

Dear Fellow Hikanation Hiker:

Well, time has passed, and perhaps by now we've all enjoyed enough showers, home-cooked eggs-and-sausage breakfasts, and fresh-sheeted beds to make us ready for the trail (or the road) again!! How time flies when you're not hiking, and getting fat instead...anyway, I hope that this letter finds you all doing well, enjoying life, and not too ensconced in post-Hikanation depression. Remember, April 12, 1983 is only 651 days away-- that's including rest days and Christmas vacation!

It has taken me a little bit of time, but I finally have gotten around to typing up this monstrosity of a poem that I finished on May 25, 1981, in the mosquito-infested respite at Redding State Park, Delaware. For those of you who were unable to be with us at the Atlantic Ocean on May 27, let me give the very brief preface that I gave the group that day when they so politely braved the sweat and emotions that had built up in 90 heat of that afternoon, to let me take 15 minutes to read this.

I wanted to give everyone some kind of gift, something personal that they could take with them to remember our journey, however long it had been for them. And, in thinking about the experiences that we encountered in crossing the country, and trying to put that in "gift" form, I began to realize that I could best communicate those months of hiking through a final, "farewell" poem. Perhaps because I enjoy poetic expression so much, I tried to include everything that I possibly could about the hike, every emotion that we had endured, before, during, and at the end of the journey. I wanted to remind each of us that in this totally human experience, we were not alone in our fears, tears, and triumphs! And, finally, I wanted to express my opinion (egad!) about what this trip could hold for us as we departed and went our separate ways at the end: a feeling of achievement, of friendship, of love. Hopefully, I was echoing emotions that others in the group also felt.

Thus, this work of art! Starting one rainy evening at Big Meadows Campground in Shenandoah Park, I had originally tried to finish this by D.C. But poetry must be written by inner feelings, it cannot be forced. And I came to realize that I could not appropriately finish it until we were at the journey's end, which had always been for me the Atlantic Ocean. It was thus, after completing the poem at Redding, I had the fortune of being allowed to read it only a few hours later at the Ocean. I have never been so honored to have shared something with my Hikanation family, and I thank them deeply for giving me the time to express it.

One additional thing that I would like to say about this poem: in trying to write what I considered a "complete poem" about the whole hike, I quickly came to realize that I wanted

to express all of the fears and anxieties that were felt before the trip began (or before one joined the group--it was quite similar, I think). Additionally, to make the story whole, I felt it necessary to talk about each state; as most of you know, I did not join until Colorado, but I have written the poem in pretty much a first-person form for the entire trip. This is by no means an attempt to appear as an "end-to-ender"(shall I be diplomatic?), but instead an attempt to be consistent. I felt that through talks with many of the hikers, I had a fairly good idea of what California, Nevada, and Utah were about. Thus, I took poetic license, and wrote about it all. I appreciate your allowing that freedom. Incidentally, writing about the first 3 states became the biggest block for me. You really must experience something firsthand before it becomes a part of you!

My utmost gratitude to 2 people in this process: first, to Wayne Phillips of Washington, D.C., one of our more "mature" hikers who could walk off the legs of just about everyone, for paying for the duplicating and mailing costs of this gargantuan work--I don't know if I could get this to you all without his help. Also, to Butch Henley, for giving me a little push to share this, and a little bit of helpful reviewing.

And finally, in dedication (though it is essentially dedicated to everyone) formally, to John Stout. I never had a grandfather before, and though John is a little bit young to be mine, I think he wouldn't mind a bit if I recognized him in that way. I offer this poem to you, John, for teaching us all about courage, humor, persistence, and life. And, most of all, showing each of us that any limits we put up are simply those which we create.

My very best to you all!!! Keep in touch, and enjoy!

Stacey Waring
Springfield, Virginia

A year for answers

by Stacey Waring

"Come hike with us,"
the ad had said.
Thus in a magazine we read
of a journey thrilling,
instilling deep within us all
desire for excitement
enjoyment
pleasure,
and perhaps, who knows,
some buried treasure that could be found.
But to walk across this nation's ground
could leave us all with pain abounding
in legs and feet!
Perhaps to complete this year-long trek,
our mental state should be also checked.
Ah, it sounded like a wondrous dream,
and in our minds we began to scheme
and think
and probe
and question, too.
"Come hike with us,"
the ad had said:
that thought we now pursued.

So checking financial situations,
or perhaps their lack, to some's frustration,
we talked
we read
we jogged a bit
and asked ourselves if we could fit
into a group of "hard core" hikers
who had trekked a million miles at least,
who had bravely met the savage beast,
and with hardly a sneer,
hardly a care,
had made jello of a grizzly bear!
Surely the others would be so intense
that I'd be lost in forests dense
and left to fend for myself alone,
bushwacking to a public phone
to call my loved ones left at home,
but only to find the number unlisted
or that distant friends and family
had packed and moved away.
It wasn't hard to say that all these things
would 'ere come true;
"Come hike with us,"
the ad had said:
we knew not what to do.

