

## 50 HOURS ALONE IN THE WOODS

HIKANATION is a group effort on the part of some fifty avid backpackers to cross the U.S. from San Francisco to Washington D.C. I am one of the 40 hikers who departed from Golden Gate Park one sunny morning back on April 12, 1980 who is still trucking along. We are now in Silverton, Colorado, some 1500 miles and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  months later. We have all suffered many agonizing blisters and hours of aching, weary joints and bones since we began. We have gotten filthy dirty by "normal peoples" standards; we have eaten strange things for breakfast; we have drunk dank looking water at times (after we have dropped purification tablets in it!)

But we have all grown and changed. We have forgotten telephones, doorbells, time-clocks, dishwashers, T-V programs, alarm clocks, dresses, high heels, and cosmetics. We have stripped life to the basics. We have learned what we can do. We are all strong and tanned. We are happy! When we were in California we began the day as a group that would form a que at the appointed starting time in the morning. Hour after hour we stuck close to one another so that what we remember most of some places was the make of the pack worn by the hiker in front of us. We hiked for fifty minutes and then sat down and took our boots off, rubbed our feet, gulped a couple of swiggs of water from a canteen, gobbled gorp, hurriedly pulled on sweaty socks and dusty boots and fell into step as we trudged single-file down the trail.

When lunch time came we would stop and rest and eat. Some folks gobbled their food so that they could catch forty-winks. Then the leader would yell "Five Minutes!" and folks would groan and skamper about in order to be organized in time. We were certain that Glen T. Seaborg thought two miles were one. We even coined the phrase, "Seaborg Mile!" Each day all hikers tried their best to reach the designated campsite at the end of the sojourn,

Across California we trudged, more or less obedient, trying to stay together as a group, to bed at dusk and up and ready shortly after old Sol peeked his glowing nose over the Eastern horizon. Then on into the seemingly endless progression of semi-arid deserts and mountain passes, one after another that we doggedly persued through heat, wind, lizzards, snakes, and tenacious, vibrant wildflowers that eagerly opened to the sun among the ever-present fragrant sage brush that was Nevada.

By Friday, the lucky 13th of June we had come to the Utah border. Monty was there. He rolled out an old piece of red carpet he had been carrying in his travel trailer so that we could cross into Utah in style! Our beloved Monty did not scold us though that we were no longer in a physically close group. All day we came trekking in, in groups of two, three, or four. He didn't even raise a bushy eyebrow when the "lone Bulls" ambled in one-by-one.

Somewhere in that Nevada hike, somewhere during the thirty-six days it took us to walk from California to Utah we became more independent; more self-confident; more bent and determined to go at our own chosen speed. In Utah, and Nevada for some, we purchased our own local maps. We bought compasses and learned to use them if we wern't already <sup>skilled.</sup> We slept till noon if we felt like it. We walked all night if we felt like it. We tested our own "wings" and for many of us these were the days that we stayed away from the group purposely to get a feeling of freedom and space. The night before we reached Warm Springs, Nevada I put about five miles in either direction between myself and another human being just so I could find out how I would feel out on the desert without a tent and alone all through the night. I had walked alone that afternoon and when I got tired I simply laid my sleeping pad and bag on the ground and snuggled down to a night full of stars. I have never seen so many stars at once! It was a warm night and I slept well and content that all was well in my world. For the first time in my 44 years I had slept alone so far from the security of other people. It was one of the most joyous nights of my life!

We spent 53 days crossing Utah. By now about the only time we could be counted on to be together was on a rest day when we got mail and would re-supply our packs with food. Rest days were spent telling one another which route we had taken to get to the camp and excitedly relating our adventures and misadventures along the way. All that Monty asked of us was that we tell someone when we were planning on taking a divergent route from the designated route. Our Estimated Date of Arrival into Colorado was August fifth. But we actually took three days in getting together at Dove Creek, the first town we reached just inside the border. Some folks took side trips to Cortez. Some chose to take the pre-arranged group trip by school bus to visit the ruins at Mesa Verde. Some stayed in Monticello, Utah a day or two longer. Some headed out across the mountains to the old mining town of Rico. Some camped off by themselves in order to stay away from a town. Some took the road and walked.

I took the tour to Mesa Verde and was glad that I had because I learned more about ancient Indian history than I ever could have from a book. By the time the group ( or what hikers were in Dove Creek) left our first town in Colorado I was ready for some solitude. I was anxious to get back to nature and away from cars, stores, city noises and decisions. I was pulling at the reins and ready to Book. I stayed fairly close to people for the next few days even though I camped away from the main group.

