TrailGroove®

Issue 21

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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:
Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Paul Magnanti, Adrienne Marshall, Sean Sparbanie, Susan Dragoo, and Eli Burakian.

Editor’s Note

Just as some additional winter gear I’d ordered arrived it seemed as though temps skyrocketed and the first weeks of spring...Feel a bit more like spring than winter here in the mountains. Perhaps another snowstorm or two will offer a few additional opportunities for winter-oriented outings before summer arrives, but for now I might just have to climb higher if I want to chase any snow. Whatever the elevation it’s hard to complain though, an early start to the 3 season backpacking and hiking season can only mean one thing - more.

In this issue we’ll travel across the Bailey Range in the Pacific Northwest, head to Everest Base Camp, and take a look at the winter gone by in the Smokies. If you’re planning a hike of one of our long trails and need some insight into strategy read about secion vs. thru-hiking, and we have an article on giving back via trail maintenance, those moments on the trail themselves, a review of a camera promising great photos that fits in a pocket, and a lot more along the way. Thanks for reading and keep an eye out for Issue 22 just around the corner.

- Aaron Zagrodnick

Contribute

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: SWE (Snow Water Equivalent)

Snow Water Equivalent is a measurement used to determine the total amount of water mass contained within the snowpack of a specific geographical area, usually expressed in inches of water. (If the entire snowpack were to melt, this would in turn = X inches of water) SWE is a particularly useful way to measure potential spring and early summer runoff as well as a good way to predict year to year when trails will start to become free of snow. Since snow and snowpack contains a substantial and varying amount of air, snow depth alone is not always an accurate gauge for the previously stated purposes. However, snow depth is a good way to determine what to reach for on the way out the door for your next winter or early spring hike, whether that be your snowshoes, skis, traction devices, or just your hiking shoes. If you're interested in the current SWE of your favorite hiking destination or just want to check the estimated snow depth, the NOHRSC Interactive Snow Information Website is a great resource to evaluate either prior to your next trip.

Trail News

with Paul Magnanti

In this month's news, some popular public land is protected, the long distance hiking trails have some changes in how they are experienced and used, a death is mourned in the mountains, while two other outdoor enthusiasts are lauded for their historic winter travels.

Outdoor recreationists are rejoicing over President Obama declaring Browns Canyon, in central Colorado, a national monument. A very popular area for white water rafting and canoeing, over 22,000 acres are now protected by this national monument status. In addition to whitewater enthusiasts, area anglers, hunters, and businesses are also happy with this outcome. In the new economy of the West, economic interests and environmental protection often happily coincide. Browns Canyon National Monument is both a scenic area that is now protected and an economic benefit for towns in Chaffee County that are near this new national monument.

To quote Bob Dylan, "Times, they are a changin' "…at least when it comes to America's well known long distance hiking trails. Some new changes this coming season include the Appalachian Trail Conference instituting voluntary registration for thru-hikers starting from Springer Mountain, the Pacific Crest Trail Association implementing a cap for permits on a daily basis for any hiker starting from Campo, CA, and the National Park Service restructuring the permit process for the John Muir Trail. With the long distance hiking trails becoming more popular, there is increased pressure on the trails themselves, the resources supporting the trails, and well-known providers of services for hikers. One popular hostel closed on the Pacific Crest Trail after 18 years, for example. The nature of the long trails will continue to change. How the long trails will change, and the experience on them, is the question.

A cautionary tale happened recently in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Kate Matrosova, 32, died near Mt. Madison in the Presidential Range. The brutal weather of -30F temperatures and fierce winds of up to 100 MPH, technology failing due to the extreme environmental conditions, possibly not being prepared in terms of gear, and simply not turning around at tree line all contributed to this tragedy. Be careful when in the mountains, especially in winter. Experience, gear and athletic ability can only go so far. Prudence is often advised.

And, to leave on celebratory note, congratulations to Shawn "Pepper" Forry and Justin "Trauma" Lichter for the first ever winter thru-hike of the Pacific Crest Trail. A mixture of skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking through snow, rain, sleet, and whiteout conditions accompanied these very experience outdoor adventurers on their nearly 2700 mile long and 4.5 month journey. Thru-hiking a long trail is an accomplishment. Traveling the length of the Pacific Crest Trail in winter? A feat never completed and something very few people would have the ability to accomplish. Bravo!

Trail Tip 21:
The 10 Essentials - Ultralight Edition
by Ted Ehrlich

There have always been a set of items that are glorified as necessities for any and all trips outside. However, as you become more experienced, sometimes you have to ask yourself why your kit is set up the way it is. The "10 Essentials" is what every traveler needs, but are there a better set of essentials? The classic kit is a map, compass, sun protection, extra clothing, flashlight, first-aid kit, firestarter, matches, knife, and extra food. These cover the basics, but to help remove some of the weight off your back, let's look at what really is needed.

Map and Compass – The basics of navigation. I ALWAYS bring a paper copy of a topo map with my route marked up, but rarely do I need a compass – I read the sun and other signs. However, in rare conditions where visibility is very poor, having a compass can be extremely handy. My watch has a built in compass, along with many other features, and a long enough battery life that relying on it is not an issue, eliminating the compass from my pack. My Suunto Ambit2 handles everything I need and more. If your map is not printed on waterproof material, a Ziploc bag will keep it dry and handy.

Sun Protection – A good pair of sunglasses, a brimmed hat, a long sleeve shirt, and pants go a long way to protect you from the sun and also from getting scraped up on a trip. I will get a travel sized bottle of sunscreen to bring with me, eliminating a considerable amount of weight, and apply sunscreen from a regular sized bottle before leaving the car.

Extra Clothes – This one is fairly easy to eliminate. Your clothing choices should be decided before the trip based on weather and location. The only extra clothes I bring are extra layers (rain jacket, insulation, wind jacket, etc.) based on conditions, and otherwise I will only bring 2 pairs of extra socks and a few extra pairs of underwear for changing out. Keeping yourself and your clothes clean is futile, so just accept that your trekking clothes are okay to get dirty and to be worn that way for a few days. It's just part of the experience. At night, wash up with clean water if available, change into clean socks and underwear, and wear whatever is cleanest to bed if needed.

Flashlight – Please, leave your 4D flashlight at home. For a few bucks, the lightest headlamps and flashlights on the market will only weigh 1-3 ounces, and will last most trips on a single fresh set of batteries. Always check your batteries before the trip and bring at least one set of spares. I personally use my Black Diamond Ion headlamp ($25) or my Fenix LD02 ($35). The Fenix has a clip so you can attach it to your hat when needed. Run the light on the lowest output possible to allow the battery to last longer. On full moon hikes, sometimes I won't even use a flashlight if the weather is clear.

First Aid Kit – Build your own kit based off how many people you have, and what you are doing. By building your own kit, you will be more familiar with what you have, and how it is used. See Issue 13 for a detailed tip on first aid kits.

Firestarter and Matches – Bringing a firestarer is more dependent on where you are going and what you are cooking with. With some practice, you can create your own tinder for starting a fire without having to pack anything in, but really I would hesitate to relying on fire for warmth and cooking. Bring a reliable stove, enough fuel, and a mini BIC lighter. Those three things will keep you warm and happy, and your knowledge for creating a "one match fire" will work just as well with a BIC. Since the mini BIC lighters are so small, I tend to bring a second one as a backup. See Issue 18 for a good primer on stoves and fuel.

Knife – Again, this depends on what you will be using it for. I personally carry a very small Victorinox Classic SD knife or a Victorinox Bantam if I want a little bit bigger blade. If I absolutely need a locking blade, I'll bring a Gerber Ultralight L.S.T or a SpyderCO Ladybug. Your big heavy multi-tool isn't needed, so leave it at home and save a full pound.

Extra food – If you're going to lug around extra food, at least do your research so that your extra food will pack the biggest punch for the weight. I try to keep most of my food above 130 calories an ounce on average, but my extra food is always higher, closer to 200 calories per ounce. Macadamia nuts, shelled sunflower seeds, peanuts, and anything else with a high fat content is crucial. Fat has 240 calories per ounce, where carbs, sugars, and proteins only have around 100 calories per ounce. High fat foods will also take longer to burn and help you feel full. The amount of extra food should be dependent on how long of a trip you are taking. For overnight trips, you should have about 1500-2000 extra calories, which can weigh around a half pound or less. No need to bring multiple day's worth unless you are going to be somewhere very remote or in technical terrain.

Communication – The 11th Essential. A cell phone if there are reliable signals or a personal locator beacon (PLB) if cell signals will not be reliable. Always leave a detailed itinerary left with a dependable person for all trips, no matter what.

The Kingly Season:
Farewell to Winter in the Great Smoky Mountains

By Sean Sparbanie

Storm Clouds Break Over The Great Smokies - Storm clouds begin to break and reveal the snow-covered peak of Clingmans Dome, the tallest peak in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Daydreams of untouched, pristine white powder adorning the ridges as far as the eye can see. The extra planning required to keep yourself warm, dry, hydrated, and fed. Sneaking past closed roads, hiking into storms. Winter: It's the most exciting time of year for mountain adventures. From the moment the last leaf falls and the throngs of tourists head home until the first fern emerges from the soil, the backcountry belongs to those who adore the unparalleled quietude of winter.

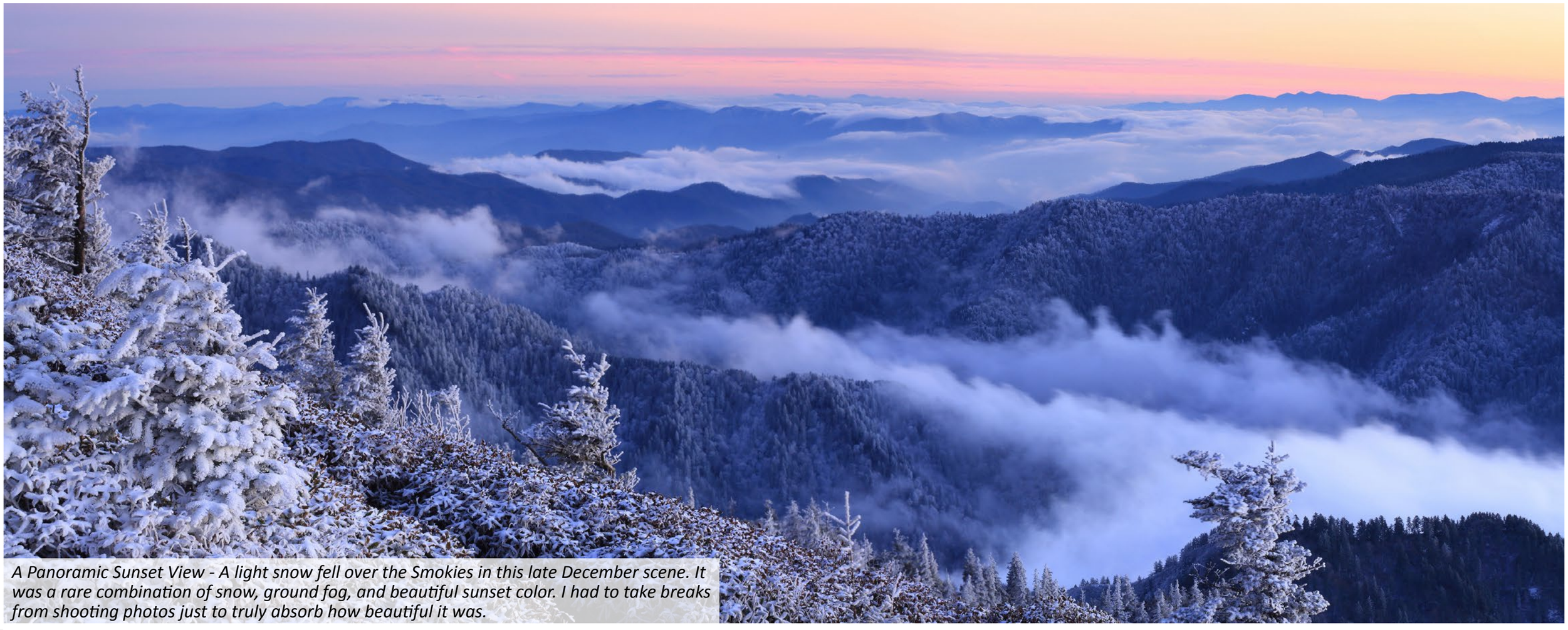
Even when struggling to keep my fingers from freezing while snapping photos, I love every challenge, obstacle, and hardship. The adventure is certainly not all struggles, though. Perfectly calm wind, heavy fog, and huge snowflakes falling all around while hiking the Rainbow Falls trail to the LeConte summit is one of the most memorable hikes I've ever experienced. Giant trees fading away into the light grey stillness. Absolute silence. Only the gentle whisper of snowflakes laying down the soft white blanket could be heard.

Even the residents of the forest seem to respect this rare sort of quiet.

Then there's the moment the storm breaks and the first hints of blue sky and sun reveal themselves. For me, there are no greater rewards in outdoor adventure. It's worth every challenging step of the way.

Alas, the pale blue dot keeps spinning in the firmament, and the seasons must change. Icicles hanging high on the bluffs will begin to melt and glisten brightly in the sunshine of early spring, and soon the air will be permeated with the smell of thawing soil. Though I love the personalities of all seasons in the Great Smokies, there will always be a part of me longing for the singular beauty of winter in the mountains.

As we bid farewell to this kingly season, please take a moment to look at some of my favorite captured memories from these ancient hills we call the Great Smoky Mountains.



A Panoramic Sunset View - A light snow fell over the Smokies in this late December scene. It was a rare combination of snow, ground fog, and beautiful sunset color. I had to take breaks from shooting photos just to truly absorb how beautiful it was.

Ice and Snow Surround Grotto Falls - The road to Grotto Falls is always closed during the winter months. I decided to add a couple miles to my trip and hike the road to the Trillium Gap Trail. This view from behind the falls made every extra step worthwhile.

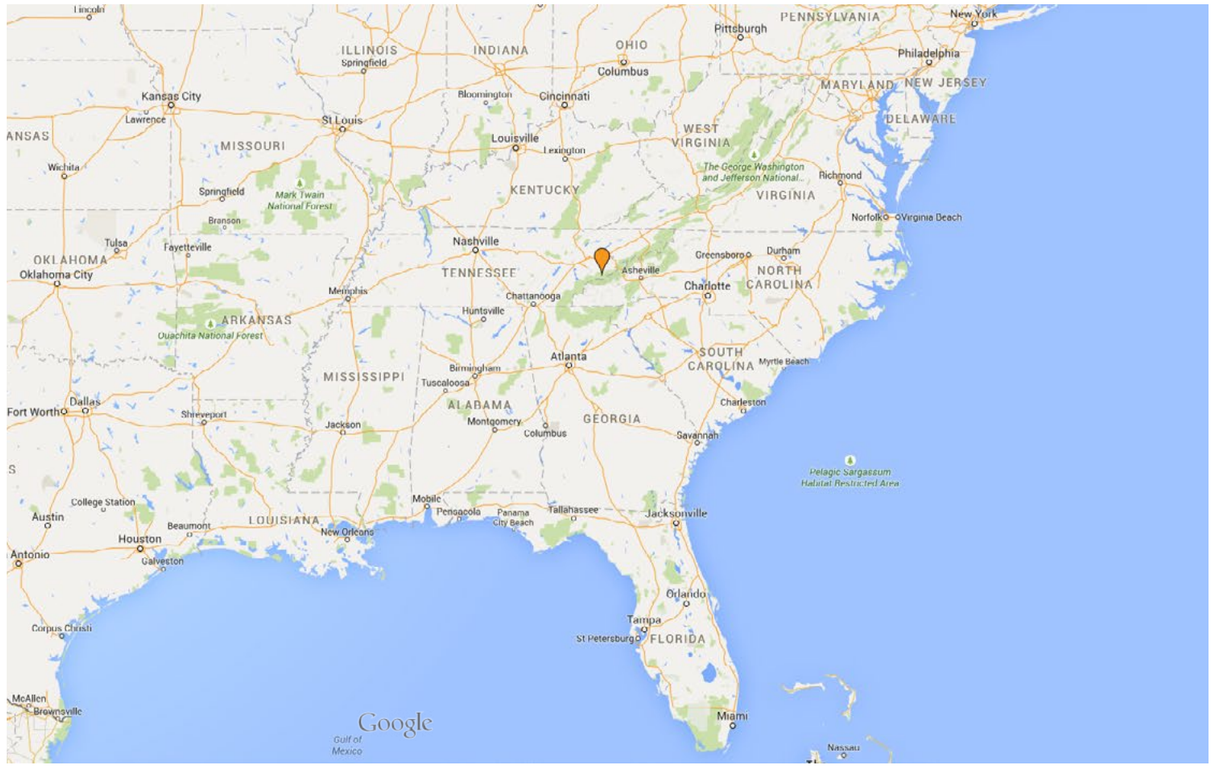
Getting There: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park straddles the border of North Carolina and Tennessee. There are numerous entrances and towns surrounding the park. On the Tennessee side, find entrances at Gatlinburg, Townsend, and Cosby. For North Carolina, head to Cherokee and Bryson City. Find camping information and links to the reservation system here: http://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/carcamping.htm

Best Time to Go: The Smokies can be enjoyed all year round, but my favorite times are: February for winter conditions, mid-April through mid-May for spring, September for summer, and late October for autumn color displays. You can take a look at a warmer hike in the Smokies in this Issue 16 article: http://www.trailgroove.com/issue16.html?autoflip=15

