# TrailGroove®

Issue 18

# Contents

*Issue 18*




A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:
Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Andrea Lani,
Eric Moll, and Sean O'Rourke.


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# Editor's Note

I'm lucky enough to live in a state where access to public lands is easy, be it BLM or National Forest or the designated wilderness area that are all just outside of town. I spend a lot of my time planning and luckily making it on more reportable trips, but recently like many of us, I've been stuck inside more than I'd like. Then the other day I looked out my window towards the setting sun, and though I'd seen the bright yellows and reds of fall, the colors of the leaves change so gradually that if you're not looking close enough they're gone by the time you realize fall has arrived. I grabbed my camera and sprinted out the door, a curious sight as I ran in pants, a camera in one hand and a tripod in the other. Quickly the houses disappeared, my road run became a trail run and then a justified bushwhack. I waded across a river, followed deer trails, and scrambled up a rocky hill, finding myself arriving among yellow aspens and willows just as the sun was setting; if I'd run 30 seconds slower I would have been too late. I took a couple photos in the fading light, but then put the camera down, sat down on a rock, and simply watched for the next half hour. As a star or two appeared overhead, the birds became used to my presence, many that would be heading south soon or might in fact, already be on their way. Deer confidently strolled into the open field below, then catching sight of me, cautiously continued after they'd determined I posed no threat. Slowly I made my way home, wading across the river again and arrived home with soggy shoes. The funny thing is before sprinting out the door that evening, I'd been pouring over maps and calendar dates for days, seemingly stuck with the planning of a couple longer backpacking trips. Suddenly by chance, or otherwise, things seemed to fall into place. Sometimes, a mile or two is all it takes.

In this issue we'll travel through Colorado's Weminuche Wilderness, Nevada's Ruby Mountains, and the Grand Canyon. We'll also check out a down parka that doesn't break the bank, the labor and love of hiking with children, thoughts and tips for extending day hikes, and a lot more. Thank you for reading and keep an eye out for Issue 19, due out in late November.

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




# TrailGroove Magazine
## Review Policy

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

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

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

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

# Jargon: CCF

Closed Cell Foam.

In backpacking circles CCF is most often used in relation to your choice of sleeping pad, which often comes down to one key decision – Air pad or CCF? Both have pros and cons. A thick air pad is found to offer a more comfortable night's sleep for many and they pack small, but care must be exercised to guard against punctures and carrying a patch kit is recommended. And if you want one that's both light and warm, they can be pricey. CCF pads are warm for their weight and can't suddenly deflate on the first night of a long trip. You can also throw them down nearly anywhere to sleep under the stars or for use as a sit pad on breaks or around camp. They're also usually easier on the wallet and can be easily cut to size, but they're bulkier to pack. As opposed to open cell, (Often found inside futon covers and inside self-inflating pads) closed cell foam offers greater durability and critically doesn't absorb water.

# Trail News

**with Paul Magnanti**

*In this month's issue of TrailGroove the FKT phenomenon is looked at, permits are discussed, why a person can't fly a drone over the Grand Canyon is examined and the opportunity to own a legendary Appalachian Trail hostel is presented.*

**Send in the Drones!** Or maybe not? After many complaints, the National Park Service (NPS) has banned the use of radio-controlled unmanned aircraft, popularly called drones, in all National Park units. Park officials have stated that the drones have bothered wildlife, disturbed the wilderness feel that many park visitors seek and have even landed on Mt. Rushmore. The tipping point for the drone ban was when a German tourist crashed his drone into a geothermal spring in Yellowstone National Park. Though there has been some opposition to this ban, popular opinion is overall in favor of the drone ban.

**Apparently it is the year of the Fastest Known Time (FKT) and attempts.** Be it because of social media, ultrarunners wanting a challenge outside of a traditional race structure or, as one famous mountaineer said, "Because it is there", trying to establish speed records on the famous long trails is becoming more and more prominent. Whatever a person's opinion on the FKT phenomenon may be, it is apparent this trend will only grow.

**Take a photo or make a film for commercial purposes without a permit and pay a $1000 fine?** A recent directive from the United States Forest Service (USFS) strongly indicates that a permit is needed for any film or photography used for commercial purposes in designated wilderness lands. Much opposition to this directive is that the terms are broad and not defined as to what is both a commercial enterprise vs reporting and what is the approval process for a permit. Though USFS officials have clarified the intent of the proposed directive, many opponents still wish for more concrete definitions written into the directive itself rather than the assurances of government officials.

**On a lighter note, for a cool $205k, a person can own the Shaw's Hostel in Monson, ME.** Deep in the heart of Maine, this hostel is legendary in thru-hiker circles as the last stop on the way to Katahdin. Eight bedrooms, three bathrooms and a lot of memories included.

# TRAIL TIP 18:

## Stove Options

**by Ted Ehrlich**

**When it comes to cooking, there are many options for stoves.** However there are only six common types of fuel for stoves in the backcountry. Those six types are wood-fired, alcohol, isobutane, propane, solid fuel tablets, and liquid gas, and each one has its own pros and cons.

Wood fires are the original backcountry cooking option, and still used frequently with fire pits and bbq grills for cooking. This doesn't work so well for backpacking though, as building a fire ring at every campsite will scar the earth and isn't very efficient with smaller backpacking meals. However there are options out there for small backpacking specific wood stoves. My personal favorite is the Bushbuddy Ultra Stove. At just over 4 ounces, it's one of the lightest stoves around, and with some practice, can be lit very quickly with only a match or a lighter. A couple other similar versions exist, along with some other styles like the Trail Designs Ti-Tri systems and Emberlit stoves. Wood stoves and the cookware need to be steel or titanium as the temperature of a wood fire will eventually damage aluminum. The good thing is that these stoves have minimal maintenance and very few moving parts, making them very dependable as long as there are enough dry twigs to start a fire. Unlike fire rings, these more modern stoves keep the earth from being scorched (some more than others), are reusable to allow quick setup and tear down when you need them to. They are very cheap to use, with the only costs being matches or lighters when needed. Their downside is they will make the outside of your pot sooty and require some wind protection and dry fuel to operate efficiently. I use my wood stove when I either don't have or don't want to use other fuels and have ample dry tinder available.

Alcohol stoves are the go to stove for many lightweight backpackers, and for good reason. They are small, efficient, and cheap. You can build one yourself if you're crafty too. Fuel is fairly inexpensive and easy to find, and the most widespread brand being sold in the USA is the yellow bottle HEET brand of denatured ethanol alcohol being sold as an engine fuel additive. 190 proof Everclear can also be used and is safe for consumption after dilution (if you want), but is more expensive and isn't sold in all states. I personally use my Vargo Decagon Stove and an aluminum foil windscreen that I made myself. Trail Designs makes a very efficient system called the Caldera Cone that I also like which comes with a stove and a windscreen to fit your specific pot. A windscreen is needed for an alcohol stove to limit heat loss and for winds that will slow down the stoves ability to cook. Alcohol stoves are fairly fast to boil after they've been properly lit/preheated, and require no maintenance. However their output is reduced at high altitudes and in cold temperatures, and they won't light in very windy conditions. They don't usually have a way to adjust their heat output, so they can be hard to use with some styles of cooking. They are safe to use with all types of metal pots. My alcohol stove is my primary stove for backpacking, and I will sometimes bring it with my wood stove, using the alcohol stove for quick meals on the trail, and the wood stove for in camp meals.

One of the most widespread backpacking stoves today are isobutane stoves. These stoves use gas canisters that are lightweight, and their biggest advantage is that they are very fast to boil water and most stoves have an easily adjustable output for different types of cooking. As far as fuel cost, it's one of the more expensive methods of cooking per meal, and you will only find canisters for sale in outdoor shops. I personally prefer my Soto Micro Regulator Stove with the optional windscreen, which produces a quick boil, even in wind. MSR, Jetboil, Primus, and Snow Peak also make isobutane stoves that are well built for backcountry use. Most stoves are maintenance free, but do have moving parts that can fail, although rarely. Depending on the gas mixture (different brands of canisters use different mixtures), heat output Is lower when these stoves are used below freezing, and below certain temperatures, the gas in the canister will stay liquid, requiring a remote inverted canister and a preheat tube like the one used on the MSR Windpro 2 and the MSR Whisperlite Universal. After being emptied, canisters are not refillable, but are recyclable if you puncture them beforehand. I bring my isobutane stove for quick overnights when I want the fastest boil possible and I don't mind paying a little more for fuel.

Propane gas stoves for backcountry use do exist, but are not popular due to the fact that all propane canisters are made of heavy reinforced steel, and are not sold in small sizes. These canisters can be refilled, and work below freezing due to their very low boiling point. Most

propane stoves are multi-burner camp stoves that are made for base camps and car camping. I have a Primus grill/burner combo stove that I use for car camping road trips.

Solid tablet stoves are anther ultralight option, especially if you want something that will burn in any temperature. The most common brand of solid tablets are the Esbit brand, and these small tablets are set onto a metal platform that will hold the cooking pot above it, and will burn just long enough to boil approximately 2 cups of water in ideal weather conditions. The downside, however, is that the tablets let off an odor in your pack, and when burned let off very toxic fumes, so you need to be in a well-ventilated area. Their ability to heat is dependent on a good windscreen and require a steady heat source to light (matches or lighter, no flint). Other than cleaning your pot and stand (they release a lot of soot), these require no maintenance. The fuel tablets will never go bad, so I keep them as an emergency stove, and keeping them in a sealed bag is a good idea to help with their odor.



Liquid fuel stoves have been around the market for a long time, and are still a viable option, although not the lightest, for backcountry use. Liquid fuel stoves can run off a variety of fuels like white gas, leaded and unleaded gas, diesel fuel, kerosene, and even jet fuel. Because of their flexibility, these are sometimes best for international travel where you can always get some sort of engine fuel. Liquid fuel stoves also work in nearly all temperature ranges, and most use a remote canister, which is nice for keeping your cooking low to the ground to avoid wind. Most are capable of a high heat output, making it easier to cook large meals for groups. Fuel is also cheap (my preference is regular unleaded gasoline for my MSR Dragonfly). However, these stoves are more bulky than other stove options, and require careful priming and use because of the potential for the liquid fuel to ignite if spilled. They don't smell the best either if you accidentally spill fuel. These stoves also require regular maintenance to clean and replace seals. I use mine for winter camping trips and for group trips where I'll be cooking larger meals.

Lastly, there are probably a few obscure types of stoves that I may have missed (solar cooking for example) that are not popular stoves for backpacking but still have their uses. Which stove works best for you is dependent on your trip and locale, along with regulations limiting the type of stoves allowed in the areas you will be traveling through.

