

TrailGroove®

Issue 13



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Issue 13

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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue: Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Erin Saver, Becca Chambers, Mike Adamovic, Peter McClure, Paul Magnanti, and Cinny Green.

Editor's Note

Although now well into 2014, with our first issue of the year we'd like to send out a big thanks to all of our readers and contributors for what was 2013! Everything that is TrailGroove only continues to get bigger and better with all the continued support, and as a result of that, TrailGroove will turn 2 in just a couple weeks. The support we've received from our readers and contributors has without a doubt been amazing and well, if you're reading this...We couldn't have done it without you. Whether you're a regular reader, contributor, have sent us feedback in the past or are new to the magazine, every single piece of the puzzle comes together to make TrailGroove Magazine everything that it is.

But now on to the present. Issue 13 might sound a little unlucky, but hey, at least we didn't release it on a Friday. We're excited to debut a new column – Trail News with Paul Magnanti who's here to help us stay on top of current events in the hiking and backpacking world. Also in this issue we interview Erin Saver, who's thru-hiked both the PCT & CDT and is setting out on the Appalachian Trail for the Triple Crown this spring, while Becca Chambers shares a few thoughts after her A.T. thru-hike. Colorado's 4 Pass Loop with scenery that doesn't disappoint, an intriguing New York destination, and day hikes in Jasper National Park give us all some destinations to put on our list. We also review an interesting sleeping bag from ZPacks, and have more great photo, culinary and trail tips to check out for the year ahead. Plus of course, a whole lot more. Thanks for reading Issue 13!



Contribute



Photo by Ted Ehrlich

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
Gear Reviews (Objective)
Photography
Video
Skill & Technique

Art / Illustration
Short Stories
Interviews
Backcountry Cuisine
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: Load Lifters



Load lifters are adjustable straps running from the top of each shoulder strap to the top part of the pack body (And ideally to the top of the frame) on many packs designed for overnight carry and beyond. By tightening these straps, the top of the pack is prevented from sagging backwards and a more efficient weight transfer to the hipbelt is achieved by removing weight from the shoulders. An angle of about 45 degrees (Running upwards from the shoulder strap to the pack body attachment point) is a good starting point and can be indicative of proper pack torso sizing. Some hikers may prefer to adjust their load lifters depending on terrain, loosening for balance on downhills, and tightening for uphill trail sections.

Not to be confused with Load Hauler, a term often assigned to larger, more robust backpacks designed for carrying heavier loads. 🗨️

Mt. Oglethorpe was the original southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail (AT) from 1937 to 1958. Mt. Oglethorpe, being the southernmost of the Blue Ridge Mountains and having a commanding view of the valley to the south, seemed a more logical choice for the southern end of the Appalachian Trail. Unfortunately, the development boom of post-World War Two caused this previously rural area to be built up. A less than stellar wilderness experience on this part of the Appalachian Trail to say the least. The southern terminus of the AT was moved twenty miles north to its current location at Springer Mountain in Georgia.

Since the move of the southern terminus, access to the summit of Mt. Oglethorpe has been highly restricted. However, due to the recent generosity of the local landowner, the summit of Mt Oglethorpe will again be accessible to the public in 2014. A small park and some hiking trails will be at the summit. For those interested in the history of the early years of the Appalachian Trail, it is exciting news. A person can again see the view that launched the journeys of Earl Shaffer, Gene Espy, Grandma Gatewood and other trail pioneers. And anyone can now enjoy what is reputed to be one of the best views in the southern Appalachians.

To learn more about Mt Oglethorpe and the public access, please see these informative websites:
<http://www.summitpost.org/mount-oglethorpe/620888>
<http://www.knowpickens.com/photos/eaglesrest.asp>



Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

Recently we've seen some interesting developments in the backpacking community. A mountain with historic roots will now be accessible again to the public, the thru-hiking season on the Appalachian trail is extended a bit, an infamous act of recent vandalism is being brought to trial with felony charges and a trail organization is being cautious about the upcoming wildfire season.

Last October in Goblin Valley, Utah former scout leaders Glenn Taylor and David Hall toppled over a large rock formation that was millions of years old. What took nature millennia to shape was ruined in seconds. An unwise decision that was exacerbated by being filmed and then going viral on social media sites. The Boy Scouts of America expelled the leaders from the local council as a result this act. After weeks of public outcry, the state of Utah has now formally pressed charges. The former scout leaders are due in court on March 18th. If convicted, the former scout leaders could face up to five years in prison and a fine up to \$5,000.

In Baxter State Park, park officials are launching a trial program to extend the camping season. The camping season will extend from the previous end date of October 15th to October 25th, 2014 and October 24th, 2015, at selected sites at Daicey Pond, Katahdin Stream and Abol Campground. For Appalachian Trail thru-hikers heading north, this extension means that they will have a larger window to complete their journey to Katahdin before camping is restricted in the park. The rangers may still restrict hiking Katahdin on any given day based on weather conditions.

More information about this trial program:
<http://baxtertrails.blogspot.com/2014/01/baxter-park-tests-extended-camping.html>

Possible wildfire conditions due to the California drought on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) have much impact for potential hikers and equestrians this upcoming season. Water sources may not be flowing as much or even dried up. Potential wildfire closures could cause reroutes of the trail itself. The Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) is also stating that alcohol stoves may be illegal to use in certain areas. A canister stove is the popular option during these open flame bans. The PCTA is advising to prepare now for a potentially dry year.

Please see this bulletin from the PCTA for more information:
<http://www.pcta.org/2014/critical-things-2014-fire-season-16533/>



TRAIL TIP 13: First Aid Kit Basics

by Ted Ehrlich

First aid kits can be a sensitive subject. What you need may vary based on your health and how much you have educated yourself on backcountry medicine. Formal medical care may be hours or days away depending on where you are traveling to, so packing an appropriate kit and knowing how use it is key. For a longer trip or a larger group, quantities of first aid supplies may need to be increased, and restocking your kit before trips is also very important. There are many kits out there, and building one instead of buying one may seem difficult, but knowing what is in your kit can keep the weight down while fully covering your needs.

The first thing that will be needed is small wound care for minor cuts and scrapes. For this, you should use an antiseptic swab (Povidone Iodine or Benzalkonium Chloride), then antibiotic ointment, and a bandage. I prefer fabric bandage tough strips since they don't peel off. If there is debris in the wound, a cheap 10cc syringe with clean water can irrigate the wound, but a ziplock with

a pinhole can work in a pinch. To cover other small wound issues, I pack three 2"x2" gauze pads, two 4"x4" gauze pads, and two butterfly closures. Leukotape is used instead of white medical tape since it is much tackier and useful for foot taping. Alcohol wipes are not used since straight alcohol will damage healthy tissue when used as an antiseptic, so don't bother bringing them. For major bleeding wounds, I carry a 25 gram Quikclot Sport silver sponge. This will stop bleeding as soon as possible, and the small amount of silver inhibits bacterial infections. For foot care I will bring a sheet of moleskin and tincture of benzoin in addition to the Leukotape I already mentioned (see Issue 10 for an in-depth look at backcountry foot care).

A small amount of over the counter medication is always carried, specifically ibuprofen for pain relief, an antihistamine to treat possible allergic reactions to poisonous plants and insects, and an anti-diarrheal, which can help prevent dehydration due to waterborne illness. Instead of



bringing bottles of pills, I repackage them in ziplock bags with a cutout of the medication instructions, writing the expiration on the back of the instructions. A pair of nitrile gloves and a disposable face shield is necessary for body substance isolation, protecting you from possible disease transmission when helping someone else. A water based burn gel is also useful to keep on hand as a topical anesthetic. All of this can be stored in a durable ziplock.

However, the lightest and most important tool you can bring to the wilderness with you is knowledge. It

is surprising how many items can be improvised when needed. Consider taking a wilderness first aid course or a wilderness first responder course if you will be leading trips. Before the trip, check on the other members in your group for any medical issues that you should be aware while traveling together, and bring any additional supplies that correspond to those issues. In addition to your medical items, having a personal locator beacon to alert first responders can save critical time in an emergency. 📍

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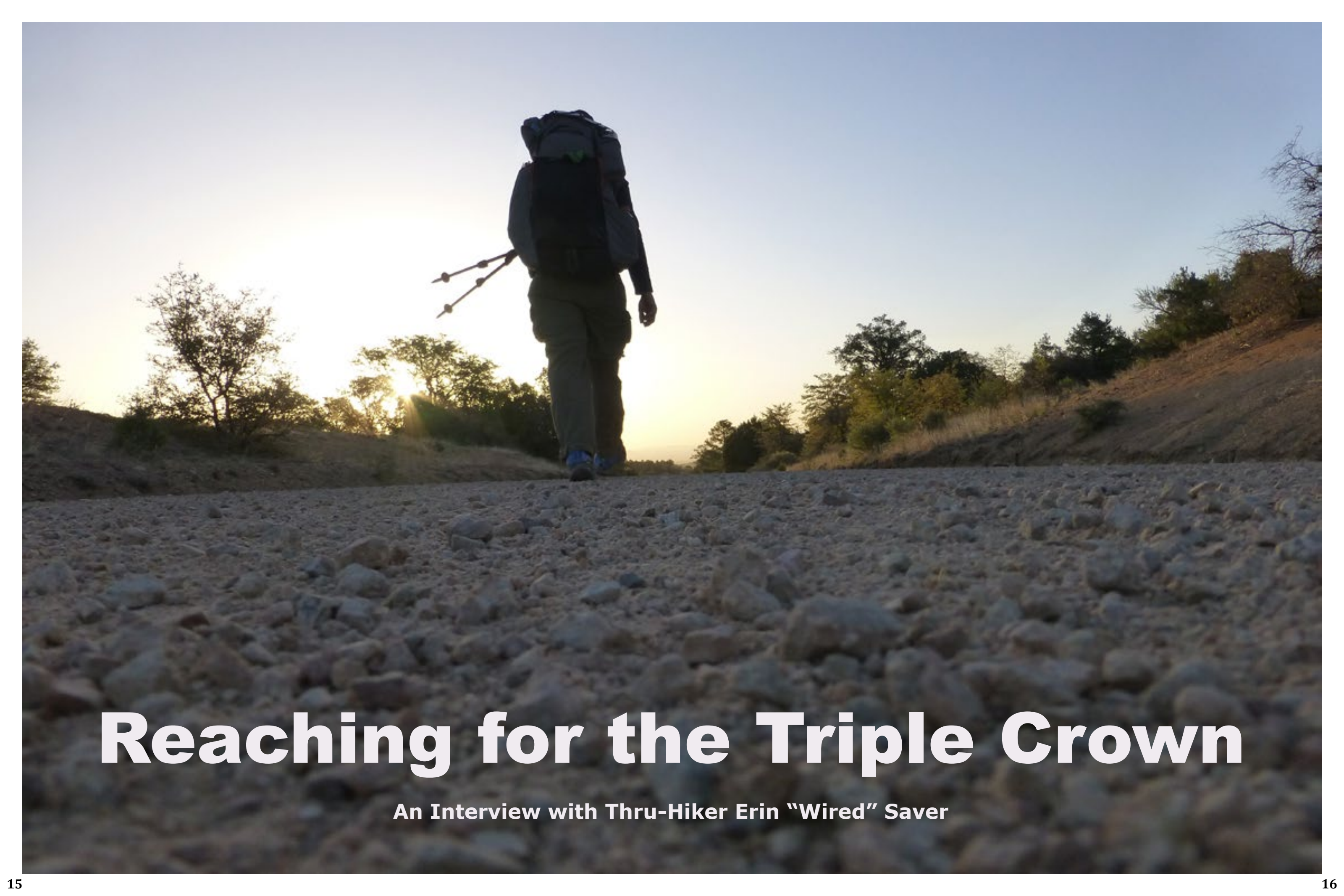
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Reaching for the Triple Crown

An Interview with Thru-Hiker Erin "Wired" Saver

After completing both the PCT and CDT, Erin “Wired” Saver will begin her thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail on April 17th to complete the Triple Crown. We recently had a chance to discuss Erin’s past experiences and future plans on the trail.

TrailGroove: What originally inspired you to start your thru hiking career and tackle the Pacific Crest Trail?

Erin Saver: The short answer is that I moved to Portland from the Midwest and learned about the surrounding trails through meetup.com. I got hooked and soon met another woman who had hiked a portion of the Appalachian Trail. That was the first time I even heard of women hiking the long trails and doing it solo. It opened my eyes to the possibility of doing it myself. She was planning to hike the PCT and encouraged me to join her. She ended up not hiking the trail that year and I ended up going on my own.

TrailGroove: Were you an avid backpacker before you set off on the PCT?

Erin: I liked the idea of backpacking, but was not exposed to it much having lived my whole life in Illinois. Before I moved to Portland in 2009, I was a recreational backpacker and car camper. I had an external framed pack and would do a two or three day trip once a year or so with my sister and friends. I had heard of the Appalachian Trail and knew little about it, but had visions of hiking it when I retired someday.

TrailGroove: You go by the name “Wired” on and off the trail. How’d you get your trail name?

Erin: I got the name Wired a couple of weeks into the PCT. I was taking my first zero at Warner Springs and had my laptop sent to me to do some blogging. I stayed up late getting the blogging done and accidentally woke up the two hikers I’d been hiking with when I came into the hotel room. I apologized telling them, “I can’t sleep. I’m wired.” One of them said, “That’s it! You ARE Wired!” I didn’t believe in trail names and swore I wouldn’t take one, but Wired just embodies me in so many ways that it was too perfect to reject. It combines my energy, little need for sleep, detailed blogging, and my enjoyment of watching tv shows on my smartphone in my tent at night.



TrailGroove: A lot of people hike the Appalachian Trail first. What made you decide to hike the PCT and CDT, and then go for the AT?

Erin: I didn’t even know the PCT and CDT existed a few years ago. I found out about the PCT when I moved to Portland. With the trail so close to home in Portland, I was able to hike on it and just became comfortable with the trail. My friend who encouraged me to hike wanted me to hike the PCT with her. I never imagined thru hiking solo, but that’s how it all worked out. I always thought the CDT was beyond my reach as a backpacker. Many of my PCT 2011 friends decided to hike the CDT in 2013. Knowing I could start with a group of friends made hiking the CDT less intimidating. I knew that if I was going to do the CDT, then 2013 would be the year. That just leaves the AT. I have to say I’m

pretty drawn to the idea of getting my Triple Crown on top of Katahdin at the end of the AT.

TrailGroove: Finding the time for “just” a single thru can be difficult or impossible for many people who would otherwise love to hike one of the long trails in a single shot. How do you make it happen between work, etc.?

Erin: I’m very fortunate in many ways to have a life that can easily adapt to the thru hiking lifestyle. I have always lived simply and saved as much as I could. I wasn’t sure what I was saving for, but saving for over 10 years before I discovered thru hiking and now working double between hikes has made it possible. I’m a substitute teacher, so I can easily leave work for months at a time without having to ask permission or worry



Left: Wired, known for her extensive blogging, finds service to post while charging with a solar charger in Colorado’s San Juan mountains. Photo courtesy of Christy Rosander.

Above: CDTers hiking north through the desert of southern New Mexico.

Previous Page: The sun rises on an early morning road walk in New Mexico.

about where I'll work when I return. In addition to substituting, I babysit and nanny weeknights and weekends for some very supportive families who are able to adjust when I leave on my long hikes.

TrailGroove: Would you suggest a northbound or southbound hike on the PCT and CDT?

