

# TrailGroove<sup>®</sup>

Issue 20



# Contents

*Issue 20*

Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. To view the magazine online go to:

<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:

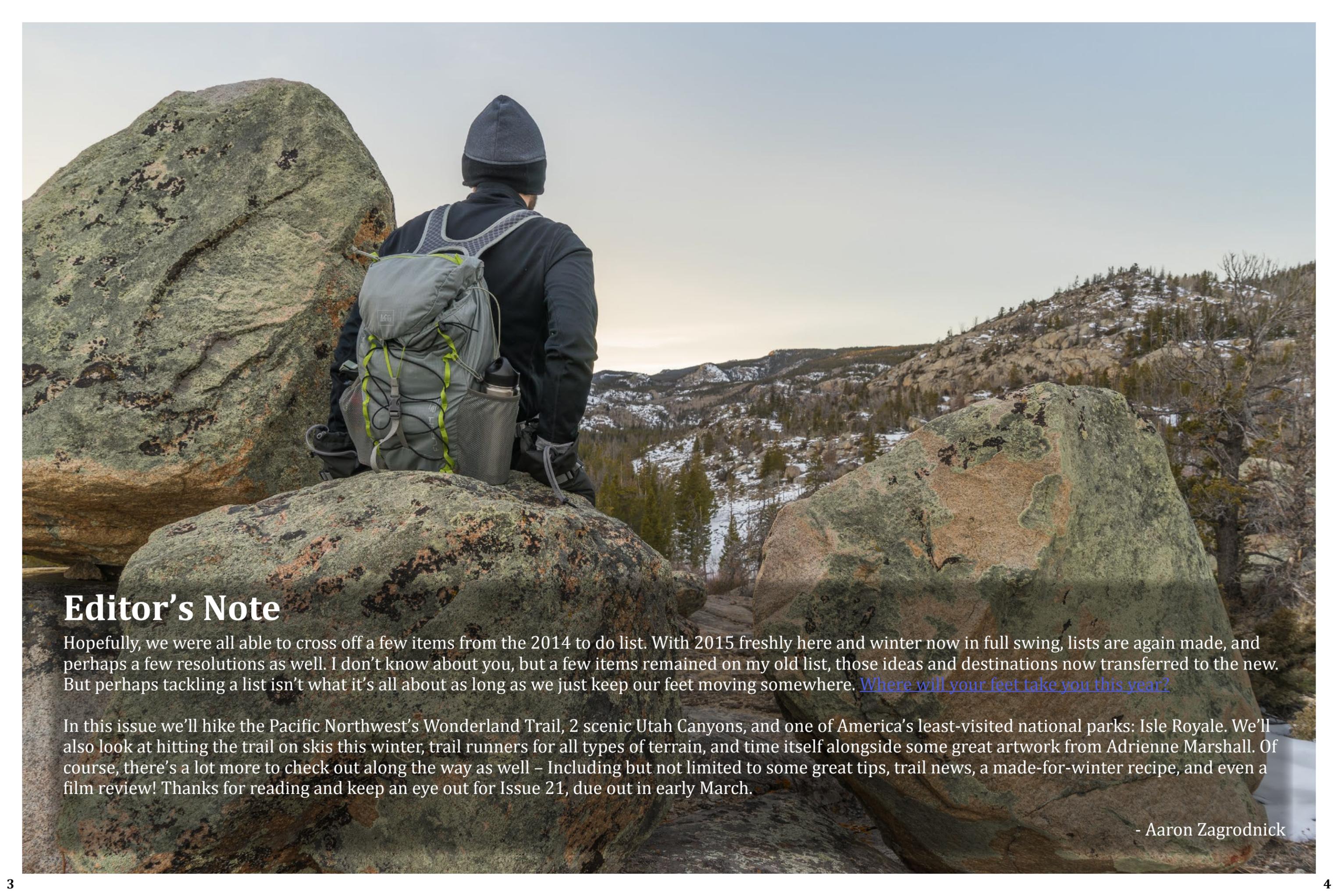
<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue20.html>

[Subscribe to TrailGroove Magazine](#)

A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:  
Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Eric Moll, Sean O'Rourke,  
Jim Grob, Bill Townsend, and Adrienne Marshall.

Copyright © 2015 TrailGroove Magazine LLC, [www.TrailGroove.com](http://www.TrailGroove.com)

- 3 Editor's Note
- 5 How to Contribute to TrailGroove Magazine
- 6 TrailGroove Product Review Policy
- 7 Jargon
- 9 Trail News with Paul Magnanti
- 11 Trail Tip by Ted Ehrlich
- 15 Backcountry Nordic Skiing: Experience the Wonder of Winter by Paul Magnanti
- 33 Ascending and Descending - Section Hiking the Wonderland Trail by Jim Grob
- 51 The Escape: Fish and Owl Creek Canyons by Ted Ehrlich
- 71 Isle Royale: A Superior Adventure by Eric Moll
- 85 Trail Runners in the Backcountry: Beyond the Run by Sean O'Rourke
- 95 Flash by Bill Townsend, featuring artwork by Adrienne Marshall
- 105 Media: "Wild" - A Film Review by David Cobb
- 107 Gear Mash  
Gear That Caught Our Eye This Season
- 109 Photo Tips from the Trail: Zooming In by David Cobb
- 117 Backcountry Cuisine: Chocolate Cheesecake Smoothies by Paul Magnanti
- 119 The Drive Home: The Sunset by Aaron Zagrodnick

A hiker wearing a dark jacket, a grey beanie, and a large grey backpack with yellow accents is sitting on a large, mossy rock. The hiker is looking out over a vast, snowy mountain valley with scattered evergreen trees. The sky is a pale, overcast blue. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated angle, showing the hiker's back and the surrounding landscape.

## Editor's Note

Hopefully, we were all able to cross off a few items from the 2014 to do list. With 2015 freshly here and winter now in full swing, lists are again made, and perhaps a few resolutions as well. I don't know about you, but a few items remained on my old list, those ideas and destinations now transferred to the new. But perhaps tackling a list isn't what it's all about as long as we just keep our feet moving somewhere. [Where will your feet take you this year?](#)

In this issue we'll hike the Pacific Northwest's Wonderland Trail, 2 scenic Utah Canyons, and one of America's least-visited national parks: Isle Royale. We'll also look at hitting the trail on skis this winter, trail runners for all types of terrain, and time itself alongside some great artwork from Adrienne Marshall. Of course, there's a lot more to check out along the way as well – Including but not limited to some great tips, trail news, a made-for-winter recipe, and even a film review! Thanks for reading and keep an eye out for Issue 21, due out in early March.

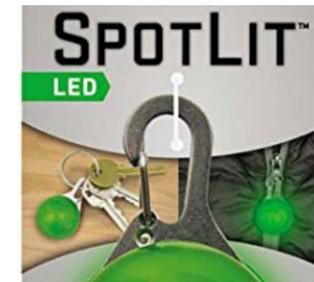
- Aaron Zagrodnick

# Contribute

Please contact us [Here](#) or email us at [Info@TrailGroove.com](mailto:Info@TrailGroove.com) with your idea. We're always on the lookout for great 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 note with a broad overview and sample of your idea, as well as an approximate word and picture count. Original and factual material with accompanying high quality photography or artwork is a requirement. Once received, we'll evaluate your submission and contact you for further discussion. Questions before you start? Just let us know.

A few examples of what we're looking for:

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



## TrailGroove Magazine Review Policy

The products we review are obtained via normal consumer retail channels. We do not ask for or accept review samples from manufacturers, and we do not obtain the products we review under the TrailGroove Magazine name. As such, we're reviewing the same products that you would obtain - Not hand-picked review samples. Even though we like free gear as much as the next person, 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: Contour Interval

On a topographic map, the contour interval is the physical elevation difference between each contour line, usually expressed in feet or meters. The smaller the contour interval, the more accurately landscape features and any elevation changes will be represented. Understanding contour lines and the interval are key map reading skills and especially useful for offtrail travel, though be aware that micro features are not always well reflected – A slope that looks to gently rise upwards could actually hold other features (such as a small cliff) between two contour lines where the interval is not close enough to reflect more minute changes in the landscape. To determine the contour interval of your map, locate a bold contour line with a listed elevation (index contour line) as well as the next index contour line up or downslope. Count the number of lines (intermediate contour lines) between the two index lines, but do not count the line you started on. Then divide the listed elevation change by the number of lines counted, or simply look at the map legend where you can find the contour interval listed.



# Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

*In this month's issue of TrailGroove, the news is that of hope and resilience. Nature has suffered setbacks over the years. Species become extinct, habitats have become ruined and a part of the wild becomes lost for future generations. But sometimes there is a small ember of hope that will let nature flourish again with some hard work, some re-establishment of wild areas, and a bit luck.*

*Alas, there is a cautionary news item, too.*

**A** [blight resistant version of the American chestnut tree](#) is ready to take root again in the American forests. Once the dominant tree in the southeast Appalachians, the American chestnut was almost at [near-extinction due to an invasive blight brought from overseas](#). Almost seventy-five years since the American chestnut nearly became extinct, an ambitious five year plan is ready to be implemented to reintroduce these trees into the American forests. Perhaps our grandchildren or great-grandchildren may see an American forest populated with these majestic trees. People may again be able to, as Longfellow wrote, stand “under a spreading chestnut tree”.

**F**or the first time since the 1830s, American bison are now roaming wild east of the Mississippi. In the [Nachusa Grasslands of Illinois](#), a herd of thirty bison now roam this 3500 acre grassland preserve owned by the Nature Conservancy. Visitors can now see a sight that has been missing almost since the days of Lewis and Clark's expedition.

**A**nd sometimes when a species does make a comeback in the wilds, our human nature reacts strongly to the potential wildness. [The first cougar seen in Kentucky since the American Civil War was shot and killed](#). Another species once native to the Appalachians, there are signs that the cougar, also known by such names as a mountain lion and catamount, is starting to re-appear in the Midwest. Sightings have been made in Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. The cougar is starting to make its way back east. Maybe this species will again be in the Appalachians for future generations as well.



# Trail Tip 20: Snow Shelters

by Ted Ehrlich

**W**hen hiking and backpacking in the winter, having the knowledge and preparation to easily build a safe snow shelter is an essential skill. Some people even prefer snow shelters over tents during the winter because they are quieter and warmer than even the best 4 season tents on the market, which can be very pricey too.

Even for people that do not plan on spending any overnights in the backcountry during the winter, knowing how to quickly construct a solid snow shelter is a good survival skill to have in case something unexpected happens. There are two main types of snow shelters, quinzhees (also known as a snow cave), and igloos. Neither are quick to make safely for someone that needs shelter fast. A quinzhee is made by hollowing out a settled mound of snow. Unfortunately it can take 12 to

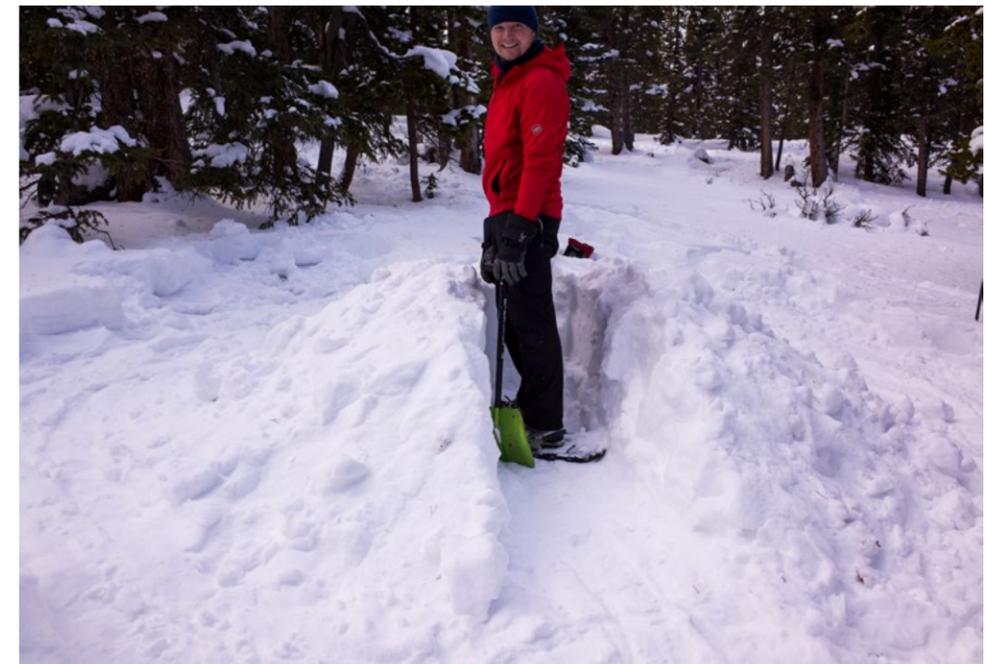
24 hours for snow to naturally settle into a hard enough pack after shoveling it into an 8 foot snow pile, and is very dependent on the type of snow. To help this process along, you can work to harden the snow by stomping on it while you are piling it up, which will give you quicker results but it's still not fast enough for an emergency shelter. An igloo on the other hand is built from blocks of snow that are formed. Forming these blocks takes the right kind of snow and is even more time intensive, but igloos are much stronger and considered semi-permanent or permanent with the right kind of maintenance along with cold enough temperatures.

In Colorado specifically, our skiing is world renowned because of our champagne powder. Unfortunately this kind of snow is terrible for snow shelters as it doesn't like to settle densely enough to prevent a cave in, even with extensive work hardening. This means you have to build extra thick walls and shovel a lot of snow to make a safe shelter, which can take a lot of time and energy. Instead I recommend a different approach that's much safer and much quicker, no matter the snow type and quality. My method is a suspension roof snow cave, and with practice an average person can easily build one in less than an hour, and it only requires you to bring two things into the backcountry, a small avalanche shovel and

a small tarp.

To begin, select a site that is relatively flat and is not in an avalanche prone area, preferably in or near a treed area if possible. Look for a flat snow surface, which will help you avoid obstacles like rocks or downed trees that may be hiding under the snow. Then stomp out a circle around your designated site to help you design a symmetric pile. If you are using snowshoes, keep them on; otherwise take off your skis for the next part. You'll need a sturdy all metal shovel (I personally use a [K2 Rescue Shovel Plus](#)), which is part of my avalanche rescue kit and has an extendable handle to make snow shoveling easier on your back. Unlike a real quinzhee, you only need to pile the snow around 3-4 feet high; work to harden it by walking on it with your snowshoes as you build up the snow pile. If this is going to be used for more than one night, take a little extra time and pile it up higher so that you have more room to sit up when it's finished.

Once you have made your pile and you feel that it's sufficiently hardened by being able to stand on top of it without sinking into the snow, figure out which side will be the entrance. You want the entrances to be downhill and downwind to help keep snow from getting inside



when the wind blows, and to make it more comfortable to sleep in so that your head is above your feet. At the entrance, start to dig out the center of the pile until a horseshoe U is formed into the original round pile. This should be slightly wider than your shoulders and long enough that can fit your entire body inside without being uncomfortable. Use the shovel to carefully cut the walls of the shelter so that they are straight up and down, giving you maximum room and keeping the walls strong. Once the snow cave is wide and long enough for you, it's time to build a suspension roof. The roof requires the second item, a tarp. You don't need a fancy tarp. For example, the blue tarp used in the photos is from Hope Depot and cost around \$6. There are lighter options, but the nice thing about a cheap tarp is that it won't matter if it gets abused.

Next, use trekking poles, skis, dead tree branches, and/or other similarly shaped items to span between the two walls to make the roof support. The tarp is then placed over them, sealing the roof and completing the shelter. I personally used twigs as stakes for the tarp and then bury the edges in snow to seal the shelter from the majority of the wind. Some people may choose to add some snow to the top of the tarp if it's flat enough to help keep the tarp from accidentally blowing away and to insulate your shelter a bit more, but normally the tarp material is too slippery to make this easy. Using small tree branches around the edges of the tarp to dam in the snow on top is a good

idea. If you do add snow to the top, be careful not to overload the suspension roof as tree branches and trekking poles may bend easier than you would think. Keeping the inside as narrow as possible, again just wider than your shoulders, will help keep the bending forces low.

Lastly, building a two person suspension roof shelter is much more difficult because the size of the tarp needs to be much bigger, and the roof will need to be built with a lot of long and thick tree branches that may be hard to find since trekking poles won't be long or strong enough. A better option for two or more people may be a tool like the [Grand Shelters icebox igloo making tool](#).



# Backcountry Nordic Skiing

By Paul Magnanti



**I**t is a cold, blustery day in the Colorado backcountry.

The mountains are covered in a blanket of snow. The tree branches are bending under the weight of the previous night's snowfall. A canopy of branches is over the trail.

My breath forms a cloud in the morning air. My cheeks are cold.

I do not dread heading into the mountains in these conditions.

I embrace them.

I am about to explore the backcountry.

Not plodding through the snow in boots. Or stomping down a path with snowshoes.

I plan on gliding over the snow on skis. I will be backcountry ski touring. An elegant, efficient and, dare I say, almost magical way of seeing the backcountry in winter.

### What is Backcountry Ski Touring?

Ski touring, formally known as backcountry Nordic touring, is a type of skiing that is located somewhere between the classic cross-country skiing in a flat or groomed area and the "big mountain" skiing where the emphasis is on steeper inclines and making turns.

Backcountry Nordic is more about the journey than the adrenaline rush.



**Above:** Jenny Creek Trail Junction. **Previous Page:** Below Rogers Pass.

Exploring. Making distance over varied terrain. Seeing what a beautiful, but crowded, lake looks like in the winter with only you and a thermos of hot chocolate present. It's akin to hiking on skis: If your idea of a quiet evening at home is poring over a topo map and plotting out a backcountry route, this type of skiing may appeal to you.

### Why Skiing Instead of Snowshoeing?

Snowshoeing has a less steep learning curve but is less elegant and slower than skiing. Once a person learns the basics

needed for ski touring, it is amazing how much ground can be covered vs. snowshoes. And while snowshoes do work better in heavily wooded areas, as a person's skill level increases, the definition of heavily wooded tends to be more elastic.

But skiing is not just about covering distance more efficiently. It is also about skiing along in fresh snow, hearing a schuss sound while making your way through the powder and getting into that magical moment as you glide effortlessly through the landscape.

With snowshoes, I feel as if I am plodding. With skis? I am in flight.

### What Type of Skis to Buy?

Unfortunately, there is no perfect ski. Some skis are long and straight and great for gliding over flat terrain but not as good for turning. Others are very wide and have a pronounced hourglass shape to them. This type of ski floats well and will make turns easier but makes for slow traveling overall.

Backcountry Nordic skis tend to be somewhere in the middle. A little wider to accommodate floating over powder, but narrow enough to facilitate gliding. And a bit of a shape to make turns. Like their classic cross-country skiing cousins, most backcountry Nordic skis have a noticeable arch (known as a double-camber) in them that facilitates good gliding.



Much like bicycling enthusiasts, many people who get into skiing end up with multiple skis in their “quiver”. Some skis for touring in rolling terrain, some for mainly flat terrain and still another set for very steep terrain. And so on. It can be an addiction! But to start off, it’s best to get one pair that will be a good all-around ski for a variety of conditions.

Besides the type of ski, the boots, bindings, and waxable / waxless skis are additional factors that need to be considered. A whole book can, and many have, been written about these topics. For the sake of brevity, the essentials are:

### **Bindings and Boots: New Nordic Norm - Backcountry (NNN-BC) vs. 75mm Three-pin**

The NNN-BC systems are best for day use activities. This system is light and excellent for speed and gliding. The older, but still widespread 75mm three-pin system is more robust and allows for better turning ability especially with a heavier load. I find the 75mm three-pin system is less prone to icing up vs. the NNN-BC system and is better suited for overnight use.

### **Waxable vs. Waxless Skis**

Backcountry Nordic skis are able to climb moderately steep terrain and still retain gliding ability on the flatter areas and downhill sections. There are two methods used in backcountry ski touring to strike to this balance between gliding and climbing abilities. The methods used are either kick

wax, or a fish scale pattern built into the skis themselves. Both of these methods allow for gliding on the flats and downhills while also allowing a skier to climb up moderately steep terrain. One method may be better than another based on terrain, type of snow, skier’s ability, or even preference.

**Waxable Skis** use a variety of color-coded hard to soft waxes that work in a variety of conditions. The colder the snow, the harder the wax that should be used. In consistent cold and dry snow, waxed skis allow for better gliding and faster descents vs. waxless skis. There is a bit of an art to applying wax that some people, especially beginning skiers, may find to be a bother or even difficult to apply correctly.

**Waxless Skis** dispense with the wax and use a fish scale pattern that is built into the skis themselves. No need to apply the appropriate wax. This pattern allows for climbing on moderate terrain but has a slower glide on flatter areas and downhills vs. waxed skis. I find that waxless skis do work better in wet and warm snow versus waxed skis.



