

TrailGroove®

Issue 17



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Issue 17

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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:
Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Cinny Green,
Susan Dragoo, Jessica Smith, and Nick Exarhos.



Editor's Note

Forecast: Snow showers likely, mainly before midnight. Cloudy, with a low around 27. Breezy, with a west wind 20 to 29 mph, with gusts as high as 40 mph. Chance of precipitation is 70%. New snow accumulation of 5 to 9 inches possible.

An early fall? Last week the mosquitoes here in the mountains of Wyoming were nearly as bad as I've ever seen them, and now I'm adding shoulder season gear to my pack. What happened to those two weeks late in the summer where the days are bright and sunny, temperatures pleasant, and the mosquitoes long gone? At least with recent weather, I should be able to leave the bug spray at home...And fall hiking has its perks. Shift.

In this issue we'll take a look at the lure of off-trail travel and the nuances of hiking in the sunshine state. Interested in exploring somewhere new? We've got you covered: Find out what it's like to backpack in Tasmania, hike in Utah, and even climb Rainier. We'll also check out an item made by ZPacks that might make organization on the trail a little easier, and a whole lot more. Thanks for reading!

- Aaron Zagrodnick

Contribute



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

A few examples of what we're looking for:

Destinations
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, 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: Talus

At times a dreaded word. Often encountered while traveling off-trail in mountainous terrain, and even at times while on trail, talus generally refers to an accumulation of larger sized rocks and/or boulders, often piled at the base of or along a slope. Talus can be challenging to navigate, and care is required to maintain balance, traction, and while most rocks in a talus field have usually settled into a semi-permanent position, you never know when one will move under your weight. Moving slowly with sticky shoes, using your hands, and planning a move or two ahead are helpful when navigating talus fields.



Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

In this issue's news, there are the makings of a possible Michael Bay movie, indications that Ed Abbey's warnings about "Industrial tourism" seem to be more true with each passing year and a recent solo excursion made for some lively debate about connectivity in the backcountry.

The Navajo reservation, located near Tusayan on the south rim of the Grand Canyon, has plans for extensive development on the land they own. Plans include 2,200 homes and 3 million square feet of commercial development. As large an impact as this development would have on the south rim area of the Grand Canyon, the proposed Grand Canyon Escalade gondola would perhaps be the most intrusive of the proposed amenities. Rather than hike to the canyon bottom, a tourist could simply get on the gondola and drop down to the currently remote confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers. A restaurant and gift shop, along with an elevated walkway, is also planned at the confluence. Currently the Navajo Nation and the National Park Service are debating where the rights of each jurisdiction begin and what is permissible. If alive today, famed long distance hiker and author Colin Fletcher would surely lament the proposed development of the canyon. Fletcher's 1963 journey of the Grand Canyon on foot can be found in the seminal book The Man Who Walked Through Time. Over thirty-five years later he took a similar journey by raft in 1989, the story of which can be found in his 1997 book, River.

Sounding similar to something out of the opening part of a disaster movie, some roads at Yellowstone National Park literally melted. The

famous "super volcano" under the park not only causes the famous geysers, but also, apparently, melts roads. One park official described the asphalt as soup and the gravel roads as oatmeal-like. Roads affected include a popular route leading to Old Faithful. Park officials also warned about not using hiking trails in the closure area.

Gregg Hein broke his leg while backpacking in the Sierra and was out for six days before rescuers discovered him. On an off-trail excursion, Mr. Hein broke his leg and was miles from the nearest trail. A very experienced outdoors person, Mr. Hein was able to be calm and improvise. He treated and stabilized his injuries and made his way out to a well-known lake. From this lake, rescuers discovered him. Out of this incident, the usual debates cropped up online: By going off-trail he was being irresponsible. He should not have been solo. He should have carried a communication device. On the flipside, many outdoor enthusiasts argued that accidents happen in the backcountry. Solo wilderness travel should not be considered irresponsible, and that with experience, off-trail travel can be rewarding. In this case, it appears that having the experience, knowledge and mental attitude to cope with the accident made the difference. The debate continues. For more information on off-trail travel, flip to page 63.





TRAIL TIP 17: Safe River Crossings

by Ted Ehrlich

While hiking in the backcountry, you will eventually come to the point where you'll need to cross water. Sometimes it's a simple crossing with a downed tree or rocks allowing dry passage over the river, other times there won't be any other way to get across except for getting wet. When faced with the inevitable stream crossing, be cautious. Water tends to be colder and swifter than expected, and drowning can happen in relatively shallow waters under poor circumstances.

Before a water crossing, even in a spot where it looks pretty straightforward, a few things should be noted. Do you see a path leading up or downstream that looks fairly well used? If so, it might lead to a better crossing spot or a makeshift bridge. Taking a few minutes to scout up and downstream is always worth the effort. Can

you see the bottom of the stream? If so, check out the streambed below the water. You will want to make sure it looks good and note any specifically deep areas that you'll need to cross or avoid. Next, make sure you have some sturdy trekking poles or a good size branch to use as a pole to help stabilize yourself while crossing. I have found that the lightweight trekking poles I normally carry are not up for the task in especially fast moving water, so I'll still grab a thick branch sometimes.

You will want to pick out a suitable spot where the water is shallow enough to cross, no deeper than the length of your arm. (Which is about as long as your lower leg) This is to avoid a situation where the water can push you under in a foot entrapment. In a calm stream crossing you can get away crossing in slightly deeper water, but still be aware of your feet and the streambed below you.

Next, as much as you may want to save your shoes and socks from getting wet, keep them on if the water is swift and if there are descent sized rocks on the bottom. Rocks can be slippery and sharp, and you do not want to potentially injure yourself while crossing barefoot. Some people may elect to take their socks off, however in the long run I find that it's not helpful and has a negligible impact on keeping your feet dry. I normally just leave mine on, and wringing them out afterwards along with dumping out my shoes of any gravel that worked its way in works well.



For crossing techniques, unbuckle your pack and loosen your pack straps before crossing, (This is so you can get out of your pack in an emergency) putting anything that may get damaged if it's submerged at the top of the pack in Ziplocs or stuff sacks to help make it "dunk resistant". Use your trekking poles or a branch out in front of you to feel your way across. Go slow, checking your footing as you cross to make sure you're stepping on something stable. I find angling myself at 45 degrees to the current and side stepping across is more stable in swift water than trying to walk straight across the river.

If you do lose your balance, swim for shore instead of trying to stand up unless you're still in arms-length shallow water. Do not try to swim against the current or for a specific spot on the other side, rather just swim perpendicular to the current so you are not wearing yourself out trying to swim upstream.

In the end, if you are still concerned about a river crossing, start bushwhacking along the stream bank until you find a suitable spot for crossing or something that bridges the stream. Use caution if you decide to cross on logs or if trying to walk across the tops of rocks that remain above water, the consequences of a slip and fall are usually much worse than just getting your feet wet in the first place. Water crossings are one of the more hazardous obstacles that will be encountered on the trail, and can easily cause injuries if they are not navigated correctly, so be patient and take your time when completing them.



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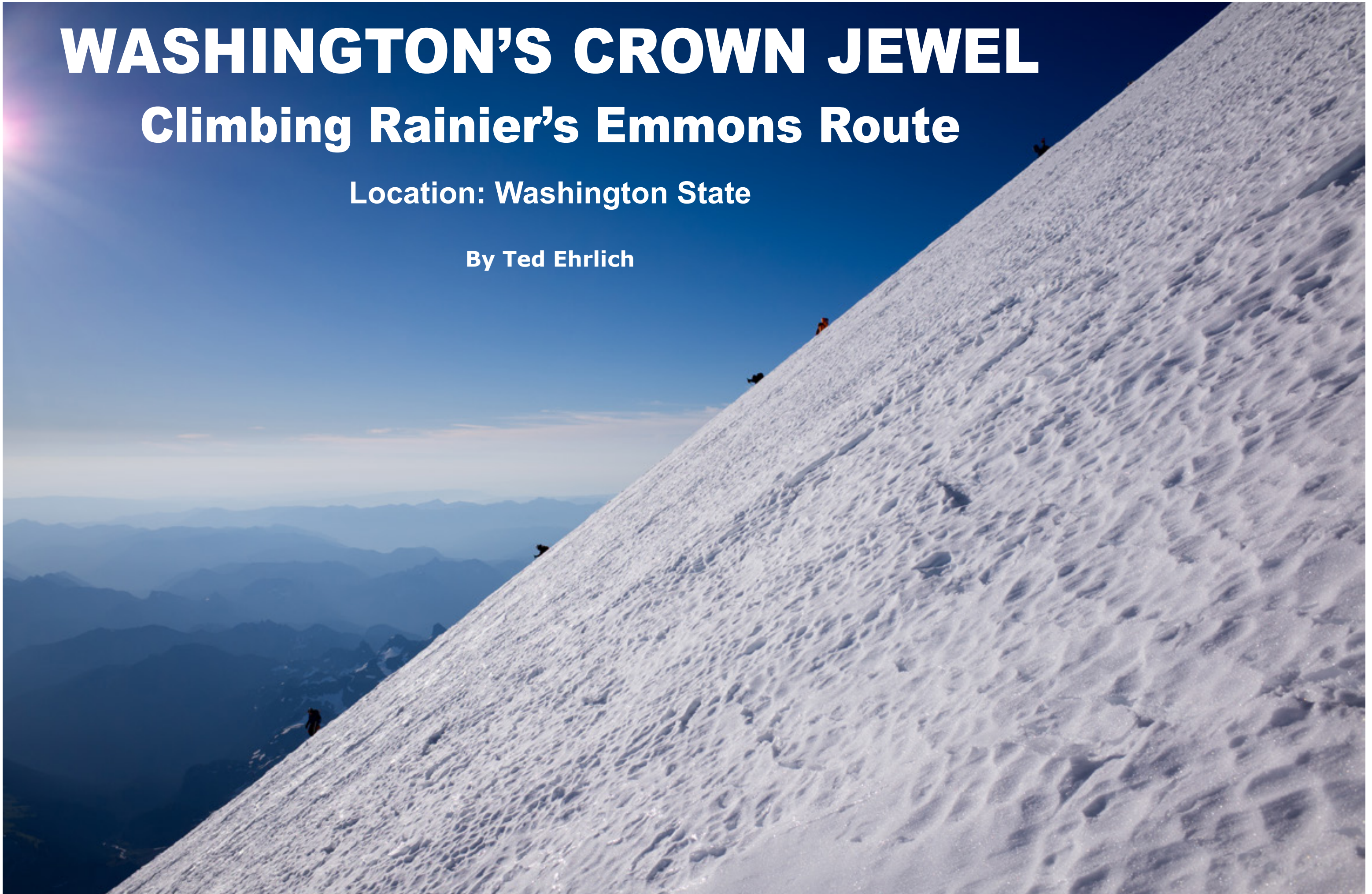


WASHINGTON'S CROWN JEWEL

Climbing Rainier's Emmons Route

Location: Washington State

By Ted Ehrlich



As I flew towards Seattle, I had a slight sinking feeling in my gut. Not because I was worried about what I would encounter in the next 48 hours, but because I realized I had picked the wrong side of the airplane to sit on. Anyone who has flown in or out of SeaTac knows that the views of Rainier, Adams, and the rest of the Cascades are spectacular, as long as you sit on the correct side of the plane with clear weather. I hadn't thought about it when I picked my seat, and as the people on the opposite side oohed and aahed, I caught glimpses of my objective by peering across the aisle. Standing massive against the skyline, Mount Rainier is a sight to behold, and I knew soon enough I would be a speck on the side of it.

