

## HIKINATION

One Woman's Journey Across a Continent

by Larry E. Carpenter

They say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Jeannie Harmon of Concord, California, took four steps for she is involved in a journey of over four thousand miles. She is hiking as a member of Hikanation from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. That is a journey that will take her across the heart of America and through twelve states to its eastern shores.

Hikanation is an effort sponsored by the American Hiking Society, a Washington, D.C. based organization. Its aim is to walk across the nation in a little over twelve months. Besides providing an opportunity to individuals to experience America's wilderness and rural regions, it hopes to dramatize the need for a Pacific to Atlantic Trail. There already exists the north-south Pacific Crest Trail on the West Coast and the Appalachian on the East. Its participants include day and weekend walkers, as well as those committed to the goal of reaching the Potomac in the Spring.

Jim Kern, a Florida free lance photographer, writer, and President of the Society, gave birth to the idea over a year ago. His infectious enthusiasm for the project spread to others in hiking circles including William (Bill) Kemsley, editor of Backpacker Magazine. It was his voice of the sport that gave publicity to the planned hike.

Backpackers read of the hike and said "not why, but why not?" and wrote for more information. Monty Montgomery, a retired Air Force Colonel, volunteered his services as Trip Coordinator. He offered to drive his Ford Van and pull his AirStream trailer along with the hikers as logistical support. Financial aid and support was secured. A 24 hour Hikers Hotline (305) 251-0484 was established to provide a recorded message detailing mail drop points and route changes to keep friends and families abreast of the trek's progress once it began. State Route Planners were enlisted including Dr. Glenn Seaborg, noted Nobel Prize Winner, of the University of California, Berkeley. Others volunteered to help coordinate Kick Off Ceremonies and activities. *three - Kemsley*

Jeannie, 51 and the mother of ~~two~~ *three* sons David 24, and Mark 19, has been involved in outdoor hikes for a number of years. She did not become involved with Hikanation in the beginning with the idea of making a commitment for the entire journey, but it turned out that way. It was her participation in group hikes that she became acquainted with Dr. Seaborg. One thing led to another and she became more involved with the planning of the 21 day route across California. She helped Seaborg and his wife Helen scout routes from San Francisco over inland hills, across the delta, up into the Mother Lode, and over the Sierras to the sagebrush of the Nevada State Line south of Lake Tahoe. There were many weekends spent walking these mountain trails, driving foothill roads, and selecting campsites and estimating hiking days.

Thus interest and enthusiasm for the idea of the hike evolved and when asked to be the Pathfinder for her state, it was natural to say yes. What made a difference was the support she received from her husband Paul and sons. The responsibility she would undertake would involve not only 21 days of walking and sleeping on the trail, but 21 days away from home as well. Eventhough her one son remaining at home was a responsible young adult, it was not easy to leave. The encouragement and support of her family, however, was there and she decided to make the commitment. This same support now makes it possible for her to continue the journey.

This was a decision that many faced as they prepared for the hike. Young men and women and mature adults weighed career and home commitments against the sheer challenge of a year on the trail. For those living largely in urban and suburban centers, there was the unknown of their physical and mental endurance against the hardships and changing weather patterns of rugged unknown territory. Friends and family told them they were crazy for considering such a thing.

But the romance and adventure of it won out and commitments were made and decisions derived and preparations begun. Boots were bought and broken in, tents reinforced or replaced, extra pockets sewn on backpacks to accommodate needed supplies. They did not blink at paying \$85 for a Mountain Parka that would provide protection from wind and rain, nor \$200 for a down-filled, mummy styled sleeping bag to snuggle into when it was 10 degrees outside. A variety of prepared specialty foods were sampled and purchased and packaged for later shipment. Sponsors and financial backing were sought, and funds transferred to finance their years travel.

Early retirements were taken or leaves of absence from employment were obtained, businesses sold, cars sold or put up on blocks. Instructions were given to husbands, wives, children and friends regarding mail drops, insurance policies and book subscriptions. Some put college degree plans aside, opting for the education of the outdoors and the experience of seeing where and how Americans lived. Young GI's who had served the flag decided to see just what they had pledged to protect. A young San Diego couple excited about the hike from the start did not change their plans to go after the birth of their daughter Jiamie. Instead they set about building a stroller so they could push and carry the child.

