



TrailGroove™

Issue 8 - May/June 2013

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A special thank you to our contributors for this issue: Tim Eisemann, Ted Ehrlich, Wallace Hunter, Adrienne Marshall, David Cobb, Brett Roberts and Claire Murdough.

Photo: Brett Roberts. Red Rock Canyon, CA.

A person is standing on a large, rounded rock formation in a desert landscape. The rock is light-colored with some reddish-brown staining. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants, and is pointing towards the sky. The background shows a vast desert with more rock formations and a blue sky with white clouds.

Editor's Note

A few weeks ago travelling anywhere in Wyoming required a break between snow storms dumping feet of snow, and now it's 80 degrees and with a forecast calling for sunscreen and streams high with snowmelt. The trees are showing signs of green again, and it's probably safe to say that spring is now in full swing. While some destinations are close to becoming a bit on the hot side to enjoy as you head south, others are just beginning to tease you at elevation as you make your way north. Either way, it's that time of year where there's little excuse not to hike.

In this issue we'll check out backpacking in Tasmania, with scenery that you'd expect from nowhere else, and if you enjoyed Ted Ehrlich's take on Zion in Issue 7, he's backpacking Pike's Peak this time around. Wallace Hunter recounts what it's like to hike 1500 miles of the Appalachian Trail, and if you've been looking for something new to try, Adrienne Marshall takes us through recording your trail memories not with photos, but with watercolors. We'll take a look at 8 lightweight comfort items that might turn a good trip into a great one, and just in time for spring, David Cobb with tips on making the most out of those spring flower shots and opportunities that now abound. We review an interesting new canister stove from Soto, and round things out with my account of a past trip in the Wind River Range – With a whole lot more along the way. As always, your opinion is highly appreciated. Feel free to let us know what you thought about the articles and Issue 8 over on the [TrailGroove Forum](#) or shoot us an [Email](#) anytime –

Thanks for reading and enjoy!
- Aaron & Jen

Photo: Ted Ehrlich

Contribute



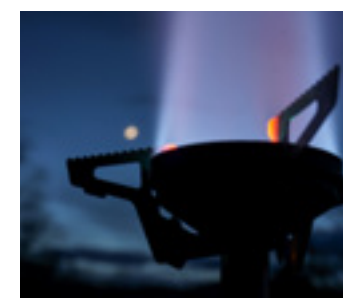
Photograph: Brett Roberts. Red Rock Canyon, CA

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

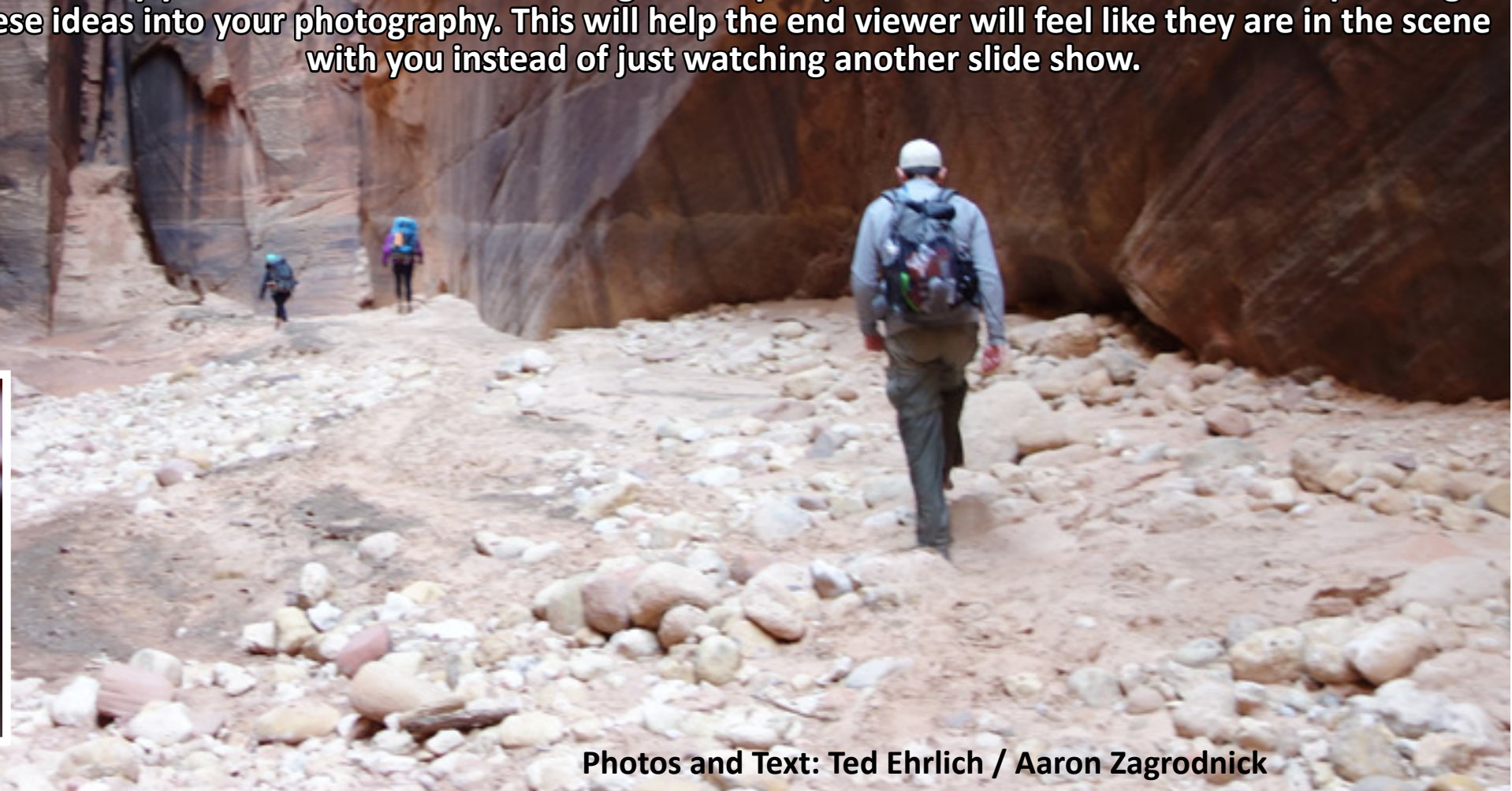
★☆☆☆☆ Poor

Random Trail Tip: In the Element

When hiking in a group, there is a time and a place for posed photos. However, you can easily make your photos a bit more creative by allowing people to act normal around you. There are several ways to do this. The first is just by letting people adjust to your presence with a camera. This may take 5 minutes; it might take an hour or two. People will pretend to be shy or make odd faces when they know they are being photographed, and will not give off the same body language. By letting them get used to it and essentially ignoring you, you can get better, more natural looking photos of others in your group. A very wide angle lens will help you achieve this even more since they won't even think they are in the frame.

Sometimes hiding the camera or carefully taking candid photos will also work too. Shooting photos from the waist will keep people from recognizing that you're actually photographing them until after the photo has been taken. A favorite technique is taking an over the shoulder photo. A tripod folded up makes a good handle to do this, and having a bit of your shoulder in the photo gives the viewer a sense of place that they are looking past you over your shoulder. Of course, make sure you're with a group of companions who won't mind and promise to delete any unflattering shots you might catch on accident.

Ultimately you will find that different angles and perspectives will be used while incorporating these ideas into your photography. This will help the end viewer will feel like they are in the scene with you instead of just watching another slide show.



Photos and Text: Ted Ehrlich / Aaron Zagrodnick

Jargon: FBC



Freezer Bag Cooking: A method for making meals on the trail where some type of plastic bag is used to contain the food and water (Usually hot) is added to both warm the meal and rehydrate dried ingredients. Heavier duty sealable freezer type plastic bags are often favored. Individual meals can be mixed in separate bags at home. On the trail just heat water, add to the bag, stir, and wait a few minutes until all ingredients have sufficiently rehydrated. During cold weather or with particularly hard to hydrate ingredients, a cozy (Some type of insulative material) can be added around the bag to retain heat and further “Cook” the meal.



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The Western Arthurs Traverse: Now and Then

Location: Southwest Tasmania

World Heritage Area, Australia

by Tim Eisemann

The Western Arthurs Range is the prominent range of the South West Tasmania World Heritage Area in Australia. It is a rugged and jagged wilderness area about 20km long, has 22 peaks around 1000m and 32 glacial tarns. It was extensively glaciated during recent ice ages and is heavily gouged to an almost continuous series of steep cirque headwalls (1). It has a sub Antarctic feel, windswept and populated with hardy ground hugging woody plants. The average night time temperature is around -5 o C. It has an annual rainfall of 2510 mm and it falls on 70% of days in a year. It can snow anytime of the year and suffers persistent strong southerly winds. It sits in cloud most of the year. The range was first traversed in 1960 and it is a small wonder they ever found this seemingly impassable steep and craggy skyline route. It is generally traversed from west to east.

In 1986, 3 mates and I attempted the Arthurs traverse in early autumn. We

carried 28kg packs each. As we came up on to the western end of the ridge we were hit by strong icy winds. Visibility dropped to 5 metres and the horizontal hail and rain continued on for the next 12 hours. We searched a trail of ghost like cairns, indistinct in the white out, eventually finding Lake Cygnet. We threw our tents up on the only flat ground we could find, a small beach at the head of the tarn, and took refuge. All night the wind and rain buffeted our thin membrane of nylon. By morning it had calmed. Things were looking up for a moment. My tent was dry but not so the other tent with a creek running through it (could have been me equally). Their down bags were history. We had little choice but to abandon the trip.

That mountain range played on my mind for many years. I wanted to go back. In late summer 2013 I did it again with my mate Nick as a big support.



We began preparations months before to find the best tent for the job. In the intervening years Tasmanian Parks Service had built some essential dry tent decks. This meant that a freestanding tent would be an advantage. We finally selected the Big Sky Revolution 2 person with solid wall inner. It weighs just 1.5 kg = 750grams per person for a free standing, 3+ season, 2 vents, dual doors and a generous vestibule each. More about that at the end.

The approach from Scott's Peak Dam was through an 11km trail of dodging deep mud holes (alternately to tentatively embrace the mud) to reach the base of Alpha Moraine - the accent to the western end of the ridge. Junction Creek is near the trail head and is a welcoming rest spot

despite looking a bit charred. There has been a long running drought here yet the creek runs with wild and amber (tannin) water -the best and sweetest tasting ever. It is a great place to de-mud shoes, socks and gaiters.

Just 3 weeks previous a bush fire had reached this point and turned south. The fire burnt out much of the wilderness valley to the south east of the Arthurs (the Pt Davy track) and even thrust up a southern gully to the foot of Lake Fortuna tarn.

Moraine A is the stiff climb. Up we went with 11 days of food and all the rest weighing in at an easy 13.5 kg each. It was 29degree C and the sun felt hot. The sky



was cloudless and blue. By 1/2 way up we hit our oxygen debt km. It was a good indication of how out of shape we were. We had to stop several times and deep breathe and rehydrate before we could proceed afresh.

Immediately on cresting the ridge a magnificent view opened before us- the southern ocean and Bathurst Harbour, and to the west, the giant (new, improved) Lake Pedder hydroelectric dam . In 1986 we saw nothing but rain and white out.

New track work greeted us so cleverly simple and permanent as large rocks can be- a single narrow file, half embedded, the faces perfect for feet. The work

had been carried out artfully. The trail channelled all foot traffic where once it fanned out on eroded myriad paths. All the scars have now healed with full plant cover.

The path lead over a gentle hill and crossed above Lake Fortuna. We could see the extent of the fire , that it had progressed 2/3 way to the ridge We had heard that an air lift rescue of walkers was commissioned. They knew 18 walkers were registered. They found 34 to be helicoptered out.

The ground cover at this western end was low and woody, a testament to the perpetual strong, cold winds that course

through here. But now wildflowers were in bloom here and there, while golden skink lizards sunbathed on the rocks. It felt a light and easy afternoon as we ambled along. Soon we began a steep descent into Lake Cygnet to make camp. The beaches were as remembered, but now there are tent decks built in the sloping scrub to

bring tents above the soak. The day was still warm so a dip in the pristine waters was welcome. As I sat in the tarn, I thought of the deep black water below and considered how it must be stratified. At its depth must be prehistoric water, laying there well before the first white folk came to Van Diemen's Land. Perhaps even some

ancient glacial waters, resting languidly.

It seems likely that even the first people aboriginals would not have ventured often to this ridgeline, for it is simply too inhospitable. We saw scarcely a mammal or bird the whole trip. Blood sucking flies however, buzzed us incessantly whenever

we stopped, as if we had a new fan club. But for now we had sunshine and clear skies, and camp seemed like home sweet home.

A fine morning greeted us on day 2. We set off for Lake Oberon, a mere 4.2 km away but a 3 hour walk. The next camp deck on was High Moor, a further 6 hours of tough and steep climbing. So we opted for an easy day.

