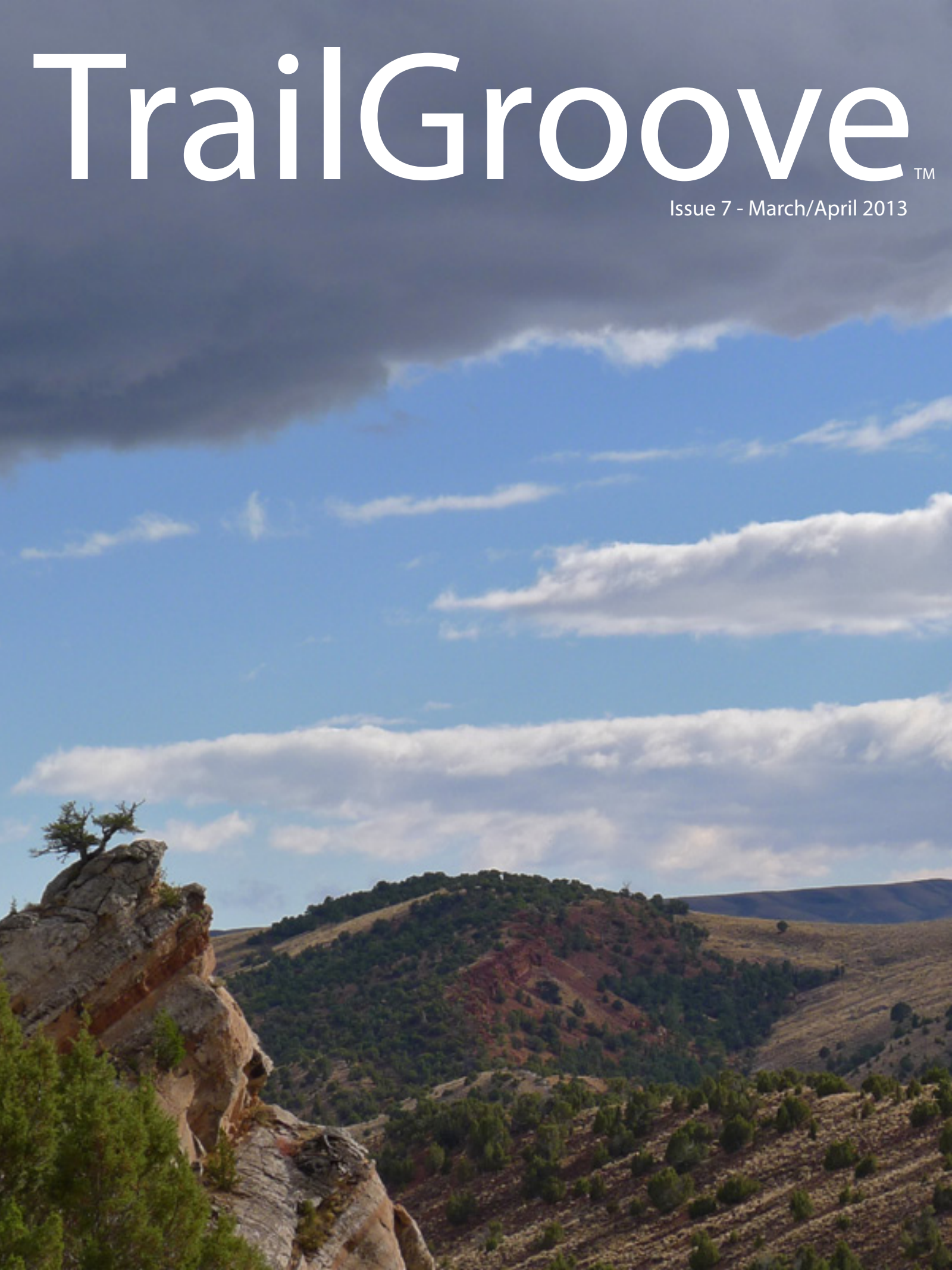


TrailGroove™

Issue 7 - March/April 2013



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March/April 2013

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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue:
David Cobb, Ted Ehrlich, Jessica Smith, Gary Meyer, and Sharon Giacomazzi.

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Editor's Note

In March of 2012 we released the first issue of TrailGroove Magazine, and now 1 year later, we've made it all the way to Issue 7. Thanks to all of our readers and contributors for helping to make that happen! We're definitely excited about Issue 7 as well as the spring weather that seems to be just starting here in the Rockies. Longer daylight hours are already making more things possible, and while winter isn't without its perks, we're ready for spring.

In this issue we'll take a look at everything from the Goat Rocks Wilderness in Washington State, then head 2500 miles the other direction to the Florida Trail. If you've ever thought about exploring Zion and the canyons of the southwest, we might just have the ultimate trip. We'll also share a great article on hiking old(er), and check out a Sierra Nevada destination you might not know about. What's the best way to photograph wildlife you encounter on the trail? David Cobb shows us how, and the TrailGroove team checks out a lightweight solar charger from PowerFilm. As always we'll wrap things up with The Drive Home – This time detailing a trip that Jen and I will definitely never forget.

If you haven't yet had a chance, check out the newly launched TrailGroove Store – Show your support and wear cool gear at the same time! Or pick up a sticker (Single stickers are still free!) which is sure to make whatever you stick it on well, that much better.

Let us know what you think about Issue 7 over on the TrailGroove Forum, or as always, feel free to shoot us an Email. Thanks for stopping by and enjoy the issue!

Photograph: Special thanks to Brett Roberts for showing off his TrailGroove sticker while hiking in Joshua Tree National Park

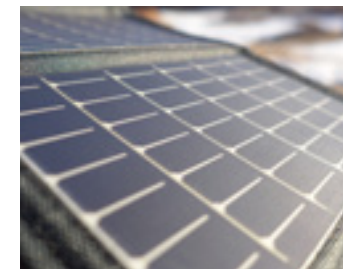
Contribute

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

A few examples of what we are looking for:

Destinations
Gear Reviews (Objective)
Photography
Video
Skill & Technique

Art / Illustration
Short Stories
Interviews
Backcountry Cuisine
Your New Idea



TrailGroove Magazine Review Policy

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

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

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

★★★★★ Excellent

★★★★☆ Very Good

★★★☆☆ Good

★★☆☆☆ Average

★☆☆☆☆ Poor

Jargon: Dyneema



A lightweight, low stretch fiber with a strength to weight ratio greater than steel. In the backpacking community, Dyneema is frequently encountered on backpacks utilizing Dyneema X Gridstop Fabric. Dyneema X is made from nylon with interwoven Dyneema strands for strength. Usually found at a 210d fabric weight, recently lighter 140d weights have begun to be used. The fabric is popular for its light weight, strength, and abrasion resistance. The fabric can be found in different colors, has a characteristic grid pattern, and is PU coated for waterproofing. Dyneema can also be found in line and rope applications where high strength, light weight, and low stretch are desired.

Random Trail Tip

Weather Lore

Sure, you checked the 5 day forecast before you left for the trailhead, but what happens when you're now 6 days into a 10 day trip and wondering what type of weather is in store for your last few days on the trail? Just keep your eyes peeled and nature can offer a few clues to at least give you a general idea of current and future weather.

Red sky in the morning, sailor's hikers take warning.

Red sky at night, sailor's hiker's delight.

You've probably heard this one before and it's one of the oldest bits of weather lore out there. Due to the rotation of the earth and a few other nuances, storm systems usually travel west to east. A red sky at sunset indicates a high level of dust in the air to the west...The direction a storm is most likely to come from. That high level of dust indicates high pressure, dry air, and good weather. The light ends up being red because particles in the air scatter short wavelengths of light (Like the color blue) with only longer wavelengths of light able to reach your eyes. (Like red) At sunset and sunrise, the light has to pass through the part of the earth's atmosphere that contains all these particles. On the flip side, a red sunrise to the east means the high pressure system has moved past you and with low pressure moving in, you'll have a greater chance to encounter precipitation and storms.

Other Tips:

A ring around the sun or moon is caused by the refraction of light as it passes through super thin high altitude cirrus clouds, which usually precede a front and possible precipitation by a day or two.

No thermometer? Don't forget the "14 + 40" trick you probably learned as a kid – Count the times a cricket chirps in 14 seconds, then add 40 to get the temp.