Thus Jeannie was not the only one to make major decisions. Other Californians would decide to see their state by foot too, and plan to join her for a few days, a weekend, or a week. Initially, the group would be composed of Americans from twenty-five states, including Hawaii. Additionally, a young Canadian would join them and a woman from Ireland who learned of the journey while visiting friends in Los Angeles. A third would be women with the oldest being 57. The average age would be 32 with John Stout at 68 coming in as anchor man.

Preparations completed and families briefed, the hikers began arriving in San Francisco by bus, car and airlines. The actual hike began the morning of April 12th in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park at the Polo Field. About six hundred hikers and well wishers gathered for the 10 A.M. Kick Off Ceremonies. Jim Kern was there to see his dream become a reality and to give greetings. There was a host of dignitaries including Rusty Schweikart, Appollo 9 Astronaut, and officials from San Francisco City government, and best wishes were also extended from Sponsors.

In addition to Backpacker Magazine, the trek is being financially supported by the Postum (instant grain beverage) Division of General Foods Corporation. The Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the United States Department of the Interior is also lending official recognition of the effort. All had representatives there to send the hikers off.

At 11 A.M. sharp Jeannie led the Hikers off toward the Pacific Ocean with the Black Raven Pipe Band providing stirring music. By evening the group of close to a hundred and fifty had walked eleven miles along the bluffs outside the Golden Gate, across the Marina and through Fisherman's Wharf and the Embarcadero to a point near the Ferry Building. There they set up camp in a locked parking lot beneath the approaches to the San Francisco Bay Bridge.

The next day which became known as Bridge Day, they crossed the seven mile span with 7000 fellow walkers and together became the first pedestrians authorized to cross it in 36 years. Their itinerary then took them across the industrial heart of the East Bay, through Berkeley and the University of California into the hills above. When they settled into camp that night eighty hikers set up their colorful nylon tents.

In the following three weeks there was much for Monty and Jeannie to do. A Steering Committee was selected from among the group and later elected by them. The daily routine was established, route discipline and courtesy agreed to and reinforced. Besides her official duties of briefing the group each morning on the days route and worrying about what direction to take at the fork in the trail, she had personal concerns too. She had to keep her own feet in condition, cook her own food, pitch her own tent and break it down in the morning.

Although in excellent shape physically for the hike, there was still conditioning to be done. In fact, it seemed that no matter how much preparation had been done previously, ones whole body had to be seasoned to the trail. The 40 to 45# pack she carried took on special weight as she took on the rolling hills and the slopes of Mt Diablo. The heat of a warm Spring added to the burden. Many hikers had made no preparation for the long distance trek, and mole skins, foot pads and foot powder became bandaids for tender feet.

But Springtime in California also means tall green grass, golden poppies and wildflowers of many colors and these helped put a zing into their spirits. The hike started under clear skies and it was not until the start of their second week that they experienced their first rainstorm. In fact, this storm dogged them all the way into Sacramento where it continued on east and left them with clear skies. It was not until they crossed Echo Summit two weeks later that the skies clouded over and poured forth again. They were prepared for these storms and those to come in later weeks, and with raingear donned, they continued walking.

The trip across California was a varied one. The trail was well layed out and spanned the spectrum of city streets, levee roads, bicycle paths, rural roads, major highways, and dirt trails. For a time they hiked along the historic Pony Express Trail in the Mother Lode and Sierras. When Jeannie handed over her duties as Pathfinder to Barry Rhodes at the Nevada State Line she could point with pride to the route Dr Seaborg and her had scouted out.

The daily routine that had been established in California continued into Nevada and beyond. Morning light would find the camp stirring. There was breakfast to be made over the small one burner gas stoves most carried. It would for Jeannie mean a special mixture of spoon size shredded wheat, oatmeal, raisins and grapenut flakes, prepared for her by son Mark, and some fruit, tea or Postum. Then it was on the trail by eight (nine on the weekends to accommodate weekend hikers) hiking into the morning light. They would hike at their own pace, bunched in groups of ten, five or three, maybe strung out for a distance of a mile. Every 50 minutes a 10 minute break would be called and the hikers would seek out a creek or the shade of a tree to sit by, and nibble fruit or snacks. Lunch was determined by the clock and location too, and dinner by arrival at the designated campsite about 5 PM. One quickly learns to live by nature's time clock in the outdoors. Fixing dinner by candles has more drawbacks than romance. Most of the group would be in their sleeping bags and tents by eight o'clock, for there were tired muscles to rest and another day of walking ahead.