# Hiking through Rubies

## Location: Ruby Mountain Wilderness, NV

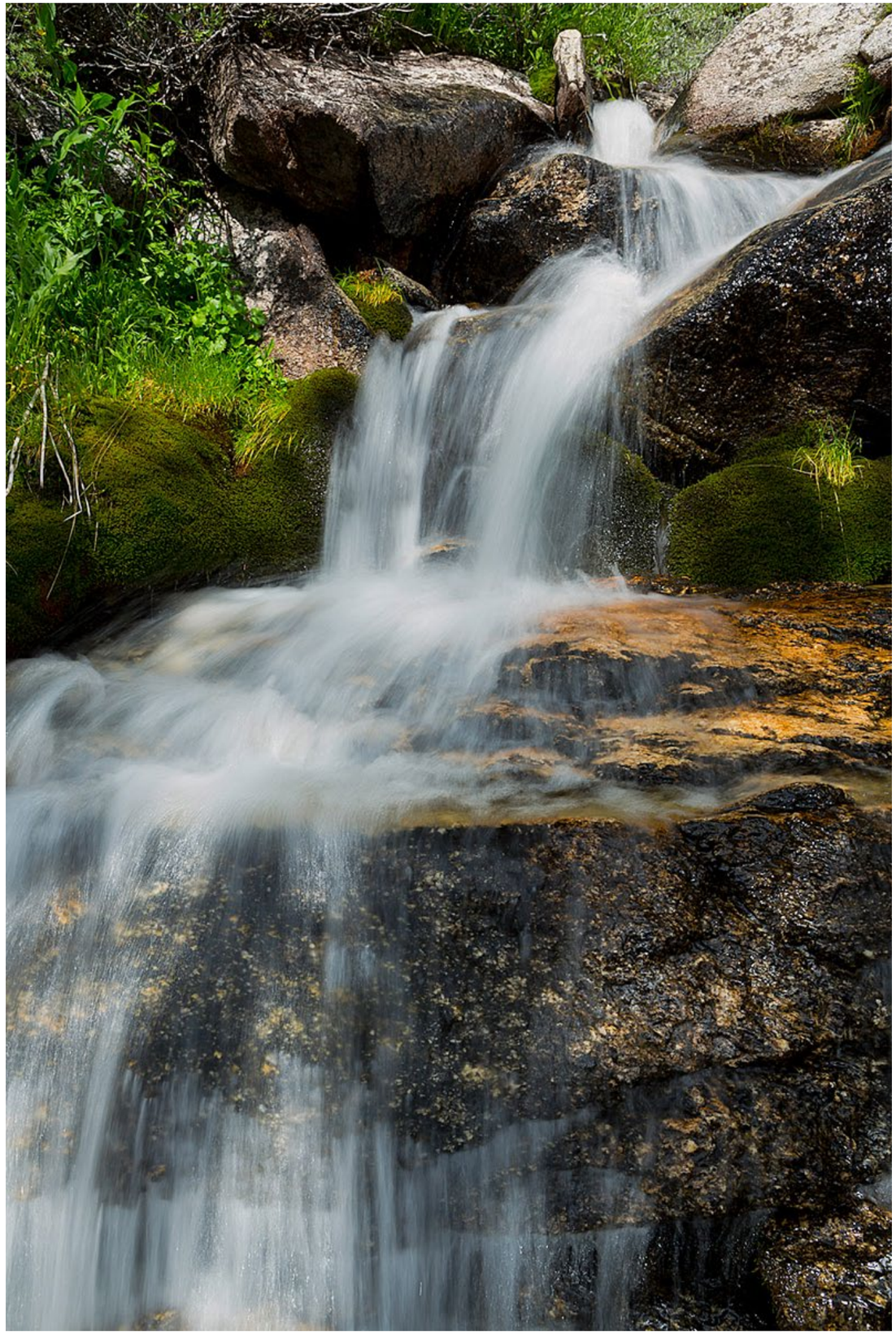
**By David Cobb**

**Recently I set out to explore the Seven Devils Wilderness in Idaho and walk a 27-mile loop through those mountains, but a large fire in Hell's Canyon diverted that plan at the last minute.** The Ruby Mountain Wilderness of Nevada had long been on my "to do" list, and this seemed like a good time to change plans and head south.

The Rubies were misnamed in the 1800s during the gold rush, when a group of army explorers thought they'd found a range filled with rubies; instead they discovered only garnets. The range is about 60 miles long, with the width being a bit narrow at an average of 11 miles across. The Rubies are also moister than the surrounding basin and range landscape of the high desert, and the summer wildflower display is impressive. The range is covered with healthy stands of lodgepole pine, and on its higher windswept peaks a handful of ancient bristlecone pine. It holds a large herd of mule deer, some elk, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, and the usual predators of cougar, bobcat, and coyote. If you're lucky, you might also get a rare sighting of the Himalayan Snowcock, transplanted here in the 1960s from Pakistan. (The Ruby Mountain range is the only place in North America to view this bird.) My real surprise in the Ruby Range was the lack of mosquitoes. Maybe it was the altitude or maybe the surrounding dry desert air, but those pests were not a problem here.

The range boasts ten peaks over 10,000 feet, which includes the highpoint of 11,387-foot Ruby Dome. Since the Rubies are a wetter range, the area is also dotted with lakes which hold a number of trout species (including the endangered Lahontan cutthroat trout). I'm told the fish are smaller in the more popular lakes, and quite large in the more inaccessible ones.

If you're interested in hiking the Ruby Mountains, there is the 42-mile Ruby Crest National Recreation Trail which cuts across the range lengthwise. You can either call a guide from nearby Elko, Nevada to shuttle your car to the trailhead or plan a two-car shuttle with a friend. Since my time didn't allow for a longer backpacking trip, I decided to head for the lake country at the end of the glacially carved Lamoille Canyon (this range's equivalent of the Yosemite Valley). The drive up Lamoille Canyon to the trailhead is beautiful; aspen line the streambeds and peaks jut out from the ridgelines above. A slow ascent brings you to 6,725 feet and the parking lot trailhead at the end of the Lamoille Canyon Road. From here it's a gradual climb to 10,450-foot Liberty Pass, and if you've come from sea level like I did the breathing will get tougher as you go. Before Liberty Pass you're still not in wilderness, so watch out for mountain bikes bombing the trail as they practice their non-bike etiquette past backpackers, day hikers, and families with children. It's a rare site when a bicycle yields the right-of-way to a hiker or equestrian; I've only seen it happen twice in all my thousands of miles of backpacking.



**Right:** North Furlong Creek Cascade

At Liberty Pass you say goodbye to the canyon behind, and look out towards Lake Peak across a valley and scenic Liberty Lake below. You might choose to stop here and camp to avoid an afternoon thunderstorm or just to stay high to acclimate to the new-found elevation. If you need to descend, you'll reach Favre Lake in another mile and a half, or you can climb from there cross-country to Castle Lake which sits in a beautiful cirque of mountains. Once you cross Liberty Pass, you enter the Ruby Mountain Wilderness and leave most day hikers behind as your solitude increases. From Liberty Pass, you can also climb and travel cross-country anywhere you wish. The rock of the area has a firm grip on hiking shoes and cross-country routes and passes abound. I chose to stay in the lake basin photographing the landscapes and wildflowers of the lush high country.

Travelling onward the Ruby Crest Trail drops and then ascends to Wines Pass, then drops to North Furlong Lake sitting below a crest of mountains. I had planned on climbing the Ruby Crest Trail over 10,892-feet Wines Peak and onward along a high ridge walk of the Ruby Mountains, but stormy weather bringing heavy rains, lightning, and dime-sized hail put the kibosh on that. Instead I waded into North Furlong Lake for some photography, where I found my legs covered with leeches.
A bit of medieval doctoring I guess. For the return route I just reversed the way I came, stopping at different lakes on the way.

**Left:** North Furlong Lake Sunset; **Below:** Ruby Crest Trail

There are a number of loops you can take in the Rubies, and some trail access routes are more difficult than others. Many of the four-wheel-drive roads are accessible in drier times, but once it rains the road mud can become slick and treacherous. If you're planning to hike the 42-mile Ruby Crest National Recreation Trail, plan on parking at the Lamoille Canyon Parking lot and leaving another car or shuttle at Harrison Pass along Route 57. Also time your ridge walks and high passes accordingly; they're best done in the morning before the thunderstorms strike the mountains. For maps I used the "Ruby Mountains and East Humboldt Wildernesses," published by the Humboldt National Forest. Both the Forest Service and BLM offices in Elko, Nevada were closed when I arrived Saturday afternoon and they weren't due to open again until Monday, and no retail outlets in Elko carried topo maps either. I bummed my map off some hikers finishing their trip. (Maybe purchasing your topo maps online would be a better option.)

The Ruby Mountain range is an impressive site. Scenes like this are usually reserved for states like Montana, Wyoming, and California – but rarely Nevada. I've heard Nevada called the "poor man's Alaska" and this state contains more than meets the eye. My guess is the Ruby Mountains could be the "crown-jewel" of the Great Basin Desert, an area that includes Great Basin National Park in Nevada, the Steens Mountains of Oregon, and the Book Cliffs of Utah. These are all beautiful places I've explored and visited, but the Rubies are truly a gem.

**Right: Camp Hail Storm**
**Pages 23-24: Liberty Lake Reflections**
**Pages 25-26: Hiker & Lamoille Canyon**
**Pages 27:** Castle Lake

**Information:** Here is a link to the U.S. Forest Service headquarters for the Ruby Mountains:
http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/htnf/about-forest/offices/?cid=fsm9_026916

**Best Time to Go:** Peak time for the Rubies is July 1 - August 31, but September can be nice for fall aspen color in Lamoille Canyon.

**Getting There:** From Elko, Nevada take Hwy. 227 (Lamoille Hwy.) toward the Ruby Mountains. Before the town of Lamoille turn right on NF 660 up Lamoille Canyon to the trailhead.

**Maps:** Ruby Mountains and East Humboldt Wildernesses



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# Skinny Big Hill Hard Mountain
## The Labor and Love of Hiking with Children

**By Andrea Lani**

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement.... If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder... he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

~ Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder

**When my oldest son, Milo, was three months old, I carried him in a front pack three miles up a steep and rocky trail to Chimney Pond Campground in Maine's Baxter State Park.** I had made our camping reservations five months before Milo was born, determined to prove, to myself if no one else, that life would not end after children. The hike in to the campground, though short, was a challenge with my post-childbearing body and the distortion to my center of gravity caused by fifteen pounds strapped to my chest, but everyone we passed on the trail up expressed their excitement at seeing a baby on his first hiking trip and encouraged us to continue his outdoor education.

That night, I dressed Milo in his dinosaur jammies and we squeezed together in my sleeping bag, listening to moose chew leaves of the mountain ash trees growing on the other side our lean-to walls. The next day, my husband and a friend of his, whom we had enlisted to help carry all our food and gear, climbed Mt. Katahdin, while Milo and I stayed behind in the lean-to, him lying on his back, kicking and looking cross-eyed at his hands, which he had just discovered the day before, and me reading, writing, and daydreaming about returning to the same spot in future years, when Milo would chase bunnies and chipmunks around the campground.