Erin: Hike direction is all about personal preference and it varies depending on the person and the type of hike they seek. There are many factors that affect hike direction and everyone needs to decide for themselves what works for them. I personally like going northbound. I like the progression on the PCT and CDT of starting off in the desert and then building up to end with a grand finale in epic mountainous scenery.

TrailGroove: Were you mostly hiking solo on the PCT & CDT or with a partner / group?

Erin: I try to hike my own hike and enjoy overlapping with other hikers along the way. Given the record high snow year I had on the PCT and the navigational adjustments on the CDT, I was mostly with others the first half of both hikes. On the CDT, I was more comfortable with splitting off for a few days on my own when I felt like I needed space. I really like having the freedom to do what my gut tells me, but it's also fun to experience the trail with other hikers. I try to keep a balance because I get cranky easily when I don't get periodic quiet time alone. Even when



Above: The Continental Divide is also known as “the spine of the Western Hemisphere.” Watershed along the Divide will either go to the Pacific or Atlantic Ocean.

hiking with others, it's nice to be able to spread out and hike at my pace while still meeting up for lunch and camping together. When I did my stats for both the PCT and CDT, I found that I was only truly alone about 25% of the time.

TrailGroove: How many miles per day do you usually like to hike?

Erin: It depends on the terrain and scenery, but I've found my good pocket for hiking during a thru hike is usually

around 26mi/day. For both my hikes, once I averaged in my days off and time in town, I found that I averaged about 20mi/day.



Above: In a record high snow year, 2011 PCTers had the added challenge of high water crossings. Here, hikers cross Tyndall Creek in the Sierra.

Right: A view of Tower Mtn in the North Cascades of Washington along the PCT.

“Go with your gut and do what works for you. Everyone experiences the trail in their own way and that is okay.”

Erin: Plan as if you’re going solo. That way, you’re prepared for anything that may happen with hiking partners. Be sure to do at least one long multi-day trip to test out your gear and see how your body reacts to multiple days and big miles. Nothing can prepare you like getting out there and trying it yourself. There is a saying in the hiking world, “Hike Your Own Hike.” Go with your gut and do what works for you. Everyone experiences the trail in their own way and that is okay.



TrailGroove: What’s been your longest stretch without resupply?

Erin: The most number of days I’ve gone is seven days and that has happened a few times. One of those instances was in Wyoming where I had my longest distance traveled between resupplies. 170 miles from Atlantic City to Dubois averaging 24mi/day.

TrailGroove: Speaking of resupply, do you prefer a mail drop based approach or do you prefer to buy as you go?

Erin: I really like having my boxes shipped to me for many reasons. My food tastes don’t change much, so I know what I

want. I also like having the care packages my family, friends, and blog followers send included in my food drops. I have a care package tab on my blog and people are able to send supportive gifts with notes to a PO Box and my stepmom includes them in my resupplies. It’s really motivating! I can’t stand shopping and I do what I can to minimize time on my feet in town. It is an extra expense, but worth it to me. For the Appalachian Trail, I might be shipping myself less and buying more in town because towns are so accessible and I’ll be on less of a timeline.

TrailGroove: You’ve hiked a lot of miles. What advice would you give to someone heading out to start their first thru?

TrailGroove: How has your gear approach changed over the years? Anything you’re still packing from that first thru hike?

Erin: I have a certain comfort level and there are plenty of “luxury items” I like to have, which are mainly electronic. I lightened up and dropped almost three pounds from my base pack weight between the PCT and CDT. I have a detailed list of the changes on my blog. It was pricey to buy a lighter tent, backpack, and sleeping bag, but well worth it for a thru hike. The two pieces of gear that have been with me for all my hikes are my beanie and buff. Everything else has been upgraded to something lighter or needed to be replaced over the length of multiple thru hikes. I can say that most of my gear from the CDT will be used on the AT now

that I’ve reached my goal in lightening my base pack weight.

TrailGroove: What’s been your most memorable, favorite moment on the trail thus far?

Erin: There are so many memories that come to mind when I think of the trail, but the one that has had the biggest impact on me was when I was dropped off at the Southern Terminus to begin my first thru hike on the PCT. I went into the hike very level headed, downplaying it in my mind so I wouldn’t be let down if it didn’t work out. I approached it mentally like just another weekend backpacking trip. As I rode in a silent van with other hopefuls to the border, I felt an overwhelming feeling of emotion that

came out of nowhere! I had prepared in every possible way for the hike, but nothing could have prepared me for that unexpected wave of emotion. I've never had anything hit me like that before and I cried uncontrollably... I still can't describe it other than to say that I was feeling what it felt like to LIVE life and hadn't even known I wasn't truly living until that moment. It was really powerful and my life has been forever changed in the most amazing way ever since.

TrailGroove: What's been the most difficult?

Erin: The most difficult times for me have been when I feel like I've bitten off more than I can chew with the blogging. The

popularity and following of the blog was never intended and it has taken on a life of its own. It has given me a great sense of purpose. For many followers, it has given them the hike they may never get to take. For others, it is a source of inspiration to get out there and do the same. I'm a perfectionist and the commitment I feel to the blog can overwhelm me at times. I've had meltdowns in towns when I feel like all the correspondence involved and posts are more than one person can handle. There are days when I wish I could let it all go and just hike without that added responsibility. Then I remember how I was inspired to hike by reading online journals. Knowing I can do that for other people makes it all worth doing.

TrailGroove: Walking all day everyday burns some serious calories. Any favorite trail foods that you've found to work really well?

Erin: I am not the best person to ask about trail food. Honestly, I eat a lot of processed junk food, but the energy bars seem to do the trick for me. I like to keep a variety and aim to have 6-8 bars a day with Clif Bars, Odwalla Bars, ProBar Meal bars, Promax bars, and Nature Valley Bars. I force down a bag of almonds each morning and I think that gives me a good start to the day. A great pick-me-up that I love on each leg is having a baggie of Starbursts and Skittles. It's a very welcomed change from all those energy

bars to get a burst of flavor like that after a long climb.

TrailGroove: Thru hiker cravings and appetites can be legendary. What's your favorite food in town?

Erin: When I'm on trail, I totally crave chocolate milkshakes, pink lemonade, burgers, and fries!

TrailGroove: If someone had two weeks to hike any section of the PCT or CDT, where would you suggest they go?

Erin: For the PCT, I'd tell people to do the section that overlaps with the John Muir Trail in the Sierra. Few places in the world are as revered as the JMT. The CDT is a more difficult one to answer. I can't think of a two week stretch that didn't have some kind of extended road walk or navigation through brush. Most CDT hikers would agree that the Wind River Range in Wyoming is a special place. Thru hikers only go through there for about four days, but section hikers can do less miles each day to really take it in. A guide to the Wind River High Route was recently created and claims it to be, "the finest non-technical Alpine route in North America."

TrailGroove: Your AT hike is right around the corner. Northbound or southbound? Do you have a planned start date?

Erin: I'm looking forward to starting the AT in mid April and going Northbound.



Left: Red Rock Lake along the CDT in Glacier National Park.

TrailGroove: What are you looking forward to on the AT?

Erin: After this past summer spent on the CDT, I'm actually looking forward to a break from navigation. I hear that the AT is so well marked that I won't even need to carry maps. I'm also looking forward to a more relaxed hike that doesn't require as much planning and has less of a rush to make it north before impassable snows hit as compared to the PCT and CDT.

TrailGroove: Do you plan to approach the AT any differently than your previous thru hikes?

Erin: First off, I'll be bringing an umbrella hiking for the first time! I really hope to approach this trail differently though. I'm going to try to be more easygoing on the AT. People who know me on the trail,

know that easygoing is not a word that is synonymous with my personality. The goal would be to plan less, try not to be on such a schedule, and be less structured. All of that is not in my nature, but the AT has a more relaxed atmosphere and there is no rush to finish the trail. Also, the AT is a more social trail and I know I should try to experience it as such, but my "wiredness" gets in the way of that most of the time. Having more people around me tends to overwhelm the senses and I burnout. Finding a good social balance is definitely going to be a challenge on this trail.

TrailGroove: So after the Triple Crown... What's next in your hiking career? Any plans?

Erin: My goal is to complete the AT by Sept 1st so that I can make the cutoff date



for ALDHA's Triple Crown each season. If I am still energized, the current plan is to immediately jump on the Long Trail, which is America's oldest trail, and runs the length of Vermont. Completing the 200mi or so that don't overlap with the AT will take me up to the Canadian border and that just feels like the right way to end the hike this summer. I have dreams of a "Triple Crown Tour" in which I could travel the US next fall and speak about my hikes, but I know it's a long shot. As for hikes in the future, I'd like to continue this pattern of doing long hikes each year while my body and pocketbook can still support it. Trails at the top of the list are the Pacific Northwest Trail, the Great Divide Trail in Canada, and the Te Araroa Trail in New Zealand.

You can keep up with the latest on Erin's hike on her blog at www.walkingwithwired.com, where she will be updating her trail journal as she hikes the A.T. in 2014.

Left: A misty foggy day along the PCT in Northern Oregon.

Above: The Collegiate Wilderness in CO was one of the highlights for Wired along the CDT.

Pages 27-28: The Southern California desert along the PCT.

Pages 29-30: A view of Mt. McLoughlin as the PCT skirts around it in Southern Oregon.

Pages 31-32: A memorable sunset along a Wyoming road walk near Rawlins.

Pages 33-34: The rewarding views of Glacier National Park near Dawson Pass.

Pages 35-36: Sunrise on the CDT at the start of a day in Wyoming.

Pages 37-38: The start and finish of the CDT. Wired hiked 2,848mi over 134 days from Mexico to Canada.















Jasper Day Hikes

Location: Jasper National Park, Canadian Rockies

by Peter McClure



Canada's Rocky Mountain Parks are a great location for hiking, and attract millions of visitors every year. At 10,878 km² (4,200 sq. mi.) Jasper is one of the largest, but Banff, Yoho and Kootenay National Parks are also part of the network as is Mt. Robson Provincial Park in British Columbia and Waterton in Southern Alberta. Fortunately, most of the tourists tend to go to the commercial hub of Banff, leaving the rest for hikers and others who enjoy the wilderness.

But my philosophy has always been that I want to take people places they never thought they'd go, to see things they never expected to see, and to do things they never thought they could do. With that goal in mind, I've been taking groups of people into Canada's national parks for many years. From beginners to experienced hikers, there are rewarding dayhikes everywhere, and I've selected a few that first-time visitors might enjoy.

One I especially like for new visitors to the Parks is the **Sulphur Skyline** trail.

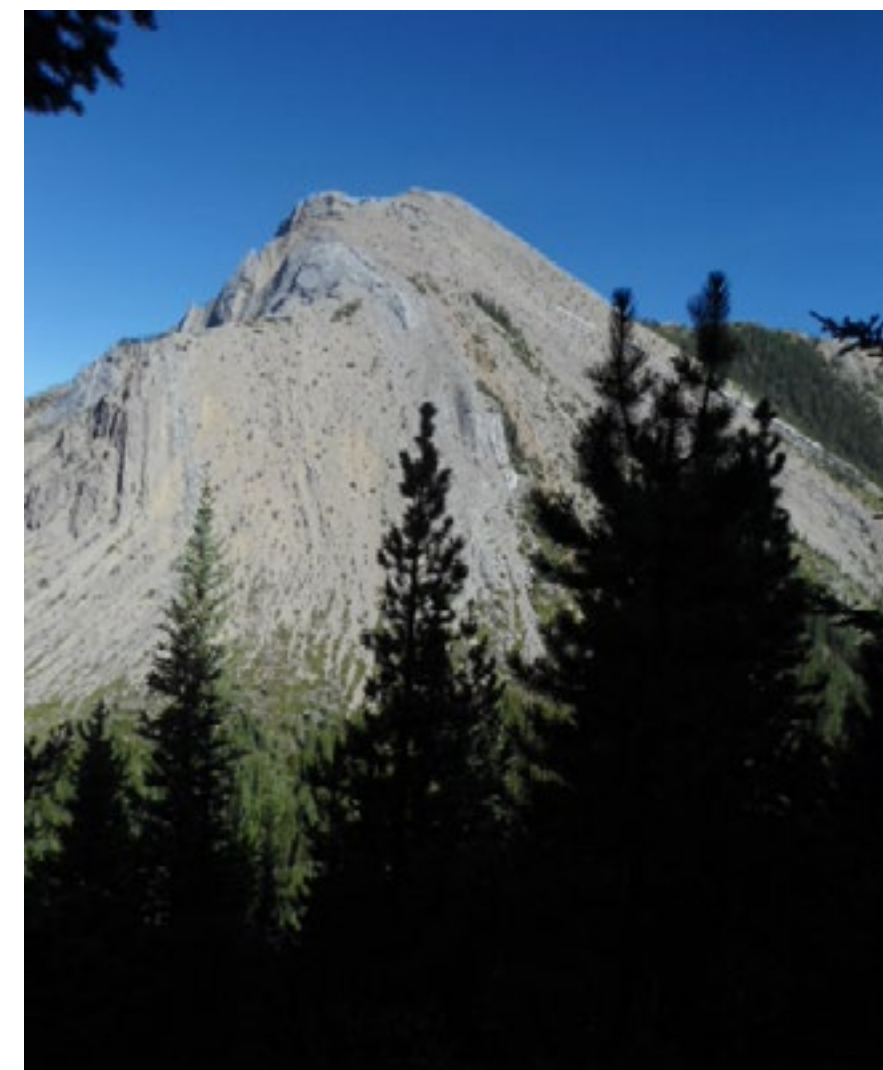
Leaving from the parking lot at Miette Hot Springs, a moderate climb up only 4 km (2.5 miles) of trails gets first-timers to the very top of a real mountain, with great views of the surrounding peaks and the scenic valleys below.

The first section of the trail is about a kilometer long, and rises steadily up a smooth path beside a stream, before turning left and starting a long ascent across the side of a mountain. You reach a junction where the now-closed Mystery Lake trail joins, and just a few steps later, the real work begins.

The total elevation gain to the top is 750 meters (2,460 ft.), equal to many of the more difficult trails in the Park, but a series of 17 switchbacks over the last few kilometers eases the pain. Setting the pacing to include brief stops at every one ensures that everybody in the group makes it all the way up, and the same principle can be used for slower hiking partners. After all, the key to a mountain hike is that anyone can get to the top, as long as you're willing to take your time!

When you've finished all those switchbacks, you'll pop out of the treeline at an alpine meadow. In front of you is a large white boulder, an 'erratic' left behind by the glaciers. It's a nice place for a break and for photos, and less ambitious hikers may want to wait there while their companions continue to the summit. The last section is a short but challenging ascent up a slippery scree slope that adds a bit of extra excitement. While quite steep, it is well worthwhile – just an extra hundred meters or so gets you that feeling of being on top of the world! From the summit, you will have views of the mountains and valleys all around. You will be looking back at the Miette Hot Springs down the valley far below, and the Fiddle River valley on the opposite side of the mountain.

It takes a bit of determination, but with only a few hours of hiking, visitors can count a new and spectacular achievement among their accomplishments. Expect to spend about 2-3 hours going up and about 1 ½ hours coming back down again, then plan an hour's soak in the hot springs before heading back to town.