Each hiker carries his own gear, foodstuffs, and sleeping bag and tent, but Monty will carry a cubic foot cardboard box for each in the support vehicle. In it they stuff excess food, souvenirs, books, pieces of clothing and extra gear. Although they carry on the average a six day food supply, lone food stores and even coffee shops often fall prey to the "Argonauts of '80" seeking to add to their food supplies or augment their diet. Much of their diet consists of freeze dried food available only through specialty stores, or mailed to them

by support teams at home. It is supplemented by portion control packaged food available in most local supermarkets. They are, however, not adverse to slipping into a coffee shop or restaurant on a rest day to taste a well prepared dinner. In fact, it doesn't even have to be a rest day. Many a cafe owner on a remote stretch of road has been deluged by twenty hungry backpackers at the same time, all wanting cheeseburgers and french fries. Before he can get the tables cleaned off another wave will hit him.

Their life on the trail consists of walking, walking day in and day out, week upon week, month after month. They walk usually six days, and rest one, although occasionally they will push on an extra day to reach a good bivouac. They take the opportunity to search out a laundromat, a warm bath, maybe a visit for the women to a beauty salon, or write letters and catch up on journal entries. In addition, there are other chores to perform. Film must be mailed for developing and returned color slides and prints labeled and sent home. Telephone calls must be made to assure friends and family that all is well and to take care of business affairs at home. John Stout of Seattle, is farming a small plot of grapes and fruit trees on Vashon Island by phone and mail for instance. All take this day to catch a little extra sleep and to rest aching muscles and prepare for the coming weeks march.

Hikers also take the time to catch up on reading too, with paperbacks, magazines and newspapers being favorites. Loud radios in camp are a no no and few miss television. They are especially interested in news articles written of the hike that appear in hometown newspapers or on the pages of cities they pass through. Jeannie has been featured with articles and pictures in Contra Costa County papers, The Sacramento Bee, The Mineral County Independent News, of Hawthorne, Nevada, and Backpacker Magazine to mention a few. While in Sacramento she appeared on a local radio talk show with Monty and another hiker Don Lindberg. During their travel through the Bay Area and later through Sacramento, Hikanation received coverage by all three national television network stations. An article on the Kick Off also appeared in the May 5th issue of Newsweek.

Days Off also mean time to be treated by family friends or old schoolmates to dinner, a warm bath and news of home and mutual friends. For some it means time to explore local scenic and historic sights. When passing through Sacramento there were Sutters Fort and Old Sacramento to explore. In Nevada the old mining districts of Goldfield and Tonopah were rich with history of days not too distant. Utah gave them an opportunity to sightsee in Zion, Bryce and Canyonland National Parks. Colorado offered many the chance to ride a narrow gauge railroad between Durango and Silverton.

They are not, however, mere tourists passing through the American scene. There have been many opportunities to participate in local activities and to become acquainted with local residents. Near Lafayette, California, an elementary school turned out to sing and wave to them and to ask for their autographs. Near Kyburz in the Sierras, several were asked to speak of their adventure to a local class. In Hawthorne, Nevada, a contingent walked behind their banner in the annual Armed Forces Day Parade and took a first place in their category. Later that month they layed over an extra day to participate in Jim Butler Days, the annual celebration of the founding of Tonopah, Nevada. What a time they had in that oasis of the sagebrush! There was a parade scheduled in which they were to march, but a snow storm in the night and a blustery wind that day cancelled it. Still there was a foot race in which four entered and placed. In the afternoon there was a mucking contest (a timed filling of a cart with ore) that several others entered. Nothing like more physical exertion for these hearty souls who had hiked 400 miles to reach this booming mining town!

There were also special celebrations held in their honor which will probably continue right on to the Potomac. At Bryce Canyon National Park, their Sponsor General Foods, put on a Barbeque that made all those days in the desert and mountains worth it. In Monticello, Utah, the local residents werved a Navajo Taco Feed for them. They were treated again to a sumptuous Barbeque by General Foods in the picturesque mining town of Silverton, Colorado. In smaller communities like Mina, Nevada, a couple provided a dinner above and beyond mere hospitality and courtesy to travellers. Once near Rescue, California, a group of hikers collapsed under a tall oak tree at mid-day for a respite from the sun and hot asphalt. A man and his daughters from a nearby house came out with a pitcher of iced tea and cups. This act of kindness is typical of that which they are experiencing as they cross the continent.