While children can be time-consuming, noisy, and distracting – a drain on attention, peace, solitude, and time to wander in nature – they can also be more attuned, attentive, aware, and, most of all, full of wonder than grownups. When I hike with other adults, talk characterizes our interactions – a steady flow of chatter fills the air and any little bit of nature noticed is either quickly discarded or talked to death. The children among us, too, become little-noticed satellites, orbiting the conversational planetoid of the adults. When I hike alone with my children, however, whether walking to the river near our house or trekking along one of our favorite trails, I am freed to give them my full attention, and in return they offer me a whole new way of viewing the world.

**Right:** Mountaintop on Northaven Island Maine
**Previous Page:** Stream Crossing Hidden Valley Nature Center Maine

From the moment of his birth, I was keenly aware that Milo experienced everything for the first time – the trees overhead that cast dappled shadows over his face, raindrops streaming down our windowpanes after a walk under glowering skies, the wind he tried to capture on his tongue. Experiencing the world through my son's newborn senses gave me a second chance to taste the wind and feel the rain for the first time. The summer Milo turned one, he and I would take a walk around the block each evening after dinner. What for me would have been a five-minute stroll became an hour-long exploration as he picked up and tried to eat every pebble we passed, chased kitties into yards, and walked around in circles, retracing his steps and changing direction without realizing it. As long as he didn't wander into the street or encroach too deeply into neighbor's yards, I let him take the lead and learned the art of appreciation on this otherwise unremarkable suburban block.

I think of the difference between how adults approach the world and how children approach it as the difference between walking around with a pair of binoculars to your eye versus a magnifying glass. As adults, we tend to gravitate toward the grand, the big, the vista, the goal, while children focus on what is before them at this moment in time, what they can see at their eye level, and what they can experience with all their senses. Adults, binoculars in hand,

**Below:** Trailside Treasure
**Right:** Skipping Stones at Trout Brook Alna Maine




focus on the destination, bagging peaks in search of the view from a mountaintop or the waterfall at the end of a trail, while kids peer through the lens of a magnifying glass, looking at rocks, touching leaves, and tasting berries along the way.

A few weeks after another trip to Baxter State Park when Milo was three, he said to me, "Remember with the bunchberries we picked? That skinny big hill hard mountain?" It was not the spectacular waterfall we hiked three miles straight uphill to see that made an impression, but a handful of tasteless orange berries and the steepness and narrowness of the trail. Four years later, we attempted the same hike again during a rain-drenched four-day camping trip. Milo, now seven, and his three-year-old brothers focused not on the miserable rain, the wet slippery trail, or the waterfall we would never reach under such conditions, but rather on each and every mushroom that sprouted along the trail – red, orange, yellow, purple, and white, mushrooms more varied and beautiful than I had ever noticed before, all pointed out and counted – Yeddow mushroom! Boo mushroom! One, two, fee mushoom! – remarked my wet but undaunted toddlers.

While it can be maddening to hike with a small child who stops to examine every bug and begs to be carried only to run circles around all of the adults who have collapsed after the end of a long hike,

it can also be eye-opening to put away the binoculars and get out a magnifying glass. That is, forget about goals and destinations and get down on the kid's level, slow down, and take in the world one pebble and caterpillar at a time. So it takes all afternoon to travel a hundred yards of trail, so what? The important thing is that you and your child are enjoying the world together and, while you're at it, you are learning (or relearning) a whole new way of seeing the world.

Somewhere around the age of ten, kids shift their focus from magnifying glass to binoculars. One October, a few years ago, we climbed a nearby mountain with friends of ours. While my husband and sons galloped ahead up the trail, I lagged behind with my friends and their four-year-old. When we caught up with my boys where they rested and snacked at the top of the climb, looking out over hills and valleys burnished red and gold and dotted with lakes reflecting the deep blue of the sky, Milo exclaimed over and over again, "Thank you, Mom," for bringing him to this place, to see this gorgeous view. I was both excited for this new development, that Milo had joined me in appreciating the reward in the destination, and a little bit saddened to leave behind that little boy who used to pick up every rock and stick along the way.

**Below:** Kennebec Highlands
**Upper Right:** Acorn Whistle along the Trail
**Lower Right:** Pausing to Reflect on the Eastern River Maine

**Tips for Hiking with Kids**

• **Choose Wisely:** Make sure that the trail you select is safe and not too challenging for your kids, be sure to take along plenty of food and water for everyone, and, of course, be flexible. If the hike isn't working, turn back and try again another time. It's important that kids enjoy themselves so that they will want to hike again.

• **Hike When They're Portable:** When children are very small, the distance and frequency of your hikes will be limited only by your ability and willingness to carry them in a sling, front pack, or backpack, and the number of diapers you're willing to carry. This worked well with my first child, whom I toted on innumerable hikes after that inaugural backpacking trip.

• **Modify and Mechanize:** Don't let multiple little ones keep you at home. My next two children came as a matched set. Sometimes my husband and I hit the trail together, each carrying one twin in a backpack. But more often, I headed out alone and I had to find trails that would accommodate the double jogging stroller, which I put through its paces on steep, narrow, and muddy trails.

• **Adopt a Child's Pace:** Once children have outgrown the backpack or stroller, or have reached the age of "do it myself," parents may want to adjust their hiking expectations. Rather than heading to the mountains, seek out local nature centers, land trust parcels, arboretums, parks, or greenways that may have shorter and easier hiking trails. And instead of focusing on a goal – mileage, heart-rate, or a destination – slow down and look at the world through your child's eyes.

• **Coax, Lure, and Bribe:** For times that hiking at a toddler or preschooler's pace just won't work, adopt strategies for urging your children along the trail. Milo managed most of that "skinny big hill hard mountain" on foot, thanks in large part to the story of "The Smilox" that my husband made up as they hiked together up the trail, keeping his mind off his tired little legs and encouraging him to keep moving up the hill and out of the backpack. On other hikes, we have taken along a bandana printed with a scavenger hunt or nature quest. Looking for leaves of a certain shape or bark of a certain texture keeps the kids moving along. When all else fails, I resort to doling out treats like orange slices or lollipops at intervals along the trail.

• **Head Toward Water.** If you must have a destination for your hike, aim for water rather than a mountaintop. Any kind of water body, from mud puddle to lake, brook to ocean, will keep kids


Trailside Pitstop Dodge Point Maine

entertained for hours. Skipping rocks alone can occupy an entire afternoon.

• **Be Prepared for them to Pass You By.** A plodder by nature, I've been outstripped by my kids on the trail for years. Nowadays, they usually gallop ahead with their dad while I lag behind with whoever is tired, cranky, or not in the mood to hike. However, on a hike in Grafton Notch State Park last summer, Milo hung back with me not because he was tired, but to help me along, pointing out obstacles in the trail, waiting while I rested, and offering to help me across stream crossings. Although it was my fortieth birthday, I wasn't quite doddering enough yet to require my twelve-year-old's assistance. I didn't tell him that, though. I was enjoying his company too much, and besides, I've been the carrier, coaxer, and cajoler for long enough; I'm happy for him to take the lead.

We haven't gone on an overnight hiking trip since that climb up to Chimney Pond thirteen years ago – we got busy building a house, and then Milo got too big to carry, and then we had twins and the prospect just seemed too daunting. But we're about to embark on our first family backpacking trip, a seven-mile trek into Baxter State Park's Russel Pond Campground. All three kids are big enough to carry at least some of their own gear in backpacks and the twins, at nine, are nearing the age of the magnifying-glass-to-binoculars switch. I hope the prospect of a pond-side campsite, wild blueberries, and the views from Mt. Katahdin will keep them moving along the trail. And, just in case that's not enough, I'll be packing a lot of lollipops.

**Rock Hopping Grafton Notch State Park**



**Winter Hike in Rocky Mountain NP**

# Wandering the Wondrous Weminuche

## A Rugged Wilderness Off-Trail Adventure in Colorado's San Juan Mountains

By Eric Moll

**As I view the green rolling hills and valleys, it is difficult to tell that the elevation is above 12,000 feet.** Off in the distance rugged peaks fill the horizon. Today a new adventure begins, one met with anticipation as well as uncertainty. My small Excel spreadsheet route plan reveals that today is actually day 17 of a journey that has been filled with lofty peaks, new friends, and some of the finest scenery in Colorado. Today's adventure enters the depths of the Weminuche Wilderness in the San Juan National Forest.

Atop the Continental Divide's 12,650 foot Stony Pass, I read about the pass's history nearly 150 years ago as a route for prospectors and traders between Sante Fe and the San Juan Mountains.

Leaving the 4-wheel drive road, I rejoin the co-located Continental Divide and Colorado Trails for some of the finest hiking on the divide. Surprisingly, the grade is gentle, making for enjoyable hiking. Clouds begin to fill the late morning sky from where I have come. Although the rain is almost a daily occurrence, the potential wetness is not my concern, but the lack of shelter from lightning while high above treeline.

Colorful flowers fill the mountainside. The dramatic Arrow and Vestal Peaks seem to grow as I come closer. Soon the

