

# TrailGroove™

Issue 5 - November/December 2012



# Contents

*November/December 2012*

- 3 Editor's Note
- 5 How to Contribute to TrailGroove Magazine
- 6 TrailGroove Product Review Policy
- 7 Jargon
- 8 Random Trail Tip
- 9** It Evicts the Self:  
Off-trail in Glacier National Park  
by David Chenault
- 21** Hiking the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness  
by David Cobb
- 35** Review: Western Mountaineering  
Ultralite 20 Degree Sleeping Bag
- 43** Virginia: A Hiker's Paradise  
by Tim Frazier
- 59** Gear Mash  
Cool Gear We've Come Across This Season
- 61** Backcountry Photography Tips  
by David M. Cobb
- 69** Backcountry Cuisine Special Feature  
An Ultra Light Kitchen-A Developing Passion  
by Timothy Eisemann
- 75** The Drive Home  
The Extra Mile

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

**Direct link to this issue: <http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue5.html>**

**[Subscribe to TrailGroove Magazine](#)**

\* A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:  
David Chenault, David Cobb, Tim Frazier, and Timothy Eisemann

Copyright © 2012 TrailGroove Magazine LLC, [www.TrailGroove.com](http://www.TrailGroove.com)



## Editor's Note

Welcome to the 5th issue of TrailGroove Magazine! With chilly weather already having arrived here in the Rockies, we've been trying to take advantage of any sunny days or breaks in the in forecast before winter truly sets in... It's almost time to find out where I hid my snowshoes when things started to warm up last spring...

In this issue we'll take a look at Glacier National Park and the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness in Montana, then head East to take a look at some great hiking and scenery in Virginia. We'll also review the Western Mountaineering Ultralite Sleeping Bag, and as usual we'll throw in a great photography and trail tip as well. In the Drive Home we're heading out into the wild with some new challenges. Craving a treat at the end of a long day of hiking? You'll definitely want to take a look at the Backcountry Cuisine feature.

New TrailGroove stickers are now available – If you'd like one, shoot us an email at [info@trailgroove.com](mailto:info@trailgroove.com) with your mailing address and we'll get a sticker out right away. The sticker and the shipping are on us!

**TrailGroove**<sup>TM</sup>  
Magazine



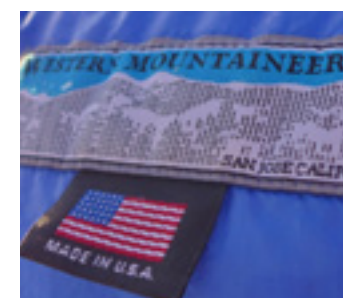
# Contribute



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

A few examples of what we are looking for:

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



## TrailGroove Magazine Review Policy

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

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

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

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



## Jargon

**DWR** (Durable Water Repellant)

Durable Water Repellant (DWR) is a coating added to the surface of a fabric to aid in waterproofing without sacrificing (And usually aiding to) breathability. The most frequent application of DWR in the outdoor gear world can be found in breathable rain gear and breathable water resistant shells. If the surface of the fabric were to “wet out”, breathability through that portion of the fabric would be severely compromised. DWR allows for water to bead and roll off the surface of the fabric, maintaining breathability. DWR is also used for footwear and other outdoor garments, as well as sleeping bags. When used on a non-waterproof product, (A sleeping bag or windshirt for example) DWR will not make the product entirely waterproof, but when the coating is fresh will make it highly water resistant and even brief light showers can be weathered before the treatment is overcome. Though durable is in the name, the treatment is not permanent and is degraded by use, dirt, abrasion, and washing. (How many washes it will last depends on the manufacturer’s application) DWR can be restored with heat – A clothes dryer or iron at a medium heat setting can work well. If this fails to revive the product, or you’d like to apply the advantage of DWR to a previously-untreated item, various spray-on or wash-in aftermarket products are available such as those that can be found here at [Amazon](#).

# Random Trail Tip

## Campsite Priorities – A Game Plan

When I first started backpacking, many times I’d find myself at the end of a long day...Wanting only to head off to sleep from the exhaustion of 20 miles of hiking. Setting up camp, filtering water, and dinner were the only things standing in my way. Things didn’t always seem to go so easily, however. 30 minutes after arriving at my favorite campsite, my shelter was probably half setup, sleeping bag out of its stuff sack but my sleeping pad yet to be inflated. Meanwhile I was off to cook dinner but only realized halfway through cooking that I was out of water and needed more to finish rehydrating a thirsty dehydrated meal. Some organization was definitely needed.

Now, upon arriving in camp, I prioritize based up on, well...Priorities:

- 1. Shelter**
- 2. Water**
- 3. Fire**
- 4. Food**

...And in that order. Above all else, a shelter (Which includes your sleeping gear) is your primary concern in the backcountry, unless you’re lucky enough to be out on one of those great summer nights perfectly suited for cowboy camping. Even then, you’d be well advised to make sure you had shelter available just in case the weather turned. Clean filtered or treated water is concern #2 – Hydration is critical, especially after hiking all day and when you’ll be doing the same the next. In the backpacking world, the fire aspect is frequently served by an alcohol or canister stove, or as an option a wood fire itself. In any event, it’s a great idea to have multiple means of starting a fire along with a plan to do so even if it’s not immediately required. Your stove or fire will most likely predicate the last item on the list however – food. Finally, dinner is served with a shelter and a sleeping bag already lying in wait after you’re done. Breaking down the list in a reverse manner the next morning allows for an expedited and efficient means to break camp.



# It Evicts the Self<sup>1</sup>: Off-trail in Glacier National Park

Text by David Chenault

Photos by David and Meredith Chenault

**I woke to the scattered splash of something in shallow water and the dry clatter of loose, melon-sized cobbles under heavy feet.** It was 430 in the morning, and I could see hazy stars through the open door of my Megamid. It was pitched forty feet from the edge of the river, tight in amongst spindly young aspens. Between the continuous rush of the shallow, late-summer river, and the soft sand under my thermarest it took a stark noise indeed to wake me at this hour. I lay dead still as the creature steadily but leisurely passed by, and after several minutes spent verifying that there is no further accompaniment to the river noise, went back to sleep.

An hour later it happened again, though this time the strike of turning rocks obviously belongs to multiple animals with hooves. Low snorting and extrapolation from their footed rhythm identifies these night walkers

as elk before they plunge in and quickly ford the yard-deep river. They must make noise going up the steep bank on the far side, but I can't hear it. What I can hear is the thundering conclusion that the animal an hour before must have been a bear. Only three wild residents of this particular corner are big enough to make that much noise, and elk and moose have the louder feet of ungulates. The edge of the water, with its diffuse pools wrought by the unusually low river, is very near. I've been as close or closer to bears on several occasions. Just four months previous I had been walking, in the 1000 pm twilight of late spring, through vast intertwined meadows along another river 100 miles south and came upon a Grizzly at around 40 feet. I saw it digging in the meadow as it saw me emerge from the shadows of a ponderosa grove. We looked at each other for several minutes, the bear circling 40 degrees to my right as it tried to

*1: from Bruce Berger "There was a River" Mountain Gazette #31 One is forced into the landscape until it evicts the self and becomes, as Eliot said of strong sensation, "Music heard so deeply/That it is not heard at all, but you are the music/While the music lasts."*

*LEFT: Megan Chaisson nearing Fifty Mountain meadows during a mid-June trip from McDonald Lake to Bowman Lake. Though on snow continuously for 10 miles once we got above 5000 feet, things were consolidated such that we never used the snowshoes we carried. Though even the trail markers were buried, the easiest way forward usually followed the invisible dirt path.*





discover what I was, before my scent was obvious and the bear ran away. By most rational standards the waking encounter was probably more hazardous, but in the future the undistracted sound of a bear closely hidden only by darkness will probably be the memory which rises first. That rare, unalloyed glance into the more normal workings of the forest is the more precious memory.

I had access to that glimpse because, on that autumnal weekend, I was travelling and camping not on human travel corridors, but on those crafted directly by the land itself. How we as hikers and backpackers travel determines not only the content of our experience, but the preconditions which make the experience itself possible. In today's continental United States it can be difficult to grasp this. Many places are like my backyard, Glacier National Park, in that travel through the landscape is so thoroughly defined by human-maintained trails that all things have altered their habits. Human trails are so clean that larger mammals, whose ranges are measured in tens if not hundreds of miles, see no reason to forge their own path. Biologists in Glacier have long relied on hair traps to estimate the population of Grizzlies and to map their movements. Like all large mammals, bears

*RIGHT: The author starting down the goat route from Iceberg Notch to Iceberg Lake, which drops 2000 vertical feet in about half a mile. The exposure is constant but the going easy, provided (as Glacier guidebook author J.G. Edwards notoriously says) the correct route is followed. In mid-summer one of the best aids to staying on the easy route is following the tufts of hair left on the rocks by shedding mountain goats.*

enjoy a good, abrasive backrub, especially when in early summer when they are dispensing with winter's coat. Strands of barbed wire, placed on hundreds of strategic trees across the park, will receive the attention of itchy bears, and the fur left behind will be collected and subject to DNA

analysis. A year's data will not only reveal how many bears are rubbing themselves on trees, but how broadly certain individuals travel. Initially scientists placed the traps off established trails, where they were unlikely to be seen by and thus subject to the interference of the general public. This did

not work. In the last 120 years Glacier has become riddled with human-built corridors, and the bears no longer make and use their own trails when they do not have to. Only once the barbed wire was relocated to trees along human trails did the bears use them regularly.





