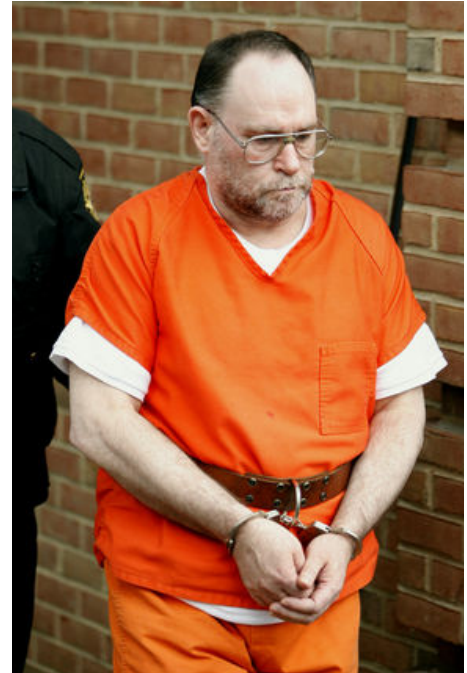


Murder on the Appalachian Trail

Paul David Crews

In September of 1990, a young couple, Geoffrey Hood (26) and Molly LaRue (25), set out to hike Appalachian Trail. Hood was from Shaker Heights, Ohio, and LaRue was from Signal Mountain, Tennessee.¹ They both worked for an organization that took troubled kids on “wilderness” trips to “challenge them and counsel them”, but they had left their jobs to hike the Appalachian Trail.² About halfway through their hike, Hood and LaRue crossed paths with Paul David Crews. Crews was a wanted criminal in the state of Florida for a murder he committed in 1986. Crews brutally murdered Hood and LaRue at a trailside shelter near the Susquehanna River. Crews shot Hood three times, and “bound, tortured and raped” LaRue before stabbing her eight times in the throat and back until she died.³ Another hiker, Brian Bowen, and his wife found the bodies on September 13, 1990. Bowen said LaRue’s body was “lying amid scattered camping equipment, naked, hands tied behind her back, head bloodied”, and he immediately notified the police of the murder.⁴ The West Virginia Police found Crews eight days later with Hood’s backpack and the murder weapons, a “.22 caliber revolver and a knife.”⁵ In New Bloomfield, Pennsylvania, the Perry County courthouse convicted Crews of two accounts of first-degree murder, and Crews received the death sentence. However, in 2006, Crews’ sentence was replaced with two consecutive life sentences without the ability to have parole.⁶



¹ Nussbaum, Paul. “Backpacker Tells Of Finding Hikers’ Bodies.” *Philly.com*. The Inquirer, 16 May 1991. We. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://article.philly.com/1991-05-16/news/25797316_1_geoffrey-hood-appalachian-trail-paul-david-crews>.

² Struck, Doug. “Pa. Jury Convicts Man Of Killing Hikers On Trail.” *Baltimore Sun*. The Baltimore Sun, 25 May 1991. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-05-25/news/1991145034_1_appalachian-trail-hood-crews>.

³ Arias, Jeremy. “Geoffrey Hood and Molly LaRue, Killed on Appalachian Trail: Notorious Murders.” *PennLive.com*. The Patriot News, 28 May 2013. Web. 15 Oct. 2014. <http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2013/05/notorious_murder_geoffrey_hood.html>.

⁴ Nussbaum, Paul. “Backpacker Tells Of Finding Hikers’ Bodies.” *Philly.com*. The Inquirer, 16 May 1991. We. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://article.philly.com/1991-05-16/news/25797316_1_geoffrey-hood-appalachian-trail-paul-david-crews>.

⁵ Struck, Doug. “Pa. Jury Convicts Man Of Killing Hikers On Trail.” *Baltimore Sun*. The Baltimore Sun, 25 May 1991. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-05-25/news/1991145034_1_appalachian-trail-hood-crews>.

