


TrailGroove[®]

Issue 2 - May/June 2012



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May/June 2012

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the 2nd issue of TrailGroove Magazine. Since launching with our first issue in March, we've received an overwhelming amount of support from the backpacking, hiking, and outdoor community. We just wanted to take a moment to thank everyone for all of this feedback and support. We couldn't have done it without you!

Since March, we've added more features to both the magazine and [TrailGroove.com](https://www.TrailGroove.com) to make reading and visiting a more rewarding and feature-rich experience. As always, please let us know what you think by emailing us at Info@TrailGroove.com or over in our [Forums](#). In this issue we're reviewing 2 interesting gear offerings from New Balance as well as Mountain Laurel Designs, while taking you from Ontario to Utah in the destination department. On top of that, we're throwing in a few more things along the way, with The Drive Home to finish things off.

Thanks again for reading!

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 are looking for:

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



TrailGroove Magazine Review Policy

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

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

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

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

Jargon

Fill Power (FP) \fil 'paʊə(r)\

A grading system for goose / duck down. Often abbreviated as FP. Higher fill power will add more loft and warmth to an outdoor garment or sleeping bag at the same given amount of weight. Measured using a cubic inch per oz system. 500 fill power down will fill 500 cubic inches of space per ounce used. 900 will fill 900 cubic inches of space per ounce. Therefore, with a higher fill product the same amount of garment / bag warmth can be achieved for less weight. Higher fill power is considerably more expensive than lower level down.

Random Trail Tip



After spending a small fortune on a nice set of titanium shepherd's hook stakes, we found that we always made it home from a backpacking trip missing at least one. After a few replacements we began to religiously count our stakes upon breaking camp, but frequently our attempts to leave quickly each morning resulted in long, futile searches through the leaves and grass for that last stake. Somehow, they just blend in too well. Don't look to paint that chips off to solve the problem - buy a supply of heat-shrink tubing in your favorite bright color. You'll need something in the 1/8" or 3/32" size. (3/32" is easiest to use but can be hard to find) Slide the tubing on your stake, using an inchworm technique if needed. Either precut your tubing (you'll need about 2" per stake) or slide the tubing on and then cut at the desired location. Resist the temptation to use the heat from a lighter to set the tubing - the yellow flame will cover your new tubing with a sooty residue. A hair dryer, or the clean blue flame from a canister stove (or your gas fueled home range) works perfectly. Your local electronics store or various online retailers are your best bet for supplies.

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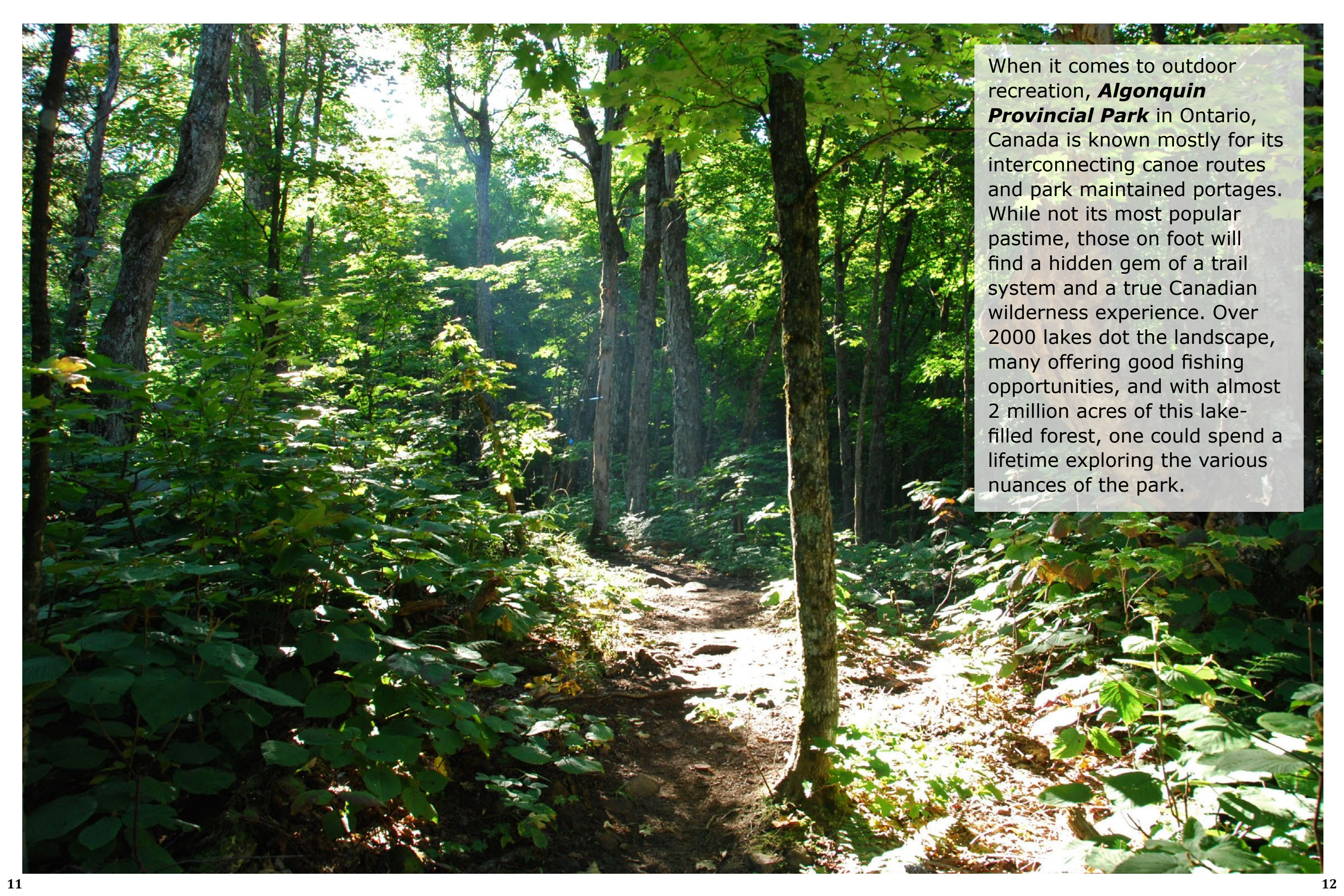
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Algonquin Provincial Park