Looking at a current map of Glacier will reveal that few major valleys do not have a human trail through them. Some research, especially access to maps from the first third of the 20th century, will show that almost all those now trail-less valleys had a human trail at one time. How humans visit the park has changed in the last 80 years, and the trails have changed along with it. Prior to the construction of Going-to-the-Sun road in the 1930s, anyone who wanted to do more than poke around the edges of the park had to do so either by foot or horse. In that age the major route across the park was not up the spectacular St. Mary and McDonald valleys

as it is today, but up Red Eagle Creek and pass and down the Nyack Valley. Both routes travel through broad creek drainages (Nyack and McDonald being the two largest in the park) and over high meadows and passes, but the route of the current road starts by the Belton train depot and has more pleasing lake views, so even though the Red Eagle-Nyack route would have had far less exposure to avalanche danger, and thus might have been open for more of the year, Logan Pass got the nod, and as the monetary and perhaps spiritual priorities of the Park Service drifted ever more steadily towards the visitor who (on average) never goes

more a mile from their car, trails were abandoned and given back to non-human maintenance. Including the trail over Red Eagle Pass. Red Eagle Pass can still be visited today, by the backpacker willing to look beyond the shocking extent to which trails on maps dictate how we view the landscape. The old Red Eagle to Nyack route can be retraced, though doing so will quickly remind

the backpacker why most hikers stick to human trails. Nyack is still maintained, though it is one of the least frequently hiked trails in the park. The Grizzlies like it fine, with its abundant vegetation and robust native trout population providing good eating almost year-round. I've seen their tracks out braving the April thaw to eat early fescue and cutthroats. The bushwhack up

*BELOW: Meredith Chenault following a game trail across the head of Park Creek, towards Aurice Lake. The trail goes through the Aurice Basin and the complex cliffs beyond it, eventually leading to the lush meadows on the low divide separating the headwaters of Nyack and Coal Creeks.*

*NEXT PAGE: The headwaters of Red Eagle Creek from Almost-a-dog Pass. Prior to 1933 and the opening of the first (and only) road across the park, the horse trail going up this drainage was the most-used east-west route. The trail over Red Eagle Pass, out of frame to the right, has not been maintained for half a century and, taken over by krummholz and alder, is now almost impossible to find on the ground.*









and over the pass is another matter, with the west side having been reclaimed by alder and the easternmost population of Devil's Cub in North America, and the pass itself a maze of dense krummholz. The east side, the upper reaches of Red Eagle Creek, burned in the last decade and has an impressive number of beaver bogs to go along with the maze of fallen pick-up-stick trees. There are coherent routes through this corridor, as bears, elk, deer, and moose still travel from one creek to the next, but they are not especially intelligible for human anatomy.

A route across the landscape is how we understand it. The salient details of a given route determines how we have to work to get across it, and that work is how the experience of hiking comes into being. Hiking

*BELOW: Megan Chaisson following the goat trail along the NE ridge of Heaven's Peak. In the Pacific-draining, wetter regions of the park the alpine is much easier going than the alder choked lower elevations, and thus animals stay high unless obliged to do otherwise.*



the trail from Jackson Glacier overlook to the foot of Gunsight Lake, for example, allows the hiker to absorb views of the forest, the St. Mary River, and the high peaks with few immediate distractions other than avoiding tripping on roots hidden by chest-high Cow Parsnip. The route south to Red Eagle Meadows, across the Jackson and Blackfoot glacier basins and moraines, requires much attention to the act of walking itself. By high summer snow has left the acres of glacier-scoured limestone below the remnants of the glaciers themselves, and tilted at steep angle the layers stack up like a giant slate roof. The Lilliputian hiker must avoid the many meltwater streaks cascading down, as the smooth rock is when wet formidably slick. All traces of past travelers, animal or vegetable, are gone here and the act of walking itself can be exhausting. Further

along the same off-trail traverse the high ridge between Red Eagle Pass and Triple Divide Pass holds one of the most coherent goat trails available for viewing by the current generation. The aforementioned valleys of Red Eagle and Nyack Creeks sit 4000 feet down on either side, with their ancillary bays and side drainages choked with vegetation. No fools, the goats stay high between the likely feedings zones found near each pass. The result is a five mile sawtooth traverse whose route finding is usually no more difficult than the well-trod Highline Trail, and whose line is barely more strenuous.

The value of going beyond human trails was first revealed to me when I visited Alaska in 2011. On our 150+ mile trek across the Hayes range we had around 15 miles of human constructed trail, most of which was ATV path fingering off from the highways. The rest of our travel was given over to reading and following the landscape as the animals did. On open tundra, along river bars, and over rocky alpine passes this was easy. Rare hints of hooves on the ground were scarcely needed to confirm our being on the most efficient route. In the lower, vegetated regions we were put to the test, and the rewards were stark. One correct twitch prompted by instinct would put us left through a screen of willow and onto a multi-species game highway, several of which would have been mountain-bikable. One choice gone awry would have us drowning in alders, sliding forward, following illusory weakness and resting only on patience. When I returned to Montana I finally saw much of what I have already said here; that extensive human trail building had changed the landscape and profoundly truncated how

I looked at and understood it. I vowed to get new eyes.

The easiest way to see the landscape of the lower 48 with as little previous interpretation as possible is to go in winter or spring, when snow blankets routes. Skiing, snowshoeing, and snow hiking hold their own rewards, but feet of snow cover also changes the rules such that it becomes a different game. New routes open up, especially for valley travel when the nastiest of brush is well buried. Snow does take sign more enduringly than most other media, and on several occasions I've marveled at bears going for 10 or more continuously snowy miles over a pass from one valley to the next. On several other occasions, I've taken advantage of the Jedi-like ability of bears to follow trails buried ten feet deep and strung through the most anonymous lodgepole forest.

Summer travel off-human trails leaves us two options: bushwhack, or climb. The horsepackers who built Glacier trails could not take their stock too high or too steep, leaving the more acrobatic passages to the goats, who build good trails, and to hikers with only a modest fear of heights. Once this fact is accepted, along with the equally remarkably tendency of broken Glacier rock to make what looks hard from a distance quite tame in the hand, vast possibilities are opened. Late this past summer I noticed that the famous Dawson-Pitamakan trail leaves the southern high stretch, to Two Medicine Pass, unmarked. On the ground my wife and I found out why, as the arrow straight game trail which took us to and past Aurice Lake lost its visibility in twisted cliffs and steep scree over dirt. The route of the goats and elk existed on the ground,



and eventually we found the complex ledge traverses and scree descents, but doing so required more exacting examination. Back in friendlier, grassy terrain the trail picked back up, until some animal-unapproved sidehilling and steep talus had us back on human trail. It was one of the shorter and slower backpacks of the year, but because we went in without a trail to follow and (intentionally) without collecting any beta from friends who might have given us details, it was the most satisfying trip of the summer.

The best trips are where problem solving leaves a good, unknown route to discover. This is harder to do when bushwhacking in Glacier, as the brush can be horrid and as mentioned the animals know it. My second trip to Alaska, this past summer in the Wrangells, brought this home. No one had done the route, and we learned why rather quickly as even the well developed bear trail along the Bremner River was a jungle-strung up and down nightmare of creeping horizontal alder and Devil's Club big as a coffee table. Even to the big Bremner grizzlies, the foliage was an enemy too vast and insidious to conquer. They shrugged, slunk along, and did their best. These kinds of trips can be satisfying, but the inherent abuse factor lacks the elegance of more coherent and accessible non-human routes.

The final way to cast off the shackles of of switchback logic is to float, and in doing so follow a route so organic that it is beyond even the animals. Packrafting is the ticket here, with the 5-6 pound boats allowing

*RIGHT: Autumn camp along the North Fork of the Flathead River, scene of the bear encounter detailed in the main text. Rivers provide for the most entrenched and enduring travel corridors of all, for animals of all types.*

for human-powered routes not beholden to road access. No land creature strictly follows a river for too many miles, but the necessities which a river provides bring almost all creatures to it every so often. The most inscrutable, and to Glacier most iconic, animal of all is the trout. Which spends its life doing nothing but following rivers back and forth, over and over. No doubt fly fishers are on occasion so desperate because after enough casting, floating, and wading they begin to know what they as puny humans do not know. Pique at the irascible nature of cutthroats is not only related to not catching them, but is an existential statement directed at the fishes obscure pedagogical practices. Packrafting is how you, the hiking animal, can be most like a trout. Up in the air, breathing and warm, but allowing comprehension of the landscape to unfold at a pace dictated by inhuman factors. Most floatable wilderness rivers in the lower 48 have a trail running parallel, which is usually at summer flows just as expedient. Expedient with respect to a given Euclidean vector, not necessarily with respect to more nuanced thought about the land. It was no accident that my dark bear encounter, also one of the highlights of the summer, took place along the big North Fork of the Flathead, in a place not far removed in miles from humans, but quite far removed by every other convention.