I hate flying. Wait, I take that back. I love flying, but I hate airports. As soon as I could, I departed SeaTac, catching a ride with Jeff, a local who was nice enough to give me a ride to the White River Campground to meet my climbing partner, Sean. After a quick stop at the grocery store to pick up food and some dinner at Taco Time, a local Mexican restaurant (or at least what they call Mexican food in the northwest), we headed out, reaching the campground and Sean's truck just after sunset. The whole flight still had me a bit wired, so we enjoyed a beer before calling it a night. Before falling asleep, I reflected upon what led up to me being nearly 1000 miles from home.

Previous Page: Climbers on one of the steeper sections of the Emmons Glacier

To be fair, this trip is the culmination of my climbing experience. After soloing Gannett Peak – Wyoming's highest point, in 2010, I decided I needed to learn technical rock and ice climbing, and set about doing that to prepare myself for more alpine pursuits in my future. For Mount Rainier this summer, I knew it was going to be technically easy for me, but still physically

demanding, so I needed to understand that my body could handle the stress. I decided my goal prior to the trip was to put in over 10,000 feet of gain in a weekend without an issue, and being in Colorado, I was able to train for this easily in the Rocky Mountains. In the weeks preceding Rainier, I went on several backpacking and peak bagging trips,

summitting 7 peaks and putting in 126 miles training, with my biggest weekend gaining over 12,000 feet. I felt prepared and ready for the challenge.

The next morning came early, and as I laid out my gear on the ground, sorting through what was needed and what wasn't, we saw more and more groups



Working our way up the lower Inter Glacier and snowfields from Glacier Basin to the Camp Schurman, Photo courtesy Sean O'Rourke



Above: Almost to Camp Schurman

Right: Melting snow in camp, photo courtesy of Sean O'Rourke

with pickets and helmets strapped to their packs roll in and out of the climbers parking area. Some looked pretty green, while others looked like they had been there before. Sean and I sized them up, hoping that they wouldn't cause us trouble while on the same route as us, but that's one of the down sides of taking a more common route. While not the most popular route, Emmons is still considered one of the standard routes, but was more appealing to us because it isn't as crowded as the Disappointment Cleaver Route, the easiest standard route for guides and first timers. It was the first time for both of us on Rainier, but we weren't exactly green either.

After sorting through my gear and packing up, we headed out. Even at 8:30 in the morning, the heat was starting to get to us, so we quickly made our way through the forest towards treeline at 6,000 feet, the end of the trail and the start of the lower snowfield. White River disappears underneath the snow here, and we momentarily dropped our bags as I swapped out my shoes for boots, filled up with some water, and slathered on sunscreen for the solar oven we were about to step into. The heat reflecting off the snow kept us warm as we worked our way up the snow field; I wore only shorts and a short sleeve shirt. As we crested the rocky ridge at the top of the 3,000 foot

snow field, we took a short break and enjoyed the view of the Lower Emmons Glacier below us and the massive north wall of Little Tahoma Peak to the south. Just past the ridge crest we found Camp Schurman, with a small tent city already forming around it. After throwing our tent up and getting out some necessities, we enjoyed the camp life for the rest of the afternoon.

We started melting snow and eventually cooked dinner on a rocky section above camp, unlike most of the people in the camp below who stood around on the snow near their tents. As the evening went on, we chatted with each other and others in camp, and it seemed like most people stated they were "leaving that

night" for the summit, which really meant they were starting out near midnight. Sean and I were in good enough shape that we didn't see the need to start out that early, so we decided a saner wake up time of 3am was good enough for us. As the sun set, the solar oven keeping me in my shorts and shirt turned off, and even in the middle of July, I got chilled and changed into warmer clothes. Haze from a wildfire burning to the north of us gave us incredible sunset colors, and in the east, a full moon rose, illuminating the glacier. I stayed up fairly late, shooting a few photos of the moon, stars, and the illuminated mountain we were going to climb in the morning. Crawling into my bag after having my fill of night photography, I fell into a dreamless dark sleep.





Sunset from our tent in Camp Schurman



The moonlit upper section of Rainier

My alarm went off and as we got out of bed, we poked our heads out to see the whole mountain glowing, illuminated by the moon high overhead. We got our packs and gear set up, roped up, and set off up the mountain. Above us a line of headlamps snaked along the mountainside, showing where others were making progress up the slopes. As we toiled up the obvious bootpack, the horizon slowly started to illuminate behind us. As the sun finally rose, we took a short break to enjoy the new light and snack on some food. After about two hours of climbing we passed our first group, and started seeing more and more people along the route. Sean and I moved fast and carefully, simul-climbing with no running gear between us, passing up the large groups running belays over the

snow bridged crevasses. Near 12,000 feet, we came upon a larger looking crevasse. The afternoon before we were warned by the ranger that it was deceptive with an overhung roof. We crossed carefully, Sean placing an axe in self arrest while I crossed, getting nerves looking through the crack in the snow.

Moving higher, we passed more and more people and smaller crevasses until finally coming to the final obstacle. A sheer fracture in the snow called a bergschrund, where the glacier pulls away from upper snowfield. It was still early enough in the season that the bergschrund was in great shape, and a quick leap put us both on the upper snowfield for the final homestretch towards the summit. A few minutes later, the rocky outcropping of the upper

volcanic crater came into view, where we could see groups staged at the edge of the rocks, leaving their packs and snow gear at the base. We unclipped, flipped off our crampons, and scrambled up the last hundred feet of volcanic scree to Columbia Crest. There was already a small group on summit, and we joined in their celebration of the climb. A human pyramid was formed and beers were chugged for summit photos, and everyone enjoyed the view from the summit, with the snowcapped mounds of Mount St. Helens and Mount Adams visible to the south. The main summit cone below us had a few steaming vents, reminding us that we were standing on top of a semi-active volcano. After enjoying the summit we headed back to our gear stash, and had a quick snack and roped up for the descent.

Lower Left: Sunrise on the Emmons Glacier, Photo by Sean O'Rourke

Lower Right: Sunrise on the Emmons Glacier

Below: One of the smaller crevasses we encountered





Climbers roped up below us on the Emmons Glacier



Climbing the steepest section of the Emmons Glacier, Photo by Sean O'Rourke

Summit of Rainier (Mount Adams in the background), Photo by Sean O'Rourke



Sean and I made quick work of the descent, dropping 2,500 feet in an hour. The snow started out nice, but lower it turned into a slushy mess from the heat of the sun. About 1,000 feet above the camp, we decided the snow was soft enough that our crampons were no longer useful, so we flipped them off and continued tromping down the snow, boot skiing or glissading the final bit. Upon returning to camp, we found the two celebratory beers we had buried in the snow, enjoying them over hastily packing up camp and a quick rehydrated lunch. From our perch above the camp, we watched as slower teams snaked their way back down the mountain, and new teams made their way into camp from the lower snowfield. After finishing off our food and beer, we started the hike back out, heading towards the car.

At the top of the snowfield crest, an obvious track from previous climbers provided some of the best glissading I've ever done – I slid 2,400 feet on my butt while Sean showed off his impressive boot skiing skills. All good things have to end, and near 6,600 feet the slope flattened out and we booted our way to the trail at the top of Glacier Basin camping area. Here Sean swapped his boots for his trail runners, and we stripped off our snow gear before hiking out the last 3 miles to the car, hitting the parking lot 31 hours after starting our trip. I told Sean that we should try to find a beach to complete the descent. We drove into Seattle, finding our way to Alki Beach to dip our feet in the sea, dropping 14,410 feet in 11 hours. As we hung out along the bustling streets of West Seattle, the sun set behind the Olympic Mountains on the west side of Puget sound. A great ending to a rewarding trip.

Summit of Rainier (Mount Adams in the background)





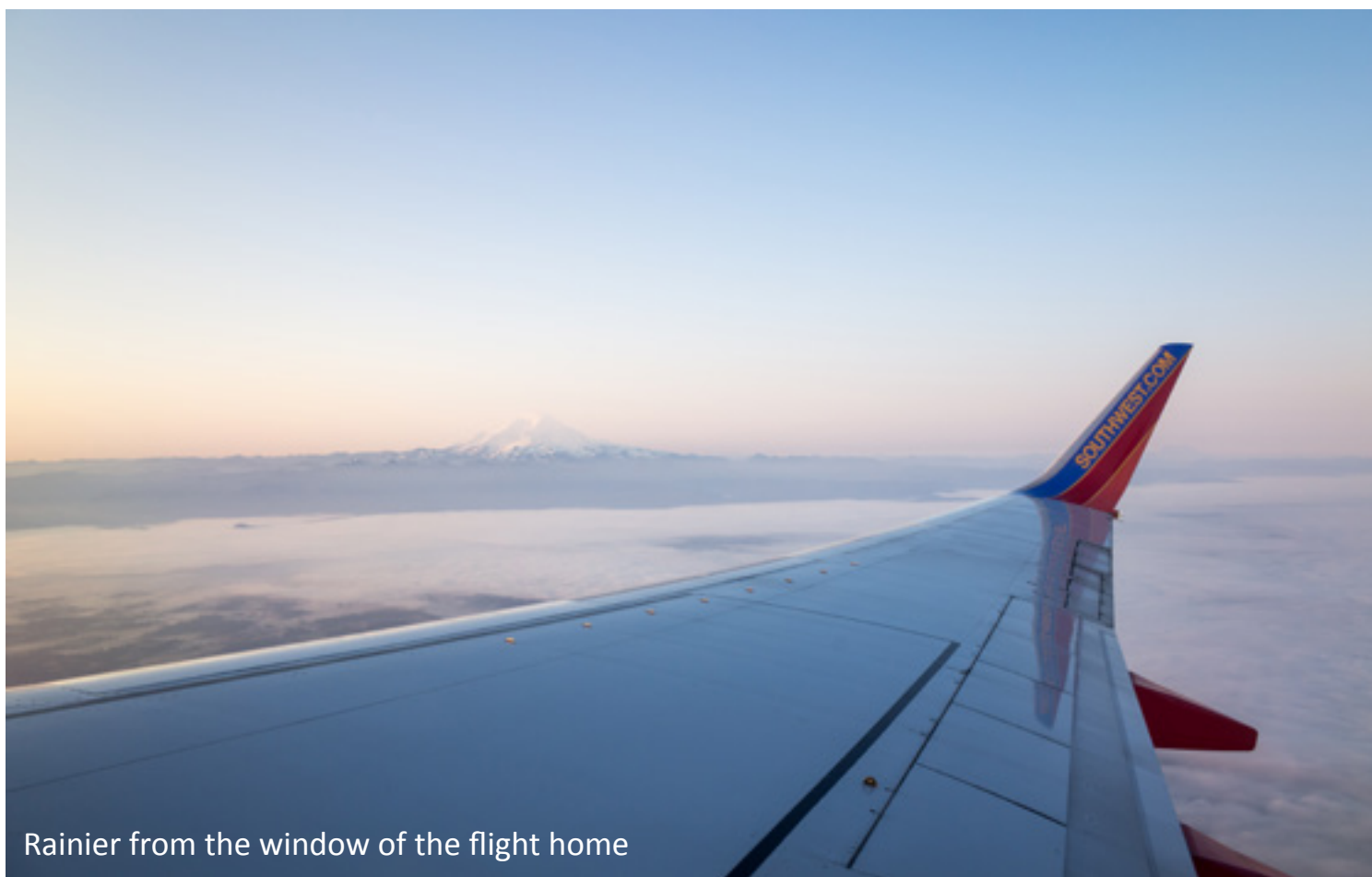
Sean checking out the bergschrund on the descent



Taking a rest on slushy snow during the descent



Below Glacier basin on the way out. One of the last good looks at the upper mountain before getting back to the trailhead



Rainier from the window of the flight home

Best Time to Go: Prime season can be between June and September. Conditions can vary greatly depending on the snow condition and route, so contact the wilderness & climbing information centers prior to climbing to get up to date conditions. Weather can also vary, with snow and white out conditions possible year round.

