

TrailGroove[®]

Issue 15



Contents

Issue 15

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Front and Back Cover Photos: Ted Ehrlich, Grand Canyon National Park

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- 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 **The Hudson Highlands**
by Mike Adamovic
- 35 **Big Bend National Park**
by Eric Moll
- 61 **By Land and by Sea: The West Coast Trail**
by Jim Grob
- 83 **Review: Salomon Quest 4D GTX Hiking Boot**
by Sean Sparbanie
- 95 **The Joy of Day Hiking**
by Paul Magnanti
- 109 **Surfing the Reef: Backpacking Capitol Reef National Park**
by Ted Ehrlich
- 131 **Gear Mash**
Gear That Caught Our Eye This Season
- 133 **Photo Tips from the Trail: Favorite Photography Phone Apps**
by David Cobb
- 139 **Backcountry Cuisine: Crispy Nut Crackers**
by Cinny Green
- 141 **The Drive Home: The Plan and the Hike**
by Aaron Zagrodnick

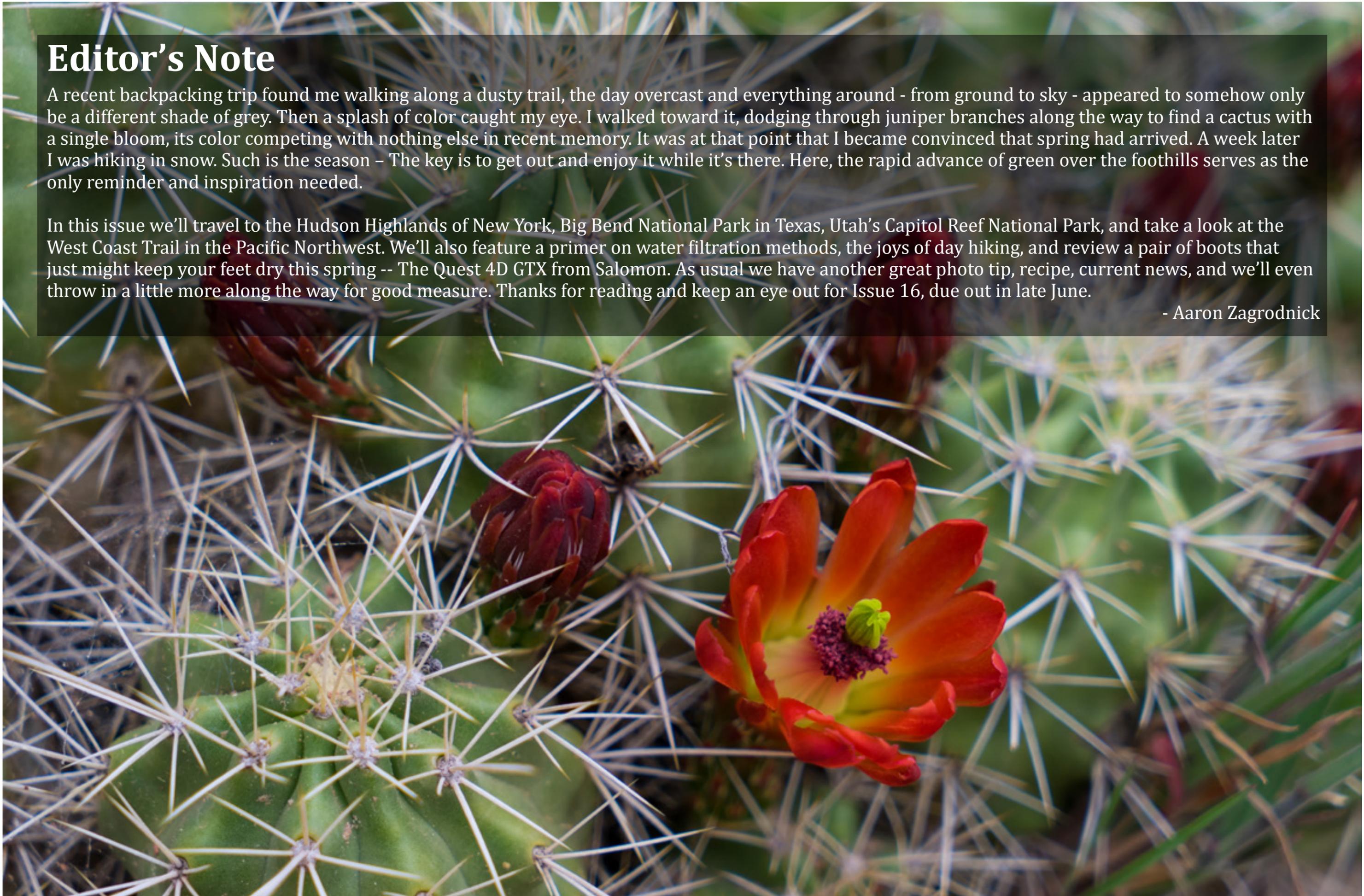
A special thank you to our contributors for this issue: Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Sean Sparbanie, Cinny Green, Mike Adamovic, Eric Moll, and Jim Grob.

Editor's Note

A recent backpacking trip found me walking along a dusty trail, the day overcast and everything around - from ground to sky - appeared to somehow only be a different shade of grey. Then a splash of color caught my eye. I walked toward it, dodging through juniper branches along the way to find a cactus with a single bloom, its color competing with nothing else in recent memory. It was at that point that I became convinced that spring had arrived. A week later I was hiking in snow. Such is the season - The key is to get out and enjoy it while it's there. Here, the rapid advance of green over the foothills serves as the only reminder and inspiration needed.

In this issue we'll travel to the Hudson Highlands of New York, Big Bend National Park in Texas, Utah's Capitol Reef National Park, and take a look at the West Coast Trail in the Pacific Northwest. We'll also feature a primer on water filtration methods, the joys of day hiking, and review a pair of boots that just might keep your feet dry this spring -- The Quest 4D GTX from Salomon. As usual we have another great photo tip, recipe, current news, and we'll even throw in a little more along the way for good measure. Thanks for reading and keep an eye out for Issue 16, due out in late June.

- Aaron Zagrodnick



Contribute



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

A few examples of what we're looking for:

Destinations
Gear Reviews (Objective)
Photography
Video
Skill & Technique

Art / Illustration
Short Stories
Interviews
Backcountry Cuisine
Your New Idea



TrailGroove Magazine Review Policy

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

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

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

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



Jargon: Rock Art: Petroglyphs & Pictographs

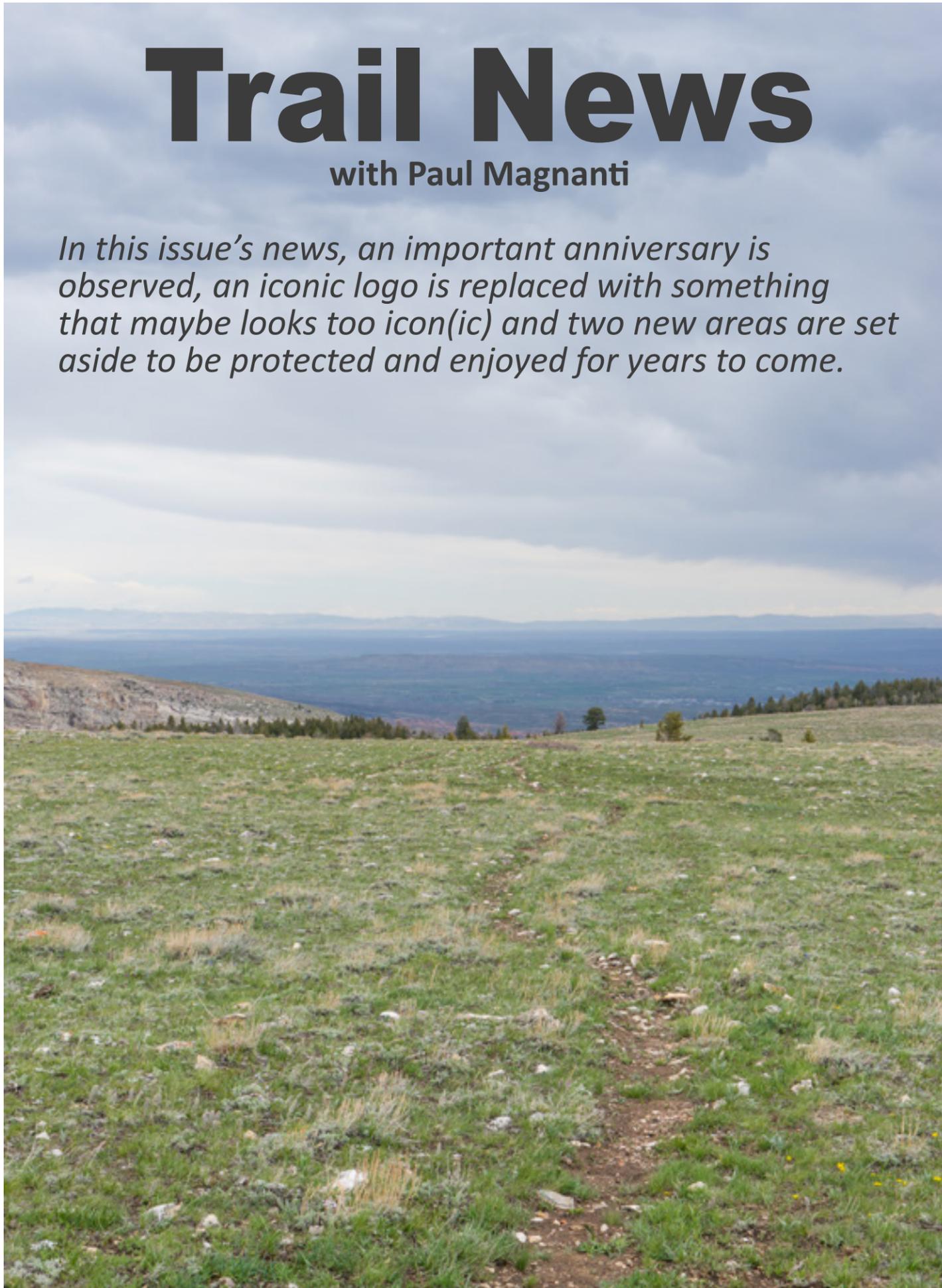
Petroglyph or Pictograph? If you can't remember, they both fall under the broader category of rock art – Images on rock created by humans long ago. Petro (Rock) Glyphs (Symbol) are carvings or pecked images engraved into the rock. Picto (Picture) Graphs (Record) are formed with the use of pigments and painted, drawn, or blown onto rock. Frequently these images will take the shape of human and human-like figures, game animals, and concentric shapes. Rock art sites can be hundreds to thousands of years old and many times, the exact meanings of these markings have been lost to time or remain in debate. Sites can be seen worldwide especially in places protected from erosion, so next time you're on a hike it might pay dividends to take a look at that protected rock face or side of a boulder just to see what might be there. Rock art sites are often vandalized however, so when you do find something take only pictures, and it's a good idea to keep those gps coordinates to yourself. 📍



Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

In this issue's news, an important anniversary is observed, an iconic logo is replaced with something that maybe looks too icon(ic) and two new areas are set aside to be protected and enjoyed for years to come.



Happy fiftieth birthday to the **Wilderness Act!** In 1964, Lyndon Johnson signed into creation the law that helps protect our wild lands. As the act succinctly and eloquently states: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Over 106 million acres of forest, deserts, mountains and other natural areas are protected by this act for us to visit. To quote another trekker, philosopher and wilderness advocate “In Wilderness is the preservation of the world”. Please see <http://www.wilderness50th.org/> for more information.

Appropriately enough, the first **wilderness area in five years has been designated.** Michigan’s Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore looks to be a scenic and pleasant area along Lake Michigan. Perhaps more importantly, this new designation illustrates fifty years later the relevancy of the Wilderness Act for protecting the wild lands for all to enjoy.

Proof that even the government is susceptible to “Creating new synergistic trends that will aggregate the bleeding edge in user experiences to assimilate the bucolic environment” (Please see the latest “Dilbert” comic for a translation), the iconic National Park Service logo has been re-designed for the new “Find Your Park” campaign. Rather than the familiar and long standing arrowhead logo, the new “hipper and edgier” logo will appeal to a broader range of people (it is claimed). Or perhaps it looks like an iPark app. Please see <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/new-logo-reintroduces-national-park-service-156475> for the various iteration of the NPS logo over the years. And note the 1960s version of logo that was also presumably hip and edgy at the time.

After much negotiation and compromise with Tejon Ranch, **thirty-eight miles of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) will be routed over the Tehachapi Mountains.** In the coming years, PCT hikers will be able to hike the route as envisioned originally in the 1930s. This re-route will avoid the Los Angeles aqueduct route that has long been infamous in long distance hiking lore.



TRAIL TIP 15:

Water Filtration and Purification

by Ted Ehrlich

As spring turns to summer, plans are being made for all sorts of trips. As you go through your checklist, make sure you are taking care of your water needs by bringing the proper water treatment for your trip.

Hazards & Purification / Filtration Overview:

The four main groups of hazards you will find are bacteria, protozoa (including cryptosporidium), viruses, and heavy metals or chemicals such as agricultural runoff. The main ways to treat your water source take the form of boiling, ultraviolet light, chemical treatment and / or filtration. Boiling, UV, and chemical treatments are all effective methods for treating water of biological contaminants, although prefiltration may be required in some cases. Filtration uses filters of different materials to strain the water of biological hazards, and is only as effective as its absolute pore size, which controls what is able to pass through the filter and what is strained out. Almost all filters on the market have a pore size small enough to filter out bacteria and protozoa, but viruses are normally too small to be filtered out effectively. Luckily in the United States, viruses are not usually a concern in the water supply. Carbon filters can work to reduce the amount of heavy metals / agricultural chemicals where present in a water source (Not normally a concern in wilderness areas) as well as improve taste, but need to be replaced regularly to remain effective.

What Is Best For You?

Boiling

Pros – no additional equipment necessary if you have a heat source and a pot, always works as long as you get the water to a visual boil.

Cons – Fuel intensive, Time consideration if you want cool water. Doesn't improve taste or remove particulates, heavy metals, or chemicals already in the water.



Chemical Treatment (e.g. MSR Aquatabs, Potable Aqua, Aquamira)

Pros – lightest option, no special equipment or maintenance, fail-proof as long as the chemicals are not expired, 30 minutes to neutralize most hazards, fairly inexpensive.

Cons – some add taste (especially iodine), iodine and sodium dichloroisocyanurate (MSR aquatabs) don't kill cryptosporidium, chlorine dioxide takes 4 hours to kill cryptosporidium, and all chemicals lose some of their effects in very cloudy/dirty water. Doesn't remove particulates, heavy metals, or chemicals already in the water.

UV Light Sterilization (e.g. Steripen, CamelBak All Clear)

Pros – Lightweight, neutralizes most hazards within 90 seconds.

Cons – Doesn't work in cloudy/dirty water, relies on batteries (always carry extras), more expensive than other options. Doesn't remove particulates, heavy metals, or chemicals already in the water. Unknown effectiveness against the largest of potentially harmful waterborne organisms (worms, parasites, etc.), although prefiltration eliminates this concern.

Filtration (e.g. Sawyer Squeeze, MSR Miniworks, Katadyn Hiker Pro)

Pros – Some models can be very inexpensive and/or lightweight, may help water taste better (especially filters utilizing carbon), will clean up cloudy/dirty water.

Cons – Viruses can still be a problem, some models can break if allowed to freeze with water in them, some models can break if dropped/mishandled, needs to be cleaned regularly to prevent clogging, filtration elements eventually need to be replaced, some models can also be expensive and/or heavy.

Additionally, there are three types of filters. Gravity fed filters use two containers, one with dirty water, and one with clean water, to filter the water through an element without pumping. Traditional pump style filters require you to move the water through the filter, and squeeze/suck filters require you to push or suck the water through the filter while you're drinking. All of these filters still function the same way of filtering the water through an element, so it comes down to preference and style for which filter will work best for you.