If wilderness travel is all about seeing, getting off human trails may be the easiest way to see better. ❖





# Hiking the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness

By David Cobb





The Anaconda Pintler Wilderness is an overlooked gem in the state of Montana. It doesn't have the notoriety of a Glacier National Park, or the iconic awe of "The Bob" (as in the Bob Marshall Wilderness), but it has the solitude and grandeur of some of the best wilderness the west has to offer. Lying in the vicinity of Butte, Montana, but closer to the copper-smelting town of Anaconda, this wilderness is part of the spine of the Rocky Mountains and also encompasses a 45-mile stretch of the Continental Divide Trail. Elevations vary greatly from a low of 5,100 feet, to a high at West Goat Peak near 10,800 feet.

On this, my third trip to the (158,656 acre) Anaconda Pintler Wilderness, I was there to photograph the landscape. (On my first visit I explored the northern boundary, and on my second I walked the entire span from north to south while through-hiking the Continental Divide Trail.) This time I had returned to explore the central segment and photograph the area's most spectacular section.

If you're interested in a long, continuous backpacking trip, I'd suggest you begin at the northeast corner of the wilderness by Storm Lake and hike up to the pass to follow the CDT (Continental Divide Trail) to the southwest corner of the wilderness. This area will give you

a roller coaster ride of a trail, as it constantly descends into valleys and ascends to rocky passes seemingly every mile. You'll be changing in elevation between 7,500 and 9,000 feet with regularity, so make sure your hiking legs are in shape. Also make sure you don't get caught in a thunderstorm on the expansive and exposed Goat Flat – I have, and it's a bit scary, since there is nowhere to shelter for a couple of miles. If you're interested in shorter loops while getting the most "bang for your buck" time-wise, head for the central section and start just south of the village of Moose Lake. This will get you to the high country in a hurry, and shorter and longer loops can be hiked from here. Trail loops can also be made with a southern approach, but you'll spend much more time in forested valleys than in the high country. Free wilderness permits are required for hiking into the backcountry and can be found at trailhead kiosks.

Like many areas of the west, the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness has been ravaged by the Pine Bark Beetle and by fire. Given that the area has experienced these environmental problems, it's surprising how well the trails are maintained. Noticing hatchet marks on the fallen bucked trees; my guess is that backcountry equestrians have given a hand with the trail maintenance.







Mosquitos can be fierce in July and will keep you in your tent most of the time, so August may be a better month with fewer bugs. This area can also look beautiful with a dusting of snow, so late September and early October will be cold and snowy and offer the changing colors of the larch—in addition to being mosquito free.

On my most recent trip I wanted to explore the central part of the wilderness. Starting at a trailhead in the northern section of wilderness, I hiked to the center passing the lovely Johnson Lake and over the divide at 9,250 foot Rainbow Pass to Rainbow Lake which is nestled 800 feet below the pass. My next journey began with a southern approach along Fishtrap Creek so I could camp and photograph Warren Lake and dramatic 10,463 foot Warren Peak. Jim Wolf, who almost single-handedly helped push through the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, named this area of the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness the “Crown Jewel” of the National Scenic Trail. Having through-hiked it from Canada to Mexico, I must concur. The two other times I visited this beautiful setting I arrived late and left early—barely enough time to appreciate its beauty. This time, I spent two days just hanging out and photographing. A few through-hikers ambled by while I camped, and I enjoyed the stories and updates from the trail.

The southwest corner of this wilderness is lower and has fewer loop possibilities. The divide trail pops above 8,500 feet a few times and leaves the woods now and again. The hiking is easier as the trail mainly follows the spine of the divide and stays close to 8,000 feet. Here side trails divert to an occasional lake, and the wilderness boundary keeps a myriad of logging roads at bay. As you head further south you finally leave the wilderness boundary and the trail heads south on its way to Mexico.

















## Getting there:

1) To the Storm Lake Trailhead take highway 1 west from the town of Anaconda, Montana and exit off of Forest Road 675. You may need 4WD for the last mile or two.

2) For a western approach to the central high peaks of the wilderness past Moses Lake, again take highway 1 west from the town of Anaconda, Montana to Highway 38 south, to Forest Road 5106 east to Trailhead 29 parking area.

3) For an eastern approach to the central high peaks of the wilderness, take Highway 15 near Butte, Montana south to Highway 43 west. Exit west on Forest Road 1203 near Fishtrap to Forest Road 1279 north and the trailhead parking area for trail 128 up Fishtrap Creek.

**Maps:** Anaconda Pintler Wilderness: Bitterroot Deerlodge Beaverhead National Forest 1983. A simple online Pdf can be found here: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fsm9\\_003162.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm9_003162.pdf)

**Guidebooks:** Continental Divide Trail guidebooks can be of use here. There is an older Hiking the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness book available and authored by Mort Arkava.

**Contact:** Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/bdnf/home> Phone: (406)-683-3900

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

**Direct link to this issue: <http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue5.html>**



*All images Copyright 2012 © David M.Cobb Photography.*



# Review: Western Mountaineering Ultralite 20 Degree Sleeping Bag



For many weight-conscious backpackers looking for a single sleeping bag to suit their needs throughout the year in many parts of the country, a 20 degree bag is often chosen for its blend of warmth while still remaining light enough to easily carry. Here in the Rockies, it might be a bit too warm in the summer, though you'll still see lows in the 20's at times at high elevation even in August. For Spring and Fall the rating is nearly spot-on perfect, and for colder temperatures you can always layer by wearing extra insulation within the bag to push the bag below its rating provided that conditions aren't too extreme. Of course, it can be nice to have the luxury of several bags to choose from depending on the situation, but for many of us the 20 degree bag makes for an excellent all-around choice. Western Mountaineering (WM) offers two 20 degree rated bags to fit this niche – The standard Ultralite and very similar but wider and more roomy Alpinlite bags. Founded in 1970, San Jose California based Western Mountaineering has been manufacturing high quality down sleeping bags and garments that frequently make the short list of any buyer interested in the warmest, lightest, and most packable down gear available. As you might expect with a product that competes among the best of the best in these categories, Western Mountaineering products often come at a price – In the \$400 range for the 20 degree Ultralite Sleeping Bag reviewed here. WM fans will tell you that few can compete with the package you'll receive, however, and in this review we'll take a look at the Ultralite and share our experiences after several years of extensive field use.



## Specifications & Construction

The Ultralite is a mummy-shaped bag available in the following lengths, with the corresponding weights as stated by the manufacturer.

5' 6": 1lb 12oz

6' 0" 1lb 13oz (1lb 13.6 Measured)

6' 6" 1lb 15oz

We tested the 6' 0" model of the bag, which came in at 29.6oz on our scale. Both the short and medium length share a 59" / 51" / 38" Shoulder / Hip / Foot girth measurement, with the long model gaining an inch in the shoulder and hip areas. You might notice that this bag is a tighter fit than many competitors – WM has elected to keep the fit like this both to minimize weight as well as keep the temperature rating of the bag low without having to add more down. If the bag were larger, more down would be required to maintain the same temperature rating due to the dead air space. Speaking of down, 850 plus fill power goose down is used for insulation. Fill weights start at 15oz for the short model, and go up 1 ounce each for the medium and long lengths. According to Western Mountaineering, this amounts to 5" of loft, accurate per our measurements. A down-filled hood and collar seal in the heat and continuous baffles (As opposed to sewn-through construction) help eliminate cold spots. The bag is part of WM's "Extremelight Series", which feature very lightweight shell materials with a DWR treatment. There's no color choice – The outside is a deep blue color with a black bottom and inner lining. The bag has a full-length zipper with a separate slider on the foot end to allow for ventilation as needed, and a down-filled draft tube inside protects the zipper area from wind and heat loss. The bag is offered in both right hand as well as left hand zip

**Pros:** Very light, very warm, packs small.

**Cons:** Zipper and hood could use improvement, fit may be tight for some, no women's specific model.

**Rating:** ★★★★★

models. All of this packs down into a 7" x 13" package. If you've looked around, you'll know that a 20 degree bag managing to stay under the 2lb mark is hard to find.