But then perhaps within us all,
there stirred a deep, resounding call
to join this trek,
just for a bit,
what the heck,
if we could fit among the bold and hearty pack
perhaps we all lacked nothing more
than a few encounters that were in store
in small towns 'cross the USA,
on county roads along the way,
over mountains,
in forests dense.
While sitting in our tiny tents
perhaps we'd learn about this land,
perhaps we'd end up understanding
and comprehending
even more:
our fellow man,
the guy next door.
We'd have occasion to meet them all,
and time to share
to spin tales tall
with farmers
or housewives.
Or no one at all:
this hike indeed had its greatest wealth
in those moments to be had just by one's self,
eyeing God's beauty,
enjoying the land o'er which we'd walk;
thinking
feeling
having a talk with yourself
on thoughts we'd stored upon the shelf
within our mind
that we never before had time to peruse.
No longer a need to refuse them,
this hike could truly have a reason
in what we might see
both within
and without.
Nary a doubt we now enveloped:
on our faces a smile developed.
"Come hike with us,"
the ad had drummed:
and we knew its time had finally come.

So we unleashed apartments,
put furniture in storage,
against our best reason,
our house we re-mortgaged.
To backpack stores galore we trooped
searching for that perfect boot.
And with our money confidently spent
on the newest model Gore-tex tent,
we checked out stoves,
tried on packs:
not lacking the least necessity
we even purchased new t.p.

for nights away from modern plumbing.
Now our minds were clearly humming
with details
questions
worry.

In a hurry
we tried to collect
what had become a nervous wreck
and put anxiety aside,
still clinging to our foolish pride
buried inside
when we had lied:

"I have no fears."
Then perhaps with tears
we packed and said goodbye to
neighbors
houses
children
spouses:

"You're doing what?
You're going where?
But don't you care
about your loved ones here?
You're clearly not about to leave?
I know you're crazy, please believe me
when I say

there's got to be some other way!"
But we smiled and tried
to calm their fear:

"A year is not that long," we said,
"To take time out, you stay ahead of life.

I love my wife,
I'll miss my home,
but in my roaming I may find
an unprecedented peace of mind."

So thus, in April, 1980,
with bank accounts empty
and backpacks weighty,
our sights were set for San Francisco,
with no less worry,
no less fear,

but in a year if we'd return
with just one lesson of life re-learned,
then it would be a year well spent
and we'd present again to friends
another person in the end.

"Come hike with us,"
the ad was clever:
we knew inside twas now or never.

In San Francisco we arrived
by plane or bus,
alive with energy abundant,
with no more echoes
of those redundant questions
raised by some at home.
And roaming to find someone in charge,
we ran across a rather large contingent
of assorted hiking folk

(it was no joke!)
"They're not hard core,"
we fast surmised
and were ever pleasantly surprised
to learn that others too were lacking
years and years of pro backpacking.
"You've never, ever dispensed fear
by scowling at a grizzly bear?
You've not worn thin ten pairs of boots?
Nor written books,
Nor given speeches?"
And smiling
they all shook their heads:
"If I were to preach about this feat,
you'd find my knowledge incomplete!"
We laughed
we joked
and relaxed a bit:
perhaps somehow we too could fit
into this regiment of folk.
We spoke
we listened
and now understood
how all of us could here appear
to share with others for a year;
to cross this country on foot required
an acceptance of what would thus transpire
within this group.
Not to be duped we had come together;
we were ready to brave the stormiest weather.
"Come hike with us,"
was the proclamation:
now we at last were Hikanation!

At the Pacific Ocean's golden shores
the boots we wore were quickly dipped;
an amazing trip would thus ensue
before these soles again perceived
the waves of a far more eastern sea.
Ah, California!
The days began at 8 o'clock
and continued late if you were slow
to walk the Seabourg mile.
With a smile we didn't try hard
to find a campsite
behind a bar.
Ah, California!
Good times,
good weather:
where getting to know each other better
was a delight.
Though perhaps a fight or two took place,
we began to find our pace of hiking,
and took to our liking this beautiful state.
The Sierras loomed tall as they awaited,
'Twas if spring's freshness celebrated our group,
and across the mountains we slowly trooped.

Like new lambs in spring
we had thus begun
the journey of our lives
on which we'd come
to learn
to love
to live.

It started in April, now it was May,
and hiking had n'er before been this way!

