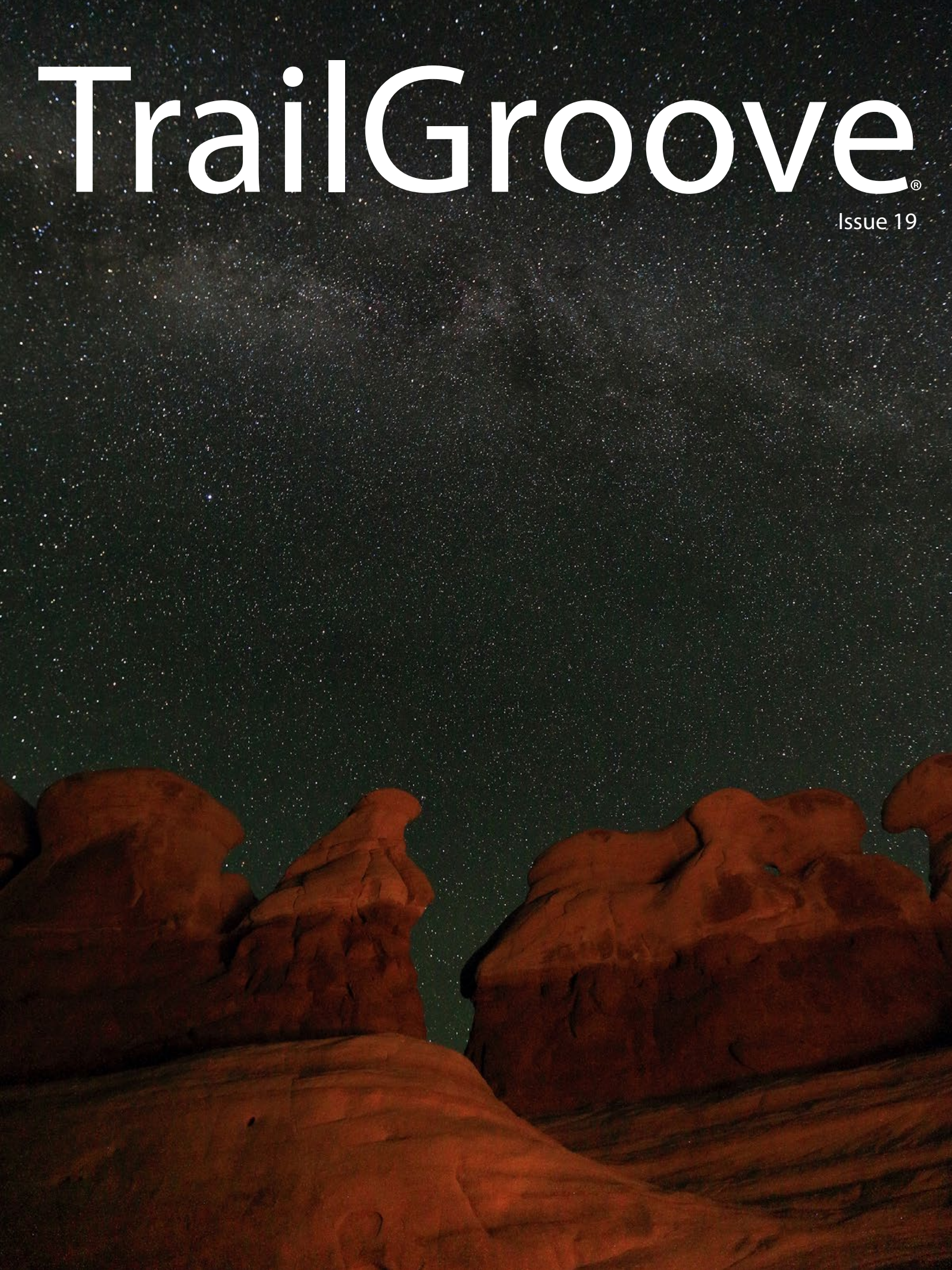
TrailGroove®

Issue 19



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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:
Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Andrea Lani,
Erin Saver, Sean Sparbanie, and Gary Meyer.

Editor's Note

Usually, I'm ready for winter. In a normal year I've had time to unbox the winter gear, get my fill of fall, and cross off the last warmer-weather backpacking goals I set at the start of the year. For some reason that all didn't happen this year. Lulled into a sense of an eternal fall by a lack of snow and mild temperatures, I was taken by surprise as temperatures dropped from highs in the 60's one week to lows of 25 below the next. Sometimes, Mother Nature gives us ample warning and allows us to slowly adjust. This however, was a year of her pulling the rug out from under us. Most of the winter gear has been amassed and snow has been clogging my boot laces. I'm still hunting for that other glove, though. Time to experience what winter has to offer the outdoor enthusiast – snow, cold, night, solitude, stars, and on occasion, that new destination that promises a warmer night's sleep and a view filled with more orange than white.

In this issue, we'll check out the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming, an obscure canyon in Utah, and the Colorado Plateau. Wired shares her thoughts on thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail, and we'll review a footwear solution that will hopefully keep you on your feet this winter. Not to mention a confession regarding trees and a lot more. Thanks for reading and keep any eye out for Issue 20 due out in mid-January.

- Aaron Zagrodnick

Contribute

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

A few examples of what we're looking for:

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

TrailGroove Magazine
Review Policy

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

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

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

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

Jargon: Baffle

Used in sleeping bags and insulated garments, baffles are a sewn compartmented wall utilized to control the distribution of down insulation throughout a garment or bag. Sewn through construction (The resulting compartments sometimes also referred to as baffles) achieves the same type of insulation control and is simple to construct as well as lightweight, but creates cold spots along the seams making such a construction ideal for milder weather. Box-type baffles are a bit heavier and more complicated to construct, but by adding the baffle cold spots are greatly reduced and down is able to loft more efficiently. On sleeping bags, frequently baffles will be constructed with a continuous baffle, such that the user is able to shift the insulation along the length of the tube that's created, often from the top to the bottom of the bag for warm nights, and vice-versa when maximum warmth is needed. For the construction of box baffles, fabric can be used, though no-see-um mesh and cuben fiber can be found in situations where saving weight is a top priority.

Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

In this issue of TrailGroove, the news discusses how social media can be wonderful, but perhaps should be used a bit more wisely by some backcountry users. And a pioneering gear company now joins the ranks of Early Winters, Alpine Designs and other influential companies that are no longer in existence.

In the old Yogi Bear cartoon, Ranger Smith admonished the visitors to Jellystone Park to not feed the bears. Wonder what Ranger Smith would think of the trend to take selfies with Yogi's real-life counterparts? Apparently the US Forest Service is not enamored of this latest trend to take selfies with bears in the background. Take your pic-a-nic basket, but please do not take pictures of you with the bears. Ranger Smith would like that.

Speaking of Instagraming, the "artistry" of Casey Nocket, aka Creepytings, has been seen all over the American West and has now gone viral. Using acrylic paints, Miss Nocket has not only defaced the natural beauty of such areas as Yellowstone and marred 800+ year old petroglyphs, she has publicized her "art" on Instagram and Tumblr. The public outcry has been substantial. As of Oct 30th, the National Park Service has named Casey Nocket as the suspect in the "Creepytings" vandalism cases. If convicted of these crimes, Casey Nocket is looking at up to five years in jail and/or $100,000 in fines.

The influential and pioneering backpacking company of GoLite filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy **in mid-October.** However, only two weeks later, GoLite started the process of liquidating their stock , including a "Going out of business sale". At the time of filing, GoLite owed over eleven-million dollars to their top twenty creditors. Additional competition, a loss of focus and investing too much in "brick and mortar" stores are all possible reasons for GoLite's fall.

Finally, perhaps in a sign of society's growing demand for connectivity, the National Parks Service is working with the telecom giant CenturyLink to place $34 million worth of fiber optic cable in Yellowstone and Teton National Parks**.** Park visitors will be able to soon post their Instagram selfies with bears easier. Ranger Smith would not like that.

TRAIL TIP 19:
Acclimatization and Altitude Sickness
by Ted Ehrlich

When traveling at higher altitudes, the body has the ability to adapt to its new surroundings. However, the inability to adjust to a lower concentration of oxygen in the air is called altitude sickness. This reduction of oxygen is due to the lower barometric pressure that is encountered as you ascend from sea level. Most healthy adults living at sea level will feel a difference beginning around 6,000-8,000 feet above sea level. As you increase in altitude above this, symptoms will become more pronounced unless you allow yourself to adapt, referred to as acclimatization.

The rate of acclimatization to the reduced amount of oxygen is different in every person, but between 6,000–14,000 feet above sea level, it is recommended that you limit your altitude gain to 2,000-3,000 feet per day to prevent altitude sickness from occurring. People who are already adapted to living at higher altitudes, like myself living at nearly 6,000 feet, are already acclimatized to a reduction in oxygen and can ascend higher before feeling a difference, but again it will differ between individuals because of their own history, genetics, and physical conditioning.

Normal symptoms of reduced oxygen include mild sleep apnea, mild swelling of the hands and feet, an increase in heart rate and breathing rate, and an increase in urination (dehydration). As your body adapts, these minor symptoms subside. However ascending faster than your body can adapt introduces additional symptoms that are categorized as AMS, HACE, and HAPE.

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) can show itself in several forms from mild to severe. The most common symptoms of AMS involve hangover-like symptoms, including headaches, nausea, lack of appetite, dizziness, insomnia, and fatigue. Dehydration increases the severity of these symptoms and the symptoms of reduced oxygen described above. High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) are severe and life threatening forms of AMS that can occur when you continue to ascend with AMS. HAPE occurs when fluid starts to leak into the lungs, shutting down their functions and eventually leading to suffocation, and HACE occurs when fluid leaks into the brain, increasing intracranial pressure, impairing the brain's function until it eventually shuts down. HACE is rarely detected by the person that is suffering from it, so it is important to watch for symptoms in people that are traveling with you. HAPE and HACE are uncommon at elevations under 14,000 feet, and occur slowly as the fluid has to build up first.

If you start to experience AMS, the first treatment is to stop, rest, and increase your intake of fluids to prevent dehydration. Your body will not be able to perform as fast at high altitude as

you are normally used to, so regulating your output and being smart about limiting your elevation gain will allow your body to adapt. Using analgesics like ibuprofen and aspirin will also help symptoms while not covering them up. If the symptoms persist or get worse, increasing your oxygen by descending to a lower altitude where the symptoms did not occur is the best treatment. After 24 hours at the lower altitude, the symptoms should disappear and climbing can resume. If HACE or HAPE occurs, descend in altitude as soon as possible until the symptoms subside. It is not a good idea to allow someone suffering any sort of severe altitude sickness to descend by themselves as the sickness could cause disorientation. If symptoms do not dissipate after descending, evacuation to an even lower elevation and treatment at a hospital is advised.

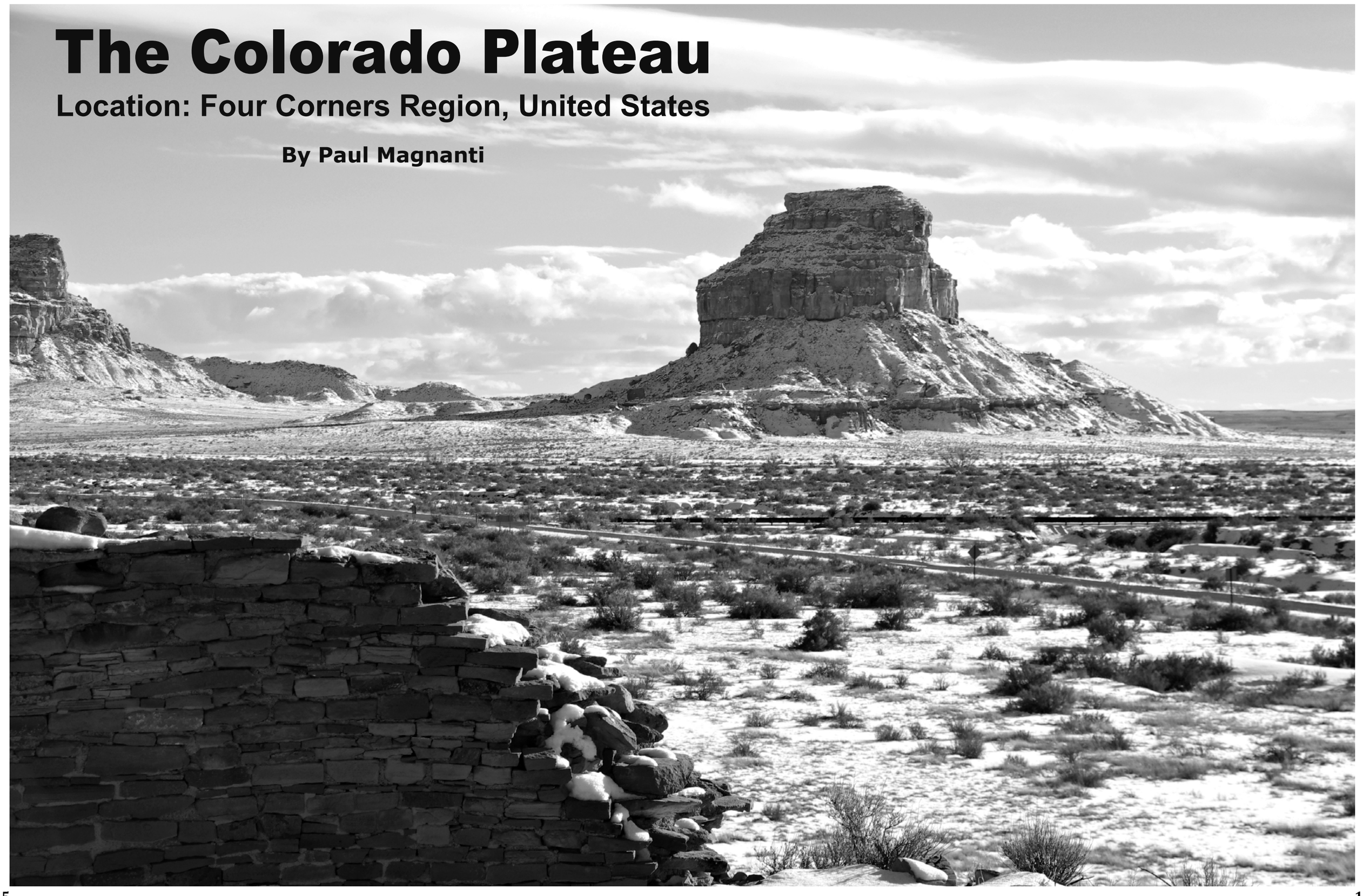
There are some medications that are commonly prescribed for altitude sickness, the most common being Diamox and Dexamethasone. Some other prescription drugs have been found to help, and over the counter options including ginkgo biloba and antioxidant vitamins have been shown to reduce or prevent AMS symptoms. You should always consult a doctor before starting any medication, even over the counter options. Avoiding alcohol, sleeping pills, and recreational drugs will help with acclimatization, as will keeping properly hydrated. Limiting your salt intake and foods that contain sulfides and nitrites may also help with limiting mild AMS and reduced oxygen symptoms. However, the best way to adjust is to just spend the correct amount of time at increasing altitudes until your body is fully adapted.