The days walk brought us into progressively more steep and complex country. We took lunch on a rock by the shore of Square Lake, our bare feet soaking in the cool waters, and watching tadpoles grazing on the algae. Across the tarn an impressive rock headwall imposed, creating a right angle on 2 shores. Back on the trail, we had 2 steep climbs and descents, and were standing on a high shoulder with Lake Oberon far below. It is the largest of the tarns and was sitting serenely amongst the towering rock surrounds (cirque). The steep trail down had a short but simply astonishing rock stair - a work of art, courtesy of some unsung trail workers. We found a perfect camp on the tarn edge. Again a dip and refresh in the cool waters was called for. In the shallows I saw a local resident- a small crayfish that only lives here - nowhere else, just here. That night the starry southern sky opened in all its vastness. Laying on our backs in the black wilderness and gazing skywards, we noted in just 30 minutes - 5 satellites and 3 shooting stars - it is getting busy up there.







Day 3 started with a very steep climb out of the glacial basin and the steepness continued all day long. In places the trail dropped away suddenly, and 1- 2 or 3 metres below, the trail continued again. We stowed our walking poles in favour of free hands. The trail went through more sheltered areas and the surrounding bush became taller. A rich tapestry of diverse providence plants blanketed the landscape. We noted the soil profile common to the range. The top 400-500mm is a peaty soil sitting atop the rocky bones and was bound together by a thick matrix of root mat. It is so effective that we saw no natural erosion anywhere on this very steep terrain, nor a weed.

We missed a turn at one time and followed a well-worn trail down a steep gully toward a slippery precipice. Bugger! We carefully back pedalled and made it back to a juncture where the trail (secretly) proceeded sharp left over a big rock.

We crossed a high moor dotted with button grass and dropped down to a lower moor where the tent decks were. The sun was still hot and we were parched. A large rock sat next to a soak where we found welcome shade and water for an hour or so before moving to set up camp. By late afternoon clouds had begun to assemble in every direction and the wind picked up, strong and gusty. By nightfall, cloud descended over the range and it began to rain.

We woke to mist with 20 metre visibility. The sun was just beginning to rise so we thought it fitting to do some yoga sun salutations to urge it through the mist. Perhaps we were too hopeful. We packed up in a shower and stowed all without getting wet. It was my turn to carry the tent fabric, wet and soggy.

Today were the Beggary Bumps, a series of 6 jagged low peaks, tucked in close together. The distance to walk is a mere 3.8 km and it took us 5 tough hours. The path becomes (impossibly) complex and sharply steep. It winds through steep gullies, over rocky peaks or hugs precipitous contour walls. We go past many sheltered gullies - exquisite in their providence - moss and fern gardens with

water dripping everywhere. The vistas were all around but today obscured by mist. By late afternoon the cloud began slowly to lift.

On the narrow twisted trail, encumbered even by a small 47lt back pack (pulled in snug) , the close quartered scrub and rocks pressed in. We now have repairs to do on our UL packs. The 2, 3 and sometimes 4 metre 'steps' became more common so technique developed to spin and drop over the edge. Just find one good handhold and over you go. Amazingly, every climb has numerous exposed tree root like firm handles, perhaps dug out by fingernails of grasping climbers. Root and branch holds were all burnished by countless gripping hands. We got into a mindful and

enjoyable rhythm of turning and dropping over, with never a miss-step. On 2 occasions we had to pack haul through an overhead boulder hole and down a sheer 4 metre chimney . It was the most exhilarating hiking experience I have ever had.

As we emerged onto a more sane landscape, the bush also changed. Young King Billy Pines and Yucca trees began to appear and grew more common the closer we came to Haven Lake.

By the time we reached Haven Lake, the cloud had lifted. Nick loves to wash each day so off he went and jumped in the cold tarn. That lead to a chilly evening for him- the water must have sucked all his heat. Here we saw the first mammals. Some native mice (200mm long) darted furtively around as we prepared food. Later we realised they were casing the joint for a midnight raid. We kept our food in the tent that night. In the morning we found they had silently eaten through the tub floor in 3 places, through a cuben fibre stuff sack, though a zip lock plastic and finally through the muesli bar wrapper and ate half of it. Nothing else - just half the bar (plus all that synthetic chemistry - I hope they had a belly ache). In future I will use LOKSAKS to keep temptation from their sensitive noses.

Steep walking was the order of the morning. As we continued on we were nearing the trail juncture where Kappa Moraine offers a way off the range or continues on for 3 more days of steep, though less spectacular walking. On a steep descent some familiar sharp

twinges in my left knee reminded me of the hundreds of deep knee bends and lifts done. That knee has given me problems before, though not for a while. We discussed it over a nut bar and decided better to play safe. The poles came out immediately. Down we went for the long descent to the Arthur Plains. Vistas of the easterly range looked tempting, but it would have to wait for another day. The sun was hot and the landscape seemed stark. Dieback from *Phytophthora* fungal disease was evident here and there. I hope it never gets into the range. Once we hit the Arthur Plains we put on the K's along this narrow foot pad. Our poles beat out a rhythm and we hit 4.5 km/ hour for the 16 km march. We arrived at Junction Creek just ahead of a small group coming in to start. They had big packs with lots of stuff hanging off the outside. They looked at our packs (now down to 10kg) and were amazed. I think the subject of our packs might occupy their minds from time to time over the next 5 or so days.

I was greatly impressed with the sensitive trail work done. Beautiful stone work tied it to the landscape -it melds seamlessly. From each end of the traverse - Moraine Alpha and Kappa, the trail is well built to either side of the 2 big days in the middle. Here it is by a wish and a hope that the trail holds together. It would be a monstrously difficult undertaking to improve or repair. This mid-section would also be sheer hell to walk in strong rain – the trail would become a creek. Much of the trail is over rock so cairns are the only trail marker and these can be difficult to find in a whiteout. Snow would make it a huge challenge.



But we were blessed with wonderful blue skies for 4 of 5 days. And I'd love to go back again.

But Never Say Never. We met 2 Scottish guys at the camp before the trail. They set off 1 hour before us with 5 kg day packs, containing a bivvy, a summer sleeping bag, a litre of water and some biscuits. They had to be back in Hobart 3 days later. They did it in 2 days (as they said they would). We felt sure they would never make it. As we walked the trail I kept on marvelling at their ability to run through this (and wondered how many times they ended flat on their faces with bruised shins). Every mud hole held their deep foot imprint dead centre of the hole, as testament to

their technique. We discovered later that they were noted ultra-runners out of the tradition of fell running in Scotland.

Food

We opted to carry 11 days of food to keep our options open. Many groups can be rained in for a day or 2 plus we had the likelihood of going the extra 3 days. All our main meals were home cooked dehydrated food. Plenty of variety makes it much more appetising - chicken laksa, goat curry with rice, dhal with rice, sweet and sour beef stew, and the old reliable spaghettis bog. We always set these to rehydrate at lunch time. The big success for this trip was sprouted mung beans in a plastic bag. Two days before setting off, we set the beans to

soak. After that it was a rinse each day. The bag of sprouts was like a magic pudding - day by day the volume increased despite eating them by the handful. We really appreciated this living food. To help spice up lunch we had 2 dehydrated spreads - humus and basil pesto. When you first make these, hold back on the olive oil and add it before serving. Both reconstitute very well. I like to take about 250 ml of oil - great to add to any dish before serving.

We always brainstorm new ideas for the future. Burcher muesli is on the drawing board pre-set with dried yogurt and grated apple. I estimate a 50 gram dry weight will make a hearty nutritious breakfast.

The Tent

The Revolution is the easiest tent ever to put up and take down. Each end is subtly different so they have colour coded the pole tie outs. The floor is light weight and needs a footprint to preserve it. The internal height is great - I am 5'11" and never touched the ceiling. It is spacious inside and comfortable for two people.

There are 4 pockets - 2 each side and 6 ceiling loops. One of the pockets stress ripped the 2nd time we erected it. Perhaps the sewn tensions were too tight. The doors are well designed and it is easy to get in and out. There were two vestibules and two entrances which was great for 2 people. They are big enough to cook in with due care.

The inner doors have a closable mesh window at the top that is in line with fly vents either side. These are designed to

prevent condensation. Condensation was only a small problem. We accidentally discovered a better condensation foil. The inner has loops sewn in so we strung lines up for drying gear. I placed a microfiber towel length ways across the line above our heads to dry. The tent inner below the towel was completely free of condensation in the morning, despite our moisture rich breath all night long. The other end without the towel was quite wet. The microfiber is so hydrophilic; it just sucks all the condensation to itself (saves towelling it down in the morning).

The fly can be pitched alone if the pole corners are pegged down. This is a great feature in rain. Say you stop to make camp and it is raining. You can put the fly up, lay a groundsheet and hang out or cook with heaps of dry space. When you need to make the bedroom, push your gear to the vestibule and erect the inner all nice and dry. It clips in securely. Of course, the reverse is doable should you pack up in the rain. Normally the fly and inner pack together, making it a breeze to erect.

Ours experienced some strong gusty winds and seemed hardy challenged. We only had light rain so it was not challenged here either. The exoskeleton has a short 3rd lateral pole to add tension to the vestibule roof creating a sort of veranda. Arguably, an exoskeleton is not as strong as sleeved poles but the advantage is ease of set up.

It needs 4 pegs minimum to set up in average conditions. Storm guys can be deployed from 4 points.





Packs - the Gossamer Gear Gorilla 2012

This slim and compact 47 liter pack was great for this sort of walk/ climb/ scramble. The Dyneema 140 fabric stood up well to the general assault but the back mesh pocket suffered bad tearing. The harness system works well and is most comfortable. It carried the load exceptionally well. The sit pad is so handy and much used. I am so happy to prove that it can be stretched to 11 days. Some load lifters would be nice.

The Z Packs cuben fibre rain skirt

This fashion item was included because we wore shorts. We used it in rain and after, when the scrub was wet. Our rain jackets - OR Helium and Montbell, are both shorter than heavier jackets but they sit easily over the skirt. The skirt kept the top of legs and shorts dry and our bottoms warm. It is a lovely 50 gram UL solution for wet weather. ❖



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PIKES PEAK OR BUST

Location: Front Range, Colorado

by Ted Ehrlich

Pikes Peak soared above Colorado Springs as we drove towards the downtown area.

As an ultra prominent peak, and one of the eastern most peaks in Colorado, it is easily visible for hundreds of miles on a clear day. The east face of the peak is massive, and the east face route of Pikes Peak, known as the Barr Trail, was our objective this weekend. The weather looked great except for the wind, which fortunately was coming out of the west, meaning the mountain would be our wind-block most of the trip. The mountain had also received about six inches of new snow earlier in the week. Did I mention it was February?

My friend Steve and I had not been on a trip since New Year's, and our last successful summit together had been just after Thanksgiving, so we were overdue for a good trip. We had decided to get a calendar winter ascent, and to do it in style by backpacking the peak and spending the night near tree line. Doing the Barr Trail had been a goal for the winter because it is the longest standard route of any of the

14ers in Colorado. Gaining almost 7500 vertical feet and a round trip distance of 26 miles, it's a long trip; however it is considered a technically easy route that does not require any scrambling. The winter also meant solitude on the mountain. It is one of the most visited mountains in Colorado, and that weekend the summit gift shop would be closed, along with the road, and the train was only running part of the way up the mountain.

As we pulled into the trailhead and started up at one in the afternoon, I realized we would definitely have some company for the first mile. Because we figured it would cut two miles off of the trail and it would be a good experience, Steve and I elected to start out the climb with "The Incline". The Incline is a popular day hike where we ascend over 2000 vertical feet in a mile, climbing up a makeshift stair of railroad ties. The Incline used to be a railroad until it was damaged in 1990. It eventually

RIGHT: "The Cirque", an overlook near the summit of Pike's Peak.

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became a cult hit by being the steepest mile to hike in Colorado. As of February 1st, the Incline was “legalized” by working out an agreement between the private land owners, the forest service, and the government of Manitou Springs, which finally removed the no trespassing sign. As we started up, with our overnight backpacks and zero degree sleeping bags we would need for the chilly night at 12,000 feet, most of the other hikers around us had little more than a water bottle in hand, hiking up in shorts and t-shirts.

The first mile was hard, with us finishing in just under an hour. There was very little snow on the ground, and most of the snow

on the incline had been compacted into ice. After reaching the top, we took a short break to eat and enjoy the view of the city from the top. Shouldering our packs again, we started up the much more relaxed path that wound through the pine forest. Unlike most of the 14ers in Colorado, which start near or above timberline, all but the upper three miles of the Barr Trail are below tree line. The crowds disappeared as we kept hiking up, only meeting a handful of people.