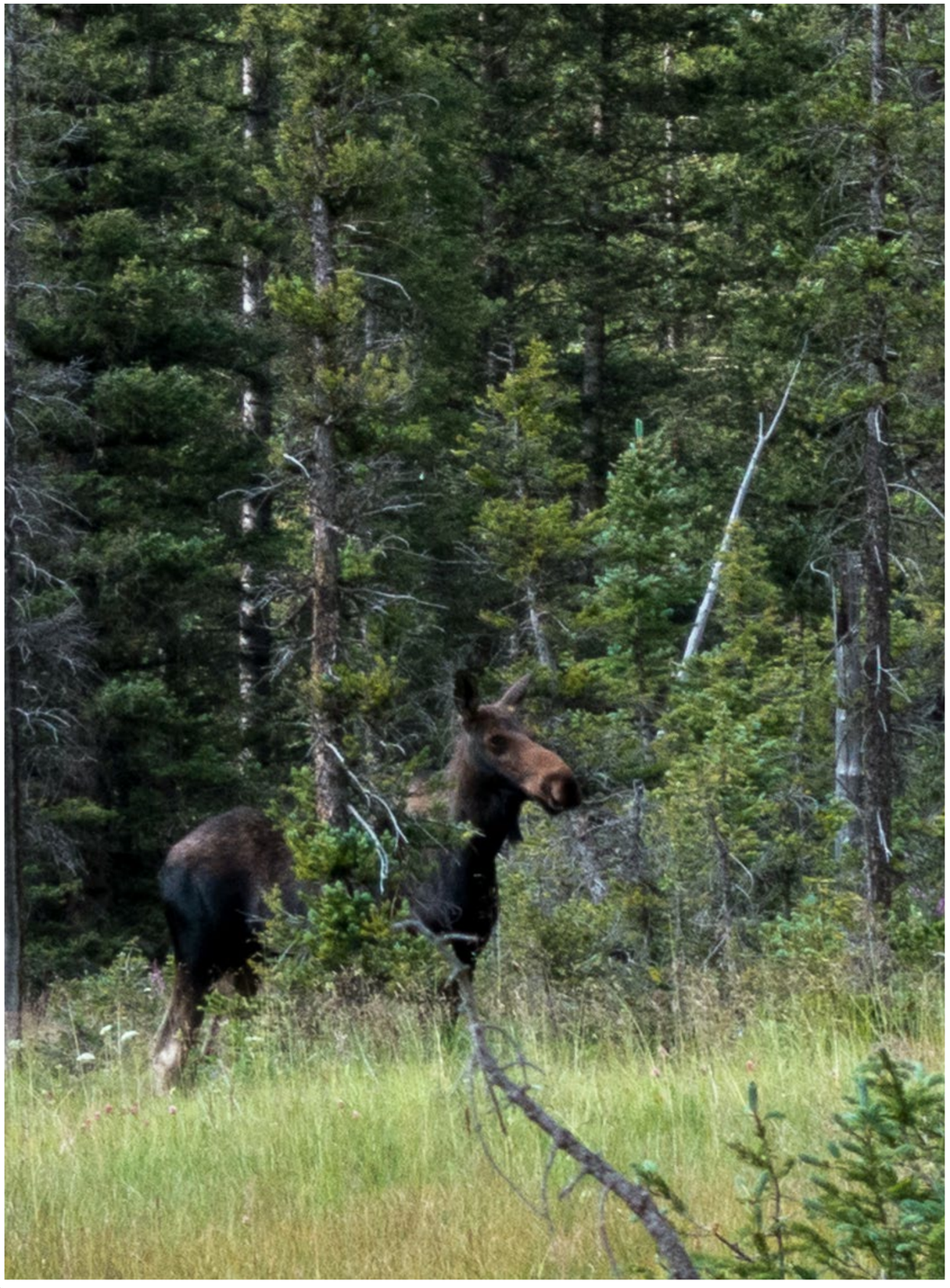
**Previous Page:** Views from the Continental Divide near Stony Pass
**Below:** Arrow and Vestal Peaks from Continental Divide
**Upper Right:** El Dorado Lake and Elk Creek Valley
**Lower Right:** Vallecito Lake, The Guardian and Mount Silex

final step of my journey on the Continental Divide Trail is complete as the trail turns southeast and continues on to the Mexican border. I stay on the Colorado Trail for a while, stopping for a brief snack break, light precipitation and a blustery wind provide a cooling effect. I view the breathtaking valley along Elk Creek, but my route sticks to the divide.

Leaving the Colorado Trail I follow a cairned path with views of El Dorado Lake sitting high above the valley. My original plan was to stay on the Divide and summit Hunchback Mountain, but the path soon delivers me to Vallecito Lake and I can't resist. The stream above the lake roars and there are impressive views of Mount Silex and The Guardian. I descend to the water's edge. Continuing to the other end of the lake I find Vallecito Creek. With no defined trail I descend near the creek, knowing it will soon converge with the Vallecito Trail. On the way down, I find several waterfalls as many different streams combine to form the powerful Vallecito Creek.

Back on the solid Vallecito Creek Trail, I hike through the forest valley passing several dramatic peaks. To my right, a rustling sound in a pleasant meadow, a

**Previous Page:** Vallecito Lake
**Below:** Headwaters of Vallecito Creek
**Right:** Waterfall along Vallecito Creek



cow moose having an afternoon snack. I move a little closer for a picture, but give the moose its space. Soon I depart and journey through swampy areas to where Vallecito and Sunlight Creeks meet.

After crossing the creek, the smell of smoke fills the air. Surprisingly, I find fellow backpackers who have setup camp for the night.  There is a faint path near the creek directing me upward. Attempting to follow it, I lose it and find it, only to lose it and find it again several times. Soon the valley is far below. Looking back reveals a beautiful rainbow shining through the clouds. A little farther up, there is movement uptrail. A medium-sized bear searches under rocks for food. Unaware of my presence, it saunters toward me. Before it can get too close, I loudly project my voice, “Hey!” Turning around, the bear runs up the trail as if its life is in danger. I continue the climb, keeping in mind that the bear may still be near. Underneath overgrown brush on the trail, I spot a dark animal-like creature. A skunk? I detour around for odor protection and a closer, but safe investigation. What I discover is not a skunk, but a porcupine, peacefully minding its business in the path.

Climbing even higher, the trail has again disappeared and clouds have darkened. Thunder booms and lightning flashes in the distance. Soon I’m in an all-out downpour. Where to go? I proceed back

**Left:** Moose near Vallecito Creek
**Below:** Porcupine on way to Sunlight Lake

**Above:** Windom and Sunlight Peaks

to the trees near Sunlight Creek for shelter. Realizing that Sunlight Lake is out of reach and dangerous above treeline, I contentedly call it a day, setting up my tent on the most unlevel site since my journey began near Frisco 300+ miles earlier.

Early the next morning I find myself above the trees on a steep scree field. I am on a narrow path but determine the need to depart from it and head in the direction of several towering 14ers (peaks taller than 14,000 feet) including Sunlight and Windom Peaks. Soon I have Sunlight Lake all to myself. The experience invigorates me more than I thought it would even after extensive online research about the lake. After enjoying the stunning alpine lake, I head off to find the next one, which is located only two unnamed passes away. Along the way, I pass the impressive Jagged Mountain and its many towers. My route follows no trail, but I simply direct myself to a point in the distance, following the route of least resistance. The lack of trail combined with the pristine mountainous wilderness makes this my most remote experience to date. Atop the second unnamed pass, I look down on an immense rock field on my way to the colorful Leviathan Lake. At the lake, I again have a splendid view all to myself. After a short snack break, I ascend north in the direction of Peak 7. This manageable climb only requires moderate scrambling.



**Next Page:** Leviathan Lake with the Guardian and Mount Silex in the distance

Next I pass an immense basin as I journey between numbered peaks and over two additional unnamed passes. Soon I identify another magnificent alpine lake, Lake Silex, its color more turquoise than any I've seen before. Navigating around Storm King Peak, the remnants of a trail lead me to Trinity Lake. Behind me is one of my last views of the Continental Divide. The sky's reflection in a small pool of water is truly inspiring! Trinity Lake presents a challenging photo site as I have to get so close to see it, but the towering mountains are so near. It is a view that is hard to capture in a photo. I see some deer staring at me, a stranger with a camera in their humble mountain environment.

Turning north, I head to my final pass, marking my return to the Colorado trail. The descent is rocky and each step requires careful foot placement. The view down to Elk Creek is stunning. The steep rocky descent levels out to become a flat rock field, only to continue steeply downward again while passing small unnamed lakes. Soon the trees are back above my head. Unable to find any form of trail, I grasp from tree to tree to prevent sliding down the steep forest mountain slope. At times I clamber over downed trees, while other times backtracking is the only way to find a safe descent. I worry about impaling myself with a sharp branch in the unfortunate event of a fall.

After significant time, I reach Elk Creek, sloshing across the water in my trail runners. I quickly discover I am almost in the back of a fellow backpacker's campsite. Not wanting to startle them or to disrupt their peaceful wilderness experience, I opt to sneak around, making my way back to the Colorado Trail.

The clouds darken and I search for a flat campsite, finding a near perfect site in a meadow just before the latest evening storm erupts. Experiencing my first episode of hiker hunger, I devour my remaining food, while planning a trip into town the next morning.

As I lay in the comfortable confines of my tent protected from the rain, I contemplate the joys of my first off -trail adventure: The Continental Divide, pristine alpine lakes, unusual animal encounters, the many unnamed passes and innumerable rugged high mountain views. Best of all I realize that I have barely touched this wilderness – The largest in Colorado, one with a name I still struggle to pronounce: The Weminuche.

**Below:** Leviathan Lake and Vallecito Mountain
**Upper Right:** Basin with Trinity Peaks
**Lower Right:** Lake Silex
**Pages 57-58:** View to Mount Nebo and the Continental Divide

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**Above:** View down into Elk Creek Valley
**Right:** View from campsite in Elk Creek Valley

**Best time to go:** July-September

**Getting there:** Arrange for a ride from Silverton to Stony Pass, start on the Colorado Trail from Molas Pass and make a loop, or better yet start on the Colorado Trail from Spring Creek Pass near Lake City for a week long adventure.

Looking for more off-trail hiking in the Weminuche? Consider the Weminuche High Route by Steve Howe. (Part of his route coincides with the route I took)

**Maps:** Trails Illustrated 140 Weminuche Wilderness

**Information:** Register at trailhead, no fee. Water is plentiful. Be prepared for high elevation 12,000'+ travel, lightning, and off-trail navigation.

# All in a Day's Work

**By Sean O'Rourke**

**Many hikers consider 10-15 miles a "dayhike," with longer distances requiring one or more nights in a tent.** However, as the growing popularity of ultra-marathons demonstrates, some are capable of covering much more ground – 50 or 100 miles – in a single day. Elite athletes like Ueli Steck and Kilian Jornet are tackling in hours routes that traditionally took days or weeks. Because these feats demand extraordinary levels of fitness and suffering, they have limited relevance to someone simply interested in exploring and enjoying the outdoors. However, anyone is capable of using aspects of their light-and-fast approach to extend the range of dayhikes.

I was introduced to longer dayhikes by reading Bob Burd's trip reports from the Sierra Nevada. Driving up to the mountains from Los Angeles on weekends, sleeping curled up in the passenger seat of my Celica at trailheads, I adapted quickly to 20-mile days with 4,000-6,000 feet of elevation gain. With such efforts, I was able to reach many Sierra Nevada peaks without buying expensive camping gear.

For my first Sierra dayhike I chose Mount Langley, the range's easiest 14,000-foot peak. Langley is a 20-mile hike from Horseshoe Meadows, following an obvious, maintained trail to the base of Old Army Pass, and fainter unmaintained or use trails from there. Leaving Los Angeles after traffic died down, I reached Lone Pine around midnight and, driven by diet soda and techno, tore up 6,000 feet of winding, rock-strewn pavement to the 10,000-foot Horseshoe Meadows Trailhead. After a chilly night, I started out wearing my improvised hiking clothes: ski cap, wool flannel, windbreaker, and jeans. After reaching the summit, I had the energy to jog much of the way back down to the pass. With plenty of remaining daylight and perfect weather, I even took a detour to nearby Cirque Peak. I was sore the next day, but I had proven to myself that I was capable of more than I had previously believed.

I was eventually driven to steeper peaks and greater distances, with 5th class solo climbing, hours of trail running, and significant headlamp time. While I enjoy this kind of "type II fun," it is not a necessary part of long dayhikes. My earlier outings required only moderate fitness, effort, and scrambling skill, making them "type I fun" accessible to a wide audience.

