

## **Outlaw: How Not to Hike the Pacific Crest Trail**

### **Brief Synopsis / Overview**

On March 21, 1983 three college friends set one foot each through a barbed wire fence across the California border into Mexico. We took a photograph, then turned north and took a step towards Canada. Six months and 2600 miles later we arrived there.

Our achievement was unlikely. Even today, with superior equipment, a well-established trail, and a documented network for re-supply points, barely 1 in 25 hikers attempting the full 2600-mile route actually make it. The odds in 1983 were exponentially higher, and the odds against us in particular were astronomically higher.

**Outlaw: How Not to Hike the Pacific Crest Trail** will tell the story of that adventure, from our early plans to our final steps. It will tell the story of overcoming inexperience, ill-preparedness, and the mental and physical travails of half a year on the trail. It will talk about personality clashes, a critical crossroad, and a difficult decision that made the difference between success and failure. Most of all, the book will be about the spirit of adventure: what it is, how it came alive in me then, and how it sustains me today.

My two partners in crime were Finn and Ryan. We were three friends who had graduated college together two years earlier. Two years before that we started talking about the adventure. We had four years of talking before taking a single step, mostly planning without a purpose. We were just kids talking while we finished our studies and got our entry level jobs. It took a weekend, six months prior to leaving, in which we realized that if we didn't do the trip soon, we would never do it, and, if we didn't do the

trip at all, we would always wish we had. For me, always wishing I had tried something was a fate far worse than trying and failing. This became the foundation that our perseverance and determination were later built upon.

We were an ill-fitted crew in terms of equipment, psychological readiness, and physical conditioning. We probably shouldn't have been out there in the first place, and we broke almost every rule that then existed for long distance hikers. We were outlaws. When we left the border that late afternoon we each had a six-pack strapped to our packs. We all smoked cigarettes and we carried no crampons, no snowshoes, and only a small, two-man tent with us, figuring we would sleep under the stars in all but the worst weather. I carried the maps but couldn't read a compass. We were also a little short on humility and respect for what we were about to undertake, and our personalities began to clash before we ever started hiking.

The trail we were on, known then and today as the Pacific Crest Trail, was not a completed, through trail at the time of our trip. The trail today, in fact, starts from an entirely different town than it did then. The trail at that time was a patchwork of short, intersecting trails, some road walking, and no shortage of bushwhacking, particularly in Southern California. To compound matters, the entire west coast had just come through one of the wettest, most severe winters in history. This meant that in lower elevations the trails were often washed out or damaged or missing signage. At higher elevations it meant snow, and snow meant that there was no trail to follow, that footing was treacherous, and that conditions were cold and wet. We would, in fact, be slogging through snow until July.

All of these obstacles, along with our embarrassing lack of money and resources, made us outlaws. To experienced and capable long distance backpackers we were unfit and unrespectable. In towns local residents moved their kids away from us and shopkeepers eyed us with suspicion. Cops and rangers asked us lots of questions and, most interestingly, actual outlaws gravitated towards us. We unexpectedly transformed into hardened versions of our earlier selves.

Also hardening along the trail was our partnership. Like any outlaw gang we were dysfunctional and doomed. In addition to our adventures along the trail, the story also chronicles the dissolution of our friendship.

Early on in the planning for the adventure a friend introduced me to the phrase "Mo Chara Abu!" Literally translated from the Gaelic, the phrase means "victory to my friend!" In use though, it was a warrior's cry, shouted as one rushed into battle, or triumphantly after a great victory. It carried with it a joy for the battle, the challenge, and the adventure. It reveled in the present moment. I adopted it as the war cry for the adventure that lay before me. Learning it as a mantra, remembering it when our plans went awry, and learning to face tough times with humor and purpose, is also key theme throughout the book.

## **Outlaw: How Not to Hike the Pacific Crest Trail**

### **Chapter Outline**

**On-Ward**

**Even Hitchhikers Get the Blues**

**Chapter One:**

**Sane or Insane**

Book starts with the first two stumbling and bumbling days on the trail and flashes back through the six months of preparation that got me there. Throughout, I was scared, anxious, nervous and excited – SANE.

**Chapter Two:**

**Warrior Attitude**

Our going is slow and our first mountain range is cold and challenging. I make it through many challenges and unfamiliar obstacles to our first re-supply point by adopting a tougher mental attitude.

**Chapter Three:**

**Cutting Our Teeth on Red Tahquitz**

This chapter is about sinking into our own version of life on the trail. We meet our first trail friends. Everything then falls apart between us after a harrowing experience in the San Bernardino Mountains. I consider quitting.

**Chapter Four:**

**A Trail of Decisions**

We press onwards through the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains. We are almost always in snow. We meet more friends. We realize that our food boxes and our money are under-supplied and we begin getting an outlaw reputation. We are told that the Sierra Nevada are impassible and essentially closed, and so we have to make a decision.

**Chapter Five:**

**Well Done in Weldon**

We leave the snow and mountains behind for a long hot walk across the Mojave Desert. Nearing the Sierra, the heat and struggle take their toll and Ryan falls ill. We temporarily leave him behind as Finn and I trek into the southern Sierra to retrieve our next food box. We are not sure he'll be able to continue.

**Chapter Six:**

**Buffalo Bill**

Finn and I learn that the Sierra are indeed impassible at the moment (it is May) and so we meet back up with Ryan in the Owens Valley and hitchhike to Oregon to resume hiking there.

The trip is long and transformative. We are outlaws on the on the road.

**Chapter Seven:**

**Long Gone in Oregon**

We hike the entire state of Oregon, along the Cascade Mountains, also enveloped in the deepest snow ever recorded there. We rely almost solely on each other and our compasses, despite our growing personality differences. Our lack of money and supplies drive us to stay in a hobo camp and to work at a Christian camp in exchange for supplies. We meet Mr. Wilderness and the two-person Glory Expedition, who hike on and off with us for several hundred miles.

**Chapter Eight:**

**Swimming Upstream**

We reach the Columbia River and rest, taking stock of how far we have come and how much it has changed us. We are tough and weathered. Friends from Washington State meet us and one joins our trip. Native Americans staying at our riverside camp teach me a lesson about living on the fringes between the wilderness and civilization, a place I now inhabit, both in society, and within our group.

**Chapter Nine:**

**No Rain in Washington**

We begin our trek through the Cascades in Washington. It is August and the winter snow from the previous year has finally, mostly melted and the early snow from the next winter has not yet begun. The hiking is glorious. Two additional hikers join our crew, bringing our band to seven, for the final 500 mile push to Canada, but I increasingly isolate myself.

**Chapter Eleven:**

**Last Stop in Stehekin**

We reach the North Cascades and though the weather and our partnership deteriorate, my own strength is buoyed. We all savor the final trail sections, which cut through some of the most remote and spectacular wilderness in the United States. I begin to think more seriously about what comes next for me, and I am increasingly impatient with Finn and Ryan. We reach Canada.

**Chapter Twelve:**

**What Happened?**

Upon reaching Canada, our partnership is irrevocably severed. I hitchhike alone back to my car in Las Vegas, then pick up hitchhikers to pay for gas to get back to Boston. Changed forever by the trip, I begin a new life. During the following two summers, I complete the trail sections we hitchhiked around.