Northville Placid Trail
Finger Lakes Trail	Pinhoti Trail
Great Eastern Trail	Tuscarora Trail



We know we won't be able to offer each one this year, but if you've hiked one of these since about 2020 and would like to share your experience and expertise with fellow hikers in a workshop, please contact Penny Vann to see about getting a slot in the program. You can reach her by email at pennyvann@aldha.org.

There's a workshop form you can fill out on our Gathering web page that you can send back electronically. Click aldha.org/the-gathering.

BRIEFS

Hiker fair has an option for 1-day-only exhibits

If you're an author, a trail-related vendor or with a trail club, you're invited to set up a display at our hiker fair. Space is free but limited this year so exhibitors will have only one table available.

To help make more room, there's a one-day-only option for those who want to set up a table on Saturday alone. Those exhibits must be taken down by the end of the day Saturday. Fill out the reservation form at aldha.org/the-gathering and mark it "Saturday Only."

Meal ticket purchases are due before Sept. 28

One of the great things about this year's event will be our ability to take meals in the campus dining center, across the street from the College Union where registration, the hiker fair, ALDHA store and two evening presentations will be.

The prices and meal times are on Page 3 of this newsletter, and are listed on the Gathering web page where you can pay for your registration fee and for each meal you'd like to take.

The dining center is welcoming us with open arms, but preprinted tickets for each meal must be purchased in advance, and the deadline is Monday, Sept. 28. Absolutely no cash or credit cards will be taken at the door. There are a total of 7 meals

You won't go hungry at the college dining hall

During a site visit in late March, we sampled the evening fare and found it just as good as it was the last time we had a Gathering there.

Basically everything is AYCE. There are 2 or 3 main food stations offering the main courses for each meal, with servers dishing up whatever you want from a variety of choices at each station. But you can always go back for more later, or go to a different station to try what they're serving.

There are numerous self-serve stations, including two salad bars (one Mediterranean-style), a fruit/yogurt bar, cereal bar, dessert bar, smoothies bar, etc. For dinner on our visit, there was a station dedicated to hot dogs, sausage and vegetarian bratwurst,

along with rolls, french fries, sauerkraut, baked beans, diced onions, relish, ketchup and several varieties of mustard.

Vending machines had all different soft drinks, plus milk: whole, lowfat and chocolate, using those dispensers that let you hold a glass and fill it using just one hand. (It's a college skill!) Refrigerators held rice milk, soymilk, oatmilk, almond milk ... in fact, many offerings are health-conscious, as in gluten-free baked items, vegetarian and vegan fare and lactose-free, nonfat milk.

Then there's a pizza parlor and grill, where you pick from a variety by the slice. You won't go hungry at Gettysburg! When you're all done, you bus your own plates.

— Bill O'Brien

available, from Friday evening dinner to Sunday evening dinner, for a total of \$105 per person if you purchase all seven meals. Those who buy their meal tickets online will be able to pick them up when they register at the Gathering, starting Friday afternoon, Oct. 9. We'll have you sign for them on receipt. *Don't lose them!* The equivalent of cash, meal tickets cannot be replaced.

Sharing meals together is one of the treasured traditions of an ALDHA Gathering. See you there.

There are plenty of restaurants in town, and there are two fast-food outlets inside the CUB, but their hours that weekend may be shortened. We'll post an update in September. The Bullet Hole, which is downstairs, serves fast food and made-to-order sandwiches, wraps and salads, as well as pizza and sushi. The Commons is a coffee shop serving joe, tea, pastries, snacks and cold soft drinks. Neither of these two facilities accepts cash. You have to pay by plastic only.

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

(Showing only relevant buildings in red outline.)

