

# TrailGroove™

Issue 9 - July/August 2013





# Contents

*July/August 2013*

Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:

<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:

<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue9.html>

[Subscribe to TrailGroove Magazine](#)

- 3 Editor's Note
- 5 How to Contribute to TrailGroove Magazine
- 6 TrailGroove Product Review Policy
- 7 Random Trail Tip
- 9 Jargon
- 11 Day Hiking the Smoky Mountains  
by Ted Schrader
- 25 Exploring Coyote Gulch  
by David M. Cobb
- 39 The Dangerous Beauty of Maderas, Nicaragua  
by Heide Brandes
- 51 Review: Tripods and Trekking  
by Ted Ehrlich
- 57 The Wichita Mountains, Oklahoma  
by Bubba Suess
- 69 Gear Mash  
Cool Gear We've Come Across This Season
- 71 Photo Tips from the Trail: Simplify  
by David M. Cobb
- 79 Tenkara Fishing  
by Ben Libbey
- 87 Backcountry Cuisine  
The Basics
- 89 The Drive Home: Seeing Stars  
by Aaron Zagrodnick

A special thank you to our contributors for this issue: Ted Ehrlich, David Cobb, Heide Brandes, Ted Schrader, Bubba Suess, and Ben Libbey



A first-person perspective of a hiker sitting on a grassy mountain trail. The hiker's feet, wearing brown hiking shoes with orange laces, are visible in the lower foreground. The trail is covered in green grass and small yellow wildflowers. In the background, a vast mountain range stretches across the horizon under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A prominent snow-capped mountain peak is visible on the left side of the range.

## Editor's Note

It's primetime on the trail – Summer has definitely arrived. The miles fly by. Packs are dusty and gear in a constant state of repair. Shoes are worn down, retired, and replaced. Warm weather bags are out of the closet and perhaps except for water, packs are light. At least that's the current state of affairs here at TrailGroove. Trips to remember aren't hard to come by this time of year – The mountains are most definitely calling.

In issue 9 David Cobb backpacks Coyote Gulch in Utah, and shares another great photo tip to keep in mind when you the trail. Ted Ehrlich breaks down tripods that won't weigh you down in the backcountry, and Ben Libbey shows us Tenkara – A simple, lightweight, and effective fishing method for the backpacking fisherman. Heide Brandes hikes a volcano in Nicaragua, Ted Schrader spends a few days hiking in the Smokies, and Bubba Suess shows us a destination you might not know about – The Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma. Learn how to hang your food bag using the PCT method, check out the latest installation of backcountry cuisine, and more. Thanks for reading issue 9!



# Contribute

Interested in contributing to the magazine? Please email us at [info@TrailGroove.com](mailto: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

## Hanging Your Food Bag: The PCT Method

There's more than one way to hang a food bag – But after trying a few, we've come to rely on the using the PCT (Pacific Crest Trail) Method. The PCT method balances simplicity, speed, and effectiveness. Rather than simply tying one end of your throw line onto a nearby tree, where a bear or another hungry forest dweller could attempt to chew through the line, break the line, or cause other forms of disorder, PCT style hanging eliminates that point of failure in a quick and easy way.



### Equipment:

- 1) Food Bag - Lightweight dry bags are ideal.
- 2) Throw Line. We've settled on 60 feet of DynaGlide Throw Line.
- 3) Throw Bag - A stake bag works great.
- 4) Small Carabiner
- 5) A rock and a short stick located at hang site
- 6) Optional: OPSAK Liner for help with containing food odors.

### Process:

- 1) Locate suitable limb for hanging. Not so strong that a bear can climb out onto it and get your food, but not so small that they can easily just break the branch. Far enough out from the trunk of the tree, and high enough up that they can't simply reach out and grab your food bag. Once you've found the right branch, locate a small stick a few inches long, the smoother the better. Hold onto this for now.
- 2) Place a rock into your throw bag to give it some weight, and using your carabiner, link the throw bag to a loop in the throwline.
- 3) Keeping your foot on the tag end of the line, throw your bag over the branch. An underhand swing is easiest, but an overhand baseball style throw can provide more accuracy. After the throw, allow the weighted bag to fall to the ground.
- 4) Disconnect the carabiner from the throw bag and attach it to your food bag. Feed the loose tag end of your throw line through the carabiner and hoist the bag up to the tree branch. Reaching up as high as possible, grab the free end of the line and tie the stick in with a quick clove hitch. An easy way to tie the knot is to simply form two loops with the tag end running under the standing part of the line, then place the right side loop on top of the left side loop. When the stick is inserted and the line tightened, the knot will form.
- 5) Lower the food bag down – When the stick comes into contact with the carabiner, it will act as a stopper and your food bag has been hung. (To retrieve the bag later, pull the free end of the line down again and remove / break the stick)
- 6) You remembered to bag those snacks in your pocket right?



# Jargon: LNT



**Leave No Trace.** A set of principles and techniques allowing one to leave little impact upon nature during wilderness travel and when travelling through wild places. LNT techniques are comprised of 7 fundamental elements:

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

For more information visit: [Int.org](http://Int.org)



The TrailGroove Store: Gear Up Now ⇨

YOUR AD HERE  
PLACE YOUR AD IN  
TRAILGROOVE MAGAZINE

WE KEEP BACK ISSUES - AND YOUR AD - AVAILABLE FOREVER.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US AT:  
[SALES@TRAILGROOVE.COM](mailto:SALES@TRAILGROOVE.COM)





# Day Hiking Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Location: Tennessee/North Carolina

by Ted Shrader

**A year ago hiking on a mountain was a possibility I had not even considered. Add to that bringing my five year old, I would have said “You’re crazy.”** My life consisted of hitting the books daily to keep up with a middle school science teaching position. As the year faded, I had to take a step back and reflect if the demands of my work were worth not spending time with my wife and two young sons. That summer some difficult choices were made and as a family we decided I would stay at home and become ‘Mr. Mom.’ During this period I became interested in carving and began working on some projects with my friend, Bill. He and his wife, Linda, asked my wife and I to join them for a short mid-winter snowshoeing and hiking weekend retreat over Martin Luther King weekend at a local state park. However, the time just didn’t work out for our schedules. They kept talking about how they loved hiking in The Great Smoky Mountains. This spring our schedules finally lined up and we decided to take the leap. As the planning continued, our group grew to include my five year old son and a close family friend.

To get ourselves in shape for all the mountain hiking my wife and I decided to do a sixty day workout series which both of us found physically challenging. The workouts were totally worth the time put in and we felt like we were prepared for a week of hiking. Getting my son excited about the trip involved heading to Bill’s cabin studio to work together on building a custom walking staff. Bill is a woodworking maniac and has been carving and making walking sticks for years. His work never ceases to amaze me.

The days flew by and the time for our departure for Tennessee finally arrived. We decided to split the drive and left on a nice spring evening, slept at a hotel overnight, and made the rest of the journey the following morning. After about a nine hour drive, there I was, day hiking through the Great Smoky Mountain National Park with my wife, Lindsey “Dr. Wild Weed”, five year old son, Keaton “Chickenbone”, and our friends Sarah “Whiskey Runner” and a husband and wife team Bill “Burl” and Linda “Big Wind Woman”. Part of their hiking ritual is to give each person that goes with them into the Smokies a hiking



nickname that creates a memory of the trip. My nickname was born after we had been looking intently for black bears all week as we hiked the trails. One night, I decided to hide in the trash bin and scare my son when he came to help put the trash away. So was born my nickname “Bear Scare”.

The plan for our week in the mountains, the second week of April, was to hike as many waterfall trails as possible on the north side of the park. We hiked six trails, Laurel Falls, Abram Falls in Cades Cove, Clingman’s Dome, (including a short stretch of the Appalachian Trail), Rainbow Falls, Hen Wallow Falls, and Grotto Falls.

The afternoon we arrived we set off on Laurel falls trail, a roughly paved 2.6 mile

roundtrip hike, with very minimum elevation gain. The falls are nicely sized but this hike had the most hikers on it due to the ease of the trail. The falls have an upper and lower section with a walkway separating the two parts. This was a great trail to start the week and get a little mountain air in our lungs and some gravel stuck in our hiking boots.

On the second day, we headed to the trailhead of Abrams falls at the far west end of the park in an area called Cades Cove. On this one way loop there is a visitor’s center with a working mill and many farm buildings from the early 19th century. The loop has heavy slow moving traffic so be prepared to take your time getting to this trail head. Once we made it to the trail head the trail

**Right:** Keaton and Lindsey at Laurel Falls.







**Above:** Ted With An AT White Blaze.

**Left:** AT Hikers Taking A Lunch Break At Clingman's Dome.

**Next Page:** View From Clingman's Dome.

went over a small bridge on this moderate five mile round trip hike alongside a mountain stream. The day we were on this hike there were a fair amount of hikers, however since this is a longer hike you don't see too many children. The waterfall is about twenty feet tall with a large volume of water flowing over into a clear pool.

The plan for day three was to hike the short Trillium Gap Trail to Grotto Falls, but as we came to the roaring fork motor parkway the park service had the gate closed due to the effects of sequestration on the National Park. Fortunately for our group the road to the highest point in the park had opened

only a week before on March 31st. The drive up to Clingman's Dome is pretty frightening at most points considering the hair pin turns and the increase in elevation, but it is a must see. As we drove, the temperature started dropping until the thermometer on the dash read 48 degrees. Wow what a change! The valley below was almost 80 degrees. I had planned to be hiking in the lower valley and was unprepared for this type of extreme change and was wearing a light weight t-shirt and shorts. After a short stop at the Clingman's Dome gift shop to buy a nice and warm long sleeve shirt, we headed up the nicely paved half mile walkway to the Dome. This is not by any means a stroll down a boardwalk. This is a high altitude hike with a steep incline.

I passed many people on the way up that were resting on benches or had stopped to catch their breath. Once reaching the top, the pathway leads onto a large circular area before it winds up a concrete spiral walkway to a lookout tower. This circular area is a place that the Appalachian Trail (AT) passes close by and about a dozen worn-out looking AT hikers were taking a lunch break before heading on to a nearby shelter. After climbing to the top and taking in the amazing views at 6643 feet, I wanted to get to one of the white blaze marks on the Appalachian Trail and see what the trail looked like. At this point the trail was very wet and muddy and at about a foot wide, was filled with rocks and ice. It was a great day and I was able to mark off a couple things from my Smoky Mountains must see list. Someday I may actually spend more time than ten minutes on the AT, but that's another adventure altogether.









