

## Trials and Tears

After a “Three” breakfast, it was time to head into the wilderness. Padre caught a ride back to Caratunk to pick up a mail drop; he'd catch up with us later. The mail drop was actually his floppy straw hat. Padre had left it back at Pine Ellis Lodging, and our hostess had graciously mailed it ahead to the Caratunk post office.

Back at the trailhead, I asked Fargo if he wanted to hike back and do the 3 miles he had cut off by blue-blazing into Monson. He declined; that would put another six-mile gap between us and he remembered the last time he'd let that happen. Furthermore, he reminded me, he had hiked the *traditional* route into Monson.

The sign announcing our entry into the 100-Mile Wilderness warned us not to underestimate the difficulty of what lay ahead. It's the longest stretch of wilderness on the AT, and, for some reason, I had imagined this section of the trail would be 100 miles of easier hiking, with time to enjoy the sheer beauty of Maine. Now I realized there were still more mountains to climb, and those southbound hikers had not been exaggerating—this trail was very, very difficult. Yes, I should have known better, but I *had* underestimated the 100-Mile Wilderness.

River fords were unusually dangerous; the waters were high and currents swift, a result of all the recent rain. We forded four rivers. The