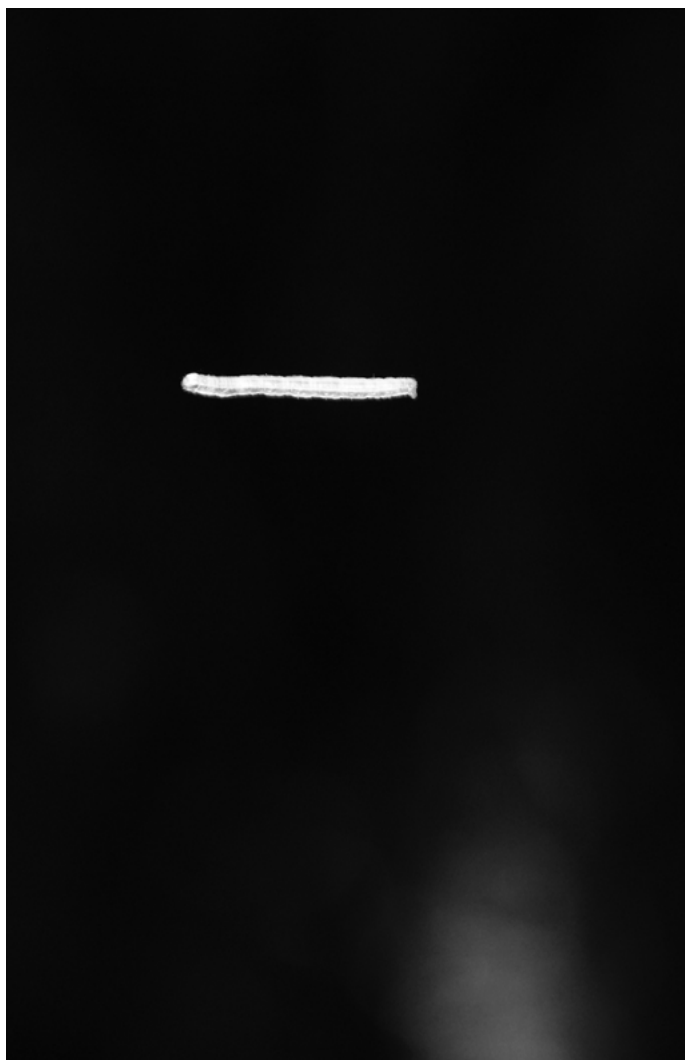


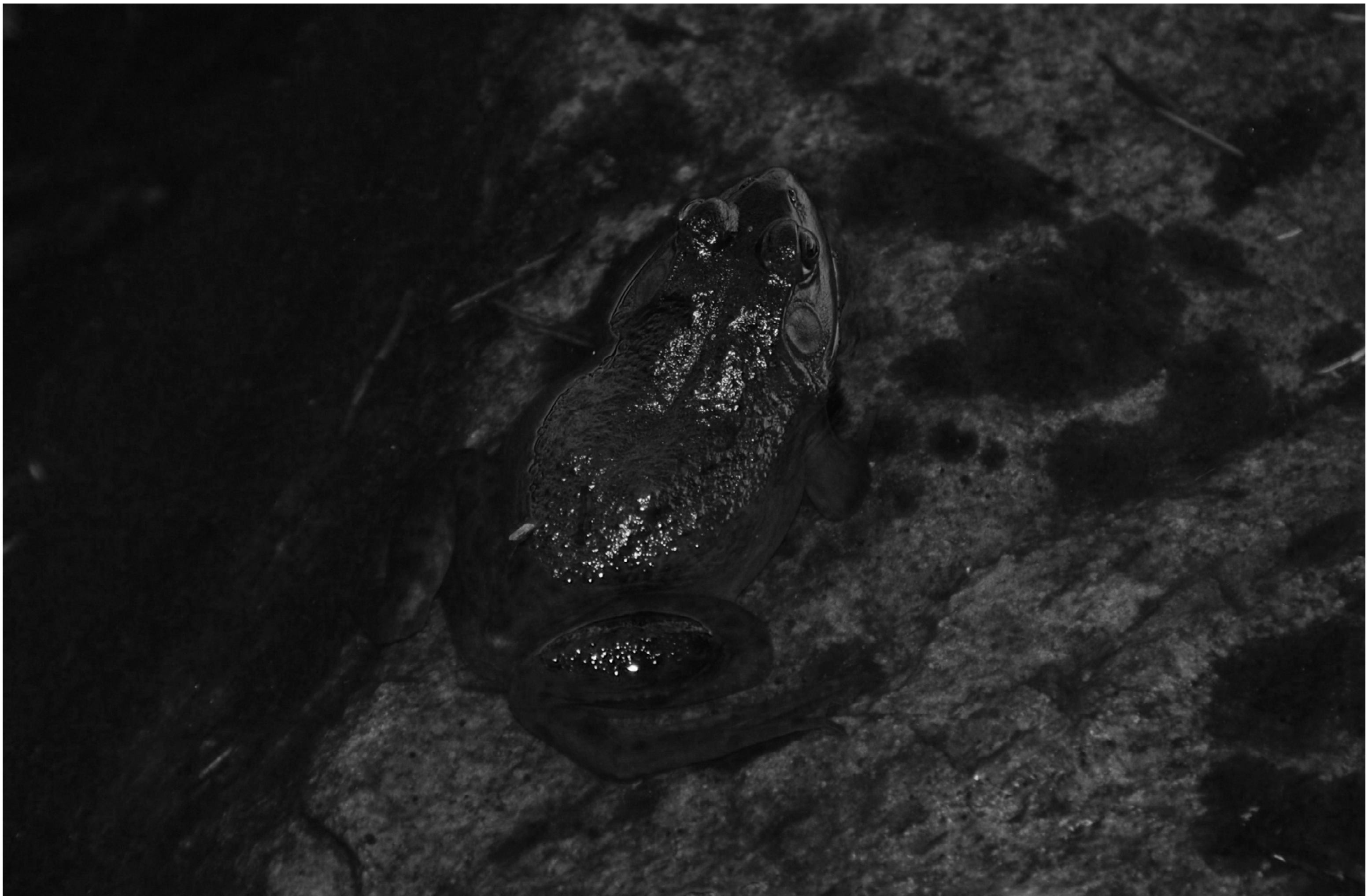
When it comes to outdoor recreation, **Algonquin Provincial Park** in Ontario, Canada is known mostly for its interconnecting canoe routes and park maintained portages. While not its most popular pastime, those on foot will find a hidden gem of a trail system and a true Canadian wilderness experience. Over 2000 lakes dot the landscape, many offering good fishing opportunities, and with almost 2 million acres of this lake-filled forest, one could spend a lifetime exploring the various nuances of the park.



“If wilderness is outlawed,
only outlaws can save wilderness.”
- Edward Abbey









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The Backpacking Trails of Algonquin Provincial Park

For the backpacker seeking a maintained trail system, there are a few areas that we can focus on. The two most convenient trail systems are on the western side of the park off Highway 60 which intersects the Park west to east. The **Western Uplands Trail** will be your most remote option and provides 3 separate loops totaling nearly 70 miles of marked trail. Access the trail either from Highway 60, or from the Rain Lake access point on the northern end of the park which will require driving on a sometimes snowy and rough dirt road. This trail system will explore the terrain to the north of Highway 60. The **Highland Trail** access can be found by driving east on 60 just a few miles from the Western Uplands Trailhead. Here you'll find a 21 mile trail system exploring the southern side of the Park. Quite some distance across the Park farther to the east you'll find the **Eastern Pines Trail**, an 11 mile trail system.

Whatever option you choose, register with the park at headquarters or at the Kearney permit office (if using the Rain Lake access point) prior to departing, as permits are required – About \$12 per person per night. Before your trip obtain the backpacking trails map supplied by the Park, as the staff will need to know your planned itinerary and campsite selections. You can obtain the map here:

<http://store.algonquinpark.on.ca/cgi/algonquinpark/00023.html>



Review: New Balance MT110 / WT110 Trail Running Shoe

Two things have happened recently regarding footwear for backpackers and runners. First, even though a good boot probably has its place in every outdoor enthusiast's closet, some backpackers began to transition from the traditional heavy hiking boot to the lower cut trail running shoes the market had to offer. What they found was a lighter shoe that dried faster and allowed for more mileage on the trail in comfort, especially during the more favorable weather periods of the year. At the same time the minimal footwear movement has taken the running community by storm. Every year the evolution in the industry offers more exciting turns as more and more people adopt the minimal footwear philosophy. Without extra support or cushioning, and modeled to protect the foot instead of change the way it contacts the ground, adopters say that the body is allowed to stride as it was designed and injuries are reduced. Trail running shoes are well adopted in the backpacking community, but the minimal stripped-down New Balance 110 is a quite different specimen to consider. A morph of a true minimal running shoe and a purpose built protective trail runner, we were interested to see how the shoe would perform while on the trail – Both while running, on short hikes, and on extended overnight trips using a heavier pack.

Pros: Extremely comfortable. Light and minimal, but still feels like a shoe. Inspires confidence. Available in multiple widths, well-built and quick drying.

Cons: Fine, dry sand enters the shoe easily. Non-gusseted tongue. Not ideal for heavier pack weights.