Near Brainard Lake

And if a person is climbing up steeper terrain, especially with a heavier pack, climbing skins may need to be used. What are climbing skins? Climbing skins are simply a strip of mohair fabric with a sticky glue-like backing on the other side of the strip. A skier will put the glue side against the bottom of the ski when a climb is encountered and remove the climbing skin when descending. The climbing skins allow a skier to climb up a steep incline and allow for limited gliding on flatter areas and while going downhill. A skier can purchase full length skins that go from the tip of the ski to the tail, or kicker skins that cover the middle underside of the ski, also known as the kick pocket, only.

For most backcountry Nordic tours, the full length skins are a bit overkill. Besides being more expensive, the full length skins inhibit the glide quite a bit and aren't suited for the typical rolling terrain seen in Nordic touring. Kicker skins, however, work well for this type of skiing and they also work very well in spring ski conditions with waxable skis. Climbing skins are probably best purchased later when a person is feeling comfortable skiing in more aggressive terrain.

### **Suggestions for an Initial Kit**

As a person can see, there are many variables in picking a ski system that will work for them. I always suggest that a person talk to a knowledgeable person at an outdoor store that specializes in this type of gear. The staff will be able to assist in purchasing skis, bindings, and boots

that will work for the type of skiing and terrain that will be encountered by an individual skier.

Having said that, when I purchased a touring system for my wife, I bought the following setup.

**Skis:** As a beginner, my wife did not want to bother with waxing skis. She simply wanted to “ski and go”. The ideal ski would be wider with good flotation and a bit of shape to them that allowed for easier turning, if with a compromise in gliding speed. Basically, an all-around mountain ski was desired. I settled on the [Rossignol BC 90 skis](#). These waxless skis are less than \$300, versatile, and wide enough to handle turns on moderately steep terrain. Overall, an excellent ski if starting out with a “quiver of one”.

**Bindings and Boots:** As mentioned, I am not a fan of the NNN-BC system overall. Though lighter than the older 75mm three-pin system, I find that the NNN-BC is prone to icing up and gives less control when making turns.

A versatile, all condition binding is the [Voile 3-Pin Cable Telemark Binding](#). Simple and bomber. The removable cable allows for more control on steeper downhills, especially with a heavier overnight pack, but better gliding ability is obtained if the cable is removed. My wife skis with the cable attached almost all the time as the better control and turning ability is more of a concern for her than gliding speed. Many beginners feel similar.



Near Brainard Lake



Hagerman Pass

Finally, a boot that works well for all-around touring, be it day use, winter overnights and even some steeper terrain, is the [Crispi Mountain Boot](#). A bit pricey at a little over \$250, but they will last a long time. If you are on a budget, these boots are patterned after the classic Asolo Snowfield boots. Snowfields can often be found online for \$75 or less and still in very good condition. An excellent option for the bargain shopper.

This backcountry Nordic touring kit is not terribly expensive, is versatile enough for many different types of backcountry skiing conditions, and is good enough to use even when a person's skill set expands. At roughly \$650 for a complete kit, it's not terribly expensive overall and will last a while.

As a side note, another way to bargain shop, besides buying used boots, is to buy gear at the end of the season. Brand new skis and bindings are often steeply discounted by March. An excellent way to get into skiing if a person wants to save money and is patient. Also consider renting a ski kit first to try some different skis, boots, and binding combinations. Some stores are generous and allow part of the rental fee to go towards the purchase of a new ski kit.

### Skiing vs. Hiking vs. Snowshoeing Speeds

A common question asked by many beginning skiers is "How much faster will I go compared to hiking or even snowshoeing?"

**"How much faster will I go compared to hiking or even snowshoeing?"**

There are many variables that have an effect on this number: Fitness and skill level of the skier, heaviness of pack, new snow or a packed-down trail, steepness of terrain, etc.

In general, I find that on moderate terrain with a packed-down trail (no fresh snow), I can climb about as fast as I hike or

snowshoe. On flat terrain, I glide about 1.5 times as fast, if not more, compared to my hiking and snowshoeing speed. And for downhills? I am flying!

As a more concrete example, a favorite ski tour of mine is about twelve miles and has approximately 2000 feet of elevation gain over rolling terrain. This usually packed trail takes me 3-4 hours to ski. If I were to hike or snowshoe this trail, it would take me 4-5 hours.

A similar loop with a lot of fresh snow and no previous ski traffic may take me 4-5 hours, however. This same loop would still take longer on snowshoes vs. skis. I also find that breaking trail with snowshoes can be more tiring than breaking trail on skis.



Trail Ridge Road, Rocky Mountain National Park

## Other Gear for Backcountry Skiing

When backcountry skiing, other gear may be needed to be brought vs. three-season hiking. Some essential pieces of gear I find useful are:

- **Ski poles, of Course!** Trekking poles can sometimes be used if snow baskets are attached. They do however, tend to be less robust than ski poles, and can bend or even break. As more aggressive skiing is done, it may be better to have dedicated ski poles.
- **Snow Shovel:** A small shovel that often splits for easy transportation in a pack. Useful for digging a snow shelter, making backcountry “furniture” when backpacking and getting the car out of the trailhead if it snowed while in the backcountry.
- **Tall Gaiters:** Helps keep the snow out of your boots when skiing through deep powder.
- **Thermos:** Not absolutely essential, but a hot drink while overlooking the valley below is always nice.
- **Repair Kit:** A simple repair kit is a “must have” when backcountry skiing. A multi-tool, duct tape, baling wire, steel wool, zip ties, ski straps and parachute cord are in my kit. If a binding becomes loose or a boot sole delaminates, I can make some emergency repairs to help get back to the trailhead.
- **Emergency Shelter:** More so for day skis than overnights (when a person has a shelter, sleeping bag, a stove, and so on), packing an emergency shelter is an excellent idea. An uncomfortable night in the backcountry is preferable to a potentially dangerous situation if something unforeseeable happens. An emergency blanket, a small tarp, or a poncho all can work. However, I prefer to pack a Christmas tree disposal bag. Only four ounces and about \$2, this bag is very large and will accommodate a person very easily.



Near Cameron Pass

## Being Safe!

Winter is not more dangerous per se than three-season hiking and backpacking, it just requires more caution and preparation. Take the appropriate clothing and gear and don't go beyond any personal comfort and safety levels. Avalanches are a concern, but by being conservative and using good judgment, avalanche terrain can be avoided.

## Need to Know More?

This article only looks at the very basics of backcountry Nordic touring. If a person has more interest in this wonderful type of outdoor experience, more information should be sought.

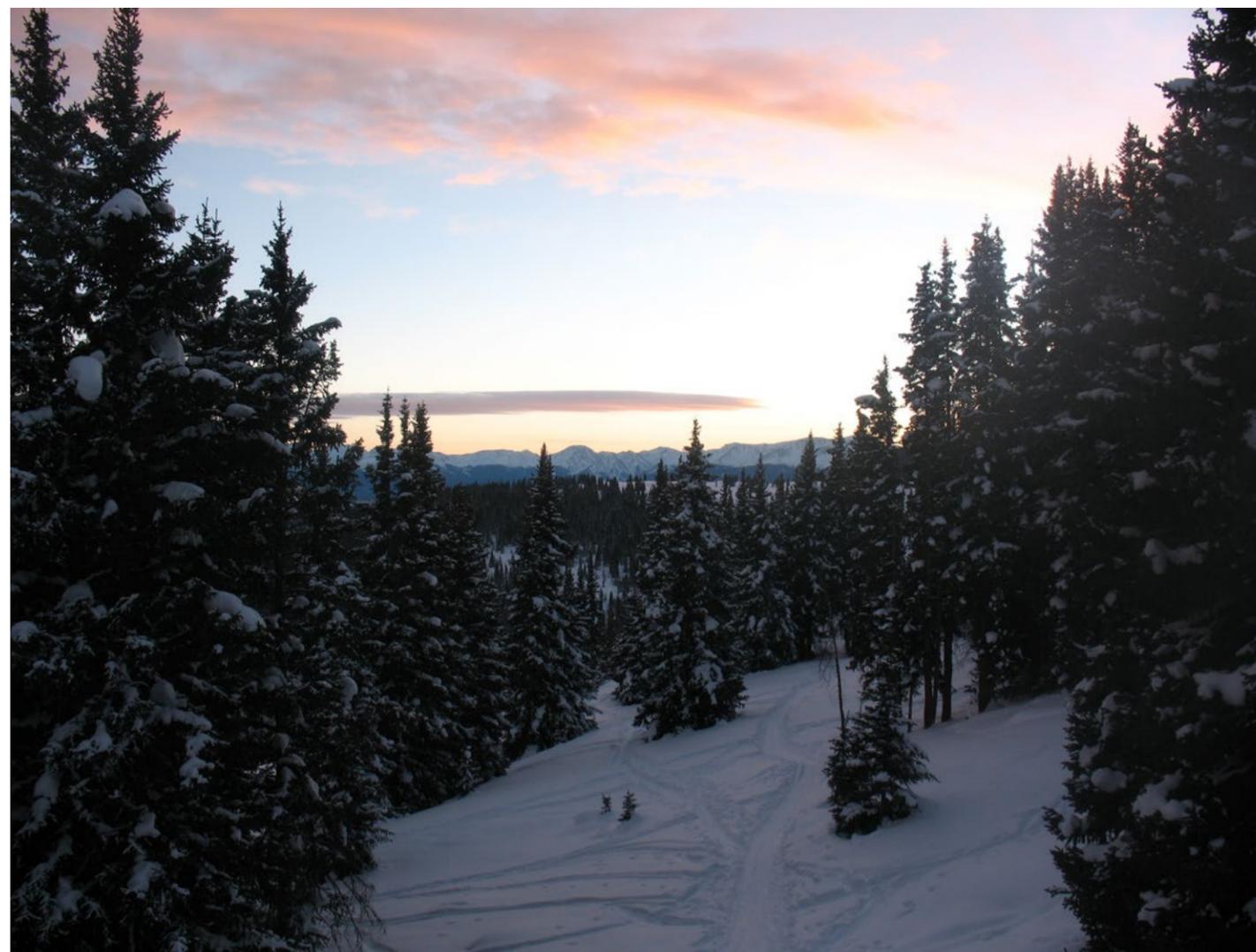
**First, find an outdoor shop** that has a good selection of these types of skis. If no stores are found locally, there are now multiple stores with an online presence. Call up or visit the store, ask some questions, and the often knowledgeable staff will help pick a ski, boot, and binding system that will fit well and work for the type of skiing that's desired. If a store is local, consider renting some gear first to figure out what equipment may work best for your skiing style.

## Next, get some practical know-how.

Going out and, to paraphrase a well-known sneaker commercial, "just doing it" is not necessarily the best idea. If a friend who is an experienced skier and winter trekker is not available easily for personal lessons, all is not lost. Many local outdoor groups offer low-cost or even free classes, workshops, trips focused on backcountry Nordic skiing / winter backpacking, and sometimes even avalanche safety classes.

**And, finally, do some reading.** Not quite as good as talking to someone directly for many, but doing some reading and applying that knowledge can work for the right person. I'm a big fan of the [Winter Trekking](#) website. The information on this site is not always applicable to lighter weight methods, but there's a lot of valuable knowledge to be found. The type of skiing they focus on is very much in the backcountry Nordic realm, and the emphasis is also on overnight trips.

[Allen & Mike's Really Cool Backcountry Ski Book](#) is also an excellent resource. A short, informative, and humorous read, the book covers not only backcountry skiing but also details winter camping information in a concise and very readable form.



## Get Out There!

Backcountry Nordic skiing is a wonderful way to explore the natural world. Winter is not a time to hibernate and have endless gear discussions online. Rather, winter is a time to see nature in a different way: The winter alpenglow on the mountains is a photographer's delight. The well-known sights become something new and different in the winter landscape. And nature reveals herself in way seldom experienced by many.

Glide on the snow, experience the fresh powder, delight in the cold air and enjoy the wonder that is the winter landscape.

Grab a pack, get on the skis and go!





Below Argentine Pass



  
**CAMPSAVER**

Pay less for gear and go.

[campsaver.com](http://campsaver.com)



# **Ascending and Descending Section Hiking the Wonderland Trail**

**Location: Washington**

**By Jim Grob**

**Mt. Rainier straddles the Cascade crest with a dry continental climate to the east and the luxuriant moisture of the Pacific Ocean to the west.** The mountain's geographical positioning coupled with its 14,410 ft elevation and 35 square miles of permanent ice and snow cover creates its own weather. The Wonderland trail is a 93 mile (150 km) circular loop trail around the mountain that traverses all drainages resulting in 22,000 feet of net elevation gain.

Many seek the Wonderland Trail out as a continuous 7-12 day trek. This poses a challenge even for fit and experienced backpackers given the trail's rugged course coupled with the unpredictable weather even in mid-summer. I have witnessed several thru-hikers on their last day on the trail and wondered if they were still enjoying the riches the trail offered up at each turn, or were simply trying to finish and return to the comforts of home.

Much can then be said for spacing the experience out in more manageable allotments by a section hiking approach. The advantages can be summarized as follows; day hiking sections allows one to make go / no go decisions at the last minute to optimize weather and viewing conditions, while larger sections requiring advance overnight permit planning can be kept to 2 - 3 days stretches so burnout does not occur,

**Right:** Sunrise at Dawn  
**Previous Page:** Willis Wall

*"Of all the fire mountains which like beacons, once blazed along the Pacific Coast, Mount Rainier is the noblest."*

*~ John Muir*

and largely removes the risk that you'll experience poor weather or trail injuries for the entire trail length. Section hiking does require planning for drop off and pickup logistics, but this is achievable with help from hiking partners or friends and family. This was the approach I took in 2013-14 where I day-hiked roughly 38 miles of the trail, with the remaining 55 miles completed in 2 overnight sections.

I chose to do the section hike in a consistent clockwise direction, and ordered the hikes by progressive difficulty (distance, elevation gain, overnight requirement) versus a linear course as if thru-hiking. My hike of the Wonderland Trail was a movement in 5 parts. The first two sections, Sunrise to Fryingpan Creek (5 miles), and Box Canyon to Longmire (15 miles) were great warm up hikes. The third section, Fryingpan Creek to Box Canyon (16.2 miles) was highly rewarding in its views of the east side of the mountain, and at the same time made me aware of the challenges ahead for overnight hikes. Section 4 (Mowich to Sunrise, 22 miles, two days) utilized the Spray Park alternative trail that is not officially part





“The true miracle is not walking on water or walking in air,  
but simply walking on this earth.”

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Logistical Considerations**

The largest limitation for any form of hiking on the Wonderland Trail is the trail’s snow-free period. For example at Paradise it is quite normal for 180-200 inches of snow to be deposited each winter. This typically limits any access to the trail from mid to late July through mid to late September, and this timing can vary greatly from year to year. If snow is expected on upper sections of the trail you are planning to hike, use of both hiking poles and traction devices (such as Microspikes) are highly recommended for safety and ease. Many sections at upper elevation, particularly Pan Handle Gap, Skyscraper Mountain

and Emerald Ridge, have steep fall offs that can become treacherous when compacted snow is present.

The shoulder periods in July and late September are the most dangerous as the trail can be largely covered in snow, and the weather can quickly become severe and difficult to navigate. In 2014, a hiker was lost (still not found as of this writing) when hiking up to the high point on the trail (Pan Handle Gap) on July 15th when not prepared for the duration and difficulty with the upper portion of the trail still in complete snow cover. In September, fog, rain, and thunderstorms can build with alarming pace. I was

of the Wonderland trail, but it is the route most Wonderland hikers take if snowpack conditions allow, because it provides higher elevation trekking and views. That hike allowed me to see (and hear) the impressive Willis Wall, and say I had camped next to a glacier. Section 5 (Longmire to Mowich Lake, 34 miles, 3 days) was a multiday experience that presented a strong physical challenge and an up close view of the mountain’s multifaceted botany, geography and geology.

I had initially become interested in the Wonderland trail to obtain a more complete view of Mt Rainier. For many years, I quite honestly was deterred by

the amount of uphill climbing required to do so. As shown in the [park’s elevation gain graphic](#), one must be prepared for one to two thousand foot continuous climbs where the gain is in the vicinity of 500ft / mile, followed by equally fast descents, and where total hike durations are 10-15 miles per day. For this reason, the Wonderland Trail can at times feel very much like [Escher’s famous Ascending and Descending drawing](#) where monks walk up and down a never ending cycle of stairs at the top of a tower. Fortunately, in the case of the Wonderland Trail, the unsurpassed experience of walking these mountain staircases is very much worth the effort!

**Below:** Creek Crossing to Panhandle Crossing  
**Left:** Fog at Sunrise



chased off the second highest and exposed point of the trail (Skyscraper Mountain) in mid-September when thunderstorms and clouds rapidly moved up from the lowlands in late afternoon. Lastly, at all times the trail is subject to forces of hydrology and geology, where both trail and bridges are subject to frequent washouts and landslides that will require hikers to creatively problem solve a traverse.

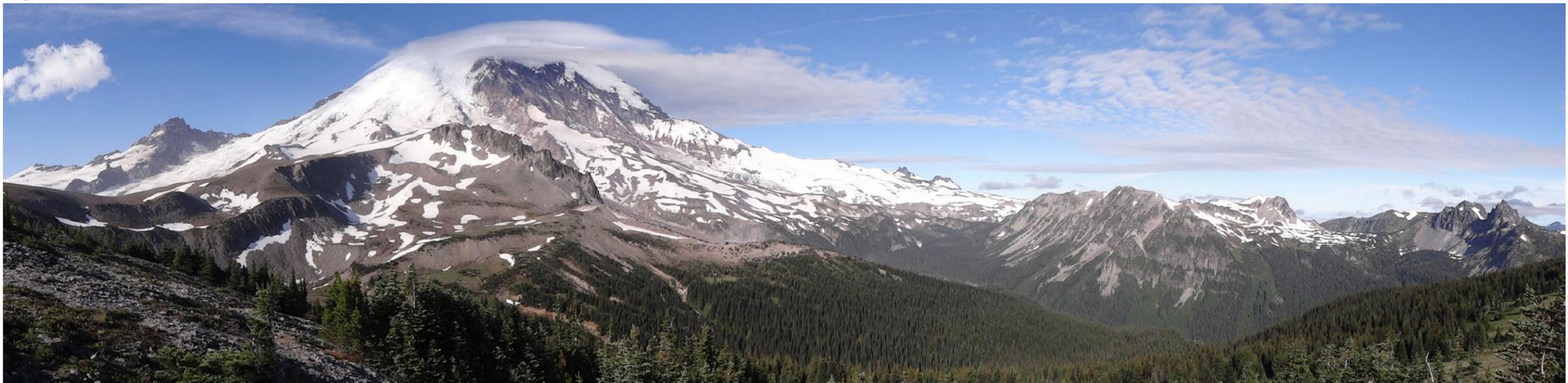
While August through early September provides the most optimal weather and trail conditions, they are also the most crowded times. Arrival at the trailhead by 7 am generally guarantees one can expect to find a parking spot and be among the first up the trail that morning. One will surely encounter a caravan of hikers as the day progresses, but at the most scenic high elevation points you will likely enjoy a reasonable wilderness experience. For those wishing

**Below:** Skyscraper Mountain.  
**Right:** Avalanche Lilies.

for even greater quiet and photographic opportunities, starting as early as first light can be particularly rewarding at Sunrise or Paradise. Be forewarned, if you try to enter the main park entrances (Sunrise, Paradise) from noon through 3 pm in August, expect to sit in a line with the vacation crowd. Parking is limited, and rangers frequently have to withhold access at the entrance kiosk. (Even if you are going to a trailhead that is not Sunrise or Paradise!)

For those wishing to do overnight sections, there are two paths to [obtaining a permit](#). One can enter a lottery of sorts where you submit an application (\$20) by March 15th, then on April 1st all those collected are picked in random order. As part of the application process you provide a window of time for conducting your travel, direction and campsite preferences along that route.

The larger the time window and less limitations you place, the higher the likelihood you will be successful. In 2014, by May 26th, reservation forms were no longer being accepted due to record numbers of applications. I submitted my reservation on March 15th 2014, and did not receive my reservation by mail until May 5th, which provided me exactly the two night itinerary I had hoped for. Do not give up hope if you don't hear back by April 15th! The second option is that 30% of permits are reserved on a walk up basis at the park's ranger stations, where you can obtain a permit up to a day prior to your first day of travel. This worked well for my 4th section in mid-September 2013, where I was at the station when it first opened the day before the hike.