We noticed one of the solo hikers heading down had snowshoes on, and we stopped him to ask about conditions near the top. He said he had broken trail all the way to the summit earlier that day, and the



snowshoes were overkill for the amount of snow he encountered. We knew he was right, with Pikes Peak receiving less than 24 inches of snow to date, most of it being blown off or melted by the warm weather the Front Range had been seeing that winter. I did not anticipate seeing more than ankle deep snow at any point. After 4 miles of hiking above the Incline, we found the next landmark, Barr Camp. Barr Camp is a year round bunkhouse, and is the only source of water in the winter. The stream that normally flows near the camp freezes and the girls that run the camp spend hours every day chopping the ice away to keep it running for their guests and others that use the trail. After filling our water bottles, we thanked them, and continued

hiking. Since we started late in the day, the shadow of the mountain already covered us, and we slowly watched the shadow move eastward as we climbed higher into the forest. Finally, just after nightfall, we found our stopping point; the A-frame. We had covered approximately 5,500 feet and eight miles in six hours.

We found the A-frame empty, which is unheard of during the summer. The A-frame had been constructed by the Forest Service to be a storm shelter and overnight hut for people like us. They knew what they were doing, because there is an incredible view. Just above tree line, Colorado Springs was sprawled out below us in a grid of twinkling streetlights.







The solid A-frame held off the wind quite nicely, giving us a fairly quiet night, staying warm as the temperature dipped to ten degrees. When my alarm went off in the morning, I rolled over to find an orange light surrounding the hut. As we crawled into the opening of the A-frame, the entire mountain was glowing; a phenomenon known as alpenglow. About twenty minutes later, the sun peaked up over the edge of Kansas, and lit up the east face. After enjoying the sunrise for a few minutes, we rolled up our belongings and stored them in the A-frame, and continued on with only our summit packs.

ABOVE: The A-Frame.

RIGHT: Steve on the Summit.

UPPER RIGHT: Ted, Along the Last Section of the Trail.



We still had 3 miles and 2000 feet to go until we hit the summit. The snow depth was mostly shallow and the hiker from the previous day had given us a good path to follow, hiking around the occasional drift. After many switchbacks, peeking into “The Cirque” and climbing the 16 Golden Stairs, we finally found ourselves at the summit. True to the weather forecast, the winds were blasting out of the west, rushing across the top. We snapped a few pictures, peered off the north side into “The Bottomless Pit” area where many of the spring mountaineering routes exist, and enjoyed the fleeting moment where we were alone on the top of the peak.

Tired of the wind, we hiked back down into the calm of the east face, with 13 miles to go to get back to the trailhead. As we

made our way back towards the A-frame, we found 3 more hikers that had stayed at Barr Camp working their way up through our tracks. After getting back to the A-frame, we repacked our bags with the items we didn't bring to the summit and ate an early lunch. Back down the mountain we flew, stopping again at Barr Camp to refill our water and goof around on the frozen stream. As we worked our way down the mountain, the snow we had been growing accustomed to disappeared, and the mountain warmed up more and more as we descended. After retracing our steps through the forest, we found

ourselves at the top of the incline again and the crowds reappeared. They ask for people to only go uphill on the incline, so we descended the Barr trail, working our way down as fast as we could; avoiding the spots where the snow was trampled into black ice. We made it back to the car around 3pm, giving us a total hiking time of just over 12 hours, and 26 hours since we had left the car. We both congratulated each other, feeling great about another fantastic trip. As we drove out of Manitou Springs back to Denver, the shadow of the mountain began to creep eastward as it had done the day prior. ❖

BELOW: Rockin' it out with summit fever.

RIGHT: Descending through the snowy forest.

NEXT PAGE: Timberline on the East Face of Pike's Peak.





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Interview: Hiking the Appalachian Trail with Wallace Hunter

In March of 2011, Wallace and Annette Hunter set out from Springer Mountain to hike the Appalachian Trail. TrailGroove Magazine recently had the opportunity to ask Wallace and Annette about their journey. This is their story.

TrailGroove: Do you remember the first time you heard about the A.T.?

Wallace: I honestly don't remember the first time I heard about the A.T. After having travelled through Europe in most of 2007, my wife and I developed a real desire to get out. We learned a lot from a book by Rolf Potts called "Vagabonding" before leaving. The book affirmed our deepest desires of a life that embraced long term travel as the ultimate goal. Our first long term trip cemented our new lifestyle. After that we truly understood the idea of leaving it all behind, pursuing our dreams and doing what we would describe as living life to the fullest. The time spent in Italy, Holland, Germany, and various other Western European countries sealed our passion for adventure. When I returned to the working world after travelling for 7 months, it was very difficult readjusting. Traveling had changed me; my values, perspectives, beliefs and politics. I felt alien and I felt that I had a hard time fitting in or being accepted for who I had become.

TrailGroove: When did you decide to hike the A.T.?

Wallace: After being back in society for nearly 2 years, in 2009 it became clear to me that hiking was the way to get OUT! I was working everyday at AT&T in Schaumburg, Illinois with Aaron before he and Jen left to start TrailGroove. I realized through our discussions that I was becoming more and more interested in long distance hiking. The more I researched and the more I learned about the A.T.; the greater my desire became to hike. So much so, that it began to outweigh my desire for

the stability of employment. I took that to heart and felt the similar push that I'd had in the past when my wife and I decided to resign and backpack through Europe for most of 2007. I searched inside and was driven by my passion to seek the solitude and peace of the wild and the hike itself, rather than a desk job that paid well. We saved over time and by 2010 we were planning on doing the A.T.

TrailGroove: You left what many people would consider a great corporate job to make the hike happen. How hard was that to do? Any regrets?

Wallace: Looking back there was never a thought that staying in the job I had at the time could even compare to the fulfillment I have lived by hiking the AT. I cannot think of any regrets to this day. I think the regret would come today if I had chosen NOT to hike. I would truly regret that for sure. I can think back on every moment of that trip and truly say today that a dream was realized. There is no way that I would trade one day on the trail for any day back here. I remember stopping along the trail one day to say to Annette, "Do you remember how we envisioned we would feel when we got to the trail?" She looked at me and said, "Yes." I then asked her, "Are things living up to your expectations?" She whole heartedly agreed that this was the right thing to do. It is extremely exhilarating to experience the difference of the working world and the hiking world. It is a true revelation that can only be discovered by stepping outside of the matrix. That is the best way I can describe it.



TrailGroove: After the decision and months of preparation, when did hiking the trail become “Real” for you? Was there a certain moment when the enormity of what you were setting out to do really hit home?

Wallace: As the days grew closer I began to feel uneasy. There were times when I would be hit with a wave of emotion about the depth of what I was about to undertake. These moments would take my breath away and my mind would race aimlessly searching for the adequate words to describe my feelings. As it turns out the best way to describe it would be just positive anxiety. It was the rush of empowerment I felt at the thought of living by my own rules. These rules made me happy to the core; especially the realization that I was being myself most of all. If I had to narrow it down to a specific event, I would focus on the last day of my job, when I got home. I sat on the porch and did the video about how I had just finished my last day. I was drinking a beer, sitting on the front porch and watching the birds. I needed to calm my inner self. I was really going to do the A.T. This was a truly monumental moment. The feelings and

emotions overwhelmed me. The thought of being true to who I was inside was something I could not compare to anything in life to this point. All the preparations to this moment seemed surreal, however that day they started to come true. I was scared, anxious, nervous, excited, there was so much emotion it cannot be described. It only got better from that point. What I would point out at this time is that the tensions, emotions, excitement factor... all of these things intensified as the time to hike grew closer. There were times like stepping off of the bus in Dahlonega, GA increased my anticipation and imprinted lasting memories in my mind. Even though the hike had not started, the idea of realizing that I was living the life I aspired to have, made me feel incredible inside. No one can ever take that away.

TrailGroove: You started on the AT as a straight through northbound hike from Springer Mountain. However, at some point you flip-flopped and started hiking south from Maine. At what point of the trail did you make this decision, and what was the reasoning behind the change of plans?

Wallace: The reason for the flip flop choice had a lot to do with Speedy G’s heart surgery that was done about 5 months before the hike. Speedy was always active, but due to her limitations before the surgery was never able to push herself at competitive level athletically. After the surgery she was officially cured of her condition called Supraventricular Tachycardia, however this was all new territory and we were not sure how hard or fast she could push herself. This changed



*LEFT: Wallace Hunter (a.k.a. SupaChef) at Springer Mountain.
ABOVE: Annette (a.k.a. Speedy G) in the Smoky Mountains.*

our expectations we had going into this type of trip. We realized that had the surgery not been an option we may have never been able to take on such physical challenge. We knew then that the hike for us would be about taking it easy and cherishing every moment. It was not about 2,000 miles for us rather living our lives on the trail. We spent a lot of time focusing on relaxing and enjoying fellow hikers’ company. Life along the trail to us was about being happy together and basking in the awareness that we had once again purchased our freedom; our time was our own not our employers’. As we started to

get close to Harper’s Ferry, we knew we would have to make a decision. We knew that we would NEVER make it to Katahdin before winter, and that we had to flip-flop to make the whole hike come together. It had taken us 4 months to get half way, 1019 miles. This seemed monumental to us at the time; however in hindsight we know we were physically capable of keeping up a much more grueling schedule and covering much more ground in less time. Instead we chose to goof off and live it up along the trail. We stopped in at many hostels and hotels, imbibed with our hiking buddies and shared some great

times. I would never trade more miles for the experiences we had or the people that we met along the way. However, we had used up valuable time that needed to be refocused, and we knew it. We decided to flip-flop at that time. We had been discussing it for about a month at that point. Others we met along the trail had done the same thing. One couple loved

Woods Hole Hostel (Virginia) so much that they flipped as soon as they left from the hostel. They wanted to end their hike at Woods Hole because it is that amazing.

TrailGroove: If you had to do it over again, do you think a northbound or southbound hike of the A.T. is best? Or do you feel that the flip-flop method is king?

Wallace: If I were to do the hike again, I think that I would say Northbound is king. The amount of people, the excitement level and the parties that are available for you to enjoy...it is not to be missed. Definitely don't forget the TRAIL MAGIC along the way also. When we started the southbound part of our hike in the northern states there was little to no trail

magic. The zest for hikers was different. The Northerners were welcoming of hikers, grateful for their patronage and happy to help with a ride to town and the like, however the gifts and extreme graciousness of trail magic were not the same. I think any trip along the A.T. is an amazing one, but for sure hike your own hike, and enjoy every second of every moment. Even if you find yourself sick and hiking 15 miles a day for 3 days in a row! Yes, that happened to me.

TrailGroove: If I'm not mistaken you used mainly a mail drop focused approach for resupply. How did this work out? Would you utilize this strategy again or switch over to a buy as you go approach instead?

Wallace: Mail drops are most certainly the best way to prepare your food ahead of time. You can truly construct an unlimited variety of things. You can make FBC or freezer bag cooking meals, and never have to do dishes! I felt that our journey with food, taught us a lot about the science of calories. I have a greater understanding of calorie density and food quality overall, that I lacked before this trip. I also deeply analyzed the foods that were available on the trail at local retailers. It was a disgrace. Most hikers subsisted on Ramen, instant potatoes, Mac & Cheese, summer sausage, cheese, and oatmeal. I was just blown away at what people were consuming daily and repeatedly.

LEFT: Wallace and Annette Hunter hiking in Maine.





ABOVE: Eric (a.k.a. LaLa)

RIGHT: Wallace and Annette in Maine.

As you know, my trail name is SupaChef. I was given that name because of the time, techniques, and personal design of our cuisine. We calculated calories and gave certain meals unique names. We developed techniques to steam certain things like omelets and pancakes without ever having to do dishes or scrape/scrub pots or pans. I recall I was steaming an omelet at the shelter approximately 15.8 miles into the trail, at Gooch Mountain Shelter. This one guy named La La (Eric) was taken aback by my techniques. He was surprised by the fact that we had bought a whole box of McDonalds Salsa packets and included them into our packaged meals. One meal we had planned used the following ingredients: powdered eggs, freeze dried chicken, peppers, onions, and of course the still sealed salsa packets. Once the omelet was steamed, I popped it out, cut it in half, put it on 2 tortillas, and Speedy G and I feasted. Then LaLa said out loud, “Oh man you are the SupaChef! I mean you are so cool, you are cooler than super, you are SUPA!” From that point on, that



was my trail name. I was definitely proud of the work I had done to earn it.

TrailGroove: As a husband and wife team, the two of you were together nearly 24/7. Did this ever place a strain on the relationship? Any tips for other couples out there regarding the best way to make a hike like this work?

Wallace: Everyone is susceptible to not getting along at times. Regardless of whether they were a couple or just hiking partners there is definitely a threshold when things can go south. There were tactics that we implemented that helped maximize our experience.