Some quick math shows that someone with decent fitness and comfortable shoes can cover much more than the standard 10-15 miles in a day. For example, at a brisk walking pace of 3 MPH, a marathon takes less than 9 hours of travel time. An average hiker can therefore cover this distance between dawn and dusk, with hours left over to take pictures, smell flowers, and swim in lakes.

Seen this way, many classic 2- to 3-day backpacks, like the 26-mile Aspen Four Pass Loop in Colorado, are reasonable days. In my experience, any one-night backpack can be done as a dayhike:

carrying an 8-10-pound daypack for 26 miles is no harder than carrying 30 or more pounds of camping gear for two 13-mile days. A lighter pack is an even greater advantage in cross-country travel, making dayhiking especially appealing to peak-baggers.

There are two ways to go farther in a day: move faster, or spend more time. Carrying a day - rather than an overnight pack - thus saving 10 or 20 pounds, will by itself substantially increase your speed. With little weight on your back, it may even be tempting to jog some downhills. While it is possible to cover great distances without running, it is often more efficient and fun to take it easier going up and jog going down. Be careful when adding running to your hikes, though: while intermittent trail running is easier on the body than road running, it should be introduced gradually to avoid injury.

You can also go farther by spending more time in motion. The obvious way to do this is to start earlier. While it sometimes helps to spend time hiking by headlamp, summer days are long enough that this is not usually necessary: even at only 2 MPH, you can cover 30 miles between a mid-summer dawn and dusk. I find it easier to start earlier than finish later, but this may be a matter of taste. I often sleep at the trailhead the night before a long day, allowing me to wake up as late as possible.



Another way to effectively lengthen your day is to shorten your stops. Spending 30 minutes instead of an hour eating lunch on an 8-hour hike allows you to hike at 2.8 instead of 3 MPH. Speeding up regular stops can help even more: stopping for 3 minutes for a drink or snack every half-hour adds almost an hour to an 8-hour day. Most of this time can be recovered by using a hydration pack or a bottle accessible while walking; the rest, by combining snacks with other necessary stops, such as resting at the top of a hill.

My summer dayhiking setup begins with cheap, comfortable, and familiar clothes: a cotton t-shirt, nylon long pants, and trail running shoes. Others are more comfortable in synthetics, shorts, tights, and/or boots. However, long pants protect from sun and brush, and boots are usually not suitable for running.

I also carry the following:

- small (10-15 liter) hydration pack
- thermal overshirt
- windbreaker
- sun-hat, -glasses, and -screen
- gloves
- warm hat

For safety, I carry a headlamp and a garbage bag or $1 plastic poncho. When backpacking, you can rely on your sleep system to survive inclement weather: if it starts raining or snowing or you are benighted, simply make camp, cook a hot meal, and wait for better weather or daylight. When day hiking, safety lies in being able to return to the trailhead. In the Sierra and Rockies, where summer storms rarely last more than an hour, I rely on my garbage bag and headlamp. The former, worn over my other clothes, keeps my core dry and warm; the latter ensures that I can keep moving (and generating heat) as long as necessary.

For nutrition, I carry 2-3 liters water and easily-digestible, carbohydrate-rich foods like granola bars, peanut butter sandwiches, and Pop-Tarts. On a multi-day trip, you have hours in camp or asleep to digest food and replenish your body's glycogen stores. This allows you to reduce pack weight by carrying fats (9 cal/g) rather than carbohydrates (4 cal/g). On a dayhike, you cannot replace your glycogen, and therefore must carry more carbohydrates, which are heavier but easier to digest.

The whole setup weighs perhaps 10 pounds including food and water -- far less than an overnight pack. With this basic setup, plus an ice axe and/or strap-on crampons when necessary, it is possible to reach almost any point in the lower 48 states in a day. Some people enjoy lounging in camp next to a meadow or lake, or wandering the wilderness for days, and are willing to purchase and carry the gear to do so. Fortunately, with just basic equipment and a bit of determination, the rest of us can hike and jog light-footed through the same places.

Example dayhikes:

- Longer Colorado 14ers, e.g. Snowmass, Capitol

- Aspen 4-pass loop

- Easier California 14ers, e.g. Whitney, Langley

- Bob Burd's Sierra Challenge

- Middle and/or South Teton

- Cascade-Paintbrush Canyon Loop in the Tetons

- Middle Truchas Peak in New Mexico via Rio Quemado




PETZL
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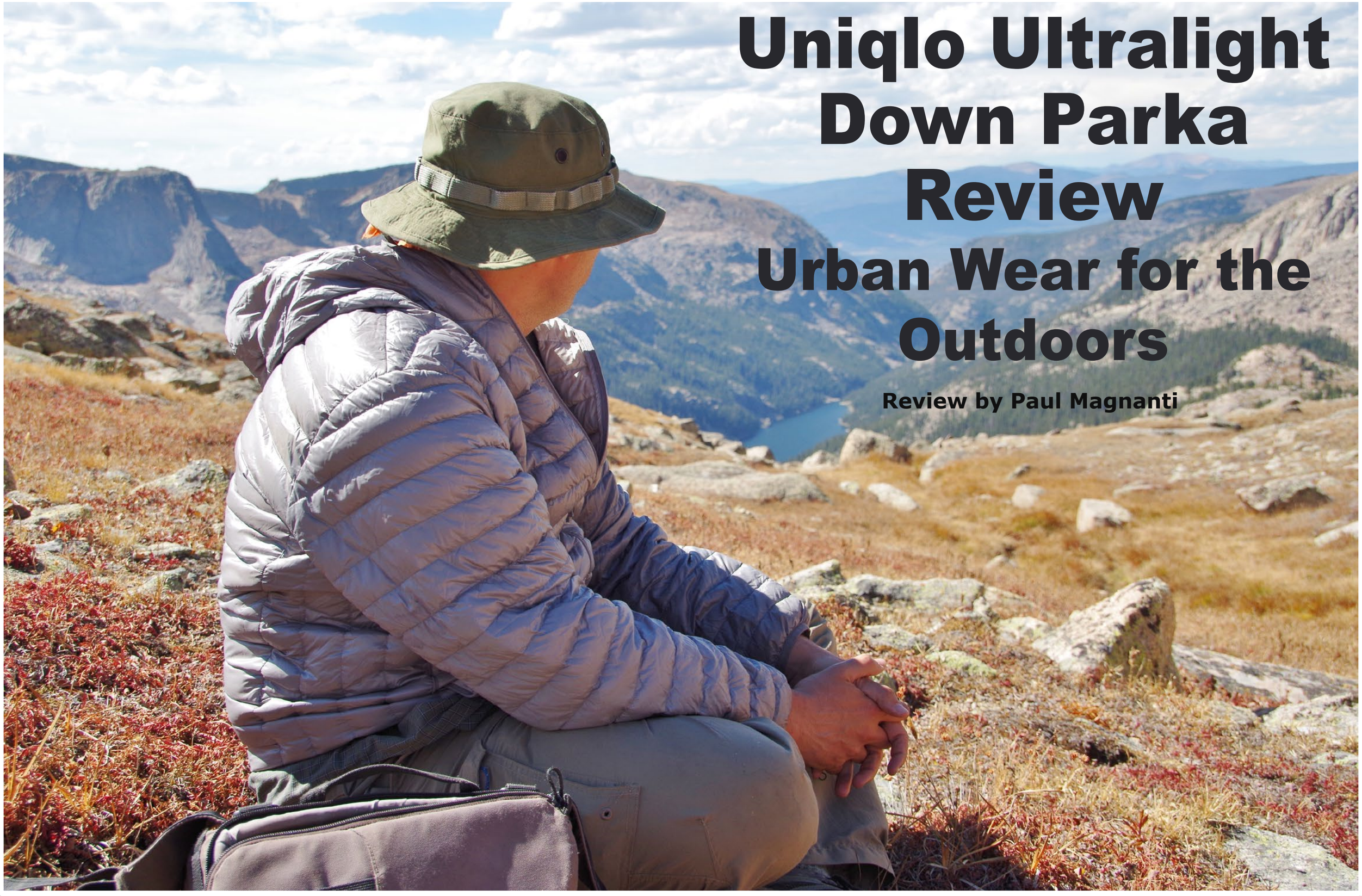
# Uniqlo Ultralight Down Parka Review

## Urban Wear for the Outdoors

**Review by Paul Magnanti**



**In the outdoor industry, there is often a cycle:** A well-known manufacturer will create an outdoor garment. The garment is combination of being stylish, functional and practical.

The garment becomes a de facto standard of outdoor wear.

Mid-range manufacturers make a similar garment. The outdoor gear becomes mainstream fashion and becomes ubiquitous. What was once meant for the outdoors is now seen at the local coffee shop worn by people checking their Facebook updates on an iPhone.

But another funny thing happens. Manufacturers of fashion wear create copies of the high-end outdoor wear for urban use.

A Polartec-like fleece is worn while walking the dog. A North Face-like shell is used when shoveling the driveway during a snowy New England day.

And add to this trend the Patagonia "down sweater".

A thinner puffy jacket that has largely replaced a fleece jacket for general three-season outdoor use.

These are not the large down jackets and parkas worn on winter trips, ski slopes or episodes of South Park.

Rather these garments are a svelter cousin of the above.

**Pros:** Solid construction and budget friendly. A lightweight piece that packs a nice amount of warmth for its weight.

**Cons:** Non-cinching hood and waist. Shell fabric and zipper are on the delicate side and require somewhat careful treatment in the field.

**Rating:** ⭐⭐⭐⭐½

Lighter and less bulky than the traditional two-hundred weight fleece, these lighter weight garments are surprisingly warm.

Though not suitable for wet conditions, these lighter down jackets excel at being worn during breaks or in camp during the cool mountain temperatures found during prime three season hiking.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, these jackets have become popular with those who may not be contemplating the view below while on a mountain pass, but are certainly wanting a light and warm garment for colder mornings during their daily commute to the office.

In such places as Boulder, CO or Asheville, NC or Jackson, WY these "puffy jackets" are found to be worn by many people. The patrons of Whole Foods or Trader Joe's are seen strutting walking the aisles in their down jacket best.

Outdoors fashion has become urban fashion.

And out of this urban fashion, brands have become available to the outdoors person that are light, high quality, pack down small, and are not nearly as

expensive as more well-known outdoor gear.

One brand of this trend of “outdoor clothing as urban gear” is Uniqlo.

Based in Japan, this company specializes in clothing that would not seem out of place in a hipster bar in Brooklyn. The clothing is trendy, looks nice and is modeled by people who look more likely to discuss their vintage vinyl collection rather than where to get a good topo map.

So how does a semi-reformed long distance hiker wind up with such clothing?

A clearance sale last January of Uniqlo’s Ultralight Down Parka piqued my interest. At $60, with shipping and handling included, a light weight hooded down jacket was too good to pass up. The clothing may be marketed to hipsters. But even dirt bag hikers like a good deal.