My favorite trick to help myself acclimate before a trip is to drive into the mountains near my home and camp at a similar altitude that I will be traveling at for a few nights before a trip, allowing me to keep my normal day to day schedule in between. However, for people who don't have this option, an altitude simulator like a Hypoxico system reduces the amount of oxygen in a sealed tent in your home. The altitude simulator systems are expensive, making them impractical for most people. Only altitude simulators that reduce the amount of oxygen in the air you breathe will be beneficial. Masks that restrict airflow, making it harder to breathe, do not help with acclimatization.

The Colorado Plateau

Location: Four Corners Region, United States

By Paul Magnanti



For me, the month of November is made of up of what I call "The Gray Days".

The high country of the Rockies are starting to become covered with snow. The days are growing short. There is not quite enough snow to backcountry ski.

And locally? The trails are starting to become covered in ice.

The dominant colors recede from the oranges, red and yellows of autumn to the browns of early winter.

For an outdoors person, it is both a time to clean and sort gear from the previous season and also to get ready for winter.

However, over the years, November has also meant something else for me besides the gray days.

It is a time when the red rocks beckon, the twisty canyons call and where the footpaths of the ancient ones may be followed.

November is the time to go to that magical place known as the Colorado Plateau.

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Wikipedia describes the Colorado Plateau as "a physiographic region of the Intermontane Plateaus, roughly centered on the Four Corners region of the southwestern United States. The province covers an area of 337,000 km2 (130,000 mi2) within western Colorado, northwestern New Mexico, southern and eastern Utah, and northern Arizona. About 90% of the area is drained by the Colorado River and its main tributaries: the Green, San Juan, and Little Colorado".

The definition is accurate.

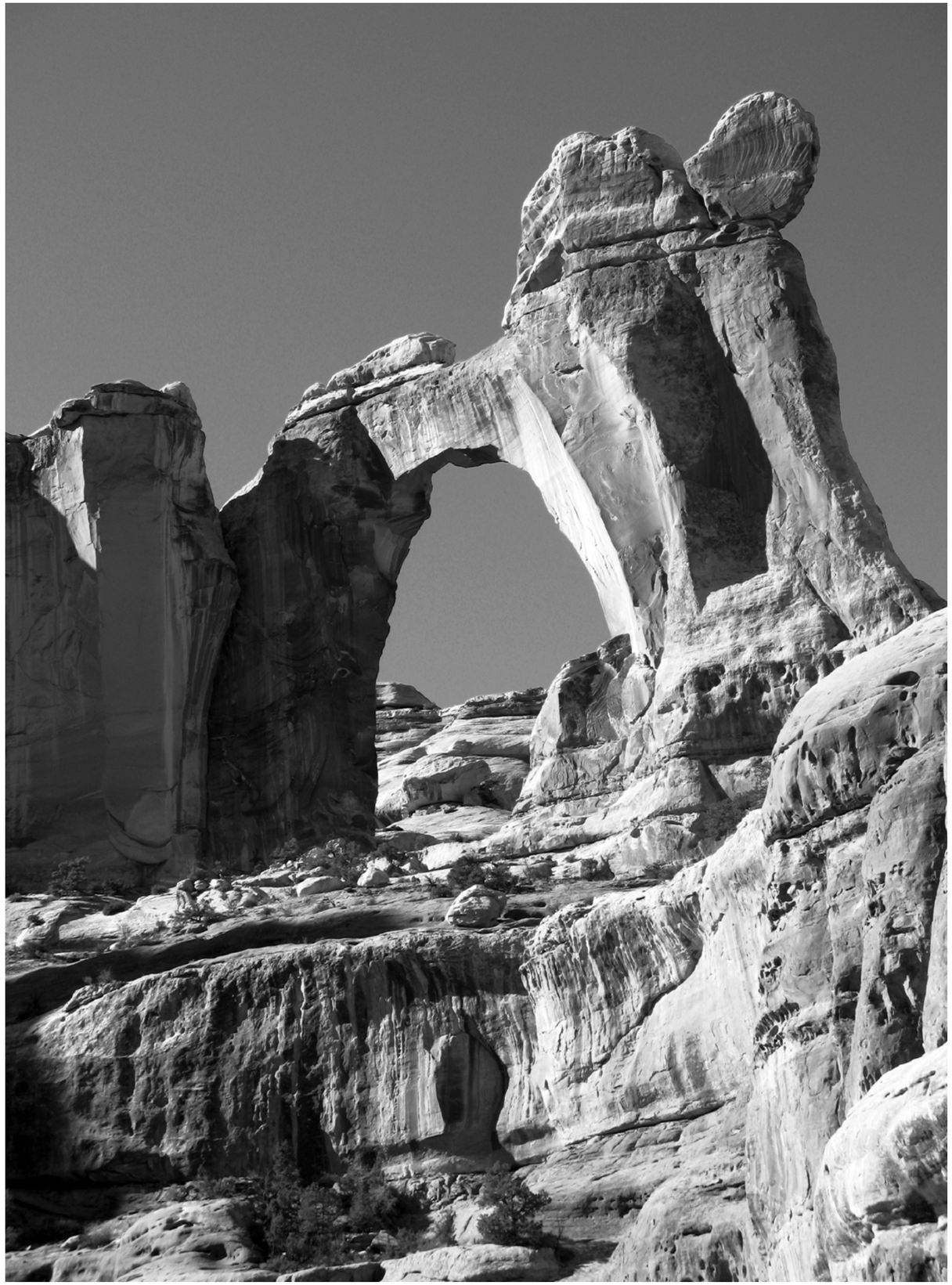
But perhaps a bit incomplete.

What the definition does not describe is the almost abrupt shift in the terrain somewhere on Interstate 70 in Colorado. The Rockies give way to red rock country while heading west.

Or a similar shift somewhere west of Wolf Creek in the San Juans. Somewhere around Chimney Rock National Monument lodge pole pines are replaced by pinon. The Southwest begins. The Rockies end.

The definition does not acknowledge Dinosaur National Monument that straddles both Colorado and Utah… and where a person can see the Uinta Mountains and arguably another boundary marker for the Colorado Plateau.

Right: Angel Arch, Canyonlands
Previous Page: Fajada Butte, Chaco Canyon



The definition does not take into account how arbitrary state boundaries seem after spending any time out here.

The definition does not take into account how the rivers shape not only the geology of the area but also the economy, politics and culture of the region.

The definition does not describe the deep history and abiding culture found on the plateau.

Or the isolation. Or how the night sky does not have any signs of light pollution.

And finally the definition does not describe what is one the most unique and beautiful areas in the United States.

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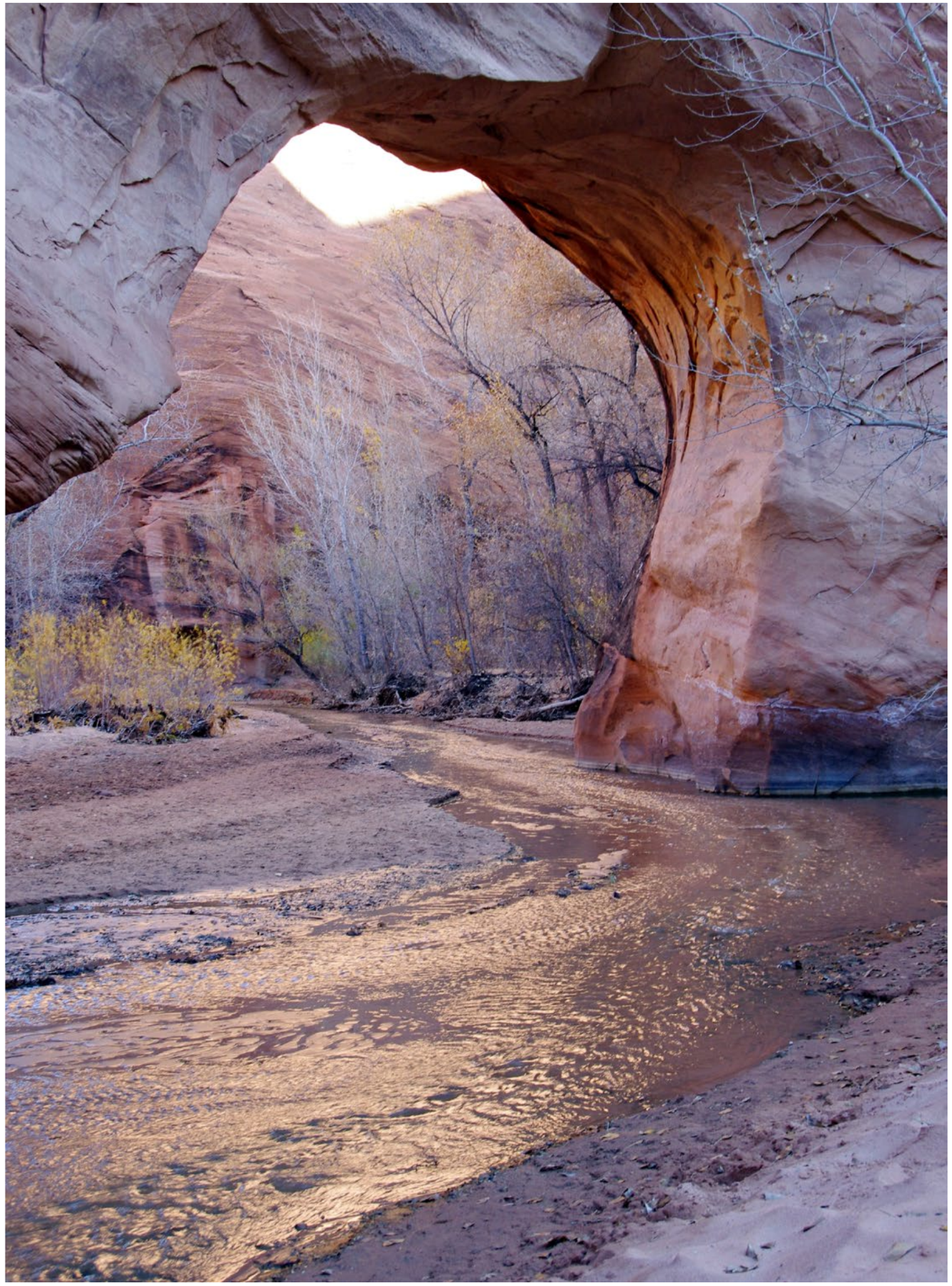
To explore this area thoroughly would take a lifetime.

There are many places to see, explore and discover. Many of the best places are secret and only marked on personal topo maps and talked about amongst friends. There are no guidebooks to these places or websites with directions to the places known only to a few.

But there are some well-known places that touch upon many parts of the Colorado Plateau experience. This list is far from complete, and never could be complete for that matter, but should give any person interested in exploring this area some ideas:

Chaco Canyon – The Center of it All.
Almost at the exact center of the Colorado Plateau is Chaco Canyon National Historic Park. Informally called "Chaco Canyon", this place is a wide, open canyon with some impressive rock formations. As with most places on the Colorado Plateau, Chaco Canyon is far from any town. But in addition to scenic beauty and remoteness, this area is considered the origin of many of the modern Pueblo nations. In an odd way, this place reminded me of ancient Rome. Like Rome, Chaco was a religious, trading, government and economic center. Remnants of old road beds can be seen, impressive ruins abound and obvious signs of religious and astronomical practices are present. There is no backpacking here, but plenty of hiking among the ruins. And the campground has ancient Puebloan ruins on site.

Right: Four Corners Marker



Left: Coyote Natural Bridge, Escalante National Monument
Above: Capulin Canyon, Bandalier National Monument

Coyote Gulch – The Classic Backpack. Arches, natural bridges, hoodoos, cottonwood oases on the canyon floor. Escalante National Monument is well-known for being gorgeous. And a way to see all these remarkable features is exploring Coyote Gulch. There are many variations on hiking in the gulch. Out-and-backs, cross-country above the rim or simply making basecamp for a day or two and day hiking the area. But all these trips take one through what many consider a highlight of backpacking in the canyon country of Utah.

Bandelier National Monument – Scenic Beauty and History. Bandelier National Monument has an easy “tourist path” that takes in some impressive structures from the Pueblo people. However, it is the backcountry of Bandelier that is both aesthetically pleasing and has some interesting things off the beaten path. An approximately thirty-mile loop in the backcountry of Bandelier will take in old Pueblo dwellings, some mysterious carved lions that are over eight-hundred years old, isolated canyons and a large shrine known as “The Painted Cave”. This cave has both post and pre-Colombian paintings drawn with distinctive red paint. Note that since some recent floods and fires in the monument, the backcountry of Bandelier is a bit more challenging. Some decent map reading skills and paying attention to the terrain are required for any backcountry travel.

Colorado National Monument – Car Camper’s Delight. The Colorado National Monument is located not far from the Utah/Colorado border and is just outside the town of Grand Junction, CO. Often a pit-stop for many people on the way to and from Moab, UT, this little gem gets surprisingly little use compared to more famous places. When my wife and I went there one Memorial Day Weekend, we were surprised at the relatively low amount of people in the campground *after* Friday night. A full campground on Friday. By Saturday morning? Maybe half-full. What we did find in the Colorado National Monument were desert wildflowers in full bloom, wonderful day

hiking trails right from the campground, long and quiet canyons and the wonderful red-rock scenery we both grew to love. And in the early morning hours? We saw some desert bighorn sheep.

Canyonlands National Park – Abbey Country. Ed Abbey may have been a ranger in Arches National Park, but I think Cactus Ed may have preferred the relatively nearby Canyonlands National Park more so if he were alive today. The Needles District, and the even more isolated Maze district, are less traveled and more remote than Arches. Classic Utah hiking with hoodoos, arches, and the smell of sage abound.

Hovenweep National Monument – Isolation. Mesa Verde may get all the crowds and press, but I prefer Hovenweep National Monument on the Colorado and Utah border. A small national monument, my wife and I were there this past March. A grand total of three parties were in the campground. The nearest towns are more than an hour away and the night sky was exquisite. Hiking can be found in both the monument and the nearby Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. But seeing the Little Ruins Canyon at sunset, a short fifteen minute walk from the campground, was the sublime highlight of our visit.

