
TrailGroove®
Issue 12

Contents

Issue 12

A special thank you to our contributors for this issue: Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Amber Howe, Sarah D. Tiedemann, Sean O'Rourke, Justin Quinn Pelegano, Renate G. Justin, and Cinny Green.

Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:
http://www.TrailGroove.com

Direct link to this issue:
http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue12.html

Subscribe to TrailGroove Magazine

Photo by Ted Ehrlich

Editor's Note

There are two things I like about December hiking. One is hiking in the cold. 0 degree air filling your lungs on a hike just has its special way of waking you up and clearing your mind, while long nights bring the year, the future, and the moments themselves into new perspectives. The other great thing about winter isn't the temperature, the snow, or the long nights; it's simply the time of year. The meat of the hiking season is over, but the next year's spring, summer, and fall hiking seasons are quickly coming into view. Trips are planned, dates on the calendar reserved. The downseason? Not at all. Enjoy the cold air, reflect on what you accomplished this year, and plan for what's next. The possibilities are endless, just set the date and go. On to 2014.

In Issue 12 we'll feature destinations across the U.S. with a backpacking trip through the Tetons, the Sierra, hiking Algonquin Peak in the Adirondacks, and a trip to the Border Route Trail in Minnesota. More winter warmth tips to follow up on our last issue, and a recipe tailor-made for those cold winter nights on the trail. We also have our Gear of the Year awards, a great photo tip, essays on hiking, (From a couple different interesting angles) and more.

Thanks for reading and enjoy Issue 12!

Contribute

Interested in contributing to the magazine? Please email us at **info@TrailGroove.com** with your idea. We're always on the lookout for quality content, and compensation is offered for quality submissions. Our list of requirements isn't too long, but please keep the subject focused towards backpacking or hiking. However, submissions related to other outdoor activities will be considered. (Backcountry fishing or wilderness photography, for example). Page through our magazine for the general idea of what we're all about, but even if you have something you haven't yet seen in an issue our ears are open. Please send us a note with a broad overview and sample of your idea, as well as an approximate word and picture count. Original and factual material is a requirement. Once received, we'll evaluate your submission and contact you for further discussion. Questions before you start? Just let us know.

A few examples of what we're looking for:

Destinations	Art / Illustration
Gear Reviews (Objective)	Short Stories
Photography	Interviews
Video	Backcountry Cuisine
Skill & Technique	Your New Idea

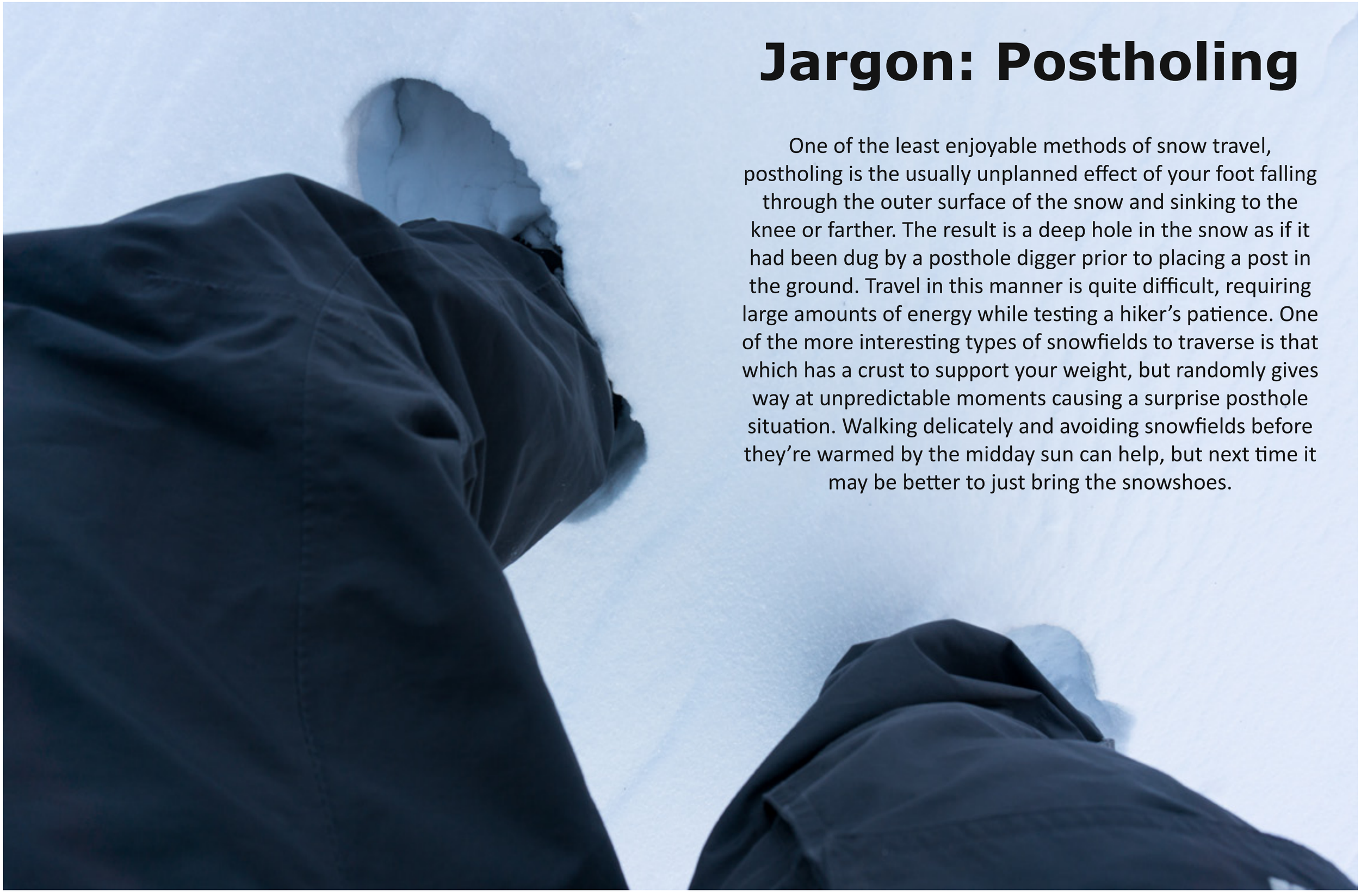
TrailGroove Magazine
Review Policy

The products we review are obtained via normal consumer retail channels. We do not ask for or accept review samples from manufacturers, and we do not obtain the products we review under the TrailGroove Magazine name. As such, we're reviewing the same products that you would obtain - Not hand-picked review samples. Even though we like free gear as much as the next person, but we won't bend on this rule! As a result of this philosophy, we are also able to experience and comment on the same level of customer service that the typical consumer would receive.

Note that this policy does not apply to any pre-release products that we're able to obtain prior to market release for review. In such cases, we will clearly state that the product was obtained from the manufacturer for a sneakpeak, pre-release evaluation in the review.

We use a 5-star rating scale for our reviews:

★★★★★	Excellent
★★★★☆	Very Good
★★★☆☆	Good
★★☆☆☆	Average
★☆☆☆☆	Poor



Jargon: Postholing

One of the least enjoyable methods of snow travel, postholing is the usually unplanned effect of your foot falling through the outer surface of the snow and sinking to the knee or farther. The result is a deep hole in the snow as if it had been dug by a posthole digger prior to placing a post in the ground. Travel in this manner is quite difficult, requiring large amounts of energy while testing a hiker's patience. One of the more interesting types of snowfields to traverse is that which has a crust to support your weight, but randomly gives way at unpredictable moments causing a surprise posthole situation. Walking delicately and avoiding snowfields before they're warmed by the midday sun can help, but next time it may be better to just bring the snowshoes.

TRAIL TIP 12: Secrets to Staying Warm in the Winter - Part 2

by Ted Ehrlich

Check out Part 1 with Tips on Winter Layering Here in Issue 11.

After you have figured out your layering system to keep you warm, picking out your equipment is the next step to successful winter camping. Parts of my summer setup stay the same in winter, like my toiletries kits. A warmer bag will be used that will match the expected lows, and if I don't have a bag warm enough to work in the temperatures I will expect, I will double up on sleeping bags to make a bag that is warm enough. A sleeping pad system with a R value of 4-6 will be used, and using a closed cell foam pad under my summer air pad is an easy and cheap way to do so since R values are additive when you layer pads. I use a single wall 4 season tent that I can seal completely to keep the wind and snow out, but a true 4 season solid wall tent is not needed unless you expect bad weather. A sturdy 3 season tent will work fine in a pinch with careful campsite selection to avoid wind and heavy snowfall. Snow shelters, like igloos and quinzhees, are a fun way to camp in the winter, and a well built one will be warmer than any tent. A larger volume backpack may be needed in winter because the gear will be bulkier, but not necessarily if you're careful about how you pack. My go to weekend winter pack is a 38L frameless pack.

A stove will depend on the length of trip and the temperatures that I expect. If I can have easy access to running water during the trip, then a canister stove will work. The canister can be placed into a small bowl of water while running, which will keep the canister above 32* and allow it to burn all of the isobutane. If it will be much colder than 32* with no running water, I will bring a liquid gas stove that runs off unleaded regular gas for cooking. Higher octane premium gas should not be used due to its hotter flash point and if you have some white gas, it will run cleaner with less soot than regular unleaded gas. Some stoves will even run off of diesel, kerosene, and jet fuel, but unless you drive a diesel, using those kinds of fuels are not common in

the United States. Wood stoves like my Bushbuddy ultra will work in the winter if you search for dry deadwood in sheltered spots around tree trunks, and I will bring a small amount of liquid fire starter for the wood stove. On short overnighters, I sometimes forgo a stove completely to reduce bulk and bring food that doesn't require cooking.

For water, hydration packs will work, but even insulated hoses can freeze up, and bite valves will freeze easily. While I am hiking I always stick my bite valve in my jacket, and I have gotten in the habit of clearing my hose by blowing the water back into the reservoir since it is unlikely my reservoir will freeze in my pack. In especially cold conditions, a hard sided Nalgene in an insulated holder is the only way to keep water from freezing, and sleeping with your water is necessary at night. Melting snow may be necessary on some trips, but on shorter trips I just carry my water in or find flowing water. Most flowing water in the winter tends to be very clear and clean, so minimal water filtration/purification is needed. However, chemicals do not work as well in cold water, filters can freeze if not carefully dried and stored, and UV lights can take additional time to get up to operational output.

Winter can be a challenge, but with a few tweaks to your clothing, gear, and overall mindset hiking and backpacking in the cold becomes an approachable and enjoyable experience. And while the coming arrival of spring will surely be appreciated in hiking circles all around, there's no reason to wait when you can fight the winter blues and hit the trail now. ❖

Adventures with the Big Pack

Location: Sierra Nevada Mountains, CA

by Sean O'Rourke

I have always been drawn to summits. Growing up, I hiked with my family in the mountains of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, where most peaks can be comfortably climbed in a day. What little camping I did was mostly of the backyard variety, and I never developed much of an affinity for it. School and work took me away from the mountains for a decade, though I remained active as a runner and sometime cyclist, accustomed to shorter, intense efforts ending with a shower, kitchen, and bed.

It took a summer working in Washington State, with some weekend trips to the Cascades, to remind me that I loved mountains. I moved up to Los Angeles the following fall, from which the eastern Sierra Nevada are within weekend striking distance. Compared to the mountains of my youth, the Sierra are both more technical and harder to reach in a single day. While I lacked camping and climbing

gear, I found that I could compensate with a combination of speed, endurance, and some acceptance of risk.

Since graduating, I have spent my summers in the mountains of the West, incrementally developing these skills. Starting with 12-hour hikes with some 3rd class scrambling, I gradually progressed to 20 hour days with low 5th class climbing, sometimes running significant portions to cover 50 or more miles in a day. However, a combination of inadequate fitness and a broken metacarpal in my hand recently made it impossible for me to pursue such outings. Despite my longstanding aversion to backpacking, it seemed like one of the few ways left to enjoy the mountains.

I had acquired most of the requisite gear piecemeal; after renting a bear canister and replacing my 25 year-old tent with a $12 plastic tarp, I was set. The brace on my left hand would not fit through the sleeves of most of my warm-weather clothes, or in my gloves. I therefore brought only a padded flannel with buttoning cuffs and a right glove, plus my usual day-hiking attire (cotton t-shirt, nylon pants, running shoes). The plan was to stay warm by either moving or being inside my sleeping bag. As a token gesture toward hygiene, I brought a spare t-shirt and socks, which I rinsed and swapped each evening. With my pad and tarp

Bottom Left: Starting out.
Bottom Right: Sunrise on Grouse Lake.
Above: West from Kearsarge Pass.
Previous Page: Dropping my pack at Dumbbell Lakes.

