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Going the Distance

Atlanta Senior Associate Hikes Appalachian Trail for Children

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On March 17, while many people raised a glass in celebration of St. Patrick's Day, **Brian Thompson** set off on an ambitious outdoor adventure. An Advisory senior associate based in the Atlanta office, Thompson is taking a combined six-month sabbatical and leave of absence to hike the full length of the Appalachian Trail, which extends approximately 2,176 miles through 14 states along the East Coast. In doing so, he hopes to raise \$100,000 for children's charities.

"I grew up hiking, kayaking, and camping," says Thompson. "Once I graduated college, it became more difficult to travel and organize trips with friends. It hit me one day while I was out on an engagement that I wanted to try to hike the Appalachian Trail, and I immediately told my performance manager about the idea. As soon as the firm instituted the Sabbatical Program last summer, we decided together that the time was right."

Support System



Thompson began his hike at the southern trailhead, Georgia's Springer Mountain, and will pass through North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire before arriving at his final destination: Mount Katahdin, the highest mountain in Maine.

While Thompson initially considered hiking to raise funds for a specific charity, he decided instead to allow his supporters to choose the children's charity that means the most to them. Among the charities receiving donations are Stand Up for Kids, a national nonprofit organization supporting homeless, at-risk youth; LeBonheur Children's Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee; and the Girl Scouts of America.

"I love working with kids, so focusing on children was a natural choice," he says. "And if one person donates just 5 cents a mile and I'm able to hike the entire trail, that's more than \$100 dollars right there."

Thompson is tracking donations on a blog he's established to keep friends and family informed about his activities leading up to the hike, share his experiences out on the trail, and enable those at home to chart his progress. Before his departure, Thompson had more than \$10,000 pledged in his name, and he has seen that number more than double after two months on his feet. Thompson hopes to see it grow even further as he marches on.

He is especially grateful for the encouragement he's received from his colleagues in the Atlanta office. "Everyone has been so supportive, and my team even gave me a gift card to go buy some new gear for the trip," Thompson notes. "The office also presented me with a great book on outdoor survival that's full of useful tips."

Wilderness Warrior

Still, there are some situations for which a book cannot prepare you, and Thompson will call on his previous hiking experience to help him navigate the trail's toughest terrain. Maine's 281 miles have a reputation of being especially challenging for hikers, containing a stretch of boulders often considered the trail's most difficult mile and a particularly remote section known as "The 100-Mile Wilderness." As for lodging, he is carrying camping equipment and taking advantage of the more than 250 camp sites and shelters maintained by local volunteers.

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And while the odds are stacked against him – only 25 to 30 percent of those who set out to hike the trail each year complete all 2,176 miles – Thompson is confident he'll make it to Maine in six months' time. "Unless a bear steals my pack," he says, "I'm in it for the long haul."

To support Thompson by pledging money to the children's charity of your choice, or to follow his journey, visit [his blog](#).

To find out more about KPMG's Time Off opportunities, [click here](#).

Approved By Laura Marcy