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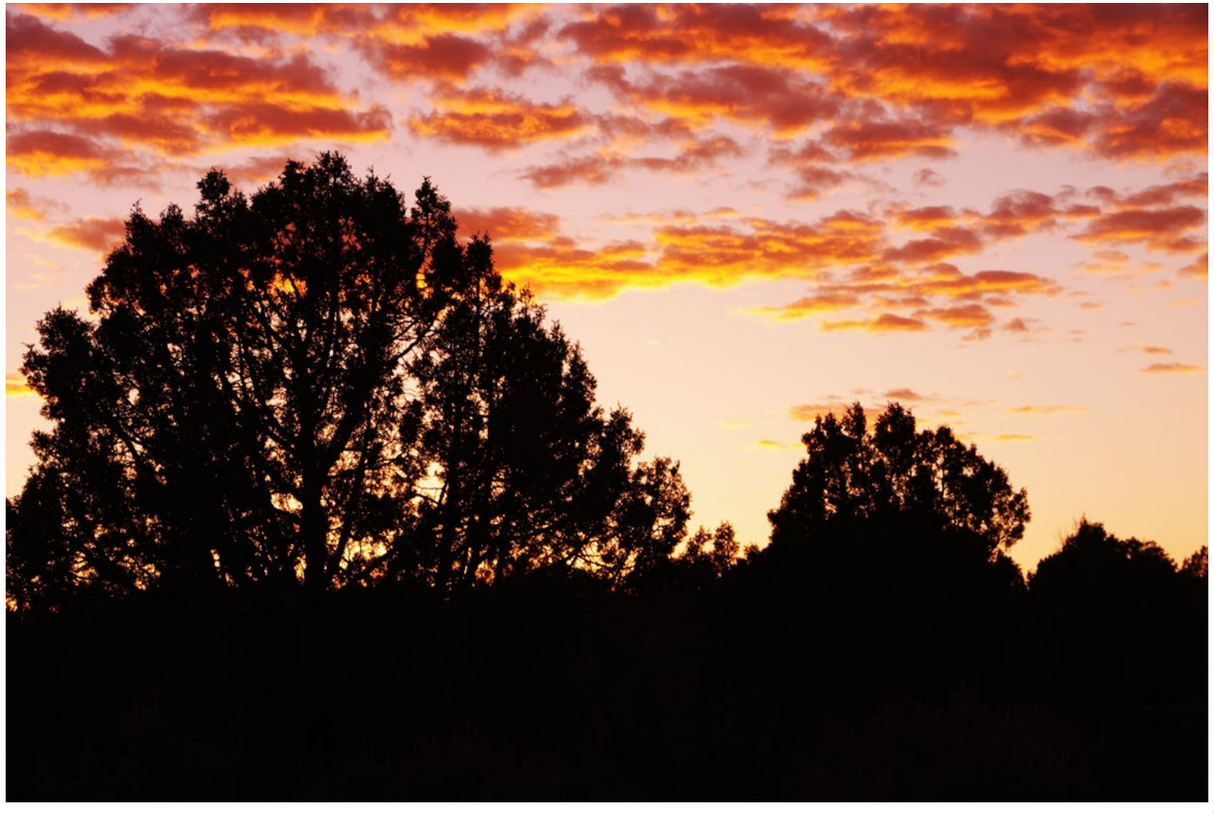
Below: Freemont Petroglyph, DNM
Upper Right: Horseshoe, Dominguez Canyon
Lower Right: Hovenweep National Monument Sunset



When to go?

March or April seem to be good times to go. Not hot, plenty of daylight and the seasonal streams are flowing. Summer is much too hot. And it can get very cold in deep winter. When my wife and I were in Chaco Canyon just after Christmas, it dipped to -7F at night!

At the end, while I go any chance I get, I prefer the latter part of fall. October or even November is when I go as there tends to be less people. Plus Thanksgiving in the desert just seems appropriate. What better place to give thanks than in one most gorgeous places in the American West: The Colorado Plateau?

Upper Left: Canyonlands Upheaval Crater
Lower Left: Claret Cactus
Pages 25-26: Green River from Ruple Point DNM
Pages 27-28: Hovenweep National Monument
Pages 29-30 (Clockwise from Upper Left): Canyonlands; Salt Creek Canyonlands; Colorado National Monument; Lizard; Dominguez Canyon
Pages 31-32: Cliff Palace Mesa Verde
Pages 33-34: 40 Mile Ridge Escalante National Monument

Hiking in Solitude

Walking Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains

By David Cobb

The snow began to fly even before I put on my hiking shoes, but wasn't this still August? It was, but any mountain range worth its salt was going to have snowfall in August, and this seemed to be the norm for me backpacking in Wyoming. Besides, I'd rather have snow than rain any day, and these colder temps meant only one thing: the death to millions of mosquitoes!

When I set out to backpack Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains Cloud Peak Wilderness, I settled on a 62-mile loop trail called the "Solitude Trail." There are a number of different access points to this trail, but I decided on the Coffeen Trailhead since it only added a mile onto my loop hike. One problem with this access point is that it has a seven-mile, four-wheel-drive road that is not accessible to low-clearance vehicles. You'll need to access the trail by a different point if low-clearance is an issue.

The Cloud Peak Wilderness is a vast area listing over 189,000 acres, and its central namesake is the 13,167-foot Cloud Peak. Much of the area has gentle talus slopes, but in the middle of the wilderness lays an imposing array of cliffs, spires, buttresses, and high peaks holding large glaciers. This is the home of the mountain climber and off-trail route finder. The Solitude Trail circles these mountainous lands and tops its high point of over 11,000 feet at Florence Pass to a low point of 8,500 feet in various places. The trail is well-marked with numbered markers, but can be more difficult to follow in meadowed trail junctions. Here trail signs tend to fall down from wind or sign rot, and rock cairns sometimes drift different ways at trail junctions like the ones in Highland Park. Along the high plateau at Elk Lake I missed one of these meadowed trail junctions and veered in the wrong direction for about a mile until I corrected my error. Except for this slight confusion the route is fairly obvious. For a short time the Solitude Trail also follows a 4WD route outside of the wilderness boundary, so the Solitude Trail may have little here. That said, I saw no vehicles and only passed 3 people during my entire 65 miles of hiking – so

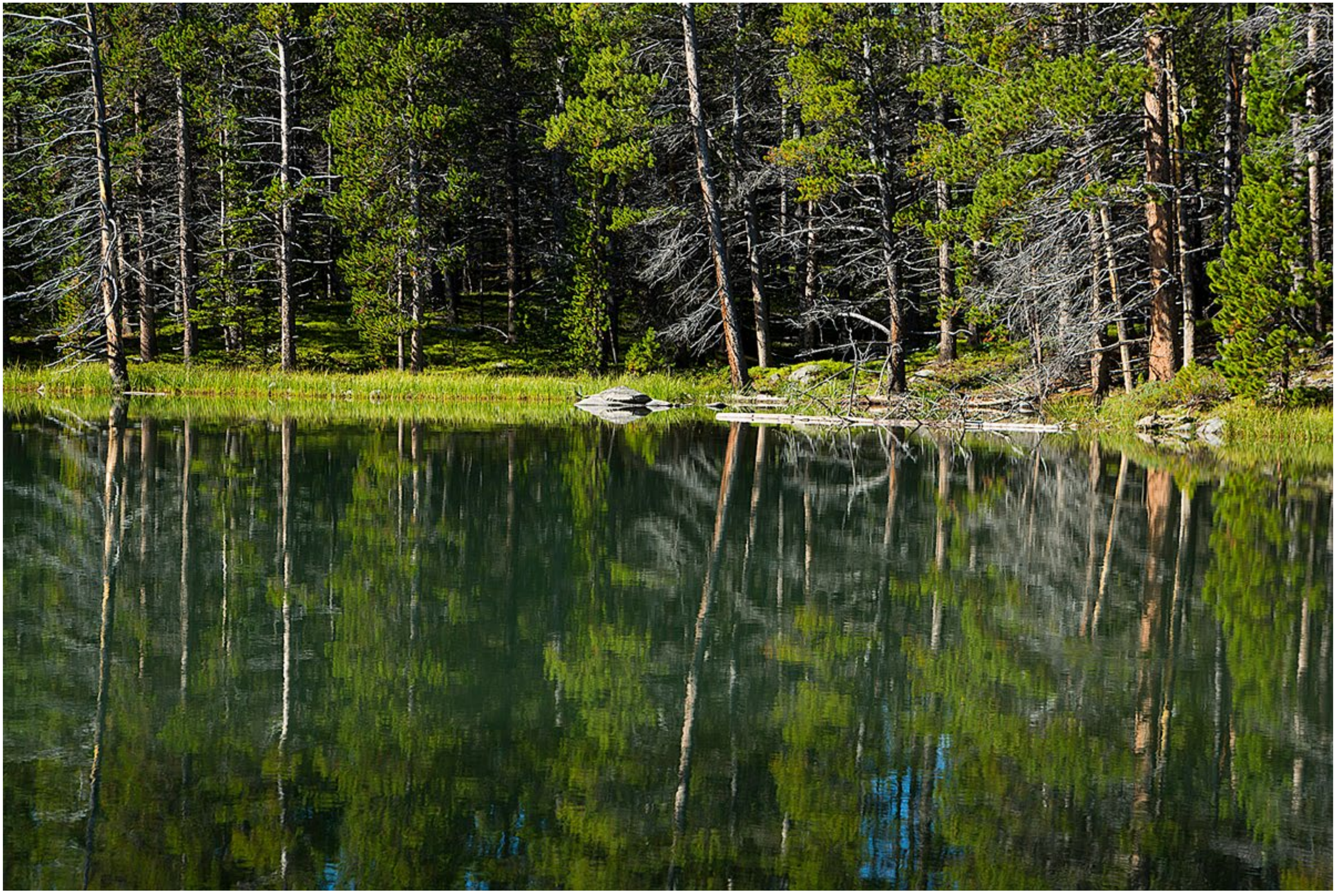
Right: Highland Park Cairn

it lived up to its namesake. I completed the trail in just over 4 days; a nice pace with all my photo equipment. The guidebook suggests hikers take 8-14 days which seems excessive to me. In order to gradually acclimate to the trail's elevation I walked a clockwise route from Coffeen Trailhead. Arriving here from sea-level, a clockwise route was the better choice for me. (Walking the route counter-clockwise gets you to the high country quicker, just FYI.)

In a way, the area has the look of Wyoming's Wind River Range but the "feel" of the Sierra Nevada Range. What I mean by that is the peaks are similar to the Winds but the hiking is not. In the Winds you hike to a high plateau and for the most part stay at high elevations, but the Bighorns tend to go from pass to valley and back to pass quite a bit.

The trail (like ones in the Sierra Nevada Range) is always undulating. Water is not a problem along the route as it seems to be everywhere. The land is dotted by lakes large and small, and creek crossings are common. It's a good idea to bring stream-crossing shoes for the three-a-day creek fords. A few of the high-volume stream crossings have bridges for safety.

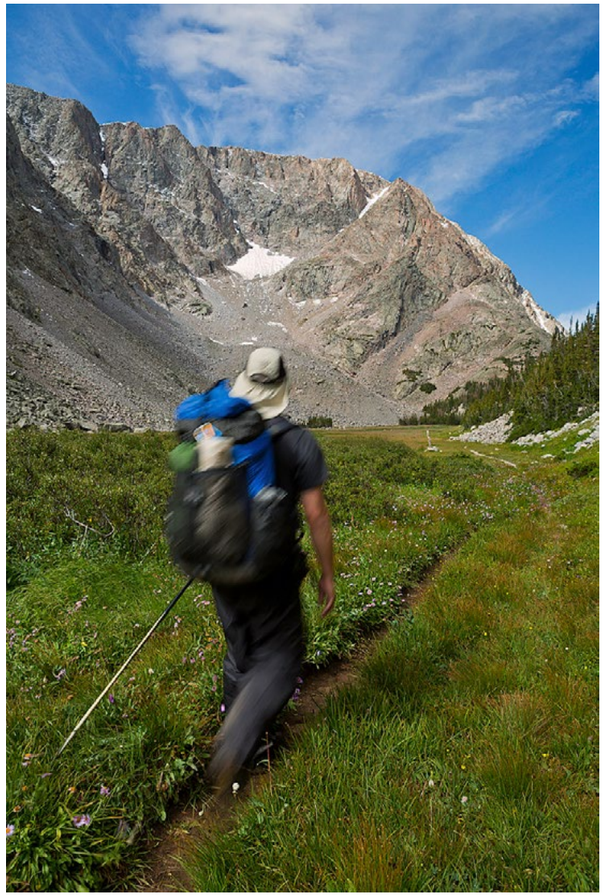
Left: Lake Solitude Sunset
Below: Stream Crossing



The Solitude Trail isn't the only route in the Bighorns; there are multiple trail loops (all of them shorter) throughout the area. Like all western wildernesses fire can be a problem later in the season, so call the ranger to find out recent conditions. Nearby Sheridan is a growing town in Wyoming and provides outdoor gear shops and grocery stores for last-minute items. And not that I needed it, but I was able to get cell reception at many of the passes along the trail; in today's social media society you can post a video from a snowstorm or a mountain pass.

The Cloud Peak Wilderness holds the usual suspects of western fauna: mule deer, cougar, bobcat, elk, and bighorn sheep – but no grizzly bear. I was told fishing is good along the route for rainbow, cutthroat, and other trout, but I didn't try my hand.

Next time you're in the mood for some remote alpine scenery, some solitude, and maybe a little snow, try the Cloud Peak Wilderness of the Bighorn Mountains.



Pages 43-44: High Country
Pages 45-46: Solitude Falls
Pages 47-48: Woodland Pond
Above: Backpacking Selfie

Information: Permits are necessary for hiking into the Bighorn's Cloud Peak Wilderness and they can be found at all trailheads, or you can pick one up at an outside kiosk in front of the National Forest Service Building in Sheridan, Wyoming.

Best Time to Go: Mid-August to mid-September seems to be an ideal time for these mountains to experience the end of wildflower season and also bug season. Cooler temps mean easier hiking.

Getting there: From Sheridan, Wyoming there are a number of access points to trails, and the National Forest Service or the Visitor Center in Sheridan can offer advice.

Maps: I used the National Geographic/Trails Illustrated Cloud Peak Wilderness Map and you won't need anything else.

Books: Hiking Wyoming's Cloud Peak Wilderness by Erik Molvar. This doesn't have the Solitude Trail in the book except for a mention near the back, but you can piece it together from other suggested hikes included in the book.

Four Days at Russell Pond

A First-Time Family Backpacking Trip in Maine's Baxter State Park

By Andrea Lani

Day 1: Roaring Brook to Russell Pond via Russell Pond Trail, 7 miles

Less than a mile up the trail and the space between my shoulder blades already aches. I'm regretting the overpriced mini tube of sunblock, which the dense trees and clouds have rendered unnecessary, the extra layer I threw in at the last minute, and my insistence on healthful foods that caused me to pack two pounds of green beans and carrots fresh from the garden, a jar of sunflower seed butter, and three loaves of German bread the size, shape, and weight of bricks.

My last backpacking trip, thirteen years ago, involved a three-mile hike to nearby Chimney Pond, carrying my oldest son in a front pack, while my last major trip was a seventy-mile honeymoon hike in Colorado two years earlier. The only times I've lugged a backpack this heavy since then, it held a toddler. I decide to be grateful that the contents of my pack are not pulling my hair or throwing sippy cups onto the trail.

My nine-year-old son Zephyr trudges ahead of me, sliding his pack straps to his elbows, complaining that his arms are falling asleep. After a while, we meet Zephyr's twin brother, Emmet, sitting in the middle of the trail eating GORP with my friend Brett. Brett heads up the trail

while Zephyr and I join Emmet for a rest. I've always hiked like the tortoise, slow and steady, catching up to my companions as they finish their breaks, so this position of sweeper suits me. I know that my husband, Curry, is miles ahead with my thirteen-year-old son, Milo, and Brett's son, Gabe.

We finish our snack, shoulder our packs, and make our way across boulders that dot a stream, but all too soon Emmet and Zephyr complain of being tired again. We stop and I hand them each a meat stick and gnaw on my own vegetarian jerky. There are many things I want my kids to get out of this trip – the experience of being in wilderness, close contact with nature, time with their parents free of daily distractions, the satisfaction of succeeding at a physically demanding experience – but my main goal is a selfish one. I want them to have a good time because I have plans for a much bigger trip next summer. So I let them take all the breaks they want and, after they finish their meat sticks, I hand them each a lollipop.

As we near Whidden Pond, our only real chance for a view of Katahdin, the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail and centerpiece of Baxter State Park, one of the boys says he has to poop, and we hurry past the pond, in search of higher ground and a gap in the dense forest that lines the trail on both sides. I rescind my resentment of the weight of the hand sanitizer in my pack and curse myself for packing the cat-hole shovel in Curry's.