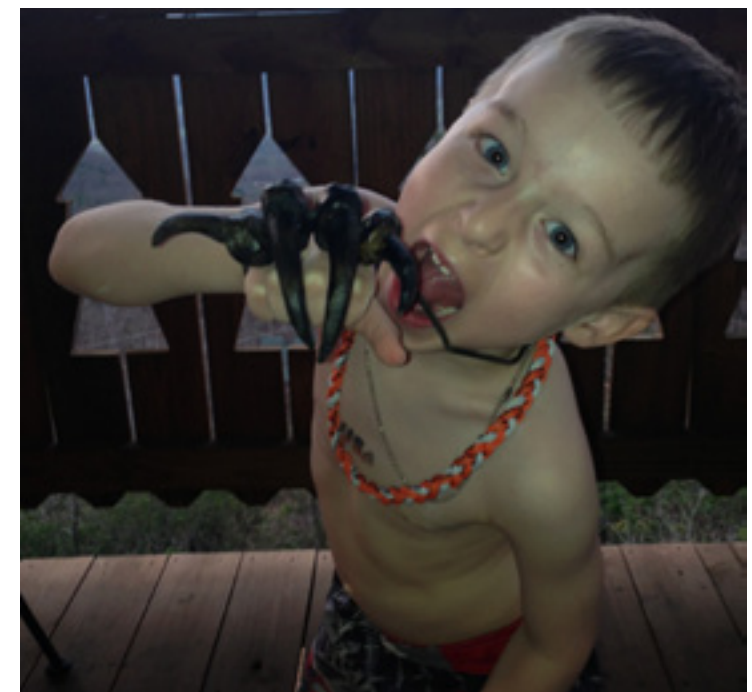
Day four was marked as the day to hike to Rainbow Falls. This was a rugged hike of 5.2 miles roundtrip with high temperatures and a good elevation change. I would separate this hike into three different sections, the first containing a lot of roots, rocks, boulders and obstacles near a swiftly flowing creek, then a dramatic change to an almost dry sandy steep elevation climb and ending with a winding gravel path. By this time in the week everyone was feeling a little on edge. As the hike continued we got pretty spaced out from time to time. We had all decided that we would move at our own pace and meet up for lunch at the falls. It seemed like my wife and I would trade our son back and forth and I would be way ahead when she had him, then way behind everyone in our

group when he and I were hiking together. My son, Keaton, was an overall good sport throughout the trip. Bill had promised to carve him a wooden bear claw after each successful waterfall he reached without being carried. That was his motivation but this hike was really wearing on him. I am a very proud Dad though because he made it there and back with minimal moaning and whining. Each night we would have a bear claw presentation ceremony and he would get to add the new one to his necklace.

Day five we took off and did some sightseeing and shopping at some local artists shops because the weatherman kept predicting rain and thunder storms. Of course we made the decision not to hike

based on the weather report and it ended up raining late in the evening and was sunny and warm most of the day.

Day six involved hiking the four miles on Gabes Mountain Trail to Hen Wallow Falls. The trailhead starts near a campground and zigzags its way over three log bridges and some stepping stones through various creeks that bisect the trail. This trail had a lot of understory trees that made a tight canopy above you which seemed like you were walking through a tunnel. On the way back my son and I waded in a pool of ice cool water for a long while. The unexpected dip was great and very refreshing. Hen Wallow falls is not what you would think of as a waterfall but more of a waterslide. The water coming down, slides over smooth rocks and ends in a small stream flowing farther down the mountain side.



**Left:** Tree Roots Growing Over The Rainbow Falls Trail.

**Below:** Log Bridge On The Trail To Rainbow Falls.

**Above:** Keaton Showing Off His Four Carved Bear Claws.

On the last day of hiking the hot weather finally broke, I was prepared this time. The “smoke” that makes the Smokies so famous was visible when we stepped foot on the 2.8 miles Trillium Gap trail to Grotto Falls. This trail was my favorite hike of the week. The trail has large trees all along the way. At one point there is a valley full of trees with burls, burls are caused by a tree undergoing some type of stress. The trail ends at a large convex waterfall that you can walk behind. The fog was hanging so low in the trees above when you looked up they seemed to just disappear into thin air. It was a wonderful sight. After we ate our lunch we took our time hiking back out and watched yellow finches on branches, stopped to look at the burls, and talked about how great a trip it had been as we made our way to the trail head.



This park is in a great location for anyone located in the Midwest or Eastern part of the United States with many large cities within a day's drive. The peak season is mid-summer, if you would like to avoid the traffic and crowds try to plan a trip in spring or fall. This park, 800 square miles of mountainous terrain, may take up to an hour or longer to travel to various trailheads so plan ahead. Plan to enter the main park entrance at Gatlinburg, Tennessee and go to Sugarland Welcome Center. The park rangers have all types of reference materials available including waterfall trail maps for sale.

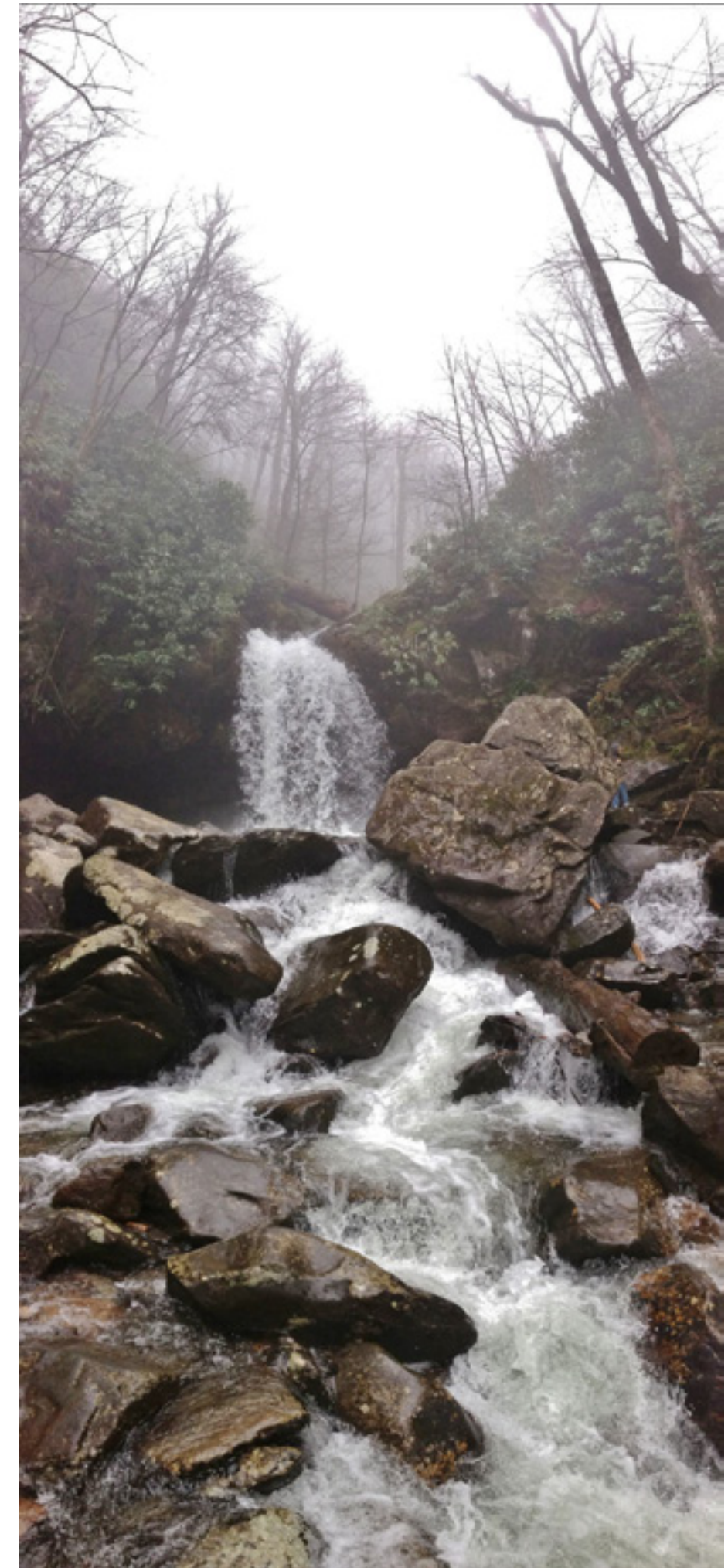
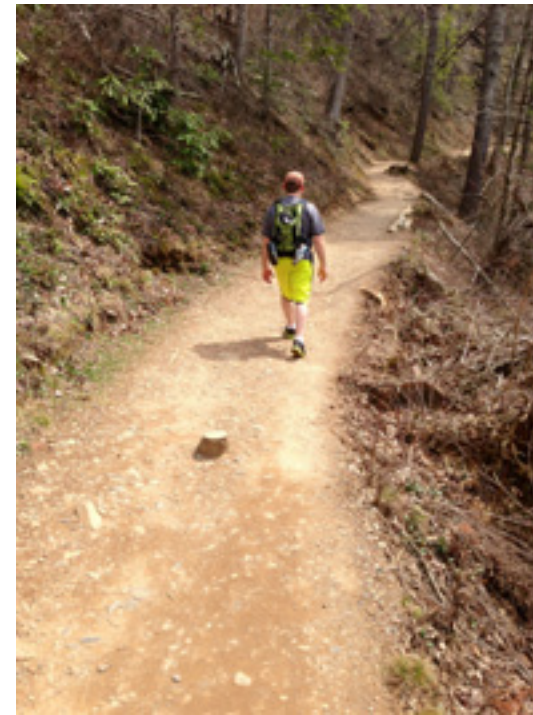
I would recommend a trip to the Smokies as a must-do, even if you are only a novice hiker, or considering hiking with children.

On this trip we averaged about a mile an hour just with the wide range of skill in our group. Even with a very inexperienced group we logged 22 miles in six days. A final thought when hiking in the Smokies, pick the short trails if you're a novice, create some reward for completing each one, include your children to make some memories, and "take only pictures, leave only foot prints," as stated by our National Park Service. ❖

**Below:** Great Waterfall That You Can Drive Right By.

**Right (Clockwise From Top Left) :**

1. Ted Hiking On Abrams Trail.
2. Grotto Falls.
3. Trillium Gap Trail.
4. Trillium Gap Trail Sign.





Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue9.html>





# Exploring Coyote Gulch

Location: Southern Utah

by David M. Cobb

**Water and sand, water and sand, water and sand—it's been a few years since I visited the canyon country of Utah and I forgot about the mix of water and sand here that can permeate one's hiking shoes.** I should have worn sandals. I read about walking the wet canyon bottom, but I stuck with my hiking shoes anyway. This time I arrived to explore Coyote Gulch, a photogenic but crowded canyon which cuts across Grand Staircase National Monument and the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area of south-central Utah. After bouncing an hour down the 33 miles of dirt-covered Hole-in-the-Rock Road, my hike began at the Hurricane Wash trailhead. You can obtain a free permit here to cover your hike, if there are still some available.