Carbon Glacier Terminus



Hiker, from Panhandle

## Day Hiking Roundtrip Recommendations

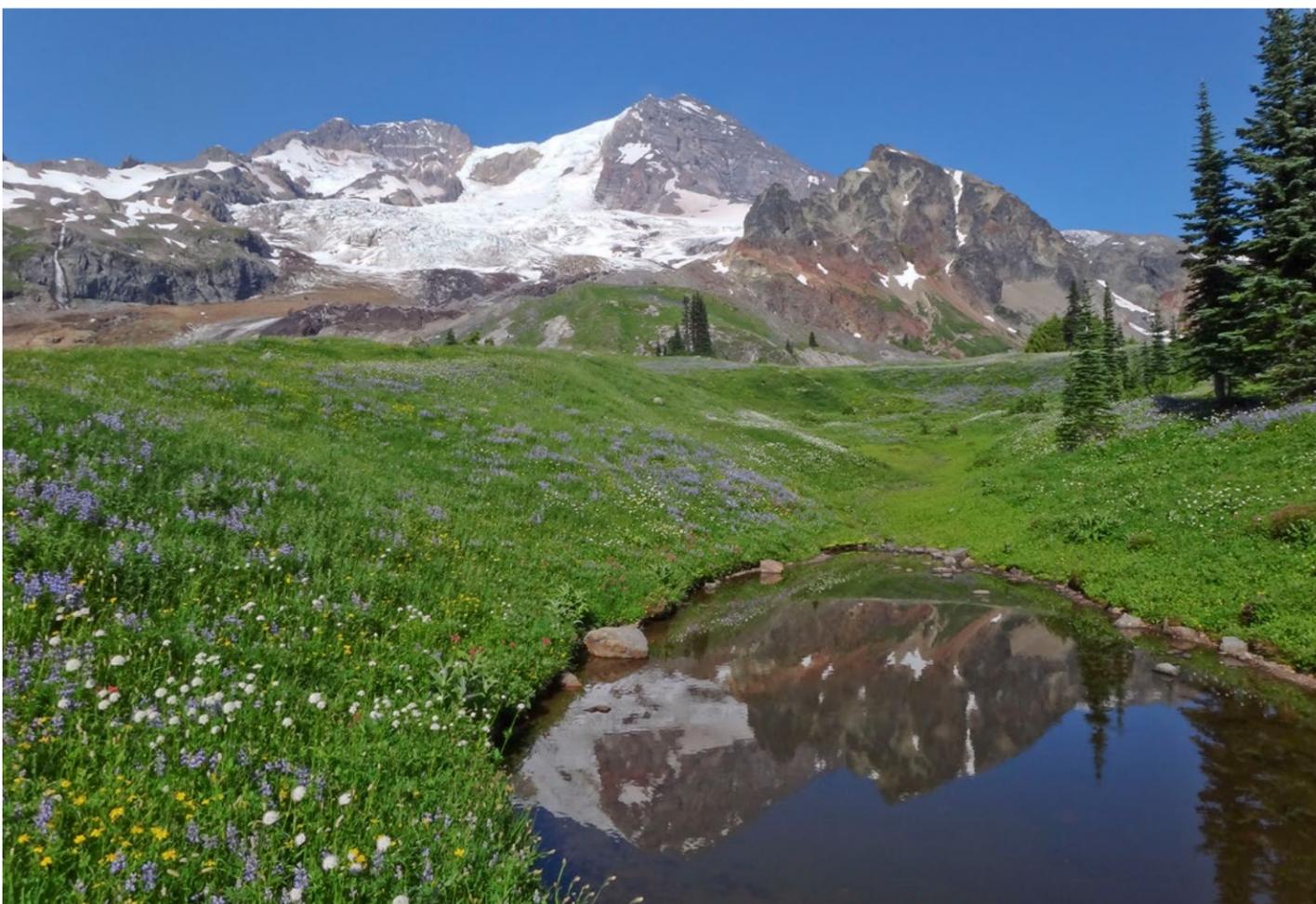
For those with limited time, but interest in hiking some of the best bits of the Wonderland Trail, my recommendations in no particular order are:

1) North views, Sunrise to Skyscraper Mountain (7.5 miles roundtrip, 700 ft gain)

2) East views, Fryingpan Creek to Panhandle Gap (12 miles roundtrip, 2,950 ft gain)...or section hike through to Box Canyon (16.2 miles, 4250 ft gain)

3) North views, Mowich Lake to Spray Park (7.5 miles roundtrip, 1600 ft gain)

**Below:** Emerald Ridge.  
**Right:** Skyscraper Mountain



4) West views, Westside Road/Tahoma Creek Trail (be sure to check current conditions of road and unmaintained Tahoma Creek trail) to Emerald Ridge (12.2 miles roundtrip, 2400 ft gain)

In all cases, before setting out check the weather forecast, the park trail conditions web page and the Washington Trail Association recent trip reports web page, leave a trip plan with friends / family, and be prepared for unplanned overnight contingencies and emergencies.



**Getting there:**

From Seattle or Seatac airport access to the mountain occurs via 2 main arterials coming from the I5 corridor, highway 410 for north side access to Sunrise and Mowich Lake, and highway 7/706 for south side access to Longmire and Paradise.

**Information:**

<http://www.nps.gov/mora/planyourvisit/trails-and-backcountry-camp-conditions.htm>

<https://twitter.com/MountRainierNPS>

[NRCS Snotel Site](#) (For watching the snow level decline at Sunrise at 5,100 ft through the spring and early summer)

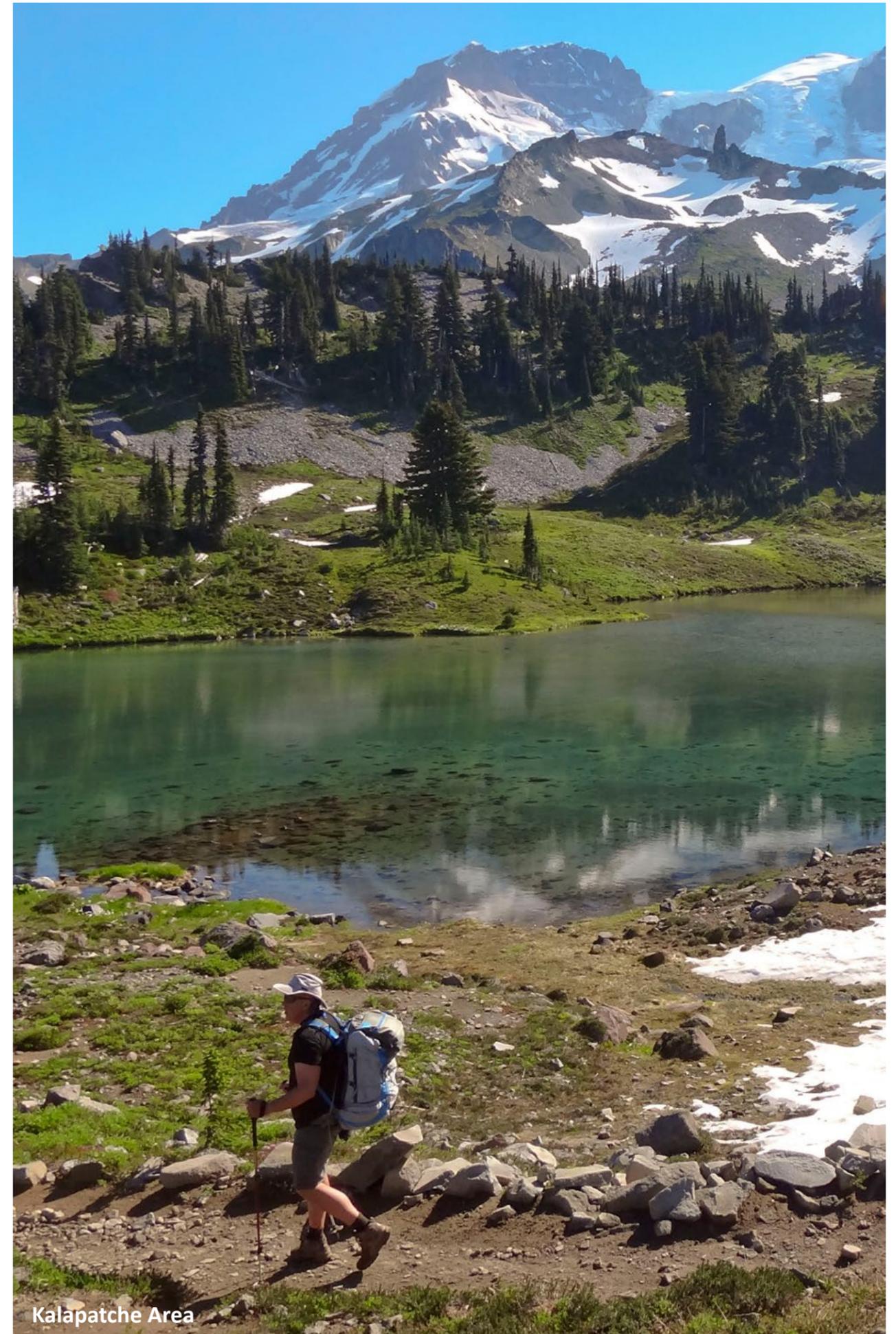
[Washington Trails Association Trip Reports](#) (Search under Mt. Rainier in drop down menu)

**Map:**

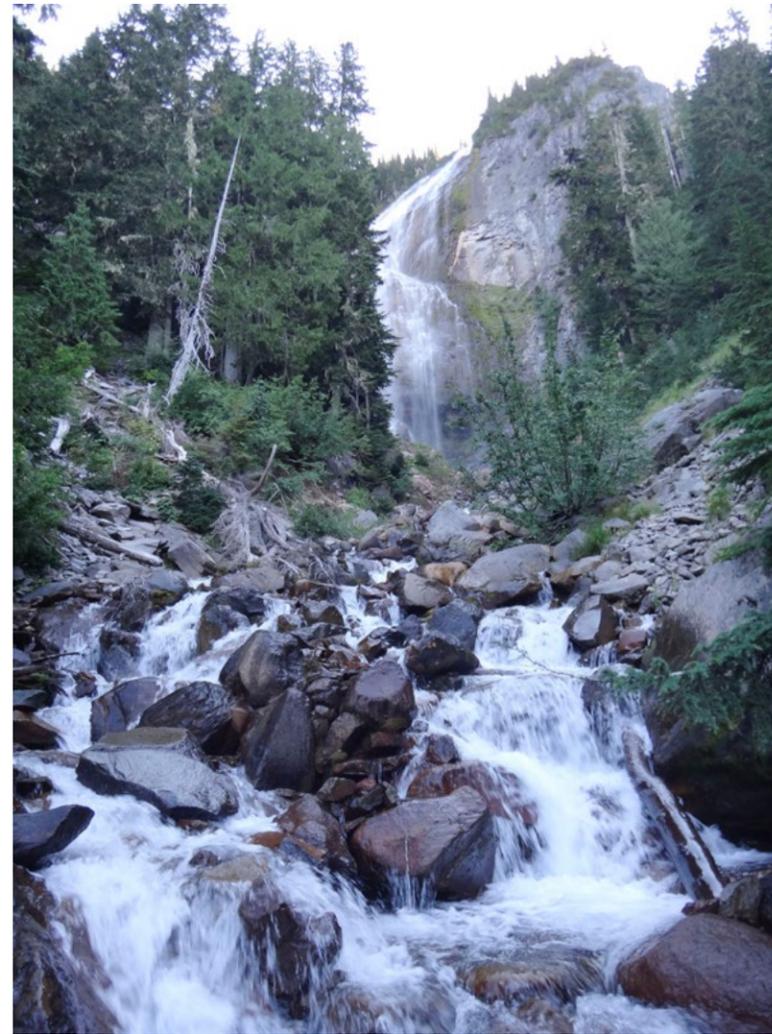
[Green Trails Map, Mount Rainier Wonderland, Map 269S](#)



Climb to Kalapatche



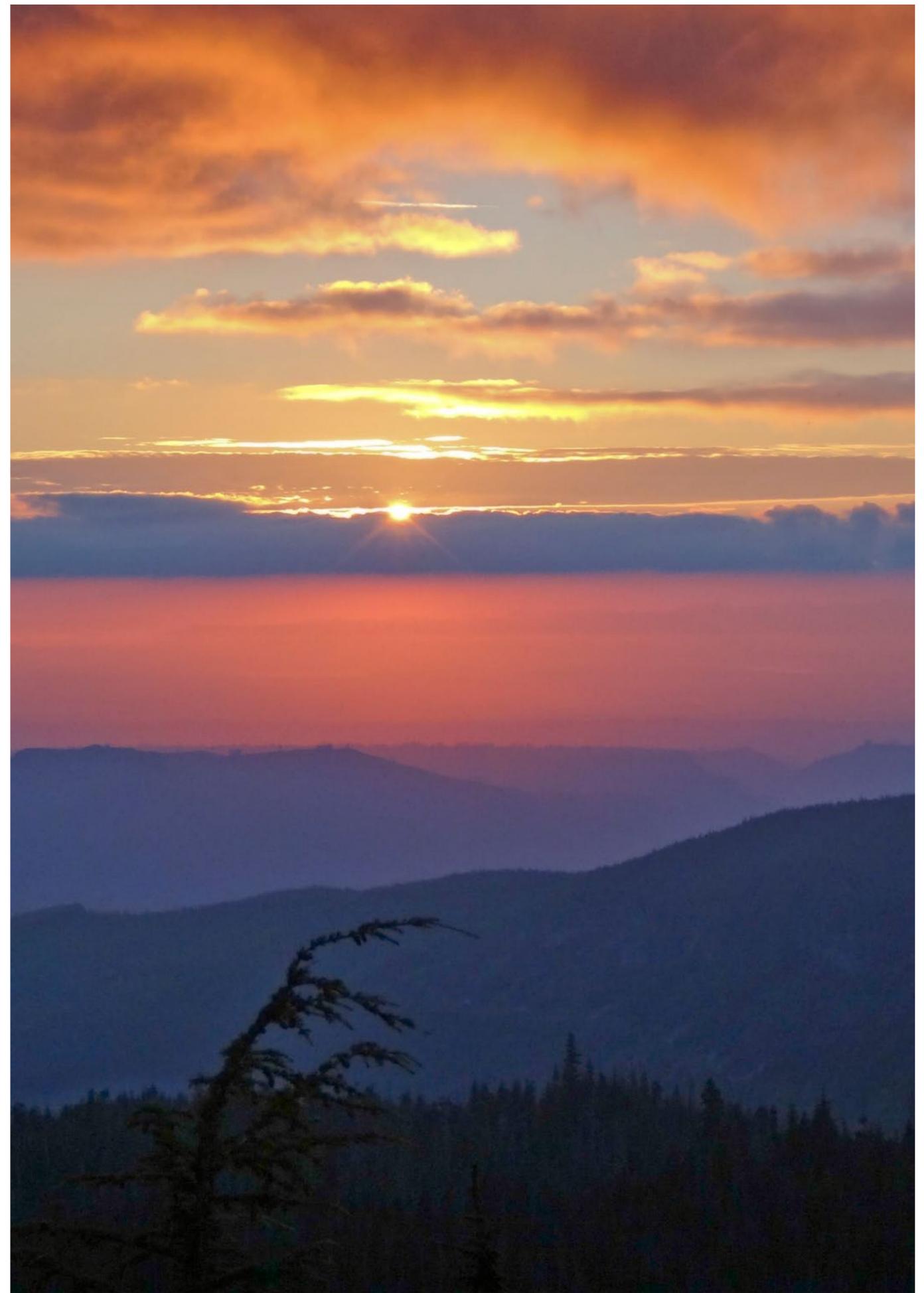
Kalapatche Area



**Clockwise from Top Left:**  
Bridge out at South Mowich  
Spray Falls  
Panhandle Snow Traverse  
Tahoma Creek Suspension Bridge  
Indian Henry Hunting Ground

**Following Page, Clockwise from Top Left:**  
Ranger Cabin at Indian Henry's  
Dusk at Golden Lakes  
Wildflowers

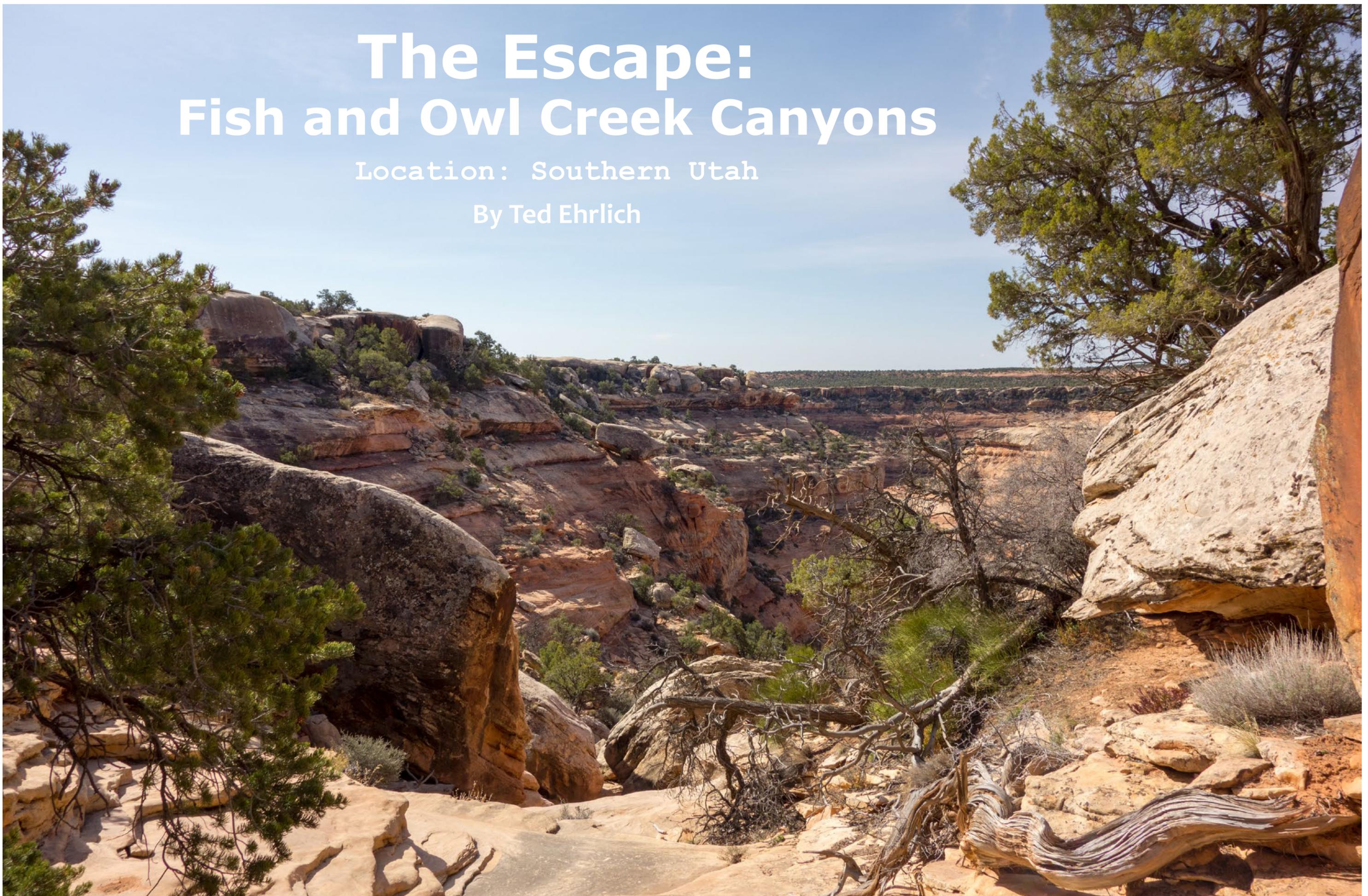




# The Escape: Fish and Owl Creek Canyons

Location: Southern Utah

By Ted Ehrlich



**T**he desert is full of little gems, and again I was off to explore another little nook in the wide expanse of the Colorado Plateau in Utah. As I headed south on U.S. 191, passing through the sleepy towns of Monticello and Blanding, my headlights cut through the darkness of the night shaded road. I was on another unplanned road trip, fueled by my need for some space and nature therapy after having a miserable week in the city. When it rains it pours, and after passing through Blanding I saw the all too familiar red and blue flashers. The officer pulled me over after catching me in a speed trap, going what I thought was the correct speed, but was actually 10mph over. He let me off with a warning after explaining myself, giving me an unexpected lift to my state of mind. Maybe it was a sign that my fortune was turning around after all. I found my turn off onto Utah Highway 95 shortly afterward, and headed through the night looking for somewhere to camp. I found a dirt road just after driving through some sort of geological feature approximately 12 miles after the junction, although it was too dark to see what I had passed by. Pulling my gear out of the backseat and setting up my bivy beside my car, I allowed my mind to quiet down and listen to the white noise of the night while my bleary eyes chased the stars for a moment before succumbing to exhaustion.

