# *Hiking for a social outlet*

**BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK**
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WALHALLA — Danny Bernstein has hiked the entire Appalachian Trail, Mountain-to-Sea Trail and all 900 miles of trail in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She's also ascended all 40 peaks in the South over 6,000 feet high, but she doesn't do it for the solitude — she does it for her social life.

"Maybe this is my Brooklyn upbringing, but I'm not big on solitude," she said. "So to me the most rewarding part of hiking the Appalachian Trail was meeting all the various characters. When you get to a campground or to a shelter, there's usually people there. And I talk to everybody."

She and her husband discovered the vast world of hiking when they moved to New Jersey and joined a hiking club they'd read about in the local paper. They were in their 20s then, and most of the other members were their parents' ages.

"They could walk us into the ground, but we loved it and kept coming back," she said.

Bernstein and her husband became what she refers to as Sunday hikers, exploring new trails on the weekends with other members of the club.

"Five days a week we punched a clock like everybody else, and we had a kid, but we didn't wait until we retired to go hiking," Bernstein said. "We hiked on the weekends from the beginning of our adult lives."

Rather than hiking the 2,160-foot mile Appalachian Trail in one go, the couple conquered it in sections, using their two-to-three-week vacations on the trail. She finished the last part of the footpath in her early 50s.

"It's called section hiking, and there's very little written on it because people don't think it's glamorous," she said. "But too many people wait until they have the time, thinking when they retire they'll hike the Appalachian Trail. Life's too short for that."

One of her favorite areas to hike is the Great Smoky Mountains because of its history. She said though there are sections of the Southeast that feel wild, there's really no wilderness.

"You know this was a railroad grade, that was a road, this was the way the settlers came from one place to another, so there's so much history in the Smokies as you hike," she said. "There's this chimney and that home site. You see daffodils, and when you see daffodils, you know people once lived there."

She grew up in the pre-Title IX era, when girls had few opportunities to play sports in school. So she's making up for a lot of lost time — she loves the physicality of hiking.

"Hiking is the great leveler between men and women," she said. "I'm a short person, only 5 feet, 2.5 inches tall. So I don't go as fast, but I have endurance, and that's what counts in hiking. It's not how fast you go, because it's not a race. It's about meeting goals."



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

**At 69 years old, Danny Bernstein is still at it, conquering some of the highest peaks on the East Coast.**

She said hiking is a lot like life — it isn't all wonderful. Sometimes her feet hurt and she can't find the next trailhead, but it's the overall experience that drives her to keep going.

Bernstein, who has written four books about hiking in the Southeast, will discuss her newest release, "Forests, Alligators, Battlefields: My Journey through the National Parks of the South" at Monday's meeting of the Oconee Hiking Club at Unity & Love Worship Center in Walhalla at 6:30 p.m.

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