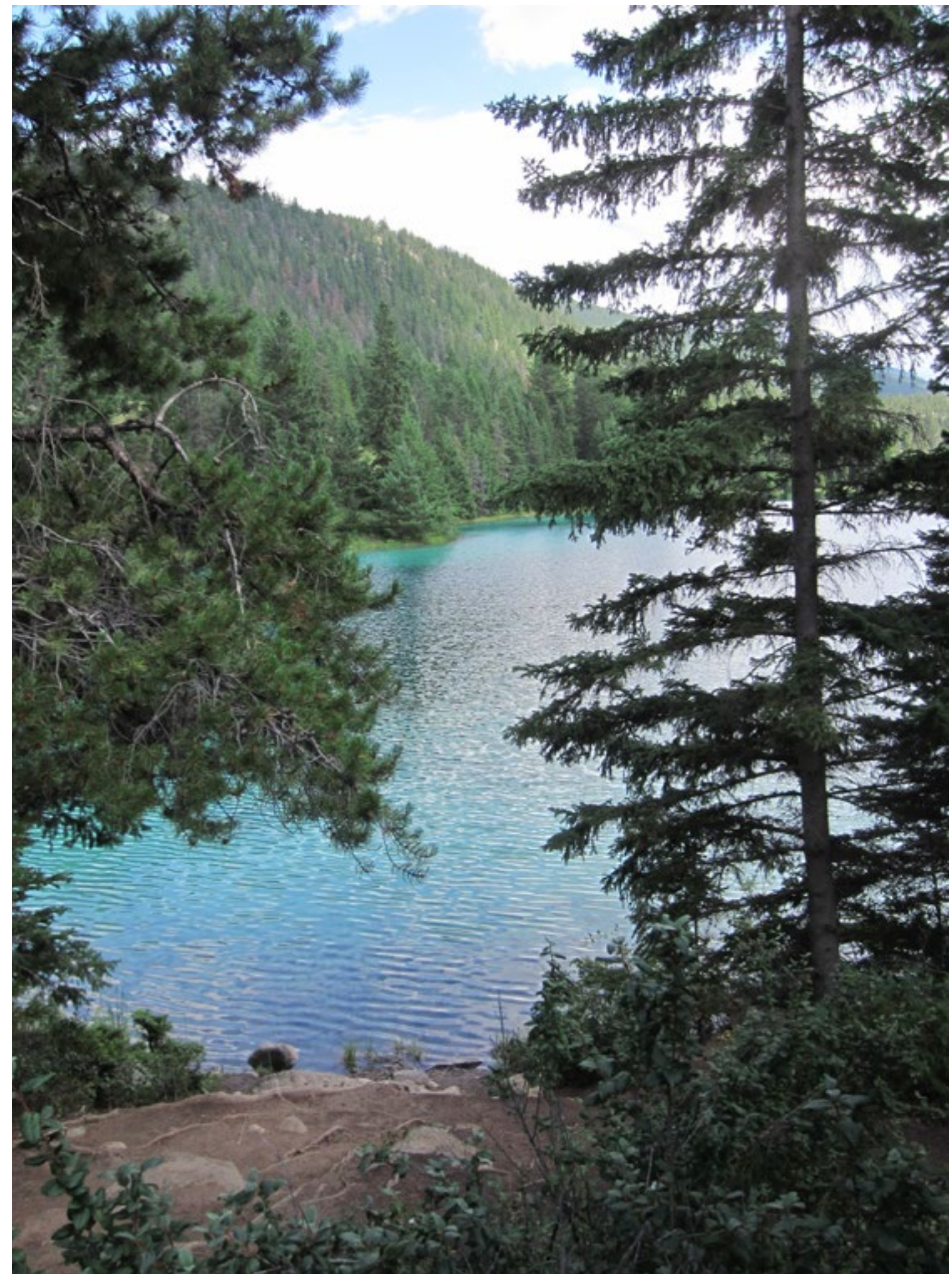


Another nice walk is the **Valley of the Five Lakes**. Just a few kilometers south of town, the trail offers easy grades, nice scenery, and a forest experience suitable for every age and ability. The eventual destination, as the name says, is a string of five interconnected lakes paralleling the Athabasca River. In summer, they are different shades of sapphire-blue, and coupled with the mountain backgrounds of the Athabasca valley, the opportunities for beautiful photos are endless.

The main trail begins in the forest, crossing a series of low, lateral moraines, then after less than a kilometer, arrives at a lovely little valley. With open meadows and views

of the surrounding mountains, it's a nice place to pause for a break.

Crossing a wooden footbridge, you reach a junction where you can choose either to continue ahead, or select other trails leading to more difficult routes. Left takes you back to the Jasper townsite, or the option of an alternate 10 km route encircling the five lakes, while a right turn takes you 9 km farther up the valley to Wabasso Lake. Most hikers will go straight ahead, climbing the opposite side of the valley. Look for ancient Douglas firs and spruce trees on the warm, west-facing slopes, and aspen groves at the top.





Once back into the forest, you soon reach a trail marker offering a left or right fork. The trail is a loop, so either one works, but my preference is to stay left. More moraines make a bit of a challenge. You'll find low hills and a few slippery spots, some steeper sections, and tantalizing views through the treetops of the mountains above. Very soon, you realize there's a lake to the left – a bit of a push through the bushes provides a great view of the first lake and the mountains behind it, and just a few meters farther down the trail shows you the fourth lake on your right.

The trail traverses the eastern slopes above the second and third lakes, and

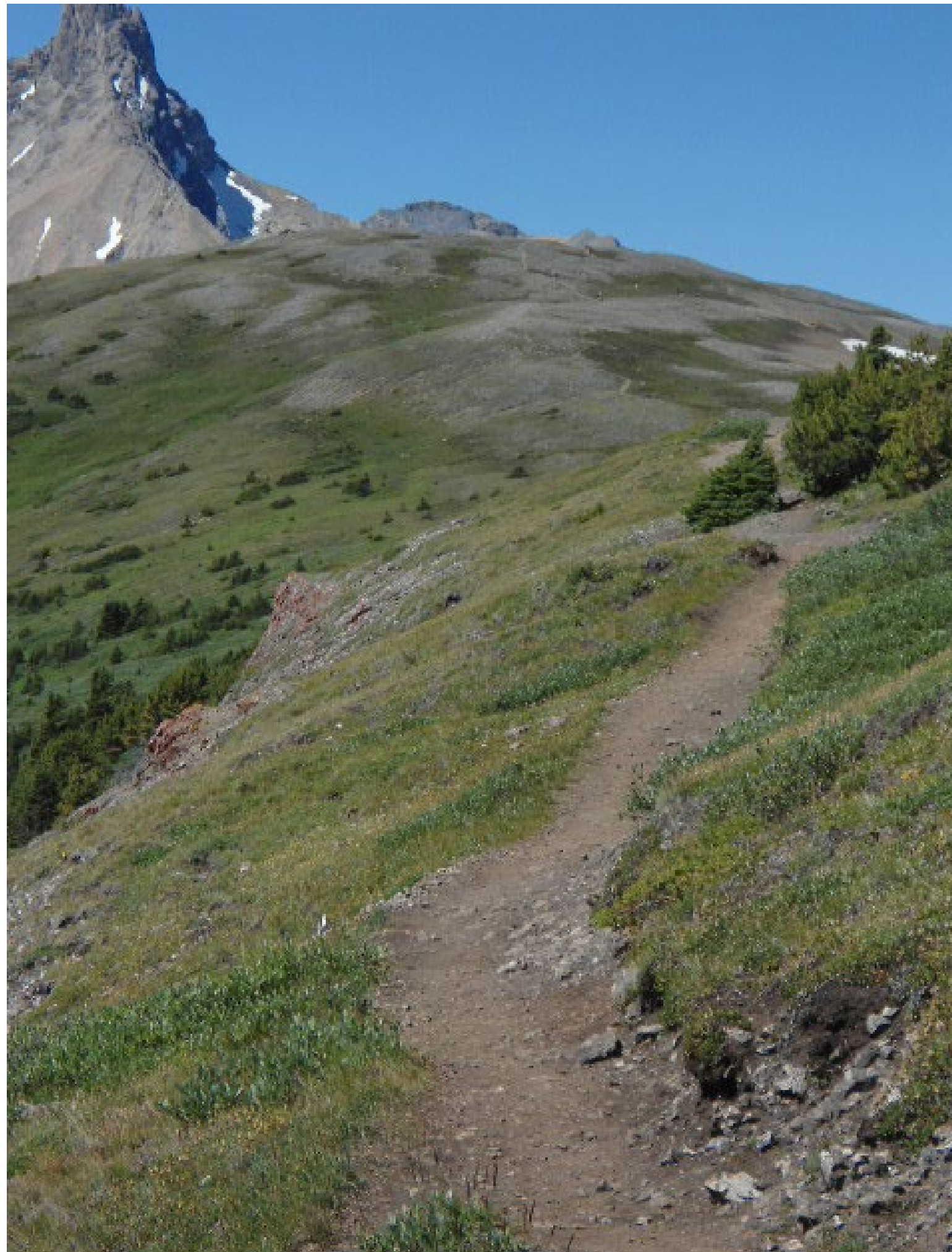
the fourth, then you arrive at the fifth. Each lake is a slightly different colour, but all are some shade of the turquoise blue that Rocky Mountain lakes are famous for. The last lake is larger than the others, and you will see a couple of old rowboats chained to the trees for fishermen to rent, and some nice views of the lake. Stop and take a rest before following the trail back around. You will still have a few hills to climb, but there is nothing too challenging. The Valley of the Five Lakes is a good trail for kids and for hikers who'd rather take their time, and it offers a rewarding walk without too much fuss. Total distance is about 4.5 km and the elevation gain is nominal.



A personal favourite is the **Bald Hills Trail**. It's not for beginners, since there can be some route-finding involved, but those with some basic skills will have no problem. Starting at Maligne Lake (a popular destination for tourists because of its scenery) the trail begins with an elevation gain of 450 meters (1,475 feet) up an abandoned fire road. At first, it's not a particularly spectacular route, but just a few kilometers of walking up a moderate grade leads to an old fire lookout just above treeline, with nice views of the lake and the whole Maligne Valley far below. But don't stop there – rising above you is a steep bluff, and a track across its slopes leads to the real destination out of sight behind an outcrop.

Just a short walk across the edge of the treeline brings you to a rocky alpine meadow. Three different peaks are now within easy reach, and the route to the farthest lies just ahead. A bit more elevation and some hopping across a boulder-field gets you to the summit. It's a nice place to stop for lunch, with wonderful views of the lake and the mountains all around, and a few boulders to shelter behind if it's windy. Take a break and enjoy the scenery!

The route to the next two peaks involves a descent back to the meadow, heading back the way you came, then a bit of easy ridge-walking up to each summit then down the slopes of each one, before you wind up back at the top of the bluffs. Straight down from there gets you to the fire lookout,



and another hour or two puts you back at the parking lot. Depending on your route, the maximum elevation gain would be about 700 meters and the distance would be around 10-15 km. A typical day on the Bald Hills will take about 5 to 6 hours, so you'll still be able to make it back to Jasper with plenty of time for supper and a cold beer.

Like Sulphur Skyline, **Parker's Ridge** is another one that is easy to do and offers unusual rewards. Located just south of the Icefields, the trail leaves straight from the highway and immediately begins a 250 meter switchbacked climb up the east face of the ridge. It's a slog, but to compensate you will very soon leave the treeline and be rewarded with good views of the surrounding mountains.

Once at the top, the adventure begins! The main trail leads ahead and to the left, curving across the southern face of the ridge. Soon, you begin to get glimpses of the Saskatchewan Glacier far below, and the river valley heading south towards Banff. Few people have seen a glacier, and fewer still have seen one from above! There are lots of opportunities for spectacular photos; the glacier or the valley, the alpine meadows and tundra, and watch for a herd of mountain sheep that live there. For many people those views are more than enough, and they are happy to return to their cars.



But there is another option as well. When returning, stronger hikers can stay left, watching for trails leading up a low hill. It's not much farther, but hidden behind that hill is Mt. Athabasca! Once on top, hikers can get a good close-up view of the mountain, and Hilda Glacier on its south flank. Be warned, though – this is open alpine tundra, and it's right next to a major icefield. On a warm summer day, you might be wearing a T-shirt in the parking lot, but by the time you reach the ridge-crest, you'll be looking for a sweater. On top at the Mt. Athabasca lookout you'll probably need a windshell as well to handle the cold winds coming down off the glaciers, and a hat and gloves might also

be helpful. Stone windbreaks have been constructed to shelter behind, but that doesn't mean you'll be warm!

Just to the north is **Wilcox Pass**, a 350 meter hike that overlooks the Athabasca glacier, home of the snowcoaches that take tourists up onto the ice. From the far side of the valley, the Wilcox Pass trail starts with a nice hike through the forest. The trail is rooted and eroded in some spots, but quite passable. Soon you will leave the treeline and reach the first of many outlooks. Nice views, and the terrain starts to open up. Wilcox Pass has been described as 'the one you will compare all others to' – it has everything, from



mountains to glacier views, to flowers and alpine meadows, to mountain sheep and mountain streams.

The hike is especially nice in mid-summer, when flowers come out everywhere – try for the last week of July or the first week of August. Like many trails in the National Parks, this one has suffered from severe trail-braiding. The alpine terrain is very sensitive, and takes a long time to recover from even the smallest footprint. Try to stay on the beaten path so there's something left for others.

Following the trail takes you high into the alpine, and you will be rewarded with views of the glaciers and mountains in the area. Mountaineers will have access to Wilcox Peak and to the surrounding summits, but most travelers will be

content with the scenery, the flowers, and perhaps a glimpse of the mountain sheep that live there. There is a cairn at the top of the pass and most people stop there before retracing their steps. There is an unofficial trail that continues down the other side and ends at Tangle Falls, but you would have to have a car parked at both ends to do the trail as a through-hike. The distance to the top of the pass is about 4 km, so expect to take 3-4 hours to do it. A pretty good destination, though, if you're driving down from Jasper.

Obviously, there are many more great hikes in Jasper National Park, from easy pond loops to week-long backpacking trips. Some are more challenging than others, but they are all spectacular and rewarding, and all reflect the character that is unique to the Canadian Rockies.

Best Time to Go: June through October. Bear in mind that millions of tourist go to the Parks every summer, so if you're looking for more solitude (and lower prices!), the shoulder season months of June, and September/October are probably best.

Getting There: From Calgary, take the Trans Canada Highway into Banff National Park (1 hour), and turn north on the Icefields Parkway (Hwy 93) to get to the town of Jasper. From Edmonton, take the Yellowhead Trail (Hwy 16) west to Jasper (allow 4 hrs.)

Information: You will be required to buy a national park pass, but access to the trails is free. Day passes are \$9.80 per day per person or a family pass can be purchased at the gates for \$19.60 per day. Annual passes are also available.

Maps: The best maps for the Rocky Mountain Parks are available from [GemTrek](#). Less detailed maps are also available free from the Park Information Office.