My system:

I have learned to prefer chemicals (chlorine dioxide and/or sodium dichloroisocyanurate) as they are fairly fast acting and very lightweight as long as my water sources are fairly clean. For trips where water sources are questionable (silty water, stagnant dirty water, livestock, etc.), I will bring a filter too, filtering my water first, then use a small amount of chemical or UV light to sterilize it completely. By using a dual treatment technique, there is a very low chance of waterborne illness being transmitted. No matter what method



I use choose for my trip, I always have a small amount of chemicals inside my first aid kit for emergency use in case my primary method fails. A filter will also be used in any main watershed rivers where treated wastewater or agricultural fertilizer may be present. As a last resort, drinking untreated water is almost always safer than dehydration, as most of the effects of waterborne illness are delayed, treatable, and non-life-threatening.



An advertisement for the Trail Designs Caldera Cone ultralight backpacking stove system. The background is a scenic mountain landscape with a yellow sun and a green mountain silhouette. In the foreground, a stainless steel Caldera Cone stove is shown with a red handle on its lid. To the right of the stove, the text reads: "Most Stable", "Most Windproof", "Most Efficient", "The Caldera® Cone ultralight backpacking stove system", and the Trail Designs logo with the website "www.traildesigns.com".



The Hudson Highlands

Location: Hudson Valley, Southern New York

By Mike Adamovic

In the mid-Hudson Valley, 40 miles north of the crowded and bustling city of New York lies the entrance to the dramatic Hudson Highlands. These peaks constitute a segment of the 480 million year old Appalachian Mountain chain that stretches from Alabama to Canada. They diagonally span the mighty Hudson River here, towering well above the low lying hills and wide plains that stretch across the

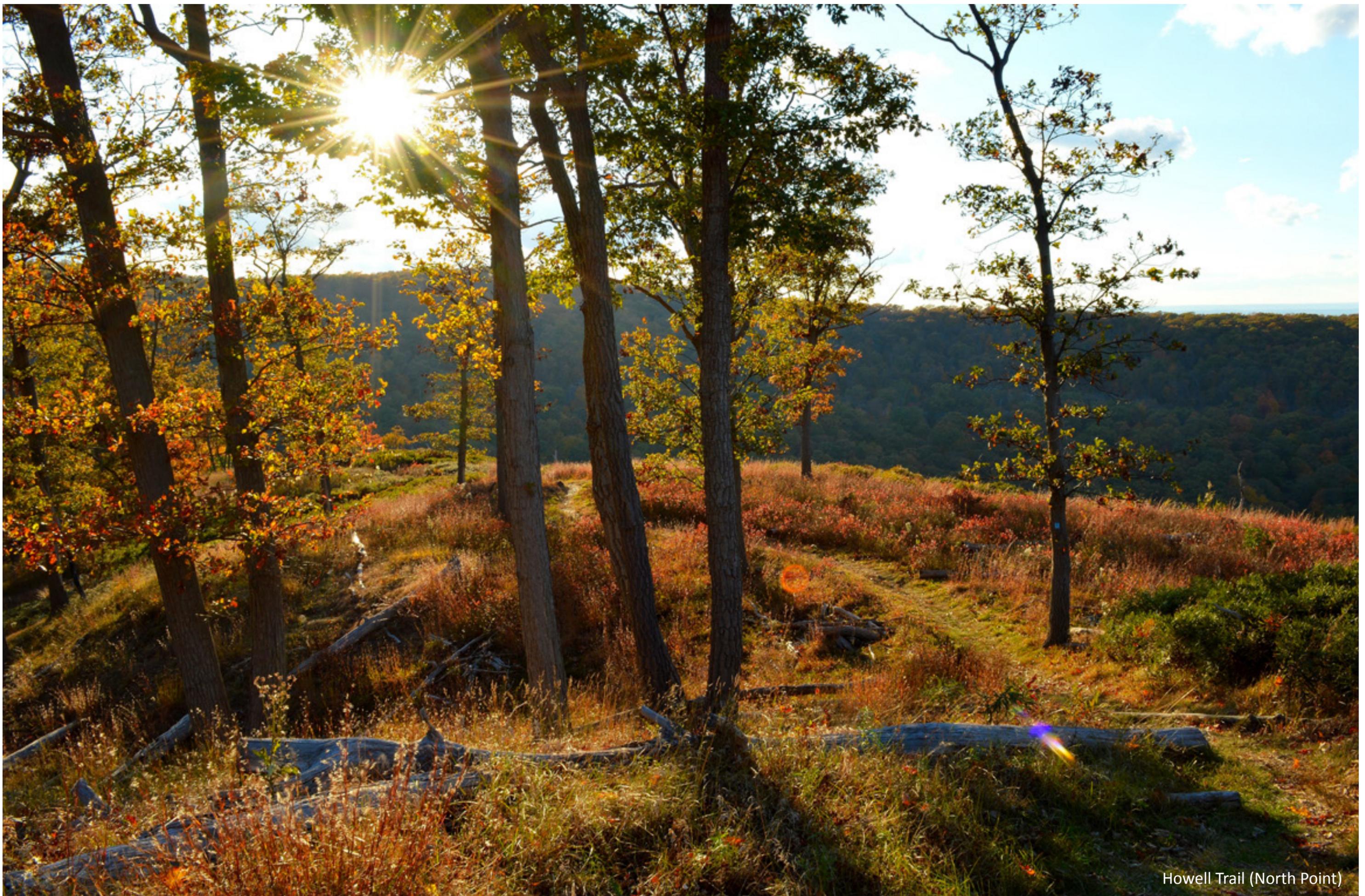
near-coastal landscape. Steeped in legend by notable American authors and romanticized in picturesque and sublime paintings by the Hudson River School, not to mention serving as a battleground for numerous confrontations during the American Revolution, the Highlands region is one of the most historic locales in New York State. Moreover, the views from the highly clustered peaks all have the lively

Hudson River in the background. The Hudson, a fjord in this location, like those of Norway, dazzles the eye with its serpentine course as it passes through a region denoted by cliffs that abruptly rise from the water with vertical ascension and shoot high enough into the sky to often be capped in clouds. In short, this is the place to be for a rugged and inspirational hike if in the vicinity of southern New York.

Near the northern entryway to the Highlands, at a spot christened by the Dutch colonial settlers as “Wey-Gat,” or Wind-Gate, can be found Storm King Mountain and North Point. These peaks in the more solitary western Highlands offer some of the most impressive scenery around. There’s easy access to the trailheads along the north-bound lane of Route 9W, the only major road that penetrates this particularly craggy area.

Previous Page: Western view from Storm King. **Below:** Rainbow after summer thunderstorm (North Point).





Howell Trail (North Point)

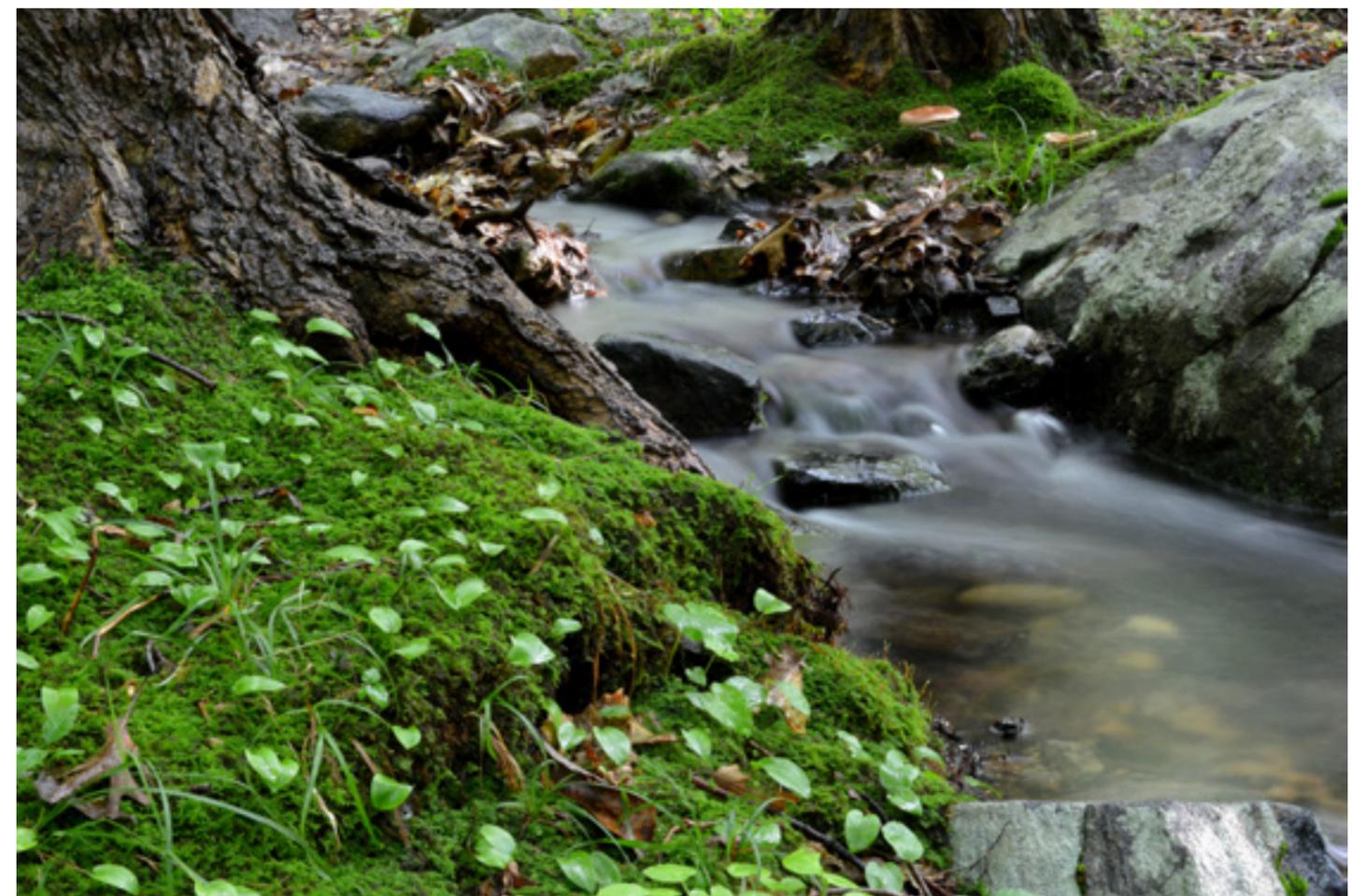


Northeastern view from North Point

Both mountains are located adjacent to one another, bounding the Hudson. They're only separated by a deep col, or narrow valley, with Storm King lying to the north. Due to the layout of the highway, it's best to visit North Point first and then drive to the Storm King parking lot, about half a mile farther down the road. Both trails can only be accessed via the north-bound lane. Also, on this portion of 9W there's no turn around point for miles.

The small parking area for the North Point Trail is approximately 2.5 miles north of the intersection of Route 293 and 9W in West Point. About ¼ mile after you begin to descend the large mountain (Crow's Nest) that you just drove up you'll find the parking area on the right, just large enough to fit 4-5 vehicles. It's not marked in any way so you'll have to be vigilant to not miss it.

Follow the white-blazed trail which immediately begins to slowly descend heading eastward. The forest at this point is composed mainly of oaks, hickories, maples, and birches, most of the trees being quite tall and well spread out. The understory is moderately thick and comprised of low-bush blueberry and huckleberry, both of which produce a copious crop in July and August. Due to the thin and rocky soil however, which poorly holds moisture, most of the berries tend to be undersized and endowed with a somewhat tart taste. In about a 1/3 of a mile the trail crosses a small stream. In the warmer/drier months, it may shrink into nothing more than a trickle. A set of stepping stones bridges it. At this spot it's nice to begin to explore the area and get a good taste of the unique nature of the Highlands.



Left: Autumnal pool (North Point). **Above:** North Point Stream.



After making the crossing, bushwhacking only a few hundred feet heading upstream will bring you to the border of a large boulder field that gets progressively denser the higher up the mountain you climb. Marking the northern boundary is an enormous glacial erratic with dimensions of 15x15 feet. This massive rock was transported to this location 10,000 years ago during the last ice age by a glacier several miles thick as it progressed on its slow migration to the sea. As it began to melt when the climate rapidly warmed, debris accrued from the tops of the highest peaks in the Northeast as the ice filed them down was released from the grip of the icy crevasses. The stones now solemnly stand where they were haphazardly dumped millennia ago.

Retracing your route and returning to the stream crossing, briefly follow the stream as it meanders to the northwest. The forest here is remarkably open and the short journey feels nothing like bushwhacking. The best time to visit here is in autumn when the leaves gain their ruddy hues and begin to accumulate in the slow moving or stationary water bodies that comprise this basin. Apart from the stream, the surrounding area is interspersed with ephemeral pools that generally fill with water in the spring and fall, but are bone dry in the peak of summer. The multi-hued leaves fall in such abundance they quickly overwhelm the pools and clog the tiny stream. The leafy amalgam whose colors are enhanced by water produce a vivid show.

Returning again to the crossing it's time to follow the trail once more. It rises in elevation slightly and then begins a slow descent. In about a quarter mile you'll come to an intersection, with the white-blazed trail you're currently on continuing downhill, and to your right, the blue-blazed Howell trail marked by a cairn that begins ascending a tall hill—North Point. Take the blue-blazed route.

The trail leading to the summit passes through a spacious meadow, one that entirely envelops all of North Point, a result of a forest fire in 1999. Along the way carbonized trunks immune to the forces of decay lie half-buried under the thick grasses. The meadow is greatly populated by plants such as little bluestem grass, low-bush blueberry, common reed—along with pungent arrays of the herbal sweet fern, whose aroma intermixed with various wildflowers perfumes the summit air with an earthen zestiness. Minor quantities of spreading dogbane, with their diminutive pink-white flowers creep among the shrubbery, inhabited by the brightly iridescent dogbane beetle and roaming butterflies. In the late summer white patches appear on the bald, flowers of the pearly everlastings.

Once you make it to the top of the hill vast panoramic views emerge, offering a clear 360° view of the surrounding mountains. Looking east, the Hudson can be seen far below, either flowing north or south, depending on the tide. Native Americans once called it Muhheakantuck, “the river that flows two ways.”

North Point receives its name from being the disjunct northern summit of Crow's Nest, a mountain memorialized in Joseph Rodman Drake's epic poem “The Culprit Fay.” Another famed writer, Washington Irving, also included the area in the short story, Dolph Heyliger. In it, the main character finds himself lost amid these same mountains after falling overboard on a sloop passage to Albany, a result of a violent storm clamoring through the Highlands. After swimming ashore and climbing to one of the highest peaks, finding no sign of human habitation within eye sight, he fortuitously stumbles across a roving hunting party. It is in the Highlands that he begins a journey that ultimately shapes his life. Many who visit the area, like Irving, become enamored with these mysterious mountains and feel compelled to document their experiences either in writing or photography. It's unforgettable in the strongest sense.

This past July while hiking North Point, I found myself in a similar situation with one of the frequent storms that quickly develop behind the western horizon during the height of summer. Starting my hike with clear skies only interrupted by the usual scattered clouds, I slowly began climbing to the summit. By the time I had reached the top the sky had darkened and a steady rain began to fall. A look to the west revealed a fierce lightning show rapidly approaching, marked by peals of thunder bursting every few seconds with angry echoes reverberating among the craggy peaks and hollows. The only source of protection around was a lone glacial erratic situated a short pace below the summit on the



Above: Glacial erratic (North Point).

eastern slope. A slight overhang afforded just enough room for me to take shelter from the wind-driven rain, and more importantly, ensure I wasn't a prime target for one of the multiple lightning bolts that struck their mark nearby. The heavy rains blanketed the region, obscuring all traces of the mountains across the river. While I waited for the thunderstorm to pass I collected handfuls of swollen blueberries from the bushes which crowded the rock-shelter, and remarked

how my current situation wasn't as dismal as it had previously appeared—it was actually somewhat enjoyable. About 10 or 15 minutes later the worst of the rain had subsided and the sun began to pierce the clouds at regular intervals, brightly illuminating the surroundings. While still under the protection of the rock-shelter I took the opportunity to pull my camera from my pack and snap a few photos of the stunning landscape, which was now beautifully draped with an overarching

rainbow and a strong golden light that intensely flooded the surroundings just as the rain had done minutes before. It was one of those rare scenes only encountered a handful of times during the course of one's life; one in which every heart beat leaves a lasting impression on your memory and you find that you're consciously aware and in tune to the transcendent properties of nature—to know what it means and feels to be alive, wholly removed from the dull and mundane, immersed instead in an ever-changing divine artwork.