Thus to the desert's open arms
we were welcomed, unleashed, and free.
In the midst of its vastness,
California had passed us,
but Nevada was a nice place to be.
Water was scarce,
but we had Monty's spring:
his beloved van would daily bring a dream
of survival,
a revival of spirit!

It was sorely needed if we were to explore
a month or so on the desert's floor.
What was in store for us in Nevada?

Long days
short nights
Long rides
to few towns.

But the brown desert bloomed like a flower,
as frequent mountain ranges towered ahead,
and into summer we were led
not knowing our fortunes that time had bred.
But now we'd perceive a different west,
and find Utah's summer perhaps the best!

In Utah we learned about ourselves
and felt summer's heat at last.

At 6 am we learned to define
what was a furnace blast.

The Aquarius Plateau,
Dark Canyon,

Country amazing
country beautiful:

Utah had it all.

The peaks of a mountain,
the feeling of solitude
in ascending a canyon wall.

The surprises that Utah brought were many
and left us all impressed
with the grandeur,
the vastness,
and special joy
of the great American West.

And so ever eastward Hikanation moved
its horde across the land:
in August we reached
the snow-capped peaks
of Rocky Mountains grand.

Colorado!
The Great Divide:
standing wide
between east and west
it called us to ascend its peaks.
For weeks we travelled
for weeks we learned,
and across its trail we slowly squirmed
with the heaviest loads upon our backs.
Then we came down
with spirits rebound:
now quite some weight we lacked!
As September's sun slowly dimmed,
we moved across the state:
The Great Sand Dunes
Old Bent's Fort;
we watched the west abate.
As summer closed,
no more mountains rose
and eastward still we moved.
We had crossed four states,
in love we had grown,
and as fall approached,
we had found a home.

Autumn:
a change of seasons
a change of pace.
And so we began the Kansas race.
Across the plains we'd now gain speed,
stopping only for a free church feed.
Glorious Kansas!
Beautiful people
long, warm days.
With loving ways these Midwest folk
opened up their toiling arms;
in passing their farms we'd also pass smiles
while clicking off the long, flat miles
with earphone radios
or the new bestseller.
But as the plains turned golden yellow,
we knew that summer at last had mellowed.
And Oklahoma's date had called,
so on we moved
as fall ensued.

We zoomed to Wagoner for chili beans
and realized then our long-fought dream
of reaching there our celebration:
2,000 miles across the nation!
The Chouteau Trail was dedicated,
and our first snow we celebrated.
But winter's white was inside forboding:
at last we ordered goose down clothing.
And as November skies turned grey
and fall eroded day by day,
Hikanation moved further east
and nervously watched for winter's beast.
But first a suprise awaited all:
the Ozark hills of Arkansas.

This land was beautiful
as we ascended
into the Razorback state.
We were finally south
we were finally ready
to relax and celebrate.
Devil's Den
Lake Fort Smith:
the times were special there.
And we drifted through the Ozark culture
to learn
and become aware.
At Billy Jo's we feasted,
and left the state impressed
with Arkansas hospitality,
a truly special kindness.
But winter's chill had merely mellowed
while in that southern state.
And at Missouri's border we learned
that for us the cold would wait.

Ah, Missouri!
Where friendly people could be found,
but we were too cold to see them;
on nights that dropped to ten below,
we were also too cold to pee then.
The town of West Plains:
a place of love
of giving
of kindness:
On Christmas we shared with Hikanation
and enjoyed a roasted pig vacation.
And at the state's far eastern border,
on a ferry boat we gaily loitered:
across the River Mississippi!
With champagne bubbly,
with hikers tipsy;
we reached another milestone there,
But with frostbit hands, how would we fare?

Into Illinois we attacked!
For two short weeks we bushwacked through
confusing forest trails.
In the dead of winter
you feel like quitting
when cold and frost prevails.
Dark at five,
barely alive,
we'd boil a freeze-dried dinner.
To sleep twelve hours
required no power
in the silent grasp of winter.
Giant City dedicated
trees in hikers names.
And at Cave-in-Rock
we all enjoyed
a snowstorm once again.

On the last day of January
we entered by boat
the Commonwealth of Kentucky.
So far we'd all been very lucky,
but perhaps at last were we pushing our fate?
Oh, the big coal state!
We couldn't wait to hike through
in record time.
Some did find a friendly time
could be had by hikers there;
but "beware" we were told,
so few were bold:
most of us chose to take care.
Mammoth Caves
Muhlenburg County
rain and weather bad.
Though it was a short visit we had there,
we all left the state a bit more aware
of its isolated Appalachian culture.

