



Passages

Volume 26, Summer 2022

Continental Divide Trail Coalition



Tourhiking New Mexico

📍 Gabaccia Moreno finds change and constancy in the Land of Enchantment

A LIFE DEDICATED TO THE DIVIDE

Remembering
'Grandfather of the CDT'
Jim Wolf

A MONUMENTAL PROPOSAL

Lawmakers call for
protections in Colorado

+ PLUS

Reflections on 2022's
Yellowstone flooding

Remembering Jim Wolf

Executive director's letter

Dear CDT friends,

As we come to the end of another summer, we continue to reflect with immense gratitude for the continued success and support CDTC receives from our entire community of supporters, volunteers, members, friends, partners, and colleagues. We say it often, and we mean it every time, that we wouldn't be here without all of you. This summer we've had the opportunity to connect with new faces, reconnect with familiar ones, and sadly, we have also had to say goodbye to some of the faces of our CDT family. One of the people we have had to say goodbye to is Jim Wolf.



For those who don't know Jim Wolf, in simple words, he is the Grandfather of the CDT. For those of you who were lucky enough to know him, interact with him, call him a friend, colleague or in my case a trusted mentor, friend, and colleague, I am certain this news will be sad to learn and I share this news with my sincerest condolences. I'd like to share my tribute to Jim and his contributions to the CDT instead of my normal opening letter. It seems fitting and appropriate to dedicate the space to one of the people responsible for creating the CDT and in some ways, for helping CDTC be able to do the work we do.

James "Jim" R. Wolf began his relationship with long trails in 1971, when he thru hiked the Appalachian Trail. After hiking the A.T., he wondered if a similar trail could be established along the Continental Divide. A lawyer by profession, he began researching the idea and discovered that in fact there were plans for exploring the development of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and he spent nearly all of his time off over the next 5 years hiking much of what would later become the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Because he hiked almost all of the CDT, when time came to hold Congressional hearings about the creation of the CDT in 1976, he was able to testify on behalf of the CDT's creation before the U.S. Congress. And, Jim was the only member of the general public to do so. Once the Trail was

created in 1978, Jim was appointed to the Federal Advisory Committee to support the development of the first Comprehensive Plan for the administration and stewardship of the CDT. In 1989, when the first official segment of the CDT was designated (at Chief Joseph Pass in Montana) he was given the honor of cutting the ribbon that officially "opened" the CDT!

In 1978, in anticipation of the CDT becoming a National Scenic Trail, Jim formed the first organization created to support the CDT- the Continental Divide Trail Society. Jim ran the organization from his home in Baltimore, and spent the next 50 years ensuring the CDT would become what it is today. Jim also authored the CDT Society's Guidebook series and while slightly out of date, they contain natural history, cultural references and a general knowledge of the American West along the Continental Divide in a detail only someone who loved the places they were exploring could write about them. Jim wrote much of the guides as he hiked and he so eloquently describes in a detail that to the unfamiliar might seem very "country mile" direction- like. He would write such things as "at the large boulder in the wide open tundra, you will look North and there will be a fence line- walk to that fence line and then turn to the East and you will find a faint path which you will follow for 15 miles." Or he would mention a small bird sitting on the fence and encourage reader to not forget to look for the small sparrows or other creatures that were also a part of the Trail Experience. And as someone recently shared- as they were reading his guide, and came to a passage describing such a scene and the mention of a bird- they looked up only to in fact see a small bird as described sitting on the fence in front of them. Where the CDT hasn't changed from its original routing, I am certain you could still follow his directions and stay on route.

Jim passed away in late May, at the age of 92. We were notified by his nephew who was quite surprised to learn how important Jim was to not just the Continental Divide Trail, but to the entire National Trails System. He was one of the last living icons of a generation of early individuals and pioneers working to create and protect our National Trails. For sure, Jim helped establish the CDT and for much of his life, it was something that people outside of the long distance hiking community, knew very little of his influence or commitment.

I first met Jim in 2000 while at the Appalachian Trail



JIM WOLF

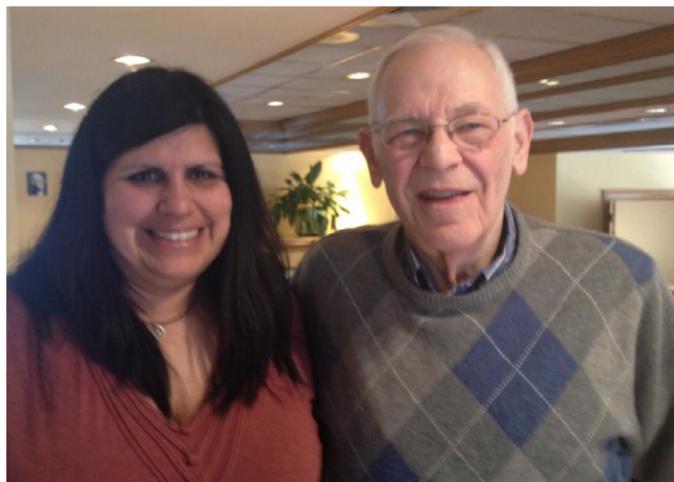
IN MEMORIAM

Conservancy and during the annual Hike the Hill advocacy hosted in Washington DC every February by the Partnership of the National Trails System. When I went to work for the CDT Alliance in 2007, he shared with me his frustration with his relationship with the CDTA, as well as a hope that “maybe, things might improve, now.” Things did get better and we worked together on many project proposals, routing issues and in general, and demonstrated that we were united in stewardship of the CDT, and along the way he became a dear friend and mentor to me, personally and professionally.

When CDTA closed its doors, and we decided to create the CDT Coalition, the first person I reached out to was Jim. Jim received the news with relief and shared “I’ve always believed that the CDT needed an organization that would not only hold the agencies accountable, but that would also create resources for people who wanted to get on the Trail, do the volunteer work and be there in all the ways it needs.” He never thought the CDT Society would be that partner, nor did he want to be. He was a one man show and liked it that way. And then in Jim’s very typical fashion, he provided counsel on what names he would be ok with for the new organization and which wouldn’t create confusion with others, specifically the IRS. We agreed that Coalition would meet all of those sideboards, and he then gave us his blessing and said he would be cheering us on.

While we continued to work closely, I was surprised when Jim reached out in late 2014 to discuss what he wanted to happen when this day would come. In 2015, we signed an Agreement that transferred ownership of his notes, files, CDTS guidebooks to CDTC upon his passing. CDTC also agreed to ensure that important files of specific importance to the CDT history are kept and archived appropriately, and host any and all of the items that are important for the long term history of the CDT. (editor’s note, CDTC will be receiving all the remaining copies of his guidebooks soon and will share more details soon on how you might be able to own a piece of history-more to come!)

In speaking with Jim’s family, we asked permission to share the news of his passing with the larger Trail Community, knowing that some of you may like the space to both reflect and share your thoughts and condolences. His family has asked for those remembrances to be shared through CDTC and that for those who wish to- to make a donation to CDTC or your favorite Trail organization. We will be sure to share all we receive with his family. In addition, CDTC will be creating the James R. Wolf Society to ensure that Jim’s legacy and contributions to the creation, stewardship and existence of the CDT may remain



TERESA MARTINEZ

forever acknowledged, remembered and honored.

The last time I saw Jim was in February 2020, at the last Hike the Hill before the pandemic lock downs occurred. Since 2012 we always met for lunch or breakfast during Hike the Hill to check in, catch up and just talk about life and he would always share memories he had of the Trail. It never failed that when Jim would talk about the CDT, he would get a little smile and then his eyes would light up and twinkle. And sometimes he would even chuckle about some event he remembered and it was always the best part of our conversations. It was in those moments his love for the CDT would shine through. I asked him if we could do a feature in Passages about him and we did, which coincidentally we shared again in the last edition of Passages and a few weeks later, we learned of his passing. I guess Jim has just been on our minds.

One of the best, coolest and my personal most favorite, classic pictures of Jim, is of him at the Canadian border, smoking a cigarette after completing the CDT (for the first time) sometime around 1975. In the picture he is standing spryly next to the monument, with an air of irreverence and looking as cool as most of us wish we could be. And that is how I will always remember him, with a little twinkle in his eye, a slight smile and as the “OG” of the CDT. On behalf of all of us who love this landscape and the Trail along its spine, Thank you Jim, for all you have done on behalf of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. May you rest in peace.

To the CDT Community: I hope to see you on the trail soon,

Teresa Ana Martinez

Teresa Ana Martinez
Executive Director
Continental Divide Trail Coalition

JIM WOLF



JIM WOLF, IN HIS OWN WORDS

Interview between Teresa Martinez and Jim Wolf excerpted from our December 2018 Passages magazine. [Read the full story on page 15.](#)

Teresa Martinez: When did you first visit the Divide?

Jim Wolf: My first experience on the Divide was a summer trip, about 1965, with several friends from the Pittsburgh Climbers. We spent about a week in the Wind Rivers in Wyoming, in the Mt. Bonneville area, hiking and climbing.

TM: When did you first hear about or envision a trail traversing the Divide? How did you get involved with efforts to create the CDT?

JW: I don’t know when exactly, but I did think about it while I was hiking the AT in 1971. After completing the AT, I thought about the feasibility of a Continental Divide Trail. I consulted maps and tried to visualize possible routes. Next, I began planning an initial trip – and hiked from the Canadian border to Lincoln, MT, in 1973. As planned, I kept detailed notes of my trip. Those notes eventually became the first guidebook in the series I published with Mountain Press in Missoula.

TM: During the period before 1978, did you always have faith that the CDT would eventually be established, or was there the thought that Congress would decide it wasn’t worthy of National Scenic Trail designation?

JW: I never feared that Congress would fail to find the CDT worthy of designation, mostly because I was not aware of ongoing efforts to consider the establishment of a Continental Divide Trail until 1976! But once I learned about the Congressional review, I traveled to D.C. to testify on behalf of the CDT before the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation.

TM: What was testifying in front of Congress like?

JW: It was actually a very pleasant experience.

The Subcommittee chairman, Roy Taylor of North Carolina, was the only member of Congress present! I had a prepared statement with me, which I was assured would be placed in the record (and in fact it is in the published report). I then began my testimony by reference to my hike of the Appalachian Trail. I stated that it prompted me to “include an activity of hiking as an important part of my own personal development, and during the past three summers I have spent a great deal of time hiking in the West, specifically for the purpose of scouting the Continental Divide Trail...”

I was distressed perhaps by what I perceived to be the slow pace of activity under the Trails System Act, and it seemed to me that I perhaps could be of some assistance by taking some initiative and going out and seeing for myself what is there. During this period, I have hiked now from the Canadian border, essentially south to Rawlins, Wyoming, the southern part of Wyoming, leaving aside what is I know one of the most spectacular areas, the Bridger Wilderness, which I hope to complete this summer. So it is on the basis of very detailed experience that I can inform you that the Continental Divide Trail at least in the states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming already exists. I think it is time and appropriate now for Congress to consider once again the designation of this outstanding pathway as a national scenic trail. I hope that my being here will help to lead in that direction.”

A brief colloquy followed in which I surmised that the federal government would have a greater role with respect to the CDT than it has for the AT “because so much of the land is federally owned.” I also commented on the importance of the role of private citizen groups.

My prepared statement concluded with: “The [CDT]

IN MEMORIAM

hiker will have enjoyed a great variety of landscapes, mountains, forest, and grassland. He will have observed an abundance of wildlife and profuse wildflower displays. The history of America – the days of Lewis and Clark, westward migration, mining, peaceful and hostile contacts with the Indians – will have been brought vividly to mind. And, most important, he will have developed an appreciation of his closeness to the land and his obligation to pass its treasures on to future generations.”

TM: Do you have a favorite place on the CDT?

JW: There are too many to pick just one! Some

of my favorite places aren't on the designated route. Of course there are the places everyone loves, like Glacier National Park and the Chinese Wall in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana, or Cirque of the Towers and Green River to Island Lake in Wyoming. But some of my favorite areas are less famous – Henrys Lake in Montana, Elwood Pass to Blue Lake in Colorado's South San Juan Wilderness, the Ignacio Chavez Wilderness Study Area in northwestern New Mexico, and the Florida Mountains, to name a few.

