



Fingerboard Shelter in Harriman State Park, New York

TRAIL TRIVIA

- More than 250 woodland shelters or “lean-tos” reside on the AT. These three-sided structures typically have a tin or shingled lean-to roof, log-cabin-style walls, and rough plank floors. Reference Waypoint C for a list of shelters by state.
- The Appalachian Mountain Club operates a hut system in the White Mountains. These large enclosed lodges sleep thirty to ninety people. They have potable water and composting toilets. Solar panels or small wind turbines provide electrical power. The “croo,” the college students that manage the huts, carry all food and supplies to the huts on their backs. Guests make reservations well in advance and pay a substantial fee for an overnight stay.

Trail Marker 18: A Safe Haven

“For You have been a *shelter* for me, a
strong tower from the enemy.”

Psalm 61:3

Mt. Washington, the third highest peak on the east coast, is known for notoriously changing weather conditions. The summit owns the second-fastest wind speed ever officially recorded. The 231-mph velocity held the world record for sixty-two years.

Strategically located 1241 feet below the summit, the Lakes of the Clouds Hut waits for weary hikers. A USFS sign located a few yards north of the hut states: “STOP. The area ahead has the worst weather in America. Many have died there from exposure, even in the summer. Turn back now if the weather is bad.”

Because of the dramatic weather changes that occur on Mt. Washington, Northbounders need to stay at the Lakes of the Clouds Hut the day before pushing over the summit.

In June 2014, I raced the setting sun to this remotely located place of refuge. As I climbed toward the summit, a sea of clouds settled over the peak, and the reason for the hut’s odd name became clear.

The fog produced a soaking rain and low rumble. The temperature plunged as I ascended. Reaching the hut became critical. I hurried through the rain, which grew more intense with each step. Concern for hypothermia crept into my mind and triggered an avalanche of negative thoughts. What will happen if I slip and fall . . . Will anyone discover my stiff body before morning? I worried the brewing storm would not hold off, and I would become a human lightning rod.

I shoved these thoughts aside and pushed onward arriving at Lakes of the Clouds Hut just before six in the evening, exhausted, wet, and chilled to the bone. I hadn't been inside for more than two minutes when the spigots of heaven opened. The rain came down in torrents. The night flashed with light, and the sky boomed.

The "crao," the college students who managed the hut, allowed me to work-for-stay. I washed dishes and performed custodial work in exchange for a hot meal and a dry spot on the floor. As night settled in, I inflated my mat and hunkered down in the warmth of my sleeping bag. I listened to the tempest outside and with each crack of thunder, I counted my blessings and thanked God for a safe haven.

A Safe Haven from the Storms of Life

Life's storms occur unexpectedly like thunderclouds that roll up on a mountain and catch the hiker unprepared. At these moments, you're going to get soaked and battered.

I was caught in a downpour one late evening in 2003. While alone on a business trip, I opened an email from the editor of a nationally circulated homeschool magazine. A story I'd written had been the feature story in the Christmas issue. Hoping for positive feedback, I opened the email with great anticipation. But my hopes and dreams came crashing down. The content of the email caused my stomach to turn over. A man was accusing me of stealing his story, an article published thirty-five years earlier in a small paper in a faraway state.

My accuser demanded I pay him financial restitution and the magazine print an apology giving him credit for the story. Devastated and bewildered, I cried out to God. Why would a "Christian" persecute me for sharing the gospel message?

I called the editor immediately. He said, "Your accuser has been very rude and intimidating. He has threatened a lawsuit." But the editor also provided words of encouragement. "Try not to worry. We've already started a prayer chain. Our personal friends and friends of the magazine across the nation are praying that God will protect both you and the magazine with a hedge of protection." A hedge of protection. That's what I needed.

I hung up the phone. *Dear God, why is this happening? Why would another Christian attack me for sharing the gospel message?* I spent a sleepless night wondering why I was forced to walk this path.

EYE ON THE BLAZE

The next morning, I caught a flight from Raleigh to Oklahoma City. I stared out the small oval window, praying for a hedge of protection and meditating on Psalm 91. The first two hours of the flight were marked by dark clouds and heavy rain. How appropriate. My situation was as gloomy as the gray clouds that I watched from the window. *Oh God, why am I going through this? Why am I being persecuted? You led me to write this story. Why am I faced with a lawsuit?*

Thirty minutes before we reached our destination, the sun broke through and illuminated the top of the clouds. The cotton-like substance suspended below my plane resembled a massive snowfield. And for the first time during the trip, I could see the earth through the breaks in the clouds. The shadow of our airplane glided along the face of the earth slightly ahead of me. Intrigued by the shadow, I watched it come and go. After a few moments, I realized the shadow disappeared from the earth because it was running across the top of the brilliant white clouds. And then I saw an amazing sight that struck me with awe and filled me with the sunshine's warmth. Whenever the silhouette of the plane appeared on the top of the clouds, it was perfectly enclosed within a circular rainbow. A calming peace settled over me, and I praised God. It was only there for a few seconds, but I drew great comfort by the presence of this symbol of God's promise to surround me with a hedge of protection.