Rating: ★★★★★

Features

The sole of the 110 features an aggressive directional lug pattern across the forefoot and heel. The forefoot lugs are designed for push-off traction on the flats and uphill trails, while the heel lugs are designed to bite on downhill sections. While the forefoot and heel are covered with this aggressive rubber sole, midfoot you'll find that New Balance has elected to allow the foam midsole to directly contact the ground. Since they've lugged the foam to match the rubber outsole, this may be hard to distinguish in the product pictures you come across but obviously is noticeable while handling the shoe in person. (In pictures the non-rubberized foam area is distinguishable by the different color under the arch portion of the shoe) The sole wraps up and around in front to create a toe bumper in front of the big toe. A Rock Stop rockplate is embedded between the sole and midsole under the forefoot portion of the shoe only. The midsole is made from Acteva foam – Which New Balance claims is lighter while being more durable than

standard cushioning materials used in other shoes. A stability shank lays within the midsole for extra arch support. The heel to toe drop of the midsole is only 4mm – Not flat like a true barefoot shoe, but close. With a 19mm heel stack height / 15mm forefoot, you'll stay fairly close to the ground. The upper of the shoes is a flexible thin plastic like material that is ventilated over its entire surface. The tongue is a standard configuration and is not gusseted. New Balance variable-width Sure Laces help to keep things tied and help to keep your tension adjustments true throughout the lacing system as you travel. (We found that a double knot is still

needed) A soft sock liner is loosely sewn into the shoe. As with most minimal shoes, there is no removable insole. New Balance uses a running targeted NL1 last, which is designed to allow natural motion of the foot and gait. The shoe is available in standard as well as wide widths in men's sizes 7-14 and women's sizes 5-12. For both the men's and women's versions you get 2 color choices and the MSRP is \$84.99.

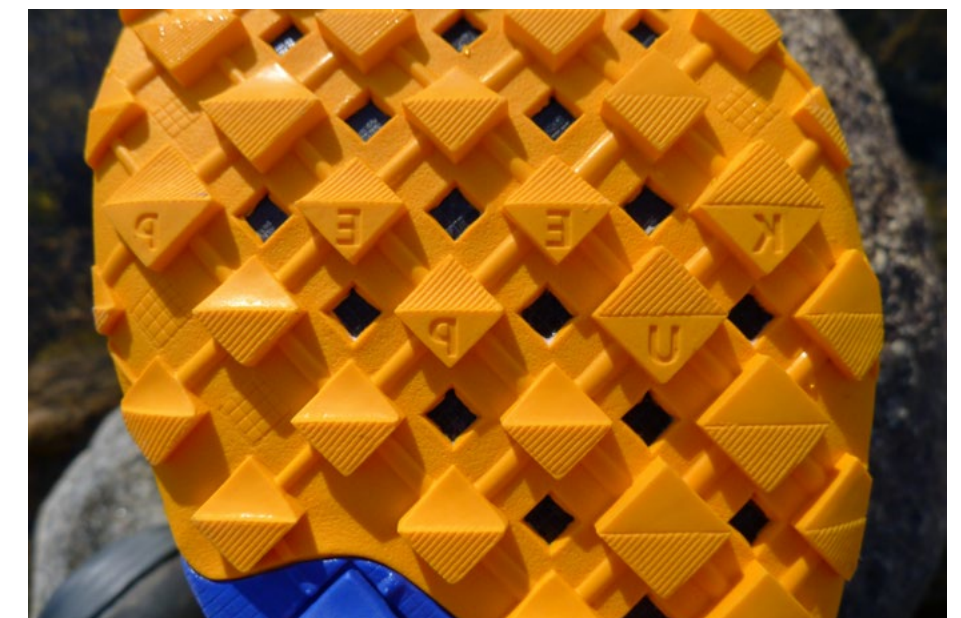
Weight

Per pair, New Balance lists the weight of the shoes at 15.5oz for a men's size 9, and 12.4oz for a women's size 8. We didn't test those sizes, but our weights were as follows:

Men's size 13 wide: 18.3

Women's size 10 wide: 14.7

This is about half the weight of your average trail runner.



Performance

A lot of features – And at in some respects the best features of the 110 are its minimal-themed lack of features. In practice they all came through for us. The shoe remains very light but offers protection where other minimal shoes falter. On the foot the shoe feels snug in the heel, even in our selected choice of the wide version. The heel cup is solid and comfortably anchors the shoe to your foot as you transition to a toe box that is comfortably wide. There's plenty of room to stretch your toes. In wet conditions the shoe dries quickly – After all the upper is plastic. Traction was very good. While running, hiking, and backpacking the tread pattern gave great bite uphill, downhill, and when cruising through the flats. The rubber is sticky – We were even able to navigate running on icy roads and over wet rocks without too much trouble. (Other shoes were like ice skates...) In very slippery conditions care will still be required however, as there's a balance that has to be found between traction of a sole and durability. After 400 miles, the tread still has life and the shoe is in decent shape. Some have had issues with puncture or tearing of the upper when encountering sharp roots or rocks, etc., but we haven't had this issue and other than a very small 1/4"

hole in the sock liner (which is understandable after 400 miles), we've been impressed with they way the shoe has held up. The midsole doesn't offer the cushiony ride that super-thick traditional shoes would offer – It's just enough to take the edge off. While the rockplate is forefoot-only, we never ended up with bruised or battered feet. It's hard to heelstrike while running or walking in this shoe. The forefoot remains protected by the rockplate, and you're still well protected in the heel from the rubber sole and foam midsole. The only thing to be careful of would be a direct strike on a sharp rock right under your arch – where the foam midsole of the shoe is in direct contact with the ground as we described earlier (no additional rubber sole here to smooth any bumps). This really wasn't an issue. Even when contacting a sharp rock the foam would compress, but then then forefoot and heel would contact the ground to



distribute the load. The only time this might be an issue is if you were to high center your arch on a sharp rock that was tall enough where the heel and forefoot could not contact any other surface after compression (if you were bouldering or going through a rock garden, as an example). The perfectly designed toe bumper provides great protection when you misstep and slam into a rock or root. They really thought this one out and wrapped it up and right in front of the big toe – Instead of just adding the extra rubber as an afterthought in the middle of the shoe's front toe area. Temperature-wise we found the shoe warm enough with socks down into the high 30's and sufficiently cool enough in 100 degree heat. (Get a light colored version if keeping cool is your main concern) However, due to the high breathability of the shoe, very fine, dry sand can make its way into the shoe if you are walking through such terrain.

While we're of the socks are mandatory with shoes camp, the sockliner is very soft and you can use the 110's without socks if you wish. We did not encounter a single blister using the 110. A lot of this can be contributed to the pure comfort and design of the shoe and the availability of a wide width.

Trail Running

For its intended use as a trail runner, we found that the shoe breathed well and offered a very comfortable ride. What we liked most is that you don't have to think about this shoe. You are indeed running almost as if you were barefoot – But you're not thinking about it. With other minimal and barefoot shoes I've found that I'm thinking more about the shoe and my technique as I run – With the MT110 I simply made sure to start my run off with a good forefoot strike – And then just ran. The shoe inspires that confidence that you would get with a fully protected heavy trail runner, but at half the weight and with a more natural stride. The lugs of the shoe are aggressive, but are closely spaced so that running on smooth terrain is not uncomfortable. Pavement was ok, but who wants to run on pavement anyway? We probably wouldn't pick this shoe for use on paved roads, but some of our trail running routes involved running the



road to the trailhead and this was fine. Sticking with a forefoot strike – You're putting almost all of the pressure of your footstrike within the 110's rockplate zone. The rockplate is rather thin but does the job. No bruised feet in our testing.

Hiking & Backpacking

As a minimalist trail running shoe, we were worried if the 110 would provide enough support and protection with a midfoot / heel strike and the different gait used while taking things a little slower. The shoe ended up being very comfortable. This first thing we noticed was just how light this shoe is on foot. The shoe really saved us energy on long days and with each stride. The forefoot is well protected by the rockplate, and even though there's no plate in the heel we found that the Acteva foam combined with the rubber outsole offered

sufficient protection. Two things to watch for are the midfoot portion of the shoe - Where there is no rockplate nor rubber outsole for additional protection - and the thin upper which offers little side protection against rocks and sticks in a rough off-trail environment. Regarding the outsole, on small rocks this isn't an issue once the foam compresses and the forefoot and heel contact the ground to smooth things out. But as stated in the overall performance paragraph, if you high center the shoe midfoot on a sharp rock, it could be uncomfortable. In practice, we were aware of this limitation and didn't come away from our hikes and trips with any bruised feet. Extending the rockplate or sole over the length of the entire shoe might be a desire for some users who intend to use the shoe entirely for hiking or backpacking, but

would add weight and decrease flexibility. As a shoe designed from the ground up to be minimal, we feel that a balance has been struck. We used the shoes while backpacking with pack weights up to 30 lbs, and during off-trail scrambles with packs up to 20 lbs. In these situations, the support and protection was adequate. Above these weights you may want to consider more substantial options.