Firstly we learned that as is the case some times, one of you will probably be faster than the other. This can be a great exercise in patience for the faster hiker. We found that splitting our essential gear was necessary in reminding the faster hiker in this case (me) not to move too far ahead. It also reassured Speedy G that she was not being left too far behind. She kept the water filter and I knew if I ran ahead that I would soon need her for more water. Another benefit to the gear sharing was that if you did have a disagreement you were more prone to work things through and keep your cool because you were dependent upon each other.

Another lesson we learned was to develop communication tactics that we still use today. When Speedy and I hiked on the trail, we began using the MARCO POLO method. This is used when you are hiking along, and you need to check to see where your partner is in reference to you. So you scream loudly, “MARCO” and wait for the partner to answer back. When you hear the response, “POLO” then you had a general perspective of how far apart you were at that time. Especially towards the end of the day, this was a real big deal for us. It always helped me to slow down and wait to get water, or take a break. Sometimes if you called and heard no response... then you just wait and keep calling. This technique worked really well when we ran into the forest fire in Virginia. You could smell fire from a long way away, but as was the case most evenings this was a sign that you were getting closer to the shelter’s camp fire. This time though the smoke smell began getting more and more dense. As if it appeared out of nowhere, all of a sudden the forest around me was ablaze. There was a tree that was a few feet in diameter and was hollow. This was engulfed in flames and you could see the inside roaring with heat. Dead and hollow, about 12 feet tall at this time, the flames were shooting 3 feet out of the top of the tree! All around the fire was spreading on both sides of the trail. At this moment, I called out to warn Speedy to move as fast as she could. She was probably about 2 football fields away. We needed to move quickly. The actual trail was free from fire, but there was no telling how long the path would be free. I turned on the camera and began filming the ordeal. The

hollow tree was very close to the trail and emanating a huge amount of heat. Speedy who was covered head to toe in flammable bug spray was not too keen on running past the flames. Needless to say she required some coaching and some colorful responses were recorded for YouTube! So communication between hiking partners is key. Always find a way to signal. Whether it is by voice or a whistle, whatever works for you. Remember, hiking apart is basically the way that you spend time alone each day, and then you are not together every day all day.

There are so many couple/partner

BELOW: McAfee Knob, Virginia.



scenarios that you might encounter, so I cannot cover them all. The two mentioned here were necessary in keeping the peace. But if nothing else, you need to be in a mindset that you are a team and that maintaining a positive attitude and experience is one of the biggest factors to success. If you lose interest in working together, expect things to fall apart.

TrailGroove: Any part of the trail that really stood out as a “Can’t miss section”?

Wallace: The southern portion of the trail holds a special place in my heart. It is

mostly because of the sheer amount of people and excitement in the hiking community when the season starts. By the time that we walked into Mountain Crossings (just 30 miles in) we had seen trail magic. At various points all through the south there were Angels that helped and provided trail magic. The magic consisted of various things. Sometimes it was soda and chips, and other times it was fresh cooked meals at a road crossing. I recall Silent Paul and what he did for us. In the video you see on our blog, Silent Paul was parked and providing a full meal to any thru-hiker that came to him for nourishment. South bounders told us of what waited ahead. This built up some serious anticipation for 2 days before we even reached him. The night before everyone was so excited to reach the road crossing just so that we could encounter the man named “Silent Paul” and have him provide full-fledged breakfast for our weakened bodies. It was like Christmas, everyone wanted to get to sleep, just to wake up and get to the FOOD! I also recall coming across a cooler in Virginia one morning and opening it to find beer and soda. We came across a cooler at about 9:00 am. There was ice cold YeungLing inside! We took some and a 20 oz soda to split. We walked on, but by 10:30 or so, we decided that we had to have those beers and we decided to eat lunch. There was so much excitement associated with the south. The hostels and various towns along the way were something. Remember that we did not finish the whole trail, but I can for sure tell you that the north did not have nearly ANY concessions for hikers like the south provided.

TrailGroove: What would you say is the most difficult section of the trail?

I was truly challenged by the terrain of Maine & New Hampshire. The climbs, the bouldering, the roots, and moisture made getting to that next step challenging sometimes. Katahdin for sure was extremely challenging. Not so much for me, but for Speedy G who was much shorter and not able to climb the way I, as a taller person, could. I would say for sure that Maine was the most challenging, especially the part known to all as “Mahoosuc Notch”. It typically takes anyone 3 hours to travel 1 mile. The terrain was very, very challenging. Speedy G had left and I was on my own that morning. I managed to travel the whole mile in a much faster time than I should have (SOBO or backwards), in the rain and cold. The extreme temperature changes added to the challenge. There were times when you would drop down into a low point and the temperature would drop 10 – 20 degrees. You would find large chunks of snow/ice down inside these holes. And if you dropped something in certain “cracks” you were probably never getting it back. I was awestruck by this amazing ecosystem. You would climb out of the whole, and be hit in the face with what you considered warm air. There was also time in my experience of the Notch that I had to reach over my head and pull myself up by the roots of trees and grab hand holds on rocks. The addition of climbing to my hiking experience was definitely something out of the ordinary for the trail experience. It was test of skill and endurance that was mind bending and unexpected.

TrailGroove: I'm sure food was on your mind a lot. Any favorite restaurants along the way?

Wallace: Food is such a passion along the trail. Every single time that you get to town, you just gorge on anything you can find that is tasty. I have so much to say about this I will need to recall an experience to explain.

I specifically remember going to dinner in TN after getting off the trail at Newfound Gap, having hiked a large section through the Smoky Mountains National Park. I recall staying at the Grand Prix hotel. It was cheap and we were thrilled to get showers and have TV to watch. That night we went to dinner at a nice restaurant/microbrewery with 2 other hikers; War Eagle and Professor. I recall having tasty beer, amazing baby back pork ribs, and just savoring every bite that I could fit in my mouth. This is very similar every time you get to real food in a town. The act of enjoying food changes your appreciation for taste. Food is such a driving force in town, there are often several things you need to do to get situated. You might have to shop, or laundry, call people, get on the internet, but those are often put off until you have gotten food and drink to the point that you are overfull. It is really just a reaction to being without these experiences on the trail.

TrailGroove: Shelters or a tent?

Wallace: During the colder months early in the trek the shelters were the best option. When we were in the process of getting our trail legs, we were exhausted

at the end of the day. The convenience of just blowing up our air mattresses, pulling out our sleeping bags and going right to sleep was invaluable. However as the seasons began to change, I believe it was at the first sign of spring the bugs started to come out. The convenience of the shelters would soon be a thing of the past as Speedy G kept getting eaten by mosquitos. This caused a huge problem that drove us into the SixMoonDesigns Lunar Duo every night. I remember very clearly the night I came to the difficult realization that we would no longer sleep in shelters. Speedy G kept insisting that she could not sleep in the shelters because she was being eaten by mosquitos all night. This, however, was not happening to me personally. So we ended up sleeping separately that final night. I did not want to setup the tent, and she did not want to sleep in the shelter. We agreed (non-voluntarily) to sleep separately. I did not want to setup the tent, or put it away in the morning. So Speedy took it upon herself to set up the Lunar Duo and I just threw out my NeoAir Trekker in the shelter. The next day I remember thinking that this is the last time that I'd sleep separately from her in the shelter. From that point on, I setup the tent every single night and we slept side by side in serenity. Speedy G is my best friend and there was no doubt that having her as my buddy on this trip was the most important thing in the whole world.

When it comes to what gear is right for someone that is debatable. Having a tent makes things really convenient when you have your own space to undress, or clean



up, or just get away from others. Not to mention foul weather is much more manageable in a tent. Technology has driven the weight of tents so low these days that for sure I would take a really close look at the current options if I did the trail again. Most likely I would now choose a double walled freestanding tent due to the versatility and its ability to stand on its own within a specific footprint. Many times in Maine, the ground is nearly unstackable, or you have to camp on wooden platforms built by the trail clubs. These platforms are to cut down on beating up the fragile ecosystem found in this area. This can make setting up a tarp or single walled hiking pole shelter sort of difficult. The freestanding

option available today at 2 to 3lbs for two people is really an amazing setup. Split between 2 persons, 1 to 1.5lbs each for an amazing double walled spacious place to lay your head is nearly priceless. At the end of the day, you are done, and all you want to do it set it up, and go to sleep. Freestanding is great in my opinion!

If you analyze weight savings to be more important than the previously stated amenities, cuben fiber & silnylon have really set the stage for weight savings. Using these materials in a minimal design can have real quantifiable benefits in lowering your pack weight. Many hikers do the tarp/bivy setup. But personally I think there are pluses and minuses.

Weight is a real savings with these options, but extreme weather can be more of a problem. Volume is certainly a plus here (smaller), but privacy and ease of use can be another factor. I believe each person should make sure that their system is going to work for them.

TrailGroove: So thru hikers carry a lot of gear. Is there anything that really stood out and worked well for you? Anything that you brought along thinking you would need but ended up sending home?

Wallace: During any thru-hike, you will make a lot of changes as you go. I recall starting my pack at about 42 lbs. Speedy's was about 31 lbs. We had already sent home a box of things that we decided against and we had not stepped foot on the trail yet. Then we walked the first 30 miles to Mountain Crossings. At this point, we bought new packs, and mailed home everything else. Ditched a lot of things, and lowered our pack weights to 18 and 13 respectively before food and water. Now at our max we weighed 28-30 and 20-25 respectively as we left town with food and water.

I cannot recall the things that I sent home, but I can give you a brief rundown of what you NEED. Meaning if you have other things in your pack because you feel that they are necessary, I am just saying you probably don't need them. Pack, Shelter, Sleeping bag, Sleeping pad, cookpot & alcohol stove, hiking poles, water filter, water bottles, first aid kit (very small one; mostly pills and medicines) pack liner,

headlamp, wool top and bottom, crocs (imitation if possible; they are lighter) light fleece/down jacket, fleece hat & gloves, backup socks, backup underwear, and rain clothes. Everyone has their spin on what is important to them, but to be honest you will find that you don't even use things outside of the basic hiking tools. Some people need sunscreen, which is fine, or you could just wear a large hat, long sleeve shirt and pants all day every day. I wore long sleeves every day, and learned how to apply sunscreen so that 2 ounces lasted me 2 weeks. It is up to each person to find their comfort zone. There will be times that, even if

your gear is a great product, you will need to replace things when or if they break or due to wear and tear, and also out growing it (i.e. your hiking shoes, some hiker's feet grew anywhere from a half size or more from the constant walking). Things happen and you will need to address those issues as you go.

TrailGroove: You both hiked a long, long way, but left the trail a bit prior to completing its entire length. How hard was that decision? Was there any particular reason or was it a mix of many different factors?

Wallace: This was an extremely difficult decision. Emotions tug you in offsetting directions. You don't want to leave because it is an amazing experience, but often money and time can be limiting factors. In the end, each scenario comes down to what limiting factors are on your scenario. Will you have enough money to take your time? Are you on a set schedule?

In our scenario, Speedy G wanted to get back and let me move at my own pace. She had thoroughly enjoyed her experience, but felt that she was ready to get back. So she left just before I went into the White Mountains of New Hampshire southbound. After completing the Whites, I had been on the trail for 6 months. I still had 700+ miles to finish and I was dealt a finishing blow in the form of Hurricane Irene. This was truly a devastating effect on the hike. They closed the trails in many places. Specifically in Vermont, this affected my hike. So this meant that I might have to sit and wait in Lincoln, NH and just try and see how long before they opened the trails back up. I could have just hiked on and not felt effected by the storm, but at that point, I analyzed all the factors around my own scenario at the time.

I decided that I felt, "The journey is the destination" meaning that it was not just about finishing for me anymore. It was about being out there, living life with no regrets, but making sound decisions and weighing risk to the best of my ability. Looking at the money situation, knowing



that I had a mortgage and needed to get back to work, I walked away and went home. I had completed 1500 miles while Speedy had done 5 months and 1300 miles. It was hard, rough, and emotionally taxing at the time. Even though you decide that hiking is what it is about and that finishing is not what it is specifically about, I still felt that I failed. I believe for sure that I will do it again and start all over as soon as I can line up the scenario. I am for sure with those thoughts.

TrailGroove: I would think that the desire to complete the trail would now be overwhelming. Is this this case or in your mind is the trail something that will “Always be there”? Any plans to head back soon?

Wallace: Trail life is now my ultimate goal. Speedy and I had bought 10 acres before the trail. We are working to join the tiny house movement and be free of debt for life. We are building our home out of a shipping container, which is already bought and paid for and on our land. The trip only reinforced what is important to us. We see every day as a chance to work diligently towards getting back out there and living the dream again. I think that the trail and the trip along it defined us and most certainly is the high point of our lives. If you said what is your greatest accomplishment in life? I would tell you, “Our hike along the Appalachian Trail.” It is an unforgettable experience that I think & talk about all the time.

TrailGroove: How did the entire experience change your life?