There have been dark days as well. Tender feet have given away to blisters and blisters to crippling foot problems, sore knees and ankles to limping. Pack straps have cut into shoulder muscles and pale skin burned and bronzed by the suns rays. Some have rode in the Van with Monty for a day or two in order to recuperate and rejoin the hike. Illness and family problems at home tugged at the conscience and sense of responsibility, and several have left their new found friends to tend to these situations. They lost, for instance, on the average of one hiker a day in the first two weeks. The rain and sun in the valleys and mountains of California gave way to the heat, cold, blustery winds and even snow of the Great Basin. These took a further toll of their number. One hiker became violently ill deep in a canyon of Utah's Zion National Park from complications of an old injury, and had to leave after 70 days on the trail.

Jeannie has endured both the beauty of the landscape and the deprivations of the trail. She has come into camp exhausted and thinking that she is not up to life on the trail after all. But after camp is pitched and she has enjoyed a good dinner and the comradery of friends over a hot drink, things begin looking better. They talk of the wildflowers they saw in the meadow, the shimmering dry lake bed or the stars in the clear night. After a good nights sleep snuggled in her mummy-style down bag, she is up in the cool morning air and ready to go again.

One of the things that keeps her going is the love she has for hiking and the sights, sounds, smells, and people it allows her to enjoy. She is concerned about not only her own welfare, but that of fellow travellers as well. She often looks after those in poor health and shares meals with weekend walkers, and newcomers. Her love and curiosity of nature often leads her to typical back-packer, but strange to others behavior. One weekend hiker found her east of Tonopah picking up small rocks as souvenirs. While significant because of their composition, color and size, one can only guess at their weight after many miles. She was found to be still carrying them when this same hiker joined them again near Escalante, Utah. After all, a souvenir is a souvenir.

She keeps in contact with her friends and family by mail and telephone. She regularly calls her husband, and Paul has visited her on the trail four or five times. A couple have been unique trips, like those of the 4th of July and that of mid-August. On that July weekend he flew with his son David and two others in a small twin engine, four-seat Piper Seminole to a little Southwestern Utah town named Escalante.

Jeannie and Monty met them at the tiny airstrip with the Van. Then it was an hours ride up into the Dixie National Forest to rendez-vous with the Hikers. One of their party stayed to hike cross-country that weekend with Hikanation. The Harmons and their pilot flew on to Phoenix for a visit with friends, home-cooking and a deserved rest. On the August trip, Paul, his son David and daughter-in-law Julie, and a Hikanation supporter were flown by their pilot friend to

Durango, Colorado. From there they rented an automobile and drove north to Silverton where they had a reunion with Jeannie and their trail friends. Paul is planning further rendez-vous with his wife, but it will probably be by commercial airline. At that time she will be on the prairie beyond the Continental Divide.

Hikanation was designed to provide an opportunity for those equal to the challenge to cross the continent by foot. It was hoped that the outline of their footsteps would become a route for others to follow in years to come. It has thus far been a success. Others in their lifetime have made a similar crossing, but their numbers fewer, their journey shorter and often less scenic, and often with angry voices. This trek began with laughter, cameras clicking, and continues with waves and shouts of greetings from passersbys.

For those who answered the challenge of living outdoors for a year, it has been worth the effort. For many it has been the first time to view the mighty Golden Gate, the majestic Sierras, the desert and mountain meadows of Nevada and the aspen and canyons of Utah. As they cross over the Rockies and the Divide onto the prairie many will see those too for the first time. Many more adventures await them in eastern forests and farmlands, and they are looking forward to them. They have thus far expressed surprise at the amount of open and unpopulated land still existing on the continent. As they move eastward they take with them memories of wild horse herds, deer, coyote, fowl, and mountain trout, and of sheepherders, farmers, and real cowboys.

It has been the experience of a lifetime for most. The daily trials and problems surmounted have strengthened their self-confidence and increased their resolve to go the whole way. For Jeannie that came near Strawberry Lodge in the Sierras. She had come to the point in her appreciation of the scenery, the friendships she had made, and the idea of the journey, that she too wanted to see what was on the other side of the hill. She now takes one day at a time, but looks forward to one day walking down the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and up to the Washington Monument.

Hikanation may pass through your community or state this Fall, Winter, or Spring. Take time to drive over and meet them. Chances are Jeannie Harmon will be there to offer you a cup of hot tea or Postum.