Remembrances from the CDT Community



Jim Wolf was a legend and an inspiration. His importance in advocating for the trail cannot be understated. This is one of those cases where one person's multi-decade dedication to see a dream become reality truly made a difference. Jim's books were a great source and comfort during my thru-hike and his appreciation for the natural and history of the landscape added to my appreciation at the time and made me eager to learn more. I still have them all and my trail notes are scribbled in the margins. It was an honor to meet him in person at the ALDHA-West Ruck and to have a chance to thank him in person alongside the distance hiking community.”

— Liz Thomas, author, former CDTC staffer, and editor of *Treeline Review*



A giant in the trail community and truly a legend — not just that overused phrase.”

— Paul Magnanti, author, former CDTC Board member



We all owe a great deal to Jim Wolf. Though I never met him I'm sure [hiking partner] Lynn and I corresponded with him. We used a copy of Bill Odell's Maps for our 1978 Mex-Canada backpack trip, and I remember when Jim's books were published, thinking how helpful they would have been for us. Thanks be to people like Jim who followed their crazy, wild dreams so that folks like us could have the life altering experience of backpacking, horse packing or day-tripping his amazing route.”

— Jean Ella, first woman to thruhike the CDT



I had only occasional opportunities to work directly with Jim, but he was always steadfast in his support for the cooperative work of the Partnership for the National Trails System. He was one of the people involved from the early days — one of the few remaining 'pioneers.'”

— Gary Werner, former Executive Director, Partnership for the National Trails System



Jim was an amazing person and I'm glad we had the chance to have him speak at ALDHA-West. Calling him an icon is an understatement.”

— Whitney La Ruffa, CDT thruhiker 2016, *Six Moon Designs*



Jim was a trail blazer (quite literally) and a mentor for many of us.”

— Don Owen, CDTC Board member



JASMINE STAR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 Executive Director's Letter
- 5 Remembering Jim Wolf
- 8 Trail Tidbits
- 10 'To Know and Be Better': Tourhiking with Gabaccia Moreno
- 28 A Monumental Proposal
- 30 Reflections from a Summer Along the Divide
- 32 Portraits of Pride
- 36 A Familial View of Colorado: Book Excerpt and Author Interview
- 40 The Trail Register
- 41 Media Roundup
- 42 Supporters, Sponsors, and Partners
- 48 The Terminus: After the Flood

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CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition's mission is to complete, promote, and protect the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. CDTC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and donations to CDTC are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. To donate, visit our website at www.continentaldividetrail.org.

Continental Divide Trail *Passages* is published three times a year for the members of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition. Membership begins at \$5 per year. Members are encouraged to submit story ideas and photographs for inclusion in *Passages* to the editor at communications@continentaldividetrail.org.

TRAIL TIDBITS

NEW TO THE CREW



ZACK BUMGARNER,
NEW MEXICO FIELD TECHNICIAN (HE/HIS)

Zack joined CDTC in June 2022 as the New Mexico Field Technician. Growing up in North Carolina, he developed a love for the outdoors through family outings and Boy Scout trips before pursuing a B.S in Geography from Appalachian State University. In 2016, after several years working for local government in North Carolina, Zack moved to New Mexico to combine his passions for maps and the public lands. He spent the next five years as a Wilderness Ranger on the Santa Fe National Forest, conducting inventories, making public contacts, clearing trail, and protecting Wilderness Character. In 2018, Zack received the USDA's Wilderness Partnership Champion Award for his efforts. He looks forward to continuing to be a steward of the trail and public lands.



JORDAN WILLIAMS,
COLORADO CONSERVATION FELLOW (HE/HIM)

Jordan calls the Pacific Northwest home, but the sunshine and mountains have kept him in Colorado for over ten years now. After graduating from Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA, Jordan received his Master's degree from the University of Northern Colorado and currently lives in Fort Collins, CO with his wife and their Australian Cattle Dog. Jordan's professional background includes stints in college athletics, community recreation, and natural resources. While working for the Poudre Heritage Alliance, his wife had the crazy idea to hike the Colorado Trail from Denver to Durango with their dog. After 31 days of backpacking, Jordan had officially fallen in love with the Continental Divide. Now he looks forward to promoting and protecting that landscape throughout Colorado with CDTC. Jordan spends his free time volunteering in the Northern Colorado community, trail running with his dog, trying to become a better skier, and supporting his wife's love of rock climbing.



GATEWAY COMMUNITY SUMMIT

Join the Continental Divide Trail Coalition for the third Virtual CDT Gateway Community Summit on November 15 - 16, 2022 to share, learn, and contribute to the completion, promotion, and protection of the Continental Divide Trail! During the Summit, you'll unite with other volunteers, residents, tourism professionals, elected officials, and members of federal agencies to hear how communities all along the Divide are contributing to the CDT's stewardship, to share successes of the Gateway Community program, and to find out how you can lead your community in stewardship of the CDT. [Register here to reserve your spot!](#)

TRAIL TIDBITS

A NEW GATEWAY COMMUNITY



The communities of Lander and South Pass City jointly became the fourth

Gateway Community of the CDT in Wyoming. Through locally-led initiatives, including the formation of a Gateway Community Advisory Council, these communities chose to designate themselves as a welcoming destination for CDT travelers. Stakeholders, including the hosting Wind River Visitors Council, community members, and trail enthusiasts gathered at the Coalter Loft in Lander on Wednesday evening to celebrate as Mayor Monte Richardson (center) signed a declaration finalizing this designation.



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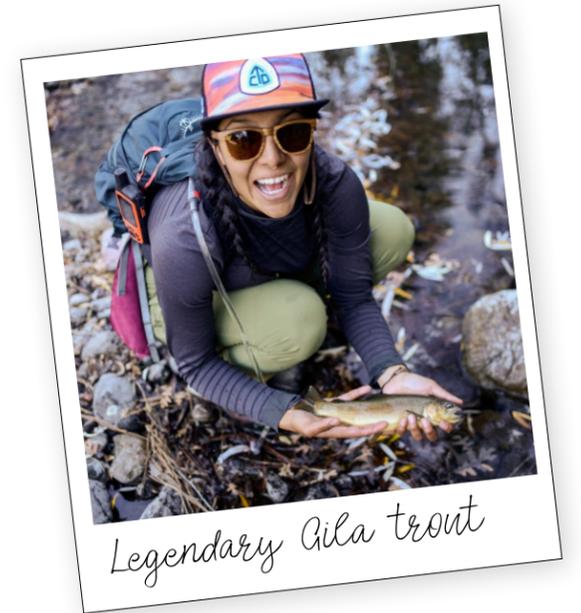
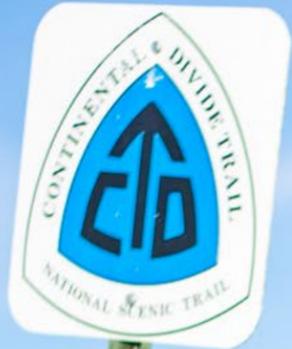
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'To know
and
be



Legendary Aila trout

better'

A traveler sees some of New Mexico's best... while learning to embrace change

*By Gabaccia Moreno
Photos by Roberto Flores*

"That was rough," I've thought to myself, "and I'm so proud I've survived it mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically."

There's a kind of peace I know I can only reach when finding solitude in nature. But as the world stands today, as I am a citizen with duties, obligations, bills, with a future yet to be secure, reaching this peace is a luxury, a privilege. I picture my ancestors retreating away from their communities to find answers and questions in the harmonious silence of the rainforests, the deserts, and the tundras they called home, in the sole company of the animal, floral, and mineral beings. I feel, in my humanity, the call to follow my ancestors' feet, to retreat into nature, to quiet the noise of the ever going treadmill of work, of the never ending wars in our neighborhoods and across the world. We are all connected, but we've grown, systemically, to feel disconnected.

I've been wanting to go on a long hike since I first learned about El Camino de Santiago, back in 2007.

I kept looking into trails that at the time, living in southern Mexico felt “accessible.” Not really shockingly, I couldn’t get together the funds to take me to the trailheads and support my dream. So for the next 14 years dreaming was as close as I knew I could get to hiking a long trail. Cut to 2021.

In 2021, amidst an ongoing global pandemic, somehow, the stars aligned for me to embark on my first long hike. Through my role at the time as Project Coordinator of the [Outdoor F.U.T.U.R.E. Initiative](#), I had been collaborating with the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, and had resolved to take on the trail’s New Mexico section about 800mi of this 3,100+mi path. I was privileged enough to have also been awarded a wonderful sponsorship through a group of brands which provided me with high quality gear I would’ve never been able to afford if I wanted to upgrade what I already owned.

The day before the trail started, my friends at CDTC and Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project threw a little farewell campout near Cumbres Pass. There had been a recent heavy snowfall and I quickly found out that my starting plans would need adjusting. Nobody wants to start a thru hike in 4ft of snow. Lesson number one learned: got to be flexible about one’s thruhiking plans. We froze our butts that weekend camping in the snow...but it was one of the most fun campouts I’ve ever participated in. We told stories around the fire (the fire was life!), we had a line dancing party (it got slippery but we survived), we build a snow shelter (labor-intensive but worth it), we learned how to make fry bread from my colleague Reyaun Francisco (it astronomically upgraded our dinner and breakfast game), and some of us even got to receive a blessing from our Jicarilla Apache friend Bryan Vigil. The weekend was so perfect, I was feeling beyond inspired and supported at all levels to start my journey. My dear friend Teresa (CDTC), my brother Carlos, and my partner Roberto dropped me off at Hopewell Lake, where I would spend my first night on trail before my official start.

And so, I started a journey on the CDT.

CDT-NM DAY 1: HOPEWELL LAKE TO CANJILON CREEK

Saw so many fresh traces of those with whom I was sharing the trail today...from 2 humans to many aspens, pines, birds, elk, turkey, deer, cows, and even moose! In fact, a herd of deer welcomed me into my last stretch of trail before I camped.

The night before I had realized I forgot my lighter and matches (packed the wrong kit!) so I was getting ready to cold soak for the next few days. Luckily I ran into Sand Man who was generous enough and gifted me his spare matches - whew! A warm meal before a cold night is so precious.

With every step on the trail I keep thinking of the gratitude I feel for being able to be here. Am I dreaming? Can life be this good that I’ll be on trail for the next 4 weeks?

Not all was magic though. About mile 11 I started to feel a hotspot aka “a blister in the making.” I decided to check it out and to my surprise, my socks were soaking from sweat and this was no hotspot any more, but a full blown 2in blister covering my left heel bone area. I’ve had something similar happen before and so I added some moleskin and tape, changed my socks, and braced the next 11 miles.



*It’s tough to be honest
— my whole body feels
really grateful for these
days of movement,
yet there is this one
thing that cannot be
overlooked.”*

When I got to camp I had to do some more first aid on the blister... the skin had ripped and I’m now dealing with exposed flesh. Still, I’ve been here before and I perform all the first aid I know. Doesn’t hurt as much but I know I better make sure it doesn’t get infected.

CDT-NM DAY 2: CANJILON CREEK TO FOREST RD 20

I found my lighter! Great morning news before I proceed to do more First aid on my blister. Since I left the blister outside of my sock overnight it’s actually looking pretty good, like it’s starting to heal. I take some ibuprofen for good measure and break up camp. Thanks to Garmin I am able to request a weather forecast and I know I need to be ready for a windy day.

If you’ve ever hiked with the wind blowing stronger than you on one of your sides then you pretty much know how my whole day was. Well that, alongside gorgeous views of valleys and mountains dressed up in fall colors. Beautiful!

I encountered the first group of cows of the day. It just so happens that I’ve been attacked by cows twice on the trail — if they charge at you, they are attacking right? — so I always approach them with too much care. And by approach, I mean literally step off the trail as far as possible from them and keep walking. This time though, the cows as soon as they saw me around - I don’t know, maybe 600 yards from them - they would turn around and leave. That happened with cow groups number 1, number 2, and number 3. Seriously, zero cow attacks felt really good.

On mile eight, I start to feel discomfort on my blister area so I decide to take a break and check it out. As I peel off my sock I see some colors on the gauze that covers my blister which I don’t really like. I slowly remove the gauze and I pretty much see a burst blister on a burst blister on exposed flesh, blood, and — how many layers of skin-depth is that? Not a good look. F*ck. It’s OK I’m going to take it easy and cut my day short.