THE FLORIDA TRAIL

Location: Juniper Prairie Wilderness,
Ocala National Forest, Central Florida

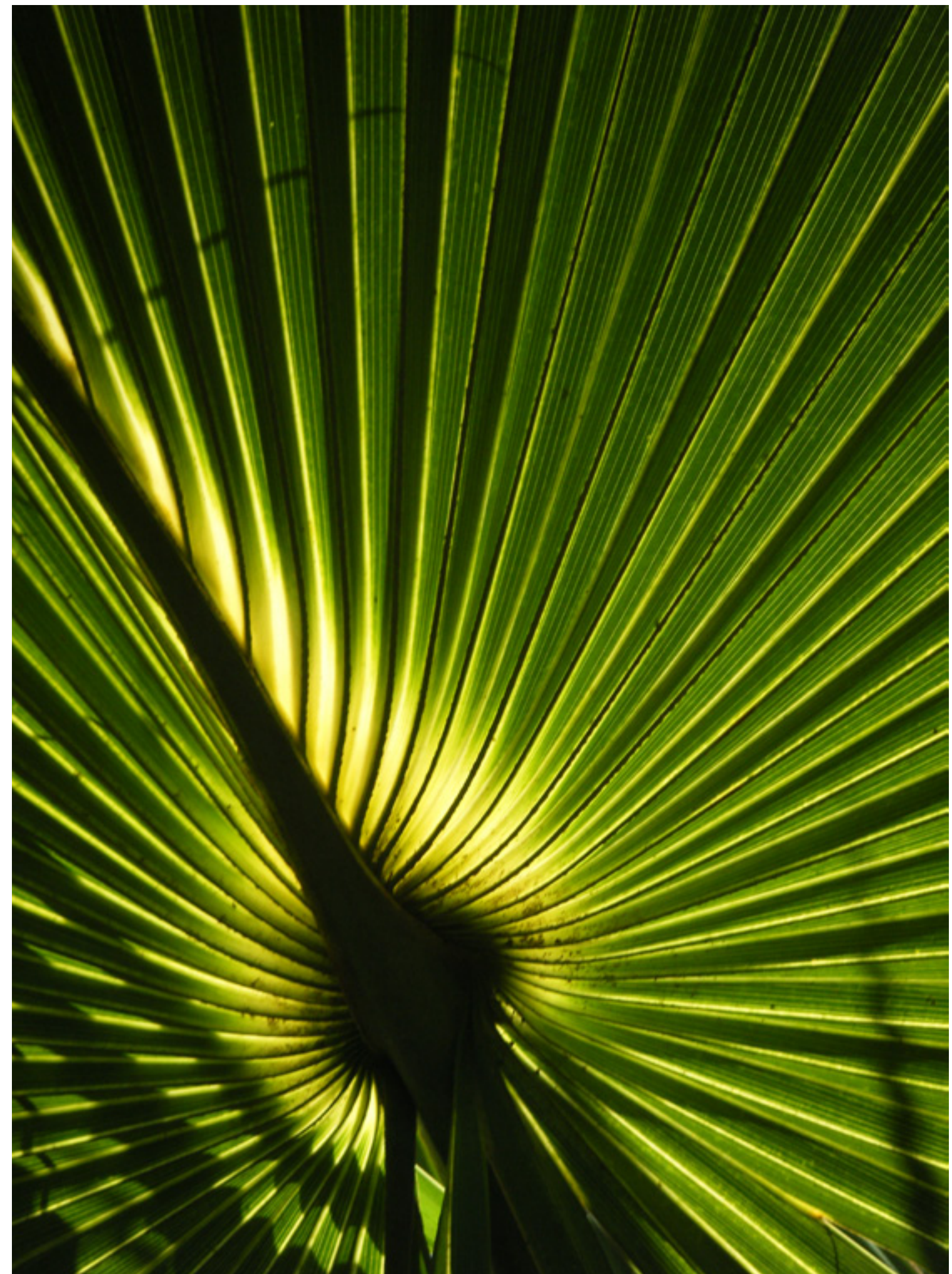
by Jessica Smith

Our boots sunk deep in the sugar white sand, making each step more laborious than we were used to. My calves had begun to burn right along with my pale skin. There was no shade to hide under, no trees to from which to seek relief. Florida is a state with more than 30,000 lakes, but around us was as hot and dry as a desert. I had grown up in North Central Florida, and knew just how unforgiving the heat could be, but the Southern winters had become much too warm for me. My years away in cold mountainous places had thickened my blood, giving me cause to strip off layers of outerwear and hastily shove them into my day pack. My Father took broad strides, and if I slowed for even a moment I would lose pace with him. Any digging around in my backpack had to be done at a trot.

Since my return we had been hiking together around my hometown, Ocala. Certain unspoken rules had developed, forming a family trail culture of our own. We moved briskly, and didn't talk much. When we did speak it was generally light commentary on our surroundings, both of us acknowledging that part of what we were seeking on the trail was the silence of nature and the subsequent clarity of thought. With Florida being the 4th most

populous state in the nation, traversing through wide open space was a form of sweet relief to us. No trail in the state delivers this relief like the Florida Trail.

The Florida Trail, running from the Big Cypress swamp in the south all the way up to the Gulf Islands Seashore in the panhandle, opens up over 1,136 miles of trail to residents. This footpath cuts a long and winding course up the center of the state, often twisting off in side routes and offering alternate loops. Bit by bit, my father and I had been working at sections of the trail over the last two years. It was easy starting out. The Florida trail cut quite close to our home, beelining a direct east-west path through our county on the Cross Florida Greenway. In an afternoon we could hop on the trail and complete a short 3-4 mile section, then be home by dinner time. Lately though, we were slowly driving further and further away to find trailheads as we trekked our way across the state. With each orange blazed tree we hiked past, our distance from home increased, requiring us to plan better for our hikes than we had previously. Rather than tossing a water bottle in a backpack and hitting the trail, we now packed lunches, hunted down Forest Service





roads, and arranged transportation. Our hikes were increasing in length as well. Once out of the Greenway area, which was criss-crossed by city streets every few miles, we entered increasingly more desolate places, often doubling the length of our treks from one trailhead to the next.

My father paused on the trail to wipe his brow and looked back to me. I saw an opportunity, and dropped my small pack in a passive aggressive demand for a water break. It was late January, and already the few cool days that make up a Southern winter had left us. It was getting too warm to be outside on dry land. Despite our trail system, Floridians are not big hikers. While on the trail, even in beautiful weather, we rarely come across other foot traffic. Florida people are water oriented, and most recreation is centered

around lakes, springs, rivers, and beaches. We do not have spanning mountain vistas or towering aspen cathedrals to inspire the soul. Instead we have swamp lands, oppressively thick underbrush, and pine scrub forests. To see the beauty in these places, it helps to have an eye for the details of the woods. The subtropical species of plants and animals that thrive in these areas are stunning in their resilience. Looking around, I thought in amazement about the early settlers of the area, and their reasons for choosing such a place.

The Ocala National Forest (often referred to as the heart of the Florida Trail) encompasses around 383,000 acres of land, and the Juniper Prairie Wilderness, sitting squarely in the middle of it, comprises 14,283 acres. My father and I were somewhere within those bounds, but with neither one of us carrying a GPS we could never be quite sure where. One thing was certain, we were alone with good reason. In the Rocky Mountain West it is easy to understand why certain areas were never (and hopefully will never be) developed. The terrain is impassible or too difficult to carve out for city life, and so it is left alone. In the Juniper Prairie Wilderness life would have been much the same.

Just before entering the Wilderness area on the north end of the trail, a side trail spurs off into a strand of pines and scrub oak. Leading past the remains of an old homestead, hikers are given a glimpse of what life might have been like in old Florida. path, known as the Yearling Trail, winds it's way around an old cattle operation. Slashing our way through waist high palmettos and cacti, we shook our





heads wondering why on Earth anyone would settle here? So inspiring were these settlers lives, that author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings immortalized their tales in her classic novels, *Cross Creek* and *The Yearling*. Today, curious hikers can visit the old homestead, though what is left leaves much to the imagination. An old grave yard is maintained and there are markers for various spots along the trail that indicate where the homes were. The sprawling cattle operation took place throughout what is now the Juniper Prairie Wilderness, though few if any signs of it remain there.

The section of the Florida Trail we were determined to conquer ran south from an area called Pat's Island just over 8 miles to the Juniper Springs Recreation area. Pat's Island of course, was not an island at all, but rather a small rise in the landscape giving anyone on top of it a slight advantage with the view. We had planned ahead and parked a car in the recreation area lot so that we wouldn't have to double back the way we came. Along the trail, the remnants of burnt out old pines and scrub oaks stood like blackened skeletons, reaching for the sky. The scrub habitat is by nature very dry, and thus especially susceptible to wildfires. The majority of our trail was without any shade, the trees having burnt up long ago. In their place a sea of bristly palmettos rolled in like a tide, reaping the nutrients from the ashes.

Though our topographical map indicated many ponds along our route, we found most of them to be nothing more than shallow depressions covered in tall grass,

or half empty mud pits for wild hogs to root in. These marshy areas in a different season, were most likely the ponds as indicated. In the dry month of January, it would be easy to miss them altogether.

Unmistakable though, was Hidden Pond, a welcome oasis in an otherwise desert like area. Approaching the pond, water could clearly be seen. When raised in the swamp lands, children grow up with what becomes a second nature cautiousness around the banks of any body of water. Venomous snakes like the Cottonmouth (aka Water Moccasin) along with alligators, were common place along banks of lakes and rivers. The fact that Hidden Pond was comprised of still murky water increased the likelihood of reptile inhabitants. We approached watchfully, but did not see any sign of trouble. For the first time a strand of scrub oaks stood tall enough for us to rest under, and we paused to enjoy the shade. If backpacking through the Juniper Prairie Wilderness, the Hidden Pond area makes for a great place to set up camp. There is a clear site designated up on a hill overlooking the pond, not too close as to place you in the way of thirsty animals making their nightly rounds.





Dusting off granola crumbs and gathering ourselves, we continued on our short southernly migration. Various “ponds” had drawn the attention of Sandhill Cranes, which made for happy entertainment. Though the tracks on the sandy path of the trail indicated that we were on an animal superhighway, we rarely saw wildlife in person. Most common sightings were of birds, whether they be Turkey Vultures, owls, or Sandhill Cranes. Children are taught in grade school that birds all fly south for the winter. As a young girl, I was always confused by this. We talked about birds flying south, meaning they were going away. To me it looked like in the winter we had more birds than ever. This, of course, was a valid observation. Florida is that southernly destination that many species flock to. Stretches of the Florida Trail, especially those with any form of water, generally make for wonderful



birding during the winter months. Species like the Sandhills Crane are both beautiful and engaging to watch in a natural setting.

Retreating from the sun, we cheerfully followed the trail into an area of longleaf pines. Peeking from behind these pines ahead of us lay the answer to our speculation. Stretched out for acres beyond the trees was an area of flowing tall grass land. It would have been a cattle herders’ delight. A disadvantage of flat land is that you have no opportunity to climb to a vantage point and gaze around. Features like this prairie can appear seemingly out of nowhere and surprise a hiker with the sudden change in landscape.

This prairie, and surely others like it out of our view, were why the settlers had established their cattle operation in this otherwise harsh wilderness. Vast expanses

of delicious grass would have been ideal for their living. Hiking the trail down from the settlements near Pat’s Island, it was almost as if the history of the area was guiding us to these pastures along the trail, revealing in time the logic behind the settlers’ existence. I smiled at my father as we nodded in agreement over our discovery. This trail had a story and it was finally starting to make sense.

Hopping over dried up creek beds and shuffling past countless orange blazes, we neared the end of our journey. Like a pot of gold nestled at the end of a rainbow, the Juniper Springs Recreation area was a miraculously and almost unrecognizable site at the end of our dry trek. Though incredibly scorched in some areas, the geology of Florida is much like a soaked sponge. Just under the ground are tremendous networks of water,



pumping up through cave systems and erupting quietly on the surface into serene swimming holes. Juniper Springs is one such place, attracting visitors for decades to cool off in its constantly 72 degree water.

Kicking off my boots, I soaked my feet in the cool water. If the settlers had known about the secluded prairies, surely they had known about this spring too. Perhaps after a hot day of doctoring cattle they’d rest and cool off here as well. I felt like I began to see the area through the eyes of the settlers, and thus began to truly understand the draw of such a place. The story of the pioneers of Florida was just one day hike, and one lesson, learned from 8 miles of the Florida Trail. With 1,128 more miles to go, there was no telling what secrets of the backcountry we would learn. ❖



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HORTON CANYON: Sierrapalooza Scenery

Location: Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains, CA

by Sharon Giacomazzi

The eastern Sierra Nevada between Lone Pine and Bridgeport along Highway 395 is gashed with great glacial troughs. Each has an orphic quality...unforgettable, alluring and distinctly unique. Years ago, I had no forewarning the High Sierra stun factor would smack me so hard or spoil me for any other terrain.