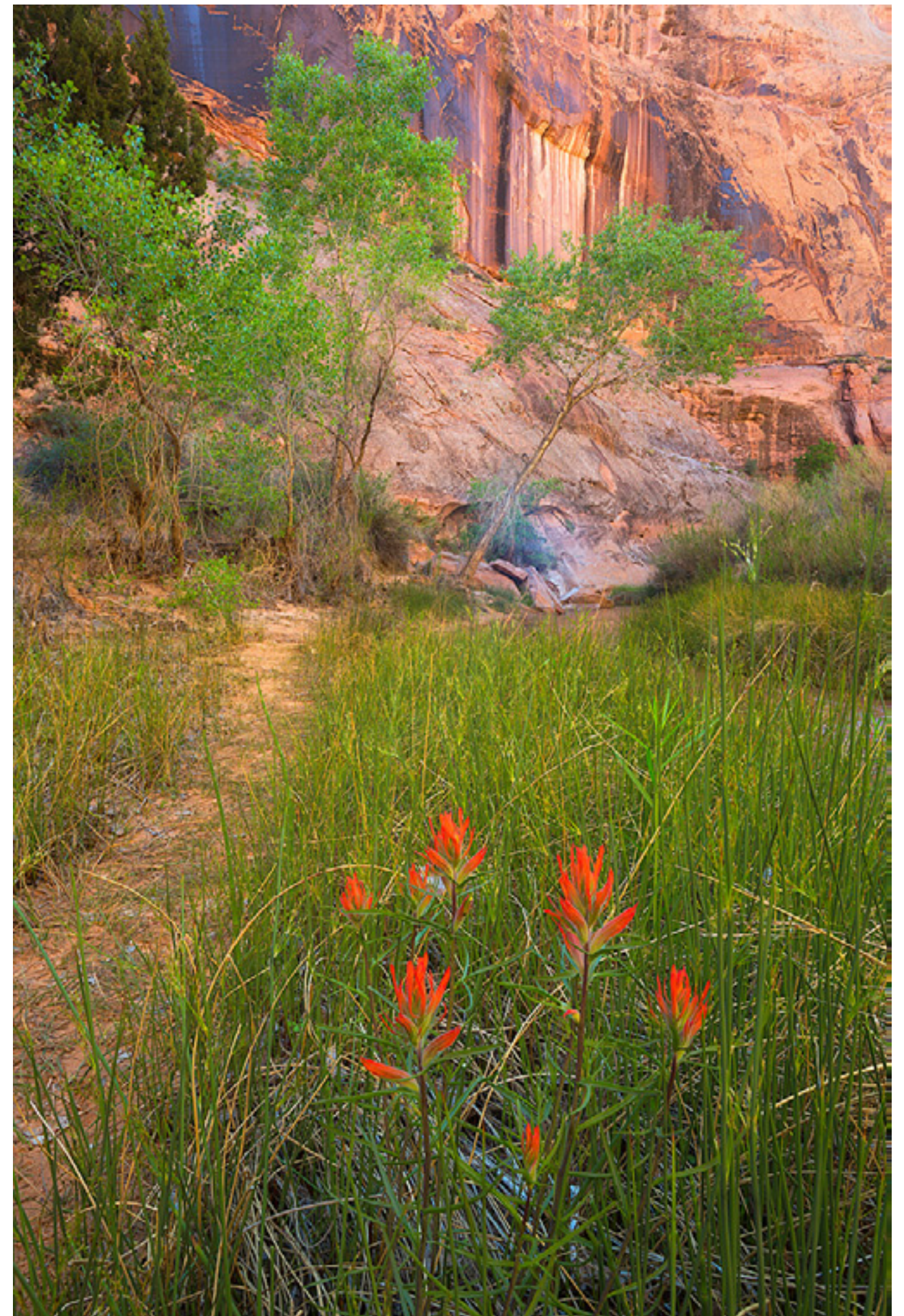
My goal for this trip was to explore the Coyote Gulch area thoroughly from Hurricane Wash, connecting with Coyote Gulch and walking it to its convergence with the Escalante River Canyon. I'd then retrace my steps for awhile up Coyote Gulch and jutting right when Hurricane Wash juts left. I'd take this route back up the gulch until it meets up with the

Red Well trailhead, walking the road from here back to my car, and creating a large 30 mile letter "Y" of a hike.

The hiking was easy enough at first, as the trail crosses sandy mounds of desert and dry wash beds. A few groups of backpackers were leaving as I walked in, but I was to see many more hikers before the day was through. This is not the place to go for solitude; as a matter of fact I saw more people on this backpacking trip than all my 60-70 Utah canyon hikes put together (excluding Virgin Narrows in Zion National Park). That was ok with me. I had hiked many other canyons in the Escalante region, but this was still on my list to explore and photograph. As I walked onward, Hurricane Wash slowly deepened and the walls narrowed as I approached Coyote Gulch.

A spring generated a small stream which grew deeper as I hiked downward, and it was here along the trail I began to find poison ivy. Since I'm horribly allergic to the stuff, I watched where my arms and legs were at all times. Water is never a problem

**Right:** Indian Paintbrush, Coyote Gulch.







**Left:** Coyote Gulch Cascade.

**Above:** Hurricane Wash.

**Next Page:** Stevens Arch.

on this hike, but because there is so much of it, I also felt more mosquitoes and chiggers than any time in canyon country.

Once Hurricane wash converged with Coyote Gulch, the canyon widened and so did the creek. Here campers and tents were seemingly around every bend. Lizards scurried across last year's fallen leaves, and you'd swear they were rattlesnakes –that took a little time to get used to. Coyote Gulch deepened and opened up to huge alcoves. From here to the meeting of the Escalante River, you can choose to try and keep your feet dry or just walk the sandy bottom of the creek. (Good luck keeping your feet dry.) In a couple of miles the route passes by Jacob Hamblin Arch, and after a couple more miles

you'll walk through Coyote Natural Bridge. If you take the higher slickrock route (instead of the bowed canyon cascade route) you'll get a good view of Cliff Arch. Along the way, you'll pass a panel of Fremont Indian pictographs too.

In the lower part of Coyote Gulch the waterfalls begin, and with that the hike begins to lower off ledges and down benches. I wanted to spend time with these photogenic cascades and take advantage of some of the morning light bouncing off the canyon walls. The lower part of the canyon seemed more flower-filled too which added to the ambiance. As you near the Escalante, you'll come to an area with a riot of signs along the trail. Somehow I passed one of the no-hiking posts, and instead followed a rock cairn towards a ledge. Here I cliffed-out on slickrock, until a Good Samaritan









**Above:** Cottonwood Camp.

**Right:** Jacob Hamlin Arch.

**Next Page:** Coyote Gulch Waterfall.

**Pages 35-36:** Hikers, Coyote Natural Bridge.

backpacker came along to help me back up canyon. The trail at this signed junction actually goes south uphill between cliff faces. A few hundred foot slog in sand gives you a view of the large Stevens Arch across the Escalante River. Further uphill will bring you to a trailhead and also a junction with the Escalante below. A longer hike can be taken from here, but for me this was trail's end. And a reverse route was begun.

I always like reversing my route in canyon country for the different perspective. I took a different route at times or walked the other side of the canyon for a change of scenery. Once I reached the confluence of Hurricane Wash and Coyote Gulch I continued my walk

up Coyote Gulch to its beginnings. Every time I thought the canyon was about to peter out I'd round the bend and there would be another 500-foot alcove shading me from the sun. Once the trail passes through a gate at a barb-wire fence you start hiking through cow country. Cow pies litter the water and splatter the sand, and within a few miles the water turns to dust. From here it's a dry hike back to the Red Wall trailhead along sandy-bottomed washes and over slickrock. I followed the road from here for about 4-5 miles back to my car.

I recommend taking this hike in spring or fall. If you'd like more water along your walk, then go for spring; but if it's the fall color of cottonwoods that you're after, choose autumn for your seasonal hiking. And when you go, prepare your feet with some good lightweight footwear, and get ready for wet and sand, wet and sand, wet and sand. ❖













Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue9.html>

**Getting There:**

From State Route 12 just east of the town of Escalante in south-central Utah, take the Hole-in-the-Rock road (may be impassible if wet) 33.5 miles to the Hurricane Wash Trailhead. Car shuttles can also be arranged ahead of time through local outfitters if you'd like to drop your car off at one end and shuttle to a starting point.

**Maps:**

I used the National Geographic "Canyons of the Escalante" #710, 1:70,500

**Information:**

Free permits are available at the trailhead and there is tons of information online. Camping is allowed anywhere in the canyon.

**Books:**

There are many hiking and canyoneering books covering the Escalante region of Utah, you might want to check out the Falcon Guide: Hiking Grand Staircase-Escalante & Glen Canyon Region by Ron Adkison.







# THE DANGEROUS BEAUTY OF MADERAS

## Hiking Isla Ometepe's Fickle Volcano in Nicaragua

by Heide Brandes

**As we approach the cloud forest area of Volcan Maderas on the Isle Ometepe in Nicaragua, the roars begin.** I can't see the beasts whose deep, ugly and threatening howls fill the morning sunshine at the base of this dormant volcano, but they sound as if they number in the hundreds. The guttural threats bark warnings to us that we are about to enter howler monkey territory, and these black loud monkeys are ready to defend their territory with not only noise, but handfuls of feces to throw and bladders full of urine to rain down upon us.

Marcos, my guide, doesn't seem perturbed by this at all. He's traveled the five-hour hike to the summit of Maderas hundreds of times and even volunteers to do search and rescue on the cone, a task he does disturbingly often. With almost every step, he gleefully shares tales of lost hikers, broken bodies at the base of waterfalls and husks of victims made dead by dehydration.

Maderas isn't a volcano to take lightly. Little trails branch off from the two main routes, leading unsuspecting hikers deeper into almost impenetrable forests, leading hikers to their death. The sides of this volcano are a Minotaur's maze, filled with hazards like fat vicious bees or booby-trapped rocks that seemed designed to break ankles.

"I find the hiker who died," said Marcos, as he races up, up, up along the volcano's trail. I pant behind him, trying to keep up as I raise one leg after another on a non-stop steep hell of an incline trail. "I find him in a waterfall. He got lost in the rain and fell."

A guide is mandatory to crest this volcano, as well as its active sister volcano, Volcan Concepcion on the north end of the island. Experienced hikers have died on both in the past decade, usually from falls or from dehydration. The volcano will claim victims who underestimate her.

When I decided I wanted to hike up Maderas, I underestimated her. After the first hour, my legs were shaking from the nearly constant high-stepping of the trail and my lungs burned in the warming morning air as I sucked in breath to keep up.