Books: Hiking Trails of the Smokies

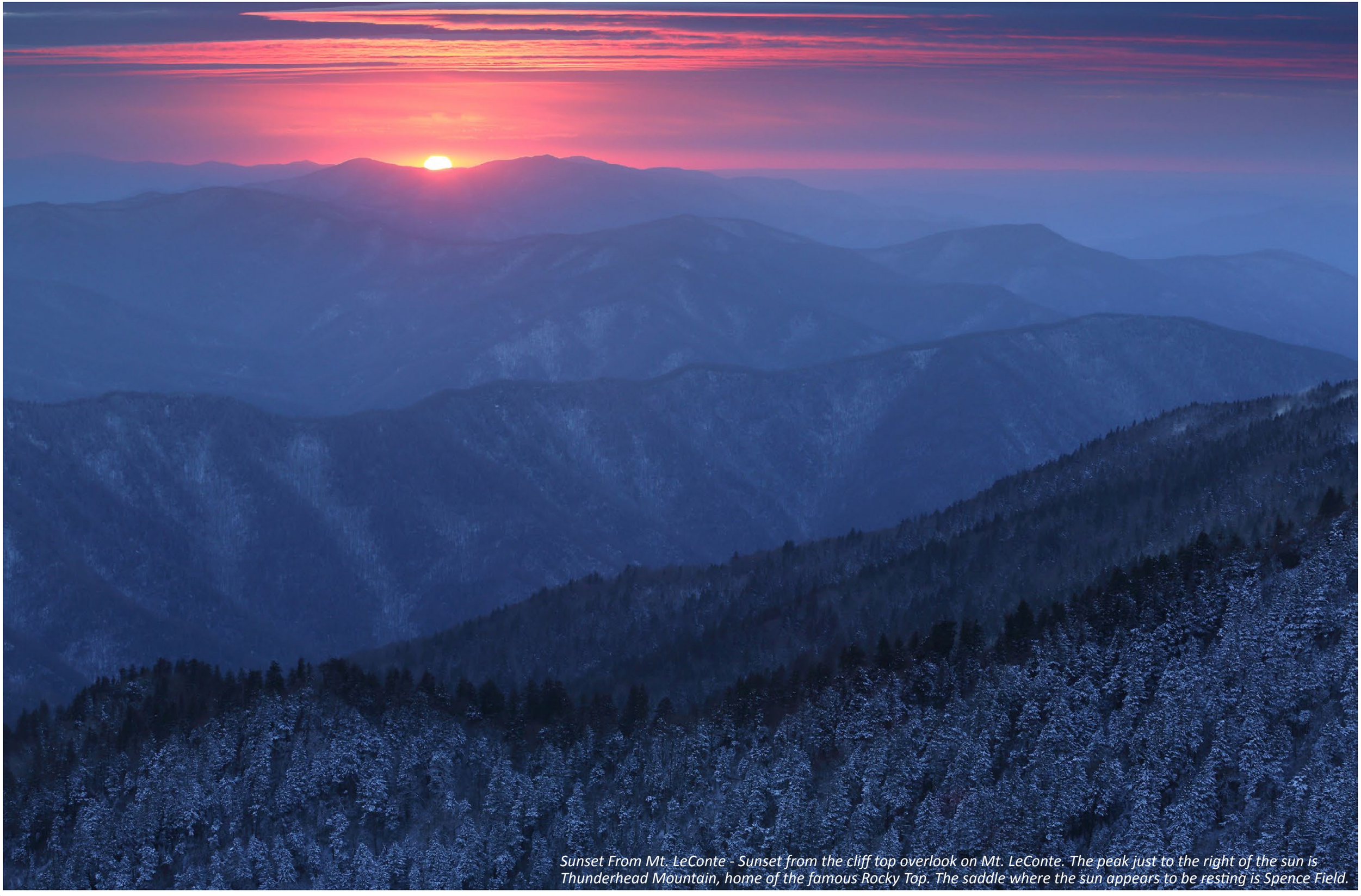
Maps: Great Smoky Mountains National Park - Trails Illustrated

The Alum Cave Trail Near the Summit of Mt. LeConte - Untouched snow graces a section of the Alum Cave trail, near the summit of Mt. LeConte.



Rainbow Falls in the Fog - I'd been hunting a good shot of Rainbow Falls for years, and always seemed to strike out. Fog is key, but I lucked out and got some snow with it, too.

Spruce Flat Falls - With the roads closed, Spruce Flats Falls is one of the closest attractions within walking distance to the park boundary. I set out early on a frigid morning and hiked a few miles of road before hitting the trailhead. This was during the infamous 'Polar Vortex', so all the park's waterfalls had some time to freeze over. This is somewhat rare, especially at this elevation. It was six degrees above zero when I snapped this photo. The spray from the small amount of flow that wasn't frozen would instantly freeze as soon as it hit my lens, so I kept a hand warmer in a handkerchief to melt it and wipe it away before shooting the next frame.



Sunset From Mt. LeConte - Sunset from the cliff top overlook on Mt. LeConte. The peak just to the right of the sun is Thunderhead Mountain, home of the famous Rocky Top. The saddle where the sun appears to be resting is Spence Field.

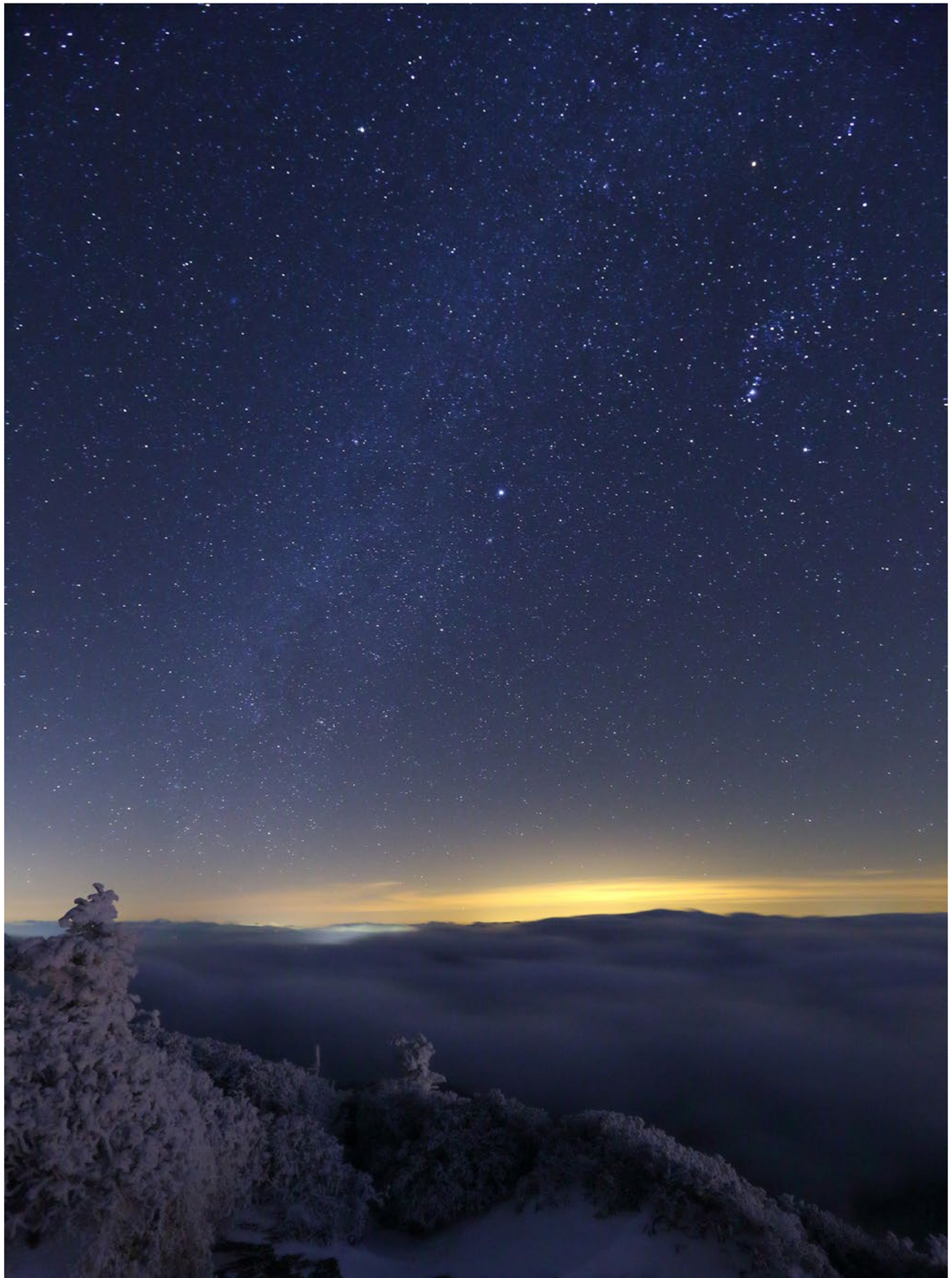
Frozen Trees Along the Appalachian Trail - Heavy rim ice under a light dusting of snow created this tunnel-like view into the forest flanking the Appalachian Trail.

The First Peek of Blue Sky - This image represents the moments I love most about winter in the mountains. The very first moment when the storm breaks. All the snow is perfectly untouched. There are no tracks on the trails. It's all perfectly new and brilliant, and then a little piece of sky is subtly revealed through the clouds. To me, there are very few moments in life as perfect as these.

Late Afternoon on Spence Field - This was a bittersweet moment for me as a photographer. I had set out for Spence Field very early in the morning. It's a little more than 5 miles, and uphill the whole way. I didn't allow enough time, and was two miles short of the summit when the sun was rising. Looking up towards the peaks, I could see a beautiful salmon-pink light piercing the thin, vaporous fog and landing softly on the snow-clad trees. I knew I'd never make it in time to photograph, and I think I may have missed an extraordinarily beautiful sunrise. I'll never truly know, and that will always be in the back of my mind when I look at this image.

Moonlit Snow on the Alum Cave Trail - Camping atop Mt. LeConte, I decided to head down to the Alum Cave Bluffs for sunset. The park was closed off for the weather, so I knew I'd have the trail to myself. Though sunset wasn't especially photogenic, this ended up being one of my all-time favorite hikes. There were nine or ten inches of fresh snow on the ground, and all the clouds cleared to reveal a magical February full moon. No flashlight needed for this midnight trek.

A Frosty Morning in Cades Cove - For a very brief moment, the clouds broke and allowed the distant mountainside to be illuminated while the rest of Cades Cove remained in shadow. There was no snow this morning, but a thick frost coated all vegetation.

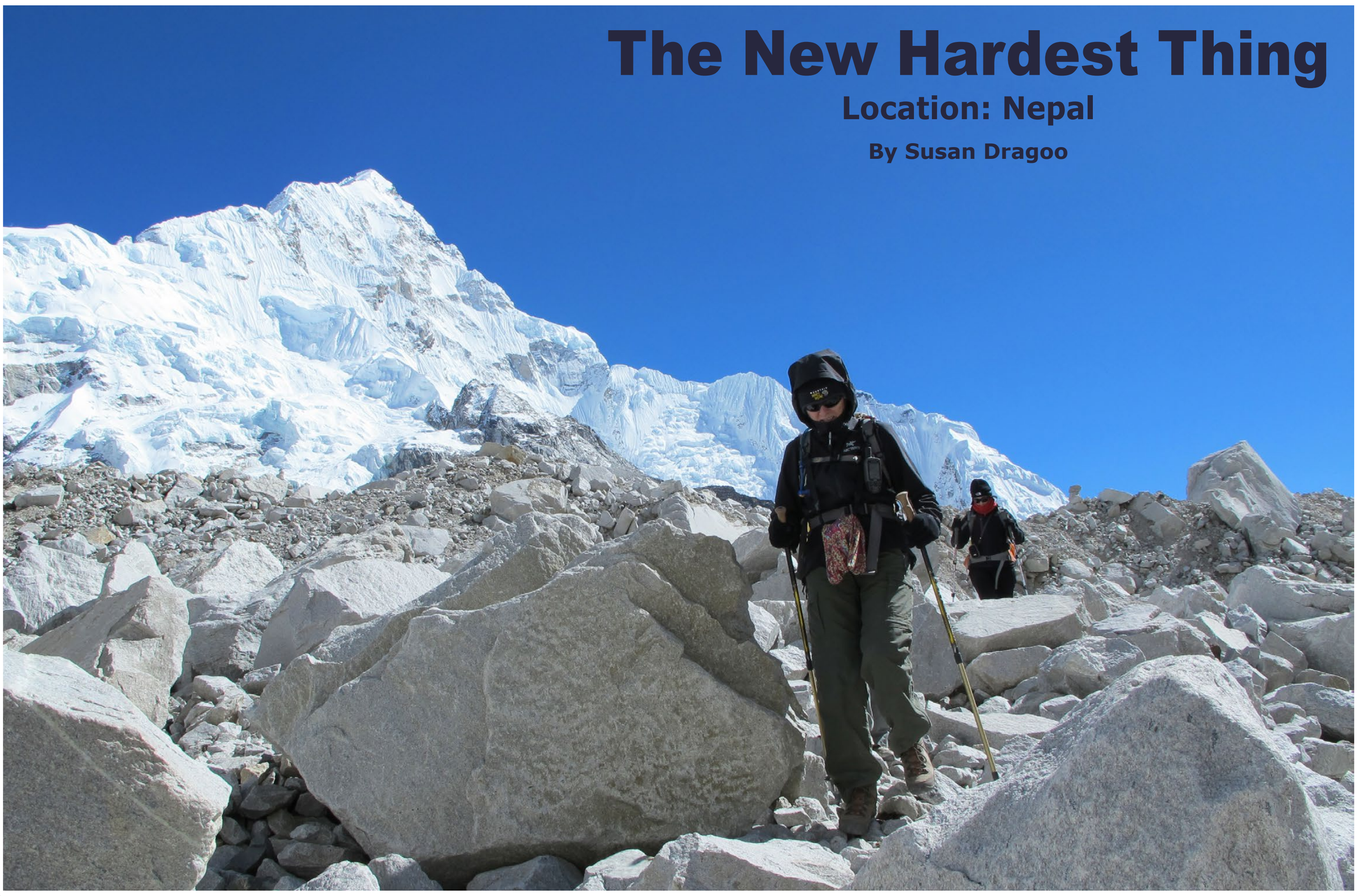


The Milky Way Over a Cloud Inversion Shortly after midnight, my friend and I both confirmed we were unable to sleep. We agreed to head up to Cliff Tops from camp on LeConte, and have a look at the stars. Shortly after completing the half mile hike to the overlook, we were treated to a cloud inversion, which darkened nearby city lights and revealed perhaps the most clear sight of the Milky Way I've ever seen on the east coast.

The New Hardest Thing

Location: Nepal

By Susan Dragoo



Strong men and women are laid low by this place. Acute mountain sickness, the "Khumbu cough,[1]" gastroenteritis, the cold, the food . . . what makes them want to come here? What made me want to come here? Our friend Paul walks down the hall of tonight's tea house, remarking on the sounds of hacking and coughing emitting from the guest rooms. "This place is full of crazy people." And I can't argue otherwise.

I wondered, before I came to Nepal to hike to Mount Everest Base Camp, whether this might be my new "Hardest Thing." My old Hardest Thing was made that way by high elevation and its effects, hiking the Bear Creek Trail in the Colorado Rockies without acclimatizing. This time, I thought I had it handled. A few years older but in better physical condition, I am taking Diamox to help mitigate the effects of altitude sickness, and am much more aware of the signs, and the dangers, of that ailment.

This is day eight of our trek, and we are in the village of Lobuche. At 16,170 feet, it is our last stop before we push on to Base Camp. It is late October 2012, and my husband, Bill, and I are traveling with a small group of Americans, led by both American and Nepalese guides.

Andrew, the youngest member of our group at 30, was the third person to come down with the fever, chills, nausea, and diarrhea associated with acute gastroenteritis brought on by ingesting the wrong thing. Such an affliction is always

[1] The Khumbu cough, also known as the high altitude hack, is named after the area in the Everest region, although it is not specific to Everest. Nearly all people who spend time at extreme altitude (over 5500m) will develop some degree of the Khumbu cough. It is caused by the low humidity and subzero temperatures experienced at altitude, and is thought to be triggered by over exertion. This leads to an increased breathing rate, which exposes the delicate lung lining to excess cold air, resulting in dried out membranes and partially damaged bronchi. This causes extreme irritation which manifests itself in the form of a dry, persistent cough which can restrict breathing. Eventually the cough can be so violent and put so much strain on the chest cavity that it causes its victim to tear chest muscles or break ribs.

unpleasant but here particularly so, as spending inordinate amounts of time in the less-than-pristine and always frigid (whether inside or outside) toilet is miserable. Neither Bill nor I have been struck with the stomach bug yet, but I have been dealing for several days with mild symptoms of acute mountain sickness, or AMS, the proper name for altitude sickness. It began with a headache at 14,000 feet and has gradually worsened, but so far isn't severe enough to keep me from moving on. Joe, our American guide from Backwoods Adventures, is keeping a close eye on me (and all the others) to make sure we are healthy enough to continue. A severe case of AMS could be deadly and, at some point, a hiker experiencing symptoms must simply descend or die.

Getting this far is an accomplishment. We have hiked 32 miles since our arrival at Lukla, the starting point for the trek, and home to an airport that has the reputation as "The World's Most Dangerous." The unusually short airstrip is squeezed between the side of a mountain and a cliff with a nearly 2,000-foot drop. Volatile weather conditions increase the risk, so pilots flying from Kathmandu must choose their timing carefully. On our first attempt to fly out of Kathmandu, the plane turned back because the landing gear would not retract. Once the mechanical issue was resolved, wind conditions at Lukla prevented departure for several more hours. It was 2 p.m. when we finally left Kathmandu for the 45-minute flight to the village at 9,800 feet elevation. It was a relief to have feet on the ground after the harrowing flight and, after a late lunch, we started to walk. Over the five miles to our lodging in Phakding, we actually descended to 8,700 feet, hiking much of it in the dark.

Our path through the Himalayas follows a well-worn trail first established by real mountaineers who didn't turn back at the base of Mount Everest. Trekking to Base Camp as a destination began in 1965 when a British mountaineer and former Ghurka officer, Colonel Jimmy Roberts, had the notion that people would pay for the privilege of following in the footsteps of Hillary and Tenzing through the Dudh Kosi river valley, along the Khumbu Glacier, and to the base of Everest. And they did, with trekking now a big contributor to tourism in Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries.

Above: We entered Sagarmatha National Park south of Namche Bazaar. Mount Everest lies within the park.
Below: This sign in Namche Bazaar may be awkwardly worded but carries a message worth heeding.
Previous Page: Susan Dragoo leaving Base Camp to return to Gorak Shep for the night

Clockwise from Left: Sturdy steel suspension bridges have replaced rickety wooden ones;
A memorial to a climber who lost his life on the Makalu peak;
Most structures are made of rock in this region; wood is a rare and precious resource;
An advertising sign at a lunch stop promises a good view.

Left to Right: Numerous suspension bridges cross the Dudh Kosi river and its tributaries;
Even the yak trains use the narrow suspension bridges;
Dzopkyos, a cross between a cow and a yak, carry trekkers' gear on the trail to Lobuche as the landscape becomes more desolate.

Accommodations along the trail are in "tea houses," which exist to provide bed and board to trekkers. While these lodges offer a distinct advantage over tents in the chill of late October, we would be seriously uncomfortable without our zero-degree sleeping bags in the unheated guest rooms. While hiking we have no difficulty staying warm, but each afternoon when we reach our destination we take refuge in sunrooms attached to the tea houses. Unfortunately our arrival seems to coincide with the daily appearance of clouds, which roll down the river valley and obscure the sun. Toward evening, yak dung stoves in the common rooms are fired up and guests gather around, trying to soak up heat for the night ahead. Warmth remains elusive the entire trip. Cold, in fact, is constant.