The next morning I awoke to my alarm and the warming sky. I had done just enough research before the trip to figure out when I needed to be at the BLM



Sunrise over Cedar Mesa. Previous Page: Looking Down into Owl Creek Canyon.

station, so I threw my gear back in my car and headed out. I guess a little info on where exactly I was heading would be helpful. At the south end of the Abajo Mountains in Southern Utah are Fish and Owl Creek Canyons, which converge into each other to make a loop for a fantastic overnight trip, or even a multi-night trip if you want to spend some extra time

exploring the area for Native American ruins and relics. Bridges National Monument is in the same area too, but it didn't really seem to fit a backpacking trip as it's more of a loop road for tourists. I decided it would be fun to visit both, day tripping the monument with the other tourists and getting away from it all in the remote canyons. I was

tired of driving, so I was compelled to go backpacking first, leaving Bridges for later. After another turnoff, I found the Kane Gulch Ranger Station along highway 261, and waited with one other car for the station to open up, sorting through my gear that had been hastily thrown into my car while I was getting ready.



The Trails Leading to the Canyon Rims



Owl Creek Canyon Indian Ruin

The ranger station opened up at 8am, and luckily they had a few permits still available even though it was considered the “high use” season. Because of the remoteness of the Cedar Mesa area, even during the high use season, it is still pretty desolate. After watching a required informative movie about leave no trace and the ecology of that area, I paid the nominal fee and collected my permit, and headed back out on the road towards the trailhead. Luckily my little hatchback made it down the last little bit of dirt road, where some of the roads in the area would have forced me to pack in my stuff.

I had read about Fish and Owl Creek Canyons in Peter Potterfield’s “Classic

Hikes of North America” a year or more earlier, and thought that if it had been placed in such a prestigious book that it definitely warranted a visit. It went on my short list since it was within an 8 hour drive from home, and beyond that I didn’t really look into it any more. Part of the adventure is knowing that a route exists and seeing it on a topo map, but leaving the sights and the rest for when you get there. Sure, I saw a few photos in the book, but from what I read it was the perfect length for an overnight loop and I thought I’d figure the rest out there when I got there. I brought my topo map and my overnight kit, slimmed down to the bare necessities due to the weather being mild and relatively warm for April. One other car with a New Mexico license

plate was at the trailhead, a different one than at the BLM station since that couple had come to see another attraction in the area, the Moon House.

I shouldered my pack gingerly, keeping the right strap a little looser, and started off towards the trail that veered right towards Owl Creek Canyon. I hadn’t been backpacking since the fall, but all winter I had been climbing snow in the Colorado Rockies, so while it felt great to be back in the warm desert, I wasn’t used to wearing my trail runners and walking in the seemingly solid red Utah dirt. At first the path cut through a fairly thick pinyon pine and juniper forest, eventually becoming faint as cairns started to mark the path down the slick rock into the

first canyon. As I worked my way down, the only obvious Indian ruin along the route came into view. Sitting under an alcove stood a small mud and stone hut with the roof missing. It was surrounded by footprints but seemed to be in good shape without any modern vandalism or graffiti, and was a fun surprise to see. I took a moment to imagine what the indigenous people would have seen in this canyon centuries ago when they lived here, and how strange I would look to them. As I continued down the canyon, I found the trail and cairns to be easy to follow, and the walls grew around me fairly quickly.

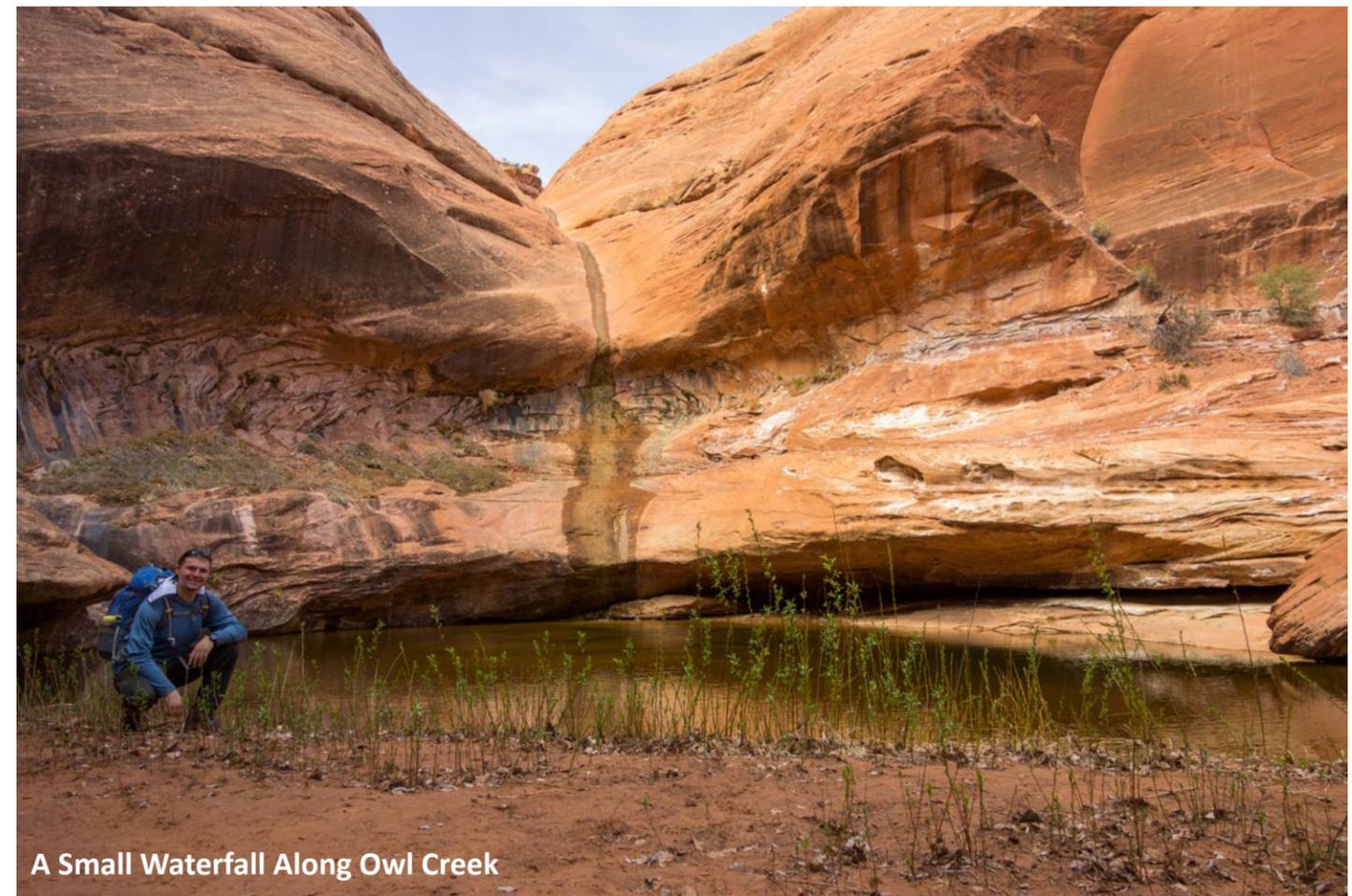


The Lush Inner Canyon

After a few miles, the grade leveled out and led to a much lusher area with Owl Creek meandering down through small ponds. Cottonwood trees and grasses replaced the pines, and on either side of me cryptobiotic soil made me think twice about wondering off the trail. A beautiful little pond with a small waterfall greeted me, and I decided it would be a good lunch spot. After having a quick bite, I continued on, and about a mile later I spied a few cairns on the left that were out of place and too high to be the actual trail, almost leading straight up the side of the canyon walls. I decided to check it out and drop my pack, and after a few moments of scrambling I found out what it was marking. A fairly large Indian ruin appeared, similar to the first one but built against the side of the canyon walls, with a beautiful view down canyon. Here a

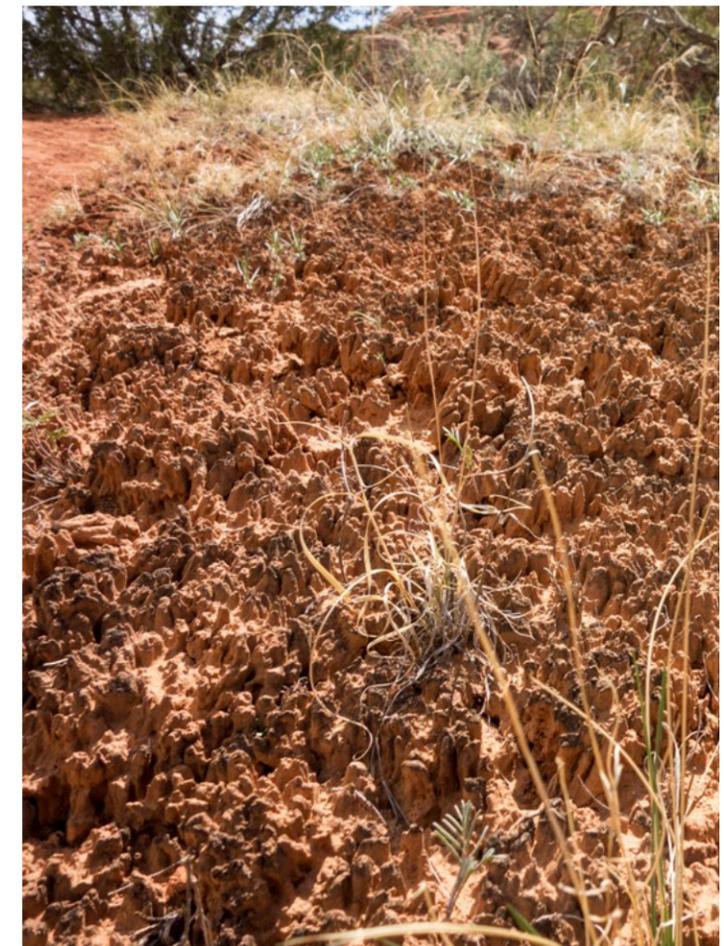
few shards of pottery were placed in an obvious spot to be seen, but I knew that touching was off limits.

After getting back to my gear, I shouldered my backpack again gingerly and continued on. My right shoulder gave me a dull throb, telling me that I needed to think twice. A few days earlier I had found out that it was torn, something called a labrum that I understood just enough to know that it was serious. Being out in the wilderness was doing more to remind me about my new found limitations than to find the freedoms I was hoping for. I answered back by popping a few vitamin-I's and pretended it wasn't there. I knew that it wouldn't tear further while I was walking, and I tried to distract myself again.



A Small Waterfall Along Owl Creek

The trail twisted around a few minor washes that came through from the north, and then opened up to the left to a beautiful arch and sand stone spires. Nevill's Arch is definitely the highlight of the entire loop, and is quite the formation. I spent a few minutes just photographing the arch and enjoying the bluebird weather that had welcomed me to the desert. After getting a few shots, I noticed on the map that the trail straightened out and I wondered what the canyon junction would look like. I hoped for it to be marked, but instead I just turned when the canyon seemed to almost disappear into a flat, and I noticed some foot prints keeping a little more left than normal. As I made the turn and started into Fish Canyon, the trail and cairns came back, reassuring me that I had made a good decision.





Inner Canyon of Owl Creek



Inner Canyon of Owl Creek



Nevill's Arch

While not quite as beautiful as Owl Creek Canyon, Fish Creek Canyon didn't disappoint. Like Owl Canyon, the walls grew quickly around me, but with a little more room in-between and with less slick rock sections. No creek existed at first, but after a few miles a small pool of water appeared. I decided it would be a good place to fill up, the first time since I had left the car, and I pumped a few liters. As I sat, I started hearing a few voices coming from up canyon. A moment later the only people I saw the whole trip came into view, three scientists from Los Alamos. I spoke briefly with them, finding out that I had also been the only person they had seen so far and that they had started down Fish Creek the afternoon before. Soon enough I returned to solitude, and continued on.

At this point the sun disappeared over the west rim of Fish Canyon, and I began to hike in the shadows. Larger pools of water appeared, and in them you could see fish swimming around, undoubtedly giving the canyon its name. Not just minnows, but small trout that didn't seem like they should exist here. They were landlocked with no water downstream, so I wondered if someone had stocked them years ago, or if they had somehow swam upstream during rainier seasons gone by. More and more fish appeared in additional pools as I moved further up the canyon, although nothing that was big enough to catch. Abruptly I stopped and stared at the ground. I still don't know what compelled me to look so closely, but I noticed a small black lump on the side of the rock in the middle of the trail.



Lower Fish Creek Canyon



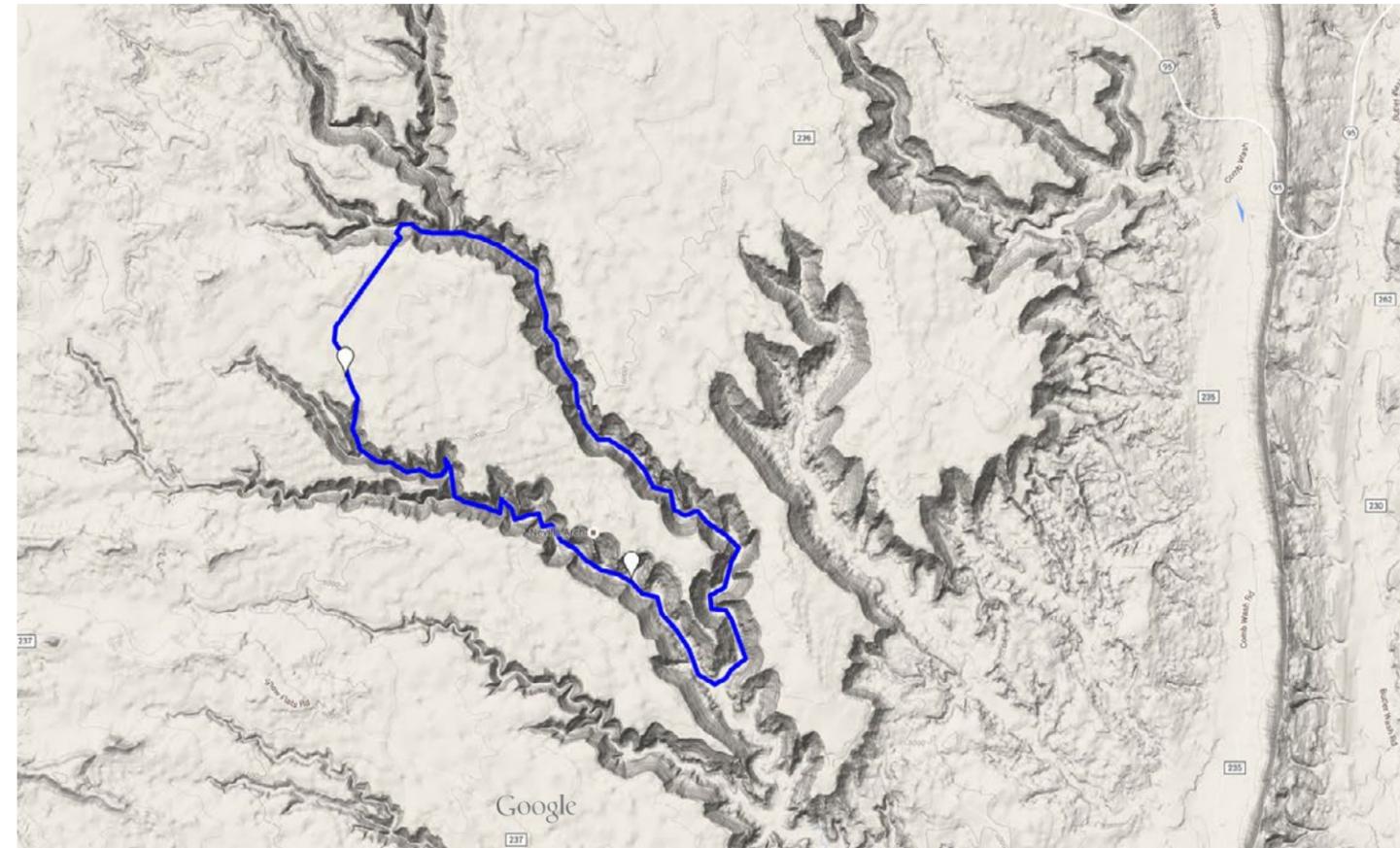
I thought it was an odd plant that I hadn't seen before, but as I prodded it with the tip of my trekking pole, it suddenly moved, surprising me. After brushing off the dirt with the handle of my trekking pole, I found out it was actually a bat. I didn't know what it was doing on the ground, however when it started moving around I saw that it had a torn wing, essentially a death sentence in the outdoors. There was nothing to do other than to leave it alone, so I snapped a few photos and walked on.

Finally the sunlight started to wane, and I decided I had gone far enough with my feet feeling the mileage, my shin starting to throb slightly. I threw together my bivy kit and boiled up some water for dinner.

As I lay under the raw sky, I thought of the hurt bat and my concept of how it might have been for the natives living in the area in an era long ago. It seemed so easy for me to repair my torn shoulder in comparison to the bat's plight, and a native that had slept in the same canyon as me would have had no way to figure out what was hurting if they had sustained an injury, just living in pain instead of having to face something like surgery. Even though I still felt uneasy with the surgery looming in the weeks ahead, I realized how lucky I was to have the option to attempt to fix myself with modern medicine. I slipped into the bivy and my sleeping bag, and again let the stars of the desert sky lull me to sleep.

I woke the next morning to the sunlight instead of an alarm. The night has been dreamless, and the throbbing in my shin and feet had disappeared. I quickly packed up and started up the canyon, looking forward to the treats in my car somewhere above me. I felt like most of the canyon was behind me, and sure enough after a larger dryfall the trail steepened as it climbed up to the rim high above. Near the rim's edge I came upon the only hard part, a two move scramble that some might consider to be slightly technical. I checked it out and hoped my shoulder wouldn't bother me, but my rumination last night gave me hope. Luckily the rock was solid, and a small pile of rocks at the bottom served as a booster step to get me high enough to grab a positive hold. I was glad that I

didn't have to down climb it, and once I topped out, I found myself back in the pine forest that I had started in, with less than an hour's worth of hiking to the car. I made a quick trek of the last bit, finding my car before noon. Getting out of the canyon so early in the day made me almost wish I had gone a little slower, but I remembered that I still had one sight to see before heading on. Bridges National Monument welcomed me with fresh water and bathrooms. As I enjoyed the lookouts over the three major bridges, crowded with RVs and tourists, I was happy in my decision to spend most of the trip in the backcountry. After driving the loop, I set back onto the road, feeling renewed and ready for the next piece of life to strike.



Map data ©2015 Google 1 mi

**Information:** Monticello's BLM website has a [brochure](#) and more information about the area. [Permit reservations](#) are encouraged.

