

Thru-Hiking: Tips and Stories from America's Long Trails

SPEAKER 1: All right. Well, I'd like to officially welcome everyone to our Thru-Hiking Webinar.

We have in representation of UREC and Outdoor Recreation,

Hannah Kiser will be presenting for us today.

I do want to remind everyone that if you have any questions throughout the presentation,

please feel free to leave them in the chat box.

Hannah, you said you want this to be very casual, conversational,

so we can ask the questions during the presentation as you'd like.

If you have any technical difficulties,

please let me know or send me

a private message through the chat and I can help you out with that.

Without further ado, Hannah, do you want take it away?

HANNAH KISER: Yeah. Welcome. I'm super excited to meet you all.

Let's see. I'll go on to the second slide

and we'll go around and do a little bit of introductions.

Like I said, I want this to be pretty casual, so if you do have a question,

you can just unmute yourselves also,

and that works great.

To start off, if we want to go around,

we can do your name,

maybe what you do at WSU, your major, your job,

what outdoor experience you have or interest in thru-hiking,

basically why you wanted to come to this awesome webinar.

To get to know each other a little better,

I'll go first. I'm Hannah.

I am studying secondary teaching here in MAC for my masters,
so I'm student teaching this semester.

I'm also the grad assistant for the Outdoor Recreation Center.

In my outdoor experience,

I grew up doing a lot of stuff with my dad outdoors
and then took a break from it for a while.

When I got back into outdoor activities in my mid-20s,

I was like, "Wow, I've really been missing out. How do I make up for it?"

I was like, "I'll just quit my job and hike for five
months," which is how I ended up doing the PCT.

Then I worked as a ranger for a little bit and working at the Outdoor Rec. Center.

So that's my outdoor experience.

I love talking to people about thru-hiking and all things outdoors. [LAUGHTER]

All right, national scenic trail. Sounds like a lot of you
are interested in just backpacking shorter distances,
but I'm encouraging you that if you can backpack three or four days,
you can do it for five months also because that's
just like the five and six day trips back after back after back.

[NOISE] In the US we have several.

The one that I'm going to talk about is the one that I've done,
which is the Pacific Crest Trail,
which starts at the Mexican border and goes all the way to Canada.

There's also another one that starts at Mexico
to Canada called the Continental Divide Trail.

That one is less frequently used.

It's a lot more rugged.

Arizona Trail goes the length of Arizona.

Pacific Northwest Trail goes from

Glacier National Park all the way over to Olympic National Park to the ocean.

That one's a little bit shorter.

Then there's some that go around Mount Rainier or around Mount Hood.

Those are three or four day trips that are also really awesome.

The John Muir Trail is really popular.

You may have heard of that in the High Sierra.

The Colorado Trail goes the length of Colorado.

There's a lot of options.

There's also a lot of East Coast options.

I'm less familiar with those.

Though I did grow up in Ohio,

I did not do a lot of backpacking since I moved here in my teens.

Internationally, there's also stuff.

Maybe it's winter and you want to get out, go to New Zealand.

Not this year, but then you can hike the length of those islands, the Te Araroa,

the Camino is also pretty popular for people who

like to get out and backpack long distances internationally.

[NOISE] All right.

So what is thru-hiking?

It's hiking a long trail semi-consistently in a single hiking season, which is normally 4-5 months for those trails that were really long, going from Mexico to Canada, and some of the shorter ones maybe take two or three months.

A lot of questions that I get sometimes when I tell people about thru-hiking is how you carry all that food.

Well, the answer is that you don't, you are stopping in towns, either hitchhiking or hiking in there and resupplying every 3-10 days depending on what the topography is.

Normally you're hiking pretty big miles, 20-30 miles a day because you've got a short window to hit your destination, so you got to keep on schedule.

If you're doing something a little bit shorter, then it is a bit more approachable.

But I know initially looking at 20-30 miles, that might be a little bit mind blowing, but your body gets used to it just like those of you who are like, "Oh, I'm a runner."

You maybe have thought like, "I can't run five miles, 10 miles," when you began but your body over time will adapt to that.

I started out doing like 10 miles a day, so you don't start out doing 30.

That's a recipe for disaster.

The main distinctive differences between

just a backpacking trip and a thru-hiking trip or that,

it's really lasting many months. [LAUGHTER]

All right. Are all you familiar somewhat with the annotation tool in Zoom?

If you go to the top of your screen,

you should see a little pencil that says "Annotate".

Then you can pick a stamp.

There's a heart, a question mark, an X,

a checkmark, if you want to pick one of those.

Then I'm going to ask you some questions and you're

going to place yourself in where that would be for you.

Your comfort zone is like,

"Hey, this is cool. This is normally what I do. I'm happy to do it."

Stretch zone is like, "All right.

I'm a little bit uncomfortable but I think I'm going to grow in this situation."

Red zone is like,

"If I survive this,

I'm going to be so grateful," [LAUGHTER] or it

would cause you quite a lot of stress thinking about doing that.

If we've all got our stamps,

you want to put one on where you would be for just like an overnight backpacking trip.

If you're having trouble with the annotate,

you can also just pop that into the chat.

Well, I got some. Yeah, so most people feel pretty comfortable with that, maybe depending on what's going on.

If it's winter, maybe I'm not super in the comfort zone there. [LAUGHTER] All right.

How about a week long backpacking trip? I'll clear everybody's.

Yeah, red zone. [LAUGHTER]

You're thinking, "Oh man, that backpack is going to be heavy.

How am I going to wash my clothes?"

Yeah. I mean, I would agree,

regardless of your experience,

it's probably definitely going to be a stretch zone because

you can't foresee all the things that you're going to have happening. All right.

