

What's Next?

Strategies to help you adjust to life after the Appalachian Trail

Keep in touch with Trail friends

Keeping in touch with your Trail community (social media, phone, weekends, meet-up hikes, gatherings, etc.) can be crucial to the reintegration process. Revisiting the A.T. or attending A.T.-related events may also help some maintain a sense of connectedness.

“**thru-hiking is less an activity and more an orientation to life.**”



Fill the community void

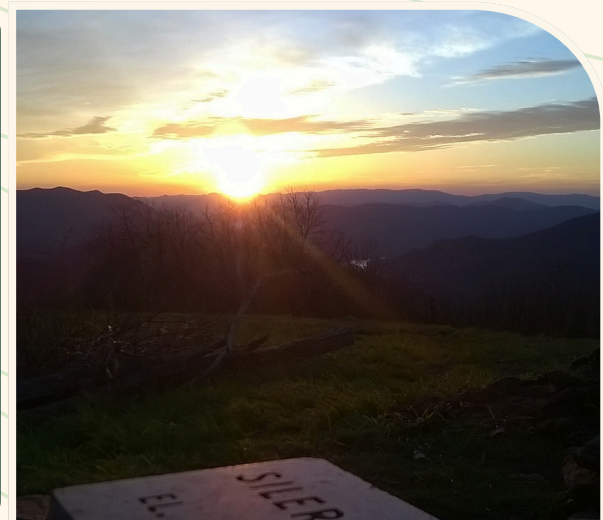
It's possible to find a new, rich community after the Trail. Connecting through hobbies, other adventures, and sports can be great ways to fill the void left by not seeing your Trail family each day.

Volunteering to maintain and protect the A.T. can be a way to connect with a new community and give back to the A.T.! Plus, a lot of volunteers are hikers just like you.

Visit appalachiantrail.org/volunteer today.

Prioritize a slow and gentle reintegration

It's easy to anticipate all the physical challenges of a thru-hike, but many hikers fail to realize the emotional challenges that may occur when it's over. It might not be easy to pick life back up where you left it. Consider an extra buffer to your budget if possible so you can ease yourself back into working life. Taking time to process your experiences can be essential.



Maintain transferrable practices from life on the Trail

Identifying aspects of Trail life that you especially enjoyed and bringing those into your day-to-day can help. Strategies that have worked for many include: pursuing different types of outdoor adventure, finding new and interesting communities at home, and figuring out what your next big goal in life will be. Not every big adventure looks like a hike!



"Sunset in the Smokies" by Jaime Barks, who uses the Trail as inspiration for her art

reintegration involves discovering how this remarkable journey will continue to color and illuminate meaning throughout the rest of your life.

Remain open to radically different post-hike values and their implications.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the last component of a good reintegration plan is to let go of the need to reintegrate! After an experience of this magnitude, you won't necessarily know who you'll be at the end of your journey. In all likelihood, your hike has affected you in ways you may think subtle, but to others may be significant. Don't feel the need to let go of the person you became on the Trail. Carry your new sense of self forwards with confidence.

This summary was adapted from "Reintegration Experiences of Appalachian Trail Thru-Hikers" by Frank Barnett, et al. Published in the Journal of Experiential Education, vol. 22, 2025. Quotes are taken from the article. Frank thru-hiked in 2015. You don't have to go through your experience alone. Seeking resources like these or talking with a therapist or counselor can help.

Consider becoming a member or donating to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to help ensure that everyone can enjoy the A.T. for generations to come.

Visit appalachiantrail.org/donate today.



Frank Barnett with his fellow hikers.

