

NEWS INFORMATION



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

No travel agent could have planned it better. The Sierras in spring, the Rockies in early fall, the Appalachians in winter, and finally -- by next June -- the nation's Capital.

What's different about this itinerary, however, is that it's all on foot -- a 4,500 mile colossal hike from the Golden Gate Bridge to the base of the Washington Monument.

Travelling the distance is a hardy group of nearly 60 backpackers determined to call attention to the size of the U.S. hiking community, the lack of sufficient trails around the country, and the importance of walking and hiking as an "ideal" form of recreation for a low-energy future.

HikaNation 1980, sponsored by the American Hiking Society, the makers of Postum instant grain beverage, and the U.S. Department of the Interior, was the idea of a seasoned hiker, Jim Kern, a man deeply concerned about U.S. trails, and blessed with a talent for organizing mammoth hikes -- witness the state-wide march for trails he organized throughout his native Florida several years ago.

"Our trails are disappearing," Kern says. "We have one-third fewer foot paths than we did 25 years ago. Yet in the last decade the number of hikers and backpackers in the United States has actually increased ten-fold. In fact, last year nearly one out of every five Americans hiked."

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Kern adds there are only two national scenic trails in the United States, the famous Appalachian Trail in the east and the Pacific Crest Trail in the far west. Many other long-distance trails have been proposed but have yet to receive legislative approval from congress.

But as far as the HikaNation participants go, dramatizing a message is only part of the road ahead of them. For most, it's a personal odyssey that they'll remember all the rest of their lives.

Gomer and Gayle Pyles, for example, are taking their seven-month old daughter Jaimie with them across the country -- in celebration of an historical time when families went cross country on foot -- to settle in new lands.

And John Stout, a 68-year old from Seattle, Washington who didn't start climbing until he was 50, says he "got the fever" when he read a newspaper article about HikaNation. He didn't take it completely seriously, however, until his wife demonstrated her approval by buying him a down jacket for the trip.

Ranging in age from seven months to 68 years, the group is a slice of Americana. There's a librarian, a photographer, and a nurse; a handyman, a housewife, and a recent high school graduate.

There are some celebrities too. Joining HikaNation in California was Nobel prize-winning physicist Glenn T. Seaborg. Seaborg personally scouted the entire California route with his wife, their children and friends, laying out the trail for the HikaNation troupe. He walked the entire route, except for a short stretch through the back streets of Sacramento.

Thousands of additional Americans are also expected to take part in HikaNation, although most will walk relatively short distances, joining the march as it passes through their neighborhoods, towns and states.

In San Francisco last April, officials closed the upper deck of the Oakland Bay Bridge to let the HikaNation troupe pass. Nearly 10,000 friends and supporters joined them on the bridge crossing, helping to make hiking history.

Over the next 12 months HikaNation will be cutting a path through Utah, Colorado and Kansas; Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri; and finally Illinois, Kentucky, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

For more information, those interested in joining along the route can call a 24-hour phone service at the offices of the American Hiking Society at 305-251-0484 or write the AHS at 317 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20013.

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