How about if you had to hitchhike into town,

if you're on the trail and you need to get food?

Yeah hitchhiking is kind of scary, right? [LAUGHTER]

I definitely never did it alone.

Someone's like outside the red zone.

They're like, "This is just a tough situation for me."

Yeah. That's a real fear.

How about, we'll just do one more,

encountering a wild animal on the trail? Like a bear.

AUDIENCE: Have you ever encountered a bear before?

That was actually one of my questions.

HANNAH KISER: We'll talk about that when we talk about animals.

But surprisingly few, I only saw I think three.

I mean, I was out for 130 nights or something,
so that's really very few.

[NOISE] Sorry, I'm toggling a lot of things.

I encountered a bear on a hiking trail here in Seattle.

You know what? They can be a lot of places.

Also from Ohio, congrats on getting out,
and I think that is true for everyone.

[LAUGHTER] [NOISE] My stamp is ruining my life.

[LAUGHTER] [NOISE] Good job, for the annotating.

Just fun to get you guys involved a little bit.

Pacific Crest Trail, this is one that's close to my heart.

It's actually 2,660 miles;
that is a long way.

On the first day, you're like, "Great,
I only have 2,659 miles left."

It's a really cool trail because you get to go through
25 different national forests and seven different national parks.

Topography varies a huge amount on this trail.

Here's my first day and last day pictures, just fun.

[NOISE] Trying to keep track of the chat, it's a little distracting.

[LAUGHTER] Usually, we have two facilitators to manage that stuff.

The first part of the PCT,

it's broken up into four sections and that would be the desert,

and the desert is the longest one.

It's about 700 miles.

You're starting off maybe the most brutal climate

[LAUGHTER] possible, and is the longest section.

Some highlights are trail angels,

which we'll talk about in a little bit,

are people who dedicate part of their summer

or part of their season to helping Pacific Crest Trail hikers.

They give you rides, bring you food,

leave tangerines on the trail.

There's a lot of them in the desert,

which is a definitely a highlight.

Also, the desert is super challenging so it makes those highs feel really great.

That's just the way of rewarding a challenge,

[LAUGHTER] I guess, in a positive light.

But you really feel like you're doing it and you have that honeymoon phase of thru-hiking.

Then sunrises and sunsets are really great,

maybe not as great as Pullman's,

but they are very awesome in the desert.

Challenges. It's super hot.

Usually start the PCT in April or May,

and by that time, it's already so

hot that you can't really hike in the middle of the day,

so you're having to lodge your body under

a sagebrush to get a little bit of shade because also water is scarce and it's not the best quality and it's heavy so you can't hike through the day or else it would just be really inefficient.

It's beautiful section, it's challenging section.

I definitely was really happy when it was over.

Especially because the section after the desert is arguably the best section, which is the High Sierra, which is also where the John Muir Trail goes through.

Has anyone here been to California or hiked in California before?

No? Would definitely recommend going to the Sierras.

They are absolutely incredible.

Some of the positives are there's so much water there, which after the desert you're so happy, it's so clean, it's always cool.

It's running across the trail constantly.

You're definitely getting a true wilderness experience in that you're not hiking through towns, you're not hiking under inner passes, which sometimes happens on the PCT in the desert section, you really feel like you are out there.

Some negatives, as you're usually reaching this area in June, which is very much still winter conditions in a lot of places so you need to carry an ice ax and microspikes.

Depending on the snow year,

you can have a super different experience.

On the bottom was the year that I did it,

absolutely super snow packed.

I actually flip-flopped, I skipped it because I didn't

have the skills necessary and I felt scared that I might die,

[LAUGHTER] to be honest,

because there's a lot of high creek crossings and a lot of ice and snow on the passes.

I came back and did it later.

Then you can see in the top picture is how it looks a few months after that.

That snow really melt super fast.

But if you're on a schedule and you have to hit that area at a certain time,

so depending on the snow year that you get,

you get at the bottom or the top picture.

Also, there is no towns for a really long way so you have to

carry 10-13 days of food and that can be really heavy,

especially when you're additionally carrying bear can.

After the Sierra is Northern California,

which is really beautiful,

but after the Sierra,

it's a little bit of a letdown.

Actually, a lot of hikers ended up quitting at this point.

It's really hot. There's lots of bugs.

There's huge climbs in and out of town.

Usually, you'll lose all your elevation,

end up in town, and the next day, full heavy pack,
you have to gain 4,000 feet in 10 miles in full sun and you're not a happy camper.

Let's see. But a lot of the highlights to are that
there's volcanoes, you start seeing like Mount Lassen, Mount Shasta.

Those Cascade volcanoes which are really beautiful and you
get to see your progress each day as you're hiking towards them.

You're also able to hike more miles in a day at this point
so that could be an exciting sense of accomplishment,
and there's lots of lakes to swim in which is always a positive.

Then there's Oregon.

The whole state is 455 miles,
but it goes by super fast,
because relatively to the other parts of the trail, it's pretty flat.

But there's a ton of bugs, still really hot,
still really dry, and water is often scarce.

You can see how everyone gets spoiled in
the Sierra and then they go to Oregon and they're like,

"Oh, my life just got way harder."

[LAUGHTER] There's also a lot of burns,
which means that it's additionally hot and dry.

Highlights are you're not in California anymore.

You spend so many months in California,
you feel like this day will never end so it's always quite exciting.

You can see the picture is my hiking buddies and I at the border and we're very pleased.

Crater Lake is a huge plus it's really beautiful fun to hike around that lake.