Books: The 'bible' for hikers is the '[Canadian Rockies Trail Guide](#)', by Brian Patton and Bart Robinson. For everything you ever wanted to know about the Canadian Rockies, look for the '[Handbook of the Canadian Rockies](#)' by Ben Gadd. 📖

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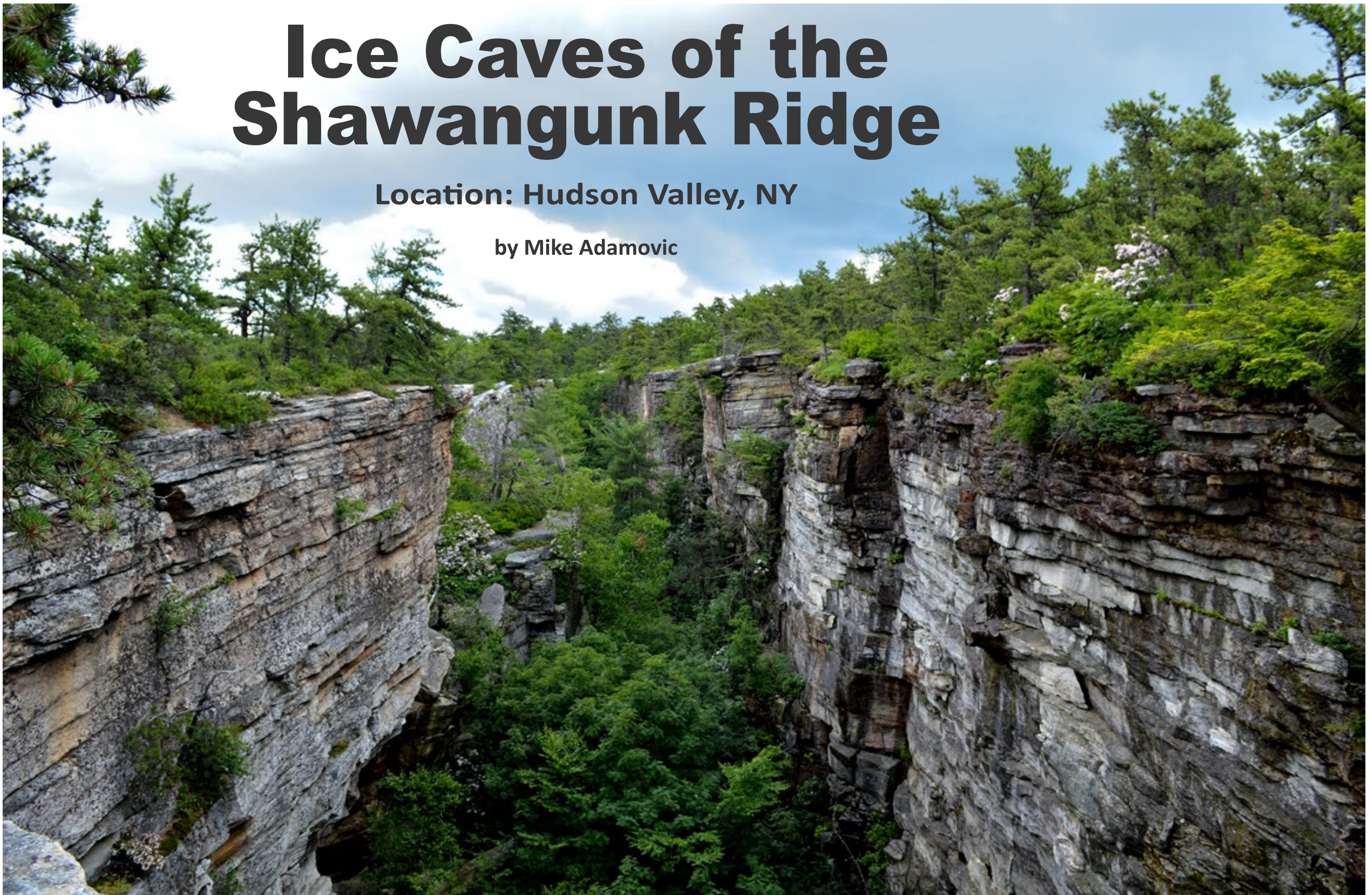


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Ice Caves of the Shawangunk Ridge

Location: Hudson Valley, NY

by Mike Adamovic



Nestled deep in the Shawangunk Ridge on the extreme western periphery of New York's Hudson Valley lies one of the least known, but most wild and adventure-laden hikes in the region. "The Ellenville Ice Caves" as they have come to be known over the years cannot be compared to anything else around. The surrounding Hudson Highlands, which are universally popular with locals and tourists alike, for providing visitors with craggy views from

dizzying heights from such mountains as "Breakneck Ridge" and "Storm King," is a tier below the experience the "Ice Caves" will offer. It requires a certain finesse not only to find them on the talus-filled slopes, but to navigate through the steep and claustrophobic passages.

The "Ice Caves," which, in most cases, are not actually true caves at all, but rather crevasses that penetrate deeply into the

bedrock of the ridge, reminds one of crevasses found in the glaciers of Alaska or some other northern extreme. On a typical year they will usually contain ice until late June or July, the result of snow and other wintry precipitation falling in during the winter and then being sheltered deep underground, usually away from the warming influences of the sun. It's similar to a bag of ice being placed into a refrigerator. It melts, although it does so at a very slow pace.

Some passages are small and only but a few feet wide, while others such as the "Grand Canyon" span around 150 feet in width and travel for nearly half a mile in length. Most are at least a hundred feet deep.

It must also be noted that there aren't any trails leading up to the ice caves. It's all bush whacking. So, you had better bring a map or GPS to figure out where you're going. The top of the ridge is composed

Below: Dwarf pitch pines in the foreground; Catskills in the background.



almost exclusively of dense, dwarf pitch pines and huckleberry bushes. It makes traversing the land difficult and one can easily lose their bearings in the sea of green that offers few landmarks.

Before heading into the wilderness in an attempt to locate these ice-filled formations, a permit must be obtained from Sam's Point, a preserve managed by the Nature Conservancy on which the caves are located. Guided hikes are also occasionally offered by various local hiking clubs. It's a difficult journey, but one definitely worth taking.

The natural history of the Shawangunk Ridge is remarkable. The ubiquitous white rock that is studded with quartz pebbles and predominates here was originally gravel dumped by several massive rivers flowing to a shallow sea in western New York. Over time the gravel became cemented together after being buried for eons. On certain rock outcroppings erosion has weathered the binding agent and the pebbles have loosened. You can pick one up and know you are holding something that was shaped well before the first dinosaur roamed the earth. The stones date back approximately 430 million years. The ice caves are also part of an open fault line system that is the largest in the United States.

The biology inside the caves is no less impressive. The cool temperatures that are felt here year round create special microclimates that support more northerly species that are routinely found in only the highest peaks of the Catskills and



Above: Blueberry bushes in October atop the Shawangunk Ridge.

Adirondacks. Bunchberry, American mountain ash, hemlock, various spruces, and a wide spread of bryophytes—many of which are rare—can be found throughout some of the larger ice caves. The “Grand Canyon” is especially diverse due to its immense size. Lush carpets of wildflowers at the bottom are soaked with ground

water that is continuously flowing down the sides of the crevasses in tiny streams and waterfalls. This ensures plants situated down here never thirst for water, even in the driest of times. These little oases of biodiversity also harbor threatened species such as mountain spleenwort, a seldom seen fern outside of the

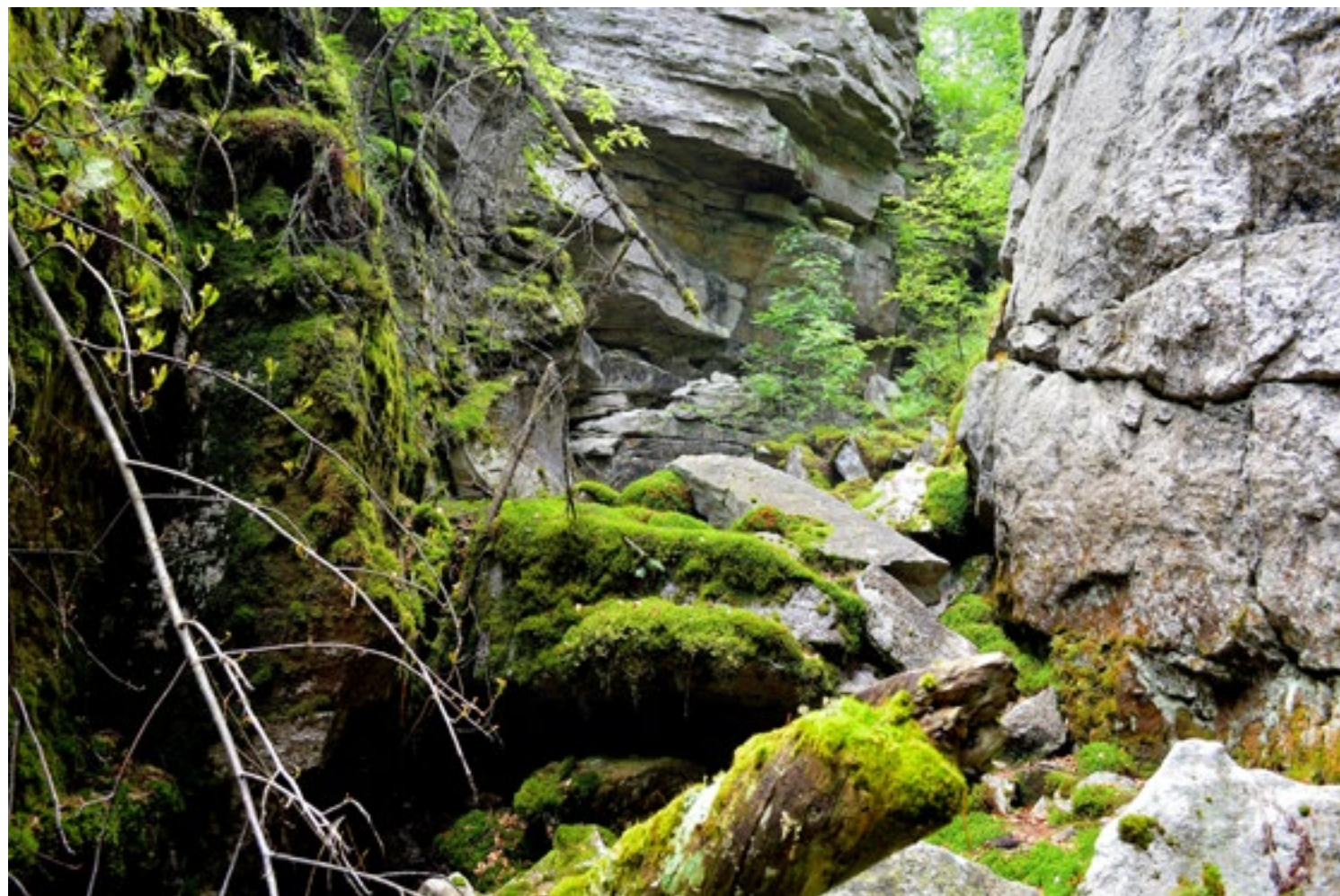
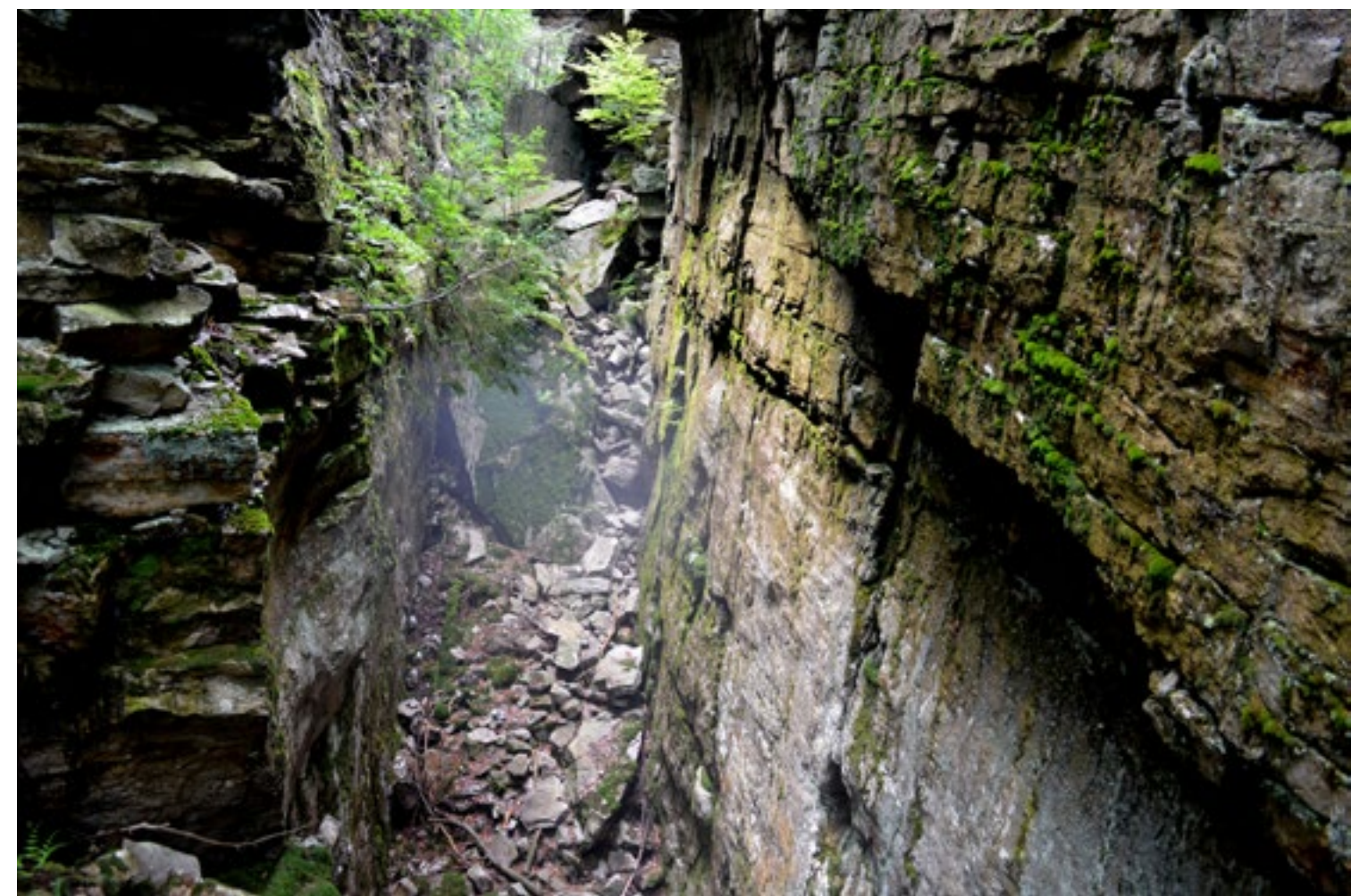
Shawangunks. The occasional rattlesnake or copperhead may also be spotted along the upper edges of the caves, using the rocky ledges to bask in the sun. It's a wilderness on par with land found in remote and near inaccessible parts of the west.



Clockwise from Top Left:
Bunchberry and goldthread;
Fissure crack;
Low bush blueberry;
Timber rattlesnake & garter snake.

Most people begin their journey at the Berme Road Park in Ellenville and from there follow the Smiley Carriageway that is located a couple hundred feet east of the parking lot. The luxuriously wide carriageway is the calm before the storm. After walking for about 1.25 miles you encounter the Shingle Gully stream on the right. Many times the stream at this particular location is nothing more than a trickle. This near perpendicular stream bed peppered with boulders of all sizes is what needs to be taken next. The stream is the trail and becomes wider as you progress uphill. A smart navigator can usually bounce from rock to rock without getting wet. Shingle Gully will lead you to the entrance of the first ice cave in about a third of a mile.

This huge gash in the earth is an eerie sight to behold. Thick stands of overhanging hemlock trees on both sides of the crevasse block the sun and significantly darken the surroundings even on the brightest of days. Due to the temperature differential, a fog can usually be seen settled in the bathtub-shaped cavity, which you will descend into. In the peak of summer it's a rare event for the temperature to rise above 60° and is usually much cooler. Climbing down, walking briefly on comparatively level rock, and then quickly rising again makes the hike resemble a roller coaster ride. This experience will be had for the entirety of your time spent in the three main ice caves.