On Monday, August 11, Monty met me at a junction in the forest service road North of the town of Delores, Colorado called Salter Y. I told him that I wanted to go ahead by myself and rather than take a leisurely  $6\frac{1}{2}$  days to reach the town of Rico which was our next rest day, I wanted to see if I could do it in four. We got out our San Juan County forest service maps. He helped me mark the trail with a red felt-tipped pen. When Monty was sure that I had the trail marked he filled my canteens with water, gave me a big hug, and told me to be careful and have fun. It was 4:30 p.m. when I hoisted my pack and set off.

The sun was bright; the temperature was in the 90's; the pack was heavy, but I was full of glee --anxious to see what adventure the next solo "first" would bring! My little Silva compass was at my fingertips in my front shorts pocket. Little did I know how many times I would refer to it during the next two days as I walked towards E even when the blazing sun was in plain sight! The forest service map eventually split its folds from the folding and unfolding that it was to endure. Grubby, sweaty, dirty fingers left their story among the printed trails, rivers and mountain peaks. That map was a constant source of reassurance as I matched up creeks, power lines, cabins, and road junctions with the paper ones I clutched in my hands. The cartographer must have done the mapping in the spring because often a stream on the map was alligator skin in the dust.

I did come to a creek that passed under a bridge about 6 in the evening. I was rewarded for a steep downclimb by icy cold water to bathe hot dogs in! The evening passed swiftly and at dusk, shortly before 9 I came to a gate and decided to camp there. After unstrapping my bag and pad and unloading water and T-P I hung my now faded blue Kelty in a tree to protect nuts, cheese, and other goodies from night foraging "varmits". I awoke at 6 a.m. feeling refreshed and full of get up and go. So after a quick breakfast I got up and went. After a few miles of brisk walking I came to a locked black iron gate with a formidable looking yellow sign: NO TRESSPASSING--THIS PROPERTY PATROLLED HOURLY. I could tell by my map that it was a piece of private property that jutted into the San Juan National Forest. My map showed the trail going right through it. Monty had not mentioned a problem in this area. I considered the alternative route--several miles out of my way. It was early and after a short debate with myself I climbed over the fence and VERY hastily crossed the two miles of private property trying to keep my feet from touching the ground as my heart pounded and visions of police dogs danced through my head.

" Entering

After safely reaching the friendly "San Juan National Forest" sign I heaved a sigh of relief and kept my brisk pace for several hours hardly stopping for a break except when the calls of nature—from my stomach and other strategic parts of my anatomy demanded attention. At one point I lost the trail through an overgrown meadow and had to use my map and compass in earnest to navigate. I had passed to the south and around Nipple Mountain. I entered a deep forest that was directly East but there was no sign of the trail. I worked my way through the underbrush and white aspen trunks until I came to a cliff that overlooked a valley far below. From this vantage point I could clearly see a road, then a river, and another road high on the other side of the river. It was easy to find this spot on my trusty map! One slight obstacle was that that first road which was my interim destination was almost straight down. I felt like a billy goat in the mountains must feel as I scrambled, slipped from tree to tree ever clutching at sturdy branches as I progressed down, down, down that mountain side. Once when I paused to reassess my position I sighted a huge dead conifer below. Its brown color was easy to spot so I used it as a land mark to work toward. Not far below that old dead monument I stumbled, to my amazement, on to a definite trail. I followed this trail to the foot of the mountain where it led out to the road. I was jubilant that I had found the exact point at the road where I was supposed to have come out. Not bad, old girl! I congratulate myself. Turn left and go a short distance to the junction in the road where the trail goes East just before you get to the bridge crossing the West Fork of the Delores River. Fine. I go to the bridge but I can't find the trail. The higher road I had seen from the mountain top perch was merely the same road as the one I had seen before the river; it made a loop and the trail I was seeking intersected the loop.

There were some camp trailers parked down by the river bank so I went over and asked the folks there if they knew where the trail was. It was 2:30 in the afternoon when I stopped there. They did not know where the trail was but they did know where Salter Y was and were amazed at how far I had come in 22 hours!

The campers were interested in Hikanation and quizzed me about why I wanted to travel alone. They told me about the place where you could see Calico Peak from the road where it ended on top of the ridge. We decided that my best route would be to follow the loop in the road up to mountainside East until the place where they knew the trail took off over the timber to Rico.

After our pleasant visit I went down to the bank of the fast flowing river where I propped my pack against a tree. Out came a dusty shirt and off came two pairs of sweaty socks. I changed into my warm red wool sweater and army fatigue long pants so that I could wash the shorts and blue shirt I had been wearing. As a brisk breeze picked up and dark angry clouds gathered, the laundry got washed in the soapless torrent. Nearby brush made a handy clothesline and also consealed my au natural bath which was the logical conclusion to the laundry chore. The West Fork of the Delores River is not too deep at this point but it is certainly cool! Before long I was squeaky clean so I hastily struggled into the sweater and fatigue outfit letting the fabric absorb what water I could not remove with my hands. How refreshed I felt.

