Who I am, what I am doing, and why I am doing it!

Hey all!

If you're looking at this, I'm assuming you got here through seeing one of my many posts where I take a trans pride flag up to the tops of various mountains in the American northeast. This is a rather unconventional project, and this post is my attempt to explain who I am, what I am doing, and why I am doing it:

**Who am I?**

My name is Veronica (she/her/hers), and I am a college student living in the Northeast. In my free time, I’m a prolific hiker: I got involved in the outdoors when I first got to college and since then have turned into kind-of a hardass (what do you mean most people don’t love walking 25 miles a day???). Just over a year ago I came out to myself as trans and have been living more and more as my true self each passing day. I have had to struggle for years with this fact and what it has meant for how I am able live my life in this fucked-up society of ours, and that struggle has helped define me into the person I am today. And if I’m being honest, hiking and being a trans-sapphic is basically most of my personality (outside of obscure meme culture, of course)

**What am I doing?**

The Northeast 115 is a peak bagging list of 4000ft mountains in the Northeast (if you’re curious, there’s 48 in New Hampshire, 48 in New York, 14 in Maine, and 5 in Vermont). This is typically a hiking project that takes people many years to complete, both due to the difficultly and geographical spread of these mountains. I’m planning on doing them within the span of about three months, which is a rather accelerated timeline compared to most of the other people I know undertaking this challenge. The hikes themselves boil down to about 50ish day hikes of varying difficulty, but suffice to say I will be spending many days trudging through many of these hikes.

**Why am I doing it?**

When I was 14, I began to realize that my body didn’t align with who I was. I would stay up at night praying to God that I would wake up with a woman’s body, or that one day I could run away from everyone I knew and begin to live my life as the person I knew I needed to be. As fate would have it, this period in my life occurred at the same time as a surge in popularized transphobia in our culture. I was inundated with media depicting trans people as freakish, perverted, and delusional, and I internalized those thoughts deeply to the detriment of my mental health. I repressed my true self for nearly six years, during which I developed a repression-depression so debilitating that I became borderline suicidal when COVID came around, and it was only a narrow series of events that allowed me to escape the self-harm I was on the path to.

Two years later, I am an open and proud trans woman, and the repression-depression that once dominated my life has completely evaporated. I am so much happier than I ever have been, but I often wonder how much better my life could have gone if I had had more positive exposure to trans people during that critical period in my life. Additionally, having started my transition in the rural south, I am well aware of how intimidating our culture can be for trans people: the clinic I first got my HRT from had a drive by shooting a few months before my first appointment went there, and then got burned down a few months after I moved up north. I’m aware those attacks were forced-birth in nature, but let’s face it: the Venn diagram between those who would commit violence against people seeking reproductive care and those who would commit violence against people seeking transgender healthcare is a perfect circle.

By taking a trans pride flag up that many mountains in that short of a time, I hope to accomplish two things: to increase trans visibility in the outdoors and to (hopefully) inspire some people in the process. I have no idea how big this project will end up being or how successful I’ll be in accomplishing those goals, but to be entirely honest, even if what I do has a positive impact on only a small number of people, it’ll be worth it. In any case, if any of you end up doing anything in response to this project, please let me know, cause I could always use some inspiration the other way :)

**Miscellaneous questions:**

Below is a list of miscellaneous questions that I want to address, but couldn’t find a way to include in the main narrative above. If you want me to elaborate on any of these, or you have any other questions people may have, feel free to drop them in the comments below!

**Why a trans pride flag and not a more-general pride flag?**

To me, I identify strongly with the trans pride flag because I consider my transness to be the most important aspect to my queer identity. I am a lesbian and am most likely on the aromantic spectrum, but the part of my identity that I feel the most strongly in my day-to-day life is my trans identity. My trans identity also happens to be the part of my identity most under attack right now. Transphobes are using fear of people like me to justify horrific acts of cruelty toward trans people, from trying to them from their supportive parents, to blaming them for acts of right-wing terrorism. I honestly don’t know what to do in the fact of such vicious hatred, but I do know that increasing trans visibility can’t hurt. And I know this is ultimately a small project I’m taking on, but if I’m going to take it on with who I am and with how the world is treating me right now, it’s gonna be with a trans pride flag**.**

**What gave you this specific idea?**

Shortly after moving north last year, I went on a hike with my friend up the Kinsmans in NH. As fate would have it, it turned out to be on the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, and I learned that day that it is tradition for people to take American flags up all 48 of New Hampshire’s 4000ft mountains and have what I can only describe as nationalism-ragers at the top. Personally, I found the whole spectacle to be quite offensive, as every single mountaintop that had one of those parties on that day was stolen from indigenous peoples, and to parade the symbol of the nation that committed those violent acts is, at best, wildly insensitive. And afterward I thought to myself: if those people can do THAT, and they can do that EVERY YEAR, then I can sure as hell bring a flag up those mountains that I am actually proud of and that stands for something I actually believe in.

**Aren’t all of these hikes on stolen indigenous lands?**

Yes. Every single inch of land I will be hiking on was brutally and systematically stolen from indigenous peoples. I have been struggling with the question of how I can enjoy being in these wilderness areas, when the only reason they are wilderness to begin with is because the lands were cleared of their indigenous peoples during repeated genocides. I don’t have an answer to that question, and I welcome anyone who has any input on the matter.

**Isn’t it a little privileged to be able to do this undertaking?**

Yes. To do what I’m doing you need time, good physical health, and strong mental health. I am aware that I have all of these things and many other people do not, but because I do have them, I know I need to make use of them. And I understand that this is ultimately a small undertaking in the grand scheme of things, but it’s very important to me, and even if it inspires just one person, it’ll be worth it.

**Are you going to use your platform to push for specific activism?**

Honestly, as I’m writing this at the start of June, I am just beginning to navigate this question. For a long time, I was afraid to start this project because of how much vitriol is hurled toward trans women online, and I’m still cautiously treading with how much of myself I want to put out there for people to go after me with. That being said, I recently got inspired by one of my professors to try harder to make an impact in the world, and I think if I amass any kind of following, it would be a total waste not to use that platform for activism. That being said, you gotta get one first, and that’s still an if :P

**Do you have any long-term plans in your life?**

Nope.

**Can I follow you on any other sites?**

Yes! As of now I have an Instagram, and I may get other accounts in the future so stay tuned!

**How can I help?**

I’m always open to discussion about how to make this project better. I’ve been planning this thing for several months, but there are still lots of questions I’ve been struggling with. The biggest question that I have unanswered is: how can I make this project have the maximum possible impact, and reach the greatest number of people? If you have any input on that, or any of the other things I’ve talked about above, feel free to lmk below!

**Pride blurb**

When I was first starting to question my gender, the narratives about trans people in our popular culture were overwhelmingly negative, and I deeply internalized those narratives as I repressed my identity. Nearly a decade later, I am an open and proud trans woman, but I often wonder how much differently my life could have gone if I had a more positive exposure to queer people when I was younger. I believe positive visibility for queer people is one of the most important aspects of pride, and my experiences over the last year transitioning have shown me just how needed pride is. I knew I needed to do something, and it just so happened that I was planning to have a pretty active summer peak bagging in the northeast anyway. So, I figured, wouldn’t it be sick to take a trans pride flag up all these mountains and show people that we exist in the outdoors? And the answer is fuck yeah, it would be. Here we are 49 peaks later and still going strong, and I can honestly say that this is one of the most rewarding things I’ve done in a long time. I don’t know how many people may be impacted by my project here, but even if just a few people are motivated to do cool things as a result, it will have been worth it.