⁶ Arias, Jeremy. “Geoffrey Hood and Molly LaRue, Killed on Appalachian Trail: Notorious Murders.” *PennLive.com*. The Patriot News, 28 May 2013. Web. 15 Oct. 2014. <http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2013/05/notorious_murder_geoffrey_hood.html>.

The Disappearance of Gerry Largay, Inchworm



Geraldine “Gerry” Largay, an experienced hiker known by the trail name “Inchworm”, began hiking the Appalachian Trail on April 23, 2013 in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Her plan was to hike to Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park in Maine, drive back to Harpers Ferry, and hike to Springer Mountain in Georgia.⁷ Gerry Largay had been keeping up with her husband of 42 years, George Largay, via text messages. George Largay followed her with the car and stayed at motels to resupply her with necessities while hiking at planned spots. Gerry was supposed to meet her husband on Tuesday July 23, 2013, but never arrived. George assumed that she had decided to camp out that night, but when she did not arrive at the meeting spot the following day, George Largay reported his wife as missing to the Carrabassett police.⁸ She has not been “seen or heard from since July 22, 2013.”⁹ This was three months after she set out for her hike. The last confirmed

sighting of Gerry Largay was at the Poplar Ridge Lean-to, near the Saddleback Mountains in Maine and Rangeley, Maine.¹⁰ Since she was declared missing, there have been many planned searches to find her. The first search began on July 25, 2013, and was conducted by Lieutenant Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service.¹¹ Search dogs, airplanes, wardens on horseback and hundreds of individuals searched a 4.2 square mile location, but no significant



⁷ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

⁸ Tapley, Lance. “A Major Maine- and National- Mystery.” *The Portland Phoenix*. The Phoenix Network, 9 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://portland.thephoenix.com/news/155248-major-maine-and-national-mystery/?page=1#TOPCONTENT>>.

⁹ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

¹⁰ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

¹¹ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

evidence was found.¹² Three weeks after Gerry was declared missing, George Largay stated, “the uncertainty is the toughest part [, and] until they find Gerry there’s always the unknown.”¹³ He also says that he will not give up hope, but he is ready to move forward with his life. He has since moved back to his home in Tennessee, but he did plan a memorial service for Gerry Largay in Atlanta.¹⁴ Mike Wingart of Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association and Jessica Pace, a reporter for the Brentwood Home Page, conducted the last search in May 2014. The search team looked 20-40 yards off the trail on both sides, but did not find any signs of Gerry Largay.¹⁵ To this date, no evidence of Gerry has been found. There are many conspiracies about her disappearance: is she still wandering in the forest? Or did she decide to start a new life somewhere else? Or is she dead?



The Murder of Meredith Emerson

Meredith Emerson, a University of Georgia graduate, went to hike a portion of the Appalachian Trail in North Georgia on New Years day in 2008. She was hiking the trail near Blood Mountain in Union County with her dog Ella when an older man, Gary Michael Hilton, approached her. Emerson, Hilton and their dogs walked back down the trail, and when they reached the end of the trail, Hilton was waiting with a knife. Hilton demanded Emerson’s ATM card. Emerson refused, and he attacked Emerson. Emerson fought back, but when she gave Hilton the incorrect ATM code, Hilton raped her.

Hilton was recorded in an interview saying that he targeted Emerson because she was a woman and held her captive in chains in his van for four days. He claims that Emerson was clever and



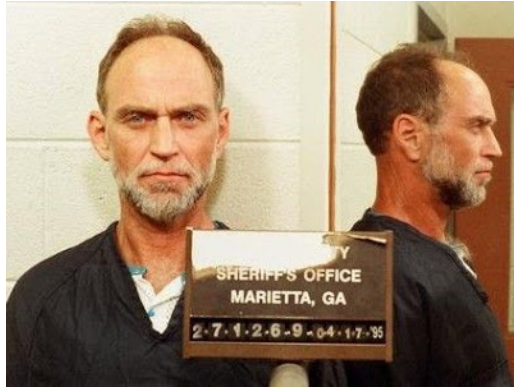
¹² Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