Although it was only 4 o'clock I fired up my MSR and quick as a wink was eating a rehydrated and steaming Chili-mac freeze dried dinner as I sipped hot Postum. I was anxious to be off so just before 5 I climbed the riverbank to the road and as I settled in to the weight of my pack the little grandma in the trailer called out as I waved good-by, "Good luck to you, Girl!"

The road loop was not long and it soon became apparent that I was better off by not finding the trail because it would have had to have been mighty steep! As the loop straight<sup>ed</sup> out I studied the easterly brush and sure enough there was a definite trailhead going up, up, up into the mountains. It was lovely up there. Very thick trees that rustled in the evening breeze that was now quite strong, letting me know that I was in for a fairly rowdy mountain thunderstorm.

After a while I came out of the woods into a meadow and once again lost my trail to overgrown flowers and grass. With compass in hand I plunged East through the overgrowth. Soon there was a spot of several acres that had once been an aspen forest. It was now a terrible mess! The place had obviously been logged a few years before and there was debris in all directions making my progress extremely slow. I had to climb over piles of rotting logs and upturned tree roots. There was much evidence of a caterpillar tractor and log trucks here. The loggers had knocked down everything in sight and had taken only what they had wanted leaving the remainder to disease and decay. Such savage rape and waste of the land and its resources appalled me. I was also angry as hell that my trail had been ravaged also! As the scene had me deep in thought about what mankind does to harm the earth I scrambled over a rotten pile of logs and scared up a magnificent cow elk who had let me get within thirty feet of it before it, too, went crashing off over and through the obstacle course that was once a living forest.

At about 7:30 I still had not located the trail. I was very tired so I decided to find a flat spot big enough for my sleeping bag and make camp. A grand storm was imminent so I decided to waste no time in burrowing in. I had not brought my tent because the additional weight was not worth the possibility of getting wet. Besides, I am a gambler and like to press my luck. The space blanket that I was carrying made a fine shelter. I put my bag on it crosswise and after snuggling in and zipping up I pulled the blanket over my head. Here came the rain! What a glorious storm! Crashing, cracking, booming thunder; blazing flashes of sun-bright snapping lightning zig-zagged across the sky for hours as the heavens opened up and dumped what seemed like rivers of water on me. Really a loud and bright and wet and lovely mountain storm. I felt all cozy and warm all safely nestled in my little house. How wonderful to become aware that I was happy, warm, & relaxed in an environment many people would have considered dangerous. They might even say I was lost but I wasn't. Somewhere East of me flowed the Delores River! Sleep and pleasant dreams.

About 7 a.m. I awoke and lay in my nest thinking about the whereabouts of the trail, about how good I felt, about how clean the wood smelled that bright sunny morning. I realized that today marked the anniversary of the 4th month since we left San Francisco. It was nearly 1500 miles. It was an awesome feeling to have come so far, to be so alone, to be in unfamiliar territory and to be keenly aware of how far I had come — from Grant High School in Portland, Oregon where I had been head librarian for the past five years, from my former terror of the creatures in the dark, from my life as a farmers daughter where I was always near one of my four sisters and my parents on our dairy farm—and I said happily to any creature who wanted to listen: "You have come a long way, Baby!" I was O.K. and I knew it.

After working my way East for less than an hour that morning I came to a gravel road and there, to my delight, was a bend in the road and a sign on a tree, TWIN SPRINGS. That was just exactly where I was supposed to be. There was a pickup and horse trailer nearby so I casually asked the folks there where the trailhead was. The man told me that it was right behind their pickup. They were a very nice and obviously happy family; Clinton, Charlene, and 12 year old Tammy Medley. They lived at Cedar Point, Utah and it turned out that Clinton's father Jack had helped with the route. Little did this couple know how I could have kissed them all out of pure elation from finding the trail and friendly folks, to boot! They invited me for coffee and fixed a great breakfast of home grown ham, potatoes and onions, and bread and honey. Their three horses were nearby and they were up here on vacation before Tammy had to go back to school. I left them around 11. We had had an especially nice visit as we exchanged views on philosophy, religion, and values. They, too, believed in living as simply as possible, working and moving whenever the spirit moved them in their journey through life.

The trail was easy and I made good time. I was on an old stock driveway that was used years before when cattlemen drove their stock to market. Around 1 p.m.,



I heard voices behind me and when I stopped to see who it was, here came the three Medleys on horseback. They had decided to come and see how I was doing. Clinton said, "Do you want me to carry your pack a ways?" I replied, "Are you serious?" He grinned a cute boyish grin and said, "Sure, hand it up!" So I did and he added, "If you don't mind cheating a bit, hop up behind my wife." Well, Sir, it took me about one tenth of a second to know that I didn't mind riding a horse rather than walking a bit so I clamored aboard. We rode for over an hour. It showered a bit and we came upon a huge I mean humungous herd of sheep. The sheep raised quite a fuss as we approached and the horses were skitterish, too, as this was their first encounter with those fuzzy bleating critters. An Indian shepherd waved to us as he headed for the white horse that was staked nearby. Soon strange singing and whistling was heard as the man calmed his herd and kept them together.