## Impressions & Field Use

If you're not buying from a brick and mortar store, the bag will be shipped uncompressed in a large box so there's no worry of compromised loft. The hand of the fabric is crisp yet soft to the touch, and the bag



seems to explode into space from the substantial amount of down fill. When new don't be surprised if the bag sheds a few feathers that sneak through the fabric with sharper quills. These can be carefully worked back into the bag if they haven't completely come through the fabric using an inch-worm technique if desired, but the great majority of the insulation is soft down that won't be able to exit the bag. The sewing and construction is second to none, and after handling the bag you get the idea that WM really cares about the products they produce.

The fit is on the slim side and as a 180lb side-sleeping tester who normally wears a men's size medium to large t-shirt, I felt the bag worked and was warm and comfortable, but there was little room left to layer for colder conditions. It seems that this weight range / size is about the upper limit for use of the Ultralite in comfort, and the bag is ideal for trimmer users. A lot of this comes down to personal preference of course – A larger bag



will give you more room to move and to layer, but will be heavier and dead air space within a bag isn't a formula for warmth. Another thing to consider is how you sleep. If you're lucky enough to be a back sleeper that rarely moves during the night, you'll probably be able to get away with a tighter fit and remain comfortable.

Western Mountaineering includes a standard nylon stuff sack, but we prefer to keep our critical sleeping gear in an ultralight dry sack for peace of mind. We found that we could get the bag into a 8L dry sack with a bit of effort, but moving up to a 13L size eliminated a bit of stuffing frustration and didn't compress the loft quite as much on the trail. Arriving in camp the bag quickly attains full loft after being unpacked with a bit of coaxing – A quick shake here and there will help move things along. The baffles are continuous – If needed, you can shake the bag side to side to move down from the bottom of the bag to the top as needed for a little temperature control. The down on the bottom of the bag has little insulation value once compressed by your weight.

Once inside, the bag drapes over your body comfortably and you can immediately feel the down start to work its magic and trap your body heat. If you get too hot, the full length zipper and separate foot box slider allow for plenty of ventilation options. WM has sewn in a stiffener along the zipper in an attempt to minimize zipper snags (More on that later), and the down-filled draft tube does a good job of preventing cold spots along the zipper during cold and / or windy weather. On the warmer nights, the bag works great as a quilt as well – Just unzip completely and use the foot box to keep the bag in place. Without the hood and draft collar engaged, and using an appropriately warm sleeping pad for the conditions, I



found the bag to be warm to around 40 degrees. Beyond that temperature, the down-filled draft collar, operated by an elastic cinch cord and cord lock, really helps to seal in the heat around your body and prevent the billows effect – Where moving around pushes all the warm air out of the bag, leaving a chilly sleeper behind. To reach the 20 degree rating, full deployment of the draft collar as well as the hood (Operated by a non-elastic cinch cord and cord lock) will be required. In this mode, you are completely sealed inside the bag save for just a small hole that allows you to breath. We've used the Ultralight in cool to cold conditions during dry as well as humid weather at both high and low elevations, and dressed in normal base layers without adding additional insulation, I found the 20 degree temperature rating to be accurate.



*ABOVE: DOWN-FILLED DRAFT COLLAR KEEPS HEAT SEALED IN LEFT: ULTRALIGHT IN 8L DRY SACK*

You may however, start to feel an occasional chill as the temperature drops to around the 25 degree mark, especially if you move a lot in your sleep. Wearing extra insulation inside the bag, such as a down or synthetic insulated jacket and pants, can help boost the comfort level considerably, especially if the tight fit of the Ultralite allows you to do so without compressing the insulation of the extra clothing or the bag itself. Jen, as a self-confessed cold sleeper, had similar experiences with the bag, but found a 5-10 degree difference in her case – Feeling chilly as temps dropped below 30. She also hopes that at some point, WM will offer a women's specific cut, as the Ultralite's fit, while quite workable in her case, seems to be optimized for a man's shape with broad shoulders and

narrower hips.

The DWR treatment held up well to condensation, dew, and light overspray into the shelter from heavy rain, and we never had an issue with the down insulation being compromised due to moisture, even in very humid environments. Western Mountaineering states that extra care should be taken due to the light weight fabric that's used for their Extremelight Series, but the bag has held up very well without special care. Our Ultralight however, was always used either inside a tent, shelter, or under the stars with a groundsheet. After spending a lot of time in the bag, dirt and oils from your skin will start to effect the loft and warmth, but a quick wash with a down-



specific soap and a tumble dry on very low heat with a couple tennis balls tossed into the dryer solved that issue. When not on the trail and in your pack, store the bag uncompressed in a dry place to maintain loft – Western Mountaineering includes a large cotton storage bag for this purpose.

We did have a few minor gripes about the bag. One is that when the hood is cinched down, the cinch cord has an annoying tendency to hang down right in your face unless specifically placed out of the way – The effect isn't too dissimilar to someone playing a practical joke on you with a feather while you sleep – I woke up wanting to

sneeze on a few occasions. Additionally, the velcro closure at the top of the zipper can at times scratch against your cheek when the bag is fully zipped and the hood is closed. Lastly, even with the sewn-in stiffener along the zipper, we still had issues with it snagging on the shell fabric unless care was exercised.

## Conclusion

Overall, it's hard to beat the quality of Western Mountaineering and they are frequently the yard stick that all other sleeping bags are measured against. The Ultralite doesn't disappoint, and though the price is steep, as a down-filled bag it should last you long into your hiking career with proper care. Depending on your build and sleeping style, it may be a tight fit for many and if you fall into that category, the wider Alpinlite, or Versalite 10 degree bags may be a good choice. At times we were annoyed with the zipper and hood design, and at this price point we'd like to see little things like that just work. Unfortunately no women's specific model is offered. In the end however, it's hard to complain when you're warm into the 20's with a bag weighing less than 2 pounds. ❖

Overall Very Good - ★★★★★

The Western Mountaineering Ultralite 20 Degree Sleeping Bag can be purchased at:

[Backcountry.com](https://www.backcountry.com)





# VIRGINIA: A HIKER'S PARADISE

By: Tim Frazier





**There's no denying that Virginia is home to some of the finest hiking America has to offer.** With roughly 544 miles of the Appalachian Trail, which is more than any other state; Virginia is easily first in my personal top 10 of states to hike.

Among Virginia's vast wilderness, two of the most spectacular, must-see hiking destinations include The Cascades and McAfee's Knob. On a national scale, McAfee's Knob is far more popular, whereas, The Cascades are usually only known to avid hikers of Virginia. Regardless, they are both spectacular in their own, unique way.

The Cascades, which are located in Pembroke Virginia, part of Giles County, feature an excellent 4 mile round trip, day hike. The entire hike is moderate in difficulty, but some steep terrain is expected and often the more rocky parts of the Lower Trail become muddied when wet. This usually isn't a problem. I personally feel that if you were to only hike one place in Virginia, The Cascades should be that place. I've been hiking throughout many different states, since I was around 11 years old, and I have yet to see anything more spectacular. The Cascades are filled with some of the most luscious, dense forestry, and lucid colors imaginable. I feel that I have somewhat shown this through my photographs, but I feel that nature's beauty can never be fully perceived unless experienced in person. The Cascades allow one to get, "lost in the moment," and simply enjoy Mother Nature for what she truly is.