Left: Dinner near McGee Lakes.
Above: East from the climb out of Kings Canyon.

strapped to the outside, everything else fit inside my 45 liter climbing pack.

Since I have low standards for food, I simply chose 30,000 calories worth of cheap, dry carbohydrates, proteins, and fats at the local grocery store, including instant mashed potatoes, peanuts, chocolate chips, oats, and a bottle of olive oil. To help it down, I tossed in my favorite “Fiesta Lime” seasoning. I planned to have one hot meal in the morning and evening, and snack on trail mix throughout the day. I wasn’t sure exactly how long this food would last, but it is usually possible to reach a trailhead in a single day in the Sierra.

Having experienced sections of the John Muir Trail (JMT), I knew I wanted something more exciting and wild. I had read Roper’s book on the Sierra High Route, a half-cross-country path roughly paralleling the JMT. My initial plan was to follow it from its southern end in Kings Canyon to where it crosses highway 120 at Tuolumne Meadows, climbing peaks along the way when I felt like it. However, I had no idea how much of this distance I could complete. I would hike until I got bored or ran out of food, then exit on the east side and hitch-hike back to my car. To make this possible, I had to start by packing across the range from Onion Valley to Road’s End.

The High Route normally starts with a grim, 5,000-foot, south-facing climb out of Kings Canyon to Grouse Lake. Starting from the east side of the range, I added another 22 miles and 2600 feet of elevation gain, making the first day truly brutal while carrying maximum pack weight. I felt fine climbing Kearsarge Pass to the Sierra crest, then descending past Charlotte Lake to Bubbs Creek, cheerfully greeting fellow backpackers on the popular trail. The temperature was comfortable, and I enjoyed my inefficient first-day food -- apples and peanut butter sandwiches. The soles of my feet started to hurt on the long, gradual descent along Bubbs Creek, but I ignored them as I descended into the land of the “face flies”, small insects which do not bite, but seem to feed on human annoyance.

After spending some time gathering motivation at the Kings Canyon ranger kiosk, I then suffered the dusty miles up toward Glacier Pass. Where the trail levels out on a ridge, the High Route takes off cross-country, heading northwest toward remote Lake Basin. I finally reached Grouse Lake about twelve hours after leaving Onion Valley, with just enough energy to spread my tarp, crawl into my sleeping bag, and eat a pot of oily mashed potatoes and meat substitute before falling asleep.

Left: Confused deer on the JMT.
Far Left: JMT below Muir Pass.
Below: The hut at Muir Pass.

I woke to frozen dew on my bag -- had I camped too close to the lake? I shook the dew off as best I could after breakfast. I strapped my frozen laundry to the outside of my pack and headed out. After tagging nearby Goat Mountain, I discarded my plan to follow the High Route, instead improvising a route between accessible peaks. Sitting in camp or on a summit, I would look at my topo map and the terrain, pick a line that looked reasonable, and see what happened. This led to some slow, difficult traversing on the second day, but also to scenic, seldom-seen Dumbbell and Amphitheater Lakes on the third.

By mid-morning on day three, my feet finally became intolerable. After sitting down for a bit of self-pity and an actual lunch, I drained and taped over the blisters. Though I still walked gingerly for the next couple of days, daily taping combined with some improvised tape shims in my shoes were adequate for the rest of the trip.

After two days with no trail or human interaction, on day four I joined the popular JMT to cross Muir Pass, a bottleneck to north-south travel. Accustomed to making my own path near or above timberline, I was dispirited by this 4,000-foot climb through “face fly” country on the familiar pack trail. When I left the JMT above Evolution Valley for a detour to McGee Lakes, I was glad to get back to the wilderness. While I enjoyed meeting the few other parties I saw during the remainder of my trip, I did my best to avoid trails.

On day six I began to consider my exit options. I had no chance of reaching Tuolumne. Even if I had ignored the peaks from the beginning, simply following the High Route as quickly as possible, I might not have been fast enough. I also had to consider returning to my car; my hitch-hiking chances would be much better exiting at a popular trailhead at the end of

a weekend than at a more obscure one on a weekday. With food for two meager days, I could have tried to make it as far north as possible, but I chose instead to bag a few more peaks and exit a day early at Mosquito Flats. Though I had not reached my planned destination, I felt that I had done something closer to what I unconsciously wanted. Spending another hungry day, or leaving ten miles farther north, would add nothing.

Some things went as planned. Given my schedule, my spartan clothing and sleeping gear worked well. My daily routine consisted of 45 minutes of morning preparation, 9-11 hours of travel, and about an hour of evening chores, with the remaining time -- 10-12 hours -- spent in my sleeping bag. I could not sleep 10-12 hours per night, and never found a way to keep my book-holding hand warm while reading, so I had plenty of time to think and stargaze through the small face-hole in my mummy bag. Sleeping fully clothed, I was comfortably warm despite camping above 10,000'. Eating a hot breakfast in my bag warmed me up just long enough to pack up and start hiking in the morning.

My food choices were mostly satisfactory. I did not tire of the same breakfast and dinner every day, though I might want to

Left: Steep chute into Mosquito Flat on exit day.
Above: Standing on Seven Gables' overhanging summit.

vary them between trips. The mixture of peanuts and chocolate chips I ate during the day provided enough calories, but left me craving salty, savory foods by the fourth day. Cheese or jerky would be a welcome addition.

There were also some surprises. First, both small and large-scale route-finding with a pack took adjustment. Even with one hand in a brace, I am comfortable and reasonably efficient on most 3rd class terrain with a day-pack. Thus my instinct is to go straight over small 3rd class obstacles. The extra, unbalancing weight of an overnight pack, however, made most 3rd class an ordeal, and ledges I would normally jump were either difficult or impossible. I repeatedly took off blithely across "moderate" looking terrain, only to either struggle or backtrack when confronted by something that I would not normally consider an obstacle.

On a larger scale, I often misestimated the trade-off between distance and difficulty. Over the years I have developed a feel for when it is better to go out of the way to gain less elevation or to cross easier

terrain. This instinct, calibrated for a day-pack, repeatedly betrayed me while carrying an overnight pack. It took several tiring mistakes to learn that it would be faster and/or less tiring to take a longer route than I normally would to avoid a ridge or talus field.

Then there was the strain the extra weight placed on my body. Having just completed the Sierra Challenge – day hiking 18 peaks in 10 days, with one rest day -- I expected my body to be mostly tough enough for a 7-day backpack. I was wrong. In addition to the expected sore shoulders and back, I developed blisters on the soles of my feet, a new and unwelcome experience. A quick drain-and-tape made them bearable, but inflammation of my outer shin muscle and tendon, probably caused by carrying extra weight downhill, has proven less tractable. Apparently long, consecutive day hikes with a 10-pound pack, even if they cover more miles and elevation, do not prepare the body for a week carrying a 30 or 40 pound pack cross-country.

Spending a week hiking along the Sierra gave me a new perspective on the range. As a day hiker, I am used to classifying peaks as “east-side” or “west-side” depending upon which offers the quickest access. Hiking up the center of the range, I found myself summiting both east- and west-side peaks, sometimes on the same day. Starting from the middle of the range leads to different measures of connectedness and difficulty. For example, Observation and Marion are two of the most challenging peaks in the range to dayhike, approached from different trailheads. However, summiting both in a day on the way to Amphitheater Lake was easy. I also realized that the Sierra are surprisingly narrow -- in most places it is possible to hike from one side to the other in a single, long day, or at least to see both sides from near the center.

Most strikingly new to me, however, was the freedom possible on a long, unconstrained backpack. Day hikes have fixed endpoints, and must usually be more precisely planned as they grow longer. As someone familiar with exhausted evening headlamp time, it was wonderful to be able to simply stop at a lake or stream when evening approached or I grew tired. And while much is possible in a single 50-mile day, it felt liberating to plan 100 miles in 10 to 20 mile increments over a week. My encounter with the big pack has given me a fresh perspective on familiar mountains, one which I hope to explore further. Perhaps next season, after my body recovers.

Top Right: Amphitheater Lake.
Bottom Right: Dry lakebed in Evolution Valley.
Below: Ptarmigan in the Bear Lakes area.

Best Time to Go: Late June through September are best for summer backpacking. The mosquitos usually subside by early August.

Getting There: The high Sierra are most easily accessible from the east, via U.S. 395 in the Owens Valley. Paved and dirt roads lead to numerous trailheads.

Maps: National Geographic Maps #205, #809, and #206 cover the high Sierra, including the High Route.

Information: No permits are required for one-day hikes. All overnight trips require entry permits, with a separate quota for each trailhead. Free walk-in permits are available starting the day before entry in Bishop and Lone Pine. Bear canisters are required in some areas, and the Mount Whitney Zone has additional permit requirements. See http://www.fs.usda.gov/inyo/ .

Books: Secor's The High Sierra is the comprehensive guide.
Roper's The Sierra High Route discusses the High Route in more detail.

About the Author: *Sean O'Rourke is a trail runner and mountaineer living in the American West, who formerly trained as a computer scientist. He writes about his travels at http://drdirtbag.com/ .*❖

Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:
http://www.TrailGroove.com

Direct link to this issue:
http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue12.html

The Entirely Real Legend of the Border Route Trail

Location: Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Minnesota

by Justin Quinn Pelegano

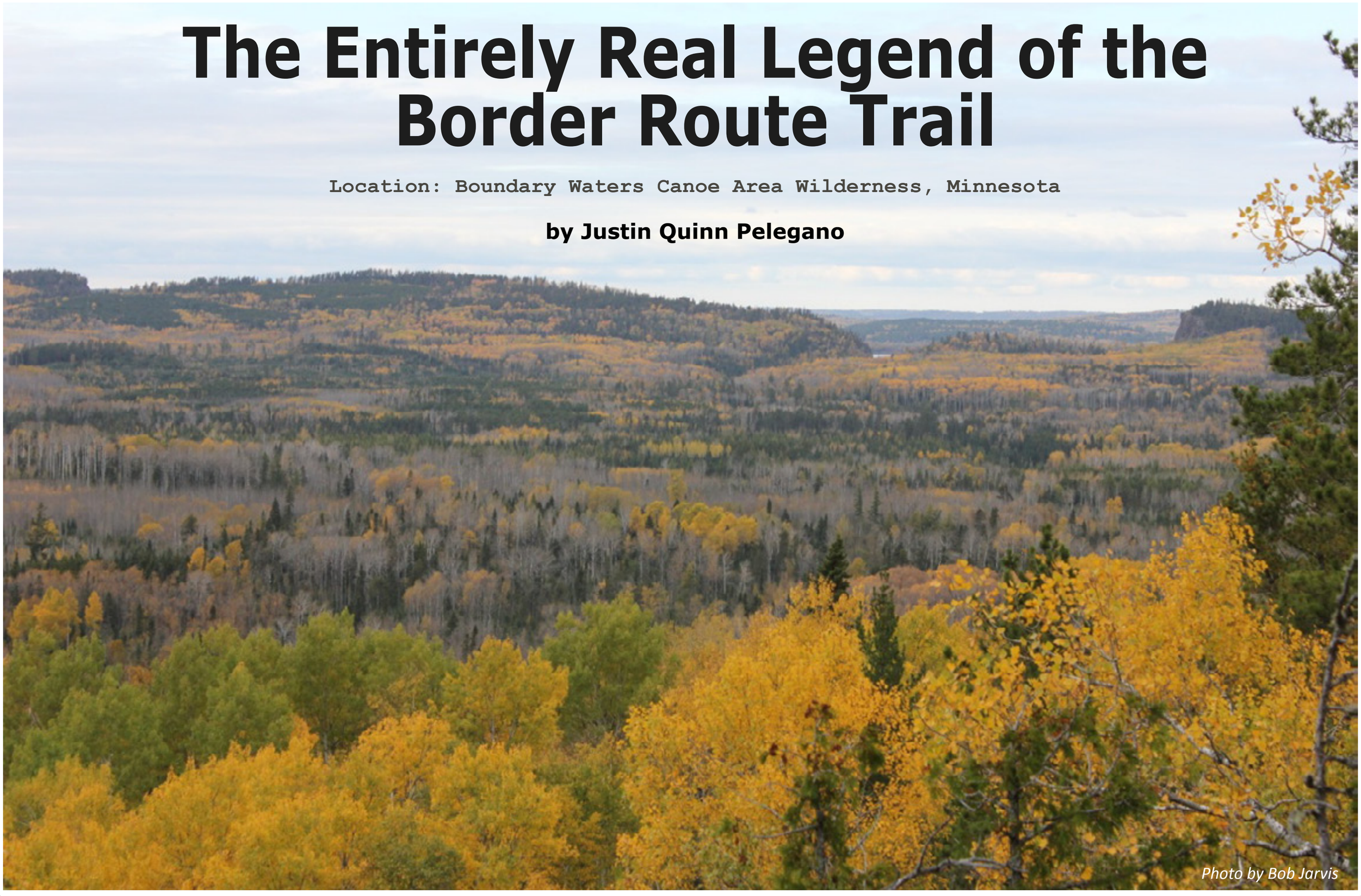


Photo by Bob Jarvis

In regular life, from my house due east, it's no more than a twenty minute drive on Interstate 394 to where Ed Solstad hangs his hat. He's in Minneapolis; I'm right across the line in suburbia. Same county. We enjoy or bemoan the same schizophrenic weather. In the grander scheme of the entire state of Minnesota, Ed Solstad and I are neighbors. We both know this going in, and yet our first face-to-face takes place some six hours by car away from the Twin Cities, in the pitch black, on the side of a one-lane logging road that's practically Canada.