From the summit of North Point, retrace your steps and begin descending the rise you just climbed, making your way back to the parking lot. Then follow 9W north for an additional ½ mile to the ample Storm King lot on the right (it's capable of holding 20 vehicles). Just beyond the northern end

of the pavement, where the steeply sloping mountain juts vertically alongside Route 9W there will be a trail marked by a triple orange blaze. Take the trail and begin a bit of a rock scramble up the mountain. The route is quite rocky and comprised mostly of unforgiving beige granite. Many of the small boulders and rock ledges harbor snakes, which love to slither out onto some of the south facing rock outcroppings and bask themselves in the sun during pleasant weather. Most species are harmless.

After weathering the first difficult climb, it levels off and the trail passes by several stone pillars and a crumbling foundation, the remnants of an early 1900's cottage. The forest here is rich in hickories and oaks of all varieties, many of which are dwarfed in some of the rockier areas due to a lack of soil and available moisture. The ground under the dense canopy farther away from



Above: Barge on the Hudson (North Point). **Left:** Eastern Milk Snake (Storm King).



the cliffs and precipitous slopes is thickly strewn with nuts in all stages of decay, some whole, and others shredded apart by wildlife, slowly moldering back to the earth to be born anew. The always-at-home red maple also makes an appearance in modest numbers, although far well below the oak-hickory population. Like North Point this area is spectacular to visit in the fall. The smaller maples are all alight like burning bushes, with a vibrancy seen nowhere else in the plant kingdom; the leaves of larger trees dropping down to the leaf-litter splatter the ground with crimson drops of blood—the earth here a battleground of the seasons.

About a ¼ mile further on from the cottage another trail junction will be reached. Go right and follow the yellow-blazed trail

uphill. As you continue to rise, views of the Hudson and surrounding mountains open again. Until reaching the 1,380 foot summit, most sights will be restricted to the south. A 10-15 minute walk will lead to the top.

The dome-like summit on the western half of this asymmetrical mountain is mostly devoid of trees, solid rock preventing their establishment. Vultures crowd the rocks here on some days, unbothered by a human presence, and remaining where they are until you can nearly touch them. Views of the south and east in the summer reveal the undulating landscape clad in a mossy green, the forests as thick and bushy as those soft layers enveloping the damp rock and earth of the understory.



Dogbane beetle (North Point)



Black vulture (Storm King)



Halloween Pennant (North Point)



North Point stream

To the west, mountain succeeds to mountain in an unbroken chain, without even the tiniest bit of human activity creeping in the background to diminish the wildness of it. And northward, you'll get a partial glimpse of the wide stretching Cornwall Bay behind the lower recesses of Storm King. Various other trails, which branch off at the top, lead to several more viewpoints that offer additional views of the bay and the Hudson flowing north into the distance past the hazy Catskills.

Though these mountains lack the height seen in the other sections of the country they still offer exceptional hiking. Altitude is only one aspect of a mountain, and what North Point and Storm King lack in height they more than make up for it elsewhere. No matter the amount of progress that takes place just to the north or south of the region, the rugged landscape here will always offer a retreat from the hectic outside world where one only has to simply turn round a bend to escape into the serene and mystifying confines of the Hudson Highlands.

Best Time to Go:

Anytime of the year except winter, at which time snow banks along the highway block access to North Point.

Getting There:

From the Bear Mountain Traffic Circle within Bear Mountain State Park, head north and take Route 9W. Follow the highway past the intersection of Route 293. From here it's only another 2.5 miles to the North Point parking lot, which will be on the right. The parking for Storm King will be an additional half a mile north beyond North Point, and will also be along the right-hand side of 9W.

Maps:

Maps for hiking in the Hudson Highlands are issued by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.



South facing ledge on Storm King

A large advertisement for REI. The background is a black and white photograph of a rocky, brush-covered hillside. The ad features several text boxes and logos. At the top left, a dark box contains the text: "FREE SHIPPING ON ORDERS OVER \$50.", "60-DAY NO HASSLE RETURNS.", and "KILLER DEALS." Below this is the "CAMPSAVER" logo. On the right side, there is a vertical column of logos for MSR, a blue circular logo, mont-bell, a white circular logo, Marmot, and GORLITE. In the center, a large orange box contains the text "SAVE BIG" in large white letters, with "ON SERIOUSLY GREAT OUTDOOR GEAR" in smaller white letters below it. Below this is a black and white photo of a person climbing a rope on a rock. At the bottom left is the REI logo, and at the bottom right is a white button with the text "SEE ALL SALE ITEMS" and a right-pointing arrow.



Big Bend National Park

Location: Southwest Texas

By Eric Moll

Located in the remote Southwest corner of Texas, Big Bend National Park provides numerous opportunities for hiking and backpacking. For those looking for a winter hike away from the cold and snow, Big Bend provides spectacular desert scenery in North America's largest desert, the Chihuahuas, including rugged mountains, expansive vistas, mighty canyons, the Rio Grande, and a variety of desert flora and fauna.

The classic backpacking trip in Big Bend National Park is the Outer Mountain Loop which is approximately 30 miles. While certainly a spectacular hike in its own right, a hike longer than 30 miles may be

desired considering the amount of travel necessary to reach Big Bend. The route described here is an approximate 80 mile route that incorporates the majority of the Outer Mountain Loop, but adds Mule Ears Peaks, Elephant Tusk, Mariscal Canyon and the Rio Grande with both on-trail and off-trail hiking. I spent five days in the park, a little more than four days backpacking.

This hike taught important techniques about hiking in this scenic but harsh environment. The weather was splendid for mid-December, no rain and temperatures with highs in lower 80s and lows not far below freezing.



THE ROUTE:

Chisos Basin

Laguna Meadow Trail (designated campsites near Laguna Meadow)

Blue Creek Trail to Homer Wilson Ranch

Dodson Trail* (water cache option)

Smoky Creek Trail

Off trail to Smoky Spring* (Smoky Spring)

Continue off trail over Jack's Pass (unofficial name, camped before pass)

Dominguez Spring Trail *(Dominguez Spring)

Off trail to where Talley Road heads southeast

Out and back to Rio Grande*(water from river)

Mariscal Canyon Rim Trail (camped near the Mariscal Canyon Overlook)

Off Trail to summit Mariscal Mountain from the west

Follow Mariscal ridge to Mariscal Mine

Off Trail to Black Gap Road

Elephant Tusk Trail*(springs along trail, camped near Elephant Tusk)

Dodson Trail* (Fresno Spring, water cache at Dodson/Juniper Junction)

Juniper Canyon Trail (big climb, potential water at Upper Juniper Camp)

Boot Spring Trail*(possible alternate to South Rim)

Pinnacles Trail (possible alternate to Emory Peak, highest point in Big Bend)

Chisos Basin

*Bold = Outer Mountain Loop; * = potential water source*

Below: Rio Grande from Santa Elena Canyon.





The Adventure

I woke from my slumbers as the sun filled the desert sky, looking around and discovering the immensity of Southwest Texas. No, this was not in Big Bend, but the side of U.S. Route 385 near Marathon. The initial plan was to begin hiking early this morning after driving from Dallas during the night, but more sleep was necessary than anticipated, meaning a short first day. Then a thought entered my mind. Why not spend an extra day in Big Bend? Explore some of the most popular attractions off my itinerary during a relaxing first day. One of the park's highlights is the 30-mile Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. As I drove, the immersion in such a remote national park was inspiring. At the end of the road, there is a short trail to Santa Elena Canyon, a must-see location in the park. The trail led to the Rio Grande, then ascended on the right side of the canyon. I looked up, wondering if the trail would take me to the rim of the 1500 foot canyon. Soon I was in the heart of the canyon and could go no further as the walls were vertical on each side. In the distance upstream, the sun enlightened this dramatic canyon.

After the short hike back to my vehicle, I lost track of time with so much to see. It was time to make a decision. Do another day hike (the famous Window Trail) or begin my backpacking adventure? The intention of journeying to Big Bend was to backpack after all, so the decision was quite simple. After a scenic drive to the Chisos Basin Ranger Station, I met a disgruntled ranger who was helpful

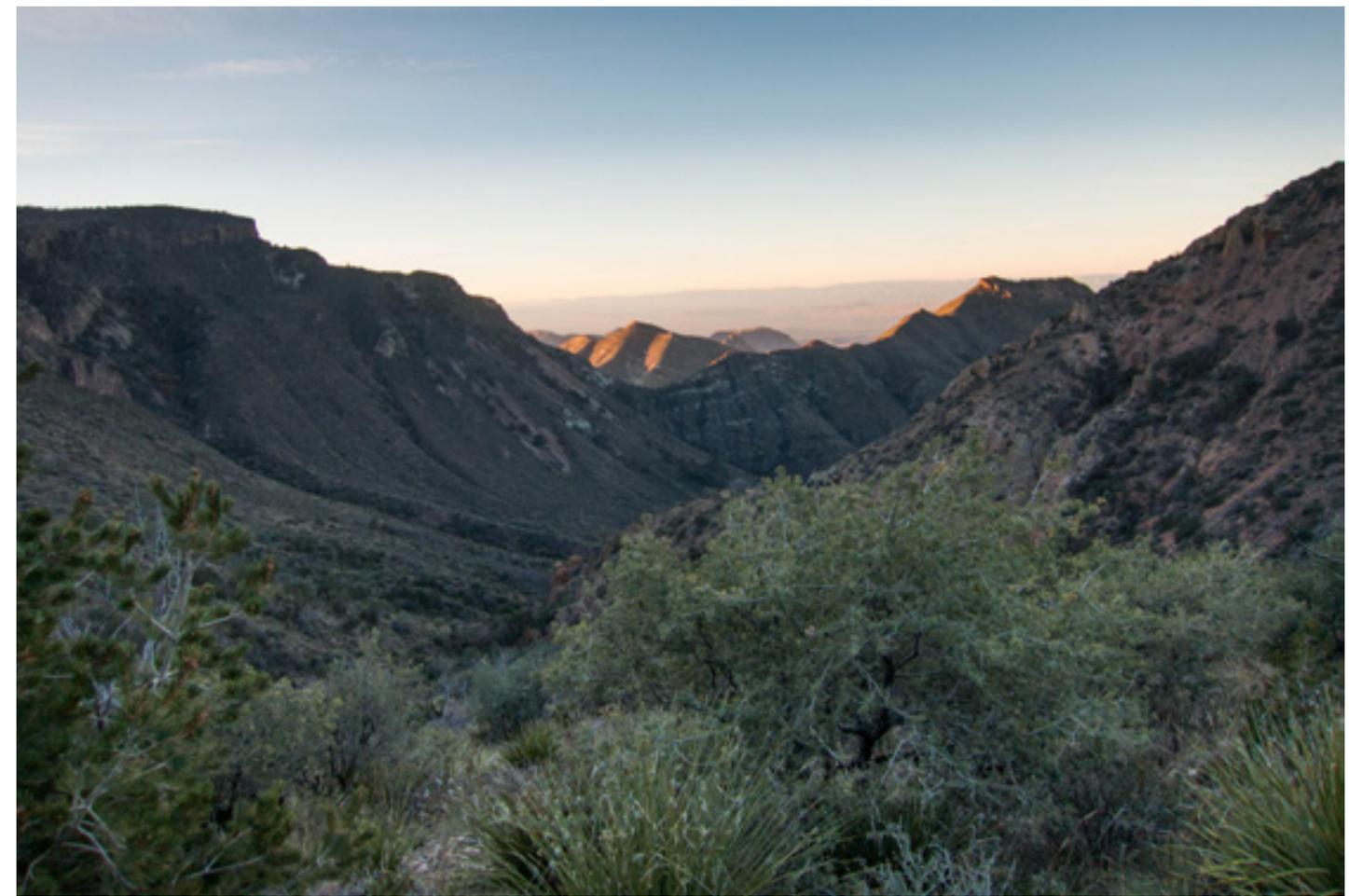
issuing my permit. Fortunately his anger was directed at his computer and not me, and soon I was experiencing the autonomy and independence that is rarely achieved outside the realm of backpacking. My climb out of the Chisos Basin began on the Laguna Meadow Trail with many forested and mountainous views along the way. Nearing the meadow, I looked to my right and saw a peak a short distance off-trail. Deciding to check it out, I was captivated by an impressive evening view back into the Basin! The mountains, including Casa Grande Peak, were a peaceful orange-purple with the moon also visible.

I arrived at my designated campsite, set up camp, and bundled up in my down jacket for warmth. It was soon dark and a chilly desert breeze numbed my fingers. Hearty burritos satiated my appetite before calling it a night. In the early morning, there was a rustling in the brush nearby. My heart began to race, thinking it might be a bear. I fumbled for my headlamp, turned it on, and let it shine through the mesh in the floor of my ZPacks Hexamid tent. Deer legs! There was no bear and I drifted back to sleep.

Beep-beep. Beep-beep. Beep-beep. Waking to the faint, high pitched alarm of my ultralight stopwatch, I groggily began packing my belongings. A layer of ice coated my sleeping bag; my Gatorade bottle was half frozen. Before departing, the rugged view of Emory Peak was enjoyed.

Left: Santa Elena Canyon. **Following Page:** Chisos Basin and Casa Grande Peak (center).





Clockwise from Top Left:

Campsite at Laguna Meadow with Emory Peak.

Morning view on Blue Creek Trail.

Cactus on Blue Creek Trail.

Unique rock formations on Blue Creek Trail.

Along the Blue Creek Trail, there were many unique desert flora including cacti, grasses, and trees. There was, however, no creek. I took a short break at the historical Homer Wilson Ranch, one of the largest early 20th century ranches. It's just an empty building now. Nearby was some free water in a bear locker.

Next, the Dodson Trail looped around an unnamed peak. Climbing up reminded me of one of the important lessons that can be learned while backpacking: don't forget to look back. Looking back provides the opportunity to experience the journey from a new perspective, one with deeper meaning, based off experience of past travels. Departing the Dodson brought me to the Smoky Creek Trail where I saw the first natural water source, some puddles resting in rocky depressions. There were areas that required a little scrambling, and the trail has been re-routed differently than my map. This caused confusion. Hiking in the opposite direction of my route was unintentional but did occur temporarily. After this realization, I turned around only to find myself at a steep pour-off. The question at this point was: backtrack on trail or traverse over a ridge that looked passable on my topo map? I went for the traverse. With each step, I was unsure whether loose rock would send me sliding over the steep edge, but I took my time carefully, while simultaneously enjoying one of the rarest views of Mule Ears Peaks. Soon I was on the other side and

descending to flat terrain in front of these uniquely eroded volcanic layered peaks. Being thirsty, but trying to conserve water, I scoured the area for Smoky Spring, but found no water. While hiking

to the unofficially named Jack's Pass, the sun set behind me. Deep inside the complex canyon system, it was soon dark. An eventful day was complete. Early the next morning I continued my eastward

climb to Jack's Pass. The climb wasn't too steep, but was the biggest of the day. There were great views of Dominguez Mountain at the top. The descent on the other side was significantly steeper



Right: Mule Ears Peaks from steep pouroff



Above: Homer Wilson Ranch. **Top Right:** Dominguez Spring. **Bottom Right:** Mariscal Mountain.



and took some time, one instance required taking off my pack and lowering it by hand. There were some nice yellow flowers on the way as well. Continuing the descent, the search for Dominguez Spring commenced. I found it by some ruins, slowly trickling down the rocks. At the main source there was a small pool to dunk my water bottles. After joining the Dominguez Spring Trail for a short distance my route directed me off trail to flat terrain to the east. Walking through this vastness of the desert was a new hiking experience, making me feel quite small. Journeying beside the Mariscal Mountain Range to the east, knowing that the next day I would be following the same spine in the opposite direction was thrilling. This southeasterly

hike continued until I met a road slightly north of the Mariscal Canyon Rim Trail. Planning to return to the trail, I stayed on the road until it met the Rio Grande River. While wading in the water I realized its importance to this desert habitat. After returning to the Mariscal Canyon Rim Trail, the trail ascended to the canyon overlook. Sunset was near and the mountains were colored gold with the sun's light. The sun had already set by the time I reached the canyon overlook, but the 1400 foot view remained impressive. My voice echoed off the canyon walls. There was a small spot to camp with views of the Rio Grande far below to the west and the immense canyon walls towering to the east.