Our morning continues like this, stop-and-start. “Did this used to be a stream?” Emmet asks of the rock-and root-studded trail that makes for slow going. I take pictures of bunch berries and mushrooms and try to keep the boys happy and comfortable. As we approach noon, I get irritated that Curry hasn’t stopped to wait for us. While we both have lunch food in our packs, it’s not evenly divided, and I’m afraid if we stop to eat we’ll fall even farther behind. We finally catch up to the group at the fork with the Wassataquoik Stream Trail at about one in the afternoon, three-point-three miles up the trail and two-and-a-half hours after we started.

Emmet, Zephyr, and I sit down for crackers and cheese and I try to foist green beans and carrots on everyone. Milo offers to carry some of my weight, so I stuff the lunch bag in his pack, and we refill our water bottles at the stream and move on up the trail. Energized from lunch, Emmet and Zephyr hike ahead, while I drift to the back. When I reach Wassataquoik Stream, the boys have already forded and reassembled on the other side. Milo and Gabe come back across, offering assistance to Brett and me as we wade the thigh-deep water. Once across, everyone surges ahead and I hike alone until I meet Emmet on a stretch of bog bridges that leads to the campground,

where he wades in the lush sphagnum moss, picking blueberries from the laden bushes along the trail.

Eventually we make it to camp and, while the adults busy themselves starting dinner, the boys go off exploring. After a few minutes, Emmet comes running back, “A moose!” he yells. “A real moose.”

We all take turns walking up “Ankle Knock Bridge” to see the big cow moose browsing through the trees just off the trail, then return to camp to tend the macaroni and cheese and settle in for the night.

Day 2: Russell Pond to Wassataquoik Lake, 5 miles round-trip

I start the morning with a swim. Russell Pond is shallow with a mucky bottom, and everyone else refuses to go in because they think there are leeches, but the water is refreshing and I’m happy to take any opportunity to swim. After a leisurely breakfast, we set out for Wassataquoik Lake.

Russell Pond is situated somewhat centrally between the Katahdin area and South Branch Pond and can be just one stop in a multi-day backpacking trip that includes other campgrounds and lean-to sites, but we have chosen to use it as a base camp and take day trips to nearby destinations. Curry carries our lunch and water in a daypack and I carry a stuff sack with my swimming suit, pack towels, bug repellent, and sunblock. The boys return to their usual unencumbered hiking mode and we all move along the trail more quickly.

Milo hikes behind me for a time, right on my heels, but when I ask him if he wants to pass, he demurs. He tells me he’s having fun and I ask if it’s easier today, without a pack.

“I forgot I even had a pack on,” he says.

“You’re made for this,” I say.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean you’re a born hiker.”

“I thought I was made to sit around playing guitar.”

“Can’t you be both?” I ask.

Wassataquoik Lake is long and deep, surrounded by mountains. We spread out on the small gravel beach, swim in the clear water, and eat lunch while the kids chase frogs and take turns paddling a kayak. After lunch, we canoe up the shore to the trail to Green Falls. A short climb leads us to a stunning cascade over the face of a moss-covered rock. After exploring the falls, we paddle back down

the lake and hike back to our campsite, stopping along the way for yet another swim at Deep Pond.

In the evening, I watch from the big rock on the shore below our campsite as Curry and Zephyr take a canoe out so that Zephyr can try out the fly rod he packed in. He appears to have gotten the hang of casting the line, but the fish don't bite. Instead I see them leap out of the water near my rock, snapping at big dragonflies that patrol the pond's surface.

Day 3: Russell Pond to Lookout Ledges and Grand Falls, 3 and 6 miles round-trip
I wake to the sound of a loon. Russell Pond's campsites are spaced well away from each other, nestled in trees, shrubs, and ferns, so that we barely notice other campers and hear only the sounds of frogs at night and birdsong during the day. Curry and Zephyr are already out on the pond, fly-fishing, again with no luck. Curry is disappointed that no one wanted to make the nine-mile hike to Baxter Peak (Katahdin's high point), or even the more modest seven-mile hike to Hamlin Peak. I sympathize with his desire to get above tree line, but Emmet and Zephyr are on the verge of mutiny. "I'm not hiking more than three miles," Zephyr declares and Emmet has to be coaxed out of his pajamas and the lean-to with lollipops.

Emmet and I fall to the back of the pack as we set out on the morning's hike to Lookout Ledges. "Whoever invented hiking for fun had a really bad idea," he says as we climb up through mossy boulders, bracken fern, spruce trees, and blueberry bushes. I remind him about all the fun things on this trip – seeing the moose, picking blueberries, talking to me as we hike without getting interrupted by his brothers – and give him another lollipop.

At the Ledges, massive boulders that poke above the trees and give a view of distant, blue-tinged mountains, we eat an early lunch and the boys leap back and forth over gaps between the rocks, then we make our way back down the trail. When we reach the trail juncture, Curry, Milo, and Gabe head toward Grand Falls, while the rest of us return to the campground. Emmet and Zephyr stop to catch frogs at the bridge over the inlet to Russell Pond while a moose noses her way through the brush nearby, indifferent to our presence.

Back in the campground, I take another swim before helping Zephyr and Emmet ease a canoe into the water. Russell Pond is the perfect size for two nine-year-olds to work on their paddling skills without much danger of getting themselves into trouble. After a while, Brett joins them in the boat and they explore the farthest reaches of the pond while I rest in the sun.

Curry, Milo, and Gabe return from Grand Falls just before dinner. On their hike, they checked out Inscription Rock and other artifacts of New City and Baxter's logging history, climbed down into a deep gorge to take a dip in the cold, clear waters of Wassataquoik Stream, and looped back via the Ledge Falls and Wassataquoik Stream Trails. They look happy and tired,

satisfied with their day's adventures even if they didn't climb Katahdin.

Day 4: Russell Pond to Roaring Brook via Wassataquoik Stream Trail, 7.6 miles
It starts to rain just as we leave the campground. For a while, we hike together as a family, Curry and me singing Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler," which has been stuck in my head since Milo taught the other kids to play poker the second night. As we drift apart, I listen to the sounds of raindrops on the trees and watch the boys' red-sleeved arms swing at the sides of their green packs, everything brightened by the glistening rain. Ahead of us, we have two stream crossings and miles of wet, soppy trail. But I feel good – happy – as if I've woken up from the hiker's version of "The Ten-Year Nap." This is who I am. This is where I'm supposed to be, out in the wild, moving under the power of my own feet, close to nature, with those dearest to me.

After the stream crossings, the group moves ahead while Emmet and I pull up the rear again. I listen to him chatter about movies, books, his friends, and Pokémon. The sun comes out in time for lunch. We make it to the trailhead in an hour-and-a-half less than it took us to hike in. Maybe because the rain cuts back on breaks. Maybe because our packs are lighter without food. Or maybe because we've got our trail legs under us now, and we're ready for another adventure. Maybe we're even ready for the big hike I have planned for next summer.


DISCOVER

Lightening Up a Family of Five

A lot has changed in the backpacking world in the last fifteen years, and for this trip I needed to catch up with the lightweight movement, not only because my hip bones groaned at the thought of hoisting my old internal frame pack, but also because Curry and I would carry the majority of supplies for five people. Plus I wanted to keep the kids happy by making their loads as light as possible. Here's what we took along:

Packs:
Emmet and Zephyr carried small Gossamer Gear G4 packs, with the hip belts taken in four inches, Curry and I carried the same packs in medium, and Milo had an Equinox Ltd. ARAS Eagle.

Shelter:
We reserved a lean-to, saving the weight of a tent, but exposing ourselves to the nightly whine of mosquitoes.

Sleep:
We used Ridge Rest SOLite pads and brought the sleeping bags we already had – LL Bean down and kids' synthetic mummies.

Kitchen:
We took along our old, reliable MSR WhisperLite, one liter of fuel, and a two-quart stainless steel pot, titanium bowls, and bamboo spoons and tea cups.

Water:
We drank from disposable water bottles, used a SteriPEN Adventurer Opti, and took along a milk jug with part of the top cut off, which we used for scooping water, washing dishes, picking blueberries, and holding our water as we purified it.

Clothes:
We each wore a t-shirt and a pair of convertible nylon pants, that for the boys doubled as swim trunks (I brought a swimsuit), and carried a fleece, long underwear, extra socks and underwear, a warm hat and gloves, a vest, and rain gear.

Footwear:
Emmet and Zephyr wore running shoes, I wore trail runners, Milo wore a pair of light hiking boots and Curry wore his ancient Limmers. The boys and I carried Crocs for the water crossings, while Curry took along Keen sandals.

Food:
In addition to green beans, carrots, sun butter, and brown bread, we took raw broccoli and whole wheat macaroni and cheese, brown rice and Indian dinner pouches, multigrain hot cereal with butter, milk powder, and freeze-dried fruit, whole wheat crackers, cheese, trail mix (dubbed “glop” by Zephyr), granola, and plenty of chocolate.

Extras:
We also carried the usual miscellaneous items: first aid kit kit, toiletries, paracord, pocket knives. I put cards and comic books in the boys’ packs and brought a book to read to them and one for myself, as well as a small journal and a point-and-shoot camera.

Our pack weight (with food) – 30 lbs. (Curry), 26 lbs. (me), 16 lbs. (Milo), 13 lbs. (Emmet), 12 lbs. (Zephyr) – was not ultralight, but averaged less than twenty pounds per person and was much more pleasant than the heavy days of hiking yore. Every time I saw a hiker bowed under the weight of a loaded pack, I felt convinced that lightening up is the path to more enjoyable backpacking, and I’m going to continue shaving pounds off our packs.

Getting there: The south entrance to Baxter State Park is located about three-and-a-half hours north of Augusta, outside the town of Millinocket. Once in the park, it’s another half-hour drive to Roaring Brook Campground and the Russell Pond trailhead.

Information: Reservations are required for campsites in the park. Information available at: http://www.baxterstateparkauthority.com/.

Maps: Delorme’s Map & Guide of Baxter State Park and Katahdin.

Guidebooks: Fifty Hikes in the Maine Mountains by Cloe Chunn. Appalachian Mountain Club’s Maine Mountain Guide (includes map).

Best Time to Go: People enjoy Baxter State Park year-round, but I prefer August and September, when the bugs are fewer and the chance of rain (slightly) lower.

Exploring Wolverine Canyon

Location: Grand Staircase-Escalante, UT

By Sean Sparbanie

"There is nothing in the desert, and no man needs nothing." This quote from the 1962 classic film Lawrence of Arabia bears relevance as I approach a place as remote and potentially perilous as Grand Staircase-Escalante in the middle of a hot summer. I suppose the 'nothing' in that quote could be validated in the literal sense. I'm not going to find something tangible that I require to continue existing. I will, however, encounter some things that I want. Beauty, solitude, adventure. Maybe I'll find inspiration. Maybe I'll even find danger or despair. Do I need any of those things? Perhaps not,

but what a dull existence it would be without all of them. My use of the word remote is not an exaggeration. This is a remote place, in a remote section of a sparsely populated region. That's a mouthful...let that sink in for a minute. There are 2,933 square miles of the monument, and the two nearest towns contain less than 1000 permanent residents combined. To put it in perspective, that's nearly as large as Delaware and Rhode Island put together, with considerably less than 1% of the population.

This vast desert area in south central Utah was designated a national monument back in 1996 by President Bill Clinton under the Antiquities Act. I'm very grateful that I may freely explore such a magnificent place at my leisure, but many locals don't share my opinion. There is still much controversy over the decision, and in some ways, it impacts the management of the monument. Confusion and brawling over road maintenance, anger over grazing rights, and the list goes on. Since this isn't a political article, I'll leave opinion out of it. Despite all the controversy, I encountered no discernible complications resulting from it.

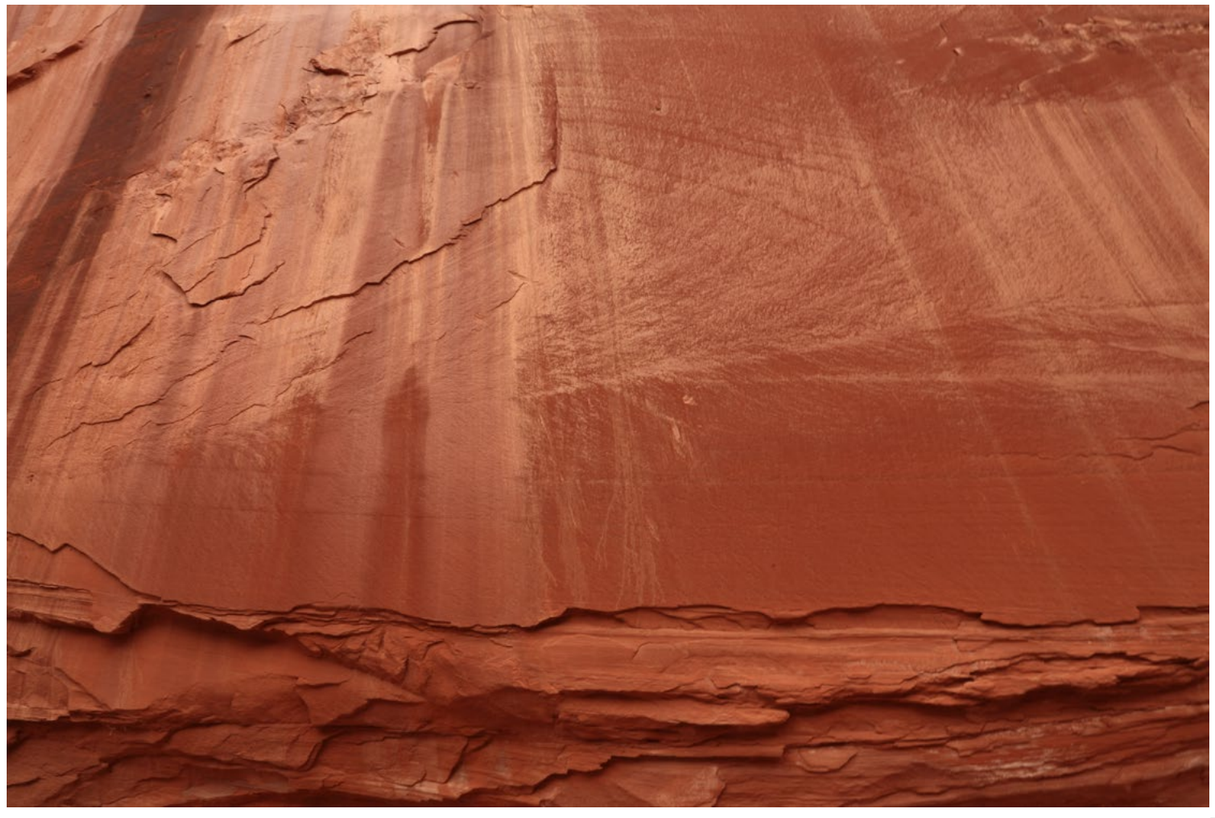
This monument is quite new in the grand scheme of things, which means it's vastly under-developed when compared to some of the long-established national parks or monuments. That means a lot more opportunity for adventure. The only downside is that it opens more threats to personal safety. The area is loaded with slot canyons formed by violent busts of flood water carving out the hard desert stone. They are some of the most fascinating and beautiful places to explore. Escalante offers some canyons that are easy to access and traverse, and some that require professional canyoneer guides to locate and navigate. With all the elements that make slot canyons so appealing to adventurers, they have the potential to be extraordinarily dangerous. I highly recommend speaking with a

Previous Page: A smoothed channel of stone in wolverine canyon
Above: Large boulders dominate the path

ranger when planning your outing. Stop by the BLM office at 755 W. Main in Escalante, UT before heading out. They will help visitors study the potential for rain over the area they're interested in hiking. An unexpected flood can turn violent in a hurry down here, carrying rocks, trees, sand, dirt, and anything else in its path right on top of you. Unfortunately, there's no shortage of horror stories of those folks who ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time. With careful planning and reasonable caution however, you'll be safe for a great hike.