I'm praying that the tires on my '05 Honda Civic don't go flat. The past 130 miles offered little in the way of hazards save for my occasional need to steal a moving glance at Lake Superior through a wall of yellow-leaved birch and Mountain Ash trees. An autumn drive from Duluth to the Arrowhead Trail is, in a word, stunning. And all of that awe quickly vanished when I hung a left in Hovland (population: 272) and began negotiating eleven miles of unpaved, pitted county road towards Otter Lake. I lost all cellular phone service the second I turned in. Normally I'd be glad for the reprieve from connectivity, but I know I won't be able to muster that gratitude just yet—not until I pull up to our makeshift campsite with an intact vehicle.

It's 6pm when I finally park, step out onto Otter Lake Road and give the car an uneventful once-over. I must be early. I take in a full breath of cool air; I take in the gray sky and washed-out fall colors; I decide to pace the site of our weekend

Photo by Bob Jarvis

headquarters. It's exactly as Ed described in his email: small clearing, serviceable fire ring, minor outcropping of bedrock that doubles as a kitchen…and then I see it. It. The sign. The entrance. A three-foot green-painted post marking the way to one of the country's more formidable hikes—The Border Route Trail (BRT). It's why I'm up here. It's why Solstad and the rest of the team will be here, too. At first look, the trailhead, roofed by pines, reads like a descent into all that is dark and deep. I take two strides down before the voice inside advises prudence. When I emerge, I'm met by a juvenile red fox who no doubt sizes me up as an alarmist, then trots on through the roadside brush. Waiting on the others and eager to beat the rain, I pitch my blaze orange A-frame tent between the lake and the northern woods.

Sometime in 1971, a small band of Minnesota Rovers—one of the oldest outing clubs in the Upper Middle West—happened upon an abandoned and wildly overgrown trekking path at the foot of the state's highest peak, Eagle Mountain. Fueled in equal parts by youthful curiosity and the determination to expand backpacking options in Minnesota, the group consulted a series of 1940's topographical maps to explain their find. The mapping revealed a three-mile stretch of trail (most probably an original section of logging route tied to Franklin Roosevelt's broadest New Deal program, the Works Progress Administration) that the Rovers would right away set about clearing, re-opening, and then extending. The BRT was born.

Above: Ed and Bob. **Right:** Brush Cutters.

Over the next decade, using volunteer manpower, machetes and cheap chainsaws procured with a grant from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Club created and connected sixty-five miles worth of hiking trail. Running through what is today the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and along the international border with Ontario, Canada, the BRT joins the Superior Hiking Trail at its eastern terminus and the Kekekabic and Gunflint trails in the west. One need only give thought to the sizeable obstacles the Rovers confronted in constructing the Border Route Trail—obstacles both natural and bureaucratic; from private land disputes to a passionate but unpaid workforce—in order to appreciate the magnitude of the Club's achievement.

Ed Solstad was there from the beginning—envisioning, plotting and blazing the way. That some forty years later, at age seventy-two, he continues to lead volunteer maintenance trips to the BRT (like the one I drove up for) is a testament to a powerful sense of loyalty, not to mention his enviable physical endurance.

Ed and Bob Jarvis—another Rover from the pioneering, machete-swinging early days—pull into camp around nine, and I slither out of my sleeping bag to greet them. As I approach the driver's side my headlamp shines right in Solstad's face, so I kill the light, and we end up shaking hands in the dark. I move back, re-illuminate and notice the two hubcap-less replacement tires adorning Ed's early model Subaru Impreza. Maybe the road in was as gnarly as I had feared. Maybe we should have all arrived in trucks. As it is, Solstad's hitched a 45'' x 68'' teardrop cargo trailer to his car, and it managed the trip unscathed. It's a good thing, too; all of our food, our water, our tools, safety equipment and wine are inside. The two men unpack nothing but their tents. Priority one is rest. Tomorrow, we work.

By mid-morning it's clear to all of us that we're off to a late start. Maintenance crews are usually on the trail by 10am. It's already eleven, and our group, which now numbers six, is still sipping Ed's camp stove coffee. The delay comes courtesy of an inexperienced team in need of instruction and a leisurely get-to-know-you breakfast of cold cereal. Luke Johnson—twenty-six and the youngest member by far—is chomping at the bit. Tall and lean and mere weeks removed from a four-month stint studying Atlantic tarpon in Nicaragua, he carpooled in last night with two other volunteers. Johnson's an avid outdoorsman whose adventures come across regularly, anecdotally, and with a harmless and entertaining cocksureness; he joined up this weekend to get a taste of the BRT before considering a thru-hike. Upon rising, Luke donned his hiking boots and strolled a few feet beyond the trailhead threshold only to turn around, just as I had, and announce the obvious: "No wonder people get lost in there." Such is the nature of the BRT that it can turn even a bold and experienced backpacker wary.

At sixty-five miles, it's not that the Border Route Trail is especially long, obviously (although those parameters may soon be subject to change when and if the BRT is officially incorporated into the ambitious North Country Trail). No, the challenge of the route lies in its terrain, in staying on course through a maze of deadfall, rocks, and overgrown thimbleberry and raspberry bushes. Much of the trail's brush problem, especially in the BWCAW, was exacerbated on July 4, 1999 when 100-mph straight winds felled huge amounts of old-growth timber in a storm that has since become known as "The Big Blow." Left exposed, without the retardant power of an arboreal canopy, low-lying plant life began to rise and obscure the trail at an unprecedented rate. It still does. For Ed Solstad and Tom Suter—the latter of whom maintains the federal Wilderness section of the BRT—it's an annual, and seasonal, race to clear and demarcate as much of the way as they can for any intrepid hikers.

Above: Otter Lake Cutoff, Photo by Mark Jensen.

Because Solstad coordinates trail work at the BRT's eastern and western most legs—both of which lie outside of the BWACW—he's afforded the luxury of power tools that are prohibited in the Wilderness (where Suter must rely on scythes, crosscut saws, and more patience than I can imagine). We get chainsaws and brush cutters. A week ago, when I asked Ed by phone to describe a power brush cutter, he had me envision a harnessed weed whacker; instead of a string at the end, picture a table saw blade. Now that I'm holding one, his description was spot-on. We'll take turns wielding and using the tool, and Solstad chuckles as he warns us against smacking the thing into rocks and the possibility of a runaway blade, both of which he's experienced firsthand. Someone will carry the loppers. Another will bring the gas can. For his part, and seeing as he's the only one who's DNR certified in its use, Ed will take charge of the chainsaw. Geared up and with clean water and lunches in our daypacks, we drop into the Otter Lake Cutoff and make our way northeast.

The Cutoff, one of the Border Route Trail's fourteen spurs and portages, feeds right into the BRT's first east/west crossroad. It measures one-tenth shy of a mile. It takes us three hours to complete. This is the painstaking stop-and-start work of a volunteer trail maintenance crew. While the brush cutter goes after alders and the loppers groom aspens, Solstad cuts deadfall after deadfall into manageable logs. We work in tandem to toss most from the trail; other pieces fill trenches in an effort to disperse spring runoff. Keeping hikers dry and upright represents a serious concern, and no detail is beyond consideration. Solstad even implores us to remove shorn, quick-to-brown pine branches strictly for aesthetic purposes. We break for lunch at a clearing atop a fifteen-foot gully, and the sound of the running water is soothing to the point of being sedative. I edge perilously close to a standing nap. Thankfully, Ed jars me back to attention sharing plans to designate the spot as an official campsite. The rest of us scramble to replace the layers of jackets and sweatshirts we peeled off after they'd soaked through with sweat. It's been overcast and barely fifty degrees all afternoon—perfect conditions for the task at hand, but borderline frigid in our current static state. With two hours left before sundown, and craving the heat of our own churning muscles, we get back to it.

Not ten yards from our Zen-ish rest area, the trail post reads, "BRT East." We've made it. The BRT proper. It's my shift with the brush cutter, so my welcome to the Border Route pretty much consists of keeping my eyes glued to the forest floor, my ear protection secured to a baby blue hard hat, and this gas-powered beast of a whacker away from my ankles. It's like trying to control an angry lawn-mowing pit bull. Just as the cutter and I are starting to function as one highly efficient, terribly noisy unit, I lift my head and realize I'm alone. Backtracking slightly, I catch the other five hats in my periphery, off to the right, and shut down the motor. I unclip the machine from its harness and come up behind them. Nobody is moving. Nobody is saying a word.

All of my internal gears slow and then halt. For the first time in a very long time, my mind goes. It just…goes. "The BRT," Solstad once told me, "is all about fantastic overlooks." Amen. Wave upon wave of

changing birch and stolid pine carry my gaze until they break at the distant Pigeon River. It's all so quietly overwhelming. It's perfect. Suddenly, and as they have every right to do, the crew starts repositioning and snapping photos. Now everyone's moving, and everyone's talking. Everyone but Luke. He stays seated on the ridgeline, staring out at Canada. Ultimately, we must drag ourselves away and retrace our steps back to camp. I wait for Luke, the last to give up the view, and when we make eye contact he looks haunted, and I ask if he's all right. Luke Johnson inhales deeply and with the brimming assuredness of a newly awakened soul, makes known his intention to thru-hike the Border Route Trail by the end of the month.

Back at base, Ed breaks out a variety of Summit beers, and he and Bob Jarvis take to dinner prep. Luke passes a flask of Nicaraguan rum; the warmth it leaves behind in my chest briefly wards off the chill I'm starting to feel in my bones. It will rain tonight and all day tomorrow, effectively putting the brakes on our maintenance work (saws and slick wet rocks don't play well together). There will be minor accomplishments on Saturday: the mounting of a hiker registration box at the McFarland Lake trailhead, for one. But it will mostly be a matter of waiting out the weather. I'll need to leave before it breaks. Ed, however, will be up here for another seven days, hoping to get one more crack at all those deadfalls.

To say that I'm left struck by Solstad's commitment to the BRT would be a woeful understatement. Over the past forty-two years there have of course been hiatuses; brief ones brought on by professional duty—for which he labored as an accountant—and newfound hobbies (Ed has a thing for Italian sports cars). But it's apparent that Solstad's heart has never strayed far from the trail he helped build. It's where he seems, for lack of a better term, happy. It comes out in his easy laugh and the way he can't wait to tell you his stories—tales of the Route, of the Rovers, of the primitive and clunky camping equipment they used in the 70's. Solstad's own past is inextricably woven through the history of the Border Route Trail.

On my last night at Otter Lake, standing by the trunk of his Impreza in a cold drizzle, I ask him how much longer he plans on heading up trail maintenance trips. Ed tells me he's ready to reduce his responsibilities by half. "I'm getting too old to think camping in the rain is fun anymore," he laughs. I ask him why he's dedicated so much of his life to the BRT. That inquiry is met with pensive silence. Solstad looks over at the few chatty volunteers still huddled around the fire ring. With his wispy white hair peeking out beneath his rain jacket hood and his slight frame swaying with every gust of wind, I'm tempted to retract the question and urge Solstad to the shelter of his domed tent. Before I get the chance he looks up at me through fogged glasses.

"The BRT is the thing that I've done that's significant," he says.

And with that, Ed Solstad and I shake hands one more time, in the darkness, on the side of a one-lane road.