Then there's really awesome breakfast at

Timberline Lodge on the border of Washington and Oregon.

That is definitely a highlight for Oregon.

Most people can do Oregon in about two weeks.

It's like the two-week challenge, which is neat.

Then the last and my personal favorite section

because it's Washington and you're in the home stretch at this point.

Challenges, huge elevation profiles.

If you've done much backpacking in Washington,

you know what I'm talking about.

It gets down to business like you gain your elevation really quickly.

But also September, though not this year,

[LAUGHTER] quite yet, can be really cold, wet, and snowy.

A lot of times thru-hikers are like, "Oh, man,

it's being in September I have this whole state left,

am I going to beat winter?"

But Washington, I think, is one of the most beautiful areas.

There's so much awesome swimming,

the huckleberries are crazy,

but that weather can be pretty temperamental.

The upper picture is in the Goat Rocks,

a really beautiful day.

Then a couple days later is down below, complete white out.

I'm told that Mount Rainier is really big and beautiful and close in this photo,
but I didn't see it. [LAUGHTER]

Some of the other trails that usually facilitate this was someone who
has done the CDT and this
is about a quite more rugged trail also going from Mexico to Canada through New Mexico,
Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and it's 3,100 miles.

There's a few more like Choose-Your-Own-Adventure in this one.

The trail is not complete,
so you can pick the route that you want to do.

The Pacific Northwest Trail which goes through Olympic National Park is
one that I have my eye on. It's only 1,200 miles
so you probably could do it in about three months,
which is really exciting.

You start at Glacier and go west,
and you get to go through a lot of beautiful and more remote areas.

The PCT is pretty busy these days, so this is a nice trail.

Also it's not complete,
so you have a few Choose-Your-Own-Adventure,
like how you'd like to go around certain areas.

The Wonderland Trail. This is
a really great introduction of thru-hiking as you're just going around Mount Rainier.

It's a pretty competitive permit process,
but you can also do sections and I
think it's really fun to walk around a volcano and see all the different aspects.

Also, that National Park is just gorgeous.

In only 93 miles,

it's a little bit more approachable than the 3,000 mile Continental Divide Trail.

Tahoe Rim Trail is another really awesome one that goes through the wilderness areas surrounding the lake.

The PCT also overlaps with it in one section.

I think Lake Aloha which is that picture there.

165 miles, no permits necessary here.

This is a really fun one that you don't have to get permits for.

There's lots of others, those are just the one's that we choose to highlight.

You may have noticed I'm using a lot of

lingo because thru-hikers have their own speak for sure.

We're going to go through some of those fun words and now you'll be able to speak the talk of a thru-hiker and you'll fit in seamlessly.

Do we have any questions in the chat? No, Okay.

Just let me know if I do because I'm not really able to toggle all the three screens.

Trail Angels are touched on a little bit.

People affiliated with the hiking community who assist hikers by giving rides, trail magic, which is like snacks and things like that, inviting hikers into their homes for food, showers, and medical care.

These people are incredible.

They have such big hearts,

it's not even necessarily that they hiked the trail,

they think what people who hike

the trail do is awesome and they want to support them in their journey.

The one in the bottom left, this guy lives out of his van and he drives it and follows

the general cohort of hikers and sets up shade

and gives everyone root beer floats through the desert,

which it's like what is better than a root beer float when it's

a 100 degrees outside and you've been hiking up no water, that's awesome.

Businesses will offer thru-hikers free pie or free burrito or something like that.

The people in the upper left invite us into their home,

and they were so sweet,

and they still send me Christmas cards,

this really it's crazy.

The relationships that you build in this very strange community.

[LAUGHTER] Then Trail Magic.

That's all the things that trail angels do.

There's a picture of me in that root beer float.

Rides, we're all packed in there.

They leave little notes on the trail some times.

For you or like,

"Oh, you can come here.

Just call this number and I'll pick you up and bring you into town,

so you don't have to hitchhike." It's really sweet.

The cache water for you in the desert as well which is a huge help.

Your trail family and your trail name.

Your trail family is people who you meet on the trail and you're like,

"Hey, I like hiking with you.

Let's hike together forever."

I started with a partner,

but we ended up splitting up because she wanted to go through

the Sierra during the winter conditions because she had a lot more experience than me.

But then I found new people who I really like,

and now I hike with them every year.

My actual family was mostly just a one other woman,

but then towards the end we got a bigger group down in the bottom left.

Then in the top part is the next year we all went on the JMT together,

well, the two that I liked the most.

[LAUGHTER] Then that's another trail family from the Pacific Northwest Trail.

People are like, "I can't believe you hiked that trail by yourself."

No one hikes it by themselves.

They all meet up with different people,

and you form this fun community.

Hiker hunger and trail legs.

After you hike for a few months,

maybe like 500-ish miles,

you get to the point where you can eat anything,

and you can eat it so fast and then you'll be like,

"Oh, I'm so full" and then maybe 30 minutes later you'll be like, "I'm starving again."

It's really fun, expensive,

but then also not that great when you have to pack it and eat it when you're out there.

It's only really fun when you're in town.

The upper-left photo is that lodge I was telling you about Timberline.

They have the best buffet. [LAUGHTER] That's definitely a highlight on the trail for me.

Then trail legs is when you also start being able to hike more miles.

I started out doing like 10,

12, 13, taking a break,

and then as the weeks go on you just start feeling a bit like,

"Wow, I just hiked 20 miles and I don't feel too bad."

That starts to become more possible for you.

Let's go back for a second trail name I forgot to touch on this,

it's a name that your trail family gives you from something quirky that you do.