After the easy first leg of our hike from Lukla to Phakding, we climbed 2,500 feet over six miles to Namche Bazaar – a hard day. The trail follows the Dudh Kosi valley north through pine forest, and was crowded with trekkers, porters, natives carrying insanely large loads, and yak trains carrying all manner of goods. Everything up here is carried by man or beast. There are no roads to these villages, and no wheeled vehicles that could reasonably convey loads up these steep, rocky, narrow trails. We have learned to step out of the way of the ubiquitous yaks – or dzopkyos (a cow/yak mix). "Yak attack!" has become our cry when we need to give them room on the trail. They appear docile but have fierce-looking horns best avoided. Our pace, it occurs to me, is life at the speed of yak, and for this place, that is plenty fast.

Thamserku, a 21,679-foot peak, rises to the east of Namche Bazaar and came into view at the village of Mondzo, where we stopped for tea. The trail crosses the river numerous times along our 40-mile path to Base Camp, typically on steel suspension bridges fluttering with prayer flags[2]. Here we used one of the steel structures to cross to the river's east bank; the remains of the old wooden bridge destroyed by floods in 1985 are visible upriver. Along the trail, the villages are interspersed with forests of rhododendron, magnolia and fir. Prayer wheels[3] decorate the village entrances and mani stones[4] are everywhere – alone or in piles – beside villages, at crossings, along paths and on mountains.

[2] Tibetan Buddhists believe that by writing and illustrating their desires on prayer flags, the wind will deliver the desires to the world.

[3] A prayer wheel is a cylindrical wheel (Tibetan: འཁོར་ Wylie: 'khor) on a spindle made from metal, wood, stone, leather or coarse cotton. Traditionally, the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is written in Sanskrit on the outside of the wheel. Also sometimes depicted are Dakinis, Protectors and very often the 8 auspicious symbols Ashtamangala. According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition based on the lineage texts regarding prayer wheels, spinning such a wheel will have much the same meritorious effect as orally reciting the prayers.

[4] Mani stones are stone plates, rocks and/or pebbles, inscribed with the six syllabled mantra of Avalokiteshvara[1] (Om mani padme hum, hence the name "Mani stone"), as a form of prayer in Tibetan Buddhism. The term Mani stone may also be used in a loose sense to refer to stones on which any mantra or devotional designs (such as ashtamangala) are inscribed. Mani stones are intentionally placed along the roadsides and rivers[1] or placed together to form mounds[1] or cairns[2] or sometimes long walls, as an offering to spirits of place or genius loci. Creating and carving mani stones as devotional or intentional process art is a traditional sadhana of piety to yidam. Mani stones are a form of devotional cintamani.

Prayer flags add color to the stunning scenery as we hike to Everest View Hotel on an acclimatization hike during our stay in Namche Bazaar

Namche Bazaar is the main trading center and tourist hub for this region and there we stayed two days to acclimatize at the 11,306-foot elevation. Our stay at Namche included a hike to the Everest View Hotel which, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, is the highest hotel in the world at 12,729 feet. As the name suggests, it also offered our first view of Mount Everest, which reaches more than 29,000 feet above sea level. Its summit cone is almost obscured by other mountains, but is distinctive because of the constantly blowing snow created by high winds at its peak. Here, 22,349-foot Ama Dablam dominates the scenery, its ghost-like shape making it hard to forget.

We saw it ahead of us for several days as we walked up the valley. Then, suddenly, it was behind us. Over the next several days we made slow progress – the trek is timed intentionally to provide plenty of time for acclimatization. Fitness is one thing, having enough oxygen is yet another, and both are critical to success here. From Namche to Phortse to Pangboche, then Pheriche, where we took another rest day, at 14,000 feet. The houses and stone walls of Pheriche scatter along the broad valley of the Khumbu Khola, a tributary of the Dudh Khosi which drains from the Khumbu Glacier at the foot of Everest. Pheriche is home to a high altitude research center at the Himalayan Rescue Association clinic,

Fitness is one thing, having enough oxygen is yet another, and both are critical to success here.

where we heard a sobering lecture on the effects of high altitude. With an extra day here for acclimatization, we hiked to a ridge between Pheriche and Dingboche, affording spectacular views up and down the river valley.

Eat, hike, sleep, try to keep warm, repeat. Everything has become difficult as we have ascended. Eating enough is a challenge. High altitude suppresses appetite but at the same time, the body needs more and more calories. And the food becomes less and less palatable. Producing food for western tastes on yak dung stoves at 14,000 feet must be difficult. And protein is hard to get. We were warned to avoid eating meat on the way up because of contamination concerns. Seeing halves of pigs carried up the mountain, I could see why.

The push for Lobuche, gaining more than 2,000 feet of elevation in five miles, was another hard day. We followed a wide trail north along the bottom of the valley, a desolate landscape, the trail going directly up the gravelly terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier. At the top of a ridge, the path bears left and is covered with memorials to lost climbers and sherpas – piles of stones and masonry pillars, prayer flags everywhere among the wispy clouds and thin air.

I am walking very slowly now. My headache recurred last night and Joe

Bill pauses to enjoy the scenery on the trail between Namche and Phortse

advised me not to overexert, which could exacerbate the AMS. Any exertion at this altitude is acutely felt. I have control over so little – my body responds as it will to the lack of oxygen – but I am trying to be very compliant so I can make it to Base Camp. It is cold inside the “Mother Earth House” lodge in Lobuche, and will be an even colder night. We have an early start tomorrow, to Gorak Shep then on to Base Camp. It will be a long day.

The first section of the trail from Lobuche follows the gap between the glacial moraine and the mountain wall. To the right, the Khumbu Glacier gurgles under a blanket of rocks and gravel. The landscape grows more desolate, and the trail is marked only by cairns of stones and the dung of yak trains. Soon Kala Pattar comes into view, an 18,192-foot mound of dark mountain rubble which provides perhaps the best view of Mount Everest in the Himalayas and which several of us had hoped to climb. At this point, I have my doubts as I trudge.

Gorak Shep is a small collection of lodges providing basic needs – food and a space to sleep. We stop there and make our sleeping arrangements and continue to Base Camp, a draining scramble starting at the north end of Gorak Shep. My headache is no worse and I am thankful. I walk at a steady pace, optimistic now that I will make Base Camp.

Soon we are there. Base Camp is a semi-permanent village of tents and prayer flags at the bottom of the Khumbu Icefall at 17,519 feet. Everest is not visible from here – it lurks somewhere beyond the icefall. We stay on Base Camp’s edges. There are crowds of people. It is an emotional moment for me, the culmination of this trek. We snap photos and return to Gorak Shep, a place which seems like – and in some ways, is – the end of the earth.

Clockwise from Top: Susan and Bill Dragoo pause on the final approach to Mount Everest Base Camp; Mount Everest peeks out from behind its Himalayan neighbors as we approach Base Camp. The jet stream constantly blows snow at its >29,000-foot summit; The GPS provides the proof – 17,353 feet elevation at Base Camp; In the early morning light our guide addresses the group before we set out from Lobuche to Base Camp.

The photo we'd been waiting for! Susan and Bill Dragoo at Mount Everest Base Camp.

After a cold night and a splitting headache, (I did not attempt to summit Kala Pattar) we begin our descent, which seems like a lark, as oxygen becomes more and more plentiful. On our return to Lukla, we walk through an enchanting rhododendron forest near Diboche, climb to Tengboche Monastery, and visit an old Buddhist nunnery, but become more and more eager for warmth, hot showers, and good food. On Day 14, we walk back into Lukla and I decide, yes, this was definitely my new Hardest Thing. And that's why I did it.

Clockwise from Top Left: Trekkers begin the walk downhill after visiting Base Camp;
Cairns in a dry stream bed along the trail near Deboche;
The town of Lukla is a welcome sight as we finish our trek.

Ama Dablam stands sentinel over the Dudh Kosi river valley

Best Time to Go: Spring or fall to avoid the summer rainy season. October and November have the best weather for trekking and comprise the high tourist season. The trek itself takes about two weeks and there are travel days before and after, so schedule about three weeks for the whole experience.

Getting There: Using a reputable tour company (and there are many) is nearly essential for first-time visitors. Backwoods Adventures, REI, and National Geographic all offer guided treks to Mount Everest Base Camp. We traveled with Backwoods Adventures and recommend them highly. Getting to Nepal from the U.S. takes about two days. Our route took us from Los Angeles to Seoul, South Korea, then to Bangkok, Thailand, where we stayed overnight. The next day we flew to Kathmandu, Nepal, staying two nights before flying to Lukla for the start of the trek.

Maps: National Geographic Everest Base Camp Trekking Map

Information: Nepal is a small, land-locked strip of land tucked between Tibet and the northeastern border of India. Its capital city is Kathmandu, with a population of 1.4 million. Mount Everest is the highest mountain on Earth, with its summit 29,029 above sea level. The mountain is part of the Himalaya Range in Asia.

Books: There are many available. Two good choices are Lonely Planet's Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya and Cicerone's Everest, A Trekker's Guide.

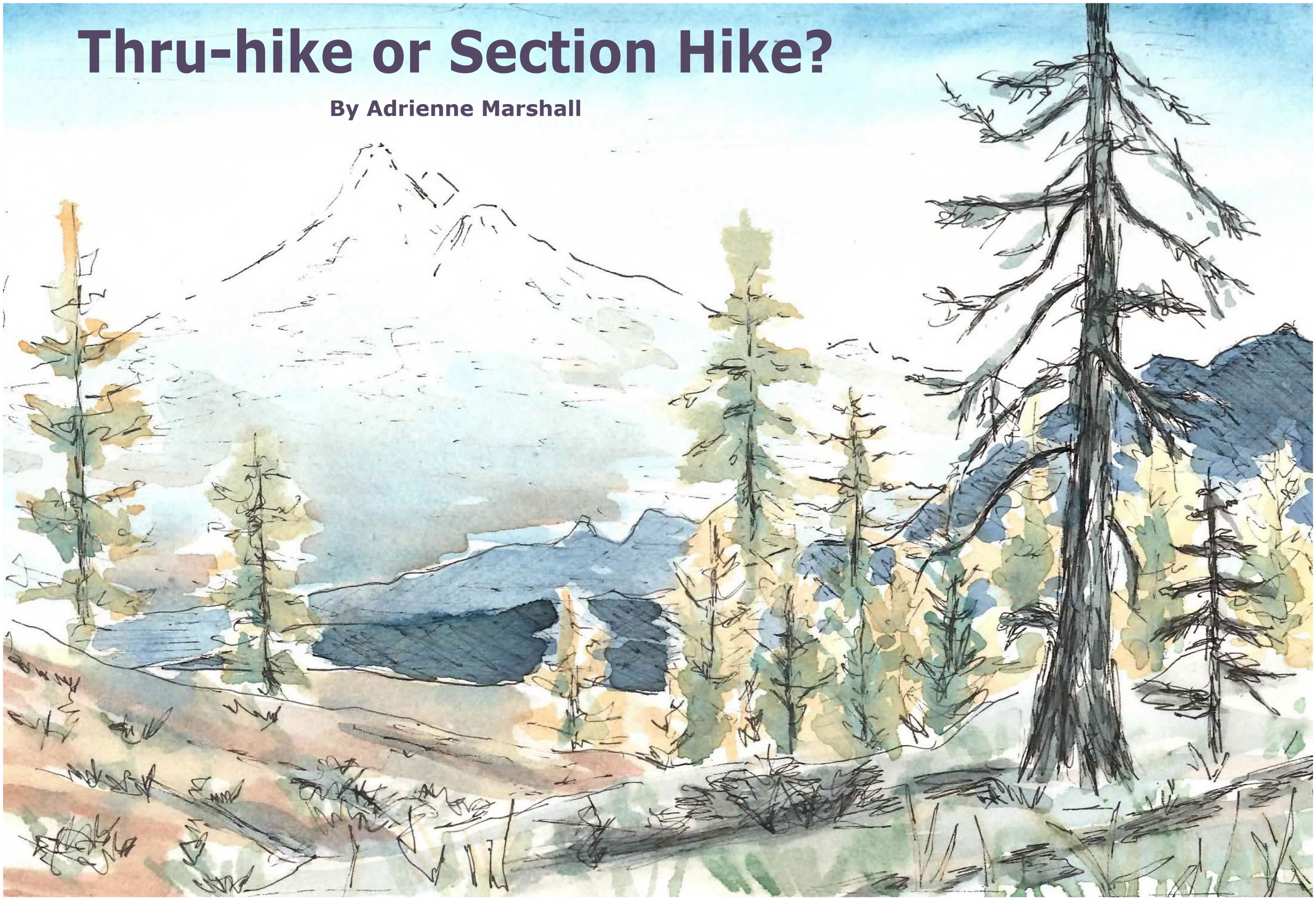
About the Author: Susan Dragoo is a writer and photographer living in Norman, Oklahoma who would rather be hiking just about any day of the year.

Pine forests return to the landscape as our trail descends

A look back towards Ama Dablam as we near the completion of our trek

Thru-hike or Section Hike?

By Adrienne Marshall

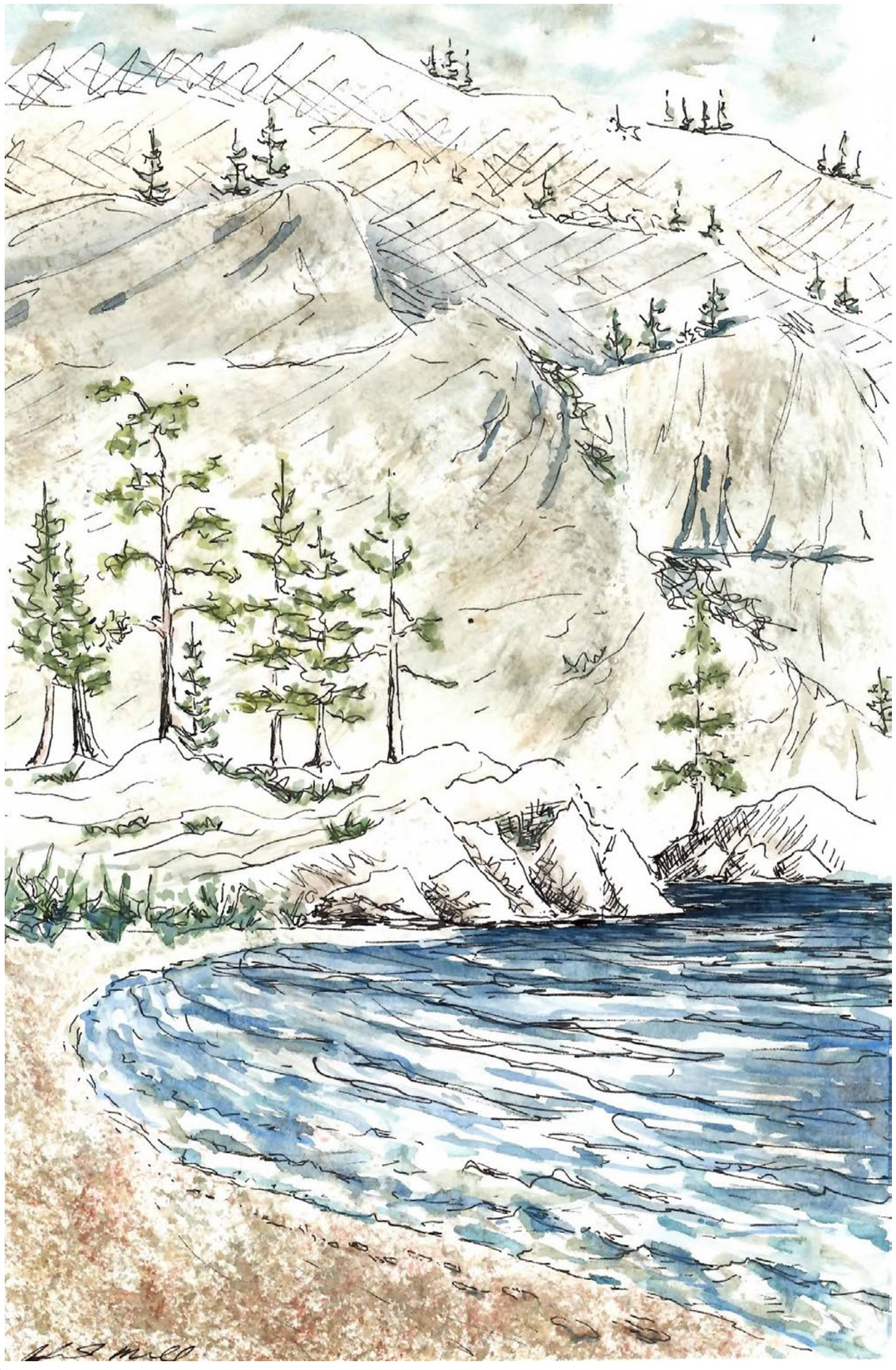


For many long-distance hiking enthusiasts, whether aspiring novices or seasoned triple-crowners, there comes a time when one needs to decide between attempting a full thru-hike or a shorter, but still ambitious section hike. For the purposes of this article, I'm defining a "thru-hike" as a hike of the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, or Continental Divide Trail completed in one season. There are other ways it could be defined, and other trails to be hiked, but these three are arguably the most popular and iconic, with a strong culture of thru-hiking. Thru-hikes can be appealing, but section hikes are often more practical in several ways. In this article, I'll give an idea of my own experience with both, and attempt to offer some perspective for anyone deciding on their own itinerary.

When I was first introduced to the idea of thru-hiking, I was captivated. I think a lot of us have that response to the idea of a thru-hike; there's something magical about the fact that you can walk all the way across the country. Like many of our athletic pursuits, there's also a draw to the fact that something you can do something you never thought was possible. A first thru-hike can feel like you're turning into a superhero version of yourself. This feeling fueled me through the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in 2010, and the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) in 2012. Last summer, I found myself with the motivation to hike, but a measly two months of free time - not even close to the five months needed to complete a thru-hike. So I decided to try something I never had before: a long section hike, about 800 miles from Ashland, Oregon to Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite. Setting out for this hike with my partner, Darren, I was nervous: without the motivation that we were accomplishing something like an entire thru-hike, would we still be able to push through the challenges that inevitably accompany an extended backpack? Or would we find out that section hiking, with less time and weather pressure, less stress on the body, was actually better than thru hiking? I don't know that there are any clear, concise answers to these questions, but I did find that the section hike was a decidedly different experience.