Photo by Bob Jarvis

Photo by Bob Jarvis


Border
Route
Trail
East
www.BorderRouteTrail.org


Photo by Mark Jensen

Photo by Mark Jensen

Getting There: From the South/Twin Cities: Connect up with Highway 61 North out of Duluth until Hovland. The constant view of Lake Superior alone is worth the trip. Left on CR-16 (The Arrowhead Trail) to either Otter Lake Road and the Cutoff, or stay straight on CR-16 until McFarland Lake and portage into the BRT. From the East: hook up with the BRT via the Superior Hiking Trail.

When to Go: "I don't go to the BRT in June anymore," says Solstad, and that's because of the black flies. The Border Route Trail is best hiked in the spring and fall months when temperatures are moderate and brush is ever so slightly less of an issue. According to Ed, "May is good because the thimbleberries haven't come up waist-high yet," thereby obscuring the path.

Tips for the Trail: A compass and a good map are essential. The Border Route Trail: a Trail Guide and Map by Hoffman and Scott can be purchased online at the BRT's official website www.borderroutetrail.org or at various outlets listed therein. Even with a map in hand, hikers can easily lose track of the trail and its blue flagging. If that happens, Solstad recommends looking for "deadfall saw cuts and fallen blue flagging on the ground," to get you back on course.

Permits: According to the BRT website: "Permits are required year-round for all users within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, which for the Border Route Trail means any overnight trip between Crab Lake and McFarland Lake requires a permit. Reservations can be made beginning January of every year for the entire year and currently cost $12 per person in your group plus an additional reservation fee for the permit. The party size in the Boundary Waters is limited to 9 people. Call the BWCA Reservation Service at 1-877-550-6777 or reserve your permit online (the pertinent entry-points for the Border Route Trail are #81 (west), #82 (center) and #83 (east)).

If you don't wish to make a reservation, permits can be obtained free within 24 hours of your proposed trip start at the Ranger Station in Grand Marais or a cooperating lodge/ outfitter."

Day Hikes: For those interested in experiencing the BRT without having to commit to a thru-hike, the trail can also be enjoyed in smaller sections—on day treks or overnights—as a straight hike or in combination with a canoe trip. Beautiful overlooks abound. Refer to the Border Route Trail's very useful website www.borderroutetrail.org for information regarding spur trails and campsites. ❖

Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:
http://www.TrailGroove.com

Direct link to this issue:
http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue12.html

HIKING

A Way of Life

by Renate G. Justin

In Germany, in the early thirties, my family lived on the edge of the Harz Mountains. Several times a week, my two sisters and I, had to lace up our made-to-order leather hiking boots and head for the hills. We complained about having to leave our dogs and toys, but once on the trail we did not wish to return home. We collected horse chestnuts from the trees in front of our house and took them to the deer feeders in the woods. We climbed up the towers that hunters used when they spied on wild life. We sang, not always in tune, as we walked and tried not to lag behind our parents. Often other hikers would praise my youngest sister for keeping up with the adults, “Du bist klein, hast aber große Wanderlust.” (You are small, but show great desire for hiking.)

My parents took the family to hike in the Dolomite Mountains in Italy when I was eight. The memory of the Alps with their profusion of flowers, Edelweiss, and gentian, the steep Schlern Mountain still nurtures my soul.

When my own children were ready to hike we lived in the Midwest of the United States, but spent vacations in the West on hiking and horseback trips. Only my grandsons from the East complained that we wore them out on these adventures.

My daughter and I were most fortunate to be allowed to treck in Nepal. A wondrous trip, with mountains the height we had never even imagined. Deep red rhododendrons in bloom, terraced fields and so much more stored in our recollection.

Left: Hiking with My Parents and Sisters in the Dolomite Mountains in Italy c.a. 1934.
Next Page: Mountains in Nepal.

My grandchildren were born in Colorado, a good excuse for me to move to that beautiful area. As soon as my two granddaughters could walk, and even before they could, we took them into the mountains. Their reward for a 'no-whining' hike was that we would stop to pick wild raspberries and strawberries. Weekends, when I did not have to work I hiked, rode horseback and camped.

On one ascent to a Fourteener, while scrambling over big boulders, our leader told me, "Don't walk on all fours, you are not a monkey, stand up." I was mortified, but stood up until I reached the top.

A professional meeting I attended in Banff, Canada almost ended in tragedy. A colleague, who came from the low altitude of Indiana, decided to go on a hike with me. She became ill, but refused to turn back. When we reached the platform of the ski tram the last car had left. I had no Canadian quarter for the telephone and resorted to wiggling the phone cradle. After some time a sympathetic voice answered and I explained our dilemma. The operator found the young men who were in charge of the funicular. They came up and carried my sick friend into the car and took us down the mountain. They would not charge for their hospitality and service. My companion recovered during the next few days while I hiked about in this superb landscape, which certainly deserves its world wide reputation for exceptional beauty.

For years I have walked every day to keep in shape for hiking. When she has a day off, my friend Karen, will pick me up at 5 AM. We watch the sunrise and are at the trailhead while it is still cool. Karen is sensitive to my age, she will offer a hand to steady me as needed, but is not overly solicitous. I have started to use one of my ski poles as a hiking stick because my balance is not as good as it used to be which I notice especially when crossing a stream on a narrow log.

I used to be fast paced, but have slowed down, particularly on the ascent. When I hike with strangers I worry about not keeping up, as I did when I was a child with my parents. Even in hot weather I wear long pants, long sleeves, cotton gloves and a rather unusual head gear. I am sun sensitive and have to cover up. Undoubtedly some people guess the reason for my strange appearance, others just shake their heads.

Now I am 87, wrinkled, white haired and bent and, as when I was a child, get comments from fellow hikers, Yesterday, one, slightly obese young man, said, talking to himself, "No more whining." He was observing me coming down a rather steep, stony trail while he was struggling to climb up. I have to admit sometimes I am tempted to 'walk like a monkey' on a trail which requires that I stretch my legs to reach above a stone step, but then I remember my leader's warning. I wonder whether at 87 he would make an exception, give me permission to steady myself on all fours?

Above: Renate, her daughter and granddaughters hiking in Colorado.
Left: Nepal.

One time I slipped on gravel and found myself sprawled on the path. Two hikers commented, “Glad to see you still out here at your age,” and passed me by without slowing their pace to help me up.

In most circles it is considered impolite to ask a woman her age, but not on the trail. At least once on each outing I am confronted with, “May I ask you a ‘personal question’? How old are you?”

The comment that follows, “Good, I am 65, that means: I can hike for at least another 25 years. You are my model,” or even, “my hero.”

It is luck and genes I tell my interrogators, there is nothing I did to ‘deserve’ that I can still enjoy the magnificent Rocky Mountains. The mountains make me realize how insignificant, how small I am and at the same time their grandeur inspires me, brings me to a spiritual experience. I have an insatiable desire to be surrounded time and again by the beauty of our remote, wild areas. That is why I still go hiking. ❖

Above: On Top of One of the ‘Fourteeners’ in the Collegiate Range in Colorado.
Right: Renate, in the Indian Peaks Wilderness area in Colorado 2013.

NEW BALANCE MINIMUS

MT1010/WT1010 V2

Review by Aaron Zagrodnick

I've been a fan of hiking in New Balance minimalist shoes for several years. Everything started with the MT101, a minimalist trail shoe that worked well while holding up to the abuse of the trail. I replaced those with the MT110, (Reviewed Here in Issue 3) which offered a grippier outsole and more comfortable fit. Both of those shoes lasted hundreds of miles and met standard expectations. With the eventual demise of my beloved MT110's I looked to try something new – The New Balance MT1010.

The only complaint I ever had about the MT110 was that the open mesh wasn't really ideal for hiking in fine sand. The MT1010 appeared (Confused with 1's and 0's yet?) to utilize a fabric in the upper that would solve this issue. In practice everything was great about the shoe.

Pros: Very comfortable ride with a nice blend of cushioning and protection in a minimalist inspired design.

Cons: Significant lug design and durability issues, questionable fit.

Rating: ★★½☆☆

Comfortable, great cushioning and a forefoot rockplate while retaining a minimalist feel and keeping your foot low to the ground. However, the downfall of the 1010 was the durability of the upper's fabric – It simply wears out too quickly under normal conditions. Even hiking carefully and without snagging the shoe on rocks or root the fabric wouldn't tear; it would just begin to disintegrate along crease lines around the 50 mile mark as if it was rotting away. Not good.

Original MT1010 Wear

The 1010 v2

Earlier this year New Balance released an update to the original 1010, the 1010 v2. The v2 looked like a burlier shoe, and weighed slightly more per pair than the original 1010 – Listed at 8.5 ounces per shoe (Men's) compared to the 7.7 ounce specification of the original. (My original MT1010's weighed 18.8 ounces per pair in a 13 2E) The v2's upper is more heavily reinforced and the fabric has been completely changed to an obviously stiffer and heavier fabric. The shoe is well cushioned with a substantial forefoot rockplate, and a partially gusseted tongue helps thwart trail debris. The sole consists of Vibram lugs in a pod arrangement, with the pods placed only in key areas to save weight and increase flexibility. In between the outsole pods, the forefoot rockplate / midfoot and heel midsole remains exposed. The shoe has a low heel to toe drop at 4mm, with a well cushioned 24mm heel / 20mm forefoot overall stack height. The shoe does not have a removable insole.

Weight as Tested (Per Pair)

Men's MT1010 v2 Size 13, 2E: 20.7 ounces

Women's WT1010 v2 Size 9.5 D: 15.7 ounces

Rock Plate and Forefoot of 1010 V2

On the Trail

With the failure of the original 1010 to succeed in the durability department, Jen and I decided to give the v2's a shot and tested the shoes over several backpacking trips, hikes, and runs. On the trail the Minimus 1010 v2 has great manners whether backpacking, hiking, or running the well cushioned midsole combined with the forefoot rockplate consistently offered great rock protection and prevented bruised feet even on longer days with high mileage. We both experienced initial rubbing on the back of the heel that's never been experienced utilizing previous versions of minimal New Balance shoes, but after a solid 30 miles on the shoe this seemed to resolve itself. The fit of the 1010 v2 runs a little large and sloppy, running approximately half a size larger than expected. But even sized appropriately, the upper has a looser fit that's difficult to truly lock down and blister potential was increased when scrambling and on difficult terrain where your foot can shift within the shoe. However, on your more average trail the shoe offers a nicely cushioned, comfortable, and stable ride. Traction is great and where you place your feet the shoe sticks, and flexibility of the sole allows the shoe to conform to the terrain offering even more grip. The shoe is still light, a feel that's apparent as you hike. The new upper features a heavier fabric with a tighter weave. This helps to shed fine sand, snow, etc., but does decrease the breathability of the shoe to some extent and our feet ran hotter in the 1010 v2 compared to all previous minimal New Balance shoes we've had experience with. But breathability is adequate and with cleaner feet and the end of the day, the tradeoff seems like a good one.

Durability

Where the upper of our original 1010's was disintegrating from casual use, the 1010 v2's upper has not shown any wear whatsoever and this problem appears to have been resolved in the update. The main issue with the Minimus 1010 v2 is a tendency for the outsole lugs / pods to separate from the shoe, especially on the heel even after low mileage trail use. We experienced both a failure of the glue that holds the rubber to the midsole, and in other cases the glue held and the foam simply tore away from itself. Once the pods separate they tear at the pod junctions and fall off the shoe, leaving you with the midsole in direct contact with the ground in these key traction areas – And that can result in a slippery trail experience, especially on rocky, wet trails. We've tested several pairs that have exhibited this problem. Trip one was a mix of terrain, part easy trail walking, part travelling over difficult terrain, scrambling through boulder fields with food-laden packs. It was more than the shoes could handle and both pairs of shoes began losing lugs after just 20 miles…And we still had 40 more miles to hike. Testing out a replacement pair on more mellow, trail-only but still rocky terrain didn't result in a better experience, with the same problem occurring around the 25 mile mark. It just seems that the pressure exerted on each pod is greater than what they can handle, especially over any type of rough terrain with a pack. With this in mind, we probably won't be utilizing the 1010 v2 any longer on multiday backpacking trips.

Conclusion

The New Balance Minimus 1010 v2 solved the issues we experienced with the original 1010, but introduced durability problems in other areas. The shoe is very comfortable, though it does require a slight break in period and the upper could be more form fitting, which would be greatly appreciated on steep terrain. While the shoe is a great and comfortable solution for hiking or running on easier trails, and has adequate cushioning and protection for more difficult terrain, durability is a major concern for multiday trips with a pack under more demanding conditions. ❖

Overall: ⭐⭐½☆☆ – Average to Good

The New Balance 1010 v2 Retails for about $110. You can find them Here at REI or at Backcountry.com.