A couple of miles later, I start to question myself. I’ve always been a “push through the blister” kind of gal, but what’s in it for me? Do I need to take a break from the trail already? Let me see the wound: looks very bad, not sure we are on blister territory anymore. A massive emotion took over my chest and I started to cry as I texted Roberto about my change of plans. I asked him if he would be available to pick me up tomorrow so that I can take a day to heal these wounds. It’s only day two of my hike and it’s not like I have all the time in the world to finish it.

In fact, my time is very limited and I am on a tight schedule which requires me to hike longer days than I have ever done, so I know this is going to yet again change my schedule and possibly require me to skip some other sections.

It really sucks, but I’m going to swallow my own words

and forget that I “push through blisters” and honor the fact that my body needs to heal right now and taking a break is not the worst thing in the world. I’m privileged to be close to home and to have trusted support to get there.

It’s tough to be honest — my whole body feels really grateful for these days of movement, yet there is this one thing that cannot be overlooked.

After some slow back-and-forth we agree on the spot to meet for tomorrow, then I hike my last couple of miles to find a place to camp before I exit the trail for maybe a half day, a day, who knows.

CDT-NM DAY 3: 2 MILES TO THE TRUCK

I kept waking up every hour of the night. I had picked a rather noisy campsite, on a windy night, on the passage of much wildlife (ok that was the cool part!). The now almost full moon kept creating creepy shadows on my tent walls. And it was COLD.

“I’ll only be gone for a day.” I keep telling myself to sleep, again and again. Sure, there were tears. Here I am, after years of backpacking “successfully,” failing miserably at my first thru hike on day 3.

My body had stopped feeling strong by now, my heart had sunken deep, and my ego kept looking for

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

“...Hiking Mexico to Canada along the spine of the continent changed my life just as it has that of many other long and short stay visitors. When I see what the CDT Coalition and the women and men before them have done to make this amazing path accessible to lovers of wilderness travel, I want nothing more than to contribute to that effort in whatever way is possible for me. For this reason, I choose to include CDTC in my estate plan.”

— Jean Ella, the first woman to thru-hike the CDT

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places to hide. I still sat by my decision. Whatever ideas I have of myself in relation to pain can go out the window. I am grown-up enough to make this choice, to choose healing over suffering.

I wake up at 5 because nature called. "Well, at least all is dry in the tent." (Wet tents are my pet peeve.)

I wake up at 6 since I'll be meeting Roberto at 7 and I know I'll have zero energy to pack this am, which means I'll be taking my time. "Awesome, everything is now frosted!" Cause why not? I'm about to go all "Murphy's law" on myself when I get a message from Roberto (thank goodness for Garmin)... "I can't find access, it'll be about another hour."

This should give me some time to dry everything out (I'm excited!), so I relax and remind myself I'm overly fortunate to have someone I trust who can pick me up mid-trail.

The morning was freezing cold but as soon as the sun rays entered my little corner I started to pack my stuff and expand all the tent parts to dry...this gives me all the satisfaction btw. Something about having the luxury of watching my stuff dry out outdoors...

The freezing morning becomes crisp and warm-ish, my tent is now waiting for a few drops to dry, and I get a new message with coordinates. Roberto could get as close as 2 miles from me. My foot feels sort of alright and for a second I think to myself I should've just kept going. After a couple of steps, a new pain reminds me why I've got to get out and heal this wound.

The road near me wasn't bad, but the closer I got to Roberto, the worse the road got. Google maps was failing to load my saved data and I was so glad to have downloaded area maps along the trail on OnX, it was a mix of Garmin and OnX that ultimately got me to my destination.

Tacos de cochinita were awaiting for me. I tried to stay as positive as possible and be grateful towards Roberto. Maybe I succeeded a little, but as I showed him the injury and saw it on his face I started to accept that this may not just be a 24h break, which in turn stung my heart a little more.

We drive home. This is how fortunate I am. I am going home, with the person I love most, to heal. I'm not sitting this out in my tent alone, or at a hostel, or with strangers I'm forced to trust. I'm safe and can focus on only healing.

We pick up some salt from the grocery store. For me, it has been over a decade since the last time I had to treat any blister as a problem. Basically since I quit dancing ballet back in middle school when my



An epic sendoff

masochism was at an all-time-high and I didn't care to go on pointe without protection. If you know, you know.

The remedy is simple: mix boiling water and salt, soak for a few, dry for a few, repeat.

The remedy is brutal. I felt, saw, heard, felt again and then screamed at my all creators. No joke. I'm glad I'm here suffering to heal and not to push through a hike which would then very likely make it even more painful to heal.

CDT-NM ZERO DAYS, PT 1: PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SELF CARE

So, I'm home. Not on the CDT, not crushing 20+ mi days, not going South watching the forest landscape turn high desert and back again.

I'm only here for a reason: to heal. As my sister Angela Mictlanxochitl reminded me, "foot wounds are good slow-me-down medicine." I'm gonna be barely moving/doing for a while and I better make the best of it. I'm tempted to "work" but I remind myself I need to REST and HEAL. And ultimately, I'm using my vacation time anyway.

Here's what worked:

WOUND CARE:

- Salt & boiling water wound soak (2-3x daily)
- Salt applied directly to the wound (not for the faint of heart)
- Collagen powder (2x daily)
- Neosporin (at night after a few days of soaking)

OVERALL CARE:

- CBD Immunity Support Caps
- CBD Salve (for my feet to stay hydrated after

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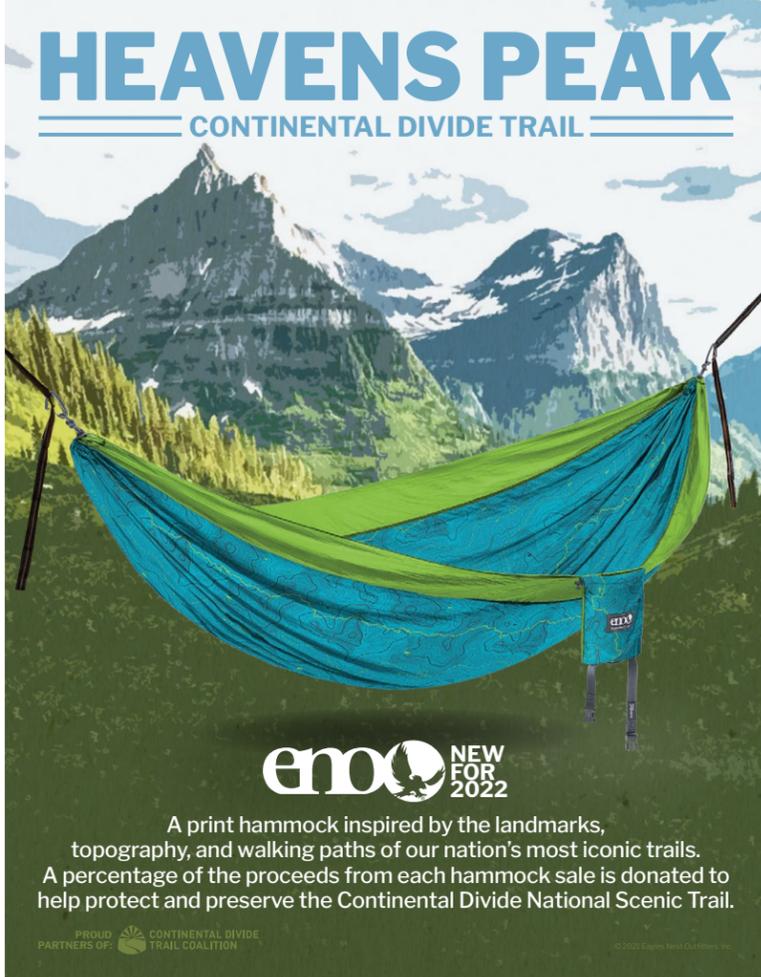
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REPEAT DAILY.



PARKS FOR ALL

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all the soaking - avoiding the wound tho)
 • Drink water, cold press juice, kombucha

HEART CARE:

- Hugs, many hugs (irl and virtual)
- Snacks from Trader Joe's (literally all of them)
- Sending updates to my family (daily)
- Reading through many affirming and encouraging DMs (so grateful for the online community)
- Video Games (Mario Kart/Party, anyone?)
- Journaling
- Rethinking my thruhike
- Looking at pics/vids from the trail send off
- Sleep, tons of sleep

CDT-NM ZERO DAYS, PT 2: GRIEVING DAYS. YES, AND...

The last few days have been a blur. I can't even begin to understand how I went from excruciating-screaming-kicking-type-pain to helping clean the house.

Every day for 4 days I decided I should rest it out one more. This choice was so hard to make, I literally waited until the last minute of every night to fully commit. Each day I woke up in some degree of tears, feeling a mix of actual pain, embarrassment for having a preventable wound, fear of never healing (does anyone else get that?), pure sadness from waking up in my bed vs a tent...also have felt tons of gratitude, love, support, joy. I cried. All. The. Time. for any and all reasons.

I truly believe it was a grieving period after all. Because during the short 37 miles I had been on trail I felt the wonder of living out my best life. Now being home so soon and for what felt so long, I saw my "thru hiker" dream once again fading away to other priorities. I've been wanting to do a long trail since 2007, and it was hard to sit here over a decade later so close and yet so far to fulfilling that dream. Don't I deserve this? Haven't I worked hard enough?

I'm so grateful for Roberto who daily reminded of my privilege. How many people even get to dream about something like this with the possibility/probability to make it come true? Realistically I don't know the numbers, but I also wouldn't guess they are high.

Thruhiking in its full recreational sense requires an immense amount of privilege. Time, money, work flexibility, training, guts... I have (to a degree) all these things and that in itself is where I needed to put my focus. I have a great opportunity, my time is set, there's a draw back (but that was always already part of the risk I was taking), and like every other time in conflict with self, mind or body, I'm going to make the best out of it.

And so under a much positive light, and with a clearer mind, I started envisioning my new CDT plan.

ZERO DAYS, PT 3: FROM THRU- TO TOUR HIKING

FINALLY! Time to get back on the trail!

Feeling good: wound is almost completely healed and I'm genuinely excited about slowing down my path and take it all in at a new pace.

Surely I missed too many days of thru hiking, but that doesn't mean I can't still enjoy most of the trail. Instead of getting right back into the thru hike tho, I decided I will instead "tour hike" what's left of my NM section of the trail.

So in my head, what's a "tour hike?" I'm ignorant of whether folks have used this term in the past for any reasons, but to me it means I will be *touring along the long trail* doing a mix of driving around, day hiking, sightseeing, backpacking, fishing, hunting, detouring for curiosities near the trail, and thru-hiking some sections within.

This way I am able to see some of what I missed while healing, but also stay on schedule and slowly ease back into thru hiking. Plus I'm really excited to be able to speak to ways other than thruhiking of enjoying this long camino.

I'll be skipping some areas, but those are the ones closest to home so I can come back and check those

out any time in the future.

CDT-NM DAYS 4-5: RETURN TO THE TRAIL TOUR HIKE STOP: SAN PEDRO PARKS WILDERNESS

This Wilderness stop on the CDT promised fall colors, native trout, wildlife watching, and maybe a bit of snow. It's all I need/want right now.

Roberto and I decide to make this a short-ish-let's-play-it-by-ear out and back as I'm listening to how my wound responds to hopping into a different shoe (my good 'ol pair of St Elias with which I've backpacked some Good miles), and wearing all sorts of stuff to keep it from getting worse (namely blister bandaids plus rock tape plus an ankle brace to keep it all in place).

We ended up hiking about 6miles in and set up camp. The rest of the day was spent fishing. Luckily, the spawn hadn't started yet and we were able to catch a few browns (contrary to the advisory we've received from NM Game & Fish, you should NOT take advantage of reds to catch more fish! Instead let them procreate in peace so that we may still know wild fish in the future — thanks!)