This article will focus on a lesser-known hike: Wolverine Canyon. This is not a difficult hike during most conditions. It's fairly level, there's no scrambling unless you get particularly adventurous, and the ground is packed pretty well. The only elements providing potential difficulty are heat and storms. If you're looking for extremes, you can do much better here. This hike will provide a peaceful, fascinating, and beautiful environment to spend the better part of a day. This is certainly a quiet hike, too. If you go in a less-popular season as I did, you'll likely have absolute solitude on a trail like this. After leaving the main road out of Boulder, Utah, I did not see a single person. No trucks on the road, no hiker's vehicles in the parking area, no backpackers...not even livestock! There

Left: One of Escalante's most popular spots - Zebra Canyon
Below: An unusual silhouette



hadn't been an entry in the trail log for two days.

While you could get to this location in a car, a 4-wheel drive vehicle is advised. The roads can wash out or turn very slick after rains, leaving you stranded in a regular passenger car. There are a few rental options nearby if you don't have your own 4WD vehicle. The BLM office will also come in handy here, as they'll have current road condition info ready online or at the office.

The hike begins at a fenced entrance near a pull-off from the dirt road. It's open desert here with almost no opportunity for shade, so bring as much water as you can carry, sunscreen, and a wide-brimmed hat. Shortly after beginning the hike, evidence of the cattle grazing is displayed, often in the form of sun-bleached bones of the less-fortunate livestock. I noticed several morbid trail cairns in the form of vertebra, jawbones, and other skeletal remains. Desert culture, I suppose, but it serves as a reminder to respect the land, that's for certain. Like all canyon hikes, the route is likely to flank or use a wash as the path. This trail is no exception. In this case, it criss-crosses a wash many times until entering the canyon proper. After about a mile, remnants of an ancient forest make themselves apparent in the form of huge petrified logs. And I do mean huge! Some of them are up to 20 feet in length, with a 5 or 6 foot circumference. Wolverine Canyon is actually home to the largest collection of petrified wood outside of Arizona's Petrified Forest. Leave them where you find them, though...it's illegal to take

Left: Chunks of petrified wood have been carried miles from their original location by floodwaters
Above: Detail view of a petrified log

them with you. They're incredibly dense and heavy, so most folks wouldn't find it practical to swipe even the smaller chunks. I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed unleashing my imagination around these ancient relics. They're around 225 million years old. To my mind, that's pretty much incomprehensible in any practical way. Where there is now desert, there was once a swampy forest, and this is all that remains. What kind of creatures made these trees their home? What sort of beasts sharpened their claws on the bark? It's fascinating to think about, especially while walking among tangible evidence.

As though the petrified forest wasn't enough, I felt as though I were transported millions of years back in time as soon as I reached the canyon proper. It's pure, raw earth here. Boulders larger than full-size pickup trucks tossed from the red cliffs dominate the periphery. I wondered how often these fall, and how spectacular it would be to witness it happening. Well, it would only be ideal if you're not in its path, of course. In some places, it looks as though it happened a few days ago. As though someone strapped TNT to the upper canyon walls and just blasted it all away. There's little apparent erosion like one may find in a wash or creek bed, just giant red squares and rectangles strewn about. Underfoot, the amount of petrified wood has remained significant. Large logs weighing

several hundred pounds can be seen all throughout this hike, which is a reminder of the astounding power of floodwater. I struggled mightily to hoist a small section of log, but these temporary rivers are capable of tossing them around like rag dolls. Another mortality reminder, for sure.

Deeper in the canyon, the walls gain height while losing width. Not in an intimidating way, but certainly noticeable. It's never narrow enough to earn the slot canyon designation. A tank could likely be squeezed through the majority of it, so there's no scrambling, squeezing, or claustrophobic nightmares here. Another feature that introduces itself rather dramatically are the 'amphitheaters'. Found at curves in the river's path, these overhangs loom above the trail and help create some interesting acoustics for the singing traveler. They are carved out by the brute force of floodwaters over time, which is another mind-boggling feat to ponder on this quiet hike. Pressing on further, the canyon walls seem to vary wildly turn after turn. Some are flat, with multi-hued streaks running vertically, as though they were hewn by an ax-wielding giant. One swift, clean cut. Others are craggy and porous like a giant red coral reef. Much like the oceanic reefs, some critters find refuge in these pocked walls. Tiny lizards scurry along the facades as though they're defying gravity. Birds claim some of the lofty miniature caves for their nests, high above the flood waters that will arrive with the monsoons of late summer and autumn. What a view they must have! Some walls in particular stand out. Rounding another shaded bend about halfway into the hike, an intricate pattern was proudly displayed about 30 feet up an orange canyon wall. It seemed to have an eye-like quality to it, and I didn't notice any other similar patterns in the canyon. The explanations for these observations can be left for the geologists, but the diversity of texture and color in a single canyon is quite fascinating.

Approaching the last section of the canyon, the walls squeeze to their most narrow about a mile or so short of the terminus. Again, not quite slot canyon narrow, but enough to be obvious. There are still large pieces of petrified wood, and they aid in making this one of the more beautiful and colorful sections of the canyon. Soon, the walls open up to a wide gap again before its confluence with Horse Canyon. There's a great opportunity for a loop hike here. My schedule didn't permit my attempt so I can't detail it, but it looks pretty appealing. If you hang a left at Horse Canyon, you will meet with Little Death Hollow after a short while, which can eventually be looped back to the parking area. Again, speak with a ranger before planning this one. Apparently backpackers may encounter difficulty squeezing their packs through the narrows of Little Death Hollow.

Left: Intricate wall patterns
Below: One of many unique views of Wolverine Canyon

As amazing as that sort of experience is, it's imperative to be prepared for as much as possible. Even though I only planned on doing the 10 mile round-tripper, I brought more than a gallon of water. 100 ounces of that was in an insulated Camelbak and loaded with ice cubes at the onset of the hike. It was still fairly cold at the end of the day, which was quite a nice luxury. I also had a handheld breadcrumb-style GPS unit, which isn't much use in the canyon, but quite helpful when trying to trace your steps in a place where the trail isn't always apparent. An emergency GPS beacon was also in my pack. Something as simple as a twisted ankle can put you in a whole lot of trouble in a place like this, so I find it's best to just suck it up and carry the extra weight. Peace of mind lifts the metaphorical weight off your shoulders anyway, right?

Speaking of taking weight off my shoulders, it was now time to turn around and head back to the truck. This was also my last day in Escalante, so I made sure to take my time and soak in as much of this desert as possible. As flat and 'easy' as this hike is supposed to be, the heat had finally got to me. Though I only had 1.5 miles remaining, the fact that it had been 97 in the shade for most of the day had taken its mental and physical toll. Our local star had relented and slipped behind the canyon walls. The rock and sand had soaked up all those rays though, and they were still spitting heat and cooking my feet. Though I had plenty of water left, I was on the verge of heat exhaustion. I felt dizzy and slightly nauseous. I knew I had to take it easy the rest of the way. After plodding along in the waning light with several long breaks, I beheld the mercy I sought: My trusty Nissan, complete with an ice and beer filled cooler in the back. Thankfully, the two bricks of ice stood up to the heat. I swear, that's the most amazing beer I've ever had. I don't even remember what kind it was. It didn't matter. I stuck my head under the cooler's drain spigot and let the melt water cool the rest of me off. These are the moments that make hiking in the heat worth the trouble. That relief...there's nothing quite as satisfying. It feels like victory.

Right: The milky way over one of Escalante's landmarks - Devil's Garden
Pages 85-86: Another popular Escalante Hike - Spooky Gulch
Pages 87-88: Wolverine Canyon's most narrow spot
Pages 89-90: Giant boulders and rugged cliffs

Getting There:
From Boulder, Utah, take the Burr Trail Road (100) east to the Wolverine Loop Road (110). Continue along the Wolverine Loop approximately 11 miles to the signed trailhead parking area.

Maps:
Canyons of the Escalante [Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument]
(National Geographic Trails Illustrated Map)

Books:
Hiking Grand Staircase-Escalante & the Glen Canyon Region: A Guide to 59 of the Best Hiking Adventures in Southern Utah

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Kahtoola MICROspikes

Review by Ted Ehrlich

If you ask five people when backpacking and hiking season is, you will probably get five different answers. For those that want to extend their own personal season into the fringes of the shoulder seasons and even into the heart of winter, there are a couple things that will be necessary. Warmer gear can only get you so far (see Issue 11 and Issue 12 for more), and as it gets icy, you'll need to add something to your footwear to help with traction. Even during the peak of summer, traction devices can make or break a trip if you're going into the high country in the northern US if it was a heavy snow year and/or a slow melt off. There are many different options out there, from companies like Yaktrak and Hillsound, but my go to has stayed the same through many years with the Kahtoola Microspikes. Simply, they offer everything you'll need for non-technical terrain with unmatched flexibility to work with any type of shoe.

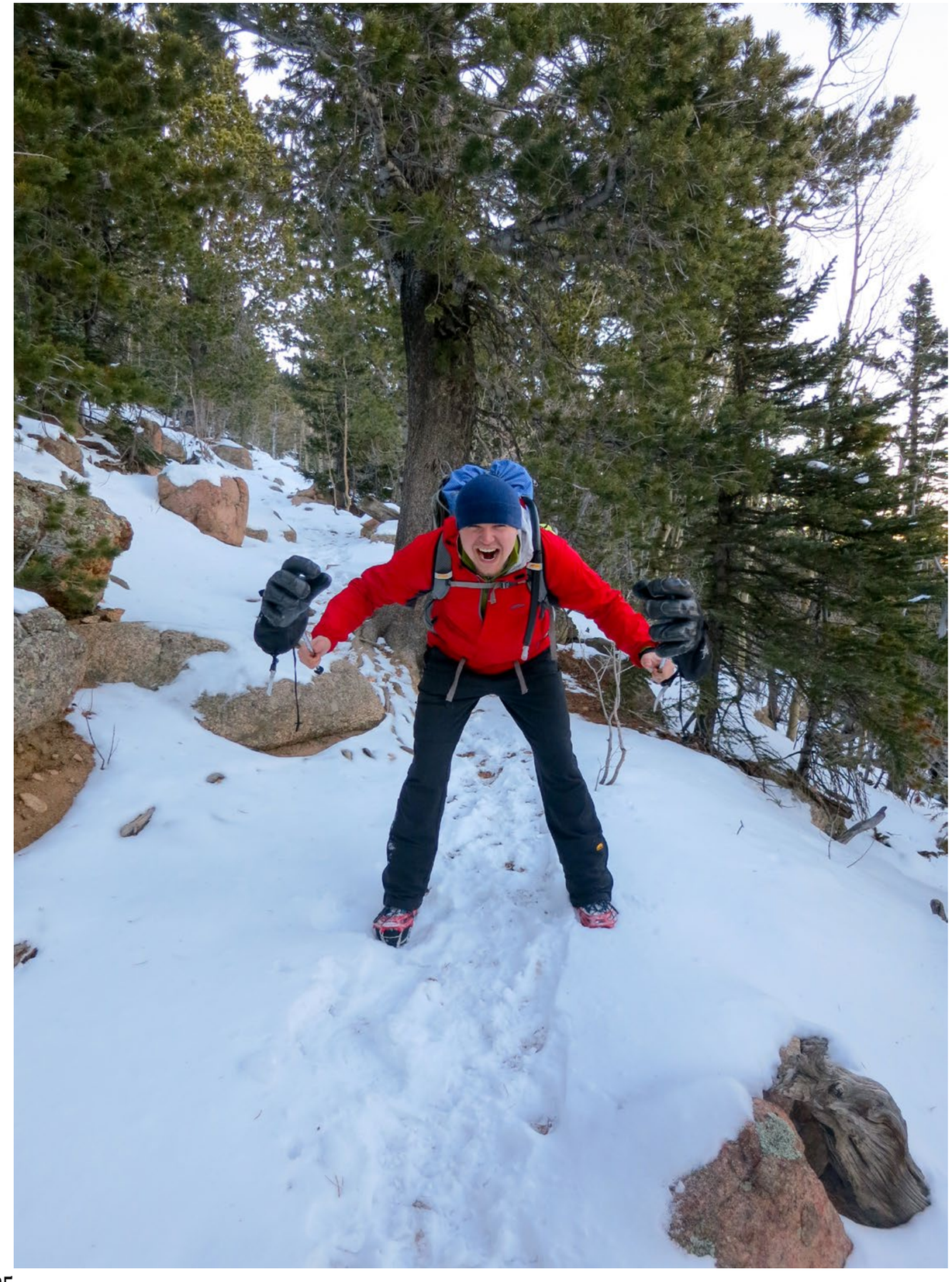
Pros: Excellent traction and durability in a small and light form factor that doesn't break the bank. Easy to use in the field, even with gloves.

Cons: Non-adjustable design may be difficult to use with a range of footwear types.

Rating: ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

Design

The design is fairly simple. All of the wearable surfaces on the bottom are constructed with stainless steel chain links and connected to 3/8" heat treated stainless steel spikes. Even though



steel is heavier than other options like aluminum, using steel makes them more versatile. An aluminum version would not be as durable, allowing the steel-spiked Microspikes to be used on snow as well as iced over rocks without bending or significant dulling. The spikes are not sharp enough to cut yourself easily, making them safer to handle and throw in the pack without thinking. The upper portion is a simple rubber ring that allows it to be secured onto any footwear without Velcro or webbing straps. By avoiding straps, it makes it easier to flip them on or off as needed without any adjustment in the field. They are also symmetrical, so it doesn't matter which one goes on which foot, making them even faster to get on. I found it took me less than a minute to get both on in the field, even with gloves on.

For 2014, Kahtoola has upgraded their design by adding an additional two spikes to the heel section of their Microspikes. After trying out the new design, I didn't find it revolutionary, but it was noticeable and helpful, adding a bit of extra grip for digging in your heels on snowy descents. The design features 12 spikes per foot on all sizes except the 10-spiked extra-small and a pair of Microspikes have listed weights ranging from 12.2 to 15.6 ounces. My size large weighed in at 15.6 ounces (440 grams) on my scale.

Sizing

Their only weakness in my opinion is each pair only fits a specific range of shoe sizes, because they don't use any sort of adjustment straps. They offer a range of sizes from extra-small to extra-large to fit

any size shoe though. If you happen to be on the edges of what one size will fit and you get a bigger insulated shoe for colder weather, you may have to get a second pair. I have not had an issue with this personally, but when fitting them to your shoes, make sure they work with all of your different footwear choices before buying. In my case, my size large fit my size 12 shoe and boots very well.