Algonquin Peak

Location: The Adirondacks, NY

by Sarah D. Tiedemann

Algonquin Peak, the second highest peak in New York, lies within the confines of the Adirondacks. She's the crown jewel of the MacIntyre Range standing at 5, 114 feet, dwarfing all but one peak around her. My husband Nick and I had the privilege of hiking Mount Marcy (the highest peak in NY) and Algonquin a few years ago. Mount Marcy left me with bloody ankles and tendinitis in my knees while Algonquin was more forgiving. We have be pining to get back ever since, injuries be damned.
On a recent weekend, Nick and I found ourselves with nothing on our agendas and decided to venture north. On this particular weekend, we'd bring his sister Laura along for her first out of state hiking trip. We knew Algonquin wouldn't disappoint.

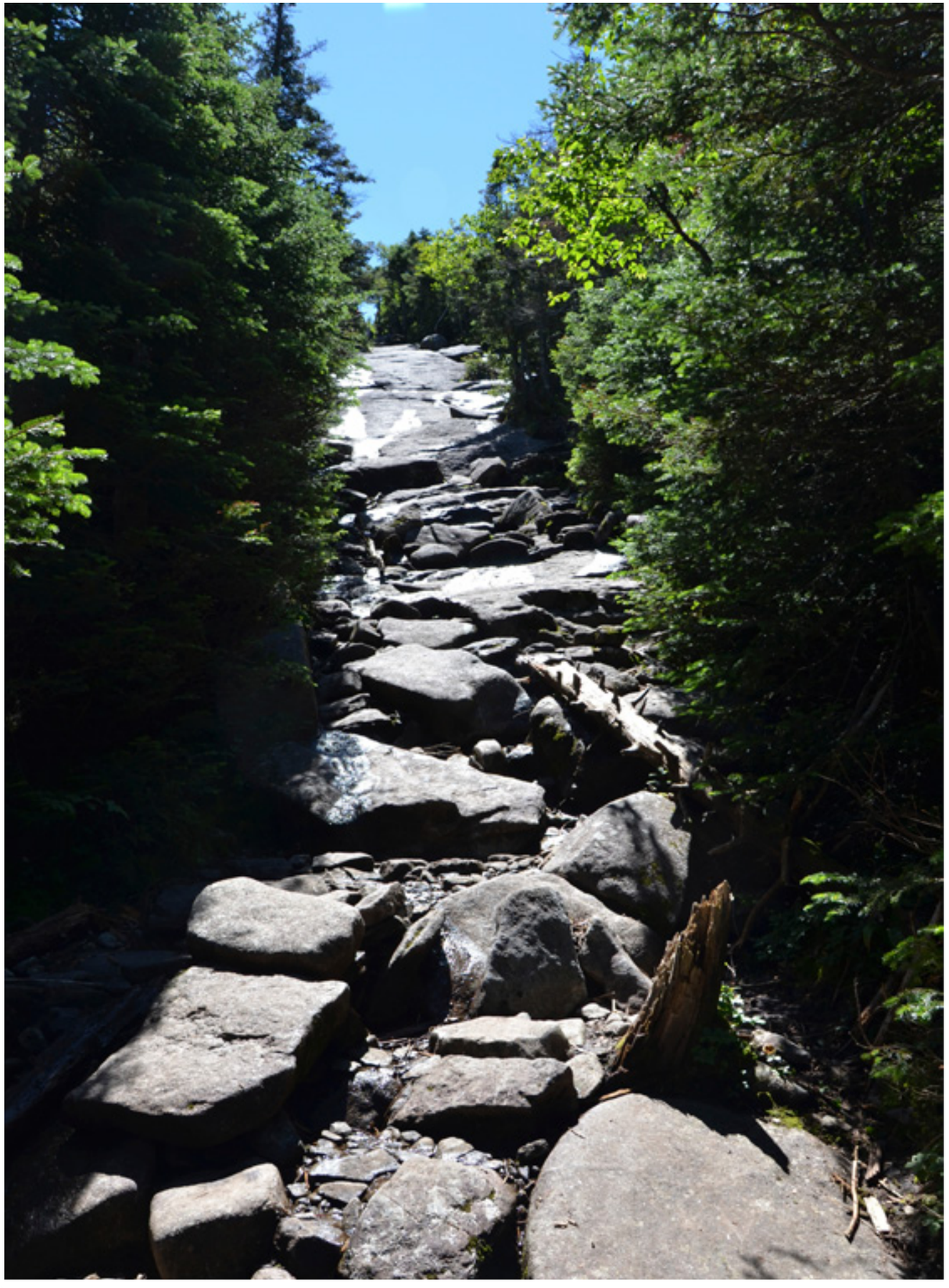
The night we arrived in Lake Placid, worn from the six hour drive, we were met by a Canadian rugby team who were sharing our accommodations. We joined them by the fire while they sung their rugby songs, many of which would make a sailor blush. We went to bed at what we deemed a reasonable hour (we surely had an early morning) but were occasionally rustled out of our sleep by roars of laughter coming from the campfire. Somehow, with interrupted sleep and restless minds, we made it to the trail head the next morning bright and early.

The trail begins at the Adirondack Loj, a starting point for many hikes in the High Peaks Region. Turning onto the Adirondack Loj Road from Route 73,

the mountains tower over a field, beckoning you to climb them. Viewing them from this standpoint conjures up the excitement, resolve, and energy to complete the hike you've chosen. The mountains of the Northeast feel inviting- the forest is lush and rife with natural features. Even the forest floor, devoid of any apparent sunlight, is teeming with life.

We signed in at the trail register and began our hike on the Van Hoevenburg Trail. It begins unassumingly enough as a gentle walk through the woods on a fairly wide trail. We meandered through a forest of hemlocks and over bridges that allowed us to traverse marshes. Despite the rain the entire week prior, the trail wasn't terribly muddy and for that we were thankful. This portion of the hike makes you feel as though it'll be an easy one. Don't be fooled- it gets much more challenging. The hike is only an eight mile out and back, but you'll climb roughly 3,000 feet in elevation with the bulk of it in 3 miles of trail.

Once we reached the junction for the Marcy Dam, we continued on the MacIntyre Range Trail, making our steady ascent to Algonquin. For about another mile, the boulders get increasingly larger, taxing your quads and making you wish you did more squats before attempting it. We were having a wonderful time being out but not making good time by any means. I've learned over the years my hiking style– slow and steady– is much kinder to my knees and better for



my endurance. This was perfect, however, because Laura was marveling at everything around her, often stopping to take photographs.

This is one of the most popular hikes in the area so we passed plenty of people on the trail. We made sure to stop and talk to everyone as we always do. More often than not, when reminiscing, you think of the people you've met on the trail rather than the hike itself. Hikers 30 years my senior were rushing past me, making me feel like a snail. I resolved to keep my current pace, knowing I would feel better in the morning than my fellow hikers. After roughly a mile of stone steps, we reached an impressive waterfall. At this point, the trail begins turning into rock slides. Nick and Laura were walking upright on them, putting me to shame. Though I knew better, I felt like I had to get on my hands and knees to traverse them. Nick often times jokes that I have more caveman in me than most people and this scrambling style I had was a true testament to my lack of evolutionary progress. Nick had it wrong all along- maybe I wasn't meant to be bipedal at all.

The rock slides were very wet (as they often are) but our grip did not suffer. We were steadily climbing, often stopping due to racing hearts and burning legs. At this point in the hike it is advantageous to stop and take a minute to look around. Unbeknownst to you, the mountain ranges around you are unfolding behind your back.

We came to the junction for Wright Peak, another 46er. Nick had practically begged to go, but I didn't think I would make it. It was another steep half mile to its summit, and we still had roughly a mile left to reach Algonquin. A mile under normal circumstances would be a breeze, but a mile over rock slides and boulders feels like an eternity. We climbed into the alpine zone and above tree line. The wind was howling but we had clear skies. I was starting to feel pretty woozy- we hadn't eaten a proper breakfast and I running on fumes . We stopped and ate on the flanks of the summit, fueling up before our final ascent. The food certainly helped, but I always seem to get a second wind when I can finally see what I've been working towards. We hoofed it the rest of the way, following the cairns and yellow paint along the rocks, scrambling our way to the top.

I can't imagine what it feels like to be on Everest, because here, at a mere 5,000 feet above sea level, you feel as though you are on top of the world. No matter where you rest your eyes there are mountains and lakes. You can see your starting point and marvel at the distance (and elevation!) you've traveled. You can see the ski jumps at the Olympic Complex in Lake Placid and Lake Placid itself. It always amazes me to view small cities and towns (and even larger ones) from this perspective. Everything seems to be in perfect order and harmony. It reminds me why I trek through the woods- it brings order to my life and makes modern day troubles seem infantile. It allows me to make sense of it all.

Although we saw many people on the trail, we were pleasantly surprised to see the summit relatively empty. It is nearly the size of a football field so even in times of popularity there is always room to be alone. We ducked down behind some rocks to take it all in. After a small snack, we made our way around the ring of the summit. Luckily, the sun warmed us up and the wind wasn't oppressive enough for us to make a hasty descent. We stopped and spoke with the summit steward who was assigned to Algonquin that day. He told us about the destruction done to the alpine zone in the 1970's and the subsequent attempts to re-vegetate the summit. He pointed out the peaks around us, the most interesting of which was Mount Colden. There are several areas of slides on its slopes, wherein the bare rock is exposed

amongst a forest around it. We noticed a couple of them were bright white unlike the numerous grey ones. He said they were a result of Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. It was a staggering reminder that mother nature calls the shots.

We were anxious to begin our descent but sorry that we had to leave. Reluctantly, we began climbing down, knowing it would take much longer to descend. Having to go back down 3,000 feet is a cruel joke. I wrapped my knee and took out my hiking poles in preparation for the horror about to be unleashed on my lower extremities.

The conversation started to die out as everyone began concentrating on their footing, allowing us to personally reflect on our day. We finally made our way back to the beginning of the trail head, happily checking off the trail register indicating we had returned unscathed. We reached the car incredibly pleased with ourselves and ready for the ultimate post hiking food- pizza. Upon our arrival back at our cabin, I immediately reached for the growler of beer we had picked up the night before at the Lake Placid Brewery, eager to celebrate yet another successful summit.

Best Time to Go: Late Summer and Fall, avoid Black Fly Season (changes yearly, but falls somewhere between June-July)

Getting There: Take the NY State Thruway to Route 73, Keene Valley. Turn left on Adirondack Loj Road, which dead ends to the parking attendant booth and trail head.

Maps: National Geographic Maps: Lake Placid/High Peaks

Information: (Camping / hiking regulations, any additional important info, etc..) $10 parking per day, $5 if an AMC member. Get there early in the summer months- the lot fills up quickly. Camping is available at the Adirondack Loj for a fee. Free wilderness camping is permitted on state land. No fires. Bear canisters are required. No camping over 4,000 feet. You can make this hike into a multi day peak bagging trip.

Books: Adirondack Trails: High Peaks Region by Tony Goodwin. ❖

Traversing the Tetons

Location: Grand Teton National Park, WY

by Ted Ehrlich

> "No mountains in the world are like the Tetons. Other mountains have foothills, but the Tetons plunge straight out of the flat valley into the clouds"
>
> – Paul Petzoldt

Memories can be painful and happy. As I drove through the darkness past the national park boundary near Moran Junction, I reflected a bit on my last trip to the Tetons. In June 2001, my Boy Scout troop took a trip to Grand Teton and Yellowstone, and during that trip we backpacked one night up Granite Canyon. I know it was my first backpacking trip outside of Colorado and maybe my second or third backpacking trip ever. Two distinct memories pop out from that trip. I remember how beautiful the mountains were, and how much my feet hurt afterward because they had outgrown my old boots. I ended up losing a toenail, but the experience stuck with me, and the Tetons have always been a special place to me.

In the past I had looked into backpacking the Tetons, however my goal was the John Muir Trail this past fall. Life got in the way with a job change and some medical bills, so flying to California and taking two weeks off wasn't going to work. I needed another plan for the Labor Day weekend and the Teton Crest Trail came to mind. The Crest Trail was too short for a 4 day weekend and I wanted something a little bit longer and remote. After studying the maps a bit, I figured that continuing on from Hurricane Pass north and linking up with the trails just west of the park might be a good way to traverse the entire park. Some research led me to Petzoldt's Teton Trails, an old guidebook from the 70's, where Paul Petzoldt described a route he called the High Adventure Trail.