Inside these profound canyons, hikers can connect with the powerful pulse of the planet beneath their boots. It's as if you are walking atop the very bones of the earth. The landscape is utterly mind-

drooling, insanely beautiful, offering a sole to soul journey that can be life-altering.

A portal to one of the colossal Sierra gorges begins a few miles west of Bishop, California, el. 4200 feet. It's a small high desert town with all the amenities along Highway 395, the state's major north-south corridor. Bishop sits in the middle of Owens Valley, a 90-mile-long arid bioregion between massive, cloud-ripping peaks to the west and White-Inyo Mountains to the east.

The summertime sun-baked town is situated in the center of an epic array of Ma Nature's handiwork. Only a few miles from Bishop, outdoor enthusiasts can do just about anything except surf. From fishing to extreme 'boarding and skiing to peak bagging to butt-kicking treks, you can play in one of the world's most sensational mountain settings.

A drive on a rough and dusty byway through a sea of sagebrush and monochromatic, dry hills west of Bishop does little to lure eager hikers to Horton Canyon. To visitors accustomed to smooth blacktop, packed parking lots and busy trailheads, the route may seem like a journey to Ultima Thule.

Because I'm always jonesing for the trail less traveled, lack of name recognition, a bumpy backcountry road and a quartet of alpine lakes grabbed me like a Gila monster. Traveling on backroads or walking a lonely trail is living life, not just observing it. If you like exploring off

the beaten track, then head for Horton Canyon's largely undiscovered stunning landscape.

Besides the big scenic payoff the canyon provides, the drive itself through Buttermilk Country reveals one of the most awe-inspiring mountain backdrops in the world. Buttermilk Country refers to the jumbled chaotic piles and clumps and hoodoos of severely eroded granite and is an area popular with novice and expert climbers alike. The vast landscape of Druid-like stones sprawling beneath the Eastern Sierra ramparts with the long line of majestic peaks west of Bishop offers an exquisite visual experience.

Local lore says the unusual place name is connected to Joe Inman's dairy where in the 1870s teamsters from a nearby sawmill stopped for a glass of buttermilk, prompting the unique name. Another version states that goat milk turned to buttermilk by the time it reached Bishop during the summer months.



“Buttermilking,” a sport now known as bouldering, was pioneered by early climbers who enjoyed the challenge of scaling the biscuit-brown rocks without crash pads and gear, using only natural finger and toe holds.

The road to the trailhead ends at the very foot of the steep Sierra wall. Above, you’re welcomed by three sky-sniffing peaks, Mount Tom, Basin Mountain and Mt. Humphreys. Here, at the edge of John Muir Wilderness, the formidable Sierra Nevada speaks for itself as the predominant geologic feature in California.

Here, too, you’ll begin a 4.3-mile jaunt to lower Horton Lake at 10,000 feet, involving a 2000-foot elevation gain. Don’t groan at the sight of switchbacks whipping back and forth across a huge, sagebrush-dotted moraine at the mouth of the canyon. The zigzags are long and gentle, taming an otherwise stiff grunt to the top. The entire trail is actually an abandoned road that was built to reach tungsten deposits at Hanging Valley Mine high on the side of Mt. Tom.

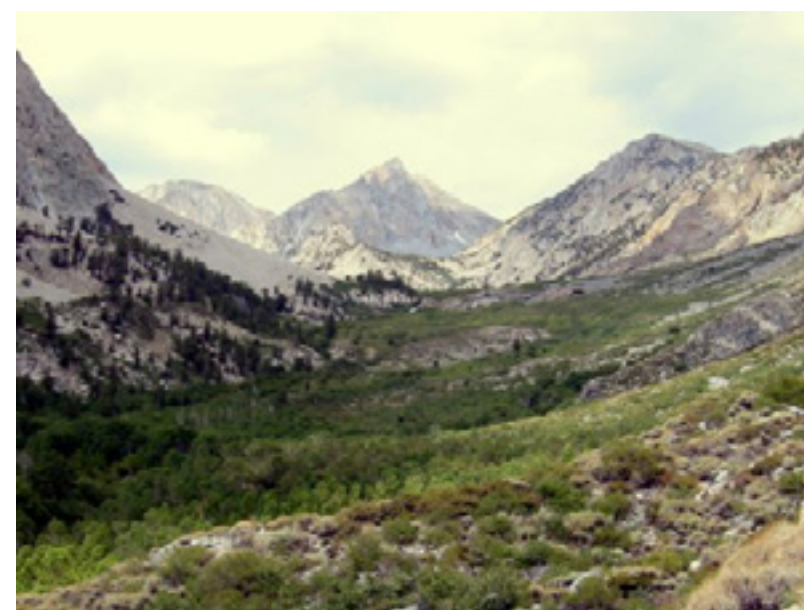
A wildfire in 1999 torched vegetation in the area, leaving only twisted, silver and black skeletons of desert mahogany and aspen. But, as you can see, the local flora made a strong recovery. Ironically, the flames that consumed them left behind nutrient-rich ash, fostering a quick and profuse rebirth. Sagebrush and early season wildflowers are back in business and add a soft touch to this hardscrabble land.

The colorful pyramidal-shaped mountain



dead ahead is massive Mt. Tom, elevation 13,652 feet. Even from a distance, it seems about the size of Idaho. Tom can be seen from nearly everywhere in Owens Valley. It was named for Tom Clark who was the first to summit in 1860. Be sure to enjoy expansive eastward views of Owens Valley, once a Pleistocene lake, and the White Mountains in the far distance.

Follow the rocky track as it ascends the lower slope of hulking, multifaceted Basin Mountain, el. 13240’, pass a stand of quaking aspen around one mile, and continue uphill to the top of a rise at 1.5 miles. Toward the bottom of a short descent, note a spur to the right that leads to the former Sonny Boy Mine Camp at 8500 feet. Consider taking a break and investigate the site surrounded by aspens.



Mining artifacts, murmuring Horton Creek, two structures and an airy privy offer interesting photo ops. The cabin is a safe haven during a storm. Within you’ll find fishing gear and a can or two of food. Leave something useful and rodent-proof if you can spare it. Please don’t move or remove mining relics.

Back on the main trail, resume the ascent before crossing Horton Creek on a stout wooden bridge at 2.0 miles. The broad verdant meadow is wall-to-wall with lavender blossoms of wild iris in early summer. Unless you’re familiar with this colorful display in Eastern Sierra canyons,



you’ll be surprised by the great change in vegetation and climate as you move up and away from the trailhead.

The subtle tones of a blistering, thirsty desert landscape change dramatically to a lush and colorful montane environment characteristic of glacier and water-carved gorges on the sunrise side of the range. A few miles and few thousand feet of higher elevation put you into an intense new zip code filled with icy streams and lakes, waterfalls, flower-starred meadows, conifer and aspen forests and miles of wild High Sierra scenery. In autumn, Horton Canyon glows with the orange, golden and



sometimes scarlet hues of aspens decked out in their fall attire.

After a respite of level walking through the sweet smelling meadow, the sagebrush-lined double track resumes its climb above the creek into Horton Canyon. Basin Mountain, Mt. Tom and Four Gables are the reigning peaks in the immediate area. As you gain elevation and look down into the canyon floor thick with aspen, willow and grasses, you'll understand why the proximity of desert and alpine communities is a major reason why Eastern Sierra visitors are so intrigued by and attracted to the region.

Your old road continues the ascent on the southern flank of Mt. Tom and climbs ever higher via two switchbacks at 2.8 miles. En route to another set of zigzags at 3.3 miles, note a small vigorous waterfall below. The road now arrows across Mt. Tom's side before bending into another switchback at 3.75 miles.



If you want to bypass the zigzag, watch for a use path on the left at the start of the switchback. A duck, small pile of rocks, marks the spot. The path wiggles through an aspen grove and regains the wanna-be road at 3.9 miles. Look for an unnamed lakelet in the midst of the greenery below the cascade. Shortly, you'll get a glimpse of lower Horton Lake on the lip of a rocky basin nearly two miles above sea level.

The road forks at 4.3 miles. The right branch leads steeply uphill to the Hanging Valley Mine site at 12,000 feet, then on to the summit of Mt. Tom, but bear left for a short drop to lakeside. Be sure to stop and photograph the abandoned, sealed buildings of the former Hanging Valley Mine Camp. Nearby, find two wooden bins into which ore was funneled for transport by truck to a processing site out of the canyon.

One bin is obviously older than the other. Compliments of the elements, the wood has weathered to a handsome nutmeg



color. Beneath the newer chute, look for samples of tungsten-bearing rock which look very different from most rock in the vicinity.

Half-mile long lower Horton Lake is a beauty. Guarded by an impressive gallery of peaks, the lake is truly a quiet alpine jewel. The stillness makes the heartbeat in your eardrums sound like distant thunder. Because knapsackers are a rarity, it's likely you'll be the only one here. The lake and creek commemorate William Horton, a rancher who settled in Round Valley northeast of here in 1864.

If you're a strong hiker and have enough daylight left, worm your way through

willows around the lake to the inlet stream. Follow a faint use trail alongside the inlet's right side for 1.25 miles and an additional 1200 feet of climbing to the glacial basin, or cirque, holding the largest of the three upper Horton Lakes at 11,200 feet. A remnant glacier gives the water an astonishing turquoise color.

The mountains rise like Gods above these alpine lakes. Views from here are absolutely magnificent. You can bet your hiking poles upper Horton will be your own private lake. If Four Gables Mountain above the headwall of Horton Canyon calls your name, work your way up the class 2 chute above the lake.



Whether you turn back at the lower or upper lakes, retrace your steps and revel in the solitude and grandeur of the canyon and environs from a different perspective. You'll no doubt see things you missed on the way up.

When you reach the top of the lazy switchbacks, you'll return to the kingdom of sagebrush and other desert-loving flora with a deep appreciation for the sharp contrast between two very different ecosystems, one nuanced and subtle, the other bold and in-your-face.

Personally, this is one of my favorite Eastern Sierra hikes. Total immersion into the belly of this spectacular canyon never fails to magnetize me. But, the many options up and away from the serene lakes into a powerful world of challenging, clean granite slopes, restless talus fields and

view-packed summits also beckon me to test my spunk and stamina. Eastern Sierra high country has taught me that climbing a steep mountain or trail is more about attitude than altitude.