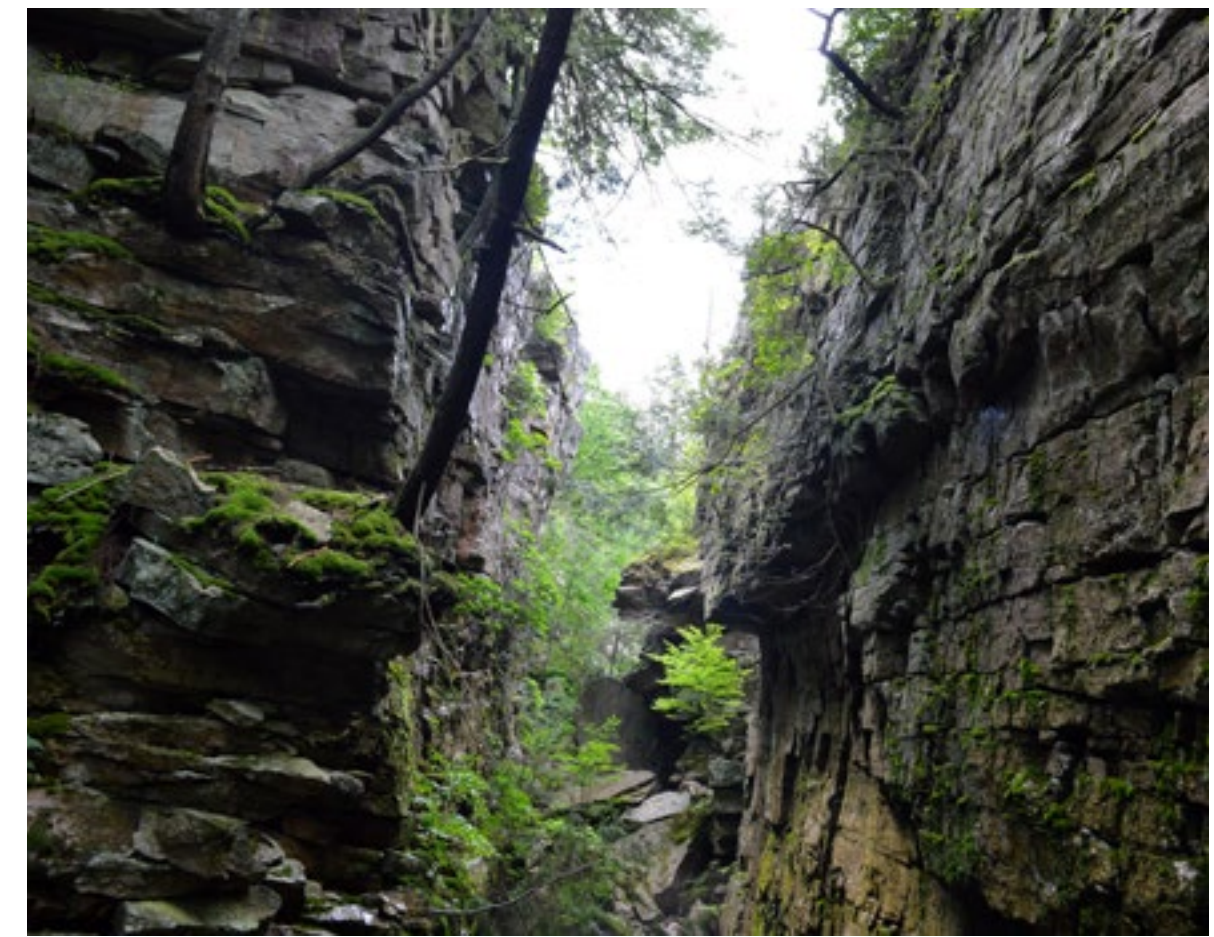
After exiting the first cave, you immediately hit the next one which certainly does resemble a canyon, with its ubiquitous winding passages. Intense rock scrambling will be your routine. Besides the element of danger, one of the first things that is noticed is how incredibly lush the passages are. Almost no matter where you place your hands or feet you'll find thick beds of mosses of all kinds that hold as much water as a fully saturated sponge. In some of the smaller wall cracks ferns can be seen sprouting, and in the larger cracks, stunted American mountain ash, hemlock, or black birch trees that have contorted, snake-like roots spreading out in all directions trying to find better support on the slick rock. It superficially resembles a rain forest.

Emerging to a plateau, now it's time to test your orienteering skills. There are no trails to speak of that lead you directly to the greatest ice cave of them all. At best, you'll be able to follow a few deer runs and bedrock arches devoid of vegetation. For first timers, a GPS is essential. It can be unnerving at times as you traverse a landscape strewn with myriads of steeply sloping rock outcroppings that are splintered apart by gaps, many of which are just large enough for a person to slip through and plummet to an unknown depth. It requires a great deal of attention to ensure that a leg, or your whole body, doesn't descend into one, many of which are hidden by low hanging shrubs.



If your navigation is successful you will arrive about 20 minutes later to the final cave. After gawking at how truly expansive it is, it's time to follow the rim and head north. Along the way you'll encounter a couple rock promontories that shoot out over the edge. These beak-like projections at their thinnest points are only around a foot thick and jut 20-30 feet out above an airy canyon that seems to have no bottom. These are great spots to snap a few photos if you have the nerve to wander out onto one. On a clear day a towering set of blue mountains can be seen in the northwest. These are the legendary Catskills.

Once you reach the northern-most portion of the ice cave, it's time to begin climbing down a very narrow and steep passage that will slowly lead you to the bottom. This "Grand Canyon" will not disappoint by any means.



Best Time to Go: May-November. The ice caves become passable in late spring, typically beginning in early May. It's especially nice to check them out in the height of summer to escape the heat. Also, in July and August the ubiquitous blueberry and huckleberry bushes ripen offering a handy trail snack for the 4 mile roundtrip trek.

Getting There: Heading west on Route 52 in Ellenville, make a right onto Broadhead Street, which soon becomes Berme Road. After following Berme Road for a tenth of a mile, make another right and enter Berme Park. Parking is free.

"Grand Canyon" Coordinates: N 41°42'47.41 W 74°21'44.27

Maps: [Map issued by Sam's Point Preserve](#) (Nature Conservancy)

Information: A permit must be obtained from the Conservation Center at Sam's Point Preserve to hike the ice caves. Information pertaining to this can be found on the [Nature Conservancy's website](#). 📍



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ZPACKS

20 Degree Sleeping Bag

Review by Aaron Zagrodnick



Every winter I find myself tidying up my gear list for the upcoming season, and reflecting on gear and how I approached backpacking in the season that just passed by. Throughout the summer season I usually make few changes to my gear, but if something wears out or something new comes on the scene that I can't resist, I might save an ounce or two here and there as the season goes along. Do these changes really make much difference in the field? Probably not. Sure, ounces eventually add up to pounds, but ounces also only add up to ounces once you've reduced your pack weight to a baseline level. Of course, most weight can be saved by replacing your heaviest items – Like a sleeping bag. I'd had my eye on ZPack's sleeping solution for a while, but hadn't really given it too much thought – I was happy with what I'd been using. But the almost too good

Pros: Very light and warm. Weight saving design that also translates into a higher level of sleeping comfort in the field.

Cons: Wait time, no inside zipper pull tab.

Rating: ★★★★★

to be true specs kept the bag in the back of my mind. ZPack's 20 degree offering for instance, would be lighter than my existing 20 degree bag by a considerable margin. Additionally, it would even be lighter than my 30 degree, "Warm weather" bag by a lesser margin. I've also been on a quest to simplify my gear. One bag, as warm as my warmest bag but lighter than all of them? The idea was too hard to pass up. The question remained how it would all work out in practice.



Design and Specifications

The ZPacks sleeping bag is currently offered in no less than 44 versions. (Full list of specifications [Here](#))

You can choose from temperature ratings of 10, 20, 30, or 40 degrees in 3 different widths and 5 different lengths. The first thing you'll notice about the bags are that they have no hood – An optional goose down hood, manufactured by GooseFeet Gear for ZPacks and utilizing 850 fill water resistant down is offered instead. (One size fits all) The bags themselves utilize 900 fill down, Cuben Fiber baffles, (The bag is fully baffled) and Pertex GL with a DWR treatment for both the shell and liner. Basically, the lightest stuff around.

No fretting over color choices here – Green on the outside and a black inside is the only offered color combination. By default, the bags have ¾ length zipper with no draft tube – The bag is designed with sleeping on top of the zipper in mind. Thus, no cold spots and no draft tube required. An elastic drawcord seals the bag around your neck. (Or face if you size up in length) Speaking of length, the bags are sized to fit comfortably to the neck of the height listed – So a medium bag listed at 5' 9" would fit up to the neck of a similar length sleeper. ZPacks suggests sizing up to the next size for extra room and warmth around the head and face. Continuous baffles allow you to distribute the down as you prefer.

With no hood, no need for a draft collar, no draft tube, the use of a $\frac{3}{4}$ length bottom zipper, superlight fabrics, 900 fill down, and with 3 widths to select from the bag saves weight over a traditional bag in a lot of ways. And it all adds up. With so many things done differently, it can be hard to compare the bag on paper to other down bags on the market. Additionally, ZPacks lists the actual height of the baffle instead of loft, so it's important to remember that the bag will loft higher than the baffle height that's specified.

The bag is so light however, that you can spring for some options and still come out ahead. Optionally you can choose a full length 2 way zipper, a draft tube, a loop closure system instead of a zipper, and you can also choose to replace the standard 900 fill down with a water resistant 850 fill option. (Free, but adds about an ounce) In the end I chose the 20 degree, wide, extra-long bag (\$430) with the 2 way zipper (\$10) and draft tube. (\$20) I also added the optional down hood. (\$65)

Impressions

ZPacks makes each sleeping bag to order, so there is a wait time involved. This changes and is posted at the top of the ZPacks website. In my case, the three week wait time specified was spot on, though you can request a specific due date. The bag arrives in a cuben fiber roll top dry bag. In the case of the 20 degree version, the dry bag is 12" x 6", though like their shelters, ZPacks sizes their stuff sacks generously - A favorite feature. (No struggling to get back on the trail with the usual undersized offerings) The bag is well

constructed while still having a handmade feel – Something I like. The fabric used for the bag is very thin – So thin in fact, that you can see the down through it. It's definitely not going to stand up to abuse, but generally speaking, sleeping bags tend to live a fairly sheltered life with basic precautions. The fabric has a slick, slightly plastic-like feel, but is comfortable against the skin, and the DWR treatment lived up to expectations – Light spray (Or water bottle mishaps, more common in my case) will bead up nicely and roll off the bag. The fabric is also considered windproof, and as such once lofted, the bag doesn't want to give up that loft easily if it's compressed. Speaking of loft, the ZPacks bag lofts to essentially the same height as other 20 degree down bags I'm familiar with, and overall the maximum loft averages over 6 inches throughout the bag. I've noticed less down leakage through the fabric compared to any other bag I've owned – Perhaps attributed to the quality of fill that's been used.

A very thin elastic and cord lock seal off the top of the bag, but the cord still flexes easily as you move. The zipper seems like it's the most robust item on the bag, and I was surprised to find that there's no zipper pull tab inside the bag. The 2 way option I selected allows for ventilation options on the lower part of the bag in warmer weather, and the optional draft tube with zipper stiffener works well to cover the zipper using a butterfly like design – But even with the stiffener, you'll need to exercise some care to keep the zipper from snagging on the draft tube. (If equipped) Finally, a small plastic clip is located at the top of the bag on either





side of the zipper which can help secure the bag if you're opening the zipper for ventilation or when using the bag in quilt mode. ZPacks also states this helps keep the zipper from sliding down on its own, but at least with my bag, the zipper is very secure and stays put clipped or not.

The optional hood fits well, and cinches up around your face easily with a non-

elastic cord for near full face coverage. The hood is very light, and utilizes a sewn-through design. The water resistant down used here is a nice touch, as the hood is more likely to possibly be affected by your breath. Two loops on the bottom of the hood allow you to secure the hood under each arm with shock cord (Not supplied) if desired, but even without, the hood seems to stay in place well for the most

part. The green outside offers a nice contrast if you start the night off without the hood on but keep it inside your bag for quick access and need to locate it quickly as things cool down. It's not really meant to be reversible, but considering the black liner you could also flip it inside out for a little more heat absorption if used on a sunny morning outside of the bag while breaking camp, for example.

Weight

Listed Weight in Ounces:

ZPacks 20 Degree, Wide, X-Long: 21.3

Stuff Sack: .9

Options:

Full Length 2-way Zipper: 1.2

Draft tube: 1.2

Goose Hood: 1.3

Measured Weight in Ounces:

ZPacks 20 Degree, Wide, X-Long, with full length 2-way zipper and draft tube: 24.35

Stuff Sack: .9

Goose Hood: 1.3

Use and Rating

As a side sleeper, traditional mummy hoods have always been warm but a compromise in regards to comfort. As I'd toss and turn at night, if I turned within the bag, I'd lose the ability to breath. I also like a mummy bag that isn't too constricting – So turning with the bag was more difficult. But when I did, and depending on which side I slept on, half the time the zipper would be facing straight up. Even with a draft tube it's definitely the weak link in the system. At times, I became frustrated and cinching up the hood basically became an uncomfortable last resort only on the coldest of nights.

The ZPacks sleeping bag changes all of this. No matter what, you're always lined up with the hood. With the zipper on the bottom of the bag, it's either directly underneath you (Ideal for warmth), or if

you turn with the bag to the side, the zipper ends up on the sides or on the sides and still partially underneath you. My preference is to treat it as a top zippered bag in milder conditions, which makes entry and exit a snap. If you're a side sleeper, the zipper will end up on either side of you as you sleep if you take the bag with you as you turn, and you gain venting options with the zipper exposed. However, I did find that once the temperature dropped below freezing, I preferred to use the bag as it was designed – I shook as much down as possible away from each side of the zipper, and slept with the zipper underneath me for maximum warmth. This way the zipper was completely covered and the maximum amount of down was brought to the top of the bag. And if you're thinking sleeping on a metal zipper might be uncomfortable, I never noticed it. I did find that at least for me, it was too much trouble to actually slide the zipper underneath me, or to zip and then shift the entire bag – I much preferred to just leave the bag zipped and basically treated it like a zipper-less bag. With the large opening, getting in and out of the bag was really the easiest way, and easier than expected.

Either way, I'd usually start out the night with the opening uncinched, and then tighten things up as it got colder. Cinched, the thin elastic hugs your neck and seals out drafts even as you move, but is thin enough to not create a claustrophobic effect. If you sized up in length, you can also pull the bag up higher. At 6' 2" I was able to comfortably sleep with the

bag cinched right below my nose in the X-Long model.