However, for those who brave her slopes and her primeval forests, the reward is full of views of the entire Isle Ometepe and a rappel into the crater lagoon at the top of Maderas. The hike normally takes five or more hours through rocky, burning lowlands, moist and steamy cloud forests, up boulderish trails and brackish mud.

Maderas rewards those who stay on track and respect her power. She's the coral snake of the island's volcanoes – beautiful, alluring and deadly.

### ISLE OMETEPE

Isla Ometepe is an island formed by two volcanoes in Nicaragua's Lago de Nicaragua, a massive in-land lake just south of Managua and butting up to Granada's shores. Near the San Jose del Sur port, one of two ferry ports on the island, is the Charco Verde Reserve, an entire cove area that has been protected to prevent development, leaving hidden lagoons and black sand lake beaches undisturbed and pristine.

My travel partner Ash and I stayed at the Hotel y Restaurante Charco Verde, a collection of cabanas that sit along the shores of Lago de Nicaragua and settle up along the borders of the reserve. The entrance to the Carcho Verde Nature Reserve leads hikers through the lowland forest, a hidden lagoon and the beach. It's also one of the favorite trails for bird enthusiasts, acting as home to blue magpies and other winged, colorful species.



The hiking trails in the reserve are well-kept and fairly easy, but the view of both volcanoes from the lagoon and the beach shores are worth the walk. Howler monkeys slumbered in the soggy heat up the trees, and Maderas rose on the horizon like a promise. In addition to countless lizards and birds, the reserve is home to iguana, rodents and sustainable gardens.

The trail takes an hour or so to complete, so don't miss the chance to explore the trail a lookout point known as Mirador del Diablo (Devil's Viewpoint) where hikers can see the entire reserve as well as the mainland on the horizon.

After this hike was the challenge of finding a guide for Maderas. Not only did we need a taxi to Finca Magdalena on the far side of the island, but an experienced, English-speaking guide. The hotel receptionist quoted a price of \$90 for both, shamefully high in my naive view as a tourist. I told her I'd think about it and wandered to the open air restaurant.

If you want a good deal, talk to the locals. A waiter at our hotel introduced us to Michael, a local taxi driver who looked as if he should be a cage fighter instead of a taxi driver. For \$40, he would pick me up at the cabana and take me to the base of the volcano where the guide he knew would call for a pick up after we were done.

While usually not the best idea to take off with complete strangers, this is how I ended up in Balgüe at the Finca Magdalena, the park entrance to the trail up Maderas. After paying less than \$5, Marcos and I begin our trip to the top.



**Above:** Marcos, Heide's Guide.

**Right:** Trail at the Base of the Maderas.

Of the two volcanoes, Concepcion is the tallest at 1,610 meters. It's also the youngest and most active. The most recent eruption in 2010 spewed ash and gas in a violent display, but Maderas is the quiet sister. It's still a huge volcano, almost 1,400 meters high and you can't help but sympathize for the workers who trekked the coffee plantations at the bottom part of the volcano.

As we start the hike, I spy a small, wood-topped shelter.





“Petroglyphs,” Marcos tells me. “It’s 2,000 years old, and was probably drawn by a shaman.”

The Ometepe Petroglyph Project has identified the ancient petroglyphs on Maderas and mapped 73 archaeological sites within the area, including almost 1,700 petroglyph on over 1,400 boulders. As we start our trek through the scrubby, dry lowlands at the base of the volcano, the petroglyphs are easily accessible and approachable, reminders of the Nahuatl people who inhabited the island.

Marcos knows them all. In addition to working search and rescue on the island, he leads scientists and biologists through the forests of Maderas as they research medicinal plants and rare orchids. He has a sense of humor with the petroglyphs.

“That one looks like a woman dancing to me,” he points out. “Or, it is just a silly drawing by a bored priest.”



Figures on the boulders have “bowling ball faces” and spirals. The guides know where the best drawings are, and as we hike the dusty, tree-less trail toward the cloud forest, they pop up around corners and on the far side of boulders that most hikers would miss.



The hike toward the cloud forest up the base of Maderas takes over an hour, and by that time, I had the feeling that Maderas may be the hike that does me in. Sweat saturated my hair, I stank from the steady, humid incline and hot hike, and I still had more than four hours to go to summit the volcano.

The monkeys see us before we see them, and the howling begins.

**Left:** White-Faced Monkey.

**Below:** Petroglyphs Along the Trail.





## THE TRAIL THAT BEAT ME

I'm eating a nut when we enter the lower cloud forest of Maderas. Marcos is fond of pointing out whatever is edible along the trail, and I'm fond of trying every edible thing he points out. He always starts out with "If you get lost, you can eat this. It is..."

Marcos talks a lot about hikers getting lost on this volcano. He seems to enjoy it. Nearly every story starts with "If you get lost," to the point that getting lost is a foregone conclusion. Thanks to Marco's vast knowledge of edible plants, I munch on nuts, leaves, flowers, plants and even considered giving the big black scaly beetle a try before reaching my limit.

As we enter the cloud forest with its roaring, poop-throwing monkeys, the air becomes more humid and wet, cooling off the sweat from the desert-like low lands.

But the hike becomes harder. Although steep with slippery rocks and packed clay, the trail is in good condition and our first stop has us both panting, sweating and ready for water.

From the makeshift benches, both sides of the lake are visible along with the looming figure of Concepcion. From here, after snacking on plantains and peanuts, the trail gets tougher, slippery and muddy.

It's not a walk. It's a four-hour climb. Every minute or so, I stop catch my breath and massage my legs. I stop looking uphill because uphill never ends. With the forest crowding in and the clouds oozing through

the trees, the scenery is Lord of the Ring-ish, but hard to concentrate on.

One misstep means a twisted ankle.

"A girl hurt her ankle here and I had to carry her on my back down the volcano," Marcos tells me. "She say she is 119 pounds." Marcos shakes his head. "She was NO 119 pounds."

Unbelievably, the island hosts a marathon that has runners sprinting up this path. The more hard-core ones do it with handcuffs on. Breathing desperately and climbing at a snail's pace, I try to imagine how anyone can safely run up this path.

Halfway up, the cloud forest air changes. We aren't alone. The rustle and cracking of branches slowly expose a herd of cows, their hip bones jutting out like cliffs. They give us baleful glances, and one calf panics as he keeps running away from us in the same direction we're traveling. Marco just nonchalantly slaps them along to move them out of the way.

Further up, a wild turkey takes flight and fat nasty bees block our path for a bit.

Four hours up, and I'm done. We sit on a mossy, damp log for another water break. My heart feels like a tribal drum. My legs tremble.

**Left:** Tree with edible nuts.

**Next Page:** View of Lake Nicaragua from the Trail up Maderas.







Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:

<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:

<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue9.html>

“From here, it gets hard,” Marco says. That earns him a nasty look from me. To him, the four hour climb has been a pleasant stroll. “It’s all mud and rain. Not going to be good hike.”

It’s humbling to know you can’t finish a hike. I started with the arrogant belief that I was in great shape; at the middle, I prayed I wouldn’t pass out. Nodding in defeat, I gazed up to path oozing black mud, and we started back down.

For those who reach the crater through calf-deep muck, a crater awaits. At the bottom, a frigid lake of rainwater and natural spring water bubbles. Again, only those with a knowledgeable guide can rappel down to it.

Two knee-shattering hours later, we reach the base of the volcano. The howler monkeys are quiet now, slumbering away the heat in the trees, but the sun is out and brutal. An hour later, we reach the car where buff and menacing Michael awaits.

“You make it to the top?” Michael asks with a wide grin. He knows I didn’t. Still, both make me feel better by sharing stories of athletes who quit one hour into the hike. At least I made four hours and a natural lunch to boot.

Instead, we load up into the stick shift, reach a natural pool and drink rum out of coconuts. Maderas, her looming top encased in rain, watched over us. ❖

**SHARE THE BENEFITS OF REI MEMBERSHIP**

REI members get free shipping on eligible orders, an annual member refund and more.

► Learn More About REI Membership

**50% off everything at golite.com**





# Tripods and Trekking: Lightweight Options

**Review by Ted Ehrlich**

**For professional photographers and serious photography enthusiasts, tripods are a necessary accessory for outdoor photography with large heavy cameras.** However a majority of outdoor enthusiasts bring small point and shoot cameras and cell phones into the backcountry to record the memories of the experience. For those users, a tripod may seem like an afterthought. However by using a simple tripod, and some ingenuity, amateurs can greatly increase their camera’s abilities with a minimal weight and cost penalty.

## The Tamrac Zipshot

My current favorite is Tamrac’s Zipshot mini. At 9.4 ounces, most people will never notice the added weight and it packs down to 9” folded. To set it up, simply undo the two red elastic cords and give the tripod a shake. Just like a shock-corded tent pole, the tripod snaps together in seconds, and the full ball head design allows easy adjustments in all directions. At 28” extended, the tripod lets the camera sit at the waist, which gives a nice perspective, and is tall enough to keep shrubs and other plants from getting in the way. Unfortunately the legs are fixed length, and the ball head only has one adjustment nut, making it hard to rotate the camera on fixed planes. You will also be squatting most of the time while shooting photos. Tamrac also makes a standard version that

is taller at 44” extended, 15” folded, and 11 oz. I found that the mini was more stable and useable in variable terrain than the standard version, and is lighter and easier to pack. Bonus – double wrap the red shock cords around the extended legs to create a monopod when the terrain makes using a tripod impossible.





### The Joby Gorillapod Micro 250

The Joby Gorillapod Micro 250 is my second favorite, and is an all around great tripod that EVERYONE should own. It weighs less than an ounce, it is never in the way, and is very stable. It is so compact that you can leave it on your camera as a permanent accessory, and fold it out only when needed. It offers 36° of tilt with its ball head pivot, making it easy to adjust on most sloped surfaces. However, it only holds the camera an inch or so off the surface, so you will need to be creative in finding a suitable surface for it to set on. I find fence posts, signs, rocks, and trees will help, and will help you be more creative with your shooting than always taking the picture from a standing perspective. Urban environments will also give you lots of

surface options too. Inevitably some areas will be devoid of any good surfaces, and you won't be able to use it. Joby also makes a Micro 800 for larger cameras (up to 2 lbs.) and a Grip Tight Micro for cell phones.

### The Original Joby Gorillapod

Another option from Joby is the original Gorillapod. They are still very light at approximately 2 ounces, and comes in lots of bright colors. The original uses multiple plastic pivots to give you an adjustable tripod that will also wrap around tree branches, poles, and other objects, or allow you to stand it a few inches off a flat surface. This was my first backcountry tripod, and I rarely use it now. I found it difficult to adjust and level and the legs won't grip certain objects tight enough for it to stay in place. Lastly, it

is not very stable, requiring a short delay timer on every shot to eliminate shaking from pressing the shutter button. Again, Joby makes a few different versions, a magnetic one for attaching to steel objects, a Grip Tight model for cell phones, and a larger version for heavier cameras.