Getting There: Mount Rainier is located approximately two hours southeast of Seattle. SeaTac and Portland International are the closest airports. There are many trailheads around Rainier to access the mountain. White River Campground is located on the east side of the mountain.

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated #217 - Mount Rainier National Park

Information: A wilderness permit is required to stay at any of the backcountry campsites, and an annual climbing permit (\$45) is required to be purchased if you are traveling above 10,000 feet. A \$15 7 day park pass (or \$30 annual pass) is also required when passing within the boundaries of the park. The inter-agency annual passes will wave this park pass.

More information about Ted (<http://mtnnut.wordpress.com>) and Sean (<http://drdirtbag.com>) can be found on their personal blogs.



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THE OVERLAND TRACK

Location: Tasmania

By Nick Exarhos

Photos Courtesy Stephen Laurence



“He’s tested positive to TNT”.

Admittedly, not the words I was expecting to hear at the start of our trip to Tasmania. This message came via phone from our friend Louise at the Melbourne airport where one of our other hike members, Julian, had been pulled aside at the airport for initially testing positive for the substance. Further tests (and considerable chit chat by a bored staff member) revealed it was a false alarm, but it certainly added to the feeling that this was going to be an interesting trip.

Below: Gustav Weindorfer’s Bath House Near His Chalet. **Right:** Old Hut by Crater Lake. **Previous Page:** Track to Windermere.

The Overland Track is considered to be one of the best walks in Australia. Running some 80 km down the middle of Tasmania, it starts at Ronny Creek and ends at Lake St Claire, Australia’s deepest lake. It traverses a glacial formed landscape with altitudes ranging from 750m to 1250m, with the option of doing side trips to nearby higher mountains. As such, waterproof and warm clothing is a must. We were also told that wet feet were a given, though I was determined to have my new Gore-Tex lined boots prove otherwise.



We allowed ourselves 7 days for the trek though it can easily be done in 5 days if time is an issue. As it turned out 7 days was ideal as it gave us the opportunity to do some of the side trips, explore the region, and take the time to relax and appreciate the beauty of this place. There were well maintained huts to greet us at the end of each day, with their capacity ranging from 16 to 36 berths. Everyone must also carry a tent in case the huts are full, though we never found this to be the case. Large water tanks next to the huts store rainwater with signs telling you to filter or boil the water. We did however notice others drinking directly from the tank and after waiting and watching for a couple of hours to see if they dropped dead, which they didn’t, we figured it was safe to do as they did.

The day before our hike began we spent the night at Waldheim Cabins, a privately run group of cabins within the National Park. This gave us the chance to take stock of our gear, food supplies and psyche ourselves up for the days ahead. The cabins were right next to the original Waldheim Chalet which was built by Gustav Weindorfer, an Austrian who fell in love with the area and was considered instrumental in the region being given National Park status.

You could certainly see why the area meant so much to him, surrounded as he was by beautiful myrtle beech forests with the jagged peaks of Cradle Mountain in the distance. Apparently he became quite friendly with the local wildlife, feeding them when he could, although



Below: Dove Lake with Cradle Mountain in the Distance. **Left:** The Road to Cradle Mountain. **Above:** Morning Tea with Cradle Mountain in the Background.



some ended up becoming pests with the now extinct Tasmanian tiger breaking into his home several times in his later years and ransacking his kitchen as if “they think they own the place”.

Being an alpine region, we felt fortunate to have a beautifully warm, sunny day with which to begin our hike. From Ronny Creek we started on duckboards across the buttongrass plains and made the steady and steep ascent up to Marion’s Lookout, where we had magnificent views of Crater and Dove Lakes as well as Cradle Mountain and Barn Bluff in the distance. The first day’s walk to the hut at Waterfall Valley is considered the hardest as you’re carrying a full pack (about 18-20kg) and have to climb over Marion’s Lookout (1250m). The walk takes about 4-6 hrs to Waterfall Valley and we were happy to take our time and not squeeze in the side trips to the peaks of Cradle Mountain or Barn Bluff, an additional 3 hrs each.

The Rangers at Waterfall Valley checked our names off when we arrived and in passing mentioned that a tiger snake had made his home near the hut. They stated this in a surprisingly nonchalant way and said just to leave it alone, which we were all too happy to do, seeing as their bite can be deadly (the snakes, not the rangers). We found the snake almost immediately, and quickly and probably foolishly lost our fear as it didn’t seem too interested in us. I made sure to let a local school group know its location as they had to walk passed it on duckboards to get to their campsite. Understandably, they didn’t seem very impressed by this prospect and even I went to bed in our tent with one eye on a leech that seemed intent on getting inside and another eye looking out for a wayward tiger snake.

The following day greeted our tent with the pitter-patter of rain. It was only a 3 hr hike to the next hut so off we went.



Above: Tiger Snake at Waterfall valley.

Below: One of the Camping Platforms.

Left: Smaller of the Two Huts at Waterfall Valley.





The pitter-patter though soon became a wild wind-blown downpour, hitting us sideways as we marched with our heads down across buttongrass plains dotted with lakes and tarns. No shelter for us in this landscape. Some of our old Gore-Tex shells weren't breathing that well so a few of us were wet on the inside and out. Fortunately the rain abated and then ceased altogether when we reached Windermere Hut. Even the sun made a special guest star appearance, giving us

some much needed rays to help dry our clothes.

Our avid swimmer Brad even decided to go for a dip in the black waters of Lake Windermere, managing a couple of minutes before the cold became too much. We all gave him a group hug to warm him up as his chattering teeth slowly came to rest. We spent the rest of the day wandering around the lake taking photographs and soaking up the sun on

the scenically placed but unoccupied tent platforms. Cards were our main form of entertainment in the evenings and after a few bad plays Brad looked at us and exclaimed "I've got HYPOTHERMIA!" Referring to his earlier lake dip. We felt this was a good enough reason and excused his bad playing.

The third day was a special one as it was Julian's birthday. We hiked for a few kilometers across moorland and when the

sun finally burst through the clouds we stopped at a rocky point with lovely views of the surrounding buttongrass plains and surprised him with an unbelievably un-squashed birthday cupcake. He was chuffed and said that he probably won't be able to top this birthday vista for many years to come. Intermittent rain followed us for the rest of the walk as we made our way through an eerily still and silent myrtle beech rainforest before finally reaching the Pelion Plains and Pelion Hut. It was still raining so we decided to sleep in the hut that night, with fog and mist occasionally blanketing the dolorite spires of Mt. Oakleigh in the distance.

Morning broke and a short walk revealed a couple of pademelons (similar to wallabies) grazing nearby, with the mum seemingly unimpressed at her now too large joey still trying to get back into her overstretched pouch. The day's walk started with a gradual ascent through lush rainforest and continued up to Pelion Gap, the closest point on the main track from which to head for either Mt. Ossa or Mt. Pelion East. At 1617m Mt. Ossa is Tasmania's highest peak and many walkers drop their main packs and head off with day packs in an attempt to summit the peak.

Unfortunately today the peaks were blanketed in cloud so we left Mt. Ossa and its promised views for another trip and continued our descent to the next hut. Large portions of the trail to Kia Ora Hut seemed to have once been covered in duckboard and planks but much of these had rotted away, leaving considerable sections of mud to wade through. Being



Upper Left: The Rains Come in Over the Buttongrass Plains.
Lower Left: Soaking up the Sun by Lake Windermere.
Above: Cupcake Time! - Julians Birthday.

well aware of low environmental impact concerns, where one should try and walk through the mud rather than skirt around it we forged ahead, often through ankle deep sections.

Gore-Tex lined boots with gaiters did nothing to stop muddy waters seeping into our shoes. It became commonplace to be putting on wet socks in the mornings, a most unpleasant feeling, although wool and synthetic socks would soon warm up as the walk progressed. At one point Louise stepped off a duckboard into what seemed like a shallow pool only to find herself knee deep in sloshy mud. Just as well she went first! It took her a few minutes to extricate herself, much to the amusement of everyone else. Seeing as we bypassed the side trip up to Mt. Ossa, we made such good time to Kia Ora Hut that after a quick lunch we decided to soldier on to the next hut at Windy Ridge,

a further 4hrs hiking. However, after about an hour walking through rainforest the trees cleared and we found ourselves looking at Du Cane Hut, the oldest and most derelict looking hut on the track. If there was a movie to be made about college kids being picked off one by one in a cabin in the woods, then this was the place. It was built in 1910 by a hunter for his winter forays snaring animals. Today it's only used as an emergency hut. It's so old and (remarkably) dry inside that you cannot cook or sleep there, as the rangers are afraid that one mistake and the place could go up in a flash. It did however have so much charm that we decided to stay the night so we set up our tents on the nearby helipad and surrounds. Inside and sitting at the rustic table you really did get a sense of what it would be like living in the earliest part of this century, without todays modern sleeping and cooking comforts. Wombat stew anyone?



well aware of low environmental impact concerns, where one should try and walk through the mud rather than skirt around it we forged ahead, often through ankle deep sections.

Gore-Tex lined boots with gaiters did nothing to stop muddy waters seeping into our shoes. It became commonplace to be putting on wet socks in the mornings, a most unpleasant feeling, although wool and synthetic socks would soon warm up as the walk progressed. At one point Louise stepped off a duckboard into what seemed like a shallow pool only to find herself knee deep in sloshy mud. Just as well she went first! It took her a few minutes to extricate herself, much to the amusement of everyone else. Seeing



Upper Left: Hut at Lake Windermere.

Above: Pademelon with Teenager Who Won't Move Out of Home.

Right: Du Cane Hut.

as we bypassed the side trip up to Mt. Ossa, we made such good time to Kia Ora Hut that after a quick lunch we decided to soldier on to the next hut at Windy Ridge, a further 4hrs hiking. However, after about an hour walking through rainforest the trees cleared and we found ourselves looking at Du Cane Hut, the oldest and most derelict looking hut on the track. If there was a movie to be made about college kids being picked off one by one in a cabin in the woods, then this was the place. It was built in 1910 by a hunter for his winter forays snaring animals. Today it's only used as an emergency hut. It's so old and (remarkably) dry inside that you cannot cook or sleep there, as the rangers are afraid that one mistake and the place could go up in a flash. It did however have so much charm that we decided to stay

the night so we set up our tents on the nearby helipad and surrounds. Inside and sitting at the rustic table you really did get a sense of what it would be like living in the earliest part of this century, without today's modern sleeping and cooking comforts. Wombat stew anyone?