If you would've told me such a magical place as the San Pedros was only a few hours away from my house, I don't know if I would've believed it. But entering



this forest was already magical. To begin, there's a sharp transition between forest and desert which makes for contrasting dramatic landscapes left and right. Then, once you step into the trail, you feel this vibrant energy buzzing from aspens and pines that look ancient and wise. The streams are so small and darling, while the trout barely fit in there... I figured there would only be miniature fish but I was wrong, these gals were long!

We were also the luckiest to catch this landscape in full blown fall mode. At times the trail was hidden below a carpet of yellow leaves, and then we got to see the leaves falling too...looked like a fairy dust shower. To make this return to the trail even more magical, we had about 2 hours of snow during our hike out (started after we had cleaned camp! Whew!).

And my wound? Even looked as if it had healed a bit more during the trip. The very extensive protective setup truly helped and my feet were happy.

**CDT-NM DAY 5: A MOUNTAIN TO OURSELVES
TOUR HIKE DETOUR: TSOODZIL (AKA MT TAYLOR)**

So called Mt Taylor is a popular summit for thru-hikers while not being on the actual CDT — close enough tho. The scenery yet again is breathtaking, and I really liked that you can drive up to about less than a mile from the summit (4x4 and high clearance recommended but neither was necessary for us). You can also take a longer and steeper hike from one or two lower trailheads. I really love that it has access at different points providing opportunities for different visitors with different interests, skills, and goals. We chose to drive as far up as we could and then take on the summit.



[...] Once you step into the trail, you feel this vibrant energy buzzing from aspens and pines that look ancient and wise. The streams are so small and darling, while the trout barely fit in there...



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CDTC's Teresa Martinez and her dog Riley joined for this hike. If you don't know Teresa yet, she is the Executive Director of the CDTC and as a Latina leader in the conservation space, she has and continues to pave the way for diverse communities to have belonging in this ever so male and white dominant space. Hiking with Teresa on and around the divide is super special because the wealth of knowledge she holds around the history, geography, and culture of the trail is incomparable and just makes you appreciate what you see even more.

On this day, we were greeted with lovely weather and being the only human visitors. We had our lunch at the summit as we wondered at the beauty and wealth that surrounded us. A couple of juvenile eagles (maybe golden) came to bid us farewell and so we hiked out.

Moments like this serve to me as good reminders of why working so hard for money is actually a slap in the face and totally unnecessary. This land is rich and has more than enough to sustain us all... but ok that may be a story/essay for another day.

**CDT-NM DAYS 6-8: SOLITUDE AND A MISTAKE
TOUR HIKE STOP: MALPAIS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Roberto dropped me off at the trailhead around 2pm; it made sense to have a short first day, as I was testing a different pair of shoes which I had never worn before while backpacking.

I over budgeted 3 nights to take my time around the Malpais, a stunning landscape of ancient lava fields, craters, and cinder cones. Tons of bright red and green "cerros" could be spotted along the trail.

The elevation changes were extremely generous as were the animal tracks. Saw 2-3 different human tracks, but no humans along the way. You can count on much time spent analyzing the scat on the ground for freshness. (Anybody else likes to know how close you have been to watching an animal go #2?)

The terrain is rugged and navigation required constant attention. In certain areas it was easy to think I was on the trail, and suddenly, on my next step, the trail would be nowhere. This path keeps you alert cause most of it is basically a cairn by cairn path. Which is sometimes fun, sometimes tiring to be constantly reminded that your 20/20 vision isn't. I probably opened my maps more than I ever had for other hikes — it was overkill tbh yet I like being extra safe when going solo.

Mentally, I had a hard time during this section. I was back out there with the birds, the cougars, the donkeys, the elk...but really it was just me with me.

The first night I made the mistake of checking for cell



Riding with Joe Saenz, owner of WolfHorse Outfitters and president of the Chiricahua Apache

service at my camp. I had it, and this would take away from the rest of my hike. I think knowing I had service once kept me checking in other spots and eventually had me being online too much, which did not help keep my mind at rest. I appreciated this landscape so much, but I have to recognize that being "online" took away from my own peace and experience.

Perhaps it wouldn't have been so bad if I had actually thru-hiked my way there, but because of my healing I feel like I have spent too much time off the trail, thus I have no need to be "connected" while I'm out there. Note to self: don't check for signal unless you absolutely need it.

It was tough to be there alone. I felt a lot of inner resistance. I was happy to be hiking and not have issues with my feet, I was annoyed at not having a set plan and playing my miles by ear. Each day I battled between hiking less and spending more time chilling at camp or wondering if I should push harder and cover more ground instead. I didn't want to make any choices. Even finding a camp spot was its own mission. I could not decide and was never absolutely satisfied with my spot even though they were super flat, gave me wonderful sunrises and sunsets, and included beautiful morning serenades by The Birdies.

After all, I finished my miles in 2 nights and got off to plan the next stop. Looking back I both loved my time in the Malpais and was constantly annoyed at all the unknowns/undecided aspects of the hike. Another lesson in self, to know and be better next time.

**CDT-NM DAY 9: I CAN BE BOTH EXTREMELY PROUD
AND COMPLETELY DISAPPOINTED IN MYSELF.
TOUR HIKE STOP: MY OWN THOUGHTS**

I am proud to be here. To allow my body to take me places in ways that honor its needs. To have made a decision that "changed" how things were "meant to be." To enter into relationships with so many places and some people within my home state. In a parallel universe, where I have unlimited resources and a whole season to hike the CDT, I would have taken off my 5 days to heal and then continued on with thru-hiking. But 5 days to 5 months, is not comparable to 5 days to 4 weeks. Losing a fourth of my already tightly budgeted time to hike was a big blow.

But I have to be honest with myself. I had, from the very beginning, signed up to do way much more than time and space could actually allow. As days get shorter in the season, I know the last thing I would want to be doing right now is "pushing" a marathon a day on any trail. Then add my commitments to document my journey and share branded content.

There are literally not enough hours in the day to do both. It was ambitious to believe I could've done it successfully and happily. Sure I could've done it, and I don't need to "finish" a hike to prove it to myself or anyone really. But would've I been happy after all? Would've I had enjoyed myself and had absorbed as much as I have about each place this path connects? While I cannot know for sure, I can speculate that I probably wouldn't have. And this realization hurts too, to admit I hadn't set myself up for success to begin with.

They call it an attempt for a reason. It's just hard on the ego to ever think one is not going "make it." While I was reading Long Trails by colleague (and super accomplished) thru hiker Liz Thomas there is a section that talks about the importance of knowing WHY you want to thru hike. What I had jotted down back in those early days of preparation was very simple: "I want to get to know my home state, intimately, through hiking it."

While I haven't and will not have thru-hiked "proper" the whole length of New Mexico - I have and will continue to pursue and be motivated to move SoBo (in my own ways) by my WHY.

Because if I only measure my success in miles/day I'm failing further and unnecessarily, when I can measure my success in connections made. Every silent step taken while Turkey hunting, or every crawling towards the little streams in the mountains to catch a fish, every pitching of my tent in a new paradise, every person that has been part of this journey, every day where I only crossed paths with non-human beings, every piece of knowledge shared with me from others, every time I took off my shoes to care for my feet... every bit of this journey has been in my completely dual-opposite-contradictory perspective, a success.

So yes, I am both extremely proud and completely disappointed in myself. And I am enjoying ALL my feelings.

**CDT-NM DAY 10: A HEARTBEAT, LIFE, LOVE.
TOUR HIKE STOP: SOMEWHERE ON THE GILA NATIONAL FOREST**

The Gila. What does that even mean?

By now, ever since I moved to New Mexico 2 years ago, I've heard infinite chisme about the mystical and mythical energy of the Gila. I've seen many pictures too. But nothing, absolutely nothing, would ever compare to just standing amidst this force field and simply feeling it. My colleague Teresa Martinez always says the Gila has a "heartbeat." I kind of knew what she meant, but being there, I finally felt it, I got it.

This forest resonates, it vibrates, it sings, it embraces, it shares, it breathes.

My first taste was while driving through Highway 15 to meet with Teresa and her friends (and CDT angels) Carol and Richard. It was on that windy and long highway that I first saw and felt this place. I could've stopped at every turn to enjoy every view.

But please know, there is nothing I can tell you about this place, there are no pictures I can show you, that would ever be able to live up to what this forest holds and is. But I will show you more nevertheless.

In the next few days I'll get to explore this beautiful area on horseback, glancing the past at the Cliff Dwellings once inhabited by the Mogollon people, then hunting for turkey, and lastly, on a mission to catch (and release) the once almost extinct Gila Trout!

Because this is LOVE.

CDT-NM DAY 11: HORSES, PETROGLYPHS, NATIVE KNOWLEDGE.
TOUR HIKE DETOUR: ARENAS VALLEY, NM

When Teresa reached out to say Joe Saenz, owner of WolfHorse Outfitters and president of the Chiricahua Apache, had an opening for an interpretive horseback ride, we didn't think twice to flex our plans for the opportunity.

I've done a handful of guided horseback tours throughout my life, but I've never learned as much as riding with Joe. Foremost, I really appreciate that Joe leads with the stories and wisdom of his ancestors. During the ride, we learned about the local history of displacement and return to the land of the Apache peoples (they most recently brought back their Red Paint Pow Wow), how the small area of Arenas once served as THE relaxing spot for all the Black folk working the mines who weren't welcome in Silver City (which has a deeply racist history), he shared with us about the natural history of the landscape and how it had changed due to cow overgrazing and poor fire management from the forest service (not a shocker), we got to learn about native plant uses and the diets of the Apache folks (mostly vegetarian!), we even got to chew on a yucca bloom (a very very late bloomer), and we learned about and helped with removing the gear from the horses (aka untacking) when we got back to the stables.

The trail we rode is called the Dragonfly trail because the place is said to overflow with these little creatures during the season. But it's also named after and famous for a Puebloan petroglyph that depicts a dragonfly. Joe let us know that the Apache did not create petroglyphs (carvings) but rather pictographs (paintings).

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After the ride, we hung out with him for a bit to learn more about his work. Know Joe is a person that speaks with a wisdom that is quite rare to find in people, inspiring reverence and respect. There's so much commitment in the work he does for his community, and it's work that comes with all the challenges you can imagine. From fighting to correct wronged Native names on public signage, to ensuring there's local visibility for the Apache culture, Joe is on the frontlines of the work.

Via his outfitters he offers so many kinds of trips, from short to multi-day ones, from interpretive to skill-building ones. I know I'll be back to continue learning from him. And if you ever find yourself in the Silver City/Arenas Valley area, I would say it's a MUST to take a ride with Joe.

Check out his website at wolfhorseoutfitters.com

**CDT-NM DAY 12: STEPPING UP TO THE PAST
TOUR HIKE DETOUR STOPS: GILA HOT SPRINGS AND
GILA DWELLINGS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Driving through the canyons of the Gila National Forest, you may arrive at The Gila Dwellings National Monument. There, for thousands of years, nomadic peoples used the caves of the Gila River as temporary shelters. But, in the late 1200's, some people had a new vision. The Mogollon People decided it would be a good place to build a, dare I say, even more *epic home.* And today, we have the immense privilege of literally stepping into that vision.

Right outside the visitor center, 600 steps take visitors into the forest, up to this ancient site once called home by the Mogollon. From up there you can hear the forest songs, the river's whisper, and the wind's prayers. Standing in these caves, looking out into the canyon walls, I couldn't help but wishing humans still lived in such harmony and proximity to nature.

There are more dwelling sites to visit in the area via hiking, alongside several hot springs opportunities. We decided to visit the Gila Hot Springs which are privately owned, right outside of the Monument. It was wonderful to sit back and enjoy the views while surrounded by healing water.

My foot is feeling so so much better by now, I can hardly believe I am almost completely healed. I thought it was going to take until next year to do so. And I'm feeling grateful, because I got here not in the "hardest way" to get here as would've been thru hiking, but in a way that honored my health and my body. Today I understood there is no "better" way to get anywhere, or "more valuable" way to get anywhere, than the way that was possible to us.

CDT-NM DAYS 13-14: TURKEY HUNTING, OR NOT SO MUCH

TOUR HIKE STOP: ALDO LÉOPOLD WILDERNESS

Maybe section hunting is gonna become my thing someday...but this time around I had ZERO luck out there. And I mean, last Turkey tracks I saw were near where we parked the truck. I thought if the turkeys were near roads they would be happier in the backcountry. Apparently not the case.