Wallace: The trail changes you in various ways. For one example, it allows you to see that simple things are not that big of a deal. Going without water on a hot day for 2 hours because you did not want to walk .5 miles down a steep path to get more, truly defines how the struggles we feel that we face most days, are really just our minds making that up. Challenges that I face today are easier to take on and completed with confidence that are transcendent to my way of thinking before the trail.

Another example is that one day you will be much older, and your body may not work the same. I call hiking as a young healthy person, “using your physical capital”. It is really something that I suggest to do if you can while you are young. This does not mean that older folks should or could not do it. They can, in fact I met Cimmaron the first day that I walked onto the trail. And he is now 88, the oldest recorded man to ever hike the AT. This was truly a high point of motivation in the beginning. But I am just saying that you can do it as an older person, but it might hurt more, be more physically demanding, and the risks just go up in various ways. Anyone who wants to can do it and have a great time, but we are only young once, and it teaches you to truly appreciate your physical health.

When you return to life in society, we tended to be more conscious of the food we ate, the trash waste we produced, the way we looked at exercise. It gives you an understanding of things and a perspective that cannot be obtained anywhere else.

TrailGroove: Any words of advice for all the readers out there who might just now be considering their first attempt at a thruhike of the A.T.?

Wallace: Do it! Do it! Research, test your kit, get yourself psyched, and Do IT!!!

Even if you show up unprepared, TRUST ME!! The trail will provide for you, the resources will be there, people will lend a hand, and your physical body will change in 30 days or so, and you will find your trail legs. But most of all, you will NEVER REGRET it EVER!!! ❖

Wallace and Annette Hunter run the [HikeBikeDale.com](https://hikebikedale.com) blog and currently live in San Antonio, TX, making custom gear for the lightweight backpacking and hiking community. They are currently planning another hike of the Appalachian Trail in 2018.



REVIEW: Soto WindMaster OD-1RX Micro Regulator Stove

by Aaron Zagrodnick



The Soto WindMaster upright canister stove is a new for 2013 offering from Soto that is similar to their popular Micro Regulator OD-1R stove, but is even lighter and has been designed with wind resistance and efficiency in mind. Soto's micro regulator valve system has also been used for the new WindMaster, which Soto claims improves efficiency and operation during cold weather, where many canister stoves begin to falter. Since I'd always have to take along additional windscreens for my canister stoves in the past, the weight began to add up and as such, I've been a dedicated alcohol stove user for several years. Additionally, nights are almost always chilly here in the Rockies, so when using my canister stove I'd always have to toss the canister in my sleeping bag at night to ensure decent performance for coffee the next morning. With the release of the Soto Windmaster and its very light weight, I thought I might be able to leave additional windscreens behind, and the alcohol stove vs. canister stove weight gap was significantly narrowed. Additionally, with Soto's cold weather performance claims, the Windmaster began to stack up on paper as a worry-free alternative to my standard alcohol setup with little to no weight penalty depending on trip length.



Pros: Very light, built in ignition, excellent performance in varying conditions, range of flame control.

Cons: 2 Piece Design.

Rating: ★★★★★

Design

The WindMaster is an 11,000 BTU canister stove listed at 2.3 ounces. Instead of a folding design, the standard 3 prong pot support is entirely removable for packing, with a clip that secures all arms together and flat when stowed. The standard 3 prong support is designed for pots with a diameter up to 5.5 inches. A larger spring loaded 4 prong support with swing arms can also be purchased (\$15) if the use of larger pots or greater stability is desired. A long wire flip-down flame control handle keeps your hands away from the heat and keeps the handle itself cool when adjusting the flame. Internally Soto's micro regulator valve system is utilized as opposed to a standard needle valve arrangement, and a push button piezo-electric igniter is neatly integrated into the stove. Soto doesn't guarantee operation of the piezo above 10,000 feet, but hopefully you're already carrying an alternate fire starting solution anyway. To gain the "WindMaster" distinction, the burner head is recessed slightly below the outer housing, and the low profile pot supports bring the bottom of your cook pot closer to the flame compared to many other stoves. These features combine to minimize the amount of flame exposed to wind.

Impressions

At first I was concerned about the 3 prong pot support – Would it offer enough stability and would it become a hassle to constantly remove and replace in the field? Additionally, I was quite curious regarding how well the stove would really perform in windy conditions by itself without the benefit of an additional windscreen.

More on wind testing later, but upon receipt it became apparent that the stove is a well built and a solid product, despite the very light 2.3 ounce weight specification as claimed by the manufacturer. In hand we measured 2.35 ounces including the standard 3 prong pot support. By itself the 3 prong support weighs a quarter ounce and the larger spring-loaded 4 prong support tips the scale just at under an ounce. The stove with the 4 prong support weighs 3.05 ounces. Operation of both pot supports is very easy and installation onto the burner head as well as removal takes just a second or two with practice. Just be absolutely sure that you read the manual and have the pot support securely installed prior to use. The standard 3 prong support packs up quite small and blends in surprisingly well with the ground on rocks and in grass, so you'll definitely want to pack it somewhere secure. Of course, as I learned by experience, be mindful to allow the supports to sufficiently cool prior to removal. On the stove the 3 prong support offered good stability for smaller sized cookware, while the 4 prong support offers excellent stability for both smaller and larger sized pots. At 3.6" tall, the stove does sit fairly high off the canister however, but overall system stability was good on level ground even with the small 110 gram canisters and a 1.3 liter pot.



After you open the valve a bit and click the piezo ignition, the stove lights reliably with a single click or two and you don't need a stopwatch to realize that the WindMaster heats things up really quickly. Turning up the heat results in a very quick boil – every time I started to think about multitasking while waiting the Soto seemed to beat me to a boil. You're not out of luck if you need to simmer a meal, or even give lightweight baking a shot – The flame also dials down really low, so much that you can run the risk of the flame being extinguished by a light breeze, and with the micro regulator valve system, flame adjustment is very precise. On many other stoves the flame control is quite rough and it can be easy to accidentally turn the stove off when trying to dial down a small flame.

The stove is on the long side, but packing wasn't an issue with our cookware of choice. With the pot supports removed, the WindMaster will fit in a 900ml Evernew Pot including a 110 gram fuel canister, and with a 220 gram canister in an Evernew 1.3 liter pot. In both cases this required either removal of the canister's protective cap, or placing the canister with the cap installed inside the pot upside down. If you have trouble squeezing things in using the upside down canister method, place the stove in first. Cookware on the tall instead of wide side worked out too – The Soto fits with a small fuel canister in the Mountain Laurel Designs 850ml pot/mug without incident.

Performance

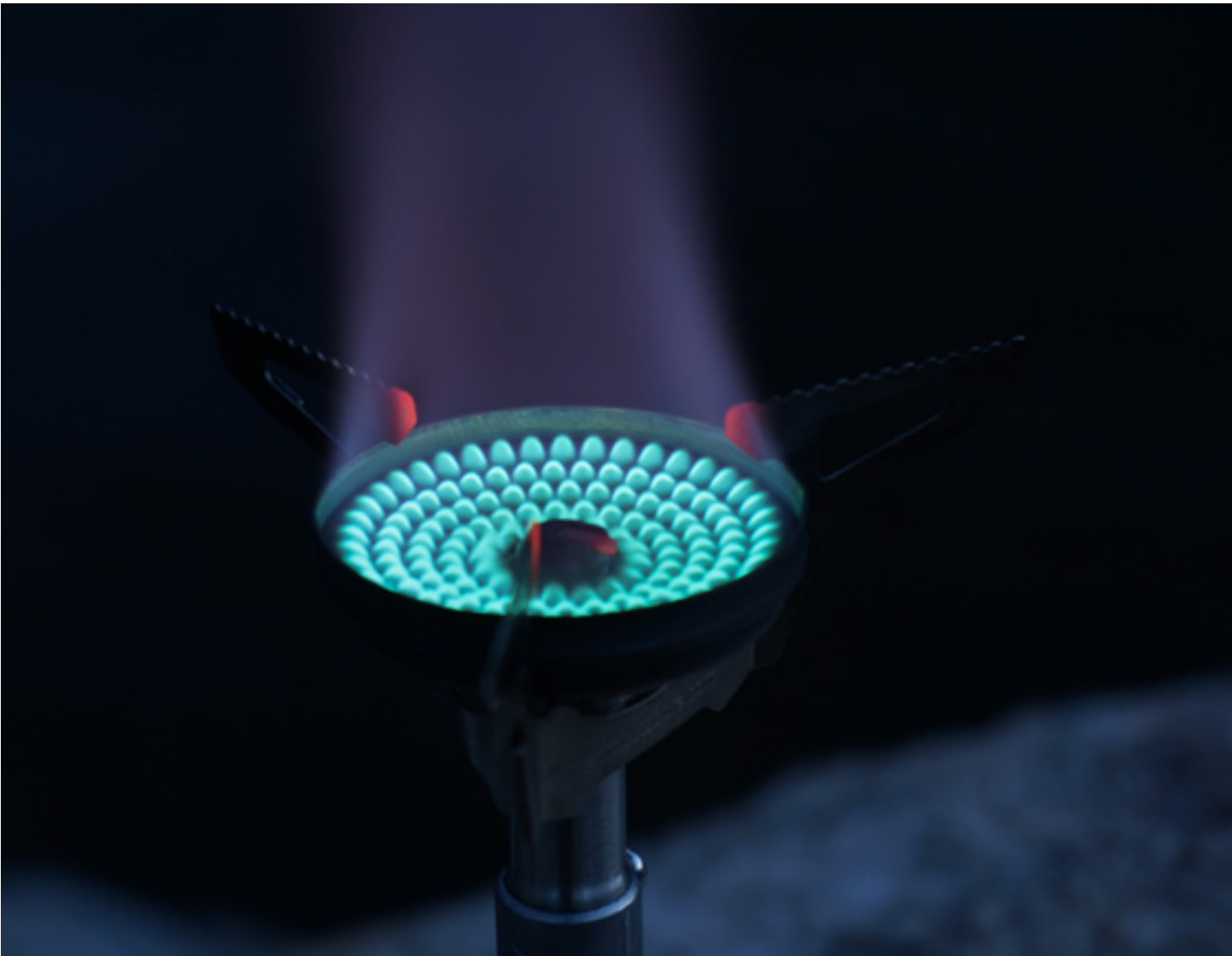
The Soto WindMaster is excellent across both mild conditions as well as in cold conditions and with chilly canisters. Boil

times are excellent. Wind performance was also excellent for an upright canister stove without additional windscreening or protection. As expected however, the stove isn't impervious to wind which still reduced both time and efficiency – But comparatively much less so than you might expect. The Soto was tested in a variety of conditions to measure both boil times and efficiency. For the 68 & 32 degree tests, the air temperature was as specified and the water, stove, pot, and fuel canister were brought to the testing temperature prior to starting each test. The stove was tested using new 220 gram Snow Peak fuel canisters on full power unless otherwise specified. 2 cups of water were used and the test ended when the water was brought to a rolling boil. An Evernew 900ml Ultralight titanium pot was used with the lid engaged. For each test, the 3 prong pot support was used on the stove. The elevation was just over 5000 feet at a barometric pressure of 24.45 inHg. Here are the results:

Test 1, 68F, 0 Wind
Temp: 68F
Wind: 0
Volume: 2 cups
Boil Time: 2:13
Fuel Used: 8 grams

Test 2: 32F, 0 Wind
Temp: 32F
Wind: 0
Volume: 2 cups
Boil Time: 2:25
Fuel Used: 9 grams

Of course, I also wanted to test the OD-1RX in windy conditions.



Test 3: 68F, 10mph Wind
Temp: 68F
Wind: 10mph
Volume: 2 cups
Boil Time: 6:57
Fuel Used: 21 grams

Test 4: 68F, 20mph Wind
Temp: 68F
Wind: 20mph
Volume: 2 cups
Boil Time: N/A. 174F Max @ 30 Minutes
Fuel Used: 100 grams
Note: Test ended at 30 Minutes. (Water temp no longer rising)

Boil times were very fast across both testing temperatures with no wind. On paper, the wind tests may look lackluster; however we also tested one of the most popular needle valve upright canister stoves on the market today in the same conditions, and used its optional windscreen. It wasn't able to bring the water to a boil in the 10mph test after 30 minutes on full power, using 65 grams of fuel. It got close though, a maximum water temperature of 198 degrees was recorded at the 28:25 mark. Wind is still a factor with the Soto, but relatively speaking, performance was impressive. In the field, seek natural windbreaks like boulders, a large tree, and consider using your pack at a safe distance to help. While cooking,

consider sitting directly upwind of the stove to help further, using your body as a shield. Using all these techniques, even if it's very windy outside you should be able to cut out enough wind in the small area where the stove is operating to remain within the Soto's performance envelope. Fuel usage for the Soto was good at full power, however I wanted to see if and how much efficiency would be affected by turning down the power at the expense of time.