**Best Time to Go:** Spring and Fall will have the mildest temperatures, and spring will have more water options.

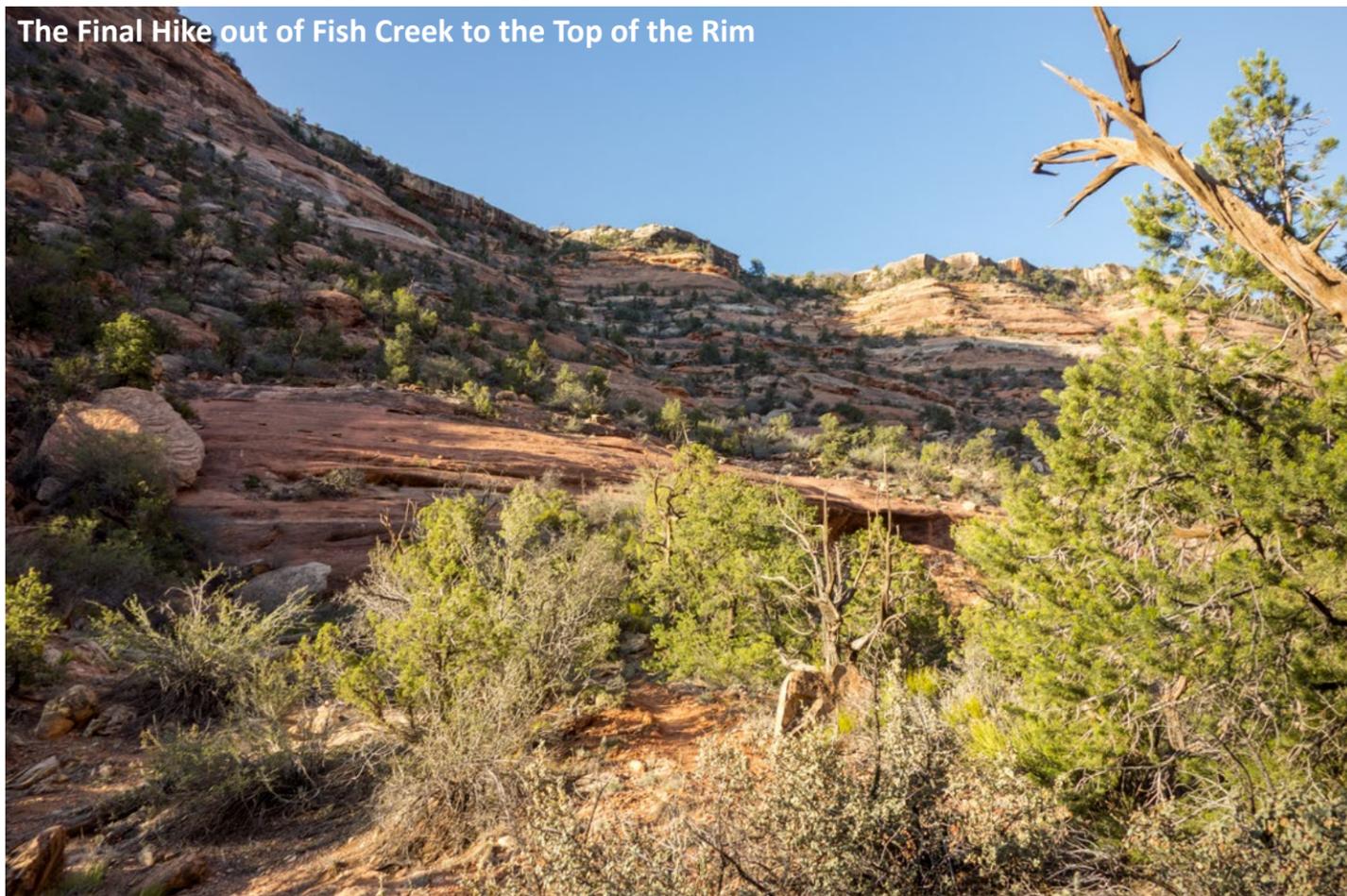
**Getting There:** There are no major airports near Cedar Mesa, and the closest town is Blanding. From Blanding, head south on Highway 191 to Highway 95, and then west on Highway 95 to Highway 261. Fish and Owl road is designated as road #253 and is 5 miles south of Highway 95 along Highway 261. Call the Kane Gulch Ranger Station before going for current conditions. Dirt roads in the area can become impassable in bad weather.

**Maps:** [Trails Illustrated #706 \(Grand Gulch & Cedar Mesa Plateau\)](#) is your best option for a good map of the area.

**Books:** [Peter Potterfield's Classic Hikes of North America](#)



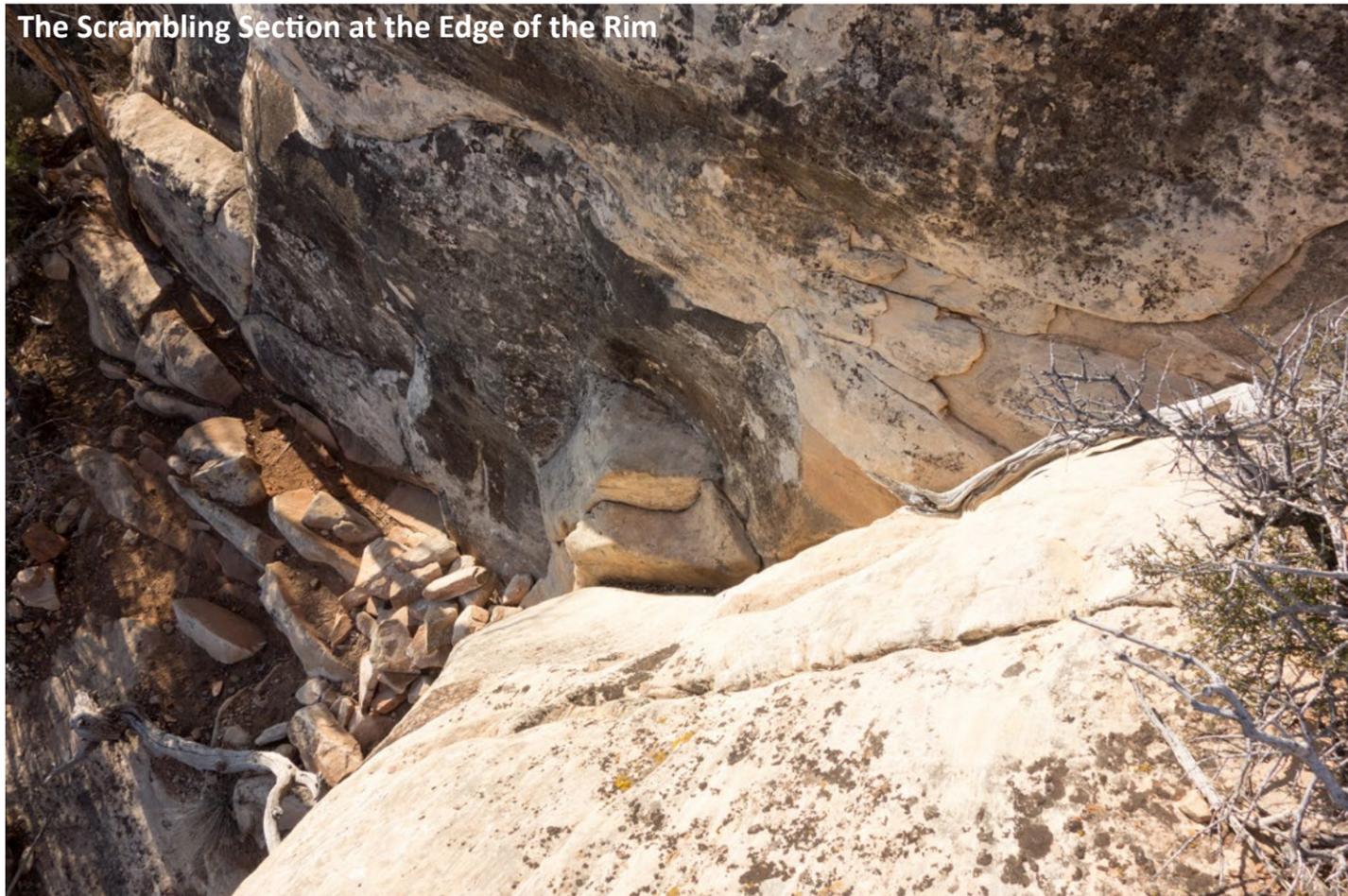
The Final Hike out of Fish Creek to the Top of the Rim



The Trail Leading Through the Pinyon Pine Forest



The Scrambling Section at the Edge of the Rim



A scenic sunset over a lake. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds, with the sun low on the horizon. The water reflects the warm colors of the sky. In the foreground, there is a dark, rocky beach with some driftwood. A dense forest of trees lines the shore in the middle ground.

# Isle Royale: A Superior Adventure

By Eric Moll

Located approximately 15 miles off the Minnesotan and Canadian shores of Lake Superior, Michigan's Isle Royale is the largest island in the world's largest freshwater lake.

This national park is a wilderness paradise with 99% of it officially designated as such. It includes scenic ridges, rugged coastal views, inland lakes, unique wildlife relationships, and an excellent network of trails. The island is 45 miles long and 9 miles wide. As the third largest island in the contiguous United States, Isle Royale is arguably the best island backpacking destination in the country. In late August of 2014 I had the opportunity to design and complete an approximately 130 mile week-long route that includes a majority of the island's 165 miles of hiking trails.

Isle Royale is located in Lake Superior, also known as Gitche Gummi ("great water"). This massive body of water is the largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area. It is more reminiscent of the sea than a lake. To the east of Isle Royale the water goes on for miles and miles with no land visible on the horizon. To put the amount of water in Lake Superior in perspective, here is an interesting fact: there is enough water in Lake Superior to cover both North and South America with water one foot deep. The contrast between its nearly ripple-free waters on a calm day and the raging twenty foot plus waves during a storm is awe-inspiring.

Being on an island creates a more remote experience. Isle Royale adds to this by having no cars or roads. The only transportation to the island is by boat or plane. There is no cell service. Even though Isle Royale is a National Park, more people visit Yellowstone in a day than visit Isle Royale in a year.



As the third largest island in the contiguous United States, Isle Royale is arguably the best island backpacking destination in the country.

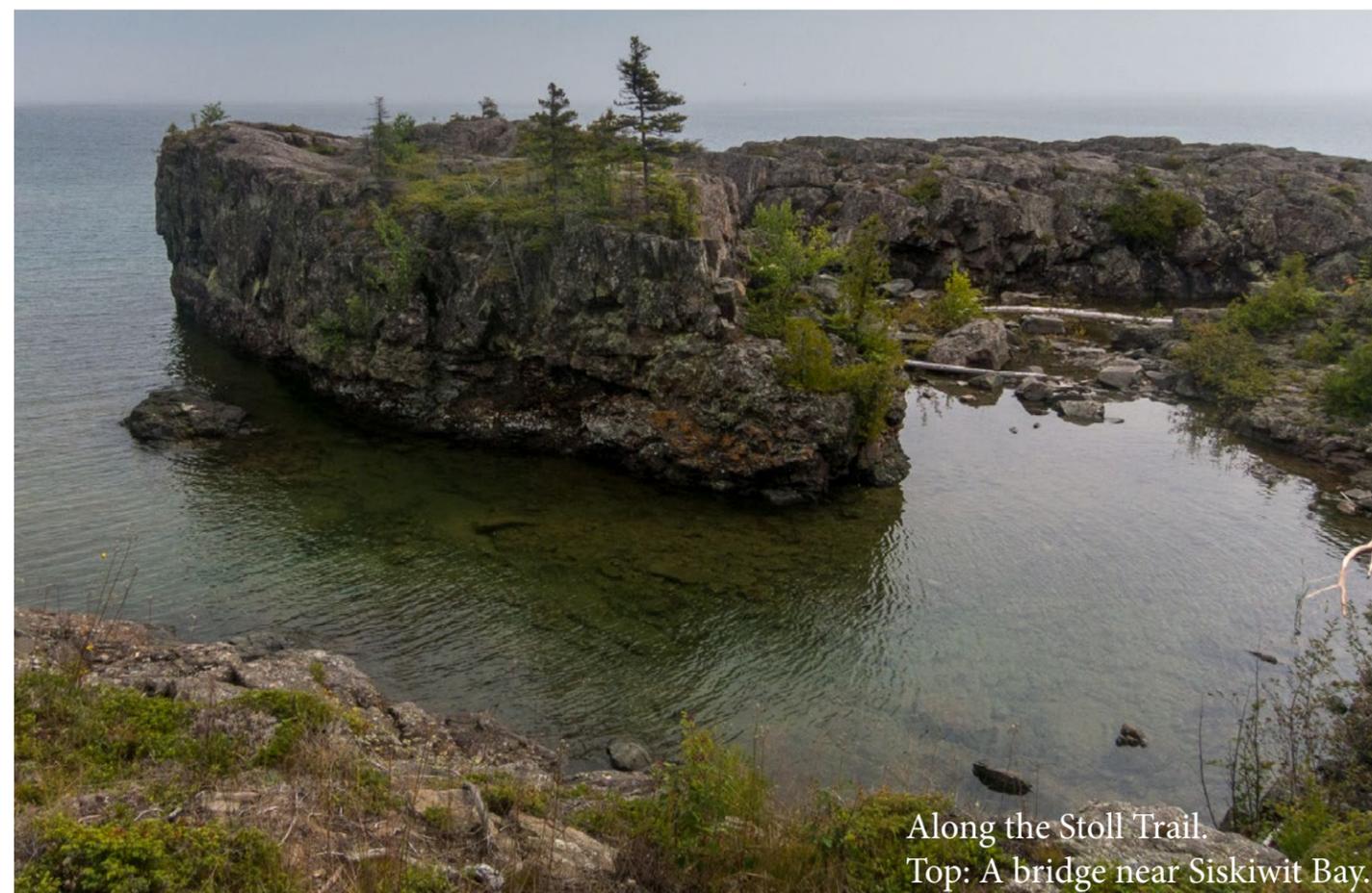
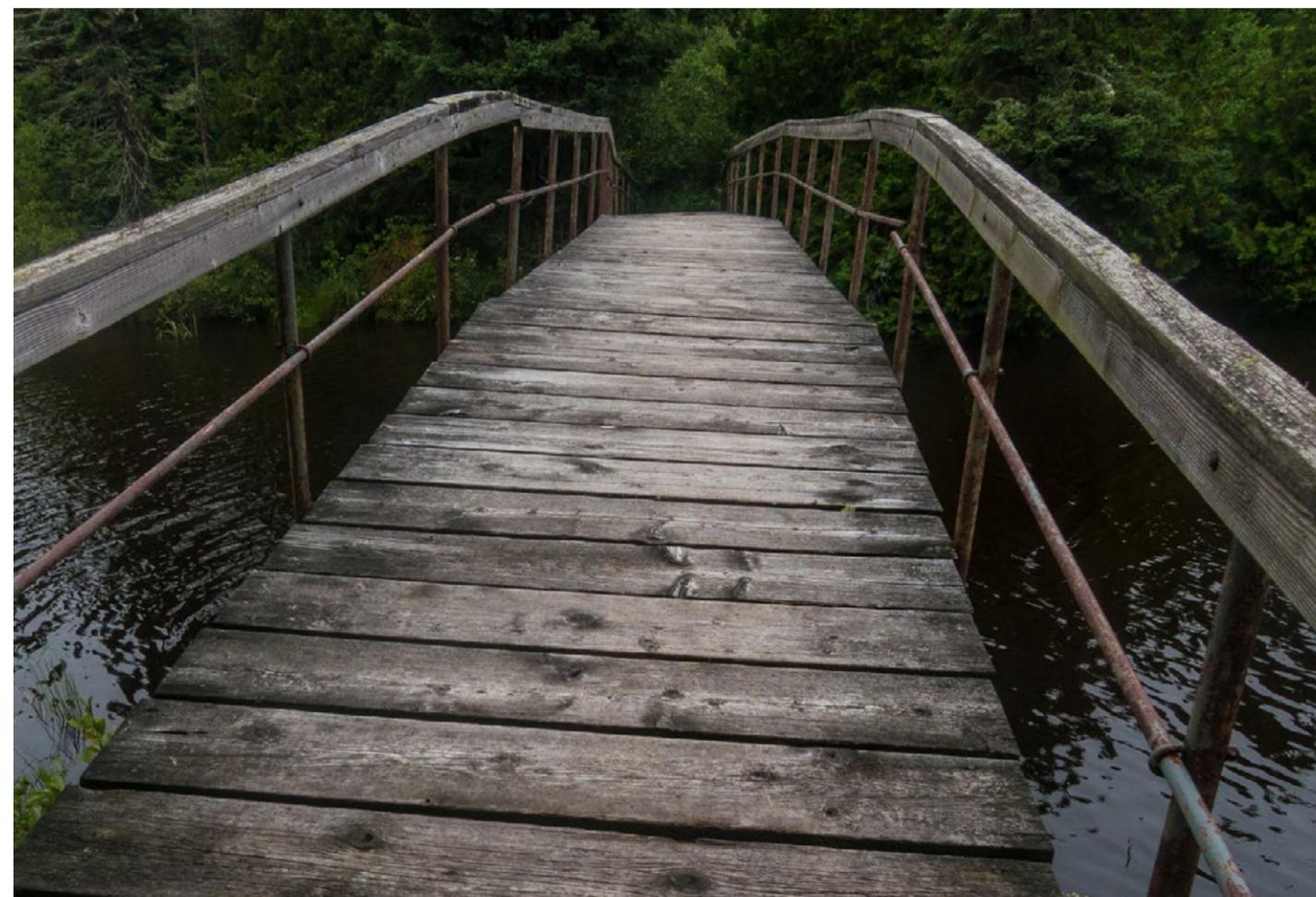
After boarding the Sea Hunter III, my journey began as the mountains on Minnesota's North Shore became smaller and smaller. Surprisingly, the water had a stillness that was greater than I could imagine. From the bow of the boat, land appeared out of the clouds. After entering Washington Harbor, the boat slowed to reveal one of several shipwrecks near the island. Through the clear water the SS America, a former passenger and delivery ship, was visible from where it has rested since 1928 down below. Exploring these shipwrecks is a popular activity for scuba divers.

Beginning on the west side of Isle Royale in Windigo, my route began with a portion of the popular Feldtmann Loop on the Feldtmann Lake and Feldtmann Ridge trails to Siskiwit Bay. I quickly left the day-hikers behind and journeyed to Feldtmann Lake, the first of ten-plus lakes that I would pass on my route, whether near the lakeshore or up on a ridge. I met a red fox a few feet ahead on the trail. Foxes have reportedly stolen hikers boots on the island.

I climbed up to my first of the island's three main ridges: the Feldtmann Ridge. The Feldtmann Ridge is located on the southwest part of the island and is the smallest of the three. It offers incredible overlooking, cliff-like views of Feldtmann Lake and farther inland. After leaving the ridge I continued through the slightly overgrown trail to the Siskiwit Bay Campground. I found a shelter near the scenic shore and enjoyed a star-filled night by the campfire.

Isle Royale has many campgrounds spread across the island. Nearly all of them are located close to a large body of water (Lake Superior or an inland lake). They are well-maintained including outhouses and in some locations three-walled, screened shelters with picnic tables. It's hard to pick a poor campground, but the best of the best include Little Todd, Huginnin Cove, Moskey Basin, and Lane Cove. All four of them are located on Lake Superior and are especially scenic.

The next day my route went past Island Mine on the way to the Greenstone Ridge, the second major ridge of the adventure. The Greenstone Ridge is the spine of Isle Royale with a 40 mile hiking trail right on top of it. The figure-eight route includes much of this trail.



Along the Stoll Trail.  
Top: A bridge near Siskiwit Bay.

The ridge was initially forested, but climbed to the highest point on the island, Mount Desor at 1394 feet, and continued past several scenic lakes. I took the time for a short detour to Hatchet Lake to get water as water was scarce up on the ridge. Walking the Greenstone was some of the easiest hiking on the island. I enjoyed the views! Sometimes they were endless including inland lakes, bays, harbors, and Lake Superior down below at 600 feet above sea level. Other times they were mystifying in the clouds. My camp for the night was north off the ridge at West Chickenbone Campground, a prime moose watching location.

Returning to the Greenstone, I trekked with sweeping views including from the Ojibway Fire Tower and Mountain Franklin, one of the best in the Midwest. At the junction after Mount Franklin, I dropped my backpack and day-hiked east.



A bull moose was ahead on the trail and it crashed away through the brush. There was a spectacular view from Lookout Louise across Duncan Bay. I munched on some delicious thimbleberries.

Isle Royale's flora is of special interest. Boreal forest is close to shore and Northern Hardwoods are in the interior. There are many types of shrubs including thimbleberry, blueberry, raspberry, bearberry and labrador tea among others. The island has over 600 flowering plants. Three types of lichens are found on Isle Royale: elegant lichen, old man's beard, and reindeer.

On the way back to my pack, I descended from the Greenstone Ridge on the portage for a swim in Duncan Bay. It was quite warm from the heat up on the Greenstone and the water felt refreshing. Back at the Mount Franklin trail junction,



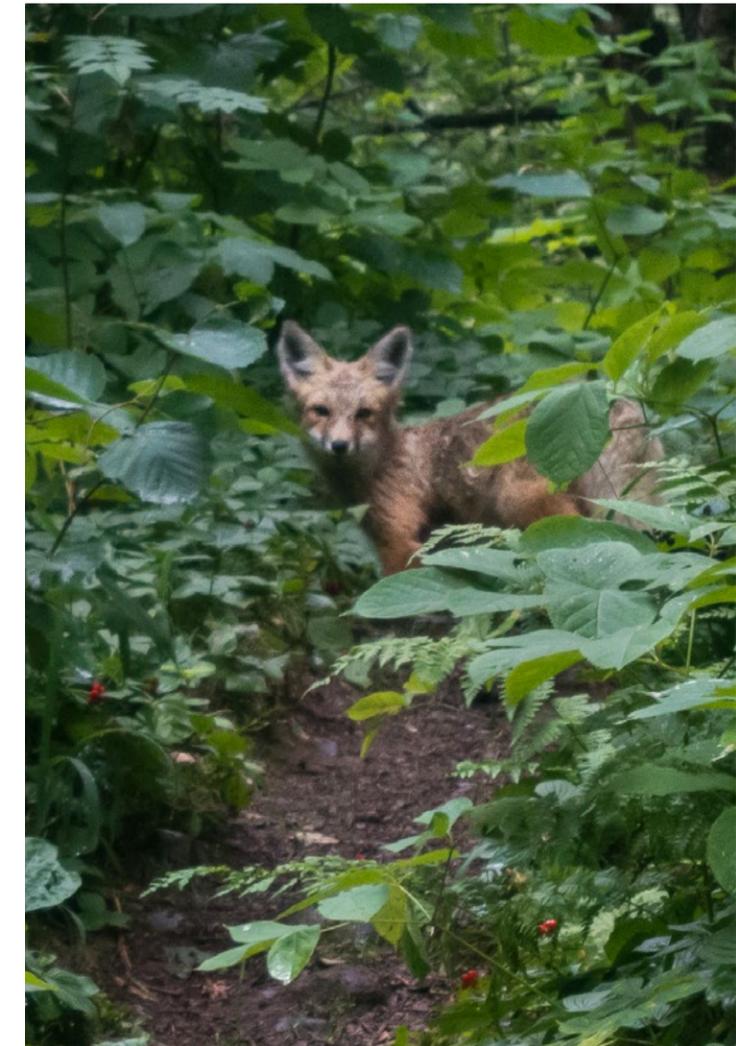
I hoisted my pack and turned right to descend steeply to Lane Cove. The campground was crowded but some friendly backpackers invited me to set up camp in their site. It was a relaxing evening listening to the call of the loon. A few years earlier at this same location, I enjoyed the colorful display of the northern lights.