As the evening progressed and the light inside from the solitary window dimmed, we settled at the table for a game of cards. We started with our familiar games but decided to liven things up by adding new rules to every round. This went on for close to an hour so that when Brad came back from meditating outside he found us barking, mooing and making various other farm and moaning noises, all new rules to our game. Clearly something supernatural had got a hold of us. Brad took one look,





stopped dead in his tracks and then slowly retreated to the relative safety of the forest. We did sleep well that night though, with all accounted for in the morning.

The next day and after filling our water reserves from a nearby waterfall, we ventured on towards the hut at Windy Ridge, a mere 3 hrs away. The day was turning out to be magnificent and sunny, so we decided to do all the waterfall side trips on offer. Ferguson and D'alton Falls are quite close to each other and lovely spots to sit and meditate for a while. Hartnett Falls were a bit further off and after following a steep narrow track to their base we were rewarded with the site of the falls in full. They had a thunderous flow, thanks to all the recent rains.



We ended up spending the entire afternoon here, sunning ourselves like lizards on the rocks and slowly drifting off to sleep, with the soft breezes and steady hum of the falls gently filling our senses. As the day wore on we reluctantly decided to leave and head to the hut at Windy Ridge. A steady climb towards Du Cane Gap brought us into a drier eucalypt forest before a final descent to the hut itself. It's located in a magnificent spot, and was built with a large platform to sit and take in the encircling Du Cane Range, with mountains like The Acropolis, Mt. Massif and Falling Mountain silhouetted against the sky.

Our second last day was a fairly easy 3-4 hr hike to Narcissus Hut at the northern edge of Lake St Clair. Along the way we passed a turnoff to Pine Valley, 4.7 km away and used by many as a base to explore The Acropolis and the maze-like collection of small lakes and valleys known as The Labyrinth. Narcissus Hut is one of the smaller huts and many walkers do not stay here, choosing instead to finish the walk by catching the ferry down the length of Lake St. Clair. We however chose to stay the night and took advantage of the cold waters of the Narcissus River for another little dip, hoping to catch sight of a platypus or two. Fortunately this time we had a wood burner to warm up with and settled down to our final rehydrated meals.

Far Left: Old Signs.

Left: Louise After Her Muddy Encounter.

The 7th day was begun in good spirits as once again the sun greeted us for our final 17.5km trek along Lake St. Clair. This really was a magical walk, with shafts of sunlight piercing the shadows of the rainforest and gentle undulations making it an almost hypnotic walk along soft spongy earth that was flanked by moss and lichen covered trees. Even some of the insects resembled tiny fairies, with their long limbs and wings catching the sunlight as they leisurely drifted sideways across our path. A few hours on and we stopped briefly for a break at the jetty at Echo Point, about halfway along the lake before having lunch on the rocky shore. I had forgotten my final lunch behind us at Narcissus Hut and had to ask for handouts from the others, where they kindly offered me bits of cheese, sardines, miso soup and crackers. Food for a king!

The final few hours continued through rainforest, followed by eucalypt forest, tall ferns and then the inevitable paved paths as we finally reached Cynthia Bay Visitor Centre and our exit point. Needless to say one of the first things we did was go the restaurant and order a double hamburger and chips, and boy was it good! And then we had a shower. And people around us thought that was good! Although I have to say I think we did fairly well in that department, seeing as most of us had woolen undergarments rather than synthetic.

The Overland Track is a great 5-7 day hike passing through some wonderful Tasmanian terrain, definitely one to keep in mind if you're ever in this part of the world.

Getting there: Getting to the start of the track is easiest from Launceston, where you can fly in from Melbourne or alternatively you can take an overnight ferry from Melbourne into Devonport. From either Launceston or Devonport there are several bus services that depart for Cradle Mountain but you do need to book ahead as different services run on different days. These same services can also pick you up on a pre-arranged day at the end of the walk at Lake St. Clair Visitor Centre. From there they can return you to either Launceston / Devonport or take you to Hobart, the largest city in Tasmania.

Best Time to Go: The months of December-April are popular as they have long daylight hours and warmer average temperatures.

Maps: A simple overview of the walk can be seen here:

http://www.100roads.com/images/tasmania/cradle_mtn_map.jpg

Detailed topographical maps and booklets are sent out by Parks Tasmania when registering for the walk.

Information: For extensive information on the Overland Track including booking the walk, planning for it and how to get there, refer to the Parks Tasmania website:

<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=7771>



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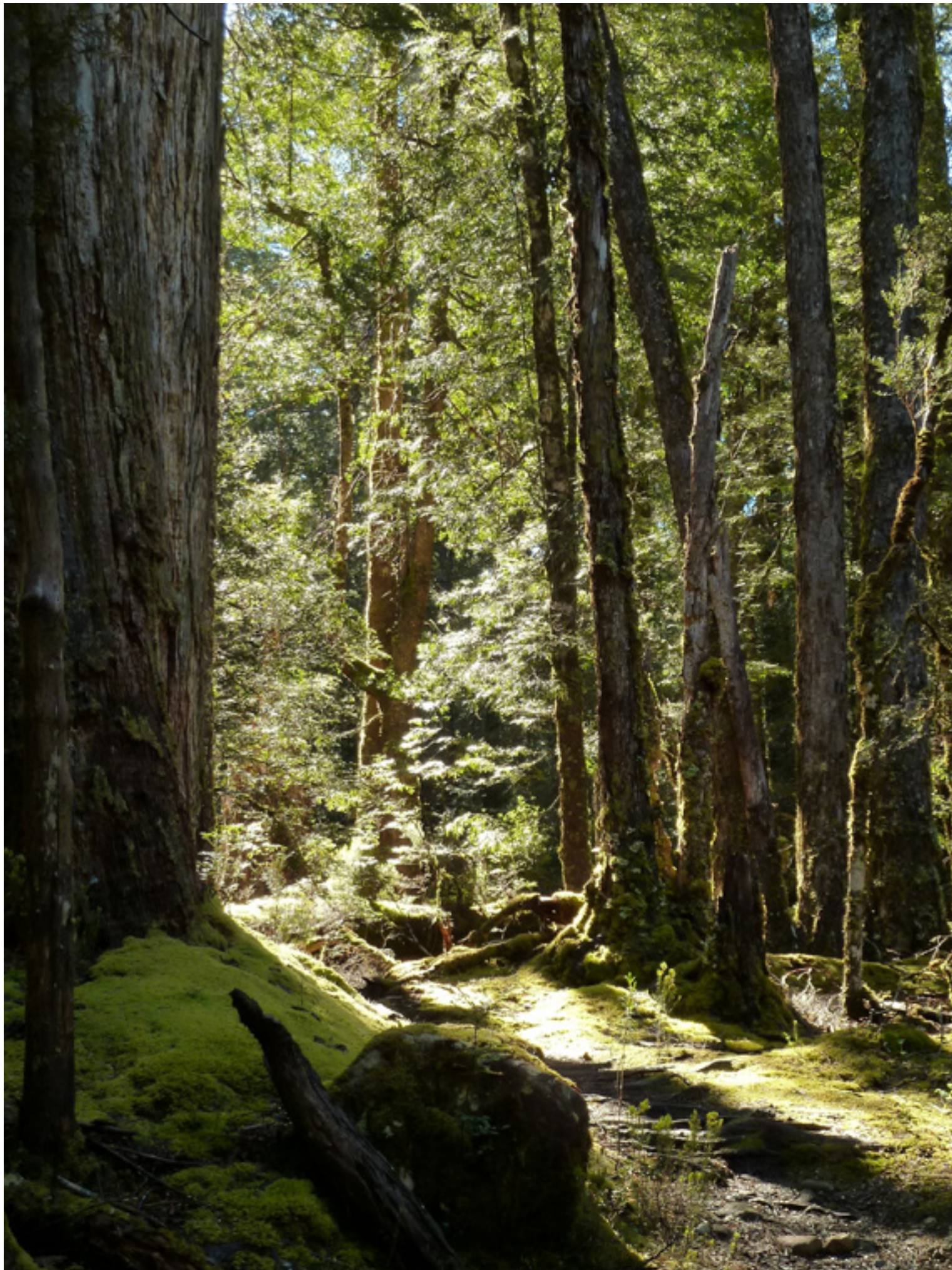
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Reflections Off Narcissus River, Where it Flows into Lake St Clair



Far Left: Forest Trail.
Left: This Way.
Above: Relaxing by the Falls.



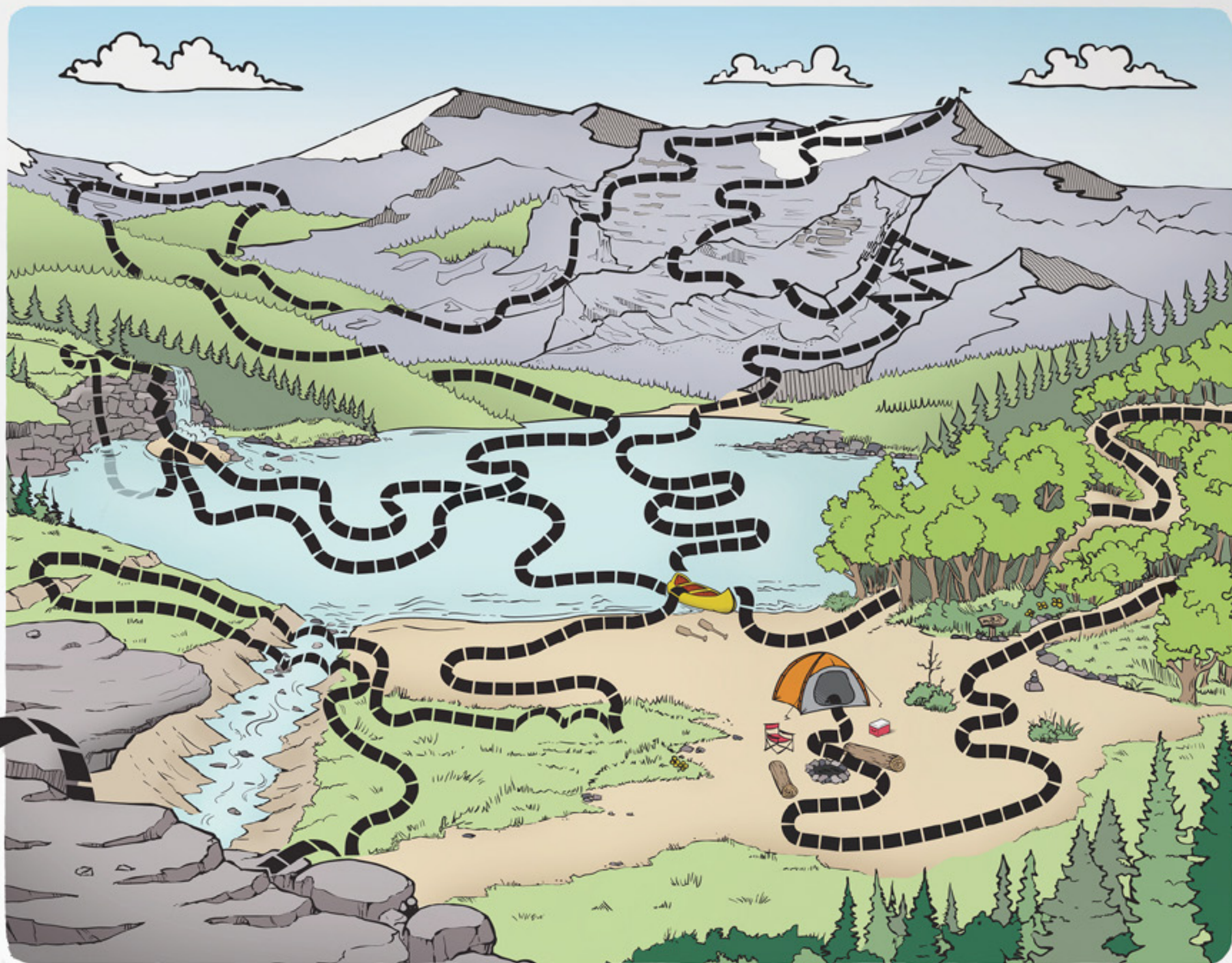




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Off-Trail Delights

By Paul Magnanti

It is the Fourth of July weekend.