***Initial impressions***

When I received the jacket, I was not surprised to see it closely resembled similar garments made by Patagonia, Montbell, et al.

The outer shell is made of thin nylon with a hood sans drawstring. The garment has the standard inner non-zippered pocket and two zippered hand warmer pockets. A small nylon stuff sack is included. The garment stuffs down to something smaller than a Nalgene bottle.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the jacket is made with 640 fill power down on the European scale, or about 750 fill power on the American scale. In other words, the garment itself is a quality one in terms of the down used.

The workmanship itself seems solid. No stray stitching or any faults that may show shoddy manufacturing.

The fit is on the loose side but seems true to size. The jacket is not overly boxy as with many cheaper pieces of clothing but seems large enough to layer underneath if need be. The jacket strikes a nice compromise between having too athletic of a cut and the “Michelin tire man look” on the other extreme.

On my scale, a men’s large parka without the stuff sack weighs exactly 10.0 ounces. The light weight, compactness and the hood made it a promising piece of gear for my three-season backpacking.

And if you really do want to get a soy chai latte at your local coffee shop, the jacket is stylish enough to wear there, too.

***In the field***

This jacket has been used very frequently over the past seven months.

The trips ranged from jaunts in the desert southwest, to exploring the High Plains in the spring, to high points of the Rockies this past summer and fall.

The jacket kept me warm by alpine lakes while taking in the scenery or while

resting in the shadow of rocks adorned with ancient petroglyphs. At night, the hood of the down jacket helped to make for a pleasant evening while snuggled in my quilt. I can safely state that this jacket has become an indispensable part of my outdoor use.

The jacket is light, warm for its weight and seemingly well-made despite its fairly low price. I also appreciate how there is no brand label on the outside of the jacket. I do not feel as if I am advertising for the company by the simple act of wearing a jacket.

The jacket works best for cool to moderately cold temperatures. I would not suggest this jacket for deep winter use, but it is not meant for those types of conditions. The niche this jacket fills in terms of warmth is the rough equivalent of a traditional 200 weight fleece jacket. With the parka, I was able to be warm sleeping in temperatures dipping into the high teens or low twenties at night. As a baseline, I was using a CCF pad and using a quilt rated to 25F.

The hood and waist of the jacket do not cinch up. On the extreme edge of the comfort rating of this jacket, a non-cinching hood could be problematic. Since I use this jacket in conjunction with a down quilt, a hood that cinches up would be very desirable. In fairness, most jackets of this type do not have a hood that cinches. Along the same lines, the lack of a waist draw string prevents the jacket from being as warm as it could be versus other, more expensive, garments of similar design.


In the same vein, the material of this jacket is very thin. Again, typical for many jackets of this type. Helps keep the overall weight low. A little more care will be needed with this jacket than others made with a studier nylon shell. The current version of the parka has a DWR applied that works well for light mist and moisture. It is not waterproof, but packing up a shelter in the cold and misty morning air before setting out for the day should not be an issue. Naturally, any down garment should not be worn while hiking as excess moisture from your body will cause the down to become damp and the warmth compromised.

The one item I really wish was made better would be the zipper. It is very light, has a small zipper pull and is seemingly delicate. Some care must be taken to zip up the jacket. If the hands are cold and/or a person has a glove or mitten on, pulling up the zipper may be slightly difficult.


## Conclusion

Light, warm and inexpensive, the Uniqlo Ultralight Down Parka is a very good product. It may have been targeted at an urban audience, but any budget minded outdoors person should enjoy the product as well. Currently the down parka is selling for $79.99 which is still a very good price for this garment especially compared to similar garments retailing $200 or more. But there is a good chance there will be post-December holiday sales to clean out this year's inventory. If the parka again goes on clearance, it is even more of a bargain. A little care must be taken with the zipper but the parka is otherwise very useable in an outdoors setting.

You can find the Uniqlo Ultralight Down Parka at Uniqlo.com.

Overall: ★★★★½ – Very Good



# The Grand Tour

## Hermit's Rest to South Kaibab

### Location: Grand Canyon, AZ

**by Ted Ehrlich**

**Winter had been especially harsh, even while living in the mild climate of Colorado's Front Range.** Multiple subzero nights had made me tired of the cold, longing for a warm retreat. As good as a tropical vacation with white sandy beaches sounded, I felt the need to get out and get dirty in the desert. I had backpacked into the Grand Canyon a year before in the spring of 2013, but it was an unplanned trip, and I had been very lucky, grabbing a walk-in permit for Bright Angel Campground. I wanted to go back, but this time as a planned trip where I could do a little more research into routes and spend a little more time in the canyon. In fact all three of my previous trips to the Grand Canyon were unplanned. The first time was on a road trip where I walked around the south rim for about an hour before having to leave, the second time was after my Zion trip (see TrailGroove Issue #7) where again I was only able to visit the rim, this time on the north side. The more I thought about it, the more I felt like I was overdue for an extended Grand Canyon trip.

After going back and forth with the backcountry office, I found that the best way to get a permit is to call in, figure out what's available and what's not with a ranger, and then fax in a permit.  In between the phone call and when the permit is actually approved, just hope that the sites do not get reserved by another person. The red tape of the Grand Canyon permit office is legendary, being featured in the book "Into The Wild" where there were years of waiting to get a prime permit. Now it's just about being lucky and getting walk in permits, or having the luxury of planning many months in advance to guarantee popular backcountry sites.

My goal was to start from Hermit's Rest, a trailhead just west of the main visitor area on the south rim, and hike all the way down to the river then back up the South Kaibab Trail. Luckily there are plenty of free shuttles along the south rim that make access to both trailheads easy. After talking on the phone with the ranger, I found out that I could get a permit for Hermit's Rapid the first night, and Horn Creek the second night, but getting a third night's permit at Bright Angel would be unlikely unless there was a cancelation. I took my chances and sent in the permit. A few days later, I got an email from the park ranger with a temporary registration. According to the email I received, my trip was considered "difficult for even the most experienced Grand Canyon backpacker." They required an additional form to be filled out and faxed in where I had to prove my hiking abilities. It was easy to show that I could handle what I thought was a fairly toned-down trip, and a few days later the permit was approved. I don't know how often they ask for the additional form, but I felt like it was appropriate to make sure they don't have to rescue people who get hurt going beyond their ability.

After waiting another month and a half, the trip finally came. I had decided to go a little earlier in the season for my


**Previous Page:** Starting down the Hermit Creek Trail

birthday in mid-march, and the weather was spectacular. I was a bit concerned planning it so early in the spring because the Grand Canyon can still get a fair amount of snow during the month of March, but the forecast was perfect, dashing my fears of icy conditions ruining my warm retreat. A friend decided to come with me too, making the trip that much more enjoyable.

Desert hiking has a few unique challenges, and one is lack of water. The Grand Canyon deals with this by providing water along the main trail corridor, but outside of that, small springs and streams are the norm. While planning I figured that I would need to be able to carry at least 1.5 gallons of water for the second day and the morning of the third day, since there is a chance that there wouldn't be any decent water between Hermit Creek and Indian Gardens. There was a chance of water at Monument Creek, but if there wasn't, Horn Creek would be the only other option, and the water in that drainage is naturally radioactive, but only slightly.

After arriving at the south rim, we boarded the Hermit's Rest shuttle, enjoying the ride and looking down into the canyon from the bus windows. After about 45 minutes, the shuttle reached the end of the road, and we shouldered our packs and headed to the trailhead just west of the bus stop down a short dirt road. They had actually sent us a

**Below:** Below Santa Maria Springs



combination for the gate blocking the road from private vehicles with our permit, since they allow overnight campers to drive on the road, but we had decided that it would be better to take the shuttle. At the end of the dirt road we found the trailhead, and began the long descent down into the heart of the canyon.

The Grand Canyon is part of the Colorado Plateau, a huge layered formation of rock covering southern Utah and northern Arizona. As we descended into the steep walled canyon surrounding Hermit Creek, we passed through the cliff bands from the juniper and pinion pine forest that covers the rim. It looked like difficult terrain, but the trail passed smoothly on ledge systems down to the first stop at Santa Maria Springs. The spring was simply a pipe coming out of the side of the canyon, dripping into a trough with an open air hut next to it to sit in for a quick break. Even though it was the last spring we would see for two days, we didn't need any water, so we continued the descent through the layers of limestone, sandstone, and shale. We started mid-day, which allowed us to enjoy full sun exposure on the west face of the canyon walls. If it had been mid-summer, we would have roasted in the triple digit temperatures that are common at that time of year. After the spring, the next two landmarks were Lookout Point and Breezy Point, two overlooks encountered while traversing through more and more cliff bands. After Breezy point, a steep hike down the Cathedral Stairs brought us to the moderate plateau of the Tonto Formation and the desert scrub of the inner canyon. Our permits were for Hermit Rapid, not Hermit Creek, so we still had another 1000 feet of elevation loss to reach our final campsite. The hike took a bit longer than I had anticipated, so we ended up descending the last mile in the dark. While most would find this unpleasant, we were fortunate enough to have a full moon, and as the sun set, the moonlight lit up the towering canyon walls, helping our flashlights brighten the path to camp.

The next morning we woke to the wonderful sounds of the river rapids echoing off the canyon walls. Hermit's Rapid is a fairly mild rapid from the looks of it from the river bank, and after taking a few photos, we had breakfast, packed up camp, and hiked back up the creek to the Tonto Platform. Just before reaching the top, we stopped to fill up at the last crossing of the creek. The water was crisp, clear, and cold, some of the best water you'll find in the inner canyon. It made my pack heavy, but I knew that we would need every drop to keep us hydrated as we worked our way through the desert. Today was the easiest day for elevation gain and loss, but the longest mileage day as we needed to go nearly 14 miles to Horn Creek, crossing three major watershed canyons along the way. After backtracking to the Hermit's Rest Trail, we continued along the wide shelf via the Tonto Trail. The trail is named after the inner canyon benchland that stretches nearly a hundred miles below the south rim, allowing easy traversing through the middle of the canyon. The first creek we came to was Monument Creek, where the path forked, with one route leading

Moonlit canyon walls under the starry sky

Hermit Rapid

Hermit Rapid from the Tonto Trail




Rock pillar near Monument Creek

down to the Colorado River again at Granite Rapids. We stayed on the main trail, and passed through the only populated camping area on the trail. The views in all directions were spectacular, especially when the trail lined up with a river view, showing the extreme relief between the river over 1000 feet below us, and the canyon rim nearly 4000 feet above. After ticking off the miles, we finally arrived at our campsite at Horn Creek, and I was glad I had packed the extra weight since the water in Horn Creek didn't look too appetizing, even if it had been radiation free.  Our campsite was under a few blossoming trees, and as the sun set, shadows crept slowly up the canon walls until the sun's color finally left, bringing the full moon out again.