The High Adventure Trail begins with the Crest Trail from Teton Pass to Hurricane Pass, following the trail through the southern end of the Tetons. At Hurricane Pass, an off trail shot straight to Table Mountain begins a whole new adventure in the Jedediah Smith Wilderness, eventually following a different Teton Crest Trail #008 through the east side of the Tetons. Eventually after Jackass Pass, the High Adventure Trail starts to bushwhack north to Lake of the Woods and Grassy Lake Road, ending at the road. I liked the idea, but it needed some refinement for someone that doesn't live in the area and doesn't want to end up in the middle of nowhere on a narrow dirt road. I noticed another trail that led from Jackass Pass to Berry Creek, eventually leading to the Glade Creek Trailhead near Flagg Ranch. Flagg Ranch is just off the main road that passes through Grand Teton to the south entrance of Yellowstone, making it easily accessible. Even better, a shuttle runs every day from Flagg Ranch to Jackson Hole, making a thru hike of the park a real possibility. From Jackson Hole I could easily hitchhike or take a taxi to Teton Pass to start the trip.

Permits were my next concern. I almost dismissed the trip thinking that getting a backcountry permit late in the summer would be too much of a hassle. However Petzoldt's book pointed out that a majority of the trail was outside of the parks boundaries. True enough, only a few miles of the Crest Trail were within the park boundary, along with the last 13

Left: Getting dropped off at Teton Pass.
Above: Grand Teton from Death Canyon Shelf.
Page 83: Park Boundary near Hurricane Pass.

miles of my alternate route from Jackass Pass to Glade Creek. The rest of the trail travels through national forest, which does not require overnight permits and has plenty of campsites. Next I made myself a datasheet for the trip with mileage splits, elevations, a few waypoints, and figured out the approximate mileage and expected campsites. Everything seemed to fall in place, making the planning part pretty easy. Unlike most of my past trips, I decided to go solo this time, so my gear list was minimized even more than normal. I packed a summer alpine backpacking kit and brought my ACR beacon as my only lifeline in case of an accident. Lastly, the Tetons have big game predators like bears and wolves, so I made sure to pack a quickly accessible can of bear spray, and I made sure that all of my food and smellables during the trip would fit within my Ursack.

The Trip

After passing Moran Junction, I drove through the darkness to Flagg Ranch and Grassy Lake Road. Since Glade Creek was a few miles down the road from Flagg Ranch, I brought my bike to help with the shuttle. Any bike will be able to handle the section of dirt road between the two, and at 4.5 miles, it's a quick ride. After locking up the bike at the trailhead, the plan was to camp along Grassy Lake Road at the primitive designated sites along

Above: Sunset in Alaska Basin, Looking at Buck Mountain.
Right: Overlook at Hurricane Pass.
Following Page: Grand Teton, Middle Teton, and South Teton.

the road. However the sites had been closed off with no trespassing signs and dirt mounds blocking them. This was unexpected, so I ended up just going to Flagg Ranch, where I located the shuttle in the main parking lot out front of the lodge. I figured nobody would mind me sleeping in the parking lot for what was left of the night, but a few hours later, the night watch of the lodge woke me up, telling me that I wasn't allowed to sleep there. After groggily explaining I was just waiting for the shuttle in the morning, he let me sleep the rest of the night out front, chastising me for not camping in the ranch's campground.

Seven A.M. came early, and as I boarded the shuttle to Jackson, I was too excited to let the lack of sleep affect me. As we drove south, my heart sank. A thick haze covered the horizon where the Tetons should have been, blowing in from an Idaho fire. I was afraid that the haze was not only going to ruin the views for the trip, but possibly aggravate my dormant asthma as I completed the trek. Soon enough, I made it to Jackson, thanking my driver Joe for the shuttle ride and having Tim from Flying T Taxi pick me up at the Home Ranch parking lot to head to Teton Pass. Both drivers were excellent and professional, and I recommend both services highly.

Tim dropped me off at the Phillips Trailhead, which is a 4wd road for the first quarter mile. The trailhead was very busy, but the crowds disappeared immediately as I headed up the road. As I worked my way up Phillips Pass, my worries about the haze dissipated. The valleys below me were hidden under the thick cloud of haze that had settled there, but the mountains were clear, without a cloud in the sky. The weather was perfect, and was predicted to stay that way through Monday, with some rain on the last day. After Phillips Pass, I headed towards the next high point, Moose Creek Divide, and I passed into the National Park. At this point, I anticipated a busier trail than the previous morning, since an alternate route to the Teton Crest intersected there, coming from Teton Village, where one could ride the aerial tram to avoid most of the elevation gain. From there the trail headed north to the first named lake of the trip, Marion Lake, a beautiful alpine lake against a steep rock face. Past Marion, the trail dipped out of the park, and then back in at Fox Creek Pass, the start of the Death Canyon Shelf. The shelf is a very beautiful area, with perfect views to the east and the Grand Teton consuming the skyline to the north. As I headed north, the Grand kept getting bigger and bigger, with the best view just before dropping over Mount Meek Pass into the Alaska Basin. Here, the Grand disappears behind a ridgeline, and Buck Mountain to the east becomes the focal point. As I passed the lowest point in the basin, the last rays of sunlight lit up Buck

Mountain with a pinkish orange alpenglow before disappearing below the horizon. I had a little more light left in the day, so I hoofed it in the last bit of twilight to Sunset Lake, a beautiful little lake with great tasting water on the north side of the Alaska Basin. I set up camp at an obvious spot just below the lake, enjoying some dinner before falling asleep under the stars in my bivy sack. Almost 20 miles down, and over 6000 feet of gain had worn me out.

Day 2 started off late, and set me back for the rest of the trip. The lack of sleep from driving so much the night before had caught up, and I shut off my alarm, waking up much later and hitting the trail at 9:45, feeling well rested. I headed up the last stretch of the Teton Crest Trail to Hurricane Pass, where the massive block which is the Grand came back into view, seeming almost so close you could just jump across the valley to it. Here the new route began with a social trail that ran just to the west side of the ridge toward Table Mountain, the obvious high point just north of Hurricane Pass. The social trail disappears after a short bit, but it's fairly easy to navigate through this trail less area. The south slope of Table Mountain is a terrible scree field from the saddle till 10,600 when the grade eases. I found sticking next to a thin line of shrubs more to the east kept me away from the loosest rock, but I still let off a few large rocks, so any groups traveling along this section need to be very cautious. The last couple hundred feet of Table Mountain is fairly stable and easy, and as I made it to the top, I was

Above: Free Trail Beer!
Left: Blair hiking down from Table Mountain.

surprised to find a small crowd at the summit.

Along the trail the prior day and a half, I had only seen about 20 people, most of them in camps along the Death Canyon Shelf and Alaska Basin. There were close to 20 people at the summit as I stopped to enjoy the view of the Grand, directly to the east of Table Mountain. A strange swarm of lady bugs covered the summit, and I swatted them off while I tried to take a few photos before hiking down. The hike down Table Mountain is fairly steep and long, losing over 3000 feet before the turn off to Fred's Mountain. I ended up having an enjoyable conversation with a local named Blair and a group on horseback offered me a cold beer during the descent, which I couldn't refuse. After the turn off, another 1500 feet of gain brought me to Fred's mountain pass, where I enjoyed my last view of the Grand, still massive against the eastern sky, and then went north over the ridge towards South Leigh Creek.

From here on, the characteristic of the trail seemed to change. The trail was below tree line more, with thicker trees, a narrower trail, and more of a wilderness feel. As I made it down to Leigh Creek, my heart sank. I was nearly out of water, and the wide stream bed which I assumed would be flowing was completely dry. I decided to take a quick break, slipping off my shoes to fix a hotspot. While I was working on my feet, a couple on horseback came by, and told me the stream was just underground at that point, and there were plenty of springs and streams just ahead. Sure enough, I quickly found some water, and I headed up towards the Granite Creek Basin. As the sun set, I found a nice spot to camp near 8700 feet. Again the sky was clear, and I setup the bivy after having some supper, enjoying the stars above.

At three A.M. I woke up, feeling something wet on my face. The stars had disappeared, blacked out by thick clouds, and I felt a few more rain drops. I didn't have the motivation to fully wake up and set up my tarp. Instead I lazily draped it over me and my backpack, tying it off to my bivy in case the wind picked up and tried to blow it away, falling back to sleep.

Above: Night Sky near Granite Basin.
Right: South of Nord Pass.
Following Page: Nord Pass.

A few hours later I woke up, with the rain clouds still looming over me. Apparently the weather decided to move in a day early, and the sky opened up within a half hour of getting on the trail. The first pass was between Granite Lakes and Green Lakes. The area between the two basins was beautiful, making me wish I would have hiked a little faster the day before to make camp there. After Green Lakes, I encountered my first stretch of missing trail just before descending to Badger Creek. At the creek I took a short break to dry out, running into a pair of locals doing the same trek as me, south bound.

From the creek, I headed up to Dead Horse Pass, with the rain breaking just before I crested the pass. I took a moment, and started the long descent into South Bitch Creek. As I descended into the creek, the rain came back as I passed several beaver dams in the lower section of the creek, spotting a beaver momentarily just before the trail junction. At the junction, I headed uphill, through the rain again, towards Camp Lake and Nord Pass. As I headed uphill, I noticed something I thought was unusual on the trail; snails. Hundreds of them had appeared on the uphill stretch, and soon I passed through the clouds at tree

line, above the rain just in time for the soft light of the evening to illuminate the valley. I found the area around Nord Pass striking, and as I crested, the sun disappeared over the horizon. Immediately on the north side I ran into thick fog moving up valley, making navigation in the dark nearly impossible. As I descended, the trail disappeared, forcing me to make camp as the fog started to become disorienting.

The last day began with a beautiful sunrise. The fog and rain passed during the night, and I had 26 miles to finish ahead before driving back to home. I was still off trail, but I could see down valley where the trail should intersect North Bitch Creek, where I filled up on water for the dry stretch ahead. After bushwhacking down the valley, I found the trail coming in from the east and the trail intersection. The next high point was just around Red Mountain near Young's Point, and the faint trail headed up around the side of the mountain. After finding the trail intersection on the side of Red Mountain, the trail disappeared completely. Cross country travel from here is pretty straightforward, heading towards Grizzly Creek and my last uphill climb to Conant Pass. I made it to Conant Pass just after noon, and with 16 miles left, I knew that I needed to dig deep for some speed. The rest of the trek was downhill on good trails, turning at Jackass Pass to head down into Berry Creek. Berry Creek ended up being one of the highlights of the trip. While being a very pretty hike, I ended up running

Above: Nord Pass.
Following Page: Jackson Lake.

into a black bear and a full size black wolf, a first for me. Ultimately I made it to the Snake River Corridor and made it to my bike at six, with a few hours of light left. The ride from the trailhead to Flagg Ranch was fast and enjoyable, and was a great finale to the trip. As I drove back to Moran Junction, the sun dipped below the Tetons, no longer shrouded in haze, and I enjoyed the views of the eastern face of the range I just traversed. The light disappeared as I exited the park, and a long drive took me back to Denver.

In retrospect, a few ideas jumped out at me. From my experience, the Tetons were fairly dry during the late summer. Maybe it was just from the low snowpack, but there were several extended dry sections that made water planning harder than other alpine

backpacking trips. Late summer means almost no wildflowers. Blair, the local I met on the trail, said that if I wanted to hike during wildflower season and get the most of the seasonal water runoff, early July may have been a better time to visit. Insects were nonexistent for most of the trip (except the swarming ladybugs at the top of Table Mountain), and the only part of the trail that felt crowded was actually the Table Mountain Trail. It's one of the highest peaks in the Tetons that doesn't require any resemblance of technical climbing and offers a great view of the Grand. Otherwise I only ran into a fellow hiker occasionally, and I did not see anyone on my last day until I started biking along Grassy Lakes Road. The most memorable pieces of the trip was Alaska Basin, Hurricane Pass, the Green Lakes area just north of the Granite Basin Lakes, and the area between Nord Pass and Camp Lake. The animal sightings in Berry Creek were also very exciting. While I was hiking, I noticed on the map an interesting alternate route. Hiking east from Nord Pass will drop you into Moose Basin, which will give you a few different routes in the remote areas of Owl and Webb Canyons. I think using either canyon as an alternate ending would be fun, and I look forward to exploring the Teton Range again in the years to come.

Best Time to Go: Mid June - September

Getting There: Jackson, WY is the closest major town and has a regional airport and rental car services for travelers needing to fly in. Flagg Ranch is 55 miles north of Jackson, just south of the entrance to Yellowstone.

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated #202 covers the entire trail.