My trail name is Spatula,

because I like to carry this spork that had a spatula on the end so

that I could clean out my pot without having to drink all the chunks.

They thought that was genius, so they named me Spatula.

Your trail family and the people that you meet,

I'm not Hannah anymore, I'm Spatula.

Some people I don't even know what their real name was.

I never knew what their name was,

because you always call each other by your trail name.

It's this weird like Altar Society,

it's a counterculture thing I guess.

[NOISE] Trail culture, just like I was talking about.

Pay it forward, there are a lot of people on the trail and you want that experience to be accessible for people over time. You always want to try and do your best and be kind to everyone in those towns, especially this year, a lot of people were saying don't thru-hike this year because of COVID.

That is an example of how you should pay it forward and make those communities like thru-hikers because of the economic growth that they bring and not make them dislike us because of spreading the virus, for example.

Hike Your Own Hike is like live your own life.

You might have a different idea of what you want to achieve from the trail.

Maybe you want to hike every single step on the trail, and I'm like, "Hey, this section is boring, so I'm going to skip it."

It's like don't judge other people, they're all here for your own reasons, that just let that be.

Hikertrash is another one.

It's this form of pride, like, "Yeah, we're pretty trashy, we're sleeping in a porta potty, or just like dirty, smelly, sort of thing.

But even though you do have those characteristics, you still are respectful.

That's the sentiment of hikertrash.

Then Leave No Trace which we're going to get into is another trail culture, when the trails are getting the amount of use that they are these days, you definitely need to practice Leave No Trace which is a way of caring for the land to keep it nice for the next people.

Do you have any questions about these words or anything?

We're good. All right.

Like I said, LNT,

has anyone heard of LNT before or familiar with it?

No? Yeah. Good. If you have ever gone backpacking, ideally, you should be familiar with Leave No Trace.

It's knowing if you were to travel to a different culture, you'd probably look up the cultural norms, so that you weren't doing something like a faux pas or something like that.

Leave No Trace is how to take care of the land, to be responsible.

Some of it's not very intuitive, so it is good to educate yourself.

But luckily, you came to this seminar or webinar, so you're going to get that info.

[LAUGHTER] There are seven principles and we'll go through each of them as they pertain to best practices for long trails.

You can see them all here, but I would encourage you if you haven't heard them before to go to Int.org and check that out afterwards.

All right. Plan ahead and prepare.

This means basically, you are doing your homework,
and you're finding out everything that you need to know about the area,
before you get there ideally.

[LAUGHTER] The PCT is just a huge planning endeavor.

I think I started planning nine months ahead of time for it.

You definitely don't need to put that much time into it,
but you are planning a lot.

You're taking a look at what gear you need,
and all that stuff like before you even hit the trail,
and then once you get to the trail,
you're also always planning.

Both the section to section stuff,
so when you're thinking about when should I start the trail,
so that I'm not starting in the dead of winter,
and I'm also not starting too late.

What's the weather looking like?

Do I need to skip a section because there is tons of snow?

The town to town level,
like how much food am I going to need?

Are there any closures?

What's the weather look like?

If I needed to bail,
if someone got hurt,

where could I do that?

If I'm going to get into this town or I need to pick something up at the post office,

is the post office going to be open that day?

Lots of planning going on and also just day-to-day;

where are the water sources?

What is the weather doing?

What's the terrain look like?

Am I going to be able to make the miles that I think I'm going to be able to make?

There's lots of planning.

If you're thinking about doing a long trail,

you definitely want to go to whatever organization runs it,

because they have very specific permitting processes.

The PCT for example,

only allows 50 people per day,

to leave from the Mexican border.

50 people per day for three months is a lot of people.

There are a ton of people on there,

but then like I said the Tahoe Rim Trail,

there's no permit process.

You definitely want to look into that before you go,

so you don't go to the Board of the PCT and they're like,

"Oh, you don't have a permit, and so you cannot hike this trail",

that would be a huge bummer.

Travel and camp on durable surfaces.

All of these are so important when you're thru-hiking because you are having a huge impact when you are staying outside for over a 100 nights, on a trail that is very heavily impacted.

Making sure when you're selecting your campsite, you're doing a job of making a stealthy one.

A lot of thru-hikers are like, "I'm so tired,

'I'm just going to camp right here,' right off the side of the trail.

Ideally, you shouldn't be able to see someone else's tent from the side of the trail, because you want them to have that nice wilderness experience, and also maybe it's not nice for you because people are looking in at you, when you're trying to rest.

Then you have less issues with animals if you do that.

Because animals know where people tend to camp and so they'll come in, eat your food and that's not nice

because you're really hungry and you want to eat your food.

Avoiding areas that may flood,

burn areas in wind exposed areas,

and the PCT in the desert, this is a huge one,

because there are plenty of burns in windy areas.

You see that top picture,

I camped in a wash,

and I was bone dry and I was like,

this is no problem.

In the middle of the night, I woke up and I turn my headlamp on to go to the bathroom,

and there was a frog like right next to my face and I was like, "Well, that's weird."

I get up and everything was wet,

and I was like, "Dang it",

but I'm also a really stubborn sleeper,

so I didn't move my setup because I was like this is probably going to be fine.

It was fine, but it was not the smartest thing that I could have done,

so just like being conscious of those things.

Then in the desert avoid camping very close to water.

That's the only water for you for many miles,

it's also the only water for animals.

If you've got big groups camping around those areas it can really impact those animals.

Avoid making large campsites larger.

If you're with your trail family and you can't all fit,

don't set your camp up on a surface that can be disturbed.