In the early morning I found another overlook into Mariscal canyon that allowed me to see all the way to the river at the bottom. The colorful morning light lit up the mountains. I continued up the Mariscal Canyon Rim Trail as the sun began to rise above the mountains in Mexico. The trail soon brought me to a point where it turns south and does a half loop around Mariscal Mountain, the southernmost extension of the Rockies in the U.S. The climb to the mountain from here looked achievable so I began the off-trail climb. It didn't take long to reach the top of the mountain's spine. Looking to the northwest revealed the sweeping desert traversed yesterday. Following the level and narrow spine was fairly easy with unlimited 360 degree views! The final ascent to the summit involved a

fun scramble up some big boulders onto ledges. Continuing north, the difficulty of the traverse increased with many converging valleys dropping to the east and west. It was challenging to stay on the spine without having to descend into valleys. Overall, there were no serious dangers, only additional time and effort required.

Mariscal Mine, an early 1900s quicksilver (mercury) mine, is located at the north end of the mountain ridge. After a brief exploration of the historical buildings, I went off trail heading northwest toward the Black Gap Road and the Elephant Tusk Trail. Thirst was increasing, but conserving water was a priority due to unknown future water availability. As the golden evening light was illuminating

Left: Mariscal Canyon. **Below:** Mariscal Mine.





Elephant Tusk, I found some water flowing down a side stream. Getting this water was cause for celebration. I found a flat spot to place my polycro ground sheet and examined the area for any

creatures. A large grasshopper was hiding under a nearby rock. Elephant Tusk was directly in front of me, the summit some 2000 feet above, as I gazed into the star-filled Big Bend sky.

Shortly before sunrise, I began what was intended to be my final day. There was ample water along the trail. Unfortunately I quickly lost the trail, hiking in the wrong direction for some

time. Not sure of my location I pulled out my phone to pair it with my InReach SE as a makeshift GPS. Unfortunately the dead battery symbol appeared on my phone's screen. Grabbing my compass, I decided to simply hike north to the Dodson Trail. This resulted in journeys over and down many ridges and valleys. In one instance, a familiar structure of rocks piled together resulted in feelings of joy and relief, only to be diminished by the lack of future rock cairns. After much of the morning, I made it to the Fresno drainage and followed its intersection with the Dodson Trail. Along the way, thick brush obstructed my path, at times taller than my 6'3" frame. Fortunately the taller it was, the less likely it was to tear my body and pack apart.

Back on the Outer Mountain Loop, the Dodson Trail gave me a final view of Elephant Tusk, which seemed to be mocking me. The high-quality trail allowed me to immerse myself in the beauty of the South Rim while making up for lost time. Eventually the trail turned north and my route joined the Juniper Canyon Trail. Beginning gradually, it soon began to climb. The mountains felt unreachable, but soon the trail's steepness increased, bringing me into a calming juniper forest, quite the contrast

Left: Camping high above the Rio.
Previous Page: Elephant Tusk.
Next Page: Climbing through Juniper Canyon.
Pages 57-58: Evening view across Juniper Canyon.







from the flat desert floor from a few hours before. The trail continued to ascend, switchback after switchback ascending over 3000 feet. Sunset was near, yet the top was not in sight. Near the top, looking over Juniper Canyon in the evening light provided one of the best views of the entire adventure. With darkness approaching, I finally arrived at Boot Spring. The decision was made to

journey back to the Chisos Basin by way of headlamp. While on the Pinnacles Trail, lights glimmered far below. Meandering through meadows allowed for peaceful stargazing. Soon I was back at the visitor center, with long-lasting memories from this remote desert environment. Putting my pack in the back of my truck, a new adventure began: Home to the snowy land of Michigan.

Best time to go: between October and April to avoid extreme heat, mid to late spring for cactus flowers.

Getting there: Driving is the best option. Make sure to have ample gas for the very remote drive. There's even a border patrol checkpoint on the drive. There are several routes to the park depending on departure location. The closest airport is in Midland, TX.

Maps: Trails Illustrated 225

Information: Permits required for overnight camping. Camping is only allowed in designated sites in the Chisos Mountains. Zone camping is permitted elsewhere. \$20 entrance fee (week), \$10 for backcountry use. Depending on the season, water may be very scarce. Know your average water intake and don't underestimate the effect that a hot and dry desert can have on your thirst. As a solo hiker in this remote environment I carried a Delorme Inreach two-way satellite communicator in case of emergency.



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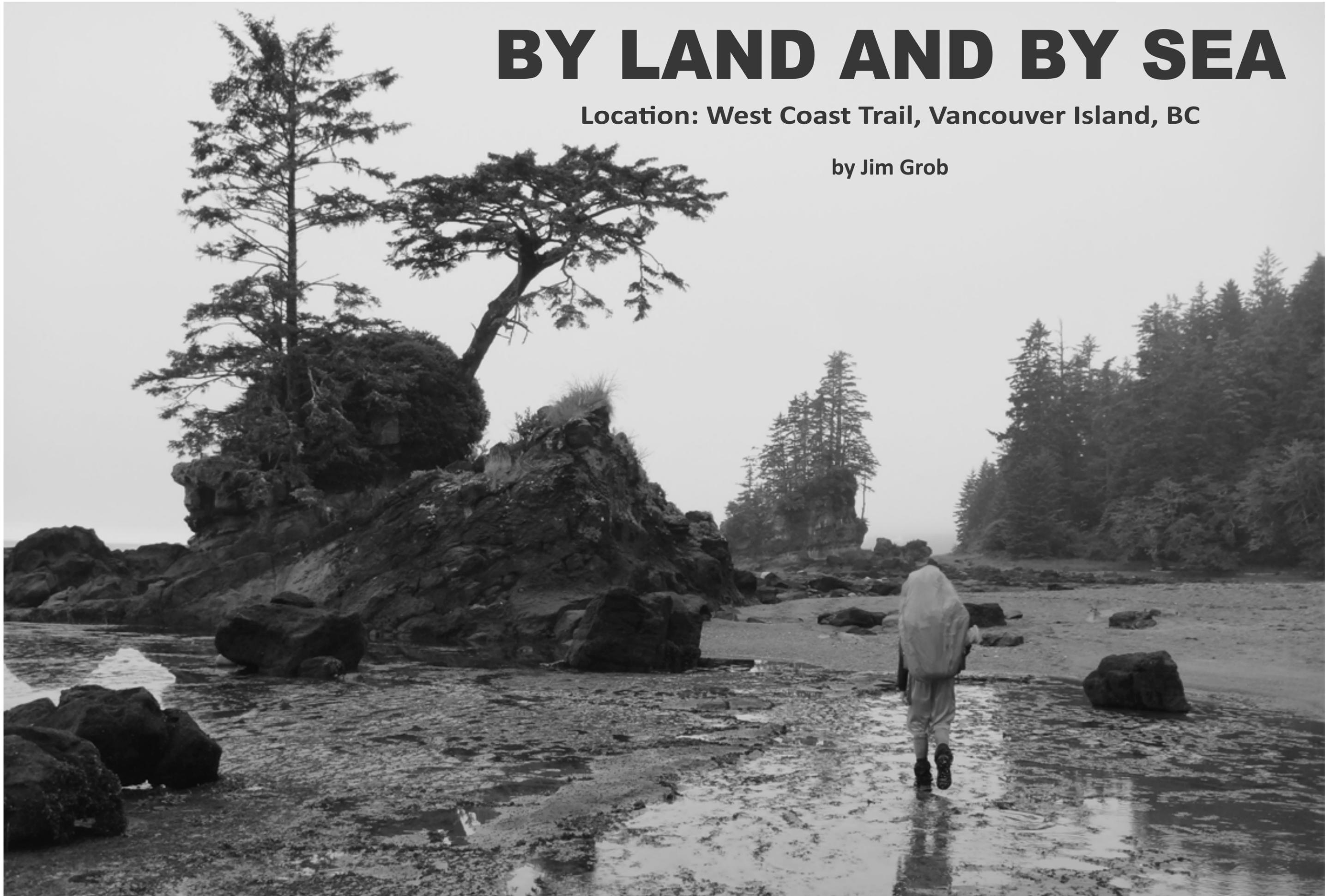


The TrailGroove Store: Gear Up Now →

BY LAND AND BY SEA

Location: West Coast Trail, Vancouver Island, BC

by Jim Grob



“Time and tide wait for no man.”

- Geoffrey Chaucer

As my son and I took the mandatory trail class by Parks Canada we were warned of many things that one might encounter. Along the shore there were the tides that can block beach routes and river crossings, fast changing surge channels that were responsible for the only death documented on the trail, and the remote possibility of a tsunami.

Along the West Coast trail, time and logistics turns more by a maritime clock, whether by tide or ferry. The trail itself owes its creation to the sea, initially created as a mariner rescue trail alongside the northern, lee shore to the entrance to the strait of Juan de Fuca, also known as the ship “graveyard of the Pacific”. Along the shore sections of the trail metal bits and pieces of these wrecks can still easily be seen.

The trail consists of the main overland trail, as well as many options to walk the shoreline that in total extends 75 km (47 miles) in length. To permit safe passage of the shoreline, Parks Canada attaches a tide table to their map. On the map proper, locations are listed showing the maximum tide height allowing safe passage, while other sections of shoreline are shown as off limits due to surge channels or cliffs.

By land, there were the usual suspect hazards, and many manmade. Already

that year someone had to be rescued from the trail after falling on a boardwalk and hitting his head on a nail. Others had been injured by crashing through rotten boardwalk planks. The trail while refurbished in the 80s has been slowly decaying in many sections, with not enough federal or user funds to do all the work needed. Nevertheless, the physical infrastructure of the trail is impressive; 38 ladder “sets”, five suspended cable cars across rivers, and 108 bridges. Hikers also pass two lighthouses.



The trip was planned as an adventure for my 16 year old son and myself. We had done many hikes through Scouting, and I had wanted to find a hike that we both would find challenging. The number of risks detailed in the class initially sounded a bit overblown. However, the speaker got our attention when we found out that the speaker herself had to be rescued on one trip, and that 100 people are medically evacuated and another 200 become injured (but hobble off) each season. With those sobering thoughts in mind, we left for the day, to return the next morning to catch our starting ferry.

Left: Gordon River Trailhead.

Below: Boulder field route to Owen Point.



There are two “ferries” (actually small boats) that enable you to traverse the 47 mile trail that are run by the people of the First Nations who are the guardians of the trail. Coming from the south in Port Renfrew, one takes a remarkably short crossing (3 minutes) across Gordon river to the trail start. Roughly half way along the trail is another ferry (about 5 minutes) across the extremely fast, tidal driven Nitinat narrows. Both crossings costs are added to your trail fee, and both ferries have particular hours of operation. After a certain point in the day (4 or 5 pm), you are just out of luck till the next day.

This can leave you scrambling for a place to camp as no campsites are located in the vicinity of these locations.

One can hike the trail from either direction. South to north covers the most difficult land sections while you have a full pack, while the north to south starts easy and becomes progressively more difficult. We chose south to north for two reasons, 1) I wanted to get my old legs over the worst section while somewhat fresh, and 2) that direction worked best for our plan to take the water taxi as a celebration of our journey.

Impressions of the trail

This is not your normal Forest service or National Park trail in any way, shape or form. Progress is very slow except for the most northerly 12 kms of trail. Movement in many spots feels more quadrupedal than bipedal as you are hanging on trees, roots, ropes, climbing ladders, and wading through calf deep mud. We found these challenges were well handled by a single bamboo hiking stick due to the ability to position hands at just the right position for the unpredictable climbing, descending and balancing requirements the trail demanded.

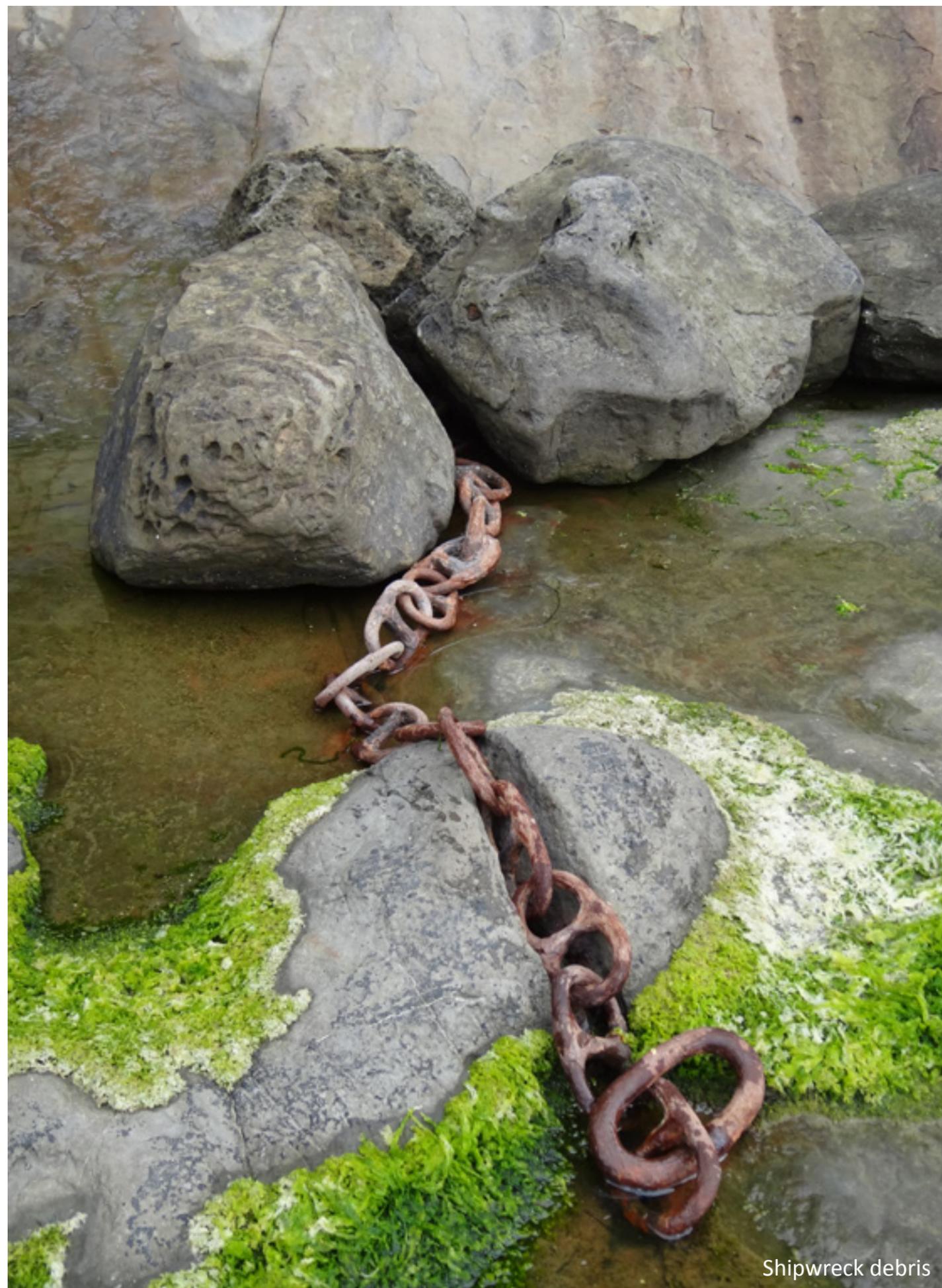
Along the shoreline, stride is constantly being adjusted either due to slipping on seaweed, jumping or climbing between rock formations or trudging through soft sand. The trail makes you a very fast learner about which seaweed species one can safely walk on and which will land you on your backside or worse.