Information: Petzoldt's Teton Trails is out of print, but can be found used. I have also provided my data book and gpx files on mtnnut.wordpress.com. ❖

GEAR MASH

Just Veggies Mix

Take this 4 ounce (Net weight) package on your next trip and you're covered with the equivalent of 1.25 pounds of mixed fresh vegetables. Eat right out of the bag or add to meals to boost nutrition on the trail. A resealable package seals the deal. About $6:
REI.com

Klymit Pillow X

This new pillow from Klymit offers up a unique design to automatically center your head at night, promising more comfort and stability. A heavier bottom fabric is utilized for durability. 2 ounces, $30:
Campsaver.com

McNett Sil-Fix

Repair slippery, tape-resistant silylon in the field with this packable kit from McNett. Weight and price penalty for the peace of mind? Less than an ounce and $7:
REI.com

Guyot Designs MicroBites Utensils

With a fork, spoon, knife, spatula, and spreader, this set has even the ambitious backcountry culinary artist covered. Nylon construction withstands high temperatures, and the set snaps together for easy packing. Less than an ounce and $5:
Campsaver.com

Outdoor Research Meteor Mitts

These 2 part mitts feature a removable 300 weight fleece liner with fold back flaps for additional dexterity when needed. The waterproof and breathable outer shell keeps things warm and dry when the weather gets sketchy or during an impromptu snow angel competition. 10 ounces, $70:
REI.com

Montbell U.L. Down Vest

Add core warmth for under half a pound with this 800 fill power vest from Montbell. Doesn't take up much space where pack real estate is concerned, and a DWR finish repels light moisture. About 5 ounces, $120:
Backcountry.com

Jetboil Sol Cooking System

Fast and efficient, the Jetboil Sol delivers hot backcountry meals in an integrated system weighing under 11 ounces – Pot included. Add a fuel canister and hit the trail. About $100:
Backcountry.com

GoLite Daylite 18 Day Pack

No over complicating the idea of a simple day pack here. Ripstop nylon construction, roll top design, a single inside mesh pocket, and an internal hydration sleeve round out the package. 18 liters of storage should get you there a back in a day. 11 ounces, $25:
GoLite.com

PHOTO TIPS FROM THE TRAIL

by David Cobb

Since long-distance hiking helped form so much of my photography, I thought it might be helpful to supply a few photo tips I picked up from the trail. These tips don't require the use of tripods or fantastic cameras; they are suggestions designed to help improve your composition and use of light, and will affect the overall impact of the photos you take along the trail. (I hope you enjoy these tidbits from this ongoing TrailGroove series.)

TIP #9: Photographing Trees

Every once in a while you come upon a majestic or magical-looking tree, one that has so much character and interest it screams for attention and a photo. Trees are not the easiest subjects to capture well, but I do have a few helpful hints to photograph them better. Often a silhouette works to capture the form of the tree and fill an uninteresting sky. Sometimes just photographing a piece of the tree works best, so look for its most interesting section–maybe it has beautifully textured or colored bark, green dollops of moss, or maybe the tree is in full blossom and that makes for the most interesting shot. If it's a tree within a beautiful setting, position it "arms-wide" framing the scene. Sometimes a tree might work best in tandem with others, for they stand together as long-familiar friends.

Left: Aspen Details.

Photographing a solo tree is much different than photographing in a forest, but a few forest tips also hold well for photographing trees that stand alone. First, much of the interest lies in those first few branches so look there for an interesting image. I also find that by walking up hill and shooting down on a tree (or level with it) works quite well. Here you might be on a plane which shows an old knot in the tree or a large hole or nest.

Backlit trees can be interesting too, especially in the fall when backlighting adds glow to fall's colorful canopy. The backlit form of a tree can also be interesting, especially at sunset or sunrise with a large ball of sun behind. On a foggy day this can also create crepuscular rays or "God rays" which shine through the branches.

Hopefully these few tips will come in handy the next time you come upon an old weathered tree of character. Capture what's best about it and you'll walk away with a successful image.❖

David Cobb is an avid backpacker and photographer. You can see more of David's images at www.dmcobbphoto.com

Check out our next issue for more "Photo Tips from the Trail" by David M. Cobb. Be sure to check out previous issues for his other great tips.

Left: Framing Tree.
Pages 107-108: Goodnight Forest.
Pages 109-110: The Walking Trees.

The Season Is Upon Us

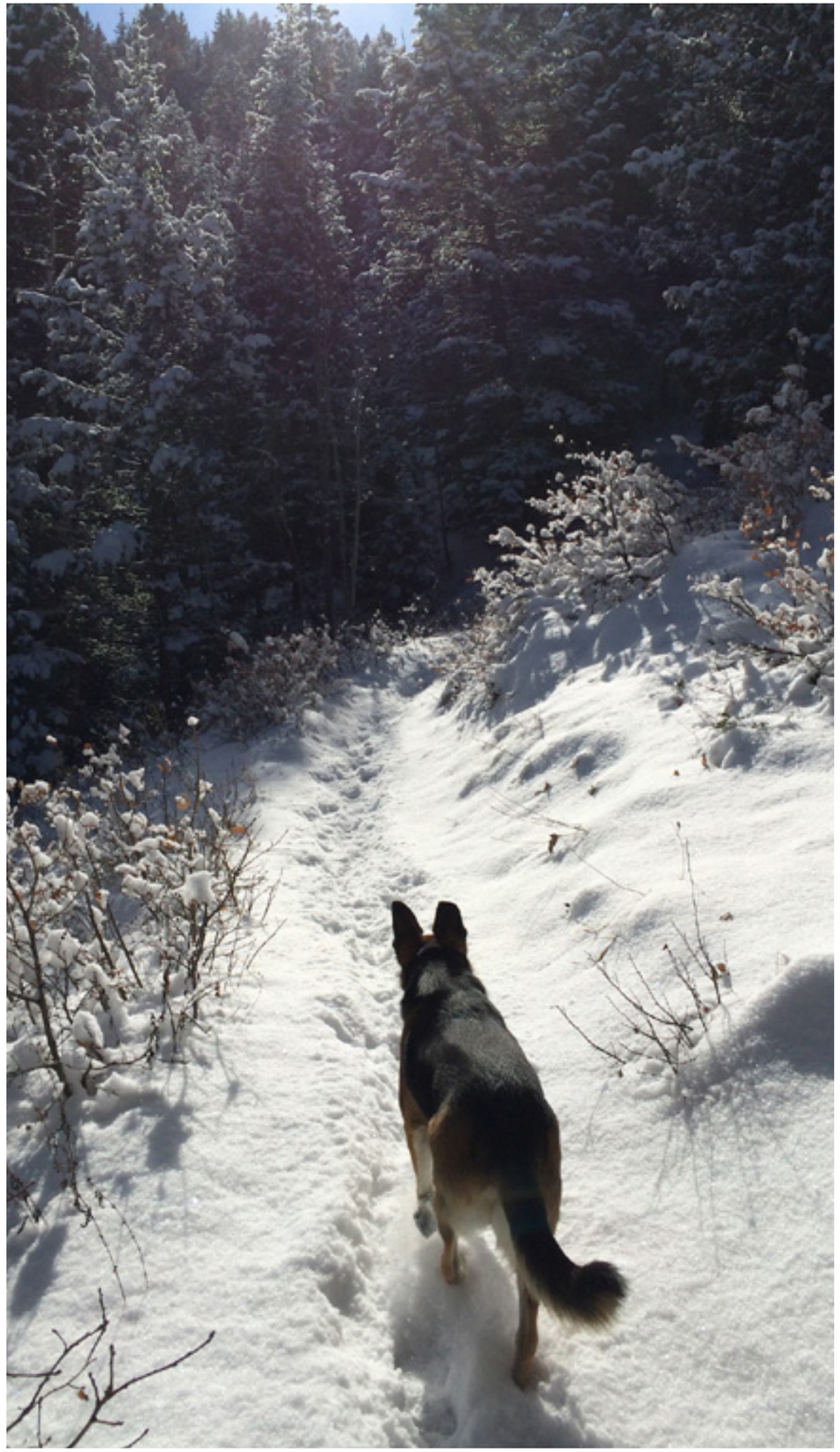
by Amber Howe

The season is upon us, friends.

No, not THAT season. There will be plenty of time for carols and eggnog and sleigh bells.

I'm talking about the days when you're awakened before sunrise by a snowplow. You stand in front of the window, clutching a mug of coffee and watching fat flakes fall from Heaven. You dig out your woolen hat and pull on thick ski socks, feeling unbearably warm until that first blast of brisk mountain air hits your face. You tug extra hard at the car door, the ice trying to seal it shut. There's that contagious glee that you catch from your happy four-legged companion, sitting shotgun with anticipation in her eyes. A wave of gratitude washes over you, for seat heaters and to-go mugs and Neil Young and this day.

I'm talking about the days of rosy cheeks and pink noses, of filtered sunlight shining through snow-laden branches. The trail is narrower than usual, a trench created by eager hikers who'd gotten an earlier start than you. You turn your face toward the sky, glittering icy crystals kissing your cheeks. There's the muffled crunch of footsteps on snow, a muted peacefulness on the trail. You recognize familiar landmarks one by one, now shrouded in a fluffy white blanket. There's a trail of doggy footprints that leads you to a snow beard and a wagging tail. The sky is extra blue set against the stunning backdrop of early winter.



These are the days of cold air in your lungs and a smile on your face, of pulling off your gloves as your body warms with the effort of hiking in deep snow. There's nothing quite like the feeling of stepping into your cozy home after playing in the snow all day, leaving your dripping boots by the door. You savor a warm cup of hot tea with cinnamon, feet propped up in front of the fire and still in your long underwear. There's a contented sigh from your tuckered-out companion, blissfully resting nearby. Your legs ache and your soul glows.

I'm talking about the bliss of starting and ending your day at the window in your slippers, anticipating your next snowy adventure while you watch the flakes fall like magic.

'Tis the season. ❖

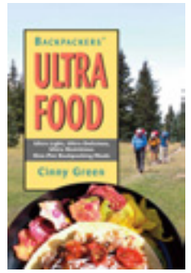
About the author:
Amber Howe lives and writes in Park City, Utah with her mountain man husband and a crooked-eared dog named Cholula. She chronicles their adventures in Utah and beyond on her blog www.theusualbliss.com where her mantra is, "TODAY is the happiest day."

Backcountry Cuisine: Spicy Squash Soup with Crispy Lamb and Cumin

For those of you who live in areas where you can camp year-round—or those of you intrepid enough to dig snow caves and hunker down, this squash soup makes a rich seasonal meal that's spicy enough to heat you from the inside. The topping of crispy lamb with cumin and sunflower seeds adds a taste sensation bold as a winter camper.

Soup "bark" is dehydrated pureed soup. The liquid is poured on solid trays then dehydrated until crisp. It often tastes good as a cracker or chip, too. Package in a zip-style baggie and rehydrate in hot water.

Remember: Save a bowl with lamb crisps for your dinner! Add a sprig of cilantro.



by Cinny Green

INGREDIENTS:

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 shallots, minced
4 cups vegetable broth
2 cups diced winter squash (such as pumpkin, butternut, or acorn)
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups collard greens, thinly sliced and cut in half
1 chopped small red chili pepper
4 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon red pepper chili oil (to taste)
black pepper and chilipowder to taste

1/2 lb organic lamb steak, sliced very thin
3 tablespoons whole cumin seed
3 tablespoons sunflower seeds
chili powder to taste
1 cup apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons coconut oil
3 tablespoons soy sauce or tamari

AT HOME INSTRUCTIONS:

In a soup pot, heat 1 olive oil, shallots, garlic, and squash on medium high. Sauté for 5 minutes. Add broth, soy sauce, and chili oil. Cover and simmer on medium heat for 10 minutes. Add the collard greens, chopped chili, cover, and continue to simmer until all ingredients are soft. Puree the soup. Adjust seasoning to taste.

Pour puree onto solid dehydrator trays and dehydrate until it becomes crispy. Break "bark" into pieces and package in a zip-style baggie. Label.

Freeze the lamb steaks until they are slightly firm. With a sharp knife cut very thin 1/8" x 1" x 1" pieces.

Toast cumin, sunflower seeds, chili in a frying pan with 1 tbs. soy sauce.

In a shallow dish combine apple cider vinegar, coconut oil, and 2 tbs. soy sauce. Grind ½ the toasted cumin, sunflower, chili mixture together (I use a coffee grinder) then add to the marinade. Add the lamb slices and refrigerate for at least one hour or overnight. Discard the marinade, place the lamb on a cookie tray and cook in a pre-heated 325-degree oven for five minutes.