When we got to a place where the trail made a steep descent they stopped the horses and I got off and retrieved my pack from Clinton. He pointed out Lizzard Head Peak, Calico Peak and several other prominent features of the range. We parted company there and I went on my way over the mountains that were now bare of trees but crowded with gaily colored clouds of dancing flowers. The mountains looked as if this was the place that "The Sound of Music" had been filmed. I could envision Julie Andrews tripping the light fantastic and singing at the top of her lungs. That inspired me so I bellowed forth in song as I trekked along. Soon I came to a weatherbeaten old sign that was standing up but I could tell it was not firm. It said "Calico Trail" going one direction and "HWY 145 11 Miles" this one was pointing East. Other listings on the same sign was "Johnny Bull Tr" and "Rico 8 Miles". but this was pointing North so I ignored it. My map showed the trail going almost directly East. Much later I was to regret having made the decision to continue on East because sure enough, I did it again! This time the trail led me up into mountain snow fields and I lost it again. Those mountain sides were

smooth and trail free. The trail I had been following simply stopped at a mountain edge. "A bunch of goats must have made it," I grumbled to myself. There I was, on top of a mountain, and the wind had begun to blow quite hard, and I did not know which way to go. I tested the sides of the precipice to see what was on each side of the peak I was on. I could see no roads, no trails, only trees and brush and rock cliffs on every side. On the North side of the mountain I was on (later I figured out it must have been Expectation Mt) the sounds of rushing water could be heard far below. Thinking that it must be Horse Creek because I was sure I had been heading straight East from Calico Peak I began to plan my method of descent. Great! Even if the trail is lost, this hiker knows that creeks drain into rivers and so all I had to do was follow the creek into Rico!

I worked my way over to the edge and my heart sank because it was incredibly steep and a loooong way down to that creek. Once I tested the stability of a fallen log by pushing it with my boot and off it went, crashing to splinters on rocks, boulders, and trees before it came to rest in chunks at the bottom of the ravine. "There, Lady, if you are not careful, is what could become of you!" The bank at that point was mostly solid rock, so working my way over to where there was some vegetation, I traversed back and forth as I slipped, slid, clutched, cursed, coaxed, my body down to the water below. Wow, I made it! But, no. On and on down the stream I went. Sometimes coming to waterfalls that had to be passed. This was the first time in the entire four months of the hike that I was genuinely scared. I felt weak as I clung to rock outcroppings, talking to myself and the @##%& rocks in hopes that they would hold my weight. I fell. I tripped. I rolled. I got scratched. I got bruised. And oh how shakey I got.

Remembering that no-one had ever been lost to the point that someone had to go SEARCH FOR THEM I resolved that they were not going to have to come look for me,

either! I was not afraid of being lost. I knew that sooner or later this stream would lead me to the Delozes River and the highway. I was not about to let Monty down. I had told him I would be in Rico tonight and I will. He had had faith in my ability to do this leg of the hike and I'm going to do it. „Slow down, Toni, get there in one piece," was my advice to myself.

I'd sometimes find myself at a point that was too steep to get down. Then I would go around and down and then return so that I didn't get too far from the stream and East. Finally I came to trees that had initials carved in them and knew that humans had been near. I soon came to what were definite trails, but as was often the case, every time I came to a meadow, the trail would get lost, and I'd have to start the search again.

I came upon trails often then and soon there were old blase marks on the trees to mark the trail for some passersby in ages past. At last the trail led to a gravel road! YaaHoo! Practically running now I thought I would soon come to town but I walked, and walked, and walked down that road. After an hour or so glimpses of of old buildings could be seen far below. Then the wonderful humm of cars and trucks whizzing by. Faster and faster I went. Seems silly now in retrospect because I was "out of the woods." I passed old mines and abandoned mining equipment. The lovely town of Rico soon came into full view.

What a beautiful sight! It was not a beautiful town. It was picturesque. At seven o'clock I bopped into the Galloping Goose and hugged the hikers who had beat me to town. We were all happy to see each other. I ate the plateful of Sloppy-joe and potato salad that the folks gave me. Then I drank two good old fashioned Manhattans and marched proudly off into the night at 9;30 to roll my bag out on the ground once more and drift off to sleep just after I see Monty come to check to see if his wayward "charge" had come home.

Yes, It is a long way from San Francisco to Silverton. We are hiking the nation but discovering ourselves!