A newness stirred inside us now:
the arrival soon of spring.
And leaving behind Kentucky's hills,
we waited to see it begin.
Virginia's welcome was kind to us,
though walking roads all day.
We regrouped our forces
and now found farmers
who gave us permission to stay.
Onto Damascus,
faster than ever,
Hikanation cleverly exceeded its pace.
And on the 16th of March
we ended the race,
and stopped at a hostel
nicknamed "The Place."
At last the A.T.
in its deepest beauty
was there for us to know.
But just as we left
we were given a gift:
a foot of fresh, white snow!
On the first day of spring
with feet barely freezing,
we stepped out onto the trail:
we'd now begin
in the newness of spring
six weeks of mighty assail.

The A.T.:
Pearisburg
the James River
SNP.

A joy for us all,
but a challenge, too,
to learn what we could see and do
out away from our secure little group.
So up the trail
(or was it the road)
Hikanation gamely trooped.

Till at last on May 8th,
without losing our faith,
we reached, alas, Harper's Ferry!
There we stopped to tarry
and welcome back
Some very special friends.
With a compendium of excitation,
we completed our hike across the nation.
Down the C&O we breezed
and on May 13th
we reached D.C.:
no celebration was ever grander!
Through city streets
we gamely meandered,
with colored flags
with unending smiles:
4,000 miles, we'd reached the goal!
Now it was for the world to know!

Then onto the ocean,
slow at first,
but at last we found a final burst
to push ourselves
and make the miles.
Chicken barbeques
friendly folks;
with quiet talks
with easy jokes
we reflected back
in our final pokes.
But now the surf does echo near,
and with smiles and tears
we at last make clear:
it's been a most unbelievable year!

"Come hike with us,"
and a year had passed.
We had seen our dream
so swiftly cast
from Pacific shores
to an Atlantic beach.
We had found the time to perhaps beseech
within ourselves
and ask some questions
or open eyes.
And we met with more than one surprise
in crossing a country 4,000 miles.
We remember the smiles of passing folk,
and recall the questions that were invoked
by curious people
about our roaming:
"Where'd you start?
Where ya going?
What didja do when it started snowing?
Did ya ever get cold?
Or ever get scared?"

And we told them not of grizzly bears
that we had met and shooed away.
But we spoke in quiet terms,
I think,
of the love seen day by day:
of the generous people we had met,
of the family feeling that we could say
was Hikanation's special way.
And I think that many understood
(though perhaps a few could not),
envision a year travelled by foot,
that we had finally reached this spot
on no more than drive,
no more than boldness.
We recalled those day of bitter coldness
or blistering heat
when it was all you could do
to just get some sleep.
In hiking across this amazing land
we have tried to spread a special brand
of love
of joy
of energy:
it hasn't always been downright easy!

But just to agree's not always right;
though it's not a fight that we did want,
to express oneself has been up front
a perpetual Hikanation right.
And sometimes slightly hurting others
whom we'd have rather just call brothers,
has meant we've learned
has meant we've grown,
has meant that we will now take home
a deeper person,
a caring person.
We have only just begun to grow
we have only just begun to see
we have only just begun to find.
Time heals pain,
we should be reminded;
now perhaps we need to find
within our hearts
a way to part
from those with whom we've vainly argued
on no more than principle discarded,
or cause,
or just frustration.
Hikanation spread love to most it met,
so in departure
let's not forget
those gifts we shared,
those times we cared.
"Come hike with us:"
we heard the call.
So we walked a few miles
and had a ball.

Now we've reached our journey's end:
the Atlantic Ocean's shores.
And it's true that many hikers here
we'll walk with nevermore.
But the goals we held
we have achieved,
there has been love
for those who sought it.
When times were hard
we found inside
some strength
and somehow fought it.
What have we learned?
What has it meant
to walk across this land?
That is an understanding
that only each of us will know;
but to grow
to reach,
to teach humanity
a special love
integrity
has been a goal that we've pursued
and most part reached, I think.
We've helped each other
to try to recover
that sometimes missing link.
Noble are those who dream their dreams,
and work to make them come true.
And it's this I want to leave with you,
my Hikanation friends:
Go in good spirit!
Know you've achieved
your goals,
your dreams.
Leave with understanding
your attempt at comprehending
yourself,
fellow man,
this wondrous land.
You've tried harder than many could imagine;
perhaps to some you're even a legend.
But the reward's inside
(so the saying goes)
thus leave with pride
for each of us knows
that we've achieved
and have received,
in spirit blessed
a true closeness
that never perhaps again we'll see.
It's been a journey incredible
and a privilege to travel this land;
our hands we've reached across to others,
and they have helped us grow.

In the coming years
we shall recall with tears
our family here we know.
But at last it's over:
the time has come
that we each must now let go.

"Come hike with us."
Our love we recall
was perhaps
the nicest gift of all.

Cape Henlopen, Delaware
May 27, 1981