Traveling by either land or shoreline is very much a full body work out. While individuals have somehow managed to run the trail in less than 24 hours (they must have had angels protecting them from broken ankles), for most experienced backpackers their daily mileage expectations need to be greatly scaled back. The park map and hiker preparation guide recommends taking 2 days to cover the first 22 kms (13.5 miles) of trail heading north. We took 2.5 days to do this section, partially to do more beach hiking that required staging campsites for tides, but I would say that those first 22 kms were very challenging and tiring. The guide also suggests taking 5-7 days for the entire trail. We did the trail in 6 days. In retrospect 7 days would have been more appropriate for myself. On 2 days, my son urged me on an extra 3 and 7 kms in order to keep up with the cohort of folks that we began the trail with. Such is traveling with the young and nimble!





1st Day upward hike to Thrasher Cove



Shipwreck debris



Ladder sets



Less slippery (left) and really slippery (right) tidal vegetation



Mink at Thrasher Cove



It goes without saying that packing as light as possible is important under these strenuous conditions that require balance and radical weight shifting maneuvers. We entered the trail with 34 and 38 pound packs fully loaded with 2 liters of water. We saw other packs that were both much lighter and much heavier.

Happy Surprises

It was a wonderful experience for my son and I to get to know the hikers that we camped with each night. There was a Swiss family of 3, a German fellow, and a large Canadian contingent including folks who had hiked the trail before. Sharing a fire, relaxing, and telling our war stories of

Left, Below: Cable Crossing.
Right: Chez Moniques restaurant



the trail each evening with folks from varied places added much to the trip. The extended one on one time with my son, and seeing him fully engage in our route planning each day will be memories I will never forget.

Due to the popularity of the trail and limited campsites, if one is looking for a solitary wilderness experience, this is probably not the trip for you. For these folks, I would suggest looking into the North Coast Trail at the northern tip of Vancouver island which my early research suggested was less well known. For those tired of reserving campsites, you will be pleased to know that beyond the start date reservation requirement, the West Coast trail has no campsite reservation system or

total hike duration. The downside is that popular campsites like Tsusiat Falls or pre-ferry staging campsites such as Thrasher can get really full. For such locations early arrival in the day can be very helpful.

One of the pleasures of the trail are the two oases of quality, fresh cooked food! Approximately 31 kms (day 3 on our trip) north is Chez Moniques. Located on First Nations land, it is a covered outdoor eatery where for \$17 CAN you get a well decked out burger. Heaven! Similarly, another 12 km further up the trail (day 4 on our trip), at the Nitinat ferry dock one can get salmon, and fresh boiled crab taken from a pen hanging off the dock that was so naturally sweet you thought it had already been dipped in butter.







Above: Fresh crab at Nitinat Narrows ferry.
Lower Right: Sandstone tidepools.

Lastly, I can't speak more favorably of using the Juan de Fuca Water Taxi that runs between Pt Renfrew and Bamfield. While one must have contingency plans to make this work, it is the perfect culmination to the trip, as you get to see the trail from the water. One must put in an early reservation as there is just 1 trip a day that leaves at fixed times, and the daily trip can be cancelled due to weather. Therefore, one must have at least a day of flexibility. For us, this flex was best placed after the hike in Bamfield because if you miss your start date, your

trail reservation is lost. Brian Grisbone is a fantastic guide, and the trip is more of a field excursion than a taxi ride. Brian, who assists biologists researching marine mammals, stops several times along the way to observe feeding gray whales and to watch the antics on sea lion-filled rock islands. Seeing the gray whales was a real treat for us as we could only hear them blow offshore on our last days trekking north. Compared to the \$80 per person to sit on a bouncing bus on logging roads, the water taxi is really an excellent value for the extra \$55.





Gray whale watching from water taxi



Shoreline blocking surge channel



Carmanah Lighthouse

Information

The trek is not cheap. On a per hiker basis, trail reservations at the time of this writing cost \$28 CAN, and \$28.50 CAN per night, with trail ferry costs at \$32 CAN for both. Much of the cost of the trail fee is to cover emergency injury extractions. One nice aspect is that if you do become injured and are extracted by Parks Canada, the cost is covered by your trail fee. Add in the water taxi at \$135 CAN per person, one is looking at just over \$300 CAN per person for logistics from trail head and return.

Money well spent in our book....the trip was awesome and one we will always remember! I recall fondly asking our Canadian friends who had done the trail multiple times, "why more than once" during the harder days of mud and soft sand. The reply was, "with time you only remember the good stuff". Within six months, I completely understood and agreed with their explanation. If you are up for a challenge, physically and logistically, and crave a change of pace from mountain trekking, I would recommend giving this trip a go!

To obtain a trail reservation, dates for June 15-September 15th open on April 17th. I would recommend using their on line reservation system for high use periods simply because the online system begins to take reservations at 12 am, while phone reservations do not open up until 8 am.

Best Time to Go

The trail is open for overnight hikers from May 1st to September 30th. From June 15th to September 15th, reservations and hiker number limits are in place. Weather along the exposed coast is unpredictable at any time in the season. The most popular time is August due to the slightly improved odds on weather, however early September can also be quite nice.

Getting There

Access to Vancouver Island is most easily obtained by the BC ferry from Vancouver, BC (Tsawwassen) or from Port Angeles, WA (Black Ball ferry). The drive from Victoria to Pt Renfrew is approximately 1.5 hours, and Victoria to Bamfield is 4 to 4.5 hours and includes driving on logging roads.

For those without a car, West Coast Trail Express provides a shuttle for \$80 CAN, and includes a pickup option in Victoria. Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi is \$135 CAN.

Maps

[Official map of the trail](#)



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Review: Salomon Quest 4D GTX Hiking Boot

Review by Sean Sparbanie

As many hikers can attest, there are few things more important than a good pair of boots. You could talk to a hundred hikers, and I'd wager they'd all have some kind of blister or foot pain horror story. They'll also likely know all the best tricks for proper lacing, the best brands, and the right sort of socks to wear. The trick is, you'll have to experiment to find the best combinations for yourself. I encourage everyone to try as many different manufacturers as possible. Take the time to research and find the best boot for your feet and the way you walk. With that in mind, I offer this review of a pair that are as close to perfect for my feet as I've ever come across: The Salomon Quest 4D GTX.

Impressions, Design, & Fit

These are extremely comfortable boots. In fact, my first hike with them was a 15.5 mile lollipop hike through 4 trails in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. I remember getting to my truck and feeling like I could have kept going. No break-in period, just comfort right out the box. The materials are more airy and padded than the usual hiking boot, allowing the boot to conform to your foot for a more comfortable ride. Cushioning is great across the entire footbed. Compared to the last pair which left me limping with blisters after 6 miles, I was smitten.

Quality comes at a cost, though. A pair of the Quest 4D GTX will set you back about \$230, give or take. I've seen them on sale before, so you might want to be patient

Pros: Extremely Comfortable, No break-in period, Waterproofing, Traction

Cons: Questionable Durability, Cost

Rating: ★★★★★

if your budget is tight. With a listed weight of 2 pounds, 13 ounces, they're fairly light for a backpacking boot and are available in both men and women's specific models. Strapping them on for the first time, you'll notice the gusseted tongue, which helps keep debris and water from getting in. Even with the loose and airy materials used, the boot still provides plenty of support when sized and laced properly. The characteristics of my feet are fairly average. Not especially wide, and I'm typically a size 11 US. The Salomons feel true to size. I have average arches, and I found the Ortholite insoles supplied with the boots to be sufficiently comfortable.

There's much more flex, though, especially when compared to other high-end brands like Asolo or Salewa. The main difference I notice (apart from not getting blisters) from Asolo is the sole has much more give. It's actually the one thing I don't like as much. I can feel larger rocks and skinny roots through the Contagrip soles. I miss the firm feel of the Asolos' sole, but it's something I can live with. Because of the softer sole and chassis, I need to be more mindful of my step. It feels like twisting an ankle in these would be easier, but the comfort is a fair trade-off in my opinion.





Waterproofing & Breathability

Another highlight of these boots is the Gore-Tex waterproofing. Many boot manufacturers will designate their Gore-Tex boots by adding GTX to the model name. Not all GTX boots are created equal. Waterproof materials in your boot do not guarantee your feet will stay dry - how well they're constructed is equally as important. Gore-Tex is useless without a good seam, for example. As a photographer in east Tennessee, I often find myself shooting creeks, cascades, and waterfalls. The best vantage points are often found in the water, and these boots do a remarkable job of keeping my feet dry. I can confidently stand in several inches of running water for minutes at a time, and my feet remain warm and dry. Speaking of warm, this is definitely a subject worth delving in to. Toasty warm, dry feet sure are nice in the winter. When paired with a thick pair of smartwool socks and a decent merino liner, you'll be very cozy. In the summer, however, be prepared to roast. If you need waterproof, odds are your feet are going to get hot. There are not a lot of options for those who want breathability, but require good support, traction, and waterproofing. You're going to have to sacrifice something.

There are certainly hikers who can justify bypassing the waterproof option, but I'm not one of them. I often find myself rock-hopping creeks for a good photograph, and unless it's mid-summer, the creeks

in my stomping grounds are awfully cold. It's a matter of convenience, as well. More often than not, I don't want to stop to take off my boots before finding a shot to compose.

Last winter, I was shooting a nearly-frozen waterfall on a very cold morning. I strapped ice spikes to these boots and put Outdoor Research gaiters over them. While carefully choosing my path over ice-covered rocks, I miscalculated the strength of the ice and fell through. It was 6 degrees Fahrenheit and I was shin-deep in flowing water. I took my sweet time finding a good path out, which required several more steps through the icy water. Once at the other side of the creek, my feet were still warm and dry. To me, something this light and comfortable that keeps me warm and dry under those conditions is not only great, it's a marvel of technology.

Traction

Regarding traction, the Salomon 4D Quest GTX Contagrip soles have a tread pattern that is useful for a wide variety of terrain, while not necessarily specializing in anything specific. The flexible sole provides a little more contour over odd-shaped surfaces like tree roots, so you really have to be careless to lose traction. Again, the waterproofing comes in handy for the narrow, muddy paths I often encounter in the springtime. When paired with gaiters or rain pants, you're an unstoppable spring-conquering



machine. They're very grippy over loose, rocky terrain in the high country, and the ankle support is sufficient enough to keep a good pace with confidence.

The grip on wet rocks and roots is about as good as can be expected. You're going to slip if you're not strategic with your footing, but the soles will provide enough purchase to keep you upright. Through fresh snow, the Salomons provided sufficient traction for me to keep a steady pace with confidence. I slipped a bit more on packed snow, and they're about as useless as any boot on solid ice. I advise pairing them with microspikes or some sort of ice traction device.



Durability

After 7 months of regular weekly use and a few hundred miles of hiking, the Contagrip sole held up very well to regular punishment over a wide variety of substrates. I've noticed very little sole wear, but unfortunately, it's not all good news. While the good definitely out-weighs the bad, I had a troublesome experience with these boots. Somewhere along the numerous hikes I put them through, some seams gave way and water started finding its way to my socks. I first noticed it during a hike through snow. I took them out on several hikes in varying conditions just to be sure it wasn't simply perspiration. They were most definitely taking on water. They ship with a two-year warranty from Salomon, but I purchased mine through [Backcountry.com](https://www.backcountry.com), whom replaced them immediately at no cost to me, with only a few days downtime.







Conclusion

I have a difficult time finding boots that work for my feet, and I'll stick with these for as long as they manufacture them. When paired with quality socks and liners, I can hike until my legs give out. They've never been the cause of a blister, and my feet simply don't hurt as long as I lace them properly. Though it may I've given these boots a pass on a number of things, the comfort and waterproofing have fully influenced my decision to give them a high rating, and I'll tolerate a number of other issues if my feet don't hurt at the end of a 20 mile day. If Salomon can figure out how to maintain the comfort while improving durability and breathability, I'm convinced they'd have the perfect hiking boot.

Overall: ★★★★★ – Very Good

The Salomon Quest 4D GTX retails for \$230, but occasionally you can find deals [Here at Backcountry.com](#), [REI](#), and [Amazon](#).



The Joy of Day Hiking

by Paul Magnanti



A backpacking trip really immerses a person into the wilderness.

One step at a time, the mountains reveal themselves. The fresh air of the woods is soothing as a person is snug in their sleeping bags with the stars above and the ground beneath them.

But sometimes getting out for even an overnight trip on a weekend is impossible.

Social or family obligations need to be met and sometimes time is a scarce commodity.

Or perhaps you have friends you want to share time with in the outdoors but they have obligations and time is a scarce commodity for them as well.

How to get a needed outdoor fix? How to spend time with outdoor minded friends who may have a busy life?

The answer is a day hike.

Something solid and challenging. Or easy. Or short. Or social.

The idea is to get out. To savor every opportunity to be outside. Be it four months on the Appalachian Trail or hiking off-trail in Rocky Mountain National Park.

And a day hike is a way to accomplish this goal.

Day hikes can immerse you in the backcountry. Where you start with the first rays of dawn and get back to the trailhead at twilight or even by the glow of the full moon.

Or it can be something as simple as enjoying a few hours with your wife looking at the early spring wildflowers while in the local foothills.

Any time outside is a gift.