Options beyond day hiking to lower Horton Lake include summiting Mt. Tom, Basin Mt. and Four Gables, class 2 treks. Consider setting up camp at lower Horton and climb Mt. Tom and/or Basin from there. Otherwise it's a long, strenuous day trip to either peak. Upper Horton makes a fine base if you plan to tag Four Gables.

Mt. Tom and Basin Mt. are two of the premier ski and snowboard descents in the Sierra. Both have enormous northeast couloirs and hold snow until late in the season. The Mt. Tom downhill drops 6000 ft. from the north ridge to the bottom of Elderberry Canyon. ❖

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Getting there:

- Find your way to Hwy. 395 and Bishop, CA. Take Hwy. 168 from the center of town. Drive about 7.5 miles and turn right onto Buttermilk Rd. Lose the blacktop here. Continue on Buttermilk past several forks and turnouts. The road gets rougher as you approach the trailhead.
- Turn right onto the marked intersection of Buttermilk and Horton Lakes Rd. Follow the lumpy route for another mile to a stand of trees. If this was challenging for your vehicle, park here and walk a half-mile to the trailhead.
- High clearance and/or AWD/4WD rigs can continue until you reach a locked gate. Park away from the gate and hit the trail.

Maps:

Mono Divide High Country by Tom Harrison Maps (he is my fave cartographer), Inyo National Forest Map is another possibility, of course.

Contact #s:

Inyo National Forest, White Mtn., Ranger District, 760-873-2500; Bishop Chamber of Commerce, 760-873-8405. Wilson's Eastside Sports in Bishop is a fount of information plus complete line of maps, all manner of gear and guidebooks.



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ZION CRISS CROSS

Location: Zion Canyon National Park, Southern Utah
& Grand Canyon National Park, Northern Arizona

by Ted Ehrlich

I smiled as the white sprinter van disappeared down the road, leaving me with only one way home, the trail in front of me. Months of planning and waiting had finally come to an end as I started down the dirt path with my friend Jon. Jon had flown out to Colorado 18 hours earlier, and had driven through the night with me to southwest Utah. This trip had been 3 years in the making; ever since I had seen the Kolob canyons of West Zion in May, 2009 and decided I must come back. Ahead of me waited 4 days and 70 miles of trails and canyons as I traveled through the park.

All images Copyright 2013 © Ted Ehrlich.

The Plan

When it comes to exploring the Zion backcountry, the obvious choice is the Zion Grand Traverse. Without any side trips, the route is 49 miles with 10,000 feet of elevation gain, covering the entire park from the Lee's Pass in the west to the east entrance. The traverse, however, skips out on one of the most sought after activities in Zion, canyoneering. Zion is well known for its canyons, from non-technical hikes to very difficult technical descents. I wanted the best of both worlds but without having to haul in technical climbing gear, so I chose to link up the Grand Traverse with hiking the Narrows of the Virgin River from the top down.

While planning for my trip, I found that for it to work within the timeframe I had available, I would need to reserve two permits, one for the night I would stay on the west rim, and one for the night I would stay in the narrows. These permits are available through an online calendar system, and would need to be reserved at 10am on the 5th of the month, three months prior to the month I wanted like to camp in Zion.

The other reservations that would be needed were two shuttles, one from Springdale to Lee's Pass, and another from the East Entrance to Chamberlain Ranch. I found that for the first shuttle, the easiest company to use was Zion Adventures since they have a daily shuttle to Lee's. That same shuttle also services the Kolob terrace road, so you can stash water for use during the long uphill hike from La Verkin creek to lava point. For the second

shuttle, I found that getting a custom shuttle from Zion Ponderosa, a ranch on the eastern border of Zion, was the best and least expensive option. The shuttle prices may be steep, however it was more convenient than driving out a second car and saved us a lot of time. I found both shuttle drivers to be very professional and timely, and would highly recommend both companies.

The last step in the planning process was the gear. Because of the Zion climate, I brought a lightweight backpacking setup that would be suitable for dry desert hiking, expecting lows to be above 40 degrees. The only specialized gear I bought was a pair of approach shoes and a few drybags. The shoes were a non-waterproof, synthetic upper approach shoe with a very sticky but durable climbing rubber sole. This gave me a shoe that would drain and dry quickly when wet, give superior traction while on wet and dry rocks, and hold up to the many miles the trip would cover. The dry bags were to keep essentials dry if our packs were submerged during the river descent.





The Grand Traverse

As Jon and I started down the trail from Lee's Pass, I had to remind myself that the first half of the day would give me a false sense of security about the water supply in the region. After 4.5 miles of hiking down along the magnificent sand stone pillars and faces of the Kolob Canyons, the trail intersects La Verkin Creek, a year round water source for the region and the second largest water resource in the park. In many spots along the trail, pools formed that were deep enough to swim in, so Jon and I took full advantage by soaking our feet and enjoying the rare commodity in the desert. Frogs and insects were everywhere, all dependent on the creek that nourished the ecosystem that surrounded it. After 7 miles, we found the first detour of the trip, an out and back trail to see the Kolob arch, the second largest natural arch in the world. While not as spectacular as Arches national park and the arches I've seen in Canyonlands, it was still a worthwhile side trip, and the viewing area made a good lunch spot.

After getting back onto the main trail, another quarter mile led us to the best water source in the area. The Beatty spring is on the south side of the creek, just to the right of the trail before it heads uphill. It's a huge gushing spring with very good tasting water and we filled up as much water as we could carry.

After leaving the creek and a steep hike uphill, we found ourselves in a wide trail-less valley surrounded by cows called the Hop Valley. It was a beautiful area, and gave us a sense of off trail cross country



travel. The little bit of water in the valley did not appear safe to drink, so we left it alone. Backpackers wishing to make the first day shorter will want to camp in hop valley at the designated campsites on the north side. This southern part of the valley is a patchwork of private and national park land, where private livestock is grazed. We exited the valley following a rarely used private road that lead us back to national park land, and to our next trail junction at the Kolob Terrace road. Here we picked up the water we had planted earlier that day on the shuttle ride, which would be needed for dinner and keeping hydrated in the hot, dry desert environment.

From there we followed the connector trail uphill near the road, providing beautiful views of the start of the west rim area. A few years ago, dispersed camping was allowed along the connector trail, however new restrictions by the park service eliminated any camping in the area, meaning we would need to make it to the Northgate peaks trail junction where dispersed camping was allowed. As we neared the junction, we came upon a beautiful pine forest just as the sun was setting on day one of our trip. After setting up our tent and chowing down on our dinner, we fell fast asleep while listening to the insects.



As we packed up camp for the start of day two, I was reminded of our luck in the weather. The high desert of the Colorado plateau that stretches across southern Utah is no stranger to wild weather. We were on the tail end of monsoon season, and our trip had started off with a blue bird day. The high pressure system over the area kept it that way for the remainder of the trip, giving us only the occasional white puffy cloud. The storms that hit Zion every summer can cause flash flooding, putting hikers and canyoneers in dangerous situations, and on the high exposed section of the trail coming up, we would have virtually no cover from lightning or wind. Ahead was



the highpoint of our trip, lava point, a small plateau at 7890 feet with an outstanding overlook of our route down the west rim trail. As we traveled towards lava point, we reached our next water source, the first natural one since leaving Beatty spring. This spring under the lava rock scree fields on the rim of wildcat canyon was a small trickle, and surrounded by honey bees. With most of the trail being downhill today, our water needs were lessened and we did not have to spend much time at the spring, just filling up enough water to keep us happy, knowing that there are water sources ahead at sawmill spring, potato hollow, and at cabin spring near our next campsite. As we started downhill along

the west rim trail, the view was immense to our left side. As we looked east, we knew that somewhere in the distance Deep Creek and the Virgin River were flowing down the canyon we would be hiking down in two days.

As we worked our way down the west rim, we enjoyed of the spectacular drops and carved canyons of the west rim as we passed viewpoint after viewpoint. We sat and tried to comprehend the vastness that lay in front of us, seeming almost unreal. The views disappeared for a few miles as we descended into potato hollow. As we hiked out of potato hollow, we found ourselves at the junction of the shorter telephone canyon route and

the continuance of the west rim trail. We chose to follow our plan and continue down the west rim, again being treated to spectacular views. As we neared our destination for the day, campsite #2 near cabin spring, the main canyon of Zion came into view. Again Jon and I set up our camp and spent the remainder of the evening watching the sunset colors reflect off the walls of the main canyon of Zion, and as the light faded, the stars began to come out, filling up the vast blackness with millions of tiny lights.

The last day of the grand traverse posed an interesting challenge. No matter how you set up your permit for the narrows, you are required to pick it up in person the day before your trip. So we were forced to take a detour mid-day to stand in line at the backcountry office in Springdale to obtain our permit. We took advantage of this opportunity to restock our food and enjoy lunch in Springdale. Before being able to head into town, we would need to descend over 2500 feet from our camp on the edge of the rim to the canyon floor. As we started our decent, the dirt trail we had been following for the prior two days turned to stone and concrete, remnants of the conservation corps efforts to give access to the area around the canyon. Most of the trail had been blasted into the side of the cliffs, giving us a smooth and steep trail down the canyon. As we descended the canyon, our second detour appeared, Angels Landing. As Angels Landing grew larger, so did the crowds. Prior to angels landing, we had seen around 10 people on the trail in two days. Once we reached scout lookout, we dropped our packs for

the mildly technical climb to the top of the landing. Chains had been installed years ago to make the passage along the sandstone fin safer, and in certain spots you could see the impressions of the chain link in the sandstone where use had slowly eroded the rock. Near the top, a beautiful view of the main canyon came into view, the reason why thousands of people from around the world climb up the canyon to stand there every year. After snapping a few photos at the top, Jon and I hurried down the fin knowing we still had a long day ahead of us. We then hiked down to the base of the canyon at the grotto trailhead, our lowest point during the trip at 4360 feet, and took the shuttle back to the visitor center to pick up our permits for the narrows. The weather was forecasted to stay clear, so the ranger was allowed to give us our permits. When weather conditions are not ideal, permits will not be given because of the flash flood potential in the canyon. After obtaining our permits and taking care of our food and water supplies, we took the shuttle back to the weeping rock trailhead. Here we had to dig deep and hike the steepest section of our route up to the top of the east rim at midday in the heat. About halfway up, another grand traverse hiker caught up to us. He had planned to hike the entire thing in two days with his girlfriend. She had hurt herself along the way, so she stayed the main canyon while he hiked out the east entrance to pick up their car. He decided to stick with us, as we double-timed it up the steep trail to nearly 6700 feet. Near the crest of the trail, we came upon Stave Spring, which is nothing more than a pipe with a trickle of water coming





out of it. The water from this source did not taste particularly good, so we were glad we filled up in Springdale. From this point, the remaining portion of the hike almost seems otherworldly. It's all downhill, and you can see the end as you look down toward the Checkerboard mesa and Jolly gulch. As the sun set, the trail in front of us darkened. Finally, just after twilight, we found our trailhead sign that signaled we had finished the grand traverse. Because our permits allowed us to stay in the dispersed camping area of the east rim, we hiked back up the trail a short ways using our headlamps, and pitched our tent for the last night on the grand traverse.