Traction & Performance

In comparison to full crampons, which these are not trying to replace, Microspikes will not work as well if you need to kick steps into hardpack snow. These are not meant for technical climbing in very steep terrain since they do not have any front points. However in some respects, Microspikes are safer than crampons since you don't have to worry about puncturing yourself with them if you fall and they are safe to glissade with. Glissading is not safe with crampons because of the possibility of breaking your ankle or spinning you if they snag accidentally. Microspikes shorter length spikes are closer to the center of the sole so they will not catch. They will also save your pants and gaiters, which will shred eventually if you wear crampons enough. In deep soft snow, Microspikes will not help at all, which will require a snowshoe or a touring ski system to float over the snow.

I've used Microspikes for dozens of trips over the last five years, from remote glacier climbs in the Wind River Mountains to descending hardened snowfields on cross country routes like the Utah Highline. They allow peace of mind at a minimal weight penalty. One of the times I was very glad I had brought them with me was during my Pikes Peak climb (see Issue 8). Even though the route was a walk up, at Barr Camp about halfway up the peak the entire path was covered in thick ice from the stream that normally provides water from the camp. The ice was so thick in areas that picnic tables were underneath the hard blue ice, which covered over a quarter mile of the trail. Without a pair of Microspikes, that section of trail would have been slow, difficult, and potentially dangerous. Later that season on another hike, a recent storm had covered every possible surface with rime ice with no dry spots, again causing a situation that would have caused me to turn around if I had not brought my Microspikes along that day. I have even used them around my place when an icy snow storm makes it hard to shovel snow, and I tend to keep them in my car in-between trips during the winter as a safety measure.

The Kahtoola spikes come with a two year warranty, and Kahtoola sells an optional stuff sack to accompany them. A stuff sack is a good idea as they can get pretty wet and muddy while being used, although I find just sticking them in a mesh pocket on the outside of my pack is just as effective between use, allowing them to dry easily. With a small stuff sack, they're only about the size of a soda can. While they are stainless steel, they can still rust if sealed up with moisture long enough, so rinsing and drying your spikes after trips will prolong their lifespan even more.

Conclusion

Overall I found that the Kahtoola Microspikes offer great traction over reasonable winter terrain, and best of all, they're fast and easy to put on when you need them and just as quick to take off – Even with the gloves you'll surely be wearing. Fit is good so long as you've sized them appropriately, and considering they're under a pound per pair, they're easy to bring along even if you aren't sure you'll need them. With stainless steel construction durability is excellent, and if you're looking to stay on your feet throughout the colder months, they might be hard to beat.

A pair of Microspikes will retail for $65 online. They come in either red or black, and in sizes to fit any foot size from kids to size 16 mens. They are sold at many retail stores as well as online – You can find them Here at REI, Backcountry, and CampSaver.

Overall: ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ – Excellent

Growing in the Green Tunnel: An Appalachian Thru Hike

by Erin Saver

It is said that with America's three longest trails, you either hike one, or you hike all three. After completing the Pacific Crest Trail in 2011 and the Continental Divide Trail in 2013, thru hiking the Appalachian Trail seemed to be the next natural step for me. There was a draw to completing hiking's esteemed Triple Crown, but that wasn't my main motivation. I feel like every trail and journey like this has something to teach those who attempt them if they are open to it, and I was ready to learn something new. I knew the AT was a social trail and that, despite my solo preferences, I should experience it as such. I was under no delusion and understood that my inner hermit would be challenged and drained by this trail due to its social nature, but I like challenges. The AT felt like a rite of passage that I needed to go through for some reason and knew that the social challenges would greatly outweigh any physical challenge placed in front of me. With this in mind, I set forth from Springer Mountain in Georgia on April 17th and headed north 2,185 miles toward Mt. Katahdin in Maine.

The mostly wooded Appalachian Trail is aptly dubbed the "green tunnel." There are views or brief ridge walks above tree line from time to time, but many of the viewpoints tend to be just off the main trail on short side trails. I find it misleading when the majority of mainstream photos of the AT feature some vast view or ridge walk, yet it feels as though 80% of the AT is under tree cover. I feel like this trail should be honestly appreciated and portrayed for what it's comprised of and that is a mostly forested experience. I absolutely love walking in the woods. There's an element of adventure along the winding trails of a forest with the mystery of what or who you may discover around each bend. Added to that is the sensory experience of lush foliage, dancing sunflects breaking through in spurts, morning fog, and the soundtrack of songbirds and breezes through the leaves. I knew I could find appreciation for what the green tunnel had to offer in scenery. My concerns were for how my claustrophobic tendencies would react to such a monotonous and enclosed experience when the wildcard of so many other hikers were thrown into the mix...

Starting the trail in mid April before spring fully hit was an invigorating experience. For three solid weeks, I had cooler temperatures and was free of the

Previous Page: Hiker Smurfin' hikes as the sun rises through and early morning haze in Pennsylvania.
Below: Hiker Double T is shaded in early spring by rhododendrons in North Carolina.

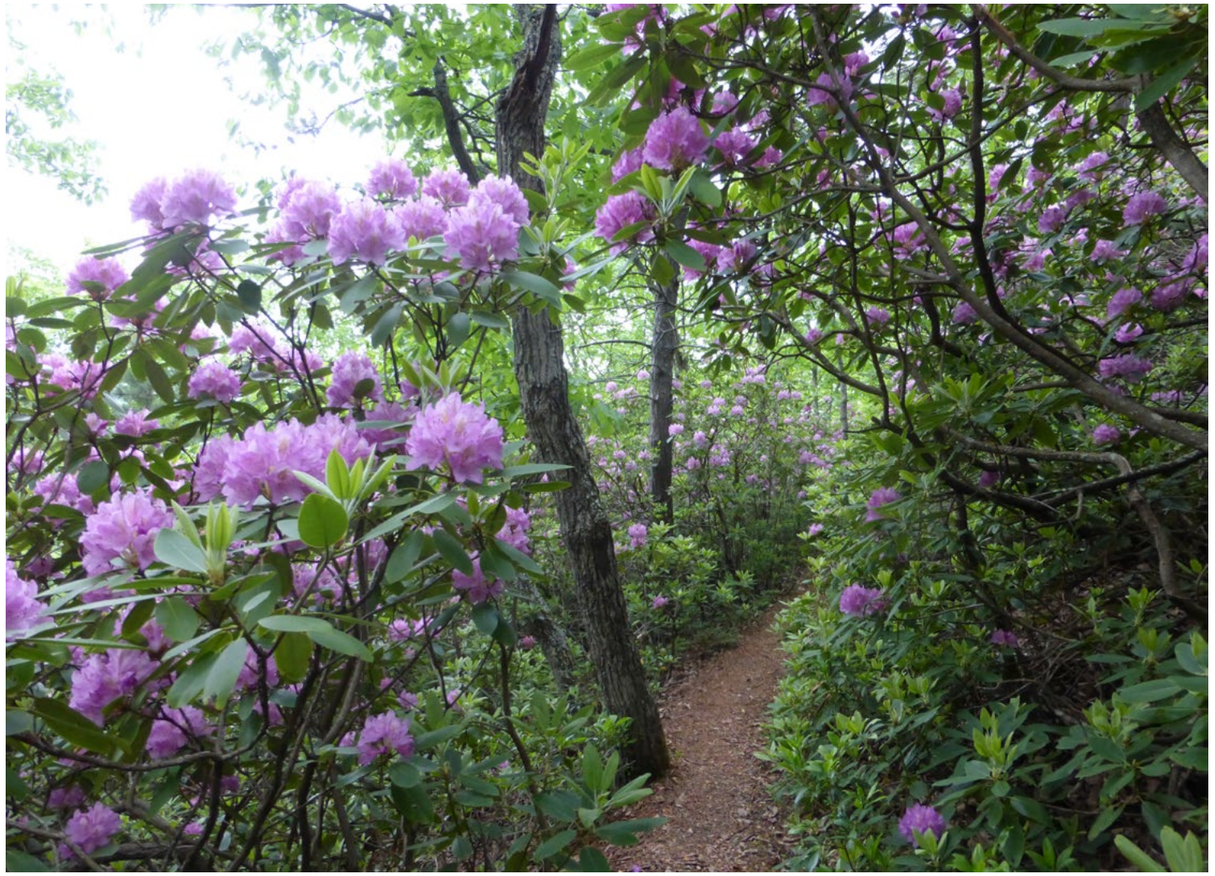
green tunnel effect. I was treated to early morning sunrises, views of rolling hills throughout the day, and campsite sunsets as I hiked north through Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. It was exciting to see the small changes as spring inched its way into the forest. There were flickers of green sprouting up from above and below, along with all sorts of wildflowers and colors introducing themselves daily. It was awakening to be there and witness such subtle changes in nature. It gave me a greater appreciation for what I was experiencing and the energy of spring was contagious. As a result, I found myself hiking faster and further than

Below: The vibrant variety of flowers found along the trail one spring day in North Carolina.
Right: Trillium and Mayapple speckled alongside the trail in North Carolina.

I had expected, and enjoying the trail much more than I had anticipated.

Before I knew it, the first month had passed on the trail. I was in Virginia, fully enclosed in the green tunnel. Having hiked mainly out west on trails above tree line or in the desert, the monotony of a predominantly forested trail presented an unexpected new challenge. Whereas on the PCT and CDT, my mind and internal dialogue tended to be occupied by vast landscapes and navigational challenges, I found that the enclosed and clearly paved AT provided few distractions for my thoughts. As a consequence of my speed and mileage, I was rarely overlapping with other hikers for an extended period of time. The monotony of the forest and ease of navigation left me free from distraction and stuck with the same cycle of thoughts repeating in my own head. I needed a diversion.

I happened to overlap with another hiker named Ferris for a week and it was a perfectly timed distraction from what I had swimming in my head. True to my solo tendencies, I continued to hike my own hike and our time was short lived, but it did set the groundwork for what was to come. It allowed for a mental reset, but I soon returned to the monotony of the forest and the cycle of thoughts in my head. Subconsciously I knew I'd need something more than the scenery to enjoy



this hike. For the first time, I found myself seeking interaction with more than just the nature around me.

Three quarters of the way through the 550 miles of Virginia and a month and a half into my hike, the solo introvert in me finally caved! I met the Kallin family who were a mother and father (my exact age) hiking the whole trail with their 7 year old daughter and 9 year old son. They were amazing and we hit it off as if we'd always been hiking together. We hiked together for about a week for over 100 miles through Shenandoah to complete Virginia and then parts of West Virginia and Maryland. What was unique about this for me was that I was open to interaction with other hikers and this interaction was intentional rather than circumstantial. I wasn't pairing up for safety or by happenstance, but for enjoyment of the companionship. That was a huge shift for me and I was finally beginning to learn those lessons I knew the AT could teach me.

The solo introvert fought back hard and I once again set off on my own, feeling that claustrophobic need for space and freedom. June and July's heat and humidity kicked in and the next month of 750 miles through Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont became the most difficult part of the trail for me. There were a lot of discomforts with rain, heat, humidity, rocks, mud, and brush. It was only magnified by the fact that the forest just got denser with longer stretches between the views. I saw few other hikers during this stretch and sometimes would go the whole day without seeing hardly anyone. The trail was definitely making a point and I was hearing it loud and clear. If I wanted to enjoy the end of this trail, something was going to have to change.

During those difficult miles, I had overlapped for a day with another hiker named Jett Cat who was having a similar slump. We each had solo tendencies, so we hiked independently from one another for 20 days after our brief overlap. The weeks of discomfort, boredom, and rain finally chipped away and washed off each of our stubborn solo prides. We agreed that pairing up could greatly help with morale and that it was worth a try. It was clear that the solo approaches were not working. We paired up for the final three weeks to complete the rest of New Hampshire and Maine together.

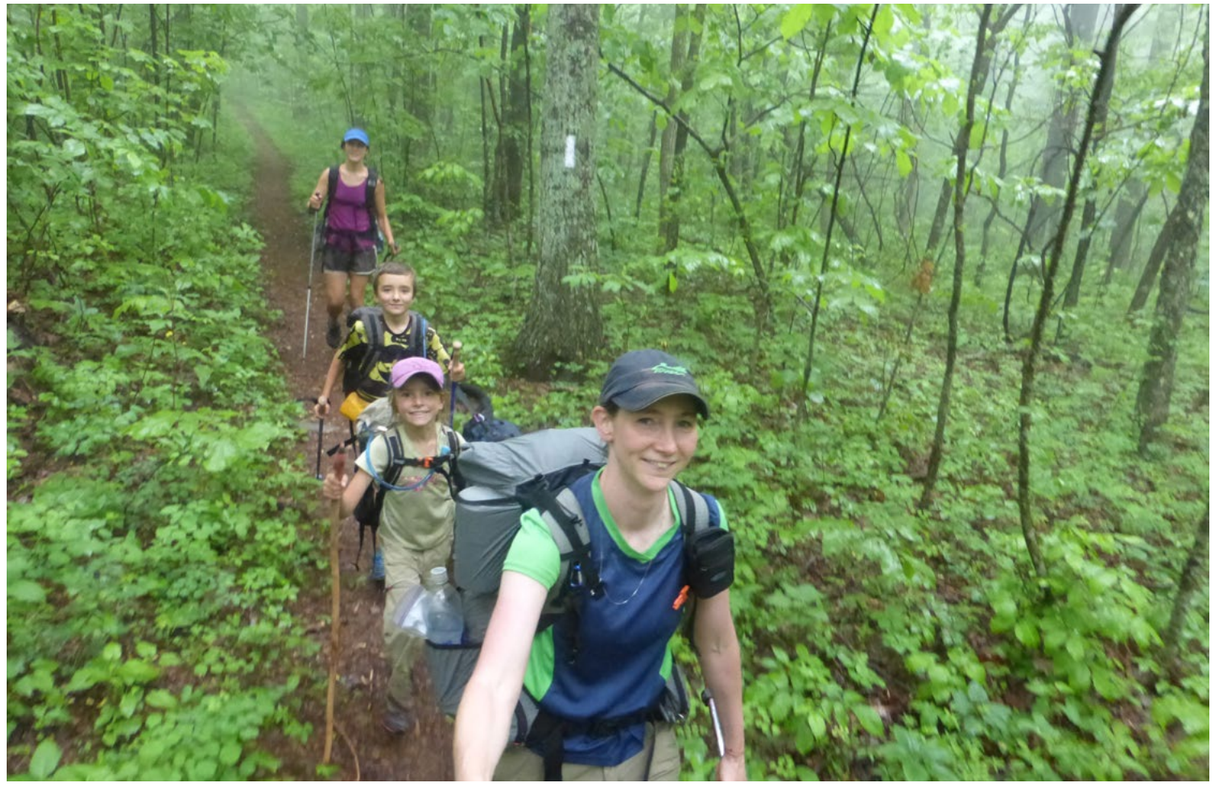
There was some very difficult terrain, rainy weather, and challenging hiking in that final section of the AT, but partnering up somehow made it the best part of the whole trail for each of us. The result of teaming up was more of a boost than either of us could have expected. The camaraderie two thru hikers can have