I always sleep with a fleece beanie, and before I tried out the bag I thought I might be able to sneak by just using that combined with the bag, but quickly found that wasn't the case. Warm nights would be an exception, but I almost always found myself immediately reaching for the Goose Hood. The hood works well, and at just 1.3 ounces it's a near no-brainer to include on a trip. Wearing a zip-neck baselayer, I could tuck in the hood, which would mostly keep it in place. (Add a bungee using the loops on the hood for even more security) The opening can be sealed off for near full face coverage, but I did find that if I cinched it too tightly the cord lock became uncomfortable against my nose. Additionally, with the bridge of my nose exposed, it would become quite cold once the temperature dropped to the mid 30's or lower, and I learned to, for lack of a better term, snuggle in against the sleeping bag to negate this effect. Pushing the rating of the bag I'd stay warm in base layers and with this headwear arrangement. I also tried a buff over my nose, but the experiment didn't last long – It constricted my breathing too much and quickly became soaked. A balaclava or other combination of head / facewear that you prefer could be utilized as well. For me, the previous combination of a fleece hat and the Goose Hood was the minimum comfortable arrangement in the low 20's. If you have something like a hooded parka or rain gear that you're willing to integrate into your sleep system, the extra hoods make a huge

difference. Another nice thing about having all this headwear separate from the bag is that you can use these pieces while hiking or in camp, and it definitely makes getting out of your sleeping bag on a cold morning that much easier. You can also opt to leave an item or two at home in warmer weather to save weight.

Fit

I'm 6' 2" and range between a medium and large size in the shirt department – And I wouldn't change a thing about the 20 degree, wide, X-Long bag I purchased. The width is basically perfect in every respect – Wide enough that I don't feel confined without being overly voluminous like some other wide bags I've tried. I can also easily turn inside the bag if I want the zipper to stay where it is, or take the

bag with me easily as I turn if that's what I'm going for. And if I want to take the bag into the teens, or want to sleep with a jacket just to stay especially warm, I have enough space to start adding puffy layers inside without compressing insulation. Length-wise I'm able to comfortably cinch the bag as high as my nose with plenty of room, and can pull it nearly to the top of my head, though things start to get tight at that point in the foot box. With 3 different widths and 5 different lengths, you'll likely be able to find something that works for you.

In use, the 20 degree rating was true for me in my normal baselayers with the down shifted to the top of the bag, the zipper on the bottom, and adequate headwear. However, sleeping bag ratings



can be tricky – If you’re a warm sleeper you might find the 20 degree bag warm into the upper teens, or if you sleep cold you might find yourself chilled at 30 without additional insulation. In these cases you could consider the next bag up or down in the lineup, and we’re not talking about huge weight penalties here. Going with the 10 degree bag over my 20 would have only been 3-4 ounces heavier and without a doubt your sleeping bag probably isn’t where you want to be cutting corners. In the end it’s up to you and ratings can be a bit subjective. However, and just for comparison, I’d say the bag is on par with other 20 degree bags I’ve tested, and much warmer than bags I’ve used with ratings in the low 30 range. With this in mind it seems that

ZPacks has rated the bags appropriately for an “Average” sleeper. One thing to consider would be adding something like GooseFeet Gear’s down booties as an optional item on your gear list – If you wanted extra warmth you could bring these along, but also leave them behind in warm weather. But at around 2.5 ounces per pair, they can be hard to leave at home. The 20 degree kept me warm in even colder weather too – During testing one night dipped to 12.5 degrees. I started out the night wearing all my usual 3 season clothing – Baselayers, a lightweight down parka, hiking clothing and rain gear. Even at 12.5 degrees I was very warm sleeping in this arrangement and even took off a layer before the night was over.

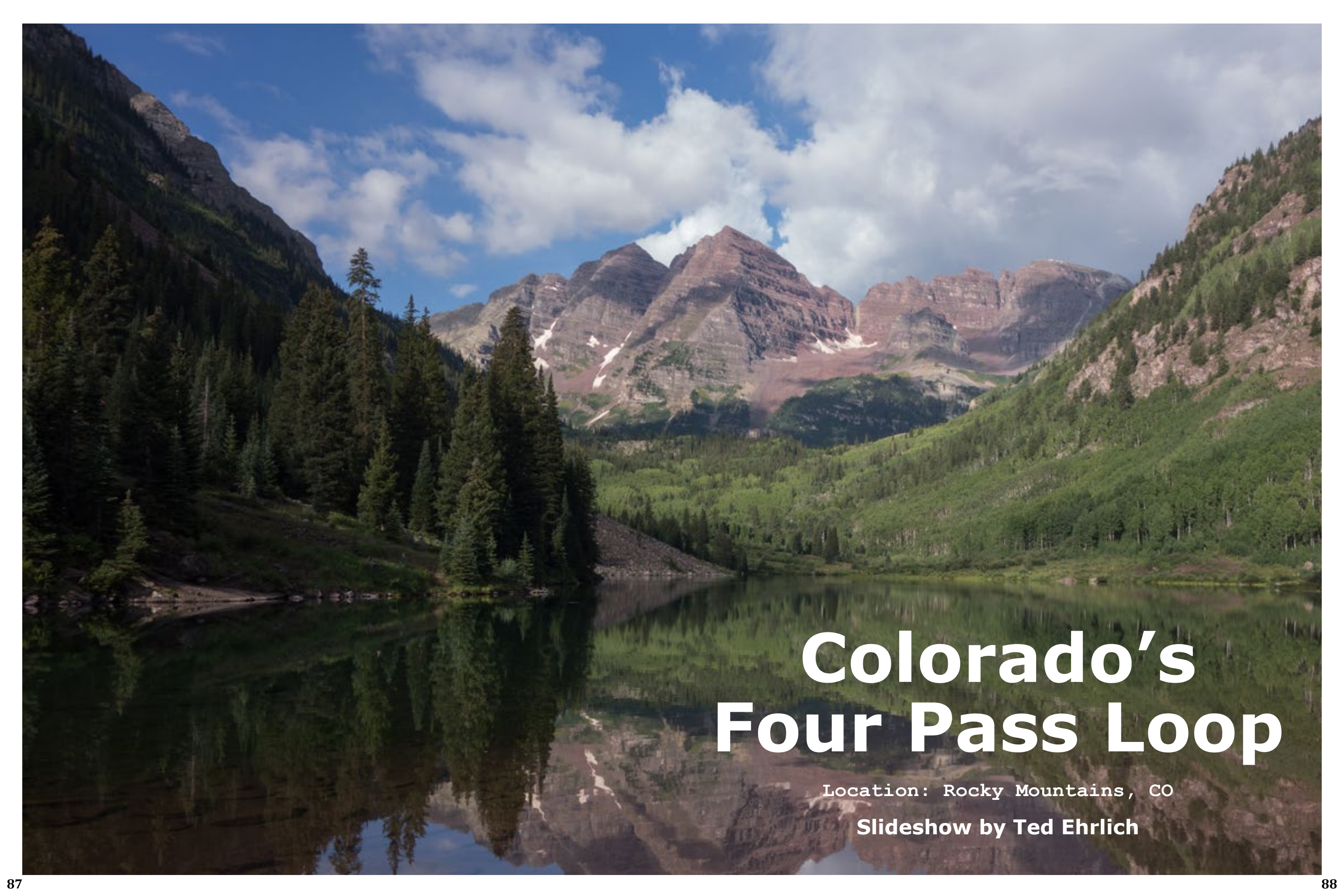


Conclusion

The 20 Degree sleeping bag from ZPacks lived up to expectations in the warmth department, and exceeded expectations in comfort and ease of use. Though after years of using traditional hooded mummy bags a small learning curve was needed to dial in such a different sleep system, the bag lives up to its temperature rating, and due to the toss-and-turn friendly design users will most importantly be sleeping more and more comfortably at night – It’s one step (Or maybe two steps) closer to sleeping at home. Due to this factor, even if the bag didn’t offer any weight savings it would still be a strong contender. But best of all, it’s really light. The bag offers a substantial weight savings over traditional bags, even over traditional bags that are rated 10 degrees higher and more. And that’s including the weight of the optional hood. The price is steep, and you’ll likely need to wait a few weeks for delivery, but considering that one ZPacks bag can fill a niche where before it might take 2 traditional bags, you can very easily save money while keeping things simple at the same time. In my case, 1 ZPacks bag has replaced 2 bags that together were twice the price. Overall more comfort, more versatility, and less weight. ▶

Overall: ★★★★★ – Excellent

You can find more information regarding ZPack’s line of sleeping bags and other ultralight gear at ZPacks.com.



Colorado's Four Pass Loop

Location: Rocky Mountains, CO

Slideshow by Ted Ehrlich



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<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue13.html>

The Four Pass Loop is a 26 mile loop around the Maroon Bells in the heart of the Colorado Elk Mountains. Near Aspen Colorado, only the first mile is below 10,000 feet of elevation, and crosses 4 passes as it loops around the Bells. West Maroon and Buckskin are the highest passes at 12,500 feet, with Frigid Air and Trail Rider just short at 12,415 feet and 12,430 feet, respectively. As you loop around the 4 pass, 5 of Colorado's 14ers are within view of the trail, and during the peak of summer has some incredible alpine wildflowers. A free self-registered permit is required for overnight camping, with no reservations needed.

Previous Page: Maroon Lake with the Bells.

Above: The road leading to the trailhead. Overnight parking isn't allowed at the trailhead, so we hiked in from the overnight lot.



Far Left: West Maroon Creek above Crater Lake. Crater Lake is where the loop splits, with us following the loop clockwise towards West Maroon Pass.

Above: Steve at the top of West Maroon Pass, our first pass of the trip.

Left: As we moved above treeline, the wildflowers took over the landscape.

Pages 93-94: The West side of the Elks, looking towards Crested Butte.

Pages 95-96: The wildflowers as we hiked towards our second pass, Frigid Air Pass.



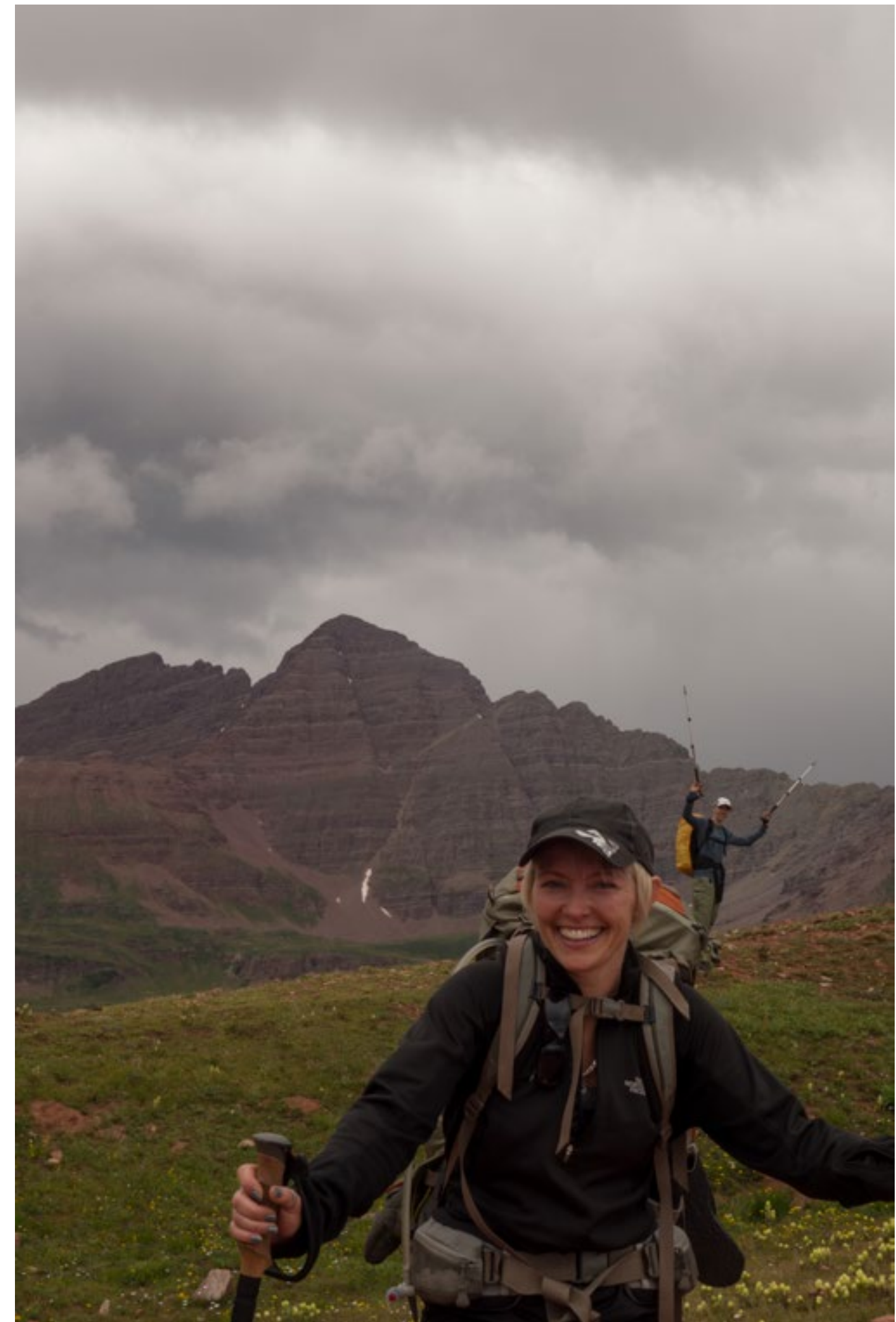




This Page: The backside of South Maroon Peak from Frigid Air Pass.

Pages 99-100: Looking South from Trail Rider Pass.

Pages 101-102: Looking Southwest from Trail Rider Pass. This area near the secluded pond would make an excellent campsite.







Right: A natural spring along the trail near the North Fork of the Crystal River.

Below: The Wildflowers along the route were incredible. All of the alpine valleys above treeline were filled with them.





Best Time to Go: Late June through early September.

Getting There: The parking area is located at 39.098694,-106.940103. Refer to the Forest Service Guide for detailed directions.

Maps: The Forest Service publishes a [simple guide here](#), and I have published a data book and GPX files at mtnnut.wordpress.com. [Trails Illustrated Map #128](#) covers the area, as well as the topographic map provided by the Forest Service. 📍

Top Left: Looking west with Snowmass Mountain and Capitol Peak, two of Colorado's 14ers, in the background.

Bottom Left: Crossing Snowmass Creek on our way towards Buckskin Pass our last pass.

Above: Steve on the top of Buckskin Pass, with Pyramid Peak in the background.



What Bill Bryson Never Told You About Thru-Hiking the Appalachian Trail

by Becca Chambers



You could have heard me all the way up the Approach Trail heading to the official southern terminus and beginning of the Appalachia Trail, “Damn.” “Ouch.” “You’re a jackass.” [audible giggling] “Oh, big tree.” “What the heck?” “Hello squirrel.” Any witness to such expressions would have been convinced I was grossly under-medicated upon realizing there was no electronic gadget attached to my ear. Like a Bill Bryson character, I would become known over the weeks and months of my AT thru-hike for a tendency to talk to Trail objects and critters, as well as my frequent use of one and two word expletives when warranted, traits common among hikers. However, what Bill Bryson never told you about thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail in his memoir is the answer to the one question that will universally stump every hiker forcing them to stop and ponder - How and why did you get up day after day after day and drag your sad, dirty, strained, deteriorating body for months just to reach a mountaintop more than 2,000 miles from where you started?

It is a question much more difficult to reconcile than the usual inquiries of, “Why did you hike the AT? What did you get out of hiking the AT? Did it change you?” In a concerted effort to seek out an answer such a sleep-depriving, ache-inducing question, I sat for two days staring at a blinking cursor looking for words to illustrate all that is the Appalachian Trail. It seemed like a good place to start. To begin, is the AT just a physical obstacle course carved from

Mother Nature’s achievements? Is it a metaphysical entity that evokes a sense of characteristics, which can only be described as otherworldly in essence? Is it just that, another world quietly coexisting along side our daily remote controlled sphere? The simple answer is “Yes.” The Appalachian Trail is all of these things. It is simply a dirt path through the American woodlands and an obstacle course full of hazards and challenges for the body. The AT is a metaphysical creature. It is a living being that was born of an abstract idea belonging to Benton MacKaye, who had a vision of a footpath extending from the highest point in New England, Mt. Washington, to the southern Appalachian Mountains, to act as potential salvation for individuals he described as “helpless canaries in a cage.” Those for whom the Industrial Revolution created a daily grind.