But a moment in the backcountry is never dull and... all I'm going to say is that what we found instead of turkeys was MAGICAL.

Something else we found, or rather spotted, were Gila Trout! And so we decided to hike out and trade the shotguns for rods.

CDT-NM DAYS 15-???: A TIME TRAP AND THE LEGEND-ARY GILA TROUT

TOUR HIKE STOP: ALDO LEOPOLDO WILDERNESS (ALP), GILA NATIONAL FOREST

The ??? much more represent a feeling than a fact. After we exited the wilderness to swap our shotguns for our fly fishing rods, I realized time was not passing by as usual. By then I felt like I had already lived weeks in the forest, and by the time we actually left it felt like months had gone by. This was my second time feeling like in a time warp on the trail. My first was on a section of the PCT that goes by Mt San Jacinto in California. Have you ever felt something like that?

It was such a needed time disconnected from the noise of the world. It was an even better time considering we got to meet the-legendary-once-almost-extinct Gila Trout!!!

The small stream made for a challenging search, but the cutties were hungry! Many were teeny teeny sardine-sized and could barely fit a fly in their mouth but they wouldn't give up trying; others were a notch larger and super feisty when hooked. These folks were so fun to fish and required all sorts of over the top sneaky approaches (see last pic and tell me if you can spot me).

It was also reassuring to see fish thriving in a habitat restoration area. Going the extra mile to protect the livelihood of important species DOES HAVE AN IMPACT! We didn't check if harvesting was allowed before our trip but we knew we would only practice catch and release — there's no guess work in not harvesting the fish.

This was my third time fishing for native trout along the CDT and I'm looking forward to learning what more fish are out there that I'm yet to meet.

**CDT-NM DAY 19: FEELING HOME AND UPLAND HUNTING
TOUR HIKE STOP: LITTLE HATCHET MOUNTAINS**

For me, seeing or smelling creosote is home. Don't ask me why. I did not grow up near these powerful



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plants, but I've always felt at home when surrounded by them.

Desert landscapes always get me. Something about seeing so much diversity of life in a place we are taught to think of as barren and lifeless. I stopped to imagine what it would be like to start the CDT going north, with these open views, with cotton candy skies, hiking on the soft arena. And on the reverse side, what it must be like to have all this at the close of a thru hike. How timing could make a difference in perception...

By now I know I only have a couple of days left before I go home. The trip got cut short with a plan of returning next year to hike to the monument at the border with Mexico - until then, I'll just play in this area for a bit.

On this particular day, Roberto and I went quail hunting...just to find out there were but very few quail in the area. Pigeons abounded tho, and so we did some research to ensure we could hunt those - and yes we could. But, I didn't feel like going out after the long morning hunt. So I stayed in the camper for the rest of the day; watched a movie and journaled a bit. Stepping out occasionally to stare in awe at all the beauty around me, and thinking about how this whole year I went on 4-5 hunts that most would

define as "unsuccessful" and yet how I was feeling hugely accomplished. I think maybe also relieved that I have been able to enjoy something that is so difficult to do, something I haven't had any immediate (or other) gratification for. In the next year or so maybe I'll start harvesting my own meat, but this just wasn't the time. And being ok with that, alongside all the other "failures" from this year feels more than ok.

There's one more day of CDT life before heading back North...

LAST DAY ON THE CDT-NM: WHAT WAS AFTER ALL, A TOUR HIKE?

TOUR HIKE STOP: LITTLE HATCHET MOUNTAINS

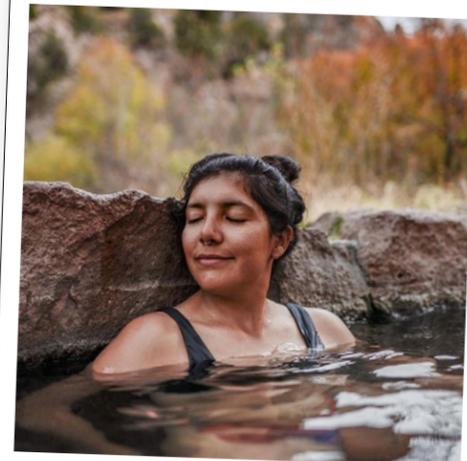
The decision to come back next year (or later) to hike all the sections I didn't this year is already made.

The divide isn't going anywhere soon, same as my dream of hiking a long path one day. And that, to be clear, is exclusive of my personal definition of long path when the time to do so comes. Just because an 800mi trail was my idea of long trail this year, doesn't mean that will define it for me forever. I'm ever-evolving and who knows where/what my inspirations and motivations will be in the future?

After the past few weeks of living in between heartache and heartjoy, disappointment and accom-



I got to experience my relatively new home state in ways better than I could've imagined, in connection with its diverse landscapes, cultures, histories, and wildlife at many intersections.



Aila hot springs



Seeking turkeys



Near journey's end

plishment, I'm actually ready to go home and start anew. Having learned a huge lesson in grace, having felt the humility of the need to heal, I close this chapter of my life with a little tear, and savoring the last moments of having nothing else to do but to enjoy the Continental Divide Trail (CDT).

I think about how I didn't meet a single thru-hiker while on the trail, how I was really truly in my own CDT bubble, in my own funky schedule, not part at all of the culture I thought I was going to join. No trail name, no plural stories from a thru hike, but just one from the brief 37 miles over my first 2 days when everything was awesome and all at once it also "failed."

"That was rough," I thought to myself "and "I'm so proud I've survived it mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically"

Then I looked back at the multiplicity of stories I made instead, at the landscapes, animals, and friends old and new that witnessed bits of my journey.

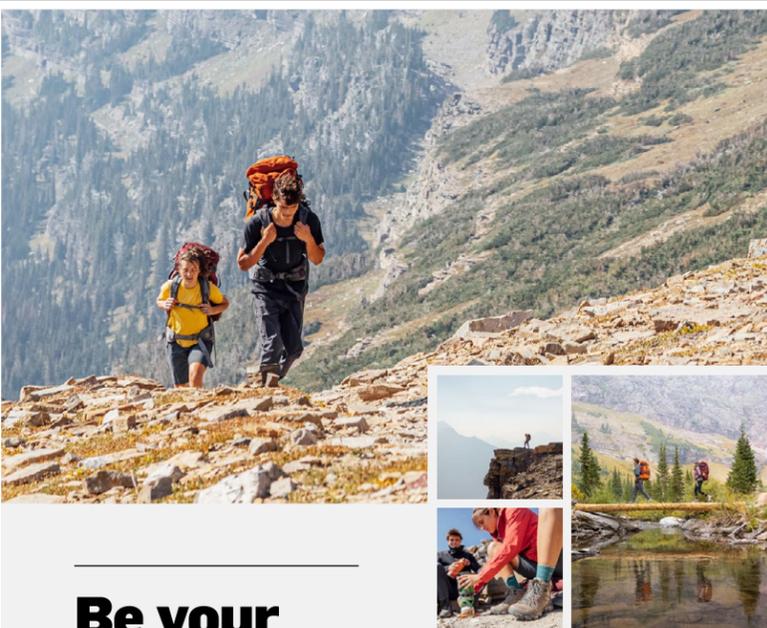
"That was epic," I thought to myself, "and I would do it again in the exact same way."

These last moments were perhaps too brief for how intense they were. But being surrounded by my favorite plant, the creosote, felt right. As if the trail could've been designed this way just for me. As if the divide knew one day I would need the biggest hugs nature can give... for me that's the hug of the fresh scent of creosote which always makes me feel at peace and at home.

So what was this tour hike after all? It was the time and space I needed to clear my head, to remember what is like to be human, to rest my brain from all the work I have been doing nonstop since feels-like-forever. It was also the most magical opportunity to connect with la tierra Nuevo Mexicana. I got to experience my relatively new home state in ways better than I could've imagined, in connection with its diverse landscapes, cultures, histories, and wildlife at many intersections.

I'll forever respect the Continental Divide Trail, for all the lives it touches, the lives it transforms, and the lives it connects. One of which is my own.

Find Gabaccia on [Instagram](#) or her [website](#). She leads in [Outdoor Oath](#) and the [Outdoor F.U.T.U.R.E Initiative](#).



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Sen. Hickenlooper, CDTC Executive Director Teresa Martinez, Sec. Vilsack (USDA), and Beatriz Soto of Protégéte at Camp Hale in August 2022.

A MONUMENTAL PROPOSAL

Senators Bennet, Hickenlooper, and Representative Neguse propose a new Camp Hale–Continental Divide National Monument

By L Fisher | CDTC Trail Policy Manager

On August 26th, members of Colorado’s delegation, including Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper, and Representative Neguse, sent a letter to President Biden in support of the establishment of the Camp Hale–Continental Divide National Monument. The news comes after a visit from Secretary Vilsack, a member of President Biden’s Cabinet representing the United States Department of Agriculture, who toured Camp Hale just last week. If designated, this could be the first National Monument designated by the Biden administration.

“The Continental Divide Trail Coalition celebrates the hard work from Senators Bennet, Hickenlooper and Congressman Neguse to permanently protect Camp Hale and a significant portion of the Continental Divide Trail,” says L Fisher (they/them), Trail Policy Manager at the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC). “We ask the Biden Administration to stand with our Congressional delegation and the 89 percent of Coloradans who support additional protections of our treasured public lands by preserving these places as a national monument. The protection of these lands

and waters not only protects the historical and natural resources on the Divide, but also helps to create a strong, diverse, and accessible trail community.”

Included in the proposed National Monument designation are the Camp Hale National Historic Site and the surrounding natural landscape, including the Tenmile Range and a 28 mile section of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT). The Antiquities Act, which the Biden administration will use to designate this monument, has been used over 150 times throughout the history of the United States to establish and expand national monuments to conserve natural landscape and enhance the cultural heritage of historically significant spaces.

“The Tenmile Range and Camp Hale are some of the most unique sites among the many cultural, historical, and natural resources that the Continental Divide Trail connects,” says Teresa Martinez (she/hers/ella), Executive Director at the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC). “For time immemorial, this landscape has been stewarded by Indigenous people and the designation of this National Monument can help ensure the ongoing protection of this special

place. With these proposed protections, we hope for a strategy of bold, innovative co-stewardship that meets this moment of the climate crisis while serving the communities that depend on vibrant, connected greenspaces the most. This action on the part of Colorado’s delegation demonstrates that community-led conservation not only works, but that leaders in Congress like Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper, and Representative Neguse, are listening to the urgent calls for bold action on the environment.”

Camp Hale and the Continental Divide landscape are one of four landscapes identified for protections in the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Economy Act, a piece of legislation that is the result of over a decade of collaboration with Colorado stakeholders. During World War II, Camp Hale was a center for mountain and winter warfare training, including more than 1,000 buildings within the valley, and was the base of operations for the 10th Mountain Division’s training. At the time of operation in the 1940s, Camp Hale was segregated, as were all contemporary U.S. military operations. Recognizing that this landscape holds a history of exclusion, stakeholders and partners are excited for a management plan that recognizes this historical context and plans for a more inclusive, collabora-

tive landscape and experience in the future.

In addition to the historic landscape, the National Monument will also protect surrounding natural resources along the CDT, including in the Tenmile Range. This section of the trail is a celebrated footpath for recreationists and others hoping to explore the scenic ridgeline trail between Leadville and Breckenridge.

“The proposed designation of Camp Hale and the surrounding area as a National Monument is very exciting,” says Greg Pierce, President of CDTC’s Board of Directors. “My family has a special relationship with the area: my experiences of fishing on the Eagle downstream from Hale, learning to ski at Cooper, and spending weekends at Hornsilver and Blodgett campgrounds with lifetime family friends has helped shape my love of nature and history. These new protections would offer visitors an additional storyline about the lands and communities through which the CDT passes.”

CDTC looks forward to working with agency partners, members of Congress, communities, recreationists, and others to ensure that stewardship of this important landscape is beneficial and enjoyable for all.

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REFLECTIONS FROM A SUMMER ALONG THE DIVIDE

Chambreigh Onesalt interned at CDTC this summer through a program with the College Fund. She shares her insights on her experience.