¹³ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

¹⁴ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

¹⁵ Sutherland, Robert. “Geraldine “Gerry” Largay Searcher says “She’s not there!”.” *Appalachian Trail*. Appalachian Trail, 9 June 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://appalachiantrail.com/20140609/gerry-inchworm-largar-search/>>.

tried to outsmart him. Hilton said, ““She would feign or pretend that I was in control and then start fighting again; I had to hit her a number of times.””¹⁶ Hilton told Emerson that he would let



her go home, but he never intended on allowing her to leave. Hilton killed Emerson by “bludgeoning” her to death with a tire jack and decapitating her.¹⁷ Emerson’s friends went looking for her when she did not return the following day. A witness told the DeKalb police where he had last seen Hilton. Two days after Emerson was reported missing, the DeKalb police found DNA evidence of Emerson in Hilton’s car and arrested him for her murder. The police, also, found “12 pairs of pants, eight jackets, 29 hats, three sleeping bags, a

hacksaw, porn and needles” in Hilton’s van. Gary Michael Hilton is now serving a life sentence in jail for murdering Meredith Emerson.¹⁸

The Murder of Scott Lilly

30-year-old hiker, Scott “Stonewall” Lilly, was found dead just off the Appalachian Trail in the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area on August 12, 2011 in Amherst County, Virginia.¹⁹ Officials are still searching for some of Lilly’s belongings such as his low-top Ozark Trail Hiking Boots, propane stove, and his blue or purple backpack.²⁰ After the autopsy of the body by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the FBI revealed that Lilly died of “asphyxia by



¹⁶ . WSB-TV Atlanta. “Emotionless Hilton Describe Killing Meredith Emerson.” *WSB-TV Atlanta Local News, Weather and Traffic*. Cox Media Group, 24 Mar. 2008. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/news/emotionless-hilton-describes-killing-meredith-emerson/nFB9j/>>.

¹⁷ . WSB-TV Atlanta. “Emotionless Hilton Describe Killing Meredith Emerson.” *WSB-TV Atlanta Local News, Weather and Traffic*. Cox Media Group, 24 Mar. 2008. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/news/emotionless-hilton-describes-killing-meredith-emerson/nFB9j/>>.

¹⁸ . WSB-TV Atlanta. “Emotionless Hilton Describe Killing Meredith Emerson.” *WSB-TV Atlanta Local News, Weather and Traffic*. Cox Media Group, 24 Mar. 2008. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/news/emotionless-hilton-describes-killing-meredith-emerson/nFB9j/>>.

¹⁹ Dumond, Chris. “Appalachian Trail Hiker’s Death Ruled Homicide.” *Timesdispatch.com*. Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19 Feb. 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://www.timesdispatch.com/news/appalachian-trail-hiker-s-death-ruled-homicide/article_d1245d42-b927-550b-a6f5-dea7098a7802.html>.

²⁰ WDBJ Web Staff. “UPDATED: New Details Released about Hiker’s Death in Amherst County.” *WDBJ7.com*. WDBJ7, 23 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.wdbj7.com/2012-04-23/metzler-and-heidi-childs_31376175>.