Transition

Transitioning from a standard trail runner to a minimal shoe takes time. We've been using the New Balance Minimus line, as well the 110's predecessor the MT101 for quite some time. As such, stepping into the 110 was not an issue. (It's much more substantial than the Minimus line) If you're just trying out a minimal shoe

for the first time, caution is always advised and a gradual introduction to your hiking / walking / running routine should be used. However, the 110 is such a blend of a shoe in our eyes that this transition should be eased. If you're currently using a fully built trail runner, the 110 might be a great shoe that eases this transition and allows you to experience what minimal shoes have to offer – Without taking the full leap. It's a minimal thought-out shoe but after having experience with truly barefoot / minimal shoes, we feel that this would be an easy transition for someone trying things out for the first time.

Conclusion

The New Balance 110 ended up as our go-to shoe for everything - From off trail hikes, to backpacking and running local trails. They're

even our choice for around town when we're not able to hit the trail. They're so comfortable that we didn't have the urge to take them off at the end of the day – The 110's are almost like aggressively-soled house shoes with a rockplate. The only drawbacks that we found are the lack of a gusseted tongue, the potential lack of protection for midfoot strikes in special circumstances, and lack of defense against the entry of fine sand. However, the shoe's tongue still forms a good seal when the shoe is laced and we didn't have any issues with debris entering the shoe through this area. And if the rockplate / sole extended across the entire midfoot portion of the shoe, the entire minimal weight / purpose of the shoe might be jeopardized.

Overall, Excellent: ★★★★★



For the past 10 days, Jen and I had been hiking the crest of the Wind River Range in Wyoming, in near total isolation the entire time. The main hiking season had since passed, and as such we only passed a few other parties as we made our way from the southern terminus of the range progressively north. Our target was the Green River Lakes Trailhead, and after about 110 miles of hiking we finally found ourselves in the strange glow of the parking lot. Both anxious for a shower and a burger yet sad that the trip was over all at the same time, we began to load up the car in preparation for the dusty drive to town. As we contemplated a successful trip a man drove up in an old pickup and parked next to us, promptly exiting the truck and grabbing a backpack out of the truck bed. He was headed in for a 3 day loop, bound for a few lakes we had just passed that same day. He asked us about our trip and we told him where we had started, and he remarked “Sounds like you’ve seen some nice country, I see you’re already out of your boots, I bet you’re ready for a little R&R!” I wished him good luck and we parted ways. Dog tired, I didn’t even realize at that moment that he in no way thought I had hiked the entire range wearing the low cut trail runners that I had on – But in fact they were probably one of the key reasons for the success of the trip.





BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Known for its unique rock formations and brilliant colors, Bryce Canyon National Park in Southern Utah has become a popular destination for tourists and nature-lovers alike. Although you can view the unusual rock spires - also known as "hoodoos" - from the rim of the canyon (actually an amphitheatre), experiencing the spires, windows and other bizarre shapes up close is even more striking. As an added bonus, most of the crowds hover at the rim without venturing downward into the canyon, so take a trip into the canyon for a good hike and breath-taking views.





Day Hikes at Bryce Canyon National Park

Bryce Canyon hiking trails range from easy to strenuous, and since many of the trails are connected, you can create a hike that best suits your abilities and schedule. Please remember that despite the high altitude at the rim, the temperature can increase by several degrees as you descend into the canyon. Make sure to bring plenty of water and remember that the hike down is usually easier than the hike back up!

Here are some of our favorite trails:

EASY

Queens Garden Trail - 1.8 miles round trip. This is one of the easiest hikes down into the canyon. If you are looking to extend your hike, you can connect to the Navajo Loop below the rim.

MODERATE

Navajo Loop Trail - 1.3 miles round trip. The Navajo Loop is one of the more popular trails. It begins at Sunset Point and goes down into the Bryce Amphitheater through a "slot" canyon. Be sure to watch out for rock slides, as they occur on this trail more than any other in the park.

Hat Shop Trail - 4 miles round trip. Descend to the Under-the-Rim Trail to see a cluster of balanced-rock hoodoos.

STRENUOUS

Peek-A-Boo Loop - 5.5 miles round trip. Steep trail, but with amazing views of the Bryce Amphitheater, including the Wall of Windows. This trail is shared by the trail ride concession, so be careful where you step. There is also a restroom (summer only) located along this trail.

Fairyland Loop - 8 miles round trip. This is one of the least crowded trails, although it has fantastic scenery including the China Wall, Tower Bridge and plenty of hoodoos.

For a complete listing of trails and more details, please visit:
<http://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/hiking.htm>



Backpacking at Bryce Canyon National Park

In contrast to the views from the rim, Bryce Canyon's backcountry trails offer access to forests and meadows, with stunning views of cliffs, but there are fewer hoodoos. There are two main trails that allow backcountry access:

Riggs Spring Loop - 8.8-miles round trip. The loop begins and ends at the Rainbow/Yovimpa Point parking lot on the far southern end of the park.

Under-the-Rim Trail - 22.9 miles from Bryce Point to Rainbow Point. There are connecting trails along the Under-the-Rim Trail at Swamp Canyon, Whiteman Bench and Agua Canyon trailheads.

Permits can be purchased at the Visitor Center and are required for all overnight stays. Camping is only permitted in designated areas. See the official Bryce Canyon NPS website for details:

<http://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/backcountryinfo.htm>









Just when you think you have all of your gear completely dialed-in, a new situation presents itself for mental review. Once such circumstance presented itself recently in the Wind River Range of Wyoming. The day started off sunny and pleasant as we worked our way alongside a river at about 7000 feet, a fairly low elevation for the area. Sunscreen was liberally applied and short sleeves kept us cool during the brisk hike to our planned stop that evening, past the river's source near an alpine lake on the edge of treeline 3000 feet above. As we gained elevation and the day progressed a storm system moved in. At first we were simply greeted by a brisk cool wind, and we donned a set of warmer clothes. I put the only pair of gloves on that I had brought to cover my now chilled hands. The gloves were marketed as a do it all type of item, fairly thick for warmth, and claimed to be waterproof, windproof, and breathable! However, ascending the steep mountainside pushed them

past their limits. While the warmth the gloves offered was welcomed, the physical exertion began to overwhelm the marginal breathability the product offered. Soon I found myself removing the gloves at intervals to cool and dry my clammy hands. Once exposed to the brisk air, the wind quickly cooled my hands beyond comfort and the gloves went back on. Over the next couple hours this process was repeated probably 2 dozen times – My hands were in a constant back and forth state of un-comfortableness. Not only that, but as we ascended higher, rain showers began to envelop the mountains, which later turned to snow. The gloves leaked and soaked up the falling snow like a sponge. Soon my hands were cold useless bricks. Finally we reached our destination, and I made the journey to the lake's shore to filter water for the night. Wind howling, with a pair of cold, damp gloves as the only protection for my hands I began to fill water bottles. My hands were far beyond having any type of

Review: Mountain Laurel Designs (MLD) eVent Rain Mitts



Pros: Extremely lightweight water and wind protection. Quite breathable. More durable than anticipated.

Cons: Cost, tricky user seam-sealing required & no built-in wrist cinching option.

Rating: ★★★★★

dexterity, and as such the water that spilled over my hands and fingers as I filtered water that evening only made the situation worse. Returning to camp, I promised myself that I would find a better solution upon returning home.

Obviously I needed something with both better versatility as well as performance. Enter the Mountain Laurel Designs eVent Rain Mitts. Combined with a lightweight liner glove of your choice, you'll end up with a highly versatile system that should come out to about the same weight or lighter than a single pair of "Do it all" gloves. When the weather is on the brisk side and you just need to take the edge off, wear the liner gloves alone, which will also be suitable for high exertion activities on the warmer side of glove weather due to their extreme breathability. If the temperature drops further, a rain shower rolls in, or if you simply need to take the wind chill out of the equation add the MLD Mitts.