The Narrows

To travel to Zion without seeing the Narrows is like going to Yellowstone without seeing any geysers. The north fork of the Virgin River cuts a deep rift into the landscape that eventually widens into the main canyon of Zion, creating a natural marvel. At its deepest point, the walls are nearly 2000 feet tall, and at some points it's narrow enough to touch both walls with your arms and trekking poles extended. The plan was to complete what I called the Criss Cross, linking the Grand Traverse to hiking the Narrows from the top down. Our second shuttle arrived on time to the East Entrance trailhead, and shuttled us up the start







of the Narrows at Chamberlain Ranch. We stopped at the Zion Ponderosa ranch briefly to fill up on water since the narrows is downstream from livestock. We arrived at Chamberlain Ranch at almost 11am, which was fine since our permit allowed us to camp at site #12 in the Narrows.

As we started down the dusty private road that forms the beginning of the trail, we knew the landscape was going to drastically change as the river dove deep into the earth. Eventually we came to a point in the trail where there was no way to go other than into the river and completely soak your feet, so we jumped in. After three days of desert hiking, the cool stream on our sore feet was welcomed. Slowly the walls started to grow on either side of the creek, and we crossed the creek more times than we could count, staying in the creek when it was easier. After many twists and turns, the roar of a waterfall began to fill our ears and we found the only spot of the river that had to be bypassed. Luckily there is a narrow trail to the left of the river, eliminating the need for rappelling to descend the waterfall.

A few more miles down the river, as the walls kept growing, deep creek converged with the Virgin River, doubling the water volume. Still we felt solid footed and refreshed in the cool canyon, and pressed on down the river. At this point, we began to see the park-designated campsites, giving us a good idea of where we were and how much further we had to go. After another hour or so, we found ourselves at site number 12. With plenty of sunlight

left in the day, and feeling much more renewed than I expected, we decided to ditch our plans to spend the night in the narrows and finish off the hike that evening. We stopped at big spring, which is just past site #12, to fill up our water bottles with fantastic tasting spring water and then began the lower section of the narrows. There we met a few day hikers that were hiking from the bottom up, encouraging us that the bottom was easily within reach before dark.

As we started down the lower section, we encountered the deepest and most constricted section of the river, with parts deep enough to require us to remove our backpacks and walk with them over our heads. Here the walls towered over us, and at some points curved inward to almost form a tunnel, with only a sliver of sky showing though above us. As we moved lower, a few more day hikers came into view as we passed the inlets of Imlay and Orderville canyons.

Finally a massive crowd appeared, signaling the end of the riverside walk starting at the Temple of Sinawava trailhead. As we walked the last mile of our trip on the concrete path, getting odd looks from others with our full size backpacks and wet cloths, both of us felt overjoyed. After 4 days of hiking, we finally found ourselves at our final trail head, the temple of Sinawava. We were soaked and tired, wishing we had another day of canyons and red rocks. We decided to finish off the night with dinner at the Zion lodge, again getting odd looks from the upscale clientele at the restaurant there.





The Bonus

While having dinner, Jon and I decided to treat ourselves to a bonus trip for finishing up a half day early. Jon had never seen the Grand Canyon, and I had missed my chance to see the north rim of the Grand Canyon the last time I was in the area, so we decided to drive to the north rim right then. As we crossed into Arizona, we had the pleasure of meeting the local sheriff of Fredonia. After letting us off with a warning for speeding, he turned into our tour guide, telling us that the best place to see the sunrise from the north side of the canyon was from Point Imperial. We drove straight there, turned in for a few hours of sleep before waking up just before twilight. As the sun started to come up, a small crowd gathered at the lookout, mostly local photographers that said that the weather and cloud level was ideal for creating a very colorful sunrise. As the sun came up, the whole landscape began to glow orange, treating us to a beautiful sunrise over the canyon.

This trip was certainly a life-lister, and I would highly recommend it to anyone wanting to experience Zion away from the crowds of the main canyon.

After spending some more time touring the different overlooks on the mostly deserted north rim, we started back on the road, with a 12 hour drive to get back to Denver, and an early morning flight back to Chicago for Jon in the morning.

This trip was certainly a life-lister, and I would highly recommend it to anyone wanting to experience Zion away from the crowds of the main canyon. I would not recommend this particular for novices, and although I felt that our pace of 16-17

miles per day was slower than most of my past trips, it allowed for longer lunch and photo breaks, and for us to enjoy the wilderness experience in Zion. ❖





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Getting there:

Springdale is the main town just outside of Zion. The closest major airport is Las Vegas, NV which is 2 ½ hours away. There are also smaller airports in Cedar City, UT and St. George, UT.

Maps: National Geographic Trails Illustrated #214

Guidebooks: Zion: Canyoneering by Tom Jones (trail and Narrows information)
Andrew Skurka's website - <http://andrewskurka.com/adventures/zion-national-park-traverse>

Contact: Zion National Park (<http://www.nps.gov/zion/index.htm>)
Zion Canyon Visitor Center - 435 772-0170
Kolob Canyons Visitor Center - 435 586-9548

Questions and comments can be directed to Ted at tmountainnut@gmail.com

It began a few months ago. After every trip, batteries kept piling up – Whether from headlamps, Steripens, or even just from devices we used around the house. Most of the time, we’d get back from a trip with batteries that still had some juice left, but how much? Enough to take along next time? I found myself either installing new batteries for nearly every trip, or taking extras, unless I’d barely utilized the batteries the last time around. Worst of all, a lot of the batteries weren’t exactly common sizes, so it was impossible to fully use the mostly drained batteries in other devices – Not many TV remotes take CR123a batteries. The “Need to fully drain” stack of batteries kept growing. That’s when I decided it would be best to move to a standard format. The venerable AA battery. And not just normal batteries, rechargeables. Now, I’ve had some not so good experiences with rechargeable batteries in the past. Charge them all night, and it seemed like they’d only last 10 minutes when used. Worst of all, let them sit fully charged for any length of time, and they’d have barely anything left when needed. Then I heard about the Sanyo Eneloop battery, which maintains 85% of its charge after sitting an entire year. Best of all, the Eneloop can be recharged 1500 times – Enough for decades of use for most backpackers. (Specifications for Eneloop model HR-3UTGA. Sanyo has also developed the newer HR-3UTGB which increases these numbers to 90% and 1800 cycles, but they can be difficult to find and are more expensive. Both models have the same total capacity when fully charged.) Once the battery choice had been decided upon and I began to migrate any device I could to the AA standard, a recharging solution was needed, one that would work well both in the field and at home. I needed something reliable, compact, and lightweight.

REVIEW: POWERFILM USB+AA SOLAR CHARGER



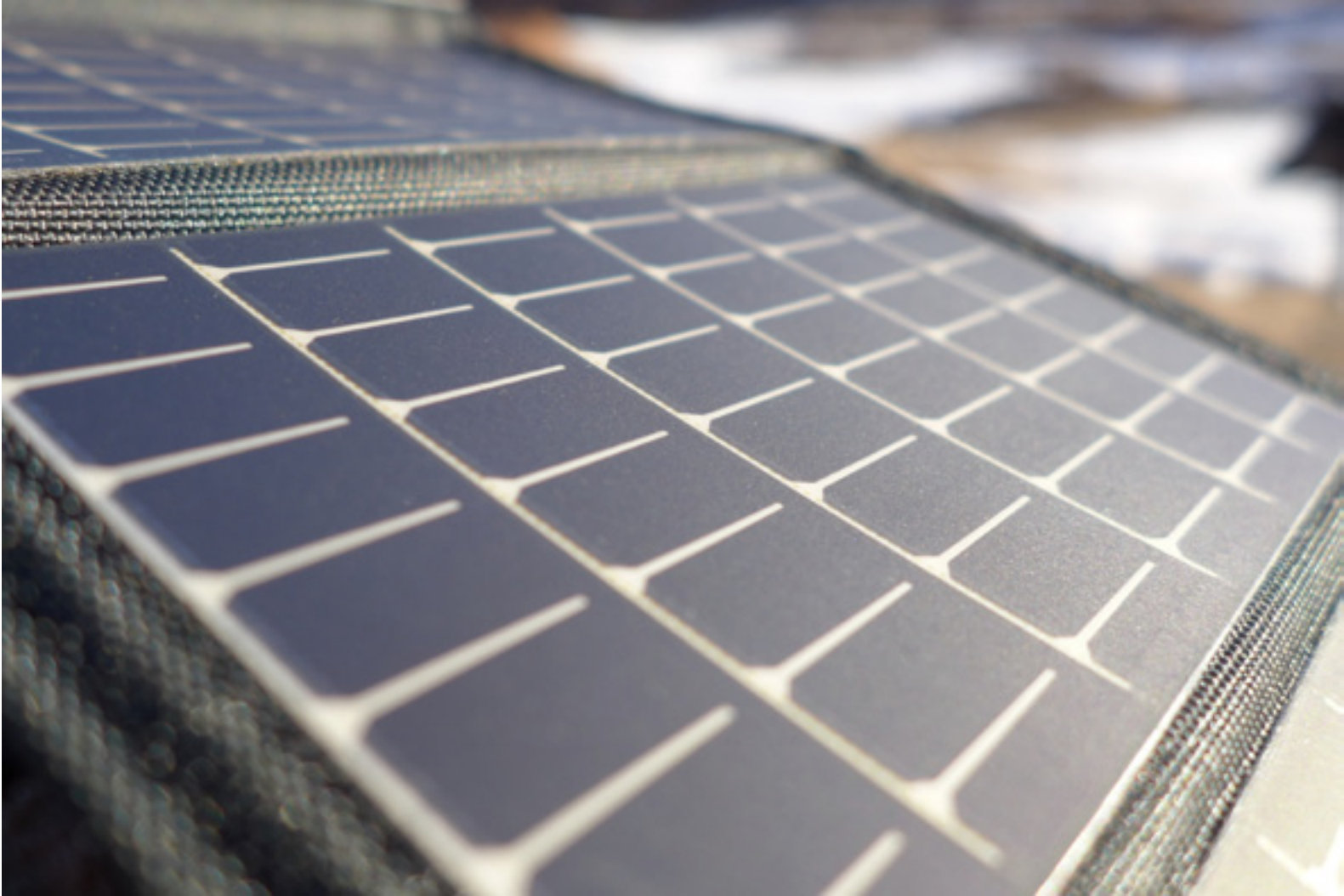
Pros: A compact, lightweight, and durable all-in-one package that recharges AA batteries as well as USB devices. Relatively quick charge time.