### The Pedco Ultrapod

The Pedco Ultrapod is a lightweight (Just under 2 ounce) tripod that works well and doesn't take up much space. Though the adjustments do the job, they aren't the most user-friendly controls out there and can at times be a bit frustrating when you need to compose a quick shot. On the plus side, a Velcro strap is included on the tripod that allows for a variety of shooting and securement options – Such as around a tree branch or tree trunk, which can make

up for the Pedco's short height. The Velcro strap does have a tendency to snag on soft fabrics however, so take note if you plan to carry the Pedco in a pocket. For a larger version, check out the Pedco Ultrapod II.





Joby also sells a nice Grip Tight accessory mount that will allow you to mount your cell phone to any tripod or monopod, including the Tamrac Zipshot.

I find for short hikes and drive up areas, a full size traditional tripod is useful, and there are hundreds of options out there. I personally use an older Ritz Camera Quantaray tripod. Again, cell phone users can use accessory mounts to attach their phones to full size tripods to get the most out of their phones. A full size tripod will allow for independent leg and height adjustment, leveling, and smoother panning for videos and panoramas. These tripods will be heavier, starting around 3 pounds for the lighter ones.

There are a few more lightweight options out there like the Gomite Tiltpod which may work well. There are also many monopods out there. These include monopod trekking poles, trekking pole adapters (e.g. Gossamer gear LT4S screw adapter), the Alite twig pod, the Trekmount, and the Stick Pic. I find that monopods are not stable enough to justify using them, so focusing on a true tripod will yield better results. For a photographer that just wants photos to share with friends and family, or someone that is ready to step up their game for their own personal collection, a tripod will be one of the most effective accessories you can add. ❖

For more details or to purchase the tripods listed in this review, check them out at the retailer links below:

	Weight	Price
<a href="#"><u>Tamrac ZipShot Mini</u></a>	9.4 ounces	\$40
<a href="#"><u>Tamrac ZipShot</u></a>	11 ounces	\$50
<a href="#"><u>Joby Gorillapod Micro 250</u></a>	0.8 ounce	\$20
<a href="#"><u>Joby Micro 800</u></a>	2 ounces	\$30
<a href="#"><u>Joby Grip Tight Micro</u></a>	2 ounces	\$30
<a href="#"><u>Joby Original Gorillapod</u></a>	2 ounces	\$20
<a href="#"><u>Pedco Ultrapod</u></a>	1.8 ounces	\$15
<a href="#"><u>Pedco Ultrapod II</u></a>	4 ounces	\$20



The Spring 2013 GoLite Tent Collection



Go Ultralight >

**FREE SHIPPING**  
ON ORDERS OVER \$50.

**60 DAY NO-HASSLE RETURNS.**

**GREAT BRANDS.**

**KILLER DEALS.**









# The Wichitas

Location: Southern Oklahoma

by Bubba Suess

**Oklahoma is generally not high on most lists of hiking destinations.** Common perceptions of the state are rooted in the Dust Bowl: flat, arid plains; dust storms; and a generally inhospitable place to live. Much of Oklahoma still fits this bill, though it is less arid than expected, and the farms and ranches are productive again. It does not seem like the place for hikers to go in search of interesting terrain, wilderness and beauty. Emerging from the unyielding flatness of the Oklahoma plains, the Wichita Mountains are a revelation of surprising beauty, craggy mountains and untamed wilderness. When nearing the outskirts of the Wichitas, the flatness of the fields gives way to rolling foothills punctuated by an occasional rocky outcrop. Yet, the mountains, amazing as they are, are not the only treasures in the Wichita Mountains. The Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge contains the bulk of the range itself and nearly all the publicly accessible land.

**Left:** View North to the Animal-Only Section of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

**Below:** Bison Roam Beneath Mount Scott.

Consequently, these mountains are home to one of the largest bison herds on public lands as well as elk, deer, prairie dogs, armadillos and the other usual denizens of the plains, plus an unusual herd of feral longhorn cattle. Taken together, the mountains and the wildlife combine to form an exceptional hiking destination.

I first discovered the Wichita Mountains at the beginning of a four- year stint at graduate school in Dallas. Growing up in northern California, I had not quite realized how important mountains and the wilderness were to me. My first semester in Texas was difficult as I came to terms with

my self-imposed exile in the flatlands. When asked about where to go, Dallas residents all pointed me to the Texas Hill Country, which, though interesting and supplying some hiking opportunities, failed to satisfy my hunger for wilderness. By accident, I stumbled across a brief reference to the Wichita Mountains on the internet. Though doubtful of their mountain qualities I made the three hour drive north to Lawton, Oklahoma the following weekend. As I approached, the peaks loomed on the horizon. It was a dramatic moment, the realization that a mountain oasis existed not far from the Dallas Metroplex. Not only were the Wichitas a wildlife refuge, they were also a hiker's refuge. Although the area was not vast compared to a national park or a national forest, the mountains were so rugged that there was immense





opportunity for exploration packed into a relatively small area. Over the next four years I returned to the Wichitas again and again, piercing ever deeper into the heart of the mountains, discovering unexpectedly wonderful sites. Though there were many great memories built during these journeys, the one that stands out was a backpacking trip during the elk rut. All afternoon and through the night, their unique bugle could be heard as I set up camp and went to sleep. That night, as the elk bulls continued to call out into the darkness, a lone bison walked nonchalantly through my camp, only a few feet away from me. As I lay there looking up at the stars, I was amazed that such a land could be found in Oklahoma.

The Wichita Mountains are a small mountain range. Rather than being a single block of mountains, the Wichitas a series of several separate batholiths. The western half of the range consists of numerous isolated granite islands protruding from the flat Oklahoma farmland. Most of this area is privately owned, though there are two spots that are accessible to the public. Quartz Mountain State Park is the larger with the more interesting landscape. The park boasts a few developed trails, a number of very good opportunities for off-trail exploration, and Baldy Point, one of the finest climbing areas in the Wichitas. Great Plains State Park also offers public hiking. Unfortunately, most of the park is occupied by a lake and only the southern fringes have any mountains of note. Thankfully, there is a developed trail here that explores this small slice of the park.

The eastern half of the Wichita Mountains is remarkably different. Rather than isolated plutons punctuating the land, the eastern



range is a large collection of peaks, canyons and valleys. Almost the entire area is contained within the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge (WMNWR) and the U.S. Army's Fort Sill Military Reservation. Although Fort Sill is closed to the public, hikers and backpackers will find ample opportunities in the WMNWR to explore the part of the Wichitas with the highest concentration of peaks, exposed granite, amazing rock formations and wildlife.

Within the WMNWR itself, much of the land is set aside for use only by the refuge's animal denizens. Still, there are three portions of the park that are open for public exploration. The first of these is the Mount Scott area, at

the extreme east end of the park. No trails exist within this area but it consists of open granite dotted by the occasional juniper and post oak, trees that are common throughout the entire mountain range. Although this area is essentially trail-less, there is a road to the top of Mount Scott, the second highest peak in the WMNWR. The views from the summit are spectacular and take in most of the refuge and beyond.

The Dog Run Hollow area, the second section of the WMNWR that is open to the public, is of more interest to hikers. This occupies the central part of the refuge. Unlike the Mount Scott area, there is a well-developed trail system providing access to some interesting



**Left:** The Rugged Wichita Mountains Spread Out Beneath Mount Scott.

**Above:** Enormous Boulders Choke The Upper Section Of Styx Canyon.

**Next Page:** Sunset In The Wichita Mountains.

destinations. The Dog Run Hollow Trail is a large, five-mile loop. Connector trails allow for a few different route options. The most interesting part of the Dog Run Hollow Trail is the east end, where the trail follows the rim of Cache Creek's small but rocky canyon. During high water the creek tumbles down pretty cascades before flowing into Forty-Foot Hole. At the hole, the creek passes through a small gorge with sheer cliffs. The name is derived from the fact that the cliffs extend forty feet below the surface of the water, making a surprisingly deep pool. Beyond the trail system, the Dog Run Hollow area also has plenty of room for cross-country exploration on the west side of Cache Creek. This includes another, larger canyon called the Narrows, a favorite area for rock climbers.

Though the Mount Scott and Dog Run Hollow areas offer good hiking and scrambling opportunities, the Charon's







Garden Wilderness is the jewel of the Wichita Mountains. Here one finds all the best attributes that define the Wichita Mountains: high peaks, narrow canyons, caves, unusual rock formations, wildlife, and human history all gathered together, amplified and arranged in spectacular fashion. Although the Wichitas' pink granite is ubiquitous throughout the mountain range, here it is manifest on an unequaled scale. The area is so rugged that it is easy to see why it was set aside as a wilderness, preserved in its primeval state: it was considered too inhospitable to be of any use to farmers and ranchers. However, what was unwelcoming to those who earn their living from the ground is a paradise to those who draw other kinds of sustenance from the land. The Charon's Garden Wilderness offers hikers and, to a lesser extent, backpackers,

a chaotic jumble of peaks and canyons to explore. Though the area is small, it is such a maze of rock that there is the opportunity for multi-day exploration without exhausting all of the sights found in the wilderness.

There are two developed trails in the Charon's Garden Wilderness. Both trails depart from the Sunset Trailhead on the area's north side. The most popular route is the Elk Mountain Trail, a 1.1-mile trail that climbs to the broad summit plateau of Elk Mountain, the wilderness's tallest peak. Though relatively short, the trail is only the beginning of the journey on Elk Mountain. The summit is expansive, with lots of potential for exploring the enormous boulders and delicate vernal pools. For those skilled enough to locate them and brave enough to enter them, the Rock Rooms are a series of caves created



by massive boulders stacked together in a draw on the south side of Elk Mountain. It is possible to enter the caves and descend through the darkness from the summit plateau several hundred feet down to an exit at the base of the mountain.

The second trail to penetrate the wilderness is the 2.2-mile Charon's Garden Trail. This path skirts the western foot of Elk Mountain before passing through the Valley of the Boulders, which also contains cavernous rooms between the massive house-sized boulders. High above the trail brood the enormous Apple and Pear, a pair of boulders, true to their namesakes. Beyond the boulder fields, the trail parallels Post Oak Creek, the only watershed in the Charon's

Garden Wilderness. The route finally ends at the wilderness area's southern trailhead. Along the way, the path passes by Post Oak and Little Post Oak Falls, the only notable waterfalls in the Wichita Mountains.