By Chambreigh Onesalt | CDTC + College Fund Intern



TOP: Chambreigh (second right) with CDTC staffers on the group trip to Glacier National Park with Oboz footwear and the Iron Shield Collective. ABOVE: Chambreigh's portrait.

I had the opportunity to do many things while at CDTC. I was able to take two trips on the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) during my time there, both in Colorado and Montana. I was able to personally experience the trail in Colorado for a little over a week. Something that I was not used to was camping without my family, but that was a learning experience. In Montana, I was fortunate to be with the CDTC Montana office and the Oboz footwear group in a bigger group experience with the Iron Shield Collective in Glacier National Park. Both experiences were very great and both experiences only added to what made a greater impact of my time with CDTC. What I mainly did was provide details of which the CDT goes through. Meaning, I looked deeper to see whose original lands the trail goes through, if there are any appropriate Native names for landscapes from Mexico to Canada. I did this to see how we could start the movement of land positionality. I contacted many tribal recourses from New Mexico to Montana, only few were successful phone calls. My time with CDTC as well, I was able to help educate the CDTC organization of appropriate terminology and histories of Native Peoples on the topic of land displacement and removal.

What did you learn?

I was able to learn many things I did not know before. I was able to learn from everyone at CDTC and what they do to protect and prolong the landscape where the trail goes through. I also became confident in my school work when I made connections from CDTC to my thesis idea. My biggest takes were that I need and want to do something for the Native communities that barely get any type of recognition from outdoor recreation. Most of the time land acknowledgements aren't enough - there needs to be more than just saying some names when giving an introduction. I started to develop my ideas for that and how I could take that further with the connections through the CDTC and the many great people I was able to meet throughout the 14 weeks.

What was the most challenging or scariest thing you encountered during your internship?

The most challenging thing I had to do during my time was to not sugar coat the truths of outdoor recreation in relation to Native and Indigenous Peoples. I was able to have conversations with many people on how the outdoor recreational industry is very harmful to Native and Indigenous communities throughout North America. This was the most challenging because I was working directly with people who are very much involved with outdoor recreation. But I had the opportunity to speak to people in such high positions and I hope they were able to understand my words and concern when it comes to protection of Native lands. I also experienced racism while I was in Colorado at Rocky Mountain National Park for my experience, but that occurrence was handled with deep emotions that were channeled from the history of Native and Indigenous Peoples. I did my best to keep it calm while making a point of how Natives and Indigenous Peoples are continued to be stepped on when it comes to our own lands. I think those would be the only challenging areas of the 14 weeks. But telling the truth to outdoor industries were the most challenging.

What was the most rewarding thing you encountered during your internship?

The most rewarding thing I encountered was the number of non-Natives wanting and willing to learn. I met some of the most kind and respectful non-Natives during my internship. And my guards are usually up very high when I talk to persons about Native lands because I have experienced my ways non-Natives get offended when the topic of land is brought up. But having the time and space to share thoughts, history, and concerns with organizations and people about outdoor recreation was the most rewarding. To have been able to have dialogue and for them to want to do better was the best part.



... Having the time and space to share thoughts, history, and concerns with organizations and people about outdoor recreation was the most rewarding. To have been able to have dialogue and for them to want to do better was the best part."

What information or advice would you share with others wanting to participate in an internship?

I would share and encourage others to do something they enjoy. In a world of capitalism, we are forced into situations where we may not grow as individuals. But what I learned compared to my peers that are in other internships, I had the ability to enjoy what I was able to do at CDTC. Yes, I also think its good to intern with places where you want your career to be in, but many of us are young and its important not to stress too much about occupations. So, I would encourage to intern somewhere where you think you will enjoy spending time at and getting a good experience at the same time.

What are your future career aspirations?

I am currently entering my second year of graduate school, so I am focusing on my education at the moment. But I hope to find myself working in environmentalism and in the realm of Land Back. I have my ideas, but they are not closed off. Very open to what I would like to do in the future.



Portraits of *Pride*

As part of our 10-year anniversary this year, CDTC is celebrating stories from members of the trail community, in their own words. [Share your story with us!](#) During our #PrideOnTheDivide celebration, participants also shared their views as LGBTQIA2S* members of the trail community.



1. MARLIN "DIVA" SILL
South Lake Tahoe, CA
 "I came here to be with friends, to be with my chosen family. To see places I've never seen, to meet new people and find more in my tribe. I came here because this Kween wants her crown. I came here because life deserves more than one great adventure. I came to heal from the sudden loss of my father, and connect with him in the solitude of the trail."

I hope the future of the CDT stays remote, and challenging, and scary. Because I think we need trails that aren't the circus and rigmarole that others are. I hope it stays wild and free, yet open to all who dare.

There are so many different routes and alternates that tailor the trail to each thruhiker's preference. I feel that I could hike this trail again and again with whole new trail experience. It is hard for me to pick just one place that was my favorite, since there were so many beautiful locations. Glacier NP, Wind Rivers, and the San Juans were my favorite sections of the trail."

3. CAL DOBBS
Los Angeles, CA
 "I thruhiked the CDT in 2021. It is my favorite of the Triple Crown trails and I hope to return and do it again some day. I loved how rugged and challenging it was. It was also a challenging navigating town and trail experiences as a transgender person, but I did my best and by the end of this year (2022) I will be the first known trans person to complete the Triple Crown!"

My favorite place has been La Osa Trail junction. Turning the corner on the ridge and seeing Flint Lake laid out among smattering on granite shelves, sparsely dotted with spruce and pine. It felt like home... like the Sierra."

Editor's note: Since Cal submitted their Portrait, they have since become the first transgender person known to have completed the Triple Crown!

5. BRADLEY OLSON
Mammoth Lakes, CA
 "The wild nature of the CDT beckoned me almost immediately upon finishing the PCT with my sister in 2018. I took on the challenge again in 2021 and headed to the divide. Walking along the spine of America pushed me in ways I had never been before. The most raw and unadulterated version of myself was forced to the surface, like a seed breaking through the soil with its first stalk. I was able to reflect on who I had been in the past, and who I was becoming."

Growing up gay in northern Minnesota had confined me to a box where I was never as strong or worthy enough to play sports like my peers or at least that's what I believed. I was too afraid to join cross country running or track. I judged myself for my weight and athletic ability constantly which has been something I've always regretted. However, it is also a huge part of what brought me to backpacking in the first place, and I'm beyond grateful for that.

I never thought I would walk 300 miles in a week, almost trip over a bison laying in the middle of the trail, or solo hike the wind river high route, but here I am, I'm starting to believe in myself now. This is something everyone should have the chance to experience. Which is why I plan to continue



2. "DINE 'N' DASH"
Dawsonville, VA
 "I hiked the CDT as a piece working towards a triple crown. The CDT is a remote difficult and often primitive trail. Some days I'd spend laughing at how difficult the trail while simultaneously in awe with the beauty before me. The biggest difference between the CDT and the AT or PCT is the flexibility of it."

4. LYLLA "SUGAR" HARROD
Salem, MA
 "The CDT has a feeling of solitude and wilderness immersion that's difficult to match on other prominent long trails. I hope the CDT community continues to develop and evolve with inclusion and diversity at the forefront."

making the CDT and the thruhiking community in general, the most inclusive space as possible. To help tear down the elitism, sexism, racism, and homophobia found in so many of our outdoor spaces. This way, everyone can come to nature, strip away the baggage of society and discover their true power within.”

6. LENA “NINJA” SAGEBIEL
Germany

“The CDT was my first thruhike and it was definitely my first true love! There is definitely nothing what can beat this beauty and roughness, I experienced there! The CDT hits me hard and welcomes me like an old friend in the same time! I will love this trail forever and after I walked the other two big trails, too, I can’t wait to embrace it again — the brutality and the unbelievable kindness of the people I met on the CDT! This adventure wouldn’t be the same without the people I met there! They saved my life, they encouraged me, and they believed in me! Even when I didn’t.”



7



7. REX
Lincoln, NE

“My wife, Baby Grand, and I are thru-hiking the CDT this year. We are going generally NOBO, but have been doing a hopscotch approach. We finished New Mexico, bounced up and did the Great Divide Basin, and now we’re headed back down to do Colorado next! We were drawn to the CDT because of a deep love of wilderness, and especially mountain wilderness, and Baby Grand has a lot of history with northern Colorado near the trail. I hope that this trail remains wild, and that it continues to provide access to the wilderness

for generations to come. I also hope that it continues to provide a challenge for people who are looking for a challenge, an outlet for those looking for an outlet, and a wonderful portrait of this land for everyone who experiences it.”

8. IZZY “PONDEROSA” LACKNER
Detroit, MI

“I came to the CDT to see the backbone of the Rockies; walk through the divide that people have traveled for centuries. Then be able to experience every changing biome from high alpine to desert floor.

When I think about my decision to thru-hike, I remember a quote by Sylvia Plath. Her words from “The Bell Jar” have deeply encouraged me:
“I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future



8

beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor...and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet.”
—Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

I have thought a lot about the figs in my life, wondering which life path I will take. With nothing to lose but stagnant rotting fruit, I choose to walk, from Mexico to Canada. Perhaps I have chosen to not have it all figured out just yet. I have chosen to go after the fig



9

on the farthest branch. A fig that I think about constantly, sleeplessly imagining. My fig is the Continental Divide Trail. One that is ready to be plucked from the branch that I cannot watch ripen without a taste any longer.

As a queer hiker, I hope to increase visibility of the LGBTQIA+ community on trail.”

9. BRITNEY INGRAM
Bend, OR

“The Trail was unique in that nearly every person’s experience was their own; whether that be choosing an alternate or walking the “Red-line”. There’s something romantic and empowering that my walk doesn’t look like everyone else’s.

My hiking partner and I created our own route through the San Juan mountains as conditions pushed us off the original CDT, and this remains one

of my favorite memories. We ended up cheering on marathon runners in a remote mountain setting and getting a boat hitch across the impassable Rio Grande River.

My future hopes for the CDT course include that it will be completed and serve as a pathway connecting communities. In doing so, I hope to see more diversity and inclusivity from these communities so that racially, ethnically, and sexually diverse peoples feel welcome in these spaces.”

10. SOL
Sebago, ME

“My first time on the CDT I was working with a trail crew using cross-cut saws in order to clear the trail in the San Pedro Wilderness Area. I was surprised and mesmerized by the lush green at 7000ft! The flowers were in bloom and it was a magical experience.”



10

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OVERVIEW OF THE MAJOR ALTERNATES on the CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL

10 Things 2020 CDT Hikers Need to Know

A GUIDE TO RESUPPLYING on the CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL



Jasmine Star

INTERVIEW

A FAMILIAL VIEW OF COLORADO

CDTC joins in conversation with Andrea Lani about her book, *Uphill Both Ways*, in which she and her young family undertake the Colorado Trail

By Allie Ghaman | CDTC Communications Manager, in conversation with author Andrea Lani

CDTC: Tell us about yourself!

Andrea: I'm a writer, a Maine Master Naturalist, and a mother of three sons: Milo, Zephyr, and Emmet. I'm a Colorado native but I've lived in Maine for most of the last 30 years. My husband, Curry, grew up about a mile from where we live.

Could you touch on why you chose to hike the CT as a family? Why did you want to have this adventure together, and was there a particular moment that made you think, this is the summer?

I came to Maine to attend College of the Atlantic, which is where I met Curry. In the year after graduation, I served as AmeriCorps volunteer near Denver, and during that time I learned about the Colorado Trail. I instantly knew I wanted to hike it, and invited Curry to join me. We spent mid-August to early October of 1996 on the trail. I imagined I'd spend the rest of my life on similar adventures--in the wilderness and around the world. But instead, over the next few

years, Curry and I got married, built a house in Maine, and had three kids. It was a lovely life in many ways, but by the mid 2010s I was miserable. I hated my job. My kids were at that age where parenting consisted of rushing around and coaxing them to do things they didn't want to do. And it was winter in Maine, which can be a grim time. I felt stuck, and somehow hiking the Colorado Trail again seemed like a way to get un-stuck. The 20-year anniversary of our first hike was approaching, and it would give me an opportunity to experience what the trail was like two decades later, introduce my kids to my homeland, and, most of all, hit a "reset" button on my life.

You had previously hiked the Colorado Trail years prior with your husband. What aspects were different once you chose to hike again, this time with your kids?