In my experience, pressure to get past a particular location before winter snows set in is a major part of thru-hiking. This is exacerbated somewhat by the fact that I've always hiked southbound, but I think it's characteristic of many peoples' thru-hikes. On the PCT, I started in Washington in late June and found myself postholing through deep snow, losing the trail, continuously, and sliding uncontrollably (though attempting to self-arrest) down icy banks. Why didn't I take a break to let the snow melt? I was dead set on a continuous thru-hike that year, which meant getting through the southern Sierras before mid-October. Waiting wasn't an option. As it turned out, once I got through the snow, I spent the rest of the hike counting the miles to try to get through the Sierras, only to get snowed out when ten miles before the last major pass. Now, I have the perspective to understand that this wasn't the end of the world, but at the time, it was heartbreaking. On the Continental Divide Trail, I hiked with Darren. We faced a similar scenario, this time trying to get through the Southern San Juans before the winter snow set in. The CDT has myriad alternate routes, and we often took the shorter option - partly out of a sense of general practicality, but also with an eye towards the timing of the whole hike. Similarly to our experience on the PCT, winter storms set in right before we got to the San Juans. The alternate route we took around them was lovely, but it did

Right: Devil's Peak wildflowers. **Previous Page:** Shasta.



make all the rushing in the months leading up to it seem a little silly.

The point of all this? Timing can be a huge part of a thru-hike, and no matter how much you rush, an early snowstorm can throw a wrench in the best-laid plans. Is it possible to hike through these storms? Maybe, but it can be pretty difficult and dangerous with the ultra-light, three-season gear that most thru-hikers carry. On a section hike, this problem is much less prevalent. There's typically more freedom to create an itinerary that suits your hiking style, rather than adapting your hiking style to the itinerary that a thru-hike requires. In some ways, this is the biggest advantage of a section hike. On the other hand, the external motivators from a thru-hike can push you to hike distances and speeds that you might not have thought possible. As long as you don't get injured or miserable, this extra effort has awesome potential for physical and mental growth.

Another issue that comes up for thru hikers is hiking sections we don't particularly enjoy. I can't speak from experience on the AT, but the PCT and CDT both go through some of the most incredible scenery in the country, but necessarily also have long stretches that can be boring or uncomfortable. Parts of the PCT wind through monotonous conifer forest, and the desert sections can be tedious unless one has a particular affinity for that ecosystem. The CDT has some long road walks and 100-plus totally flat miles through the Great Divide Basin, both of which can be rough on a hiker's sanity. I have heard from many other hikers, and have also been personally guilty of an attitude that these tough sections are something the trail is forcing you to do - something you're being subjected to. With a little distance, it's obvious that that attitude smacks of almost unspeakable entitlement, but it happens nevertheless. When I hiked a large section this summer, I lost that attitude almost entirely. Planning my section hike, I had explicitly chosen the sections I wanted to do. That meant that even when they had boring or unpleasant stretches, I felt ownership over my decision to hike them, rather than feeling that the trail had somehow forced me into them. While blaming your discomfort on an external source can be satisfying, it's rarely fulfilling, and losing that attitude vastly improved my hiking experience. Of course, one can adopt the same attitude on a thru-hike - you've chosen to do the trail, and therefore, you've chosen each section. Many hikers do adopt this attitude, but for me, it took a certain amount of maturity - and a section hike.

There is, however, a flip side to this: thru-hiking can expose you to places and experiences that you might not have chosen otherwise. That 100-plus flat, desert miles of Great Divide Basin that I mentioned earlier? Never would I have chosen to do that if it weren't part of a thru-hike. However, the expansive, barren landscape had a subtle beauty that I only began to appreciate after several days of it. We saw herds of antelope and wild horses, megafauna that are uncommon in much of the United States' wilderness areas, but ubiquitous in this great desert. Through some of what might otherwise be my least favorite sections of trail, I've seen parts of our country that few have, with hidden gems that I wouldn't have known to look for. This is true also of places that have broader appeal, but may not attract as much attention as more popular National Parks and wilderness areas. The Bob Marshall Wilderness, for example, may be familiar to Montanans. However, coming from California, I would never have heard of it had I not hiked the

Left: Benson Lake

CDT, and certainly never would have planned a hike 20 miles into the heart of it to see the Chinese Wall - a feature that I think rivals the cliffs of Yosemite in grandeur and beauty. If I had section-hiked the CDT, I may or may not have seen these things, depending on how I planned my hike, but I certainly wouldn't have known to seek them out.

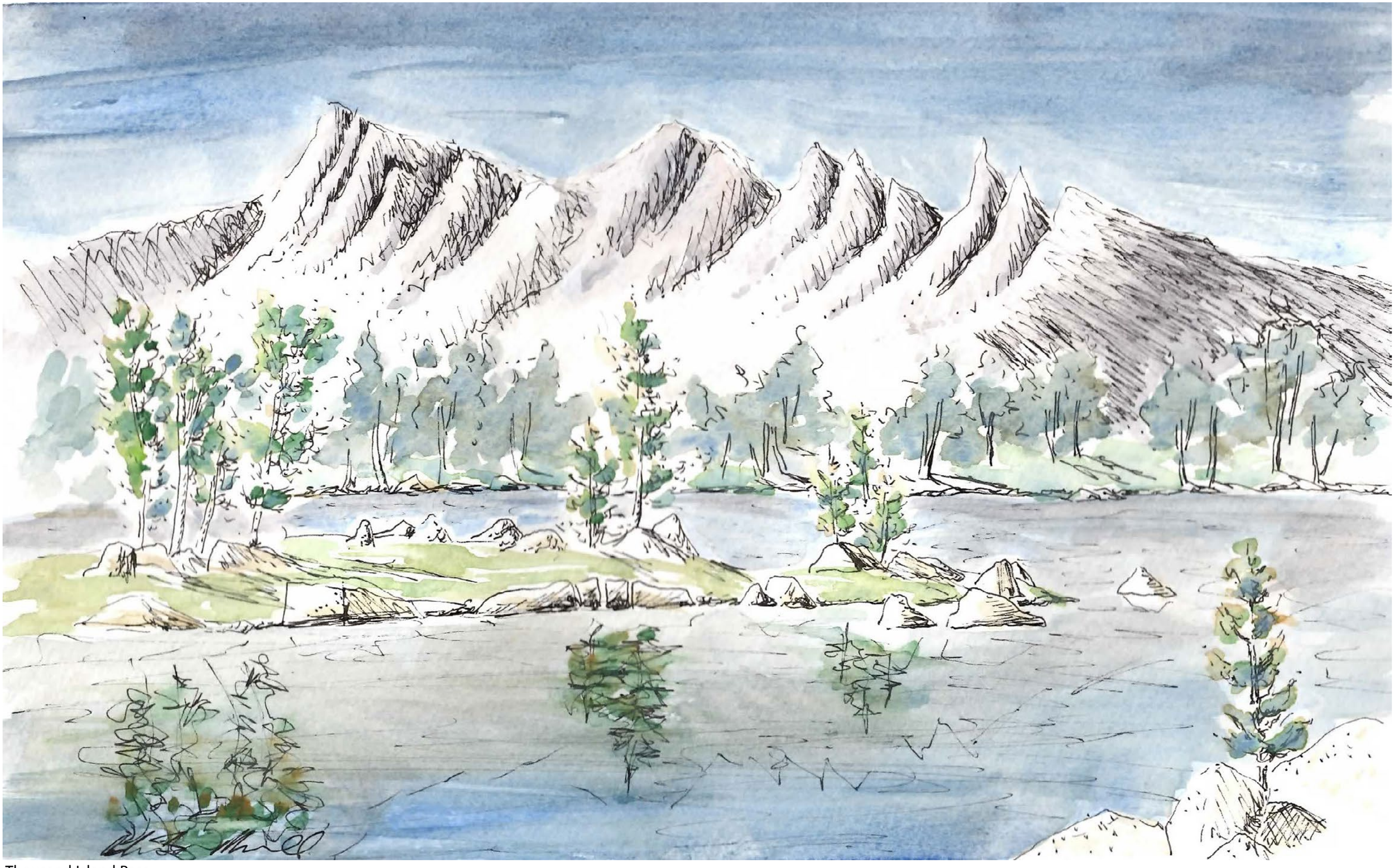
Another significant difference is that when planning a section hike, you can plan to see each part of a trail in its best season. I've had several northbound hikers tell me how much they hated Northern Yosemite - the worst part of the trail, they claimed. Now, Northern Yosemite is incredibly remote, with granite crags, sparkling lakes, and awesome wilderness value. It's one of my favorite parts of the PCT. It's also very difficult, with constant ups and downs - one reason some hikers "hate" it. The other, more significant reason, I've realized: for most northbound thru-hikers, Northern Yosemite can be one of the buggiest parts of the trail, blanketed with mosquitoes. This, I understand. Thick mosquitoes are one of the fastest ways to take the fun out of a hike. This year, on my section hike, I saw Northern Yosemite in late August - warm days, cool nights, nary a bug in sight. I spent bug season farther north in California, where steep topography makes standing water, and therefore mosquitoes, a rarity. Section hiking allows you to do this: armed with enough information, you can make choices about your timing to minimize seasonal discomfort. Love fall colors? Get thyself to southern Colorado in September, when the aspens shimmer with rich gold. Hate rain? Avoid being in Washington in June or September - a feat that's impossible for most north or southbound PCT thru-hikers.

The other important aspect of this seasonal planning is the social aspect. When section-hiking, you may not have the same community of hikers that a thru-hiker would experience. Depending on your perspective, this could be a great advantage or disadvantage. There is a unique camaraderie amongst long-distance hikers. When hiking sections, you only access this camaraderie if you hike at a time and in a direction that places you in the company

Banner Ritter Sunset

of other hikers. On the other hand, if you prefer solitude, you can choose to avoid the rush of other thru-hikers or recreationalists. (Although, the folks on weekend trips are generally smart enough to be there at the best season!)

All this makes it sound like I might be an advocate for section hiking, to the point of being dismissive of thru-hiking. However, if I had infinite time and money for hiking, I would choose another thru-hike, rather than section, no questions asked. With all the practical advantages of section hiking, why? For me, the magic of a thru-hike - the incredible sense of accomplishment, the outlandish level of struggle required, the sense of giving control of your journey over to the trail, the embrace of the best and worst that the trail gives you - these things, for me, outweigh the draw of practicality. You, reader, if you've made it this far, may be reading just for fun. However, you may also be reading because you are weighing a thru-hike against a section. If that's the case, the only answer is: which feels most appealing to you?



Thousand Island Pass

Pulaskis, Sweat, Hard Work, and Fun: Trail Work

By Paul Magnanti

One sunny day in August, I was on top of the summit of Katahdin in northern Maine. After over two thousand miles of backpacking, I had finished my thru-hike of the famous Appalachian Trail.

I had crossed wooded gaps, walked along treeless ridges and had seen the wildflowers of the Appalachian spring.

In those two thousand and more miles, I had also walked on maintained tread. Followed painted blazes. Walked over water bars and rock walls. And climbed up banked switchbacks.

Whether a multi-state trail such as the Continental Divide Trail or a trail in the local open space, all trails are a product of some sweat equity.

The trails are built and maintained, usually by volunteers, by an army of people who trim brush, revegetate soil, place markings and swing Pulaskis so backcountry travelers can see the high passes, fish at a backcountry lake or enjoy a quiet walk after a hard day of work.

Trail work is hard, but fulfilling. And it is fun.

A pride at accomplishing something, a pride at giving back to something you may love and the fun of being in a beautiful place and sharing it with some fellow outdoor enthusiasts.

What's not to like?

And you can do it too.

The Benefits of Trail Work

Besides being a good thing to do, you are often working in a memorable place. Working all day in a high alpine environment, I saw much more beauty in my "office" than the corner office of any high ranking executive that I've known. Trail work is another way to experience the outdoors and to be immersed in nature.

Another benefit of performing trail work is knowing that you are giving back. It is a joy to walk a trail and see the rock wall that you helped construct five years earlier.

A bonus of trail work is that often times the local agency will let you camp where people normally aren't allowed. On one project, all the trail volunteers were given permission to camp at the bottom of a canyon. Normally not allowed, but the volunteers were given an exception for this project. Picket Wire Canyon in the Comanche Grasslands is a beautiful place and to experience it by sleeping on the canyon bottom was a special treat.

Trail work is just plain fun as well. The people met on these projects share a love for the outdoors and are invariably good people to know. And on multi-day projects, some excellent camaraderie is formed. Working together for a common goal makes for some fast friendships.

And it is not all hard work. There are laughs, good meals are shared and, on more than one trip, some local craft beer is often provided for the volunteers!

On that trip where the volunteers were allowed to camp in Picket Wire Canyon? The local forest service office provided a campfire, some live acoustic music was played and the sound of coyotes yipping in could be heard as the sun was starting to set. What could be better?

Types of Trail Work

Trail work is a very broad term and can encompass many different types of activities. Depending on a person's age, physical fitness, and preference, many types of projects are available. Trail maintenance groups will often rate the volunteer project as easy, moderate, or difficult as well. These ratings help form a baseline of what may be a good project for a particular volunteer.

Some types of trail work projects are:

- Habitat restoration work: Gardening on a large scale! Raking tread, planting native wildflower seeds and plants, clearing brush and sometimes removing non-native plants. These trips, especially the re-seeding trips, are often very family friendly. These trips are a great way to introduce young people to the outdoors and to the concept of stewardship. While these projects usually do not feature craft beer due to the family friendly nature of the project, one of the restoration projects did have root beer floats made with ice cream from a local vendor as a post-project treat. Mmmm!

- Trail maintenance: A project that can run the gamut from clearing brush or repainting trail markers to using hand tools to cut down blow downs in a wilderness area. The bread and butter work of most trail organizations. And often the most needed work.

- Building new trail: Be a pioneer and build new trail! There is something very satisfying about literally being the first person to take a step on a new trail. You built

it after all! Build rock retaining walls, clear tread, carry in equipment, and realize how much sweat equity is needed to build a ten foot stretch of trail. What may take you one weekend to build could be walked by you a few years later in less than a minute. But you'll know you helped build it. And be proud of "your" stretch of trail.

- Trail closures: And when new trail is built, there are sometimes heavily eroded social trails that need to be closed down. Making an old social trail look natural is an art. Besides usually being difficult to hike, the social (or sometimes older) trails are usually steep and prone to erosion. Not only are you making a more pleasant hiking experience for others, but by closing this unsustainable trail, you are helping to protect the environment as well.

How to Volunteer

- The National Scenic Trails all have dedicated trail working groups and projects that need your help. As the Continental Divide Trail Coalition puts it, you are helping to "build a legacy". Knowing that your work helps maintain a trail that stretches from border to border makes a person feel they are part of something grand.

- Rather give back to something more regional in scope? Such trails as The Colorado Trail, the Benton MacKaye Trail, Vermont's Long Trail and many others also have projects that are focused on something that may very well be within a few hours drive at most. Perfect for a weekend trip!

- Your local park system, open space or similar often have volunteer opportunities as well. From clearing trash to building new tread, the local outdoor groups offer many opportunities for giving back on a very local level. After the infamous floods that swept through Colorado in September 2013, there was much damage to the local trail system. It felt good to volunteer, help restore the trails and to directly benefit my own community.

- Many groups work on specific areas or regions. The groups could be something such as the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative that helps protect Colorado's popular mountains or various volunteer groups that work directly with wilderness areas and even national parks. If a place is special to you, volunteering in the place itself is a good feeling, too.

- Still looking for volunteer opportunities? The Wilderness Organization directory has an extensive list of non-profit organizations where volunteer opportunities abound.

Give back. It's a good thing to do. The work is in a beautiful place. You will get a feeling of accomplishment. And you just might have some fun doing the work, too.

Review: Canon G7X

By Aaron Zagrodnick

Photography in the outdoors can be an addictive pursuit – Both in time spent hunting for the right light and in pursuit of better, and often larger and more expensive gear. Heavy cameras, tripods, then heavier tripods, larger cameras and larger bags to carry them. Perhaps additional lenses, filters, caps… The list goes on. And while a noteworthy and rewarding pursuit in its own right, sometimes you just want to capture the moment or perhaps keep your pack light for big miles but still have nice photos to remember the trip by when you get home. Or maybe you're just the type of person who likes to take photos, but doesn't necessarily have the need or desire to learn photography. In these situations, nothing beats a point and shoot type camera small enough to fit in a pocket without gear and accessories to worry about like filters or lens caps. But not all small cameras are created equal, and some far surpass the norm. In 2015, you now have the option of taking a camera that can rival the quality that large DSLR cameras were putting out a few years ago – But now it fits in the palm of your hand. One of those cameras is the Canon G7X.

A lot of it comes down to the sensor. The Powershot G7X is a 20 megapixel camera utilizing a large (for this form factor) 1" imaging sensor. While not a large sensor compared to professional DSLR Full Frame, APS-C, and smaller than Micro Four Thirds offerings, the 1" sensor in the G7X is huge compared to your standard point and shoot. What's all this mean? Larger sensors offer better low light performance, offer more dynamic range from light to dark, and offer more control over depth of field. (Say you want to throw the background behind that blooming cactus out of focus) Basically, usually you'll get better photos. Combine this with a lens that lets in quite a bit of light on its own (f/1.8 – f/2.8 to be specific) and zooms from 24mm on the wide end (Good for sweeping landscapes) all the way to 100mm on the telephoto end (Good for portraits and ok for wildlife) in a package weighing just over half a pound that can fit in a pocket and you've got what sounds like a pretty darn good backpacking camera over a wide range of lighting and photographic conditions.

Pros: Compact "backpackable" form factor that remains easy to handle with an integrated lens cap. Excellent image quality, bright lens, useful zoom range for most backpacking purposes. Touchscreen operation works very well.

Cons: Highest quality file settings oddly unavailable in automatic mode, wide angle results not as sharp as closest competitor. Mediocre battery life & not rechargeable in-camera via USB.

Rating: ★★★★½

Key Specifications:

Size: 4.06 x 2.38 x 1.59”

Weight: 10.7 ounces CIPA Standard (10.8 Measured w/ wrist strap, battery, and SD card)

Battery Life: 210 CIPA

Zoom Range: 24-100mm Equivalent

Aperture: f/1.8 – f/2.8

Sensor: 20.2 Megapixel 1.0 inch CMOS

File Recording: JPEG Fine / Superfine / RAW

Video: Up to Full HD 1920 x 1080 60fps MPEG4

Touchscreen: Yes

Charging: Wall Adapter

MSRP: $700

In Use and in the Field

The best thing about the G7X is its size – You can even just hike with it in your hand and it won’t become a burden, although it is nice to tuck it away between uses just to keep it out of the dust and the elements. A textured outer surface offers a nice grip, and the wrist strap is a comfortable insurance policy against drops. The camera is quick to turn both on and off, leading to no frustration when capturing fleeting moments. The camera is small though, so on occasion I found myself accidentally hitting some of the

controls – Recording the unintentional video or taking an unanticipated photo, for example. The menu is easy enough to figure out without going too deep into the manual, and the camera really shines in regards to touch operation, although it’s hit or miss with gloves on. Without a viewfinder, this is your only option to compose your photo, but I never had issues even in bright sunlight at the screen’s default brightness level, and you can even enable a night mode to preserve night vision the next time you’re out photographing the stars. Around the lens barrel you’ll find a clicky control wheel that you can set to control some camera functions quickly. Zoom utilizing the control lever surrounding the shutter button and select from full auto, spot, or even manual focus modes.