Like grasses in alpine vegetation are really sensitive if you set your tent on them,

so being conscious of setting up in areas that are durable.

Durable surfaces like rock or mineral soil,

snow is a durable surface.

You don't want to be putting it up on vegetation.

Don't cut switchbacks.

There are a lot of switchbacks on the PCT and it's like,

if you're hiking from Mexico to Canada,

you're not here to cut the switchbacks,

you're out here for the journey, so just stick on the trail,

because otherwise you're contributing to erosion,
and they put a lot of work into building those trails.

Finally be a puddle stomper,
don't make those muddle puddles bigger,
you've got boots for a reason.

You're out here to have an adventure so,
no need to tiptoe around those puddles.

[NOISE] All right.

Dispose of waste properly,
this is like having been a former ranger,
one of my areas of passion is poop math.

So you go poop two times a day,
and you're out there for a 120 days,
and there are over 2000 hikers per
season which there are probably way more now like 5000,
that is 187 poops per mile,
which is one poop every 27 feet,

if everyone were to go the same distance off trail before going to the bathroom.

It is very important that you know how to dispose of this waste properly,
because this could very quickly become a gross situation for everybody.

Which means that you need to be walking plenty far off trail,
plenty far from water and from camp,

so usually that's like about 80 steps,

but also you want to think about the area you're in.

If there's like a nice lake and it's in a bowl,
and you go to the bathroom here,
it's going to wash into the lake.

So trying to go to a place where you are
thinking about the long-term impact of where you're going.

Then all garbage you want to pack that out,
that includes things that you might think are
biodegradable like orange rinds and apple cores,
that's not natural to those areas,
so you want to be packing those out.

Maybe you don't think it's a big deal, few pistachio shells.

If there are that many hikers thinking that exact same thing,
it quickly becomes a much bigger deal than what is just your personal impact.

Also, I pack out all my toilet paper,
it's not that gross to do,
just have like an opaque bag and it's no biggie,
just because that can get dug up by animals,
and you will see what is called toilet paper gardens,
which is just people are going to the bathroom in the same area,
they're not bearing their waste properly,
and there's just toilet paper everywhere.

It's really gross, that's not why we're out there,
we're out there for the wilderness,
not for seeing the impacts of lazy humans. [LAUGHTER]

I'm going to go through this really quickly.

If you're wondering what a good setup is,

for disposing your waste properly,

here's some good ideas.

Digging device, wiping device,

dirty bags, storage bag,

and if you're a lady,

urination bandana helps you not get UTIs.

This is an area of passion for me obviously.

[LAUGHTER]

Know how to take care of all that stuff.

Keeps you healthy, keeps the outdoors beautiful, rangers will thank you.

[NOISE] Oh man, more slides about this.

I think I already touched on this. [LAUGHTER]

Sanitize your hands afterwards.

That's another good one because you're out for months,

you don't get to wash your hands that much,

and you don't want to give each other diseases.

Personal hygiene, I do not carry hand soap or deodorant,

I probably would carry hand soap now just because

of [NOISE] so the culture of washing hands is different these days,

but it's definitely not the same as your normal hygiene standards.

That goes with like the hikertrash culture.

Clean your hands, brush your teeth,

keep your body clean enough to prevent blisters and chaffe,
but you're not using shampoo, washing your hair,
using deodorant, probably not shaving all that often.

A lot of the guys have really long beards by the end which is pretty fun.

Foot care is a huge one especially in the desert.

Air-out, wash those socks,
clean your feet at night because otherwise you get blisters,
and that can be no bueno.

I'd say that foot care is maybe the number one thing that
is not attended to enough in the beginning,
and you have many blisters and much pain.

[NOISE]

Leave what you find,
leave only footprints, take only pictures,
you may have heard that before.

Like I said, with the number of people who are on long trails these days,
everyone wants to take that cool rock,
if everybody wants to do some of those things,
then they're not going to be there for anybody.

Don't vandalize, don't build cairns,
you represent a community,
and even if you think, "Oh,
maybe they'll think a day hiker did it",
everyone blames things on PCT hikers,

because we are there in such large numbers.

Rep your community well.

For example, there is a woman who liked to draw these bears on everything,

but you are on a wilderness area,

which means you're wanting an experience where you feel like

you're the only human that has been there in a very long time,

and so when you see something like this that's like a sign of humanity.

Actually it was a ranger district that I worked on,

and I had to go and cut that off [LAUGHTER] the next year.

Just that wilderness spirit of we want to be natural,

to be undeveloped, just keeping that in mind.

[NOISE] Reduce campfire impacts is a huge one.

Avoid having a fire.

I don't think I ever had a fire the whole time I was on the PCT.

Most of the time you're way too busy and way too tired.

It's not really an issue,

but you can put this into the chat or unmute

yourself how many gallons do you think it takes to put out like a campfire?

That's about, I don't know like your arms width.

[NOISE]

54? Wow, that's a lot.

Four? It's more than people think.

It's like between 9 and 12. Yeah, 10?

Okay. Wow, you guys like have really good [?ideas?].

[LAUGHTER] Mostly, people are like a half.

It takes a lot of water,

and so if you're not somewhere where you have the water to do that,
then it's probably irresponsible for you to have a fire.

I can't tell you how many times I walked up on someone's hot fire,
that the wind had picked up,
and was throwing ashes.

I was frantically trying to put out that fire before it became a really big problem.

Now, as we know, the West is super dry and
that stuff can quickly become really dangerous.

Then you could potentially kill people if that
really got out of hand and a whole drainage went up.

It's really important to think about,

yes, it's fun to have a fire,

yes, maybe you're cold;

but do you need to have this and is it worth the risks?