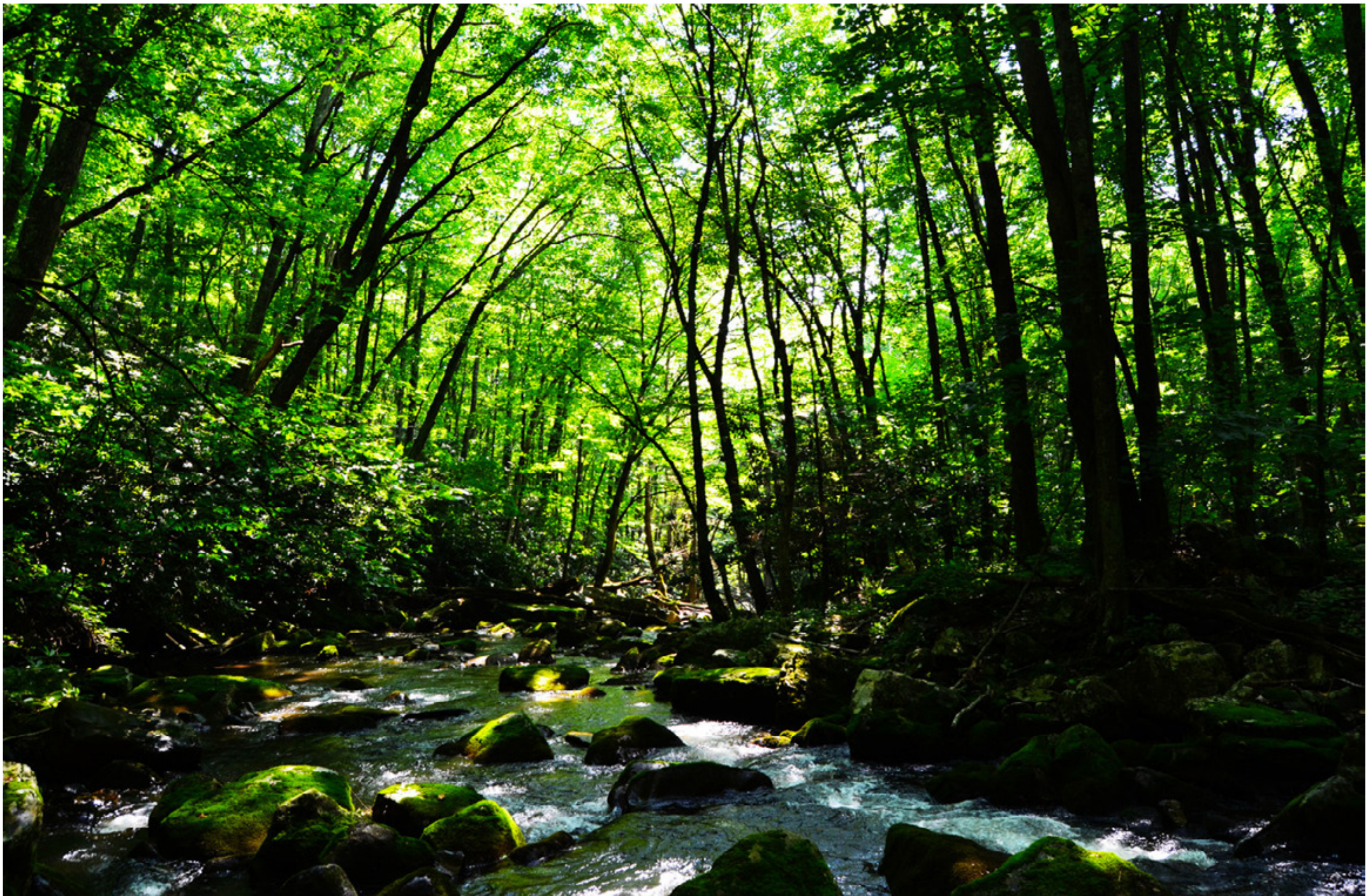
The Cascades consist of two different trails, the Lower Trail and the Upper Trail. The Lower Trail is a somewhat steep, rocky trail that closely follows Little Stony Creek. Often this trail passes clearings which allow one to walk out and explore the creek, which I highly recommend. There are 4 different bridges you will cross when on the Lower Trail. This is a good way to know how far you have gone, for there aren't many mileage markers. When you have reached the 4th bridge, you have about 1/4 of a mile left to the waterfall.











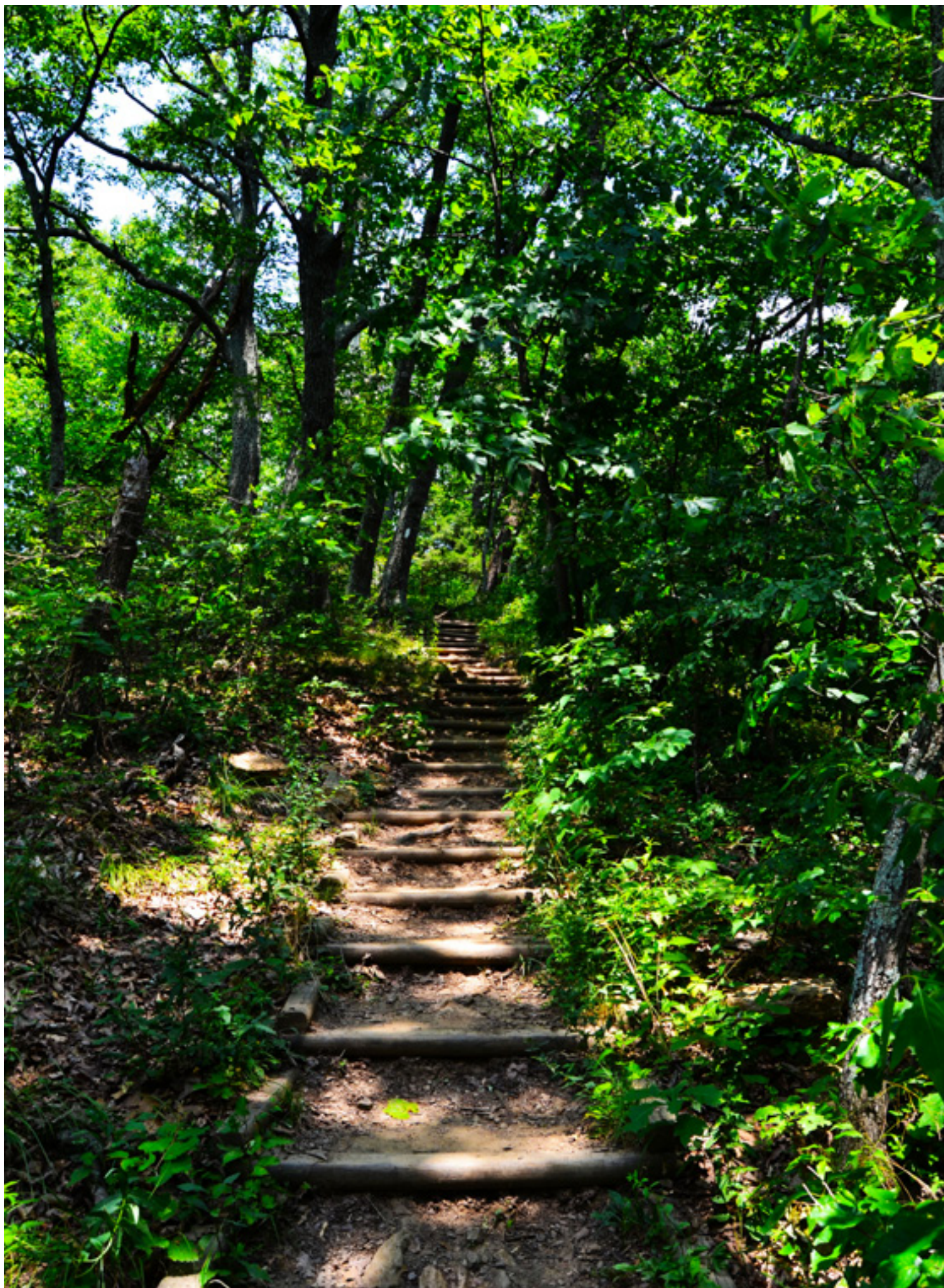












The hike to McAfee's Knob is strenuous – an 8.8 mile round trip. You'll climb about 1700 feet of elevation in the 4.4 miles it takes to reach the top. As strenuous as the hike may be, the reward of reaching the top and witnessing this beautiful overlook far exceeds any discomfort one might endure on the hike up. McAfee's Knob is by far one of the most spectacular overlooks Virginia has to offer, and the Appalachian Trail itself, for that matter. The Knob has a 270 degree view which overlooks the Catawba Valley and North Mountain to the West, Tinker Cliffs in the North, and Roanoke Valley in the East.

The McAfee's Knob Trail Head is located on the right side of the Appalachian Trail parking lot, across VA311, heading North. Trail markers are blazed white and appear frequently.

To return from McAfee's Knob to the VA311 parking lot, retrace your steps going south. For an easier hike back, feel free and take the un-blazed Old Fire Road, it's not as pretty, but it gets the job done. You'll cross the Old Fire Road roughly 1.4 miles prior to the Knob.

#### **Directions to the Cascades:**

Take exit 118 1-81 N on US-460. Make sure to bypass exits for Christiansburg and Blacksburg. After about 26.6 miles, make a right turn on Cascade Drive (SR-T623) in Pembroke (there is a gas station at the right turn). The entrance will be in 3.3 miles. Warning: There is a \$3 entry fee per vehicle (cash only). If unpaid, there is a \$75 ticket. The pay area is at the entrance and directions are on the bulletin board.

#### **Directions to McAfee's Knob:**

From 81 N take ramp onto I-581 N/US-220 N. Take exit 1S on the left and merge onto I-81 S towards Salem/Bristol. Take exit 141 for VA-419 towards VA-311 N/Salem/New Castle. Turn left onto VA-419 N/N Electric Road. Turn right onto VA-311 N. The parking lot will be on the left in 5.6 miles on VA-311 N/Catawba Valley Dr.

The McAfee's Knob Trail Head is located on the right side of the Appalachian Trail parking lot, across VA311, heading North. Trail markers are blazed white and appear frequently.