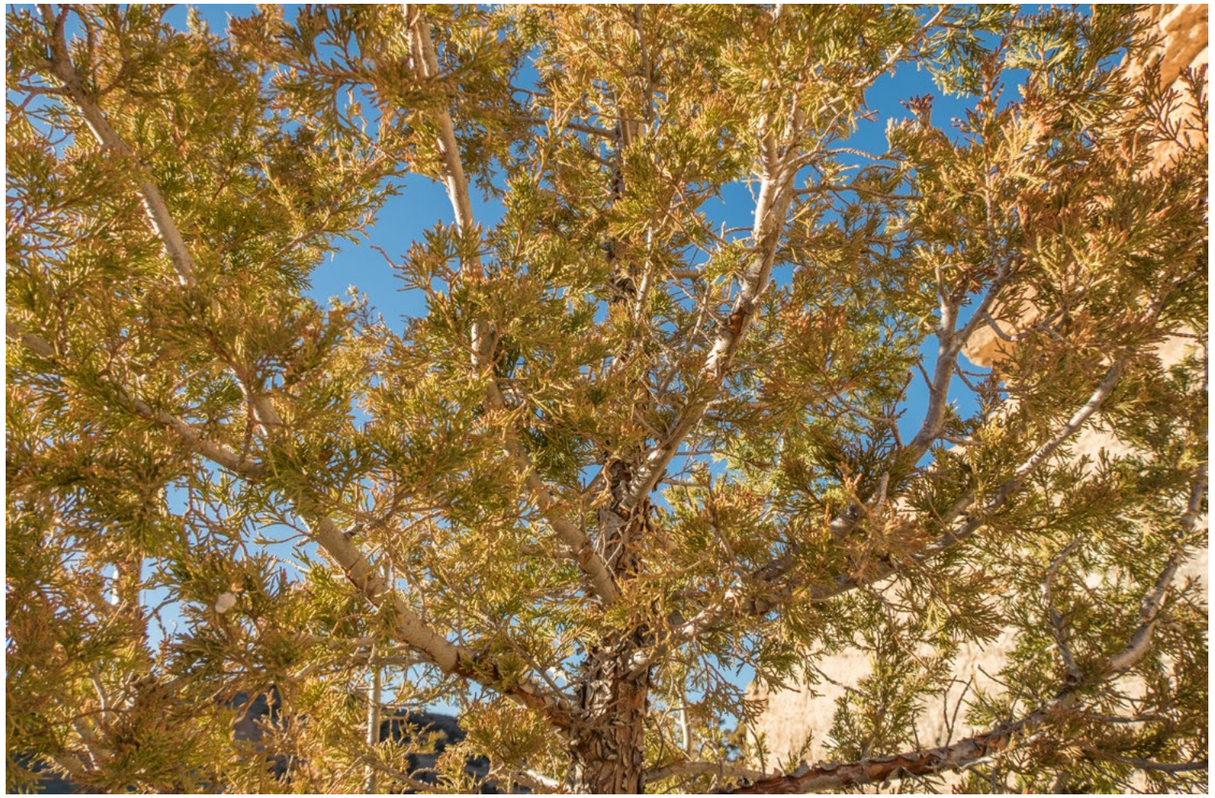
My favorite way to shoot with the camera was to enable the one spot focus and the touch shutter, set ISO to auto, and shoot in P mode for automatic exposure settings. With this setup, you can simply shoot as you walk by touching the screen where you want the camera to focus and it instantly takes the picture, much like a smartphone but with better response and better quality. Action in the shot? Just hold your finger on the screen and the camera will take pictures in succession. Used this way, it was nice to just take photos without having to think about it too much like I do with my larger cameras, although that can be fun in its own right. But sometimes, you just want to get the shot and move on. Later in the day, when the light gets low you can switch gears and turn your stabilization off, set your ISO to 125 and switch to aperture priority

mode or manual mode for tripod work at sunset with a 2 second self-timer to avoid camera shake. A tripod like the Tamrac ZipShot Mini works great with a camera of this size. The self-timer is a great feature for low light with a tripod or for group pictures, etc. but oddly does default to off each time you cycle power to the camera. This was an inconvenience when walking with the camera attached to a tripod and moving from scene to scene, but it can also be inconvenient on other cameras where this setting is saved and you miss a shot. For more creative control there's an included ND (Neutral Density) filter that will help you take longer exposures in bright light for that perfect waterfall shot or for the use of larger apertures when needed for maximum background blur. If you need a flash, the G7X has one of the pop-up variety on its left side. If the moment is calling for a selfie, the LCD on the G7X flips completely forward and automatically flips the preview image to make the process easy, especially with the touchscreen.

Unfortunately, full auto mode doesn't give you access to the best files the G7X can produce (Superfine JPEG or RAW) and you'll only be able to take JPEG photos in the standard "Fine" setting when in full auto. This may work for some and the "Fine" JPEG photos do look quite good and save some storage space compared to the other options. I like the best quality I can get however, hence my preference for program mode or others, where these file settings become available. By using the Ring Function button on the back of the camera, you can also shift the Program mode while shooting if desired to obtain specific effects while maintaining an automatic exposure – Which you can even compensate via a dedicated dial on the top of the camera.

Reviewing pictures in-camera is easy and can be activated by pressing the play button when the camera is on or off. Navigation of photos is achieved with the cameras control wheel or by touch – Pinch to zoom and swipe and are all touch-enabled operations here. You can also view the photos that are on the card (And in the camera) without transferring the card to a PC by activating the WIFI feature on the camera, then connecting your phone to that access point and utilizing Canon's Camera Window App to either view photos on your phone or even save them to your camera roll and you have the option to save images to your phone in the default file size or two smaller space saving options. Utilizing the app was a little clunky, but nevertheless does work. You can also use this app to remotely control the camera, with what the camera sees displayed on your phone in real-time, but the quality of pictures taken here are limited to what appears to be auto mode and JPEG Fine quality.

While battery life is ok, the battery gauge on the camera leaves a lot to be desired. Battery life is indicated by 3 bars, and you might become over confident as the level stays full for quite some time. However, by the time the level drops to 2, it seemed like just a few pictures later the indicator was flashing red and the battery was soon exhausted. In the end though, while the level indicator wasn't all that useful or accurate I was able to take right at around 200 pictures per charge shooting JPEG+RAW with a few short videos taken along the way and I always carry a spare battery.



For what it's worth, that was with the Servo AF and Continuous AF features turned off in the menu settings, but without ECO Mode (Described below) enabled and at default LCD brightness as well with continuous stabilization turned on. Considering that I usually take around 40-60 pictures a day while backpacking and on the move, 2 fully charged batteries (A spare weighs just .8 ounces) should be fine for most trips. Charging takes a couple hours from empty but you have to use the wall charger; you cannot charge the batteries in-camera via the USB port. If you need the battery to last longer, there is an ECO mode available which enables power-saving features, including darkening the LCD after 2 seconds and turning it off after 10 which will get some more shots, but I preferred leaving this disabled for convenience. You can also manually dim the LCD to save more power than I did and set stabilization to only activate when the picture is taken.

Overall use in the field is great – with a few quirks.

Image Quality

There's not too much to say here – Take the extensive feature set of the G7X and its quirks… Put them together and in the end you'll wind up with some nice photos, no matter how much you want to explore the features of the camera. If you're used to an APS-C DSLR or full frame camera expect to see more noise in your photos, especially with heavy post-processing and you'll get less detail, but if you're not being critical the images may at times be hard to tell apart at first glance from systems equipped with larger sensors. If you've been using your smartphone on the trail or a more standard point and shoot with a 1/2.3" sensor or even offerings utilizing 1/1.7" sensors, expect to notice a lot of improvement in the quality department.

Superfine JPEGs straight out of the camera at default settings are really nice with very rich "Canon" colors, and even at the standard JPEG Fine setting you won't lose too much. The lens is weakest at its widest 24mm equivalent zoom angle, and if you're picky and evaluating your photos closely you might notice softness in the corners here. However, sharpness dramatically improves as you zoom in. Pictures taken around f4 are very sharp, although with a sensor of this size depth of field is still limited so you might want to stop down a bit further in landscape situations, but not so much that you start to encounter diffraction. Open up the aperture and zoom in a bit for very nice portraits or pictures with background blur, or to keep your ISO low in low light. The lens does seem to be quite prone to flare and artifacts when pointed anywhere close to the sun – Something to keep in mind.

The in-camera stabilization proved to be very good and I was able to get some "keepers" handheld at shutter speeds as low as 1/10th of a second at wide angle without too much concentration – Bump that up to about 1/30th of a second zoomed all the way in. Pictures up to around ISO 1600 look pretty good and fairly noise free out of the camera, albeit at the sacrifice of detail. Without looking closely, noise doesn't really start to creep in on out of camera JPEGs until above the 1600 ISO mark although you'll notice it sooner if you're correcting your photos later and trying to boost shadows, etc. or if you look closely. ISO 2500 looks pretty good without critical viewing and you can go higher if you like, but starting around ISO 4000, and especially at 6400 noise is very apparent and details are muddy even at first glance to my eyes. You can go up to 12800 if you really want to, but remember that details decrease and noise increases along way. Stay low if you can, and make the most out of the large sensor and bright lens in the G7X, or use a tripod. Want the

best quality and maximum control over your photos? By processing the RAW photos from the G7X in Adobe Lightroom I was definitely impressed with the level of dynamic range and post-processing leeway I was able to get out of a camera this small. The camera also records video in Full HD – for which Canon recommends a class 6 or higher SD card. I use a SanDisk Extreme 32GB card in the camera with no issues.

The RX100

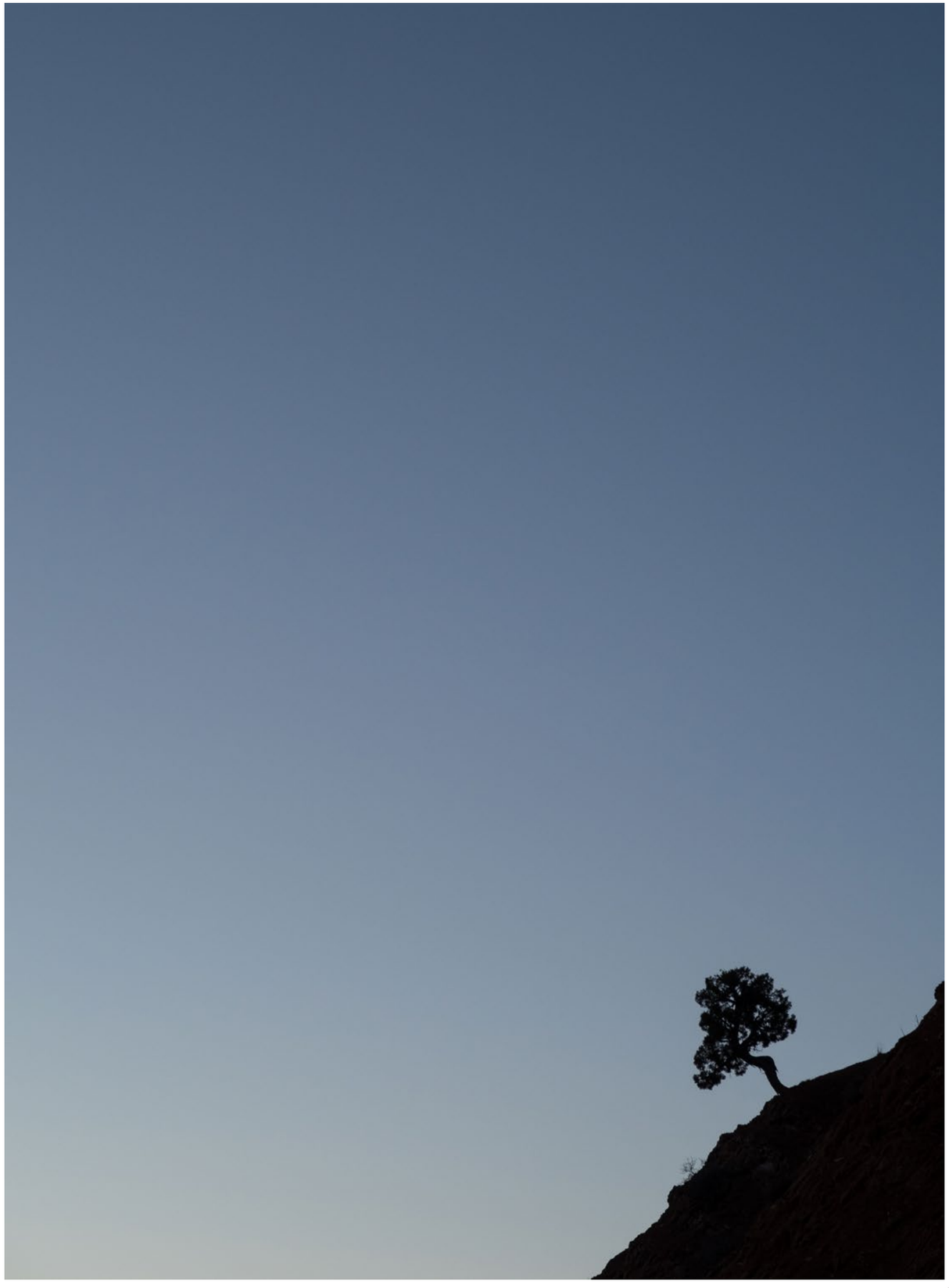
Any review of the G7X would be incomplete without mention of its main competitor – the well-established Sony RX100 line, the latest of which is the Sony RX100 Mark III. The Sony is an amazing camera in its own right – In fact the G7X likely uses the exact sensor that Sony produces and utilizes in the RX100. There are a few key differences however, and I did have the luxury of testing the cameras side by side for a few days. The RX100 is slightly smaller and lighter, but as such feels more difficult to handle with small hands. The RX100 also lacks a touch screen, but has a popup viewfinder and will charge in-camera via USB. Both LCDs flip up, but the Sony sports an additional hinge for a more natural method of articulation. The lenses are different as well. While the Canon has a 24-100 zoom range the Sony is limited to 24-70 and while both are f/1.8 – f2.8 optics the Sony closes down sooner over its zoom range compared to the Canon, and of course is limited to 70mm on the far end. With what's probably the same sensor photo quality is quite similar; the RX100 produces sharper images at 24mm, especially in the extreme corners but the Canon quickly catches up as you zoom in and eventually overtakes the RX100 in the sharpness department. At default JPEG settings, the RX100 produces colder images, with the Canon offering warmer and perhaps more natural tones. The RX100 wins in regards to battery life. Currently, the G7X will save you $100, but with the previous point regarding battery life, it could be argued that $50 of that savings should be put towards a spare Canon NB-13L battery pack. In the end, there's not really a clear winner, it just depends on which features are most important to you. We did find the Canon friendlier to operate and it might be more suited for photographers with less of a pro background or professional photographic knowledge.

Conclusion

Overall the Canon G7X delivers excellent images in a form factor that fits just fine in a hipbelt pocket for no-fuss run and gun photography on the trail without lens caps to drop in the dirt or lose. And no matter how you choose to use it, the touchscreen just makes life easier. Battery life could always be better and is often cited as a weak point of this camera, but in practice I was able obtain around 200 shots per charge – and that was without enabling every possible power-saving option – and a spare battery weighs just .8 ounces. While it's no replacement for the latest mid and full sized systems on the market, it's a great second camera or a good primary if you just need great photos, but perhaps not the best quality that's currently trending in the market. I wish you could recharge the battery in-camera via USB, and it's odd that the best image quality setting aren't available in auto mode, but these issues can all be worked around without being deal-breakers. While I still carry a larger system camera in most circumstances, the size, weight, touchscreen, and lens of the G7X make it an overall excellent choice for use in the field and on the trail.

Overall Very Good: ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

The Canon G7X currently retails for $700 – I picked mine up Here at Amazon.com



Across Olympic National Park

An Extended Backcountry Traverse of the Bailey Range

by Eli Burakian

I thought I knew what cold was.

I've skied my whole life, often powering through temperatures way below zero in search of fresh tracks. But five days into a trek across Olympic National Park – at low elevation in mid-summer – I finally learned the meaning of "cold down to my bones." I was huddled in a partially drenched down sleeping bag wearing all the clothes I had with me, in a tent and on a pad, and yet the shivering wouldn't stop. And my hiking partner Jevan – well, he wasn't faring much better.

Yet, even in the throes of hypothermia, I was relishing the experience. I knew it was always the hard days that we remember most, and most of the days on this trip were hard. Really hard. And after this experience down at Cream Lake I knew I'd be able to tell a good story.

We also remember the beautiful days. Our ten-day journey, along trails and backcountry from Lake Crescent in the north of Olympic National Park to the Quinault River Basin in the south fulfilled both the "hard" and "beautiful" criteria in spades.

When my son entered the world in December 2013, I knew 2014 was going to be a particularly difficult year to find time for adventure. I wanted a hike that was accessible, challenging both physically and mentally, and yet with an authentic "remoteness." Ideally the route would travel through varying types of terrain, and it needed to be at low elevation as the timeframe was just too short to acclimatize to anything over 10,000 feet and still enjoy it.
The Bailey Range Traverse in Olympic National Park seemed to fit the bill perfectly. I had done day hikes in the old growth forests of the park and had hiked most of the 70 miles or so of wilderness coastline and I was in love.
I knew I needed to delve much deeper into this magical place.

Above: A peaceful fog envelopes the forest on the Barnes Creek Trail.
Previous Page: Jevan makes his way over to the more technical part of the Catwalk, the arete between Cat Peak and Mount Carrie.

The Bailey Range flanks Mt. Olympus, the tallest and most glaciated peak in the park. A classic traverse of the range leaves from the Sol Duc Trailhead, along trails up past Heart Lake and onto the High Divide. We wanted to extend the trip a bit, so decided to follow the first sections of the traverse as noted in Olympic Mountains: A Climbing Guide, the premier climbing/hiking book about the park. We'd take the Boulder Creek Trailhead to Boulder Lake and head backcountry from there to Appleton Pass and from Appleton Pass to Cat Basin before getting on the main portion of the Bailey Traverse. If time permitted, we hoped to finish by hiking the Skyline Ridge Trail instead of following the North Fork of the Quinault River down from the Low Divide.