Test 5: 68F, 0 Wind

(Stove set to approximately 1/3 of maximum)
Temp: 68F
Wind: 0
Volume: 2 cups
Boil Time: 3:03
Fuel Used: 6 grams

Turning the stove down to medium-low definitely helped efficiency, saving 25% compared to full power, and waiting around 3 minutes compared to 2 is no big deal. Over a long trip, this efficiency could really add up, especially if it saves you from having to bring another canister. Since dialing down the heat resulted in this large of an increase I wanted to take things a step further – Running the same test but essentially boiling the water as slowly as possible. Watching the digital thermometer, I turned the heat control on the stove down as low as possible while still maintaining a rising water temperature. (68 degree environment) After 12:03 the water was at a rolling boil, and again, 6 grams of fuel had been used. So after a certain point additional efficiency was not observed, but regardless of time, running the stove lower will save fuel.



Test 6: 68F, 0 Wind, 0F Canister

Temp: 68F
Wind: 0mph
Volume: 2 cups
Canister Temp: 0F
Boil Time: 2:08
Fuel Used: 8 grams

The Soto had already performed well in the 32 degree test with a chilly canister, bringing water from an ice bath to a rolling boil in just less than 2 and a half minutes, not much change from performance at 68 degrees. However, with the Soto's micro regulator valve system and claims for improved cold weather performance, I took things a bit further and left 2 full 220 gram canisters in a freezer for 24 hours at a temperature of 0 degrees Fahrenheit. I then removed one canister to the 68 testing environment and immediately tested the WindMaster using the chilled canister. The stove lit easily without any impression of

reduced performance. 2 cups of 68 degree water were boiled in 2:08 using 8 grams of fuel, virtually identical to the performance of the stove in a 68 degree environment with a 68 degree canister. I then took the second canister from the freezer and repeated the test with a popular canister stove utilizing a standard needle valve system. Compared to its normal 68 degree performance, its boil time was reduced from a 3:45 to 8:44. Fuel efficiency was however identical – The stove with the needle valve took a lot longer, but used the same amount of fuel as it did at room temperature. (11 grams) I repeated this test informally again the next day, using the same canisters. Outside & water temperature was 72 degrees with a gentle breeze. The wind really made a difference on this one – The Soto was basically again unchanged, however the tested needle valve stove now took 12:20 using 18 grams of fuel.

Test 7: 68F, 0 Wind, Canister 8 grams from empty:

Temp: 68F
Wind: 0mph
Volume: 2 cups
Canister Volume: 8 grams
Boil Time: 1:59
Fuel Used: 7 grams

Lastly, it remained to be seen how well the WindMaster would perform on nearly empty canisters. Would the design of the Soto and the micro regulator valve system work to maintain output and efficiency not only in the cold, but with canisters holding a low volume of fuel? I took a nearly empty 220 gram Snow Peak fuel canister

and ran it down so that only 8 grams of fuel, or approximately one 2 cup boil at full output was left in the canister. That's it. I then allowed the stove and canister to return to 68 degrees, and repeated the 68 degree 0 wind test as detailed above. The stove boiled in 1:59 and used 7 grams of fuel. With only 1 gram of fuel left in the canister, the Soto's efficiency didn't decline and actually ended up using 1 less gram of fuel and boiled slightly faster than with a completely full canister. Only after I re-fired the stove on its very last gram of fuel did the flame begin to slowly fade until all fuel had been used over the course of approximately 30 seconds. One last weigh in – The Soto had used every bit of the 220 grams of fuel originally in the canister.

BELOW: Evernew 1.3L Pot with 4Flex and 220g canister.

TOP RIGHT: Evernew .9L Pot with 110g canister.

BOTTOM RIGHT: MLD 850ml Pot with 110g canister.





3 Prong and Evernew .9L



4Flex and Evernew 1.3L



3 Prong Installation



... and Removal



4Flex Spring Action



WindMaster Without Supports Installed

Conclusion

The Soto WindMaster lights up like a jet engine at full power yet remains surprisingly efficient – Even in less than ideal weather conditions and under changing canister pressure. But it's not just an on or off stove, allowing you to dial down the flame to increase efficiency or for more complex cooking. Performance across a range of ambient and canister temperatures is excellent. Wind is still a factor, but by seeking windbreaks in high winds you'll be fine without the weight, bulk, and fiddle factor of an additional windscreen. The removable pot supports are different, but they're extremely user friendly and quick to attach and detach, and while you should always take a backup ignition source, the piezo igniter is cleanly integrated into the stove and makes things so easy. The price is higher than average in this category, but if fuel efficiency doesn't quickly make up for the price difference, the performance will. At just 2.35 ounces with the standard pot support, the WindMaster performed so well at times it had us shaking our heads, perhaps the current stove to beat in the upright canister stove category. ❖

Overall Very Good to Excellent - ★★★★★

The Soto WindMaster OD-1RX Micro Regulator Stove retails for around \$75. Check it out over at [Campsaver](#), [Trail Designs](#), and [REI.com](#).



Backcountry Painting for Everyone

by Adrienne Marshall



Making art while backpacking can be a fun and rewarding way for hikers to engage more deeply with their environment. Unfortunately, many of us are intimidated by drawing and painting. I spent years of my life afraid to make art of any sort, despite a nagging feeling that it was an activity I might enjoy. I suspected that my attempts would be read as childish forays into an arena that only had space for other, more skilled contenders. However, when I started thru-hiking, I decided to keep a journal through painting. Perhaps starting one great adventure (the Pacific Crest Trail) gave me the courage to try another type of challenge. I resolved not to judge my own artistic attempts, and began to make drawings and paintings of the natural world. As I continued hiking and painting, my comfort, skill level, and enjoyment of painting improved. My intention in this article is to help you, my fellow hikers, to do the same.

This transformation from non-artist to artist is not easy for most of us, but if we can achieve it, we open ourselves up to a whole new way of enjoying our backcountry trips. The primary transformation required is not one of artistic skill or technique, but a change in attitude, self-image, and willingness to try. The following is a list of steps to get you started on your artistic journey. They are intended for sketching and watercolor painting, because these media are easy to carry into the backcountry, but of course you could use these tips with whatever media you like. Good luck and have fun!

1. Promise not to judge your own art. This can be the most difficult step, but also the most necessary. Release yourself from the need to make something that looks impressive or realistic, and focus on enjoying the process.

2. Choose a subject. I find it most helpful to choose something that is natural and will hold still long enough for you to closely observe it while you draw. Your subject can be tiny or huge, but try to take up your whole paper with it either way. Try this: Make an L-shape on each hand with your forefinger and thumb, and put them together to make a rectangle. Use this rectangle as a viewfinder, moving it around to see what will fit on a rectangular sheet of paper.

3. Try a blind contour drawing to warm up. A blind contour drawing is a drawing that you do while staring at your subject, without looking at your paper. Using this method ensures that you won't create a realistic-looking image regardless of your skill level, so there's no point in judging your work.

4. On a fresh sheet of paper, start drawing! This time, you can look at your paper, but do try to spend more of your time looking at the real world than you do looking at your paper. This will help you to observe the landscape more closely and learn from it in the process.

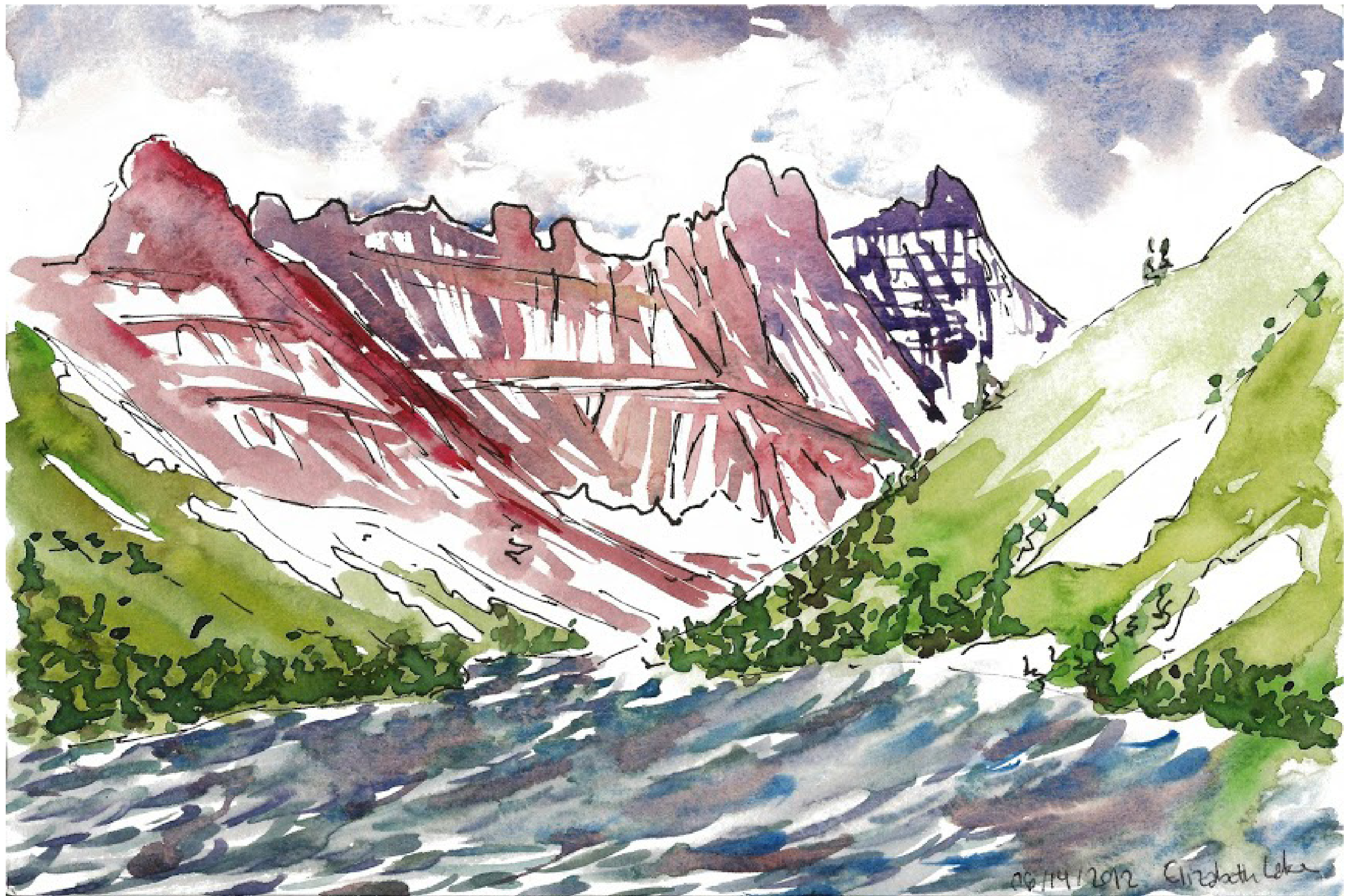
5. Once you've sketched your subject to your satisfaction, pull out the paints. You can start with a children's set of watercolor paints, and graduate to more expensive, higher-quality paints later.

6. When painting with watercolors, the most important thing to keep in mind is to use lots of water. Sometimes in an effort to make brighter colors, people are reluctant to use a lot of water. However, watercolors derive their signature luminosity from their transparency when mixed with water, so make sure they're nice and liquid!