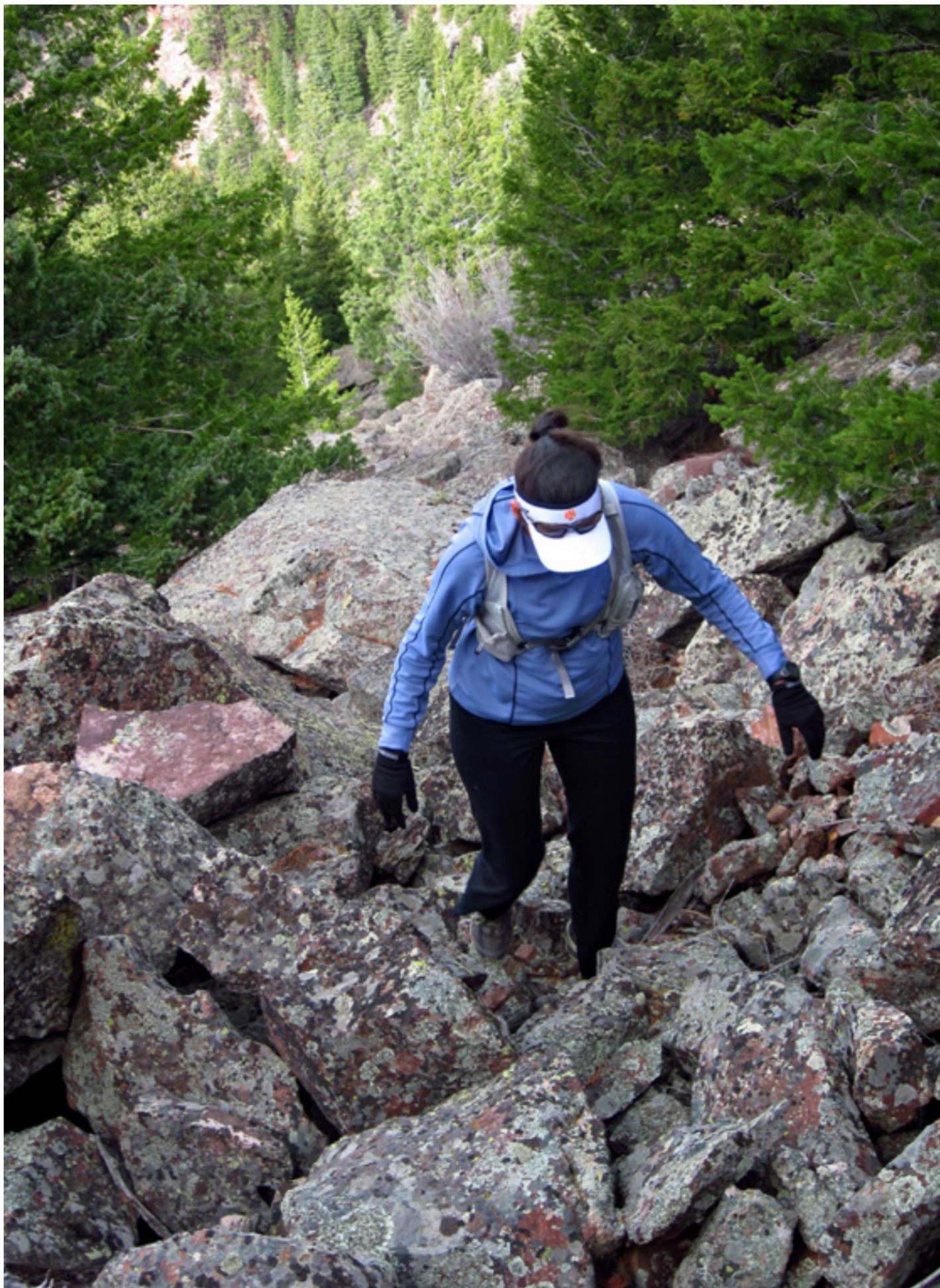
Previous Page: Colorado National Monument.

Right: Sego Lily.

Following Page: Bachelor Party Hike, Rocky Mountain National Park.







On day hikes, I've seen alpine lakes off the beaten path. Hiked up nameless peaks. Deepened friendships (and enjoyed more than a few post-hike brews with said friends), enjoyed some impromptu star talks with an astronomer friend and, on one hike, I met the woman who is now my wife.

Day hikes also open up a place where backpacking is not necessarily a viable option. With a car camping site as a basecamp, ancient pueblos can reveal themselves, the canyons beckon, and the High Plains with its ancient fossils are waiting to be discovered.

I don't think of day hikes as a shortened outdoor experience, rather I think of them as an outdoor experience in concentrated form.

The wildflowers are still beautiful. The ridge walks still seem to go on forever.

And every foot step is savored.

As I try to balance a marriage, a job, friendships and the need to be outside, day hikes fill a needed niche in my life.

I can't be out for months or weeks a time as often as I'd like. And sometimes I can't sneak away for a weekend.

But a day hike allows me to enjoy one the great pleasures of life: Time spent outdoors.

Every moment outside is a gift. And a day hike lets me enjoy these moments immensely.



Left: Eldorado Monument bushwacking.

Above: Hovenweep National Monument.

Pages 101-102: Great Sand Dunes.

Pages 103-104: Lost Lake, Snowy Range, Wyoming.

Pages 105: Near Devil's Thumb Pass, Indian Peaks Wilderness. Boulder Open Space Traverse.









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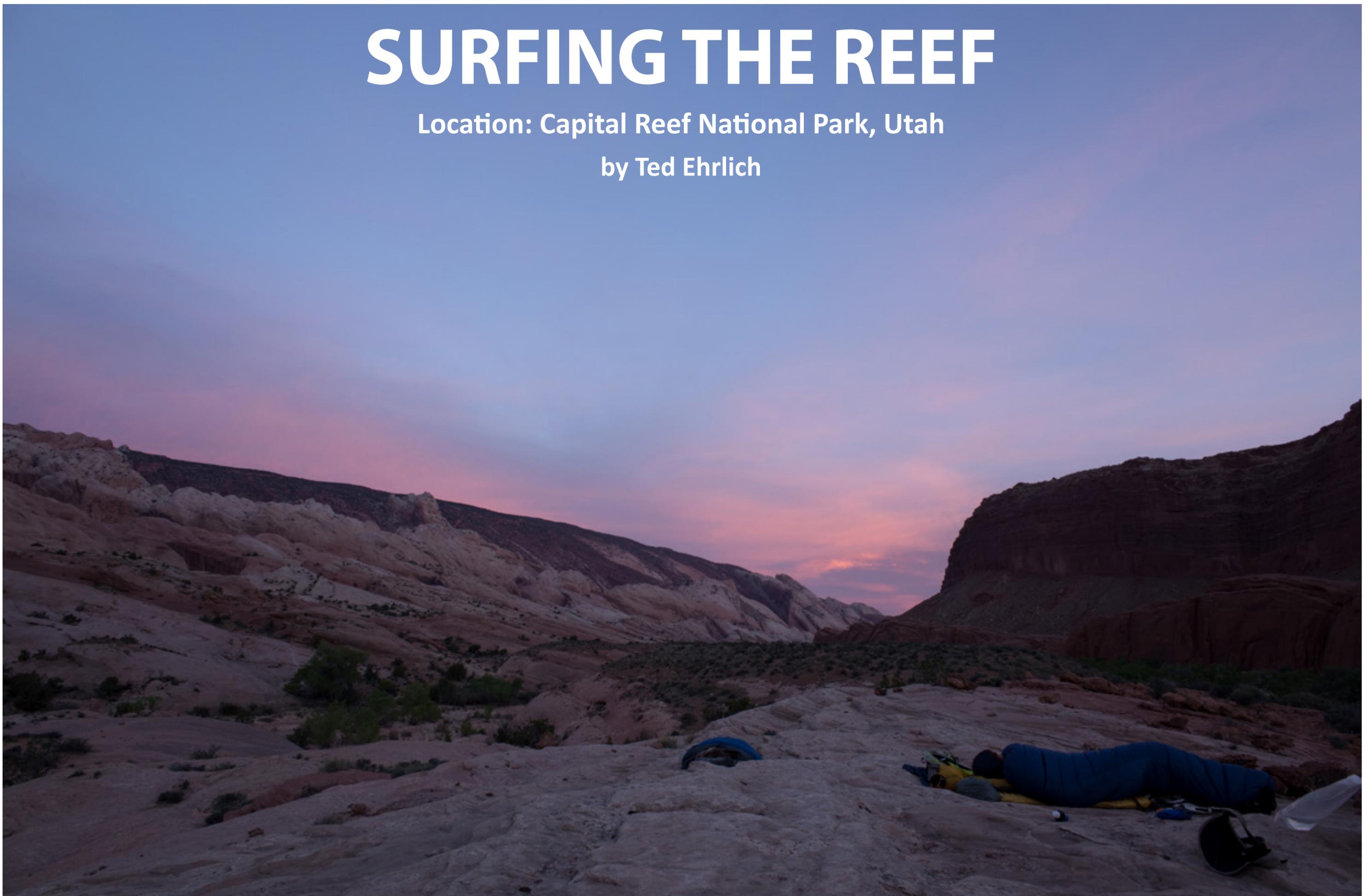


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SURFING THE REEF

Location: Capital Reef National Park, Utah

by Ted Ehrlich



I have never been inspired to do a multi-day trip from an overlook, but that was before Capitol Reef. In May of 2013, I took my dad to southern Utah for a road trip. I was still recovering from surgery, limiting myself to merely driving. On our way home, we drove the Burr Trail, a scenic back way through the heart of Capitol Reef National Park, and on the map I saw a point called Halls Creek Overlook. We decided to drive out of our way to see it, and I was blown away by the scale that could be seen, deciding right then I needed to go back and explore. When the opportunity of a long weekend came, I started planning.

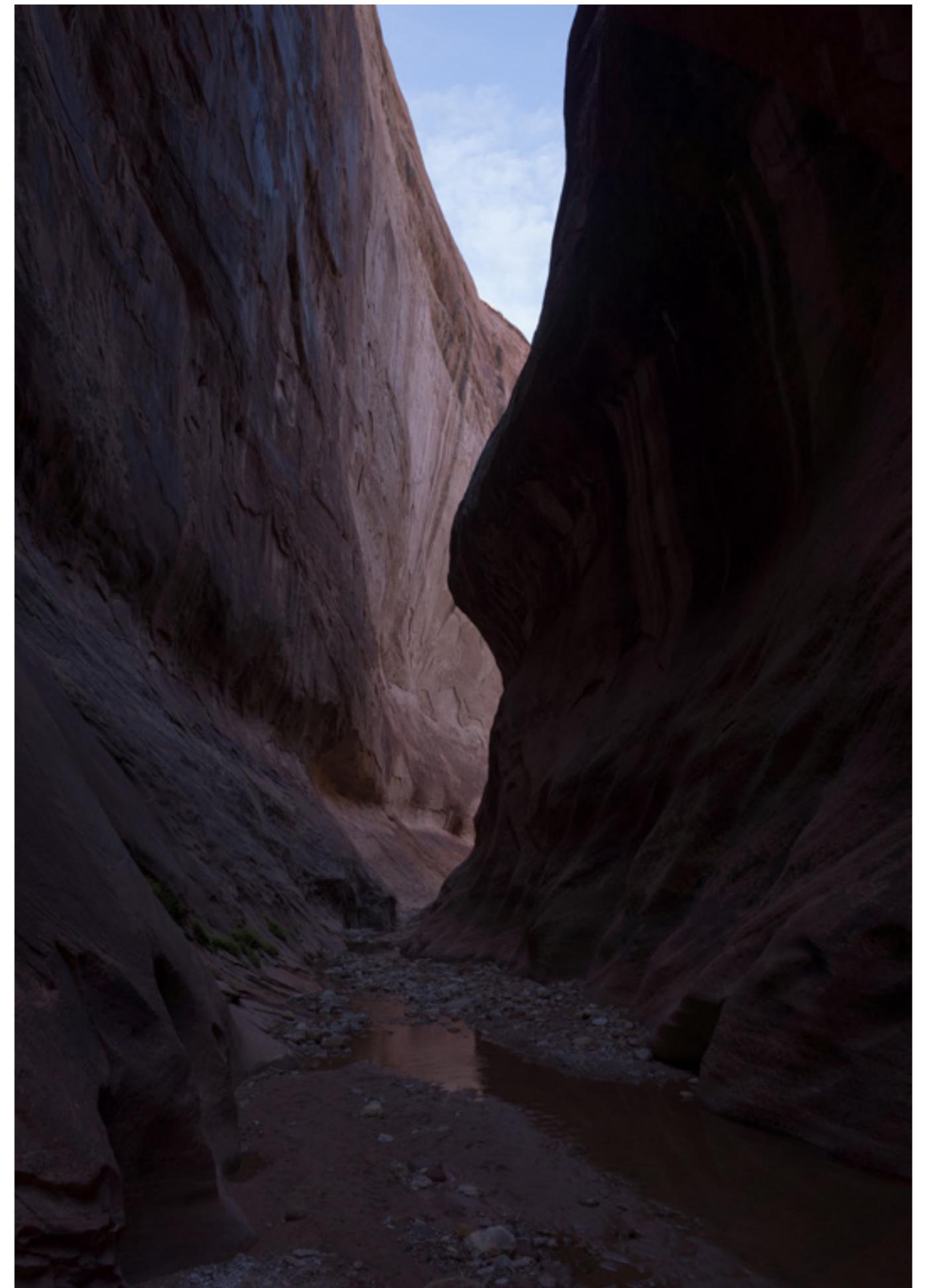
Capitol Reef had always been overlooked by me because it seemed like most of the park was on the stretch of Highway 24 that curved beside the Fremont River as it cut its way through the Waterpocket Fold. While the section along Highway 24 is pretty spectacular, the back way we drove further south gets off the highway. The Burr Trail, a partially paved, partially 2wd dirt road, is named after John Burr, a rancher that developed the path for moving cattle. It leads east from Boulder, Utah to one of the only natural routes through the Waterpocket Fold, Muley Twist Canyon.

The Waterpocket Fold, that's another story in itself. Named because of the pockets of water it contains in its natural tanks, the fold is a nearly impenetrable reef. It's not a reef in a conventional way that we think of coral in the sea, rather it

is a ripple in the earth's crust that goes on for over a hundred miles. Only the two roads mentioned go through the fold, and the relief makes a striking view from anywhere along the reef. Halls Creek flows intermittently along the grand gulch that makes up the valley to the east of the fold, the valley that inspired me to come back.

The Plan

After researching the area, I found that Capitol Reef has one of the best backpacking policies among all of the national parks I have visited. Permits are free, available in person only at the Fruita Ranger Station (Open 8 AM – 4:30 PM), and to my knowledge there is no limit on permits available each day. They do have a group size limit of 12, which is the only limitation they enforce. However, the remoteness of the area means that doing a shuttle hike implies that I almost certainly needed to provide my own shuttle. While hitchhiking might be an option, there are very few people that drive the roads out there, meaning that I may be waiting a significant amount of time for a ride. I decided to bring my mountain bike and self-shuttle on the last day, giving myself a bit more freedom to do a longer hike without the need to loop back to the car. The best route looked to go from the Halls Creek Overlook to the Halls Creek Narrows, then back up the valley to see Brimhall Natural Bridge, a double arch that can be seen from the overlook, and then north to see the historic Lower Muley Twist Canyon, the canyon that provided settlers and ranchers



a path for them to travel through the reef. At the top of Lower Muley Twist is the Burr Trail, where I would stash the bike for the shuttle back to my car. If I was feeling good with enough time, my plan was to day hike Upper Muley Twist Canyon, an extension of Lower Muley Twist on the north side of the Burr Trail.

The Trip

After a long drive through the night, the sun started to rise as I drove south from Green River towards Hanksville. As it crested the La Sal Mountains to the east, the light lit up the red rock country I had become almost accustomed to this spring. This was my fourth desert trip of the season, however it was the first solo trip of the year. While the company of the previous trips was great, there's something to just getting out into the wilderness alone that can give a person peace. After getting the permit in Fruita, which was a bit out of the way, I headed back towards the Notom-Bullfrog Road. Named after the Notom Ranch on the north end and Bullfrog Marina on the south, my little hatchback tore down the dirt road with a cloud of dust in my wake towards my first stop, the Burr Trail switchbacks.

Up the switchbacks, the Lower Muley trailhead was just past the top, where I pulled over and hid my mountain bike and a full water bladder for the shuttle back. As I started my drive back towards Bullfrog, I watched the odometer of my car climb another 18 miles before finally reaching my destination, Halls Creek Overlook. Only the last bit of the road to



Above: The view looking north from Halls Creek Overlook.

the overlook is rough, where with careful driving any car should be able to make it all but the final tenth of a mile. As I pulled up, I only noticed one other car parked at the overlook. I wondered in the back of my head if I would see anyone along the stretch of desert I was about to roam through, but the thought passed as I

packed my backpack and double checked everything was where I needed it

After shouldering my pack, I finally walked to the edge of the rim to survey the canyon below. Halls Creek Overlook is spectacular. Nearly 1000 feet below me was the dry creek bed, with the canyon

sprawling for miles unobstructed to the north and south. On the other side of the canyon was the colorful uplift of the Waterpocket Fold, featuring the massive red slide area, where it looks as if a major section of the fold suddenly turned into dull red lava, flowing down the side of the hill into the dry wash at the bottom. On the far side, I could see a very distinctive

double arch eroded in the sand stone, inviting me out to run down and explore its secrets. Down I went, first captivated by the exposure of the cliff I was hiking down, slowly turning to awe at the wildflower bloom I was finding. On my previous trips, the wildflowers of the high desert were just about to start blossoming, however now in mid-April, the flowers were in full bloom, lining the red cliffs with yellows and violets, whites and reds. As I reached the creek bed, I immediately headed south, knowing I had a quick march of 7.5 miles before reaching the inlet of the narrows. The route went quickly, with a mix of trail and wash hiking keeping the route from meandering too much with the bends of the dry creek. As I started to approach the narrows, the creek started to appear sporadically,

finally becoming a flowing stream just before a sharp right turn where it abruptly changed its southerly flow to head west into a canyon of its own making. Just before delving into the canyon, I stashed most of my overnight gear out of sight before the entrance, continuing on with only my day hiking gear.