suffocation.”²¹ His body was also partially buried after he was killed. The murderer has yet to be found, but officials offered a \$10,000 reward for information pertaining to Lilly’s death.²² In the absence of any leads, investigators turned to the Appalachian Trail message boards. One hiker, who had met Lilly on the trail, spoke of Lilly’s love for the Civil War. This linked to what his sister, Alysén Lilly, had said about how he had visited Virginia the summer before his death to experience nature and learn more about Civil War History.²³ The hiker also recalled that Lilly had been carrying a “particularly heavy pack for a section hike.” The topic that gained the most speculation on the message boards had to do with a hiker nicknamed “Papa Smurf,” who was later called in by the FBI. “Papa Smurf” was known to be “spooky, unstable, and troubled,” and was said to have “threaten[ed] other hikers for food” as well as “threaten to eat [someone’s] dog.”²⁴ But ultimately, none of the leads led to a verdict. The only conclusion was a series of rumors and discussions. A “proper” hiker would know to just drag the body off the trail and leave it for the animals, so why would he bother digging a grave? Allegedly, there were 80 FBI agents on the Scott Lilly case, but why were there so many on a single case? Ultimately, the truth remains unknown about the unfortunate murder of “Stonewall.”

Killer on the AT: Randall Lee Smith

In May 1981, two social workers, Susan Ramsay and Robert Mountford, who were hiking befriended Randall Lee Smith. They were reported missing when they failed to appear in Pearisburg, Virginia, as scheduled.²⁵ It was later discovered that in the middle of the night as Ramsay, Mountford, and Smith slept at the Wapiti Shelter, Smith shot Mountford in the head with a .22 caliber, and then stabbed Ramsay with a wrought iron poker as she attempted to run away. He then proceeded to bury them both “with his bare hands.”²⁶ Smith was convicted with two counts of second-degree murder, but after 15 years in prison, he was put on parole. Past events once again



²¹ Dumond, Chris. "Appalachian Trail Hiker's Death Ruled Homicide." *Timesdispatch.com*. Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19 Feb. 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.

<http://www.timesdispatch.com/news/appalachian-trail-hiker-s-death-ruled-homicide/article_d1245d42-b927-550b-a6f5-dea7098a7802.html>.

²² WDBJ Web Staff. "UPDATED: New Details Released about Hiker's Death in Amherst County." *WDBJ7.com*. WDBJ7, 23 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.wdbj7.com/2012-04-23/metzler-and-heidi-childs_31376175>.

²³ WDBJ Web Staff. "UPDATED: New Details Released about Hiker's Death in Amherst County." *WDBJ7.com*. WDBJ7, 23 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.wdbj7.com/2012-04-23/metzler-and-heidi-childs_31376175>.

²⁴ "Trail Talk." *True Crime Diary*. Mission Media, 17 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.truecrimediary.com/index.cfm?page=cases&id=160>>.

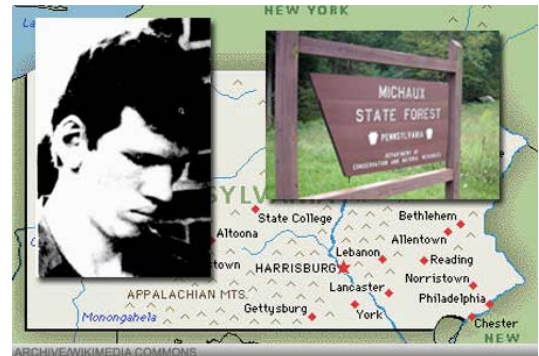
²⁵ Hansen, Chris. "Escape from Brushy Mountain." *Crime Reports on Dateline*. MSNBC, 15 Feb. 2009. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29187510/ns/dateline-nbc-crime_reports/t/escape-brushy-mountain/#.VEQ3_JRdXXw>.

²⁶ Haygood, Wil. "Blood on the Mountain." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 08 July 2008. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/07/AR2008070702332_5.html?sid=ST2008070801140>.

became all too familiar when Smith acquainted himself with two campers on the same trail, Scott Johnston and Sean Farmer, in May 2008.²⁷ Smith introduced himself as a fellow fisherman as he ate dinner with Johnston and Farmer, but as he claimed to be leaving, he turned around and shot the two men, first Johnston, then Farmer, multiple times. After being shot, Farmer stumbled to his truck, which was parked about five yards away, and was later joined by Johnston. As they sped away, able to escape as Smith reloaded his ammunition, they ran to the first house they saw and received help from a locals, Melissa Miller and her son, Randy. Later, while he was still on the trail, Smith spotted a State Trooper. Smith attempted to drive away, but he ran off the road and flipped over. Smith was taken to Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, and upon release two days later, was arrested. On May 10, a jail officer found Smith dead, but no foul play was involved, and instead Smith most likely died of natural causes.²⁸