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

**Direct link to this issue: <http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue5.html>**





### **CREE LED Warm White Lantern**

Lighting up camp on those long winter nights, this LED lantern casts a warm yellow glow not unlike a traditional gas-powered solution. Up to 110 lumens with high, low, and flashing modes. 6oz with 3 lithium batteries. About \$25:

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



### **Kahtoola MICROspikes Traction System**

Wrap around your normal hiking footwear for extra traction on snow and ice. Less than a pound, about \$60:

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



### **Exped Air Pillow**

Inflates & Deflates fast with Exped's flat valve technology. A soft exterior fabric helps you fall asleep quickly. About 3 ounces & \$40:

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



### **Mountain House Breakfast Skillet Wrap**

Finally, a freeze-dried meal that really does taste great. Hash browns, eggs, sausage, and veggies provide a great meal anytime of the day with or without tortillas. 680 calories per package fuels long miles. 5.5oz including packaging. About \$7:

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

# GEAR MASH



### **Vargo Titanium Long Handled Spoon**

Reach into those freeze dried or freezer bag meals without getting your hands dirty. Half an ounce, about \$10-\$15:

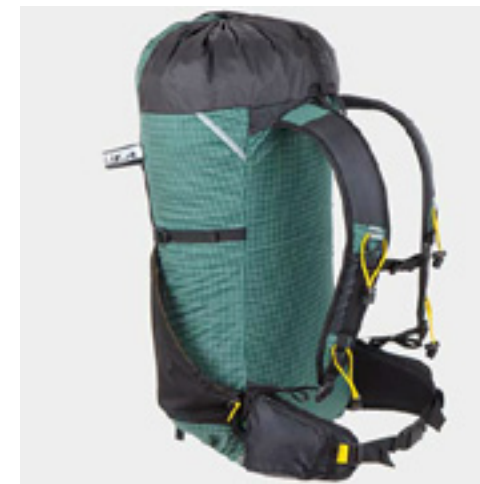
[Campsaver.com](http://Campsaver.com)



### **Western Mountaineering Flash Booties**

Ultralight, ultra warm. 3 ounces, \$50:

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



### **ULA CDT Pack**

Over 3000 cubic inches of storage. 5 exterior pockets. Bombproof Dyneema fabric. 21 ounces. Enough said. \$135:

[ULA-Equipment.com](http://ULA-Equipment.com)



### **Therm-a-Rest ZLite Sleeping Pad**

The ZLite pad the lightweight backpacking community has come to love taken to the next level. An aluminized coating boosts warmth by nearly 20%. The pad still folds up accordion style for easy packing. 10-14 ounces and about \$40 depending on length.

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



# Backcountry Photography

by David M. Cobb

Since long-distance hiking helped form so much of my photography, I thought it might be helpful to supply a few photo tips from the trail I picked up along the way. These tips won't need tripods or fantastic cameras; they'll be ideas to help improve your composition and light, and the overall impact of your photos from along the trail. I hope you enjoy some of the tidbits that come your way through this TrailGroove feature.

## TIP #2: THE LEADING LINE

Too often I see images that look 2D on the screen--creating a flat image that doesn't draw the viewer into the scene. Giving two-dimensional images a way to look more three-dimensional is a sure-fire way to create interest in your photography. The best and easiest method for adding depth is to include a leading line which leads the viewer into the scene to search out the photo. Trails are the first thing that comes to mind—creeks, rivers, or cliff lines are others. By anchoring the eye to the foreground and leading it into the background, you'll create a much more dynamic image than just another flat, boring mountain shot. Sometimes I angle the leading line from one corner of the frame to the opposite corner, or I look for "S" curves to snake through an image, or "C" curves which arc their way into the scene. Try this tip yourself, and start creating more dynamic images and garner more interest with a simple leading line.

*Page through for more examples of the leading line. All images Copyright 2012 © David M.Cobb Photography.*

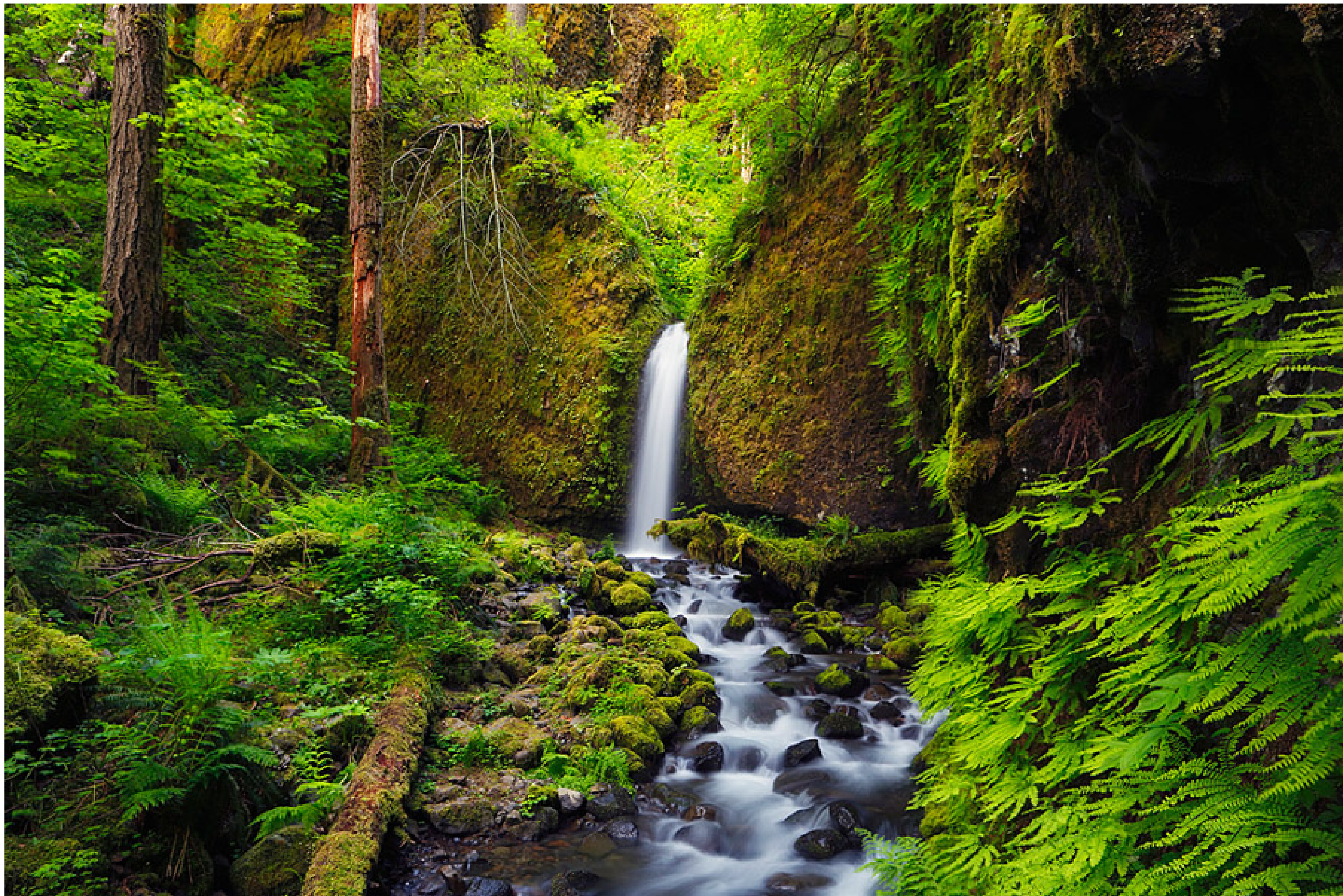
RIGHT: COLUMBIA RIVER  
NEXT PAGE: TRAIL CAMASSIA NATURAL AREA















*LEFT: GOAT ROCKS MT RAINIER  
PREVIOUS: WATERFALL COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE*

Check out our next issue for another great tip from David!

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



# An Ultra Light Kitchen - A Developing Passion

by Timothy Eisemann

If you are like me, you have spent many hours browsing the web and developing a precious obsession. One thing that is apparent when we begin building our knowledge of ultra light hiking and camping is that there is a lot of passion out there. It seems as if there is an endless quest for some ultimate goal or experience. Sometimes it's for the light and fast but mostly it's the light and easy. No matter which, gram counting is at its core.

Food is so fundamental to the experience of remote area camping. But often it is not appropriate to build a meal from base ingredients so many ingenious methods of pre-preparation have developed, from sealed commercial meals (both wet and dry), to home made dehydrated food.

Late one night while obsessing on the web, I came across a reference to the Backpacker Pantry Outback Oven (215 grams). I was intrigued as I am experienced in camp oven baking,

though that was always in 5kg cast steel. Nothing quite compares to a fresh bake in a wild place. It was such a novel UL idea. I had to buy one without knowing how to do the heat to complete the picture.

The basic need was for up to 1 hour of constant heat. Using a canister stove for this seemed a potentially dangerous affair (unless it was remote canister like a MSR Wisperlite) and it would also add unreasonably to my load. Ethanol and solid fuel stoves didn't seem likely contenders either. So I put it aside and waited, hoping to happen upon a solution.

Six months later, it appeared. The titanium Emberlit stove. This wood stove flat packs and weighs 195 grams. It has the facility to continuously feed small thumb sized branches to the fire base. I theorized that in Emberlit was the match made in heaven. The Firefly is a recent discovery - a similar though smaller unit weighing 72 grams (damn, how can I resist).