Then I was faced with another set of questions in my explorative effort to find a reason, sensible or not, for why I awoke and walked day after day after day. Is hiking the Trail an emotional journey? Does it leave an indelible mark forever in a hiker’s mind and heart? Does the Trail have the ability to change a person’s life? Was Benton MacKaye correct in his beliefs concerning the potential mental and emotional benefits of such a trail?

Previous Page: Self-Portrait, 5th AT Anniversary hike, Tennent Mtn., NC.

Right: Phil (Jogle) Donnelly, Big Rocky Row, VA.





Again, I believe the answer to all of these questions to be “Yes.” I may not be able to articulate the words needed to define the answers other than to say that I know I am an improved model of the woman that began walking northbound in Georgia and that the Trail is ever present in my mind. It may be just below the surface, but it is always there, a comfort that lives within me.

The answer to the question Bryson never broached, the reason why a thru-hiker awakes in rain or shine, injured or healthy, happy or sad and continues to walk, hike, drudge, or sometimes literally crawl day after day after day for weeks and months just to reach the highest peak in Maine is for the unequivocal

feeling of complete genuine satisfaction. Satisfaction to such a height, such a grand magnitude that the word itself cannot do the sensation justice. To be sure, there is tremendous satisfaction in completing an AT thru-hike, but I am talking about something much smaller, much simpler. It is the total fulfillment and satisfaction reached at the end of every day of hiking. And the longer and more difficult the day, the greater the joy.

My first inkling of this phenomenon occurred after the exhilaration of my start had worn and I sustained my first injury. Still in Georgia, I was hiking down Tesnatee Gap when my right leg crumpled and I was sent bouncing, then

Left: View from Smarts Mountain fire tower, NH.

Below: Phil (Jogle) Donnelly and I, 2,000 Mile mark, Maine.



Though spent, in pain, and a little confounded by your new home for the evening, you are satisfied. Moreover, you feel more alive in your faded state than ever before.
This is the real world.

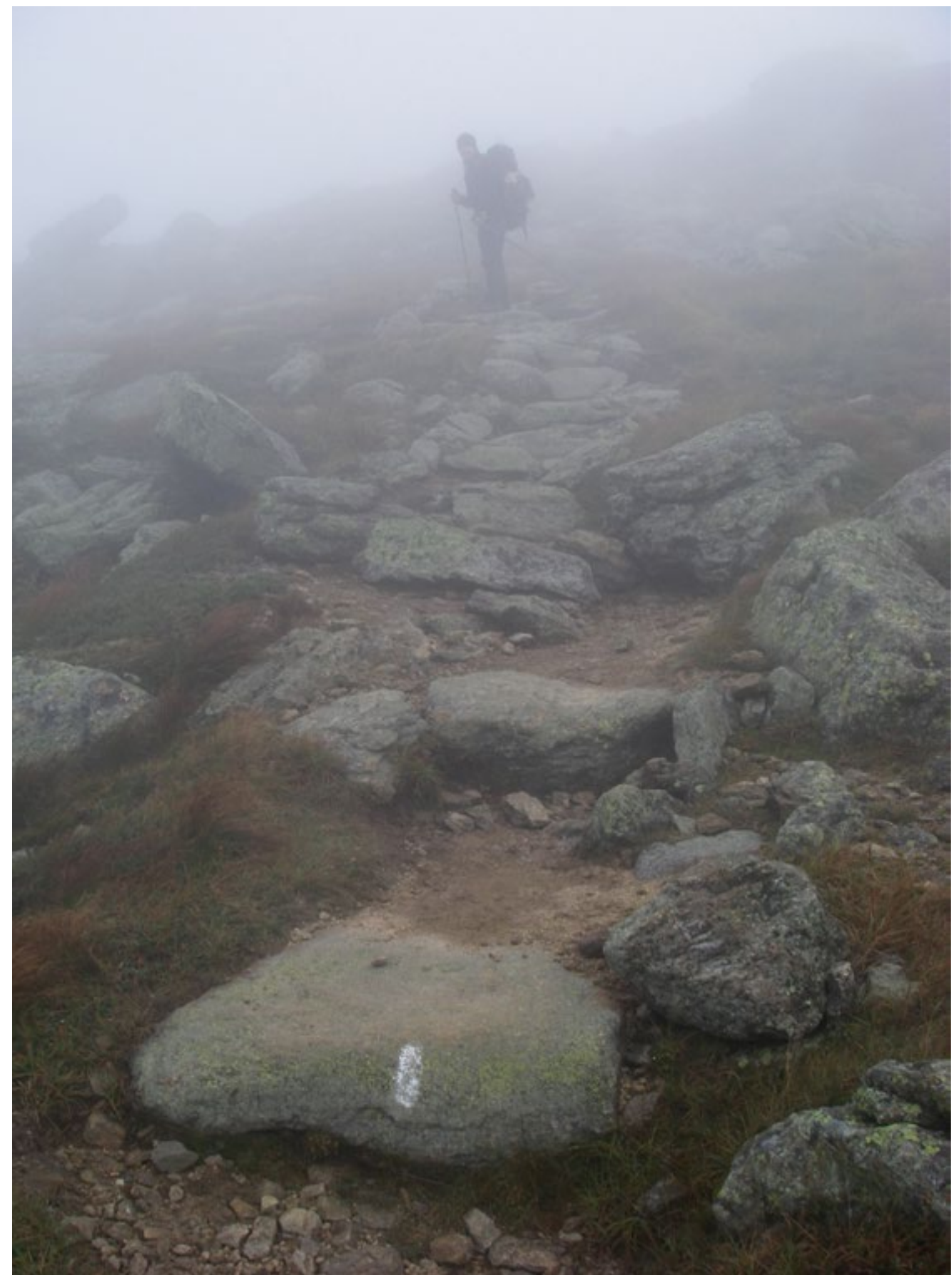
rolling down a boulder field. I had to limp ten miles into camp that night alone. The odd thing was that despite the pain and misery I had been experiencing, I was happy. No, I was elated. Why? I was spent. After a long day of hiking the AT, you are not tired, but exhausted to the point that you are unable to manage facial expressions - no smiles, no frowns. You are in a shape devoid of any energy so that everything seems a bit hazy, a reality cloaked in a foggy dreamscape. Where have you been? What have you done? Automatic pilot takes over and without awareness the tent has erected itself, shoes have been removed, water for the evening has been retrieved and filtered, a pot full of which is on the burner nearby where you sit pondering the surrounding alien landscape.

Your very first tinge of awareness is that you are uncomfortable. Pain is ever present, a state of being in varying degrees. It is the kind of physical suffering that, if experienced in the other world, would have you calling in sick because it would be too unbearable to sit at a desk for eight hours.

Though spent, in pain, and a little confounded by your new home for the evening, you are satisfied. Moreover, you feel more alive in your faded state than ever before. This is the real world. Your all-out effort and struggle have directly resulted in achievement. Everything you had, you used. The accomplishment is undeniably entirely your own. You are far more than satisfied. Those weathered, raw nerves have allowed sensations to reach new places never before experienced.

As your awareness continues returning from that haze of drunken exhaustion, you find a new happiness welling up within every fiber of your being. You are ecstatic because you are now aware of your fortunes. Your pulse is felt from your innermost depths straight out through every pore. You are more than blissfully alive, you are inspired. And you conclude that to inspire one's self must be one of mankind's greatest rewards for a life lived. It is why you hike day in and day out and how you find yourself able to drag your poor body through all conditions to reach the highest peak in Maine. It is for the journey itself. 📍

Right: Phil (Jogle) Donnelly on the Franconia Ridge, White Mountains, NH.
Pages 117-118: Presidential Mountain Range, White Mountains, NH.
Pages 119-120: Phil (Jogle) Donnelly beginning descent of Baldpate Mtn., southern Maine.
Pages 121-122: View from Glastenbury Mtn. fire tower, VT











Above: Avery Peak, Bigelow Mtn. Range, central Maine.

Right: Cloud inversion, Race Mtn., MA.

Far Right: Sunrise at Silver Hill Campsite, CT





Top Left: Self-Portrait, Max Patch, NC.
Top Right: View from Overmountain Shelter, NC.
Bottom Left: View of Mount Katahdin from Abol Bridge, ME.
Bottom Right: Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
Pages 127-128: View of Mount Washington in the background, Presidential Mountain Range, White Mountains, NH.





PowerPot V

Cook dinner and recharge at the same time. This 1.4L pot utilizes thermoelectric technology to recharge anything from a GPS to your phone via a USB output – Just add water and heat. \$150 and just over a pound: Campsaver.com



Petzl e+LITE Headlamp

Store this light with batteries for up to 10 years, or take it on your next overnighiter. A retractable cord keeps things compact when stored, and at 27 grams it's "Light" enough. High, low, and strobe modes with a bonus red LED all at \$30: Backcountry.com



Outdoor Research Helium II Jacket

A 6.4 ounce rain jacket with a lifetime warranty. A few bells and whistles, but only what you need: Adjustable hood, water resistant main and chest pocket zippers, and elastic cuffs. \$150: Backcountry.com



GoLite Down Mittens

Cold hands weren't exactly the fun factor you were looking for on a late winter day. Keep 'em warm with these 600 fill power down mittens from GoLite – Add a waterproof shell and reinforced palms and it's hard to complain. 5 ounces and \$60: GoLite.com

GEAR MASH



Granite Gear Crown V.C. 60 Pack

An update to the venerable Vapor Trail from Granite Gear, the Crown V.C. 60 offers a new HPDE Vapor Current suspension system with integrated back ventilation. The pack offers 60 liters of storage for loads up to 35 pounds. 2 different torso sizes are available in both men's and women's specific models. About \$200 and just over 2lbs: REI.com



Toughstake Sand & Snow Stake

By attaching the guyline to the bottom of the stake, the toughstake is a great choice for a winter snow camping anchor and potential sandy summer trips alike. Available in 3 different sizes, \$30 - \$40 per stake / set: Campsaver.com



REI Minimalist Bivy Sack

Waterproof and breathable, this bivy keeps the weight under a pound and the price under \$100. Mesh panel for bug protection with sealed seams straight from the factory: REI.com



Niteline Accessory Cord

This 3mm cord from Bluewater Ropes has reflective strands woven throughout its length for nighttime visibility. Polyester sheath / nylon core. Available in multiple colors, 6.6 grams per meter and about \$18 for 50 feet: Amazon.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 #10: Photographing Snow

With winter in full swing now in most states, you've probably already been snowshoeing or skiing at least once, and would like to capture some of the magic a winter wonderland offers. I thought a few tips for photographing in the snow may help you enjoy the season, even if it lingers a bit too long.

If your camera is in auto mode it can do some weird things in the snow and it may make your image too blue or too gray, so setting your white balance to the cloudy mode will help warm things up and temper that blue cast. To eliminate the gray look that snow can give your image, set your camera to manual or aperture priority mode and set the exposure compensation to +1 or +2 to create a better snow exposure.

Left: Tamanawas Falls in Winter.

All images Copyright 2014 © David M.Cobb Photography.



For falling snow, experiment with the shutter speed on your camera and see which effect you like the best. A faster shutter speed will freeze the snowflakes in place; a slower one will create snow streaks. This can be fun to play with, especially as you change the focal length of your lens to create a layered effect of flakes.

On extremely bright days, snow can be difficult to photograph and you'll end up blowing out highlights and losing detail. Snow, however, is a great reflector and I think winter images look best in low light and soft light situations such as dawn, sunset, and cloudier days. A polarizer will help reduce snow glare, so it's best to use one when out photographing winter scenes.

There are a few equipment related issues too when it comes to the snow and cold. Batteries don't last too long when it's cold outside, so placing them in a warm pocket will help; then just pop them into your camera when you're ready to shoot. Also, be wary of transitioning your camera between warm and cold temperatures (indoors to outdoors) since this can possibly cause condensation in the camera and also fog up the lens. Also snowflakes can stick to the front of your lens, so use a lens hood to help deter flakes from melting on your lens glass.

Photographing in the snow and cold isn't hard, just different, so enjoy the experience fully with a camera in your pocket. 📷

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: Summer Thaw.

Pages 135-136: Aspen.

Pages 137-138: Three Sisters Sunrise.

All images Copyright 2014 © David M.Cobb Photography.





Backcountry Cuisine: Strawberry Cran-Apple Trail Juice

by Canny Green

Have you ever been on a long hard trail, sweating like a prize fighter, wishing you could have a cool drink of real juice? Well, you can! It's simple and (almost) fresh.

Last month's seasonal soup recipe introduced the notion of dehydrated "bark". Bark is created by spreading any blended ingredients, such as soup, on a solid dehydrator tray (or on baking parchment paper on a mesh tray) and drying it until crisp. Apply this technique to blended fresh fruit and your backcountry refreshment dreams will come true.

The other benefit of drying liquefied fruit is that it does not have to be cooked. It holds all the glorious color and flavor in a little crispy chip. Just add cool water filtered from a mountain creek, let sit for 10 minutes, and drink to your heart's content.

I love this blend because it is bright red, full of vitamins and minerals, and naturally sweet.

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INGREDIENTS:

2 cups raw cranberries, frozen or fresh
4 apples
1 quart fresh strawberries
Sweetener to taste, optional




INSTRUCTIONS:

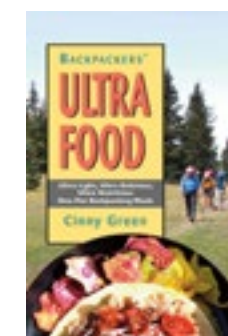
If you have a juicer simply run all the fruit through it until you have a thick blend. If you only have a blender, add cranberries and sliced, peeled apples to hot water and let sit until the berries pop open and the apples soften.

Place the softened fruit and strawberries in the blender and blend until they have the consistency of thin applesauce. I like a bit of tart flavor from the cranberries, but for a sweeter juice add extra strawberries or your sweetener of choice.

Pour the juice 1/8" thick on the dehydrator trays and dry at 135 degrees for several hours until crisp. Check consistency every two or three hours.*

When the juice is totally crisp, remove from the dehydrator and store in labeled ziplocks. You can also put the crisps in a coffee blender and make a powder. Either way, your future thirst-quenching treat is ready for your next trip in the wild.

*TIP: If you want to remove one tray of drying juice when it is rubbery, you can make fruit leather to add to your trail mix. See more about fruit leathers in [Backpackers Ultra Food](#) on pages 51-52. 