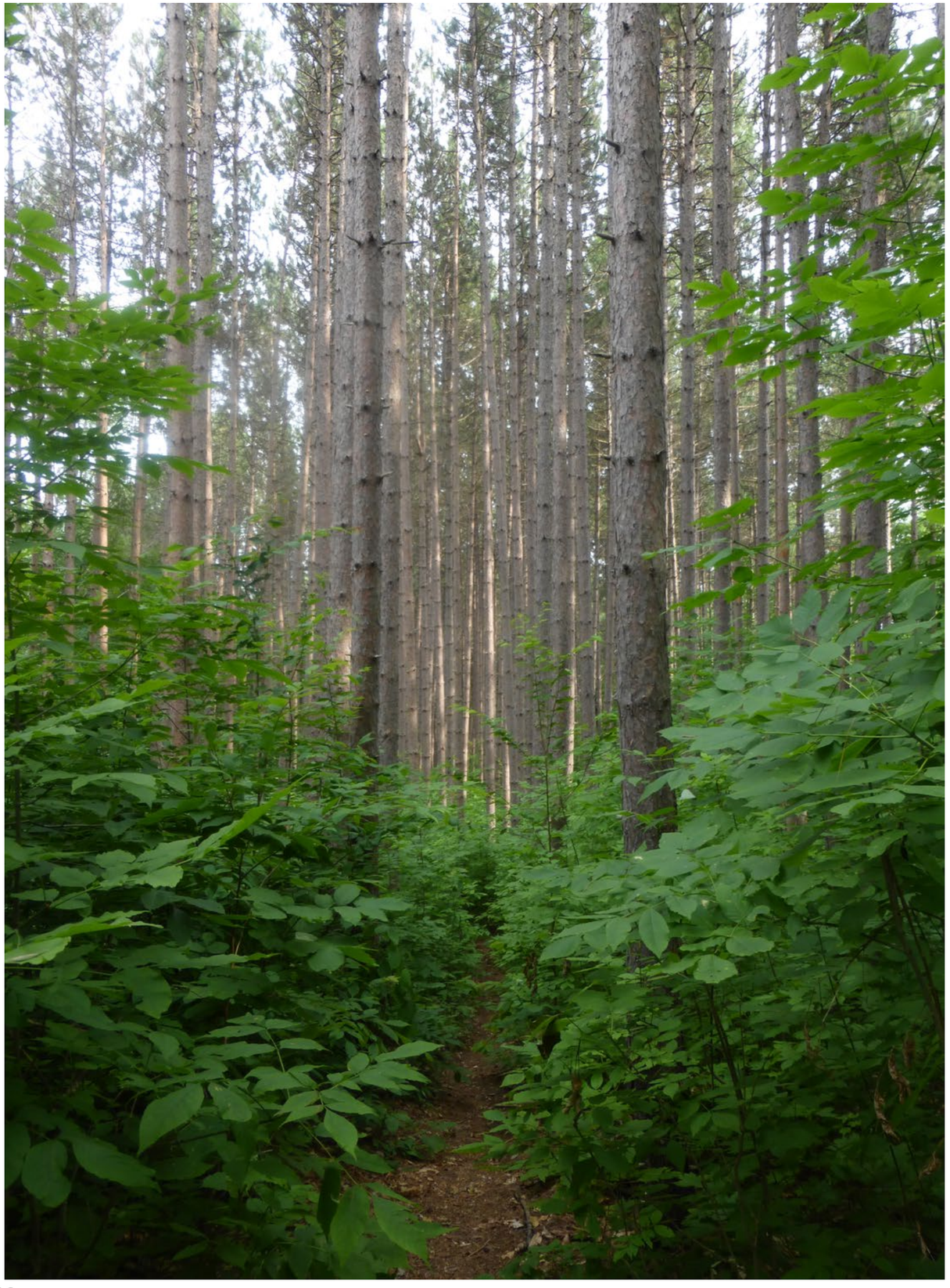
Left: Rhododendron in full bloom in Virginia.
Below: Camping near Black Rock Overlook in Virginia.
Pages 107-108: A mystically foggy evening in Tennessee.

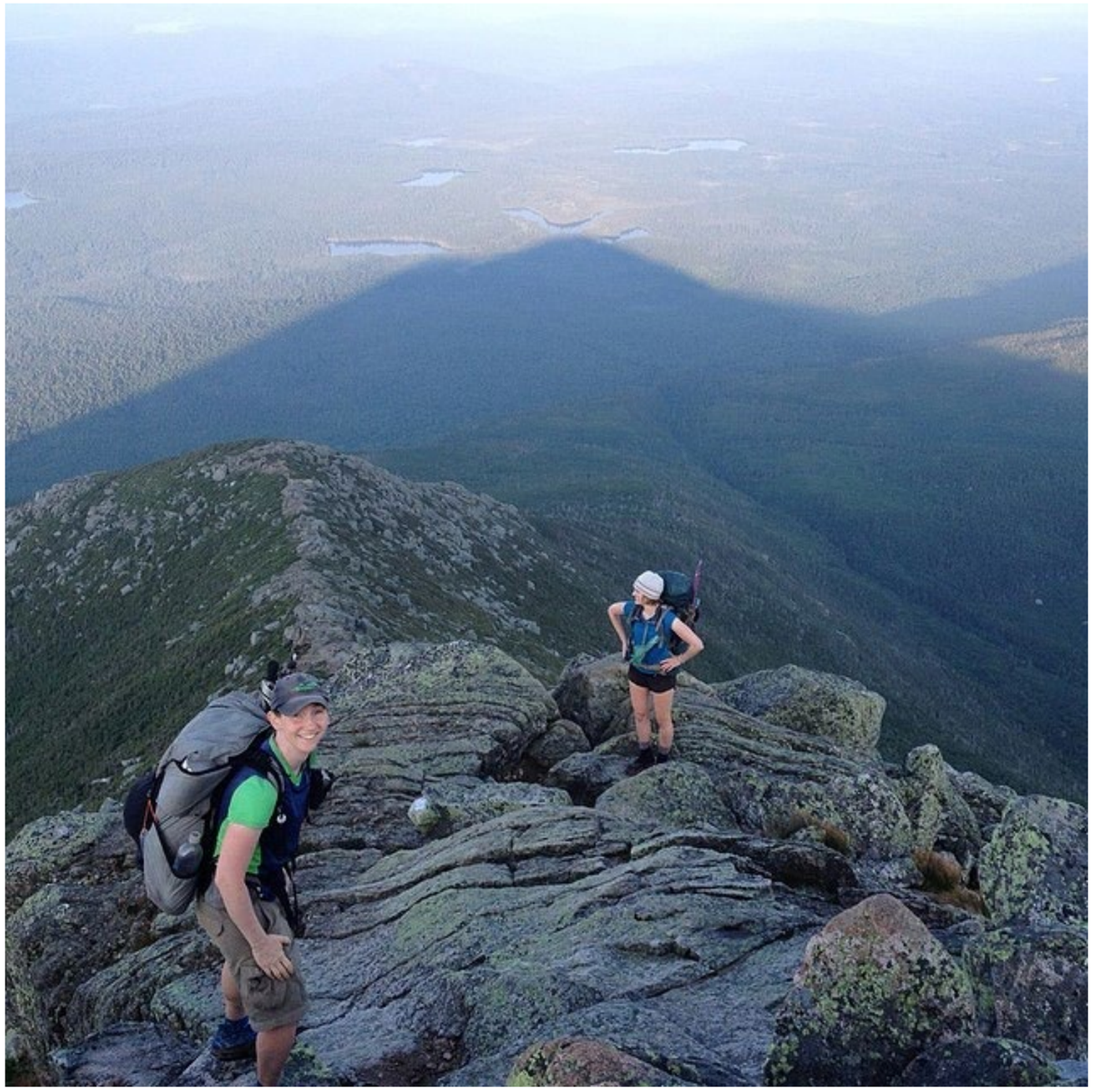
at the end of a long trail is unlike any other bond. Even if you first meet on the final day of a hike, it's a unique and unspeakable bond that hikers share when they have both hiked for months on similar journeys in (almost) parallel universes that rarely overlap. It took me over 7,000 miles of hiking to really appreciate this aspect of hiking and I don't know that I would have come to this conclusion without the influence of the green tunnel. On August 5th, I reached Katahdin having learned more than I ever expected from the Appalachian Trail.

This trail may not have had the deep wilderness and solitude I've come to love, but it has had an impact on me that will forever influence my future paths. It was recently pointed out to me that the AT is a trail that forces you to go within yourself more than any other trail and it definitely did that for me. I went into the green tunnel, literally and figuratively, and emerged a better person. As I said before, I feel like every trail and journey like this has something to teach those who attempt them if they are open to it. Trust and reliance on others has never been a strong suit of mine, so hiking solo has always been my comfortable and safe place. My experiences on the AT let me know that it is possible for me to step out of that "safe place" from time to time and be more than okay. Just learning that it's possible has made a world of difference for me. I'll always be thankful to the green tunnel for letting me know it's possible.

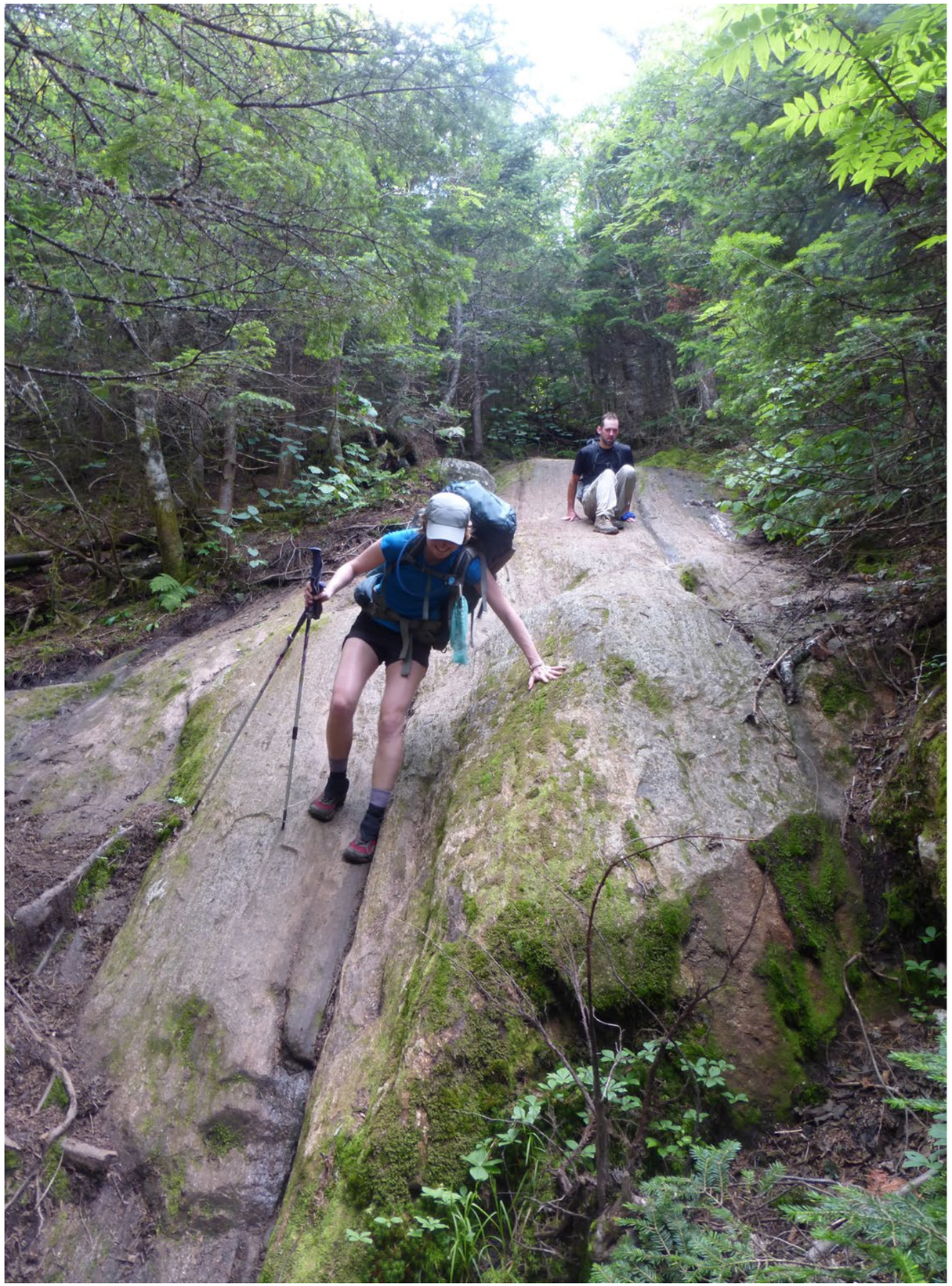
Below: A jagged section in "Rocksylvania."
Upper Right: Hiking with the Kallin family in Shenandoah.
Lower Right: Reaching mile 900 with the Kallin family in Shenandoah.







Left: Trees (don’t know the name of them??) tower high from the low Vermont brush.
Above: Katahdin’s imposing shadow as Jett Cat and I break out of the “green tunnel” on the final day.
Pages 115-116: Sunflects break through the trees in Virginia.
Pages 117: Hikers Jett Cat and Sweetfish carefully descend mossy slick rock on the trail in Maine.
Pages 118: Jett Cat descends the rocky rooty trail in Maine.
Pages 119: Tents alight in early evening on a tenting platform in New Hampshire.



GEAR MASH

ENO Twilights LED Light String

Use the shorter days to your advantage – Bring in the holidays with this 10’ strand of battery powered lights from ENO. 3 AA batteries provide 72 hours of use, adding the perfect ambiance to your tent during those long winter nights. Available in 3 different color combinations. 4 ounces, $20: REI.com

Smartwool Slouch Beanie

A 50/50 mix of merino wool and acrylic, this beanie is equally at home on the trail or after the hike in town. Reversible, one size fits most. $34: Backcountry.com

Big Agnes Insulated Air Core Pillow

Primaloft insulation adds warmth to this inflatable pillow on chilly nights, and the pillow offers a solid 12x15x3.5” of sleeping space. 4 ounces & $30: CampSaver.com

MSR WindBoiler Stove

MSR’s new WindBoiler stove utilizes radiant Reactor technology with a matching 1 liter pot & heat exchanger that locks on to seal out the wind and increase efficiency. Boils half a liter in 2.5 minutes and the entire system comes in just under a pound. $130: CampSaver.com

Marmot Plasma 15

875 fill down with a water-resistant treatment gets this 15 degree sleeping bag from Marmot under the 2 pound mark. Vertical baffles keep your insulation where you need it and a draft tube and insulated collar seal out the cold. Around $550 depending on length: Backcountry.com

Ultralight Survival Kit

At just 3.5 ounces, even the book is ultralight. Through the course of 106 pages thruhiker Justin Lichter shares his tips and advice on making long hikes a success. $13: Amazon.com

ULA OHM 2.0

3,960 total cubic inches of conveniently placed storage in a package weighing less than 2lbs, the OHM 2.0 offers carrying comfort for lighter trips up to about 30lbs. Available in 4 different colors and multiple sizes for the perfect fit. $200: ULA-Equipment.com

Outdoor Research Sparkplug Gaiters

Defend your feet from trail debris, light precipitation, and splashes with these stretchy, water resistant and breathable gaiters from Outdoor Research. Attaches to most trail running shoes. 1.2 ounces each and $20 a pair: REI.com

PHOTO TIPS FROM THE TRAIL

by David Cobb

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

Photographing Mountain Light

I almost never set out to photograph a landscape, nor do I think of my camera as a means of recording a mountain or an animal unless I absolutely need a 'record shot'. My first thought is always of light. - Galen Rowell

When I head out to photograph the alpine country, I love to capture the drama of the mountains, which means I'm there for the leading-edge of a storm or the backend of a system. Keeping track of the weather is a good idea if you're a photographer, because those blue-sky days are nice for camping but they don't offer much to a photographer. When I walked about 1,100 miles of the Canadian Rockies, there seemed to be daily storms and that taught me to think much more about light when I photograph in the mountains. Whether it's light in the sky, light on the mountain, or the light of a nearby rainbow, light is what makes a successful shot with mountain photography. If you're looking to get better images put that camera away on gray days or blue-sky days, go for the drama instead, and look for the light.