I have hiked in the Zion Narrows and Buckskin Gulch, two of the most famous “narrows” of the southwest, and I have to say post trip that the Halls Creek Narrows were just as good, just shorter. As I headed down the river, the crisp clear water felt great on my feet, unlike the stagnant chocolate milk I had found in Buckskin, and the canyon walls, some over six hundred feet high, towered around me on all sides. About a mile in I was forced



Below: A frog, the first of many, along the Halls Creek drainage.

Right: One of the deeper sections of water within the narrows.



to start walking through the water, and irregularly there after I had to wade back in when the river shore disappeared. The deepest water I found was two spots past the half-way point, both being around 3 feet deep and rising to my belt loops. During the peak of spring runoff, these could get deeper, but I would imagine that most people would be able to get through them without having to swim.

As I neared the end of the narrows, the sound of frogs filled the canyon halls. They seemed to be everywhere, with an occasional tadpole swimming through the water. As abruptly as the narrows started, it ended, leading back into the Grand Gulch and continuing south as if nothing had happened. Here I turned left and followed another small stream northward to the top of Halls Divide, the

rise in the gulch that caused the creek to flow around it and through the narrows. Near the top of the divide, I was fortunate to see the sunset and find remnants of an old wagon road, proof positive that this area had been part of the historic west. As I made my way back to my gear stash and north along the wash, I finally gave into the twilight and started looking for a spot to make camp. A sandstone outcropping on the east side caught my attention, and as I walked up to the top to make camp, I was surprised to find two other guys were already up there, camping out and eating dinner. We talked for a bit, I found out that they had seen me from the top of the narrows earlier that afternoon, and they invited me to hang out with them that night, sharing stories about recent trips. As the sun finally set and the stars came out, I was treated to a mass array of light

points that can only be seen in darkest of skies, abundant in southern Utah.

After a colorful sunrise, the next leg of the journey began with hiking back to the area just below the overlook. Again, I made fast time back up the valley to the point I had come down from the cliffs. Here, instead of heading north towards the Muley Twist entrance, I decided to take a side detour

to go see Brimhall Natural Bridge up close. At first, the trail to the arches was very easy, turning into a decent scramble and steep hike at the end as I navigated around a friction climb, a squeeze to get by a large chock stone, and finally hiking up and over a steep ridge to bypass an impassible dry fall to see the arch. It's quite an elegant arch, symmetrical with one arch on top of the other instead of

side by side like some of the other double arches I've seen. The area just below the arch is a small oasis, with a small amount of water and shade trees, making it a great lunch spot.

After hanging out for an hour or so and enjoying some food with a view, I clamored back through the two harder sections, and back to the main gulch to

continue my route north. Here the trail was less defined, following the dry creek bed exclusively for a few miles before spotting the next stop of the trip, the Hamburger Rocks and the Muley Tanks. The Hamburger Rocks is a collection of short hoodoos that have eroded from the top layer of the slope, forming small dark oval boulders that resemble hamburger patties. The slope to get to them is fairly steep, but just north of the hoodoos are the Muley Tanks, large pockets of fresh water that are well shaded enough to hold water from storms for weeks after the last rain. Some of the best water in the area, and the last decent spot to fill up, pumping a gallon or so of water out of one of these holds is a necessary stop before continuing on. After spending some time pumping water from the tanks and enjoying the mini oasis that had grown out of the solid rock around the tanks, I continued on towards the goal of the day, Lower Muley Twist Canyon.

After about a mile I came to the obvious entrance to the canyon, another steep walled canyon driving a slot through the reef directly west. I followed it as it seemed to slice right through the sandstone without any elevation gain, and brought me promptly to what seemed the other side of the reef, continuing northward on the west side. After another mile or so, I found an enormous alcove that I turned into my camp for the night. It looked as if it had been well used, and

Left: The hamburger rocks near the muley tanks.
Next Page: Dark Skies lit up with millions of stars.





upon further inspection, I found old cowboy signatures from the 20's along with some relics of their equipment they brought through the canyon. The park named that alcove Cowboy Camp, and as I fell asleep, the sun sank and darkness enclosed the alcove with hardly a sliver of sky showing at the edge of the overhanging roof.

The next morning I woke up very refreshed after the early night, and immediately started racking up the miles through the canyon as I worked my way north and slowly up, winding my way through the Muley Twist. The canyon had gotten its name from the pioneers that had used it in the 1800's as a wagon trail,

saying it would twist up a mule with all of the weaving turns as it cut through the sandstone. Several enormous alcoves, bigger than the one I camped at the night before, left me in awe as I followed the dry stream bed. Colorful wildflowers filled the canyon, most notable wild purple Antirrhinum, more commonly known as snapdragons. Only one short section required some scrambling to get myself through some boulders that had been tossed around, probably by the last major flash flooding event based on the debris strewn around. After a few hours of winding, the first indication of a trail I had seen since the Muley Tanks showed itself with the trail cut-off sign that signaled the final stretch of the Lower Muley Twist.

Below: A relic of the cowboys that use to run livestock through this valley.

Top Right: Cowboy signatures on the wall at Cowboy Camp.

Bottom Right: Wild Snapdragons in Lower Muley Twist Canyon.



As I worked my way up the last few miles, a sudden gap in the canyon walls to west indicated I had finally reached the road. At the road, the first people I had seen since the first night came into view, a couple with a camper truck just about to hike down the canyon. After talking with them briefly, I fetched my hidden bike and my water stash, filled up my water bottles, and started biking my way down the steep switchbacks to the Bullfrog Road. On the bike ride back, I didn't see a soul on the road, although the trailhead had a few more cars than when I had left it. As I jumped in my car, I decided it might be best to head home and leave the Upper Muley for another day. At the least, it would give me an excuse to come back and further explore the beautiful area surrounding the fold.











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<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Best Time to Go: Spring and fall have the mildest weather, with the most water being available in spring. Summer can be dangerously hot.

Getting There: Capitol Reef is located in southern Utah. The trailhead is located on the Bullfrog-Notom Road, south of highway 24.

Maps: [Trails Illustrated #267](#) covers the entire park

Information: Free overnight permits can be picked up at the Fruita Ranger Station along Highway 24.

Pages 121-122: Brimhall Natural Bridge, a double arch.

Pages 123-124 (Clockwise from Upper Left): The sunset, looking north from the top of Halls Creek Divide; Spring Cactus blooms on Halls Creek Divide; Last view from the trip; The massive roof of the Cowboy Camp alcove.

Pages 125-126: The sunrise along highway 24 with the La Sal mountains on the horizon.

Above: My shuttle home.

Direct link to this issue:
<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue15.html>



Sierra Designs Backcountry Bed 800 Fill 2

An integrated pad sleeve keeps this sleeping bag in place while a top quilt portion promises a closer to home sleeping experience with easy venting. 800-fill hydrophobic down, no zippers, and a 30 degree rating in a 35 ounce package. Available in 3 lengths, \$350 - \$390: Campsaver.com



GoLite Manitou Hiking Shirt

Strategically placed seams allow this quick drying, 100% synthetic shirt to remain comfortable under pack straps. Available in both men's and women's specific versions. About 4 ounces, \$25: GoLite.com



Altra Olympus

A fully cushioned, zero drop trail shoe? It's arrived with the Olympus from Altra. A trail specific sticky rubber outsole offers confidence through tricky trail sections and the zero drop platform maintains a natural gait. About 11 ounces per shoe and \$130: REI.com



Outdoor Research Spring Ring Headnet

It's that time of year – Stay sane in camp and on the trail without dousing yourself in repellent. This headnet features two rings to hold the net away from your face, but still packs up small within the included stuff sack. A neck drawcord seals out persistent skeeters. Just over 2 ounces, \$20: Backcountry.com

GEAR MASH



Alite Designs Monarch Chair

A unique design allows this chair to remain light (Just over 1lb) and pack small. Your weight (Up to 250lbs) is mostly supported by the chair's two legs - use your own legs for the additional needed stability. About \$70: Amazon.com



Platypus HyperFlow Cap

Tired of dropping your cap on the ground? Turn any Platypus reservoir into a one-handed hydration solution with this bite valve cap from Platypus. A quick twist locks out the flow, stopping leaks in their tracks. Less than half an ounce, \$10: Campsaver.com



REI Half Dome 2 Plus

10 inches longer and 4 inches wider than REI's standard Half Dome 2, the Plus version offers a generous 98x56 floorplan. Dual side entry and 2 vestibules allow for easy entry /exit and gear storage. Around 6lbs, \$220: REI.com



Granite Gear eVent Uberlight CTF3 Dry Sack

Cuben and eVent together in one high tech stuff sack. Waterproof roll top design keeps gear dry and the permeable eVent bottom lets you squeeze the air out. Available in multiple sizes (All less than an ounce) and colors to visually organize gear. \$42 - \$53: Backcountry.com



PHOTO TIPS FROM THE TRAIL

by David Cobb

Since long-distance hiking helped form so much of my photography, I thought it might be helpful to supply a few photo tips I picked up from the trail. These tips don't require the use of tripods or fantastic cameras; they are suggestions designed to help improve your composition and use of light, and will affect the overall impact of the photos you take along the trail. (I hope you enjoy these tidbits from this ongoing TrailGroove series.)

My 13 Favorite Photography Phone Apps

It's no secret that smartphones have changed the way we view and take pictures. When I'm on a hike or a backpacking trip I sometimes take out my phone to snap a few images or use an app just to learn a little more about the area. Here are a few apps I have on my phone to help me with my photography.

1. Photo Pills: This app is the brainchild of photographer/author Antoni Cladera who made planning, plotting, and preparing for a photograph much easier. Do you want to know where the sun will set in a certain location? Are you wondering if that distant mountain will block the sun? Do you want to mark and save this secret spot on a map or share it with friends? Photo Pills does it all and much more. This is an inclusive app that incorporates Google Earth and helps you plan for that perfect image.

Left: Snapseed

2. Peaks: Curious about the names of those distant peaks or even the ones close by? Hold up your phone and with the use of its camera lens the names appear over every peak, hill, and knoll. I'm amazed at all the information this little app holds. It's also useful for identifying where you are on the map-then again, so is a GPS and compass.

3. Snapseed: Photographers have been using Nik Software for a long time and when Google purchased it in 2012 Snapseed also came along for the ride. This popular photo app helps you crop or level images, increase contrast, intensify saturation, and much more with a touch of a finger. Great for all occasions and especially for outdoor photography.

4. Tide Graph: If you're along the ocean and curious about high and low tides in the area this app comes in handy. Maybe you're planning a trip on Canada's West Coast Trail and want to know what the tides are in August; then this is a good app to have. I use it to plan my photo shoots along the Oregon coast for low tides at sunset.

5. Sun Scout: After a quick shake to calibrate the compass, you just hold your camera to the sky and it gives a quick peek at where the sun will rise and set today, or tomorrow, or next month. I use this for quick location planning when I photograph an area.

6. Shot List: I use this app created by photographer Ralph Valasco to help me plan ahead for the different images I might want from any given area. This also helps you plan out photo ideas on family trips or general travel.

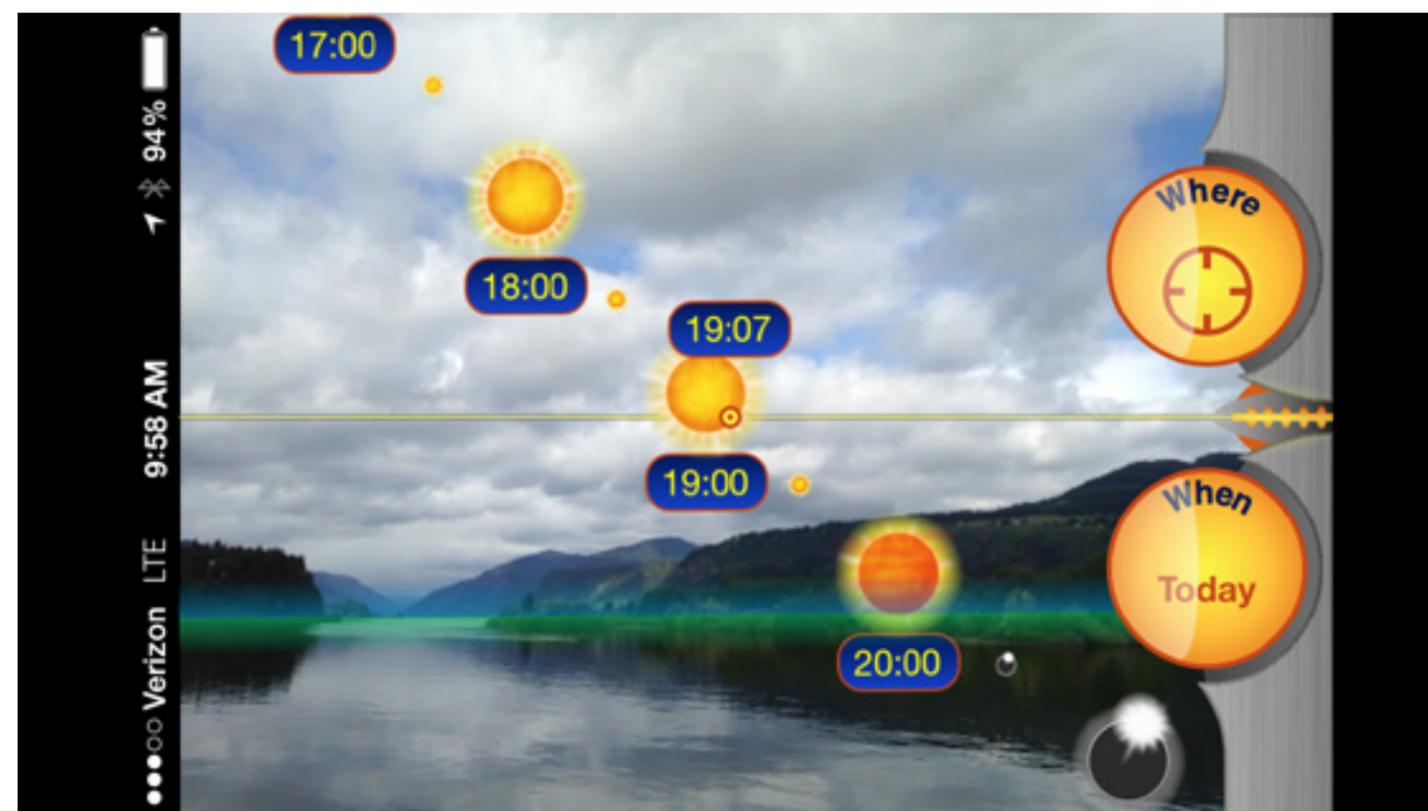
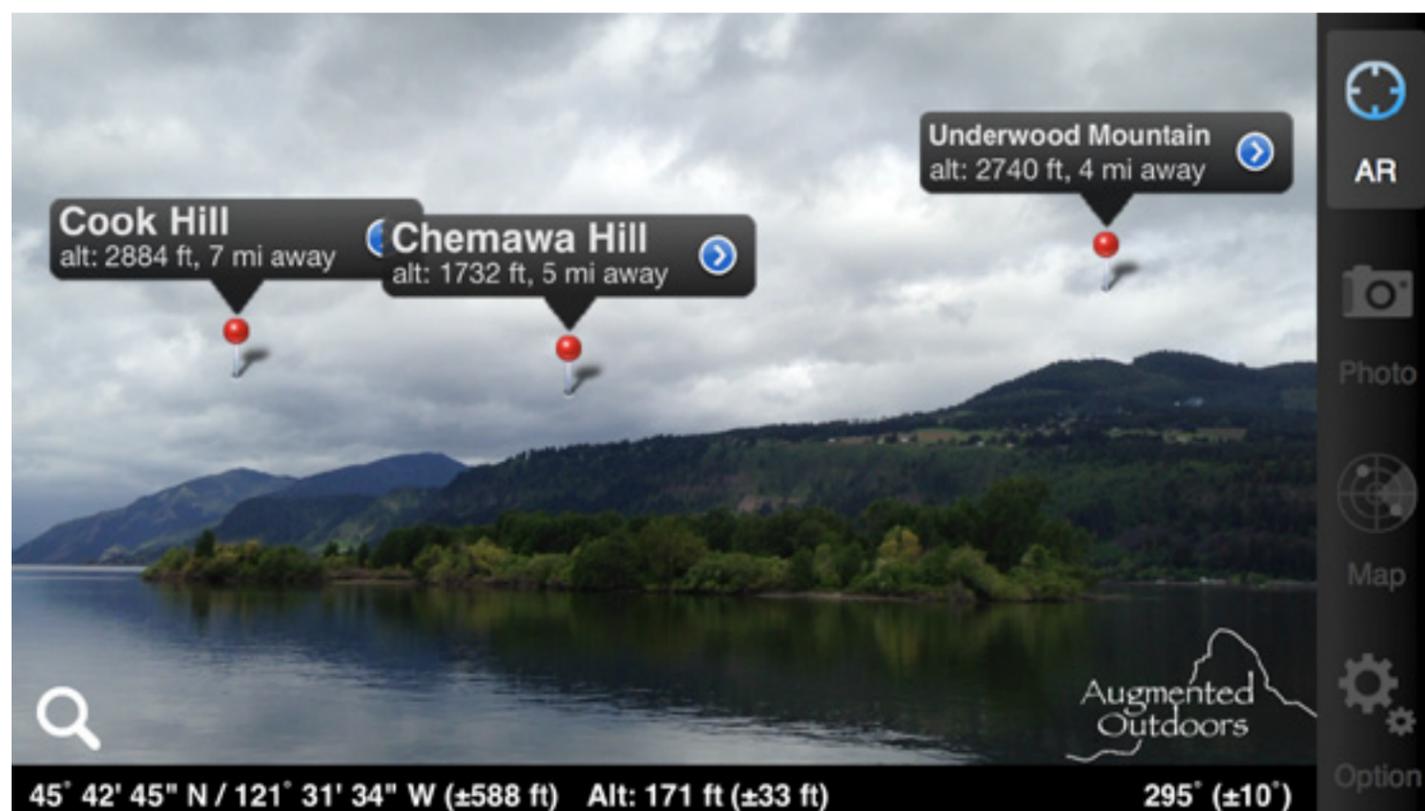
7. National Parks: Photographer QT Luong travelled the U.S. photographing all its National Parks. He's taken some wonderful photos and they give inspiration and ideas for your own travels to these national gems. His stories from the parks outlining some of the history and information on the flora and fauna are also interesting to read.