Backpacking gear had gotten so much lighter since the mid-90s, and my mindset about what is an essential item in the pack had changed as well, so we had much, much lighter packs. We also hiked the trail earlier in the season, which meant we had longer

days and better weather (no snow!). So those two things together made the hiking faster and easier; we finished the trail in about 2/3 the time. My kids, who were 15 (Milo) and 11 (Emmet and Zephyr) at the time, did an incredible job covering more miles than I'd dared hope they could. The trail itself is better marked, with less road walking and more permanent stream crossings (although two major bridges were washed out that summer) than it was 20 years earlier. But it is also far more populous. In 1996 we'd sometimes go days without seeing another soul; today the CT is more of a social trail like the AT. The most obvious change in the landscape was in the trees — dead lodgepole pine from the pine beetle outbreak that spanned most of the two decades since we'd last hiked and dead spruce in the southwestern part of the state from the more recent spruce beetle outbreaks.

The biggest logistical challenge was going to towns to resupply with five people. We had family members meet us at the more challenging resupply points to keep hitchhiking to a minimum. But there were still a few towns we had to hitch to, and Colorado's not as friendly to hitchhikers as it once was, even with two adorable eleven-year-olds by our sides. The biggest hiking challenge for me was that Curry and Milo wanted to hike fast all of the time, the twins would sometimes hike fast and sometimes dawdle, and I am a slow, slow hiker. So our hiking speed and style, as well as our goals and expectations, were totally mismatched, which created friction.

How did you prepare, mentally and physically, and perhaps emotionally, to take this journey together?

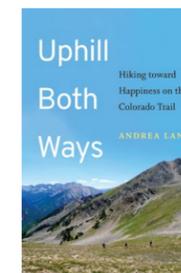
To prepare physically I walked at my lunch break and after work, swam laps a couple mornings a week, and hiked local land trust trails on weekends and during my kids' baseball practices. It wasn't enough, but it was the best I could do while working full time, doing all the mom stuff, and planning a huge trip. All three kids and Curry are all athletic and energetic, so they adjusted to the trail with no particular preparation, other than the twins playing baseball that spring. To adjust to the altitude, we arrived in Colorado a week before we started hiking, and spent time with family in Denver and the Winter Park area, to get that initial headache out of the way. To prepare mentally and emotionally, I reread my first Colorado Trail journal, collected inspirational quotes from friends, made a clear list of my goals for the hike, and established a routine that included yoga, poetry, visualization, and a walking meditation, which I practiced every morning on the trail.

INTERVIEW continued on page 38

BOOK EXCERPT

UPHILL BOTH WAYS: Hiking Toward Happiness on the Colorado Trail

Excerpted from *Uphill Both Ways: Hiking Toward Happiness on the Colorado Trail* by Andrea Lani by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. ©2022 by Andrea Lani.



A white admiral butterfly alights on a spruce branch, fanning velvety black wings striped with a bold white line. I try to take its picture, but it flies off and lands farther down the trail. I put the camera away and walk on, leap-frogging with the butterfly, appreciating its beauty without trying to capture it. Throughout

the day, more butterflies appear, rising from and landing on flowers, their bright colors—yellow, pale green, orange, brown, amber—and gentle flutterings guiding me down the trail.

After another break, Curry and Milo power hike ahead, while Zephyr, Emmet, and I follow more slowly. The trail mounts a long, gently sloping hillside of pale green grass and colorful wildflowers. A mountain biker coming down the slope stops to chat.

"Where you headed?"

"Durango." I believe it a little more now that we've almost finished our first week.

"Wow. I wish my parents had been so cool." He turns to Emmet and Zephyr. "You'll remember this trip for the rest of your lives."

"Why does everyone say that?" Zephyr asks after the biker has ridden off.

I laugh. "Because it's true. You will remember this trip for the rest of your life."

The boys give me a skeptical look and troop ahead uphill. They have no idea what a rare experience it is for a couple of eleven-year-olds to spend a whole summer hiking through the

EXCERPT continued on page 39

What did the boys find to be the best part of the adventure? Either a place, an experience, or some other aspect?

Someone asked the boys what the best and worst parts of the trail were partway through the hike, and they had the greatest answers. For Zephyr the best part was the sunsets and the worst was pooping in a hole. For Emmet the best was trail magic and the worst was cold oatmeal. And for Milo the best and worst parts were the same: spending all day every day with your family.

The same question as above, but for you and Curry!

For Curry the best part was being above tree line. For me the best part was having undistracted time with my kids, to witness them interact with each other, be silly and imaginative, and grow in incredible ways. Milo was a hiking machine; he could cover the miles with good humor and almost no complaint. Emmet was impervious to discomfort (except eating that cold oatmeal!), and he became a trail angel, buying candy to share with other hikers. Zephyr had eagle eyes and spotted birds and wildlife that the rest of us missed.

If you were to undertake this journey again, is there

anything you would do differently?

Absolutely! If I were to go back in time, I'd work on getting more buy-in from Curry from the beginning, and I'd do a better job communicating my needs, wants, and goals. To save both weight and time, we left behind our stove, fuel, and cookware, instead reconstituting meals with cold, treated water, and I would not do that again. There's nothing like a hot meal and drink to bolster low spirits. If I were to do another long-distance hike in the future, I think I'd start from the beginning with hiking partners who shared my pace and style, or try going solo.



Do you have any advice for other parents who may be looking for ways to get outdoors with their kids? Whether that's a day hike, a long distance hike, or some other kind of outing.

Don't let expectations of a big, grand adventure get in the way of getting out. A local park or nature center can be perfect for a pint-sized adventure. Get started when they're little and portable, when you can carry them in a sling or backpack or push them in a jogging stroller. When they can walk on their own, let them take the lead and go at their pace. You might not get far, but you'll discover many wonders along the way. If you need to go farther, bribe them with orange slices or lollipops; play games like a scavenger hunt, quest, or hide & seek along the way; and try to head toward water — a little kid can be entertained for hours throwing rocks in a puddle or building dams in a stream. When they're older, aim for trails that have attractions that might make your heart skip but give them an opportunity for a little risk taking — boulders to scramble over or plunge pools to jump into — and give them a little freedom to find their own way on the trail or choose which trail to take. Make it fun so that they want to go (even if they whine about it until you hit the trailhead), and once they're in their late teens and early 20s, like my kids are now, and don't want to go with you anymore, enjoy hiking by yourself!

Find more about Andrea Lani at <http://www.andrealani.com> and [on her Instagram](#).

EXCERPT continued from page 37

mountains. If we were normal parents, we would have taken them to Disney World, but we're just crazy enough to think a five-hundred-mile walk through the wilderness is the perfect family vacation.

Beyond a ponderosa grove, mountains come into view, distant and hazy-blue. The mountains. We have been, technically, hiking in mountains all week—the Platte River and Kenosha Mountains of the Front Range. But our route has taken us through an area of forested uplands north of Pikes Peak and south of the cluster of high peaks that includes Mount Evans. There, on the horizon, the real mountains start, our first crossing of the Continental Divide at Georgia Pass the day after tomorrow, beyond that the Tenmile Range, and then the Sawatch Range, where the highest mountains in the state rise. While the entire Front Range stood resplendent before us as we drove across the plains toward Denver, we've caught only brief glimpses of mountain skylines since we entered the Gambel oak forest back in Roxborough. Now the mountains appear snow-dotted and real, just a few days' hike away.

Some people like to point out that the Rocky Mountains are so tall and jagged because they're so young. At around 25 million years old, the Colorado Rockies are mere infants compared to the 480-million-year-old Appalachians. But the rocks that make up these mountains formed through a long history of mountain building, volcanic activity, and sedimentation. Most of the rock that forms today's mountains, the "basement rock," dates from the Precambrian era—the oldest about 2.75 billion years old. Prior to the formation of the Modern Rockies, at least three mountain ranges rose and fell here, beginning with the Colorado orogeny around 1.7 to 1.8 billion years ago, followed by the Ancestral Rocky Mountains 300 to 320 million years ago and the Laramide orogeny, 40 to 80 million years ago. Between each mountain-building event, erosion, deposition, and

layers of volcanic debris smoothed the landscape to a flat plane, like an Etch-a-Sketch shaken clean. Meanwhile, the continental plate on which the rectangle we call Colorado sits scudded around the surface of the planet, bumping into and ripping apart from other plates, lolling around the equator, and submerging under shallow seas and swamps. After the formation of the Modern Rockies, Ice Age glaciers sharpened peaks, carved cirques, and deposited moraines, giving the mountains their rugged appearance. We're hiking through just a moment in a long history of geological drama, stretching far back into the past and far into the future.

The boys have gotten ahead of me again, and I hike alone for a while, until I come around a bend in the trail to find Emmet crouching over something on the ground.

"What do you see?"

"A dead chipmunk."

He points to a rodent, curled as if in sleep in the middle of the trail. It's a golden-mantled ground squirrel, a regal name for what is essentially a big chipmunk, and it appears to have had a fatal run-in with a boot or bike tire. Emmet takes its picture and we hike on. When we reach a grove of pine trees, he pauses and looks back over the hill we just climbed, and sweeps his arm to take in the green, red, orange, yellow, and purple of the hillside.

"Isn't it so beautiful, with all the wildflowers?" he says.

I stand beside him and look at the flowers and drifting butterflies, the aspen groves and bristlecone pine forests beyond, the foothills in the distance and, out of sight, the plains stretching across the Midwest, the farms and forests we traveled through on our way from Maine.

It is so beautiful. I take Emmet's hand and we hike on, into the trees.

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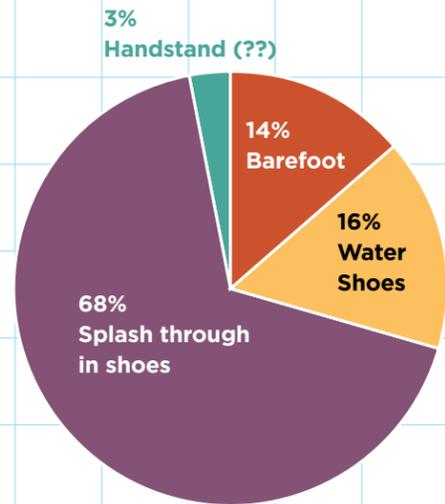
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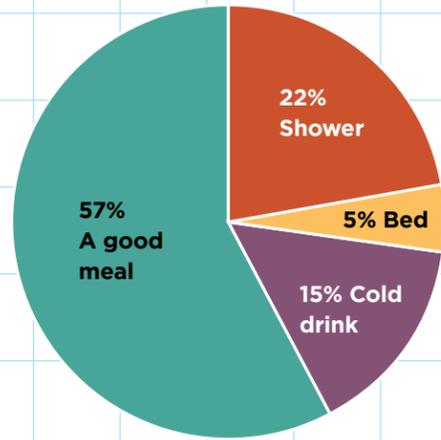
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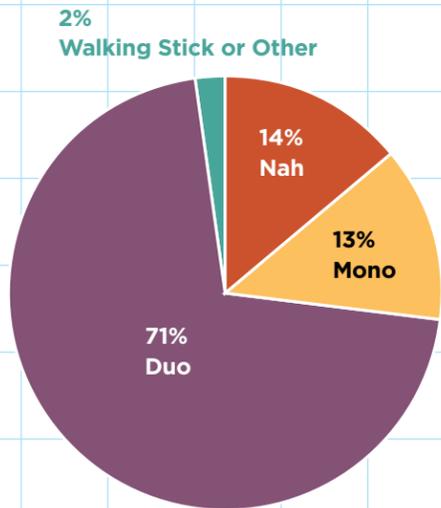
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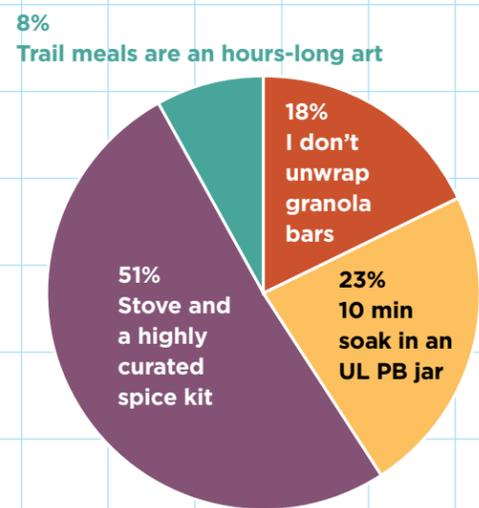
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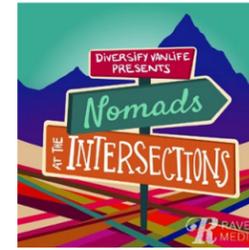
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AFTER THE FLOOD



Confluence of Pebble Creek and Soda Butte Creek on July 8, 2022, after the flood. Photo by Jacob W. Frank/NPS

George Bumann and Jenny Golding of [A Yellowstone Life](#) share their experiences after the historic flooding of Summer 2022

By George Bumann

Jul 3, 2022—Jenny is right when she says, “we will never see this the same way again.” She speaks of the Gardner River, and the park’s north entrance road.