Unfortunately, the Boulder Creek Trailhead was closed due to a major dam removal project, so we started from Lake Crescent. After some crazy rental car logistics and a bus trip we started late in the afternoon of August 29th.

Counting our break time, it took us nine hours to make it just six miles!

This trip required a bear can, crampons, and an ice axe, which combined added an additional five pounds and some bulk. That, along with ten days of food, made for a heavy pack and we were happy to make the first day a very short one. We had crossed over Barnes Creek on a 150-foot log bridge made from one single tree, and we camped next to the creek, surrounded by huge conifers and large leafy plants.

Day two involved a long climb of over 4,000 vertical feet up to the Aurora Ridge Trail to the Happy Lake Trail and finally to Boulder Lake. On our way up, as we reached about 4,000 feet of elevation, a layer of fog suddenly appeared in trees, unmoving, ghostlike, and magical.

We hadn't seen a soul the entire day and when we got to Boulder Lake, we camped on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by steep walls. The echoes created from our shouts reverberated many times and lasted 5-7 seconds.

It was without a doubt the best natural echo chamber I've ever experienced. Before hitting the sack, we heard another couple come in but never laid eyes on them. Day three was probably the most physically exhausting of the trip – and the slowest. Counting our break time, it took us nine hours to make it just six miles! Why so long? Were there technical sections, crazy river crossings and lots of vertical? Nope. There were blueberry bushes. Oh the deadly blueberry bushes.

We climbed up and down, over rocks and ridges, past beautiful lakes and eventually to the Appleton Pass Trail just south of Appleton Pass. The entire off-trail route was covered in blueberry bushes, and as it was misting all day, they were slick. There was very little purchase for our feet on anything but the bushes, which were all sloped downhill. I fell innumerable times and by the end of the day, my pants were dyed blue from all the crushed blueberries. The heavy packs didn't help things, and Jevan got stung by a bunch of wasps as well, so we were happy to set up camp when we reached Appleton Pass.

Left: This seemingly inoccuous high alpine terrain on the shoulder of Mt. Appleton became a tiring slog through wet blueberry bushes. At least the view was beautiful!
Below: The Tarptent Double Rainbow was light, quick to set up, had separate doors and vestibules, tons of extra space length wise and weighed just 2.5 pounds.

Left: Another hiker took a photo of of us about to get on the High Divide, the true beginning to the Bailey Range Traverse.

The next morning we were treated to an incredible sunrise on the surrounding peaks. Knowing that we didn't want a repeat of yesterday, and that we didn't want to be done before even starting the actual traverse, we chose to take a slightly longer but significantly easier route using trails. We followed the Appleton Pass Trail down to the Sol Duc River Trail where we climbed up to Heart Lake. Just above and beyond Heart Lake is the turnoff to the High Divide Trail, where the Bailey Range Traverse really begins.

From my understanding, the Civilian Conservation Corps created this trail before World War II. It follows along a ridge before skirting the edge of Cat Basin and then contours around Cat Peak. This trail is an incredible sight to behold as it's cut right into a steep mountainside with the Hoh River Basin dropping dramatically to the south. Originally, the High Divide Trail was supposed to cross much of the Bailey Range and meet up with the trail at Dodger Point; however the project was abandoned at the beginning of WWII. Basically, the trail just ends at a drop-off and we had to climb up a very steep eroding way-trail for a few hundred feet to reach the shoulder of Cat Peak.

According to many hikers, the next section was the crux. We had to cross the Catwalk, a class 4 arête which crosses between Cat Peak and Mt. Carrie. Many people camp at Boston Charlie's, which is a camp located on the far (east) side of the Catwalk. But visibility was dropping, rain was coming in and the wind was blowing hard. We decided to save the Catwalk for the next morning and set up camp on the shoulder of Cat Peak just above the Catwalk. We knew water would be hard to come by so we had carried numerous liters up from Heart Lake.

It turned out to be an interesting night. First, just as Jevan and I were discussing the fact that we probably wouldn't see anybody else now that we were hitting the more remote portion of the trip, out popped two hikers who were coming from the Catwalk. We came to find out that it was a father and son team, and after spending a long time trying to cross the Catwalk in deteriorating conditions, they decided to turn around and ended up camping next to us.

The second interesting event is something I was both incredibly proud of and totally embarrassed by. As mentioned, we didn't have any water sources and were banking on finding some water at Boston Charlie's or along a stream just beyond the next day. Well, I had been hoarding my water and had about a liter left when I went to bed. Just before crawling into my sleeping bag, I realized I had left the top loose on my bottle and all of my water had dripped out. After initially freaking out, (because what's scarier than going to bed with no water only to wake up without any guaranteed water source ahead?) I calmed myself and thought, what would Bear Grylls do? By that time at night it was misting and I decided that I would use Ziplocs to shake water off the plants and tree needles.

After about 2 hours of wandering around in in the wet night, I was able to get almost 1.5 liters of water, which I filtered through a bandana and used iodine to purify. I had never felt so proud and so foolish at the same time.

The beginning of day five started out sunny and beautiful. From our ridge we were afforded our first incredible views of Mt. Olympus across the Hoh River Valley to our south. Low clouds filled the valley and the gigantic Blue Glacier radiated the early morning sun. Thinking we finally had a perfect day, we took our time getting ready. That was probably not the wisest decision, as the clouds and wind started rolling in by 9am and the day turned out to be the roughest and most emotionally and psychologically draining of the trip.

The Catwalk began with a sketchy traverse along the side of a ridge. The narrow trail fell away below for 500 feet. Once onto the arête, we had to make our way across some short but very exposed rock-climbing sections. Doing all this with a large pack made the going much tougher. The section was short but exhilarating and in less than 45 minutes from camp we were at Boston Charlie's, which did indeed have water.

Even though the Bailey Range traverse is technically a route, not a trail, enough people do it that there is an informal path for some of the way. We followed it as it contoured along the side of Mt. Carrie. The wind was picking up and by 11am we had 100-foot visibility, sideways rain with a constant 30mph wind and no shelter to speak of as the route was almost entirely above timberline. The trail became sketchier and sketchier as it crossed steep, wet, unconsolidated gullies. The temperature was probably in the upper 30's but the wind-chill and rain made it feel much, much colder. We were so cold in fact, that we couldn't even stop to eat and none of our rain gear kept us dry or warm.

If you're comfortable with exposed rock, you can follow the ridge along Stephen Peak, but most people head down to Cream Lake. With no visibility and hypothermia a distinct possibility, we continued contouring until the path petered out at a gully that was too steep to cross. Instead, we half walked, half butt-slid down a steep rocky streambed to a meadow and eventually to Cream Lake. During an extremely brief window when the rain stopped, we set up our tent on a gravel bar next to the lake. Even with a pack cover and a stuff sack, my down sleeping bag was partially soaked, but with all my clothing on, I hopped in anyways as it did provide some warmth.

And here is where this story began. I was too cold to do anything and was racked by full-body spasms. My teeth chattered uncontrollably and it took me a few hours to gain enough dexterity to eat something. I finally got a few sweets down and eventually passed out.

Top Right: We had a few particularly exposed moves on the Catwalk, as the Hoh RIver Valley stretched out below.
Bottom Right: Traversing the gullies on the side of Mt. Carrie proved to be sketchy, especially as the conditions were very wet. At times, the way path just disappeared leaving us to negotiate the steep hillsides.

Had the weather been the same the next day, we might have been in big trouble, but luckily for us we woke to bright blue skies with a rapidly warming day. Our wet gear was coated with ice, and we put everything we owned out on the “beach” to dry. By noon we were finally feeling like ourselves again. We left Cream Lake around 1pm, thankful for a beautiful day and glad we didn’t have to avail ourselves of our satellite phone and emergency rescue insurance.

We followed an inlet stream up the valley and came within one hundred feet of a big bear that was slowly ambling by. He didn’t seem to care much about us and walked on past. Soon after, we were stymied by a steep wall with no real idea of where to go. Jevan headed up first as he veggie-belayed up the slope. I yelled to him, “hey Jev, do you see a path or tracks?” He smiled and said yeah, there were some tracks. When I finally got to where he was I saw the tracks we were following. They were huge bear prints in the mud! Well, it seemed to be the only way up and as we followed the route we were hoping the tracks were created hours, or days ago. It’s a tough hike when the safest route is to follow a bear!

After following the wrong stream for a while, we were able to get back on route (thank you iPhone and Gaia GPS) and followed a ridge up to Ferry Basin where we set up camp above treeline next to a beautiful alpine lake. The lake was surrounded by incredible wildflowers, and as sunset approached, the clouds flowed up the valley toward us. Just when we thought we were going to be stuck in the middle of a cloud for the night, the fog was sucked back down the valley as it took on the bright pink hue of dusk. It was as if the air itself was glowing while the mountains took a final breath for the evening.

We woke the next morning in the cold rocky moonscape and climbed to the top of Ferry Basin between Mt. Ferry and Mt. Pulitzer. When we reached the ridge, we were literally standing on the edge of a sheer 2,000-foot cliff above the Goldie River Basin. Although the terrain was rugged, the hiking was pretty easy as we followed the ridge down to Lone Tree Pass. We continued up along the ridge and finally had to use our crampons and ice axes to safely ascend a steep frozen snowfield.

Right: After a tough day of rain, the beauty of morning light illuminating dew on wildflowers was all the more special.
Below: Jevan passes by one of the many beautiful lakes on the way over to Ferry Basin.

Continuing to follow the ridgeline to the south, we were afforded incredible views of Mt. Olympus to the west and 360-degree panoramas the entire time. We would occasionally duck off the ridge to cross snowfields and glaciers. The snow crossings were straightforward and easy, but there were huge crevasses below and we were happy to have our crampons and ice axes. We headed off the ridgeline to navigate around Mt. Childs and the Needles where we rejoined the Bailey Ridge just north of Bear Pass Glacier.

Mt. Olympus seemed so close we could touch it and after crossing the glacier we set up camp on the edge of the Queets Basin at what was without a doubt our most beautiful (and windiest) campsite of the trip. We climbed a small peak just to our east and took in a stunning sunset. We could see the ocean down the Queets River Basin and beautiful alpenglow shone off the snow-covered patches on nearby peaks. Our first day without having seen another person (Jevan had spotted a hiker on a nearby peak a day earlier) we climbed into our sleeping bags satisfied that this day exceeded our expectations for beauty and adventure.

Left: The subpeak on a ridge peaks through the clouds as the light quickly diminishes.
Below: Jevan enjoys the view of the steep cliffs down to the Goldie River Basin and the glacier on Bear Pass just ahead.

We saw these prints just before Bear Pass. Go FIgure.

This view from our campsite on Bear Pass above the Queets River Basin was probably my favorite of the trip.

Day eight began sunny as we climbed down to Dodwell-Rixon Pass and said goodbye to the Bailey Range and headed down the Elwha Snow Finger. In a typical normal or high snow year, or in early season, hikers can make quick progress as they scamper down on top of the thick snowpack that fills the valley even in late summer. After a dry spring and hot summer, the Snow Finger had withered away. We traversed the snowfield for a few hundred feet and then alternated going around on the steep banks, rock-hopping and moving quickly under a number of huge snow bridges.

A choke point in the river led to a steep scramble out of the valley and down to a meadow. We then bushwhacked through dense alders, waded across the river and finally reached the Elwha River Trail. We made quick progress down to Chicago Campu and up to the Low Divide.

We decided to finish by hiking the Skyline Ridge Trail. This was a last-second decision and we didn't know anything about the trail. Luckily (or so we thought) we ran into a guy who had just come along that trail, gave us a bunch of beta and told us there was no water up to the high point, but plenty after that.

Unfortunately for us, Washington was experiencing the hottest days of the summer, and we about died on our way up around the backside of Mt. Seattle. We stopped for lunch near a small tarn not far from Lake Beauty. By the end of lunch, it must have been over 100 degrees and after struggling for another hour up exposed (to the sun) rock, we decided to take a mid-afternoon siesta. Starting out again around 5 o'clock, we were able to enjoy the strange rocky moonscape below Kimta Peak. We arrived at Kimta Peak just as the sun was setting, and we were treated to a magnificently multi-hued sky as we watched the glowing orb set over the Pacific Ocean.

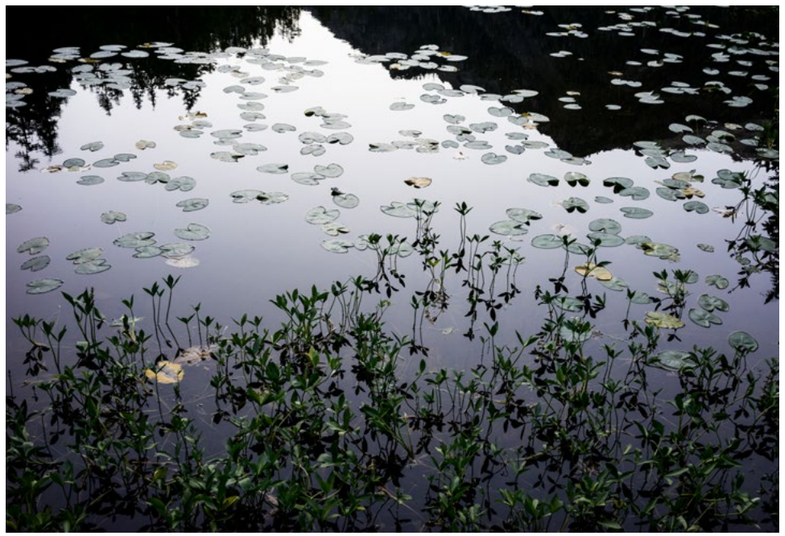
We had already hiked about fifteen miles and were happy to do the final five mostly downhill to the Three Prune Campsite. Strangely, there had been plenty of water on the way up and we had carried too much. Having drunk most of it, however, we were glad to know there were plenty of water sources on the way down. For the first half mile along the ridge we had stunning, unobscured views to the west.

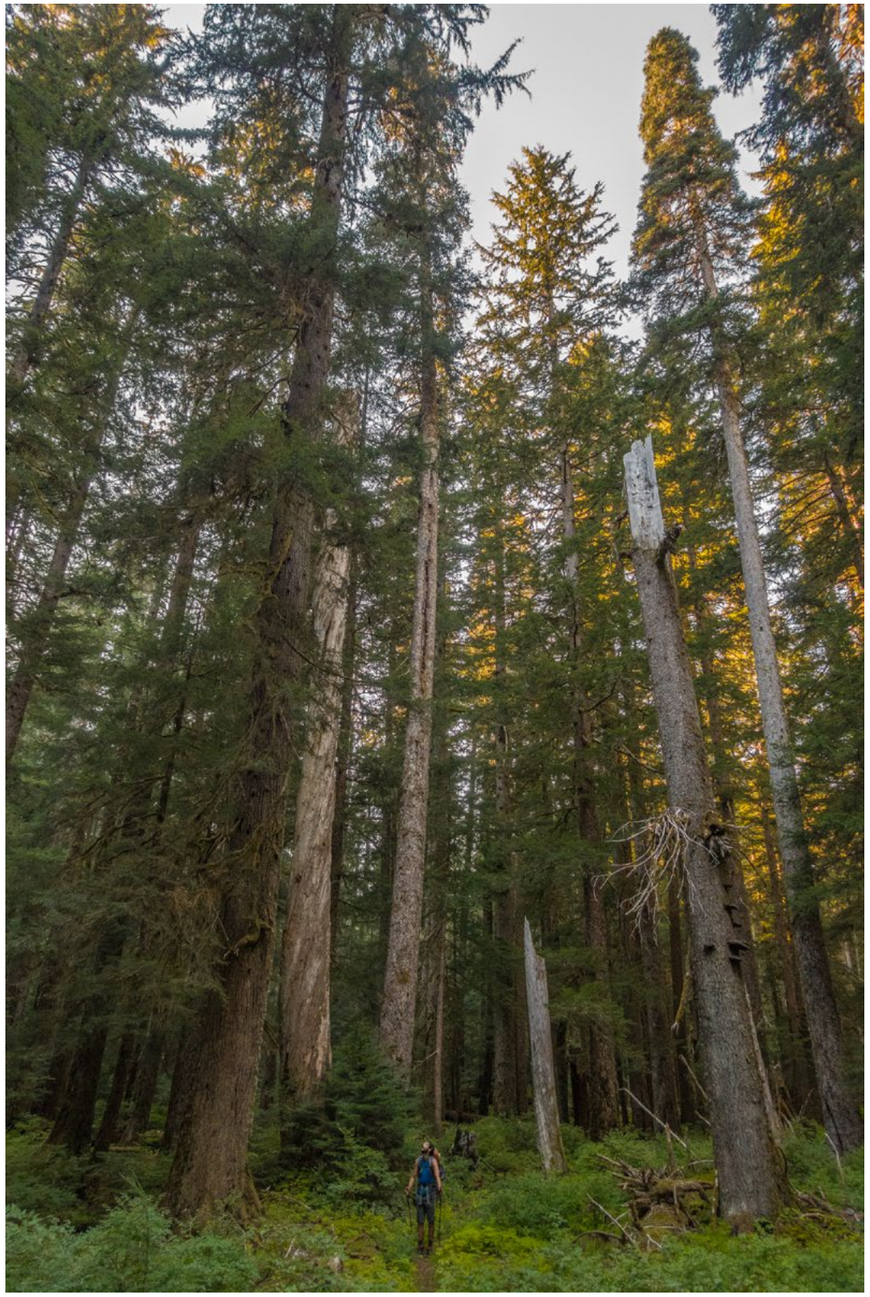
Once the ambient light had fled and we were cruising through forest, we both came to the realization that our helpful hiker had led us astray. He had mixed up his directions and there was no water to speak of. Very thirsty and tired, we raced down the trail and in my haste, I took a nasty digger, bruised my shoulder, and managed to fulfill my requirement of any good adventure...battle wounds.

By the time we arrived at camp, we were so tired that all we could do was drink up and pass out. The next day was a leisurely stroll through beautiful old growth forests, past the Three Lakes Campsite and out to the car with lighter packs and even lighter hearts.

Jevan raises his hands in the air on a nearby peak.

Traveling under the many snowbridges on the upper Elwha River Basin was both beautiful and terrifying.





Clockwise from Left:
Jevan takes a shower under the edge of a snowbridge, a remnant of the Elwha snow finger.
From the ground, it's hard to comprehend the size of many trees in Olympic National Park such as these near Chicago Camp.
Bear pass glacier catches the early morning light.
Lilypads and other plants make for a unique composition as the late evening light creates shadows and reflections on Lake Margaret, near the Low Divide.