I am at a pristine lake somewhere in Colorado.

Above me are the sheer walls of the mountains forming a deep cirque.

The lingering summer snow is on the cliffs above and reflecting the morning light.

The scent of pine is strong. The birds are calling out their morning songs.

I sip my coffee and quietly contemplate the beauty around me.

There is no one here.

A holiday weekend and I have this gem all to myself.

How could that be?

It is because I went off the beaten path and followed no path at all.

I went off-trail.

Why go off trail?

Besides leaving the crowds behind, going off-trail makes the familiar new again. New passes are seen, trail-less peaks are summited and long ridge walks are explored.

Tired of being rain-fly to rain-fly at a mountain lake? Look at a map and figure out the best way to arrive at that hidden lake where few Vibram soles tread.

And it is not all about grand views or hidden locations. Wildlife viewing can be astounding when the trail is left behind. I've camped near big horn sheep, seen mountain goats grazing contently and have seen elk bugle. On-trail and near popular camping spots? Not so much.

But sometimes going off-trail leads to more subtle pleasures. A memorable jaunt going cross-country through wooded terrain lead to the spotting of a wood lily. This rare, for Colorado, flower is magnificent. And I have not seen it since that off-trail jaunt.

Another advantage to going off-trail is that new routes become available. When sticking strictly to trails, options are limited. A high ridge may separate one portion of the park from another. Learn to read a map and following the easiest contours up to the ridge – A loop hike is now a possibility. The choices of routes can now be expanded.

Knowledge is power....or at least needed.

Before going off-trail, some basic map and compass knowledge is needed. Many local outdoor stores, hiking clubs and

sometimes even colleges will offer a course on map and compass use. Though the basics can be learned from a book or a website, some competent instruction can make learning the concepts easier.

Usually for a modest fee, such terminology as contour lines, declination, plotting a course, dead reckoning and so on start to become familiar terms and become part of the everyday outdoor vocabulary as much as GORP or silnylon.

And once these concepts are learned, practice. And practice some more. And practice yet again.

Go to an area that is familiar and make use of what are called “handrails” and “backstops”.

Following a stream up to a lake would be an example of a handrail. Making your route of choice end at a trail or even a jeep road perpendicular to your compass bearing would be an example of a backstop.

Handrails and backstops help ensure that a person does not become “misplaced” especially during the initial forays into off-trail travel.

Another aspect of practicing off-trail travel is learning the fine art of micro-navigation. Macro-navigation (reading a map, taking a compass bearing, etc.) fundamentals can be taught. Micro-navigation can only be learned through experience. Examples of micro-navigation include finding the best way through a talus slope safely, learning

to make incremental changes in a route without getting off course, adjusting an uphill climb to make use of tundra rather than scree and so on. As a person becomes more experienced in off-trail travel, refining micro-navigation skills makes future routes a little bit easier.

Have the right tools

A good compass is essential for off-trail navigation. A compass does not have to be anything too fancy. A simple baseplate compass is usually sufficient.

Equally important is a good map. A recreational map is very good for on-trail travel. Depending on the terrain, a recreational map may or may not have the detail needed for off-trail hiking. A popular example of a recreational map is the National Geographic Trails Illustrated series.

Often times for off-trail travel, a more detailed map is needed. The standard map for this type of navigation are 7.5 minute maps put out the by the USGS. The details are excellent and great for making sure if a place is too steep to ascend safely, picking out a good camping spot and so on. These USGS maps can be found online for free on various websites (including the USGS site itself) and printed out as needed. I find having both a recreational hiking map and a 7.5 minute topo is a good combination for off-trail hiking. One map has the overall route, the other map is used for more detailed navigation.

Besides a map and a compass, a watch is a useful navigation tool. When a pace is

known through certain types of terrain (also learned through experience) along with the length of travel time, a good guess can be had as to where your current location is on the map. Though not needed, an altimeter setting on a watch is also found useful by many for off-trail travel.

In addition to navigation tools, paying attention to what type of gear and clothing brought is also important. Be sure the pack material can handle the scrapes and bumps that comes from sliding down rocks, squeezing through brush and bashing between logs. The sub-1lb pack used for something like a Pacific Crest Trail thru-hike may not last long for some off-trail travel. Similar concepts apply to rain gear and other clothing, too.

If the vegetation is especially thick, long pants are encouraged instead of shorts. In my native New England with its thick woods or the desert southwest with prickly plants, shorts would leave my legs all scraped up.

In addition to sturdier clothing and gear, some stiffer shoes are sometimes welcome for scree and talus hopping and third class (hands and arms needed; no exposure) scrambles. While trail runners can be used, a studier shoe can sometimes can make for more secure footing during more technical off-trail travel.

What about a GPS or even a smart phone? While those tools can be useful, they are absolutely not needed. Following a waypoint blindly can also cause issues





as an electronic tool does not take into account the terrain between a hiker and a waypoint. And, like all electronics, a GPS or smart phone can fail. Think of electronics as a complement to traditional navigation tools and not a replacement.

Be safe

When going off-trail, do not overestimate skills and attempt something beyond a comfortable skill level. And be more conservative when going solo. And by all means, be sure to leave an itinerary with someone at home. Note that these suggestions apply for all wilderness travel and not just off-trail travel. Some prominent outdoor writers suggest a SPOT,

PLB or similar as well. To bring that type of device is a decision each hiker will have to make for themselves.

Final thoughts

If the beaten path is becoming a bit too beaten for personal taste, go off-trail. The people are fewer, the views sublime and the memories delectable.

Walt Whitman may have sang the praises of “The long brown path...leading wherever I choose.”, but if Mr. Whitman had a good map, no path would have been needed.

Leave the path behind and go wherever you choose.



Upper Left: Near Devil’s Thumb Mountain.

Lower Left: Paintbrush.

Below: Rawah Wilderness.





Knapsack Col



Bighorn Ewe



Hutcheson Lake



Tarn in Comanche Peak Wilderness



Old Man of the Mountain

The Perils of a Florida Hike... and How to Face Them

by Jessica Smith



Pristine beaches, dolphins jumping in the sunset, and a spinning world of over the top theme parks, are a few images that come to mind when people think about Florida, but the Sunshine State can be more of a hazardous obstacle course than a tropical paradise to many hikers who hit the trails. Skip the trails, and you miss out on the authentic Florida that hasn't been prefabricated in a studio, the wild Florida that the Timucuan people inhabited for centuries, and the untamed jungle Florida that Hernando DeSoto and Ponce DeLeon first cut their way through in the 1500's. While it may be tempting to stay by the pool sipping on a Pina Colada, stepping out of the tourist illusion and into the real Florida gives visitors a chance to get to know a side of the State that many people are completely unaware of. While it certainly has its challenges, the hidden gems of Florida can only be found by getting away from the concrete and plastic and heading into the woods. Setting off into the swamps like the Conquistadors of old, just may have you discovering your very own Fountain of Youth. The following is a look at some of the difficulties you may encounter when hiking in Florida, and how best to tackle them and continue onto some outstanding off-the-beaten-path locations.

The Varied Terrain

While Florida lacks the elevation rise and fall of mountainous states, it would be unwise to assume that the going will be easy on flat ground. Geologically composed of a massive underground

water-filled cave system, the landscape is pitted with springs and sinkholes. Limestone and sandy soils left behind from the rise and fall of ancient beaches millions of years ago have left the terrain sandy in some areas and soggy in others. Hikers should be prepared to encounter anything from miles of hiking in sugar sand to hiking on trails completely submerged with water.

The North Central Florida scrub habitat is especially challenging on sections of the Florida Trail, like the stretch that crosses the Juniper Prairie Wilderness. This section of trail runs about 8 miles one way and is nearly tree-less throughout, making trekking similar to crossing a desert landscape, cacti and all. Hiking while sinking into sand can feel like taking one step forward and two steps back, and will leave your calves burning the next day.

The flip side of the coin is the down and dirty truth that Florida is generally a very wet state. Depending on the time of year, certain trails might end up completely underwater. Sections of trail in the Big Cypress Swamp are infamous for being water-trails, but you don't have to be as far south as the Everglades to experience a trail submerged in water or thick mud. An especially rainy Spring recently left Gainesville's La Chua Trail in Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park underwater and thus unsafe to complete due to the large number of alligators resting in the murky shallows of the path.



To face these challenges, savvy hikers keep the weather in mind and plan accordingly. Trekking across the arid scrub habitat is best done on cool overcast days (meaning the winter months), or in the early morning or late evening in an effort to avoid the mid-day sun. While some hiking trails are underwater year round, most dry out in the winter months. If there have been heavy rains in the recent past, just plan on the trail having some parts that might have you skipping across on cypress knees. Wear your old hiking boots that you don't mind getting covered in muck, and don't hold back. Occasionally you'll see locals heading out on trails in flip flops with every intention of kicking them off and going barefoot through muddy patches. In Florida, the flip flop is considered appropriate footwear for all

occasions including church and hiking. When in Florida, do as the Floridians do and get yourself some sturdy sandals.

Wildlife

Spotting wild animals while on the trail can be both a thrilling and inspiring experience that many hikers look forward to, but what do you do when a 12 foot alligator emerges from the swamp and crosses the path mere feet in front of you? Florida has incredible biodiversity, with everything from alligators to anacondas (yes, they have been found in the Everglades) now calling the state home. Iguanas have long been found in South Florida, especially the Keys, and an increasing number of invasive species are creating a stir with the local ecology. In fact, boa constrictors have



become such an issue in the Everglades that the Division of Fish and Wildlife held a hunting season for them. Further north, black bears have been making an increasing number of appearances around the Orlando area, due to rapid development into their habitat as well as the lack of bear proof trash cans, offering up a veritable garbage buffet to these opportunistic omnivores.

While these are extreme examples of what hikers may encounter, most people pass through the woods without spotting much due to thick vegetation providing plenty of hiding spots for wildlife. Just because you don't see them, doesn't mean they aren't

there. A tip for Florida hikers would be to watch the ground and keep a sharp eye for detail. When hiking out west, trekkers have the luxury of looking up at distant peaks or out across valleys for herds of elk or the occasional moose. In Florida, hikers keep their eyes on the ground. It is instinctual to native trail walkers, as so many species are small, low to the ground, camouflaged, and hazardous. Florida is home to six species of venomous snakes, all of which can be easy to miss on the trail if you aren't careful.