This month, reader Timothy Eisemann from Australia shares his backcountry baking solution as well as an intriguing carrot cake recipe

LEFT: TIM'S CAMP OVEN SYSTEM



It was some months before I finally got to test the system. A group of 6 walkers stealth base camped in Wilpena Pound, South Australia, to bag three 1000 meter peaks in a weekend. The first test was a carrot cake.

At home I prepared 2 cups of dehydrated grated carrot (40 grams) and pulled together a dry mix of SR flour, powdered whole eggs, full cream milk powder, sugar, walnuts and spices (250grams). I took along 100ml

of olive oil (olive oil is a super food and great to drizzle over rehydrated humus or ready to serve pasta).

In camp I rehydrated the carrot (4 hours before) and mixed it with the dry mix, water and olive oil. It is important to mix well to aerate the batter. I have a bamboo broad spatula (16 grams, Backpacker Pantry) that is great for this and doesn't scratch the non stick ceramic coating of my titanium pot.(Evernew DX 1.4 litre- 205g).



*LEFT & ABOVE: THE FINISHED CARROT CAKE!*

To bake, I simply left the batter in the mixing pot and carefully placed it in the oven. The thermometer has 2 zones – bake and burn. I quickly discovered (as expected) that a fine fire stoke was necessary.

For an hour I regularly adjusted the fuel feed and ensured the stove vents were clear of ash. Occasionally the flames would lick around the flame guard and scorch the oven cover though a hasty withdrawal of one of the fuel sticks would set things right.

The Evernew pot has folding handles that must be tucked in before it goes in the oven. These are plastic coated and really are heat resistant.

After one hour (and a couple of peeks) we did a handy wire test and it withdrew clean (a titanium sheppard's hook peg will do also). It was ready. Now for the test of the non stick coating and..... Wallah!!

The cake fell out on to the Frisbee (the ultimate multi- use UL camp companion) without much resistance. And it was perfect-well risen and fluffy. Also perfect was the expression of wide eyed wonder on the faces gathered around. The only thing missing was the icing. The word is.... 'if you put it out there that pudding is on the menu, people will bring cream'. We are working on that one.



Two weeks later was the oven's next outing. This time it was a 4 day walk through the gorgeous Southern Flinders Ranges. We were a team of 4 - 2 boys aged 11 and 13 and the dads. The boys carried 7kg (5kg without water) and the big guys carried 15kg.

This time I had the ingredients for a chocolate self saucing pudding (450grams) and another carrot cake. One of the boys took up the role of fire monitor (who exercised much pyromaniac restraint). Both were cooked to near perfection. The pudding was 1.4 litres (full to the brim) of rich chocolaty comfort. We finished it at morning tea the next day.

It is surprising how little fuel the Emberlit uses to do the job. Essentially it is a twig and stick burner and these are all around.

With desert done the Emberlit was unleashed (an outburst of repressed pyromaniac energy) to shoot flames half a metre into the night air. In the morning little



remained but a small pile of grey powder to disperse, with not so much as a scorch mark on the earth. Leave no trace.

### LESSONS LEARNT

- I plan to get a wider aluminium heavy foil to guard against flames absolutely. The oven cover is looking pretty scorched and needs de-sooting at trips end.
- Portions need not be so large. Half would be sufficient (especially if a tub of King Island cream appeared). A rule of thumb might be 50 grams of dry mix per person. You will need a pot size to suit.
- On the menu to come is damper and bread.
- The weight imposition is really not so onerous when one considers the wonderful facility it brings. Fresh baked farinaceous delights far from the maddening crowd. It does not get much better. ❖

*LEFT: MT KARAWARRA, WILPENA POUND, SOUTH AUSTRALIA*

*RIGHT: THE NARROWS, WILPENA POUND, SOUTH AUSTRALIA*







# The Drive Home: The Extra Mile



**Recently Jen and I experienced what might be considered a bit of a life change – The birth of our first child, Weston.** We've always been a bit on the free-spirited side, picking up to go on last minute trips at a moment's notice. If we couldn't decide exactly where to head out for our next backpacking destination, we might throw a dart at a map with our eyes closed and head for the nearest swath of green that signaled a National Forest or Park. Sometimes the dart would even land in another country, but we'd just laugh before looking at each other with a bit of concern and asking the other if they'd seen our passport lately. Of course we knew things would change, we just weren't exactly sure in what way or just how much. We fit in as many hiking and backpacking trips before he was born in July...Just in case things took a while to get back up to speed. By early September we were out day hiking all together around the Wind River Range. The day hikes went well, so around mid-September and with a favorable weather forecast we decided to give our first overnighter a shot. We'd be starting midday on a Friday, and our target was a lake within the Winds rumored to hold golden trout. This was a lake we'd almost made it to on a trip 2 years prior, but we ran out of time and weren't able to take a side trip. We could potentially push to the lake and make it there by nightfall on this try, but we'd then have to turn around and hike right back out the next day. So we chose to stretch the trip to 2 nights in favor of a slower pace – After all we had no idea how much, or even if our pace would be slowed with the added weight of carrying a baby and all the extra care that would be needed along the way. So far during our day hiking test runs he'd fallen straight to sleep while being carried anyway, so while I knew

it would be extra work, it didn't seem like too big of a deal to me. Jen wasn't quite so sure.

We decided to pack as we normally would so far as distributing the weight between us, and then planned to switch off carrying the 15lbs of Weston and carrier as we went along. Safety was at the forefront of our minds, but I'm also a golden trout junkie and have to admit that thoughts of landing a golden in a remote corner of the Winds were also at hand. Let's just say that eventually, we made it the trailhead. Now, once we made it there Weston didn't seem too particularly happy about the situation (To say the least!) and we began to question if 2 nights, let alone leaving the car at all was even a good idea. At that point turning around seemed like a decent option but was one that I knew we would regret. I just said "Well, we're packed for 2 nights. Let's hit the trail and take it minute by minute. If it gets too be too much, we can turn around. If it's great, we're packed for two nights". We shouldered our packs, locked the car, and as the first day of our planned route was the uphill portion, I took Weston in the carrier against my chest. Since my hands were full, Jen took over leash duty with respect to our canine companion, Layla. The sun beat down in the afternoon heat, but there was still a bit of chill to the air like there always is at that high of an altitude. The trailhead parking lot was already miles from civilization, and then we left the parking lot behind as we passed the register and quickly crossed the wilderness boundary.

We made our way upwards through a rocky switch-backed trail through a pine forest, up and up until we eventually broke out into an open meadow with an amazing view of the



East Fork Valley in the distance. There didn't seem like there could ever be a better place for a break, so we walked off the trail a few dozen yards and gazed at the peaks in the distance. We rested for a bit, and pretty soon we could hear voices coming our way from the direction of the trail. Two gentlemen broke out of the forest single file, having a rather loud discussion regarding correct camera shutter and aperture settings. Even though they were right beside us, the conversation was apparently so intense that they failed to notice us, even as I began to raise my hand to wave a hello. They continued their conversation and trekked past us. As they passed we noticed something quite large attached to the pack of the 2nd hiker, and Jen and I both looked at each other with that "Is that what I think it is?" look, then we both quickly



nodded our heads as we looked back and confirmed that it indeed appeared so. The trailing hiker had what appeared to be a floppy household twin size bed mattress, folded in half and securely strapped to the back of his pack with a network of straps and



ropes. He seemed completely unencumbered by the load. Heavy I'm sure, but he definitely had us beat in the camp comfort department. With our late start, the afternoon was slowly moving towards evening at this point, so we broke out the map and picked a lake a few miles away that seemed like a nice stopping point. We resumed our hike and I took off my hat, using it as a shield for Weston against the afternoon sun. A Northern Harrier<sup>1</sup> passed in front of us, flying in a patented seesaw motion as it hunted for voles low over the expanse of meadow that lined the trail.

A few thousand steps later we arrived at the lake, and after a bit of scouting we located a nice flat spot set back from the shoreline in the surrounding pine forest. Normally at this point, we'd begin to divide duties – I might setup the shelter and then head off the filter water while Jen started on dinner, for instance. This time however, we had other responsibilities to attend to. I handed Weston over to Jen and setup the shelter, then headed down to the lake shore with Layla to filter water.

The lake was a dead calm, only broken by the occasional rise of a brook trout seeking its evening meal. The sun had just dipped below the hills, and the surface of the lake began to turn pink and purple with the colors of sunset. I thought about taking out the fly rod – Rising fish and the potential for some dry fly action are hard to pass up as a fly fisherman – But it had already begun to get dim and dinner was still to be made.

<sup>1</sup>: A Northern Harrier is a large hawk that prefers open grasslands and marshes. Unique among the diurnal raptors of North America, the Northern Harrier has an owl-like face and hunts by flying low and slow over the ground using sight as well as sound to ambush prey.