The next morning was great, and we slept in much later than normal because we knew that our easiest day of the trip was ahead. Only a few miles away was Indian Gardens, where our next water stop would be, then the easy descent down the Bright Angel Trail to the Phantom Ranch area where a cold beer was waiting for us. The first few miles along our last section of the Tonto Trail were similar to the day before, endless desert scrub and cactus with the trail meandering east. However, as we turned at the Plateau Point Trail, the oasis of the Indian Garden came into view. Here the groves of blossoming trees and immense cottonwoods offered a stark contrast to the surrounding inner canyon. After filling our water, we started down the lower

**Below:** Hiking along the Tonto Trail
**Right:** Trees full of spring blossoms



section of the Bright Angel Trail. Here we encountered the crowds that we had missed on the first two days. After descending the switchbacks to the bottom of Pipe Creek, the trail leveled out and followed the creek down to its final destination, the Colorado River at Pipe Creek Beach. Here at the bottom of the canyon, the oldest layers of rock are exposed, and the only easy way across the river for almost a hundred miles in each direction lay ahead of us in the form of the two foot bridges, the silver bridge and the black bridge. On the north side of the bridges laid our goal for the day, Bright Angel Campground and Phantom Ranch. Another oasis in the desert, surrounded by large cottonwoods, we picked out a campsite and headed to the cantina. Everything at Phantom Ranch is packed in and out by mule, and keeping that in mind, the scale of what's available is quite impressive. Snacks, souvenirs, drinks, even mail that is carried back to the rim by mule. After visiting with some other campers, I decided to have dinner next to the river, setting up underneath the silver bridge for a rehydrated meal as I watched colors of the cliffs high above change. However at Phantom Ranch, the cantina doesn't shut down till well after nightfall, allowing my friend and I to enjoy a few more drinks before last call. Stumbling back to camp, the moonlight peered through the tree branches above us, casting spidery shadows over camp. We certainly made the most of our last night in the canyon, and fell into a deep sleep under the cottonwoods.



The next morning we awoke with the hardest leg of the trip ahead of us. Instead of backtracking up the Bright Angel Trail, the normal route back to the south rim, we decided to take the shorter and steeper route up the South Kaibab Trail, finishing off the tour. I had hiked it before and knew there was no water til the top, so we filled up at the campground and started across the black bridge to the tunnel on the far side. The first part was the steepest, switch-backing to the tipoff 1500 feet above the river. At the tipoff, we found the Tonto Formation and the continuation of the Tonto Trail that we had hiked on a day prior, but passed it to continue up. Another set of switchbacks brought us to the mid-point of the climb and the ridge the trail followed past O'Neill Butte. Here the canyon showed its splendor again, spilling out for miles on either side. Down on the plateau we could see Indian Gardens off in the distance, but Phantom Ranch had disappeared into the depths past the benchland. As the ridge met the main rim walls, the trail followed the walls of the canyon on an easy trail through again what looked like very difficult terrain to navigate otherwise. As we neared the top, the day hiking crowds grew in number, and finally the last set of switchbacks showed themselves under the edge of the rim. Climbing the last 200 feet was very satisfying, and at the top, the bus stop greeted us with a water spigot and hordes of tourists peering into the depths we had just climbed out of. A few minutes later a shuttle came. We boarded, destined to return to where we had started our grand tour.

**Getting There:** The south rim is open year round and is approximately 80 miles north of Flagstaff, Arizona. The north rim is only open during the warmer months, and is approximately 80 miles south of Kanab, Utah.

**Best Time to Go:** The spring and the fall are the prime seasons, with more water being available in the spring. Summer can be very hot, especially in the inner canyon, and in the winter months, snow storms can happen on the rim areas and sometimes even in the inner canyon.

**Information:** See the National Park Service website for current regulations and info at http://www.nps.gov/grca

**Maps and Books:** Trails Illustrated #261 and #262 cover the area hiked in this article.

**Page 93:** The silver bridge
**Page 94:** Rafters passing under the black bridge
**Pages 95-96:** The Grand Canyon, overlooking O'Neil Butte
**Below:** A park ranger hut near Bright Angel Campground
**Below Right:** Moonlight through the cottonwood trees at Bright Angel Campground



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# GEAR MASH


## Sea to Summit Ultra-Sil View Dry Sack

Wait, I packed the T.P. right? Now you don't have to unpack and re-seal your dry sack to find out. The siliconized fabric and fully seam sealed construction is suitable for wet environments where the bag won't be totally submerged. Multiple colors and sizes available from 1 to 35 liters. A few ounces or less and $18-45:
Amazon.com


## TX.Direct Spray on DWR Restorer

Restore water repellency to everything from well-used rain gear to sleeping bag shells with this easy to apply treatment from Nikwax. Simply clean your item first, then spray and allow to dry. Watch the water bead away. 10 ounces, $15:
Backcountry.com

## REI Air Rail 1.5 Sleeping Pad

Tired of waking up beside your sleeping pad? This might help. Large insulated air tubes on both sides offer support while a self-inflating design keeps setup easy. 23" wide with an R-Value of 4.2. Regular, long, and long wide versions available, with the regular coming in at 26 ounces and $90:
REI.com

## GSI Glacier Stainless Espresso Cup

Serious connoisseurs only, please. This stainless cup from GSI is guaranteed to serve up the perfect backcountry espresso experience – Brewing it right is up to you, of course. Double walled construction keeps your drink hot as you sip through the 1.75 ounce capacity. 1.2 ounces in weight. $6:
CampSaver.com


## Tenacious Tape Patches

Fix almost anything with these superlight patches of Tenacious Tape, just peel the backing and you're in business. 2 clear and 2 black fabric backed patches; doesn't leave a sticky mess when it's time for a more permanent repair. Or, you could just use these and call it good. $3
REI.com

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## GoLite Wenatchee Jacket

PrimaLoft insulation is ready for crisper fall days in this wind and water-resistant synthetic jacket. Pit zips for ventilation; available in men's, women's, and even a vest version. About 16 ounces and $100:
GoLite.com

## Big Agnes Super Scout UL 2

If you like a large vestibule, this tent is for you. Trekking pole supported to save weight; this tent comes in well under 3lbs packed and has 29 feet of interior floor space for 2, and a lot more in the vestibule. The awning can also simply be rolled up or secured closed if desired. $400:
CampSaver.com

# PHOTO TIPS FROM THE TRAIL

**by David Cobb**

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

## Photographing Mushrooms, the Flowers of Fall

Mushrooms are the flowers of fall, and photographing them may look easy but it's not. Here are a few helpful tips to use when photographing them. First, you'll want to correctly identify the mushrooms you shoot, so pick up a good mushroom book to help with identification. My favorite book on fungi is Mushrooms Demystified by David Arora. I also recommend his field-pocket guide. When I photograph mushrooms, I often begin with a document photograph. This helps me identify the mushroom later and creates a stock photography photo I can use. (If you're having trouble with identification, spore prints and other identification factors listed in the book can help.)

**Left:** Mushroom Forest

When photographing mushrooms, I often look for a good background first and then I look for an interesting mushroom. Close to the ground there can be a lot of dirt and dark blobs which prove distracting, so use a bed of leaves to cover up those distracting dark holes. To make your mushrooms look even more presentable, lightly brush off stray pine needles, sticks, or insects. As with flora photography, I usually zoom into a small area of the mushroom that inspires me the most – such as the cap or the gills underneath. Turning an occasional fungus over on its backside can be an interesting study in form, or photographing from above can capture some nice mushroom patterns. When photographing mushrooms, changing your point of view can alter a subject drastically as well. Shooting from above is nice, but photographing a mushroom at ground level or even from below is much better, so lie on your belly and get down and dirty. Mushrooms photograph best on overcast days, but even then you may still notice the mushroom cap giving off some reflective glare so a polarizer will come in handy.

The best part of mushroom photography is that after you photograph and (positively!) identify a few edible mushrooms like Chanterelles, you then take them home and eat them!

**Right:** Senorita's Dress
**Pages 107-108:** Fly Amanita (Amanita muscaria)
**Pages 109-110:** Chanterelles

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

*Check out our next issue for more "Photo Tips from the Trail" by David, and be sure to check out previous issues for his other great tips.*

# Backcountry Cuisine:
# No Bake Pumpkin Banana Pudding

Still hungry after that freeze-dried dinner? Dessert is a great way to boost spirits at the end of a long day, but sometimes it's just too much hassle. Don't settle for that spare granola bar before climbing in your sleeping bag, check out this seasonally-inspired solution that doesn't require too much backcountry culinary prowess but still tastes great.

**INGREDIENTS**

For each serving:

- Dehydrated pumpkin or pumpkin powder - equivalent to 1/2 cup canned (just an overnighter? pack in some canned pumpkin)
- 2 TBSP freeze dried banana powder
- 1 TBSP milk powder
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp pumpkin pie spice
- 1-2 tsp granulated sugar, honey, or maple syrup
- Graham Crackers or Cookies for topping

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Mix all ingredients in a small pot or single-walled metal cup. Add just enough water to hydrate and create a pudding consistency. Optionally, heat using your stove's lowest possible heat setting. Stir constantly and hold above the flame when needed to prevent burning. Heat until warm and serve immediately.

Top with crumbled graham crackers, shortbread, Nilla Wafers, or your cookie of choice. Happy Autumn!

# The Drive Home
# PERFECTION

**by Aaron Zagrodnick**

**I sat at my desk and gazed towards the mountains, both regretfully and with hope, packs at the ready next to the front door.** The past few days had brought unplanned responsibilities and a 5 day trip had been reduced to a planned 3. At least the weather made staying inside somewhat tolerable; the rain hadn't stopped for the past two days and the highest parts of the mountains were receiving snow. However, with our packs both ready to go, Jen and I committed to a departure date in the morning, and with an improving forecast things were looking up.

The pleasant sound of rain against the roof lulled us to sleep that night, and forewarned of what was to come. 6 AM brought ringing alarms and a quick wrap up of things left to pack, errands to complete. The windshield wipers struggled to keep up at times in a torrential downpour during the 2.5 hour drive to the trailhead, the weather only clearing as we pulled into a parking space and made our final preparations. Above, the hills were shrouded in clouds, somewhere behind them, mountains. Hiking in the rain can be challenging, and it looked like we'd be tested today. I donned my pack, light with only food for 2 nights. I couldn't help but think of the 5 day, 60 mile offtrail trip we'd planned the previous year. But so many things at home had come up recently that it was just no longer possible. A 5 day trip now only 3…The weather didn't help my spirits, but I tried to crack a smile and stay positive. Jen and I used to go on backpacking trips together frequently, now the opportunity to get away together comes but once a year.