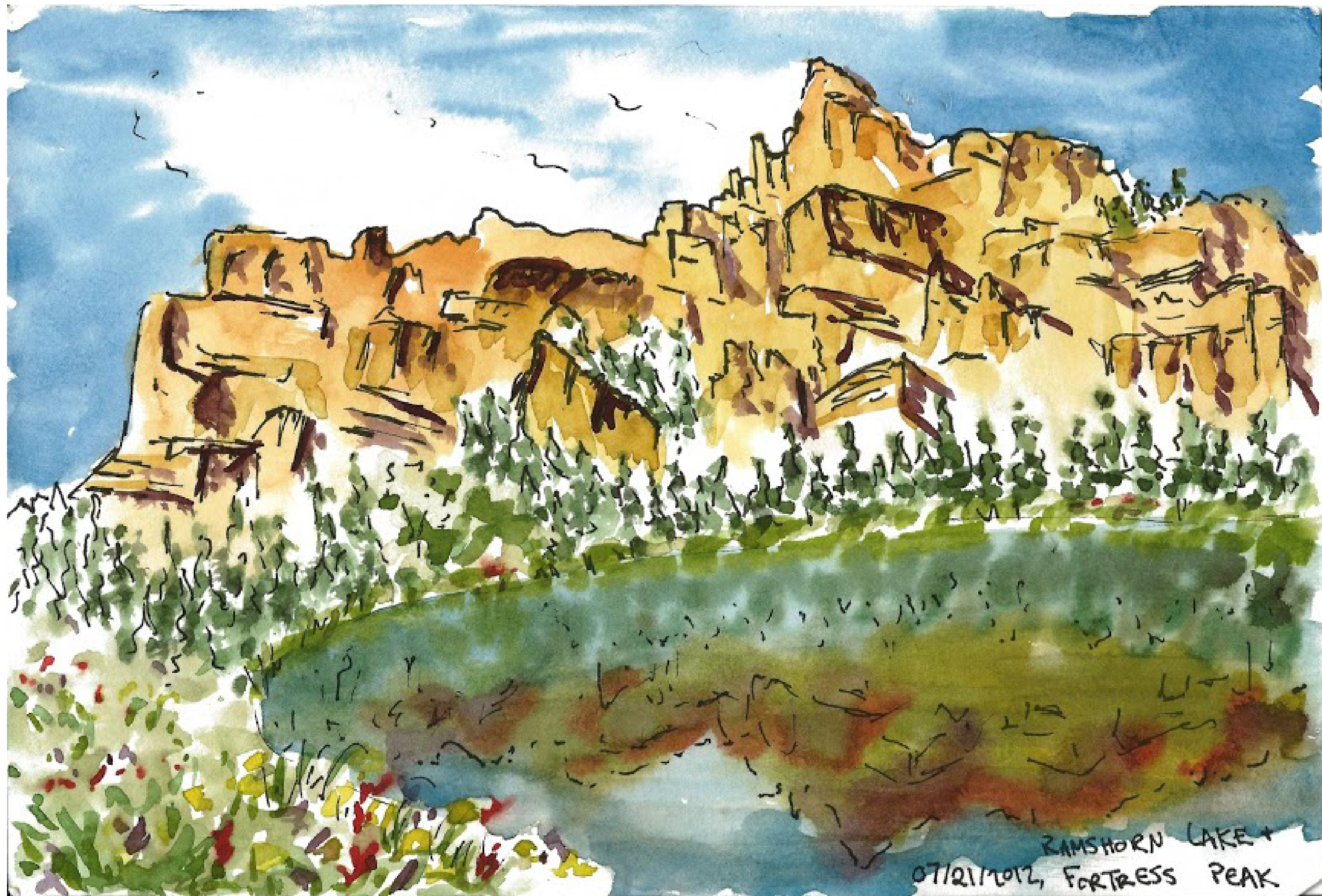
7. As you paint, try using two techniques: wet-on-dry and wet-on-wet. Wet on dry involves putting wet paint on dry paper. It's relatively predictable and easy to control. Wet on wet is a technique in which you wet your paper with either water or paint, and then paint on your wet paper. Your colors will spread and smear, which can make for exciting effects in clouds, rock, water, and foliage.

8. Don't be afraid to use bright colors, and to exaggerate the colors you see. Gray rocks can be made much more exciting by using complementary colors (orange and blue, purple and yellow, or red and green) to make a rich and vibrant gray. I recommend avoiding the brown and black pigments that come in most watercolor trays.

9. Keep your work, enjoy it as a reminder of your trip, and share it with others! The paintings that accompany this article are mine from a 2012 thru-hike of the Continental Divide Trail. They help me to remember my experience, and it is a joy to share them. ❖



08/14/2012 Elizabeth Lohr



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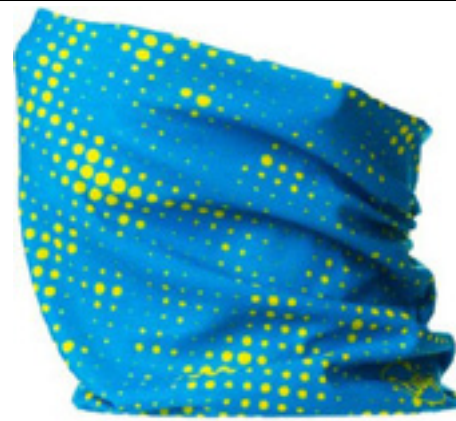
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A 2 person single wall tent that uses two trekking poles (Not included) for setup. What's the point? You'll get 34 square feet of floor space for two at under 2 pounds. Around \$280:

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McNett Tenacious Tape

A strong adhesive makes for quick repairs in the field. Best of all, no residue is left behind when you're ready to make a more permanent repair. Check out McNett's dedicated Sil-Fix kit for silnylon. Available in several colors, including clear. 1 ounce and \$5: Campsaver.com



Photo Tips from the Trail

by David Cobb

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

TIP #5: Photographing Wildflowers

In the transition from spring to summer, and as the wildflowers head higher up the hillsides and mountains, you'll probably get the urge to capture these beauties sometime during a hike or backpacking trip. Here are a few pointers from what I've learned by photographing wildflowers the wrong way and the right way.

The best time to photograph wildflowers is when the light is right. Cloudy days are better than sunny days, and early morning is often better than afternoon. I prefer the early morning over afternoon because the day is usually calmer, so the wind isn't blowing these little flowers to-and-fro. I find the light cleaner in the morning too, and sometimes the morning dew or frost can add that little extra oomph a shot needs to take it to the next level.

LEFT: Spring Lupine

All images Copyright 2013 © David M.Cobb Photography.

Another tip is to get low; flowers often look better from their point-of-view. You can shoot through them and selectively highlight certain flowers while blurring out the rest. This makes for a pleasant color palette and adds a painterly like quality to your images. When you're photographing flowers, if you think you're close enough get a little closer. Fill that frame and let the petals fall off the edges, because the brain fills in the rest and knows the flower carries off the frame. When I'm close to a flower, I often tilt my camera about 10-15 degrees one way or another to make the image more interesting. I find a flower standing straight up and down to be a bit boring, but a slight tilt creates a more dynamic line and therefore a more interesting image.

Finally, watch your histogram. On a digital camera it's that graph on the back that pops up after you take a picture. It tells you how your image is exposed, and when you break it down to your Red, Green, and Blue channels it will let you know which colors you're overexposing. When photographing flowers, I always pay attention to my red channel since many flowers are yellow, orange, or red. If that Red channel is too far to the right, I might be overexposing my red highlights and losing detail in my flower. If my flowers have no detail and look like blank sheets of color, then I need to underexpose my shot slightly to keep detail in my image.

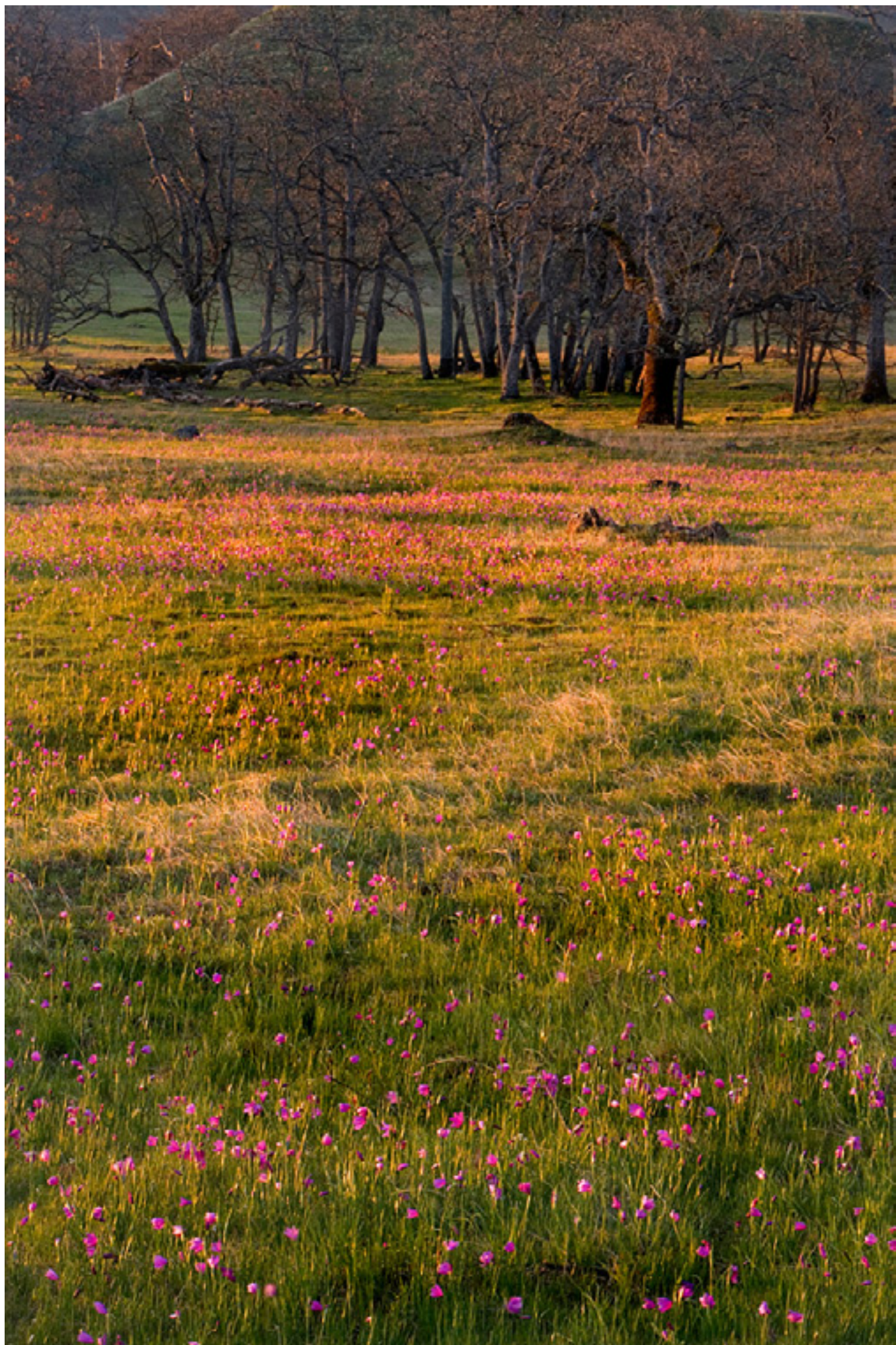
Those are a few quick tips, and I have many more coming in a soon-to-be-available e-book I am writing on this subject. I hope these pointers help you in the field and improve your spring and summer mountain wildflower photography. ❖

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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Lightweight Luxuries:

8 Easy Extras That Will Take Your Trek from Ooh to Ahh

by Claire Murdough

Every backpacker should have a slightly miserable trek just once in their life. Nothing dangerous, or traumatizing-- just one with a bit of good-old fashioned discomfort. Maybe a rock under a sleeping bag, or a slightly damp boot during a section of a hike – it's during those moments of less than easy explorations that the true value of the little amenities becomes evident, and much more appreciated. The small bits taken for granted on daily basis are sincerely cherished on the trail.

That being said, there is no reason that trekking should equate to trudging. Just as a few discomforts can change perspective; it rings equally true of comforts on the trail. A few extra lightweight luxuries can make an incredible and positive difference in your backpacking experience!

While not essential for survival, these optional extras are easy ways to pack a bit of added comfort into the back country.

1. Camp Shoes: Hiking boots and trail runners are great for their purpose, but sometimes not the best bet for comfort at the end of the day. Any hiker who has experienced the blissful feeling of removing a well-used boot knows the almost unintentional groan of satisfaction that accompanies the action. While it's perfectly reasonable and effective to rely solely on the shoes you hike in, bringing a light weight set of slippers or sandals to wear around camp provides freedom for your feet. Crocs are a light, durable option, but any kind of easy to slip in to model works – Even foam sandals from the drug store work great. Strapped on to the outside of a pack, they are a light and easy addition. They're particularly appreciated if your hiking footwear gets wet during a hike.



2. A High Temperature Water Bottle: Everyone has their favorite bottle, and the market abounds with options. While the main purpose may be to hold water for drinking, a durable, well-shaped bottle can be an added element to comfort as well. One of the best things about a bottle tolerant of high temperatures is its ability to safely hold boiling water. On colder nights, and with enough fuel to spare, fill one with boiled water, crawl into your sleeping bag, and snuggle up with your bottle buddy - no more fro-toes (frozen toes). Insulated by your bag, a dependable bottle will stay hot for hours. An added bonus - in the morning, you have pre-boiled ready to drink water! The Nalgene has long been a forerunner in the bottle race and even with admirable competition, and its size and functionality are proven components to its success. If the wide mouth seems bothersome, ones with smaller mouths are available, as well as attachable guards which funnel the water to a smaller opening.



3. A Salty-Sweet Treat: Of course there's the classic GORP, but if you've ever coveted a 5-dollar candy bar, take this as your excuse to splurge on your lust. Go for that one that contains maple encrusted bacon, or caramelized pecans, or elven magic—whatever ingredients really make you salivate. On a recent trek, a hiker brought a salted toffee dark chocolate bar and for nearly two hours – and then sporadically throughout the rest of the trip - we found ways to discuss its epicness. Whether it comes in the form of chocolate or some other kind of special treat, the salty- sweet combination is oh so appreciated, and oh so much more delicious after a 6 hour hike.