Though these trails offer scenery far exceeding anything one would expect from this part of America, they are really just appetizers to the real adventure of the Charon's Garden Wilderness. The only way

**Left:** The Apple and Pear Preside Over the Valley of Boulders in the Charon's Garden Wilderness.

**Above:** Eagle Peak Looms in the Distance Beyond the Dog Run Fork of Cache Creek.



to truly explore this wilderness is to depart the trail and scramble over the cliffs and boulders, climb down into the draws filled with thickets of juniper and oak, and ascend the peaks that dot the wilderness. There, one finds the true essence of the wilderness in the Wichita Mountains. Though human feet seldom journey into the hinterlands beyond the trails, the feet of bison, deer and elk are no strangers to these lands. They, along with geologic wonders like the appropriately named Crab Eyes and the numerous peaks, ensure there is no lack of destinations to explore.

Although the number of official trails in the wilderness is limited, the Refuge makes the expectation of cross-country travel explicit. Backpacking is allowed in the wilderness, but camping is permitted only in a broad

valley between the heart of the wilderness and Sunset Peak, a lone mountain occupying the northern part of the region. While there are use-trails, there are not official trails accessing the camping area. Bison and longhorn cattle often frequent this valley, adding significantly to its scenic quality. The Crab Eyes, twin rocks perched precariously on a 100 foot tall column of rock, are easily reached from the camping area as well.

Hikers and backpackers are not the only people who have fallen under the spell of the Charon’s Garden region. Rock climbers have developed numerous routes in the wilderness and elsewhere in the Wichita Mountains. Indeed, the Wichitas are considered one of the finest climbing destinations east of the Rocky Mountains. The granite slabs and walls draw climbers from around the area and



across the country. Trails blazed by climbers to reach climbing areas are eagerly used by hikers as well.

After I finished school in Texas, I returned home to California. Now surrounded by more familiar hiking haunts, I strangely found myself longing for my small granite refuge in Oklahoma. The tiny mountain range had cast its spell on me and helped me to redefine my definitions of wilderness, of beauty and what I considered spectacular. Places in California that I had disregarded in favor of the grand towers of the Sierra Nevada had a new appeal to me. My time in the Wichita Mountains had blessed me with an appreciation for the beauty found in lands not so tall or vast, but still rich with a glory and wonder of their own. I suspect this spell of the Wichitas will be with me as long as I live. ❖

**Left:** The Backpackers Camping Area Lies Beneath Sunset Peak.

**Above:** The Crab Eyes Are Ones of the Fantastic Formations in the Charon’s Garden Wilderness.

**Below:** Post Oak Falls, the Only Substantial Waterfall in the Wichita Mountains.





Note: You are viewing the PDF version of TrailGroove Magazine. For the optimal viewing experience please view the magazine online at:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com>

Direct link to this issue:  
<http://www.TrailGroove.com/issue9.html>



A composite image featuring a dark forest background with two promotional banners. The top banner is orange and white, advertising a "SAVE BIG" sale on outdoor gear. It includes the REI logo and a "SEE ALL SALE ITEMS" button. The bottom banner is dark blue and white, advertising "FREE SHIPPING ON ORDERS OVER \$50.", "60-DAY NO HASSLE RETURNS.", and "KILLER DEALS.". It features logos for MSR, Mont-Bell, Nemo, CampSaver, Marmot, and GSI.





### Exped Schnozzel Pumpbag

Blowing up your air pad at the end of a long day making you dizzy? Come back to earth and keep the moisture from your breath out of your Exped sleeping pad & pillow with the Schnozzel. Doubles as a packliner / drysack as you hike, and maybe a pillow later. Crazy name, serious performance. Just over 2 ounces, \$30:  
[REI.com](http://REI.com)



### GoLite Poncho Tarp

Multiuse defined. Shelter, rain gear, packcover...GoLite has you covered with their 7 ounce Poncho Tarp. \$60:  
[GoLite.com](http://GoLite.com)



### Marmot Plasma 30 Sleeping

900 fill-power down keeps the weight down to just 22 ounces - In a bag still rated for 30 degrees. \$470:  
[www.Campsaver.com](http://www.Campsaver.com)



### Ruffwear Quick Draw Leash

Can't find a good spot to stow your best friend's leash while on the trail? The Quick Draw solves the problem by stowing the wrapped leash neatly around your dog's own collar, nearly out of sight. When needed, just pull the red tab, releasing the Velcro to form an instant lead. 2 ounces and \$15:  
[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

# GEAR MASH



### CamelBak Groove Bottle

First off we think this bottle has the best name of any water bottle on the market. Secondly a built in replaceable carbon filter improves water quality and taste, anywhere. Holds 25 ounces with a \$27 price tag:  
[Backcountry.com](http://Backcountry.com)



### Snow Peak HotLips

Morning coffee in the mountains. Nothing defeats the moment like burned lips. Fight back against single-walled titanium mugs with Snow Peak's Hot Lips solution. Sliding over the rim of your mug, silicone buffers the heat while keeping things light. \$7 a pair and a tenth of an ounce each:  
[REI.com](http://REI.com)



### Outdoor Research Sombriolet Sun Hat

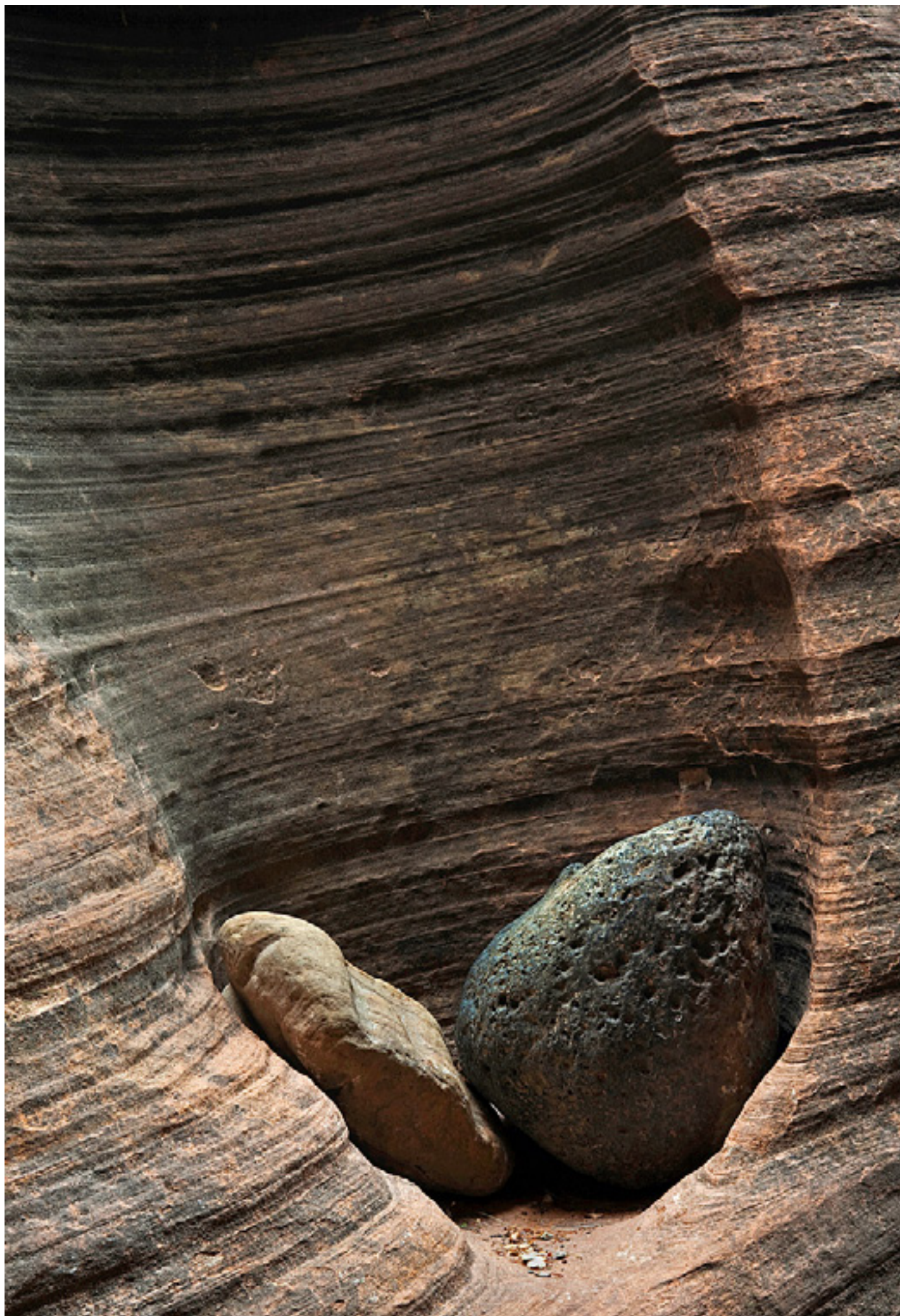
Create your own shade, no trees required. Choose from 3 stylish colors. If it does rain, this synthetic hat dries fast. 3 ounces, \$40:  
[CampSaver.com](http://CampSaver.com)



### REI Trail Stool

At 18 ounces for a fully packable place to sit, the weight penalty isn't too bad for trips where you aren't counting every ounce and plan to spend a little extra time in camp. \$23:  
[REI.com](http://REI.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 #6: Simplify, Simplify, Simplify**

Simplify, simplify, simplify. Yes, Thoreau penned this long ago, but it sounds like he was thinking about photography when he wrote it. If you follow Thoreau's logic, you'll quit trying to tell the whole story in one photo and instead create a photo narrative in bits and pieces. If something in the scene moves you, then narrow it down to that particular subject. You'll better communicate the idea to your audience and have a more successful image.

**Left:** The Cradle.

*All images Copyright 2013 © David M. Cobb Photography.*



Most of the time, just framing your subject gets the point across when simplifying your composition, but at other times you might want to use a shallow depth-of-field like f4 or f5.6. This will allow you to frame the subject and keep it sharp, but at the same time blur out all the intrusions in the background—the eye will then just concentrate on the sharpest object and not all the confusion that may lie behind your subject.