The Drive Home: WINTER

by Aaron Zagrodnick

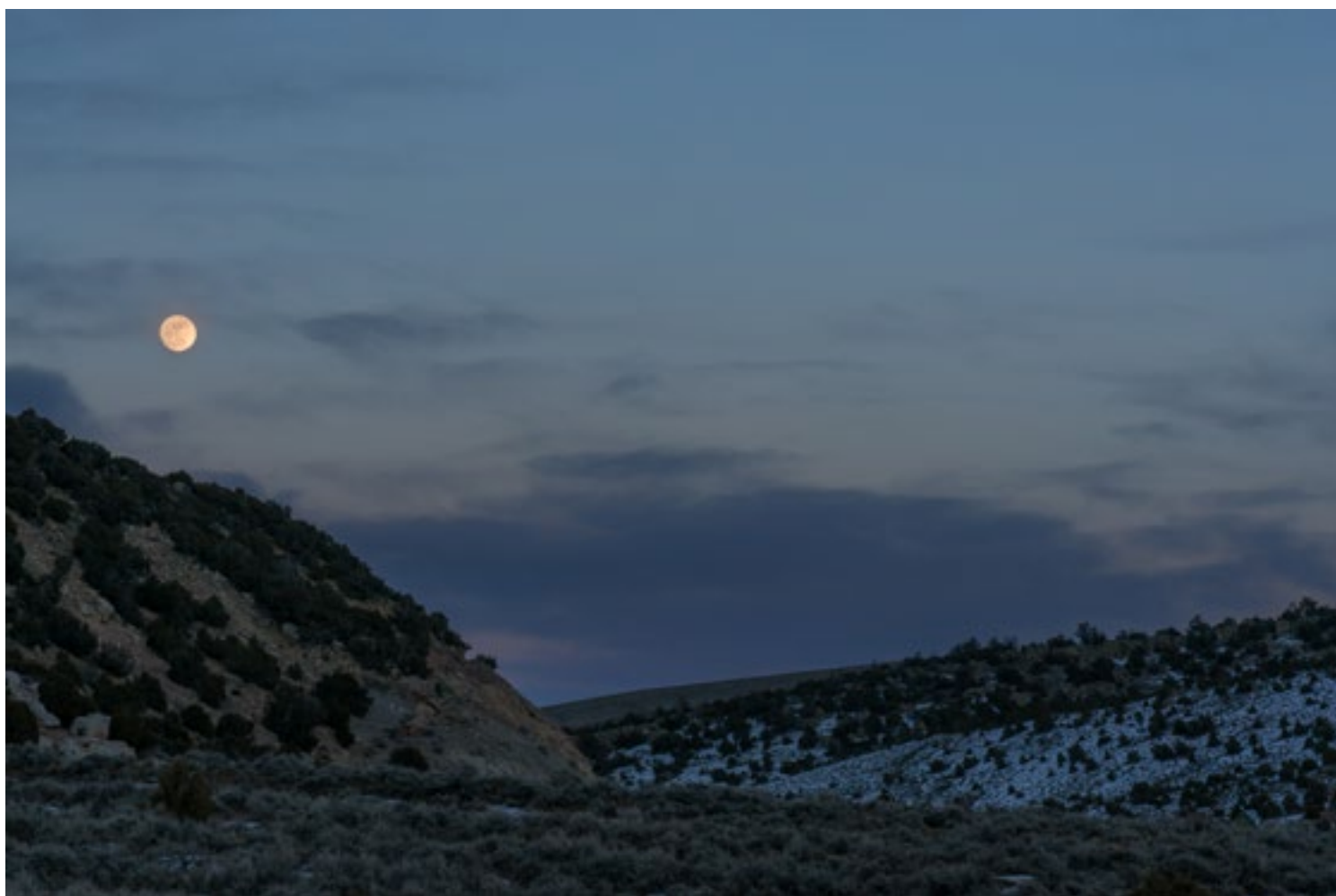
Just a few miles from where I parked I'd found it. I'd passed the popular cross country ski trails, and stumbled uphill through hip deep snow without snowshoes. I kept close to the trees, avoiding the deepest snow. I'd only hiked a couple miles, but between the snow and the off-trail travel, they'd been tough. Or maybe it wasn't off-trail and I was standing on the trail itself. Who could know? There were no markers, no footsteps to follow. Directly overhead a brilliant blue sky gave way to gray clouds and blowing snow to the west, shielding the higher peaks from view. Though shaded, the forest was also warmer – Cold winds stole away any heat the minute you'd step into a meadow. Snow covered everything that was shielded from the wind, in other spots the ground was swept nearly bare where it remained more exposed. I kept hiking.

The tract of National Forest I was navigating would be buzzing with hikers and mountain bikers by spring, ATV's

in the summer, and hunters next fall. But this was February. Any trails were covered in snow, invisible below my feet. Even though it hadn't snowed in a week, the white expanse remained unbroken except for the occasional tracks of a deer, a snowshoe hare or perhaps an unidentified rodent. And once, huge bounding tracks through the snow, many feet apart. This, though not designated as such, was wilderness. I saw no one. And except for the occasional Chickadee or Nuthatch hunting seeds and insects among the trees, and the occasional hawk or Raven soaring overhead, I'm not sure if anything saw me.

I hiked until the chill was too much to ignore, and using a convenient fallen tree as a seat, stopped to heat up snow for a boost of warmth. There was no avoiding it – You couldn't help but include a few pine needles in the mix, and the end result was a decidedly forest-like, piping hot drink. I cradled the too hot to drink mug in my gloved

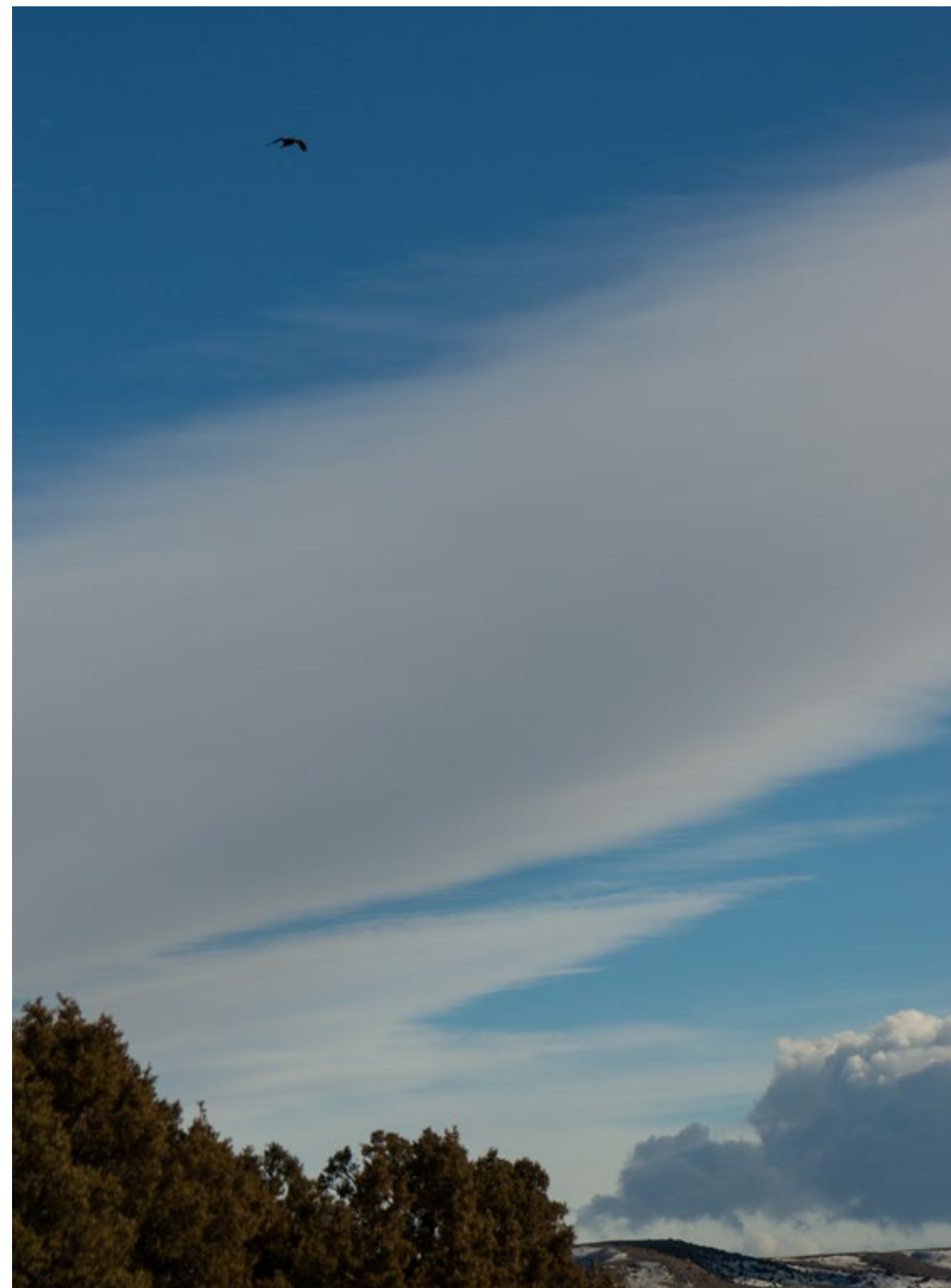




hands and waited, alternating between gawking at the clouds soaring by directly overhead, driven by the wind at ridiculous speeds and checking on the snowstorm shielding the peaks to the west. It was moving this way. What could be better? Shouldering my pack I hiked higher, the sun sank lower. Though clear directly overhead, light snow began to fall. Eventually I made it to the top, though without the sun to provide warmth any longer, I didn't stay long prior to heading back downhill. This time there were footsteps to follow, my own. Dusk fell over the forest and the moon rose to the east. My fingers and toes felt frozen; my water bottle a slushy and uninviting solution to thirst. Downhill I made much better time, at times sliding my

way down the snowy slopes towards civilization. But I realized I wasn't in a hurry. I slowed my pace, now I could steal glances at the emerging stars above.

2 days later, 6 A.M. and speeding west on a state highway, racing against the rising sun. I hoped to hit the trail before the sun made its way above the plains. I narrowly make it. But the sunrise, save for a brief 30 second burst of pink light falling on the now distant Wind River Peak and company, is mostly gray. I don't mind. On BLM land, I explore a series of ridges that all run in a parallel fashion. Each ridge presents a predictable pattern. Facing southwest, one side is nearly devoid of snow.



The other side, facing northeast and mostly shaded, has snow 2 feet deep. At first I traverse them the hard way, up one slope, then down the other, each time the winds I encounter at the top forcing me down the other side quickly despite the views. But I soon tire of this and begin following the crests of the ridges I encounter, until I reach the end or the terrain becomes too steep to comfortably traverse over loose rock, mud, and snow. The whole process was too entertaining to abandon – Something new lay around every corner and behind each cedar tree I dodged. Soon it was midday. The sun, high overhead, now provided enough heat as long as you stayed on the move.

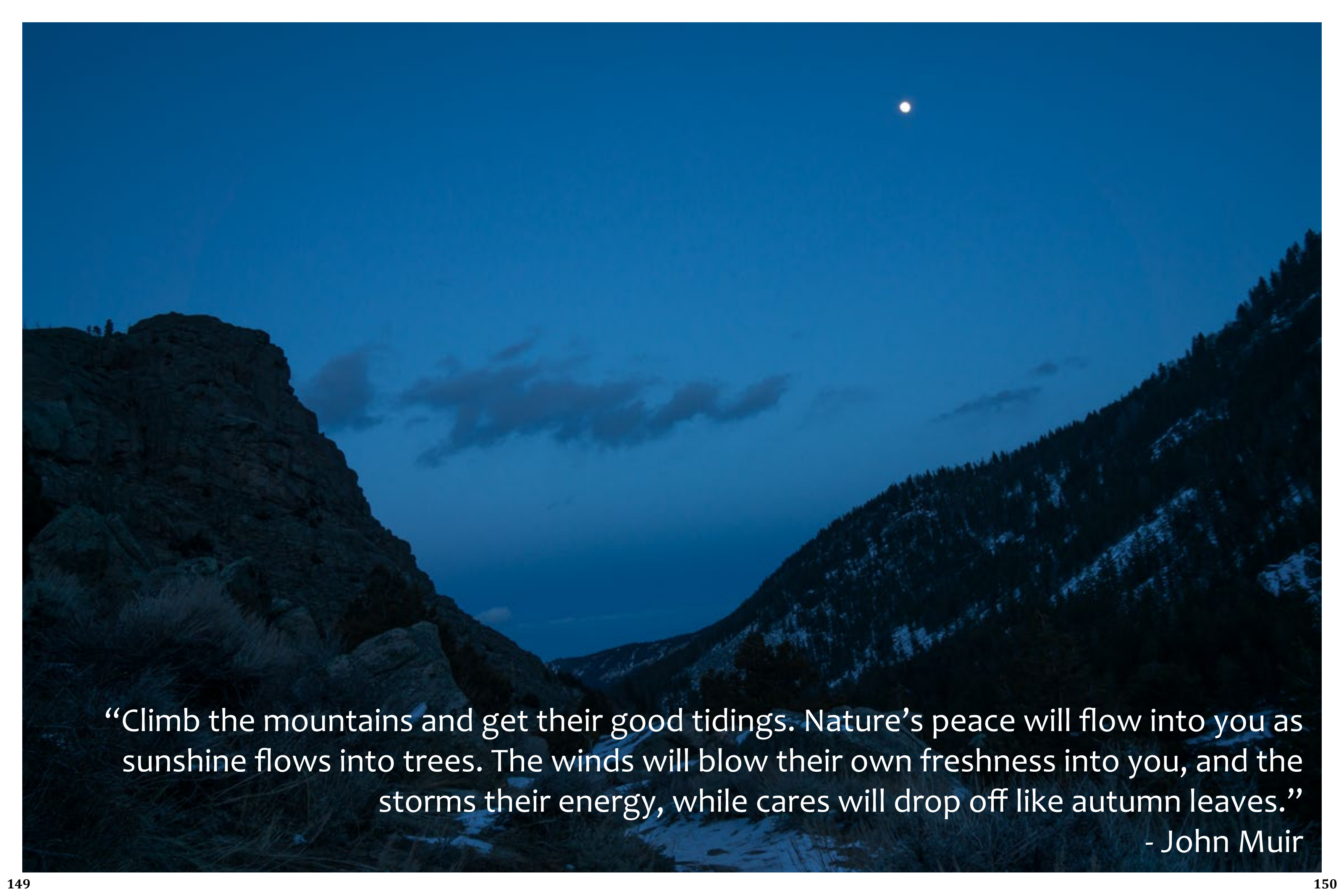
Early afternoon resulted in a series of missed turns, dead ends, faulty navigation, and somehow I'd ended up covered in mud, almost from head to toe. Finally, at the end of a particularly scenic ridge and near a rocky outcropping with a pile of stones forming a near perfect seat, I sat and listened. Facing southwest, the sun soaked into my clothing and the rocks around me. Other than the wind no sound could be heard. Hawks soared soundlessly overhead, perhaps in equal admiration of and unwilling to break to silence surrounding us both. Four deer quietly moved through the sagebrush, far below me. I stayed in that spot for 2 hours, well past sunset. That day I saw no one.

I recalled a trip 2 summers ago in the Wind River Range. We'd passed the sign signaling the wilderness boundary 7 days before. But that day we saw dozens of people in less than an hour's time. Of course, it's hard to complain since you're part of the crowd, but something didn't seem quite right. And other trips have resulted in what seemed like sheer isolation. But as I sat on the ridge that day, I realized that it's not always a sign that marks the spot. And these weren't just forests, fields, mountains, and deserts in a different season. Quite the opposite; each of them was now an entirely different and unique place. It's what winter has to offer.

I descended from the ridge and rounded its southernmost edge, the trailhead quickly coming into view. Dimly lit from the reflection of the full moon rising behind me, the only two headlights in the parking lot stared back at me, again. 📷







“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”

- John Muir





Thanks for Reading Issue 13

Check out our next issue
(Available in late March) at:

www.TrailGroove.com

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