Only once did I faintly hear what might have been a baby crying in the distance. I made my way back to camp, my hands hurting from the weight of the now full hydration reservoirs with their thin handles. Jen of course still had her hands full with Weston, but she had at least somehow managed to extract our sleeping pads and sleeping bags from their stuff sacks. We left our down bags to loft and I grabbed our food bag and cooking gear. We found an area away from where we'd sleep with a few fallen logs serving as ready-made seats, and I fired up the alcohol stove. I made us an interesting Mexican bean burrito concoction (Interesting, but not necessarily good – I think Layla liked it best) and then hung our food bag. We returned to our shelter by way of headlamp as the colors of sunset had long since faded and been



replaced by stars shimmering overhead. We jumped in and inflated our sleeping pads, then tried to figure out a sleeping arrangement in a two person tent for 2 people, a baby, and a dog. Eventually, we managed to squeeze everyone in and had our first chance to sit and do nothing for just a moment, and we wondered how well the night would go.

We didn't quite get as much sleep as normal, but overall things went well and who gets a great night's sleep the first night out on a backpacking trip anyway? Everyone stayed warm – Especially Layla and Weston who were each on a pile of foam sleeping pads, then tucked into down parkas made into makeshift sleeping bags. The next morning Jen and I sat in the sun with coffee and tea, and all was well in the wilderness. I disassembled camp and once again took Weston...Golden trout lakes are almost always a bit remote and nearly always high up, so at least the first part of the second day would be a continued uphill climb. Weston began to become upset at leaving camp, but Jen just said "Better start walking!" so we left camp and filed in along the trail. Weston is nearly always happy to be on the move, so we settled into a comfortable routine and at least one of us got to take a nap as the morning sun warmed us on the trail.

With all systems go the trout fever began to take hold of my mind, and I had visions of rounding a bend along a nearly forgotten trail a few miles ahead, moving pine branches out of

*2: The Pika can often be seen and heard in high altitude, rocky North American environments. Though rodent-sized, the Pika is actually in the same family as rabbits and hares - One quick look at their ears can confirm this fact. Pikas relentlessly gather grasses and vegetation in warm months, dry their feast in the sun, then store their dried cache in their den to survive the winter months.*

my way to reveal a hidden lake set amongst thousand foot granite cliffs on either side. Of course 20" golden trout would be patrolling along that part of most alpine lakes where the shallow flats along the edge of the lake suddenly drop off into the depths and into mystery. Pikas<sup>2</sup> would scurry and whistle amongst the rocks as...

Then I realized I had better keep my eyes on the roots and rocks studding the trail and think about golden trout lakes later – I had to be a bit more careful than normal considering what I was carrying this trip. The day warmed up and became quite pleasant, and soon we came to a signed junction. The trail we'd been following led to the right, another trail to the left. Faintly and straight ahead lay our route up to the lake, the faintest of trails leading the way. We continued on straight ahead and navigated a shallow river crossing, then began to follow steep, rocky switchbacks higher and higher past 10,500 feet. The air cooled a bit and the wind became stronger. Eventually we made it to the lake, or so I thought. "Wow" I said. "We just hiked 7 miles in about 2 hours, not too bad!" Normally we average 2-3 mph with a pack at altitude including breaks. I'd been so preoccupied navigating the trail carefully to ensure I didn't fall with Weston in tow that I hadn't had a chance to look at the map and track our progress as often as I normally might. Our plan was to make it to the lake around midday, and spend an hour or two exploring, before returning back the way we came and finding another suitable camp for the night. The next day would be a quick hike out back to the car. So far, we were right on track.

The lake was beautiful, set on a shelf cut into the rising terrain with peaks

towering above. The water was blue from a cloudless sky, but the wind had really picked up, and casting a fly line would be a challenge. The faint trail we'd been following seemed to continue on past the lake for some reason, but on the opposite shoreline a nice grassy point extended into the water, and there were trees and boulders where Jen and Weston could shelter from the wind. I knew Layla would be right at my side as I fished, ready to investigate any potential catch.

Jen relaxed in the sun as I assembled my fishing gear and ventured off to the shoreline. I fished for two hours, fighting the wind, but was still able to cast a line in between gusts. I tried everything. I saw no signs of fish, so I started fishing a heavy fly underwater with a slow retrieve. Nothing. I switched to a larger fly, fishing even deeper. I tried the surface with a couple dry flies cast out into the middle of the lake just in case there were any fish cruising near the surface. Large flies, small flies, fast

retrieve, slow retrieve. Beneath the surface or not it didn't seem to matter. But it was hard to be frustrated in such a lovely place. Still I thought it was puzzling that I didn't even see signs of any fish at all. I chalked it up to an off day though, golden trout are notorious for their ability to seemingly disappear into the depths of a lake one day, then be in the shallows and hungry the next. It's usually either on or off with goldens. I must have just hit the lake on the wrong day. Layla and I walked back to the boulder Jen and Weston were hiding behind, and snacked on cashews and beef jerky for lunch. Jen asked if I wanted to stay and fish longer, but it didn't seem likely that fishing longer would help anything, and we both wanted to get dinner going before it got dark, unlike last night.

So far the entire hike had been uphill, but this was our turn around point. Jen now took an occasionally angry but mostly content Weston, and I took over the food bag and leash duty for our downhill return.







We didn't know where we'd camp, but we actually ended up at the same lake we'd been at the night before, just in a much better spot. Due to our early departure from the lake, we were eating dinner before sunset and for the first time in the trip I think Jen and I both began to really relax – After all, this was our first day of the trip where we'd both wake up as well as sleep in the wilderness.

That's when the screaming began. For 5 minutes we tried everything to console our new hiking partner, to no avail. Of course 5 minutes doesn't sound like a long time, but it could have lasted an hour for all we knew. We were in the middle of nowhere, but I hoped nobody else was camped at the lake that night. I gazed along the shoreline and saw no lights and we'd seen no one and previously heard no sounds of the human variety, but if there was anyone there hopefully they read my mind and heard my silent

apology. Eventually we normalized the situation a bit, but so much for the relaxing night. We piled into the tent and I found I had the short end of the stick – Everyone was comfortable but my sleeping pad was on the one steep section of our campsite. I'd be sliding around and fighting it all night. Around 3 AM I woke to the sounds of coyotes howling in the distance, and looked outside to see a million stars, an expanse unbroken by commercial aircraft or even the star-like but manmade satellite streaking through the view. Other than the coyotes it was dead quiet. It was cold. I stuck my head back in to find Weston sleeping soundly, but a concerned Jen up as well. Layla just sat our feet with an occasional sigh, wondering I'm sure when I'd stop sliding into to her with my feet from the slope I was on. Weston looked and felt toasty warm, but we opened a hand warmer and put it under his cocoon just for good measure.



The next day went as planned and I tried to find the ideal speed to minimize the jarring of washboard dirt roads on our drive out from the trailhead. Can I recommend backpacking with a baby? Not really. But I can't suggest against it either. Backpacking is already a lot of work in itself, and this of course adds an entirely new and different set of factors to contend with. But at the same time, if you're willing to deal with those factors, why not? It's better than not going at all. Two weeks later I saw the Wind River Range map on the bookshelf and for no particular reason, laid out the map to recount our trip. After all, we'd been so busy taking care of everything that needed attention while on the trip that we'd hardly looked at the map at all. I followed the network of dirt roads that we'd taken to the trailhead, and wondered about a few of the canyons and streams that we'd passed by but were far enough off of the trail to be just out of view. I followed the trail up to where we'd camped, then past the ford and to the golden trout lake where we'd fished. I looked to find the grassy point where we'd eaten lunch and fished, but it wasn't there. I immediately realized our error. I followed the trail backwards a mile and there was a lake with a grassy point, but it wasn't the right lake. In fact, it was reported that this lake held no fish whatsoever. In

our nonstop job of being parents we'd failed to look at the map and hadn't thought twice that we were at the wrong lake. I now knew why the faint trail seemed to keep going past the lake...Just a bit further...To the golden lake just a mile ahead.

I knew we wouldn't make it back to the lake this year. With Fall weather on the way the route would soon be snowed over at that elevation, and even if you made it to the lake it would soon be frozen over. We had devoted all that time to getting there and were only a mile away, but surprisingly I wasn't very disappointed. Part of the purpose of our trip was to make it the lake of course, but once we were out there it paled in comparison to making the trip simply work as a family unit for the first time and experiencing a couple days on the trail. That 3 AM wakeup call to the sights and sounds of the wilderness had made every part worthwhile, and we'll be back soon.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that even if we'd made it to the lake, there was that mountain pass just a mile further that I'd always wanted to climb to see what the view was like. Past that was the glacier that keeps staring at me from the map on my wall and calling my name... It dawned on me that there will always be another mile, and another trip, to go. ❖





“In wilderness I sense the miracle of life, and behind it our scientific accomplishments fade to trivia.”  
- Charles A. Lindbergh

















# Thanks for Reading Issue 5

Check out our next issue  
(available in early January) at:

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

Copyright © 2012 TrailGroove Magazine LLC