God did indeed protect me from my accuser. The editor provided me with contact information for a Christian copyright lawyer, who reviewed both stories. He said, "I don't think you have anything to worry about. Even though the two stories deal with a similar idea, they are substantially different. Contrary to the plaintiff's accusation, you can't copyright an idea, only the way it's expressed." My lawyer sent a letter to my accuser stating that I hadn't committed plagiarism and would not pay retribution. Thirty-eight days later, my accuser offered to settle out of court, which I promptly refused. Praise God! We never heard from him again.

Many times, I've questioned why I had to navigate this difficult terrain. My only explanation was Satan tried to use this person to discourage me from writing Christian articles. God used this trial to make me more determined than ever to write Christian material.

Why do we often look to God as a last resort? We trust in ourselves to battle the storms, but our capabilities fail us. We place

hope in wealth and possessions to preserve us from the thunderheads, but they're inadequate. We trust family and friends to help us confront the harsh weather, but they're powerless to help. All we want is an ear to hear, a comforting embrace, and a shelter from the storm. And then in desperation, we finally remember the divine ears always alert to our cry, the holy arms ever open to receive us, and the eternal refuge constantly available. We turn to God, our safe haven.

The Psalmist described his safe haven this way: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.' Surely, He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler" (Psalm 91:2-4). The Psalmist mentions the following four aspects of the shelter God supplies:

1. God provides a refuge.

Often, we just need a place to retreat in time of need, a spot where He is near, and a space to clear our heads and gather our wits. We need a shelter from the thunderstorm, a peaceful spot where we can sense God's presence and hear His voice. At my bleakest time, God gave me three hours of refuge next to a plane window to pray, meditate, and clear my head.

2. God's past faithfulness promotes hope in our present struggle.

God gave me a rainbow when I most needed a reminder of His protection. When I first saw the rainbow in 2003, I wasn't sure whether it was real or a product of my imagination. Years later, after the Internet became commonplace, I googled the phrase "circular rainbow." To my surprise, I received numerous hits and even pictures of circular rainbows enclosing the shadow of aircraft. This atmospheric phenomenon is known as a "Pilot's Glory" or a "Pilot's Halo." According to aviation tradition, if you see a Pilot's Halo, you have a Guardian Angel flying with you. Through my turmoil, I knew that God offered a hedge of protection. And because of His past faithfulness, I can face future struggles with confidence.

3. God delivers us from our circumstances.

EYE ON THE BLAZE

After several months of agony, God delivered me from my accuser. Although He may allow heartache and suffering for a season, He is in control and can calm the storm (Mark 4:39).

4. God desires to protect and comfort us.

He gathers His hurting and frightened children, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37), to provide a comforting embrace, a shield from the downpour, and a hedge of protection.

Countless times I've found shelter from foul weather in a lean-to or hut. Isn't it comforting to know God provides refuge from the storms of life as well? More than once, I've faced overwhelming circumstances, but each time God delivered me. Numerous times, I've been frightened by threats, but God always gathered me under His wing and sheltered me from the storm. Isn't it reassuring to know God is in control? He is our Pilot Halo, our hedge of protection, and our safe haven.

Hiking Focus: God our Refuge

Memory Verse:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Prayer

Father, thank you for being my safe haven. When faced with the storms of life, help me to remember to turn to you first. Amen.

Evaluating Your Walk:

1. Recall a time in your life when you were caught in a storm without shelter. Where did you find refuge?
2. Where is the safest place you know? Why do you feel safe in this place?
3. When did you last feel threatened? Physically? Spiritually? Financially?
4. What part did God play in your deliverance?

Going the Extra Mile (Verses for Further Reflection):

Terry Bowman

- Proverbs 18:10 – “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”
- Psalm 9:9 – “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.”
- Psalm 28:8 – “The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed.”
- Psalm 62:8 – “Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”
- Psalm 94:22 – “But the LORD has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge.”