Dehydrate the lamb until it is very crispy, like chips. Package the lamb crisps and the remaining toasted cumin, sunflower seed, chili mix in a zip-style baggie. Label.

IN CAMP:

Rehydrate the squash soup bark with 3 cups of water. Heat and serve with a generous sprinkling of lamb-cumin crisps on top. Add a sprig of dandelion greens or wild onion for color!

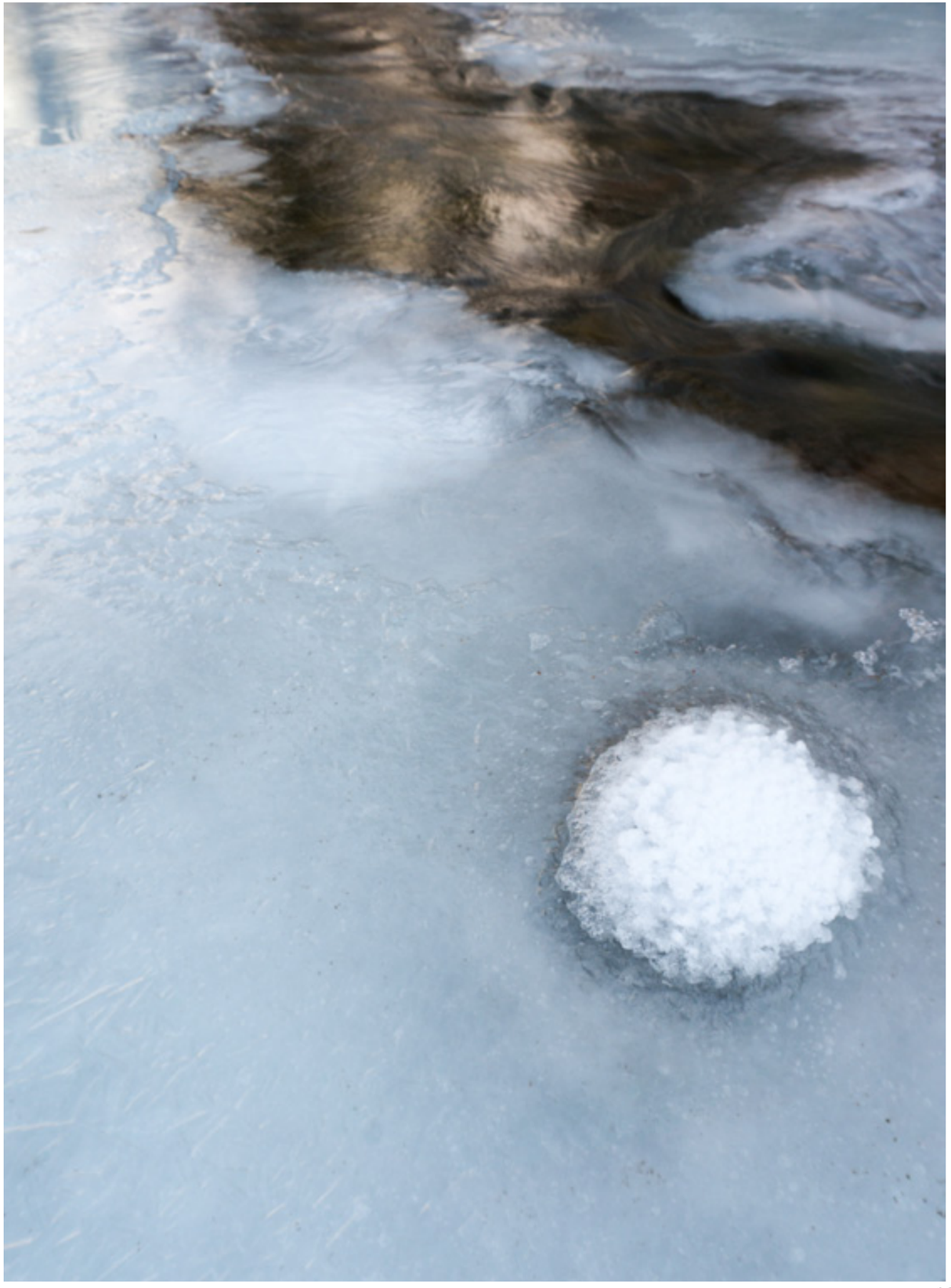
This goes well with a cranberry chutney. Find out how to make chutney roll-ups and other ultra nutritious and delicious backpacking meals in Backpacker's Ultra Food. Find it Here at Amazon.com.

The Drive Home: ‘13

by Aaron Zagrodnick

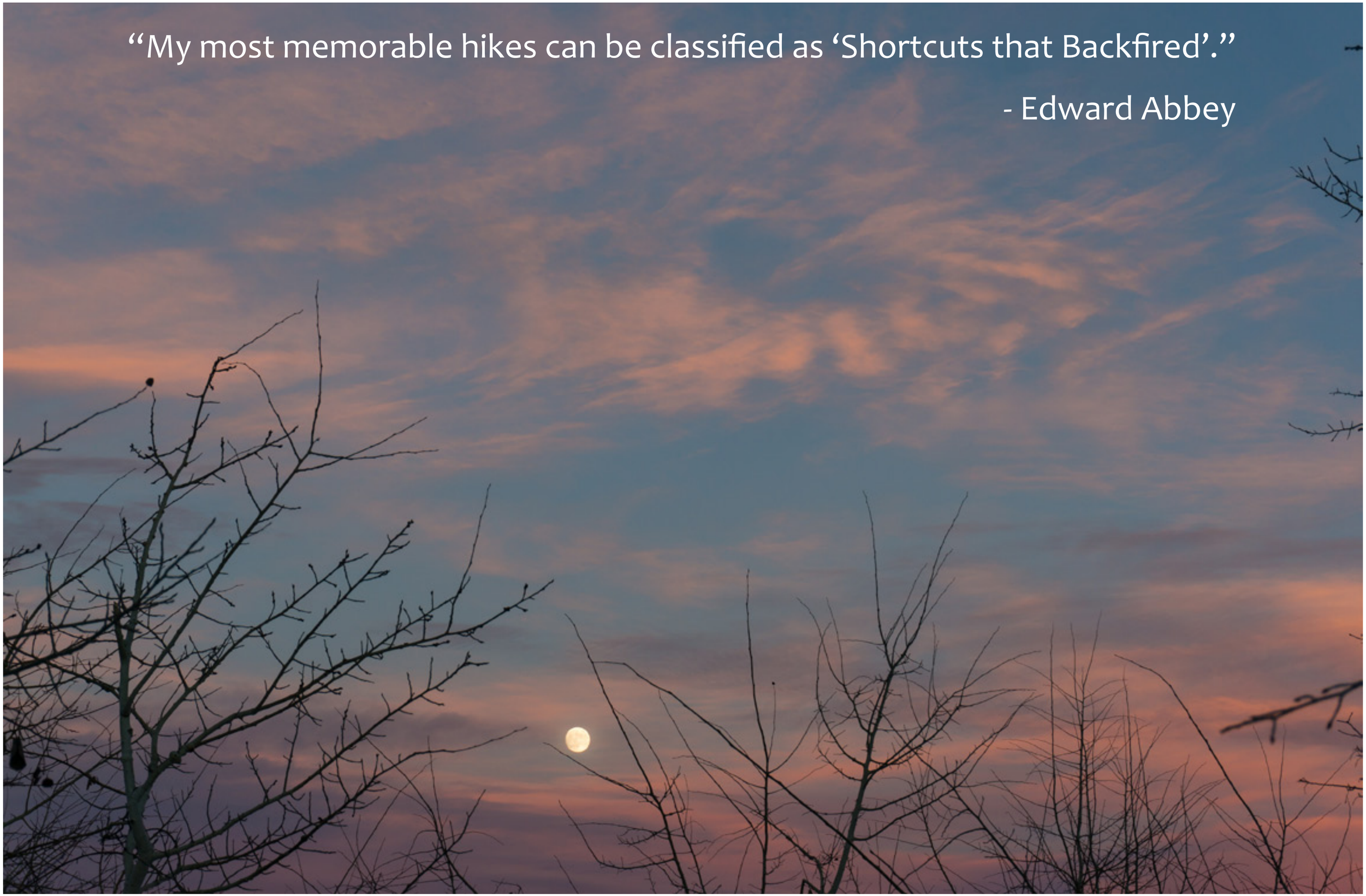
December. Day hiking. Cold. The high for the day was just below 0; it would fall to 20 below or colder overnight. I made it to the trail around noon. Only 2 other cars were parked at the trailhead. I stepped out of the car into a brisk wind and was immediately chilled even though I'd dressed quite warmly, and I spent the next few minutes addressing my layering strategy to block every bit of wind that I could. Eventually I hit the trail as if I was ready to step out onto the moon. The trailhead faded from view as I hiked into the canyon, following the mostly frozen river that lay at its base upstream. With the short days, some parts of the canyon never seemed to see any sun, but I was lucky enough to dip in and out of patches of sunlight as I hiked. A few inches of snow covered everything in sight. I looked up. Above and to my left the canyon remained in deep shade, but to my right the rim of the canyon was bathed in sunlight. My plan had been to follow the trail, gaining elevation a few miles until sunset, but I'd made the trip before and the plan was easy to abandon. On a whim and with the promise of full sun I left the trail and climbed to my right, ascending the slippery, sagebrush and snow covered slopes of the southern facing canyon wall. The effort of the climb helped to take away the chill and I soon found myself on flat, sunlit ground, looking down at the mostly shaded trail below. I'd found the sun, but with little in its way the wind outside of the canyon offered another challenge to staying warm. Keep moving.

I headed north into open sagebrush, leaving the view of the canyon behind, then angled west, gradually gaining elevation with each step. As I hiked higher groves of aspens and pines became increasingly common, and soon they closed in all around me. The wind loudly moved through the tops of their branches, but was contrasted with quieter forest at my level. Navigation was slowed as I moved through the trees, their branches zipping across the fabric of my pack as I ducked under and slid between them. But soon I came across a stale set of elk tracks in the snow, leading away at a 90 degree angle to my current, non-planned direction of travel. I followed them. The elk apparently, knew every nuance of the forest and travel became easier. Deadfall was avoided; the course of travel now favoring parts of the forest where the trees were spaced wider, their branches higher. I knew not where the elk had been headed or where I was going. Soon though, I lost the trail. Not because it became too faint to follow, but simply because more and more tracks had begun to show up in the icy snow, all leading in opposite directions along the forest floor. I stopped and drank the rest of my water that I'd stored outside my pack before it could fully freeze, then continued on a route that I thought would roughly parallel the canyon, unseen and somewhere to my left.



Just before 4 PM the sun dipped below the ridge. With sunlight now unable to be found, my fingers and toes quickly felt the results. I continued on another mile or two as stars and planets appeared overhead. Twilight would last a while. I scrambled south and found the trail I'd started in on; I'd hiked far enough to rejoin it after it exited the head of the canyon. I walked at a slow pace and followed the trail downhill until the river came into view below me. A gray jay flew, then perched at the top most point of a pine. The jay lazily looked left and right, although it appeared to be holding for dear life with its feet. It seemed impervious to the cold. Why was it here? Just a few miles away, a short flight for the jay I'm sure, a few thousand feet of elevation could be lost. There was less snow and warmer temperatures. Perhaps the jay just enjoyed the view. Other than the jay and myself, no other living creature braved the cold, at least that I could see. My fingers became too numb to work the usually non-intricate buttons of my camera, and even with two sets of gloves, operating the metal legs of my tripod pulled any heat I had left painfully out of my hands. It was only 5:30 PM, but dark. I slipped on my headlamp and hiked back towards the car, eventually emerging from the forest about an hour later to find that I was the only car in the lot. An easy target I guess; my windshield wipers were now missing. A small price to pay.

I made my way home, thankful it was a clear night in my wiper-less car. My fingers were painfully numb; I alternated holding the wheel with one hand with the fingers of the other hand over an air vent searching for any warmth, and wished the engine would heat up faster. The year was almost over. I was looking forward to next year, and back on what had been. 2013 ended up being a lot of things, with epic trips that can't be forgotten, and smaller excursions that might be forgotten when taken by themselves. But the moments will always be remembered no matter where the trip was or how far – The gray jay, the wrong turn, an unexpected echo, the sound of a river outside your tent at night. With each trip somehow a new memory is recorded, something else learned. Looked at as a whole? Quite the journey indeed. ❖


“My most memorable hikes can be classified as ‘Shortcuts that Backfired’.”
- Edward Abbey

Thanks for Reading Issue 12

Check out our next issue
(available in February) at:

www.TrailGroove.com