Most of the time, that answer is no.

Especially because the PCT is so hot and so dry, often really windy.

A lot of times, because you're hiking in a straight line and you're not just
going out into one area like you would on maybe a normal backpacking trip,
you might not know what area you're in.

You might not know that you've entered an area where there's restrictions
on elevation or restrictions at a lake or restrictions in that,
like national forests or something like that.

You might have entered a different area,
and not really realized it.

It's always good just to think about these things.

If you do ever have a fire,
you just want to make sure that you put out really good;
[NOISE] stir those ashes, lots of water.

A good thing if you are going to have,
one is carrying a really big garbage bag,
because you can scoop up a ton of water in
a bag and then it's not like a heavy thing you have to carry around.

It's a ranger tip for you.

[LAUGHTER] Respect wildlife, cook away from your camp.

There's not a grizzly country in the PCT,
but the CDT and those other trails have some.

This is really good if you get paranoid about animals.

You can just find a really beautiful spot,
cook your dinner, pack up,
and then hike your rest of your way to camp.

It's also a good way to break up all those miles.

Cleaning up after dinner, drink your greywater.

Who knows what greywater is?

Should I made like really awesome mac and cheese
for dinner in my pot and then I'm done eating,
but now there's all this cheese sauce in my pot still,

and I need to clean it.

What you should do is bring a spatula, which is my trail name,

and scoop all that out,

and then you will only have to put a little bit of water,

and then rinse it around and it's pretty clean.

But if you don't have an awesome spatula,

then you need to put water in there so that you can clean your pot.

But now, that water has food chunks on it,

and animals probably shouldn't be eating that,

and maybe you're in an area that has really sensitive vegetation,

so what is best LNT practice is to actually drink it.

It's called drinking your greywater.

It sounds really nasty and it kind of is,

but that is a point of pride for you.

If you have the spatula, it's not too bad.

If you're really grossed out by that,

what some people will do is strain it and disperse it,

but I can't see myself doing that in an area where I

know there's thousands of other people doing that and thinking about

the effects that's going to have on the aquatic life in the lake,

or other animals, or attracting animals to camps and stuff like that.

Don't use soap, same thing.

Soap is not bio-degradable in water.

It's only bio-degradable in soil.

[NOISE] Can you share a link to your backpacking for spatula?

Yes, at the end, I will do that.

Then pack it out, as we talked about before.

Food smells and smell-able storage.

Smell-proof bags can be really nice.

They help me feel like animals can't smell stuff.

I'm not really sure if they work,

but I haven't had any little rodents chew into stuff.

I would say the biggest problem on the trail is not bears,

not racoons, it's rodents.

The little guys, those are going to get you,

because if they get into your food,

and they will go in,

and chew holes and everything,

and then you can't really safely eat that because the rodents pee on like everything.

Protecting your food from rodents is the key.

You can do that by carrying rodent proof bags, bear bags,

doing like just a little critter hang,

not even a full on bear hang.

Although if you are in an area where you know there are bears,

you should do the full on bear hang and the specs for that,

or 15 feet up and five over.

But sometimes, you're in areas where that's not achievable,

so you got to get a little bit creative.

But most people are scared about the big animals.

Like I said, I saw three bears,

but I had friends who had mice chew through their tents to get to their food and stuff.

For foods, also all smell-ables; toothpaste,

none-scented deodorant, if you did carry that,

wet wipes, all that stuff has scent and can attract animals.

Then last, respect other visitors.

Hikertrash, you represent the community.

I feel like all of these have really touched on that.

You want to preserve it for the next group that's coming through.

Also, other things that are not great are noise,

playing music, camping near on the trail,

and having a sense of entitlement.

A lot of thru-hikers are like, "I'm a thru-hiker,

which means I mean to be here and I'm somehow better than other hikers."

That attitude, I just don't tolerate that because everyone is free to be here.

No one deserves it more than anyone else because of any reason.

But that noise and playing music,

I just want to be respectful of what other people want from their wilderness experience.

Respecting fire closures, restrictions,

and COVID restrictions; you really should respect those.

Those communities are so helpful to hikers during the year and you want

to respect them by doing what's best for them healthwise.

[NOISE] All right. Now,

we're going to get into some of the things I think people are probably really interested about in terms of thru-hiking safety and all of the things that maybe are different than just a regular backpacking trip.

Although I think a lot of these do have a lot of good things to say about just general safety.

Exposure, snow travel, hitch hiking,

river crossings, animals, fires,

oh my [LAUGHTER], all of these things

and we'll have some great pictures and can touch on these a little bit.

In terms of your own safety, share your itinerary,

touch in with your family,

a lot of times there is service in some of these areas.

But if there's not, you can get a really light,

somewhat cheap GPS device to let

people know when you don't have service, where you're going to be.

GAIA is a great resource,

also SPOT by having the SOS button.

Usually, those make your family feel better.

Maybe you don't feel like you need it,

but then your family feels good that you have it.

Exposure is like the elements.

Most people are afraid of, like a bear attack, but the truth is,

exposure is going to be what gets you if something gets you.

Hypothermia, heat illness in the desert,

lightning, if you're up on a ridge during a lightning storm.

These are the things that are the silent killers, [LAUGHTER] I guess.

So just making sure that you bring the things that you need to be warm, that you're taking a siesta in the middle of the afternoon if it's too hot, that you know where your water source is going to be, and carrying extra day of food is always a really great practice.

Plus the last day before town, you can really chow on them, if you didn't have to use it.

[NOISE] Snow travel,

I touched on this a bit depending on what season and what kind of snow year they had, you might have significant snow travel.