Cons: Can only charge via USB when rechargeable batteries are installed in the unit, must charge batteries in pairs. Full charge indicator not reliable, doesn't completely charge batteries to 100%.

Rating: ★★★★★

The PowerFilm USB+AA Charger

PowerFilm Solar manufactures a rather wide array of solar products, but for backpackers who utilize devices that run off AA batteries or can recharge via a USB connection, their USB+AA charger stands out. The charger is listed at 4.9 ounces without batteries, but we were surprised to measure an actual weight of 4.6 ounces. Retail price is right around \$75. Two Eneloop batteries are included that weigh just under an ounce each (.9 ounces) bringing the total weight to 6.4 ounces. If you only want to recharge using the USB function you can't leave the batteries at home to save weight – They must be installed, and have some level of charge for charging to work. The unit has 4 flexible solar panels that fold up accordion style, all leading to the plastic battery compartment secured with a hinged clear plastic door. The entire unit is backed with heavy fabric, and when not in use, or when charging via USB, this serves to protect the panels and battery compartment by wrapping around the entire package and securing with a Velcro closure. 4 grommets allow you to fasten the charger to a pack or object for charging. Moving to the



outside of the battery compartment, on one side you'll find the USB charging port, and on the other a simple red LED charging indicator status light. A slow flash means the batteries are charging, a rapid flash indicates an error / incorrect battery polarity, and a solid light is supposed to indicate a full charge. (More on that later) The charger is rated to fully charge an empty set of Eneloop batteries in 5 hours of full sun. The charger isn't waterproof, but PowerFilm states that light moisture can just be wiped off and that if the charger does get soaked, it's usually not a problem as long as you remove the batteries and allow for a full drying. However, solar charging in the rain probably won't work out great anyway. Overall the charger feels quite solid for such a lightweight package, and is small enough to fit in a large pocket.

also water resistant to 100 meters. Within each menu screen and option there are a ton of settings & calibration features if you want to get into it and really tweak each setting, but for the most part I kept it simple and the watch in an out of box state with just a few minutes of setup time upon receipt have worked well for me. The watch weighs just 2.2 ounces, band included.

Performance

Curious to see how the charger performed, I hooked up an iPhone 5 to the device and charged the phone until it stopped charging, then ran each battery through a headlamp to make sure the batteries were fully discharged. After unfolding the unit, I aimed it at the sun and continued to track the sun's movement over the next 5 hours. I



then folded up the unit so it wasn't receiving any additional juice from the sun. After completely running the battery of my phone down and plugging into the PowerFilm's USB port, it was able to raise the charge level of my phone from completely dead to 37%. I repeated the test over several more days and weeks, and consistently was able to raise the charge level of my phone about 40%, with a maximum of 45% in a single test after charging in full sun for 5 hours. All testing was performed with the iPhone's radios disabled, applications shut down, and screen off just to level the playing field. I also tried recharging the batteries from an actual Eneloop brand charger from a standard wall socket, which was able to charge the batteries a bit better – Enough for a 60% phone battery level bonus. Obviously, there's only so much energy that the batteries can



hold and they're not capable of fully recharging the phone. It would have been nice if the PowerFilm charger was able to charge the batteries to their full potential, (Leaving the charger in the sun for longer periods of time did not result in any additional charge) but it gets close enough to keep you running in the field. One of the nice things is that you can charge the AA batteries by day, then recharge whatever you need to recharge via USB at night. Or of course if you just need the batteries for a device that runs off AA's, charge the batteries in the sun, then swap into your device. If you need more USB boost than the fully charged batteries can provide alone, leave the solar panels in the sun as you recharge your device via USB. The batteries will drain faster than they charge, but this method will help you get just a tad more charge on your device. Using the iPhone 5, this method allowed for a charge all the way from 0 up to 60%, compared to

the usual 40% assume you started with fully charged batteries.

Disappointingly, you're unable to charge a single AA battery with charger and I found that working in pairs was required...You'll get a battery fault if you only insert a single battery, and when I tried to mix discharged batteries with fully charged batteries, the uncharged battery would not charge in the sun. I can only assume this is to prevent overcharging of the already charged single battery. With this in mind, I'd actually have to take an additional rechargeable battery along for my headlamp that takes a single AA, then run both batteries down before I could recharge them together. For full performance, I suggest always working with pairs of batteries that have an equal charge. If you only need to recharge devices via USB, this isn't a concern.

Durability of the product hasn't been an issue, it's solidly built. The weak point in the armor however is the face of the 4 solar panels themselves – Use caution when charging as they do scuff and scratch rather easily.

LED Indicator

Immediately after you unfold the panels and expose them to light, the red LED light will begin to flash to indicate charging. You'll get the rapid pulse if you've inserted the batteries incorrectly, but a few times I've received the rapid pulse for no apparent reason. Folding the panels to shield them from light and then unfolding usually resolved the issue. If that didn't work, removing and reinserting the batteries was required. What doesn't work so well is the full charge indication. The red light will turn solid well before the batteries are fully

charged. PowerFilm states that the light actually turns solid at a 75% charge level and advises to charge by time to remedy the issue, but in my case, I generally received a solid red light after about an hour – Good for just a 10% boost on the iPhone 5. If you'd like to charge the batteries as much as possible, just leave the unit in full sun and check your watch, as long as you're aimed at the sun or close to it, you should have a full charge in 5 hours.

Performance 2

Solar panels definitely work best in a base camp type situation, where you monitor the panels to ensure they're in full sun and aimed properly during the charging process. But I also tested the PowerFilm during a less than ideal scenario while on the move during a recent weekend trip. Strapped to the outside of a pack while hiking, the panels



will very rarely be at the optimum charging angle. The day started with two completely discharged batteries inside the PowerFilm unit and a sunny day. I gave the charger a head start by facing it directly at the morning sun as I worked to break camp for 30 minutes, then shouldered my pack and hit the trail. By lunch time a thin haze blanketed the sky, and I gave the charger another 30 minutes pointed right at the sun while I ate lunch. As I hiked after lunch the haze thickened and it became completely overcast for a couple hours, however by late afternoon the clouds rolled out and it was once again a sunny day. The charger was

simply strapped to the top of my pack as I hiked through a mix of wide open spaces with more light as well as shadier aspen groves, though the trees were without leaves for winter so there were a mix of sun and shade. After 10 hours of hiking, I gave the hopefully charged batteries a shot. They were fully charged and added a 43% charge to my phone. So even in less than perfect conditions the charger worked over a day's worth of hiking, though experiences will of course vary based upon the length of the day, tree and cloud cover, and direction of travel.

Conclusion

The PowerFilm USB+AA charger is a great fit for lightweight backpackers who need a solution to charge devices in the field – As long as those devices will take rechargeable AA batteries or can recharge via a USB cable. On shorter trips, or if you're not a heavy electronics user it will probably be lighter and more efficient to simply take spare batteries instead, but if you're planning extended jaunts or utilize power hungry devices like a GPS frequently, the PowerFilm charger might end up making things easier. The charger isn't without its quirks, and we found ourselves wishing for an accurate full charge indicator and the ability to work with a single AA battery instead of in pairs. However, the unit is quite light, the price is manageable and best of all you'll get a single, compact unit that almost does it all. ❖

Overall Good to Very Good - ★★★★★



The PowerFilm USB+AA Solar Charger can be purchased at:

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



WALKING THE GOAT ROCKS WILDERNESS

Location: Southwestern Washington

by David Cobb

The Goat Rocks wilderness is located in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest of Washington, between the Mount Adams wilderness and Mount Rainier National Park. The remnant of an old volcano which stood at over 12,000 feet is now an area of alpine scenery with many peaks over 8,000 feet. The wilderness contains 105,000 acres and I've hiked through this area a few times before, but recently I made a trip into the backcountry to camp and walk a bit of a wilderness trail loop. The protection for this region has been in place for a long time since February 13, 1931, when it was first established at the Goat Rocks Primitive Area. The acreage protection grew and Goat Rocks was listed early as wilderness with the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1968.

The Goat Rocks offers many beautiful trails and I decided on a loop, beginning the trip at trail number 96 near Chambers Lake. The path from the parking area passes through a mossy forest and low brush, but soon connects with the Pacific Crest Trail

that quickly launches into the high country offering views of some stunning vistas. On the way to the alpine country I passed many of the best wildflower areas too, such as Snowgrass Flats. This area offers meadows thick with lupine, beargrass, and Indian paintbrush. But the wildflowers were stunted due to a cool summer, so I'll be back to view them again in a warmer year. For witnessing the peak of the wildflower bloom, a trip here in early to mid-August is the best time to travel.

Like most mountain areas, mosquitoes can be a problem in late July to mid-August so you might want to pack some bug spray. The higher areas are less bothersome due to cooler temperatures and a perpetual breeze. By late August the temperatures are cool enough to have killed off most of the insects, and in September there are often clear skies with an occasional frost or dusting of snow. Visiting earlier than mid-July will be difficult due to snowpack, so bring the proper equipment. Wilderness permits can be picked up at the parking

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LEFT: ABOVE THE CLOUDS

lot kiosk, and are free for those taking day hikes or overnight backpacking trips. A Northwest Forest Service Pass is needed to park your car in many trailhead parking areas.