Once the weather starts to heat up, the forests erupt with spiders and insects. While there are the infamous brown

recluses and black widows about, hikers are much more likely to run across (or directly into) the Golden Silk Orb-Weaver, or as it is locally known, the Banana Spider. These massive arachnids have bodies that are around 2 inches long with legs fanning out to cover just under the size of an adult human hand. While non-venomous, these spiders are no less intimidating and are thick along the trails, weaving webs so strong that hikers who run into them often have to stop and back out before continuing down the trail.

The benefit of these spiders is that they help to keep the biting insects in check. Still, hikers would regret not purchasing the most frightening can of bug spray they can find and hosing themselves down before setting out in the summer months. While these spiders can be found throughout the state, an especially notable section of trail for viewing them is on the Cross Florida Greenway in Ocala, aptly named "The Spider Kingdom". Popular with hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers, this stretch of trail is thick with a variety of arachnids and insects. If you plan on taking on this challenge, pick up a stick on your way onto the trail and carry it out in front of you like a shield. While you may feel bad moving the spider webs out of your way at first, when you hike back through it's likely that the industrious spiders have already recuperated and begun rebuilding over the trail once more.

As far as spotting or running into other wildlife, general rules of common sense apply. As always, giving animals the



respect and safe distance they deserve is extremely important for your safety and the safety of the animal involved. In Florida it is actually a crime to harass the alligators, and whatever you do, do not feed them. Not only is it against the law, but it teaches the gator to associate humans with food, which is the last thing anyone should want.

To spot wildlife, anywhere with water just about guarantees you'll come across something. Birds, raccoons, turtles, snakes, and gators all accumulate along banks and in marshy areas. Silver River State Park is a great place to start. With hiking trails, canoe rentals, and an interpretive museum about local natural history, the park is wonderful for wildlife viewing. Currently

dealing with a population of wild hogs (as the rest of Florida seems to be as well), the state park is no stranger to invasive foreign species. Along the Silver River is one of the only places in the nation in which a wild population of monkeys calls home. Deposited on an island in the river in 1938 by Colonel Tooley in an attempt to spice up his boat tours, the monkeys didn't



stick around for long. The group of rhesus macaques swam to shore and swung off into the surrounding swamp, growing in number and forming several separate troops over the decades. Lucky hikers and paddlers often catch sight of these primates while out exploring the area. Be sure to bring a long camera lens and have it at the ready, as all wildlife can be flighty and you don't want to miss capturing the perfect picture for your disbelieving family members back home.

The Elements

Snowbirds (of the human variety) flock to Florida each winter for its mild and snow-

less climate. While the winter months are pleasant, the summer months can be hellaciously hot. From May to September the weather can easily break 95 degrees every day, and that's before even taking the humidity into consideration. As the summer months set in, a regular pattern of booming afternoon storms emerges, making dry afternoons outdoors a rarity. Florida has often been labeled the lightning strike capital of the world, and taking these storms seriously is the only safe option.

When setting out to enjoy your time in the great outdoors, check the weather report often, but most importantly use good



judgment. Most thunderstorms pass in an hour or less, so settling in at a shelter or a ranger booth for a few minutes while waiting out the storm is a viable option to keep your afternoon outdoors rolling.

Beating the heat can be tricky, but the answer is in mother nature as well. The entire state is peppered with absolutely gorgeous natural springs. These hidden jewels of the forest are something that most visitors to the state miss out on entirely, but they are wildly popular with locals. Believed to be the inspiration for the tales of the fountain of youth, Florida's springs offer sweet relief from the sticky humidity and leave visitors feeling young again.

While some springs are privately operated, most are state or county parks and are relatively inexpensive to enter and enjoy. With the water temperature in the springs sitting at a steady 72 degrees, these swimming holes feel brisk and refreshing in the oppressive heat. Most of these spring parks also have trail systems. For example, Silver Glen Recreation Area in North Central Florida has two different trails within the park, and a third just across the highway called The Yearling Trail. This trail connects through to the Florida Trail and features numerous historic sites related to the family that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings modeled her classic American novel *The Yearling* after. Making a day of a hike, snacking on some hot boiled peanuts, and taking a dip in the spring to cool off is as authentic of a Florida experience as an outdoor enthusiast can get.

Like an orange grove, delicious and full of spines, Florida is both alluring and challenging for those who wish to get to know the state's natural spaces. With unpredictable weather, an extreme and shifting landscape, and vast biodiversity, Florida offers adventure for all of those who seek it. While these obstacles may keep the average tourist at the poolside, it's the explorers and trekkers who break away into the wild spaces that get to experience the real Florida and all its trails and rewards.







ZPacks Multi-Pack Review

Review by Aaron Zagrodnick

On backpacks, I'm a huge fan of exterior storage. I've settled on a popular arrangement: A large interior storage compartment for items I likely won't need while hiking during the day, a large outside pocket for items I might need when stopped, and dual side and hipbelt pockets for items I'll definitely need while on the move like water bottles, maps, snacks, and other great to have at hand items. The ZPacks Multi-Pack builds on this idea by adding a large additional storage option with a variety of possible configurations. When my hipbelt pockets began to become too packed for convenient access and with no place to really contain a larger than pocket-sized camera, in 2013 I began to test out the ZPacks Multi-Pack as a potential solution. ZPacks later added factory-taped seams to the Multi-Pack feature set, and as such, I'm utilizing their current version on trips into the backcountry.

ZPacks is a manufacturer of lightweight, forward-thinking backpacking gear founded by superhiker Joe Valesko in 2005. A lot of cuben fiber is used by ZPacks, and the Multi-Pack makes use of 2.92 oz / sqyd hybrid cuben fiber, which is cuben fiber with a protective polyester facing for addition durability and protection from cuben fiber's main enemy – Abrasion. The pack features a water resistant zipper, the seams are taped from the factory, and it comes with an arrangement of quick release buckles, straps, and cord locks that allow for multiple (Multi) ways to attach the pack to your backpack / person and

Pros: Durable, water resistant construction with factory taped seams. A well thought out system that's versatile and easy to use.

Cons: Bounce when utilized in chest pack mode with only two top straps – Mitigated by utilizing bottom strap(s) for stability. Rough inside zipper surface.

Rating: ★★★★★

utilize its storage in the field. An internal loop allows you to secure items like keys with a carabineer if you'd like. With all accessories, our measured weight for the Multi-Pack came in at just 3.15 ounces. (Listed weight: 2.9 ounces) Not bad for 215 listed cubic inches of total storage. The Multi-Pack is available in grey, army green or indigo and currently retails for \$39.95.

Multi-Pack Weight: 1.5 ounces

Straps / Buckles: 1.65 ounces

Total: 3.15 ounces

Implementation

I've used the Multi-Pack as a chest pack to carry a camera and photo gear, lunch, as a fishing tackle pack, and for any other odds and ends I like to have close at hand on backpacking trips as well as day hikes. I've also used it as a sling bag / ahem, man-bag on day hikes away from a basecamp where it's worked great for carrying fishing gear, a 32 ounce water bottle, a snack, and a small camera



comfortably, but close to maxed out. It can also be easily attached to the top of a backpack as an impromptu lid, or worn around your waist. In all situations, the Multi-Pack has adapted quite well.

Attempting to go as light as possible, I initially tried the Multi-Pack as a chest pack and only utilized the 2 top attachment points, attaching the pack to the D-Rings near the top of my ULA Circuit's shoulder straps. This worked well, but on any incline or decline the bounce became too much to handle as the pack swayed back and forth away from my body and I'd resort to holding the pack in place with my hands as I hiked. This was quickly solved however. Utilizing the cord lock attachment

system, which works quite well, I attached the 2 additional provided straps and buckles to the hipbelt stabilizer straps of my pack, or to the hipbelt of an REI Flash 22 for day hikes. (Attaching where the hipbelt meets the pack body in each case) The resulting 4 anchor points at each corner of the Multi-Pack essentially eliminate bounce. All 4 straps are easily adjustable while on the move as well – Set the height of the pack higher on your chest or lower close to your hipbelt by adjusting the 2 top straps first, then tighten to take out the slack of the 2 lower straps for stability. Taking out the slack on the 2 lower straps is all that's needed – Over tightening makes for an uncomfortable squeeze. To take off your backpack, all you have to do is disconnect



the quick release buckles on one side – The other side can remain attached in a semi-permanent arrangement. All 4 attachment points remain attached directly to the backpack. Consequently, shouldering your pack again can be done in one smooth motion and requires just a few extra seconds than without the Multi-Pack entirely. Snap the top of the Multi-Pack to its top shoulder attachment point, then clip the bottom in on the same side and you're ready to go. On the trail, it's very stable used this way on the flats, uphill, downhill, and even scrambling off-trail. With this method and by disconnecting the lower straps and clipping the opposing quick release buckles together, you can then easily convert the Multi-Pack to a shoulder bag or waist pack in less than a minute if needed.



On the Trail

The zipper is easy to use, but does require two hands to open and close – You can easily just grab one of the loops on either side of the zipper for assistance, and for me this has become second nature. For the most part, items will even stay inside while hiking with the pack unzipped, the only time I've ever had anything fall out was when leaning over with the Multi-Pack unzipped to take a photograph close to the ground. With the hybrid cuben fiber construction, water resistant zipper, and taped seams, the contents of the Multi-Pack are well-protected from precipitation.

However, for full protection ZPacks does recommend an additional liner, and a gallon Ziploc (Or dry bag) does the trick nicely. I usually just keep this rolled up in the bottom of the Multi-Pack, and only utilize it when needed for sketchy looking stream crossings or especially rainy days. In fact, recently in the Wind River Range I arrived at camp on an overcast evening. I leaned my pack against a log and walked down a hillside towards the nearby lake to filter water, but found myself unable to access the lakeshore due to lakeside cliffs. That's when the skies opened up and a steadily increasing rain began to fall. By the time I located a route to the shore a quarter mile away, filtered 4 liters of water, and trekked back uphill to my pack I was soaked, my waiting pack was soaked, and so was the outside of the Multi-Pack. Even without a liner, I was quite relieved to find that my camera and everything else inside the Multi-Pack was dry. The main weakness so far as water protection is concerned is where the two zipper sliders meet; you won't want to rely on the Multi-Pack for complete protection throughout longer and heavier rains or underwater dunks. Therefore, use of a liner of some type is advised if what you're carrying can't get wet. As a side benefit, the Multi-Pack also provides great protection from additional elements. I've drug the Multi-Pack through the dirt and backpacked in Utah where sand finds its way past nearly any defense. In all circumstances everything inside, namely in my case a camera, have remained well protected.

With waterproof fabric right on your chest, on warm days I did find that the Multi-Pack would increase the sweat factor slightly, but in my case, it hasn't been an issue. The fabric doesn't absorb much water, and as long as I didn't over-tighten the bottom straps I found that enough air circulated to keep things comfortable even while hiking hard on the uphill. In any event, the Multi-Pack dries quickly and combined with fast drying synthetic clothing it's been a non-issue for me with temps up to the high 90's. In colder weather of course, no worries.