From below it had looked like we'd soon be hiking within the clouds themselves, but as we gained elevation we never caught them…They always seemed just a few hundred yards ahead. The reality was that we were hiking in clouds the entire time in a constant state of illusion as we made the 2000 foot climb towards our destination 10 miles away. At present no rain fell, Jen and I joked back and forth, smiled, and pointed out animal tracks, trees, birds, and all the other

randomly interesting things you find along any trail. We'd even managed to keep our feet mostly dry, it had rained here as well but we were able to step over puddles where needed. The higher we hiked, the closer the forest drew in around us, and with it came the increasing chorus of mountain chickadees, the scratching sound of nuthatches scrambling up tree trunks in their circular fashion, and the occasional burst of a grouse exploding out of the forest underbrush accompanied by doses of our adrenaline. Then, a steady rain began to fall.

This was the Wind River Range, where usually just by the time you've stopped to put on your rain gear and hit the trail again the rain passes, the sun comes out, and you'd just have been better waiting it out. But something about today was different. We waited on the leeward side of a small spruce tree where we remained protected from the rain, but after 10 minutes it only intensified. We donned our rain gear, checked that our packs were sealed and protected everything that couldn't get wet. Shouldering our packs again I confidently walked through the first puddle I saw and Jen and I continued the climb, the hoods of our rain gear forming a narrow tunnel for us to look through as we rarely gazed at anything other than our own two feet. The trail deteriorated to a mud soup, and this close to the trailhead it remained an area heavily used by horse packers, signs of their passage quickly mixing into the soup and into our shoes as well. Conversation, as well as our hiking pace, both slowed.

The monotony continued for several miles until something blocked our path – A bull moose munching on mushrooms just to the side of the trail. He gazed at us through bloodshot eyes, but wasn't interested in retreating. I took a step closer; the bull moose took two steps closer to us. It wasn't a pattern I wanted to keep repeating. We stepped off trail and scrambled up a hillside, giving the moose a wide berth and coming out the other side and taking a photo or two before too much rain soaked into the camera. Slowly, we made progress and eventually stepped out of the drenched and dark forest, finding an amazing view at 10,000 feet. Now, we could see the mountains, the tops of which were accumulating snow 1000 feet above us. The rain didn't stop, but with such a view our pace quickened and smiles were more readily found. We raced sunset to our goal for the day, the sunset at present only an ominous and slowly darkening shade of gray.

Our goal was a campsite we'd stayed at several years ago on a 10 day trip, with an amazing view, but as we checked our maps and tried to find exactly where we'd been about 1000 days ago another nice looking spot presented itself, with an equally amazing view. We setup the

tent, and no sooner had we done so than the rain stopped. We both were halfway inside the tent unrolling sleeping pads and bags when I stepped out to grab another stuff sack and I couldn't believe my eyes. Where everything in view had been bathed in some shade of gray, the mountains were now illuminated with purple and gold. Above clouds still filled the sky, threatening more rain or perhaps even snow, but far to the west a small gap existed between the horizon and the blanket of clouds, a gap through which the setting sun now shined. As soon as it started, the light began to fade. I raced for my camera and was only able to take a couple pictures of a sunset that deserved a hundred as the sun set and the light was gone. It remains the most amazing sunset I've ever seen.

No longer distracted by the sunset, our focus turned to the tasks at hand – Dinner and getting warm. After hiking for hours in the rain our hiking clothes were a bit damp and our bodies no longer generating any heat. Basically, we were cold, wet, and tired. I struggled with the stove with numb hands, spilling my first attempt to boil water and frustratingly had to repeat the process. We ate as fast as we could and Jen, colder than me, jumped in her sleeping bag. I ambled off with the Ursack and found a good place to tie it off, and with warmth somewhat returned to my hands from holding the hot pouch of the freeze-dried dinner a few minutes prior, I managed to complete the task. In the dark, I found my way back to the dimly illuminated tent. I was cold, but Jen couldn't warm up. I boiled a liter of water as the clouds slowly started to open up overhead, stars filling the gaps. With the clearing skies, it would likely only get colder. I poured hot water in a Nalgene bottle and handed it to Jen, then jumped in my own sleeping bag.

Just as I was drifting off to sleep I heard a growl from Jen's side of the tent. I paused for a second, trying to make sense of the sound. "That was you right?" I asked Jen. "No, I thought that was you!" She replied. I leaned over her and unzipped the door of the tent, as she scrambled for the bear spray I inadvertently was now laying on top of. I looked out into the night. Something white moved 30 feet away. I clicked my headlamp to high and illuminated the subject. What was revealed? A large white sheep dog sat on the ground and stared back at us. They've been grazing sheep in the Winds for a hundred years or more, and the open field we'd passed earlier was prime territory. Apparently we'd roused one of the protectors of the herd. I turned my headlamp off as I

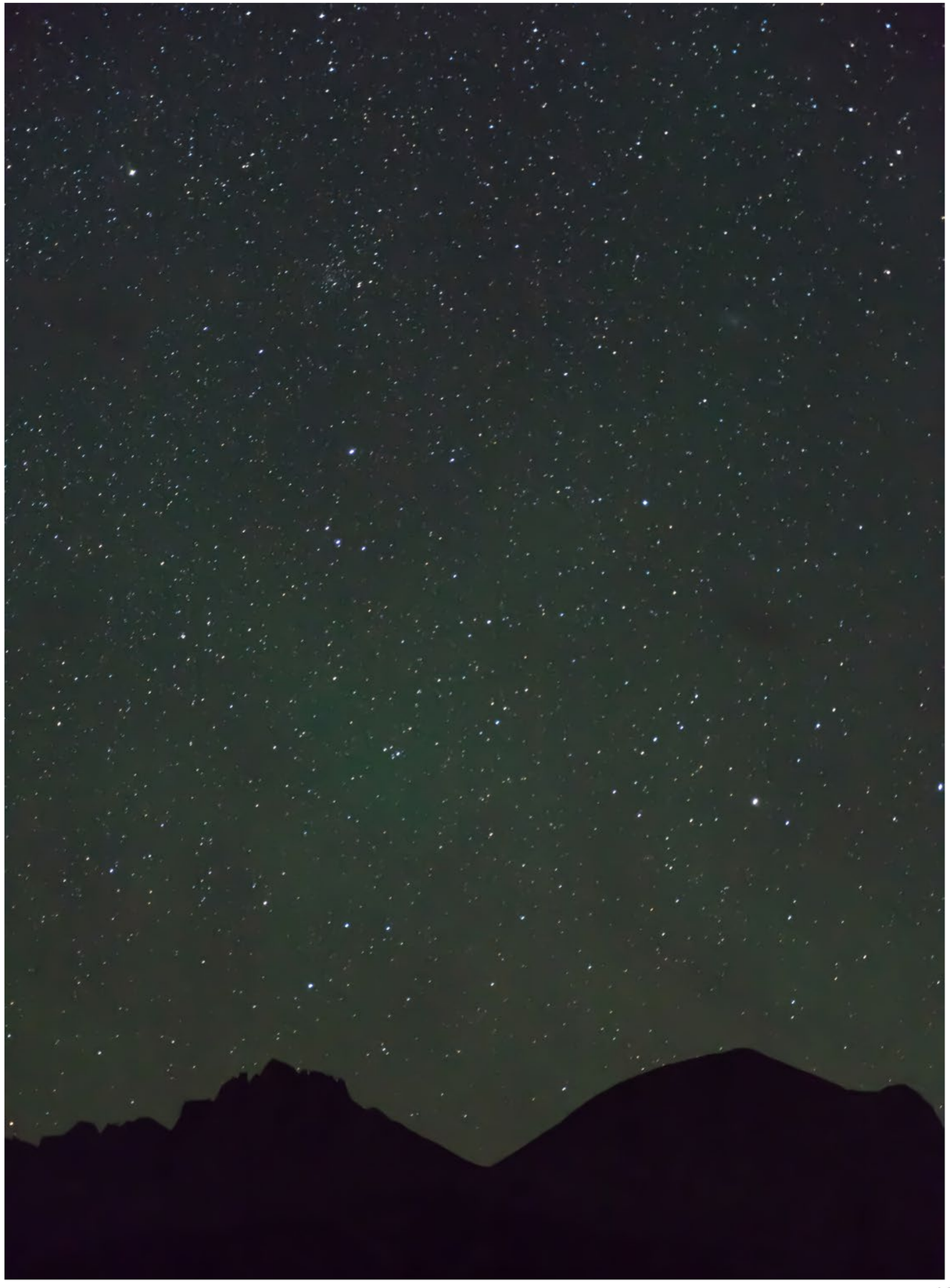
rolled back over, finally allowing Jen to locate the bear spray. “Just a sheep dog” I said, climbing back into my sleeping bag. Soon, we were both asleep. Despite the dog somewhere nearby, the next morning we followed fresh bear tracks on the trail just a half mile from camp. Even with a herd of sheep and a dog or two, it was still the wilderness.

The next morning couldn’t have been a more opposite start than the day before. Without a cloud in the sky, we lazily sat around the tent, dried our gear in the sun, and made a plan. We’d thought of a shorter loop hike, but something we’d actually never done, a basecamp style approach, sounded appealing. After all, this was supposed to be a relaxing vacation right? We occupied our time with a 12 mile day hike farther into the mountains that we could see from camp, though from the mountains I never caught a glimpse of camp. We caught a few fish along the way, and gazed nearly straight up in awe at the imposing peaks whose bases we traversed. As the day closed we returned for a slightly less eventful sunset, and the next day hiked out, the trail now thankfully somewhat dry, our muddy footsteps from the way in erased by rain. Just at the edge of the huge field something white on the hill above and to our left. The sheep dog watched, maybe more often than we knew. “Thanks for the visit!” I yelled towards the dog, a touch of sarcasm in my voice. The dog was unamused and solemnly stared back. The trail led into the forest and we began our descent.


A few weeks later we were out again on a farewell to summer trip so to speak, even though it was the first day of fall. This time though, it was the entire family. The trip was short, just an overnighter and 10 miles round trip. Stressful as a parent? Both in the mind and on the body - I carried our son Weston who weighs almost 40lbs. And that doesn't include backpacking gear. Jen shouldered almost twice the weight of her normal overnight pack weight. Our dog Layla and son Weston had it easy. Layla carried only her collar and Weston was along for the ride. With our worry regarding our 2 year old, I think the latter two were also the only two to get more than an hour or two of sleep that night. But we all stumbled back to the car the next day, another successful trip in the books.

My pride still hurts a bit from the first trip, and my feet still hurt from the second, but both trips got us out of the rut that can sometimes become life off the trail. And sometimes just getting up and going, even if things aren't perfect, even if it's not the perfect destination or as many days or miles as you'd like can make all the difference. Sometimes, changes take place, compromises must be made. But when you get out there any regret quickly fades away, the moment takes over, and you can just be. Sharing that moment, however perfect or imperfect, with the people you're closest to? That's quality, and maybe even perfect.






“Like music and art, love of nature is a common language that can transcend political or social boundaries.”
- Jimmy Carter

# Thanks for Reading Issue 18

Check out our next issue
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