So the next time you take out your camera keep it simple, and I'll guarantee you and those around you will like your photos a lot more. ❖

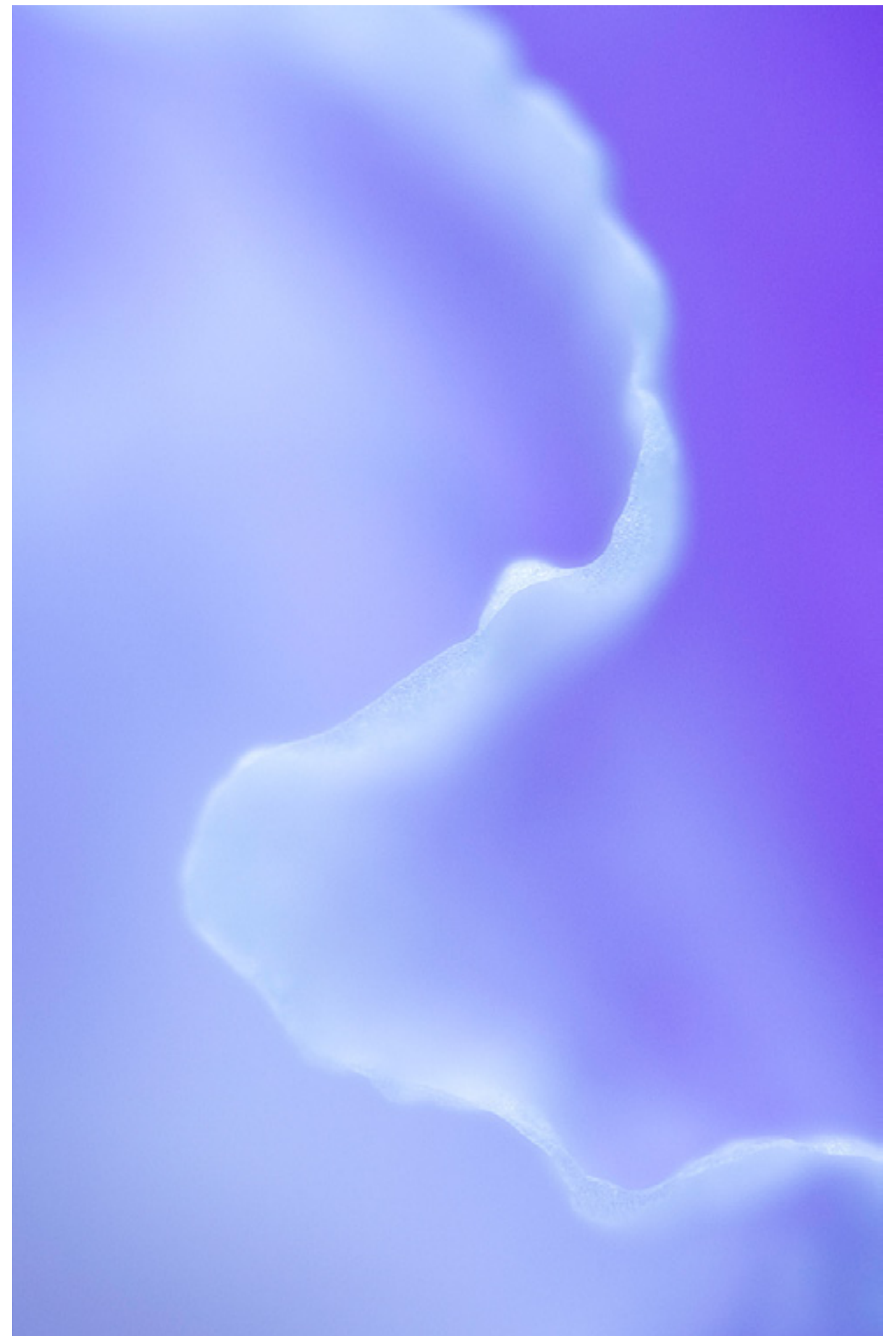
David Cobb is an avid backpacker and photographer. You can see more of David's images at [www.dmcobbphoto.com](http://www.dmcobbphoto.com)

Check out our next issue for another great tip from David!

**Right:** Sleeping Violet.

**Pages 75-76:** Forest Fog, Great Smoky Mountain NP.

**Pages 77-78:** Home & Hills.















# TENKARA

Thought that lightweight backpacking and fishing along the way weren't compatible? Think again.

by Ben Libbey

**Tenkara was born and still lives in the mountains of Japan.** Although likely dating back further, the earliest recorded mention of the Tenkara fishing style dates back to 1878, when British diplomat Ernest Mason Satow referenced it in his work. At that time, Tenkara was a tool used by commercial fishermen out of necessity and simplicity. Rods were constructed from bamboo, lines were handmade, and flies were tied with various materials available at home using a bent sewing needle. Fishermen used only a single fly pattern as they believed presentation was the key to catching fish, and switching flies was considered a waste of invaluable time.

Modern Tenkara was introduced to the western world by Tenkara USA founder Daniel Galhardo in 2009. Tenkara rods sold today are telescoping graphite rods that weigh only a few ounces and vary generally from 11' to 15' in length. For reference, a 12' rod will pack down to just over 20" long and weigh under 3oz. Each rod is designed to be light and flexible, and because Tenkara is a fixed line method of fishing there is no reel. The line is attached to a braid on the end of the rod called a lillian.

There are two types of lines that are most often used: Level and Furled line. Level line is a fluorocarbon line that has the same





diameter from end to end, hence the name level line. The level line is measured using a Japanese rating system: #2 being thinner and #5 being thicker. A #3.5 (which translates to an approximate 14lb. test) would be an extremely good overall line. The level line is beneficial because it can be cut to any length, it is easy to cast in the wind, and is less expensive than furled line. Additionally, one can easily carry multiple length level lines for versatility. To ensure having the appropriate length for any circumstance, one could pack a line that is half the rod length, another that is the full rod length, and a third line that is 1 1/2 times the rod length and be prepared for any scenario presented.

Furled lines are handmade and woven or twisted together using various materials. The line has a taper like traditional fly line. Benefits of the furled line are that they are highly durable; so durable that it is not extremely easy to cast and the lines are

uncommon to get several years use out of the same furled line. As to determining whether to pack level or furled lines, it is best to try each and decide which line better suits your style.

Sticking with a traditional Tenkara approach, many choose a fly style that is called a Sakasa Kebari. Sakasa Kebari is a reversed hackle fly. When pulsing the fly in the water, the hackle opens and closes creating a lively motion. Sakasa Kebari style flies can be fished on the surface or sub-surface, adding to the versatility and simplicity of Tenkara. The most well known Kebari fly is the Ishigaki Kebari, which is tied with nothing more than black sewing thread, a hook, and solid brown hackle. Another favorite is the Amano Kebari, which is a white silk body, hook, and a brown and tan hackle. Both flies can be fished successfully anywhere in the water column, however they are most effective sub-surface where the fly can be pulsed and given life.



Tenkara fishing does not limit users to Sakasa Kebari style flies. In fact, Tenkara can be used with any fly or even dry dropper rigs. Any fly that the fisher has confidence in and enjoy using will do, as the presentation is what triggers the fish to strike, not necessarily the fly itself.

Tenkara rods are extremely easy to cast as the rod acts as an extension of the arm. A backcast should stop at the 12 o'clock position, and the forward cast should stop at the 2 o'clock position. The rod handle should be grasped with the pointer finger up instead of the thumb, like on a western fly rod. With practice, the rod becomes easy to manipulate into various casts. The line should be kept off the water as it is

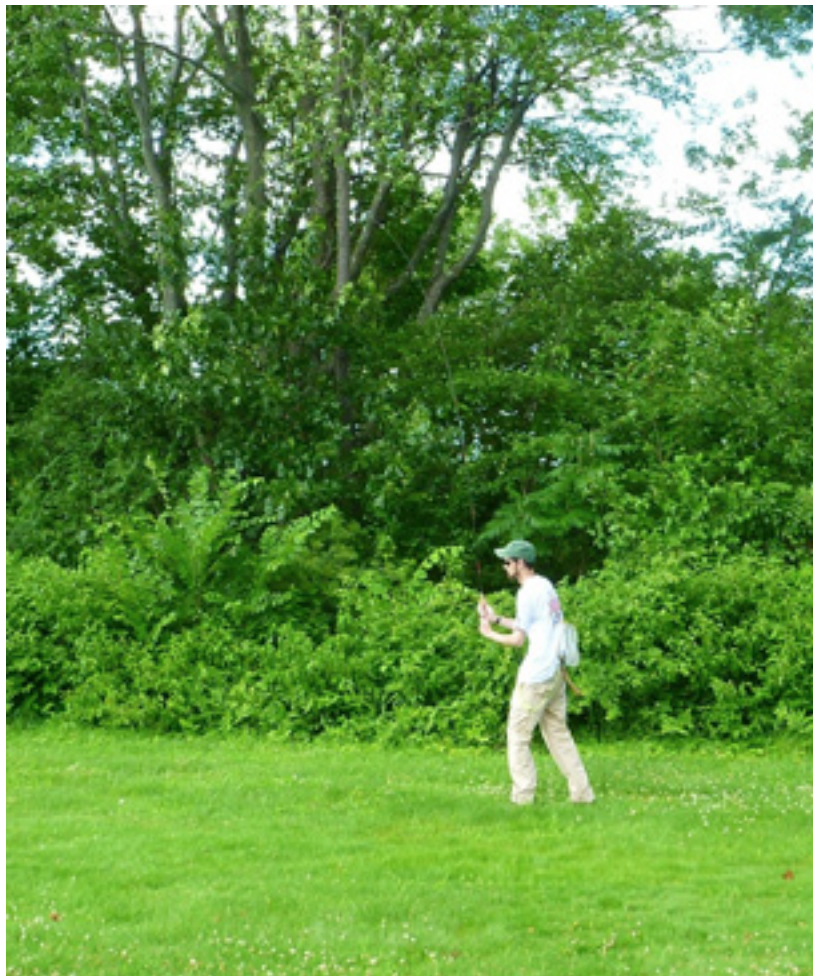
easier to detect strikes and present the fly without any dragging from the current.

With Tenkara, it is best to break down the water into smaller areas. Attempting to fish with too lengthy of a line may cause problems in some waters. It is usually recommended to cast into the water at the closest section to the bank before stepping foot in the water. Once the closer options have been exercised, wade out and fish the areas a little further from shore. This technique ensures effective fishing at each section of the water. If the fly has been presented properly to entice a strike yet there are no takers in a particular section after some time, move on. Rivers are long, and chances are there are fish that are





Tenkara rods are extremely easy to cast as the rod acts as an extension of the arm. A backcast should stop at the 12 o'clock position, and the forward cast should stop at the 2 o'clock position.





actively feeding somewhere else. With one fly, fishers won't spend time second guessing the gear in an area where the fish might not be feeding. Move on, explore new water and enjoy the natural surroundings until feeding fish are found.

Landing a fish is simple as well. If a fish has been hooked using a line the same length as the rod, the rod should be held behind the back and the fish will be within arms reach. If a line longer than the rod length was used, hand line the fish in by grabbing the line and gently pulling it in. If the fish attempts to run, release the line and try to pull the fish in again. To continue to pull the line with a running fish may result in a broken tippet, a lost fly, and a lost fish.