The high country offers a number of knife ridges just off and along the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Camping near Packwood glacier allows views of the surrounding Cascade volcanoes, like Mount Adams, Mount Saint Helen's and Mount Rainier, with distant views of Glacier Peak and the North Cascades. A backcountry shelter once stood near the crossing of Packwood Glacier, but time and the elements have collapsed the beams years ago, and now not much remains except for a bundle of wood. Even without the shelter, camping can still be found here amongst the stunted pine. Nearby creeklets flow from the surrounding snowfields, so there is plenty of water. In a good year, blooms of beargrass stretch from here seemingly to Mount Adams miles away. Years ago I walked through this high country during a snowstorm and passed by two shaved and hypothermic llamas wrapped in shiny space blankets. They looked like a couple of extra-terrestrials trying to make first contact. The llamas survived the night and look no worse-for-wear in the morning. From the location near Packwood Glacier a spur trail climbs to the top of 7,930 foot Old Snowy that supplies views over many of the surrounding peaks and glaciers in this incredible wilderness. A walk along the PCT from here follows a ridge on clear trail with perpetual snow fields dropping off on either side. The crest trail will drop

you down to White Pass, which is a great place to start an adventure into the Goat Rocks, and also a resupply point if you're planning a longer hike on the PCT.

Continuing on my loop, I stopped off at Goat Lake which is usually frozen over into mid-August. Here is a fantastic spot to view a sunset warming the peak of Old Snowy, or to see sunrise reflections off the mountain cirque into the ice-covered Goat Lake. This is also a good place to observe mountain goats, and I spotted more than 40 above the lake on my last trip. Marmots and pika are common in the area too, and while descending Goat Ridge I came face-to-face with a wolverine on the trail. Since fewer than 400 remain in the lower 48, I considered my sighting fortunate.

Departing Goat Lake early in the morning, I continued on my loop to watch the sunrise along Goat Ridge. The ridge stays high in the alpine scenery, but the valleys drop off immediately to reveal gaping views of the distant Mount Adams. Descending from here, there are a few reflective tarns with views of Mount Saint Helens and the often-cloudy valleys below. I completed my loop and my trip with a steep descent along trail 95 through woodlands and meadows, which offered wildflower viewing opportunities.

When I returned to my car, I felt refreshed and thankful for all that I'd seen. A few hours along a dirt road returned me home, and the photos I took along the way will always remind me of a trip to a place I love. ❖







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Getting there:

From the north access can be made from Highway 12 to a number of trailheads, or you can take the drive connecting road FR21 to climb alongside Goat Rocks for more trail access.

From the south, drive north out of the town of Trout Lake to FR23 past Mount Adams and connect to FR21 to a myriad of forest roads and different points of trail access.

Maps:

I used a Goat Rocks Wilderness map offered by the Gifford Pinchot National Forest 1:63,360.

Guidebooks:

100 Hikes in Washington's South Cascades and Olympics by Ira Spring and Harvey Manning covers the Goat Rocks Wilderness pretty well.

Backpacking Washington by Craig Romano (2011) and Backpacking Washington by Douglas Lorain (2007) both cover hiking in the Goat Rocks Wilderness.

Permits:

A free backcountry permit can be obtained at the trailhead kiosk. A Northwest Forest Service Pass is needed to park your car at the trailhead parking area during your stay.

Contact: The Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 360-891-5000

Web: http://www.gorp.com/parks-guide/travel-ta-gifford-pinchot-national-forest-washington-sidwcmdev_066996.html

*LEFT: GOAT ROCKS, MT. RAINIER
NEXT PAGE: THE HIGHLANDS & MT. ADAMS*





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Marmot Super Mica Rain Jacket

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Runs off 3 AAA rechargeable batteries - Recharge by plugging a USB cable directly into the light. Also compatible with normal batteries. Up to 110 lumens and about \$60:

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You probably won't shed any tears as you kiss that hydration bladder funk goodbye: \$13:

Backcountry.com



Starbucks Via

Directions: Pour in packet, add hot water, stir and enjoy. Each packet makes 1 cup. About \$.60 cents a packet and feather light:

Amazon.com

GEAR MASH



Katadyn Hiker Pro Water Filter

Possibly setting the backcountry standard for pump filters. Less than a pound and about \$85:

Campsaver.com



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GoLite Imogene UL3 Tent

A 2-3 person freestanding tent that tips the scale at just over 3 pounds and just under \$300:

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GoLite Chrome Dome Umbrella

It's no joke – the Chrome Dome has protected more than its fair share of PCT thru hikers from the southern California heat. Oh yeah, works for rain in Washington too. 8 ounces, \$20:

GoLite.com



Photo Tips from the Trail

by David Cobb

Since long-distance hiking helped form so much of my photography, I thought it might be helpful to supply a few photo tips I picked up from the trail. These tips don't require the use of tripods or fantastic cameras; they are ideas 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.)

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TIP #4: Photographing Wildlife on the Trail

When backpacking, there is often the opportunity to photograph wildlife along the trail and to help tell part of the story of your journey. However, a good photo of wildlife can sometimes prove elusive. If you're carrying a point-and-shoot or your phone, you probably won't get a good portrait of the animal. But that's ok. I actually prefer capturing an animal in its environment as opposed to the portrait shot. It tells the story of where they live and under what conditions, which is far more interesting to me than a portrait.

To get that image of an animal in its environment, turn your ISO up on your camera if you can. This will help speed up the shutter so the animal's movement doesn't create a blurry image. Of course, if you want to capture the motion of an animal with image blur, then keep your ISO on a slow setting and just pan your camera with the animal to capture the sense of movement. Be careful when approaching an animal, since it is wild, unpredictable, and there is no need to cause it undue stress—all good reasons to keep your distance and capture it in its environment.

As a general rule, it's best to have the animal walking into the scene to create a suggested line of sight for the animal and to lead the viewer's eye through the composition. A catch-light in the animal's eye is also important, since it suggests life. Keeping the eye sharp is also important, so focus there first and then recompose. A whole book can be written on the subject of wildlife photography and many have, but use these few tips as a starting point to enjoy wildlife photography from the trail. ❖

LEFT: Rough skinned Newt (taricha granulosa)







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 another great tip from David!

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HIKING OLD(ER)

by Gary Meyer

It really first started to hit me just after my 60th birthday. I was getting old(er)! Not old mind you, but older, yes. No more denial or excuses, no getting around it anymore. Time for some honest re-evaluation and facing the facts about Hiking Old(er).

As we age, the same fundamental rules of hiking and backpacking safety exist, but

now with a few new points of emphasis. First of course must be the physical realities of life. Everyone (and I mean everyone) over 50 should have an annual physical examination. Be open and honest with your physician; explain the physical challenges of backpacking and hiking on the rather isolated trails that you might visit. Special emphasis should be placed on any history of health problems.

I've had a couple of health concerns myself in recent years, so I realize it is critical not to minimize the potential health risks of hiking or backpacking. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis are just a few of the major health issues that should be discussed with your doctor. New concerns such as allergies which previously were not relevant may now become critical. The risk of skin cancer among older people is very real. This may be minimized by using a quality sun screen and wearing a hat, the bigger the better.

As we age, our senses may diminish, and our ability to recognize thirst decrease. And to broach a rather delicate area, as we age we may all need to stop more frequently, not only to catch our breath but of course, nature may call more

often than before. So now, be even more observant of dehydration and drink plenty of water. Include in your pack high carbohydrate snacks and foods with sugar if you are a diabetic in case your blood sugar drops. Educate yourself on basic first aid techniques, especially those that may relate more to an older person.

Various issues which previously seemed minor become more important as you age. This can range from the most serious concerns to something as simple as wearing an elastic support brace or using hiking poles to help minimize the pounding your knees and back take on rocky trails. I've been an ultralite fan for years and, as we all know, the less weight you pack, the easier it is to hike. This also holds true for your body weight, so don't let extra pounds get added on along





with some extra years. If you happen to overdo it on the trail, ibuprofen is a relatively safe and effective aid for pain and swelling.

In short, know your limitations and hike or backpack areas which match your current level of abilities and fitness. But at the same time, don't feed into some manufactured Madison Avenue view which portrays only young and attractive people involved in outdoor activities like in some beer commercial. We are not all 25 and not all that good looking either. The good news is that backpacking and hiking is something we can enjoy for many years, well into our 70's and perhaps beyond. All of this is good common sense, but sometimes good sense is just not that common.

Sounds a bit depressing, yes I know. But being properly prepared and hiking smart could easily save your life. Why not look on the bright side of the Hiking Old(er) equation? As the natural aging process eventually decreases our physical ability, consider the potential increased mental health component of growing older.



When I was younger, I was sometimes guilty of seeing things as a competition, something I needed to win! Sorry, it all goes back to how we were raised and many of us were taught to strive to be a 'winner'. You know, if a 10 mile hike is good, 15 miles are better. Don't pay attention to the (extreme) heat or that pain in your chest. Faster is better! But is

it really? As we age, can we learn to get more out of hiking and backpacking, to better appreciate the experience? Today, we can all take advantage of new equipment and go as high tech as you like with wide ranging options in top quality boots, clothing, and gear. For example, I especially love my Garmin 62S GPS. It has greatly increased my on the

trail enjoyment as well as the downtime between hikes. Or you can just go old school and keep it simple. I still bring along a peanut butter sandwich as a trail snack just like when I was a kid, although now of course there are many quality high energy alternatives.

Hiking Old(er) has given me a chance to realize some of my past mistakes and an opportunity to learn from them.

Hiking Old(er) has given me a chance to realize some of my past mistakes, and an opportunity to learn from them. These days I do better at taking my time. Miles don't mean nearly as much as living for the moment, and enjoying the experience. I love to hike in some remote area, and get the special feeling of seeing something new or unexpected. It could be anything, as long as I appreciate the time spent on the trail. I (for the most part) gave up

backpacking some years ago and now stick to hiking, mainly with my Newfoundland canine companion Maximus. This allows me to spend more time doing what I enjoy most, and get the most of my always limited free time. Nothing more complicated to it. Others will have different feelings on this, and should follow their own hearts. I wouldn't want it any other way!

There is also the ultimate Golden Ticket, the Big Enchilada; "Retirement" to consider and perhaps dream about. I'm not there yet (and work is still fun and rewarding for me at least), but the idea of having additional free time to be able to plan hikes and maybe get back into backpacking is an exciting proposition. Perhaps time may now be spent passing on our love of the trail to a younger generation, many who have grown up not knowing the wonder of the outdoors.

What about a trail maintenance weekend or two? Perhaps it's time to give back a little more. I believe I can even now hear the Mark Twain National Forest calling my name.

To me, Hiking Old(er) is a state of mind. It's a chance to reflect and learn from past backpacking and hiking trips while still embracing new, forward looking ideas. Inner demons from younger days have been dealt with, exorcised, and left behind literally in the dust. My preferred therapy treatmentwhy hiking of course!