The next morning I climbed back up the Greenstone and decided to return to Mount Franklin for a spectacular morning view. I discovered the sun shining brightly on Canadian soil in the distance. Returning to the trail junction, I turned right joining the Mount Franklin Trail. I continued to the Tobin Harbor Trail and then to Rock Harbor. Rock Harbor was the psychological midway point of the hike and is a great place for a large meal at the Rock Harbor Lodge.



I was inspired by the dramatic coastal scenery with a day-hike loop on the Stoll Trail, to Scoville Point. The power of this Great Lake is clearly evident by the rocky bluffs and cliffs and in some places even arches. The work of Albert Stoll, Jr, the man who envisioned and fought to protect Isle Royale as a national park deserves great appreciation.

Returning to Rock Harbor, I joined the Rock Harbor Trail. Suzy's Cave was a short, but interesting side trip. It is an inland cave that was formed by the powerful Lake Superior years ago. In the harbor nearby I viewed several kayakers paddling by.



Isle Royale is a great place to canoe or kayak as there are many campgrounds and portages exclusively for water travel.

On the way to Moskey Basin the trail passed two large campgrounds: Three-mile and Daisy Farm. I enjoyed the coastal scenery as I could see the park headquarters on Mott Island. After a long day, I arrived at Moskey Basin in the late evening. Personally, Moskey Basin is one of the finest campgrounds on the island with shelters on rocky slabs near the water.

My route continued on the Indian Portage Trail past Lake Richie and several other lakes. I met a cow moose with two calves and followed them on-trail as there was no way to pass due to the thick undergrowth. Many people who have heard of Isle Royale will have heard of the extensive research (>50 years) on the predator and prey relationship of gray wolves and moose. The current theory is that wolves reached Isle Royale on an ice bridge across Lake Superior sometime after the park was established in 1940. The wolf population is currently down to nine wolves. This number is quite low as there were approximately 50 wolves on the island in 1980. With the wolf population down, the moose now number approximately 1050 on the island. Other fauna on Isle Royale include: red fox, beaver, snowshoe hare, bat, loon, duck, and bald eagle.

I crossed over the Greenstone Ridge at the center of my figure eight route and sped along to McCargoe Cove. While taking a break and eating a snack, I watched another hiker take a plunge off the dock into the chilly water.

From McCargoe Cove, I began hiking on the most challenging trail on the island, the Minong Ridge Trail. The Minong Ridge is the third major ridge on Isle Royale.



On the northwest portion of Isle Royale, it is the most rugged and remote on the island. It is nearly 30 miles long and a frequently cairned trail follows the ridge as it rises to many spectacular views of Lake Superior and Canada.

I quickly came to the Minong Mine. This historic site was well worth the time to explore. Copper mining activity dates back 4000 years on Isle Royale. Back up on the ridge was a great view of Otter Lake down below. I even saw some swans. I listened to the waves at Todd Harbor and saw some fellow hikers waiting for a boat on the dock. Continuing to secluded Little Todd, I discovered one of the best campgrounds on the island with an isolated beach and rocky coastline. After sunset, the mosquitos were ferocious. They swarmed me and so many entered my tent that I just wore my headnet all night. In the early night I watched a storm blow in with dark clouds and lightning flashing across Lake Superior.

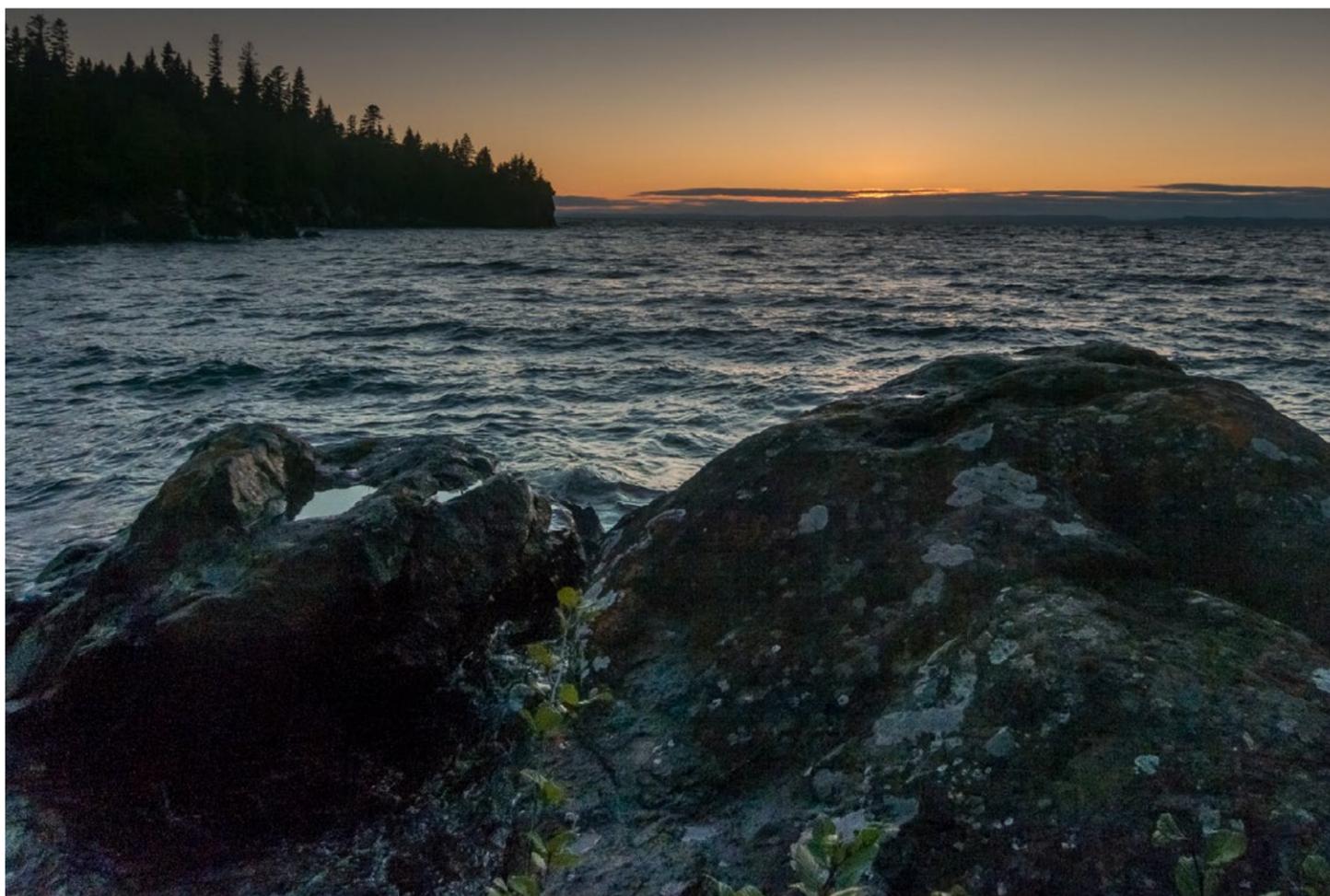
The next morning, I hiked back to the Minong Ridge for the most remote on-trail hiking on Isle Royale.

After a break at Lake Desor, I hiked the longest section of trail without a campground or trail junction on the island. I followed the ridge from cairn to cairn with majestic ridgeline views of Lake Superior. There were at least four beaver dams between ridges to cross. The latter half of the trail was through pristine forest.

I finally came to a trail junction and turned right to take the East Huginnin Cove Trail to Lake Superior for a beautiful segment of trail hugging the coast. The Huginnin Cove Campground provided an unforgettable view of Canada across Lake Superior. I sat back and reminisced about a week in the wild.

After an extended night's rest, I returned the short distance to Windigo, bought a snack at the small store, enjoyed a ranger talk, and voyaged back to the mainland.

This was my second experience at Isle Royale National Park. The island has many hiking options from short day-trips to extended routes such as my figure eight route. With more time or a faster pace, worthy side-trips on my route include Chippewa Harbor and Siskiwit Lake, the largest on the island. There are also many options in addition to hiking. Isle Royale provides an exceptional wilderness experience, one that I recommend highly to all outdoor enthusiasts.



A view of the coast from the Stoll Trail.  
Opposite: Huginnin Cove

**Information:** Obtain permits upon arrival at the island. Daily campground destinations are placed on the permit, but changes are allowed. Campgrounds are first come, first serve and sharing sites is encouraged when they are crowded. Backpackers are expected to stay in designated campgrounds unless they obtain a backcountry camping permit. Potable water is only available at Rock Harbor and Windigo. Chemical treatment alone is NOT sufficient on Isle Royale, and ultraviolet purifiers have not been tested for a common Isle Royale parasite. The National Park Service recommends boiling water, or using a <0.4 micron filter in addition to chemical treatment. I used a [Sawyer Mini](#) filter alone without any problems. You can find additional online information at [isleroyaleforums.com](#) & [isleroyale.info](#).

**Best Time to Go:** Late Summer to Early Fall to avoid the bugs and hot weather. Early October is best for enjoying fall colors. There will also be less people on the island after Labor Day.

**Getting There:** Getting to Isle Royale takes planning. Most people arrive via boat either from Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula or Grand Portage, Minnesota. Boats don't leave every day so it is important to identify a route that can be completed when a boat is returning to the mainland. Boats make stops at designated harbors around the island, so backpackers do not have to necessarily return to their starting point. From Grand Portage, Minnesota, use <http://www.isleroyaleboats.com>. From Michigan, take the [Ranger III](#) or the [Queen IV](#). Flying is also an option, however it is more expensive via the [Royal Air Service](#).

**Maps:** [Isle Royale National Park Trails Illustrated 240](#)

**Books:** [Isle Royale National Park: Foot Trails and Water Routes](#)



# Trail Runners in the Backcountry: Beyond the Run

by Sean O'Rourke



**T**raditional hiking boots, with high ankles, stiff soles, and heavy-duty materials, are a significant burden to the fast-and-light hiker. Their clunky construction makes jogging awkward, and their extra weight wastes energy – an extra percent for each 100 grams.

Boots are also expensive, usually costing about twice as much as a pair of trail runners. A good pair of synthetic hiking boots will retail for around \$200, with leather boot prices approaching \$300. While high-end running shoe prices are currently approaching \$150, several good options are available for around \$100, and those of us who are price-conscious can usually find shoes for \$70 or less.

Fortunately, a good pair of lightweight shoes can do almost anything boots can do, and some things they cannot. In years of on-trail hiking and off-trail scrambling, I have almost never encountered terrain where traditional hiking boots would be better than trail runners. When my sneakers are not enough, I switch to either rock slippers for steeper rock, or full-shank mountaineering boots for steep snow and ice.

While boots provide more ankle support, their stiff soles make rolling an ankle more likely than in flexible-soled trail runners. Boots' heavy leather or synthetic uppers protect the feet from rocks and sticks and last a long time, but good trail runners will protect your feet, and cost half as much as boots. Higher ankles and solid uppers help keep out sand and gravel, but so will the right shoes with cheap spandex gaiters. Boots can be waterproofed, but trail



**Descending Cloudveil-Nez Perce col, Tetons.**  
**Previous Page: 12 Hours into a Snowy Day, Sangre de Cristos.**

runners will dry more quickly. When hiking in rain or dew-soaked underbrush, your feet will get wet even in “waterproof” boots, but they will dry more quickly in light, fast-drying shoes.

In snow and colder weather, putting bread bags over wool socks will keep your feet warm. For harder snow and ice, either [Microspikes](#), specialized crampons like the [Kahtoola KTS](#), or general strap-on crampons with a flexible cross-bar, work well with trail runners. Boots' lugged soles grip well on rocks, mud, and dirt, but the right lightweight shoes have similar lugs. For steeper scrambling, boots' stiffer soles may edge better, but trail runners have good and predictable climbing performance.

However, not all trail runners are up to the task; many will either perform badly or

wear out quickly when used for hiking and scrambling. Sometimes this is because they are not suitable; sometimes they are just poorly designed. One might be tempted to choose a so-called “approach shoe,” designed for climbers to wear on the way to technical climbs. These have softer rubber to grip on rock, and often have sturdier uppers like a low-top hiking boot. However, they usually run poorly, and their soles rarely perform well on dirt, snow, and turf. Stick with carefully-chosen trail runners.

Look for soles with moderately aggressive lugs, which perform both adequately and predictably on all surfaces. While smoother soles like the dot-rubber found on many approach shoes smear and edge better on rock, they perform terribly on mud, snow, and steep turf, which are usually more

common surfaces. An ideal tread pattern would have a lugged sole with a smoother patch below the big toe, as found on some mountaineering boots. The soles should be made of a single, continuous piece of rubber. The decorative multi-part soles found on many road shoes, and some trail shoes, will usually tear off in pieces.

Trail runners and especially approach shoes sometimes feature softer rubber, which provides a better grip for rock scrambling. However, it also wears out more quickly, and unlike with rock slippers or mountaineering boots, it is probably not possible to re-sole these shoes. The marginal improvement in rock performance is not usually worth the loss of durability.

The midsole should provide some protection from sharp rocks. This can take the form of either a padded midsole in traditional running shoes, or a “rock plate” in minimalist shoes. When possible, avoid midsoles with plastic bits and bobs. They are likely to break, they may poke into your foot or ankle uncomfortably, and when the outsole inevitably wears through, they will be dangerously and unpredictably slick. Both midsole and sole should extend up to, but not beyond, the inside of the toe box. Too narrow, and your feet become vulnerable to sharp rocks; too wide, and the sole will flex and give when edging or making sharp turns.

The uppers should dry quickly, protect your feet from rocks, keep out sand, and survive abrasion from scree-skiing. Choose a shoe with a substantial toe rand, to protect your toenails from the inevitable toe-bashing when traveling quickly on rocky terrain.

Avoid shoes with mesh sides, which will tear quickly, let in sand, and not protect the sides of the feet from sharp rocks. Leather uppers are more durable and provide better rock protection, but dry more slowly than fabric. Try to find a shoe with leather (or leather-like) sides and a fabric top. Waterproof uppers are pointless: in rain, snow, or dew-soaked brush, your feet will get wet no matter what you wear. To keep them warm, wear wool socks and, in colder weather, plastic bags.

Since the publication of [Born to Run](#) in 2009, “barefoot” or “minimalist” shoes have become popular among both road and trail runners. Subsequent experience has shown that some runners adapt their gaits to these shoes, adjusting their foot-strike to compensate for the lack of padding and heel-toe drop, while others fail to adapt and injure themselves. There is no conclusive evidence that minimalist shoes reduce injury or improve performance among runners. For hikers and scramblers, foot protection is more important than gait. While there are some thin-soled minimalist shoes with adequate rock protection in their soles and toe rands, a more traditional, thicker-soled shoe will last longer and better protect your feet from sharp rocks. Unless you already run in minimalist shoes, stick to standard trail runners.

As an example of an effective all-around trail shoe, the discontinued [La Sportiva Crossleather](#) (\$100 retail, \$70 discount) was one of the best I have used. It combined the simple, lugged sole and running last of Sportiva’s mud-running

shoes like the C-lite with a durable and protective leather upper. While the leather upper is slower to dry than mesh, the extra protection from sand and sharp rocks made up for this shortcoming. The simple sole and solid upper both withstood far more abuse than most trail runners I have used before or since.

The Salomon fell-running shoes, such as the [Fellraiser](#) (\$110 retail, \$70 discount), have aggressive lugs and durable rubber suitable for the mud, snow, and turf of Scotland’s grassy fells. They also feature durable, quick-drying uppers with good toe protection, and their quick-lace system is convenient and surprisingly effective. However, the hard rubber and large lugs, which protrude slightly beyond the side of the sole, dramatically reduce smearing and edging performance. If you plan to spend much time scrambling on steep rock, consider something else.

[New Balance’s Minimus Zero v2](#) (\$110 retail, \$70 discount) is a minimalist take on the same design, with the expected advantages and disadvantages. Its lighter uppers, while more breathable, quicker to dry, and surprisingly durable, do not provide the same degree of toe or foot protection, though the sole is wide enough to partly shield the sides of the foot. The outsole has similarly aggressive lugs, which partly protect the bottom of the foot from sharp rocks. However, the uppers are less durable than leather, and once the lugs wear down, the soles do little to protect the feet. Though a rock plate like the one in New Balance’s old MT 101 would address the second problem, the tradeoff between weight and durability is inevitable.



**Above:** Salomon Fellraisers out of their element on Baboquivari



**Left:** Crossleathers with Bags and Kahtoola KTS Crampons for snow/glacier travel on Gannett

**Below:** Crossleathers at end-of-life



However, the market is full of choices, and you're bound to find something that works for you and your particular style on the trail. Here's what some other members of the TrailGroove team had to say regarding their current choice of trail runner:

**Aaron Zagrodnick:** For the past year, I've nearly always laced up the [Lone Peak 1.5](#) from Altra for my backpacking and hiking trips, excluding trips with significant snow. The Altra Lone Peak is a zero-drop, but not necessarily minimally oriented trail running shoe that works well for backpacking, hiking, and of course trail running. The midsole features a 23mm stack height in the 1.5 version, up to 26mm in version 2.0. The 1.5 will last around 400 miles before the tread is worn down such that traction becomes less than ideal, but prior to that point the sole offers great traction on varied terrain. The toebox is roomy and the full length rockplate helps to protect feet from rocks and trail debris, and there's even a built-in Velcro tab on the heel to secure your gaiters if you wear them. Overall, it's hard to ask for much more.

**Ted Ehrlich:** My current favorite shoe for hiking and backpacking is the [Brooks Cascadia](#) trail runner. Its tread pattern and one-piece continuous rubber outsole give it plenty of traction in normal conditions and on wet/mucky trails. The rubber isn't the stickiest for 3rd and 4th class scrambling, but is good enough, and provides adequate cushion for running

and rocky trails with the forefoot nylon rockplate and its biodegradable EVA midsole. It has plenty of flex in the right areas and fits well in the heel to keep my feet blister free right out of the box. I did find that tread tore up a little faster than I hoped, but it lasted at least 600 miles before I had shredded them enough to retire them. The newest shoe I've been trying out has been the [Saucony Xodus 5.0 GTX](#). I am normally not a fan of waterproof shoes as they do not breathe well enough in normal conditions, however for running around in the muddy trails of the Colorado front range in the winter, they've been slowly winning me over. They have a good amount of flex, a very aggressive tread pattern, and my feet haven't gotten wet or cold, even when my shoes come back covered in muck or when running in -8 degree weather. I have found that the sewn-in tongue rubs the top of my foot more than I would like, but that's a common issue with Gore-Tex shoes so they can seal out water. A bonus feature I like is the hidden pocket for the laces. I wish all shoe manufacturers put one in to keep the laces clean and out of the way. I may even give the non-waterproof versions a shot this summer. For both shoes I've found that I needed a slightly thicker insole, like the [Sole brand insoles](#) I use to get a proper fit, but I have low volume feet so that's a common issue for me.

**Paul Magnanti:** My favorite trail shoe of all time is the legendary thru-hiker favorite [Montrail Hardrock](#). A wonderful blend of lightness, with both a gripping and stiff sole and the shoe itself also had excellent durability. The Hardrocks were wonderful for walking down a single track on the Continental Divide Trail, off-trail scrambling on weekend jaunts in Rocky Mountain National Park or taking a moonlit social walk with a local outdoor group. Alas, these shoes are no longer made. Currently, for on-trail and some off-trail hikes, I've been using the [Mix Master Move](#) by Merrell. More of a minimalist shoe that is light, stable enough for certain jaunts and works well with a light pack. I am now on my third pair. Alas, this shoe is no longer made either. (Though they can still be found on clearance.) For off-trail hikes with major scrambling, I've been using the

[Patagonia Release](#). Stiff, sturdy and a bit heavier than a trail shoe with more of a hiking boot feel. Even has a Vibram sole with excellent grip. Feels a bit too heavy, though, and I do not use them as often as I should. I've heard good things about the Brook Cascadia 9 and how they are similar to my old, beloved Hardrocks. I may give them a whirl as my next purchase sometime this coming year.