4. A Back Country Café: Coffee is like the whiskey of the morning hours: it just makes everyone friendlier. Melita or similar cone-shaped coffee makers are lightweight and simple to use. Pack one up with a pre-measured ration of ground coffee, and as many paper filters as needed. If space is an issue, there are traveling editions made of soft, flexible plastic for more compact traveling. If coffee's not your thing, hot chocolate or tea bags are light and welcome warmers. Bring along some dried creamer and a bit of sugar, and you could practically label

your camp an experimental hipster micro-café. Unfortunately, whiskey can't be powdered, but luckily, its potency allows small measures.

5. A Pen and Paper/Notebook: There are always practical uses to bringing paper on the trail, but in this particular pull for its inclusion, the entertainment value is the tout: Games, writing and drawing to name a just few possibilities. Do you sketch for fun? No? Well, with a few hours to kill lounging at camp, now's the time. It's fun! And if you really hate those

doodles, you can always use the paper to start your fire. Same with poetry, writing or a poorly played hangman. You never know, though, maybe those jotted sentences or thoughts will be the first lines to your great literary masterpiece.

6. Spices: Ah spices. If hard pressed, spices might rank as the most appreciated extra when backpacking or camping. While the main priority of food is to provide the necessary energy and balance of nutrients, having it taste good is a highly valued bonus! Spices are the easiest way to pump up the flavor profiles - salt alone makes a huge difference. The possibilities here are endless: cinnamon, pepper, pesto powder, ground ginger, and so many more. Being so light, having variety doesn't mean weighing you down. Just be sure to label that sugar clearly from that salt. Even in the surrounded by beautiful wilderness, that accidental switcheroo is no fun.



7. A Riddle: This one is a freebie! Playing cards and similar packable games are great for the campsite, but while hiking, riddles can be fun forms of entertainment when the trek feels a bit more like a trudge. Though every hiker wishes they could say they hike in constant awe of nature, but there are always those more monotonous stretches, after other conversation has been exhausted, when you simply want to take your mind off your tired feet. Having a go-to riddle is an easy way to provide some distraction, and packing up a few for longer treks can continue to fuel the fun factor. And obviously, the only added weight is your brain mass. Don't leave it behind.

8. A Change of Clothes in the Car:

Returning to the parked car after a decently long backpacking trip, to realize you have a nice clean wardrobe change in the car will never become old. Nothing fancy, but a pair of sweatpants and a fresh smelling shirt are always well-received - particularly if the ride home from the trail head is longer than 30 minutes. It's a secret to be shared: the value of cleanliness to a weary traveler.

Packing light can be paramount for longer treks, but even with all these additions, you won't weigh down your pack. The delight experienced from these small comforts will feel far, far greater than the ½ pound or so you might cumulatively add.

So go, frolic, explore and adventure-- but no harm in bringing a bit of cozy to that back country. ❖



Backcountry Cuisine: Fruit Leathers

If you enjoyed fruit roll-ups as a kid, you can relive those memories on the trail with this easy take along snack. (And it doesn't have any artificial colors or preservatives!) There are endless combinations of fruits/veggies/flavors that you can use to make your own fruit leathers. Here are some ideas:

Apple & Cinnamon

You can cook & puree your own apples or use premade applesauce. Add cinnamon (and sugar if you'd like).

Berry Banana

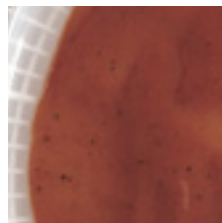
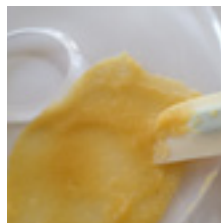
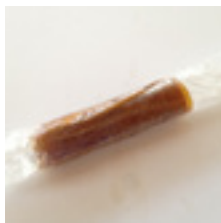
Pureed blueberries, strawberries, bananas, and a little lemon juice.

Pureed Sweet Potatoes

OK, this isn't a fruit, and it comes out a bit thick. But it tastes great! Add a little brown sugar if you need extra sweet! (This may be more of a "bark" than a "leather")

Apple, Banana & Zucchini

Delicious... I found this out while trying to use up zucchini from the farmer's market. Can also puree and add spinach, kale, or other veggies, although you may need to sweeten.



At Home - Preparation ~ 8-12 hours

You can make these in your dehydrator or in your oven on a very low setting (approximately 140F). If you use a dehydrator, you will need to have the tray inserts for liquids, and if you use the oven, you will want to line a cookie sheet with either parchment paper, foil, or some people even use the thicker plastic wrap (check manufacturers recommendations about heating). Just puree your fruit, add some spice if desired and spread a thin layer on your tray. The thicker you make it, the longer it will take to dehydrate. However, a thicker leather is easier to handle and won't tear as easily. The leather is done when the top is no longer sticky. Let cool and lay on piece of plastic wrap. Roll it up & take it with you on your hike!

At Camp or on the Trail - Unwrap & Enjoy!

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The Drive Home: Out of Order

by Aaron Zagrodnick

Day 10. Our blisters were now well on their way to callouses and I'm not sure if our bodies were getting used to the hiking, or if we were just getting used to having bruised feet. We'd gotten to that point where pain didn't matter, and being covered in dirt just seemed normal. The light was fading as I sat on a granite seat in the middle of a rushing mountain stream, filtering water with a protesting pump filter into all of the various containers we'd brought along. Another day of hiking had come to an end, and we'd pitched our shelter a couple hundred yards uphill

away from the stream, set in a fantastic nook between several huge pine trees. We should sleep well tonight I thought, on a bed of pine needles hundreds of years old and us tired from yet another day of hiking. After filtering water for 10 days, 2 people, and a dog, our water filter had definitely lost its new cartridge luster. It was quite the struggle pumping water through its nearly clogged pores, but tonight was our last night. As I sat there on the rock I just hoped it would make it through another day. We'd make do either way, though.

The stream where we now sat lay in the center of a 7 mile long canyon, and suddenly the roar of the stream was superseded by another sound, similar in tone and gradually growing louder. Louder and louder the sound grew, until the sound of the stream and the birds singing their evening songs was completely washed out. It didn't take long before the source of the racket was exposed, and a military fighter jet streaked directly overhead, just a few thousand feet above the rim of the canyon and then quickly out of site beyond the far wall and towering pines. We'd seen only a few people since leaving the trailhead 10 days prior, and hadn't carried on any significant conversation except with each other or ourselves. The jet broke the calm that one develops over a trip of this length for a moment, but as the mountain chickadees resumed flitting amongst the

brush beside the stream, the rushing water and their calls brought us back to earth.

Day 3. Walking. Even though we'd tried to eat the heaviest of our foods first, our packs still slunk heavily against our shoulders, still loaded with food for the next week or so ahead. I kept messing with the load lifters on my pack to solve the problem as I stood at 11,000 feet, just beyond halfway up the south side of Texas Pass in the Wind River Range. Layla, our Blue Heeler, sat by my side as we looked downslope. Jen stood a few hundred feet below, out of breath but slowly catching up. While I always outpace her on the uphill, she's faster downhill. On flat terrain it's a draw...But there wasn't much of that to go around at the moment. In the end it works out. After ascending a total of 1300 feet, we met at the top of the pass where





the wind tried to knock us off our feet. A few quick pictures and then we glanced down. The descent to Texas Lake on the north side would be steeper. It was a cloudy day, and all around us nothing really grew...Grey rock and occasional patches of ice and snow had replaced the green grass we'd been hiking through earlier that morning. But the descent looked doable. Steadily we navigated through the rocks, avoiding the patches of ice, and eventually the three of us reached the lake at the bottom.

Mostly the landscape was still gray and barren, but we found a patch of grass and sheltered behind a huge boulder, out of the wind and assembled a random mix of food stuffs for lunch. We'd made good time, and hiked on. As we hiked we descended past the appropriately named Barren Lake, but trees gradually began to reappear by early afternoon and we descended out of the wind and now found streams with water



instead of patches of ice. The sky began to clear. Briefly we waved at a couple crossing our path a few hundred yards ahead, the only people we saw that day. Glancing at the map we located a spot off trail that looked suitable for camping a few miles ahead and headed in that direction. With a little luck and compass work, we eventually found the spot. A bench cut into a hillside, several hundred yards off trail. We were surrounded by deer and pines, but for the most part the bench was covered in long grass that waved back and forth in the evening breeze. From a spring somewhere, a trickle ran through rocks close by, sluggishly cascading through the rocks downhill on a journey – Somewhere. Peaks rose above us to the east, and as the sun set in the opposite direction, the peaks turned pink and orange with fire and the light surrounded us. Gone was a gloomy late summer day in the Winds and it looked as though good weather lay ahead.



Day 1. “Looks like rain” I said as we ascended switchbacks in the car, leaving the high Wyoming plains behind and rising into mountain air and weather. “Great day to start a trip, I guess” Jen replied reluctantly. Dark clouds hid the peaks from view above. Super caffeinated soda in one hand, I rolled down the driver’s side window. Cold air rushed in. After 18 hours of driving I was just trying to stay awake. After dozens of hairpin turns the road straightened and we made our turn for the trailhead, the road becoming rougher as we did our best not to take a wrong turn. At the road’s end we came to a giant dirt and gravel parking lot, completely empty. And it began to rain. I parked the car, turned off the engine and we sat in relative silence, both anxious to start the trip but at the same time hesitating to leave the relative luxury of the warm and dry car for

a week and a half on the trail. At least the forecast called for sunny weather ahead. With a push we opened our doors and donned our rain gear, checking inside the car to be sure we didn’t leave anything out of our packs for the journey ahead. Layla was ready to go no matter the weather, apparently tired of having to lay in the backseat for such a long drive. I was tired and needed sleep, but our arrival at the trailhead had somehow brought me back to life. Or maybe it was just the caffeine. Little did we know that as we hiked in and began to climb in elevation and into the mountains, the rain would turn to snow, temperatures would fall into the teens by morning, and coffee would freeze in our cups before we could finish drinking them at sunrise. “Ready?” I asked. Jen replied with a quick nod and I locked the car.



Day 11. I woke up at 3am. The night was warm and sheltered in the pines as we were, I'd fallen quickly asleep. But from the high slopes leading up to the canyon walls an elk had descended to the small meadow just beyond our tent. While I couldn't see him – We could certainly hear him. Layla was on alert, gazing through the mosquito netting and out into the darkness. We suddenly realized this spot didn't belong to us. Jen and I joined Layla in staring off into the darkness, soaking up the moment, but we needed sleep. The elk bugled beside us for the next hour, showering the darkness with sound, and sleep didn't come easily. Eventually the elk moved on however, and we both managed to catch another hour of sleep. Normally we'd wake with the sunrise, but today the watch alarm went off at 5am. Today would be our last day in the Winds, and we needed to make 15 miles by noon to meet our shuttle. After a week and a half in the wilderness, pizza, burgers, a soda, and a shower were at the forefront of our minds – Though it's hard to prioritize the order. We looked at the map, now battered from days of trail use. We'd walked about a hundred miles so far, and the map showed a ranger station at the trailhead where we'd be headed – And what looked to be a big parking lot and campsites. Surely, there had to be a vending machine, and ice cold drinks would be a great way to end the trip after days of only water and dehydrated meals. Not many stores in the middle of the Wind River Range, but we managed to find a few dollar bills amongst our ID and keys. We were set. These dreams inspired us to break camp quickly in the predawn darkness and we hit the trail just at that time when you can barely see well enough

to find your way without a headlamp. We plunged downhill into a thick pine forest which hid the trail in darkness, but soon it became light enough to quicken our pace. The birds awoke and squirrels quickly ran to the closest tree as we approached, then scolded us from above. But soon we left the forest, and hiked most of the day through open fields. The sun rose higher and in the open, it was hot. We pulled our hats close to our eyes and pushed our long sleeves down for shade. We passed lakes and streams along the way, their cold

water inviting, but we were on a mission. Around 10am we ran out of water, but pressed on instead of stopping to filter more, though I saved some in reserve for Layla. We stumbled into the trailhead, hot, parched, and dusty, an hour early around 11am. The ranger station lay straight ahead. We walked around to the door, it was locked. It was prime hiking season in the Winds on a Saturday at 11am, but we might as well have showed up at midnight in the middle of winter. Disenchanted and disappointed, Jen found a concrete picnic

table close by and collapsed on top of the table, pack and all. I glanced around the corner of the building. I was looking straight at the side of a shiny soda machine and could barely believe my eyes. I smiled and walked closer, pulling 2 dollars out of my pocket. But as I rounded the front of the machine it wasn't on. And a big "Out of order" sign stared right back at me. I walked back to the picnic table with Layla. "Anything around the corner?" Jen asked. I just shook my head. I gave Layla the last of our water. We waited for the shuttle. ❖



“The richest values of wilderness lie not in the days of Daniel Boone, nor even in the present, but rather in the future.”

- Aldo Leopold





Thanks for Reading Issue 8

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