So backpack a favorite mountain trail or hike a new woodland adventure. Dawn is on the horizon, bringing hope of spring and adventures to come. Don't let a bit of grey or white hair hold you back. I'll meet you early this weekend at the trailhead! Hiking Old(er) is something I'm still learning about. How many hikes, how many miles do any of us have left? No one knows! I do know I'm going to enjoy every moment of TrailGroove I possibly can. ❖

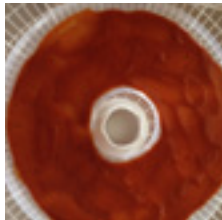




By doing a little preparation at home, you can bring your favorite sauces on the trail with you. This is a simple BBQ dinner that is a welcome end to a long day of hiking.

Ingredients:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Dehydrated BBQ Sauce (see below) | Extras such as: |
| Freeze-Dried Chicken or Beef | Olive Oil Packet |
| Water | Cheese |
| Tortillas or Bread | Dehydrated Veggies (Onions, Mushrooms...) |



At Home - Preparation ~ 5 hours

The hardest part about this meal is dehydrating your BBQ sauce... which is not difficult at all, but it can take some time. Luckily, a dehydrator with a sauce/fruit spread tray does all the work. Just spread a thin layer on each tray and dry this sauce at 140F degrees for 5 hours (may vary depending on your dehydrator & the current humidity). When dry, cool, then break into small "chips". Place sauce chips, chicken, and any dehydrated veggies into a ziploc bag.

At Camp - Cooking Time ~ 5 minutes

Boil the water, then add chicken, sauce, and any veggies. Stir well and let sit until sauce chips & chicken is fully hydrated. Add oil or cheese if desired. Serve on a tortilla, roll, or eat with a spork. Remember it's better to add too little water & have to add more than to add too much at first... unless you like BBQ Chicken soup.

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The Drive Home: What Lurks Beneath

I started to wonder if the map was right, or maybe the magnetic field of the earth had pulled a 180 since we'd left for the trailhead. "Hang on!" Jen shouted ahead to me. I turned around to find her entangled in briars, their thorns doing their best to block any passage. Carefully we worked to untangle her legs, not without each receiving a few small battle wounds in the process. With the patience of a herding dog waiting for a member of the herd to make a wrong move, Layla stood close by until we'd cleared the debacle. Somehow with 4 paws and no shoes, she was able to traverse through the briars

seemingly without incident. It was a late Friday evening in the Deam Wilderness of Indiana, and we'd both left work early in an attempt to stretch the weekend as long as we could. We were hunting for an offtrail pond – or at least I was – In the fading evening light. Jen thought we should just camp anywhere. But the pond! In my mind, we had to get there. "It can't be much farther, I'm sure it's beautiful and I bet no one has been there in years." I said optimistically. "Who knows what we'll find?" The weather was cloudy, humid, the earth and leaves soft under our feet. The pond was about 2 miles in a straight line

from where we'd left the trail, but we'd zigzagged along the way to avoid the larger briar patches, and to find routes up and down ravines where the soft ground was always on the edge of giving way under your feet. My back faced the general direction that we needed to travel as I faced Jen and pleaded my case about the pond. Just when I thought I'd convinced her to continue, she asked me to turn around. 50 feet in front of us a Striped Skunk ambled along, rooting among the forest floor for dinner. Or perhaps, breakfast? We watched the skunk and kept discussing our options, but we didn't have much time in the fading light.

It was early spring, and as the sun set somewhere behind the clouds of an overcast sky the forest came alive with sound. Not only with the soft sound of a skunk's footsteps among wet leaves, it's raised tail brushing amongst the higher brush... but the forest also came alive with the vibrant sounds of insects in the treetops above us, and the high pitched call of the Spring Peeper Frog in the distance pierced through the night. Dozens of them. Frogs – That must be the pond, I thought. I put the map and compass away, we donned our headlamps and simply followed the sounds of the night, circumventing the skunk on its nightly rounds and the call of the frogs became our only directional guide. And soon we found the pond, a small pond you could easily toss a rock across from any direction. We'd been traversing through a deciduous hardwood forest to get there, but as we circled the pond searching for a suitable place to setup the tent, we found a small grove of pines to the north a few hundred

feet from the water's edge. Damp leaves under our feet were replaced with a cushion of needles, and soon we had our shelter setup and ready for the night. It began to rain.

"Wow, this site is perfect. And great timing, at least we found it before the rain." Jen said as we released our sleeping bags from the confines of their stuff sacks, and unrolled our sleeping pads inside the tent. The briars had beat us up a bit, but nothing that wouldn't heal in due time. Layla quickly jumped inside from the cover of the vestibule and settled into her usual corner, eyes almost immediately half closed. Normally we don't cook near our campsite, but for a change we weren't in bear country on this trip. We whipped up a one pot meal on the canister stove, the stove and meal simmering an arm's length outside the door of the tent, the sound of rain drops pinging against the metal lid. Occasionally we'd stretch out from the tent into the rain for a quick stir, then retreat until everything finally rehydrated enough to eat. Dehydrated vegetables were still a bit al dente, but palatable, and we were hungry.

There's not much to do during a rainy night on a backpacking trip, no fire, no TV... so after dinner we lay on our sleeping pads, headlamps as low as they would go, and listened to the rain beat against the roof, the sound at times trying to find a rhythm. You could see each drop hit through the fabric, exploding into smaller droplets, which all eventually gathered themselves and streaked in sudden rushes down the sidewall of the tent. Without the distractions of modern conveniences,



it all becomes hypnotizing and through infrequent conversation, we both drifted off to sleep.

“There’s something under the tent!” Jen said. My eyes opened, I’d drifted off with my headlamp still on, I looked at the roof of the tent and then remembered where I was. What? Leaves, ground? I thought. I was tired from the drive and the hike, just wanted sleep. Reluctantly I unzipped my sleeping bag and sat up to see what the fuss was about. “Look!” Jen pointed to the tent floor. And it began to move. Underneath the floor of the tent something crawled, a snake? A mouse? With only a thin nylon shield between us and the source, we could only guess. Jen huddled on her sleeping pad. I put my rain gear and shoes on, then exited the tent, headlamp in hand. I needed to re-tension the guylines anyway. Jen wasn’t sure if it was safer outside or inside. As I cautiously lifted a corner of the tent and shined my light beneath the floor it quickly became apparent what we were dealing with. “Wow, come check this out! It’s a salamander!” I said. Jen exited the tent as I reached down to rescue the seemingly wayward amphibian, a pretty blue-grey creature with a couple dozen bright yellow spots. Growing up in a near bone-dry portion of Texas, this was something I’d never seen before, at least not outside of a field guide, a textbook, or on Wikipedia. Jen, now with her shoes and rain gear back on, joined me to check out the find. Uninterested, Layla stayed in the tent, content to rest her paws. “That is cool, he’s kinda cute but gross at the same time” Jen said. Almost tame, the salamander contentedly sat in my hand as we fumbled

for the camera and tried to get a good shot at night, and in the rain. But our camera wasn’t waterproof and we didn’t want to ruin the salamander’s night, so we set it free after a few quick shots 30 feet away. It paused for a moment, then slowly but steadily it began to crawl in the general direction of the pond. After a mandatory hand washing order from Jen we dove back in the tent, anxious to crawl back in our now cool sleeping bags and happy that we’d been able to rescue the woodland creature. We settled into our sleeping bags and turned off our headlamps.

That’s when the assault began. Now the tent floor rose in not one, but two... three...four places. We couldn’t move. I shined the light on the mesh side of the tent closest to me and only the glinty eyes of a salamander stared back at me, its hand grasping at the noseeum mesh that surrounded us. I unzipped the tent... “No leave it zipped!” Jen cinched the hood of her sleeping bag closed with her inside, just in case. I swept the beam of my headlamp over the forest floor. There must have been hundreds, thousands? The salamanders crawled towards us on top of the forest floor, or within it. Used to living underground and among rocks and logs, crawling under a tent floor posed no barrier to these beasts. As they passed us by, more came, all travelling downhill towards the pond as if drawn by some invisible force, crawling over or under anything in their path. I wasn’t sure how many were rising from directly beneath us and how many simply saw us as an inconvenience along their route. At any given point in time, there must have been half a dozen under the floor, only to be

replaced by half a dozen more after they'd left. I stepped outside to fully appreciate the spectacle, stepping carefully. We discussed the issue through the tent; Jen's voice muffled as she was now buried within the confines of her sleeping bag in fear, but we determined that while on the creepy side, the movement under the tent posed no threat. I crawled back inside, trying to avoid any bump and ripple in the tent floor that might be a salamander, and doing our best to block out any sounds of rustling nearby, we both managed to somehow eventually catch a few hours of sleep.

At some point during the night the rain stopped, and we woke to cloudy skies. No trace of the event from last night could be seen, we'd made it. "Did that really happen?" I asked Jen as we fired up the stove for coffee and tea. "I was afraid to move all night...I think I barely slept" she replied. I poured hot water for her tea and mixed my coffee to the right consistency. I cradled the warm cup with my hands and joked, "Probably should have just packed the tarp to save some weight...That tent is on the heavy side." Jen wasn't amused. This was definitely one trip where having a shelter with a real floor and a completely enclosed space made the difference – Otherwise an evacuation may have been required.

Over the next 2 days we explored more of the Deam Wilderness, hunting down forgotten homesteads, secret caves, a rickety fire tower, and did our best to stay dry during a weekend of cloudy skies and rain. We stayed at another site on the second night, but not a single additional

salamander did we see. And none have I seen since in fact, perhaps we experienced a lifetime's share of sightings in one night. All we saw was the occasional woodpecker hunting among the tree trunks by day, and all we heard was the sound of a solitary owl by night.

Later we'd learn that once a year, usually during a single rainy early spring night, the Spotted Salamander rises from its usual

underground habitat and in a mass migration they travel to a nearby pond, most likely the same pond they were born in, where eggs are laid and a new generation begins. I guess we happened to be in the right place at the right time. Or maybe the wrong time? Still not sure. One salamander is an intriguing find, 2 quite interesting, and once you get to 3 you definitely have company. But hundreds and thousands? Without a doubt however,

it's one of the most interesting wildlife encounters I've ever experienced. I'm not sure if anyone's been to the hidden pond since our fateful spring trip several years ago, and I'm not sure if we'll ever make it back. But if we do I'll probably double check the forecast, the integrity of our shelter, and without a doubt, we'll be leaving the tarp in charge of the gear closet while we're gone. ❖







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

- Charles A. Lindbergh



Thanks for Reading Issue 7

Check out our next issue
(available in May) at:

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