The mitts are offered in two sizes - Medium and large. Both sizes are sized larger than

normal to account for layering and for improved breathability. We found the sizing directions on the MLD website were spot on - Size up if in doubt and you should be set ordering the size that you would usually wear in a normal glove. At a current price of \$49 the cost is on the high side, but remains competitive with similar offerings from other manufacturers. Upon receipt the craftsmanship of the mitts could be regarded as excellent. True story - The first thing said after opening the featherweight package was "I wish I could sew like this". The construction is kept simple to minimize seams and maximize durability. (And to keep the



price from rising, presumably) The fabric itself feels paper-thin. Initially we were concerned about durability, but were impressed as we gained experience using the mitts. (Extreme example later) The gauntlets are adequately long enough to tuck under or over your jacket sleeves per your preference. A single cord lock ensures a good seal around your arm, and while not an issue - The cord lock and bungee seem a bit heavy duty compared to the eVent fabric and overall nature of the mitts, just slightly out of place. MLD claims a weight of .99oz for a medium pair and 1.2oz per pair for the large size. Our mitts came in a bit over spec at 1.25 and 1.4oz, respectively. (And still respectable)

Unfortunately, in order to obtain full waterproofness the user will need to seam-seal the mitts at home themselves and there is no seam-sealing



option offered from MLD. Fortunately a small tube of sealer is included with each pair of mitts. The instructions on the MLD website first call to stuff the inside of the mitts using paper towels to give them shape and flatten the seams before applying the sealer. The stuffing is a bit tedious and requires a seemingly extraordinary amount of material to ensure that the mitts fill out well. MLD then states that the user should apply a thin bead of sealer to each seam, and using a finger spread the sealer in one direction along each seam. Once all seams are covered, hang the mitts by the bungee overnight to dry. We followed these instructions, but it's still

a tricky process. Even after spending hours stuffing the mitts as best we could, it's nearly impossible to get all seams completely flat along their entire length. As such, achieving a 100% seal without using large copious amounts of sealer is tough. After our first run at sealing the mitts, filling them with water the next day revealed several leaky areas. The leaks were limited to slow drips however, and filling the mitts with water is indeed an extreme test. Still, the mitts remained waterproof at this point when tested in light rain, but would not hold up against very heavy rain or any type of submersion. If further waterproofness is desired, you'll likely need to

apply two coats of sealer over a couple days. We purchased several pairs of the product and found that the best seam sealing regimen involved first a light coat of sealer to penetrate the stitching of the seams, and then a heavy coat of sealer the next day with a focus on coating the seams. This resulted in a 100% waterproof product that even passed the water fill test with no leaks. The included tube of sealer might at first look like too much for 1 pair of mitts, but we suggest using the entire tube (if not a slight bit more) for full waterproofness. Regardless, the whole experience left us dreaming of factory taped seams those nights. After two coats of

sealer and the resulting fully waterproof mitts our medium pair weighed in at 1.4oz and our large at 1.6oz, ready for battle.

Performance of the product is excellent - Assuming you've seam-sealed them well you'll have no issues with water penetration, and we were continually impressed with how easily water beads and rolls from the surface of the fabric. The breathability is also very good but can be overcome if you're really pushing the limits of exertion. For instance, on an intense trail run one day in 45 degree, rainy, humid weather we found our hands began to get a bit clammy after a few miles. Used to conventional waterproof-breathable fabrics, we thought that mitt removal and a later air dry at home might be needed. However, compared to those other fabrics the inside of the gloves seemed to equalize and dry quickly during a short 5 minute break without even taking them off. We were quite impressed - They actually do breathe! At this point no waterproof-breathable fabrics are perfect in terms of breathability, but for their application this product comes close. You simply will not find a pair of more breathable, waterproof mitts than this offering from MLD. Most mitts have some type of wrist cinch system to keep them in place



over your hands, which the MLD mitts lack. In practice, we did find this to be somewhat of a distraction, having to either cinch the bungee system so tightly that it began to become uncomfortable around the lower arm, or having to pull the mitts back into place frequently as we moved along. To solve the problem use an elastic hairband around each

wrist, which seems to work perfectly. You can even leave the elastic around the mitts at all times - They'll stay in place as you put the mitts on or pull them off. MLD claims comfort worn alone to about 35 degrees or into the mid 20's when combined with a lightweight fabric knit glove while active. We found this to be a reasonable expectation

in practice, and we were even able to take them into the teens with a liner while highly mobile. So much of this "Temperature rating" will be personal in regards to how your body handles cold weather and how active you'll be while using this product. Oh - And back to durability concerns we put our concerns to rest during a foothills

training run one evening. The weather was brisk with a raging wind, so the MLD mitts came out of the gear closet for extra protection on the outing. Light fading and descending on uneven terrain, a toe suddenly caught on an unseen root and I found myself in midair, in that slow motion experience where you know you're about to really bite the

dust and you hope that no one is watching. Despite the feeling of time slowing down, things happened so fast that the thought of protecting the mitts didn't even cross my mind. I hit the dirt, and the first thing to hit was the palm of each hand as I braced my fall. The mitts took the full force of the fall, sliding against rocks and dirt as I braced with my hands. After arriving home I was able to inspect the extent of the damages in full light. Each palm had an abrasion about the size of a dime and an even smaller sized area had worn through on only one mitt. The mitts were restored to full duty with a bit of left over seam-sealer and were quickly back in business. We have been more careful with our other pairs, and they show minimal wear and remain fully functional after more than 100 uses.

Conclusion

Overall MLD met our expectations in every department with this product and exceeded our expectations in others. While the entry cost is somewhat high and seam-sealing tedious, both are of no worry once the purchase has been made and the one-time job of sealing completed. The only other drawback found was quickly and cheaply remedied with a simple hairband.

Overall, very good - ★★★★★



TIPI PIT FIRE

Backcountry Fire Building Made Easy

It seems that building a fire without lighter fluid and yesterday's newspaper is quickly turning into a lost art. While a fire is an optional (For some) addition to an evening campsite, the ability to quickly build a fire can make a pleasant evening great, reverse the frustration of a day where everything went wrong, or even save your life if things go really bad. During my childhood years my brother and I spent every bit of free time we could in the southern woods, and each time we ventured out we would challenge the other with a fire building challenge of sorts. We would take only 1 paper match each, requiring near perfect execution for success. Obviously with this 1 match there were no second chances and rainy days were always interesting. My brother was always the skilled technician when it came to fire building, a natural by any standard. I can only recall one time that he failed at the exercise – We both slept with a chill that night, thankful for a warm house to walk into the next morning. As highly competitive siblings, it was never a good day when my attempt failed and he had to step in. He was older which drove my desire to never fail even further. I practiced often to refine my technique. (And perhaps mostly to avoid further embarrassment) Eventually, I developed a system that would allow a good deal of success in most conditions, leaves little trace, and most importantly boosts my spirit and keeps me warm at night.



The first step is to find a suitable location. Most areas that you would pick as a nice place to setup your shelter and make camp should have a nice site for a fire within close reach. Look for a space that is clear of plants and avoid any low overhanging branches that might suddenly catch fire and ruin your night. Dry ground and an abundance of above ground deadfall in the surrounding area is always a bonus. Above ground deadfall would mean dead trees/brush that is no longer living but remains above the forest floor (The above ground branches of a fallen tree for example.) This material will burn much easier compared to anything found laying directly on the ground, though on-ground wood can be useful once the fire is going well and a good base of coals has been established. In windy conditions a wind break, such as a large fallen log or boulder can be of good use, but be careful to space your spot far enough away that your fire won't scar the rock or end up lighting your wind break on fire. In still to light wind conditions, avoiding a wind break may actually help your cause by feeding your fire with oxygen.



Once you've located a suitable spot clear the area. Aim to clear a circle approximately 10 times the size of your intended fire. So if you plan to build a fire a foot across, clear a 10 foot circle. This will involve removing everything that's flammable from the area. Scrape away leaf litter, loose wood debris, etc. Once you've cleared a sufficiently large circle, dig a small shallow pit to contain your fire. Use either a stout stick, a tent stake, or a trowel if you chose to pack one. The pit will concentrate the heat of the fire as well as contain it in an organized and safe manner. If conditions are windy, the depression will help to supplement the natural wind break that was found earlier. Lastly, this will help us leave the area with little trace, which we'll describe later. With the excavated earth form a berm on the windward side of the fire pit. Avoid the temptation to make a fire ring of rocks. The fire pit we just built replaces any functional need of a fire ring and you'll avoid leaving a dozen blackened rocks behind. The larger the fire, the deeper you'll need to dig, and you'll want a pit slightly larger than the overall size of your intended fire. For a fire 1 foot across, a pit approximately 18 inches in diameter, gradually sloping to 6 inches deep in the center would work perfectly.