Left: Mt. Hood & Lost Lake

The mountain doesn't need to be the main focus of the image, but the light does. Frame the range with sky above or fall color below as long as the light is interesting. Some days the peak itself may be the main focus for the image, so zoom in and capture that but only if the light is interesting. Usually I use the mountain range as a frame of reference only (especially if it's backlit), capturing its form but letting the light in the sky and the light on the land tell the story. If you're highlighting the peak itself, try and capture it when it's side-lit (see my recent TrailGroove piece http://www.trailgroove.com/issue17.html?autoflip=119 on side-lighting). This will accentuate the crags of the peak, and the light and shadow of the mountain.

Next time you put on a pack to go photograph a mountain, stop thinking of the peak or range and think only of the light around it. Your mountain images will improve.

Right: Mt. McGowan Mist
Pages 127-128: McDonald Sunrise
Pages 129-130: Beginnings

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: Southwest-Style Omelet in a Bag

by Paul Magnanti

After a hiatus due to grad school, my wife and I are now enjoying the outdoors together again on a regular basis. We have enjoyed the summer wildflowers, walked among the aspen leaves of autumn and plan to explore the canyon country of Utah over Thanksgiving.

My usual solo backpacking fare of cold food for breakfast would not work for Mrs Mags. And while a hot dish of cream of wheat, dried cherries and almonds can hit the spot on a cool Colorado morning in the backcountry, sometimes I want to make a breakfast perhaps a tad fancier for the wife and I.

One culinary trick I have used is a simple “omelet in a bag”.

A perfect breakfast for a quick overnighter or even the first morning out on the trail. Easy to make. No clean up in camp. And pretty yummy, too.

INGREDIENTS

2 eggs
½ cup shredded cheddar cheese
4 green onions - chopped
2 oz diced green chiles
1 tbsp salsa
2 tbsp dehydrated black beans
Pepper, salt and hot sauce
Tortilla

AT HOME

- Add eggs, cheese, green onions, chile and salsa in a good quality, quart sized resealable plastic bag. Also add salt, pepper and hot sauce to desired taste.
- Squish and knead bag until all ingredients are mixed.
- In separate resealable plastic bag, add black bean flakes. Seal.
- Add both bags to gallon size resealable plastic bag along with the tortilla and seal well. The gallon size bag makes for easier transport and a less likely spill in the pack.

IN CAMP

- Rehydrate black bean flakes.
- Add to mix made at home.
- Squish and mix again. Seal well.
- In cook pot, bring water to boil.
- Add mixture-in-a-bag to pot.
- After approximately 15 minutes remove bag from pot and place omelet on tortilla wrap.
- Enjoy!

Trees: A Confession

by Gary Meyer

You know, I've been thinking.....

"Hold on now," you might rightly say. "Isn't that a rather dangerous thing to be doing in this modern, super technological, and civilized age?"

"Yes, perhaps" I would reply, "but these thoughts just won't go away." I must put into words what I have thought and felt for a long time.....

I Love Trees!

Yes, I said it. I Love Trees! I love trees of all kinds, from the massive redwood to the humble willow. I've loved them for a very long time.

When I was a kid in St. Louis, I used to sneak away from city life to a nearby cemetery. There was a wooded area for the folks to view while paying their respects to their dearly departed. The woods were a wonderful place, filled with frogs, turtles, and trees. I remember a large (to me at that age, massive!) oak tree. I climbed this tree many, many times up to the very top. I was an excellent tree climber. You know, the world just doesn't seem so bad when you're climbing a tree. Perhaps that's when I developed this love of trees.

Trees are our friends, don't you know? Their leaves capture light energy and convert it into sugar via photosynthesis. They remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and oxygen is released, as I recall from my freshman biology class. It's almost like magic.

Trees are either evergreen, having foliage that remains green throughout the year, or deciduous, losing their leaves at the end of the growing season. The leaves grow in a wide range of shapes and sizes which have developed in response to various environmental pressures. The real tree pros can tell them apart just by looking at their leaves.

In my adopted home State of Kansas, the original inhabitants valued and greatly appreciated trees. On the

western high prairie and Flint Hills, trees are few and far between. Primitive dwellings instead were made mainly from either mud or sod. In an early tradition still seen today in the Post Rock portion of the state, white settlers had to use limestone rock slabs for fence posts. Trees (and thus wood) were that scarce. It must have been a very hard life for those early people, living without trees.

Because our ancient ancestors weren't complete idiots, trees from the very beginning of humanity have been revered and been a part of the world's mythology. Trees have been worshiped since the first primitive humans climbed down from them and decided the ground wasn't really such a terrible place after all. Hey, let's try walking upright and see where that leads!

To the ancient Greeks and Celts, certain trees held special meaning and religious significance. Nymphs and spirits of the dead were believed to inhabit trees. Roman heroes wore a symbolic wreath of oak, olive, or ivy leaves on their head. To the Norse, Yggdrasil was the cosmic world tree, basically keeping the universe from falling apart.

Of course, in the creation story in the Bible there was the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life; planted by God Him (or perhaps Her) self in the Garden of Eden. Buddha found enlightenment underneath a Bodhi tree which offered him protection. Apparently, God likes trees too. So at least I can say I'm in pretty good company.

As mentioned, tree worship (dendrolatry) was common among the pagan Europeans and survived their conversion to Christianity in various modified forms. My family ancestors, the Germans, came up with the idea of the Christmas Tree which goes back to about the 15th century. I think it was just an excuse to bring a tree indoors.

Our greatest deep-thinking philosophers, burnt out poets, and cheap romance novelists have all written at great length on the majesty of trees.

Words turned into prose, an outdoorsman's play
Singing the beauty of a woodland day
Glorious Nature, splendid and free
Forest of wonder, wondrous tree

Trees, of course, also have many practical uses. They provide a major habitat for wildlife, homes for our many woodland friends. Trees help prevent soil erosion and cool the climate. They also provide various nuts and fruits with which we may supplement our diets. Trees are a critical source for modern day miracle drugs, which may extend or even save human lives. And yes, we harvest them for lumber to build our homes.

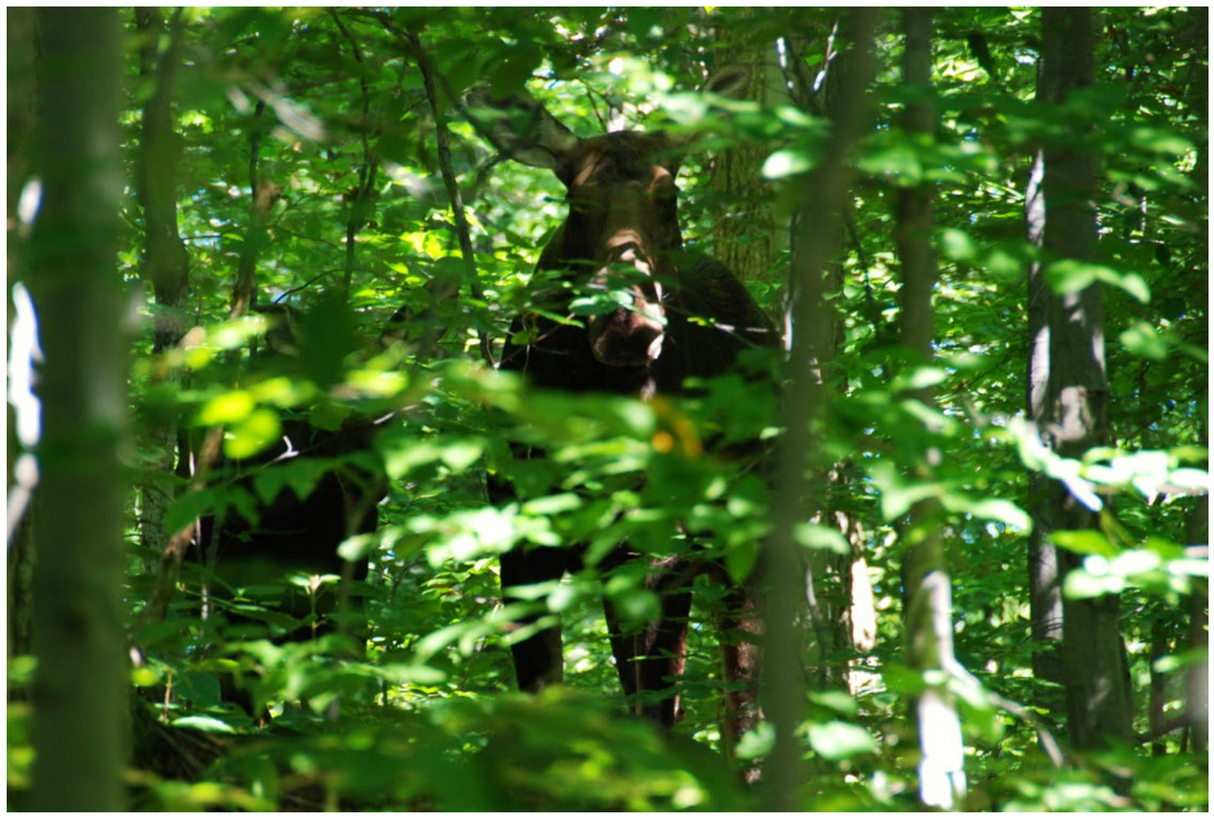
Trees are a very hardy bunch, growing across the planet in various environments. The Joshua Tree is native to the Mojave Desert; thorn and mesquite trees manage to survive in some extreme places. Trees are so universally beloved they currently are featured on over 25 various national flags, and many state flags.

“Wow,” you might say. “That’s a whole lot of totally fascinating information about trees!”

Yes it is my friends, but have YOU looked at a tree lately? I mean really looked?

They are simply beautiful; lovely to look at, and a joy to contemplate. I like to use trees as markers on the trail; using these literally living guideposts to help point the way. You know; hike past the grove of elm trees and turn east; then at the old pine head back south to the trailhead. Many trails owe their physical configuration to trees, wandering and looping about in a serpentine fashion to better navigate the various natural woodland obstacles. Thus trails are sometimes named after trees, such as the Lone Elm or Big Pine Trail.

I would guess it is safe to say that most hikers and backpackers especially love to be outdoors in the fall, with its wild symphony of various colored leaves. It’s almost as if some drunken, mad artist armed with a vivid pallet of orange, yellow, and scarlet red was somehow left loose on the forest. The spectrum of hues is almost beyond description, you simply must see it yourself.



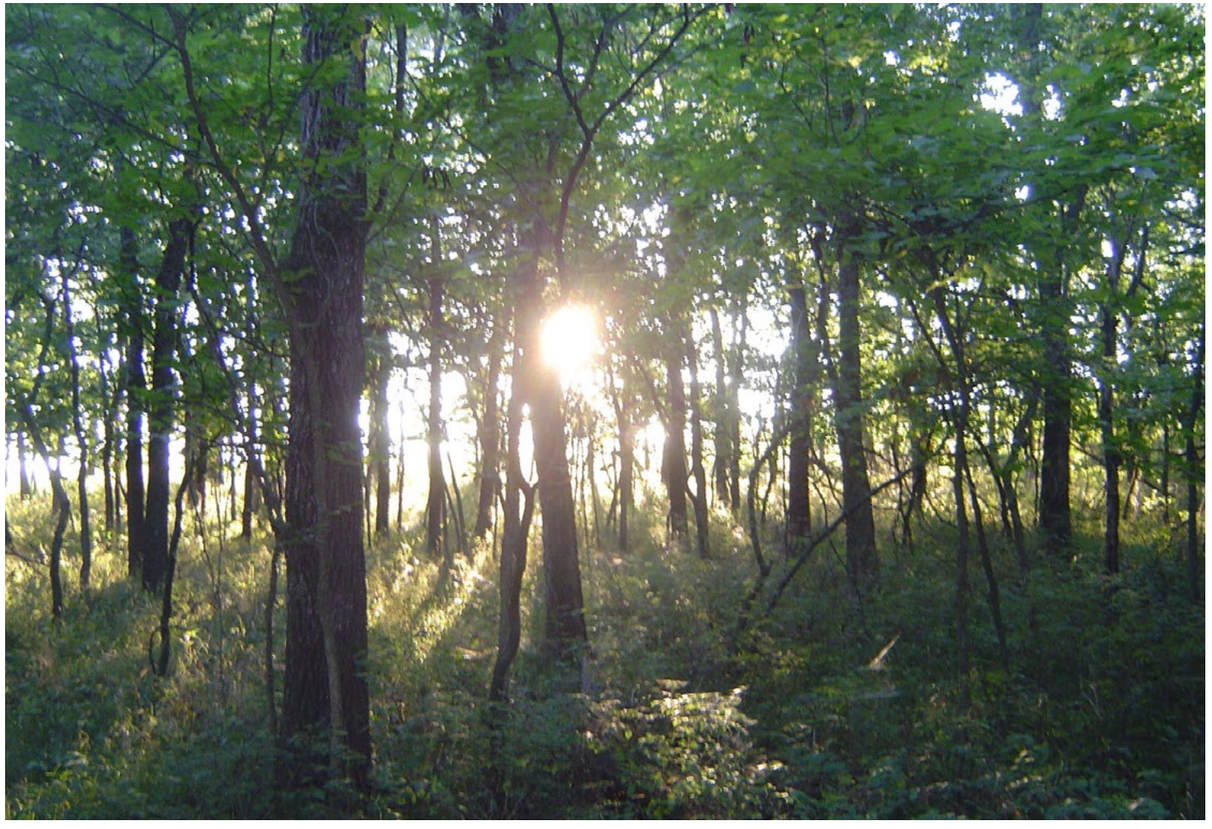
Haven’t you been backpacking and taken refuge in the shade of a mighty oak? Have you hiked the treeline of a majestic mountain slope or camped beside a grove of Cottonwood trees to help keep off the cold wind? Have you seen the absolute and unmatched beauty of a Dogwood Tree in bloom? On the trail, I want to take the time to really see the trees. I want to touch them, respect them.

Not very long ago, I drove by a small local wooded area, and saw the damage done just recently by a construction company working on a new development. The once thriving small woods had been plowed up, with nothing but raw dirt left behind. The mangled and smashed tree trunks left in a rotting pile, bleaching like bones in the sun. What took decades, perhaps hundreds of years to grow was eliminated in a few hours. Gone forever. It is called progress. Now some youngster will not have the opportunity to climb those trees, to learn to appreciate them, to love them. It saddens me.

Yes, I am a certified tree hugger. A hopeless lover of beauty, nature, and trees! Is that so wrong?

I believe it is not. Perhaps you will consider these ideas, and think them as truly not so peculiar. Better yet; next time you frolic aimlessly in a forest glen or explore the mysterious deep woods, reflect on the wild and wonderful trees.

For you thus tempted by this metaphoric later day Tree of Knowledge; embrace nature in all of its splendor, read Thoreau, and love a tree!




“Life should be an unfinished business.”
- Colin Fletcher

Thanks for Reading Issue 19

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

www.TrailGroove.com