From Kimta Peak on the Skyline Ridge Trail, we watched the sun set over the ocean on our last night of the trip.

As we cross over Bear Pass, Mt. Olympus seems so close we can touch it.

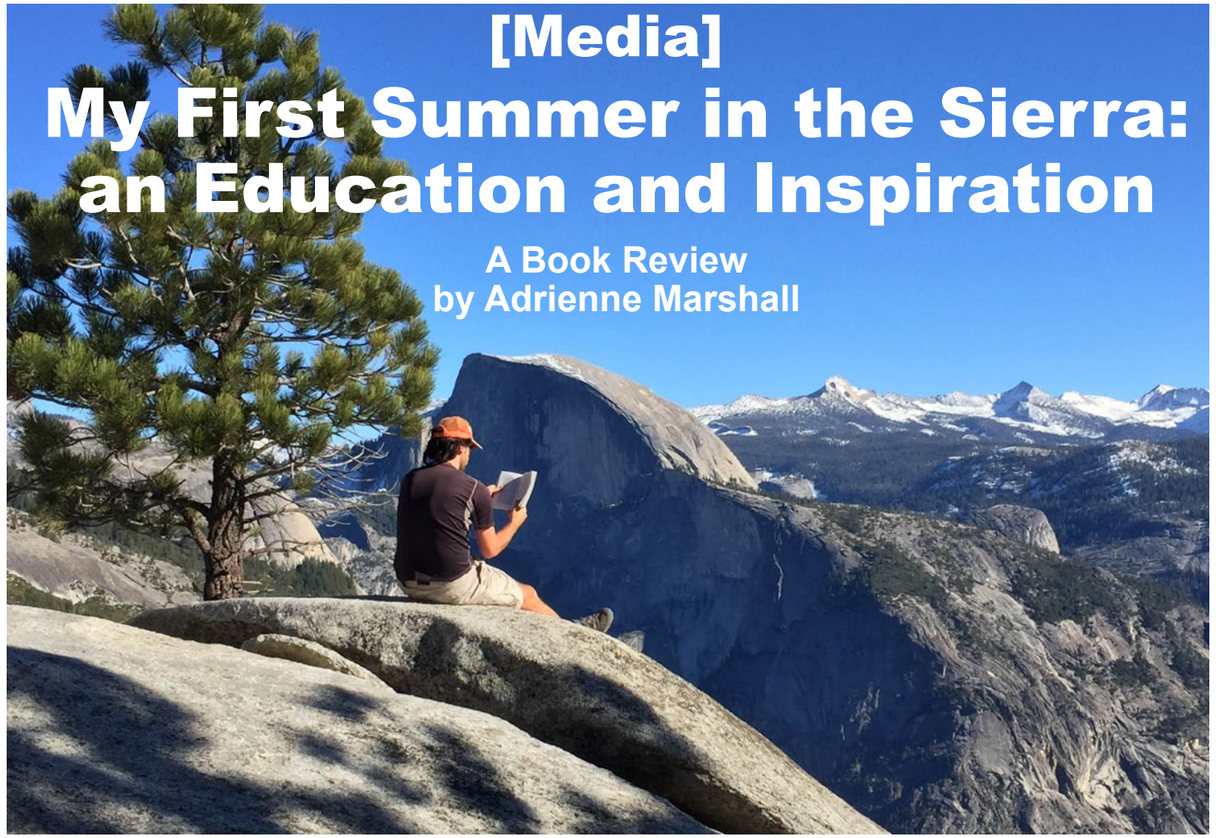
Information: Bear cans are required, but you can rent them very cheaply from the Olympic National Park ranger station. (And they've got the lightweight Bearikades to use!) You'll also need to get a backcountry permit and give your itinerary to the rangers before heading out. You'll also most likely need an ice axe and crampons to travel safely over the snow and glaciers on the highest part of the route. (Lightweight Kahtoola crampons that can work with sneakers are highly recommended.)

Getting There: There are numerous places to start, but if you're going from the north, base your operations out of Port Angeles. There are supermarkets and outdoor gear stores as well as a ranger station. If you leave from Lake Crescent as we did, you can catch a public bus to the trailhead. The closest major airport is in Seattle and you'll probably want to take the ferry over to the Olympic Peninsula. There is no public transportation to the southern trailhead at either the North Fork Quinault River Trail or the Irely Lakes Trail just down the road so you'll need to drop a car or arrange for a pickup.

Best Time to Go: It depends on the year, but most hiking in the high alpine sections of the park have a short window from July through early September if you don't want to be dealing with much snow.

Maps: I used Caltopo.com to print my own maps on waterproof paper. I also carried the National Geographic Trails Illustrated map of Olympic National Park and I used the Gaia GPS app on my smartphone, which allows you to download detailed topo maps prior to your trip and utilize the GPS functionality of your phone without cell **service.**

Books: The best book for the trip is Olympic Mountains: A Climbing Guide by Olympic Mountain Rescue.



[Media]
My First Summer in the Sierra: an Education and Inspiration

A Book Review
by Adrienne Marshall

> "No Sierra landscape that I have seen holds anything truly dead or dull, or any trace of what in manufactories is called rubbish or waste; everything is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons… When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."
>
> ~ John Muir

These words - some of Muir's most famous - are just a few of the many gems of *My First Summer in The Sierra*. Muir's 1911 book traces his summer as a sheepherder in the Sierra, discovering and delighting in the smallest flowers and largest mountains. Muir's delight is infectious, and had a huge impact on the history of preservation and management of wild lands in the United States. Whether or not this article inspires you to read the book, I hope to offer a working knowledge of Muir's influence in his time, and his relevance for contemporary readers.

My First Summer in the Sierra reads like a highly stylized diary of the eponymous season. After a boyhood in Scotland and Wisconsin, a young adulthood exploring a talent for engineering, and an accident that resulted in his near blindness, Muir headed for California, and first visited the Sierra in 1868. He was so enchanted by his early visits that he took a job the next summer as a sort of supervisor to a shepherd. The flock would begin in the foothills, and move higher through the mountains as the snow melted. His employer assured him that the job would allow him to spend ample time exploring the Sierra, and, as the reader learns, it does.

For readers familiar with the Yosemite area, particularly those who have driven from the Central Valley up to Tuolumne Meadows and perhaps even beyond, the book covers familiar territory, but at a shepherd's pace. As the party travels through the foothills and gradually upward into lower montane, upper montane, and ultimately the sub-alpine territory of the Tuolumne Meadows environs, Muir naturalizes, sketches, adventures, and writes with an almost unbelievable level of enthusiasm. It should be said here that this book is not one to be read for the plot - in fact, if you are concerned about spoilers, they've already been given away in this short description.

While narrative arc isn't the strong suit, the book has plenty of other engaging factors. The most fascinating to me is Muir's intense level of enthusiasm for everything he deems wild. Consider this description:

"How interesting everything is! Every rock, mountain, stream, plant, lake, lawn, forest, garden, beat, bird, insect seems to call and invite us to come and learn something of its history and relationship."

Muir's effusiveness continues throughout the book. He does indeed find everything interesting, and offers detailed descriptions of his surroundings. Often, as in this instance, his descriptions are combined with musings on how his surroundings influence him, with a suggestion that they may have a similar impact on others.

Another striking feature of Muir's writing is his ability to function simultaneously as a scientist and artist, using the two perspectives to enhance each other. In his conclusions, he states that "the most telling thing learned in these mountain excursions is the influence of cleavage joints on the features sculptured from the general mass of the range. Evidently the denudation has been enormous, while the inevitable outcome is subtle balanced beauty." The understanding of cleavage joints was relatively new at the time, and in fact, Muir's observations of Sierra glaciers were critical to our current understanding of the region's geologic history. Without hesitation, he leaps between astute scientific observations and aesthetic musings.

Some of these features are particularly significant in terms of understanding the historical significance of the book. As Roderick Frazier Nash describes in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Muir was writing at a time when American attitudes about wilderness were in the midst of a transition. His primary intellectual predecessors, Emerson and Thoreau, had popularized the transcendentalist idea that nature could be associated with Godliness, in opposition to earlier tendencies to associate it with the Devil and evil.

He says, for example, "No other place has ever so overwhelmingly attracted me as this hospitable, Godful wilderness (279)." This association of wilderness and Godliness was sparked in part by the changing American landscape, as "wilderness" became more scarce, while towns and cities became more ubiquitous. Muir functioned as a sort of west coast iteration of some of earlier Transcendentalist tendencies.

The western part of the country had larger tracts of wilderness, and less human influence than the New England landscapes. Along with this came, for Muir, a more extreme desire to devote his life to wilderness than Thoreau and Emerson had modeled. His writing publicized the wilderness and drew people to it. Ultimately, Muir was instrumental in arguing for the creation of Yosemite as a National Park[1].

In its day, Muir's writing advanced the cultural conversation about the nature of wilderness, and helped lead to the creation of protected wilderness areas. We now live in a world with a very different relationship to wilderness. The association of wilderness with Godliness is no longer novel, and narratives of wilderness as spiritually cleansing are commonplace. Modern wilderness is much more well defined than it was in Muir's day - in 1964, the Wilderness Act defined "Wilderness" and set out rules for its management. In addition to our Wilderness areas, we have a complex hierarchy of preserved areas - National Forests, National Parks, Monuments, etc. - that was just beginning to develop in Muir's day. A modern perspective on wilderness issues makes some of Muir's ideas read as naive. For example, thanks to the work of William Cronon[2] and others, it is now more widely understood that very little of the North American continent was ever unimpacted by humans. Many of the areas that we treasure as undeveloped have had people living in them for tens of thousands of years. While this doesn't devalue the wilderness areas we have, it does complicate the definition of wilderness as an area unimpacted by people. In Muir's time, these complexities were little known, so for the modern reader, some of his ideas about the nature of wilderness and the native groups living there feel simplistic.

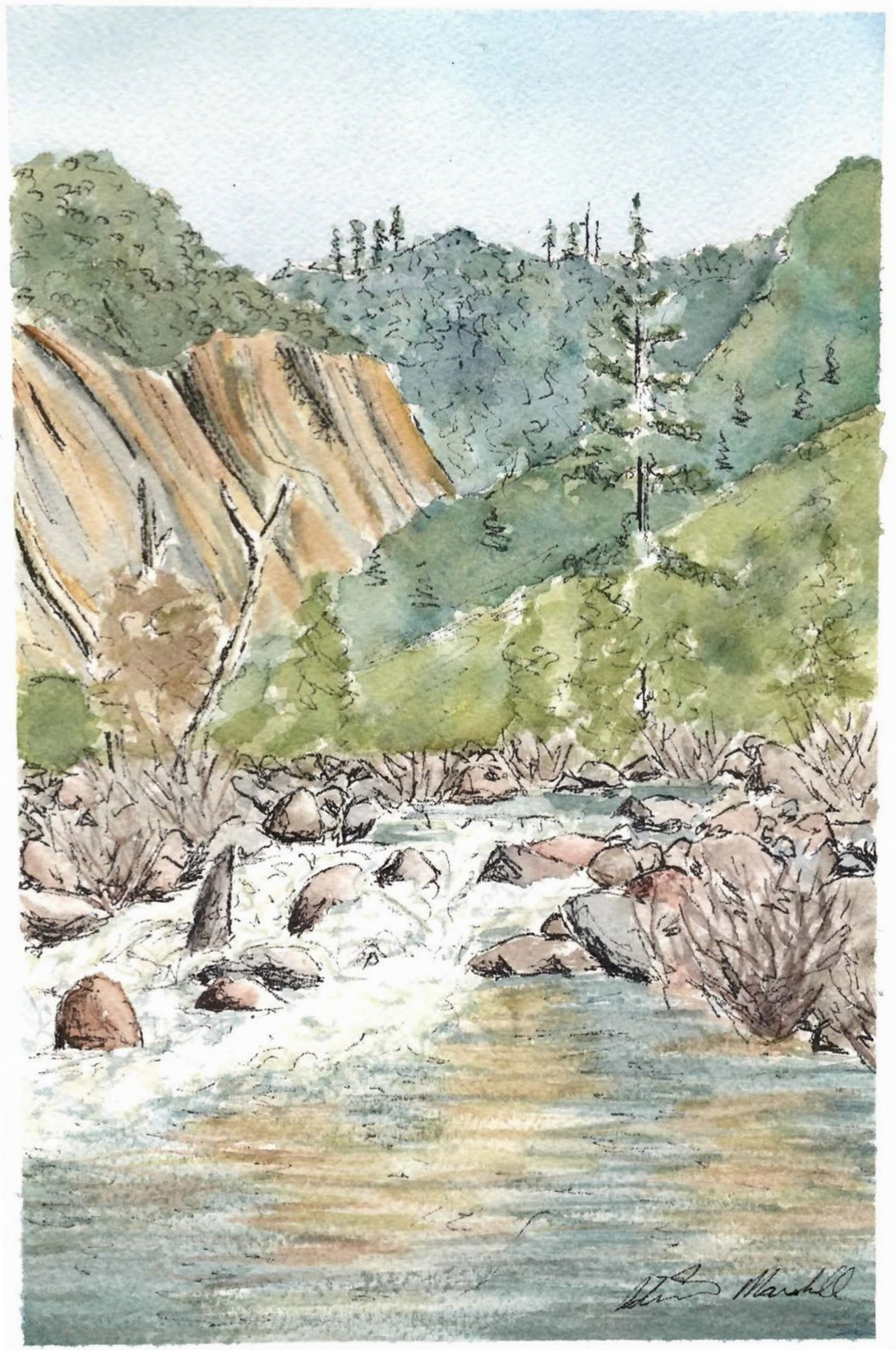
What, then, is the role of Muir's work for a modern reader? Muir's infectious enthusiasm and striking visual descriptions offer one sort of inspiration. As I read his effusive descriptions, I wondered - what would my life be like if I took that much delight in everything? The constant celebration could be exhausting, but overall I finished the book inspired to celebrate the natural world more thoughtfully, even in my suburban environment. Muir's delight could also make the book an enriching read before, during, or after a trip to the Sierra. He illuminates treasures that might not otherwise catch our eye. Bringing a copy of My First Summer in the Sierra for evening reading on a Yosemite trip would be like having an outstandingly enthusiastic and knowledgeable personal guide.

Muir's confidence in combining science and art is also valuable for the modern reader. Many of us are taught to think of ourselves as either scientific or artistic, left or right-brained. Muir's embrace of both might inspire us to do the same. How might our personal excursions to the backcountry be enhanced by Muir's style of naturalizing? To follow in his footsteps, we might observe something that strikes us, take the time to sketch it, ask questions about its life history, and see if our observations can help answer our questions. While it's often tempting to fill our wilderness adventures with accomplishments, including this model of observation could provide an additional dimension for our travels. Perhaps letting the lines between science, art, spirituality, and adventure blur a little could enrich our lives.

Muir's work had a great level of influence in his time, and while our culture around wilderness has changed significantly, his writing still holds allure and promise for inspiration. For more discussion of his historical impacts and relevance for modern backpackers, join us in the forum!

You can pick up a copy of *My First Summer in the Sierra* Here at Amazon.com

[1] Nash, Roderick. Wilderness and the American Mind, Yale University Press, fourth edition (2001), p. 122-140.
[2] Cronon, William. The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. Environmental History, 1:1 (January 1996) p. 7-55.



GEAR MASH

Gossamer Gear LT4/S Trekking Poles

These carbon fiber trekking poles from Gossamer Gear offer adjustability in a design weighing less than 5 ounces each. Available without straps for maximum weight savings, or with for comfort and versatility – You can even add a camera mount to the latter. Surprisingly durable, they're great for shelter setup as well. Around $90 per pole:
GossamerGear.com

Justin's Honey Peanut Butter

1.15 ounces of honey peanut butter with 190 calories per pack – Get your calories in and take your trail lunch to the next level while bringing only what you need. $1.35 each:
REI.com

Sierra Designs DriDown Pillow

This combo pillow from Sierra Designs features a down-filled cover (600fp water-resistant DriDown) combined with a polyester taffeta insert –Take both or leave one behind to save weight. 13x9" and 5.8 ounces all together. Available in multiple colors, $40:
Backcountry.com

Artemis 55 Backpack

Utilizing 420D fabrics, the Artemis is both durable and light. A ventilated backpanel keeps you cool, while the aluminum stay gives you a suggested carrying capacity of up to 40lbs. With a zippered outside compartment, plus side and hipbelt pockets your gear stays organized with up to 65 liters of total storage. Available in several sizes and made in Colorado. ~40 ounces or less and $295: Katabaticgear.com

Sea to Summit Ultralight Insulated Sleeping Pad

This insulated sleeping pad from Sea to Summit brings a respectable 3.3 r-value to the table with 181 individual air sprung cells for sleeping comfort. A multifunction valve makes inflation, deflation, and fine inflation adjustments a snap in the middle of the night… And they've even added a microbial treatment inside. 3 different sizes ranging from 14.5 to 19 ounces and $130 - $150:
Amazon.com

Vargo Aluminum Windscreen

Vargo designed this folding windscreen for use with their ultralight alcohol stoves, and it doubles as a pot support as well. Strategic cutouts allow for proper ventilation, and you can select from blue, black, or natural to add an aesthetic touch to your camp kitchen. 1.3 ounces and $15:
CampSaver.com

Big Agnes Copper Spur UL 2 mtnGLO Tent

If you're tired of rigging your headlamp for a little light at night, this is the tent for you. Integrated LED lighting offers over 90 hours of run time on 3 AAA batteries with two brightness levels. All on the popular Copper Spur platform with 29 square feet of interior space and 2 doors. About 3lbs and $450:
REI.com

Platypus Big Zip LP

The Big Zip LP features a new low profile design that offers a better fit in your pack's hydration sleeve, along with a large, zip type opening that makes filling and cleaning a breeze. Available in sizes up to 3 liters and 6 ounces or less. About $35:
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 in a Desert

When photographing in the desert, first and foremost take care of your camera. There's a lot of dust, grit, and sand blowing around that can wreak havoc on the sensor and lens, so make sure your camera is covered when not in use. If you're changing lenses, turn your camera off first so the camera's electronics don't suck dust onto the sensor. I use a paintbrush, lens rag, or a rubber dust bellows to clean sand off my lens. These items can be handy to pack along.

For compositions in the desert look for lines, they're everywhere. Look for ripples or footprints in the sand, gradations in rock strata, or fallen cactus to help lead the eye into an image. If there are cactus in bloom, use those reds, violets, and yellows to anchor the eye to the foreground of the composition. If there are cacti with interesting form, that can also be used as a foreground element. Just photographing the color of a beautiful cactus bloom or some of its form is also a good idea, but be careful how close you get to these prickly plants.