Now it's time to transition to search and gather mode. Search the immediate area for the standing deadfall that we described earlier. To start the fire we're looking for the best material

you can find - Starting the fire and the first few minutes thereafter will be the most critical point in this entire process. For this step I like to locate a fallen tree, or dead limbs attached to a standing tree. Look for the very end of the upper branches. We're basically trying to find the smallest possible twigs that we can, think spaghetti pasta size or even smaller. Make sure to gather dead wood. (If it bends when you try to break it off, it's not dead) Stay above ground to obtain the driest wood possible. Break off what you find into 6" lengths, gathering 2 solid handfuls. If you're having trouble finding wood small enough for this purpose, supplement with loose balls of dry grass, or using a knife, wood shavings and splinters from a larger dry piece of wood. Dry grass lights easiest, but with the extremely quick burn time it may make starting the fire a tricky process.



Take the material you've gathered at this point back to your fire pit, and then begin to gather larger and larger pieces of wood. As you move up in size, you can begin to select wood that you might have found on the ground. You'll be using this once the fire is burning strongly, and the heat should dry this out as long as it's not soaking wet. Create separate piles of the different sizes you're collecting. In addition to your wispy starter pile, you'll want to end up with a nice stack of pencil thickness dry wood again broken into 6" lengths. Another two generously sized handfuls should do the

trick. Move up to magic marker thickness (An armful) broken into slightly longer lengths up to 12". End the gathering process with yet another pile of larger sized logs that will keep your fire burning through the night (If needed) and provide lasting heat and coals. This last pile should be of forearm and upper arm sized wood. Anything larger likely won't burn all the way through. When it comes to the larger sizes gather as much as you want. The more you gather at this point the less trips you'll have to make into the woods later to keep your fire going - But at this stage you're probably just ready for a fire. Seek a balance.



To start the fire select a handful of the smallest and driest wood you've gathered. Align these pieces in a compact parallel row, but not so tight that oxygen can't reach the center. A gentle squeeze should do the trick. Lay the pile in the center of your fire pit. Using a larger stick to rest one end of the pile upon, angle the pile at about a 45 degree angle. Once in order, use a lighter or match to light the lower end of the pile from underneath. Hold the flame against the base until it begins to burn on its own and the flame starts to spread amongst the individual sticks. It may help to rotate the pile on top of the flames if needed. This will be the most critical point of the entire operation. The key is to slowly build the fire using gradually increasing sizes of material. Build too slow and you'll lose the fire by running out of fuel. Build too fast and you'll

lose the fire starving it from oxygen. Don't rush and start to place larger wood on the fire too soon - The slower you increase the size the better. This is where that second handful of primo, dry, wispy wood helps. With all this in mind begin laying the additional wood against your burning pile at 45 degree angles, placing wood wherever you see flame. Slow and steady. Begin to shape a tipi shape, which will resist wind and form a heat-focusing structure to enable an efficient and easy burning fire. Small pieces burn easily but quickly, so keep building until you've worked up to your larger sized piles which will burn for a more extended amount of time. Once you've built a solid base of coals you're burning your larger sized wood - You're set and should have no trouble keeping the fire going as long as you have enough wood at



hand. Finally, time to relax. The size of the fire you build is up to you, but rarely should it be necessary to build anything larger than a foot in diameter. This should keep you warm enough on the coldest of nights and provide enough heat to cook any meal you might desire. Even smaller fires can be a nice, quaint addition to a campsite. Heating up a cup of tea on a fire no bigger than the cup itself can be a great, low impact way to enjoy the comforts of a fire without blinding you from what the night woods have to offer - You'll still be able to see the stars.

Before departing your campsite allow the fire to burn out completely. Flip any unburnt ends of wood you might have along the edges of the fire back towards the center (Use a poker stick)



so that all wood ends up completely burned. Don't add any new fuel for an hour or more before you plan to depart. Once all wood has completely burned you'll be left with nothing but ashes and coals. Provided that you didn't go overboard and use any wood too large while maintaining your fire, what's left should only last about an hour. You can test this by running your hand through the ashes – If the fire is still going you'll be able to tell quite quickly. Just to make sure, douse what you have left with water, then cover the area with the earth that you excavated earlier. Flatten to match the surrounding landscape. In order to completely cover your tracks you could go further and scatter the leaves and debris that you cleared away earlier back over the fire pit, but avoid this – Just in case. There should be no danger at this point -After dousing your lifeless ashes with

water and covering them with earth, but you can't be too safe when it comes to a forest fire. As long as you haven't left large piles of debris, wind should recover the area after a few days.

When it comes to fire building, no amount of reading or research can make you an expert. It's only with practice that proficiency is achieved, and even then, things are never guaranteed no matter the level of experience or skill you might have. The process detailed above is a good baseline to start with, but these techniques can and should be adapted to what works best for you. Practice and adapt and you should find success. When things don't go right, don't become discouraged. Whether you rarely build a fire in the backcountry or couldn't imagine going without one, fire building is an essential skill to have for all outdoor enthusiasts.



The area upon departure -
very low impact.

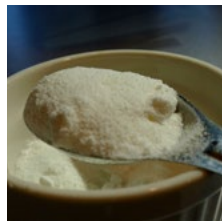
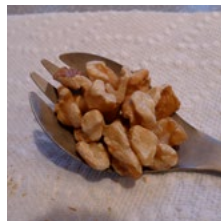
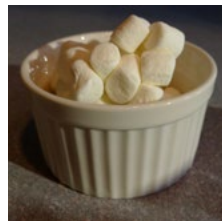


Backcountry Cuisine: Sweet Potato Casserole

This Sweet Potato Casserole dish was discovered on a weekend backpacking trip over the Thanksgiving holiday. We wanted a small taste of home without bringing a ten pound turkey and whole apple pie in our packs. We ate a freeze-dried turkey dinner and made these sweet potatoes as a side dish (although it doubled as dessert!)

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Cup Dehydrated Sweet Potatoes | 1 Tblsp Cinnamon |
| 1/2 Cup Mini-Marshmallows | 1/4 Cup Chopped Pecans or Walnuts |
| 1/4 Cup Milk Powder | 1 1/4 Cup Water for Cooking |
| 2 Tblsp Brown Sugar | |



At Home - Prep Time ~ 1 minute

Combine sweet potatoes, milk powder, brown sugar, and cinnamon and place into a Ziploc bag. Place marshmallows and chopped pecans/walnuts in a separate bag (you can combine everything if you wish, but the marshmallows will melt completely and the nuts will not be as crunchy.)