People used to hiking in boots should probably start slowly, using their trail runners mostly on-trail until the muscles stabilizing their ankles become stronger. Those with a history of ankle sprains may not be able to make this transition, as their stabilizing ligaments have been permanently stretched and weakened. However, with properly-chosen trail runners, most hikers, scramblers, and even backpackers can skip happily forward, leaving their boots behind.



Playing on Sunlight Peak, San Juans

Boosting onto the Summit of Mount Gould - Sierra Nevada



LIGHTWEIGHT  
**BACKPACKS**  
for the trail ahead

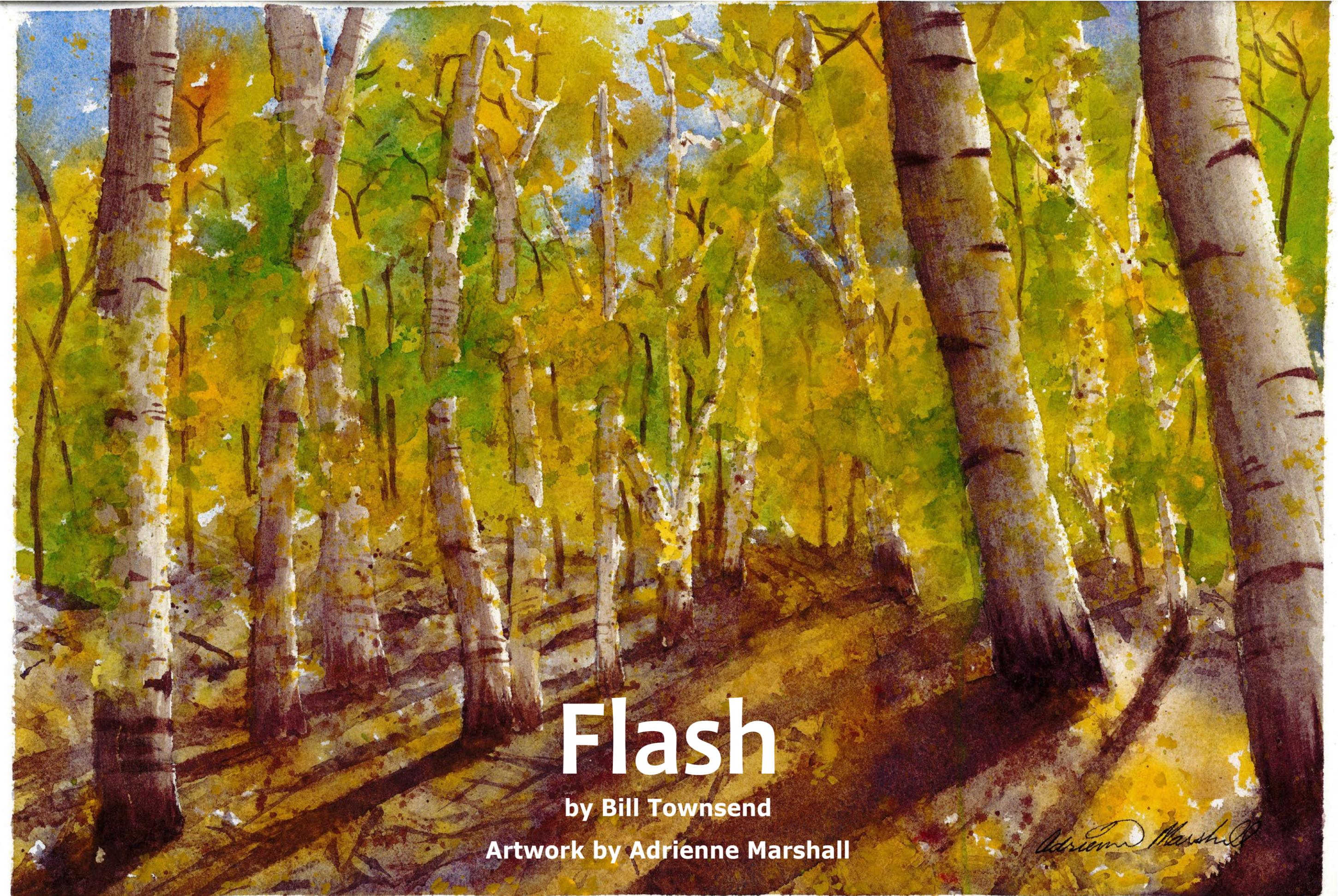
**ULA**  
EQUIPMENT  
LOGAN, UTAH

CARRY ONE ▶

**SAVE BIG**  
ON SERIOUSLY GREAT OUTDOOR GEAR

**REI**

▶ SEE ALL SALE ITEMS



# Flash

by Bill Townsend

Artwork by Adrienne Marshall

*Adrienne Marshall*

I knew my feet were moving, but I couldn't feel them. I thought of the Taoism I had studied, one of the many teachings that had nothing- and everything- to do with running. Specifically, I wondered if I was at that moment practicing wu wei, or "doing without doing".

~Scott Jurek, Eat and Run



## Time.

The sharp reminder of Father Time's greedy and restless fingers clutching at our lives. The traveler often seeks the peace of the woods to evade his tireless grasp. At work; appointments, deadlines, commutes, schedules and of course plain ol' punching the clock every day. At home; juggling schedules, keeping kids busy, getting to bed on time, finding time to be healthy and attempting to carve out a few minutes for yourself. We are always out of time in town. To master this desperate situation we have attempted to create time in the greatest modern wonderment of all: Quality Time. When we attempt to pack all the lost hours we have failed to spend with our loved ones into one quality packed fifteen to thirty minute block of stressful interaction with each other with the expectation that carving out this special time will work if we just really concentrate on it.

And so we that love the woods make the time to escape. To turn off the phone, unwind the watch, coldcock the clock for a brief bit and take a stroll. Some even get the chance to commandeer the calendar and escape for a few days or even months at a time. The longer we can go, the more the shackles of town's time constraints melt away. The longer we go, the more the minutes and hours fall apart. Time breaks down into the gradual movement of the sun across the sky. The elongation, elimination, and rebirth of shadows as the day moves along.

If you go long enough even the calendar breaks down. The days of the week become just days, the name little more important than the designations we associate with them. Mondays aren't the crappy day you go back to work, Friday isn't date night, Saturday isn't the day you have for you or your loved ones, and Sunday is not the day you practice religion. Every day is just a day, no more or less important or given to a special purpose than the day before or the next. Only the big things matter on that great wheel of time; the next full moon, the turning of the seasons, the passing years.

It turns out Ol' Father Time is really just a doddering fella who was only grasping at you because you were running away from him. He just wanted to grab ahold of you to ask you to stop, maybe take his arm and stroll a bit. Tap you on the shoulder, apologize, and remind you his boss didn't mean for town to turn out the way it did. But now that you're out here, he's happy to shake your hand and give you a wink, "This is the way the boss intended it to be."

You will often meet outdoors folks who've met this fella, and rightly so, are proud to have done so. They are calm, relaxed, assured, unhurried and even aloof. They are shocking to their more civilized companions. Cell phone, no I don't need one of those. Watch? What fer? The sun wakes me up, my belly tells me when it's lunch time, my feet tell me when the day's work is done, and my head knows when to lay me down to sleep. They may even stop wearing a watch in town. They have shaken that good fella's hand and figured out how they want to spend their time from now on.

But these folks are liars. Don't get me wrong, the outdoorsman has a certain luxury of timelessness rare among the common folk, equaled only perhaps, by those with so much money they don't even have to care for themselves, let alone what time it is. While there may be no particular rush to cook dinner, hell, some days you may wait til sunup if you're in a particular mood; but you still have to eat eventually. You are subject to whims of



the weather, the shifting of the seasons, a muddy stretch, steep trail, thorny bushwhack, or even the occasional tree that up and fell down quite inconveniently. You're still a human, with no store or currency that would buy the necessities of life in the woods. You still have a few things that need to get done. While a timely fashion isn't quite accurate, meeting your needs has to get done in some fashion.

Even Jerimiah Johnson had to figure out when to come to the rendezvous to sell his furs. So at some point the traveler must resupply, get a good wash-up, make some repairs, grab a beer, or even return home to the town he's left behind. Even the watch-free nomad misses their loved ones. So I guess after all, even the outdoorsman doesn't escape for long, if at all. Entering his home he flips the hourglass on the mantel and sees the sands quickly drain

before his eyes once more. Oh for a time... the traveler was blissfully ignorant of the seconds, the minutes, the hours. But that time is ended. Although you shook that fella's hand, turns out it's only because you're his co-worker, not his master.

But this is a lie too.

Not everyone is so lucky, but a few of us are. No, we don't cheat death or discover immortality on some lost trail leading to the fountain of youth. There is no secret really, you can't learn it, or seek it, buy a map or read a good guidebook. Ironically you must devote a fair bit of time to do it. It comes easier over the years, but it can be years before it comes at all. The longer you're away the longer it takes to get back, and even then there's no guarantee you'll find it. There's a bit of danger to it as well. But somewhere in the long miles, find it you will.

It often sneaks up on you in small bits. Some wonder is found; a mysterious track, a quiet brook, dancing waterfall, scenic vista, or sometimes just a peaceful bit of woods with nothing particular about it. These bits pile up, taking up and stealing away the seconds, minutes or hours. There is a thoughtfulness to it at first, much like we occasionally lose ourselves in an interesting task at home or work and look up to the clock to see that the last few seconds have somehow lasted an hour. At first it's just a perception, getting lost in thought. Really nothing most of us haven't had happen at one point or another.



**In the woods, though, there is an added bit of depth.**

In the woods, though, there is an added bit of depth. Much like the monks that practice seated meditation in order to progress to walking meditation, so too does the traveler begin to find these bits sneak in while in motion. You find at some point no effort in the motion, no concern in the thought, no awareness of time's passage. Your feet land softly but rhythmically, the air moves cleanly from tree, to cloud, to lung. The birds chirp their greeting, colors get brighter, the deer no longer skitters away, the trees pass you by. The sun seems to pause its endless motion. You are no longer you, becoming instead a part of the whole. And all is in motion.

Flash.

Not of light, of time. Suddenly, a millisecond later you are you again. Sometimes you note the position of the sun, the dryness of your throat, a hunger in your belly. You may even pull out your watch. Sometimes a few minutes have passed, sometimes hours. Time, distance, metabolism, life. All the natural things have continued well enough without you, but for a brief bit, they were not your concern. For a little while you weren't just on a stroll, but were a part of the woods themselves. Or yourself. Or I suppose it just gets confusing at that point and you simply move on.

Reviewing the map you find your bearings. Occasionally the distance is minimal, or at least respects the old formula; distance equals speed multiplied by time. But every once in a while that formula breaks down. I suppose in theory, when time is infinite, it should follow that distance is as well. In practice perhaps science hasn't solved every mystery. It matters little really. It's just a feeling. It doesn't matter if it happens when you sit on a stump for half a day bewildered by beauty or transport yourself twenty miles across the face of the planet. Perhaps it's just in your head. Perhaps for a second or two, you mastered time.

Either way- if you get lucky- Give a nod and a shake to Ol' Father Time next time you meet.

If you get really lucky- maybe you'll get to peek over his shoulder and trade a brief nod with his boss.

*Bill Townsend lives in the Chicago burbs where he raises two small kids, works, makes gear, writes, and occasionally gets to take a stroll. You can find more of his tales in [Lying on the Trail](#), available [Here at Amazon](#).*

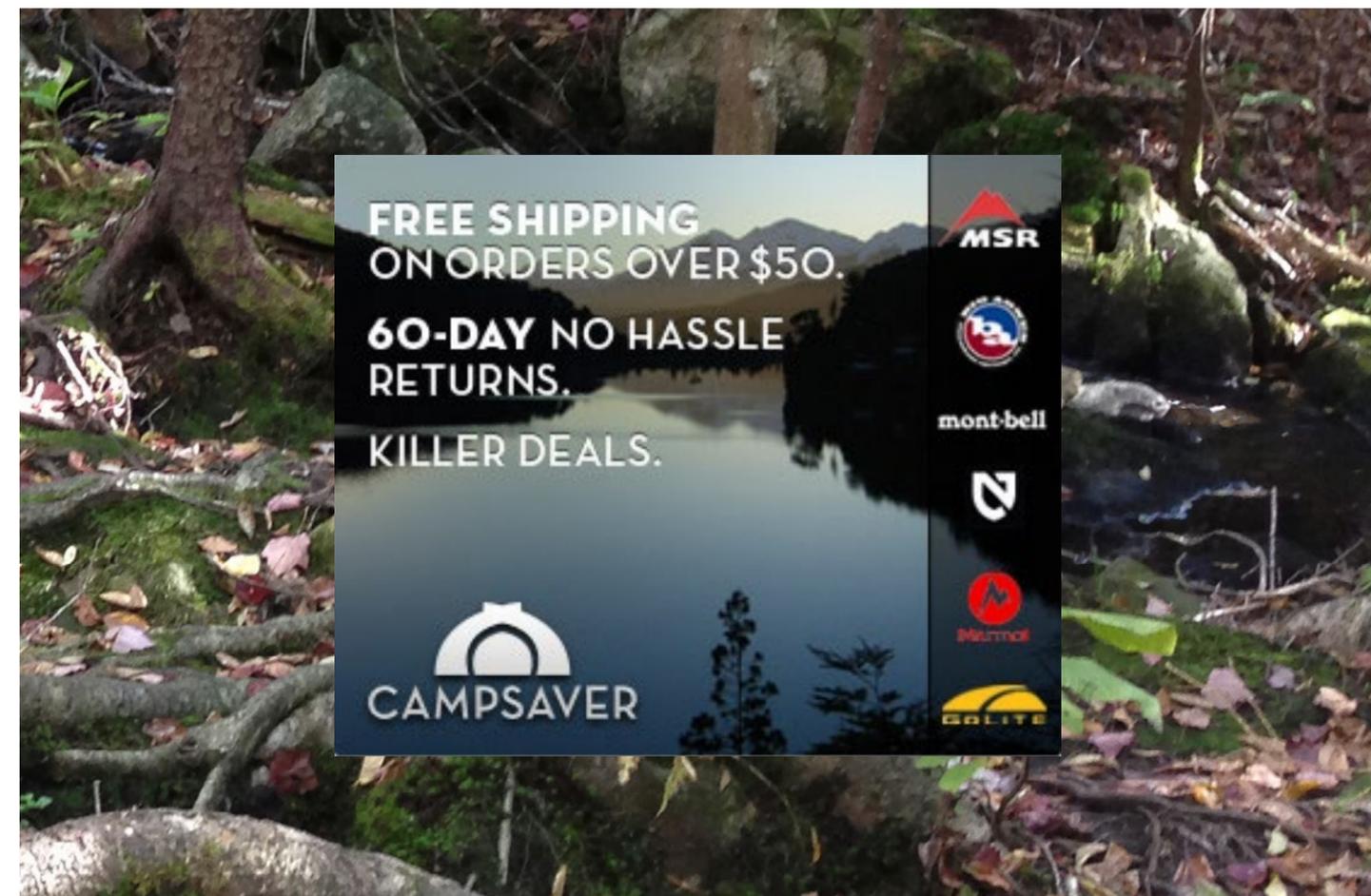
**Artwork by Adrienne Marshall. See more of her work in [Issue 6](#).**

**Pages 95-96:** Backlit aspens: movement of the feet along a wooded trail.

**Pages 97-98:** Tuolumne: water flowing through a landscape, altering it through seasons and eons.

**Pages 99-100:** Half Dome sunrise: the arrival of the sun in the morning.

**Pages 101-102:** Storm over Tahoe: the approach or departure of a storm.



# “Wild”

A Film Review  
by David Cobb

I thru-hiked the Pacific Crest Trail a while ago, so I was interested to view the film adaptation of the [Cheryl Strayed book Wild](#) to see how a long-distance hike was handled as a Hollywood movie. But “Wild” isn’t a hiking film; it’s more about a woman’s relationship with herself rather than her relationship with nature. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, “Wild” follows Cheryl Strayed (played by Reese Witherspoon) on a 1,100 mile cathartic walk along the Pacific Crest Trail.

After the death of her mother, a divorce, and a stretch with heroin, on a whim Strayed embarks on a hike of the PCT. Vallée depicts the experience of a long-distance hiker well in the film: from the small night noises, to the blisters, trail angels, memories, songs, and those millions of reasons to quit. The film splits from the trail at times to show flashbacks of Strayed’s former life, and it’s from those memories we learn why she has taken on this journey. Most of the flashbacks are recollections of her mother (superbly played by Laura Dern) who had a positive outlook on life – and it’s the memories and spirit of her mother’s optimism that finally helps pull Strayed out of her own abyss.



Director Vallée has a theme of unlikely heroes in many of his films. In the “Dallas Buyer’s Club,” it’s Matthew McConaughey as a cowboy dying of AIDS, but finding a way for thousands to survive with the disease. In “Young Queen Victoria,” the unlikely heroine is the queen standing on her own against the entrenched powers of England and reigning longer than any monarch in British history. The film “C.R.A.Z.Y” stars the unlikely hero of a young man struggling in 1970s Montreal. So the director is in familiar territory with “Wild” and the challenges of a young woman with a dark past struggling against nature to reclaim herself.

Witherspoon is at her best in the film, losing the gloss and perkiness we associate with her from earlier movies and opting for a more stripped-down acting role. During a long-distance hike there are reasons all day every day to quit, and fewer reasons to keep going. This in particular is demonstrated well. From the opening scene of pulling off a toenail to the body welts created by her massive pack, she’s in new territory with her acting. As she meets men along the trail, there sometimes come fears both genuine and imagined. This is a transformative role from a dark self to a better self along the trail, and as a long-distance hiker I believed Witherspoon’s performance as a Pacific Crest Trail backpacker.

“Wild” was mostly filmed in my home state of Oregon, so I was happy to see so many familiar sites of the region. Cinematographer Yves Bélanger helps bring the vastness of the trail’s landscape and the scenery of Oregon alive. I also know two of the hikers portrayed in the film, so that was of particular interest to me. The screenplay by Nick Hornby flowed much better than the book, as did the film. A couple of notable cameos in the movie: author Cheryl Strayed makes a brief appearance as a “trail angel” in an early scene, and rocker Art Alexakis (of Everclear fame) has an amusing part as a tattoo artist.

Whether you’re a hiker or not, “Wild” is entertaining and well-acted throughout. Backpacking films are few and far between, and they’re usually about growth and revelation along the trail and not about backpacking – The Way” starring Martin Sheen comes to mind. “Wild” covers similar terrain, and does so in spectacular fashion.





### Nite Ize SpotLit Light

With a built-in stainless steel carabiner clip that attaches to almost anything, the SpotLit offers up ambient lighting in your tent at night, around camp, on your keychain...The list goes on. Really want to be seen? Double click the push button switch for strobe mode. Available in various colors with a 20 hour battery life; replaceable batteries. About an ounce and \$7:

[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)



### Vargo Titanium Whistle

Put the finishing touch on your collection of titanium backpacking gear with this indispensable backcountry safety item from Vargo. Just a tenth of an ounce, \$11:

[Campsaver.com](http://Campsaver.com)



### Duck Brand Window Insulation Film

Don't just insulate your house, make a superlight and pretty tough groundsheet out of window insulation film to protect, help waterproof, and keep the bottom of your shelter clean. Or use alone with a tarp. Cut to size, a typically-sized 2 person ground sheet will weigh around 3 ounces. From \$8:

[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)



### JayBird BlueBuds X Headphones

Like to hike to a few tunes? The Bluetooth BlueBuds X headphones offer premium sound – Wirelessly. 8 hours of listening time per charge; recharges via USB. An inline remote offers volume adjustment, skipping of tracks, and you can even talk to Siri if you get lonely. \$170:

[REI.com](http://REI.com)

# GEAR MASH



### Therm-a-Rest EvoLite Sleeping Pad

Thought self-inflating pads were old school? This new sleeping pad from Therm-a-Rest needs just a few breaths to top off after inflation. Alternating foam and air channels aim to reduce bulk and increase comfort, and the pad provides 2" of height in 3 different sizes ranging from about 12-23 ounces. R-Value of 2.1 – Priced from \$100-\$140:

[REI.com](http://REI.com)



### MSR MiniGroundhog Tent Stake

A smaller and lighter version of the venerable Groundhog tent stake, the Minis offer the same Y-shaped design for great holding power in 7000-series aluminum. 6" and .35 ounces each. \$18 for 6:

[Backcountry.com](http://Backcountry.com)



### Helinox Ground Chair

This chair from Helinox weighs in at a respectable and packable 22 ounces, and the DAC aluminum pole structure breaks down into a compact form factor so you can easily carry the chair inside or outside your pack.