Left: Desert Dusk

Aim for the sky. Some of the best sunsets I've seen were in the desert, and you don't need to show much of the desert floor to capture sky color. The silhouettes of saguaros or rock formations (like a natural arch) can offer some interesting shapes against a stellar sky. For many sunrises or sunsets, I'll frame my image using about 10% land and 90% sky to capture that feeling of a big sky over desert lands.

To give the impression of heat in the desert it's good to include the sun, but keep in mind that this can be a difficult capture due to lens flare. Another way to say "hot" with your image is to zoom in and photograph the layers of heat coursing over the desert floor. By zooming in you can compress all these heat waves for an interesting visual effect. As the sun sets notice how the sand and the shadows change, this is a great time to capture desert light.

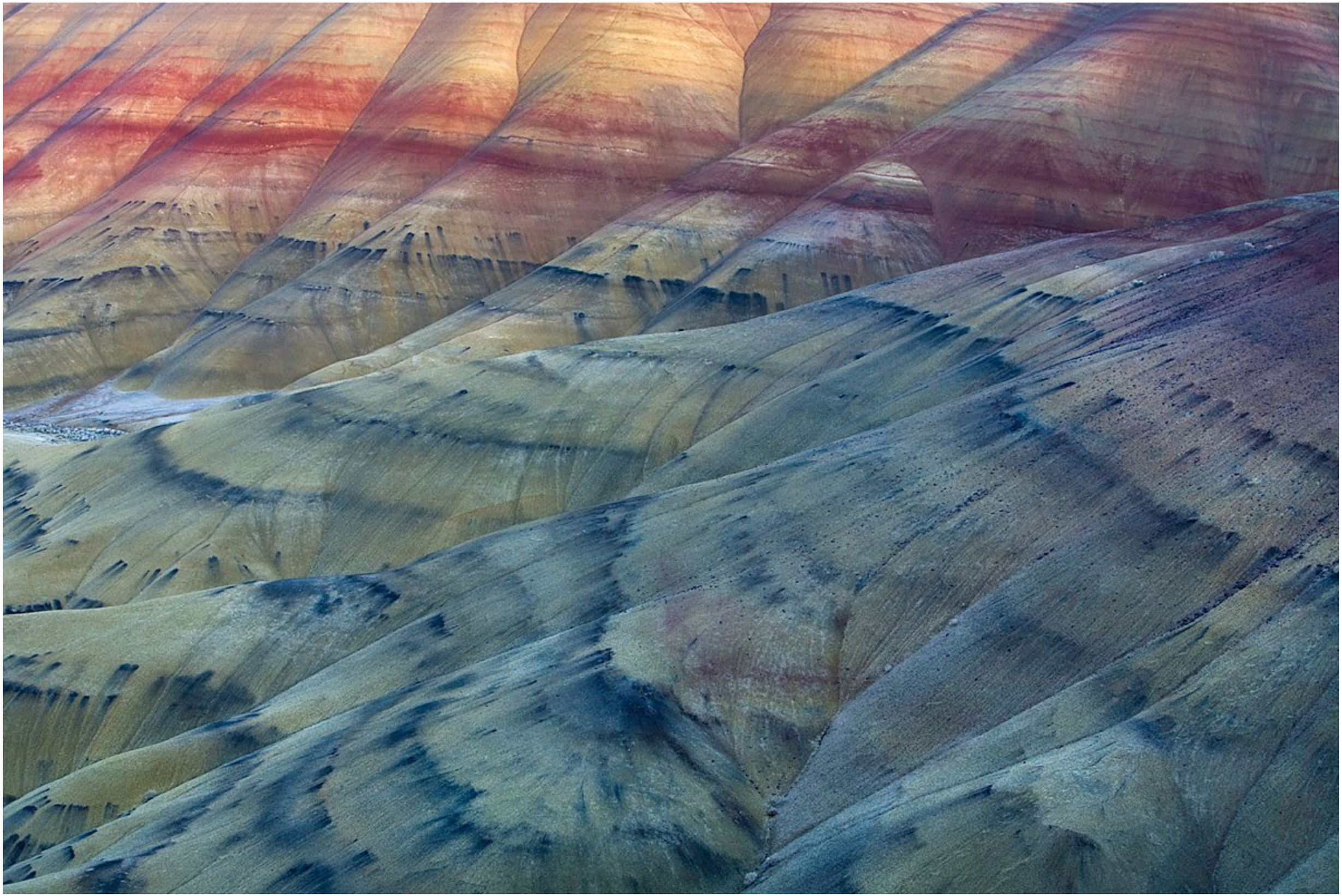
Round out the flavor of the desert by photographing some its wildlife. Many of the mammals are nocturnal and avoid the heat of day, so reptiles might be your best bet for photography. I find much of the reptile activity happens during the heat of the day, but most reptiles don't stay put for a portrait as they skitter about way too much for a good capture. Try taking that shot nearer to sunset, when the light is much better and they slow down to warm themselves on a nice rock – your chance of success is better.

Enjoy your days under the desert sun, and when you're looking for photos make sure to step around and not into those cacti.

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.

Right: Mt. Moriah Sunrise
Pages 139-140: Painted Hills
Pages 141-142: Desert Sunrise



Backcountry Cuisine:
Curried Chicken Noodles

by Paul Magnanti

For cold weather backpacking, nothing hits the spot quite like a soup. The broth heats up a person from the inside and is welcoming. And if the dish is on the spicy side? Even a little more heat to warm those winter or even early spring nights.

Here is a meal that is quick to make, fills the belly and has a bit of heat to keep a person warm during cool weather backpacking trips.

The dish uses the old standby of both poor college students and thrifty backpackers: Ramen noodles. But by adding some vegetables and discarding the flavor packet for a spice mixture made at home, the dish really is quite flavorful and is something to look forward to on backcountry adventures.

Ingredients:

- 1 package ramen noodles
- 1 pouch chicken (7 oz)
- 2 tablespoons dehydrated coconut milk powder. This item is found at many health food stores or online. Nido powder also makes an acceptable substitute if not quite as flavorful as the coconut milk.
- 3 tablespoons of dehydrated vegetables
  - Dehydrate your own -OR-
  - Harmony House sells a variety of dehydrated veggies. I like the vegetable soup mix myself with carrots, onions, tomatoes, peas, celery, green bell peppers, green beans, and parsley. It is a wonderful mix useful for many different dishes.
- Curry powder with dashes of salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to taste preference.
  - Want a milder taste? Use 1 tablespoon of the curry powder
  - Use 1 ½ tablespoons for a moderately spicy taste
  - Like some heat? Use 2 tablespoons and season liberally with more red pepper flakes!
- OPTIONAL: 2-3 stalks of fresh green onions. Green onions pack well and add a delightful flavor for backcountry cuisine.

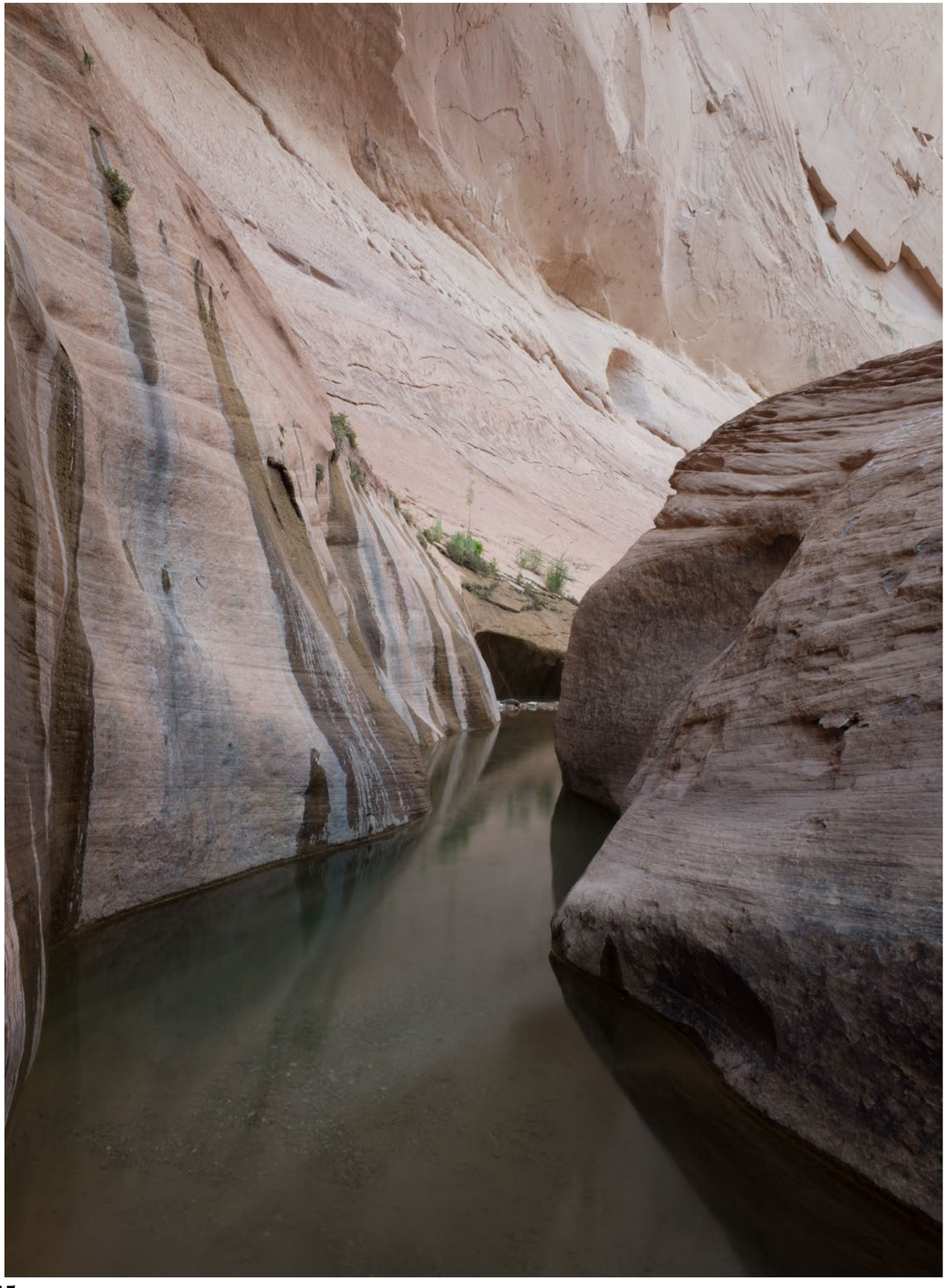
AT HOME

- Pre-measure the vegetables, milk powder, and curry mix. Place each ingredient in a separate sealable plastic bag.
- The chicken and ramen noodles are conveniently pre-packaged.
- If taking green onions, place in a sealable plastic bag as well.

IN CAMP

- Bring two cups of water to a boil.
- Add ramen noodles. Discard flavor packet.
- When noodles are starting to become tender, add dehydrated vegetables. Stir.
- When the vegetables look to be mainly hydrated, add in curry powder and stir.
- Repeat step with milk powder.
- If desired, add chopped green onions.
- Simmer on low heat and stir.
- Cover pot
- Wait for five to seven minutes.
- Enjoy!

TIP: Make the dish with less water for more of a stew. Make the dish with more water to make it even soupier to have a large amount of broth to drink. Adjust the spices accordingly.



In the Moment

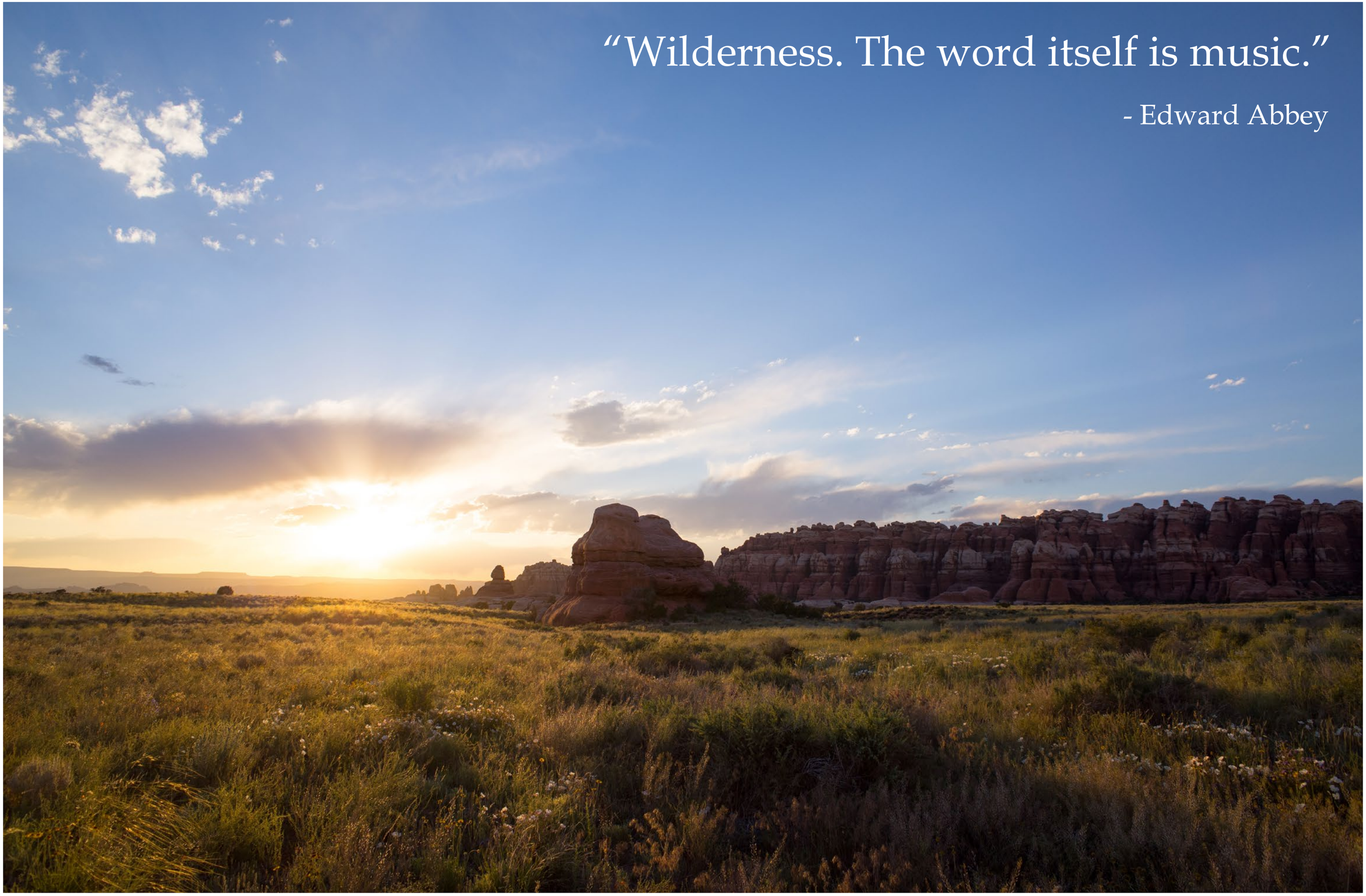
by Ted Ehrlich

This spring, again I found the call of the desert a driving force in my mind. An eleven hour drive across the southwest had led me to a very ambitious goal for a backpacking trip. The Plan: nearly 20 miles a day through a very remote area, on primitive trails that require frequent route finding, all to squeeze the most adventure into my limited vacation time as possible. Not everyone is bound to the ever increasing time constraints of a single father, but many have to plan their time according to their urban life schedules. I had even added an entire extra day for driving, eliminating the need for a caffeine fueled race through the night to be back in time for but another work day. Yet still I felt like I was there to perform a mission, not to enjoy the experience, even though I had planned the entire trip myself.

The first day, while breathtakingly beautiful, was only truly quiet after dark. The relentless sound of our own footsteps over the varying terrain had ceased, and slowly the stars came out. The weather was mild and the sky cloudless. After getting my fill of astrophotography, with the added benefit of some extremely dark skies on the moonless night, I laid on my pad with my eyes chasing the different shapes of constellations. Even on the outskirts of the city I called home, there is so much light pollution at night that only the brighter constellations are observable. I began to wonder what the men of old saw in these stars to give them the names and stories that we hear today in legends and folklore. Staring off into the vastness above me, a feeling began to come over me, but it vanished with the onset of my eyelids as sleep overtook my head. By the morning it was forgotten and the stars had vanished, washed out by our sun rising with pastel hues over the sandstone.

The sound of our footsteps soon occupied my thoughts again. For the second evening, the timing worked out that it was far easier to stop two hours earlier than planned because if we carried on, we would undoubtedly be dry camping in an area that may not have any flat ground, or we would be backpacking by headlamp to get to the next decent spot after that. After dropping my pack at our chosen spot, hot and tired, it hit me that I really had not given myself the time to just enjoy the silence of the area. There were no cars driving by, no drone of TVs or radios, no phones ringing, no conversations – none of the noise that humans have made to occupy our world. Nature filled my ears, and I made my way to the river that we were stopped next to. I sat down next to the river on a wet sandy bank, soaking half my legs in the shallow water, I allowed myself to empty my mind. No deadlines existed, no goals were being reached, no money needed to be spent, earned, or transferred. The rest of the world was carrying on without me, teeming with everyone else's self-interests and objectives. The only thing that mattered in that moment was I.

Scraping my hands and feet though the sand, I enjoying the cooling grit on my sun-worn skin. It reminded me of my childhood trips to Florida, where for a week I would trade out the mountains of Colorado for the salty seas, building sand castles and swimming in the surf. Those trips were always with the goal of enjoyment and spending time with my family and relatives, and those times are some of my fondest memories of just pure fun. As I looked at the landscape, the stresses of the day drained through my legs and into the river, to be carried along away from me. I watched the ripples of water as they coursed around rocks and stream banks, eventually lapping up on the sandy beach and my feet. I wondered what an outside observer would think of seeing a grown man, covered in salt and grime from head to toe, carefully crafting towers and moats out of sand on the side of a desert river. I wondered how quickly my efforts would be washed away the next time the river rose a few inches. As I allowed my empty mind to wander from thought to thought, the shadows around me slowly began to grow, and I found myself listening to a new noise, coming from deep within myself. As much as I tried to empty my mind, my stomach decided it was even emptier, and the protest had finally reached audible levels. As I stood up to go back to my belongings to find some food, I felt like for those few moments I had found the peace in my life had been absent. Sometimes you just have to find the place, and in it you will find your moment, as fleeting as it may be.


“Wilderness. The word itself is music.”
- Edward Abbey

Thanks for Reading Issue 21

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

www.TrailGroove.com