The cord lock attachment system works well and best of all, is adaptable to nearly any pack and can be attached to

any D-Ring, loop, strap, buckle, etc. The system is secure, and they've consistently remained attached and in place save for one occasion. In that instance I did have one connection work its way loose during a trailside lunch break, however it was of course quickly noticed as I shouldered my pack and reached for the missing strap that now lay on the ground. Occasionally checking the tightness of the cord locks would be a suggested practice. Despite loading up the Multi-Pack with a fair amount of weight, (I'm usually carrying about 2.5 to 3 pounds) the quick release buckles have worked as expected. Even when taking my backpack off / putting it on where for moments all the weight has been supported by just one buckle, the buckles as well as the cord lock



attachment points have never released under load unexpectedly and the contents of my Multi-Pack have remained protected and safe.

One downside is that the inside of the zipper is rough, and if you're packing the Multi-Pack with enough stuff that something is contacting the zipper towards the top from the inside, as you hike the zipper will wear against that item. After hundreds of miles, my camera now shows this superficial wear, so either pack items you might be worried about towards the bottom or pack them in another bag or liner. As a liner is suggested for maximum water protection anyway, it also works well for this purpose.

Durability

I haven't been especially careful with the Multi-Pack during use and it's held up quite well – Most notably the fabric of the Multi-Pack hasn't worn through (Inside or out) in any spots and water resistance has been retained. The zipper operates like new, all accessory straps, buckles, and cord locks have suffered no failures. That said, as a chest pack, pack lid, sling bag, or waist pack the Multi-Pack does lead a fairly sheltered existence. I'd say in this case, ZPacks struck a good balance – The Multi-Pack is light but can still hold up to years of service in the hands of most users.



Photo Courtesy of Ted Ehrlich



Photo Courtesy of Ted Ehrlich



Conclusion

Overall, the ZPacks Multi-Pack really hits the sweet spot on convenience, durability, weight, and at \$40, the price isn't too bad either. It adapts to most backpacks small and large, and you'll gain additional storage options with a system that conveniently adapts to your needs on the trail while conveniently keeping things close at hand. Equally well suited for a variety of situations from backpacking to day hikes...to most likely whatever your situation may be. It's not overbuilt, but still does a great job at protecting gear from the elements when needed. When I first purchased the Multi-Pack it was something that I at first considered an optional item on my hikes, but now for hikes lasting from a trip of just a few hours to backpacking trips lasting days, it's never left behind.

Overall: ★★★★★ – Very Good to Excellent

You can find the ZPacks Multi-Pack and other lightweight gear at [ZPacks.com](https://www.zpacks.com).





Grand Gulch: A Magical Connection

Location: Southeastern Utah

by Susan Dragoo

It was gradual, the dawn of my understanding of Grand Gulch and its magic. Only five years ago, I rode a motorcycle right up the Moki Dugway, its dirt surface ascending in precipitous twists and turns, and traveled blithely across the gentle slope of Cedar Mesa, oblivious to the treasures hidden within its canyons. That changed with repeated visits to Arizona and Utah. Seeking new hiking destinations, I noticed an adventure guide offering a Utah backpacking trip and, through the itinerary, learned for the first time of Grand Gulch. I quickly determined to hike it on my own, and thus my path was laid.

Grand Gulch carves the surface of southeastern Utah's Cedar Mesa in

serpentine fashion for more than 50 miles, and its tributaries add miles of cliff-lined canyons which provided sheltered overhangs to people of the past. This area was occupied by Ancestral Puebloan people between 800 and 2,000 years ago and it is literally an outdoor museum with scores of ruins, some perched high on ledges and under overhangs, adorned with artifacts and rock art.

It was to experience the solitude, scenery and slickrock (in this case smooth and wind-polished but more tacky than slick) of the desert canyons that I sought Grand Gulch, but the appeal of walking through this natural museum was for me its biggest draw.



My husband, Bill, and I were halfway through a two-week visit to Arizona and Utah when we arrived at Grand Gulch. We had spent the first week on a four-wheeled adventure driving the Arizona Backcountry Discovery Route, a trail stringing together dirt roads from Mexico to Utah. Along the way we stopped for a few days in Flagstaff to visit with other adventure travel enthusiasts at the Overland Expo. Now, finally, we were ready for the pedestrian aspect of our trip.

Driving from northern Arizona, where we had stopped to hike Water Holes slot canyon, we approached Cedar Mesa from the south. From Mexican Hat, Utah,

we traveled north on Highway 163 to Valley of the Gods, and traversed the valley on a winding dirt road. This spot is little brother to Monument Valley, and is the more intimate and less traveled of the two. Valley of the Gods Road ends at SR (Utah State Highway) 261, which becomes Moki Dugway, climbing the southern escarpment of Cedar Mesa with tight switchbacks and steep grades. The dugway, a term describing a roadway carved from a hillside, was built in 1958 for trucks hauling uranium ore. The term "moki" is derived from a Spanish word used by explorers to describe Pueblo Indians as well as the vanished Ancestral Puebloan culture.



The pavement resumes atop the mesa and SR 261 passes through the Grand Gulch Primitive Area to intersect with SR 95. The Kane Gulch Ranger Station is on SR 261 about four miles south of the junction with SR 95. Along SR 261, dirt roads (many of them recommended only for high clearance vehicles) lead to numerous trailheads. Within Grand Gulch, we had chosen to day hike Bullet Canyon, the trailhead for which is located 7.1 miles south of the Kane Gulch Ranger Station. It is Road 251 and marked with a sign for Bullet Canyon.

Bullet Canyon is the largest tributary of upper Grand Gulch, running east-west for about six miles. Its main attractions are two well preserved Ancient Puebloan

sites, Perfect Kiva and Jailhouse Ruins, situated close together about five miles down the canyon. Its trailhead is easily accessed, just 1.1 mile from SR 261. Primitive camping and vehicle camping are available near the trailhead.

Arriving at the Bullet Canyon trailhead late afternoon, we found a pleasing campsite and made camp, enjoying the sunset over Cedar Mesa. The next day, we were slow to get on the trail, starting about 9 a.m. It was the middle of May and would be warm, but not miserably hot. Our guidebook indicated a round trip of 9.5 miles to Perfect Kiva and Jailhouse Ruins. The area was lightly visited. We had seen a group of three young men at the trailhead and they



had preceded us on the trail, but we saw no other hikers at the start. From the trailhead, signed “Grand Gulch 7 miles,” we followed the path west to the mesa rim, then descended a cairned route to the wash bottom. Bearing right (west) into the canyon we climbed over ledges, among boulders, around and over pouroffs and a spectacular slickrock cascade, through brush and trees, and experienced about 900 feet of elevation change. It was a challenging hike – one I would rate moderate to strenuous.

The area is primitive. Once on the trail, there are no signs (other than cairns) or maintained trails, and no archeological site is marked in any way. The canyon floor is sandy, and along the first few miles we were shaded by cedars, large cottonwoods and other riparian vegetation, indicating the presence of water. An hour or so into our walk, we stopped for a break beneath a cottonwood and another hiker walked by, returning to the trailhead. He had started very early in the day, done the same trip we were doing, and was now about to finish before the heat of the day. Smart fellow.

As the canyon became deeper the terrain became more appealing and Utah’s characteristic red sandstone walls towered above us as we walked beneath a clear blue sky. Wildflowers and cacti were blooming, with colors of red, orange, yellow, fuchsia, and even the delicate pink blossoms of wild roses.

Our guidebook stated that Perfect Kiva was located 4.5 miles from the trailhead but when our GPS indicated we had traveled that distance, we saw nothing to suggest we were near the site. We continued walking and looking and finally climbed up the slickrock to a point high on the canyon wall in a place that looked promising, where side trails were evident. Nothing. Eventually we rounded a bend and saw a tent pitched in a shady spot on the canyon floor. Looking up, we saw in a south-facing alcove what looked like a structure high on the canyon wall, near an overhang. Bill saw movement there, and we decided we had arrived. We ascended the slickrock, with a bit of boulder scrambling. The thing we thought was a structure was just a pile of rocks but it appeared sufficiently manmade to point us in the right direction. The tent belonged to the three young hikers we had seen at the trailhead and they were exploring the kiva when we climbed up over the last ledge, but they soon left us to ourselves.

Perfect Kiva features a complete kiva which has been partially restored, a small house, and several other structures, along with pictographs and long, impressive grinding stones overlooking the canyon. A modern juniper ladder allows visitors to descend beneath the reconstructed roof into the subterranean chamber and imagine the ancient ones’ rituals. Inside the kiva, we detected the aroma of modern-day rituals, and reckoned the hikers preceding us were smoking their own



brand of peace pipe. When we tired of taking photographs and exploring, I lunched on a roast beef sandwich and Fritos while Bill attempted to nap.

I sat in the quiet, doing such an ordinary thing – eating a sandwich – and pondered what an extraordinary moment it was. In the cool breeze, I gazed out over the large stones where Ancient Puebloans had worked grinding corn, looking upon the same canyon, feeling a breeze as fresh and cool. It was a magical connection.

For Bill, however, the breeze was a bit too cool for napping even on this warm day, so we soon continued down the canyon, searching for Jailhouse Ruins. We stayed high on the canyon wall walking on slickrock. Before we had traveled far, Bill spied our goal. The white, moonlike pictographs above Jailhouse Ruin are striking, and visible from a distance. The structure is built into small ledges high on the canyon's north wall and is named after a small, barred window that gives the false impression that one of the structures had been a prison cell. Even at its significant height from the canyon floor, we were able to ascend to it easily on the slickrock. The ruin incorporates a granary, and the remains of small corn cobs lie there on a windowsill, looking centuries old. Here in a more protected alcove, Bill got his nap and I photographed pictographs.

Ahead, the canyon continues generally northwest to intersect Grand Gulch, but



we turned back and began our return to the trailhead, now hiking in the heat of the day. We ended the day tired and a little dehydrated, both of us finishing off the water in our Camelbaks as we approached the end of the trail about eight hours after we started, showing 13.1 miles on the GPS. We had originally planned another Grand Gulch hike on the next day, but that would have to

wait. Although we were highly satisfied with our experience, we were exhausted. A few days later as we were returning to our home in central Oklahoma, we stopped at the Lowrey Pueblo, part of the Canyon of the Ancients in southwestern Colorado. It's a nice job of preservation -- well marked, with smooth sidewalks for easy access only a few yards from the paved parking lot.

We strolled around, chatting with other visitors. But it left me cold. It felt sterile and dead, so far removed from the life of the people who built it. It was there that I clearly understood how special our experience in Grand Gulch had been. It was magical indeed, and well worth the effort, to connect with the Ancients deep within the canyons of the Southwest.









NOTE: When visiting these fragile archeological sites, take care not to harm them and leave all artifacts in place. Never touch or put chalk on rock art figures, and don't write on the rocks. Take only pictures, and leave only footprints.