While Tenkara is fantastic for mountain streams and small rivers, it should be noted that Tenkara is not an ideal application for all forms of fishing, such as when fishing for large fish like steelhead or salmon, and for use in salt water areas. Of course, that being said, there are people that have caught steelhead, salmon, carp, muskie, and pike on a Tenkara rod.

Those with a minimalist mentality will certainly appreciate Tenkara for its simplicity and ease. The minimal gear takes up very little space, often weighing just one pound and sizing in at almost no larger than the size of a smartphone. Fishing packs can be attached with ease to any backpack, belt, or simply put in a shirt pocket. There is no assembling of rods and feeding line through guides upon arrival at the water. The line can be stored with a fly attached and a simple knot joins the line to the lillian.

Extend the rod and cast. The simplicity of Tenkara makes it wonderful for kids or first timers to experience fly fishing. With minimal expense and only a couple of knots, it couldn't be easier to get started.

Tenkara brings many fishers back to a time in life during childhood when fishing was simple: it was about having fun and enjoying nature, not worrying about what the fish are biting and the extensive gear

needed to catch a fish. Tenkara is a style and a mindset that values enjoyment, technique and simplicity above anything else, and will make a better technical fisher out of all those who give it try. ❖







# Backcountry Cuisine: The Basics

Stay fueled. Here are some versatile items that we like to always have in our food bag to add extra calories, flavors, and variety to backcountry meals. The possibilities are endless, but by carrying these ingredients you can take any off-the-shelf backpacking meal to the next level or add calories and taste to your own creations.

## Olive Oil Packets

An easy way to add calories to any meal. Using packets is a lightweight & clean way to carry oil into the backcountry to avoid leaking or spilling.

## Instant Mashed Potatoes

So many variations can be made with instant potatoes... for breakfast (add eggs, ham, etc) or dinner (cheese, meat, veggies, etc). You may want to bring powdered milk or butter for creamy potatoes.

## Peanut Butter

Yes, it's a little heavy, but it is packed with calories. You can pair this with small jelly containers from your favorite breakfast joint and serve on bread or tortillas. Eat on its own or add to Asian-style dinners.

## Chicken Packets (or Tuna)

Protein! Add to a rice or pasta dish for dinner; Add mayo packets & seasonings for chicken salad to serve on bread, bagels, or tortillas.

## Dehydrated or Freeze-Dried Vegetables

A great way to add flavor and variety to your meals, as well as have a few servings of veggies during the day or with dinner. So many options... carrots, spinach, tomatoes, mushrooms, you get the idea!

## Potato Chips

Maybe not the healthiest choice, but this snack food can add flavor, calories and a crunch to many dishes. We sometimes use crushed cheddar & sour cream chips to add a "tangy" flavor to freeze-dried meals - It's like dehydrated potatoes and flavoring all in one.

## Tortillas

You can make a wrap out of nearly anything. Add extra calories to breakfast scrambles or freeze-dried meals. For lunches or snacks, you can use this to hold chicken salad or peanut butter & jelly (see above).

## Cheese

Wax-sealed cheese rounds keep well on the trail and are great by themselves or added to lunches. Where they really shine is when melted into dinners or breakfast - Melted cheese just makes everything better.

## Chocolate

Maybe not the most versatile ingredient, but as a dessert a simple chocolate bar may be the best way to end the day on a good note. Dark chocolate bars keep well, are easy, and if it's calories you're looking for, no worries here.







# The Drive Home: Seeing Stars

by Aaron Zagrodnick

**I'd been hiking uphill for two hours.** The day was hot and at midday, the sparse pine forest I'd been travelling through offered little shade. To my left a rushing mountain stream could be heard, making its way downhill in the opposite direction. I tried to imagine soaking my hat in its cool waters, putting the hat back on and hiking up to the pass in comfort, but I could only imagine for now – The stream was out of reach down a 100 foot cliff. As streams seem to do, it was travelling the easy direction. My blue heeler Layla looked up at me and panted, and I offered her water from my bottle until she wouldn't drink any more. We continued on, and eventually the terrain began to level out. We'd made it to the pass. Emerging from the forest and into a clearing a crisp mountain wind swept the sweat from my face and a grand view overtook the scene. Now, it began to really feel like I was in the mountains.

I paused for a moment and took a few pictures, but not so many that I couldn't enjoy the moment itself – A mistake that's plagued me for years. Here I could see for miles, a view mashed together of mountain peaks, rolling green grassy slopes, rocky outcrops, and nearly hidden

lakes – I could have spent an hour with a map in an attempt to identify everything in sight. But Layla and I continued on, leaving some mystery to the scene and followed the trail as it began to descend over loose rocks and then through a scattered pine forest, quiet except for the call of an occasional gray jay. As we descended the forest began to take hold, the trees growing higher and more numerous, and I found myself in shade. Other than our footsteps, breath, and the shifting of my pack, no sound could be heard.

A trail junction and a river crossing later the trail, as expected from looking at the map, faded out and eventually came to an end. I hiked on following the rocky terrain uphill past several lakes and a stream for another mile or two, and eventually found a spot and setup camp as the sun began to set. I was camped among stunted pines close to 11,000 feet, in a flat spot I found between randomly strewn rocks and boulders. Close by was an unnamed lake set amongst the cliffs and steep terrain that marked the head of the drainage I'd been following. After all the normal duties of setting up the tent, filtering water, and a 5 minute lounge on a log to rest my tired





feet, I grabbed my food bag and retreated across an open field to a forested rise downwind from camp to cook dinner.

Firing up the canister stove to heat water I readied the ingredients for my meal and as I waited for the water to come to a boil, Layla joined me in surveying the surrounding terrain. Camped in the flat basin as I was, the only way out was back the way I came – Or up. I was surrounded on 3 sides, mostly by sheer and impenetrable cliffs, but in places the terrain sloped gently enough to appear passable as an off-trail route, many places still holding snow fields that had refused to melt. My water came to a boil, and I turned off the stove, adding the water to the pouch that held my food. While the meal was rehydrating I watched trout rise in the lake and considered fishing

possibilities for the next day, but again my gaze was soon drawn to the furthest thing I could see, a snow slope above me and about a mile away. At the top of the slope the jumbled rocks, silhouetted against the evening sky, could be made into any number of imaginary creatures and objects. Then in the snowfield, I noticed a single dark object I hadn't seen before. It looked fairly large, but it was hard to tell at that distance. Was it moving? I asked Layla, but she had her eyes steadily affixed to the pouch holding my and what she hoped would be our food. I lined up a close by branch with the object and sighted in. Whatever it was definitely now appeared to be making its way slowly across the snowfield at a steady pace, but with the distance and the tree branch slightly moving in the breeze it was difficult to tell. But if it was

moving, and at that size, there was only one it could be – A black bear. There was one way I could tell. I jumped up and ran back to the tent to grab the camera, hoping that if I took a shot I could then zoom in on the camera's LCD screen to find out just what was on the slope. With the snowfield higher than myself it was still in sunlight, but the shadows were quickly overtaking everything in view with the sun setting and my plan with the camera wouldn't work if I waited too long. I jumped up and sprinted across the meadow towards the tent, Layla torn between following me and the food. The camera was in the tent and the door on the farside. I'd pitched the footend of my tent close to an old pine tree, and as I ran between the foot end of the tent and the

tree I ducked to avoid the lower hanging branches and started to reach for the tent's zipper. Then the world changed. Time slowed down. My vision left me, everything went black and I felt my teeth clank together with a solid report. My head hurt and my hands instinctively tried to cover my head and face to limit whatever damage was happening. I'd gone from running across the ground at a good clip to an instant stop, and now I felt myself falling backwards. Barely aware of anything that was happening, I fell to the ground and then everything went black.

The first thing I heard was the sound of wind rushing through trees, but for some reason I could only hear out of my right ear. Gradually opening my eyes I stared





up at the stars, unsure of where I was – Like when you’re a kid and you wake up in the middle in the night at a strange place for the first time. It was cold and I was shivering. I was lying flat on my back, the back of my head resting on a flat slab of granite. But I didn’t feel at rest. My head hurt everywhere, and as slowly as the stars that moved overhead my senses began to return. I remembered where I was, and the bear on the slope. I remembered running around the tent and ducking under the tree and then being stopped in my tracks. I turned my head to the right and saw Layla watching me from just a few feet away, barely visible in the darkness. She jumped up as I looked her way, whined and walked towards me, then laid down again by my side and gazed into the night. I sat up and felt my head; my hair was matted with blood. I looked at my watch – 10:05pm. With difficulty I made it to my feet and fished my headlamp out of my pack. I looked at the tree and saw the branch I’d ducked under, then lower the dead, broken-off branch (Some of my hair still attached) that I hadn’t seen and hit straight on. I’d then apparently fallen backward and hit the back of my head on one of the many rocks that littered the campsite. I drank water and poured some for Layla. I walked slowly back across the meadow and found dinner still in the pouch. But I wasn’t hungry. I poured the contents of the meal into my pot and gave it to Layla, who had missed her dinner. I turned off the headlamp and looked back up at the slope, but only its silhouette could be seen against the night sky. I hung my food on a very imperfect but easy branch and headed back to camp. I drank as much

water as I could, then washed my wounds with the rest. My head ached, but it seemed like the hearing in my left ear had started to come back. I wasn’t even sure if I should sleep, but we crawled into the tent and sleep I did.

The next morning I slept as late I could until the bright morning sun and insects buzzing about the netting of the tent made sleep no longer possible. My head seemed better; it didn’t hurt unless I moved too fast. I had only planned an overnight, and I just felt like heading home. I retrieved my food bag and filtered water at the lake, made coffee, then drank as much water as I could. My appetite wasn’t really there, but I forced down an energy bar and slowly packed my gear. “Ready”? I asked Layla. She jumped ahead of me and led the way, 12 miles back to the car at the trailhead, a good thing since I was a bit foggy in finding my way. Before we left the basin we crested a small rise and I thought for the first time that morning to look back at the slope. I found the snowfield I’d seen the night before, and the dark object in the center was still there, it hadn’t moved. I pulled out my camera from a hipbelt pocket, took a picture, and zoomed in on the screen. I shook my head - All that over a perfectly bear-sized boulder. At least Layla was the only witness I thought...She could keep a secret. I hiked on and tried to forget about the night before, though if I look closely I can find a scar to forever remind me, as well as the boulder on that slope in the Wind River Range that despite occasional appearances to the contrary, refuses to move. ❖



















“The earth laughs in flowers.”  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson







# Thanks for Reading Issue 9

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

[www.TrailGroove.com](http://www.TrailGroove.com)

Copyright © 2013 TrailGroove Magazine LLC