Today is the second day that visitors can enter through the north entrance (in a vehicle with a guide, or individually on foot) and have a chance to explore the damage incurred by the June 2022 historic Yellowstone flood that forever changed the river landscape.

Extreme rainfall on top of late season snowmelt led to an epic, “500-year” event that caused flooding, and rock and mudslides that cut the towns of Gardiner, Silver Gate, and Cooke City, Montana off from the world. Record-high water levels inundated parts of Paradise Valley and the towns of Livingston and Red



Road damage in Yellowstone National Park. Photo by Jenny Golding.

Lodge, wiped out the north entrance road between Gardiner and Mammoth Hot Springs, portions of the northeast entrance road, and closed the north and northeast entrances to the park indefinitely.

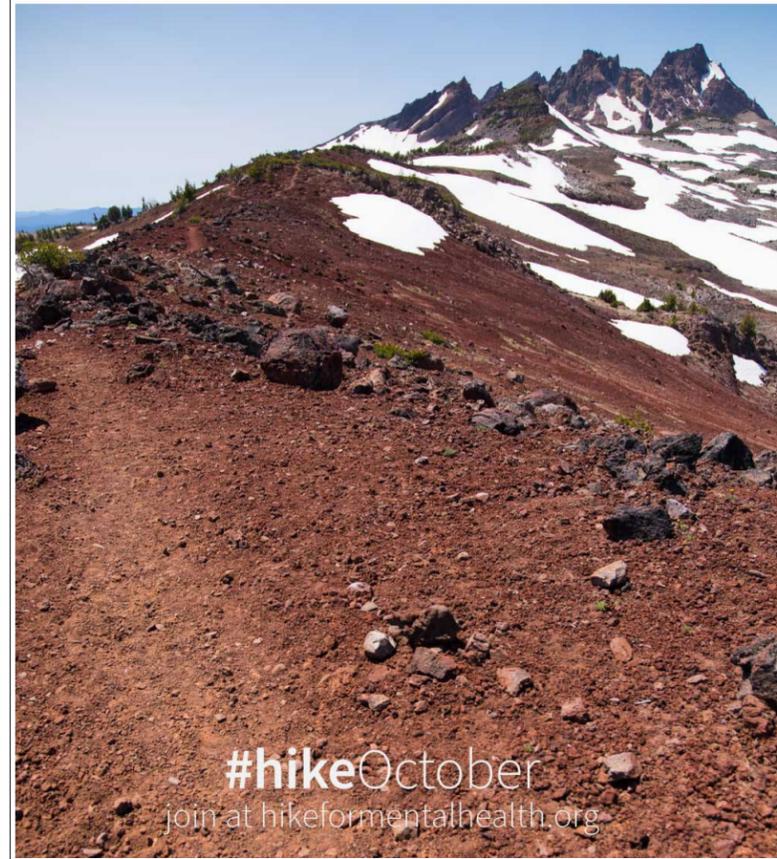
On this particular day, there are only a few other people venturing in on foot to view the damage, and all of those are locals, save one family of tourists—two adults and a pair of bored teenagers, identifiable by their unimpressed air, and the absence of water bottles, bear spray or any other essential gear. Their demeanor is in sharp contrast to our eagerness to witness the evidence left behind in the face of a spectacle that none of us could scarcely imagine was occurring on that fateful day. How has our familiar landscape changed?

The first bend of the Gardiner River, just inside the entrance gate, looks like a recently abandoned gravel pit. It was as if the usable innards of the landscape were removed and all that is left is an empty void. The entire bend for almost 100 yards is now completely flat, barely above water level, and bookended by a nearly vertical, upshot walls of collapsed earth 30 to 35 feet high. The changes are so striking, and Jenny and I have a strong desire to explore the river closer.

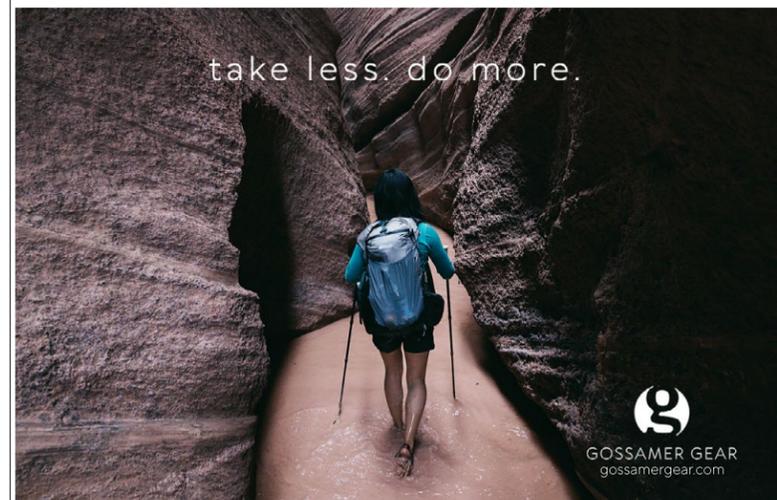
We leave the road in favor of walking directly on the riverbank where possible. Atop the flood deposits of sand and mud and rock are the tracks of Canada geese, a coyote, elk, deer, some pronghorn, otters and of course, grizzly bears. Life for these creatures and many others carried on in spite of the elevated flows. Of the bears, I seriously wonder if they are equipped with an atavistic memory for the sounds and scent of flooding. As consummate opportunists, I can only imagine that a river blasting out of its banks is like the sound of a dinner bell to bears, and with it, the chance to forage for less fortunate victims left behind after the waters receded. Although there has not been much news of animals caught and killed in the flow, there are always enough possibilities to draw a bear in for a closer look.

We have all seen the power of water broadcast on mass media, but until you see it for yourself, it’s about like looking at a movie poster and thinking you know all the details about the show. Today’s experience however, goes beyond watching the film; here is the raw, uncut footage. Despite closely studying the familiar landmarks in pictures posted by Yellowstone National Park on their Flickr account, it is impossible to grasp the full scale of what has changed, that is, until we saw it for ourselves.

Here are places that we knew intimately, ones we never could have imagined might become exposed, much less changed, or flat-out erased. The Rescue Creek hiking bridge is gone. The only evidence that it existed at all are the pylons upon which it stood and



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the trails that dead end on either side of the river.

The bridge itself, or what remains of it, is 50 yards down stream; it is trashed and washed up with heaps of other debris on the western shore, the only tracks nearby those of a grizzly sow and cub. As we approach it and marvel at the grizzly tracks, I breathe in the sweet petroleum stink of the creosote used to buffer its wood against the elements. My memory snaps back to more than one occasion where I laid flat on my belly upon on those same boards when they were still a bridge, peering through the cracks between them like a voyeur watching the American dippers fly beneath me; they would bounce among their favorite rocks, dipping as they went, and then dive into the mini cataracts below.

Further upstream, I climb over the trunk of a giant juniper tree. Uprooted, it is now horizontal and dying. The scent of its cedar innards permeate the air, sunlight glinting off of beads of sap upon the bark; it was taken down and throttled while still full of life and vigor. The tree's plight is far from unique.

On the day of the flood, I stood on the Yellowstone River bridge in Gardiner and took a tally for 10 minutes and chronicled 177 trees floating down the Yellowstone River. Repeating it again a little while later, I counted 185—amounting to almost twenty tree-sized logs passing beneath the bridge over the Yellowstone River in Gardner, each minute.

A bit further along our exploration, I am happy to see an old friend who has managed to dodge this uprooted fate. Cut off from the large pullout by a channel that only recently emptied of water, this stately cottonwood tree is alive and standing and I am delighted to see it is still here. I've painted and drawn it so many times, walked around its impressive girth, sat in its shade, and marveled at its bloodshot orange foliage in autumn. I give it a full checkup and walk around to the upstream side. It has taken a beating. Its trunk and buttressed roots have been battered to within a hair's breadth of girdling. This is one who will remain.

Lines of flotsam on the road surface lends testimony to the water's upper extent. Much of this smaller debris is organic in nature. I pick up a handful and examine it. Much of the contents of the flotsam are composed of conifer needles, juniper berries, the small pollen cones of pines and firs, but the lion's share is wood that has been ground to a coarse meal by the river's teeth. Beside those debris lines, huge bites are taken out of the asphalt road, cutting all the way across the historic travel route.

Chunks of the highway lay about like jagged Lego blocks while other pieces are strewn about like strips of old, nasty carpet thrown out during a renovation.



Above: Road Damage in July 2022. Photo by Jenny Golding/A Yellowstone Life.

Below: A road crew works on the Northeast Entrance Road Improvement Project on August 15, 2022. Photo by Cam Sholly/NPS.



The only thing giving the true identity of this debris is the white stripe from the outside of the lane, or chunks of double yellow. Still more bits lay around like the leftovers of a birthday cake in the aftermath of an eight year-old feeding frenzy. Strata of asphalt, road base and compacted layers ranging from concrete to rip rap are now exposed to the sun in head-high cross sections.

I imagine future civilizations picking up these chunks of asphalt and inferring that a travel way was built here by earlier people. They will of course, not know the stories that occurred upon those roads—the Rangers racing downhill from the park to break up fights in the now burned and repurposed bars of Gardiner, the grocery runs made before family holidays, the speeding cars carrying birthing mothers, etc.

Future people will not know of that place along

a straight stretch where some years ago, a park employee sounded the whistle about a 'poacher' wearing chest waders, trying to steal the head of a deceased bighorn sheep on the far shore. The responding park ranger upon arriving said, "oh, it's you George. Want to help me get that sheep over here and remove its head so nobody else takes it?" I, the perceived poacher, had simply waded the icy, winter waters with a measuring tape and some calipers in hand to take anatomical measurements of the carcass for art reference, and nothing more. This part of the river's story and this section is largely unchanged, aside from its banks looking a bit more harsh.

Before the flood, a friend in Paradise Valley who manages a ranch and spent considerable time clearing a large, riverside field of stones twenty miles downstream of this point, in order to cultivate it. Following the flood he revisited that same field only to see it had acquired an additional twelve to fourteen inches of new soil. History lessons about ancient Egypt and the silting of the Nile delta come to mind.

As I look at these enormous cut banks, I now realize with my own senses where that amount of soil could have come from. It came from right here and so many other places in the upper Yellowstone drainage. The power of the water still so present, even though it has lowered substantially, Jenny and I have difficulty speaking with each other in anything but a yell, despite only being a few yards apart. We turn around just after crossing the first bridge over the Gardner River, which is still mostly intact.

Beyond that I wonder about the 45th parallel tree. This is a large juniper that had fallen into a horizontal position, almost spanning the entirety of the river at that time. For the last twenty years I would point to that tree and tell visitors, "look, the park service made pull outs with signs saying 45th parallel to accommodate parking and photo opps, but the real 45th parallel is where that tree leans over the river." I wonder about that tree and resolve to come back later and forge further upstream to see if it and other familiar friends are still there. Odds are though, it is all the way down to Livingston or somewhere between at this point.

While the flood has brought much hardship to our small community—cut off from the tourist income that is the town's lifeblood—we feel dueling perspectives of compassion and worry for the folks of our community, and the awe at being present to witness a historic natural event.

Find more of George and Jenny's work on their website, [A Yellowstone Life](#), and learn about the [Yellowstone Community Fund](#) online.

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