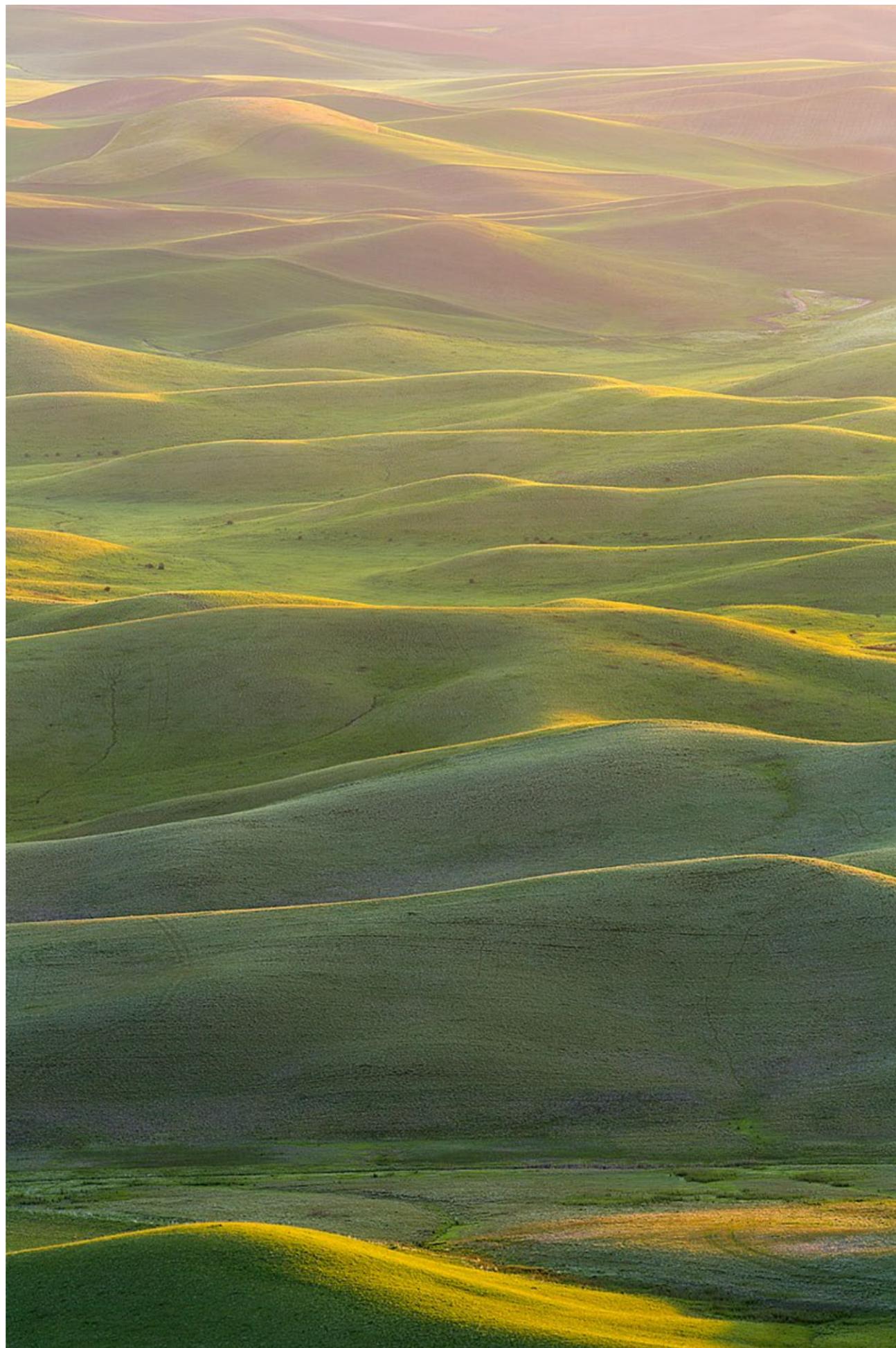
[Campsaver.com](http://Campsaver.com)



### Sierra Designs Tensegrity 2 FL Tent

The Tensegrity 2 FL features an interior that gets wider towards the top for more shoulder space, a clean entry and exit, and gear storage away from the doors with multiple pitch options. Pitches with your trekking poles to save weight, with the tent itself coming in at a minimum of 42 ounces. (The Elite version saves another 7 ounces, +\$100) \$390 for the 42 ounce FL:

[REI.com](http://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.*

## Zooming In

Many of us beginning in photography want to take in the entire scene with our cameras, so we go as wide as possible to capture the sky, the mountains, the river, and the valley but then discover we don't capture much of the landscape's story. Sometimes by zooming in and capturing a part of the scene, we can tell more of the story of the land we're visiting and photographing. What follows are a few hints for knowing when to zoom.

I use a zoom when trying to simplify my image for more visual impact. The zoom also compresses the scenery, so it can emphasize repeating lines for compositional rhythm or give the foreground the illusion of being closer. The downside of using a zoom is that it's more susceptible to lens flare and can add light artifacts to your image. So make sure your lens is clean and use a lens hood if available, or use your hand or a hat to help shade the lens from the sun if a lens hood isn't available. If you have "live view" on the back of your camera, press the magnify button with live view turned on and make sure your image is sharp while zooming. (This trick can eat your camera battery a bit faster, but it's a useful tool for capturing a sharp, zoomed image.)

**Left:** Palouse Hill Country

A zoom lens is great for creating an image with graphic details and highlighting light and shadow. I'm often looking to reduce an image to only the lines and form of the land. Zooming is also effective for compressing color in an image, such as a field of flowers. Brighter colors can offer a leading line and compressed complementary colors will add more drama to an image – because opposites do attract. I often include a tree or man-made element to the composition too, which introduces an overall sense of scale.

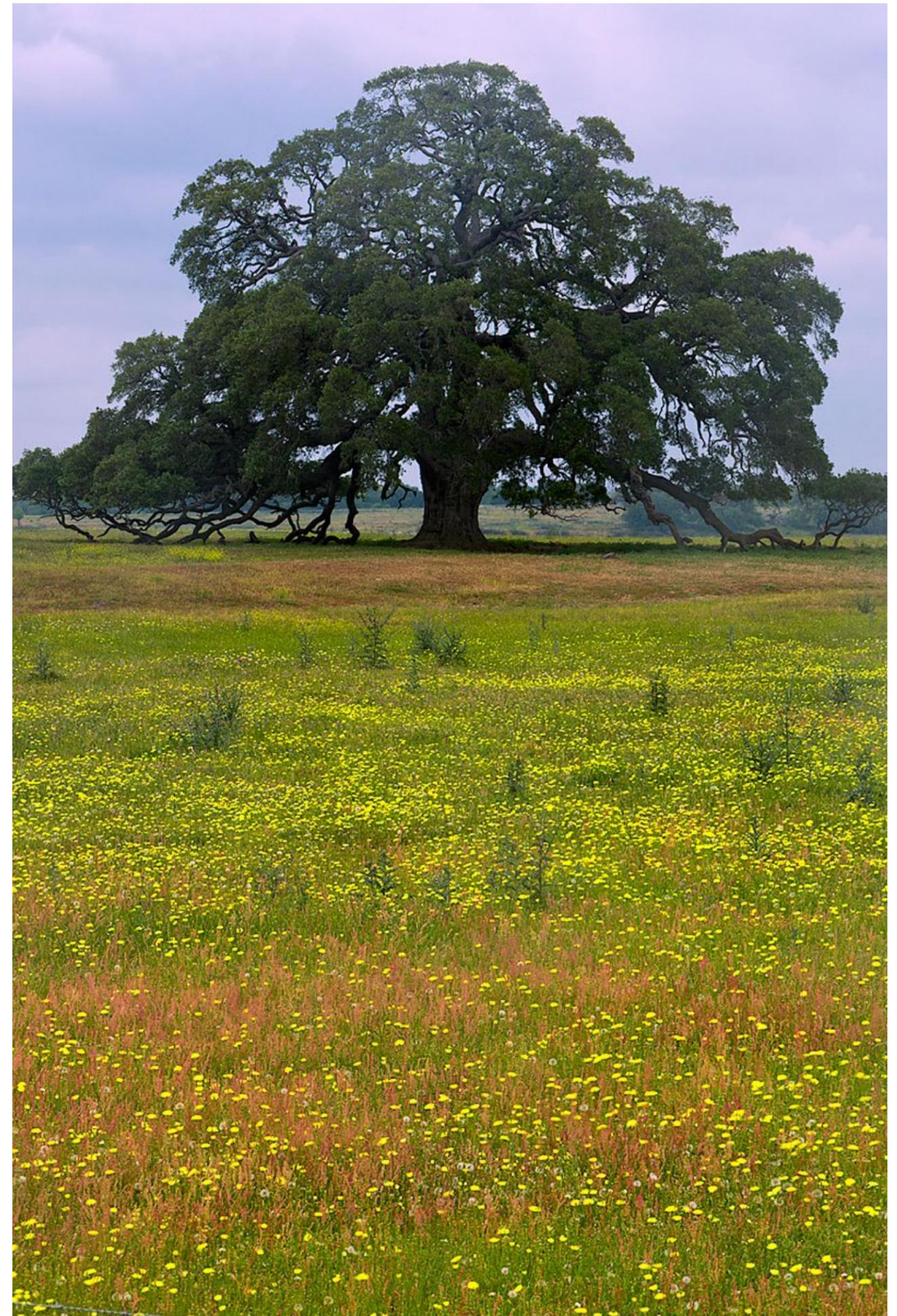
So if you're looking to simplify your landscape image by reducing the elements to light, form, and color then zoom away – I think you'll be happy with the results.

*David Cobb is an avid backpacker and photographer. You can see more of David's images at [www.dmcobbphoto.com](http://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.*

**All images Copyright 2015 © David M.Cobb Photography.**

**Right:** Dandelions & Oak  
**Pages 113-114:** Badland National Park  
**Pages 115:** Sylvan Lake Cliffs







because a chef is  
too heavy to  
**carry in your pack**

10% OFF Promo Code: Embpro

EMBERLIT Fire

[www.emberlit.com](http://www.emberlit.com)

**YOUR AD HERE**

Place your ad in  
TrailGroove Magazine

We keep back issues - and your ad - available forever.

For more information, contact us at:

[sales@trailgroove.com](mailto:sales@trailgroove.com)

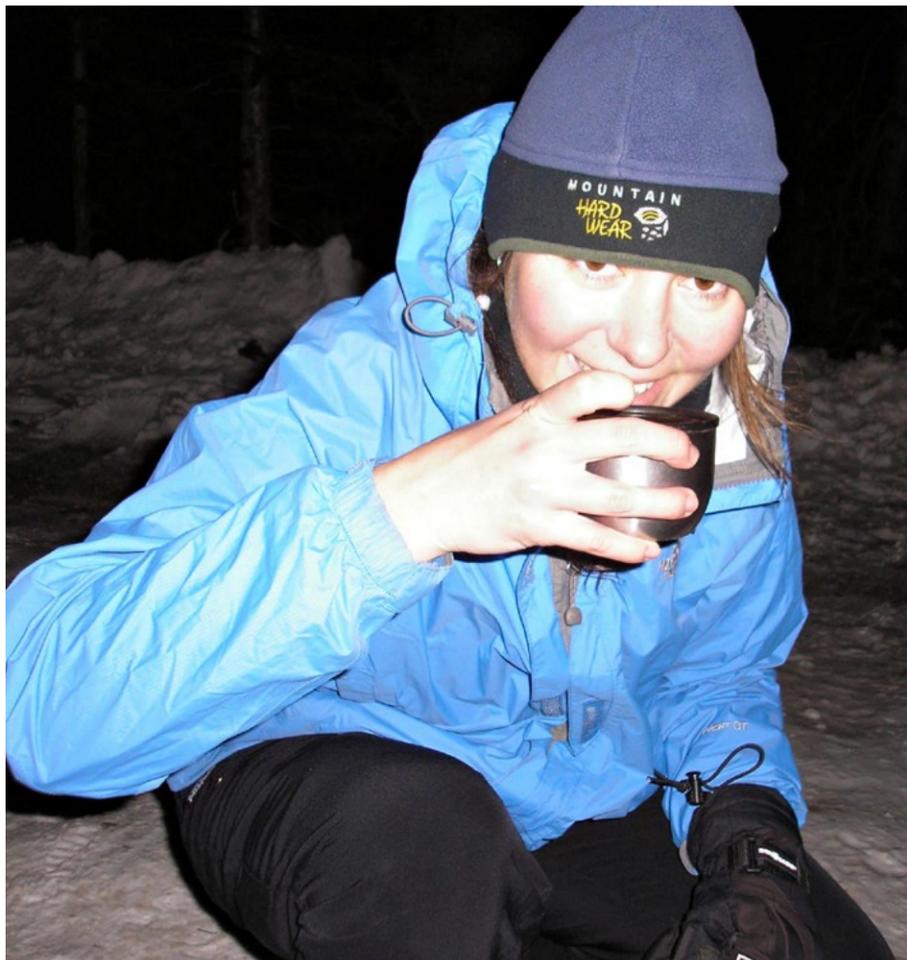
# Backcountry Cuisine: Chocolate Cheesecake Smoothies

by Paul Magnanti

After a cold day of backcountry skiing, a sheltered spot is found for a campsite. A snug spot located in the trees, it has an excellent view of both Mitchell Lake and the Continental Divide above. The shelter is soon erected, warm and dry clothes are changed into, and the stove is fired up. Dinner is cooked and consumed. But it is not quite ready to be called a night. The sun is setting and the alpenglow on the mountains is delightful. The stove is fired up again. A drink is quickly made. A warm and delicious beverage completes the night.

Life is good.

Is there anything better than a hot chocolate cheesecake smoothie to drink in the cold winter night?



A chocolate cheesecake smoothie is a combination beverage and dessert that is perfect for any backcountry winter activity. Yummy and full of calories, it is ideal for helping to keep the inner furnace stoked until morning comes.

## Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp whole milk powder (Nido)
- 4 oz. no-bake cheesecake mix
- 3 oz. hot chocolate mix

**At home:** Take all ingredients and place in a re-sealable plastic bag. Shake and mix thoroughly.

**At camp:** Pour mixture into a 16 oz. mug or a Nalgene bottle, add hot water and stir. Add enough water until the desired consistency is reached. Want it thicker and more dessert like? Add less water. Want it more beverage-like? Add more water. I personally like it on the beverage side of the smoothie equation as it helps to hydrate, too.

The cheesecake smoothie is very versatile. Add your favorite instant coffee to make a mocha. Or brew up some very strong fruit flavored herbal tea and make a berry-flavored cheesecake smoothie instead. Double the recipe to share with friends.

[Going on a day ski tour?](#) Make this tasty treat at home and throw it into a Thermos. The delicious goodness will be appreciated for sure.





# The Drive Home

## The Sunset

by Aaron Zagrodnick

**A**rriving at the parking lot, I struggle to find a parking space. This is Wyoming right? Crowded with vehicles and vehicles with trailers, the area is full of others enjoying the weekend day, but most by snowmachine or on cross country skis. It's hard to blame them, a Saturday with temperatures in the low 40's is hard to pass up and I'm guilty of it myself. Interested in a little less traffic, I hike the opposite direction from the National Forest roads and take the trail towards the wilderness boundary. Quickly it becomes apparent that rubber soles alone won't cut it, as I half skate across a trail that's packed with melted and refrozen snow. Stopping I put my Microspikes on, and they give the grip I need to ascend the icy slope. I pass families out for the day, myself hiking as fast as I can in a race against what I know will be the light. Quickly I make 2 miles, sweating my way upwards. The trail here becomes more remote, at least by winter standards, and the trail is no longer packed. It's very quiet, perhaps only the fleeting echo of a snowmachine

racing somewhere miles away can be heard. I begin to sink into the snow as I walk farther into the forest. Finding a convenient log beside my path I stop and switch to snowshoes. No longer on the move, I'm quickly chilled and reach for vacuum bottle I'd filled with boiling water before I left. Opening the top reveals water – Slightly flavored with lemon – piping hot. A few sips and I'm warm again, I'll save the rest for later. I might need it.

I follow the corridor that must be the trail, the occasional sawed tree limb above the snow confirming my suspicions and rarely, items left behind long ago by other explorers of the land. Slowly I begin to fall into the rhythm of the woods, my vision opens up and I feel less like an intruder in this space and more like I'm a part of it. My thoughts start to follow suit...until the loud and sudden scolding of a single squirrel in the tree above me startles my body and mind. Strangely, no birds perch or fly within this forest...none can be seen...



none heard. Passing past the irritated voice that had scolded me from above, the land is again silent and the air windless. I ascend over 1000 feet, the snow deepening along the way as I climb. Then, I crest a hill and the air changes, as does the terrain. Here, few trees grow, and the wind coming from the continental divide has few obstacles to block its path. Few trees means more sun, and more wind has swept most of the snow that hasn't yet melted from my path. I stop and refuel, again I'm quickly cooled and again I turn to the flask to resist the chill. I walk, without snowshoes or spikes, towards a rocky outcropping...A good photo opportunity perhaps. It's not as far as I'd planned to go for the day – Deep snow can do that to you. But the sun was setting. I could push forward, and possibly make it to my destination by dark, (promising a perhaps, even better view) but I'd miss this moment. I criss-crossed over the outcropping, hoping to find the perfect seat to watch the fireworks as the wind picked up. Below me, the river, though mostly frozen, reflected the skies above in the few areas that weren't quite fully frozen. I took a few photos, mostly I watched.

A sunset in the mountains is always a beautiful thing. It starts with that ever so subtle glimmer of light against the foothills, a barely-there indication that something is about to change. Then, the color in the sky begins to build, slowly but confidently like a thundercloud on a hot summer day. As though I'm a

sailor and the sky is a Siren it makes you pause, calls you to look. But the sunset has no ill intent, it just is. Time no longer exists, the sunset peaks, then goes grey in an instant. In January, as long as it takes you to come to your senses and walk the 100 yards back to your snowshoes, it's now dark.

Such is my fate. The wind has fizzled and all is again quiet. I layer up in the windless but noticeably colder post-sunset air, check my headlamp, and begin to follow my tracks back through the snow downhill. It's a completely different journey – I'm not only looking at things from the opposite direction but I'm now doing so in the dark. My headlamp focuses my vision on specific points of light; my other senses become acute in an attempt to make up for the loss of sense. Though my senses are focused, my mind ranges far and wide. Boulders beyond the reach of my headlamp lay hidden in the shadows, their presence only revealed by dark silhouettes against the white snow. I look at them and some seem to take the shape of houses or cars, and some even cause me to second guess my reasoning behind what they really are. It's colder now, and the top layer of snow has started to refreeze. At my feet the snow glitters back at me – It's unreal. Each step with my snowshoes crunches loudly through the top layer like someone opening a giant bag of potato chips. It's so loud in fact, that nothing else can be heard and I feel almost as if I'm bulldozing my way home – Loud enough





that I can't help but focus on anything else except my own thoughts and the next step. Occasionally I glance behind me. Suddenly something darts out at high speed across my path – A rabbit flees to the side of the trail, leaving no track and making no sound as it seems to glide over the crusty snow. The rabbit stops as I shine my light to investigate and looks into space, motionless and frozen. I crunch forward.

Leaving the rabbit about its nightly routine, the process of descending is the reverse of before. I stop at the same log on the way back and trade out my snowshoes for Microspikes. I drink more (now warm) water, but I'm already far from chilled with the effort of hauling snowshoes around attached to my

feet. Retrieving a Nalgene bottle from the depths of my pack, the icy water contained within offers a higher level of refreshment. I continue on and remove my spikes just short of the trailhead, again half skating –and make my way to the road. My headlamp lights up the parking lot – Signs painted with reflective paint shine blindingly back at me. Other than my truck the lot is now deserted, almost appearing as though it's been abandoned for years. Though it wasn't an early start, I suppose it's not so bad when you're the last one to leave. For a moment I'd held my breath and left the world behind, for a moment or two I'd thrown myself out there into the unscripted world that always seems to be the trail. The story always writes itself.





“To learn something new, take the path that you took yesterday.”

- John Burroughs





# Thanks for Reading Issue 20

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

[www.TrailGroove.com](http://www.TrailGroove.com)

Copyright © 2015 TrailGroove Magazine LLC