You can check the conditions on different sites.

One for the PCT is postholer.com, and then there's certain gear that you probably should be carrying; sunglasses, sunscreen, microspikes which is traction on the bottom of your shoes, it helps you from slipping when the snow is icy.

Gaitors, which are the piece of cloth that attaches to your shoe and goes up your leg so you don't get snow in your shoe.

If you know you're going to be hiking somewhere, and it's going to be really cold and wet, then neoprene socks can help.

But here's two pictures, the bottom one is my friend who went through the Sierra and as you can see, like she slipped and fell,

and then she's just using her ice ax to chop into the snow to keep her from sliding down.

Then there is another picture of the guy who also helped me do this one.

But you can see, it's really melted out on the bottom,

so it's also a hazard because that's a snow bridge.

If he walks over that and it doesn't support his weight, he could fall.

There are a lot of hazards with snow travel,

so I really would recommend familiarizing yourself with that,

if you do want to go somewhere when it's really snowy because a lot of times,

we don't know what we don't know to be aware of,

and then that can be really dangerous.

But also, if you have the proper skills and know how to deal with it,

it can be a great time to be in the mountain. It's awesome.

[NOISE] Stream crossings, this is probably along with exposure,

one of the most dangerous things,

because once that snow starts to melt,

these creeks can really swell,

and become whitewater, and sweep you away,

and you have to cross them a lot of times.

Some good tips ask are,

do I have to cross at all?

Do I have to cross here?

Maybe there's a better option up or down the trail like up to a mile away,

and do I have to cross now?

If you cross in the afternoon,

the sun has been on that snow all day and the creeks are going to swell.

But if you wait until the morning,

there's less snow-melt up higher,

and so those creeks will be a few feet less deep.

Sometimes waiting till morning can be a great strategy if you do need to cross a creek.

This mostly happens in the High Sierra.

This was one of the main reasons I decided not to go through at the time that I did,

because this creek crossings were extremely engorged and I think, not to scare you,

this rarely happens,

but the year that I did it,

because it was such a high snow year,

two people ended up actually dying because they got swept away by creek crossing.

It's something to take seriously.

[LAUGHTER] [NOISE]

Hitchhiking, so we had a lot of anxiety about this and rightly so.

Hitchhike with other people,

that's the main piece of advice I could give.

Know where you're going, find alternates,

maybe you can hike into town you absolutely don't want to hitchhike,

then you can definitely do that.

Take advantage of family, friends,

and trail angels, people that you can trust to a higher degree.

Go with your gut, if something feels wrong,

have an excuse ready.

"Oh man, I forgot my camera, sorry. I got to go back."

Your safety is really important.

[LAUGHTER] Then all of the animals,

we talked about this a little bit. Prevention is key.

Proper food storage protects you and animals.

Avoid hiking at dawn or dusk and at night.

A lot of people wanted to hike at night because it was less cool and
100 percent of those people saw cougars that were hiking behind them.

To me, that's the scariest animal I can see.

I see some people be like, "Nope",
and that's exactly how I feel too.

I was always paranoid about cougars.

Don't hike at dawn or dusk or in the middle of the night and you should be good.

Because I barely saw any animals and I didn't really hike in those times.

Also, you can sing and whistle while you're hiking,
you're talking with somebody.

That way, you're not going to spook any animal.

Forest fires, closures and smoke.

Just trying to keep up today.

I know it's so hard. You go out into
the wilderness and you don't really want to be connected.

But as a PCT hiker,

you always are because you need to know where the water sources are
changing and you need to know what's happening in terms of weather and fires.

But usually they'll have closures posted,
so you're not going to be wandering into a fire unbeknownst to you.

Once I started working for the forest service,
I realized that if they know people are in a closure,
they will try to come find you,

[LAUGHTER] which made me feel pretty good.

A good skill you might pick up if you're thinking
about doing something longer is wilderness first aid.

Because it gives you the skills to know what things to pack
to help with little injuries and stuff like that,
or if you ever did need to evacuate someone,
you would know the skills.

Like how to make sure that if they go into shock,
they're not going to deteriorate super quickly.

I really recommend UREC usually puts on a course in, I think May.

It's a really a great skill and it weighs nothing.

[LAUGHTER] How are we doing on time?

Looks good. Now we're talking about something like a little more than nitty-gritty.

Does anyone want to have any questions about all of the safety
and main fears people have?

Hopefully I made you feel better,
not worse and gave you some good tips.

[NOISE]

AUDIENCE: Wait a moment. Sorry.

HANNAH KISER: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Last minute.

Staying on top of where your water sources are and what's available.

Are you using an app?

Is there an updated website that we can print a list out?

How do we stay up to date on where these water sources are?

I was reading a book and the lady was like,

"Well, this was supposed to be a water source,

but it's not anymore apparently."

I was like, "Okay, so how do we know?" [LAUGHTER] How do we know?

HANNAH KISER: I mean, you always do your best.

There is a water report and you can get the most updated version.

You can download it to view offline on your phone or you can print it off if you wanted.

But you need to update it as much as possible.

But sometimes it just doesn't get updated because it only gets updated if a hiker says,

"Oh hey, this is dry now."

I use the water report, that's what I'm referencing.

But another option is an app called Guthook's.

Guthook's gives you where you are on the trail and then it tells

you where good campsites are and information that hikers leave in comments like,

"Don't camp here, there's a bear walking around all night."

You'd probably see that and be like,

"All right, yeah, not camping there."

But then also there will be information on water like,

was here last week,

was dry or one of the times it was like,

water isn't wheelbarrow but there is a dead lizard floating in it.