PARKING*

- 1 West Lot
- 2 Bream Gym
- 3 Stadium Lot
- 4 Special Event Lot
- 5 Masters Lot
- 6 Constitution Lot
- 7 Stone Parking Lot

* Subject to change

GATHERING BUILDINGS

- CUB** College Union Building (Registration, evening events)
- DC** Dining Center
- M** Masters (classrooms)
- Mc** McCreary (classrooms)
- SC** Science (classrooms)

Many restaurants and shops can be found in and around Lincoln Square

HOW TO GET THERE

- **By car:** Set your GPS for the College Union Building, or CUB, 242 W. Lincoln Ave., Gettysburg. Park in one of the lots at left.
- **By plane:** The closest airports are Harrisburg (MDT), a 1-hour drive; Dulles (IAD), a 1.5-hour drive; and Baltimore-Washington (BWI), 1.5 hours.
- **By train:** The Harrisburg Amtrak Station is a 1-hour drive from campus. Baltimore Washington Amtrak is a 1.5-hour drive away.
- **Registration desk:** In the CUB, in Room 126 near the Ballroom. Pick up your meal tickets here.
- **CUB Ballroom:** Site of Friday and Saturday night programs.
- **Hiker Fair:** Behind the info desk; (some will be in the Ballroom).
- **Dining Center:** The college dining hall is across the street from the CUB. It's open for dinner Friday and for all three meals Saturday and Sunday. *No cash or credit cards allowed.* Instead, meal tickets must be purchased by Sept. 28 at aldha.org/the-gathering. Pick them up at the registration desk.
- **Other food:** Gettysburg has lots of restaurants featuring an extensive variety of cuisine, but parking is tight on weekends. The CUB has two fast-food outlets.

TENTSITE

Green barn

TENTING AREA

1200 Table Rock Road

Redding Auction Service

South to college

TO THE CAMPSITE FROM COLLEGE

Set your GPS to 1200 Table Rock Road, Gettysburg, Pa.

Follow Carlisle Street (Route 34N), heading north for about 1 mile.

At the fork where Route 34N continues, leave Route 34N by turning right onto Table Rock Road.

Redding Auction Service is about 2 miles ahead on the right.

Our campsite is about 1/4 mile farther ahead, on the left. Look for ALDHA signs for parking and accessing the camping area.

Campers, RVs and heavy vehicles should park in designated area.

Reminder: The campsite is not equipped with trash receptacles. Drive it in, drive it out. And please, no smoking at or near the barn.

Be part of
the magic



HEAD TO THE GATHERING

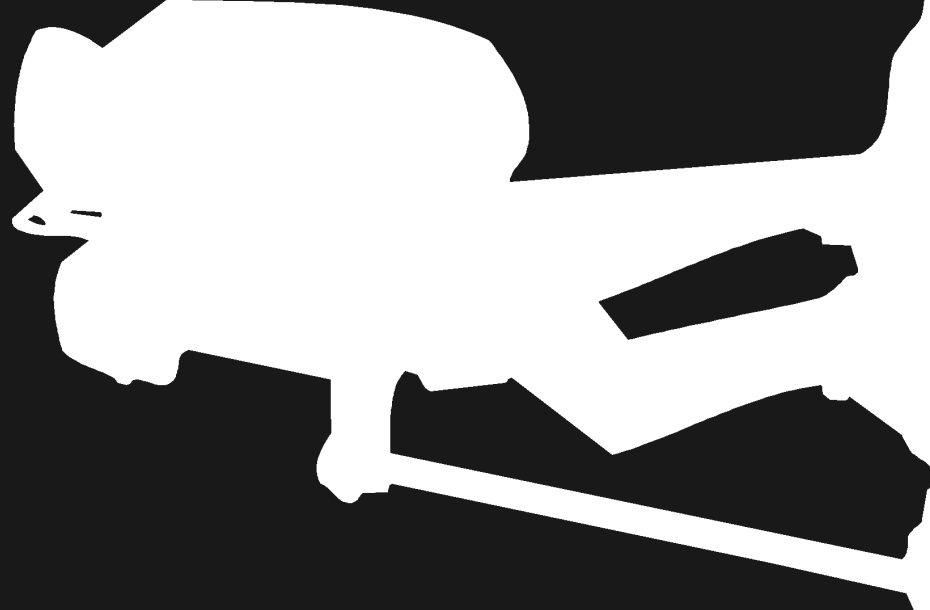
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[gathering @aldha.org](https://twitter.com/aldha)



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