At Camp - Cooking Time ~ 15 minutes

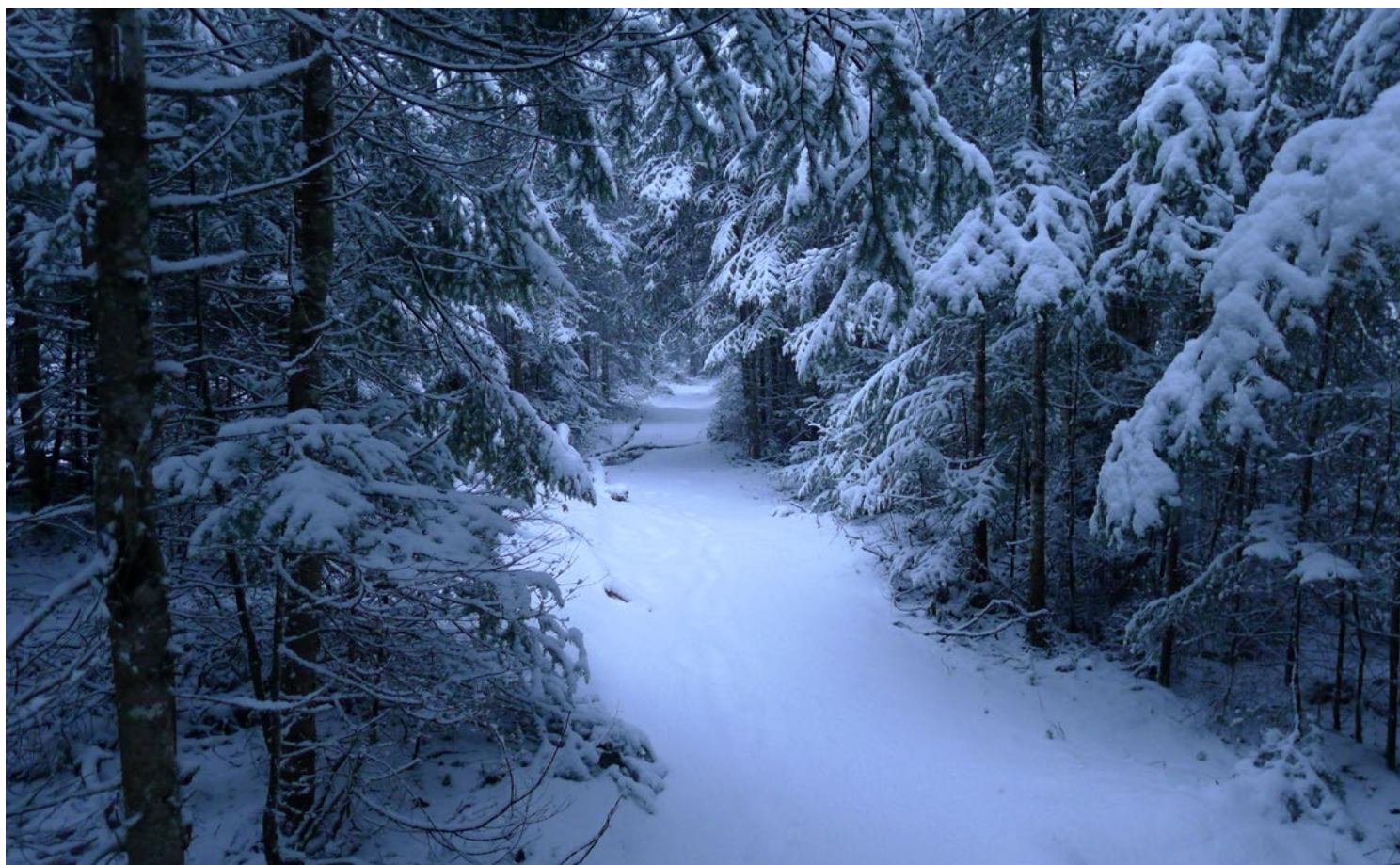
Add sweet potato mixture into your cooking pot along with the water. Bring to a boil and let simmer for around 10 minutes or until sweet potatoes are tender. You may use a pot cozy instead of simmering, but it may take longer for the sweet potatoes to cook. Another option is to pre-soak them before cooking for 15 minutes (easy thing to do while setting up camp.) Before eating, either mix marshmallows & nuts into the pot or sprinkle on top.

Dessert for 2 hungry hikers with about 300 calories per serving. TIP: To increase the calories, you can add butter or oil, as well as more nuts. You can make this a breakfast porridge also, with or without marshmallows. Enjoy!

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THE DRIVE HOME *NOTHING EXPECTED*

THE COLD AND THE CULTURE OF THE NORTHWOODS

Heading north into Minnesota and northern Michigan is always a special treat. The Northwoods are an excellent place for the backpacker seeking a different type of trip. It's off the map. Generally speaking, you won't quite find the wilderness feel that you'll find in the West, but there's a certain rural character that can be appreciated. Towns are small; a highway seen on a map can turn out to be a rarely driven gravel road in person. The woods can also test a backpacker's patience. Winters start early and temperatures can drop dangerously low for weeks on end, but it's business as usual for the locals. The region receives

a high amount of snow that hangs onto the ground well into the spring months, only to then suddenly melt. This brings muddy trails, mosquitoes, and black flies. Summer can bring oppressive heat and humidity. But towards the end of the season if you catch it right, an array of fall colors can compliment your hike, and if you're lucky, an awe-inspiring show from the Northern Lights can at times be seen.

On this trip however, there would be neither fall colors nor lights. A mid-March outing, the trails were muddy and the woods had an overall imposing grayness all around. Seemingly, spring had come

early with unusually warm temperatures and frequent rain during the week prior to my trip. In a normal year a trip here this early might not be possible without snowshoes. The trails would be muddy, and a dark overcast sky lay overhead as I made the drive in. Along the northern-facing slopes, snow banks still dotted the landscape on occasion. The forecast for the weekend called for rain and nearly steady temperatures in the low 40's. Gradually, as I travelled further and further from home, I found myself on roads of gradually decreasing rates of travel. I entered the National Forest on an old, graveled county road. Private lands lay within the forest, and every so often I'd pass a country house or two along my way. Eventually I arrived at the trailhead, located along the old road, late in the afternoon. There were no other cars. There were no permits, no fees, and definitely no ranger station. In my rush to leave the house, I hadn't fully finished packing, and as I worked to dial my backpack in for the upcoming trail an old pale blue pickup drove slowly by on the rough road, dilapidated and nosily making its way forward, as though it could fall apart into pieces at any moment. Despite the warm temperatures, a snow plow still lead the way in front of the truck, the steel blade giving a formidable look to the otherwise tired and beaten vehicle. I felt a bit out of place - Readyng all of this gear with fancy names and bright colors in such an opposite type of place. But the occupants of the truck, clad at least from the waist up in camouflage, just smiled and waved. I gave a friendly wave in return. I concealed anything of

value in my car and locked the doors as I walked away towards the trail. I'm not sure what the point really was, in a place like this someone could have the time of their life dismantling my vehicle into all its separate parts at their leisure without fear of anyone standing in their way. Even though the area was very rural with few locals electing to eke out the hard living needed in such an area, it seemed almost as though I was planning to hike through their backyard. I wasn't sure what it was, but something had me on edge.

The afternoon had worn on and I knew twilight would come early considering the cloud cover above, and the days were still short given the time of year. This was a quick weekend trip - A simple 30 mile loop hike back around to the car. Grey trees closed in around me as I walked off the road's shoulder and past the weathered post that marked the trail's entrance. In a month the forest would be alive with green, but for now only a lonely pine tree every so often added a splash of color to the scene. I slogged along the muddy trail, in a few areas crossing over areas of snow that had refused to melt. As daylight faded I ventured down a ravine off trail and setup camp on a flat bench cut into the hillside. Rain imminent, I grabbed my food bag and headed off into the dim forest. Here the ground was a squishy mass of wet leaves, slowly decaying and turning into the rich soil that lay beneath them. I found a nice spot a good distance from camp and quickly ate dinner. The light was now fading fast and a fog was starting to develop in the humid air. After a few throws my bear bag was hung and I found

my way back to camp with the aid of my headlamp. I jumped in my shelter just as a steady heavy rain began to fall. I find that few sounds in life are as soothing as the sound of raindrops overhead against taut nylon fabric, and soon I was fast asleep.