Stephen Roy Carr

In 1988, Stephen Roy Carr fired his .22 rifle eight times at two women in the woods, thus killing Rebecca Wight and injuring Claudia Brenner.²⁹ Wight and Brenner were camping along a creek near the Rocky Knob Trail of Michaux State Park when Wight was hit with five bullets and Brenner with two. Wight died as she was fleeing, but Brenner was able to walk three miles until she found a motorist, who brought her to the Shippensburg Borough police station.³⁰ Brenner had failed to tell the police that she and Wight were lesbians. The shooting was an act of anti-gay violence, and Carr later claimed that he was provoked by catching the two women having sex.³¹ After an air and ground search by the Maryland State Police, it was apparent that Carr had escaped. As it turns out, he was hiding on the dairy farm of Chester and Esther Weaver, where he had been working for six days. On July 26, 1988, Carr stood trial under the plea of mute, but he was later found guilty and is now serving a life sentence in Montgomery County at



²⁷ Hansen, Chris. "Escape from Brushy Mountain." *Crime Reports on Dateline*. MSNBC, 15 Feb. 2009. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29187510/ns/dateline-nbc-crime_reports/t/escape-brushy-mountain/#.VEQ3_JRdXXw>.

²⁸ Haygood, Wil. "Lonely, Dark and Deep." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 09 July 2008. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/07/AR2008070702332_5.html?sid=ST2008070801140>.

²⁹ Kelley, Mark. "Murder on the Appalachian Trail." *Adventure Possible*. Protrack Marketing LLC, 1 Aug. 2014. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <<http://adventurepossible.com/adventure/murder-on-the-appalachian-trail/>>.

³⁰ Cress, Joseph. "Local Farmer Recalls Visit by Murder Suspect." *Cumberlandlink.com*. The Sentinel, 04 Aug. 2013. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://cumberlandlink.com/news/local/history/local-farmer-recalls-visit-by-murder-suspect/article_88bd0fe2-fd40-11e2-b1a7-0019bb2963f4.html>.

³¹ Anderson-Minshall, Diana. "Hate Crimes across the Globe." *High Beam Research*. Cengage Learning, 1 May 2010. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-225786479.html>>.

the Graterford State Prison.³² Claudia Brenner eventually moved to New York where she went on to write a book about the incident called *Eight Bullets: One Woman's Story of Surviving Anti-Gay Violence*.³³

³² Lowry, Tom. "Alleged 'Mountain Man Killer' Was Artist, Nature Lover." *The Morning Call*. N.p., 29 May 1988. Web. 18 Oct. 2014. <http://articles.mcall.com/1988-05-29/news/2628246_1_appalachian-trail-stephen-roy-carr-hikers/2>.

³³ Garvey, Megan. "The Target That Shot Back." *The Washington Post*. Washington Post, 17 June 1995. Web. 19 Oct. 2014. <[http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/307874927.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Jun%2017,%201995&author=Megan%20Garvey&pub=The%20Washington%20Post%20\(pre-1997%20Fulltext\)&edition=&startpage=&desc=The%20Target%20That%20Shot%20Back;%20Victim%20Takes%20Aim%20at%20Anti-Gay%20Violence](http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/307874927.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Jun%2017,%201995&author=Megan%20Garvey&pub=The%20Washington%20Post%20(pre-1997%20Fulltext)&edition=&startpage=&desc=The%20Target%20That%20Shot%20Back;%20Victim%20Takes%20Aim%20at%20Anti-Gay%20Violence)>.