8. Pano: Want to get that breathtaking scene into one long image? This is the app for you. Take a number of photos across the horizon or anywhere and the Pano app will stitch them seamlessly together.

9. NMW Flowers: A number of wildflower apps may be found for different regions of the country, since I live in the Pacific Northwest this is the app I have for my region.

10. Tadaa SLR: This is a fun little app that can help give the illusion of depth-of-field like a "real" camera might give you. Take a picture of something (like your pet) then call it up in Tadaa SLR. With your figure brush in what you'd like sharp and leave what you want blurred – tada!

Below: Peaks. **Below Right:** Sun Scout



11. Photo Calc: When I have my “real” camera along, this app helps calculate distances for sharpness at certain f-stops and much more. If you’re a photo geek like me, you’ll like to have this one along when you’re photographing with a digital SLR.

12. Easy Release: I might see some hikers nearby and include them in a shot for an outdoor magazine. If I don’t have my model release forms with me, or if my forms are sopping wet from a recent rain shower, I use this app to gather information and have them sign it with a finger.

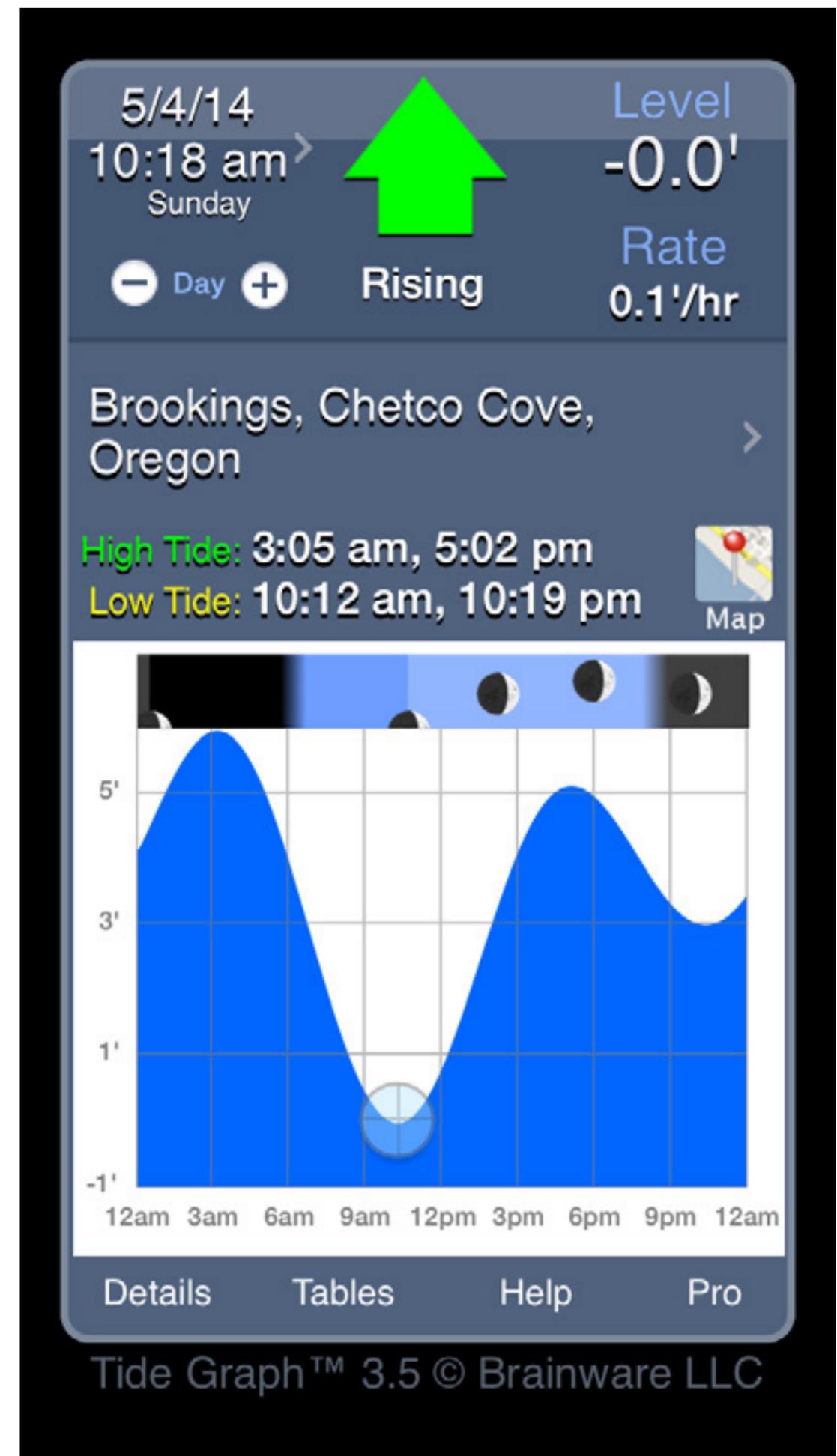
13. Google Maps: This app is a must for any backpacker or photographer. It not only helps me plan some photos, but it gets me to and from locations. You can also utilize voice instructions to help you with directions.

I hope these suggestions come in handy if you use your phone for photography during your hiking and backpacking adventures. And taking pictures with your phone is certainly a lighter way to travel with a camera. If you don’t take out your phone for photography, at least you might learn a thing or two about your surroundings with some of these great phone photo apps.

For more information, check out these apps [Here on iTunes](#).

David Cobb is an avid backpacker and photographer. You can see more of David’s images at www.dmcobbphoto.com

Check out our next issue for more “Photo Tips from the Trail” by David M. Cobb. Be sure to check out previous issues for his other great tips.



Backcountry Cuisine:

Crispy Nut Crackers with Cracked Pepper and Himalayan Salt

Crispy food has enormous sensory appeal, and this gluten-free cracker also offers great nutrition. We all know nuts are full of omega-3s and minerals as well as protein. Himalayan salt has 84 minerals and trace elements making it important for electrolyte replacement. The high levels of piperine in freshly cracked pepper are an anti-inflammatory that soothe a hiker's weary joints. This nut cracker delivers great taste as well as all these benefits. After a spicy bit of cracked pepper, a touch of coconut offers a lightly creamy finish. Add fresh avocado, hummus, or nut butter for a perfect lunch or snack. It's also a great dipper for soup.

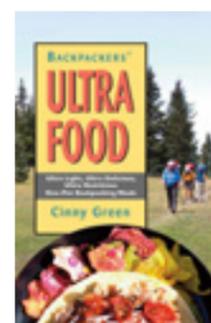
INGREDIENTS:

1 cup each flax seed, cashews, walnuts (you may substitute/add almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, etc. as preferred for taste)
 ½ cup dry coconut flakes
 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
 A pinch of almond flour as needed
 A tablespoon of coconut water as needed
 1-2 tablespoon freshly cracked peppercorns (to taste)
 1-2 teaspoons Himalayan pink salt crystals, unrefined and unprocessed (to taste)



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Soak all the nuts, flax seeds, and coconut in separate bowls for eight hours. Add water to the nuts as needed. Let the flax seed soak up all its own water. They will develop a gelatinous consistency, but that helps hold the cracker together.
2. Drain excess water from the nuts and coconut (Save the coconut liquid to add to the cracker dough if it gets a little dry) and blend or process them with the olive oil.
3. If the consistency is too sticky, add a pinch or two of almond flour to tighten up the dough. If it is too dry, add some coconut water. You are looking for a textured, spreadable blend.
4. Add Himalayan salt crystals, blend, and taste. Add more as desired.
5. Crack your peppercorns. For the most variety in texture, I fold the peppercorns in a cloth napkin and hit them with a small kitchen hammer or a rolling pin. As each pepper cracks, the aroma rises from the cloth.
6. Spread the mixture 1/8-inch thick on solid dehydrator trays or baker's parchment paper. After dehydrating for 4 hours at 165 degrees, make lines (with a knife) halfway through the dough in the shape of your crackers. [My dehydrator is round so my crackers come out in pie-like wedges.]
7. Dehydrate until the crackers are ever-so-slightly soft in the middle... they crisp up as they cool. This can take from 4 to 8 more hours.
8. Pack them in a firm plastic storage container. Don't eat them all before your next adventure on the trail!



Find more cracker recipes in *Backpackers' Ultra Food* by Cinny Green along with more tips, techniques, and recipes to elevate eating on the trail. You can find the book [Here at Amazon.com](#).



The Drive Home

The Plan and the Hike: Point A to Point B

by Aaron Zagrodnick

I didn't need to look out from the tent to realize the weather had changed.

The color of my sleeping bag was dull, the fabric of my tent – Normally an olive drab...Appeared as some previously undiscovered shade of purple. My grey backpack now looked blue. The light was playing tricks on everything. I stepped outside the tent to tighten the guylines as the sun set somewhere off to the west. It must have been a nice sunset 30 miles away on the other side of the mountains, but that colored light filtered through the wall of grey that enveloped the peaks I now looked at. The wind picked up and the flurries started. As darkness overtook my campsite the cold soon followed. For the flurries I'd brought the tent, for the cold my sleeping bag. I'd need them both tonight. Except for the wind in the trees and the occasional flap of the vestibule there was no sound as darkness fell. For hours I was never fully asleep – Never fully awake. I lay there through the night in some sort of half aware, half unconscious slumber.

Eventually the wind slowed and stars must have appeared overhead, though I can only guess – I wasn't moving from my bag. The dawn of a sunny blue day the following morning ensured there'd be no sleeping in. I pulled the map from the side pocket of my pack and though I knew it by heart, evaluated the route home.

When I look at a map, some part of me needs to walk each trail and explore every corner, and for my favorite destinations, the scale is too grand for this to be accomplished in a single trip. For many places, too much for a single year, or longer. As a result, records are kept, research is constant. Lists are made. Wild places are analytically dissected into units, imposed upon the landscape without regard to the features of the land that make different areas of a mountain range what they are. But it's no matter; it's easier for us to understand on a square paper map or computer screen this way, or within the pages of a book. Making lists and setting

goals is partly a competition with myself, partly a child-like wonder at the secrets an off-trail valley might hold, the thought of what the view might be like from that obscure off-trail ridge. Has anyone even been there, ever? It's also partly because no matter where I go, I know what I'll find when I get there...A state of mind. It's like peak bagging perhaps, but instead of just peaks it's a list of destinations, trails, valleys, rivers, meadows and forests. But as I sat in my tent, the sun slowly heating everything in its path, my pupils constricting just as slowly in the brightening light, map on top of my sleeping bag, I didn't worry about any of this now. Of course. I was here. Goals could be...Would be set later. The only thing on my mind now was coffee and the sunrise.

Initial morning goals obtained, (Empty coffee cup, sun now rising higher) I quickly packed and hit the trail, placing the map back in its side pocket last. The flurries hadn't stuck, it almost seemed like an early summer morning. Pausing to admire the view of the peaks to the west, now cloud-free and bathed in the morning light, I followed the smallest of streams babbling down a slope until I intersected with the trail and turned left, now walking downhill, away from the peaks and towards the nearest road. At home that bookshelf of information, maps with pins and notes in margins. An internet browser with folders containing other folders full of bookmarks – A paper list of trips slowly getting crossed off one by one. But here that mattered naught. The point of it all became clear, like water





I flowed across the trail as the miles ticked by, my feet on autopilot and my mind now able wrap itself around the steady cascade of thoughts within with ease. All is smooth, a steady flow. The maps and lists got me here, but now I just am, I can simply be. The cycle repeats.

Hours later. I analyzed the ridge. Descend to the left or right of the lake? The ridge to the east of the stream's outlet looked promising – Trees grew from the valley floor to the top of the ridge. Less steep, maybe. On either side, boulders. No matter, I'd have to find out later – I was 100 miles away. Midnight and with the rest of the house asleep, I stepped away from Google Earth and the topos that now lay on the coffee table. Using a ruler and a trusty ballpoint pen reserved for the purpose, I outlined another UTM grid on the map that graced the southern facing interior wall, designating each

rectangle as having been travelled, and added another pin, designating last night's campsite. An array of outlined grids and pins stared back at me. Moving to my left, I struck a line through another item on the dry erase board. My backpack, yet to be unpacked, lay forgotten in the corner. My feet were still sore from hiking, I considered my limp a badge of honor. I looked back at the map. A lot down. So much more to go. For me the planning phase, the goals – Couldn't be more opposite of time on the trail itself. But both parts play off each other and both are important, and both are entertaining in their own unique way. At home the planning and excitement of what's next keeps me up at night, gets me to the trailhead...Once on the trail and I'm asleep at dusk. Both play off each other and both are important, and like parts of a recipe...When mixed correctly, the result can't be beat.









“Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow”

- Henry David Thoreau





Thanks for Reading Issue 15

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

www.TrailGroove.com

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