Permits are required for hiking and backpacking in the canyons of Cedar Mesa, including Grand Gulch. Day use permits may be obtained at the Kane Gulch Ranger Station or at trailheads. Detailed maps showing road access are available from the BLM or the U.S. Forest Service.

http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/monticello/recreation/places/grand_gulch.html

<http://www.americansouthwest.net/utah/cedar-mesa-grand-gulch/bullet-canyon.html>



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Updated with more cushioning (Now with a 26mm stack height) the new Lone Peak offers zero drop cushioning in a shoe ready for nearly any trail. Around 11 ounces per shoe and \$120 per pair: CampSaver.com



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A potential .45 ounce (net) trip-saver, this easy to apply balm protects skin on your feet and for that matter, anywhere else as needed. Easily fits in any first aid kit; aloe vera and Vitamin E keeps skin happy on high mileage days. \$6: REI.com



Outdoor Research Wind Warrior

You won't be a wind weenie in this beanie, as you might expect from the name – WindStopper Fleece seals in the heat in a hat that will surely be welcome on fall days and maybe as an addition to your sleep system any time of the year. 2 sizes and multiple colors. 2.5 ounces and \$37: Backcountry.com

GEAR MASH



Therm-a-Rest NeoAir Mini Pump

Time to inflate? 3 Minutes. Weight with batteries? 2.3 ounces. Effort factor? 0. Inflate your NeoAir pad with this mini pump from Therm-A-Rest that takes 2 AAA batteries and is about half the size of your palm. About 25 inflations from a single set of batteries, \$40: CampSaver.com



MSR Titan Kettle

At just 4.2 ounces and with a capacity of .85 liters, the Titan(ium) Kettle is equally suited as a pot for dinner and a mug for coffee the next morning. Add a spoon and you backcountry cookware ensemble might just be complete. \$60: CampSaver.com



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Suunto Ambit 3

With a feature list too long to list here, the Suunto Ambit 3 packs some serious tech within arms-reach including GPS functions, temp, altitude, speed, heart rate, and even the time of day. Wirelessly connects to your smartphone and features 50 hours of battery life with GPS. Just over 3 ounces, \$550: REI.com



PHOTO TIPS FROM THE TRAIL

by David Cobb

Since long-distance hiking helped form so much of my photography, here are 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.

Utilize Side-lighting

When you're out on the trail with a handheld camera, light can be a tricky thing to capture well. Even though I find backlighting (when the light source is in front of you) the most interesting light, it can be difficult to capture with a point-and-shoot. Front-lighting (when the light source is in back of you) can be terribly dull, and can leave an image looking flat. For a traveler with a point-and-shoot your best bet is side-lighting: This is when you turn 90 degrees from your light source to capture the play of light and shadow. You'll find that side-lighting will enhance the contours of the land, giving it an almost sensual feel.

Left: Shi Shi Sun Breaks

Another tool which will enhance your side-light is a polarizer. If you can't fit one on your camera, just hold it in front of your lens when taking your photo. This filter works best at 90 degrees from a light source, so it's the perfect match for side-lighting. You'll notice that a slight turn of the circular polarizer will cut through reflection, haze, and glare to make the colors more saturated and the light on the subject softer.

As the sun moves closer to the horizon, shadows will lengthen and the contrast between light and shadow will lessen. Scenes that at midday looked flat and featureless will come alive with light, shadow, and depth. The perfect light, from which memories are made.

Right: Painted Hills.

Pages 123-124: Bryce Canyon National Park Sunrise.

Pages 125-126: Lupine and Oak.

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, and be sure to check out previous issues for his other great tips.

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Backcountry Cuisine: Cool Ginger Blueberry Cherry Tea - Easiest Trail Drink Ever!

by Canny Green

While I've shown how to make dehydrated juices in earlier cuisine recipes, here's the easiest of all...and you only need dried fruit and a pinch of salt (to add those essential electrolytes). I chose blueberries, cherries and ginger because they are especially high in micronutrients critical for the vitality of backcountry exercise.

First the technique: just add a ¼ cup dried fruit and a pinch of salt to your water bottle. Using a wide mouth bottle is best. Add cool filtered or purified water and let it sit overnight or for a few hours as you hike the morning away. By lunchtime it is dark red, sweet and filled with soft, near-fresh tasting fruit. You get a bite of fruit with each sip. You can refill over the remaining fruit and it will seem like an endless fountain of deliciousness.

Why blueberries and cherries? All fruits and vegetables in shades of blue, purple, and red are full of the antioxidants called anthocyanins. These micronutrient wonders are anti-inflammatory, protect the cardiovascular system, and support the nervous system. Also, "there is new evidence that damage to muscles following overly taxing exercise can be reduced through consumption of blueberries" (go to whfoods.com for info). That's enough to convince me. And ¼ cup dried berries equals about one cup of fresh ones. So you get plenty of restorative power in that one little bottle of berry tea.

I add ginger for its spicy taste but also because of its special gifts to the body. It has potent anti-inflammatory compounds called gingerols that help sore joints. It is also soothes the gastrointestinal system and it is warming. Candied ginger adds a little extra sweetness to the berry tea but I generally just use my home dried ginger slices. They get spicier as the day goes on.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups each fresh blueberries and pitted fresh cherries.
one 4" x 2" piece of fresh ginger root, peeled and thinly sliced.

INSTRUCTIONS

In your home dehydrator layer berries and ginger
Dry until the consistency of raisins (about 6 hours)
Package in a baggie together

When you add the fruit mix to your water, add a pinch of sea salt or Himalayan rock salt to your bottle for electrolytes.



Find more drink recipes in *Backpackers' Ultra Food* by Canny Green along with more tips, techniques, and recipes to elevate eating on the trail. You can find the book [Here at Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



The Drive Home

The Nuances of a Name

by Aaron Zagrodnick

For a moment, let's forget the thousand or so mosquitoes and gnats that had me under siege. At least that's what I did. Standing well over 10,000 feet, my feet were immersed in a mountain stream and my ears filled with the sound of water, my eyes squinted against a golden sunset. But I dare not close my eyes for a second. I was too amazed with the realization of the moment. I often combine fly fishing with my backpacking trips, and there was no exception here. I cast my fly towards the setting sun and it landed perfectly where the current poured in over rocks, then deepened and slowed to form a small pool. Staring directly into the light, the water reflected the sunset and streamside terrain in such a way that I couldn't see beneath the water's surface. Were there actually fish there? My question was quickly answered – A half second after the fly softly landed on the water a fish broke the surface to intercept the fly. Not long after, the sunset I'd been watching was briefly overtaken by the colors of the golden trout I now had in hand. I took 1 or 2

long seconds to let the moment soak in, then released the fish back into the pool. Only later that evening would I feel the only negative result of the whole experience – As my body itched from the dozens of insect bites.

Those 2 seconds. I'd hiked 30 miles over 2 days, fallen down rocks and bloodied my shin, the insects had been horrible. My feet hurt. I was dirty, and the night before the rain that inundated my tent managed to find its way through a seam I apparently didn't seal as well as I should have. But it was all worth it.

Earlier that day my eyes were on my feet as I descended a hillside, walking sideways through a pine forest, then over talus, then as aspen grove and repeating that process several times. Travel was silent except for the sound of my feet, the side of the mountain strangely without the sound of wind or wildlife. Then, a sound steadily increasing in intensity filled the valley. "Whock-a-whock-a-whock-a-whock-a" – The sound of a helicopter. I sighted my



compass at the dot just cresting over the mountain and into view, it came directly from my intended direction of travel. Aircraft at low elevations over a wilderness area can only be one of a few things. Even here though, in an area empty on the map, a faint trail has its stops and starts. The route consists of my destination for the day, a map, and a compass bearing while occasionally dodging tree limbs, stepping over fallen logs, and balancing on rocks. Every so often for some reason I see a pink ribbon tied to a tree. I hiked on, eventually bottoming out and intersecting the trail long after the invasive sound of the helicopter blades had subsided.

Are you hiking the “XYZ Route to XYZ lake?” The hikers guessed and stared back at me with a smile, almost as if they expected an immediate confirmation. “No, but I’ve heard of the route and it looks pretty interesting. I’m actually not sure where I’m going yet, but I have a few ideas.” I replied while nodding my head towards the fly rod sticking out of my pack. They were stopped on the side of the trail, looking at a guidebook and map set. I’d heard of the XYZ Route, but I had something better in mind. We exchanged information on what we’d each heard regarding the forecast and then parted ways while wishing each other good luck. Soon after I stepped off the side of the trail, allowing a group of 20 to pass

headed the other direction, towards the trailhead. My hiking brought me to the shores of a lake by evening, the reflection on the lake’s surface slowly dimming in the fading the light. Storm clouds threatened, I made setting up my shelter a priority. The altitude was high, but not too high – Several groves of forest had managed to fare well on two sides of the lake, offering some sense of natural shelter.

Thunder roared in the valley as the sun set, echoing off the cliffs surrounding my campsite in such a way that you could never tell the true direction of the source. Rain poured down, I lay there looking up at the drops that began to collect on the outer surface of my shelter’s fabric. I’d made camp

just in time, I hadn’t even unpacked my sleeping bag or pad yet after the day of hiking. But the ground was soft under my tent. The group of 20 I’d passed on the way in...I’d found out that the 21st member of the group was on board, hurt from a fall but okay. Another group, who were shouting back and forth at distances of about 10 feet, were camped on the other end of the lake as they tried to save their fire. Smoke billowed up through the trees. I cooked dinner and hung my food, then soon drifted off to sleep in the increasing darkness among the damp forest and wet grass. This lake had no name but it had a nickname, and everyone knew it. The fishing was reportedly great, campsites amazing, access easy. Something was off, at least for me. I woke up the next



morning and hiked on – Waving at the camp as I passed by. Oddly, they didn't wave back. Beer cans and fishing line could be seen occasionally lining the shores of the otherwise pristine lake.

I looked at the map and kept climbing. I pushed higher and deeper into the wilderness. Use trails were left behind. No helicopters were heard on day 2 and the only footsteps I saw were those of moose, elk, bear. Ominous clouds continued to threaten, occasionally blocking the sun and dropping the temperature 10 degrees in an instant, maybe more. Then they'd blow past and the sun would shine again in what became predictable intervals. I saw a small mini-pass to my right and 500 feet higher. On the other side, according to the map, a few lakes, connected by a small braid-like stream. I stopped for lunch and looked up at the pass. The clouds again threatened, but as the sun came out again I knew I had a window and I made a beeline to the top. I was quickly at the saddle. The valley below – A mix of green fields, forest, rock, and snow clinging to steeper slopes came into view. Though in the back of my mind I knew I was kidding myself, it felt like I could be the first person to ever stand in this spot, and I was the first, and would be the only person to ever experience that exact view, that moment. It could never be replicated. I hiked down into the valley as the clouds threatened less and mosquitoes threatened more. On the banks of the braid-like stream between two of the

lakes I assembled my fly rod. Every moment is different. But for me there's often a common thread. I've found a way to put myself in a good position for the cards to fall in my favor so to speak. It's not on an established route; I'm not following a guidebook or a line drawn on a map. And backpacking trips rarely go as planned anyway. Moments can't be planned. Sometimes they hit you when you're least expecting them, sometimes in the most unlikely of instances. Sure, you can give yourself good odds with trip planning and experience, but it's a game you can't entirely predict, or always win. You just have to seize the moment to put yourself in that position, that chance to get out there in the first place, and wait for the moment to come to you. It might not arrive, and that's the chance we take. But it's always worth the gamble. A handful of things you'd like to see, time with a map finding out how best to connect the dots. My favorite way to plan a trip. Isn't that freedom? A route with no name, no speed record, a route that likely won't be done that exact way ever again, your own vision. That's freedom (in) the hills, mountains, forest....wherever your trail may be. It doesn't have a name, it's just a place.











“In wildness is the preservation of the world.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Thanks for Reading Issue 17

Check out our next issue
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