Just as much as I love falling asleep to the sound of rain, I hate waking up and forcing myself to break camp while it's falling. Thankfully, that wouldn't be the case today; the rain had stopped at some point during the night and I was now simply faced with cloudy skies and chilly weather. I dried things off as much as I could, but still ended up packing a damp wet shelter. Soon enough I was on the trail. I was hoping today would be the highlight of the weekend trip - My only full day on the trail. Tomorrow I had to hit the roads early and then be at work the next day. Normally I shed layers as the day goes on and the work of walking the trail warms me up, so I knew something was different when I found myself chilled and only adding layers at lunch. I soon realized that the temperature had actually been dropping throughout the day. The forecast had called for steady temperatures in the 40's, but as the day moved along I noticed the droplets of water cupped in the curled leaves littering the forest floor began to turn from water to slush and finally ice. Despite the cold temperatures I layered up and tromped onward. Passing the 24 hour mark of my trip I began to finally relax and really start to feel the woods for the first time, and the nagging thoughts of work and other factors of civility began to recede from the weave of thoughts filling my mind. Just as I was starting to

find my zone, my thoughts were broken by someone moving towards me on the trail ahead. As the man approached I could see he was a fellow backpacker and by the looks of his gear he seemed to have a similar approach to the pursuit. I noticed a pair of snowshoes strapped to the outside of his pack, and knew that he was either too concerned about the weather or there was something I didn't know. "Afternoon, how's it going?" I said as we closed into speaking distance. "Not too shabby, just trying to plug along and keep the feet dry" the man replied with a grin, as he stabbed his trekking poles in the ground and came to a stop. "I hear ya, I couldn't help but notice the snowshoes there - You headed north or something?" I searched for the reason with humor. The man's grin faded and he seemed to ponder my question for a moment. "No sir, just wanted to be ready for tomorrow, you heard about the storm right?" My heart sunk a bit. "I heard about a rain storm..." Before I could finish the man interjected. "Well, they're sayin' some front moved farther down than they thought and we're supposed to get nearly half a foot overnight, you headed out today?" I felt a bit ashamed and informed him that I was not expecting snow and had planned to stay another night prior to heading out the next day. "Well, you at least got a good shelter?" I replied that indeed I did, and after informing that man of the single walled shelter I was using for this trip, he seemed unimpressed. This surprised me, since it seemed like something we would find common ground on from the looks of his gear, at least the gear that I could see. In an odd exchange, the man began

explaining all the attributes of the shelter he was using - Another single walled shelter, similar to mine. I had actually considered the exact shelter he was using in the past, and I knew it was a great product, but for a few reasons the shelter I was using just worked better for me personally. Obviously, the shelter he was using worked better for him, as I learned over the next 10 minutes as he explained all the reasons that his shelter was superior when compared to mine. I informed the man of my past consideration for the exact product he was describing, and briefly explained the reasons that I chose otherwise. He seemed perplexed. "Are you sure we're talking about the same shelter?" He asked. Seemingly, from his perspective, if you weren't using what he was using you either didn't know it existed or you had evaluated your purchase incorrectly. I love to talk gear as much as the next guy, but I just had a feeling there was no talking this one through. His gear was superior, and he knew it! Not wanting things to spiral into a geargument, I thanked the man for the weather (And shelter) advice and we parted ways. Concerned about the weather, I quickened my hiking pace.

I had already hiked 15 miles for the day and the afternoon was ticking away. Luckily, my plan had been to make nearly 20 miles at the end of the day, which would put me within just a few miles of the trailhead, for a short hike out the last day. Now that snow was in the forecast I pondered pushing on, all the way to the car - And hitting the road as night fell to beat the snow. But part of me wondered

if what the man had said was even true... After all I'd received plenty of advice from hikers I'd passed on trails before, some good, and some bad. Even if it was true, it would only be a couple miles to the car the next day and I didn't feel like cutting the trip short. Despite darkening skies, I stayed true to the original plan and setup camp for the night 3 miles from the loop's end, in a grove of pine trees on a southern-facing ridge.

At 2 am that night I awakened to something brushing my face. I looked up and found nothing but silnylon all around me, lying upon me almost like a sheet instead of the taut walls overhead that I would normally expect. It was cold and quiet. Apparently the snow storm had indeed hit the area. I began punching upwards, beating the snow off the walls of the shelter. I gathered my courage and unzipping the vestibule, I ventured outside to evaluate the mess my shelter had become. Snow covered everything. I turned my headlamp on and the forest lit up as the white snow bounced the light off every available surface. I made a circle around the shelter, sinking in snow up to my calves. Slowly I was able to clear most of the snow from the walls and tension the guy lines, giving myself an acceptable, but not perfect result. I thought my efforts would get me through the night, or at least another hour or two before the process would need to be repeated. Hands chilled to the bone, I jumped back inside and into my sleeping bag. There I huddled and slept in fits until daybreak.

The morning came with a blast of light and

clear blue skies. I lay in my sleeping bag, trying to gather the courage to jump outside into the cold. The shelter had sagged more during the night, but thankfully I hadn't needed to venture out again. In times like these I usually adopt the band-aid method, so in one sudden motion I jumped out of my bag and quickly worked to put my shoes on and break camp. I opted to break camp and eat breakfast on the move, so that I could get some body heat going as soon as possible. My shoes were giving me fits though; they had frozen solid during the night. Somehow I forced them on with kicking motions in a comical scene, but the laces were frozen in place and they couldn't be tied. What the matter. This being my last day I quickly packed in a haphazard manner and hit the trail, unlaced shoes and all. I knew I was only a few miles from the car, so stumbling my way along in the foot of snow that had fallen would be possible. The trail was obscured, but well blazed with blue markers and I was able to find my way. In the snow however, the first mile took nearly an hour, giving me plenty of time to mutter under my breath both about the numbness in my toes as well the inadequacy of the weekend forecast I had seen. At least I would get some heat once I arrived back at the car, but I started to worry about the conditions of the roads. I wasn't exactly driving a 4x4 truck with a snowplow, rather a front wheel drive sedan quite low to the ground. Thankfully I still had a snow shovel stashed in the trunk, but I wasn't going to shovel my way 20 miles back to the highway, and there was no way I driving anywhere in a foot of fresh snow. Eventually, the row of blue

diamonds I had been following rounded a bend and the county road came into sight. The direction that I had driven in from, and had planned to take out, was untouched and impassable. But the lane headed the other way (Where it lead I knew not) had apparently been touched with a plow at some point during the storm. This side of the road held snow only a few inches deep. I knew care would need to be taken while driving, but in that one direction I knew the road was at least passable. My heart sunk a bit as I walked further along the road and the trailhead parking lot came into view, though. Not only had the lot not been plowed - It was nearly two feet deep. The wind had blown the snow in drifts all over the lot, only making my situation worse. Adding to my despair was the fact that for some reason, I had chosen one of the parking spaces farthest from the road when I had arrived to start my trip. It was nearly a 100 foot distance that I would have to shovel, a task that would most likely take at least several hours. It would be a back-breaking task, and I was already exhausted. I stepped onto the road, relieved to finally find myself in snow less than a foot deep, and used the single plowed lane to make my way towards the parking lot. As I drew closer, I realized that a stroke of luck had come my way. A plowed path, only the width of a single vehicle led all the way from the county road, 100 feet to the far end of the lot and right to the rear of my car. I almost fell over with happiness. I quickened my pace and reached my car. Once there I got the engine going for some heat and ditched the backpack in the backseat. I knew I couldn't return home

the way I had planned, so I grabbed the roadmap out of the glove box and determined that following the road in the plowed direction would place me in a small town after 15 miles. There I could jump on a highway and make my way home. This of course, assumed that the road in front of me now had been plowed the entire way. Plan made, and with no room to turn the car around until I made it out to the road, I put the car in reverse and backed out of the parking lot.

I drove slowly and blasted the heat in the car. The one lane had indeed been plowed all the way to the town, and I eventually made it to a gas station with the well-plowed highway in sight. As the tank was filling, I noticed a restaurant attached to the gas station, but it was closed - Apparently a breakfast-only operation. It looked like a soda and some gas station junk food would have to get me home.

The man behind the counter had seen the direction from which I came, and asked how I ever made it down the road in such a vehicle as I walked inside. I told him that I'd been out hiking, and the success story of finding a path plowed to my car. "I guess I was lucky that the county got out there to plow at least one lane and help me out in the lot at some point" I said. "County?" The man said. "Nah, back there they don't plow - Ever!" The man pulled at his mustache and looked at me as though he was sizing me up. "You must of just been followin' in Bill's tracks, he lives back there by that trail of yours - Comes in here every Sunday morning for coffee and breakfast. You can tell time by the man..."

He's always here as soon as the restaurant opens." The man's gaze then drifted out the window, and down the road that led through the small town. "Yeah he's probably over at Mack's watching the game right now...I haven't seen him head back yet." The wheels started to turn in my head as I grabbed a soda and a few other items off the shelves. I walked back towards the counter. "By chance, does Bill drive a blue truck with a snowplow?" I asked. The man smiled in return and again worked his mustache over, seemingly now in amusement. "Well, that thing might have been blue 30 years ago!" As he trailed off into laughter, I paid for my items.

Before walking out, I handed the man a \$20 bill. "Next Sunday tell Bill I said thanks, and breakfast is on me."





THANKS FOR STOPPING BY!

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