

Long-Distance Hiking in the Digital Age: Where Are We Going?

A Proposed Exploration of AT Long-Distance Hiker Decision-Making

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Long-distance hikers (LDH) increasingly rely on smartphones

(Baker, 2019; Harmon, 2015)



(Tinker Knob, PCT in CA, A. G. Rogers)

Information as a Management Tool

- Use of Information is an Important and Appropriate Management Tool (Roggenbuck & Watson, 1985; Flood, 2003)
- Understanding recreationist decision-making is complicated but necessary for the design of information materials (Vining & Fishwick, 1991)

Visitor action, example, & potential effectiveness of information to minimize impacts

Type of Action	Example	Info.'s Effectiveness
Illegal	Knowingly camping where prohibited	✓
Careless	Camping next to spring	✓ ✓
Unskilled	Unable to locate marked campsite	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Uninformed	Camping on edge of established site	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Unavoidable	Soil compaction on tent site	✓

(Adapted from Dawson & Hendee, 2009)

Research Question

How do LDH use digital information sources to make spatial decisions?

Methodology

- Naturalistic approach: social phenomenon studied in its “naturally occurring state” (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 122)
- Participant-observation + semi-structured interviews on the AT in two phases
- Criteria to be LDH: 3+ weeks on-trail

Data Collection and Analysis

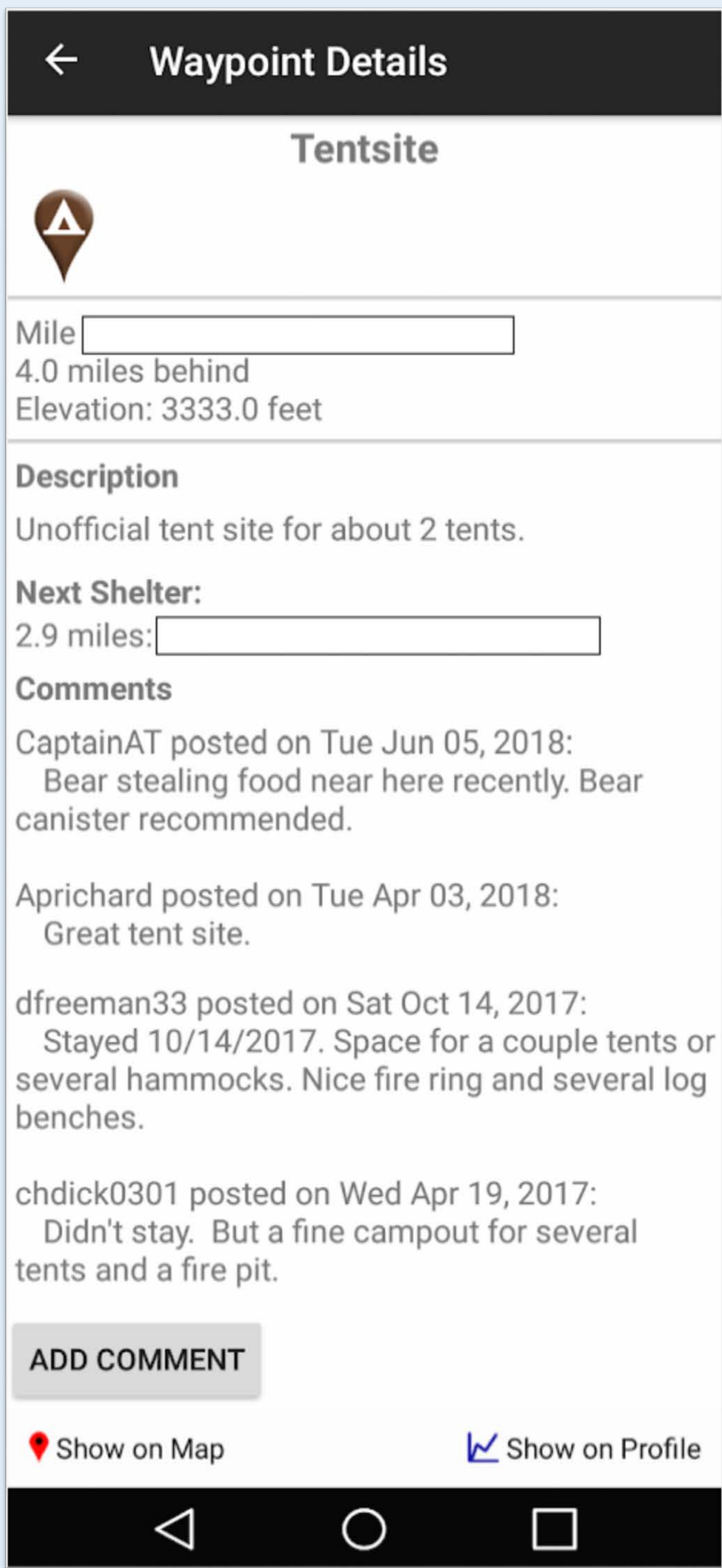
Phase 1	Maximum Variation Sampling
Initial Analysis	Data Immersion Phase (Tracy, 2013)
Phase 2	Informed by Initial Analysis
Final Analysis	Develop Key Themes

Technology produces both positive gains and new challenges (Freed, 2004)

Expectations →

versus

Actual use →



Research Objective

To better understand how information affects decision-making of LDH



(Blood Mtn., AT in GA, A. G. Rogers)



(Jarrard Gap, AT in GA, A. G. Rogers)

Expected Outcomes

- Provide better understanding of LDH behavior
- Enable evaluation of management strategies in context of new technologies
- Inform design of informational materials that encourage preferred recreation behaviors
- Increase sustainability of long-distance trails and the protected areas through which they pass