I was like, "Great, this is my water source.

I have no choice but to drink dead lizard water", like yuck.

The app and then the water report are the two options,

but it varies from trails.

For the PCT, those are the two pieces of info.

But for the other trails,

you could look on the organization website and there would be information.

Guthook's. Halfmile is another good app.

Talked about this a little bit,

for PCT, there is a permit process.

It's an online lottery in the fall.

Let's see, Halfmile app, yeah.

We're going to touch on some other things.

I think this is more of a little bit of a summary slide,

but we are also got only five minutes.

[LAUGHTER] The budget for a thru-hike,

depending on how much gear you have, is \$4,000-\$6,000.

Maybe you have expensive taste,

every time I come to town, stay in a hotel.

You're going to be on the upper end of that \$6,000 or above it.

But maybe you're like, I'm going to stay with trail angels.

I'm just going to camp really close to town and go in in the morning and leave at night, which is what I did, then it's closer to that \$4,000.

If you have a lot of your gear already, it's going to be pretty cheap, but you can always find good, used, in consignment gear also on Reddit, on like Ultralight Gear Trade or Gear Trade.

Also consignment stores are really great or just during the sale season, you can get a lot of good stuff.

You are going to have to buy extra pairs of shoes, usually go through four or five and most people don't wear boots for the PCT and those type trails because the trails are really well-groomed.

They used trail runners, which is nice because those can be a bit cheaper.

Food, you're also having either buy food in town or package it beforehand and send it to yourself.

There's considerable costs associated with that.

If you want to eat at restaurants, which you're going to be really hungry, those are other costs to factor in as well.

So people think, "Oh, it's free to thru-hike," usually it's about one or two dollars per mile.

But if you think about it, you'd be paying rent.

Maybe it's worth buying that expensive tent if it's light and what you want.

Different strategy ideas, I did a mixture of sending myself resupplies where I made things at home and sent them to towns that had very little options.

Like Crater Lake, didn't have a lot of options, so I sent a box there.

Stevens Pass also doesn't have a lot of options or you can buy as you go if you're entering places.

So the trail goes through South Lake Tahoe, huge town, definitely bought food there.

There was lots of options.

The best of both is the combination because maybe you get super tired of eating what you packed and then you have to eat it the rest of the trail, don't do that. [LAUGHTER]

You can then mix it up and get some variety.

In terms of food, you want to be packing a lot of calories because you're burning a ton, about 5,000 a day.

Focusing a lot on that fat and that protein, my claim to fame was like,

I gained three pounds on the trail, which is unheard of.

Most people lose like 20 or more because I really focused on I want to leave lots of protein and lots of fat because I wanted to not be skin and bones by the time I got to the cold parts of the trail.

Carrying a stove is the best way.

Some people just soak their food in cold water and eat it or make things you don't have to cook.

I think that that would not be morale booster for me.

I'm going to skip through some of this because I do want to leave time for questions.

Yeah, we talked about the water report and touch on gear really quick.

Skill and knowledge weigh nothing.

Getting those skills like wilderness first aid is really great,

and not packing your fears.

Maybe you're like, "I'm super afraid to be cold.

I'm going to pack at negative 15 degrees sleeping bag."

Just do the things that you need and you don't need to be overkill about it.

You'll hear this thing called ultralight.

Ultralight is about minimalism.

Everything has more than one purpose,

and you don't need to have all these extraneous things

because really you're out there for the journey,

not for all of your possessions.

Your back will thank you if you shoot for

all of your stuff weighing under 15 pounds plus,

then you can pack more food, which is always plus.

Because usually my pack, I'd say after I was leaving town was about 35 pounds,

which is a decent amount,

but a lot of that food and then you hike into town and it's a lot lighter at the end.

This was something that I did, but I think questions will be better for people.

Post trail depression, this is a real thing.

You've had an awesome experience and then you get done.

Don't neglect this part of your health.

Think about it before you get off trail and what you might do to bring that closure in your journey.

Here's some great options,

trail work, trail magic,

presentations like this one, [LAUGHTER]

getting out locally and all that good stuff.

What questions do you guys have?

SPEAKER 1: Thank you so much.

It looks like Mary [inaudible] has a question.

Do you have any books, websites,

or apps that you recommend for planning?

HANNAH KISER: Perfect. That is the next slide. [LAUGHTER]

I just want a screenshot this.

I think I can also send the presentation if you put your email in the chat.

You can also privately message me it.

These are all super great resources.

Also feel free to email me anytime.

I always offer this up to people.

I'm not just getting bombarded with the you all's emails all the time.

People don't take me up on the offer that much,

but definitely if you have questions and want to know more about any of this stuff.

I think normally this presentation is for 90 minutes,

[LAUGHTER] we did breeze over a few things.

But all of those books:

Thirst is an amazing one.

Becoming Odessa, Thru-Hiking will Break Your Heart.

These are really great books by awesome female authors who hiked the trail and are like fastest known time. They're just incredible people.

I love it.

Yeah, The Track. Sweet.

SPEAKER 1: Thanks. I've seen some people are putting their emails in the chat.

Do you want me to send you the emails or are you going to [inaudible]?

HANNAH KISER: Yeah. You can send me the emails.

SPEAKER 1: Awesome. All right. Does anyone have any more questions?

Looks like we don't have any more question.

Thank you so much for the presentation, Spatula.

HANNAH KISER: Awesome.

SPEAKER 1: Great. Thank you all so much for coming.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your Friday.

I left Hannah's email in the chat as well if you want to contact her.

Thank you so much Hannah for presenting for us and yeah, have a great weekend, everyone.